I, Janice M Fredwest, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Architecture

in Architecture (Master of)

It is entitled:

Popular Library: Rethinking the Cultural Relevancy of the American Public Library

Student Signature: Janice M Fredwest

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee Chair: Nnamdi Elleh, PhD

Elizabeth Riorden, MARCH
ABSTRACT:

The American Public library is no longer the popular destination that it used to be. Since the emergence of America's public libraries in the late nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century, the library’s main goal was providing its community with information and education, a once-unique capability. Now, rapidly developing digital information technologies like the computer and the Internet provide an opportunity for contemporary society to access information without the aid of such a building. Today people go to other destinations “hot spots” for information and community activity such as Barnes & Noble’s, Borders, or shopping centers. The library has to introduce something completely new in order to make it relevant to people’s lives and for them to want to travel there.

Hence, the main argument of this thesis is the library needs to position itself as a popular place of destination in order to remain relevant to the community, justify its continued financial support and existence and keep its patrons happy. It is argued that the library needs to borrow a leaf from certain popular places of destination such as shopping centers, sports arenas, and other places which call for human interactions. Or, essential and utilitarian destinations, such as the grocery store or drug store, where people are required to frequent in order to properly live in contemporary society. My arguments evolve from the supposition or understand that buildings types are not fixed. Instead they continuously evolve and adapt according to changes in function, technology, social behavioral patterns, and image.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

I would like to say thank you to my parents for the constant and loving support during my six years at the University of Cincinnati.

I would also like to thank my fellow thesis colleagues and my advisor, Dr. Nnamdi Elleh. Thank you for pushing me to my fullest potential. Your words of advice were an essential part of this process.

I’d also like to thank Joseph because his countless hours of listening to me discuss this thesis and his constant encouragements were what kept me going.
TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Abstract
List of Images

Chapter One: Understanding the Institution “Library”
  1.1 Origins of the Public Library in Antiquity
  1.2 The Library Comes to America

Chapter Two: The Declining Library
  1.1 Effects of the Digital Age on the Public Library
  1.2 Funding Crisis for Ohio’s Public Libraries
  1.3 How Other Institutions Take Over as Destinations

Chapter Three: Learning from Popular Culture
  3.1 Identifying the term “pop culture”
  3.2. Pop culture and the mass media
  3.3. Pop culture and the visual culture
  3.5 How Private Institutions use Pop Culture: Prada Store, NYC

Chapter Four: Design
  4.1 Site Analysis
  4.2 Design Implications and Program

Bibliography
| Fig 1.1 | http://www.shekpvar.net |
| Fig 1.2 | http://www.shekpvar.net |
| Fig 1.3 | http://www.shekpvar.net |
| Fig 1.4 | http://www.shekpvar.net |
| Fig 1.5 | http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk |
| Fig 1.6 | www.encasement.com |
| Fig 1.7 | http://www.craylinks.com |
| Fig 1.8 | www.printsourceinfo.com |
| Fig 1.9 | www.uh.edu |
| Fig 1.10 | www.essential-architecture.com |
| Fig 1.11 | www.essential-architecture.com |
| Fig 1.12 | www.riponmainst.com |
| Fig 1.13 | andrewcarnegie.tripod.com |
| Fig 1.14 | www.yworkshop.com |
| Fig 2.1 | www.boston.com |
| Fig 2.2 | mused.pixelflake.com |
| Fig 2.3 | www.clevelandleader.com |
| Fig 2.4 | volumeone.org |
| Fig 2.5 | images.morris.com |
| Fig 2.6 | desertpeace.files.wordpress.com |
| Fig 2.7 | farm4.static.flickr.com |
| Fig 3.1 | compassioninpolitics.files.wordpress.com |
| Fig 3.2 | www.architectureweek.com |
| Fig 3.3 | www.paulrudolph.org |
| Fig 3.4 | www.boston.com |
| Fig 3.5 | farm2.static.flickr.com |
| Fig 3.6 | www.nga.gov |
| Fig 3.7 | farm1.static.flickr.com |
| Fig 3.8 | www.artnet.com |
UNDESTANDING THE INSTITUTION “LIBRARY”

My thesis entails a deep investigation of the evolution of the American public library. The word “library” in this thesis is to be understood as a typical community, public library in America. While it is easy to define the name of the institution in this thesis, some of its traditional objectives and programmatic functions will be rethought in order to better adapt the institution to contemporary social practices on places that can be described as popular public destinations. The premise is the American public library, like all places of popular destination, has to adapt to the contemporary culture or it will become obsolete and make it irrelevant. While the thesis intends to maintain many of the public library’s values and clientele, suggestions will be made on how the institution can learn from popular culture and collaborate with private enterprise in order to strengthen its survival. We begin with a surveys of the institution and how it came
to be as we know it today.

ORIGINS OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY IN ANTIQUITY

Based on scant information we have on ancient libraries, we can make state that Americans did not invent the idea of the public library. We do not know exactly the first library in the world, but most consider the Library of Alexandria in Egypt (circa 300 BCE) to be the first major one ever recorded. This library had a clear organization system and designated storage space for keeping scrolls and tablets of works from all over the world. It became a mecca of knowledge in the ancient world and drew in scholars from all points of the civilized world. Yet, little is known about the architectural spaces. What we do know is that even back to the times of ancient Egypt, books and information was a powerful political and economical tool.

The power of information in Ancient Alexandria:

Information as power is a timeless concept. It is recorded that the Ptolemies’ library at Alexandria had from 200,000 to 700,000 volumes depending on the source, and is considered to be the first formal library building. Unbeknownst to many, the library at

reconstruction of the main hall of the Museum of Alexandria

reconstruction of the storage rooms of the Museum of Alexandria
Alexandria was actually two separate libraries. The first, main library was built in the third century BCE within the Mouseion (temple of the Muses) and then a much smaller “daughter” library was built at the temple of Seraphis. It is important to note that both collections, although public, were housed within the royal grounds and the libraries were referenced as one single unit.  

While not much is known about the architecture of the library at Alexandria, the technology involved in producing the information had large political importance. The scholars that resided at Alexandria did not read books, not in the sense that we know them, but on scrolls made of papyrus. Papyrus, a water reed, is native to the banks of the Nile which gave Alexandria a plentiful medium for creating her collection. In an effort to monopolize on all of the world’s scholars, Alexandria began to prohibit the exportation of papyrus making it harder for the growth of other large libraries that threatened the prominence of Alexandria such as the libraries at Rhodes and Pergamum. This, however, had an adverse affect for Alexandria. It promoted the Pergamenes to invent parchment, which became the medium of choice for over a thousand years in Europe. The technology and medium of information became a struggle between two competing civilizations; attracting the great thinkers of the world was seen in the same light as Alexandria’s commerce.  

The Ptolemies wanted the world’s information to be under their control and so they invited scholars from all parts of the world to come to Alexandria and work and live, at royal expense, making the library into a “think tank” for Alexandria’s dispense. They saw the monopolization of knowledge, particularly in theology, medicine, and engineering and ordered that all visitors give up their books so that they could be copied for Alexandria’s collection. Despite competition from other libraries such as Rhodes, Pergamum, Athens and others, the library at Alexandria thrived while under the rule of the Ptolemies. Great minds such as Euclid, Archimedes, Erathosthenes, Strabo, and Galen all used the library at Alexandria to create their masterpieces. They were encouraged by the Ptolemies to interact with each other.

---


and gave the great minds academic freedom to work as they see fit, thinking they would produce the most useful work if given full reigns. Soon the library started to branch beyond just the Hellinistic culture, but strove to gather the great works from languages other than Greek. It became a mecca of knowledge, and the base model for the university of the modern era.

The library at Alexandria was not quiet in its aggressive acquisition of books from visitors and the wealth’s private collections. Alexandria’s mission was not for the preservation of free learning, but controlling information and using it for political and economic advancement. “The Ptolemies made good on the essentially Alexandrian intuition that knowledge is a resource, a commodity, a form of capital to be acquired and hoarded at the pleasure of the regime”.

More of the books may have survived the Christian era if Alexandria had not centralized and boasted its size. It was a target and was a victim of burning on multiple occasions from Julius Caesar in 48 BCE to Christian Emperor Theodosius who ordered all pagan, non-Christian, temples to be destroyed. The extent or damage of all

the political attacks on the library at Alexandria is unknown today, but it probably was not from one single source:

*The libraries of Alexandria probably shared a modest fate, moldering slowly through centuries as people grew indifferent and even hostile to their contents. Ancient Greek, never a linguistic monolith in any case, became incomprehensible to Alexandrians of the Christian era... Ignored by the generations to whom they were indecipherable, the scrolls would have been damaged by alternating periods of moisture and aridity, eaten by the troublesome fauna and flora that have evolved especially to live in the library, stolen, lost, and yes, burned. They were replaced by writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the church...* ⑩

By tracing the information of Alexandria, a rich history of shifts in political and religious power can be mapped out. The very first library that we know of has a violent and complex path, all because information held great political power at the time. Alexandria took the approach of the government flaunting its stronghold of information over others.


The Romans followed suit in building library buildings after the historical burning of the Alexandria library in 88 BCE. The height of the building of libraries in Rome came about from the first century BCE to first century CE. These were open to the public, but were mainly used by scholars and the upper class. The library really became a social and democratic space in Ancient Rome when library
spaces became integrated with Roman baths. The Roman bath was a destination place and a large part of popular Roman culture for all of its citizens. This integration allowed for information to be spread to a much wider array of people. Clearly this so-called new trend in seeing libraries as great civic, social spaces is not really a new idea. While concepts of integrating new programs and other institutions with the library may sound cutting edge or risky, this idea has solid historical roots as seen through the Roman baths.

The Roman Baths: Libraries integrate into Roman Culture

The earliest of the Romans considered health and cleanliness to be an important part of their culture. By the last century of the Roman Republic, bathing had become a daily ritual, just as important as the dinner which it typically preceded. Many of the wealthy had bathrooms in their own home, most Romans, of all classes, preferred a public establishment. Baths could be found all over from Rome itself, smaller towns, and even in the provinces. Through remaining ruins, an account by Vitruvius, and various references through literature a good depiction and history of the public baths is known.10

The first accounts of public baths arose shortly after the Second Punic War. It was during this time that changes in living came about, and the number of public baths quickly increased. In 33 BCE there were approximately one hundred seventy baths in Rome and later there were more than eight hundred. The baths were public in the sense that the baths were open to any citizen, no matter the class, but at a small fee. The prices were low enough so that various groups of people could still use the baths on a daily basis; the regular price at Rome for men seems to have been about a quarter of a cent. Yet, the fees were enough to keep them well managed and running. Sometimes a “public-spirited” citizen or a politician running for office would pay the charges of a bath house for a definite time, allowing anyone to access the baths. For example, Agrippa, in 33 BCE kept all one hundred and seventy public baths open free of charge for a year.10

The simple bathhouse from the earlier times and the bath itself were called balneum or balnea. Over time the establishments became more luxurious and complex which were called balneae and the very largest were named thermae, yet the statuses were

10 Johnston, Mary, Abigail Ayres. *Roman Life*. Scott Foresman, 1957
somewhat interchangeable and loosely categorized. Over time bathhouses started to provide exercise grounds, courts for games, as well as rooms for reading and conversations, and of course libraries. “These features eventually became more important than the bathing itself, so that going to the bath was a popular recreation”  

Seneca, a well known Roman philosopher gives a vivid picture of the public baths from his time:  

"I’m in the midst of a roaring babel. My lodgings are over the baths! Imagine every possible outcry to shatter your eardrums. When the more athletic bathers swing their dumbbells I can hear them grunt as they strain, or pretend to, and hissing and gasping as they expel their breath after holding it. There’s a lazy chap happy with a cheap massage: I hear the smack of the hand on his shoulders, the sound of varying with whether it strikes flat or cupped. If an umpire comes to keep score at the ball game, counting the tosses, it’s all up to me! There’s the refreshment man with his wide range of cries, the sausage vendor, the confectioner, the men from the places of refreshment shouting their wares..."

According to Seneca, the Roman baths were a vibrant and noisy place, buzzing with a variety of activities. Many of the larger baths contained libraries, which typically resided near the gardens and  

reading/conversation rooms. While there were many public library buildings, even during the Roman republic, they were mainly used by scholars and the wealthy. By incorporating the library into an existing institution where people frequented daily, the library became well used and an important part of Roman culture.  

The Romans also believed in the power of education “A knowledge of the elements of education was more generally diffused among the Romans than among any other people of the ancient world. Their elementary and grammar schools were open to all, and  

---

10 Johnston, Mary, Abigail Ayres. Roman Life. Scott Foresman, 1957 p.21  
fees were low”\textsuperscript{10}. They were democratic in the ways they taught too, giving no distinction between classes when disciplining or treating their pupils. This philosophy can be directly linked to the formation of the Roman Republic. As a result, the libraries in the public baths were well used and there was a cultural importance put on knowledge and learning in Roman society.

After the fall of the Roman Empire it was the Christian church that became the keeper of knowledge and information. As the primary source of information a religious space, even a monastery, held secular bodies of work intended for a more education nature for use in classrooms. The typology ‘library’ went under hardship in the Middle Ages. Most collections were very small; typically a book collection was stored in something as small as a closet within a religious institution. The dedicated building devoted solely to information had become obsolete.

It was technology that saved the library building in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century with the invention of paper and the printing press. Book collections began to expand and therefore separate buildings, built at first by the church, were constructed once again. These spaces later became universities and critical to western culture. By the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the countries of the western world had an elevated sense of nationalism and so libraries became so much more symbolically than just a storehouse for books, but rather, a face of the country’s intellectual power.\textsuperscript{10}

Again, like the Roman baths, library buildings were integrated into the social life of its constituents. Take for example, the Bibliotheque Sainte Genevieve, unlike most of its predecessors Sainte Genevieve provides a large rectangular, open space with large tables. This encouraged reading and studying inside, a social gathering place within the actual building. Henry Labrouste, architect of Sainte Genevieve, also advertised the library’s functions in an outward fashion using architecture. He branded the library by using the names of famous writers and literature as ornamentation to his building. The

\textsuperscript{10} Johnston, Mary, Abigail Ayres. \textit{Roman Life}. Scott Foresman, 1957 p. 10-25

\textsuperscript{10} Battles, Matthew. \textit{Library: An Unquiet History}. New York City, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2003 p. 45
bricks and stones became an interpretation of the books inside.

Bibliotheque Ste Genevieve: a Revolutionary Social Space that is Advertised

Designed in 1843 by architect Henri Labrouste and built 1845 to 1851, the Bibliotheque Sainte-Genevieve is considered to be one of the most influential buildings from the 19th century, especially given its historical context. About fifty years prior, 1789, the French Revolution had rearranged all of France’s social and political structure. Just as important in shaping France’s whole social perspectives was the Enlightenment, specially the great thinkers from the French Enlightenment. They promoted a sense of empowerment and equality for the people of France, and the Bibliotheque Ste Genevieve gives appropriate response to revolutionary and modern ideas of the Enlightenment by reflecting the ideals through architectural elements such as material, program, and circulation.

The men of the Enlightenment came from a time where the Roman Catholic Church had been defeated by Muslim Crusaders of North Africa and gone under heavy attack from the Protestant Reformation, leaving nation-states, not a religious power, as
the political force in Europe. In addition to the decline of papal and aristocratic power, new technologies and globalization of certain markets allowed for a new emerging bourgeoisie class. Enlightenment thinkers such as: Voltaire; Rousseau; and Diderot, came from this bourgeoisie class. They were educated, and promoted reason and science as driving forces for finding truth in the world which compromised centralized religious power.\(^{10}\)

Take for example, Voltaire, who was a French playwright, philosopher, essayist, novelist, and, amateur scientist. From 1726 for 1729 he traveled bath and forth between England and France, which had a heavy influence on his later work. He soon became a fan of the British position on religious tolerance, championed Bacon’s empiricism, and Locke’s fundamental ideas on individualism and liberal democracy. These became the core building blocks of the French Enlightenment and were carried on through the writings of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Diderot. The men of the Enlightenment believed that man could improve himself through knowledge and intellectual study, which have now become the basis of modernity.\(^{11}\)

Because Ste Genevieve was built not too long after the French Revolution, the library could support the idea of “self improvement” for even the working class. The social system had been restructured, ridding itself of aristocratic authority, which made it possible for the working class to learn and become educated in order to improve their economic and social status. Labrouste’s design for the Bibliotheque Ste Genevieve responded to the ideas from the Enlightenment, even


though it was built long after. As a result, Ste. Genevieve branched away from the typical library designs of its immediate past and was much more reflective of its time. It pushed the concept and mission of the public library and is considered to be one of the first modern libraries in the world.

The materials used in Ste Genevieve are unlike many of the other buildings from its time. Labrouste wanted to use this project as an opportunity to explore new technologies and new building methods. The first floor is mainly comprised of a long and large reading room upheld by iron columns. Having such a large space represents the shift in use. Originally the building had been intended for a handful of elite class users, but as the working class began to utilize the library it needed to vastly expands. Using exposed iron allowed for a two-story space with two long barrel vaults and lots of openings along the exterior walls. The walls are able to be more transparent, and so clerestory windows line along top of the bookshelves, creating even lighting throughout the day. The use of iron as the primary structure was not common for a library of this time. Iron was considered to be lower grade material and so Ste Genevieve was the first monumental public building to employ the exposed iron structural system. It symbolizes a shift from the library being an elitist space to a space that is forward thinking, more reflective of the time, and more accessible. 10

Ste Genevieve uses her exterior as a model for advertisement and equality. The names of scholarly thinkers and authors are inscribed onto the stones, as if the stones themselves were rows of orderly lined books. It directly tells us what type of institution and advertises the large collection inside. The façade promotes equality and order. All of the great names are engraved in the same size text and no one name has precedence over another. Even the categorizations of the different subjects are written with equality. The science of God is equal with all of the other subjects making it a study among many. 11

---

The public library has faced many trials and tribulations throughout antiquity. Politics, economy, technology has all sent the institution on a roller coaster. The whole time there have been great examples how libraries have appropriately adapted to their time and pushed the meaning of the institution such as Alexandria and Ste Genevieve. We can see that even as far back as ancient Greece and Rome, many libraries have always stood as a symbol of the public and served as not only places to learn but social spaces. In cases such as Ste Genevieve it is evident that libraries have also noticed the need to adapt to changes in technology while still being accessible and relatable to its patrons. All of this history leads up the public library systems in America.

THE LIBRARY COMES TO AMERICA:

The most significant single library in American history is the Library of Congress, the country’s national library. However, arguably the most noted chapter in the American Public Library’s history is not one building but an entire system. It was from 1890 to 1920 that Andrew Carnegie donated money to build hundreds of library buildings across America, specifically 1679 libraries. Most were built in Neoclassical and Revival styles, a testament to the great libraries of Europe. There were a variety of locations for Carnegie libraries and were integral to civic and social life for many Americans during their height. These libraries made a pathway to the library as we know it today:
The Carnegie public library program, which never had a formal name, constructed buildings in large cities, such as New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Saint Louis and Detroit, with the majority, about 70 percent, built for under $20,000 in small towns with populations of ten thousand or less. In all of these communities, Carnegie libraries played a formative role in education, as well as civic politics, finance, and artistic and social developments. Many American women cast their first ballot on the issue of whether their communities should accept a Carnegie library building—years before the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 gave them equal voting rights. Carnegie’s grant stipulations fostered the now-unquestioned concept that it is a governmental duty to provide tax monies to support public libraries, as well as other major public works projects.10

Understand the Carnegie Libraries from 1890 to 1920 reveal so much about the social struggles in America’s history. Take for example the social stratification of women in society, as mentioned above by Jones. These social breakthroughs in voting on Carnegie libraries were huge having just come from the Victorian Era. It is interesting to see a change in ideals and social construct through simple changes in spatial adjacencies. For example, the Winn Memorial Public Library in Woburn Massachusetts, by architect Henry Hobson Richardson, was deeply rooted in the library’s tie to medieval monasteries and the gender roles of the Victorian Era. Richardson organized the building’s plan much like a medieval cathedral. Along the buildings long, main axis was the book hall, picture gallery and museum. These double-height, monumental spaces reveals the importance and hierarchy of the books and cultural artifacts themselves. The reading rooms play a secondary role and are small and homey in comparison.10 The domestic scale and coziness was to relate to the Victorian ideal of home, working in tandem with the current cultural assumptions.

---


---

Even some of the earlier Carnegie library buildings plans showed the social inequality of the time, such as the Carnegie Library in Allegheny City (now Pittsburgh), Pennsylvania:

*The main reading room, ending with an octagonal bay, was south of the delivery room and on axis with it and with the bibliographic room. East of the reading room was the much smaller ladies’ reading room, from which opened the ladies’ toilet. East of the delivery room were the men’s toilet and librarian’s office. Since both the library commission and the architects assumed that librarianship would remain a male profession, these two rooms communicated directly with one another, as well as with the delivery room.*

Having separated rooms for Women to read, the architecture and scale of their rooms, and the spatial adjacencies (or lack thereof) to rooms used by librarians is a clear indicator to the role of women in society. It also shows gender roles in the workplace and education during the late 19th century.

Yet just a couple decades later, the role of women as library patrons and librarians would erupt, which again can be seen through the institution’s architecture and funding. It was actually the library program itself that had an impact on the field of librarianship.

Carnegie’s philanthropic ideals facilitated the entry of women working in libraries. As the funding and number of libraries increase, so did the demand for a qualified staff. In an attempt to reduce the ‘excessive’ architectural expression of the spaces in libraries, funding was distributed in smaller appropriations. Thus, it resulted in smaller funds for maintenance and staffing. Under these circumstances, library boards were more likely to hire a female for lower pay. This is just one instance where the development of the public library reflects and also has influence over very large social and cultural issues. The library building must always rethink its design and program in order to best adapt to the culture in which it is built and provide for the future.

The very end of the nineteenth century was critical for library buildings in small town America. After the federal census declared the frontier closed, there was a focus on developing existing towns west of Appalachia, not building new towns. Building libraries was one way that small towns could be to provide amenities similar to bigger cities. Seen as outmoded by the city dwellers, the small towns were proud of their new range of governmental and cultural

---


institutions popping up. Much of this excitement was due to the placement of Carnegie libraries across America.

To the small towns across America considered their libraries to be more than just a space to hold books. They were not only cultural institutions but social institutions: “they not only store and organize human knowledge, they mediate and shape human interaction as well”. Sometimes these two functions butt heads and so the Carnegie’s ideal plan sought to be efficient in their handling of books, but also even out the social experience of the library in small town life. As a compromise Carnegie libraries across America actually vary significantly, despite their similar classical facades. What is amazing is out of the 1679 libraries built 86% of them are still standing with 78% still being used. While it is great that this great era still holds a presence today, Carnegie libraries to not reflect the needs of contemporary society and have had a hard time adapting. Many contemporary designers recognize the need for change, so we are starting to see new directions in library design.

Arguably the most significant and talked about library within the last ten years is the Seattle Public library by Rem Koolhaas and OMA/LMN. Built in 2004, it is an example of new directions for libraries in America:

*OMA’s ambition is to redefine the library as an institution no longer exclusively dedicated to the book, but rather as an information store where all potent forms of media – new and old – are presented equally and legibly. In an age in which information can be accessed anywhere, it is the simultaneity of media and (more importantly) the curatorship of its contents that will make the library vital.*

Koolhaas recognizes libraries are under threat from a “shrinking public realm” and the digitization of media. His solution is to create civic space for the presence of a variety of media. He reorganizes the system to accommodate for a growing physical collection and the library’s various programs are arranged across five planes, which help dictate the distinct façade. The façade itself clearly proclaims itself as different from the traditional classical facades that we often associate

---


www oma.nl
with public libraries. It is a shining billboard of change. The unusual shape helps give the library a new face and a new identity, one that is shaped from changes in technology and civic integration. The use of glass and transparencies offers the user a sense of what is inside making it a very democratic space and accessible to the public.¹⁰

We can see new ways of creating social spaces and librarian-patron interaction. Libraries like the Seattle Public Library have started to break from the mould and are more appropriately defining libraries for contemporary culture, but there is still a long road ahead.

Even a library as innovative as Seattle still has flaws in addressing contemporary issues, which will be discussed further in chapter two.

¹⁰ Kubo, Michael, and Ramon Prat. Seattle Public Library. OMA. Barcelona: BActar, 2005
THE DECLINING LIBRARY:

The American public library is on the brink of death, as libraries across the nation are reducing their hours and sometimes shutting down altogether. This chapter explores three major reasons for why the library is dying as a cultural institution. They are: the effects of the digital age on the public library, funding crises specifically for Ohio’s public libraries, and other institutions taking over as destinations. First, the library’s special characteristic as a storehouse of knowledge is no longer unique due to technological advancements in gathering information. Next, the physical evidence of libraries struggling is already present when it comes to money issues. Libraries across the nation are also having a hard time securing funding from the government, many of them shutting down completely, which will be explained in more detail later in the chapter. Lastly, while the library’s funding diminishes, other institutions such as corporate bookstores, shopping malls, and markets are becoming the big destinations in everyday American life for accessing information and acting as places for community engagement. These issues are all taking away from the prominence and relevance of libraries in American daily life.
PROBLEM ONE: EFFECTS OF THE DIGITAL AGE:

It’s hardest for existing libraries:

Feeling connected to others and having a constant access to information has become important to modern society, forcing libraries to face new problems regarding the libraries integration into the digital age. This challenges libraries to provide entirely new technological functions and rethink its program. Libraries today have recognized these new implications and have attempted to provide new resources and have helped us stay connected digitally. Yet, this has only succeeded, at the most, marginally in the best cases. Many of the older libraries, specifically Carnegie Libraries, constructed during the 20th century are having a very hard time adapting properly. Elements like internet terminals and providing power outlets for laptops often results in new spaces that feel cramped, out of place, and are usually lacking in general. Having to retrofit the older library buildings has been a challenge when trying to update them into the digital age, these are features that the system is slowly working to integrate and some newer branches have implemented them, yet when looking at the system as a whole the technology systems are woefully outdated and poorly executed. Existing libraries are struggling at best, which has caused much controversy when designing new libraries. There has been a lot of debate and conflict on the new direction of modern library’s reaction to the digital age.
It’s all technology based for some:

While the library could still be important in modern society, presently it is not adhering well to the new nuances of technology in this digital age. Even libraries built in the past couple decades are starting to lose its identity and having a hard time fitting in physically with digital information technologies like the computer and the Internet. In 1996 a study prepared by the Benton Foundation remarked:

*Library leaders are struggling to find a place in the digital age for the physical building most Americans traditionally associate with the library. Most library leaders say without hesitation that libraries constitute a physical space that holds collections. Libraries are also a space for learning and reflection- a public space that brings together diverse populations into one community to learn, gather information, and reflect.*

Even over a decade ago questions were being raised about the use of a physical space that we presently call a library. Since then the reliance on new technologies has only increased at a significant rate. This makes the concern over information technologies affecting the importance of libraries a forefront when discussing the present state of library use. The study by the Benton Foundation went on further to say that a radical change must take place in order to better react to the digital age. It was suggested to rid entirely the physical space that the library currently provides: “...libraries need to evolve into entirely new organizational forms that take into account the digital library-without walls and that acknowledge that information today can be gathered, disseminated, and created at anytime in any place”

It is important to understand that this is just one of many opinions on how to deal with the public library’s relationship to the digital age. Its physicality is certainly threatened but others still see the role of the library place in a digital world. Library design in the past decade has been very sensitive to this issue, but no concrete solution has been resolved.

This school of thought is not being ignored by Cushing Academy’s library in Ashburnham Massachusetts. Cushing Academy, an elite boarding school, made national news when they became key story on the program “All Things Considered”, a popular program


on NPR (National Public Radio). In the year 2008 the cumulative audience for the average NPR program is about 20.9 million people, making the story all the more a headlining issue in American society.\textsuperscript{10}

The large and costly renovation of Cushing’s Library did not involve improving the stacks, in fact; they rid the library of stacks all together. The NPR article describes the transformation of the traditional library program being transformed into a social gathering place, immersed with new technology, and finds it to be a success amongst most students:

\textit{There’s a new café where the circulation desk used to be. Where bookshelves once stood, students now sit in easy chairs, studying or watching one of the three new flat-screen TVs. It’s all part of what have been two substantial recent changes at Cushing’s library. The first is removing most of the stacks. And the second is transforming the place into a hub of activity, to give what’s now a largely virtual library a physical home and gathering space. Sophomore Elise Eastman says she’s her all the time now. ‘I barely ever went’}\textsuperscript{11}

The aim of the new Cushing’s library is to help familiarize the students with the new and emerging technologies and provide a more comfortable atmosphere for students to gather and learn. While this has generally been well received by the students and staff of Cushing Academy, there were a few exceptions. Yet, it is mostly from the general public, including American Library Association president Camila Alire, we hear voices of concern. While they have no problem with introducing technology, many think that Cushing Academy went overboard in diminishing the existing stacks. But in terms of actual users, on a whole, the young students who primarily use the library find it a popular place to frequent.\textsuperscript{10}

Others refuse to give up books

Information technologies in this digital age have caused many of the traditional library’s programmed spaces to become obsolete. Yet, today, many library designers are overcompensating by many people’s standards. The argument over books being the primary purveyor of information in the future has been a hot debate when talking about space for storing information in the library’s future. The San Francisco Public Library, which opened in 1996 and designed by James Ingo Freed of Pei Cobb Freed, is a prime example of a library design that is too zealous in ushering in the digital age. The library is organized around a circular, central atrium topped with a large

\textsuperscript{10} www.npr.org
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid
In this new design books were the focal point, but only on the upper stairs. The lower level was devoted to more popular and high traffic functions and clearly the space with the most grandeur. This, however, breaks up the floors above into unequal parts, complicates circulation, and provides no visual tie with the stacks. Light wells are placed throughout the building, which fragments the stacks even more. This also caused a split between patrons who are working in the stacks and the area with the service desks and work surfaces. The organization of the stacks and working spaces took a back seat when designing the layout and circulation of the San Francisco Library, according to the architect.\textsuperscript{10}

In addition to not giving stacks any sort of importance or clarity in the design, the stacks themselves were way undersized which caused a lot of controversy. By increasing the square feet of the library by 400\%, it was just assumed that everything would fit, not taking into account how much the San Francisco Library’s book collection had grown. It was mostly just bad planning; many of the materials were stored in off-site storage locations and one year prior the library had agreed to accept all of the archival materials from city hall when it closed for seismic retrofitting. Many times throughout construction the stack spaces were reduced. For instance, it was discovered that many of the spaces for the HVAC systems were undersized, so it the shelving units became five high instead of the intended seven high.\textsuperscript{11}

Walking into the library and not seeing any books, but a grand space for only public interaction and digital technologies sent a strong message to its employees and patrons. Giving a lower priority to books and not adequately giving them space caused quite the

\textsuperscript{10} Mattern, Shannon Christine. The New Downtown Library: Designing with Communities. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007 p. 89-95

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid p. 98-99
controversy. There was great symbolism in this, which upset many people:

...some of the staff and public were concerned that they had just bought into a building dedicated to the phasing out of the book, a building that reflected the vision that Dowlin laid out in this 1984 book The Electronic Library. The distinction he drew between the Old Main and the new library is telling: ‘The old main library was designed to function as a book warehouse with some space for readers. The new main was designed to function in the communication age.’ Dowlin seemed to regard books as anachronistic in this age of communication media. The staff became convinced that those books that did not fit on the shelves were simply jettisoned.10

There was uproar when people suspected that the extraneous books were being disposed. The librarians’ union became quickly involved and brought in writer Nicholson Baker, who wrote for The New Yorker, to give national press to the issue. The fear of technology overpowering the book, or wasting space for grand public spaces has seeped into many recent library design processes. Even today there are an abundance of book carts parked along the walls reading “No room to shelve” The issues surrounding the digital age have resulted many problems for the public library, no matter what approach is taken.11


11 Ibid p. 102
Digital technology and the book seem to be in a constant battle to many. Some see technology digitizing the physical library altogether, but some become outraged when the stacks lose important even when it is just symbolically. It is harder for the library to cope, because unlike the elite private boarding school in Massachusetts, public libraries in general have a much more diverse user group to serve. This makes the issues surrounding technology versus books a delicate balancing act, which has not been achieved just yet.

PROBLEM TWO: FUNDING CRISIS FOR OHIO’S LIBRARIES

As discussed in chapter one, we can begin to see the great impact of Carnegie libraries and the current reaction towards their design. We can also see great economic impact that Andrew Carnegie had on the library system. While Andrew Carnegie donated millions of dollars to build libraries across America, he was also responsible for forcing the government to take on the role of funding and maintain the libraries. This has remained constant even today. While some libraries receive small amounts of funding through other means such as wealthy patrons donating to a library from time to time, most public libraries in America are intrinsically tied to the government in order to remain in business.

Strickland’s original plan

Having the library directly tied to the government for its existence in terms of funding has recently become problematic. Ohio’s financial situation is a prime example of how the library’s life is threatened due to economic hardships. At a news conference on Friday, June 19 2008, Governor Ted Strickland proposed a cut to state funding for public libraries of $227.3 million throughout 2010 and 2011 as part of his plan to fill the $3.2 billion deficit in the budget that must be balanced by the Ohio General Assembly’s Conference Committee by June 30.

The proposal amounts to a 30% cut in funding for Ohio’s public libraries. This cut is in addition to the 20% reduction in funding that libraries are already facing, because their funding comes from 2.22% of the state’s declining General Revenue Fund.10

10 www.olc.org
The current (implemented) plan

The plan that actually passed on July 17, 2009 was not as harsh, but still profound. It reduced Ohio’s Public Library Fund (PLF) from 2.22% to 1.97% of the tax collections included in the State’s General Revenue Fund. Since tax revenues are dependent upon the state of the economy, it is impossible to accurately predict what dollar impact the reduction will have on library funding. However, the bill estimated that this temporary law change will cost the PLF an additional loss of $84.3 million over the next two years. This has forced many libraries to lay off over 20% of their staff since 2001, cut back on services, and reduced hours significantly. Some libraries are in jeopardy of closing down all together because the government is, for the most part, the sole source for funding.10

Due to the economic hard times, Ohio’s libraries are experiencing an increase in patrons and an increase in demand for services, thus worsening the need for funding. More and more people are using the library as a primary source for information and recreation: “We’re seeing huge growth in all of our services. In these hard times, more and more people are turning to the Library for

10 www.cincinnatilibrary.org
books to read, homework assistance, help in finding a job, computer access, programs on how to deal with bankruptcy and foreclosures, and programs on early literacy for their small children”. This puts an even great financial strain on the library, but the backing is not there anymore. If the library does not turn to other means and methods for sustaining itself monetarily, then libraries across the nation will inevitably cease to exist.

The citizens of Ohio have been very vocal about the subject of funding libraries, which helped convince the state legislature to try and preserve as much funding as possible by rejecting the original 227.3M cut down to the now implemented 84.3M. Mass e-mails, phone calls, and protests at the statehouse show that the public is still passionate about keeping the library as a staple institution within our communities. However, the numbers are always subject to change, despite public influence, depending on state of Ohio’s deficit. Having the library tied solely to the government is leaving the institution inadequately funded and its future in jeopardy.

PROBLEM THREE
OTHER INSTITUTIONS TAKE OVER AS INFORMATION/SOCIAL DESTINATIONS

With the library not adapting properly to modern society, people are now going looking to other institutions as major places within their daily life. We now associate places such as marketplaces, the mall, and corporate bookstores (i.e. Barnes & Noble’s, Borders, etc) as the destinations spots in our everyday lives. One prime example of an institution that has properly adapted to modern society, taking away library patrons, is the corporate bookstore specifically Barnes and Noble. Barnes and Noble has marketed itself well in the past decade along with consistently evolving the program and layout in order to better fit within today’s society.

Barnes and Noble takes over:

Barnes & Noble got its start in 1873 in Wheaton, Illinois when Charles Barnes opened a book-printing business. In 1917 the first true bookstore was set up by his son, William, in New York City along with his business partner, G. Clifford Noble. The original bookstore Barnes and Noble was at 31 West 15th St., and opened during World War
I. In 1932, at the height of the Great Depression, the bookstore was moved to its current flagship location on 18th Street & Fifth Avenue. Leonard Riggio bought the company in 1971 and transformed Barnes and Noble into a university bookstore and soon became the most popular place for students to purchase books in all of Manhattan.10

But, Barnes and Noble did not stop with its respectable success as a university bookstore. Its real success as a company has come through by expanding their client base. Barnes as Noble now has a wider foundation of patrons and is seen as an icon in the retail world. This was a very purposeful move when Barnes and Noble became the very first bookseller to advertise itself on television with the first commercial airing in 1974. The “Of Course! Of Course!” commercials from the 70’s won awards and were so memorable that customers still recall them to this very day. Much of Barnes and Noble success can be attributed to its decision to link itself to mass media and coining a popular phrase for people to relate to the Barnes and Noble store.11

As the company started to grow more and more, Barnes and Noble had the money and resources to rethink the size and location of their stores. The company began to grow in the east coast markets by opening smaller discount bookstores. In addition, it acquired two local chains, BookMasters and Marboro Books, which were converted to Barnes & Noble discount stores. Although these stores were fairly successful from the start, they were phased out in favor of building larger-format book superstores. Soon Barnes and Noble started to experiment with store versions similar to the original store in New York City, but a suburban superstore format in locations areas with well established retail. In 1987, the company made its largest acquisition when it purchased B. Dalton Bookseller from Dayton Hudson. The Barnes and Noble Company still use the B. Dalton name and many of those stores can be found within suburban shopping malls. Barnes and Noble started to put its stores in large destination points within suburban area, making them much more assessable and gave them a lot more exposure in general.10

The experience associated with Barnes and Noble is quite

---

10 www.barnesandnoble.com
11 Ibid
10 www.barnesandnoble.com
unlike the stereotypical “hushed, quiet library”, but it draws in users from all over and promotes them to read linger, much like the aims of a library. Much of this success can be attributed to introducing cafes and reading areas for its patrons. Cafes serving Starbucks beverages started back in 1993. Now it is possible to pick up a book, bring it to the café, read, and engage with other patrons, while bringing beverages into reading areas is something the library has historically frowned upon. Technology has also crept its way into Barnes and Noble. In 2004 select cafes started offering wireless internet. By 2006 all cafes in Barnes and Noble provided wireless internet, but at a price. In July of 2009 this changed: “On Monday, the bookseller with 777 stores across the country quietly switched to a no-cost, unlimited Wi-Fi service for customers. Previously, the chain charged about $4 for two hours of access”.¹⁰ Even in these economic hard times Barnes and Noble made Forbes “The 400 Best Big Companies” list for the second year in a row.¹¹ And is the largest book retailer in the United States, while the library struggles to keep its staff and barely stay afloat.¹²

The library needs to rethink its place in society and make some drastic changes to its image. Because the library is a public institution it has to serve a very diverse group of patrons. This makes the issue on how to integrate the library in the digital age along with funding the library in these hard economic times. Thus far, the library has not been addressing these issues and patrons are now considering other institutions more important in their daily lives. If the library continues on its current path, the typology as we know it will become extinct.

Yet, it is important that we uphold this institution. The public library has and still has the potential to be a positive force in our daily lives. Some of the library’s mission and function should remain the same, but the library needs to rethink its cultural relevancy and find a way to fit socially and economically into modern society.

Lessons Learned from Barnes and Noble

Building typologies should evolve over time, and the library should start to look at other more successful institutions as a model. Not only that, but it should directly integrate itself with institutions that understand popular culture. Understanding how the library can mesh its old notion of providing information and being a public, social

¹⁰ www.LAtimes.com  
¹¹ www.forbes.com  
¹² www.barnesandnoble.com
space along with pop culture and modern institutions that work well economically and socially will be the aim of the rest of the chapters.

ELEMENTS TO KEEP TRUE:

The library institution has a long and rich history, which is a beneficial asset when experimenting with adding new elements and rethinking its organization. The library has been seen as a compassionate and trustworthy space, therefore there is some built in credibility and value to the institution as a whole. Thomas Augst in his book Libraries as Agencies of Culture wrote:

*The library has represented not merely a collection of books gathered for some purpose, but also arguments about the location, form and power of knowledge in particular social and historical contexts. As a symbolic space, a type of collection, a kind of building, the library gives institutional form to our collective memory.*

It is important that we keep a physical space that we know as a library even in our modern world. It is with the physical spaces that we derive our memory and emotions of the institution, a memory of a

---

place where people gather and access information. These memories and trust in the public library should be used as leverage in its reorganization for contemporary times, which is essential if the library wishes to continue its legacy.

If the library needs to take such radical changes in adding something complete new in order for the library to survive, but why even bother to save the institution? What aspects of the library should be persevered in the future? It is critical that we keep a public space for people to gather as well as providing a space where people can access information and learn. Throughout history information has always been a symbol of power and importance. Even the book itself and the technology used to produce the information have, over time, become symbols of empowerment for the individual and societies as a whole.

Therefore, it is critical that there is an institution that can provide information in a democratic fashion to all of its patrons. As a developed and intellectual nation of individuals we need to provide all citizens with the basic amenities to gather information and learn.

Although even the United States has seen low points of this in its history, the library needs to enforce that information should be democratic and free to all, even in our modern society. The library also acts as a social hub for its community. As a public institution it should value the diversity of its community. It should provide a venue for its patrons to mix and coexist ranging from a wide variety of ages and cultures. It is important that we save the library, because many of its historical values and missions could still be applied in a contemporary setting.

Information’s Power in the Modern Era: Hiding Knowledge

Information is still a powerful weapon today. Because it is so empowering to those who access information, many times the government in control of the libraries do not flaunt the information, but rather they hide it from their patrons. Socialist and Fascists governments are the forerunners when it comes to controlling what information is seen by its citizens. One of the most notable in history is Nazi Germany. While over six million Jews were murdered during
the Holocaust, over one hundred million books were destroyed by
the Nazis over a period of just twelve years. “Historians of the book
all share the same working premise that, in literate societies, script
and print are the primary means of preserving memory, disseminating
information, inculcating ideologies, distributing wealth, and exercising
power”. Understanding how a civilization’s body of knowledge was
saved, used, and destroyed can help us understand how their past
worked.

It is important to remember how the power of knowledge has
been manipulated through history. For Nazi Germany, the book has
always been the foundation of Jewish culture, Jewish religion, and
Jewish survival. The book is essential to survival and identity. As a
result the Nazi party went on a book burning spree and made it illegal
to own certain pieces of literature. History was literally re-written
and entire races and events were eliminated from history text books.
The infamous May 10th, 1933 mass public book burning made the
newly created but unofficial blacklists of authors, ideas, and books
much more known throughout Germany and across the world. Yet, a
list had already been published when the National Socialists came to

power one year prior. The symbolic act of burning knowledge made
worldwide news and sent an ominous message of what was yet to
come.

The strict control over all the books published in the country
allowed the government to determine what books should be read
by its citizens and remove or censor any piece of literature they may
find unsuitable. Unlike the barbarian act of burning books, book
censorship has always been a complex business. In Nazi Germany
it was confusing process even for the totalitarian conformity. The
censors themselves were frequently confused on what books should
be banned and what their exact criteria was. The process was
muddled and improvised and difficult to enforce. Storm troopers
were usually not supplied with lists of illegal books, and in the process
many of the books burned weren’t even on the list. Controlling
books gave totalitarian government of Nazi Germany instilled fear
and established great power over their people. This gives strength
to the argument for using the public library as an integral part of the
democratic process for the United States. The rise of ideologies such
as Fascism and Communism actually helped shape the role of the

---

10 Rose, Johnathan. *The Holocaust and the Book: Deconstruction*. University of
Massachusetts Press, 2001
library as a “guardian of the people’s right to know”\textsuperscript{10}, making it a moral and political move to uphold the library as an accessible space of information. As a free and democratic nation the United States, by fundamental principles that the nation was founded upon, the library should encourage free speech and free information through the press by having spaces that are available to everyone for learning and accessing knowledge.

We should uphold the democracy of information because even the United States sometimes loses sight of this mission to promote information as something equal to all people. In 2003, during the United States invasion of Iraq, the Iraq National Library was looted and burnt to the ground. Only 10\% of its literature and 40\% of its archives survived the brutal attack. Although the United States stands for the democracy of information, Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense for the United States, seemed apathetic. His response to the situation was that “freedom’s unity” and that looting, he added, was not uncommon for countries that experience great social change “stuff happens” Rumsfeld said. The Library of Congress offered to help rebuild the Iraq National Library, but when the library renovations starting taking place in 2005, the Library of Congress had yet to contribute a significant amount of help and it is often difficult to uphold the democracy of information and creating space for the public to access freely. Even as the library as an institution and starts to behave more like other institutions that have better adapted to contemporary culture, it is essential that the library still acknowledges that information should be accessible to everyone and still a major part in our democratic process.\textsuperscript{10}

Public Space is social space

The library’s social role as a knowledge bank of information makes in by default a social space for people to interact as well. For the most part, the history of libraries has depicted an image of a storehouse for books; it has always been the library’s main objective to provide information to its patrons. Yet, if the library wishes to reclaim itself


as a destination point in American life, it needs to respond to the fact that the library is also a social space for people to gather. Because of its nature, it is capable of appealing to a very wide and diverse group of patrons. The library must take advantage of this potential to facilitate a community presence and provide an opportunity to strengthen social ties. Modern libraries are acknowledging this potential by creating spaces for public gathering, community events, and more comfortable reading spaces. Much of this model has been lead by the Seattle Public Library by Rem Koolhaas and coined the term “urban living room”.

The Seattle Public Library is probably the most popular library in terms of new programming and advancing the role of the public library in American culture.

*The library - especially the North American public lending library- is a particularly populist building type, uniquely serving all classes, all ages, and all education levels. The Seattle building fulfils its library functions admirably, but it is trailblazing for its take on public space, and through this, the idea of public architecture... Its levels provide niches for scholars, corporate researchers, bibliomaniacs, teendaters and even homeless seeking refuge from the rain...In terms of architecture not sculpture, libraries are more interesting than galleries, not only because of the broader range of people who use...*
them, but because they are places of work. And as mental work is what most of us do these days, we hanker after public spaces to enrich the task.10

These new “urban living rooms” as libraries are utilizing the fact that libraries are public spaces that can possibly be relevant to a multitude of people ranging from a wide variety of ages and cultures. These new trends also recognize the library as a place to linger; they are trying to make the library more of a destination point rather than just a storehouse of books.

While the Seattle Public Library is making the right steps towards a more culturally relevant place for modern society to frequent, the changes are not drastic enough to escape the same fate that traditional libraries around it are faced with. From August 31st through September 6th, 2009, the Seattle Public library and all of the branch libraries in Seattle shut down due to citywide budget cuts. Seattle had to close a 43M gap in the 2009 budget. Since 2% of the budget was allotted towards the public library system over 1M had to be cut from the libraries alone. By shutting down the system for that one week it was estimated that about $655,000 would be saved from salary reductions, as employees were not paid for that week.10

In order for the library to survive it needs to be socially relevant to people’s lives and work within the modern economy at the same time. It needs to appropriately advertise itself, integrate itself with prosperous institutions, and become relevant and viable to people in modern society.

10 www.architecturalrecord.com
CHAPTER THREE:

DEFINING POP CULTURE:

If the library wishes to survive as a staple institution if everyday American life, it must become culturally relevant to people’s lives and be responsive to the present day. The aim of this chapter is to understand the theory and methodology behind popular culture and its influence on American culture. Knowing how pop culture is defined in the United States by examining the mass media and the visual arts starting with the Postmodern Era of the 1960’s to the present day gives insight to how pop culture might translate relevantly into a architecture.
The term “pop culture” broad and carries many interpretations. It is important that “pop culture” is properly identified for reference within the remainder of the thesis. Ray B. Browne gives a good, overall description for America’s definition of pop culture:

By the term ‘popular culture’ we generally mean all aspects of the world we inhabit: the way of life we inherit, practice and pass on to our decadents; what we do while we are awake, the dreams we dream while asleep. It is the everyday world around us: the mass media, entertainments, diversions, heroes, icons, rituals, psychology, religion—our total life picture. Although it need not necessarily be, it is generally disseminated by the mass media...most important, the popular culture of a country is the voice of the people.

Pop culture refers to the content that the masses interact with on a regular basis. That means that products and services that are included under the umbrella of pop culture are appealing to a variety of people and are widely and easily distributed and consumed. This concept is parallel to that of the public library; it should be accessible to a diverse group of people and it strives to be an everyday destination to people’s lives.

---

When looking at art and culture that is considered “pop” understand that most all culture and art in the west is categorized in two groups “high” and “low” culture. There is a distinction between craft, fine art, industrial design, and mass media. The later two listed are generally considered pop art or pop culture. “High art” refers to the modern system of the arts grouped as: painting, sculpture, poetry, architecture, and music established around the 18th century. The term implies great skill, superiority, perfection, and beautiful mastery. Despite a historical legacy, there is nothing essential to these arts, and their materials, that make them “fine” or superior to any other form of art:

*This point is confirmed by the fact that many contemporary fine artists utilize the new technologies of photography, film, and video. It is not the technology in itself which produces the distinctions between fine art, craft and mass culture, but rather the way in which materials and tools are habitually used (the different formal conventions), and the social institutions within which works are produced, distributed, consumed, and categorized. Even the concept of art itself can be regarded as a social institution.*

Really the difference between high and low art is a matter of subjective, historical opinion. This difference has often been categorized as the distinction between the non-utilitarian and the utilitarian, again making the perception an availability and social issue. High art is constantly concerned with aesthetic value and nothing else, yet this point become debatable when talking about architecture, which is considered to be one of the five fine arts. It must be functional in addition to having an aesthetic value, but this same case could be said about the other four fine arts.

Our perception as high art being only worried about aesthetics comes a lot from our contemporary galleries and museums where the art is taken out of its religious or secular contexts in which they used to fulfill a social function. The socially unimportant situation of fine art does have a positive side in the degree of independence and freedom it gives to the artist. It is not constrained by having to obey the directives of any commercial establishment, unlike a graphic designer for example. The downside is that the fine art does not have the resources or the audience of low art/mass media. High culture, the fine arts, is normally seen as the exact opposite of mass culture, hence the term “minority culture” Although the word “minority” can

---

apply to any small group that is not the majority within a culture, in this instance it refers to the privileged elite and the educated. Mass media is catered for the majority of society.\textsuperscript{10}

Mass media insinuates a system of communication and delivery where there is a mediator between a small group of cultural producers and a very large number of cultural consumers. Some of the most important mass media are: cinema, radio, photography, television, home video, the press, comics, advertising, magazines, compact discs, and DVDs. As technology advances new mediums are constantly being added to the list. That, and many of the medias on the list often overlap each other. Because mass media is distributed to such a wide audience, it relies on machines and technology to facilitate this process. Many historians say the invention of the printing press started the age of mass media, but most attributes the beginning of mass media to technologies from the 20th century:

\textit{Practicality would suggest a somewhat ostensive definition: mass culture consists of cultural elements traditionally not included in high culture, and transmitted by the printed press, the electronic media or by other forms of mass communication.}\textsuperscript{11}


\textsuperscript{11} Brown, Ray B. and Sam Grogg and Larry Landrum. Theories & Methodologies in Popular Culture, Indiana University Popular Press, 1975 p. 441
Machines enable communication from the designer to the audience but also stand in between the two parties. This is another difference between fine art and mass media. The direct contact typical of much folk and even popular culture is lost in mass culture. There are some redeeming factors though, mass production and technology has democratized our culture. The bad news is that it has forced large groups of people to become mere consumers of culture produced by a small group of others.

The terms “mass media” and “mass culture” does not actually represent one single audience. Marketing and advertising companies recognize that the general masses are not a homogenous group, but are actually very stratified by things like income levels and social status. Mass media products are always targeted towards a piece of the total group, although “in spite of these necessary qualifications the term ‘mass’ is a useful one simply in the sense of the scale which it implies”. Mass media dominates the human consciousness in American culture. Unless extremely isolated, the culture of mass media influences everyone. This power is not without some concern:

Many intellectuals, especially those employed in education, are highly critical of the mass media for a number of reasons: the mass media, it is argued, reproduce dominate ideology and are thus a conservative or counter-revolutionary force; they encourage passivity and apathy; power is concentrated in the hands of a few people who are motivated by self interest, private profit and/or social control; the culture associated with the mass media tends to be of low quality, bland, escapist, standardized, stereotyped, conformist and trivial. In short, mass culture is seen as an ‘opium of the people’, a means by which the laboring classes are manipulated and diverted in their leisure hours in preparation for their daily work in factories and offices, or as compensation for unemployment.\(^\text{10}\)

Walker’s statement does hold an element to truth, but this argument is one-sided and too simplistic. For example, not all products of mass media are low quality in terms of artistic merit. Many of the products of mass media often explore the conflicts and issues in our society.

Fundamental to understanding the architecture of pop culture is the 1972 book, *Learning from Las Vegas* by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. It calls for architecture to be more accommodating to the “common” people. It should consider their interests and needs instead of being egocentric monuments. The authors argue that although architecture is considered one of the

---

“high arts” it should respond to the lives of people, something that they believe the modernist movement does not address. One of their main criticisms of the modernist movement is the abandonment of iconology in which art forms like painting, sculpture, and graphics were fused with architecture.

The integration of the arts in the Modern architecture has always been called a good thing. But one did not paint on Mies. Painted joints; sculpture was in or near but seldom on the building. Objects of art were used to reinforce architectural space at the expense of their own content.  

We can see this idea explored further with Las Vegas’s Guild House and Crawford Manor. The first has what is seen as an ordinary, somewhat ugly, sign ornamenting a rather plain building. The Crawford Manor has small, non-commercial looking sign and a heroic

---

façade. Buildings with sings and symbols, like the sign on the Guild House, provide a direct and denotative meaning in its simple words. It is the opposite of architectural expression of the building which evokes a more connotative expression.¹⁰ Venturi further explains the difference:

the sign saying GUILD HOUSE denotes meaning through its words; such as, it is the heraldic element par excellence. The character of the graphics, however, connotes institutional dignity, while contradictorily, the size of the graphics connotes commercialism. The position of the sign perhaps also connotes entering... Denotation indicates specific meaning; connotation suggests general meanings. The same element can have both denotive and connotative meanings, and these may be mutually contradictory... is the Guild House boring? For all its dramatic balconies, is the Crawford Manor interesting? Is it not, perhaps, the other way around?¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid p. 100-101
¹¹ Ibid p. 101
Venturi does not criticize the Crawford Manor house on a moralistic platform and he is not concerned with the building’s honesty in architecture. The problem is that the Crawford Manor is ugly and ordinary while appearing as heroic and unique. Instead of dishonesty, what Venturi disapproves is the building irrelevance to today.

With that being said, art (pop art) can also fulfill a positive, significant purpose in relation to the mass media. It calls for architecture to be more approachable towards the masses and under

Pop Art and Mass Culture

Pop art is the art world’s positive response towards mass culture and mass media. It takes on many of the forms found in high art such as paintings and sculptures produced by professional artists, but uses popular culture and materials from mass media as a means of representation of conversations and iconography:

*Pop art can be characterized as a meta-art or meta-language in that it takes as its object of scrutiny not really perceived directly, but existing representation of reality found in the realm of graphic design and mass media. The fact that Pop artists did not follow the Impressionists and work directly from Nature is an acknowledgement*

that, for modern city-dwellers, ‘Nature’ has been almost completely replaced by a human constructed world... In short, we live in a media saturated world.10 (Walker 22)

When Pop art was first emerging, many critics accused the artists of plagiarism; they did not understand the difference between Pop art and popular and mass culture. In addition, they did not understand the amount of change made by Pop artist in their transition and interpretation of popular and mass culture into their art. By examining different pieces of Pop art we can begin to see the extent and method of the Pop artist’s interpretations.

Andy Warhol

Andy Warhol used the silkscreen method to produce his paintings, and it is critical that we understand this process in order to understand his philosophy. Warhol used a photographic process and then a printing process. Just one silkscreen can create hundreds of mass produced images, but all of the copies are not identical. Variations of color and design can be created by changing the pressure of the squeegee, the use of different ink, and the way the images are placed. Warhol did this because of economy; he could

---

repeat the same image and increase production output. With this method he could do partial mechanize so that batch production could take place in his studio that he named “The Factory”. 10

Warhol was very unorthodox in this method in his the way that he industrialized the artistic production in order to create pop art. Ever since the beginning of modernism, artists and social critics have been criticizing the machine as the opposite of art and a terrible threat to the future of art. He challenged the conventional values associated with the high arts by turning his studio into a factory, championing the machine, selecting pedestrian imagery, and denying he had a specific, artistic talent.

However, Warhol’s machine process is not completely mechanized and the end products are not all identical. His work differs from industrial products through Warhol’s purposeful “mistakes” that puts in his prints. Using the printing variations already explained such as color variation, different pressures, and placement of the image creates slight differences from one piece of art to another. In an industrial setting, any mass produced object that

has an imperfection is thrown out. In Warhol's case, the “defective” pieces of art are highlighted. He realized that the paintings sold better when they had a certain level of uniqueness. We can see that Warhol is, in fact, a compromise between the industrial production and artistic process. The end result using this technique, though, results in the superficiality and flatness of its subject matter. ¹⁰

Take for example the series of screen prints and paintings of Marilyn Monroe in 1962. The original photograph was taken by Gene Kornman and was the basis of a series that Warhol simplified by taking out the detail and line work from Monroe’s face. It takes out depth and perspective and consequently the foreground and background are on the same plane. By repeating the image over and over, simplifying the image, and emphasizing Monroe’s lips, hair and eyeshadow through color schemes the subject’s former life is stripped away, resulting a superficial flatness to the artwork. We can see the Warhol values surface over the content of the image. Although, the image is diluted but some characteristics of Monroe still remain. This helps define the subject as an object. He exaggerates elements such as her eyebrows, intensifying the iconic, stereotypical qualities of the

original subject. Here a star is born and elevated to the next level by a simple process of diluted surfaces.\textsuperscript{10}

Claes Oldenburg

Claes Oldenburg takes an opposite approach in his technique for making objects into an icon. Where Warhol strips away details to expose the object’s desired identity, Oldenburg transforms the pedestrian objects. He picks very commonplace objects and obscures their domestic identity by “monumentalizing” by a process of visual free-association. Created in 1999, his piece “Typewriter Eraser, Scale X” achieves this elevation and monumentalization by changing the object’s physical placement to a sculpture park, and also changes the material and scale of the object. This forces the onlooker to rethink the attributes of the object because it is so misplaced from its normal context. Oldenburg calls the duality between everyday objects and this newly created identity “parallel realities”. Much of pop art is about making the viewer question what reality really is. It is also about rethinking the everyday icons and objects that we come across on a daily basis. Oldenburg uses this dynamic treatment,

the use of scale to be exact, in order to elevate an object otherwise overlooked by its own familiarity. We can consider the artwork to be a new way of looking that temporarily corresponds with our everyday viewpoint.10

Tom Sachs

Tom Sachs uses his art to abstract the viewer, not so much the content expressed in the artwork. His work criticizes that advertisements and media have little to do with the object and setting in which the advertisement is attached. We see logos and trademarks on the sides of cars, buildings, even government institutions and stadiums. Sachs exaggerates the placement of advertisements and media by attaching common labels and symbols to reverential settings. Sachs comments: “Fashion, like fascism, is about loss of identity”. Here the viewer sees the process of advertising in late capitalism by layering common trademark with sacred imagery. Take for example his work done in 2000 entitled “Prada Deathcamp”, is a setting of a Nazi death camp, but is branded with a large Prada logo at the very center of the model. By looking at different approaches to Pop Art we can begin to understand the basic concepts for what makes something popular and what pop culture means in late capitalist life.¹⁰

HOW PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS USE POP CULTURE: PRADA STORE, NYC

The Prada Store in New York City (SoHo) by Rem Koolhaas in 2001 is a good example of a building that reflects pop culture through its architecture. The building is 23,000 square feet and is on the corner of Broadway and Prince Street. The long rectangular shape of the building allows for one long sweeping wall that runs through the length of the entire building. Here is what Koolhaas calls the “graphic wall”. It is intended to be the element that connects the streets on either side of the building. So while the graphic while the graphic wall keeps the same size and location, the artwork and style change to reflect change over time. It runs parallel to the trends in the fashion world. The adjacent walls have minimal surface treatments, allowing for a striking hierarchy.

The shelving and displays consists of metal cages that are suspended along one of four tracks that run along the length of the building. Koolhaas refers to this display system as a “hanging city”. This city can change layout by sliding the cages along the tracks, allowing for lots of flexibility. While there is a considerable amount of flexibility, the system appears to be very uniform no matter what the
current arrangement may be. The cages can change orientation and location and the opacity of the cage can change as well. However, the general shape, size, and material used are kept constant. This allows for each cage to have some individuality and display its contents, yet visibly work within a system of displays. The material used for these cages are unfinished metal frames and wire mesh shelves and panels. The utilitarian material creates a striking contrast between the display case and the product placed in the display. Rem Koolhaas uses unlikely contrasts in materials throughout the building.
CHAPTER FOUR:

DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

Based upon research the most logical architectural solution to the library’s future is to model it off of successful, private institutions. For example, Barnes and Nobles and other profitable stores keep an open floor plan making it easy to view the products inside. It also allows for flexibility. Like Prada, the spatial arrangements can occur from a dynamic shelving system within an open space. The centerpiece of my building design is a large open atrium. The atrium is the most public space and has an open arrangement of displays that hold book stacks, CDs, DVDs, local artwork, and small retail stalls.
These companies use their storefront in order to advertise and put activities with a lot of traffic, take cafes for example, within view from the street. They incorporate branding and imagery that as a surface as a means of advertisement. We can see this concept of surface applications from the studies of pop art. Looking at the way companies like Prada showcase their goods is a simple but effective technique. Their New York store uses utilitarian metal cages suspended from the ceiling. All of the goods on these cages are part
of an overall, uniform system. Yet, the cages can rotate, move, and can be more or less opaque. My design incorporates the delineation of volumes that hold different programmatic functions, all centered around a public atrium. Like the Prada cages they are all part of one building, but it is easy to see each volume as its own separate functional space. This goes back to libraries like Ste. Genevieve where all of the knowledge stored was advertised on an even playing field, but the individual authors were advertised on their own separate store on the façade.

In order for the public library to be economically viable, the layout should not only mimic a store, but also literally include stores and other means for making money. A large residential wing will be added to my library design along with private galleries, daycare, cafes, and a bar. Location is also a key factor for private enterprise. I am relocated the Columbus library to a space that people already see as a popular destination. This idea can be traced back to Ancient Rome where libraries were added to public baths allowing, giving them much more traffic.


Kubo, Michael, and Ramon Prat. Seattle Public Library, OMA. Barcelona: BActar, 2005


Johnston, Mary, Abigail Ayres. Roman Life. Scott Foresman, 1957


