



[BAUKUH \(/AUTHORS/888905702-BAUKUH\)](#), [GRONTMIJ \(/AUTHORS/49659-GRONTMIJ\)](#)  
ANTWERP TOWN HALL



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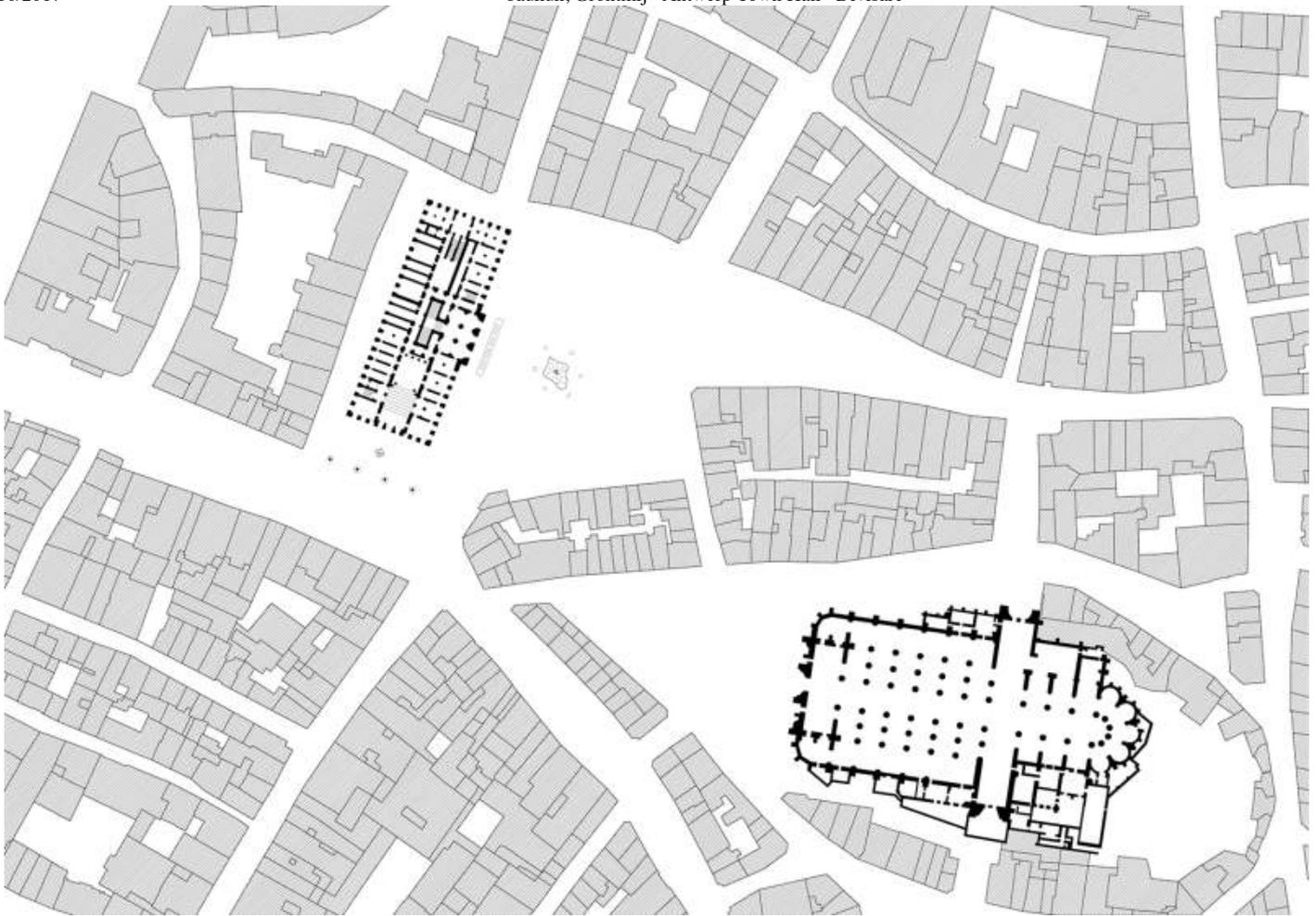
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### *1. Objectives/ method*

The Antwerp City Hall is the seat of a democratic institution. As such the building and the surrounding spaces are pervaded by two opposing tensions: a tension towards stability – a consequence of the loyalty to the past and to the founding principles of democratic coexistence – and a tension towards change – a consequence of the need to adapt to the contemporary development of public life. This complex dimension of the monument is the starting point for our proposal. We believe we should not impose a fixed identity over this complex system of urban elements. We believe that the City Hall and the surrounding public spaces should address both tradition and innovation by providing a spatial configuration that could correspond to the complexity of such multiple identity. As a consequence, we propose to accept the slowly mutant and multiple identity of the building and to increase its complexity by expanding its endowment of metropolitan assets. We propose not to exclude any of the activities that currently inhabit the building, we propose not to erase, not to correct, just to increase and expand. We choose for abundance.

In any case, it is not only wrong, but also unrealistic to try to fix a definitive status for such a large and significant building.



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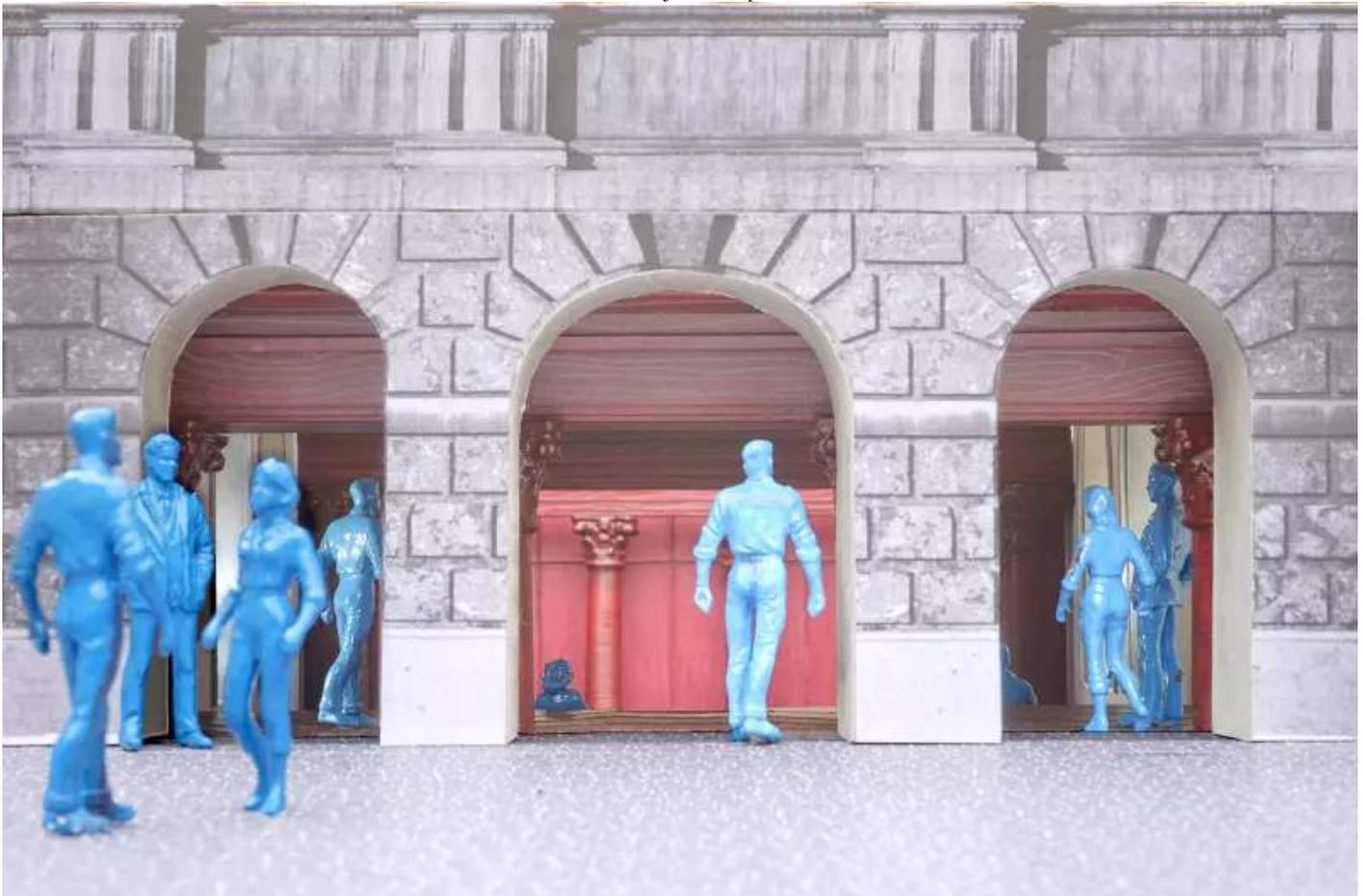
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## 2. Premises/ History

The history of the Antwerp City Hall is a series of reciprocal adjustments among the building and the city. These transformations are of two distinct kinds: monumental interventions that tried to affirm a centralized, perfectly defined identity (the construction of the building in 1561-64, the reconstruction of 1579, the transformation of the courtyard in 1858) and minor adjustments emerging as the city invaded and digested the building blurring its identity (the transformations of XVII and XVIII century, the adaptations of the 1950s). Like many monuments inside the European city, over time, the City Hall oscillated among typological consistency and urban complexity, moving around its internal parts and producing an internal urban history of its own. As a true monument, the building not only reacted to the city, but acted as a miniature city, somehow establishing a relation of microcosm and macrocosm with the entire city of Antwerp.

This relation among the City Hall and the city is further complicated by the complex geography of public spaces and monumental furniture surrounding it. The interactions among the different elements of this geography are so sophisticated that over time transformations started to produce consequences at remote and apparently unrelated places. Like in acupuncture, the insertion of a fountain in a square generated the disappearance of the stairs inside the building, the planting of a tree implied the disappearance of a door, the demolition of the neighbouring houses generated a new door.



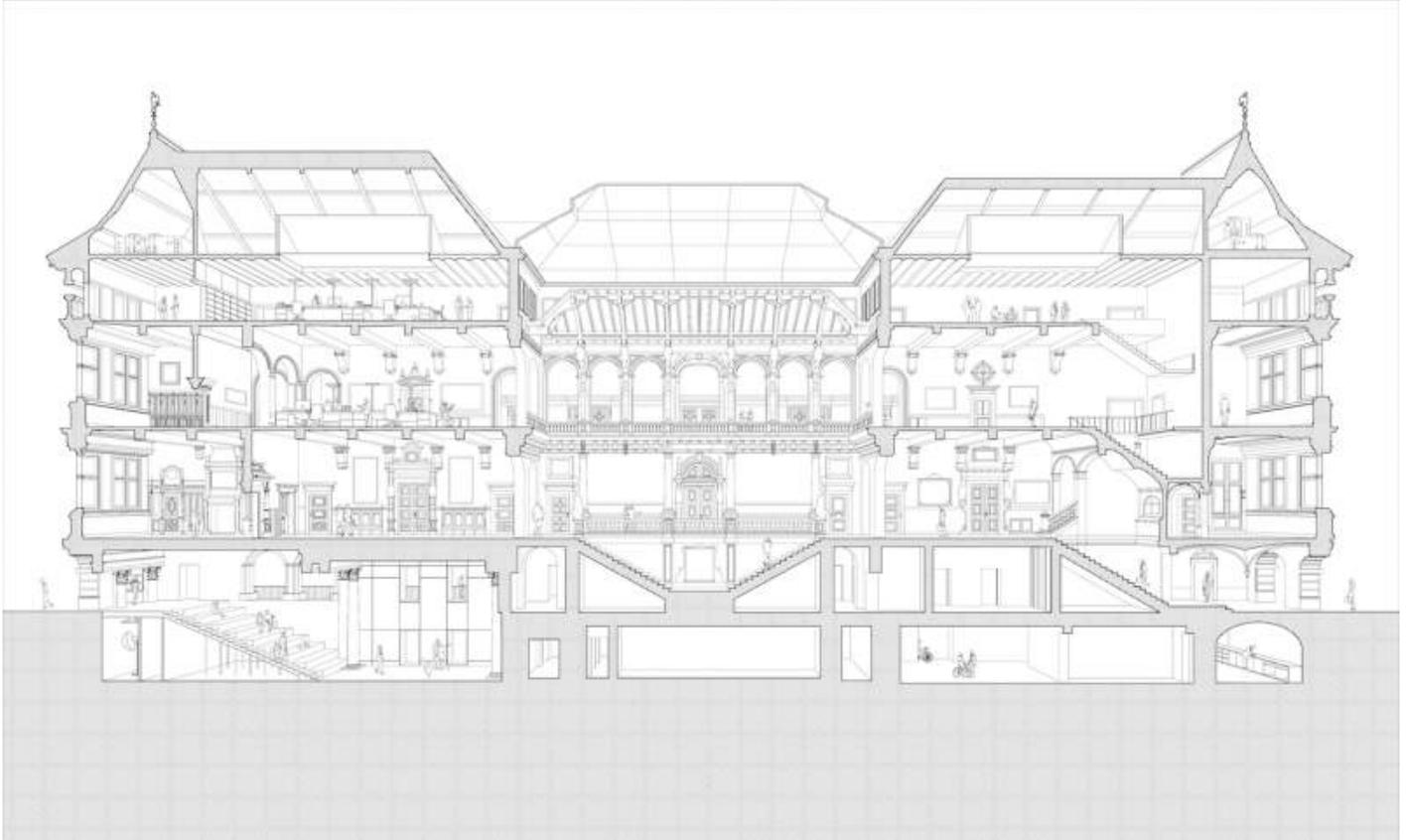
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### 3. Premises/ Geography

The history of the interactions of the building and the city is reflected in its intricate geography. Indeed the City Hall is not as clear a building as it might seem at first sight. The internal geography of the building in fact does not exactly correspond to its extremely hierarchical façade and somehow also suggests a more complex relation to the public spaces surrounding it. The apparently symmetric body of the City Hall is permeated by an internal unbalance that corresponds to the different urban conditions of its different sides. In fact the building, beyond the obvious link with the Grote Markt to the east, is also associated with the space on the south, while on the contrary the northern and western sides are relatively unimportant. Inside of this urban configuration it is important to underline the potential of the square on the south, that, in combination with the Grote Markt, could be exploited to develop a multi-layered urban landscape in which different spaces and different programs are combined into a comprehensive urban figure. The southern square, that appeared thanks to the demolition of the pre-existing row houses and that still lacks a name (a clear symptom of its uncertain status inside the city), has great urban potential and only needs to receive a precise form (and a proper name!) and to establish clear relations with the City Hall and the Grote Markt and produce a new urban sequence. Indeed, with the demolition of the row of houses south of the City Hall, the urban system around the building passed from a very precise, unilateral configuration (as in the case of the Stadhuis and Grote Markt in Brussels) to a more complex urban configuration (that could be exploited to generate a constellation somehow similar to Venice's piazza and piazzetta San Marco).



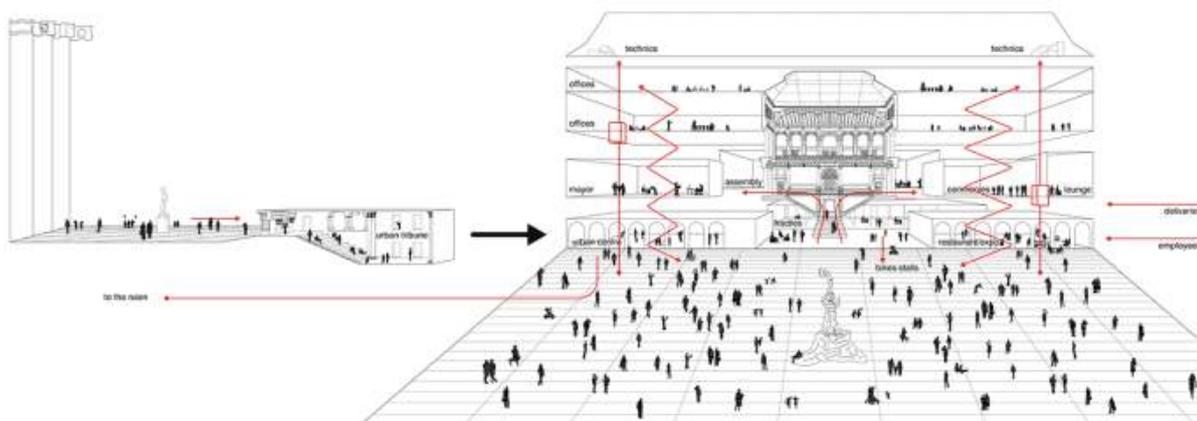
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#### 4. Design Strategy

The interpretation of the history of the City Hall coincides with the interpretation of its relation with the city. And such an interpretation implies a decision about the transformation of the building: whether to try to correct the building according to a strict typological interpretation (a sort of neo-classical restoration) or to accept the multiple condition of the building and develop a plurality of relationships with the city. This problem can be reduced to a fundamental architectural question: how many doors does the building have? Or, to put it another way: should a symmetric plan correspond to a symmetric elevation?



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We propose to accept the multiple identity of the building. Instead of imposing a clear hierarchy on the building and on the system of public squares around, we propose to accept the complexity and the multiplicity of this ensemble. For this reason we propose not to erase the link of the City Hall with the square on the south and not

to tone down this square in order to have it disappear in relation to the Grote Markt. We propose not to disqualify the recent transformations of the City Hall, to clarify the movements inside the building without erasing the possibilities for encounters. This decision implies accepting the entrance on the south, accepting the three different stairs inside the building, developing the southern square as complementary to the Grote Markt by adding a public space directly open onto this public space.



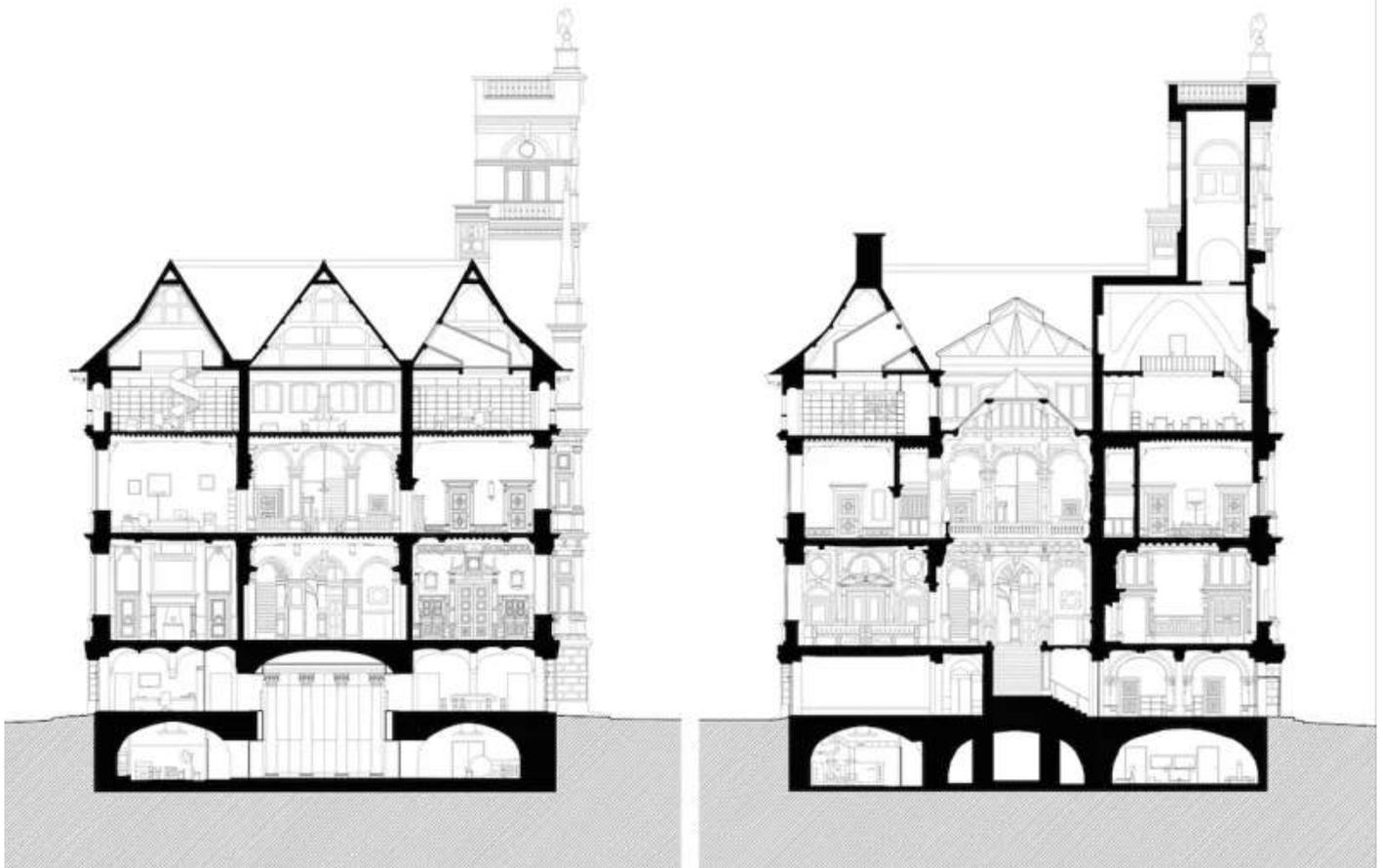
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All new interventions are inserted into the solid masonry of the City Hall as a lighter system of furniture. All new interventions are made of wood and as such are entirely reversible.

The new wooden furniture is toned to match the atmosphere of the different rooms: it is explicitly monumental in the public space of the urban tribune, it adapts to the historical decoration in the rooms at the first floor, it provides an efficient and warm office configuration at the upper levels. The wooden furniture can be realized in phases and will be coordinated with the restoration of the existing furniture and decoration.



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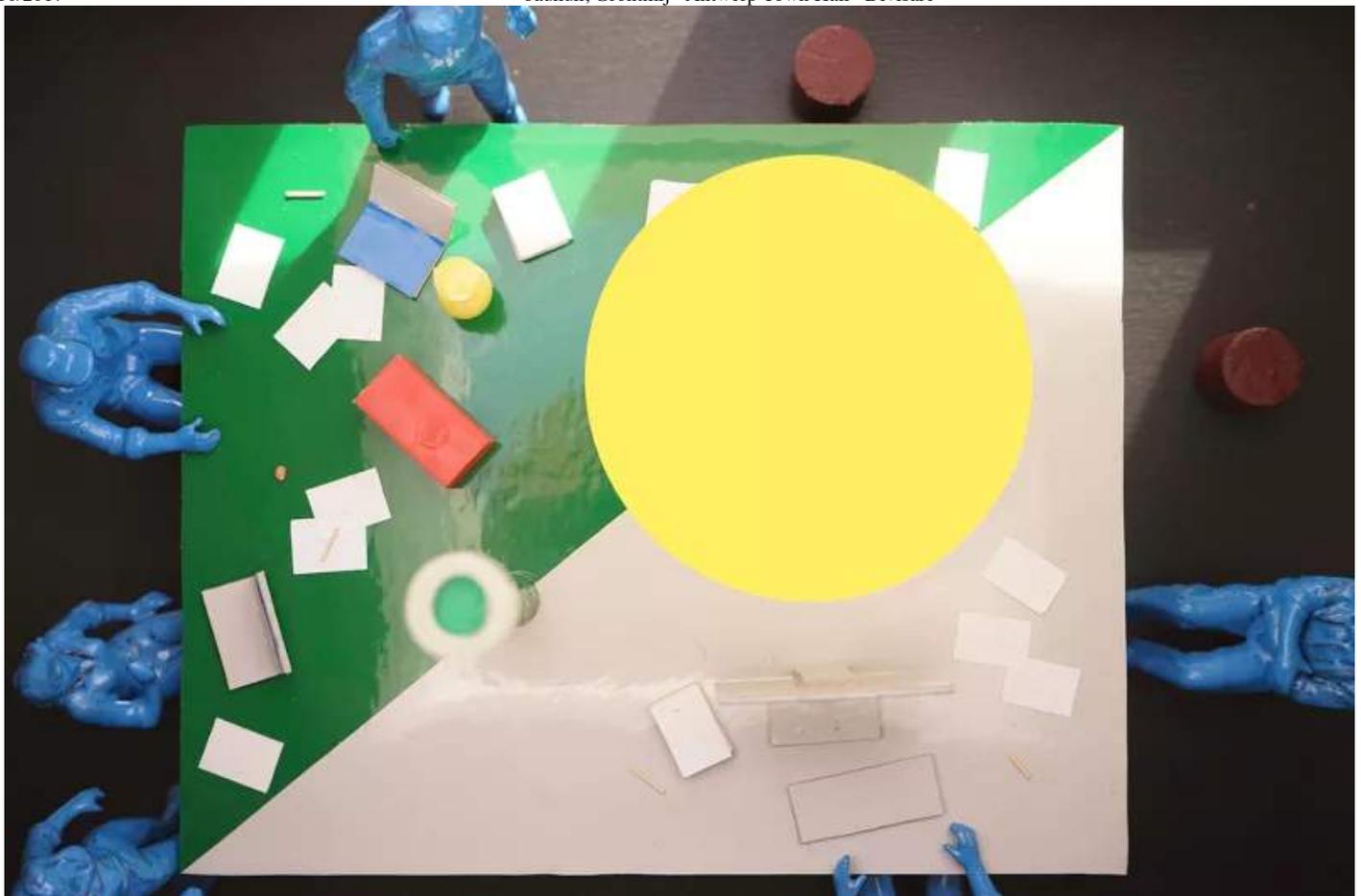
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### 5. Populations

The City Hall is inhabited by a multitude of populations: citizens, politicians, tourists, administrative personnel, passers-by. These different groups of users occupy the City Hall according to very different times and cycles. The building consequently changes in the different hours and seasons, and needs to be ready to accept a plurality of uses while maintain its architectural consistency.

The clarity of the design strategy allows such co-existence of populations inside the building: working spaces are clearly separated from representative spaces and assembly spaces, working spaces are organized as simple platforms ready to be used in many different ways. The simplicity of this organization of the working spaces allows the office layout to comply with the evolution of working-styles. As the simplest and most generic office organization (a large clean table in the middle and shelves around), the working space can easily adapt to unpredictable need.

The different populations enter the City Hall in different ways: citizens taking part in municipal political life enter from the main door and access the assembly rooms through the grand stairs; citizens take part in public debates entering the urban tribune directly from the square on the south of the City Hall; politicians access their offices through the stairs in the southern side; freights are loaded on the northern side; citizens access fractions directly at ground floor; tourists and customers enter the restaurant from the openings on the Grote Markt.



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## 6. Program

The City Hall is a colossal chest of drawers made of a collection of clearly defined rooms. As such, it is possible to insert new elements into each single drawer without altering the overall architecture of the building. We propose not to alter the organization of space according to rooms and to use rooms in the simplest possible way. Each room is cleaned as much as possible and restored to its essential architectural elements, removing clumsy furniture and inappropriate objects while not deliberately erasing the traces most recent phase of the history of the building. Representative spaces remain in their historical locations and a new design for the rooms is developed only in the case of the office spaces at the higher levels.

New elements in wood are carefully located along the borders of the rooms, creating a warm and intimate working condition. The re-organization of the working places is inspired by contemporary, dynamic working habits. The spaces are easy to use and simple to adapt to new possible uses. The clarity of the spatial scheme allows extreme flexibility and so provides an office landscape that is ready to evolve in time without losing its consistency.

The very simple strategy of organizing the office spaces with shelves along the walls and a large table in the middle allows to imagine a very simple and very free style of working, with documents and office materials stored at the periphery and free, clean space in the middle.

Allow to produce also more intimate working conditions

The ground floor contains:

- \_ the different accesses (public access, employees access, deliveries and logistics)
- \_ the public facilities related to the Grote Markt (urban centre, info point, restaurant)
- \_ the urban tribune facing the square to the south of the City Hall
- \_ the services associated to the urban tribune, such as press rooms, and technical spaces for projections and

spectacles

\_ the political representations facing the Gildekamersstraat

.

The piano nobile contains:

\_ the main lobby

\_ the Council

\_ the cabinets

\_ ceremonial rooms

The first floor contains:

\_cabinets and offices

The second floor contains:

\_cabinets and offices

The attic contains:

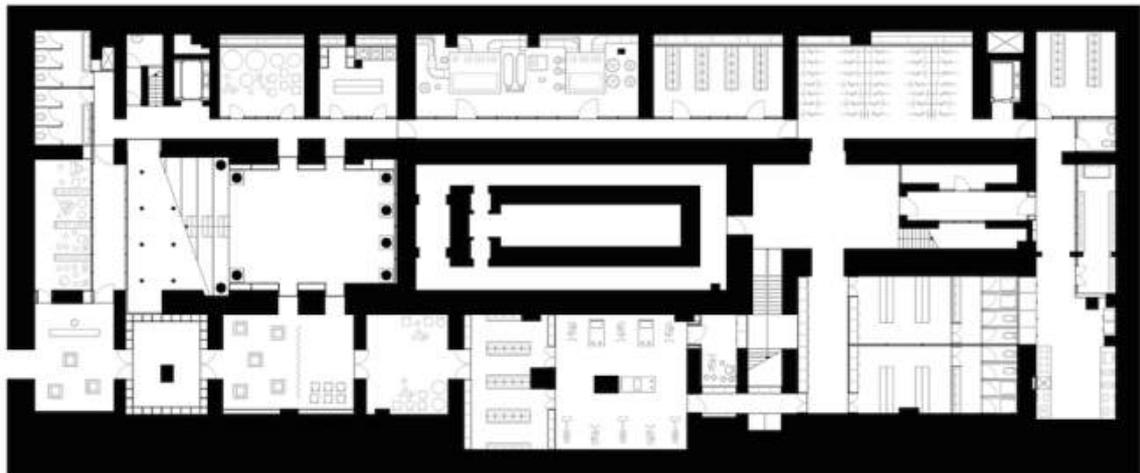
\_departments

The basement contains:

\_bicycle storage

\_kitchen

\_gym, dressing rooms and showers



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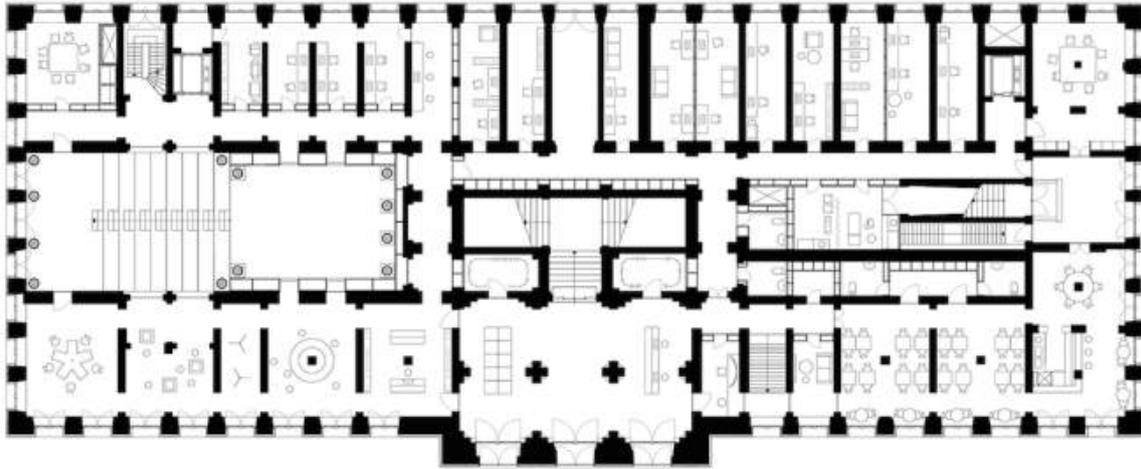
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## 6. Urban Tribune

The urban tribune is a small public auditorium that can host an audience of circa 120 people. The tribune is directly accessible from the small square to the south of the City Hall and occupies the ground floor and the underground of the central portion of the southern wing of the building. The urban tribune is inserted into the building as a precious wooden box that finds its place inside the rigorous structure of the City Hall. The tribune is organized as a small theatre that can be used for political discussions, for news conferences and for small spectacles and cultural events.

The urban tribune completes the set of facilities of the City Hall. Like for many Renaissance palazzos, the City

Hall has its own theatrical space (as the teatro Farnese inside of the Palazzo della Pilotta in Parma, as the theatre on the Mercatale ramp inside of the Palazzo Ducale in Urbino, as the Festsaal and the Redoutensaal inside of the Hofburg in Vienna))



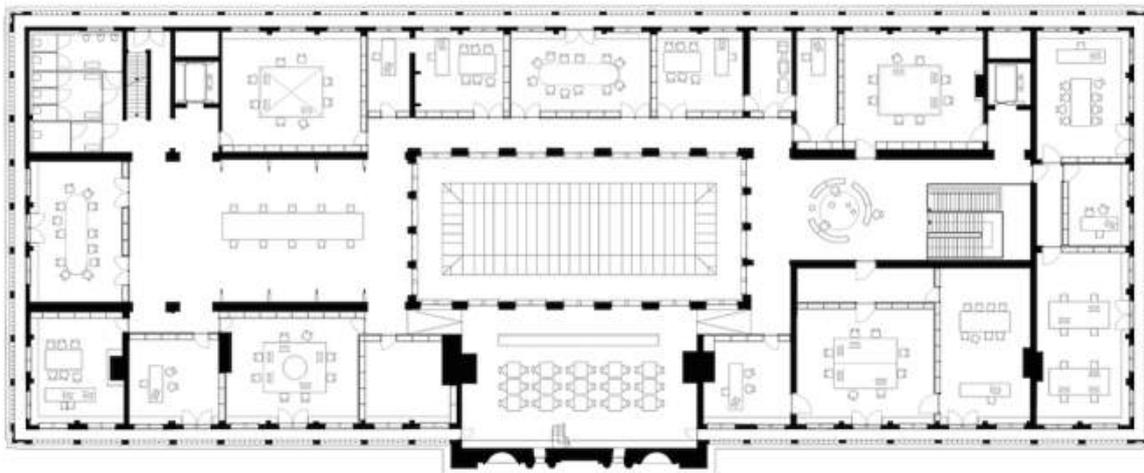
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The urban tribune can host different programs, and can be used by different users: citizens, politicians, actors, performers, artists. Through its program the urban tribune introduces into the building different populations from different regions: not only from the city but also from the neighbourhood and from the region.

By being directly accessible to the public and connected but separated from the offices of the Mayor, the urban tribune allows to bring the press room at the ground level.



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