

National Bank of Belgium, Boulevard de Berlaimont, 1950s. Source: hemels.brussels

Introduction.

Contemporary society is governed by the regulation and flow of capital. The supply, perceived value and control of money determines, to a large extent, the conditions in which we live, and its accumulation underpins the perceived success of individuals, companies, cities, regions and nation states.

Capitalism enshrines this right of self-enrichment, at every scale. It does however place limits upon it. In order to regulate capitalist economies, complex financial systems have developed, which control finance and secure assets. Banks of many kinds provide liquidity and invest wealth. National Banks control the production and supply of money, regulate their commercial counterparts and, together with governments, define monetary policy and protect national interests. They are the lenders of last resort at times of crisis.

Modern industrialised economies measure their performance through growth, a desire for the sustained increase of national wealth which has underpinned the thinking of National Banks. A sustained increase in gross domestic product has been the mantra of prudent governance, fueled by work and production and regulated through finance, the control of interest rates and levels of inflation. However, we are arriving at the collective realisation that our obsession with enrichment has come at an enormous cost. The relentless extraction of profit has unbalanced the finite resources of the planet to the extent that

humanity now faces an existential threat. As we attempt to address the enormous challenges the future holds, we ask what might be the role of a future central bank?

Set in Brussels, the project will address the transformation of the National Bank of Belgium. This occupies a vast, triangular urban block of 91,000m² that is situated at a critical moment between the upper and the lower parts of the city. This is made manifest in the 8m sectional shift across the site as it rises from the austere, 200m long, columnar façade that announces it to the Boulevard de Berlaimont.

From palatial beginnings, the present bank developed as a consolidated aggregation of buildings, planned by Marcel Van Goethem after the Second World War. Its current form is the result of a massive reconstruction project that transformed and rescaled this piece of city into an imposing, yet ultimately alienating urban environment. Built to its boundaries, the introverted nature of the complex reflects the historic need to secure Belgium's financial reserves within its walls. However, since its completion, there has been a fundamental shift in the requirements placed upon it. Industrial functions like the printing and storage of currency have been relocated out of the city, or overseas; finance is becoming increasingly digital; while Belgium's membership of the EU has led to much of the Bank's traditional role being subsumed into the European Central Bank (ECB), based in Frankfurt. In response the National Bank has decided to redefine itself physically.

**National
Bank of Belgium**



a large office building

a large office building

1500 people working together

a large office building

1500 people working together

history of work

a large bank building

a large bank building

money and banking

a large bank building

money and banking

history of banking



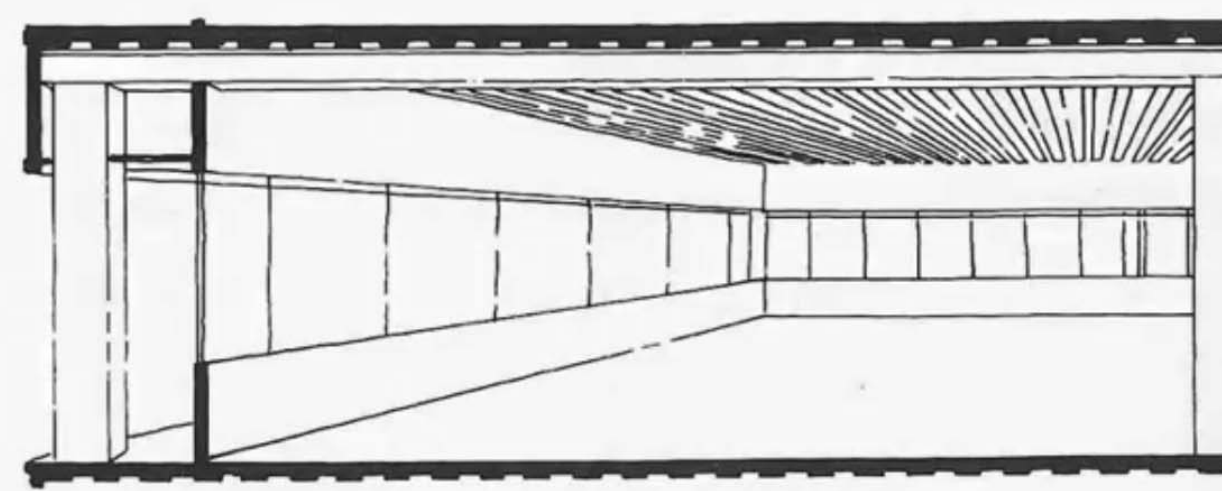
office precedents
original photographs



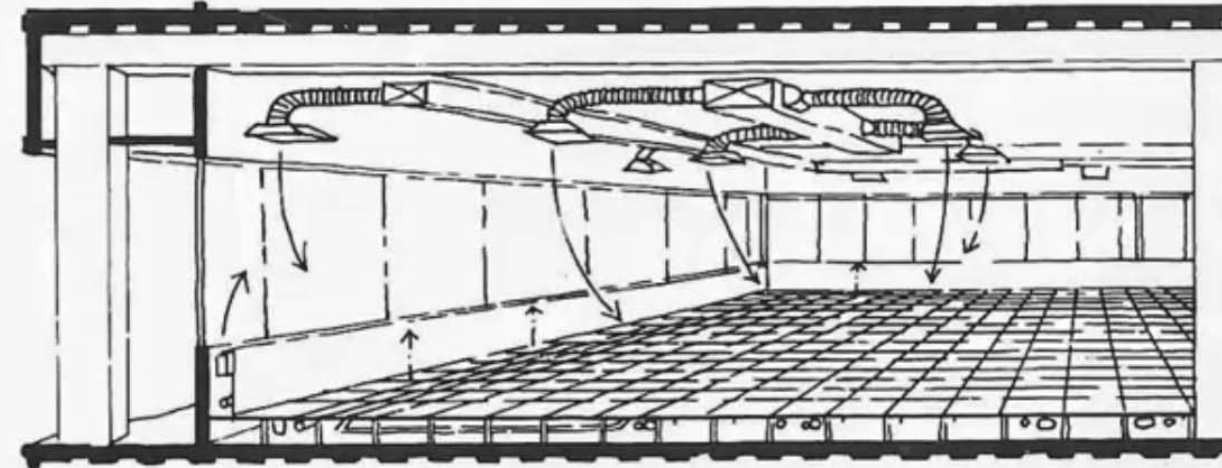




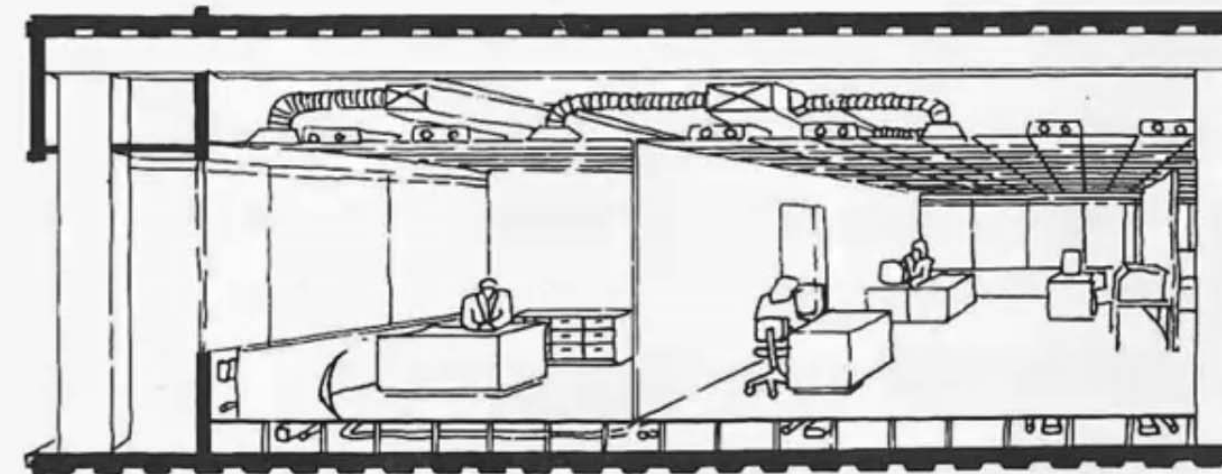
Shell
50 years



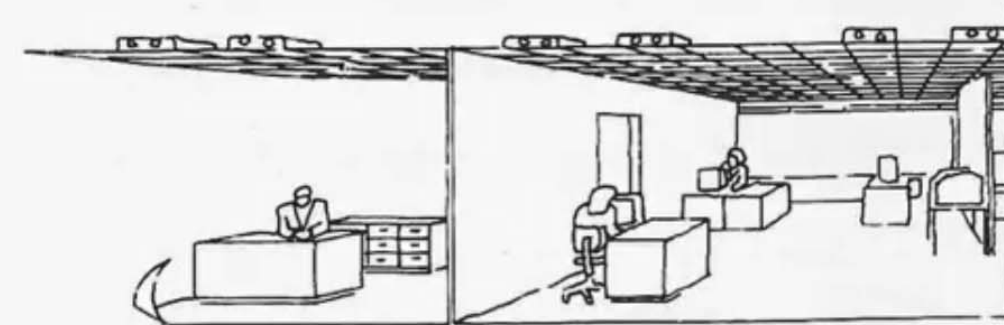
Services
15 years



Scenery
5 – 7 years



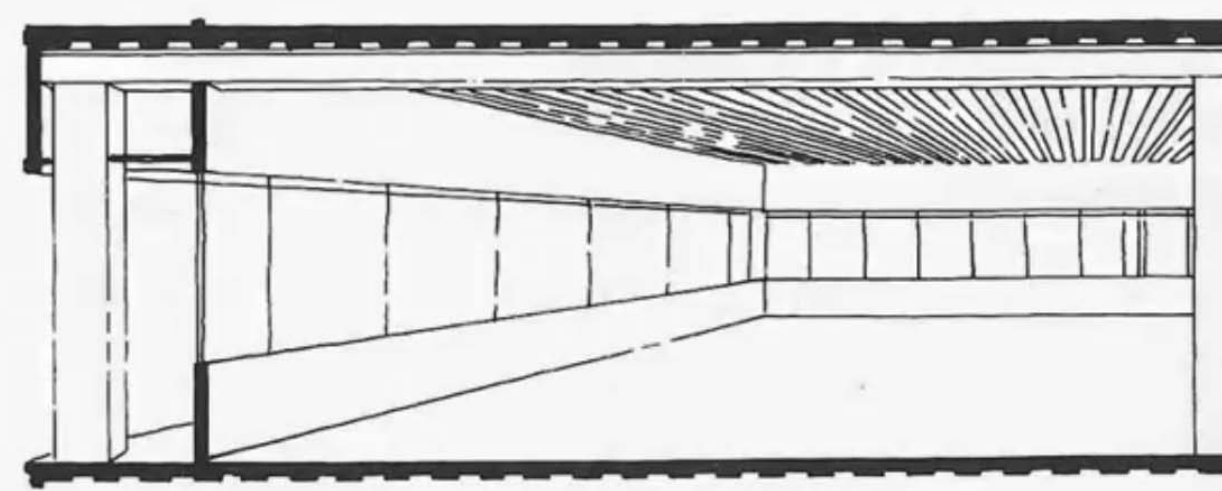
Sets
Changing every day



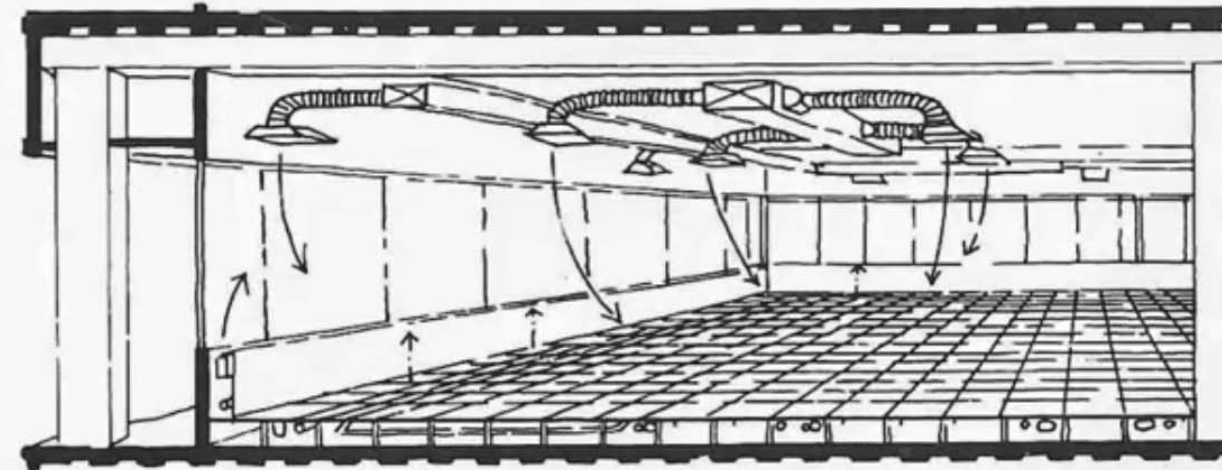


Shell, Services, Scenery and Sets in the office building
DEGW, The Changing City. London: The Bulstrode Press, 1989

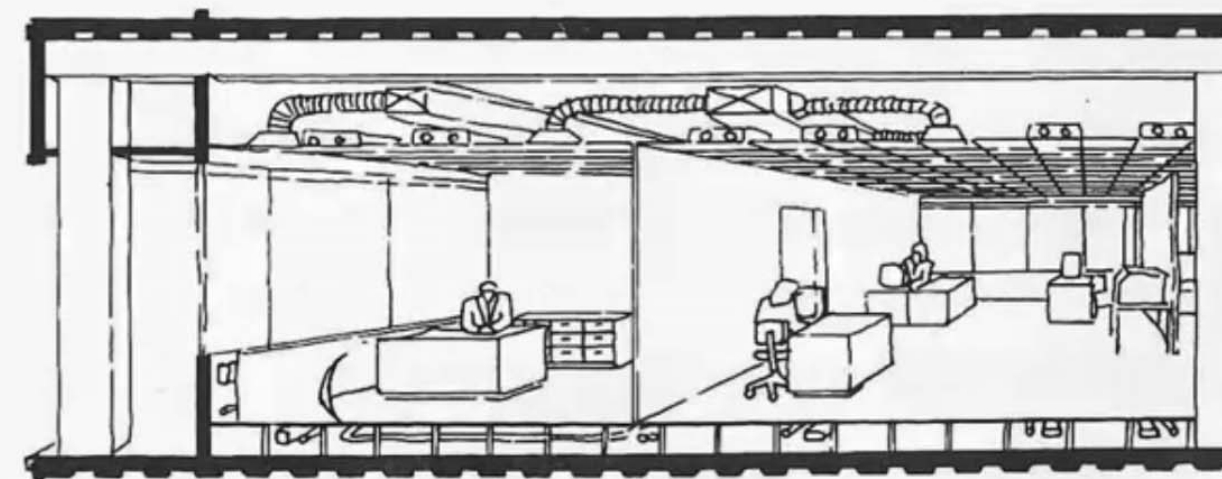
Shell
50 years



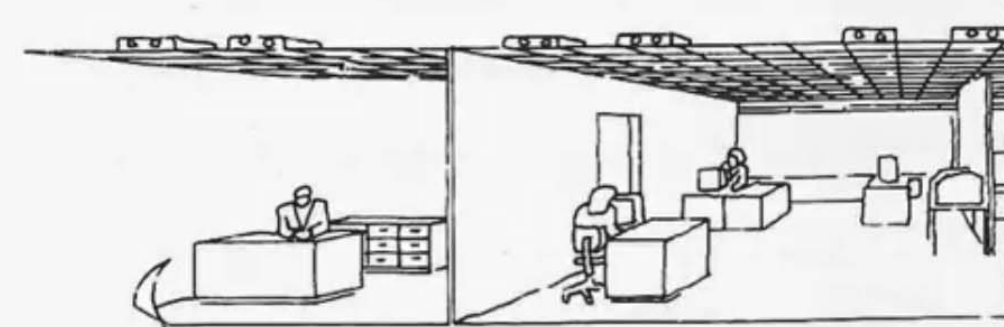
Services
15 years



Scenery
5 – 7 years



Sets
Changing every day





photographic survey of the ATM in the contemporary city (part of a series)
Bas Leemans, Laurens de Munck



teller transaction at Delaware National Bank
1950





teller transaction at Delaware National Bank
1950





bank interior Vlaer & Kol
Het Utrechts Archief, 1973





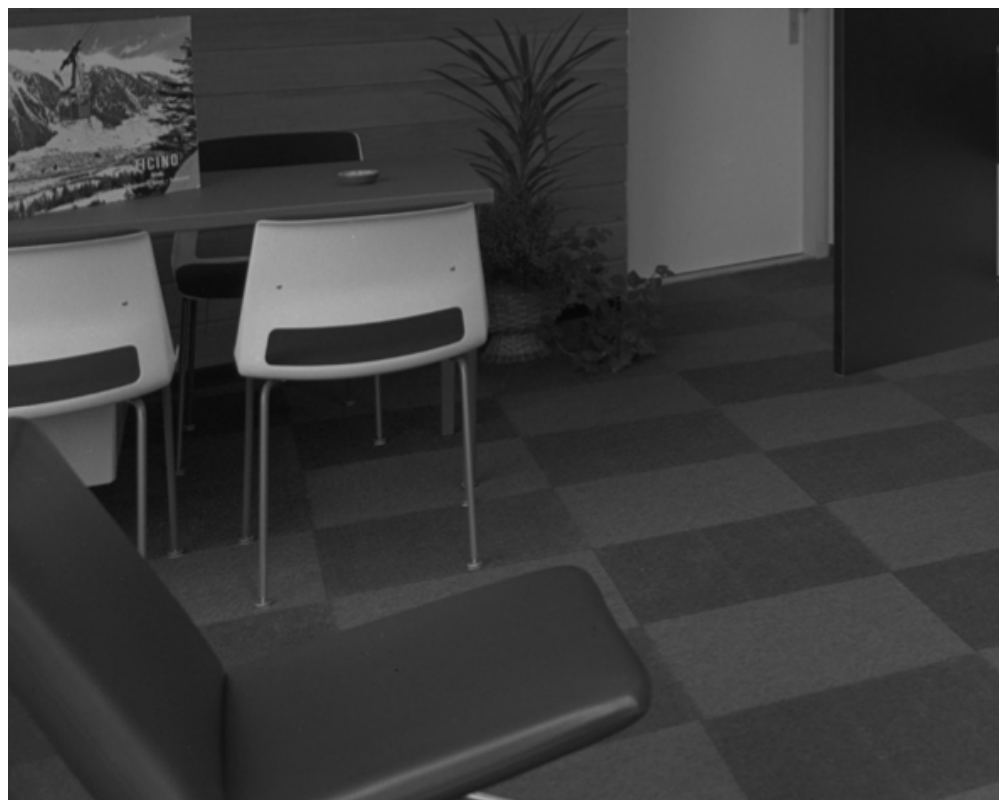
bank interior Vlaer & Kol
Het Utrechts Archief, 1973





bank interior Teldersweg Schiebroek
Ary Groeneveld, 1971





bank interior Teldersweg Schiebroek
Ary Groeneveld, 1971





1:10 objects
Bas Leemans, Laurens de Munck



***how can we
internalise the ATM,
or reintroduce the
ATM to a public
interior?***



1:10 statgeset
Bas Leemans, Laurens de Munck

1:10 tea-time
Bas Leemans, Laurens de Munck





1:10 tea-time
Bas Leemans, Laurens de Munck

dissection



dissection

reconfiguration



dissection

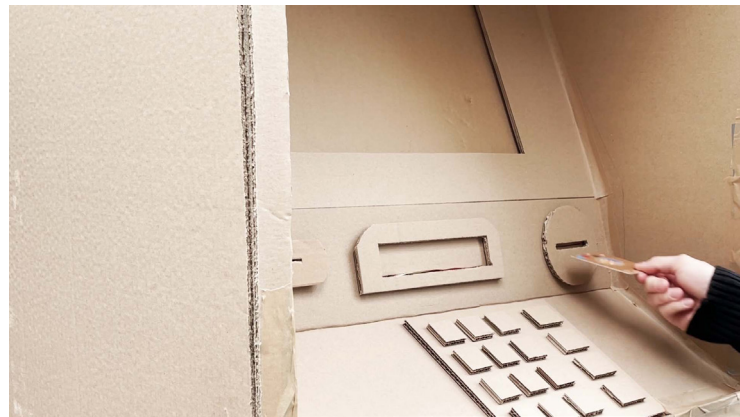
reconfiguration

displacement

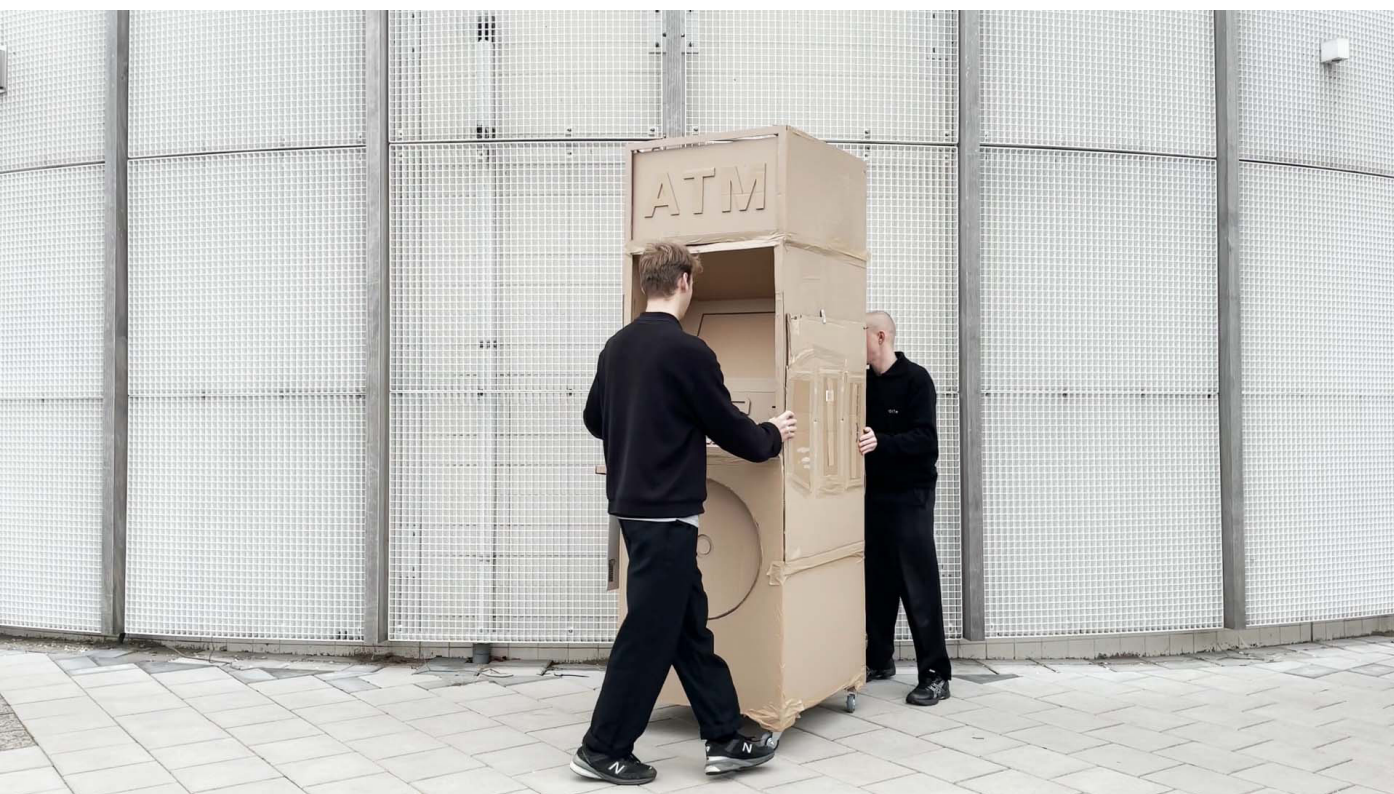




1:1 reconfiguration of the ATM
Bas Leemans, Laurens de Munck



ATM (film stills)
Bas Leemans, Laurens de Munck



ATM (film stills)
Bas Leemans, Laurens de Munck



Charlotte Posenenske
Series DW (1967), performance



Charlotte Posenenske
Deutsche Bank, 1989

1. *How can one reconfigure the interior fit-out elements of the National Bank of Belgium?*

Charlotte Posenenske
Deutsche Bank, 1989



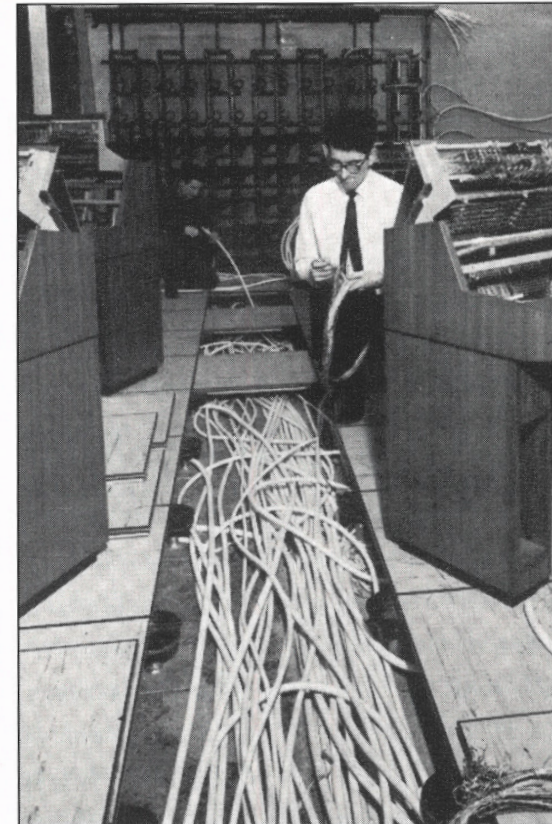
1. How can one reconfigure the interior fit-out elements of the National Bank of Belgium?

2. What is the potential of the Bank's technical services when one does not hide them?



1. *How can one reconfigure the interior fit-out elements of the National Bank of Belgium?*

2. *What is the potential of the Bank's technical services when one does not hide them?*



4.11 Layout of cables underneath a raised access floor, circa 1972.

compact network of electrical systems. Each of these options was sufficiently developed and available to planners in the early 1960s; all they needed to do was merge the redefined concept of mechanical space with the enlightened reexamination of Taylorism advocated by theoreticians and business leaders. The depth of the Inland Steel Building, 65 feet, matched the Quickborner Team's recommended minimum dimension for the office landscape, thus indicating how the leap to a 160-foot depth signified a readaptation of interior work systems (layout and furnishings) more specifically than it did a significant change in construction.⁷

FROM THE OFFICE LANDSCAPE TO THE AUTOMATED BUILDING (1970–2000)

The appearance of automated work systems at the beginning of the 1970s marked a turnaround in the principles governing the construction of office spaces. As a result of the need to incorporate wires under the floors, these systems prompted a new process of revising floor depth by incorporating raised floors for mechanical equipment. Energy equipment was also tested for adaptability, and, compared to other subsystems, its rapid obsolescence became obvious. The cores and floors housing centralized mechanical equipment were replaced by a more compartmentalized organization that questioned the existence not only of mechanical systems but also of the traditional office layout.

- 1. *How can one reconfigure the interior fit-out elements of the National Bank of Belgium?***
- 2. *What is the potential of the Bank's technical services when one does not hide them?***
- 3. *What is the potential of working with the (obsolete) standardised interior elements of an existing bank building?***

National Bank of Belgium, improvised storeroom on office floor



1. ***How can one reconfigure the interior fit-out elements of the National Bank of Belgium?***
2. ***What is the potential of the Bank's technical services when one does not hide them?***
3. ***What is the potential of working with the (obsolete) standardised interior elements of an existing bank building?***



Thomas Demand
Raum, 1994

National Bank of Belgium, improvised storeroom on office floor



- 1. How can one reconfigure the interior fit-out elements of the National Bank of Belgium?**
- 2. What is the potential of the Bank's technical services when one does not hide them?**
- 3. What is the potential of working with the (obsolete) standardised interior elements of an existing bank building?**
- 4. How to incorporate an element of interactivity to this system of (technical) services?**

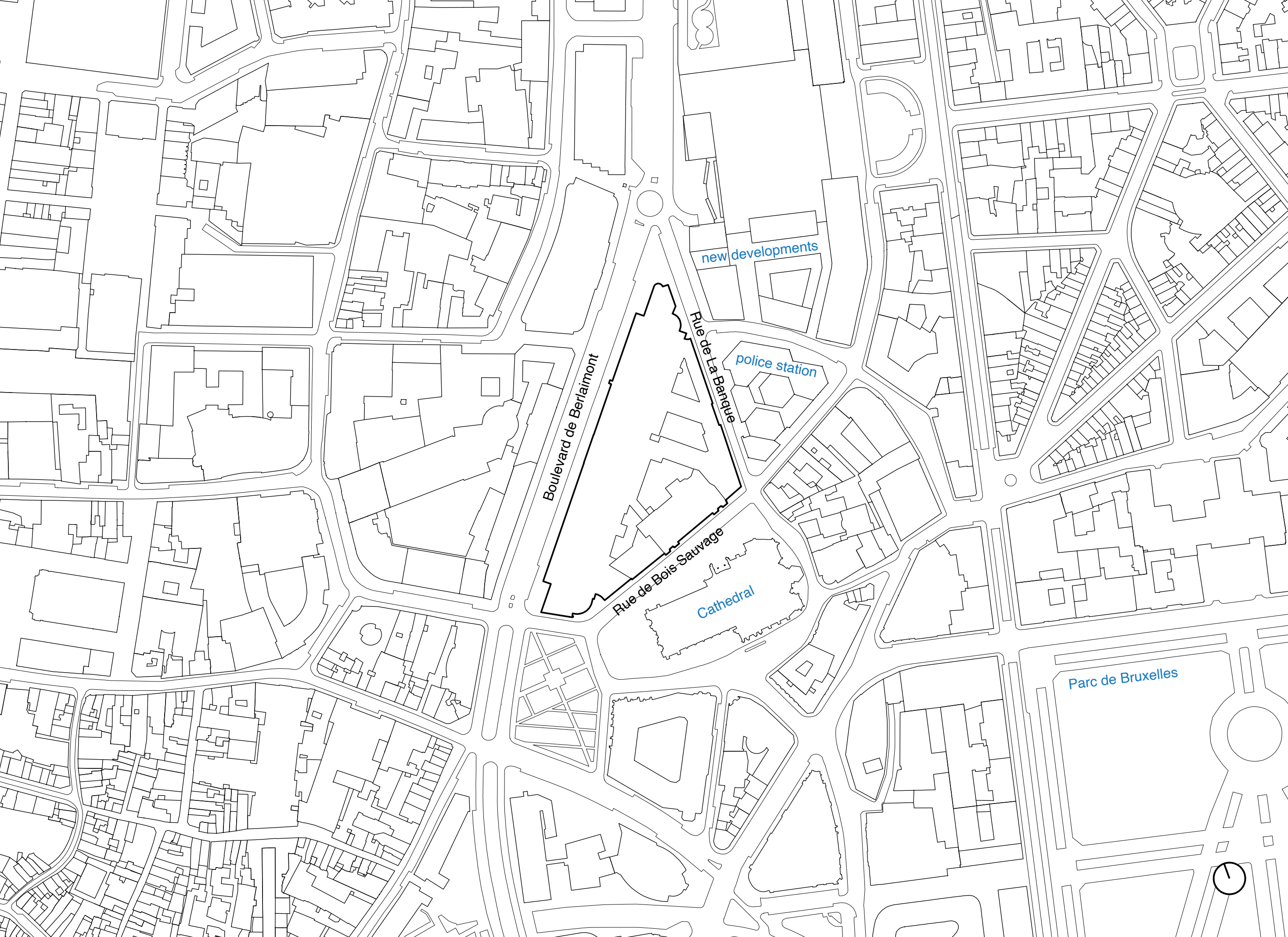
Theo de Meyer
Goods between floors



NATIONAL BANK OF BELGIUM







Boulevard de Berlaimont

new developments

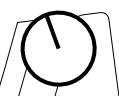
police station

Cathedral

Parc de Bruxelles

Rue de Bois Sauvage

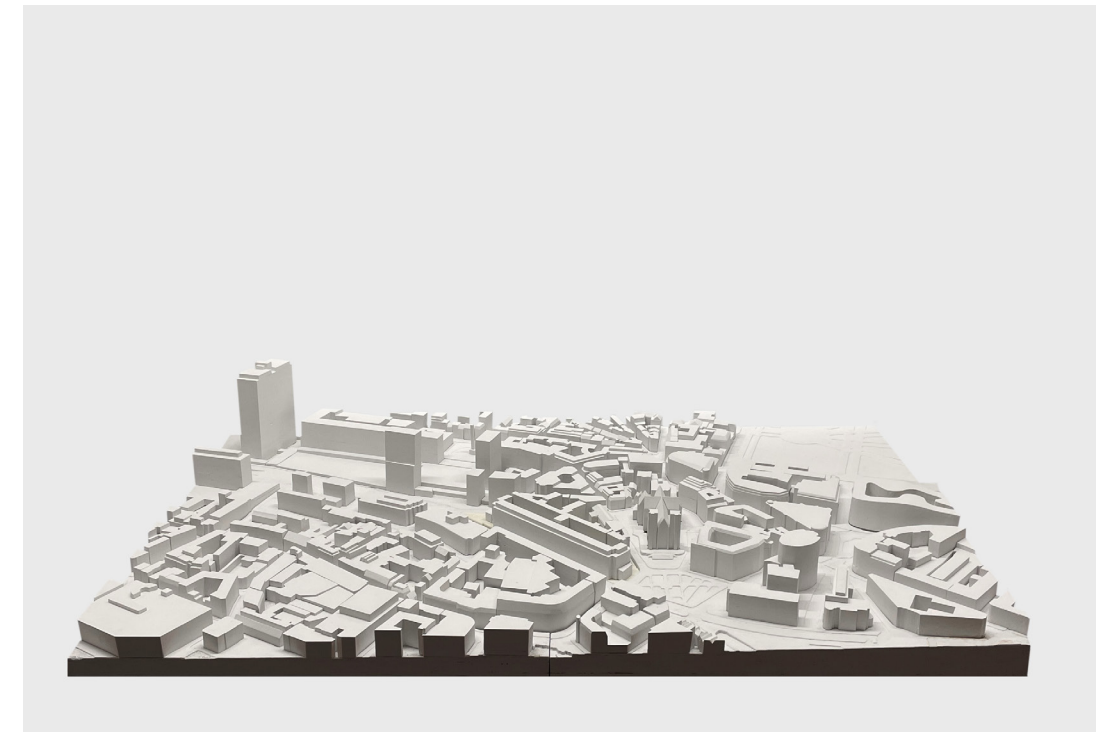
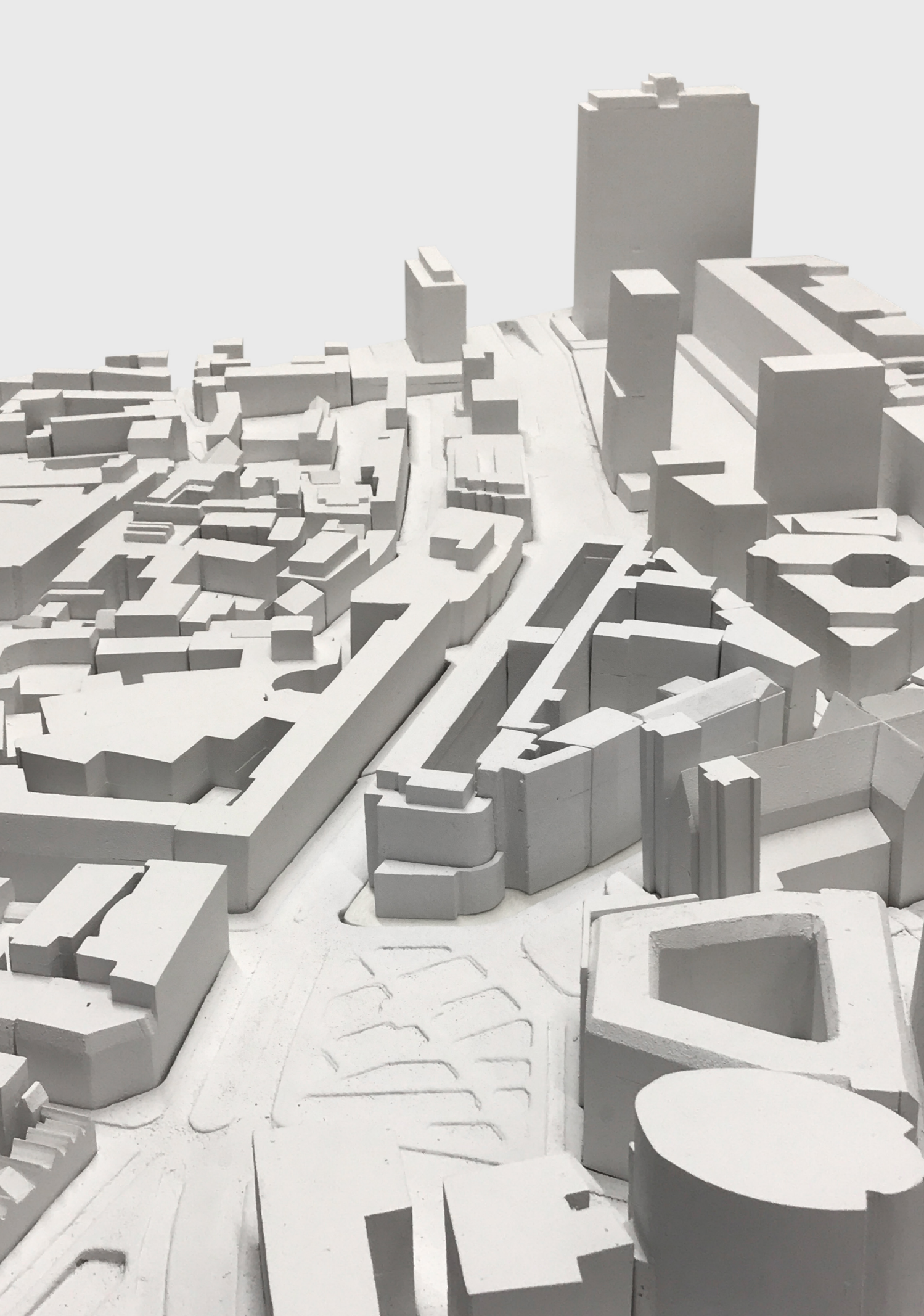
Rue de La Benetue





1:500 site model in foam
situation with future developments





1:500 site model in foam
situation with future developments



view on Boulevard de Berlaimont
Brussels, November 2021



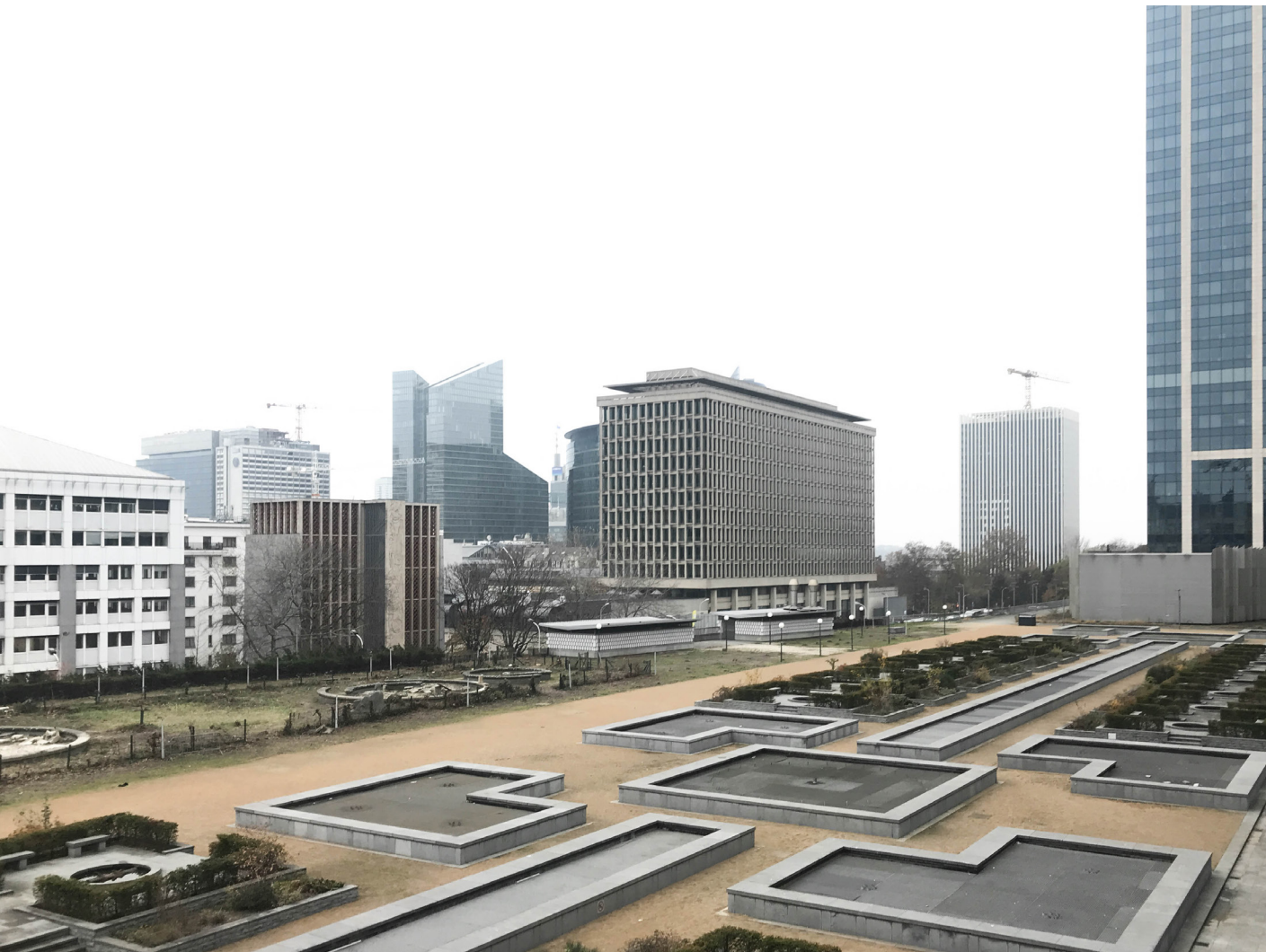
view on Boulevard de Berlaimont
Brussels, November 2021



view from the St Michael and St Gudula Cathedral
Brussels, November 2021



view on Brussel North
Brussels, November 2021



view on Brussel North
Brussels, November 2021



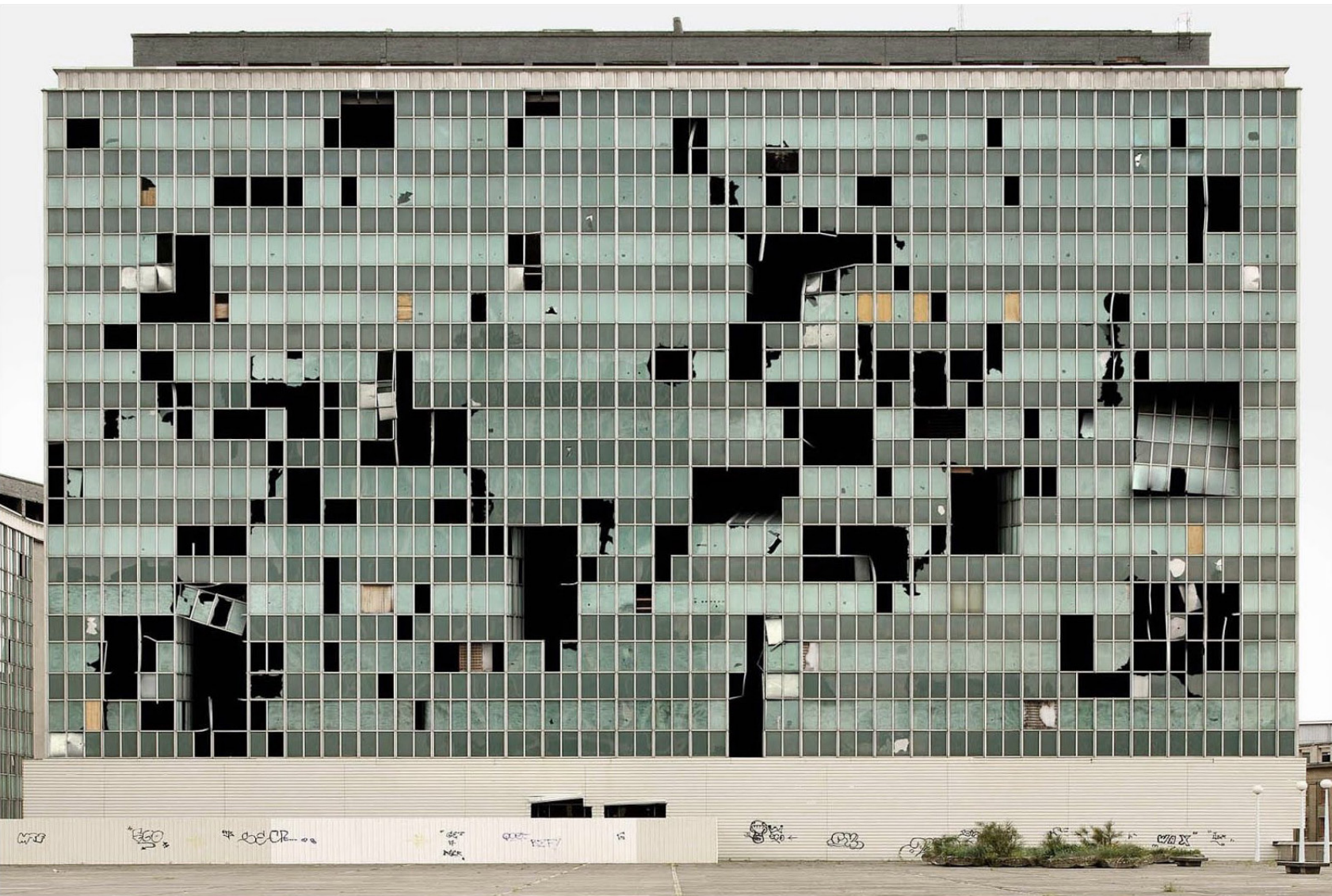
view from Brussels Police station
Brussels, November 2021



view on Rue de La Banque
Brussels, November 2021



view on future developments
Brussels, November 2021

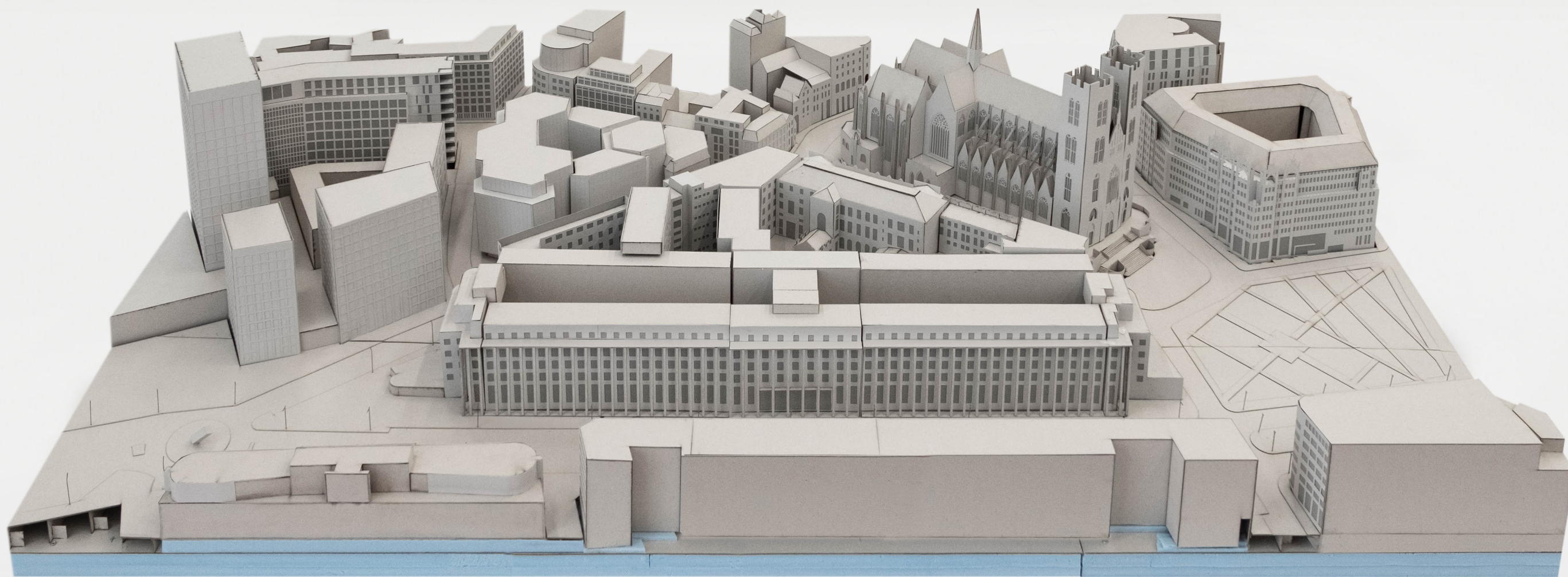


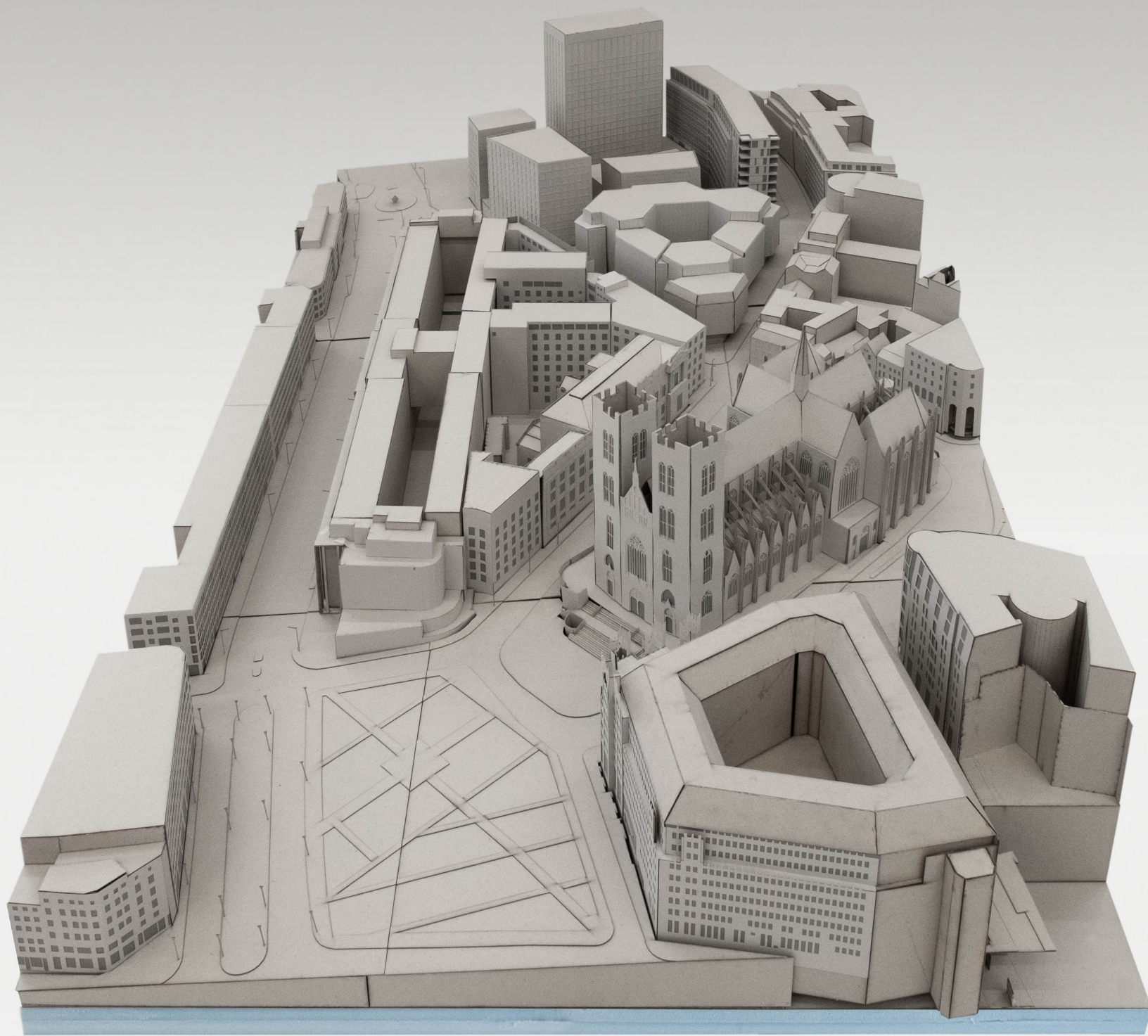
Filip Dujardin
Untitled, from the series *Fictions*, 2009



view on future developments
Brussels, November 2021

1:200 site model in cardboard
situation with future developments





1:200 site model in cardboard
situation with future developments



-1, view in the basement
National Bank of Belgium



-1, view on the ramp
National Bank of Belgium



O, banking hall
National Bank of Belgium





O, banking hall
National Bank of Belgium





+2, typical office interior
National Bank of Belgium



+2, typical office interior
National Bank of Belgium



(left photograph Bas Leemans)



+2, typical break room interior
National Bank of Belgium

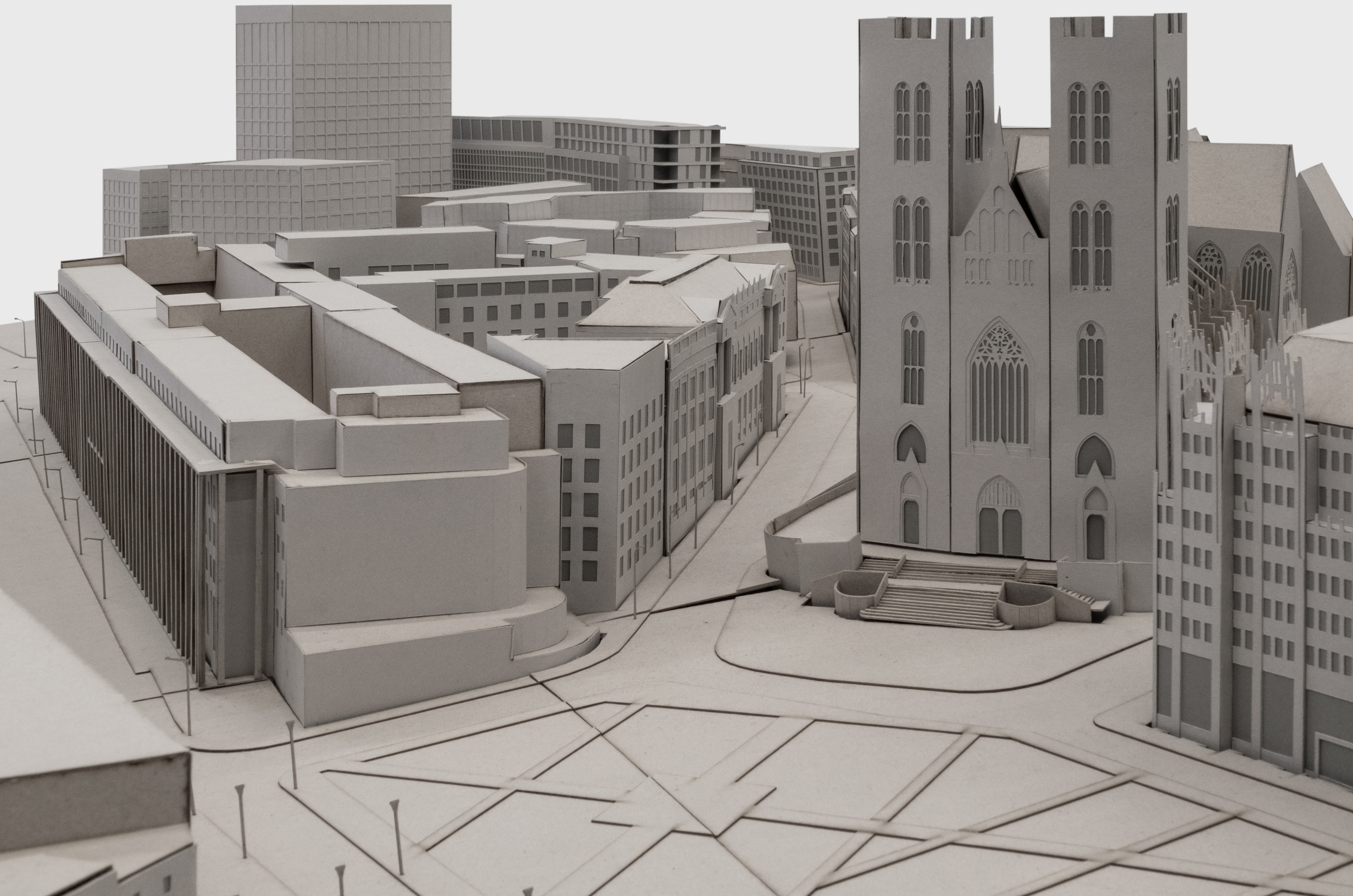


+3, typical aluminium guillotine windows
National Bank of Belgium

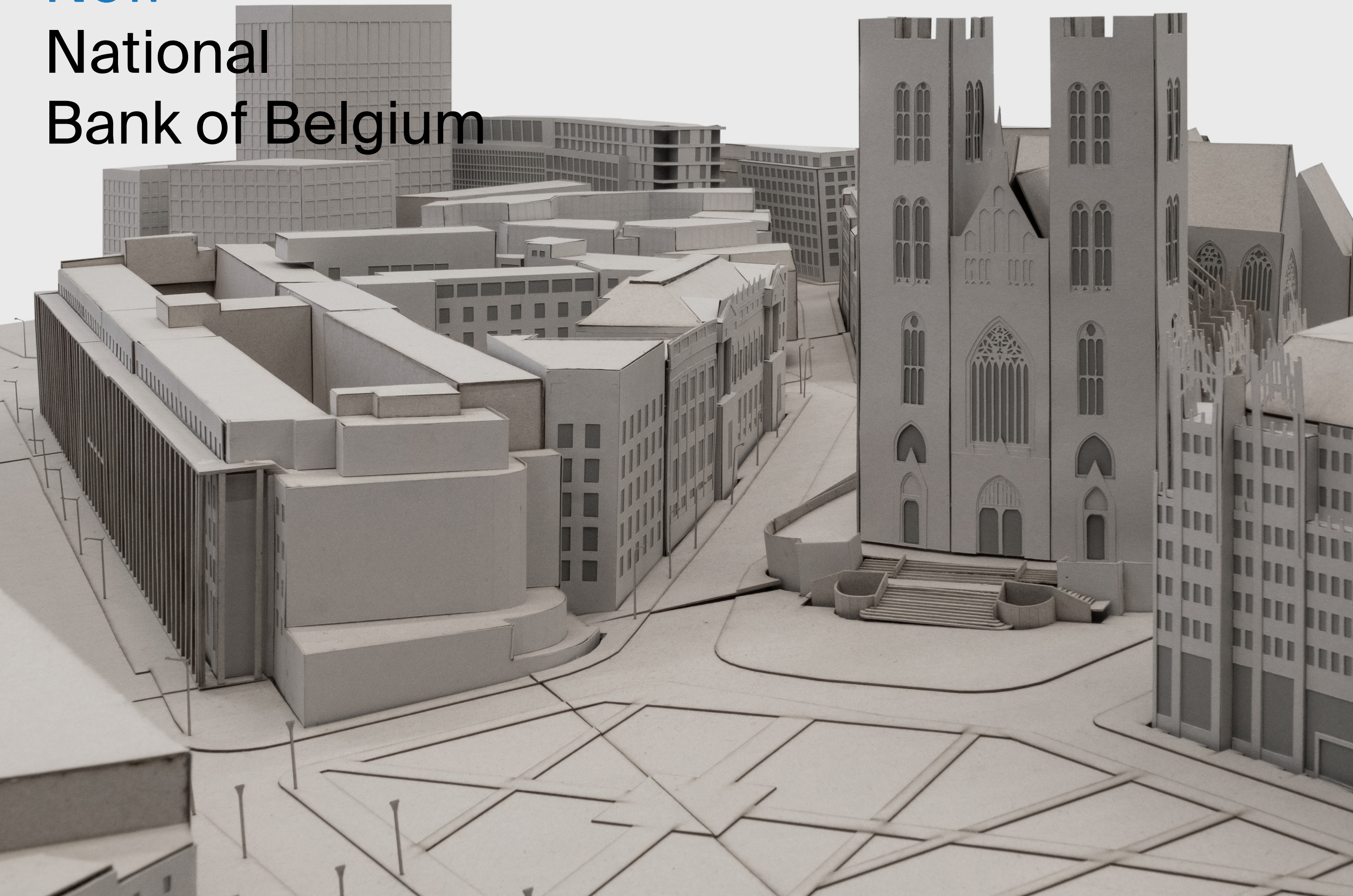


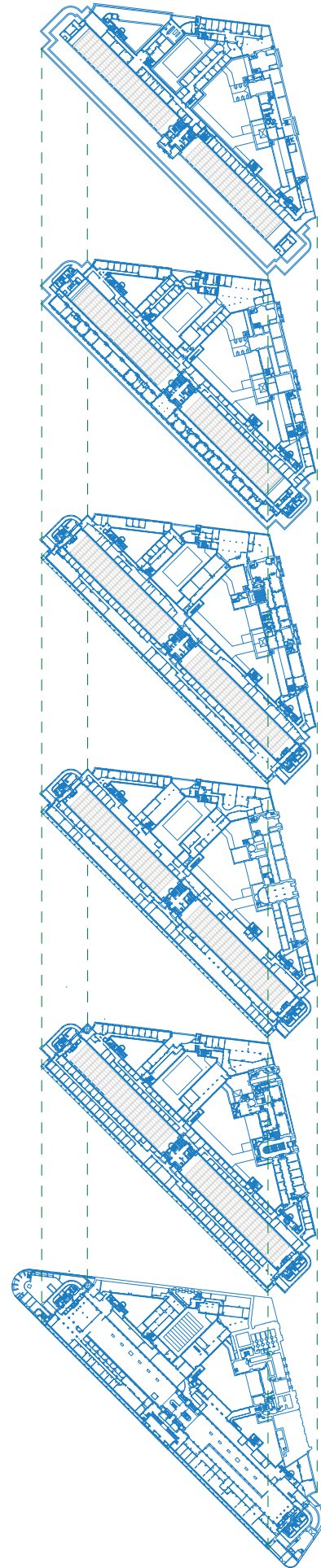


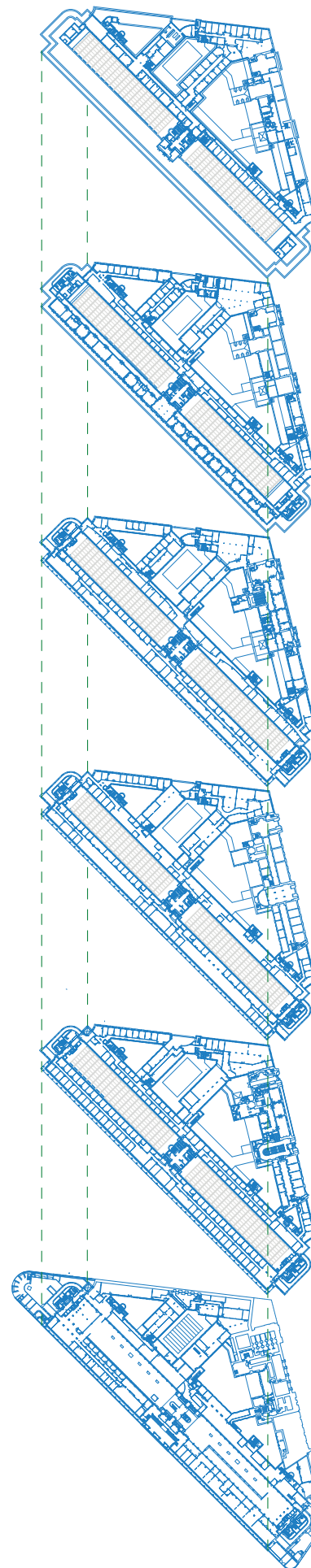




New National Bank of Belgium







fifth floor

fourth floor

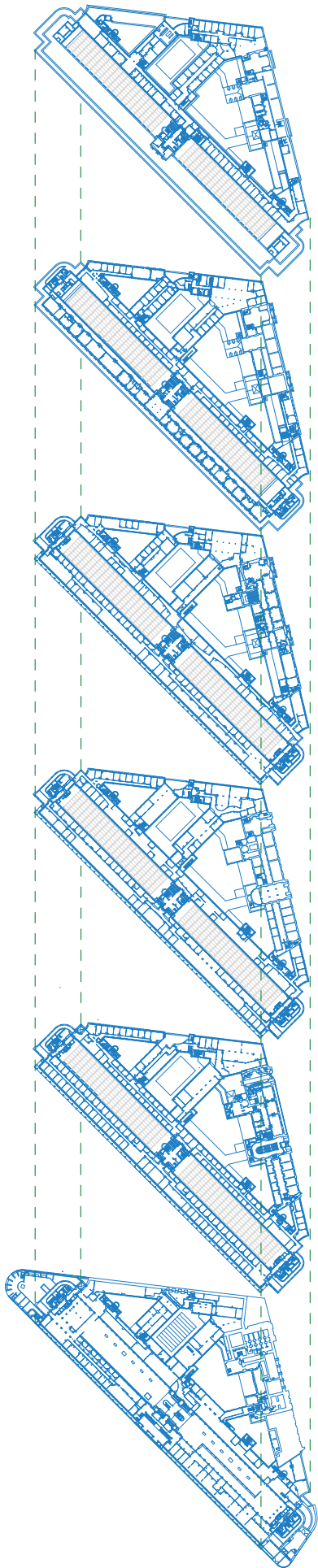
third floor

second floor

first floor

ground floor

public entrance 1 on Boulevard de Berlaimont:
lobby
exhibition banking hall
functional banking hall, deposit and withdraw
public banking hall, pop-up café
bank offices



fifth floor

fourth floor

third floor

second floor

first floor

ground floor

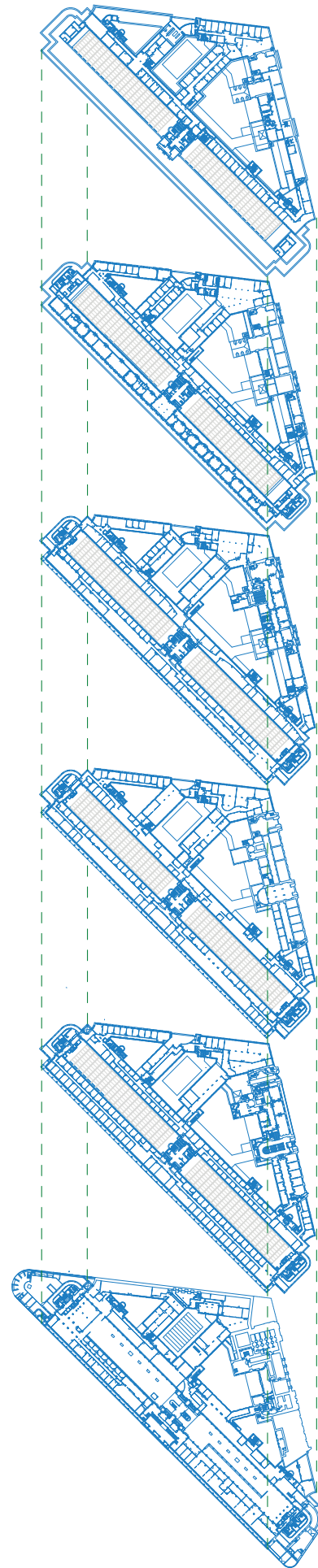
public entrance 2 on Rue de la Banque:
pop-up café leading towards banking hall

public entrance 3 on Rue de Bois Sauvage:
storeroom in governor's hotel

bank offices
bank restaurant

public entrance 1 on Boulevard de Berlaimont:
lobby
exhibition banking hall
functional banking hall, deposit and withdraw
public banking hall, pop-up café

bank offices



fifth floor

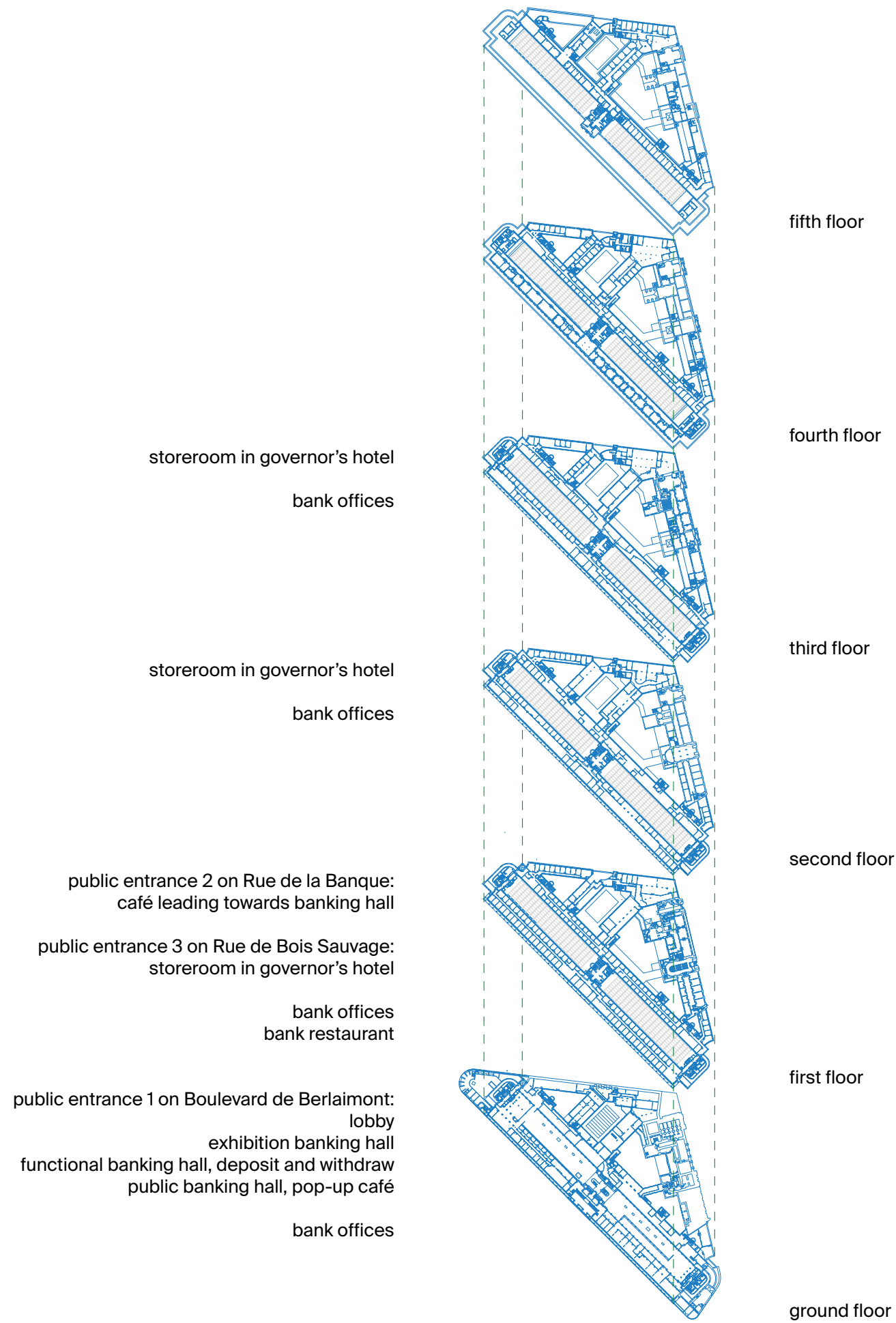
fourth floor

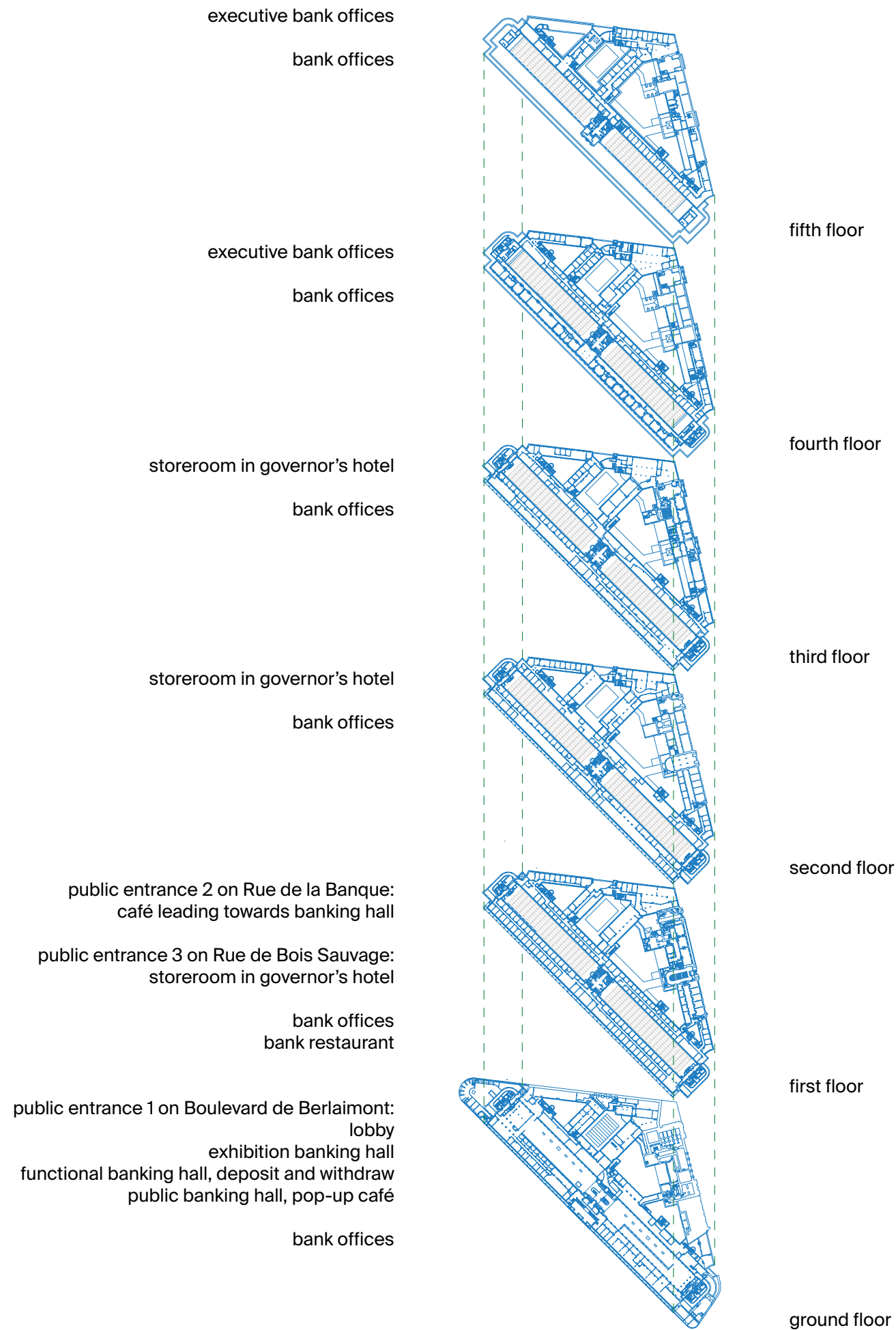
third floor

second floor

first floor

ground floor





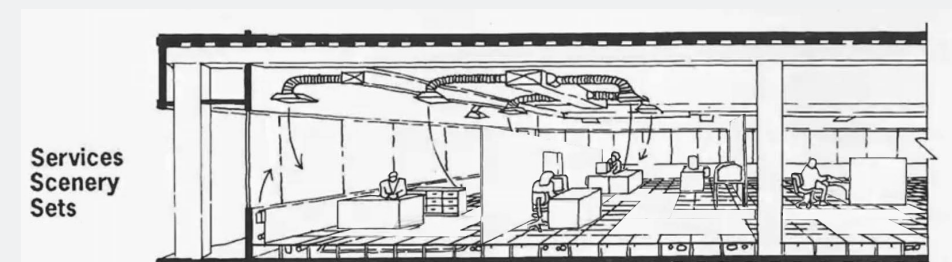
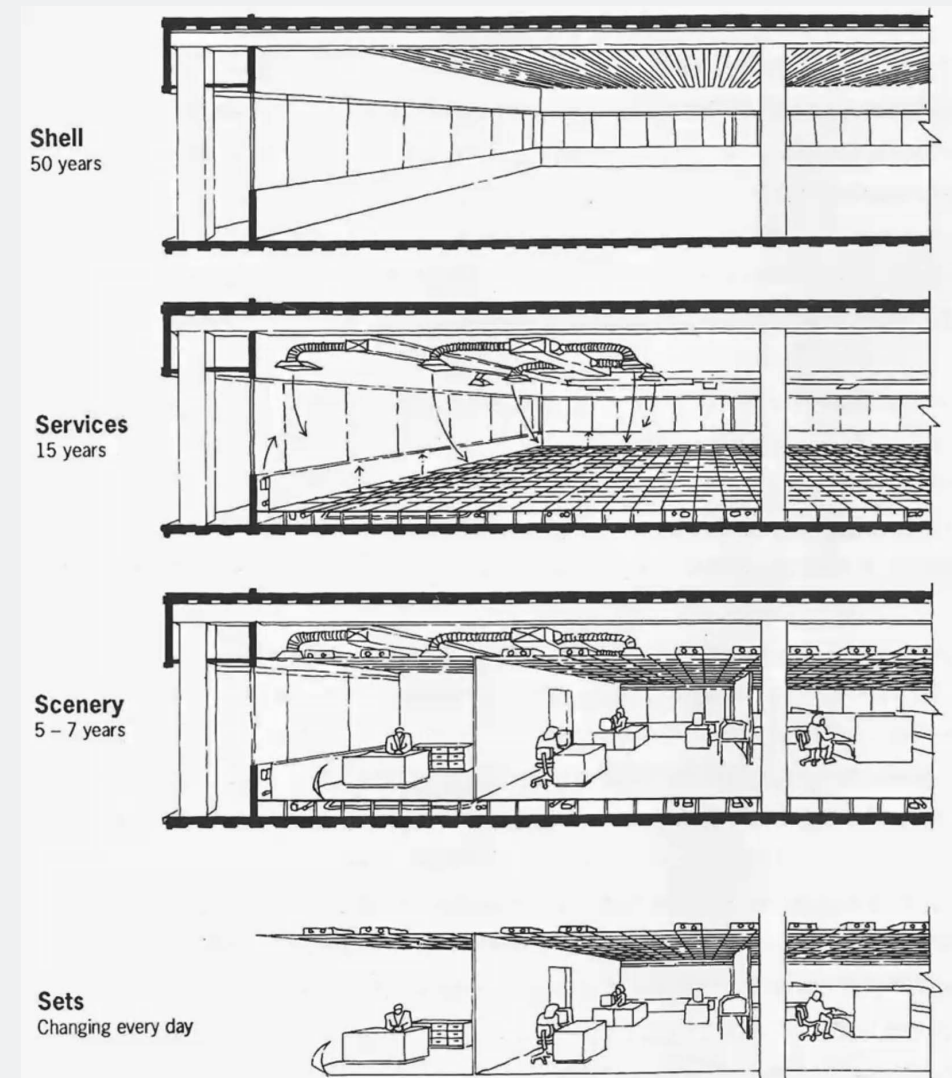
How far can the architect go with an existing building without demolishing any built volumes, rendering the structure of the bank a shell and combining its services, scenery and sets into a single layer?

Undressing the existing fabric to reveal the theatre of a typical office interior.

Undressing representative materials of the National Bank of Belgium to reinforce its loss of traditional secure functions.

Undressing the National Bank of Belgium to make- and open up space for its inhabitants and visitors.

undressing



1.
Services, scenery and sets
combined into a single layer,
based on DEGW, 1989

What is needed in a room after the shell? What accomodates the space? How to reconfigure the hierarchy of these interior layers?

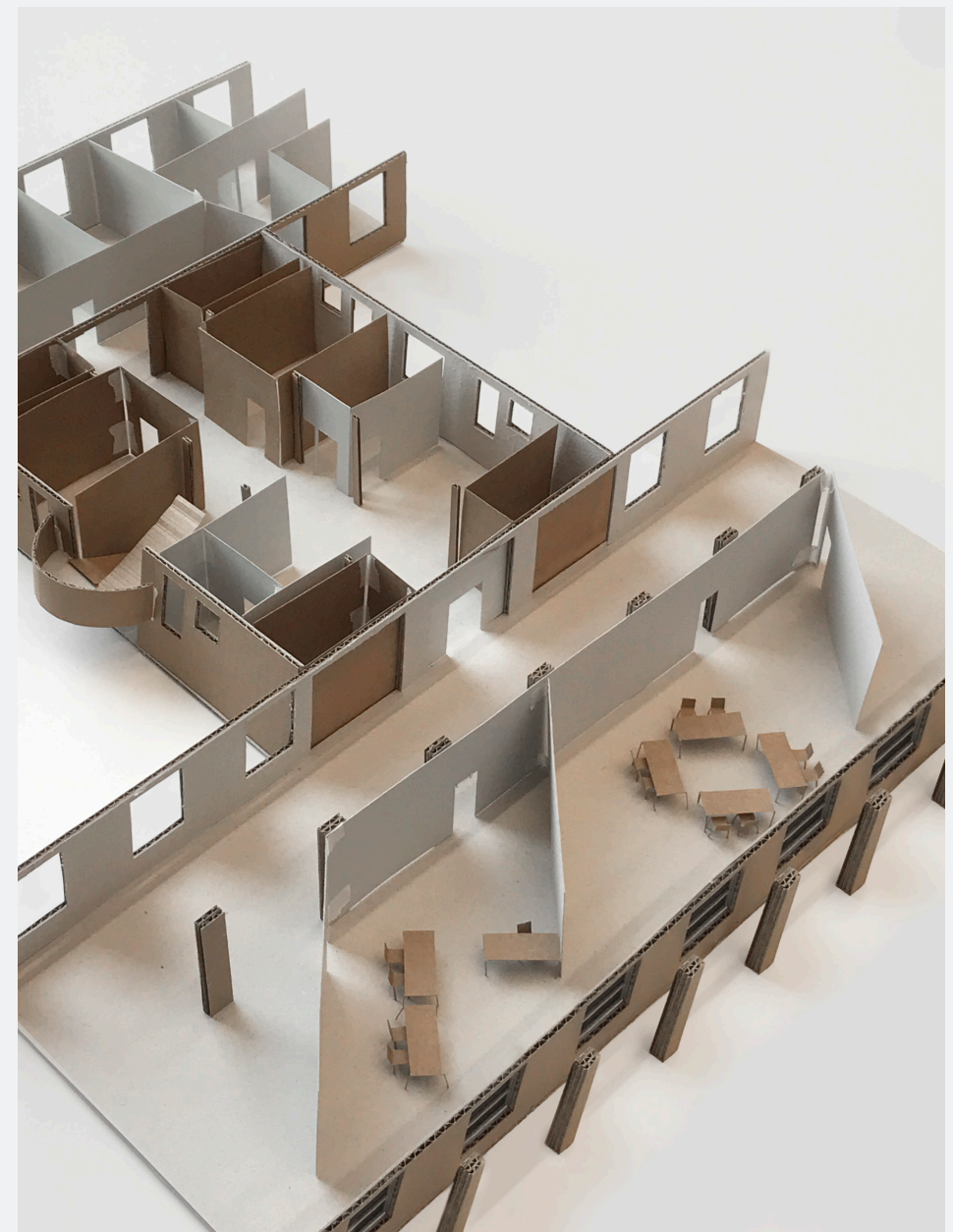
Through reconfiguration the interior hierarchy is renewed.

Through reconfiguration the existing interior fit-out elements change.

Through reconfiguration a more dynamic lay-out with intimate neeches is achieved.

undressing

reconfiguring



2.
New National Bank of
Belgium, removal and
reconfiguration of
existing interior layers, 1:50

How can existing- and new technical services be an active instrument in the interior of the New National Bank of Belgium?

What if the relationship between buildings and their services is fundamentally rethought?

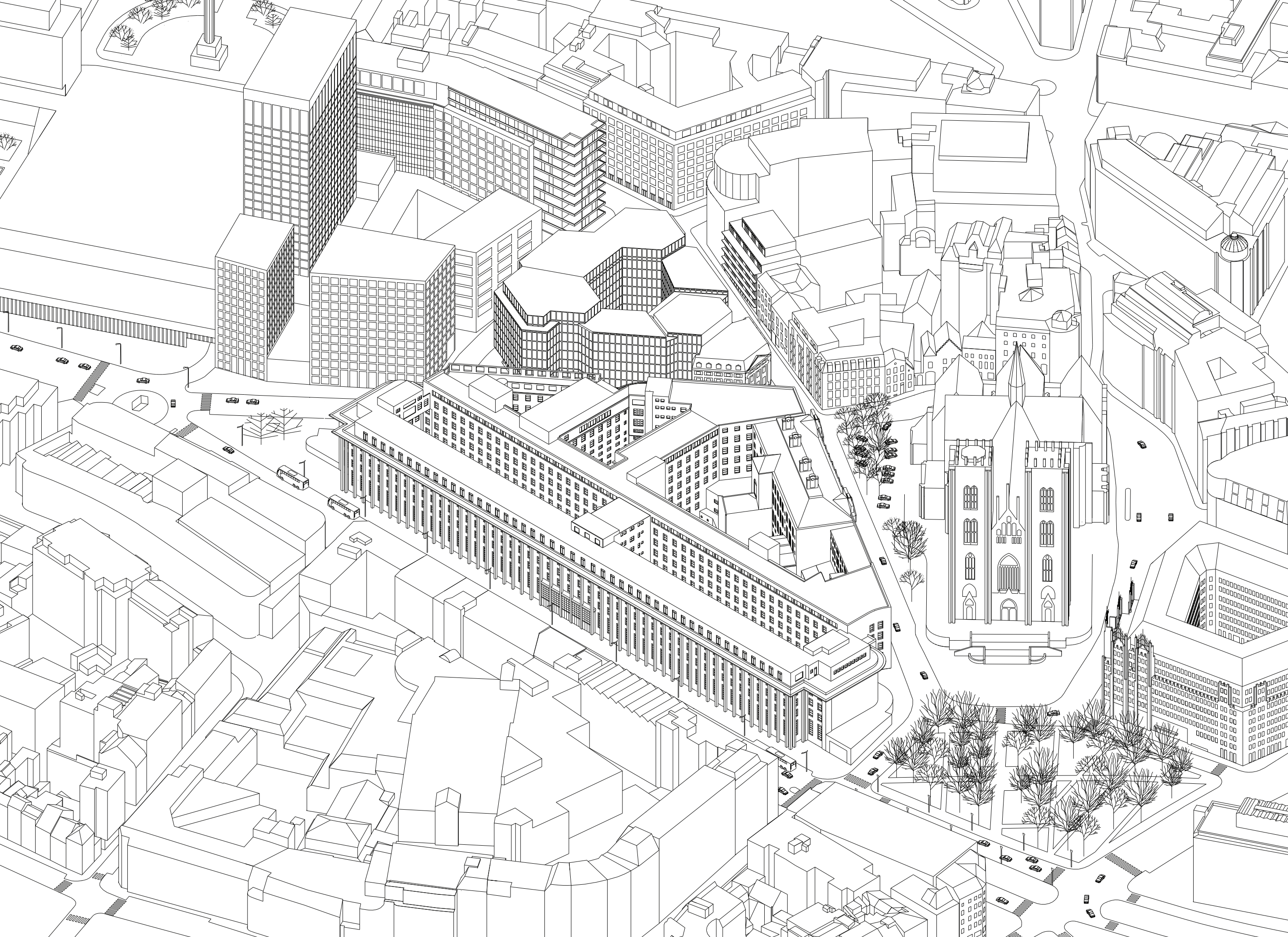
Through the displacement of technical elements in the interior of the office, a new work culture emerges.

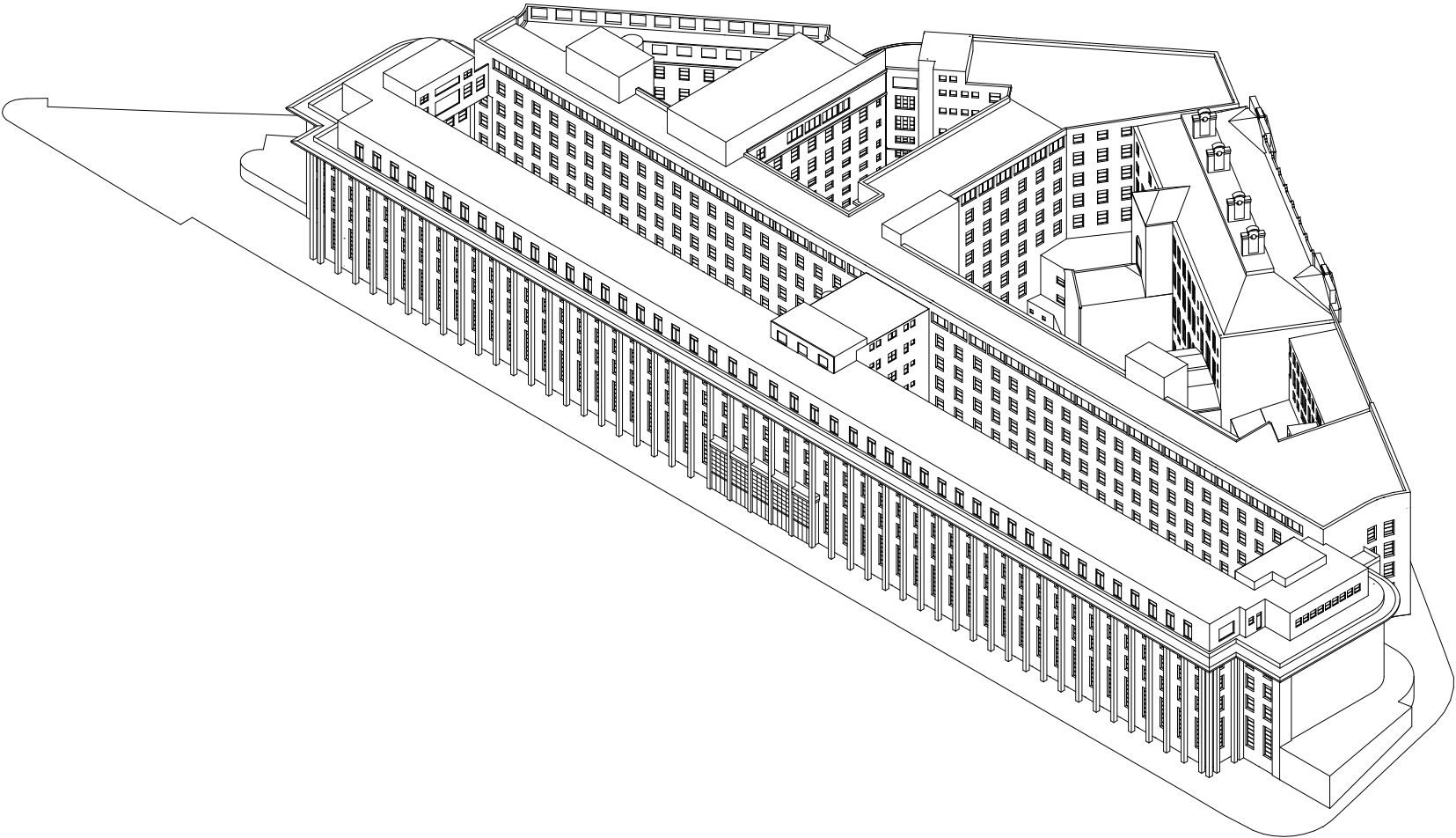
Ducts, lifts and services are becoming space-defining elements in between which the work is happening.

undressing
reconfiguring
displacing

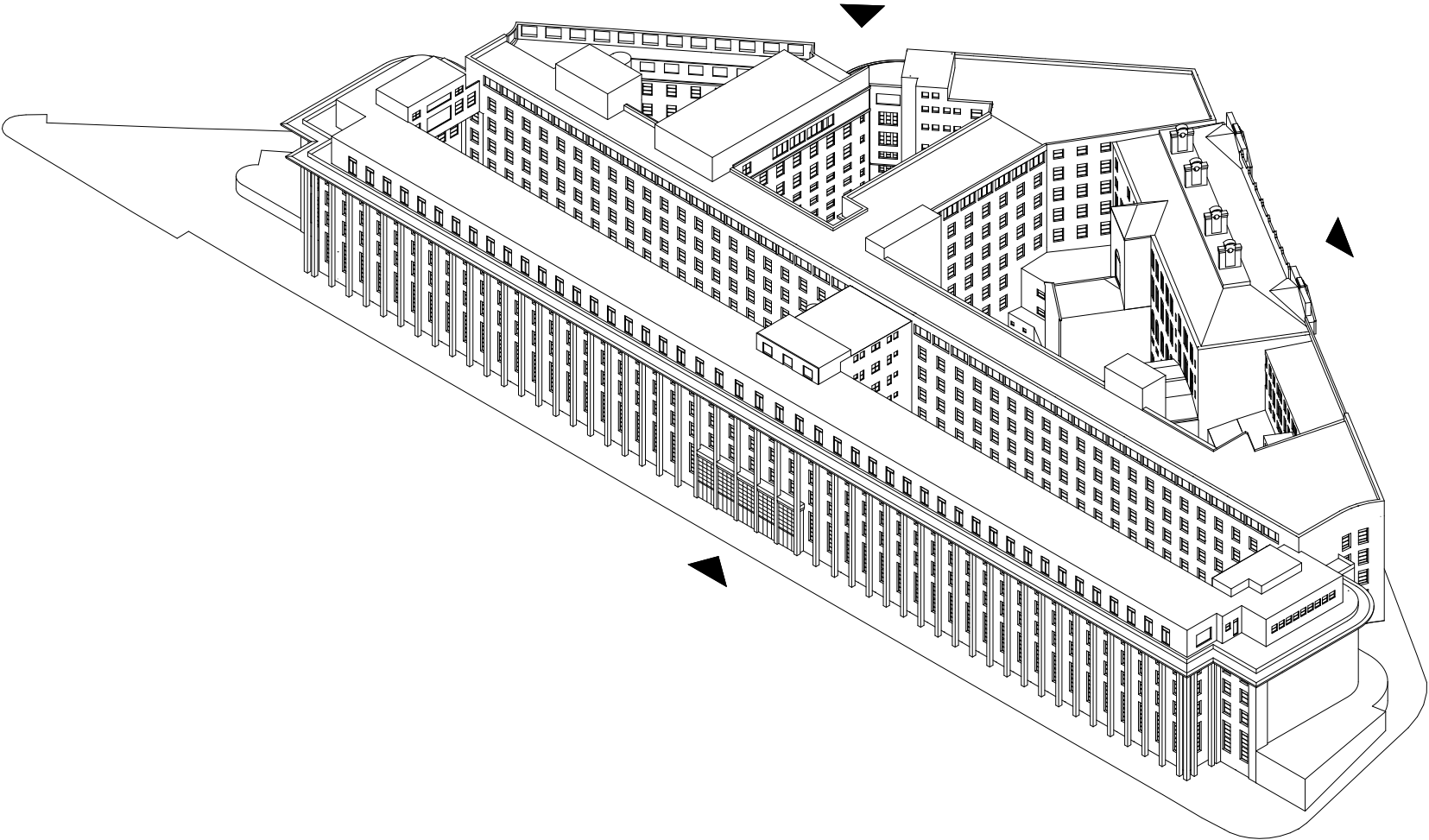


3.
New National Bank of
Belgium, removed ducts
are displaced as an element
for meeting

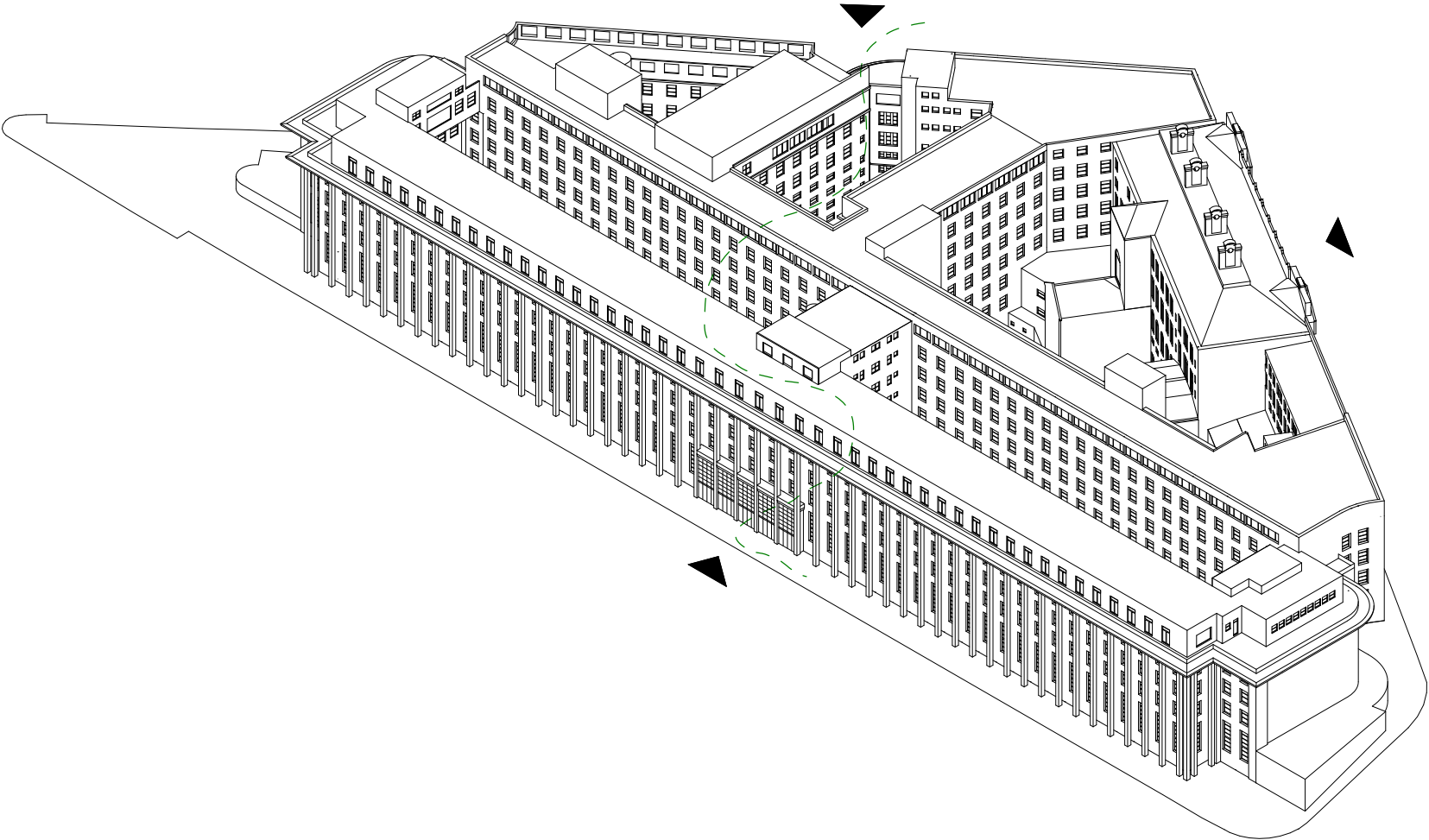




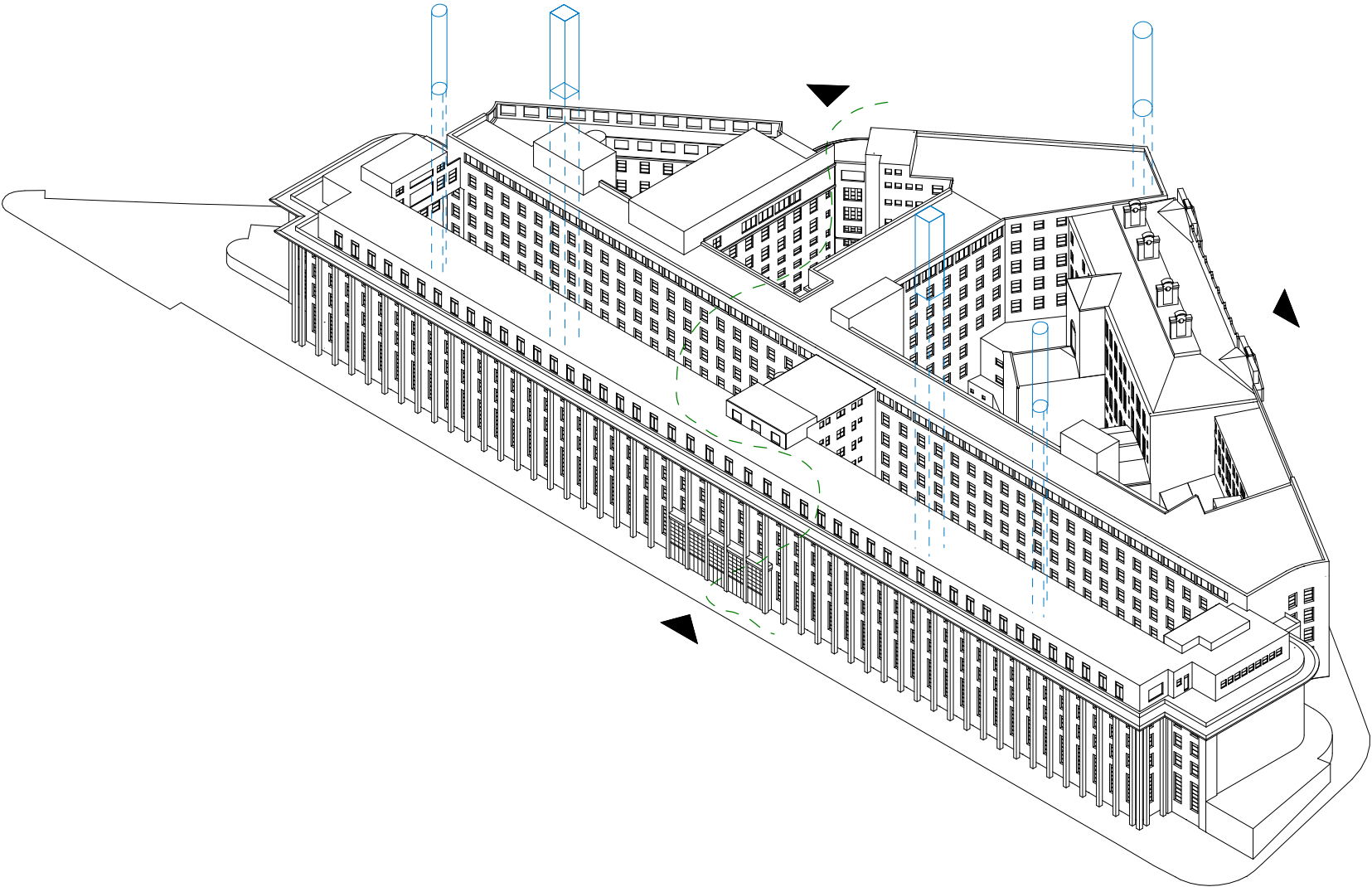
axonometry
new public entrances



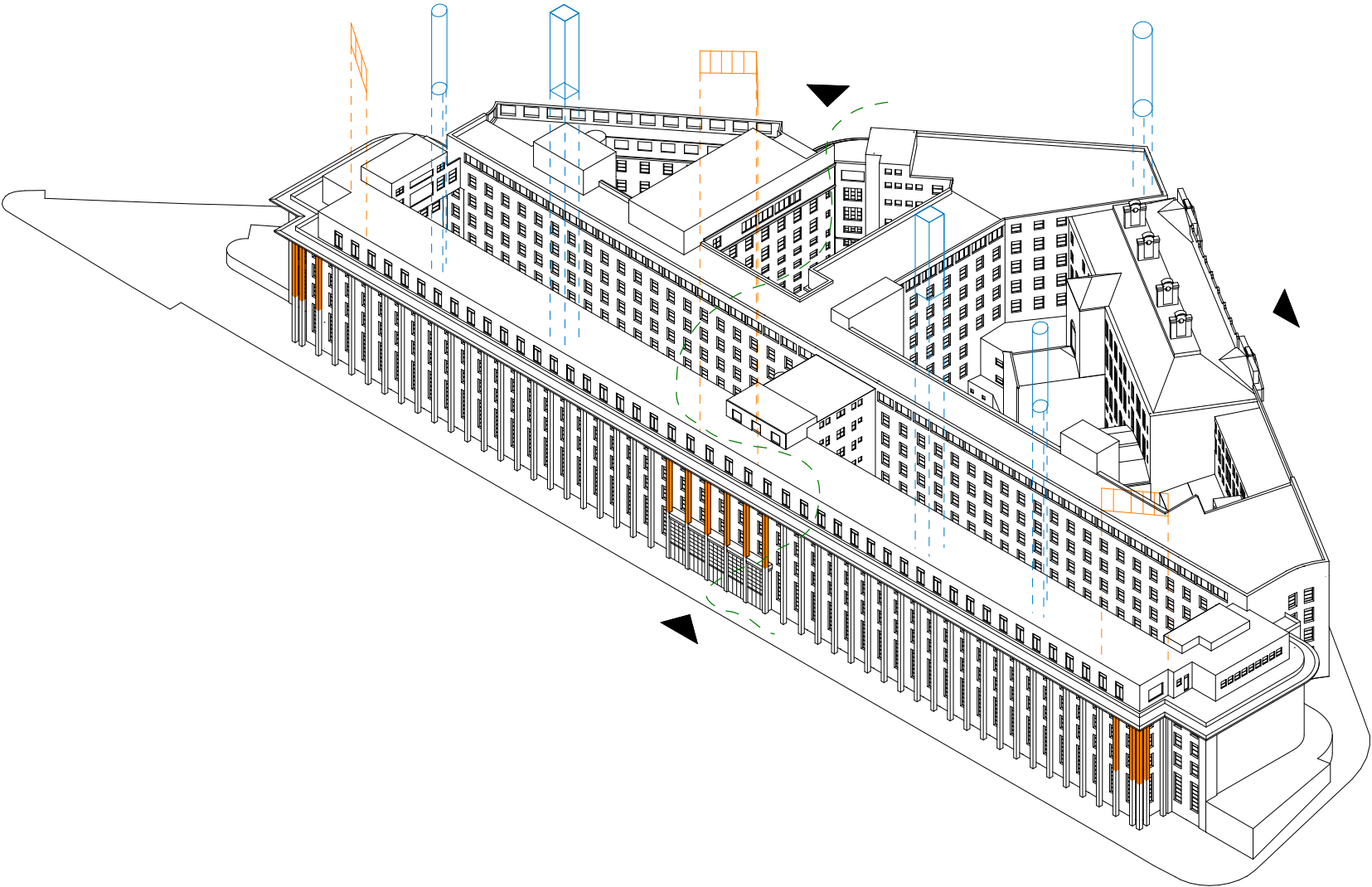
axonometry
a public route



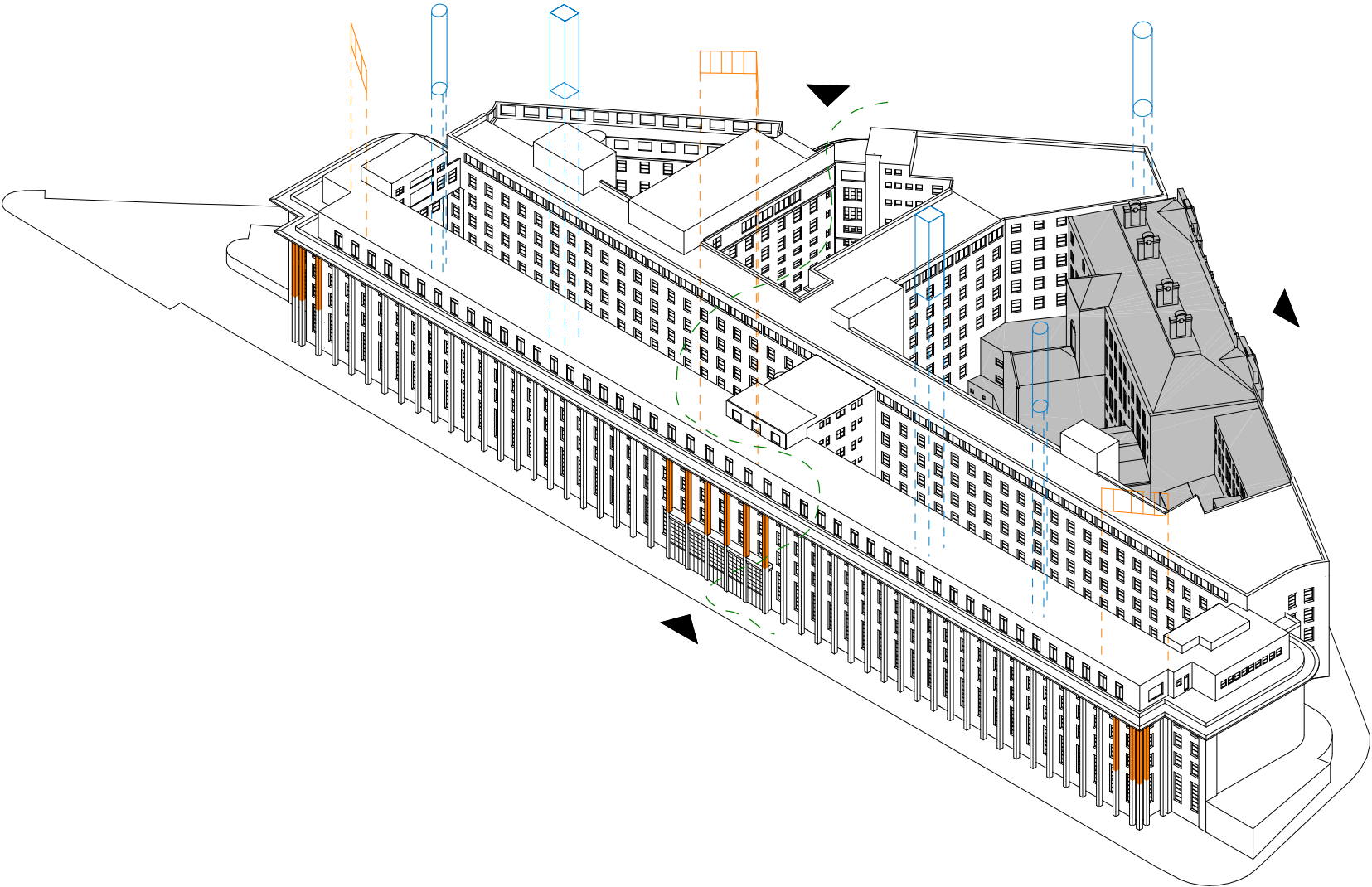
axonometry
new circulation cores (stairs + lifts)



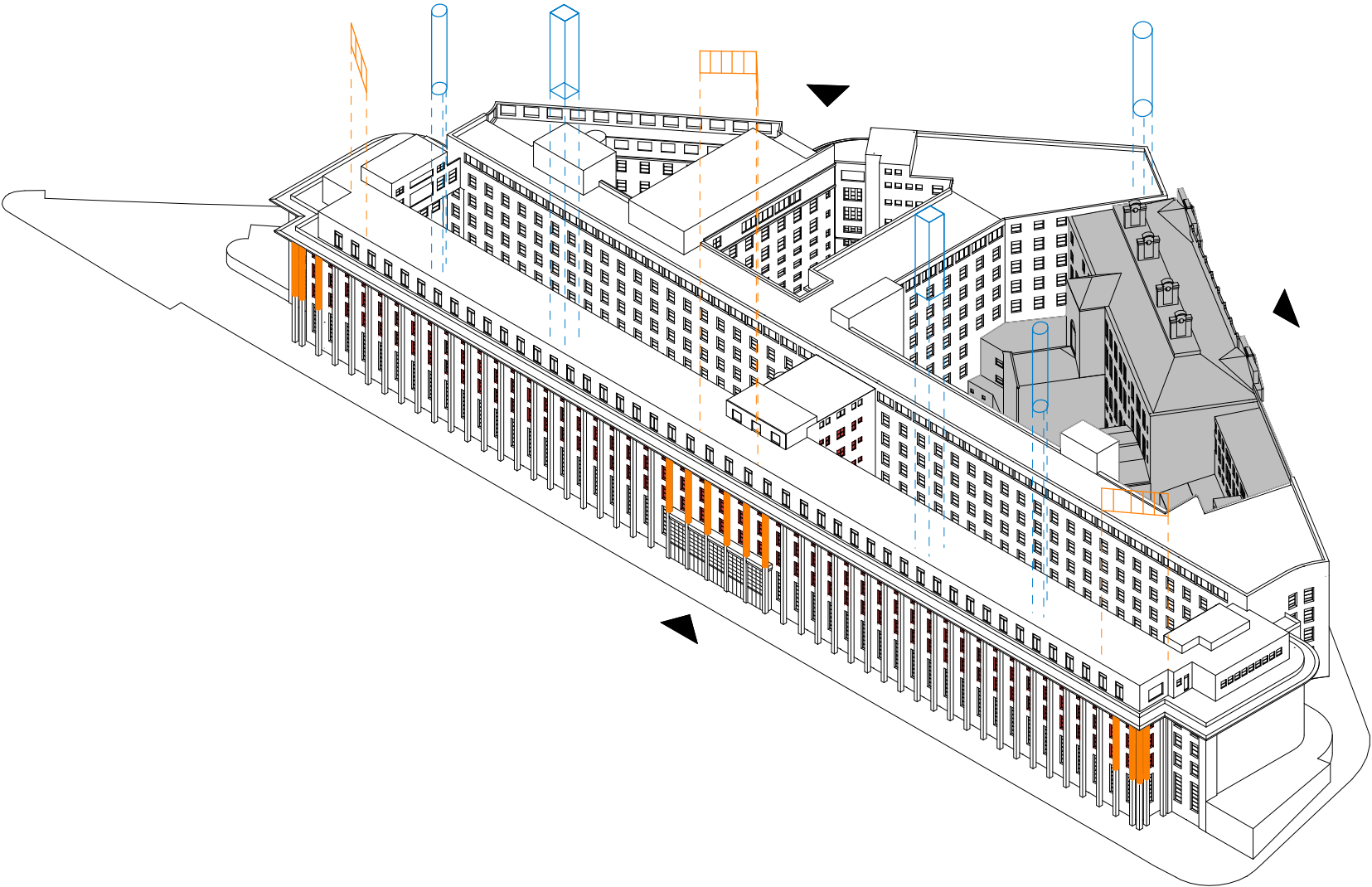
axonometry
opening up the bank entrance and corners

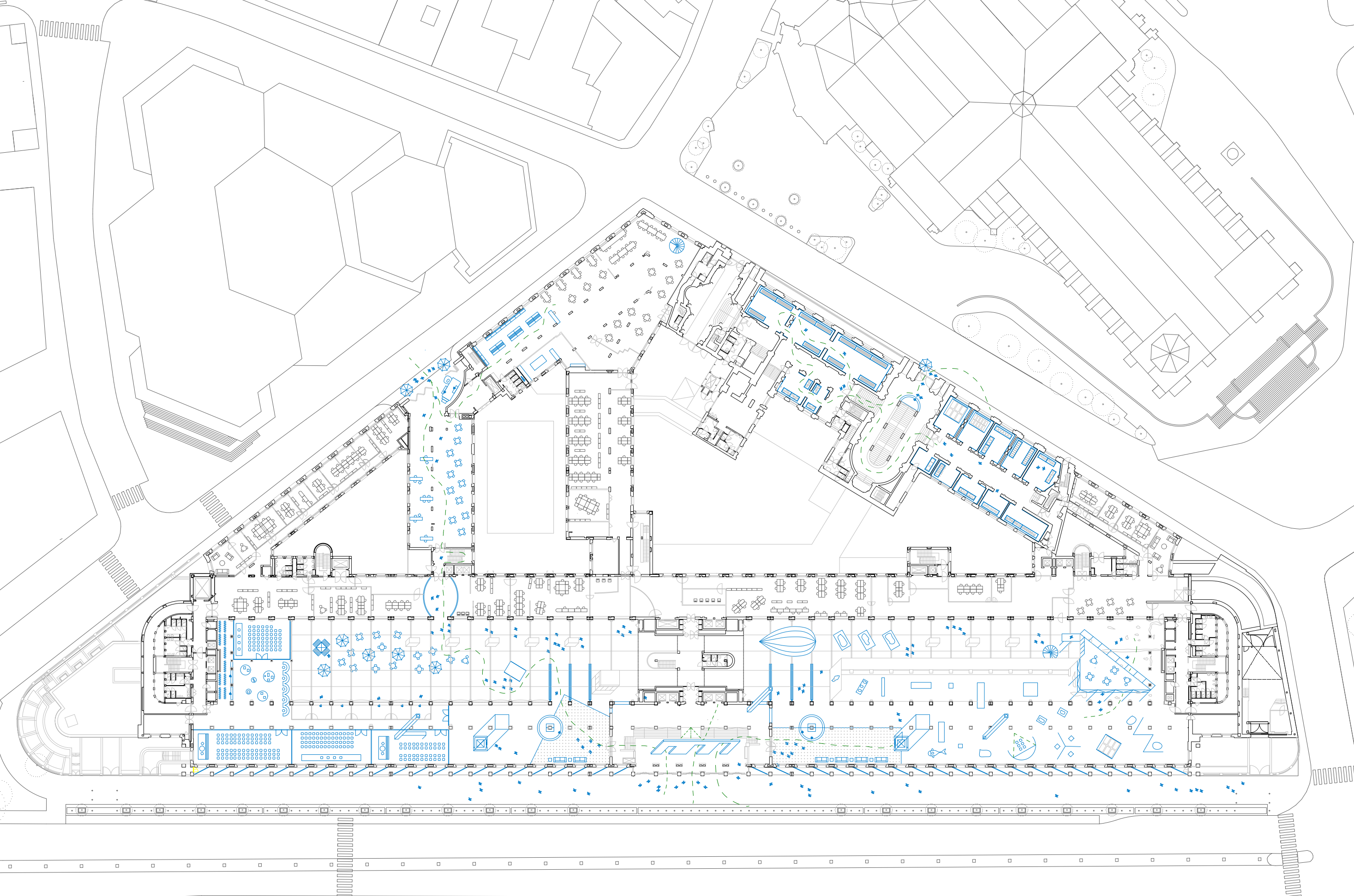


axonometry
governor's hotel as storage

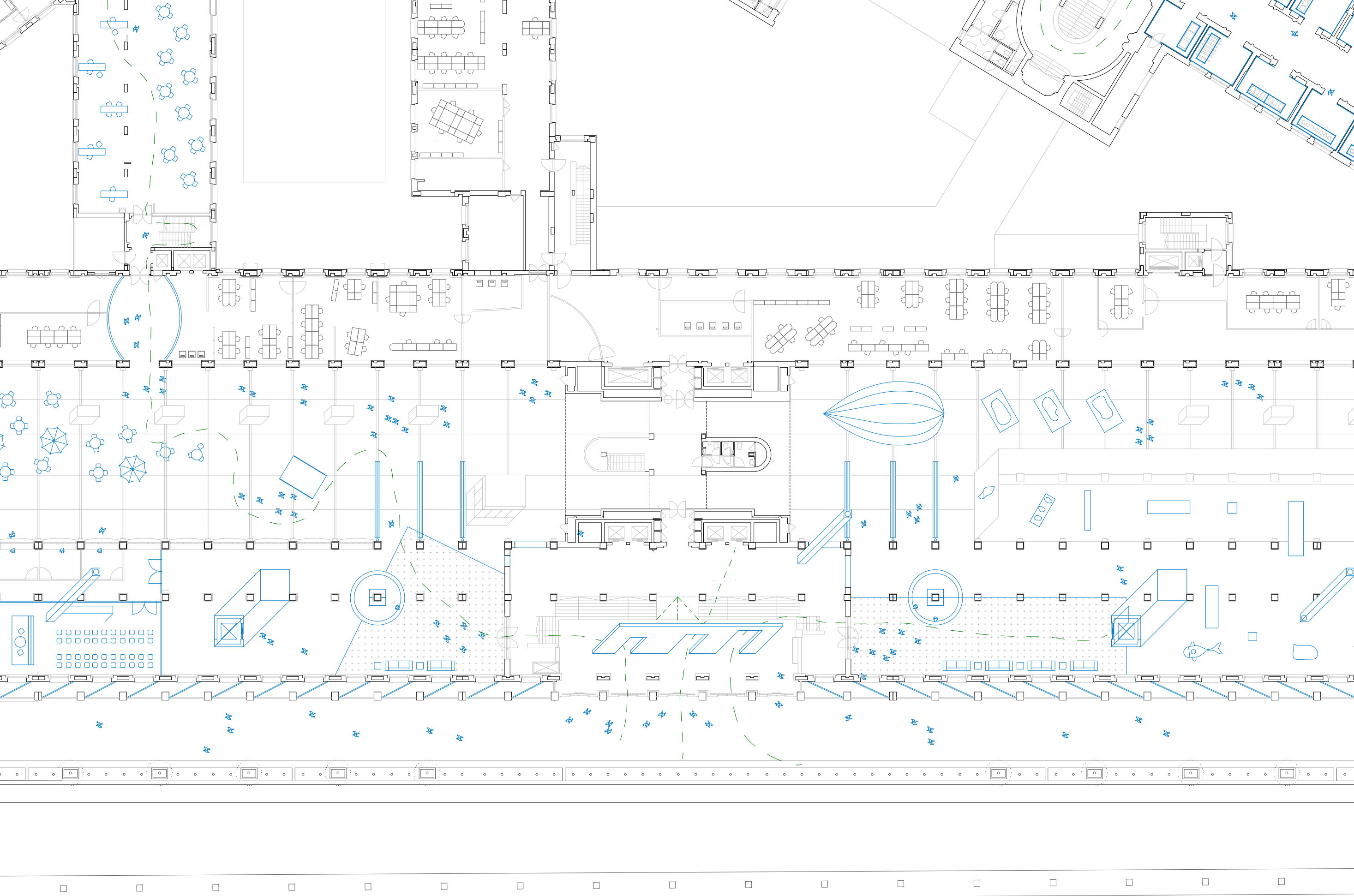


axonometry
shifting down the windows



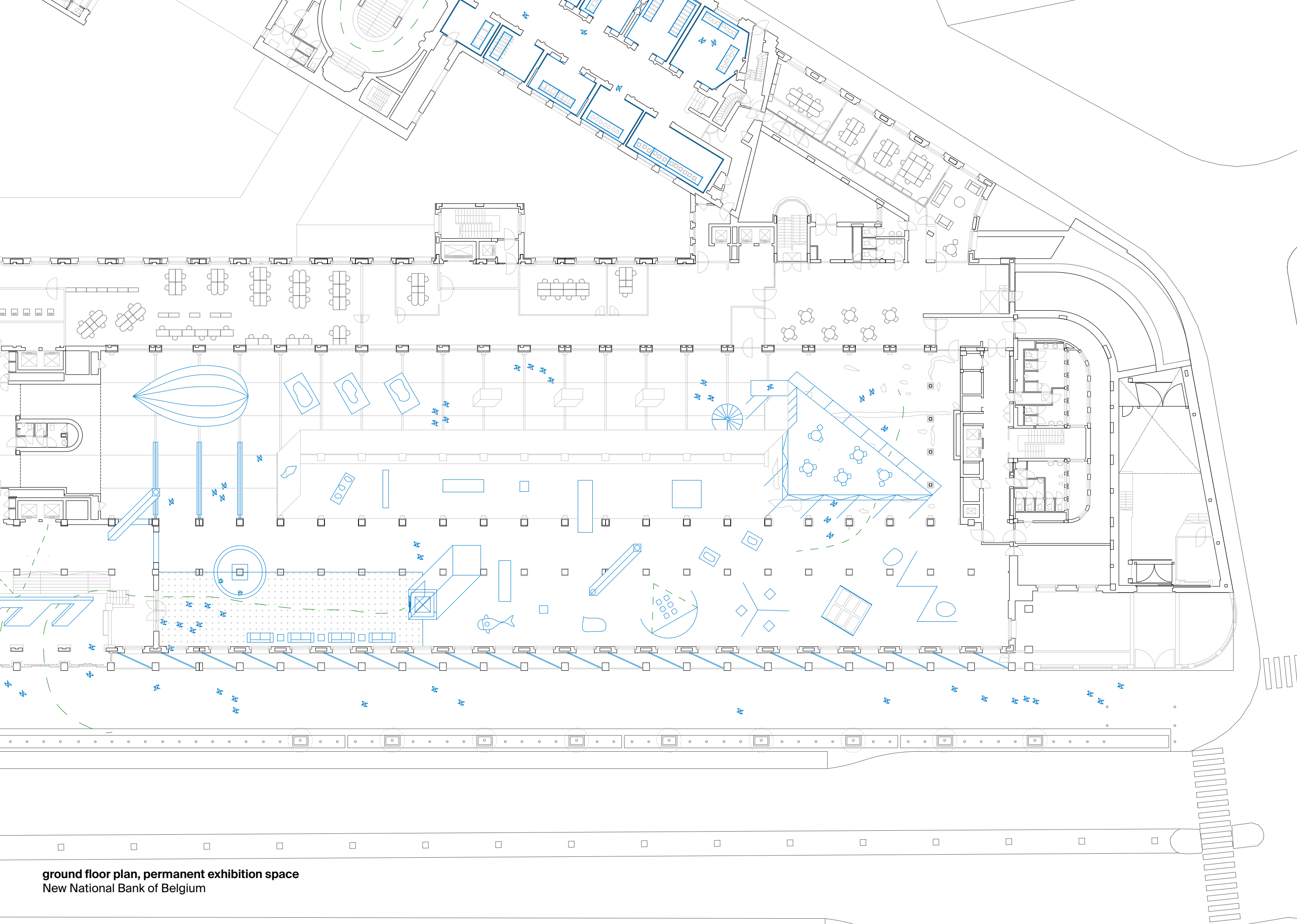


ground floor plan, combined
New National Bank of Belgium

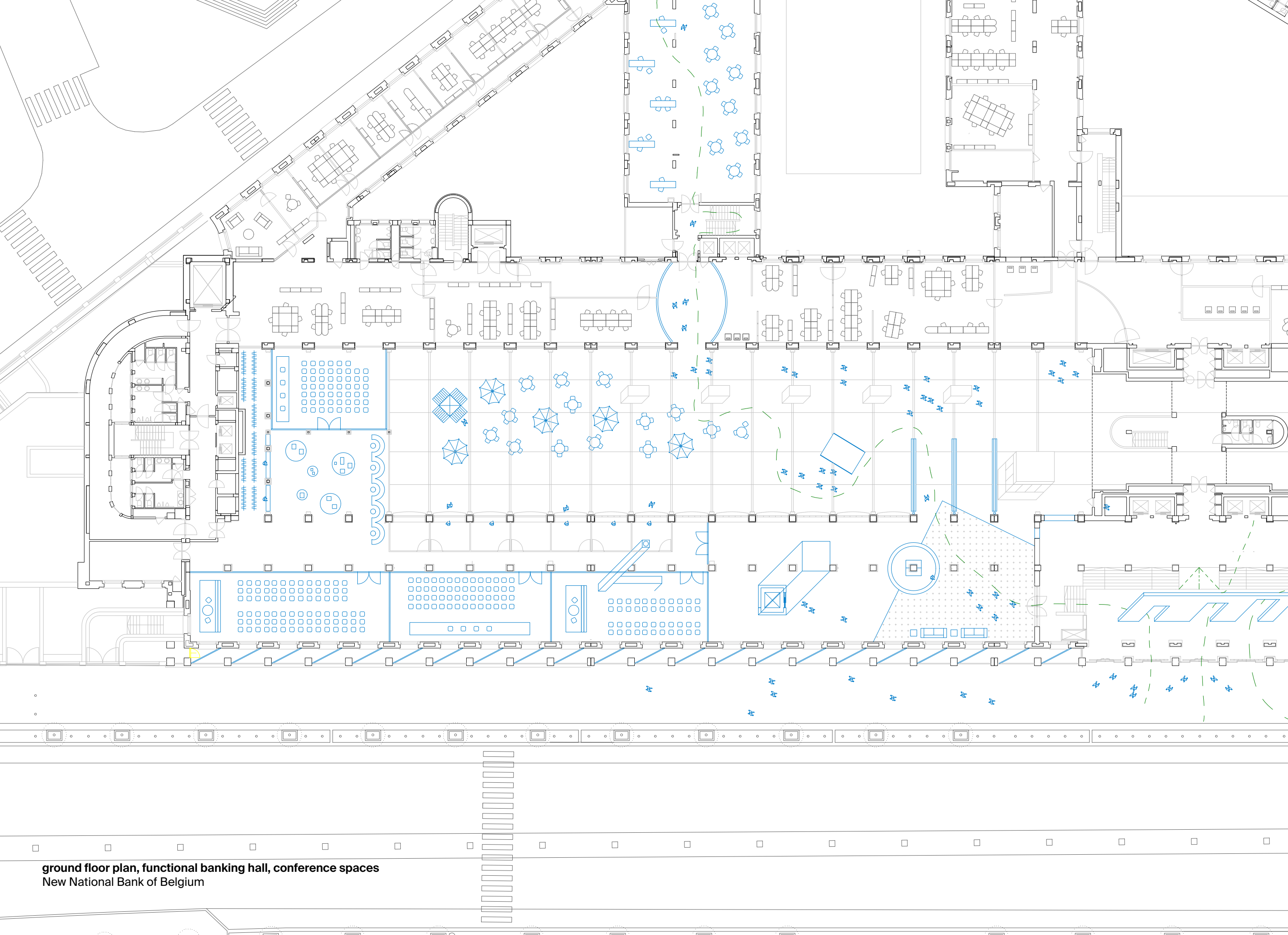


ground floor plan, public entrance on Boulevard de Berlaimont
New National Bank of Belgium



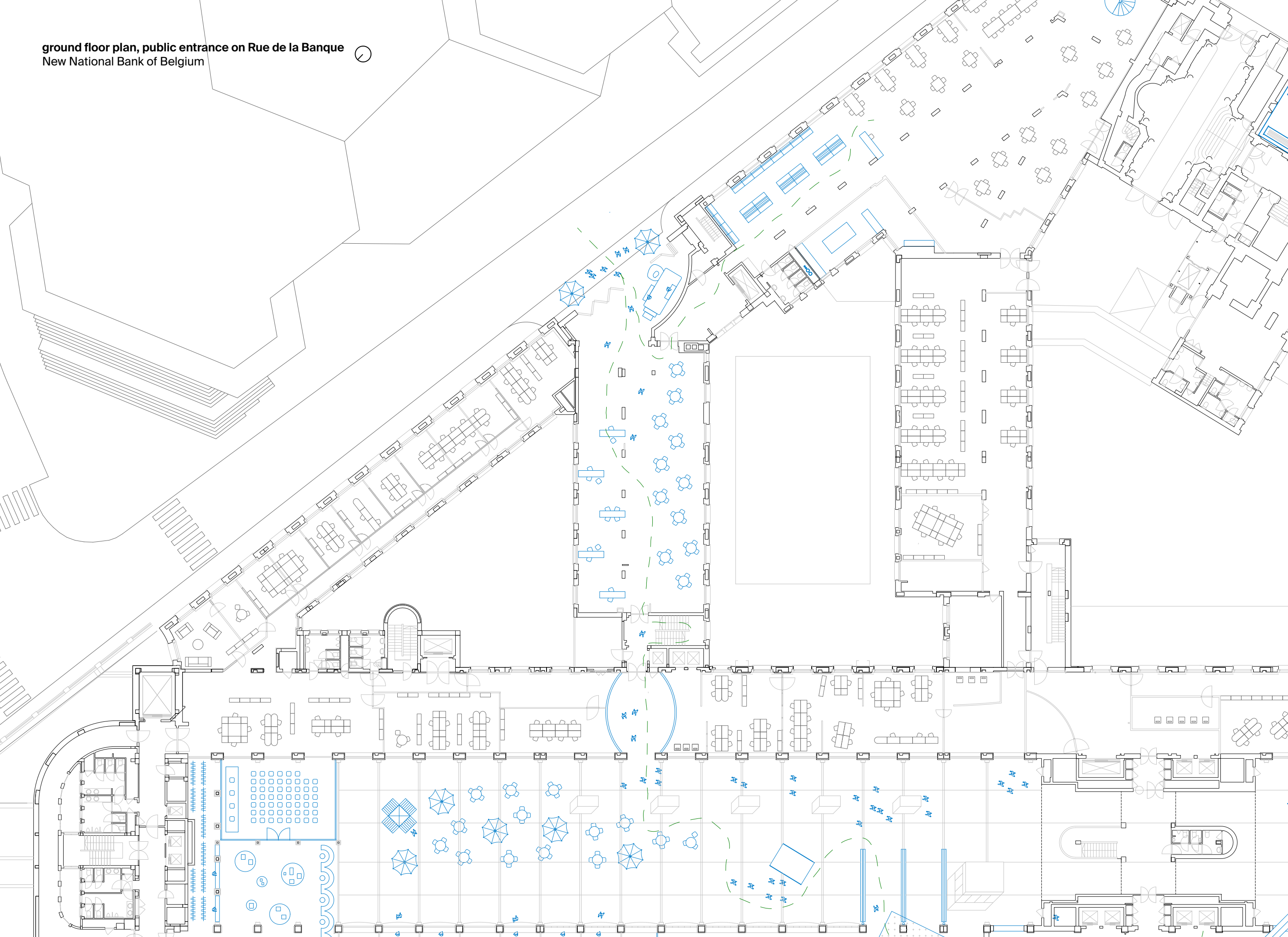


ground floor plan, permanent exhibition space
New National Bank of Belgium

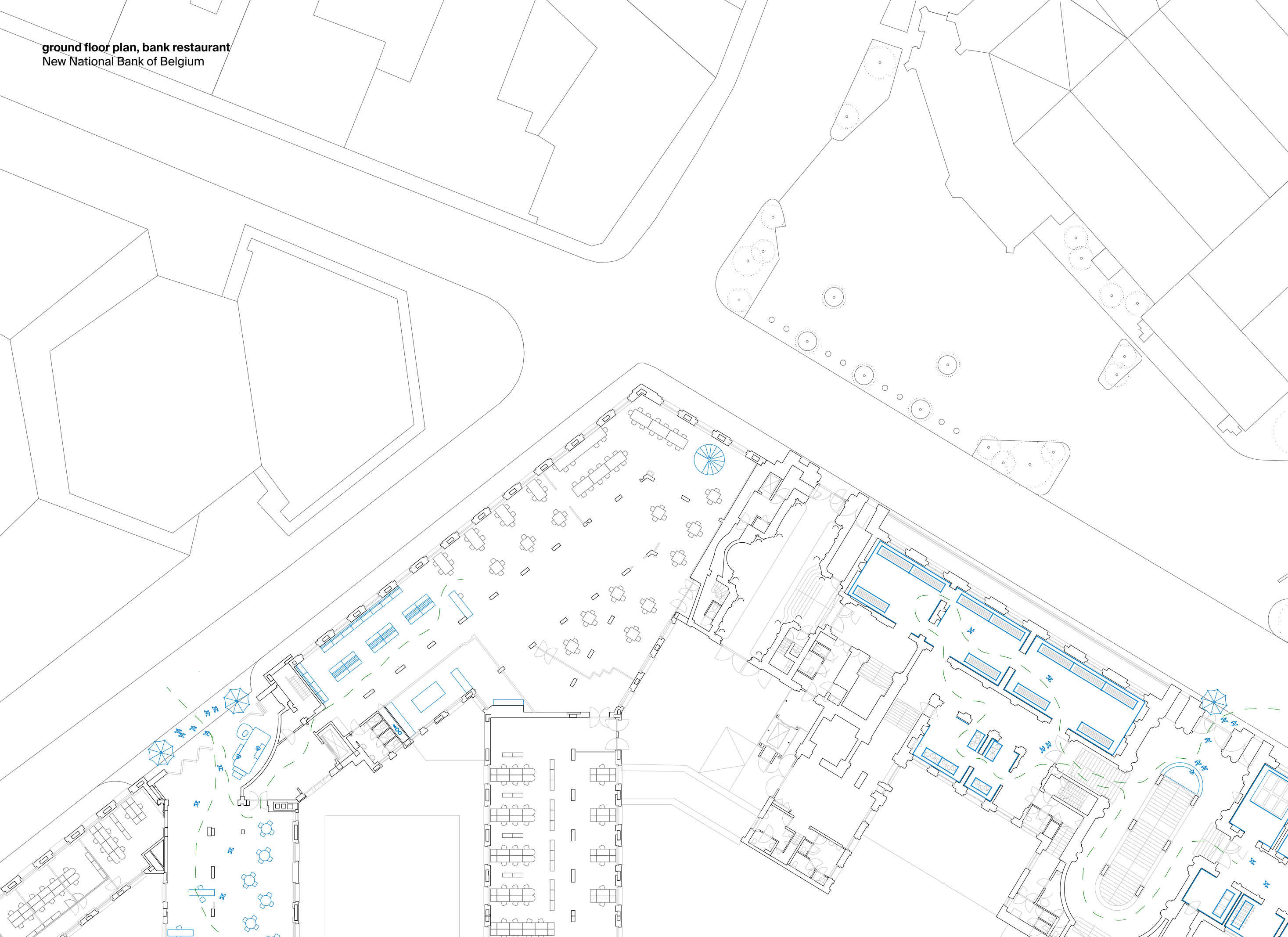


ground floor plan, functional banking hall, conference spaces
New National Bank of Belgium

ground floor plan, public entrance on Rue de la Banque
New National Bank of Belgium

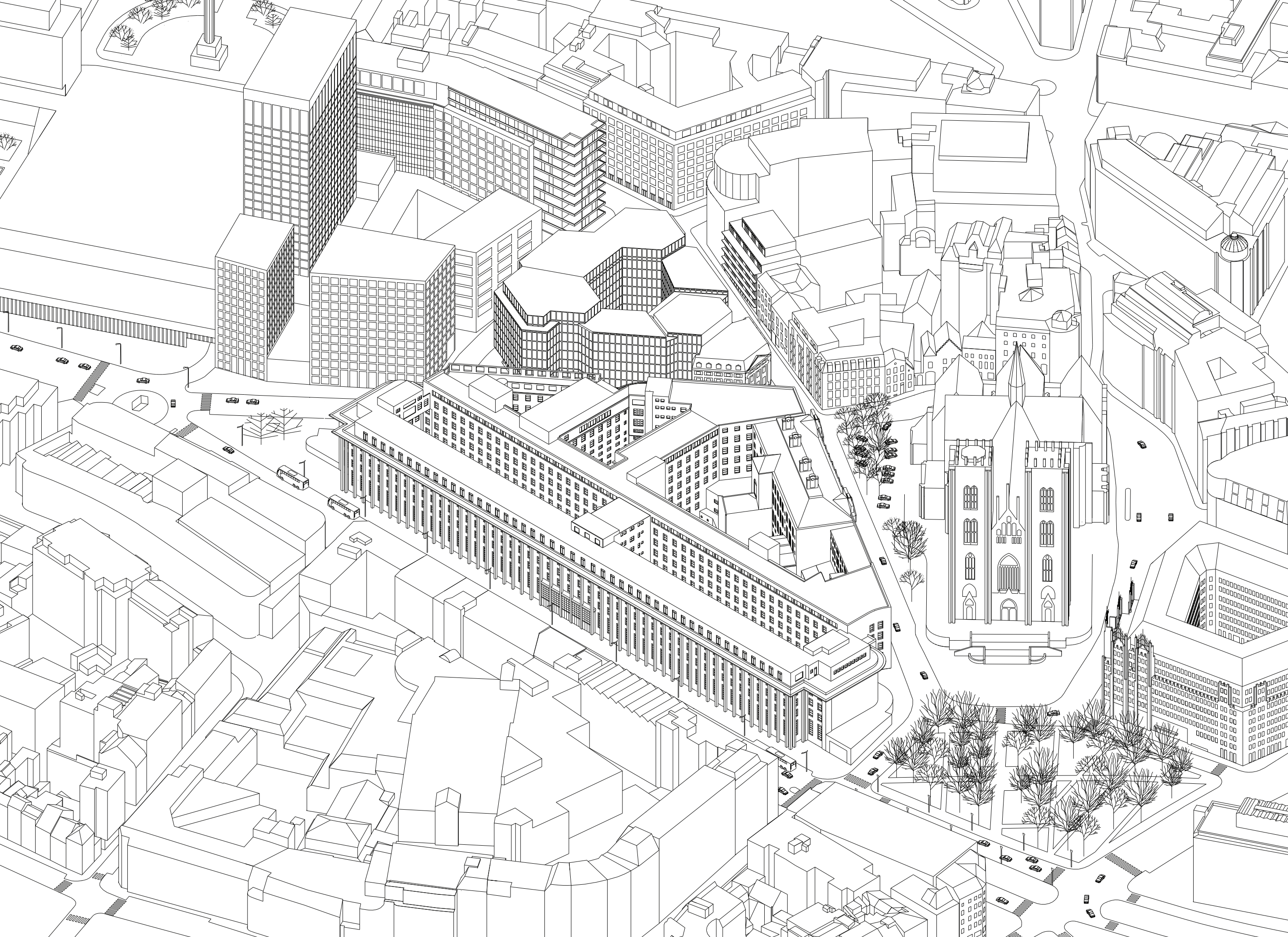


ground floor plan, bank restaurant
New National Bank of Belgium

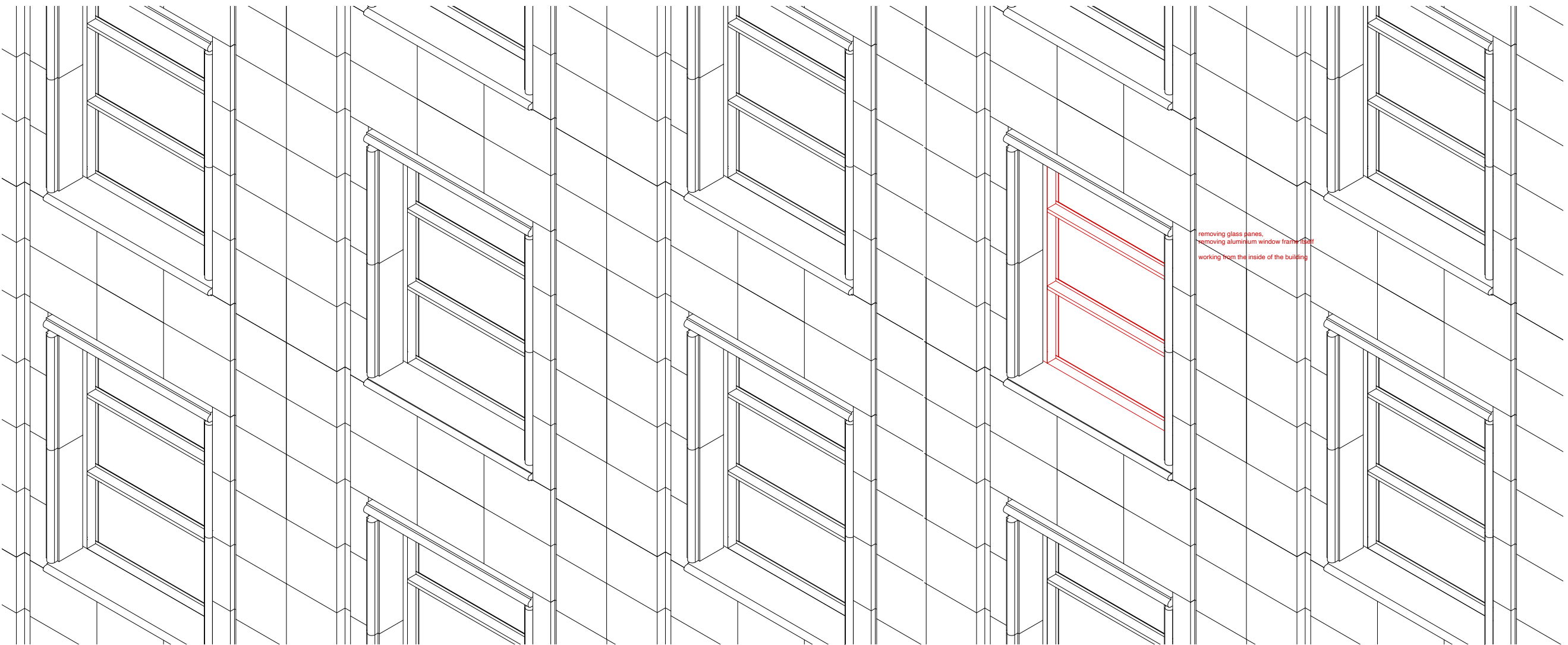


○ ground floor plan, public entrance on Rue de Bois Sauvage
New National Bank of Belgium



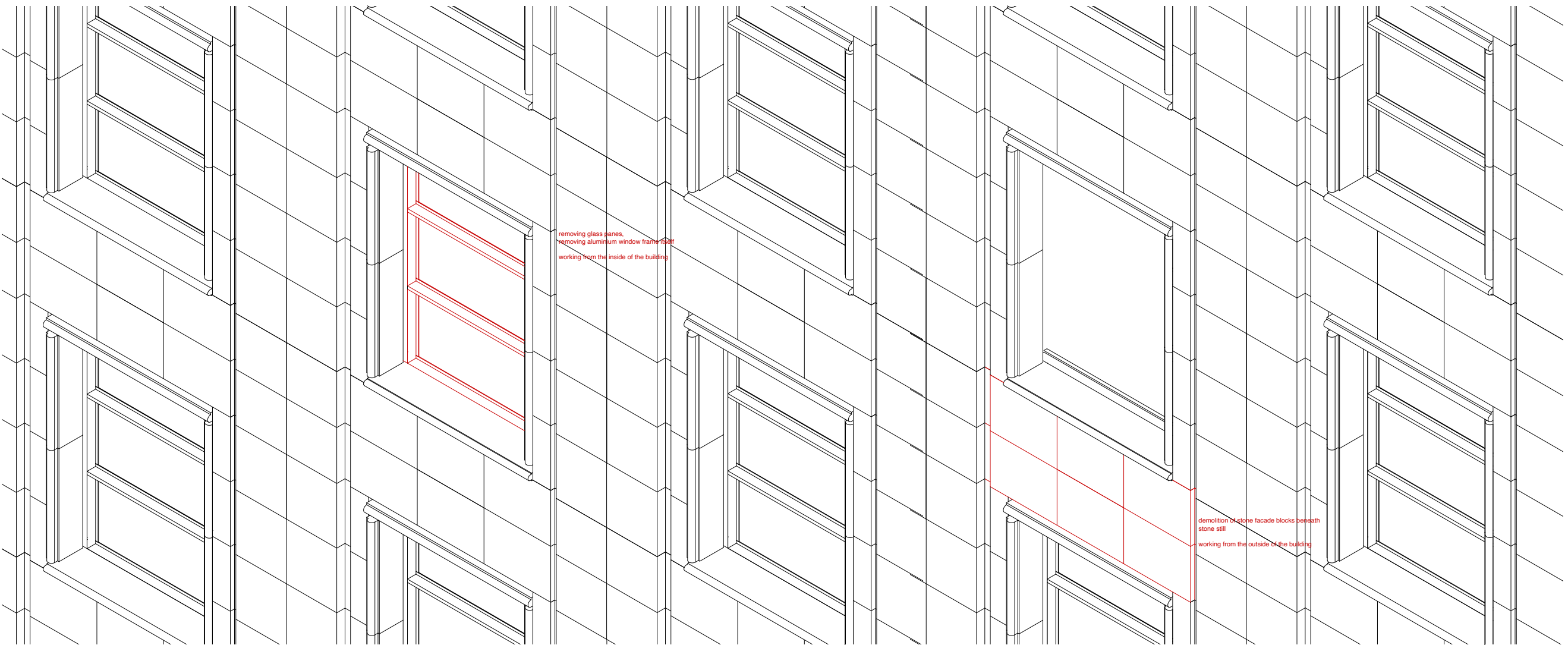


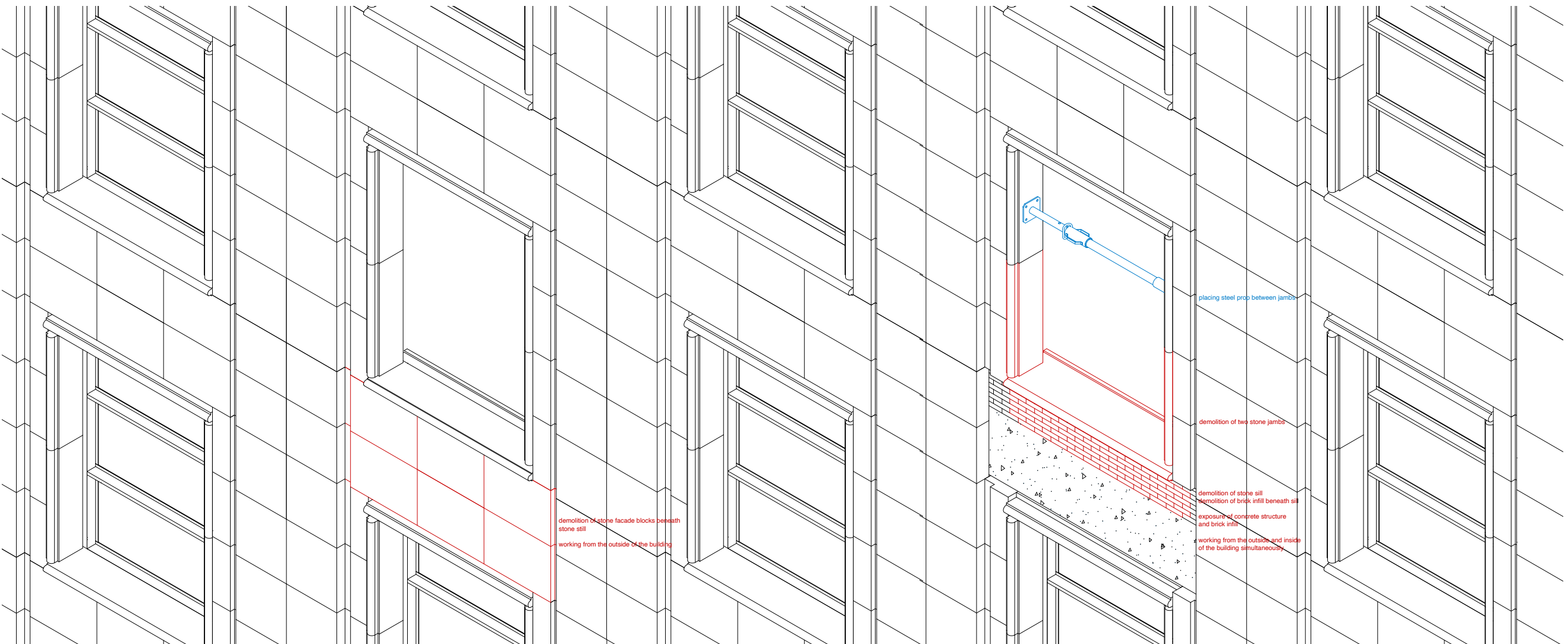




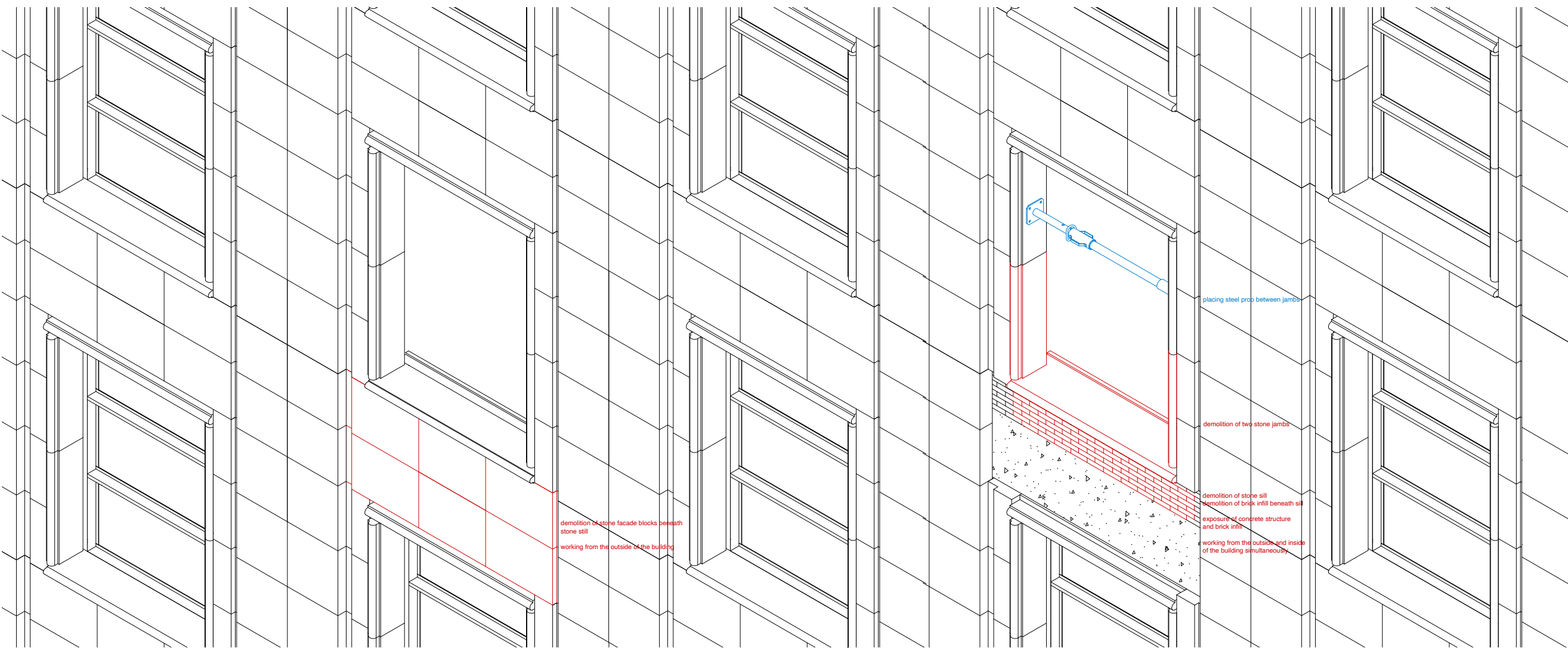
removing glass panes,
removing aluminum window frame itself
working from the inside of the building

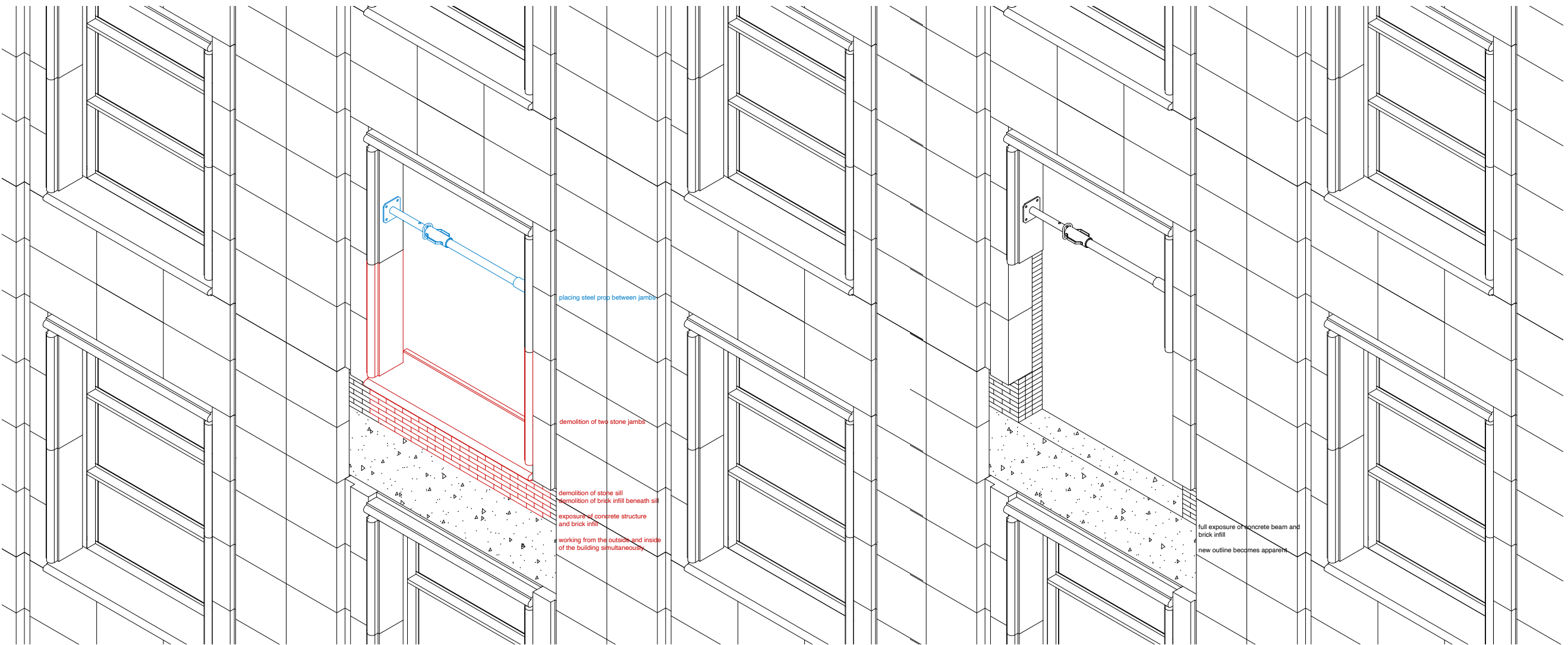


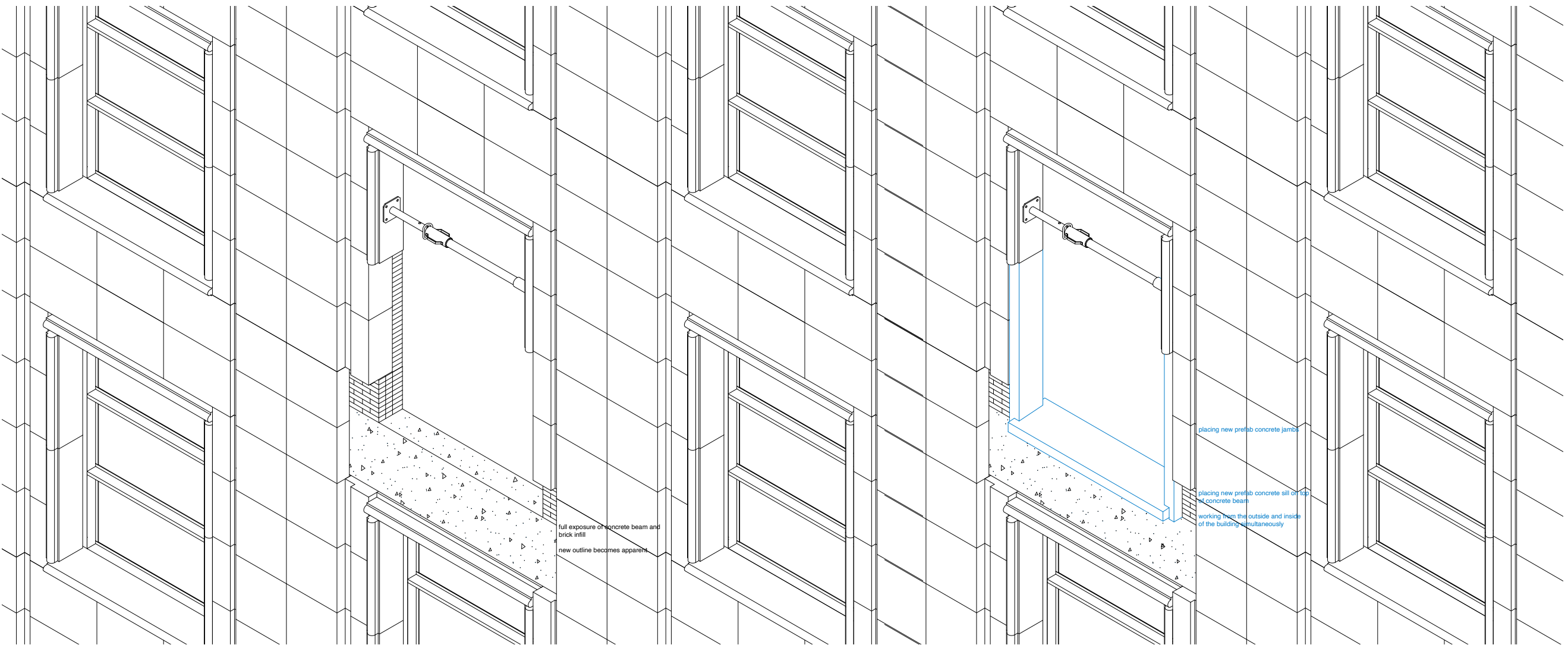


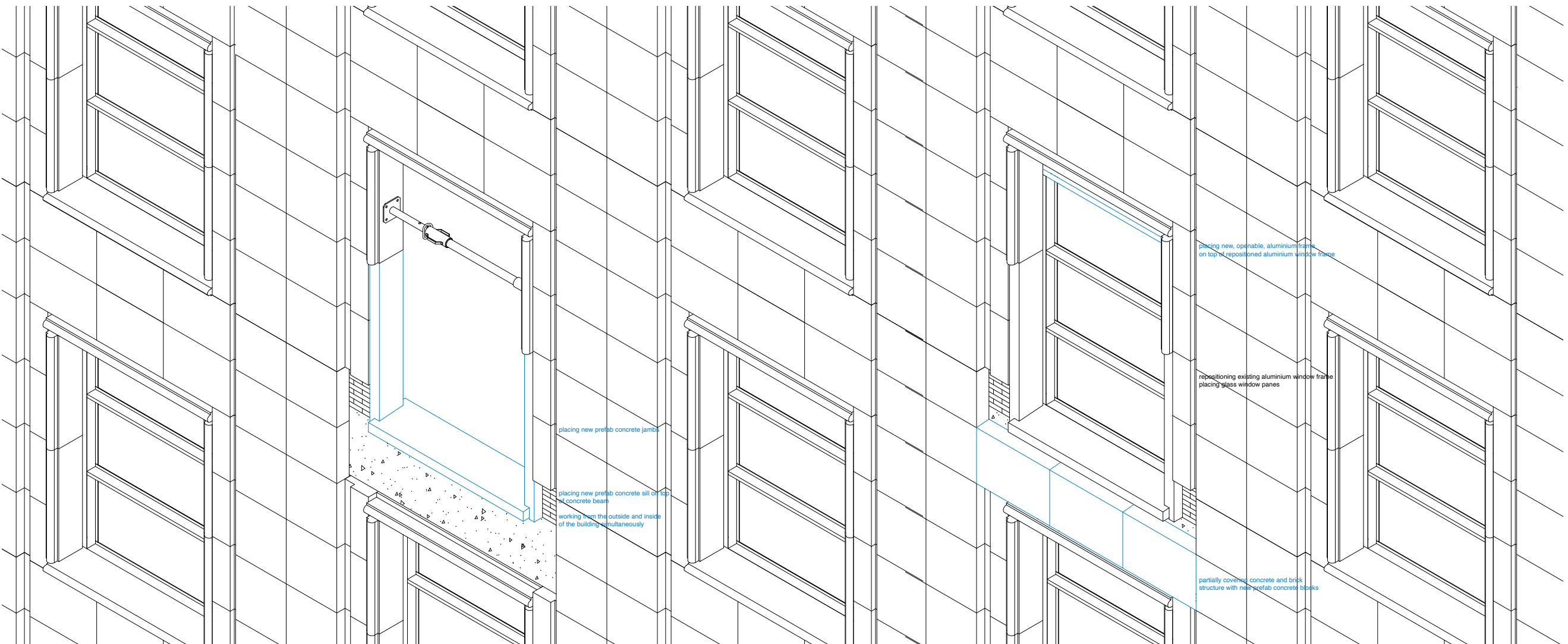


undressing

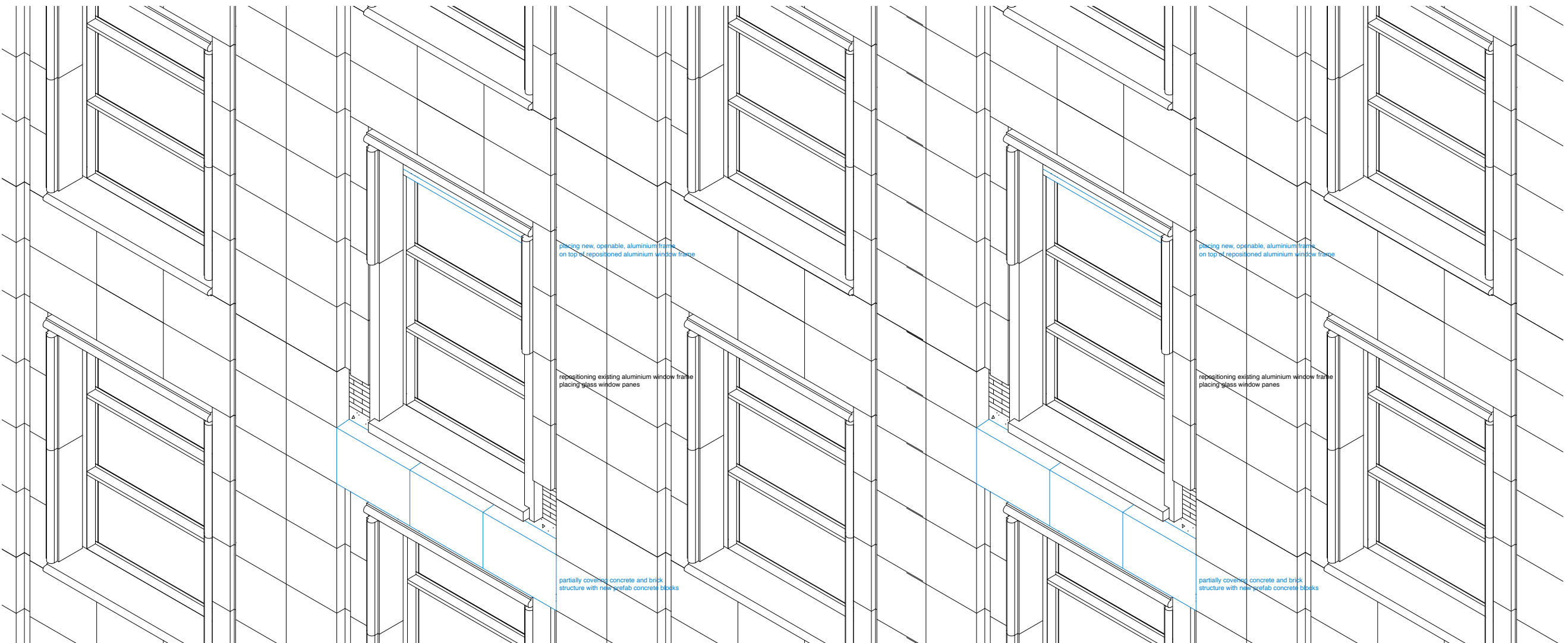






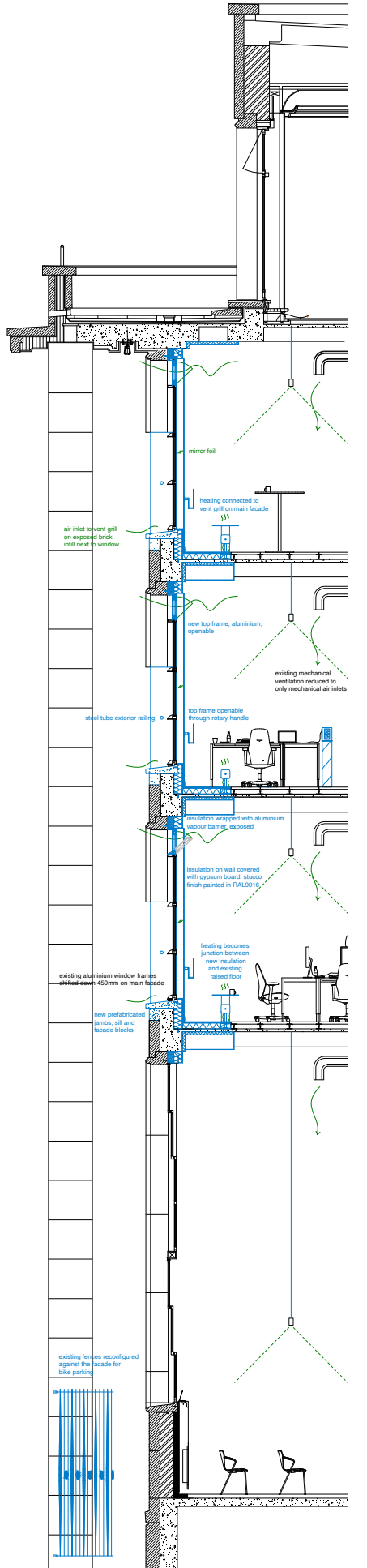
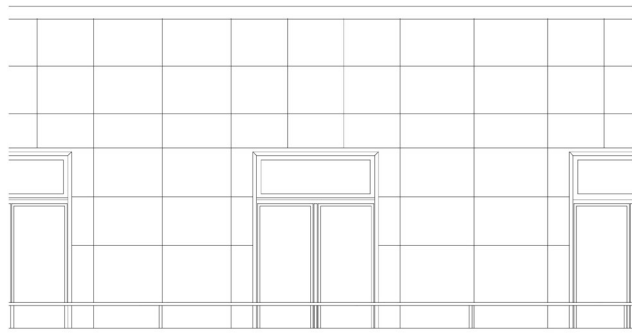


displacing



facade, National Bank of Belgium
photograph Bas Leemans





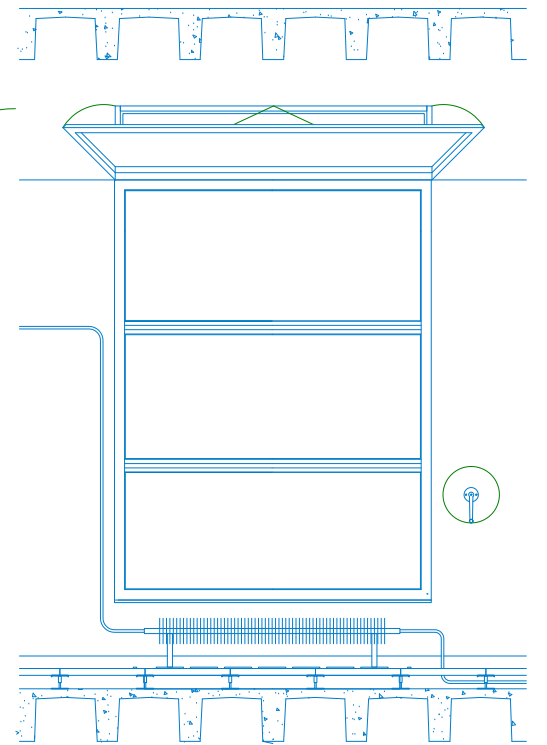
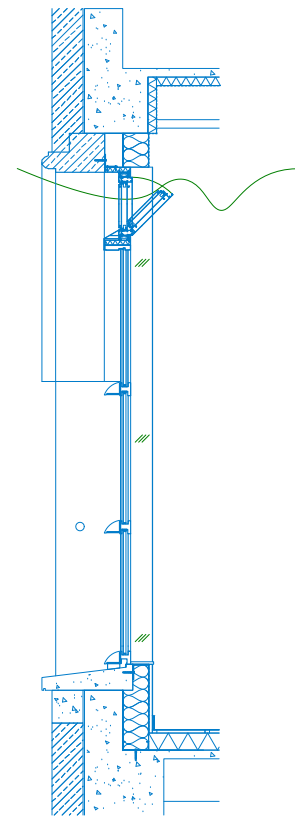
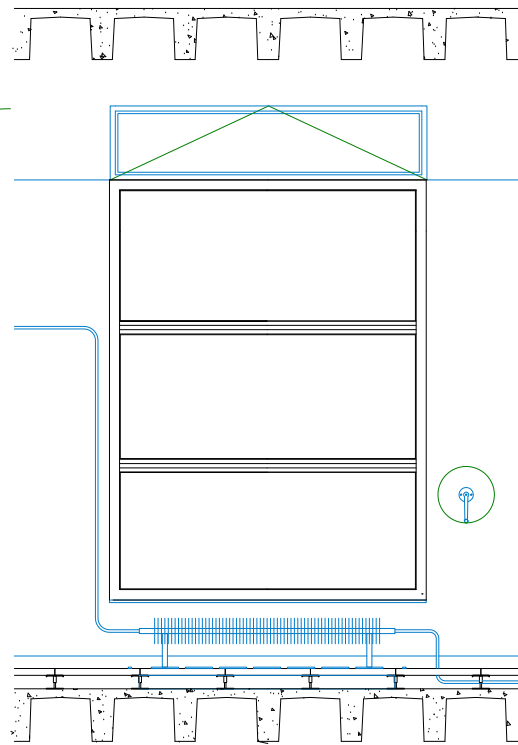
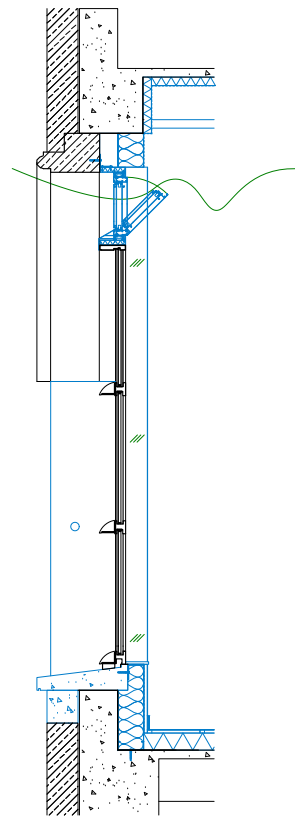
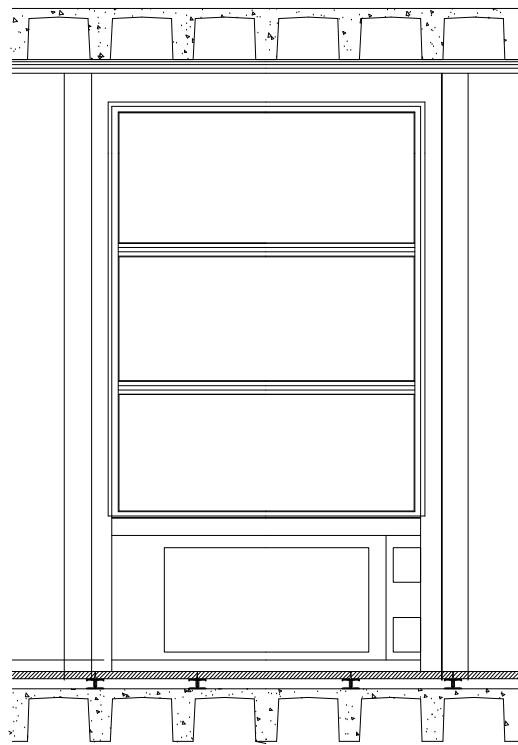
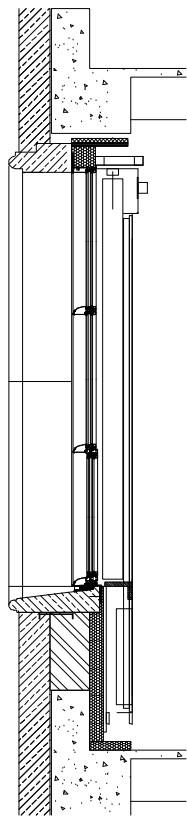
facade, New National Bank of Belgium
elevation, section 1:50





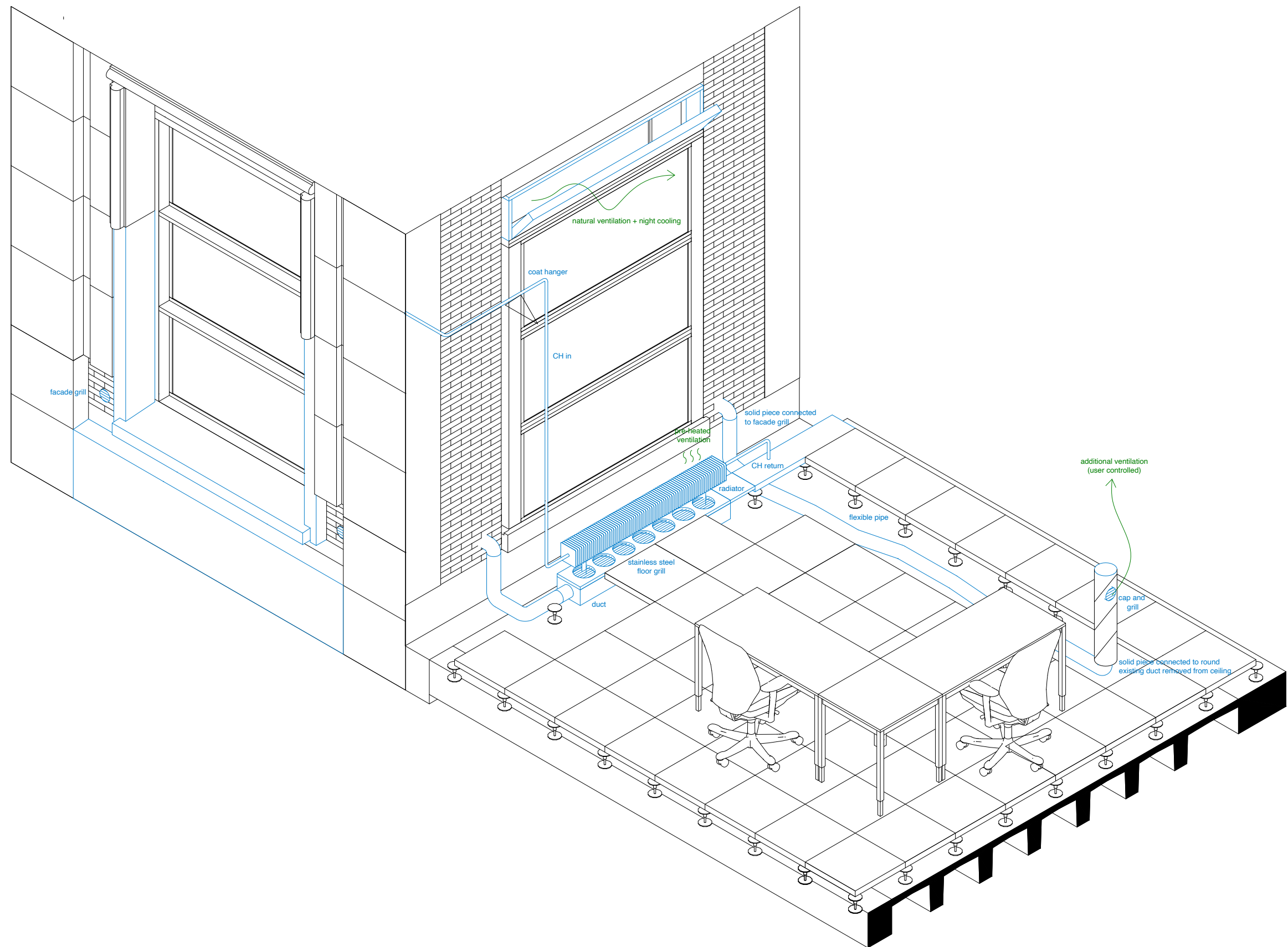
facade, New National Bank of Belgium
elevation 1:50

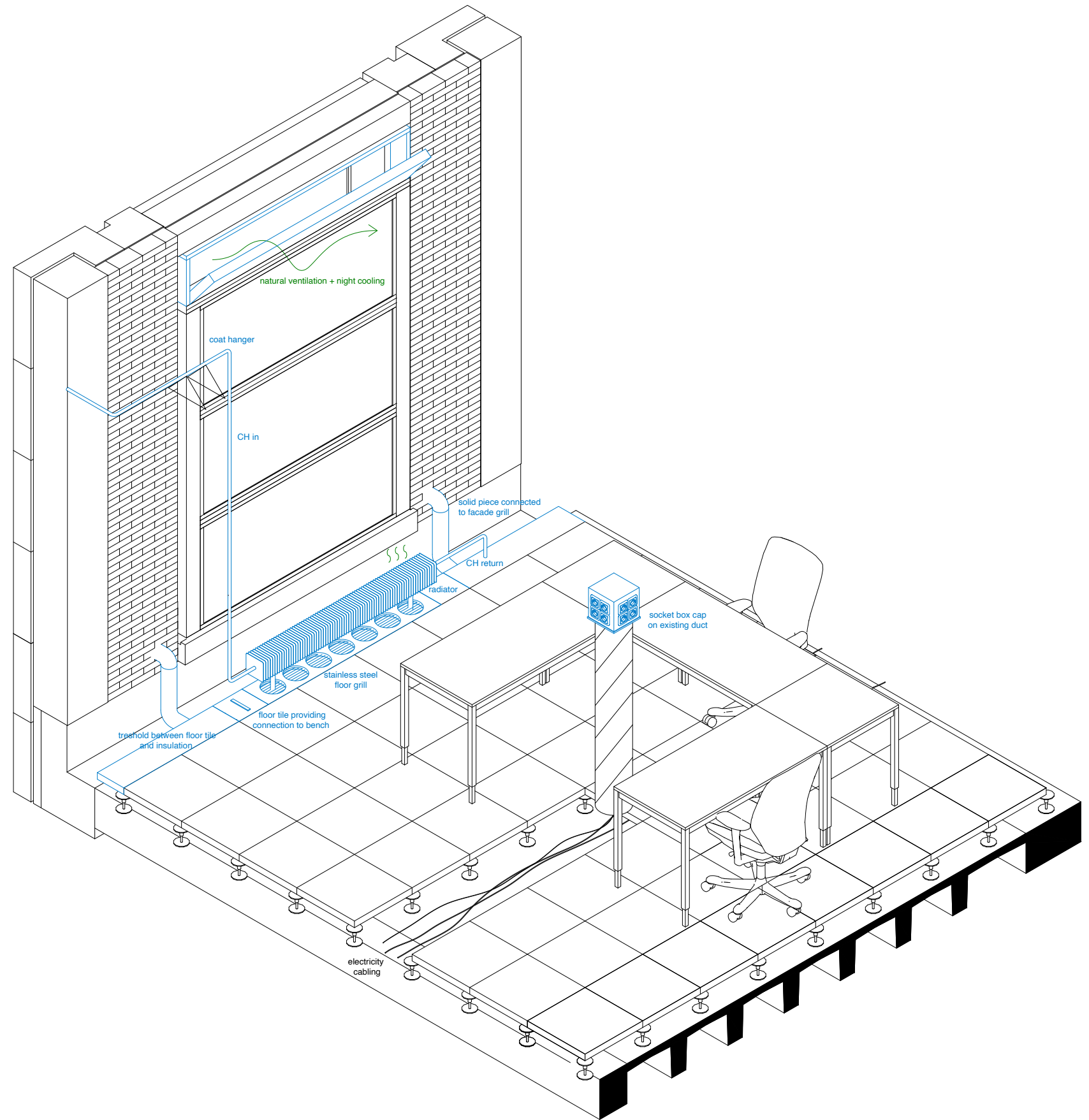


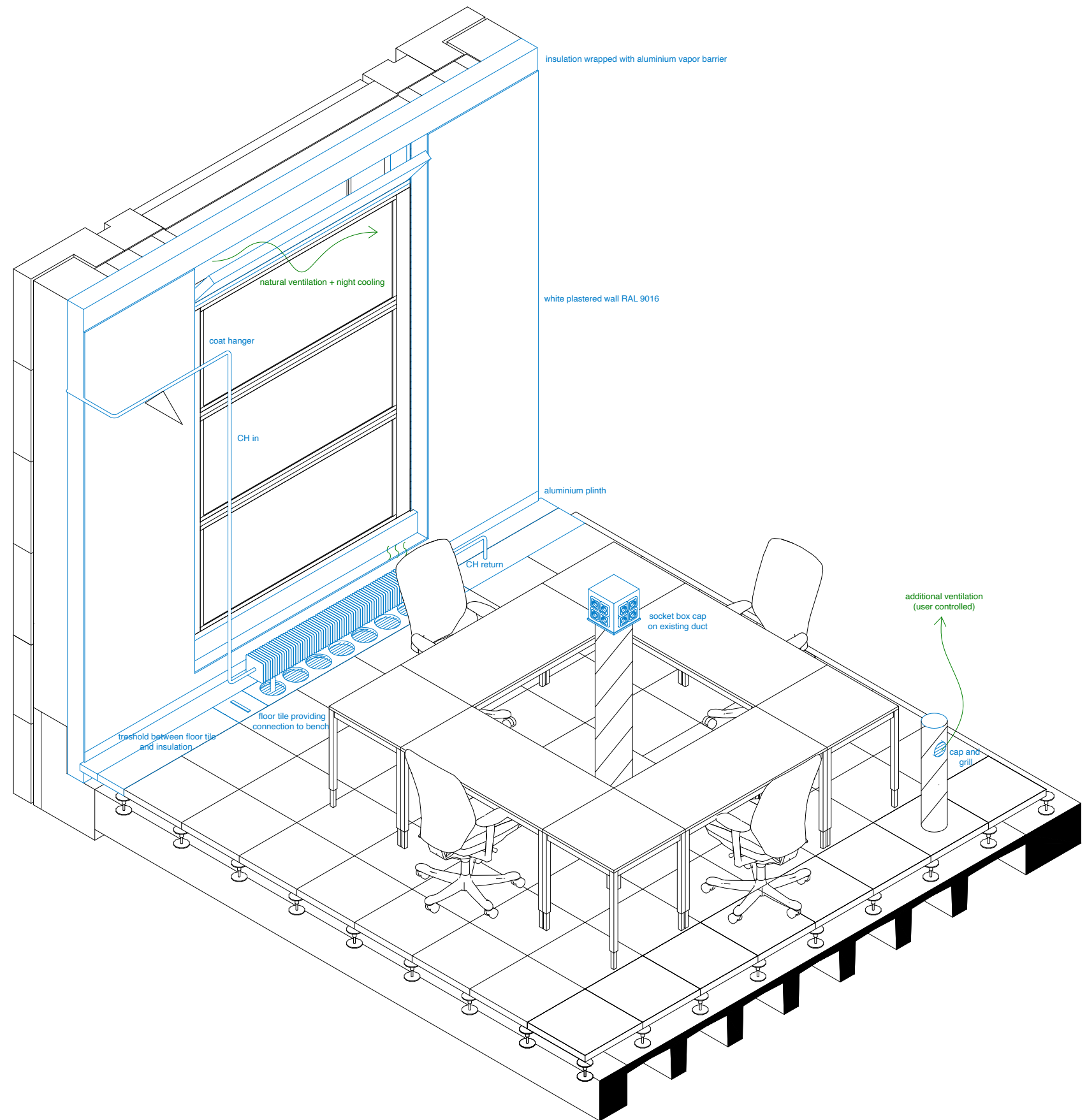


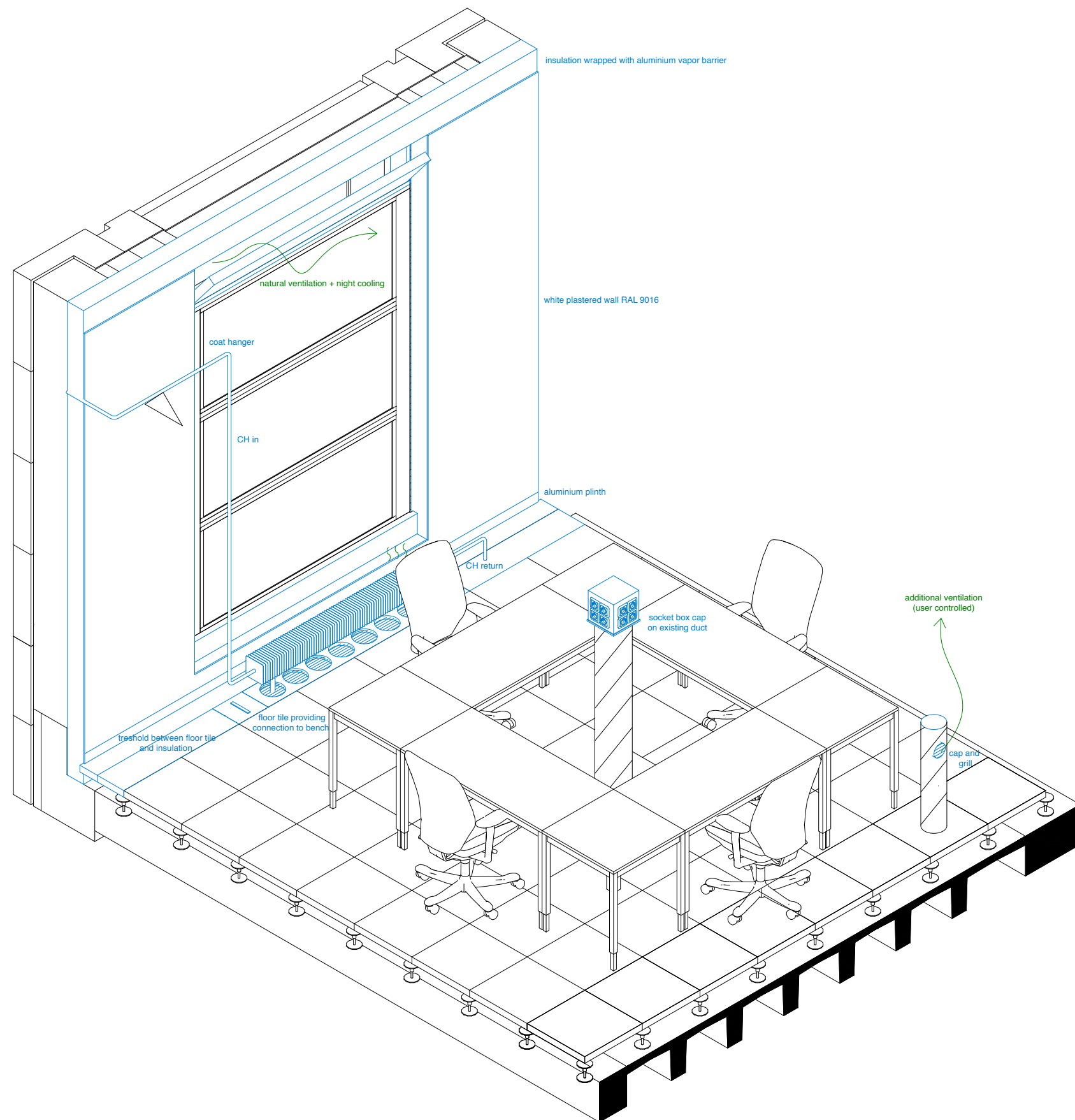


perspective 1:20
working models office interior

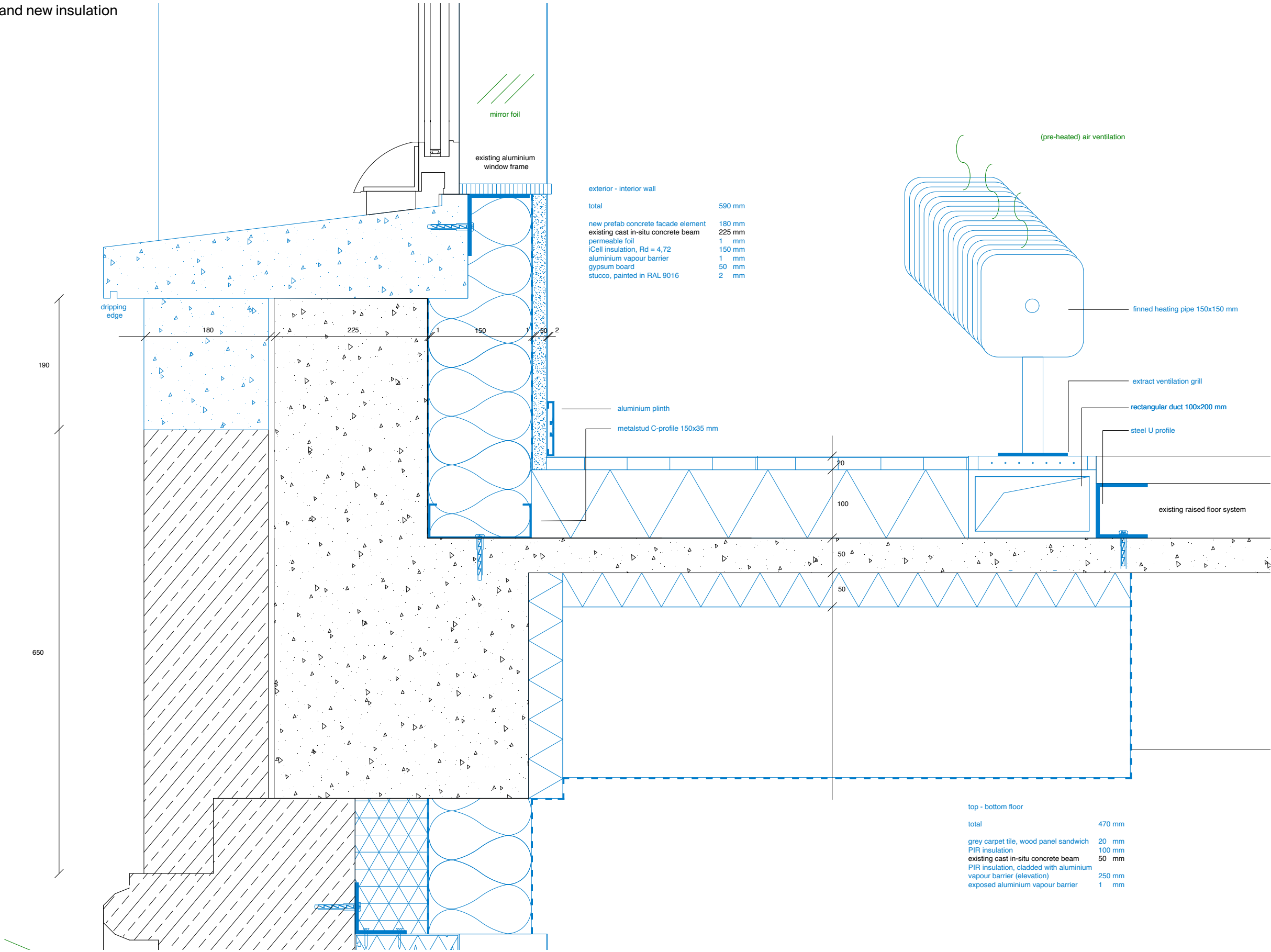




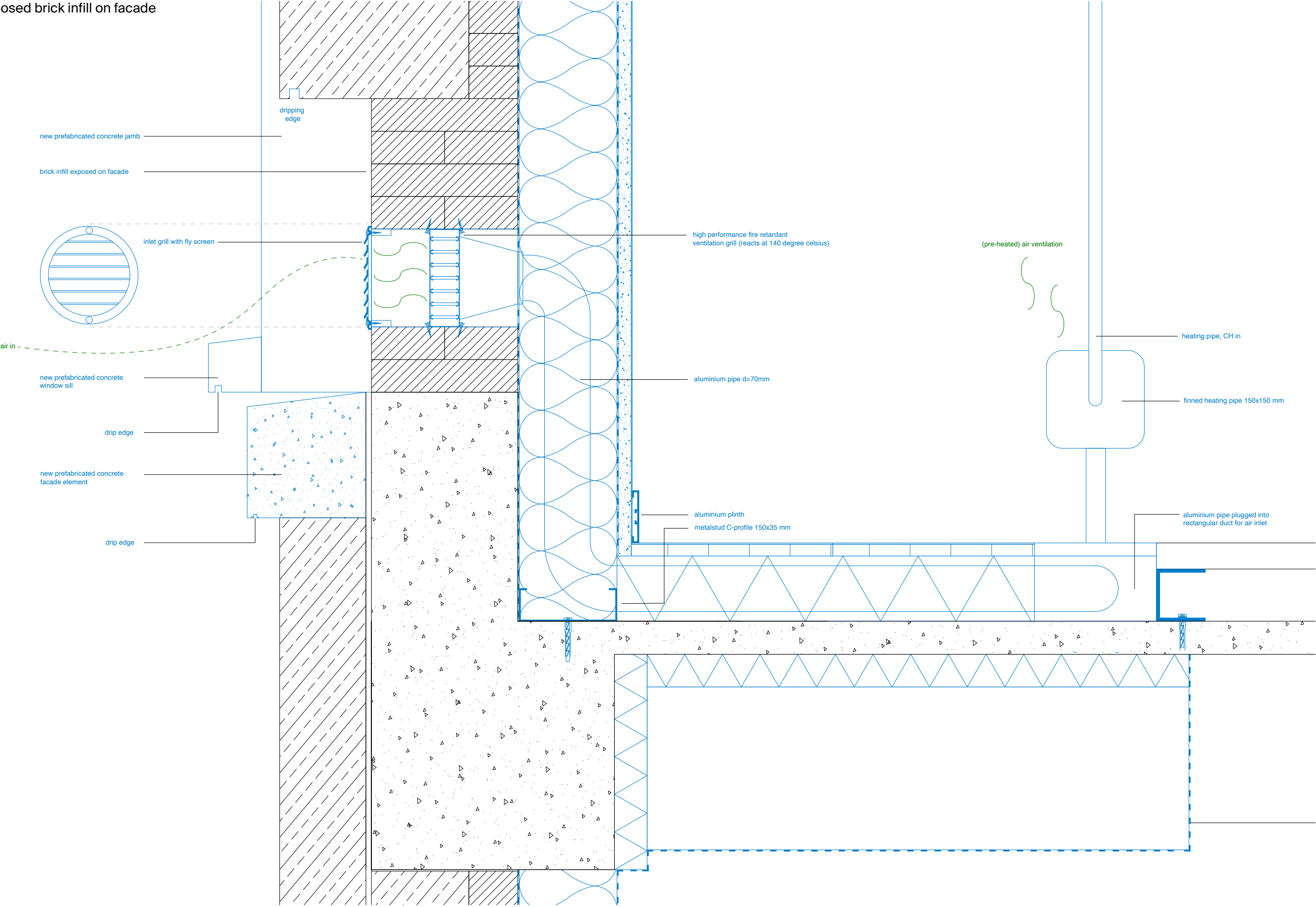




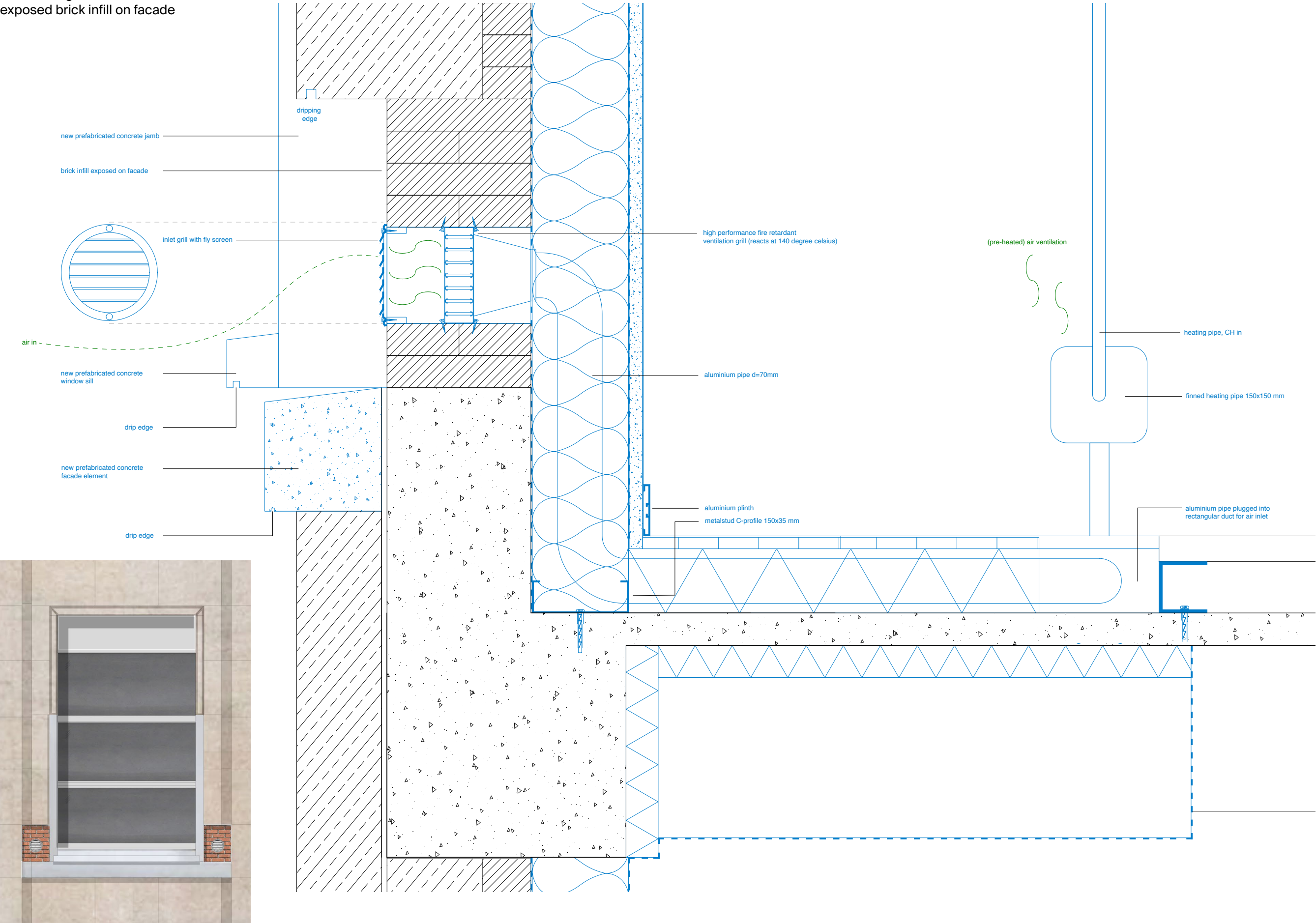
detail, 1:5
new duct in floor as junction between
existing raised floor and new insulation



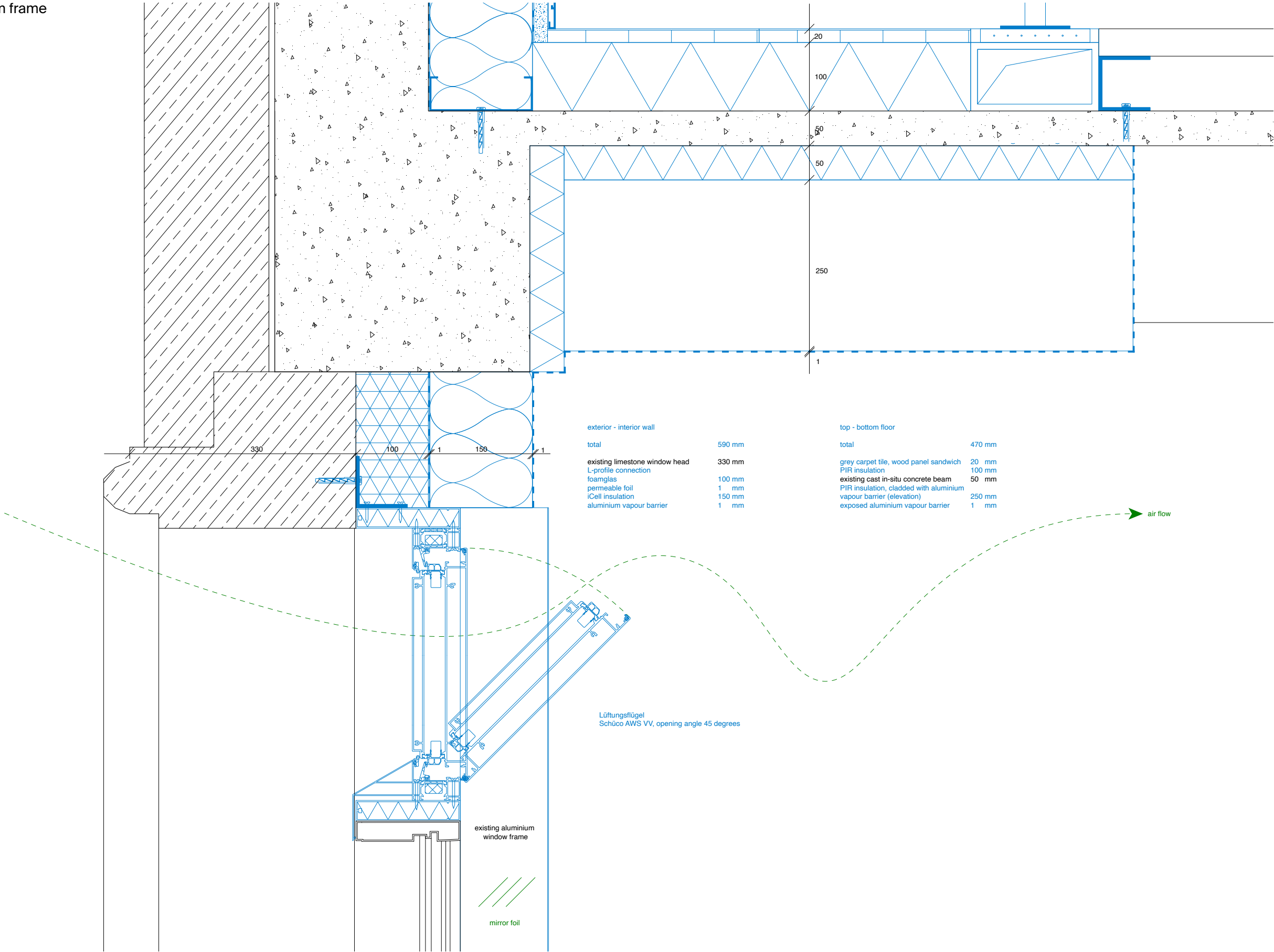
detail 1:5
ventilation grill inserted into
exposed brick infill on facade



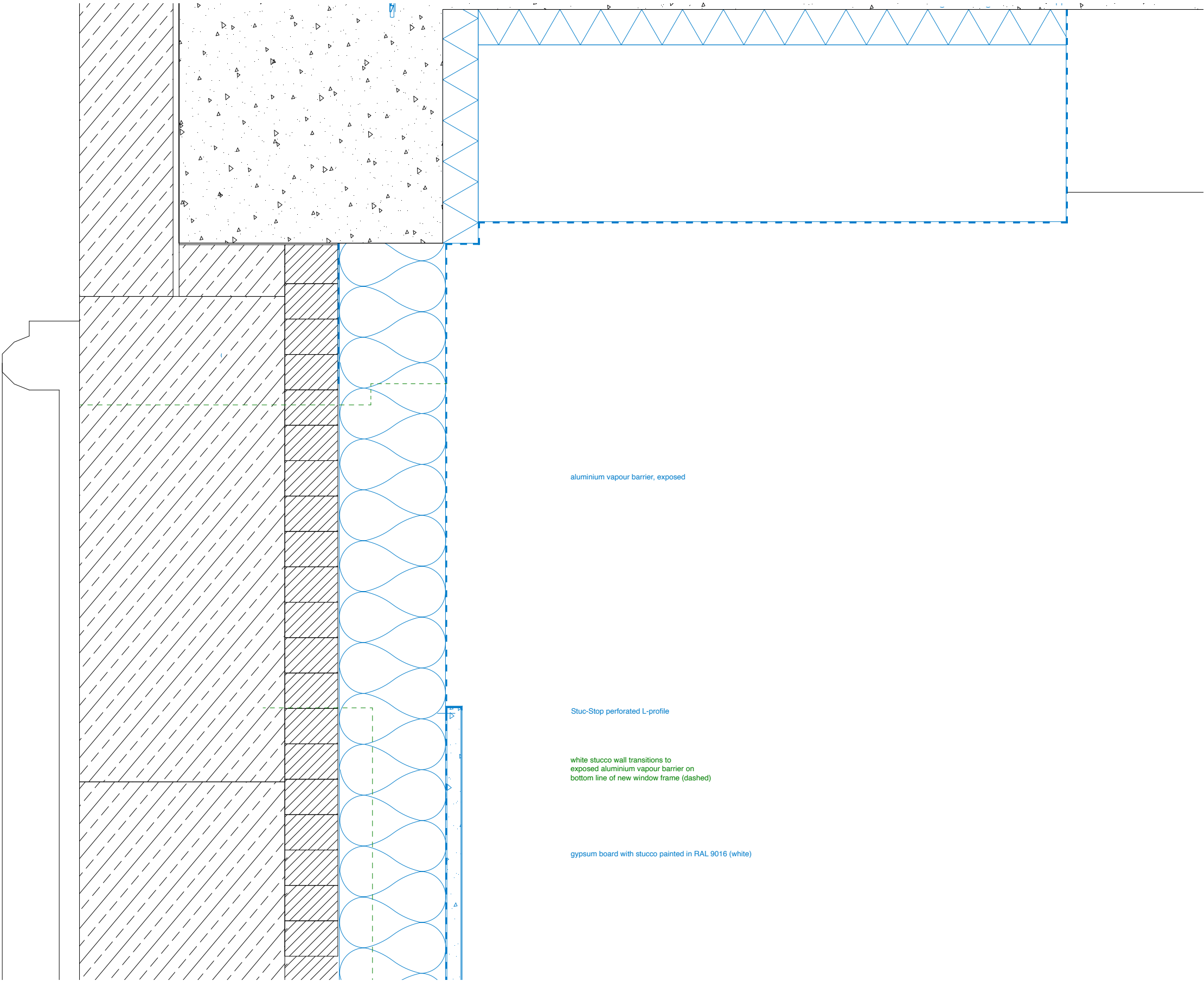
detail 1:5
ventilation grill inserted into
exposed brick infill on facade

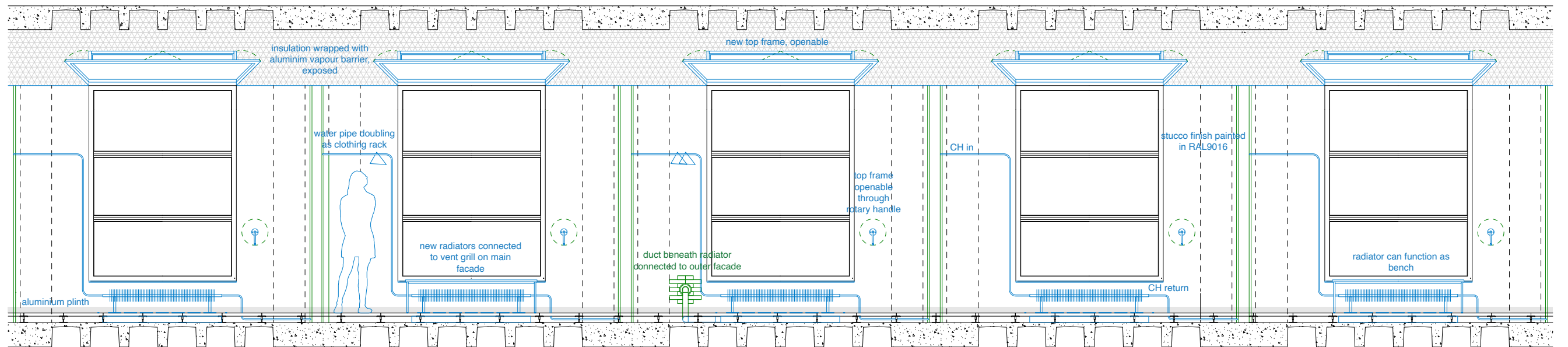
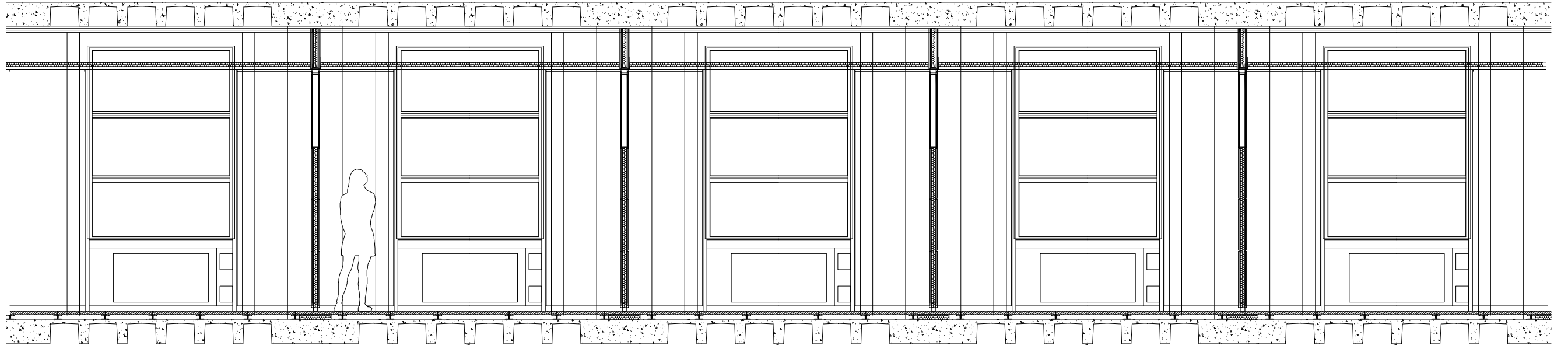


detail, 1:5
connecting new openable frame
to existing aluminium frame



detail, 1:5
interior wall: moments where
insulation is exposed



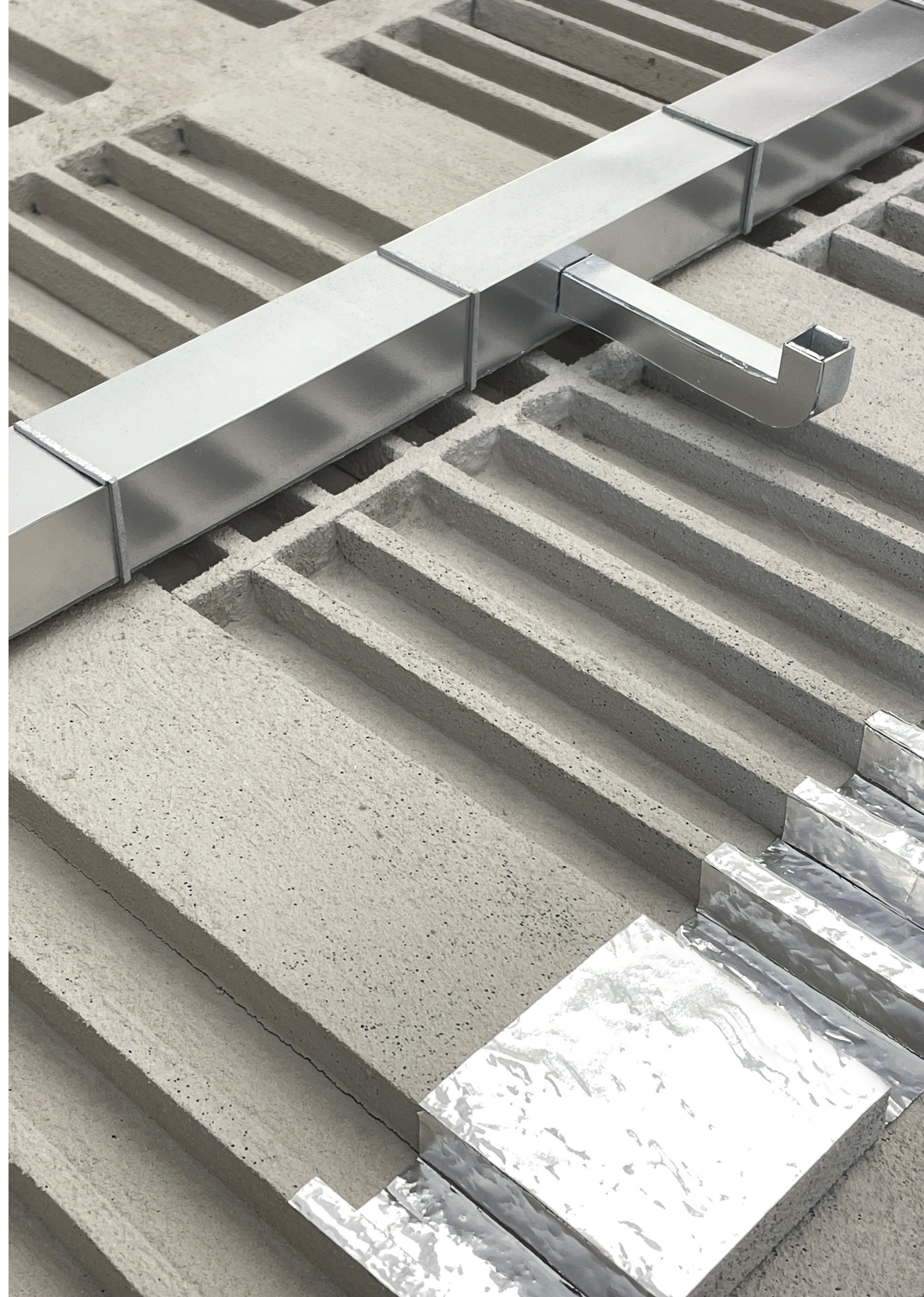


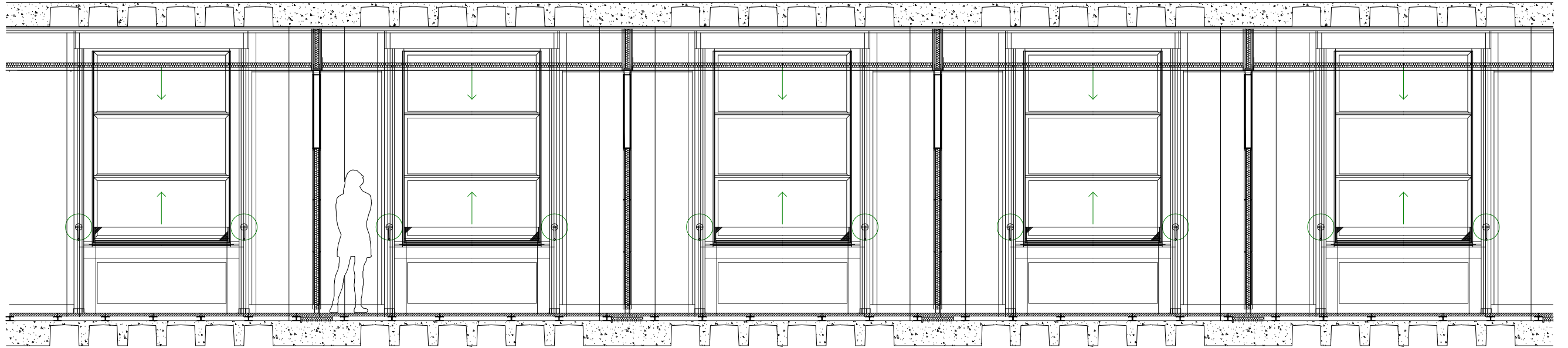
section 1:50
interior wall facing outside, new situation





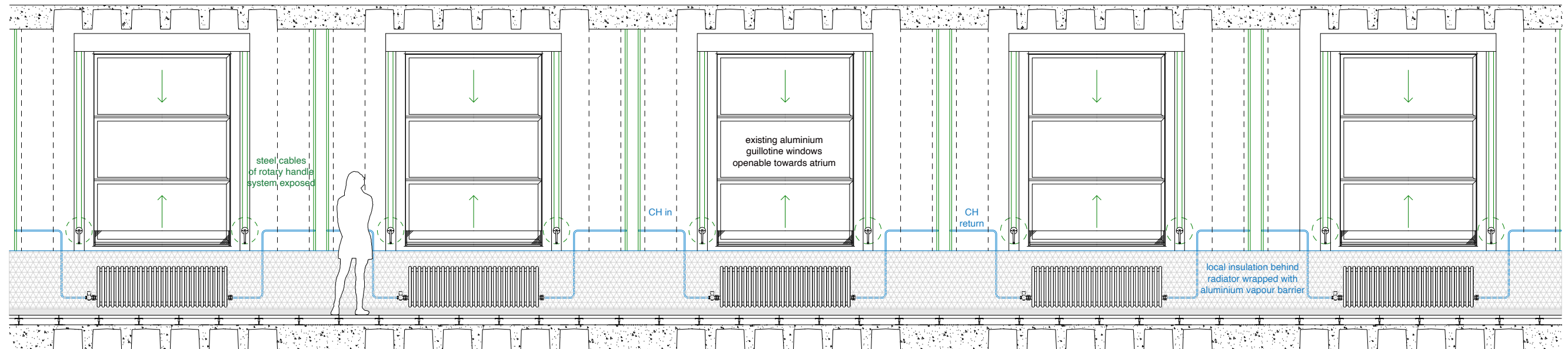
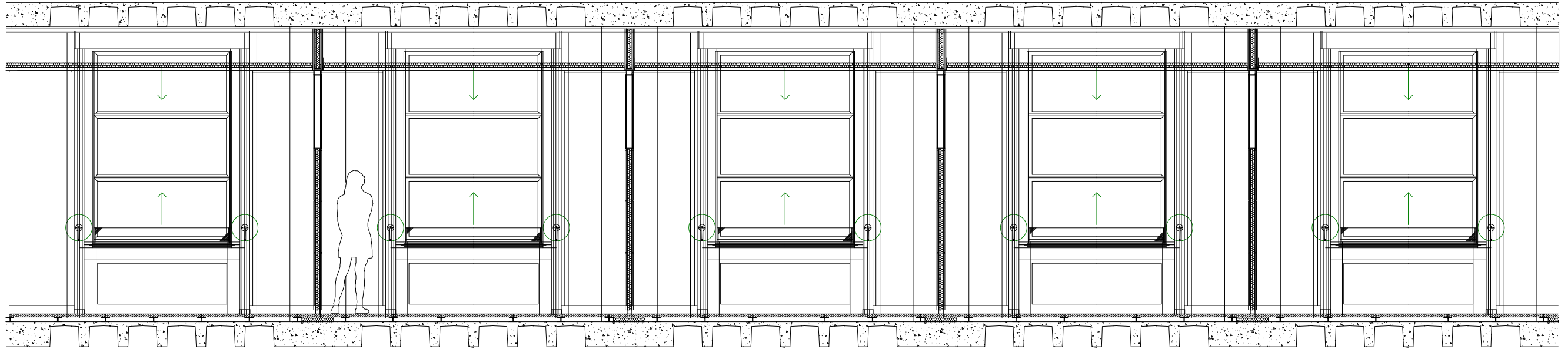
model 1:20
ceiling plan





section 1:50
interior wall facing atrium, current situation

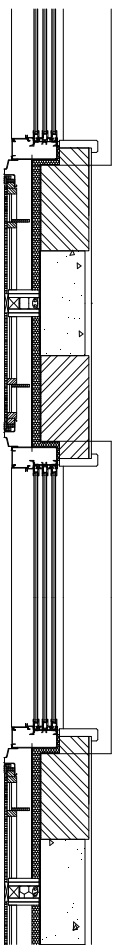
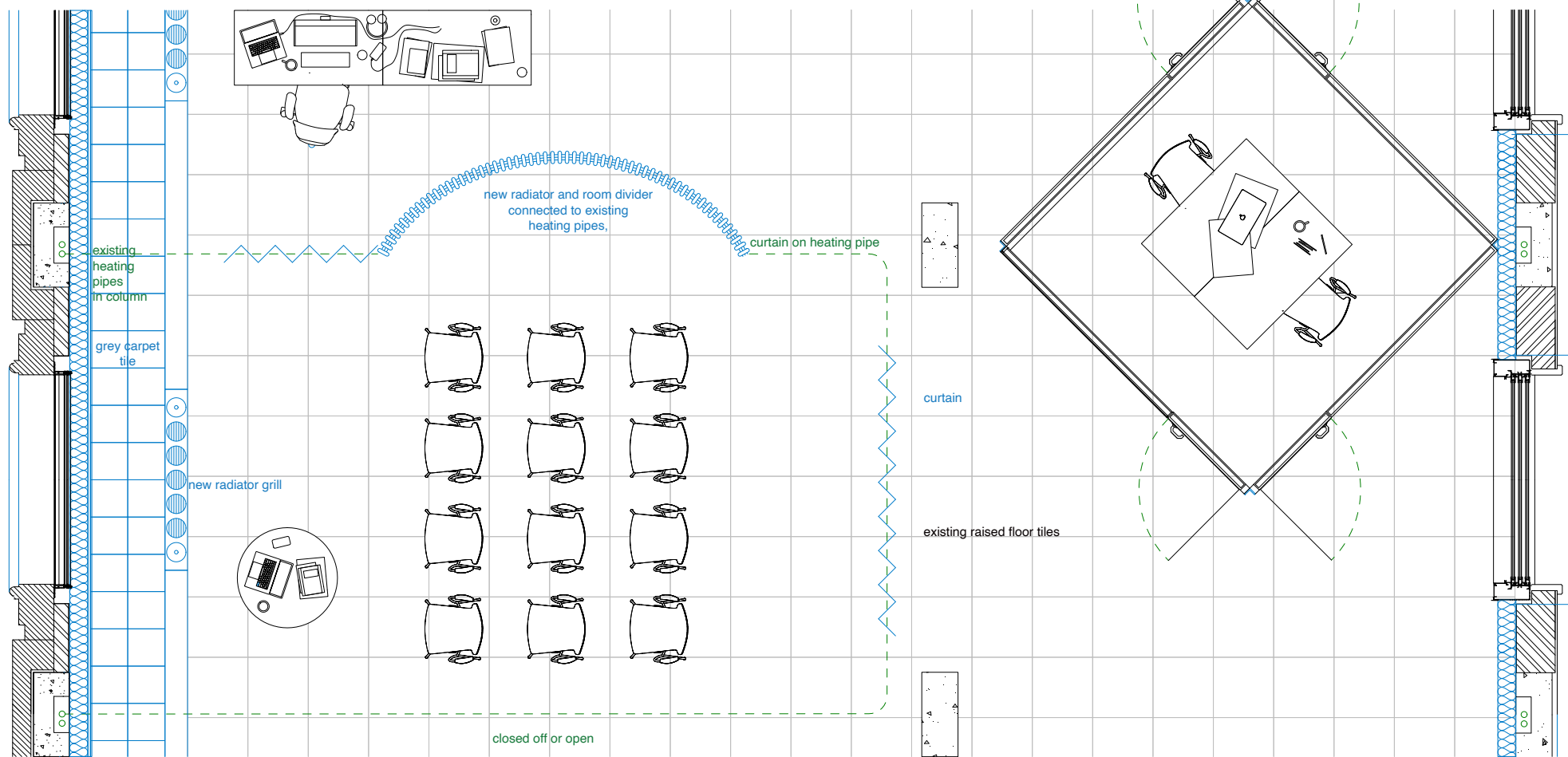
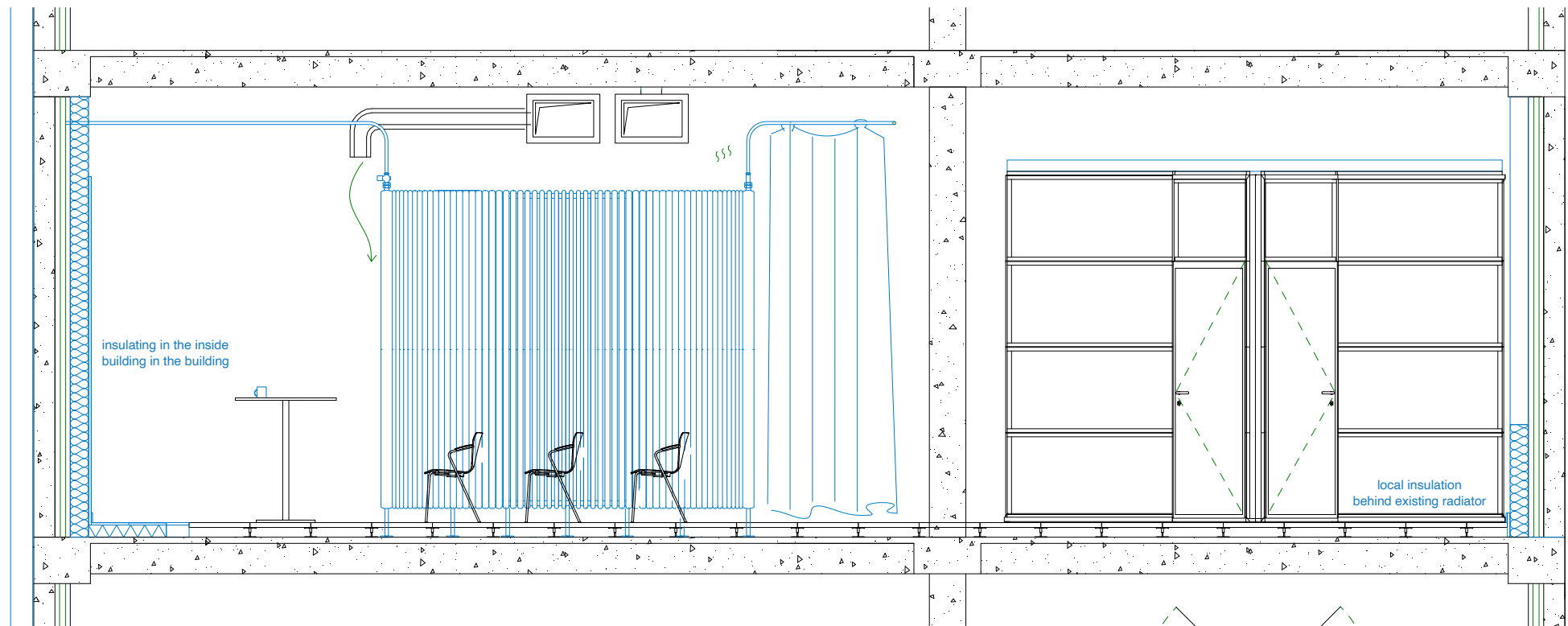




section 1:50
interior wall facing atrium, new situation

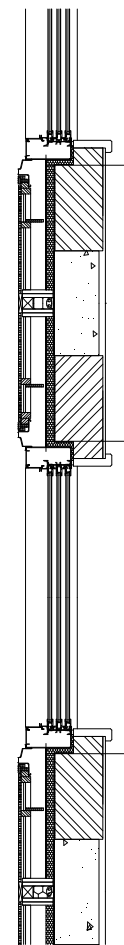
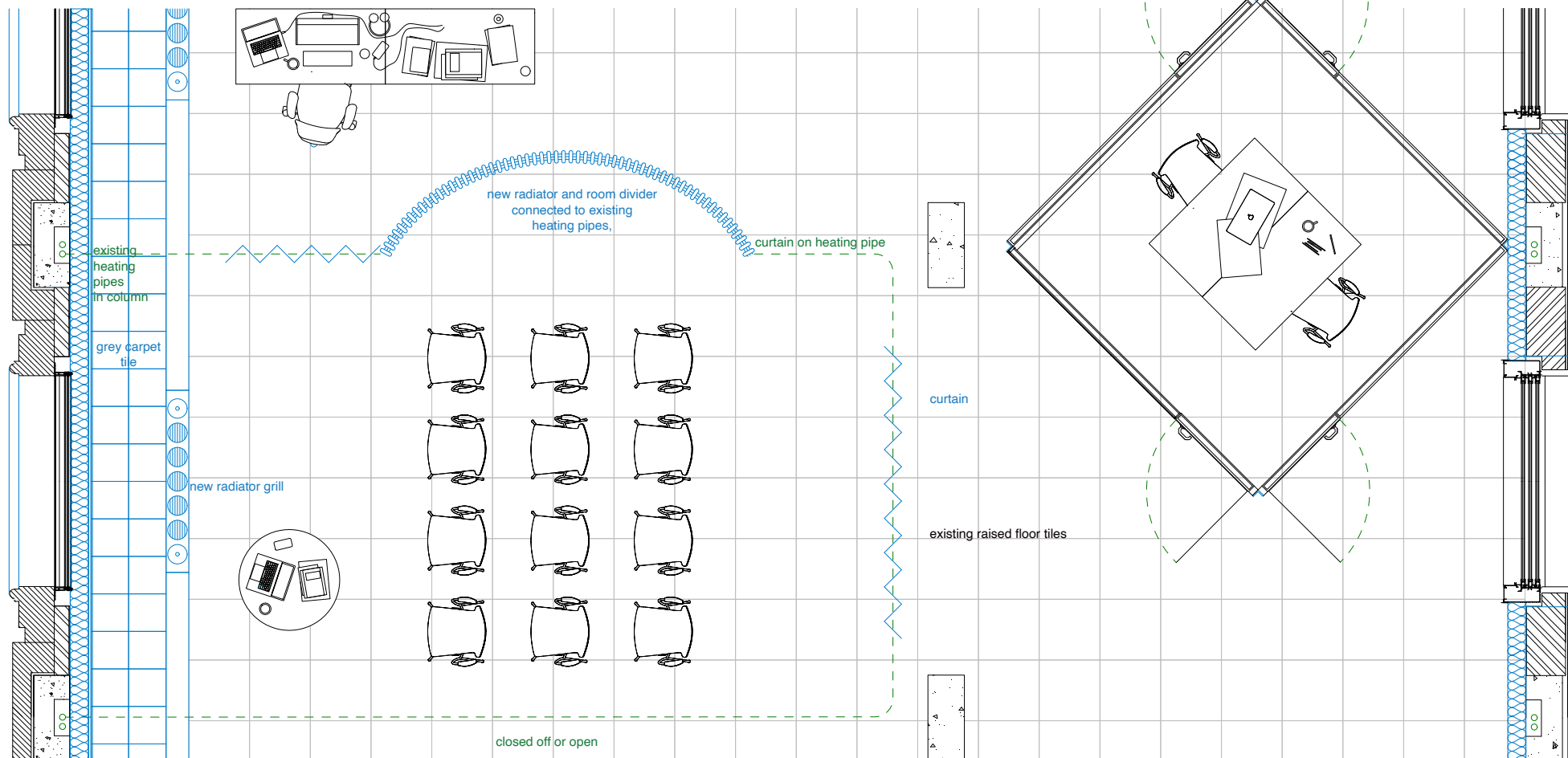
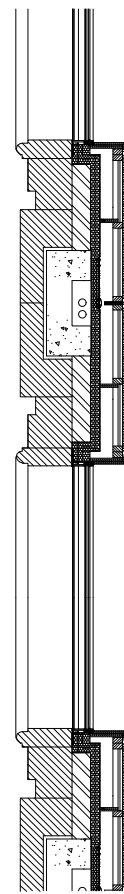
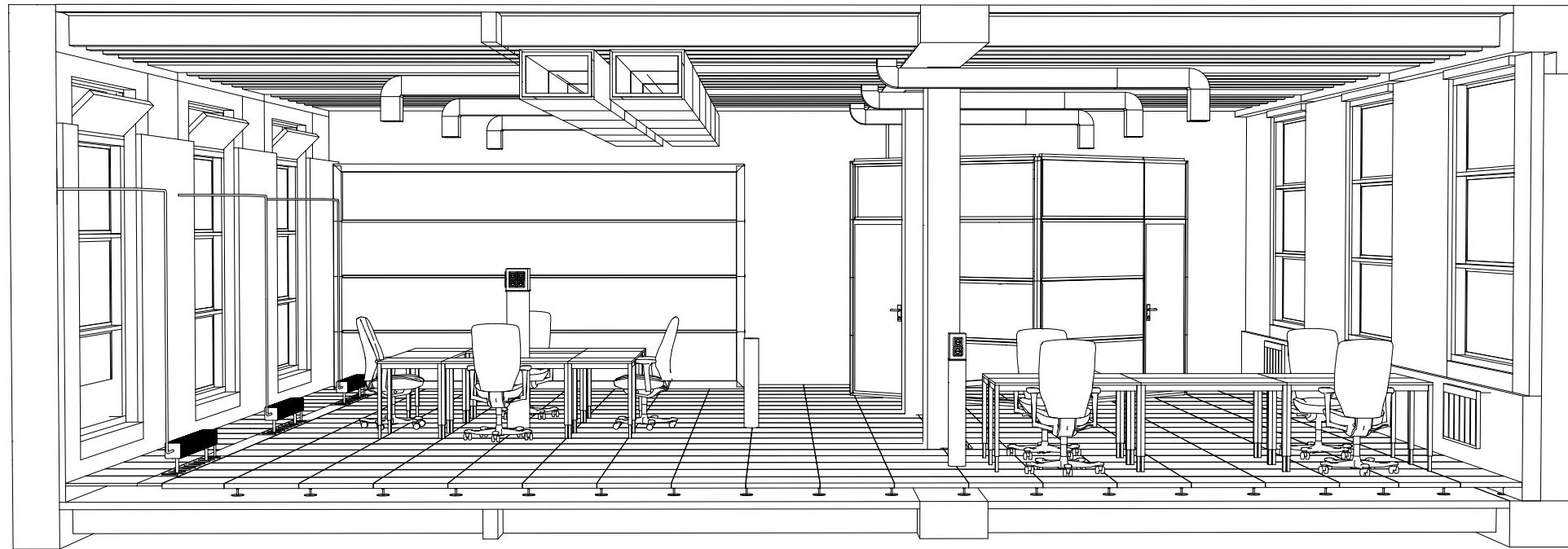




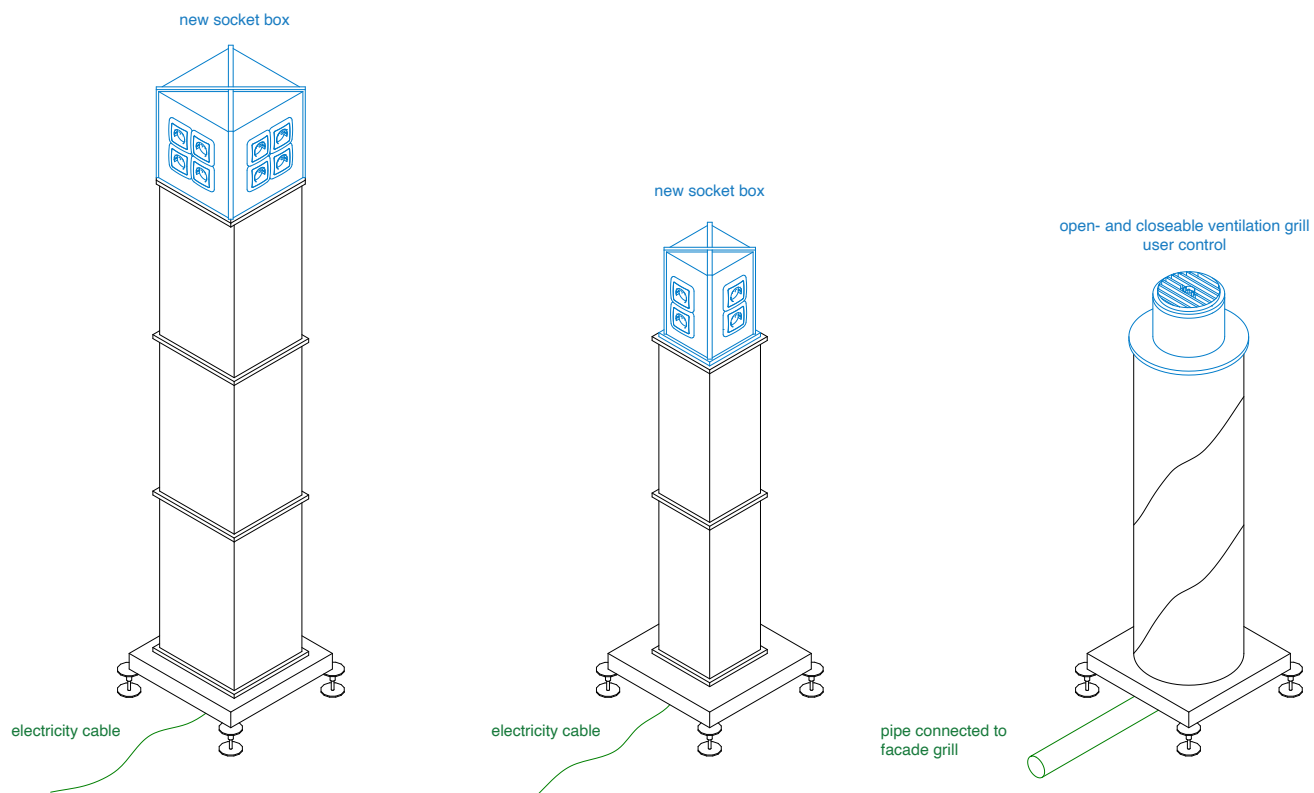
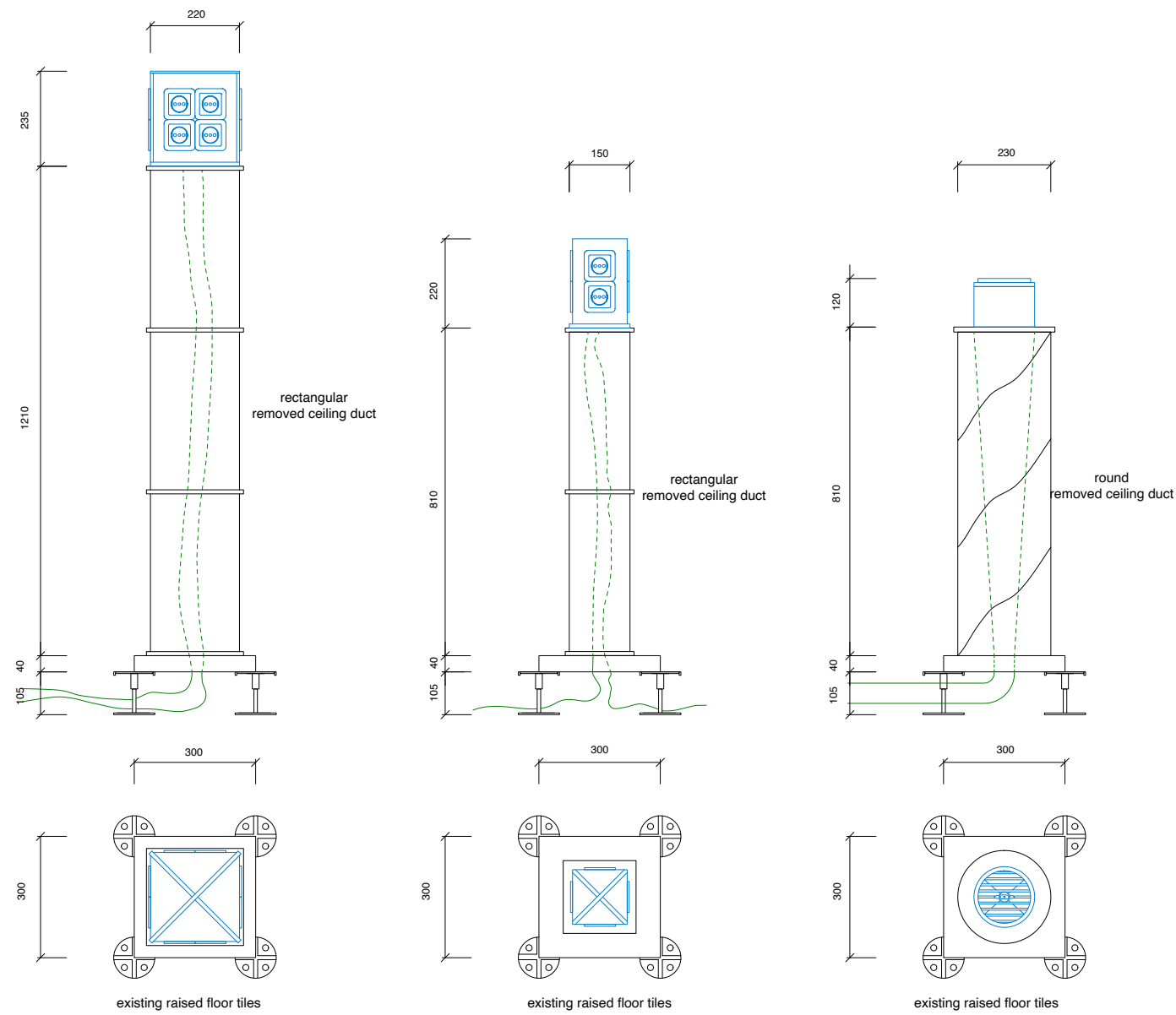


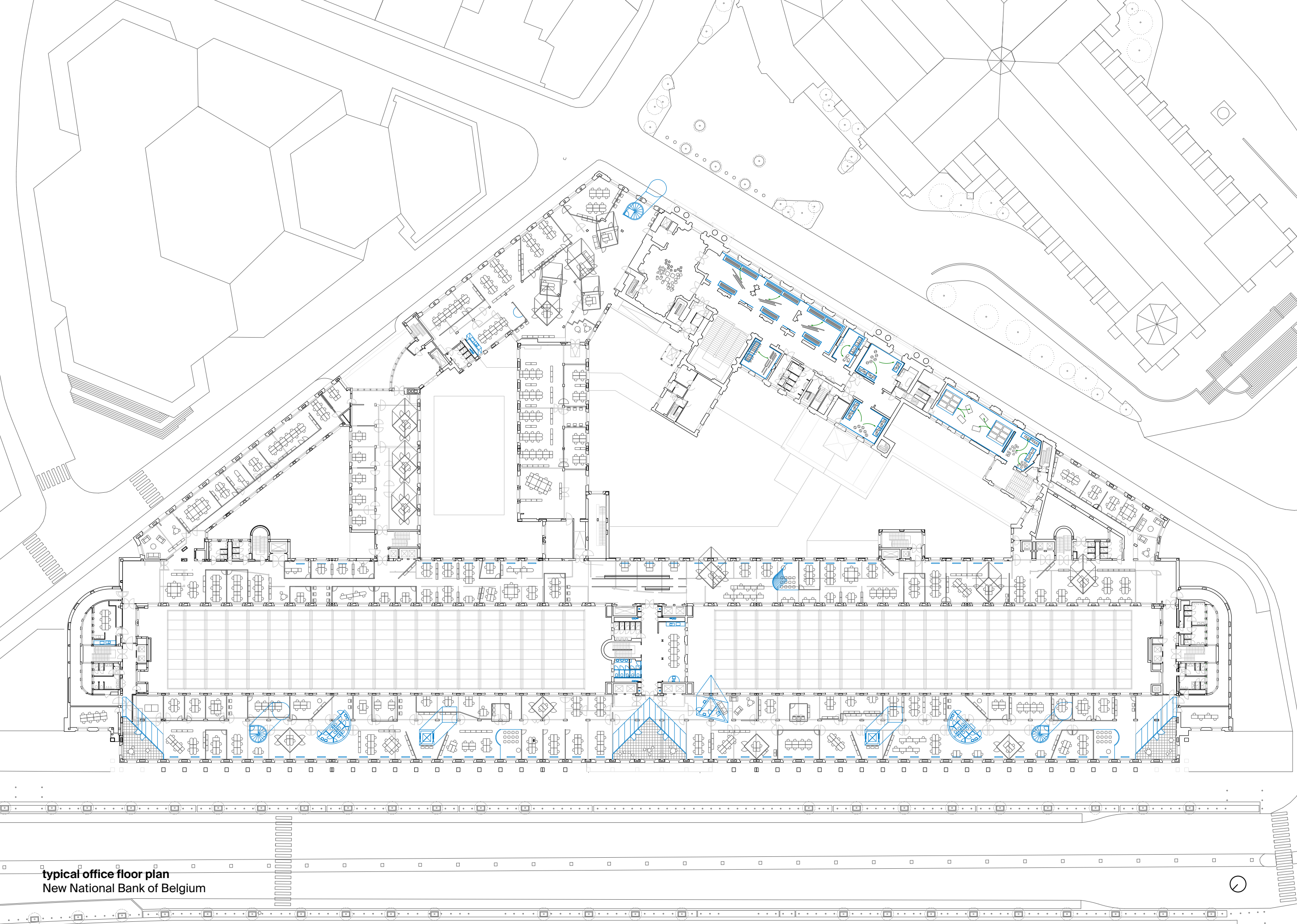
plan, section 1:50
office 1, workplace





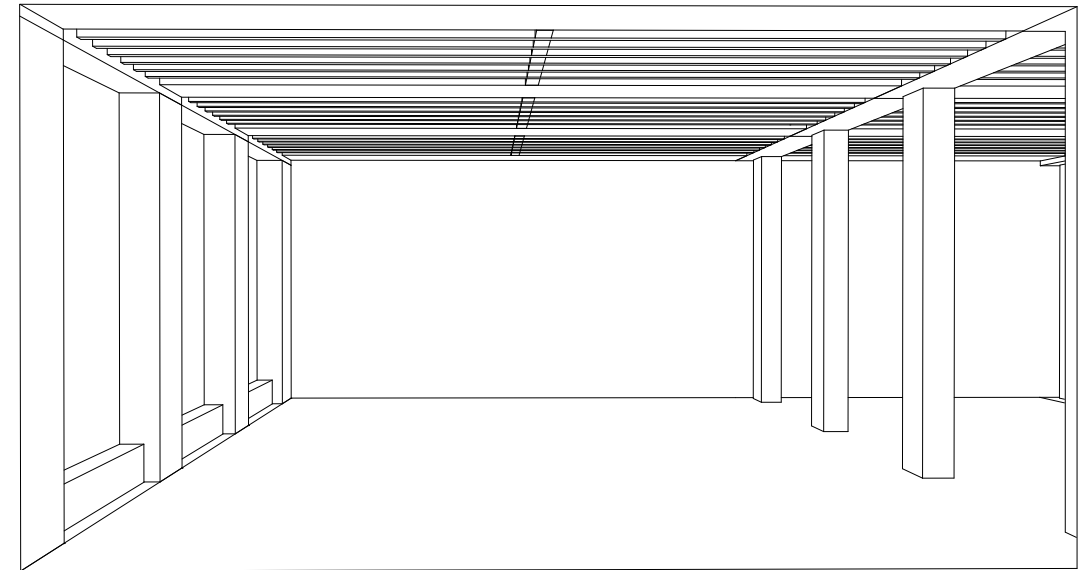
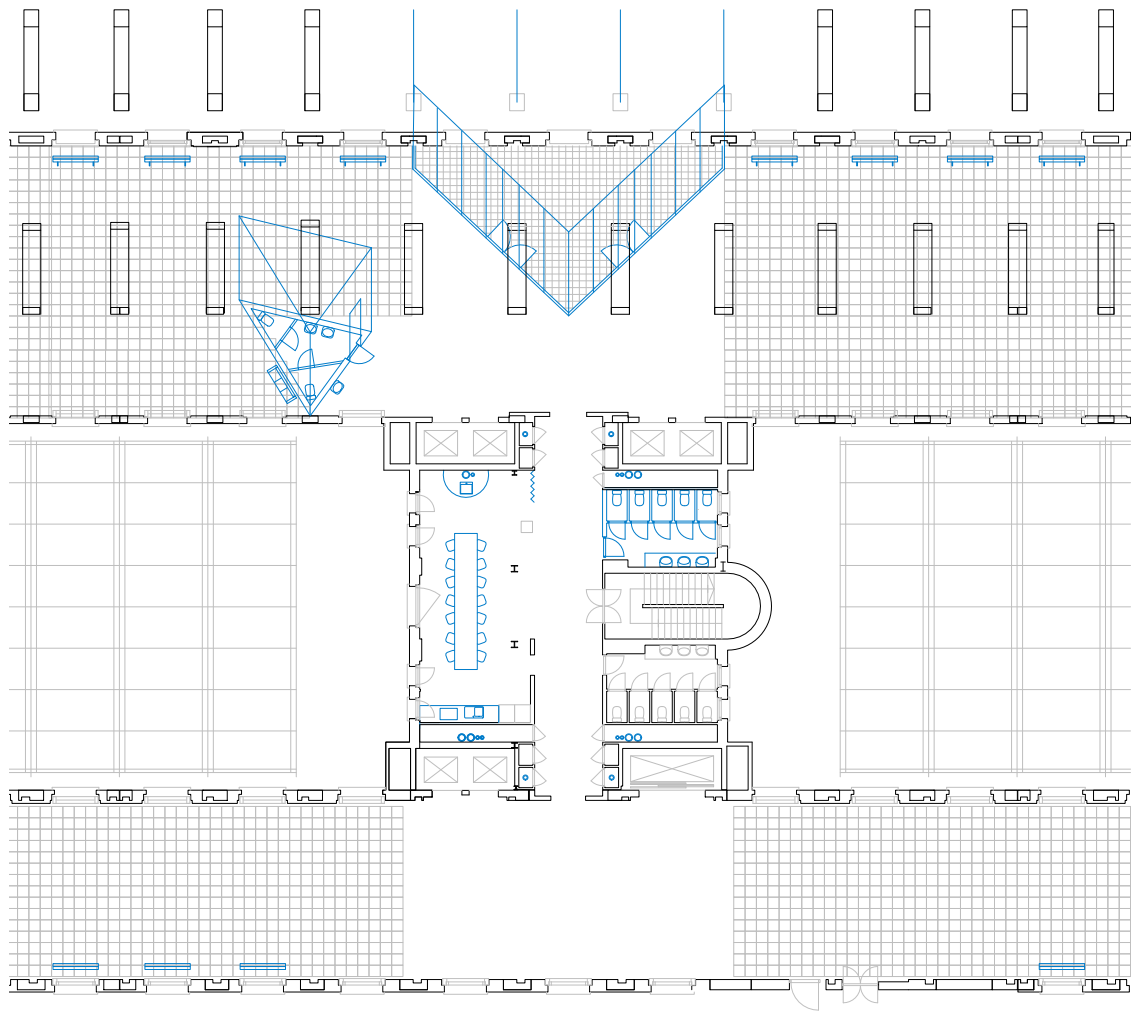
plan, perspective
office 1, workplace

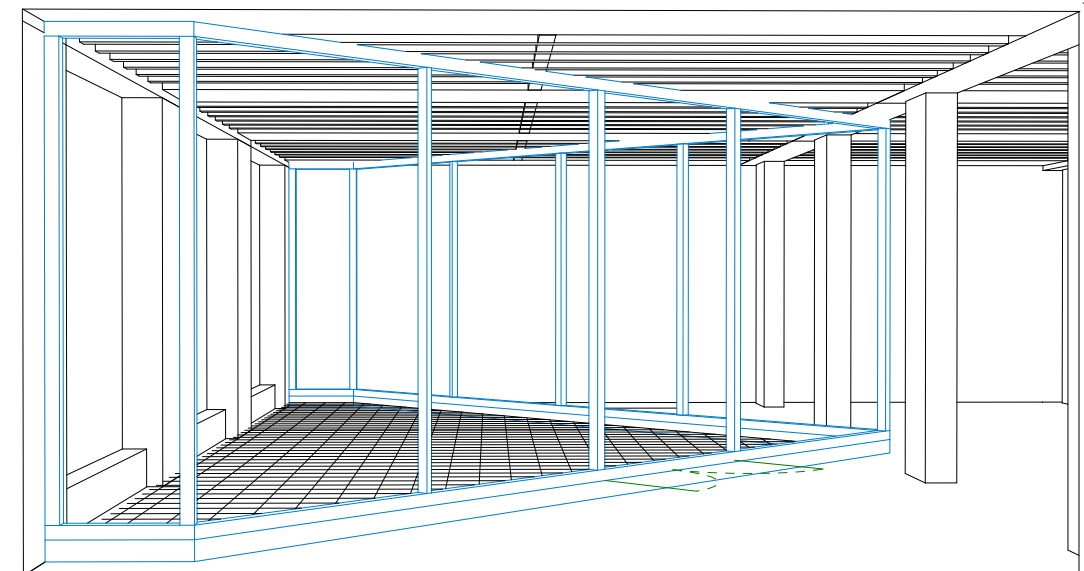
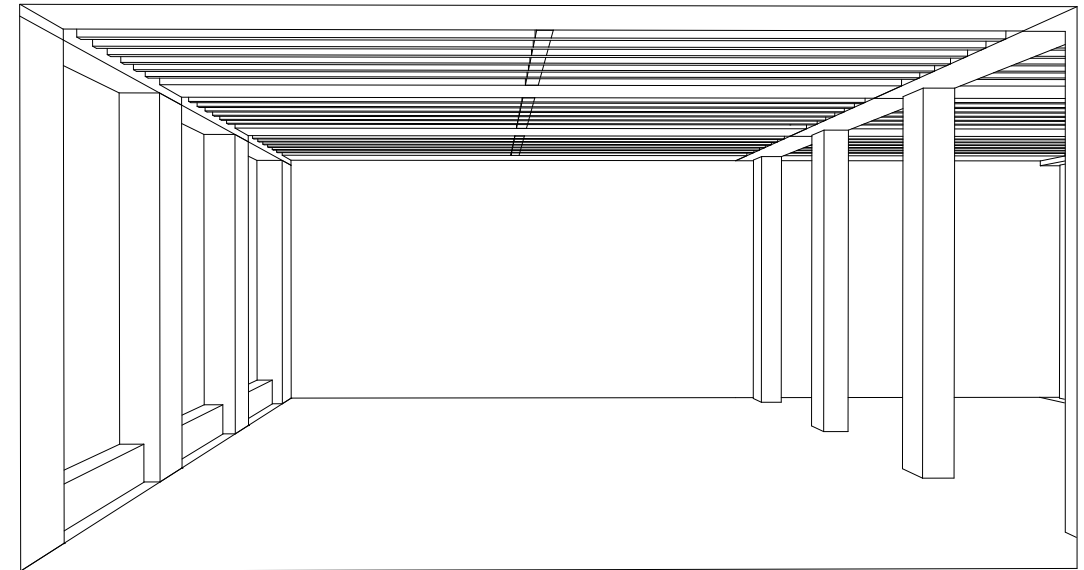
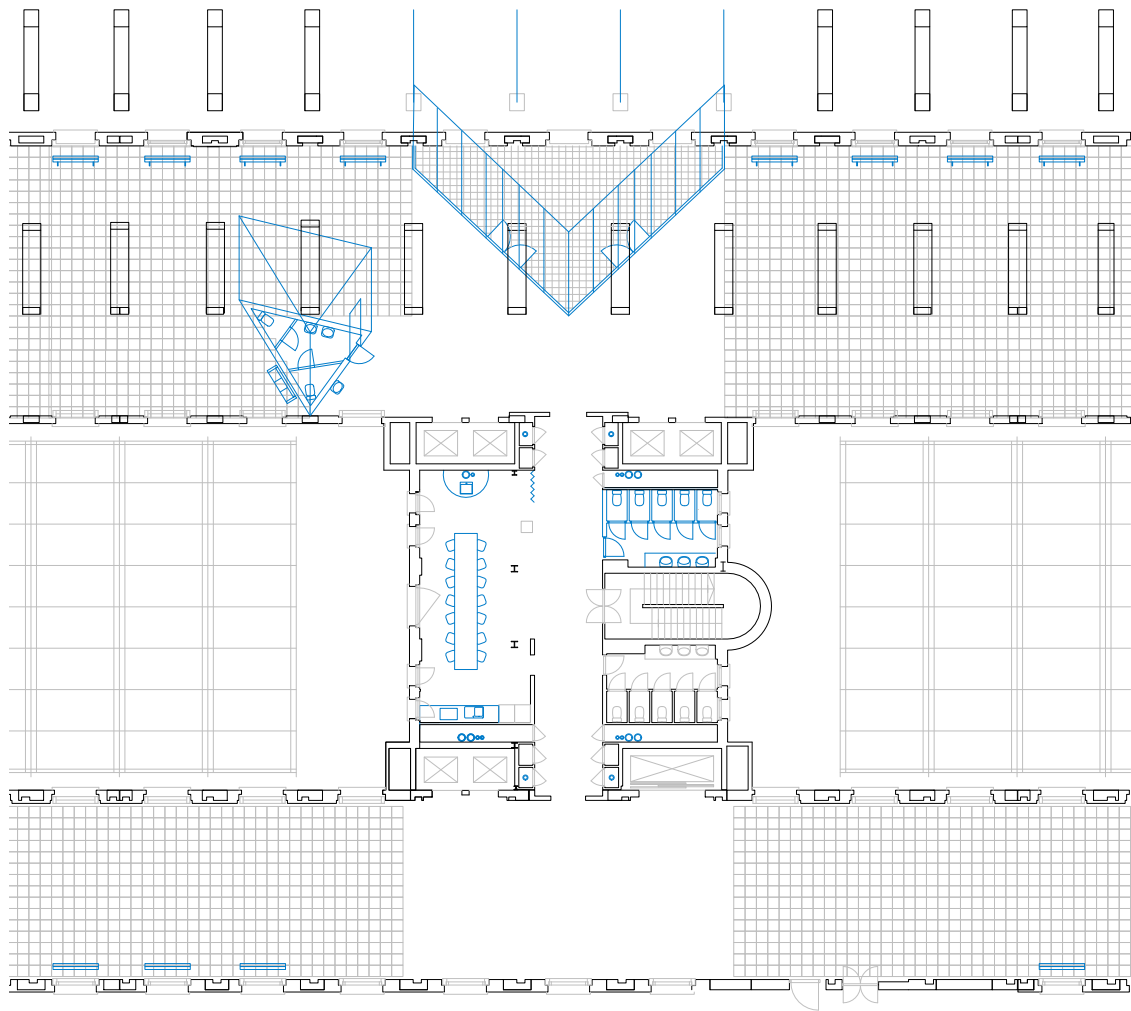


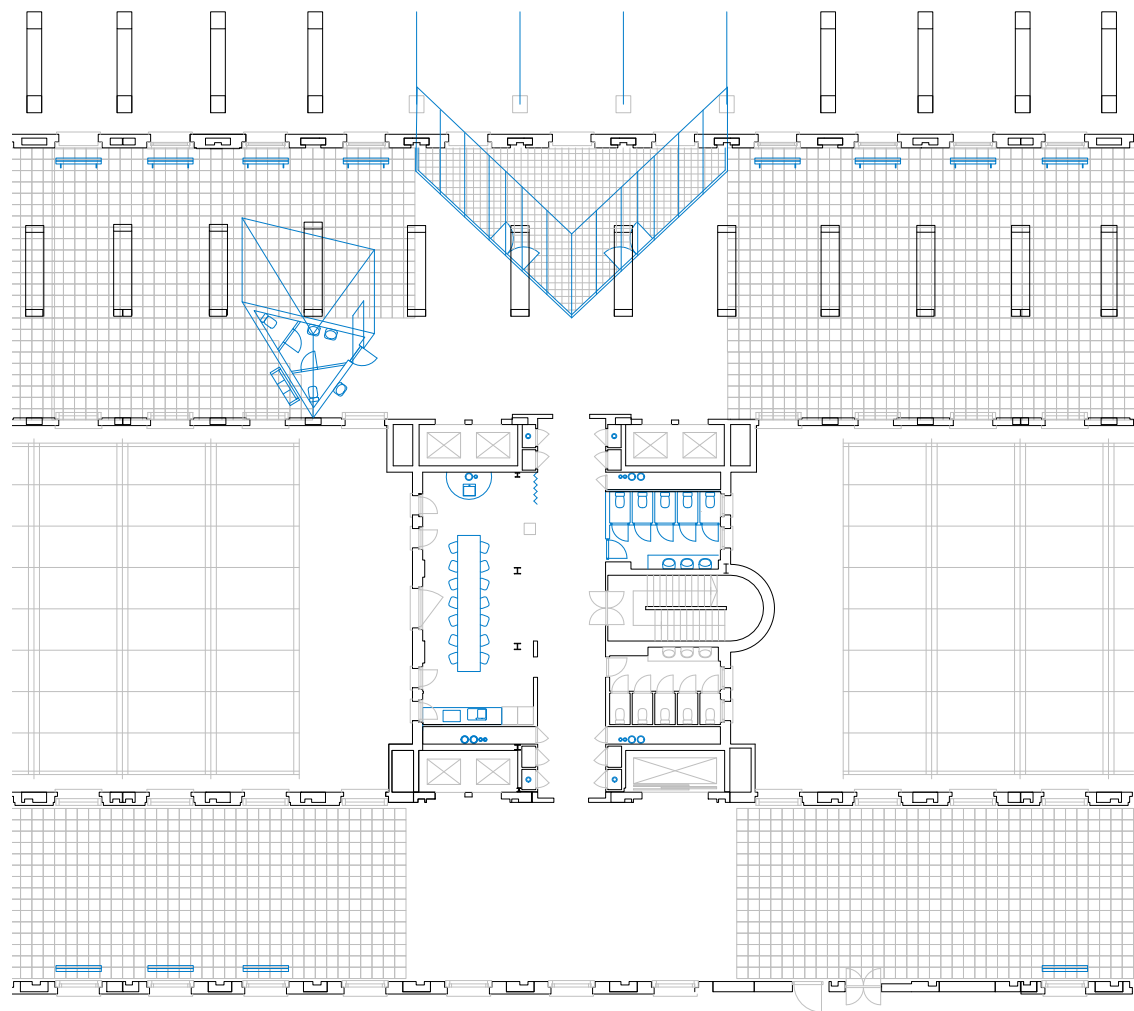


typical office floor plan
New National Bank of Belgium







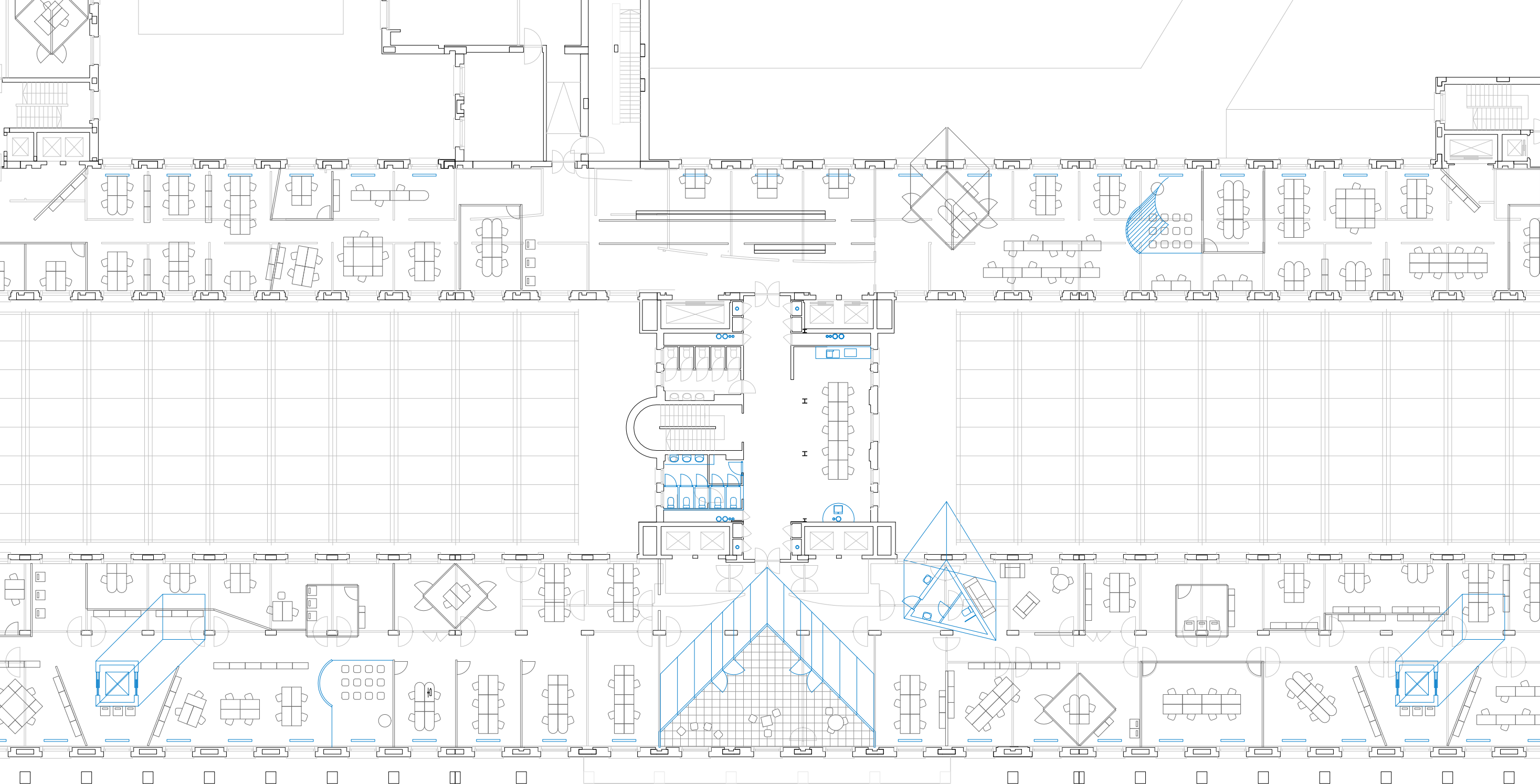


fragment plan
middle circulation core



perspective 1:20
working model

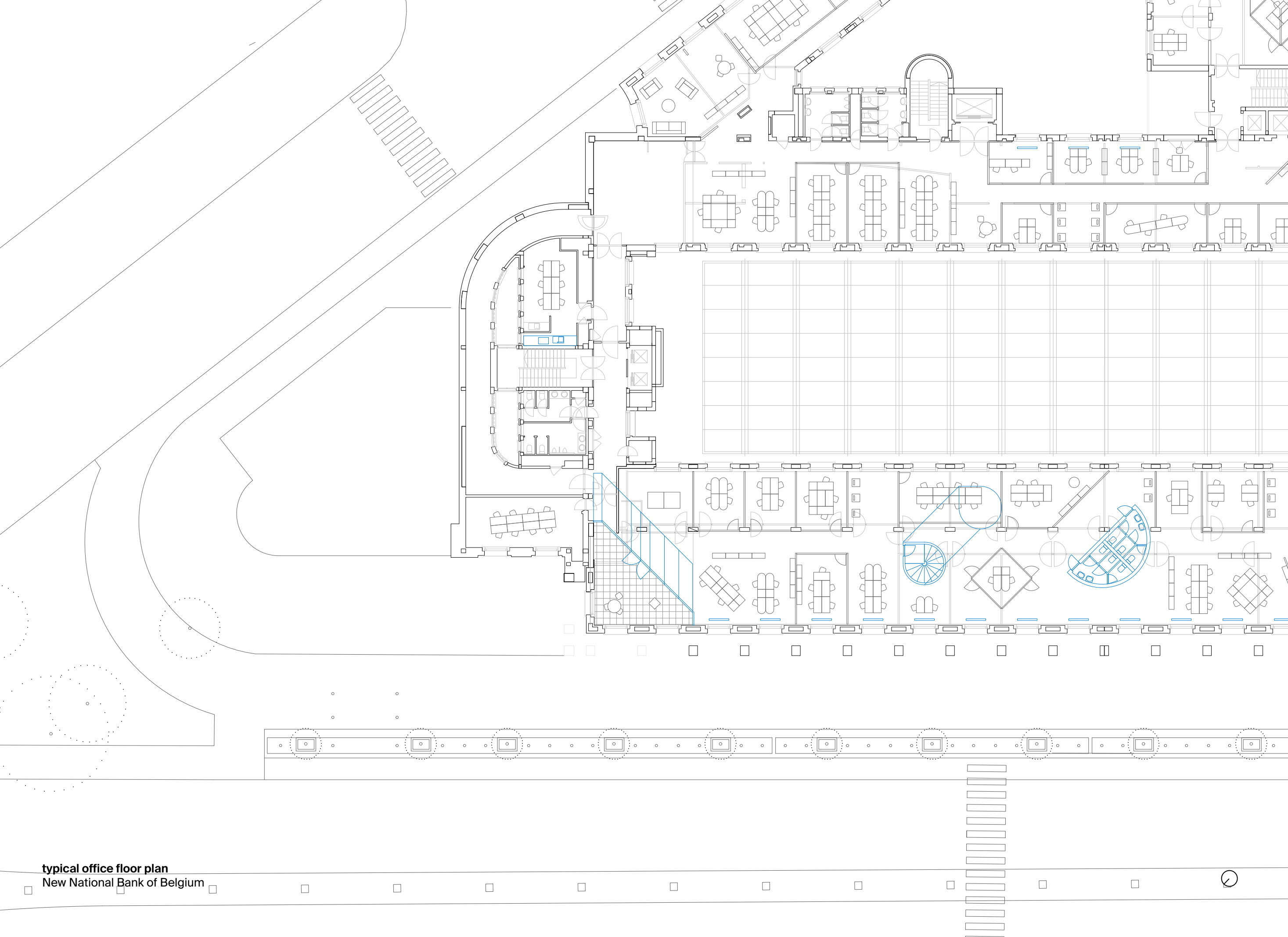




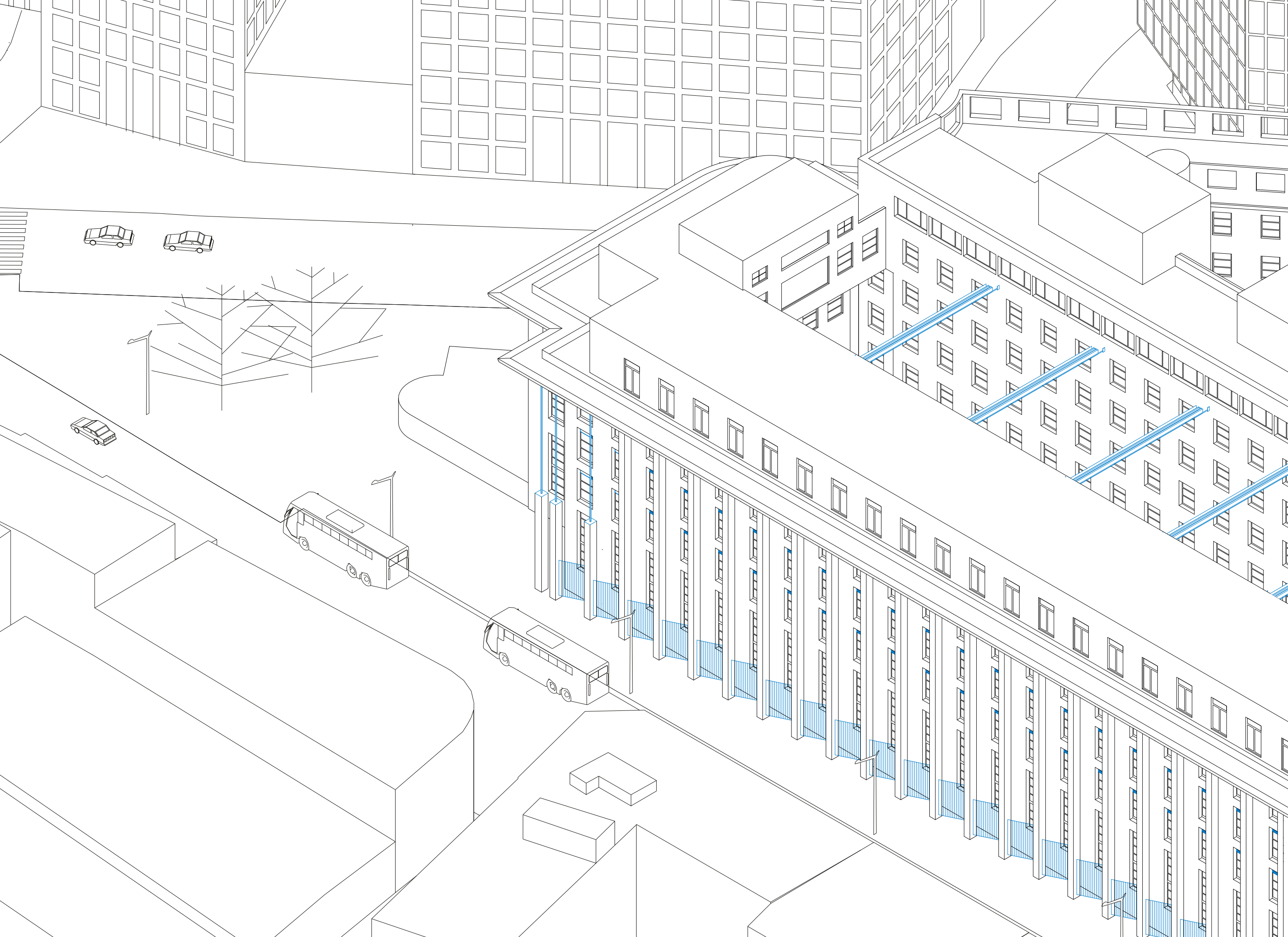
typical office floor plan
New National Bank of Belgium

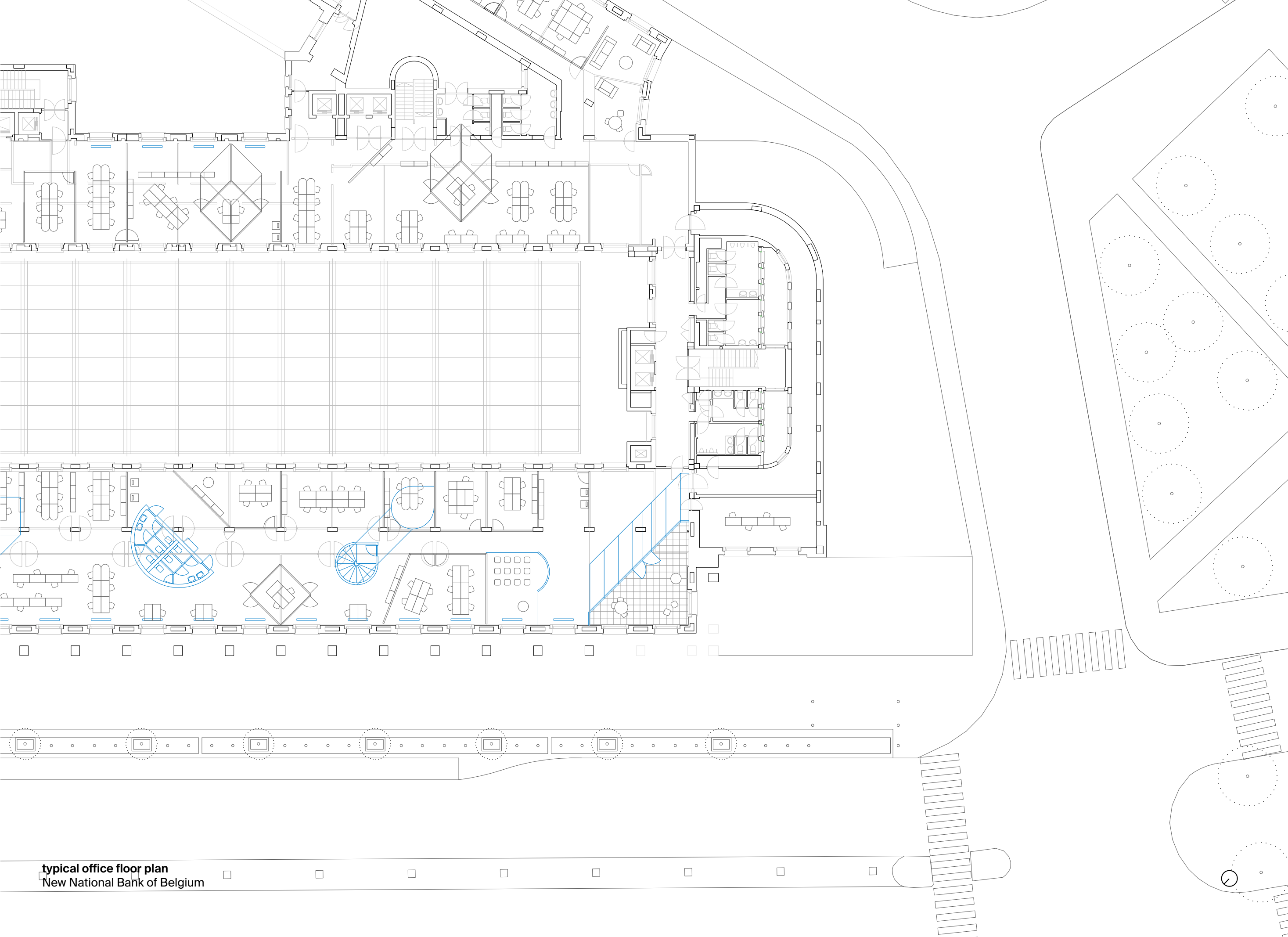




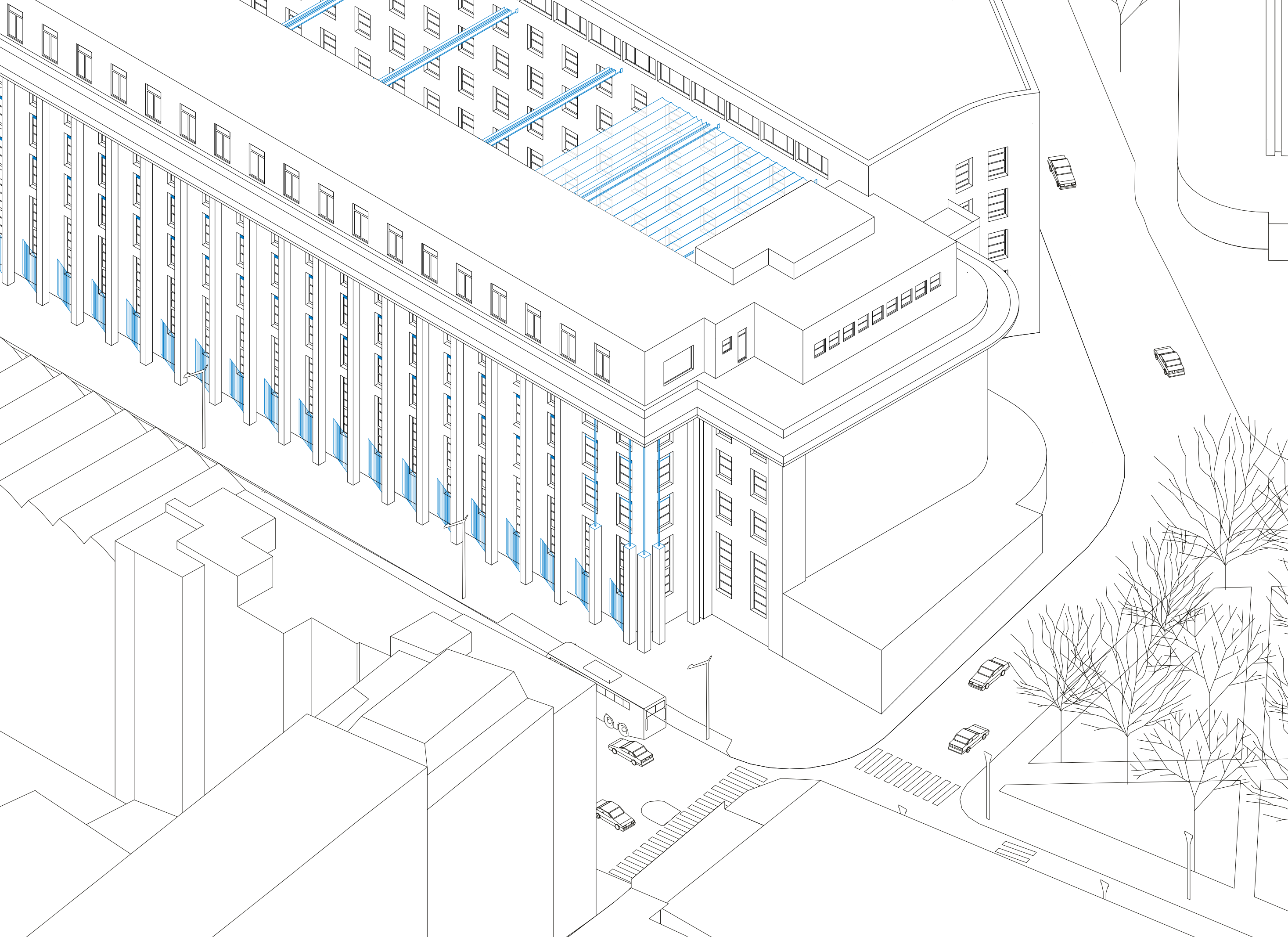


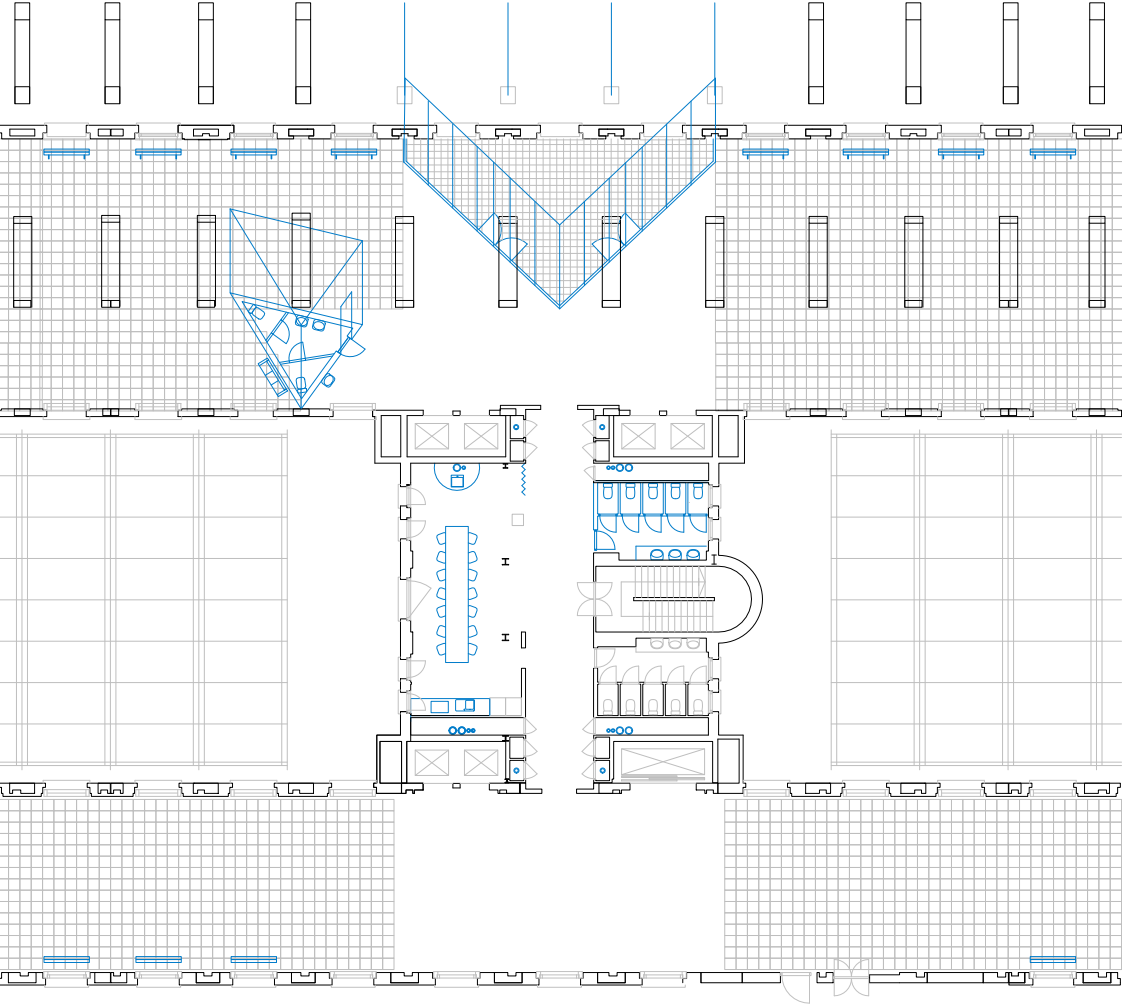
typical office floor plan
New National Bank of Belgium





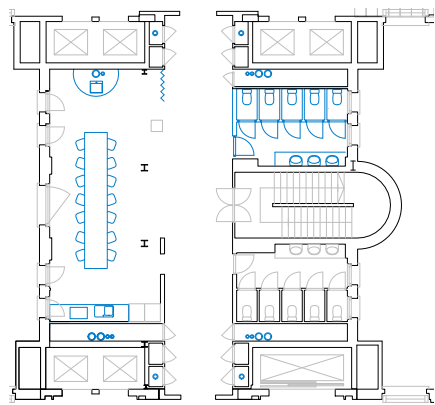
typical office floor plan
New National Bank of Belgium





fragment plan
circulation core





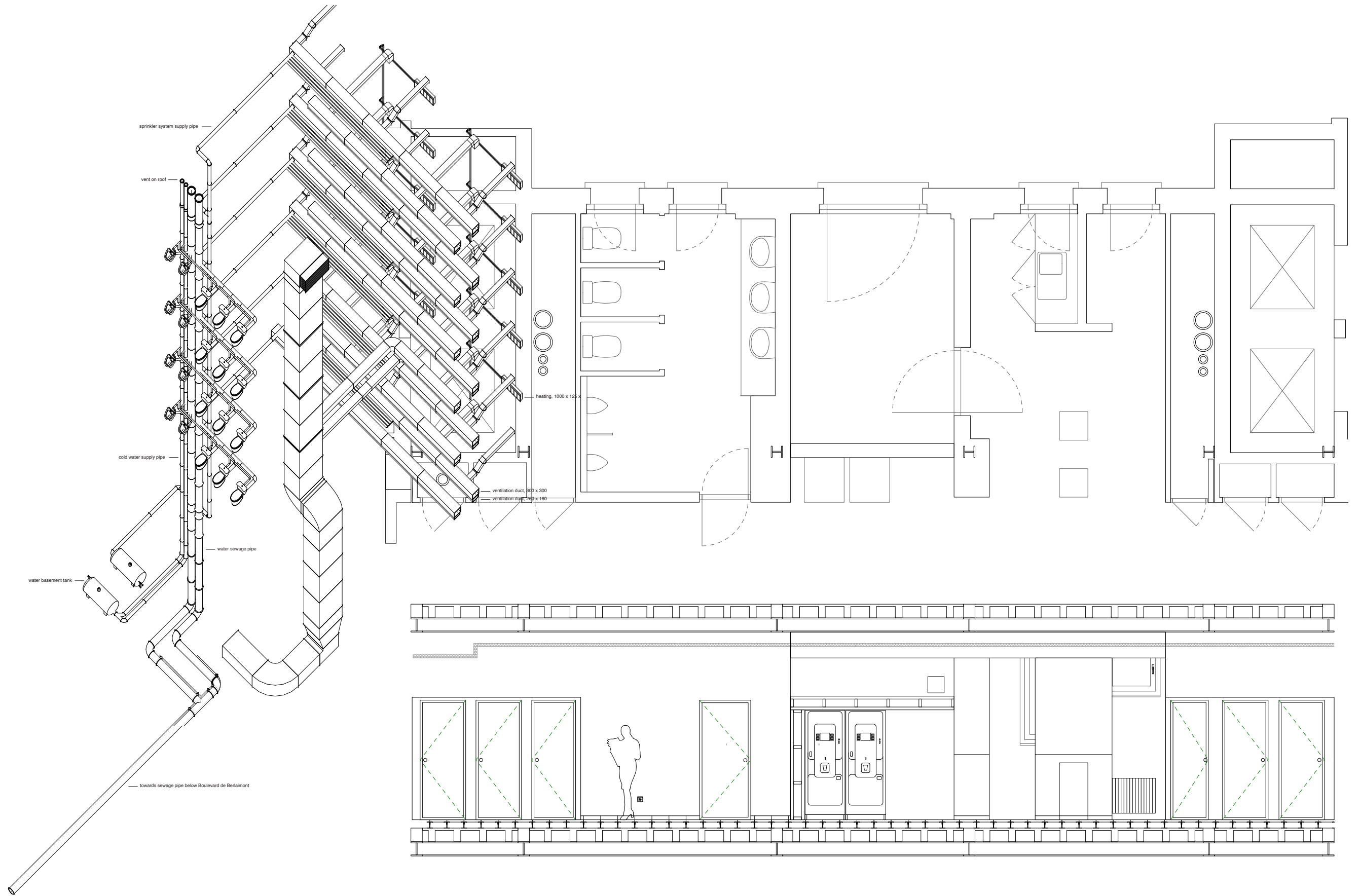
fragment plan
circulation core



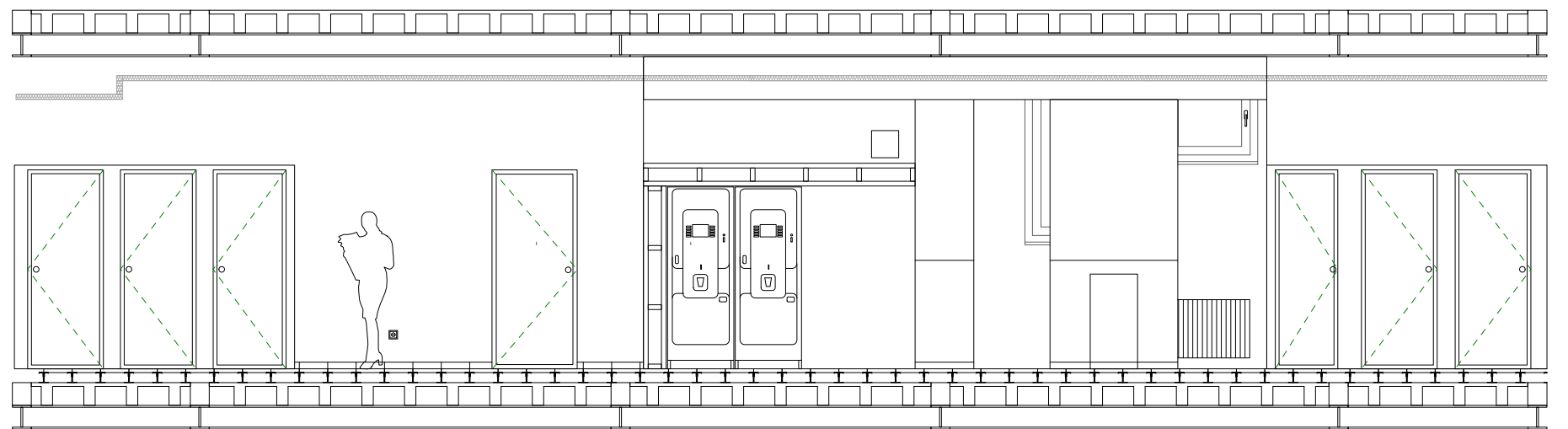
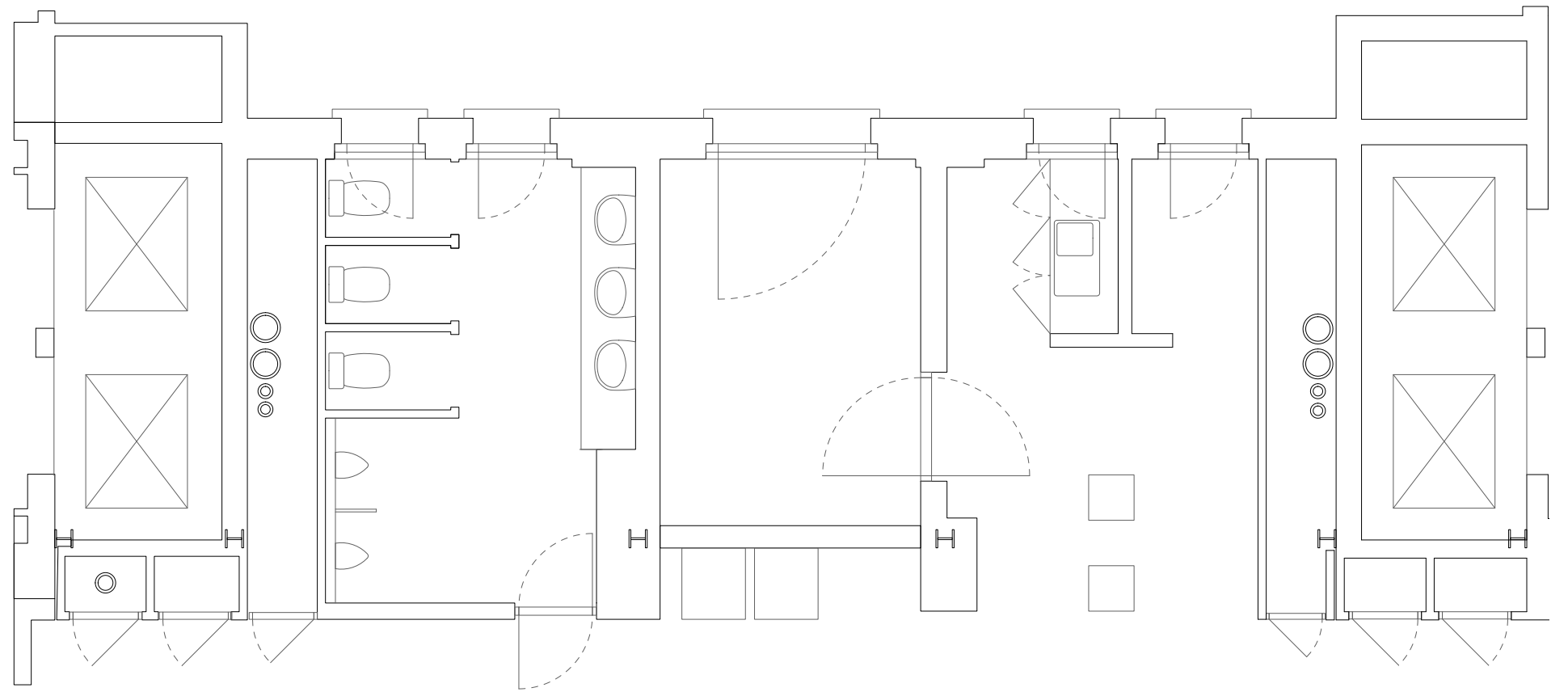
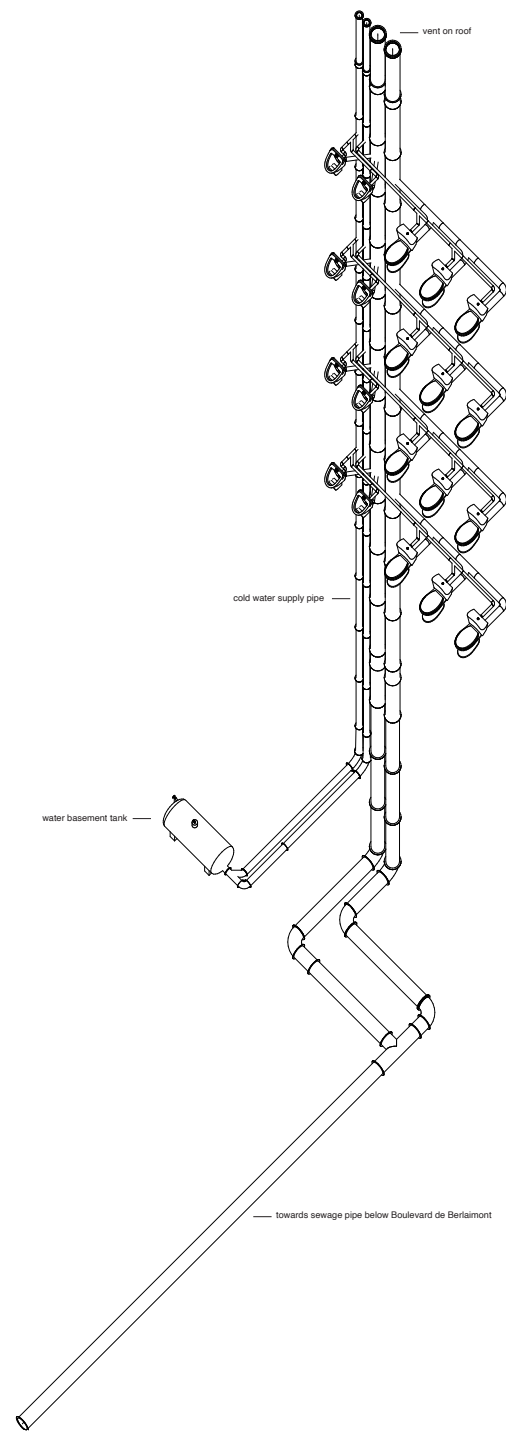
photograph: Bas Leemans



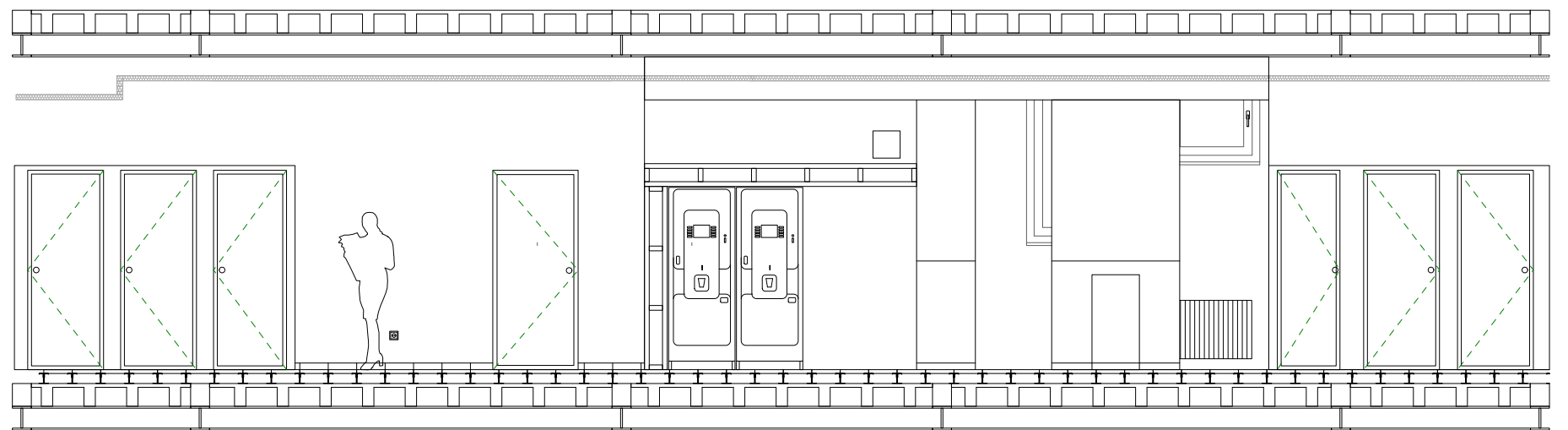
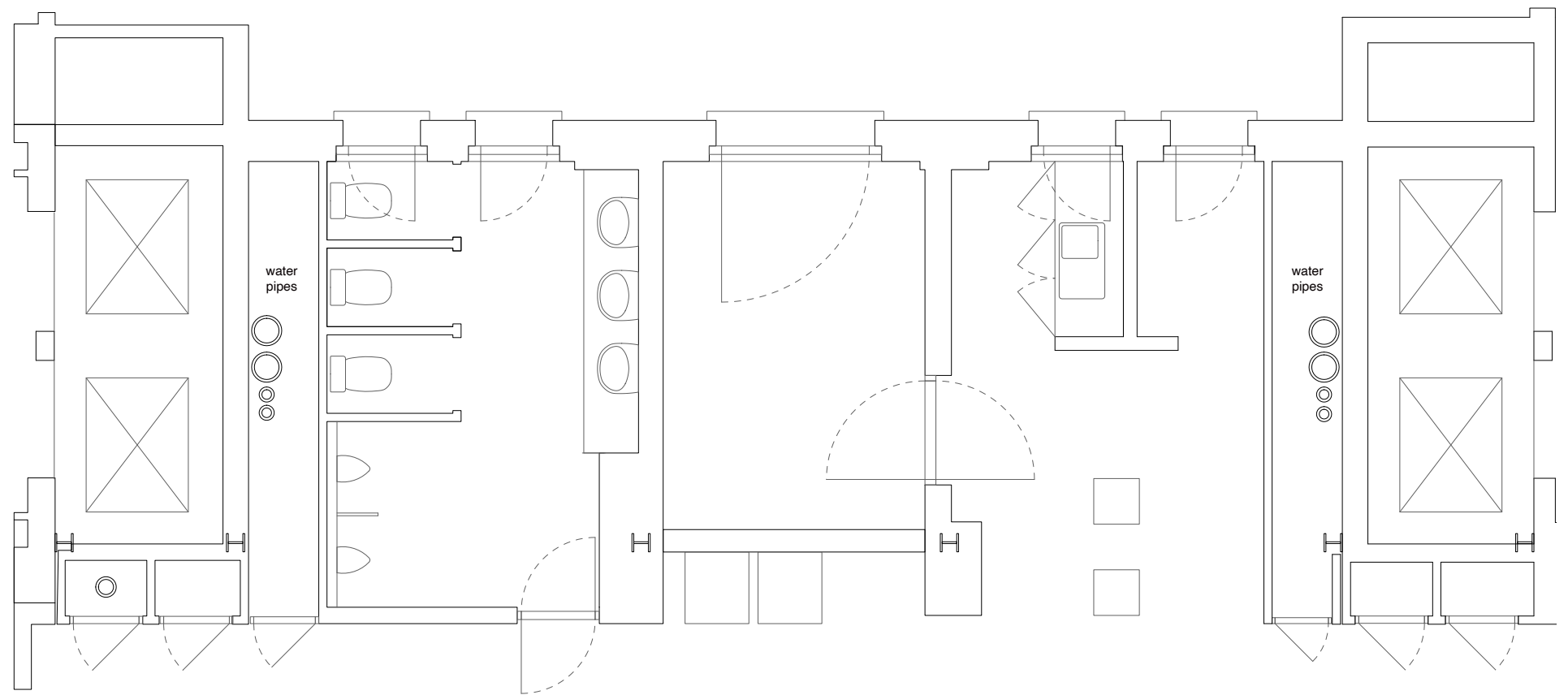
plan, perspective
existing situation middle circulation core



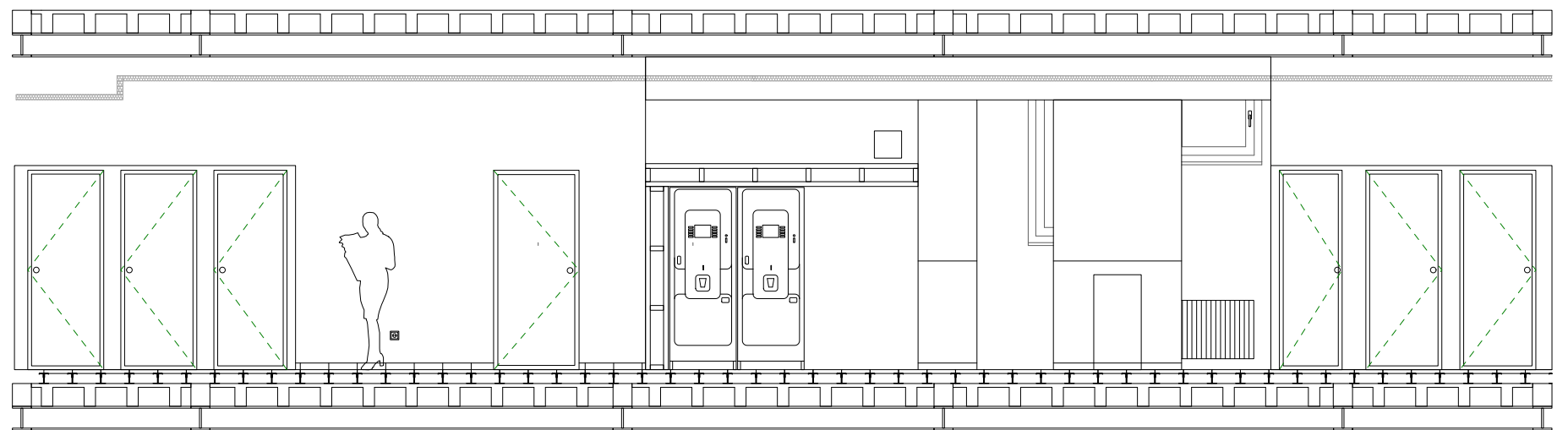
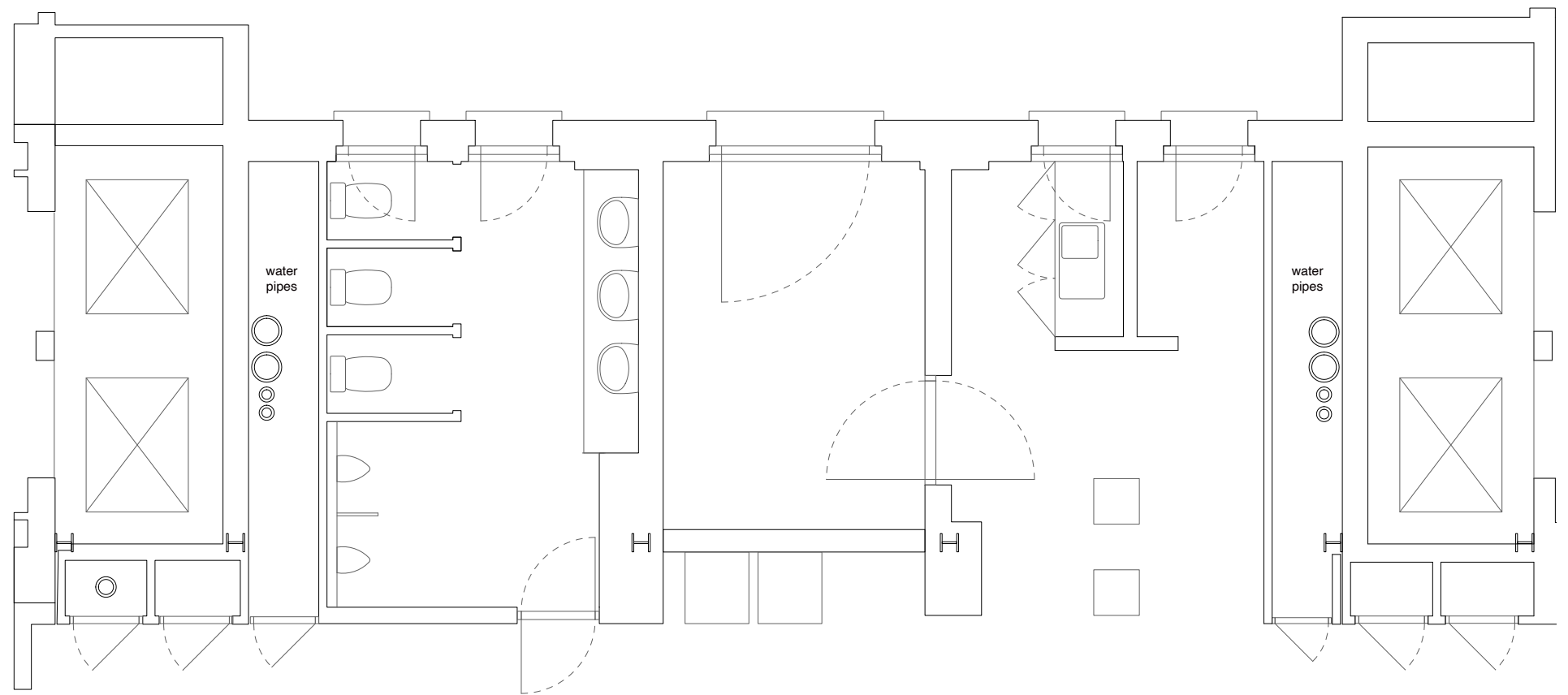
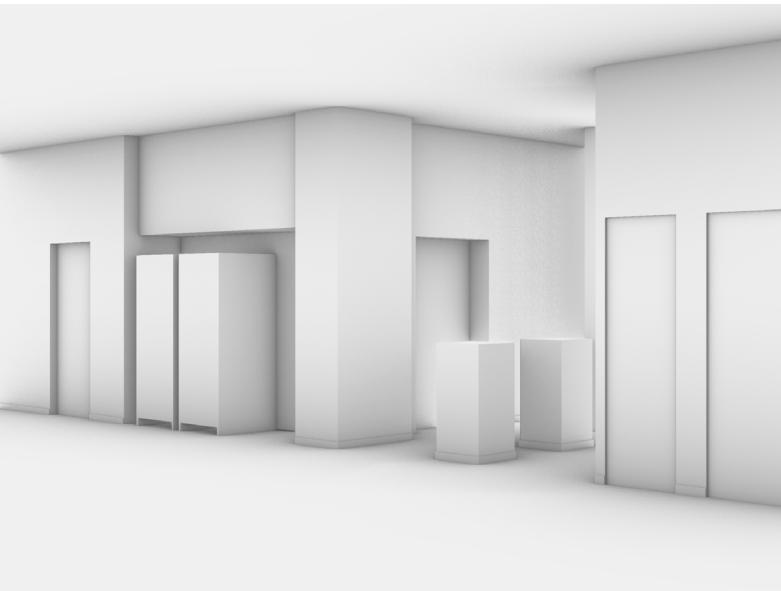
axonometry, plan, section
existing situation middle circulation core



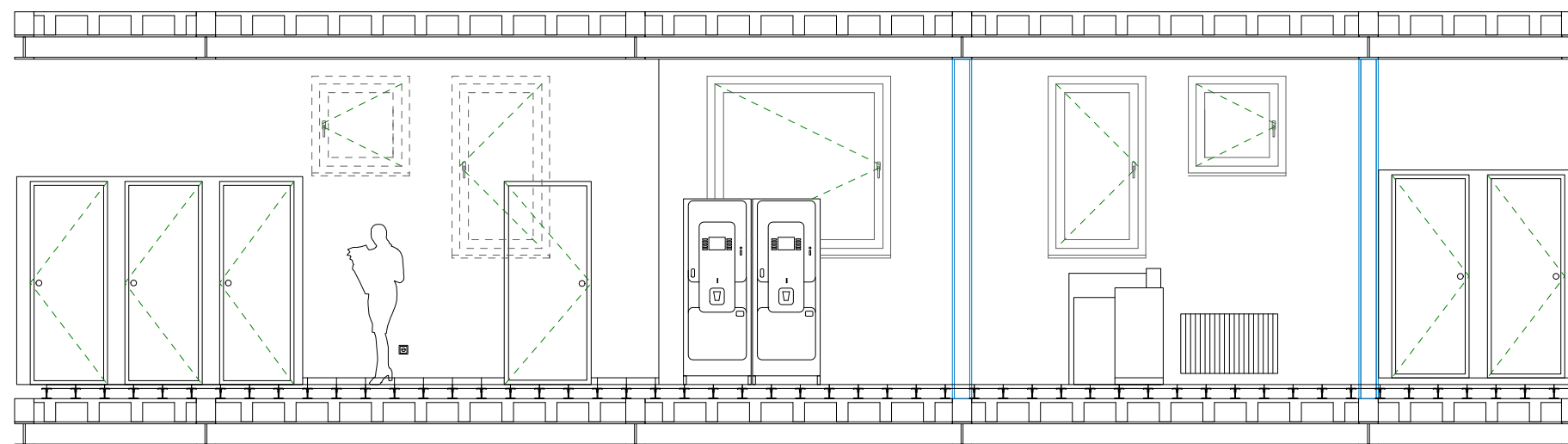
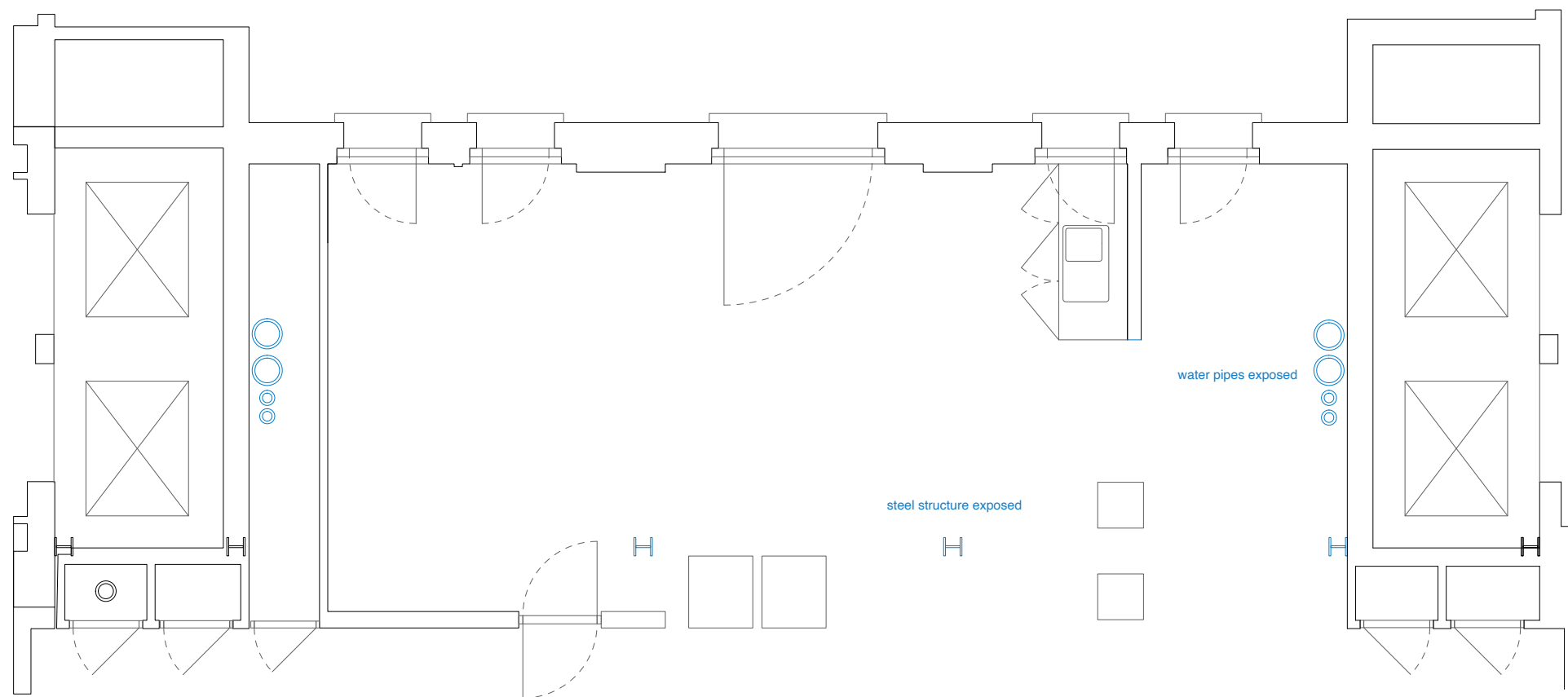
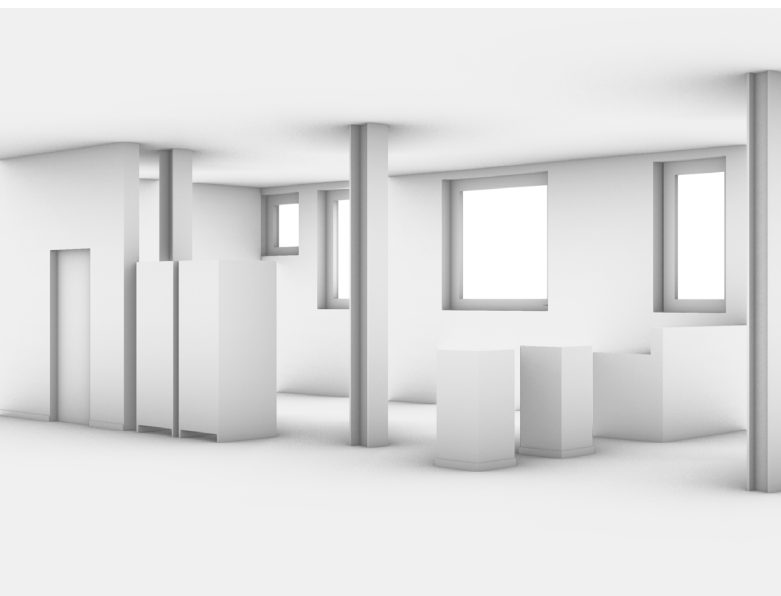
axonometry, plan, section
existing situation middle circulation core



perspective, plan, section
existing situation middle circulation core

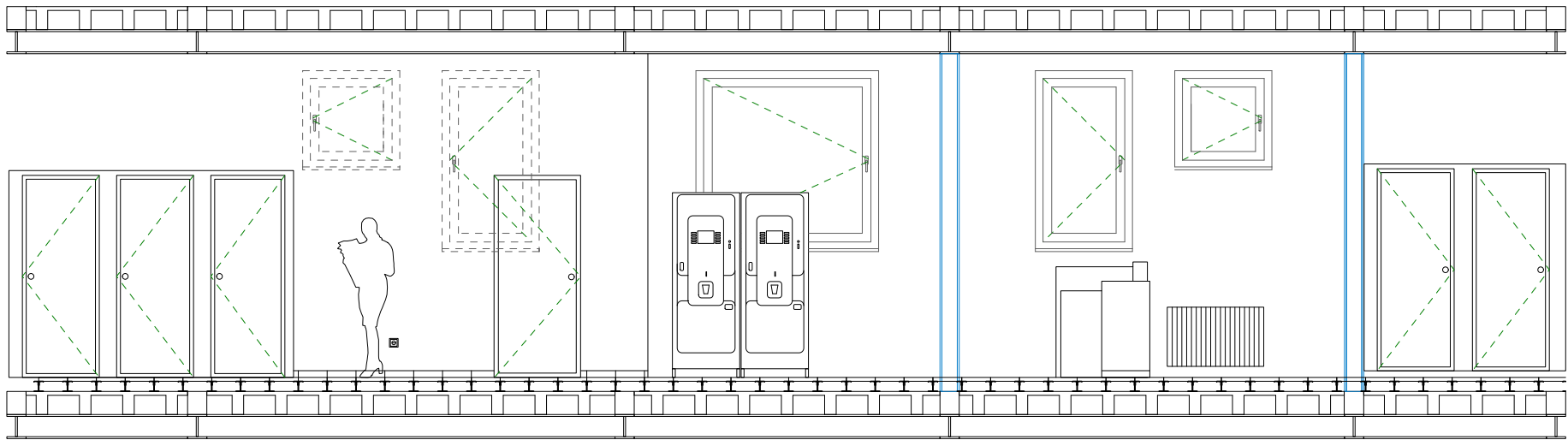
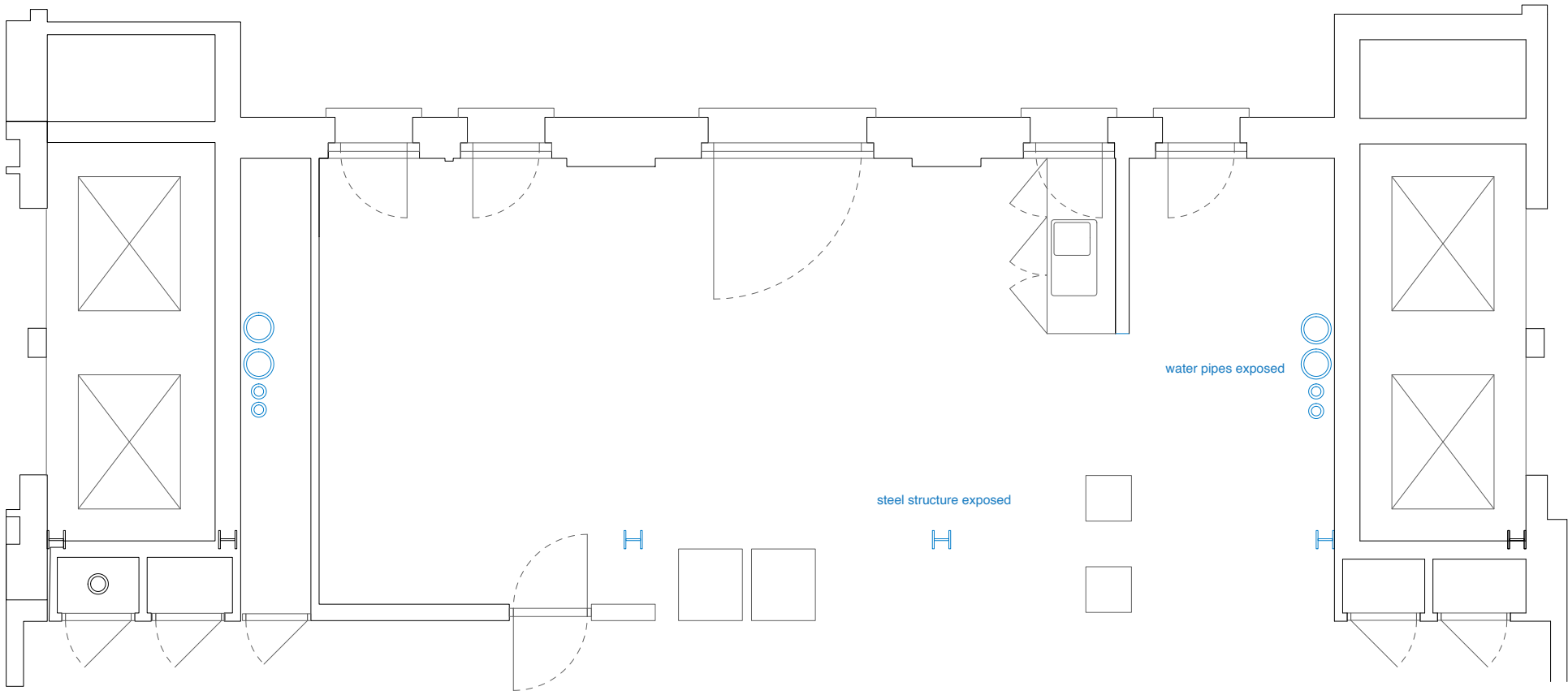
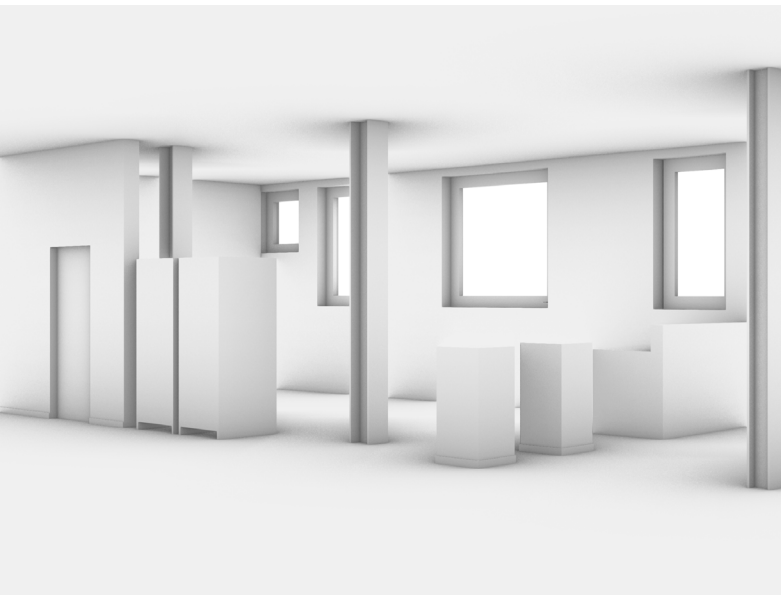


perspective, plan, section
existing situation middle circulation core



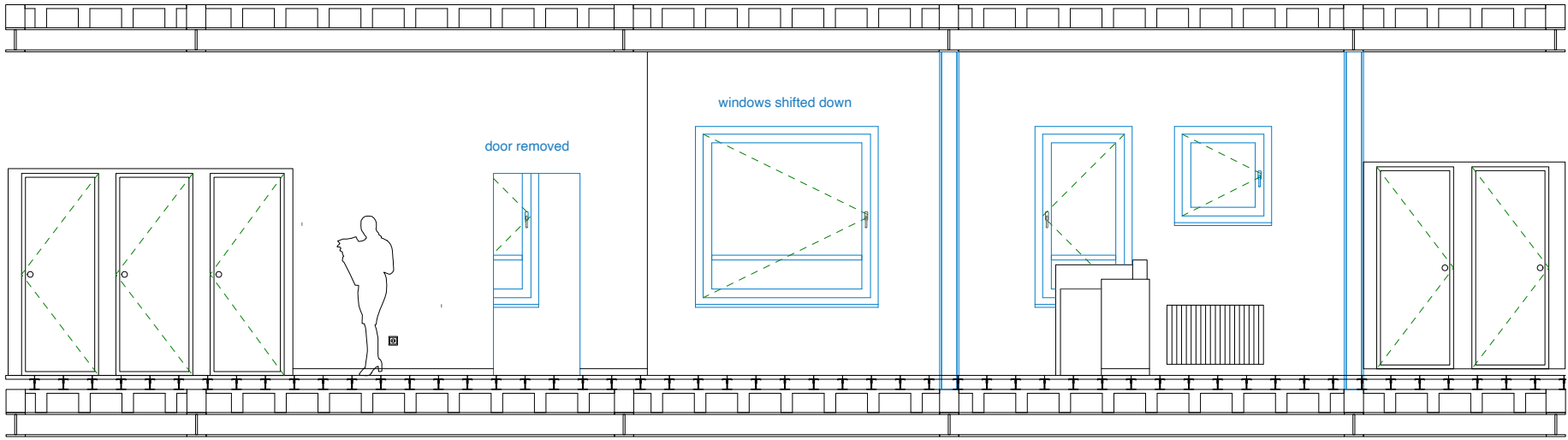
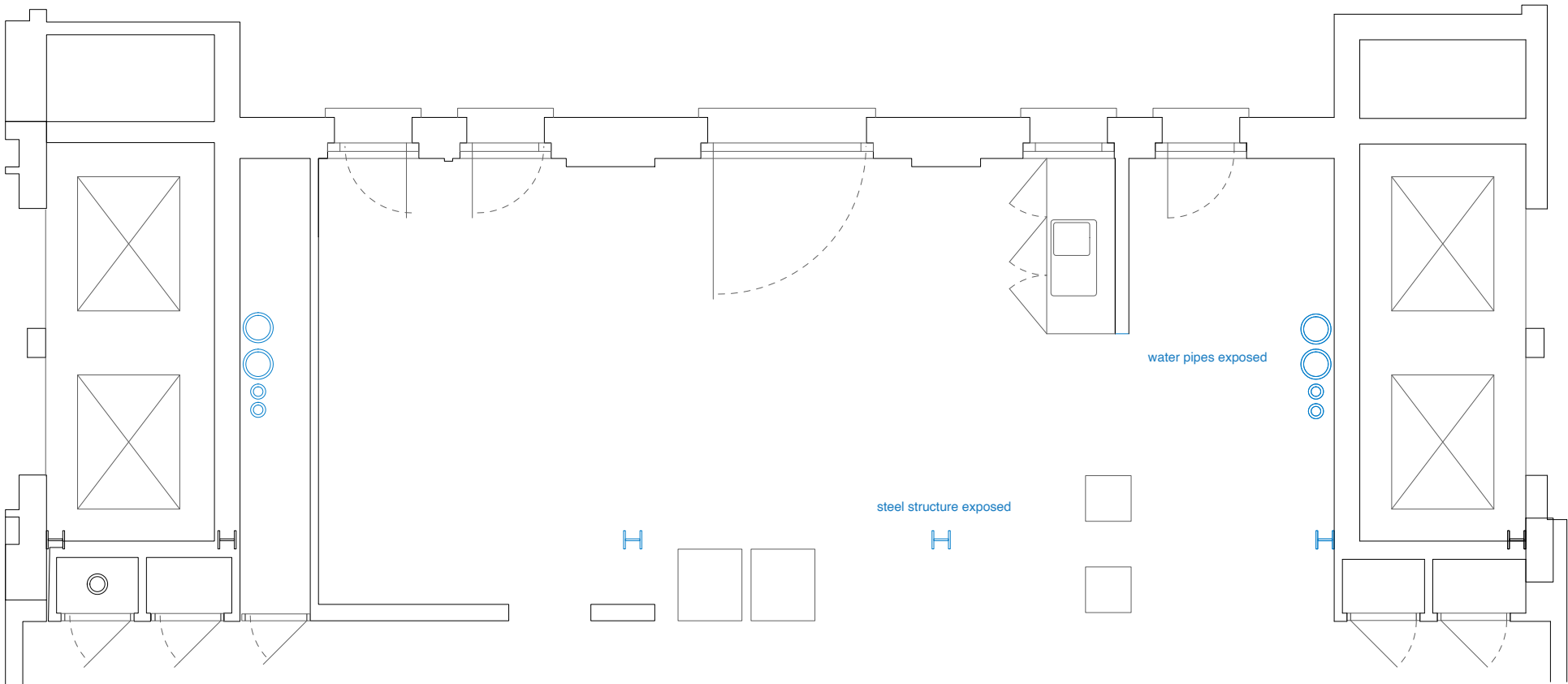
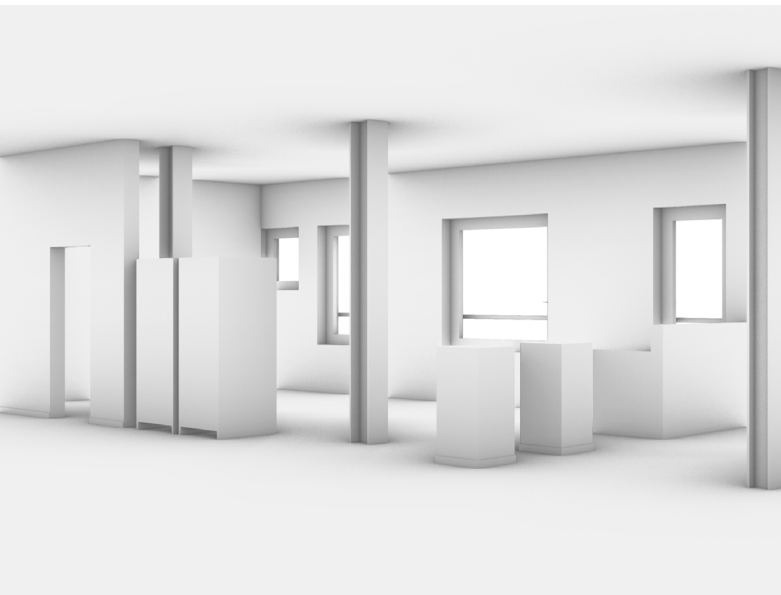
perspective, plan, section
middle circulation core

undressing



perspective, plan, section
middle circulation core

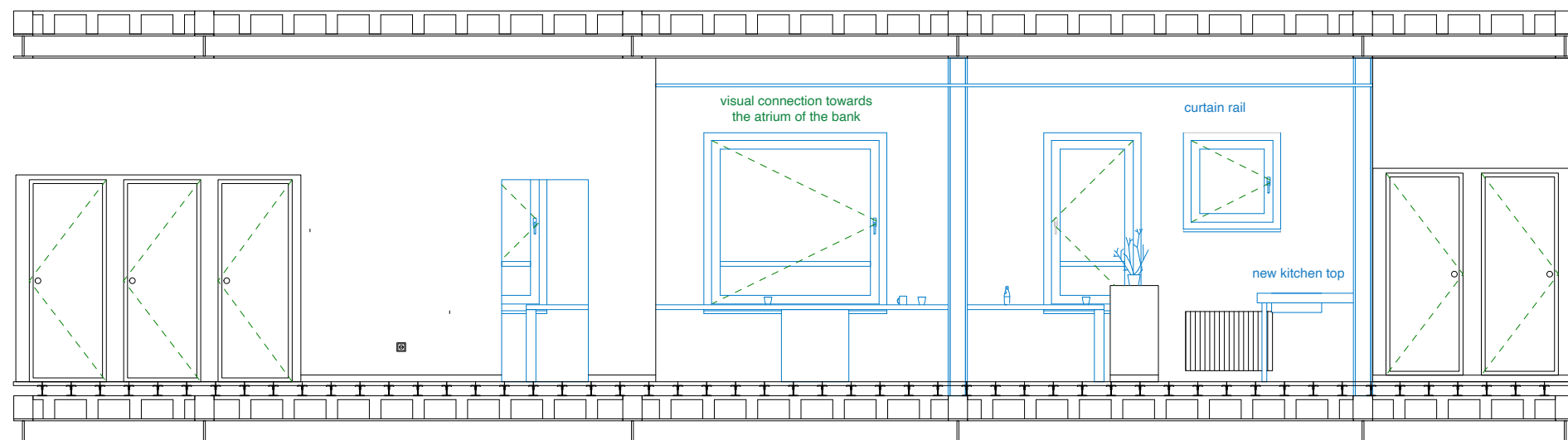
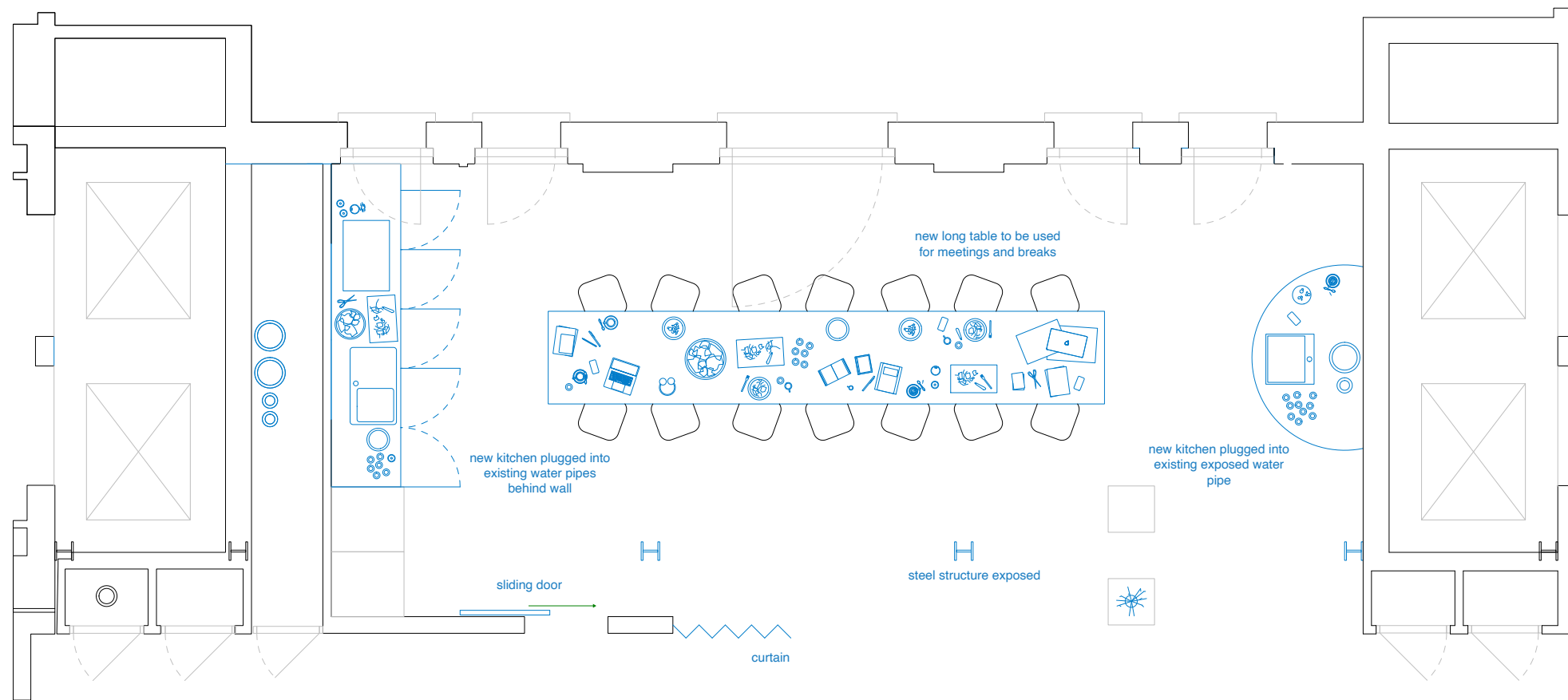
undressing



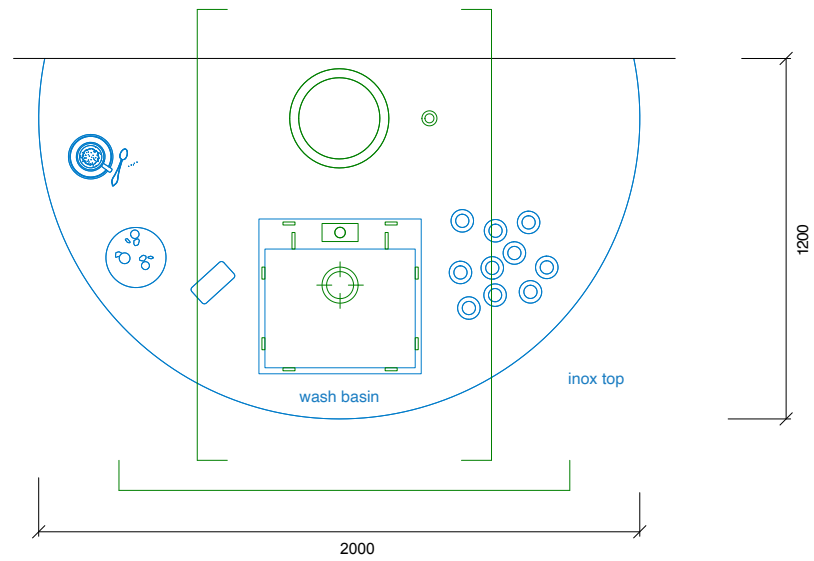
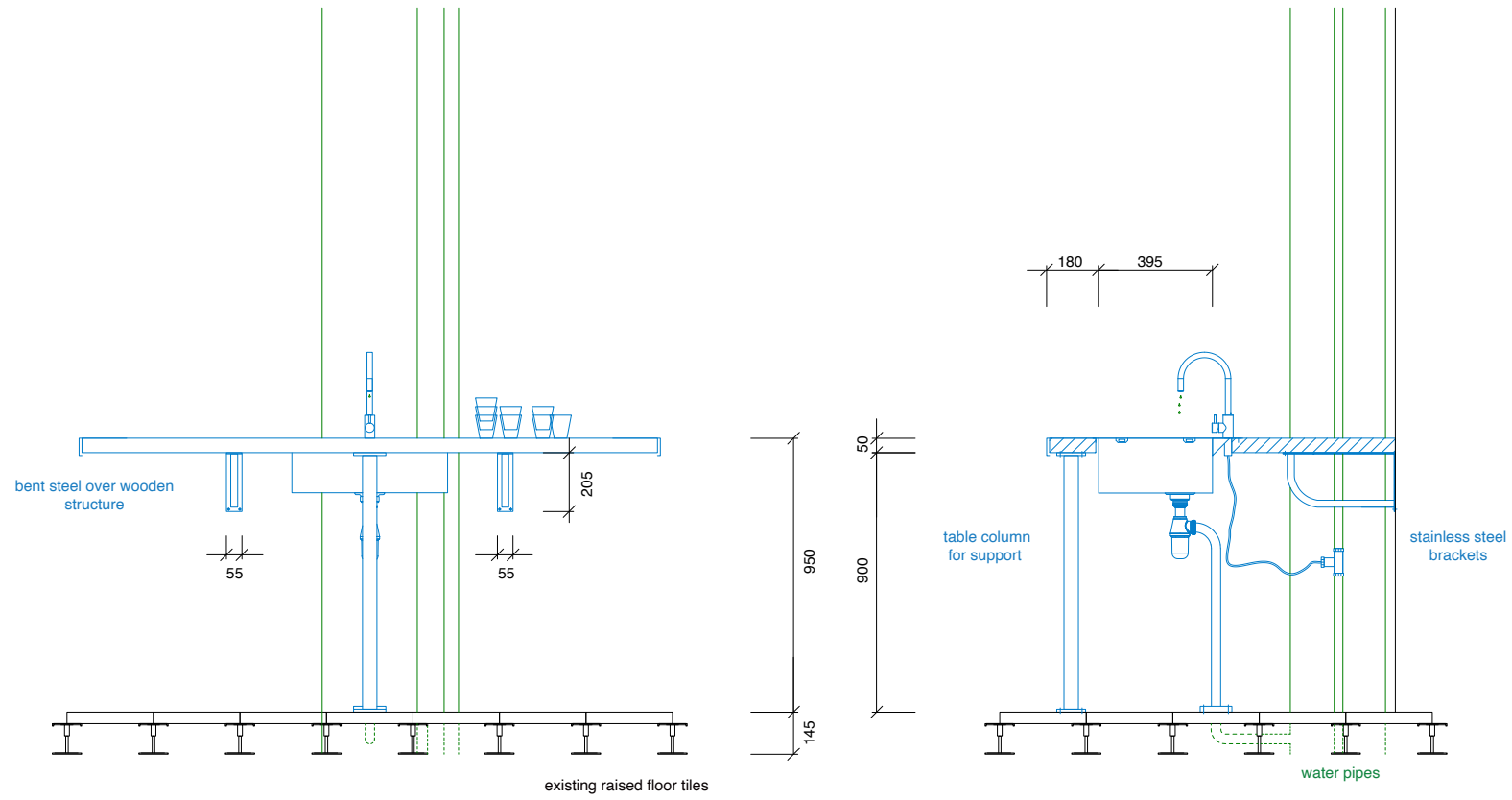
shifting



perspective, plan, section
middle circulation core



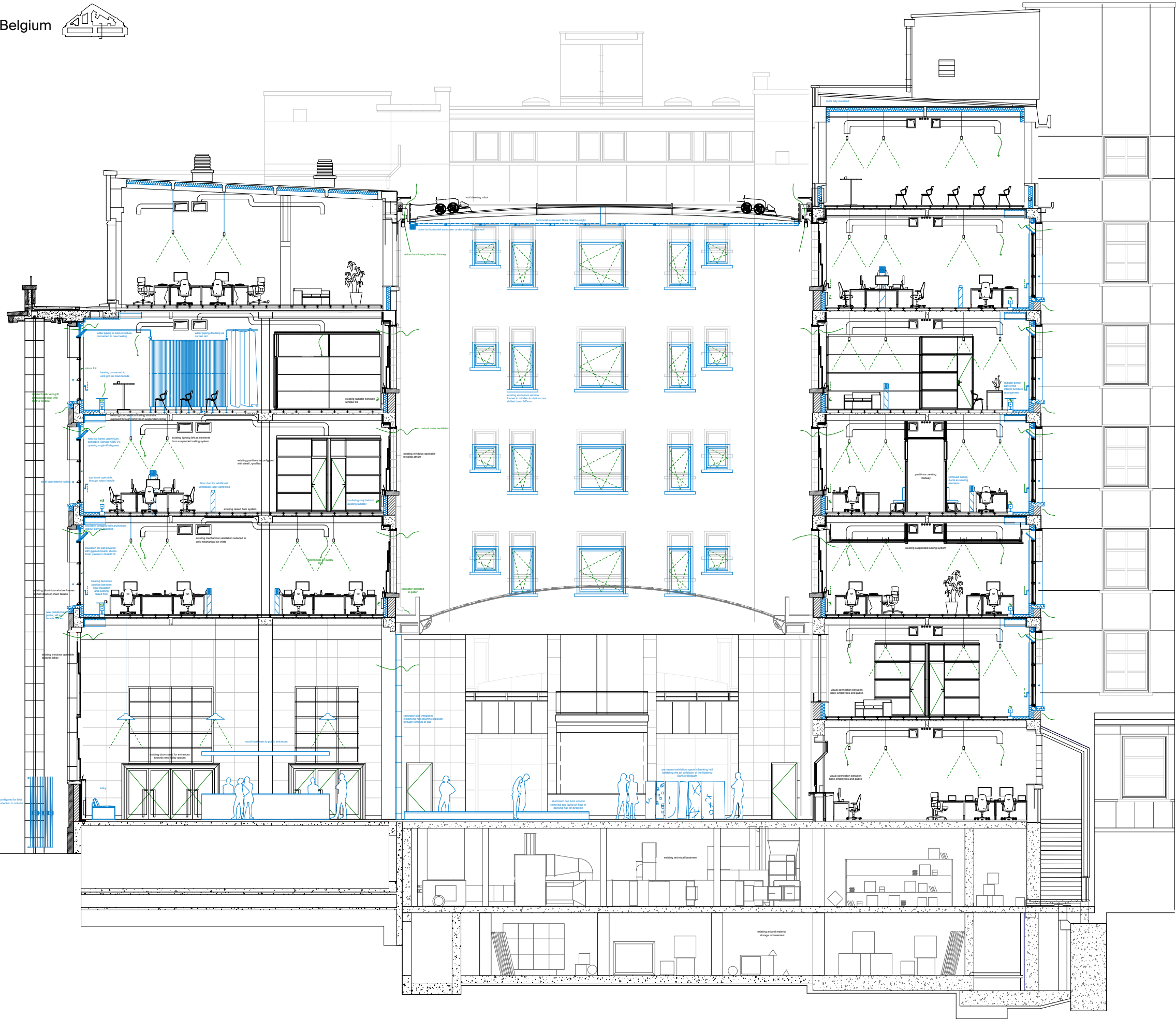
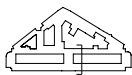




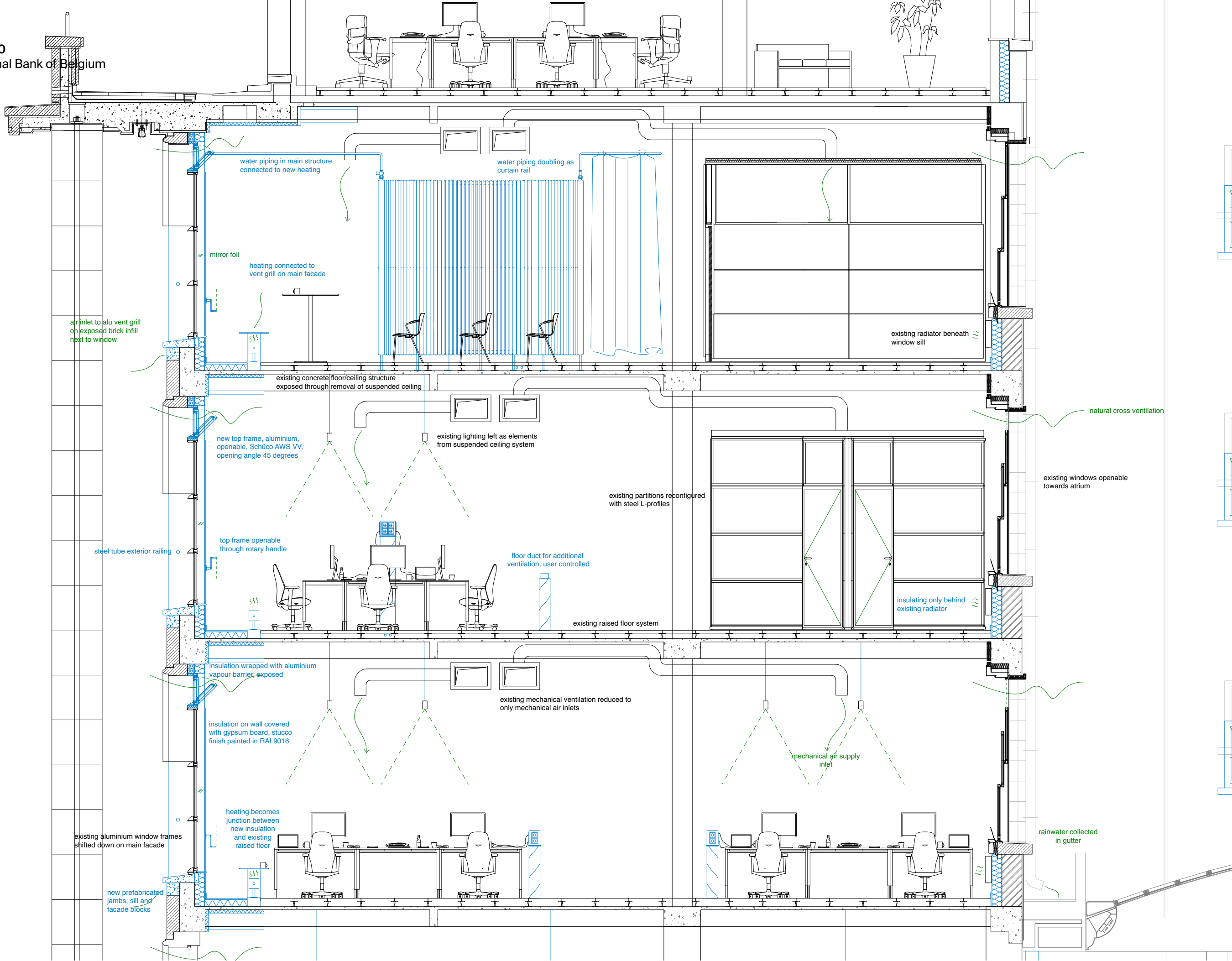
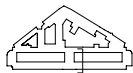


perspectives 1:20
 meeting- and breakroom facing interior atrium

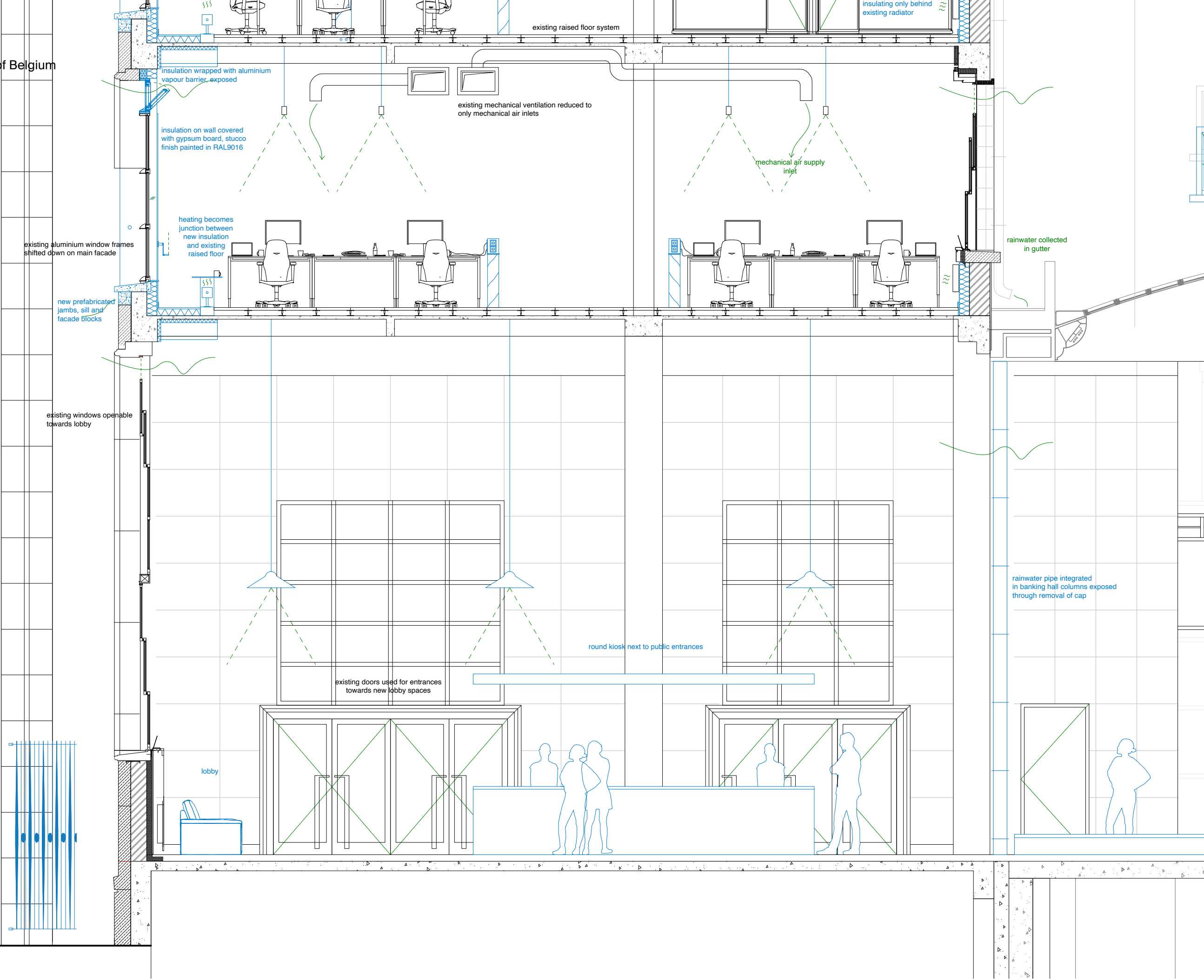
section 1:50
New National Bank of Belgium

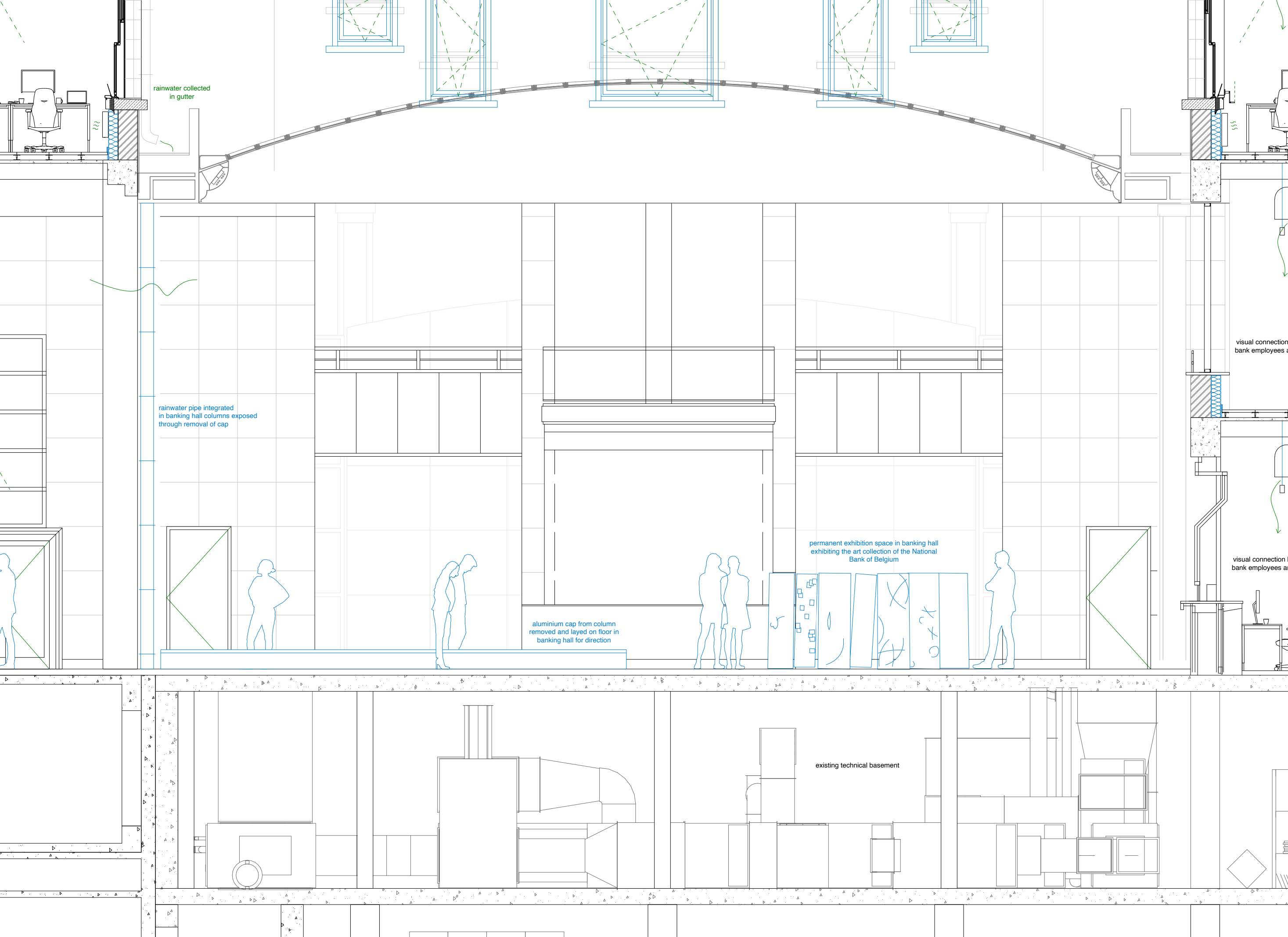


section 1:50
New National Bank of Belgium



section 1:50
New National Bank of Belgium





rainwater collected
in gutter

rainwater pipe integrated
in banking hall columns exposed
through removal of cap

aluminium cap from column
removed and layed on floor in
banking hall for direction

permanent exhibition space in banking hall
exhibiting the art collection of the National
Bank of Belgium

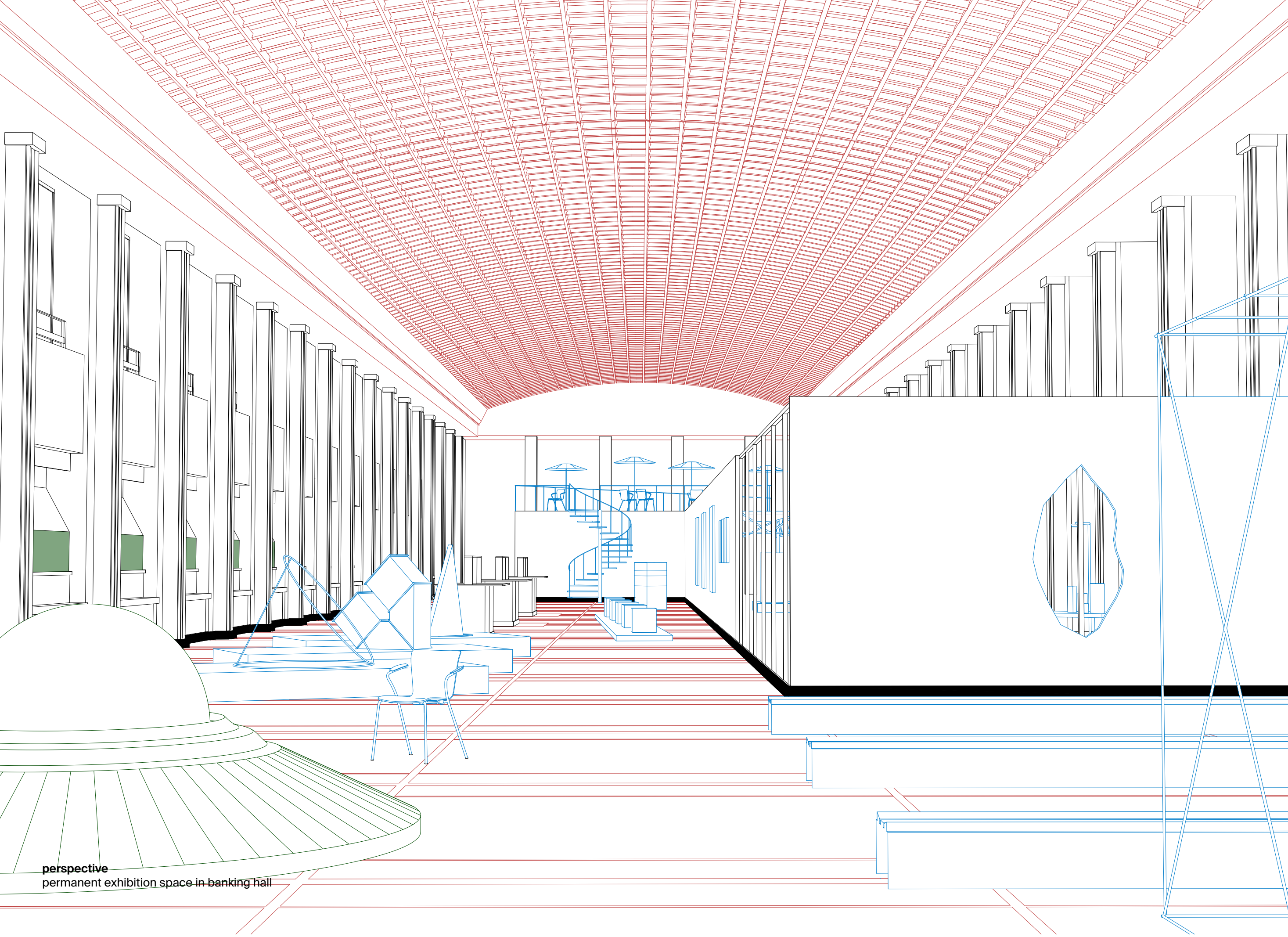
existing technical basement

visual connection
bank employees a

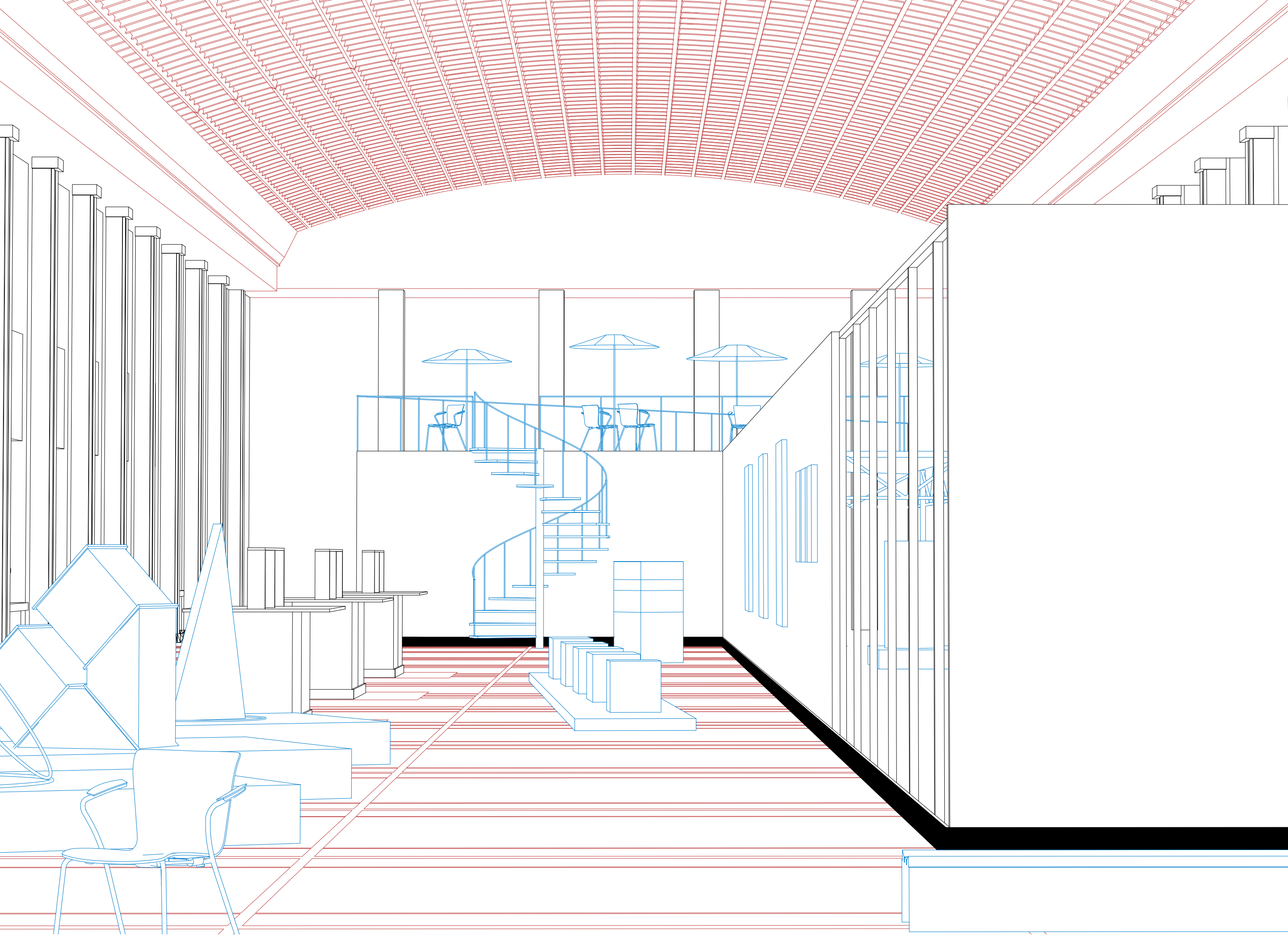
visual connection
bank employees a

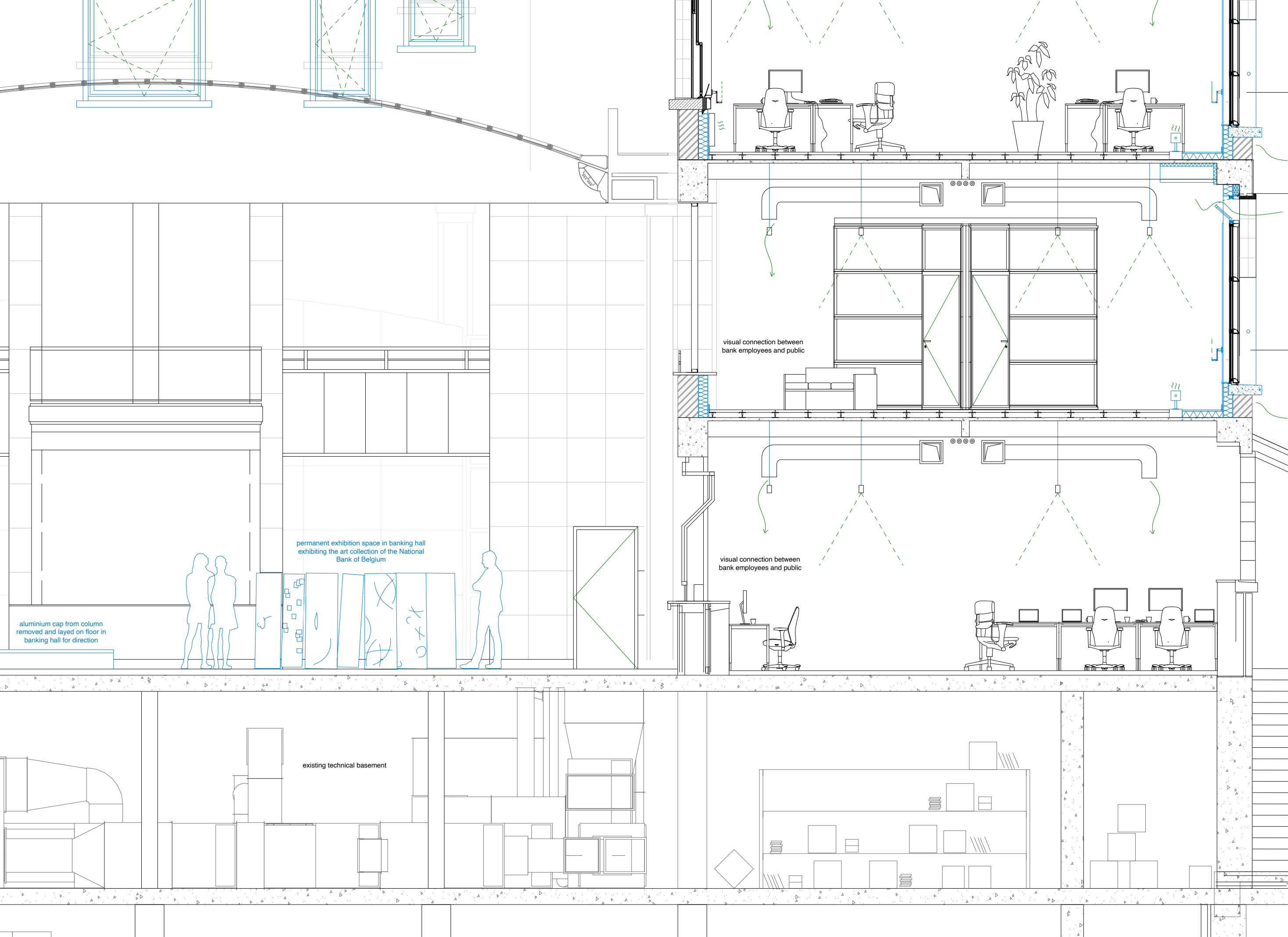






perspective
permanent exhibition space in banking hall





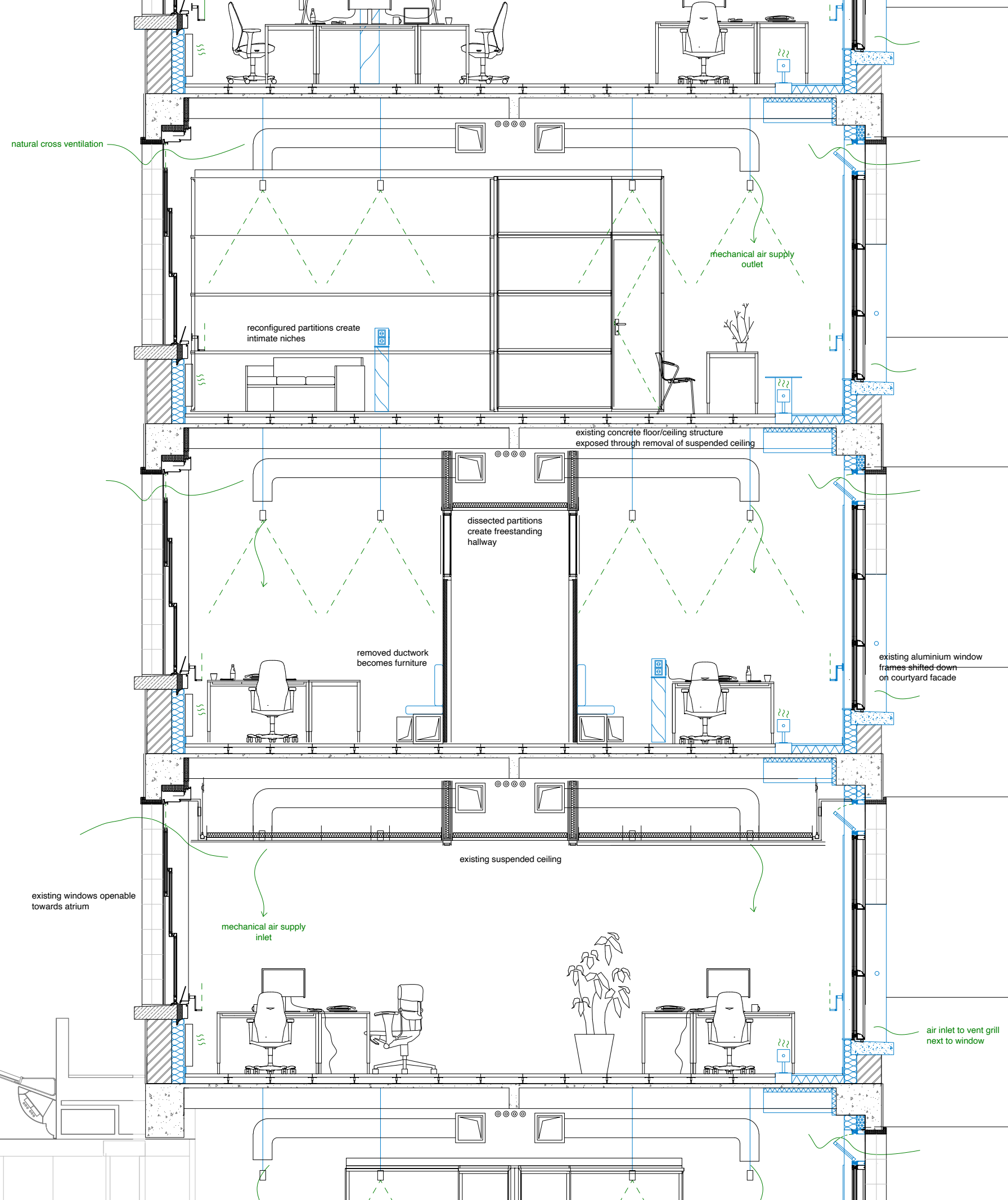
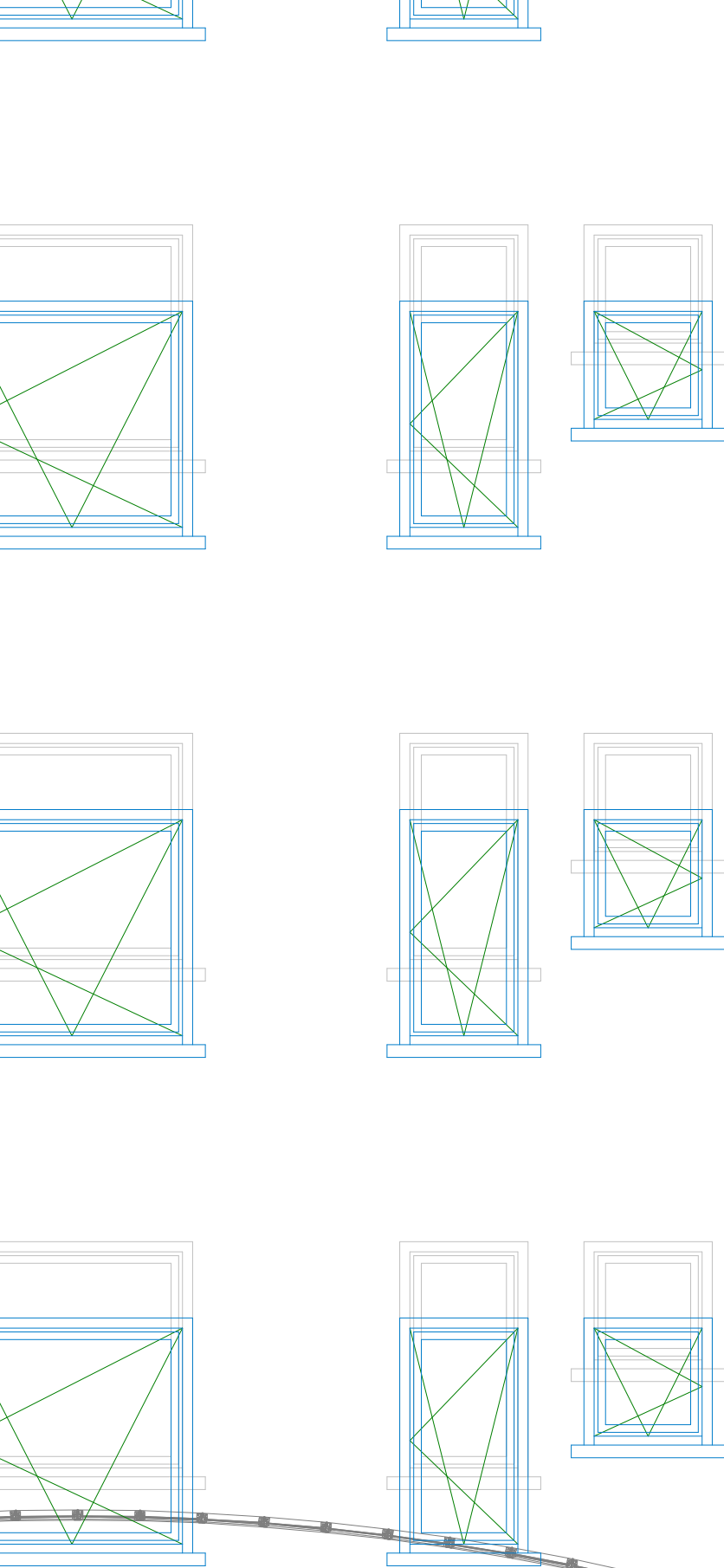
aluminium cap from column
removed and layed on floor in
banking hall for direction

permanent exhibition space in banking hall
exhibiting the art collection of the National
Bank of Belgium

visual connection between
bank employees and public

visual connection between
bank employees and public

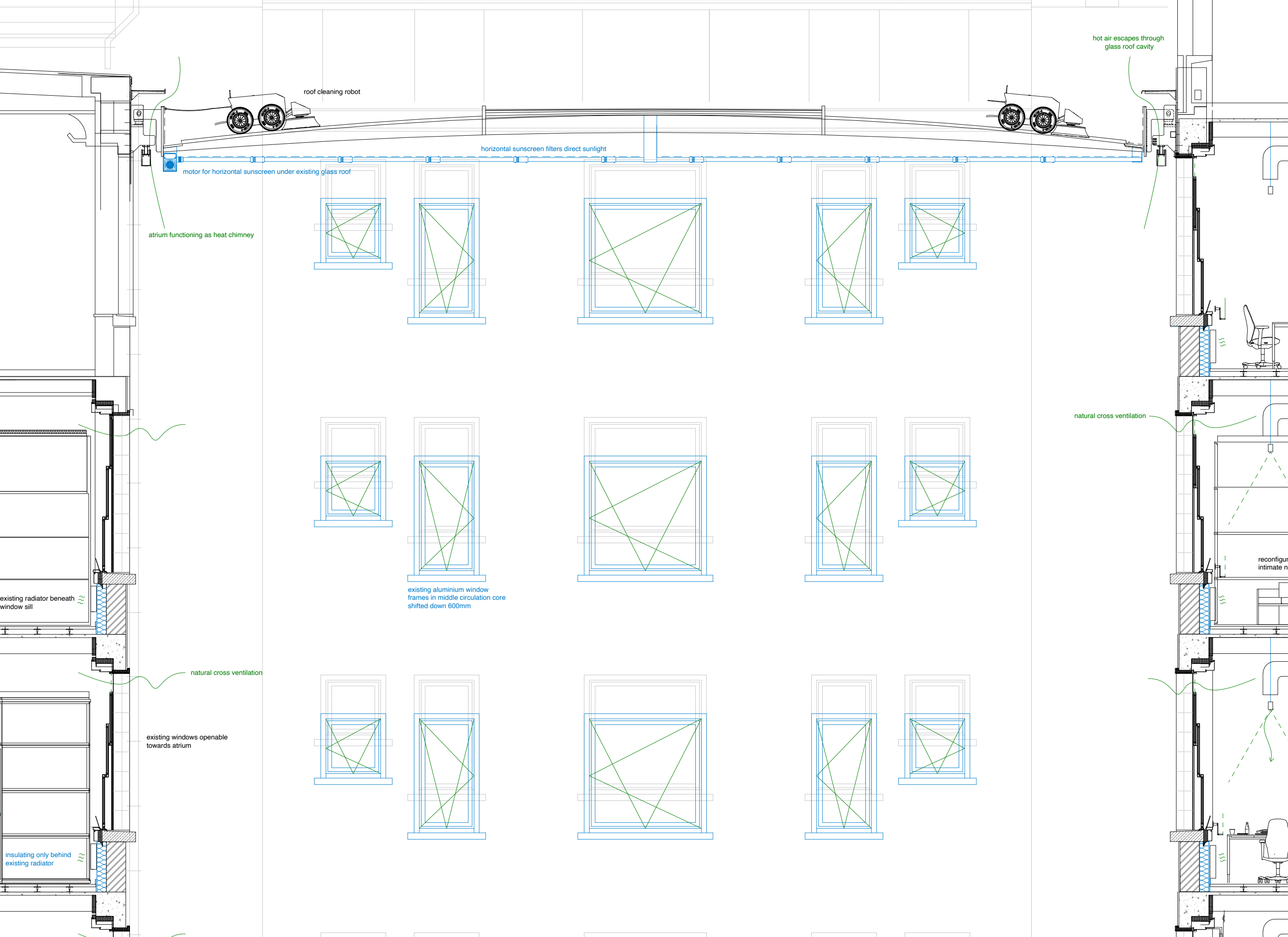
existing technical basement

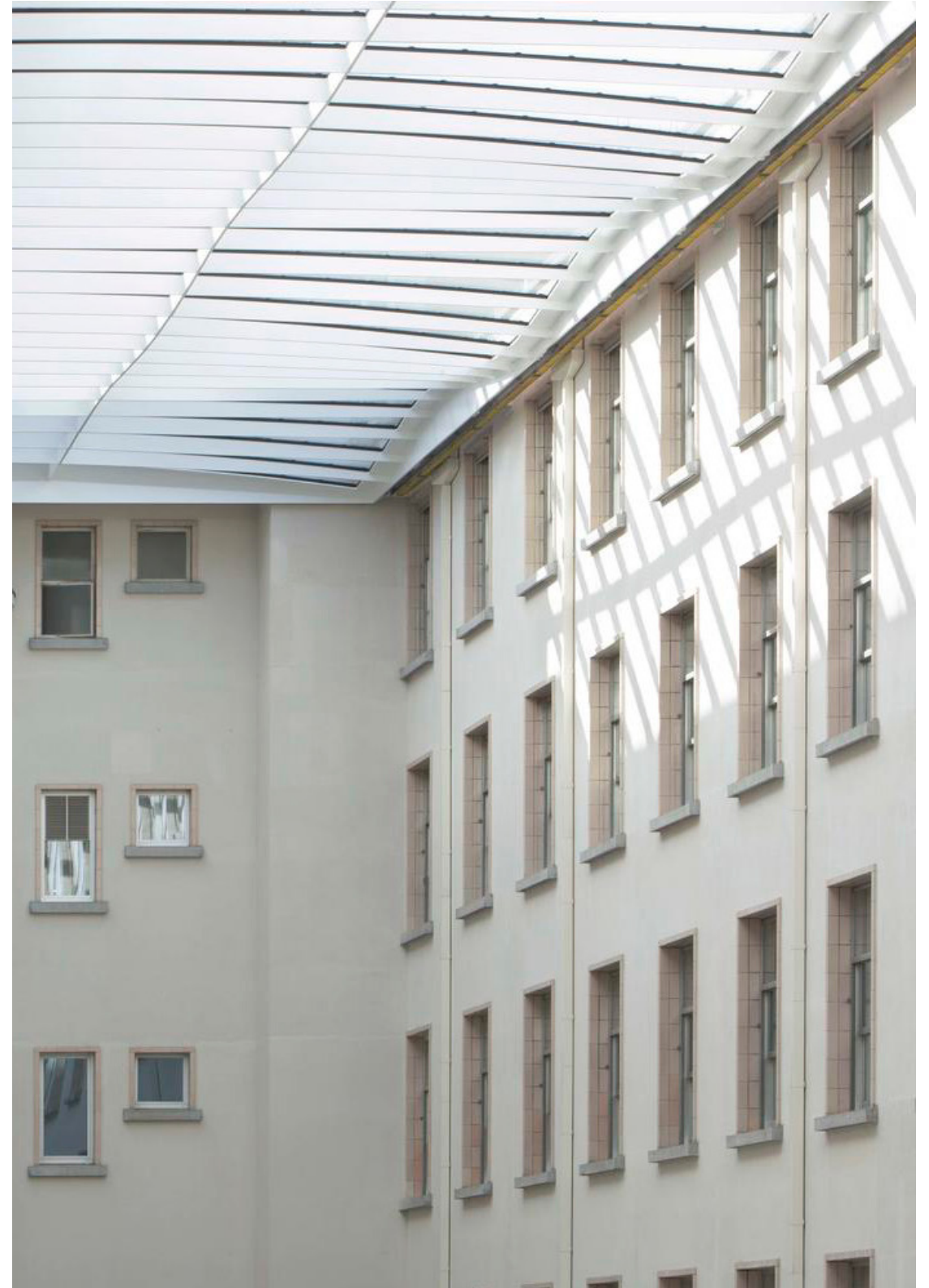


reconfiguring

working model 1:10
reconfiguring the typical office interior



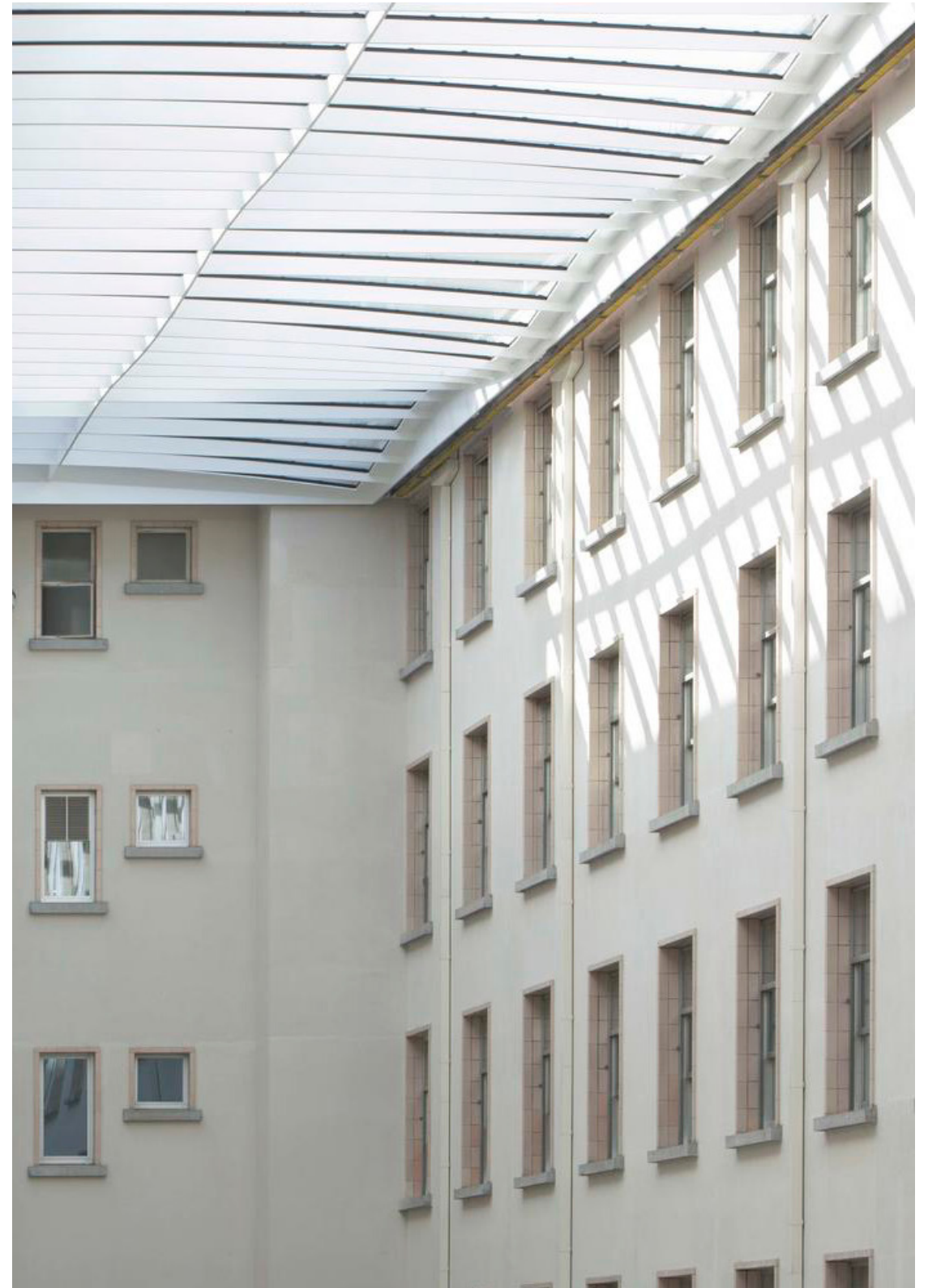






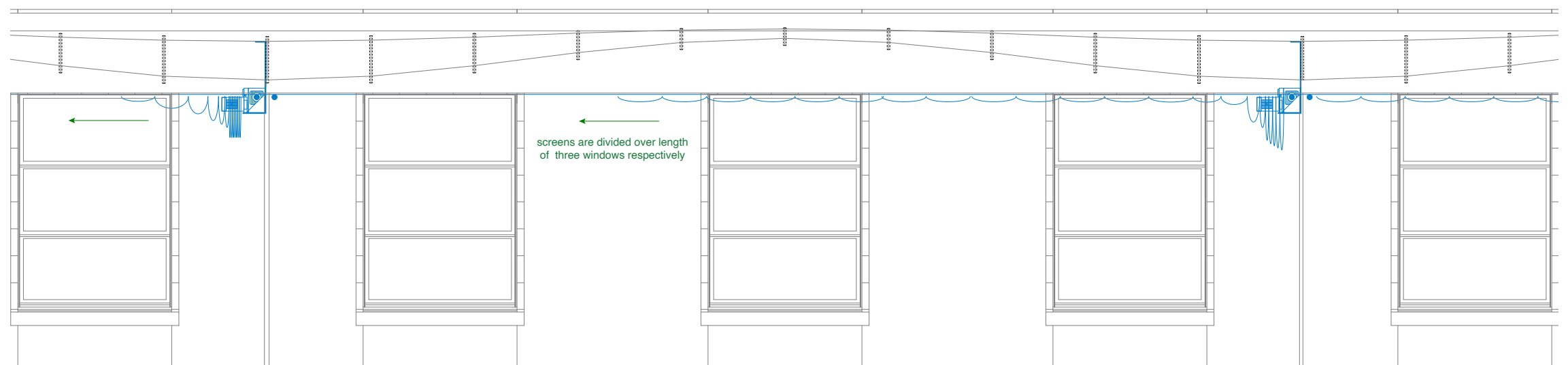
Alumat Zeeman
screening systems for horticulture

photograph
interior atrium, collaboration Ron Barten



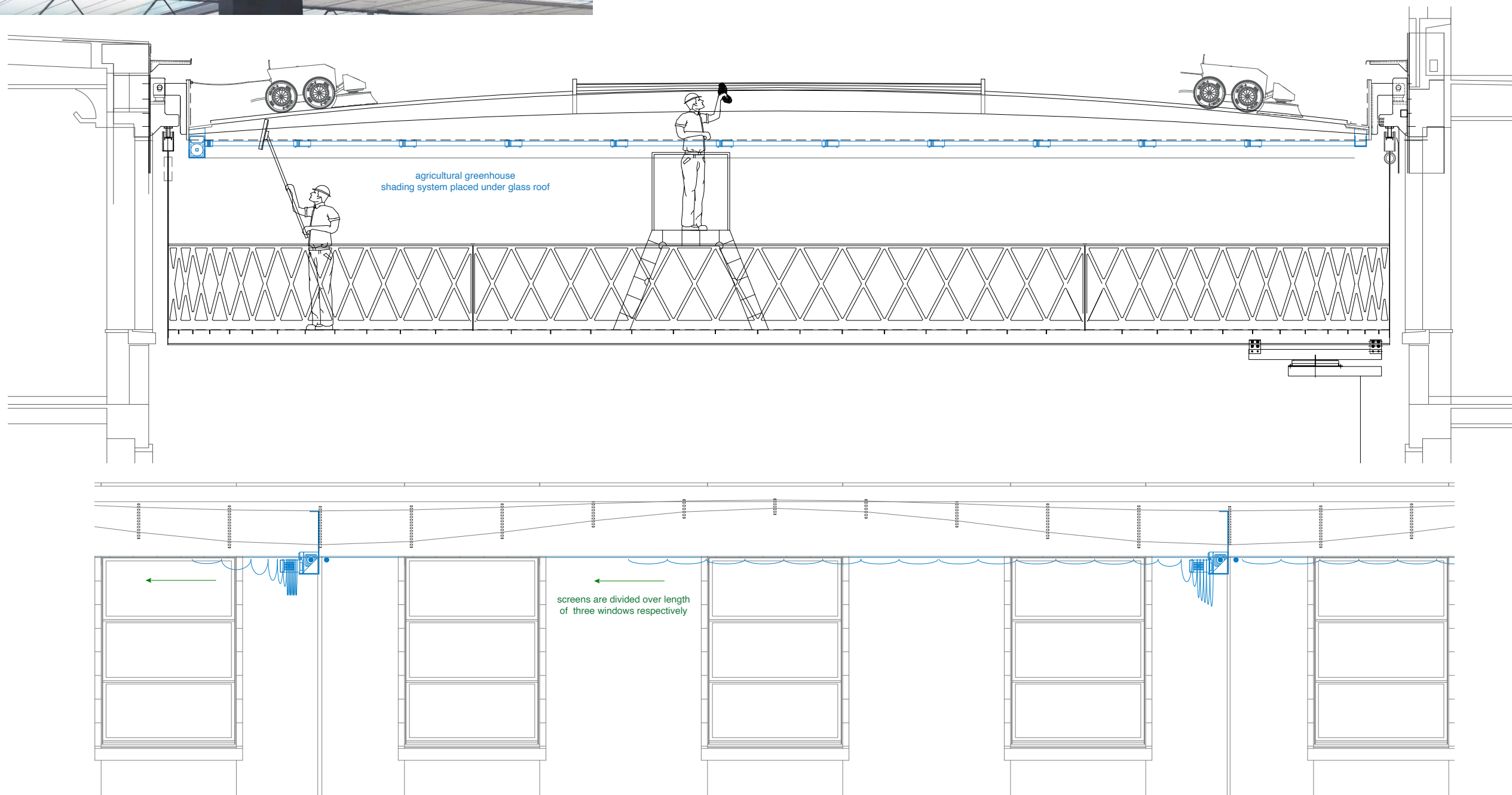


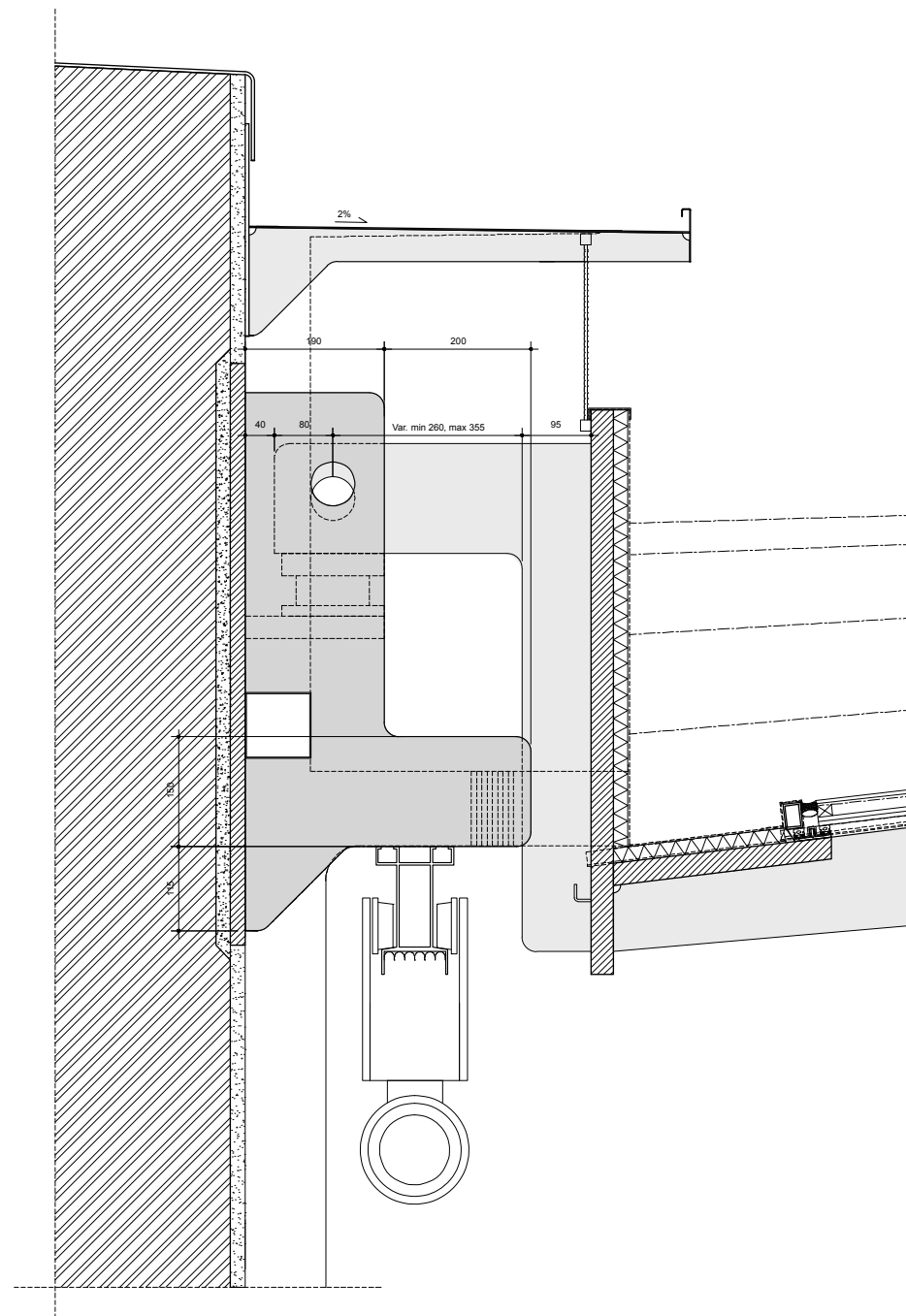
section
interior atrium, collaboration Ron Barten

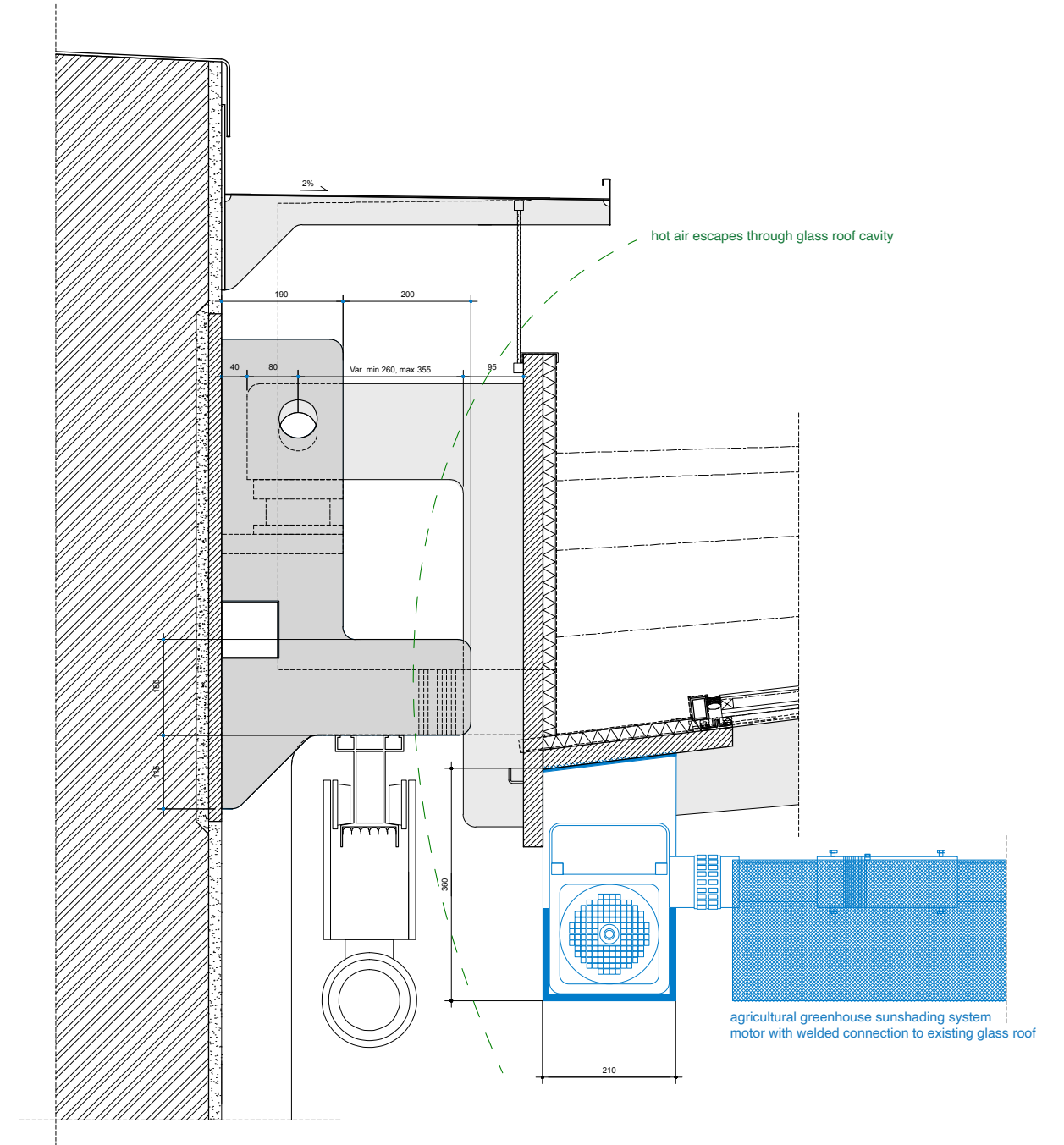
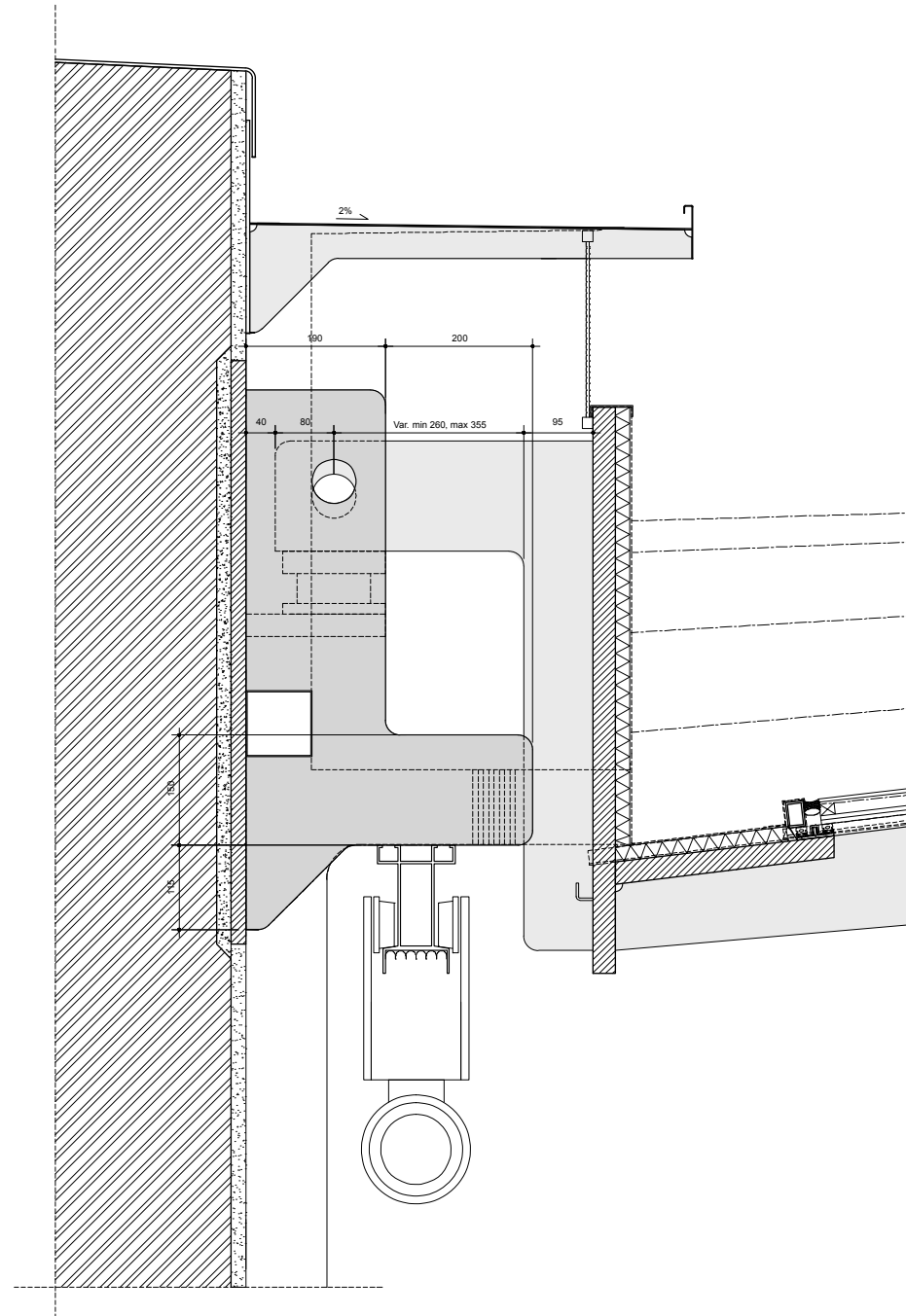




section
interior atrium, collaboration Ron Barten







interior atrium
National Bank of Belgium, collaboration Ron Barten



interior atrium
New National Bank of Belgium, collaboration Ron Barten



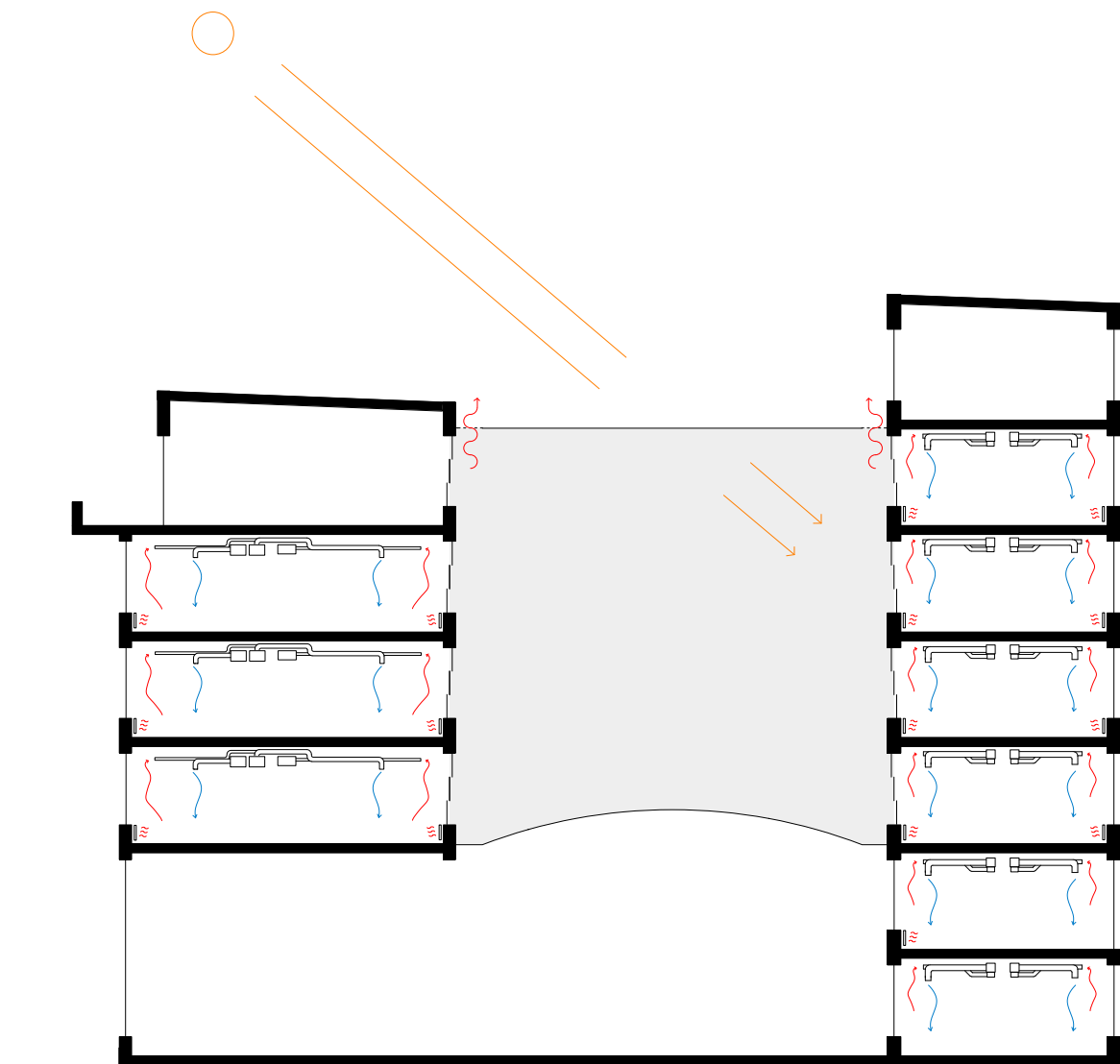
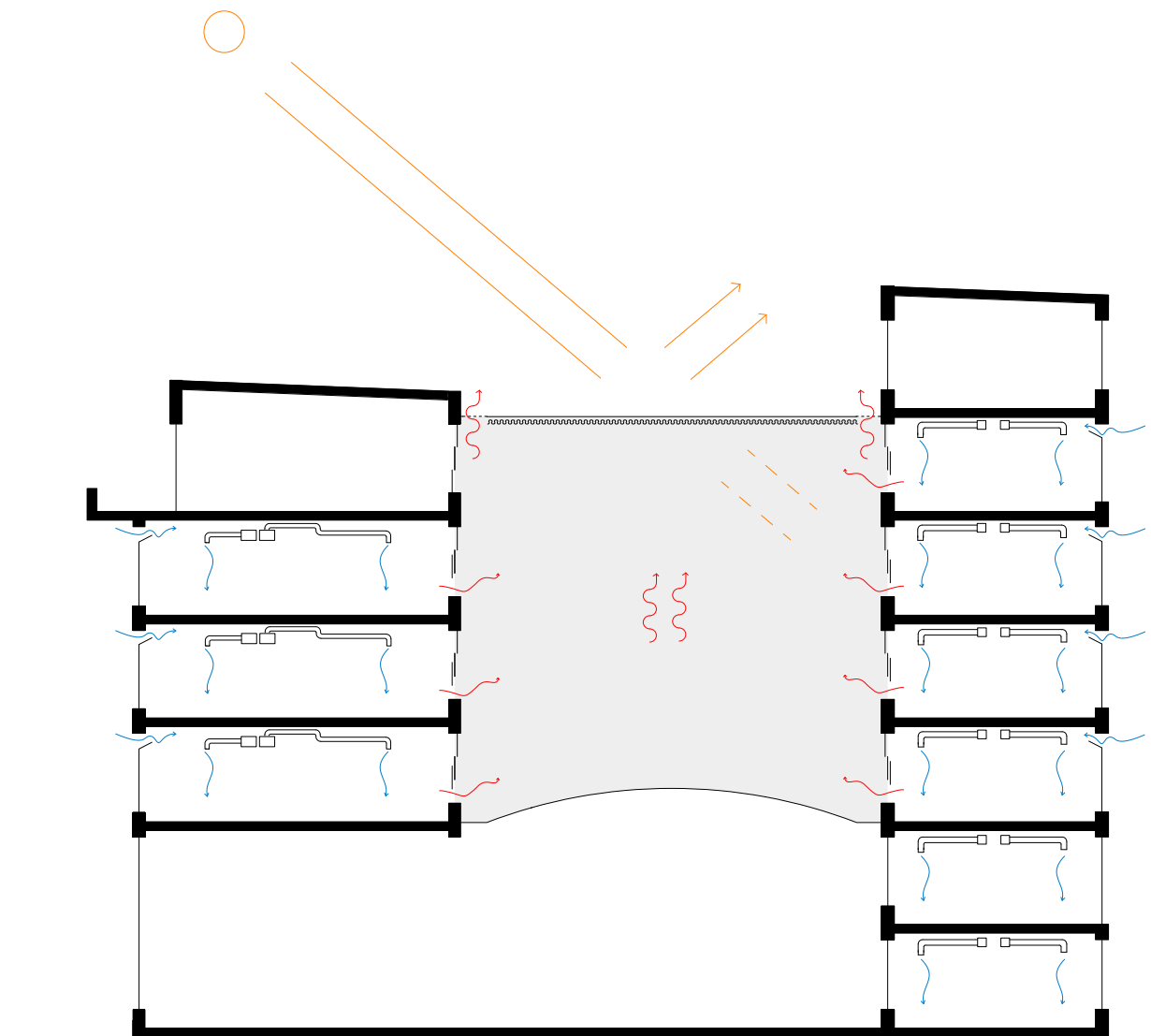
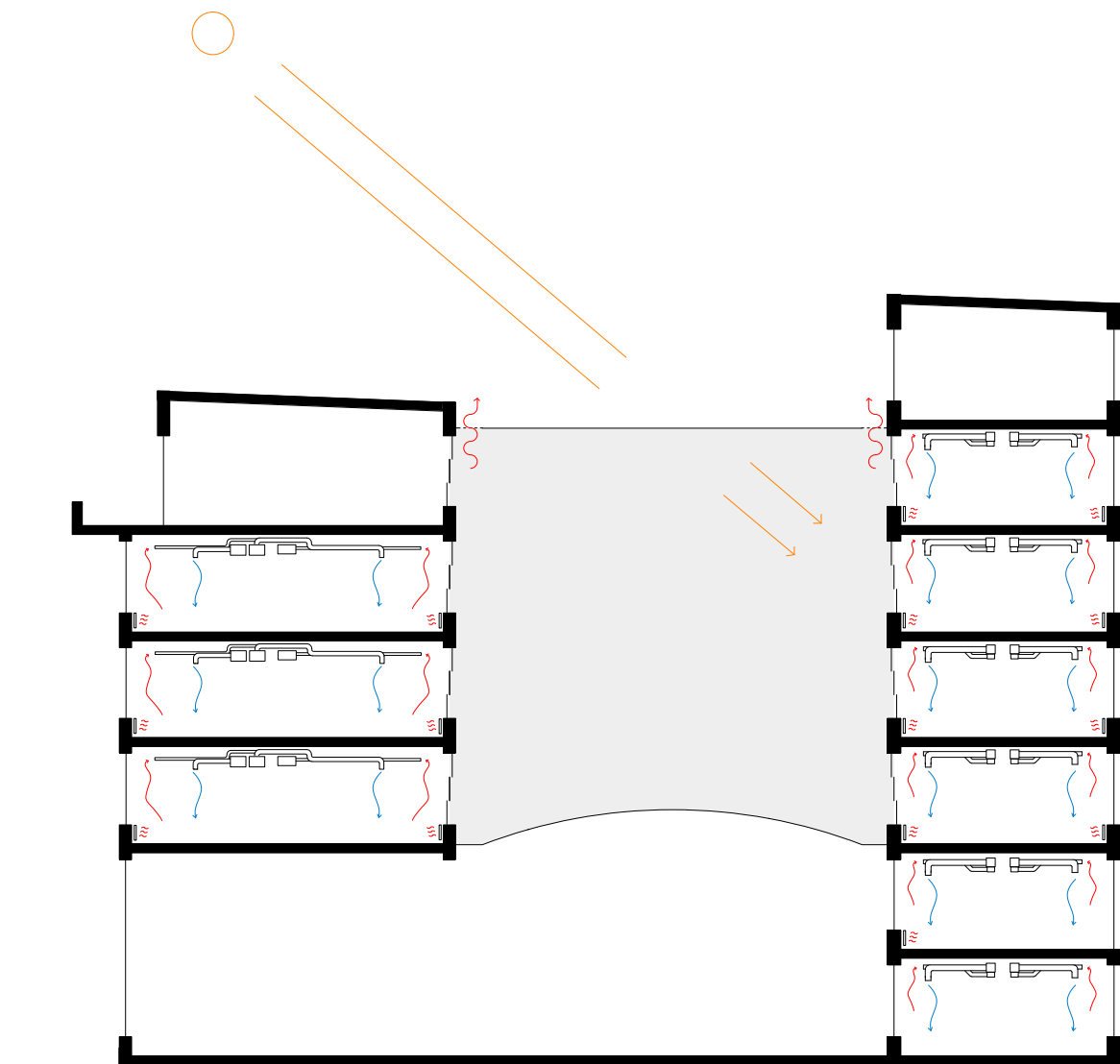


diagram
climate, current situation



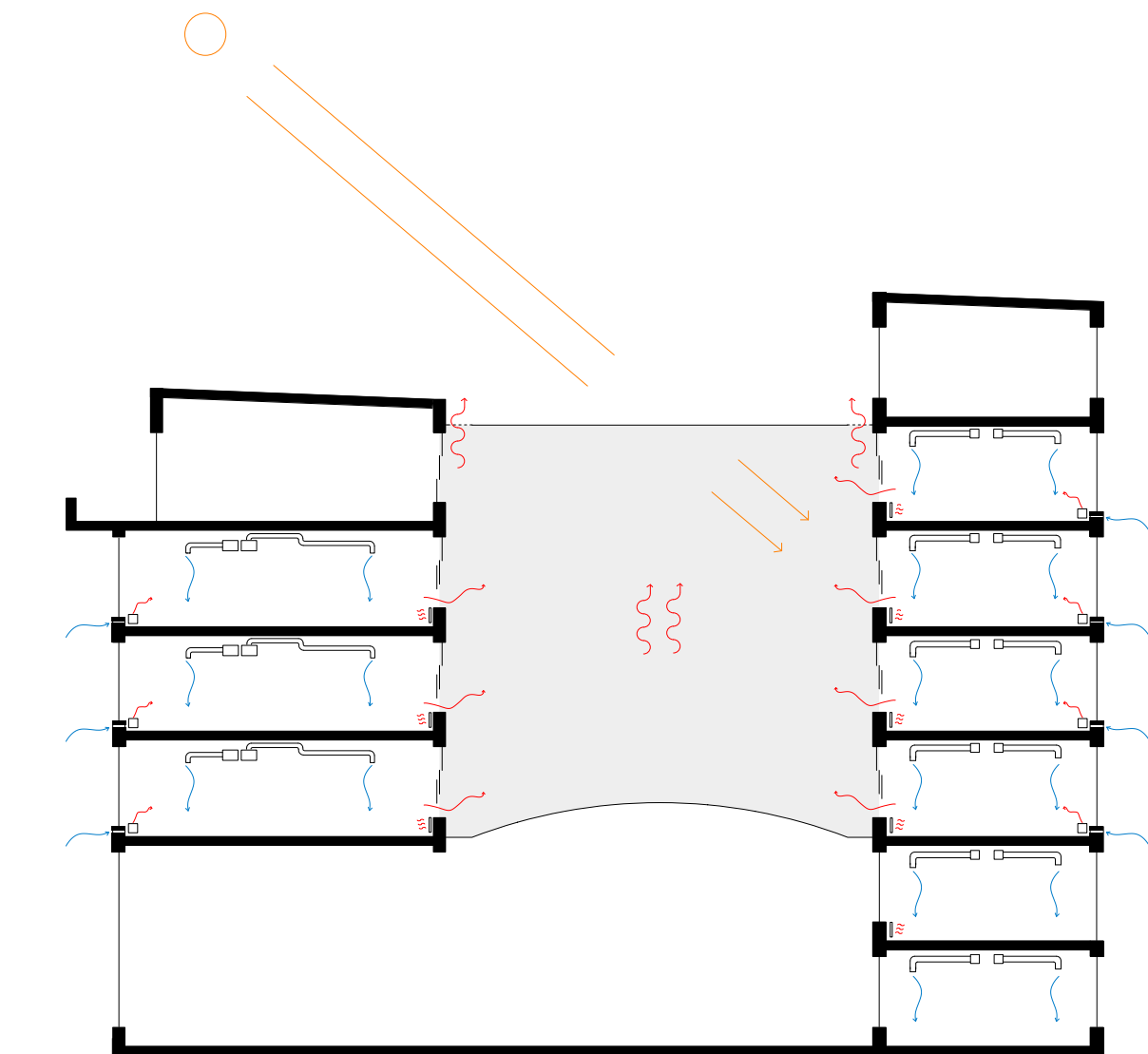


diagram
climate, new situation winter

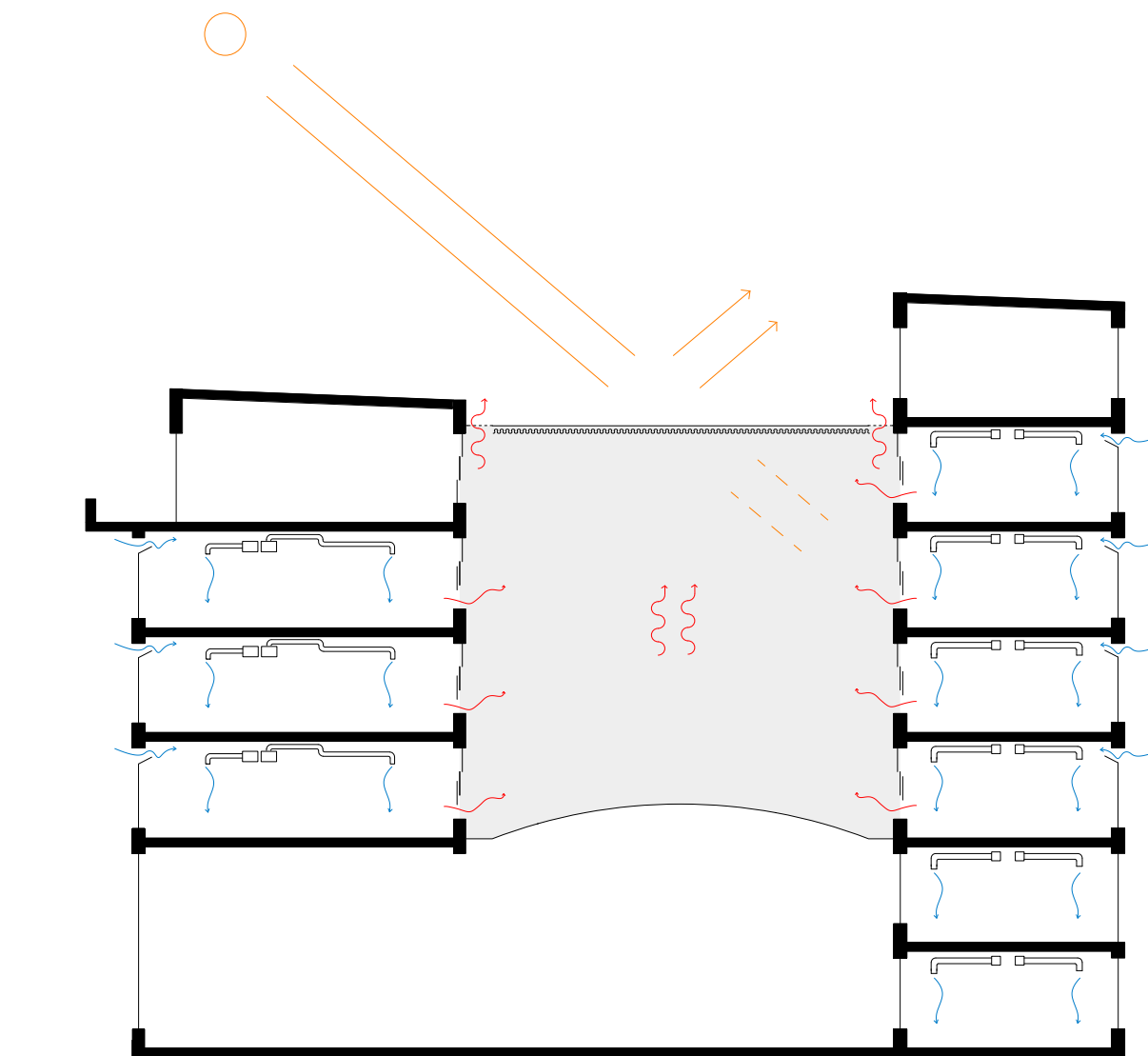
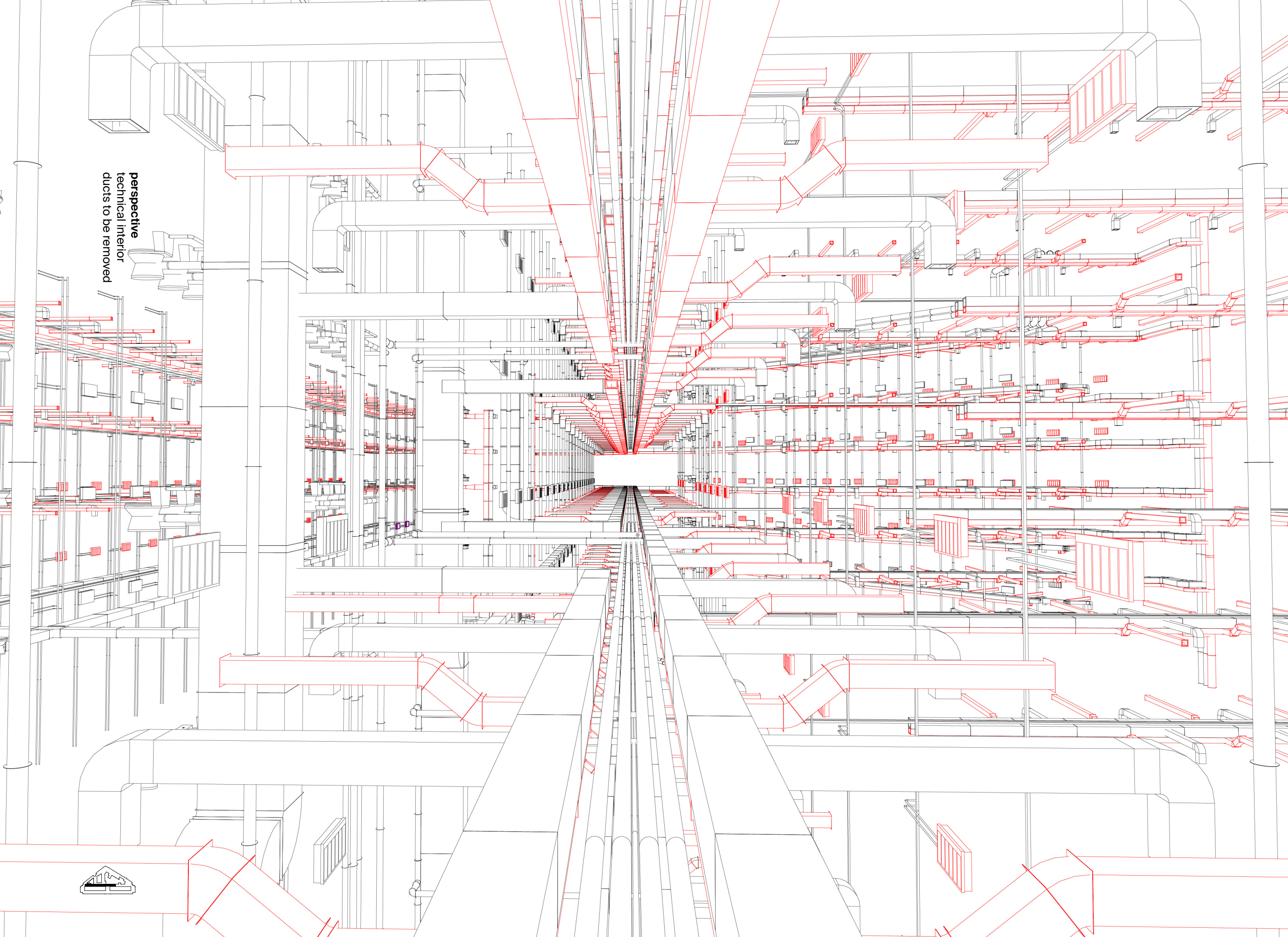


diagram
climate, new situation summer

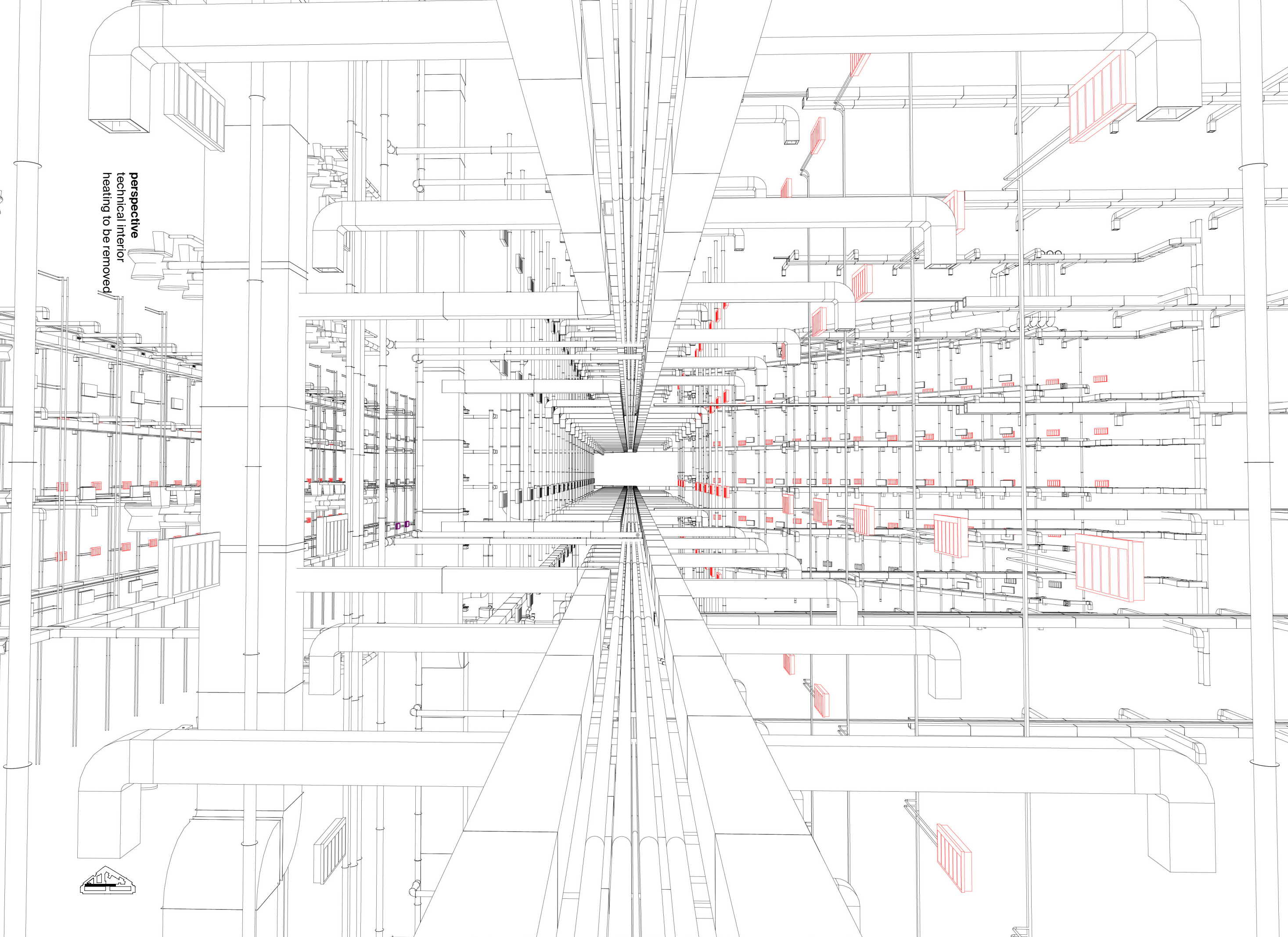
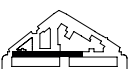
perspective
technical interior
current situation



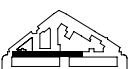
perspective
technical interior
ducts to be removed



perspective
technical interior
heating to be removed

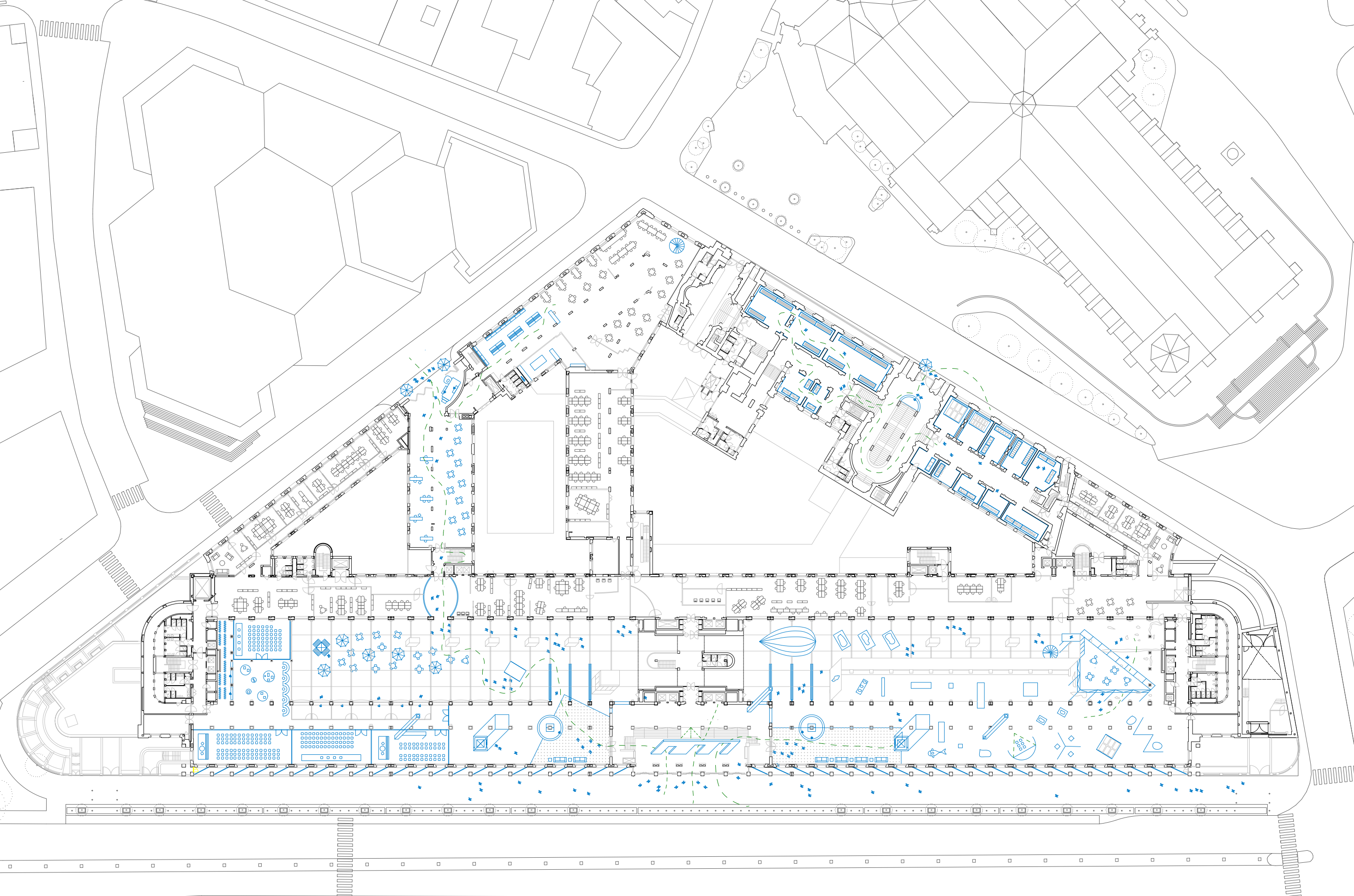


perspective
technical interior
interim



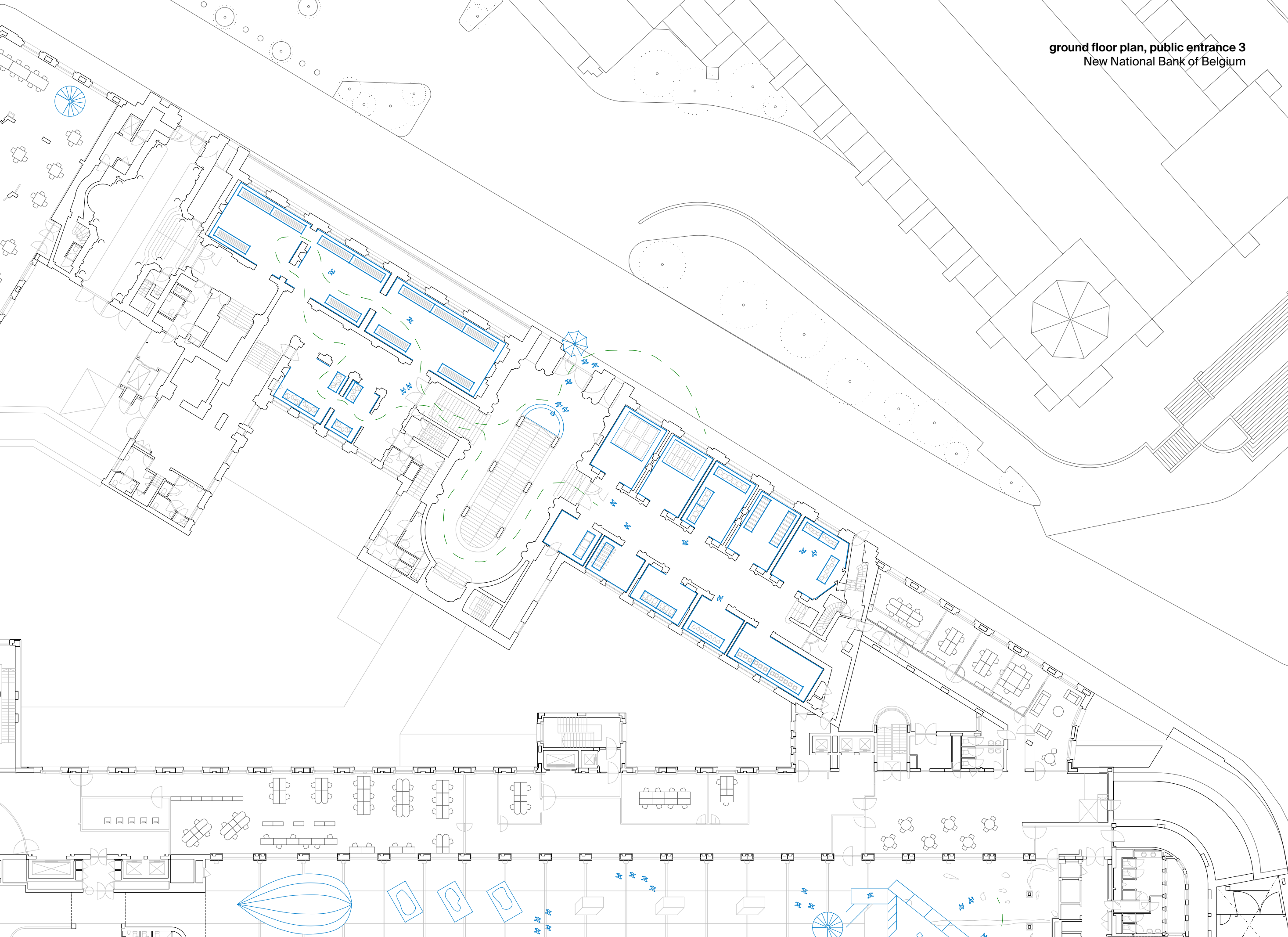
perspective
technical interior
new technical radiators

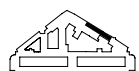


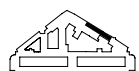


ground floor plan, combined
New National Bank of Belgium

ground floor plan, public entrance 3
New National Bank of Belgium





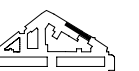
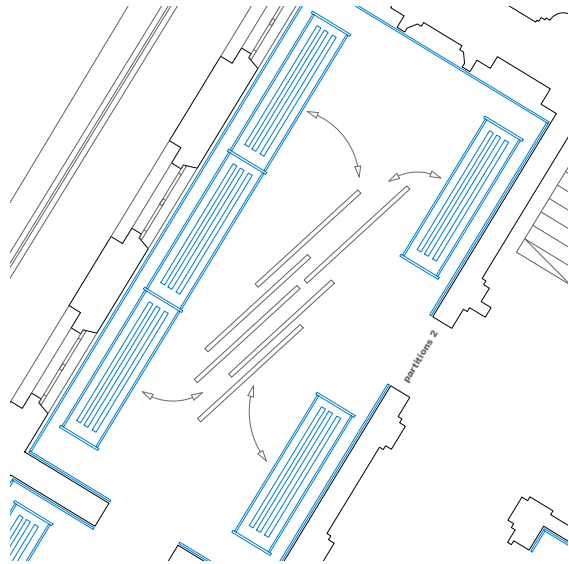




Topregal GmbH
industrial shelving



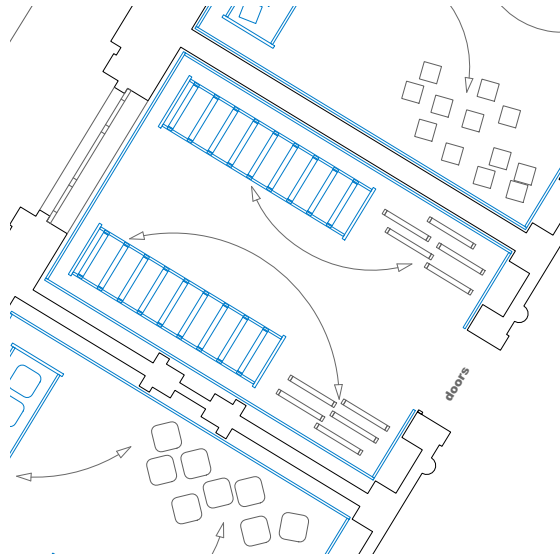
partitions



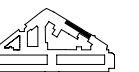
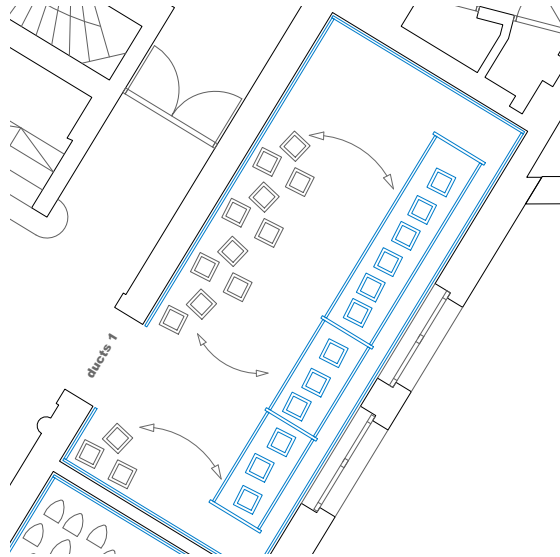
floor panels

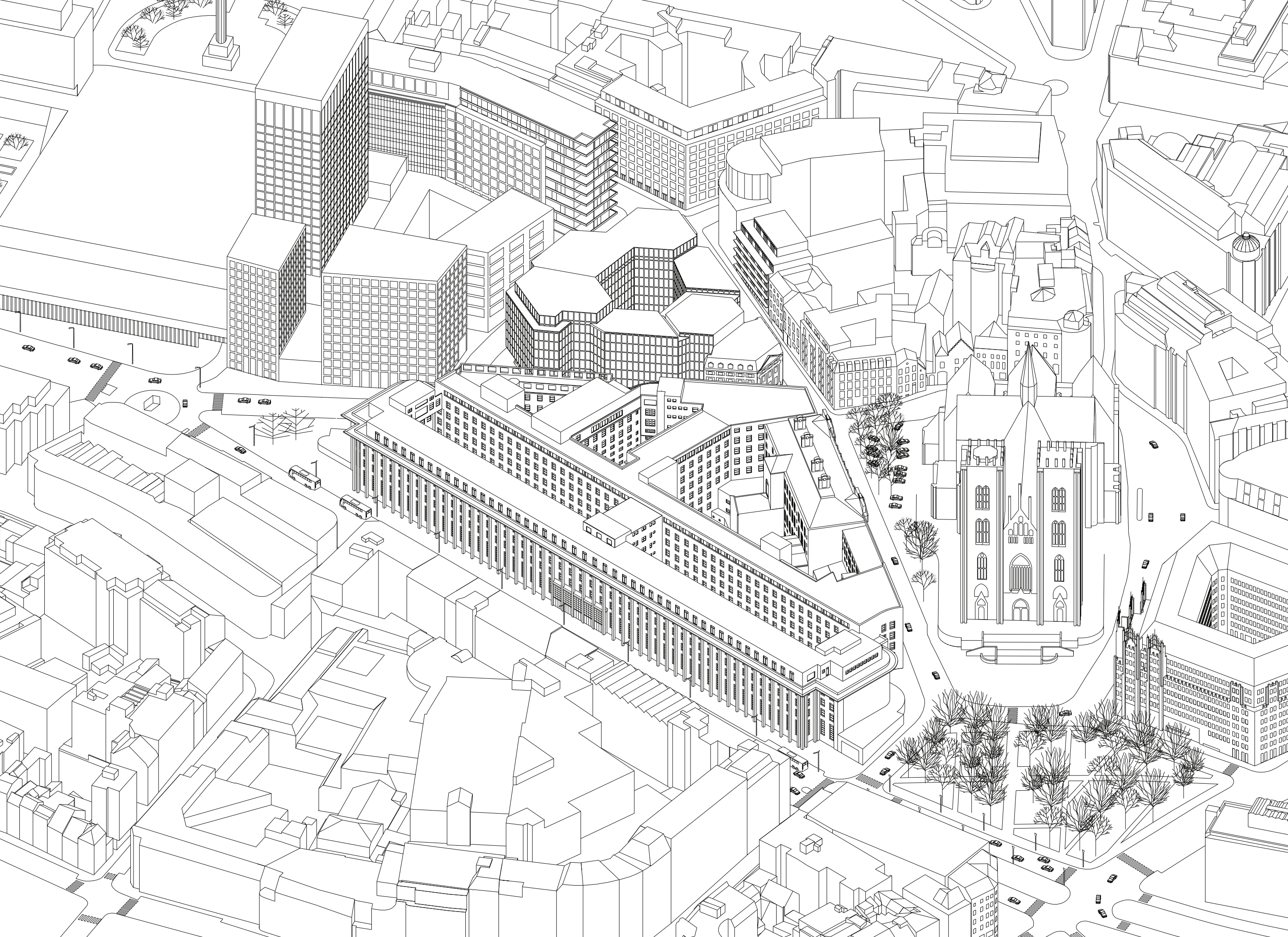


doors



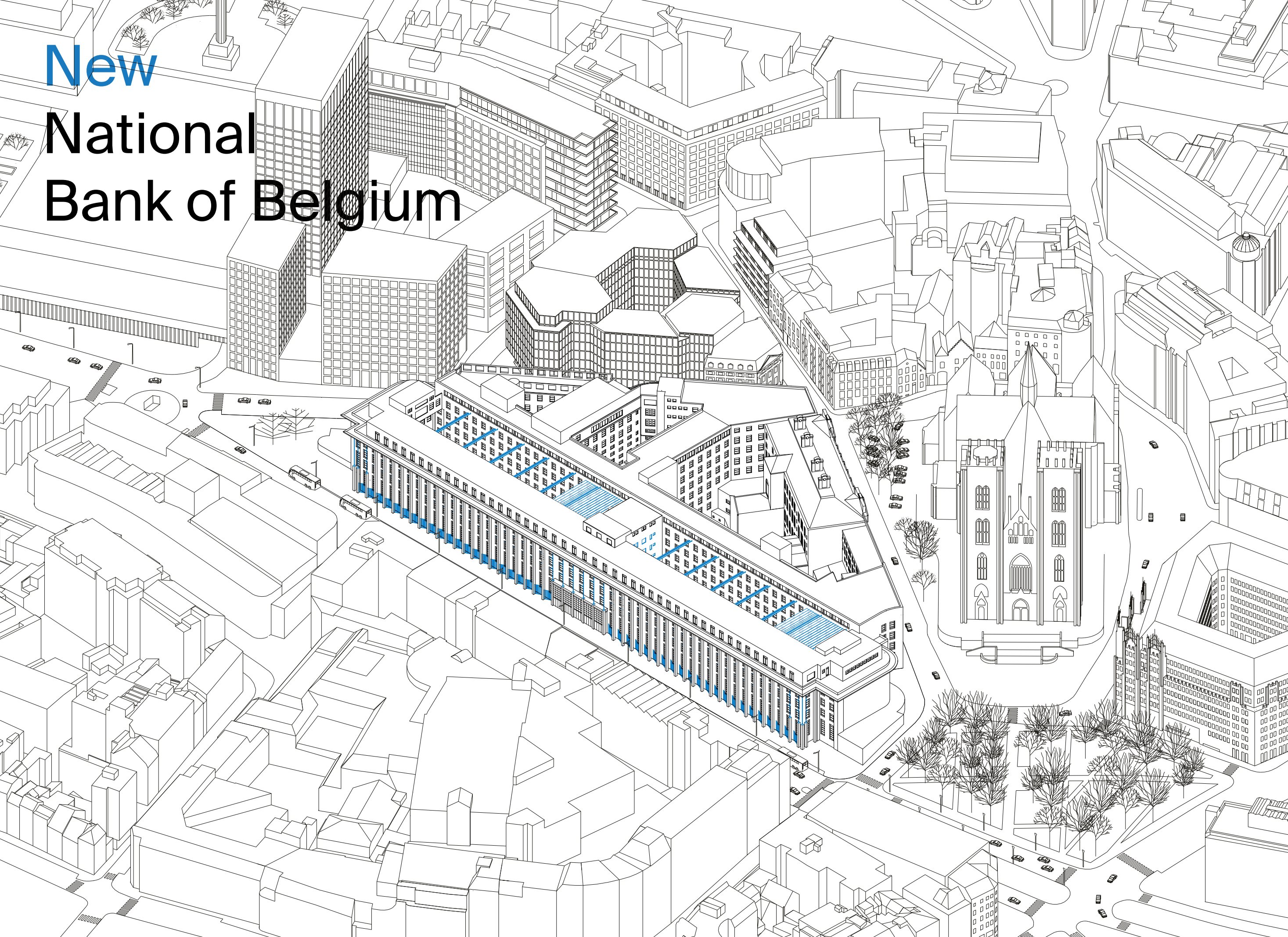
ducts





New

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