

# UC Riverside

## UC Riverside Previously Published Works

### Title

The President's Address 2017

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5mz1f6tt>

### Journal

PACIFIC COAST PHILOLOGY, 52(2)

### ISSN

0078-7469

### Author

Ganim, John M

### Publication Date

2017

### Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

# The President's Address 2017



JOHN M. GANIM

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE

**Abstract:** The contradictions built into the architectural programs of library buildings result in a deep tension in library design between technical and human requirements, and this tension is often dramatized, not only in the conflict between symbolic and programmatic form, but in the very uses of the library. The Apollonian image of the library disguises a darker, more esoteric and private desire expressed in the often strange uses and abuses of the library. Architects have occasionally implicitly understood this dichotomy and expressed it in their structures.

**Keywords:** libraries, architecture of libraries, storage technologies, modern and postmodern architecture, films about libraries

Over the past few decades, a discourse of crisis has defined the institution of the library. From constant funding cuts to massive digitization projects, to the increasing use of public libraries as refuge of last resort, the state of the library has been depicted in apocalyptic terms. At the same time, a rich thread of theoretical speculation has developed around the archive, the collection, and the library, most famously in the writings of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, and in the continuing impact of Walter Benjamin.<sup>1</sup> The history of the book has been transformed by scholars such as Roger Chartier and Robert Darnton, and has made us aware of the physical reality of our intellectual heritage.

Most surprisingly, libraries have become one of the most significant building types in contemporary architecture, rivaling museums and concert halls as projects enlisting internationally significant architects.<sup>2</sup> Across Britain, and in certain North American cities, fitful investment in infrastructure has produced a renaissance of community library architecture not seen since the days of the Carnegie libraries. What I want to point to in the following observations is how the built form of some of these new projects address, and even allegorize, the contradictions and tensions of this felt crisis of the library. Behind my analysis is the sense that libraries have always been in a sense of crisis and that this crisis can be read in the physical forms of the buildings themselves.

Even the most beloved of library buildings have had their critics. For an example, we can turn to a famous and familiar critic, Lewis Mumford, on a famous and familiar building, the Carriere and Hastings New York Public Library of 1901–11:

New York Public Library. Actual working facilities as a storage place for books and manuscripts and as a workplace for scholars and writers and readers seriously marred by the sacrifice of space, convenience and efficiency to solidity and monumentality. Overcrowded within a decade of its opening. Light, air, space, and silence—the Benedictine luxuries, according to Dom Butler—were all forfeited in this inept design. (*Culture of Cities*, 359)

Critics have always had problems with libraries. In fact, the New York Public Library more or less repeated the design solutions of the great turn-of-the-century public libraries in the United States, and in so doing dramatized the division between populist access and progressivist civility. But these conflicts are not only expressions of political ideals, they are also conflicts among, and within, libraries themselves. The program for library buildings are among the most detailed for any building type, rivaled only by hospital and military institutions, a kinship that has implications for the buildings I will be examining. Access and protection, security and hospitality, specialized and general collections, storage and reading areas, comfort and surveillance, discovery and retrospection, technology and preservation, all these demands sometimes conflict, as do, more formally, the rationalized and technical demands of librarianship and the public use of the library building as a built form of collective unconscious, esoteric secrets, a Memory Palace.

The problem is not one of design, but of the almost impossible demands of the library program, which cannot be met in the single, unified structure extolled by modernist agendas or the formal symmetries extolled by neoclassical architecture. The buildings do not always, in fact, rarely work to the satisfaction of librarians, because of that conflict.<sup>3</sup> Librarians have always had difficulty

with libraries. But they are libraries because of that conflict, because libraries function in the public consciousness and unconscious as peculiarly liminal spaces. Like the books stored within them, libraries can say more about the societies that build them than those societies would sometimes like to know.

As iconic as the New York Public Library has become, the first, and paradigmatic, great public library in the United States was, however, not the New York but the Boston Public Library of 1895, by McKim, Mead and White (Whitehill 1956). While there was a tradition of local and privately funded libraries before Boston, this was the first library to address the challenges of serving the burgeoning populations of the great American Northeast cities. No librarian was involved in the original planning committee, and as a result the building opened with a grand meeting room for the trustees but no office for the head librarian. McKim, Mead and White placed their main reading room on the second floor. In small American vernacular libraries, there had been good reason for such placement. A reading room elevated and removed from the dust and noise of the unpaved town street (libraries were usually off Main Street for the same reason) allowed a certain amount of light and quiet. In the plans for the Boston Public, the second story placement was justified by a form of crowd control, reserving the more difficult of access space for serious scholars and researchers, and leaving the first floor rooms for those who used the library to while away time, the implication being that immigrant patrons would use these rooms as a sort of social club. The architects' elevation of the reading room allowed the grand processional entrance experience beloved of Beaux-Arts and postmodern historicism, but they also created a system of controlled access, using subtle social clues to differentiate its supposedly equal public.

In the plans for the Boston Public Library, McKim, Mead and White created a building that responded as much to the history, conscious and unconscious, of library architecture as to their program. The most immediate of these archetypes was Labrouste's *Bibliothèque St. Genevieve* of 1838–50. The restrained facade of the *Bibliothèque St. Genevieve* was meant to submit to its urban context opposite the Pantheon, but it results in an appropriately puritan gesture in one of Boston's most important public spaces. Labrouste had placed bookshelves between the cast iron beams supporting the roof of his reading room, using the beams to support the books. But in Labrouste's later *Bibliothèque Nationale* of 1860–68, the stacks themselves become part of the load-bearing structure of the book weight. The collections are now too large to contain within the reading room itself, and the result is the cast iron frame of the stacks.<sup>4</sup> And this space becomes one of the hallowed precursors of the modernist marriage of form and function, celebrated in works such as Siegfried Gideon's *Space, Time and Architecture*.

At the same time, the Bibliothèque Nationale and the many libraries that imitate it complicate one of the most famous distinctions in architectural theory. That is, libraries predicted, and in some ways confound, the problematic agenda of the postmodern, famously illustrated by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's brilliant polemic *Learning from Las Vegas*, which, along with the earlier *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, criticized not only modernism's failure to achieve its goals, but those very goals themselves. In addition to celebrating popular everyday taste in the American landscape, Venturi and Rauch also explicitly questioned the heroic and individualistic credo of American architecture. They pointed out that architects in fact had a choice of two basic forms: the "duck"—a building that symbolizes its uses and purposes and that demonstrates the ingenuity and originality of its architect—and the "shed"—essentially a shack suited to any purpose its program demanded, which the architect could then sincerely or ironically decorate to appropriately announce its purpose (*Learning from Las Vegas*, 105). Yet the public library as we know it, born in the great engineering experiments of the mid-nineteenth, complicates this distinction. It must be both "duck" and "shed," and indeed, its duck-like qualities are found in its most public areas, and its shed like qualities in its secret storage recesses.

By the 1890s in America, wrought iron construction, familiar to us from the cast-iron district of lower Manhattan, had advanced to the point of the mass-produced elaborate Snead Library Stack System, in which the stacks themselves carry the weight of the structure as well as of the books (Baumann) (figure 1). While there were physical limits to how high or low the number of stacks could be piled up, the result was the familiar backstage of American research libraries, such as the Library of Congress, the library of the University of California at Berkeley, the Low Library on Columbia's campus, or the New York Public, with their wrought iron, slate, quartz, or glass floors, frequently translucent or perforated to allow light and air to circulate and to allow quick access by staff members.

This engineering, along with the expressive grandeur of Beaux-Arts architecture (the American term for turn of the century neoclassicism learned at the Ecole des Beaux Arts) resulted in the distinctive bifurcation of American libraries before the rise of the International Modern Style, into grid networks of stacks on the one hand and massive and luxurious reading and public areas on the other. But in fact the elevation of the reading room had as much to do with tradition as with function. The medieval library, from its earliest ancillary place in the monastic church, served as a reference shelf for sermons and services and was naturally placed there. And there was good reason to so place the medieval library as manuscripts accumulated, since ground moisture and the danger of flooding were less in elevated floors. So, for instance,



Fig. 1 | Main Stack Room, New York Public Library. *Library Planning: Book Stacks and Shelving*. Jersey City, N.J.: The Snead & Company Iron Works, 1915. P. 79.

in the most influential and famous library building before Labrouste, the avant-garde dynamism of Michelangelo's entry—as if the library were a building within a building—opens out into a much less frequently illustrated because a much more conventional and programmatic space. Even Michelangelo's famous carrels and their chained books recall earlier technologies, ensuring security, but also placing the reader's stations near sources of natural light. The obvious solution before electricity was a basilica plan, with a central aisle flanked by stations and shelves, a plan followed again and again until, in the gigantic reading rooms of New York and Boston, the basilica plan is blown up to the scale of the Roman Bath, one of the origins of the basilica, just as the Bibliothèque Nationale and the British Library recall the Pantheon in Rome. For all of the modernity of his facade, Michelangelo's space devolves in its obeisance to the library program.

Major public libraries, such as those of New York and Boston, as well as others in North America, reflected a Progressive-era agenda. On the one hand welcoming a public of readers and invested in the democratization of knowledge, they also expressed an anxiety about the uses of that knowledge and the uses of the spaces they created for more informal social practices. The solution, more



often than not, was intimidation by design. The elevation of the reading room is one example, since it took some level of social access to be willing to mount those intimidating staircases. The pattern I have described: functional stacks, grandiose and inspiring reading areas, and a certain schizophrenia between symbolism and function remains more or less of a constant until the end of World War II. Some library designers, like Angus Macdonald, who inherited the Snead company with its engineered stacks, advocated the development of an open plan, in which stacks and reading areas could be interspersed and room for growth accommodated by expandable modules. Without necessarily advocating modern architecture—the library in general was still stylistically classical moderne—he pointed the way toward a modernist solution to the quandary of the library, one in which form would follow, indeed, literally become, function. Ironically, Macdonald's dream was also the death certificate of his family's library stack firm, which had converted to aluminum aircraft construction during World War II, and which found itself without clients when the war ended. The change was a matter of infrastructural technology: low-cost electric lighting, particularly fluorescent lighting, and ventilation systems, particularly air-conditioning and humidity control, which now became financially feasible. Macdonald had hoped to preserve the elegance of the stack design solution by running vents and wiring vertically through columnar stack supports.

The research library after World War II would follow a different path than elegance. If you run your wires and ducts horizontally, and you want to carry the weight of the books, you need flooring closer to four to six feet rather than four to six inches. The result was the loft solution: towers or warehouses with perhaps a two story allowance at the entry to create the sense of a lobby. Now such an industrial solution is not without honor in American architecture: the great Kahn auto factories, the silos and skyscrapers admired by Corbusier. But it was not this vernacular that emerged. What had interceded was World War II, which the United States had provided much of the engineering for. Almost unconsciously the forms of the American library, particularly the university library, which became a form of public library, began to echo military architecture. Perhaps this was only fitting, for the American university was now flooded with veterans on the GI Bill. Older and more independent, these students, along with the new conceptions of university education developed to accommodate them, having been everywhere and done everything, expected and could be expected to use open stacks—previously only faculty and graduate students in most universities had stack access. Moreover, education funding in the United States during the Cold War years was inextricably linked with military spending and research and development. The chief higher education funding bill of the 1950s was called the National Defense Education Act. The library became a stockpile of information. Without intending to, the library

began to express the political unconscious of America. Indeed, the library frequently became the battleship of the American campus, and the librarian its captain. The Geisel Library at the University of California, San Diego (figure 2), for instance, was designed to resemble the mesas to the east of the campus. But from most angles it more resembles the battleships anchored in the bay to the west of the campus. Once criticized for its concrete brutalism, the building is now accepted with affection, no doubt reinforced by its naming after the author of the Dr Seuss stories.

The research library after World War II takes two different paths. One is the open stacks, democratic access model, which I associated above with the GI Bill and the class and regional expansion of the American university. But the other path relied on technology rather than open plan modernism, and could be adapted to many different styles. The most influential of these



Fig. 2 | Geisel Library, University of California, San Diego. Architect, William Pereira. Courtesy of Glasheen Collection, Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego.



technologies was the remote retrieval system. Complex retrieval systems, like the Randtriever, treated books like they were plutonium, stored in stacks too narrow for any but service technicians to enter. Books could be stored in silos, or underground, akin to Cold War military images. Underground storage, a fairly recent idea, is almost certainly a post-WWII development. In the New British Library by Colin St. John, it recalls, even in the rail terminal form of the building, the preservation of books in the underground during the blitz. In American libraries, underground storage takes on nuclear imagery, of missile silos and live-in shelters. Is it possible that the Philology Library at the Free University of Berlin unconsciously echoes the WWII bombs that decimated so many cities? The actual experience is light and airy, as if exorcising that memory. Bombs are a touchy subject for libraries. Books published during a period from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth century were printed on acidic paper that is subject to disintegration when in contact with air. In the 1980s, NASA teamed up with the Library of Congress and treated the books with diethyl zinc, which would change the molecular composition of the paper. But DEZ is also an ingredient in explosives and is unstable in the presence of water. The NASA facility famously exploded.

Many of these themes converge in the Science Library at the University of California, designed by the English firm of Stirling, Wofford. The building employs program solutions that Stirling had depended on since the brutalist projects he completed for British universities in the 1960s, which established his reputation, and which he employed also in his bid for the Bibliothèque de France. What Stirling gives us, however, is much heavier than the lightness of Labrouste's library. It recalls the bunkers of Stirling (admittedly not in England) and Wofford's youth, suggesting the same combination of reverence and irony that motivates Paul Virilio's essays on the fortifications of the west coast of France. It advertises its geometry and its scale, rather than mute them. Like the British Library at St. Pancras by Colin St. John Wilson, it is prepared for another blitz. It is as martial as many other American postwar libraries, but it is defensive rather than offensive. Here, in the middle of what was then one of the wealthiest areas of the United States, the building prepares for an invasion, in ways that reflect the obsession with security and surveillance that permeate the labyrinthine streets and gated communities and private security patrols of the surrounding residential districts, punctuated by its edge city defense technology companies. Legend has it that the campus was designed to minimize and control student demonstrations—unlikely given its student body anyway—and that the circular inner core of the campus could be surrounded easily by troops and police. Robert Hughes once used the campus in his BBC program *The Shock of the New* to suggest the disturbing echoes of fascist architecture in modern institutional and corporate building. And

the building stands as a gateway between the older campus and the newer precinct sponsored by David Neuman, then the campus architect, which became to the postmodern what Columbus, Indiana, is to the modern. While the library comments on this setting, it does so through a childhood memory of a heroism that can still be located, perhaps, somewhere, in a library.

As the Cold War wound down, the military metaphors of the American campus library, and the relation of the American university to what Eisenhower called the military-industrial complex, are, I think, slyly, even optimistically, called upon in the temporary undergraduate library by Hodgetts and Fong, in use while the permanent library was undergoing earthquake repairs. The Quonset hut, Los Angeles's intimate involvement in aircraft manufacture, technology as form—all of which in fact underlie L.A. modernism itself, including the utopian Case Study House experiments—are rather playfully called up in what could only be a post-Cold War building, including its allusions to deconstruction. At first unsettling, the building was popular enough that it was repurposed as a retail space for the campus store, as university bookstores now call themselves.

The destruction of libraries through war and their partial retrieval has been a form of indirect lament for human loss, as some of our current imagery shows. The destruction of the ancient Library of Alexandria, for instance, has been one of the great symbols of cultural discontinuities and traumas. The architectural firm Snohetta, which has gone on to design some of the most widely photographed libraries of the past decade, first made its reputation by receiving the commission for the new Library of Alexandria, which then made news for its vandalism by rebels during the Arab Spring. *The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu*, despite its title, celebrated the safeguarding of ancient Islamic texts and scrolls against marauding militias. News media reported on the so-called “Library of Syria,” which collected books from destroyed private libraries in badly bombed areas and stored them in an accessible underground sanctuary (Thompson 2016).

In addition to monumental public libraries in major cities, and research libraries at universities, there was another important architectural tradition in the evolution of the library as a building type. This was the Carnegie library, financed by Andrew Carnegie's trust, which provided every town in America, and neighborhoods of large cities, with small local libraries (Van Slyck). Between 1894 and 1918, about 1,500 libraries were built across the country. To build a Carnegie library, a town had to establish the population requirement, find a site, and more or less match the grant. The program was overseen by James Bertram, Carnegie's secretary, who eventually prepared a pamphlet entitled *Notes on the Erections of Library Buildings*—spelled without the “u” on the title page. The Carnegie template took what it assumed to be the best

of already built libraries and condensed them into a code. The influence of H. H. Richardson's celebrated town libraries, such as the Woburn library of the 1880s, on this program was therefore considerable.

The small shell buildings suggested by Bertram and Carnegie normally had a desk in the center of two wings. They sometimes had a basement partially above grade so that windows could be used. Such windows were to be seven feet above the floor so that the entire circumference of the building except for doors could be used for shelving, and, presumably, the librarian could survey all of her—and she usually was a she—domain. Even partitions were generally of glass. The site was supposed to be large enough for expansion (though sadly few towns expanded—during the 1950s they tore down many of these libraries and started over), accounting for the spaciousness and separateness of the way these libraries sit in their denser contexts today. These libraries, which were often designed in a scaled down Palladianism, had an incalculable effect on the imagination of small town America, allowing a window to a larger world than Main Street, Winesburg, Zenith (to name some famous literary small town images), as well as sanctuary from their occasional meanness. And while the librarian of the libraries of the great cities and research universities was usually male—designed as men's clubs before WWII and as fortifications after—the gatekeeper to this wider world was usually a woman. In America today, a new commercial venture, the book superstore, with its comfortable chairs and reading areas and cafés, began to take over their role, so that especially in large cities and suburban areas, these stores appropriated the uses of the Carnegie libraries, as funding declined for public libraries. Ironically, competition from online booksellers doomed many of these stores, while towns and cities engaged in revitalization have looked again at their local libraries. And admittedly, many libraries, including the Los Angeles public library, evolved through a series of such typologies in response to changing populations.

In Europe, the counterpart to the Carnegie library evolved differently, and especially under the wings of modernism, the provincial library resembled a community center, or the literary equivalent of a Kunsthalle. The modernist library sought to obliterate the distinction between the open and the closed, between the esoteric and the accessible. One of the most iconic of these libraries is Alvar Aalto's 1927 Vipuri library, with its inviting white spaces. Interestingly, Aalto in this period was working on his great sanitariums, and that the solutions he offers here, however profoundly elegant, are solutions one offers for health as much as for knowledge. The imagery of disease and cure is written on the white walls. It exudes the values associated with Scandinavian modernism, at the same time that its history complicates those values. The renovation of this library is a result of cooperation between Russia

and Finland, but its survival is something of a miracle given the vexed politics of this region, and the strategic location of vipirri/Vyborg, which changed hands over the centuries. Along with Gunnar Asplund's great Stockholm Library, which is elegant and imposing, massive and light at the same time, Aalto's library remains a prototype for many subsequent library buildings.

Frank Gehry, world famous for his imaginative museums and concert halls at the turn of the twenty-first century, first came to prominence as an inheritor of the Aalto mantle. His contribution to library architecture dates from the mid-1980s, the Francis Goldwyn Hollywood Regional Library, which predated the impressive renovation of Los Angeles's local libraries in recent years. The library replaced one, destroyed by fire, that had housed a great deal of film industry material, including screenplays and films. Its public was assumed to be film industry patrons, people who would appreciate the light and air and space so brilliantly deployed in the building, as if it were made out of what films were made of. But other patrons also liked the building. Its stucco surfaces invited, and homeless people crowded the building in the day and slept outside it at night, as the library in the 1970s became a refuge from the collapse of other American social institutions. Gehry reluctantly responded to the security concerns of his clients by revising the walls in front of the building, raising the ire of Mike Davis in *City of Quartz*, who attacked him as the "Dirty Harry" of an architecture of security, surveillance, and exclusion. Gehry, in fact deeply concerned with the inviting urbanism of his buildings, supposedly later asked Davis to advise him on the entrance to the Disney Concert Hall. Yet the building does have a heritage of security. Around this time Gehry received the commission for the U.S. Embassy in Damascus, which was never built. In the tradition of desert palaces, it was to be a walled white compound, with a series of cubes placed at skewed angles to each other. Such a design would have fit the casbah kitsch of Hollywood perfectly, but is very different than the final form of the library as it stands, renovated recently once again, which was actually a great success and has had an important positive effect on its immediate neighborhood. Moreover, the building predicts some of the major developments in library architecture since, by dramatizing the tensions of the library project without pretending to resolve them. And it does so within a modernist idiom, while so many of the other library building by major architects do so by claims, sometimes subtle and sometimes blatant, to an archaic monumentality. In the recent Vancouver Public Library by Moshe Safdie, for instance, this sort of recall results in a cross between Babel and Borges, with its labyrinthine edifice warning the patron at the same time that the almost Las Vegas decoration beckons. Surprisingly, Safdie's interior invokes a Romanesque, monastic setting.

This move toward the historical, and even the archaic, in the face of increasingly complicated technological requirements, is predicted, I think, in Louis Kahn's consciously heroic Phillips Exeter Library (1965) (figure 3). Because of its relatively small scale—it is a library for a preparatory school—it is able to deal with some of the conflicting demands I mentioned earlier. Kahn builds the stacks around a central gallery, a design first employed in



Fig. 3 | Carol M. Highsmith, photographer. Phillips Exeter Library, Exeter, New Hampshire. Architect, Louis I. Kahn. Courtesy of the Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

the Cleveland Public Library of a hundred years before probably in imitation of the great Parisian department stores. Kahn, however, is able to employ his raw concrete and partially exposed infrastructure to create the atmosphere of the medieval library, complete with Romanesque echoes. It has a great entry space, exposing and veiling at the same time the open stacks, and celebrating what Mumford found lacking in the New York Public, “Light, air, space, and silence—the Benedictine luxuries.”

He sets the books in an archaic monumentality, as if to take them out of and place them in history at the same. But what I find particularly interesting is the way Kahn aestheticizes the card catalogue, obviously interested in its traditional wood, but thereby predicting its obsolescence in the face of computer technology, here with the same spectral quality as the chained book. We are reminded that Nicholson Baker’s widely read *Paper Fold* begins its investigations of the destruction of books after they are digitized or copied when he notices an uncommon number of card catalogues up for auction. A number of well-known library building expose or dramatize the books themselves, as in the beautifully restored Beinicke Library at Yale (1965, SOM/Gordeon Bunshaft) with its translucent walls or the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Dominique Perrault 1989–96) with its towers suspending its books in space, as if they were virtual apparitions impervious to physical decay.

In the past few years, however, the libraries that have been the focus of the most architectural attention have addressed their changing uses as much as they have dramatized their traditional function. Two examples serve as an appropriate conclusion. One is the Seattle Central Library (Rem Koolhaas/OMA 2004) (figure 4) and the other is the Hunter’s Point Community Library (Steven Holl 2010–17). Both of these projects experienced unusually long planning, gestation, and construction schedules. The sites are quite different, with the Seattle project at the very center of a major downtown area, and the Hunter’s Point library on a previously ignored waterline across from Manhattan. Koolhaas’s library addressed a preexisting urban fabric, while Holl’s beckons from a distance. Each architect is associated with a very different catalogue of projects. Koolhaas has consistently ironized the received notions of what architecture should do and questioned the degree to which it can escape its economic and political circumstances. At the same time, he has revamped a supposedly rational modernism to uncover its unconscious desires and drives. Holl is often associated with thoughtful, spiritual, almost mystical, monastic designs, which may be why he has been shortlisted for so many library projects in recent years.



In very different ways, these two buildings attempt to reinvent the library. Both are community libraries (though Seattle Central is more like a main city library) that descend from a Carnegie prototype. Yet both seek to rewrite the





Fig. 4 | Carol M. Highsmith, photographer. The Seattle Central Library, interior view. Seattle, Washington. Architect, Rem Koolhaas/OMA. Courtesy of the Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

agenda of the Carnegie model, calling upon a populist and community based rhetoric. While the Carnegie model was based on Progressive era values and strategies, and while it did conflate sometimes mutually exclusive goals of community welcome and protection of the collections, it did not, or rarely did, result in the architecture of intimidation sometimes found in research libraries. The result is that both projects, brilliant in their own way, offer answers to questions no one has asked. As a result, they dramatize, rather than solve, the quandaries of the library as a building type.

As a modernist intervention, Koolhaas takes apart and reassembles the modernist functionality of the building, as he does in other projects. As with the aestheticization of the rare book that we have seen in other recent libraries, such as the Beinicke Rare Books Library and the British Library, Koolhaas treats all books as rare books, and all books as commodities at the same time. The stacks are arranged in a spiral ramp arrangement, a bit like a parking garage. Actually, this motif can be found in some  OMA's other recent proposals for museums and libraries, but  it more fully expressed here. And as in the tradition of the great urban libraries, the main reading room is on top, creating an openness to the city that is reminiscent of the Centre Pompidou, which is another ancestor of this building. As in other recent institutional

buildings—think of the Reichstag—openness and transparency replace, or compete with, solidity and formality. The complex forms on the outside suggest that knowledge is accessible, but not necessarily easily assimilated.

Both Koolhaas and Holl have a history of inflecting apparently rational, modernist projects with an uneasy, even uncanny quality. Koolhaas's work suggests that desire, secrets, and dream states are as much part of architecture as reason and function. Holl, like Louis Kahn before him, infuses his projects with a sacramental, even sublime property even when building with the simplest materials. They bring these unexpected filters to their library projects. While not something their clients or users might have expected, the association of the library with the uncanny is not unprecedented. The desires of the library program result in a deep tension in library design between technical and human requirements, and this tension is often dramatized, not only in the conflict between symbolic and programmatic form, but in the very uses of the library. The Apollonian image of the library disguises a darker, more esoteric and private desire expressed in the often strange uses and abuses of the library. Architects have occasionally implicitly understood this dichotomy and expressed in their structures. But interestingly, filmmakers have always understood it, and have been drawn to the library as a location.

A full discussion of the library and its uses in film, as a location, as a theme, and as a metaphor would be the subject of another study. Indeed, so many films use libraries as themes or settings that it has become a virtual subdiscipline. But by way of conclusion, we might point to the ways in which many memorable library scenes in film function as a sort of architectural criticism. The most iconic of such scenes is in *Wings of Desire* (dir. Wim Wenders, 1987), in which mysterious angels dressed in dark overcoats listen to the thoughts of patrons as they read and study or daydream. The tensions between expressionism and modernist rationalism in Hans Scharoun's Berlin State Library are gently exposed as the camera moves with the angels. A clarifying turning point in the uncovering of Watergate in *All the President's Men* (dir. Alan J. Pakula, 1976) is signaled by a shot of the rotunda of the Library of Congress, which ironically guarded many secrets during its long life. A visit to the New York Public Library to research the Seven Deadly Sins leads the detectives to the gruesome killer in *Seven* (dir. David Fincher, 1995). In these political thrillers and horror movies, the library functions as a pause in the train of transgressions or atrocities, allowing us to recover a modicum of civilized norms. A more benign, but no less uncanny, set of associations with libraries can be found in children's films, animated features, and fairy tales. The recurring library in versions of *Beauty and the Beast* is one example. Others include such films as *The Pagemaster* (dir. Joe Johnston, Pixote Hunt, 1994). These films often track the growth of a child from dependence on adults to the freedom of their own imagination, and in this





genre, the books and the architecture of the library have more to do with releasing that imagination than in preserving the lessons of the past. While architects are often urged to create safe spaces in libraries for the special use of children, children themselves are very good at claiming the architecture of libraries for uses not yet imagined. At their best, the libraries we have briefly surveyed allow themselves to be interpreted and used as arenas for such imaginings.



JOHN M. GANIM is Distinguished Professor of English at the University of California-Riverside and was the 2015–16 president of PAMLA. He has served as president of the New Chaucer Society and has been a Guggenheim Fellow. His most recent books are *Medievalism and Orientalism*, which was translated into Arabic by the Kalima Foundation, and *Cosmopolitanism and the Middle Ages*. His earlier books *Style and Consciousness in Middle English Narrative* and *Chaucerian Theatricality* have just been reprinted in the Princeton University Press Legacy Library series.

#### NOTES

1. See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*; Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 128–30; Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library.”
2. On libraries as a building type throughout history, see Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types*, 91–110.
3. The American Library Association has sponsored sessions on library architecture, usually from a planning and program perspective, through its long history. In recent years, the American Institute of Architects has teamed with the ALA to award AIA/ALA annual prizes to noteworthy examples of library architecture. See <http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2017/04/eight-recipients-honored-2017-aiaala-library-building-awards>.
4. See the catalogue to an excellent recent exhibition of Labrouste’s work, *Henri Labrouste: Structure Brought to Light*, ed. Bélier, Bergdol, and Le Cœur.

#### WORKS CITED

- Baker, Nicholson. *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper*. New York: Random House, 2001. Print.
- Baumann, Charles H. *The Influence of Angus Snead Macdonald and the Snead Bookstack on Library Architecture*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1972. Print.
- Bélier, Corrine Barry Bergdol, and Marc Le Cœur, eds. *Henri Labrouste: Structure Brought to Light*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2013. Print.
- Benjamin, Walter. “Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting.” *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1978. 59–68. Print.

- [Bertram James]. *Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings*. New York, 1911. Print.
- Chartier, Roger. *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1987. Print. 
- Darnton, Robert. *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982. Print.
- Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. London: Verso, 1990. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972. Print.
- Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 194. Print.
- Hammer, Joshua. *The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu: And Their Race To Save the World's Most Precious Manuscripts*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016. Print.
- Mumford, Lewis. *The Culture of Cities*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1938. Print.
- Pevsner, Nikolaus. *A History of Building Types*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1976. Print. 
- Thompson Mike. "The Search for Syria's Secret Library." BBC News. Web. 3 Aug. 2016.
- Van Slyck, Abigail A. *Free to All, Carnegie Libraries and American Culture: 1890–1920*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. Print.
- Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966. Print.
- Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972. Print.
- Whitehill, Walter Muir. *Boston Public Library: A Centennial History*. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1956. Print.