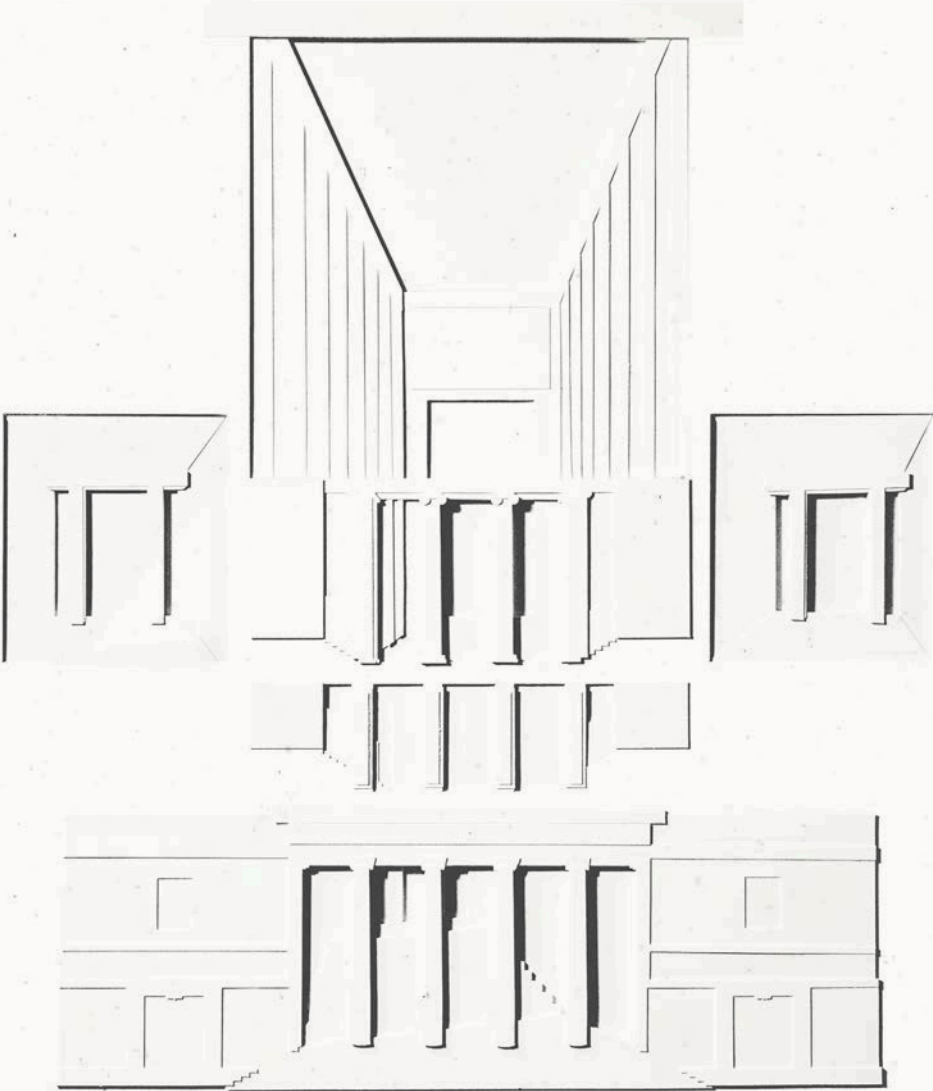


manner & method



kit bylett

manner & method

observing oslo's ambiguous, modern enigma

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autumn 2018
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Preface

Tucked in your hands is a secret, restless in anticipation, eager to be divulged.

This book is an invitation to a world that lies just below the shimmering surface, and it is my testimony that if you look long, hard and from just the right point of view, this hidden world will begin to materialise.

Manner and Method has been compiled after three months spent fastidiously observing and analysing a single building. Through this process, I have unearthed a secret gem, perhaps Oslo's best kept secret that, for almost a century, has been hiding in plain sight. This secret is the Deichman Library; a truly fantastic, *ambiguous, modern enigma*.

Like a hermit crab, eager for its new, bigger and shinier home, this coming Spring, the Deichman Library facility will be relocated to a new premises along the Oslo harbour. The current library will be left vacant, a shell of its former self, waiting to be colonised and given a new lease on life. This study was initially fuelled by topical discussions regarding the imminent transformation of the current library building, with many locals wondering in earnest, what *is the future* of the Deichman? I soon realised that, in fact, the answer to this question lay in another more fundamental question, which seeks, first and foremost, to ask: what *is* the Deichman?

This is the question that I set out to answer, with the hope of providing a fresh portrait of a monumental public building, about which surprisingly little is known and recorded. My findings are not presented in a report, as one would typically expect of an architectural survey. Alternatively, they are expressed as if this were a companion-book to the building. This format has encouraged me to explore modes of architectural representation that are not solely bound to the analysis of objective physical data, photos and drawings. Rather, I have allowed myself the freedom to delve into more subjective domains, with a focus on ideas, abstract illustrations and speculations. In this book, I wear many hats, posing, all at once and to the best of my abilities, as an architect, historian, preservationist and cold-case detective.

This process has given me a platform to indulge many of my tendencies; for critical thinking, for rifling through books I don't completely understand, for keeping indecipherable notes, for enthusiastic sketching and, above all, it has indulged my tendency to be curious. The result is deeply reflective

of my manner and method of working; a series of observations and articulations expressed, like they were generated, through an interweaving of mediums, approaches and pursuits. While writing is certainly not my first trade, I have made a valiant attempt to engage this challenging territory; with much inspiration drawn from the architects, artists and critics whose thoughts I have consumed throughout this process.

So, it is with this greeting that I invite you to explore my take on the Deichman Library, its relationship to Nordic Classicism and its place in modern Norwegian architecture.

Introduction

Upon waking, at the brink of consciousness, instinct compels a momentary audit: muscles are tensed and limbs contorted to confirm the body is present and familiar; hands are drawn to the face and, after coaxing the eyes open, vision is brought into focus to survey the scene wherein the day will begin.

Observing is an act essential for piecing together the present state into a frame of reference. However, the act of observing slides so instinctively into the requirements of day-to-day life that it is easy to take this process for granted. The capacity to react, in any given situation, conditionally rests on the quality of one's frame of reference, and, by implication, on one's manner and method of observing.

It was suggested by Sigfried Giedion, the mid-century architectural historian, that;

observation and what is observed form one complex situation – to observe something is to act upon and alter it.¹

The inherent interdependence between oneself and one's situation, a product of observation, resembles the mechanics of a feedback loop; the continuous cycle of inputs and extractions wherein the influencer and the influenced become muddily entwined. Giedion applied this *complex situation* to the exchange between historians and their construction of history, however, his idea fluently translates into a consideration of architects and their construction of architecture. Echoing Giedion's message in regards to historians, architects too should remain acutely aware of their mode of observation, as it is these inputs that ultimately shape a frame of reference from which their architectural outputs will emerge.

Ways of Observing Architecture

By observing architecture, one engages with its construction. Observing architecture with conscious intent expands one's frame of reference, and as one conscientiously pursues these observations, that frame of reference becomes increasingly more elaborate and enriched with potential.

The vitality of architecture, as an overarching discipline, is sustained by the diversity of contributions within the profession. The available channels, which one has to exercise a form of architecture, spans from the pragmatic to the abstract; from, at its polarised ends, the physical manifestation of a structure realised through construction, all the way to the purely academic modes of speculation and representation.

As a consequence, when observing architecture, one is thrust into a vast sea of old and new architectural conversations; a turbulent sea wherein buildings, architects and their critics are wilfully buoyed to its surface or sunk to its depths. The process of observation composes portraits, be it of a building or a community, of topical issues or trends, or, perhaps, the portrait of a mystery. The qualities of this portrait will invariably be coloured by the lens through which they are depicted; a reflection not only of the architecture itself, but further of one's own biases, of their point of reference in this sea of ideas.

Engaging in the intentional and conscientious separation of observation from preconception allows one to subdue unfairness when assessing the qualities of architecture, and, moreover, this manner of engagement provokes one to question the genesis of both its merits and predicaments without prejudice.

Observing An Ambiguous, Modern Enigma

The public library, known by its colloquial alias, *Deichmanske*, is Oslo's oldest-running cultural institution. The library was founded at the behest of Norwegian philanthropist, Carl Deichman, when, in 1785, his amassed collection of literature was gifted to the city of Oslo. For nearly 150 years after its inception, The Deichman Library was a nomadic institution that occupied a series of interim sites across the city. Eventually, in 1921, the successful design competition entry by Nils Reiersen handed the Deichman Library its first permanent address in the central Oslo district of Hammersborg. Construction of the Deichman Library building took significantly longer than originally intended and, finally, it opened to the public in 1933. Seemingly a victim of poor timing, over the decade that it took to construct the Deichman, the architectural paradigm of Europe underwent a significant shift. As the new aesthetic of Functionalism asserted itself, modern became Modernist and, no sooner than the paint had dried, the new Deichman became the old Deichman; merely a relic of an ill-advised foray into the Neoclassical.

The Deichman Library building is an architectural enigma lying dormant in the heart of Oslo and, surrounding this enigma, there is a mysterious world of quandaries to behold. After nearly a century of slumber, it is no small task to reawaken this sleeping beast. As such, it is necessary to proceed with caution so as to avoid the many traps described by its past; at first one should assess it from afar (*what is its territory? who are its known contemporaries?*), before moving up-close to observe this creature as an entity in and of itself (*what is its demeanour? what are its strengths and insecurities?*) This manner of observing architecture prioritises curiosity, instinct and hyper-attention, alongside a conscious repression of bias with the intention of fashioning a formidable frame of reference.

Another Frame of Reference

The Deichman building never managed to shake the stigma that accompanied its beginnings and thus, in 2008, with excited handshakes and hastily scribbled signatures, it was concluded that the library would be granted a fresh start and relocated to a new, landmark premises. This premises, in contrast to the general conception of its current home, would be state-of-the-art and unmistakably contemporary. Today, construction of the new library facility nears completion and, by this coming Spring, the end of an era will be marked as the final books are withdrawn from the shelves. Despite this long-foreseen closure, the authority in this matter, Oslo Municipality, has yet to decide a fate for the old Deichman building, whose future remains in limbo. With cultural heritage protection extending from the national level, the building will definitely be retained, but, for now, one can only speculate as to how it will be used and under what agenda it will be transformed to suit its new life.

With its desertion imminent and no solid prospects, in 2015, the Municipality commissioned a feasibility study to assess the building and explore options for its transformation. The study was a compendium of conventional architectural surveys; a room-by-room description of notable features, prior uses and condition assessments, regulatory analysis, an official conservation evaluation, and a conclusion of recommendations for suitable functional adjustments. It painted a noble portrait of the Deichman Library; despite its few serviceable shortcomings, the building was reported to be sound and handsome.

While the feasibility study is comprehensive and contains much

useful information regarding the pragmatic requirements to facilitate transformation of the library building, the starting point for the study, its frame of reference, remains unchallenged. The Deichman is labelled as being, “built in a new classical style,” and its anomalies regarding symmetry and axially are justified as simply a response to the “irregular shape of the plot and its neighbouring buildings.”² It is true that the plot is not conducive to a wholly orthogonal building, however the responsive gestures are seemingly more nuanced than they are given credit for, and they are also accompanied by a range of other anomalies throughout the building that are less easily explained.

The book is comprised of three discussions; ambiguous – modern – enigma. Whether read consecutively, as *ambiguous, modern and enigma*, or singularly, as *ambiguous, modern enigma*, these three discussions are intended, much like their mannerist references, to be understood, at once, separately and together.

Symmetry, while obviously the most straightforward path to achieving balance, in both a literal and figurative sense, is not a prerequisite for such a pursuit. In this vein, the first discussion, *Ambiguous*, applies a mannerist reading to the Deichman building in order to reframe some of its less tangible and seemingly unusual attributes. Through this frame, these ambiguous qualities of the building are laden with intent and explored as a series of carefully balanced counterpoints; an attempt to create a proportional, yet nuanced relationship between its should-be-incongruous parts.

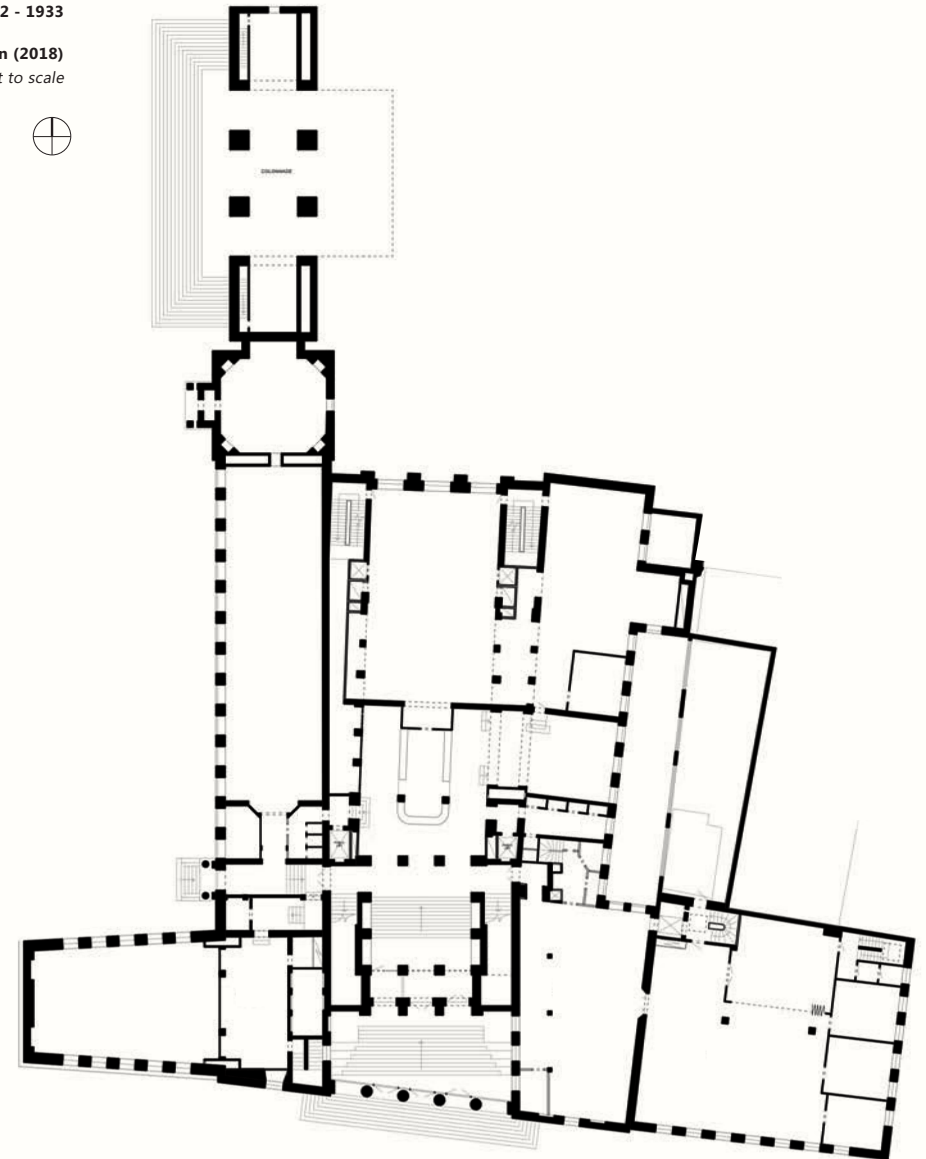
The second discussion, *Modern*, expounds upon the relationship between technology, materiality, style and time. The discussion intends to untangle terminology that has variously been used to describe the Deichman and reinforce that, despite its frequent Neoclassical categorisation, it is actually a thoroughly modern building.

Finally, the third discussion, *Enigma*, is really what triggered it all; to understand the alluring mystery of the Deichman. This portion of the book investigates the little known school of Nordic Classicism, something of a ‘lost tribe’ of modern architecture, with the possibility of finding a more fitting stylistic home for the Deichman.

It is with the above in mind, that this book seizes an opportunity to provide another portrait of the Deichman Library building. This portrait seeks to, from the outset, shift the frame of reference for observing the building and uses alternate methods to depict its likeness.

Nils Reiersen
Deichman Library, Oslo
1922 - 1933

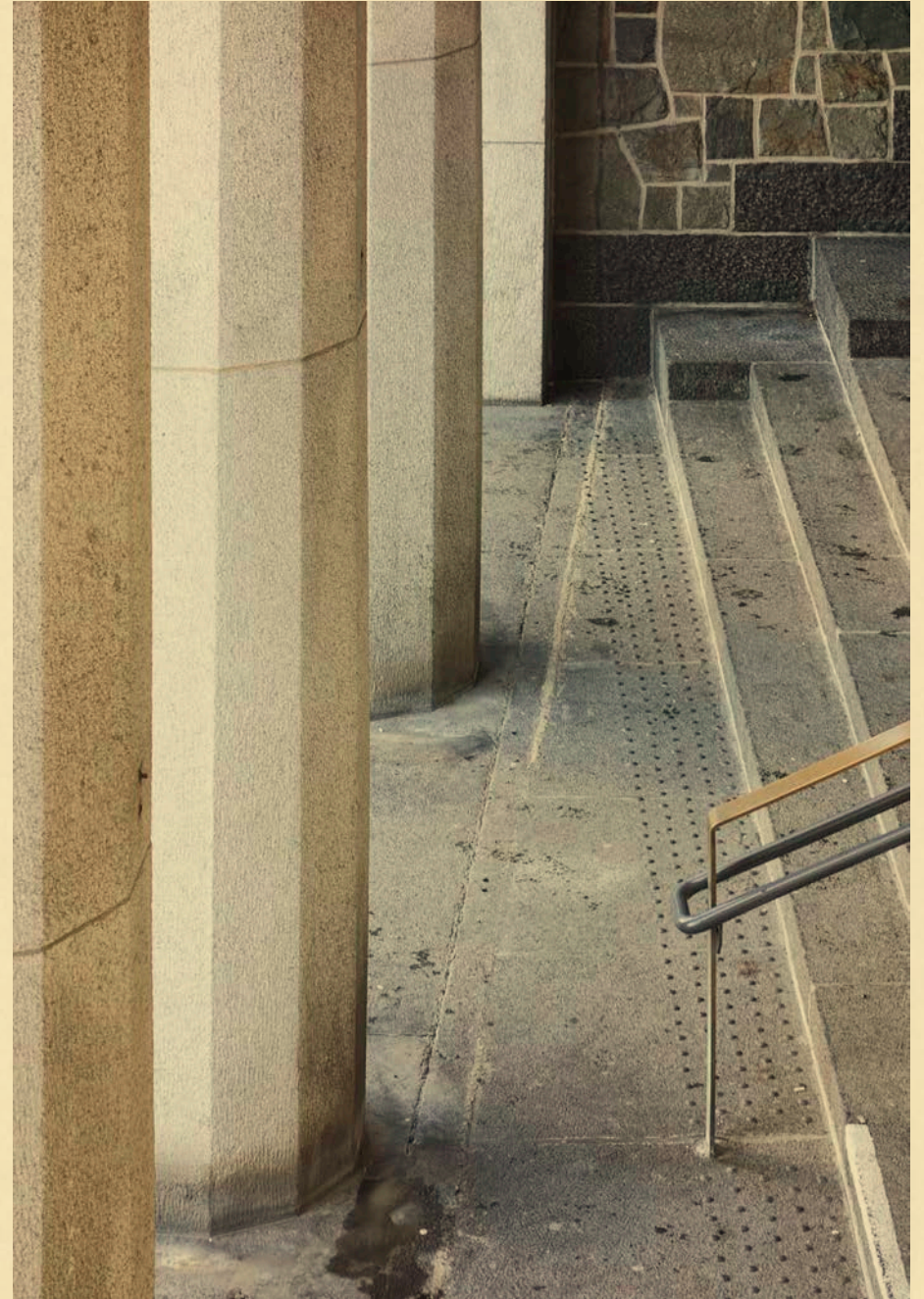
First Level Plan (2018)
Not to scale



Ambiguous

Modern

Enigma



Ambiguous

Passing over the temple threshold, it is widely accepted that one's preconceived thoughts are best left at the door. Four stoic sentinels mark this judicious passage at the Oslo public library where one easily imagines, on a quiet Sunday morning, these monoliths reciting the poetic lines of Wergeland and Ibsen amongst themselves. However, ascending beyond the granite pillars, this assured aura of the library building is knocked, ever-so slightly, off-kilter.

Within the *pronaos*, the flight of stairs, that launched orderly enough, performs a small diversion towards the left as if coerced by the anarchic directions of an unfamiliar deity. Observing the imminent clash of a pillar and a stair, a delicate, yet palpable tension sets in and one realises that they are standing on an eternal battle ground where diametric dogmas jostle for dominion over the building's architecture.

This example is but one in a handful of unexpected and idiosyncratic architectural moments, detectable throughout the Deichman Library. These anomalies surface in a variety of incarnations, from the disrupted composition of its primary façade, to the shortage corners that are right-angles, through to the ever-so-slightly tapering passageways concealed in its walls. In light of the impending relocation of the Deichman Library facilities and the anticipated transformation of the library building in its aftermath, several architectural assessments of the building have recently been prepared. In general, these assessments have either overlooked the building's oddities or excused them as digressions of a design not wholly committed to the Neoclassical scripture it is presumed to have observed. When one realises that these moments are actually not a product of inconsistency, but rather of intentional, innovative and, perhaps, wry stylistic manipulation, it becomes clear that there exists a richer opportunity presented in the building's transformation.

There is an opportunity to celebrate the split-personality of the Deichman Library rather than to ignore or misdiagnose these conditions. With the future in mind, adopting an alternative framework for understanding the intentions of this building proves useful. It is the first step in establishing a meaningful paradigm for the upcoming reimaging of the structure.

Mannerisms

Under the framework of *mannerism*, art historians and architectural critics of the last century have been provided with an alternative set of values to appreciate the ambiguous and contradictory qualities of art and architecture that, previously, had only been sources of frustration to others. It is this *mannerist* approach that provides a more accommodating framework for understanding the character of the Deichman Library at times when conventional codes and criteria fail to elicit engaging rewards.

For a term that frequently draws blanks, it comes as a surprise to discover the fundamentals of mannerism casually, albeit sometimes unwittingly, employed throughout architectural discourse. The term, M(m)annerism, is comprised of two meanings, both of which were inventions of the early modern era with the second meaning being a subsequent derivation of the first. The term encompasses, on the one hand, an episode of artistic production from sixteenth century Italy and, on the other hand, a collection of qualities, identified, by turn of the twentieth century art historians, as characteristic of these sixteenth century Mannerist artworks and buildings.

The first application, denoted by Mannerism with a capital M, refers to a period that holds the likes of Michelangelo, Palladio and Bronzino as its heroes. The characteristically self-reflexive works of these artistic giants have been allocated the status of revolutionary within art and architectural history. This school of thought identified that Mannerist principles were a divergence from the deterministic ideologies governing the Renaissance prior and, also, that Mannerist expression was not codified in the service of Counter-Reformation rhetoric, which later became the case under the Baroque artists.¹

The second application, mannerism with a little m, refers to the qualities of art and architecture that, for example, Rudolf Wittkower has aligned with *conflict*, Colin Rowe with *uneasy violence*, Robert Venturi with *contradiction*, and Peter Eisenman with *disjunction*. These mannerist qualities have been extensively applied to works and individuals outside the original Mannerist period of sixteenth century Italy. For the architect Robert Venturi, traces of mannerism are evident in varying manifestations, ranging from the Hellenistic period in Classical art, the architecture of eighteenth-century England's Hawksmoor and Soane, nineteenth-century America's Sullivan, all the way to Le Corbusier, Aalto and Kahn of the Modern era.² The ongoing integration of mannerist principles in architecture

throughout the twentieth century, and continuing into the twenty-first century, has established a canon of architects and critics each of whom found, from its subversive disposition, a promising framework to counter the prevailing hegemonic readings of architecture.

Provocations

In her recent reassessment of the term *baroque*, the scholar Helen Hills suggested one should leverage the baroque as conceptual technology; as a framework "to provoke new forms of historical conceptualisation and interpretation."³ Following suit, implementing a conceptual framework based on the notion of mannerism can also provoke new and alternative evaluations to challenge established interpretations. The inherent flexibility of mannerist provocations is reflected by the subject's thematic diversity. Consider, for instance, the vast expanse that separates Nikolaus Pevsner's mannerist take on the English Elizabethan style from Bruno Zevi's pronouncement of Brutalism as a "Manneristic phenomenon."⁴

Colin Rowe's essay *Mannerism and Modern Architecture*, first arrived on the scene in the *Architectural Review* of 1950. As a provocation, Rowe's essay illustrated the rewards of transposing mannerist qualities onto misunderstood and canonically problematic buildings of the early twentieth century; buildings that he deemed in need of a different perspective. Here, one can find a reference case particularly pertinent to the issues faced today concerning the re-interpretation of the Deichman Library building in the lead-up to its future transformation.

Rowe's analysis of Le Corbusier's 1916 Villa Schwob, at La Chaux-de-Fonds, established that a Mannerist lens provides the "most probable and certainly the most rewarding field of investigation," into the villa.⁵ The problematic duality of Le Corbusier's villa, whereby it is a simultaneous expression of opposing principles, is resolved by Rowe through the implementation of a mannerist framework. According to Rowe, any appreciation of the villa that only considers its conventional motifs, a so-called, "appreciation in Neo-Classical terms," fails to account for much of the underlying complexity of the villa.⁶ The handful of mannerist motifs present should demand equal appreciation not only for their precocious expression of a different logic system, but moreover as they provide an instrumental disruption to the conventional motifs. For instance, Le Corbusier's inclusion of a blank wall panel at the centre of the villa's street-side

façade is, at first, befuddling, but ultimately an integral device for the villa's overall conceptual expression. Rowe understood the blank panel as;

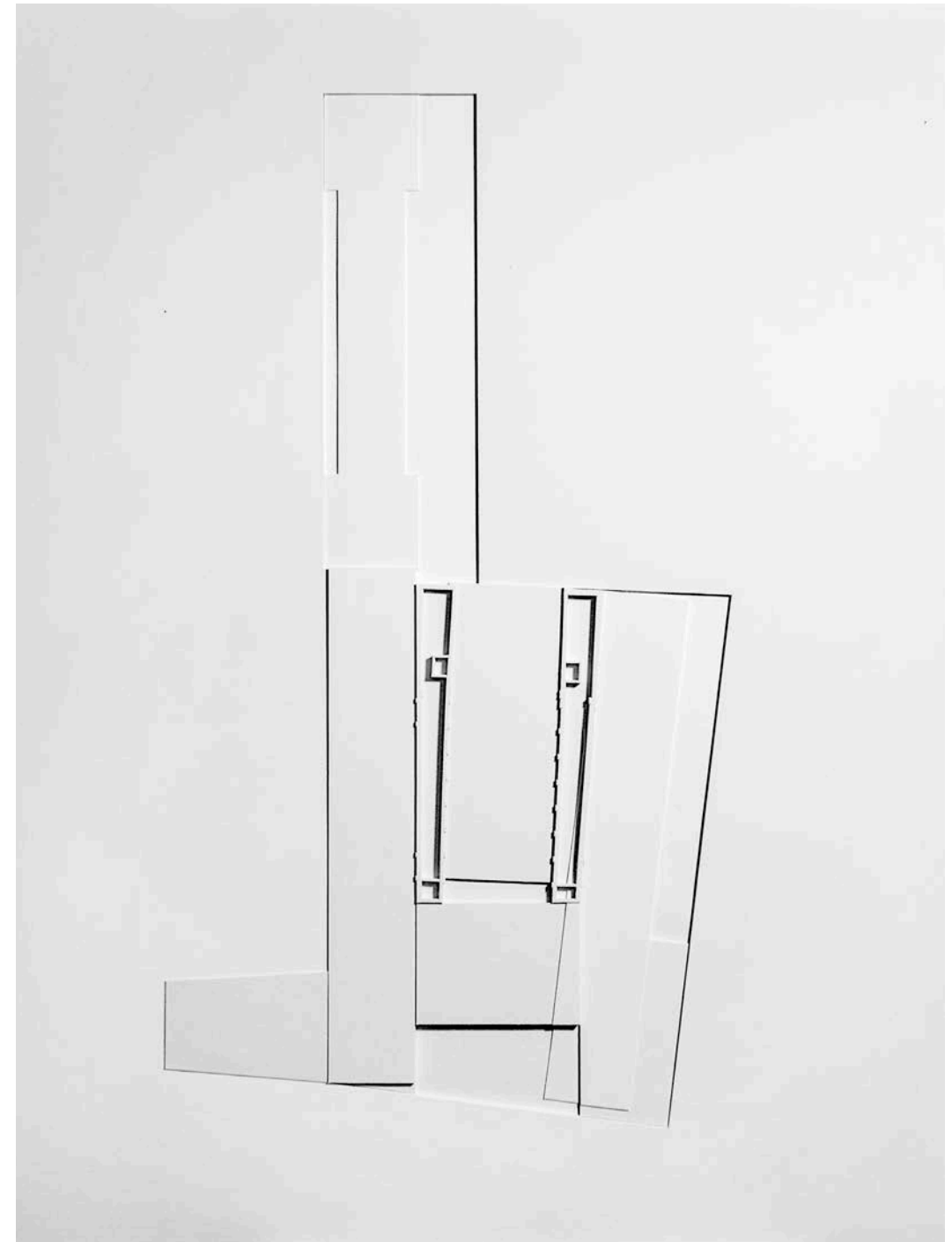
Distinct and deliberate, drawing attention to itself, and yet without apparent content, at once distributing attention over the rest of the house; by its conclusiveness the whole building gains significance; but by its emptiness it is, at the same time, the problem in terms of which the whole building is stated.⁷

According to Rowe, from the ambiguous moment offered by this blank panel, the manifesto for the entire villa can be established. One can draw similarities between Le Corbusier's device and another idiosyncratic moment at the Deichman Library, where a portion of the front façade sits askew from the dominant building line. While such a moment, seemingly incongruous and out of step with the rest of the building, could easily be dismissed as merely a product of its misshapen site, the consistent inconsistency of such devices needs to be re-evaluated. Under a mannerist framework this process becomes incredibly rewarding, whereby we can ascribe intent to the curious and recognise these gestures as integral to the overall design.

Correspondences

A central argument of Rowe's *Mannerism and Modern Architecture* proposed that the pairing between mannerism and modern architecture was made more reliable because they emerged concurrently from the shared milieu of early twentieth century Europe. The term, M(m)annerism, in both its forms, came into use after the turn of the century. Rowe surmised it was no accident that at the same time art historians desired to classify the sixteenth century Mannerist period, architects, such as Le Corbusier, were preoccupied with casting Michelangelo in a new light; his St Peter's now expressing conflict though "stridently incompatible details."⁸

The evolving definition and broadening application of the term mannerism, from the late nineteenth century to the present, was the focus of *The Journal of Architecture's* 2010 issue *Mannerism, Baroque, Modern, Avant-garde*. The publication revealed that Mannerism was first formally identified, by historians such as Alois Riegl, Walter Friedlander and Max Dvorak, as the shift away from the positivist rationality of the Renaissance towards the artistic expression of the



#1 'Skewed'

individual. For these historians, the Mannerist artist was no longer tethered to religious rhetoric or the imitation of natural principles, and hence, the Mannerists' intellect and sensuous sensibility was looked to as a new utopian model. Similarly, Mannerism provided a pathway to navigate out of the positivist and academic backdrop of the nineteenth century and towards the spiritual modern era.⁹

Mannerism, Baroque, Modern, Avant-garde also revealed the terms, mannerism and baroque, as holding a mirror to the agendas, biases and interests conditioning the early modern era. The publication opened on the deduction that

The term baroque made a division in the history of architecture that was visible only after modernism made it so...it proposed a value judgement about the past that was also a prognosis [of the present].¹⁰

However, this correspondence had been noted earlier, by Rowe;

if in the sixteenth century Mannerism was the visual index of an acute spiritual and political crisis, the recurrence of similar propensities at the present day should not be unexpected.¹¹

As a consequence of tying the architects of the sixteenth century and the early twentieth century together with communal causes, each navigating a spiritual crisis and challenging artistic dogmatism, Rowe elucidated a mutual attitude between these distant times and, as such, repeatedly referred to mannerism as "a state of mind."¹²

Ambiguities

A mannerist sensibility is also put forward by Robert Venturi. Drawing on observations from his self-compiled collection of Mannerist buildings, Venturi deduced a phenomenon that he termed: the phenomenon of "Both-And" in architecture. Both-And was a rebuttal to the "either-or" tradition of Modern architecture; an argument against clarity of articulation. The effect of "both-and" qualities was manifested in contradiction and paradoxical contrast that, for Venturi, allowed for "finer distinctions and the more subtle reservations," of architecture to emerge; a mode of ambiguity that he modelled on a mannerist sensibility.¹³

In the third chapter of Venturi's 1966 *Complexity and Contradiction*, titled, 'Ambiguity,' he reached to the literary critic William Empson who, earlier in his 1930 *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, controversially championed ambiguity as the chief virtue of poetic literature. According to Empson's understanding, ambiguity was something of a double edged sword. When handled well, it provided a provocative quality that could lead to sophisticated and complex readings, however, if used excessively or inadequately, the results were often muddled and imprecise. According to Venturi, the successful application of ambiguity was a matter of balancing ambiguous tension "precisely at the points of greatest poetic effectiveness."¹⁴

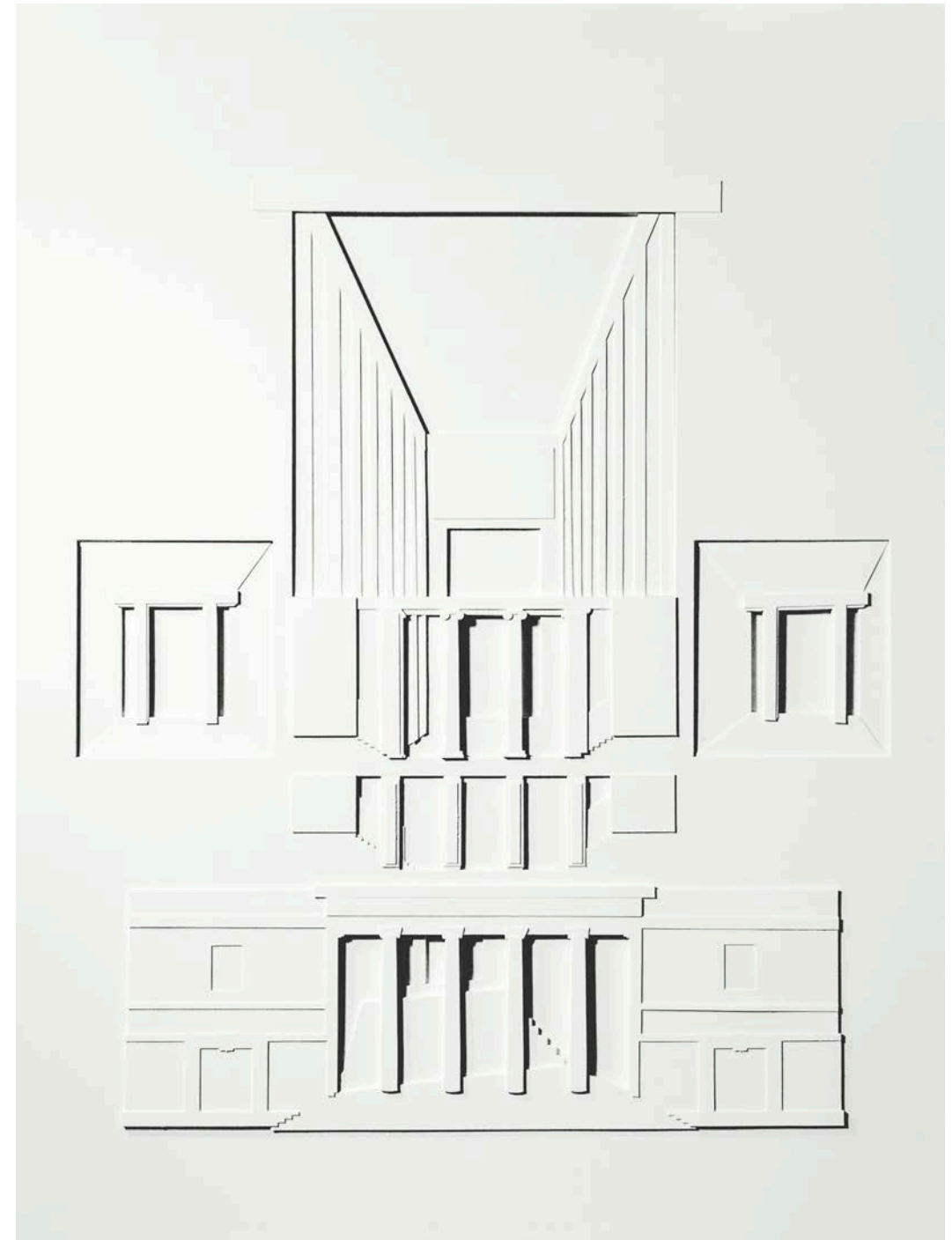
One can recognise that many Scandinavian artists and architects of the early twentieth century were captivated by the reconciliation refinement of conflicting subtleties. This is particularly apparent when reading analyses of the Swedish architects Ragnar Ostberg, Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz. A lecture by the Danish architect and ceramicist, Carl Petersen, given in 1919, postulated that beauty is often best served by a harmonious ambiguity that allows engagement at multiple levels. Petersen professed;

*Yet in fact the most beautiful condition for metal lies somewhere between the two extremes, between the neglected tarnished state and the brightly polished state. ...The dilemma here is that the metallic brightness predominates in the shiny metal and the form predominates in the dull. In the intermediate state, the worn but not brightly polished metal, both types of beauty are present.*¹⁵

For the application of mannerism to Scandinavian architecture of the early modern period, it is in terms of the precise and proportional incorporation of ambiguity, as understood by Petersen and Empson, that one finds rewards.

Nearly, But Not Quite

For Venturi, the Both-And phenomenon could be applied very liberally, the proportionality of ambiguous measures in relation to each other was not necessarily of primary concern, whereby the outcome could concurrently be "black and white, and sometimes grey."¹⁶



#2 'Disjunction'

In the case of the Deichman, for an assessment of style, the building can be seen to embody Venturi's Both-And phenomenon, whereby it is at once, and inseparably, classical and modern. However, in regards to its formal characteristics, the Deichman displays a more subtle synthesis of contradictions for which another mannerist device provides us with a more compelling explanation. Peter Blundell-Jones, in his 2006 monograph on Gunnar Asplund, opened the chapter of the Snellman House by establishing that many, including himself, have appreciated the villa for its awkward and mannerist qualities. Throughout his description of the Villa Snellman, completed in 1917, Blundell-Jones was repeatedly drawn to one specific expression to convey the ambiguous precision of Asplund's design:

*The fireplace is nearly, but not quite, in the middle of the north wall, and the windows are nearly, but not quite, symmetrically placed in the garden side. This is close enough to assert the formality of the room, but the slight slippage is important.*¹⁷

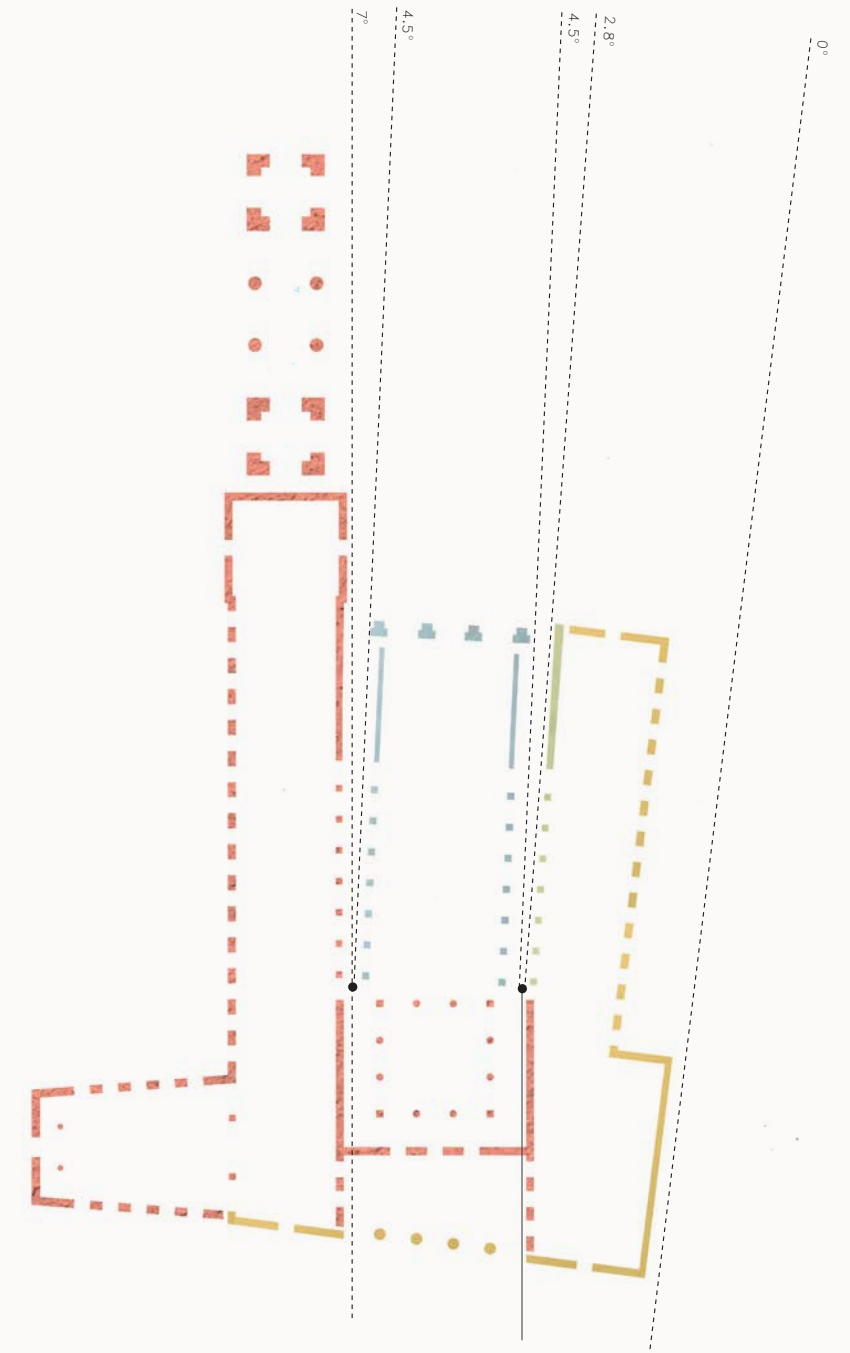
Blundell Jones's turn of phrase, *nearly, but not quite*, bares great relevance to the mannerist sensibility that is cultivated in the formal composition of the Deichman Library. As a basic massing, the Library is composed of three large rectilinear forms: a central mass flanked by two wings. These building forms appear arranged in parallel to one another, however, clues destabilising this theory are provided by the angled wall at the front façade, and by the barely perceptible spatial deformation in the main hall. The unusual morphology of the Deichman becomes transparent through the study of its plan that reveals a composition of, not parallel, but adjacent and radially modulating rectilinear forms. If the wing to the west is considered as the principle axis, one notices that the central mass and the east wings performatively peel away, establishing their own axes at 3.5° and 7° in a successively clockwise fashion.

This skewed arrangement of the plan was no isolated incident, with other Scandinavian architects of the time having also exploited spatial disjunction; Asplund's Villa Snellman is often cited as the most lucid example of this device. For the Deichman Library, the skewed plan achieves a number of massing and functional desires that included maximising the buildings area within the irregular-shaped plot, relating the building comfortably to its neighbouring buildings, and allocating service cores to the residual wedge-shaped spaces. Despite the apparent practical benefits of this compositional device, one is tempted to see these as the byproducts of a subtle conceptual

breakdown of conventional and common-sense planning. As such, *nearly, but not quite* can easily be adopted as a catch-phrase for the Deichman building; an expression that infuses idiosyncrasy with intent and endeavours to describe the building's unusual architectural moments, not from a point of condemnation, but rather as a series of considered moments that are integral to the building's complexities.

To talk about the Deichman Library in terms of mannerist qualities is to draw attention towards its idiosyncratic moments. These are the very same moments that conventional assessments have presently discounted. The new perspective of the Deichman presented here is not a wild theory of far-flung observations, but the result of an alternative approach of assessment; one that has been favoured and legitimised by architectural critics for over a century. In contrast to the avant-garde movements, who readily vocalised their positions, the architects of Nordic Classicism did not publicise an ideology. As a result, in the subsequent decades, the original intentions of the Nordic Classicists can only be interpreted from their buildings, substituted in place, as physical manifestoes.

The Mannerist framework has elicited a building that is rich in unusual qualities and highlights a conceptual sophistication, that, one could dare say, more accurately explores the complexities of the architecture as they were originally intended to be seen.

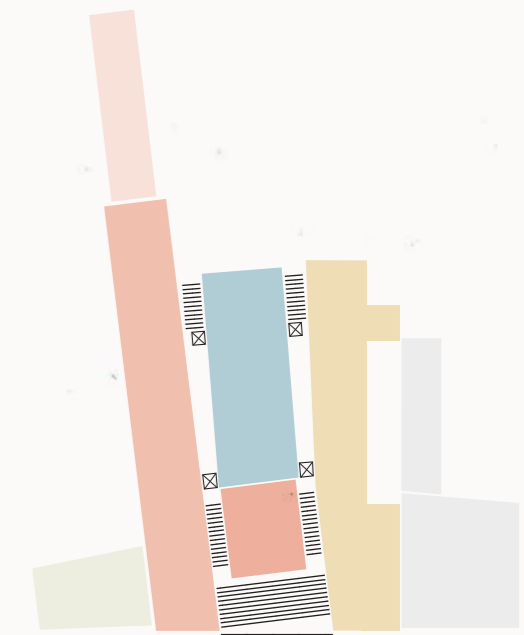
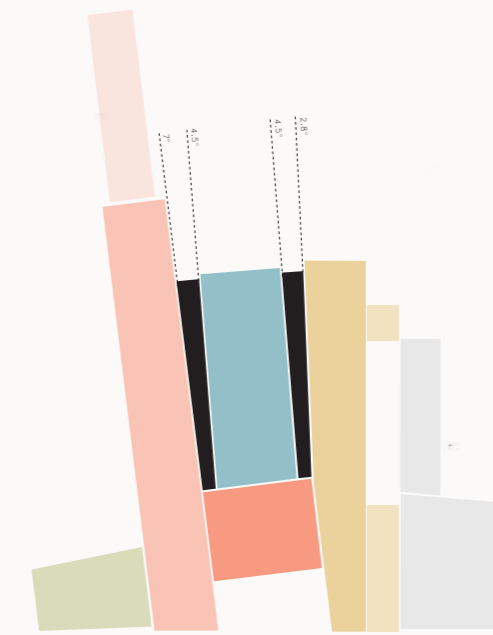
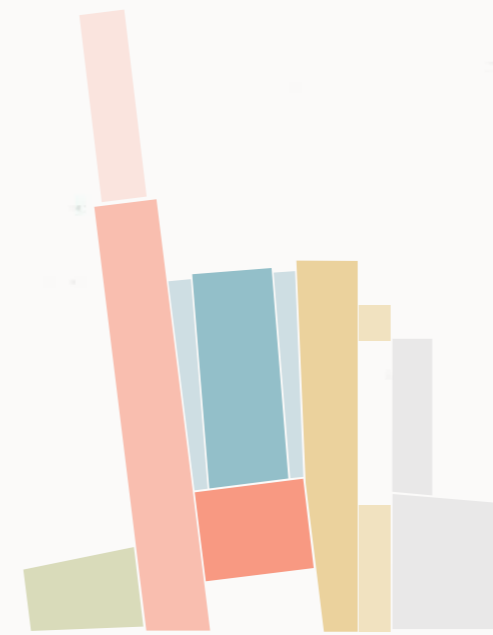
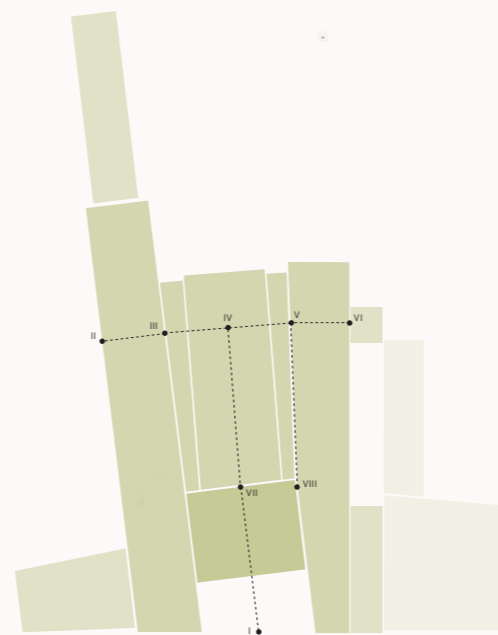
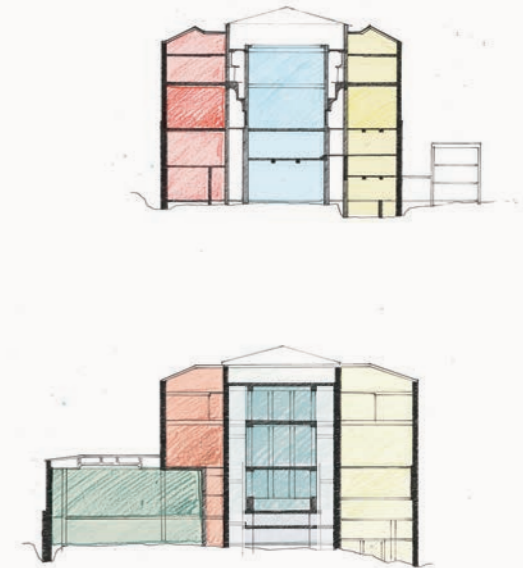
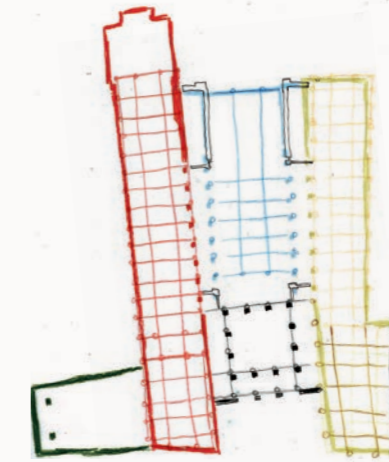
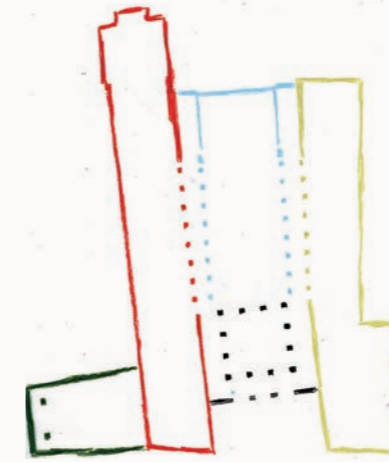
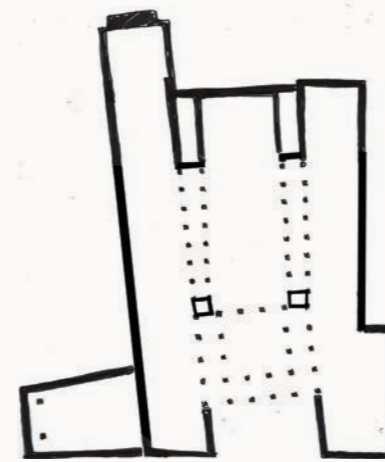


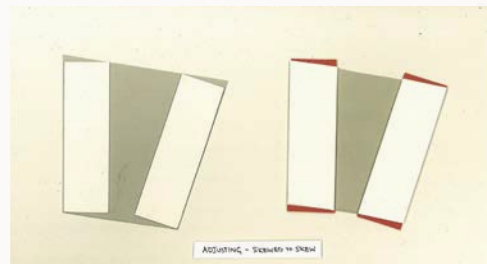
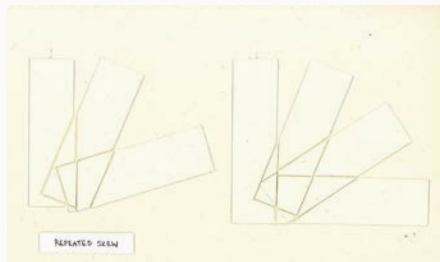
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Studies of the Deichman Library plan composition





Michelangelo
Ricetto, Laurentian
Library, Florence
1552



“Essential, however, for a real understanding of this architecture is the fact that the usual form of wall and covering orders is simply reversed. The observer is plunged, unconsciously, into a remarkable situation of doubt and obscurity.

He perceives, on the one hand, that walls and orders have exchanged function, reacts immediately, however, to the instinctive consideration that this is impossible. The whole arrangement of the wall articulation thus contains a conflict to the solution of which the architecture provides no clue.”

Rudolf Wittkower
Michelangelo's Biblioteca Laurenziana, 1934

Venturi's mannerist canon:

(Left column)

Hawksmoor; Christ Church
Spitalfields, London
1729

Aalto; Church of the Three
Crosses, Imatra
1957

Le Corbusier; Villa Savoye,
Poissy
1931

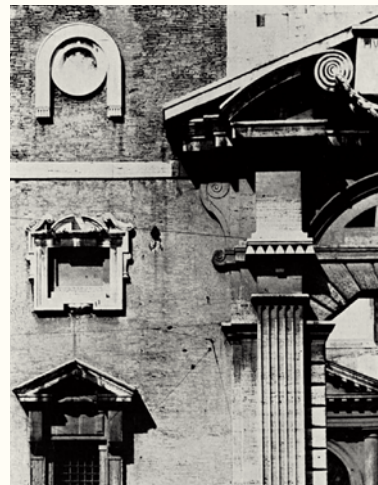
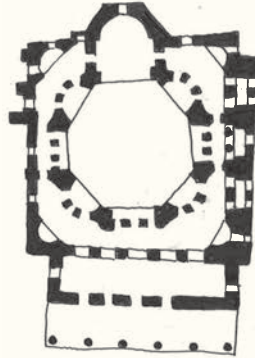
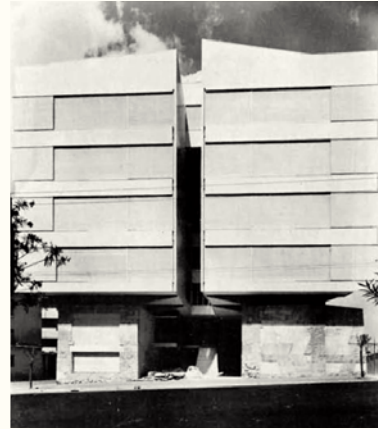
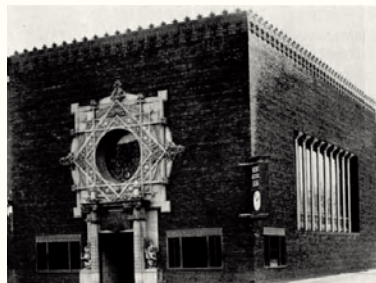
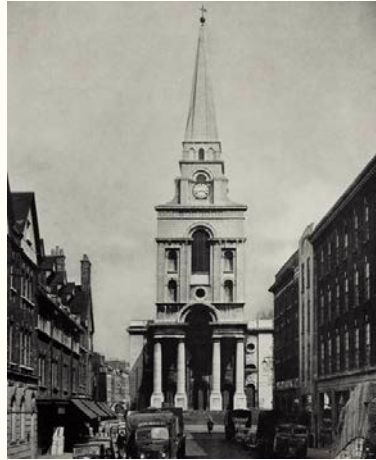
Sullivan; Merchants'
National Bank, Iowa
1914

(Right column)

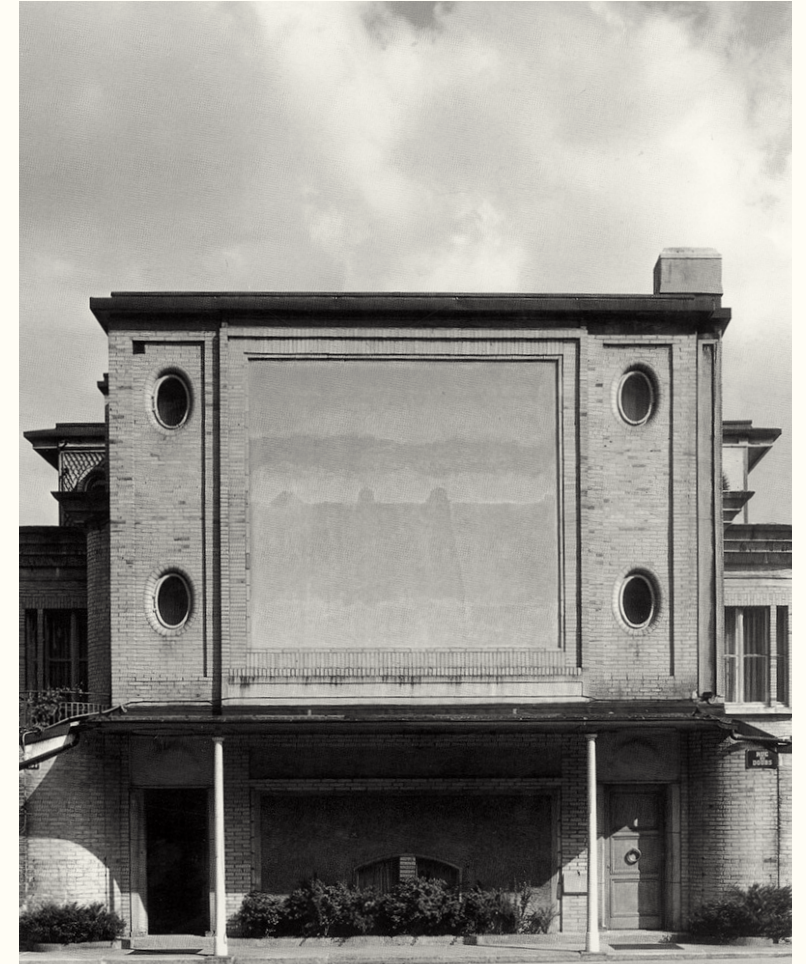
Moretti; Casa "Il Girasole",
Rome
1950

Unknown; Little Hagia
Sophia Mosque, Istanbul,
plan
527-536AD

Michelangelo; Porta Pia
Rome, facadedetails
1565



Le Corbusier
Villa Schwob,
La Chaux-de-Fonds
1916



Borromini
Palazzo di Propaganda Fide,
Rome
1626



"Borromini's mouldings in the rear facades of the Propaganda Fide are **both** window frames **and** pediments."

Robert Venturi
Complexity and Contradiction, 1966

Venus, Cupid,
Folly and Time
Agnolo Bronzino
1546



Borromini
Palazzo di Propaganda Fide,
Rome
1626



"Borromini's mouldings in the rear facades of the Propaganda Fide are **both** window frames **and** pediments."

Robert Venturi
Complexity and Contradiction, 1966

Tracing Mannerism and Nordic Classicism

Break up of History:

Baroque and Rococo identified as distinct from Renaissance
Baroque seen as positively anti-classical
"Proto-Baroque", or what was to become Mannerism was considered degenerate

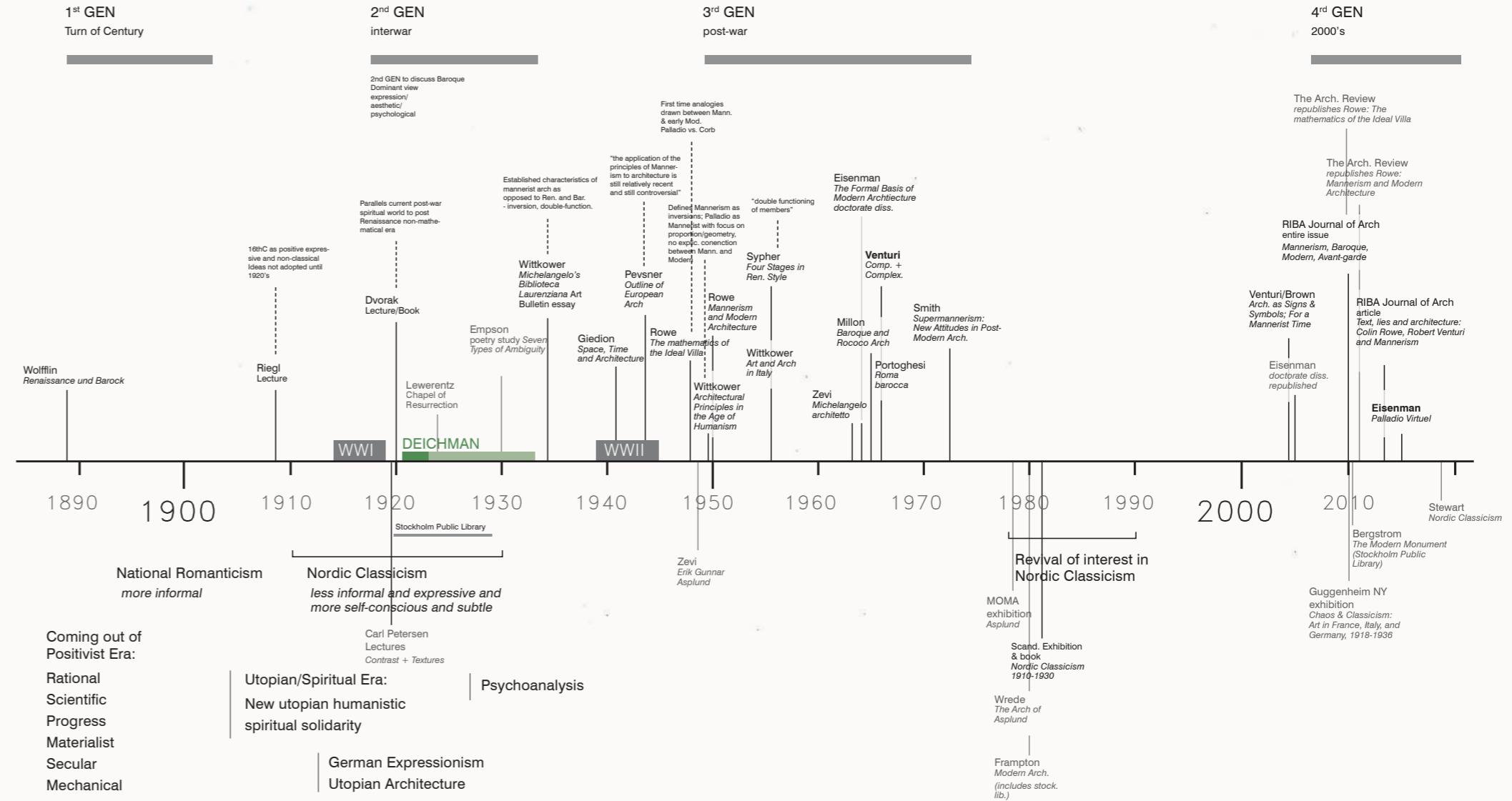
Mannerism identified as distinct from Baroque

"Art historians have sedulously investigated mannerism since the second decade" Sypher

Post modernism, to an extent, took on Mannerism as its model, playing out and superseding the rules of Modernism.

Parallels made between complex surfaces and curvature Baroque and computer/parametric design

Resurgence of interest in Mannerism, and the historiography of Mannerism



RENAISSANCE

MANNERISM

BAROQUE

Humanism
Rediscovery of
Classical antiquity

Proportion
Mathematics
Golden Ratio
Da Vinci
Raphael
Botticelli
Copernicus
Printing press
World exploration

Michelangelo

Palladio

Alberti

Bramante

Borromini

Alberti
*On the Art of
Building*

Laurentian Library
ricetto
Michelangelo

Palazzo Te
Romano

1527
Charles V
Sack of Rome

Reformation
begins

1500

Serlio
publishes influential
Architettura / All the
works on architecture
and perspective

The Last
Judgement
Michelangelo

Palazzo
Massimi alle
Colonne
Peruzzi

Romano
House
Romano

Villa Rotunda
Palladio

Palladio
visits
Rome

Palladio
*I quattro libri
dell'architettura*

1600

1545
Council of Trent

Counter Reformation



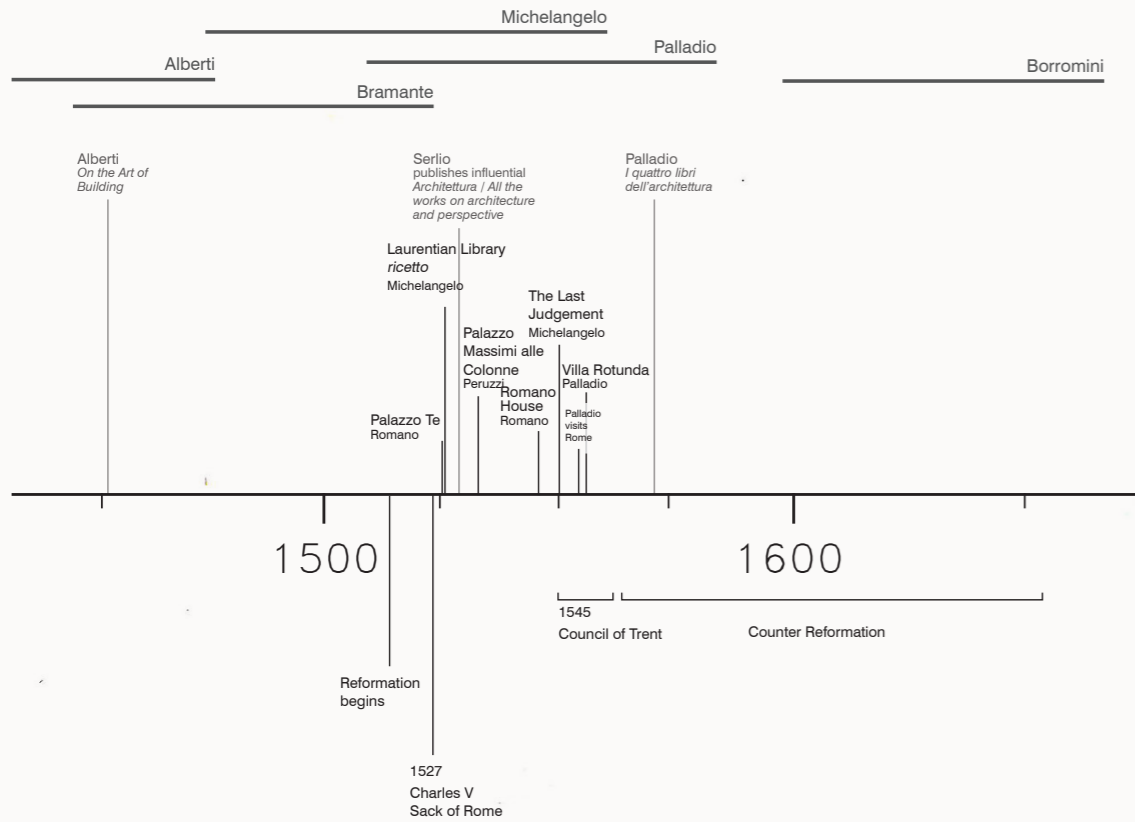
RENAISSANCE

MANNERISM

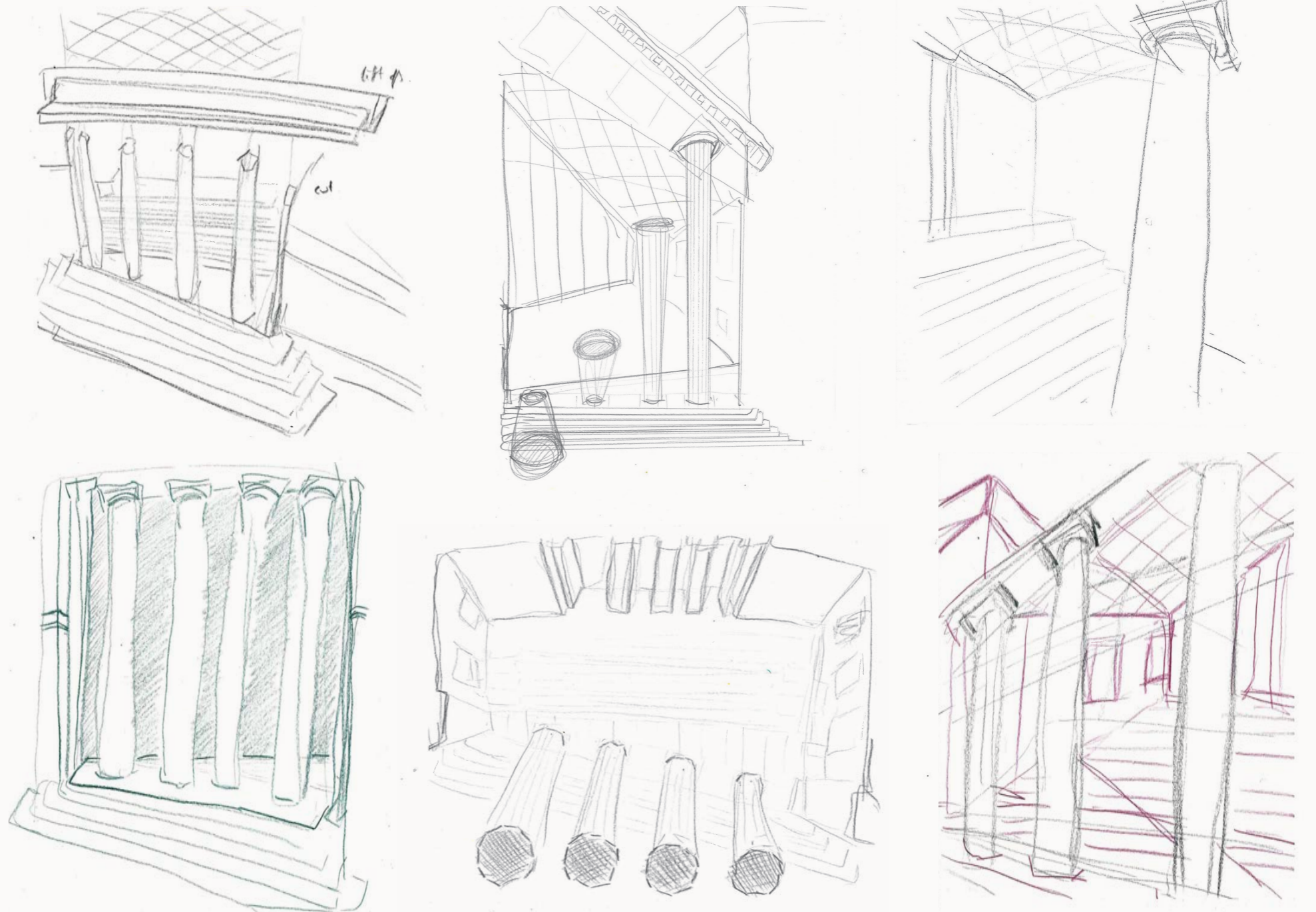
BAROQUE

Humanism
Rediscovery of
Classical antiquity

Proportion
Mathematics
Golden Ratio
Da Vinci
Raphael
Botticelli
Copernicus
Printing press
World exploration



Studies of the peculiarities at Deichman's entrance



Studies of the peculiarities of the Deichman's windows interior vs exterior



Carl Petersen
Fåborg Museum,
entrance
1915

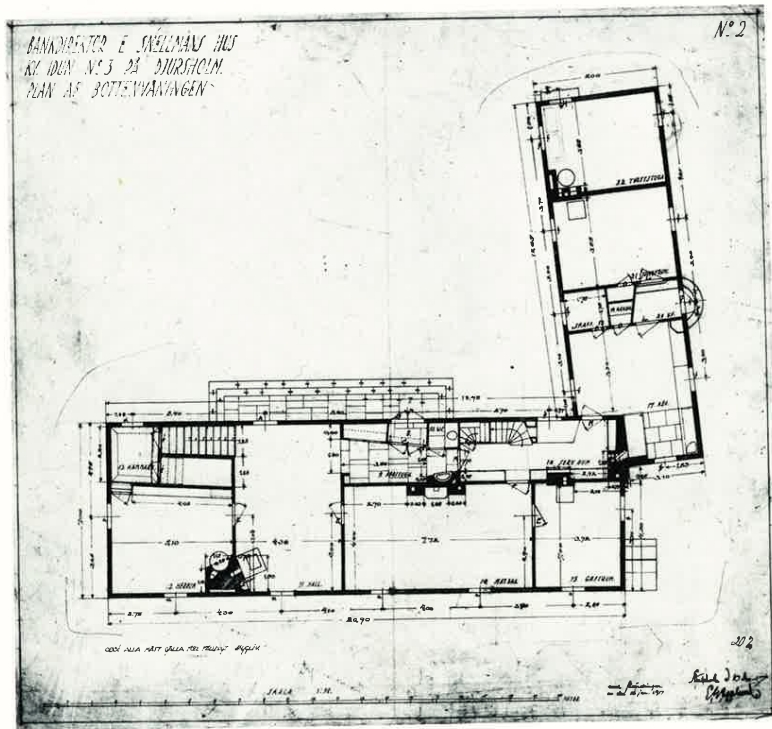
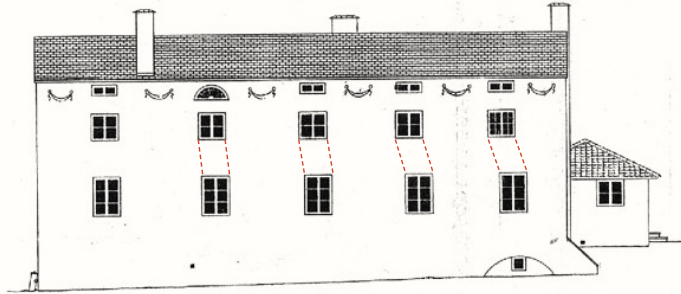


Sigurd Lewerentz
Resurrection Chapel,
the Woodland Cemetery,
Stockholm
1925



Gunnar Asplund
Villa Snellman, Djursholm
1917

rear elevation
ground floor plan



Ambiguous

Modern

Enigma



Modern

That a column can be singled out to dismiss an entire building should sound an alarm, as even before the merits of the column are tried, the judgement, has already been passed. A criticism of this particular nature was recently levied at the Deichman Library, whose *impressively Greek* pillar, according to one local reporter, was conclusive evidence of a building radically out of touch with its time and place.¹ This opinion signals one of two common evaluations of the library presently dominating the Norwegian media following the announcement that the 1933 building will soon be retired.

Although polarised in their conclusions, both sides of the Deichman discussion are preoccupied with the building's stylistic appearance. For some, the heavy monumentality and classical ornamentation pigeonhole the library as unfashionably antiquated, and for others, these same features denote its finest qualities and timeless stature. Absent in these contemporary assessments, however, is any identification of the Deichman Library as a piece of modern architecture. It is curious and concerning that debate regarding the Library has not considered this aspect of the building's genesis, for it is in this realm that the Deichman reveals its full spectrum of merits and materialises as a fascinating synthesis of modernity and tradition.

Modern and Tradition

The marriage of modern and tradition is not wholly unfamiliar; any enquiry into Modernism's lead figure, Le Corbusier, will no doubt encounter this alliance in his early work. Le Corbusier made this connection explicit in his notorious manifesto, *Five Points of Architecture*; five tenets describing his new architectural expression, wherein each tenet was a thoughtful translation of a familiar classical principle.² That said, while modern architecture operated in various guises and phases throughout the twentieth century, it usually remains narrowly identified by one mode: the clean, industrial aesthetic of the International Style.

Kenneth Frampton identified the Modern Movement to have been essentially shaped by

*three conflicting cultural paradigms ... of modern architectural culture - the technological, the classical, and the vernacular.*³

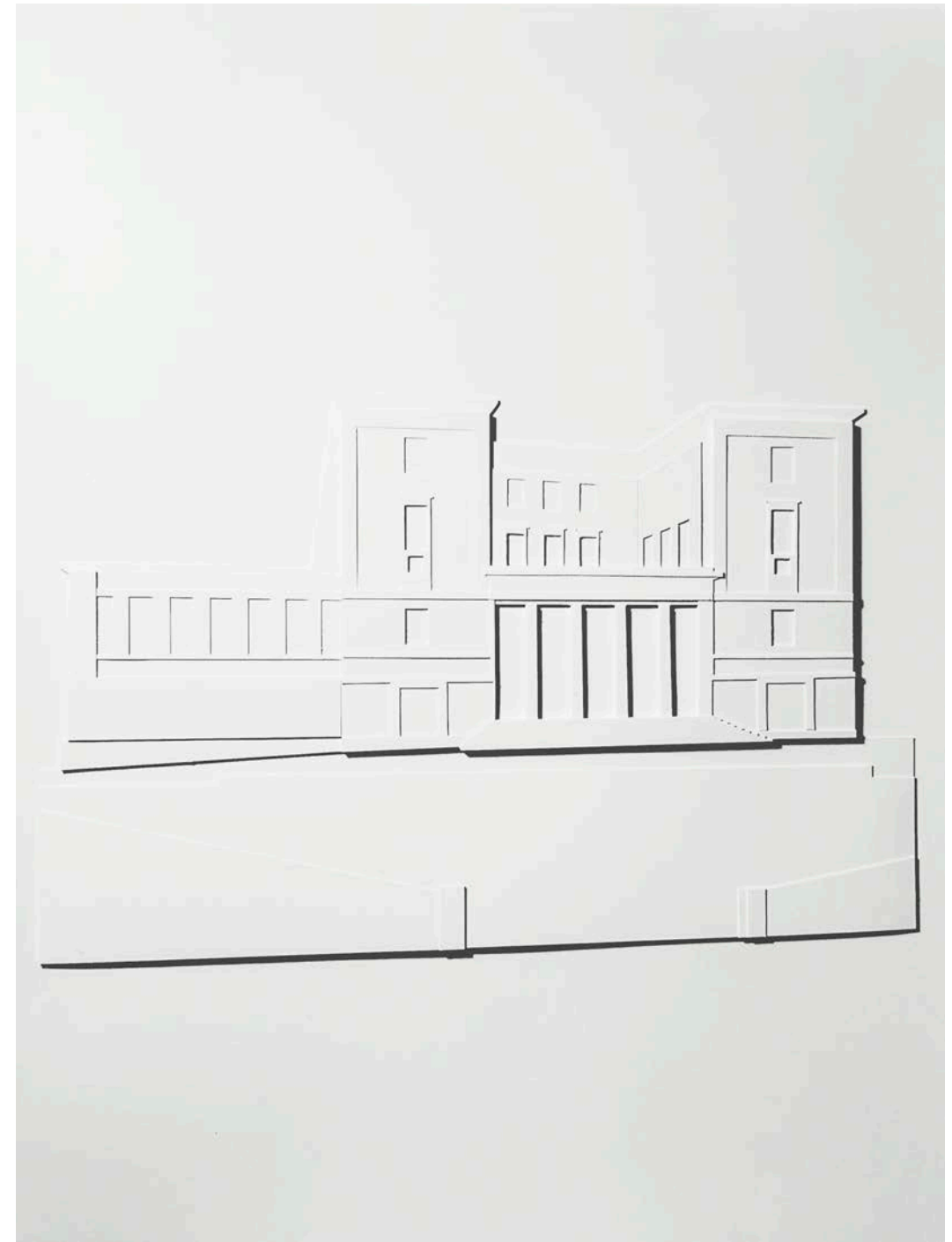
Modernity and technology easily fall hand-in-hand, but it is the meeting of modernity with the classical and the vernacular that, for many, approaches unfamiliar territory. Frampton, almost uniquely amongst the prevalent architectural critics of the later twentieth-century, showed a conspicuous interest in the Scandinavian narrative of modern architectural development. In the Swedish architect, Gunnar Asplund, and his Finnish counterpart, Alvar Aalto, Frampton saw an inflection of modernism that was heavily fused with the classical tradition and vernacular motifs. As a result, modern Scandinavian architecture illustrates a particularly novel and stylistically offbeat passage of modernity.⁴

Confusions of Style

It is overwhelmingly the case that commentary on the architecture of the Deichman Library is driven into a discussion of its style. Although the building was constructed in the nineteen-thirties, its seemingly forthright traditional appearance, likened by many to represent the Neoclassical style, initially, and quite persuasively at that, discourages the conclusion that this is a quintessentially modern piece of architecture.

Today, the propensity to classify a building as belonging to a *style* is the continuation of a mentality that had its origins over two centuries ago; a mentality that seems to have been firmly secured in our common psyche. The definition of style evolved by way of the German-led historical debate at the turn of the nineteenth-century, which endeavoured to couple 'style' with time. From this union between epoch and its artistic expression, emerged the famous notion of the *Zeitgeist*. According to the nineteenth-century historian Franz Kugler, style was the articulated "consciousness of a people and an age" and, to the architect Heinrich Hubsch, it indicated the correlation between architectural form and the corresponding material and cultural needs of its time.⁵ In contrast to such a conception of style, at the Deichman Library, one finds that the correspondence between the appearance of the building and its time is often not so easy to discern.

Understandably, for an assessment of style, attention immediately tends to be drawn towards the most distinguishable and familiar visual features of a building. The Deichman Library has a robust external character that stands distinct from its neighbouring buildings. The library's façades feature highly stylised, carefully composed and generously scaled architectural elements. One's first impressions of



#3 'Tableau'

the building are elicited from the stoic entrance portal, with four granite columns bearing the weight of an entablature overhead, from the oversized roof cornices and heavily rusticated base, and from the intricate windows featuring stone-carved pediments, pilasters and bracket motifs. The familiar austerity of these customarily classical elements allows one to be easily convinced that they are soundly in the presence of the neo-classical tradition.

Following shortly after the classically neo-classical, there is another set of impressions of the Deichman Library that tell a somewhat less coherent tale. These features include the bare expanses of façade, painted in a bold avocado hue, several challenges to symmetry and the four gigantic ionic columns to the north, seemingly neither detached nor integral to the building, serving as a grandiose civic portal for a boulevard never built. This second round of observations sits squarely in opposition to the rather tangible and sober initial impression of the building. These other elements inject a sense of surprise, playfulness and even a degree of irony into one's conception of the building. Although restrained and still subtle in comparison to the imposing neo-classical markers, these gestures begin to hint that the Deichman library is perhaps not what it first seems. These curious gestures somewhat prematurely *Postmodern* in their whimsical self-reflexivity, invite suggestions for alternate stylistic readings of the Deichman library.

Classical Architecture?

Central to the 'modern' dilemma faced by the Deichman Library is a misunderstanding of its relationship to classicism, which is manifested, not according to the classical prescription, but in an unorthodox manner. Whether interpreted as a singular style, a group of styles or a more universal concept, classicism is one of those mainstays of architecture that has raised its head numerous throughout history and arrives, today, loaded with a plethora of connotations. The classical tradition's well-established line begins its bifurcation at the fourteenth-century Italian Renaissance and, to name but a few, proliferates to include eighteenth century Swedish 'Gustavian' Neo-Classicism, nineteenth century Danish 'Golden-Age' Neo-Classicism, German Romantic Classicism, French Classical Rationalism, and the New Classicism of Postmodernism.

While the construction of the Deichman Library throughout the 1920s made it a contemporary of the anti-classical European avant-

garde, in Scandinavia, it was the modern guise of Nordic Classicism that dominated the early twentieth century. The architecture of Nordic Classicism, although subject to regional variation, is typically characterised by its appropriation of codes drawn from both classical and vernacular traditions. Its architecture borrowed heavily from the aesthetic principles of classicism, but, at the same time, was inclusive of new material innovations and responsive to the changing demands of modern culture.

Demetri Porphyrios, the architect and theorist, renowned for his interest in the intersection of modernity and the classical tradition, discerned a special quality of Nordic Classicist architecture:

The ability and determination to continuously shift between classicism and vernacular without the slightest embarrassment that it might be mistaken as practising an eclecticism, suggests that it is not stylistics that the architectural mind of the period is after.⁶

In line with Porphyrios' intuition, the final objective of the dominantly classical features of the Deichman Library is not, in fact, to adopt and replicate the classical style. Alternatively, in this instance, the familiar and strict regimen of the classical style is manipulated to express architectural ideas that, paradoxically, challenge the classical idiom they typically represent. Carefully composed arrangements of forms, elements, and details, both outside and inside the Deichman Library building, unite to project powerful impressions of an architecture that is classical, familiar and predictable. However, these cursory impressions are actually a classic case of misdirection, a sleight of hand that, upon closer inspection, reveals clues of a not-so-passive resistance, which shakes one's conceptualisation of the building.

At first glance, the south façade of the Deichman provides an impression of symmetry and centrality. The façade can be divided into a composition of thirds, wherein the towering masses of the two outer façade components are mirrored about a central recessive element that is set back by ten metres. The walls of the outer masses are blunt and emphatically flat, while the central façade component temporarily disrupts this front plane of the building and introduces a negative. Substituted in its place along the façade line is a regimented row of columns supporting an entablature, an archetypal should-be-imposing portico that is thoroughly dwarfed by the towers that flank it. While employing recognisably neo-classical features, the facade subverts the stylistic intentions of such devices. The unusual scale and

arrangement of these devices produces a façade that culminates with an unexpected, yet intentional sense of omission. Central grandeur is substituted for a void. And, all the while, as our mind stitches together the oddly shaped pieces of this pseudo-symmetrical neo-classical puzzle, our attention is diverted from the recessed central wall that sits impishly in the background, cloaked in shadow as it commits the final act of insubordination. This wall, it turns out, is completely skewed in relation to the established façade line.

Modern Architecture?

The Deichman Library is a modern building, although, the significance of this claim rests contingently on defining: what makes a building modern? The answer is not so straightforward, and like the notion of 'classical architecture', the definition of 'modern architecture' has mutated over time and has been contained by varying limits. Even Colin Rowe admitted;

Of course what is, or what was thought to be, the idea of modern architecture is a subject of some confusion.⁷

What could be constituted as the beginning of the modern architectural period, Kenneth Frampton claimed, depends on how rigorously one desires to seek out modernity. Frampton suggested one should look at the mid-eighteenth-century; a time that saw the universality of Vitruvian proportions questioned, and the splitting of the building profession into architecture and engineering.⁸ For the nineteenth-century Swiss historian, Jacob Burckhardt, a modern sensibility was evident as far back as Michelangelo, whom he identified as the prototypical modern artist; as embodied in Michelangelo there was the first historical instance of purely individual and spirited expression.⁹

Nonetheless, two consistent conditions for the definition of 'modern' are seen to repeatedly raise their heads. These conditions were articulated by Frampton as, "consciousness and polemical intent"¹⁰; whereby, modern architecture is exhibited when there is conscious resistance to the learnt patterns and norms of the corresponding era. For twentieth century modern architecture, this resistance targeted the nineteenth-century academic tradition. Nordic Classicism demonstrated a conscious liberation from the academic tradition; a split that was made literal with its principle protagonists, Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz, rejecting the standard academic

training, and instead, forming their own breakaway architectural school.¹¹

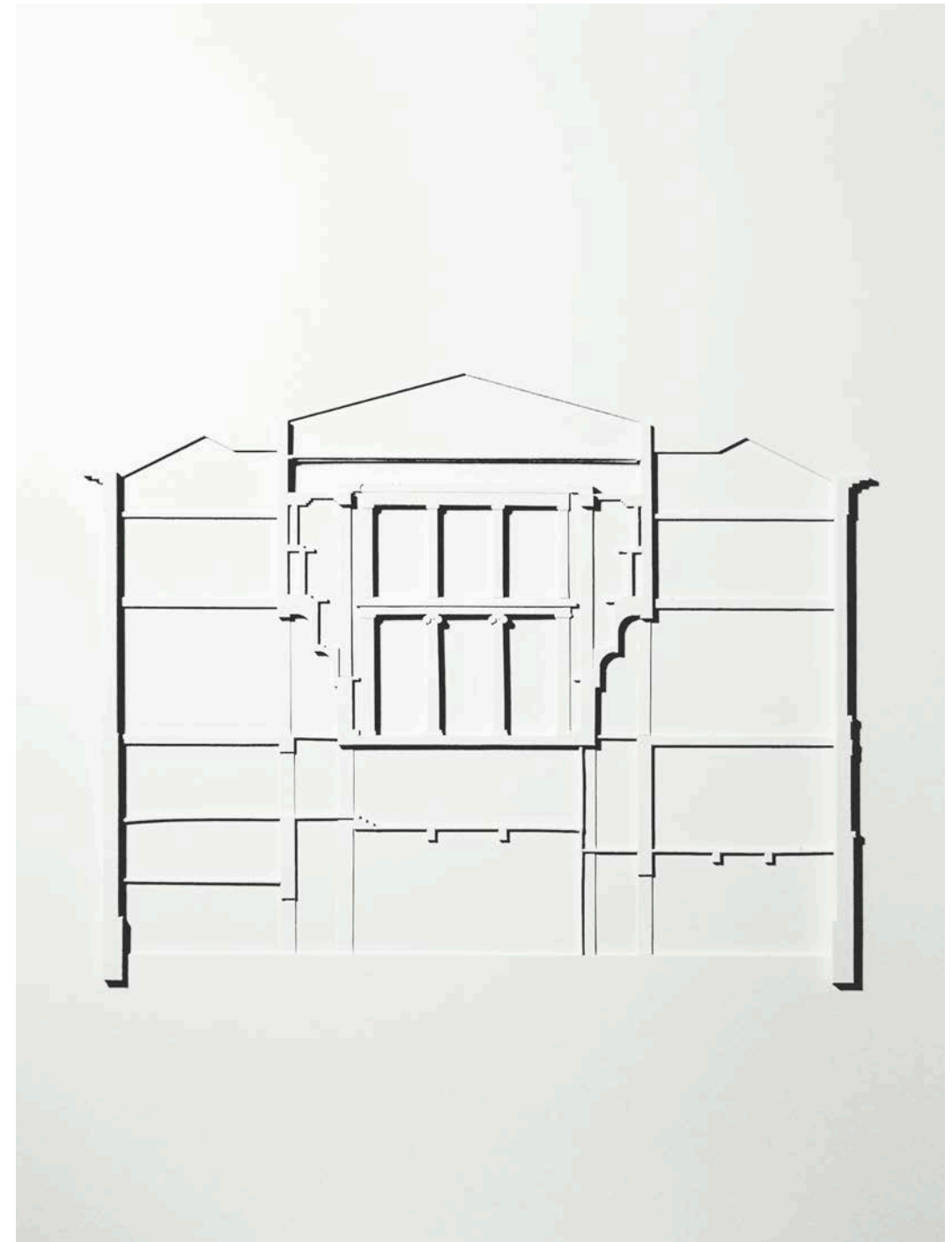
Material

A building's modernity can be recognised by its inclusion of advanced materials and technologies, but it is by the conscious application of these material innovations that one can ascertain modern architecture. The early twentieth century was the era of concrete technology. The popularisation of iron and steel mesh reinforced concrete was prompted by industry-leaders, such as Francois Hennebique, who standardised the architectural material that would be readily adopted for the new modern expression.¹² Of the early pioneers in concrete architecture, one need not look further than Auguste Perret. His early projects in Paris, such as the rue Franklin apartment building, 1904, and the Garage Ponthieu, 1905, are revered for their refined tectonic expression of the concrete skeleton-frame structure.¹³ Perret's architecture was based on a classical lineage, as Frampton observed of his rue Franklin building:

Perret rendered the frame in such a way as to resemble trabeated timber construction ... clad throughout in ceramic tiles.¹⁴

Perret's rue Franklin building consciously engages with the new material of reinforced concrete. This material is translated into a vocabulary conversing with the history of architectural construction, which in this case was a dialogue between the primeval and classical traditions and Perret's present. Similarly, in the material qualities and tectonics of the Deichman Library, there is a deliberate exchange between historical tradition and the innovations of the turn of the century.

At the Deichman, a narrative device expounds the cultural and technological transition into the modern era. This device draws on the rhetoric of materiality and architectural motifs, and it is delivered over the journey one makes from the street towards the heart of the building. The Library's external walls are veritably solid, masonry walls, but as one passes through the façade and enters the building, a sparse and spacious interior awaits. In contrast to the massive load-bearing external walls, the interior is dissolved into the tectonics of the frame and expressed as variations on a theme; language of the column and the beam. Whilst the columns of the Deichman have



#4 'Progression'

often been the source of its bane, it is by the columns that the tale of the Library's modernity is made most explicit. A gradual transition takes place moving from the vestibule into the main hall, as if the building is leading one by their hand. The columns of the vestibule's first floor are carved from a dark granite and ornamented according to the classical ionic order. Evolving vertically, the columns of the vestibule's second floor are square-form concrete piers, coated in bright coral rough render, and still retain basic plinth and capital elements. At the peak of this chain of evolution are the soaring piers of the central main hall, plastered seamless; their ornamentation lying surface-deep in the smooth polished finish, coloured a dreamy powder blue. All three modulations of the column stand juxtaposed together in this space, kept in company by the mural to the rear of the main hall; an additional allegoric tale of the shift into the modern.

Despite the promontory on which the library stands having, on more than one occasion, been referred to as the *Acropolis of Oslo*, the Deichman is no stand-in for the Parthenon. The Deichman Library currently accounts for one of Oslo's most dignified public buildings, but to deny this early twentieth-century structure its inherently modern identity, is to misplace this value. If one is to champion or condemn its fluted columns and stone aedicules, then I implore them to properly understand the use of these features. The controlled use of ornamentation, in this case, provides a critical contrast, which emphasises the building's more 'modern' intentions. After taking a longer look at the Deichman, the tell-tale signs begin to materialise of an architecture not conservatively looking back towards the past, but firmly confronting its present.

Le Corbusier
Pavillon Suisse,
Cite Universitaire, Paris
1930



"The use of pilotis, for example, is a reversal of the classical podium; it accepts the classical separation of the piano nobile from the ground but interprets this separation in terms of void rather than mass.

The fenetre en longueur is a contradiction of the classical window aedicule.

The roof terrace contradicts pitched roof and replaces the attic story with an open-air room.

The free facade replaces the regular arrangement of window openings with a freely composed surface.

The free plan contradicts the principle by which distribution was constrained by the need for vertically continuous structural walls and replaces it with a free arrangement of nonstructural partitions determined by functional convenience."

Alan Colquhoun
Displacement of Concepts in Le Corbusier, 1972

Alvar Aalto
Jyväskylä Workers' Club,
Finland
1924



Gunnar Asplund
Skandia Cinema,
Stockholm
1923



Deichman Library;
Skewed facade wall



Deichman Library;
Rear portal



Classicisms:

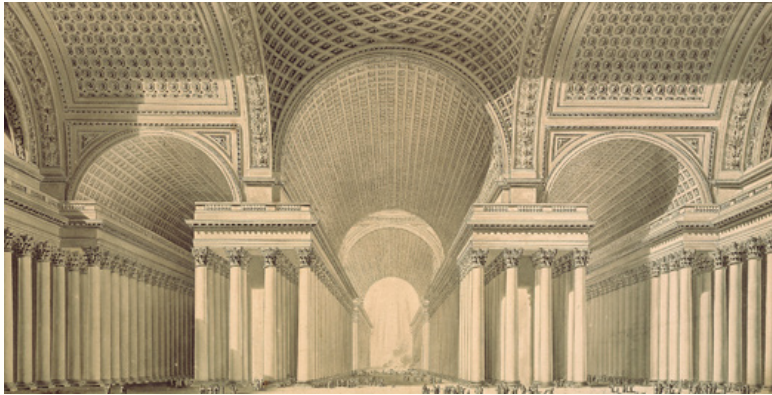
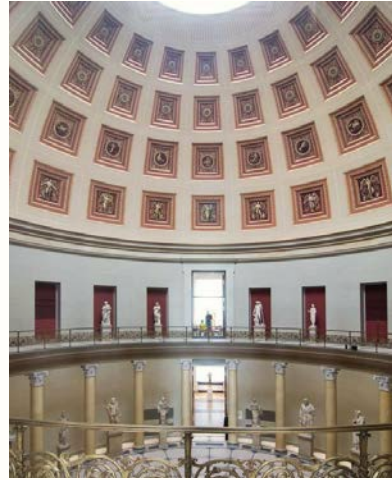
**Bramante; Tempietto, San
Pietro in Montorio, Rome
1502**

**Karl Friedrich Schinkel;
Altes Museum, Berlin
1830**

**Etienne-Louis-Boullée;
Project for a Metropolitan
Cathedral
1782**

**C. F. Hansen;
Christiansborg Palace
Church, Copenhagen
1826**

**Charles Moore;
Piazza d'Italia,
New Orleans
1978**

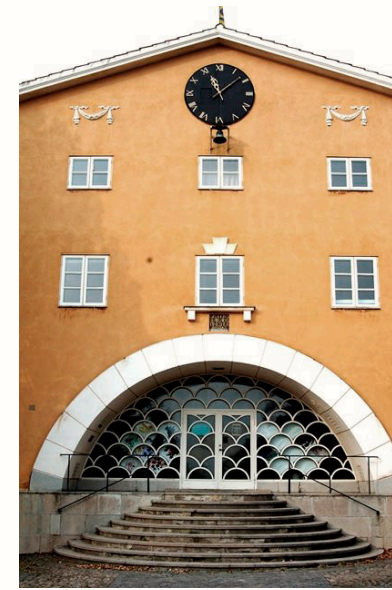


Nordic Classicism:

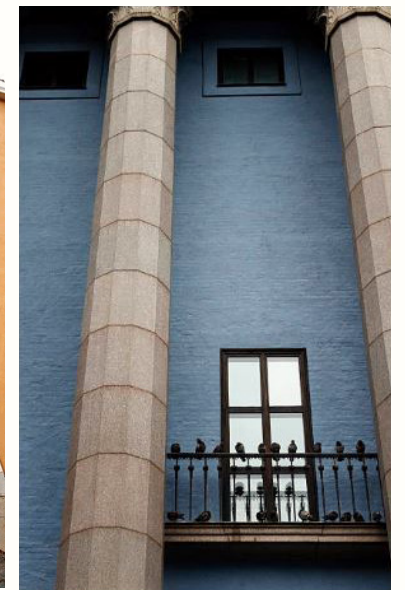
**Carl Bergsten
Liljevalch Art Gallery
1916**



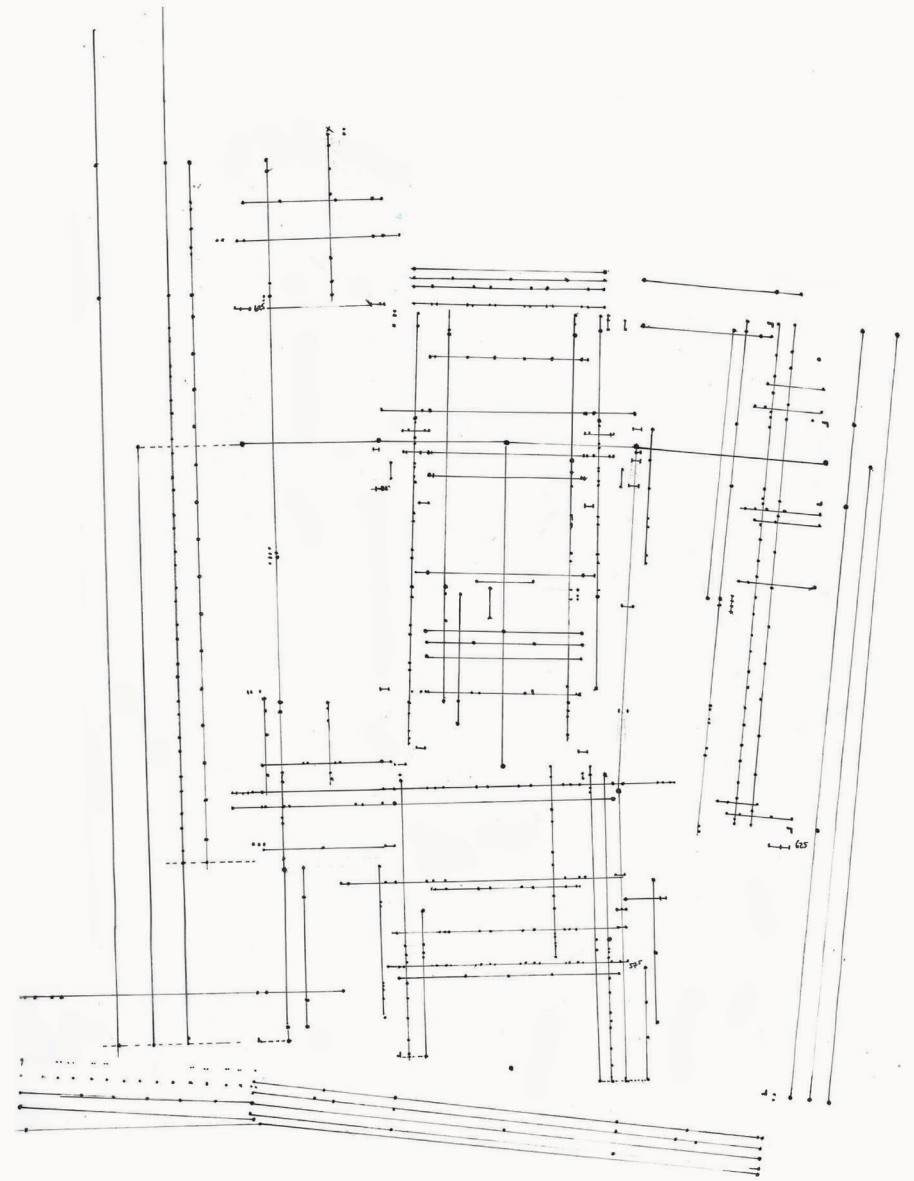
**Gunnar Asplund
Lister Courthouse,
Blekinge
1921**



**Ivar Tengbom
Stockholm Concert Hall
facade
1926**



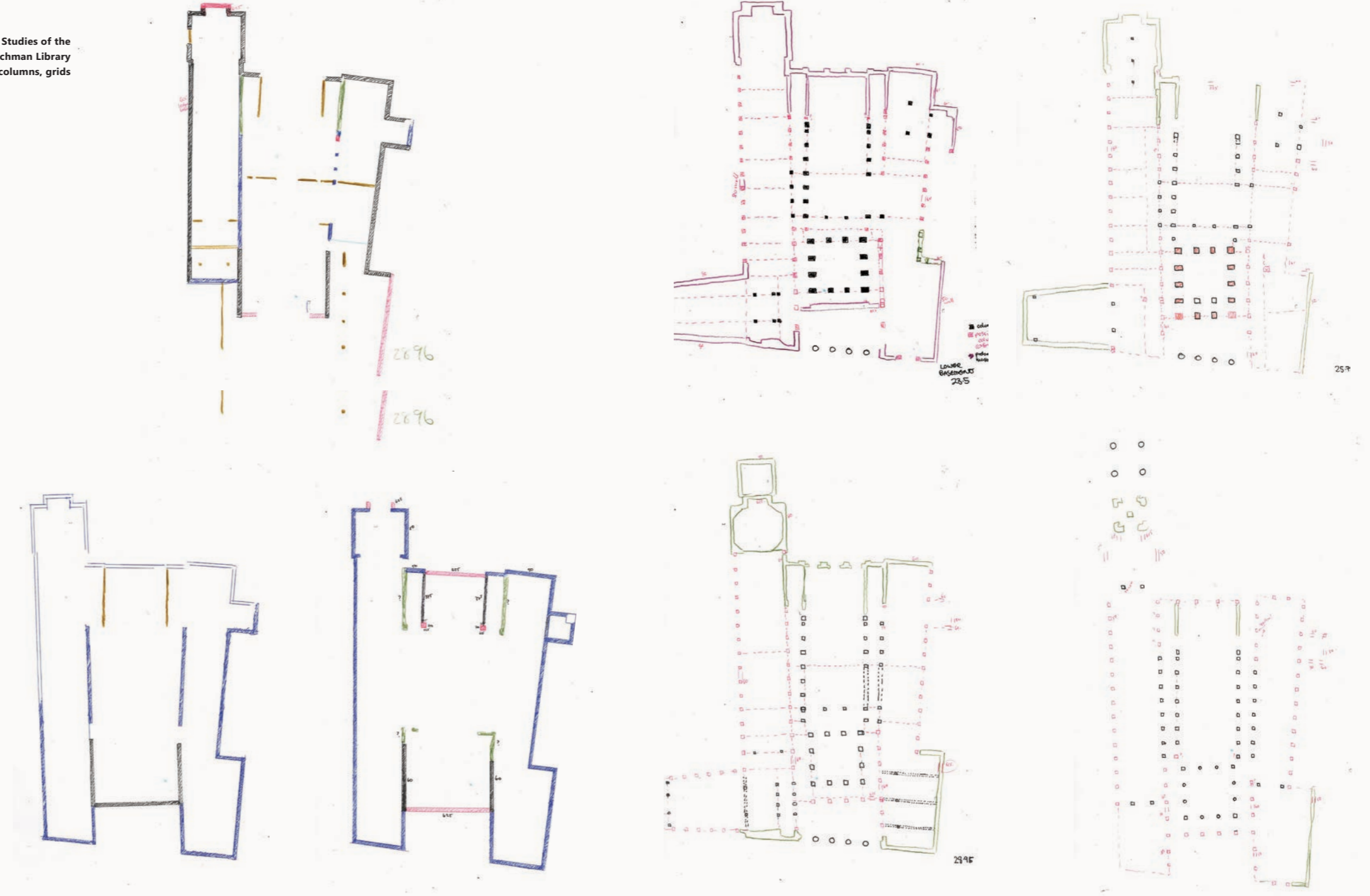
Auguste Perret
Rue Franklin apartments,
Paris
1902-04

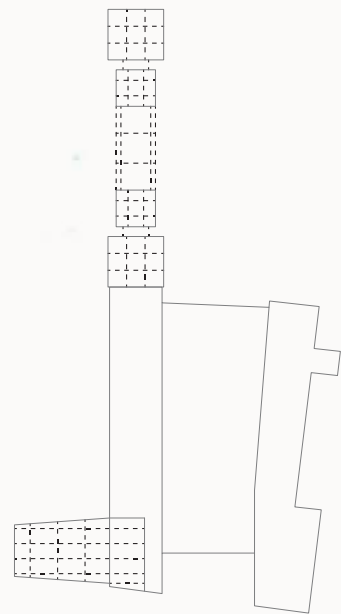
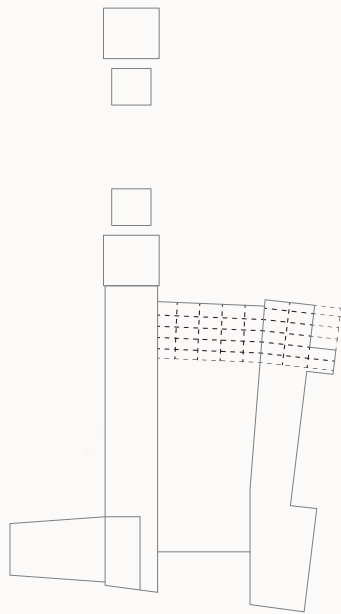
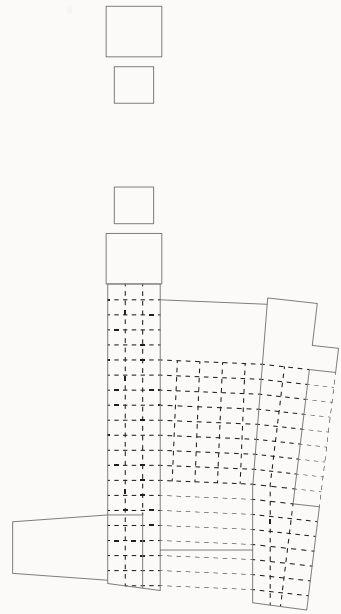
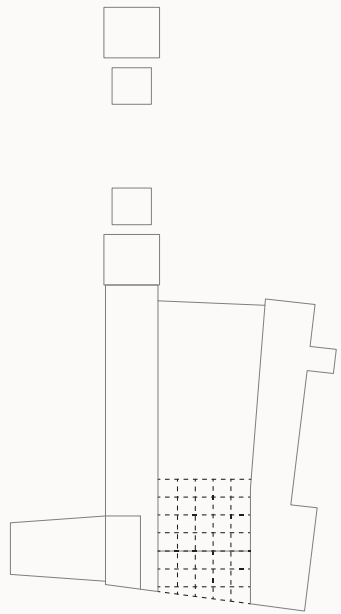


Auguste Perret
Rue Franklin apartments,
Paris
1902-04

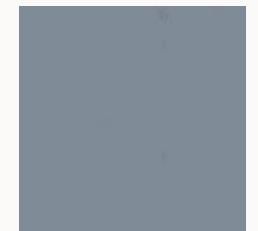
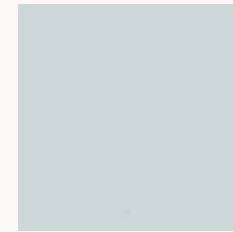


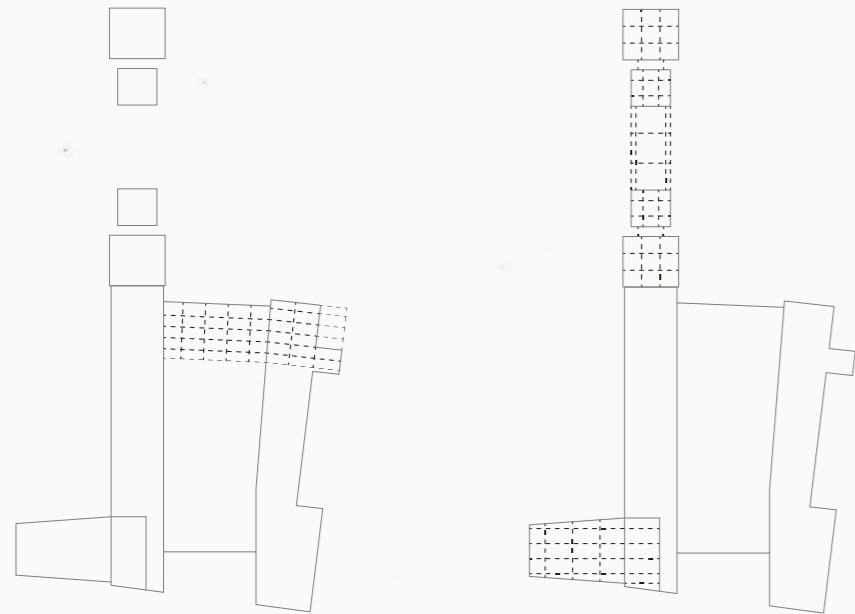
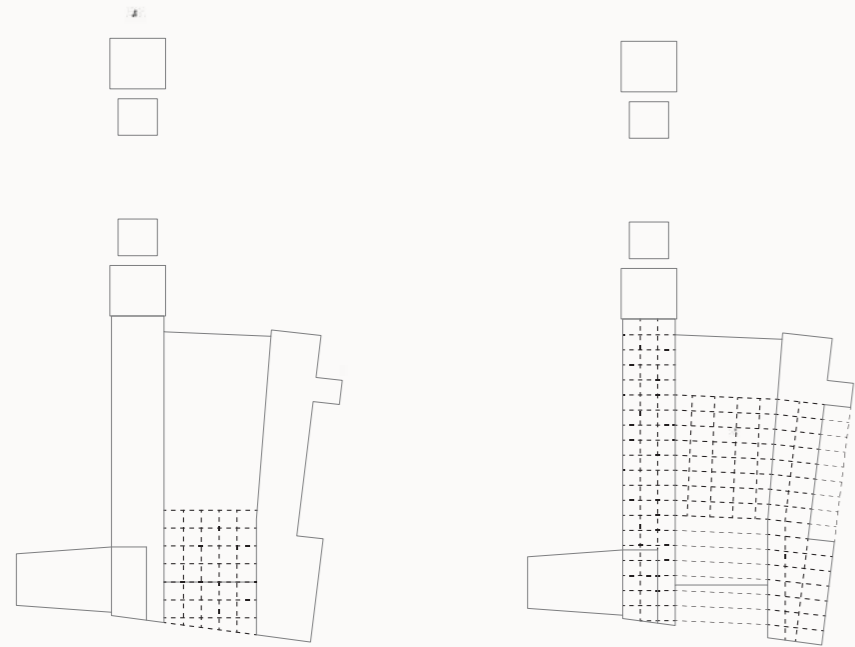
Studies of the
Deichman Library
walls, columns, grids





Deichman
Colour Study





**Teknikken og vitenskapen
(Technique & Science)**

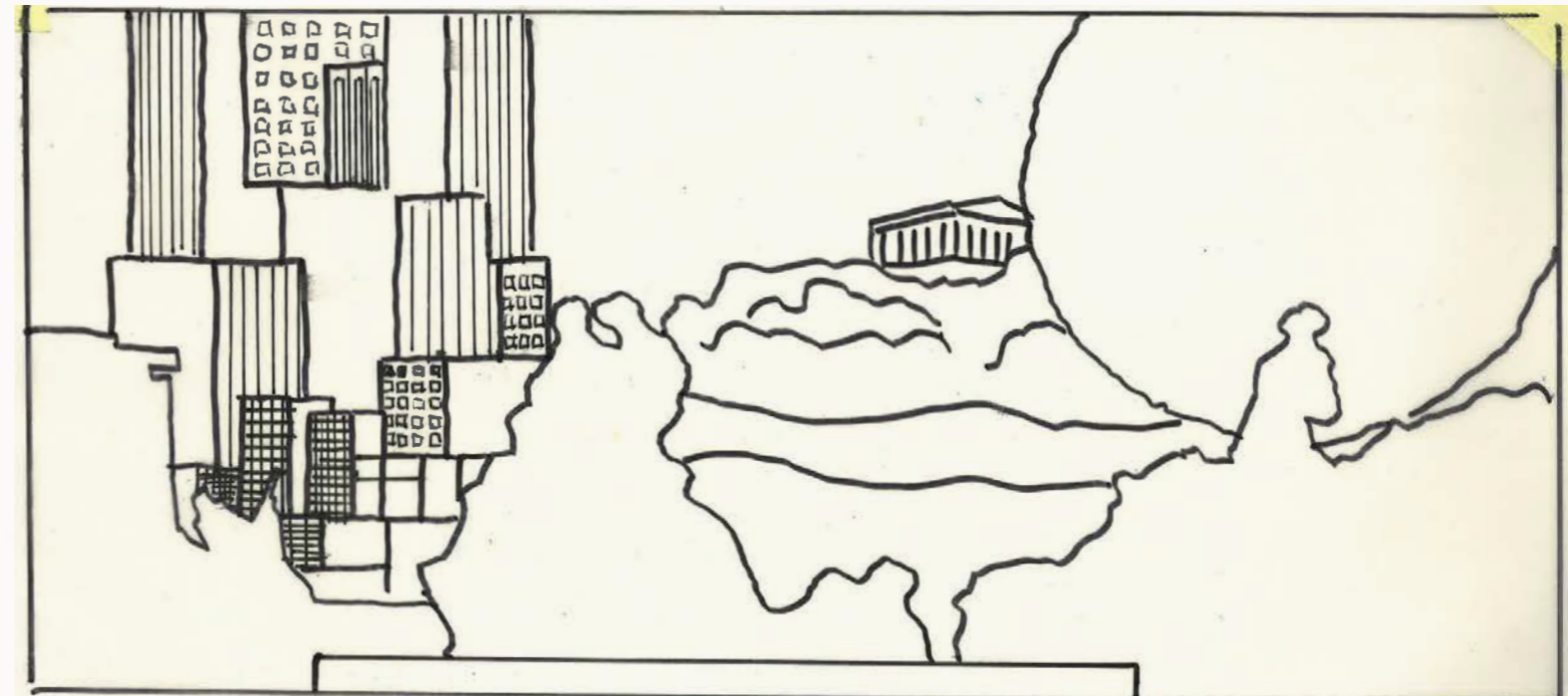
**Axel Revold
1932**

**Mural featured the main
hall of the Deichman
Library**



**Study of the
mural isolating
its compositional
symbolism:**

*the scene of modernity
sits side-by-side with the
pillars of the past,*

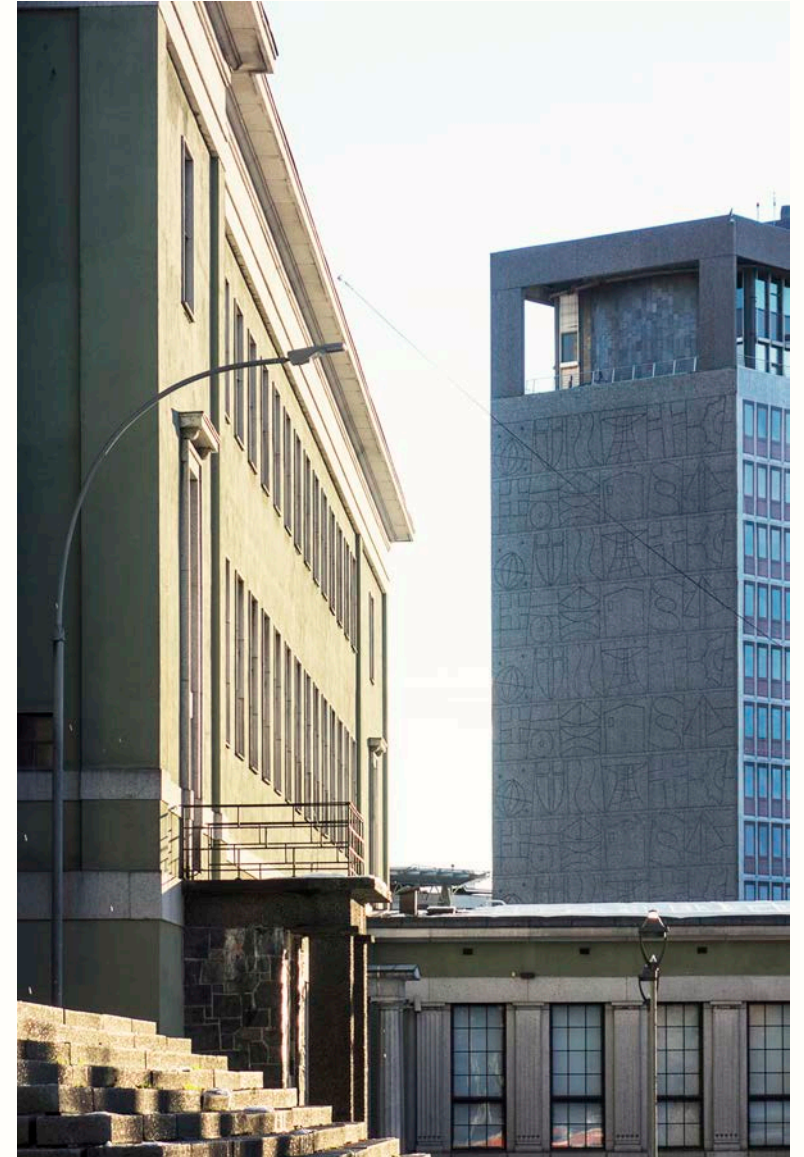


Neighbourhood
Facade Studies of
principles, ornamentation
and colour

Hammersborg , Oslo
1880-1920



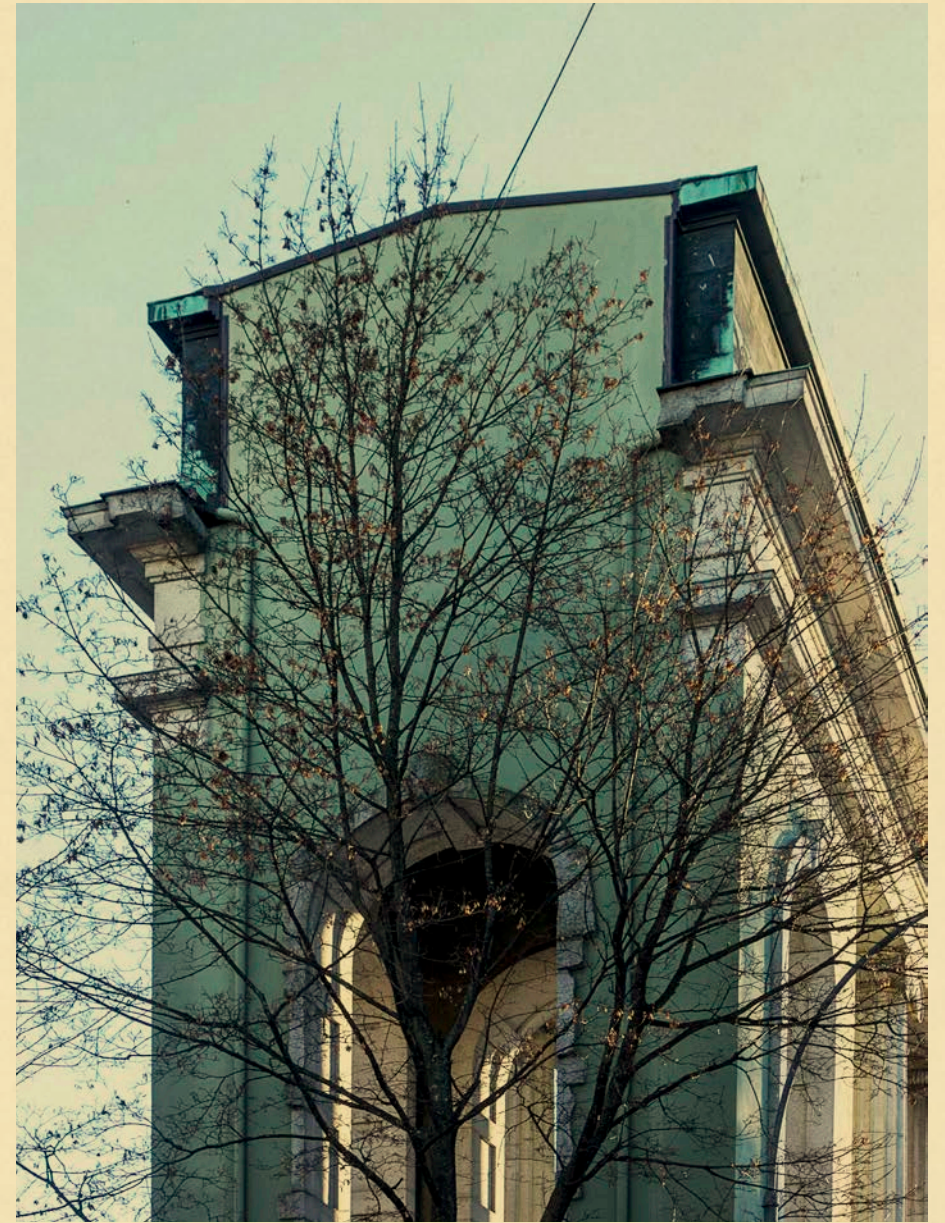
Two modern buildings
in Oslo's government
quarter district



Ambiguous

Modern

Enigma



Enigma

Without doubt, there is a term that, when uttered to the residents of Oslo, evokes a sense of pride in the thriving social democracy that typifies modern Norway. That term is *Deichmanske*, the city of Oslo's public library system, an institution that dates back to 1785 and holds sentimental value for many an Osloviaan. Today, standing in the lending hall of the library, one can sense that underlying the pensive space, there is a peculiar hum of activity. It is only when one notices the gradually receding stacks of books, which once formed towering pixelated murals across the main hall, it crystallises that the Deichman Library is in the midst of a major transition. As staff cart book trolleys across the floor, they no longer head back to their decimal homes, but rather to large bins in the garage, already heavy with dog-eared volumes slated for burial. The small groups of faithfuls, that gather daily in the vestibule, patiently await a guided tour through the arcane stack rooms; a chance to pay their final respects. The library is leaving and yet, in the void left behind, a building still stands.

An architectural transformation is the next chapter for this eighty-five-year-old building, but the specifics of this transformation are still unknown. Reconfiguring the building for a new life involves not only changing its functional parameters, but also curating the future identity of the building; its qualities of space, materiality and the endurance of its conceptual clarity. It is in this capacity, the interpretation and re-imagination of the values of the existing fabric, that architects have a crucial responsibility to sensitively steer the future character of buildings.

Upon initiating a transformation project, the accepted mode of practice is for architects and their teams to conduct a careful survey of the building at hand. Original documents and secondary references for the building are sourced and reviewed with the hope of revealing illuminating information to move the transformation process forward. In 2015, such a survey report was compiled for the Deichman Library. Disappointingly, aside from the architect's as-built drawing set and a handful of archival photos, the report revealed there was limited information available for inclusion in the document. It seems rather extraordinary that, for such an established public building, little material has been retained and an equally minute amount of discourse has been generated over the years. A series of checks performed

online, in the public library system itself, in academic databases and in the Norwegian Architecture Museum's archives, confirmed that the Deichman Library building is, indeed, in an architectural sense, incredibly obscure.

From this void, both literally and figuratively, the building is calling out to be discovered. Unravelling the enigma, that is the Deichman Library, involves tracing the building's past in relation to the shifting cultural conditions that have shaped the last century in Europe.

Nordic Classicism

The Deichman Library comfortably belongs to a brief phenomenon of architecture and furniture design that emerged across the Scandinavian territories during the nineteen tens and twenties. Coined as *Nordic Classicism* in contemporary accounts, this period was engaged with the architectural predicaments faced by a rapidly modernising society with a burgeoning desire for a deeper sense of regional identity. Nordic Classicism navigated these conditions through the melding of classical idioms with vernacular motifs. Demetri Porphyrios and Kenneth Frampton identified this to be the Doricist Sensibility in the North, of which Porphyrios observed;

The vernacular or classicist looks of Asplund's or Lewerentz's chapels, do not refer to the associational mythology of the respective stylistic regions, but instead they point to the... "doricism" inherent in the austerity of both the shed and the temple.¹

The architecture of Nordic Classicism is often characterised by its restrained expression of classically-derived elements, often solemn and monumental, alongside striking and idiosyncratic markers of a more modern time. Somewhat unique to Northern Europe, a stable war and inter-war economy allowed for a flourishing stock of public and cultural buildings commissioned in this distinctive new classicist style. Notable buildings from this period range from the Copenhagen Police Headquarters and Fåborg Art Museum in Denmark, the Concert Hall and Public Library of Stockholm, the Parliament House in Helsinki, the Vigeland Museum and Haugesund Town Hall in Norway and lastly, to the oft maligned Deichman Library in Oslo. By the 1930s, a changing political climate and the rise of its aesthetic antithesis, Functionalism, saw Nordic Classicism experience a rapid local decline.

The Political Climate

In the wake of the first world war, it comes without surprise, the architectural landscape of the early twentieth century in Europe was heavily influenced by the simmering backdrop of political tension and instability. As disillusioned populations yearned for a solid support structure, institutions looked to show strength and reshape themselves to address such needs. In the built environment, architects were the architects of these sentiments. The fascist regimes of the 1930s looked to historicised monumentality, a stately and unyielding form of stripped back classicism, as their ideological rhetoric for the building projects of the state.² Following the war years, the classical language of architecture, whose aesthetic sensibilities were exploited for the projection of power, was perceived to indicate de facto support for the fallen fascist regimes. To this end, Italian architect and author, Bruno Zevi, was highly critical of the use of classical principles and monumentalism in the architecture of totalitarian regimes, claiming that

Symmetry is the façade of sham power trying to appear invulnerable.³

Nordic Classicism, however, developed in isolation to the extremist political agendas that propagated the Neoclassicism of the Third Reich in Germany and Mussolini's Neoclassicism and Rationalism in Italy. Despite this clear distinction, these Scandinavian buildings still got caught in the dragnet of unpopularity that swept through Europe after the wars. Their images tarnished for being seen to share, albeit coincidentally, many hallmarks of the classical language that was leveraged upon by the regimes.

The Shadow of Functionalism

While people had already begun to distance themselves from Nordic Classicism due its circumstantial, yet ultimately meaningless relationship with fascism, the successful and continuing rise of Functionalism since the late twenties further sealed its fate. Over the past century, the enduring strength of functionalism has had a two-fold effect on public engagement with Nordic Classicism. Firstly, the sheer popularity and demand for the new modern aesthetic of Functionalism led to a decreased appetite for Nordic Classicism. In this sense, the style was simply crowded out, marginalised, due to its comparatively limited presence as something of equally limited

importance. Secondly, during this period, readings of modern architecture became strongly biased towards a Functionalist sensibility and, through this positivist-rationalist lens, Nordic Classicism quickly seemed antiquated in comparison. The result of these two outcomes meant that, for much of the last century, Nordic Classicism has been either omitted from the histories of modern architecture or, as even Scandinavian architects were guilty of doing, labelled as, "a classical interlude."⁴

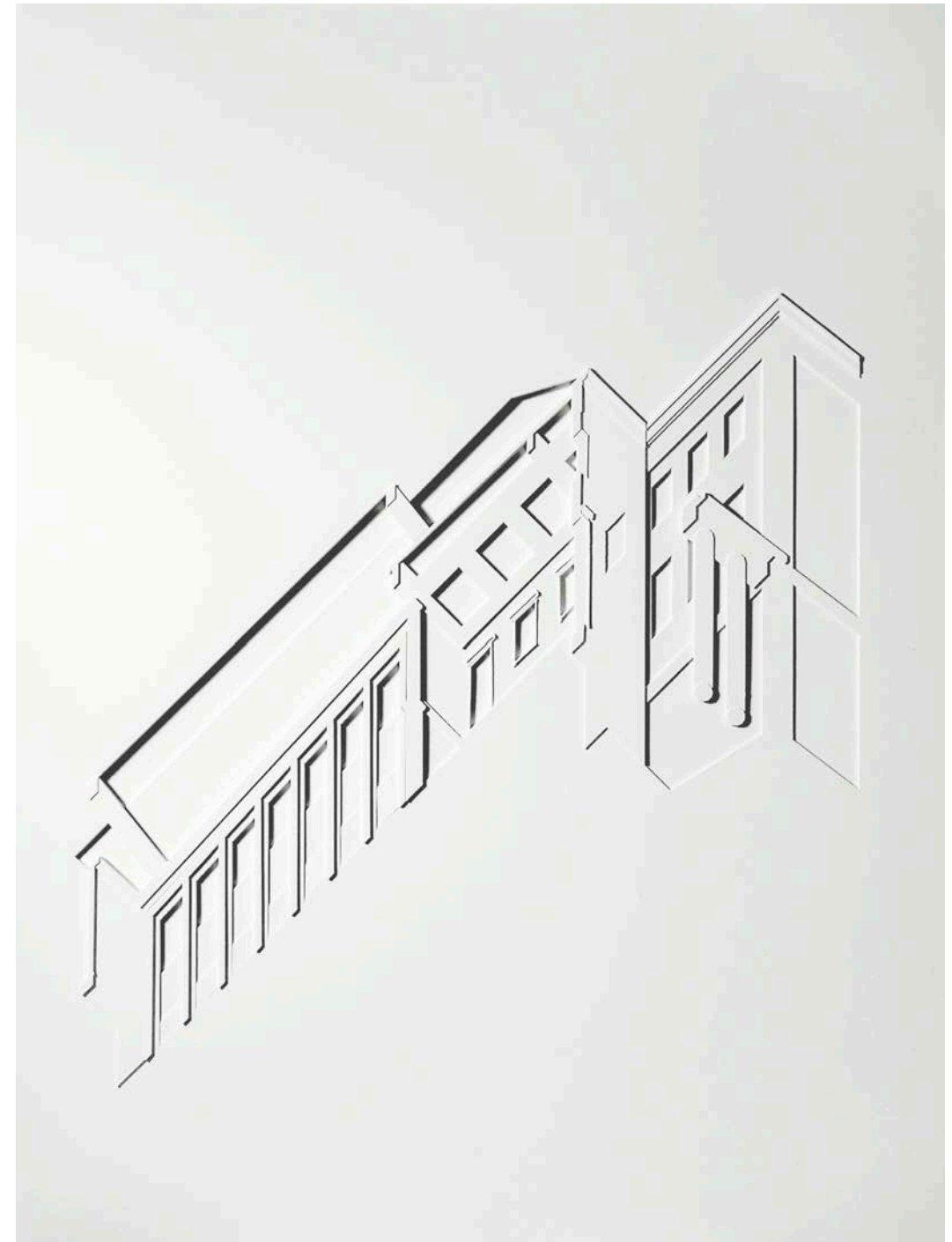
The Shadow of Functionalism: Rational Vision

The second impact of Functionalism, its dissemination of a widely accepted frame of reference for the evaluation of modern architecture, was a substantial setback to the general perception of the architecture of Nordic Classicism. One of the primary concerns of a Functionalist frame of reference is that of consistency; a product of the hardnosed rationalist mentality that lies at its core. Nordic Classicism, on the other hand, liberally and intentionally defies consistency, presenting, as previously discussed, an unashamed melding of style and manipulation of expectations. Due to this fundamental divergence from the Functionalist philosophy, the continual application of this substitute set of criteria in value judgments throughout the twentieth century immediately put Nordic Classicism at a disadvantage.

Under this framework, throughout the twentieth century, architects and critics have continually applied a substitute set of criteria based on clear-cut rational principles continually read through the spectacles of Functionalism, that without a doubt, carry a different prescription. As a result, a substitute set of criteria based on rational principles and qualities has been unknowingly employed to understand and assess these buildings. To this end, while referencing a like problem, Bruno Zevi noted, somewhat facetiously, that;

The Beaux-Arts displayed the Propylaea to make it appear symmetrical. Why? Because in a moment of mental aberration the Greeks must have made a mistake, according to Beaux-Arts logic.⁵

A similar misunderstanding occurred at Sigurd Lewerentz's 1925 Resurrection Chapel at the Woodland Cemetery. It is a Nordic Classical building of two simple elements, a chapel and a portico. In the composition of these two elements, the smaller portico is minutely dislodged from the larger chapel by a rotation of 2°. While a seemingly small detail, this use of marginal misalignment is, in fact,



#5 'Boundaries'

a recurring device present in several other Nordic Classicist buildings. Seventy years down the track, this gap between the entry portico and the chapel was deemed unnecessary to the overall expression of the building and infilled to meet demands of a practical nature. Although indicated in Lewerentz's original drawings to be a definite part of the design intent, when seen through a Functionalist lens, such a subtle act was - like the Propylaea was to the Beaux Arts - seen to be an error in judgment.

The Deichman Library, like the Resurrection Chapel, is a nuanced building that oscillates between rational and irrational order. The photographic series, *Deichmanske*, was produced by the noted German photographer, Candida Höfer, who is renowned for her meticulous portraits of institutional and public interiors. This portrait of the Deichman, shot in 2000, provides an important additional source of information about the building. Moreover, the photos are equally revealing due to the way in which they choose to represent the building. The photos draw on the strong geometric qualities of the building, seemingly as a celebration of rational principles. For instance, a photograph of the library's main hall frames a picture of perfect symmetry, a proportional balance befitting the rationalist sensibility that Höfer brings to the illustration. Ironically, in reality, the main hall of the library skews off at an unusual angle and, in order to present such mirrored composition, Höfer's tripod likely had to stand way-off the vestibule's midline.

The Other Histories

Pivotal for Nordic Classicism to be popularly recognised as a serious phase of modern development, both locally and abroad, were the reassessments of the Modern era initiating from the post-war period and onwards. Lead figures of the historical revision, such as Kenneth Frampton, endeavoured to espouse the merits of Nordic Classicism, drawing particular attention to its seminal architect, Gunnar Asplund. Frampton's interest in Nordic Classicism provided the incentive for the 1980 travelling exhibition across Scandinavia, *Nordisk Klassicism 1910-1930*, curated by the Museum of Finnish Architecture in collaboration with the other Nordic architecture museums. An important outcome of this exhibition was the dissemination of a comprehensive publication, sharing the exhibition's name, that critiqued the shortcomings of the long-established histories of modern architecture. At the opening, the editors reflected that;

*Nordic architecture had forced itself into the formula imposed by the international history of architecture, like Cinderella's stepsister, who cut off her own heel to make the glass shoe of Modernism fit.*⁶

This book still provides the most comprehensive index and evaluation of the period; citing the drawings, sketches, and photographs from over fifty architects that were represented in the 1980 exhibition and essays outlining the cultural and architectural currents that manifested in Nordic Classicism. Importantly, the content was presented in the Nordic languages yet mirrored by an English translation, enabling a vital source of material to be accessed by both local and international audiences. Unfortunately, Norway's Deichman Library was not addressed in this seminal publication, however, the answer could lie in the chosen format of the publication. The book established profiles of select architects and their commissions, divided by each of the four Scandinavian regions. It appears likely that the Deichman Library was omitted because its architect, Nils Reiersen, was a particularly unprolific practitioner, with often only this one building attributed to his name.

The Beginning of the End

Although the heroic status of Functionalism in Scandinavia has persevered, even through to the present day, it seems that there is growing support to destigmatise and proudly include the artefacts of Nordic Classicism in the opus of Norwegian architecture. The Oslo exhibition, *Model as Ruin*, 2013, and the English-language publication *Modelling Time*, 2014, featured 32 models showcasing Norwegian architecture from the interwar years. A 1:100 plaster model of the Deichman Library was featured, as were models of the Nordic Classicist Torggata Bath and Vigeland Museum. The exhibition demonstrated the range of modern Norwegian architecture to be inclusive towards the more overtly classical and vernacular styles. Of this diversity, the publication emphasises the importance of acknowledging, for example, the

*grand neo-classical Deichmanske Library to be a contemporary of the ultra-modernist Hotel Continental.*⁷

Interestingly, the Model as Ruin exhibition was, first and foremost, an expose on what the architectural profession of the early twentieth century designated to be representative of Norwegian architecture at

that time. Accordingly, the inclusion of the Deichman indicates that at the time of its inception, despite its Neoclassical veneer, the building was considered to belong to the canon of modern architecture. The models exhibited in Model as Ruin were drawn from a larger holding of documentation called the *Permanent Collection*; an initiative by the Norwegian Architects' Association in the nineteen twenties and thirties, with the objective of introducing the work of homegrown talent to the profession abroad. With its model only assembled in 1935, not long before the discontinuation of the collection, the Deichman Library was not prominently featured in the travelling exhibitions. Nonetheless, its inclusion in both instances, the past exhibitions and the more recent retrospective, signals that this building has, at least in an underlying sense, been recognised as a contributing figure to the development of modern architecture in Norway.

The End of the End

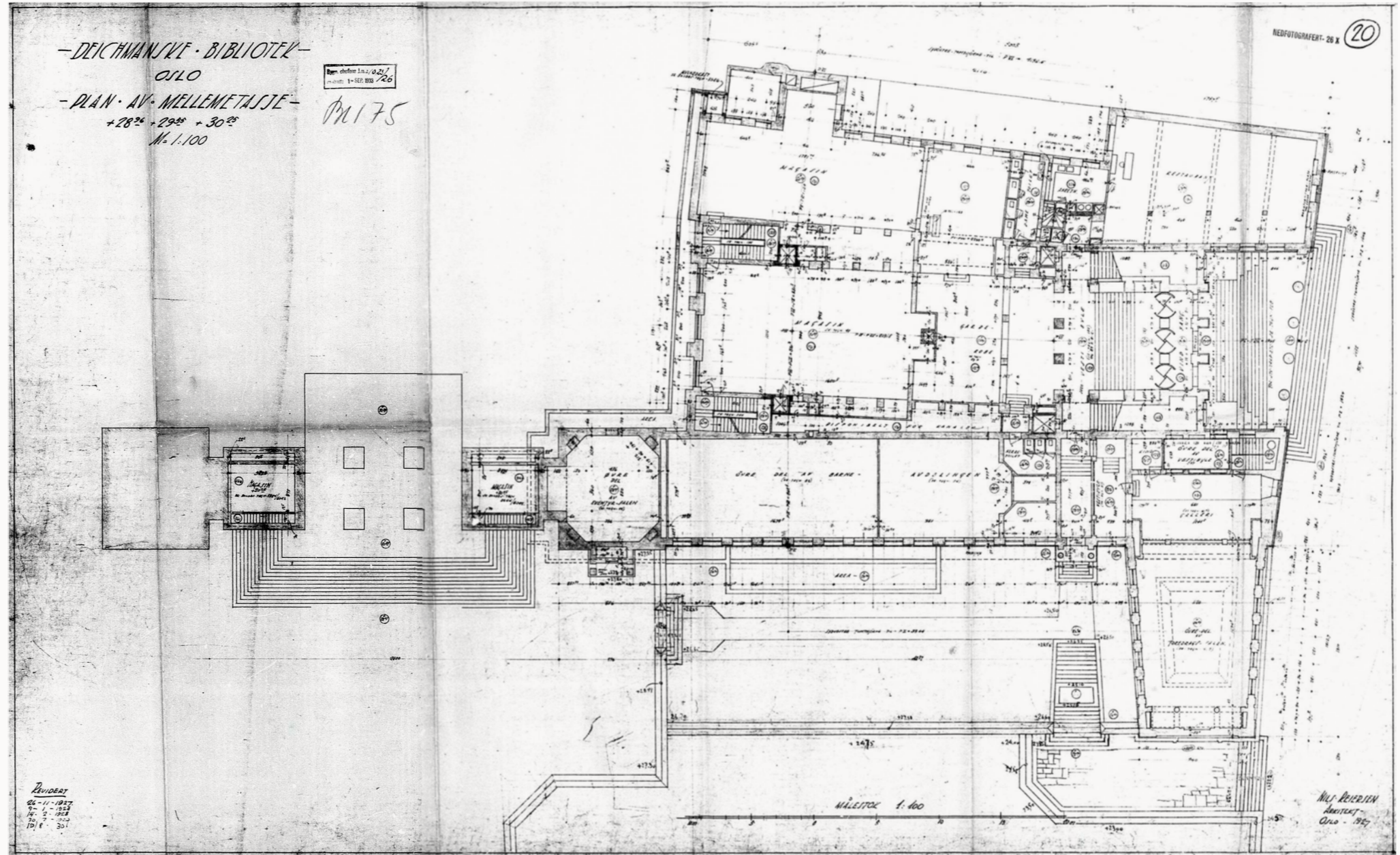
As we look into the beguiling mystery that is the void of information available for the Deichman, we realise that a combination of untimely external factors cast a long, discouraging shadow over the architecture of Nordic Classicism. Information about this rare-breed of modern architecture is severely limited and appreciation of its buildings has been largely relegated to die-hards brave enough to state their case. However, moving forward into the next incarnation of the Deichman's existence, hopefully more of this enigmatic building's rich character comes light. Because, currently, as much as there is a building present, we are still grasping into a void.

Deichman Library
Under construction
1931



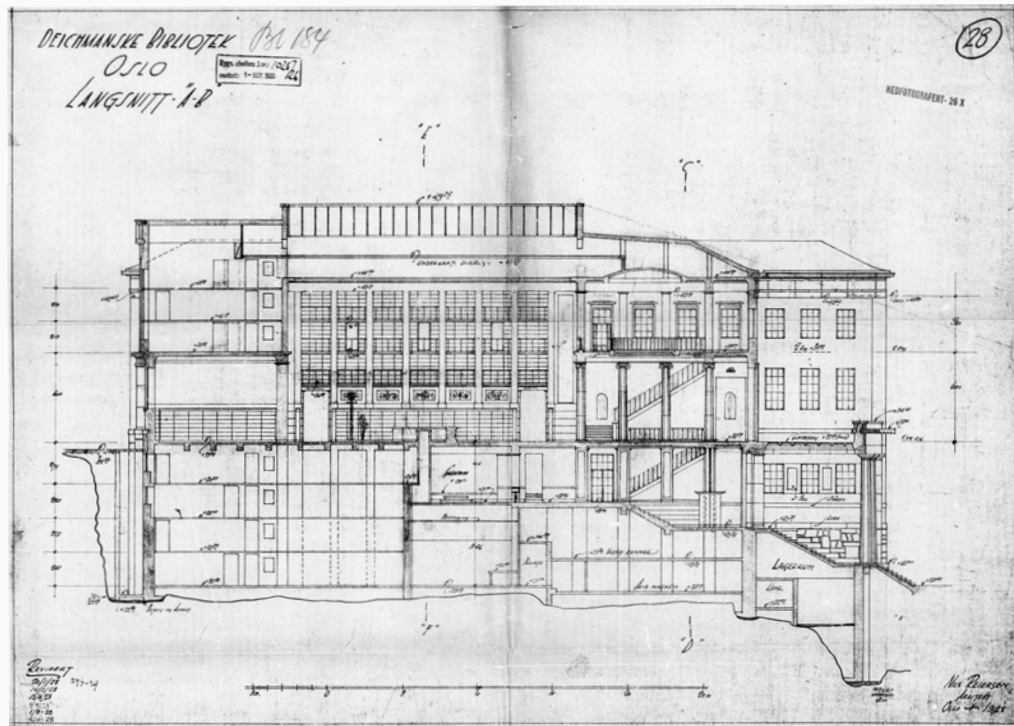
Deichmanske Bibliotek
Nils Reiersen
1926

Ground Level Plan (+29)
& Magasin 4 (+30.29)
1:750

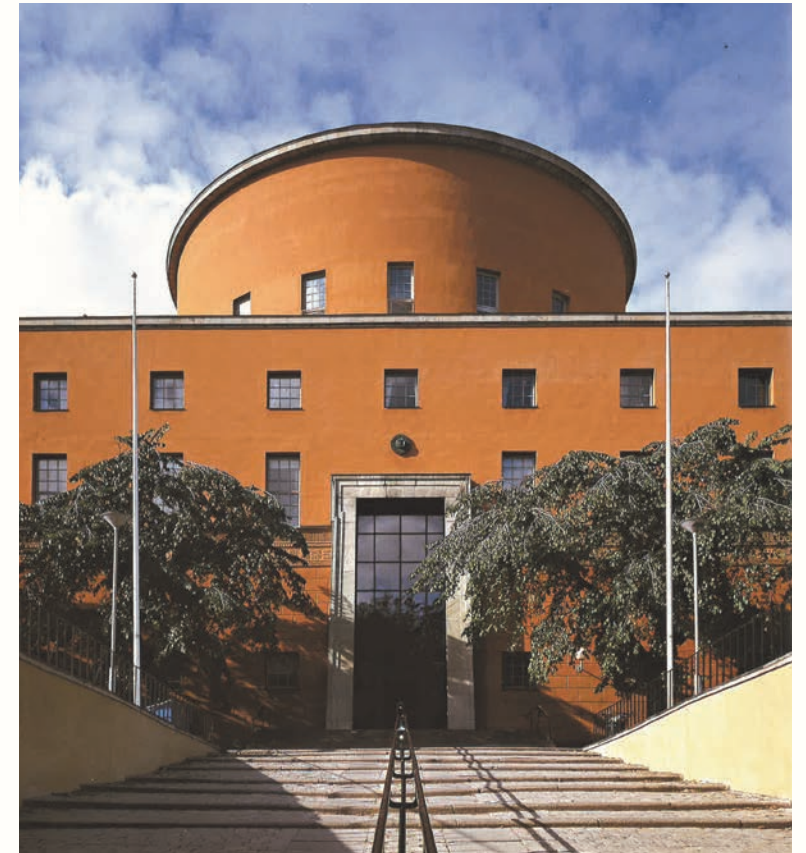


Deichmanske Bibliotek
Nils Reiersen
1926

Long Section
Not to scale



Nordic Classicism:
Gunnar Asplund
Stockholm Public Library
1928



Blakstad & Munthe-Kaas
Arkitekter
Haugesund Town Hall
1931

Hack Kampmann
Copenhagen Police
Headquarters
1922



Albert Speer
Reich Chancellery, Berlin
1938



Giovanni Guerrini,
Ernesto Bruno Lapadula
and Mario Romano
Palazzo della Civiltà
Italiana, EUR
1938-1943



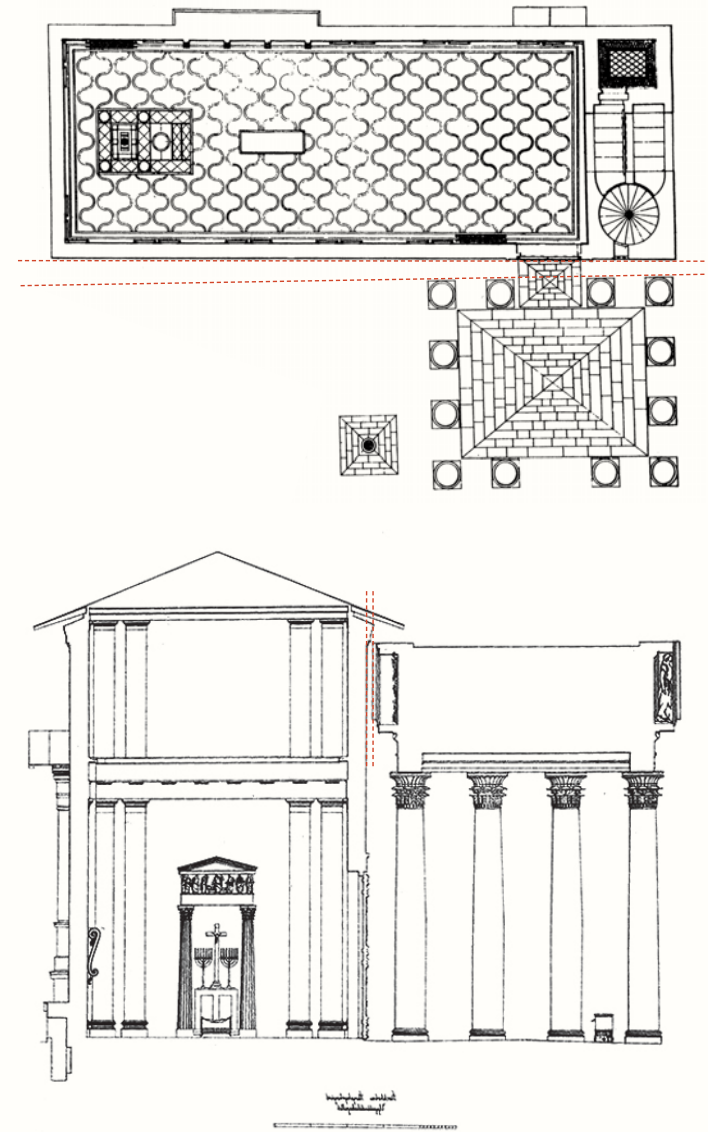
Deichmanske Bibliotek
1:100 plaster model
1935
Permanent Collection
Currently in storage at
the Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo

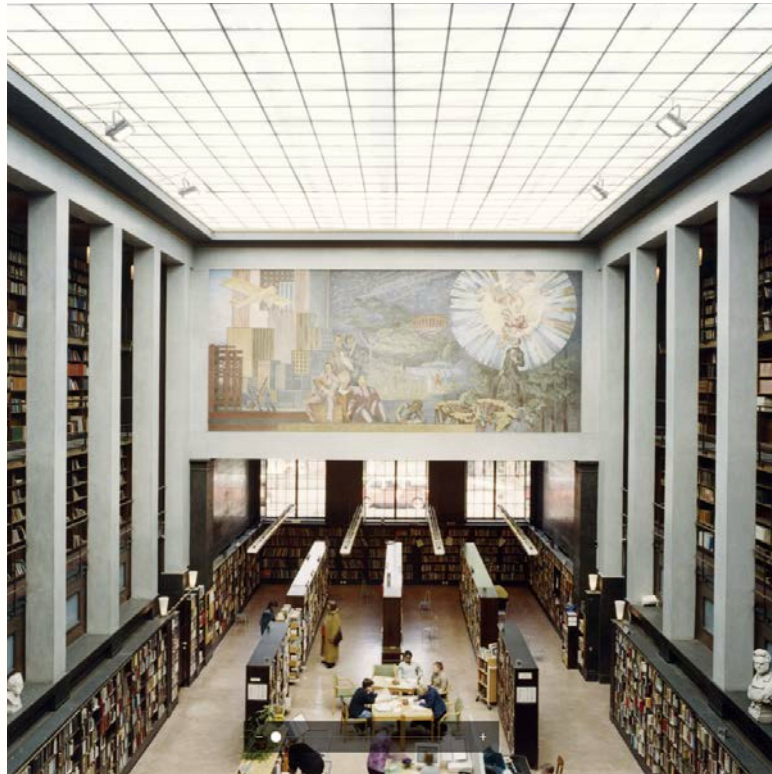


Hammersborg Square
1:200 plaster model
1930
Permanent Collection
Currently in storage at
the Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo



Sigurd Lewerentz
Resurrection Chapel, plan
and section
1925





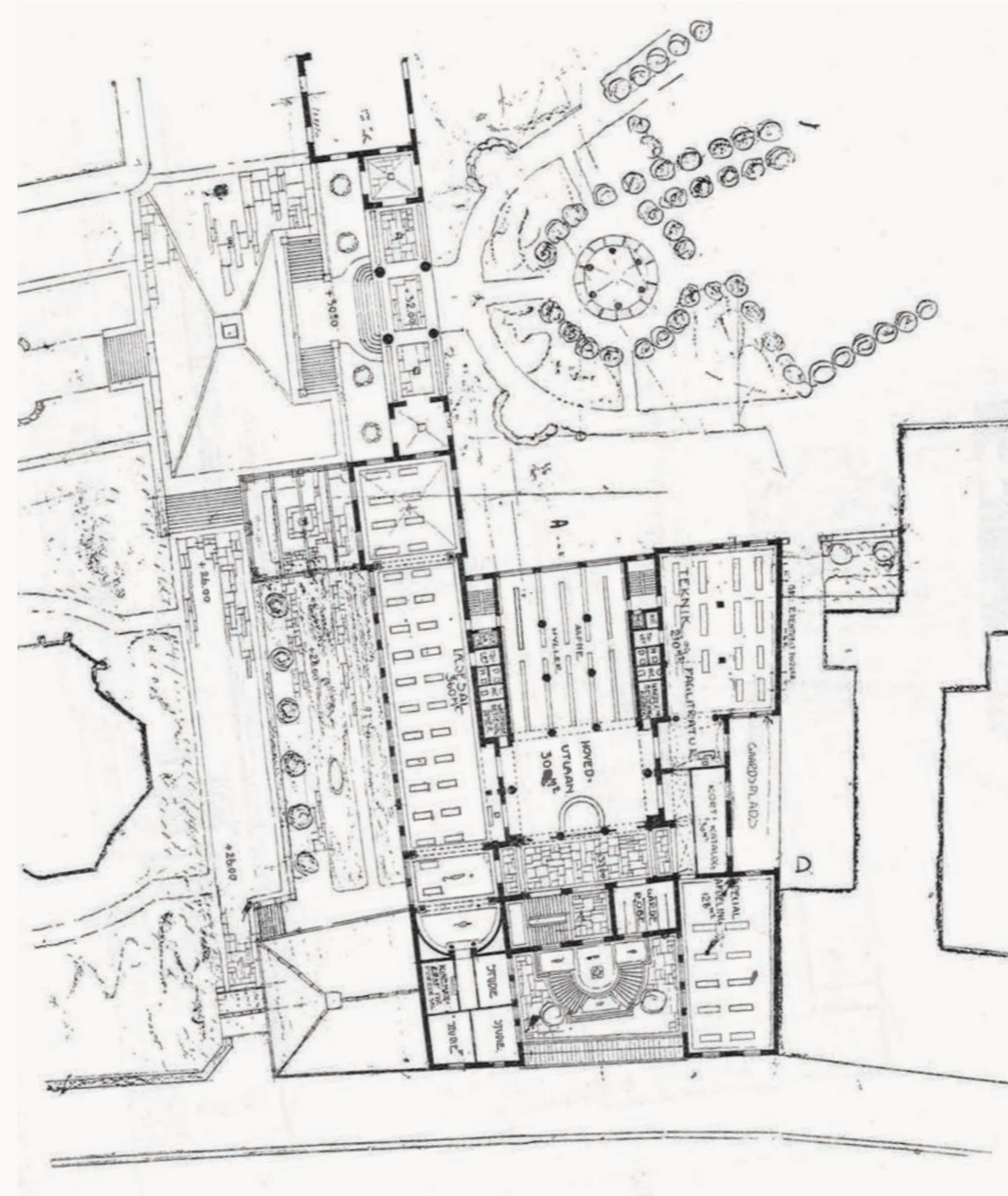
Motto: Ved Monumentparken.

Deichmanske Bibliothek I
Candida Höfer
2000



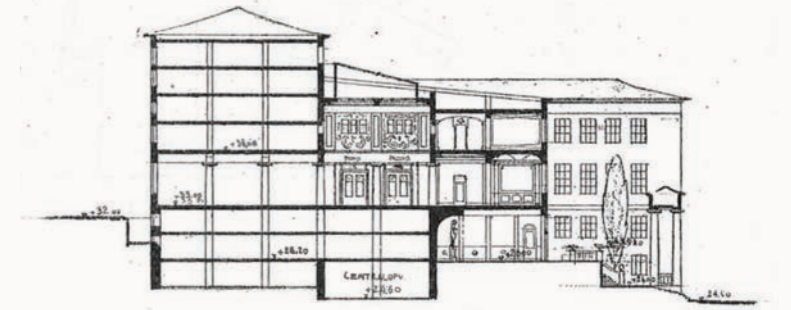
Ved Monumentparken
Nils Reiersen
Deichmanske; successful
competition entry
1921

⊕
1:750

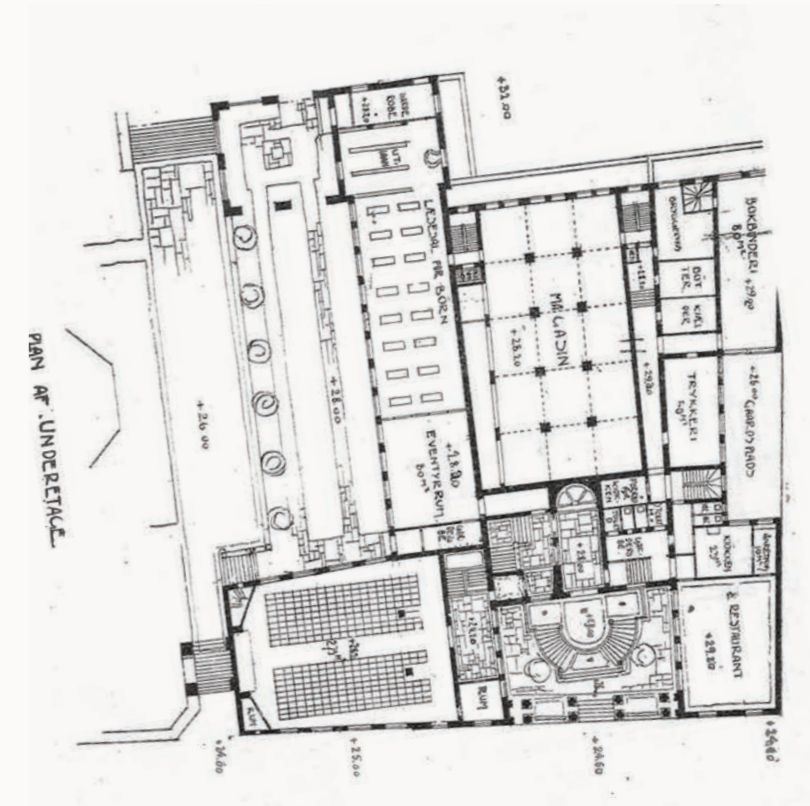


Motto: Ved Monumentparken.

Ground Level Plan



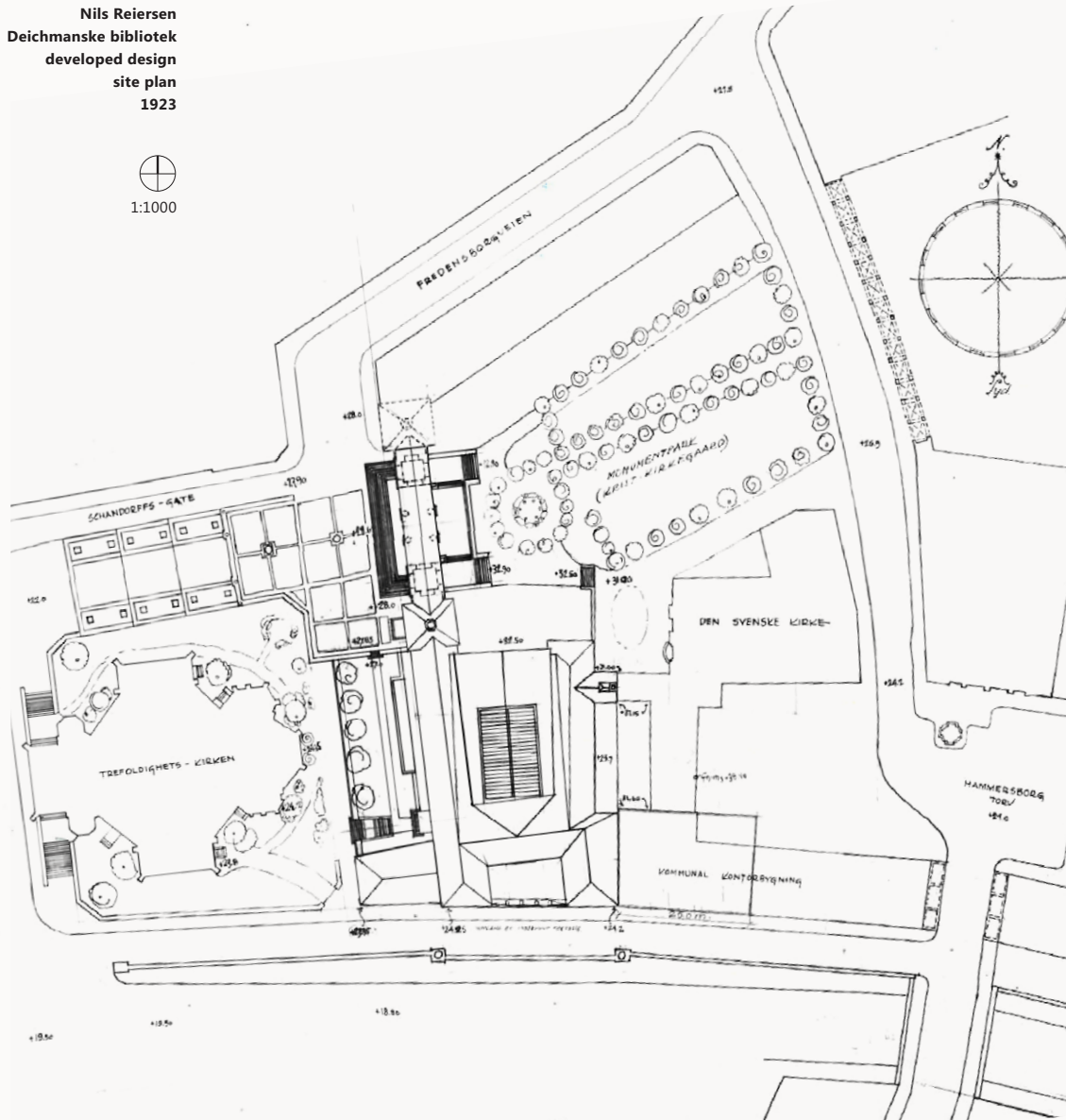
Long Section



First Level Plan

Nils Reiersen
Deichmanske bibliotek
developed design
site plan
1923

1:1000



Endnotes

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4. Bruno Zevi, *The Modern Language of Architecture* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 187.
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13. Karla Britton, *Auguste Perret* (London: Phaidon Press, 2001), 14.
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Image Sources

Cover

#2 Disjunction by Kit Bylett, photographed by Jan Godzimirski.

Introduction

Deichman Plan. Drawn by author.

Ambiguous

Deichman Library - Stair and Columns, Jan Godzimirski; #1 Skewed by Kit Bylett, Jan Godzimirski; #2 Disjunction by Kit Bylett, Jan Godzimirski; Skew Studies, author; *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time*, Angelo Bronzino, Sartle commons; Mannerism timelines, author; Ricetto, Rudolf Wittkower, *Michelangelo's Biblioteca Laurenziana*, 1934; Christ Church Spitalfields, Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction* 1966; Church of Three Crosses, Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction* 1966; Merchant's National Bank, Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction* 1966; Casa Il Girasole, Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction* 1966; Little Hagia, Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction* 1966; Porta Pia, Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction* 1966; Villa Schwob, Francois Burkhardt, *Angelo Mangiarotti: opera completa*, 2010; Palazzo di Propaganda Fide, Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction* 1966, Faborg Museum, Helen Binet, Faborg Museum <http://www.faborgmuseum.dk/en/art-and-artists/carl-petersens-building/>; Resurrection Chapel, Swedish Museum of Architecture, courtesy of Park Books, 1920's, via Arch Daily; Villa Snellman elevation and plan, Stewart Wrede, Erik Gunnar Asplund, 1980; sketches, author.

Modern

Deichman Library -Two Columns, Jan Godzimirski; #3 Tableau by Kit Bylett, Jan Godzimirski; #4 Progression by Kit Bylett, Jan Godzimirski; Pavillion Swisse, James Frazere Stirling, 1954, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture; Jyvaskyla Workers' Club, Alvar Aalto Museo Jyvaskyla, *Architecture by Alvar Aalto 3 The workers' club, Jyväskylä*; Skandia

Cinema interior, Ha bárkit érdekelne, via <http://wergida.tumblr.com/post/110515430559/erik-gunnar-asplund-1885-1940-movie-theater>; Deichman Library - Skew Wall, Jan Godzimirski; Deichman Library - Rear, Jan Godzimirski; Tempietto San Pietro in Montorio, available Web Gallery of Art; Altes Museum interior, Landesdenkmalamt Berlin (Wolfgang Bittner); Christiansborg Palace Church, seier+seier available on Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/seier/2388371618/>; Piazza d'Italia, Terrence McClellan, 2006; Liljevalch Konsthall, Arkitektur-och designcentrum, 1962; Lister Härads Tingshus, via boka-blekinge.se; Stockholm Concert Hall, Fay Edwards, via <https://www.slowtravelstockholm.com/design-architecture/architecture-in-stockholm/>; Rue Franklin, via <http://www.hiddenarchitecture.net/2015/06/rue-franklin-apartments.html>; Wall studies sketches, author; Deichman Library and Y Blokk - A Modern Pair, Jan Godzimirski.

Enigma

Deichman Library - Abrupt End, Jan Godzimirski; #5 Boundaries by Kit Bylett, Jan Godzimirski; Deichman Level One Plan, 1926, Nils Reiersen, courtesy of the Oslo Planning & Building Department; Deichman Section, 1926, Nils Reiersen, courtesy of the Oslo Planning & Building Department; Stockholm Public Library, Peter Blundell Jones, *Gunnar Asplund*, 2006; Haugesund Rådhus, Ragnvald Engebretsen; Copenhagen Police Headquarters, Andrew Cusack; Reich Chancellery, Bryan Finoki on Archinect; Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, Leonardo Case & Stili; Deichman Library 1:100 model, author 2018; Hammersborg Square 1:200 model, author 2018; Resurrection Chapel plan and section, original blueprints 1923, Estudio Previo, accessed <http://www.estudoprevio.net/en/papers/46/dossier-teses-joao-ortigao-ramos--building-a-temple-sigurd-lewertz-three-case-studies>; Deichmanske I, Candida Hofer, 2000, Guggenheim Museum; Ved Monumentparken 1921 Competition drawings, Nils Reiersen, published in *Byggekunst* Nr.5.

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