

Research Plan

[Palace]

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National and University Library

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Introduction

This Research Plan Book serves as a comprehensive summary and catalogue of the drawings and collaborative work conducted from week 1.1 to 1.9. It refuses to be a fragmented narrative of the work but rather it aims to offer a cohesive reflection on Asplund's oeuvre and delves into one of the eight public library references.

During the initial weeks of the Research Seminar we explored the world from which Stockholm City Library emerged by taking a deep dive into the architectural world of Erik Gunnar Asplund. To grasp Asplund's brilliance, we delved into Asplund's work across various phases of his career, seeking to unravel the techniques, compositional and material concerns, and the design principles that defined his architectural evolution.

Our group was tasked with examining the Skandia Cinema, a creation of Asplund's from 1922-1923. Our study of the Skandia Cinema wasn't just about the structure. We placed it within the broader Scandinavian architectural context and even drew comparisons with designs outside the region. We collected a set of drawings and images, highlighting the cinema's unique features. Beyond studying the building itself, we positioned the project within the larger architectural and societal landscape of Sweden and beyond, further exploring its ties to projects from different historical periods. After examining the building through four primary architectural themes (spatiality, ornament, composition, and landscape or urban context), we synthesised our insights into a singular presentation drawing that captured the project's essence.

In the subsequent phase, we were tasked to investigate eight iconic modern libraries in depth to gain a broader perspective on the evolution and possibilities of the modern public library. Our group was assigned to study the Ljubljana National and University Library, designed in 1931 by Joze Plecnik. Through our research, documented in a series of line drawings, we delved into the library's design philosophy. Taking into account its location, how its architectural elements convey the library's purpose, and how they relate with visitors, we further took into consideration the choice of materials and the inclusion of decorative elements within Plecnik's design.

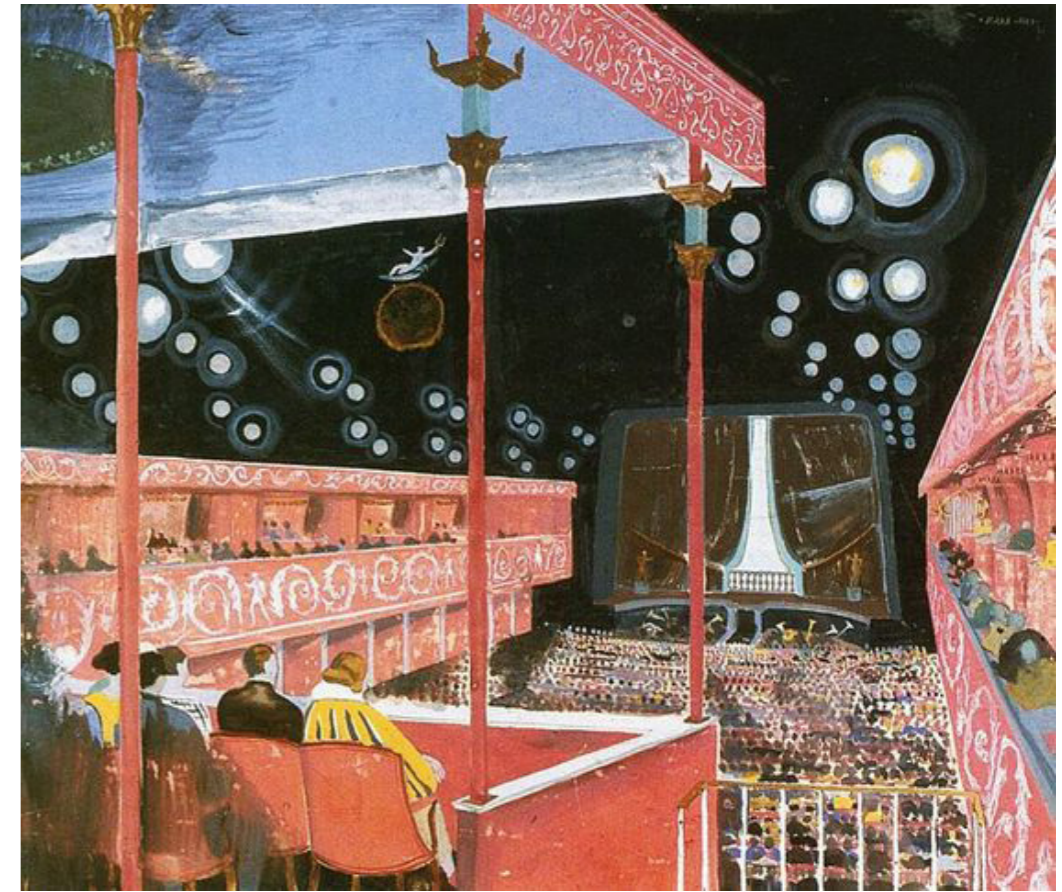


The introductory task is a collective analysis of Gunnar Asplund's work and thinking through the study of a selection of eight of his buildings, in the following case: Skandia Cinema, built in Stockholm between 1922 and 1923.

In the early twentieth century, cinemas as buildings were to a certain degree of undefined type. One could say that American-English translation for cinema movie theater could perhaps more precisely describe such buildings at a time. One of the investors, Röda Kvarn, imagined Skandia Cinema to follow the contemporary fashion of cinema design as such Atmospheric Theatres he visited during his several trips to the USA (Wrede & Asplund, 1980). Strive to provide the audience with a feeling of sitting outdoors in an amphitheatre, may be a result of dominance at that time in Sweden neoclassicism. Many architects would refer to ancient architecture, as in the case of Ivar Tengbom, who designed the Stockholm Concert Hall which largely influenced Asplund's approach to the cinema. The Concert Hall has an arched ceiling that Tengbom himself called "a glowing southern sky". It is a reminiscence of the Greek theatre at Segesta that he once visited (Woollen, 2019).

What is more, the ideals of National Romanticism were sustained in monumental architectural projects that related more closely to the landscape than with an urban order (Woollen, 2019). The movement explored the human body within nature as well as the relationship of typical Swedish buildings to landscapes. Such a feeling was desired by Asplund who through precedent studies and based on his own experiences sought new forms of monumentality, simultaneously retaining particular Swedish qualities (Woollen, 2019). In February 1914, he visited a carnival in Taormina, which elements he translated into sketches for Skandia (Cornell, 1985). Thus, the open sky of Taormina became the innermost of the cinema, an inside outside festive hall with celestial, vaulted ceiling of the main hall and the stars that turned into hanging above the audience lanterns.

Prior to the experience of the festive hall, the audience would undergo a series of transitions, which gradually introduced the yet-to-be-discovered, fantasy world. From the seriousness of the streets to the reverie, one is invited through the illuminated façade. Ornaments such as sculptures of Greek Gods or statues of Adam and Eve on the sides of the stage and a handrail in the shape of a biblical snake referred back to the Garden of Eden and paradise as well as grounded human pleasures. On the contrary, the inner courtyard portraying the sky would represent higher, godly-like power. Asplund was particularly interested in unleashing an individual's self-awareness and peculiarities. Therefore, he restrained from strict narratives and introduced more general themes, giving freedom for his own explorations and conclusions for a true experience of introducing people to the new.



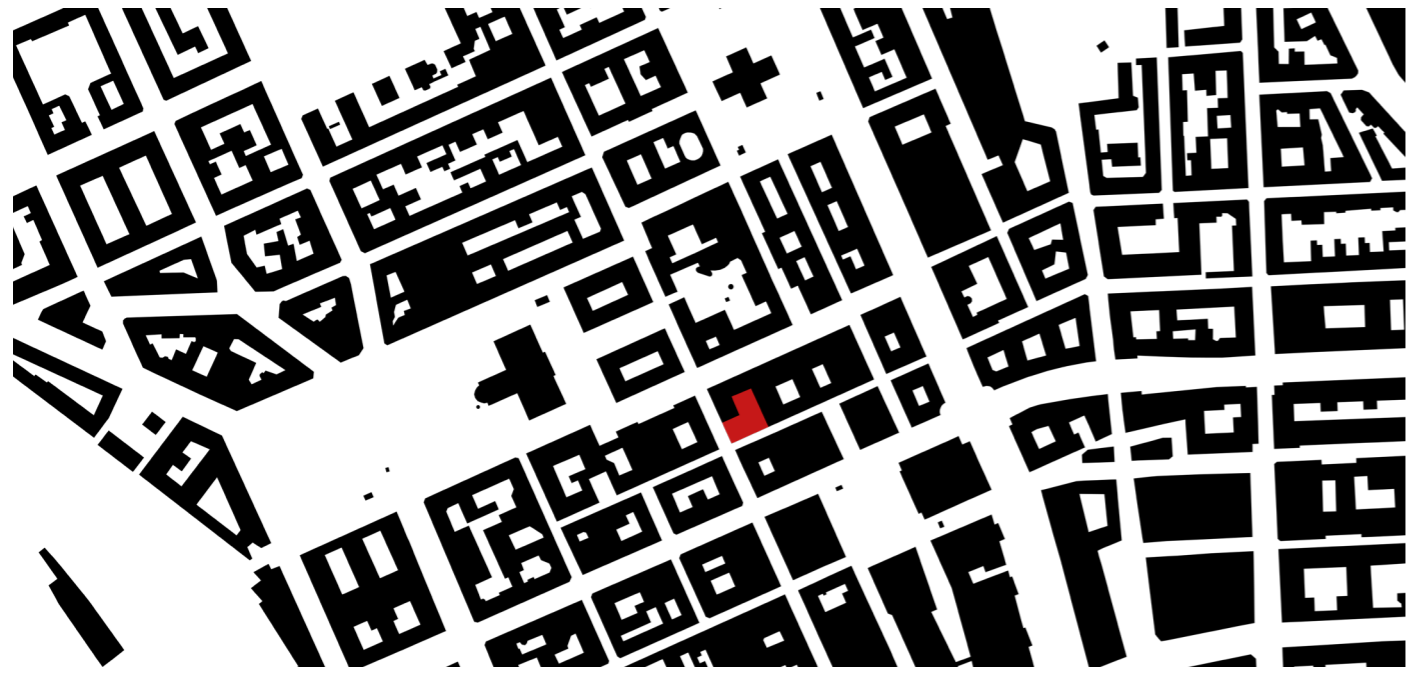
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'It was the last day of the carnival there and in the evening there were coloured lanterns and funny coloured people and a big band on the square beneath the starry sky up there and with the roar of the sea deep down below...'

4 In Asplund's diary from a journey through the Mediterranean countries, concerning a visit to Taormina in February 1914.



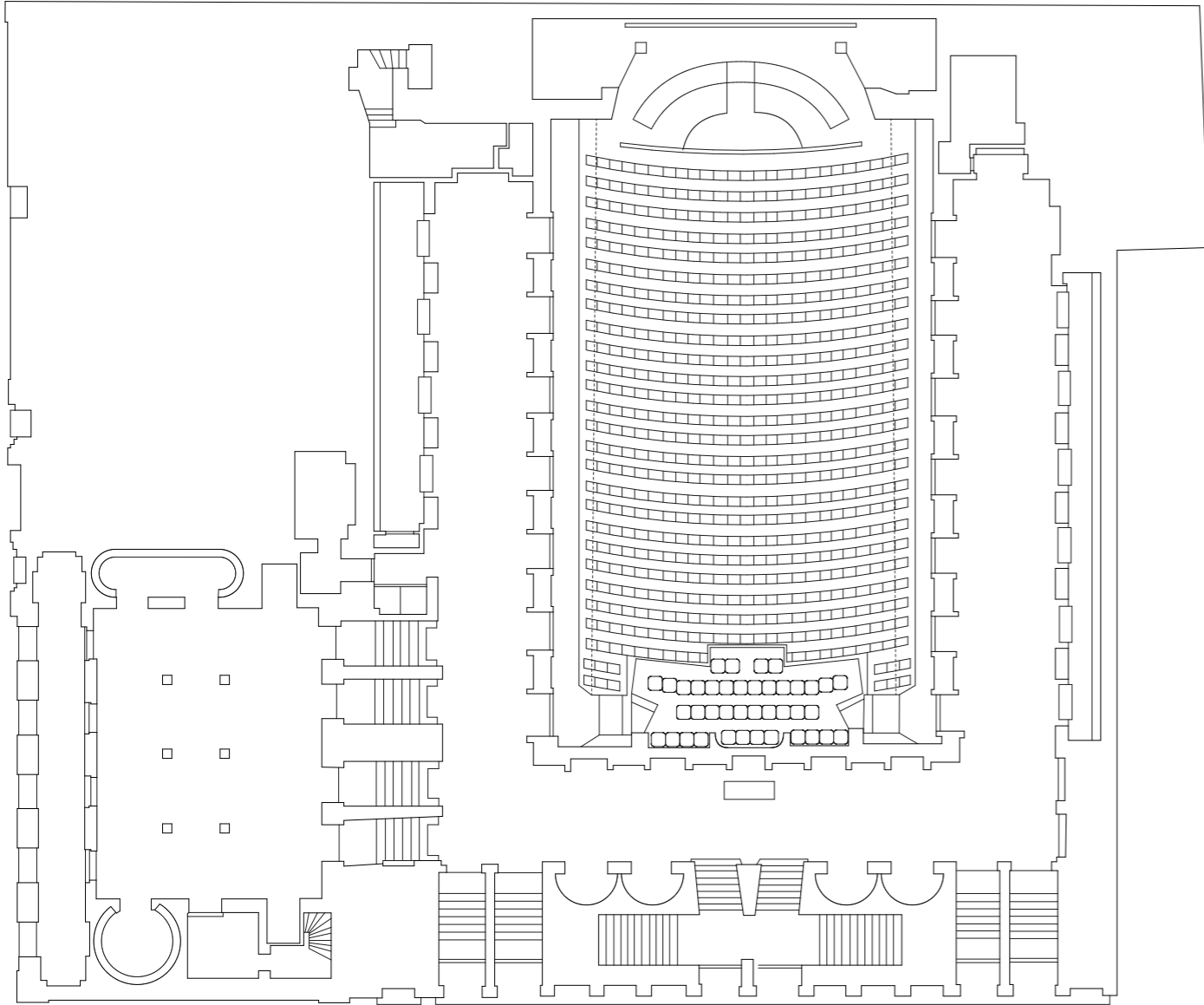
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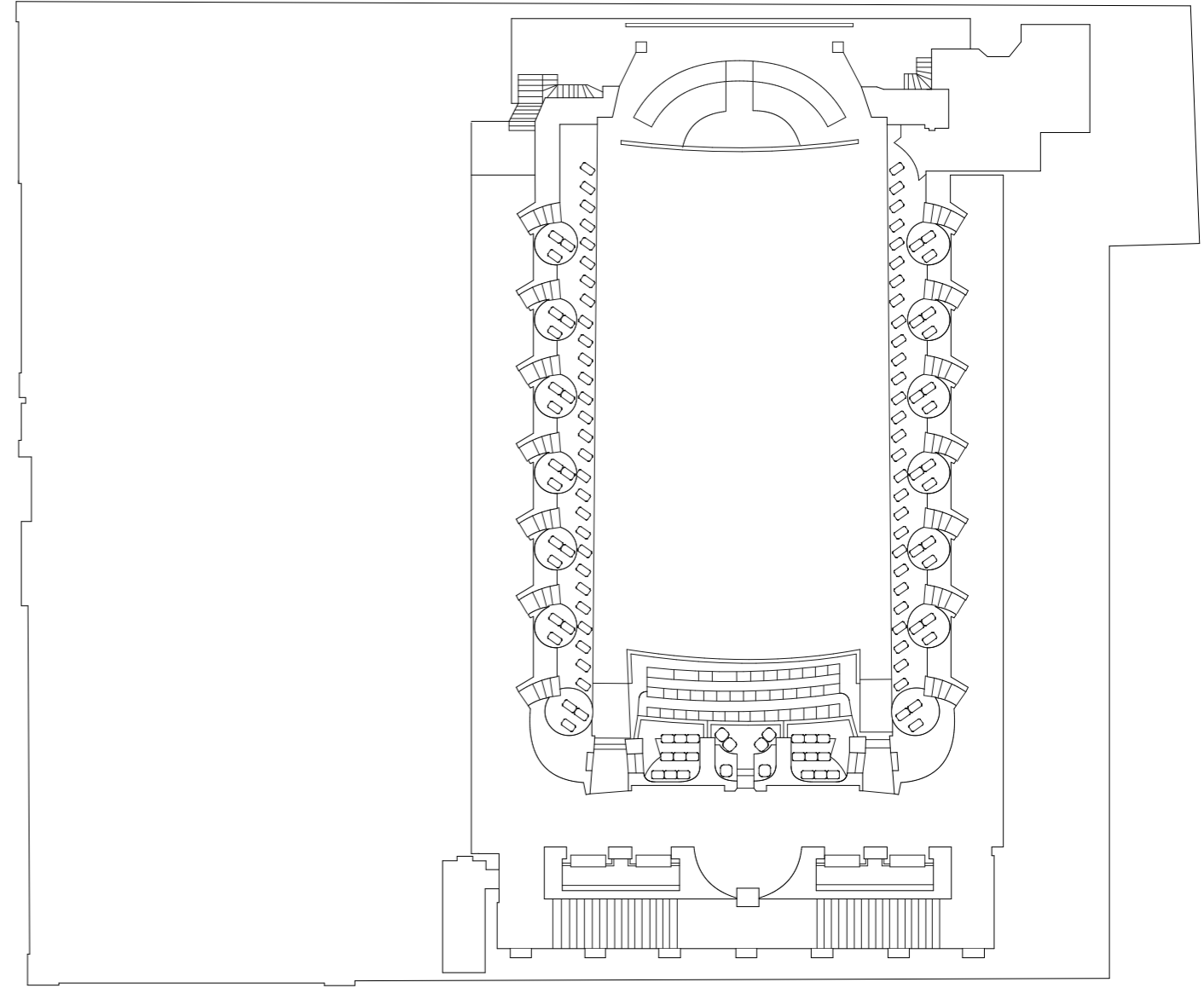
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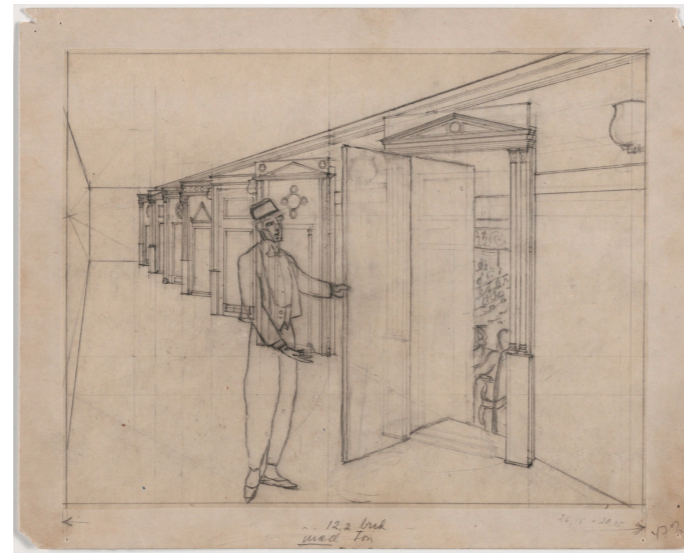
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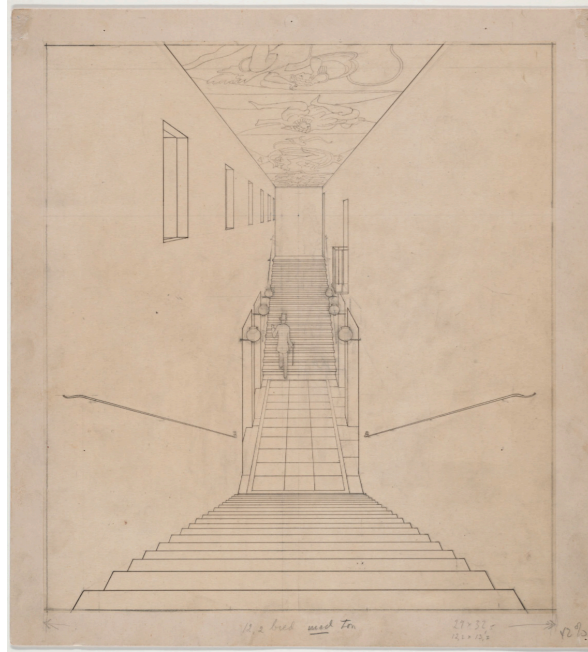
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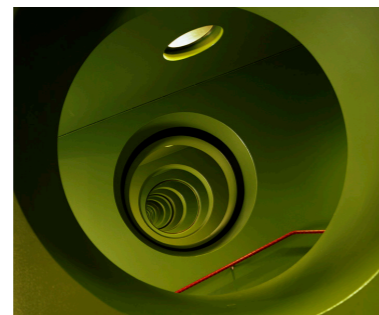
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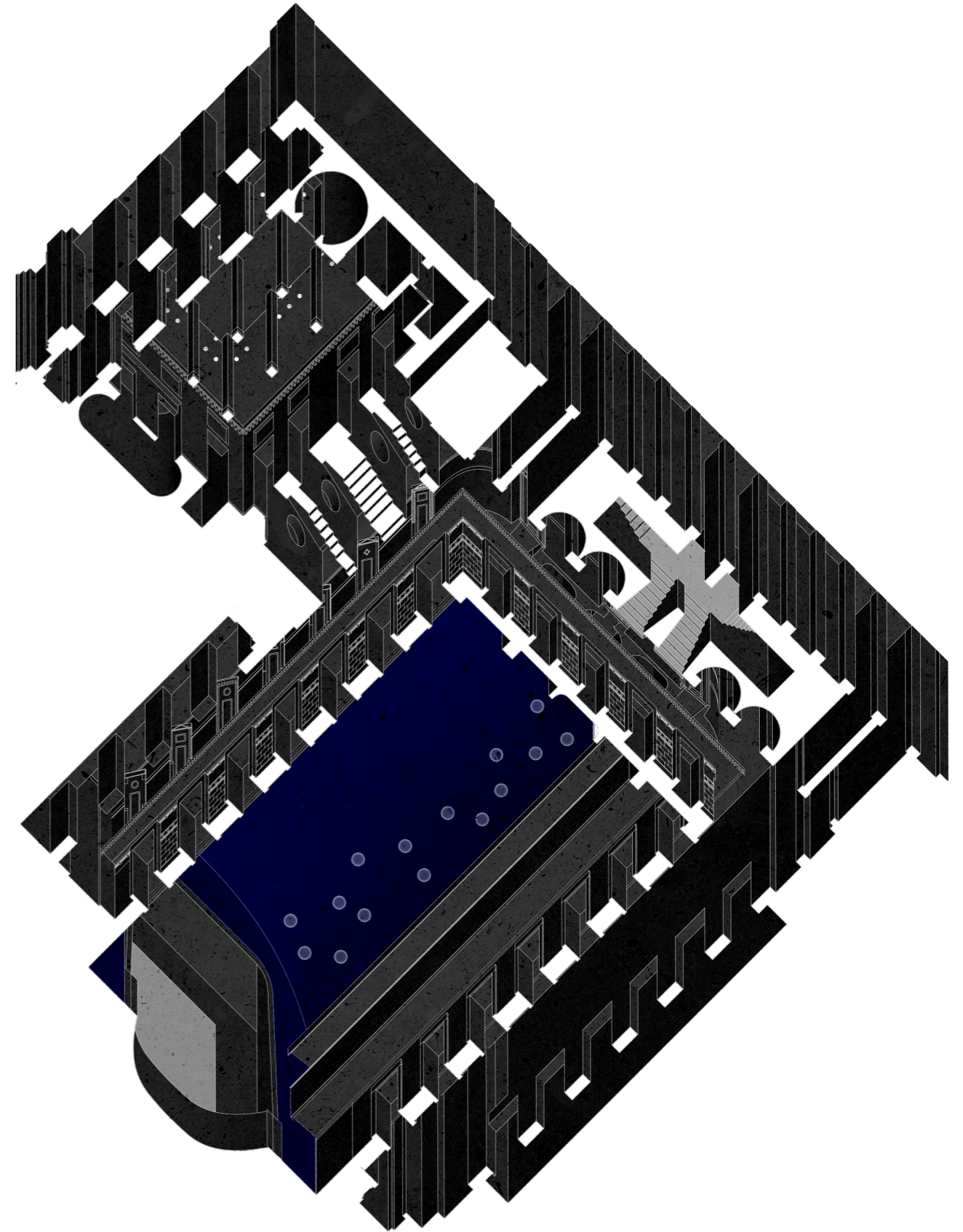
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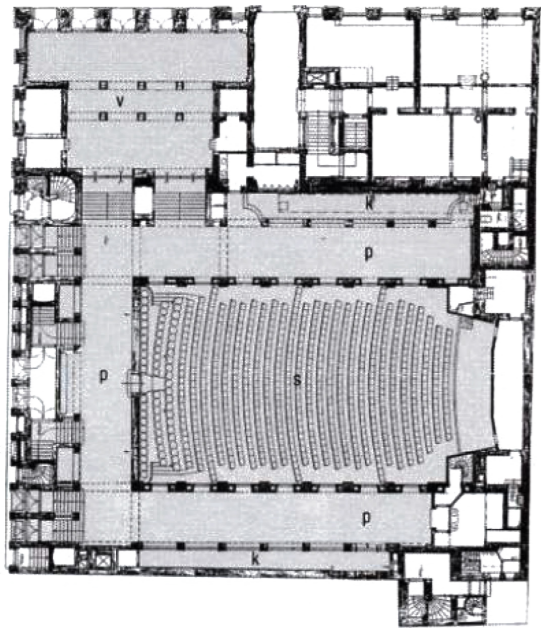
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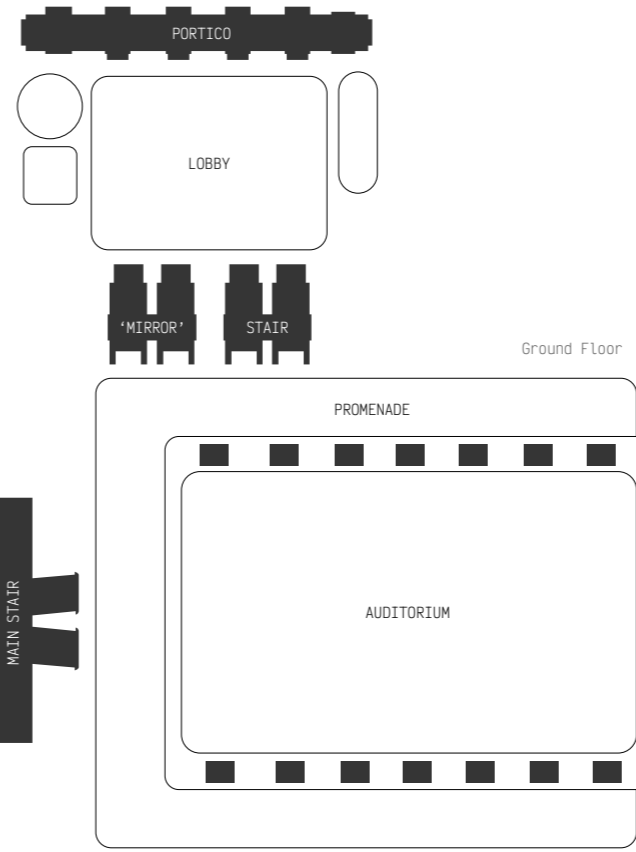
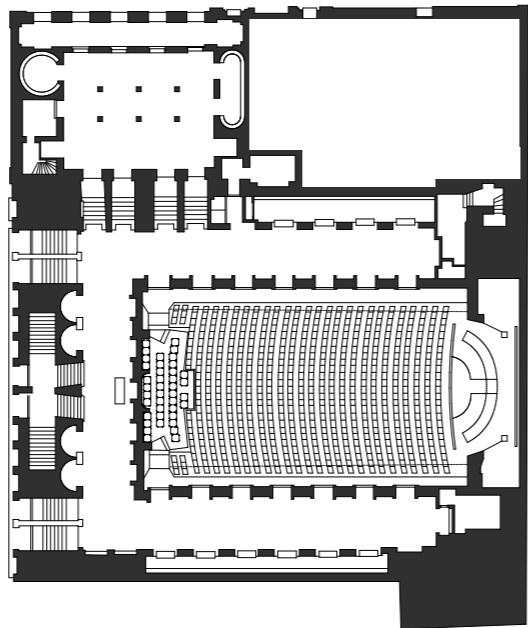
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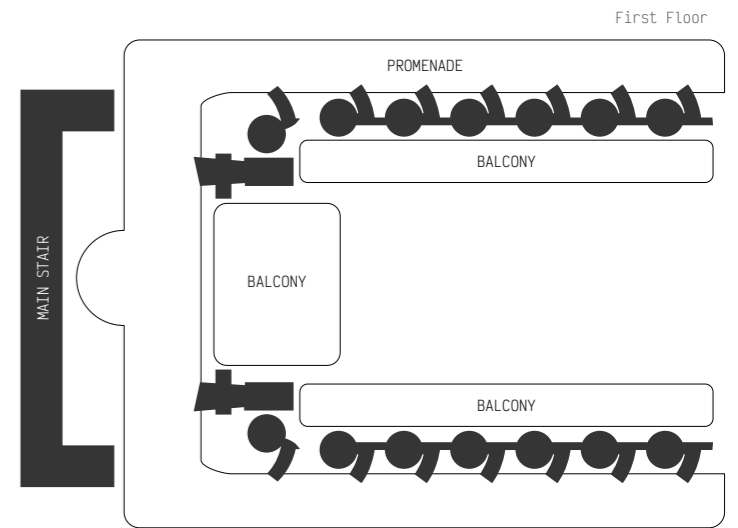
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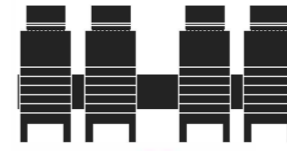


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The portico is intended to convey by architectural means the transition between the serious, beautiful and weathered facade by Scholander and the colourful, somewhat strident modernity of the cinema. Its walls and coffered ceiling, accordingly, are treated in the dark greyish-brown tone of the facade and the asphalt of the outside pavement enters in the guise of flooring.



portico



stair with mirrors



22



main stair



entrance on ground floor

The lower promenade takes the form of an ambulatory round the auditorium. The wall of the auditorium, with lavish reliefs and red velvet door openings, is shimmering white against the deep green darkness of the smooth outer walls and ceilings. This auditorium wall, surmounted by a parachute roof, is intended to give the impression of being the outer facade of an enticing place of amusement.



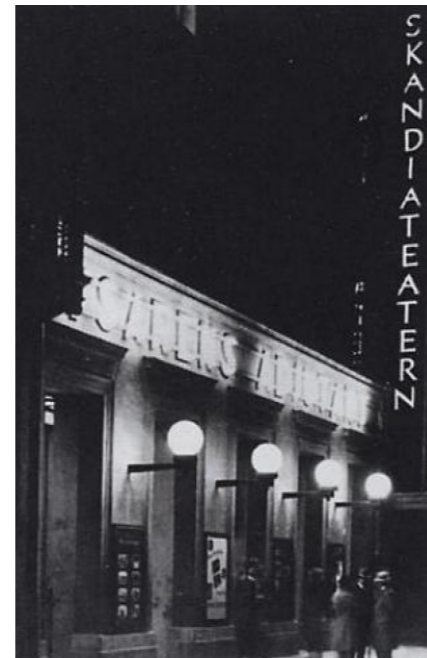
entrance on first floor



entrance to central balcony



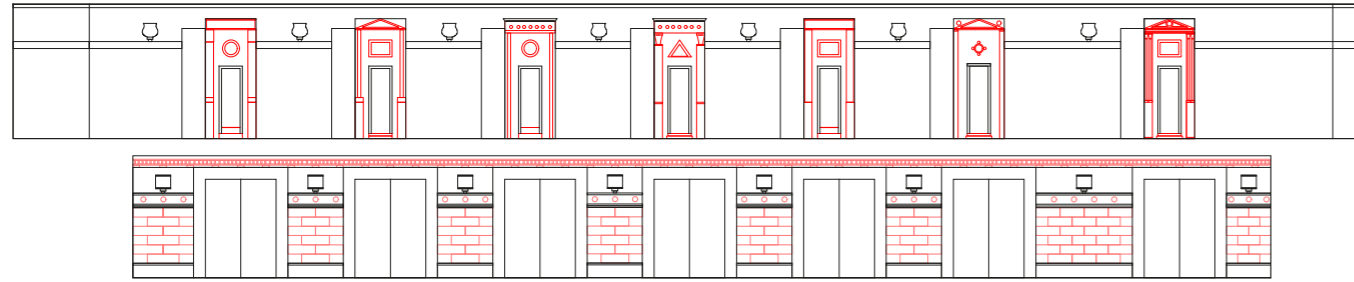
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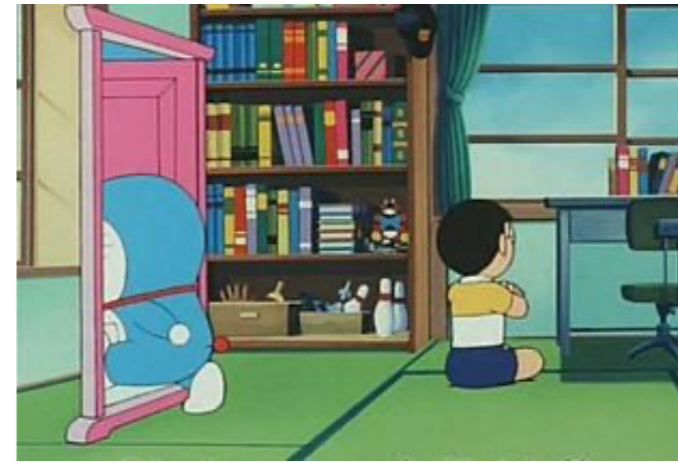
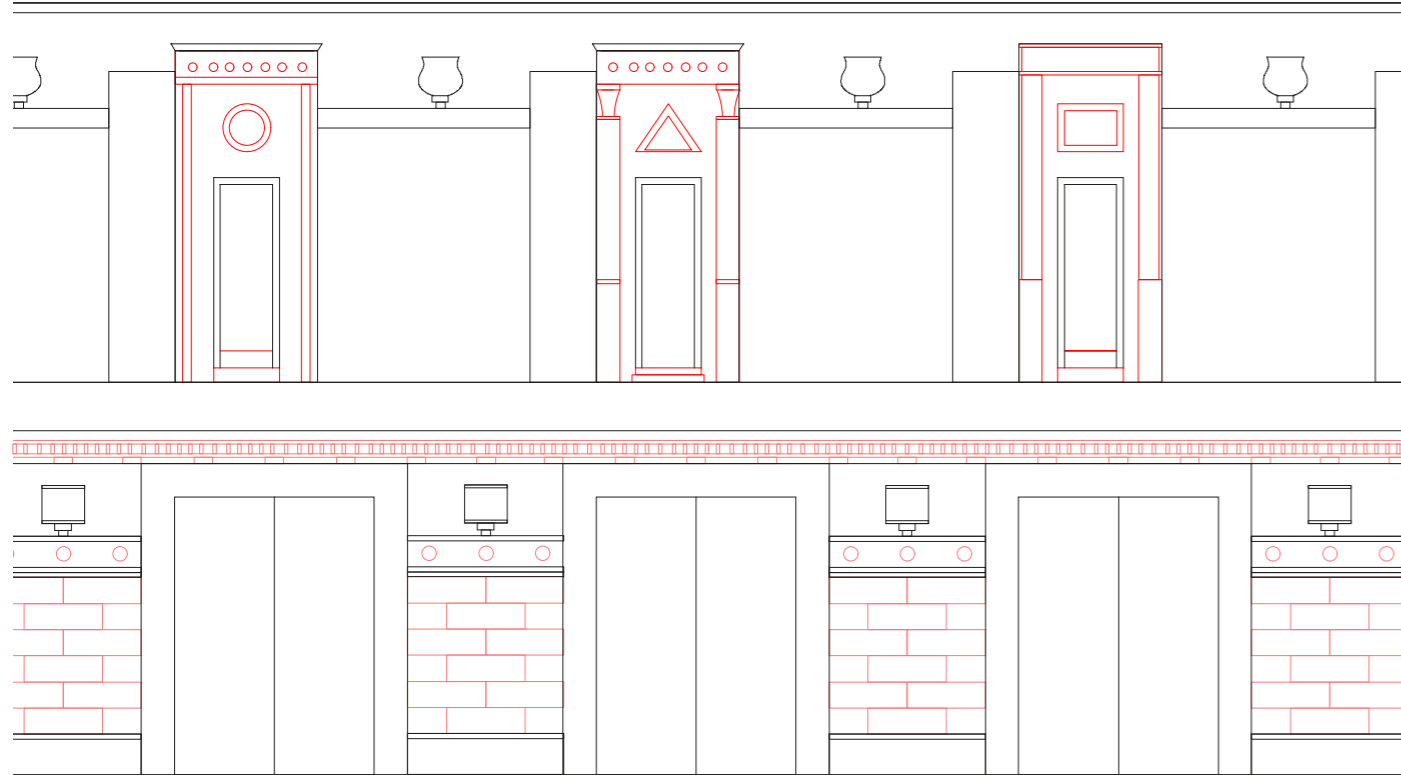
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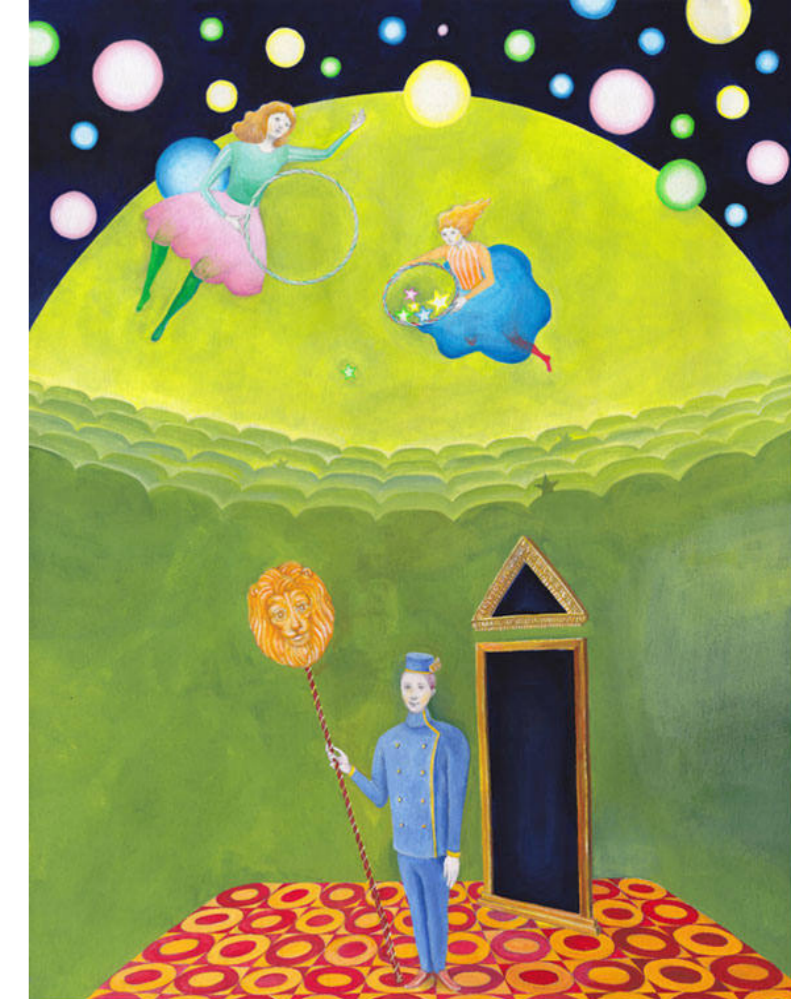
diagram, threshold as a spatial device



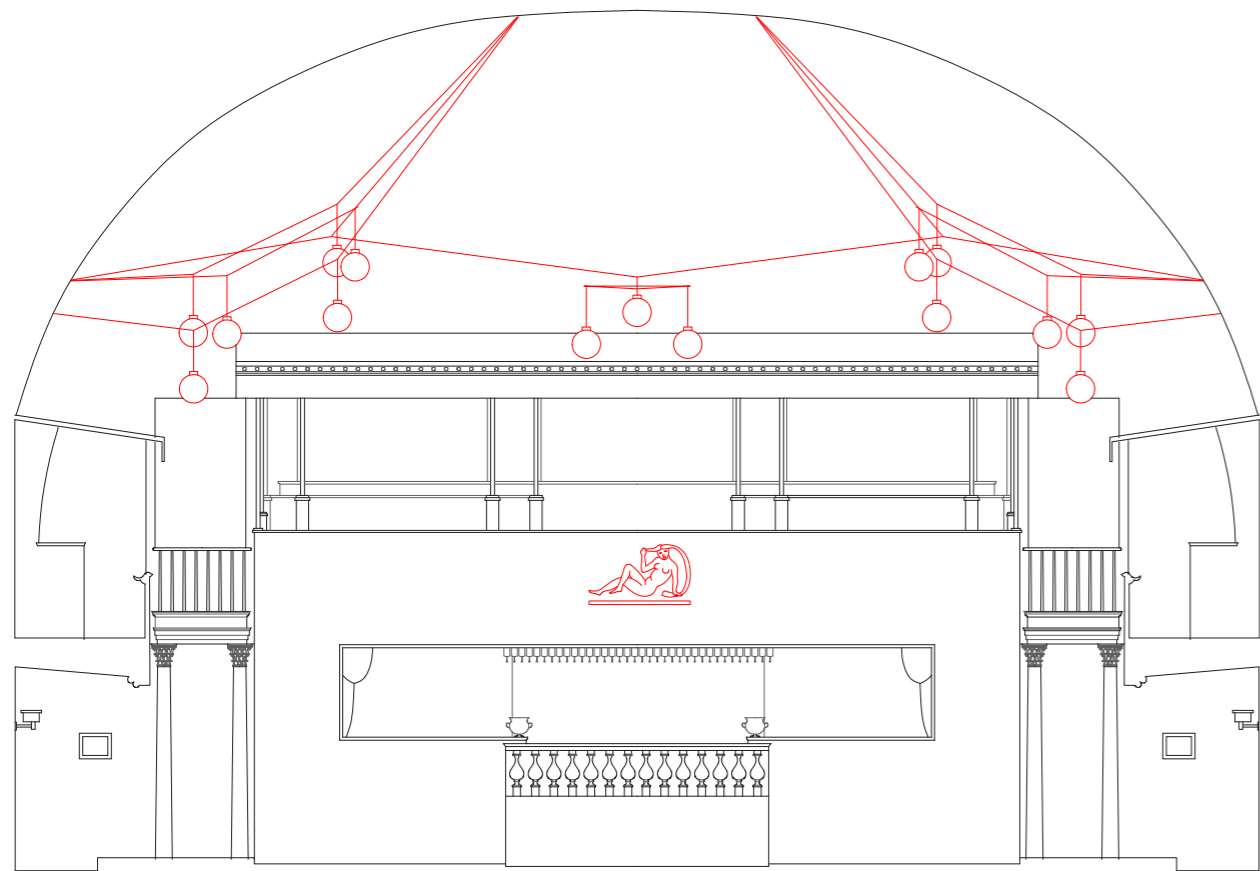
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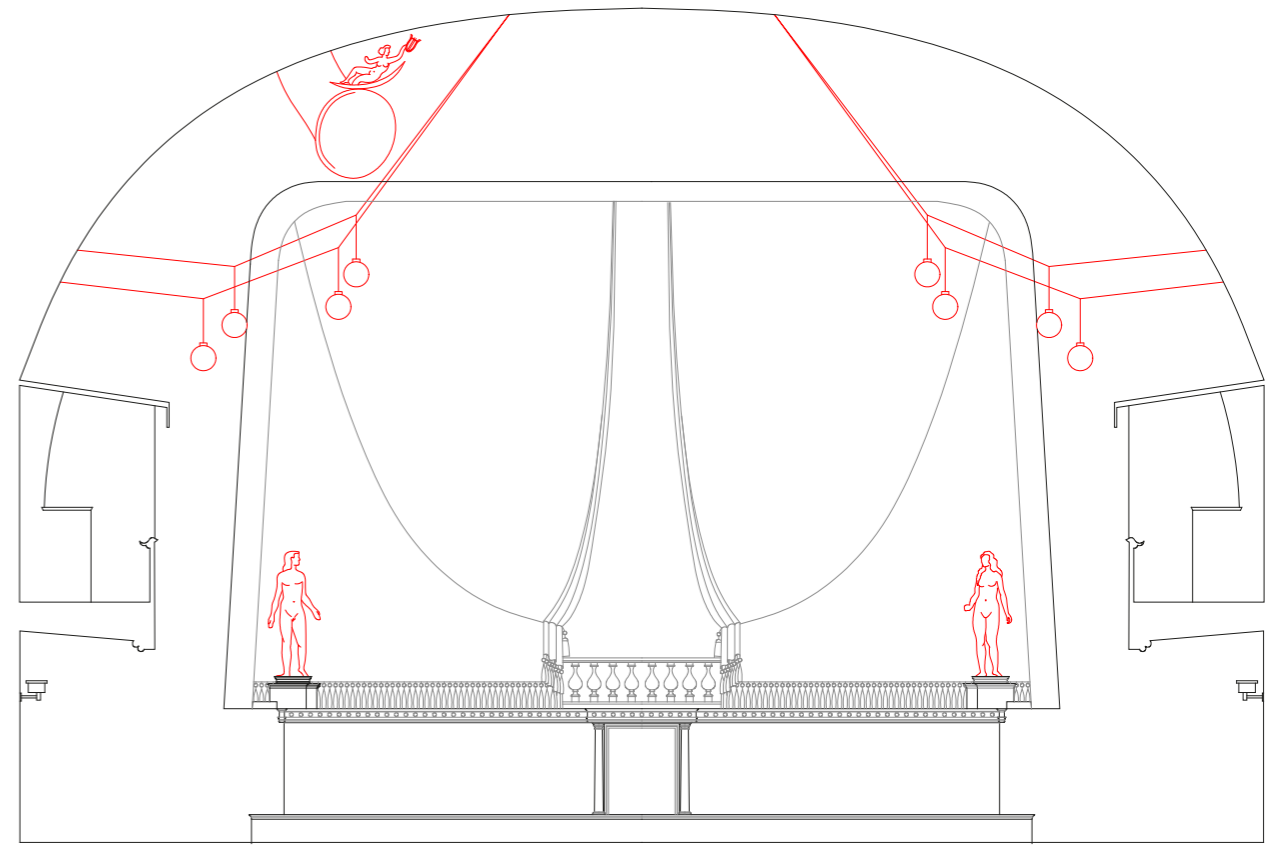
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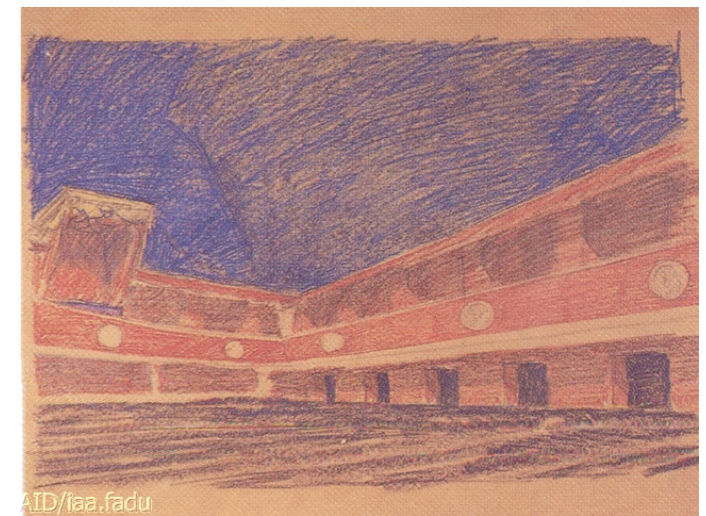


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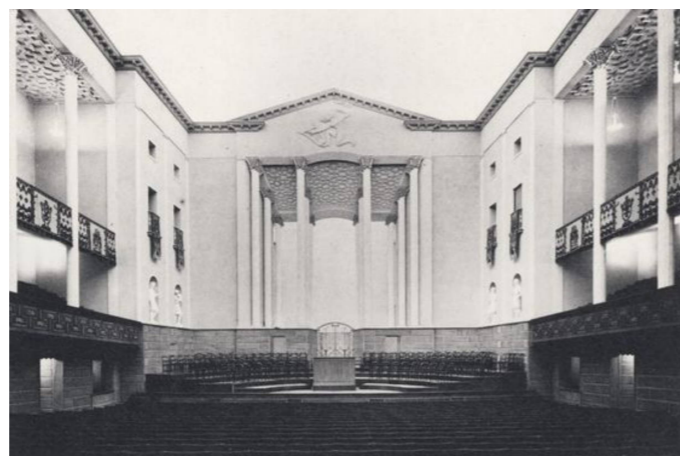


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The great concert hall is midway between indoors and outdoors, but it is no compromise. It is consistently based more on musical mood than on architectural effect, and just for once this may be right. The architecture is light and buoyant, the ceiling hovers freely, an effect which puts one in mind of Gustavian tents on slender tent poles. The bright, inviting space and the far prospect of the orchestra platform draw one's gaze away from the architecture and into a room which is limitless and incorporeal. This room, when filled with music, would be felt to constitute the natural framework for the most unreal of the arts.

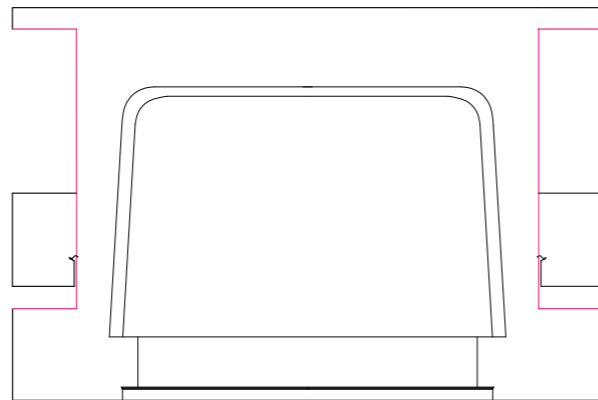
32 Asplund described the sketch, comprising Ivar Tengbom's first drawings for the Stockholm Concert Hall.



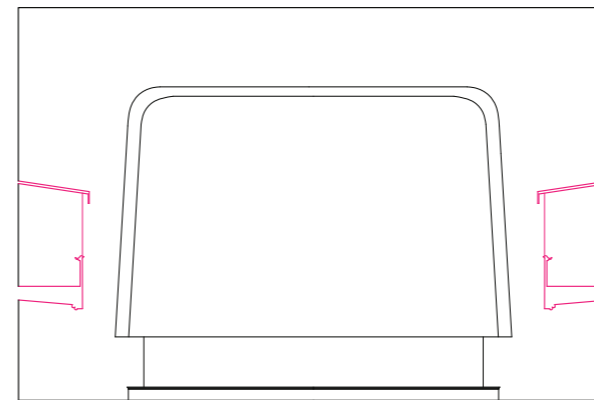
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The auditorium incorporates, paradoxically speaking, a series of “genuine illusions”, as opposed to illusory or illusionist effects. The balcony barriers and canopy pelmets were made as wide as possible to reduce the dimensions of the room, and to the same end.

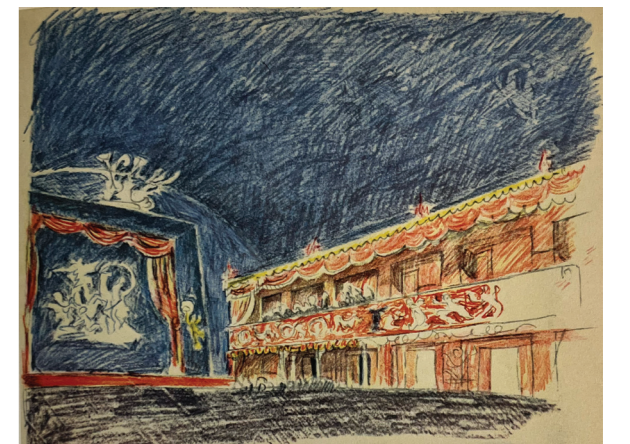
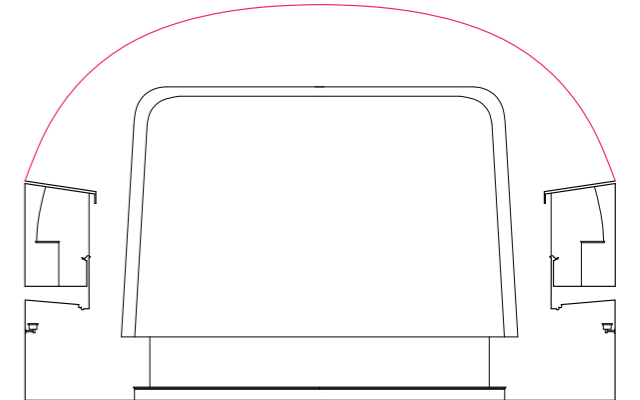
Balcony as Volume

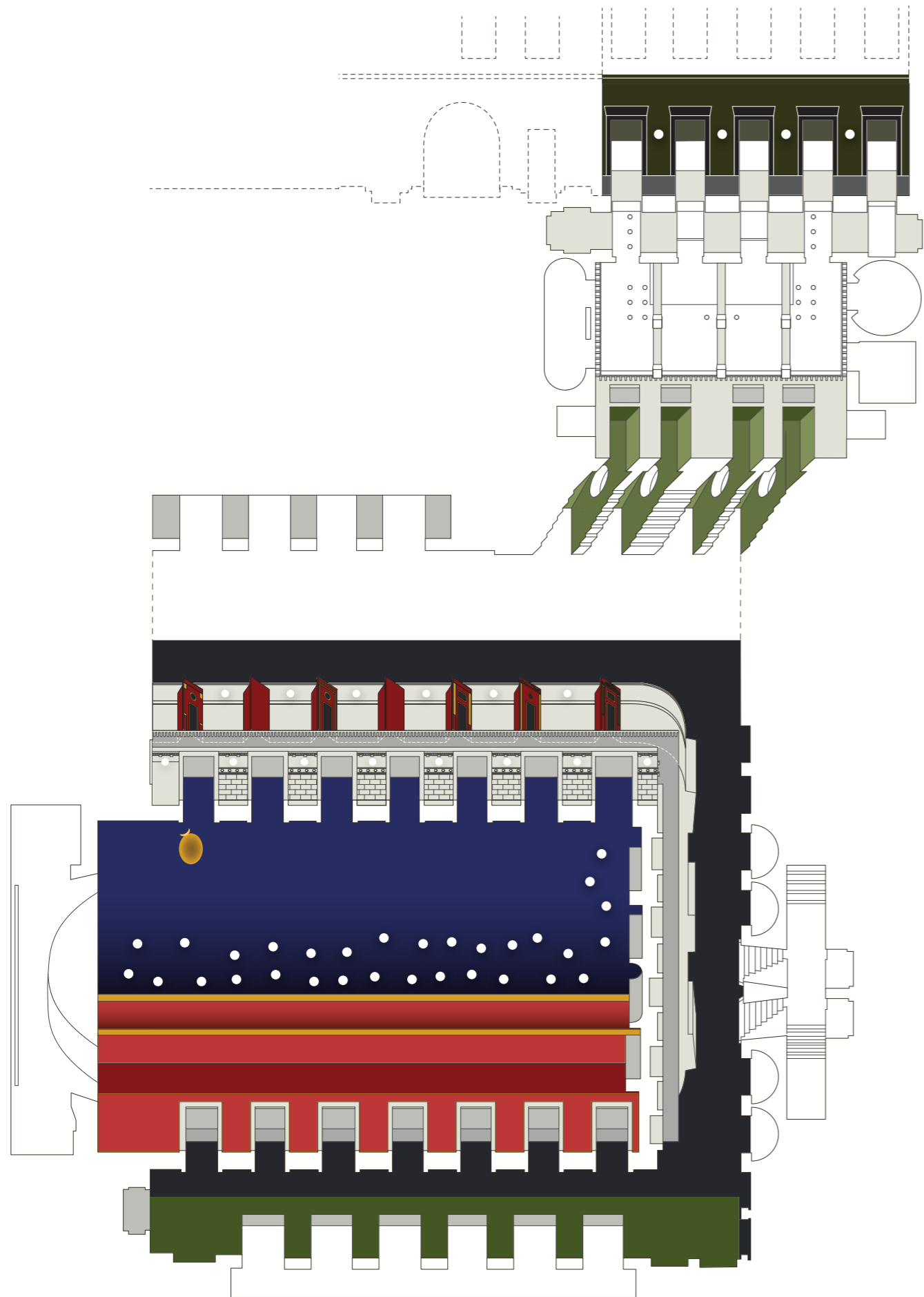


Balcony as Language; Motif of sky and sea



Sky as a Vault







In the studio, a second research was conducted into eight modern libraries. In this case: the National and University Library in Ljubljana, designed by Jože Plečnik in 1931 and finished in 1941.

Plečnik is a Slovenian architect who has had a great influence on his hometown of Ljubljana. The site of the library is the same place where a seventeenth century baroque palace had stood for centuries, destroyed in the earthquake of 1895. It was seen as a very important building to the city, and Plečnik believed something important had to be built in this site. Partly to replace the historical building and partly because of its location at an open urban space, Novi Trg (Cenicacelaya, 1989).

The library is designed to occupy the volume of the former palace as closely as possible (Gooding, 1997). From the street, it presents itself as a solid block. The façade is in sharp contrast with the surrounding buildings. It consists of red brick interrupted by seemingly random blocks of rough stone, partly coming from the ruins of the former palace. This expression presents the building like a fortress: it is a monument to the Slovene language and culture, protecting the valuable things stored within. The harshness of this façade is interrupted by the tall windows of the reading room, on either side of the building. The building is set on a slight slope, which is expressed in the placement of the windows on the lower part of the façade.

Entering the library is a very spatial and symbolic experience. The main entrance is placed centrally on the north façade. It is a large portal coming out onto the street, containing a rather modest door. The door handles are brass horses, carefully designed by Plečnik himself, showing the way arts and crafts values were a part of his architectural vision. The visitor enters into a small lobby space, turns left to the entry office, and continues into a corridor. They will now find themselves at the base of the dark staircase leading to the reading room. There is almost no natural light here, the only light coming from the main entrance behind you and the window above the door to the reading room, beyond the staircase. This feeling is reinforced by the black marble of the walls and floors, and the large columns on the landing. The visitor ascends from the darkness to the light above. This is almost a spiritual experience, leading to the reading room as a place for study, reflection and contemplation (Gooding, 1997).

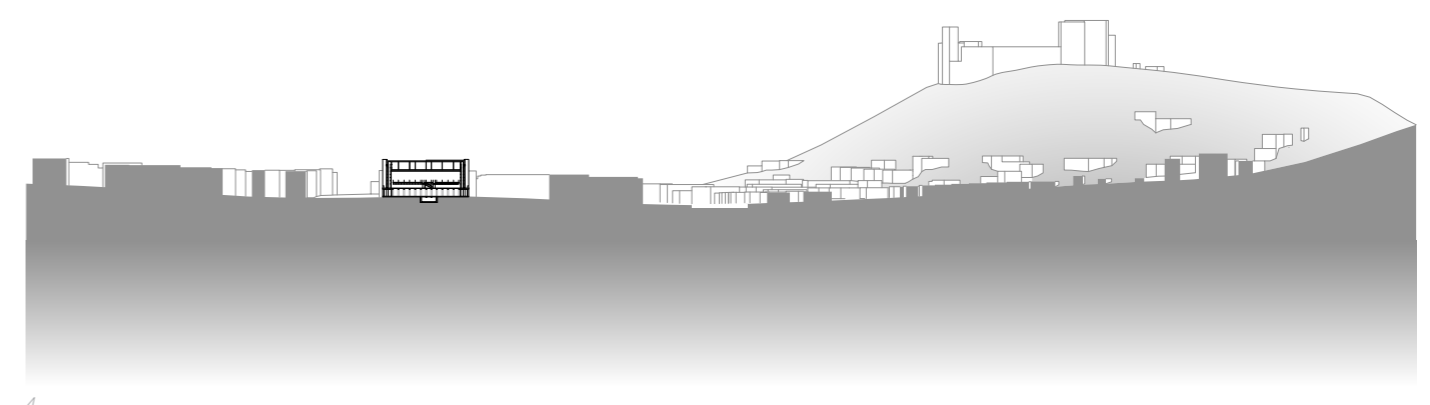
From the dark and gloomy staircase, one enters into the reading room that is the complete opposite. It is a tall and light room without a single column, its axis at a right angle of that of the staircase. The room spans the entire width of the building, with large floor-to-ceiling windows on either side. The slightly frosted windows bring subtly diffused light into the whole room.



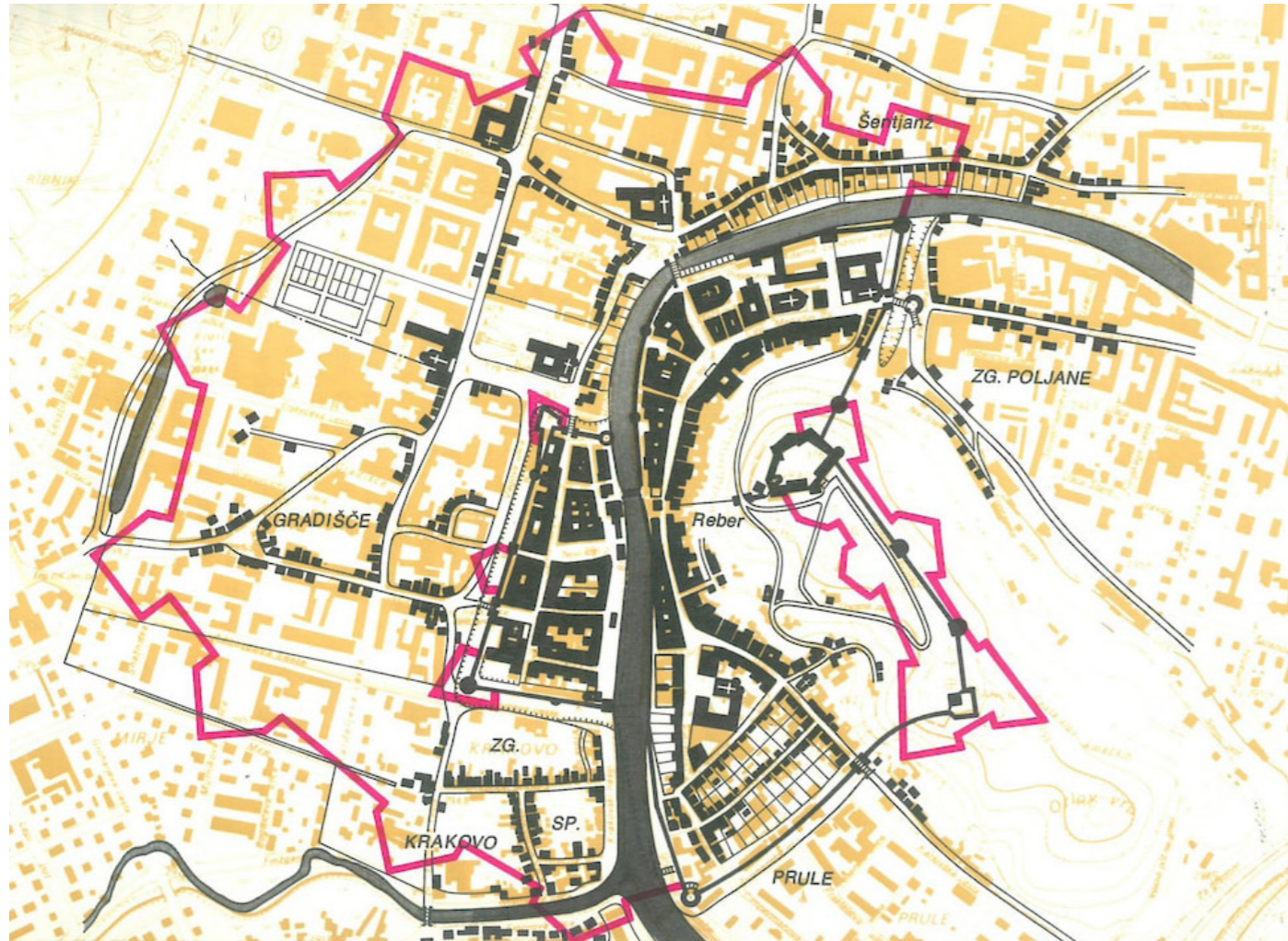
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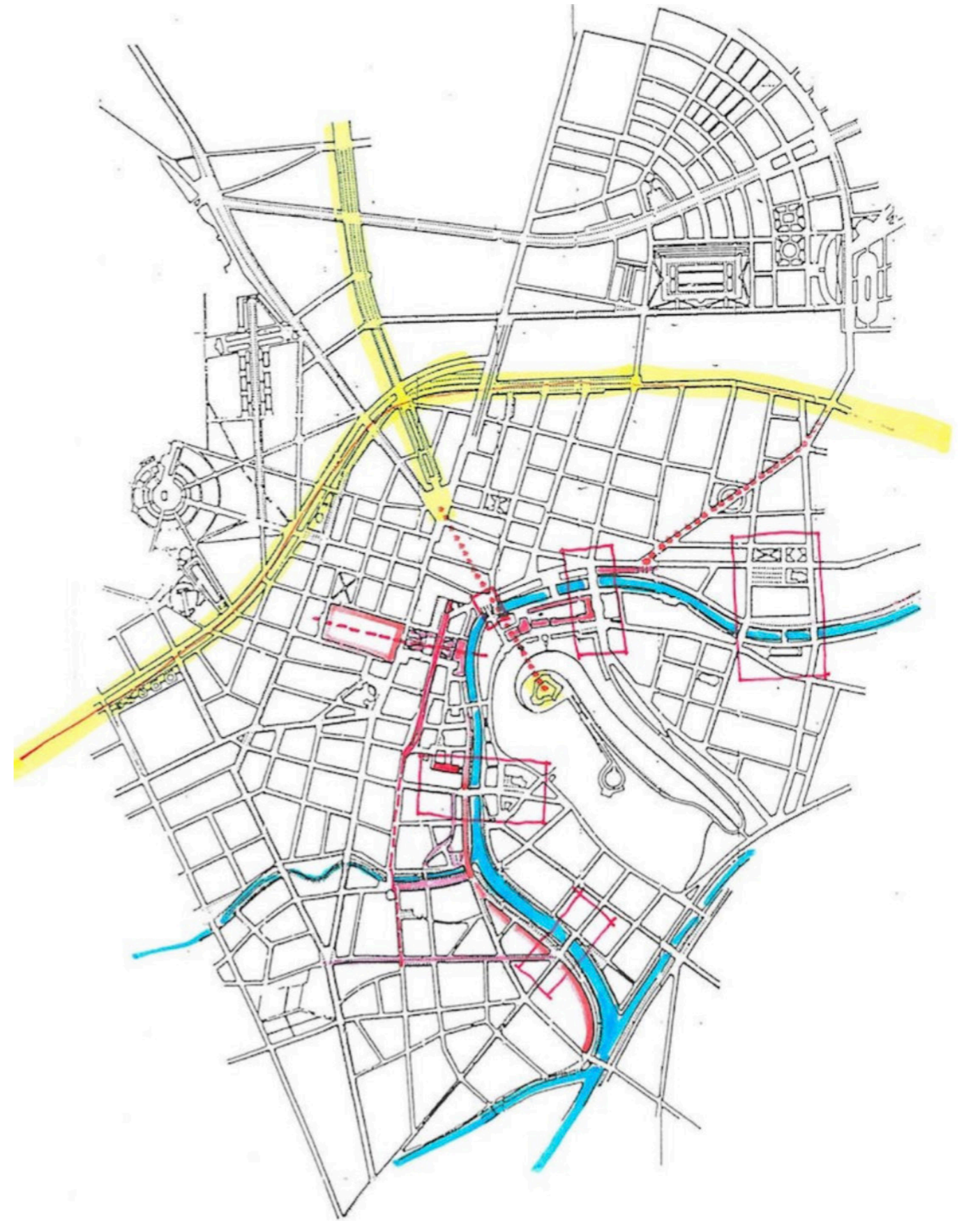
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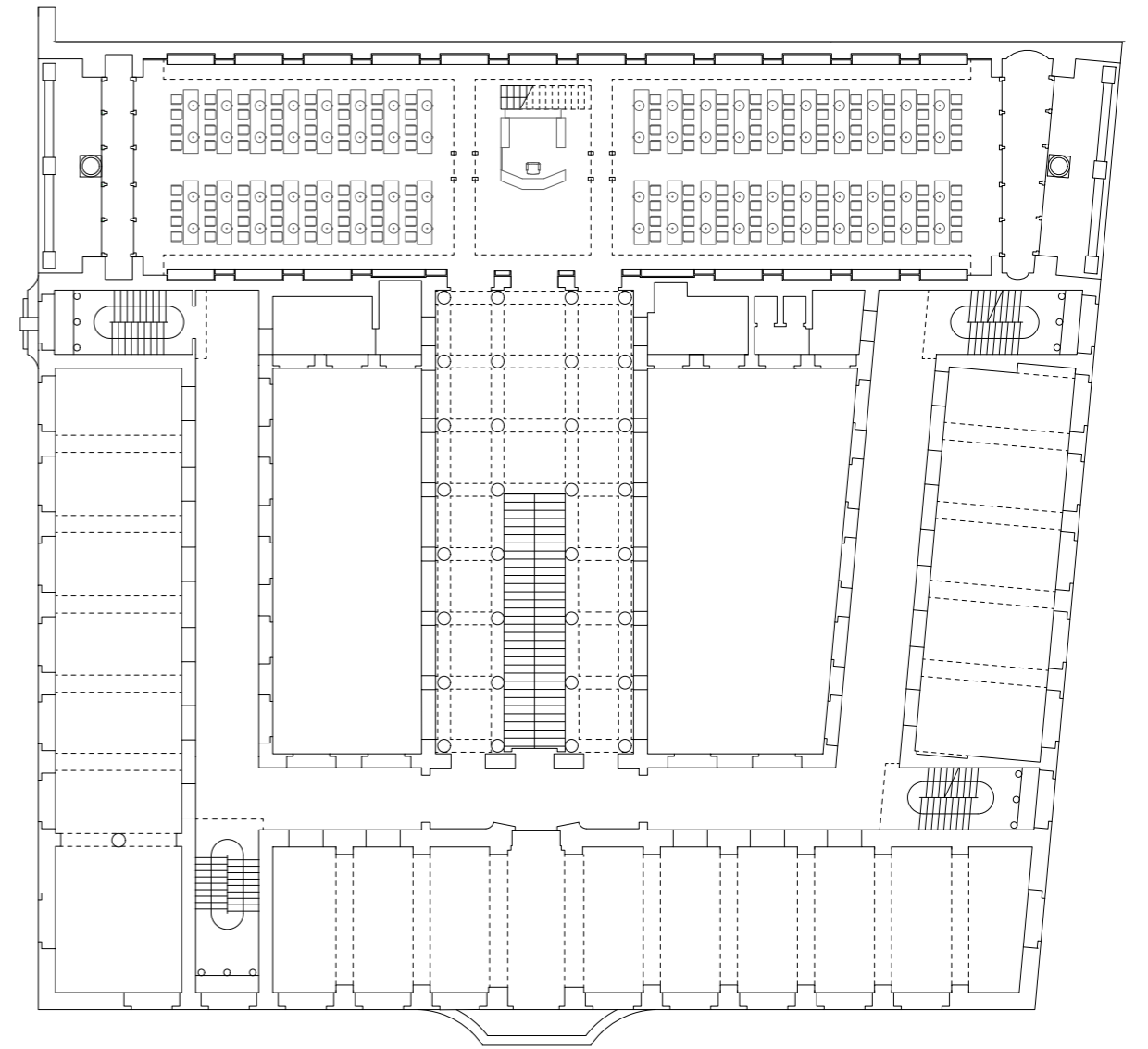
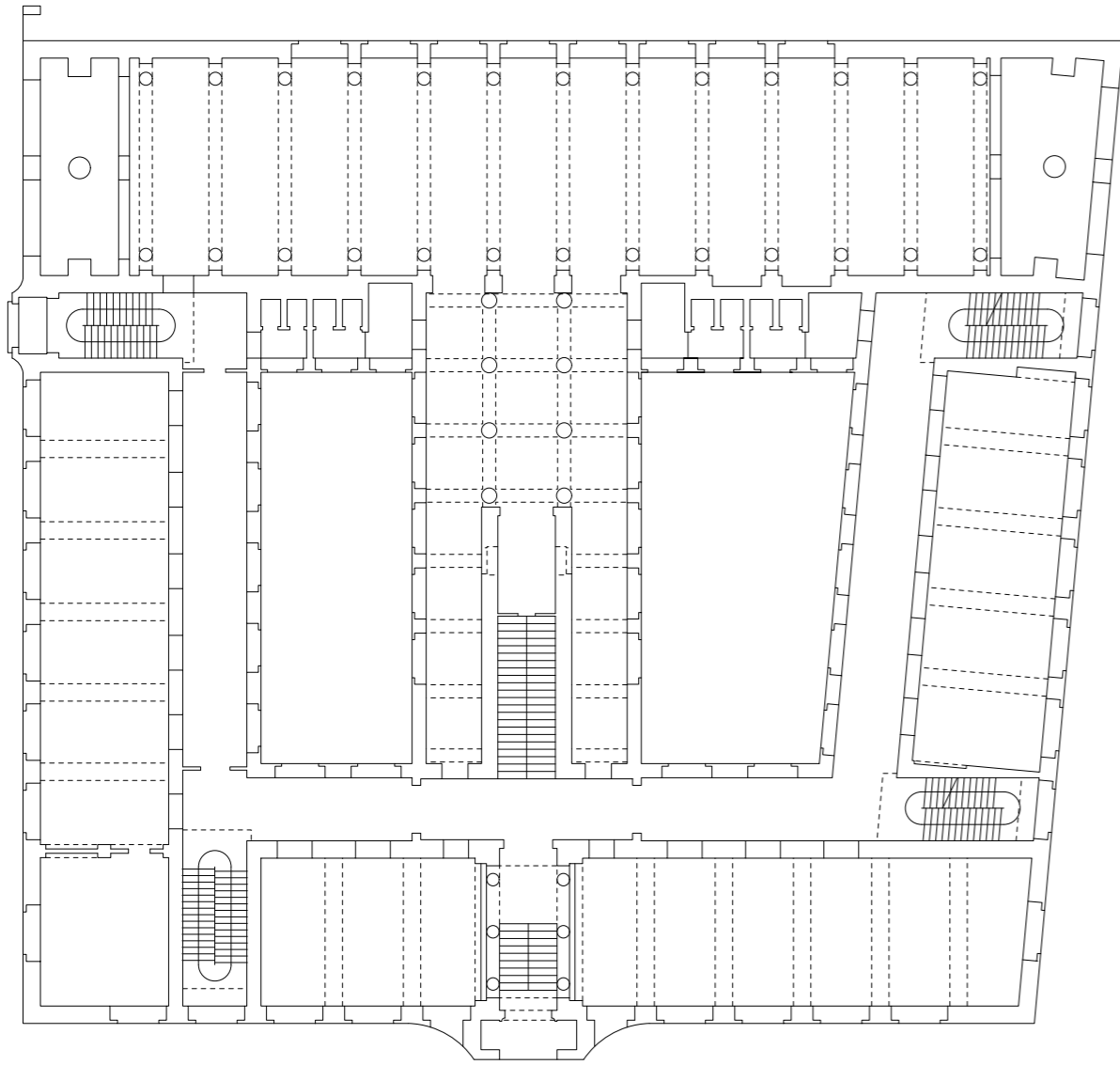


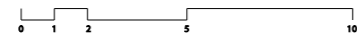
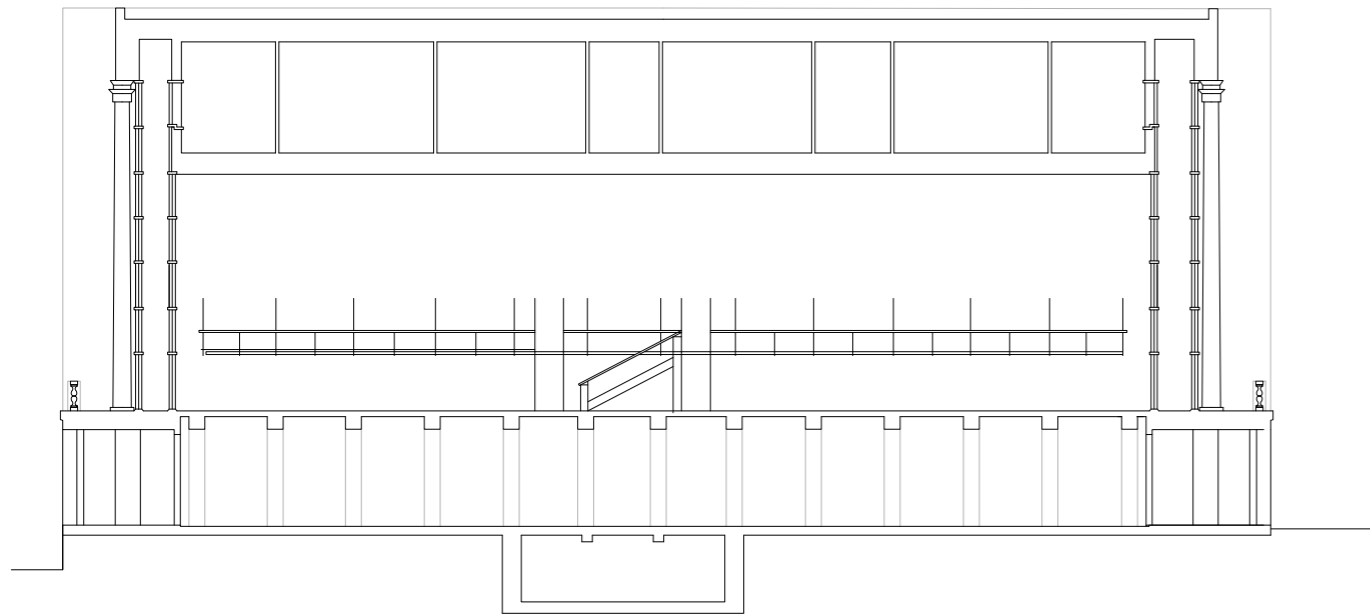
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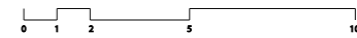
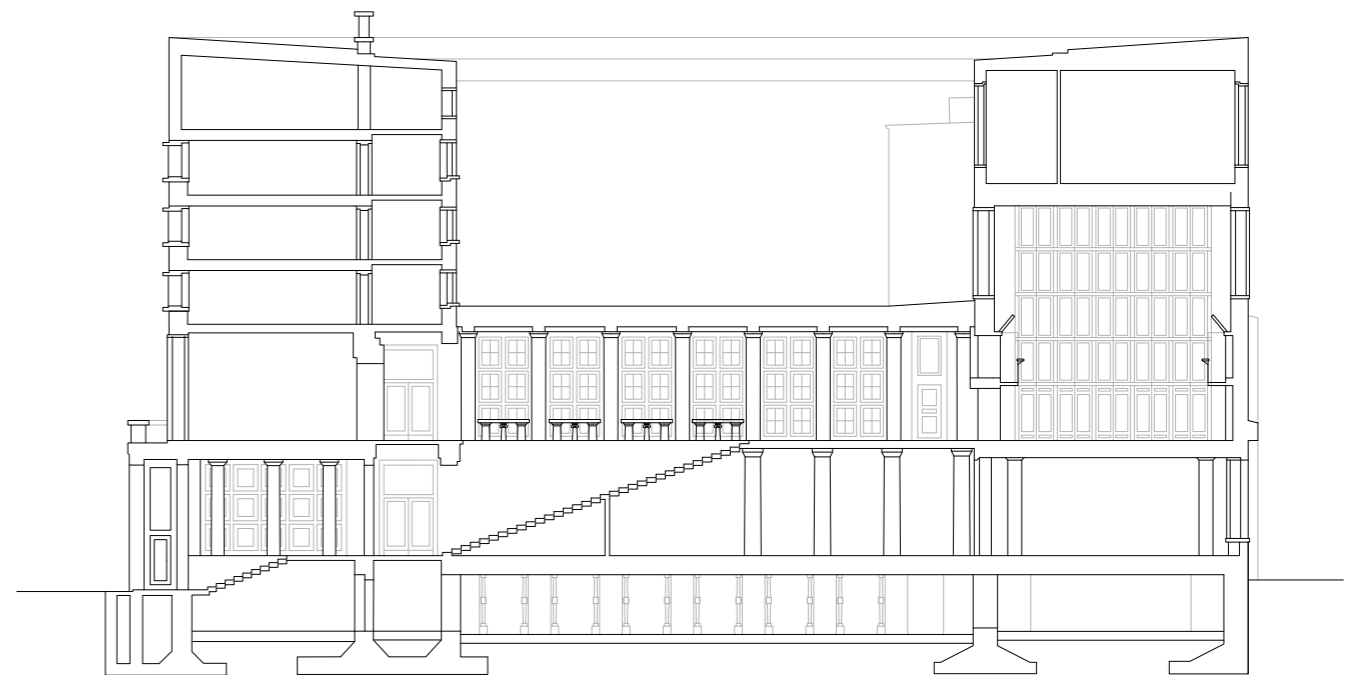
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The library is located on Novi Trg, which is subordinate to a series of public spaces connected by the Ljubljanica River. It is a sophisticated and refined system of connections and elements that emphasise their belonging to a broader urban vision. (Potenza, 2017)





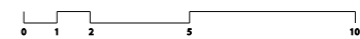
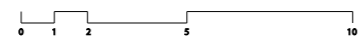
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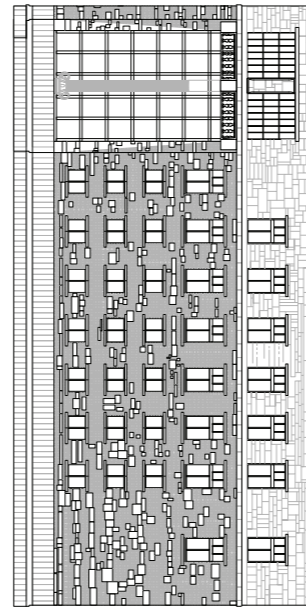
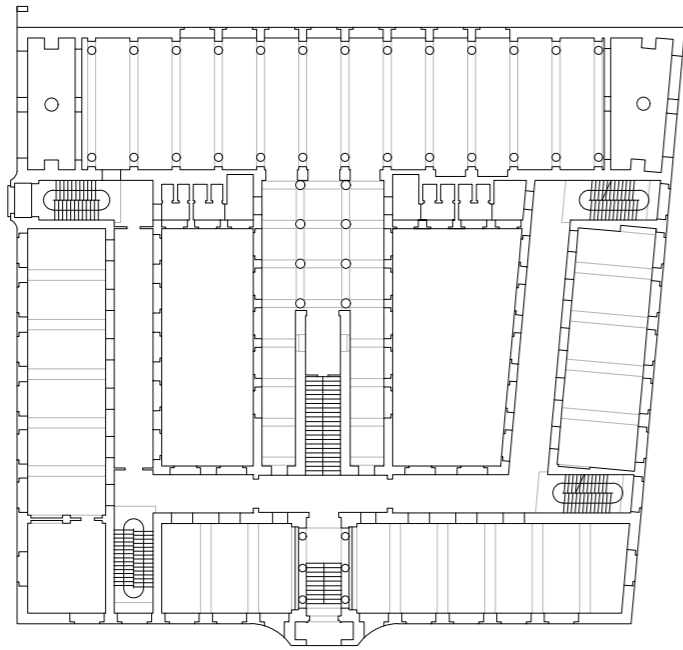
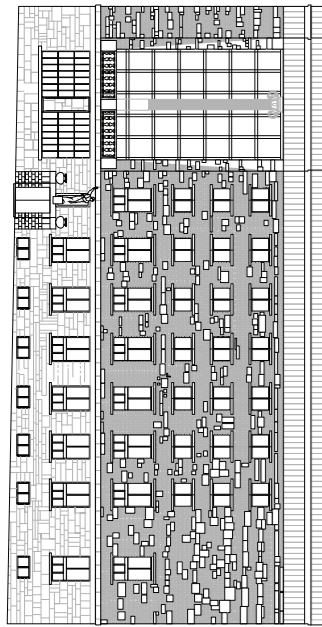
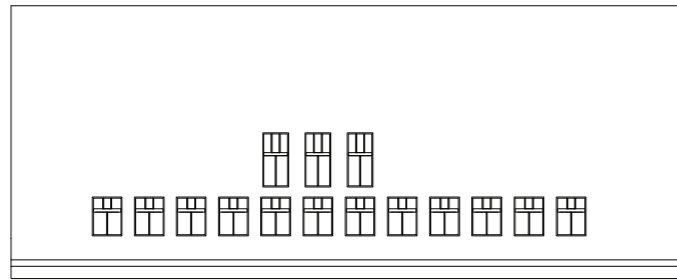


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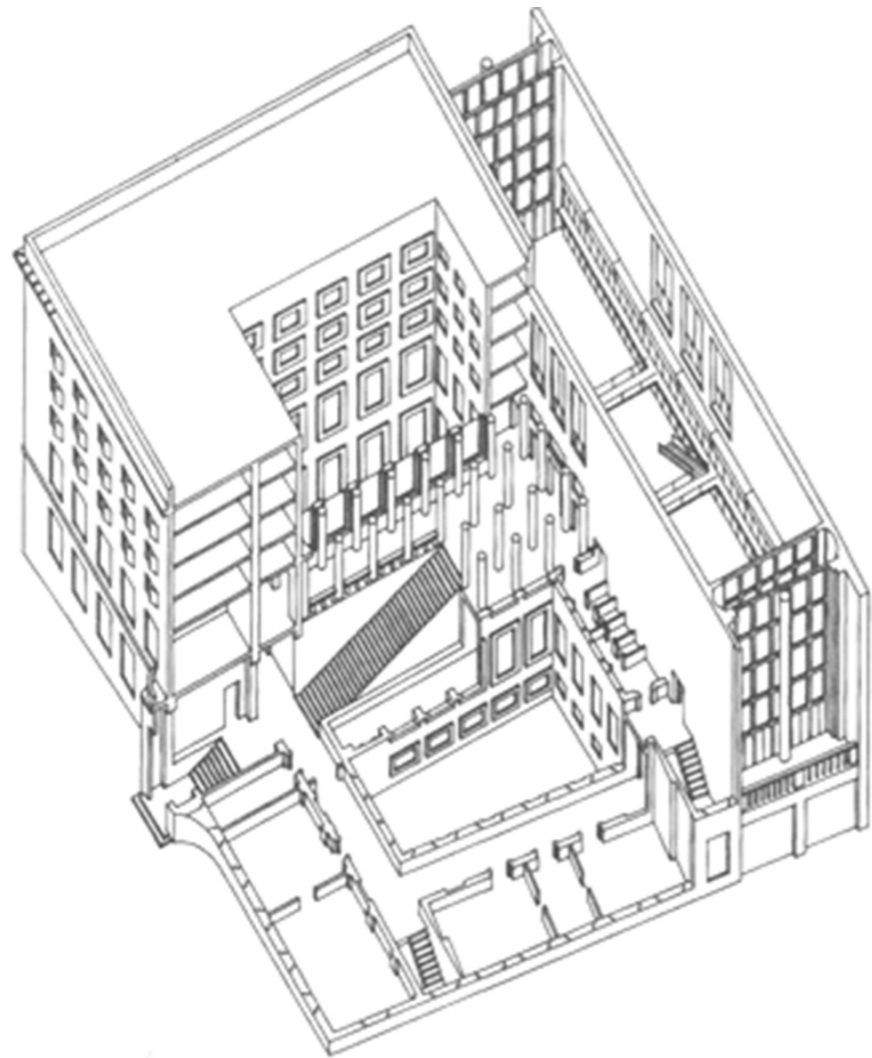
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archival photo, after bombage



17

archival photo, building under construction



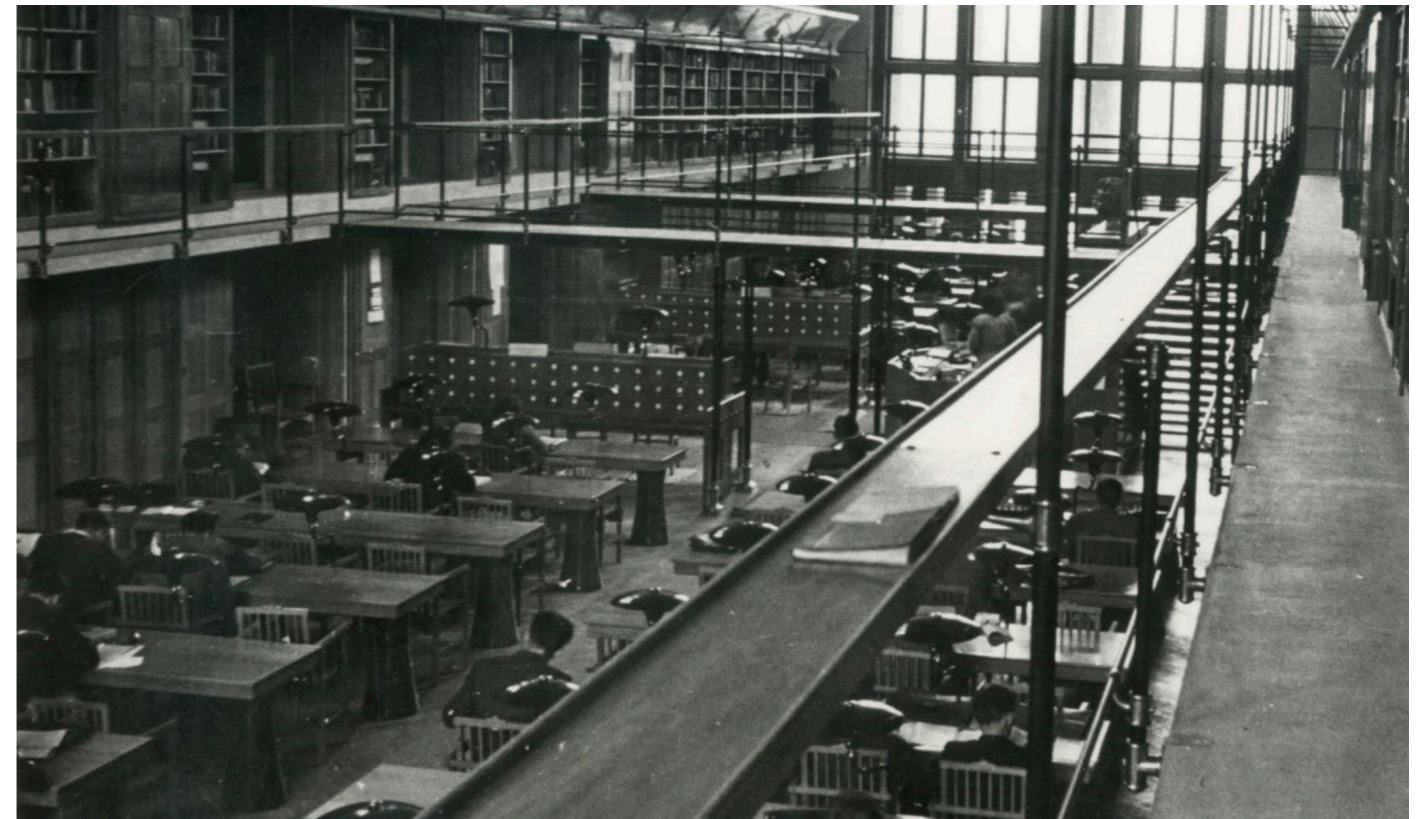
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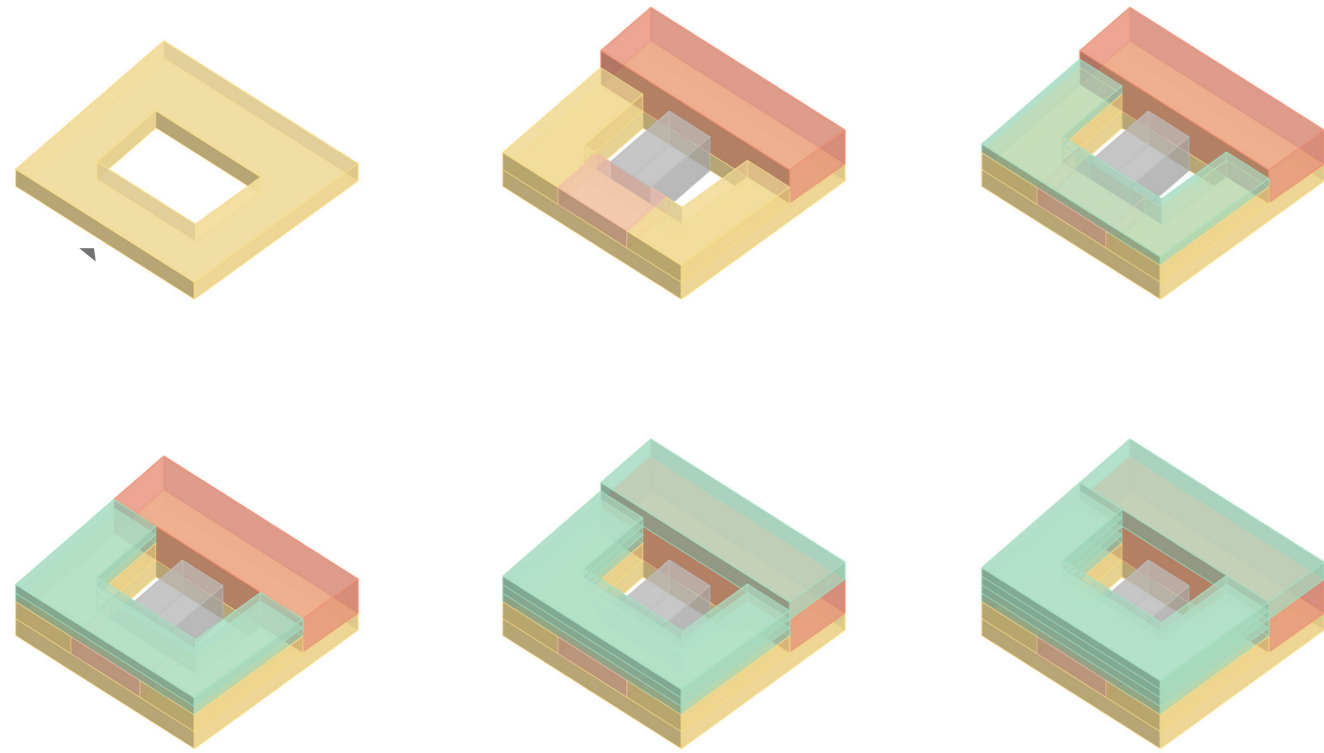
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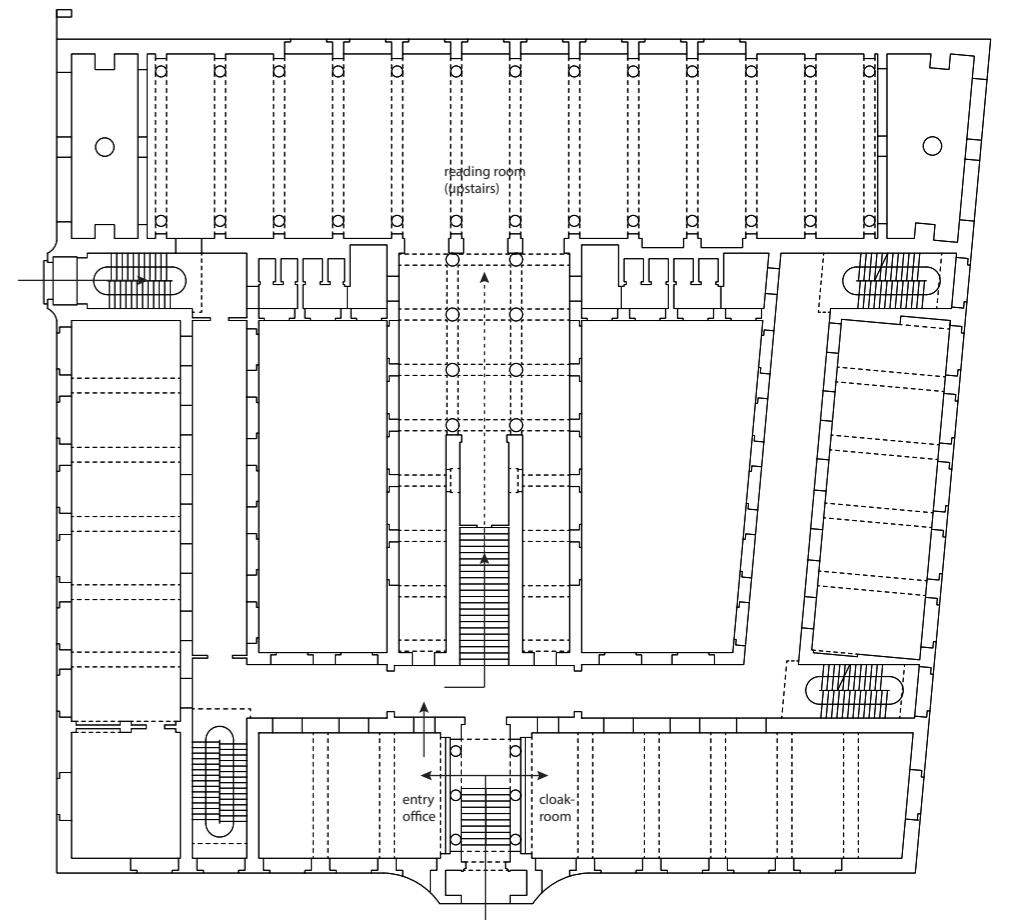
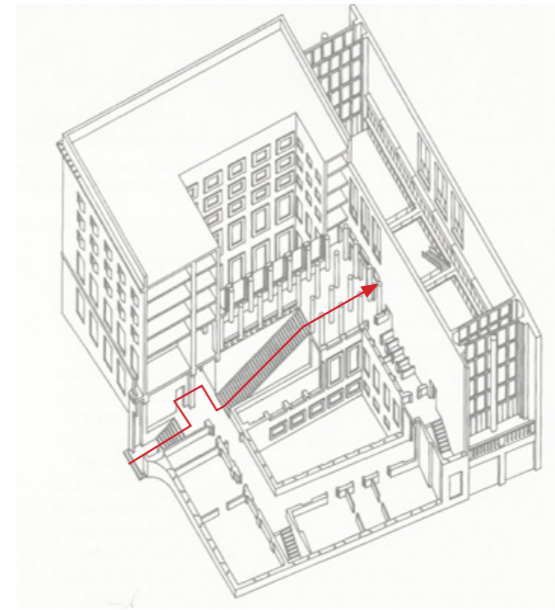


- Education
- Reading room
- Storage and offices

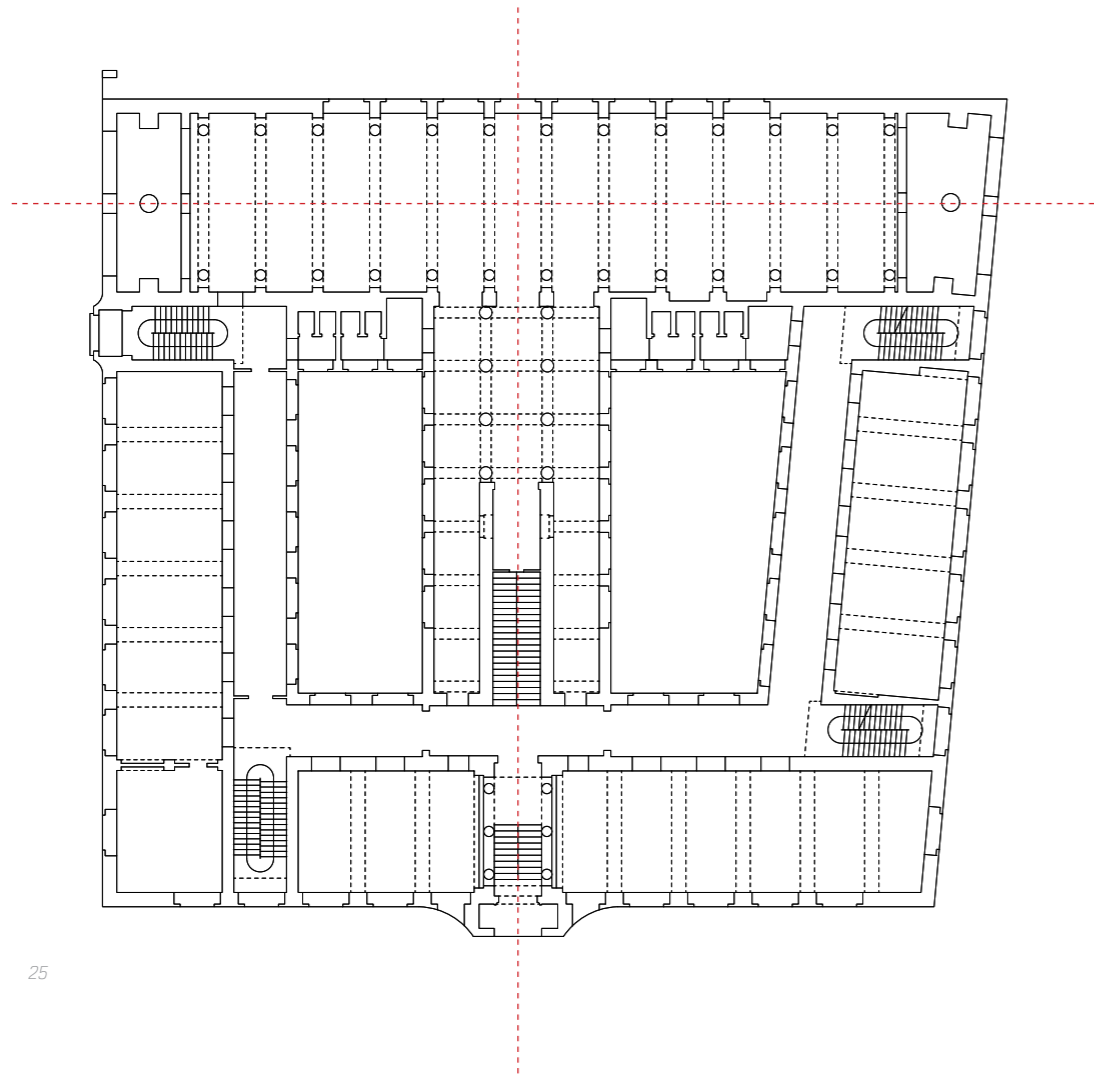
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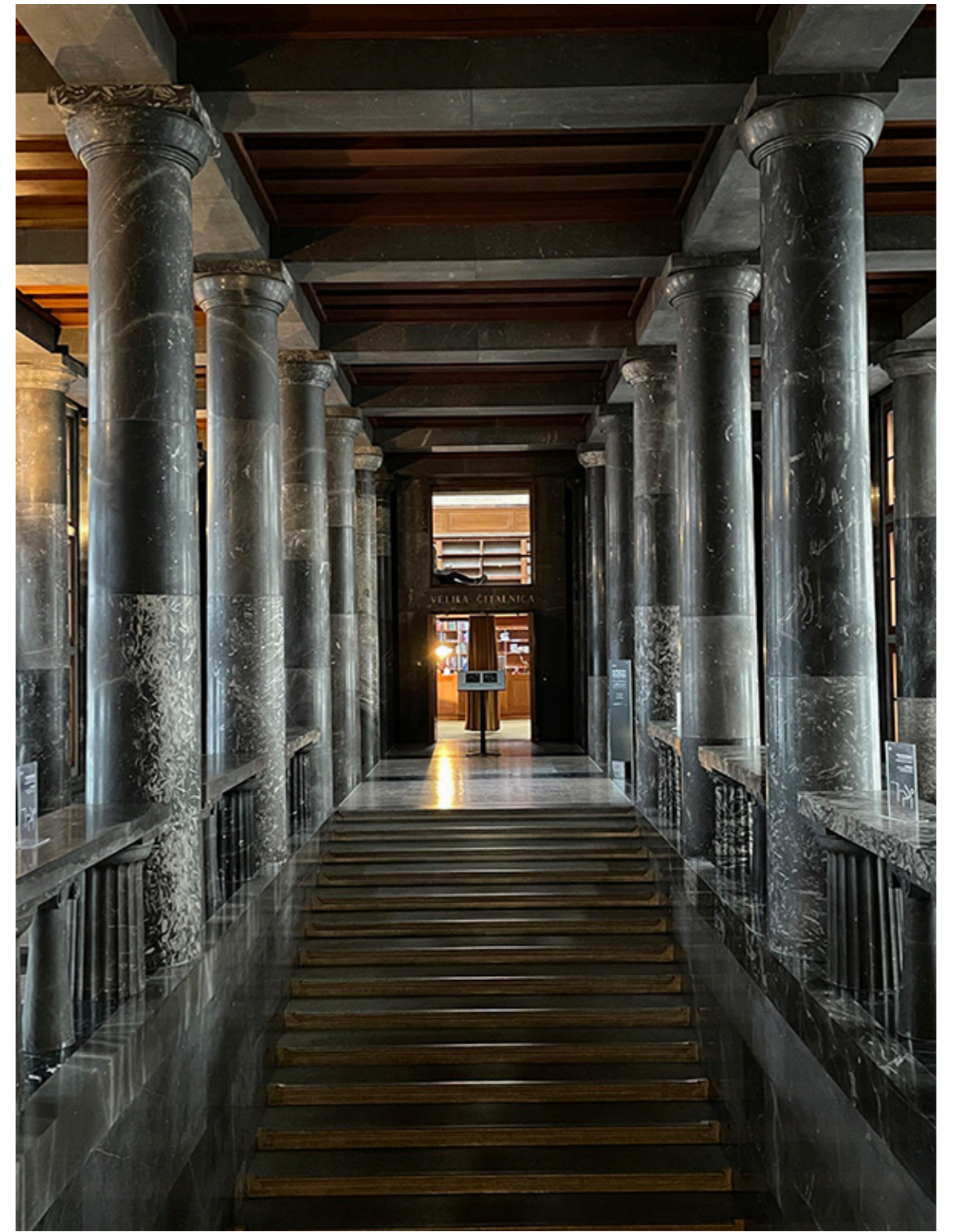
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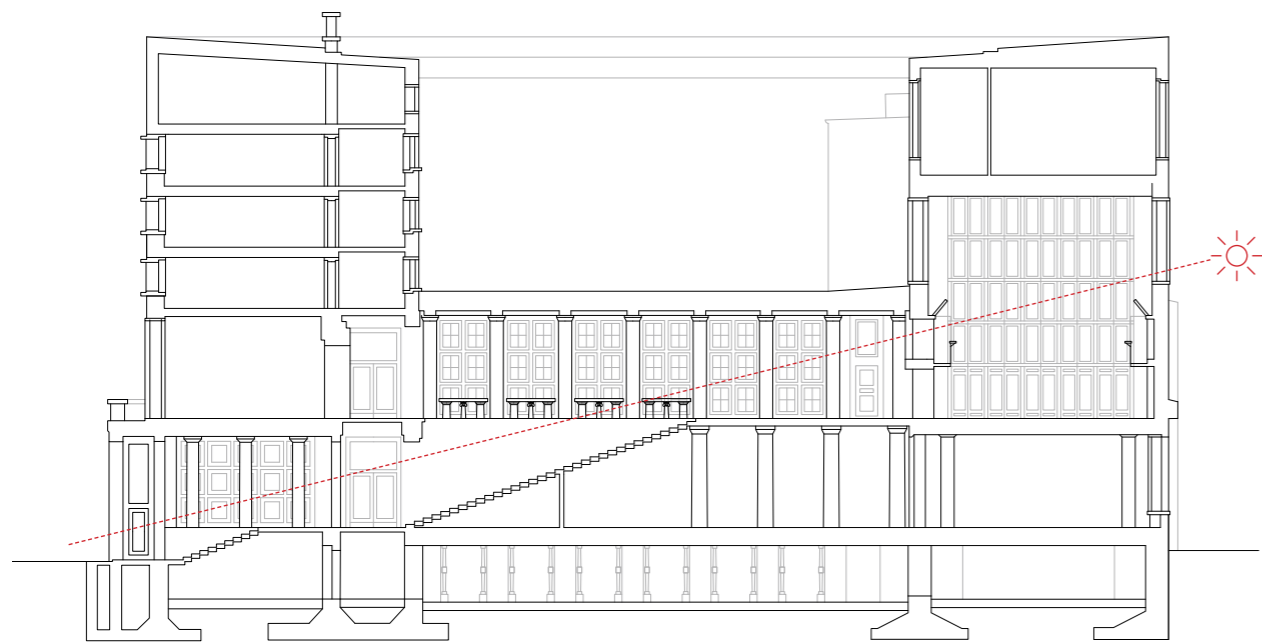
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Image Sources

- Fig.1.1: <https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/search/details/collection/object/5249>.
Fig.1.2: <https://arkivkopia.se/sak/digmus-ark-ARKM.1990-04-68>.
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Fig.2.26, 2.28: <https://atelierdehahn.com/josef-plecnik-ljubljana/>.

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