

G R A D U A L
G R O U N D I N G

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INTRO

What rights up the history of a place?

Zurich's sex cinemas are closing down. Some become a café, like the Kino Sternen in Oerlikon, others stay a cinema, but change the program from adult to children's movies, like the Stüssihof. Others become something like a ruin, a reminiscence of their own, like the Kino Roland on Langstrasse.

But a ruin of what? What produced the Kino Roland?

For this research, the former sex cinema shall be considered a case study to investigate what mechanisms led to its becoming, what it represented and how to move on with such an emblematic building.

The history of a place is persistent and simultaneously its narratives are constantly instrumentalized to keep certain structures in play. By embedding these narratives historically, socially and spatially, can we resist them becoming nostalgic? The question of what influenced its becoming, allows to reflect on the transformations in both architecture and how the narratives around it shaped the public perception over the past centuries. It provides the basis for the discussion about how the cinema could live on, rethought or reused. Simoultaneously, it hints to how buildings with such an emblematic presnce in space become loaded with narratives, which can lead to the building becoming sublimized.

Such cases require a grounding of the overarching topics. This shall allow the places, in this case the cinema, to speak for themselves.

The recent change in landownership in January 2022 makes it ever more so relevant to answer these questions.

How do we move on from here?

PART I: TO APPROACH

On Langstrasse 111 lies the Kino Roland, freestanding, not sharing a wall with any of its neighbors. Wether standing on the Helvetiaplatz, some 50 meters up the street, or coming up from the under-bridge further down the street, the cinema has an important presence in its surrounding. It has a distinct, elongated shape, peeking onto Langstrasse with its short side, where the tall neon-letters reading ROLAND stand out.

For the last years, the Kino Roland was used as an event location, where they held concerts, comedy nights and vernissages. On the 30th of September 2021, one of the last happenings took place in the movie hall of the Kino Roland. The documentary „Cheibe Zürcher“ (2019) by Nicolas Yves Aebi, Christoph Soltmannowski and Sven Prausner, was screened publicly for the last time, a movie consisting of 59 portraits, where former inhabitants, hairdressers, lawyers and other characters talk about the environment they used to work or still work in: Zurich's district Kreis 4.

„Its a different world here. This simply isn't really Zurich. It is a world of its own. And I love it. So motley and... - ah, just great!“

„The last 40 years have been incredibly casual in Kreis 4. But I would say the audience changed over the past 20 years. Some of them died, some moved away.“¹

The movie paints an image of Kreis 4 by showing the various protagonists sharing their stories and anecdotes. Some talk about their childhood memories of watching men walking up to prostitutes, others talk about the heterogeneity they witness in their bar. Or as they describe it on their website:

„People who live or work in the „Chreis Cheib“ tell everyday and not-so-ordinary stories about the most un-Swiss place in Switzerland.“²

The aim of the movie is clearly to portray, not to question or contextualize any of the descriptions given by the protagonists. At the same time, the movie doesn't make any false promises either, in the movie description it says „They all describe why they love their „Chreis Cheib“ so much (...)“.

This approach results in the movie producing a nostalgic and romanticizing image of the Kreis 4, which is reinforced by the decision to show the footage in black-and-white. The images they project are characterized by the district being a former workers-district and therefore showing high percentage of immigrants, which presently is shrinking, its nightlife, alcoholics, prostitutes and other marginalized groups, which however are not called out as such. The intro and ending to the movie furthermore adds 1970s music to the footage, some blend of blues and gospel, creating the illusion that some scenes could have also been taken 50 years

[1] AEBI, Nicolas Yves: „Cheibe Zürcher“ (Movie), Christoph Soltmannowski, 2019

[2] <https://www.cheibezuercher.ch>

ago. Even though the movie doesn't directly raise any questions, it has left me with quite some question marks.

What effect do such narratives, like calling the Kreis 4 the most un-Swiss place in the country, have on our perception of the place? Wouldn't the adjective urban be more accurate to describe what they mean, instead of un-Swiss?

The movie *Cheibe Zürcher* can be read as an example for how easily the uncritical reproduction of stories around a place can result in certain narratives becoming romanticizing and nostalgic. The movie pushes the image of the former workers-district, which underwent the classic stages of gentrification, leering back to the stages before the hype and normalization. While the stories told in the movie undoubtedly correspond to the truth, they lack proper contextualization. Topics and challenges of urban centers like social segregation and the question of how to deal with marginalized groups in the city center are trivialized and the nostalgia resulting from it is misleading.

To some degree the movie manages to deliver the idea of the Kreis 4 as a landscape, where all the mentioned topics are like fields, which overlap, stretch out and border each other. These fields also leap over the edges of the Kreis 4 into other districts. It is important to understand that when talking about city districts, their borders blur and are mainly restricted by physical barriers such as the track field separating Kreis 4 and 5. In order to ground certain topics and narratives, the research shall start from a specific building, a single dot in this landscape, kind of a bottom-up approach, as a means to be able to make suggestions about the material and immaterial environment of Kreis 4.

Among many dots in this landscape, the Kino Roland constitutes one of them. So what rights up the history of the Kino Roland?

To examine this question being means to also understand how the (sex) movie scene in the 1960s and 1970s in Zurich, to which the Kino Roland was exposed to, came about. In this first part I bring together certain innovations in architecture and media, which not only serve as the factual basis for the reading of the Kino Roland, but also constitute specific viewpoints on the topic, what makes them equally subject to discussion. They depict smaller case studies, which lead up to the main study of the Kino Roland.

For that I reference different authors and philosophers, such as Paul B. Preciado and Nicole Kalms, who provide examples for the various transformations over time. The examples they provide will be complemented by isometric and perspective drawings. These CAD drawings serve to understand the functioning of these transformative innovations more profoundly and achieve a deeper knowledge of how they came into being. Nicole Kalms, whose work will be treated more in detail and who herself worked intensively with a series of case studies, puts it in a nutshell with her explanation about how the case studies serve the larger debate and why they deserve our attention:

„Through these case studies, i propose that it is not merely the representation of sex or sexuality that may be problematic but the ways that sexist content is communicated spatially. Therefore, its understanding the sexist contexts, which is the challenge. In a complex composition of multi-modal media infrastructure coupled with a predominantly uncritical approach to sociocultural sexualized norms, hypersexual urbanism requires urgent attention.“³

[3] KALMS, Nicole: *Hypersexual City*, 2017

In order to answer the question „What produced the Kino Roland?“ I will act on the assumption of Kalms that one has to understand the sexist context, in which such buildings and their narratives arise to be able to talk about the presence they have in urban space.

On the Term of the Socially Constructed Sublime

Before diving into the research, I would like to briefly touch on the notion of the „sublime“ and introduce it to the discussion and negotiate its meaning next to the understanding of nostalgia. The word „sublime“ in this context is deducted from Philip Ursprung’s book „Der Wert der Oberfläche“⁴ and his reading of the word. Ursprung is a professor for the history and theory of architecture and art at ETH Zurich. In his understanding, the sublime defines itself through its frightening and fascinating effect on the viewer, its scale that eludes the one of the human and by that blurs the boundary line between the human and inhuman and oscillates between the two.

What underlies the sublime, is its aestheticizing effect on the viewer, or as Ursprung puts it in his lecture: „Aestheticizing the potentially dangerous is the sublime“. In his theory, he distinguishes between the natural and the artificial sublime. The natural sublime manifests itself in for example a waterfall or a looming storm, which are both distant enough to grasp its force, but presently do not threaten the viewer. As an example for the artificial sublime, he names the photographs of Bernd and Hilla Becher who portrayed the vast abandoned industrial sites in Germany’s Ruhrgebiet. Ursprung shares his observations of how the aesthetic sublimation through the photographs of the ruined industrial sites, such as the Ruhrgebiet in Germany, disguises the formerly or still prevailing structures of power. For his argument, he cites 18th century philosopher Edmund Burke: „I know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power.“⁵ According to Ignasi Sola y Morales it also the inner conflict that fascinates us about a terrain vague or in our case the Kino Roland. It is worth pointing out that through this process of aesthetication, a naturalization of these phenomena is the consequence. This naturalization is what then acts as a veil for the object, cloaking the history that determined its shape and eventually produced it.

I would like to tie in with this reading of the concept of the sublime. Within the categorization of the artificial sublime, which according to Ursprung is described through the portrayal of vast industrial or military sites, the impressionist drawings of early industrialism or human interventions in the landscape such as works belonging to Land Art, the term of the „socially constructed sublime“ shall be introduced. Ursprung stresses that the sublime is only encountered if there is a certain physical distance between subject and object, as with the examples of the waterfall or the looming storm, which are far enough to not do actual harm, but close enough to feel its force. The same applies to the socially constructed sublime. In her lecture „To Heat By Melting“ Petra Van Brabandt⁶ brings up an other example, where she examines biblical paintings from the 17th century showing scenes of violence. She explains how they are experienced as beautiful or erotic, even though they scenes of horror, because of their composition. This as well is a from of normalization due to aesthetic sublimation.

[4] URSPRUNG, Philip: „Der Wert der Oberfläche“, 2017

[5] BURKE, Edmund: „A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful“, Oxford University Press, 1990

[6] VAN BRABANDT, Petra: „To Heat By Melting“ (Lecture), 2018

The Kino Roland is surrounded by narratives which tell an aesthetized story the legendary sex cinema on Langstrasse. This process of aestheticizing the cinema’s history and present being is only possible by keeping the required distance to it. The constructed image is accepted and functions as long as it doesn’t move too close to the viewer and starts to pose some sort of threat. Therefore, the process of aesthetization, is fueled by movies like for example Cheibe Zürcher. The nostalgia we feel towards such reproductions of narratives arises from this very sublimation. The decision to build the movie around exclusively the positive aspects of the Kreis 4, is equivalent to making a step back and looking at the object from a distance. Because from a distance the object can be abstracted and reduced to its socially constructed sublime appearance.

Interestingly, most of the people whom I interviewed and asked questions about Kino Roland, quickly started talking about Langstrasse and the area on a more general level. Again and again I tried to bring them back to my main point of interest, the cinema. It wasn’t until I spoke to Mitch Bekk, a neighbor living right above the cinema, who grinned at me and said: The Kino Roland is Langstrasse’s number one witness. People tend to project their perceptions of a place to what catches their eye the most.

I started to ask myself if not this very circumstance wasn’t the main driver for the current perception of the building, as one which has risen to an emblem of its area and in way was also celebrated as such.

In the context of sex cinemas, sexual imagery and pornography, the history of aestheticizing, sublimation and naturalizing these phenomena goes back to earlier examples. What we observe today with movies like Cheibe Zürcher or contemporary depictions of sex cinemas, is to be read as part of a chain that goes back to discussions about state brothels in the 18th century, the first Playboy issue in 1952 and the the emergence of the peep-arcades and peep-shows in the 1960s and 1970s. All of them, each one in its their very own logic, contributed to the aesthetic sublimation we can observe today.

Definition and differentiation

For the following chapters I will take the Kino Roland as a baseline to investigate the topics and themes that surround it. For that it is important to define certain terms and the way they are used in the context of this research.

Modern Pornography

There is no definite answer to the question of where the origin of pornography lies. Many texts claim to have an answer because of some early finds dating back to ancient or even prehistoric times. I ask myself if it is worth asking the question of origin, when the meaning since then transformed into something so fundamentally different. „Pornography“ is coined from the greek word „porne“, prostitute, and „graphein“, writing, which translates to „the writings about prostitutes“. Since history hasn't brought up any new terms to describe the different facets of pornography and the fields they are active in, I will try to define how pornography is to be understood in the context of this project.

When writing about pornography, I am referring to „modern pornography“, which, this is my assumption, develops itself in the Cold War period from the 1950s onwards. The main differences of this modern form, in comparison to the previous ones, is summed up in the way the content is produced, how it is distributed and under what conditions and circumstances the content is consumed. When looking at these changes, my interest lies in the field of architecture, urbanism and space-making. Meaning, that I am investigating what kind of architectural figures modern pornography produced to understand what followed afterwards. It is as a suggestion for an urban topology, a topos for the reading of spaces that derive from the history of modern pornography. Of course it would be wrong to draw a separating line definitely. This is why I will widen the context at some points again, to blur the borders and open it to topics like sex-work and the question of what eroticism is. However all topics are coined to the physical manifestation of an architecture in urban space.

PART II: TO GROUND

Playboy-Architecture: Three deductions on post-domesticity

In his book „Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboy’s Architecture and Biopolitics“ the Spanish philosopher and theoretician Paul B. Preciado takes on the Playboy Magazine as a sort of laboratory, to investigate how it became the multimedia machinery to produce a new understanding of the domestic, public, sexuality and pornography. The founder of the Playboy Hugh Hefner was certainly a forerunner in rethinking and reproducing these models through Playboy magazine he founded, which used the new forms of communication at the time to produce a new image of a post-domesticity and post-domestic masculinity. For the following chapter, Preciado’s book will serve as a basis to elaborate on certain inventions and developments, which are related to the context of Zurich and the Kino Roland.

The term Playboy-Architecture was first used by Siegfried Giedion and quoted by (then) Beatrice Preciado in his book „Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboy’s Architecture and Biopolitics“ to describe a superficiality and ephemerality in architecture, which he relates to the alteration of pornography to a product of mass consumption and its attack on the traditional relations between gender, sex and architecture.

„A kind of playboy-architecture became en vogue: an architecture treated as playboys treat life, jumping from one sensation to another and quickly bored with everything. I have no doubt that this fashion born out of an inner uncertainty will soon be obsolete; but its effects can be rather dangerous, because of the worldwide influence of the United States.“⁷

In his book, Preciado manages to draw a line from the first issue of the Playboy issued in 1953 to today’s multimedia-based reality of pornography and sexual imagery. There are three crucial developments on this line, which I will point out, since they are relevant for the Kino Roland too.

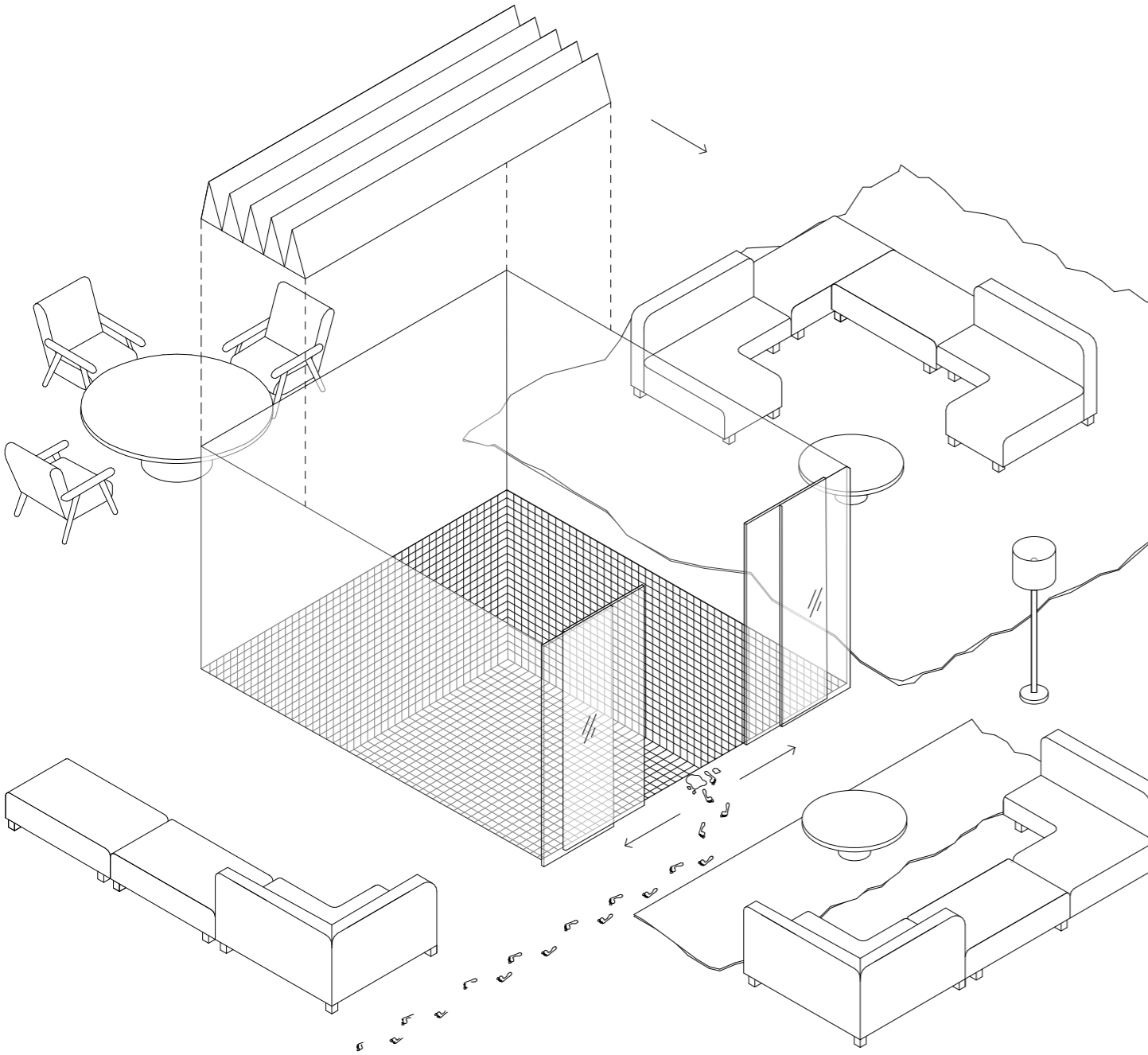
Firstly, there was a change in the social conditions, under which sexuality was being consumed. Preciado picks up on the example of the emergence of stag films, short sex films that were shot in black and white. Stag films were not only explicitly produced for men, but also consumed solely by men. However, men wouldn’t consume these films isolated, but together with other men in some sort of a social event. It is important to mention that when talking about men in this context, only heterosexual white men are addressed, since this was the audience the magazine imagined. This

homoerotic setting, as The Playboy puts it in one of their issues, revealed how men could feel lust also in absence of the women or in fact, feel even more lust than when women were around. From there, Preciado deduces his premise that the homoerotic consumption of sexual imagery, outruns sexual lust in intensity. This sudden turn in what was satisfactory to one’s personal sexual desires was only possible because the magazine opened up a new realm. The photographs were exclusively shot in interiors, what allowed readers to gaze into a room, which up until then was completely private: the domestic household. This new access marks an important change for the understanding of how pornography is consumed today.

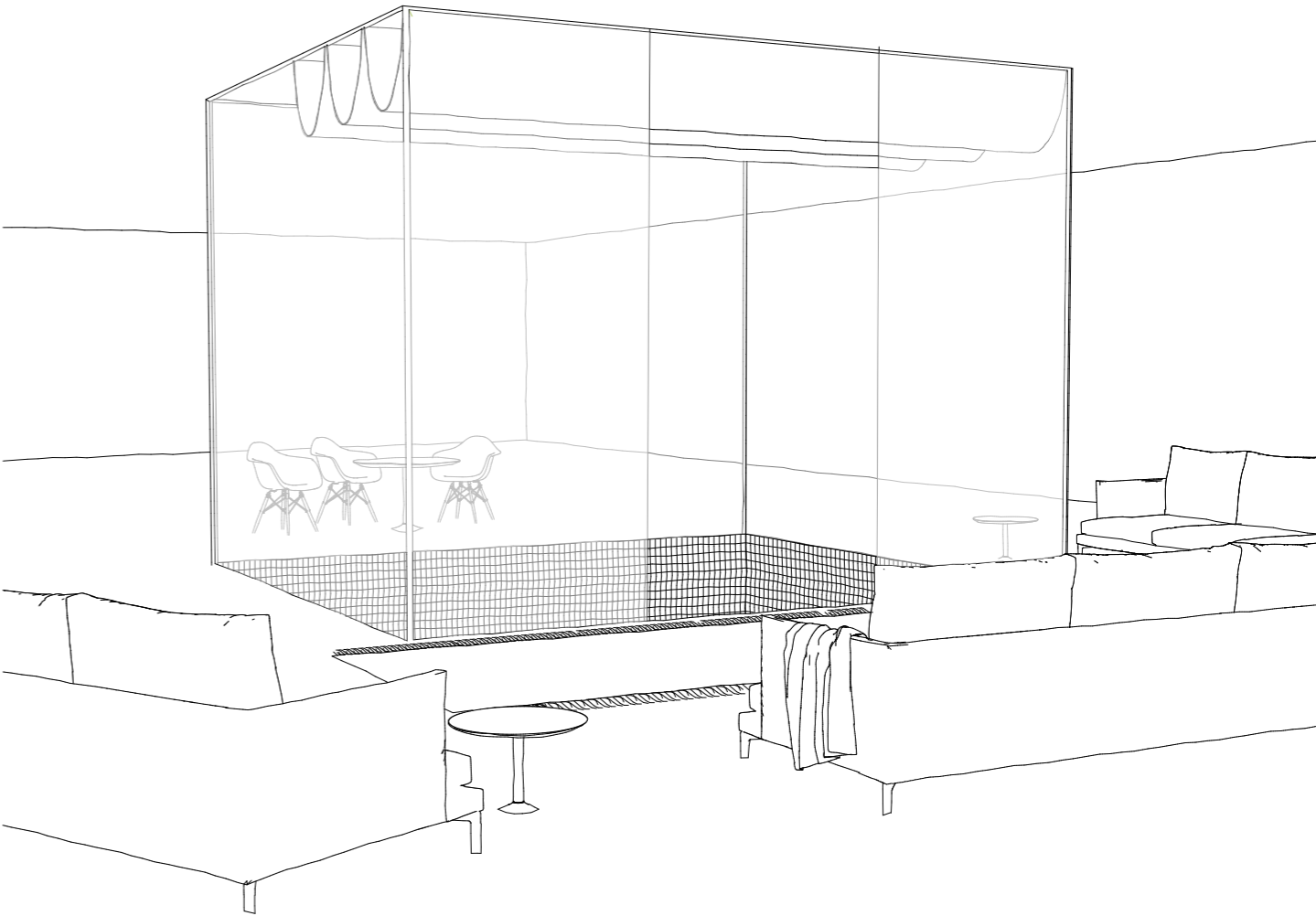
The Playboy was engaged in entitling men the access to the domestic realm, which in the post-war years of the 1950s was connoted with the women. This time was generally marked by strong binary oppositions both in architecture and society: interior vs. exterior, private vs. public, work vs. household, male vs. female. It was this opposition the Playboy was targeting to gain access to the interior. However, the magazines influence largely contributed to the establishment of gendered spaces, even though it tried to blur the boundaries of interior and exterior. It led to the second development I want to mention: the eroticization of the domestic. The Playboy not only openly questioned, but declaring the traditional, nuclear post-war family as outdated and proposed its own new imagery of post-domestic space. The Playboy knew to use the new technology at the time, new forms of media of telecommunication, to directly project its imagery of the post-domestic into the living rooms of the suburban, heterosexual family. The Playboy conceded the right to the domestic for men and started to produce a new interiority, adjusted to the needs of the playboy. The eroticization of the domestic manifests itself most prominently in the playboy mansions. Judging from today, the mansions served as multimedia factories. The mansion consisted of spaces that functioned for living, working, as studio spaces for TV shooting and spaces for sex. They are the pivot point to the whole cosmos that The Playboy opened up.

The villa I want to look into is one, that only served as an inspiration for a Playboy-Villa, that was formerly projected in Chicago. It is the single-house of Hefner’s friend Harold Chaskin in Miami, where in 1959 a photo series was shot for the Playboy. The center of the house consisted of an indoor-pool, separated through sliding walls out of glass, able of transforming the living-room into one big zone of pleasure. The layout represented a domestic peep-show, where guests were able to watch wo-

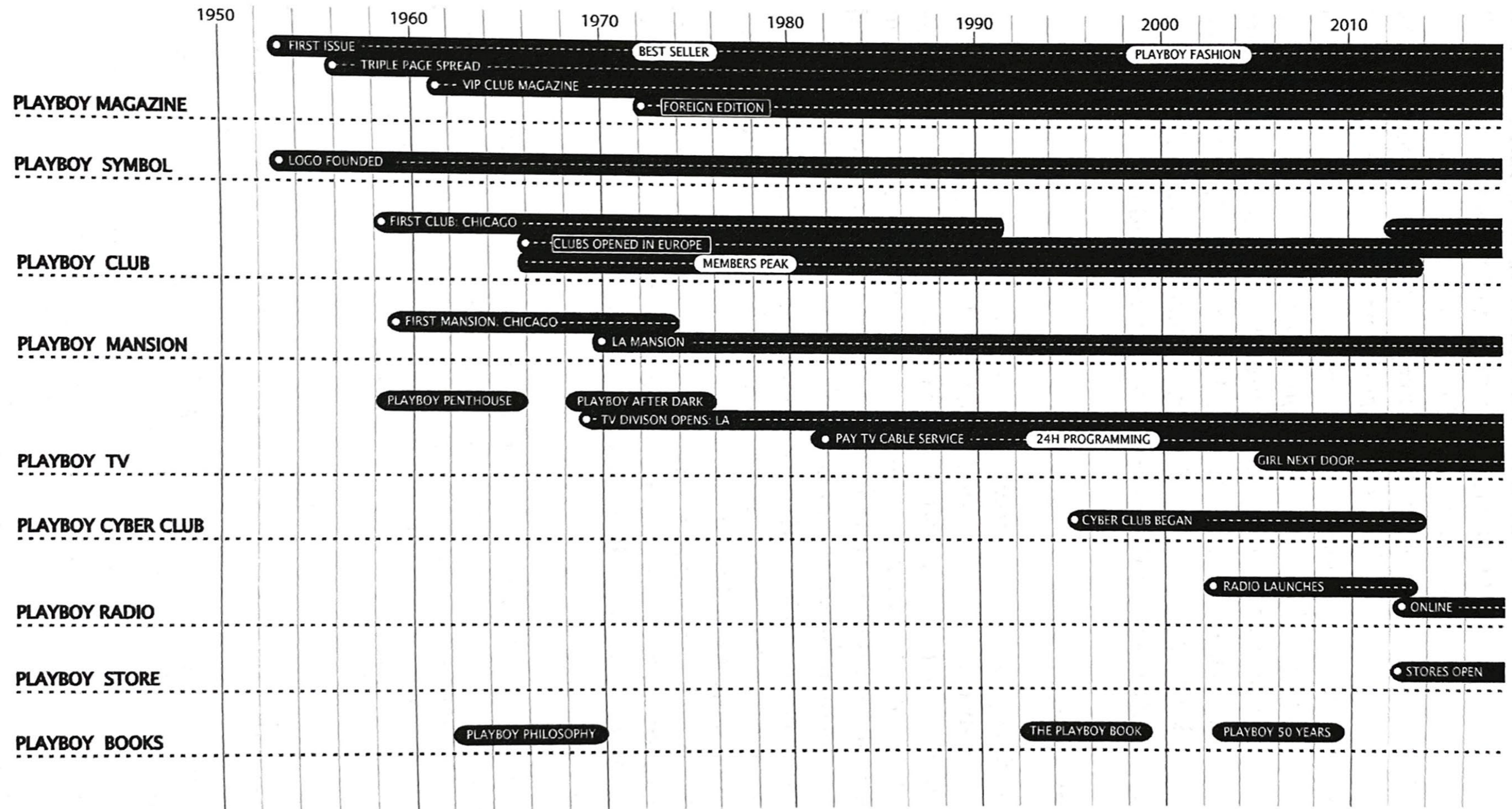
[7] PRECIADO, Beatrice, „Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboy’s Architecture and Biopolitics“, 2012



Chaskin's Pool
1:100



Chaskin's Pool
Perspective Drawing



men half naked in the pool, while not getting wet themselves. The readers of the magazine found themselves in the position of a voyeur, peeking through the magazine into the private rooms of Chaskins living room.

The immense success of the May 1959 issue convinced Hefner that, to his new readership, there was nothing more appealing than diving into a stranger's private, virtual interior space. Shortly after Hefner commissioned architect Donald Jaye for a three-story high house in Chicago, following the example of Chaskin's house. The proposal was never realized, but was described by Preciado as if „The blunt interiority (of the house) transformed itself into a pornographic object par excellence.“⁸ The visions of the house are well documented and show all of Hefner's most notable ideas for a Playboy's House, such as „The Round Bed“ and an adapted version of Chaskin's indoor pool.

This new form of lust, consumed solely through sexual imagery makes the third point. Hefner gained his reputation as „the inventor of pornography“ through a, judging today, simple invention. The second magazine was published in 1953 and contained an image Marilyn Monroe, laying naked on a red blanket. It wasn't necessarily the fact that she was already famous as a movie actress by the time the issue was published, but the fact that the photograph was printed as poster, meant to be taken out of the magazine and hung up. This heralded a new era of the consumption of imagery in general. Suddenly, sexual imagery was portable, could be hung up in public spaces and disrupt them. Hefner was conscious of the the possibilities of industrially reproducible visual information, able the serve him and his ideas he pushed through the Playboy.

This new from of consumption, be it through a stag film or a Playboy magazine, fueled what had already been known as voyeurism: The manly lust to see without being seen. The magazine puts its readers, who, as openly stated, are men only, just as the stag films, in a voyeuristic position. It is the position from where they can, as if looking through a peephole, enter a room, which up until then has been private. The newly gained access to the interior realm, physically and mentally, constitutes the first step towards modern pornography.

This phenomena and the success of the Playboy is deeply embedded into the context of the post-war period in the United States. As Preciado writes, one can characterize the postwar years as a period of expansion and consolidation of an ensemble of norming, both gender and sexual. The single family home and the idea of the nuclear family were already entities successful in strengthening the image heterosexual white family. The Playboy therefore had to find a way, how to at the same time relate to

[8] PRECIADO, Beatrix, „*Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboy's Architecture and Biopolitics*“, 2012

[9] *The era of his mandate is known as McCarthyism. It is characterized by anticomunism, the prosecution of alleged communists and conspiracy theories.*

the dominant logics of consumerism and still disrupt the domestic realm, without raising any suspicion of being called out as un-American, which was reality during Joseph McCarthy's time as senator.⁹

The Peep Arcade

The '59 issue shot at Chaskin's house laid the ground stone for the uprise of peep-arcades and peep-shows in the 1960s. After the product of sexuality proved itself to the market, it was the media that transmitted the product that changed. In a straight line, the image of Marilyn Monroe sold in the magazine transitioned to short film loops and later on to actual movies.

The descriptions by Amy Herzog in her text „Architectures of Exchange, Feminism, Public Space, and the Politics of Vulnerability“ (2015)⁹ are quite revealing to contextualize the architecture of the pornographic arcade and how it significantly contributed to the commodification of sexuality.

Centre to the uprise of the arcade was New York and an invention by Martin Hodas. Hodas was initially a vending machine servicer who rebuilt his jukebox-like machines to play short film clips, instead of tunes. He would then go on and place his film-arcades in movie stores or adult book stores, where he would play soft- and hardcore explicit pornographic films. Apparently, for his first machine he was told I was broken, just to find out that it had simply jammed after it was stuffed to the top with quarters. He quickly became known as „The King of the Peeps“. This is a narrative completely specific to New York and part of a larger transformation of the urban pornographic marketplace, a transformation reverberating across North America, Europe, and Asia, as evidenced by the proliferation of well-demarcated red-light districts with peep arcades, explicit book and media shops, and adult film theaters in cities around the world.

These vending machine-like peep arcades often had pictures of interiors on their front with a women posing in it. Through the peep hole that reaches out of the machine like blinkers and reminds of pilot glasses one can see the shorts that are being played.

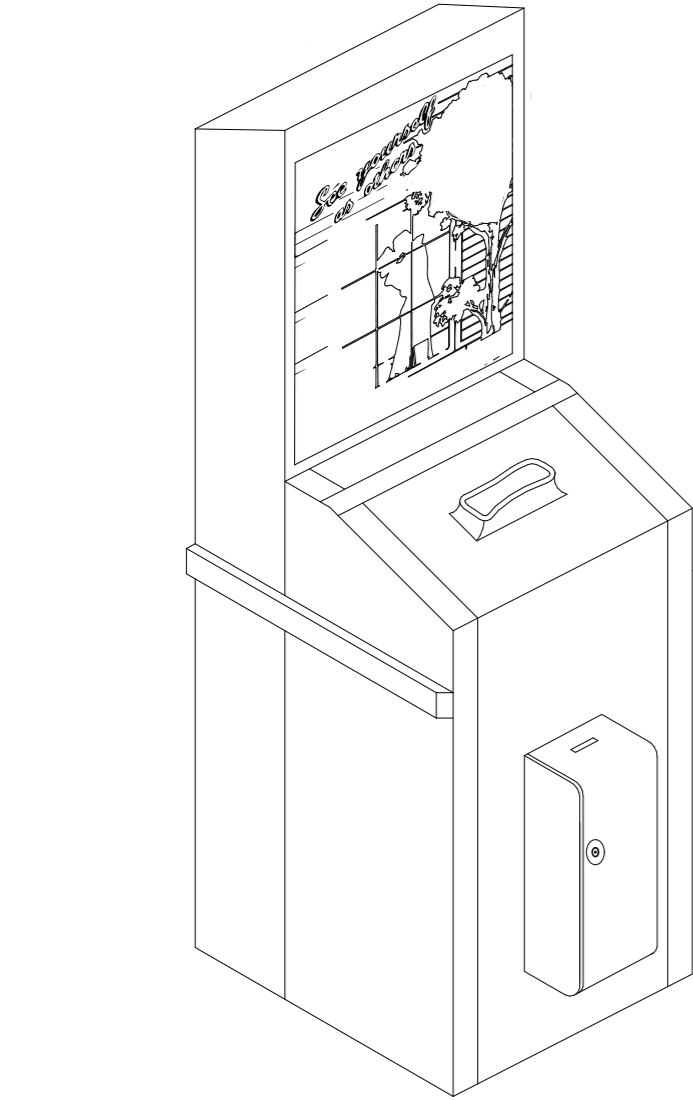
Vulnerability

What makes her text so telling is that next to the exploitative reality of the sex-arcades she also names the potential of them, the potential the have to be hijacked, coopted by other usages and user groups to upend existing economies and structures. For her, the key characteristic to the arcade is rather the vulnerabilities than the voyeurism. Vulnerabilities are the entity that govern the interactions within the arcade. Or in her own words:

„The public performance of these rituals, and their potential subversion through acts of unsanctioned sexual exchange, renders the arcade a charged space of mutual vulnerability where patrons are on display for one another, each one a potential partner or potential threat, depending on one's desires or anxieties.“¹⁰

[9] HERZOG, Amy: „*Architectures of Exchange, Feminism, Public Space, and the Politics of Vulnerability*“, 2015

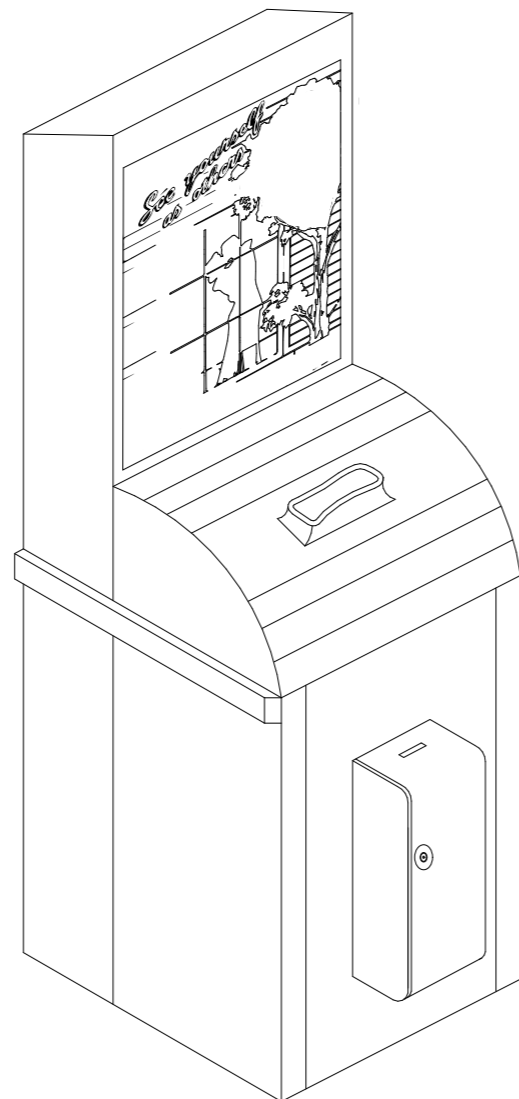
[10] HERZOG, Amy: „*Architectures of Exchange, Feminism, Public Space, and the Politics of Vulnerability*“, 2015



AS
OTHERS

The Peep Arcade

SEE
YOURSELF



The mutual vulnerability Herzog writes about, derives from the social risk of being seen, of putting ones personal desires on display or even risking to become someone else's object of desire. The mutuality of these ephemeral encounters is what makes them anonymous and tense at the same time. This used to be a reality inherent to the interior layout and circulation of the Kino Roland as well. For both the ground floor and the balcony floor there was an entrance and an exit. The staircase leading would even have a stop sign to prevent someone taking the wrong staircase and possibly waling into a stranger face-to-face. This sort of circulation allowed patrons to move through the cinema without recognizing anyone they wouldn't expect or have to fear to be oneself recognized. One would merely look at the back of whoever is in front. And one would obviously never turn around and look back, not inside and not after leaving the cinema.

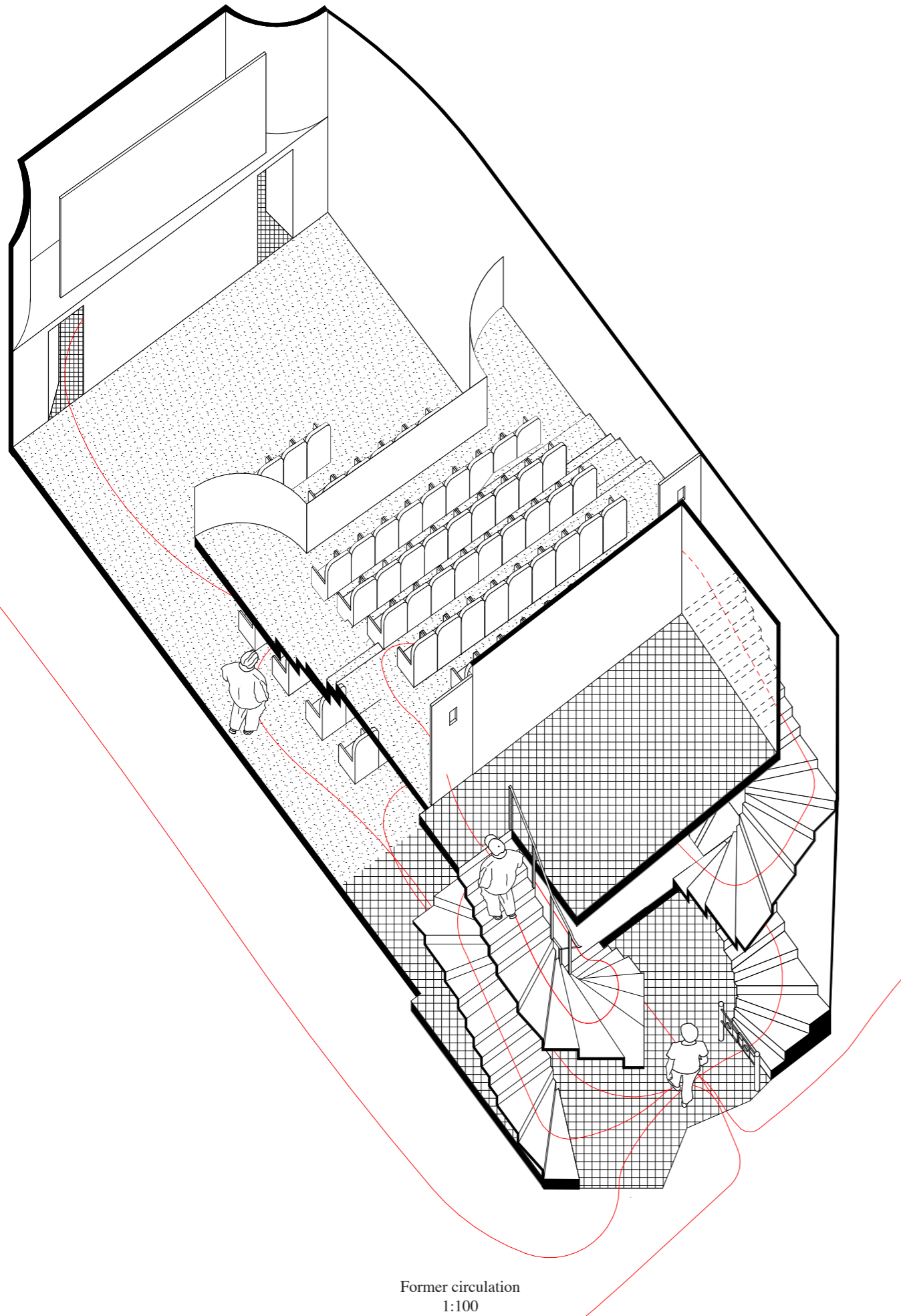
The (market)place of sexual exchange, manifested in forms of the sex-arcade or a porn theater, accommodated a range of other interactions. Primarily, the arcades were about the profitable sale of heterosexually oriented media. The ancillary practices that rose from these places, generated through various affects, range from prostitution, drug dealing and cruising. According to Herzog this variety of affects led to some effects coinciding with heteronormative economy of this places, others however completely diverting from the connection between affect and monetary exchange.

Herzog brings in the theory by French Philosopher Michel Foucault on heterotopic spaces to further examine the arcades. In this context, heterotopic spaces are to be understood as locatable utopias, provisional and ephemeral spaces. They constitute a coincidence of places which usually wouldn't coincide. Since the pornographic arcade is a real space structured solely around sexual fantasies and desires, it constitutes some form of heterotopic space. This classification attributes the arcade new qualities. Even considering the oppressive economic logics behind the sex arcades, the ancillary practices that were mentioned before architecture prove that they allow for more. The architecture of the arcade allows for playful subversion, as for example queer cruising or free public sex.

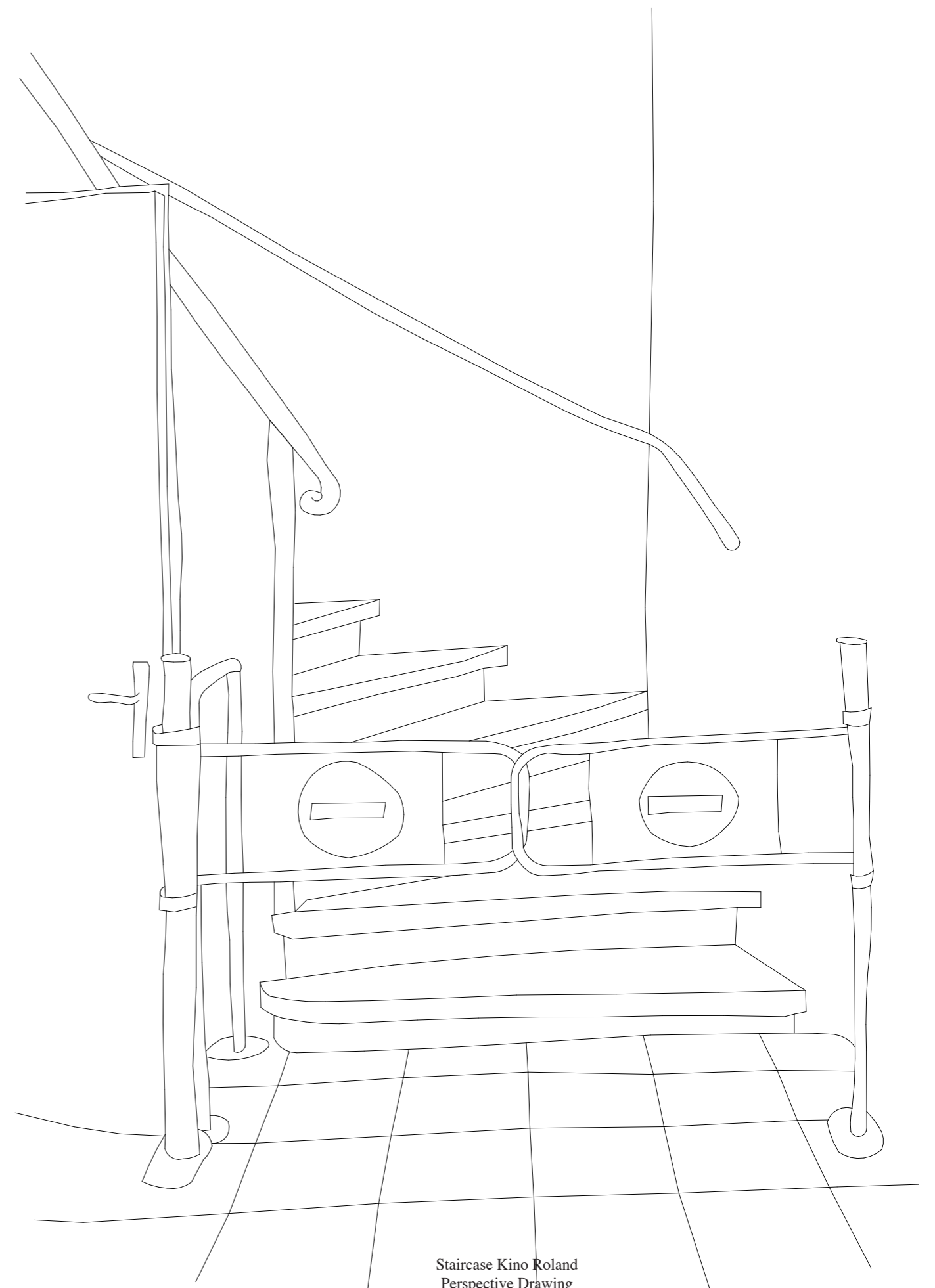
Her text examines both the exploitive economic logics and the subversive spatial qualities of the sex arcade. She identifies vulnerability and risk being central to the reality of the arcades users. To some extent her text advocates for vulnerability and risk bearing the potential to provide political strategies to negotiate agency over a place and shifts in groups of users. By preferring vulnerability and risk as the dominant forces driving a space to comfort, she manages to turn the issue of the sex-arcades towards the discussion about queer space making.

Stüzli-Sex

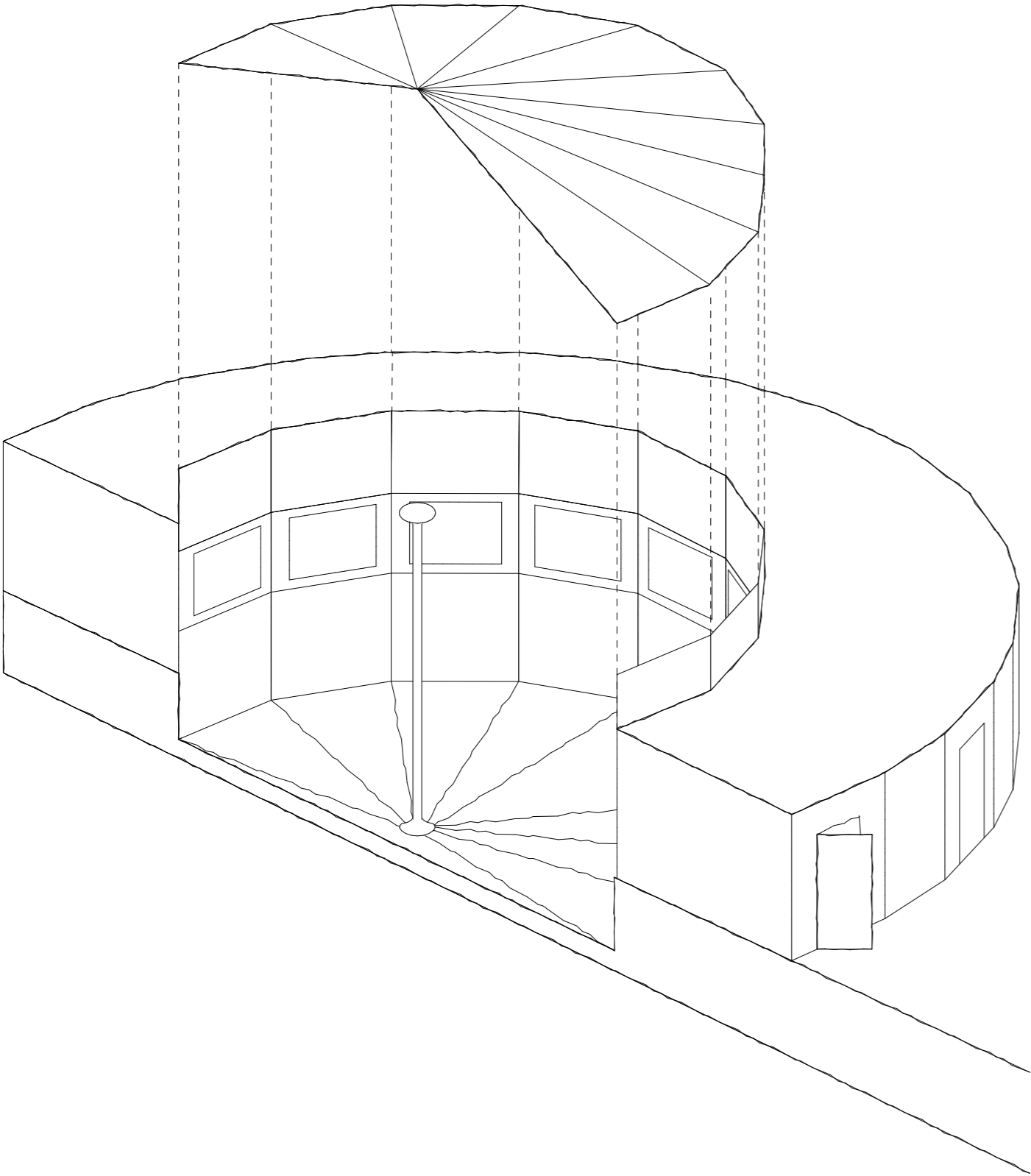
Zurich experienced reproductions of the sex-arcade too. In the late 1960s Gotthard Müller (mostly called Gody) invented the Stützli-Sex. He



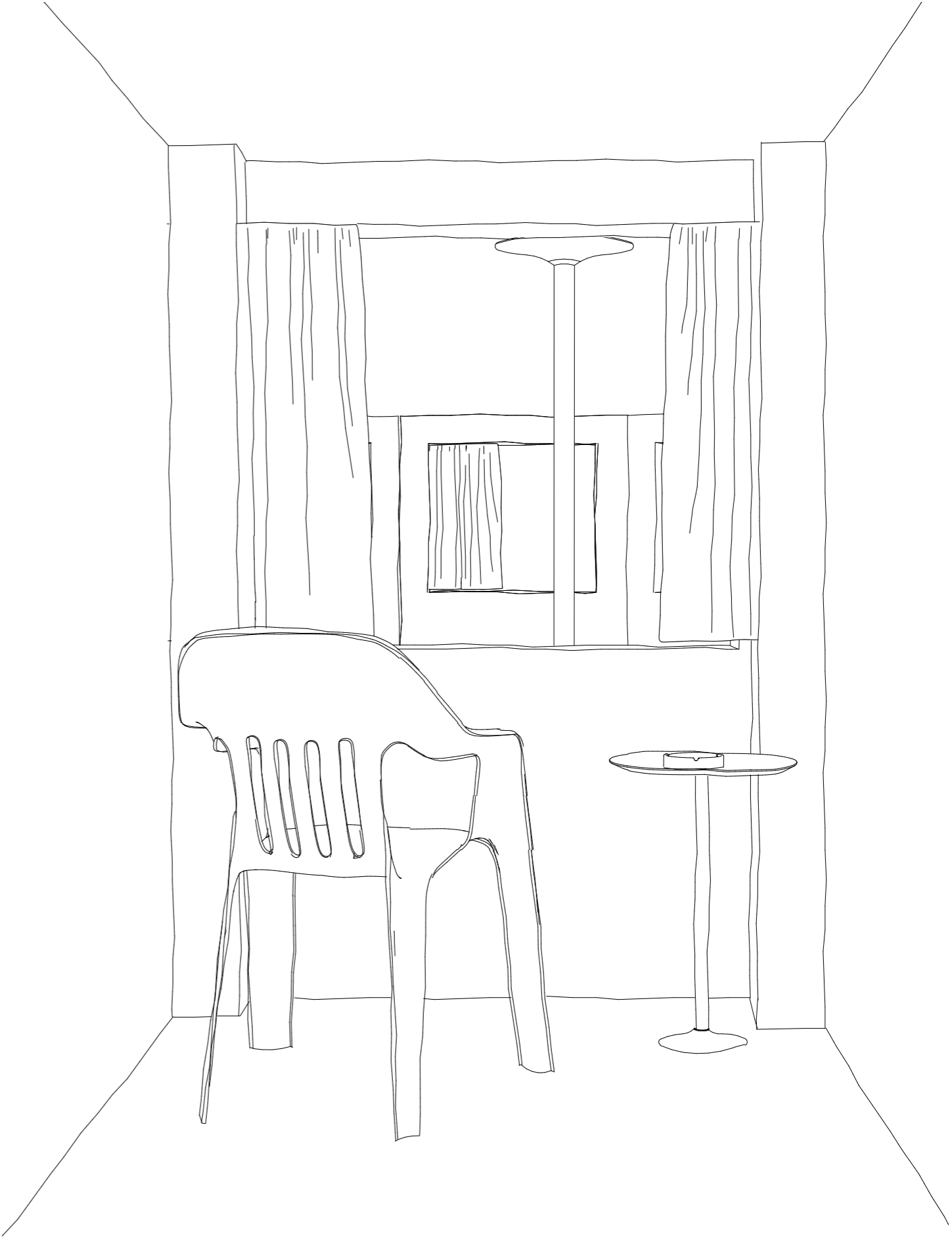
Former circulation
1:100



Staircase Kino Roland
Perspective Drawing



Stützli-Sex Cabin
1:50



Stützli-Sex Cabin
Perspective Drawing

inherited the property at Brauerstrasse 33, just a few meters away from the Kino Roland, and converted into a, for Zurich, new from of peep-show, which he called Stützli-Sex. The name derives from the Swiss-German word Stutz meaning 1 Swiss Frank, which is the minimum amount one has to spend. The spatial layout was simple: A circularly shaped room with a stripper in the middle and single-person cabins distributed around it. Inside such a cabin, one had insert a coin, a Stutz, to watch a stripper for 30 seconds, before the shutter would come down again. The cabins were slightly elevated and had one-sided mirrored glass, which guaranteed the viewers absolute anonymity. By that, the Stützli-Sex constitutes another architecture of the arcade, site-specific for Zurich and the Kreis 4.

New Rating Systems

Sex films are gaining social acceptance

Among the byproducts such as the peep/sex-arcade, the professionalization of the sex film industry can be read as another consequence to the uprising and disruptions in domestic and multimedia space initiated by Hugh Hefner and his magazine the Playboy. Preciado gave the Playboy the title of an multimedia-based architecture office for a reason, because as a production factory it infiltrated all new forms of telecommunication. In the long term it helped sex films to become fit for market and establish themselves as an established and respected genre.

In the movie Taxi Driver by Martin Scorsese (1979) is a scene which is closely related to the history of modern porn movies. The movie is located in the exact same context as the new sex-arcades by Hodas: New York City in the 1970s. At one point, the protagonist Travis, who managed to take out his crush, a woman named Betsy, proposed to go to the movies. What the two of them end up seeing however, wasn't a regular movie but a porn movie, which results in Betsy leaving the cinema. The viewer is acquainted beforehand with the movie they are about to see: The billboard reads „Swedish Marriage Manuel“ or more prominently known as „The Language of Love“.

„Language of Love“ was a real movie produced in Sweden, ten years before Taxi Driver in 1969. The movie was an international success while at the same time being harshly critiqued for its graphic and pornographic content. What the producers did, was to mark the movie as an educational film, in order to bypass certain obscenity laws at the time. After the supreme court declared the earlier Swedish production „I Am Curious“ (1967) as not obscene, because of its educational context, many more followed. These films became to be known as „white coaters“, because of a doctor in a white coat, who, at the beginning, would introduce the following graphic content, which qualified the whole movie as „educational“ or gave it some sort of „socially redeeming value“.

This reality of this uprising in pornographic movies, which justified themselves through supposedly educational content, is well shown in this

short verbal exchange between a prostitute and a sex movie producer in the TV series „The Deuce“:

(...)
*if you make it, you know,
educational, whatever.*

But real hard-core? No.

*In Europe...
Europe is Europe.*

*Yeah.
(...)¹¹*

Longterm consequences were the establishment of the X-rating system, which up until the 1970s wasn't trademarked. Some producers even declared their movies with multiple X's to (i.e. XX or XXX) emphasize the amount of graphic and sexual content, as it was in Taxi Driver as well („Bold XXX Entertainment“). Simultaneously the scene reveals the much looser obscenity laws in Europe at the time, which triggered the shift in politics in the US, in order to remain capable of competing.

At the time, the newspaper The New York Times wrote critically about the movie, which at first was shown in an even shortened, less graphic version:

„Language of Love“ adds nothing specially new to our movie scene, which, at this late date, already has been filled with practically every aspect of sex, educational, blue and in between.“¹²

Considering the fact that it even provoked protests in the United Kingdom at the time, the author is writing rather soberly about the movie. What does the author mean by saying, that in the movie scene every aspect of sex and education has already been filled? The movie industry found itself in this situation of reviewing obscenity laws and rethinking the movie's ratings, because sexuality had become, or was still in the process of becoming, a product to consumerism: The product being the women's sexuality, the consumers being heterosexual men.

The movie's title has therefore a virtually symbolical value: The impact and changes the movie provoked reshaped the language of love, the

[11] SIMON, David u.a.: „The Deuce“, USA, HBO Productions, 2017

[12] WEILER, A.H.: „Sweden's Language of Love“, The New York Times, July 1971

On Biopolitics

Reproducing Restif and de Sade: Biopolitics in the 18th century

What Preciado describes and captions a Pornotopia isn't the physical manifestation of Hefner's visions, but the reproduction of ideas that have been present for centuries, they just had to be dug up again and be re-adapted. The spatial layout of the playboy mansions and the voyeurism discussed on the basis of how the Playboy seized domesticity and sexuality can be traced back to thoughts from the 18th century. In the 1950s and 1960s Hefner and the Playboy translated them into presence of multimedia, telecommunication and mass-consumption. One of the authors at the time, whom Preciado was also engaged with, was Nicolas Edmé Restif de la Bretonne a social reformer and sex researcher.

His text „Le Pornographe“ (1769) advocates for the establishment of a state brothel, a state-administered whorehouse in the city's periphery, which he called „Parthénia“. His work constitutes a crucial contribution for the understanding of terms like privacy, publicness and the biopolitic relations between gender, sexuality and space, both for the 18th century and today. Restifs proposal is to be read as an appliance to prevent the spread of syphilis, not as a temple of lust. The Parthénia was therefore something between a hospital, a prison and a brothel, here to regulate bodies in space and their sexuality. The brothels and the women's bodies were subject to biopolitics, here to structure and regulate the bodies and its fluids in space. Preciado suggests that dispositives like the Parthénia or the Oikema, a similar proposal by Nicolas Ledoux, constitute Pornotopias themselves which function according to the architectural figure of the panopticon to ensure the health of the public. This suggestion is deducted from the notion of power, which manifests itself best through the architectural figure of the panopticon, and the question of how to justify a power regime and its structures. On this Preciado writes:

„To each power regime corresponds a model of sick body, a specific management of life and death in space, a utopia of national and political immunity.“^[13]

The understanding that the body is closely related and even object to structures of power points to the term of biopolitics. Biopolitics refers to the regulation and administration of bodies in space, in order to ensure the functioning of a society and put life into order. It is therefore concerned with the themes of health, bodily habits, sexuality, architecture and domesticity. Within this setting, body and sexuality become subject to political management. But what is the role of architecture in biopolitics?

„The city, like the body, was a close space defined by the circulation of fluids and airs. Between the city and the body was architecture, serving as a mediating, regulating system.“^[14]

This understanding of what biopolitics are is marked by the theories by Foucault. In his understanding, architecture functions as a disciplinary technology to transform its users into docile subjects, subordinate to the regime in power, in order to ensure its functioning. In his text „Discipli-

[15] FOUCAULT, Michel: „*Discipline and Punish*“, 1975

ne and Punish“ he writes about the panopticon as the ideal architectural form to enforce the logics of biopolitics. He delivers detailed descriptions of the panopticon, based on the thoughts by Jeremy Bentham: „an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheral building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other.“^[15]

With Marquis de Sade, who only wrote about prisons and didn't engage with them by means of drawing, we encounter a similar shape spatially, but an alternated form of power. And again, the architectural figure of the panopticon is described with all of its voyeuristic traits. With de Sade, the bodies within the panopticon become „sexualized“ by the gaze watching from the tower. As these instruments of power gain sexual traits, the structures of power become subject to eroticization. Modern biopolitics work with the eroticization of disciplinary power architectures. Moreover these spaces erotisize the structures of hierarchy.

To this I would add, following the reading of Ursprungs „Der Wert der Oberfläche“, that the eroticization can be read as a further iteration of aesthetizing the sublime. Ursprung names the impressionist drawings of the upcoming railway towards the end of the 19th century by Carl David Friedrich and other artists as a further example for what he calls the artificial sublime. Again, artificial sublime engages with cloaking the prevailing structures of power and normalizing them. In my opinion, de Sade's writing has a similar effect, simply achieved through a different medium. Instead of the painting he uses writings and words. As with the paintings, who show the object, for example the railway, from a distance, de Sade's text also allows the reader to distance him- or herself from the erotisized instruments of power. It is this distance, which is required, that ties any form of sublimation to the figure of the voyeur.

The spatial layout of the Chaskin pool, the peep-arcade and the Stützli-Sex can be read as an inversion of the classic panopticon, as it was thought by de Sade and Bentham and described by Foucault. The power structures represented remain the same, it is only the viewer who rotates, who changes position and moves from the center to the periphery. Terminologically, we talk about the same kind of rotation as with Chaskin's pool, which rearranges the human and inhuman relations within the Playboy Mansion. In terms of the panopticon, these examples constitute an inversion because the watcher and the watched or the voyeur and the unsuspecting swap their positions in space.

The Playboy and the changes it triggered, in a comparable manner as to how the Parthénia and the Oikema transformed architectural figures such as the prison and the clinic into spaces of lust, transformed spaces of domesticity and work into the eroticized successor, the post-domestic. If the post-domestic covers the time from the 1950s up until the beginning of the 1970s, the question arises: What followed after?

[13] PRECIADO, Paul E.: „*Restif de la Bretonne's State Brothel: Sperm, Sovereignty, and Debt in the Eighteenth-Century Utopian Construction of Europe*“, 2017

[14] PRECIADO, Paul E.: „*Restif de la Bretonne's State Brothel: Sperm, Sovereignty, and Debt in the Eighteenth-Century Utopian Construction of Europe*“, 2017

Living in Hypersexuality

[16] LAHIJI, Nadir: „Architecture in the Age of Pornogrpahy“, 2022

„The present time is pornographic. It exemplifies the age in which the differences between the real and the image is no longer discernible.“¹⁶

This premise by the architect and theorist Nadir Lahiji shall be taken as a baseline to reflect upon the present, to engage with the question of what it means when the terms ‚pornographic‘ and ‚sexualized‘ are used to describe the spaces in the urban environment today.

When asked in the interview with SRF Fokus what the next business model of pornography was, Eduard Stöckli, former owner of the Kino Roland, responds: That it is no longer a business model.¹⁷

Nicola Kalms would probably disagree to this response. Judging by her book „Hypersexual City - The Provocation of Soft-Core Urbanism“, sexuality was simply seized by new forms of media and architecture, where it doesn’t have to be purchased anymore, but is used as a means to sell and project an image, an idea into the private and public realm. Kalms is an associate professor at the Melbourne School of Design and conducting researching in gender-sensitive design practices. According to her, we are unconsciously exposed to the typologies of hypersexuality frameworks. All of the typologies she suggests manifest themselves physically in space. She calls them: playful, territorial, tactical, staged and mobile.

For the case study of the Kino Roland and its context, I will reference the five typologies for hypersexual frameworks suggested by Kalms. Furthermore I want to put forward the thesis, that the post-domestic city, as treated with the Playboy, is followed by sexual liberation and the hypersexual city.

In her book she examines various case studies to propose, that it is not the representation of sexuality that is problematic, but the ways that sexist content is communicated spatially. By that, she makes a case for focusing on understanding the context rather than the content.¹⁸

Sexuality today is consumed through flat screens, billboards, mobile phones, laptops, television and in cinemas. The images projected are furthermore being translated into the built environment. This is what Kalms calls Hypersexuality or the reality of Hypersexual Cities. To talk about the presence and future in hypersexual cities, to which the Kino Roland is subject to, we have to understand how the foundations for the theory of hypersexual cities have been set.

Kalms references the book „Learning from Las Vegas“ (1972) by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown and suggests that they unwillingly predicted the hypersexual future. To some degree this observation of Kalms goes hand in hand with Lahiji’s assumption that today’s architecture was dominated by „the regime of images“. Venturi and Scott Brown expose and investigate the urban space through „the sign“ along the Las Vegas Strip. They most prominently compare the typologies of the „duck“ to the „decorated shed“, the first one being a building that can’t be anything but what they are as their shape foretells and the second being a single generic structure with a purpose identifiable solely because of its signage. The sign is introduced as a new type of media inherent

to architecture, capable of distracting the viewer. This „architecture of the sign“ is exactly what she examines in her book „Hypersexual Cities“ through various case studies. Her investigation shows that the architecture of the sign developed into something more subtle and refined than the duck or the decorated shed. This again adds to the urgency of the whole topic, because its participation in the audience’s perception is often underestimated.

According to Kalms, this subtlety is ensured through the five typologies of hypersexual frameworks, each one operating on a different level of urban and media space.

Playful The first typology is characterized by the medial language of pornography, where nudity, suggestive postures and accessories are used to advertise consumer products. Playfulness is therefore a question of paid-for expectation, a way to generate affect that derives from strip-club culture.

Territorial Hypersexual provocations seldom stand alone. They are nearly always part of a network spanning across large urban areas, reaching from cities into the suburbs. Moreover they operate on various forms of media, be it print, social media or television.

Tactical Kalms here quotes Foucault to describe how this topology functions: „The success of tactics, is their ability to mask their inherent mechanisms.“ Provocative hypersexual tactics guarantee the public’s attention as well in the urban as in the media realm. Simultaneously they know to mask the value the companies get from this free media attention.

Staged The word stage is here used to describe how hypersexual representations arrive in previously unsexualized spaces or events that turn them into a stage for hypersexuality. Kalms also calls them satellite stages, since they represent the extension of the culture of commercializing sexuality. This results in passers-by walking into the stage becoming unavoidably engaged in the hypersexual framework.

Mobile Because of its flexibility this typology constitutes the opposite to the static consumer advertising techniques. This makes it responsive and resilient to changes in urban space. The mobility signals the possibility of sudden transformation into hypersexual space.

What Kalms typologies for hypersexual frameworks and Learning from Las Vegas have in common, is that they both try to find a code, a matrix in order to categorize their investigations and establish connections between them. Even the figure to visualize the five typologies is graphically based on the ones by Venturi and Scott Brown. Kalms importantly adds that her study is ongoing and can be revised and extended.

What is described as *distraction* by Kalms when referring to Learning from Las Vegas, is captioned as a form of „seduction in its broadest sense“¹⁹ by Neil Leach in his text „Architectural Models“ from the book „Desiring Practices“ (1996). Both Kalms and Leach critique the lack of academic critique of hypersexual urbanism respectively the uncritical use

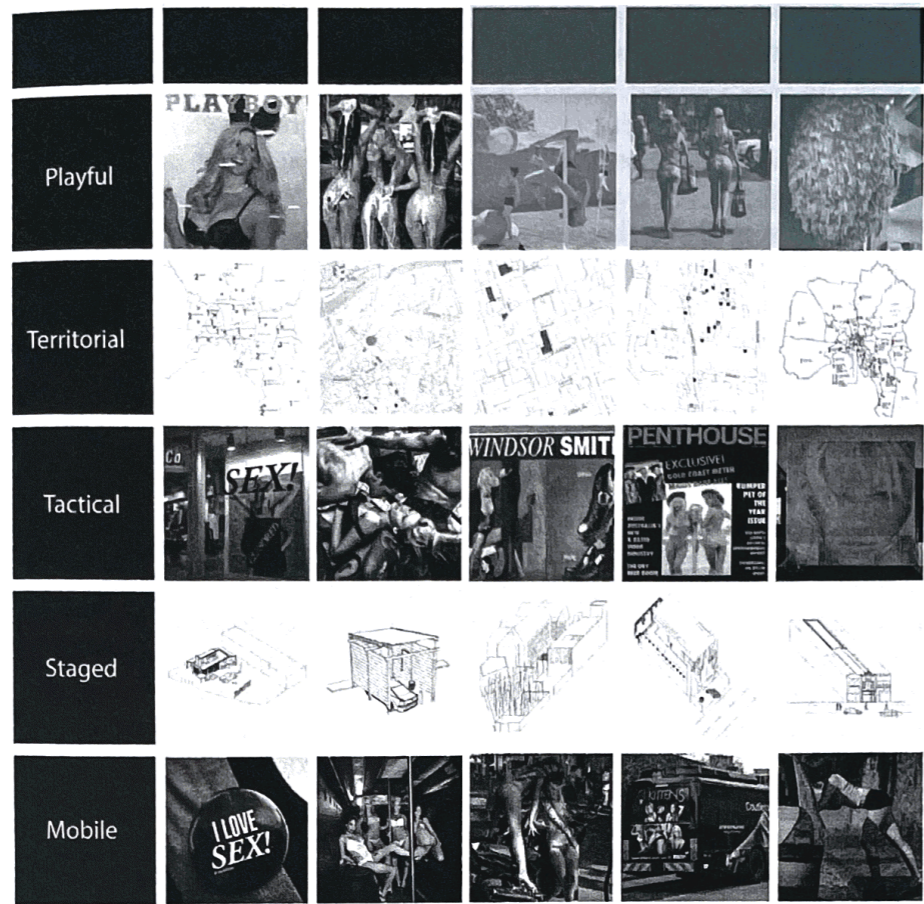
[18] KALMS, Nicole: *Hypersexual City*, 2017

[19] LEACH, Neil: „Architectural Models“, Hrsg. in „Desiring Practices“ by Duncan MyCorquodale, Katharina Rüegg, Sarah Wigglesworth, 1996

Denise Scott Brown & Robert Venturi,
Learning from Las Vegas, 1976



KALMS, Nicole: Hypersexual City, 2017



of visual imagery on the basis of Learning from Las Vegas. According to Leach, seduction in this context enchants the viewer visually to prevent the search for any deeper meaning or any deeper enquiry. He deduces his argument from the thesis, that we are living in the Society of of the Spectacle, thereby obviously referring to Guy Debord's work „The Society of of the Spectacle“ (1967). Leach takes in an interesting position between Debord and Scott Brown/Venturi. While the first one condemned the superficiality of the sign, the latter saw a potential in them and celebrated them, even though the authors did have their points of critique. However the critique wasn't aimed at the content, because their study was one of method. Leach manages to both examine and critique contents and methods of how sexualized imagery is used for promotional and self-display purposes, while not denying them their right to exist. This becomes clear at the end of his text when he addresses architects advocates for understanding the logics of visual imagery in the context of capitalist consumer society, not for its abolition, as Debord would.

To pick up on Leach's understanding of seduction, I would argue that an uncritical form of nostalgia very much applies to this exact form of seduction. Both terms absorb the content to the surface, to refuse the viewer any deeper engagement. This characteristic subscribes both terms to the political realm, because it ensures the dominant structures functioning and minimizes the questioning of them. They both operate with images and narratives complementing each other, consolidating their entitlement by being reproduced time and time again. So can seduction be read as a further facet of aesthetic sublimation? Seduction very much plays into the subjects feeling of subjection as does the sublime in its natural or artificial form, as described earlier on.

In his last paragraph, Leach shares his hopes for writing the paper. Even when he doesn't share concrete solutions to the problem he unveiled, the premise he sets for himself is worth investing further.

[20] LEACH, Neil: „Architectural Models“, Hrsg. in „Desiring Practices“ by Duncan MyCorquodale, Katharina Rüegg, Sarah Wigglesworth, 1996

„The premise here is that by understanding the mechanisms by which images are constructed, architects may become more aware of the consequences of their use of visual imagery in the design process.“²⁰

Visibility

To the comments by Kalms and Leach on ‚Learning from Las Vegas‘ I would add that the investigation also in many ways about visibility. This applies especially to what was referred to as the decorated shed: A generic structure, whose purpose becomes visible not until a sign shows. The notion of visibility is a double-edged sword in this context. On the one hand the signs and their graphical language contribute to what was discussed before as nostalgia respectively seduction on the viewer. A means to avoid any deeper enquiry in the topic. This is best illustrated in new businesses opening up in areas like Kreis 4 which pick up on the exact same designs to advertise their business. On the other hand however, treating signs and visibility in the context of sex-workers, which is inevitable when talking about Zurich's Kreis 4, signs serve to mark the

[21] WITTWER, Angela u.a. (Hrsg.): „Eine Recherche zu Sexarbeit in Zürich“, 2015

[22] GRANT, Melissa Gira: „Hure spielen. Die Arbeit der Sexarbeit“, 2014

existence of sex-workers.²¹ The authors of the text „Eine Recherche zu Sexarbeit in Zürich“ argue that because of social and spatial segregation and the displacement of sex-workers into the city’s periphery, such signs and their distribution in urban space gain importance. In one passage they quote the author Melissa Gira Grant:

„Sex-work operates with signs. When you think of a red light district, you don’t see people having sex in your mind’s eye, but only glittering and glowing signs pointing to sex.“²²

Even though the graphical language of these signs signaling sex-work is undeniably sexist, they do grant the sex-workers their right to work where they are. The sign allows them to say: „I work here. This is my workplace“. The suggestion might sound trivial but is not to be underestimated, when in the past years sex-work was made more and more invisible by pushing it to the urban periphery. In Zurich the „Verrichtungsboxen“ is such an example, located in Altstetten. In my opinion, the businesses who use the same graphical language to promote their product or service, even though it doesn’t have anything to do with sex-work or similar services, are much more problematic. I briefly point out two examples from Zurich. Both examples operate according to what Kalms defines as playful and tactical in hypersexual frameworks.

Firstly, there is the car wash company „Stützli-Wösch“ who has salons across the canton of Zurich. It is unclear if the name is derived from the Stützli-Sex, but the logo, a personified car which is clearly illustrated as a women, allows for suspicion. The company hit the headlines with advertisement slogans like „Besorgs mir richtig dreckig“ and „Staubsauger zum Saugen & Blasen“ what translates to „Ride me dirty“ and „Vacuum cleaner for sucking and blowing“. The viewers attention is captured by utilizing words with ambiguous meaning to reference sexual acts, which is in the first one the act of sex in itself and the second one a blowjob. The triviality of the wordplay is what makes it a seller. What raised more questions was the image of a lascivious women next to the lettering.

Sexual Liberation

I want to pick up on the topic of sexual liberation. The notion of sexual liberation is often found in the same context as the sex cinema, as for example in a newspaper article from 2021 writing about the Kino Sternen in Oerlikon, that it had enjoyed a reputation for promoting sexual liberalization in the city²³. Such claims have to be handled with care. How did this narrative come into being?

Amongst other concerns, the movements of 68 brought the urgent topic of gender inequality up and discussed new ideas for living together as society, what also included the question of how what a relationship is or could be. The importance of these events isn’t in any way denied, some thought-provoking impulses reverberate still today. However, the reality of the years after 68 in the 1970s consisted rather of a medialization of sex than a revolution. A media hype unleashed around the themes of

[24] WITTWER, Angela u.a. (Hrsg.): „Eine Recherche zu Sexarbeit in Zürich“, 2015

sex and sexuality. It was also called „a wave of sex“. Problematic was the fact that the term sexual liberation was still used. By that, the term was hijacked by the media and the initial thoughts and visions behind it started to fade.

In a text about prostitution in Zurich the authors too write critically about the usage of terms like sexual liberation. They write:

„However, the talk of the liberalization of sex and the sexualization of society conceals effective power and gender relations. Talking about sex is not inevitably an expression of a liberal understanding of sexuality. The compulsion and desire to talk about sexuality all the time and everywhere, sexuality serves rather to maintain the heterosexual norm and the binary division of the sexes. Here, speaking serves as a means to establish the prevailing norm.“²⁴

The authors elaborate on how easily the term ‚liberation‘ can be instrumentalized to claim the completion of a certain process. When writing about sexual liberation in the context of sex cinemas, the term has to be reviewed critically. An inaccurate usage shows to be problematic. It can be deceptive and misleading. Moreover, what was often claimed as liberation and was seized by the media hype, laid the ground stone for what Kalms describes as the Hypersexual City. Kalms doesn’t write this anywhere, but in my reading it is no coincidence that in the word „hypersexual“ lays the (media) „hype“.

[23] BARGETZI, Jenny: „Wie ein Sexkino zum neuen Quartiertreffpunkt werden soll“, tsüri, 2021

Veiling the Erotic and Unveiling the Pornographic

It shall not be questioned, that during the protests in the 1960s womens rights have been claimed, which led to certain degrees of emancipation. What I want to question however, is how these transformations were later picked up by the media and also men, who re-pivoted their core meanings and led to their newly gained power being thwarted. One example for this is the attempt to equate the erotic with the pornographic.

When talking about sexual liberation, we have to talk about the erotic on a broader level. According to the US-American author and activist Audre Lorde²⁵, the erotic is a resource of power. However for too long this resource was denied to women. This goes hand-in-hand with the attempts to put the two terms on the same level of meaning. Lorde narrows down the essential differences to the opposition of sharing and using. The erotic engages in SHARING. It is understood as the sharing of mutual joy and satisfaction, originating from connections between ones similarities and differences. The pornographic on the other hand is about USING. She writes that is about the mere using of each other as objects of satisfaction. Her core message to the topic is that „In order to be utilized, our erotic feelings must be recognized.“ And every form of disregard, looking away or ignoring, results in some sort of distortion, which she describes as pornography.

Nadir Lahiji sets up a similar however more literal opposition of the the two terms in his book „Architecture in the Age of Pornography“²⁶. He builds his narrative around the words of VEILING and UNVEILING. While veiling and concealing is coined to eroticism, pornography operates with unveiling and bluntness. His deducts this premise from the believe that „Pornography - as nakedness without drapes, without any secrets - is the opposite figure of beauty.“ In this believe resonates Preciado’s statement on the unrealized project for the Playboy Mansion in Chicago, where „*The blunt interiority (of the house) transformed itself into a pornographic object par excellence.*“²⁷ Can we take Lahijis reading of the pornographic to understand Preciado’s description of the proposal for Chicago? For the case of the Chicago Mansion this would mean, that the proposal and its objects do not hesitate to show their true form. There is no veiling. All furniture in the mansion is designed as dispositives for play and are presented as such. What is erotic is the staging of appearance as disappearance. In the proposal by Donald Jaye this is not the case.

What about the Kino Roland?

[25] LORDE, Audre: „Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power“, 1978

[26] LAHIJI, Nadir: „Architecture in the Age of Pornogrpahy“, 2022

[27] PRECIADO, Beatrix, „Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboy’s Architecture and Biopolitics“, 2012

PART III: TO ACT

The Kino Roland

The topics discussed so far constitute the main threads along which the Kino Roland has developed. These were the overarching themes that had their influence on a broader socio-political and architectural level. Now that there is a reference point to the question of „What produced the Kino Roland?“, further questions can refer to the present.

What do these recent changes in ownership and program mean for the building, considering the history of what produced the Kino Roland in the first place? Why do we still feel some sort of attraction to this building? After its initial use as a residential building, its long life as a sex cinema and its short years as an event location, what role does it play today? Is it a ruin worth preserving? Shall it be listed, as it has been done with the Kino Sternen?

If the thesis by sociologist David Harvey is true, that we tend to aestheticize crises or circumstances to make them more tolerable and we agree on the sublimation of Kino Roland, the question is: What does it embody to go through this process? The Kino Roland is first and foremost a reminiscence of the whole history that produced it in the first place. It is however also a reminder that what used to happen within its walls - the consumption of heterosexual porn, prostitution, sex-trafficking, exploitation of women working in the sex industry and diverting usages - is still happening.

Hence the sublimation of Kino Roland can be read as a consequence of the attempt to forget about the fact that all of these practices are still present. In 2001 the city of Zurich initiated the project Langstrasse PLUS. The objectives were to make the Kreis 4 more safe, prevent public drug trafficking and prevent prostitution. The initiative ended in 2011 and the years after the results followed. The initiative met its objectives. The practices mostly disappeared from the public eye are now happening elsewhere more discretely.

The Kino Roland stands there as a reminder.

It combines the traits of the pornographic and the ones of the sublime, carrying them within its chest.

The Kino Roland finds itself in a mediating role.
The Kino Roland as a mediator between the

PAST and the FUTURE.

PORNOGRAPHIC and the SUBLIME,

NOSTALGIA and the EROTIC,

VEILING and the UNVEILING,

LIBERATION and the NORMATIVE,

IMAGE and ARCHITECTURE,

SHARING and USING,

RUIN and the NEW.

The role of the mediator is what makes it so emblematic. It lends it its sublimeness. In order to work with the emblematic and sublime, we have to profane it first, to ground it. The research so far can be read as a first contribution to an overcoming of the aesthetization. Laying open the logics that produced certain archetypes in architecture can drain their sublimeness. The Kino Roland shall become a concrete place.

Until January 2022, the Kino Roland was led by Zoé Stählin, before it was sold to the Novaron AG. Stählin is the daughter of Eduard Stöckli, a man who built his renommé with sex cinemas from the 1970s onwards. He owned several other sex cinemas, of which the most prominent are the Kino Sternen in Oerlikon, the Kino Stüssihof in Zurich's old town and the Kino Walche, which is the last one presently in use.

Stöckli was ever since working in the movies, sometimes as executive producer, but mostly as assistant and co-producer. In the 1970s he partnered with Beate Uhse, who was an influential business woman at the time already and the first person to open an official sex-shop in 1962. Stöckli managed to gain her as partner, where he would supply her with sex-movies, which he would buy from all over the world. The trick to his success was that Stöckli would keep the movie rights for Switzerland, which allowed him later on to show the same movies in his cinemas. By that, he became one of the most important content providers and traders of movie rights. After opening up and running several sex cinemas, he moved on with regular cinemas. Amongst others he was a founding partner of the Kino Xenix and opened in the multiplex-cinema²⁸ Arena in 2007.

The Kino Roland gained cult status at the latest when the program changed a couple of years ago from showing sex movies to showing regular movies and hosting concerts. Suddenly last year the cinema closed permanently, the website was taken down and on their Facebook it said: Time to say Goodbye. Silently and without any publicity the Kino Roland was sold.

The building was used as a cinema for more than a hundred years. The first plans of the building date back to the year 1893. The plans actually show an extension of an already existing building onto Langstrasse. Since then the base area of the building hasn't changed. Only ten years later in 1903 the building was transformed into a cinema. Only the top floor was left for apartments.

Today the Kino Roland is a reminiscence with an uncertain future. The Novaron AG, the new owner of the property, commented that the building was worth preserving, not because of its physical structure, but the cultural status it gained. The building itself was nothing more than a ruin, they said. They knew, people would try to prevent the demolition if they wanted to do it. It remains uncertain who will move in and how it will live on in the long term.

[28] Large Cinema with multiple movie halls showing movies simultaneously.

The former sex cinema Kino Sternen in Oerlikon, which once belonged to the series of sex cinemas owned by Eduard Stöckli as well, stands at a different point in its life. It is located on Franklinstrasse in the north of Zurich, not far from Oerlikons historic center. As the Kino Roland, the Sternen too has an emblematic appearance onto its surrounding. However the building fabric here is valued much higher than the one of the Kino Roland. The Kino Sternen is an early work by the Swiss architect Werner Stücheli from the year 1949. Most eye-catching is the cantilevering projection booth, which stretches out 2 meters onto street creating an oriel-like projection. Since 2018 the cinema is listed. Its listing will dictate a fundamentally different future than the one that awaits Kino Roland.

One day the Roland might have almost been listed. The facade on Rolandstrasse carries a pilaster-like arch. So does the one on Langstrasse, but on Rolandstrasse the ornaments of the arch are missing. Instead, one can see the reminiscence of the arch through the brick stones that were behind it. For too long it looked the building was simply decaying and was left on its own. There is the saying that the ornaments had been removed secretly shortly after it was announced that Zurich's cultural heritage preservation was about to rate the Kreis 4 anew. It is assumed that they tried to prevent the building from getting listed. Hence, the colorful arch on Rolandstrasse was removed. Supposedly it was done in a cloak-and-dagger operation with a heavy driller at 5am some neighbors say. It was visibly not done by a professional.

On a Tuesday in June I met a Mitch Bekk for lunch in the Europaallee. Mitch lives above the cinema since 2013, almost ten years passed since he moved in. He tells me that doesn't buy the story of the Novaron AG to not tear down the building. He already received the notice of his rental agreement being cancelled by January 2024. But more importantly, I learned that the Novaron AG also recently bought the neighboring building, Rolandstrasse 6 and 8. „You'll see, they'll place a new volume on the surface area covering all three parcels. I guess it makes more sense economically.“

Almost simultaneously on the 1st of June 2022 it was announced that Projekt Interim is taking over the estate until the end of 2023. Projekt Interim is a company interested in bridging vacancies for other owners with temporary usages. The concept is simple: Projekt Interim just needs to break even, meaning that just the amount invested has to be earned from the project. The Open Call ended on the 30th of June. 14 proposals have been received. Of these 14 proposals 5 proposals are concerned with event spaces, 6 with art spaces and 3 with commercial usages.

[29] LAHIJI, Nadir: „Architecture in the Age of Pornogrpahy“, 2022

*To profane would mean to return to common use that which has been removed to the sphere of the sublime.*²⁹

The Kino Roland shall be taken as testing ground.

A testing ground to engage with the heritage of sex cinemas in our cities,

the consequences of hypersexual space on our cities,
the question of the logics behind aesthetic sublimation
and the question of what the appropriate answer could be.

To list? To demolish? To leave it as a ruin? To reconstruct?

Solutions and concepts shall be tested. At this point is not about finished design proposals. A testing ground doesn't necessarily ask for finished proposals but impulses. Various, both singular and chains of impulses shall be thought through and questioned. The research constitutes the backdrop. It serves to strengthen arguments and to draw inspiration from.

The engagement with the Kino Roland should be about finding ways to articulate the inner conflict, consisting of its history, the development of the building into the archetype of the sex cinema, its sublimation and attempt of gradual grounding, all of which it carries within itself.

Retruning to Common Use

The intervention takes place in the former foyer of the cinema. Formerly, there was the till, the stairs leading to and the stairs leading down from the balcony as well as the doors leading into and out of the cinema hall.

The proposal aims neither for demolition nor for leaving the building in its current state. It isn't aiming for its listing either. Listing the building would petrify the current perception, which, as described in part one, in my opinion is not one worth preserving. Leaving it in its current state would mean to further expose it to itself and the reproduction of problematic narratives. This could possibly lead to more speculation around the building, not in an economic sense, but in one of meanings and values. Lastly, demolition would be a missed chance. The Kino Roland is not a place asking for a memorial. Such a new building possibly could still articulate the buildings inner conflict and frame it accordingly. It is a question commensurability, if the whole volume is necessary. For this case, it assumed that building is either renovated or partially demolished. The proposal acts on the premise that this intervention on the ground floor could be realized independently from the future plans and decisions of the owners of Novaron AG.

The intervention turns the foyer into a void. It is closed off from the cinema hall on the ground floor. The passages leading into the hall now serve to connect the foyer to two former fire exits placed opposite each other. They form entrance and exit. A void, which turns its view towards the city, that catches its moments through a small hole and projects them onto the inner walls. The walls hold openings and cavities. two of them serve to project images into the interior, others serve to let the soundscape from Langtrasse enter inside the foyer.

The aperture in the wall follows the logics of a camera obscura. A camera obscura uses simple physics to project real time sceneries onto a surface. It relies on a lightproof and dark interior and a hole with a small diameter. A lense inside the cavity can serve to adjust the angle of the incidenting light and redirect the projecting image. The small diameter of the aperture restricts the bundles of light to a small opening angle and prevents the overlapping of the light beams. The projection frames the presence up side down. The light rays from the upper area of an object land on the lower edge of the projection surface.

The images projected inside bring the ones of the movie „Chreis Cheib“ to mind, discussed in Part One. However here, no question is asked. If there was one, it would be „*What is there, on Langstrasse?*“ instead of „*What do you like the most about Langstrasse?*“. And nevertheless the camera obscura does give some sort of an answer. The answer is to be understood as a new perspective on the Kino Roland and its context.

Statements like the ones from the movie „*This simply isn't really Zurich. It is a world of its own. And I love it. So motley and... - ah, just great!*“ become increasingly short-sighted, as viewed through the camera

obscura, the projection shows the individuals in their singular situations. It transforms the Kino Roland and its embedding in Langstrasse into a concrete space, one where the viewers can start identify themselves with the people they see, feel empathy with them. The camera obscura doesn't reproduce a narrative or story, but rather show where this very narrative originated from. With the projection into the foyer there is no translation in meaning and values, nothing added or ignored, only a change in display. The only fact the reminds us that some sort of translation is taking place, is the uncorrected image falling through the lens onto the wall up side down.

The camera obscura also hints at the motive of the peep hole. However, instead of peaking into a private interior, the lens peaks onto the public of Langstrasse. The archetype of the former sex-arcades and video cabins, some of which also used to stand around the ground floor, becomes a linking element for the cinema to its surrounding.

Noises and smells from outside enter the foyer through the other openings. The foyer becomes a passage, on the one hand with an immediate proximity to Langstrasse and continuity of Langstrasse, on the other hand embodying a cut, a shift in perspective in its reading and perception. The sign is repositioned into the side street above the new entrance. No longer is sign reading ROLAND the most eye-catching one on Langstrasse. The former sex cinema addresses its surrounding in a new way. It is pivoted 90 degrees, away from Langstrasse, looking into itself more than out onto the street.

Sober Up

*Colors shimmer on the ground,
reflecting the colors and faces seaming the street.
Some faces are in motion, others stand still,
some stop, others move along.
So do I.
I move along
I step down the sidewalk onto the street,
to walk around a group taking in the sidewalk.*

*Shouting, car engines, distant bass, laughter, noise
What's that noise?
Drops of liquor, glasses clinking, people cheering
Santé
Students looking after a friend throwing up behind
the dumpster.
Some laugh
Gaging
Sex workers waving at strangers
Some wave back
Gazing*

*A gleam of light covers parts of my face,
crossing the next side street.
I stop.
Shining down on me, a sign.*

*R
O
L
A
N
D*

*The sign, a familiar one, yet displaced.
Underneath an entrance, a projection peaking onto
Langstrasse,
turning its front subtly to the right,
presenting its open doors.*

*Smells of wet metal framing the doors,
As I reach for the handle.
Behind the door wan lights from the street reaching
inside,
scattering light across the curved wall, draws me
inside.*

*An encounter of discomfort,
A dark room with dim lights,
my eyes need time to adapt,
the bright light from before aggravates the process.*

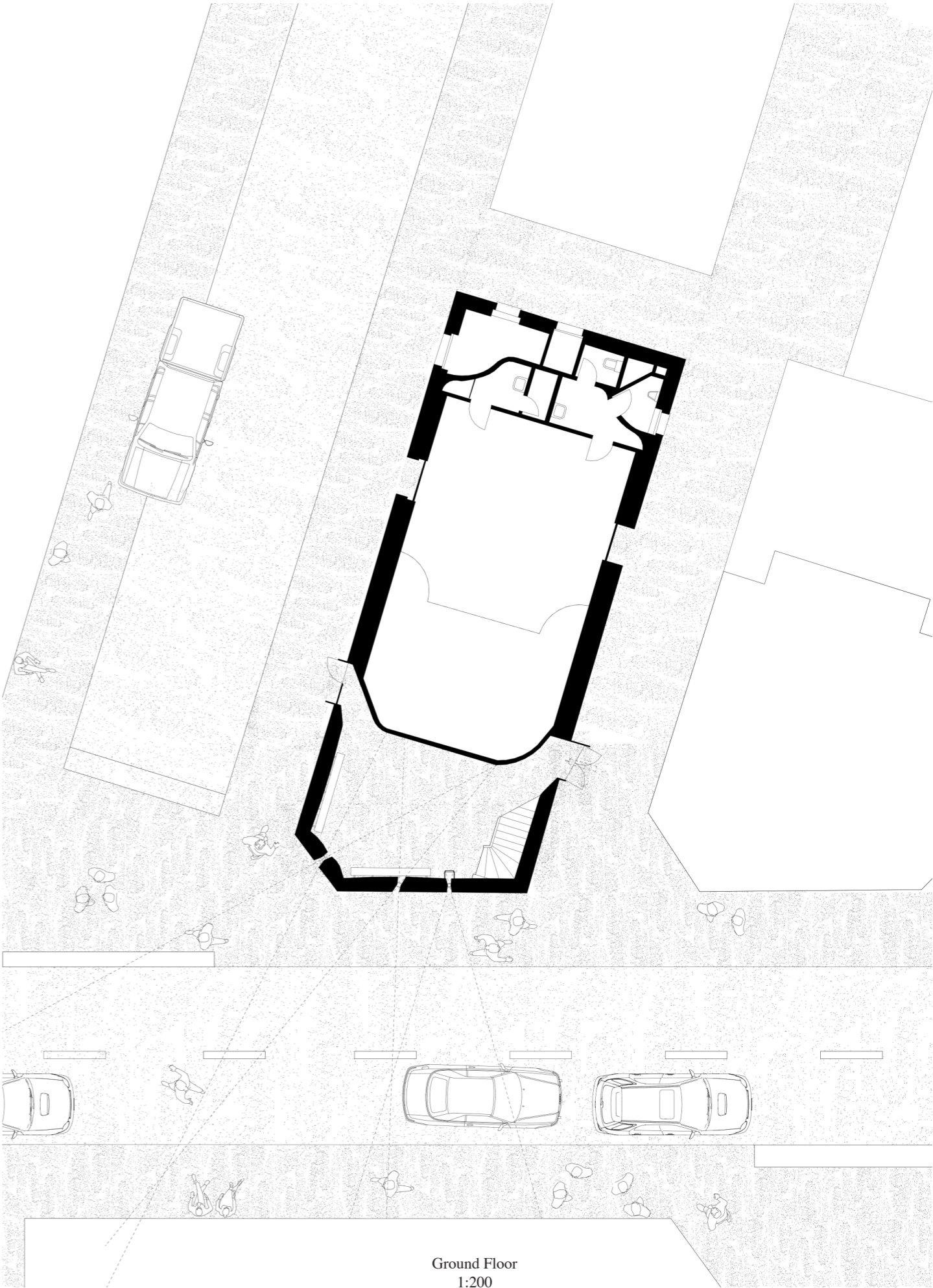
*Squinting my eyes
silhouettes appear from the dark,
the walls uncover, I see how the lean into the room.
The space unfolds.*

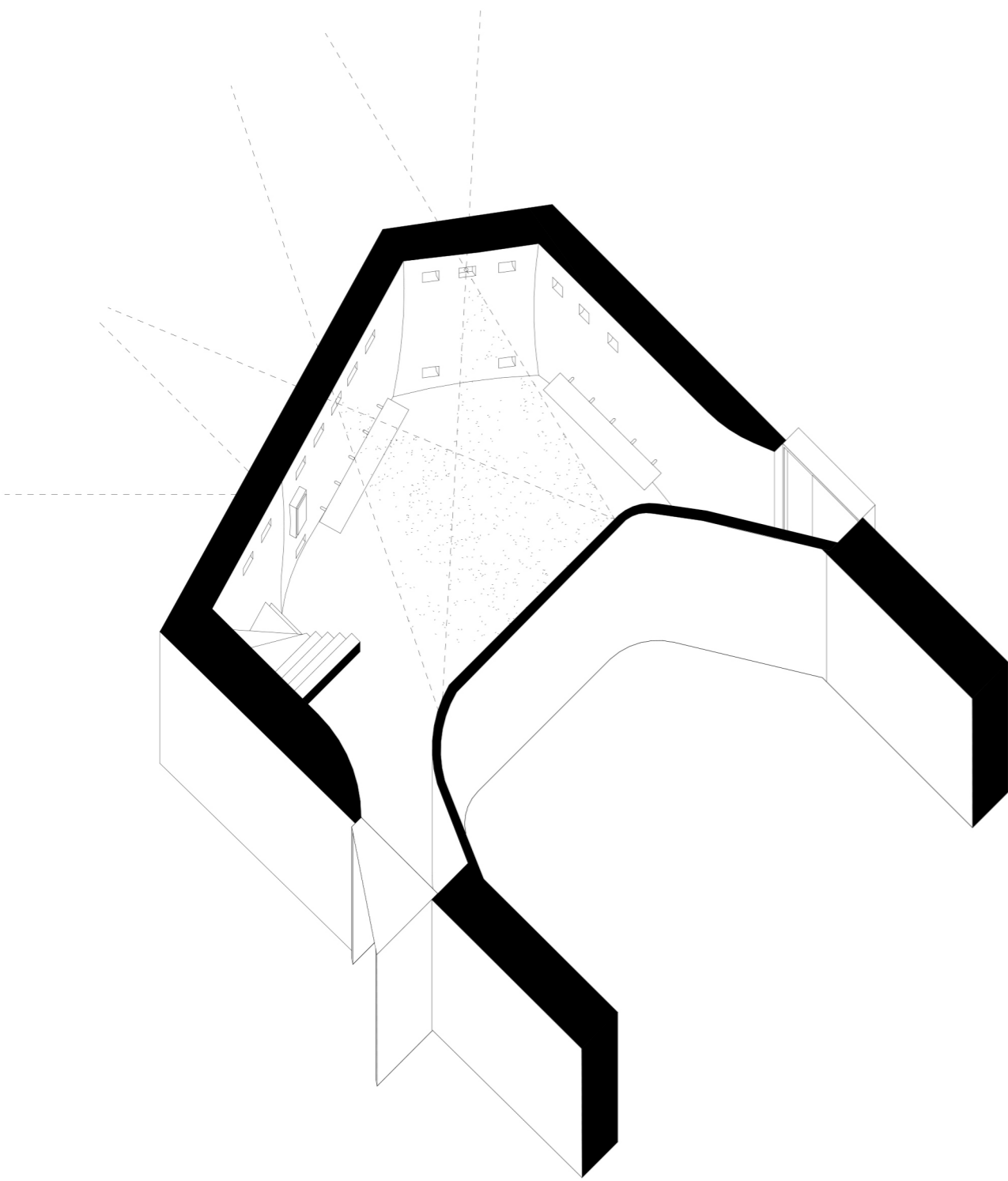
*A rectangular metal box poking out of the convex
wall.
I bend down to look into the light box,
to see what I portrayed before,
in a new light, up side down.*

*A couple having an argument,
ignoring a homeless women asking for money.
Sex workers exchanging looks,
nodding and moving lips.
The student from before carrying a bottle of water,
spilling half of it on the ground.
Unease seizes me,
as I peep through the light box.*

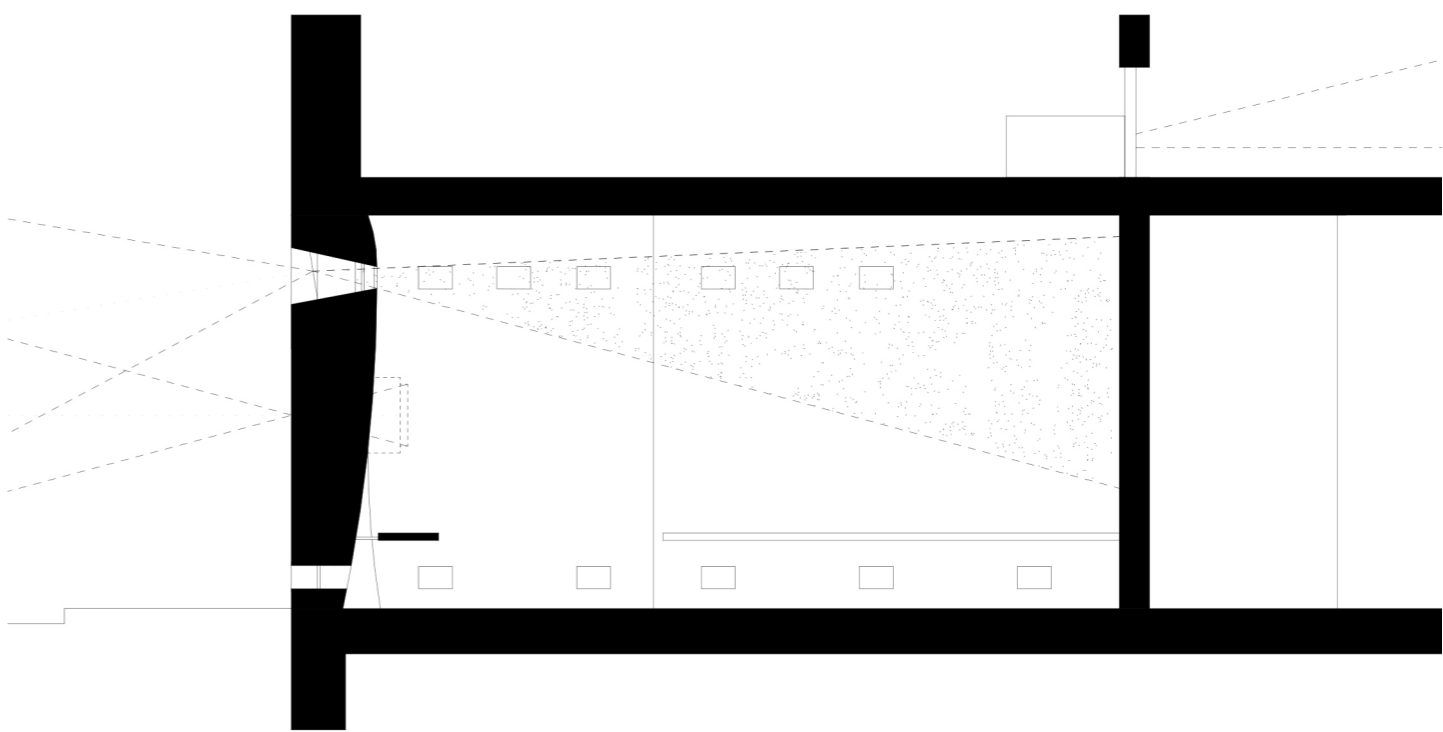
*I find myself sitting on a metal bench
my back against the wall.
30 centimeters of bricks and plaster,
between Langstrasse and myself.
In front of me the same street again,
a different corner.*

I step out.





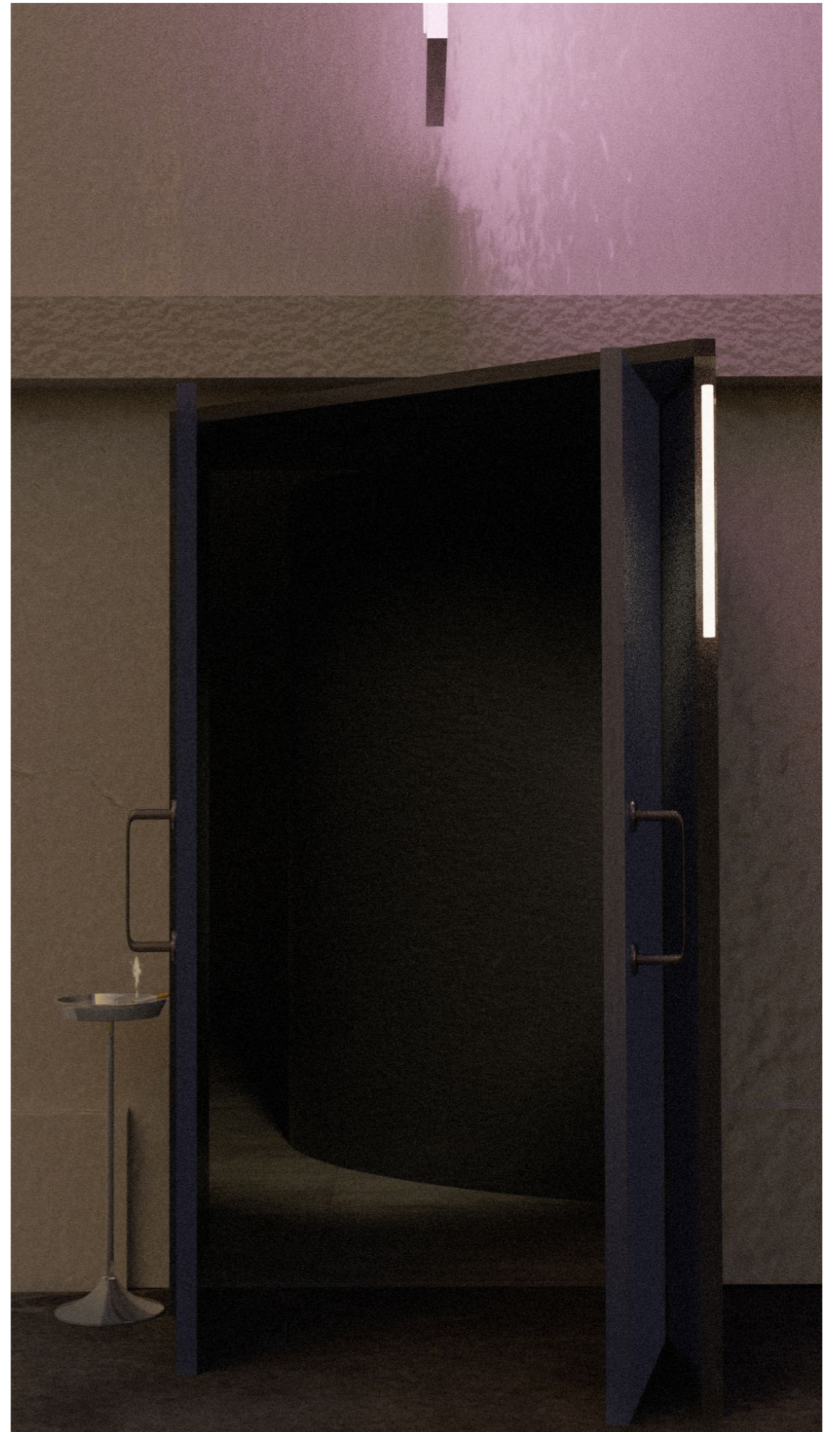
Axonometry
1:100



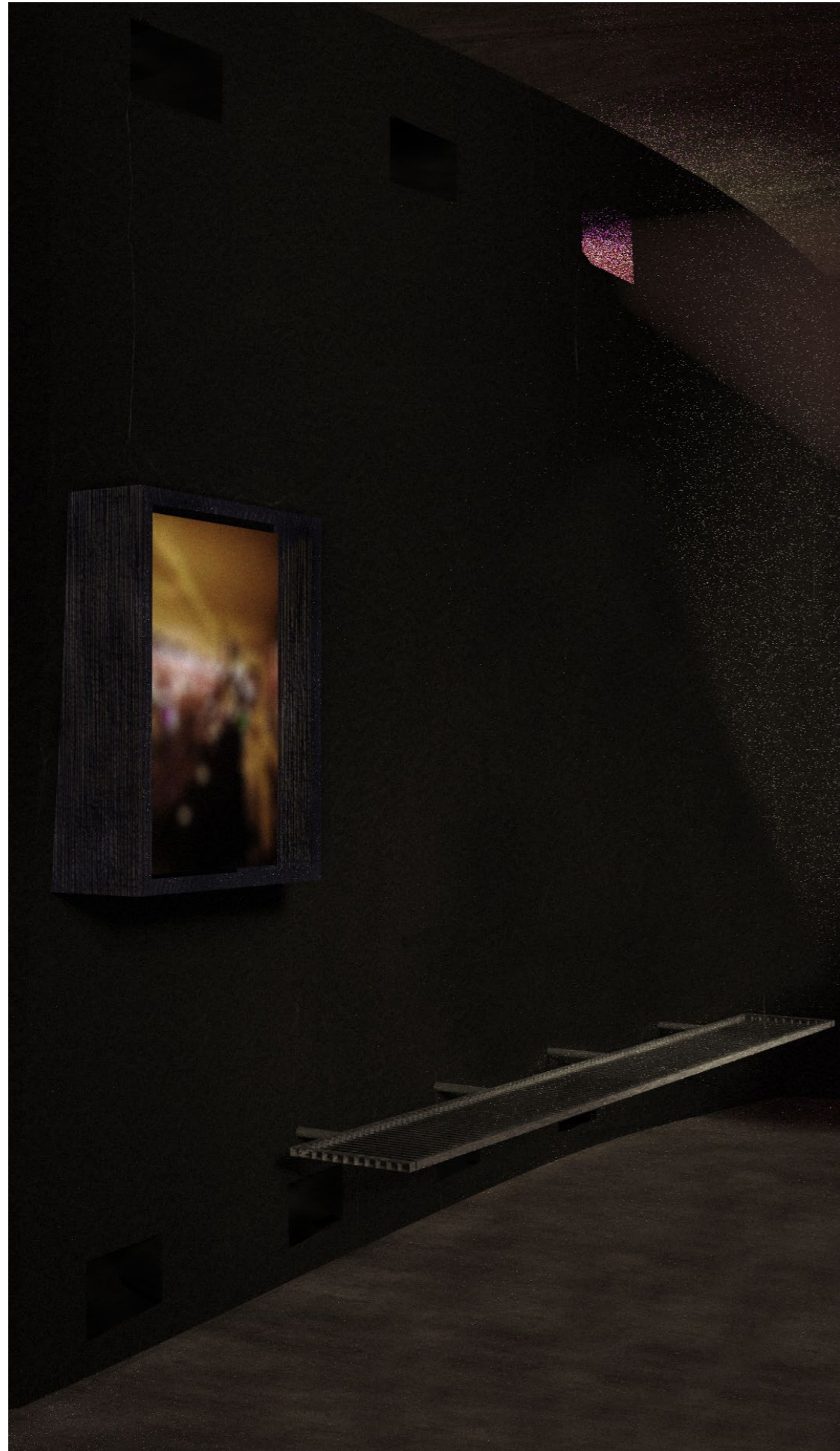
Section
1:50



Street View from Langstrasse



The Entrance



The Foyer

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