

# The Glass Library: A Retro-Propective

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In tandem with the protracted debate over the ramifications of the digital information technologies for the library, there has been a surprising surge in the construction of new libraries over the course of the past twenty-five years. The overarching intent behind these new libraries has been to address the specific demands and challenges of the digital age. However, the responses have not been merely programmatic and functional, or for that matter technological in nature. In these regards, old and new libraries alike have responded and adapted in like manner. Yet, in mark contrast to the punctured masonry frame of traditional libraries, what distinguishes the majority of the new libraries is their appearance as articulated volumes clad often entirely in glass.

Why for the last two and half decades “permeability and transparency” of the library’s exterior envelope (Dunlap 2002), has been considered a requisite virtue, and not so in the many preceding decades, is the focus of this paper. Given that there is no overt programmatic, functional, or technological correlation between the incorporation of digital information technologies and the aesthetic desirability of the display-case (vitrine) approach to the outer envelope of the library, this essay examines the overlap as an ideational rather than a technological response to the unique conceptual challenges of the digital information technologies. The culprit is the virtual text that brings to surface certain culturally unsettling aspects of writing that the analogue age had carefully kept under wraps within the cover of the book, inside the confines of the library. Unlike the analogue text, the virtual text offers no correlation between its temporal appearance (the screen) and its indiscernible spatial presence (the digital media). What it presents is a spatial and

temporal dislocation and dispersion of appearance and substance that the library for the “electronic present” is critically asked to recompense as the measure of its aesthetic success. The less the “electronic text” is like the analogue text, the more the “library for the electronic present” is wished to offer, by way of substitution and supplementation, what the “electronic text” does not: a “perceptible correlation between the boundaries of the texts” and “the physical properties of the artifact” (Nunberg 1993), i.e., between appearance and substance, or else outer-form and inner-content.

## PART I

“There is a small painting by Antonello da Messina which,” Michael Brawne in introduction to “Libraries, Architecture and Equipment,” tells us: “shows St. Jerome in his study; the Saint is sitting in an armchair in front of a sloping desk surrounded on two sides by book shelves” (9) (figure 1). In this picture, the author writes, “we have an accurate and brilliant portrayal of the characteristics most needed if there is to be a successful communication between the accumulated store of knowledge and the reader” (9).

A primary purpose of the library is, the author contends, “to aid the communication between the book and its reader,” that is, to give the reader access to the accumulated store of knowledge, expressed in written form, placed within the protective cover of the book, held well within the bounds of the library. To create a library, the author argues, it is necessary to manipulate, as the painter has done, “the furniture, enclosure, space, light, and outlook,” to create “an individual and particular space delineated and in some measure separated from the greater space beyond” (9). A successful library allows the reader to make not only “a place for himself,” but at the same time “detach himself,” as Saint Jerome has done, from an inhospitable ground that is in turn clearly delineated and separated from the greater landscape in the background.

Michael Brawne’s observations about the library as a building-type are not historically amiss. We find the logic of this separation and delineation at work in the formation of the library from the Medieval book-press to the modern stack-system library. In each instance writing has been



Figure 1: Antonello da Messina, *St. Jerome in his study* (1474), Henri Labrouste's *Bibliothèque Ste.-Geneviève* (Paris, 1842–50), Mckim, Mead and White's *Boston Public library* (Boston, 1895), Carrère and Hastings' *New York Public Library* (New York, 1911), or Henry Hobson Richardson's *Crane Memorial Library* (Quincy, MA, 1882), Asplund's *Stockholm Public Library* (Stockholm, 1920–8), Alto's *Municipal Library* (Viipuri, 1930–5), Louis I. Kahn's *Exeter Academy Library* (Exeter, New Hampshire, 1965–72).

the object of an elaborate ritual of separation and delineation—first within the delineated cover of the book, and in turn the protective masonry cover of the library. Celebrated examples of this introverted approach to library design over the course of the last 150 years are as diverse as Henri Labrouste's *Bibliothèque Ste.-Geneviève* (Paris, 1842–50), Mckim, Mead and White's *Boston Public library* (Boston, 1895), Carrère and Hastings' *New York Public Library* (New York, 1911), or Henry Hobson Richardson's *Crane Memorial Library* (Quincy, MA, 1882) from one end of the spectrum, to Asplund's *Stockholm Public Library* (Stockholm, 1920–8) and Alto's *Municipal Library* (Viipuri, 1930–5) to the other, inclusive of Louis I. Kahn's *Exeter Academy*

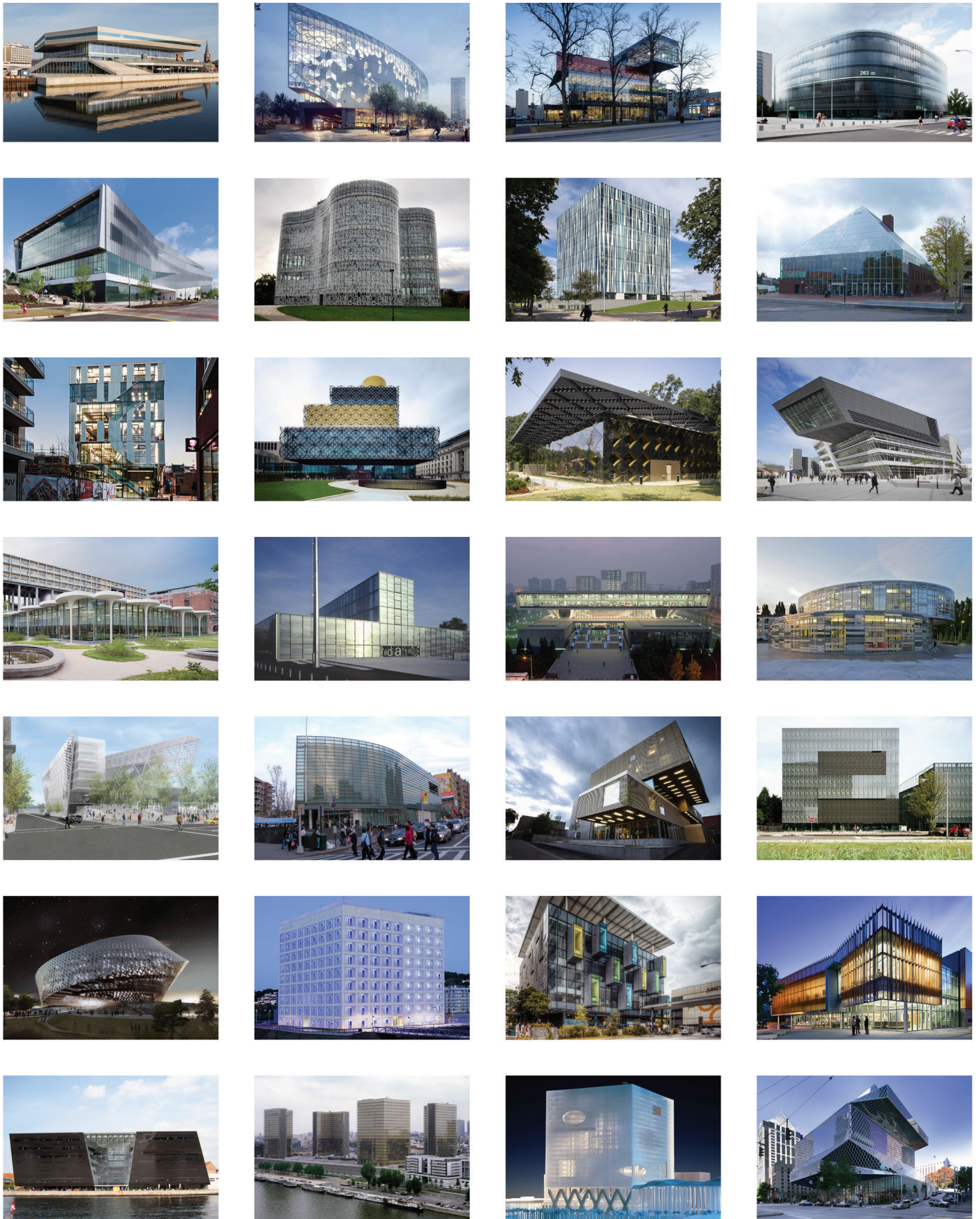


Figure 2: GLASS LIBRARIES 1996-2016.<sup>9</sup>

Library (Exeter, New Hampshire, 1965–72) that served as a model for numerous academic and public libraries in the ensuing two decades.

## PART II

Over the course of the past twenty-five years, in tandem with the protracted debate over the ramifications of the digital information technologies for the library as an institution, the design of new libraries – of which there has been a significant number – has gone through changes that has led at least some observers to conclude that “Regardless of who designed these libraries, they did share one characteristic: relatively few of these schemes look like libraries. Only a handful of them even make reference to Carnegie’s old archetypes” (S. C. Mattern 82).<sup>1</sup>

What is significantly and visibly different about the overwhelming majority of the libraries built in the past quarter century is the wrapping of the library’s outer envelope in glass. This is in mark contrast to the punctured masonry frame of traditional libraries, i.e., what libraries looked like. “Glazing” we are told, “has returned in a big way” and it has because a glazed library “presents so many glass faces to the street, the building’s function is obvious from the outside (S. C. Mattern 61). Library Architects, we are told, “have adopted transparency as a means of allowing passersby to see for themselves what a library has to offer (Van Slyck 151). The desire is “for anyone approaching the building, whether on foot, bicycle, bus or car, to be able to see inside (McGuigan).<sup>2</sup> Whereas the traditional punctured masonry frame of the library served to perceptually protect and to various degrees discreetly conceal the library’s interior from the passersby, the new glass envelope is intended, in principle, to expose and showcase the interior.

Why for the last two decades “permeability and transparency” of the library’s exterior envelope (Dunlap), “revealing the bustle of multi-levels of activity through a glass curtain wall” (McGuigan) has been considered a requisite virtue, and not so in the many preceding decades, is a question that is not taken up and addressed in the trade literature on contemporary libraries. The desirability of the display-case (vitrine) approach to the outer envelope of the library is generally assumed to be self-evident. This is specifically the case in the discussion of libraries that address and seek to effectively incorporate digital information technologies:

Not so long ago, the public library was a passive repository of books headed toward obsolescence—along with the book itself. Yet books are still with us, and libraries have broadened their mission: as everyone knows, they have been retooled as providers of digital access, ... (McGuigan)

It is precisely the new retooled libraries as providers of digital access that are simultaneously praised for their glass display-case approach to the building’s outer envelope. What correlation there is between the glass display-case approach and the incorporation of information technologies is a question whose answer takes us back to the earliest attempts at addressing the ramifications of the digital information technologies for the contemporary library. A significant and telling example is the design competition for Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF).

## PART III

From the outset, BNF was intended to be one of the largest and most modern libraries in the world, incorporating cutting edge technologies to make every form of knowledge accessible to researchers in 21st century and beyond (Perrault, Jacques and Lauriot 8).<sup>3</sup> Although BNF was to be the forerunner of “an entirely new type” of library, almost from the moment the competition winner was announced in 1989, the BNF’s design has been the subject of often-severe criticism for its failings as a library. The criticisms have centered, as Jack Kessler sums them, “upon three of the basic elements of the design scheme: the towers, the garden, and the subterranean readers’ quarters” (202). (figure 3)

The glass towers, being the most visible and prominent feature of the BNF’s design, were intended to house the majority of the library’s book collection and read as “four open books” framing a “void.”<sup>4</sup> Had the book collection been left visible through the towers’ transparent glass curtain wall, the library may well have been a monumental first in a long line of glass libraries to come. The towers would have assumed both texture and depth and bore an experiential analogy to a book, from the outside. However, in response to the immediate outcry of critics, wooden shutters were incorporated into the tower design and located at a distance behind the glass curtain wall to save the book collection from exposure to sunlight, and thereafter the gaze of the spectator from the outside.

The unintended opacity of the glass towers has rendered them mere markers to an encampment that seemingly holds and protects nothing. The towers’ “glass façades,” according to one reviewer, “behind which the entire knowledge of a nation is preserved, are too flat” (Cowan 63). They are, another reviewer clarifies, “too insubstantial to anchor themselves or their surroundings in place.” Their “smooth facades offer no friction or detail to arrest attention and the flow of space” (Buchanan 66). To rectify this fault, this reviewer wishes Perrault had placed “covers” around the towers to clarify the “open book” metaphor, and allow the towers to “form a single whole, to define a central location, and perhaps also to convey some civitas” (66).

It is not clear the design of this library would have appeared any less enigmatic had the towers had covers. The four “open books,” with or without cover, appear to the viewer to be bereft of content. Though one can clearly see through the glass façades, there is nothing there for one to see! The metaphoric pages of these “open books,” front or back, are blank sheets that “offer no friction or detail to arrest attention” in the way a book does. Yet, the problem exceeds the unintended open book without content metaphor.

The basic premise of BNF’s design, as one prominent reviewer decries, “directly contradicts the typological care and contextual premises taught by respected architectural ideologues” (Vidler 117). This library is, in the typological sense, not a library. If typologically the library, in its various historic manifestations, has been predicated on the logic Michael Brawn articulated for us at the outset of this work, the BNF has all the trappings of that logic, without the requisite effect.

The ritual of entry and access at BNF is as elaborate, forceful, and dramatic as any critically lauded library before it. Entering from either of

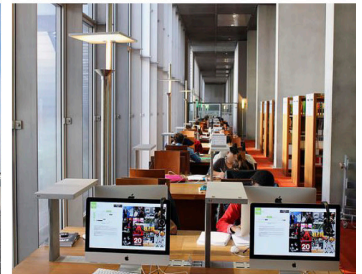
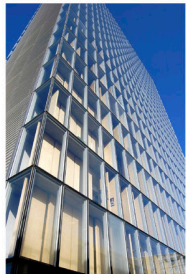
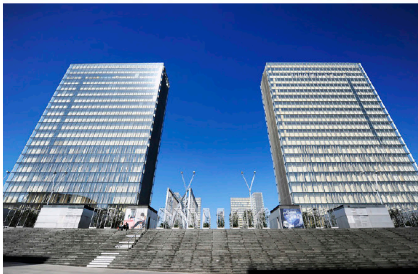


Figure 3: Dominique Perrault, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1989–95.

the two streets flanking the short side of the library’s raised rectangular platform, the visitor has to climb and cross a chorus of well delineated boundaries, from steps to caged planters, to empty voids, to moats and bridges to enter at the apparent end of this elaborate journey a large empty space flanked by the glass towers. The absence in this well-defined “void” is as profound as the journey’s end is anticlimactic. The palpable and lingering absence at the climax of BNF’s dramatic delineation, separation, and processional transition leaves “the overall impression,” according to one reviewer, “of something soulless, ghastly, and oppressive” (Bottomore 92). According to another reviewer “with its gigantic book-sculptures dominating a vast wooden plaza, the whole complex resembles a mausoleum commemorating the passing of print’s hegemony” (Buchanan 66). Other reviewers liken the complex to a “gigantic carcass, bereft of a soul,” and “an enormous animal lying on its back, with its four legs pointing heavenward” (Dawson 65). Yet another reviewer tells us: “the heart of the library, once reached, this heart is

revealed not to be there” (Vidler 122). What these analogies have in common is, of course, a missing and missed presence that all the reviewers assume ought to have been there in a library.

To find the library’s missing “heart” or “soul,” one has to, in disbelief, press on to discover a concealed escalator that delivers one at long last to the doors of the library a level below the central void. In sharp contrast to the exterior, the BNF interior is, to a measure, a typologically correct stack-system library, where the reading rooms flank the tree-lined courtyard on multiple levels, while the stacks, devoid of any reading space, hover above the periphery. The only concession to the digital age in this surprisingly conventional library interior is the omnipresent computer terminals that “will naturally be an indispensable instrument for our management of men, books and movements. It will be the tool for the public’s access to our treasures ... a tool which will be, like the book itself, fully available to the reader” (Perrault, Jacques and Lauriot 14). Despite this reserved and measured appeal to the digital technologies, the BNF is remarkably similar in both design and experience to the quintessential

digital apparatus: the personal computer. To the viewer, the BNF similarly presents a blank screen that provides access to an otherwise invisible content through the multistep rituals of transition and access that are experientially akin to operating system and application boot-ups, only to give access to the books it holds for the duration of reading – keeping them otherwise out of sight in hidden storage.

Although the BNF's interior is "surprisingly" rich and colorful and to a large extent conventional, it too does not fail to raise typological trepidations. The BNF's interior has, similar to its exterior, all the requisite parts without the typologically requisite effect. In the BNF interior, similar to any typologically correct stack-system library, the spaces of reading are conjoined to a view out onto a tree-lined exterior. However, unlike other libraries, this is not an out where one has been and will be, or for that matter, could be. Similar to the caged plants encountered outside, one reviewer reminds us that "the pine forest in the courtyard is sealed off, as remote as a mirage" (Buchanan 66). In addition to being the mirage of an outside, this garden, another prominent reviewer laments, "is gratuitously introduced without reference to its typological place within the system of the library per se" (Vidler 126).<sup>5</sup> "The obvious solution would have been," another reviewer notes, "to have the reading rooms and so on in the center and the garden extended around them" (Dawson 83). This would have been the typologically correct place for the garden.<sup>6</sup>

Given the above and many other noted "faults," the BNF, despite its pioneering glass cladding, proved not to be the answer it was asked to be to the electronic age.

In contrast to Dominique Perrault's winning entry for the BNF design competition, Rem Koolhaas' competition entry, Anthony Vidler tells us, "took seriously the mandate to produce a library for the electronic present" (Vidler 130). Koolhaas' entry was conceived not as a computer, but "conceived like some vast three-dimensional information chip," i.e. "a solid block of information, a warehouse of all forms of memory: books, disks, optical instruments, microfiches, computer" (131).

But the solid block of information is in fact conceived as a translucent cube, luminous, and radiating the secrets of its interior to the exterior. On this outside surface, the shadows of the public spaces within are projected like ghostly manifestations. (131)

It was not the internal content, that is, the literal or even the figural "warehouse of all forms of memory," that distinguished Koolhaas' proposal as a "library for the electronic present." Nor was it the external metaphor per se - the open-book versus the three-dimensional information chip. The difference was crucially and essentially lodged in the relationship of the contained to the container, or else the internal to the external, that is, the extent to which "the exterior" attested to and revealed "the secrets of its interior" (figure 4).

Whereas Perrault hid "all forms of memory" underneath and around the periphery, leaving a void in the center, Koolhaas not only located that "memory" in the center, as many critics of BNF wished Perrault had done, Koolhaas also gave that memory a protective cover - the translucent cube - whose outside surface bore the "secrets of its interior" as cast "shadows" that vividly and directly attest to an internal presence.

In other words, much as Perrault's warehouse appears empty to the onlooker, Koolhaas' warehouse appeared otherwise by virtue of making its contents thematically visible on the exterior, without rendering them transparent. "The result is," we are told, "a brilliant and architecturally original evocation of the poetics and pragmatics of information technology, and by far the most successful of all the competition entries." This is apparently by mere virtue of that one all-important difference in the relationship of the interior to the exterior, the container to the contained. Yet, on that score, the rhetoric of the "poetics and pragmatics" of information technology notwithstanding, Koolhaas' design had much greater affinity to a traditional book than a computer chip, in much the same way Perrault's design had much greater affinity to a computer than to an open book. Koolhaas' play on the thematic of enclosure and disclosure has its parallel in traditional book design, where the cover envelops and hides a content that remains, nevertheless, visibly present within its volumetric thickness as the sum total of all the pages.

To be a library for the "electronic present," what is requisite is, it appears, the conjoining of the traditional enclosure of content to the testimonial disclosure of its presence. This is to say that the library for the "electronic present" is not one that is per se digitally savvy or technologically up-to-date. Rather, it is a library that ameliorates the consternations that are omnipresent in the "electronic present."

#### PART IV

The mechanically (re)produced book has, from inception, offered a direct correlation between its physical outward form and its content (writing).<sup>7</sup> In contrast, much as the book gives its written content the appearance of permanence and immutability, the digital media does the opposite. Not only is the computer screen not correlated with one content, within the physical bounds of the screen, every content becomes temporal, mutable and seemingly limitless.

A computer doesn't have to store texts in a form that corresponds to the space they occupy when they are displayed; that is the source of all its informational capacity. But for just this reason, there is no perceptible correlation between the boundaries of the texts we read on a computer and the physical properties of the artifact or the display itself. So there is inevitably a sense of disconnection between the text that is immediately present to the senses and the text that stretches out indefinitely and invisibly on either side of it ... You literally cannot grasp an electronic text in its entirety. (Nunberg 18)

Wherever and whenever the "electronic text" appears, it is de facto partial and transitory. Its bounds are not elsewhere; they are nowhere. Unlike the book, the "electronic text" is spatially beyond grasp. It is incapable of offering a direct correlation between the appearance of the text and its literal presence, that is, between where the text is seen (read) and where it is, between its temporal appearance (the screen) and its spatial presence (the disk) as indiscernible digits. The "electronic text" does not forego its physicality as writing. Its physicality is dissociated and displaced. In other words, the "electronic text" acts like writing, but it is not like writing. What the placeless "electronic text" offers in place of the correlation that the book has perpetually offered is spatial and temporal challenges that the library for the electronic present is asked

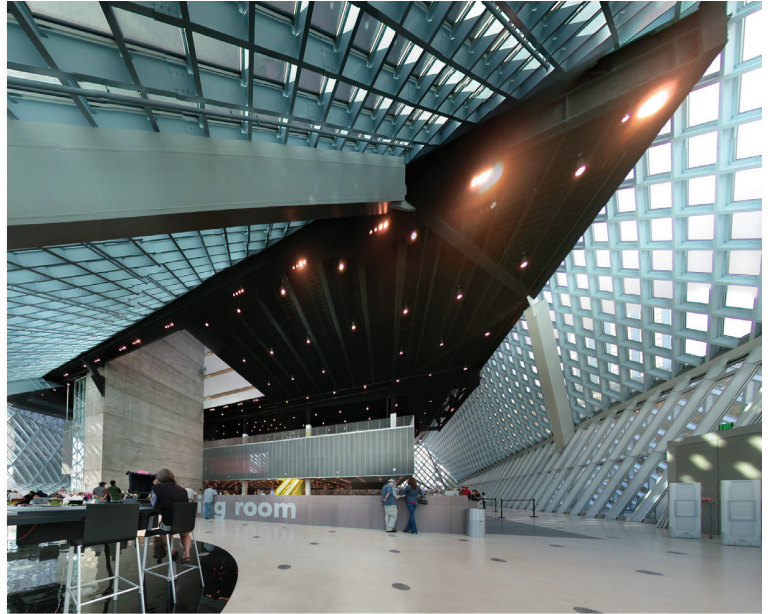


Figure 4: Rem Koolhaas, Très Grande Bibliothèque project, Bibliothèque nationale de France competition entry, 1989. Rem Koolhaas, Seattle Central Library, 2004.

and hoped to ameliorate. The library is asked, in other words, to compensate for what is missing and missed in the “electronic present.” It is asked to provide, by way of substitution and supplementation, what the “electronic text” cannot: a “perceptible correlation between the boundaries of the texts” and “the physical properties of the artifact.” The less the “electronic text” is like writing, the more the “library for the electronic present” is wished to be like a book, that is, to enclose and disclose its content at the same time. This is what Koolhaas’ proposal did and Perrault’s did not. Whereas Perrault’s final design amplifies all the consternations digital technologies raise regarding spatial and temporal bounds for writing, Koolhaas’ design correlates, compensates, and reassures. Nevertheless, Koolhaas’ design was not selected as the winning entry! Why this typologically correct library “for the electronic present” did not win the competition was, Vidler speculates, because of one mistake.

Koolhaas’s mistake was to configure information under the sign of translucency and shadowy obscurity; the politics of the moment insisted, and still insist, on the illusion that light and enlightenment, transparency and openness, permeability and social democracy are not only symbolized but also effected by glass. (131-32)

In time, Koolhaas would have a chance to correct the asserted mistake of the BNF entry in the competition entry for another “library for the electronic present:” the winning entry for the Seattle Public Library, completed in 2004 to critical acclaim. Whereas in Koolhaas’ BNF proposal the requisite enclosure and disclosure of content were tenuous and tangential, consisting of shadows cast on the autonomous form of a translucent cube, in the Seattle Public Library, under the banner of transparency, Koolhaas were to establish a direct correlation between the container and the contained (figure 4).

The Seattle Public Library (SCL) was intended to “honor books and prepare for ambitious technology” (Kubo and Prat 66). It was intended to “redefine the library as an institution no longer exclusively dedicated to the book, but as an information store where all potent forms of media – new and old – are presented equally and legibly” (11). Although, “at first glance,” we are told, “it is easy to miss the logic” of the building’s exterior form, leading some critics to conclude that “not only does it not look like a library; it does not look like a building” (Mattern 10), the “irregular form” of the building we are assured by another reviewer “arises from an almost slavish devotion to a detailed program developed by the library board and staff” (Olson 88). The exterior form, “striking, even startling” as it may seem is merely the correlated outward expression of what is inside (Kubo and Prat 66).<sup>8</sup>

Having pushed and pulled the programmatic platforms into “stack of shifting, precariously balanced volumes” on the inside, the whole is “shrink-wrapped” in a “taut skin of steel and glass” that “captures the five floating boxes like a butterfly net” (66). The relationship of the building’s exterior form to its interior is, as Andreas Zoch, the project manager notes, “like the relationship of skin to body” (Swimmer 44). An equally apt analogy would be the book whose outer form directly correlates with the content it envelops. If SCL does not look to some like a library, or even a building, it is because unlike the libraries of the mechanical

age, and most conventional buildings, it is not the external envelope that gives the interior its outline; it is the interior outline that dictates the external form.

The SCL is not, of course, alone in its response to the challenges of the “electronic present.” Other successful libraries for the “electronic present” share its strategy, if not exactly its form (figure 2).<sup>9</sup> The many glass-clad libraries of the past two decades also seek to compensate for what is missing and missed in the “electronic present.” They too provide, by way of substitution and supplementation, what the “electronic text” cannot: a “perceptible correlation between the boundaries of the texts” and “the physical properties of the artifact.”

Even though the less the “electronic text” is like writing, the more the “library for the electronic present” is wished to be like a book whose outer enclosing form visibly attest to the presence of the content, the desired encampment of writing is essentially the same in these as the libraries of preceding ages.<sup>10</sup> This desire is, in no small measure, a reflection of the ambivalence of Western culture toward what the library seeks to place and keep in place: Writing.

## PART V

Writing, Jacques Derrida pointed out long ago, has been the subject of simultaneous condemnation and praise throughout the history of Western culture for being the purveyor of life and the agent of death at the same time. It has been commended and censured for immortalizing and supplanting the author by preserving and dispensing with living thought at once.

Whereas speech functions in the immediacy of thought as a transparent and seemingly immaterial realization of its presence, writing entombs and defers thought. It makes the absent present, though devoid of the immediacy and the pliancy that are its distinguished marks.

Regardless of its immortalizing virtue, or rather because of it, writing has been consistently assigned a secondary, subservient role with respect to speech and condemned for being, among others, a bastardized form of speech, a “dangerous supplement,” or in Plato’s term, a *Pharmakon*: neither simply a remedy nor simply a poison, but both at once.

If writing is deemed to be a precarious and pernicious drug, it is in part because its effect cannot be delimited in space and to its assigned place and role as the dead imitation of a living speech. If it is deemed to be a dangerous substitute for speech, it is in part because writing does not simply insinuate itself in the place of speech from outside. In the process, it also permanently dis-places living thought and the speech that is presumed to be the privileged locus of its presence.

The “alleged derivativeness of writing, however, real and massive,” Derrida notes, is “possible only on one condition: that the ‘original,’ or the ‘natural’ language had never existed, never been intact and untouched by writing, that it had itself always been a writing.” Writing can take the place of speech as a poor substitute and a dead imitation of it, if speech itself is a form of writing, that is, if speech itself functions by virtue of the same difference and deferral that is presumed to be peculiar to writing. Speech can only be substituted, imitated, or represented

by writing, if it has a repeatable, imitable or re-presentable form whose signifying function is not governed, or determined by what it signifies. If the seemingly transparent face of speech was indeed linked to the features of the landscape of thought it designates, it could never be substituted, imitated, or represented. If, on the other hand, the landscape of thought can only be located in the space of representation, if speech itself must necessarily defer the presence that it can only represent, then the living thought itself must forego its privilege as a simple presence in order to appear in representation, that is, to appear at all. In short, “what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence,” along with the disappearance of a decidable place within whose demarcated boundaries writing may be put to rest as a substitute representation of speech.

Should one wish, however, to retain the privilege of speech as the locus of a living, present thought - all the metaphysical, theological, and socio-political implications of this assumption withstanding - then one must indeed make every effort to delimit the dangerous effect of this paradoxical drug to a decidable place. One must make every effort to place writing: be this in a subservient supplemental position with respect to speech or within the protective cover of the book, held well within the bounds of the library. One must substitute a clear sense of place for the missing place of this dangerous pharmakon: a place from which speech can be withdrawn to the outside, safe and untouched by writing's effects.

The book is, of course, one such place. The “idea of the book which always refers to a natural totality,” Derrida notes, “is profoundly alien to the sense of writing. It is the encyclopedic protection of theology and of logocentrism against the disruption of writing, against its aphoristic energy, and, ..., against difference in general.”

The typologically correct library constitutes another place: a supplemental, immobile, and generalized doubling of the book, encompassing and placing writing in place. This is to say that the logic of encampment at work in the formation of the library is an ideological response and an institutional solution to the enigmatic place of writing. It is, in a manner, a defensive measure against the “disruption” and “aphoristic energy” of writing: a defensive measure that sees to the confinement of the book in a “heterotopic space,” that is construed to keep in place that which has no decidable place.

Whereas the book and the library of the analogue age have managed to effectively suppress the “disruption” and “aphoristic energy” of writing within their supplemental borders, the electronic text, as discussed earlier, brings the displacement of time and space that is writing back to surface. It threatens to undo much of what the book and the library have managed to keep, as it were, under wraps. Hence, to incorporate and encamp the “electronic text” as well, the “library for the electronic present” is additionally asked to compensate for what is missing and missed in the “electronic present.” It is asked to provide, by way of substitution and supplementation, what the “electronic text” cannot: a “perceptible correlation between the boundaries of the texts” and “the physical properties of the artifact.” What remains to be seen is the degree to which the new encampment will manage to keep the “disruption” and “aphoristic energy” of the electronic text under wraps as well.

## ENDNOTES

1. Also: “Architects have also sidestepped the monotony of modular libraries by using windows, skylights, clerestories, glass curtain walls, and top-lit atria to bring natural lighting back into reading areas ... A number of recent projects, ..., have adopted transparency as a means of allowing passersby to see for themselves what a library has to offer.” (Van Slyck 151)
2. As evident in these passages and numerous others that one may cite, at issue is primarily the view in from the outside and not per se the view out from the inside. Framed views from inside the library have been a matter of emphasis in the least since the advent of the stack system library where reading spaces were relocated to the periphery of the building, in proximity to punctured masonry frame of the library. A telling example is Louis Kahn's Exeter Academy Library (Exeter, New Hampshire, 1965–72).
3. Jean Favier notes: “Hence the new library had to supply not only a new dimension to our original *Bibliothèque Nationale*, but also a whole new concept of our contribution to the civilization of the Third Millennium. The computer will naturally be an indispensable instrument for our management of men, books and movements. It will be the tool for the public's access to our treasures. But, like the taperecorder and the video machine, it will be an intermediary for a part of our heritage; a tool which will be, like the book itself, fully available to the reader.” (Perrault, Jacques and Lauriot 14)
4. Perrault notes: “The ‘four open book’ evince a concept with absolute clarity and conciseness. It's part of the new library's dialogue with people. For many of those people their first act of reading in association with the library will be done in those four open books. This relationship between the architectural ensemble and the language is necessary if we are to initiate communication; it supplies a mnemotechnical means of identifying and locating the library within the city. Afterwards, less immediate, more contradictory and complex perceptions will lead to other levels of reading.” (Perrault, Jacques and Lauriot 48)
5. Also: “The area reserved for researchers will have a view over a patch of forest, a quintessential Fontainebleau which will nevertheless be inaccessible, save in the unexpected event of a disaster. These favored researchers will thus have a view over this garden, but they will not be able to stroll round it. The entrances for the general public are on the upper floors only, ... The public will not be entitled to the view over the garden, except by going to a walk-cum-resting-place, separated from the reading rooms by a partition, and in effect prohibiting the concurrence of work and contemplation of nature.” (Edelmann 22)
6. However, instead of surrounding the building, the BNF garden is surrounded by the building, and the view out is a view in. Offering the reader “no view of the city from the reading rooms or even of the river” (The National Library of France: A Patron Reflects, 2004, p. 83), the BNF reading rooms effectively offer no “reassurance of an outside to which one can always turn for escape,” as any typologically correct reading room would (Siegel, 2011, p. 41). In addition to lingering and unabated impressions of being caged-in, “after a visit to the BNF, walking through the old areas of Paris (and even some of the new) comes as an incredible relief—to be once again among people in everyday surroundings, buildings on a human scale, and trees that are not locked in cages.” (Bottomore, 2004, p. 94)
7. Nunberg, in the same volume as Vidler's account, tells us: “A book doesn't simply contain the inscription of a text, it is the inscription. It is as fat as the text is long, it opens at the beginning of the text, and if we break off our reading, we are left literally in media res. This property is crucial to the way we read any book whose content is essentially linear or narrative, as we subconsciously register the external boundaries of the volume in terms of the space between our thumb and forefinger, and reckon our place in the text accordingly.” (The Places of Books in the Age of Electronic Reproduction, 1993, p. 18)
8. We are told: “After analyzing functions and space requirements, five broad categories emerged: administration and staff, collections, information, public space and parking. The architects visualized the space as five stacked boxes and used that as starting point for the building's design. The boxes, or sections, were repositioned to allow better views and light. The headquarters on top was pushed east to look down Fifth Avenue toward Mount Rainier, and the area holding the main book stacks was nudged north to offer reading-room views of Eliot Bay. Moving those upper floors also let more light into the lower floors.” (Seattle Public Library, OMA/LMN, 2005, p. 66)

9. Prominent among these are: Dokk1 Library, Schmidt Hammer Lassen Architects, Aarhus, Denmark, 2015; Halifax Central library, Schmidt Hammer Lassen, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, 2014; Library and Learning Center, Zaha Hadid, University of Economics & Business, Vienna, Austria, 2013; Birmingham Public Library, Mecanoo, Birmingham, England, 2013; James B. Hunt Jr. Library, Snohetta, University of North Carolina, Raleigh, North Carolina, USA, 2013; The National Library of Technology (National Technical Library), Projektil Architekti, Dejvice, Prague, Czech Republic, 2012; Book Mountain, MVRDV, Spijkenisse, the Netherlands, 2012; The University of Aberdeen Library, Schmidt Hammer Lassen Architects, Aberdeen, Scotland, 2012; Francis Gregory Library, Adjaye Associates, Washington, DC, 2012; Stuttgart City Library, Eun Young Yi, Stuttgart, Germany, 2011; Culture House and Library, COBE, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2010; Beijing National Library, KSP Jürgen Engel Architekten, Beijing, China, 2008; Médiathèque de Vénissieux, Dominique Perrault architecture, Vénissieux, France, 2006; Grande Bibliothèque, Patkau Architects, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 2005; Cottbus Technical University Library, Herzog & de Meuron, Cottbus, Germany, 2004; Utrecht University Library, Wiel Arets Architects, Utrecht, Netherlands, 2004; Brooklyn Visual and Performing Arts Library, TEN Arquitectos, Brooklyn, New York, 2003; Queens Borough Public Library, Polshek and Partners (Ennead Architects), Flushing Regional Branch, 1998; and the list goes on (Figure 2).
10. This is not to decry the significance of the differences and the important transformations in the history of the library as a building type. One may readily trace the specifics of these differences and transformations, as I have tried to do with SCL and BNF, to among other factors the specific modalities, shifts, and changes in the cultural perception and definition of what constitutes knowledge, how and where it is located (localized), and in what relationship it is placed with respect to its manifestation(s) and/or representation(s). For instance, in contrast to the medieval book press that was predicated on the idea of knowledge as a locked and hidden secret awaiting revelation, in the Laurentian Library, having climbed one's way up the taxing stairs of the slithery vestibule into the calm of the reading room, one may be well inclined to agree with Alberti, among other theoreticians of the Renaissance, that the path to knowledge is fraught with difficulties and it is on "industry and diligence no less than in the favours of Nature and of times" that "the ability to achieve the highest distinction in any meritorious activity" relies (33). Imagining oneself arriving in the reading room of a 'Saal-System' library, surround by walls of books en masse from behind which light penetrates and pervades the space, one may be readily inclined to agree with Marc-Antoine Laugier among other proponents of the enlightenment, that "truth," "indelible as it is," is "hidden" behind the "outer cover" that hides it from view. To discover the truth, one must "tear away the veil which covers it," if only to see the "light" that awaits only those who make the effort to "penetrate the outer cover" (2, 7). In a similar vein, confronted with sublime spectacle of rows upon rows of books on shelves in the stack-system library, one may be well inclined to agree with Ruskin that the "only merit" of this "frightful" mass is "in its sense" (107). Nevertheless, these diverse manifestations, including the reassuringly transparent libraries of the digital information age, share a common logic. Each, at a certain level, is a different expression of the logic of encampment and as such an attempt to purvey to the viewer a sense of confinement, control, and order, that is, to assure the participant that the books are in place and under control.

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