

THUS THE CITY WITHIN

Project Journal

Pablo Escamilla Sánchez

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*Recuerdo a mi Córdoba, sus calles adoquinadas,
el encalado de sus muros, el frescor de sus patios.
Recuerdo el sonido de sus fuentes y el olor de sus
naranjos. Recuerdo su sol y recuerdo su sombra.*

*I recall Cordoba, its cobbled streets, the whitewashed
walls, the freshness of its courtyards. I recall the
sound of its fountains and the smell of its orange
trees. I recall its sun and I recall its shade.*

Pablo Escamilla Sánchez -4660501

PROJECT JOURNAL

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INTRODUCTION

A palatial building sits in Rue de Bois Sauvage of Brussels, at the exact point where the lower historic city ends and upper bureaucratic city starts. The Palace remains like a parasite of a larger introverted structure that fortifies an entire urban block to hide the offices of the National Bank of Belgium. The architectural brief for this graduation project requests the renovation of the headquarters concerning the vacancy of office space with the greater intention of opening up the National Bank as an institution. To the light of this brief, this architectural thesis departs from the premise that in order for the Bank to open up it must get engaged in the problems of its nearby reality, the problems of the city of Brussels.

The purpose of this project journal is to guide the reader through the answers to two fundamental questions that derive from the original premise: **what are the historical problems of the city of Brussels that concern the Bank as an institution? How can the Bank get engaged in the solution to these problems, thus opening up to the city as an institution?** Both questions correspond to two actions that go hand by hand, the act of researching and the act of designing, the search for the *what* and the seek for the *how* trying to answer the *why*.

The journal has been structured chronologically in order to explain the different steps taken to arrive at the final conclusion of the project, the city within. For this reason the different chapters correspond to the different moments in the research and design that throughout the year have been part of P1, P2, P3 and P4. Alongside them, small reflections and reference pages in-

terrupt this chronology to document other dimensions of the project. It is not the intention of this journal to explain the project at its final state, nor to give an overview in plans and sections of how it is articulated. This document however is complementary to the Book of the project which condenses the documentation of the final product, while the journal will refer to the decisions by which the project is informed.

RESEARCH PLAN

Introduction

From the western facades of the northern edge of Via Giulia in Rome, one can read pieces of a lost puzzle of heavy rusticated stones that time had overlapped with the plaster finish of smaller residential buildings. This puzzle was once the great Palazzo dei Tribunali (Fig 1), designed by Bramante in 1506, a pivotal piece for the renewal of Via Giulia and the new position of power from the Pontificate with respect to the city. Despite its relevance the project remained unfinished and was later fragmented into private buildings that reused the foundations of the Palace. Nevertheless the transformation of Via Giulia and Rome had just begun, reorienting the city towards the river Tiber¹. This project has been discussed as an example of *Renovatio Urbis*, a Renaissance principle by which a collection of specific projects are capable of transforming the meaning and the function of existing parts of the city or even entire cities. In the case of Via Giulia, Bramante proposed to reuse typological qualities of the Florentine palaces that range from the scale of the plan, such as a central courtyard surrounded by arcades, to the detail, urban elements that refer directly to the transformation of the street, such as a bench by the rusticated plinth of the palace.

The concept of the *Renovatio Urbis* is deeply uncertain at this point of the research and could be that eventually relates more to the idea of gentrification than to a serious urban transfor-

mation. The typological definition of the palace² seems equally uncertain and even more whether this specific type from the mediterranean architecture could be translated into the contemporary European city to trigger a change in specific areas. However this research ought to explore this and other examples of palaces that were capable of transforming their urban conditions either after their construction or after their reuse. The historical approach for this research represents a personal interest for typology and temporality, it is also related to the fact that historical references were often more constrained to the small reality of their context and the idea that one can study them over several layers of time.

¹ Rebecchini, Guido. *Renaissance Quarterly* 65, no. 2. 2012. p.538. <https://doi.org/10.1086/667288>.

² The palace as a public building or building with a public function towards a territory, either local, regional or national. The focus of this research is not on the private residence type but on the building that despite being a private residence in its origins, could perform a broader political role. It is the case of Palazzi della Regione, Palaces of Justice, Treasuries or Bishopric palaces that departing from the Florentine residential model adopted a public position in the city.



Fig 1. Via Giulia, Rome. Fragments of the rusticated plinth of the Palazzo dei Tribunali commonly known as the sofa of Via Giulia. Rivista Capitolina, 1951.

Academic positioning

In relation to the multiple topics brought up during the reading discussions and reflections there seemed to be a line of continuity in their argument despite the different authors and the time they were written. The readings have been classified into three categories for the understanding of their subtopic, typology, use and materiality.

On the topic of typology, Duffy's *Office Building and Organisational Change* (1980) and Pevsner's *A History of Building Types* (1976), discussed a typological genealogy of offices and bank buildings which justified the evolution of a particular type as the response to previous design decisions, either reacting to them, as Duffy described, or mutating from an original idea in favor of its continuity, which came closer to Pevsner's argument. The genealogy explained the temporality of typology, not studied as successive archetypal models but rather as examples that together project the type. This topic of temporalities, either following Duffy's or Pevsner's argument, produced the idea of a typological palimpsests, where the design decisions of a particular time were rewritten over previous layers of knowledge, thus the building, regardless of whether it is the Ninoflax Offices or SOM's Hannover's Trust Company (Fig 2), reconfigured an idea of the past in a present canvas, either the rigidity of the workspace or the solidity of a fortress like facade in order to convey a message of trust. However both texts seemed to detach the type from its urban, and therefore also its social and political context, the city. This aspect completely objectified the type and reinforced the argument of the typological palimpsest, a building that responded only to temporality, to the previous, setting a path for the coming. Nevertheless, the building even in the typological discussion must also be described as a reaction to the greater scale, the city and its complexities.

The second topic, use, came up with Daphne Spain's *The Contemporary workplace* (1999) and Dr.Amy Thomas' lecture *The Changing Workplace* (16/09/21). It had to do with the sociological consequences of design decisions for office spaces. The importance of this matter right after the previous genealogy of types, revealed the most tangible aspect of typology, which was not material form, but use. The question now was what the consequences were of certain building types in the user, the worker in this case. This represented an important shift in scale for the discussion, moving from aspects that concerned the plan and the section, to the impact of furniture design in the role women were given in the sexist world of the workplace. Here the input of societal changes was fundamental for design decisions. A clear example was how Taylorist ideas for efficiency (Fig 3) found a position for women in offices, they were given the simplest manual task as the cheap labour they were, mere pieces of a greater engine. This later turned into adopting the role of the secretary with all its gender implications, a work wife always dependent on a higher rank male. This position of the worker explained most of the typological design decisions, describing them as instruments for reducing the privacy of women in the office, from the scale of a panopticon plan to the detail of a filigree table which would expose the woman in her workday.



Fig 2. Type evolves through time always in resonance to former models. New York Manufacturers' Hannover Trust Company, *A history of building types*. Princeton,



Fig 3. The disposition of the desks and even the objects on top are carefully arranged to guarantee the efficiency of the 'factory' office, where women occupy the lowest rank Frederic Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, 1911

The third and last topic of discussion, materiality, was brought by Dovey's *Corporate Towers* (1992), Wim Boonstra and Linda van Goor's *The Basics of Money and Banking* (2021) and Dr. Amy Thomas' lecture, *The Paradox of Visibility* (7/10/21). Despite touching on different fields, both texts and lecture, tended to dematerialise the subjects of representation and finance. In the first case, Dovey presented an architecture capable of producing symbolic value, turning the material realities of office spaces previously discussed into a semiotic game by which type, scale, user and all the rest were compressed into an image, the image of a building capable of generating market value. In the discussion of the basics of financial systems and alternative monetary systems, there was a recurring historiographical approach that led to understanding the decline and almost disappearance of physical qualities in the world of banking. The increasingly vanishing interaction, physical exchange of goods, face to face discussion and materiality of money, have completely changed the dynamics of finance and banking. The dematerialization of capital has also dematerialized the institution of the Central Bank that dissolved into the Dovey's game of representation. Indeed one could once again refer to the issue of scale as an important factor for this shift, because it is the scale of the financial system, the global consequences of every action (as *The Big Short* (2015) pointed out) that have completely changed the speed of transactions, making unsustainable a material based model, slower and limited. However this topic also raised the question of an alternative system (Fig 4), possibly more related to the local and regional scale or even to the individual domain, as for example Varoufakis' corpo-syndicalist proposal. Here the issue is not the need for the physicality of things, spaces, actions, etc, but the need for a safer scale where decisions and changes are realistic.

To conclude, the social and political implications of these texts may outstand for the reader, however there is an aspect without which any ideological change could not take place, this is the awareness of scale. It is fundamental to understand how societal problems as well as their potential solutions cannot be discussed on the scale of the office world, the patriarchal society or the globalized economy. Instead, in order to seriously tackle the issues of the worker and the market economy one must step down into the smallest scale that articulates the bigger mechanism. This is the scale of the desk, the office room, the relation between two individuals at different ranks, the bank account or the physicality of a coin. It is in this smaller scale that one can start wondering why a type has the form and function it has, why the role of some workers is different from others or why are the stock markets let free in their imaginary game. This may be one of the biggest interests of this research, how can the smaller scale of the urban element trigger a change that extends to the city scale?

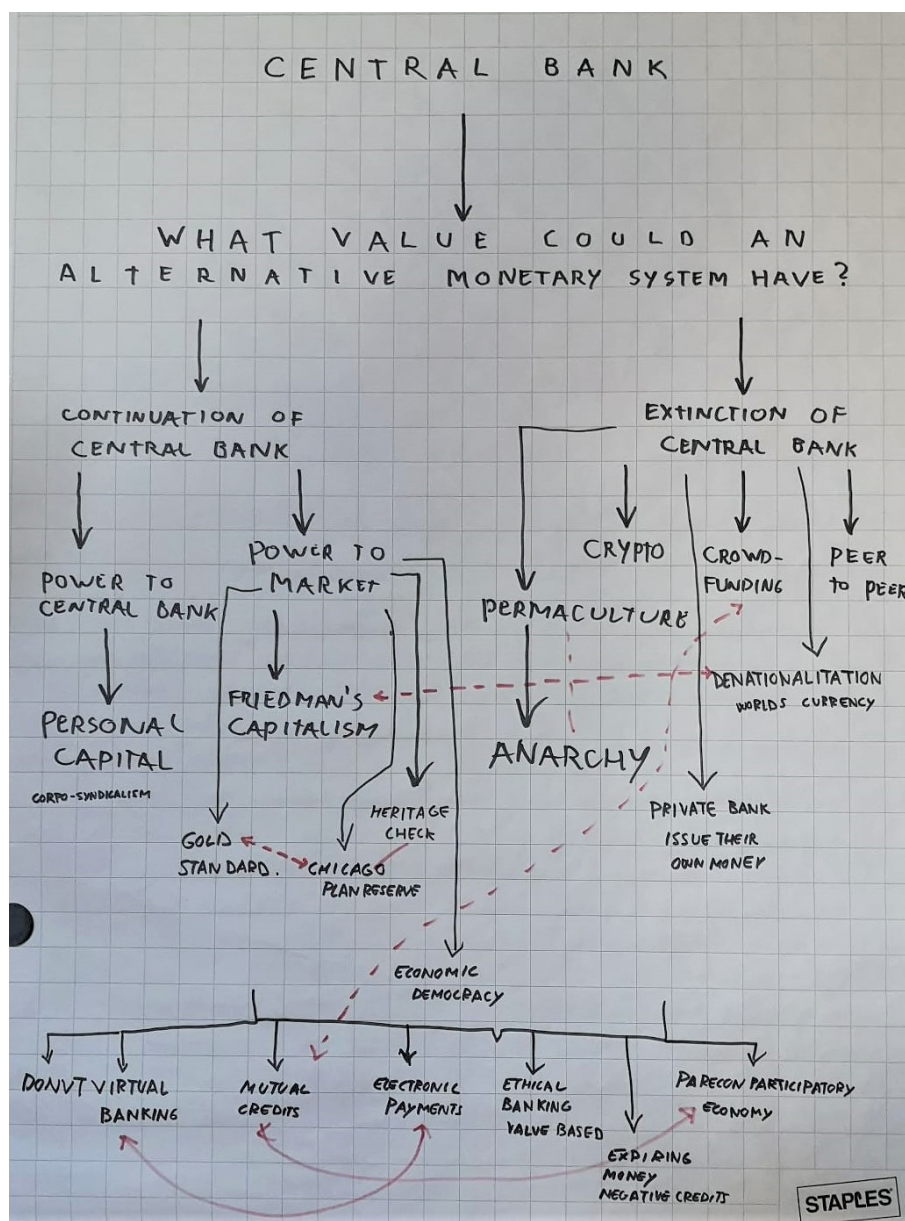


Fig 4. Diagram of alternative monetary systems at a national and global scale according to the role of the central bank. Research seminar 7/10/2021.

Reflective problematization

A premature analysis of the city of Brussels related to the assignment for a social plinth revealed urban problems that happen to be present in most European capitals. Among them is the radical social segregation of the city that is divided into a poor west side and a rich east side, this asymmetry is well defined by a scarcely inhabited historic centre¹. The laissez faire attitude of the local authorities (Fig 5), the process of *Brusselization*² and the concentration of all European institutions on one part of the city are some of the reasons that led to this urban fragmentation and the deterioration of the oldest parts of the city. Already in 1976, the Italian architect Aldo Rossi pointed out the problems of dealing with historical cities. In his work *La Citta Analoga* claimed the need for the reuse of the historic city structures as places for living rather than the commercial monofunctional role that they had adopted. In the case of Brussels, the deserted historic city, known as the Pentagon, strives to survive beyond the self referential model that it has become. The musealized city, a city confined to the footprints of the old ramparts where few can afford to live and everyone is expected to consume, where international franchises occupy the plinths of most representative buildings and mass tourism surrenders to the lure of a picturesque image.

The death of the historic centres can be acknowledged in the smallest scale of urban life. The entry to buildings from which people do not come out in the mornings to work, the benches where elderly do no longer have a long day to sit or the streets that uniformed children do not take on their way to school. It is precisely at this scale that the assignment for a social plinth (Fig. 7) was operating. In this case the proposal intended to create a common space free of consumption by the existing plinth of the palace typology of Brussels in the very commercial heart of the city. Taking foreign types such as the portico and translating them to the morphology of the city could change the role of specific buildings and according to the *Renovatio Urbis*, even transform certain parts or reorient the living quarters. However this idea and how to proceed at such a small scale remained immature.

Moreover, in the specific case of the National Bank, the brief not only offered an existing structure in the historic centre but also one of the most relevant palaces of Brussels, built on a monolithic plot over decades of history. In this palimpsest there are greater chances of generating a larger impact in the transformation of the Pentagon. The research could question for instance the need

¹ Aureli, Pier Vittorio. *Brussels, a Manifesto: Towards the Capital of Europe*. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2007. p.63

² Described as “the indiscriminate and careless introduction of modern high-rise buildings into gentrified neighbourhoods”

State, Paul F. “Brusselization”. *Historical dictionary of Brussels. Historical dictionaries of cities of the world*. 2004. p.51
The origins of Brusselization took place during urban regeneration performed by the city with the occasion of Expo 58. As a consequence of it, buildings were torn down regardless of their historical or architectural relevance.

Elliott, Mark; Cole, Geert . “Brussels”. *Belgium and Luxembourg. Country Guide Series*.2010. p.64

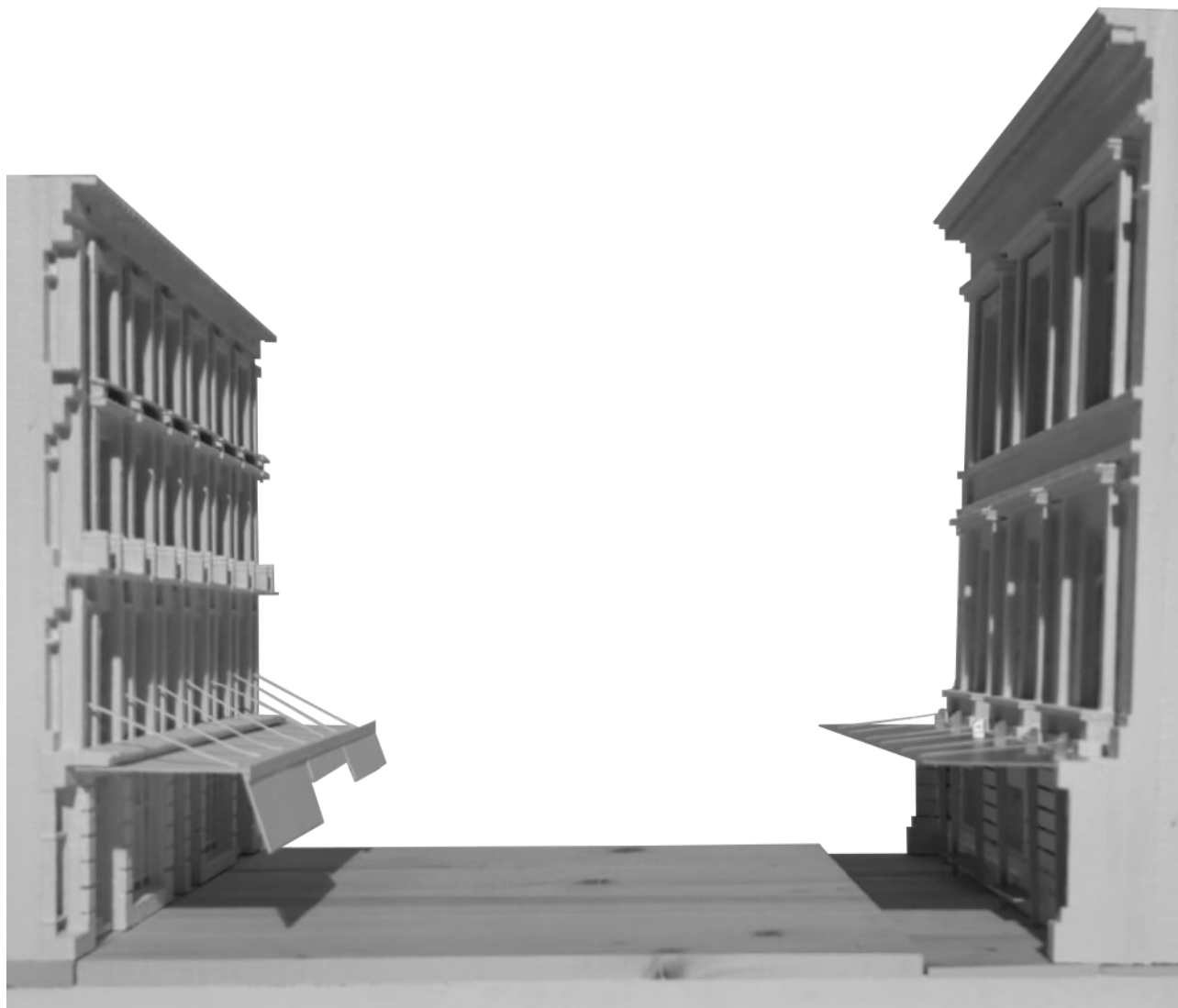


Fig 5. The effects of Brusselization in the historic centre of Brussels, the same fragment of the city in 1944 and 2014 reveals the destruction of several plots to accomodate offices and comercial functions.



Fig 6. The Grand Place of Brussels in the 1960s was not the example of touristic facadism that it is today, instead the citizens used it as a car park, a questionable function for a historical site but certainly the proof of the privatization of public space that preceded mass tourism.

for a monofunctional building block, the role of the contemporary palace, the types that can enrich this building typology, the possibility of a fragmentation similar to that of the Palazzo dei Tribunali or the structures that should be preserved and reused strategically to make an impact in the surrounding historic city. At first the death of urban life in historic centres seems to be an issue of building policies and price regulation, however this research should give light about the role of architecture, which could be illuminated by the principle of *Renovatio Urbis*.



Methodology

In order to provide sufficient information on the topic of this research:

- Define and contextualize the principle of *Renovatio Urbis* to determine how it originated, whether it was only a Renaissance conception or it survived in the Baroque and later periods. The historians Manfredo Tafuri, Antonio Foscari and Nicholas Temple developed extensive literature about it which later became useful for the Italian urbanist Bernardo Secchi on his practice about urban transformation. These authors could guide this part of the research referring to both history and contemporary practice.

- Carry out a historical and typological analysis of the palace, of different sizes and in different urban contexts, identifying it in the present day. This typological analysis should also focus on architectural elements, the scale of the detail and the material qualities present in the palace. In order to do so, the research should be supported by existing literature but also through the modelling of these examples to extract conclusions.

- Develop an analysis of the city of Brussels and the situation of its historic centre, the Pentagon. Produce hypotheses that can relate the previous analysis to the context of capital, the urban block and the Palace of the National Bank in particular.

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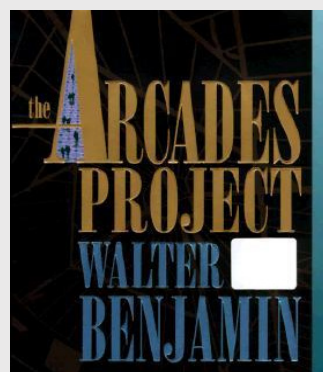
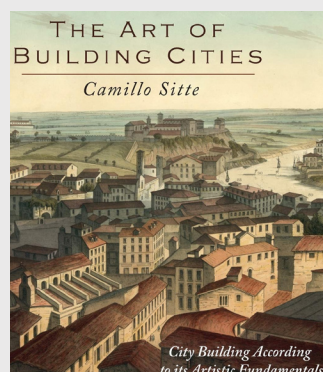
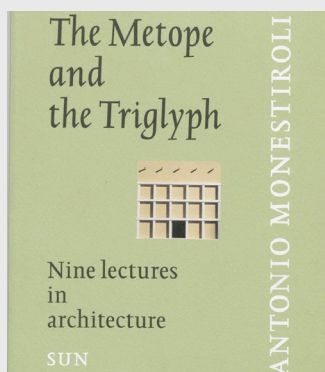
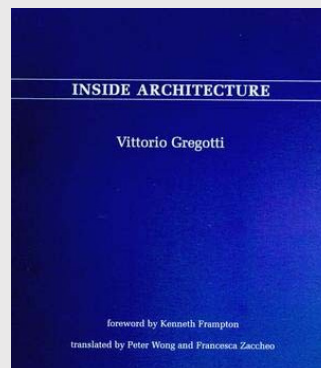
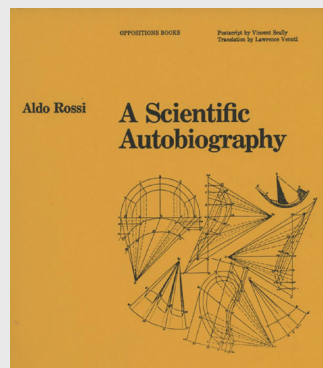
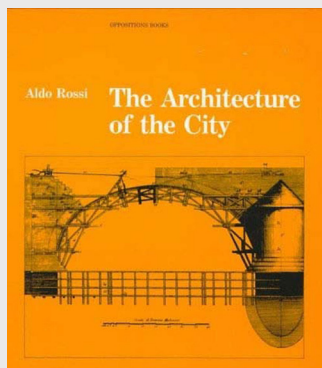
Reflection *Academic Positioning*

It would be difficult to imagine the academic intentions of this project without considering the voices that have informed it, directly or indirectly. From the point of view of the student that is writing this essay, these voices are a collection of memories captured throughout the education in architecture that began a long time before stepping in the academic world of the Faculty of Architecture of TU-Eindhoven, more than five years ago. The first lessons on architecture depart from the memories of the city of Cordoba. Only those who have visited and lived it will acknowledge the beauty of its architecture which goes beyond the superficial charm of its monuments. Cordoba is a place where one learns how the sound of water can travel from an open patio to a narrow alley, one discovers how to find oneself through an endless labyrinth of winding passageways, memory unfolds, spatial and collective memory. Cordoba is a place where to understand time, the beauty in superposition and contradiction of the forms of time in space, but also the irrelevance of the now in the immensity of a palimpsest which is lived by those who inhabit it.

Within the academic world the memories of Cordoba have played a fundamental role to guide these architectural studies towards the path of those who refer to the city as the departure of every architectural thinking. To this respect the lessons of the Italian architects of La Tendenza have influenced the way of looking at the city, at any city, through the lens or architectural typology. The reflections of Vittorio Gregotti, Giorgio Grassi, Antonio Monestiroli and above all Aldo Rossi have built a postmodern view on the city which could be criticised in many aspects but has become undeniably relevant to understand the city as a collection of architectural types built over time, the superimposition of permanent forms and ever changing function. Parallely, their work must be comprehended as the reaction to an speculative fever, which fed by the attitude of the leftovers of modernism, turned as a threat to the historical city and the collective memory. This concern led architects to reflect on the attitude towards the architectural forms of the past, the need to either neglect them or encapsulate them in altars of time as untouchable figures. This architectural lesson for the continuity of urban forms under risking contradiction inspired the History Thesis of this architectural studies, *Thus the fetish was born*, a historical research that questioned the fetishized, necrophilic and romantic contemplation of ruins as static objects in the city and claimed the need for reuse of existing urban structures.

Moreover the academic positioning of this Thesis deals with the complexities of the big city. The lessons of Pier Vittorio Aureli's work on the economic and social problems of Brussels that root back to its architecture, which has historically been divided among the rich and the poor. Together with the Lessons of Bernardo Secchi who reflected on the idea of the porous city as a reaction to the contemporary city of clusters, poor and gentrified zones. Both of them adopted in their work a concern for scale which is deeply embraced by the position of the chair of Interiors, Buildings, Cities. This concern is better explained by the research of *Renovatio Urbis*, the Renaissance idea recurrent in Secchi's work by which the problems of the urban scale may often find solution in the scale of the architecture of pivotal interventions.

At last, it is necessary to speak of history. This academic positioning is deeply rooted in moments of the past, authors that have always remained in contact with the lessons of time and a city, Cordoba, which may be one of the best explanations of what time has to say in space. It is therefore that this thesis also finds an unavoidable relation with the past of Brussels, but also with the study of architectural references of the past, those that have been survived the trends of their times and can be judged with the eyes of a different age, even at the risk of being nostalgic.



STUDIO RESEARCH. THE OFFICE

Francis Duffy 1980

The British architect founder of the DEGW, Francis Duffy, wrote in 1980 the eighth chapter of the book *Buildings and society*, as part of his continuous research on workplace strategies that characterized most of his career. The chapter constructed a genealogy of office spaces, coming to prove the evolution in the design strategies deeply rooted in the ideas of each time.

The author, who defined himself as an architect rather than a historian began describing the hierarchical distribution of space in the Sun Insurance Office building which was designed as a palazzo. This high class domestic architecture was also part of the Oriel Chambers despite its completely different model based on a modular floor plan that would allow several small firms to work together. In these two examples, not only the arrangement of the plan but also the furniture in space contributed to an atmosphere that reinforced the image of the corporation in a society of classes. Duffy proceeded with Wright's Larkin Company administration building, an example of how Taylorism and Fordism had influenced American society. Rather than social status, the office aimed to vindicate efficiency at its best, turning the space into an engine in which the worker was a mere piece and furniture design was presented as an essential element of the workplace strategy. Moreover, the arrival of women in office space and the specialization of workflow, turned the office into a sort of conveyor belt where ever present hierarchy was laid out for efficient communication and production of value. On this idea of efficiency the Seagram building was also presented as an example of a multi corporation tower, where the development of technical facilities would allow a different arrangement, independent of natural ventilation and lightning. To conclude his genealogy of office spaces, Duffy explained how the ideas of the *Burolandschaft* came to replace the rigidity of workplaces. By treating the office as a landscape where everything would be carefully arranged to guarantee proper communication between working groups and at the same time give an image of flexibility and informality that would break down hierarchical barriers. Once more the smallest scale, the furniture, played an important role in this landscaping that would use for instance plants instead of opaque separation walls.

With this argument the author reinforced the idea that workplace strategy is ever changing and inseparable from the social, technological and cultural conditions of each time.



The Sun Insurance Office in London, built in 1849, mid-twentieth century photograph, *Buildings and Society*, London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2003



Larking Company Administration building, 1904, *Buildings and Society*, London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2003



Ninoflax offices, Nordhorn, West Germany, 1963, *Buildings and Society*, London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2003

Daphne Spain 1976

The American academic Daphne Spain carefully analysed the characteristics of the office space of the present in her work *The Contemporary Workplace*. Dedicating a part of it to the topic of spatial segregation, Spain put the emphasis on the different working conditions that hierarchy and gender impose in the office space. The arrival of women to the office world changed the hierarchical orders in these spaces. Women, considered cheap labour, took over the simplest manual task in the office, typing. This condition already came along with spatial gender segregations, especially manifested with the introduction of Taylorist ideas in the workplace, that aiming for the efficiency of the office would give the typist a certain position, always at reach of their superiors. Spain suggested that the segregation of women in the contemporary office however, displays a far more complex mechanism depriving them from the possibility of empowerment. The limitation of privacy and knowledge are the tools that Spain identified as key factors in space that enhance this segregation, further on she referred to secretaries in particular who are not only stuck in a position closely related to fixed gender roles but also occupy a given position in space, deprived from privacy and always dependent of their superiors. The spatial consequence of this is what Jennings defined as *visiposure* which was even compared with the idea of the Panopticon, identifying the worker as a prisoner in a space where they can be watched at all times.

The reading of this text raises the question of whether the spatial segregation that the author is talking about is truly characteristic of gender discrimination or it is a pure hierarchical issue that could equally affect the different working classes within the dynamics of the office. These working classes could well be associated with social classes as the point of departure, given the fact that the arrival of women to the workplace was closely related to the need for cheap labour. However on this remark, it is important to take into account those circumstances where the task given to these workers is intrinsic in societal gender roles, for instance the image of the secretary as a sort of office wife, or the figure of the typist as a diligent worker with thin and careful fingers required to perform their task.

Dovey 1992

The Australian architectural critic Kim Dovey wrote *Corporate Towers and symbolic capital* in 1992 with the intention of revealing the tools capable of generating symbolic capital through built form. Dovey explained the use of distinction, authenticity, power, contextualism and timelessness as key for the creation of symbols. Despite the different instruments that Dovey presented in the process of creation of symbolic capital, they could all be brought together around the idea of image. Semiotics plays an important role, introducing the discourse of power in the phallic symbol of the tower, different in form and scale of its surroundings, capable of pinpointing a part of the city as its landmark and communicating permanence to the viewer. Nevertheless it is more remarkable that the image becomes the only possible outcome of this discourse and the ultimate goal of the architect. The demand for a workplace with all its material, technical, contextual and spatial complexities goes to the background and instead prevails the ambition of the client to make a statement in the market economy. However, one shall not fall into the simplistic idea that the architect is a victim of an economy driven society, because it is in the very heart of the education of architects that the cult for the image plays such an important role. The corridors of universities, their publications and studio's required deliverables seem to insist on the render as the ultimate tool of representation, as a result of this, architecture often becomes superficial and immaterial. The problem becomes even more serious when this architecture is meant to shape the city, in the case of the corporation tower, resulting in a ridiculous circus of self centered pieces shouting for attention. Immersed in the crisis of symbolic capital, Dovey also reflected on the responsibility of the architect, who should firstly put an end to this lucrative practice of image production and secondly take the public imagination into account. How can architecture develop out of the lucrative vicious circle of creating symbols when it is demanded within and without the profession?

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Amy Thomas 16/09/21

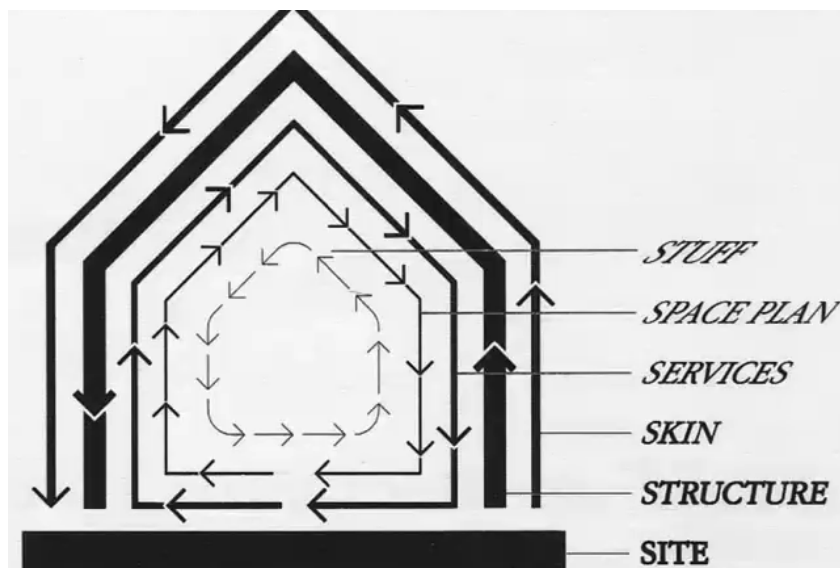
The shift from prewar state controlled economy to postwar neoliberal market economy implied that the power of rights and laws would be replaced by investment, competition and interest, a system that would enable the user to create productivity and what Michelle Foucault described as the homo economicus, for whom every action had economical repercussions.

As a consequence of these political, cultural and economical changes, the rigid office space prior to the war was slowly replaced for the search for a flexible open workplace. Along with this shift, came the ideas of metabolism and structuralism in architecture, that aiming for a universal space capable of expanding and contracting according to the needs of the market, raised the question of what the role of the architect was and whether it ended with the completion of the building or was supposed to remain in constant progress.

The growing scale of corporations led to designing the versatility of office space in the way that real estate firms such as DEGW did as part of their environmental behaviour studies. In the same line the British American architect Christopher Alexander in his *Pattern Language* or Stewart Brand's *How buildings learn*, thought of offices as multilayered organisms able to adapt to changes. According to him there is not such a thing as a building, the office should be an extension of the corporation consisting of a shell, services, scenery and a set. Each of this layers was supposed to have a specific lifespan and only replacing them separately could one guaranty flexibility and continuity. These theories influenced Duffy's work at DEGW that advocated for de-planned structures that could enable maintenance and change.

The introduction of the open plan enabled the organization in working groups rather than the hierarchical arrangement that had been enhanced after the feminization of clerical work and proletarianization of the office.

However one can think that the attempts for a flexible everlasting space were since their beginning very limited. The size of corporations has not ceased to increase leading to another type of office space, the cooperative campus office. This form of cooperative city also seems to reinforce Peter Drucker's thoughts of the relevance of a strong working culture as opposed to the traditional working strategy, considering knowledge workers as capital assets rather than costs.



Stewart Brand, *How buildings learn*, Viking Press 1994



Frederic Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, 1911



Clerk as craftsman, Lecture 1 Workplace A.Thomas, 2021

Pevsner 1976

By looking at the multiple references displayed in this text one can immediately understand the argument of the German-British architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner on typology. The author almost listed in a chronological manner a series of examples that altogether shape the architectural type of banks and exchanges. It is therefore as useful to read as it is to observe, not only paying attention to the images that Pevsner carefully included in his book *A History of Architectural Types*, but also to those references that the author only dropped in his paragraphs.

Together they built a genealogy that could confuse the reader at first sight, as it did not conclude with a definitive type for banks and exchange buildings. In fact it seemed that their evolution was an unclear set of choices that ranged from the private house to the modernist glass box, passing through the basilica, the cloister, the rotunda and the fortress as other characteristic types that it adopted. However the choice for these specific types was far from being accidental, each of them responded to the socio-cultural and material circumstances of their time. Therefore, one can relate its origin in private houses to an early business rooted in a familiar tradition. As it evolved into the public realm, the approach is that of a permeable market in an open courtyard, where people could touch the goods they were investing in. The establishment of national banks that would deal with the governments' treasury, changed completely the architectural form and function of banks, they adopted the fortress type, a closed, robust and secure box in which the country's gold would be stored. Nevertheless, the parallel development of private banks and exchange buildings continued the tradition of the central grand space, preferably covered and often adopting the form of a rotunda or an atrium instead of an open courtyard. At last Pevsner presented modernist transparency and lightness as the culmination of the evolution of banks and exchange buildings. This last step in the genealogy points out the importance of architectural language in bank types to convey a message through material form. One could think that it was the immaterial character of a business deal where the client trusts the bank's security or the bank trusts the client's liability to pay their debt, that justified a strong material expression in which the knowledge of trust was embedded. As a result of this, apart from the pragmatic use of the cloister or the fortified building, the evolution of types seemed to move around this matter of expression. Surely one can trust the wealth of an institution coated with opulent facades and art pieces, surely that one's money would be safely stored within robust looking walls of the neoclassical examples, surely one can rely on a country's power when one sees the security with which their gold is being stored and certainly one could always trust what one can see, thus nothing like a transparent institution.

It is possible to wonder to what extent these institutions deal with something tangible. Money as an immaterial invention is like a virus that one cannot see but only perceive through its symptoms. For that reason the symptoms, as only witness of the existence of monetary wealth must be shown and exaggerated so that one can rely on what the eyes do not see, value.



New York Manufacturers' Hannover Trust Company, *A history of building types*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997



Tivoli Corner, The Bank of England, Threadneedle Street, City of London, 1915

Wim Boonstra and Linda van Goor 2021

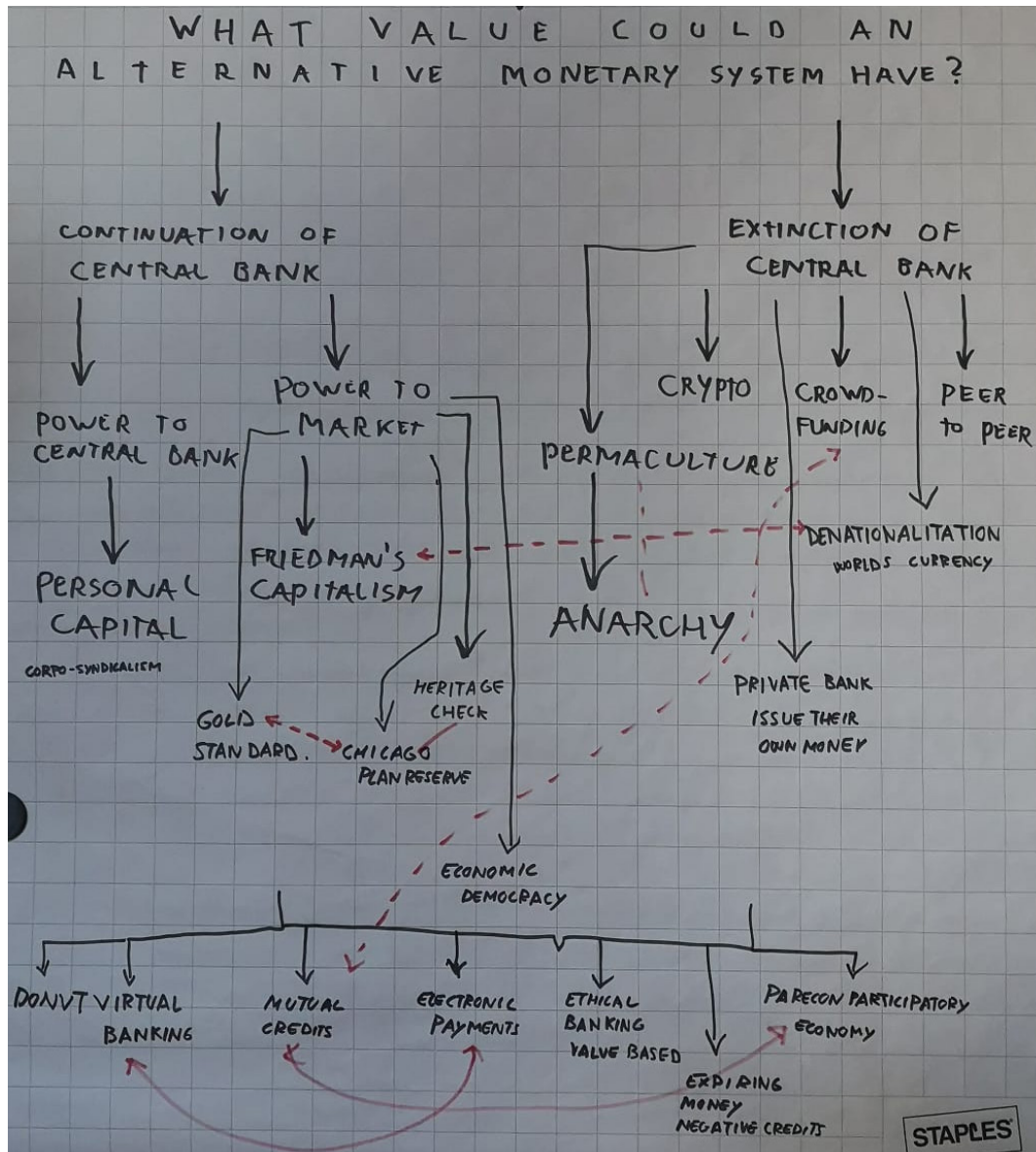
The Dutch economist Wim Boonstra and the advisor for European regulatory affairs, Linda van Goor, summarized the principles of the occidental financial system, including the role of banks, market funds, direct and indirect finance or the basic principles of central banking. This last issue became especially relevant in the discussion of monetary systems, since the central banks are responsible for the proper running of the payment, operating as advisors and main lenders of the government, supervisors of private banks and conductors of the monetary policy. The role of central banking is essential to understand alternative monetary systems to that inherited from the Bretton Woods and the reliance on the value of dollars and euros. The following scheme shows the alternatives in relation to the role of central banking.

Therefore if the decision is to consolidate the presence of the central bank as opposed to that of the market, one alternative could be the monetary system based on Personal Capital described by Yanis Varoufakis, by which each individual would have an account in the central bank and receive a fixed stipend as well as the salary for working in a corpo-syndicalist company where every employee is an equal. The idea behind it is that individuals have a direct connection to the central bank, that does not demand private banks as intermediaries in monetary policies.

It can also be the case of monetary systems that rely on the market rather than a strong role of the central bank. For instance Friedman's Capitalism stands for a competitive free market, a self regulatory system that minimizes the influence of a central bank.

Other alternative monetary systems simply refuse the existence of central banking, it is the case of the denationalisation of money suggested by Friedrich Hayek, the Mutual Credit system that suggests eliminating banks as intermediaries between lenders and debtors, the Expiring Currency proposed by Silvio Gessell as a way to avoid the storage of money and guaranty its continuous circulation, as currencies would lose value in the hands of people thus resulting in negative credits. Moreover, the virtual character of money has gained relevance with the popularity of cryptocurrencies, as an alternative to traditional currencies, these have a highly volatile value that states cannot regulate and thus constitutes the paradigm of the universal deregulated system.

Despite all the alternatives, one may go back to the Aristotelian model of *Politika*, that inspired christians to forbid interest. Aristotle understood interest as an incentive for money growth, which according to him, was undesirable. The idea of money as a mere instrument of exchange rather than a goal in itself makes one wonder what the role of private banking could be and perhaps gives wings to the idea of a solid central bank that approaches Varoufakis personal credit. The role of central banking has proven to be fundamental in the 2008 financial crisis, as well as in the last intervention of the ECB to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. However it seems as if these institutions were a mere life jacket for emergency situations, when the private sector, in desperate need for liquidity suddenly realized the existence of a national bank for the good. One wonders whether a greater regulatory power for these institutions could help prevent financial crises such as 2008's, or simply control prices in certain strategic sectors such as real estate or energy by regulating their finances.



Precedents *Offices and Banks*

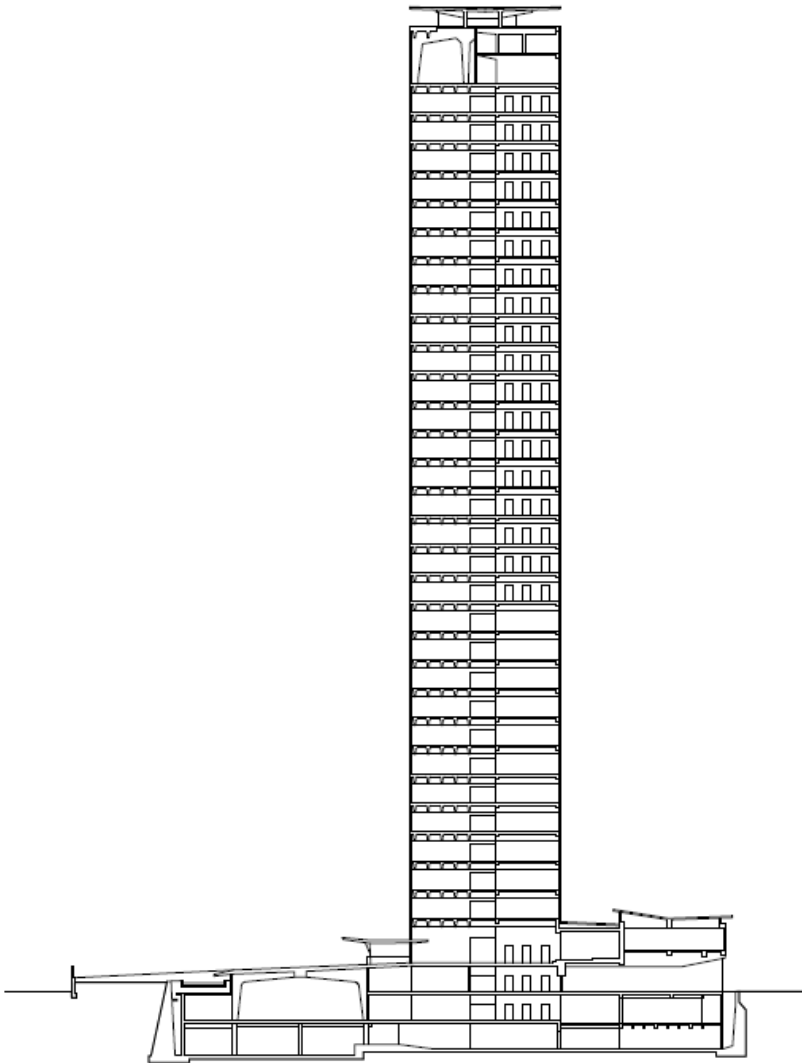
The study of precedents carried out by the design studio gave light to the arguments of the reading responses, particularly the work of Duffy and Pevsner that revealed a historical evolution of these types.

Here have been collected only the most relevant of these precedents in later stages of the design process. Their relevance resides in their role as urban figures, their position as palaces or their interior qualities.

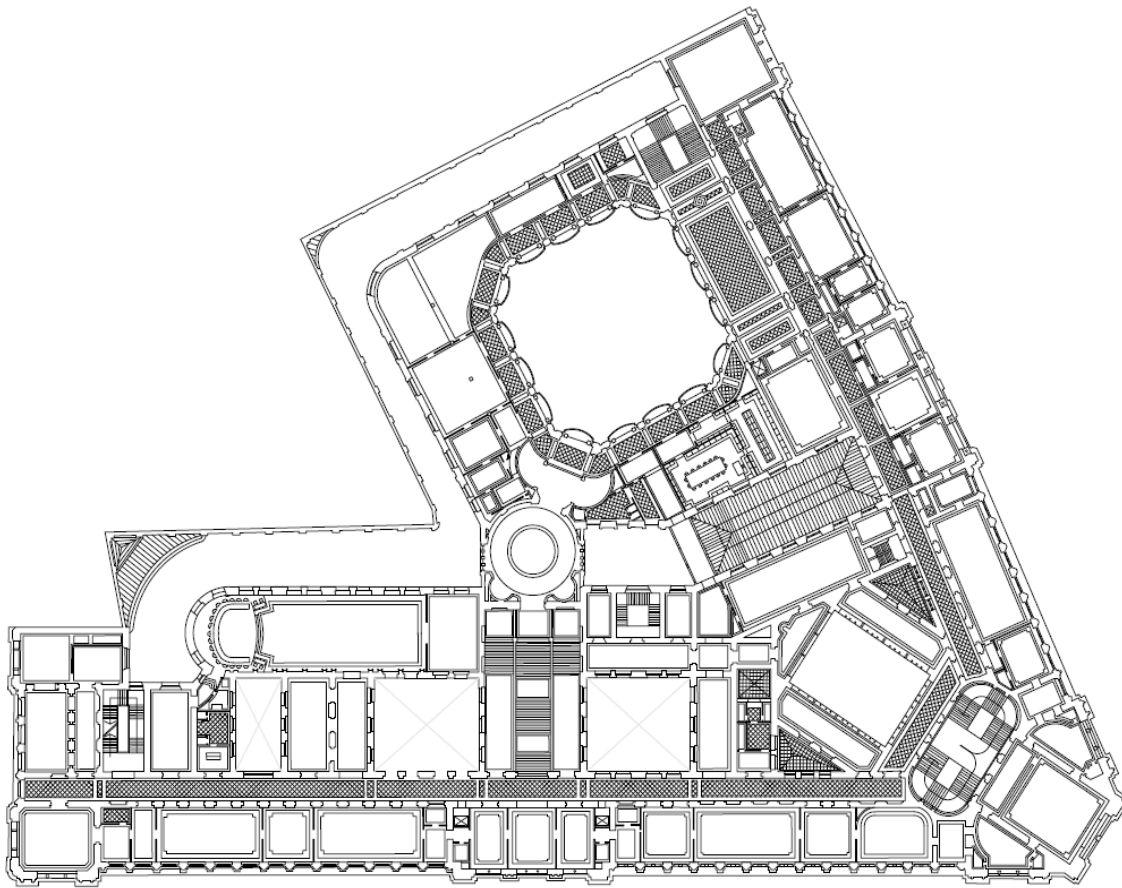
- Urban figures. One can see that some of these offices and banks behave as urban projects, landmarks in the city dressing relevant points like Gio Ponti's Grattacielo Pirelli, an obelisk at the square of the Central Station of Milan. Another example is the Bank of Spain, working horizontally through the facade to demarcate a plot of relevance in the most important artery of Madrid by monumentally taking the corner; it is a Palace of the estate that presents itself to the city at the corner. The Economist Buildings by Alison and Peter Smithson however, take the scale of the urban solution down to the plinth, through the creation of a public plateau and the arrangement of colonnades that give a different form of representation to the office based on the use of public space through architectural detailing.

- Palaces. Many of these precedents are buildings that rely on their power of representation, towards the city and the interior, something that reminds the public role of Palaces throughout history, either as images of the private or the state owned institution. The reading of their plans often shows a sequence of open rooms that reinforces this typology, sometimes as a simple arrangement of entrance halls leading to a greater room, as for instance the building of the Bank of Spain, or as a complex and labyrinthic plan of consecutive rooms connecting the indoor and the outdoor as in the great block of the Bank of England by John Soane. The thinking of this office buildings as urban palaces opens a new point of view to projects like SOM's Manufacturers Hanover Trust, a glass palace conveying a message of transparency and trust or for instance Scarpa's Banca Popolare di Verona, expressing the continuity of the institution that rests its extension on the walls of the old Palace with a clear intention of translating its architectural language.

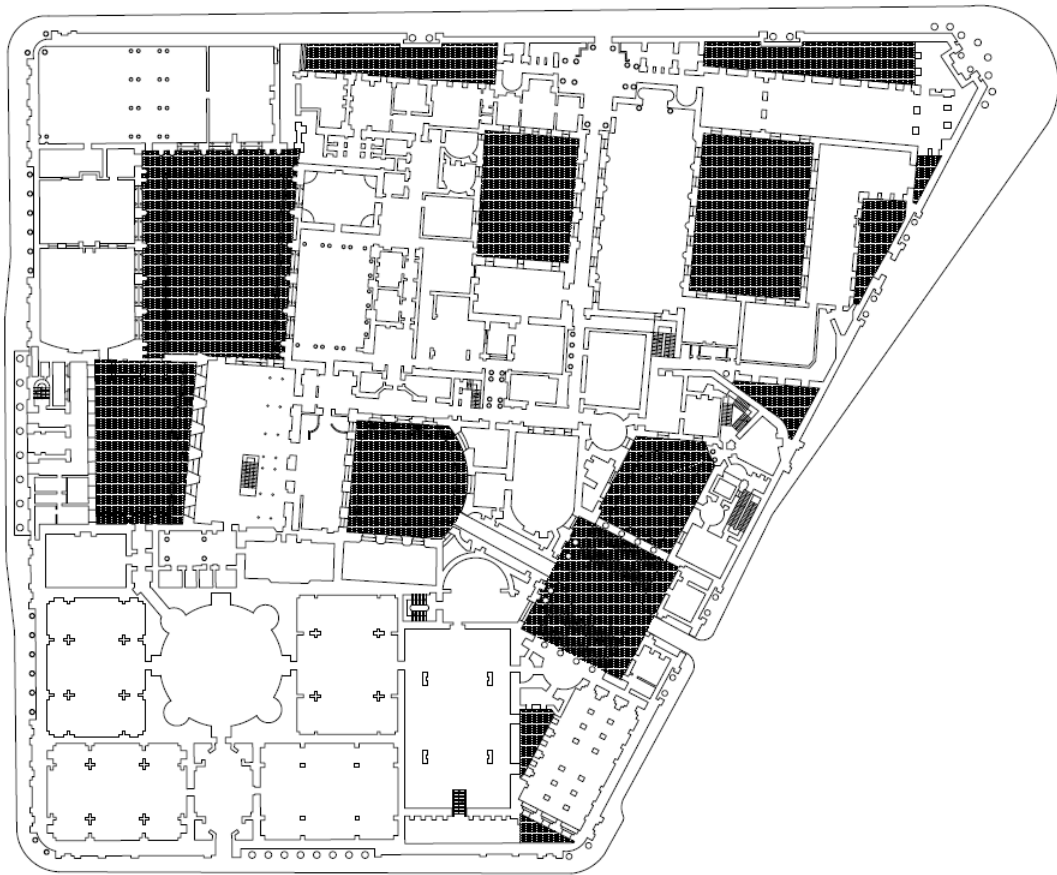
- Interiors. In line with the above mentioned topic of the Palace, the configuration and dressing of many of these offices and institutions displays a complex language of materials, colors reflections, textures which one could imagine resulting in different echoes of heels and shoes stepping on the office floor. Some of these interiors make an effort to convey a palatial atmosphere as in Gio Ponti's Grattacielo Pirelli or Scarpa's Banca Popolare di Verona. Others on the contrary, rely on the efficient configuration of an office space articulated with moving furniture within a fixed shell as in Heidersberger's Osram Headquarters or creating a complex sequence of internal streets crossing through the office space and bringing the work space to the innerblock, for instance Hertzberger's Centraal Beheer.



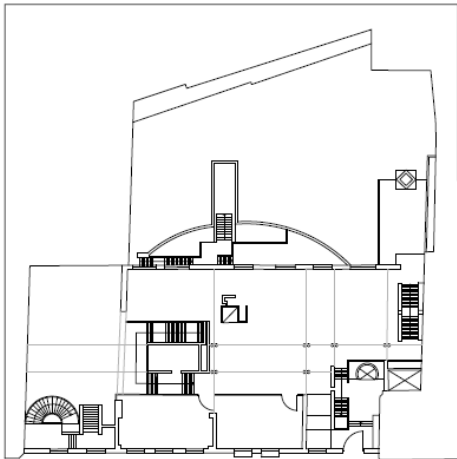
Grattacielo Pirelli
Milan, Italy
1956
Gio Ponti
For Pirelli



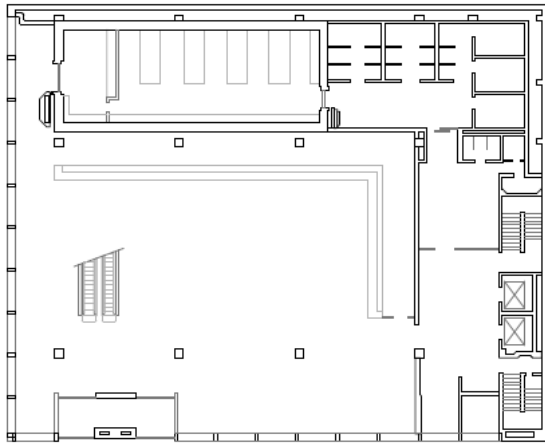
Banco de España
Madrid, Spain
1782
Eduardo Adaro
For Banco de España



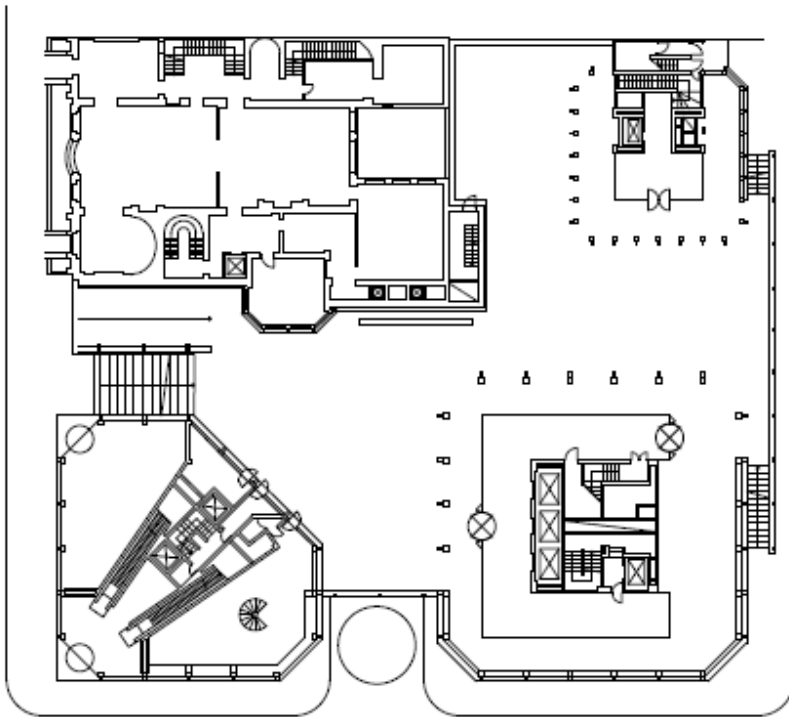
Bank of England
London, England
1788-1833 (demolished 1920s)
John Soane



Banca Popolare di Verona
Verona, Italy
1978
Carlo Scarpa and Arrigo Rudi
Banca Popolare di Verona



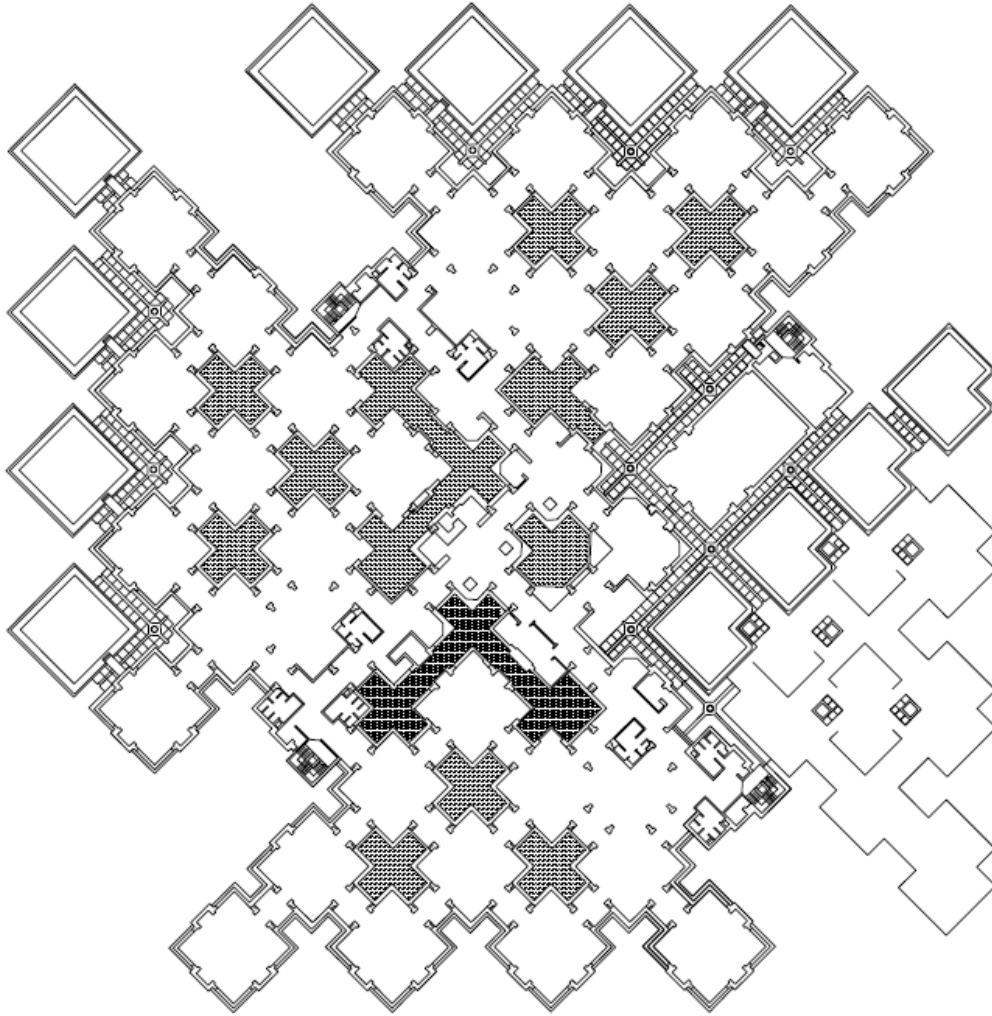
Manufacturers Hanover Trust
New York, United States
1954
Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
For Manufacturers Hanover Trust
Company



The Economist Building
London, England
1959-1964
Alison & Peter Smithson
The Economist Group



Osram Headquarters
Munich, Germany
1965 (demolished 2019)
Walter Henn
Osram



Centraal Beheer
Apeldoorn
1972
Herman Hertzberger
The Centraal Beheer Insurance
Co-operative

On offices

The topic of the office has been presented as the introduction to the challenge of renovating the building of the National Bank of Belgium. Despite the insistence on the workspace and the evolution in office design regarding social aspects that concern the worker, there seems to be other fields of research linked to the idea of office space which go beyond the efficient and strategic layout of a working environment for a corporate profit. The study of precedents and the personal interest regarding three particular aspects, set a starting point to dealing with the office, not just as a space of bureaucracy and production but as type within the city. The architectural study of offices as urban figures very present in every historic city, city centre or periphery and its current (lack of) relation to the urban context is the first matter of concern that must be addressed also in the case of the National Bank of Belgium. Secondly, the analogy between the office and the architectural typology of the palace uncovers a point of view with a historical foundation that can help to deal with the aspect of representation and the role of an institution in time and its position in the city. Lastly, the attention to the interior of the office, moves this research into a different scale. How to move from the 'palace' in the city to the rooms for visitors and workers? How does the institution arrange the boundaries between private and public? How does it dress? How is it laid out in order to provide comfort? What are the scales of the interior and how are they affected by the previous to aspects, the city and the palace?

It is for the above mentioned reasons that the topic of the office space presented in this studio will not be addressed from the point of view of optimization of workflows. The reading responses pointed out that the evolution of office spaces have often been presented as scientific researches that offer a model which is to become outdated in only a few generations of workers. However there seem to be aspects of the office that persist in time and seem to deal with complexities that go beyond the efficiency of the institution or corporation. Those will be the focus of this architectural research project.

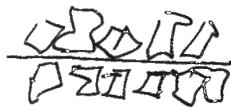
RESEARCH ON THE CITY

P1 - A social plinth

PLINTH

DATUM.

A line unifies and organizes a pattern of forms in space through its continuity.



pg 380 Form, Space and Order

originally a flat squared slab under the molding of the base of a Roman Column

French plinthe, Latin plintus, Greek plinthos

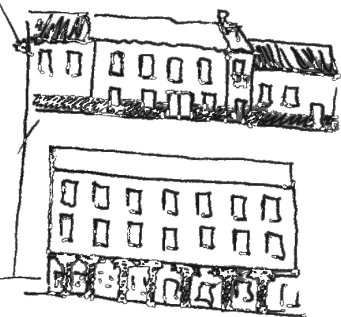
from "to split"

from "flint" a rock noted for its hardness.

"Pedernal"

Pedestal → pedestal Pied (pié) estal (zócalo)

stalla; installare



hablamos de una transición de la idea de pedestal clásico a la cubierta ?? El ZÓCALO

Es esto una evolución del concepto ??

Perforar ese pedestal. Vacío.

- ✓ • Heidegger
- + Arch and Utopia Tafuri
- + The right to the city Lefebvre.
- + How to look at arch Zevi
- + Monestrol.
- + Gregotti.
- + De Carlo.
- + Manieri Bla.
- + Walter Benjamin Flangel de la historia
- + Theodor Adorno.



Semantic study of the word plinth. it is important to understand what it means in language to acknowledge its meaning in space. First studying the origin of the word and its translation to Spanish, where the concept becomes more complex. In Spanish there are two words for plinth, "pedestal" (referring to the piece that raises another element to distinguish it from the rest and detaches it from the ground) and "zócalo" (referring to the part of an element that touches the ground without raising the object and it is differentiated from the rest of the body). Secondly, this part already reflects on the portico as an evolution of the plinth, a perforated plinth. Does the "pedestal" or the "zócalo" prevail?

¿Me pasó la primera vez al oír social plinth?
Tal vez algo así:



es un punto importante en la creación
de ciudad y de espacio. Es la forma en
la que el edificio como cosa transforma
la calle como cosa a nivel humano.

¿Pero qué es crear espacio? Te pregunto Lefebvre
¿y qué es la ciudad y el espacio público?

Un lugar en el que uno puede habitar,
no es calle ni edificio, ante todo es un
espacio anticipado que confronta es uno
privado de la ciudad para intereses monetarios.
Las terrazas que invaden la acera son el
anti-espacio público el antiplinth. Las normas
en el plinth son las de la calle con los
derechos que regala un edificio cosa,
un techo, un resguardo,

Plinth is the opposite of the non-place? ???

Tomando el palacio como el tipo que dirigirá
esta investigación puede resultar interesante
ligar las ideas de Heidegger sobre la cosa que
crea lugar a las ideas de los Smithsons sobre
el charged VOID. Si el palacio es la tipología
y la ciudad su contexto me gustaría establecer
una relación entre el Palacio y la ciudad desde

Spatial reflection on the plinth. Understand the plinth as an important point the making of the city from the architecture, at which the building as an urban object takes a human scale. At this point the plinth is just that volume of space or that point where the mass of the building meets a context, a reality that precedes it and will chance at a different pace. That is the plinth! It is the overlap of spaces, scales, rhythms, temporalities.

Moreover try to regard the plinth as an antiprivate space, a place where the private use of a piece of land will inevitably be confronted by the street.

Pero quería entender realmente la idea del changed void y sobre todo mirar del modelo totalizante y centrarme en el regionalismo. Como un tipo ligado a lo más local puede crear ciudad

¿Cuál es la tipología local??

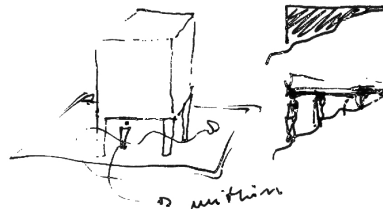
¿Cómo combate esto el nacionalismo globalismo?

¿Cómo el social plinth se convierte en una lucha contra el espacio universal?

¿Es este un instrumento contra la presencia de la economía especulativa de mercado a gran escala?? Contra el HM, la tienda Apple, el Zara, el social Plinth contemporáneos de la ciudad del presente.



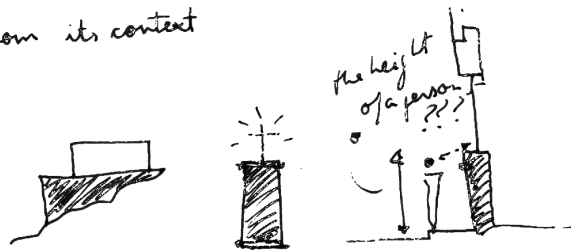
The social must be related to the cell.



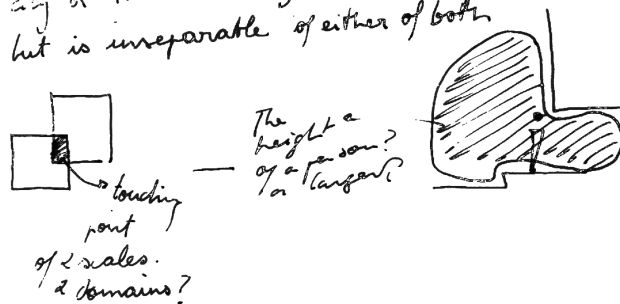
Thinking of type. At this point of the reflection there is a need to think typologically, the assignment could be a way of getting in touch with the palace as an urban type and learn from its relation with the city through the plinth. The sketches repeat again the idea that the plinth is a point that deals with the context, the topography, the plane, the street. In doing so there are two ways of looking at it, the solid mass or the void, the hollow plinth.

+ DEFINE PLINTH.

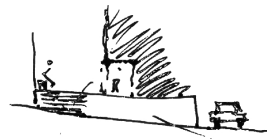
Here we can be referring to an independent object,
an instrument capable of raising the building
and producing monumentality and detachment
from its context



On the other hand the plinth can be a
part of a whole. This whole is either the
city or the building, the context or the object
but is inseparable of either of both



This second idea of the plinth as an urban
element and an architectural part of the building
seems to be the connection between the
interior and the city. To this definition the
example of the Economist Buildings by the Smithsons
provides the perfect ground for research.



the second
the plinth is a point of
contact with the city

Moving from the concept to a case study. The previous ideas are reiterated to find the definitive idea of plinth, the point where both architecture and urbanity meet, therefore dealing with two scales and two domains, an interior and the city.

To study more in detail a place where interior and city meet at multiple levels the reflection moves to the case study of the Economist Building by the Smithsons. The plateau that raises the towers creates almost an interior condition in the city and deals cleverly with the physical context, but even within this interior of the raised squared there appears to be a second and a third point of contact, the porticos and the foyers of the buildings.

+ BERNARDO SECCHI

- He redefined the notion of spatial proximity and insisted in the need for POROSITY in the city. A more densified urban space where people cannot avoid each other and must deal with cultural and class difference.
- ! The designer is not an activist, if anything they design a flexible place that facilitates appropriation and change.
- ! RILIEVO ordinary objects of the small space that articulate the complexity of a larger urban reality.

Ex.

The bench

The PORTICO.

+ MANFREDO TAFURI

! Microhistories the method by which the ordinary unheard history can create an antihegemonical history based on instants in time

Can it help us define the identity of the plinth within a context, what does such an element mean in Brussels and in Cordoba?

+ HEIDEGGER

- The ideas of the thing against the object

+ THE CHARGED VOID

Alison and Peter Smithson.

- The emptiness of the public space, emptiness that is full of possibilities, the ambiguous space, the open.
- Emptiness is the liberal programmed space of the contemporary city.
- What if they had built the Kiosk? the push to appropriate the place by the user.
- Emptiness only works in the right scale.



BENCH.

FLORENCE PALACES ????

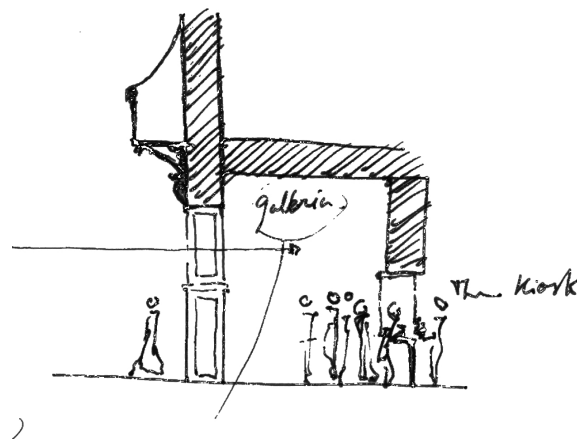
The role of the bench as a public gesture intimately related to the plinth, a way of reprogramming the street level.

MEDICI - RUCCELLAI - MUSEO DI FIRENZE.

!! TO EMPTY THE PLINTH!!! The ideas of the Smithsons could well be oriented to

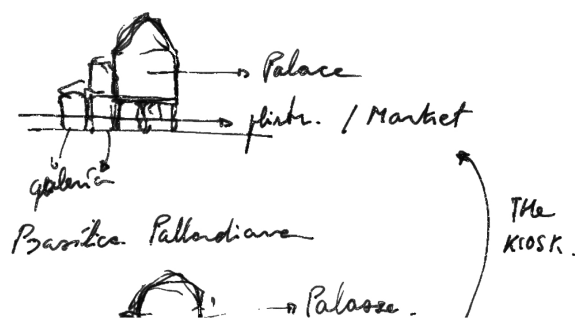
The case study of the "charged void". Alison and Peter Smithson implemented the idea of the "charged void" in the Economist Building, an empty space, thus full of possibilities. This idea extended to the plateau and the portico, that could be appropriated providing bits of program such as a bench or a kiosk. This is very important, specially when put together with the thoughts of Tafuri's microhistories to develop counterhegemonic discourses and Secchi's porosity and rilievo. The first can suggest to look into the most ordinary situations instead of only focusing on canonical examples of social plinth. The second can explain the relation between the urban object and the bigger scale.

The idea of the urban void as the plinth that can connect the architecture and the city. I cannot but remember the Corredera in Cordoba. (Lugar de corridas de toros y centro de las fiestas municipales, se construye en su centro el mercado de abastos, centro comercial de la ciudad & el mercado fue derribado pero la actividad continuaba en las galerías de la plaza, hoy ocupadas por cafés y tiendas son espacio público).



Italian Portico origin??

Palazzo della Regione Padova.



The generic case study of the portico in Cordoba. The idea that more ordinary examples reveal more clearly the reality of the social plinth takes the reflection from London to the small town of Cordoba. La plaza de la Corredera is the example of a local square used for bull fights, fairs and market in the most daily basis. The enclosure of the square hides a continuous portico that precedes the entrances to small bars and shops which do not take a width larger than a single bay. In section this example reveals what reminds to the void of the Smithsons, an empty square, a perforated plinth and bits of program. The plinth here becomes that transition from the city to the building.

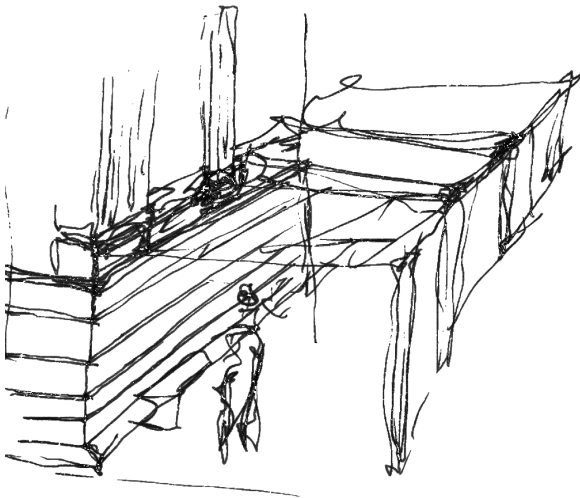
BRUSSELS

Monumental plinth and nothing to do with the portico (Alhambra Theatre) But it is remarkable when you look at the plinth of the continental Hotel, the power of the awnings to smooth the plinth a cover of the street that reminds to the portico and that comes back in the maison du peuple and in the GREAT KIOSK of public life: the mall

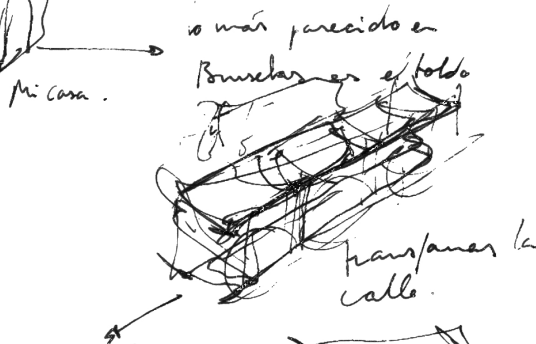
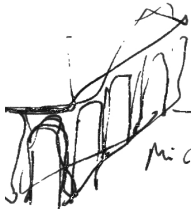


plan to deal with the existing plinth

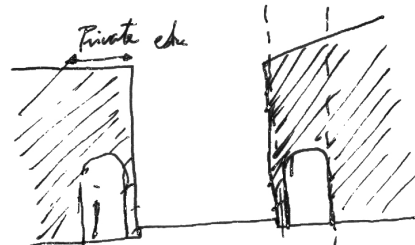
The generic case study of awnings in Brussels. If the portico was an important type to understand the nature of a social plinth in mediterranean architecture, could it be exported to a different city? Is there an equivalent in Brussels that can explain what happens in that point where the building touches its context? The answer could be in awnings, another ordinary form, in this case filigree and often temporal that anticipates a program and softens the plinth in a similar way.



este arquitectura no introduce
al edificio en la ciudad, lo ignora



The Porticos as a projection of public
building on the public land, they
are not a catastrophe to public space



How to invert the model?



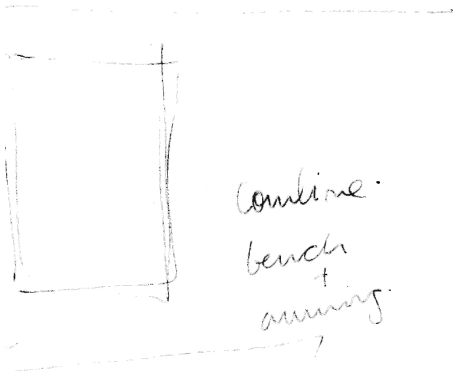
The arcades appear as a consequence
of densification, more population in
same territory land.

Maybe the awnings of Brussels should
be the opposite, a public addition to the
private facade, a counterargument
to the privatization of the pavement.

Map of Brussels → squares.
plintus.

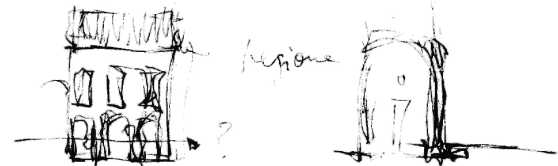
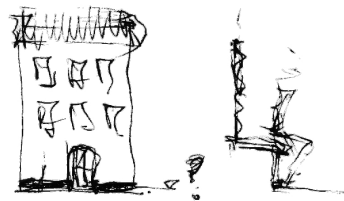
Could it be publicly owned? After looking into other examples of porticos, such as the streets of Bologna or the Palazzi della Regione in northern Italy, it was clear that they were a consequence of the extension of the architecture into the public domain, and not the opposite. Sometimes resulted from densification and others the repeated extensions of a palace over the street. Even in the case of Brussels the awning invades the pavement privatizing what lies below the fabric. At this point the challenge was to use the awning (as the urban object characteristic of Brussels and typological translation of the portico) to revert the tendency of privatizing the street, as an object that extends public use.

Kiosk



La pregunta es como determinados objetos
que traducen tipologías de un
lugar pueden activar el public plinth
del palace.

Medici



Calle

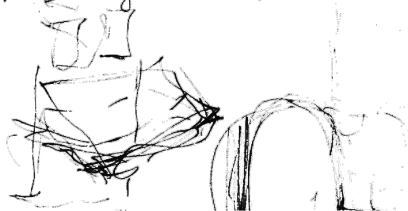
face
wing

Commercial

2. Awning

Palace

Portico

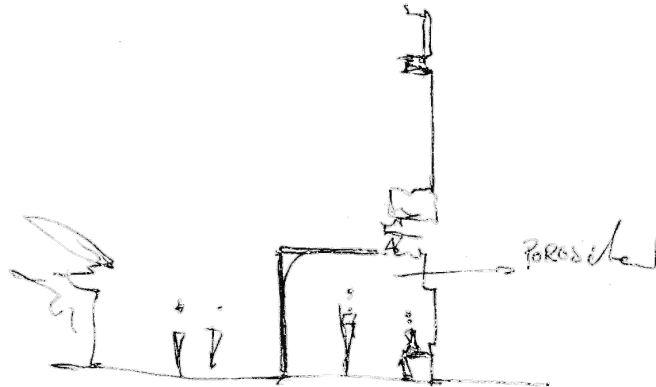


what if it wasn't
a place of movement
and it was a
place of rest

The form of the plinth. The reflection moves on into the form of the portico and the awning, figuring out details that make the plinth a static place such as the benches by the facade of the Medici Palace in Florence or steps leading up to an entrance, which are more likely to become public seats. But it is equally interesting to see elements that produce movement in the plinth, for instance lowering the pavement a couple steps, thus suggesting a different speed from the street or the interior. Perhaps it is the combination of both that can generate the social plinth, by creating bits of static program and a constant flow running parallel to the street.

PIER VITTORIO AURELI

LECTURES

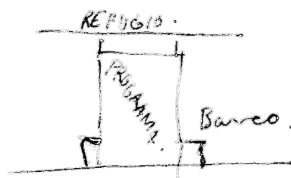


Para mí el interés está claro. Cual es el impacto de una escala arquitectónica sobre otra? Que relación guarda el edificio con la ciudad y el elemento con el edificio y el elemento con la ciudad. En este caso situar el contexto de esta pregunta en la cuestión tipológica del Palacio. Que papel jugaba el Palacio como tipología urbana y que papel juega. Que relación guardaba el palacio como un órgano de gobierno económico y de orden político. Uno puede imaginarse el micrófono que daría lugar por al lado del Palacio de Venecia siendo un criminal buscado en la ciudad la seguridad que daba un orden político como el del campo de Diemna, que memoria generaba el volterpalo de Berlín a esas familias que iban de noche a conciertos y actividades. Hay demasiadas preguntas aquí, que es un palacio, que papel juega, que lenguaje utiliza. ¿Es un comunicador de ideas? es un objeto abstracto o una cosa concreta?

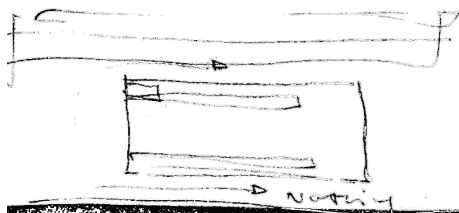
Choosing a plinth, the palace. At this point the site has to be chosen. There is an interest for the relation between the smallest scale, that of the urban element which will be the intervention, and the bigger scale, the historic city of Brussels. Between both lies the building and within the Pentagon, the specific type of the urban palace seems to be representative of a certain period and crucial for the design of the city. The sketch is a first attempt to imagine an element by the plinth of the Palais de la Bourse, which is pivotal for one of the largest transformations of the young capital of Belgium right in the intersection between Anspaach Boulevard and the historic urban tissue. This is the choice.

urbano. Aquí también entra la cuestión del espacio urbano, la ciudad, qué es y hacia donde debe ir. Como el palacio puede ser una de esas permanencias de las que hablaba Marcel Pöte para construir una ciudad ligada a su pasado: De Sección y Tufuri podríamos extraer el paradigma de una ciudad orientada a la producción capitalista. Esto no es la opción.

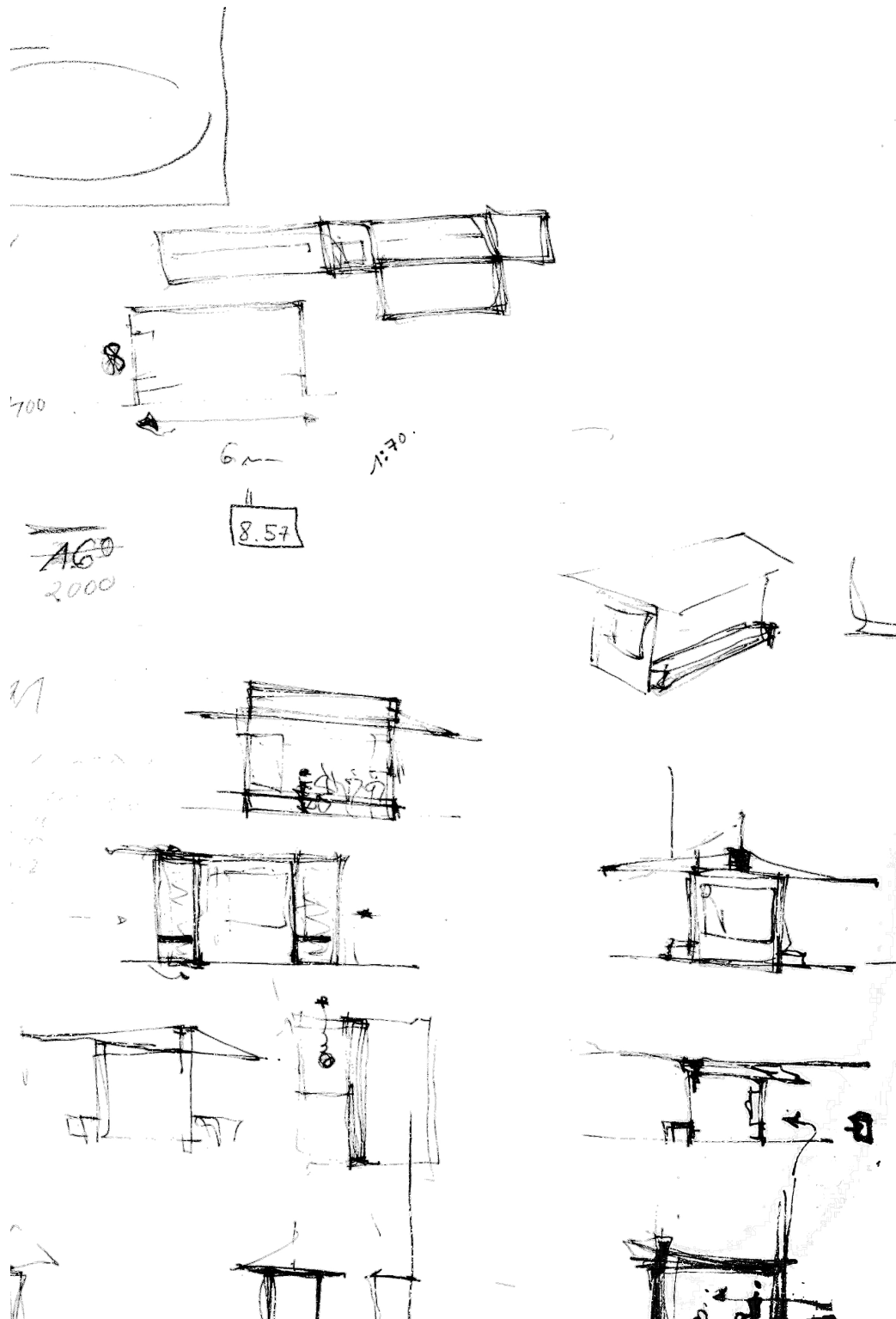
En la cuestión de la escala el Kiosk juega un papel fundamental, no solo como un antídoto al social plinth sino como un puro social plinth, una reducción del social plinth. habría que entenderlo como la suma de 3 elementos:



KIOSK IN DER STADT.



The kiosk. The thinking of the relation between different scales and in particular between the urban element and the city leads to the kiosk, a plinth on its own that by landing in an empty boulevard or square can change it completely. It can easily translate the elements of the portico (the shelter, the program and the seat) into a different form, perhaps too detached from its context.



The form of the kiosk. Perhaps it should be less of a diagram and more of a real thing with the complexity of the street. For that reason these sketches try to imagine it with measurements that could work with the Rue Henri Maus, by the Bourse. Besides, at this point it became clear that the kiosk needed two benches at both sides under an awning, thus positioning the counters at both ends of the rectangle, allowing for two kiosks in one rectangular shape. This way the counters would always face the flow of people in the street and the benches and the awnings run parallel to it. This could be the way to refer to the portico, making the space under the awning static but aligned with movement.

The Economist Building 1964, Alison and Peter Smithson



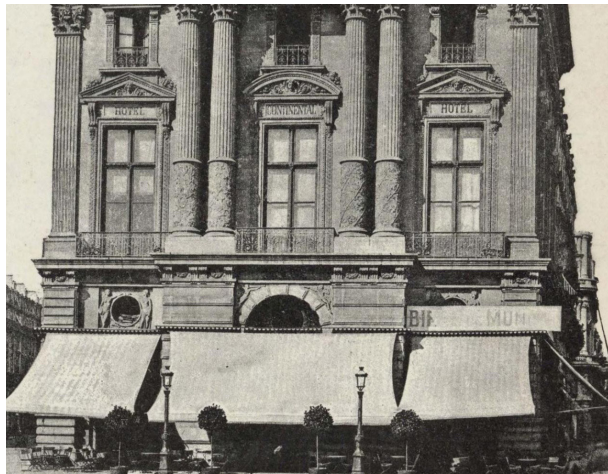
Plaza de la Corredera de Cordoba 1901

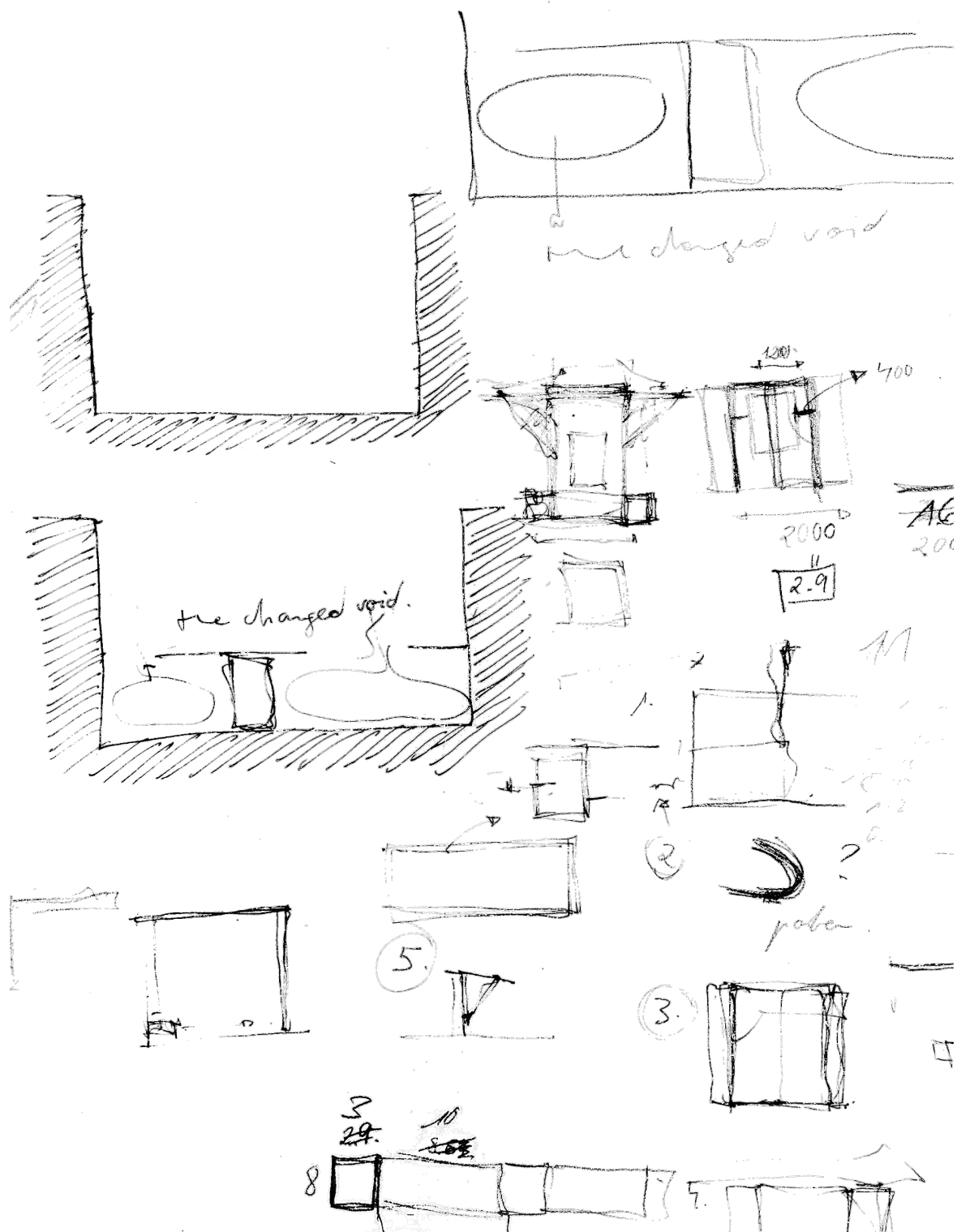


Piazza delle Erbe, Padua, 80s

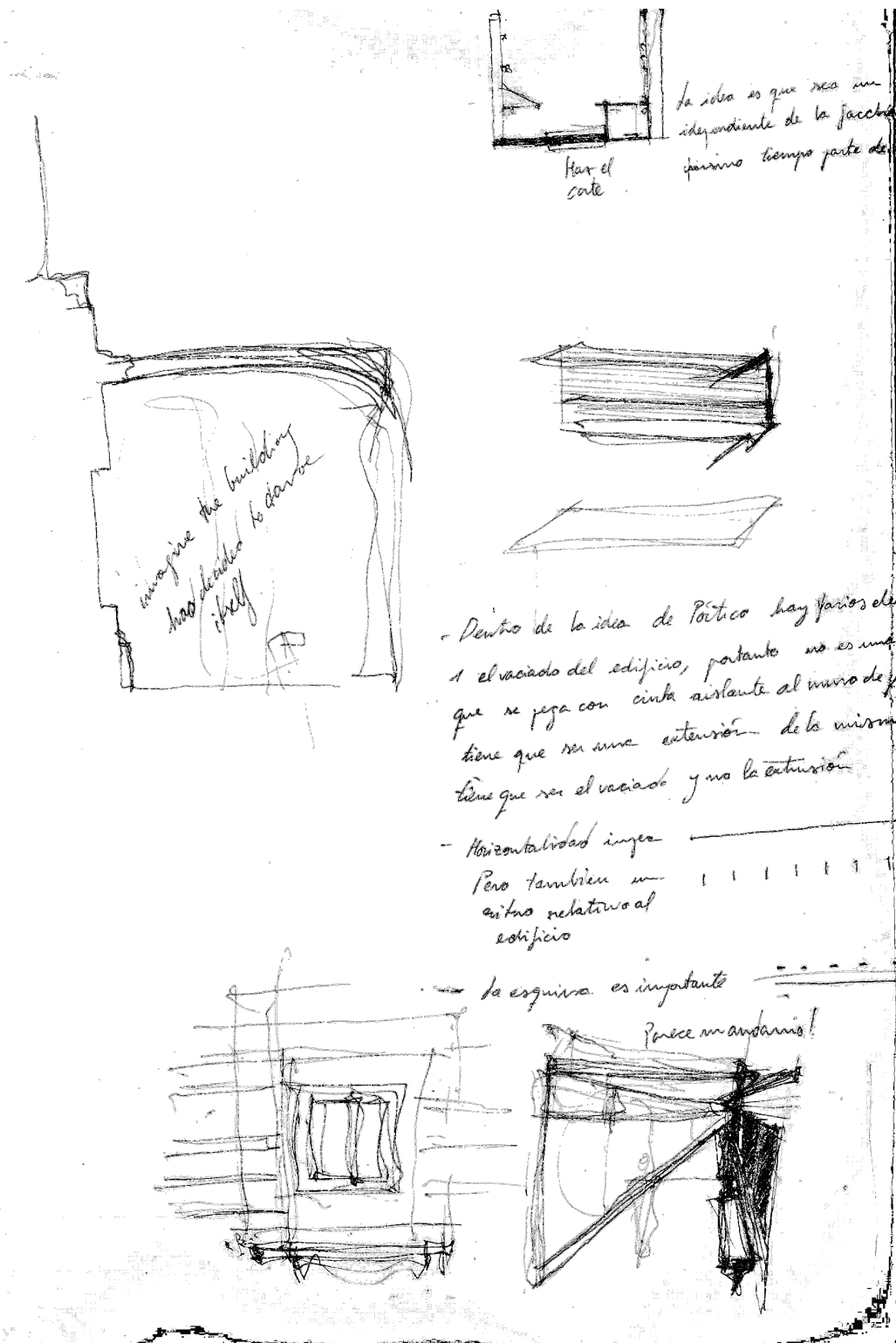


Hotel Continental, Brussels 1901

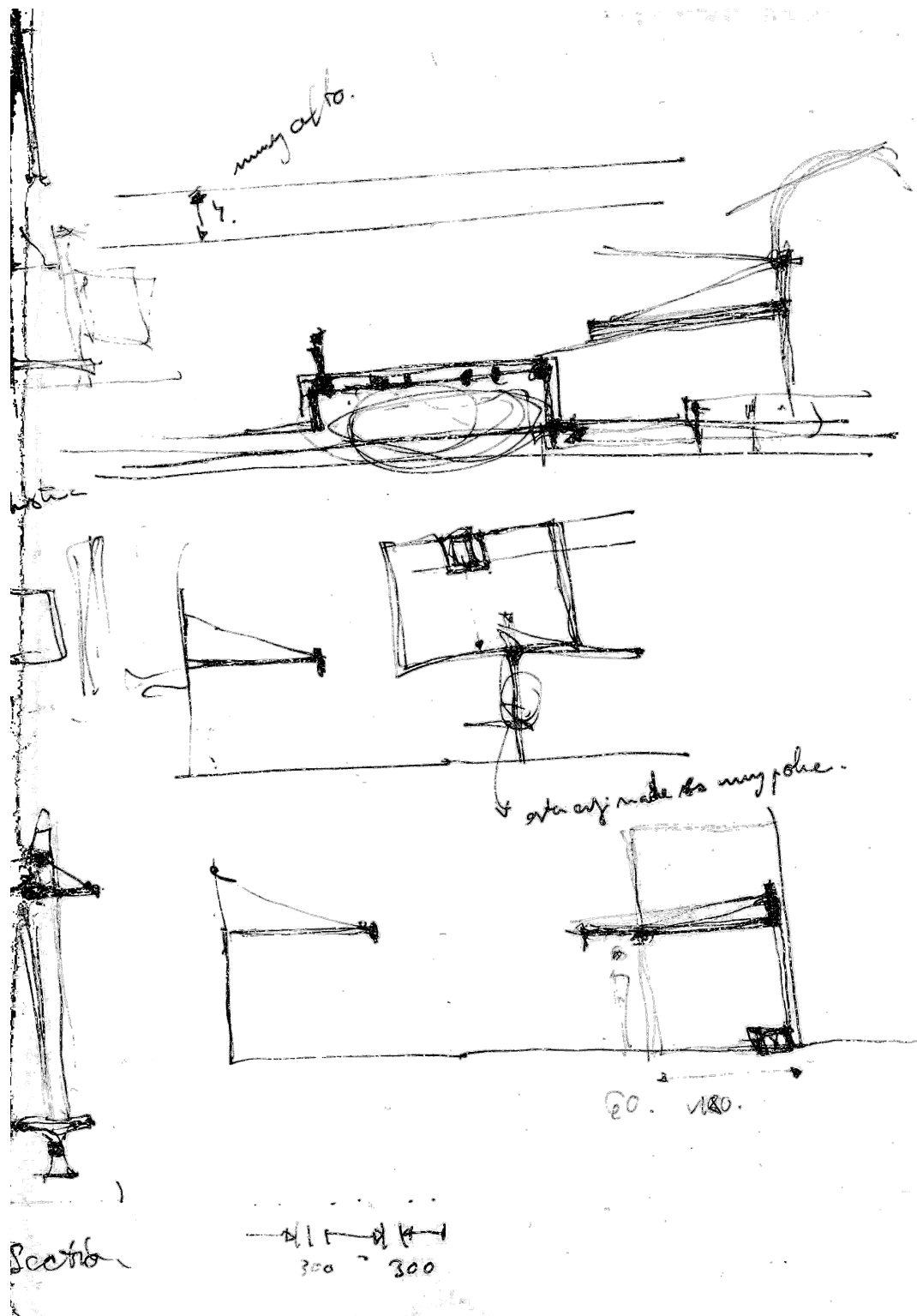




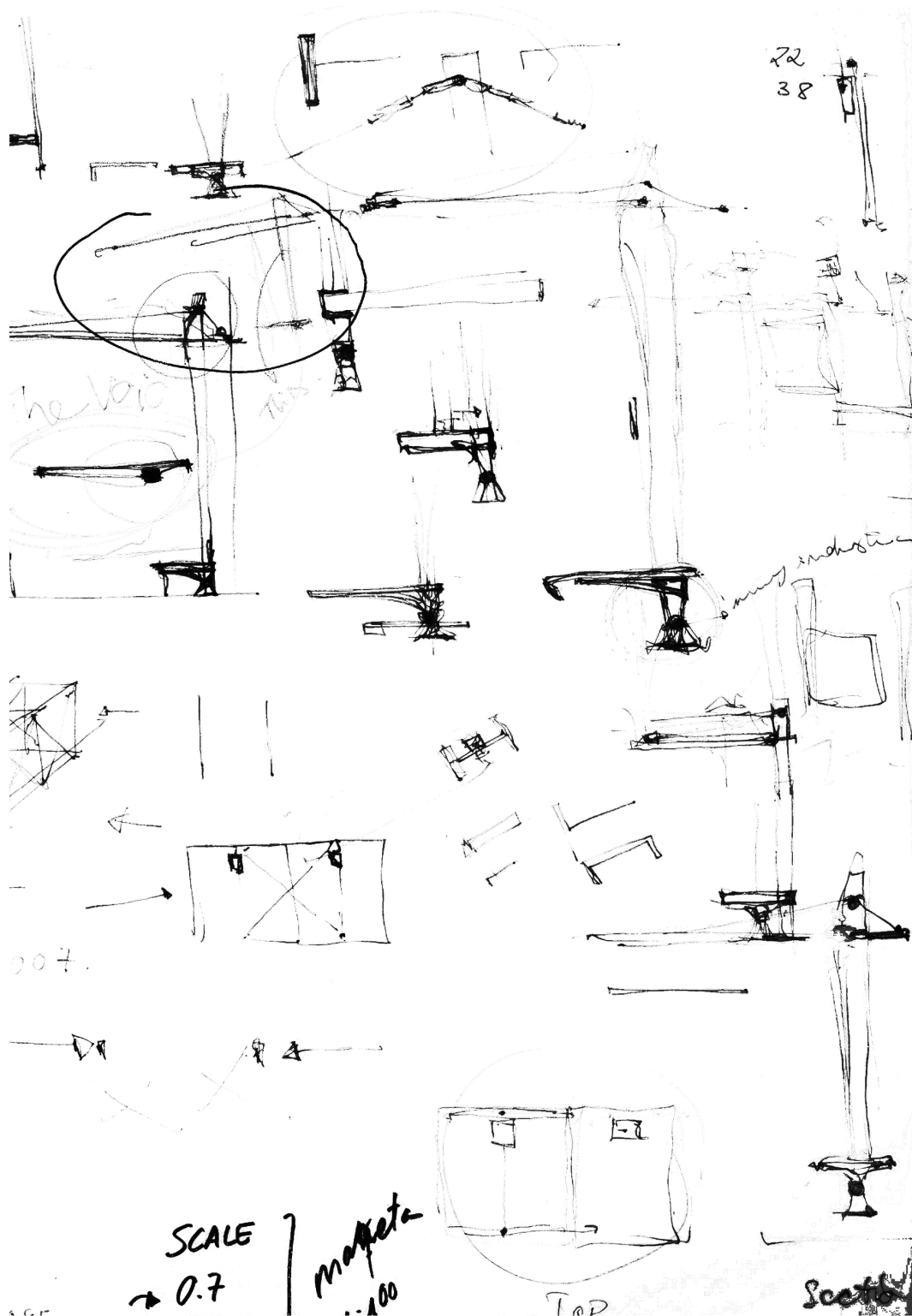
NOT the kiosk. This type of urban element is interesting, no doubt, it could be a social plinth on its own capable of producing change on a different scale, the boulevard, the square or the quarter simply by gathering people around an extremely affordable program and delivering public shelter and seat. It could even be owned by the municipality or the neighbourhood and rented to small initiatives. However it does not deal with the plinth of the palace, its too much on its own, it does not exactly contribute to generate void in the street ready for public use, if anything it could become another excuse for consumption. It does not confront how the Bourse touches the city. It should not be.



Imagine the Bourse decided to carve its plinth out. It is necessary to go back to the idea of void, of empty space that can be full of possibilities. To contribute to this the bench and the awning seem to be the most valuable lessons from the attempt of the kiosk. This time it should not be an extrusion of the building, but rather a piece that has been carved out of its plinth to make room for use. This does not mean a literal carving but simply that the structure should not be a rough scaffolding that adds to. This urban element has to quietly appear from the rhythm of the facade and perhaps only where it touches the ground acquire the massiveness of the Bourse, carving a step like in Bologna?



The awning, a thin metal sheet. This is the first time that the awning takes a fairly definitive structure consisting of slender aluminium columns holding metal sheets from tensile cables, but also the first time that it deals with the offsets in the facade, taking advantage of the zigzagging contour to place the benches.



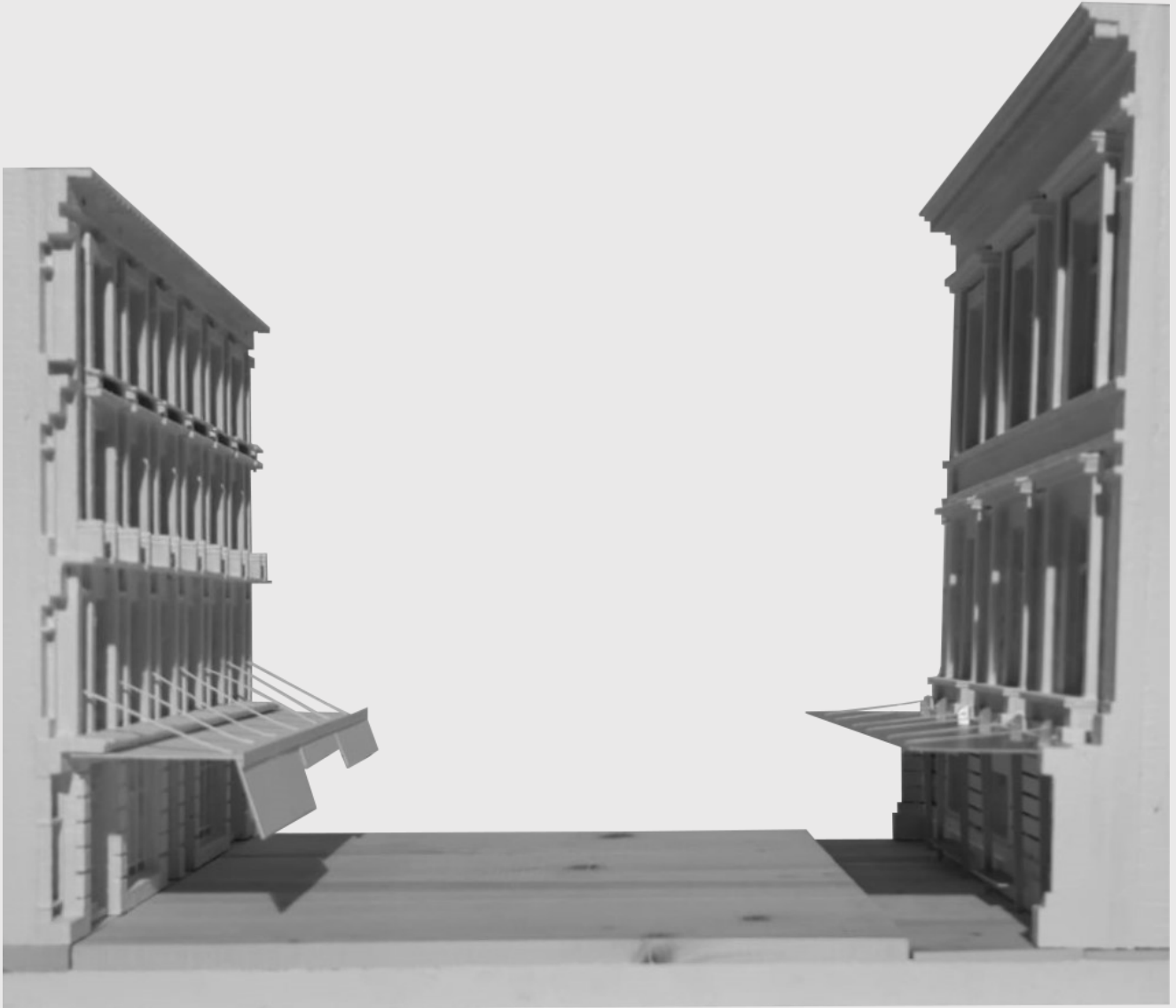
Figuring out the smallest elements. It is important to give the bench the same lightness as to the rest of the structure. The sketches show some of the attempts to arrive at the final decision (upper left side in a circle under “the void”) which is an aluminium profile attached to a horizontal steel element that holds the bench to the columns. This way the bench and the awning can become one urban element.

Reflection *On P1*

The design assignment for a social plinth became an opportunity to address the relation between the building and the city at the human scale. On the one hand, it was interesting to depart from the idea of land use, who owns the plinth? Is it a private piece of the street or the last public boundary before own ventures the building? At the same time, is the plinth an exterior or an interior? Can it be an indoor in the outdoor? or even could there be qualities in the street that make such relation between the building and the city a relation between two interiors at the plinth? In creating a social plinth, is it architecture or the fact that it can become a space free of charge what makes it social? On the other hand, the assignment focused on the aspect of composition of a space, the relevance of the void at the plinth brought by the portico and the awning, but also the role of urban elements, the bench, the kiosk... Therefore the question of how much impact do urban elements have in creating a social condition by the plinth? Can street furnishing achieve a public use of a private plinth? Is this the reason why architecture plays such a relevant role in creating a 'free of charge' condition? How does the urban element respond to temporalities? Is it capable of crating an interior in the outdoor?

The choice for a case study in the centre of Brussels, the historical Palais de la Bourse became an exercise of understanding both the street and the palace in the context of a touristic historic centre where the plinth is highly privatized, taken over by consumerist attractions, the Mcdonalds, the Starbucks, the souvenir shop... There is a need to offer different plinths in the historic city, oriented to a public use, free of charge, capable of attracting people becoming static points in the city life. At the same time it necessary to use existing typology in order to properly connect with city. The examples of porticos in Italy and Spain were enlightening to proof the impact of the void by the plinth. However, Brussels is a different city, it has its own historical language and its own types. In this case the awning seems a reasonable translation of the covered public space offered by a portico. The second step is to detach this type from a comercial use and use it as an urban another urban element, therefore type is not fixed, it may be a point of departure only (understanding that type means both form and function in this case, the awning is not just a morphological element, it has its particular tectonic but always related to use, sheltering). At last the awning can become a furnishing element, like street lamps, bins, benches, it is meant to create an interior condition in the street.

The result of all the previous arguments is a position that will orient the design for the NBB. The need for creating public use and urban conditions free of charge. The need for offering interiority through urban elements that enable use of the public space. The need for dealing with the street and the existing building conditions. The need for softening the palace figure. The need for adresssing the role of private property in an urban context. The need of dealing with highly privatized and comercial cities.



Visit to Brussels

The first visit revealed a city of fragments of different eras, that rather than a palimpsest one could call a mutilation, because it is mediaeval but not quite, it is neoclassical but not quite and it is modernist but not quite. Each of these epochs seems to have collided carelessly with the previous. This becomes clear in one of the last crashes, the landing of office-spaceships in the Pentagon known as Brusselization which has left a cityscape of urban voids and liminal spaces. Among all places la place de la Monnaie is the one that better explains this mutilation of the city, not only because of the absolute dramatic scale of the Centre Monnaie but also due to the ridiculous dialog between the office block and the theatre in the same square, where the older seems not to dare to confront its younger sibling. Equally dramatic was to see a highrise monster of monotonous stone cladding from the alley of des Pigeons rising in the place where Horta's Maison du Peuple used to be.

In this fragmented context there is one more particular phenomenon, facadism. Amidst the effects of Brusselization there are entire plots that have been demolished in the inside to leave their historic facades still standing like shells supported by massive scaffolding. What they will become seems uncertain but they look as if authorities had impose their preservation in regret from previous demolitions, as if there was an intention to look back at the historic city again. However the thread is that these will become superficial attempts of preservation.

The last note is on the innerblocks of Brussels, perhaps inherited from the mediaeval fabric. One can wonder around the city through avenues and boulevards but also taking alleys and arcades that transport one through the block. These shortcuts have been filled with program, sometimes beautified to a great extent and have built a city of interiors. Without wanting to sound romantic, they are another Brussels that has been built inwards and it is known only by those who are acquainted with its labyrinthic sequence.



Place de la Monnaie



Rue des Pigeons



Tour Noire



Rue Royale



Place de Brouckere



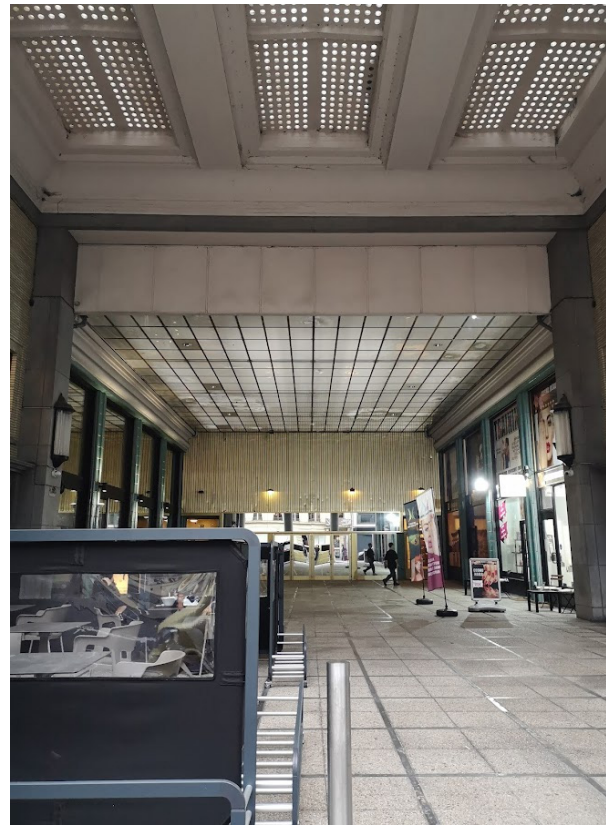
Place de Brouckere



Rue Royale



Passage du Nord



Monnaie Building



Gallery Ravenstein



Passage Rue d'Argent

RESEARCH ON THE CITY

Historical research

- 1.The case of Rome and Renovatio Urbis**
- 2.Brussels. The two cities**
- 3.Brusselization**

1.The case of Rome and Renovatio Urbis

From the western facades of the northern edge of Via Giulia in Rome, one can read pieces of a lost puzzle of heavy rusticated stones that time had overlapped with the plaster finish of smaller residential buildings. This puzzle was once the great Palazzo dei Tribunali, designed by Bramante in 1506, a pivotal piece for the renewal of Via Giulia and the new position of power from the Pontificate with respect to the city. Before Julius II pontificate (1503-1513) the city was regarded more as “a squatter’s settlement than a properly planned city”¹. Therefore the Palazzo dei Tribunali was thought as the first of a series of projects that contributed to the beautification of the city supported on ancient literary reference and the legitimacy that the remnants of the Roman Empire gave to the papacy². Back in Roman times there was already a historical relation between the idea of conquest and urban renewal through monuments built from the spoils of warfare, however in the 16th century the challenge was to reconfigure the remnants of classical antiquity aiming for the unification of Italy under a Papal Empire³. Julius II’s intention was to transform the Vatican into the political and judicial heart of Christianity and so began a fashion of popes that would implement urban transformations of Rome as political statements to endure their legacy.

Julius II transformation of Rome relied on three routes that converged in two main streets of the mediaeval tissue, Via Papalis (route for the ceremony of coronation of the Pope), Via Peregrinorum (pilgrimage route) and the Via Triumphalis (which simply retraced Via Peregrinorum and was meant to reinforce the role of the warrior pope, ‘second Caesar’). These ceremonial routes had to converge in the Vatican which back at the time was at the outskirts of the mediaeval city, the ‘backside’ of Rome. The insertion of another route, a third street running parallel to the river would not only shift the city towards the Vatican, it would also make a coherent network with the other two streets, a primitive goosefoot that would create the impression that Rome’s routes came together at the Vatican.

This new street was Via Giulia, “perhaps the first example of a systematic and uncompromising urban insertion that consciously subordinates the surrounding urban morphology”⁴. The main element of this route was the Foro Iulio, the piazza for the Palazzo dei Tribunali which carved out part of the mediaeval tissue to suffice Bramante’s urban proposal of fostering commercial and religious program in a former residential area (abitato)⁵. The second intention of Bramante’s design was to create “extra territorial centres for Papal activity”⁶ in densely inhabited areas of the city, in order to let administrative functions penetrate the mediaeval fabric, thus reinforcing the omnipresence of the Papacy. The Palazzo Riario (Camera Apostolica), Papal Zecca (Mint), Palazzo Sforza Cesarini (Old Chancery), among others were part of this administrative network embedded in the city fabric in which the Palazzo dei Tribunali would be an “urban fulcrum” between the Vatican and the Capitol.

The Palace was meant to bring together the four tribunals of Rome (Rota, Camera Apostolica, Roman Senate and Segnatura di Giustizia) in a symmetrical piano nobile orbiting around a central court that would also give access to a church on the side of the river, placed right at the axis of symmetry. The design which was indeed influenced by the principles of a renaissance urban palace like the ones in Florence referred more strongly to the history of the city of Rome, as it has been said that it was something in between the ancient Tabularium and the fortified mediaeval city hall.

Despite its relevance the project remained unfinished and was later fragmented into private build-

1. Temple, N. *Renovatio Urbis* (The Classical Tradition in Architecture) (1st ed.). 2021.p34

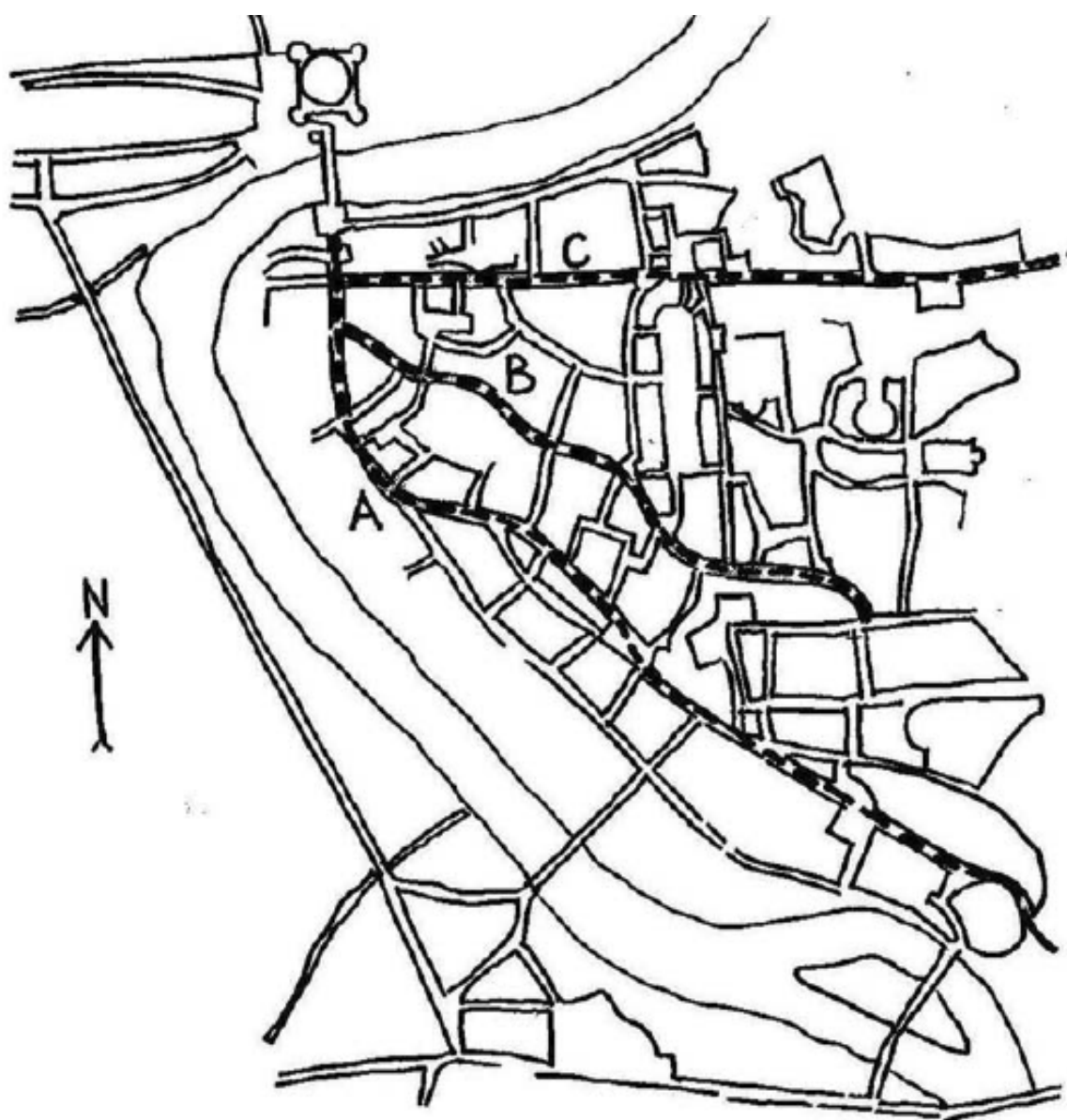
2. Temple, N. *Renovatio Urbis* (The Classical Tradition in Architecture) (1st ed.). 2021.p36

3. Temple, N. *Renovatio Urbis* (The Classical Tradition in Architecture) (1st ed.). 2021.p39

4. Temple, N. *Renovatio Urbis* (The Classical Tradition in Architecture) (1st ed.). 2021.p64

5. Temple, N. *Renovatio Urbis* (The Classical Tradition in Architecture) (1st ed.). 2021.p65

6. Temple, N. *Renovatio Urbis* (The Classical Tradition in Architecture) (1st ed.). 2021.p66

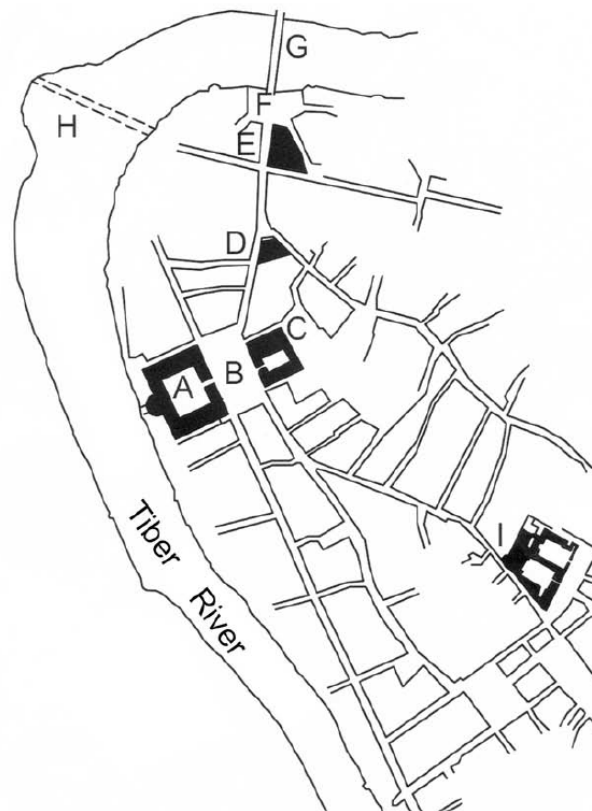


ings that reused the foundations of the Palace. Nevertheless the transformation of Via Giulia and Rome had just begun, reorienting the city towards the river Tiber¹. In the coming years and later in the Baroque period several churches and private palaces were built in Via Giulia that had become an exclusive piece in the power display of the Papacy. This project has been discussed as an example of *Renovatio Urbis*, a Renaissance principle by which a collection of specific projects are capable of transforming the meaning and the function of existing parts of the city or even entire cities. In the case of Via Giulia, Bramante proposed to reuse typological qualities of the Florentine palaces that range from the scale of the plan, such as a central courtyard surrounded by arcades, to the detail, urban elements that refer directly to the transformation of the street, such as a bench by the rusticated plinth of the palace looking onto the public piazza that never got built.

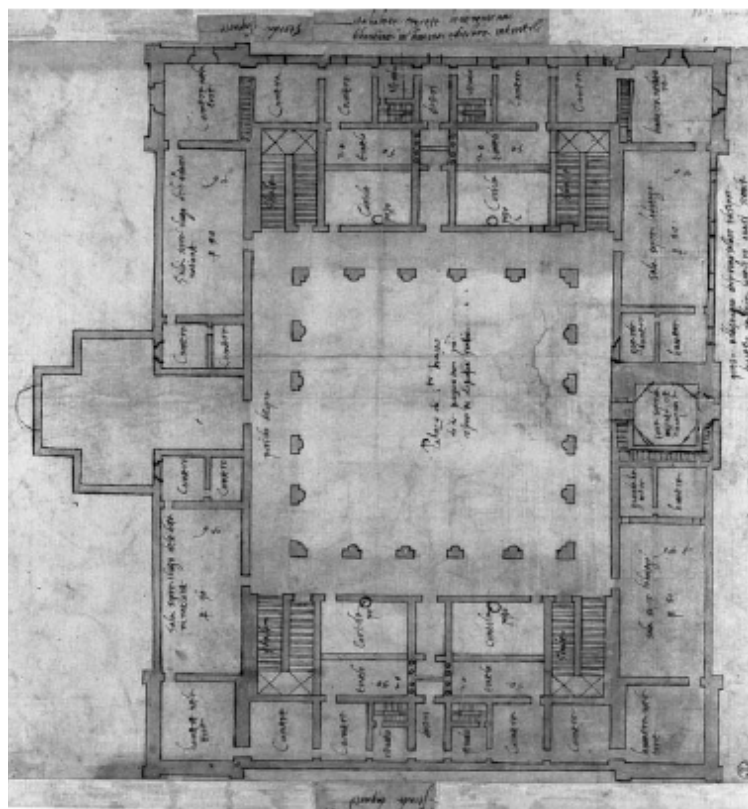
Renovatio Urbis is a clear sign of the transformative role that architecture plays at an urban scale even when the object remains hypothetical. However this story must not fool the reader, because it was obviously not only an unfinished rusticated plinth that transformed Rome, neither did a very coherent design of a Palace and a grand piazza. What really transformed Rome was a political ambition that survived through generations of Popes in the Renaissance and Baroque periods. This political ambition had a purposeful strategy to embed itself in the urban fabric using the urban Palace as a key figure together with other elements that would be later displayed in Sixtus V plan.

There are a few lessons that could inspire the design of the Palace of the National Bank of Belgium. The first is the need for a political ambition that concerns the city of Brussels in relation to the problematic gentrification of the historic centre; to this respect the project should attempt to reprogram the Pentagon introducing residential functions in a similar but opposing way to what Bramante attempted in Rome's residential mediaeval fabric, because a series of projects can reprogram entire parts of the city. The second lesson has to do with the coherence for the urban solution which should not only comprise the site and its surroundings but the entire city of Brussels; in this case it has to do with looking at the division between eastern and western, upper and lower Brussels, the administrative city and the historic centre, the long boulevards and inner urban routes; the project must be coherent with these realities and the solution must include them, simply like Bramante was aware of the position of the Palace with respect to ceremonial routes, the Vatican and the Capitol, the river and the topography, all parts of a more extensive network. The third lesson has to do with referring to the strongest morphology and typology of the city, the architecture of Brussels; the point is never to introduce a foreign language into the city that can contrast the existing, the point is to reinforce the existing, refer to the identity of the city, like Bramante being capable of identifying the role of the mediaeval town hall palace and the ancient Roman Tabularium, it is necessary to find the types that help to read Brussels, those that make its identity.

1. Rebecchini, Guido. *Renaissance Quarterly* 65, no. 2. 2012. p.538. <https://doi.org/10.1086/667288>.



Map indicating the principal landmarks/developments: Palazzo dei Tribunali (A), Foro Iulio (B), Palazzo Sforza-Cesarini (Old Chancery) (C), Papal Mint (D), SS. Celso e Giuliano (E), Piazza di Ponte (F), Ponte Sant'Angelo (G), Pons Neronianus (H), Piazza della Cancelleria (I) and Ponte Sisto (J).



Antonio di Pellegrino (attrib.), Plan of the Palazzo dei Tribunali and church of S. Biagio della Pagnotta (sixteenth century). Florence, Galleria Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Uff. 136Ar

2.Brussels. The two cities

The city of Brussels has inherited an urban morphology clearly conditioned by its origins as a capital city and the creation of the independent Belgian State in 1830¹. The birth of the new nation is made sense of within the spread of 19th century colonial nationalism in Europe. In this context the young Belgian monarchy and the bourgeoisie elaborated a strategy to reinforce the national identity by strengthening the catholic nature of the country in opposition to the Dutch protestantism, repress Dutch as the language of the former occupier while embracing French (a language of freedom and European hegemony at the time) and lastly developing a grand European capital, Brussels. Therefore the decisions that shaped Brussels' morphology were strongly fundamented in ideological desires in which the city was regarded as a symbol, an instrumental object of power. The process of secession from the Netherlands also conditioned the fact that Belgium would rather embrace the religious, linguistic and cultural model of its Southern neighbour, which also had a notable influence in the layout of the new capital, having Haussmann's Paris as canonical model.

The architect Victor Besmes was commissioned by King Leopold II to plan the expansion of the city in 1866². His proposal connected the mediaeval fabric of the Pentagon with a national Basilica, expanded the suburbs within a large ring road, implemented hygienic principles in the newly developed areas and within the Pentagon, always articulating a series of urban devices present in the Parisian model and its predecessor, the Baroque transformations of Rome. These devices comprised long open boulevards, city parks, memorials and representative palaces to give sense to a new network that aimed to establish a visual omnipresence of the national identity in Brussels. Moreover, Besmes' plan opened the door to two main infrastructural projects that changed the historic city:

- The North-South railway connection that provided a Central station at the Royal Palace. It was only executed years after (1912-1952) and demanded important land expropriations in the mediaeval city, as well as the destruction of a considerable amount of historic city blocks³.

- Leon Suys' vaulting of the Senne. The large number of industrial, commercial and residential plots piled along the river's bed had turned it into a dump, an open air sewage that would carry the waste of the historic city. In addition to the previous, the numerous floods that had been threatening the workers' blocks around it urged for a solution for the Senne within the plans for the new capital of Belgium⁴. In 1865 Leon-Pierre Suys proposed the underground vaulting of the river and the construction of a 30m wide Boulevard cutting through the pentagon in North-South direction. The proposal became a project of "lucrative urban renewal" with the intention of attracting an international bourgeois culture from the periphery to the centre while doing away with the historic tissue of small labyrinthic alleys, impasses, and workers's quarters, more than 1100 homes were expropriated and 8000 people were forced to move.⁵

By the second half of the 19th century, Besmes had envisioned two parallel cities taking place simul-

1. Lagrou, Evert. Brussels: Five Capitals in Search of a Place. The Citizens, the Planners and the Functions. *GeoJournal* 51, no. 1/2 (2000): p99

2. Lagrou, Evert. Brussels: Five Capitals in Search of a Place. The Citizens, the Planners and the Functions. *GeoJournal* 51, no. 1/2 (2000): p99

3. Lagrou, Evert. Brussels: Five Capitals in Search of a Place. The Citizens, the Planners and the Functions. *GeoJournal* 51, no. 1/2 (2000): p102

4. Apers, J. Bezetting en Verbeelding van de Anspachlaan in Brussel, (2013).p23

5. Apers, J. Bezetting en Verbeelding van de Anspachlaan in Brussel, (2013).p25



Map of the Pentagon of Brussels overlaid with the urban blocks (in white) that disappeared in the process of transformation of the historic urban tissue

taneously. On the one hand the historic tissue of winding and crooked streets, where one could easily get lost amidst the narrowness of its alleys and the ambiguity of its facades. In this city the urban block was an amalgam of tremendously fragmented programs, where the interior of the block was often conceived as a continuation of the street in the form of open inner courts, dead ends and corridors providing shortcuts through the mass of the block. In this tissue the city used to breathe in the openness of public squares embracing bits of program important enough to present themselves in an independent block, such as churches, monasteries, city palaces etc. The block is the urban device that arranged a sequence of urban spaces and programs that were revealed around the corner in a scale that was very much related to the smallest elements, windows, doors, showcases, but also the width of horse cars, awnings, market tables and other objects of the city program.

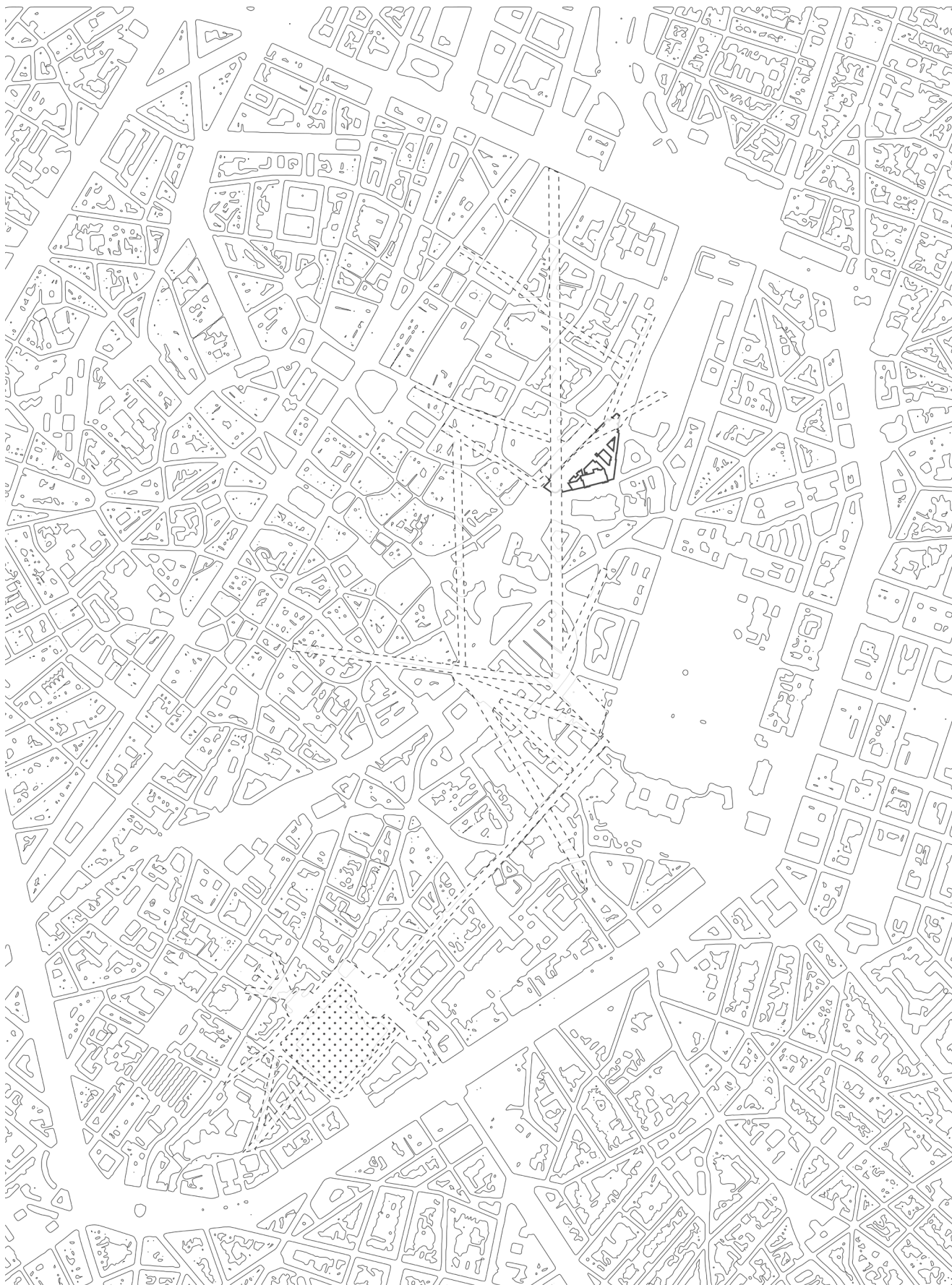
On the other hand, Besmes imagined a capital, a city projected on a territorial scale with long avenues to guide the citizens through a parade of national grandeur. In this city the urban device was not anymore the block but the street. The capital was approached as an homogeneous mass that could be carved out linearly to connect independent points of relevance, these places would have been left for memorials, churches or state buildings seating in monofunctional freestanding blocks. Nevertheless the importance of this layout did not reside in the point that it connected but in the connection itself. Therefore the sequence of urban spaces adopted the metropolitan scale of the two points that it linked. Besmes city regarded a completely different speed in the public space which was more representative of the hygienist urban modernity than of the logic of the city block and its particularities at each instant in the urban tissue.

Originally these two cities were conceived independently, having the Haussmannian plan being developed beyond the Pentagon. However the two major historic attempts of gentrification led to the superimposition of both cities resulting in two of the three North South Axis that cut through the historic centre, the Boulevard Anspach after the vaulting of the Senne and the Boulevards L'Empereur, L'imperatrice and Berlaimont after the train junction. The third of these large axes was the Rue de la Regence in connection with Rue Royale, which also became fundamental in the design of the quarter of palaces in the upper part of the city.

In 1910, with the occasion of the International Expo the general public work contractor Jules De Waele published the *Nouveau Plan de Bruxelles Industriel avec Suburbains* a map of most iconic buildings of the industrial Brussels, in which his enterprise would also be displayed¹. The plan worked as an inventory to catalogue industrial building types and their location in the city together with schools, hospitals, transports and parks promoting a specific image of the hygienic city. It was later followed by the *Plan de Bruxelles Mondain*, an attempt to portray in the same manner an image of "the most commercial and elegant establishments in the centre of the capital"². The comparison of both plans points out that the industrial building typology extended towards the western side of Brussels, beyond the Pentagon while the palaces and public buildings of the Mondain Brussels were concentrated within the gentrified historic city and especially towards its eastern side. This fact explained that the division between the eastern bureaucratic bourgeois quarters and the western industrial and labour districts dated back to the early industrialization and gentrification of the Pentagon, that pushed to the suburbs the historic working class quarters.

1. Declève, M. Reading the Brussels Palimpsest in the History of the *Nouveau Plan de Bruxelles Industriel* (1910). *Urban Planning*, 5(2), (2020). p231

2. Danckaert, L. *Bruxelles. Cinq siècles de cartographie*. Tiel: Lannoo.(1989).



Map of the Pentagon of Brussels overlaid with the Boulevards that were envisioned to transform the historic centre into a Haussmanian capital city.

3.Brusselization

The projects to transform the historic city continued after WWII with the implementation of modernist ideals that brought the third city into the game board. In this case the Marshall plan was the trigger and the 1958 Expo the excuse for another urban redevelopment¹. Moreover, by the end of the 1950s the European Commission, the Council of Ministries and the Social and Economic Committee settled in Brussels and less than 10 years later, in 1967 the NATO headquarters was also established in the Belgian capital, thus the city adopted the political role of the capital of Europe which would soon have its implications on the urban tissue². In the beginning of the 1960s the modernist city started to overlap the bourgeois Pentagon of the early 20th century, initially only with single office buildings that landed on residential Art Nouveau quarters, sometimes with dramatic consequences such as the demolition of the Maison du Peuple by Victor Horta in 1965³. However this phenomenon soon adopted a greater scale that led to the concept of Brusselization⁴ referring to the demolition of fragments from the historic city taken over by office blocks. This modernist exercise has been regarded as “the capitalistic destruction of a city with a compromising collaboration of the public sector”⁵ and did not contemplate a coherent vision for Brussels, it was the result of alliances between real estate developers and politicians working for a private interest⁶ in the context of an early European capital with high demand for office spaces. This aspect of Brusselization became evident with the Act of 1962 by which Municipalities could put forward local plans regulating physical aspects of land use such as building height, these plans were ultimately subordinated to the approval of the National Government, thus transferring all powers to the central institutions⁷. The regulation included several controversial points that determined Brussels urban development in the coming 30 years, for instance article 25 that “allowed anyone owning half the ground area of a designated plot to redevelop the entire block”⁸ and recognised a private right of expropriation. These conditions in favour of the private real estate sector encouraged a laissez-faire attitude out of the reach of municipal power which resulted in the destruction of terraced houses blocks to make room to high rise offices⁹.

The process of gentrification of the historic city after WWII differed considerably from the previous model of urban transformation inspired by Haussmann's Paris. In the former, despite manipulating the city regarding a national scale, solutions aimed for a coherent urban transformation politically driven. The destruction of the Pentagon was justified by the desire to become a gentrified residential area for a bourgeois class and a quarter of palaces for the nation, in the upper part of the city. However, the process of Brusselization was economically driven by private developers left out of any control. Suddenly the real estate market took over the Pentagon resulting in a city of fragments. This third city which brutally overlapped the two previous was neither a city of blocks or streets, instead the ruling principle was the highest economic revenue possible from the private land property. This resulted firstly in an attitude confined to the legal limits of the plot which did not deal with the public space. Secondly in the definitive destruction of the mediaeval block whose interior would only be conceived as part of a privately owned complex, thus leading to the extinction of inner courts, alleys and dead

1. Romańczyk, K. M. . Transforming Brussels into an international city-Reflections on 'Brusselization'. *Cities*, 29(2),(2012). p126

2. Romańczyk, K. M. . Transforming Brussels into an international city-Reflections on 'Brusselization'. *Cities*, 29(2),(2012). p1274

3. Demeulemeester, K. Manhattan, New York – Manhattan, Brussels postwar urban planning in the grip of an island. (2006). p25

4. “the indiscriminate and careless introduction of modern high-rise buildings into gentrified neighbourhoods”

State, Paul F. “Brusselization”. *Historical dictionary of Brussels. Historical dictionaries of cities of the world*. 2004. p.51

5. Lagrou, E. Brussels. A Superimposition of social, cultural and spatial layers. *Metropolitan Governance and spatial planning: Comparative cases of European City-Regions*. London: Spon Press. p(303)

6. Romańczyk, K. M. . Transforming Brussels into an international city-Reflections on 'Brusselization'. *Cities*, 29(2),(2012). p127

7. Romańczyk, K. M. . Transforming Brussels into an international city-Reflections on 'Brusselization'. *Cities*, 29(2),(2012). p128

8. Romańczyk, K. M. . Transforming Brussels into an international city-Reflections on 'Brusselization'. *Cities*, 29(2),(2012). p128

9. Romańczyk, K. M. . Transforming Brussels into an international city-Reflections on 'Brusselization'. *Cities*, 29(2),(2012). p128



Historic city 1933



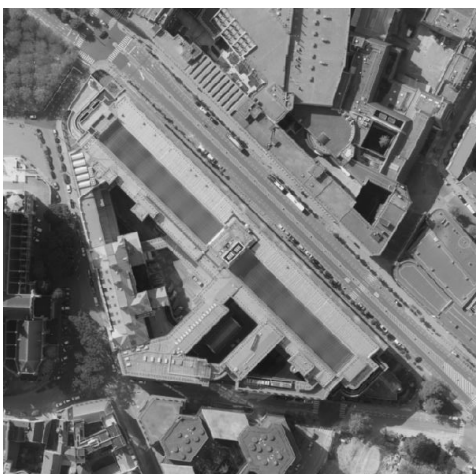
Historic city 2000

ends which were either closed or removed. Thirdly it resulted in the programmatic destruction of the city, the European aspirations of Brussels that had lead to an escalating demand of office space put the Pentagon in the eye of sight of land speculation, important fragments of the old city were repurposed as office and commercial space, thus forcing the displacement of its inhabitants and sterilising it of urban life.

1933



2000



RESEARCH ON THE CITY

Typology of Brussels

- 1. Impasses**
- 2. Arcades**
- 3. Corner buildings**

The successive transformation of Brussels' urban fabric has left fundamental traces to unfold the city in each of these periods in the form of four urban types: Impasses and alleys, arcades, corner buildings and hotels. The evolution of this typology and its slow disappearance explains the social, economical and urban consequences of the various processes of gentrification in the historic city.

1. Impasses

The first subject of analysis is a consequence of the above-mentioned city of blocks, the historic city that the capital of Belgium inherited in the first half of the 19th century. However the industrialization of the Pentagon introduced breweries, paper mills, printing works, textile workshops and other urban factories that were expected to tightly mingle with the residential and commercial functions of the block. This industrial development led to a rapid growth of the population and an increasing demand for housing for workers. As a result of that began a wild speculative urban practice that moved landowners to build dwellings in the inner courtyards and gardens. The consequence was a peculiar urban morphology where the already dense urban landscape of winding streets often adopted a very characteristic scale, especially narrow and especially deep, the alley and the dead end, also known as *impasse*. The 19th century *impasse* was a residential type that has been described as a "dwelling place set back from a public road, with which it communicates only through a more or less narrow bottleneck, which is only exceptionally accessible to vehicles"¹. The buildings within the *impasses* had their own door, therefore they were independent from the street facades that provided access to the inner alleys. Their entrance was normally constituted by an open or partially covered corridor running between two buildings on the street that granted access to an inner court at the heart of the block. The houses in the inner court were one or two levels tall and no more than a bay wide, which was enough to fit a ground floor room, an upper floor space and a cellar or an attic². These modest dwellings for workers grew during the first half of the 19th century, when 27300 inhabitants lived in *impasses* out of a total population in the Pentagon of 158000³. The densification was such that the *impasses* even crept into the luxurious areas in the eastern higher part of the city such as Notre Dame district or the Montagne de la Cour street that led straight to the royal district. The unavoidable clash between workers and the bourgeoisie and nobility living in these areas, motivated the complaints of the higher classes arguing that the *impasses* constituted a threat to public health, thus had to be eliminated⁴. The truth is that the conditions of these alleys and inner courts brought some of the worst cholera epidemics (1832,1848,1866) which encouraged the bourgeoisie to move to the newly developed suburban areas and boulevards in the site of the former ramparts⁵. This exodus of the higher classes from the historic city was part of the first phase in the transformation of the young capital in search of the European model. While the Pentagon remained densely populated and heavily industrialised, a bourgeois city grew progressively in the higher parts that were to accommodate the palaces of the bureaucratic centre of the new monarchy and extended towards the recently planned Leopold district in 1832. The migration of the well to do classes became a matter of concern

1. Gaiardo, Lucia, IGEAT, and ULB. *Impasses De Bruxelles*. Bruxelles, Belgique: Ministere de la Region de Bruxelles Capitale, 2008. p2

Gaiardo, Lucia, IGEAT, and ULB. *Impasses De Bruxelles*. Bruxelles, Belgique: Ministere de la Region de Bruxelles Capitale, 2008. p2

2. Gaiardo, Lucia, IGEAT, and ULB. *Impasses De Bruxelles*. Bruxelles, Belgique: Ministere de la Region de Bruxelles Capitale, 2008. p2

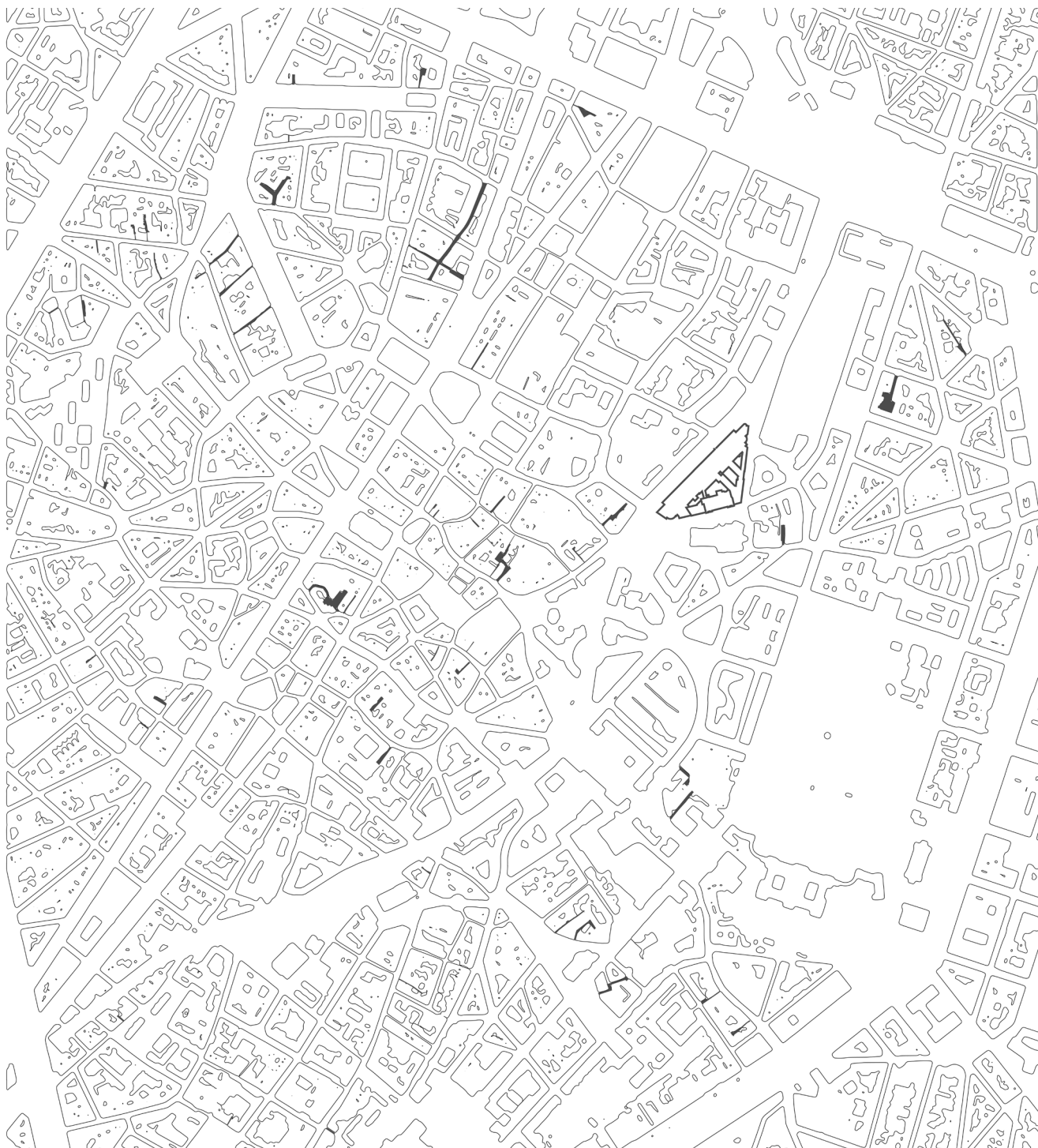
3. Gaiardo, Lucia, IGEAT, and ULB. *Impasses De Bruxelles*. Bruxelles, Belgique: Ministere de la Region de Bruxelles Capitale, 2008. p11

4. Gaiardo, Lucia, IGEAT, and ULB. *Impasses De Bruxelles*. Bruxelles, Belgique: Ministere de la Region de Bruxelles Capitale, 2008.

p9

5. Gaiardo, Lucia, IGEAT, and ULB. *Impasses De Bruxelles*. Bruxelles, Belgique: Ministere de la Region de Bruxelles Capitale, 2008.

p12



Map of the Pentagon of Brussels with the existing impasses, most of them fenced or converted into backyards, service accesses or emergency entrances.

for the municipality who had lost an important source of tax revenues and so began from the 1840s a desperate attempt to regenerate the historic city¹, which would ultimately lead to the second transformation of Brussels that brought the Haussmannian model to the Pentagon. The first steps to gentrification came in July 1858 with a law that “allowed land expropriation for reasons of public health and extended the acquisition faculty of municipalities to open or transform a street or a square”². This law prompted the demolition of impasses pushing the working class to the suburban areas of neighbouring municipalities in the face of the reluctance of those who had found shelter in the more familiar dead ends. In the beginning of the 20th century there were shy attempts to clean up these blocks while relocating the population in social housing projects built within the historic city. One of the most remarkable examples was “Cité Hellemans”, an unprecedented social housing development managed by the Municipality of Brussels and designed by the city architect Emile Hellemans in 1912. The project consisted on the demolition of several blocks and impasses to make room for seven rows of residential blocks thought to reduce the insalubrity and overpopulation³. Nevertheless Hellemans proposal was an oddity, most dead ends were demolished by their landowners to build multistory buildings instead. By the 1930s many impasses had already lost their residential role to become back alleys and emergency exists for shops, cinemas or theatres⁴. The Ministère de la Région de Bruxelles has catalogued around 40 impasses that can still be recognized today out of the 375 that existed in 1866. Most of them have been closed by doors or are hardly indicated by an old plaque or a pavement that continues from the street to the inner block. Very few instead have been renovated to host luxury shops as in the Impasse Saint Jacques.

Despite the health and living concerns that led to the disappearance of this urban type, they must be studied from a morphological point of view and most importantly their study should be detached from the various hygienic matters that occupied the industrialised Pentagon during the 19th and first half of the 20th century. Having pointed out this, there were indeed qualities given by the scale of this form of living, the penetrability of the urban block or the porosity of the city as a whole that is enriched with a large number of interior spaces, shortcuts and alternative routes. The Ministère de la Région de Bruxelles in the same document admitted that the residential role of alleys and inner courts offered advantages that were appreciated by the inhabitants such as “mutual aid, solidarity, social cohesion and tranquillity of life withdrawn from the intrusion and the inquisitive gaze of all comers”⁵ which explained the reluctance of their inhabitants to leave even when offered new social housing alternatives. The migration of its inhabitants to the suburbs was the result of a forced expulsion, part of the strategy of urban gentrification that took place in the first transformation of the Pentagon during the process of construction of the capital of Brussels that comprised from the independence in the 1830 to the completion of the Midi-Nord Junction in 1952 and the following process of Bruzelitisation starting at the end of the 50s. In this long interrupted process the intention was always to push the working classes as far west as possible or simply out of the historic city and replace their district by modern bourgeois residential quarters and later by the profitable and very much demanded office buildings. The importance of the impasse as an urban figure is that it proved precisely this process and its morphological urban consequences, the destruction of the city of blocks, the disappearance of the residential historic city and the definitive privatisation of the inner block.

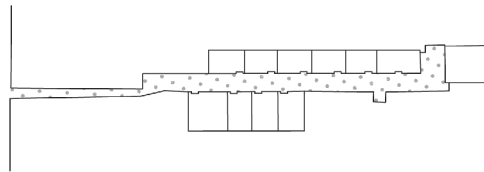
1. Gaiardo, Lucia, IGEAT, and ULB. *Impasses De Bruxelles*. Bruxelles, Belgique: Ministère de la Région de Bruxelles Capitale, 2008. p12

2. Gaiardo, Lucia, IGEAT, and ULB. *Impasses De Bruxelles*. Bruxelles, Belgique: Ministère de la Région de Bruxelles Capitale, 2008. p15

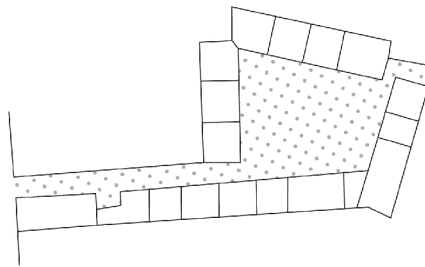
3. Ville de Bruxelles - Archives de l'Urbanisme. “La Cité “ Hellemans “, Au Cœur Des Marolles: De Cité “ Hellemans “, in Het Hartje Van De Marollen.” Archiviris, February 15, 2019. <https://archiviris.be/fr/2019/02/17/la-cite-hellemans-au-coeur-des-marolles-de-cite-hellemans-in-het-hartje-van-de-marollen/>.

4. Gaiardo, Lucia, IGEAT, and ULB. *Impasses De Bruxelles*. Bruxelles, Belgique: Ministère de la Région de Bruxelles Capitale, 2008. p24

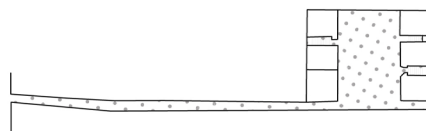
5. Gaiardo, Lucia, IGEAT, and ULB. *Impasses De Bruxelles*. Bruxelles, Belgique: Ministère de la Région de Bruxelles Capitale, 2008. p25



Impasse de Meert



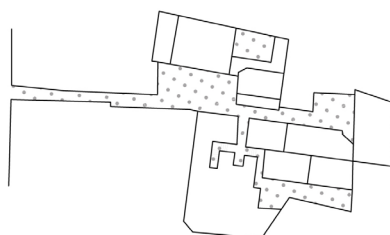
Impasse de Jasmin



Impasse de la Varsovie

Cataloguing some of the extinct impasses of Brussels showed that there was no strict archetype, instead, they responded to the complexities of each case. The simplest case was the alley that would depart from the street facade and stretch into the block with houses on one or both sides of the passage until reaching the dead end, for instance the Impasse de Meert and the Impasse de la Pie. Another level of complexity were the impasses that combined the passage and the court, thus creating a sequence of movement between the street, the alley and the court, for instance the Impasse de Jasmin and the Impasse the Varsovie; the alley would connect and at the same time establish a distance between the open street and the residential court; the court acted like a square, an open air room in the city around which the living of several families would revolve. The highest level of complexity was achieved in a labyrinthic model constituted by bottleneck passage, a primary alley and secondary alleys or courts, for example; the first, like in the previous case would grant access to the open street, the second was a sort of central spine that would lead to narrower alleys and a few houses, the secondary paths led straight to main doors or to small courts that preceded the entrance to the house and would often be shared by more than one household. The Impasse de Scargots, Impasse the St Patronille and the Impasse Perle d'Amour were examples of this labyrinthic model.

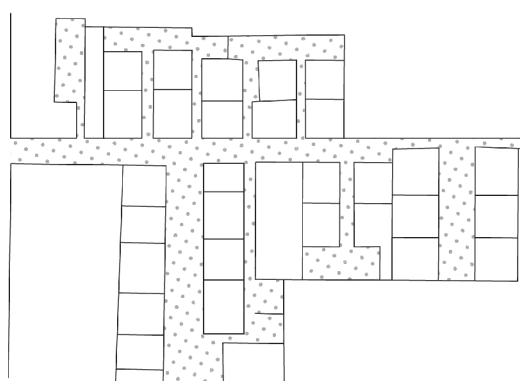
The archival images and remaining alleys are good witness of the familiar scale of the impasses, almost paradoxical taking into account that they were at the heart of heavily industrialised quarters amidst a growing European capital. This characteristic scale can still be sensed in the alleys that are still standing such as the Impasse de la Cigogne, a narrow and winding passage with dwellings at both sides, a stone monumental portal dedicated to Saint Roch towards the Rue du Rem des Moines and a smaller fenced portal integrated in a residential facade along the Rue de Flandre. These two portals were the first boundary with the street that led to partially open and partially covered stretch 'room' from which one could step into the ground floor of a two, often three storey house. It is precisely in the details that build this sequence towards the domestic, the fenced portal, the cobblestone pavement, the lower disposition of doors and windows and the stone step at the front door of each house, that one can sense an extraordinary control of the scale that little has to do with the high rising monsters of Brussels.



Impasse de St Patronille

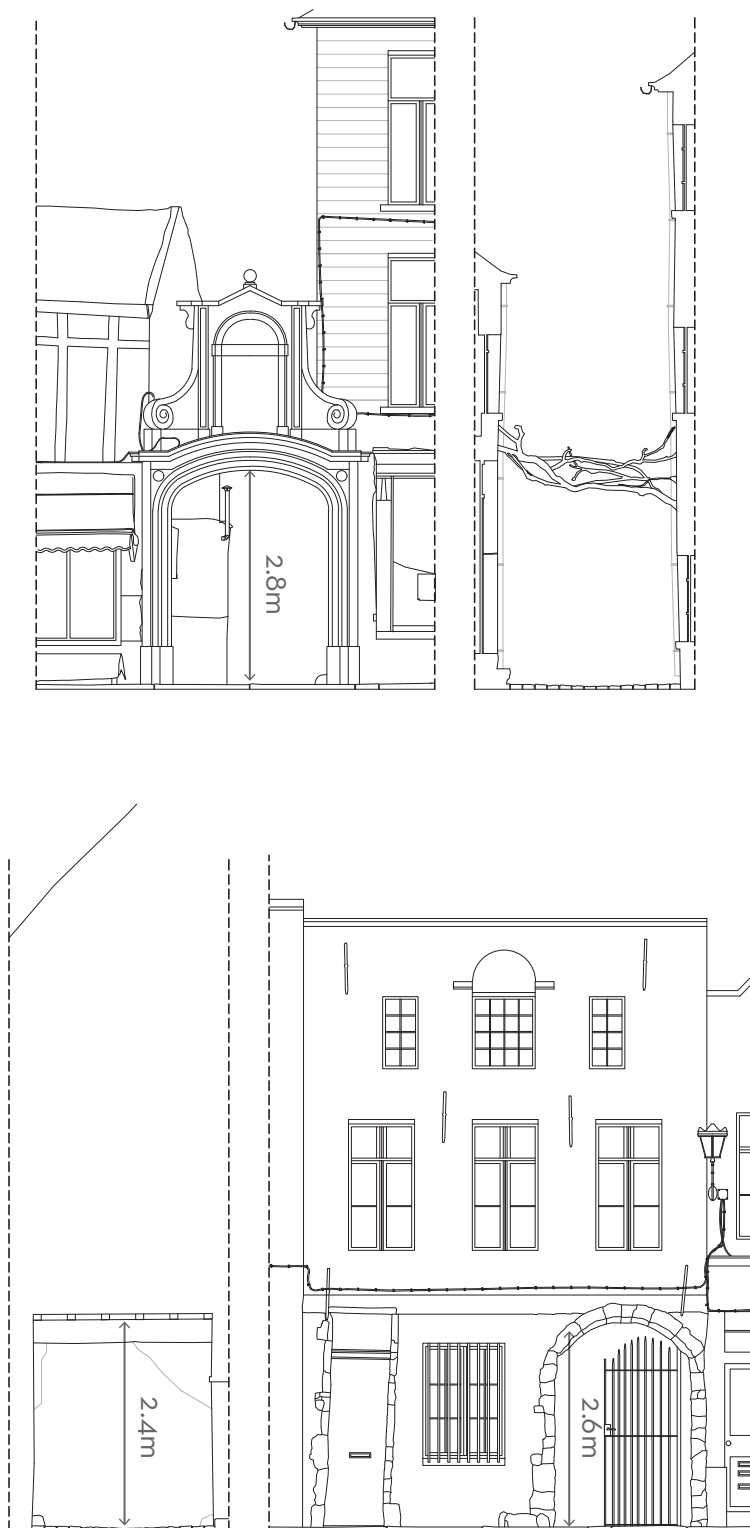


Impasse de la Perle d'Amour



Impasse des Escargots

Scale 1:500





Rue d'Une Personne 1920



Impasse de la Fidélité 1980



Rue Hérís 1930



Impasse de la Maison Rouge 1944



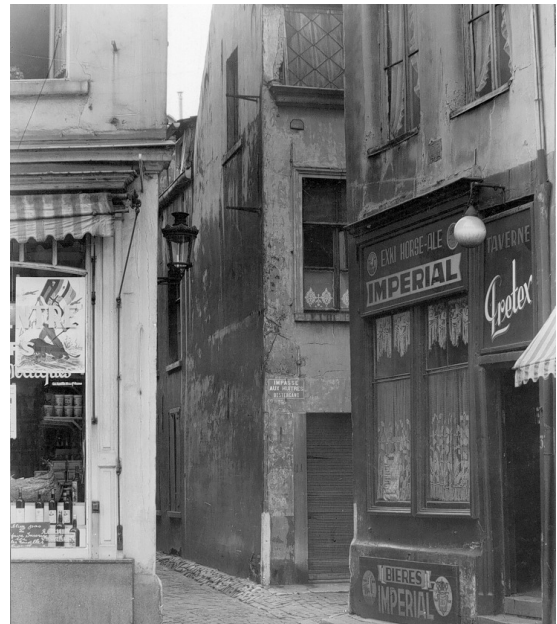
Impasse de la Cuve 1975



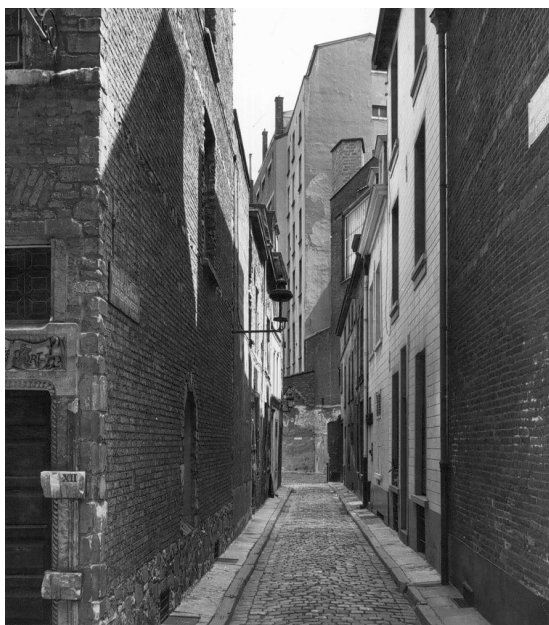
Impasse de la Colombe 1944



Impasse de la Faucille 1978



Impasse aux Huîtres 1945



Rue des Quatre Fils Aymon 1971



Rue de la Gouttière (depuis la cour) 1945



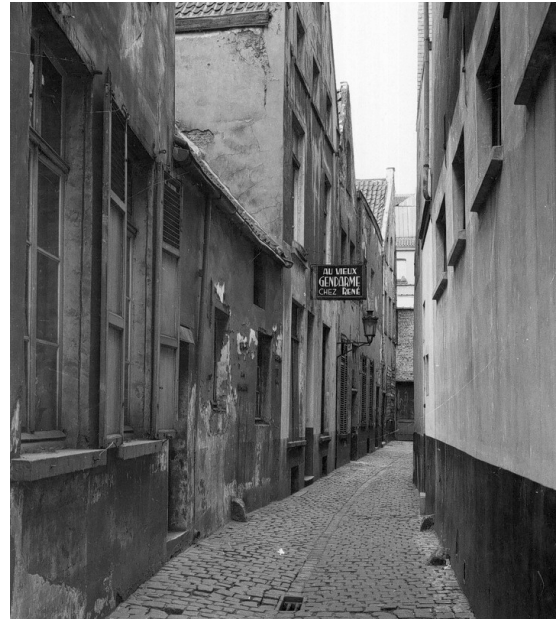
Rue du Chêne (côté cour) 1980



Rue des Cendres 1920



Impasse de la Perle d'Amour 1944



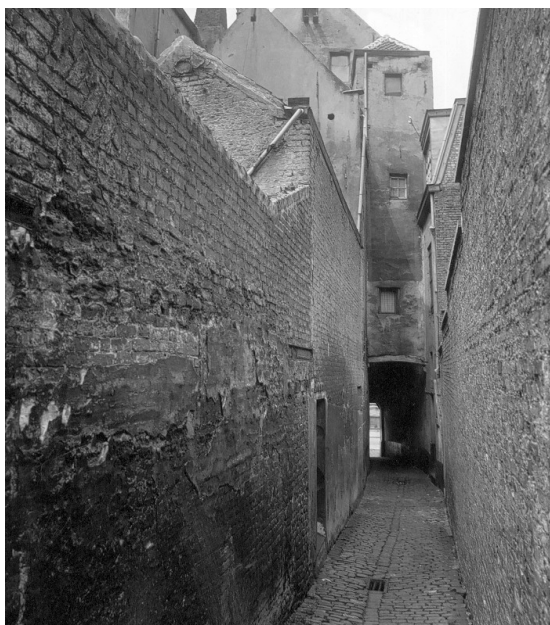
Impasse Madrille 1942



Impasse de la Pie 1948



Impasse Vandeleer 1946



Impasse de Varsovie 1920



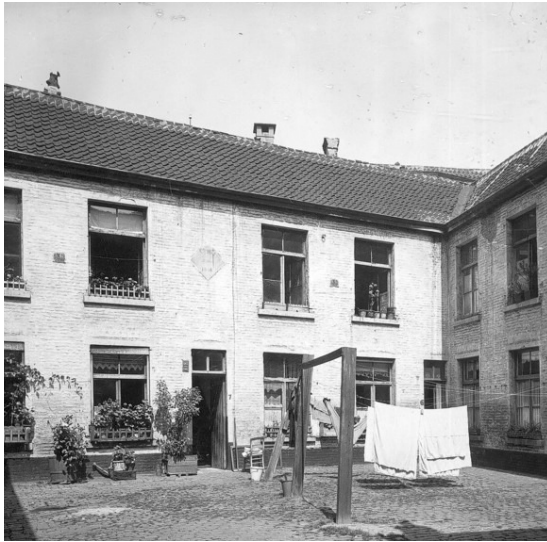
Impasse de la Poupée 1985



Impasse du Sorbier 1930



Impasse de l'Infirmier - Rue Philippe Vander Elst
1980



Impasse Vanhoeter 1944



Rue d'Anderlecht 1980



Petite rue au Beurre 1925



Rue de la Bergère 1920



Place de la Vieille Halle aux Blés 1944



Petite rue de la Violette 1944



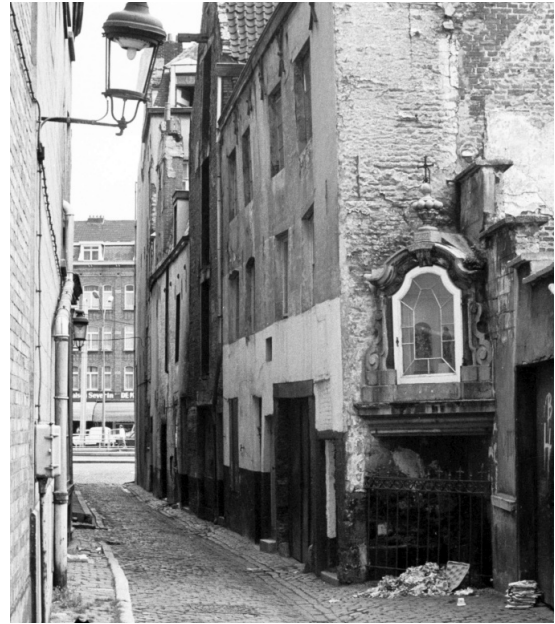
Place de la Vieille Halle aux Blés 1980



Petite rue des Bouchers 1988



Rue de la Chaufferette 1980



Rue du Chien Marin 1971



Rue des Quatre Fils Aymon 1971



Rue du Nom de Jésus 1975



Rue de la Cigogne 1920



Rue du Vieux Marché aux Grains 1920



Rue du Pays de Liège 1920

3. Arcades

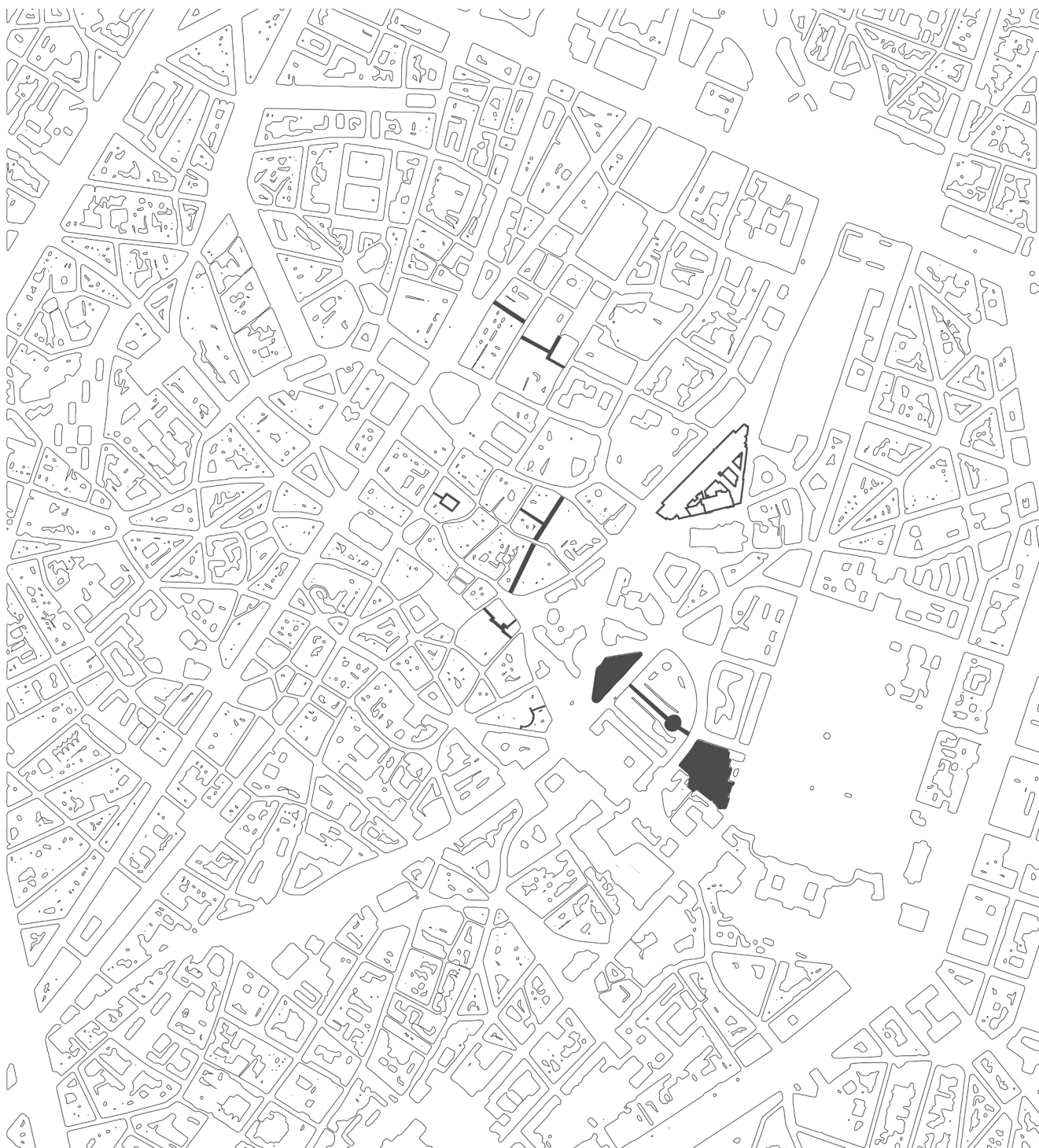
The second subject of analysis is a consequence of what has been referred to as the first period of gentrification of the historic city that began with the proclamation of Brussels as the capital of Belgium in 1830. By that time, impasses and alleys articulated a porous city of open air courts and winding streets that very much played the role of interior spaces. Market activities took place in the street that gave rise to an atlas of trade that can still be unfolded by the plaques of street names. The sequence could start in the rue du Marché aux Poulets (chicken market) that crossing the rue des Fripiers (second hand clothe) would link with rue du Marché aux Herbes (herb market) from which one could take the first turn on the right to rue au Beurre (butter) or continue until the crossing between rue des Bouchers (butcher) on the left and rue Chair et Pain (flesh and bread) on the right. Taking the last option and turning left to rue du Poivre (pepper) one would intersect the rue des Harengs which led to the great market in the Grand Place. The very left corner of the square, looking from rue des Harengs (herrings), took to rue des Chapeliers (hat makers), intersected by the rue du Marché aux Fromages (cheese market) on the left and rue des Brasseurs (brewers) on the right. From here there was the option of taking a left turn to the rue de l'Etuve (steam rooms or baths) or continuing all the way until the crossing with rue du Marché au Charbon (coal market) from which one could eventually reach the rue des Tenturiers (dyers). For those who wandered around in search of goods, the streets of the heart of the Pentagon were not a labyrinthic conglomerate of alleys, they were a coherent sequence of programs, products, smells, noises and temperatures that made sense in the daily or weekly routine. However in the beginning of the 19th century the bourgeois rarely dared to venture the unsafe and chaotic maze of the historic city and were in process of migration to the newly developed suburban quarters on the eastern upper side of the city. In this context, with the occasion of the proclamation of the Belgian nation and the intention of connecting the market streets with the well to do Quartier Rue du Marais and building safer and more comfortable shopping areas that could attract the bourgeois back to the Pentagon, the architect Jean Pierre Cluysenaar was commissioned by a local merchant and a banker together with the aid of the City Council, to design an ensemble of shopping arcades¹. In 1847 the Saint-Hubert street was turned into the Galeries Royales, two arcades aligned with one another and intersected by the rue des Bouchers and a third smaller gallery perpendicular to one of them. The project incorporated shops with cellars, a theatre, a casino and houses and apartments in the upper floors. In the twentieth century a cinema was incorporated and the casino was replaced by a vaudeville².

There are three fundamental aspects that make this project relevant for Brussels which have later repeated in other designs for shopping arcades. The first is that it proved the process of gentrification of the historic city began already with the proclamation of the capital in 1830. The study of the impasses explained the intentions to clean up the Pentagon and especially its eastern upper part, of working class to slowly introduce commercial functions that would attract the bourgeois back into the centre. The Galeries Royale not only was thought of as a device that could articulate this process triggering similar initiatives, it was a straightforward demolition of a historic sequence of alleys and impasses that belonged to the coherent system of streets of the urban market of Brussels. Moreover it was the replacement of this existing order by a beautified privatised model detached from its surrounding context. Citizens saw how what used to be the street Saint Hubert suddenly turned into a passage only open from 8.00am to 8.00pm with an entrance fee of 25 cents on Sundays and Thursdays and 10 cents on regular days³.

1. MacKeith, Margaret. *The History and Conservation of Shopping Arcades*. London: Mansell, 1986. p37

2. MacKeith, Margaret. *The History and Conservation of Shopping Arcades*. London: Mansell, 1986. p38

3. MacKeith, Margaret. *The History and Conservation of Shopping Arcades*. London: Mansell, 1986. p38



Map of the Pentagon of Brussels with the existing arcades, some of them still in use lacking the grandeur of former times or simply in decay while others have been turned into touristic attractions.

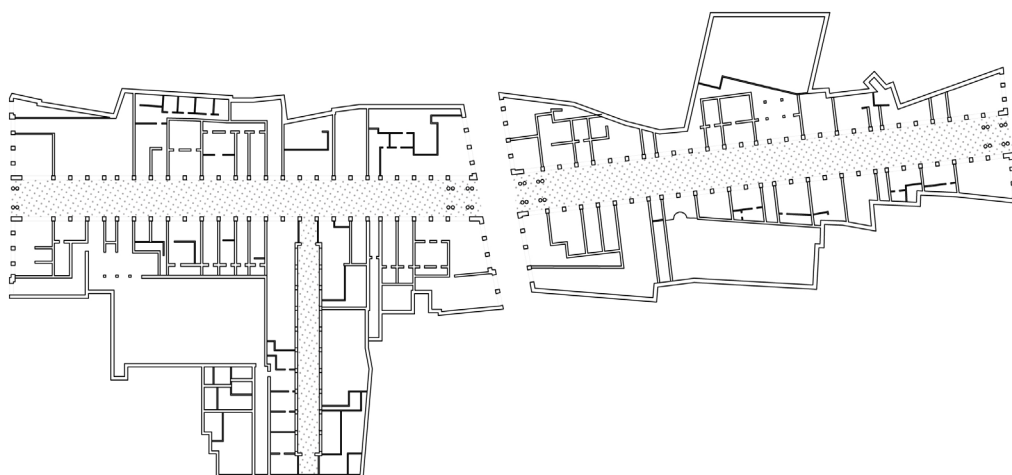
The second important aspect is the introduction of a higher level of interiority in the city of Brussels. The Galeries Royales were the first of a series of projects that emphasised on the possibilities of mingling the open air circulation in the city with the interior of buildings that could establish a sequence through the building block. It has been mentioned how the impasse was already able to create such a complex sequence that allowed one to venture inside the city of blocks, however the shopping arcade represents an ordered and refined interior protected from the outdoor climate that would inspire 20th century projects such as the Galerie Ravenstein or the Bozar.

The third relevant aspect of Cluysenaar's design was the ability of bringing together different forms of private and public program into a linear sequence of spaces that had the gallery as commonplace. It is remarkable how the architect managed to convert the street into a palace-like hall, from which one could enter shops of comparable size, attend spectacles, find entertainment in gambling or access their own house in the upper floors.

The success of the Galeries Royales led Cluysenaar to design a covered market hall for the local merchant M. Bortier in the quarter that preceded the ascent to the Mont des Arts. The architect instead was encouraged by the City Council to combine the program he had been commissioned for with a shopping arcade cutting through the block¹. The design eventually consisted of a semicircular market hall accessed from a porticoed facade in rue Duquesnoy and an arcade to provide a secondary entrance to the market. Once again, the architect managed to create an accessible interior in the plinth that could at the same time make the block porous, inventing a pleasing shortcut towards the upper city.

In the following years the phenomenon of the shopping arcades extended throughout the slowly gentrified historic city. The disappeared Galerie du Commerce connected the rue d'Argent and the Place des Martyrs with the rue Neuve which one could cross perpendicularly to access another arcade, the Passage du Nord, and appear in the Place de la Brouckere. The last one was designed in 1882 by the architect Henri Rieck in sintony with the great transformation of this part of the city after the vaulting of the river Senne and the development of bourgeois residential and commercial quartier along the Boulevard Anspach and Place de la Brouckère. They became another device in the process of gentrification of the northern part of the Pentagon, enabling a straight connection towards the upper city, all the way until the Bd de Berlaimont, right at the point where the National Bank of Belgium was erected. The arcade was another excellent example of the combination of programs since it housed 32 shops in the ground floor and a concert hall, museum, conference hall and games room in the upper floors.

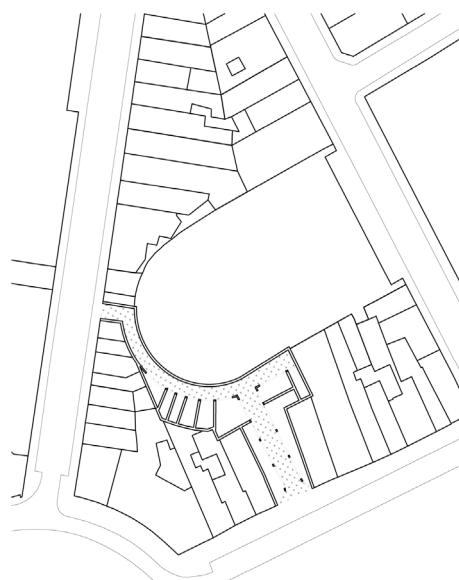
1. MacKeith, Margaret. *The History and Conservation of Shopping Arcades*. London: Mansell, 1986. p39



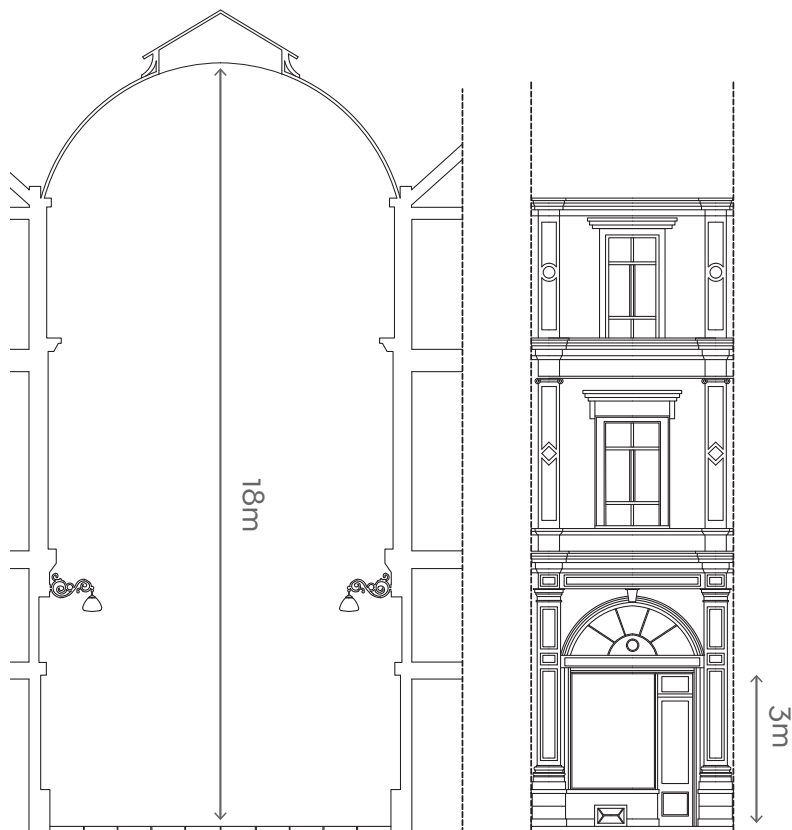
Galeries Royales



Passage du Nord



Galeries Bortier





Passage du Nord 1920



Galerie Bortier 1980



Galerie du Commerce 1920



Galerie Ravenstein



Galerie de la Reine 1920



Galerie St Hubert Prinjsengallerij 1980

3. Corner buildings

The third subject of analysis is also a consequence of the first process of gentrification of Brussels' Pentagon. If the introduction of shopping arcades in the mediaeval city was a first symptom, the corner buildings of Brussels are an evidence of the transformation and the progressive Haussmannization of the historic centre. Following the example of Paris, Brussels' boulevards and street network slowly sculpted a new morphology in the city block moving from the building in the corner to the corner building, an opportunity for celebrating the street junction and the public square.

The series of buildings that have been collected for this research bring another typology of Brussels that has been classified according to Cliff Moughtin, Taner Oc and Steven Tiesdell's distinction of corner buildings, in their book "Urban Design: ornament and decoration". In their work they made a morphological classification of street corners that included 5 main categories: faceted corners (chamfered), flowing corner (a gentle curve, softenned chamfered corner), wrapped (tight, obvious curve), hinged (curved corner recessed from the wall planes), tower corner (a taller corner than the wall planes)¹.

In relation to Brussels, it is difficult to state that each form corresponds to a particular function (residential, commercial, office, symbolic, etc.), however some of Moughtin, Oc and Tiesdell conclusions appear to be true, for instance the fact that faceted corners improve sight lines and ease the arrangement of the ground floor, flowing corners and wrapped corners try to dissolve the corner and flatten the facade and even continue the fenestration while hinged corners take an opportunity to embellish and mark the building, which is taken to a next level of expression in the case of tower corners. This explains for instance the use of faceted and wrapped buildings for commercial plinths and the presence of hinged corners in the administrative part of the Pentagon behind the NBB, in this case the ground floor becomes a monumental entrance accessed through an interior or open air arcade.

It is certain that the corner buildings of Brussels seem to take over the ground floor in a way that the building in the corner does not. By embracing the sharp angle of the street and creating the possibility of an awning that revolves from one edge to the other, the cafe by the corner offers a square like atmosphere from which to observe street life, then that table by the awning at the corner turns into a unique gazing point; assuming that the corner itself is an entrance, because it always is, the ground floor retail tends to wrap the plinth with showcases that not only provide extraordinary visibility to the function in question, they also create a very particular effect, by which a pedestrian on one edged of the street can have a glanze through the corner plinth beyond the showcase towards the street at the other end.

Regarding the more monumental version of the corner building, one is automatically transported to another scale which concerns the entire boulevard or street; here the building behaves as a landmark, a place to meet or to set up a demonstration because most importantly the corner becomes the building. The hinged corners of Brussels show how an institution that takes an entire city block can all be compressed in one corner, an entrance, or rather a head, as if the rest of the building was merely a pile of mass with little symbolic meaning. When this head touches the ground a few steps raise the plinth, and if this is an open air arcade or even a vaulted open space the sense of transition towards the heart of the institution grows in the visitor who can perhaps feel the echoing sounds of this vaulted hall or rush towards the arcade in rainy day, wait for a few minutes to get their umbrella

1. Moughtin, Cliff. *Urban Design: Ornament and Decoration*. Oxford: Architectural Press, 1999. p53



dry and carry on towards the inside hall.

Moughtin, Oc and Tiesdell pointed out in the same book the consequences of Brusselization concerning the corner building that characterised the Haussmannian plan of the first gentrification of the Pentagon:

“Brussels found that ‘architects and public powers neglected the treatment of corners which are now systematically denied or destroyed. The authors of this survey suggest that the neglect of the corner imperils the traditional urban structure and is one reason for the city centre having the appearance of a slum. These strong views about Brussels hold true for many cities throughout Europe. One reason for the dismissive treatment of corners may have arisen from the imposition of engineering sight lines but this requirement was also supported by the urban philosophy of the day with its lack of respect for traditional urban spatial arrangements, streets, squares and the urban block.”¹

The building of the NBB was also a victim of this process of destruction. During the demolition of the old bank in 1953 the flowing corner building at the crossing between la rue de la Banque and Bd de Berlaimont was knocked down and replaced by a closed monolithic stone wall behind which the circulation of the new bank would be placed. Rather than damaging the expression of the NBB at a relevant city junction, the renovation damaged the public space as a whole, the crossing and the avenue with which the Bank would totally disengage. The demolition suddenly altered the neighbouring corner buildings which were equally knocked down in the following years. On the other side of the Bank, looking towards the Cathedral of St Michael and St Gudula, Van Goethen had planned the same intervention at the corner, a windowless wall with an elevated plinth fenced in the ground floor. In this case the most significant demolition did not take place in the plot of the NBB but right next to it, two entire building blocks that used to frame the square of the Cathedral with monumental corner buildings reminiscent of Rome’s Sta Maria di Montesanto and Sta Maria dei Miracoli, were demolished to make room for the Nord-Midi train junction. In this case the demolition altered completely the square of the church that was left naked, without proper enclosure, besides the framed view down towards the historic centre that these buildings used to create and the scale of the square was forever damaged.

1. Moughtin, Cliff. *Urban Design: Ornament and Decoration*. Oxford: Architectural Press, 1999. p53





Rue de Louvain 1980



Rue Antoine Dansaert - Rue Léon Lepage 1971



Rue des Chartreux - Rue Antoine Dansaert 1979



Rue de Laeken 1920



Boulevard du Jardin Botanique - Rue du Marais
1980



Boulevard Anspach - Rue du Marché aux Poulets
1920



Place de Louvain - Rue de l'Enseignement 1920



Rue Ducale - Rue de Louvain 1973



Rue Sainte-Gudule - Collégiale Saints-Michel-et-Gudule 1920



Parvis Sainte-Gudule 1920



Rue Sainte-Gudule - Collégiale Saints-Michel-et-Gudule 1920



Parvis Sainte-Gudule 1920



Boulevard du Jardin Botanique - Rue du Marais
1980



Boulevard Adolphe Max - Boulevard du Jardin
Botanique 1980



Rue Ravenstein 1980



Boulevard Adolphe Max 1930



Rue du Bois Sauvage - Treurenberg 1980



Rue de la Chancellerie - Rue des Colonies 1980



Rue du Marché au Bois - Rue des Paroissiens - Rue des Colonies 1920



Rue de Louvain 1970

Reflection *On history and typology*

The reason for this research had to do with a personal interest for the city and the belief that architecture interventions have an impact on the urban scale. This will be the guiding principle of the project, the idea that scales are correlated and that the past conditions of a certain place tend to shape its circumstances on a different time.

Therefore the history of the transformation of the capital of Belgium and the typology that resides in it tells very much of what Brussels is. The problems of the past and the attempts to reconfigure it resonate in the present figures of the city. Besides, whether the goal was to move the working classes away from the Pentagon, or whether to bring a higher income resident or whether to introduce a more profitable program or whether to become Paris or whether to be a touristic theme park, in every of these *whether* typology is present. For that reason one can pretend to be an archeologist of a near past and understand what then means to find an impasse, a shopping arcade, a corner building, a modernist block or a souvenir shop.

And why is such a conclusion relevant today? Why should we pay attention to these types of a city of the past which often did not work? Is the intention to restore an older Brussels inebriated of nostalgia?

When one looks at these pictures of the small residential alleys of the inner block, one can finally read a domestic space in the city. This domesticity has to do with its dimensions, it has to do with its elements, the large size of windows looking onto the alley, the step by the entrance which occasionally becomes a bench in an outdoor living room, the roughness of the cobblestone pavement where one can flush away buckets of cleaning water which will later run down the alley, the feeling of an entrance with a gate to the street from which the smells of the domestic start imposing, the loud fights that resonate within the walls of the alley. In better or worse conditions the impasse was a domestic cosmos within the block.

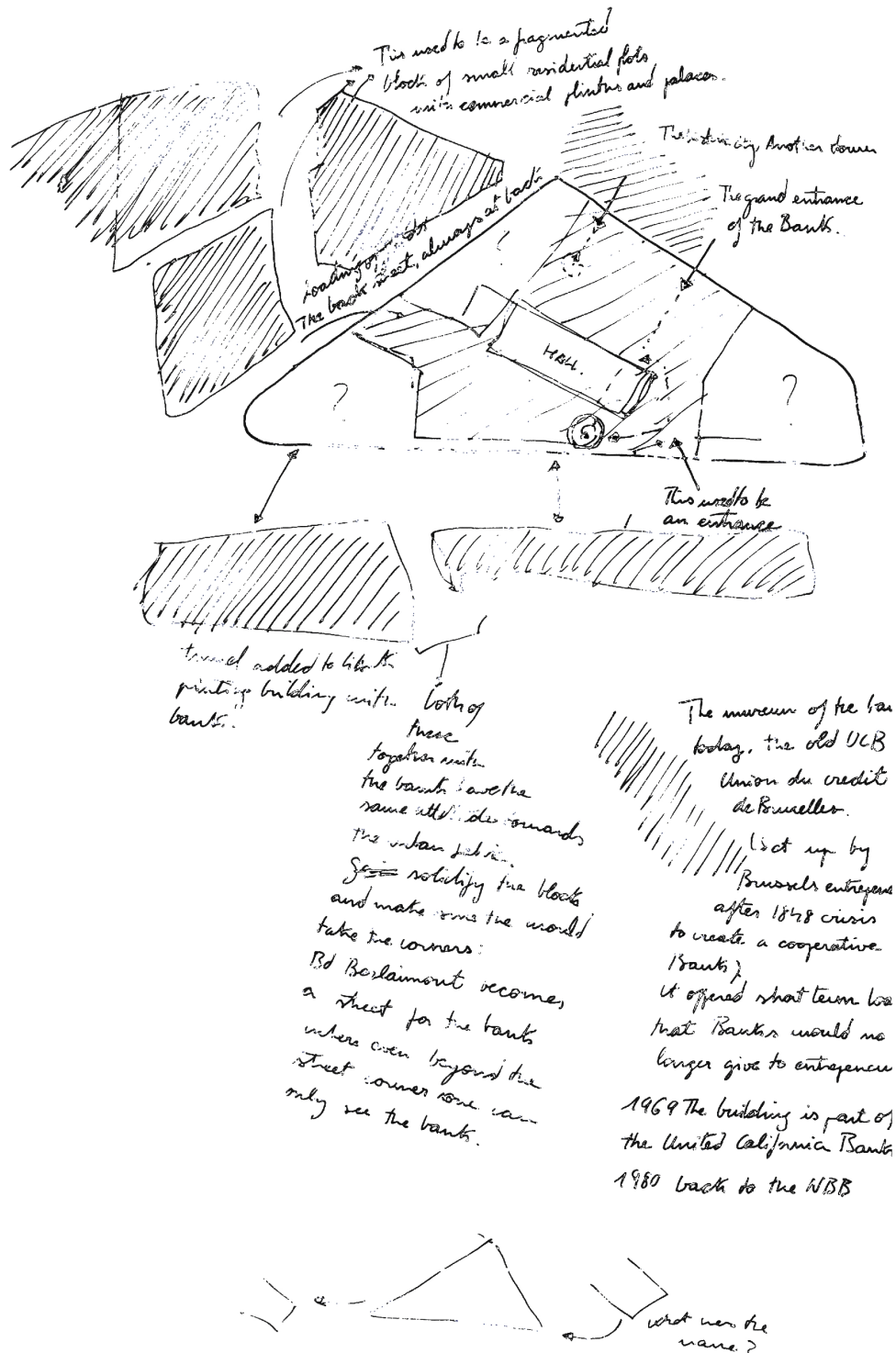
Looking at the old shopping arcades, one senses the grandeur of an unusual promenade through the inner-block, an event materialized in large showcases, ornamented lamps, naturally lit interiors with refined glass roofs, embellished interior facades and defined portals that anticipated the spectacle of the higher class. One can read them as undeniable excuses to stroll through the inner block, show off status and behold the opulence of others.

At last the corner buildings without a doubt are celebrating a privileged position in the city, a place to be looked at. Whether they are main entrances or retail corners, they usually present extraordinary plinths to the public space, in the form of arcades, large portals or awnings of grand cafes with large windows looking onto the street. Their tops are equally remarkable, adopting the form of a tower, a dome or a loggia they catch the attention of the passerby, they map the city of large boulevards, they downscale it creating smaller realities, the corner of the Josi, the corner of the cafe, the junction of the Bank. They are urban tools in a larger system.

Eventually one has an image of the city and the type becomes useful. At last this research is a catalogue of Brussels where one can look at to refer to the domestic, to the public route or to dealing with large elements in the urban plan.

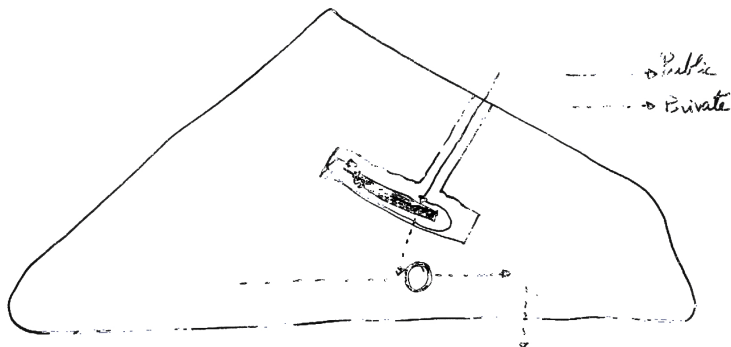
DESIGN PROCESS

P2 - A city from within

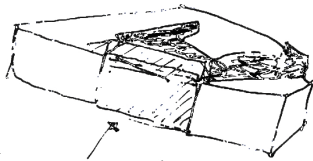


The urban block. The series of notes on the block of the Bank tries to give order to the site and develop an approach. This first one shows the old scheme of the building, facing the Cathedral, giving its back to the boulevard and with the banking hall at its heart. It is important to understand that the Bank is not just a triangular plot, it is a whole piece of city that has been claimed. The institution takes over Bd Berlaumont with two blocks on the opposite side, that creep down to the historic city. Coming up from La Monnaie (the commercial and touristic centre of Brussels) one first bumps into the first facade of the Bank, what is now the Museum of the NBB, former UCB. This route and the entire urban block must be included even though it is not within the given site. On the other side of the triangle, the Bank faces what used to be a very heterogeneous neighbourhood that with time has lost the residential program.

La implantación antigua era la siguiente.

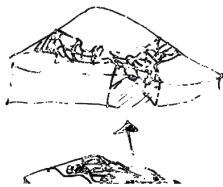


The process of construction of the plot seems to be an organic growth of a living being. First building the Hotel, the great facade they desired since the times that did not manage to get in into the exclusive area of the regent street. To this facade a public hall behind, the whole mechanism of the bank hidden within the great block, even since that first move.

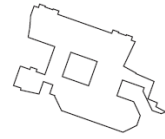


Rue de la Banque was the back to side of a not yet existing building.

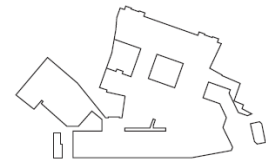
The second phase is what actually anticipates the Bank's eagerness to expand and take over the block. They decide to reach Rue Bd Berlaumont, therefore touch the three streets surrounding the block. This new facade hides another private part of the Bank, suggesting also that rue de Bois Sauvage was still the front edge of the block.



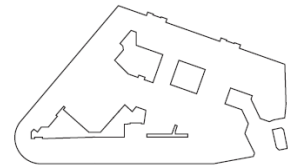
The next intervention is equally crucial, become a corner building. But why did they take the northern edge of the block? Why didn't they take the closest point to the city?



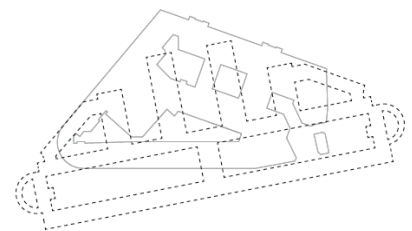
1860-1874



1874-1878



1900-1908



1948

The metamorphosis of the urban block. This part tries to understand the process of formation of the plot that went from being as heterogeneous as its surroundings to becoming a monofunctional site, the Bank. It is important because one can understand that ultimately it is a process of self isolation. The bank expanded from **within** until having reached the three facades of the plot creating a face for the Bank in rue du Bois Sauvage (a Hotel), an exit in rue de La Banque and a service court in Bd Berlaumont. At last the **corner building** becomes the definitive move to claim the urban block.

- ② La segunda cuestión hace referencia a la apertura de la institución y aquí la circulación puede jugar un papel clave, en el eje horizontal



what if it continues as a gallery?

¿qué funciones pueden tomar el sótano?

En segundo lugar como tratamos la calle? No puede ser un eje completamente peatonal, pero en la parte que colinda con la iglesia.

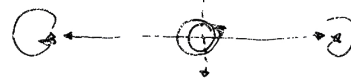
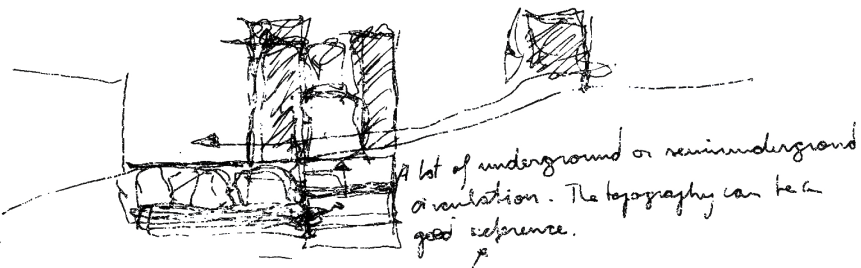


What is property of the bank?

Let it remain property of the bank but with a public use

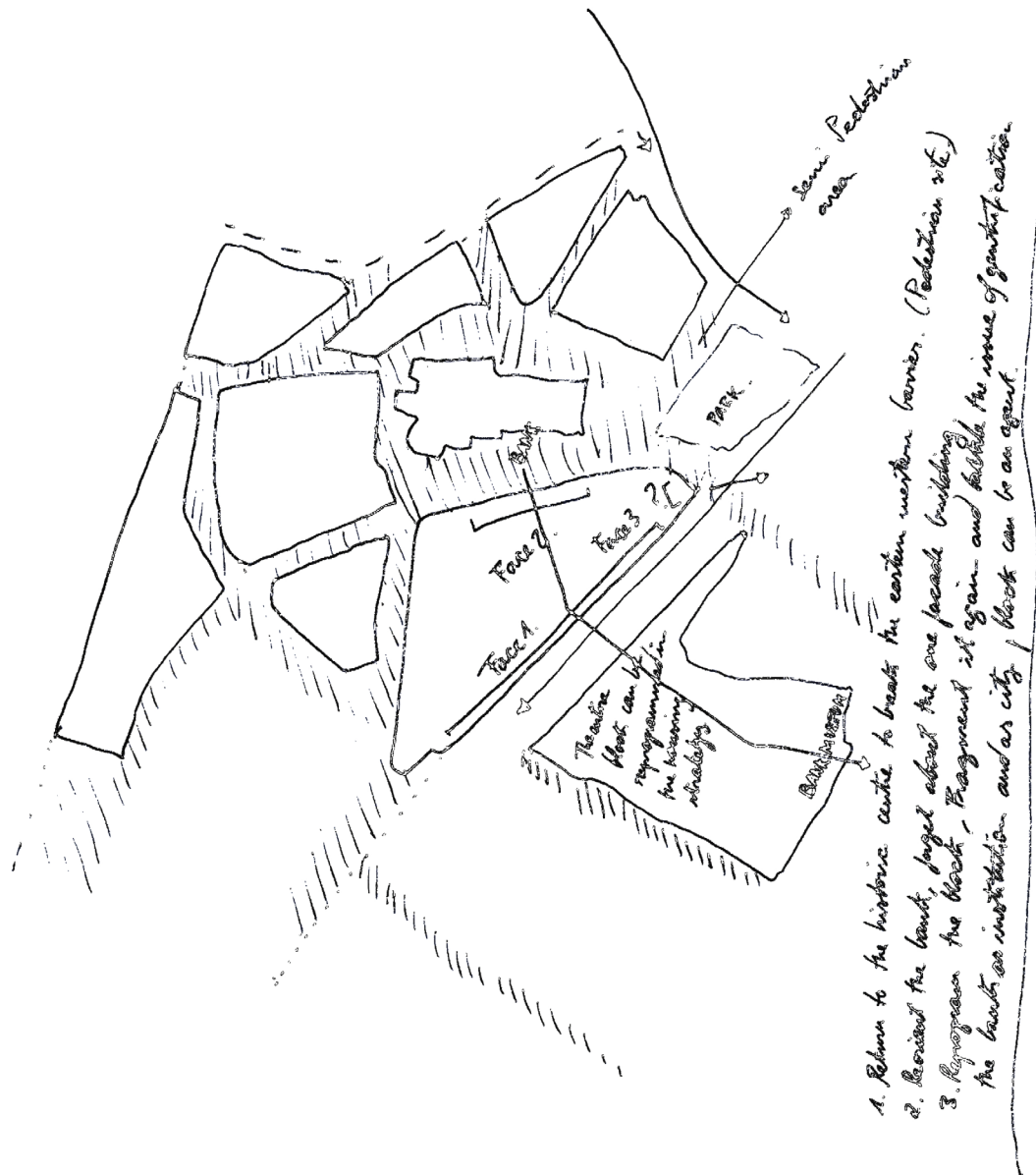
- Fragmentation of the block
- Circulation through
- New use: residential rental on public land owned by the bank.

- The formal penultimate move was represented a turning point, straighten the facade of Bd Berlaumont, hide the older bank behind, (did this had have to do with the railway underneath?). Here the building becomes ashamed of its past, shifts the public facade, takes over the entire block and rotates its back sides to la Banque and Bois Sauvage.
- The Next intervention implied destroying the bank's past form and face and present a rational billboard to fortify the block.



- ① Si hay espacio vacante está claro que hay que introducir nuevas funciones, nuevo programa y por tanto fragmentar el bloque, quizás teniendo en cuenta las dos fachadas principales.

The metamorphosis of the urban block. The process of transformation of the block continues shifting the face of the Bank from Bois Sauvage to Bd Berlaumont, the former service side. The conclusion here is that the shifting of facades and this metamorphosis of the building in general is an urban transformation that implied creating a boulevard in Bd Berlaumont and then claiming it with the acquisition of the lower blocks mentioned before. The metamorphosis of the Bank proves the research on the typology of Brussels, the abandonment of the inner block, the use of the corner or the neglect of the Hotel, that becomes a back side of the Bank are symptoms of the urban changes that were taking place in the Pentagon, from the introduction of Haussmanian boulevards to the later Brusselization.

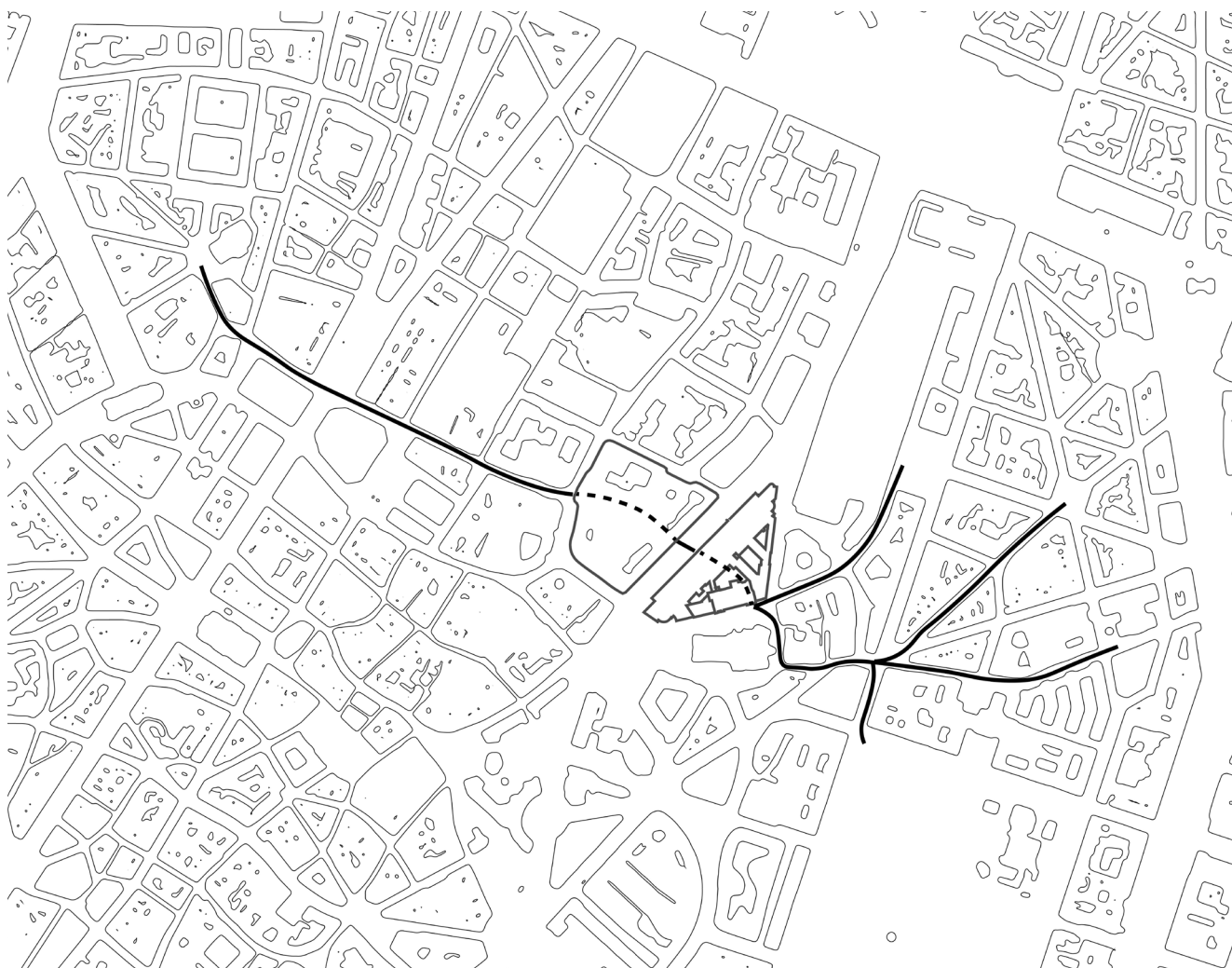


First intention. The sketches and notes in the previous page explain for the first time the 3 fundamental intentions of this project. Thirdly, reprogram the block, go back to the heterogeneous city fragment where multiple functions coexist. This area is an urban void, deprived from life and in process of gentrification, therefore it is necessary to restore this fragment reintroduce neighbourhood functions. The heart of the historic problem of gentrification of the Pentagon lies in the aspect of living, the role of the residential in the city and the question of who lives there. Firstly, create a public route through the block to connect upper and lower Brussel, the administrative and the historic city, allowing the circulation within the block. Secondly, give a new face to the Bank, their intention is to open up the institution, perhaps it should be oriented to wards the square of the church, take the corner, and at the same time avoid having a back and front as previous designs had intended.



This wooden model is an urban section cutting through the plot of the NBB and the lower plot adjacent to the historic city. The idea of reprogramming both blocks and opening a public route to connect upper Brussels with the historic tissue implies several interventions in the inner block. The white colour shows in the section the series of interiors that this route would run through.

In the larger context the route links with Rue du Fosse aux loups, which leads directly to La Place de La Brouckere, passing by La Place de la Monnaie and the Theatre de la Monnaie; from La Place de La Brouckere the route continues down to the lower Pentagon, a more residential area around the church of Saint John the Baptist at the Béguinage. Coming from this lower area of the Pentagon and having reached the lower block of the NBB shown in the model, the entrance to the block is presented monumentally in what is today the entrance to the museum of the NBB. The idea is to preserve the museum in the upper floors and let people cross through in the ground atrium and colonnade to open an access on the other side of the building, inside the building block. The long building at Bd de Berlaimont should open up a few bays in the ground floor to frame and approach the facade of the Bank frontally. The block of the NBB offers a public passage at its centre to lead to a public court where a staircase takes the passerby to one of the entrances of the Palace, ending at Rue du Bois Sauvage. From there the route to the upper city continues from Rue de Ligne towards La Place du Congrès or from Treurenberg towards the Federal Parliament and the Place de la Nation.

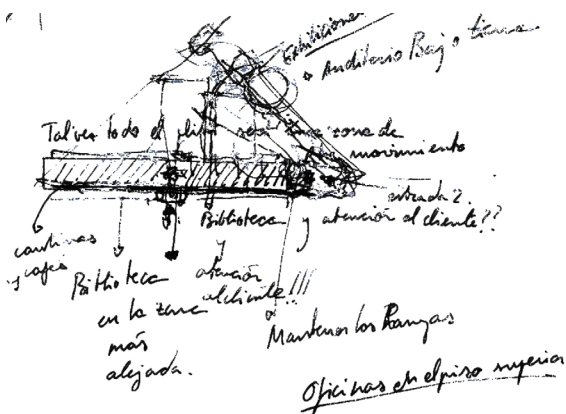


Hay una serie de preguntas que requieren respuesta urgente.

En primer lugar la referente a la colisión entre lo nuevo y lo antiguo, entre Van Goethem y Beyaerts. Nadie entiende a Van Goethem, el arquitecto que rompió el modelo historicista, que rotaba con la città nuova de Sant'Elia en apenas unos metros cuadrados. Él parecía entender el Banco como una institución de la capital y sentía la necesidad de acercarse a esa capital burocrática, creando una fachada que vista de frente recordaba a una gran plaza y vista de lado alarga el ojo hacia un boulevard que no encuentra continuidad. Van Goethem trabaja por conectar el edificio con la nueva Bruselas y hacerlo formar parte de la red de boulevares y grandes avenidas de una ciudad cada vez más higiénica, más eficiente, más modernista. Su intención es clara, no mantener ningún nexo con el pasado.

Beyaerts no es muy distinto, a pesar de las diferencias entre ambas arquitecturas el anterior se refiere a esa ciudad de con su temprana monumentalidad, patosa en la escala y que proyecta boulevares sin agotarse de su parado por completo. Él entiende que en ese momento el centro todavía es Bois Sauvage, la iglesia es su contexto y mirar hacia ella es su garantía de frontalidad. Al mismo tiempo se podría decir que en su sensibilidad por el contexto Beyaerts imagina un edificio en la pendiente de Bruselas camino de arriba abajo. Esta circulación se pierde en las sucesivas intervenciones de Van Goethem y solo vuelve realmente en la sección de la página 51 donde parece que se propone un pavilión que atraviesa el edificio. La colisión temporal es una colisión entre dos modelos el historicismo de Beyaerts que mira a la iglesia a la pendiente.

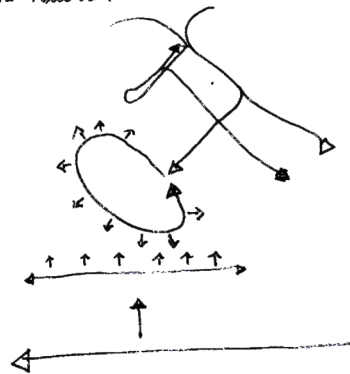
Understanding Beyaerts and Van Goethem. These notes reflect on the two main architects of the NBB who represent two phases. Firstly Beyaerts envisioned a hotel in Brussels, a monumental hotel like many others in the surroundings of the Cathedral. He still understood the Church as the urban centre that the Bank should look at and behind its neoclassical facade Beyaerts laid out a complex sequence of rooms, halls and stairs at different levels adapting to the topography and welcoming light from courts and skylights. Secondly Van Goethem seems to disagree with the scale, the historicist language and the role of the Bank. His intervention does not deal with the surrounding, it even neglects the corner and becomes an building on its own with horizontal facade that would have been much different if looked at from the front. Inside



Piensa de alguna manera que funciones necesita un barrio para ser un barrio. Eso es lo que queremos crear en esta zona de Bruselas un Barrio, Ciudad! Necesita casas que todo el mundo pueda pagar, necesita un buen gimnasio? supermercado, escuela, guardería públicas, peluquería, una farmacia cercana, comercio asequible! pero sobre todo necesita VERDADERA.

La colisión de este programa con el anterior es evidente pero no debería serlo, basta ver fotos de como la residencial y la calle pueden mezclarse en Bruselas. De esa misma manera si entendemos lo el plan que se está visualizando como una extensión de la calle no habría que tener la intrusión de un programa residencial; pero al mismo tiempo me gustaría evitar crear zonas separadas, un tabique que divida el plot entre zona residencial y banco, esta es la diferencia con el plan anterior de Bequaerts. Para mí la vivienda tiene que tocar el suelo en el punto donde el Banco toca el suelo. Pero es que es un patio demarcado grande!

Que no sea una- por unos espacios menos secuenciales, no invasivos sino fuertemente eficaces (entrada, hall, mostradores, todo en un mismo plano) Por otro lado mira a un contexto mucho más urbano, la capital, la gran ciudad del siglo xx. con de alguna manera hace un ejercicio mayor por recrear su Cité Nouvelle.



- The question of the program trae las siguientes demandas

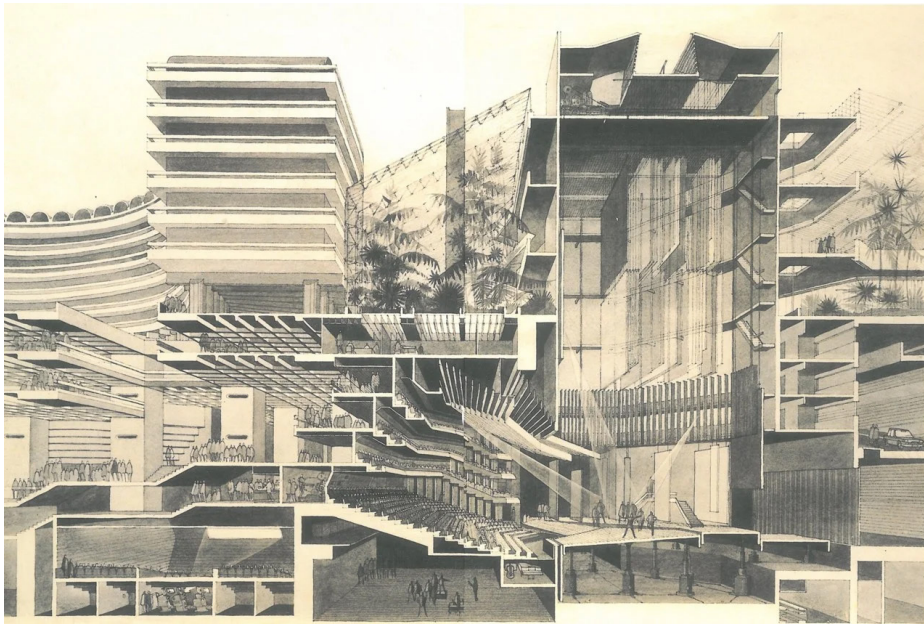
- Reception
- Auditorium (250)
- Trading Hall
- Counters (3 accesos públicos)
- Museo
- Restaurante
- Exhibiciones
- Biblioteca

Hay que tener cuidado de que no se convierta en una amalgama de funciones no relacionadas. Entiendo por uno lado que hay funciones que requieren máximos mecanismos, otras en cambio solo tienen sentido dentro de una libre circulación y otras puede imaginarse

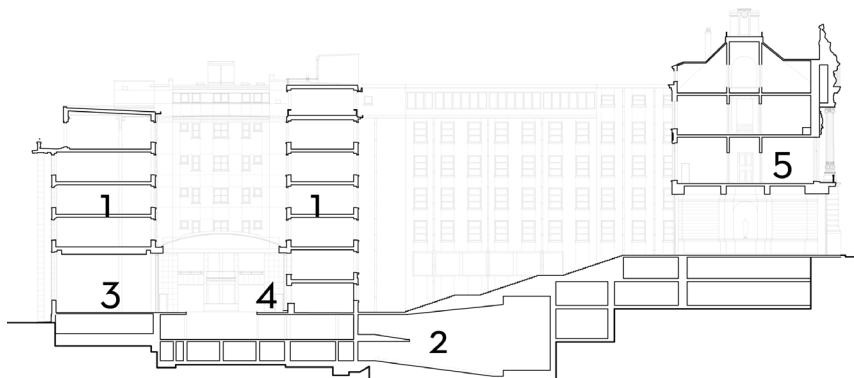
he simplifies the topography and lays out his sequence of entrance, banking hall and counters in one single level and straight forward movement.

The conclusion is that both approaches do not coexist, they collide in the existing plot, even after the demolition of most of Bequaerts intervention.

On a different page the collision will carry on if a new program is introduced, it is important to allow coexistence of program. At this point it is clear that a neighbourhood creep into this rock. There is need not only of housing but all sorts of functions that make the living, municipal sports facilities, supermarkets, hairdressers, pharmacies, etc.



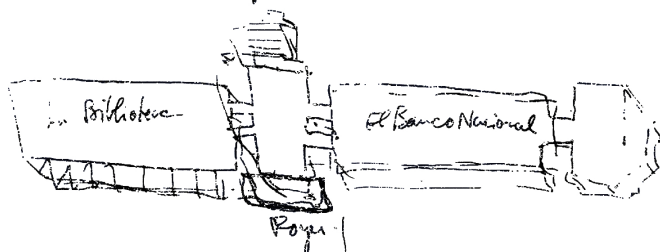
Chamberlin Powell and Bon. Drawn perspective section of the Barbican Centre, Silk Street, City of London, England, 1982.



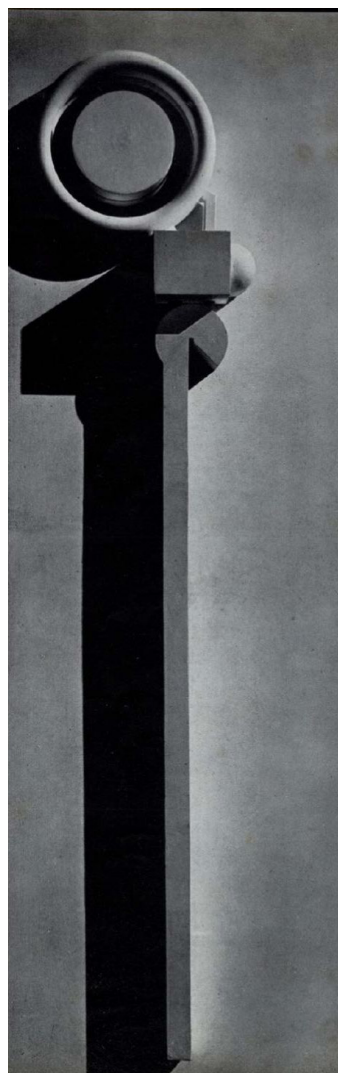
1. Offices of the NBB
2. Auditorium of the NBB
3. Canteen of the NBB
4. Counters of the NBB
5. Exhibition spaces of the NBB

Two references. This sketch is particularly useful as a record of three early references that inspired the thinking of the residential and the issue of topography. Firstly the idea of housing in the inner block makes one think of the Barbican in London that arranges housing and cultural program through a complex circulation of galleries, inner courts, gardens, walkways and stairs. Despite it being a completely different scale one could agree that when there is such collision of program, circulation should be thought as buffer space. Secondly the problem of topography led to a close by reference, Horta's Bozar. In his section the concert halls are sunken underground to allow for exhibition spaces on the ground level without adding height to the building. Moreover the corridor's and steps that make the routing up to the entrance at the top of the hill are also laid out over a large concert hall hidden underground. This reference inspires the location of the auditorium, which could be sunken underground allowing to have large public stairs on top that could solve the problem of the topography in the way up through the block.

la secuencia debe ser coherente, entender que hay una entrada principal dando acceso a un gran hall, luego un pasaje y luego otro hall.

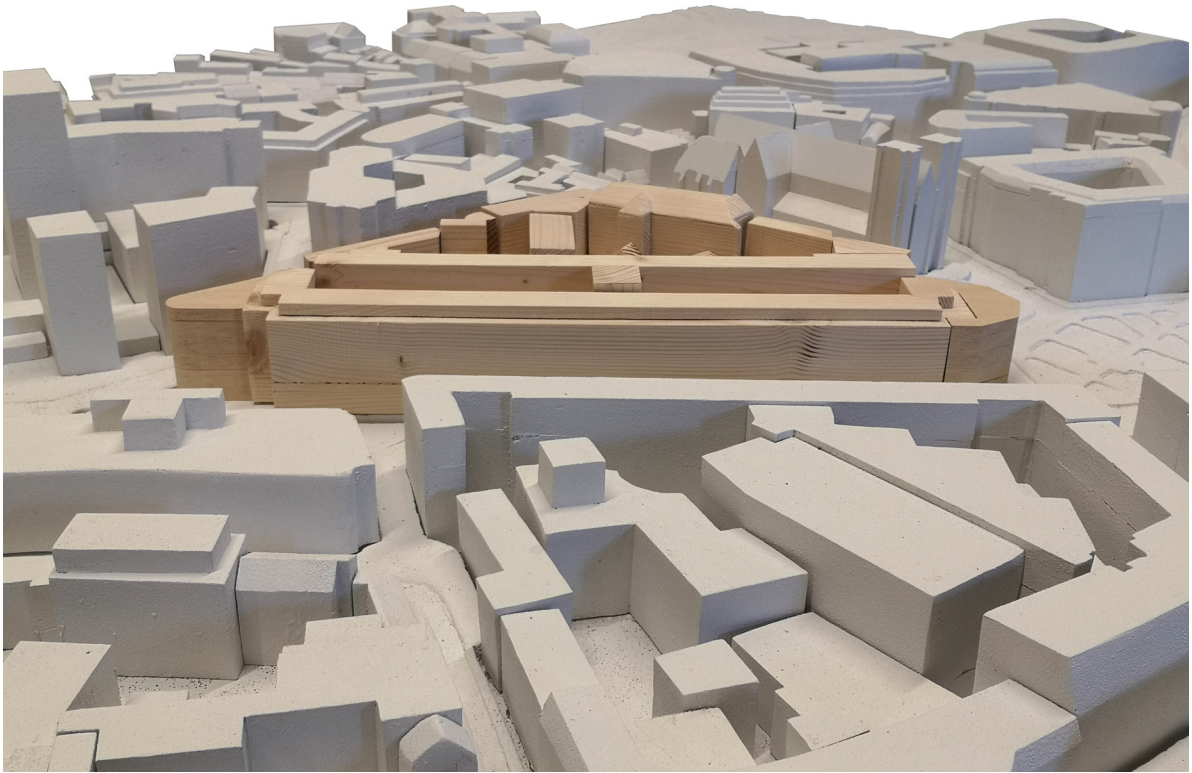


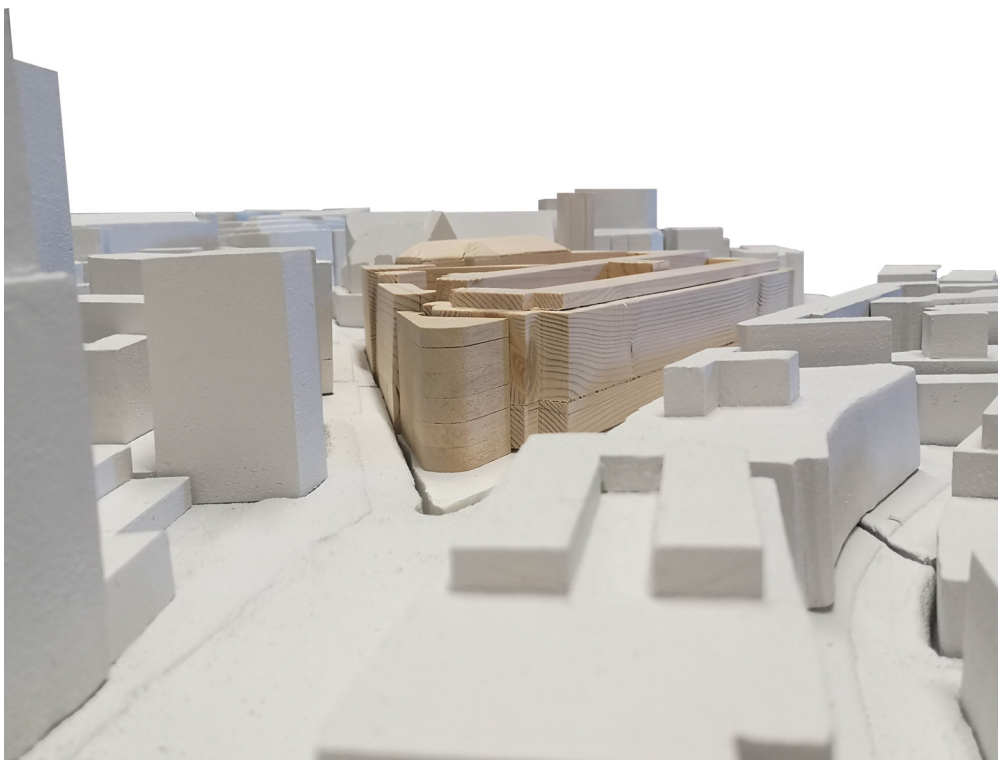
Poner las escaleras en el Hall del Banco acabo con la idea de habitación, se convierte en un ritmo de paso que quizás posea tiene que ver con el banco. Deja que se acceda al Foyer a través de la biblioteca



Luigi Moretti, Strutture e sequenze di spazi, 1952

The idea of a sequence. The long hall of the NBB stretches symmetrically along the facade of Bd de Berlaumont, having its axis of symmetry as the only public access from which the visitors are spread out to the counters, the inner facade of the building. The introduction a third face to the Bank, the corner entrance by la Pl. de Sainte - Gudule, and the intention of having a public route running through the block, offers the possibility of reconsidering the sequence of the former banking hall. The idea is to locate multiple public functions at the plinth that justify its openness. These functions include the new banking hall, the library of the NBB and the cantine of the NBB (with the hope that it becomes a place of reference for workers and passer's by). In order to arrange them the banking hall is understood as two independent halls separated by an arcade. The sequence starts with an entrance hall that leads to the counter's hall and the cantine, to then pass through the arcade and continue to the library, the dead end of the sequence. The intention is that between each of these spaces there can be a transition, a bottleneck space that closes one space to open to the next one, as it was concluded in the studies *Structures and sequences of spaces* published in 1982 in the magazine *Spazio*.





Reflection On P2

It is undeniable that the NBB has a responsibility to its greater state and the city of Brussels is its ultimate field of action in what concerns the economic policy of Belgium. The idea that is being suggested here, is that the Bank takes a position in the economy and becomes not only a mediator between the private sector and the ECB but also an agent capable of regulating prices and developing policies that reach the local scale, the reality of the city, the neighbourhood and the block.

The argument is simple, the NBB possesses a fundamental tool for action, land property. The institution has inherited three large building blocks right at the centre of the gentrified historic city. There appears to be a strategy to sell this property to the private sector which will be in charge of its development. However, the proposal here presented is to use land property as a tool from the NBB to introduce residential functions back into the historic city and regulate housing prices within the Pentagon to revert the process of gentrification. It would be naive to state that two blocks can stop a process that dates back to the origin of the capital of Belgium, nevertheless, it is not imprudent to say that a change of policy from local and national authorities can, and that these two blocks are an exemplary proposal for a tendency that is necessary, to regulate the market or even close it. The example of *Renovatio Urbis* was important to understand the impact of a series of individual projects in the city and to realize that there is no naivety in believing that the transformation of urban problems begin in the scale of the urban block or even in a smaller one, the plinth.

The readings of Bernardo Secchi (*The city of the rich and the city of the poor*) but also the criticism of Aldo Rossi (*La città Analoga*) and the proposals of Giulio Carlo Argan (*A policy for the preservation of historic centers*), all point into the same direction, it is necessary to restore the city in those places where it has disappeared, due to housing speculation, the spread of office buildings or a touristic ambition that tends to theme European historic centres. In the case of the NBB, the three problems come together in one plot, a mono-functional office fortress that barely mediates with the city and certainly reminds to the urban void of the bureaucratic upper Brussels; streets deprived from the life of a neighbourhood, empty in the weekends and in weekdays between 8am to 6pm (when all workers have taken their position within the stronghold). It is worth looking back to realize that there was a time where this urban block was a fragment of the historic city. The three storey high houses with retail of all kinds on the ground floor used to belong to an urban tissue that connected the centre of the Pentagon with the area of the Cathedral and beyond towards the upper city.

These images of a functioning city, are not nostalgic witnesses of the past, they are evidences of how gentrification and Brusselization have created a monotonous urban void. Therefore, the intention of the project is to break the monotony of the block through the introduction of few bits of program (residential, retail, municipal facilities) as triggering points for a programmatic erosion in time. This is, fundamentally a strategic idea based upon historical and urban studies of e.g. the transformation of ancient Roman architecture through spolia for instance Piazza dell'Anfiteatro de Luca, the Theatre of Marcellus in Rome, Diocletian's palace in Split, and the study of urban spatial typologies in Brussels like corner building, arcade, Impasse and their historical development. The project is then inspired in the morphological transformation of these canonical examples of reuse of monolithic structures in the city. Perhaps some could see a typological contradiction in imagining a residential hive or shops taking over the vaulted grandeur of a Roman theatre, an amphitheatre or a palace. These however have enriched urban voids in a centennial process of reuse.

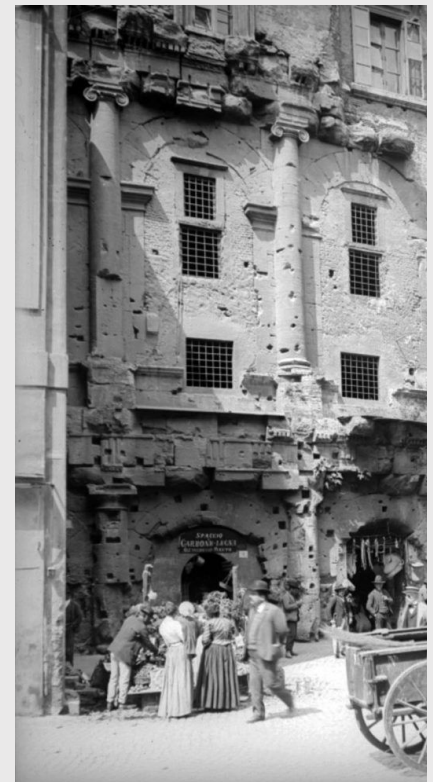
In the case of the block of the NBB, one wonders whether a similar erosion is possible in time, whether the block can again belong to a living urban tissue, whether it can belong both to the upper and the lower Pentagon and most importantly, whether this process can be guided to reuse urban typologies of Brussels such as the corner building or the innerblock.



What is today the block of NBB back in 1933, views from Rue de la Collegiale and Rue du Bois Sauvage



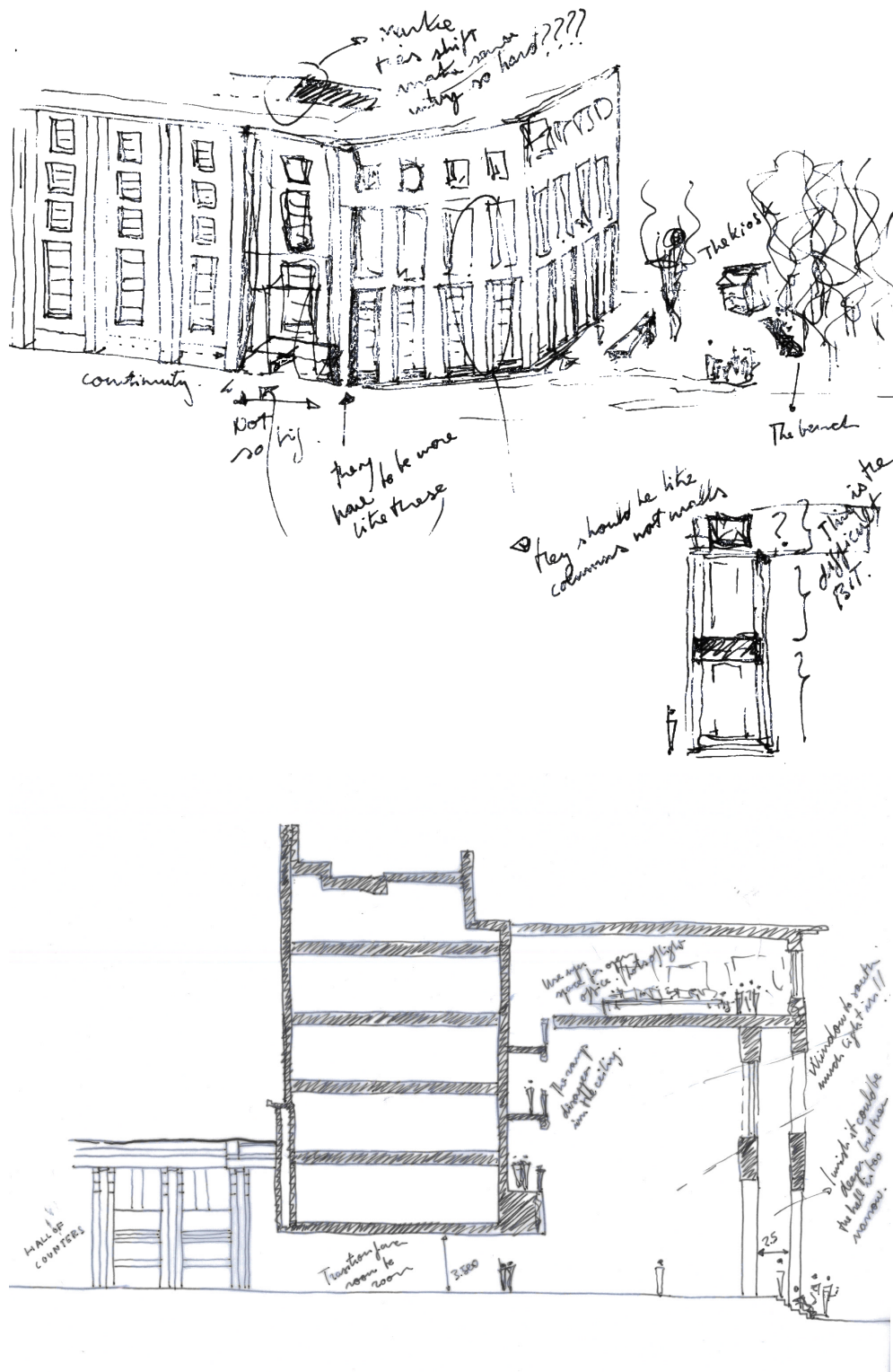
Anfiteatro de Lucca, 1970s



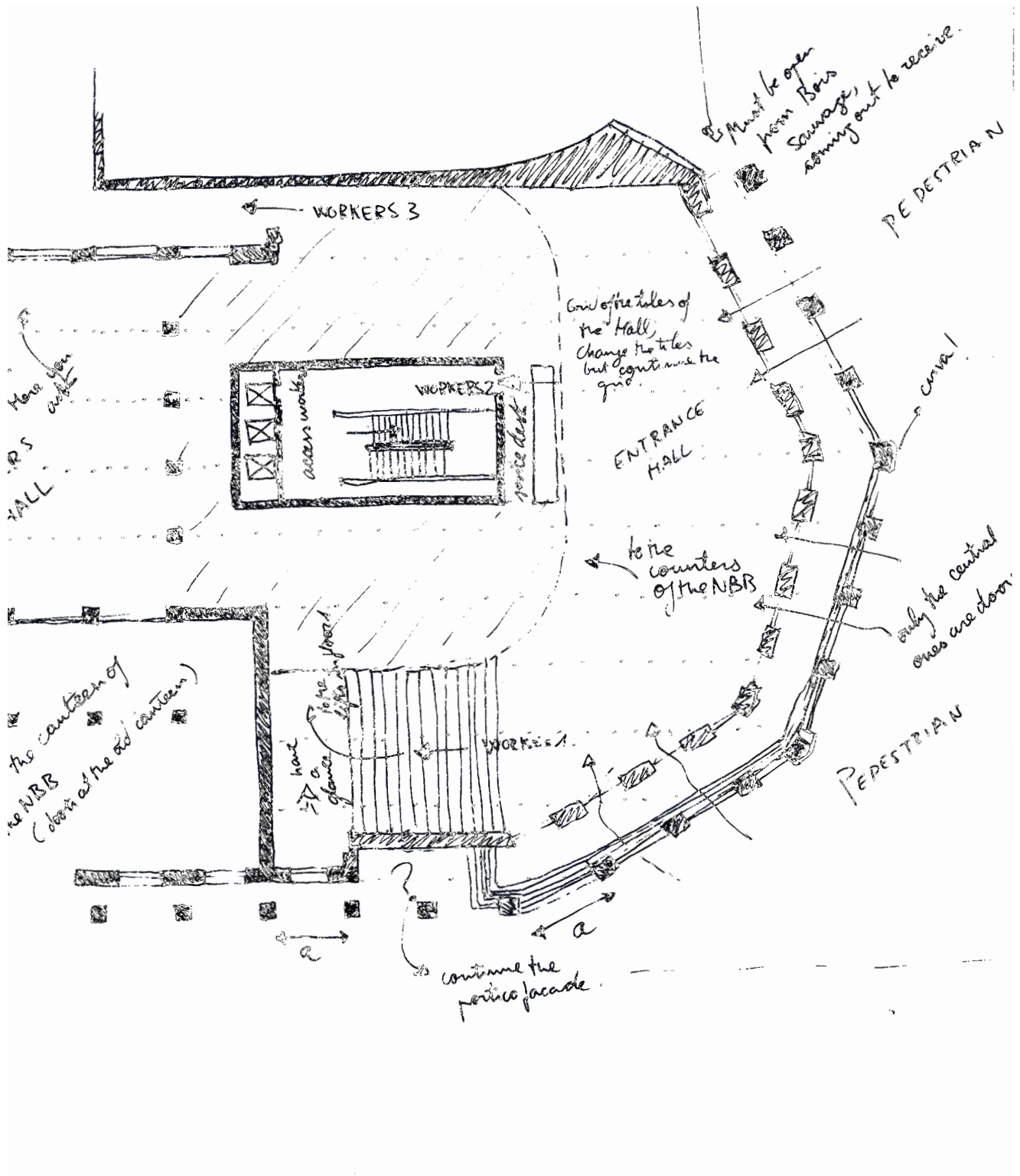
Teatro di Marcello, Rome, 1910

DESIGN PROCESS

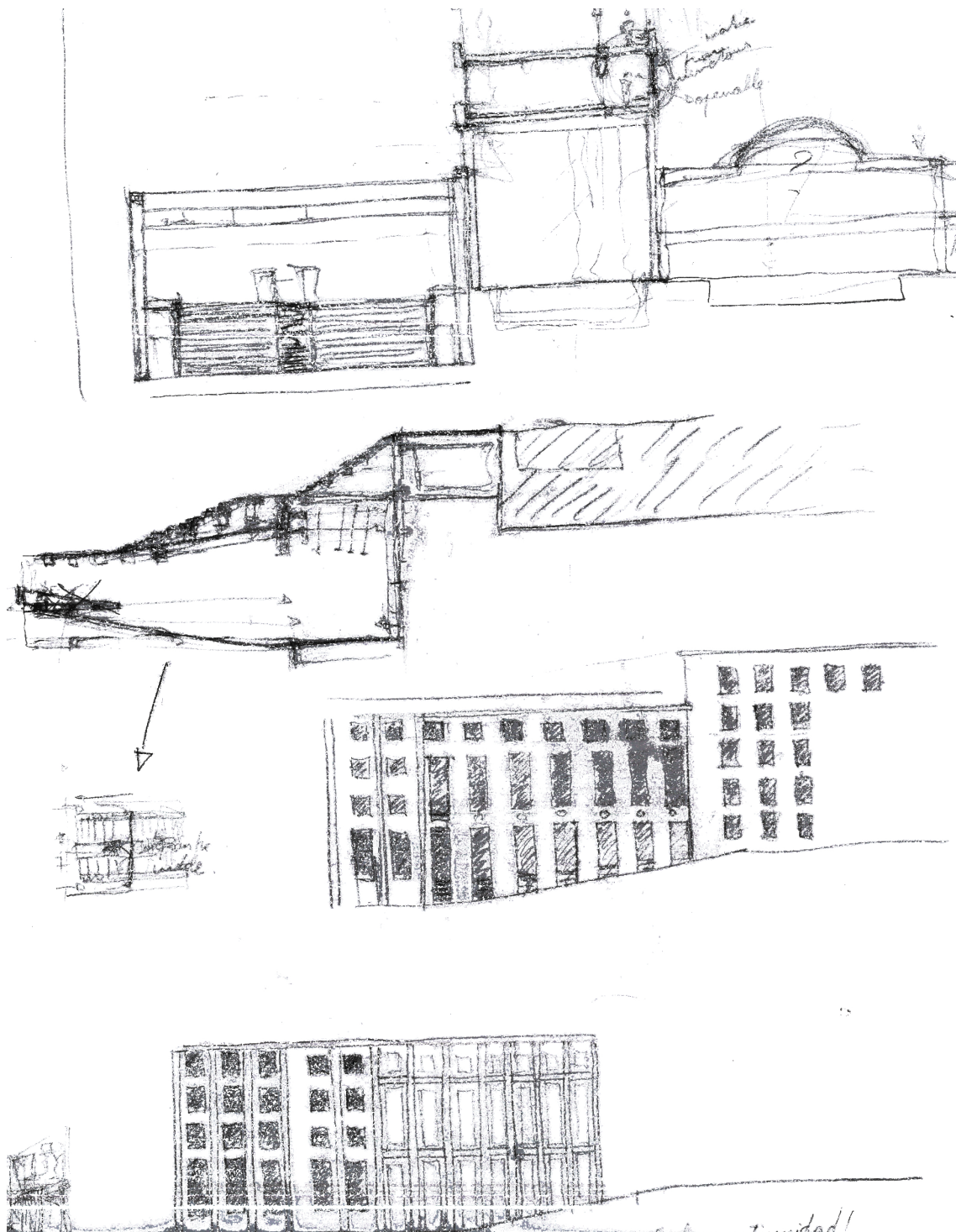
P3 - A ruin



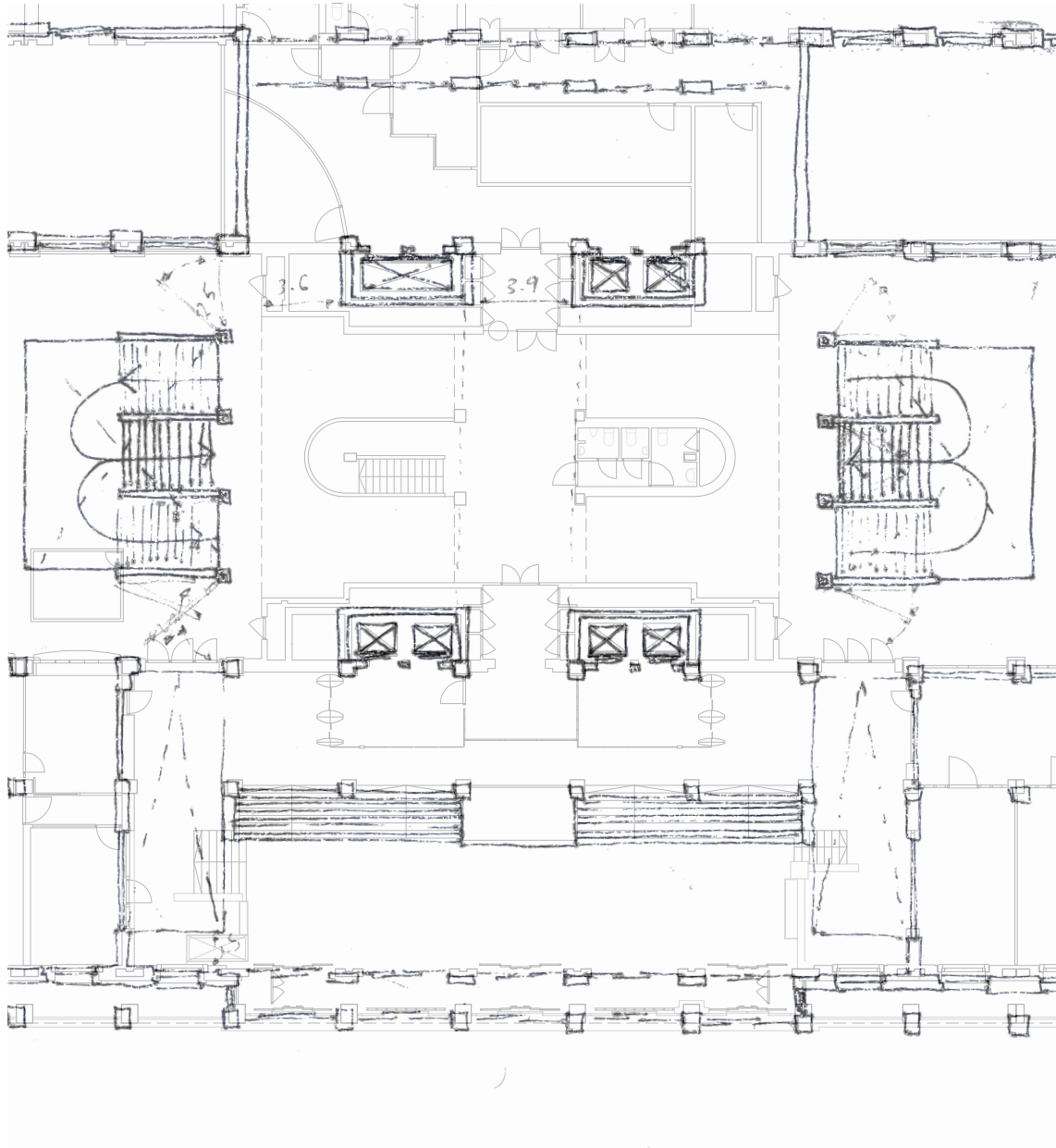
Entrance. This series of sketches were the first attempts to design the corner of the NBB. They correspond to the addition at southern edge of the building, which intends to enclose the block and give a facade to the NBB at the great square of the Cathedral, a public entrance to the *hall of counters*. Inside, this entrance hall must make a progressive sequence towards the *hall of counters*, in it the existing circulation of the Bank plays a fundamental role showing the movement of workers up and down using the vertical ramps, which are left exposed once the cladding is removed. The design on the outside however presents more uncertainties, which have to do with the connection between old and new facade. Should the colonnade be continued or should it be divided in 3 vertical bays that demonumentalize the scale of each entrance?



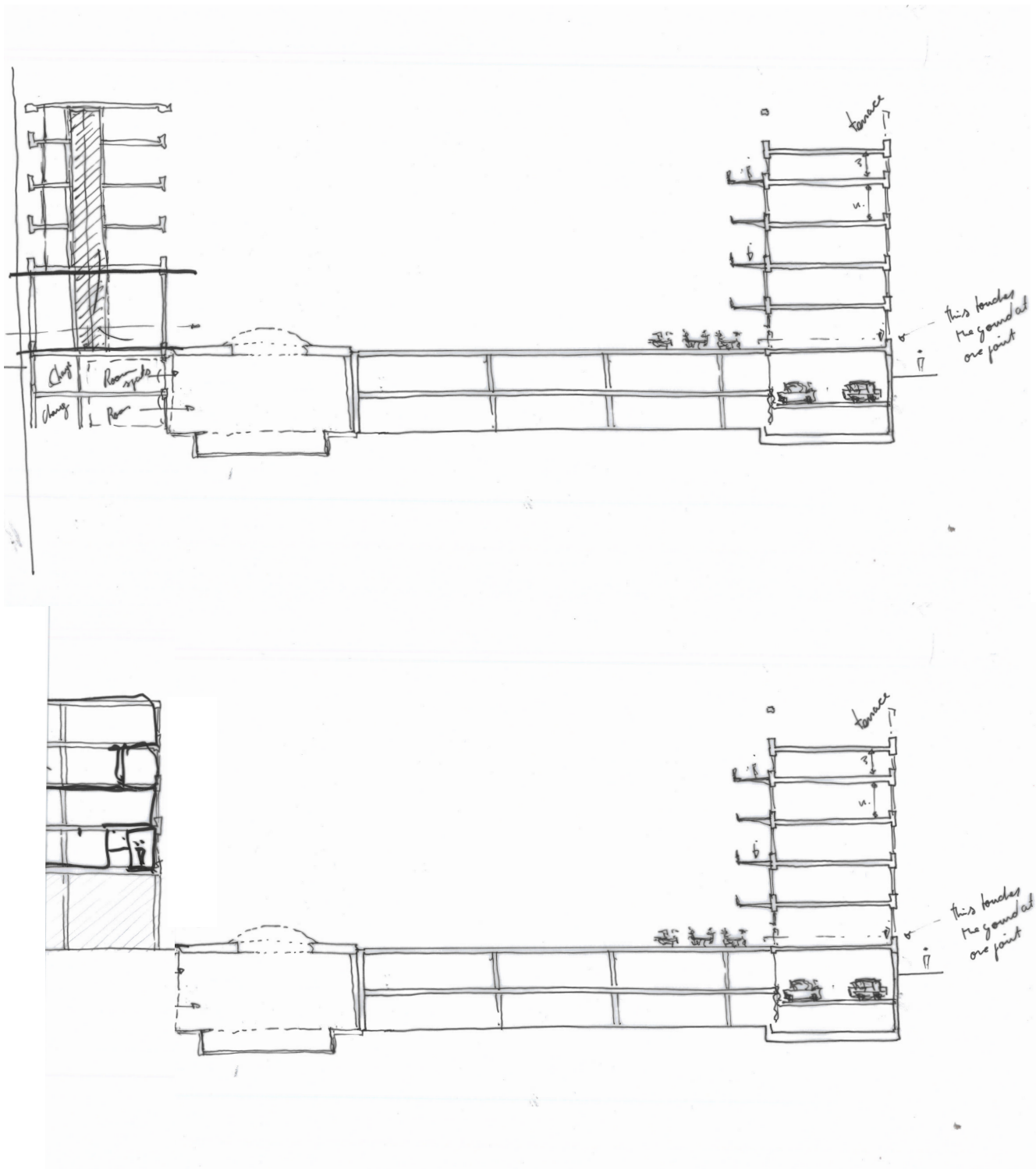
Entrance. The entrance hall is intended to receive both workers and the public. The first group of people can either enter through the offices of the hall of counters, the lifts placed behind the entrance desk or a large staircase as main access that celebrates the arrival. The public on the other hand is expected to continue underneath the vertical ramps towards the hall of counters. The difference of height surrounding the building's corner is solved with a few steps between the colonnade which could be seen as part of the public space.



Entrance. The discussion on the composition of the facade went on to conclude in this sketch, a stone cladded colonnade that continues the existing and is interrupted by 2 horizontal beams dividing the front facade in three parts that correspond to the dimensions of the existing window. The intention is to create a facade on two layers, the permeable layer of the colonnade (slightly wider than the existing) and the layer of the exterior wall, with bays composed by a large door to the entrance hall, a large window bringing light into the hall and a smaller window looking out from the office space above the entrance hall. The area between both layers, an exterior covered space protected behind the colonnade, is intended to become a transition space from the street to the interior, one of those many spots in the city where one shelters from heavy rain, where one sits on a warm summer day while overlooking the Cathedral or a point of reference for casual meetings (*let's meet around 5pm by the steps of the Bank and walk around from there*)



Passage. The second important proposal of the project consists of allowing public a public route running through two interiors, one of the entrances of the Hotel leading to Rue de Bois Sauvage and what is now the main entrance of the NBB coming from Bd de Berlaimont. In order to open up this passage, the space has to be reconfigured, the existing long banking hall must be understood as two independent spaces that can be approached from this central passage. One of these spaces is the Hall of Counters that one could access from the new main entrance of the Bank at the square of the Cathedral; the second hall accommodates the Library of the NBB, an grand open space with smaller studyspaces behind the former counters of the Bank. At the same time the passage should give access to the foyer of the auditorium of the NBB, a double height space located underground. All in all the intervention requires the clearing of this central area, by removing the existing staircase and a small bridge above, the space receives extra height and becomes free of obstacles. Besides, the removal of the central core gives the possibility of bringing natural light from above, just like in the two great halls. Moreover, in order to avoid interruptions in the passage the stairs to the foyer are placed on the sides, two grand double staircase that connect with the underground level. This gesture offers a higher degree of enclosure to the Library and Counters hall that are access from the side of the staircases, between high panels that frame the access and at the same time serve as openings for the halls.

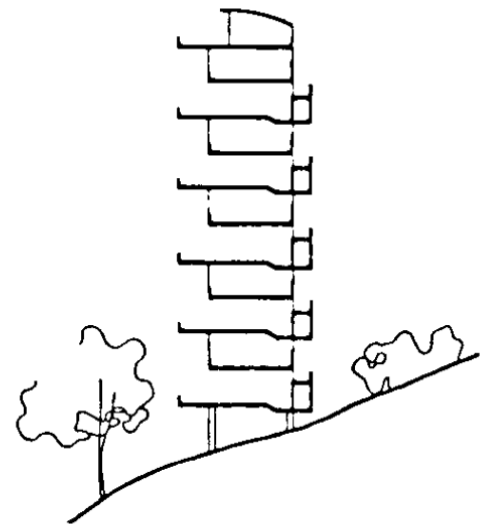


The question of housing in the inner court. The original proposal for the development of affordable housing contemplated the idea of having the residential court as a court of galleries around which all apartments would revolve. The apartments of the building in the inner court would have access to only one inner facade, the first solution was to introduce two cores giving access to apartments looking at both sides of the innerblock. As a result of this the circulation of the court of galleries would suddenly be interrupted and the ground floor would be compromised by two vertical shafts and therefore two entrances to the residential. The sketch on the bottom suggests an alternative that consists of gallery apartments with a double height which would give them access to both facades. This way the circulation of the galleries could continue, no extra shafts are needed and the ground floor would remain free of interruptions, resulting in a covered public space between both courts.

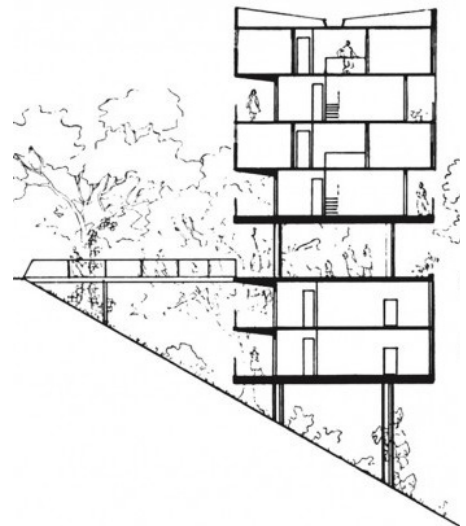
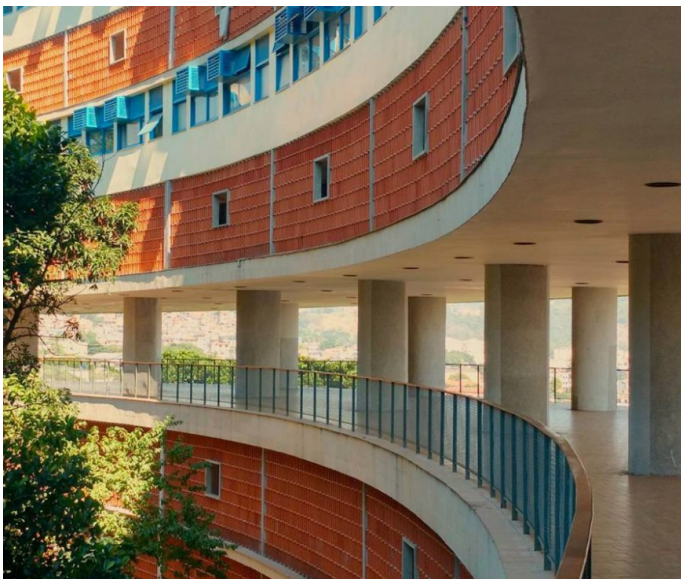
Unite d'habitation, Marseille



Edifício Julio Barreto, Rio de Janeiro



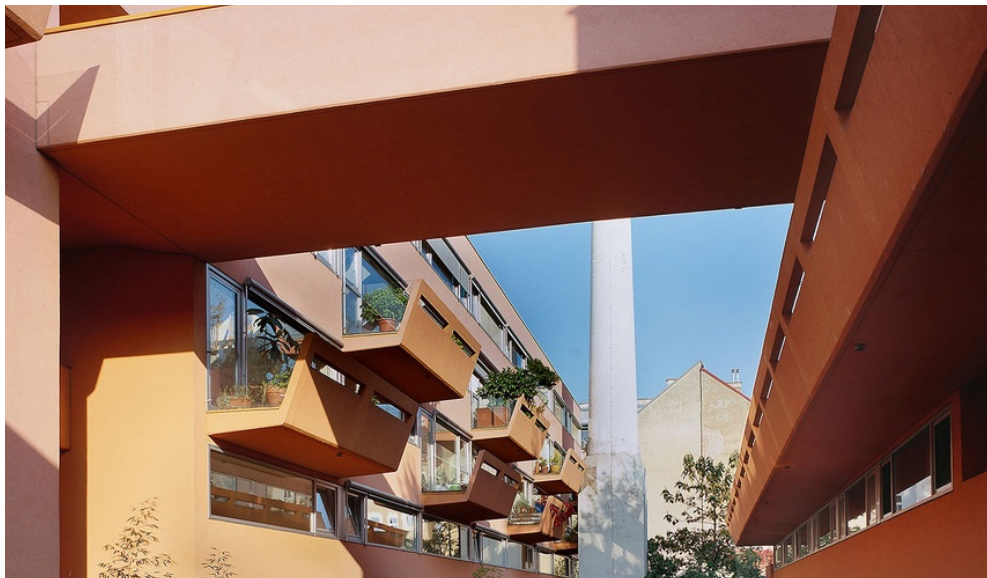
Edifício pedregulho, Rio de Janeiro



Palacio Capanema, Rio de Janeiro



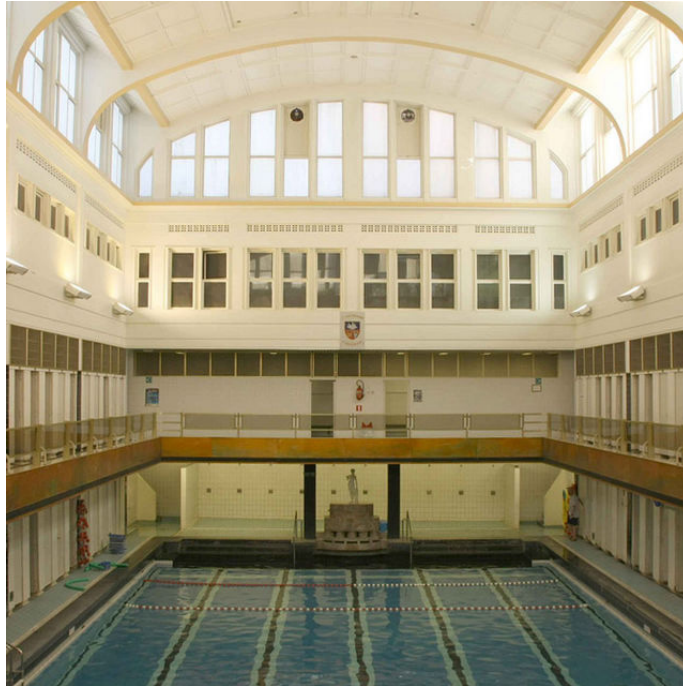
Sargfabriek, Vienna



La Borda, Barcelona



Piscine d'Ixelles, Brussels



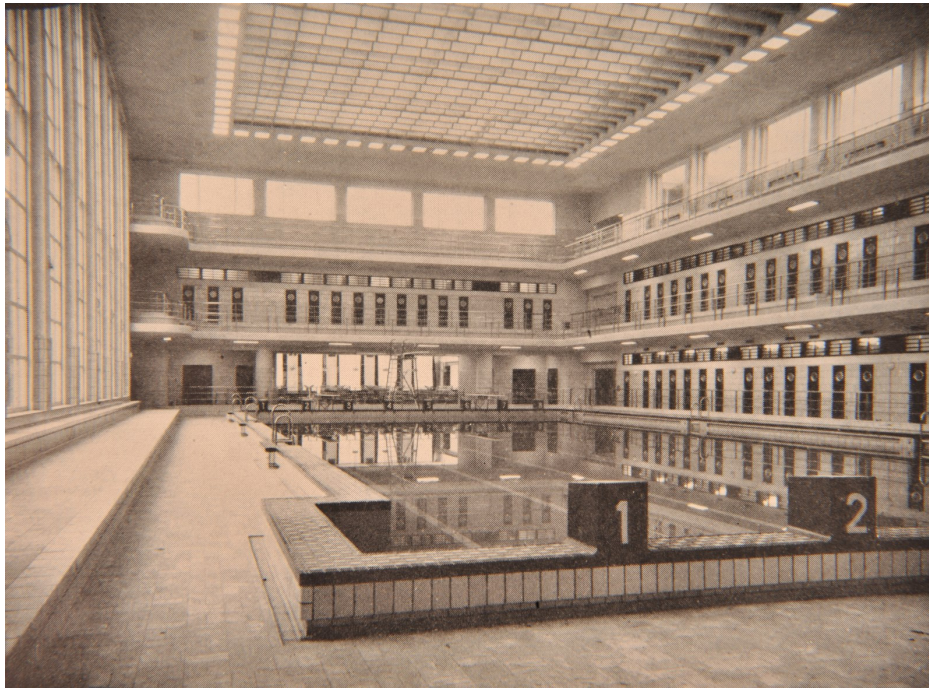
Bainsde Victor Boin, Brussels



Piscine d'Ixelles, Brussels



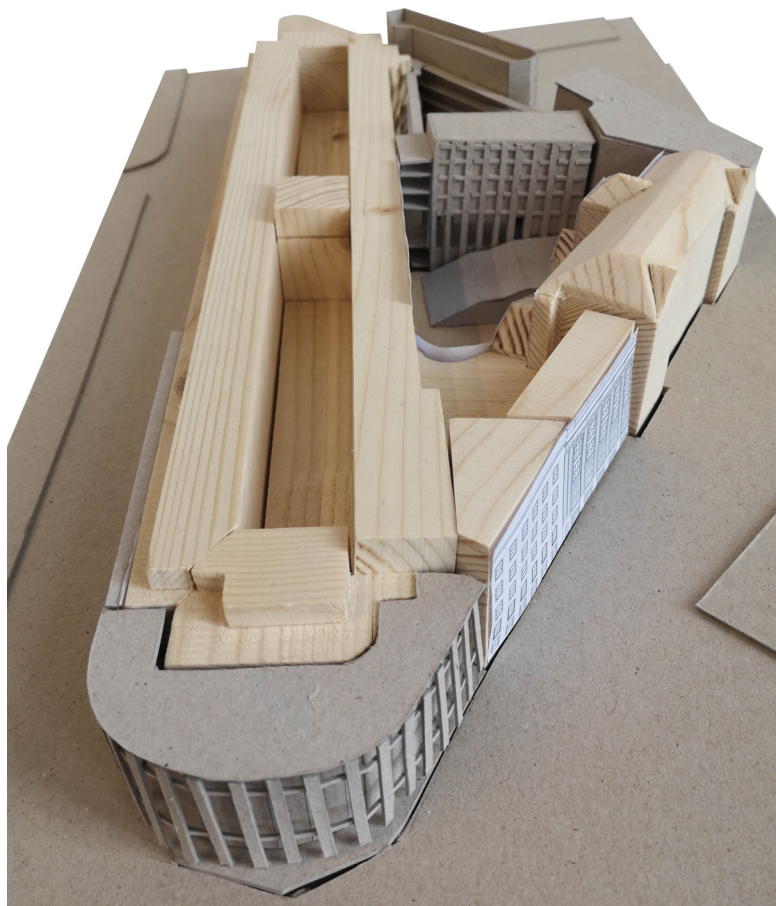
Neptunium, Brussels

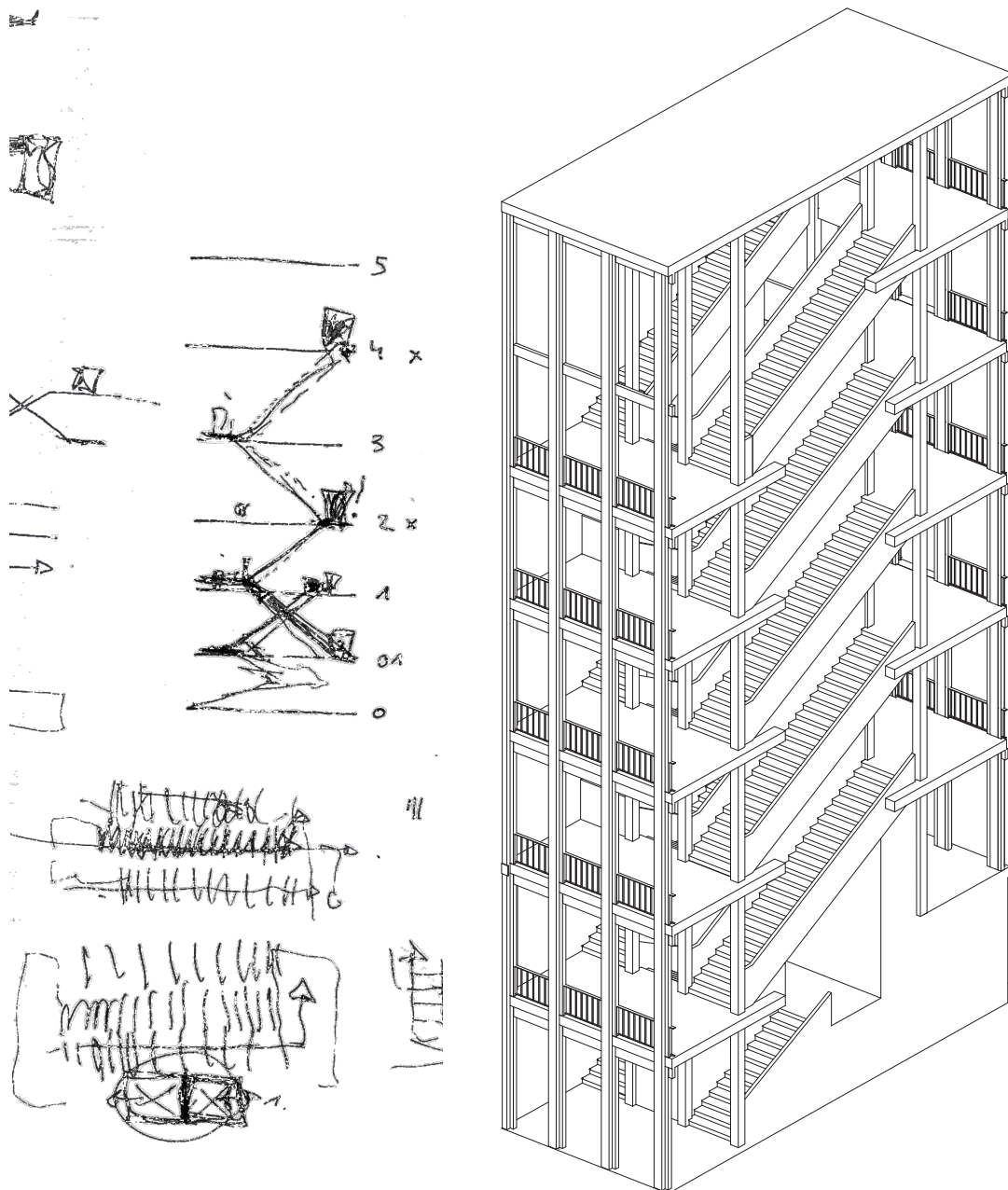


Bains du Centre, Brussels



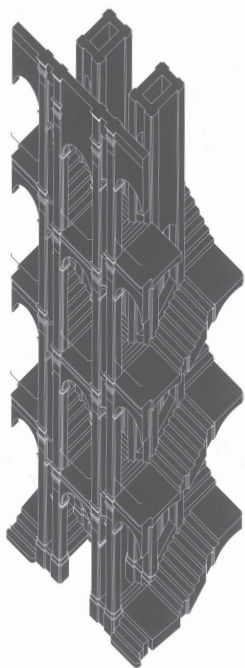




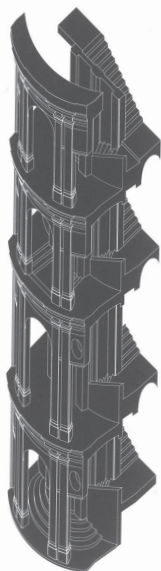


The fragment, stairs. The point where the residential building collides with the offices of the NBB must explain this collision of program, it must translate through space the relation between these two realities, the reality of the worker of a national institution and that of the resident that benefits from the great state of the NBB. It is also the point where the engine of the institution meets the city function, the daily routine of the innerblock that the Bank itself has triggered. This space of collision is the vertical circulation of both programs, an access to the public court for the offices and an access for the court of galleries for the apartments. The complexity of this collision results in a helix staircase inspired in Ferdinando Sanfelice's Neapolitan staircases, a baroque model. These sketches are one of the last attempts to organize this scheme. The idea is that residents accessing from one side in an upper level and workers coming from the other side in a lower level, could move up and down looking at both courts without ever bumping into each other, but crossing gazes in every floor. In this scheme the residents enter from the right at floor O1 and reach their galleries in floors 2 and 4, while workers access from the left at floor O to a double staircase, which becomes single in the next floor and double in the following and so carries on separating and mingling the movement of workers in every other floor.

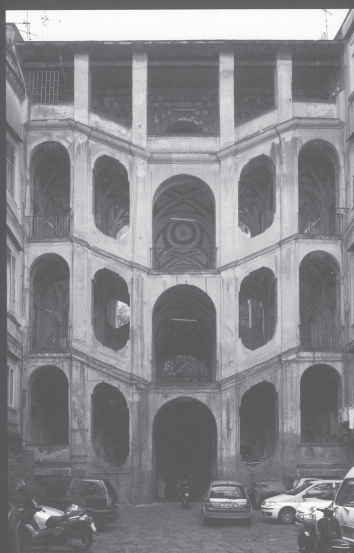
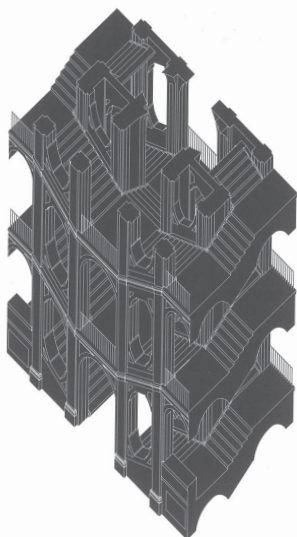
Palazzo Trabucco, Nicolo Tagliacozzi



Palazzo d'Affito, unknown architect

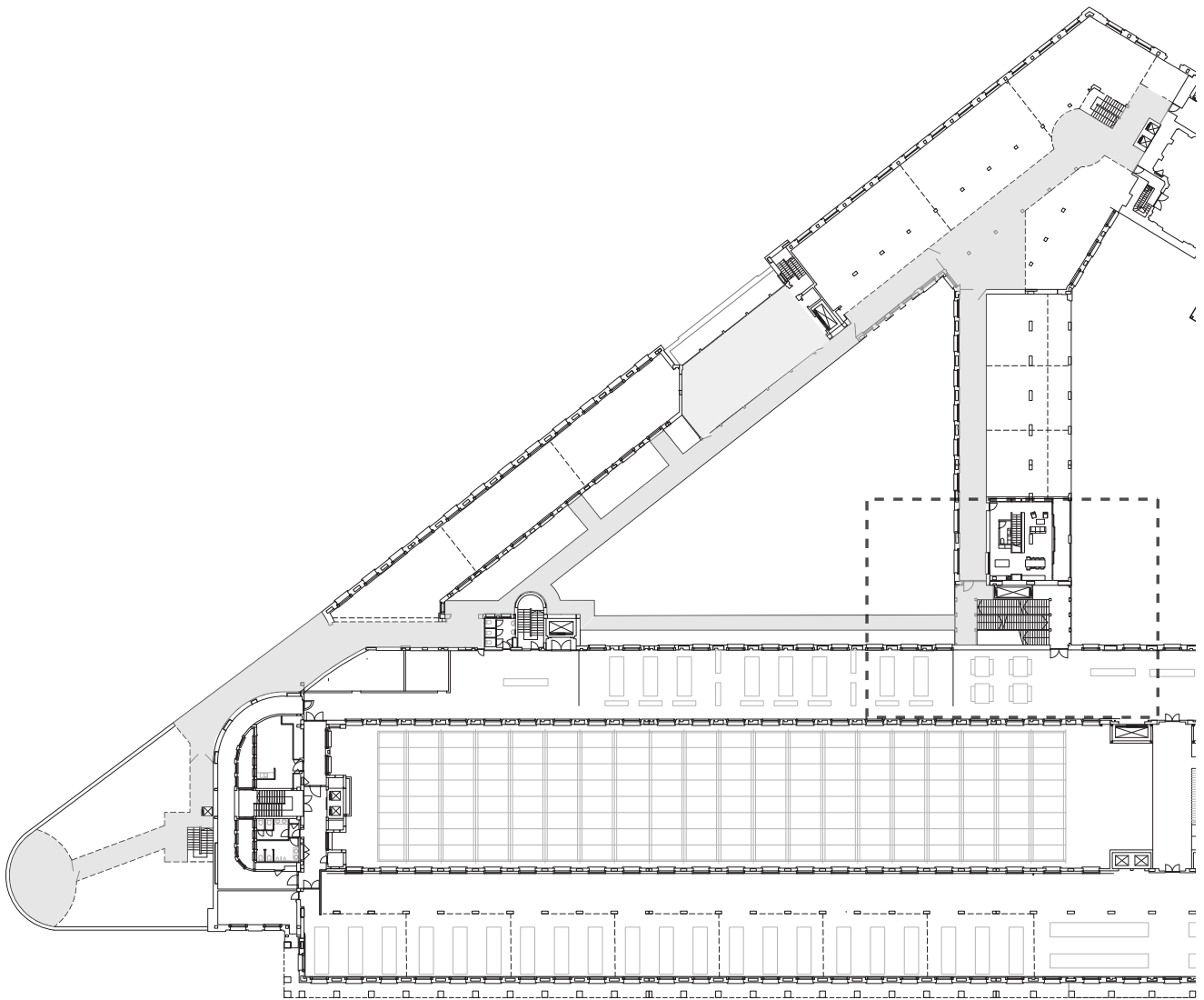


Palazzo Sanfelice, Ferdinando Sanfelice

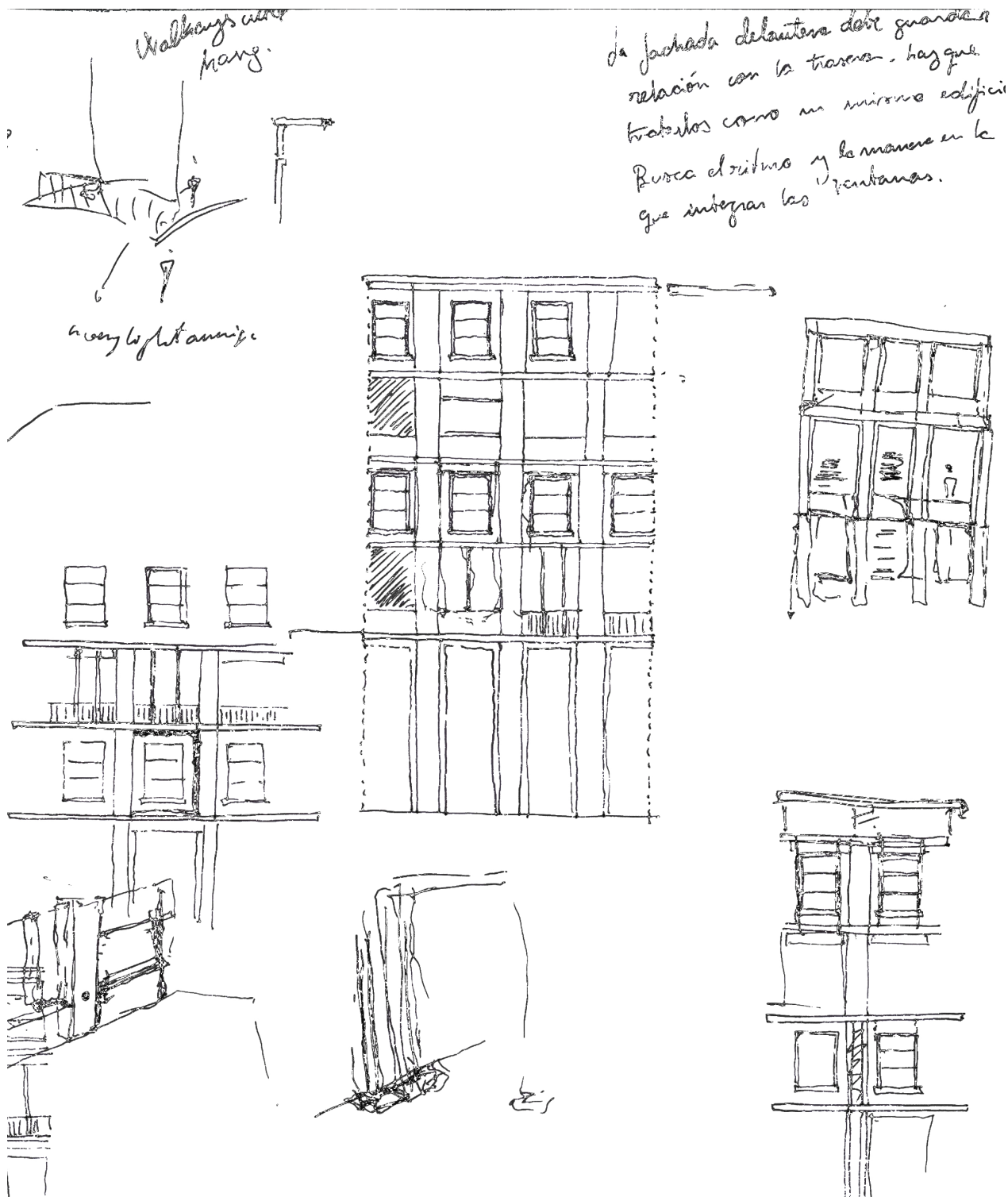




The fragment galleries. The design of the staircase brings question about the circulation for the rest of the housing complex. The corridors that were imagined to conform a court of galleries where residents bump into each other, hang out or simply circulate, a space that would remind the experience of the impasse, a court around which through circulation, residents mingle. Most of these galleries work like hanging bridges, detached from the facades of either the Bank or the housing complex. This gesture offers certain privacy to the apartments and safety for the offices while cross gazing may still happen. However the consequence is that these bridges become narrow circulation paths which must be combined with the interior galleries designed to give access to the Duplex apartments in the central building of the court. The interior gallery is a wider space that receives morning sun and overlooks the court. The glazing of this gallery would offer the possibility of using the space in the cold seasons and openings that work like the existing windows of the Bank could turn them into exterior spaces in the summer. This still leaves the question open of how does the facade deal with the relation between gallery and bedroom above, should bedrooms present equally large openings?

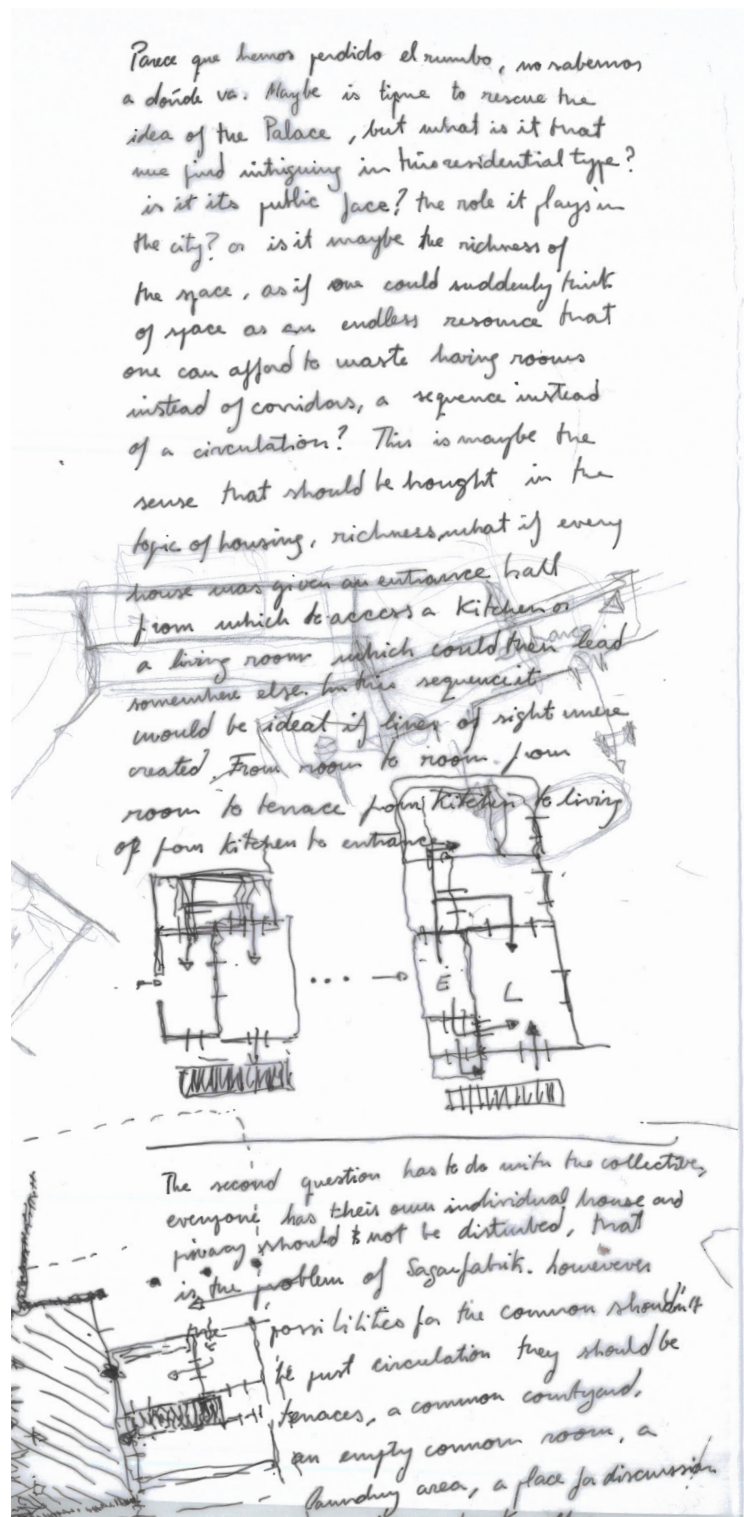


Floorplan of the building in the groundfloor showing the galleries and collective spaces they lead to in gray



The fragment, facade. The decision of creating gallery apartments with double height lead to difficulties in the facade. The ground floor is clear, the existing structure of the building is clad in stone and reinforced with cast in site concrete portals that give the stability that is lost once the beams have been removed. The upper floors however are more complicated, there are glazed galleries that give depth to the facade in the second and fourth level, between and above them there are two rows of windows that look from the bedrooms of the apartments into the court of galleries. The lines of the structure are made visible to visually link the floors vertically while horizontal cornices reinforce the perpendicular direction. There is however something wrong about this composition, something that has to do with dealing with its depth, its openings, it must be refined to be less of a chocolate cake. It could be that the upper floors are still too horizontal with respect to the portals on ground.



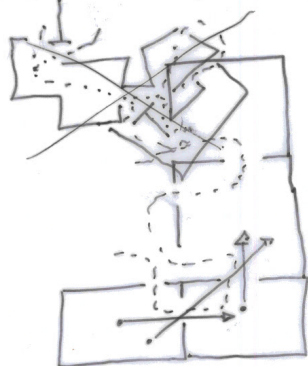


The home, a palace. The reflection on the matter of housing was inspired by several references which range from the flexible idea of property suggested by MAIO Architects (where one room could be shared by multiple residents or simply be leased from one resident to another), the generosity of the plans of Lütjens Padmanabhan, Emi architekten or Sergison Bates to the complexity of the Milanese apartments designed by Caccia Dominioni (his plans are an attempt to build a sequence of rooms, with no need of corridors and generating always an open circulation where rooms are accessed from multiple points, this way Dominioni achieved a feeling of spaciousness which also relied on the search for sightlines running through the odd corners of the apartment).

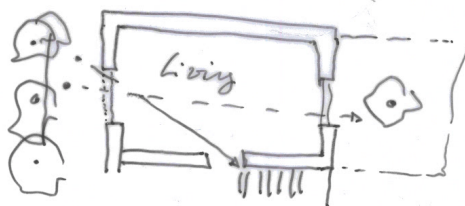
For the design of the residential units looking to the inner court we must consider the crossing views within the apartment and within the court. There will be situations at which makers of the bank peek right inside the home and those are the moments that we can control with the design, what exactly do they see. This is what we learnt from Caccia. The plan must have visual connections through, ~~at~~ There is no need for an overhand complexity of corners and sharp turns there is just planes that give this sense of intimacy around the corner.

But at the same time it is important to remember Van Eyck lessons on the Koller Muller Pavilion,

a space that offers multiple routings for the same goal an open circulation, the maze like plan

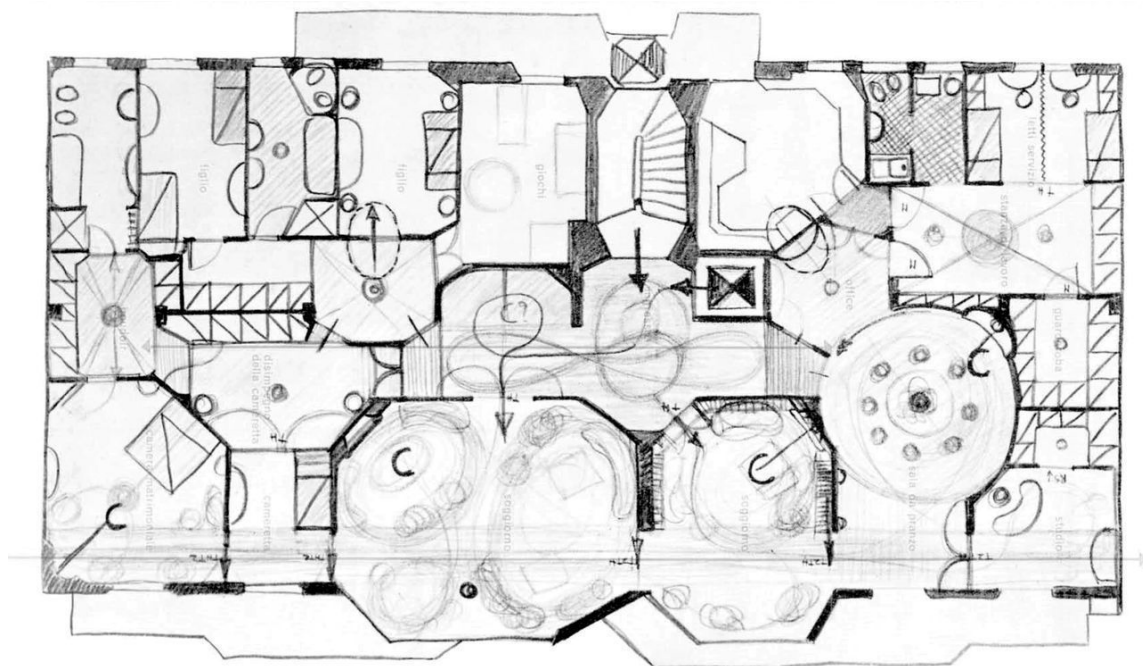


At the same time there is a phenomenon in Dutch houses that I noticed when cycling past their large street windows at the ground floor. it is the feeling that one can see all the way through, it is a generous

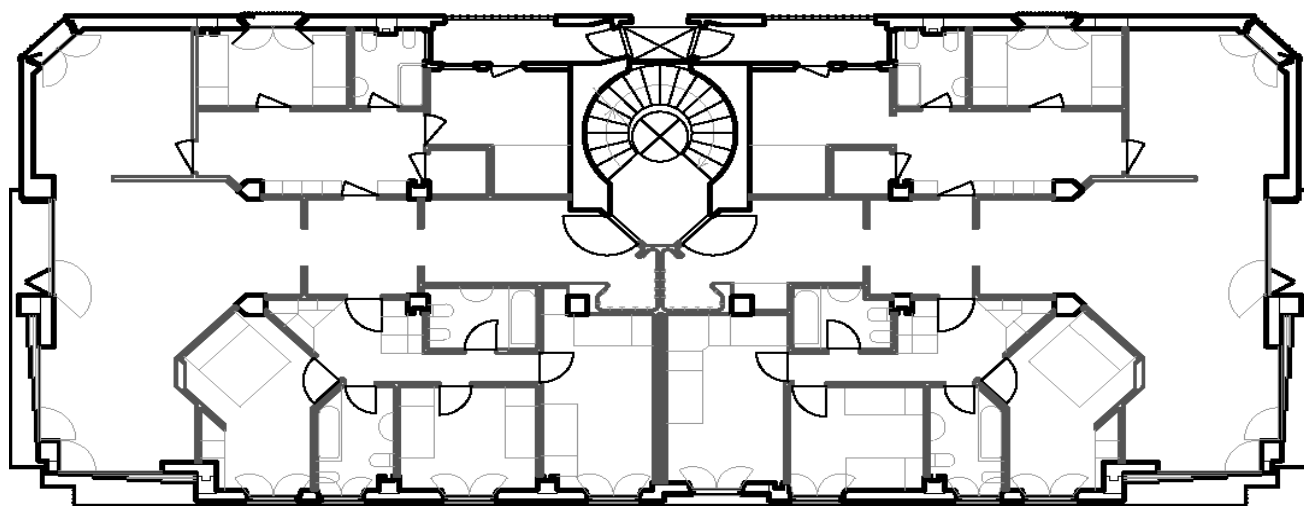


gesture towards the street.

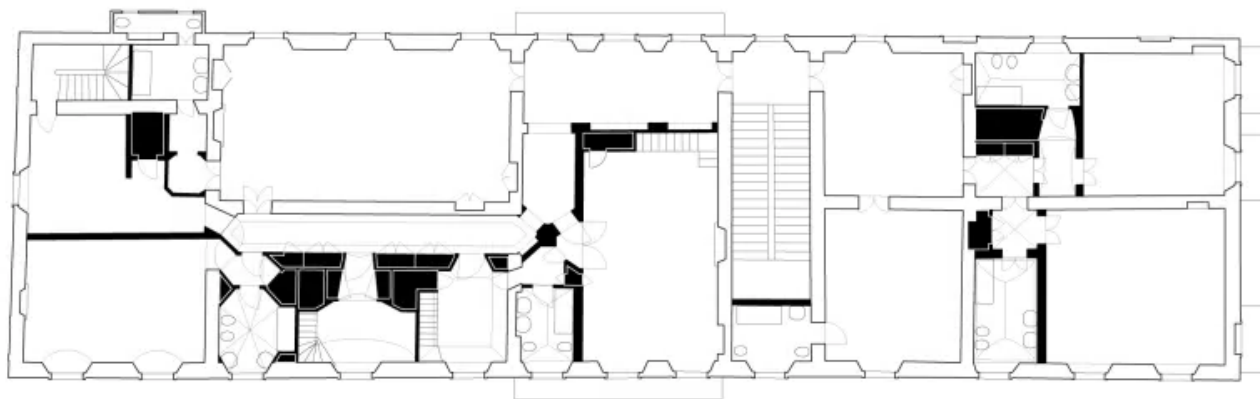
House in Via Vigoni, Luigi Caccia Dominioni



House in Via Massena, Luigi Caccia Dominioni



Villa San Valerio, Luigi Caccia Dominioni



Hampstead mansion block, Sergison Bates architects

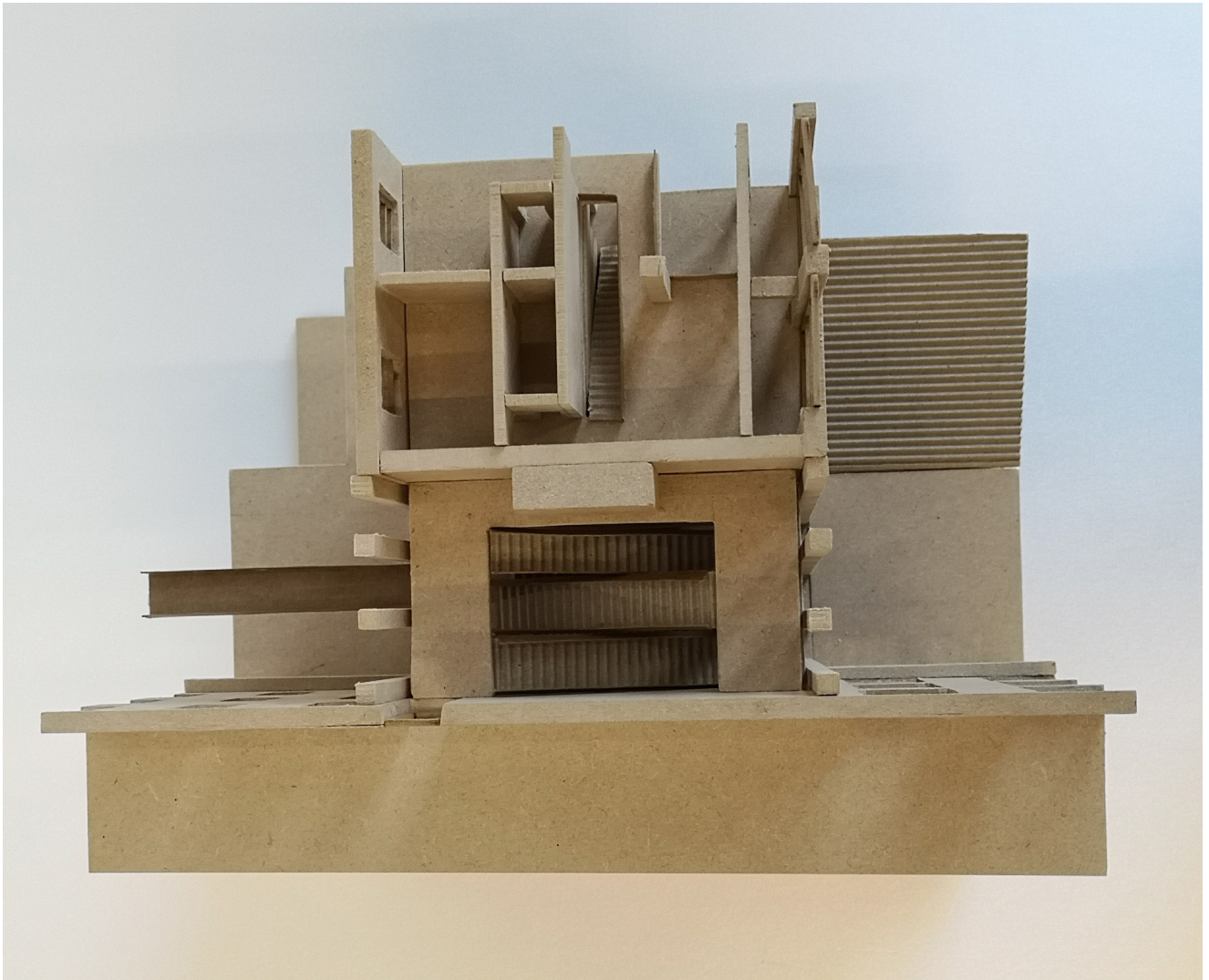


Hottigen, Emi - architekten



Herdernstrasse, Lutjens Padmanabhan







Reflection *On P3*

The design brief of the Fragment and Fragment of a Fragment resulted in a good opportunity to find a physical outcome to the research and imagine a particular situation in the project which could be repeated in other points of the building: the partition situation.

The isometric drawing on the right hand side of the page corresponds the fragment that of the project where multiple programs collide in the inner court taking over the existing structure of the building. At this point where the affordable housing sits over a covered public space connecting two courts (the more public court over the auditorium of the NBB and the court of galleries for the residential, over the municipal sport facilities and car parking of the NBB). At the same time the building between both courts intersects perpendicularly one of the wings of the NBB with offices inside. At the point between these intersection of existing structures, a new structure is added, the “baroque” staircase of Ferdinando Sanfelice, a staircase for the residents and workers that never meet in their way up.

In this piece of the new NBB multiple city functions can take place, residential, retail, cultural, office and one of the most important, pedestrian traffic, movement. The idea that these functions can happen within the urban block, makes one wonder whether this is a possibility to revive the labyrinthic qualities of the Impasse, by which one could penetrate a block from one point and pierce through to another part of the city. One wonders whether these galleries in the inner block and program can remind the noise of those alleys, a constant flow of people, although within a different scale. At the same time, how would this change the daily life of the worker that suddenly finds themselves at the city rather than at a closed fortress, will they be more distracted, will they be more aware of the responsibility of the institution they work for? Will they establish a daily relationship with those who dwell in the block and come across every morning when going up the stairs?

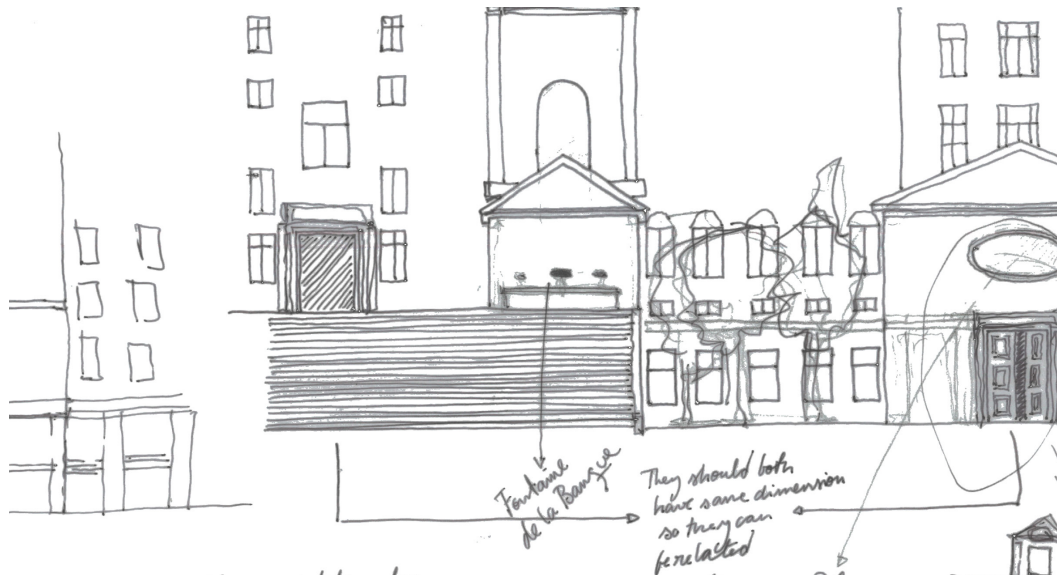
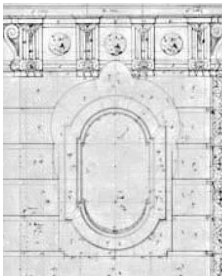
If any of these situations is ever to happen, they must equally occur in others points of the block where this partition situation repeats. At those points where city program is capable of interacting with the NBB it must happen. Either in the form of a few doors that connect the Palace and the residential, entrance points side by side at the plinth of one of the corners or meeting rooms right behind one of the public halls of the Palace.

Parallely, the fact that this action takes place within an existing urban structure recalls the memories of the P2 reflection and the idea of erosion of urban artefacts by change in program within existing form.



DESIGN PROCESS

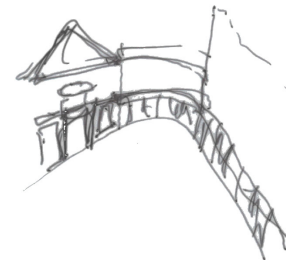
P4 - A palace



You are making a mistake when dealing with the facade of the Palace in a purely classical manner; a cornice, a top tympanon, and an entrance door with stone frames around. Maybe there is a way of letting these elements free, of allowing certain contradictions with the classical. But under no circumstances shall it be a excuse to create CONTRAST. Run away from contrast. But Another question is whether this facade can relate at all to the Bank otherwise the building just sits alone.

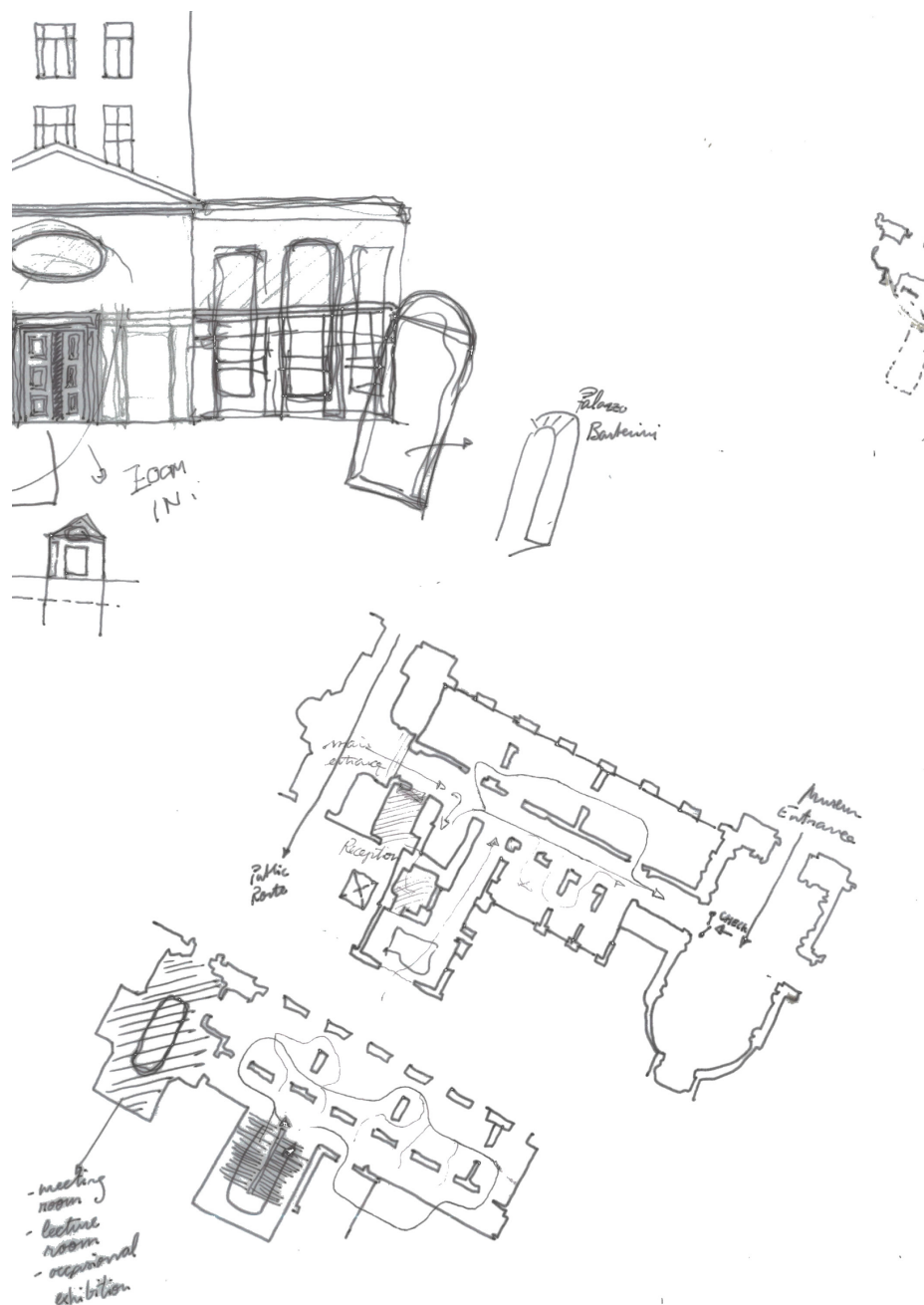


The elliptic window fills a gap in the facade and in the interior, in the entrance Hall of the Hotel. The cornice on the other hand is



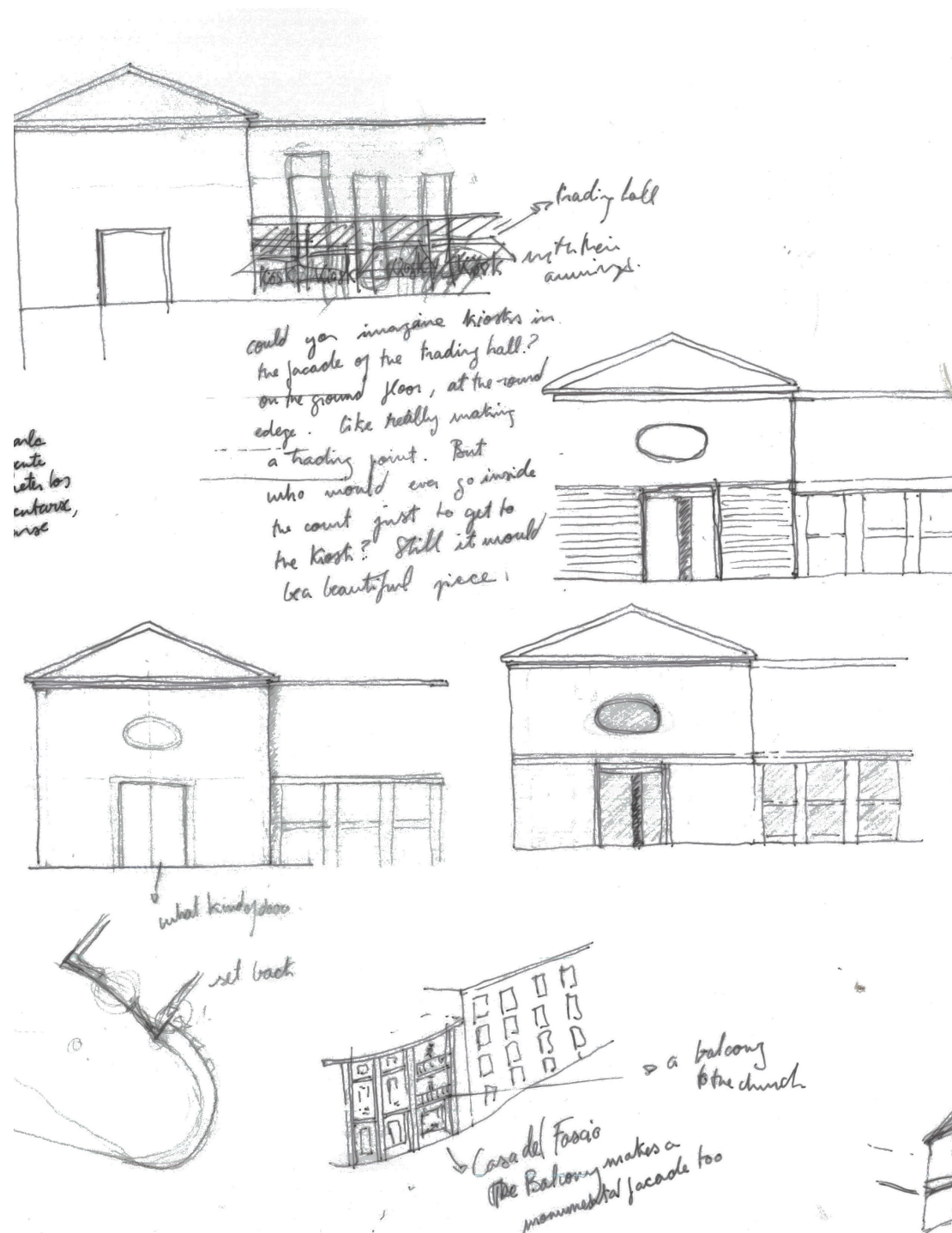
- meeting room
- lecture room
- reception
- exhibit

The Hotel and the court. The redressing of the Palace is discussed here in order to revert its current situation, the Hotel has been turned into a back facade towards the innercourt. All the efforts are focused on creating a frontal situation by which the Palace can turn towards the innercourt and present two entrances as part of the public route through the building: the old entrance of carriages at the top of the staircase and the old main access leading to an entrance hall at street level. While the first access remains permanently open, the second is an alternative route that connects the court and the street to the interior of the Palace, used as the exhibition space of the NBB. It is precisely this access that it is being discussed in these sketches, that suggest the creation of a frontal door and an oval window reminiscent from the windows in the facade at Bois Sauvage. The idea is to avoid contrast with the language of the Palace and at the same time introduce elements that give continuity to its expression, avoiding an eclectic dressing of the innercourt where already three elements are confronting each other, the Palace, the Bank and the curved building at the corner containing the Trading Hall of the NBB. Some of these elements deal with the interior, like the oval window giving a view from the interior entrance hall at street level to the innercourt; others deal with the public character of the court, such as the entrance itself, the trees in what used to be the old court or the proposal of a facade

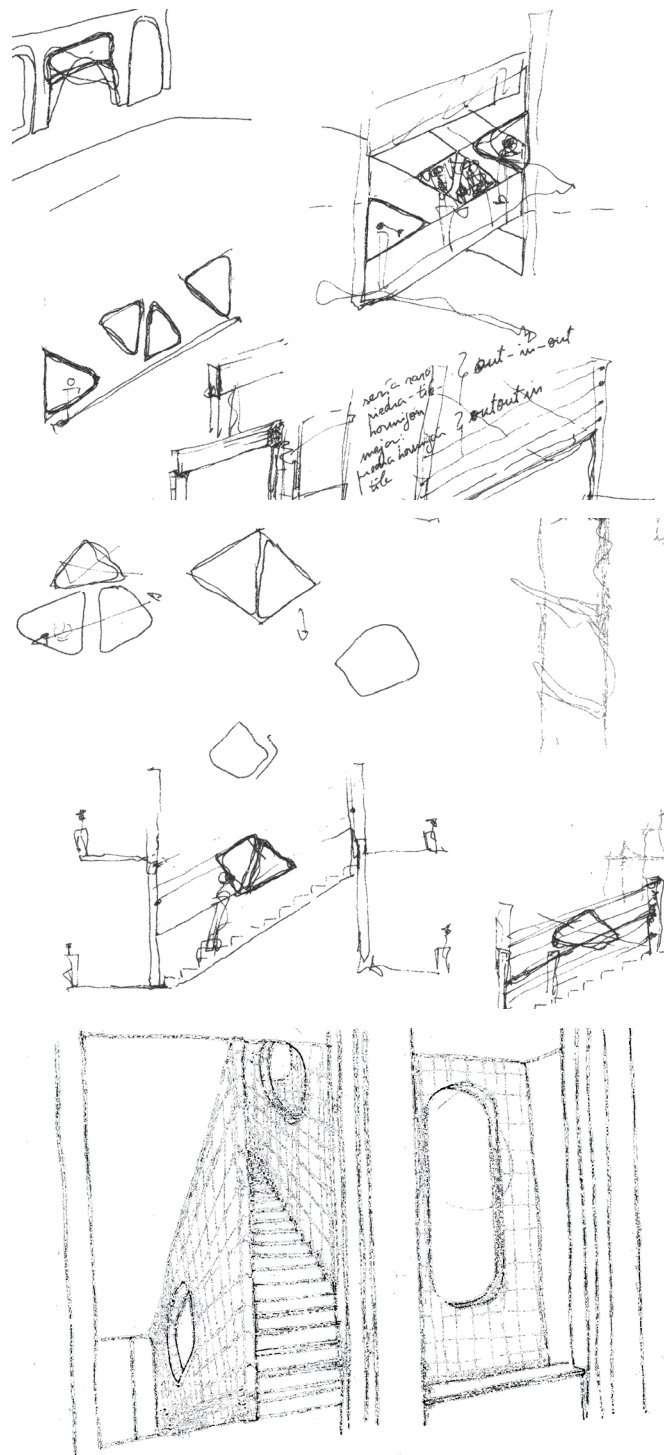


fountain to dress the facade overlooking the court from the street level, at the top of the staircase. This fountain it is thought as an urban device, a sign of publicness that could bring another atmosphere to the court. Well designed, it could become a refreshing pond in the summer by which one could lay down and get ones feet wet, at the same time one wonders whether such elements are precisely what bring life to public spaces, not only as reference points in a route but also as excuses for joy often capable of exciting children passing by, bringing new noises into the serious court of the NBB. But also in winter, when water is less precious to the passerby, the constant dripping of a fountain can resonate in court as one slowly goes downstairs to the other side of the building. Such noises make a public space, the fountain dressing the Palace is an important element.

Besides the public route, these plans of the ground and upper floor of the Palace illustrate the sequence for the visitor of the exhibition spaces of the NBB, guarded behind its oldest walls. The existing sequence of rooms proves to be ideal for distributing works and visitors with respect to the two entrances that connect with the innercourt.



The Trading Hall and the court. The curved facade of the innercourt that takes the concave corner between the Palace and the existing facade of the Bank, corresponds to the Trading Hall of the NBB. An great open room of high ceilings (16m) from which the stock market is monitored. Its open and hectic interior looks directly to the public court of the NBB, from which the daily life of the Trading Hall is also looked at by the public. This visual connection between the court and the room, happens through the openings of the curved facade touching the entrance to the Palace. The intention of this sketches is to achieve a balance between the openness of the Hall and the enclosure given by the facade of the Hotel. Besides the corner tries to give continuity to the rythm of the third facade to the court, the facade of the Bank. To do so, the openings in the facade of the hall responds to two datum lines: the horizontal line beneath the Tympanum (marking its height) and the line of main entrance that is aligned with the facade of the Bank.



The fragment, stairs. The staircase that became the fragment between the offices of the NBB and its residential program, had to be reconsidered in order to avoid a security bridge between the two colliding programs. At the same time there is a need to allow moments of visual contact between both interlocking staircase. These moments, windows between the staircases, must pierce through a solid wall separating both. These sketches imagine the form of those openings in order to allow multiple framed views in the way up and down but at the same time wonder what form could possibly reduce the massiveness of the wall. At last the decision lies in the Palace's oeil de boeuf which served as reference to dress the facade in the innercourt. The intention is to introduce an opening that can present the staircase as something detached, an element on its own hidden behind a facade and at the same time establish a dialogue with the forms of the Palace.

One of the questions of the project is related to the feeling of interiority in the inner courts that must on the one hand be extensions of Bois Sauvage and Rue de la Banque but at the same time evoke an sense of indoor condition. This affects in great the materialisation of these courts, the paving that must be coherent between both courts and at the same time keep a relation with the real public interior, The Passage and Banking Hall. Secondly the cladding of elements which must give coherence to the facade. The stone cladding is the guiding element and the concrete portals must cohere with it. The next question regards the ceilings of these public spaces, should they be a concrete finish just like the reinforcement? Is wood acceptable here? maybe lamps should be kept in the vertical and the ceilings left empty to allow use for hanging objects or maybe there could be lamps hanging from the ceilings like in the corridors of the university of Berlin. It's a matter of how much of an interior should it be.

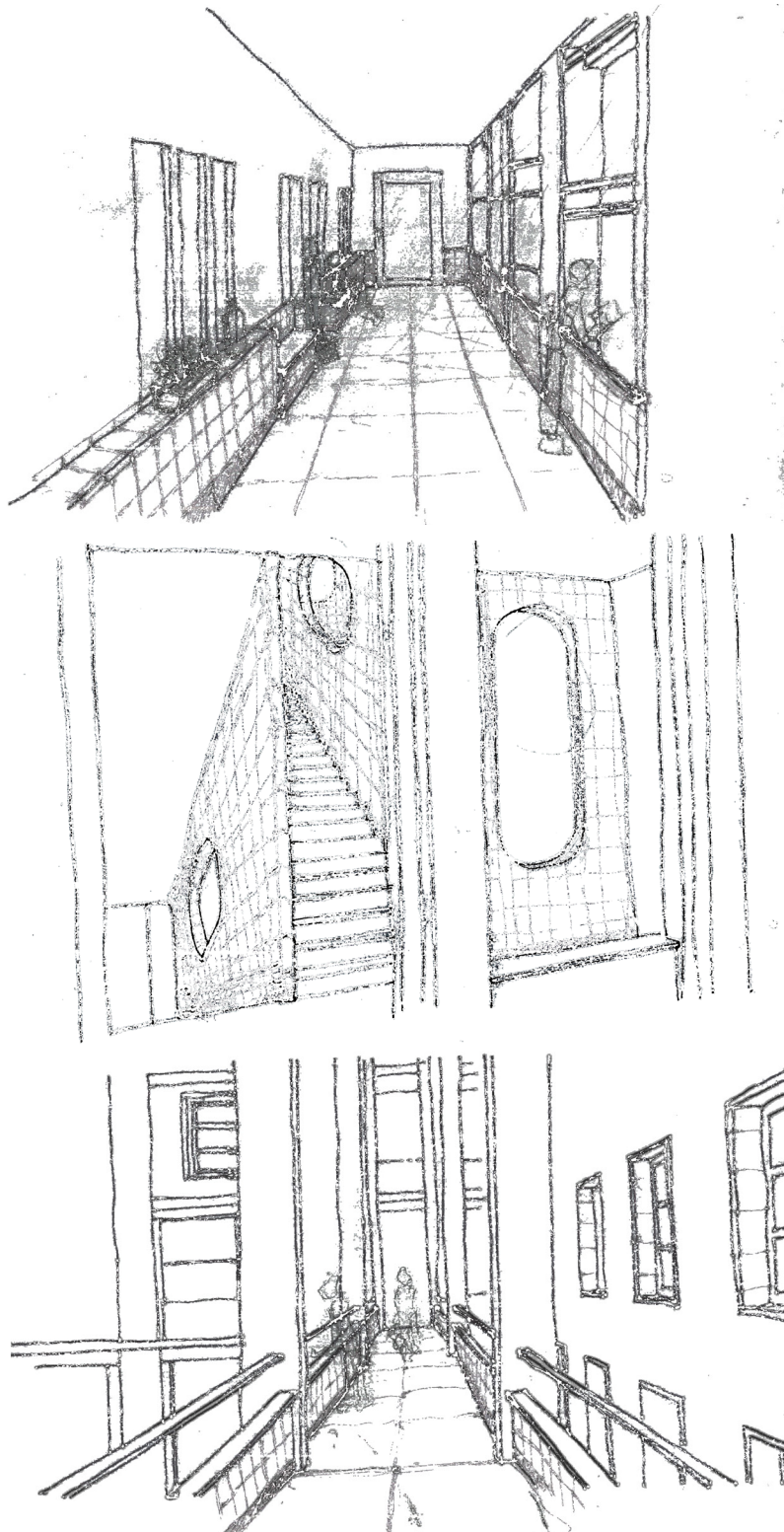
At last the galleries and staircase are another vulnerable point. Tiling them seems the solution to allow this interior condition to flourish, however there is sth wrong about the treatment of the floor in the outdoor galleries maybe that must remain in concrete. Because the tectonics of this space cannot be ignored it's getting much a structure & where some walls on top than tiling it implies might imply hiding this tectonic.

Possible to the design of the galleries comes the way of dealing with the entrance to the residential. Should there be a clear boundary to this exterior space that is the court or should this entrance remain as an public exterior space where one casually takes the stairs up. Perhaps this last approach will clash with the reality of this space which in essence is completely detached from the exterior public condition.

NO! Decided! it must be presented as an entrance to a residential. An interior detached from its surrounding condition.

The question of material. The materialisation of the project deals with two concerns: give continuity to the existing (meaning the historical materialisation of the building but also the materials that are already present, the urban context) and create a sense of interiority through textures, but mostly through elements. The first concern is tackled with the cladding of the facades, the pavement of the courts using cobble stone or blue stone that can relate to the streets surrounding the NBB. At the same time, the addition of materials must remain silent under the shadow of those that are already there, the white concrete bridges and the reinforcement of the structure, the staircase fragment, they all speak in the same tectonic load bearing language and all expose a concrete finish that can camouflage with the white stone cladding.

Regarding the second concern, the feeling of interiority is brought in specific points such as the staircase fragment or the internal galleries of the residential part. In these cases ceramic tiles and terrazzo tile floors construct these spaces. The tiling of interiors seems to be a recurrent theme within the spaces of the NBB, the intention is to



use it in order to avoid having interiors detached from those of the NBB. Moreover the network of external and internal galleries that give access to the apartments and collective spaces, share a common datum line, marked by the height of the railings, the openings of the staircase and the separation between the tiling and the plaster in the indoor galleries. This is meant to give a sense of continuous space while one wonders through the galleries of this court.

Street pavement and stone cladding of the exterior facade of the Bank



Interior of the Bank corridors, floor to wall tiling



Interior of the Bank hall, floor to wall tiling



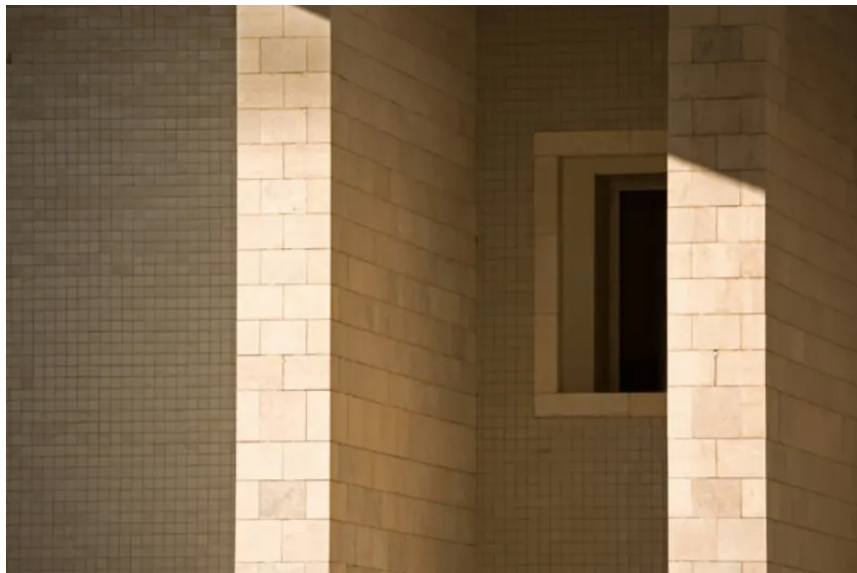
Bel Forte, Minusio Switzerland (stone facade and white concrete finish)

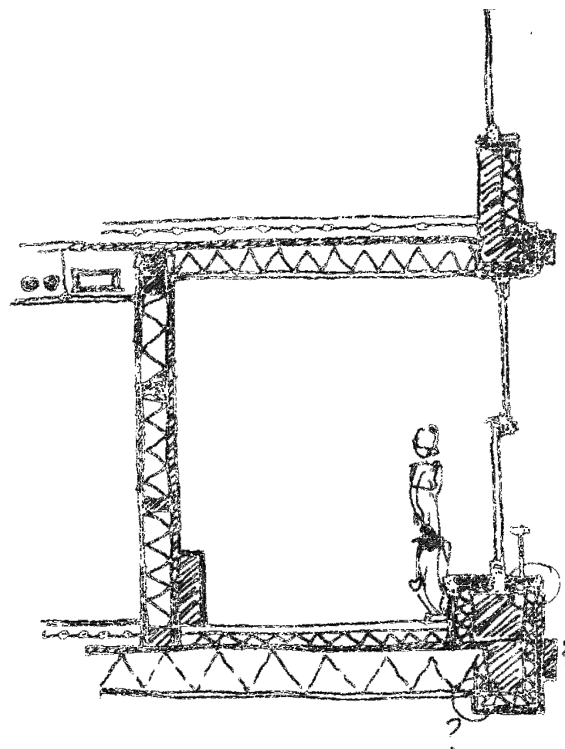
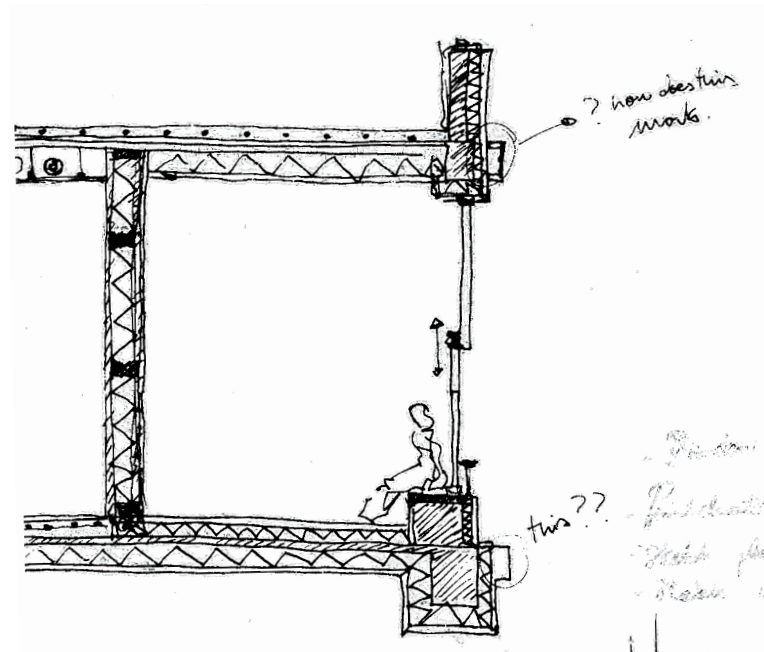


Extension de la Mairie, Biot France (white concrete prefabricated structure)



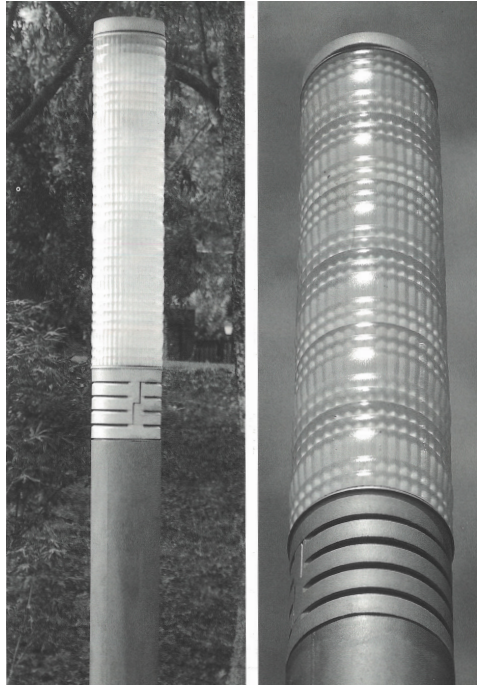
Pavilhao de Portugal, Lisbon





The question of detail. One of the details mentioned before had to do with the furnishing of the interior galleries, a high niche by the facade of the apartments and a bench by the window, tiled at its bottom and topped with a wooden board on which to sit down. Such elements can help to program the interior galleries becoming more than just spaces of transit. In order to make these spaces suitable as both interior and exterior spaces once the windows are open, they should be insulated independently from the apartments. That requires dealing with a warm structure all the way up and insulating all around.

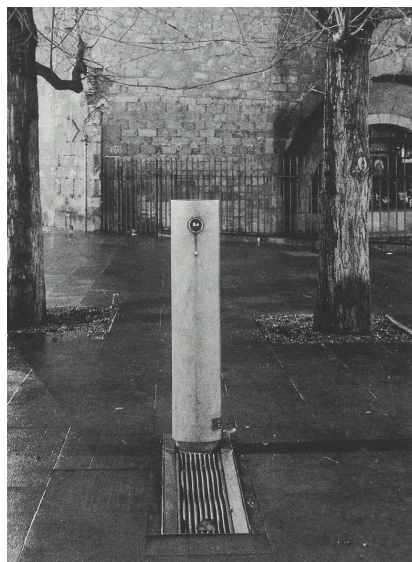
Farola P.E.P., Jordi Henrich, Olga Tarraso (1988)



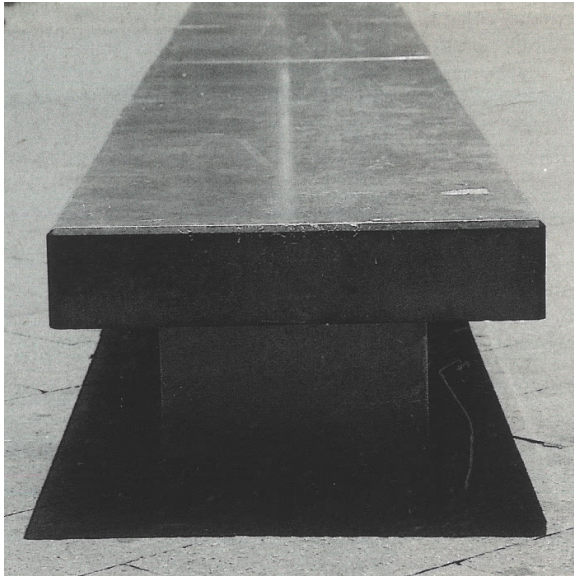
Bebedero publico, Pedro Feduchi, Luis Moreno, Alvaro Soto (1986)



Fuente Georgina, Antoni Rosello (1990)



Banco Levit, Jaime Artigues (1989)

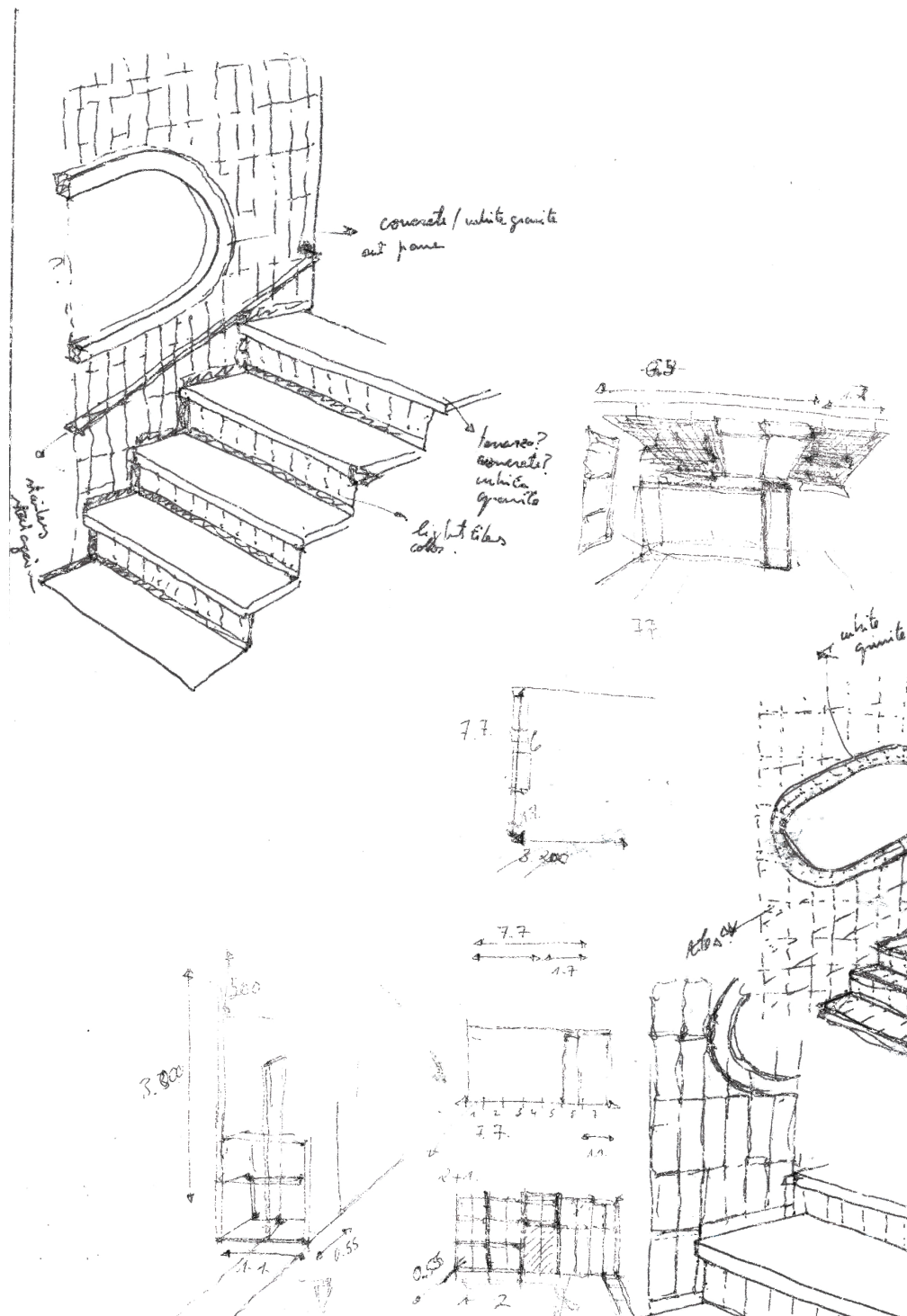


Quiosco de prensa, Antoni Rosello (1991)

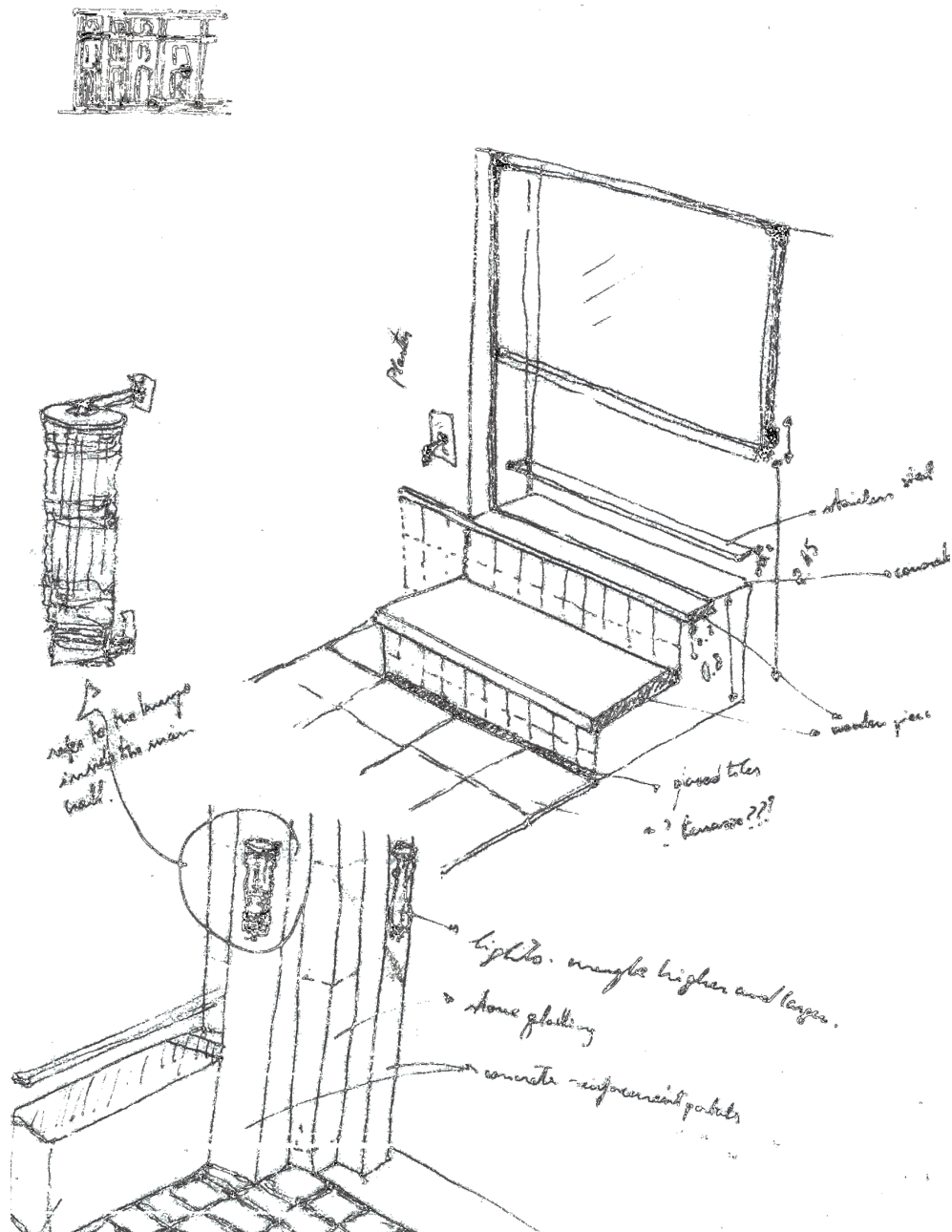


Quiosco de prensa, Antoni Rosello (1993)





The question of detail. The fragment staircase, alike other detailed fragments are meant to work as exemplary pieces for the level of detailing at other points of the building. This concerns the point at which materials meet, always cushioned by another material, either a line of tiles or a thin wooden piece. This is necessary to enrich the materialisation of the space and carefully bring together moments of transit from one space to another.



Reflection *On P4*

The final stage on the design process took the original concerns of the project to another scale in order to reflect on all the efforts needed for this architectural change to really take place. It is the scale of detailing that had the protagonism in this last stage of the process. Indeed, the moment one is faced with the question of materialisation, one must choose whether the project continues the language of what lies there or whether a new language is introduced, a contrast to the existing that highlights time differences and gives a unique relevance to the now. From this two, the intention was always to carry on the existing language, since there is a need for coherence and upmost a need for association to the existing. The passerby, the visitor, the dweller, the worker must be aware that they residing in the National Bank of Belgium, that it is the same institution that has opened up to the city. This implies that the characteristic tiling and griding of surfaces established by the former architect, Marcel Van Goethem, must carry on in the same direction. There is room for new materials that make the intervention possible, such as the concrete structures of bridges and portals or the cobblestone that triest to connect with the street.

Moreover, this was the moment to reflect on use, to introduce people in the composition and think back to the P1 assignment for a social plinth. What elements are necessary to generate use of public space, regardless of whether it is the office, the galleries of the residential complex or the public courts? Once more the scale of the urban element plays a fundamental role by furnishing the interiors in the outdoor. Street lamps, fountains and the three essential elements of a social plinth the bench, the awning and the kiosk. These refer to program free of charge and small retail units that can activate it. To this concern, there is perhaps a last thing to clarify, the urban furnishing of this public space, dresses and recognises its public use, this means that regardless of the land property, this is to become a piece of city, with all the good and the bad. Therefore to the recurrent question of what happens at night, or what if homeless do use these benches, these fountains and sleep under these awnings, there is an important reflection that must be clarified: architecture is not to blame. The city must in fact deal with its problems and of course the proper location of entrance points, retail in the innerblock allows to think of these courts as places analogous to any street of Brussels, and therefore same problems and solutions will arise. If the Bank wants to open up as an institution it must not deal with its image, it must deal with its reality, the reality of Brussels.



CONCLUSION

Following the line of thought established in the Research Plan, the project of the transformation of the offices of the National Bank of Belgium (NBB) has adopted a dramatically different scale from that of the office desk and workplace, a scale that deals with the public essence of the institution and the way this piece of estate sits in the city of Brussels.

The in depth analysis of the history of urban transformation of the city of Brussels, revealed the problems of the Central European capital cities during the second half of the 19th century, which have been unavoidably inherited by the city of the 21st century. The process of urban gentrification of the historic town, firstly by pushing out the working classes to the periphery in favour of the wealthy bourgeois and secondly exploiting land value financially erasing any hint of residential life from the old city at the heart of Brussels' Pentagon. The result of these consecutive processes of urban transformation can be read in space through the architectural typology of Brussels and have been explained in this research by means of the alley, the shopping arcade, the corner building and the blocks of Brusselization. Understanding them not only as architectural devices but also as urban figures has helped untangling the history of urban gentrification in Brussels which constructed through time a division between the rich bureaucratic upper eastern city and the working class neighbourhoods in lower western Brussels, articulated by a touristic uninhabited historic city where the National Bank of Belgium sits. More than anywhere else, Bd Berlaimont and the building of the NBB are examples of this

urban transformation that has emptied from the residential life of this area of Brussels. In a process that anticipated Brusselization, the NBB made sure to erase a mixed block where housing and retail used to make a piece of the city to turn it into a monolithic impenetrable office block. This essential aspect of the site, together with the research make a project with three fundamental intentions:

Create a public route able to establish another point of connection between upper and lower Brussels, increasing the porosity of the city and the permeability of an existing urban structure. Reprogram the block to revert the process of Brusselization and erode its monolithic nature through the introduction of residential and retail functions. Maximise the value of the land property which is currently owned by the NBB to launch a program of affordable housing capable of setting a starting point to revert the process of gentrification and land speculation that has historically threatened the process of urban transformation of the city.

These three points become the nexus between the conclusions of the research and the design decisions that followed the P2 and P3 examinations. Therefore the final design proposal is concerned with each of these aspects, from the scale of the building mass and how it is oriented towards the city to the scale of a service staircase that tries to create a partition situation between two different programs embedded in the block. It is precisely in the mediation between scales, which is ultimately the materialisation of a research, where this particular studio provides

the most appropriate framework for the project to develop. In this sense, despite the project not being restricted to the topic of the office space, the multiple conversations and study of references has been extremely useful to get acquainted with the importance of coherence in scale, from the city to the interior. Besides, the precise mapping of the existing situation of the building as part of the brief before P3 (Intelligent Ruin), has been relevant to create awareness about the necessity to work with what is already part of the site. Reuse seems like another recurrent theme of the Studio which has truly enriched the project giving it a shade of reality and introducing the idea that urban transformation begins in the existing urban structures and not in imaginary visions. Nevertheless I must admit that the size of the project did never cease to be overwhelming and often ungraspable. As a result of the amount of design that the project demanded, certain parts of it have remained more vulnerable, less thought through, or simply serving to a general scheme rather than making sense on their own. There is still the question whether it is just a matter of time or simply that there are certain scales, certain projects that cannot be imagined by one person only and perhaps need a preliminary collaborative phase and a second individual approach that concerns only a particular fragment.

