

memorial library

memorial library
the layering of historical architectures in
a memorial library in belgrade
kato klein gunnewiek

Меморијал библиотека
слојевитост историјских архитектура
у Меморијал библиотека у Београду

Меморијал библиотека
memorijalni biblioteka
memorial library
herdenkingsbibliotheek

Застаните, зачас, ви који пролазите!

На овом месту се, до недеље, б. априла 1941. године, налазила Народна библиотека Србије. Тога дана је, у рано јутро, почело бомбардовање Београда.

Прво је разнесен мир, а затим је, на Косанчићевом венцу, заплamtела Народна библиотека.

Данима су горели древни писани споменици, старе и нове књиге, списи и писма, документи и новине.

Данима је пламен уништавао сведочанства о постојању и трајању једног народа. Данима је ватра гутала столећа историје, сажете у слова. Пламен се, најзад преобличио у жар, а жар у пепео.

На овом месту се, од недеље, б. априла 1941. године, налази пепео великог дела историјског народа.

памћења српског Застаните, зачас, ви који пролазите!¹

- Светлана Велмар-Јанковић

Stop, for a moment, you who are passing by!

On this spot, until Sunday, 6th April 1941, there was the National Library of Serbia.

On that day, in the early morning, started the bombing of Belgrade.

First, peace was blown to pieces, and then, in Kosačićev venac, the National Library began to burn.

Ancient written heritage, old and new books, papers and letters, documents and newspapers were burning for days. For days flames destroyed the testimonies on the existence and lasting of one people.

For days the fire devoured centuries of history, condensed in words.

The flames finally turned into coals, the coals into ashes. On this spot, since Sunday, 6th April 1941, there have been the ashes of a great part of the historical memory of the Serbian people.

That's why stop, for a moment, you who are passing by!¹

- Svetlana Velmar-Janković

table of contents

introduction	9
site	11
history	12
present	18
future	28
layering	31
belgrade	32
precedents	34
temples	43
thresholds	44
gradients	50
project	59
brief	60
design	62
sources	89
text	90
images	92

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Graduation project for the Architecture Track of the
MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences of the
University of Technology, Delft. 2021/2022

Methods of Analysis and Imagination
MSc3/MSc4 Graduation Studio (AR3MET105)
Positions in Practice. Towards Democratic Environments
in Belgrade.

Under the guidance of:
Dr. Jorge Mejía Hernández
Dr. Aleksandar Staničić
Ir. Pierre Jennen

introduction

In the middle of the picturesque quarter of Kosančićev Venac in Belgrade, a small empty crater is to be found. Once, the National Library of Belgrade stood here, but it got bombed during the second world war. Now it seems there is nothing more but some ruins of the original building. In multiple cases in Belgrade, the questions of how to deal with these scars in the urban fabric remains unsolved.

This graduation project investigates the site of the former National Libray of Serbia and how to deal with the historical continuity of its narrative. For the design of the intervention, the concept of layering will be used as a formative method. To strengthen the memorial function of the site, the intervention will serve as a place that allows for the experience of an abstraction of daily life. To achieve this, research into religious architecture is conducted.

'Architectural structures, as well as mere remembered architectural images and metaphors, serve as significant memory devices in three different ways: firstly, they materialize and preserve the course of time and make it visible; secondly, they concretize remembrance by containing and projecting memories; and thirdly, they stimulate and inspire us both to reminisce and to imagine. Memory and fantasy, recollection, and imagination, are related and the relations always have a situational and specific content. One who cannot remember, can hardly imagine, because memory is soil of imagination. Memory is also the ground of self identity; we are what we remember.'²

site

site history

In the very heart of Belgrade, in the old quarter of Kosančićev Venac, once stood the National Library of Serbia. On the 6th of April 1941 the building was hit with bombs, as part of a series of bombings that day, fired by Nazi Germany. The decision for targeting the National Library was due to its crucial role in Serbia's cultural identity.³ As a result of the bombing, the building burst into flames. That day, a large part of the building, including many old manuscripts and books were burned to ashes, causing the biggest book burning in the recent history of Europe.⁴

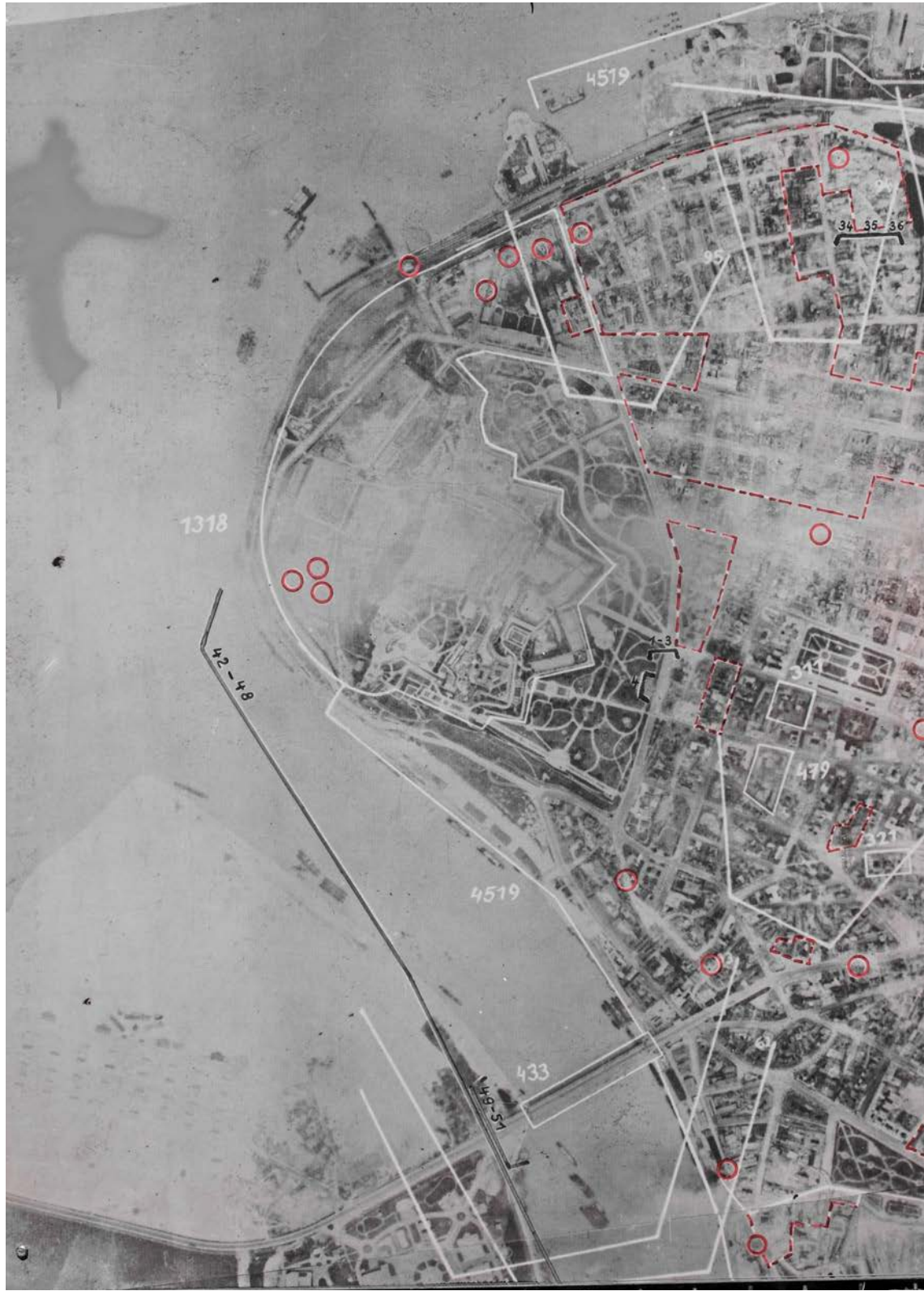
The building at Kosančićev Venac was built as a cardboard factory, in neoclassicist style. In 1921 it was bought by the state from Milan Vapa, the owner of the factory. After some adaptations to make it suitable as a library, the building was opened to the public in 1925.⁵ After the bombing the building was temporarily housed in the former hotel *Srpska kruna*, nowadays the building of the Belgrade City Library, but exactly 32 years after the bombing, on April the 6th 1973, the new building for the National Library of Serbia was opened on the Vračar plateau.⁶ The site of the bombed building remained untouched. 'The wreckage in Kosančićev Venac is a symbol of suffering, but also one of the most important symbols of the revival and survival of culture in this area.'⁷

2. the site of the bombed national library

3. map of the city of Belgrade made on the 7th of April 1941. It shows the part from Kalemegdan to Brankova street, with the locations of the nazi bombings. scale 1:10.000

4. photograph of the national library on Kosančićev venac before the bombing.







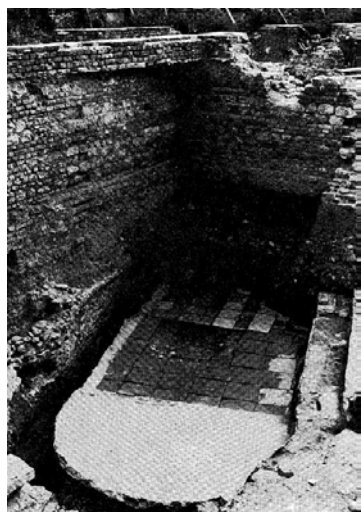
5. - 8. remains of flooring tiles.
9. overview of the library ruins, looking in northern direction.

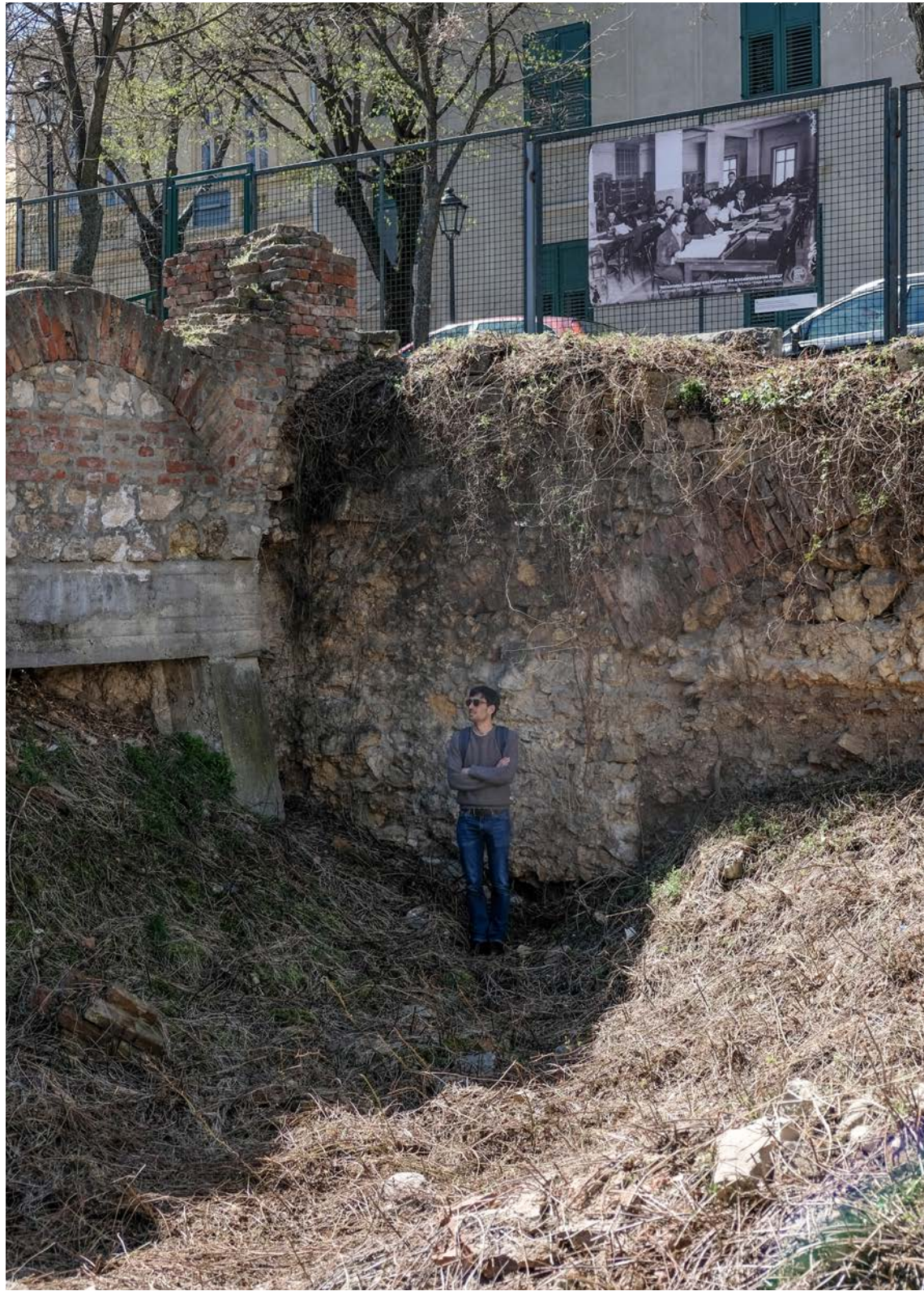


site present

After the demolition of the library building, it was possible to carry out excavation works. Gordana Cvetković Tomašević, an archaeologist from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia, started these excavation works to determine the state of the library's foundations. First, a large number of burned books were discovered, but later that year the presence of a structure from the Antiquity period on site was discovered. Over a thousand objects were found, from ancient mosaics to hand-written journal notes from modern times.⁸ The first two pictures below show the roman pool and the hypocaust system of the structure. Currently these roman ruins are hardly identifiable since the site is slowly getting overgrown.

10. remains of the roman apsidal pool under library walls.
11. remains of the hypocaust system.
12. remains of library walls.
13. drawing of the ruins by the person who excavated the site.
14. big height difference between street level and roman ruins.
15. remains of library walls with newly constructed timber deck for accessibility.
16. remains of library column with exhibition about the site in the background.
17. overgrown roman ruins and library ruins in the back.







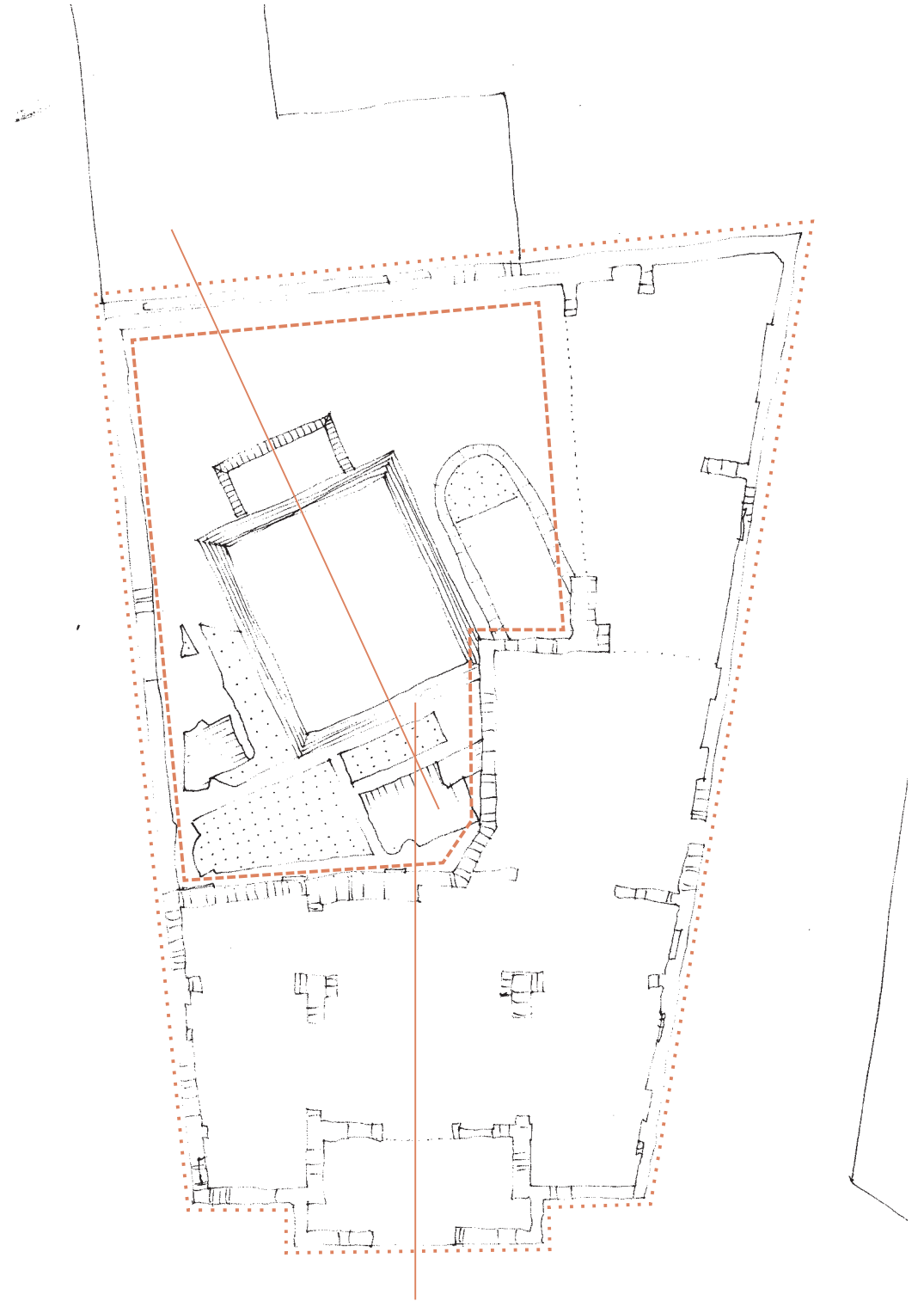
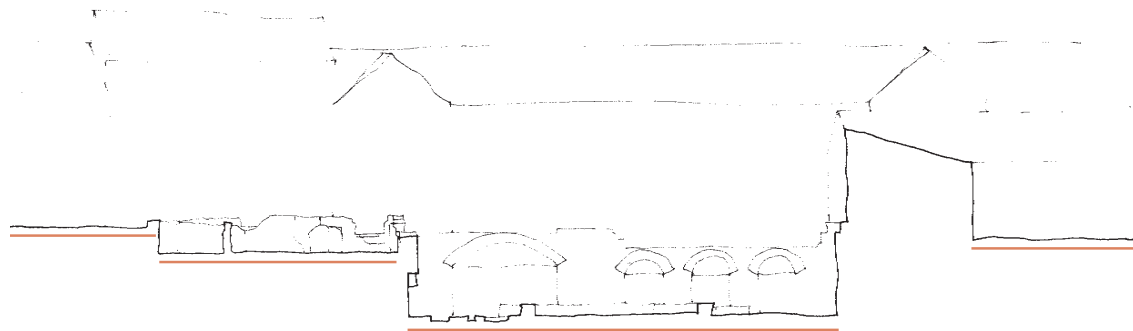
Based on site visits and existing drawings, the ruins of the roman villa and the library could be mapped, both in plan and section.⁹ Various findings could be done after analyzing these drawings.

First of all, we can distinguish the site into two areas. One area is containing the ruins of the roman villa, whereas the other area houses the old library walls. However, the whole perimeter of the site is enclosed by the library's outer wall. Secondly, we can see a distinct change in orientation between the library and roman ruins, emphasizing their different origins. In thirdly, we can identify different unique or significant elements like the roman pool with its mosaic flooring, the

hypocaust system of the roman villa and the arches in the library's outer wall. In fourth place, we can find a huge elevation change between the two areas and the street, leaving an enormous void space of almost four meters deep at the location of the bathhouse. At last, there is a pile of bricks in the middle of the site, originating from the library building. These bricks can be used to rebuild some parts of the ruin for safety purposes.

18. analytical section of the current situation showing the different elevations. scale 1:500

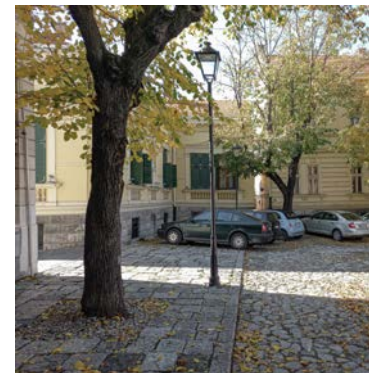
19. analytical plan of the current situation showing the change in orientation and the two different areas. scale 1:300



[...] “ the atmosphere of Kosančićev Venac, the beauty of the architecture and the harmony of that part of the city, which can even nowadays be felt in these streets. They resonate with specific peace which seems to be made for writing and reading, contemplation, daydreaming and escaping to some parallel world, far from everyday life.”¹⁰

- Dusan Zlokolica, editor of the Cultural Programme of the National Library of Serbia

After the bombing of the library, the ruins were left to the elements. “Today the National Library of Serbia is trying to revive Kosančićev Venac with its contents. Programs like “Writers in the Library, Evenings in Kosančić” bring the public to that locality, who have the opportunity to step onto the tiles of the former rooms of the National Library and listen to [...] writers and other artists.”¹¹ Except for these occasional poetry nights and the annual memorial service, the site is closed off by a big fence. At the moment an exhibition about the history of the site is hung on this fence. Dušan Zlokolica, editor of Cultural Programs of the National Library of Serbia and editor of the exhibition, wrote that the atmosphere of the site is made for the escape to some parallel world, far from everyday life. Currently, by leaving an inaccessible crater in the area, not much of this potential is used.



20. the street of Kosančićev venac, looking in southern direction.

21. street of Kosančićev venac with the stairs towards Brankova at the left side.

site future

Since the National Library of Serbia has been bombed, different plans have been made for the location. Three examples are shown in the images on the next page. In 1975, architect Zorana Jakovljevića suggested the symbolic rebuilding of the portico, with the double Tuscan columns that supported the terrace. In 2017, the Viennese architect Boris Podreka, proposed to keep the plot open and make it accessible for the public. He suggested some walkways, a tribune, and a flower garden. Both plans were never executed.

During the annual memorial service of the bombing in 2022, Vladimir Pištalo, the director of the National Library of Serbia, announced that the Ministry of Culture and Information granted the National Library of Serbia funds for a public tender for a full restoration of the library building. He stated that the exterior of the building would be completely replicated and inside there would be a Memorial Centre. 'A crime against memory and against imagination happened here, but a crime against imagination must not be a crime against hope. We cannot return the books, but we will not give up memory, and that is why we are building the Memorial Centre,' Pištalo, said. He added: 'This Memorial Centre would become one of the recognizable faces of Belgrade, just like the Nikola Tesla Museum, and tourists from all over the world would come here, because here Belgrade would tell its story - the story of the flame and resurrection.'¹²

22. Vladimir Pištalo, director of the National Library of Serbia, during the annual memorial service at Kosačićev venac in 2022.

23. sketch for the location by architect Zorana Jakovljevića in 1975

24. plan by architect Boris Podreka from 2017

25. current proposal for the complete restoration of the destroyed building

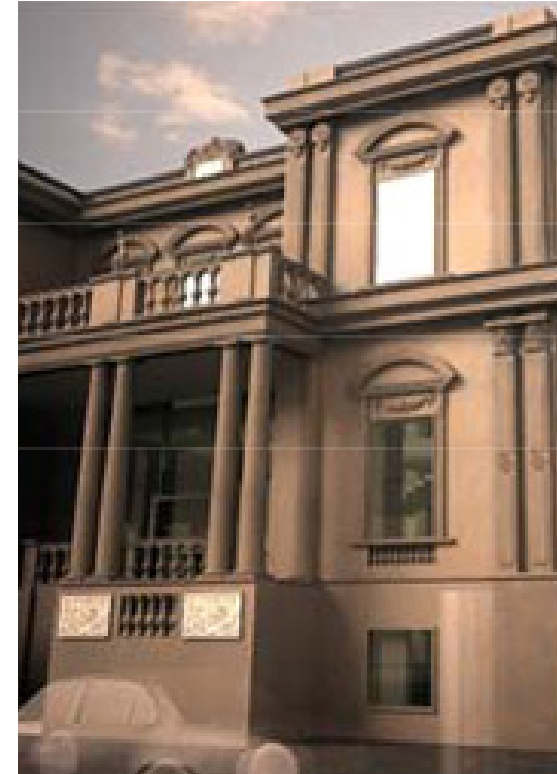
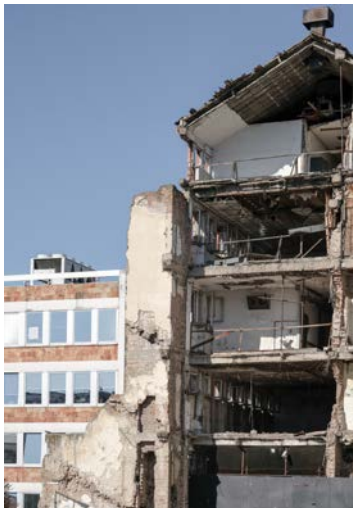


layers

layers belgrade

The city of Belgrade, being at the crossroads between East and West, socialism and capitalism and different religions has a history with conflicts that left scars in its urban fabric. 'The effort to reconstruct these damaged buildings, [...] poses deeper questions about understanding the past, facing unpleasant truths, and setting the course for an uncertain future.'¹³ The inability to answer these questions often results in indecision about intervening in sites or buildings with a violent past, like the generalštab complex, the national radio and television station and the national library. This indecision and postponement of dialogue 'can lead to another type of fetishism; a fascination with ruins', or what is happening now in the proposal for the restoration of the library, the despair of sentimental revival.¹⁴

- 26. remains of the generalštab complex, bombed in 1999
- 27. the remains of the national radio and television station, bombed in 1999
- 28. remains of national library, bombed in 1941
- 29. render of the plan for the reconstruction of the bombed national library



layers precedents

In contrast with the current idea of restoring the original building, I propose to add new layers to the site without removing the old. This can be done in such a way that the layers of the different architectures will strengthen each other and allow for a deeper experience of commemoration. With the presence of the ruins on site, it is easy to fall into the trap of sentimentalism since ruins 'usually carries with it that which it is not - an absence, a loss, a hope, and ideal.'¹⁵ This gives the site a special evocative power that forces the visitors to reminisce and imagine.

The Italian architect Carlo Scarpa manages to avoid this trap. He achieves to create a sense of deep continuity without any direct formal reference. In his expressive details, architecture fulfills the task of 'preserving the past, enabling us to experience and grasp the continuum of culture and tradition. Architecture is essentially an [art] form of reconciliation and mediation and [...] articulates our experiences of duration and time between the polarities of past and future.'¹⁶

30. museo di castelvecchio in verona by carlo scarpa



Museo di Castelvecchio in Verona, Italy
by Carlo Scarpa, 1974

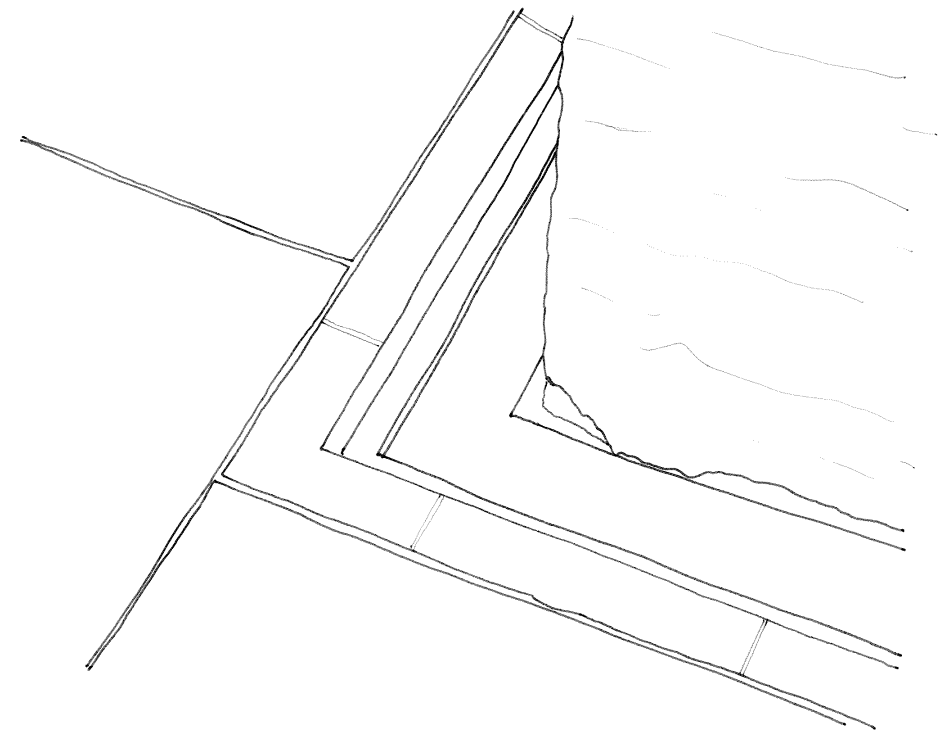
In the expressive details in Museo di Castelvecchio, Scarpa uses the process of separation, excision, and contrast, to aim for stratification of parts into a larger whole. In this flooring detail he creates a multi-layered edge between new and old by using different materiality's, heights, and shadow gaps.

for the architect to leave conspicuous and characteristic evidence of his own era withing the historic fabric, trusting time to fuse it into a comfortable whole. In thus reconceiving preservation as a dialogue between what is there and what might be, the architect could set up what Scarpa called a "speculative tension" in which anticipation was as important as memory.¹⁷

'See how a building inevitably establishes new identities over time. Once acknowledged this basic principle makes it fundamental

31. museo di castelvecchio in verona by carlo scarpa

32. drawing of the multi-layered edge of the floor, articulating the transition between old and new



Shelter for roman ruins in Chur, Switzerland
by Peter Zumthor, 1986

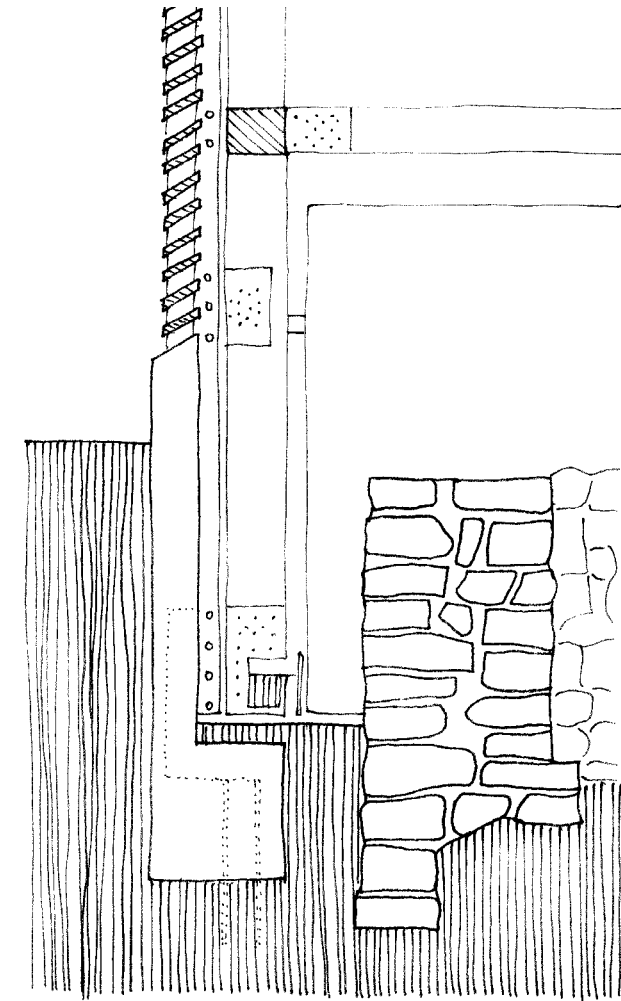
In order to make the different layers of the building perceptible there need to be places of transition that function simultaneously as a link and a separation. In the Shelter for Roman Ruins, Zumthor creates these places of transition with a play of light and dark. He integrates shadow gaps, a black band as contrasting backdrop for the ruins and a collection of different offsets smoothly into the design.



'Earlier in life I used to say that what I'm looking for is a way to create the right atmosphere. But now, talking about time of my places, I think I'm trying to achieve something that I would call "emotional reconstruction", by which I mean the formal and material qualities my buildings should have when they speak about the time of their place.'¹⁸

33. shelter for roman ruins by peter zumthor

34. detail drawing of the interplay between old ruined wall and new timber facade



Hedmark museum in Hamar, Norway
by Sverre Fehn, 1979

In the intervention for the Hedmark Museum in Hamar, Fehn maintained the stone walls of the original barn on site and extended them upwards. Additionally, he adds a timber substructure for the new roof. These different layers added to the site, with their different materiality, bring each other to life, and there is no visible hierarchy.

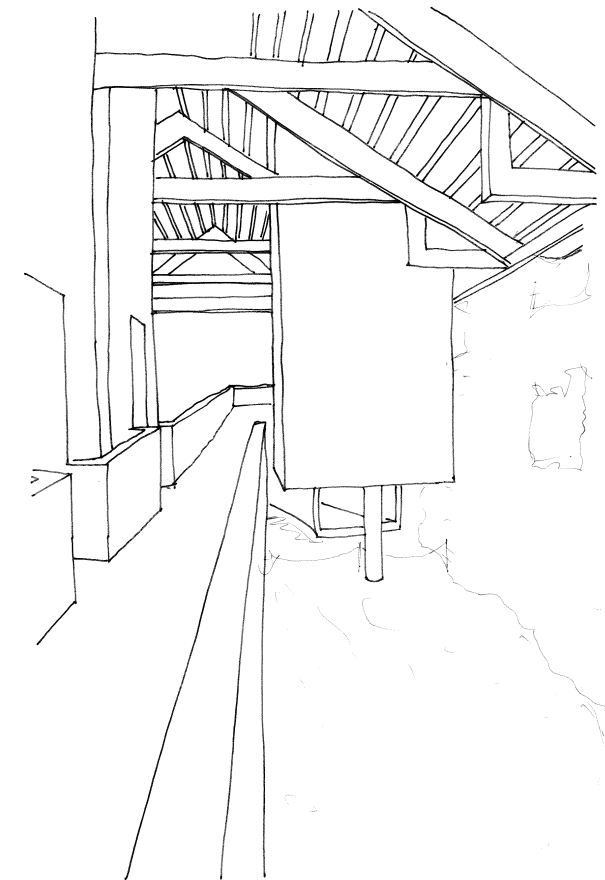
Age, when I built a museum among the ruins of the Bishops' Fortress at Hamar. I realized, when working out this project, that only by manifestation of the present, you can make the past speak. If you try to run after it, you will never reach it.'¹⁹

35. hedmark museum by sverre fehn

36. perspective drawing of the new concrete structures hovering above the old ruins and protected by a light timber roof structure



'My most important journey was perhaps into the past, in the confrontation with the Middle



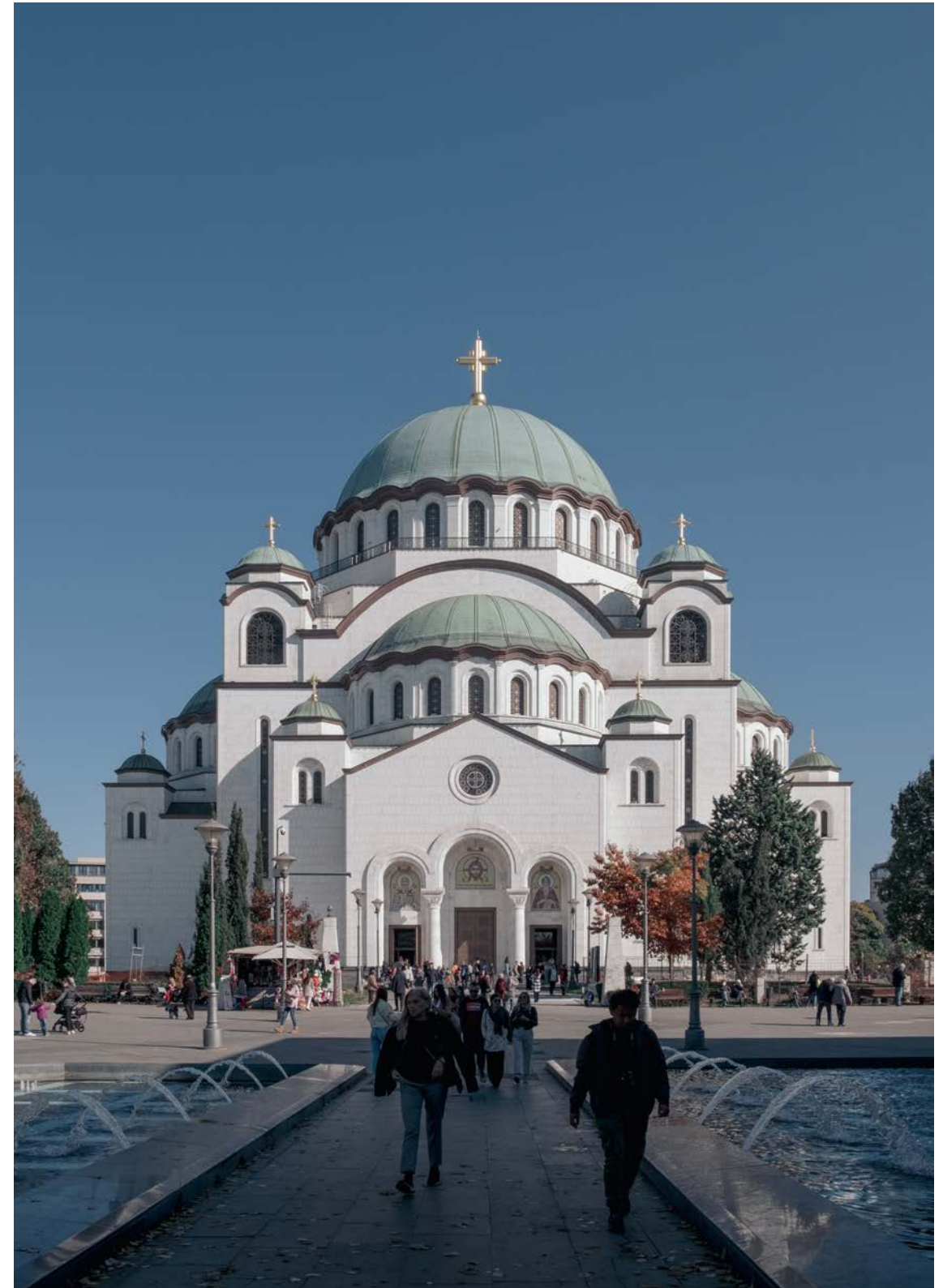
temples

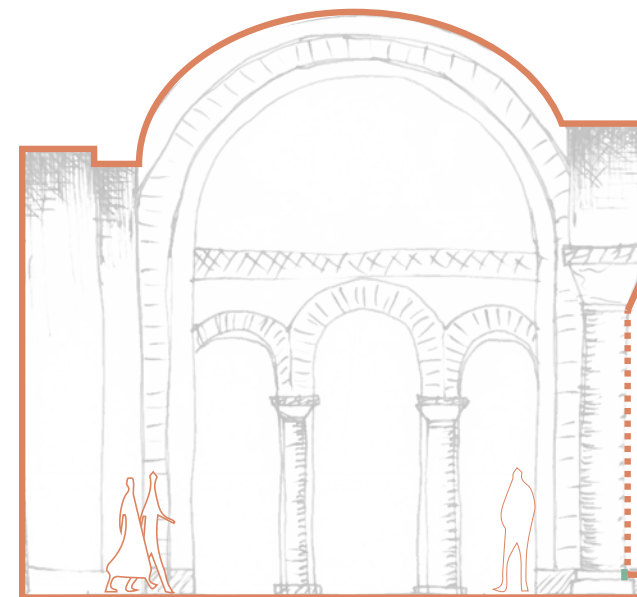
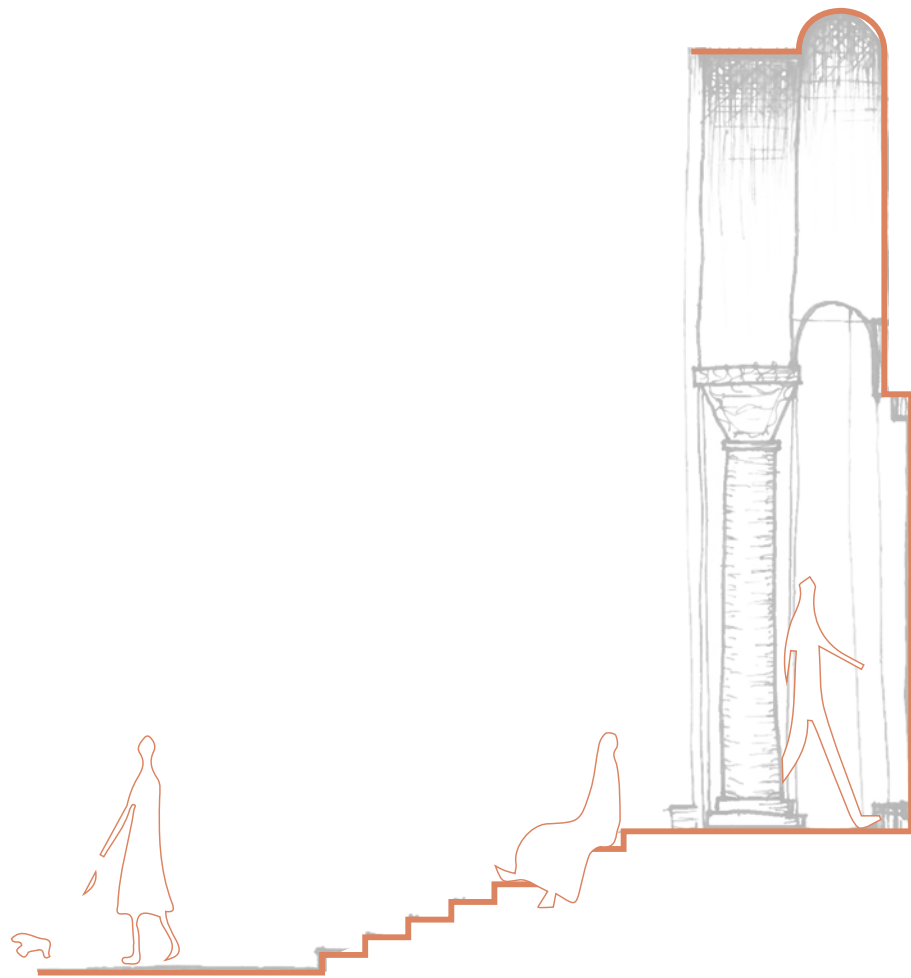
temples thresholds

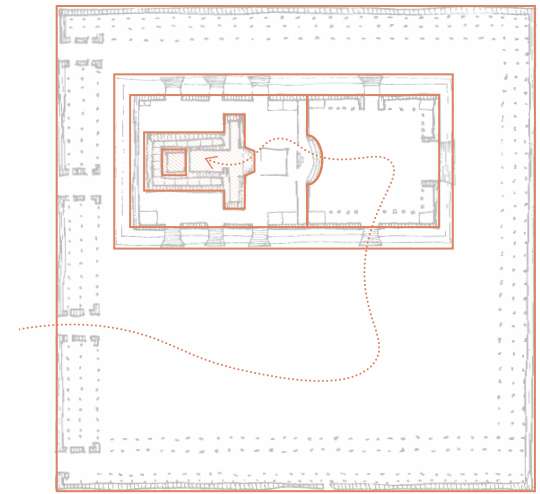
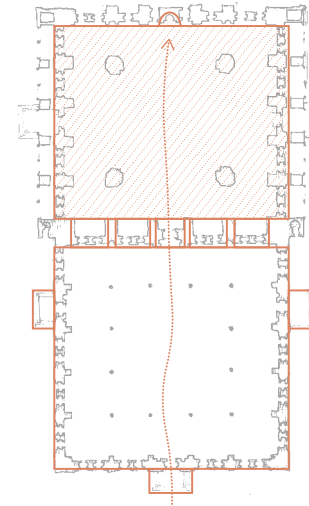
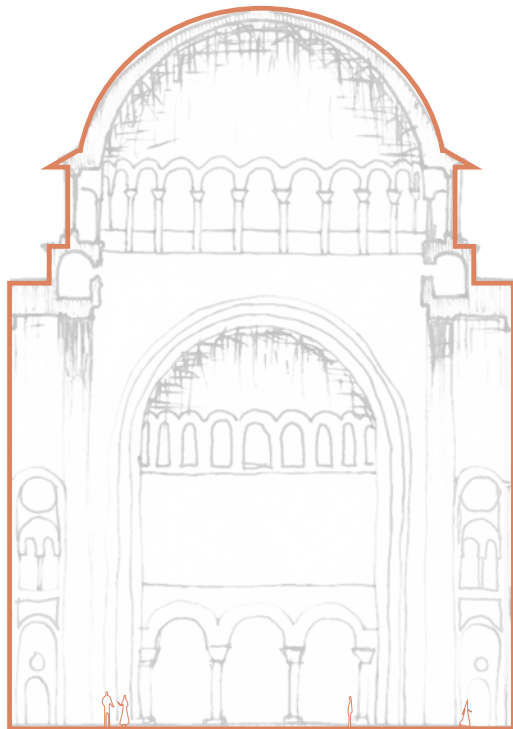
The memorial function of the library is asking for place where people can reminisce and imagine, where they can experience a different reality or temporality. The architecture of temples will serve as the epitome to achieve a building that allows for these experiences. To build a temple, the most sacred space must be set apart from the continuity of the normal by a system of thresholds and enclosures. 'Articulate paths and places are intrinsic to the symbolism and ritual use of sacred architecture and exhibit the characteristics of clearly articulated entries, spatial sequences, and symbolic narratives.'²⁰

I labeled these extensive entry sequences as system of thresholds. This system is an architectural tool that at the same time separates and connects two different spaces, atmospheres, or experiences.

37. hram svetog save, the temple of saint sava in belgrade



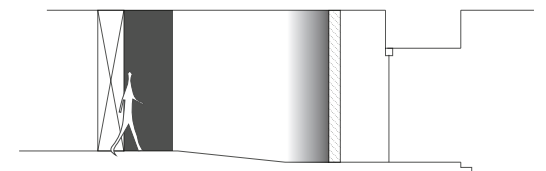




In the Temple of Saint Sava in Belgrade, this system consists out of the park surrounding the church, the steps to reach the elevated portico, the big wooden door in the thickened wall before entering the narthex. This narthex again is separated from the nave by means of a colonnade and after which you finally arrive in the imposing nave with its immense dome on top. Through the examples of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque and Solomon's temple we see that a system of threshold can appear in a linear as well as a more radial form. 'Attendant to the clear delimiting of sacred space are the approaches, paths, thresholds, and paths to enter it. Ritual processions are a symbolic journey from outside to inside, edge to center, profane to sacred, and from one mode of being to another.'²¹

In the design for the memorial library, the system of thresholds can take shape in the following elements: a change in illumination, materiality, floor or ceiling heights, ramps, thickened walls, services spaces as buffers, antechambers or porticos and doors.

- 38. entrance area of the temple of saint sava as the first part of the system of thresholds. scale 1:50
- 39. the narthex of the temple of saint sava. scale 1:100
- 40. the nave of the temple of saint sava as the main space in the church and the endpoint of the system of thresholds. scale 1:500
- 41. the entry sequence in the sultan ahmed mosque in istanbul. scale 1:2000
- 42. the entry sequence in solomon's temple. scale 1:1000
- 43. conceptual image of the identified methods for achieving thresholds

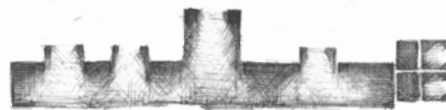
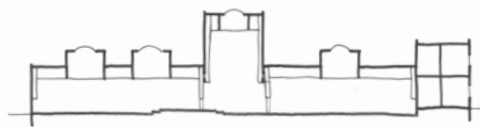
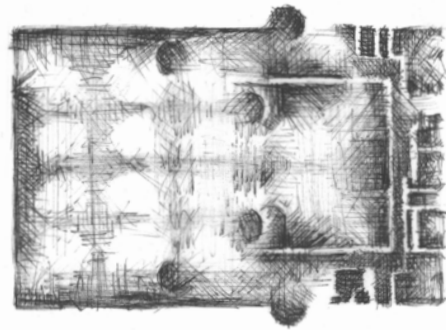
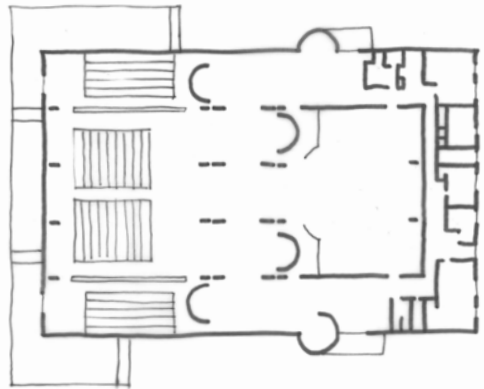


temples gradients

An additional approach for the creation of a place for reminiscence and imagination is working with the sensorial or embodied experience of architecture. For this I reached to the field of phenomenology and consulted the books *The eyes of the skin* by Juhanni Pallasmaa, in which he advocates for the implementation of not only sight, but all the senses in the design process, and *Experiencing Architecture* by Steen Eiler Rasmussen in which he describes the importance of light, color, shape, scale, texture, rhythm and sound in the embodied experience. Through its arched ceiling, thick walls, the smell of incense, echoing acoustics and relative darkness, the Little Rose Church in Belgrade allows for a deeply intimate experience.

44. interior of the crkva ružica, little rose church in kalemegdan fortress in belgrade



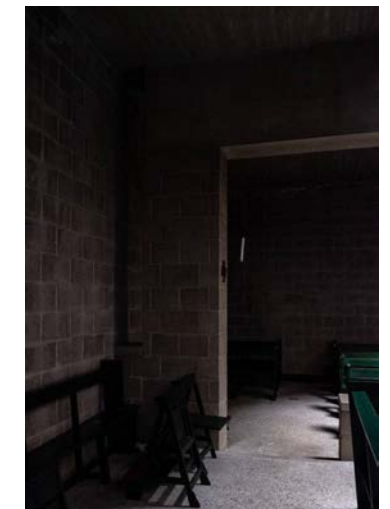


- all drawings in scale 1:750
- 45. floor plan of pastoor van arskerk
- 46. light plan
- 47. section of pastoor van arskerk
- 48. light section
- 49. facade and entrance of the church
- 50 - 58. photo essay on the pastoor van arskerk



**P. van Arskerk in The Hague, Netherlands,
by Aldo van Eyck, 1969**

In the Pastoor van Arskerk by Aldo van Eyck, the only light enters the church through vast, circular rooflights. This excludes a view of the outside world and creates dark corners and walls which intensifies the experience of seclusion.

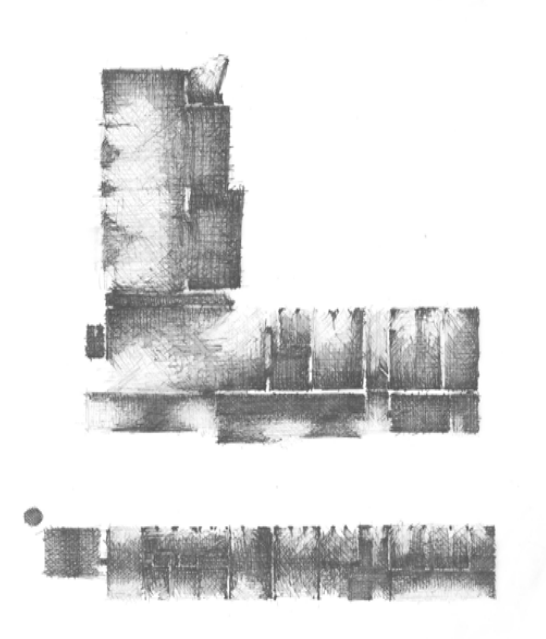
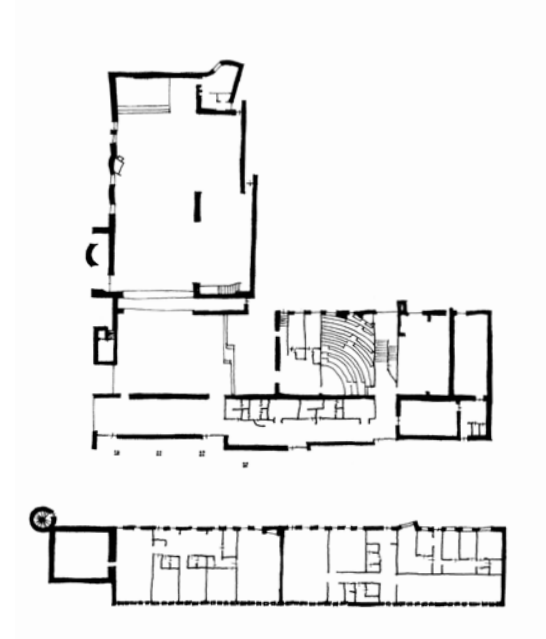
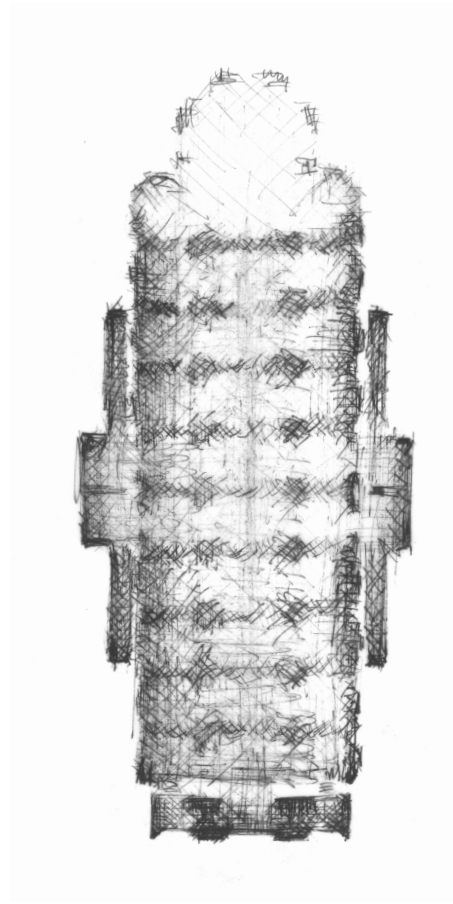
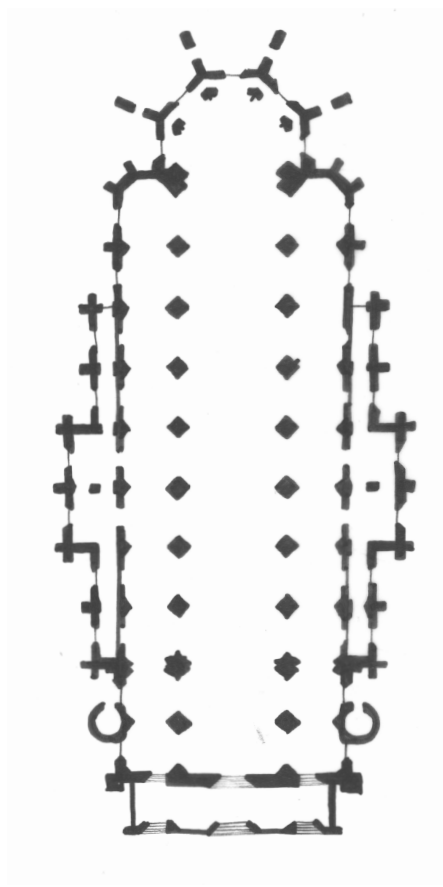




Grundtvigskirke in Kopenhagen, Denmark,
by Peder Vilhelm Jensen-Klint, 1926

In the Grundtvigskirke by Peder Vilhelm Jensen-Klint, the light rhythmically enters the church between the light brick columns, to end in the highly illuminated apse. This guides the movement of the visitors towards the most sacred space of the church.

- all drawings in scale 1:750
- 59. side aisle of grundtvigskirke
- 60. plan of grundtvigskirke
- 61. light plan

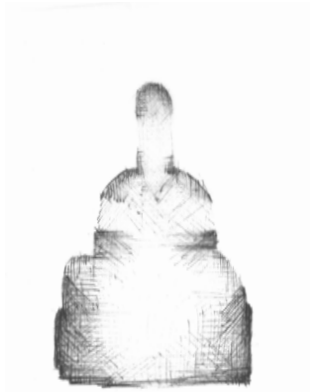
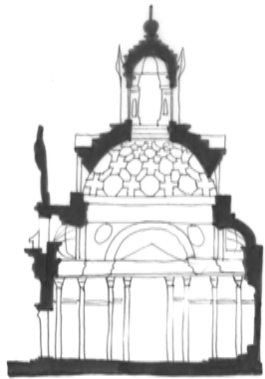


Markuskyrkan in Björkhagen, Sweden
by Sigurd Lewerentz, 1960

Like in the Grundtvigskirke, the material uniformity of the Markuskyrkan by Sigurd Lewerentz evokes experiences of serenity. 'This church is an enclosed world, an architectural microcosm that directs the visitor's awareness and thoughts to the ultimate shore of life. Its monolithic materiality gives the space a mysterious and therapeutic darkness and shadow, more than light.'²²

- all drawings in scale 1:100
- 62. plan of markuskyrkan
- 63. light plan
- 64. entrance of the markuskyrkan



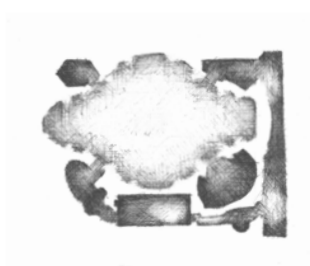
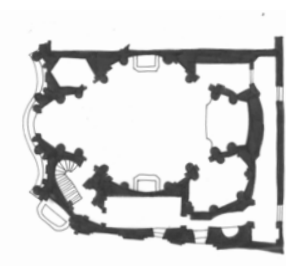


Sultan Ahmed Mosuqe in Istanbul, Turkey,
by Sedefkâr Mehmed Agha, 1616

In the Sultan Ahmed Mosque by Sedefkâr Mehmed Agha, the play of light is part of the system of thresholds. Going from dark to light and back again the visitor is giving the time and suggestions of entering another world.



all drawings in scale 1:1000
70. forecourt of the sultan ahmed mosque in istanbul
71. light section
72. section of the sultan ahmed mosque

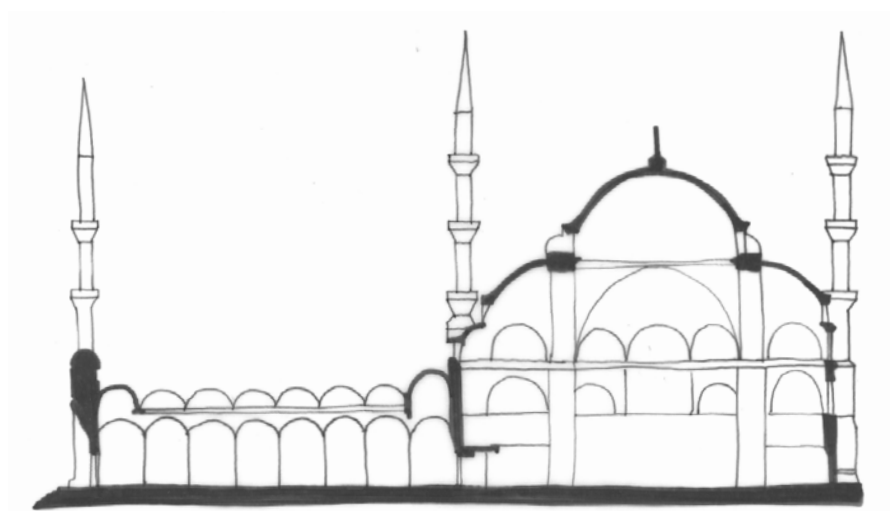
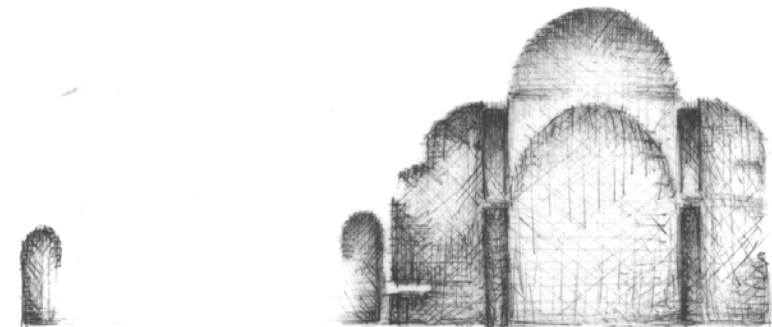


all drawings in scale 1:100
65. section of San Carlino
66. light section
67. floor plan of San Carlino
68. light plan
69. front facade of the San Carlino



San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane in Rome, Italy
by Francesco Borromini, 1677

In the San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane by Francesco Borromini, the luminance of the space creates different atmospheres for different gradients of publicness. The nave, for public services, is highly illuminated, but the chapel for private prayers sits in the dark.



project

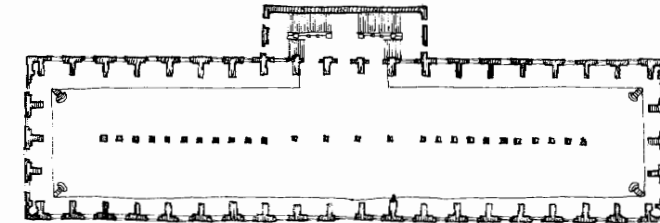
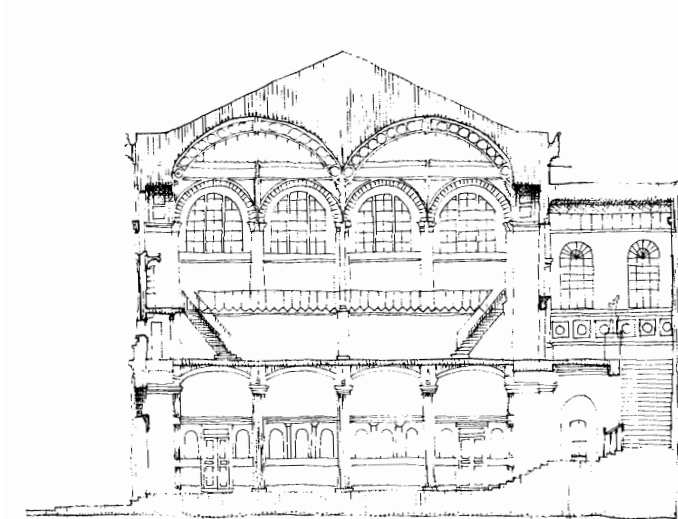
project brief

On the site of the former National Library of Serbia, a new building needs to be designed. This building should serve as a memorial for the bombing of the 6th of April 1941 and at the same time house a new library program. The library will fall back on the paradigm of old libraries, which were spaces to retreat and abstract from the world around. Therefore, this memorial library will have the architectural qualities of a temple, allowing for the experience of a different reality or temporality. At the same time, this will strengthen the ability for people to reminisce and reflect. This aimed for 'other world', will be achieved by the implantation of different systems of thresholds.

Besides, the building will not only take into account but also highlight and reveal the historical narrative of the site, by means of architectural layering. By removing the fence around the site and making the ruins visible and accessible for the public the site will be given back to the people of Belgrade. The totality of the street level floor will leave space for events and exhibitions to continue to happen.

73. section of the bibliothèque sainte-geneviève by henri labrouste. scale 1:500

74. floor plan of the bibliothèque sainte-geneviève. scale 1:1500

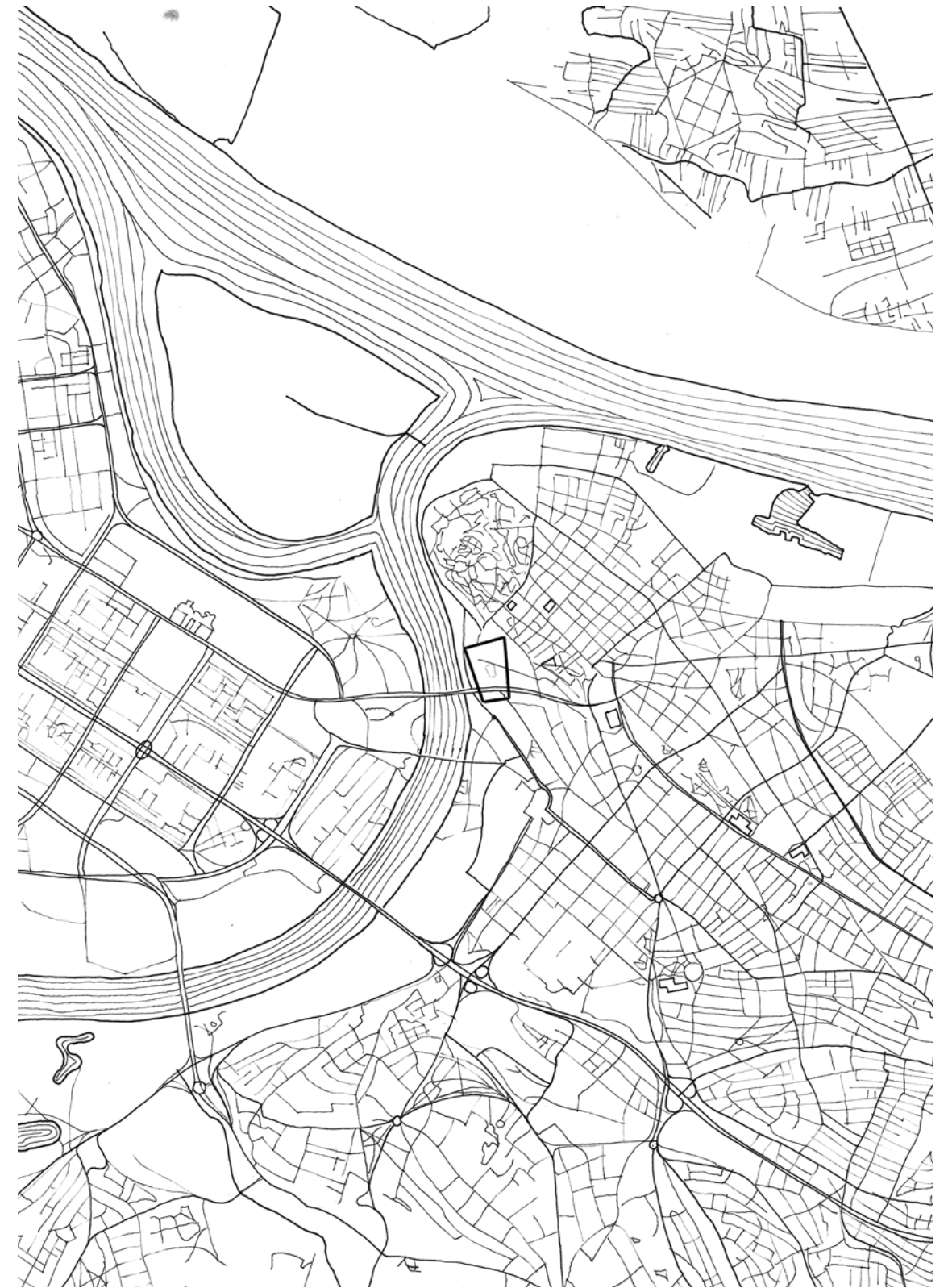


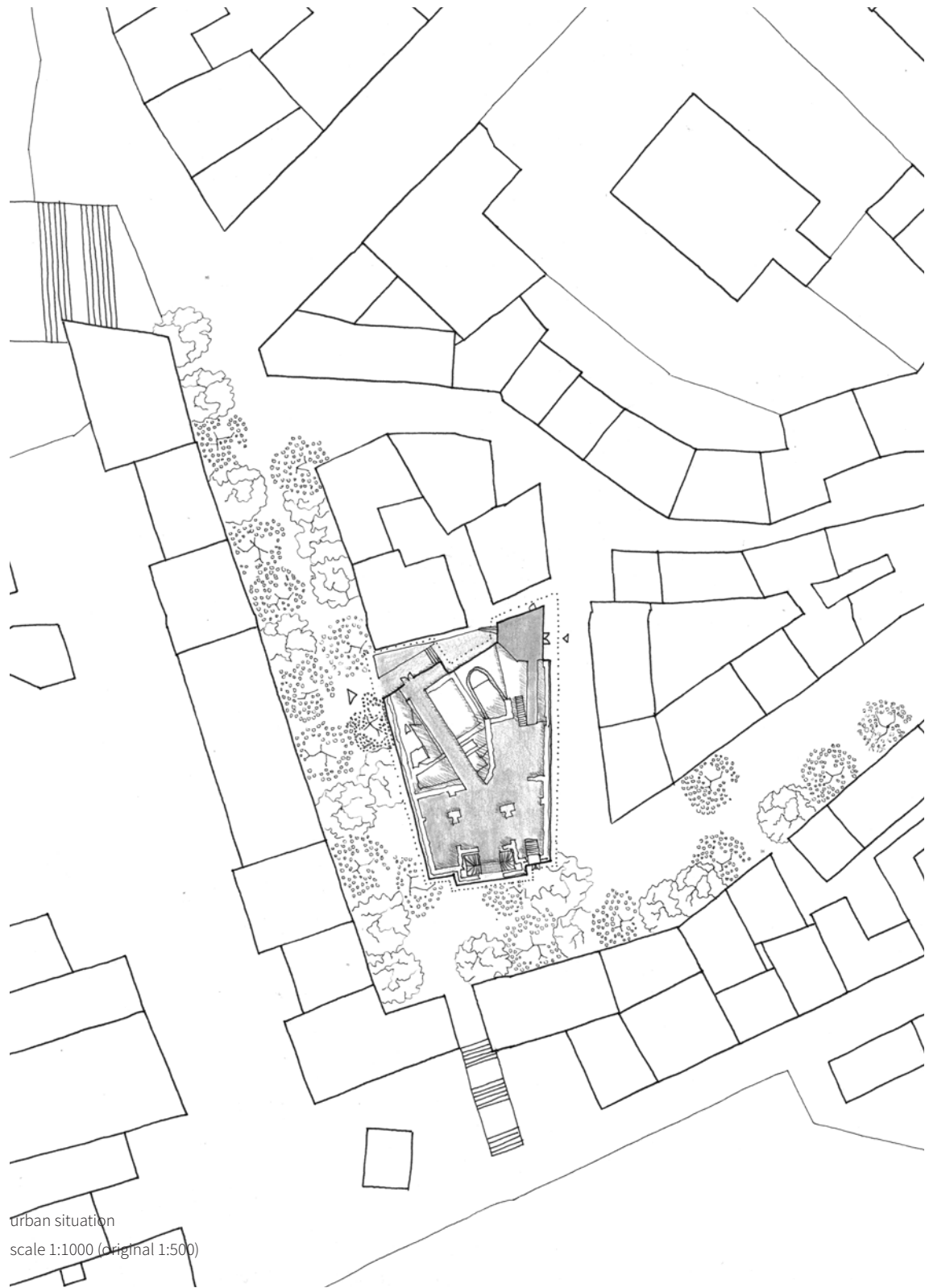
project design

The new memorial library will cover the full site of the former library, protecting the ruins against decay. The plinth of the building is almost completely open to preserve the view of the ruins. The entrance will lay on the street of Kosančićev Venac, connecting to the new proposed urban stairs, and creating a grand entrance void at the location of the roman ruins. A walkway is hovering above these ruins, following their alignment, prolonging the process of arrival. A concrete floor has been cast carefully between the old library walls, making the space suitable as exhibition area and event space. This area will serve as an in-between climatic zone since it is not possible to fully insulate it. Besides, the presence of the ruins also causes some difficulties for the structure, resulting in two independently operating grids. Above the ruins, different volumes are hovering in on of these grids. The volumes have different floor- and ceiling levels, creating a patchwork-like interior.

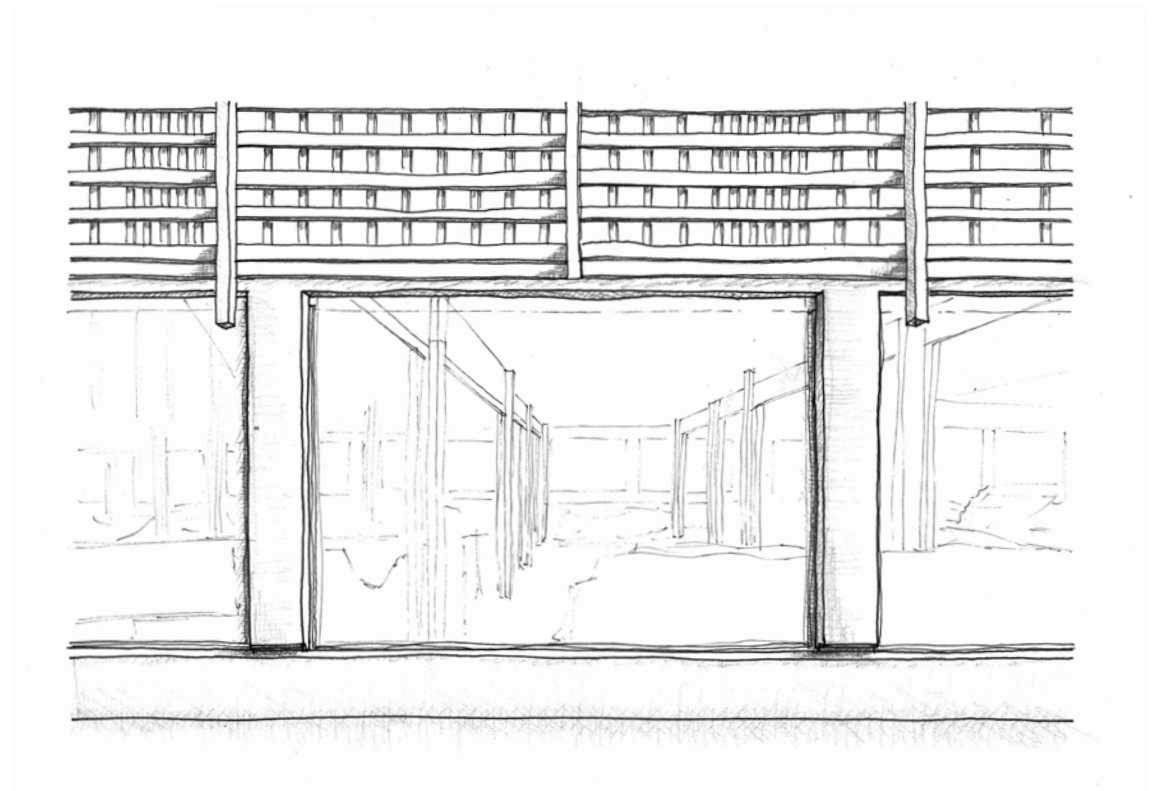
To bind this patchwork together, the building is wrapped by an open timber structure, which gives a glimpse of the richness of the interior behind it. The timber structure consists out of three layers, the first vertical layers follow the rhythm of the concrete columns and densify per floor. The horizontal layer slowly opens open towards the sky, producing a gradient of lightness in the facade. The third layer responds to the underlying, uneven rhythm of the ruins. To achieve a certain gradient in terms of intimacy in the different interior spaces and rooms, every space has its own system of thresholds, that can consist out of an accumulation of the following elements: a change in illumination, materiality, floor or ceiling heights, ramps, thickened walls, services spaces as buffers, antechambers or porticos and doors.

urban plan with libraries
scale 1:40000 (original 1:20000)

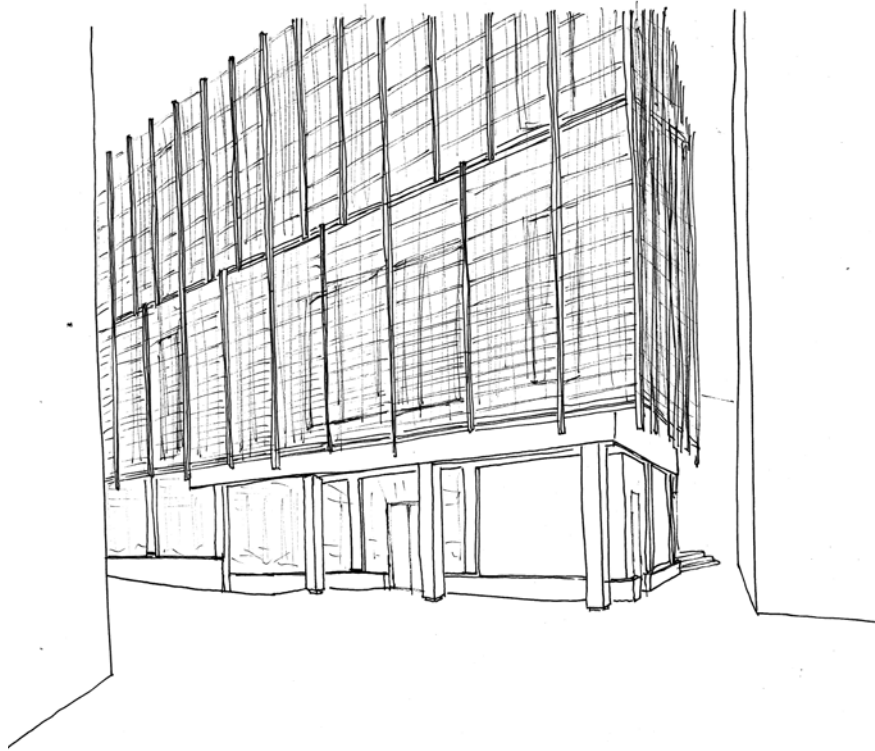




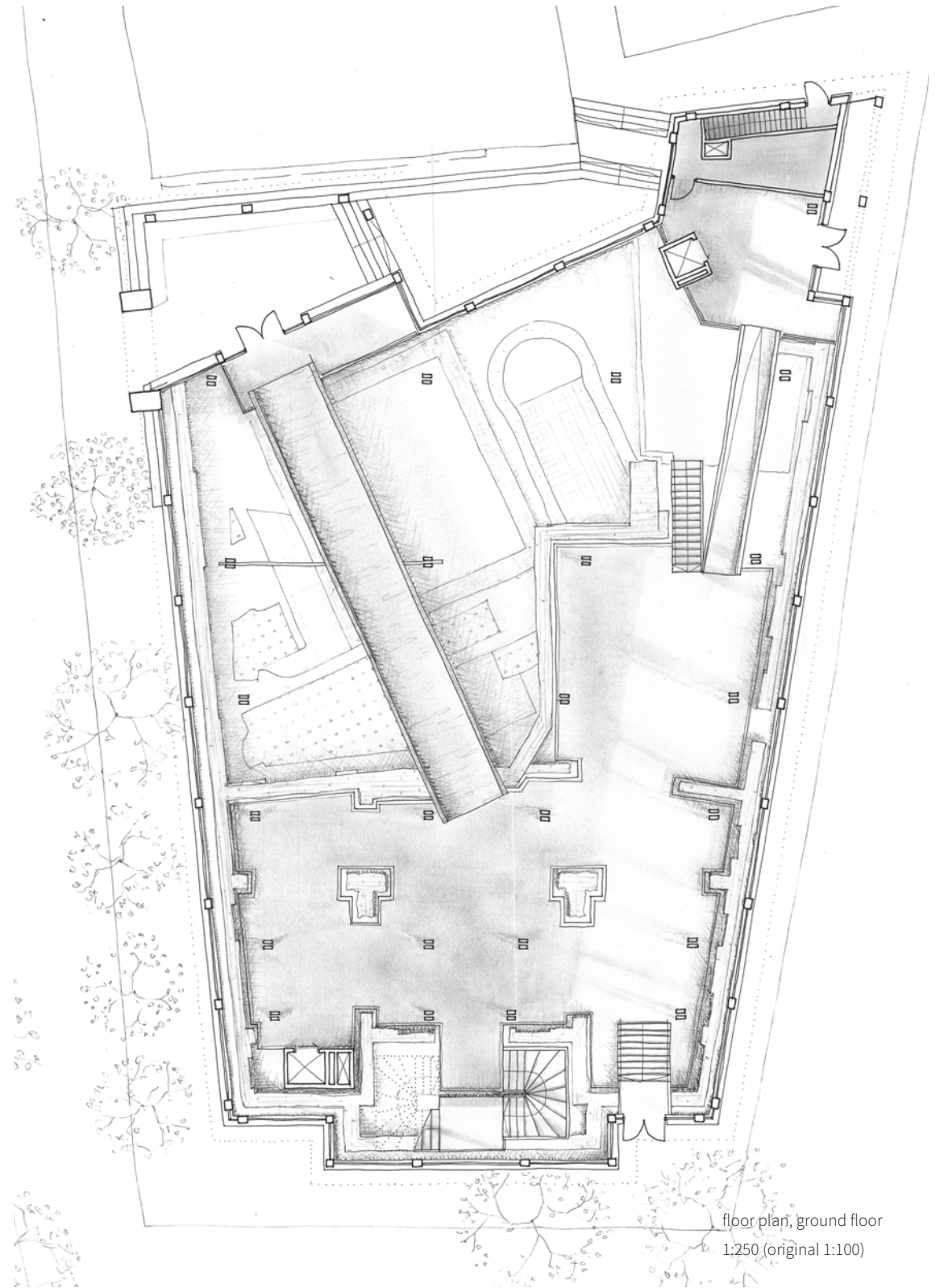
urban situation
scale 1:1000 (original 1:500)



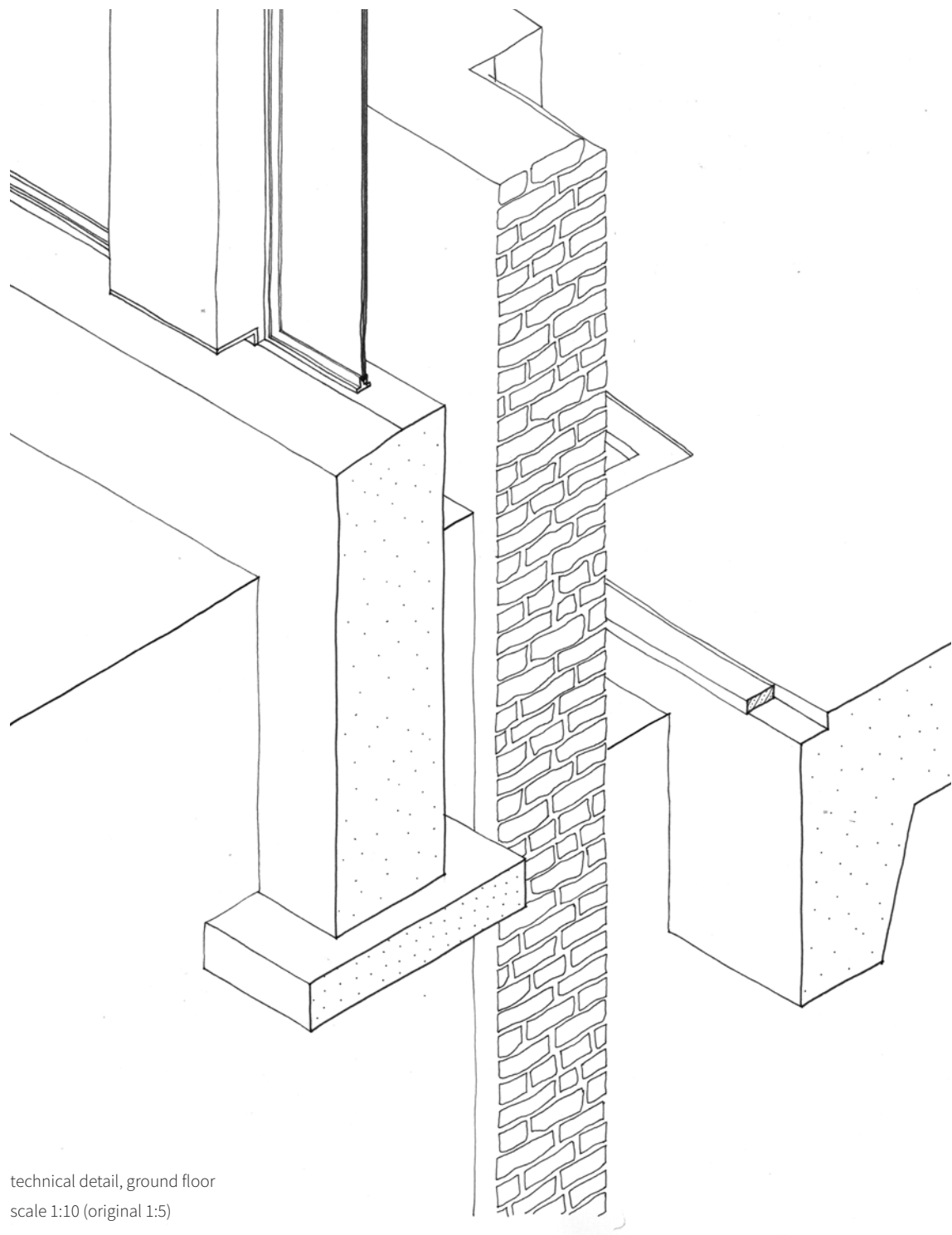
perspective view from the
street overlooking the ruins



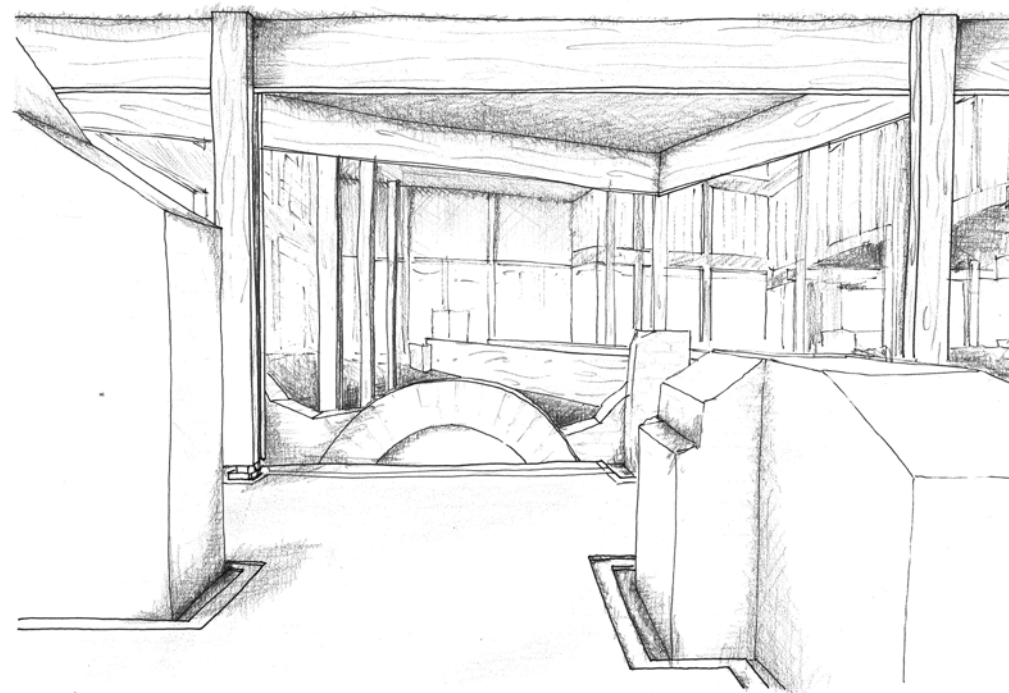
perspective view from
Zadarska street



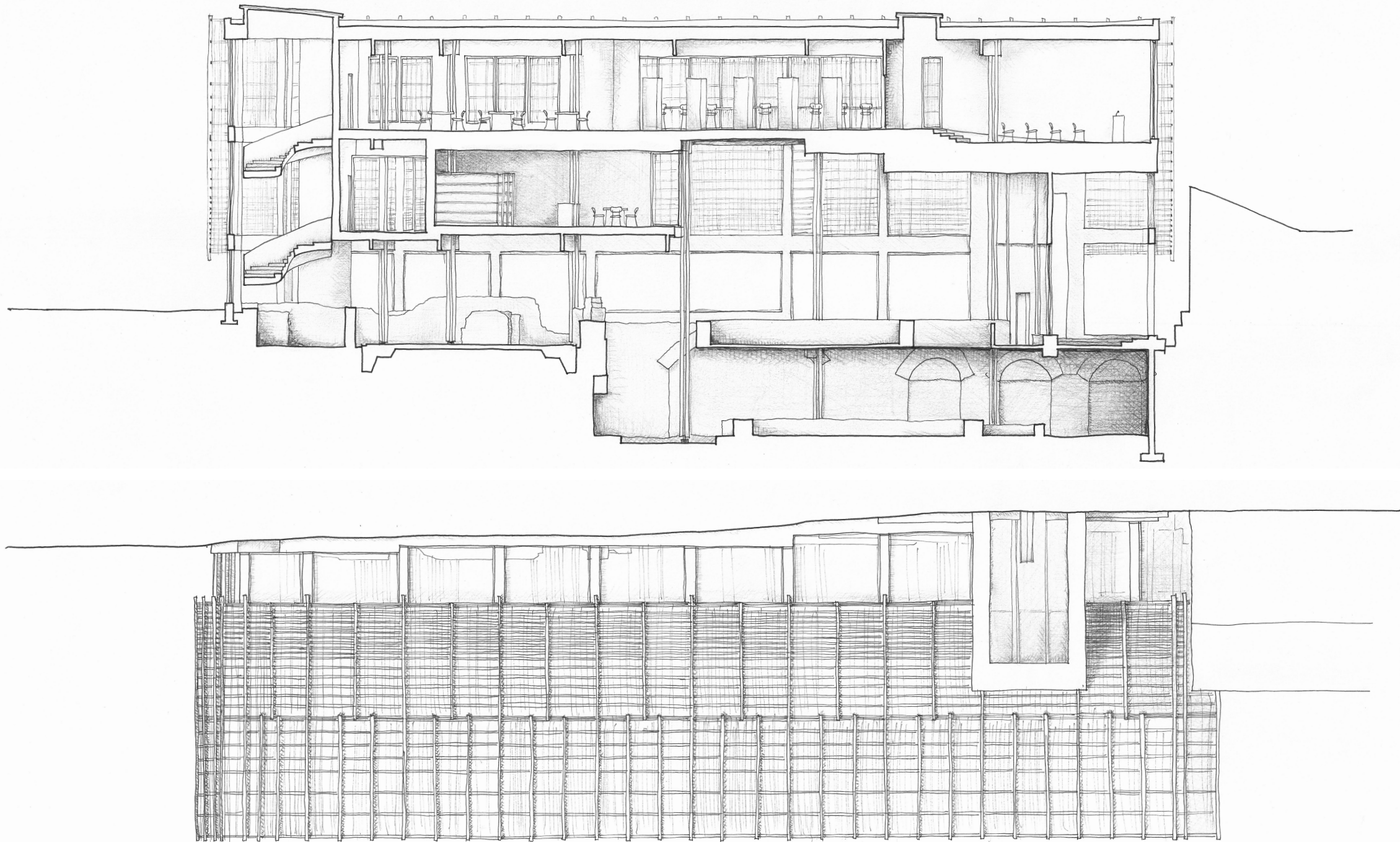
floor plan, ground floor
1:250 (original 1:100)



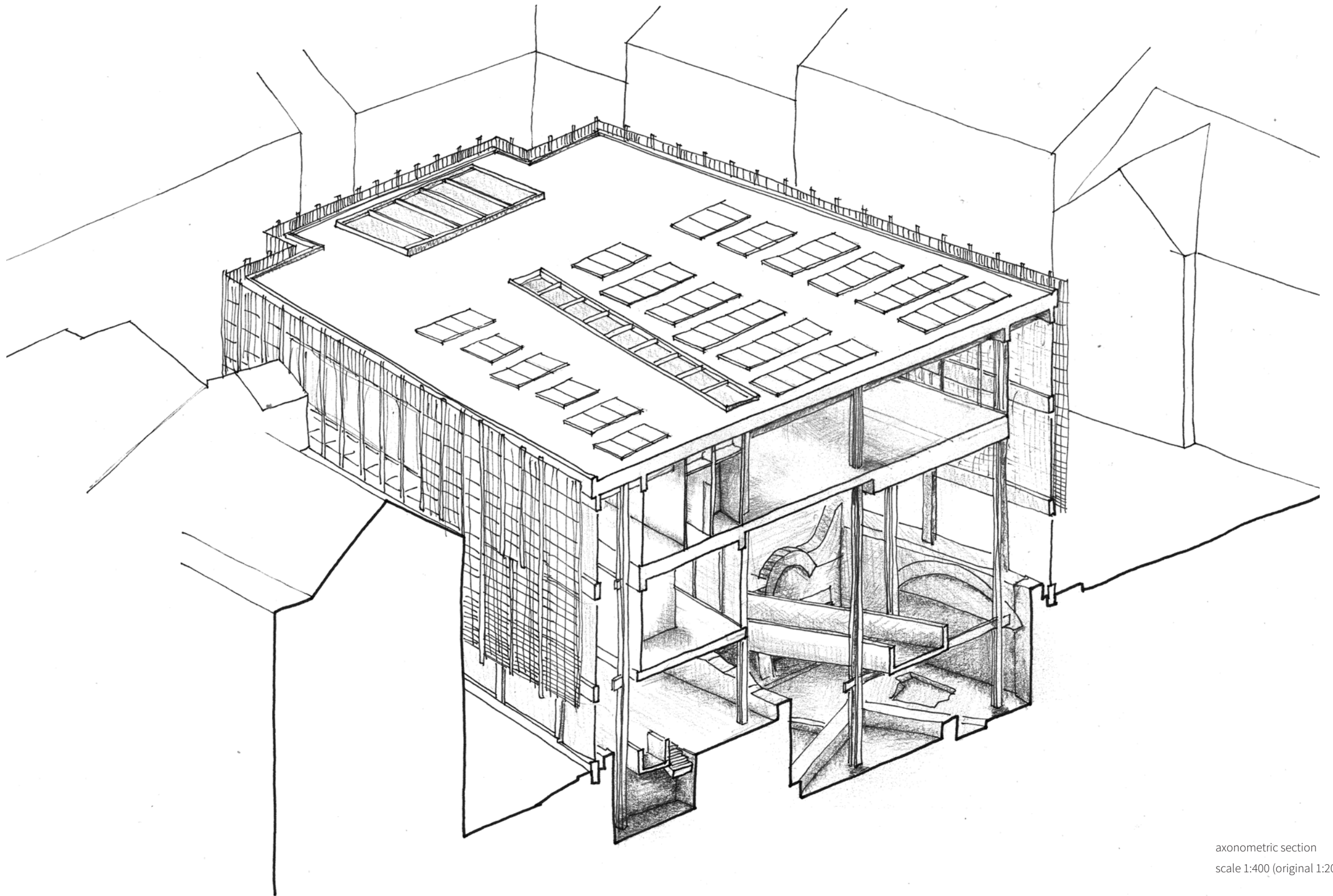
technical detail, ground floor
scale 1:10 (original 1:5)



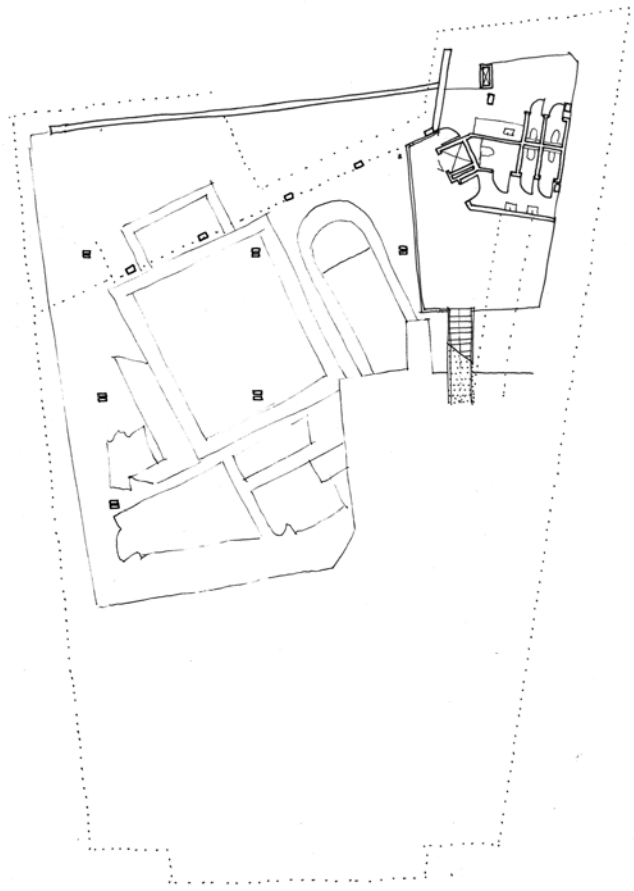
perspective view from the
library ruins towards the
entrance void



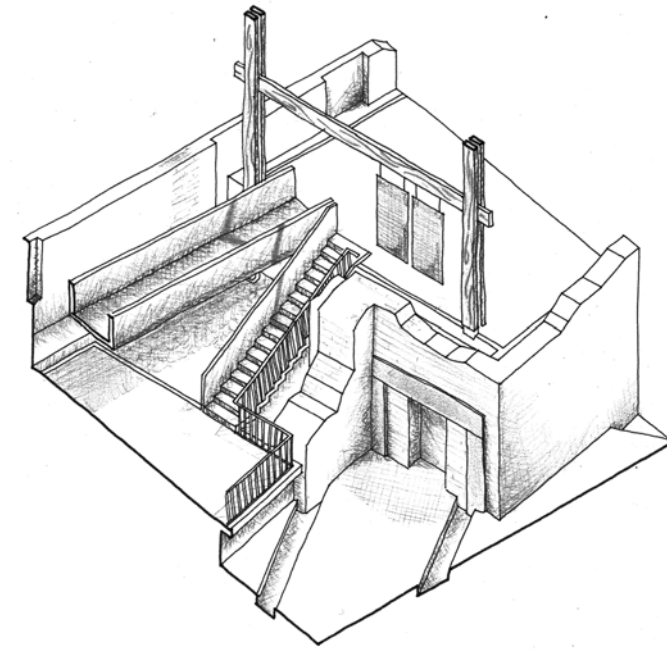
section and facade
1:200 (original 1:100)



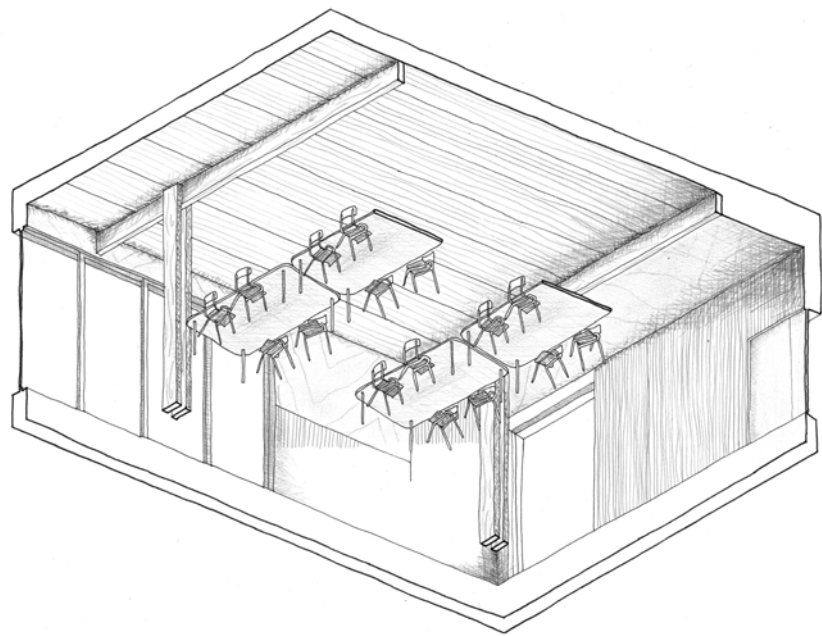
axonometric section
scale 1:400 (original 1:200)



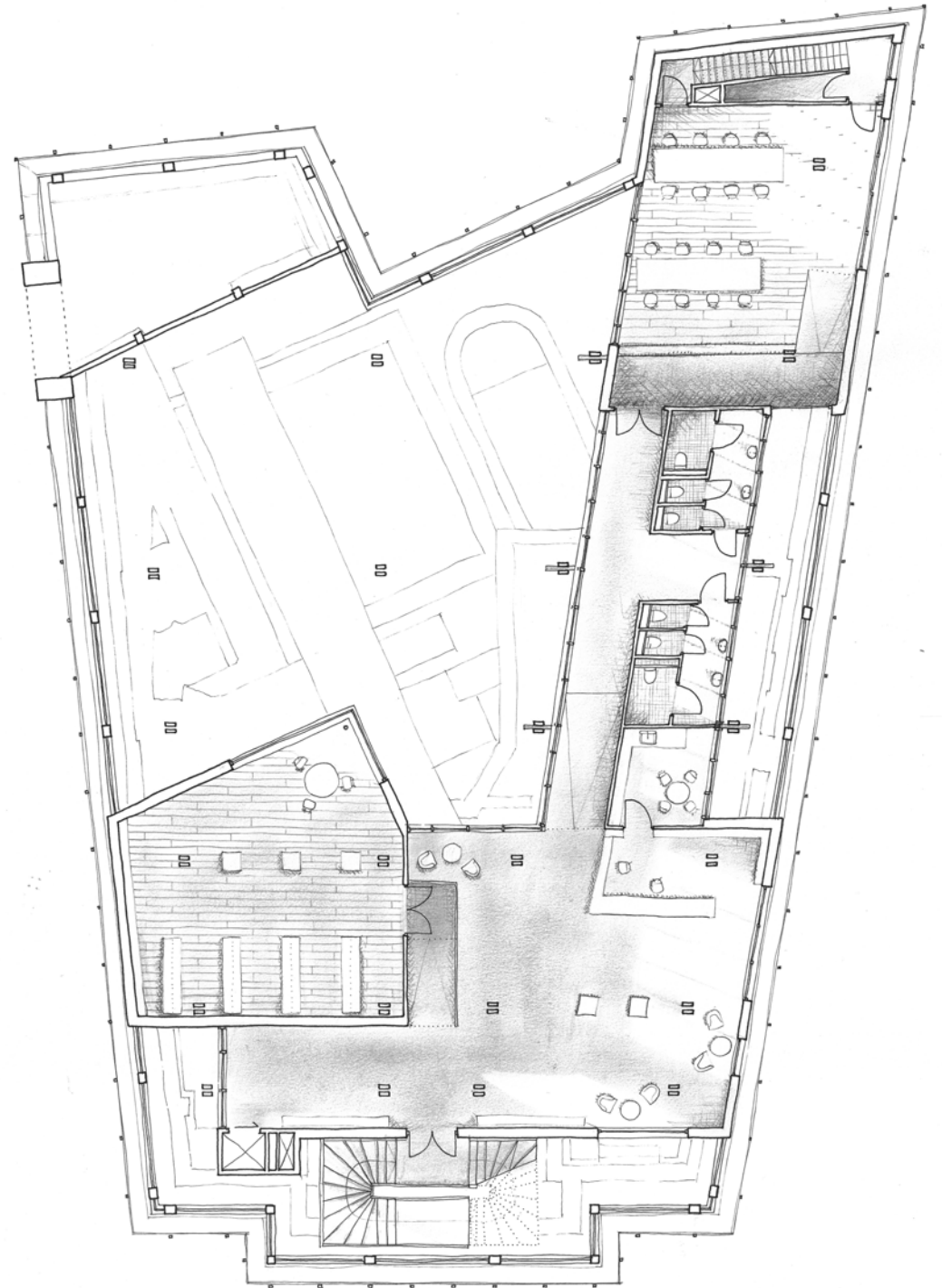
floor plan, souterrain
scale 1:400 (original 1:200)



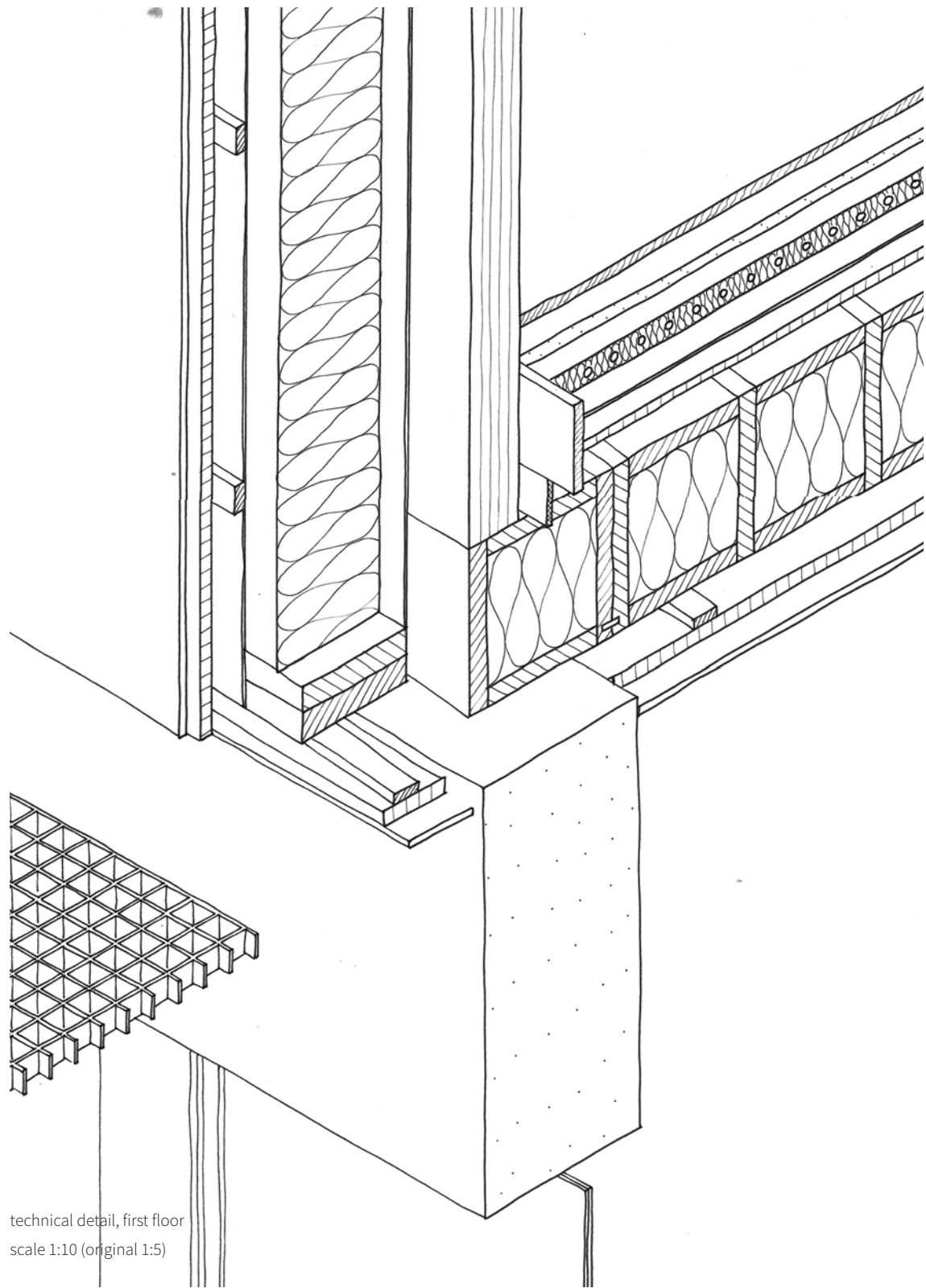
axonometric of ground floor
scale 1:250 (original 1:100)



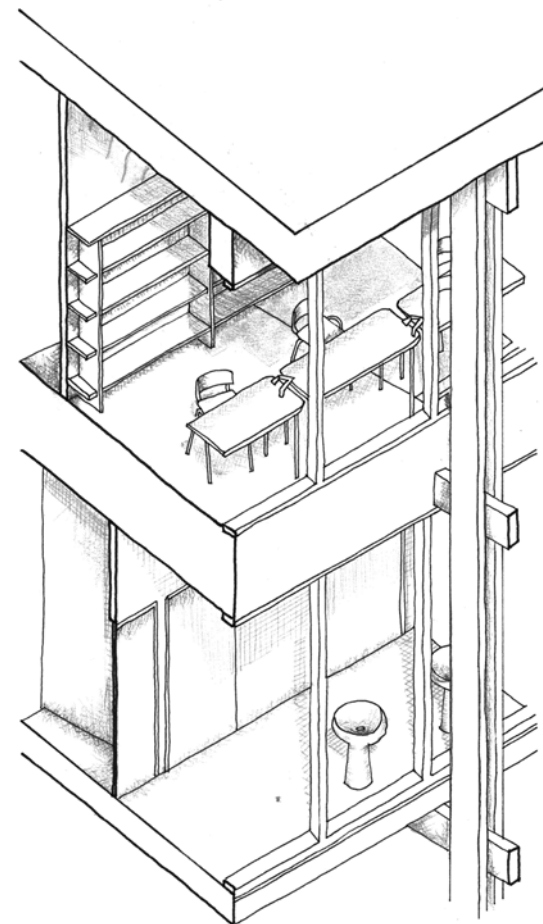
wormseye axonometric of
reading room
scale 1:150 (original 1:50)



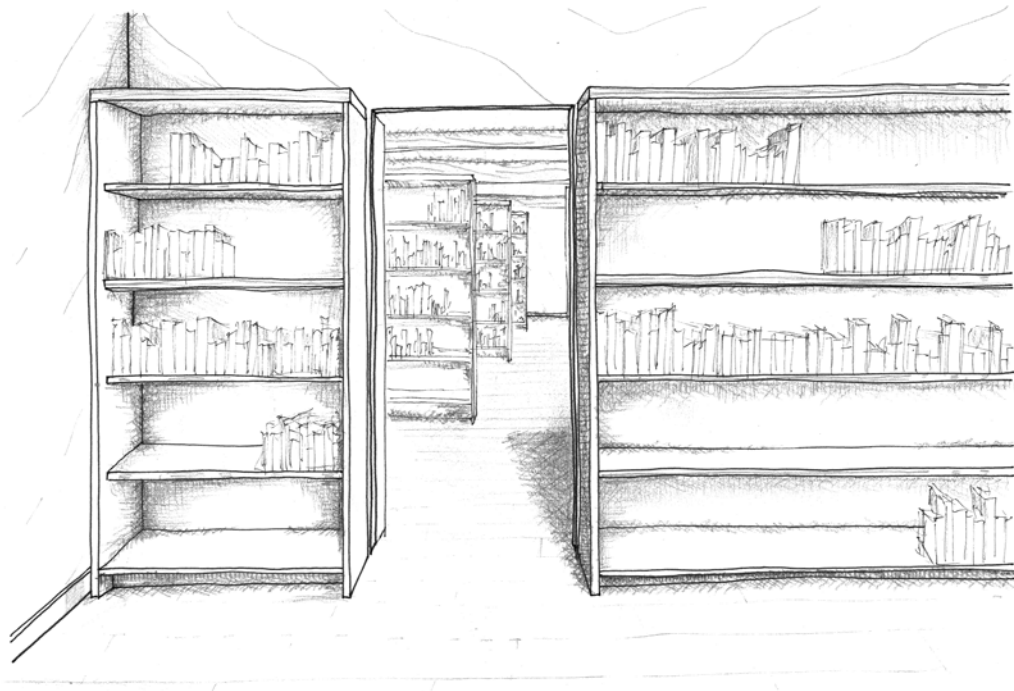
floor plan, first floor
1:250 (original 1:100)



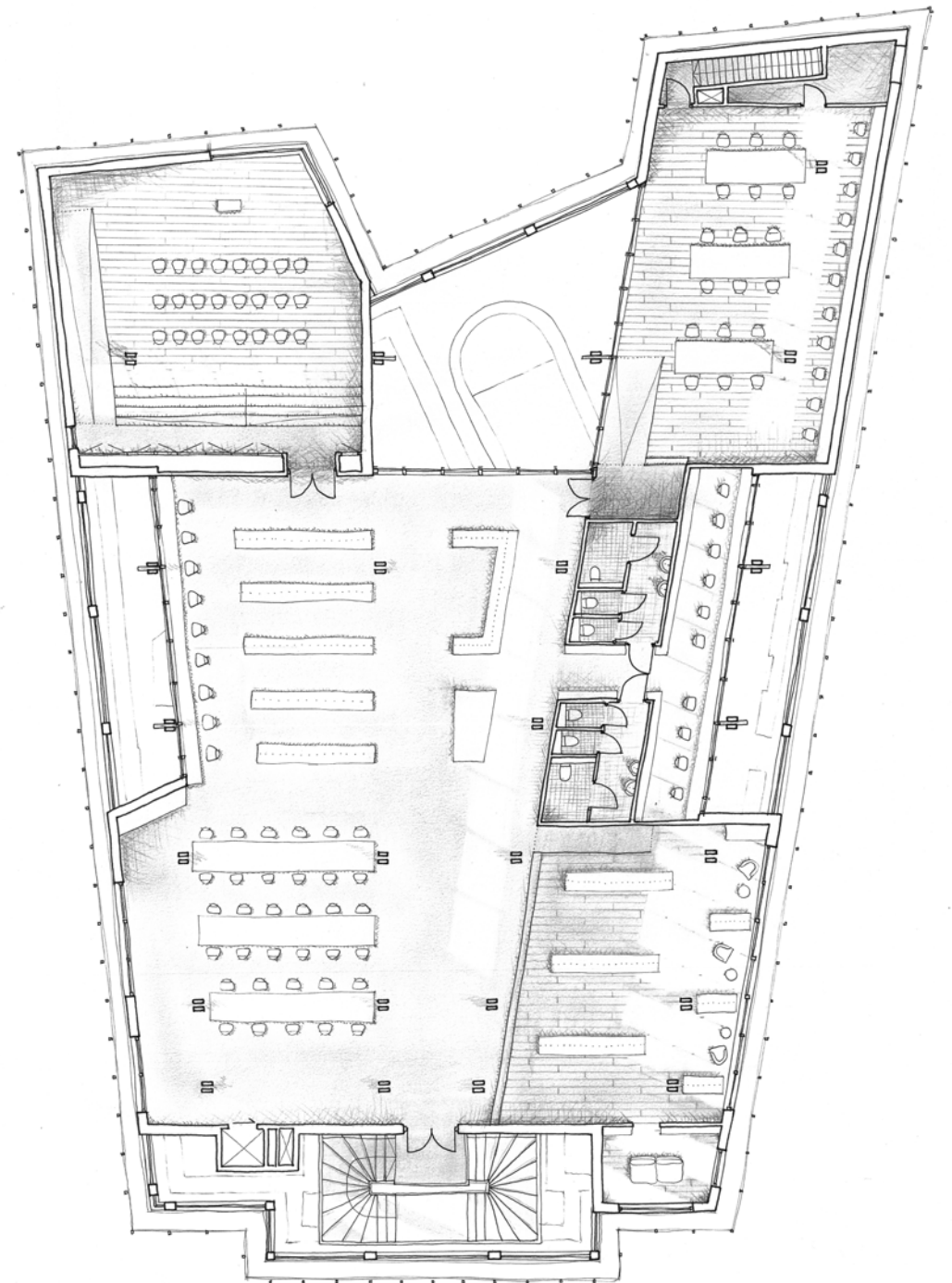
technical detail, first floor
scale 1:10 (original 1:5)



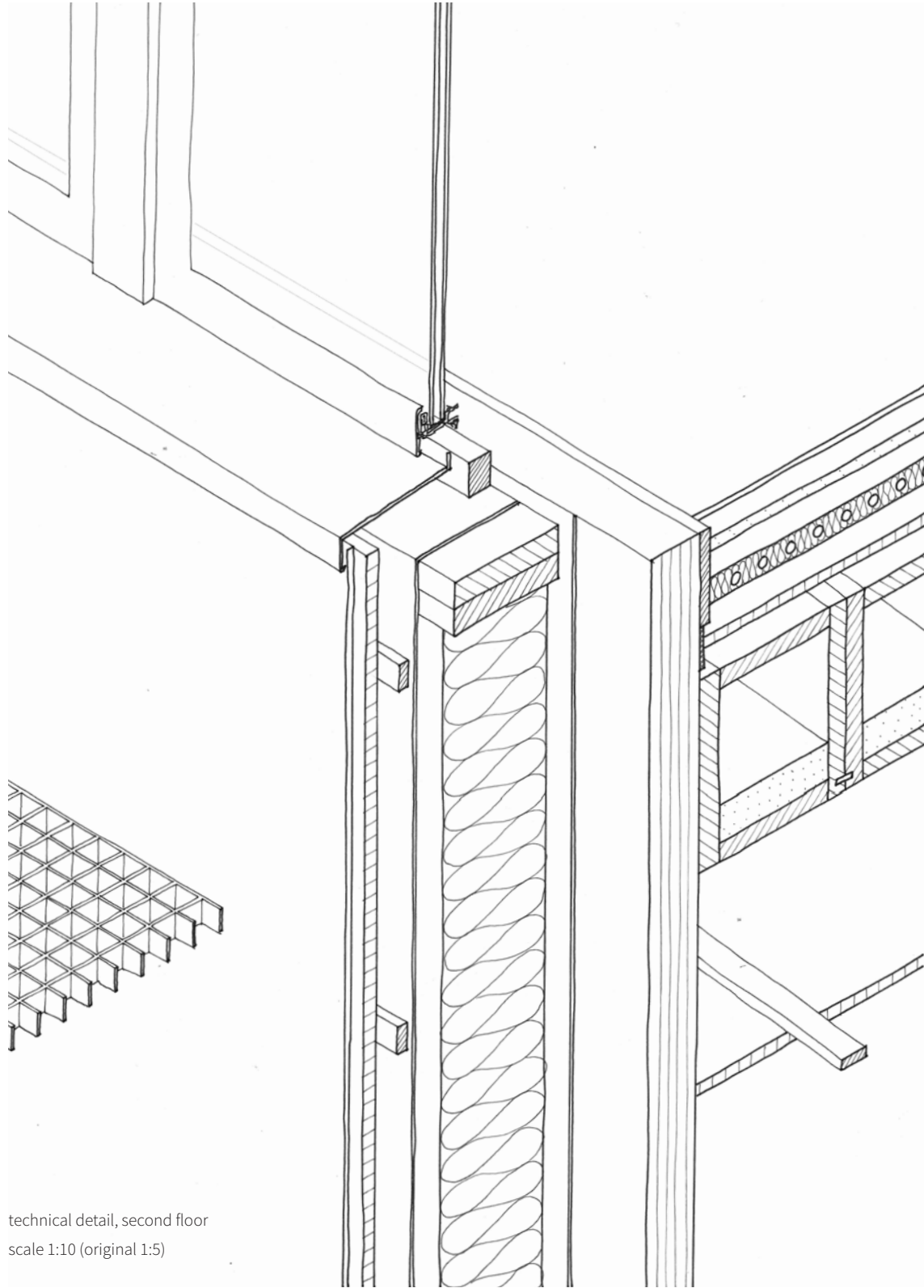
axonometric of writing gallery
and toilets
scale 1:100 (original 1:50)



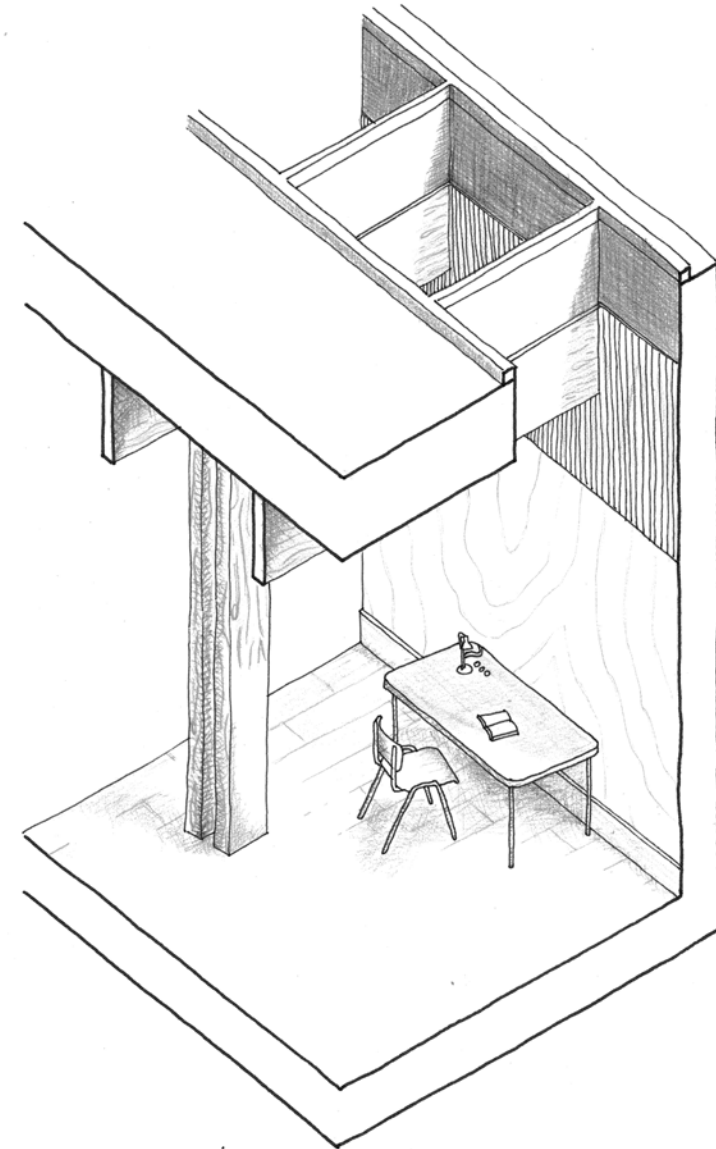
perspective view from the
reading chapel



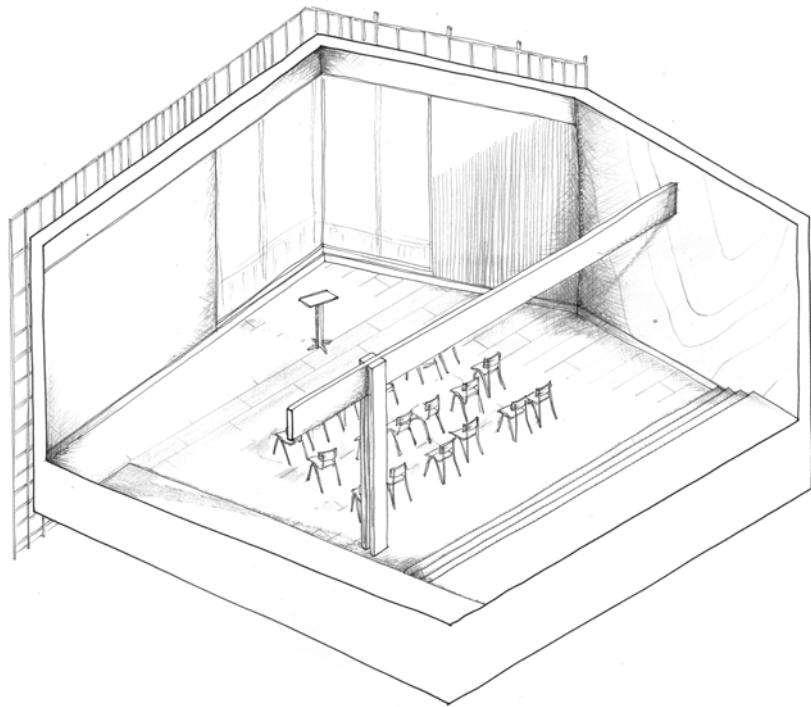
floor plan, second floor
1:250 (original 1:100)



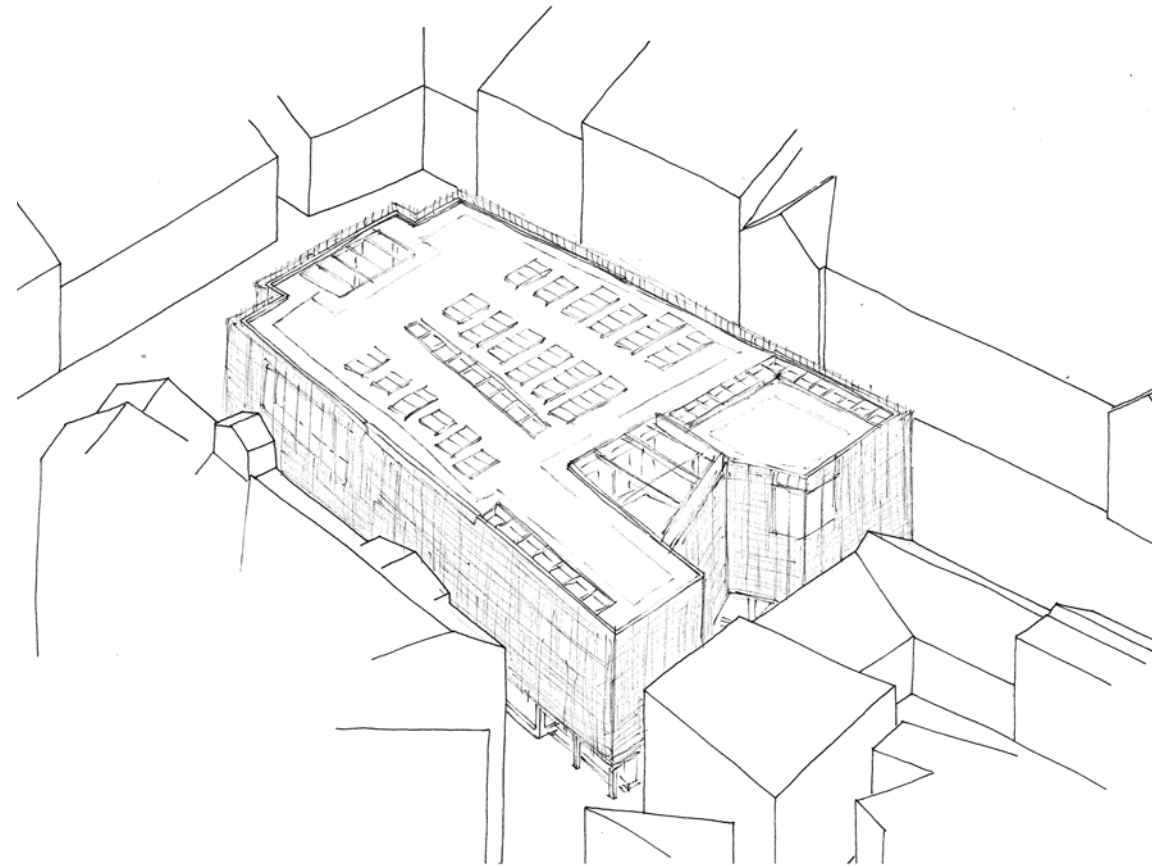
technical detail, second floor
scale 1:10 (original 1:5)



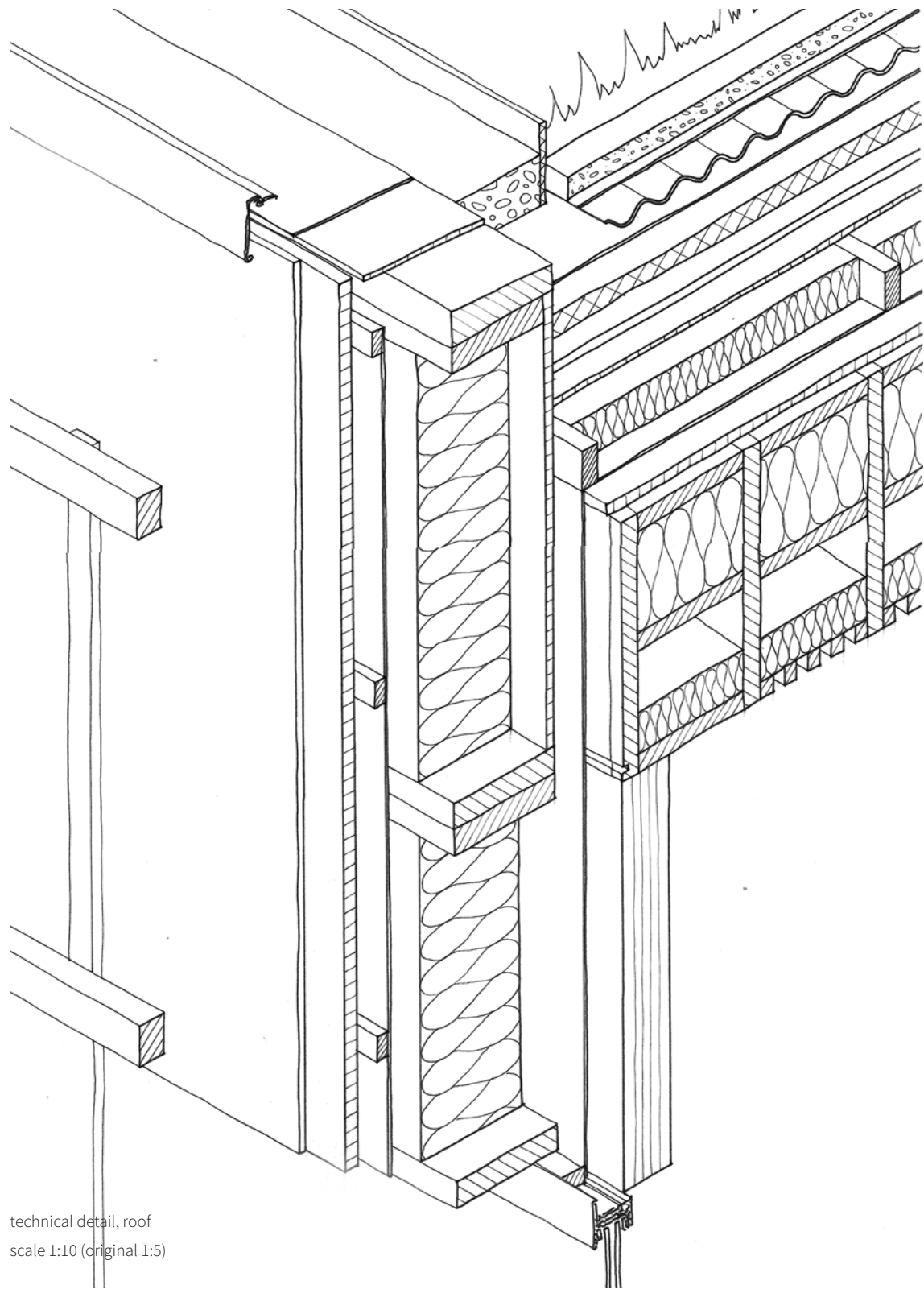
axonometric of reading room
scale 1:50 (original 1:20)



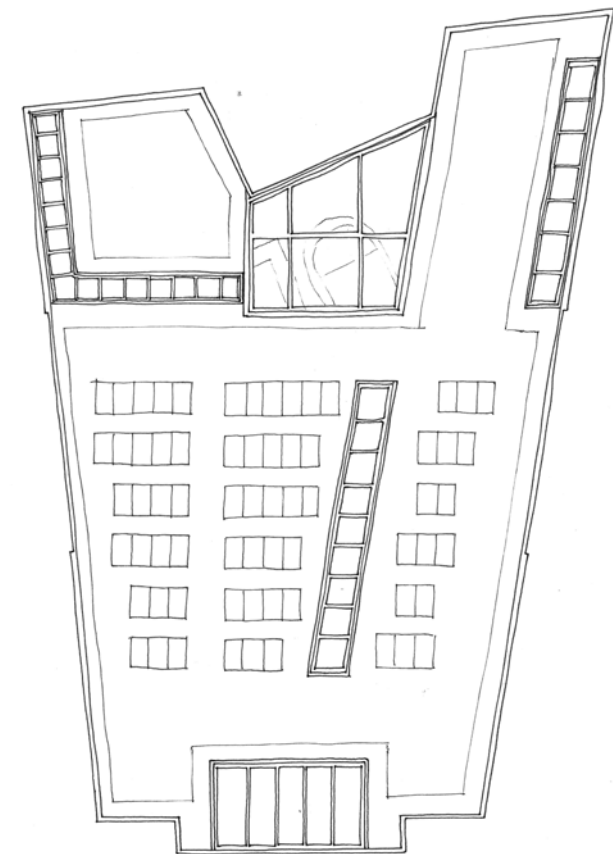
birdseye axonometric of
auditorium
scale 1:150 (original 1:50)



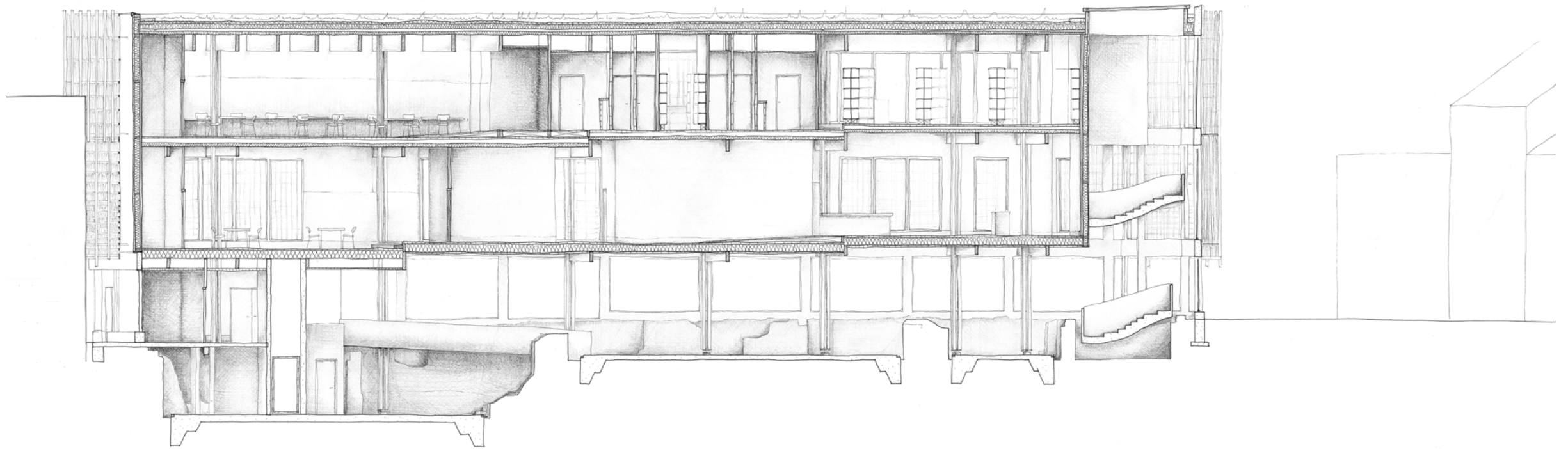
axonometric in urban situation
scale 1:600 (original 1:300)



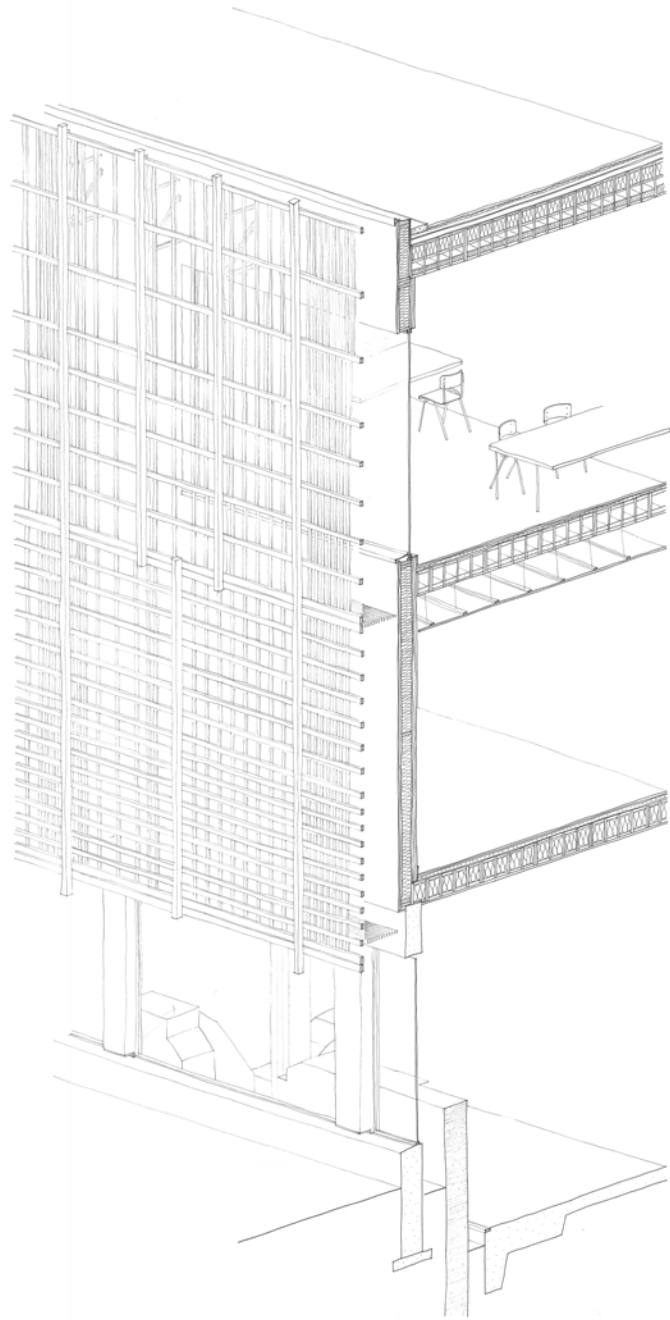
technical detail, roof
scale 1:10 (original 1:5)



roof plan
scale 1:500 (original 1:200)



section
scale 1:200 (original 1:50)



technical section
scale 1:100 (original 1:20)

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