

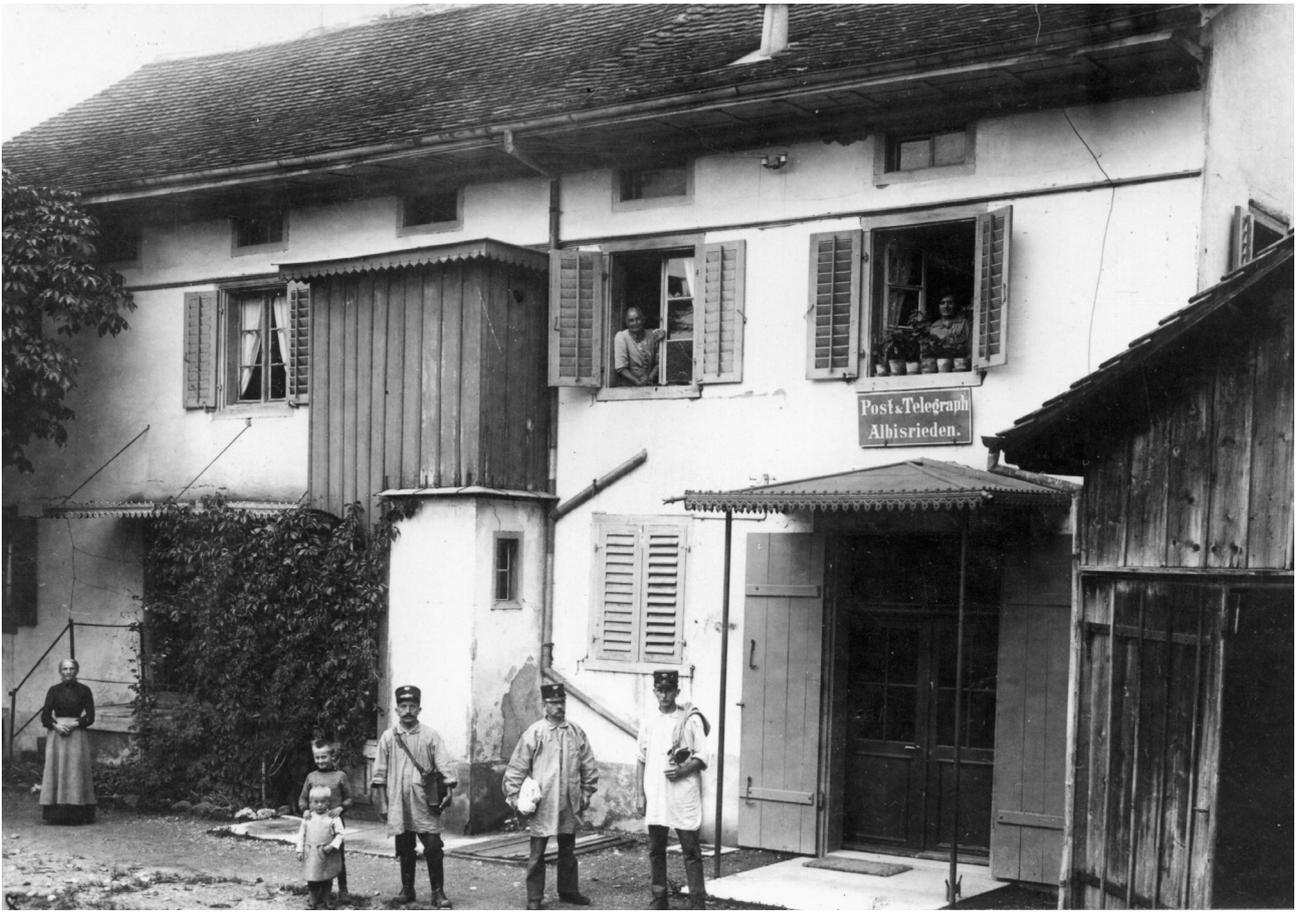
post
office
ritual

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Master's thesis HS2022
De Vylder, Langenberg, Delbeke

A relic can be defined for what it is, but what makes it a relic is even more fundamental. Its essence lies in the possibility it offers - that of a ritual. A procession, a cult, a *mise en scène*, that offers meaning to the relic. A series of actions carried out in a singular and similar way and repeated at regular intervals, which give the element - even the simplest - a new reality that ends up defining it.

The post office accompanies a daily ritual that, despite the changes that have occurred throughout history, remains. This project aims to restore the social quality of postal services by reimagining the role of ritual in a visit to the post office.

At Hofwiesenstrasse 3, the elements related to the logistics of postal services are thus condensed in the first basement directly linked to the distribution area. On the ground floor, only the counters are still in place, thus opening up the floor plan. The counter room appears as the meeting place between the employees and the users of the postal services. It is one of the possible places of departure and arrival of mail, but it represents above all the human qualities, the social aspect of the post office. The whole ritual of a visit to the post office - entering, welcoming, waiting, caring, exchanging - takes place in this space.



The post office accompanies a daily ritual that, despite the changes that have occurred throughout history, remains. Its relics are the letters that pass through the city, or the last people who still regularly visit the post offices, or even the post offices themselves. In a relationship of mutual legitimation, relics and ritual become witnesses to history, while retaining their purpose. The ritual of the post office user has changed over time and continues to evolve. From horses to cars, from six letters per inhabitant in 1850, to ninety in 1910, to more than five hundred today, the Swiss Post has developed. However, this progress is not simply a growth in the quantity of mail. Indeed, the number of letters is decreasing, while the number of parcels is increasing.¹ This phenomenon, associated with digitization, contributes to a transformation of postal services and therefore of its architecture. When the Swiss Post was founded in 1849, 1500 offices ensured the distribution of mail un-

til reaching 4000 offices in 1912. Since then, this number has dropped to 1500 again.² Swiss Post's strategy is now to stabilize this number in order to maintain a network that is accessible to 90% of the population within twenty minutes on foot or by public transport, while adapting the necessary services.³

The return to a number of offices similar to that of 1849 refers to a period when the post office was only a room in the house. Moreover, this number responds in a key way to a need for distribution and balance of postal services in the city. Since the post office is not doomed to disappear, it becomes essential to rethink its face for the future. The enacting of an updated ritual and the mise en scène of its relics seek to question the role of the post office beyond postal services, by turning to the domesticity lost during the rise of the Swiss Post and the sacrality embodied in its ritual.

1. Swiss Post, in: Annual Report 2021, 1st March 2022, <https://geschaeftsbericht.post.ch/21/ar/en/>.

2. Karl Kronig: "Post", in: Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz (HLS), 20th October 2011, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/014057/2011-01-20/>.

3. Confédération Suisse, in: Ordonnance sur la poste (OPO), 2018, <https://www.news.admin.ch/newsd/message/attachments/54839.pdf>.

35 post offices in Zürich

There are currently 35 post offices in Zürich, 14 of which are actually subsidiaries in partnership with another company. The remaining post offices operate solely for Swiss Post and are under pressure to remain profitable. The spaces are therefore filled with all kinds of sales stands, thus neglecting their spatial and social quality. The technological revolutions and the increase of competition and activity have in turn impacted the post offices, leaving traces of their passage and a tortured and damaged ritual. The observation of this ritual according to its procession, its cult and its mise en scène tries to identify the essence of postal services. The following texts have been modified from the original to add a level of interpretation to the post office and engage with the potential of these spaces.





weinbergstrasse 168
1916 - 1935

schaffhauserstrasse 41
1935 - 1947

schaffhauserplatz 22
1947 - 1957

hofwiesenstrasse 3
1957 - now

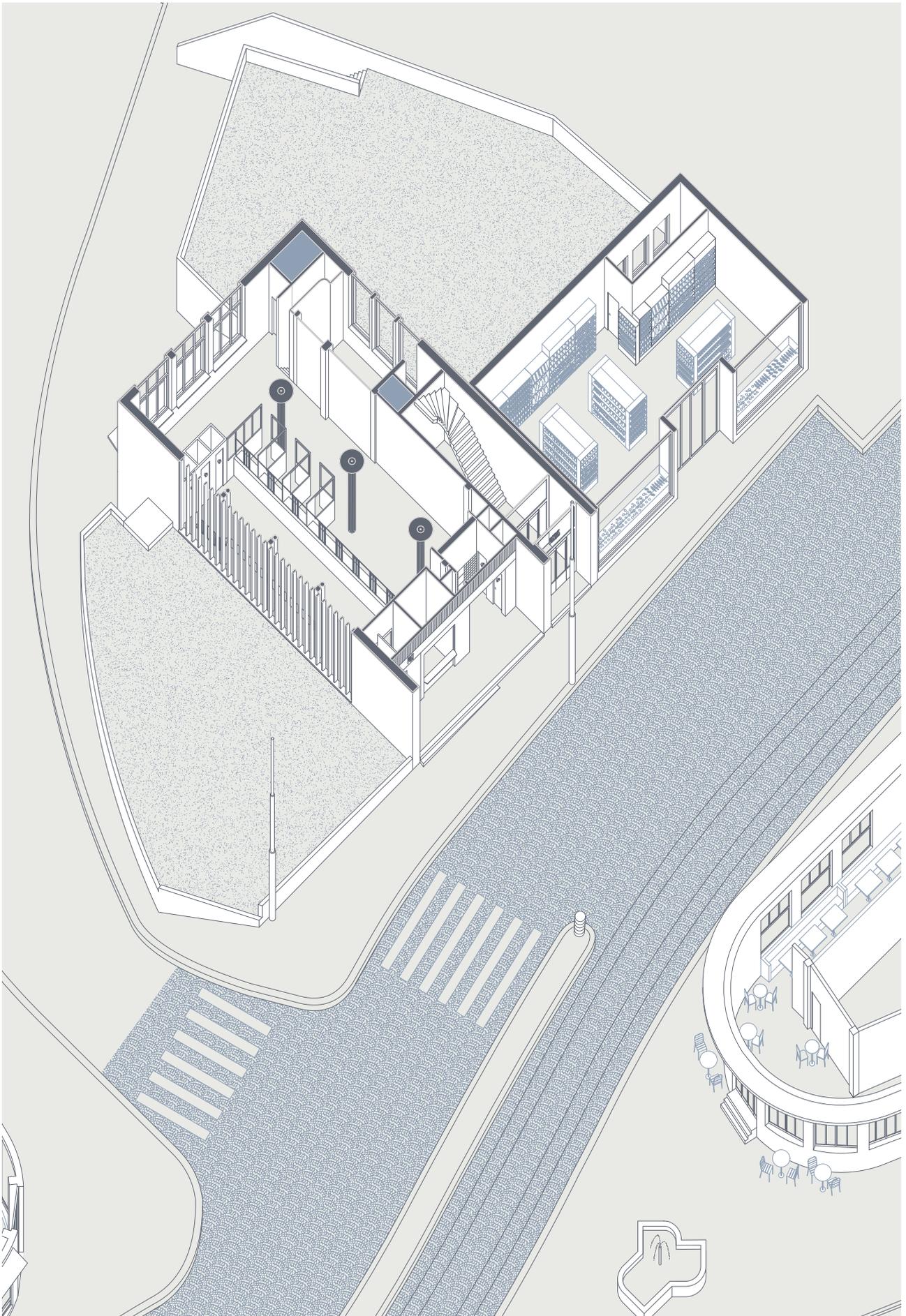
renovation
1980 - 2003 - 2012



hofwiesenstrasse 3, archive



hofwiesenstrasse 3, archive





a procession

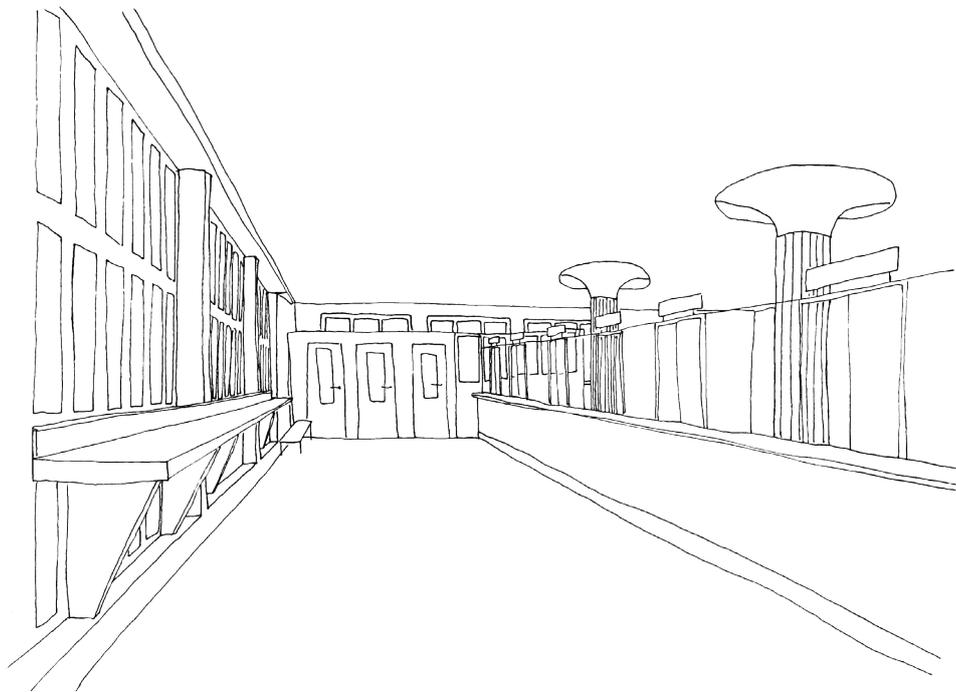
The time of collection is the beginning of the procession of mail which, in the performance of a ritual and postal act, is sent from one place to another (most important), while performing and passing through other facilities belonging to the postal services. The mail collection is a symbolic expression of the intrinsic rhythm of operation of the Swiss Post.

a cult

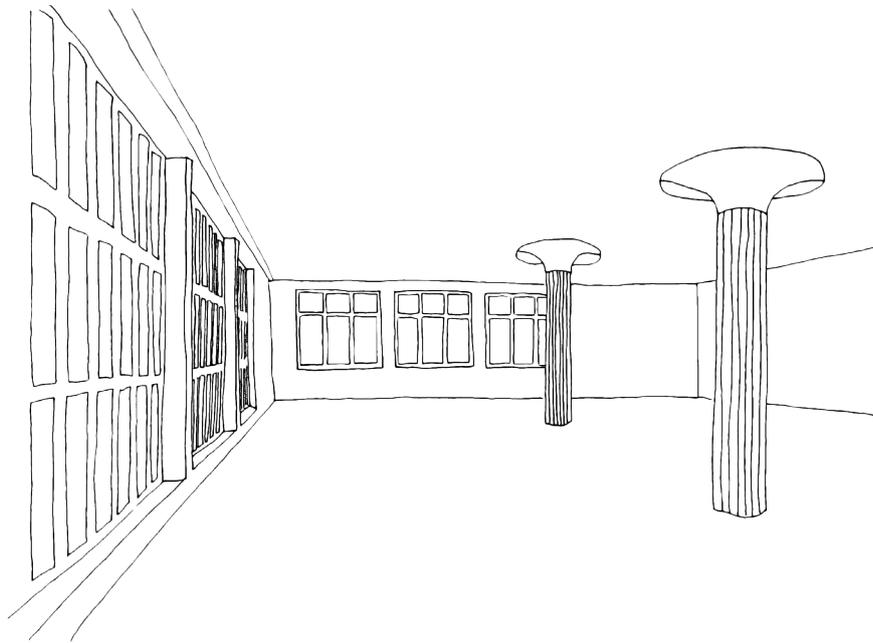
A post office is a place, usually a building, where people gather in an organized ritual. Counter rooms often - but not always - have a permanent sacred character in the eyes of users. Their architecture is particular in that the very structure of the buildings, and their interior layout, reflects the need for care of man and seeks to lead him towards interiority, meditation and reflection.

a mise en scène

The ideal post office does exist - and it's yours. The ideal post office is the one you visit, the one you appropriate for yourself, the one which you inhabit and that, with patience, you know how to turn into reality. However, it must adhere to certain principles and requirements that combine strict rules and, to a larger or lesser degree, subjectivity.







entering

In all post offices, where these services are treated with enormous power and respect, the postal services, in one form or another, are supported by parts of the physical environment which have the character of gates. Of course, a gate, or gateway, by itself cannot create a postal service.

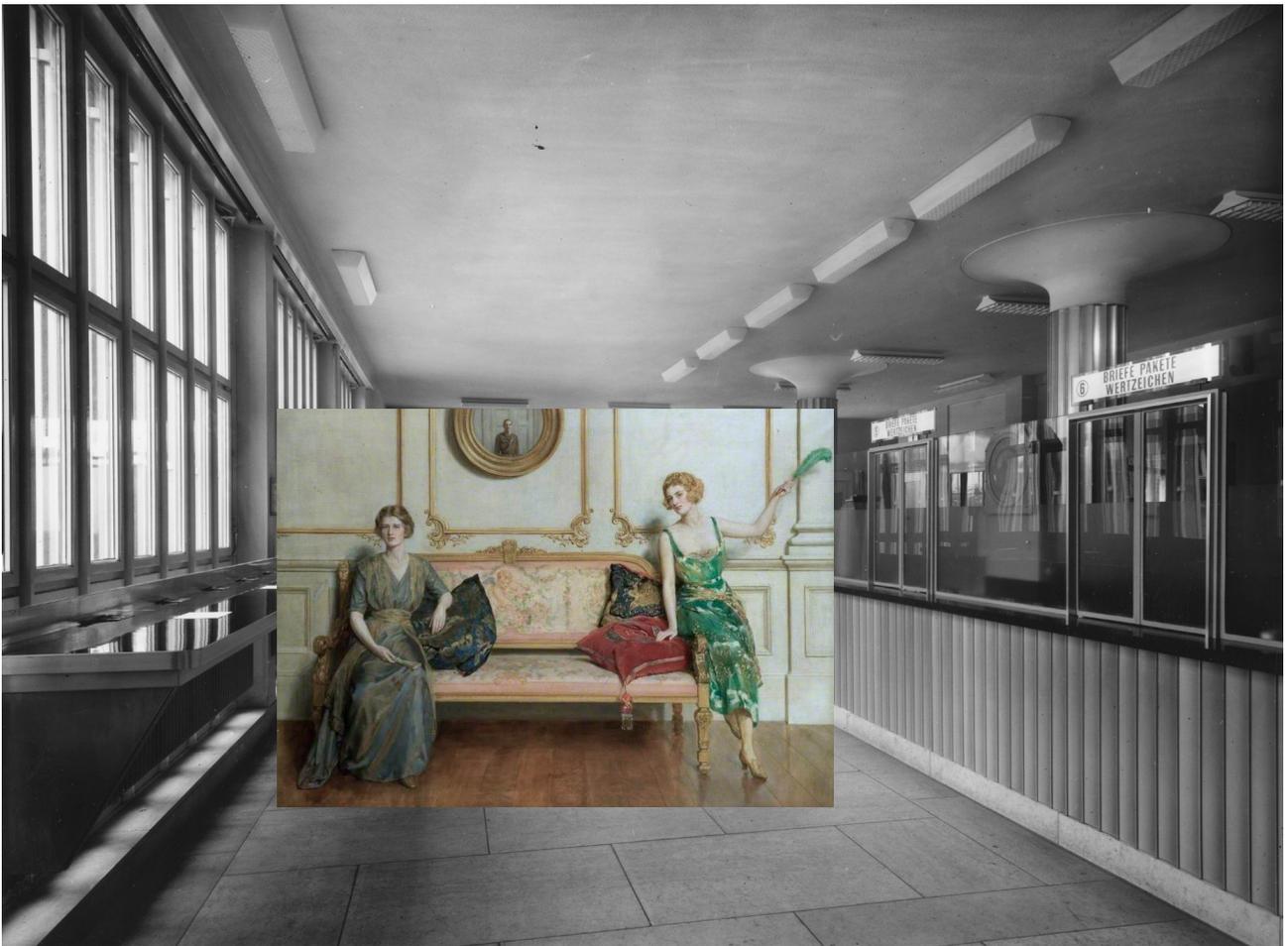
welcoming

The welcoming is a moment shared by almost all post office users, given the reason of their visit. The taking of a ticket symbolizes both the completed entering in the hall, inhabited by other users, and the beginning of a waiting and conflicting moment.



waiting

The process of waiting has inherent conflicts in it. On the one hand, whatever people are waiting for - a registered letter to sign, a package to pick up, mail to send - has built in uncertainties, which make it inevitable that they must spend a long time hanging around, waiting, doing nothing. On the other hand, they cannot usually afford to enjoy this time. Because it is unpredictable, they must hang at the very counter. Since they never know exactly when their turn will come, they cannot even take a stroll or sit outside. They must stay in the narrow confine of the post office, waiting their turn.



caring

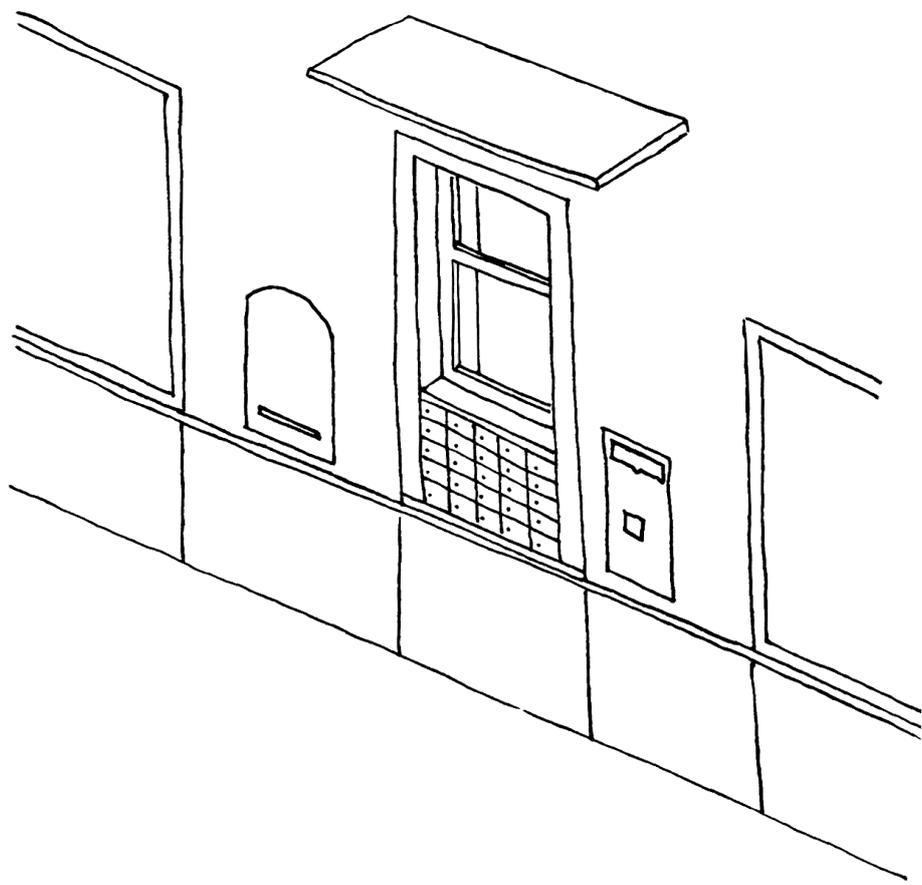
The care is a postal service. It occupies a central place in the ritual and everyday life of the post office. While users and visitors speak of caring, the term responsibility is generally used by post employees to refer to the same rite. The institution of the caring by the Swiss Post is part of the societal tradition which attaches great importance to users and employees which are sharing, especially during exchanges, in order to maintain a social aspect to the post office.

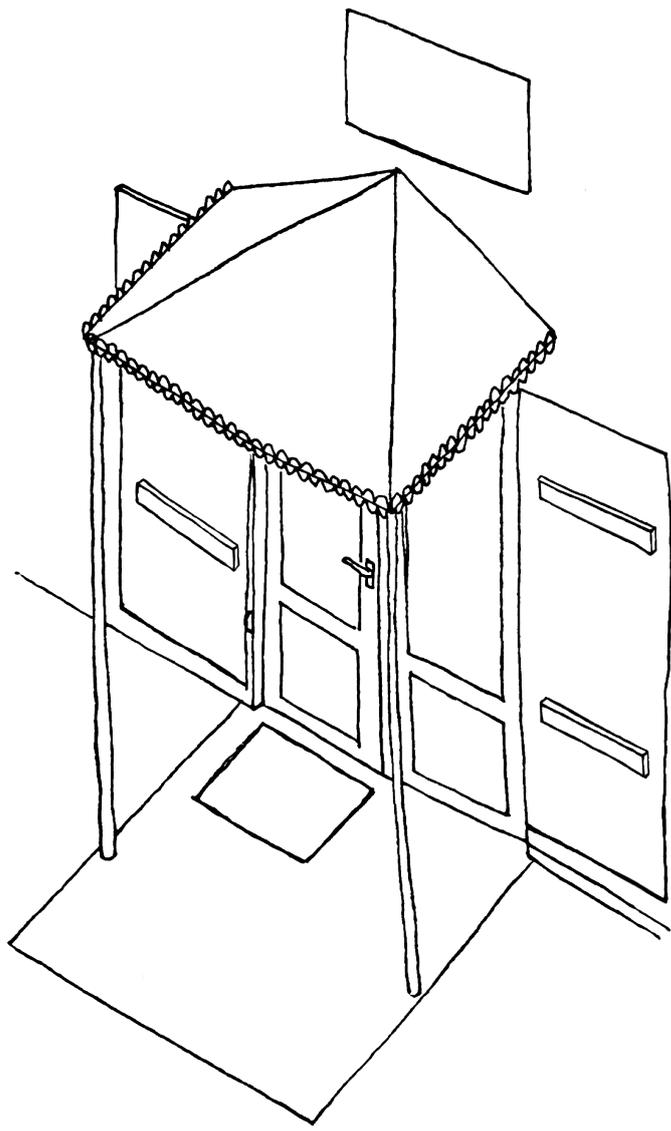


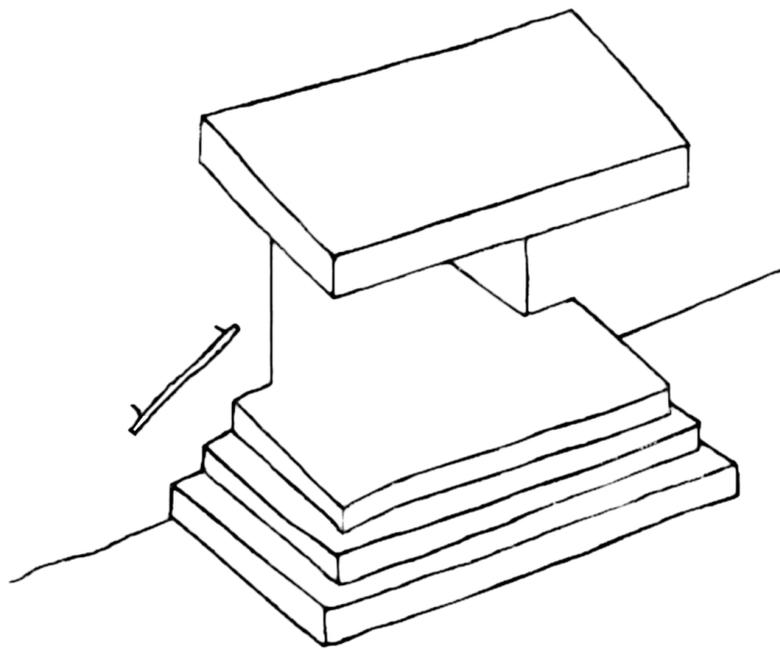
exchanging

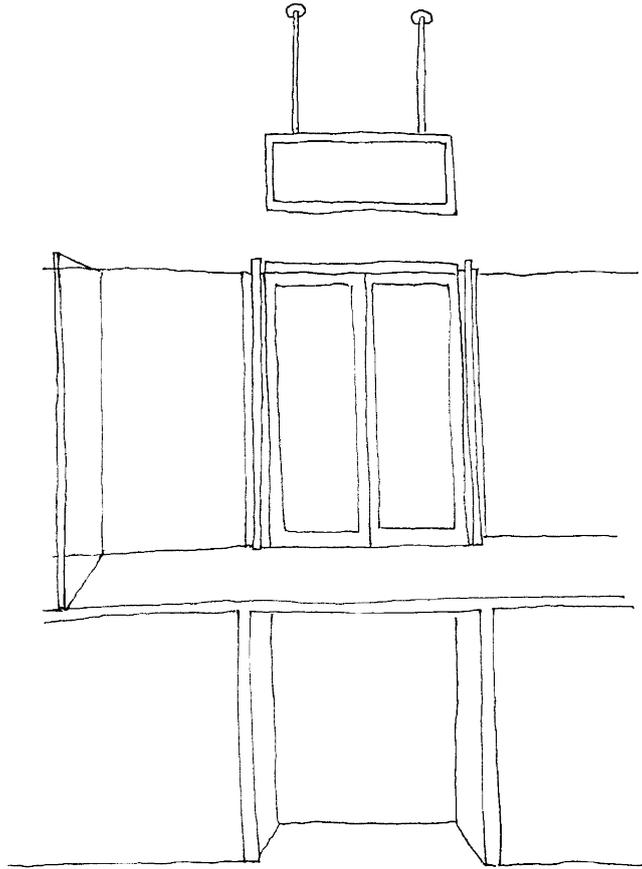
We call exchange the whole of the public and/or private practices of a post office by which the relationship of the users to their public services is manifested, either to send parcels, to receive letters, or to have coffee. It is the central element of any post office, the moment when users meet and commune with the public services and with each other.



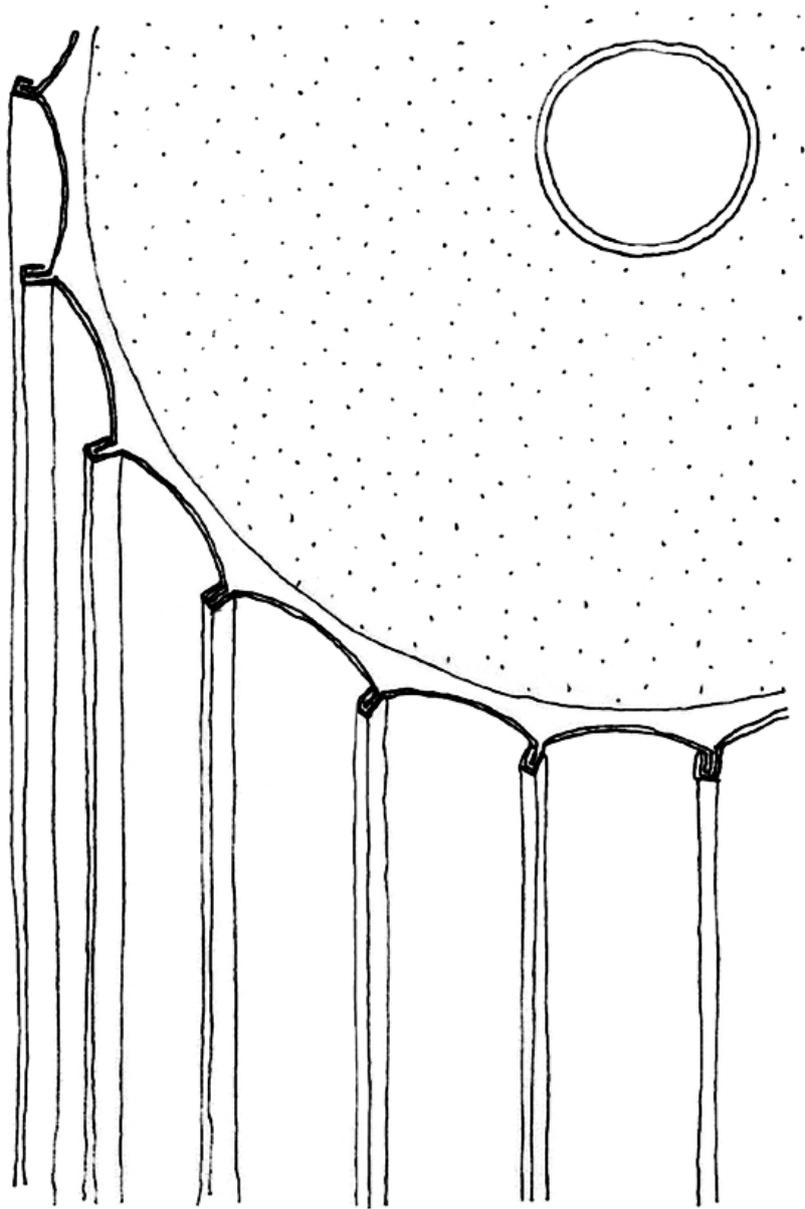


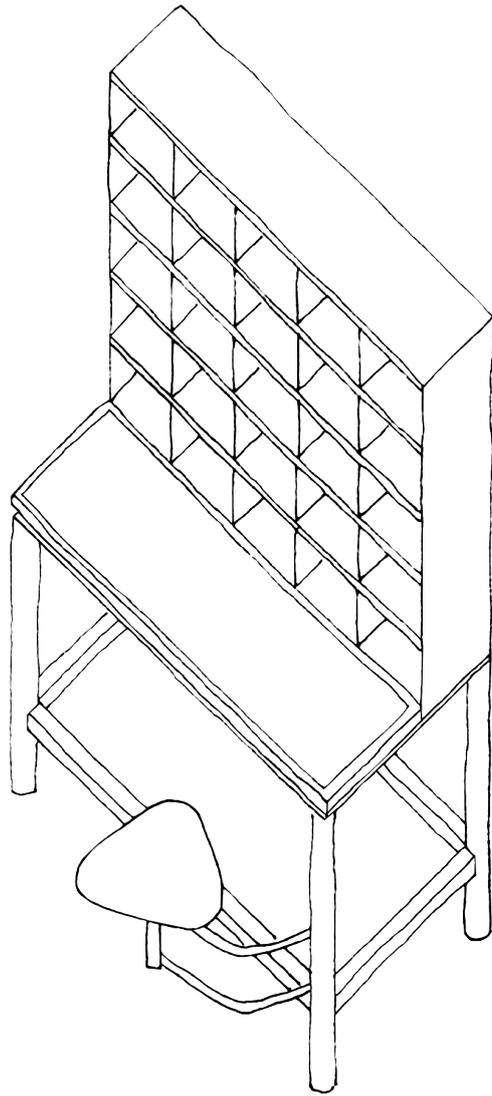


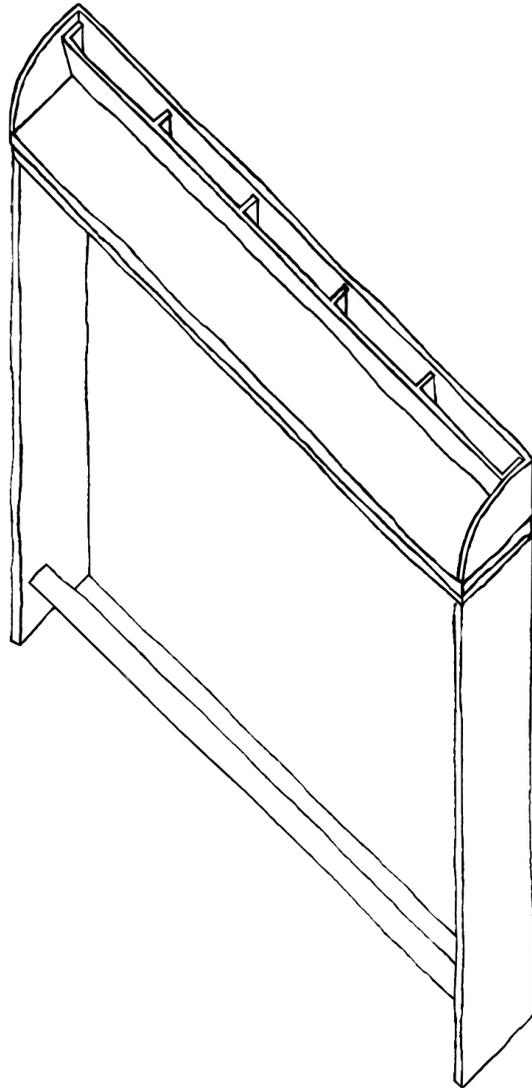














mail box
hofwiesenstrasse 5
mo-fr 18.00
sa 12.00
su 15.00

my post 24
mo-su 24/24

mail box
schaffhauserplatz 10
mo-fr 9.00

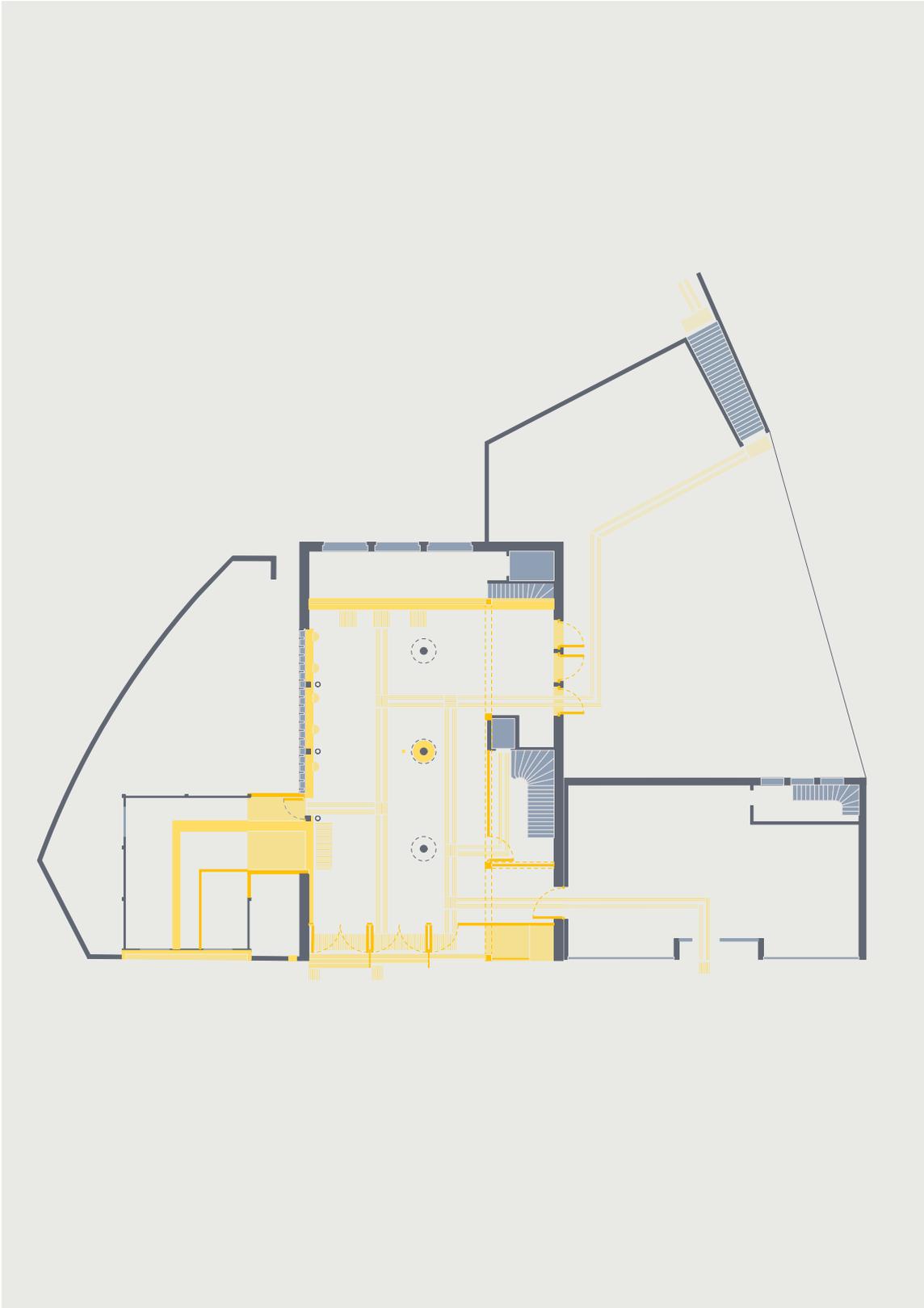
east facade



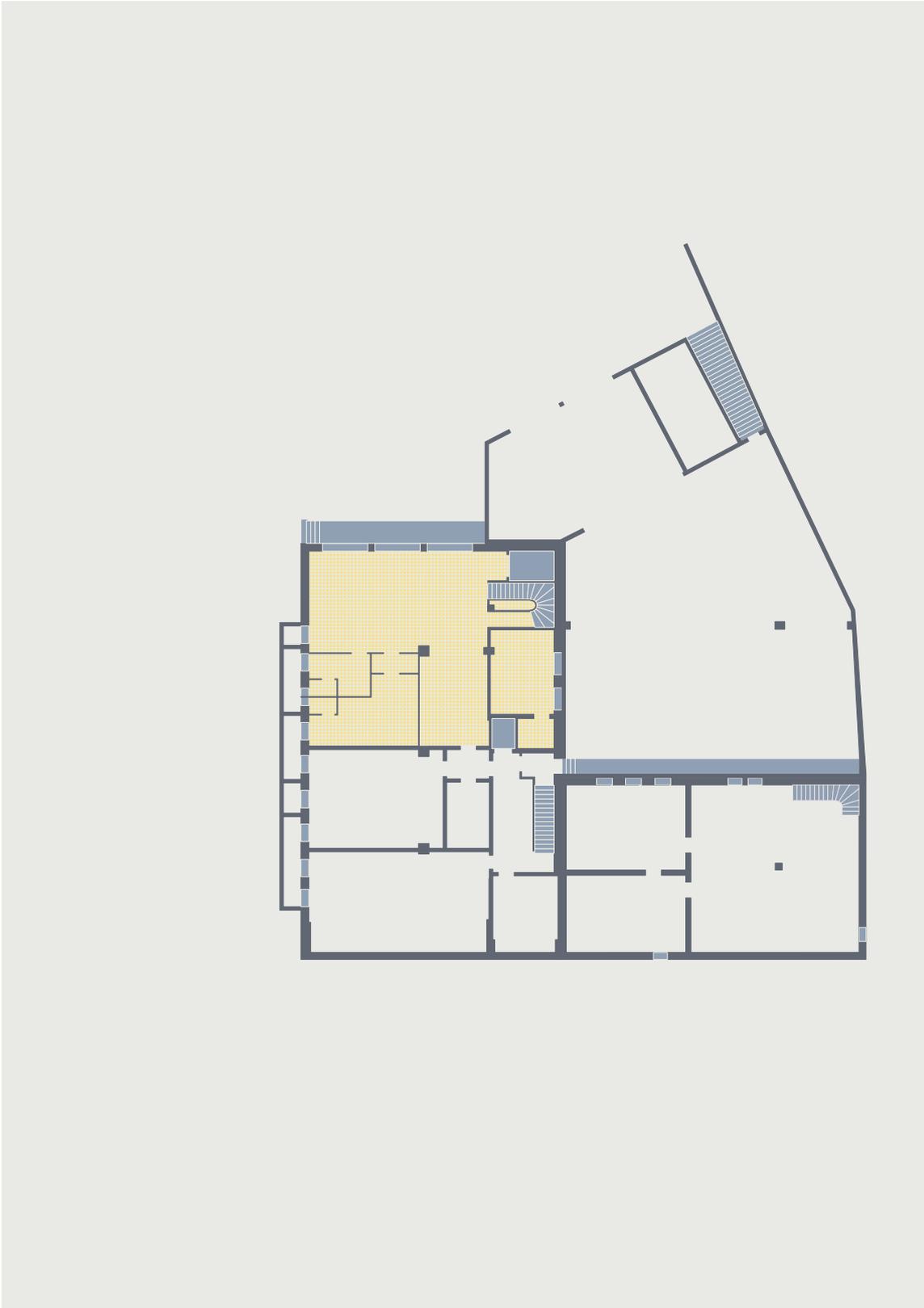
south facade



west facade

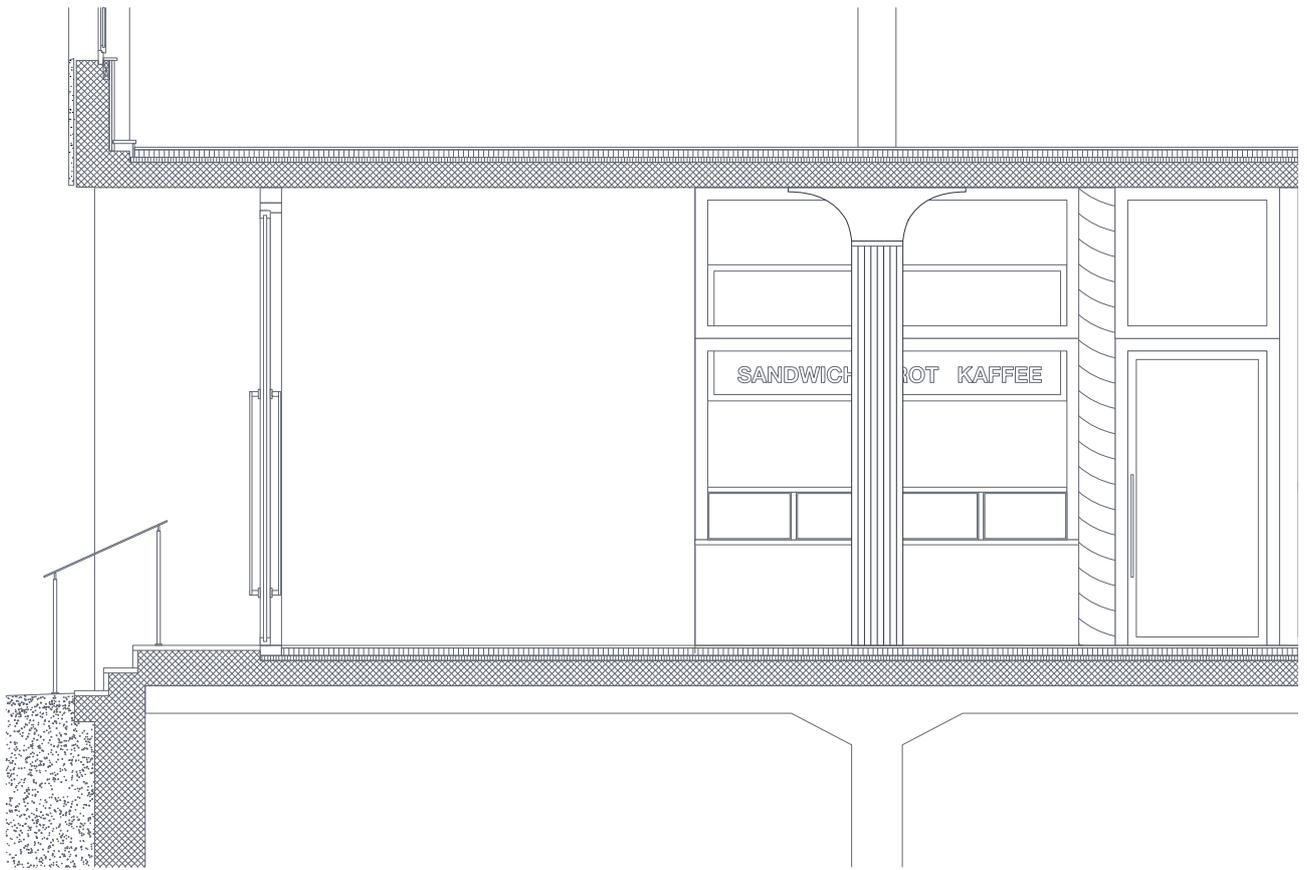


ground floor

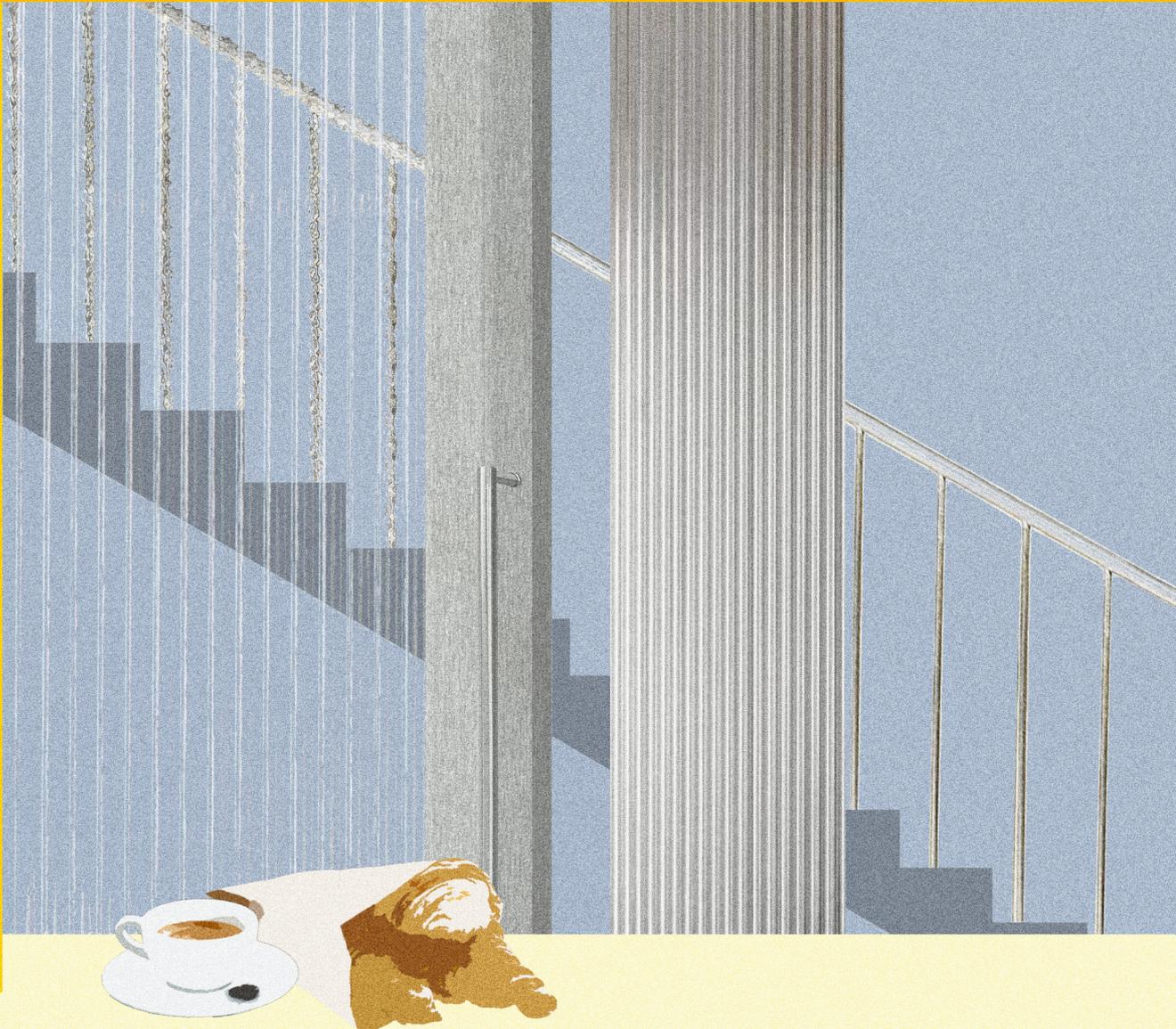


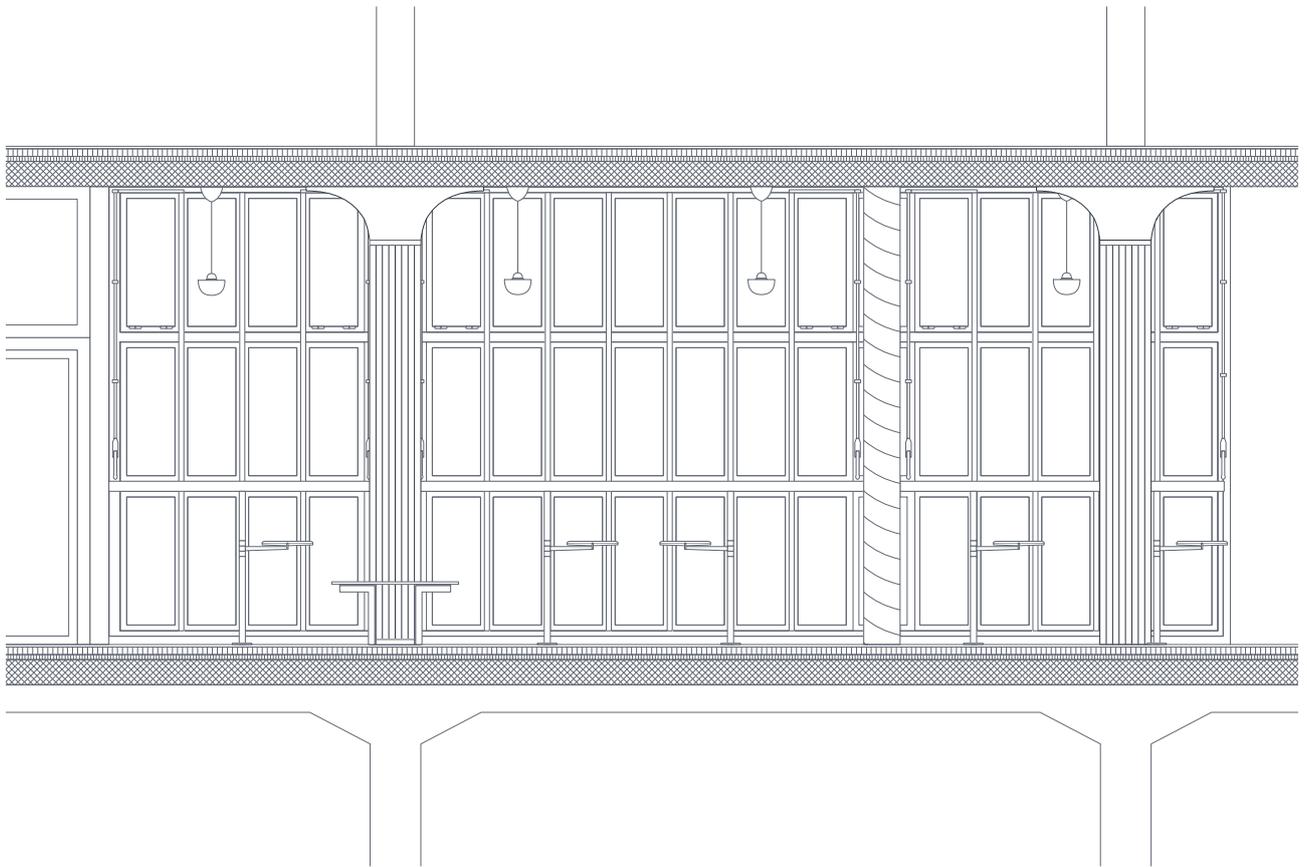
basement



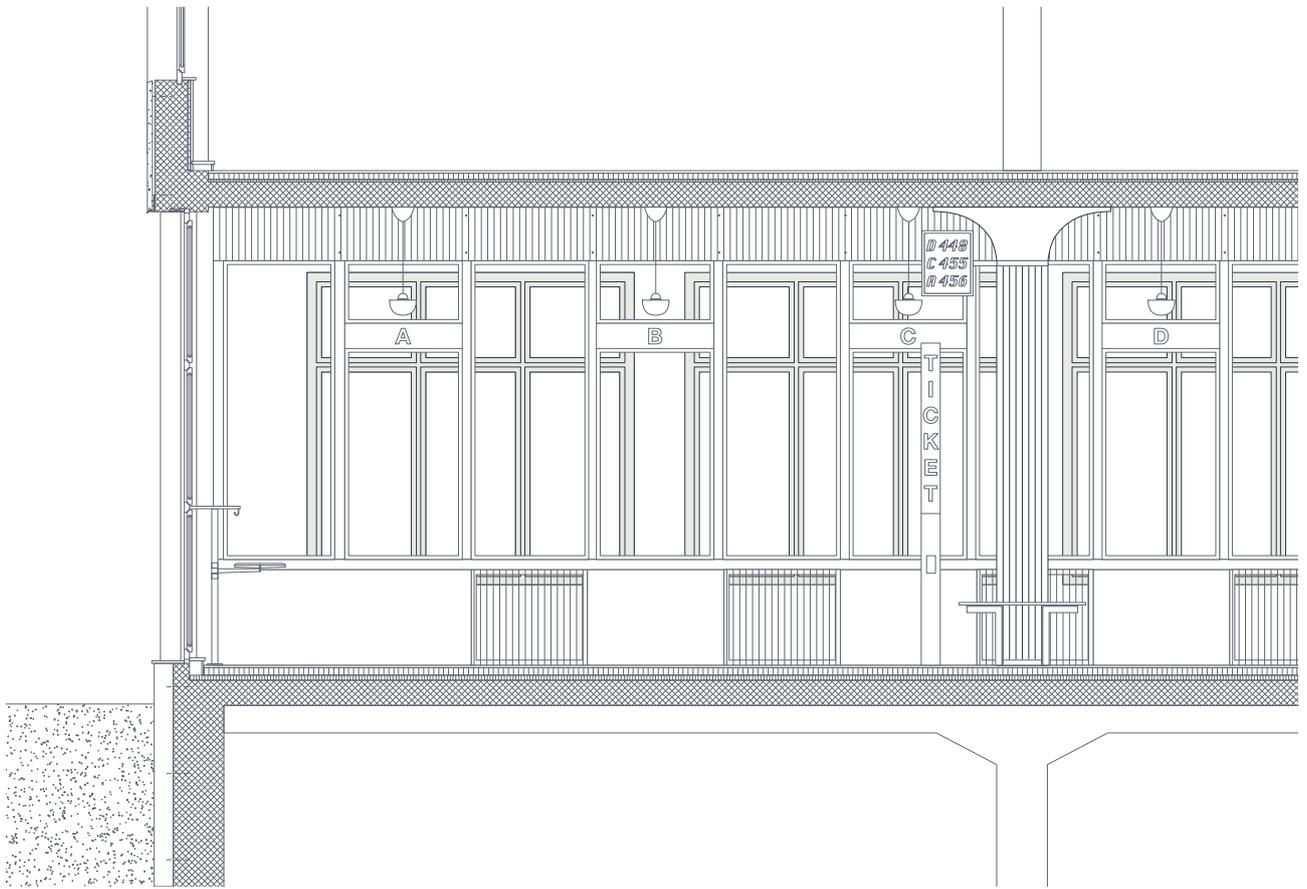


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