The beginning phase of my project was a lot about gathering information and finding out what I’d like to accomplish with the expansion. I took a lot of photos of Asplund’s building to understand it better and have a closer look, and I also took walks around to get a better feel for the context and how people would approach and arrive at the building. I interviewed three hotel managers early on because at that point I thought I would be making a typical hotel together with the library but that idea was soon dropped. I was recommended to explore the idea of inverse monumentality which sent me in an unexpected, unfamiliar direction. This began a period with lots of sketching. I sketched forms and how they could express inverse monumentality, as well as branching out and exploring other related things such as shelf arrangements and corridors.

A point of interest was the entrance to the new expansion. Since most of the library was going to be underground I felt that the entrance should have its own identity, so experiments on it continued far into the project.

Another point of interest was the program. I spent a lot of time figuring out what I thought a library could be. It began with the simple proposition of adding a hotel to the library as an unusual twist, but then developed into more mature ideas about the publicness of the library. These ideas then served to motivate me to suggest beds for loan, advice center, etc.

One of the major learnings I had was that I really got to understand what a huge project actually means. I could understand conceptually that a huge project would be different than a small but I didn’t have the experience to anticipate how thinly I would have to stretch my focus. My conclusion: I am more comfortable and interested in smaller projects where I can have control over everything.

Something else I got to experience and learn about was constraints. During the middle of the project I became increasingly frustrated with the circumstances of my site. Sure, there was a lot of potential there to add without needing to tear down, but I questioned whether it was enough to accommodate the huge program. It seemed none of my ideas could be fully expressed because they would hit limitations. I had to keep in mind the hill, the existing structures, the circulation, the arrangement of books, the subway tunnel etc. But this was fine since my project was framed as an exploration and I was discovering that putting the expansion underground would be difficult considering its size.

Since my process was a bumpy one in this project, I have renewed interest in investigating what makes for a great design process. Method is, of course, what I’ve learnt throughout my education, but it would be interesting to synthesize all those dispersed small lessons into a repeatable step-by-step formula.