



Rom.Hof
Student Residential Courtyard, Bonn 2014
Commentary by Uwe Schröder

The city is laid out polycentrically. Over time, the surrounding villages have grown into the interior of the town. Even today, these successively incorporated locales are structurally and spatially perceptible within the fabric of the city; in some instances, despite having been reshaped, they continue to preserve their cores. Toward the outside, their spatial and formal concentration has been weakened, yet these villages have maintained their own mutually overlapping peripheries within the overall urban fabric. These townscapes, with their diverse origins, have grown into one another in a disordered fashion, interpenetrating and generating a new emptiness rather than a new center.

Correspondences between Places

It is a place that can be referred to as ‚in between‘ rather than ‚in the midst of.‘ Its spatial identity is more effec-

tively shaped by the topography and by outdated agricultural utilization than by the roads that terminate here or by the scattered settlements facilitated by them. Apart from the immediate location of the object, it is difficult to locate any local point of reference that could serve an architectural repositioning.

This is undertaken instead in a mediated way, and derived from the structure’s dedication. Topologically, as a student residential courtyard, the building casts an associative bridge across to the neighboring ‚locality,‘ with its late 19th century university buildings, found in close proximity to the palace. No viewing point in the town offers a commanding view of this spatial relationship. In aesthetic terms, this visual link is reserved for the „correspondence“ (M. Seel) between the two places via their similarities.

Interior Spatial Sequence

The building confronts the location’s exterior spatiality with its introverted character. From the street, a gate leads into the interior access balconies, which provide



accesses to small apartments. The open corridors of the four stories are linked to one another via staircases situated in the corners. The core space is subdivided by a transverse block („washhouse“), and features courtyards on the upper entry-level and the lower egress level that are enclosed by the open access balconies, and which provide a connection to the open landscape via the lower gate. Accommodated in the lower courtyard is the kitchen, with the washroom in the upper courtyard, and above it the playroom. The apartments, including ancillary spaces such as kitchens and bathrooms, are linked to the access balconies via openings with doors and windows. Loggias („studioli“) are set before the externally-oriented rooms.

Solitude and Community

As a ‚courtyard,‘ the building perpetuates a type that – together with the atrium for the home and the forum for the town – enjoys a long tradition in building history. That it occurs in the context of the individual building and of the larger urban fabric, with their contrasting forms of

relatedness, is owed to a „higher purpose“ (G. Semper) that is always acknowledged by the „courtyard“ as a type: a dedication to collective dwelling in both house and town. As an interior external space, the courtyard is the most public part of a building, one that mediates in a reciprocal way between street and dwelling. And just as the courtyard consists systematically of core and ancillary spaces, and is dedicated to ‚community,‘ the inner interior space of the dwelling can be traced back to this principle as well. Because of its complementary dedication to ‚solitude,‘ however, the „studiolo“ – as the dwelling’s core space – is positioned eccentrically along the building’s outer periphery. As the dwelling’s spatial terminus, of house and courtyard as well as of the city, it is the place of maximum retreat from community and society; by virtue of the deficient urban context and the discontinuous external interior spaces of the city, the „studiolo“ is at the same time the place that is confronted with the greatest immediacy by the exterior outer space of countryside and landscape.

Building and Courtyard as Celebration

The „washhouse“ that is set in the middle of the courtyard represents community residence, embodying it and (hopefully) engendering it, presupposing the act of communal dwelling. The courtyard as a whole is conceived as a ‚densified settlement,‘ while the urban emerges in place of the rural. As a kind of compensation for the urban space design that is lacking at this location, this ‚citified settlement‘ leads toward a kind of urbanity in the building’s interior. Only in this way can this heightened space, installed in the middle both horizontally and vertically, be set up functionally with clothes washers and dryers; only in this way can the fountain in the courtyard that is set in front allude to this dedication. Even more primordially than the washing place, the hearth and cooking allude to the communal event. With its hearth, the courtyard on the lower level that opens onto the landscape is set in front of the common kitchen. And installed high above, even higher than the other two, is the space for play. Here, the familiar acts of cooking, washing, and playing allude to the celebration – a celebration of „beautiful use“(Bruno Taut)– the „celebration“ (H.-G. Gadamer) that constitutes and represents communality.

The Architectural System

The building is assembled in an organismic way. Part and whole stand in a relationship of commensurability in a way that manifests proportional correlations between spaces and forms and is grounded in relations of scale. In the architectural system, the proportions of the spaces lead all the way to the unit of the opening, and the proportions of the forms to the unit of the column. From the very beginning, opening and column, spaces and forms, are integrated into one and the same modular dimensional system. The term proportion, then, characterizes the proportionality that exists within an order (i.e. that of the building), while the term scale characterizes the commensurability between two different orders – i.e. that of the building and that of the occupants. Only scale positions the building, with its spaces and forms, in relation to something other than itself, to the occupants. Ostensibly, it is the craftsmanship of the brick that renders the scale of the building palpable: here, to grasp physically means to grasp mentally (to comprehend). Scale comprehends far more than a traditional anthropomorphism or anthropometry of forms, but instead means prior to this and primarily the spatiality of the architecture; ultimately, it aims toward a total constitution, one that also encompasses the occupants’ capacities for movement, perception, and imagination. A scale,

then, that is no longer exhausted in dimensions alone, but instead find expressions and makes an impact in an expanded commensurability.

Openness and Openings

The rooms are derived from the walls. They are linked to one another and to the exterior space via the element of the opening. The open and closed qualities of the walls display the social separation into public and private. Via openings, the walls enclose and exclude. The building’s openness decreases from the interior toward the outside. Just as the exterior openings of the walls indicate the presence of rooms belonging to the occupants to the outside, the inner openings – by doubling the interval – call attention within to the shared spaces without. The openings too are spaces – spaces inside of walls within which one stands or through which one passes. Walls open up as places and as passages. Arches and vaults characterize these interior spaces within walls in a special way: the protective and sheltering quality of the simultaneously closing and opening gesture has the effect of intensifying space at such places and passages. An arch focuses on the middle through which the gaze and movement lead. Unlike the angular opening, which seems to simply cut the wall away, to slice through it, the arch seems to dilate the opening, to almost draw the wall aside, which seems to allow the quality of massiveness to remain palpable within the space of the opening.

Botany of the Wall

Precisely because it can do little else (at least not without extraneous support), brick is assembled into arches and vaulting. The openings below arches allow walls to seem heavy. Loads are diverted via arches into walls and supports in a flowing way and dissipate into the ground. The ‚draining away‘ of loads allows walls to appear rooted solidly in the ground, from which they seem to grow. This peculiar efficacy of the wall is manifested emblematically in the configuration of the brickwork. As the wall approaches the ground, the water-struck brick changes to red, while the height difference between the street and the landscape behind means that the rear of the building is formed primarily as a red-clad basement level. The walls that rise above the pedestal become yellow. As it increases and recedes, the transition from red to yellow takes a course whose intermingled transition mimetically depicts the ‚growing upward‘ of the wall and the ‚growth‘ of the building. In a number of regards, this allegorical character of the ‚organic‘ wall and the organismic building is transformed, as emphasized by

the appearance of side, end, and face surfaces of the bricks, by the ‚wild patterning,‘ by the branching out of the network of joints, by projections and setbacks, and by predetermined technical ‚mistakes.‘ The resultant irregular pattern characterizes the organically proliferating (wachstümliche) texture of the wall and defines the tectonics of the building - which resembles that of a plant.

The Garb of the Spaces

Linked to the coloration of the materiality of the brick – to the red and yellow – is the interior polychromy of walls and ceilings. Together, initially, with a third color, the mineral blue which with the ceilings are „painted away.“ Three additional colors – beige, purple, green – appear as products of the three principal colors. The interior walls of the access balconies, staircases, and „wash-house“ are clad in a carton-toned beige as a mixture of red and yellow. The „studioli,“ with their orientation toward the outside, are characterized by a transition from purple below to green above. If a given „studiolo“ is set behind a masonry wall that is primarily red, the walls are painted in a brownish purple, a mixture of red and blue. Emerging behind the mainly yellow masonry walls is green as a product of yellow and blue. Because of the silification of the plastered ground, the colors of the mineral paints (Keim) display a mineral ‚depth.‘ The polychromy is associated with the building’s public areas, that is to say the spaces dedicated to collective functions, and contributes to their atmospheres. In the outer „studioli“ of the apartments, the coloration evokes symbolic associations with the communal and the social, turning away from the spatiality of the building and of the city. Otherwise, the apartments – in white and gray – are excluded from this color scheme.

Without Color

The art of Detlef Beer too renounces color – i.e. beneath the blue ceilings of the „washhouse“ and the „studioli.“ This is all the more remarkable when we recall that in the work of this painter, the handing of color – especially yellow, blue, and red – is accorded a fundamental conceptual significance: here, however, the chromatic prerequisites of the architecture lead toward an artistic renunciation of color. To begin with, this means the direct ‚omission‘ of color which first endows the inner relationship between action and building with spatiality. For while the architecture delimits the space structurally while at the same time masking its structural features through color in order to focus attention entirely on the interior spaces, the art – with its ‚omission‘ of the colors

– in the first instance enacts an opening up of the space in opposition to the architecture. But these ‚cut out‘-style openings are not intended to call attention to the construction lying above, for instance the rough plaster ground or the coarse concrete of the ceilings; instead, it is a question of opening the space toward another space – an imaginary, an expanded, unbounded, open space. From there, as though from a great distance, and caused by the pale ground, the motivically omitted areas of the three abstract ceiling paintings radiate back into the space’s interior. The design’s mathematical qualities and the recessed proper names in the ceilings of the „studioli“ allude enigmatically to astronomy.

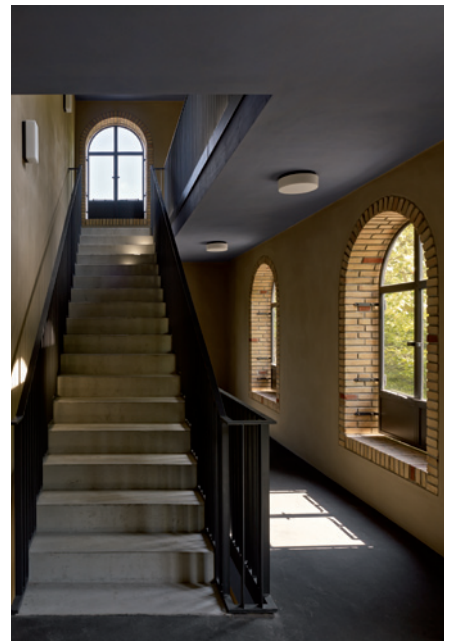
Regarding Time

The building alludes to that which precedes it, to the past, albeit without delimiting itself explicitly from the ‚old.‘ It does not, then, appeared genuinely new. This need not be a disadvantage, since that which is regarded as ‚new‘ today may be consigned to the category ‚old‘ tomorrow – in any event too hastily for a deliberate, a thoughtful architecture that displays little concern for fashion. The building is set into a temporal foundation as though into the ground – a work that generates cohesion between past, present, and future: a building that will never have been modern.

Project participants

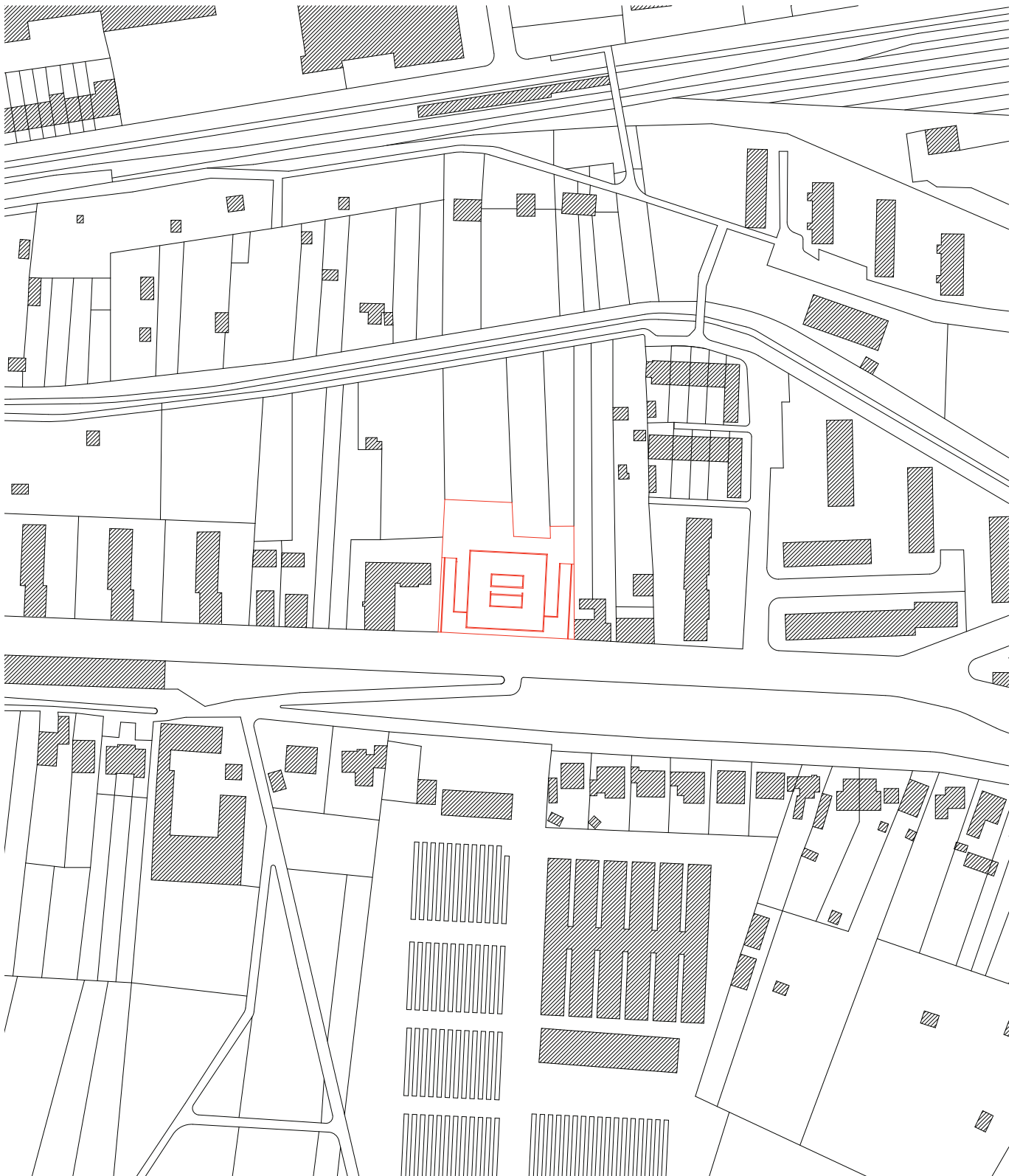
Architect:	Uwe Schröder Architekt, Bonn
Project manager:	Matthias Hiby
Project collaborators:	Feyyaz Berber, Stefan Dahlmann, Josephine von Hasselbach, Paolo Marra, Giovanna Moccia, Olga Rausch, Christopher Schriener
Structural engineering:	Ertl Tragwerk, Bonn
HVAC engineering:	Bähr Ingenieure, Cologne
Artworks:	Detlef Beer, Bonn
Photographer:	Stefan Müller, Berlin

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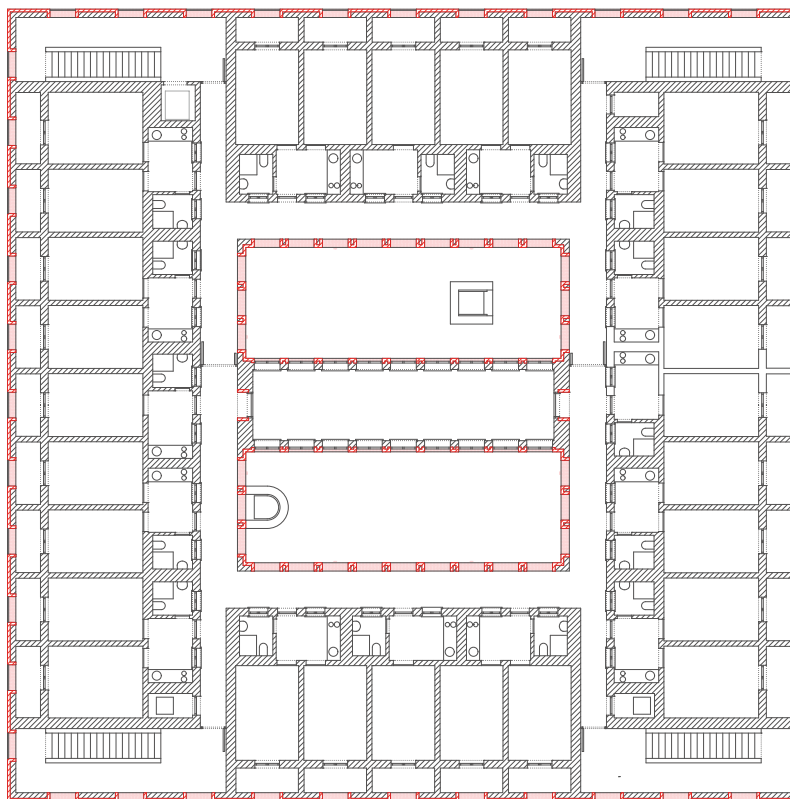
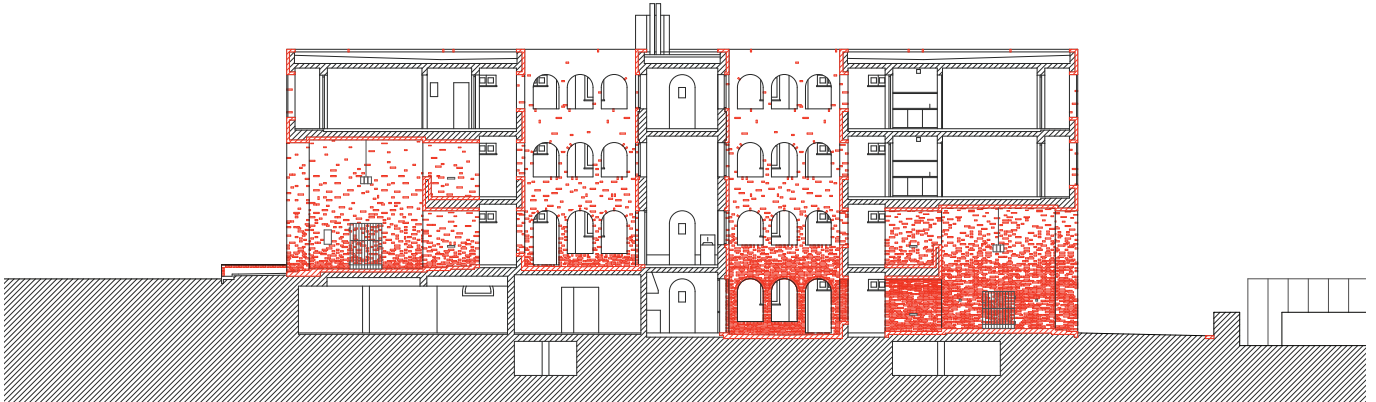






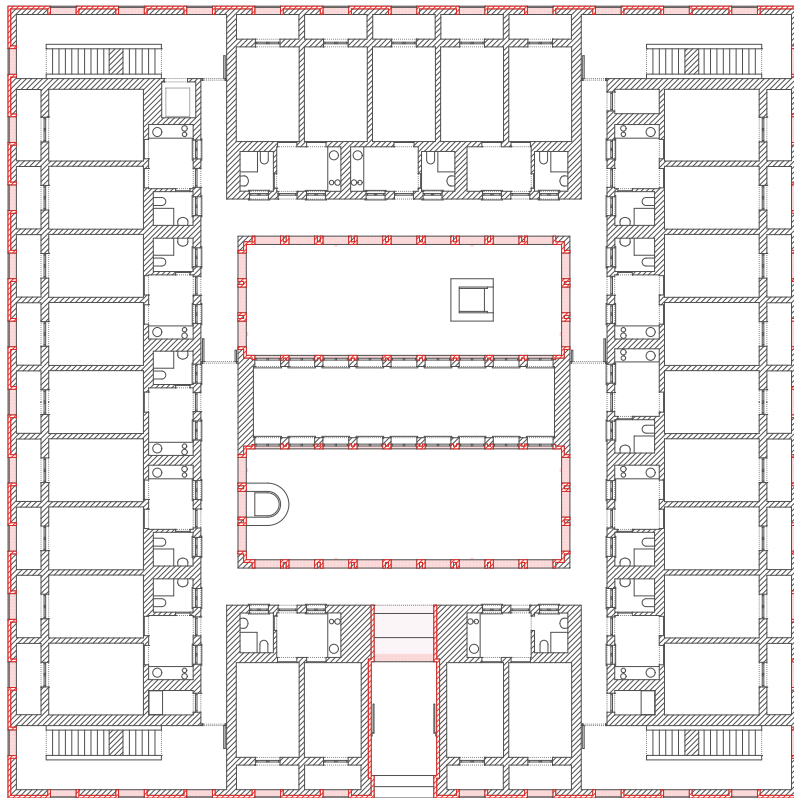
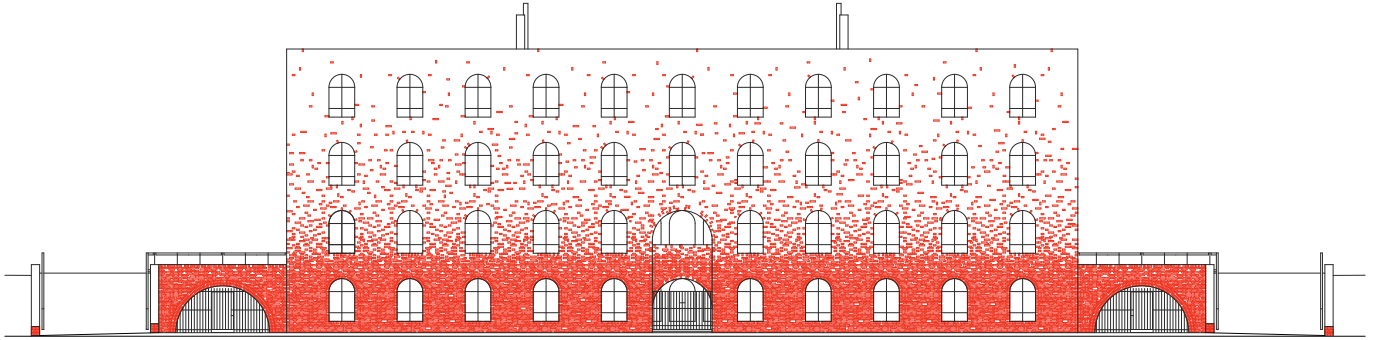
Situation plan, 1.2500

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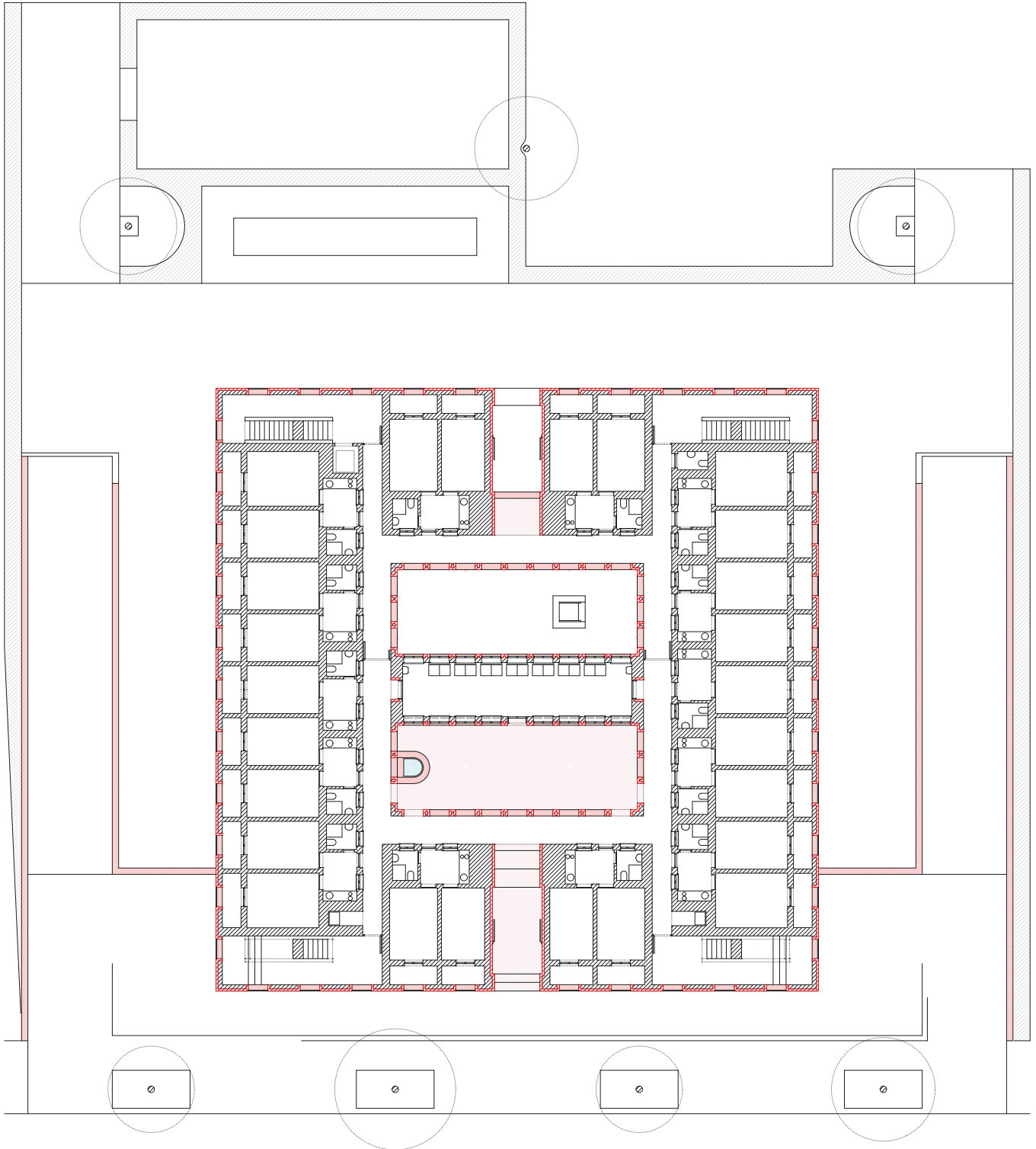
Courtyard section, 1.333
Plan of 2nd upper story, 1.333

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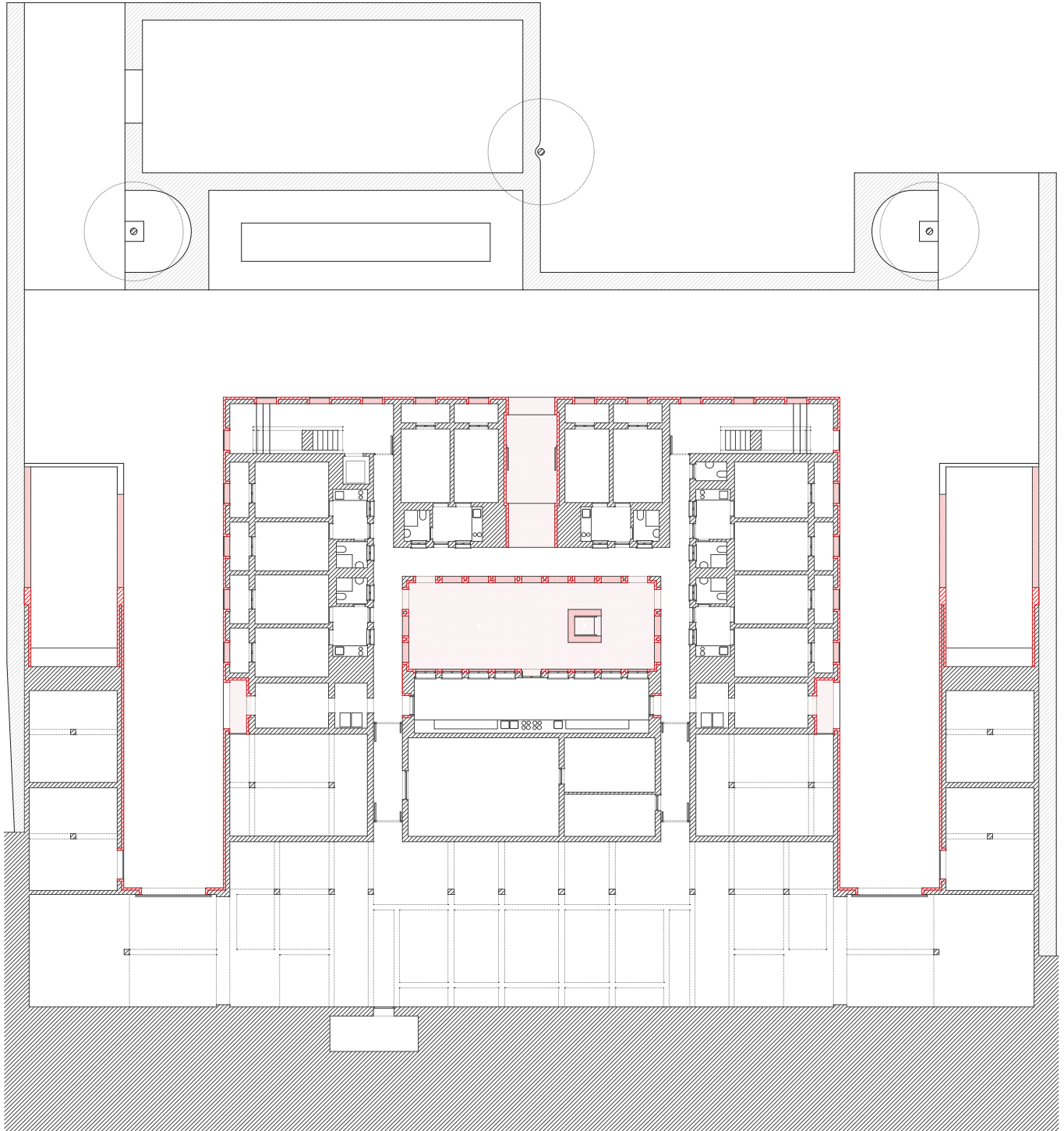
North elevation, 1.333
Plan of 1st upper story, 1.333

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Plan of ground floor, 1.333

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Plan of basement level, 1.333