Friends of Fondren Library Research Awards Application

Applicant: Liang Wang, Graduate Year 1, Rice School of Architecture
Research Project: "Re-Forming & Re-Presenting A Public Library"
(ARCH 503 Core Design Studio, 10 Credits, Rice School of Architecture)
Instructor: Neeraj Bhatia (Visiting Wortham Fellow, Rice School of Architecture)
Rice Library Consultants: Sandi Edwards (Head of Reference Services)
  Kim Ricker (Head of GIS/Data Center)
  James Springer (Library Service Center Manager)
  Esther Crawford (Head of Government Publications and Microforms)
Major Research Sources: Brown Fine Arts Library
  Online E-Journals & Articles & Databases
  GIS/Data Center
  Government Information Section
  Library Service Center
Research Equipment/Technical Support: Digital Media Center
Re-Forming & Representing
A Public Library

“It is the library as social symbol that matters – as a center of community interaction and as a place to celebrate learning. Just as the stadium, airport and museum symbolize their respective functions and transcend limited utilitarian need, the modern library celebrates a deep social ideal. The library would be needed even if we abandoned the book merely because it brings people together in the pursuit of knowledge. So essentially, the library is a place for people not books.”
– Edwards, Brian with Biddy Fisher

“Cyberspace is nowhere – it is the ether. To compensate, the library must be made into somewhere, and that task falls to the architects. It is an irony that at a time when books are being marginalized, library buildings are becoming more important. In our increasingly privatized, commercialized environment, the library is growing in status as the final outpost of knowledge (versus information), public (versus private) and real (versus cyber) space. In a post-industrial age all that is left is information. If that information is power, libraries should be power stations, not dreary municipal outposts – they need to fulfill Borges’ vision as the mirrors to the universe.”
– Heathcote, Edwin

“Library architecture is, and always has been, a symbol of the way society views itself – or would like to see itself.”
– Heathcote, Edwin

STRATEGY

The third semester core studio continues the study of disciplinary concepts and techniques raised in the first year while introducing more complex issues related to program, form, and material. The studio investigates issues of public architecture through the design of a medium-scale public institutional building (library, courthouse, or other public building), and specifically examines the projective potentials of program and site in relation to form. The studio advances inventive, plausible building design strategies that exploit the operational and representational aspects of architecture.

Core 503 examines issues of programme, structure and skin to identify how public architecture represents itself as a cultural and political artifact. The studio approaches the architectural typology of the Public Library to question the relationship of program and technology in relation to form and context. Rather than understand architecture as autonomous from its social, cultural and political environment, the studio posits that architecture must be integrated and potentially transform the systems that envelope it. The studio uses a multi-lingual branch library as a vehicle to develop projective, speculative experiments that reframe the problems of the contemporary city through architecture. Sited in Houston, within and between various demographics, this (small) project raises (big) questions about the role of public architecture in the contemporary city. What is the role of architecture in representing an increasingly fragmented public? How does architecture become the common object within a city with little in common? How can politics be engaged, questioned, and challenged? What is the symbolic role of architecture in contemporary urbanism? How does the material practice of architecture – namely, structure and skin – respond to larger cultural and political questions of the city?

Plural Infrastructures

The Public Library is perhaps the last remaining “public” architectural typology in the city. Emerging as a free-standing typology during the Age of the Enlightenment to reaffirm democracy, the public library is still today considered a public infrastructure – as only with knowledge and access can one successfully participate in democracy. Today, the role of the library is being reinvented as mediums of information (books, films, periodicals, etc.) are increasingly de-spatialized. While this increases the possibilities of disseminating information, it also questions the role of the spatial architectural artifact.

Critical to the re-formed public library is its ability to absorb dualities – the allocation of public and private, loud and quiet, and most importantly commonality and distinction. The potential of this new typology is rooted in what both political theorists/philosophers Jürgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt feel was lost in modern society – the common political object. The strength of the re-formed public library is the speculative development of a new public architecture (or the creation of a common object) that allows simultaneously for en-
gagement and interaction between diverse constituencies. Through the forum of a design studio, we will examine the role and form of the new public library through asking:
— What is the symbolic and urbanistic function of the public library?
— How does one organize the individual (private) and collective (public) programmes to accommodate, engender, and/or represent a new public?
— How does one organize programme to represent various language groups and provide identity?

Media-ted Environments of the Public Library
Despite the static perception of the library as an institution, the typology has incurred dramatic transformations since its inception and the basic role and configuration of the typology continues to be questioned and reworked today. These transformations in the typology have been directly linked to shifts in the socio-political hierarchies within the city as well as advances in technology. Socio-politically, the transformation from a hegemonic society to a pluralist society corresponded to a shift in mediums and how these were placed within the library. Technologically, information has been transferred to successive forms of less permanent, increasingly instable, yet easier to disseminate media. This has altered the key role of the library from an institution of storage to that of mass dissemination.

The library as an institution reveals how information and knowledge are transmitted through society and moreover how society is structured in regard to this information. If architectural historian Edwin Heathcote’s symbolic assertion is true, then an examination of the library typology is able to unveil the value system and organization of society. An analysis of the architectural typology reveals the breakdown of the library as a symbolic monument during the 19th century. This transformation is instigated through a shift from a synthesized set of information that was embedded in architectural matter to a pluralism of information that uses architecture as a symbolic container. The pulling apart of information from architecture is not a new phenomenon, in fact this shift during the 19th century is indicative of a larger transformation of the library. Whereas architecture served to be the first library, embedding information within its walls, it was slowly superseded by new forms of media that rendered the “social book” aspect of architecture inconsequential.

During the rise of Romanticism, Victor Hugo had declared, “This will kill that. The book will kill the building. That is to say, Printing will kill architecture.” Hugo’s assertion revealed the power of the printed book in replacing the building. Hugo contrasted the freedom within the emerging voices of the mass brought out through mobile media with the medieval world of stone that was symbolic of an older hierarchical order, as expressed by Anthony Vidler:

Hugo’s obituary for architecture was justified and explained by history itself. For if the political and social history of civilizations was calibrated with the history of written language, then it was evident that, at a certain moment, architecture, which from the earliest times had served to memorialize and teach by means of signs and symbols, had lost its primary role as “social book.” It was now usurped by the book itself, rendered ubiquitous by the techniques of printing.

This repositioning of architecture’s role is perhaps best exemplified in Henri Labrouste’s Bibliothèque Sainte Genivieve (1851), wherein the walls were inscribed with the names of authors, confirming the triumph of literature over architecture. Labrouste had stated, “This monumental catalog is the principal decoration of the façade as the books themselves are the most beautiful ornament of the interior.” What now preoccupied Labrouste and subsequent architects in a more severe manner, was the design of the envelope. Labrouste’s façade reflected the emerging pluralism of society, the newfound identity of the author.

The modern library, like most civic institutions, has difficulty assuming a single ideological position within its form – and now stands as a backdrop to a new pluralism of information and media. One of the main tasks of the future library is how it is able to provide forms that are simultaneously able to assert a civic stance through form and interface. Because the history of libraries has been a history of the relationship between media, structure and skin, these elements are now once again foregrounded and questioned in reforming the symbolic role of the library.
— What is the relationship of structure and the organization of media?
— What is the role of the envelope in mediating environments and creating the public image of architecture?
— How does structure, skin and media get organized to represent a public(s)?
The studio is organized such that research and design are in a continuous feedback loop. This position requires an intensive, iterative process of working, and clear articulation of design ambitions and intellectual underpinnings. The semester is structured around a single theme, divided into four projects. The first project will allow for collaboration in teams across the two sections. The remaining three projects will be individual study. Moreover, the whole process will get highly involved with the Fondren library in diverse ways, which not only serves as a knowledge source but more like a live platform to re-address the relation of knowledge and media.

**Project 1 — What is Public?**
Students are asked to diagram the properties and characteristics that make up a specific existing public space; followed by a concise thesis statement about the role of a public building and institution in the contemporary city. Statements will speculate inventively on their potentials and dilemmas in producing, promoting, and/or maintaining a public culture.

**Project 2 — Presenting Publics**
Students will work in teams to analyze a pair of given precedent buildings. Each team will be responsible to produce physical models and two-dimensional drawings that demonstrate critical aspects of public architecture: organization, representation, and tectonics - and more specifically of the library typology: media, structure, envelope, and knowledge. Presenting Publics will be compiled into a collective booklet for shared reference and use.

**Project 3 — Forming Public**
This design exercise will transform the research analysis from Project 1 and Project 2 into abstract models of program organization and enclosure for a given site. Students will use physical models and diagrams to develop a critical position about the role of a public library building in the contemporary city.

**Project 4 — Re-Forming + Representing Library**
Each student will develop a detailed design proposal for a small public institutional building, a branch library, on an urban site in Houston, Texas. Project analysis, development, and presentation will require a diverse range of representational methods, techniques, and support; to include plans, sections, wall sections, perspective details, diagrams, digital models/output, physical models (overall and detail), booklets, written thesis, and precedents.

**Seminars**

1. **Rice Fondren Library Tour (led by Sandi Edwards)**
   Following the case study project (project 2), a library tour is aimed to provide a basic sense and knowledge of a public library in terms of space utilization, programs and circulation etc., which also helps students to explore more relevant resources about the project during the whole research and design process.

2. **Rice Library Service Center Tour (led by James Springer)**
   A fieldtrip to the newly built LSC building by Carlos Jiménez after the project 3 will focus more on the relation between specific library program and their envelope as well as circulation system.

3. **GIS Session (led by Kim Ricker)**
   Tutorial on GIS technology will be given during the early stage of the design process, so that students will learn how to get useful GIS info and analyze them as the research and design basis.

**4. Critical Readings**

All readings materials will be available in Fondren Library by studio reservation. Digital readings will be published online and students are encouraged to find more relevant resources.

**Seminar 01: Politics and the Public Sphere**

**Seminar 02: The Library Typology**

**Seminar 03: On Site**

**Seminar 04: Programming**

**Seminar 05: Envelopes and Representation**
— Vidler, Anthony. "Read! Study! Learn!" and "Make your voice heard", revealing both the individual learning and communal action through speech in the library's structure.
Houston is a multicultural city with over ninety different languages spoken throughout the metropolitan area, due in part to its internationally renowned medical research and health care institutions, academic institutions, energy industries, aeronautic industries, as well as being a major port city.

In addition to the assigned precedent analysis, the following selected library precedents are recommended for further study and research. A minimum of 3 building precedents will be required for the final design proposal, relating to program, enclosure, site, tectonics, representation, etc..

—SOM / Gordon Bunshaft, Yale Beinecke Library
—Norman Foster, Berlin Free University Library
—Toyo Ito, Sendai Mediatheque
—OMA, Seattle Public Library
—Hans Scharoun, Staatsbibliothek KulturForum
—Gunnar Asplund, Stockholm Library
—Snøhetta, Alexandria Library
—Herzog & de Meuron, Cottbus University Library
—Hans Scharoun, Staatsbibliothek KulturForum
—Toyo Ito, Tama Art University Library
—OMA, Seattle Public Library
—OMA, Jussieu University Library
—OMA, Caen Library
—OMA, Tres Grande Bibliothèque
—OMA, Qatar Education City Central Library
—MVRDV, Book Mountain
—King Roselli, Pontificial Lateran University Library
—OMA, City of Education
—OMA, Jussieu University Library
—OMA, Caen Library (Caen, France, Competition Winner X)
—OMA, Tres Grande Bibliothèque
—OMA, Qatar Education City Central Library
—Office d’A, RISD Library
—KVA, Shady Hill School Library

Houston is the fastest growing city in the United States. In 2009 the city added 141,000 permanent residents. As the city continues to grow, it will increase in diversity and language groups. While most of this growth occurred on the periphery in the suburbs, the inner-loop area is also experiencing unprecedented densification. Moreover, the demographics of this growth places Houston on the leading edge of demographic transformations occurring throughout the United States. Yet, while unprecedented, Houston serves as a template for growing American metropolises. Within this changing demographic climate, the culture of Houston is also in transformation.

—How can architecture provide for moments of collectivity in a city that is redefining itself through a multitude of cultures while reinventing its own?
—What is the role of public architecture in allowing for distinct groups to maintain their cultural identity yet produce collectivity?

The studio research will work on two separate sites in the city, engaging different demographics and site types that project distinct potentials for a multi-lingual library.
Historic
— Michelangelo, Laurential Library (1559)
— Thomas Burgh, Trinity College Library (1732)
— Étienne-Louis Boullée, Bibliothèque du Roi (1785)
— Henri Labrouste, Bibliothèque Saint-Genevieve (1850)
— McKim Meade and White, Boston Public Library (1895)

Related Programs
— SANAA EPFL, Rolex Student Centre.
— Herzog et de Meuron, Espacio de las Artes
— Neutelings-Riedijk, Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, Hilversum
— OMA, Netherlands Embassy
— Interloop-Architecture, Symonds I & II Teaching Labs
— Zaha Hadid, Wolfsburg Science Center
— OMA, IIT Student Center

The transformation in the relationship between information, knowledge and structure within the library typology.

RESEARCH RESOURCES

PERIODICALS
All of these databases (and many more) are available at on the library website.
http://library.rice.edu/collections/eresources

Avery Index
Coverage: 1977- present Description: The Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals offers a comprehensive listing of journal articles published worldwide on architecture and design, archaeology, city planning, interior design, and historic preservation. Avery indexes not only the international scholarly and popular periodical literature, but also the publications of professional associations, US state and regional periodicals, and the major serial publications on architecture and design of Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Australia. Expanded coverage includes obituary citations providing an excellent source of biographical data—often the only information available for less-published architects. Coverage is from the 1930s (with selective coverage dating back to the 1850s) to the present. The Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals is updated weekly.

Art Index Retrospective
Coverage: 1929-1984 Description: Indexes key international English-language arts publications, including periodicals, yearbooks, museum bulletins, competition & award notices, exhibition listings, film reviews, etc. Covers earlier period not covered by other versions of Art Index.

BOOKS
The book collection at Fondren Library is good. Always have a look to the left and right of the book that you get. Hidden treasures are waiting for you.
http://library.rice.edu/

Inter Library Loan (ILL)
If Rice does not have a book, magazine or video in its collection you can request the library to get a copy for you from another institution. Rice has agreements with a number of lenders, so if you can find it on the web, they can get it. These take some time, typically 5-10 days, so you must plan ahead.
https://rice.illiad.oclc.org/illiad/logon.html

WorldCat
WorldCat is the world’s largest network of library content and services. WorldCat libraries are dedicated to providing access to their resources on the internet.
http://www.worldcat.org

Google Books
Over the past few years, Google has been working with several major libraries to include their collections in Google Books and, like a card catalog. For many books, it is possible to do a full text search.
http://books.google.com/

Add All
For used books, this site is very helpful. It searches about 40 individual data-bases of booksellers worldwide.
http://www.addall.com
**IMAGES**

One of the quickest resources is, as is widely known, Google Images. However, the more advanced web programming gets, the harder it will be to retrieve images at a decent resolution.

http://images.google.com

**Getty Images**

Getty is the largest provider of images online. They have a relational database that works on keywords describing the content of the image. To get high resolution images you have to pay quite a bit, although the comp images (72dpi, for placement only) are free.

http://gettyimages.com/

**NASA**

Satellite and space images for free, tons of them.

http://www.nasa.gov

**U.S. Geological Survey**

Aerial photos, satellite pictures, maps.

http://www.usgs.gov

**AccuNet/Associated Press Photo Archive**

Online access to over 500,000 photos with detailed captions from the AP news wire. Includes all photos from US and abroad added in the previous 365 days (800 per day) plus many selected older photos from 1844 to the present. Updated continuously.

http://library.rice.edu/collections/eresources/accunet-ap-photo-archive

**MAPS AND CENSUS DATA**

The Fondren Library has a good collection of digital and physical maps. Inquire with the reference desk.

**Rice GIS/Data Center**

Digital maps and a collection of GeoLytics CDs/DVDs is available at the Rice GIS/Data Center at Fondren Library for easy demographic analysis. These discs export ready-to-use GIS layers and cover the entire US.

http://library.rice.edu/services/gdc/gis-data/copy_of_referrals

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**EPILOGUE**

Throughout the whole research and design process, Rice Fondren Library not only provided all the essential information/knowledge with different media formats (physical books, e-books, CD/DVD media, government statistics data, GIS data, geological mapping, journals etc.) and technology supports (video camera, projector, digital SLR cameras, graphic software etc.), more significantly, by the interaction between people and library (searching for relevant data/info and the various study/tutorial seminars in library), an clear model and methodology has been built by Rice Fondren Library indicating how the library as a public institution could re-address the crucial relation in-between knowledge, media as well as people's perception of publicness.