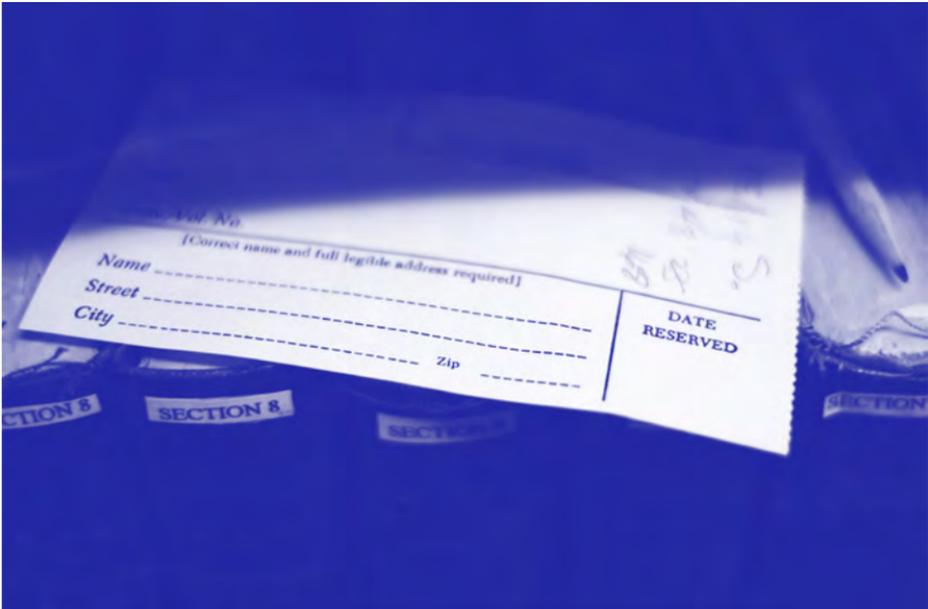


BOOKSPACE



COLLECTED ESSAYS ON LIBRARIES

Edited by

María Inês Cruz

Lozana Rossenova

BOOKSPACE

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ON LIBRARIES

Editorial 5

In Conversation with David Pearson 11

The Right to Know: Accessing Egypt's
National Library and Archives 25
Heba El-Sherif

Romanticism and the Architecture
of Public Libraries 42
Jorge Reis

A Hybrid Building: Lisbon's Central
Library and Municipal Archive 67
João Torres

Notes from the Stacks 85
Julius Motal

Points of Access: Reflections on Public Libraries,
Special Archives, and New Digital Initiatives 99
Marie Lécivain

Libraries without Walls 118
Tom Vandeputte

Contributors 125

Acknowledgements 130

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



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?'

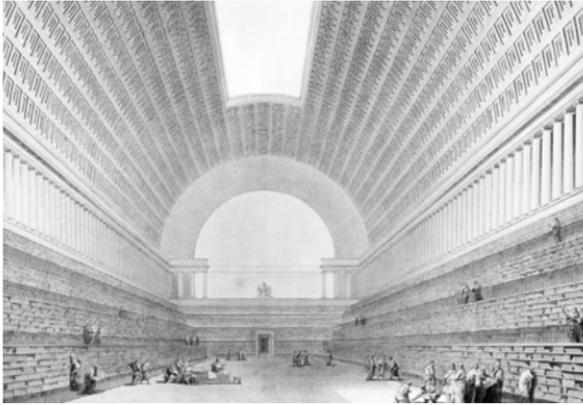
I passed through the pseudo security gate and at the front government-run depository. In return, I was given a worn out pass enveloped in a plastic cover on which a serial number was printed next to the words: security permit. I later learnt that upon entering any of the reading rooms in the seven-story 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

Romanticism and the Architecture
of Public Libraries

Jorge Reis



Étienne-Louis Boullée, Bibliothéque 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



Atrium and Public Services, Municipal Archives

Introduction

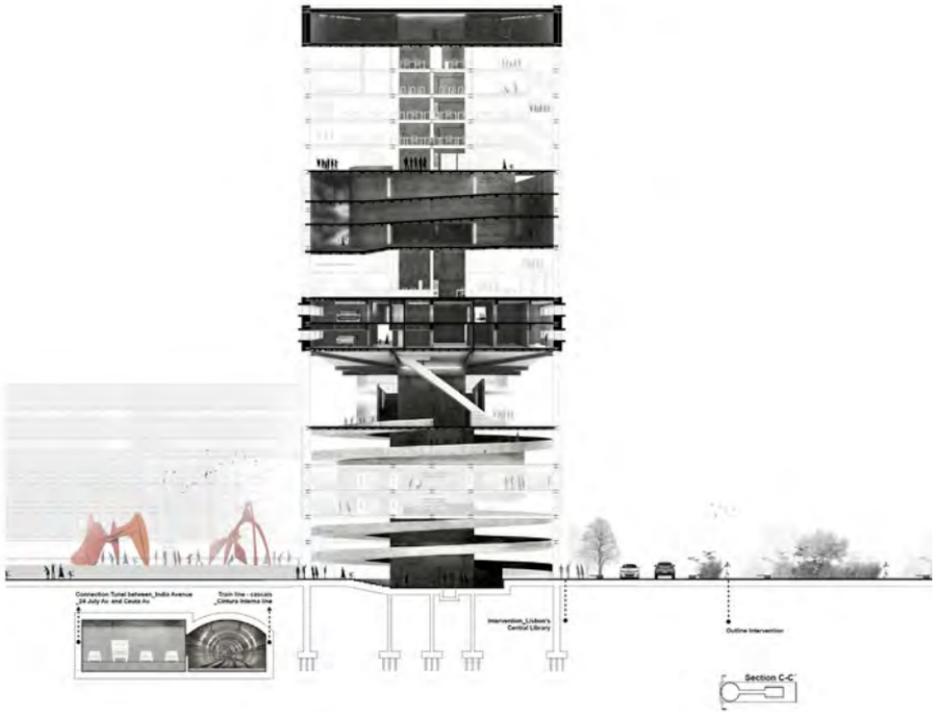
This article discusses the research and reflects on the theoretical concepts applied to the practical design project, Lisbon's Central Library and Municipal Archive, developed for the Alcântara area in Lisbon, Portugal.

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



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

Contributors

Heba El-Sherif is a writer by education, a news junkie corrupt by working as a local reporter for a couple of years in Egypt. She has worked with both *Daily News Egypt* and *Al Jazeera English* after completing a BA in Journalism from the American University in Cairo. She is now a freelance cultural writer in Cairo. She is also on Twitter @hebalsherif.

Marie Lécivain is a graphic designer specialising in publishing. Marie holds a degree from the *École de Recherche Graphique* in Brussels, where in 2012 she founded the *Fonds de Documentation et de Lecture FDDDL*. She is also co-publisher at *La Houle* – an art and literature non-profit press. Marie has worked as an art bookseller, a media archivist, and has volunteered at *St Bride Library*, London. She is currently enrolled in an MA in Cultural Studies, doing research on online libraries and digital archives at *KU Leuven*, Belgium.

Julius Motal is a freelance photographer from New York, with a penchant for street photography and a desire to tell stories. He is Executive Editor at *The Phoblographer*, a photography news, reviews, and culture website. His work has been published in *Impose Magazine*, *Voices of NY*, *New York Observer*, *Commercial Observer*, *Time Out Istanbul* in English and several books. Julius is currently based in Istanbul.

Jorge Reis is an architect from Lisbon. He holds a Master of Science in Architecture from *ISCTE* at the University Institute of Lisbon, where he is also completing an Executive Master in Corporate Finance from *INDEG*. Jorge regularly participates in international conferences with research in the theory and practice concerning cultural influences of Romanticism and Early Modernism in literature and architecture.

João Torres is an architect currently working at *Züst Gübeli Gambetti* in Zurich. He completed his Master thesis (*Re*) *Think the Alcântara Hub Through a Hybrid Building: Lisbon's Central Library and Municipal Archive* in 2012, after which he was finalist in *Secil Students Awards* and *Presidents Medal Students Awards RIBA*, London. In 2013 his thesis project won the *Competition for Archiprix Portugal Awards*. He has since participated in conferences and exhibitions in London *RIBA*, *Lisbon School of Fine Arts*, *Note Gallery*, *Trindade Palace*, and *Madrid*.

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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About the publisher

Inland Editions is a non-profit publishing initiative based in London. We publish critical texts on social issues, art, and culture by young authors from various professional and research backgrounds. The interdisciplinary character of our books is grounded on the premise that no leading discussion should be linear, nor subject to one single field of study. We wish to engage and provide in-depth analysis on building contexts for informed debates.

Bookspace: Collected Essays on Libraries addresses the architecture of modern public spaces and the development of library collections in the age of digital information, in order to discuss the larger social context of libraries as institutions.

Featured libraries include the British Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris, the Belgian Royal Library, the Grimm-Zentrum Library at Humboldt University of Berlin, the Dar El-Kutub (National Library of Egypt), the New York Public Library, and many others.

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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