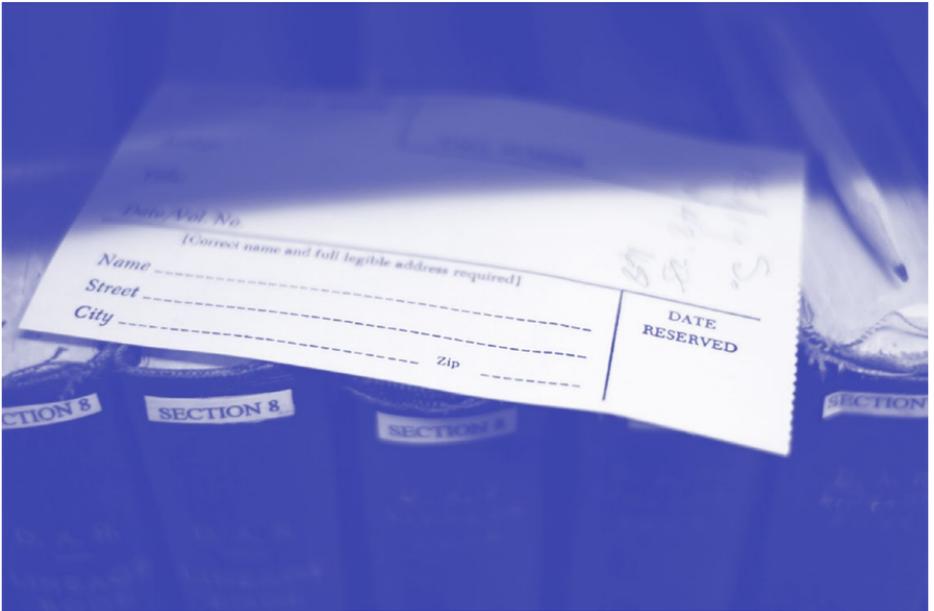


# BOOKSPACE



COLLECTED ESSAYS  
ON LIBRARIES

Edited by

*María Inês Cruz*

*Lozana Rossenova*

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ON LIBRARIES

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## Editorial

*A public library is the most democratic thing in the world.*

Doris Lessing

For centuries, libraries have been vital sources and distributors of knowledge and information, not only as functional social and public spaces, but also as formal representations of society's relation to knowledge, expressed in the architecture and organisation of library buildings. The *raison d'être* of *Bookspace: Collected Essays on Libraries* began with a concern over the way libraries as institutions, and public libraries in particular, have been portrayed and discussed in the public sphere in recent years.

Reports in the news regularly announce how public funding for libraries is constantly being cut; how much a new building or rehabilitation will cost the tax payer; how major libraries are digitising their catalogues and making them available online, while discarding printed material, thereby contributing to a greater digital divide. More bleak news comes from war zone areas in the Middle East and Northern Africa, where the bombing or raiding of libraries and other cultural institutions has become everyday reality. Issues such as these provoke conflicting debates and often there seems to be little space for opposing views to co-exist.

While the relevance of library spaces in the ever-more-digitised social milieu we inhabit is often challenged, government commissions for library buildings remain some of the most prestigious and highly-contested projects among top architecture studios across the globe. At the same time an understanding that the past might not, or must not, be replicated, ties in with the idea that classic libraries might well become relics, while new buildings structured around the use of digital information will transform our interaction with these public spaces. It seems most likely that people will not stop reading books, or at least documents containing information, but will likely change the ways they engage with this information, as part of the ongoing cultural transformations in the digital age. How exactly will libraries

respond and adapt to these transformations are some of the questions we wanted to address by commissioning the articles and essays featured in this book.

With *Bookspace: Collected Essays on Libraries*, we propose a debate of heterogeneous perspectives to examine what guides our society when it comes to making decisions regarding library institutions. We asked architects, journalists, librarians, photographers, and writers to focus on the social role of libraries in an in-depth look at institutions in the West, as well as the Middle East and Northern Africa regions. The arguments about the evolving relationship between libraries and their patrons and the debates around likely possibilities for the future that ensued are particularly interesting in light of the variety of different cultural backgrounds and fields of study our contributing authors come from. Patterns of related discussions emerge around the notion of the classic library as challenged by the architecture of modern public spaces; around the management of library collections in the age of digital information; and around issues concerning access and restrictions. Each discussion offers room to question the direction followed by institutions worldwide. Some signal the inconsistencies and difficulties of accessing public libraries and collections, while others reveal the lack of vision for what a future-proof development of these spaces could be.

In an interview with David Pearson, we seek to understand the difficulties and possibilities related to managing print collections and digital initiatives across the UK. Moving on to a different social context, Heba El-Sherif reveals Egypt's National Library and Archives' access and research constraints and the efforts to overcome them in post-revolutionary Cairo. Starting in antiquity, Jorge Reis traces the origins and evolution of the architectural typology of library buildings following a discussion from ancient Egypt to post-

revolutionary France and the birth of the modern library. With a focus on contemporary trends in the design and architecture of libraries, João Torres reviews his work on an award-winning project for a hybrid building that encompasses a public library and municipal archive for the city of Lisbon. In a photographic essay, Julius Motal navigates the Stephen A Schwarzman Building, the main site of the New York Public Library, depicting daily life in this iconic NYC public space. Marie Lécivain writes about accessing public libraries across Europe and, on a global scale, about the freedom and restrictions of sharing data online via independent digital initiatives. Finally, in a more theory-driven piece, Tom Vandeputte examines the state of academic libraries. He traces connections between the current use of their spaces and the consumerist habits developed in the modern high-street cafés, and questions what would be the future 'politics of study'.

*Bookspace: Collected Essays on Libraries* documents a variety of perspectives on the current state of libraries and their uncertain future development, while in no way presuming to be an exhaustive account of the myriad discussions surrounding these issues currently in the media. One note we would like to make clear is that we have aimed deliberately not to publish any arguments that rely on the emotional attachment usually attributed to library campaigners. While emotional reactions to movements in the field of libraries are neither uncommon nor invalid, arguments that arise from them may ironically damage the case for the institutions themselves by creating an us- (the campaigners) versus-them (the policymakers) dichotomy. It is essential that libraries adopt a digital strategy with a vision for the future and that librarians seek to reinvent their role within the contemporary social context. However, it is key that the case of libraries as public spaces worth being fought for includes policymakers

as part of the discussion, as well as mediators who can effectively communicate the cultural values inherent to these institutions and their collections.

Our primary concern in publishing *Bookspace* is to offer a platform for this topic to be examined as fairly as possible and to provide a starting point for our authors and readers to pursue their research, activities, debates, and concerns for the future of our knowledge repository institutions even further—beyond the constraints of the pages of a small-scale independent publication. We hope the words on the following pages will inspire and lead to informed actions where citizens and policymakers work together towards a sustainable future vision for our libraries.

*Maria Inês Cruz & Lozana Rossenova*  
January, 2015

# In Conversation with David Pearson

David Pearson has been Director of Culture, Heritage and Libraries at the City of London Corporation since 2009. He has previously worked across a range of major research and national libraries in the UK, including the University of London Research Library Services, the Wellcome Trust, the National Art Library, and the British Library. He has lectured and published extensively on book history, with a special focus on aspects of the book as a physical object of cultural and historical significance. His books include *Provenance Research in Book History* (1994), *Oxford Bookbinding 1500–1640* (2000), *English Bookbinding Styles 1450–1800* (2005), and most recently – *Books as History* (2008).

On December 8th, 2014, we met David at his office in Guildhall Library in central London. We wanted to get his perspective and ideas on the future development of libraries, print collections, and digital initiatives across the UK and beyond. What followed was a lively and open conversation about the current state of libraries in the UK, about positive developments and new directions, as well as some missed opportunities. We opened up the discussion with some general remarks on possibilities for the future of the library institution. Below is the edited transcription of the conversation that ensued.

INLAND EDITIONS How do you see library institutions developing in the near future?

DAVID PEARSON Libraries cover quite a wide spectrum – there are different sorts of libraries in all countries. There is a big difference between what a national library like the British Library does, or what a university library does, or what a public library does, and the way forward for all of those services isn't necessarily one and the same.

The traditional public library model involves a concentration of books available for people to come in and borrow. This core idea that public libraries have been built around for a long time (and which a lot of people still think they are built around, or should be built around), is ultimately a failing business model. Sustaining and arguing for libraries on that sort of rationale will get harder and harder, partly because of the current state of public funding. Everything that we are hearing about what is going to happen after the next election just emphasises all of that. But there are also gradually changing patterns of user behaviour and user expectation – people are going to cease using those services in the ways that they used to, because there are so many other channels for people to get information now, and

a younger generation is going to come that lives on those things [pointing at the smartphones on the table].

Of course, people are not going to stop reading. People talk about the future, or death, of the book – what do we mean? Books as texts, as ideas, as knowledge – that is going to carry on forever. People are always going to want stories, always going to want knowledge. But how they read them is going to carry on changing. More and more people are going to read them and access them via their Kindles, via their tablets, via whatever the next generation of that kind of technology is, and gradually reading physical books is going to decline. So the traditional core services of libraries are inevitably going to be squeezed that way. Public libraries have been undergoing huge changes in the last decade or so, and I think that will continue. There are a lot of success stories where public libraries are genuinely and successfully reinventing themselves much more as multi-purpose community hubs. What the mixture of facilities is within any particular community library will vary according to the community and its location. In some places they will become partly library spaces and partly doctors' surgeries and health clinics, or police surgeries or community advice centres, it depends on what makes best local sense.

They will reinvent themselves in an ongoing way, but ultimately there will be fewer of them than there are now, because it will not be possible to afford so many. Here in the City of London, we have a successful recent reinvention of a library. We had a small branch library, which had to close, and we have reopened it as a library and community centre. It is now part of a building that has got a dance floor, a community residents' meeting space, and some smaller rooms where health practitioners can come and give advice. There are considerably fewer books on shelves than there were at the branch library that was replaced, but the new facility is thriving.

That is a different kind of trajectory from what you would get in a university library or a national library, which are serving a different sort of audience, and will be increasingly electronic as time progresses. I was looking at a press statement from the British Library this morning where they talked about bringing the new Alan Turing Data Institute into the Library. It is going to be based there and the press statement noted that the British Library expects to be ‘increasingly digital and data-driven’ in the future. Which I am sure is true, and I think they will increasingly be delivering information and services electronically rather than in print.

IE What about the legacy of print collections?

DP There is a huge legacy of print collections and documents that we have in print and in manuscript form in all our research libraries and record offices and historic libraries. Increasingly, as the content of these print collections gets digitised and becomes available online, if you simply want to read the text you will be able to do it online, without having to go visit the original. And I think that is where all the *Books as History* arguments come in.

I do think it is really important that we collectively – we, civilisation – should recognise that there is a lot more to those legacy collections than just words on pages; that there is a huge wealth of cultural history in books that have come down to us in those kinds of libraries and increasingly that is where people will find interest in those materials and see value. If you talk to a National Trust librarian, or librarians who look after Oxford College libraries, what they would tell you is that people are still coming to use the books in those historic collections, but they don’t come in any more to read the texts. They come because it is the collection of a particular individual, or they are interested in the annotations, or the marginalia, or the bindings – it is all those elements of

cultural history that are in those collections that makes them interesting. This really is an important aspect of that documentary legacy. When we are looking at the winnowing down of library collections in order to save costs and space and when we are putting books in skips, we need to be alert to all those other values around books and actually start re-valuing them. So we can start seeing the value of books somewhere different from where a generation and more ago people saw value, and manage those collections accordingly. I suspect that increasingly that will be the way print collections will be managed and it is encouraging that we are seeing more effort put into recording those kind of aspects of books when people are cataloguing them. We are just beginning to see research libraries gearing their acquisition policies to recognise the value of interesting marginalia or provenance and other cultural and historical aspects of the physical book object.

IE Can you give examples of some of those libraries?

DP A few decades ago, libraries like the Bodleian or the British Library would rarely buy books because of their bindings or provenance, or particular characteristics of the copies, or if they had that edition already, unless the binding was very fancy or the owner very noteworthy; the acquisitions policy was very geared to texts and editions. I think that is slowly changing.

IE So there is a shift in how we are thinking about books?

DP Yes. In Oxford, for example, the Bodleian now has its Centre for the Study of the Book. There are a lot of people in Oxford who are actively working on the historical aspects of books, as opposed to the traditional textual focus. Centres for the material book, the book as object, academic units around those kinds of themes, we are seeing more and more of.

There is one in Cambridge now. Increasingly we are also seeing online resources being developed around those aspects of books. A project was launched a year or so ago called Annotated Books Online, all about building a database around books that are interesting because they are annotated. The Oxford University Marginalia group on Facebook—who note interesting annotations they find in books both old and new—has over 3,000 members. There is growing evidence of interest in the material characteristics of books in cataloguing, in exhibitions, in acquisitions, in published literature, and online.

IE How do you think that is coming across to the public?

DP Not well enough. And I think that is a really important point. That is why I wanted to make *Books as History* an accessible and well-illustrated book. I deliberately wanted that book to be not just an academic book, but one that a wider range of the public would pick up and look at, because it is really important to get this message about changing values around books, and why they might be interesting, beyond the book history departments in the universities and out there to the public. And to the politicians, because they are the people making the funding decisions that will influence what will happen. The academy often falls into the trap of talking to itself—academic corridors of specialists who talk to one another and think they are the whole world, and they really aren't. Getting the ideas about the shift in values out to a much broader public is an ongoing challenge. That is where exhibitions and broadcasting films on the web comes in, but still there is this very strong idea of books as words on pages—why do we need them in the age of the Kindle?, people will go on asking.

IE In the 'Libraries as History' lecture, which you gave at the State Library of Victoria in Australia last year, you talked about libraries gradually becoming more aligned with museums. The controversy in this idea comes from the fact that a lot of librarians still think that books are objects that should continue to be used the way they have been used throughout history, whereas objects in museums tend not to be in continual use. Still, do you think there are ways in which libraries can learn from museums how to engage the public with their collections, especially the historic print collections and the collections that are digitised?

DP Yes, certainly. I think that is part of that re-evaluation mindset. Museums recognise that they have got large collections of interesting historical artefacts that can help people understand the past, share the past, get excited about the past, discover things. And they make use of their collections in lots of ways to encourage that. They engage their publics through the ways they interpret and display their collections, both within a museum and digitally online – to bring out what is interesting about this leather fire bucket or that Roman spear, and tell stories about them that engage people. And we need to do more of that with books and focus on the object qualities of books and interpret them to the public in an engaging way.

Though there is still a bit of a cultural challenge for librarians there, because a lot of librarians do think that the 'M' word is a dirty one. I have had conversations with senior library colleagues in recent years who will say: 'Libraries are not museums. We need to keep a distinction. A library is for working with books for reading and study. Once we start thinking of libraries as museums, we go down a slippery slope'. Which is arguably true if you see the slippery slope as leading to a lot of books being thrown away, but whether we like it or not, that is going to happen. The key thing is that we throw the right books away.

IE Talking about discarding books is always a controversial topic, even among the general public. Has there been any significant development in recent years?

DP Obviously librarians have discarded books for centuries, it has been part of managing libraries. There has been a lot of discarding of print journals in research and academic libraries over the last ten years or so. The tax payer, through the Higher Education Funding Council, has invested millions of pounds in the UK Research Reserve, which is an initiative partly led by the British Library to encourage university libraries up and down the country to discard their runs of journals where the text has been digitised. Lots of sets of the *British Medical Journal* have ended up in the skip alongside many other journals in all disciplines where the print version is just no longer used.

I was up in Boston Spa, at the British Library's Yorkshire branch a few weeks ago, where they were talking about taking that initiative forward. I think that they will be moving into monographs, and saying to university libraries: 'You have got miles and miles of these books on shelves. The text is now digitised, there is a copy reliably held at Boston Spa, should anybody want the physical manifestation of the text. You don't need to keep it. You can pulp it. You can, therefore, save a lot of space costs. You can repurpose that expensive library building to be communal use space or a café.'

Economically, it makes complete sense. Libraries are expensive spaces to run, an aspect of all this that is easily lost sight of, particularly if you are thinking of it from a purely academic perspective. So the question is: Are we sure that the books that go into the pulping mill are not ones that have got those other kinds of values that we might actually want to hang on to? There are after all millions of 20th-century books that are identical, that have no distinguishing features, nobody has written or made notes in them. How many copies

of those do we need for textual purposes? Obviously, we need to have some copies for their physical characteristics from a book design history perspective, but maybe we don't need 100 copies. We are back to that point about asking the right questions.

IE There is also the case of digitisation, which could be quite efficient if libraries shared their resources. For instance, if a big project is funded to digitise a large number of journals and create a database, then multiple libraries can use that same database.

DP I think those models of shared digital resources have been developed not so much by libraries acting together, but by organisations like JSTOR. JSTOR have created that type of resource, and so have Google Books. What the library community is not good at is getting its head around that and working together to deliver that sort of digital resource by the community and for the community. It is something that Bob Darnton [Director of Harvard University Libraries] has lamented: 'Have we not missed an opportunity by not creating a big digital library by the public for the public?'

And I think that is absolutely right. It is the great professional failure of my generation of librarians. But I also understand all the reasons as to why the library community could not do it. It is such a fragmented world professionally.

IE One of our contributors, Marie Lécivain, makes a similar point in her analysis on the fragmented library systems in countries like France and Belgium. There are very good digital initiatives within specific institutions, but then those resources often do not get to the public in the same way that initiatives like the Gutenberg Project or the Internet Archive do. These projects are done on an international level and a lot of people know about them, using them more often

to get public domain materials instead of consulting their local or even national libraries.

But going back to your previous point, if libraries will be more and more digital in the future, and we need to be less sentimental about the kind of smaller public lending libraries, then shouldn't more public funding be going towards supporting digital initiatives and making these resources more easily available to the public?

DP I agree, I think there is a lack of vision. There is a lack of forward thinking at a national level about these kinds of issues. And there are other countries, which are more enlightened. In the Scandinavian countries and in some of the Baltic countries there are models where the state is investing in creating a national digital archive. The National Library of Norway is digitising its entire printed stock to be available for the nation as part of the national library function. It translates the concept of a national library into the digital age in a genuine way. But the vision to do that is still lacking in the UK.

What we need is an understanding of the importance and the potential of having the national documentary heritage available digitally like it is available in print, and that is what we should invest in.

IE Do you think we also need to see a transformation of the role of the librarian as someone who understands the cultural value of the collections, but who can also communicate that to the public in innovative ways?

DP Librarians need to reinvent themselves in all kinds of ways in order to make themselves relevant for the 21st century. At a high national level it is difficult to be visionary because there are a lot of political pressures and economic pressures. And I understand why it does not happen, but I still think it is regrettable.

IE The new Library of Birmingham could have started a change in the way of doing things. Do you think we could have a successful case where this happens and see other libraries follow?

DP I personally found the new Library of Birmingham a less innovate space than I expected. If you are looking at new models and new ways of doing things in libraries, the new library in Worcester is a much more interesting example, because there they brought together a public library, an academic library, and a range of other municipal functions. There is a theatre, a council office, a café, etc. That is a much more interesting and more adventurous bringing together of facilities than what you actually get in the Library of Birmingham, which to me has too much of a flavour of being a big box of books.

The thing that most struck me in the new Library of Birmingham was going up the escalator and seeing a rotunda entirely shelved with old law reports, which have been colour-coded to be decorative. So you have a circle of books and there is a big block of red ones and a big block of green ones, etc, and they are purely decoration. They are books which nobody wants to use, nobody wants to read, and they recognised that nobody wants to read them. The new Library of Birmingham is already too big for the purpose that was intended within it, so they had to start using the books just as wallpaper. How long is it going to be before a lot more of the books in Birmingham have the same status, and what do they plan to do then?

IE Was it a missed opportunity then? It could have reshaped libraries as we know them, but in the end it is only more of the same – with new packaging?

DP Yes, I fear so. The overriding impression is that it is like a big box full of books and is that not what a traditional

big library is? I do not think you get a sense of a very digital world in the new Library of Birmingham, and I am not convinced that it is future-proof. In 20 years' time, if the number of loans from the library is half, and loans of books from public libraries are going down all the time across the country, what are they going to do with it all?\*

IE Wouldn't it have made more sense to invest, at least part of the huge amounts of money that went into building this enormous building, into your idea for developing a more future-proof national digital strategy?

DP Yes, I couldn't disagree with that.

For generations, we have been investing public money in creating wonderful public resources where the national documentary heritage is freely available for the public, supported by the public. Because in the digital world it is commercial operators like Google and JSTOR who are offering the resources, we are almost going back to a pre-20th-century framework as to where knowledge and ideas and content sit. Before the 20th century, a lot of it was in private hands and then in the 20th century much more of it moved into the public domain. Going forward this seems to be changing, partly as a consequence of the economic climate, the fact that there is not the public funding anymore that there used to be, partly an adjustment of political philosophy in response to that. But if we think seriously about what it means to have a national library and national public library resources, and we translate what that means from

\* Just a couple of weeks after this conversation took place, it was announced that the Library of Birmingham would be halving its staff and its opening hours, because it has proved unaffordable to run. For more information read Steve Morris & Alison Flood, 'Birmingham Turns Page on Glittering New Library as Staff and Hours Slashed', *The Guardian*, 10 December 2014. See [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/dec/10/birmingham-turns-page-glittering-new-library-as-staff-hours-slashed](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/dec/10/birmingham-turns-page-glittering-new-library-as-staff-hours-slashed) [December 2014].

the printed into the digital world, then we ought to be investing more of what is going into traditional ways of doing things into making resources available digitally instead. That will starve some of the more traditional library functions, and force the pace of change, but it's a fast changing world.

*María Inês Cruz & Lozana Rossenova*

December 8th, 2014

The Right to Know: Accessing Egypt's  
National Library and Archives

*Heba El-Sherif*



Damage caused by a bomb that blasted outside  
Dar El-Kutub – Bab El-Khalk, January 2014

The bustling sounds of the cars that jam central Cairo gradually go quiet. It's a little after ten in the morning on a weekday. Much of the activity at Dar El-Kutub, Egypt's National Library and the Arab world's first state-run public library takes place only among its staff.

Upon arrival, four women, hair tied back and their feet wrapped in rubber slippers, are mopping the ceramic stairs leading up to the twin blocks that house the main branch of the library, a composite of three adjoining buildings. At the gate, a man glances idly at the rare occasion of a visitor. 'Yes?'

I passed through the pseudo security gate and at the front government-run depository. In return, I was given a worn out pass enveloped in a plastic cover on which a serial number was printed next to the words: security permit. I later learnt that upon entering any of the reading rooms in the seven-story building, visitors are asked to copy those digits onto the sign-in sheet, next to their name, occupation, and nationality.

In one such room, five staff members are huddled around a desk placed between rows of wooden cabinets that make up the card catalogue. Around the table to their right, a handful of students bend over the slim wooden chests as they browse through a string of sheets, faded and dust-caked from years of abandonment. The cards are momentarily resuscitated as the eager hands of students fish for potential sources.

Only one of the five on duty that morning was attending to the inquiries of the students who were in their late teens and seemed stressed over a looming deadline. Categorically, the attending librarian asked them about the topics they intended to explore, narrowed them down to one key word, and directed them to the relevant drawers. In between questions from students, he turned around to his colleagues to blurt quick observations that fed into their ongoing conversation. For the most part, the seated librarians remained unengaged in their daytime duties. Between discussing

politics, sharing sandwiches and rhetorically reprimanding the visiting students, accusing them of carelessness for checking into the library one day before deadline, they chatted the morning away.

*Egypt's National Library, or Dar El-Kutub*

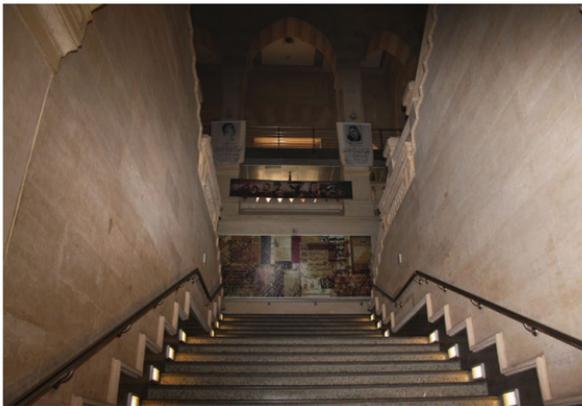
Egypt's nearly 57,000 manuscripts, its large collection of books, periodicals and growing number of governmental records have not always been stacked at the present modern building overlooking the Nile. Since its inception in 1870, the National Library, or Dar El-Kutub relocated twice, once in 1899 to Bab El-Khalk, a neighbourhood in central Cairo, and again in 1971 to its current location.

After a decree from Khedive Ismail, then Egypt's ruler, the first floor of Mustafa Fadil Pasha Palace in Darb Al-Gamamiz in Cairo was the initial home for a small collection of irreplaceable treasures. That was 1870. Much of the credit for what was deemed a progressive project at the time goes back to Ali Pasha Mubarak, Minister of Public Works and Education. At the foyer of the current premises of Dar El-Kutub, his name is still carved on placards dotting the wall.

At the turn of the century, Dar El-Kutub – Bab El-Khalk, the second location of Egypt's National Library, opened its doors to the public, taking in the ever-expanding collection of treasured documents from the palace to the new grounds in Bab El-Khalk, one of Cairo's oldest neighbourhood. Across three stories that buoyed the government's fondness of Islamic Architecture, the building was built to house the National Library as well as the Museum of Arab Antiquities, which now became the Museum of Islamic Art. It was only in the early 1970s that the National Library transferred to its current location, enduring its third and final move and escorting with it the majority of the collection. Because of the vastness of the new space, the National Archives took up the

adjacent building to the library, and the twin blocks are what we now refer to as Egypt's National Library and Archives.

After the third move, however, Dar El-Kutub–Bab El-Khalk, the second location of Egypt's public library, continued to exist, housing a slightly smaller collection than the one present in the new, large building. It continued to carry the name Dar El-Kutub–Bab El-Khalk, (which denoted the smaller library that is situated in the Bab El-Khalk neighbourhood in Cairo). After undergoing some alterations of its own, today Dar El-Kutub–Bab El-Khalk boasts an exhibition space showcasing a few dozen manuscripts, a microfilm department and about 7,500 books split between two modest reading areas. However, the third move forced Dar El-Kutub–Bab El-Khalk into a back seat, since much of the government attention was focused on the new building. This secondary status is made worse by the unfortunate overshadow powered by the library's neighbour, the Museum of Islamic Art, which is situated on the first floor of the Bab El-Khalk building. The museum, a much sought-after destination by tourists, continues to enjoy considerable attention from the state and consequently the public.



Stairs leading up to Dar El-Kutub–Bab El-Khalk



Scene of bomb blast at Dar El-Kutub – Bab El-Khalk, January 2014

In January 2014, a bomb blast targeting the Cairo Security Directorate, which is located on the same street as Dar El-Kutub – Bab El-Khalk, caused significant damage to the building. To the dismay of Iman Ezzedine, the library's Director at the time, very few spectators were aware of the existence of two cultural institutions at the site where the bomb went off.

*Lack of government support  
and the problem of accessibility*

A daytime Drama Professor at Cairo's Ain Shams University, Iman Ezzedine was appointed head of Dar El-Kutub – Bab El-Khalk in October 2012. An upholder of creativity, Ezzedine was quick to sketch out her priorities; she was going to lure average readers into the library by broadening the selection of non-specific books and turning its lecture hall into a cultural hub. Libraries worldwide are undergoing a shift, she thought, and keeping up with the trend of diversifying the services offered by the notable house of knowledge seemed imminent. For the weeks that followed, she brought in poets and thinkers, marked anniversaries of literary giants

such as Taha Hussein – one of Egypt’s most influential 20th-century writers – and hosted a concert by the ever-popular music ensemble Eskenderella, famed for their street performances during the Tahrir Square sit-in in 2011 and their honest, biting defiance against the government. In doing so, Ezzedine was hoping to bring up the number of daily visitors of the library from a staggering 10–12 a day. According to the library’s staff, this number hikes up to 20 during mid-term and final exams but quickly returns to a mere dozen as summer vacation creeps in.

Upon arrival at her new post, Ezzedine, hopeful and pregnant with ideas, pushed for digitising the manuscript collection. Although the project initially took off, it was met with resistance half-way through and ultimately reached a complete stop. No explicit reason was given for why the project discontinued but Ezzedine is quick to point out fear as one of the possible motives for the shutdown. She explained that the digitisation project received funding from Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, a non-profit foundation that supports the protection and preservation of Islamic patrimony. In 2011, a nation-wide mistrust of foreign-affiliated projects mushroomed in Egypt; non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have since been regularly harassed, contested, and accused of spying. As such, Egypt saw the closure of a number of organisations over disputed licenses, and in June 2013, 43 NGO employees were handed down prison sentences for running unlicensed organisations, receiving foreign money, and conducting political training without permits. As a result of such a thorny climate, during her short reign, Ezzedine led the digitisation of only 10% of the manuscript collection at Dar El-Kutub – Bab El-Khalk.

Ezzedine attributes the disheartening lack of interest and general state of inaccessibility of Dar El-Kutub – Bab El-Khalk to a number of factors. At the forefront is the muted reopening

in 2007, after renovation efforts forced the entire library shut for seven consecutive years. As part of the facelift, a state of the art exhibition space was built, laying ground for display windows eager to hold up Egypt's revered, multi-lingual manuscripts. However, the collection on rotation remains a fraction of what the state owns, proclaims Ezzedine. 'You are left with a fixed frame because no one wants to take full responsibility [for transporting the manuscripts]',<sup>1</sup> she says, explaining that the persons in charge at the General Authority of the National Archives were reluctant to transport the remaining manuscripts from the storage space in the main building by the Nile to the equipped showrooms in Bab El-Khalk. According to Ezzedine, the General Authority was hesitant to transport the manuscripts across the streets in downtown Cairo fearing that they may be mistreated in case of sudden violence, considering that this area was a site for recurring battles between protestors, the police, and the army during the months that followed former president Hosni Mubarak's downfall. Despite that, she remains frustrated about the lack of willingness from the authorities to rejuvenate the library. '[The library] is like the fancy sitting area at your home where only guests are allowed', says Ezzedine. She goes on to suggest that Suzanne Mubarak, Egypt's former first lady who led the renovation efforts, preferred to maintain Dar El-Kutub – Bab El-Khalk polished and exclusive, reserving it only for visits by foreign officials, the way rich people's homes are devoid of clutter.

Whether the intention was to maintain Dar El-Kutub – Bab El-Khalk only for a select few, upholding it as an inaccessible treasure to the average Egyptian, or whether the exclusivity originates from a fear of documents being tarnished or used to jeopardise the state, the approach to the library in the last few years raises the fundamental question of entitlement: who really owns the archives?

### *The right to know, 2011 onwards*

In a country that lacks a law that upholds freedom of information—a document that obligates governments to make information readily accessible to its citizens—the truth remains a luxury. On a regular day at Zeinoh, Cairo's only morgue, bereaved family members wait powerlessly for the news of whether their lost ones are among the dead, a scene that has recurred over and over since the onset of political unrest in January 2011. Outside Zeinoh, chilled trucks line up to the silent beat of aching cries. Inside, nameless bodies choke the corridors that make up the morgue, their relatives waiting for an autopsy report or a slip of paper that states the cause of death. In Egypt, even a proof of death is difficult to obtain.

During the last three years, Egypt has undergone a series of events that have made the right to access information an unavoidable demand. This access is meant to allow for meaningful government accountability in an effort to reduce rampant corruption, which was in itself one of the reasons people revolted in January 2011. Two drafts of the law surfaced in 2011 and 2012, the former involving a number of civil society organisations. But to date Egypt is yet to pass a freedom of information law due to disagreement about some of the articles in the 2012 draft, a reality exacerbated by a tumultuous political scene that gripped the country after the ouster of Mohamed Morsi in summer 2013.

Among the contested articles is one that lists the exceptions from law, including 'any information that if revealed may endanger national security, the economy, international relations, commercial relations, or military affairs', in addition to singling out information pertaining to the general intelligence and military intelligence. The contention stems from the vagueness in defining national security and the wary exemption of entire agencies such as the general and

military intelligence. Another debated point is in reference to the National Council for Information, a body tasked with enforcing the law; as penned in the latest draft, members of the council are mostly representatives of governmental bodies and the president approves the council's chairman. Critics insist that the article jeopardises the independence of the council, and hence undermines the desired forcefulness of the bill.

Khaled Fahmy, a leading historian and Professor at the American University in Cairo, is a member of the team that produced the first draft of the freedom of information law. He recalls a recent incident during which a researcher from a reputable university was disallowed to look at archival content at the National Archive. Fahmy says that the historian who was looking at agricultural policies during the 19th century was turned down access to the archive. He was not granted a permit because, Fahmy learnt after investigation, his research had to do with Egypt's dispute with Ethiopia over the building of the Renaissance Dam. 'They thought that he might be a spy, hiding as a student',<sup>2</sup> Fahmy said. Throughout Hosni Mubarak's regime (1981–2011) researchers and journalists working in Egypt were well aware of the difficulty to access the National Archives. While there are recorded cases of researchers being granted permits to consult specific governmental documents, the mere need to issue permission seems an unnecessary hurdle for researchers, proclaims Fahmy. He added that researches have to petition and plead to be granted access, a process that can last months, and their appeal must first endure a security clearance, as is the case across most countries in the region.

Access to such documents is closely tied to democratising governance. To Fahmy, opening up the archives would be a revolutionary act; allowing researchers and interested citizens to read vast sources of history will make room for a

different interpretation of events, lending a space for new narratives that may not be in line with what is propagated by the state. Presently, the National Archives are not accessible to non-specialists. 'The questions we ask about those institutions are the same questions we ask about others: who are they supposed to serve? The revolution is trying to ask the same question', says Fahmy. In a sentiment similar to that of Dar El-Kutub – Bab El-Khalk's former head Iman Ezzedine, Fahmy believes that the state has claimed jurisdiction over Egypt's National Archives. 'The officials in charge of the archives think of it as the archives of the government, as the administrative section of the Egyptian government. When different government agencies suddenly realise that there is something called the National Archives they think it is the suitable place where they can deposit their unwanted documents. It's a dumping ground', added Fahmy. In other words, the archive has become a purging vat for ministries and governmental bodies, a place where unwanted documents are left to collect dust away from the public's eye, burying any proof of potentially unlawful actions by the state.

In an interview in *Ahram Online* in 2013, the English language portal of Egypt's biggest news organisation *Al-Ahram*, the Head of the National Archives was quoted as saying: 'I was informed by the official that [the papers] were occupying space so they decided to dispose of them. Another senior official sent a fax asking permission to sell 50 tons of documents that belonged to his institution, an unimaginable action considered a crime by law'.<sup>3</sup> The interview was published after the National Archives managed to retrieve old documents from antiques markets, presumably deposited by a number of official directorates, ministries, and governmental institutions.

Critics of the government's approach to producing and disseminating information, including journalist and archiving expert Lina Attalah, have labeled the current collection at

Egypt's National Archives a mortal archive. Alongside Fahmy, Attala was a member of the committee that drafted the first freedom of information bill in 2011. Today, they both still dream of reestablishing the archive as a laboratory that fuels collaboration and breeds innovative ideas.

*'Don't wait for the archive'*

About 20 years ago, a group of mostly female researchers and university professors who were concerned by the feminist movements had a thought: they will help change the status of women in Egypt and in the Arab region by rereading and rewriting history. Following this premise, they founded the Women and Memory Foundation, a Cairo-based research hub committed to collecting and documenting roles played by women in history. The predominant narrative at the time was that the feminist movement in Egypt was a result of the tireless efforts of only a handful of women, an account propagated by outdated school curricula, academic papers, and most media outlets, according to Maissan Hassan, programmes manager at the foundation. 'The narrative is being constructed as if the state is the only one responsible for any gains of the women's movement',<sup>4</sup> said Hassan, a reality that begged the founders to shed light on a range of Egyptian women that have not made it in to the current archives. It was the lack of adequate documentation of women's participation in society that bred the idea for the Women and Memory Library and Documentation Centre (WMLDC) which launched in 2009, both online and offline, under the umbrella of the foundation. At the onset of the project, 'we found that the accessibility of Arabic material [about feminist movements] in the region was very limited, especially through digital platforms. We found some research NGOs and grassroots organisations that put their work online, but the idea of a resource centre did not exist at that time', Hassan explained.

‘The predominant narrative makes it seem as though women were confined to the private sphere all along’, she added, maintaining that having the power to document history does not give one the right to discard accounts one does not agree with. The library, a composite of rooms in a humble apartment that is also the foundation’s headquarters, welcomes researchers daily, though the number of visitors remains between one to two a day. ‘We realise what we are offering is very specific’, said Hassan, adding that the WMLDC is part of a Consortium of Egyptian Libraries, meaning that students enrolled in all national universities across the country can access the library’s content online.

The Consortium is an important collaboration between state institutions and the Women and Memory Foundation. But allying with the government on matters related to producing and disseminating knowledge is not always an easy feat. Soon after Mubarak was unseated, historian Khaled Fahmy was asked by the General Authority of the National Archives to assemble a team to document the revolution. In other words, a state institution was commissioning their opponents to archive the revolution. To him, this was an unusual proposition. The team was called: The Committee to Document the January 25 Revolution. Relying solely on volunteers, the task was to collect official recordings, multimedia footage, grey literature, as well as social media updates that reflect the social and political upheaval that had just swept the country. In addition, the project was collecting audio testimonies from different people that took part in the uprising; the mission was to gather as much information as possible from as many sources as possible.

The project gradually fell through. After the months following the fall of Mubarak, a bloody relationship ensued between the armed forces and the people. As much as there were people siding with the army, there were many against

its handling of affairs. At the same time, much of the audio recordings collected seemed self-incriminating, and a proof of legal protection was absent. ‘We could not give them a guarantee’, said Fahmy about those who volunteered their stories, citing this as one of the reasons the project came to a halt mid-way through. In addition, questions about what kind of information to collect were followed by debates on when the revolution actually started. As events were still unfolding rapidly and with unexpected turns, the act of collection became all the more difficult. ‘As time dragged on,



Tahrir Cinema, 2 December, 2011



Mosireen: A place to collect and distribute archival videos of the revolution, open between 8 pm and 2 am; July sit-in, 16 July, 2011

we [members of the committee] got involved, our friends and colleagues were arrested; we had protests we needed to attend, articles we needed to write... We found that it was very difficult to document the revolution when it hasn't finished.'

Meanwhile, several independent initiatives sprouted in an effort to document the uprising of January 2011. At the front-line of these efforts is Mosireen,<sup>5</sup> a crowd-funded media collective that boasts a vast video archive of the revolution that opposes state media narrative; Wikithawra,<sup>6</sup> an extensive online database that chronicles major events since 2011, in addition to maintaining statistics about deaths and injuries; Tahrir Monologues,<sup>7</sup> a collection of testimonies written and collected throughout the months that followed the downfall of Mubarak. Many personal stories have been acted out on stages across Egypt, lending them a sense of continuity. The forte of these initiatives is that they give a voice to those ambushed by state media. In a vast sea of information unsteadied by shifting perspectives, personal memories are kept alive in books, songs, and oftentimes on public walls. Their downside, however, is that these initiatives remain

scattered and are predominantly online, rendering their durability uncertain. Moreover, most of the content of this ad hoc archive is not accurately catalogued or tagged, making it difficult to access from external search engines and hence isolating it from a large number of researchers, raising once again the question of accessibility. And while these initiatives are laudable for essentially changing who narrates history, the imminent question is how do we make possible the telling of multiple narratives while ensuring that none of the entangled parties dismiss the other's storyline? As Cairo-based writer Naira Antoun suggested: 'The question then is not what story to tell, but how to enable the telling of multiple stories and narratives. What to collect, how to organise the material are of course deeply political questions, for they will shape, limit, enable what stories it will be possible to tell'.<sup>8</sup> The most difficult part of archiving the events of January 2011 is deciding when it started and where it ends, and consequently choosing what to include.

Egyptians now are aware that it is their inherent right to know, and as such there has been an apparent increase in consciousness about the importance of historical narratives. So even if the freedom of information bill is on a far-off dock, and even if in 2014, three years after the onset of the uprising, voices across the political spectrum are still being silenced, many will continue to document what they can of their memories, if only to hold on to a morsel of hope that their stories too will not be silenced.

How this consciousness can fuel a more inclusive and publicly-accessible archive is what seems to be missing from current debate among implicated ministries. That, and the relevance of national institutions dedicated to collecting, safekeeping, and impartially disseminating information can become measures for a truly progressive, representative government.

1. Iman Ezzedine, Interview, 6 April 2014.
2. Khaled Fahmy, Interview, 5 April 2014.
3. Mohammed Saad, *Head of Egypt National Archives: State institutions illegally dispose of documents*, Ahrām Online, 29 October 2013. See <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP18/84935/Books/Head-of-Egypt-National-Archives-State-institutions.aspx> [11 November 2014].
4. Maissan Hassan, Interview, 10 April 2014.
5. See [www.mosireen.org](http://www.mosireen.org) [2014].
6. See [www.wikithawra.wordpress.com](http://www.wikithawra.wordpress.com) [2014].
7. See [www.youtube.com/user/TahrirMonologues](http://www.youtube.com/user/TahrirMonologues) [2014].
8. Naira Antoun, *The Archive of the Revolution: A Living Archive*. Arabic Literature, 30 September 2012. See [www.arablit.wordpress.com/2012/09/30/the-archive-of-the-revolution-a-living-archive](http://www.arablit.wordpress.com/2012/09/30/the-archive-of-the-revolution-a-living-archive) [14 April 2014].

Romanticism and the Architecture  
of Public Libraries

*Jorge Reis*

The Universe (*which others call the Library*)  
Jorge Luis Borges<sup>1</sup>

In *The Library: A World History*, James Campbell argues that 'the history of libraries has been a story of constant change and adaptation'.<sup>2</sup> This essay proposes that these changes are closely related to artistic and cultural transformations in society, and that there is a direct link between each period and the architectural typology of its libraries. At its core, the architectural expression of a library conveys an idea of culture: the relationship of an epoch with the book.

The central argument of this essay is that a different type of library corresponds to each epoch and that the last greatest transformation in the architecture of libraries occurs with Romanticism. The Romantic characteristics of indomitable will, the denial of structure, and the notion of exile are translated into art primarily through the idea of movement. During the Romantic period natural light becomes the most important element, which architects use in order to express movement. Since then it has allowed the construction of an emotional space based upon its dramatic perception.

Somehow these three features will be transposed to art by means of movement, ie movement is that which represents and explains these notions in art. The willingness to represent movement will lead architecture to consider as its most important element natural light. From Romanticism onwards, natural light is that which will be treated with paramount importance because it allows an emotional construction of space based upon its dramatic perception.

### *Three typological phases*

Despite the continuous transformation in the design of libraries, it is possible to divide its history in three major phases that encompass a range of other changes.

The first phase begins with the origin of libraries in antiquity where, as Campbell points out 'most of the types of libraries that exist today have their roots'.<sup>3</sup>

The second phase corresponds to a period from the Middle Ages to the end of the Enlightenment, in which libraries are created as part of buildings with different primary function (eg libraries in monasteries).

The third phase begins with Étienne-Louis Boullée's project for the Bibliothèque Royale (Paris, 1780), which considers the library as a singular and autonomous building, and is deeply related to the modern idea of a public library. This third phase can be subdivided into a fourth major transformation, wherein the library holds the main function of a building that serves an ensemble of additional purposes. The pivotal moment for this transformation is the international competition for the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris in 1989.

This typological division of libraries is an attempt to identify major trends and does not mean that during the third phase there are no libraries being built in monasteries. This division is possible if we consider the most important characteristics of each phase: origin, dependence, and independence. Each one of these three phases has different expressions, but they are united by some key features. For example: a library in the Middle Ages is quite different from a library in the Renaissance, but both satisfy the criteria of being part of a building with a different primary function. Nevertheless, there are exceptions to this rule.

Even if it is true that there are examples of libraries from the ancient world, from what we do know (and we do not know very much) they appear to be quite different from our modern concept of a public library. Romans were the first to have public libraries,<sup>4</sup> but one can assume that a far-reaching concept of public for the Romans would have constituted Roman citizenship, which is still quite limited compared to our modern idea of public. Besides that, there is an extreme lack of evidence concerning ancient libraries. The ruins themselves do not provide unquestionable architectural

evidence, and the function and organisation of those spaces is frequently a matter of dispute.

Considering these issues regarding ancient libraries, it is reasonable to attribute the original concept of libraries as public spaces to Boullée and Henri Labrouste. They introduce the modern understanding of libraries as spaces that are truly meant for everyone. The library of Labrouste (Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris, 1838–50) may not be the very first independent public library building, but it is certainly the most influential among the first modern public libraries to be built.

### *Public buildings*

The development of libraries as independent buildings is made possible by an architectural context wherein unprecedented new building types are emerging. The idea for a public building appears immediately before the French Revolution and is associated with ‘the conviction that monumental public buildings and urban spaces might sponsor a renewal of civic life’.<sup>5</sup> This shift from private to public domain has a symbolical significance since these new building types carry the promise of a new world. Despite the origination of many of these ideas in the 18th century a considerable part of them only come to fruition during the Romantic period in the 19th century, ‘the crucial century’<sup>6</sup> for new building types.

The modern library, as a public building, seems to be more a consequence, than a product of the Enlightenment and it is possible to identify two specific moments. The first, during the Enlightenment, in which the incredible development of experimental science provoked a broadening in the understanding of the different areas of knowledge, leading to the necessity to collect, classify, and systematise that knowledge. The second moment can be defined by means of

the psychological construction of the library which turns out to be its physical construction. The library is something more than a repository of knowledge. Romanticism begins a symbolic construction of libraries and the architecture of the period reflects these ideas. The idea of a public library emerges at the verge of the transition from Enlightenment to Romanticism in France.

The first project for a public library is that of Étienne-Louis Boullée for the Bibliothèque Royale and appears around the 1780s in a series of studies concerned with public building programmes. Boullée's project is not built but gives an architectural type for a new programme, since there are no previous examples of independent library buildings known at that time, and states a spatial approach, which still influences libraries today. Most of all, Boullée's project has a very clear influence on the first public library built in France, and is certainly the most influential project of this period. The bookshelves surrounding the reading room, stepped gallery, or even the longitudinal floor plan are some examples of this influence.

### Romanticism

Oscar Wilde's famous 'Life imitates art'<sup>7</sup> from the end of the Romantic period is not just a paradoxical aphorism; rather, it expresses a common sentiment of the time. It is precisely the central role of art that makes Romanticism the latest great artistic and cultural revolution in western civilisation.

Isaiah Berlin is able to synthesise the immense diversity of Romantic expressions in two characteristics: an 'indomitable will' and the idea that 'there is no structure of things'.<sup>8</sup> By indomitable will Berlin means:

*There is no copying, there is no adaptation, there is no learning of the rules, there is no external check, there is no structure*

which you must understand and adapt yourself to before you can proceed. The heart of the entire process is invention, creation, making, out of literally nothing, or out of any materials that may be to hand. The most central aspect of this view is that your universe is as you choose to make it.<sup>9</sup>

The second proposition is a consequence of the first:

*The universe must not be conceived of as a set of facts, as a pattern of events, as a collection of lumps in space, three-dimensional entities bound together by certain unbreakable relations [...] The universe is a process of perpetual forward self-thrusting, perpetual self-creation.*<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the simplest way to understand the origins of Romanticism is to recall Johann Georg Hamann who saw that ‘God was not a geometer [...] but a poet’.<sup>11</sup>

Romanticism is born out of a revolution against everything and thus, as anything that defines itself against something, is limited and indeed bound by that which it criticises. Romantics have to overcome this negation to attain an affirmation of principles by means of the affirmation of a supreme, random, and obstinate individual will.

The French Revolution is fundamental because of what it makes possible:

*The Revolution was an immense imaginative delirium of the human community. The prophecies of the 19th century, the eschatological speculations are not, free fantasies; the revolutionary precedent gives to modern utopias a new validity; the possible and the impossible, the real and the unreal have seen their signification change dramatically, their respective limits become blurred, or even disappear.*<sup>12</sup>

From then on utopias become reasonable possibilities.

French Romanticism is deeply connected with the national revolution to the extent that it ‘defined itself according to

the Revolution, first disapproved then celebrated as the first approach to a glorious future'.<sup>13</sup> This is why the first project for a public library is conceived during the Enlightenment, but the first public library to be built is only made possible during the Romantic period.

Georges Gusdorf<sup>14</sup> recalls that there is a permanent dialogue with the past, ancient or medieval, either for the sake of continuity or rupture. It is no longer possible to look at those epochs without considering the influence of Romanticism to our understanding. By being a reconstruction of the past in the present, it is, above all, an attempt to rebuild two different cultures with distinct approaches to what a book is. Antiquity, roughly speaking, is based upon an oral culture. During the Middle Ages, the book gains importance and, consequently, more thought is given to the book's place in society, both physical and figurative. At its heart, Romanticism is an outcast cry due to a denial of the immediate past but also due to sentiments of humiliation, contempt, and scorn suffered by its authors:

*All men, even if they don't change place, must individually realise the experience of exile. If the spiritual environment changes, if the established values suffer a radical mutation, those who do not move are aware of becoming displaced individuals in their own country.*<sup>15</sup>

To feel expatriate in one's own country is one of the most defining experiences for these men from which a certain revolt emerges because 'they were a remarkably unworldly body of men. They were poor, they were timid, they were bookish, they were very awkward in society'.<sup>16</sup>

When Novalis answers to 'Where are we going then?' with 'always home'<sup>17</sup> he is stressing an expatriate feeling. In fact, Romanticism can be understood as 'the search for a place'<sup>18</sup> alongside 'the search for the absolute'.<sup>19</sup>

The ideas of permanent revolution and a deification of the past may seem contradictory, but are based upon the same dissatisfaction with the present moment. This is why:

*Romanticism, far from affirming l'esprit du temps, takes its time anachronistically, in the opposite direction of history, which is not working for poetry, for the lyrical interiority, but for the rule of brass of a triumphant industry, for the fabrics and the railroads, for economic expansion with no limits.<sup>20</sup>*

Romanticism is 'a product of historiography'<sup>21</sup> and so its outcome is unpredictable.

Berlin synthesises the essence of Romanticism as: 'will, and man as an activity, as something which cannot be described because it is perpetually creating; you must not even say that it is creating itself, for there is no self, there is only movement'.<sup>22</sup> Movement is key to understanding Romantic art because it becomes a metaphor for the idea of indomitable will.

Movement is represented in different ways: through the painting of a billow sea; through a sculpture apparently unfinished; through the accelerated rhythm of a poem; or through an exalted symphony. This representation of movement in art is deeply connected with a desire to break the existing conventions. Innovation in art is very seldom a question of revolution, it is more a product of change achieved through certain rules of composition, through a canon, and there are indeed few revolutions worthy of that title in art. Romanticism itself does not represent such a break with the art of the past, but it tries to create a rupture with its rules of composition.

Romanticism establishes a hierarchy in artistic expression defined by the ability each form of art has to express the indomitable will. Music becomes the most important art in Romanticism since it is, as Berlin sees it in Schopenhauer, 'the expression of the naked will'.<sup>23</sup> Music is the ideal art for

a movement which wants life to follow art, as Wilde says 'music is the art in which form and matter are always one, the art whose subject cannot be separated from the method of its expression, the art which most completely realises the artistic ideal, and is the condition to which all the other arts are constantly aspiring'.<sup>24</sup> Painting and literature, especially poetry, follow next. And finally, mainly due to its static nature we find sculpture, and at last architecture.

#### Romanticism and architecture

The first public library is a construction of Romanticism both in its intentions and its architecture. Typical examples of Romantic architecture are commonly considered to be the oneiric visions of Pena National Palace (Portugal) or Neuschwanstein Castle (Germany), and this is due to the way architecture is read, rooted in the particular way it is represented as a form of art.

It may be useful to recall that 'all art is quite useless'.<sup>25</sup> What makes architecture a half-art, an expression used by numerous authors, is the difficulty to draw the line of usefulness. A poem in itself does not have any practical objective purpose, but there is a point from which architecture becomes useful. The problem of confrontation with architecture is evaluated by Bruno Zevi in *Saper Vedere L'Architettura*: it is about the representation of architecture, but also about the confrontation *in loco* with the architectural object. The stillness of such an object makes it hard to represent the impetuosity of Romanticism. However, architecture is not simply a huge sculpture. Approaching the object is already part of the architectural experience. In the ambulations around and through the object, architecture gains expression, dimension, and depth.

A common misreading of architecture is to perceive it only through vision. The fact that the easiest way to represent architecture is through drawing or photography, makes it easier to compare it with other visual arts. This misinterpretation consists in trying to explain architecture by looking first and foremost to the visual arts; looking for literal translations of the visual language of Romantic painters such as CDFriedrich, into an architectural form. Instead, a much more in-depth approach would be to identify the intention behind such paintings and see if it is traceable in an architectural expression. The problem with this misapprehension is that it fails to take into consideration the fact that architects are very much aware of what is happening around them and do not answer in a mere visual way.

On the other hand, architects tend to see architecture as the motor for change, a view heavily influenced by Le Corbusier's idea of 'Architecture or Revolution' expressed in *Vers Une Architecture*. This slightly exaggerated statement contributes to the notion that architecture should be looked at from the inside out. What happens is quite the contrary. Architects more often than not respond to the changing environment around them. This is suggested by Zevi<sup>26</sup> when he states that the renewal of architecture is born out of a social impulse and urban expansion. Reality imposes itself upon architecture and forces it to change.

The indomitable will, the denial of the structure and the experience of exile are represented by expressions of movement in Romantic art. In the case of architecture, movement is achieved by imposing a path upon the spectator. Movement is thereby about three-dimensional perception as much as it is about capturing an instant, and thus creating an impression. Romantic architecture will therefore suggest dramatic spatial variations inspired by Boullée, which will become an expression of will through the metaphor of movement.

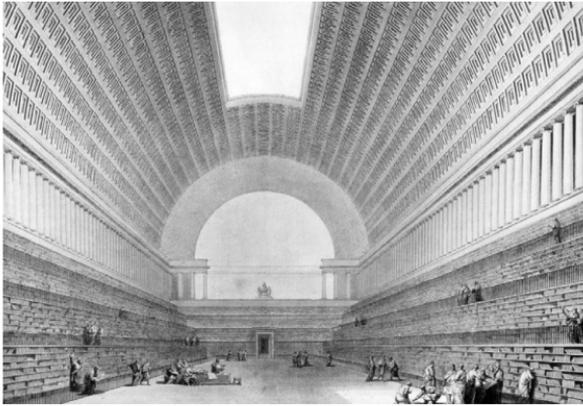
Although Boullée is closer to the enlightened experience, his projects are highly influential to Romantic architects since Boullée evokes 'the sublime emotions of terror and tranquillity through the grandeur of his conceptions'.<sup>27</sup>

Romantic architecture after Boullée explores the expression of movement emphasising a sensorial perception of space through a drastic transition of spaces and a confrontation with monumental scale and light.

The famous dilemma of style in the 19th century architecture is a direct expression in architectural terms of the experience of exile that GUSDORF puts at the heart of the Romantic feeling. The problem of style is the longing for a place in time and, through this problem, the Romantic sensibility becomes relevant to architecture. Through indecision, architecture takes a wavering path to explore different expressions with varying results, on some occasions taking the form of Neuschwanstein, on others that of Sainte-Geneviève, but at its heart all these architectural expressions represent an outcast experience.

#### *Romantic libraries*

All the enunciated factors are critical in understanding what might be considered the Romantic transformation of libraries. When Boullée and Labrouste introduce the idea of the library split apart from a main building with a different function, the most important room becomes the reading room, and it is there that all afore-mentioned formal issues are materialised. The reading room then goes on to develop a dramatic sensorial perception of space mainly through a confrontation with scale and light. Romantic architecture dramatises the experience of space using all the architectural elements known. The wide range of experimentation made during this period should be read according to this willingness to create an emotional (but not sentimental) architecture.



Étienne-Louis Boullée, Bibliothèque Royale, Paris, 1780

A key factor for the Romantic revolution in the architecture of libraries is the importance of light. The ideological foundation and technical development of the period enables Romantic architects to adopt an element as subjective as light as a primary one. Light has always been carefully treated by architecture; it has also been explored in different ways. In the architecture of libraries, however, light is seen essentially as a necessity to reading, that is as something functional. With the invention of gas light, which is used in the library of Labrouste, natural light is no longer an absolute necessity and so it begins to be explored in an emotional way. It becomes theatrical. Light is first treated as another architectural element and then as the most important one, because through a careful and purposeful use of light architecture can attain a new expression.

A preference for natural light is deeply rooted in the idea of movement. The most ancient form of light—fire light—is very vivid and expressive and is never monotonous. Gas light and electric light on the other hand are quite uniform, and uniformity is something Romantics hate. Romantics aim to find

a way to impose movement upon light and the simplest way to do that is to work directly with that which is always moving, that is natural light. The way natural light is explored in contemporary libraries is not only about an efficient use of natural light, but also about creating a dramatic perception of space.

Boullé proposes a longitudinal plan, with a vaulted axis, with four walls covered with books. Natural light penetrates the building only from the top, inspired by churches and previous libraries. With this plan, Boullée establishes what a reading room should be and shows how every spatial artifice works within the most public and important room in a library.

From Boullée onwards, libraries become a new temple for a new society—a temple of knowledge. The vaulted and longitudinal plan of the reading room, which creates a hall, is comparable to the central axis of a church. A similarity is obvious in the scale, but it is in the treatment of light that the similarity is emphasised. The hall-type library also proposes a free plan which is a revolutionary idea in architecture at the time.

The formal and symbolic similarities between libraries and churches account for some of the reasons why architects are as interested in designing libraries as they are in designing churches. By doing so, architects place themselves in a long tradition and they compare themselves to old masters.

It is important to point out a significant difference between the idea of an Enlightenment library, in which we can include the encyclopaedic libraries, and a Romantic library. Enlightenment has a conception of finite knowledge. Even an enormous amount of knowledge is finite. This idea corresponds to the Enlightenment view of the universe as something limited. At its heart, Enlightenment professes that one can learn to know everything. This is manifested in the creation of the encyclopaedia, which is supposed to concentrate all known knowledge. On the other hand, Romanticism has the conception that knowledge is infinite, so is the universe,

and so should be its libraries. There is an obsessive notion in the idea of an infinite library that can only be fulfilled by a Romantic mind. Related obsessions are still present today, especially in legal-deposit libraries, which are meant to collect everything being published.

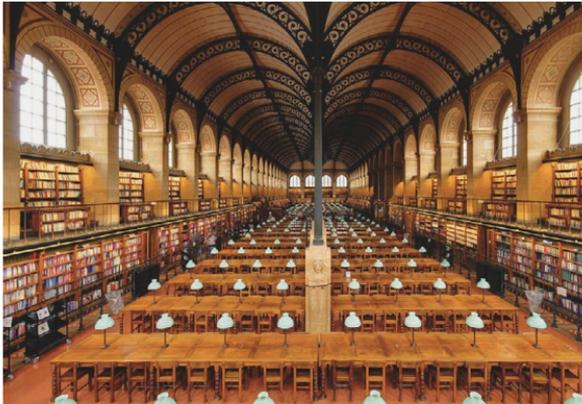
In order to see how this Romantic conception is still influential, one may look at what are arguably the two most significant contemporary texts about libraries by Jorge Luis Borges<sup>28</sup> and Umberto Eco.<sup>29</sup> When one looks at the descriptions Borges or Eco write of what a library should be, one can easily identify Romantic notions. Borges envisions a library as a way to glimpse into the infinite, because it is a symbolic representation of the universe.

#### *Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève*

It is very common to see Sainte-Geneviève portrayed as the first independent library building. Even though that is not the case, it appears to have been the first in France. Many scholars assumed that Sainte-Geneviève was the first independent library ever built. Despite it being a mistake this proves the enormous influence of this library.

Another feature of Sainte-Geneviève, often praised for being an innovation, is the visible internal iron structure. Nikolaus Pevsner<sup>30</sup> states that this is in fact the first time that iron appears internally exposed, but according to Campbell<sup>31</sup> it is not Labrouste's choice. It is rather an imposed necessity to protect against fire. Nevertheless, Labrouste can be credited for what he accomplishes with iron, because he creates 'a new language of decoration appropriate to the material'.<sup>32</sup>

In what directly concerns the library's design, it is hard to find a single characteristic that can be called innovative. The innovation in Sainte-Geneviève, as Campbell<sup>33</sup> recalls, lies in the way Labrouste combines existing elements in order to attain a new expression.



Henri Labrouste, Bibliothèque de Sainte-Geneviève, Paris, 1838–50

It is in this dialogue with the past and in the way Labrouste is 'able to probe the principles of past styles (not just to parrot their effects), then to translate these into authentic vocabularies of their own and achieve a prodigious imaginative unity in their results',<sup>34</sup> that we see how Labrouste reaches a new expression. This confrontation with the past combined with the willingness to change and adapt represents the materialisation of Romantic ideals. For example, Campbell<sup>35</sup> argues that there is no structural need to have central columns and that it is done by purely aesthetic motivations. This shows how Labrouste alters Boullée's library and how he tries to emphasise the idea of a secular building. It is no longer possible to establish a comparison between the two vaulted halls of the library and the central nave of a church.

There is another characteristic that defines the Romantic architectural expression in Sainte-Geneviève: a promenade meant to exhilarate a theatrical perception of space. The entrance hall, with its naïve garden paintings, is small and has no natural light. This consequently creates a dramatic transition between the entrance and the reading room. With

this radical transition, the reading room appears to be much larger than it actually is. This approach is first explored by Boullée, but especially favoured among Romantic architects, because it evokes very simply and directly striking emotions in the viewer.

### *Bibliothèque Nationale*

The third phase in the historical and typological evolution of libraries is defined by the independence of the building. That conception undergoes a critical transformation when independent library buildings begin to aggregate many other functions. The key moment for that transformation is the international competition for the design of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris in 1989. The winner is Dominique Perrault and the library is completed by 1996. But even more important than the project and its final result is the discussion that the competition allows to develop. With this competition, leading architects from around the world attempt to devise solutions for the challenges of a new type of library. The approach proposed by Rem Koolhaas with OMA is quite elucidatory: TGB – Très Grande Bibliothèque.

In Perrault's project, there is an 'axial monumentality',<sup>36</sup> emphasised by an incredible scale which must be read according to 'a renewed interest in the meaning of the city'.<sup>37</sup> In fact, this is the most significant feature of this library. It works on several scales, and the urban scale – the scale of the city – is perhaps the most rhetoric one. Despite the enormous monumentality, Perrault manages to create intermediary scales. There is an increasing amount of public space areas, where the library no longer functions solely as a place for consulting books. The fact that many other functions are conceived as part of the library reveals the idea of the library as a cultural centre, as a place not only for work, but also for leisure.

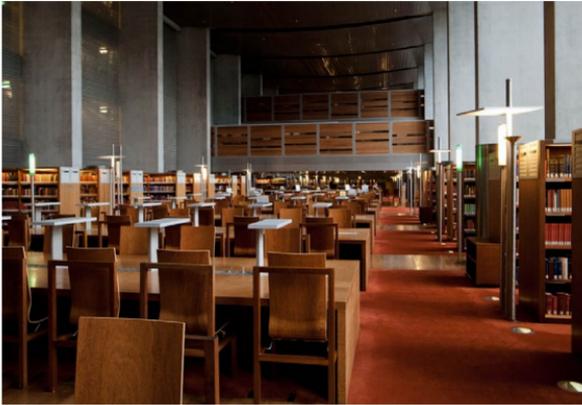
Despite a concentration of additional functions, the reading room is still the crucial element in the design of the Bibliothèque Nationale, as is the reinterpretation of the reading room as a hall. It surrounds a garden in a way that makes it hard to recognise that one is in the centre of Paris. The high ceilings and a wall of glass facing the garden open the space to the exterior from which filtered light enters the room.

Similarly to many previous examples, ranging from Boullée to Labrouste and beyond, an environmental condition as subjective as light comes to define the library space here, even more so than the structural architectural elements. It is indeed hard to find an architectural element more immaterial than light. The way the architecture of libraries has tried to work with light is crucial to understanding it. Light is what allows for a dramatic perception of space, creating striking emotions in the observer. This type of emotional architecture is deeply rooted in the Romantic period.

#### *Present tendencies*

Among the many different directions in the architecture of libraries today, there are three major trends that can be roughly categorised as the small-town library, the university library, and the mega-library.

The small-town library, which will likely persist for a long time, is deeply rooted in democratic principles that do not allow ignoring more peripheral regions. This type of library does not imply a great amount of economic expenses and has indeed great cultural and social advantages. Such libraries serve as small but very enthusiastic cultural centres. The library catalogue is usually devoted to more general themes, with some books specifically relating to the geographic and cultural region of the particular library branch. It is possible to find the great literary classics, some regional authors, and



Dominique Perrault, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 1996

often books from a wide range of cultural subjects, ranging from history to art, for instance.

An interesting example of this type is the Library of Viana do Castelo by Álvaro Siza, inaugurated in 2008. This library matches the description of the small-town library but is also a remarkable interpretation of the programme of a library.

Its lifted cloister is opened both to the interior and to the exterior of the quadrangle. The narrow *fenêtres en longueur*, are not meant to open the library to the city nor to the river,



Álvaro Siza, Library of Viana do Castelo, 2008

but to control the natural light. Once again, an example of how the treatment of light remains continuously critical to the design of a library. The design is also highly functional. There is diffused natural light which comes from the top and the height of the longitudinal windows is especially well-suited for reading desks.

As in previous cases, there is a path that leads to the reading room. The entrance is slightly darker, but the staircase leading up to the reading room is illuminated. Thus, light is used to guide the visitor naturally along the route to reach the reading room. The reading room has no high ceilings, no pretentious scale, but the elegant and efficient design surmounts the lack of grandiose appearance.

The second tendency in contemporary library architecture is manifested in university libraries. This tendency is very old and is likely to persist for numerous reasons. This type of library tends to be much larger in size and scale compared to town libraries. University libraries are expected to have many more books, from a vast range of subjects, which are to be used by students or researchers.



Max Dudler, Grimm Centre, Humbolt University of Berlin, 2009

In the Library of the Humbolt University of Berlin, designed by Max Dudler, the most remarkable feature is the re-interpretation of the reading room as a grand hall. The treatment of light here is also significant. Natural light, flooding the space both from the ceiling and the external walls, combined with the composition of the reading room with its stepped platforms achieves an impressive result. Furthermore, the stepped and open platforms in the room allow for different spatial perceptions of the room from each one of the platforms. The way the open-stacks shelving system is arranged within the space allows for a very fluid circulation, which is another significant aspect of the design of this library. The spatial arrangement of the Humbolt University Library highlights the fact that university libraries are not intended to be cultural centres, or simply places to consult books, they are first and foremost places for study.

The third major tendency in the architecture of libraries today is inaugurated by the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The mega-library is a construction of the great and the developing economic powers. In the long run it is hard

to tell whether these libraries will retain their significance and practicality. Many of them, the less interesting ones at least, could very likely be abandoned or converted to general national archives or legal-deposit libraries.

The critical characteristic of these libraries is the overwhelmingly large scale. The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris still manages to work on several scales; one may argue how successfully that is accomplished, but it is clear that the control of different scales is a concern. Some more recent mega-library constructions face the same problems, and not all of them have successful solutions.

The National Library of China in Beijing, completed in 2008, aspires to collect everything published in Chinese and also to be the Chinese library with more Western titles. Such ambitious aims demand necessarily a building of gigantic proportions. It is a clear example of architecture 'intended to stand out on an urban scale'.<sup>38</sup> To stand out is clearly different from working with the urban scale and that seems to be the critical problem this type of library will increasingly be confronting in the future. In many such libraries, the grand urban gesture seems to have been designed to stand out, rather than be constructed as a space that can manage different degrees of layers and scales.

To be capable to manage all the variables of a mega-building is much more difficult than to design a small one; it is like composing a symphony as opposed to a violin concerto. For instance, it is very difficult, although not impossible, to achieve an interesting treatment of light in many such buildings. In the case of the National Library of China, the gigantic dimension of the library is counter-balanced by the stepped reading room. On balance, the main problem this tendency in the construction of libraries suffers from is the risk of disproportion.



Jürgen Engel, National Library of China, Beijing, 2008

Although mega-libraries are being built around the globe at an increasing rate, this tendency is likely to change. The economic or environmental effort of such enterprises poses several doubts about both efficiency and usefulness. What will probably substitute the mega-library will be a mega-archive, such as that of the Bodleian Library. Libraries will still have a considerable size, especially university libraries, but the gigantic scale of mega-libraries will probably not last for long. The obsession to record everything produced in the past is a Romantic one, still present today, and will likely not disappear because an agreement about what can be forgotten seems impossible. Therefore, the only possible solution is to archive everything.

1. 'O universo (a que outros chamam a Biblioteca)'. Jorge Luis Borges, 'A Biblioteca de Babel', *Ficções*, in *Jorge Luis Borges: Obras Completas: 1923-1949*, vol 1 (Lisboa: Editorial Teorema, 1998), p 483.
2. James WP Campbell & Will Pryce, *The Library: A World History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2013), p 15.
3. *Ibid*, p 37.
4. *Ibid*, p 47.
5. Barry Bergdoll, *European Architecture: 1750-1890* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p 43.
6. Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976), p 6.
7. Oscar Wilde, *Intentions* (London: Filiquarian Publishing, 2007), p 27.
8. Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p 119.
9. *Ibid*, p 119.
10. *Ibid*, pp 119-120.
11. *Ibid*, p 49.
12. 'La Révolution a été un immense délire imaginaire de la communauté humaine. Les messianismes du XIXe siècle, les spéculations eschatologiques ne sont plus, comme autrefois, des fantaisies gratuites; le précédent révolutionnaire donne aux utopies modernes une validité neuve; le possible et l'impossible, le réel et l'irréel ont vu leur significations varier du tout au tout, leurs limites respectives devenir floues, sinon même disparaître.' Georges Gusdorf, *Le Romantisme: Tome 1: Le Savoir Romantique* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2011), p 57.
13. 'le romantisme se définit par rapport à la Révolution, d'abord réprouvée, puis célébrée comme première approche d'un glorieux avenir'. *Ibid*, p 135.
14. *Ibid*, p 11.
15. 'Tous les hommes, même s'ils ne changent pas de place, doivent réaliser pour leur compte l'expérience de l'exil. Si l'environnement spirituel change, si les valeurs établies subissent une mutation radicale, ceux qui ne bougent pas ont conscience de devenir des personnes déplacées au sein de leur propre pays.' *Ibid*, p 53.
16. Isaiah Berlin, *op cit*, p 130.
17. *Ibid*, p 158.
18. 'la recherche du lieu'. Georges Gusdorf, *Le Romantisme: Tome II: L'Homme et La Nature* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2011), p 85.
19. 'la recherche de l'absolu'. Georges Gusdorf, *Le Romantisme: Tome I: Le Savoir Romantique* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2011), p 465.
20. 'Le romantisme, bien loin d'affirmer l'esprit du temps, prend son temps à contretemps, à contresens de l'histoire qui ne travaille pas pour la poésie, pour l'intériorité lyrique, mais pour la loi d'airain de l'industrie triomphante, pour les usines et les chemins de fer, pour l'expansion économique sans freins et sans limite.' *Ibid*, p 38.
21. *Ibid*, p 12.
22. Isaiah Berlin, *op cit*, p 138.
23. *Ibid*, p 129.
24. Oscar Wilde, *Essays & Lectures* (Rockville, MD: ARC Manor, 2008), p 70.
25. Oscar Wilde, *Intentions* (London: Filiquarian Publishing, 2007), p 4.

26. Bruno Zevi, *Storia Dell'Architettura Moderna: Volume 1: Da William Morris ad Alvar Aalto: La Ricerca Spazio-Temporale* (Torino: Einaudi, 2007), p 37.
27. Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), p 15.
28. Jorge Luis Borges, 'La Biblioteca de Babel', in *Ficciones* (1941).
29. Umberto Eco, *De Bibliotheca* (1981).
30. Nikolaus Pevsner, *op cit*, p 289.
31. James WP Campbell, *op cit*, p 228.
32. *Ibid*, p 230.
33. *Ibid*, p 228.
34. William JR Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (London: Phaidon Press, 2005), p 26.
35. James WP Campbell, *op cit*, p 230.
36. Kenneth Frampton, *op cit*, p 382.
37. William JR Curtis, *op cit*, p 672.
38. James WP Campbell, *op cit*, p 300.

A Hybrid Building: Lisbon's Central  
Library and Municipal Archive

João Torres



Atrium and Public Services, Municipal Archives

## *Introduction*

This article discusses the research and reflects on the theoretical concepts applied to the practical design project, Lisbon's Central Library and Municipal Archive, developed for the Alcântara area in Lisbon, Portugal.

On an urban level, the Alcântara hub is an interdisciplinary platform integrated in a city system—an entry point into the historic city centre of Lisbon. For this project I was interested in analysing the development of the relationship between (re)thinking the territory and the meaning of a hybrid building. This relation comes as a result of the decentralisation of the industry in Alcântara and, consequentially, the expansion of the urban territory. Such spaces render new opportunities for urban regeneration. Given its intermodal nature, Alcântara is one of the largest and most dynamic infrastructural points in Lisbon.

The development of this urban space embraces the relationship between the public building and the hybrid territory through its local (interaction of the building with the location and its industrial nature) and global connections (transportation connections that allow a swift connection between Alcântara and the various reference points in the city). Thus, a public building developed in this area can become a defining element of the city's public domain.

## *Contextual background*

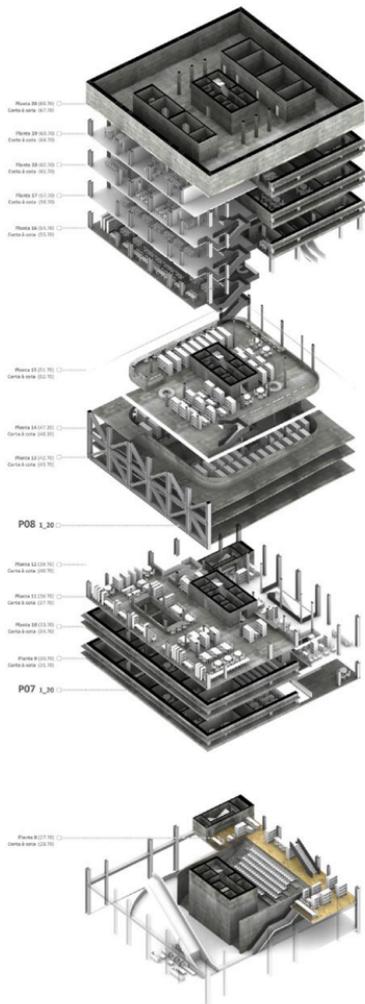
With regard to public libraries, the concept behind Lisbon's Central Library and Municipal Archive bears connections to the Central Library of Berlin, developed in the 1970s. The concept (on a project level) was developed further by Rem Koolhaas (OMA) in 1998 for the Seattle Central Library. Koolhaas's concept was based on the organisation of the architectural programme and the display in platforms, separating or congregating spaces. The approach to the

programme is to consolidate similar areas, in which each platform corresponds to a specific programme; each platform has a specific function that differs in size, flexibility, access organisation, structure, and public or private areas. The hierarchy among these elements helps the development and organisation of the building, and the key characteristic of this approach is that it can be divided into programmes and mediators. The programmes are elements that allow a particular building to be used for a specific purpose, and in this case define an organisational strategy in collaboration with the mediators. The mediators can be identified as devices that enable the physical connection or separation between two programmes.

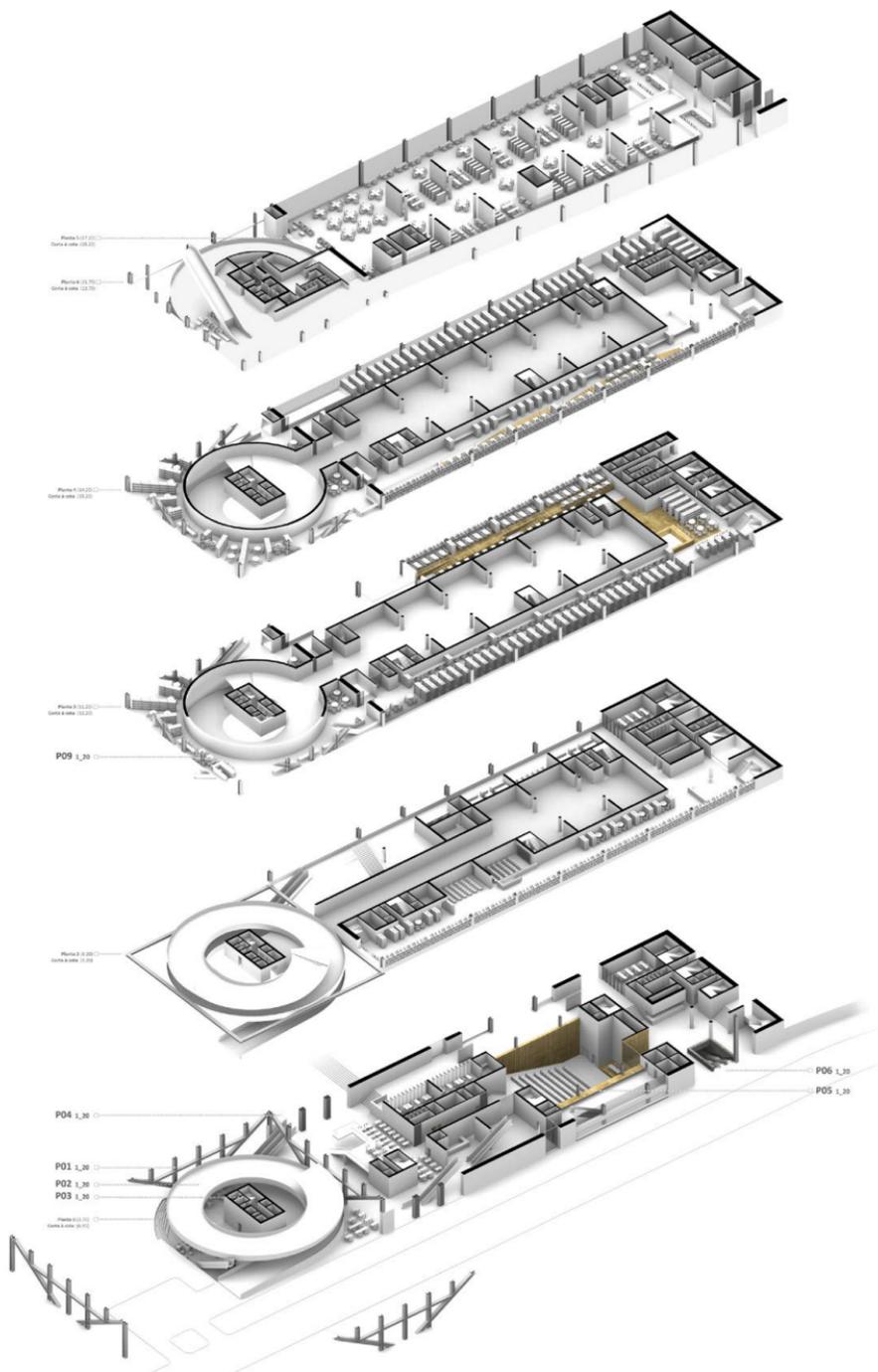
The interstitial spaces organise the connections between platforms with working, interaction, and event operations, allowing librarians to encourage the use of the library's collections. These interstitial spaces, functioning as mediators, can be informal auditoriums or even ramps that connect spaces—where one can read and the walls can function as bookshelves.

As in the above-mentioned public libraries, the project for Lisbon's Central Library and Municipal Archive falls within the hybrid-building category. The hybrid concept is defined as the intercrossing of different species (ie it can be applied to several categories), composed of different elements, and can be included in a hybrid style.

American cities, like New York, reflect the great (r)evolution of this architectural code (hybrid) from the beginning of the 20th century until the 1960s. A critical vision and analysis on the 'modernist functional clarity' is what Rem Koolhaas describes in his book *Delirious New York*.<sup>1</sup> Determining factors like the high density of American city centres and the functional segregation contributed to the development of new typologies. The hybrid building began its existence in the



Above, overleaf: Axonometry – Programmes and Mediators

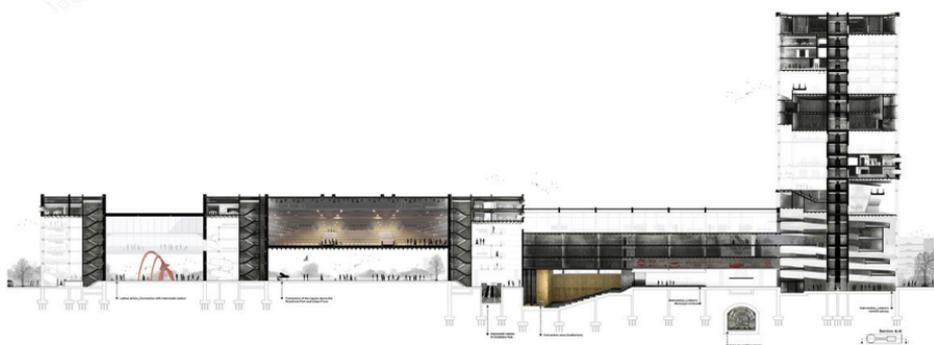


field of market economy and was reflected in the design of land parcels. In this respect, high-rise buildings gained new uses, as in the case of the Downtown Athletic Club, one of the first social clubs of its time. Public activities were now extended to the inside of buildings, consequently leading to several typological changes. It was therefore determined that hybrid buildings could be: The Metropolitan Hybrid, The Indeterminate Hybrid, The Mat Hybrid, and The Topographic Hybrid. In this context, the New York Zoning Law was approved in 1916. It considered a simple regular mesh offering flexibility and simultaneously regulating the uses, the height, and the massing of new buildings. Thus, establishing parameters such as solar incidence on façades and the width of streets (eg the Downtown Athletic Club).

By the end of the 20th century, with the globalisation and rise of competition among contemporary cities, the question about the potential of hybrid buildings in the 21st century gained greater relevance.

The different purposes to which the hybrid concept has been applied, as well as its unnecessary subdivisions, create several misinterpretations regarding the term. In the philosophical context of the 21st century, the definition of hybrid proves a difficult one and is sometimes confused with a practice that relates to it. It is possible that this lack of formal definition is a result of the permanent cultural transformation, which underlies urban territories. Culture, through its social actors, generates processes in constant mutation, to which hybrid programmes must continuously adapt. It is in this process of transformation that the best opportunities for change in architectural culture can be found, as discussed, for example, in the international seminar *Open Source 2010—Architecture as an Open Culture*.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, one of the main issues for buildings to continue to work in active urban networks is the integration of



Section A-A' of Lisbon's Central Library and Municipal Archive

public programmes within the buildings – the idea of verticalisation of the public domain. For Lisbon’s Central Library and Municipal Archive a special path was created to connect the two halls: a general hall, in the ground level, and the 21.60 meter high library hall. This platform is the first standpoint between the river and the city, making this building unique in this territory and a new vision for public space in the city.

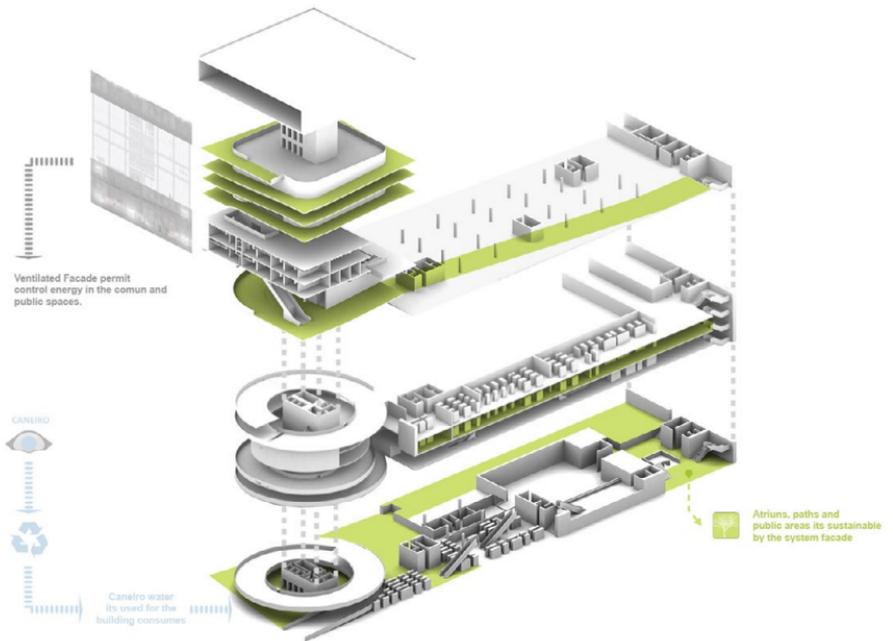
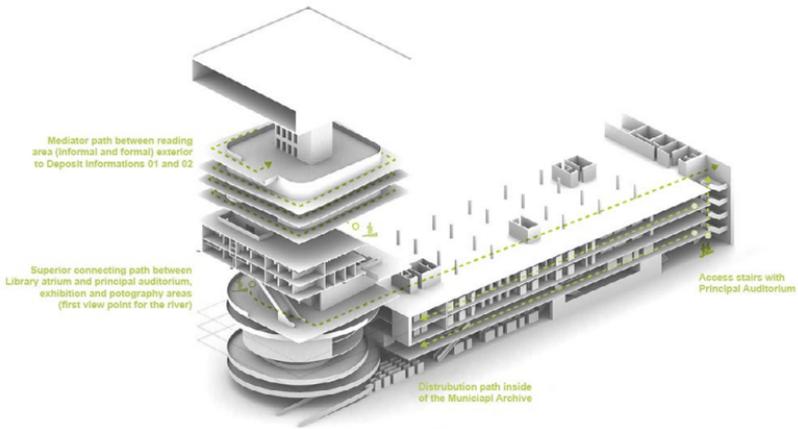
*In the past three decades, entirely new spatial conditions that demand new definitions have emerged. Where space was considered permanent, it now feels transitory – on its way to becoming. The words and ideas of architecture, once the official language of space, no longer seem capable of describing this proliferation of new conditions... (But) words that die in the real are reborn in the virtual.<sup>3</sup>*

#### Project proposal

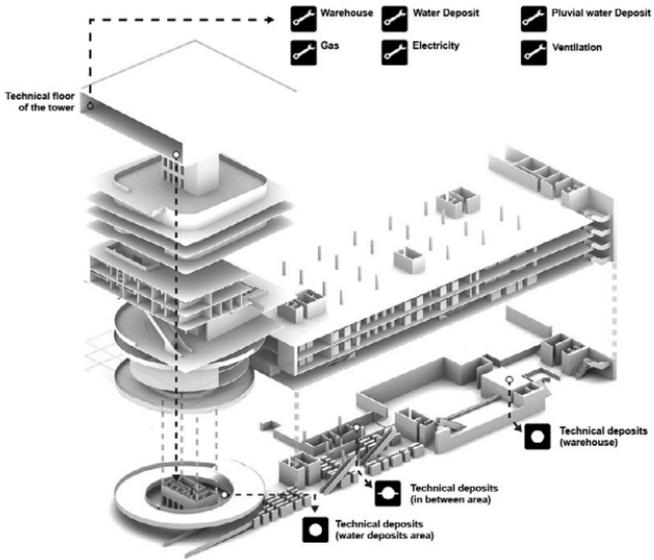
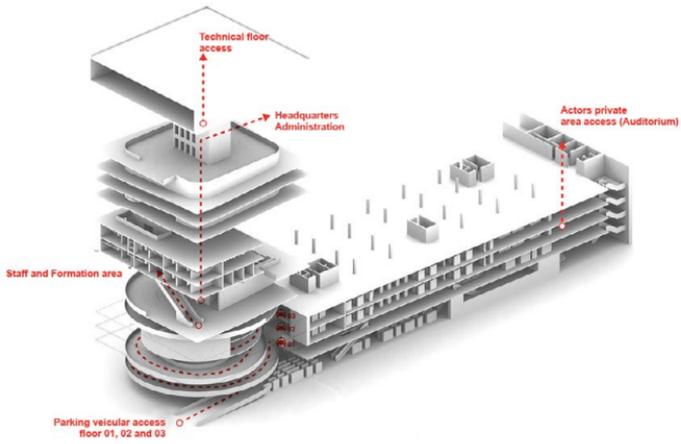
Lisbon’s Central Library is part of the National Network of Public Libraries. With a capacity for more than 50,000 people the building also comprises Lisbon’s Municipal Archive. The Archive is currently composed of three parts: the Historical and Intermediate Archive in the Liberdade neighbourhood; the Arco do Cego Archive in the Arco do Cego neighbourhood; and the Photography Archive on Palma Street, where the most important documents regarding the city of Lisbon and the country are kept.

The proposal for the new Central Library and Municipal Archive building is formed by two volumes: a vertical body (the library, referenced as a new Tower of Babel), and a horizontal body (the archive) where the depositories and halls act as communication and sharing locations.

The project intends to integrate the public domain into the building. The large exterior plaza, a reference point in this area, contains the highest pedestrian flows and makes



Top: Public paths of the building  
 Bottom: Sustainability system

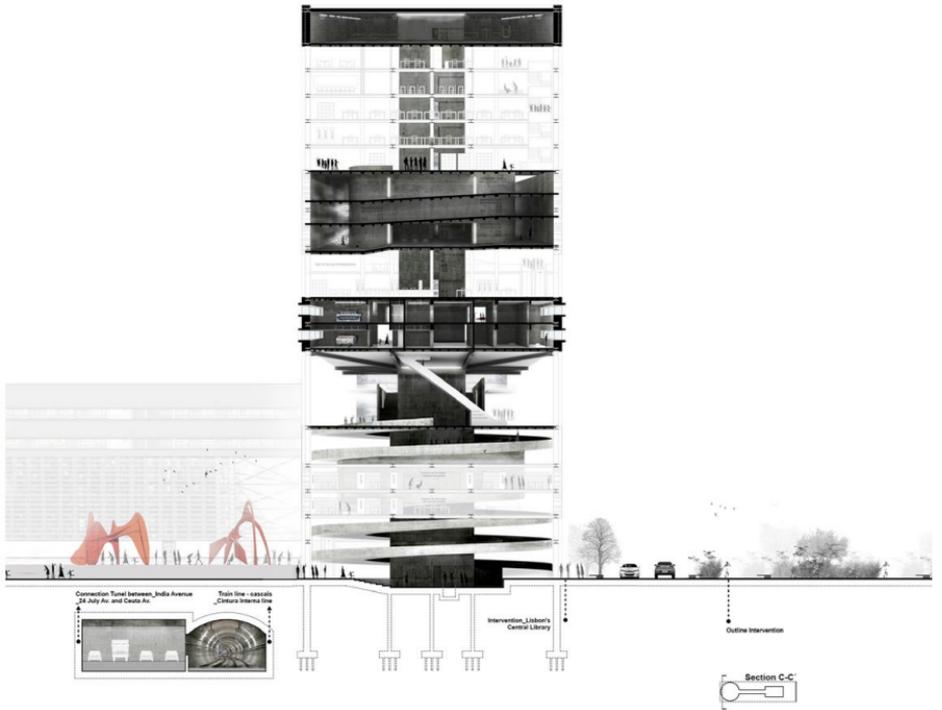


Top: Private paths of the building  
 Bottom: Technical system of the building

possible to establish a connection between the two entrances of the building. The first (vertical body) connects the central square and the large hall of the library, where the pathways become reading areas. The second (horizontal body) connects the intermodal station with the Municipal Archive and Main Auditorium entrance. These aspects express the idea that the two bodies are halls integrating new public spaces, initially non-existent in Alcântara, inside the building. Through its programme, the ground floor determines the process to verticalise the public space on the several platforms of the building. The verticalisation of the public space into the building is made possible by the different entrances at different levels. This idea also transforms the elevated square and the vertical coffee shop into new public areas.

The library's elevated hall acts as the mediator between the reading and the archive areas, connecting them to the municipal archive depositories. In contemporary libraries, the hall is designated as the reference area and it is the location where one has access to preliminary knowledge, an antechamber. The lobby establishes the relationship between the interior and the exterior of the building and guides the public toward the building's various interior spaces. In practice, this area is intended for the reception and information of users. Users are guided to the reading areas, depositories, and to the Main Auditorium through a suspended pathway inside the building.

In the Municipal Archive, the main programmes are the depositories and warehouses (its core), although in the future the 1st-floor indoor parking lot could be used as an archive area, too. The public areas along the façades of the building are consultation and reading areas, and are divided by themes: the historical, educational, photography, and photographic heritage (photographs and cartography) departments. The main route starts in the hall of the Municipal Archive and



Above, overleaf: Section B–B' and West Façade of Lisbon's Central Library and Municipal Archive



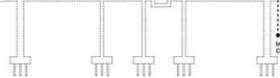
Canals of Alcázar



Connection Tunnel between India Avenue



Train line - cascals



Intervention Liban's Central Library

Outline Intervention



ends in the hall that leads to the Auditorium, in opposite locations, covering the departments and the main areas of consultation. The archive hall is organised by themed platforms connected by pathways, similar to those in the Seattle Library and the Berlin Central Library.

The articulation of the spaces takes place alongside the three main public pathways, formed by ramps. The connection between the library hall and the archive hall is where one can apprehend the different scales of the library, with a triple high ceiling, and the archive hall, at the city level. This path is essential because it is possible to exchange information between the library and archive—the idea being to share information in the physical space transitions. The passages of the library connect the reading areas (formal and informal), where users can consult documents along the façade whose walls are lined with bookshelves. The pathway through the archive organises it so that the depository areas are positioned in the centre and the reading areas along the façade. The reading areas exist at two levels (with 1.5 meter variation), the lower one being for quick research and the other for more in-depth research.

#### *Considerations for the future*

Today, what brings us to a space such as this one is the access to knowledge through an open community. The modern component of the library resides in the sharing of information. According to these considerations, the modern library introduces new information and approaches in which it increasingly plays a role of social responsibility. The library remains one of the last public spaces with free access to information. The goal of this public library project is not to redefine the library as an institution based solely on books, but rather as an information platform, where documents are accessible to everyone. In this building it is possible to have access both

to new documents and information, as well as to the old and historic archives.

*The library will increasingly become a mixed use building. [...] A type of 'futurescope', as George Steiner called it. The scanning of documents and its availability online will progressively turn the library into a Babel Tower, one that is decreasingly physical and increasingly memory.<sup>4</sup>*

Libraries in the future will increasingly have a hybrid function where the interaction with the city and its public spaces will be ever greater. Access to information will be part of the daily routine of its inhabitants and the urban nature of the city will also be integrated into the building.



Model 1:100.



Lisbon's Central Library and Municipal Archive

1. Rem Koolhaas, *Nova York Delirante*, trans. Denise Bottman (Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2008).
2. 'Open Source credits invention without bounds. The informal with its focus on local juxtaposition hybrid allows probability to become serial possibility. Run by algorithm and rigorous search, the so called random is the source.' (Cecil Balmond, whose written and built work inspired this event.) See [www.circodeideias.pt/2010/06/cecil-balmond.html](http://www.circodeideias.pt/2010/06/cecil-balmond.html) [2014]. 'Open Source – Term used in the definition of the software where the original code is shared between the users.' Gonçalo Azevedo, *Open Source 2010: Architecture as an Open Culture* (Circo de ideias – Associação Cultural, 2011).
3. El Croquis 134–135: OMA / Rem Koolhaas 1996–2007, vol II (El Croquis Editorial, 2007), p 3.
4. Jorge Ferreira, 'A Biblioteca: Construção de Babel', in *Arquitectura Ibérica 17: Bibliotecas* (Caleidoscópico, 2006), p 7.

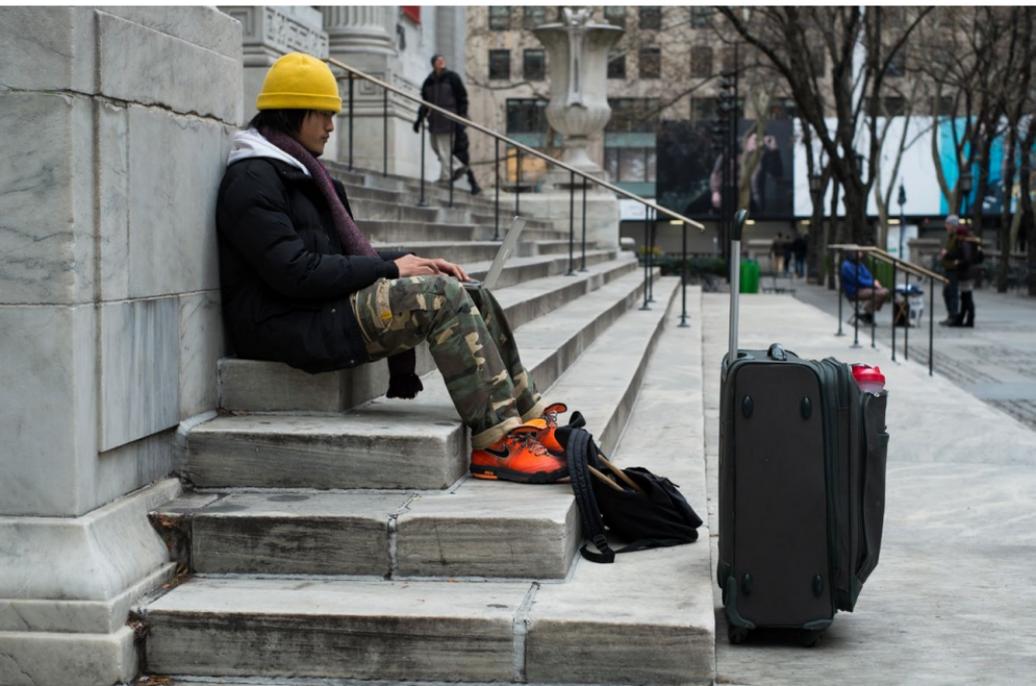
To see a gallery with high-res, full-colour versions of all images for this project, please visit: [www.inland-editions.com/joao-torres/](http://www.inland-editions.com/joao-torres/)

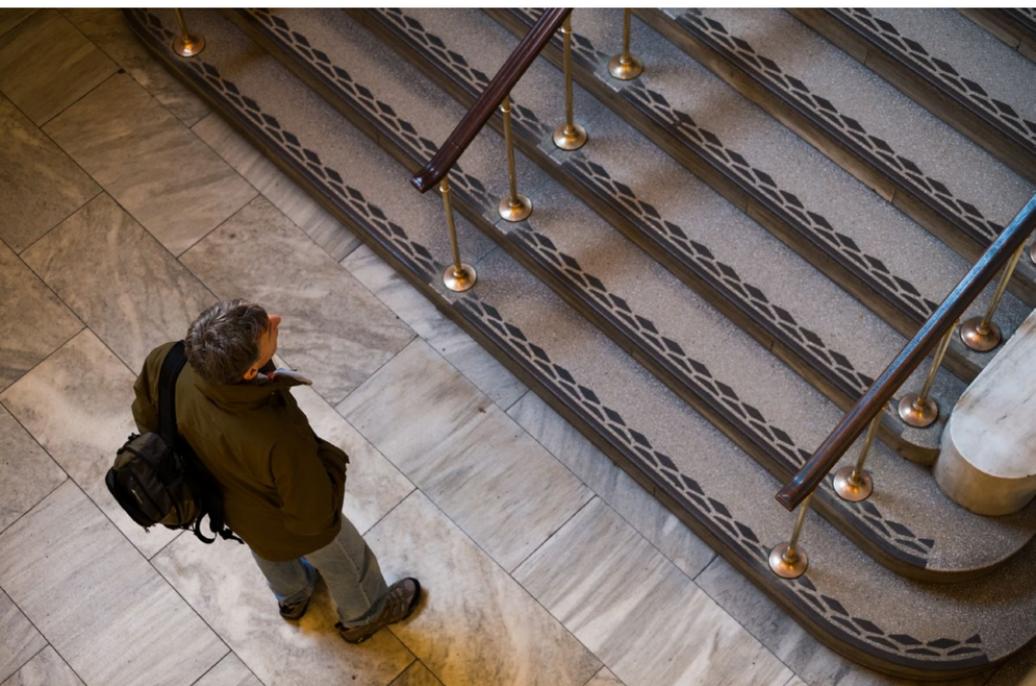
Notes from the Stacks  
*Julius Motal*

If you look up from your book in the Salomon Room of the New York Public Library's Main Branch, there's a good chance you'll see a group of tourists, cameras slung unevenly around their necks, looking at the portraits that adorn the walls of the room. This is part of the NYPL's charm. It has as much utility for tourists as it does for library goers. Part gallery space, research centre, reading room, archive, performance space, and much else besides, the NYPL is a staple of New York City life – artistically, academically, and architecturally.

The library was the subject of some controversy when renovation plans were announced in late 2012 to reduce the capacity of the reading room services and add a lending library to its main branch, which would have caused a sizable portion of the stacks to be moved offsite. Following criticism and petitioning from prominent members of the literary and academic community, as well as the general public, the plans were scrapped in early 2014 in favour of improving the existing design.

The photographs in this series aim to show the current intersection of the space and its patrons. They were put together over the course of several visits in late 2014. The Rose Main Reading Room was closed for repairs during my time there, so it does not make an appearance in this series.

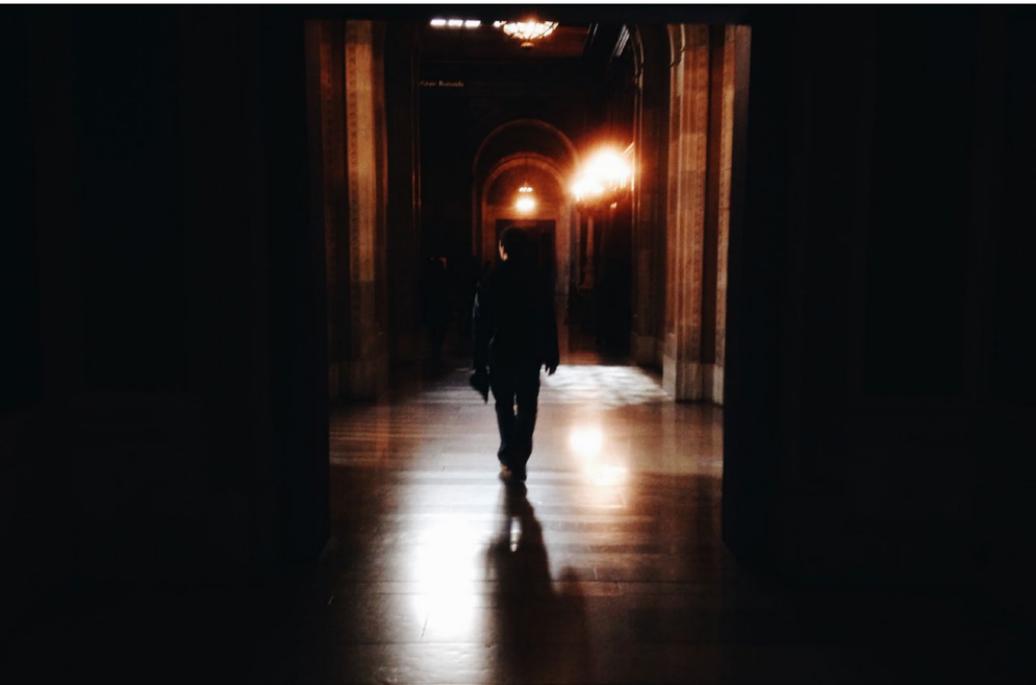








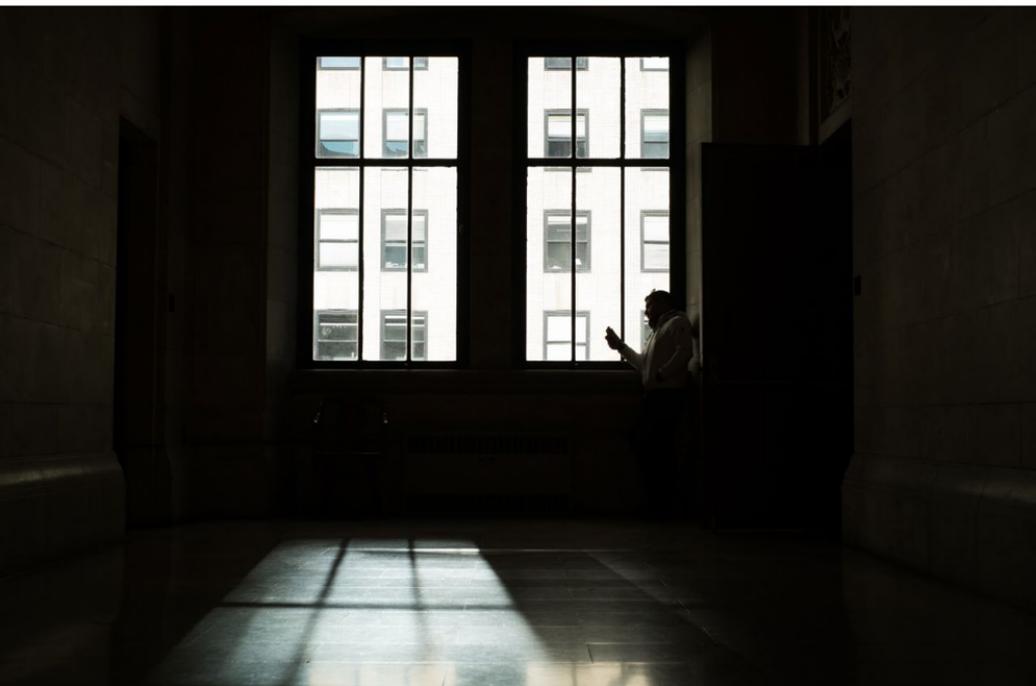
















Points of Access: Reflections on  
Public Libraries, Special Archives,  
and New Digital Initiatives

*Marie Lécivain*

We pick our way down endless library shelves, choosing this or that volume for no discernible reason: because of a cover, a title, a name, because of something someone said or didn't say, because of a hunch, a whim, a mistake, because we think we may find in this book a particular tale or character or detail, because we believe it was written for us, because we believe it was written for everyone except us and we want to find out why we have been excluded, because we want to learn, or laugh, or lose ourselves in oblivion.

Alberto Manguel<sup>1</sup>

## Join The Library

**Your Details:**

Title	-	
First Name *	-	<input type="text"/>
Surname *	-	<input type="text"/>
Gender	Miss	
Date of Birth*	Month -	Year -

**Your Address:**

House Name / Number	<input type="text"/>
PostCode	<input type="text"/>
Address line 1*	<input type="text"/>
Address line 2	<input type="text"/>
Address line 3	<input type="text"/>
Address line 4	<input type="text"/>
Postcode*	<input type="text"/>

**Title dropdown menu:**

- 
- Mr
- Mrs
- Miss
- Master
- Ms
- Dr
- Professor
- Reverend
- Sister
- Father
- Sir
- Lord
- Lady
- Not Specified
- Capt
- Col
- Maj

Over the last few years as a library user, I have been confronted with difficulties in accessing libraries on several levels: physical space, availability of materials, and difficulty with conducting research through databases. Copyright and permissions policies also restrict library access, as do cuts in public funding that prevent libraries from performing essential functions like conservation and preservation. On the other hand, the number of emerging electronic resources may offer an alternative to accessing online databases, hard-to-find editions, or digital collections from brick-and-mortar institutions. This article gathers observations I have made in Belgium, England, and France, where, at different points, I made various experiments with book searches.

#### ACCESS TO PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS IN EUROPE

The local public library near my home in Brussels is only open four afternoons and two mornings a week. Only recently has it started opening on some evenings. I recall going to my local library on Wednesday afternoons as a schoolchild – the only time we were free from school and the library was open. I later discovered that the students from the closest neighbourhood had access to the university library in their area from eight in the morning to eight at night, Monday to Saturday.

In most European countries, library users can browse books until late in the afternoon and even at night, as well as spend part of the weekend among the shelves. However, opening times for libraries remain vastly inconsistent, depending on their function or the size of the city. Opening times can also vary depending on how the libraries are staffed (whether with full-time employees or volunteers), as well as according to their respective countries' cultural politics. In France, for instance, a report states 'libraries are

open 30 hours per week on average, while in Copenhagen or Amsterdam they are open around 100 hours on average [...] Elsewhere, in Europe, many cities boast libraries that remain open until 10 pm and systematically open on Sundays'.<sup>2</sup> This report was established by NGO Bibliothèques Sans Frontières (Librarians Without Borders) in the context of a petition calling for more frequent and longer library opening hours, to which a librarians and civil servants collective answered: 'Before thinking about opening on Sundays and on evenings, libraries should function satisfactorily during the week.'<sup>3</sup> According to Bibliothèques Sans Frontières, the lack of opening hours reflects financial resources issues, yet they seem to ignore other questions of territories concerning libraries. The collective pursues, 'If we remove close links, we will "lose" the less mobile populations, that is, the more destitute, by favouring people living in city centres or able to circulate more easily'.

#### London, UK

Staying in London during 2013, I noticed how relatively easy access to local libraries is there. In one borough, there are smaller local libraries and one larger central building that serves as a learning centre with full access to new technology. No registration is needed for entry, but registered members can borrow books for free, and films for a small fee. However, most of these libraries, from borough-run to national, or even specialised libraries, ask for an ID document, as well as a proof of address.

On the other hand, one need not show research credentials or certificates to enter some specialised libraries or archives such as St Bride Library or the Victoria & Albert Museum National Art Library. St Bride Library is a wonderful printing history library and typographical archive, run by a passionate team of volunteers, where one can get free access

to the Reading Room for £5/year. Similarly, at the V&A National Art Library, registered readers can consult books from the archive and use cameras free of charge to document their research.

The British Library website also indicates: ‘Anyone can apply for a Reader Pass, but due to pressure on our services we cannot guarantee admission’, explaining that the library is different from public or university libraries, before adding, ‘Staff may suggest other, more appropriate libraries or sources for your research’. Again, access is free and there is no need to show an accreditation, only a proof of identity and address.



The screenshot shows the website for the St Bride Foundation Library and Archives. The header features the St Bride Foundation logo and the text 'LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES'. Below the header is a navigation menu with links for 'THE LIBRARY', 'YOUR VISIT', 'EVENTS', 'SHOP', and 'FRIENDS'. The main content area is titled 'Information for Reading Room users' and contains two sections: 'Access & opening hours' and 'Reader Cards'. The 'Access & opening hours' section states that the Reading Room is open on Wednesdays from 11:00am until 6:00pm from 26th September 2012, with a maximum of 12 researchers at any one time. The 'Reader Cards' section explains that readers must present a valid Reader Card upon entering the Reading Room, which is valid for one year from the purchase date. A £5.00 processing fee is mentioned. On the right side of the page, there is a sidebar with a list of links: 'Information for Reading Room users', 'The subjects we cover', 'Collections', 'How to locate the items you want', 'History', 'Who we serve', 'Staff', 'Contact information', 'Home', 'Support us', 'Help to keep the Library alive', 'Contact us', and 'Search the site'. At the bottom of the sidebar, it says 'More at St Bride Foundation'.

[www.sbf.org.uk/library](http://www.sbf.org.uk/library)

The new Library of Birmingham – probably one of the last examples of a library building on such a grand scale – opened its doors in 2013, replacing the city’s central library and becoming one of the largest public libraries in the UK. However, other cities in Britain are plagued by library closings and declining conditions.

Certainly, if you examine Britain's library closures the story does get repetitive. According to figures collated by Public Libraries News in the last financial year, 61 libraries were withdrawn from service. The preceding year it was 63, the year before that 201. Some new libraries have opened, but there's debate, again often inaudible, about how many hundreds of others are threatened. Of those 325 lost libraries, around a third have been taken over by their communities in various ways, often with reduced opening hours and working with volunteers.<sup>4</sup>

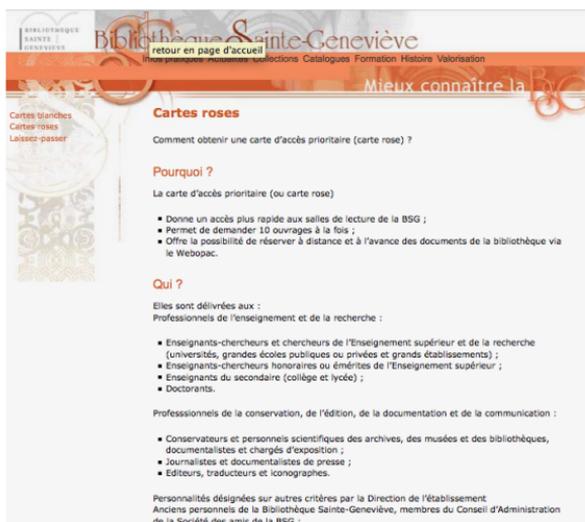
The future of UK public lending libraries seems uncertain with regards to local access and access in larger cities, as there is such a paradox in building a large and expensive library, while so many other libraries in the rest of the country have disappeared that same year. Does that mean that certain areas get better access while others lose it? On the other hand, there is promising development in terms of digital book loans in UK public libraries – yet the organisation of digital content distribution already seems to become a new profitable market monopolised by only a handful of corporate structures. This brings into question the role of libraries regarding their support for digital content.

#### Paris, France

Each Parisian *arrondissement* has a number of different libraries. For entering local lending libraries (*bibliothèques de prêt*), free registration is mandatory for borrowing books, while access to other media is granted through a yearly subscription.

Access to the BNF – *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* – is also subject to a registration, as well as a daily or yearly pass subscription (€3.50 / €38 respectively). While a large part of the library's resources is accessible for every visitor, the research department follows a different set of rules. Requirements include obtaining an accreditation justifying research

work, as well as providing various other documents – student card, certification from a research supervisor, professional certificate or contract, letter from an employer, and so on. Access to the reading spaces and the national collection is only granted after an interview with a librarian. Research resources at the BNF are thus restricted to readers with a specific administrative status.



The image shows a screenshot of the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève website. The header includes the library's name and navigation links like 'retour en page d'accueil', 'Plus de programmes', 'Formations', 'Collections', 'Catalogues', 'Formation', 'Histoire', and 'Valorisation'. A main navigation bar contains 'Mieux connaître la'. The page content is titled 'Cartes roses' and includes a sub-header 'Comment obtenir une carte d'accès prioritaire (carte rose) ?'. It has sections for 'Pourquoi ?' and 'Qui ?'. The 'Pourquoi ?' section lists benefits like faster access and remote reservation. The 'Qui ?' section lists eligible groups: teaching and research professionals, university and secondary school staff, and doctoral students. It also lists professionals in conservation, editing, and communication, and mentions designated personalities.

[www-bsg.univ-paris.fr/infos-pratiques/reglement/cartes-roses](http://www-bsg.univ-paris.fr/infos-pratiques/reglement/cartes-roses)

At the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, located at the feet of the Pantheon in a neighbourhood surrounded by several universities, schools, and high schools, there are three types of free reader access cards: the day-pass, *laissez-passer*; the white card for readers above 18 or *baccalauréat* (the French equivalent to A-Levels) graduates; and the pink card, which allows its owner to skip waiting lines and is offered to lecturers and researchers, PhD students, secondary-education

professors, disabled people, and people above 70. Originally designed for education and general access, this academic library is now teeming with Parisian students looking for a space to work outside of their (usually small) flats. With the granting of a pink card being restricted to certain categories, the reader's status remains an ongoing issue, yet the library remains open to all within the limits of available places. As an example of a different library model, the Bibliothèque Mazarine, France's oldest public library, located on the banks of the Seine by the École des Beaux-Arts, is still following its founder's idea of a truly democratic library—open to everyone without any paperwork needed.

In January 2014, an important part of the literature and arts collection at the BNF was severely damaged after a flood, allegedly caused by a decrease in maintenance budget. 'Up to 10,000–12,000 books were damaged, at various degrees of severity.'<sup>5</sup> Sadly, this was not the first instance of such a calamity, as a similar event occurred in 2004.

There is a noticeable slowing-down in the development of French libraries stemming from cuts in public funding and leading to the degradation of conservation means—a failure of the system that was thought to be compensated through the development of digitised collections (eg the BNF's Gallica programme), or eBook loans. Yet the latter is visibly absent in an overwhelming number of libraries. Indeed, 'With barely 1% of French public libraries offering a satisfying electronic book collection according to the IDATE 2013 census,<sup>6</sup> France falls distinctly behind in terms of eBook access policy, while it boasts a rather developed e-publishing market in comparison with other European countries'.<sup>7</sup> Here the issue seems to come from shortcomings in organisational structures, preventing libraries to integrate eBooks into their collections.

## Brussels, Belgium

Libraries in Brussels have extremely different statuses from one another, a fact that reflects the city's and Belgium's organisation. These may be *bibliothèques communales*, linked to the 19 *communes* (former towns which later became districts with their own town halls) that make up Brussels, or libraries attached to a specific linguistic *communauté* (French- or Dutch-speaking), plus academic and specialised libraries. There are catalogues connecting some of these libraries, but also fragmenting the library landscape scattered across the two languages spoken in Brussels. It's often easier, therefore, to find a recent exhibition catalogue published by a French museum in the Flemish Art School Library rather than in any French-speaking library. In addition, since many French and British publishers print their books in Belgium, in order to minimise costs, a number of very recent titles can often be found among the archives at the state-run Belgian Royal Library (KBR). Access to the reading room at KBR is quite easy—only proof of identity is required—and for €2.50/day or €20/year, books from the archive are available within the specific opening hours of each service.

A student in Brussels will therefore quickly become confronted with issues linked to the search for and availability of particular books in libraries, and will have to be prepared to carry several library cards in order to compensate for the lack of titles in some libraries despite the possibility for astonishing discoveries in others. The issue this raises concerns not so much a type of restricted access than a complex one, whose lack of unity and centralisation results in dysfunctions.

Still, some interesting developments seem to be appearing in the city of Brussels, such as the creation of MuntPunt, a Flemish community-run library that opened in September 2013 in the heart of the city after some major renovation work.

#### Unicat News

- 14/4/2014: content originating from ARB - Académie Royale de Belgique was added to Unicat.
- 03/03/2014: two catalogs below have been integrated into Unicat:
  - Short Title Catalogue Vlaanderen BTCLV
  - Catalogus van Belgische Kranten AbrahamThe databases were provided by Vlaamse Erfgoedbibliotheek (Flanders Heritage Library)
- 23/12/2013: Unicat was newly rebuilt from scratch using a fresh complete dataset from all partners.
- 13/07/2013 : content originating from KCE - Belgian Health Care Knowledge Center was added to Unicat.
- 21/06/2012 : CatDitHb (Catalogus Dentale Wetenschappen/Bibliothèque) data were added to Unicat.
- 20/04/2012: Unicat was added as a target to Virtuelle Bibliotheek (VfB) Benelux online. VfB Benelux is a new portal for studies with regard to Dutch language and literature, including Afrikaans and Frisian and with regard to the Benelux countries. VfB is developed by the university libraries of Münster and Cologne.
- 21/03/2012 : Hogeschool Gent (HOGent) data were added to Unicat
- 30/01/2012: 6.6 millions small size cover images have been added into Unicat. Images originate from <http://openlibrary.org/>
- 12/01/2012: Unicat has got it's export citation into RIS format function. Users can now export Unicat records to endnote or Reference Manager. A third option is to export to RefWorks web based application.
- 03/08/2011: Unicat was newly rebuilt from scratch using a fresh complete dataset from all partners.
- 20/08/2011: Unicat has now got it's SFX server. It can be found at: <http://www.unicat.be/sfx>
- 19/08/2011: complete revision of the About pages. Overview of participating libraries was updated and the requirements for participation were added. Also added were: list of other union catalogues in Belgium and a page related to the Unicat Steering Committee.
- 06/05/2011: <http://www.unicat.be> now in first position in Google search result when searching on "unicat"
- 04/03/2011: A message on Unicat was posted to <http://www.iaasector.be>
- 30/04/2011: A message on Unicat was posted to <http://www.informatisecofresional.nl>
- 30/04/2011: A message on Unicat was posted to <http://www.sankantoor.bibliothek.be/>
- 30/04/2011: Unicat was added to [www.technologie.be](http://www.technologie.be/)
- 18/04/2011: Unicat has been added to [Lea Sciences de la Bibliothèque nationale de France](http://www.lea.sciences.de)
- 06/04/2011: LIBSinet - KU Leuven data were added to Unicat.
- 21/03/2011 : First public presentation of Unicat during Impuls Users Meeting (Antwerp)
- 17/03/2011 : Press release Unicat in [English](#), [French](#) and [Dutch](#)
- 11/03/2011 : KBR data were added to Unicat.
- 04/03/2011 : almost all partners have delivered their data, Libis and KBR are expected to do so in the coming days
- February 2011 : Unicat undergoing beta-testing.

<http://www.unicat.be/unicat?func=loadTemplate&template=news>

This new library offers innovative perspectives in a truly contemporary centre for culture, learning and reading. MuntPunt organises the library space as an open house and a forum for literature, films and documentaries, events, youth activities, and Dutch learning sessions. Moreover, since 2011, UniCat<sup>8</sup> has been gathering records from Belgian university libraries and from the Royal Library (the National Archive) – from both language communities – into a single catalogue, promising to centralise online research resources.

\* \* \*

When it comes to archives in national or specialised libraries, access varies according to each country and their culture-specific, often quite divergent, policies.

One is left to wander what are the priorities for the development of public knowledge repositories and what should be the real social role of public libraries. Should a more unified system of accessing library resources – not only inside each country but also across Europe – be a priority for European cultural and political bodies? Could that be possible to achieve within the limitations of fixed institutions?

## INFORMATION AVAILABLE BEYOND THE PHYSICAL POINT OF ACCESS

With the use of the internet as an immediate tool for sharing information, besides digital collections in public libraries or national museums allowing a privileged access to historical resources coming from institutions, a large number of individual or collective initiatives have been carried out through the web.

### *Gutenberg Project*

In 1971, Michael Stern Hart, who was a student at the time, started sharing texts he typed up on a computer in the University of Illinois computer lab – making them available for students to download through the electronic network, and thereby launching what would become the very first digital book collection. As of March 2014, it comprises of more than 45,000 items in several languages, available on the internet in various formats and readable on a computer or on any other digital reading device. More than 500 years after the German printer Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, the Gutenberg Project initiative constitutes an attempt at democratising reading and learning through enabling universal access to public-domain or copyright-free texts. With the help of thousands of volunteers, free eBooks are made available in EPUB, PDF, or HTML formats, mostly in English, but also in French, German, Portuguese, Chinese, and more than 40 other languages. In his own words, Hart's mission was 'to encourage the creation and distribution of eBooks', 'help break down the bars of ignorance and illiteracy', and 'give as many eBooks to as many people as possible'.<sup>9</sup>

### *Internet Archive*

Archive.org was founded in 1996 as an internet library. 'Its purposes include offering permanent access for researchers, historians, scholars, people with disabilities, and the general

public to historical collections that exist in digital format.<sup>10</sup> For instance, old radio shows and various podcasts can be listened to online, along with a collection of art and music videos, free to download or stream online. Besides a textual, video, audio, and software archive, it is possible to consult the history of web pages from different timelines through a webpage archive called the Wayback Machine. In addition, the Open Library is an open-source project with a book data-saving feature, working as a wiki page, where anyone can add information on any published book.

### UbuWeb

It is worthwhile mentioning the UbuWeb website, which makes various media (sounds, videos, texts) available as downloadable files. UbuWeb's collection focuses on avant-garde currents such as *musique concrete*, experimental film, or sound poetry. Founded in 1996 by poet and music critic Kenneth Goldsmith, this ever-growing archive constitutes a one-of-a-kind archive where rare documents are provided by the users in the form of donations. On the one hand, there are legal grounds to consider the site as an infringement on copyrights. On the other hand, most online users see UbuWeb as an invaluable source for artist materials and historical avant-garde documents for study and diffusion. In this light, the project can even be seen as playing an institutional role in terms of rare resource conservation. 'It's full of artefacts that are historically and intellectually valuable but financially worthless. So it's the perfect place to practice utopian politics: let's pretend copyright doesn't exist.'<sup>11</sup>

### AAAARG

Described by its founders as 'a conversation platform [which] at different times [...] performs as a school, or a reading group, or a journal', AAAARG was created 'with the intention

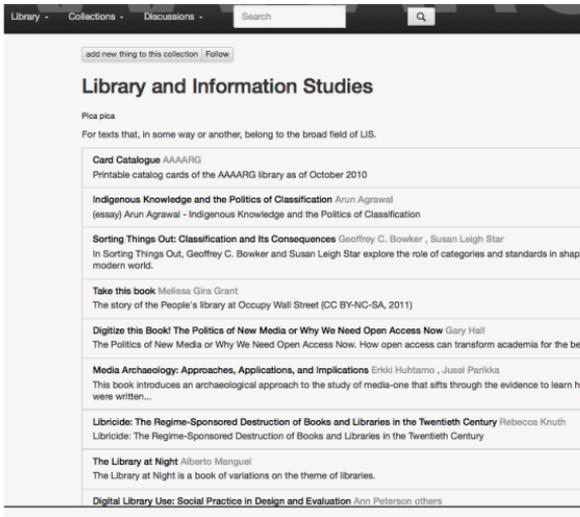
of developing critical discourse outside of an institutional framework. But rather than thinking of it like a new building, imagine scaffolding that attaches onto existing buildings and creates new architectures between them'.<sup>12</sup>



[aaaaarg.org](http://aaaaarg.org)

In 2001, Los Angeles-based artist Sean Dockray started to share digital content and documents with friends and collaborators, and progressively built a community around AAAARG, an online platform dedicated to the redistribution of textual material uploaded by users. Since 2010, the platform has gathered more than 20,000 users with an average of 300 visitors per day. Several months ago, the site's address gained an extra 'A' and users were asked to use an email registration for access—most likely a measure to avoid legal repercussions—making it [aaaaarg.org](http://aaaaarg.org). The site still offers often hard-to-find texts—either out-of-print or poorly circulated—as well as a collection of reference books on art history, architecture, design, philosophy, and politics for students and scholars. Classified either by author or through a thematic collection, available resources range from classic writers to contemporary theoreticians, and even include meta-resources, providing information on AAAARG's theoretical concerns and motivations. While most of its content is still available in bookstores, the website enables users to share texts and ideas via the discussion part of the platform, and could be considered to follow a counter-cultural agenda.

Yet, AAAAARG's true role online seems to rather make up for the lack of certain titles in library collections, and to build bridges between the titles it offers and its users—granting access to anyone anywhere seeking a text uploaded by another user. Even if copyright remains a concern for many of its users, this site's main idea is that giving open access to content and discussions allows the community to further explore their areas of interest, and thus impact the research and educational discourse.



<http://aaaaarg.org/collection/51c593f56c3a0edf197b0100>

### The Serving Library

In addition to such endeavours gaining prominence and distributing rare or even public-domain resources, there are also other new initiatives which take into account the notion of archiving within the publishing process, or offer personalised and collaborative tools for research, note-taking, and archiving.

UNDER SECTION 402 OF THE NOT-FOR-PROFIT CORPORATION LAW:

FIRST: The name of the corporation is: The Serving Library Company, Inc.

SECOND: The corporation is a corporation as defined in subparagraph (a)(5) of Section 102 of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law and shall be a Type C corporation under Section 201 of the Not-For-Profit Corporation Law. The corporation shall have no members.

THIRD: The purpose or purposes for which the corporation is formed are as follows:

- a) To provide a facilitating structure for publishing, archiving, and related activities rooted in the fields of design and art, in direct response to the inflexibility of existing publishing channels;
- b) To develop and maintain an extensive online website as a public archive of Portable Document Format (PDF) texts made available for download at [www.servinglibrary.org](http://www.servinglibrary.org), according to a regular publication schedule;
- c) To publish a biannual journal as the *Bulletins of The Serving Library*, which addresses ideas related to publishing;
- d) To found and maintain a physical library location with a specialized collection of books comprising a core of knowledge that is specific to the fields of art and design, and to the productively gray area between the two disciplines;



[www.servinglibrary.org](http://www.servinglibrary.org)

For instance, The Serving Library is a project created in 2011, by David Reinfurt, Stuart Bailey, and Angie Keefer, on the foundations of an earlier project they ran – Dot Dot Dot magazine. The Serving Library was imagined as a completely autonomous system incorporating archiving within its very editorial process. Articles commissioned by the publishers are accessible online for six months in PDF format, before a printed version gathers all the archived articles, or what the publishers refer to as *Bulletins*. The printed books are then distributed in bookshops, while a single printed copy is archived in the Serving Library’s physical library along with other publications by Dexter Sinister (a collaborative moniker for Reinfurt and Bailey). Within the premise of The Serving Library, the hard copy is available after the online version is published. New texts are open to download before each printing of the *Bulletins* and remain available afterwards. The intended use of the website integrates the archiving process with the process of publishing, providing open access to the public, while also challenging traditional notions of the cycle of publications and copyrights.

### *Active Archive & Pad.ma*

Another notable project is Active Archive, founded in Brussels in 2006 and led by Constant, an art and media collective, in collaboration with Arteleku, a Basque contemporary art centre for creative arts and experimentations. As an open source platform, Active Archive gives access to various media – from texts to video, historical or new – upon which the user may directly act by annotating or adding links or translations to the constantly evolving archive. The web interface is therefore not only a digital mirror to this archive, but also a tool that decentralises the archive and brings in multiple, echoing voices and views through the user activity. It is a new way of thinking about an archive not only as fulfilling a conservation role, but also as becoming a dynamic resource, involving decentralised tools.

The same principle is followed on the website Pad.ma, an online archive of densely annotated digital materials, primarily footage and unfinished film projects, working with a dual interface – as a video player and a text reader, with a keyword search engine resembling the iTunes interface.

\* \* \*

Digital resources appear to give access to anyone, anywhere, at anytime, yet one shouldn't forget that limitations exist online, as well. Access can be restricted either by the provider, by a censoring government, or by a third party (eg author, publisher, etc). Web domains can expire, servers can go down, data can be lost, which is why it is increasingly important to develop robust web-archiving or web-librarianship practices. Web-resources also require funding in order to be maintained and are often run by volunteers, like some physical libraries. In that sense they are mostly community-run or user initiatives. This once again brings up questions about the role of politics and the allocation of government funding –



who should be responsible for building and funding open access to digital content for public education?

It is reasonable to expect that such access should not come from private initiatives only. At the same time, it is important to consider what level of independence those initiatives can have if they become state-funded, and also what the impact of copyright laws will be if access to digital content is institutionalised. UbuWeb founder Kenneth Goldsmith does not accept funding, stating: 'Because if I take that money, then I have to start paying everybody.'<sup>13</sup> He also likes to remind us to download everything and not trust the Cloud.

Since the issue of free access to books and to archives has now extended to the internet domain, there are many new digital platforms providing innovative possibilities for online access. It should not be forgotten, however, that established infrastructures such as public libraries have a crucial role to play in these cultural transformations – as the original sites of access to and of preservation of historical and cultural resources, but also as physical sites of mediation for the use of new technologies. Thus, while new types of access are slowly being facilitated through the internet, the initiatives listed above remain yet to become familiar access points to a more general audience. And they would need to do so, if they are to provide a solid alternative to more commercially-driven endeavours.

Both physical and digital spaces have advantages and disadvantages when it comes to accessing information, and it is important to recognise that both are equally important to co-exist in our highly digital, data-driven, contemporary culture. Their future evolution should be guided by sensible political decisions, fuelled by responding to the needs of the public for open access rather than money-driven, industry-oriented choices. Only in such a scenario, Melvil Dewey's dream of 'Free Libraries for Every Soul'<sup>14</sup> can remain a viable possibility.

1. Alberto Manguel, *The Library at Night* (Newhaven CT: Yale University Press, 2008), p 222.
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# Libraries without Walls

*Tom Vandeputte*

In library interiors, the light of table lamps designed to illuminate books in dim reading rooms has been replaced by the fluorescent glare of screens of various types and sizes. Even in those rare instances where the physical appearance of reading rooms has remained unchanged, and a mute community of readers are still enclosed by rows of books, the old image of the library is unmistakably waning. With the introduction of the screen into the reading room, the experience of the library interior as a monadic space, sealed off hermetically from the surrounding world and closed in on itself, can only appear as a relic of the past. What today seems most outdated and remote about photographs of 19th-century library interiors is perhaps not the ambition to gather the whole of human knowledge under their vaulted roofs, but precisely the possibility of a closed room, a space of study isolated from the fabric of society and governed by its own rules.

Historically, the domed reading room provided the stage where the illusory separation between socio-economic mechanisms and the 'life of the mind' was enacted in the most exemplary manner. But beyond this semblance of autonomy, it also harboured the possibility of another, more resilient non-communication with the surrounding world, a certain resistance to comply to its logic and values, an irreducible element of anachronism and untimeliness. In its place, a new image of the library now makes its appearance: a space of study which no longer tries to differentiate itself from the surrounding world, but instead attempts to adapt immediately and seamlessly to the fluctuating demands placed upon it by the present moment. Nowhere is this more palpable than within universities, where a new species of libraries makes its entrance alongside a shifting conception of what it means to study.

In contrast to the self-enclosed library of the past, the new university library tends to present itself first and foremost as a 'service'. Whereas the classical library functioned like

an institutional space to whose rigid rules the reader was expected to submit, the new library is recast as a facility at the service of its 'users'. Like other bourgeois institutions, the classical library was indeed designed to induce a specific mode of behaviour: it orchestrated a certain mode of study and fabricated a certain type of studying subject, condensed in the figure of the silent reader. In its place, the new library presents a range of options that the reader can choose from like a consumer. But even though the shifted nomenclature seems to suggest a certain neutrality, the new library marginalises certain forms of study, while enabling and privileging others.

In the new species of libraries appearing on university campuses, reading rooms make way for open-plan areas for so-called 'self-directed' study. Together with the reading rooms, the image of study as a solitary and silent activity is dissolving. If this seemingly outmoded form of study is inherently tied to the technology of the book, the new image of study is staged around laptops and touchscreens, extolled in saturated online videos produced by the multinational corporations dominating the higher education industry. The scene of the mute reader, central to the old image of the library, is thereby replaced by that of the discussion group. The self-composed discipline of the isolated reader gives way to the virtuosity of communication, to a skillful performance of symbolic exchange. What is at issue in this scene is no longer the self-disciplined acquisition of knowledge: the library appears more like a training ground, anticipating the productive exchange associated with the corporate workplace.

And just as the university increasingly resembles the corporation, the corporate office, for its part, purports to be modeled on the learning environment. The image of the self-motivated student is transposed into the Silicon Valley office, where it becomes the model for a worker who no

longer needs to be disciplined—a worker who does not see work as an obligation but as a process of life-long learning. If the new library anticipates and produces a specific form of subjectivity, a certain type of student, it is perhaps firstly that of a student-entrepreneur, which fits seamlessly into this image of the corporation as an enormous, surplus-value-producing Montessori classroom, where work, play and learning are supposed to become inseparable.

A peculiar characteristic of the new type of university libraries is the shifted attitude towards consumption expressed by them. The classical library maintained a strict separation between consumption and study, which corresponds to a specific image of the reader, understood as an ascetic figure who abstains from bodily pleasures in order to dedicate him / herself fully to the life of the mind. If smuggling a cup of coffee into a reading room used to be a threat to the library's proper order, consumption within the library is now increasingly permitted or even actively encouraged. This tendency is noteworthy, not because it is a sign of supposedly deteriorating norms, but because it marks a shifting perception of the library itself. In the increasingly privatised university, even the library, as the space where the claim to autonomy of the university always seemed most palpable and persuasive, is ultimately nothing but another space from which profit may be extracted.

To the neoliberal university management, the traditional library can only appear as unexploited capital, waiting to be put to more efficient use. In library refurbishments, it has become common practice to move the library café into the library itself, within the boundaries cordoned off by turnstiles, where the university-licensed café is in a better position to compete with local high street shops. What used to be shared study spaces are now sitting areas, where signs gently remind the reader that seats can only be used by

customers. Consumption extends into the reading rooms themselves, where the image of the ascetic reader makes way for the image of the student-consumer, for whom study is thought to be linked inextricably to self-indulgent comfort.

Whereas the disciplinary mechanisms of the old library relied on unassailable principles—silence being the primary one—the new library regulates behaviour and control in a different manner. Spaces are coded with pictograms which do not only specify where group study is allowed or mobile phones are prohibited, but inform the reader where food may be consumed, where one is only allowed to drink, or where neither food nor drink is allowed. In the college library where I write this text, notices on the tables inform readers that if they are sitting in a ‘zone’ which is either ‘food free’, ‘phone free’, or ‘noise free’, they can use an anonymous text messaging service to report sources of nuisance—that is to say, fellow readers—to the private security company which surveils the library. The appearance of such signs indicates a changing mechanism of power: the librarian, who makes his rounds through the library spaces like a sovereign, is replaced by a form of control where students effectively police one another. Silence is no longer treated as a rule but as an exception—a shift which marks the complete reversal of the norms about what constitutes a library space and what modes of study and attention it should render possible.

More than anything else, the model for the newly emerging library appears to be the contemporary café. Whereas the library was once a polar opposite to the café, together representing two distinct possibilities of study, two spaces where study could take place under radically different conditions, the two have now become almost indistinguishable. Also the separate figures which populate the two spaces converge: like the freelance worker migrating through the spaces of coffee shop chains, the student heralded by the

neoliberal university is a figure for whom self-entrepreneurship and indulgent consumerism coincide with highly precarious conditions of existence. And just like the café worker, the library reader is forced to work in an environment from which one needs to isolate oneself actively in order to be able to immerse in one's work. The enforced silence of others is replaced by the technology of the headphone; sounds are no longer repressed, but merge in a cacophony of indistinct noises. As the library space increasingly resembles that of the café, silence becomes a scarce resource – even within the walls of university libraries. Together with the disappearance of silent spaces, the conditions for a certain type of study are waning. The new library does not only support new forms of study, supposedly better suited to the times, but also deliberately renders other forms of study impossible – and by implication obsolete.

The new image of the library not only expresses a shifting attitude towards education, study, and the university; as an institutional space, the library also actively instills and reproduces these attitudes. In its apparent flexibility and freedom from repressive constraints, the new species of libraries cropping up at university campuses nevertheless produces a specific attitude to study and conditions a particular type of learning subject. Even when it cloaks itself in the discourse of progressive policymaking, presents itself as an attempt to dismantle the old disciplinary institution, or poses as a mere service responding to students' demands, it is unmistakably part of yet another, different mechanism of control. Just like the old, disciplinary library, which now appears like a relic from a long foregone time, the present-day library renders certain forms of study possible, while excluding or marginalising others. The question today is not only how to resist this logic, which increasingly pervades the university at large, but also how to conceive of spaces where

precarious types of study can find a shelter and where other, new practices of learning and inquiry can come into existence. To conceive of such spaces, conditions, and practices means to take part in what we may call a 'politics of study', intervening in areas which extend well beyond the boundaries of academic institutions.

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Tom Vandeputte is a writer and theorist based in London and Amsterdam. He is head of the *Critical Studies* programme at the *Sandberg Institute* and a visiting lecturer at *Kings College*, London. Tom received an *MRes* with distinction from the *London Consortium* and is currently completing his doctoral research at the *Centre for Culture Studies*, *Goldsmiths College*. He is co-founder of *The New Reader*, a journal for theory at the intersection of art, philosophy, and politics.

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A conversation with David Pearson, Director of Culture, Heritage and Libraries at the City of London Corporation, opens the discussion with insights into the social role of libraries, their management, and their changing functions. Other contributions include architect João Torres on his ArchiPrix-winning design for Lisbon's Central Library and Municipal Archive, and writer and architect Jorge Reis on the historical roots of library architecture. Publisher and designer Marie Lécivain shares her experience using libraries across London, Brussels, Paris, and beyond, while Egyptian journalist Heba El-Sherif discusses 'the right to know' and freedom of access to information in post-revolutionary Cairo. Photographer Julius Motal traces the daily interaction between public space and library visitors through a series of photographs taken at NYPL's famous main branch in Manhattan. Finally, Tom Vandeputte, course director of the MFA Critical Studies at the Sandberg Instituut in Amsterdam, shares his views on current developments in academic libraries and the implications for the future 'politics of study'.

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