Public space plays a vital role in the life of cities, the importance of which has been well documented throughout the centuries. Giorgio Martini’s 15th Century *Man as the Prototype for Urban Form*, for example, depicts the public plaza as the *umbilicus* of the city. Cities rely on the existence of society, which in turn relies on the gathering of people. However, gathering space is not limited to outdoor plazas; a fact clearly understood by Giambattista Nolli who surveyed Rome in the mid-18th Century. In his famous plan, Nolli shows the interior spaces of Rome’s churches and other public buildings in the same fashion as the plazas and streets that surround them. When weighed against the solid masses of the other private buildings of Rome, these interior public spaces clearly have a direct and fundamental connection to their exterior plazas.


The library's Piano Nobile is an indoor extension of the outdoor plaza and is akin to the indoor public spaces depicted in the *Nolli Plan of Rome*. Giambattista Nolli's strategy of separating the built environment from open space (including streets) is not quite so effective when translated to the neighborhood plan of Shaw, due to the lack of urban density of this particular area. However, if the both the building and vehicular (including streets and parking lots) realms are separated from the pedestrian zones, a much more revealing story is told.

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**The "Nolli" Plan of Shaw**

- **Buildings**
- **Vehicular Space**
- **Pedestrian/Gathering Space**
The plaza is where many visitors begin their library experience and it is designed to facilitate this experience as well as the multitude of other purposes the community may find for it. In a bold gesture toward weaving the library into the neighborhood, the rough textured granite floor of the plaza crosses R Street at the sidewalk level, forcing vehicular traffic to climb a six-inch slope. This gives drivers a heightened awareness of their momentary presence in the pedestrian realm. Overall traffic on R Street is reduced by dedicating one lane for busses and one lane for short-term parking. An existing driveway connecting R Street to several parking lots north of the plaza has been eliminated and a new access lane north of the plaza enters from 7th Street and exit to 8th Street. The Metro station entrance has been moved to the eastern half of the plaza, allowing the Metro a clear relationship to the library entrance. Consequentially a below-grade tunnel connecting the escalators to the station platform is shortened by approximately 50 feet. A grove of trees is introduced to the site and with it spaces to sit, read, and interact with other members of the community.

(Inset) Demolition Plan
1. Existing Library
2. Existing Metro entrance
3. Existing Driveway

Site Plan
4. Granite Floor
5. New Metro Entrance
6. New Access Lane
7. Bus/Bike Lane
8. 10 Minute Parking Zone
9. Reading Grove
Upon crossing the plaza, visitors to the library approach the building’s entrance by ascending a four-feet tall ramp or an associated set of stairs. The ascent is the transition from the plaza to the library, bringing the visitor to the level of the Piano Nobile.

Site Section, view to the East

Site Plan
1. Plaza
2. Entrance Ramp
At the main entrance, visitors to the library pass through a massive threshold that is both inviting and uplifting.
"You shouldn't be forced to put people through the library. It should be just something in its structure which says, 'what a wonderful place to go.'"

--Louis Kahn, on the Phillips Exeter Library

Despite the odd geometry of the plan, the Piano Nobile space is oriented along an axis perpendicular to that of the main entrance. Upon entering the building massive columns turn the visitors' attention to the left, toward the grand stair to the second floor, the circulation area, and ultimately the books. Computer terminals in this space allow quick reference of the library's catalogue. A secondary entrance off of 8th Street is opposite the main entry and a stair down to the assembly level is at the northern end of the space.

**Piano Nobile Plan**

1. Entry
2. Piano Nobile
3. 2nd Floor Stair
4. Computer Terminals
5. Circulation
6. Elevator
7. Secondary Entrance
8. Assembly Level Stair
The floor-to-ceiling height of the Piano Nobile space is 42 feet.
Sketch of Piano Nobile, from base of Grand Stair

Working Model
“Traveling up through a building should be an adventure in climbing.” -- Jaan Holt

The path of ascent through the Piano Nobile weaves in and out of the building offering visitors several moments of reconnection with the surrounding city. At the second floor this path exits the building through the utility wall, and a glass-enclosed stair carries visitors up to the third floor. While on this stair visitors are closer to the outdoor environment of Shaw than the interior of the library.

As visitors re-enter the building through the utility wall at the third floor, the stair to the fourth floor is immediately to the left. The landing for this switchback stair pokes through the exterior wall for a brief glimpse at the neighborhood before turning visitors around, sending them back into the library. The path ends on the fourth floor with a small, glass enclosed platform, allowing visitors to read and reflect while surrounded by the sky.
The Piano Nobile and its ascending path act as one contiguous space, winding through and around itself, weaving the library in and out of the surrounding city.
Sketch of Piano Nobile, from 4th Floor walkway

Working Model