The Bias of Libraries: Montreal's Grande Bibliothèque

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Abstract

This dissertation is centered on the Grande Bibliothèque (GB) which opened in Montreal in the spring of 2005, and was a library project of unprecedented scale in the city. The Grande Bibliothèque project unfolded during a significant moment in the cultural history of Québec, in which contemporary technological changes were, and are still, exerting transformative pressures on traditional models of the library. These same technologies have come to play an increasingly important role in the formation, circulation and reproduction of cultural practices and identities more broadly.

As a case study, the GB is an instance of the many trends that are currently shaping libraries, including their changing historical narratives, their innovative architectural designs, their adjustment to new and emerging media technologies and the implications of the changing meanings of the book and reading. The aim of this research has been to consider the role that the library plays as a communications medium and cultural technology in a period when emerging digital and network media are destabilizing traditional notions of libraries and their role as democratic, public institutions. In other words, this dissertation considers how broader understandings of the library, which is treated as a medium of communication in its own right, have shifted dramatically over the last several decades.

The 21st century library can be seen as an emerging medium that seeks to not only preserve and disseminate collective memory and culture, but also to provide access to spaces and networks of knowledge, culture and interaction that together renovate the library's traditional role as a democratic institution. The library has become a central nervous system for new and emergent media technologies, a space that centralizes increasingly decentralized networks and systems, and a place in which new and emergent media technologies have not only found a home, a place where they can be contained, but a space in which the encounter between citizens and public knowledge and culture is staged.

Cette thèse a pour objet principal la Grande Bibliothèque (GB) qui ouvrait ses portes à Montréal au printemps 2005. La création de cette bibliothèque, projet de grande envergure sans précédent à Montréal, marque un moment important dans l'histoire culturelle du Québec, où de nombreux changements technologiques ont eu, et continuent d'avoir, un effet transformateur sur le modèle traditionnel de la bibliothèque. D'une façon plus générale, ces mêmes technologies jouent un rôle de plus en plus important dans la formation, la diffusion et la reproduction des pratiques et des identités culturelles.

En tant qu'étude de cas, la GB met en relief de nombreuses tendances qui sont actuellement en train de révolutionner la conception contemporaine de la bibliothèque: ainsi, cet exemple rend visible l'évolution des récits historiques présentés par les bibliothèques d'aujourd'hui, ainsi que leurs conceptions architecturales innovatrices. Enfin, l'étude des différentes modalités de leur adaptation aux technologies nouvelles et émergentes permet une réflexion poussée au sujet de l'évolution des significations du livre et de la lecture. L'objectif de cette recherche est donc d'examiner le rôle que la bibliothèque occupe dans une période où les technologies émergentes déstabilisent et la notion même de bibliothèque et son rôle en tant qu'institution publique démocratique. Pour se faire, la bibliothèque est considérée à la fois comme moyen de communication et comme technologie culturelle. En d'autres termes, en abordant la GB comme un moyen de communication en soi, cette thèse met en lumière les changements spectaculaires subis par le modèle de la bibliothèque au cours des dernières décennies.

La bibliothèque du 21e siècle est appréhendée comme un médium émergent qui vise, d'une part, à préserver et à diffuser la mémoire et la culture collective et, d'autre part, à donner accès à des espaces et à des réseaux de connaissances, de culture et d'interaction qui, pris ensemble, revitalisent le rôle traditionnel que la bibliothèque occupe en tant qu'institution démocratique. Ainsi, la bibliothèque est devenue à la fois une sorte de système nerveux central pour les technologies nouvelles et émergentes, un espace qui centralise des réseaux et des systèmes de plus en plus décentralisés, un point de ralliement pour les technologies nouvelles et émergentes et, enfin, un espace où citoyens et connaissances se rencontrent.

Dedication

In October, 1949, at the age of 25, my great aunt, Łucia Kalisz, died in a lab explosion in Bratislava, in the former Czechoslovakia, while doing research towards her Ph.D. This, at least, is the 'official' story conveyed to my great grandparents by the authorities in Bratislava. The actual story of her death is, to this day, mostly a mystery, and what is known of what might have happened to her casts a sinister shadow. Łucia apparently died of heart failure brought on by the explosion, but this was difficult to determine as, when my great aunt's body was returned to my great grandparents, there was evidence of an unofficial autopsy that had left her body empty of organs and with sawdust in their place. Her skin bore no signs of burns or lacerations that may have resulted from the alleged explosion. By contemporary standards, her death would no doubt be considered suspicious, but in the post World War II Stalinist climate of Eastern Europe, truth, at least in these types of circumstances, was a rare commodity.

My great aunt was a vibrant and brilliant young physico-chemist, and a Ph.D. candidate at Warsaw Polytechnic, now the Warsaw University of Technology. She was one of the very few women in her field and the only other woman in my extended family to have been working towards a Ph.D. degree. I dedicate this dissertation to Łucia Kalisz and her memory. Not only was I fortunate enough to finish the degree that she tragically was not able to complete, but I was able to finish this degree in an environment free of the political and violent turmoil that she no doubt was witness to and possibly a victim of. I hope for more open, honest, and safer universities the world over, so that brilliant researchers such as my great aunt can continue their work in the search for truths that are neither prescribed nor managed, but truly free.

A coal drawing of my great aunt Łucia Kalisz. This was drawn by her fiancé and given to my great grandmother shortly after my great aunt's death.

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It took me a long time to bring myself to write these acknowledgements. In fact, I waited until the last possible second. When I started this dissertation I naively thought the acknowledgements would be a breeze to write up, of course I knew whom I was going to thank. Yet, when the task was finally upon me, I realized that it wasn't about whom I would thank, but about how I would thank them. Although I just wrote a three hundred page dissertation, I don't consider writing to be my strongest suit and although I feel so much gratitude towards those who I am about to mention, these few lines cannot even begin to express how grateful I am to them and how important they have been to me throughout this entire process.

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Introduction

In fall 2013, the United States will see the opening of its very first bookless public library. Bexar, Texas, a sprawling county just fifteen kilometres outside of San Antonio, with a population of nearly two million people, has announced its plans to build a 4,989 square foot futuristic looking e-library. Not to be confused with an online portal to an existing library, this library, for some, can be seen as a confirmation of the much-feared and often talked about demise of the book. The bookless library is not an entirely new idea, as many academic and secondary school libraries in the United States have traded in books for e-readers and computers. However, the fact that Bexar County's new BiblioTech will be the first bookless public library is indeed novel. Through partnerships with e-book publishers, the BiblioTech will offer approximately 10,000 titles to its patrons when it opens. The library will have 100 e-readers available to its adult patrons, 50 to children, and will house 50 computer workstations, 25 laptops, and 25

The BiblioTech. (Image: inhabitat.com)

tablets (Goodwin, 2013, January 18). Patrons will also have the opportunity to

borrow e-reader devices for two weeks at a time. The design of this new library has been compared to an Apple Store, and renderings of the project depict it as more akin to an Internet café than an actual library. The specific aim of the library—to bridge the digital divide between Bexar County's wealthier residents and its lower income (primarily Latino) households—is unsurprising in the context of what has come to be known as the "information age." More provocative, in the context of conventional ideas about what public libraries are and what they are for, is the BiblioTech's radical *booklessness*. For, while we are accustomed to the idea that part of what a library does is to facilitate literacy (including digital literacy), we are perhaps still not quite ready for the idea that a library can be a library without books. In this respect, the prospect of Bexar County's BiblioTech raises a much broader set of questions currently surrounding public libraries.

The increasingly rapid trend towards the substitution and supplementing of the book by other reading technologies is but one (albeit major) symptom of the shifting terrain upon which knowledge practices and cultural institutions meet. The library is being reinvented and reimagined, not only in its material infrastructure, both inside and outside library buildings the world over, but also in terms of its identity and purposes. The notion of "the library" inherited from past centuries has expanded considerably. The variety of roles that the contemporary library now takes on extends beyond preservation, dissemination, and access, to include providing individuals and communities with a new kind of social public space. In other words, although the preservation and dissemination of cultural

memory remains central to the role of the contemporary library, the needs and interests of individual patrons have become equally, if not more, important. The book competes for space in the library not only with computers, but also with human beings. On a weekend in late January, the Atwater Library in Montreal, along with a number of public libraries across Canada, launched the Human Library Project, where actual books would remain on their shelves and, instead, people would take on their role, allowing themselves to be "checked out" by patrons for twenty minutes at a time in order to have a conversation about their life experiences. The aim of the conversational book is to break down social barriers by creating a space for mutual understanding between individuals. The Human Library movement originated in Denmark in 2000, launched by a young Danish activist group that sought to combat violence that stemmed from prejudice (Scott, 2013, January 24). The Human Library Project highlights how the contemporary library has been repurposed as a space that mediates human communication in a diversity of forms that depart significantly from the "traditional" practice of reading a book. The contemporary public library is not only a space of reading, research, or even of access to information, but also a site for engineering social encounters. Libraries have thus become many things to many people. This dissertation explores how this diversity of expectations and roles has come about, how it is manifested in library design, programming and practice, and what it means for the present and future of libraries as public institutions.

My research is centered on the Grande Bibliothèque (GB) which opened in Montreal in the spring of 2005, and was a library project of unprecedented scale in the city. The Grande Bibliothèque project unfolded during a significant moment in the cultural history of Québec, in which contemporary technological changes were, and are still, exerting transformative pressures on traditional models of the library. These same technologies have come to play an increasingly important role in the formation, circulation and reproduction of cultural practices and identities more broadly. The GB is an exemplary case study, as it is an instance of the many trends that are currently shaping libraries, including their changing historical narratives, their innovative architectural designs, their adjustment to new and emerging media technologies and the implications of the changing meanings of the book and reading. The aim of this research has been to consider the role that the library plays as a communications medium and cultural technology in a period when emerging digital and network media are destabilizing traditional notions of libraries and their role as democratic, public institutions. In other words, my dissertation considers how broader understandings of the library, which I treat as a medium of communication in its own right, have shifted dramatically over the last several decades. The 21st century library can be seen as an emerging medium that seeks to not only preserve and disseminate collective memory and culture, but also to provide access to spaces and networks of knowledge, culture and interaction that together renovate the library's traditional role as a democratic institution. The library has become a central nervous system for new and emergent media technologies, a space that centralizes increasingly

decentralized networks and systems, and a place in which new and emergent media technologies have not only found a home, a place where they can be contained, but a space in which the encounter between citizens and public knowledge and culture is staged.

My dissertation both reflects and contributes to a rich body of scholarly literature relative to the study of libraries. Within the Canadian context it can be placed among texts that have traced the history of libraries in Canada such as *Readings in Canadian Library History* (1986), as well as literature that has studied the the evolution of print culture more broadly, such as the *History of the Book in Canada* (2004), which emphasizes the various social, political and economic factors that have had an impact on the ways in which libraries were developed from province to province. It equally resonates with William Buxton and Charles Acland's *American Philanthropy and Canadian Libraries: The Politics of Knowledge and Information* (1998) that focuses on an overlooked but essential report conducted by Charles F. McCombs on Canadian libraries in 1941. The work highlights the extent to which American philanthropy, notably that of Carnegie and Rockefeller, had a major impact on library development in Canada that went beyond simply funding new Canadian public libraries. My work can also be inserted within a broader range of histories that study library development in North America and the Western world, such as Michael Harris' *History of Libraries in the Western World* (1984) and Matthew Battles' *Library: An Unquiet History* (2003), which trace the history of the development of libraries from the

creation of the Library of Alexandria to the modern American library, and the impact of the digital age on our traditional understanding of the library.

In the Québec context, while my work contributes to histories of library development within the province, it can equally be viewed as building on a body of literature that has been devoted to the cultural history of Québec. Richard Handler's *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (1988) and historian Jocelyn Létourneau's work entitled *A History for the Future: Rewriting Memory and Identity in Quebec* (2004)—a first real attempt in recent years to revisit, and as the title might suggest, rewrite Québec's cultural historical past—are some such examples. My own work is unique in that it attempts to situate the library's role within these types of histories.

Libraries have also been considered in relation to citizenship and culture and how the library's past and current role have had an impact on the formation of a cultural citizenship. An important body of work considers Andrew Carnegie's role in the development of public libraries (specifically in North America) and his vision to transform the public library into a democratic institution, free to all, with the idea of universalizing knowledge and education. In addition to the body of work on Carnegie himself, there are many texts dedicated to Carnegie style architecture, in other words to that traditional architectural form that has become so naturalized as what public libraries should or should not look like, and that has been challenged only in the last two decades or so, with innovative architectural designs emerging for new public library projects. Although scholarly work on Carnegie architecture seems far removed from questions of libraries and cultural

citizenship, this is hardly the case. An excellent example of this is Abigail Van Slyck's work entitled, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890-1920* (1995). Van Slyck's work, although considered more of an architectural history of Carnegie style buildings, challenges the often uncontroversial readings of these spaces as the first real democratic institutions that embodied as she writes "a golden age of American unity" (p. xix). Van Slyck's work focuses on the relationship of libraries and cultural citizenship as they have manifested themselves in the past.

Much scholarly work attempts to define the current role of public libraries, particularly in the face of emergent technologies that are seemingly eroding the traditional civic and cultural responsibilities of the library. Thomas Augst and Wayne A. Wiegand's monograph entitled *Libraries as Agencies of Culture* (2001) explores how we have come to consider the library as a definer, preserver and also producer of culture, and how this role has been maintained although significantly altered within the library (particularly in the U.S.). This notion is furthered by books such as T.D. Webb's *Building Libraries for the 21st Century* (2000), which includes a collection of essays that challenges the notion that the library as a concrete structure is disappearing in the face of digitization. It examines the design of new modern library projects and how, rather than render the "library with walls" an obsolete institution, technological advancements have actually motivated the public library into a reinvention of itself and its civic roles. By contrast, John E. Buschman's *Dismantling the Public Sphere: Situating and Sustaining Librarianship in the Age of the New Public Philosophy* (2003)

challenges this reinvention of the public library, claiming that the current role of the library has moved away from its democratic purpose of contributing to the public good, and has instead embraced economic incentives as the driving principles of its new policies and designs.

A final and interesting work that needs mentioning, as at the moment it seems to be the only of its kind, is Shannon Mattern's book entitled *Designing With Communities: The New Downtown Library* (2007). Mattern would disagree with Buschman's claim that the modern library has moved away from its traditional role of providing a public space in which democratic citizenship is practiced, mainly because, for Mattern this institution never really existed. However, Mattern's main concern is of a different sort. Like many of the aforementioned scholars, she recognizes that there has been a recent boom in new library design projects in North America, from Moshe Safdie's Vancouver Public Library project opened in 1995 to Rem Koolhaas' Seattle Public Library opened in May 2004. What Mattern focuses on, however, is not only the new role that the public library is to take on with regards to civic and cultural responsibility, but also the degree to which the public has a say in what that role should be. More specifically, Mattern investigates how much, if any at all, of the design process of these new library projects were open to public voice and deliberation. She posits that the more the public was "properly" considered and included in the decision-making process, the more successful the outcomes were with regards to the role prescribed to the library in a given city.

The greatest preoccupation with libraries today that inevitably overlaps with the texts that were discussed above is their changing roles in the face of emerging technologies. The body of literature higlighting these issues often claim that the transformation that is taking place with regards to how we approach the library today is almost entirely due to new and emergent technologies. Without the digitization of information, the Internet, and more generally the changes in the ways in which we relate to vast amounts of information, and how we communicate with each other, the library would most likely still retain Carnegie's ideal form and perform many of the same functions. However, as Kathleen Molz Redmond and Phyllis Dain argue in their book *Civic Space/Cyberspace: The American Public Library in the Information Age* (2001), libraries are spaces that do not simply disappear, rather they change over time and adapt to the environments they find themselves in. Much scholarly work of the 1980s and 90s was preoccupied with the idea that the way in which the library would adapt in an information society would be to transform from a material entity into an immaterial one. Books such as Kenneth E. Dowlin's *The Electronic Library* (1984) were concerned with avoiding this fate, whereas others, such as William J. Mitchell's book *City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn* (1996) predicted that the façade of the library would be reduced to numeric codes on a computer screen. Redmond and Dains's text challenge this prediction as they argue that in the face of an ever increasing information society, rather than dwindling in importance, the library's civic role is even more valuable.

By contrast, there is a body of scholarly work that considers that emergent technologies are not only fragmenting and commodifying our culture but that libraries are far from resistant to such pressures. Books such as *Libr@ries: Changing Information Space and Practice* (2006), for instance, argue that libraries too are moving away from being the traditional gatekeepers of culture and knowledge and are becoming what Kapitzke and Bruce have described as "market-driven libr@ries" (p. xiv). Kapitzke and Bruce are interested in the library as a space of knowledge that they claim has been dematerialized and commodified.

A final range of work that relates to libraries and emergent technologies focuses specifically on the impact of the Internet on libraries. These works range from considering the Internet as a potential threat to the library as an institution to considering it a form of empowerment. However, some of the most interesting works center on how new technologies such as the Internet are being integrated into the space of the library, and how library patrons are interacting with them. Martin Hand's work *Making Digital Cultures: Access, Interactivity, and Authenticity* (2008) emphasizes that although the library's primary goal is to promote the Internet as a form of empowerment through access to greater amounts of information and knowledge, patrons prefer to take advantage of free access to the Internet within the library to communicate (catch up on e-mails, chat on skype etc.) rather than to research, altering the purposes for which citizens decide to enter the library to begin with.

Libraries have been studied from multiple perspectives within varying disciplines. They have been treated, amongst others, historically, architecturally, and culturally. My own work is reflective of many of the ways in which libraries have already been considered, however, what is distinctive about this particular project in relation to the field, is that I present a comprehensive study of a single library in the context of broader developments in the world of libraries. Furthermore, the consideration of this single library takes on multiple perspectives—historical, institutional, spatial, architectural, technological and ideological/discursive—in order to expose the multidimensionality of the contemporary "situation" public libraries now find themselves in. Yet, what is particularly unique about this project is the way in which the library is approached, which contributes not only to the scholarship already devoted to the study of libraries, but also contributes to furthering the field of communication and media studies. What is original in my treatment of the library is that I consider the library as a communications medium. By saying the library is a communications medium, I have in mind what James Carey (1989) distinguished as the *ritual* view of communication (as opposed to the *transmission* view), whereby what matters about a medium is how it gathers people and structures their common experience, rather than the content of the information it transmits or its technical success or failure in doing so. Following Harold Innis (1951), I also mean to suggest that the most significant properties of a medium—what Innis referred to as a medium's "bias"—are those that bear on our experience of space and time. Whereas libraries oriented to the storage of books and records that never

change and hardly move are/were "time-biased" media suited to a time-biased culture (oriented to community, tradition, locality), contemporary libraries are a more space-biased medium suited to a culture that values individuality, mobility, temporal flexibility, accessibility, and global reach. In many ways, the GB is trying to be both time-biased and space-biased.

The manner of understanding the library as a communications medium, is reflective of scholars such as Lisa Gitelman (2008) and Jonathan Sterne (2012), who consider that all emerging or new media are decisively conditioned by their partcular histories and the contingencies of their realization under particular circumstances, and cannot therefore be subsumed under a general theory of media or technology that purports to account for all their qualities and contingencies in advance. Every library, like every medium, is/has a story of its own.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999), claim that all media are intermedial and "re-medial." As a medium, the library is actually multiple media—an elaborate combination of plural media forms, practices and experiences, some of which are "old" and some of which are "new," which exist in complex relationship to one another and which together comprise the library as a medium. Finally, the library considered as a commincations medium, also follows scholars such as Vincent Mosco in *The Digital Sublime* (2005) or Darin Barney in *Prometheus Wired* (2000) and/or *The Network Society* (2004), where media—telegraph, radio, TV, Internet and including now libraries—are propelled by, and absorb, materialize, and reflect the hopes and anxieties of their age, which are more often than not democratic hopes and anxieties.

All of these understandings of media are bound up in my claim that a productive, critical approach to libraries in the contemporary moment recommends treating them as one would any other medium of communication. What follows is a detailed study of, primarily one library in dialogue with others from this perspective, a study that suggests, without necessarily attempting, a media theory of libraries.

Chapter One presents the Grande Bibliothèque as an object of study, and establishes the historical and local context from which it emerged. It recounts the pre-history of the GB, including the history that surrounded the creation of a public library system in Québec and more specifically in Montreal. The chapter then recounts the details of the project to bring together the collections of both the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec (BNQ) and the Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal (BCM) in a new, unified institution that would become the Grande Bibliothèque. As this chapter will show, from the outset of its development, the GB project was intended to serve a diversity of national, civic and public priorities that invested it with a complexity that greatly exceeded what we might otherwise imagine for a public library.

Chapter Two seeks to address the importance of site in modern library design. This chapter explores the tensions surrounding the choice of site for the Grande Bibliothèque (GB). Attention to new library design and architecture have overshadowed consideration of the actual physical siting of new libraries and how site has affected the kinds of public spaces that they become. The final choice of site for the Grande Bibliothèque in Montreal's less gentrified downtown east end

raised many issues concerning questions of access, public involvement, suitability, and more generally about the library's future success. Drawing on a 1998 study evaluating potential site choices for the Grande Bibliothèque, Chapter Two serves to explore how matters of site can affect the ways in which we use and understand the library as a public space.

Chapter Three is dedicated to the architectural dimensions of the Grande Bibliothèque. It focuses on the spatiality of the GB as well as on the new architectural priorities that have emerged in the construction of contemporary libraries. More broadly, this chapter studies the ways in which contemporary libraries are imagined and constructed in architecture and design. Designing and building the contemporary library has everything do with attempting to define its new role. Although newly constructed libraries share many similarities, they are also unique in the ways in which they are adapted to their particular contexts. Through a close analysis of the Grande Bibliothèque's (GB) trajectory from conception to building, Chapter Three investigates how architecture has, in part, defined and delimited what sort of institutional public space the Grande Bibliothèque creates.

Chapter Four focuses on the programming and technologies of the GB. One of the main reasons for the creation of the GB was to offer Montreal citizens a public library that would be capable of not only hosting and managing emergent media technologies, but that would provide free and equal access to these new media. In addition to being a highly digitized and networked facility, the GB is also a site that offers the most advanced methods of storage, search and retrieval

of a multiplicity of collections, be they referential, digital or archival. This chapter studies the so-called "technologization" of the traditional library, how this has transformed the ways in which we use and understand the library as a public space, as well as what this may mean for the future of libraries, and how well equipped the GB is in adapting to the constant flow of newer and faster technologies. I propose that the idea of the library as an important medium in itself has been overlooked in the broader context of communication and media studies. Because of its mix of both national and public mandates, the GB evokes competing narratives around what forms of citizenship—technological, national, civic—the library as a mediating technology will or should foster**.** The case of the Grande Bibliothèque speaks to a broader trend that is currently taking place with regards to libraries in the digital age, hence the importance of treating it within the larger context of the changing relationship between libraries and technology, and how this has transformed our perceptions of what a contemporary civic institution such as the library can be, and what shapes it can take.

Chapter Five explores the ideological and organizational shift that has taken place within the contemporary public library. There has been a significant move away from the library as a space of autonomous learning to the library as an institution now offering more formal educational programming, and increasingly, a community service oriented outlook. As such, librarianship has been equally transformed from being a relatively passive profession of custodianship and organization to a more proactive presence in the facilitation of education. Chapter Five focuses on how and why this move has taken shape and what the

implications are for the future of libraries more generally. Libraries have continued to thrive in the face of digitization, not only because they have embraced new and emergent media technologies (libraries have always done so throughout their history), but primarily because they have become new social and educational institutions for the 21st century. There is a tension that lies within this transformation as libraries struggle to hold on to an older version of themselves while simultaneously coming under pressure to fill in the gaps that other cultural and educational institutions often leave behind. The contemporary challenge that libraries face, to become more like *something else* or to step in where other institutions might be struggling or failing, is a new kind of challenge; a challenge that is specific to the library's place within an evolving digital cultural reality. This chapter seeks to address the potential consequences of transformative pressures on the defining characteristics and identity of the library. In other words, where is the line to be drawn? At what point does a library stop being a *library* and become something else?

Chapter 1

Introducing the Grande Bibliothèque

Founding a "Scriptural" Society

> [T]he idea of producing a society by a "scriptural" system has continued to have as its corollary the conviction that although the public is more or less resistant, it is moulded by (verbal or iconic) writing, that it becomes similar to what it receives, and that it is *imprinted* by and like the text which is imposed on it (de Certeau, 1984, p. 167).

If one looks back on the struggles that surrounded the creation of the first public library in Montreal, it is clear that the roots of its delay (its doors were not opened until 1903) lay in the conviction that the written word had the power to mold a subject into a specific kind of citizen. Montreal's struggle to create a public library was enveloped in the interests of those factions that maintained authority over matters of culture and education within the city at the time. On the one hand, the clergy envisioned one type of citizen, morally grounded in Christian values that needed to be secured against the threat posed by exposure to certain secular texts. On the other hand, the Anglophone community, mostly indifferent to the Francophone community, envisioned a more "American" citizen, and created its own libraries with this model in mind. These kinds of tensions, although clearly exemplified in the founding of a significant cultural institution in Montreal in the early twentieth century, also contextualize Québec's situation with regards to the rest of Canada as well as the United States and Europe at this time. As a result,

even though Québec may have produced one of the first publicly-funded libraries in Canada, with the Québec Library founded in Québec City in 1779, it would be many years before it would found an institution in which its cultural patrimony would be properly conserved and diffused.[1]

The story of the Grande Bibliothèque (GB) is in many ways a contemporary extension of the aforementioned struggles and tensions. However, its emergence and significance cannot be reduced to the terms provided by this historical narrative. The Grande Bibliothèque project unfolded during a significant moment in the cultural history of Québec, one in which contemporary technological changes were (and are still) exerting transformative pressures on traditional models of the library. These same technologies have also come to play an increasingly important role in the formation, circulation and reproduction of cultural practices and identities more broadly.

What makes the history of the emergence of the Grande Bibliothèque so unique and significant today, is that the project's primary goal was to bring together the collections of two very different types of libraries into one unifying space. It sought to merge the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec (BnQ) and the Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal (BcM): a merger that would

[1] The first public library in Canada in fact opened in Toronto in 1884. There is an important distinction to be made in the history of Canadian public libraries between publicly-funded libraries and public libraries. The Québec Library was founded in 1779, and The Montreal Library in 1796; however these libraries were publicly-funded, meaning that they were supported by subscription fees, therefore open to the privileged few who could afford to pay to have access to these libraries. The first free, tax-supported public library, open to all, was in fact founded in Toronto, and as mentioned above, opened in Montreal only in 1903. This was due to the fact that the development of public libraries was contingent upon various factors affecting individual provinces at the time. Some of these determinants were geographic, economic, cultural and/or demographic (Lefebvre & Dubois, 2006).

eventually marry the national, the public, and the civic dimensions of what a library could be. Before they merged, these two libraries served quite different purposes and were born of not only different but even opposing histories.

The Saint-Sulpice Library

On September 14th, 1844, the Sulpician Congregation opened the first Francophone library in Montreal. It would be the first library in Montreal to embody the characteristics typical of a public library, and would simultaneously serve as the first Catholic Parish library in the city. The library was named l'Oeuvre des bons livres de Montréal and was located in the Notre-Dame neighbourhood of Montreal. The following year, the Sulpicians created an English counterpart to the library and named it the Institute of Circulating Good Books. The library's mandate sought to circulate only those books that were deemed morally "good" by the Catholic order.[2] Despite considerable opposition to a library that controlled its readership's access to certain texts, the Sulpician Library would continue to grow considerably, not only in terms of its collection, but also in its importance in Montreal.

In 1857, the Oeuvres des bons livres de Montréal became the Cabinet de lecture, and moved its location to Old Montreal where it would be in proximity to the Notre-Dame Cathedral. It also became closely associated with Laval University in Montreal, a relationship that significantly transformed its importance within the community. As its collections and influence grew steadily,

[2] The Catholic Church had assembled a list of works which they felt should be prohibited from the general public. This list was called the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, often referred as "The Index." It was finally abolished on June 14, 1966, by Pope Paul VI.

so did its need for more space. As a result, in 1910 a project was conceived to build a new library (this time in the Latin Quarter) that would house the joint collections of both the Sulpician Congregation and Laval University; an interesting hybrid that echoes the project of the Grande Bibliothèque. The new Sulpician Library (La Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, as it would eventually come to be called) would simultaneously serve as a university research library as well as a public reading library, a union that would counter the influence of Montreal's Civic Library over which the clergy had no control (Lefebvre & Dubois, 2006, p. 29). Inaugurated in 1915, the Saint-Sulpice Library would become, and to this day remains, one of Montreal's architectural gems.[3]

The Saint-Sulpice Library, Montreal. (Image: imtl.org)

[3] The Saint-Sulpice Library was designed by architect Eugène Payette in a French Beaux-Arts style. A beautiful architectural exemplar, over the course of the century it would eventually come to be classified a historical monument by the city of Montreal in 1988 (Lefebvre & Dubois, pp. 29-30).

From its inauguration, the Saint-Sulpice Library grew considerably and acquired a large number of diverse collections, from intellectual texts to more accessible books on French North America and French-Canadian thought. The library also attempted to acquire publications from both the provincial and federal levels of government. In addition, in 1921, the library succeeded in establishing a system of "voluntary deposit" (Lefebvre & Dubois, 2006, p. 30) by authors and editors of French Canadian texts. This growth in collections however, although significantly enriching the library, also eventually led to its struggle for resources. This, paired with the economic crisis of 1929, placed the library in an extremely vulnerable position, so much so, that in July 1931 the Saint-Sulpice Library was forced to close its doors to the public. They were not re-opened again for another thirteen years.

This brief history of the Saint-Sulpice Library is significant for it eventually became what we know today as the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec. In 1941, the Québec government decided to officially acquire the Saint-Sulpice Library (which was unable to repay its numerous debts). Its extremely rich collection of books, monographs, manuscripts, journals and periodicals, not to mention special or rare collections, made it worthy enough to become a "Library of the State" (Lefebvre & Dubois, 2006, p. 30). On August 12th, 1967, the National Assembly of Québec passed a law officially creating the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec. The Québec Ministry of Cultural Affairs would become the library's governing body and the collections and assets of the former Saint-Sulpice Library would become its very first documentary holdings.

The Bibliothèque nationale had as its original mandate to "rassembler et conserver, si possible dans leur forme originale, des exemplaires de documents qui sont publiés au Québec ainsi que de ceux qui sont publiés a l'extérieur du Québec mais dont le sujet principal est le Québec" (Lefebvre & Dubois, 2006, p. 30). In other words, the Bibliothèque nationale was to be the space in which documents (preferably in their original form) published in and outside of Québec (as long as they pertained to the subject of Québec itself), were to be gathered and conserved.[4] This mandate, as will be seen, differed enormously from the mandate associated with the Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal, the institution that makes up the second half of the Grande Bibliothèque.

The Civic Library

When the Oeuvres des bon livres was instituted by the Sulpicians, it met with considerable opposition primarily from Montreal's young, educated population who held a more liberal stance with regards to what citizens should or should not be "permitted" to read. They too wished to have a library, one that would be secular and that would provide a space free from censorship and open to the exchange of ideas. Consequently, on December 17th, 1844, a group of two hundred young French Canadians decided to form the Institut canadien de Montréal (The Canadian Institute of Montreal). It was through the initiative of one of its members, lawyer and journalist Antoine Gérin-Lajoie, that the necessity to create an institution that would serve as Montreal's public library, where

[4] An important development to add to this story of the Bibliothèque nationale is that in 2006 it merged with the Archives nationales du Québec (originally created in 1920) thus becoming what we know today as the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ).

Montreal's Francophone community could have access to a wide range of publications, was brought to the fore. This need led to the creation of a temporary, in part public, library that was defined by the Institute as "secular and liberal" (Goulet, 2009, p. 9), and that deliberately ignored pressure to exclude books officially prohibited by the Catholic Church from their collection. This decision, however, did not bode well for the Institute. A fiery opposition of *ultramontanes* was formed, led by Montreal's Bishop Ignace Bourget, and it succeeded in fighting the existence of the library on all fronts (Goulet, 2009). This eventually resulted in its closure in 1880.

Although a brief moment in the history of Montreal's public libraries, the existence of an organization such as The Canadian Institute of Montreal clearly shows that the desire for a municipal public library reaches relatively far back. The resurgence of this civic need became evident two decades later, at the turn of the century, when the city of Westmount opened the first genuine municipal library in Québec in 1899, mirroring the American model. Yet, this did not seem to be enough of an incentive to do the same for the city of Montreal. Even the formation of a special municipal committee for the creation of a public library in 1892 did not seem to hold enough bargaining power to enable its creation. What was holding Montreal back was the argument that Montreal did not truly need a municipal public library as it could be better served if resources were allocated to the already existing parish libraries. A few years later however, an official Commission for the Public Library was formed. Benefiting from two important events, a conference held in 1900 in Montreal by the American Library

Association (created in 1876) and the then Montreal mayor Raymond Préfontaine's interest in the creation of a public library, allowed for the project to gain more earnest attention. It is with Préfontaine's initiative that American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie (who financed more than 2500 public libraries around the world, 150 of which are in Canada) donated $150,000 to the cause in July 1901. Carnegie believed that "public libraries were to become the cradles of democracy wherein neither status, position, nor wealth could keep someone from having access to the institution" (Goulet, 2009, p. 11).[5] A year later, Préfontaine voted in favour of creating a free public library in Montreal that would model Carnegie's vision. Unfortunately, "a debate that would pit the *ultramontanes* against the liberals, the believers against the free-thinkers, and the impassioned against the indifferent" (Goulet, 2009, p. 12)[6] would once again delay the institution of a public library in Montreal. Montreal, and Québec as a whole, remained in deep debate on the merits of a public library that would be independent; in other words, not in the hands of the clergy. The clergy in Québec clearly had a strong hold on most cultural institutions. Therefore, although Québec eventually saw the creation of a public library, it never saw the construction of a Carnegie building.

After this series of false starts, Montreal finally saw the institution of a public library in 1903, named the Civic Library. In one sense, the development of this institution was considered a success, in another it was seen as not entirely adequate as it was primarily a scientific and technical institution, meaning that all

[5] My translation.
[6] My translation.

fiction was excluded from its collection (a compromise meant to appease the clergy) and therefore only in part fulfilling the role of a true public library. As Birdie MacLennan points out:

> The Catholic Church exercised enormous influence on public reading. This influence permeated the social, educational, and cultural fabric of Québec society and extended into the administrative activities of the municipal library before, during, and after the foundation of the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice (2007, p. 358).

With growing pressure from the public however, and with the initiative of The Civic Library's first librarian Éva Circé-Côté, the range of books was soon expanded, and texts by such authors as Voltaire, Rousseau, Balzac and Sand were added to the collection, much to the disapproval of the clergy.

Additionally, in 1910, the city of Montreal acquired an exceptionally rich collection of texts on the history and geography of French America from collector Philéas Gagnon. This marked the beginning of the Civic Library's long battle with space constraints, a struggle that would eventually culminate in the construction of the Grande Bibliothèque in 2005.

Although the public library continued to expand, much of what it acquired was not accessible to the public primarily due to a lack of space. This persistent lack engendered the creation of a new building to house the growing collections of the library. Again conceived by architect Eugène Payette (architect of the Saint-Sulpice Library), a monumental edifice was constructed on Sherbrooke Street East across from Lafontaine Park. This new building, often considered a true "palais du livre" (book palace), would house the collections of what would eventually become the Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal, for close to a century.

Ironically, it would also be known as a “library without books” for although it held a capacity of approximately 400,000 documents, only about 25,000 of them were accessible to the public (Lefebvre & Dubois, 2006, p. 22).

Between the period of 1960 and 1995, Québec witnessed substantial improvements with regards to its public libraries. Nonetheless, even in 1995 it was still seriously behind most other provinces in Canada with regards to the general technical and administrative sophistication of these libraries. This was mainly due to a lack of qualified library professionals as well as to the absence of an efficient system for the distribution of resources. At this time, sufficient political attention was also lacking with regards to the state of public libraries in Québec, not to mention that most cities were still imposing a fee for basic public library services.

Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal. (Image: bilan.usherbrooke.ca)

More specifically, in terms of the Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal, its nickname as a "library without books" was not entirely false. Even though many important repairs and renovations had been made to its central location on Sherbrooke Street East, the building, both in terms of its structure and architectural design, was considered passé and out of step with its times. Consequently, it had trouble fulfilling the growing demands (both structural and technological) of its public. In addition, space constraints kept its seating capacity at approximately 223 places (very few if you consider that Vancouver's municipal library could seat up to 1,200) and as a result many documents ended up being housed outside of the institution with no public access. Hence, Montreal was the only municipality of 100,000 inhabitants or more in North America that was unable to offer an adequate central public library service (Goulet, 2009, p. 164).

Montreal Libraries in Context

Montreal's struggle to create a public library system, as touched on above, was shrouded in the interests of those factions that maintained authority over matters of culture and education within the city at the time. Consequently, when revisiting the development and creation of both the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec and the Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal, it is important to consider the time frames within which these two institutions were created.

In an article that appeared in *Le Devoir* in March of 2005, journalist Caroline Montpetit explains that in looking back at the history of libraries in Québec, and specifically Montreal, Québec's slowness to develop an adequate

library service and encourage reading, was largely due to the stranglehold that the Church had, for a considerable period of time, on the perception of what kind of books should and should not be accessed by the public. This was also paired with a general disinterest from the Anglophone community as to the cultural and educational fate of francophones. Montpetit quotes former Chief and Executive Officer of the Grande Bibliothèque, Lise Bissonnette, who explains that during the discussions surrounding the development of the first public library in Montreal, the Anglophone community questioned why this would even be a necessary institution as francophone Québécois, on the whole, could not read. Similarly, when discussions surfaced with regards to the creation of the GB, there was again expression of a general opinion that Québécois were, if now able, simply not interested in reading. Montpetit writes:

> 'À l'époque, les Anglophones avaient dit: pourquoi les francophones auraient-ils besoin d'une bibliothèque puisqu'ils ne savent pas lire?', relève Lise Bissonnette. J'ai lu cela l'année dernière dans le Mirror aussi. Pourquoi le gouvernement du Québec dépense-t-il tellement d'argent pour une bibliothèque alors que les Québécois francophones ne lisent pas?', dit-elle, faisant référence au débat qui a accompagné l'érection du monumental édifice, rue Berri (p. F1).

The province's delayed interest in reading, books, and consequently public libraries was, one could claim, associated with the fact that reading was something that represented censorship and oppression within society rather than freedom, education, and the opening up of new horizons. The Church's struggle to maintain the established order, not to mention the reign of Maurice Duplessis[7] that

[7] Maurice Duplessis served as Premier of Québec between 1936-1939 and then again between 1944-1959. He was the leader of the extremely conservative Union Nationale party and his reign as Québec Premier is often referred to as La Grande Noirceur ("The Great Darkness") or Les Années Noires (The Dark Ages) primarily due to the corruption of his government, but also

accompanied it over the course of the 1950s in particular, was entirely contradictory to an institution such as a public library. The public library was an institution that symbolized the breaking down of an extremely hierarchical society through the creation of a reading public that could be both many in number and diverse in interests, whether religious, political or cultural. People were bored with reading, but this was less due to the books themselves than to the fact they were books chosen and imposed by governing authorities.

In a 2007 interview Lise Bissonnette describes her own realities with reading in the rural Abitibi region of Québec:

> I think that I've been very privileged, I was not born in a family of privilege, I was not born poor also, but very, as they said in our sociology courses, lower middle class, and with not many books at home, and with a mother and father who believed that I should learn music and go to school, but that was about it, and especially in a region, in the Abitibi where there was nothing, there was nothing, not a library. In fact, I shouldn't say that, there were maybe about two hundred books at city hall in Noranda and they were all in English. So that's about it, there was nothing, and so you read what you could, and I went to school and these were nuns of course and they preferred us to read stupidities rather than get to the real thing because the stupidities were less dangerous for our minds. I mean stupid things—you know what they were writing for teenagers at the time—how stupid they were. And there was a series called *Brigitte* that was made in France. Oh my God, this Brigitte was she virtuous! She did everything right, she was so dull, and we kept reading these things. But at some point things changed a bit when I began to read excerpts in our schoolbooks about George Sand and some other writers, we just had some little excerpts, but I guessed that there was something there (interview, May 22, 2007).

The disinterest, therefore, that was instilled in French Québécois society with regards to reading was less a reflection of illiteracy, as was often believed by the Anglophone community, and more a show of resistance to what was being offered

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because of the extreme traditionalism and conservatism that he promoted. His opposition to more modern or contemporary ways of life (i.e., secular and socially plural) consequently did not offer much support when it came to public libraries.

as acceptable reading material. As MacLennan writes, what was taking place in Québec, particularly at the turn of the century until about the end of the 1960s, "was essentially a struggle over the control of ideas" (2007, p. 351). In the Québécois context, the authority of the Church with regards to policies pertaining to reading and culture, although blamed for Québec's delayed public library system development, also instigated a politics of resistance, which would become particularly poignant in the 1960s with the slow emergence of the Quiet Revolution. As Marshall McLuhan notes, somewhat summarily if usefully, in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1968), "print created national uniformity and government centralism, but also individualism and opposition to government as such" (p. 235). What is more, print, as argued by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1991), also contributed to the formation of national identity wherein "the convergence of capitalism and print technology […] created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation" (p.48). Print was central in the formation of a Québécois national identity and it is therefore not a coincidence that the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, for instance, was created within the context of the Quiet Revolution.

The Quiet Revolution

In most historical accounts, the Quiet Revolution is understood as the period from 1960-1966. In these narratives this period is marked by several aspects. It is the time during which Jean Lesage's Liberal Party was in office, as well as the period which immediately followed "les années noires" in Québec associated with the

government of the aforementioned Maurice Duplessis, who was seen as a promoter of traditional and conservative values that made Québec fall behind socially and economically compared with the rest of Canada and the world. The Quiet Revolution is thus characterized by the fact that it was a very condensed period of time that saw the province of Québec through a series of extremely important cultural, societal, political, and nationalistic changes. During this time, traditional values were replaced with liberal ones and Québec became a province that no longer wanted to simply survive, but wished to modernize and develop. Nonetheless, Québec nationalism (often considered as somewhat traditionalist) seemed to strengthen with the identity of the French-Canadian being abandoned for the identity of the Québécois. What is most interesting with regards to the Quiet Revolution, and its effect on the development of libraries in Montreal and in Québec in general, is less its economic and political consequences than its cultural ones.

The term "Quiet Revolution" evokes the sense that the changes which took place in Québec during the period between 1960 and 1966, were fundamental, yet came about without any recourse to violence. There were of course some aggressive demonstrations and the FLQ violence[8] that accompanied this period cannot be ignored, nevertheless, in general, this revolution was in fact "tranquille." The revolution in Québec during this period was "quiet" partly because the Québécois intelligentsia expressed their political and national

[8] The FLQ stands for the Front de libération du Québec (Québec Liberation Front). The FLQ was founded in Québec in the early 1960s and supported the Québec sovereignty movement. It was active during the Quiet Revolution, primarily between 1963 and 1970. The FLQ was considered a terrorist organization throughout most of Canada and Québec due to the fact that it took responsibility for over 160 violent incidents mostly in and around Montreal.

struggles by way of writing. The sixties in Québec were characterized by a revolution of words, words that were written and read as much as they were spoken and heard. As McLuhan (1968) notes, "the very nature of print creates two conflicting interests as between producer and consumers, and between rulers and ruled. For print as a form of centrally organized mass-production ensures that the problem of 'freedom' will henceforth be paramount in all social and political discussion" (p. 236). During the Quiet Revolution, Québec's print culture was a crucial site for the development of a culture of intellectual freedom.

As a result, the sixties witnessed an explosion of revolutionary and progressive magazines and journals such as Parti Pris and Cité Libre, not to mention revolutionary poems and novels such as Paul Chamberland's *Poèmes de l'anterévolution*, Laurent Girouard's *La ville inhumaine* or Jacques Renaud's *Le Cassé*. In *The Shouting Signpainters* (1972), for example, Laurent Girouard tells Malcolm Reid: "'To me,' he said, looking back to his time as publisher, "book publishing is political agitation. The book should try to shake people, tell what the regime hides'" (p. 60). For Girouard, words, in a sense, are the revolutionary weapons of the Québécois and they carry with them both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, words are non-violent and do contribute, one could say, to a certain kind of national literature, on the other hand, their limits lie in the fact that they cannot always reach those who need to be mobilized. He continues: "'But alas, books just don't get to the people who need shaking, the workers, the exploited'" (p. 60). Words thus reach only a certain class in Québec. Nonetheless, he admits that words not only have a cultural function in society but

a socio-political one as well. Commenting on the publication of Jacques Renaud's novel *Le Cassé* he says: "'I consider *Le Cassé* an event in Québec history—not just a literary event, but a social one. I'm proud of having put it into circulation. And it was a success, 6,000 sales'" (p. 60).

This emphasis on words and writing during the Quiet Revolution is also highlighted by the creation of both the Bibliothèque Gaston Miron (a poet, writer and editor himself) founded in Paris in 1964, and as was previously mentioned the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec. It is also significant to note that "[i]n granting the title Bibliothèque nationale du Québec to the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, Québec legislators for the first time had affixed the term 'national' to a Québec 'state' ('état') institution" (MacLennan, 2007, p. 368). As a result, the library during this period could be seen as perhaps a "quiet" linguistic representation as well as an institutional means by which the transformative changes taking place in Québec at the time could be expressed.

To return to the notion of "revolution" in the Québécois context, it is important to note that although Québec did experience significant changes within a short period of time, the term "revolution" that would generally imply some sort of definitive break with the past, took place with regards to what preceded it. In other words, even though Québec may have seen a shift from conservative values to more liberal ones on more than one level, be it social, political or economic, it did not entirely break with what had existed before. In much of the revolutionary writing that emerged, there was a strong tendency to criticize the institutional and political mistakes of the past. The existence of the Quiet Revolution relied heavily

on the fact that it was Maurice Duplessis' "dark" government that preceded it and thus there was something to react against. Nonetheless, in order for the Québécois to have been capable of completely breaking with that government, rather than simply focusing on what the Duplessis regime had done wrong, they would have had to concentrate on an entirely new kind of future altogether. However, what we can gather from the preceding discussion on the revolutionary writing of this time, rather than creating a break or even the mobilization towards such a break, this writing could in fact be seen as having ended up creating a kind of documentary national continuity. The libraries that were created, for instance, did not only house revolutionary texts, but all literature that went towards making up and representing the specificities of Québécois identities, thus perpetuating a common and de facto integrative national historical past (one that included Duplessis and his miserable regime).

The very term "Quiet Revolution" as it pertains to Québec is extremely interesting for it is somewhat contradictory. It is contradictory not only for the obvious fact that revolutions are almost never actually quiet or non-violent, but also because if we understand the term as a revolution propagated by the silent mobilization of written words, the revolutionaries in trying to break with the past by writing a new reality into being, unavoidably also maintained this past in reacting against it. The creation of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, by the institutionalization of many of these documents, attests to this.

The Québécois "nous"

To take a look back into Québec's cultural history, is to see that the ambitions of Québécois cultural policy and institutions have been, and still largely remain, primarily to construct a particular collective "we" or "nous" of Québec. Not only have these ambitions been steered towards the building of this Québécois collective but they have also sought to maintain and protect it, to make sure that it survives. However, the emphasis in Québec is perhaps less on the construction of the "we" in itself than on its protection and maintenance, or on its "survivance." In his article "La quête d'un État" (1979), Michel Audet argues that "le gouvernement du Québec affirme l'existence de la nation québécoise et la légitimité d'un État national souverain par un argument holistique: la culture" (p. 263). In other words, "culture" and its promotion, protection and diffusion have always been at the heart of Québec's nation-building project. This has perhaps been the fundamental difference between Québec and the rest of Canada, since in the latter, culture has often taken a backseat to many political and economic motivations, creating the sense that the rest of Canada, at the very least as it compares with Québec, has a weak culture and by extension a weak identity.

Furthermore, the idea of culture as a holistic argument for nationhood has in a sense focused the way in which Québec identity is defined. The Québécois nation is not conceived individualistically but rather there seem to be two metaphors that characterize the Québécois "we": "the nation as a collective individual and a collection of individuals" (Handler, 1988, p. 39). Richard Handler (1988) argues that Québec as a nation is firstly seen "as a living

individual," an image that contributes to "a sense of wholeness and boundedness" (p. 40) and is strategic in the sense that it allows for Québec to "be discussed in terms of its freedom to choose and its ability to control its own destiny" (p. 41). Similarly, the metaphor of Québec as a collection of individuals also perpetuates this idea of togetherness or "boundedness," and as such "the nation is bounded in terms of its autonomous will and unique personality" (p. 44). This manner of conceiving of the Québécois identity is echoed in Audet's (1979) argument that sees how these kinds of metaphors are "compatible avec les notions de classe sociale et de nation et permet l'affirmation d'une spécificité culturelle" (p. 265).[9] In addition, this conception of the Québécois identity on some level encourages the government of Québec to intervene in matters of culture. On the provincial level, by intervening in matters of culture the government is protecting Québec's national specificity. As much as it is representative of the place of the library in the digitized cultural age, the project of the Grande Bibliothèque also exhibits all the complexities, tensions and contradictions characteristic of contemporary Québécois subjectivity, identity, and citizenship especially as these tensions have played out historically in the urban context of the city of Montreal.

The Grande Bibliothèque: From Conception to Object

With the arrival of Lucien Bouchard as Premier of Québec on January 29th, 1996, a significant shift took place at least with regards to matters of culture and specifically with regards to libraries. In 1996, Bouchard arrived on the political

[9]These metaphors interestingly manifest themselves in the slogan Je *suis, nous sommes* or *I am, we are,* used by a 2009 campaign to persuade the federal government to increase and stabilize funding for Radio-Canada in Québec (www.jesuisnoussommes.com).

scene with a passion for two things in particular: music and books. Bouchard was fascinated by the beauty and magnitude of Vancouver's new municipal library that had opened in 1995 and that was designed by architect Moshe Safdie. In Bouchard's own words: "Je me suis promis que si j'arrivais au pouvoir, je ferais construire une grande bibliothèque" (qtd. in Goulet, 2009, p. 164). For Bouchard the creation of a "grande bibliothèque" in Montreal was not only a necessity but also a personal desire, which is reminiscent of what was taking place in France at the time with the creation of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), one of the most impressive of François Mitterand's "grands projets." In fact, the creation of the BnF in France should be seen as part of the context for the conception of the Grande Bibliothèque. Mitterand's "grand projet" actually succeeded (unwittingly) in setting the stage for the first real discussions surrounding the construction of a similar library in Montreal.

Bibliothèque nationale de France. (Image: blog.bnf.fr)

Both Minister of Culture and Communications Louise Beaudoin and Under-Secretary Martine Tremblay insisted that the project of a grande bibliothèque in Montreal could not be explored without instigating a general politics surrounding the role of books and reading, not only within the city, but also within Québec. The project would necessitate input and interest from those who would arguably benefit from it the most, such as librarians, authors, editors, distributors, teachers, and scholars, amongst others.

The admiration and awe with which the opening of the BnF was greeted by influential figures such as Bouchard were appropriately timed to set the wheels in motion for Québec's own "grand projet." Bouchard's reveries, however, might not have amounted to much had he not had an unexpected push from Lise Bissonnette.[10] At the time editor-in-chief of *Le Devoir*, Bissonnette was the first to publicly evoke the idea of constructing a "Très Grande Bibliothèque"[11] in Montreal in a column devoted to arts and culture that she wrote for each Saturday issue of the paper. This particular column was published on February 10, 1996, and without it there may possibly not have been a Grande Bibliothèque. Bissonnette explained that she often had a hard time coming up with topics for her Saturday column and that a colleague of hers suggested that she write about the possibility of building a Grande Bibliothèque in Montreal. As Bissonnette explains:

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[10] Lise Bissonnette eventually became the president and general director of the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ) in 1998, previously known as the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec. Since the summer of 2009, Guy Berthiaume is Chair and Chief Executive Officer of the BAnQ.

[11] "Très Grande Bibliothèque" was what the project of the BnF was called at its inception.

> So I wrote a tongue and cheek article addressing M. Bouchard, saying, "you people at the PQ [Parti Québécois] are always talking about culture but not doing much about it"—most big cultural institutions were built by the Liberal government—"but if you want my advice and you read this column, why not build a Grande Bibliothèque." Bouchard was influenced by the Vancouver public library and what was going on in France, and so him and Louise Beaudoin decided to launch a committee to look into this project. I wrote all the time and criticized the committee quite a bit. I never liked what they were doing, so I wrote a lot about this subject (interview, May 22, 2007).

Bissonnette had, on some level, beaten Premier Bouchard to the punch with her column, insisting that Québec should also have a

> Très Grande Bibliothèque moderne, de facture pluraliste—publique, universitaire et nationale—dotée d'équipements technologiques de pointe et qui regrouperait les collections publiques et nationales de la Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal et de la BnQ, les collections des bibliothèques universitaires de Montréal et des bibliothèques des deux musées ainsi que celle du cégep du Vieux-Montréal (qtd. in Goulet, 2009, pp. 165-166).

Two years following this legendary column, Minister of Culture and Communications Louise Beaudoin called Bissonnette and asked if she would agree to meet with Premier Bouchard. Soon after this call, Bissonnette had decided to give up her position as editor-in-chief of *Le Devoir* and take on a new role as president and general director of the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ). Bissonnette made a quick decision knowing that a conflict of interest between the two positions would not allow her to hold both. She took on her new role with enthusiasm as she saw the Grande Bibliothèque project as "a work of culture, and a work of education" (interview, May 22, 2007).

The public attention instigated by media coverage such as Bissonnette's, paired with the ongoing problems of space constraints both within the BcM and the BnQ, led the Québec government and the City of Montreal to hold discussions

in April of 1996 over whether or not to house the dissemination collections of both libraries within the same space. In the December following these discussions (and as was mentioned by Bissonnette), an official committee was formed by the government of Québec, presided over by Clément Richard, [12] that would eventually make Bouchard's and Bissonnette's dream of a "grande bibliothèque" a reality.

In 1997, the parliamentary committee published the Richard Report which concluded that Montreal, and Québec as a whole, was in fact in need of a large library, and that such a library was to be constructed. The library would indeed merge the dissemination collections of both the BcM and the BnQ in what would eventually become the Grande Bibliothèque.

In 1998, a Provisional Council was created in order to outline the project's preliminary programme. In addition, Louise Beaudoin, set out an initial policy with regards to not only reading and books but also introducing the goals and missions of the Grande Bibliothèque. Later that year, public hearings led the government to choose the site of the Palais du Commerce in Montreal (located at the corners of De Maisonneuve Boulevard and Berri St.) as the new location for the Grande Bibliothèque. Interestingly, the public hearings were not originally part of the plan of the choice of site, they were in fact the solution to a great debate sparked by the question of the placement of the Grande Bibliothèque; a

[12] Clément Richard is a former member of the Parti Québécois and also served as president of the administrative council for Place des Arts (a major Performing Arts Centre in Montreal) between 1995-2002.

debate that began almost immediately following the mere mention of a potential grand library project (and long before Lise Bissonnette had left *Le Devoir*).[13]

Library Leadership

With the site decided upon in June 1998, the National Assembly adopted the legislation establishing the new Grande Bibliothèque. The next thing that needed to be done was to choose the future Chair and Chief Executive Officer of what would become the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ) as well as appoint six additional members to the Board of Directors.

When it came down to nominating the Chair and Chief Executive Officer, there were three possible candidates that were proposed to Premier Bouchard: Lise Bissonnette, Clément Richard and Philippe Sauvageau[14]. For Bouchard and Beaudoin the decision to select Bissonnette was immediate. As Denis Goulet (2009) writes:

> À l'aune de ses efforts pour appuyer le projet du gouvernement Bouchard, de sa rigueur intellectuelle, de son autorité morale, du capital de respect dont elle bénéficie dans tous les milieux de la culture et des communications, de sa détermination et de son amour des livres, la nomination de Lise Bissonnette est judicieuse (p. 181).

Born in Rouyn, Québec, Bissonnette is a writer, journalist and administrator who earned both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the Department of Education Science at the University of Montreal. Bissonnette devoted her doctoral research to the study of the organization of higher education, research which she pursued in France at the University of Strasbourg and the

[13] This debate will be expanded upon in subsequent chapters.
[14] Philippe Sauvageau is a Québécois librarian and public administrator and has been the general director of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec since 1989.

École pratique des hautes études in Paris. Upon her return to Canada, between 1970 and 1974, she took up a post teaching English in a Montreal high school. Shortly thereafter, she began working at the University of Québec in Montreal (UQAM) where she participated in the creation of the first Department of Institutional Studies, before she took on the role as coordinator for the Famille des arts and later for the Famille de formation des maîtres. In 1974, she became a reporter for *Le Devoir* where she began as the education chronicler and later became the parliamentary correspondent in both Québec City and Ottawa until she became writer-in-chief of the newspaper in 1982. Between 1986 and 1990, she worked as an independent journalist and consultant, and collaborated with many Québec and Canadian media organizations such as *Le Soleil*, *The Globe and Mail*, *L'Actualité*, *Montreal Magazine*, and Radio-Canada. During this period, she also played an active role on numerous administrative councils such as the Conseil de presse du Québec, the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, the Vie des arts, and the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, to name but a few. In 1990, she returned to *Le Devoir* becoming the paper's first woman editor-in-chief. At this time, Bissonnette also succeeded in saving the newspaper from deep financial trouble and returned it to the profit-earning and successful establishment that it once was. This she did by completely restructuring its financial organization, revising its editorial contents and coming up with a newer and more attractive lay-out that won international recognition. Bissonnette would occupy her post as editor-in-chief of *Le Devoir* for the next eight years, before becoming the first Chair and Chief Executive Officer of the BAnQ. Her service to Québec society as a whole,

and in Montreal in general, earned her many awards and honors; she received the Order of Francophones of America in 1993, was made an Officer of the National Order of Québec in 1998, and holds five doctorates *honoris causa*.

This impressive list of accomplishments made Bissonnette in many ways a perfect choice for the task of heading an immense cultural institution such as the Grande Bibliothèque. Additionally, throughout both her own education and her service to the Québécois and Montreal community, and even though she may have seemed at times to be more of a political analyst than a cultural one, Bissonnette was always interested in the ways in which she could fuse the concepts of culture and education, and her outspokenness on this topic is what made her a particularly attractive candidate for Bouchard and Beaudoin. For Bissonnette, the Grande Bibliothèque was not simply another career move but a chance to bring culture and education together in a new and innovative way. She herself said that for her "the library was first and foremost a cultural proposal" (interview, May 22, 2007). This idea of the library considered as a "cultural proposal", also made Bissonnette an unpopular choice for some. For many people, and quite notably for many librarians, the new library was more about information than it was about culture. More particularly, it was about information, technology, and the library as a place in which information could be not only stored but also managed. Consequently, many people were hesitant about the fact that Bissonnette, for all her tremendous accomplishments, was simply not a librarian by profession, a detail that was particularly bemoaned by the Corporation des bibliothécaires professionels du Québec. This detail did not seem to deter Bouchard or Beaudoin, as well as

Bissonnette for that matter, for all three saw the new Grande Bibliothèque as a cultural institution, and with Bissonnette's vast experience within and amongst Montreal's cultural milieu, not to mention her ability to run a newspaper operation as large as *Le Devoir*, Bissonnette's experience spoke for itself.

Bissonnette was also chosen for her innovative and bold ideas with regards to what she had initially termed the "Très Grande Bibliothèque." She was interested in building an institution that would compare to the new urban libraries that were being built across North America and Europe at the time. At this time in the 1990s, libraries as complex institutions were being redefined, and Montreal needed to create an institution that would serve a new kind of reading public, a public that expected new technologies and various services to be available at their fingertips, and at the same time, Montreal's Grande Bibliothèque needed to be unique in the sense that it would be a so-called "central nervous system"[15] for the rest of the province. In her interview, Bissonnette explains that Montrealers had never really seen a large, functioning lending library in their city, which made them all the more skeptical about the need for such an institution at all.

> [W]hat I found so difficult at the very beginning, [was] when all my former friends in journalism were saying "we don't need that, we have the Internet." "Why should we have a library?" "What's going on here?" M. Bouchard is a megalomaniac and Lise Bissonnette also—silly things like that. They never saw a large library. There were quite a few projects in the States, there was the Vancouver library, different from ours, but nevertheless, Toronto has had a large library for a long long time, the Toronto Reference Library, it's as large as this library, Vancouver also and Seattle, San Francisco, Phoenix…Even Nashville for God's sake! As large a library as this one, Nashville! It was about time that we realized that these

[15] Many *Le Devoir* articles described the Grande Bibliothèque as the "centre nerveux" or "central nervous system" of the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ). As an example, it appeared in the following article: Rioux Soucy, LM. (2006, August 12). La Grande Bibiliothèque, entre rêve et réalité. *Le Devoir*, Final Ed., p. E4.l.

> were huge successes and that we could have one in Montreal (interview, May 22, 2007).

But Bissonnette's "big ideas" were also a source of concern for many, particularly because rather than being compared to its North American counterparts, the GB project was often being likened to Mitterand's "grand projet", the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and many were wary of the GB becoming just a smaller version of something that the French had the idea to create first. Bissonnette however, always fiercely opposed such criticisms. In an article from *Le Devoir* dated October 2002, Bissonnette argued that the concept of the GB could not be further from that of the BnF, the main distinction being that the BnF was always destined to be a research institute of the highest quality (not necessarily free and open to the public) whereas the GB sought to be a large public library, with open and democratic access to all, not to mention that the GB would be a vastly smaller endeavor, both architecturally and financially. Bissonnette argued that with regards to research, the BnQ would offer more in the Grande Bibliothèque location than was possible at the old location, but researchers who sought more specialized materials would still have to head over to the rue Holt location in Rosemont. Bissonnette insisted that "[l]e bâtiment du centre-ville s'addressera donc d'abord au 'grand public'" (p. B5) and not primarily at researchers as in the BnF case. Indeed, Bissonnette kept her promise. Not only is the GB first and foremost a public library, it is also a national library, an archive, and a virtual library, which makes it all the more unique, not only in comparison to the BnF, but also with regards to most newly constructed libraries in the world.

Battling the Budget

As much as Premier Bouchard and the government of Québec were in favour of the Grande Bibliothèque project, there were prolonged disputes over an appropriate budget for the construction of the library. The Grande Bibliothèque project may have been a priority for Bouchard, but he, and by extension the provincial government, were far from willing to incur major expenses with regards to the new library. In addition, in December 1998, a new Minister of Culture and Communications was appointed, Agnès Maltais, who replaced Louise Beaudoin, and who repeatedly turned down requests for a larger budget. Part of the problem was also rooted in trying to convince Montrealers, and Québecers in general, that the library was a good idea. Québec had in the past struggled with the creation of public libraries across the province, and therefore had no tradition of financing such projects nor garnering public support for them. This worried people like Lise Bissonnette who feared that in demanding a greater budget, they would alienate public support for the project. Montreal, in particular, has always been a city that is not particularly keen on the creation of institutions. Historically, institutions have been less important than fostering creativity, in other words a kind of legacy had been established in Québec where money that was destined towards anything that was cultural or artistic would find its way directly into the hands of artists or writers in order to finance their creativity, rather than put towards the creation of large-scale cultural institutions. In Montreal, creativity and institutions were incongruous; in fact it was generally believed that the latter often stifled the former (Bissonnette, interview, May 22, 2007).

Consequently, the initial construction budget for what was to be a building of 33,000 square metres was 75 million dollars, it was later adjusted to about 85 million, but for a building of this size, this preliminary budget was highly unsatisfactory. San Francisco's municipal library, which is comparable in size, cost 130 million dollars to construct. Many were concerned that this restrained budget would compromise the integrity of the architecture, forcing the architects to use cheaper materials which would risk lowering the quality of the building, and consequently affecting important details vital to the success and functioning of the institution itself, such as the quality of the air, the sound, and the light within the structure; not to mention what this might mean for the durability of the building as a whole. In fact, some of these fears did come true. When the Grande Bibliothèque was finally completed, opening its doors in April of 2005, the architects were pleased with the interior of the building but not with its cladding. To make matters worse, a few months after the library opened, between June 20th and July 18th, 2005, six pieces of louvered glass fell off the building onto the sidewalk below. A seventh piece shattered on May 2nd, 2006 (Rioux Soucy, January 25, 2007).

Nevertheless, on January 19th, 2000, the Ministerial Council officially authorized 90.6 million dollars for the construction of the Grande Bibliothèque, which included not only the construction of the building itself but also the costs associated with the inner workings of the library, such as information technologies, specialized equipment, artworks, etc. The final cost of the library was closer to about 98.7 million dollars (Lefebvre & Dubois, 2006).

Architectural Makings

With the construction budget and needs of the new Grande Bibliothèque authorized by the Québec government in January 2000, an Office of Planning and Management was established for the construction of the library. It was headed by Jean Roy and included the architect Jacques Charbonneau (also on the board were Diane Arcouette, Claude Rheault and Marc Robillard). The purpose of this office was to act as a mediator between the needs of the institution and the construction of the building, ensuring that the future architects of the project respected the original parameters laid out with regards to the dimensions and interior design of the building, without restricting the creative aspects of the architectural process itself. As much as there existed a desire to build a unique and attractive architectural structure, the Office of Planning and Management had the task of ensuring that the functional needs of the library be met when it came to the construction of the building. The library was to be a building of 33,000 square metres, but it was also expected to have the capacity to contain more than four million documents, a third of which would be books. These documents were to be redistributed within the library itself, divided into approximately 30 sections dedicated to different themes and subjects. Additionally, the GB was to offer 2,900 seats, there was to be a distinct section reserved for the National Collection allowing for both the occasional user as well as the avid researcher to have access to it. Patrons were to have direct access to the necessary information technologies, as well as to a variety of both quiet and animated working stations. The library needed to be equipped with functional working spaces and needed to guarantee

superior service and welcome stations (Goulet, 2009, p. 197). Finally, the architectural design of the GB needed to ensure that patrons would have easy and absolute access to all the collections being held within the library.

With these plans in mind, on January 21, 2000, the official terms and conditions of an international architecture competition were made public in order to choose a design team for the new library. This would be the first international architecture competition to be launched in Québec for the design of a public building. Although launched as an international competition, candidates would have to work with a team of architects from Québec in order to be eligible to compete. In order to choose the finalists for the design team, a prestigious international jury was formed presided over by Phyllis Lambert, President and Founder of the Canadian Centre for Architecture, accompanied by various members of the Montreal community and including several world-renowned architects. This list included Georges Adamczyk, Lise Bissonnette, Ruth Cawker, Yvon-André Lacroix, Hélène Laperrière, Mary Jane Long, Bernard Tschumi and Irene F. Whittome. In total thirty-seven potential designs were submitted to the competition out of which five finalists were invited to display their models. On June 28th of that same year, following a two-stage evaluation, the firms of Patkau/Croft-Pelletier/Gilles Guité were chosen, a collaborative effort led by John and Patricia Patkau from Vancouver.

The initial inspiration for the design of the Grande Bibliothèque came from a novel entitled *Les Chambres de bois* (translated as "*The Silent Rooms*") published in 1958, and written by Québécois author Anne Hébert, who spent most

of her career in Paris. The library would be divided into two "chambres de bois" (the literal translation being 'wooden rooms')—one holding the 'National Collection' and the other the 'Universal Collection'—and these wooden rooms would in turn be enveloped within a unifying glass structure. As Trevor Boddy (2006, Fall) writes, the Patkau's "GBQ concept is predicated on two louvered 'wooden rooms' contained within a similarly louvered glass box, nearly filling an entire super-block" (pp. 20-21). Boddy also notes that

> [a]ccording to Patkau associate designer Michael Cunningham, early designs proposed pale-green oxidized copper shingles as cladding—alluding to Montreal church towers and "chateau chapeaux" in that material—but for cost reasons this was changed to the glass louvers in the same colour, most likely a better foil to surrounding brick buildings than the metal sheets would have been. Certainly, the scale and textures of the coloured glass and wooden interior constructions resonate against the blunter concrete structure, the GBQ having an unusual—and welcome—clarity of construction (pp. 20-21).

What seduced the judges with regards to the design proposed by the Patkaus was not only the subtlety offered by the wooden rooms, but also the clarity of the architectural design, the organization of the internal areas of circulation, and the clever creation of various environments that would be conducive to both reading and working (Goulet, 2009, p. 198). Additionally, two essential elements made the Patkaus' design stand out from the rest. The first was the unique architectural promenade that would serve to connect the spaces of work and reading to the various collections offered. The second was the way in which the Patkaus managed to conceive of the interior spaces so that they responded to this ambition that the library had of being a public space in which patrons could feel comfortable and at home (Goulet, 2009, p. 199).

The design for the new library did however spark a new debate involving the placement of the National Collection within the library. When the Provisional Council was created in 1998 to set out the initial programme for the library, the wish was to see that both collections (those of the BcM and the BnQ) be placed together within the same unifying space without one collection taking precedence over the other. The new directing body had a different vision however, one in which the National Collection would in fact be distinguished from the Universal Collection, and thus literally and symbolically placing it in a space apart. Both the UNEQ (Union des écrivaines et écrivains québécois) and the ANEL (Association nationale des éditeurs de livres) petitioned the directing body and Chief Executive Officer Lise Bissonnette to give the National Collection a distinctive space not only for symbolic reasons, but also for the general security and preservation of the documents themselves. With this request adopted by the Administrative Council for the GB, the National Collection would in fact be housed in its own distinct wooden room.

On April 30th, 2005, the Grande Bibliothèque was opened to the public.[16] An official ceremony inaugurated the new library with the cutting of a red ribbon

[16] As I mentioned in a previous footnote, the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec merged with the Archives nationales du Québec (originally created in 1920) in 2006, thus becoming what we know today as the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ). When the GB opened it became the space for not only the collections of the BAnQ, but also for the realization of its mission: The "Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ) has as part of its mission to assemble, preserve permanently and disseminate Québec's published documentary heritage together with any related document of cultural interest, and documents relating to Québec that are published outside Québec. BAnQ also has, as part of its mission, to provide democratic access to the documentary heritage constituted by its collections, and to culture and knowledge in general, and to act, in this regard, as a catalyst among Québec documentary institutions, thereby contributing to the personal development of Québecers. More specifically, BAnQ pursues the following objectives: to promote reading, research and the enrichment of knowledge; to promote Québec publishing; to facilitate ongoing self-education; to foster the integration of persons new to Québec; to strengthen cooperation and exchange between libraries; and to stimulate Québec's

and a commemorative plaque, in the presence of most of Québec's political, cultural, and literary elite (over 800 people were invited), including figures such as Lucien Bouchard, Jean Charest, Gérald Tremblay, Bernard Landry, Liza Frulla, Line Beauchamp, and Louise Beaudoin. Speaking about the library during the ceremony, Lise Bissonnette is quoted as saying:

> Nous pouvons être heureux aujourd'hui, mais nous n'avons ni le loisir ni le droit d'être satisfaits […] Les prochains jours seront un bonheur, mais non un repos, car il reste tant à faire. Le livre n'a pas à chercher la paix, il en perdrait son sens. Le livre poursuit d'abord et avant tout la lumière (Tremblay, April 30, 2005, p. a2).

The sentiments that were expressed during this grand occasion for the city of Montreal included satisfaction in seeing how an institution like the Grande Bibliothèque would finally give books, culture, and knowledge a privileged (not to mention institutionalized) place within the city, and how, as a result, Montreal was becoming a more attractive hub for cultural, economic, and tourist activity. Although, some concerns were expressed (as to the fate of the old buildings that originally housed the collections now in the GB, for example), the library opened to great public success, and still seems to be growing in popularity. After only a week of being open it had already seen 63,000 visitors, and had loaned 50,810 documents, and after only one month it boasted 130,000 members (Turcotte, 2005, p. A1). Currently, the Grande Bibliothèque has about 10,000 users per day, and had a record 3 million users in 2009, double that of the originally expected figure of 1.5 million users.

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participation in the development of the virtual library" (http://www.banq.qc.ca/portal/dt/a_propos_banq/qui_sommes-nous/mission/qsn_mission.jsp).

The scene that greets visitors upon entering the GB today is eloquently described by Trevor Boddy:

> Library patrons rise up from the Métro station or enter from a recessed corner entrance to encounter the first and largest of the two "wooden rooms" that wrap the main library stacks. A sequence of quite differing reading rooms and carrel spaces are arrayed along the GBQ's main pedestrian path, as it moves up and around all sides of these slatted wooden walls, providing readers a wide variety of light, view and privacy conditions. These spatial decisions are inverted for the second and smaller "wooden room" that is home to *La collection Québécoise's* literary documents and rare books. Here a skylit reading room demurs serenely at centre, surrounded by stacks in the 19th-century manner. This dynamic balance of introverted and extroverted reader's spaces is an apt architectural metaphor for Montreal and contemporary Québec, where enduring local traditions have now come to co-exist comfortably with the finessing of global economic and technological forces (2006, Fall, pp 20-21).

Whether "enduring local traditions now come to co-exist comfortably" within Montreal and Québec as a whole is arguable. Boddy's concluding remarks do touch on the notion that the Grande Bibliothèque could in fact be understood as an architectural metaphor for the aspirations of both Montreal and Québec, in other words, for that which looks both inward and outward, and is both national and cosmopolitan.

The Grande Bibliothèque is not simply a library, but also a building, an architectural intervention into the city, and a monument that grounds Québec's existence in material reality. The Grande Bibliothèque not only houses a general reference library as well as Québec's national heritage collection, but also includes such public spaces as a café, a lecture theatre and an art gallery. In addition, in terms of infrastructure, the Grande Bibliothèque is also a highly digitized and networked facility, offering the most advanced methods of storage, search and retrieval of a multiplicity of collections, be they referential, digital or

archival. As an architectural intervention into the city and a "container" for various modes of public interaction, expression and communication, it can also be understood as an institutionalizing force for a specific type of subjectivity. In these respects, the Grande Bibliothèque represents a significant architectural and technological statement about how we use libraries, and about the reasons for which we find ourselves in them.

Chapter 2

Matters of Site

Approximately one hundred and sixty kilometres south east of Montreal, straddling the border between the United States and Canada, lie the charming Boundary Communities of Derby Line, Vermont, and Rock Island and Stanstead, Québec. The three communities differ little from the handful of towns that populate this region of the Eastern Townships in Québec, a year round escape for Montreal city dwellers searching for tranquility and seasonal fun. Yet what Derby

Haskell Free Library and Opera House. (Image: haskellopera.com)

Line, Rock Island, and Stanstead have, which the other towns do not, is the Haskell Free Library and Opera House. Of course, the nearby towns of Magog,

North Hatley, Knowlton and the like, do boast their own public libraries; nevertheless their libraries have not been built to intentionally straddle the international border between the United States and Canada. In most libraries, in fact in all libraries, save for the Haskell, you would not be able to read a book chosen from the stacks in Canada in a reading room located in the United States, or enjoy a performance in an Opera House where you sit in the United States watching performers on a Canadian stage. In fact, The Haskell Free Library and Opera House has often been deemed as "the only American library with no books" and "the only American opera house with no stage" ("Unusual library with no books," 2009).

The Opera House. (Image: haskellopera.com)

A gift to the community from Martha Stewart Haskell and her son, Horace Stewart Haskell, and a memorial to Mrs. Haskell's late husband, Carlos F.

Haskell, the cornerstone of the library and opera house was laid in 1901 and they were later completed in 1904, a joint effort by Americans and Canadians. An enormous sum for the time, the library cost nearly $50,000 to construct, and has remained an extraordinary landmark and source of fascination for people all over the world, a prolonged period of fascination clearly fueled by the deliberate choice of a unique site. Martha Stewart Haskell wished that the library and opera house be built on the boundary line so that it would serve all the bordering communities; it "is, as it was in the past, an important factor in the education and recreation of the Boundary Villages," (Haskell Free Library and Opera House) but it is also a testament to the importance of site when it comes to the location of a cultural institution such as a public library or an opera house.

The boundary line that separated Canada from the United States was not nearly as significant as it is today. In fact, for a long time it seemed relatively arbitrary. Derek Lundy (2010) writes that

> for long after the towns were founded in the late 1700s, the boundary line was meaningless. Roads crossed it with their own commonsensical logic. Houses were built right on top of the boundary—a family might cook dinner in the United States and eat it in Canada. River mills were set up so that they straddled the line, allowing people from both sides to use them.

The somewhat obviously named Canusa Street (Canada-USA), which is in Canada, has houses built on its south side that are in the United States. This arrangement makes it so even the drinking water is shared, as the water "is pumped from wells in Canada, stored in a reservoir in the United States and distributed through a system by Canadians" (Austen, 2007). Before Québec introduced its own health care system, and Stanstead residents were offered

access to a nearby hospital, the closest one was across the border in Vermont, meaning that many Stanstead residents were actually born in the United States (Austen, 2007).

Although it may have been built at a time when the border seemed insignificant, the choice of site for the Haskell Library was still very deliberate. It was thoughtfully, if not strategically, located so that both Canadian and American residents would have equal access to it. An inadvertent result of this particular choice of site, has been the transformation of its meaning over time from simply being the best access point to the library to a representation of the border communities' transnational unity.

Haskell Free Library and Opera House. (Image: haskellopera.com)

As Lundy (2010) writes, "[d]uring the Vietnam War," for example, "men who had fled to Canada to avoid the draft would come to the library to visit their families. As long as they stayed on the Canadian side of the black line, their sanctuary was

intact." Even more so today, the library is a unifying force in the face of post 9/11 heightened security initiatives, which seek to tighten border controls and separate the communities with physical roadblocks, plans that have significantly angered the residents of these communities who consider themselves one. The site of The Haskell Free Library and Opera House has therefore almost ironically become a kind of site of resistance, one that has kept these divisive initiatives at bay.

The only entrance to the library is in the United States, and currently if you are a Canadian resident, you can park your car in Canada and walk over the border and enter the library without having to go through border control. At present, this is the only site along the border at which you can still do this. All other points along the border either have an official border crossing point (a total of three),[17] or are heavily controlled by surveillance cameras and ground sensors (mainly in the wooded areas that scale the border with Vermont). Physically manifesting the border in the vicinity of the library would mean cutting off access to the library and the opera house to the Canadian residents of Rock Island and Stanstead, a controversial action that border officials from both the Canadian and American sides have not yet attempted to enforce. You can, however, be sure that as you cross the border by foot from Canada into the United States you are being closely monitored by a United States border patrol vehicle, making sure you enter the library, and only the library.

[17] The three official border crossings are all located near Stanstead, Québec. The first is located off of Route 143 in Québec, the second is in Rock Island (off of the A-55 in Québec), and the final one is located in Beebe Plain (off of Route 247 in Québec).

Haskell Free Library and Opera House. (Image: cityprofile.com)

Site matters. In other words, what this library is, and what it means, has everything to do with its site, both temporally and spatially. What I wish to explore in this chapter is how and why site matters, particularly in the case of the Grande Bibliothèque, but also in the wider context of libraries in the 21st century. This chapter seeks to address the importance of site in modern library design. More particularly, this chapter seeks to highlight some of the tensions surrounding the choice of site for the Grande Bibliothèque. Current discussions surrounding the future of libraries have tended to focus on their new role as central nervous systems for new and emergent media technologies, and spaces that localize increasingly decentralized networks and systems. The current trends in new library design and architecture attest to these projections regarding the possible futures of libraries. Less attention, however, has been paid to the actual physical siting of new libraries and how their siting has affected the kinds of public spaces

that they become. The final choice of site for the Grande Bibliothèque in Montreal's less gentrified downtown east end raised many issues concerning questions of access, public involvement, suitability, and more generally about the library's future success. Drawing on a 1998 study evaluating potential site choices for the Grande Bibliothèque, this chapter will serve to explore how matters of site can affect the ways in which we use and understand the library as a public space as well as have an impact on how encounters between citizens, public knowledge and culture are staged.

The Politics of Reading and the Problem of Place

As early as 1994, at a time when the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec (BnQ) was looking for a building in which to house its dissemination collection, and a few years before it was decided that these collections would be coupled with those from the Bibliothèque centrale de Montréal, the BnQ's administrative committee considered housing their collections in the 67 year old Simpsons building located on Ste. Catherine Street West, a building which had been vacant since 1989. The option to house Québec's national collection in an old commercial building that represented English domination for many Francophone Québécois in Montreal strongly divided the administration. Nevertheless, the idea remained quite attractive. On the one hand, in housing its collection in the Simpsons building the BnQ would have the possibility of generating some income by renting the lower floors of the building to other businesses. On the other hand, this location was seen as beneficial to those in Montreal's business community who saw it as an

opportunity to restore life and economic growth to this particular part of Montreal's downtown core.

In 1996, when discussions began in earnest around the creation of a Grande Bibliothèque in Montreal, the Simpsons option was still being weighed. The GB project unsurprisingly created two factions within political and cultural communities in Montreal: there were those that were very strongly in favour of the construction of such an institution, and those that were perhaps not entirely against the idea but also not completely willing to make the process too smooth for their adversary. There were also those who were not against the idea of improving library services in Québec, but rather weary of a showy mega-institution that the Trés Grande Bibliothèque would possibly become. Those in favour of the GB project included such public figures as Lucien Bouchard, Louise Beaudoin, Lise Bissonnette, and Montreal's literati. Those in opposition to the project included then Mayor of Montreal, Pierre Bourque, who was not sympathetic to the cause although he had promised that Montreal libraries would thrive under his administration. In fact, in a 1997 article from *The Gazette*, Peggy Curran writes that, "[b]efore he was elected mayor three years ago, Pierre Bourque made a lot of noise about how awful the city's libraries were. 'Montreal wants to become the capital city of gray matter, of tomorrow, of communication, but we don't have anything in our libraries.' His team would do better, he said. Yet Vision Montreal has done little to make Montreal book-rich" (p. A3). On the contrary, according to the article, many Montreal libraries were under threat of being shut down, "only fierce local protests stopped the city from closing libraries

in N.D.G. and little Burgundy," writes Curran (1997, p. A3). Also in opposition to the GB project were Montreal's business community, as well as public figures such as Jean-Claude Marsan, a well-known Montreal architect, urban planner, and Professor at the University of Montreal, and Helen Fotopulos, then a culture critic for the Montreal Citizens' Movement, she is currently a City of Montreal executive committee member responsible for culture, and a Côte des Neiges City Councillor. Although an avid defender of better public libraries for the city of Montreal, Fotopulos was strongly opposed to the construction of a Trés Grande Bibliothèque, which threatened the existence of smaller branch libraries. Fotopulos was not alone.

A 1997 article from *The Gazette* echoed such concerns:

> Although the Quebec government says it is not considering reducing the $15 million that it now gives to libraries across the province to augment their generally meagre resources, financial pressures may make such cuts tempting. Such pressures would be particularly intense on Montreal Island itself. One can imagine the argument: why give the island's neighbourhood libraries money for books when the province's showcase facility happens to be located in Montreal? But people want and deserve adequate libraries in their own neighbourhoods (Don't shut out local libraries, 1997, p. B2).

The arguments put forth by Bouchard and the GB committee, that such a library would in fact stimulate an interest in reading in Québec seemed to fall on deaf ears. At a National Assembly meeting in May 1997, Bouchard was quoted as saying that "[t]he fight for the French language starts with reading […] The fight for culture by young people, whether they be anglophone or francophone, starts with the mastery of writing, with reading, with the familiarity with which one turns to great writers. Montreal lacks this (tradition)" (qtd in Aubin, 1997, p. B2). The fact that Bouchard seemed to assume that a grandiose library would solve

Québec's reading problems was met with great skepticism, and more than irked some. Henry Aubin (1997) writes that,

> What is questionable is Bouchard's premise. He seems to assume it is possible to change a society's habits by providing it with a splendid physical plant. His thinking reminds me of former mayor Jean Drapeau. When we think of the scandal of the Olympic Stadium, we think of cost overruns. But there was another scandal. Drapeau justified the stadium's costly mast and its state-of-the-art sports facilities inside it on these grounds: that they would help inspire in young Quebecers a new enthusiasm for sport. Plans called for universities and other organizations to rent the mast's superb facilities for judo, fencing, wrestling, boxing, basketball, volleyball, badminton and squash. Today, of course, except for the swimming pool, only bats inhabit the place (p. B2).

The debates surrounding the construction of a mega-library in Montreal touched on two major issues, the politics of reading in Québec, and how money should be distributed in order to promote reading within the province. Since as early as the 1930s, Québec had lagged behind the rest of Canada with regards to the promotion of reading. The 1997 Richard Report[18] states that in 1933, 35% of the population of Ontario visited a library, whereas in Québec this number was only at 2%. Ten new public libraries were created in the 1940s, bringing the number of libraries to a total of only seventeen for the entire province. In 1956, Québec still had five times fewer volumes in libraries and ten times fewer library members than Ontario. Furthermore, it was only in 1959 that the government of Québec adopted the *Loi sur les bibliothèques publiques du Québec*, a law that would bring in measures that would encourage library creation within the province, and lessen the gap that existed between Québec and the rest of Canada.

[18] The Richard Report, headed by Clément Richard, was the governmental report that established that Montreal was indeed in need of a new public library that would adequately respond to the needs of a city of its size.

This law, however, came seventy-seven years after a similar one had been passed in the province of Ontario (Richard Report, 1997, p. 19).

By 1997, things had dramatically improved with respect to libraries in Québec. The province saw the creation of seventy-three new public libraries between 1950 and 1970. However, Québec was still very much behind the rest of Canada when it came to reading. Henry Aubin writes that

> A CROP poll that ran in l'Actualité magazine several years ago […] showed that Quebecers read far less than other Canadians. When asked if they had read any book in the previous six months, 37 per cent of Québec respondents said no. That was more than double the rate in the rest of Canada (15 per cent) (1997, p. B2).

The Richard Report found that although library service standards had improved, reading continued to be a problem within the province. The Report stated that 43% of Québécois between the ages of 16-69 did not have the skills to satisfy the exigencies of contemporary reading, and amongst them, 19% had major difficulties reading (1997, p. 28). These problems were found amongst both francophones and anglophones, but were more prevalent in the case of the former.

The Richard Report also highlighted that the reasons for reading in Québec had changed. In 1997, the most common type of reader was the "practical reader," in other words, those who read were those who sought answers to problems and questions that concerned their everyday lives. People were reading almost as much to be informed as they were for enjoyment (p. 27). The report stressed that the practice of reading was especially crucial in a society of "autoformation" or self-education and continuing education. Reading was fundamental for a citizen's ability to participate in society (p. 28). What was

equally crucial was to equip Québécois citizens not only with the educational tools to read, but the technological ones as well, those tools that benefitted those "practical" readers that had become so prevalent. In 1996, 33% of anglophone households and 24% of francophone households had a computer at home, and amongst them, a bit more than half had a modem (pp. 28-29). This was about the Canadian average, but other Canadian provinces were still very much ahead of Québec when it came to providing computer services within public libraries. Given these types of statistics, the Report concluded that,

> Tous ces constats nous obligent, comme société, à nous préoccuper des exclus du savoir ou de ceux qui pourraient le devenir parce qu'ils seraient insuffisamment outillés. Mais la capacité de lire et celle de se server des sources d'information électroniques constituent évidemment des préalables minimaux. Encore faut-il avoir facilement accès à la lecture. Et encore faut-il que les nouvelles technologies de l'information soient en mesure de répondre efficacement à la demande de produits culturels et d'information en langue française (p. 29).

Most agreed, that Québec was indeed in need of improving its library services, and that an improvement in library standards would eventually lead to a higher degree of literacy within the province. What was debateable however, was whether the city's money would be better spent on an ambitious project such as the Grande Bibliothèque, or whether the city should allocate its resources to improve local libraries across the province. The $75 million budget that had been set out for the construction of the new Grande Bibliothèque (and that later unsurprisingly rose) and its $25 million annual operational costs were extremely high for the city of Montreal, even though construction budgets for similar library projects in Vancouver and Seattle were substantially greater than that amount (the Vancouver Public Library's construction budget, for instance, was approximately

$110 million). Montreal's "The Big O," or more appropriately named "The Big Owe," the city's Olympic Stadium constructed for the 1976 Summer Olympics, was still acutely being felt by taxpayers. The budgetary projections for the stadium were originally at $134 million, then rose to $264 million at the time of the stadium's opening. When the stadium was finally paid for in full in 2006, it cost $1.61 billion. It is therefore unsurprising that many opponents to the GB saw the new library as another white elephant urban project.

Critics such as Helen Fotopulos were also worried about what this would mean for Montreal citizens not only with regards to their local library branch services, but financially as well. The government was planning to have the city of Montreal contribute $8.1 million annually to the GB's operational costs. Michelle Lalonde writes that,

> [I]n a letter to Mayor Pierre Bourque, Fotopulos said she was stunned by the report's suggestion that the city of Montreal should contribute $8.1 million to the library's $25-million operating budget. "It is unthinkable that the city would abandon its central-library collection to the Grande Bibliothèque du Québec, and then assume a third of its operating budget," Fotopulos wrote. Montrealers would be paying twice for the new library through provincial and municipal taxes, she said. She notes that fully one-quarter of the users of the city's main library on Sherbrooke St. are non-residents. Also, since the city will have to find a new use for the Sherbrooke St. building—which recently underwent $4 million in renovations—city taxpayers will continue to pay the $3.1 million in yearly heating, maintenance, security and other costs required to keep that building open. "Shouldn't the gift of the main library's book collections (more than one million documents) be, in itself, a sufficient contribution from Montrealers to the annual operating expenses of the Grande Bibliothèque du Québec?" the councillor asked in the letter (1997, p. A5).

Meanwhile, buildings such as the old Simpsons building considered for the new GB site, stood empty. Almost a decade had passed since the site had been occupied by the famous department store, and nothing was being done with the

space. It was, in a sense, a testament to the perhaps overly ambitious budgetary plans in store for the GB. With the financial pressures of the Olympic Stadium still very much a reality, and empty, unused historical monuments scattered across the city, the new library project for many seemed a frivolous undertaking; more the makings of the dreams of a perhaps overly determined Québec Premier, than a quest for a more literate society.

Whether for or against a library project for the city of Montreal, however, everyone seemed to have an opinion about its potential placement. Mayor Bourque was particularly enthusiastic about the idea of using the Simpsons building as the new space for the library, and was eager to pursue the idea at any cost. In a *Globe and Mail* article from October 22, 1996, Konrad Yakabuski writes:

> Mayor Pierre Bourque has a different idea. And he not only has the backing of the city's business community, but also that of the minister responsible for Montreal, Serge Menard, and—to the literati's horror—the head of the Bibliothèque Nationale. Desperate to find a tenant for the 67-year-old Simpsons building on Ste. Catherine Street, the mayor has earmarked the BNQ for the space—which has lain dormant since owner Hudson's Bay Co. closed the once venerable department store in 1989. For the city's business leaders, the empty space has become a gaping symbol of Montreal's economic decline. Needless to say, the idea of locating the BNQ—a beacon of Quebecois culture—in former temple of English Protestant capitalism has not sat well with the literati. It has generated enough acrid editorials and missives to the opinion pages to fill, well, a book (p. A2).

Although the municipal government strongly lobbied for the Simpsons site, the thought that the new Québécois national library would be placed in an old department store was "politically and philosophically unacceptable" (Goulet,

2009, p. 169)[19] for most, and the idea was eventually dismissed, but the problem of location persisted.

On March 16th, 1998, a study was published listing nine potential sites for the library. The Provisional Council of the Grande Bibliothèque had enlisted the services of la Société immobilière du Québec[20] to conduct a survey of the best available options for the potential site of the library within Montreal's downtown core. The choice of sites, nine in total, that resulted from this report were selected according to five different categories that would serve as preferential selection criteria. It was also clear from the outset that a search for the future GB site would require limiting the number of geographical choices. The exploration of various potential locations would have to take place within a specifically delineated geographical boundary.

Constructing the "Third Place"

As was seen before with the potential Simpsons site, since the early nineties discussions surrounding the project of a new public library within Montreal always had it rooted within the city's downtown core. This is not entirely surprising as the logic behind building the Grande Bibliothèque in the first place was to offer Montreal citizens a suitable downtown public library, that could not only be easily accessed by residents from the island of Montreal and its

[19] My translation.
[20] The Société immobilière du Québec is a government agency that, since 1984, has as its mission to seek out real-estate property for various ministries and public organizations and provide them with the necessary services of construction, development, and management. It is one of Québec's largest property owners and one of the principal rental agencies of properties currently on the market. Retrieved January 9, 2012, from http://www.siq.gouv.qc.ca/pageInterieur.asp?type=entreprise&html=mission.html.

surrounding areas, but would also have the capacity to serve the nearly four million people residing in Montreal's metropolitan area. However, two general trends in library development seemed to stand out with regards to locating the GB in downtown Montreal. The first being that, on some level, as Shannon Mattern (2007) has argued, "[p]ublic libraries have always been businesses, taking on commercial functions and forms, and they have always played important roles in civic culture and urban revitalization efforts" (p. 1). This is not to say that the civic and democratic nature of the public library has somehow been lost, only that the politics surrounding the construction of new downtown public libraries have often had to do with regenerating a section of a city's downtown core that has lost some of its commercial and cultural appeal. Although the previously mentioned Simpsons debates clearly exemplified this dynamic, this is not unique to Montreal. As Norma Rantisi and Deborah Leslie (2006) write: "New governance regimes have embraced the view of a city as a space of consumption and creativity, and have set out as their objective an interurban competitive strategy based on the marketing of their locales as distinctive destinations for work and play" (p. 365). These kinds of strategies can be seen taking place in most major cities in the world, especially with regards to libraries. The commissioning of high profile architects such as Moshe Safdie and Rem Koolhaas to design modern, ambitious, and daring new architectural library forms, exemplified by the Vancouver and Seattle public libraries, respectively, is one of the ways large metropoles have sought to put themselves on the international map. For Rantisi and Leslie, these types of library projects perfectly exemplify what they call the

"hard branding" of a site, "i.e. an altering of a physical site and the symbolic attributes of a place to create a unique tourist experience" (p. 366). They explain that,

> Hard branding introduces order, certainty and coherence into an unruly urban landscape, making it easier to 'read'. Governments will often appropriate star architects, designers or literary figures in the construction of a signature brand for a 'city' […] In this process there is a fetishization of the individual designer and a privileging of the building's status as architectural monument over its functional use value (p. 366).

There are numerous examples of this kind of hard branding happening in cities all over the world, from Frank Gehry's Dancing House in Prague to Will Alsop's Sharp Centre for Design at the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto. In the case of the GB project, the architectural design aspects did not lead to a fetishization of the library's architects, John and Patricia Patkau, and its functional use value has, on the contrary, been praised and privileged over its aesthetic properties. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the GB was in a sense about branding the city of Montreal, however perhaps not entirely in the sense described by Rantisi and Leslie. The GB project sought to brand the city of Montreal on an international scale as a city that boasts a vital and distinctly modern public library, but it also needed to brand itself to its own citizens. Montrealers needed to regain confidence that public money could actually result in a successful urban project. As was seen with the previously discussed budgetary debates that preceded the construction of the library, and in light of the unfortunate fate of certain buildings and neighbourhoods within the city, Montreal citizens were quite skeptical of so-called hard branding projects. Debates surrounding the construction of the Grande Bibliothèque came at a time when the city was struggling to pay for too many

failed and costly urban projects, seen with the Olympic Stadium and Mirabel airport, for example. Funds had all but run dry for any more expensive urban projects, and Montrealers were faced with the realities of failed decisions that had left them with mostly run-down and seedy city streets. The GB project sought to rectify past mistakes as much as it aimed to bring cohesion between the west and east ends of its downtown, the latter having been historically mostly neglected and underdeveloped, still clinging to its industrial past.

In a publication presenting the proposals for the GB's international architectural competition, Lise Bissonnette (2000) writes that,

> high hopes are entertained of the GBQ by its social context, the Latin Quarter and south-central Montréal which is frequented by thousands of other Montrealers and Québeckers who expect far more from the building than a traditional library look. A little before the competition was launched, we consulted with the various interest groups (community, cultural, and commercial organizations) and drew up a list of expectations that ran from the "reattachment" of areas cut off by an urban highway to humanization of the heavy university-institutional character of the area and the sterility of the metro/bus depot, the sum of all anonymities. It is an area of all miseries accompanied by much petty crime, and we are asked to take these problems into consideration if not help solve them. Some said the GBQ ought to be totally transparent to the city. Others, apparently irreconcilable, said the GBQ ought to be an inward-looking oasis in the same city (p. 3).

Given the general skepticism that accompanied the debates surrounding the construction of the GB, I would argue that there was not necessarily a "hard branding" priority attached to the project, however, the subsequent success of the GB seemed to introduce a new cultural "hard branding" priority that did not exist before. To borrow from Rantisi and Leslie (2006), the GB brought "certainty and coherence" into the east end's "unruly urban landscape, making it easier to 'read'"

(p. 366) for the city's own residents and future potential patrons, and possibly instilled a new confidence in the city's urban developments.

In November 2007, two years after the opening of the Grande Bibliothèque, a meeting was held at the Palais des congrès de Montréal called Montréal métropole culturelle (Montreal Cultural Metropolis) that invited representatives from the cultural and business communities of the city to participate in promoting "Montreal as a 21st century cultural metropolis, that prioritizes creatvity, originality and diversity" (Montreal métropole culturelle). The two day meeting was attended by almost 1,300 people and resulted in a 10 year action plan to develop culture as Montreal's signature brand "seen as key to the city's competitive identity in the global economy" (Everett-Green, 2012, p. R8).[21] This seemed to follow the school of thought propelled by such scholars as Richard Florida (2005) who argues that "creativity has become *the* principal driving force in the growth and development of cities, regions, and nations" (p. 1). A *Globe and Mail* article from March 3, 2012 entitled "Montreal builds its cultural brand" gives evidence of some of the projects taking shape in Montreal due largely to this initiative. Robert Everett-Green writes that "Montreal has always had a vibrant culture, but these days there's a new will to intensify it, by raising new buildings and emphasizing the links between them" (p. R8). He highlights a number of new and renovated cultural institutions that have popped up across the city over the last few years including plans for new developments. The most recent example being La Maison Symphonique, a new concert hall

[21] The 2007-2017 Action Plan is an initiative that was proposed by the Ville de Montréal, Culture Montréal, the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal, the Government of Québec and the Government of Canada.

which opened in September of 2011. This architecturally impressive addition to the city came very soon after "a $120-million redevelopment of public areas in the Quartier des Spectacles cultural district, including open-air performance and display spaces, and a 'luminous pathway' around the area" (p. R8). Montreal's Museum of Fine Arts is currently expanding their facilities at an approximate cost of $42.4 million. Montreal's Museum of Contemporary Art also hopes to expand, a project that could cost the government almost $88 million, and the Pointe-à-Callière Museum of Archeology and History is in the process of expanding their institution with a budget of approximately $60 million. Part of the 2007-2017 Action Plan, was also to see to it that Montreal's numerous old and abandoned heritage buildings would find new purposes. In April 2010, for example, the Bibliothèque Saint Sulpice which housed Montreal's dissemination collection before it was moved to the GB, was repurposed for use by the Le Vivier Group, a community intitiative comprising 27 music organizations. The old Saint Sulpice library is now a space for the research, creation and dissemination of new music. There are even plans to include an auditorium within the space where concerts could be held as early as 2012-2013. What is particluarly interesting about Montreal's new Action Plan and the expansion of its cultural institutions, is that not only has Montreal clearly developed a "hard branding" strategy for the city as defined by Rantisi and Leslie (2006), but that some of the same people who were strongly opposed to seeing millions spent on the GB project, are now adamantly behind these new branding strategies. Helen Fotopulos is quoted as saying that "[c]ulture and creativity is our DNA. It's not an expense any more, it's an

investment, and we have to increase and identify it" (qtd. in Everett-Green, 2012, p. R8). And yet a decade earlier it was very much an expense and far from an investment. Whether this kind of complete turnaround in opinion in Montreal is in part due to the success of the Grande Bibliothèque is arguable, but the GB can be considered a turning point in how the city has gone from being "Montréal declassé" to a thriving cultural hub.

The second trend that made itself apparent in the downtown siting of the new Montreal library, was that not only was a new library project considered a possibly revitalizing force for a somewhat run down urban district, but building an innovative and architecturally impressive downtown public library was also considered as a form of revitalization for the institution of the library itself. Not only were major cities finding an urgent need to centralize their library services in the face of increased decentralization, but libraries were also trying to transform their own image. Similarly to the branding strategies taken up by cities, libraries were also trying to brand themselves in new ways. They too were looking to become "distinctive destinations for work and play" (Rantisi & Leslie, 2006, p. 365). Mattern (2007) writes that

> contemporary libraries have made various programmatic and spatial changes in order to assert their continued relevance in a new age. Yes, we have ever-spreading suburbs, edge cities, and "exurbs"; we are indeed becoming more decentralized in our living patterns, our communication, our consumption, and so forth. But just as many sociologists, geographers, historians, and political scientists have acknowledged the continued, perhaps increased, importance of "place" in global economies, networks of information and library systems have retained a "center," too. There is a continued need for some centralized services, for hubs, in decentralized systems. Downtown libraries serve as hubs for their systems of branches. They provide a backbone for decentralized information systems (p. ix).

The branding of a library required not only the transformation of its exterior image, but a transformation of its interior elements as well. The interior space of the library needed to shift from being solely a space of knowledge, to one that combined knowledge with education, sociability, and recreation. The library needed to become a space for citizens as much as it needed to remain one for books. Some scholars have argued that the library needed to become akin to what Ray Oldenburg (1997) has termed the "third place."

In his book *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (1997), Oldenburg introduces the notion of "third place." Reminiscent of Edward Soja's (1996) assessment of Thirdspace, which Soja claims "is a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings" (p. 2), and also in line with Habermas' (1989) theories of the public sphere where rational, critical, and un-coerced opinion-making and debate can occur, Oldenburg defines the "third place" as that place that exists between the work place and the space of the home. For Oldenburg the third place is not only about escaping from the everyday realities of the spaces of the home and the work place. One of the more important aspects of third places is the differences that they make apparent to us when compared to the habitual places within which we normally reside and work. He writes that "[t]he *raison d'être* of third place rests upon its differences from the other settings of daily life and can best be understood by comparison with them" (1997, p. 22). Focusing on various examples of how third places have evolved in

Europe and the United States over time, such as the German-American lager beer garden, the French bistro, and the main street of small town America, Oldenburg argues that Americans, in particular, have lost their sense of community as the social functions of informal public gathering places have lost their importance. This phenomenon is primarily the result of decentralization (the move to the suburbs, for example) and the transformation of our urban landscapes into mainly spaces of work and consumerism, leaving little room for spaces of leisure.

According to Oldenburg:

> The examples set by societies that have solved the problem of place and those set by the small towns and vital neighborhoods of our past suggest that daily life, in order to be relaxed and fulfilling, must find its balance in three realms of experience. One is domestic, a second is gainful or productive, and the third is inclusively sociable, offering both the basis of community and the celebration of it (1997, p. 14).

Oldenburg identifies various characteristics for his definition of the "third place." For him, third places should be those places that allow people to come and go as they please, they should be inclusive, accessible, playful, and the main activity should be conversation. His list of potential "third places" includes cafés, pubs, diners, hair salons, and bookstores, but somewhat surprisingly excludes libraries. In their article "Seattle Public Library as Place: Reconceptualizing Space, Community, and Information at the Central Library," authors Fisher, Saxton, Edwards and Mai (2007) argue that while the space of the library (in their example, the Seattle Public Library) "does not support [all of Oldenburg's] third place propositions […] it is consistent with other third place characteristics that Oldenburg notes, as offering such personal benefits as novelty, perspective, spiritual tonic, and friendship via its collection, staff, services, and clientele" (p.

152). Although Oldenburg omits libraries, most likely because conversation, recreation, and forms of play have always been at odds with traditional perceptions of what appropriate behaviour within these institutions should be, it could be argued that with cities engaging in novel efforts to revitalize informal public leisure spaces, newly designed libraries are incorporating Oldenburg's functions of the third place more and more. Furthermore, the space of the public library, unlike Oldenburg's other third places, has no direct monetary cost to visitors, making it that much more accessible and inclusive as a place. However, for Oldenburg the loss of the third place, at least in the United States, has a great deal to do with location, or rather "dislocation," in the sense that as Americans have moved further and further away from downtown, and as a result away from the pleasant café or lively pub, they have by necessity had to expand their homes into spaces of leisure (home entertainment systems might come to mind). They have "dislocated" themselves from those places where they might otherwise go to relax. Consequently, in order for the public library to potentially become a contemporary third place, its siting cannot be arbitrary; access, proximity, and neighbourhood are all central in establishing, whether the library could in fact function as a third place.

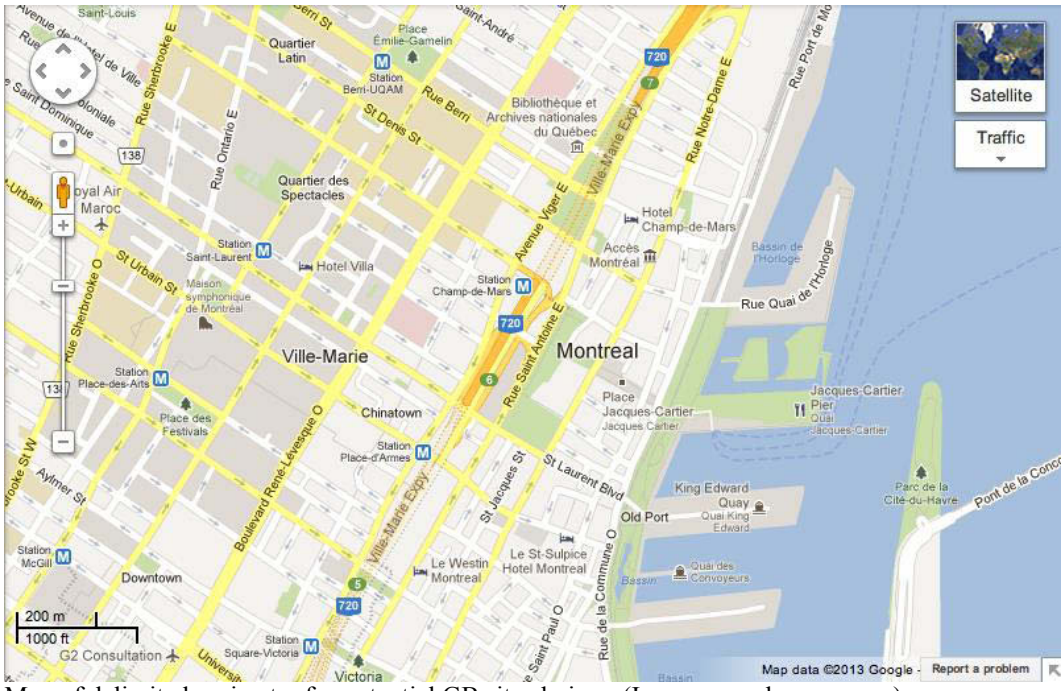
The Finalists

Siting the new Grande Bibliothèque was far from arbitrary, and in light of the previously discussed trends, no doubt largely defined the kind of public space that the institution would become. As previously mentioned, the Provisional Council set out five criteria according to which the Société immobilière was to make its

decision on potential site choices. The first criterion considered how well the surrounding neighbourhood would be able to integrate a new public library. The second measured the ease with which the site could be accessed. The third was to take the general characteristics of the site into account, which meant considering such things as the site's surface area as well as its configuration. The fourth was to judge the impact that the project would have on its surroundings; in other words, the library was expected to simultaneously reflect the social and economic characteristics of its environment as well as reinforce the various urban characteristics that defined the neighbourhood within which it sought to inscribe itself. Finally, the Société immobilière was to consider whether the project could be effectively and realistically implemented given the proposed budget as well as the four previous criteria.

Based on these criteria, the Société immobilière delineated a specific geographical perimeter in which they would consider sites for the new Grande Bibliothèque. Located to the north of Old Montreal, this perimeter had Sherbrooke Street as its northernmost boundary, University Street to the west, Saint-Antoine Street to the south, and Saint-Hubert Street to the east. For the Société immobilière the urban identity of this particular part of downtown Montreal was qualified by several factors. The Société immobilière's search would firstly encompass what could be considered the center of Montreal's business district, it would also be located within the east-west commercial axis of St.Catherine's Street, and because the area's limits also included Montreal's Quartier des Spectacles, where the Place des Arts is situated—a complex that

includes such cultural spaces as the Salle Wilfrid Pelletier, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Théatre Maisonneuve, and the Palais des Congrés—this particular district was also acknowledged as housing the heart of Montreal's cultural scene.



Map of delimited perimeter for potential GB site choices. (Image: googlemaps.com)

For the Société immobilière, the recent construction of the University of Québec (UQAM) pavilion north of the Place des Arts, and the expansion of the Théatre de Nouveau Monde, attested to the cultural as well as educational character of this particular neighbourhood. Finally, the delineated district was also one that included the intersection of both local and regional transport, encompassing Berri-UQAM metro station, the busiest station within Montreal's transit system, and the city's Terminus bus depot, a significant and practical feature of this part of the city as it would respond to the eventual need of ease of access to the library.

The Société immobilière proposed nine potential sites, all of which are found within the delimited perimeter described above. The first was property owned by UQAM, which at the time of the 1998 report's publication was being used as a public parking station. The second was the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, which was then the current site of the Bibliothèque nationale de Montréal. The other choices included the Palais du Commerce[22], what had originally been a commercial exhibition space and had over time become completely underused; Terminus Voyageur, a site that encompassed the Terminus Voyageur bus depot, a hotel, as well as various institutions and residences; the Ilot Balmoral, a site located to the west of Montreal's performing arts center, Place des Arts; Site Hydro-Québec/TNM (Théâtre de Nouveau Monde), the west part of which was owned by Hydro Québec, and the east side shared by multiple owners. This site was mostly made up of commercial buildings that were in large part vacant. The final three choices included the Ilot Anderson, which was made up of mostly empty spaces used for parking, commercial, and residential properties; the Autoroute Ville-Marie, the choice of this site would mean demolishing the highway itself, and finally the Champ-de-Mars metro station. Following a close examination and rating of the sites according to the aforementioned criteria, the Société immobilière presented the GB's Provisional Council with three options. These were the Ilot Balmoral, the Palais du Commerce, and the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice sites.

[22] In 1998 the Palais du Commerce was owned by the real estate company SITQ (Caisse de dépot et placement du Québec) now called Ivanhoé Cambridge.

The Ilot Balmoral site seemed to be the favourite from the outset. Enclosed by De Maisonneuve boulevard to the north, Jeanne-Mance street to the east, St. Catherine Street West situated to the south, de Bleury street to the west, and Balmoral being the street that runs north-south dividing the site into two islets. For the Société immobilière and the GB committee, this particular choice of site seemed obvious as the library would easily complement its cultural surroundings, such as the Place des Arts. It also responded well to most criteria. Constructing the GB on the Ilot Balmoral site was extremely practical as it would have meant not having to build such spaces as public parking, and could easily be connected to the Place des Arts, not only culturally and ideologically but also in terms of construction, where various electromechanical systems, heating, and air-conditioning could be shared. This would not only reduce costs of implementation and construction, but would also significantly reduce the building's functioning costs.

The Palais du Commerce site was a particularly interesting choice. With regards to its characteristics, the Palais du Commerce was situated in a neighbourhood deemed by the Société immobilière to be relatively culturally homogeneous. It was located near cinemas, very close to UQAM, and not far from the CEGEP du Vieux-Montréal, to name a few examples. Yet it was still located on the outskirts of the neighbourhood's principal commercial activities, which are mostly situated on Saint-Denis and Saint-Catherine Streets a little further south, meaning that those who frequented the site were mostly limited to those who worked in or used the neighbouring institutions. The building could

potentially attract those on foot, but would more likely be accessed by those in transit from the metro to the bus depot and vice versa. This site's fortunate placement right at the intersection of the Berri-UQAM metro station and the Terminus bus depot was most likely one of the major reasons for which it made the final list of chosen sites, access being one of the major focus points of the search. However, for both the Société immobilière and the GB council, the Palais du Commerce site was problematic for numerous reasons. With regards to the practicalities of the site, although it was located at the intersection of both local and regional transport, its urban characteristics were not homogeneous enough to consolidate easily. Although, cinemas, a major university, and schools existed within its vicinity, the bus depot, the fast food restaurants, as well as the various empty and neglected buildings, made it difficult to create a sense of cohesion. In addition, it did not encompass the necessary and important road axis, and its visibility was limited to the principal intersections of the neighbourhood. Furthermore, although the site had potential for future expansion, and already contained public parking space, the Palais du Commerce would have to be demolished as it could not be used as the Grande Bibliothèque site itself, a detail that would significantly increase construction costs. Finally, the built structure would not necessarily be the compact square-like building so important to the Provisional Council, for ease of circulation, surveillance and cost reduction[23], instead the building would most likely take on a more oblong kind of form. This detail could potentially be rectified by purchasing more land in order to make the surface area of the ground floor longer than the floors above it, for example,

[23] This will be elaborated on further in the following chapter.

however this again would most likely lead to more expensive construction costs, and might also take up the already existing and necessary exterior parking. With regards to its integrative qualities it also seemed questionable as a choice. The report highlighted how it could be considered weak in terms of the clientele it might attract, in particular, possibly undesirable people from the bus depot, as well as the fact that it was not directly surrounded by any commercial activity. Finally, in terms of its proximity to cultural activities, which would potentially attract "diverse social groups," it was given an average score (Société immobilière du Québec, 1998, p. 3).

The final potential site was the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice. Located on St. Denis Street, it seemed an obvious choice as it already housed the Bibliothèque nationale de Montréal, not to mention the historic and symbolic qualities that it possessed. Nonetheless, although rich in symbolic value it was even less practical a choice than the two previous sites. The Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice site would generate higher construction costs for numerous reasons. The building in its current state could not serve as the new GB, and could under no circumstance be destroyed. Because of its great symbolic and patrimonial value both in the city of Montreal and in Québec as a whole, this site would require not only the building of a new library but also the renovation and integration of the already existing one. Furthermore, as the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice did not have any direct access to a metro station it was not as easily accessible as the two previous sites. Nonetheless, the extra costs generated by more complex construction needs would possibly be made up for by savings with regards to the functioning, conservation,

and costs involved with moving the library's documentary holdings that would ensue if this particular site was not chosen. [24]

The Curse of the East

The final two criteria set out by the Provisional Council, were what they termed as the "project's impact" on the surrounding neighbourhood, and finally, the construction budget (which was not to exceed 75 million dollars (CAD)). The project's impact, similar to what had been discussed earlier as the library's potential integrative qualities, meant that the new library would ideally reflect the socio-economic characteristics of the neighbourhood within which it was to be situated. The integration of a new institution and its various forms of use needed to reinforce the urban characteristics of its environment. Given the final choice of site for the Grande Bibliothèque, in Montreal's East End, or Latin Quarter as it is otherwise known, this final consideration was quite an ambiguous one as the surrounding buildings and services in this part of the city were actually in quite dire states of disrepair after years of neglect. Furthermore, although the GB, at present, has managed to some degree to gentrify this particular corner of Montreal's downtown east side, the architectural properties of the building itself certainly did not reflect the existing characteristics of its surroundings, a lack that was highly criticized when the building was constructed, and yet which has also

[24] The remaining six sites were all deemed unlikely to become the future sites of the Grande Bibliothèque largely due to their functional deficiencies as well as the difficulties involved in the implementation of the new library within these sites. The UQAM site, although it did not pose the same implementation problems, was not favourable due to its lacking integrative qualities as well as the proximity desired with regards to commercial activities.

simultaneously been largely responsible for the building's success. When the GB was built, many criticized the fact that the library's design failed "to acknowledge the history of the site on which it was built" (Straw, 2004, par. 57), and yet it is one of the first buildings to have (at least so far) resisted the so-called "curse" of the downtown east side. Montreal's East End, and particularly the corner on which the GB now stands, had often been considered "cursed" due to the many architectural projects that had fallen through, and the various buildings that had either burned down or were eventually left to decay and faded into that urban nothingness of the ground-level parking lot. In a *Le Devoir* article dated June 16th, 2007, Stéphane Baillargeon writes about the "malédiction de l'Est" (p. b1), the curse of the east, explaining that aborted projects (either badly proposed or just unlucky) have succeeded each other in Montreal's East End for more than a century and a half. One of the earliest monuments that met with this unlucky fate was the Saint-Jacques le Majeur Cathedral. The very first Catholic Cathedral of the Montreal Diocese built in 1825, had burnt down and was reconstructed three times in 1852, 1858, and 1933 (p. b1). Only the facades of the Cathedral remain, now integrated into the UQAM campus, a fact bemoaned by Baillargeon when he writes that, "[i]l n'en reste plus que les façades, intégrées depuis le début des années 70 aux disgracieux pavillons des premiers temps de l'UQAM, entre les rues Saint-Denis et Berri" (p. b1). Imagined as a thriving francophone downtown, Baillargeon explains that the Latin Quarter had seen at least three major urban projects erected and destroyed during the first half of the 20th century.

In his article "Le rêve est-il patrimonial? Histoire des aspirations identitaires pour le secteur de l'Îlot Voyageur à Montréal" (2007), Jacques Lachapelle traces the architectural history of the neighbourhood and highlights the struggles that this particular part of Montreal's downtown had faced in its quest for an identity, and specifically a francophone identity, over the past 180 years. For Lachapelle the architectural history of the Latin Quarter largely mimicks the socio-cultural politics that have always been present within Montreal and Québec as a whole. Lachapelle writes that

> [p]uisque l'identité est souvent un rapport à l'autre, dans ce cas-ci, la référence a été à plusieurs reprises celle du quartier central, le centre-ville de Montréal, établi à l'ouest et associé au milieu anglophone. Cette dualité bien montréalaise est-ouest, francophone-anglophone, sert de toile de fond à cette histoire. Comme on le constate, l'identité n'est pas qu'affaire locale, mais relève d'une perspective métropolitaine. Elle se bâtit même en parallèle à l'évolution des enjeux idéologiques nationalistes qui ont cours au Québec (p. 40).

In other words, the architectural history of this particular *quartier* exhibits all the complexity, tension and contradictions characteristic of past and contemporary Québécois identity and citizenship. In fact, as one of the earliest buildings to be erected within the neighbourhood, what is particularly interesting about the Saint-Jacques le Majeur Cathedral, is that it was strategically sited (on Saint-Denis Street, very close to Saint-Catherine's Street) in order to divide the city of Montreal in two. Representing the catholic francophone community to the east of Saint-Laurent Street and distinguishing it from the Protestant anglophone community to the west. Ironically, the great fire of 1852 that ultimately destroyed the Cathedral also ended up redrawing the city's divisive lines. The then second Bishop of Montreal, Ignace Bourget, decided to rebuild the Cathedral, this time to

the west of the city in the heart of the anglo-Protestant district. Bishop Bourget's then quite radical decision reflected the ambitions of francophone elites who wished to succeed within the anglo-Protestant established business district rather than isolating themselves and building a distinct one of their own (p. 41). What Lachapelle questions, however, is whether the tumultuous history of the Latin Quarter, which sought to make the dream of a francophone downtown in Montreal a reality, should be put aside as a thing of the past, or whether it should remain inherent within the contemporary architectural undertakings of the area, and consequently possibly posing a challenge to perhaps newer and more cosmopolitan conceptions of urban creativity within the city (p. 40). Lachapelle explains that the architectural history of Montreal's East End was largely dominated by important religious structures, such as the Saint-Jacques le Majeur Cathedral, but also by various hospices and convents such as the l'Asile des soeurs de la Providence,[25] as well as a reform school for homeless and delinquent youth (l'École de réforme pour jeunes sans-abri et délinquants (1866)). These institutions defined the neighbourhood as a district of reform and charity, and significantly tied the francophone community to the clergy (p. 42). This in itself was not necessarily detrimental to the identity of the East End, but as Lachapelle argues this imposed a Christian morality and ethics to the neighbourhood and instilled a provincial landscape on it that seemed in stark opposition/contrast to

[25] The Sisters of Providence which opened in 1841, was a Roman Catholic congregation founded by Émilie Gamelin, a social worker and Catholic nun from Québec known for her charitable work within Montreal. Place Émilie Gamelin, otherwise known as Berri square that currently lies adjacent to the Grande Bibliothèque, is named after her.

the industrial growth that was taking place to the west end of the city. As Lachapelle writes,

> [t]outefois, la contribution de ces institutions à l'urbanisation du secteur est paradoxale dans une ville en plein essor industriel, dans la mesure où elles perpétuent une image encore très paysagère, voire agricole, de la ville et favorisent, avec leurs murs d'enceinte, la réclusion, symbole du passé, plutôt que l'ouverture moderne (p. 43).

Later attempts to industrialize the neighbourhood with the construction of the Palais du Commerce and the Voyageur bus terminal in the 1950s, seemed only to feed the so-called aforementioned curse discussed by Baillargeon, with both buildings deteriorizing and becoming somewhat obsolete overtime, unsuccessful in stimulating the economic growth so desired for the area. The construction of the UQAM campus in the 1970s, however, brought new meaning to the Latin Quarter. Rather than attempting to recreate a francophone business district, UQAM was a turning point in how the *quartier* would be defined in the future, revitalizing it as a social and cultural hub rather than an economic one. With the arrival of students, the old residential buildings that populated St. Denis Street were transformed into cafés, bars and boutiques, and unused lots were reconfigured as outdoor public spaces. Although, the presence of UQAM made the neighbourhood thrive, attempts to expand it seemed also to succumb to the curse. In 2005, UQAM announced an ambitious project on the Îlot Voyageur site, that sought to create numerous new classrooms, residences, offices and an underground parking lot. The construction, which was never completed due to a scandal involving overspending for the project approved by top university officials, ended up resulting in the loss of more than half a billion dollars in public

funds. The site, which was later bought out by the Québec government, is now home to Montreal's new bus terminal, which opened in early 2012.

It could be argued that the only building that has not yet succumbed to the Curse of the East End is the new Grande Bibliothèque (although it did experience its own set of troubles in 2006 and 2007, when some of the building's glass claddings came crashing down onto the sidewalk below). This is in large part due to the fact that, as was discussed earlier by Lachapelle, it neither reflects the Latin Quarter's religious and rather rural architectural history, nor its somewhat disastrous economic and industrial one. In fact, the Grande Bibliothèque is more representative of the cultural history of the neighbourhood. As Lachapelle writes

> La Grande Bibliothèque ainsi que les édifices de l'UQAM constituent actuellement les contributions publiques les plus signicatives pour redonner un visage contemporain aux aspirations historiques du secteur. Tant par leurs activités et leur qualité architecturale que par leur gabarit plus approprié au secteur, ils témoignent du fait que ce n'est pas en tentant de copier l'ouest commercial—sans pouvoir y réussir—que le secteur saura perpétuer le rêve identitaire de participer à la vitalité du centre-ville (p. 52).

There exists a trend in Montreal, at least in terms of urban planning, that has always wanted its neighbourhoods to be contextual or to mimic the past by representing, in one form or another, what was there before (Baillargeon, 2007). In recent years, however, many architects and planners have become resistant to this idea, claiming that this is perhaps not the best approach to successful urban planning. For them, the success of the Grande Bibliothèque lies very much in the fact that it is precisely not a contextual building. However, Lachapelle takes this further when he argues that the GB is on some level reflective of the distinct past that the Latin Quarter has lived. The GB has created something new and unique

for the neighbourhood, it in itself is singular, and although it may not mirror its past and current surroundings through its architectural properties, it certainly succeeds in demonstrating that the Latin Quarter was never meant simply to mirror the west, or even to exist in opposition to it, rather, its identity relied on its distinctiveness both historically and in its present form.

Public Choice

From the three final sites chosen, the committee leading the study decided that according to their criteria, the best site for the Grande Bibliothèque would in fact be the Ilot Balmoral. As was highlighted earlier, the Ilot Balmoral was really the safest and most practical choice, located within an already existing cultural hub, and with low construction costs, it seemed perfect. However, the reason for this choice ran even deeper. It was also considered a part of the city in which you would find people who were more likely to read, or who were already reading, such as students, scholars, intellectuals, artists, journalists, and thus those who would be more likely to frequent a library in the first place, as opposed to a site located more to the eastern part of the downtown core, for example. Although the Palais du Commerce site to a certain extent satisfied several of the Provisional Council's conditions—such as being a suitably located site that was accessible and encompassed a university, a cinema, cafés, and other culturally appropriate institutions that would complement the activities of a public library—it was also adjacent to a decrepit bus terminal, empty and abandoned construction sites, as well as at an intersection where east met west, where the poor met the affluent,

and by extension where those who could not read or did not, met those that could. For someone like Lise Bissonnette, the choice to place a public library in a neighbourhood where those who would frequent it were more likely to be affluent and well-read was frustrating reasoning. "I was mad," she says about the Ilot Balmoral choice, "because I had followed the project from the beginning, and I had written about the reports and I felt that there was something wrong with that" (interview, May 22, 2007). Indeed, for Bissonnette, the point of constructing the GB was not to satisfy (only) the needs of scholars, academics, and researchers, who most likely already had adequate library resources available to them through their academic institutions. The goal was to get those who were not reading or could not read into the library, to offer access to those who did not already have adequate public library services, even if this meant making the library accessible to a possibly less desirable patron demographic. Consequently, it was thanks to Bissonnette that discussions about the placement of the library were readdressed and this time with more public participation. In an article that she wrote for *Le Devoir* in response to the Ilot Balmoral decision, Bissonnette offered another choice of potential site, ironically, the unlikely site of the old Palais du Commerce.

> I knew about this square Boulevard de Maisonneuve; and you remember that it was the Palais du Commerce that was sitting right here where we are. It was almost empty except for the Taz Mahal and a used bookstore. Destined for demolition, I argued in *Le Devoir* that the Grande Bibliothèque should be here. The discussion caught fire, and I should thank my supporters in the neighbourhood, mostly cultural organizations like the Académie des lettres, La maison des écrivains, others in the vicinity, who wrote open pieces and began the debate, and [Louise] Beaudoin said that she would hold public hearings on the placement of the Grande Bibliothèque (interview, May 22, 2007).

Indeed, public hearings did take place and it appears that 70% of those who participated in the hearings favoured the Latin Quarter as the new site of the Grande Bibliothèque as opposed to the approximate 1% who voted in favour of the Ilot Balmoral. Ease of access to the library was as equally important to the GB committee as it was to Montreal citizens. Most agreed that the Berri Street location had the best transport access not only for local residents but also for those arriving from outside the city. The proximity to the bus depot meant that people could save time and money on transport costs within the city. Yet there seemed to be another reason for the Latin Quarter as the favoured choice of site. In the past, Montreal's urban projects always seemed unfortunately placed, often leading to the demise of the projects in question, it was therefore important for citizens that this did not repeat itself with the GB. A 1997 article from *The Gazette* highlights this need and the popularity of the Palais du Commerce site:

> The ambience of the neighbourhood, the Quartier Latin, is well-suited for the facility's literary vocation. And the presence across the street of the Université du Québec à Montréal, with its tens of thousands of students, would ensure that the library had plenty of users. Many of the region's public-works projects have been in the wrong location—one has only to recall the Olympic Stadium, Mirabel Airport and the Convention Centre. Putting the super-library on Berri St. would break that unhappy pattern (p. B2).

The choice of site ultimately ended up being a public decision rather than a governmental one. This is not to say that there was no opposition to this decision. As Will Straw writes: "The choice of the Palais du Commerce site for the new library came late in the process, and many felt that this neighbourhood, with its fast food restaurants, bus fumes and legacy of activism and transience was not

worthy of so noble an institution" (2004, par. 55). However, the "access" argument seemed to be enough for the majority. As an intersection for three major Montreal metro lines, the location of the Central Bus Terminal and the proximity to UQAM, as highlighted within the report, the Palais du Commerce site was already a hub through which approximately 500,000 people passed each day.

Yet it was more than all this to those who were concerned with its placement. As Bissonnette explains in her interview, the discussions about where the library should be located were more than just discussions about a building and its location, but rather a discussion about a library and the concept behind it. What kind of institution was this particular library going to be? The last minute decision to involve the public in this process was therefore a significant one, for up until that moment the public was largely excluded from the decision-making processes involved in the construction of what would be their new public library. As Mattern (2007) insightfully points out,

> the design process presents an opportunity for library decision makers and the city to think through exactly what the "public" means in "public library." What publics will that library building serve, and how will those publics be represented, if at all, in the design process? […] The shaping of a library building is, in effect, the shaping of the public it serves and the determination of the institution's public identity (p. 9).

Mattern makes an interesting claim as to this question of what "public" means when we speak about the public library. The GB project decisions were mostly being made behind closed doors, yet as will be seen in further chapters, most of the decisions were being made in the name of the public and what it wanted: more space, more comfort, noise, privacy, freedom, access, protection. These were things supposedly desired by the public, yet the public, except for the

aforementioned last minute hearings, was not consulted on these questions. These were decisions made in part based on the success of the public libraries that the GB was modeled on—specifically the newly built Seattle and Vancouver public libraries as well as the Toronto Reference Library—and in part by what government, city, and library officials defined as a suitable public library for the city of Montreal. However, the Seattle, Vancouver, and Toronto publics differ greatly from each other as much as they differ in large part from the Montreal public, and again in those cases it is unclear to what extent the public was consulted, and if they were, what the quality of this participation was. Were these publics invited to participate in the decisions pertaining to the construction of a new public library as an audience, or as genuine participants in decision-making (Mattern, 2007, p. 9)? I do not wish to argue that in the case of the GB, the government and library officials overstepped their boundaries in terms of the decisions that they purportedly made on behalf of the public, nor that these decisions were in any way detrimental to the public. I only wish to highlight that the term "public," as it pertains to the decision-making processes of a new downtown public library, takes on different meanings in different contexts, and might not always actually mean "public" or even be "public." At the same time, however, the term "public" in the context of the public library is not static, so although government and library officials and various policy makers might inscribe a certain kind of "publicness" into the library itself, this is immediately transformed as soon as the library opens its doors to *its* public. In the instance of the choice of site for the GB, by allowing the public to voice its opinion on this

particular issue, this "door" was opened a bit earlier. Although, it could be argued that these opinions were not in any way representative of all the patrons that in the future would frequent the library, they did in a large way contribute to the success that the library is currently experiencing, and consequently, where the library would be (and is) situated would become a very important part of its overall conception.

In light of this public character of the choice of site, it is interesting to note that the Palais du Commerce choice is still one that is full of contradictions (perhaps even somewhat representative of the public that chose it), and it is simultaneously a site that shares some ironic similarities with its successor. The Palais du Commerce, or Show Mart, as it was known in English, was built in 1952 and was modeled on Chicago's famous Merchandise Mart. As Straw (2004) writes, "[t]he original plans for the Palais called for a palace-like structure with meeting rooms, projection facilities, radio-studios, restaurants, retail stores and recreation-based enterprises like bowling and billiard parlours" (par. 27), but ended up serving a whole variety of even more varied purposes up until its demolition in 2001. What is interesting about this description of what the Palais was intended for, is that it is reminiscent of what is currently offered at the Grande Bibliothèque. Although primarily a container of books, it likewise holds meeting rooms, projection facilities, a restaurant, and at one point also had its own retail store. Similarly, when the Palais later served as a meeting place for local events as well as an exhibition space, one cannot help but deduce that the design

of the GB at least with regards to the purposes that it sought to serve (if not in terms of its architectural design) almost mimicked those of the Palais.

Palais du Commerce. (Image: imtl.org)

This was perhaps less obvious during the Palais' final days when it had been transformed into what many called the Taz Mahal, "described by those who adored it as the largest indoor skateboard park, in-line skating facility and BMX-riding surface in the world" (par. 42). Yet, as Straw further indicates, in its nearly fifty years of existence the Palais du Commerce became not only an urban gathering space but also "a market for used cultural commodities" (par. 53), cultural commodities that were in large part specific to Québec's cultural heritage and were possibly just as efficient at gathering Québec's national treasures as the Grande Bibliothèque itself.

On the Border of Things

> [P]ublic libraries play several roles simultaneously: they respond to downtown patterns of movement; they relate to nearby cultural, residential, and commercial developments; and they anchor revitalization districts, sometimes "legitimating" or "softening" these developments by inserting some free, public culture into an otherwise commercially driven program (Mattern, 2007, p. 43).

Libraries straddle borders. The Haskell Free Library and Opera House introduced at the beginning of this chapter is a literal example of a library that does so. Yet it can also be seen as an institution that not only offers services to communities living on opposite sides of a border, but one that also metaphorically crosses boundaries. Throughout its history it can be seen as an institution that has attempted to cross lines, or better yet redraw them. From offering a sanctuary for families to reunite during the Vietnam War to becoming a site of resistance in the face of post 9/11 heightened security initiatives, the Haskell Free Library and Opera House not only straddles a boundary but pushes one as well.

The site of the Grande Bibliothèque can similarly be seen as one that is located on the border of historical, cultural, political, technological, geographic, and economic dynamics. The 1998 study evaluating potential site choices for the Grande Bibliothèque elaborated on throughout this chapter, brings the numerous expectations that new public libraries are expected to satisfy to light. For instance, the new GB was to integrate itself smoothly into an already existing neighbourhood while simultaneously contributing positively to and expanding on what that neighbourhood already had to offer. Yet on both literal and symbolic levels, the GB was expected to do much more. In a very literal sense and given its historical background, the GB clearly straddles the border between Montreal's

downtown west and east ends. It is equally very concretely sited at the intersection where all of the city's metro lines meet. On a more symbolic level it is simultaneously representative of its neighbourhood's past, present, and future. The GB's architectural properties may not allude to the churches and charitable organizations that were located there prior to its existence, but its educational role within the city as well as its accessibility as a sanctuary or safe space for those who may find themselves on the margins of society, does keep these types of activities central to Montreal's Latin Quarter. In addition, it is symbolic of the neighbourhood's (and possibly Montreal's as a whole) tendencies towards a more cosmopolitan outlook. Although the GB may be an institutional embodiment of some of Québec's franco-anglo political tensions, it is in reality a space that serves a much more culturally, linguistically, and ethnically heterogeneous population. It is where those who read might come into contact with those who do not, where those who have homes might witness those who do not, and where those who speak French may encounter those who speak other languages. The Grande Bibliothèque, as the Haskell Free Library and Opera House, is on the border of things, and what will be seen in subsequent chapters is how it negotiates the tensions that come with straddling several borders at once.

Chapter 3

Letting the Outside In: Designing a New Public Space

> Human movements are not linear like the way a train travels, but curve in a more organic way. With straight lines we can only create a crossroads, but with curves we can create more diverse interactions. Architectural forms can be created from human movements and, in turn, architecture influences humans. I think it's ideal when they create a dynamic interaction (Nishizawa, SANAA, 2010).

On February 22, 2010 the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) introduced the newest addition to its campus facilities, The Rolex Learning Center. The institution, now open to the EPFL community as well as to the general public, was conceived of by Japanese architects Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, both partners at SANAA Architects. Through their design, Sejima and Nishizawa introduced a new architectural approach to education and learning. Rather than understanding the acquisition of knowledge in a linear sense, they preferred to treat it as a landscape in which different people, disciplines, and technologies come together in a spontaneous and free way. The Rolex Learning Center is "barrier-free," instead of walls it has incorporated slopes, plateaus, and valleys into its design in order to allow visitors to move through and use the space as they see fit. However, more than simply providing flexible and spontaneous mobility to the Center's users, the institution's unique design and architecture also mimicks the exterior landscape of the Swiss alpine and lake region in which it finds itself. It creates a seamless relationship between the inside and the outside

that suggests learning is not done in isolation, but shares a sensibility with the environment in which it takes place. The Rolex Learning Center literally lets the outside in.

The Rolex Learning Center, Lausanne, Switzerland. (Image: laufen.com)

Although primarily a library, with one of the largest scientific collections (500,000 printed works) in Europe, The Rolex Learning Center is also a "laboratory for learning," and equally functions as an "international cultural hub" (Rolex Learning Center Press Information, 2010, p. 2). Providing a vast range of services and spaces, from the library and study areas to cafés and restaurants, what is interesting about the Center is that although it blends all the elements of modern library design, it is not called a library. This is significant, as in the first instance it suggests the current discourse that holds that libraries are no longer "just libraries," but a hybrid of different specializations and services that have come together to create a new public space.

The Rolex Learning Center. (Image: gsm.epfl.ch)

It also indicates that there is a certain difficulty today in calling a library by name. The contemporary library has been called a number of things, including a 'learning/community center,' an 'access point,' and a 'technological hub.'[26] Although these might be positive ways of positioning the library as a more relevant institution for today, it has also plunged the library into a series of tropes. Notions of democracy, access, interactivity, life-long learning, publicness, and sociability have been brought to the fore as ways of promoting the contemporary

[26] The Rolex Learning Center is a good example of this, but it is not the only one. Vancouver's 'Old Lady Sandstone', the city's first Carnegie Library (located in Vancouver's downtown east side), re-opened in 1980 as The Carnegie Community Centre. The Information, Communication and Media Center of the TFH Wildau (Technical University), in Wildau, Germany, which opened in 2007, is another example of a hybrid library. Urban Mediaspace in Aarhus, Denmark, scheduled to open in 2014, is to be Scandinavia's largest public library.

library, while also masking the complexities of some of these concepts. What is the contemporary library "actually"?

The Rolex Learning Center, interior. (Image: flickr.com)

In this chapter, I will explore this question through the ways in which contemporary libraries are imagined and constructed in architecture and design. Designing and building the contemporary library has everything do with attempting to define its new role, to answer precisely that question, "What is the contemporary library?" and simultaneously to attempt to answer the question, "What is *this* particular library about?" Although newly constructed libraries share many similarities, they are also unique in the ways in which they are adapted to their particular contexts. Through a close analysis of the Grande Bibliothèque's trajectory from conception to building, what I seek to do within this chapter is to explore how architecture has, in part, defined and delimited what sort of institutional public space the Grande Bibliothèque creates. What I also

wish to bring to light is how concepts employed within the preliminary conceptual design phase of the project, such as openness, access, freedom, and publicness, took on new, contradictory meanings when the library materialized, to reveal issues surrounding restriction, control, inaccessibility, and surveillance. I want to lay stress on the *process* of design and how its various agencies shaped a particular institutional incarnation of the library.

Library Transformations

Things have changed as far as the priorities for library architecture are concerned. Conceptions of the library as a modern institution, that is a building that houses a collection of books (or earlier forms of technologies of the written word), allows access to that collection, and offers a distinct area for consultation, were born with the Renaissance, and date as far back as 1450 with one of the earliest examples being the Biblioteca Malatestiana in Casena, and later the Laurentian Library in Florence (the Biblioteca Laurenziana, designed by Michelangelo, see image on p. 174). Of course the Ptolemy Library in Alexandria, could be considered an even earlier example of what is understood as "modern" with regards to the library, however, what is significant about early "modern" libraries is the emphasis that they placed on books and reading. The aforementioned examples marked the library as distinct from the museum, as libraries moved away from being spaces that only housed and preserved collections, and became sites that stressed the importance of the relationship between the collections, knowledge, and their readers (at the time, primarily monastics or scholars).

Imaginary recreation of the Ptolemy Library in Alexandria, Egypt, from 'Histoire Generale des Peuples', 1880 (engraving) (b/w photo), Hungarian School (19th century / Private Collection / Archives Charmet / The Bridgeman Art Library. (Image: bridgemanart.com).

As a result, the correlation between books and their readers drove the earliest forms of library architecture. These earliest transformative forms of library architecture sought to simultaneously celebrate books and readers. They created spaces in which books could be displayed within grandiose bookshelves and accommodated readers in impressive reading rooms (first introduced in the eighteenth century) suitable for study and reflection. The association between books and reading evolved over time. As books became less a "treasure" to be preserved and protected, "and more an object of use" (Edwards, 2009, p. 4), the

architectural priorities of libraries accordingly shifted. As Brian Edwards (2009) explains, "[o]ver the past two centuries, the balance of power has shifted from the book to the reader and more recently from the book to digital data systems" (p. 7).

The very first reading rooms were domed spaces around which books lined the circular walls. Edwards (2009) writes that

> the text of the building and the text of the books within shared a common ideal. The formal organization of architectural space and the space in the mind liberated by the power of the written word became symbolically united. It is this symbiosis which led to the domed reading room—itself a metaphor for the human brain (pp. 5-6).

The British Museum's Old Library Reading Room. (Image: guardian.co.uk)

The reading room, both its symbolic value and real presence, became even more prominent in the twentieth century, when libraries were becoming more democratic spaces that encouraged not only study and reading, but also a communicative exchange between users and library staff, and users amongst themselves. Libraries moved away from the nineteenth century architectural

combination of dome and cube, reminiscent of museum architecture, to the container/square model still seen today. Reading rooms turned into foyer-like spaces and books were stored in galleries removed from the library's more public areas. The contemporary library is currently a vast reading room that accommodates all forms of reading practices. The significance of the evolution of the book in favour of the reader is that it has not only driven library architectural priorities, but has also given architecture a privileged place in the transformation of the meaning and identity of the library. Edwards (2009) argues that,

> The shifting politics of power in the library has been to the advantage of architectural space. As the importance of the reader has grown under the influences of falling book prices, and the ever-lowering cost of information technology, so there has been a growing recognition of the value of space as the medium of interchange (p. 7).

This is certainly true of contemporary library design. Vast, fluid spaces with high ceilings and large windows that take in the surrounding environment, and allow for natural light to filter through what was once a muted interior, creates the desired effect for the space itself to take on the role of being "the medium of interchange." What is more, and will become apparent throughout this chapter, is that the library that was once a space that looked "inwards not outwards," one that was not a place from which "to view the city but one where the intellectual realm of society [was] captured within its walls" (Edwards, 2009, p. 9), has transformed into one where the outside, the presence of the street, has become central to its contemporary needs.

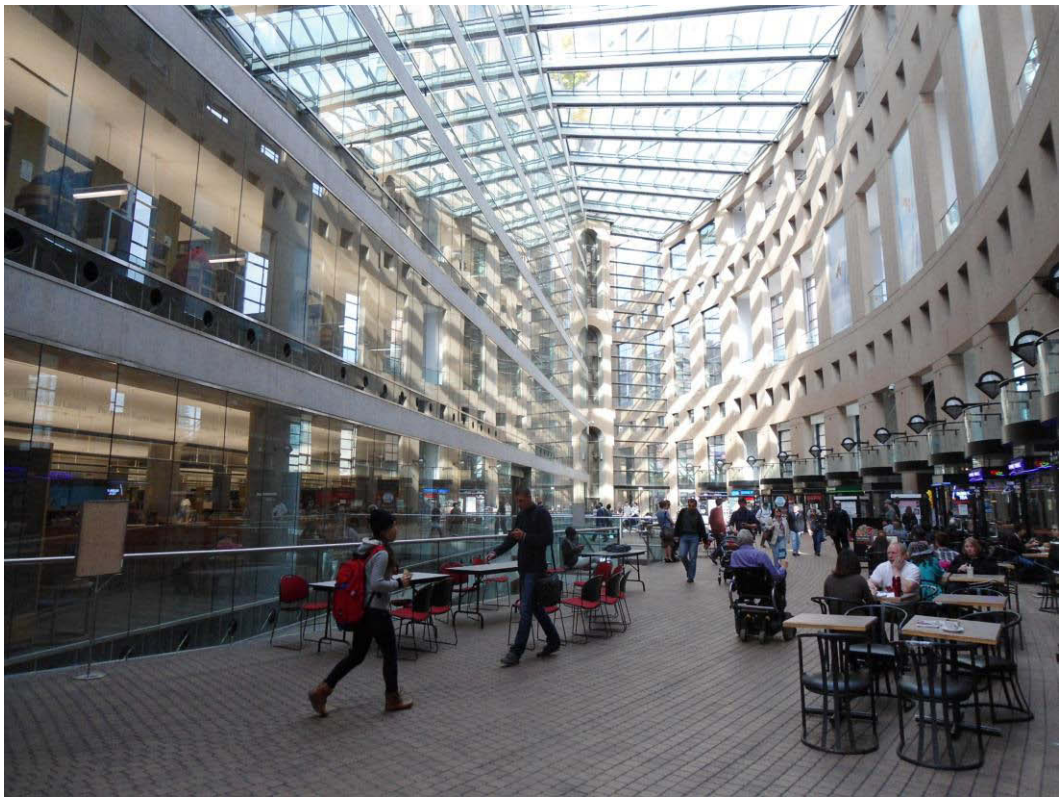
Peckham Public Library, London. (Image: flickriver.com)

This can be seen with examples such as the Peckham Public Library (2000) designed by Will Alsop, the Vancouver (1995) and Seattle (2004) (see images on pp. 118, 177-179) public libraries designed by Moshe Safdie and Rem Koolhaas respectively, as well as the Brighton Public Library (2005) by Bennetts Associates. This is the context within which the Grande Bibliothèque project can be situated and understood as a library that has not only adapted its role to the needs of the contemporary socio-political and technological environment, but has also made architecture the central player of its transformation.

The International Architecture Competition

On January 21, 2000, the same day that the government of Québec gave its official consent for the construction of the Grande Bibliothèque, the GB committee announced that it would hold an international architecture competition

in order to choose the future architects of the new library project (Bissonnette, 2000, p. 2).



The Vancouver Public Library

The launching of an international competition for the construction of the GB was not an insignificant decision as it would be the first time that the design, architecture, and construction of a major public building in Québec would be open to international architects. Lise Bissonnette claimed that the decision to open up the competition internationally was not easy. She writes that, "the decision seemed based on somewhat symbolic considerations. The GBQ is not merely a building but an entirely new national cultural institution, the most important in Québec since the creation of the Université du Québec at the end of the 1960s" (2000, p. 2). It might seem that Québec architects alone would be best suited to reflect Québécois national and cultural symbolism in a building that would

become the primary guardian of Québec's heritage and patrimony. Nevertheless, for the GB committee the emphasis was on the "new." Notions of openness, democratization, and access afforded by new and emergent media technologies were what new libraries were all about whether national or public (or both, in the GB case). Opening up the architecture competition to the world reflected the kind of openness that the GB committee wanted the new library building to evoke, and was very much indicative of the discourses surrounding new technologies and the unprecedented global reach that they offered. Bissonnette writes that, "[c]learly, an international competition, with the visibility and prestige it confers is appropriate to so heavy a burden of symbolism, with its linkage of identity and openness" (2000, p. 2). Québec architects were far from excluded in this competition. The architectural competition stipulated that the chosen firm, although it could be international, had to work with a local firm.[27]

There were some concerns that the international competition might not garner enough attention from abroad. Québec had rarely opened itself up to international design propositions in the past, and the GB budget was so modest given the scale of the project, that there was fear that no major international firm would be interested in submitting a proposal for it. Bissonnette pointed out that the importance of holding a competition rested not only on the library's national symbolism but primarily on the fact that what they were seeking to do was to construct a building that would redefine the traditional library: "We are well aware that the new building is only a beginning, that we are witnessing the birth

[27] This stipulation, is in large part, the result of the fact that architects certified by the Ordre des architectes du Québec have to sign-off on construction drawings. They quite literally have to give them their stamp of approval.

of a new urban 'place,' which will probably be turned inside out several times before finding its true mission" (2000, p. 2). Architect Patricia Patkau, whose Vancouver firm Patkau Architects was the eventual winner of the competition, confirms this when she says she thought the reason why the GB committee decided to launch an international competition was "because they were open to imagining a library that they didn't actually 'know'" (personal communication, November 22, 2011).

Architectural Priorities and Hopes

The proposals submitted for the competition were expected to encompass the various features that were outlined by the GB committee from the outset. The GB's surface area was to represent approximately 30,000 square metres in addition to which about 15% more would have to be added to allow for ease of circulation, leave space for walls and partitions, as well as various electromechanical installations. As a result, the library would eventually make up a total surface area of approximately 34,500 square metres. It was proposed that the library was to have six floors at most, but ideally five floors varying between 5,750 and 6,900 square metres. For the GB committee, a library of approximately this size would avoid any major problems of circulation for both library patrons and staff, but would also make for a more efficient flow of documents throughout the institution. The ease with which people, documents, and other kinds of materials could circulate within the space of the library was one of the primary

considerations when characteristics of the Grande Bibliothèque site were being established.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, space constraints had always been an issue in the past, both within the Bibliothèque Centrale de Montréal and the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec. The Richard Report, published in 1997, noted that it was primarily the collections themselves, the documentary holdings, that generated problems of space, organization, and distribution. In 1997, the annual total Québec book collection in all fields was at 5,700 titles, and was growing at an average rate of about 5% each year; on top of this figure, books from France alone made up an additional 24,000 titles per year. Scientific publications from all over the world were also in the hundreds of thousands. The report highlighted that due to the fact that many people in Québec were prolonging the duration of their studies, there existed a higher demand for information collection and reading; not to mention the diversity of tastes that change constantly over time with regards to patron demands. Furthermore, the library could no longer be expected to carry only documents that existed in print. The library had become an information and cultural center open to all types of documentation, such as discs, video cassettes, pieces of art, interactive videos, video games, cd-roms, not excluding one of the central arrivals to the library space, computer work stations (Richard Report, 1997, pp. 25-26).

However, space constraints were not the only considerations with regards to questions surrounding the configuration of the building. The idea that the library should offer a comfortable environment within which its patrons could

find pleasure and enjoyment was also important, and to a certain extent, a new way of rethinking the space of the library, at least within more general discussions of new library design. There has been a general belief that if patrons could feel more at home in the library they would use it more frequently. Making this kind of affective connection to a place is reminiscent of Yi-Fu Tuan's work in *Topophilia* (1974), where in the 1970s he complexified how we might understand notions of place and our attachments to them. For Tuan, topophilia is the "affective bond between people, place and setting" and this bond could be formed in various ways from the aesthetic or tactile experiences of a place, to the memories we create within particular places, like those of the home (p. 93). The ways in which we experience the space of the library, therefore, could have a significant impact on whether we will frequent it and for what purposes.

In the past, libraries were not designed in order to evoke either feelings or experiences of comfort, that aforementioned sense of well-being; in fact, quite the opposite was true. Libraries were often considered to be an extension of the school where patrons were to be properly educated and formed into good citizens. As a result, the idea of comfort, and as Abigail Van Slyck (2007) writes, "the pursuit of pleasure" was seen as "antithetical to the serious purpose of the public library" (p. 222). In the face of digitization, however, libraries needed to reinvent themselves as much as they needed to appeal to and respond to their patrons; they needed people to want to come to the library and stay awhile. More importantly, they sought to encourage young people to use the library in the hopes that while using the space most likely to have access to digital networks and audiovisual

material, they might also occasionally pick up a book. Making the space comfortable and appealing to youth was especially important in the case of the Grande Bibliothèque. Lise Bissonnette highlights that the quiet, reflective space filled to the brim with books that the library once was, could no longer work.

> It's difficult today, it's all about, you know, people are told to travel all the time, as if life was outside of their head and their heart, and they're incited to sit in front of the Internet all day and chat. So I have a tremendous feeling that people, young people, have a very difficult time, more and more, to stay alone for some time, and think, and read. And I might be wrong, but it's their challenge today, and they find it difficult, and right here in this library when we began to think of spaces for teenagers I got the idea that I saw in the library in France [Bibliothèque nationale de France]. You have to, if you want them to come to the library, they have to be like they sit in a bistro, like they need some noise, they need some element of circulation, so that's why we have these ramps, that's how they like to sit. It's telling that this need for noise, you know doing many things at the same time, all of this they find it really difficult, it's challenging for them to just sit there and not relax, just work in there, and read, and think for more than half an hour (interview, May 22, 2007).

The space of the GB therefore needed to be configured in such a way that spaciousness, some noise, comfort, and pleasure could be heard and felt when the library materialized. The library was to be inviting and comfortable, allowing for "a sense of well-being" (Bissonnette, 2000, p. 3), meaning that it needed to provide spaces that would speak to different kinds of library patrons. It was expected to have a children's area, a space for youth, spaces that catered to the browser, and others that answered the needs of specialized researchers. It needed to blend quieter working spaces with noisier bustling areas. A sufficient number of computer work stations had to be offered, as well as spaces in which patrons could learn about new software programs, watch films, and listen to music. Yet the building needed to be more than just a library. The expectation was that it

would also incorporate such areas as a café, a lecture theatre, an exhibition space, a retail store, a section that would be open 24 hours, not to mention the exterior spaces of the library that were expected to accommodate street booksellers and sculpture gardens. At the same time, Bissonnette said that the library should not only present itself as a space that was simply accommodating and comfortable, as "other public places lend themselves to that." The space also had to "allow for discovery, for the prolongation of one's educational and cultural development, irrespective of where it is undertaken or pursued" (2000, p. 3).

What was all the more challenging, was that by establishing itself as both a national and public library, the building itself had to play somewhat with notions of time, where the traditional priorities of archiving and preservation had to meet the contemporary priorities of access to knowledge and information in all its various forms. Patricia Patkau says that,

> [t]he main distinction made in the GBQ is as much one of time as one of media or technology…the archives versus the lending library (which lends just about everything in pretty much every form!). There are some things that are controlled because they have specific 'value' to time and history, as actual artifacts, and other stuff that just needs to get out there, into the hands and minds of the public…in whatever form is appropriate….books, physical plays, digital, music in various forms, etc. (personal communication, November 22, 2011).

For the architects involved in the competition, incorporating architectural priorities alongside hopes for what the building would eventually become, would be no small feat.

The Architects

The competition was challenging and the jury was impressive. Chaired by Phyllis Lambert, the jury was made up of renowned architects Bernard Tschumi, Ruth Cawker, and Mary Jane Long, as well as other experts specializing in libraries and urban planning, such as Hélène Laperrière, artist Irene F. Whittome, Lise Bissonnette, Yvon-André Lacroix, and Georges Adamczyk (Lambert & Adamczyk, 2000, p. 2).[28] The competition took place in two stages within a period of six months. In the first stage, the architects were asked to submit their portfolios, firm qualifications, and a summary of what would be their conceptual approach to the GB project while incorporating the spatial requirements and key organizational concepts of the building. The jury was then charged with choosing five applicants (very few in a competition of this scale) from what ended up being a total of 37 submissions (11 of which were from Québec). The jury had to choose at least two firms from within Québec, and two from outside the province.[29] The five finalists who made it to the second stage of the competition were each awarded $60,000 to come up with an initial conceptual sketch of the new library.

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[28] Phyllis Lambert is a Canadian philanthropist who founded the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal. Bernard Tschumi is former Dean of the Graduate School of Architecture at Columbia University and is best known for designing Parc de la Villette in Paris. Ruth Cawker is an architect with Atelier Baraness & Cawker. Mary Jane Long is an architect and was the principal designer for the British Library in London. Hélène Laperrière, at the time of the competition, was an urban planner for the City of Montreal. Yvon-André Lacroix is a library sciences consultant and former director of circulation at the GB. Georges Adamczyk is full professor in the School of Architecture at the Université de Montréal.

[29] It is telling that the GB committee, while deciding to pursue an international, if regulated, architectural competiton, did not decide to make it either a blind review process or one based on select invitations to particular firms. The former, while not a common method in international architectural competitions, is considered the most equitable and as a process that may lead to the most number of submissions that lean towards the experimental on the level of their proposed designs.

Although the competition wished to establish an atmosphere of openness, some of its regulations were in fact quite restrictive and deterred many established firms. The competition's advertising was done entirely in French, which may have significantly reduced the pool of possible participants. In addition, not all firms outside of Québec were very keen on partnering with Québécois firms given that the timeframe in which to submit a proposal was quite short, and expanding the number of players would be a challenge as most Québécois firms were relatively inexperienced in working within these types of partnerships. As I will discuss below, this last concern became an unfortunate reality for the winning team of Patkau Architects and their Québécois partners Croft Pelletier and Gilles Guité.

The five finalists were Atelier Christian de Potzamparc/ Jean-Marc Venne/ Birtz Bastien/ Bélanger Beauchemin Galienne Moisan Plante/ Élizabeth de Potazamparc from France; FABG/ GDL/ N.O.M.A.D.E./ Yann Kersalé/ Ruedi Baur from Québec; Zaha Hadid/ Boutin Ramoisy Tremblay architects from the U.K.; Patkau Architects/ Croft-Pelletier, architectes/ Gilles Guité, architecte from British Columbia; and Saucier+Perrotte/ Menkès Shooner Dagenais/ Desvigne & Dalnoky, landscape designers/ Go Multimédia, technological integration from Québec (Lambert & Adamczyk, 2000, p. 2). It took the jury two days to choose the winning design, which was granted to John and Patricia Patkau of Patkau Architects and their Québécois counterparts Croft-Pelletier and Gilles Guité. The winning design was chosen according to specific criteria, which were, among others, "clarity of [the] architectural design; integration into and impact on the urban fabric; functional organization in response to the facilities needs

assessment; evocative and symbolic power; quality of spaces and atmosphere; and consistency of architectural design with technical requirements and budgetary constraints" (Lambert & Adamczyk, 2000, p. 2).

The well-known Québec architect, Gilles Guité, a former mentor to Eric Pelletier, joined the architectural competition in order to lend some expertise to the Croft Pelletier team who were relatively inexperienced in managing architectural projects of this magnitude. The Patkaus and their Québécois counterparts ended up having a falling out before the results of the competition had even been announced. No longer in agreement about some of the original conceptual aspects of the project, the teams deeply diverged on financial questions, as well as on the division of work. With an architectural project of this magnitude, it is crucial to establish a strict distribution of tasks between the architects in charge of the conceptual framework of the project and those in charge of its execution. In the case of the Patkaus, Croft Pelletier, and Gilles Guité, all the architects laid claim to the conceptual design of the GB. The Patkaus, however, being the more experienced firm, tended to impose their ideas as well as their method of working. Not capable of finding a middle ground, the architects decided to announce their dispute to the jury, which coincided with the announcement of their winning project both to the participants and the media (Goulet, 2009, pp. 199-204). Although reminded of the rules of the competition by the jury, the Patkaus refused to work with the young Québécois firm, a predicament that became extremely problematic during the planning phases of the GB, and also significantly delayed the planned construction and opening date of

the library.[30] Unable to convince the Patkaus to compromise, Gilles Guité backed out of the project in October 2000, and the jury (having hired a mediator) convinced Croft Pelletier to remain on the team and allow the Patkaus to take charge. Croft Pelletier eventually left the project quietly in the fall of 2002.

Firms from a number of European countries as well as the United States and Canada took part in the competition. Their approaches, however, were quite different. Phyllis Lambert and Georges Adamczyk write that, "European competitors stressed the ideas and innovativeness of their proposals, while North American competitors provided more detailed accounts of their projects, emphasizing the operational aspect of their proposal" (2000, p. 3). Luc Doucet, an architect with Menkès Shooner Dagenais Letourneux (MSDL) Architects—the Québécois firm that was one of the five finalists and also (due to the aforementioned dispute) eventually in charge of the plans and design specifications of the GB's construction—explained in conversation that although the winning design came from a North American firm, which as Lambert and Adamczyk (2000) pointed out would most commonly favour the more practical aspects of design, it was primarily chosen based on the concept. Doucet explained that this is rare in Québec, as architectural projects are often chosen on a technically-based model, where the client is able to modify things. In the case of the GB, the library committee was open to adapting the program of the library to

[30] There were a total of four construction phases scheduled for the Grande Bibliothèque. Originally they were scheduled for January 2002, February 2002, June 2003, and November 2003 (Goulet, 2009, p. 200). The quarrel between the architects resulted in the delay of this schedule. In light of this, the GB committee predicted that construction on the library would begin in late September 2002 for its provisional opening in August 2004, and its official opening in November 2004 (Goulet, 2009, p. 203). The Grande Bibliothèque did not, however, officially open to the public until April 30, 2005.

the conceptual architectural ideas that were driving the design from the outset. Normally the opposite is true, where there is a move further and further away from the original concept in order to answer to the more practical and technical demands of the library itself. As a result, the competition as well as the ultimate design of the building retained a European-influenced porosity in the design process that made for a more symbiotic relationship between the intentions of the designers and the final program of the library (Doucet, personal communication, August 24, 2011).

An Architecture of Openness: Letting the Outside In

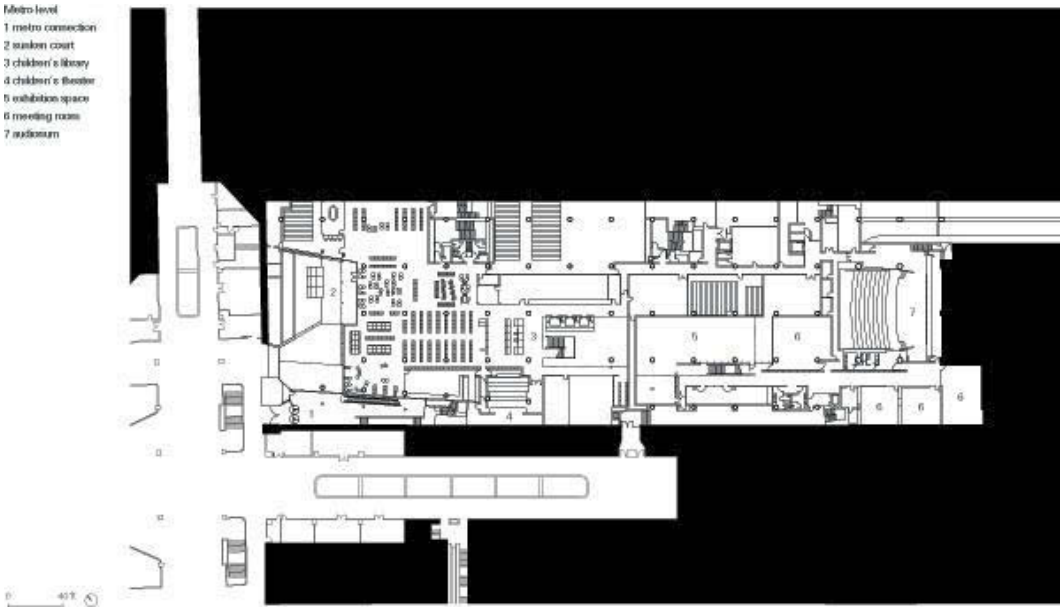
With regards to the architectural properties of modern libraries, access physically manifests itself through a building's openness, or porousness to its surrounding environment, as well as internally through various circulation strategies, such as those laid out by SANAA. Huib Haye Van der Werf writes that

> the contemporary public library no longer merely houses and catalogues books and records. It also provides public access to the Internet, computer workstations, recreation facilities such as a cafe/restaurant, exhibition spaces, educational programs and in some cases even day-care facilities. In many ways, the library has become an appendage of the public space [sic]. An institute that houses multi-faceted and varied programs under the same roof […] Outside the walls of the public library—in an increasingly marked and marketed public domain—the same amenities are available, but the library seems to have chosen the strategy to become a concentrate of this public space, letting the outside within its walls (2010, pp. 16-17).

What the Patkaus proposed for the GB was precisely a variation on this idea of constructing a building that would "let the outside within its walls." A primary goal for the Patkaus was to make it so that the GB not only reflected its urban surroundings but created a seamless connection between the interior space of the

library and the exterior space of the city streets. The way in which they wanted this to physically manifest itself was through what they called “collapsed spaces, whereby the project’s and the site’s different component parts are closely interrelated,” as well as through “mutual appropriation,” where the library appropriates the city in which it finds itself, and in turn that city and its public appropriate the library:

> Our proposal is that the different constituents of the public spaces of the city and the library be collapsed or compressed together, so that they can dialogue and interact by mutually enlivening and supporting each other. In this way, the components specific to each one are superimposed, juxtaposed at the core of an attenuated ensemble where lines of separation are virtually non existent (Patkau, 2000, p. 4).



A lower floor plan of the Grande Bibliothèque. (Image: architectural.com)

The four floors that make up the GB, therefore, correspond, in one way or another, to the activities taking place within the city. For instance, in the initial design drawings, what you will see is that at the metro and street levels of the library, you will find the library café, the retail store, exhibition spaces, the 24

hour section, an auditorium, meeting rooms, the newspaper and magazine area, all spaces that could correspond to activities that might similarly be taking place at street level, and these spaces, although some have been modified, are in their envisaged locations within the library today. Furthermore, the interior space is always invariably linked to the outside, as are the different interior spaces and activities linked to each other. The children's space, or the *Espace Jeunes*, which is located at the basement level, looks out onto a garden that simultaneously brings light into the area and allows for light to filter through to those crossing the passage that leads from the metro into the library.

View from the *Espaces Jeunes*, Grande Bibliothèque. (Image: Patkau Architects, patkau.com)

Whatever floor you find yourself on waiting for the elevator, you are always able to look onto what is happening below or above you. Things in the library space communicate visually, you can see and be seen. The point of such collapsed

spaces was as much to create a seamless encounter between the library and the city as it was to encourage accidental and spontaneous interactions within the building itself, as well as between the library and the street:

> The manifold programs of the city, of the street, of Savoie Ave. and the elements of the library's program are integrated in thought-provoking visual combinations. They can thus be experienced accidentally by passers-by, by regulars, by audiences for special events, and by strollers in quest of a cup of coffee. Accidental engagement is favoured by means of visual prolongation and the unexpected continuity of spatial and functional experiences (Patkau, 2000, p. 4).

Creating a space for spontaneous and accidental public encounters seems to be a recurring trend in modern library design.

Grande Bibliothèque, interior. (Image: Patkau Architects, patkau.com)

It can be seen with the Rolex Learning Center, but also in libraries such as the Seattle Public Library, for example. Again we see an instance of an architectural form that seeks to bring the outside in, what is otherwise understood as "urban

consolidation," where "[i]nfrastructural elements typical of the city, such as streets, squares, and buildings are reinterpreted as spatial components of the library, thus suggesting a continuation of the public realm" (*The Architecture of Knowledge*, 2010, p. 62). It could be argued that this is a somewhat paradoxical way of conceiving the new library. What this kind of architecture seeks to do is, in a first instance, renegotiate and juxtapose the restrictive, closed, and controlled nature of the traditional library, and at the same time create a new public space. New public spaces often come about unpredictably, they can form around a park bench, a snack bar, an empty parking lot, or an alleyway. New library design is attempting to build unpredicatbility and the 'encounter' into the space of the library so that it may become a new public realm that people engage with, and where new forms of publicness can be displayed.

What is paradoxical about this overall conception, is that the library is still an institution, and institutions are by default predictable spaces, meaning that the unpredictability being built into them tends to be lost, or, at the very least, managed into non-spontaneity. As Daniel Van Der Velden writes, "publicness is not a given. It depends on how, when and why people choose to congregate in public" (2010, p. 26). Patricia Patkau argues that part of the reason that the GB has had so much success as a very particular attempt at creating a new type of public space, is because architecturally it has managed to somewhat overcome the institutional control that comes with the territory of the controlled library space:

> Many large libraries actually kill urban space around them because of this issue of a single point of control (with the rest of the perimeter being quite dead). So the lecture/theatre, gallery, meeting rooms, meeting spaces, mini-conference rooms, gift shop, bouqinists, etc are all directly connected to the

> street/lane/subway system/city and the library control point is pushed back as deep into the building as possible. Spaces outside of control can operate outside of normal library hours (personal communication, November 22, 2011).

Some scholars such as Bart Verschaffel, criticize the new trend of incorporating other public spaces, such as retail stores and cafés, into institutions such as the library. In an essay entitled "Semi-public spaces: The spatial logic of institutions" (2009) he argues that institutions such as the library, the museum, the school are *semi-public spaces* that "are *separated* spaces" (p. 142) and should remain as such. For Verschaffel, letting the street in, or the outside in, means turning semi-public spaces into spaces of consumption, just as the street, which he argues was once a public space of encounter and dialogue, a political space, has been transformed into a politically irrelevant space of "spectacle and voyeurism […] where one is free to move and to look, to *choose and to buy*" (p. 141) but no longer to speak. He writes:

> Semi-public spaces are essentially *theatrical*. This implies that they are spaces *with a threshold*. They are *conditionally accessible* […] Certain groups have easy access while others are barred. But a threshold is more than an obstacle. It also marks a *transition* from the street to a conditioned space: one may enter the theater or the museum *on condition that one plays the game* and takes part in what goes on inside (p. 142).

One should therefore be entering the library with knowledge of the conditions that it imposes. For Verschaffel this is crucial, because if libraries all of a sudden embody a hybrid of meanings, if they blend their ideologies with those of the street, they risk losing their autonomy as well as their relevance as the institution they propose to be. For Verschaffel, the argument is not that a library should be inaccessible or restrictive, only that those who access it should understand the

rules they are required to play by in order for the library *to remain a library*. For him "[t]he existence of conditional public spaces and of institutional spaces is a precondition for criticism" (p. 144), and architecture is what defines them as such. Nevertheless, the winning project of Québec's very first international architectural competition, designed by Patkau Architects, Croft-Pelletier, and Gilles Guité, was one that through collapsed spaces and mutual appropriaton, let the outside in.

The Grande Bibliothèque

In 1958, Anne Hébert, a Québécoise author and poet, who spent most of her career in Paris, published her first novel, *Les chambres de bois*. Although the literal translation into English would make the title *The wooden rooms*, the book was nonetheless translated as *The silent rooms*. This makes sense given the type of story that *Les chambres de bois* tells. The novel can be read as a disturbing and violent coming of age story. The young heroine, Catherine, is trapped and alienated in her marriage and attempts to set herself free physically, emotionally, and psychologically, through her own imagination. An original and daring piece of writing for Québécois literature of its time, it is surprising that this dark novel would be the inspiration for the two wooden rooms that currently complement each other within the GB. Within the novel, Catherine and her husband sleep in dark wooden rooms separated by long ominous corridors. However, it was less the story and more the title that inspired the Patkaus. For them, what was particularly interesting was precisely the translated title's elision of language.

The Grande Bibliothèque model. (Image: Patkau Architects, patkau.com)

The variability in the translation, where one could translate the title of the novel either literally as ‘wooden rooms’ or as ‘silent rooms,’ left some room for spatial speculation on the part of the architects. For the Patkaus, the play on the words ‘wooden’ and ‘silent’ invoked a memory of traditional libraries, “of an interiority, a materiality and muffled sounds” (personal communication, November 22, 2011). Rather than try to dismiss the various contradictory discourses at play within contemporary libraries, between the traditional and modern priorities of what libraries ought to be, the Patkaus decided to engage with those dichotomies. They wanted the form of the traditional library simultaneously to have a kind of phantasmic and real presence within the contemporary one. As Patricia Patkau puts it:

> We wanted to both suggest a myth of a kind of past, urban, cultural, interior space while we constructed the reality of the contemporary space of a large

> urban library. That is part of the reason that we used two wooden rooms with very different characteristics to organize the program of the GBQ, two identities representing two very different kinds of library space; the quiet occupied room for the Quebec Archives and the storage box for the contemporary lending library (personal communication, November 22, 2011).

The GB could indeed be described as two wooden rooms, or 'boxes' as they are often referred to; both are encased in another larger glass box. The use of wood, although evocative of the more traditional form taken by libraries of the past, is also meant to represent the richness of Québec's timber resources. The main lending library, the holder of the GB's Universal Collection, is contained within the larger of the two wooden rooms. It consists of four floors that can be accessed via various routes.

The GB's main lending library. © Bernard Fougères/Bibliothèque nationale du Québec. (Image:architectural.com)

The different circulation paths, an atrium with elevators, the stairs, a meandering pathway, that give access to the different floors as well as to the National Collection, housed in the second wooden room, are meant to appeal as much to different kinds of users, as they are to express movement. The library was not only meant to be functional as a space, but rather also sought to go against the carrel-logic of other libraries by making common reading areas and other such transitional spaces break down the library's traditional goals of individual isolation and increased concentration.

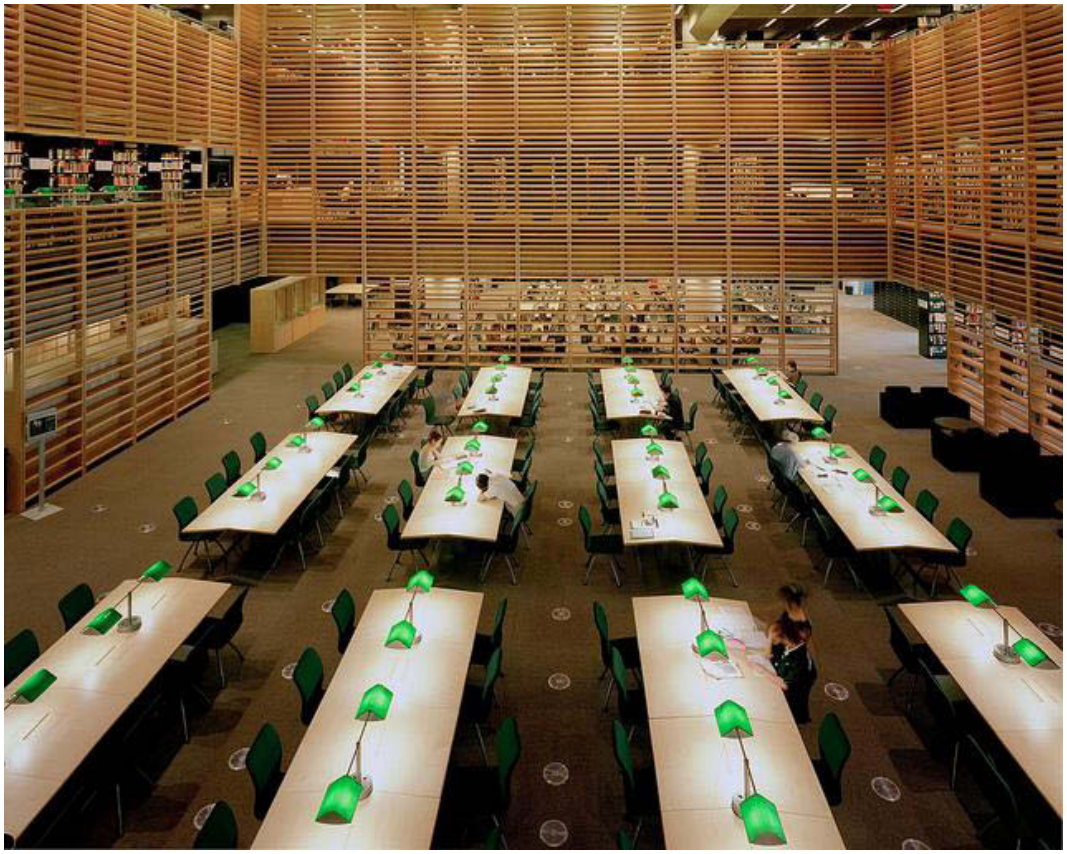
GB, main stairwell. (Image: Patkau Architects, patkau.com)

Lighting, and the ways in which it is distributed and played with in the library, is one of the GB's defining characteristics. The public box lets light in, yet this light is dimmed in the working spaces that frame the building's edges. The Patkaus envisioned that patrons who had finished consulting or browsing the

lending library's materials, might prefer to work by the large windows that overlook the city of Montreal and that let in natural daylight. They also felt that dimmed lighting within the box would be more useful "for machine use, for digital display, for the concentrated virtual life and for storage of the diverse collections" (personal communication, November 22, 2011). There is therefore a clear contrast between spaces that are meant for different kinds of work, consulting vs. reading and writing—these spaces are located within the two wooden rooms—as opposed to areas outside the two wooden rooms (the café and restaurant on the main floor, for instance) that are reserved for more leisurely activities.

Even dimmer still, however, is the second wooden room that houses the National Collection, also referred to as the Québécois box. When the GB was being built, the library's committee insisted that the Québec national collection be a space apart from the rest of the library, one that would be distinguished as a unique and special room. It is interesting then that the chosen design for this space would take on the feel of the more traditional library, with stacks surrounding a working space center, and not a more imaginative and original room that could be set apart through its design alone. Because it held so much real and symbolic Québécois historical value, the Patkaus argue that they preferred that the National Collection have a somewhat unchanging quality to it. Patricia Patkau writes that:

> The Archives is more spatially 'fixed' with its central room presenting more traditional, quiet, interiority…space that is more timeless (even though, today, it is clear that there really is no such thing as the timeless in the library. All spaces have to be agile in terms of future proofing for changing technologies) (personal communication, November 22, 2011).



The GB's National Collection. (Image: flickr.com)

This agility was especially a priority for the space of the Universal Collection, which has been built precisely so that it can adapt more fluidly to any significant change that the library may face in the future.

Whether dark, dim, or light, both wooden boxes serve as filters of varying degrees of light that comes in through the glass that envelops them. The glass is meant to make an allusion towards the image of frozen water; it is intended to be representative of Canada and Québec's northern climate. This specific symbolic effect also complements the many other prevalent architectural uses of water that are scattered throughout the city of Montreal—its canals, public fountains, and, of course, the St. Lawrence River. The green glow that filters through the glass is therefore not arbitrary. Neither is the grid-like system of the lending library box,

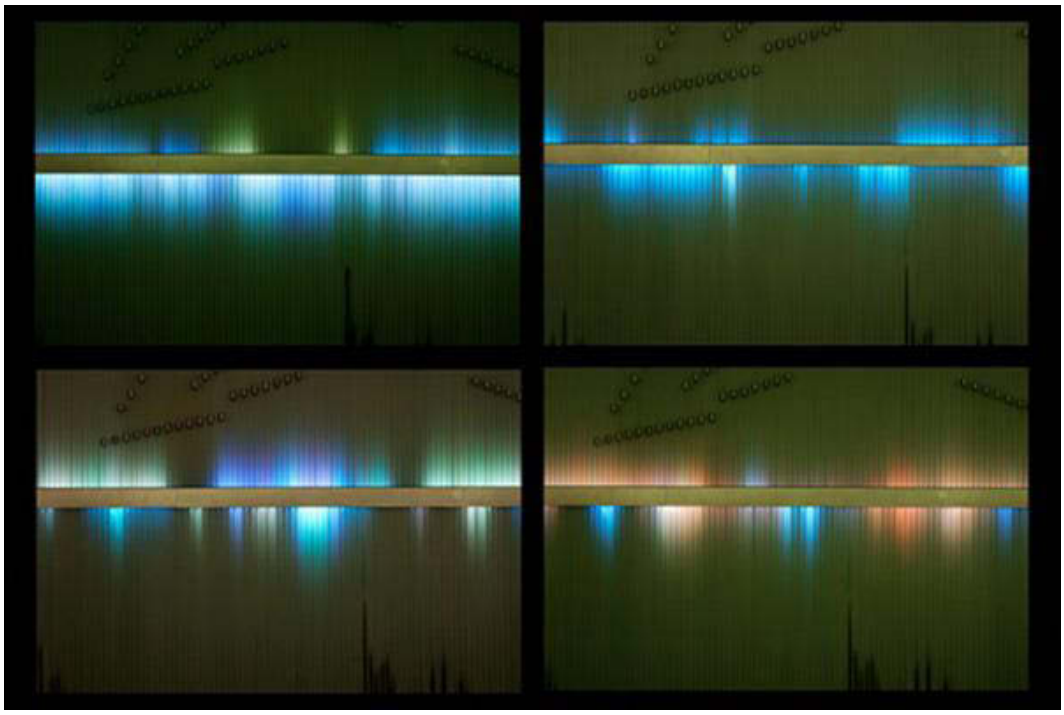
which is modular and repetitive in order to give the space an easily navigable and orderable structure.

Other sections, both within and outside the boxes have been conceived in order to adapt to both different kinds of patrons, as well as to different kinds of activities. The *Espace Jeunes* has been designed so as to create a comfortable and safe environment for children of all ages.

The GB's exterior green glass panels. (Image: Patkau Architects, patkau.com)

There are two handrails as you make your way down to the basement level, where the *Espace Jeunes* is located. It is not cold or dark, but a rather bright and cheerful space where the furniture and the stacks have been scaled down to a more child-like size. Corkboards for the display of children's artwork and other projects hang on the walls, and the entire space is yellow, which brightens it while simultaneously picking up on the wood colour within the rest of the library.

Behind a large wall shared with the *Espace Jeunes*, is the public art exhibition space. The library sought to be a sort of atelier for the arts, as much as it would be a space for books. In fact, in Québec, the provincial government requires that one percent of the budget for all new publicly funded buildings is set aside for artwork, and the Ministry of Culture provides a list of pre-approved Québécois artists. Although perhaps not immediately noticeable when you enter the library, the institution is actually marked with different kinds of art displays. At basement level, the library wanted something retro, a lit mural reminiscent of neon signage from the heyday of Montreal's entertainment strip on Boulevard. St-Laurent, so they purchased Louise Viger's *Voix sans bruit*; as numerous visits have revealed, the library has trouble keeping the piece's fiber optic cables lit.



Voix sans bruit (2005), Louise Viger. (Image: louiseviger.com)

Glass art, in the form of a mural entitled *Vous êtes ici* by Dominique Blain, as well as cartography superimposed on windows can also be found

primarily looking out through the façade that gives onto the rue Savoie. The glass art was partly meant to complement l'Allée des bouquinistes, or Bookseller's Alley, an initiative organized by Lise Bissonnette, that sees book stands set up along the library's rue Savoie façade on the weekends during Montreal's summer months. Located to the north of the building, is a sculpture garden containing sculptures by artist Roger Gaudreau. The garden, inspired by the royal sculpture gardens of France, was conceived as a space that would evolve, with a new potential sculpture built each year.

Allée des bouquinistes (September 7, 2008). (Image: Alanah Heffez, spacing.ca)

If you make your way up through the building, from the basement level, on past the conference rooms to the main floor, you will find what used be the retail store, a relatively small room located right next to the exits leading down to the Berri-UQAM metro station. The retail store was one of the few areas within

the library that seemed ill conceived. It was small and cramped and was not very accessible visually; most people walking right by it without noticing that it was there at all. It also mostly sold only books, not having space for much else, which ironically may have led to its closure (the space remained empty for the past several years, until recently, when it opened as a Presse Café). Continuing past the main entrance to the lending library, you will find the Café des lettres bistro, which is a full service restaurant, serving as a quaint place to dine mid-afternoon during the week, and that occasionally opens during the weekend for special events and soirées. The library also offers a more casual sandwich stand with a seating area. The GB's amphitheatre is located behind the dining areas, with 120 seats, it serves as a more official public lecture hall in which the library can host invited guest lecturers and other special events.

Café des lettres, Grande Bibliothèque. (Image: archello.com)

The classic colours within the library, the whites, blacks, beiges, and browns, were chosen to withstand time. However, with regards to the stacks for example, the use of black and white was more strategic. Black shelves were used in order to contrast the white or brightness of the books that they held. The architects thought that black shelves would make the books more visible, and as a result, would make them more accessible.

Although there has generally been less emphasis on books within the contemporary library, books still remain an important element within the space of the Grande Bibliothèque. In fact, the architects that I spoke to seem to agree that books still hold an important place within the modern library, even though their numbers may have diminished in order to make space for other things. In conversation with Joseph Tattoni, a principal architect at ikon.5 architects, he argued that what we see now is less that books are being discarded, but that they are simply being moved from the space of the library to other storage facilities, such as warehouses. He insists that though now you might see more digital readers in the space of the public library, the tactile nature of reading still remains extremely important to the library patron, and books continue to be an important design element when it comes to new library architecture (personal communication, July 14, 2011). Patricia Patkau similarly argues that,

> It is all a question of degree isn't it? Yes, there is less emphasis on books today as, only a few decades ago, there was NO space at all for information technologies…because there wasn't any such thing. Will proportions change in the future? I suspect so but it is not necessary to dwell on the question if the mechanisms of the building make change easy. If we were to do another large public library, this is one of the primary issues that we would continue to explore (personal communication, November 22, 2011).

The notion of change was one of the most important elements for the Patkaus in their design of the Grande Bibliothèque. In their view, the principal way that new libraries can adapt not only to rapidly changing technologies, but also to the ever increasing expectation that libraries will offer a varying range of services, is to design them in such a way that they can be both physically and ideologically adaptable, in the sense that they can accept and evolve with the new and changeable programmatic roles that they are expected to take on. The Patkaus did not pretend that they knew what changes these might be, and when visiting the institution today, these changes are perhaps not entirely visible yet, but the building needed to be designed in such a way that it could anticipate change. A very practical example of this kind of approach to change was the design of some of the furniture, for instance. The desks, which were designed by the Patkaus, are modular so that they could be rearranged, if for whatever reason, they did not ultimately work within the space. The working surface of the desks is linoleum, because overtime this material can be re-buffed and maintained. The flexibility of the furniture, easily moved can modify spaces over time, but it can also be modified to the needs of people with disabilities. For Patricia Patkau "[c]hange is very much a part of the flexible servicing systems of the lending library. The only part that we tried to 'fix' in the lending library was a proportion of space given over to the body (which presumably will stay pretty much as is in the future)" (personal communication, November 22, 2011).

Welcoming the Grande Bibliothèque

On April 23, 2005, only a week before the official opening of the Grande Bibliothèque, Montreal befittingly became UNESCO's World Book Capital. The GB opened to mixed feelings largely concerning the new library's overshadowing of smaller neighbourhood libraries, especially children's libraries that would close as a result of the opening of this large, all encompassing library. In an article from *The Mirror*, Kristian Gravenor writes that

> with the relocation of $35-million worth of books to the new library, various other Montreal-run neighbourhood libraries will be closing, including the current main library on Sherbrooke E. facing Lafontaine Park and a small one on Esplanade near Mont-Royal (2005).

These types of concerns were quickly quelled by people such as Francine Senécal, then vice-president on Montreal's City Council, who "vow[ed] that once Montrealers [got] their eyes onto the new, gleaming library, they might share her optimism. 'It's a beautiful place, it's very large and will contain books from the central library - archives, newspapers, magazines, everything'" (Gravenor, 2005). Others, such as Odile Tremblay, argued that indeed the new library was beautiful, particularly its interior that is said to make people happy and want to read. Yet the GB's presence also ironically emphasized the need to revamp Montreal's smaller municipal libraries by modeling them on their big sister, and making them more modern with more audiovisual and media outlets as well as language learning centres for new immigrants. She writes that the biggest annoyance with the GB is that it highlights Montreals's lack in city-wide public library services. "L'ennui avec la Grande Bibliothèque, c'est que sa criante réussite met en lumière plus que

jamais les carences de ses cousines pauvres. Folle ironie du sort et du succès..." (Tremblay, 2005, p. E2).

The building's architectural properties also seemed to receive mixed reviews. It appears that most people, including the Patkaus themselves, were quite satisified with the interior design of the library, but not so much with its exterior. "Si on ne juge pas un livre à sa couverture, on peut bel et bien évaluer un immeuble à son envelope" (Baillargeon, 2005, p. a8). Gilles Saucier, an architect that had been involved in the design competition was surprised at the scale of the building which he claimed did not resemble the original model. This was admittedly true. Furthermore, the Patkaus' relative dissatisfaction with the library's shell stemmed largely from the fact that they originally wished to use copper for the exterior of the building, both because it symbolized institutions of knowledge in Québec (historically copper was used to coat the rooftops of schools and churches), and because copper is a local resource that ages in an interesting and progressive manner (Baillargeon, 2005, p. a8). The Patkaus' Québécois former partners Croft Pelletier were even more critical of the library's exterior design than John and Patricia, who accepted the final result. Mr. Pelletier was quoted by *Le Devoir* as saying: "Je ne dis pas que le verre est inintéressant, mais ce n'est pas celui que nous souhaitions" (Baillargeon, 2005, p. a8). Mr. Pelletier was careful to disassociate his firm with the design decisions made about the exterior of the library, but did not shy away from taking credit for the building's popular interior. Although, his firm did not see the project brought to term, Mr. Pelletier claimed "[n]ous n'étions pas très à l'aise avec certaines décisions, dont

celle concernant le cuivre […] Cela dit, le projet général ressemble, surtout à l'intérieur, au projet que nous avions développé" (Baillargeon, 2005, p. a8).

Grande Bibliothèque, exterior. (Image: Patkau Architects, patkau.com)

Finally some of the other critiques that were voiced concerned the unfortunate location of the building, many claimed that no relationship existed between the library and its surrounding environment. The building was also said to lack audacity comparatively to the Seattle or Vancouver public libraries that made a mark on both those cities respectively, *The New York Times* having named the Seattle Public Library its "building of the year" in 2004. The GB would not make such a grand architectural statement for the city of Montreal. Of the libraries built around the same time, it would remain the smallest and least impressive. Stéphane Baillargeon writes that "[a]ucun expert consulté par Le Devoir ne voit

dans la GB un ajout marquant à l'architecture contemporaine internationale. Par contre, tous reconaissent la très grande qualité de l'aménagement intérieur" (2005, p. a8).

However, local reaction to the building was tougher in its criticisms than global assessments of the library. In an issue of *Architectural Review* from June 2006, the Grande Bibliothèque is described as quite the opposite, certainly a contender in new library design projects, and particularly comparatively to those in North America.

> With its combination of research library, rare books collection, children's zone, multiple public reading rooms, multi-media holdings, gallery and theatre, the sheer size and range of functions arrayed within the Grande Bibliothèque place it firmly in the architectural line of recent North American downtown libraries. While most of its holdings may be in French, its sister designs are to be found in Phoenix (Will Bruder, AR March 1996) and Seattle (Rem Koolhaas, AR August 2004), not the Parisian tradition from Labrouste's Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève through Piano and Rogers' Pompidou Centre (containing, amazingly, France's first public lending library) to Dominique Perrault's Bibliothèque Nationale (AR July 1995) (Boddy, 2006, para. 2).

Despite the mixed reactions to the library's design and architecture the GB has had enormous success. In fact, the GB has been a bit of a victim of its own success. After only a week of being open it had already seen 63,000 visitors, and currently boasts an average of 50,000 visitors per week. It was initially meant to be open 24 hours. The main floor of the lending library, where the check-out and reference desks are located, was actually designed so that a section of the library could be closed off by sliding doors from the rest of the library in order to remain open throughout the night. However, the large number of users, and the budget capabilities of the library did not coincide, and keeping the library open all night

would have meant much higher operational costs. Nevertheless, the GB's success cannot be denied, and the reasons for it are numerous. They range from the architectural sophistication of the building, to the services offered within, to the fact that Montreal was very much in need of a new "free" public space, and an interior one at that, given the city's long and usually harsh winters.

The Grande Bibliothèque by night. (Image: Patkau Architects, patkau.com)

The Complexities of Access

While 'openness' was one of the primary goals for the GB design, this was not necessarily an innovative and genuinely forward-looking stipulation on the part of the GB committee and the architects. It could be argued that openness in contemporary library culture and design, has become a standard conceptual language through which the library can present itself as a supposedly more

accessible institution, even as the library remains a dominant provider and arbiter of certain forms and practices of access to knowledge reserved for a very particular population of users. I want to make the claim that access has become the operative ideology of the modern library. Through its deployment, it has become a term that has simultaneously come to mean everything and nothing at all. Access has come to define the contemporary library, and has become a given in terms of what libraries are and what they have to offer. Libraries and access have nearly become synonymous, and yet access as it relates to the library is a relatively recent phenomenon. Historically, libraries were not institutions that were built upon ideological assumptions of access. The very first libraries were built to archive the earliest forms of writing: they were meant to preserve the clay tablets of the pre-Christian era. As forms of writing progressed from papyrus rolls and parchment leaves, through to manuscripts and books, so too did the role of the library. Libraries have always provided access to the materials they hold but, for most of their history, this access was formally restricted. It is only of late that "universal" access has come to be associated with libraries per se. Libraries were primarily similar to universities as places of scholarship; they were institutionalized seekers, producers, preservers, and cataloguers of a managed 'truth.' They were not necessarily meant to be disseminators of that truth. Van der Werf writes that the library was an "exclusive setting for [the] task of power and enlightenment" (2010, p. 17), and this task was exclusively reserved for societal elites. It could be argued that access became more directly associated with libraries in the late 19th century when the library became an institution supported

by taxation but, even then, lower and marginalized social classes, women, and children were still excluded (Van der Werf, 2010, p. 12). In fact, even with the birth of the Carnegie library model in North America, which arguably democratized the library, it could be said that access was still a murky term. In Abigail Van Slyck's *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890-1920* (1995), she challenges often uncontroversial readings of American libraries as the first real democratic institutions that embodied "a golden age of American unity" (p. xix). She writes that, for example,

> the efficient library design espoused by Carnegie can be read as an attempt on the part of male library leaders to maintain the prestige of their profession by circumscribing the professional activities of new female librarians. By the same token, deviations from the Carnegie ideal (particularly the emphasis on a separate children's room) reveal the range of strategies used by women to claim a more active professional role for themselves (p. xxvii).

In addition to a thorough study of the buildings themselves that often masked (and perhaps still do) a more complex history, Van Slyck highlights how a form of cultural citizenship still highly dependent on unequal power relations was written into the very design of Carnegie buildings themselves, and how this would have a major impact on both women and children, the newest members of Carnegie's 'free' institution.

It is not surprising that access would be a founding priority for an institution that would eventually be responsible for the documentary holdings of both the Bibliothèque Centrale de Montréal and the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec, not to mention a wide variety of digital collections. The GB was expected to be physically accessible by those arriving by metro—a direct entrance

to a major metro station was highly desired—by car, by bus, or on foot. However, when the configurations of the site were being established, access also came to mean "reception" or "accueil." The 1998 report siting the GB, stated that, "[l]'accueil est au coeur du concept de la Grande Bibliothèque" (Société immobilière du Québec, p. 4). In other words, not only did the building need to be easily accessed by patrons in terms of its location, but the building needed to just as smoothly receive them. This meant that the library had to not only be visible and easily accessible, but that the approach to the building, the library's façade, as well any exterior planning and design was to reflect this preoccupation with "reception." Mere access was not enough, the Grande Bibliothèque needed to be inviting to its patrons. It was also important that the building facilitated the smooth delivery of not only documents, but the necessary supplies for the functioning of the institution as well.

As I touched on above, the idea of accessibility of site, although in building design often primarily understood as ease of entry to the building for things and people, is especially interesting to flesh out as notions of access have become so pervasive in how we currently speak about libraries and their democratic character. It is also relevant to the ways in which we have come to speak about emerging media technologies and, in both cases, access has very clearly come to mean making things available. Yet the presumption of access often obscures lingering problems of inaccessibility to various things/spaces for particular classes of people. Martin Hand argues that ideas of access have become the "dominant narrative" of the digital age. He writes that access can first "refer to

a democratization or a 'flattening' of culture, of new cultural spaces and forms which are inherently more accessible than ever before because of the place-defying structure of digital communication technology," but it can also refer "to new disconnections alongside connections, to new territories and zones, and to divides between them which need to be 'bridged'" (2008, p. 75). In other words, libraries within this context can be seen as having become increasingly accessible not only as physical sites, but also through the expanded amounts of information that can be accessed within them thanks to the affordances of emerging media technologies. However, this so-called 'democratization' of spaces and information alike has also created new dividing barriers and perhaps even reinforced old ones. In their study of the Seattle Public Library, Fisher, Saxton, Edwards, and Mai (2007) found that although access to raw information may have been improved and facilitated, access to actual people and bodies was not as obvious. In their survey of over 151 patrons, many admitted that they were often unsure of who the librarian was. Fisher et al. write that

> [g]eneral confusion over who exactly a librarian is from amongst all a library's staff […] still exists in the minds of at least some users […] On the one hand, this suggests that the public is savvy; they know that the person behind the circulation desk or providing security is not a librarian; on the other hand, it further suggests that perhaps librarians have become invisible, that the few who haven't been replaced by technicians or paraprofessionals are mainly behind the scenes, and that a lack of name badges or other prominent signage is keeping them from being easily identified. Whatever the reasons, the public—at least those of the SPL—admire their librarians, know their worth, and want to see and interact with more of them (p. 148).

The invisibility of the librarian is not a problem that is unique to the Seattle Public Library and may be the result of several factors. From my own experiences at the GB, I also found that the librarian has become invisible, or rather as Fisher et al.

argue, perhaps his or her role has been delegated to more "behind the scenes" kind of work, rather than hands on, face to face communication with patrons. Technology, although it has perhaps enhanced our levels of access to raw data, has also made the body disappear. In the modern library, the loss of the body is also often associated with a preoccupation with the loss of the book. In *Future Libraries* (1995), R. Howard Bloch and Carla Hesse write that, "[t]he electronic book and the electronic library are seen to be permeable in ways that are analogous to the physical permeability of the individual body" (p. 4). The fear of the loss of the book, in particular, has manifested itself through library architecture particularly in the 1990s, when the obsolescence of the book seemed an inevitable outcome. Architect for the San Francisco Main Library, which opened in the spring of 1996, Cathy Simon, writes that the main hall of the San Francisco library was conceived as the "table of contents of a book, in which chapter headings lay out the order or structure of the work to follow and give a sense of the complexity contained within" (1995, p.133). Similarly, the Bibliothèque nationale de France was also built in order to evoke the form of the book. With regards to the invisibility of the body, to return to Fisher et al., I would argue that the contemporary librarian, rather than having been replaced by technicians or paraprofessionals, has become the technician, the archivist, the community organizer, and the activist, on top of the role that she/he holds as librarian. The duties of the contemporary librarian have expanded, they encompass numerous professions, and if librarians are not necessarily overworked (although this is very likely the case), their duties require them to possibly be

elsewhere, or invisible, a problem that has apparently been solved by the promises of technology with the expanding services offered by the virtual librarian. Ironically, however, at the GB, online service options such as asking a librarian a question, or e-mailing user-services with various queries actually reduced access to the information that I needed rather than enhanced it. It created not only a greater physical barrier, in which I was not able to speak to a librarian personally, but also created a temporal as well as an ethical one, where in the first instance I had to wait for a response (on a time sensitive issue), sometimes not getting one at all, and in the second where it was completely impossible to deduce responsibility and accountability for the information sought after. In this sense, notions of access have not only taken our attention away from that which is inaccessible, but have also displaced our assumptions of accountability. I do not wish to argue that accessibility should not continuously be promoted within an institution such as a library, only that it should not simply be taken as a given and should be understood in all its myriad forms.

With regards to the physical properties of the library space itself, the idea of access displays similar contradictions. Van Slyck argues that,

> A building's exterior forms set the tone for an individual's encounter with the institution: gates, steps, doors, suggest the library's approachability (or lack thereof), its scale inspires awe (or not), and its formal vocabulary signals a kinship with other institutions of a similar style. A building's plan determines which interactions—with books, with library staff, with other users—are possible and which are impossible. The three-dimensional qualities of a building's interior spaces, as well as the furnishings and fittings in those spaces, constitute a sort of stage set that encourages users to play certain sanctioned roles, while making others seem unthinkable (2007, p. 222).

These various configurations that Van Slyck addresses, which usually go unnoticed, exist within the Grande Bibliothèque. A very concrete example would be the multiple circulation paths that exist within the library, and that may or may not be appealing to different kinds of users. The meandering path that envelops the central staircase in the GB might appeal to the library flâneur, whereas the stairs or the elevator may appeal to the patron that is seeking to find what she is looking for as quickly and efficiently as possible. This particular example is quite adaptive to a patron's preferences, and although on some level it conditions the ways in which people move within the space of the library, it can be recognized as not intending to be restrictive in any sort of way. However, as will become apparent in the next section, certain library properties are in fact pre-emptive features of the building, and have been put into place precisely to prevent certain actions or situations from taking place within the space; these same features often call the library's democratic assumptions about access into question.

Surveillance, Monitoring, and Questions of Privacy

The GB's square-like formation (perhaps more rectangular when looking at the finished building) was not an arbitrary decision. Not only could the square be made into a spacious, comfortable, and pleasurable space, but it could also distribute noise in such a way that created quiet spaces where those areas were desired, and noisy ones in order to appeal to a younger demographic. The square, however, was also considered to be the most practical and amenable to ease of flow between people and the collections. In establishing the configuration of the

site, the library in the shape of the square was to be privileged as it could offer the largest surface area for the smallest perimeter of wall to be constructed, and simultaneously assured a more efficient distribution of technical and mechanical systems throughout the building.

Still, the square was practical for perhaps an even more important and pressing reason. The library within the form of a square would also provide for more compact forms of spacing within the building itself, which, according to the GB committee, would make for spaces that could be more easily monitored by staff. This would in turn translate into budgetary savings, for in this scenario fewer employees would be required to monitor patrons as technical security systems could do the job even more efficiently. Surveillance has become an arguably necessary and also inevitable part of our lives, particularly in urban centers. As David Lyon (2002) writes, "[s]urveillance," (especially digital surveillance) "is an increasingly significant mode of governance in so-called knowledge-based or information societies […] Daily routines are now subject to myriad forms of checking, watching, recording and analyzing, so much so that we often take for granted the fact that we leave trails wherever we are and whatever we do" (p. 243). Nevertheless, surveillance, monitoring and the implications that these might have on our privacy take on a particular complicated importance with regards to the public library. In his book *Local Library, Global Passport* (2008), Patrick Boyer writes that,

> [a] significant feature of the library, perhaps one of the important though seldom mentioned reasons for its dynamism or vitality, is the way it enhances the privacy of the individual, especially important in an age when our personal privacy is so eroded. This is another paradox of the public

> library. This public institution is open to anyone who strolls in, a place of public exposure in many ways, but it is also a place that respects individuality and enshrines the privacy of each person. You can obtain virtually any book, either from the stacks or through inter-library loan, then take it to the privacy of your own home (pp. 7-8).

Privacy is one of the most important qualities of the library and yet it is also hardly ever discussed. Boyer raises two interesting points. On the one hand, the public library is indeed a place that is open to "anyone who strolls in," and although this is in fact one of the characteristics that defines the public library as a democratic public space, it simultaneously engages the need for surveillance, as "anyone who strolls in" could also be the unsolicited or possibly undesired, high risk passerby, whose actions may deviate from those normally expected within the space of the library. Here again, notions of access are called into question, as "true" access in this case is only granted to those who fit within a specific, acceptable "low risk" norm or category. A concrete example of this is played out within the GB restrooms. Although cameras may be a violation of privacy within the GB restrooms, ultraviolet lighting to prevent heroin addicts from shooting up,[31] and occasional monitoring by security staff to make sure the homeless are not planning to spend the night, are not seen as problematic. In fact, this type of monitoring is meant to protect patrons, and also enhance privacy rather than infringe upon it. Lyon writes that

[31] Given the location of the Grande Bibliothèque in Montreal's less affluent downtown east end, library officials were concerned that the library might become a shelter of sorts for the homeless and for those struggling with drug addictions. The library's numerous entrance points would make controlling who walks into the library, when, and for what purposes, relatively difficult to monitor, particularly if someone were to walk in in order to use one of the washrooms that are located outside of the two wooden rooms. As a result, one preventative measure, was to install ultraviolet lights in all of the library washrooms as a way of discouraging heroin addicts from using the library as a safe space for drug consumption. Ultraviolet lights make it impossible for addicts to find their veins.

> [p]rivacy, which so often is felt to be endangered […] can equally be considered as a key generator of surveillance. As the more anonymous arrangements of the modern 'society of strangers' emerged, and privacy was more valued, so the reciprocal need for tokens of trust grew as a means of maintaining the integrity of relations between those strangers (2002, p. 245).

Another instance of this type of risk management presented itself in a slight modification of the interior design after the library had opened to the public. Originally, if you looked up at the vast wooden room that houses the GB's universal collection and serves as the public lending library, you would notice that slats or empty spaces had been designed into the wooden paneling as a way of allowing natural light to be filtered into the space. Not long after the library opened these spaces were filled in with glass panels to prevent people from throwing books over the guardrails to the main floor where they could then potentially make off with a book without having checked it out. This glass modification, and similar small changes in detail, came as "after thoughts" to various scenarios not previously anticipated, and also to respond to the fact that not everyone was comfortable with the library the way that it is/was. Openness was not for everyone, and neither was it always practical. Access here is again called into question, for in this instance it relies very much on issues of trust and perception, a so-called possible "high-risk" patron or user, might have initial access to the library and all that it has to offer, but cannot be trusted to behave accordingly within the institutional framework in which he/she finds themselves, therefore does not entirely belong to the category of those who should *have access*.

The question of who should or should not have access to the GB

culminated on February 29th, 2012, in the midst of tuition protests and the fight for more accessible education, which was then taking place in Montreal. Throughout the duration of the protests, Berri Street, on which the GB is located, had become the site of numerous demonstrations and marches protesting the Government of Québec's proposed increase in tuition rates for higher education. Berri Street has become a symbol of the so-called Québec or Maple Spring, and has even been called Revolution Avenue. On February 29th, a read-in was scheduled at the GB between 6.30-9.30pm, where approximately 6,000 protesters were scheduled to stage a peaceful demonstration in order to raise awareness about the proposed tuition hikes. As Julia Jones writes "[t]he event invitation stated that the goal of the read-in was to 'show that students want to learn, but knowledge should be accessible to all. The library is an excellent symbol'" (*The Link*, February 29, 2012). Ironically, the library, this excellent symbol of accessible education decided to close its doors to demonstrators, stating that the "action was taken in order to 'ensure the safety of its users and employees and the integrity of its documents and collections'"(Jones, *The Link*, February 29, 2012). Here, who is and is not accepted within the space of the library is called into question. This event, and the GB's reaction to it, also highlights the contradictory nature of wanting to build openness and the possibility for unpredictable, spontaneous encounters into the library's architectural fabric. Letting the outside in is a nice idea in theory, but in actuality, the kind of spontaneous displays of publicness acceptable within the space of the library are limited. Sarah Leavitt writes that "[i]ronically, the protest coincide[d] with the closing of a year-long

exhibition at the library entitled 'Contre-culture: manifestes et manifestations.' The exhibition looked at Quebec's history of holding protests and the tumultuous years of 1968 to 1975. Little did they know a protest was to be held in their very halls" (*Openfile*, February 29, 2012). However, in closing its doors to avoid the demonstration, the GB made it clear that at the library one could engage in a discussion of protest movements in Québec, but it would not become the site of such protest or struggle. Not everything that happened on the street was welcome in the library's sanctuary.

As was argued earlier by Verschaffel (2009), and in light of some of the previous examples, although the library may be promoting the idea of ultimate freedom in the ways in which one behaves within its space—in theory patrons can talk above a whisper, they can choose their own paths, they can sit at a desk, or lounge on a couch, they can have a coffee or eat a sandwich (albeit in a designated area), all actions that would have been unthinkable in the traditional library—in reality, the library still imposes its own set of conditions and rules of behaviour. In fact, when I toured the library with architect Luc Doucet, we were almost immediately shushed while discussing the building design, even though we were in what seemed to be a designated noisy area. This particularly surprised Doucet precisely because the concept was for the library to be open; as he explained it, more like a community center than a traditional library (personal communication, August 24, 2011). Similarly, bringing food and drink into the two wooden rooms of the GB is strictly forbidden.

> I would say that in a place like this we tried to be a cross of European libraries and North American libraries […] You will have noticed that

> there's a café, a very good café des lettres bistro that we opened just a few months ago when we finally found the money, but also the Americans will let you enter the library with a coffee, we won't, and I'm adamant that we won't, and it's because we want to keep this place, I want to keep something a bit sacred nevertheless about this place. I think, I'm a bit worried about American libraries, if we become too noisy, and we're still a bit noisy here because of the kid's space, so we have to live with that, but not too much, at some point you're not a commercial place and people have to understand that you have to keep it elegant, nice and quiet and we don't want to have to clean it up after them, and we have to keep this space a bit different (Bissonnette, interview, May 22, 2007).

Although thoroughly committed to notions of openness and freedom during the conceptual design phase of the project, Bissonnette admits that there are limits to freedom, and explains the current restrictive measures employed at the GB as a distinction between American and European libraries. American libraries being more open and free whereas European libraries tend to be stricter, more traditional, in what may or may not be acceptable behaviour. She claims that the GB is somewhere in between.

Verschaffel writes that

> [t]his drive to control and regulate use of the public space will always lead to the exclusion of what is—by a certain class or regime—considered as 'improper use' by 'undesirable users'. It produces the phantasm of the clean and well-ordered city, from the urban utopias of the Renaissance to the 'gated communities' of today. But now, new surveillance devices and an obsession with security create a condition that not only excludes the social dimension, but where *everybody* is being watched all the time. People who move 'freely' leave traces wherever they go. Being free to move without anyone interfering, while nonetheless continuously being tracked or watched, is no longer intuitively perceived or experienced as freedom (2009, p. 139).

What I wish to highlight here is that the problem of the "high risk" user equally implicates all library users, as monitoring devices and risk management initiatives restrict and control everyone within the space of the library, meaning that the so

called spontaneity, openness, and unlimited freedom that has been built into the space of the library by way of collapsed spaces and meandering pathways, are ultimately lost not only because the library imposes its own set of rules and conditions that regulate behaviour, but also due to surveillance.

On the other hand, to return to Boyer (2008), when he speaks of the paradox that exists between privacy and the inherent publicity of public libraries, I would claim that there is less of a paradox and more of a tension that is displayed. As a public institution, the library is a space where patrons mingle together as a collective in their various activities of reading, researching, writing, watching films and the like. Not only can individuals enter the library and borrow a book, which they can read in the privacy of their own homes, but they can also be sure that the kinds of books that they borrow and read, and the sorts of research that they do in the space of the library will not be monitored. To be more precise, although resources that patrons use are subject to certain forms of data collection and preservation—as library users, we are well aware of the fact that libraries maintain systems of registering and recording which books are borrowed, and which returned, and what kinds of information are being accessed through their databases and servers—patrons can feel confident that their personal records will remain confidential and will not be used against them. The privacy of the patron is a right that is (perhaps ironically from what we have seen in the GB restroom example) fiercely protected, it remains a value which librarians, in particular, hold as close as the idea of democratic access, particularly in the contemporary context where surveillance and monitoring of citizens is so prevalent. Not only is

surveillance and monitoring a steady constant in our everyday lives, but as was pointed out by Lyon (2002), methods of surveillance are built into the very structures and codes of new and emergent media technologies, and, as is revealed in the GB's structural shape, these methods are also built into buildings themselves; as such, systems of monitoring that we may not even be aware of (i.e the GB restroom lighting) infiltrate our everyday practices. We also much more readily give up our privacy in exchange for "protection," as well as free services both online and offline. With this in mind, the privacy upheld in the space of the public library is increasingly crucial and rare. But privacy is central to the functioning of the public library not only because privacy is more and more of a rare commodity, but because the entire foundation of the character of the public library is at stake if patron privacy is abused. The idea of the public library as a space in which democratic access to information is guaranteed is predicated on the fact that this access is personal and private to the individual. Patrons come to the library, a public institution, precisely because their privacy is guaranteed, without this assurance the inherent publicity of the library, the very democratic character of it, that anyone is welcome, would be completely lost. Therefore, the terms "public" and "private" with regards to the library, share an almost mutually enabling quality in which one cannot exist without the other. And yet this quality is simultaneously called into question and perhaps even undermined when enabling forms of surveillance and monitoring become an already pre-existing function that are purposely built into the structure and design of the library itself.

Mediating Public Space

> The entire design process—from the moment a city decides it needs a new library building to the selection of the architect, from the creation of blueprints through the building's construction—depends in great part on the objectives of the design project. In other words, what do the local library and the city hope to accomplish by building a new downtown library building (Mattern, 2007, p. 9)?

In the case of the Grande Bibliothèque, the new downtown library was to be a space that promoted openness, access, spontaneity, publicness, and freedom. These ideologies are translated in the ways in which they are designed into the fabric of the library building itself. Yet in reality these ideologies, which are currently at the forefront of what the contemporary library is supposed to be about, are difficult to uphold. What I wanted to bring to light in this chapter is that library design is now asked to be responsive to an extensive set of "values" that go beyond what might have traditionally been invested in a library as a place to store and read books. The process of design and its various agencies, from the integration of collapsed spaces to locating certain activities outside of the library's central point of control, have indeed shaped a particular institutional incarnation of the Grande Bibliothèque, but these same processes have been reshaped by not only socio-political, technological, and economic imperatives, but also by the various kinds of "publics" that the GB serves. Architecture has become the primary means by which the attempt to realize the aforementioned values is being made. It has been called upon not only to re-imagine a building's shape and structure, but also to re-imagine the ideological priorities of an institution that dates back centuries. Architecture is increasingly considered to be one of the means by which the contemporary library finds solutions to the transformative

pressures that it faces. Architects are given a privileged role: by re-designing the traditional library they are also in part deciding what the future spaces of the library will be for, who they will be for, and ultimately what they could or will mean. These meanings may vary with each library's cultural context, however what is increasingly apparent, and what has been demonstrated through the designs of both the Rolex Learning Center and the Grande Bibliothèque, is that the notion of "letting the outside in" does not make the library equivalent to those public spaces that are spontaneously created in the street. Architecture alone cannot achieve the wide-ranging set of "values" that the contemporary library is currently expected to uphold, not least because there are many factors extraneous to architecture that also come to bear on what the library becomes. In this way, a certain level of architectural investment and intention is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of possibility of the contemporary library. By contrast, as new iterations of the library increasingly let the outside in they are beginning to position themselves as new kinds of educational institutions, that not only understand themselves as preservers, disseminators, and sources of knowledge, but also facilitators of the creation of knowledge, culture, and memory. Yet this vision of the responsive, accessible, and 'free' library is only possible if the surrounding environment and all of its contingencies become an integral part of the space itself. Even the most contemporary of library doors have yet to be fully opened.

Chapter 4

Knowledge Experiments: Technology and the Library

> Every new technology has advantages over the previous one, but necessarily lacks some of its predecessors attributes. Familiarity, which no doubt breeds contempt, breeds also comfort; that which is unfamiliar breeds distrust (Manguel, 2007, p. 321).

In the conclusion to his book *The Library at Night* (2007), Alberto Manguel seeks to dispel the pervasive fear that new and emergent technologies have always bred, and continue to breed, about the precarious future of the printed word, the book, the traditional library, and the ways in which we read and conduct research, the qualities of which some critics have claimed are being eroded by the emergence of the World Wide Web and related digital, network and screen technologies. Manguel writes that "the new sense of infinity created by the Web has not diminished the old sense of infinity inspired by the ancient libraries; it has merely lent it a sort of tangible intangibility" (p. 322). The claim can be made that the library is in fact not obsolete but rather has transformed itself, and not, to the surprise of many scholars, in the ways that were predicted in the 1980s and 90s—particularly due to the development and proliferation of the personal computer, as well as the development of "other means for storage and transmission of information and knowledge" (Dowlin, 1984, p. v). Many scholars throughout the 80s and 90s were preoccupied with the idea that the principal way in which the library would adapt in an information society would be to transform from a

material entity into an immaterial one. In *City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn* (1996), William J. Mitchell predicted that the design of future libraries would literally leave them without any walls. He writes:

> The facade [of the library] is not to be constructed of stone and located on a street in Bloomsbury, but of pixels on thousands of screens scattered throughout the world. Organizing book stacks and providing access to them turns into a task of structuring a database and providing search and retrieval routines. Reading tables become display windows on screens. Resources are made available to the public by allowing anyone to log in and by providing computer work stations in public places, rather than by opening reading room doors. The huge stacks shrink to almost negligible size, the seats and carrels disperse, and there is nothing left to put a grand facade *on*. It will not be possible to tell tourists where some Marx of the next millenium sat. All that is solid melts in air (pp. 56-57).

"Cyberspace would replace civic space—or would it" (Molz & Dain, 2001, p. 10)? Cyberspace has not replaced civic space. Rather, when addressing the question of the library today, it would be more accurate to say that cyberspace has become an integral part of civic space.

The library has in fact become a central nervous system for new and emergent media technologies, a site that centralizes access to increasingly decentralized networks and systems, a local place in which new and emergent media technologies have not only found a home, but also a site that seeks to preserve and disseminate collective memory and culture through these technologies. Libraries provide access to spaces and networks of knowledge, culture and interaction that together renovate the library's traditional role as a democratic institution. As such, they commingle past, posterity, and the present. The modern library is the library that "contains" cyberspace, or at least public access to it.

This chapter seeks to explore the "technologization" of the library. More specifically, it will examine how this process of "technologization" has transformed the ways in which we use and understand the library as a public space as well as what this may mean for the future of libraries. I propose that the idea of the library as an important medium in itself has been overlooked in the broader context of communication and media studies. The following chapter will pursue these questions in two parts. In a first part, I will examine how libraries have, to borrow from Andrew Barry (2001), become "technological zones," as much as they have remained civic spaces. For Barry, "[z]ones are not fixed structures within which action takes place. Zones are always in process. They demand regeneration, adjustment and reconfiguration: frequent maintenance work" (p. 40). It is this idea of the regeneration of the library that I wish to explore in order to establish how through the strategic deployment of technology and design, libraries have become new, almost experimental sites of knowledge. The second part of this chapter will consider the technologizing effects of the Grande Bibliothèque. The Grande Bibliothèque, and particularly its digitization initiatives, is an interesting instance in which the undetermined future of what a library can be is played out. Because of its mix of both national and public mandates, the GB evokes competing narratives around what forms of citizenship—technological, national, civic—the library as a mediating technology will or should foster**.** The case of the Grande Bibliothèque speaks to a broader trend that is currently taking place with regards to libraries in the digital age, hence the importance of treating it within the larger context of the changing

relationship between libraries and technology, and how this has transformed our perceptions of what a contemporary civic institution such as the library can be, and what shapes it can take.

Technology and Design

To claim that the "traditional library" has not in fact been replaced by the so-called digital library is not to say that its façade has not changed, that its shape has not been deeply modified. The library is not obsolete precisely because it has transformed and adapted itself to its environment over the centuries, and this environment has become increasingly technological. These technologies, although they have not superseded the library, have nonetheless had a tremendous impact on modern library design. The "traditional library" in North America, that ideal form propagated by American industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, has had to adapt and change in interaction with the ever increasing demand for digitized information, the new forms of temporal access enabled by the Internet, as well as the broader transformations taking place around the role of media protocols in human practices of communication. In fact, technological sophistication has become almost synonymous with what we consider to be a successful modern library. Andrew Barry (2001) highlights this point when he argues that,

> This is an era obsessed by a series of interconnected technological problems: with the maintenance of technological competitiveness and the improvement of research productivity; with the need to patent and protect intellectual property; with the dangers posed by the unintended consequences of technological development; with the public understanding of science; with the risks and prospects for e-commerce and electronic

> democracy; and with the need for life-long learning in the face of rapid technical change (p. 3).

This last point directly implicates the library as one of the institutions that has been called upon to meet this need. Absent contemporary demands arising from a range of perceived technological imperatives, Carnegie's library might very well have continued to perform the same functions—a "traditional" mix of stone buildings, paper-bound books, and a site-specific democratic imperative of access.

There is a distinction to be made here between notions of what qualifies as the "traditional" library and what as the "modern," at least in the ways in which these two terms will be used within this chapter. It could be argued that the idea of the modern library dates as far back as 1523, when the merchant Medici family commissioned the construction of Michelangelo's Laurentian Library in Florence. The library was built primarily in order to make a political statement that the Medici family had moved into the upper echelons of society and were now members of the Italian intelligentsia and religious society rather than simply mere merchants; library architecture during this period reflected the relationship that books held to power (just as contemporary library design reflects the relationship between power and digital networks in the current period). The Laurentian Library is renowned for its architecture, which was designed and built by Michelangelo, but it is also significant because Michelangelo's design and innovative use of space was revolutionary for his time. According to James Murdock, this particular library would serve as the model for future libraries, which would be characterized by rows of desks that would "dominate a navelike reading room" (Murdock, 2011, p. 56). European libraries continued to assume

this “temple of knowledge”-like form throughout the Enlightenment, even when the political identity of the library had begun to move away from its association to power to adopt its more democratic characteristics.

The Reading Room of the Laurentian Library, designed by Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), 1534 (photo), Buonarroti, Michelangelo (1475-15-64) / Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Florence, Italy / The Bridgeman Art Library. (Image: bridgemanart.com)[32]

In the more recent past, remnants of this prototype can be found in the very familiar image of what we have come to associate with what a library *should look like*: a Beaux Arts building façade within which “[b]ooks line the walls of these buildings’ vast reading rooms, while tables and carrels occupy most of the floor space” (Murdock, 2011, p. 56). In North America, it is the free, public and democratic space we have come to associate with Andrew Carnegie, a quiet space

[32] It is interesting to compare the Laurentian Library reading room to the the future BiblioTech reading room featured on p. 10. They are effectively the same: rows of individual reading stations; not a book in sight.

that predominantly contains books, and not much else. This is the image of the "traditional" library in relation to which the imagination and materiality of the contemporary library is cast into relief.

Image of a traditional Carnegie Library built in 1908. The Bracebridge Public Library in Bracebridge, Ontario. (Image: Community Information Muskoka)

Over the last fifty years or so, there has been a significant trend towards redesigning the traditional Carnegie library. Shannon Mattern (2007) writes that

> [b]y the 1960s, 'there was a discernible trend toward replacing old Carnegie libraries' with 'modernistic, inviting, and often architecturally distinguished' buildings. Among these new buildings, no single architectural style dominated, as the Beaux Arts had done for decades before, thanks to the influence of Carnegie and his favoured architects (p. 4).

This trend towards new modern library design, although particular to North America with the re-imagination of the Carnegie library, can be seen all over the world, particularly in the 90s and throughout the 2000s, a period which has seen

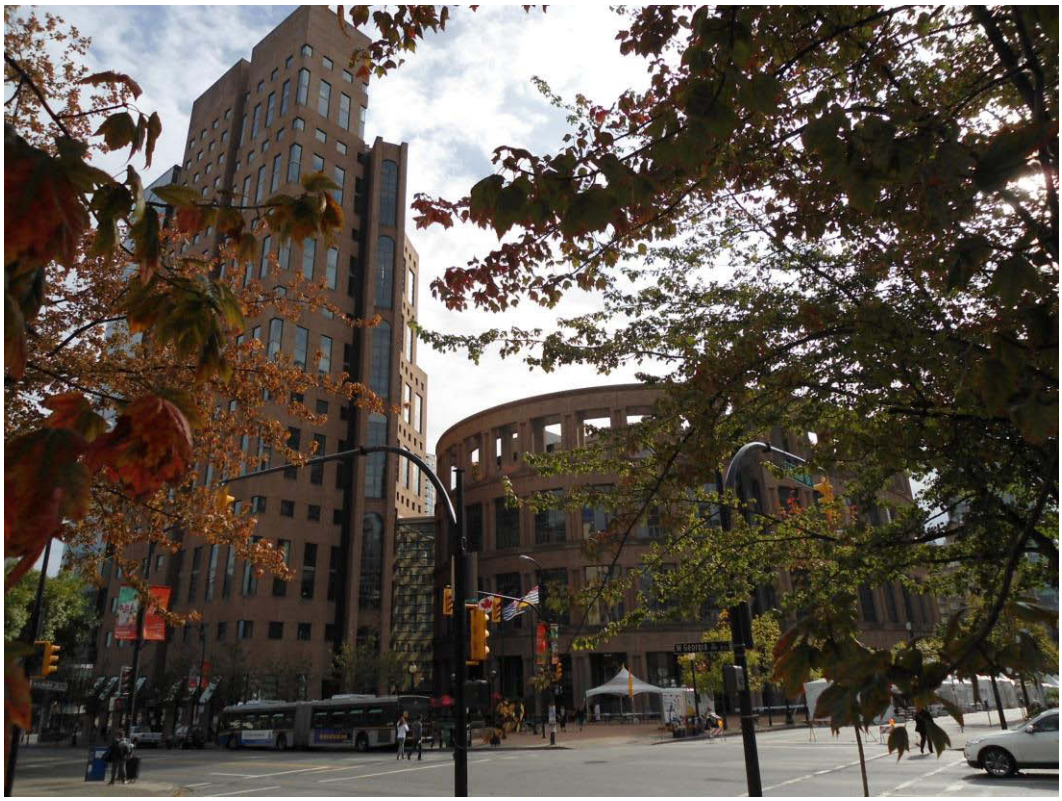
the emergence of a number of architecturally innovative new libraries. As a result, it could be argued that there is more going on with new library design than a mere re-imagination of the Carnegie library, but a significant transformation of the identity of the library in response to digitization: What kind of publics does it serve? What kind of space should it be? What are the functions that it is meant to perform?

These were the kinds of questions posed by renowned Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas while designing the Seattle Public Library, which opened in May of 2004. Mattern (2007) cites Koolhaas as arguing that many new libraries, particularly

> those built before the mid-90s, 'don't reinvent or even modernize the traditional institution; they merely *package* it in a new way.' Koolhaas wanted to go beyond packaging; changing the institution's wrappings is not enough to remedy its self-misrepresentation and its operational failings, he thought. Koolhaas attempted, through his design, to 'reinvent the idea of the library,' both functionally and architecturally (p. 70).

As Mattern goes on to explain, Koolhaas recognized that the reinvention of the library went beyond just its form, rather its very purpose needed to be re-imagined "because, as he put it, the 'legitimacy' of the library is under question" (p. 70). What the Seattle Public Library succeeded in doing, as well as many other libraries of its kind, such as the Vancouver Public Library (1996), the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (2002), and the Grande Bibliothèque (2005), to name a few, was to make a clean break from not only what the Carnegie library looked like but also what it stood for. The libraries of the mid to late 90s and early 2000s began to alter the discussion about what a library is and what it should be. As Mattern writes with regards to Koolhaas' design,

> [t]his approach to design means rebuilding the operative ideology of the library as one rebuilds the physical library itself. In this case it seems that the antitype—that is, design not relying on precedent but instead based on questions of the very nature and function of the library—is Koolhaas's signature design style (p. 71).



The Vancouver Public Library

However, even as recently as the last two or three years, these ideological debates surrounding the purpose of the 21st century library have shifted dramatically in that the most recent new library designs have begun to reflect discourses that surround technological innovation. As a concrete example of this, very recently built public libraries have begun to re-imagine or experiment with the idea of a library that is not without walls (as was feared with the increasing impact of digitization), but a library whose walls contain either a limited number of books or no books at all. More accurately, we can say that the newest kind of library is one that contains books, but in a new format. In conversation with the principal

architect from ikon.5 architects, Joseph Tattoni, whose firm has undertaken the design of several large-scale libraries in the United States, Tattoni mentioned that twenty years ago library employees were very resistant to books being moved out of the library. In the last ten years or so this has changed to the extent that there are simply so many more types of objects that are desired within the space of the library. The issue today is less about the diminishment of books and more a conversation about creating access to other types of technologies that have opened up possibilities for new sources of information (personal communication, July 14, 2011).

The Seattle Public Library (Image: ArchitectureWest.com)

The Seattle Public Library, interior. (Image: Beautiful-Libraries.com)

Consequently, the newest models of the library not only question where books fit with regards to libraries in the digital age, but they also represent the idea that the answer to what the future library will be is unknown, that what defines the library of the digital age, and is reflected within its very structure, is that it has built into it the very idea of the unknown. The newest kinds of libraries are built for change. They are expected to be as much physically as philosophically adaptable and flexible to their transformative environments. In other words, the ideological debates surrounding the identity of the modern library have shifted from a discourse that asks how libraries should reinvent themselves in order to keep up with the times and stave off obsolescence, to the notion that libraries must be designed so as to be open to an undetermined future as a result of emergent technologies whose forms and attendant practices cannot be easily predicted.

Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, Egypt. (Image: OpenBuildings.com)

When discussions began surrounding the building of the Grande Bibliothèque, one of the primary goals was to convince taxpayers that building a downtown library was a worthwhile endeavour. This was not unique to Montreal; most libraries being built at the time faced the same issues. As Mattern (2007) writes:

> One of the first steps in most library design processes is convincing the taxpaying public that it *needs* a new downtown library building […]. Despite the fact that most people, whether library patrons or not, are generally supportive of, or at least benevolently ambivalent toward, public libraries, library construction campaigns are occasionally a tough sell […][they are] just one of many institutions competing for the same public and private funding (pp. 9-10).

This was very much the case for the GB. The question that was asked repeatedly was why there was a need for a building at all? This question was posed to Lise Bissonnette. The question that was put to her was why, with the explosion of the

Internet, was it so important to have a building as a means of promoting culture when the promotion of culture could be achieved in other, newer, cheaper, presumably more immaterial and innovative ways? Bissonnette's response was one that became very familiar in the mid 90s and late 2000s; it aimed to convince citizens that a library with walls was even more necessary in the digital age than it had been before:

> Well you know it's a sense of place, I mean the libraries today are becoming, and fast, the center of cities and it's fascinating because they're not traditional libraries anymore as you see when you come in a place like this [the Grande Bibliothèque]. They're not traditional libraries anymore, they're not a place where people come, take a book and just go out. They're a place where people can stay for a few hours, discover, come to a conference, everything is free by the way here, and we don't accept even when people ask about an entrance fee, and everything is free, there are exhibitions, they can meet with librarians, we'll help them with their personal research. This is a very different place, it's a community place, and even in small villages today it's fast becoming the library, when they build one or when they enlarge one, it's fast becoming the center of the place. It's the new institution for the 21st century, as I say, inside a city (interview, May 22, 2007).

When the first prototypes of the 21st century library were being built, this is how their projects were being sold. The library's purpose was no longer solely to preserve and disseminate culture and memory, and librarians were no longer to be only archivist-guardians of a library's documentary holdings. The library needed to become a free space in which communities could gather, and librarians needed to become "part reference specialist[s], part social worker[s], and part community organizer[s]" (Murdock, 2011, p. 56). As Murdock writes,

> [t]he modern library has always been something of a community center—a place where people can gather to learn, whether in a story hour or a craft workshop, in the presence of others. Many observers contend that this role, often referred to as an 'information commons,' must now take center stage (2011, p. 56).

And it has taken center stage. So much so that the challenge is no longer to convince taxpayers to support a new library project in their cities, the challenge now is to further rethink the library's potential in the face of new and emergent media technologies. The year 2009 in particular saw the opening of an immense number of new libraries all over the world, and these libraries, although modeled on the earlier mid-90s modern libraries, differ in their approaches to what libraries of the future are and what they should be. These new libraries are knowledge experiments in and of themselves.

The Musashino Art University Museum & Library in Tokyo is a fascinating example of future potentiality being built into the structure of the institution itself. Originally built in 1962, the Musashino Art University decided to turn its original gallery-library into a museum, and build a new library immediately next to it. The result is an incredibly impressive building that can be described as "a single, spiral-shaped bookshelf encased in a glass box" (Pollock, 2011, p. 61). What is unique about this library is that the bookshelves—which are floor to ceiling, and make up the entire building in a continuous maze-like formation—are not entirely filled with books; in fact most of the shelves, although they do contain some books, remain empty. A first interpretation is that the architect, Sou Fujimoto, was commenting on the identity of the 21st century library. The library in the digital age is one that is free of books and instead houses books in digital formats and incorporates other new technologies (which at times seem almost invisible when one looks at images of the Musashino library).

The Musashino Art University Library, exterior. (Image: Architectural Record). Photo © Iwan Baan.

In this sense, Fujimoto's design might echo what Lisa Gitelman (2008) perceived to be "amazingly prescient" (p. 100) in J.C.R Licklider's depiction of the future library in his study *Libraries of the Future,* published in 1965. Gitelman writes that

> [t]he future Licklider takes as his point of orientation is the year 2000, and the libraries he proposes are what he calls 'procognitive systems' […] Licklider arrives at a wishful future in which researchers sit at consoles or terminals, typing on keyboards and looking at screens, connecting to and interacting with digital systems to query, search and retrieve information (pp. 99-100).

Licklider's future library has by 2009 possibly come and gone. Although computers are still given a place within new library designs, because their size has radically diminished, and most library patrons might have their own computing devices at their disposal, computers have become increasingly invisible within new libraries. However, Fujimoto's intention with regards to the Musashino Art University Library's empty bookshelves was in fact not a comment on the

potential obsolescence of books. Paradoxically, the library was designed to celebrate books. Fujimoto originally envisioned the library with its vast number of bookshelves being completely filled with books, but is quoted in *Architectural Record* as saying: "'After completion, I found that emptiness is better […] If you fill up all the shelves, it is just a bookcase. But if you leave it part empty it is full of potential'" (Pollock, 2011, p. 67). The mostly empty bookshelves were a somewhat unintended consequence of the architectural design. As earthquakes are quite common in Japan, special modifications would have had to have been made in order to allow for books to be stacked on the shelves reaching above six feet, not to mention the problems surrounding the accessibility of the books placed on the higher shelves.

The Musashino Art University Library, interior. (Image: Architectural Record). Photo © Iwan Baan.

The Musashino Art University Library, interior. (Image: Architectural Record). Photo © Iwan Baan.

Fujimoto's extensive bookshelf design was meant to offer the option of filling the shelves either with books, or other objects, or nothing at all, this decision remained with library management. Nonethless, his design sought to inspire a sentiment of freedom and openness, and the predominance of the empty bookshelves, at least for the time being, complements the spacious atmosphere, while simultaneously keeping the library open to future potentials.

> As Fujimoto himself says, the shelves may eventually fill with books, or they may be used to display works of art or other creative installations—or they may be left empty, the blank space 'hinting at the infinite expansion of information into realms that transcend the medium of the book.' In other words it is a space that is not meant to be filled by books alone. The empty shelves serve as a tacit suggestion, a presentiment of future possibilities, of what may happen. In playing this role they, too, are essential component of the library. (To enhance this symbolic space, the stacks for books in storage are tucked away out of sight in the basement or on the first floor.) The spiraling library opens itself up not only in space, but also in time (Tanaka, 2010, p. 19).

Yet another instance of library experimentation is the newly built Fisher-Watkins Library at a prep school in Ashburnham, Massachusetts. This library, although not a public library and perhaps not one of the most innovative in its design, has been one of the most technologically pioneering in that it recently replaced its nearly 20,000 printed books with Kindles. The library's mandate, with the heading "A Library Transformed," reads as follows:

> In 2009, The Fisher-Watkins Library underwent a digital transformation. The Academy replaced the majority of the library's 20,000 printed books with electronic sources as a natural and integral outgrowth of the school's strategic commitment to becoming the national leader in 21st-century secondary education, and to providing students with the necessary tools to become lifelong learners in a socially—and globally—connected world. We wanted to create a library that reflected the reality of how students do research and fostered what they do—one that went beyond the stacks and embraced the digital future ("A Library Transformed," 2011).

The Fisher Watkins Library is an instance wherein we can see that a technological shift exists alongside a closely-related discursive shift, in which the perceived imperatives of emerging technology and emerging narratives concerning the library's purpose and future become mutually reinforcing. Martin Hand (2008) argues that,

> [t]he narratives of digitization in the library shifts learning from 'instruction' to 'empowerment,' entailing an institutional move from custodialism to interfacing, and a promotion of citizen engaged in indefinite learning. In this sense, the Web (as the latest information machine) has become a powerful set of cultural discourses about the traditional purposes, functions, and effects of public libraries in contemporary information cultures (p. 10).

For Hand there are two types of discourses that are presently circulating within public libraries, modern and postmodern. Under the auspices of new and emergent media technologies, the discourse of libraries shifts from a modern pre-occupation

with collections, pedagogy, and legitimation, towards a postmodern emphasis on interfacing, empowerment, democratization, and communitarianism (p. 83). What I wish to emphasize here is that this shift is not only a discursive one but also one that is being materialized within libraries in very real and tangible ways. It is being played out in the ways in which libraries are being designed and built (as we have briefly seen here), in the ways that the librarian's role is changing, and also in the ways in which patrons are using libraries.

To return to Barry (2001), libraries have become "technological zones," not simply because they contain technological devices but because they have also become "discontinuous spaces of circulation and regulation" (p. 41). They are discontinuous because every modern library does not only exist within the boundaries of its own walls; they are connected through permissions and codes, various access points, to not only other libraries, but to other sources of knowledge and information as well. However, libraries are "technological zones" because they also require a certain expertise from both their patrons and their staff that was previously not required. Libraries as sites need to be adaptable but so do the humans that frequent them. As Barry argues:

> As doctors, auditors, and computer users well know it is never possible to assume that the same technical practice will work in another place in exactly the same way. For however apparently standardized a device is, or is supposed to be, there may also be a need to make adjustments to its design and use […] In the context of an analysis of technological zones, an expert should not just be thought of as somebody who knows how to use a complicated piece of equipment or perform a difficult task, but rather somebody who is able to make adjustments to this equipment, and to themselves, which take due recognition of the complexity of circumstance (p. 40).

Technologizing the Grande Bibliothèque

The idea of the library as a civic space is not a novel one. Libraries have over centuries (at least in Western liberal democracies) been associated with spaces in which the potential for civic participation is possible. Libraries have been those institutions in which democratic access to knowledge and information would lead to a more informed, knowledgeable, and as a result, engaged citizen, capable of participating and governing herself within a democratic public sphere. The public library is an example of an institution in which Foucault's idea of governmentality, for instance, is played out. It is an institution that recognizes an individual's "capacity for action" (Rose, 1999, p. 4), and encourages it in a way that might produce the desired outcome of civic engagement. Within the public library, however, "civic engagement" understood as direct political participation, is not necessarily the desired outcome in itself, but rather the cultivation of the sort of subject who governs or regulates herself through civic engagement. In other words, we might understand the public library as a site in which Foucault's idea of 'the conduct of conduct' is performed. A site in which patrons are indirectly shaped and guided so as to eventually conduct themselves in a manner by which certain socio-political objectives might be fulfilled. Again, here patrons are not considered as passive but rather as active agents of their own behaviour. It could be argued that the desired form of civic engagement encouraged by the public library is both enabled by technology, "[i]nteractive technology is expected to produce active citizens" (Barry, 2001, p. 127), and is technological in that "the individual citizen is increasingly expected, and increasingly expects, to make his

or her own judgments about scientific and technological matters" (Barry, 2001, pp. 127-128), judgments that are enabled through access to information. Libraries have thus gone from not only being cultural institutions that are charged with the preservation of books and cultural heritage and memory in general, to being primarily conditioning media spaces in which technologies are not only stored but can be accessed freely, and moreover destinations to which people go in order to engage with emergent technologies that are on offer, both structurally and cognitively. Emerging media technologies have brought with them a prominent normative vocabulary that centers on notions of interactivity and access. Interactivity and access together are the new "operative ideology" of the library.

On the one hand, the idea of interactivity within the modern library is not only about patrons' technical capacities and their use of technologies within the space of the library but it also assumes that by being actively engaged with technology citizens are empowered, for they are active rather than passive agents of their own knowledge and expertise. Scholars such as Yochai Benkler (2006) argue that the "networked information environment" has allowed "for the emergence of a more critical and self-reflective culture" (p. 15). The distributed architecture of new and emergent technologies have allowed for novel pathways of communication releasing the public sphere from its market-oriented grasp and allowing individuals to communicate with each other outside of commercial priorities and strategies (p. 212). "[T]he social practices of information and discourse," within the networked information environment, "allow a very large number of actors to see themselves as potential contributors to public discourse

and as potential actors in political arenas, rather than mostly passive recipients of mediated information who occasionally can vote their preferences" (p. 220). The contemporary library patron is not one who is governed within the space of the library but one who governs herself. As Barry (2001) writes, "[i]n an interactive model, subjects are not disciplined, they are *allowed*" (p. 129).

On the other hand, access plays a parallel if slightly varied role. Hand (2008) writes that

> [t]he term 'access' has become pervasive in popular and academic commentary, highlighting inequities and privileges of one kind or another, moral imperatives to eradicate exclusion in favour of inclusion in all areas of societal life, a generalized shift from 'ownership to access' in a new 'experience economy' (p. 75).

As I discussed in chapter three, for Hand, 'access' has become the "dominant narrative of digital culture" (p. 75), and as a result, it has also become one of the dominant narratives surrounding these new iterations of the public library. Access has become nearly synonymous with the primary mandate of public libraries to disseminate and promote knowledge, to disseminate and promote a particular cultural heritage, which can only be accomplished if people have access to the knowledge being promoted and disseminated. New and emergent media technologies that promise enhanced public access to information and knowledge are thus difficult to resist, even for the most bookish of libraries.

With the growing impact of new and emergent media technologies and the increasing expectation of people to be able to engage with and have access to these technologies, constructing the Grande Bibliothèque went beyond issues of space constraints and documentary holdings and offerings. Although the reasons

for building the GB were numerous, a technological imperative rapidly took precedence over many competing priorities, and exerted enormous influence on the design aspects of the building itself. The normative imperatives of interactivity and access arguably account for the Grande Bibliothèque's $17 million (Cdn) investment in information technology infrastructure in its construction. The Grande Bibliothèque has more than one hundred multimedia stations available to its patrons (approximately 350 computer posts). These workstations are located on all levels throughout the library, and allow users to access the Internet, many electronic resources, including databases, the Iris catalogue, and various applications. The library also holds a music and film section, and has a viewing room and viewing stations for on-site viewing of part of the library's film collection. The section also offers listening stations that facilitate on-site consultation of sound works and music shows. In addition to a language laboratory, there are also music rooms. These rooms are small studios where interested patrons can perform, manipulate or create a sound work in electronic format. Finally, the library contains what it calls the Logithèque, where you will find 12 multimedia stations that include software applications and educational software available as a way of allowing patrons to learn how to use these media.

As such, in addition to being a significant architectural statement in the city of Montreal, the Grande Bibliothèque is also a highly mediatized and technologized site. The Grande Bibliothèque's digital character and its particular technical imperatives, in an important way conditioned its structural design; the

bit, in the case of the GB, came before the brick. The library's virtual collection was actually launched before the opening of the library itself, and the design of the library was as much about preparing the structure for the necessary IT services as it was about the look and feel of the space of the library. As Patricia Patkau notes "[a]ll spaces [had] to be agile in terms of future proofing for changing technologies" (personal communication, November 22, 2011).

As in most contemporary libraries, managing the library's virtual space is extremely complex and often challenging. The ease with which we as patrons can search the GB's online catalogue—which contains approximately two million documents, not including their copies—and access the numerous services on offer, hardly reflects the amount of labour necessary to keep these systems up to date and running smoothly; at the GB this is managed by the web services department. The GB's web services department has approximately fifty employees, not including the various outside consultants that are hired in order to help them stay on top of the newest forms of information systems. According to Jean-François Gauvin[33], director of the department, the GB's online technological infrastructure, although it has been hailed as one of the most advanced in the world, is not quite as mature as that of the Library of Congress or the Bibliothèque nationale de France, for instance. This is largely due to the fact that the GB is still a very young institution, having opened in 2005. For Gauvin, however, a small web services department is relatively advantageous for it means

[33] Director of web services at the GB, Jean-François Gauvin, is a librarian and archivist who has worked in web services and development at the GB since 2002. His background is in library science and he also studied communication studies at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM).

that there are much fewer obstacles to the decision-making processes involved when it comes to developing something new or different. The GB's web services department has more flexibility than most libraries of its size in how it deals with keeping up with new systems, a task, which according to Gauvin, is quite difficult (personal communication, December 14, 2011). With regards to the technological infrastructure of the library, it could be argued that the department of web services is one of the most important departments within the institution. Located on the fourth floor of the GB, the department manages approximately 1,400 PCs. The GB's computer systems are developed by what they call an "appel d'offre" or a call for bids or tenders; in other words, the library hires companies to develop, integrate, and maintain certain systems and servers. The library's main server runs on a system called SCGD and its nucleus is called Portfolio, which manages the library's cataloguing system, meaning all documents and their copies, as well as their circulation; this encompasses loans, renewals, and returns. The digital library is managed through DSpace, a relatively recent system that was developed at the Massachussetts Institute of Technology in 2002. DSpace is an open source software package that provides the tools for managing an institution's digital collections; because it is able to support a wide variety of data such as books, journals, newspapers, and primarily image based files such as videos, photographs, maps, and blueprints, it is adaptable with regards to a library's digital collections. It is particularly important to a library's catalogue as it includes Dublin Core, metadata terms or vocabulary that describe the available documents found online. Most of the GB's systems are open source, and

according to Gauvin, the library prefers to work with open source as much as possible. The GB, however, still has quite a long way to go before it is completely up to speed with open source software, such as DSpace.

Currently many, if not most, GB patrons are using/accessing the online systems in and via the library by way of their own devices rather than via the computer terminals within the library (even if the computer terminals available on site are still very much in use). In order to access the Internet as well as BAnQ's full catalogues and software systems patrons need to connect through the library's wireless system, which covers more than 90% of the building space. To access the wireless system patrons need to enter their usernames and passwords that identify them as BAnQ subscribers. BAnQ offers two types of subscriptions free of charge to Québec residents only:

1. A subscription to all services, on-site and remote, which entitles the user to a subscriber's card.
2. A subscription to remote services, which provides access to electronic resources requiring authentication on BAnQ's Internet portal (Subscriptions, BAnQ).

It is difficult to make a categorical statement as to whether patrons access the library's website, software, and catalogues while on-site (as they can access these remotely as long as they are BAnQ subscribers) or if the GB is merely a hospitable place for people to work and search the Internet in ways that have nothing to do with the library and its systems per se. For instance in his study of Internet use in UK public libraries, Martin Hand (2005) found

> that most library users [were] framing the Net as a *communication medium*. That is they [were] mostly dis-aggregating the Internet-in-the-library into email facilities […] Th[e] ability to maintain friendships-at-a-distance

> through email use was considered a (if not the) major benefit of public Internet access (pp. 380-381).

It is possible that GB patrons frequent the library simply in order to have access to free wireless Internet without actually engaging with the services offered through BAnQ's online portal, nevertheless, no matter what they use the Internet for, in accessing the GB's wireless network, patrons are subject to the library's terms and conditions of use, as they would be if they were using any other kind of institutional network. Consequently, library patrons are affected by the GB's widely used security systems that exist in order to protect their documents and sites, such as Cisco checkpoints or firewalls. Furthermore, the GB also employs software programs such as Websense, which can restrict access to illicit sites (pornographic ones, for instance). This is not entirely surprising as most public institutions as well as private work places have something similar integrated into their computer systems. What is interesting in the case of the GB, and speaks to the uneasy relationship between publicness and publicity and security and privacy, is that the GB's policy with regards to a software program like Websense, is that access to illicit sites is actually only restricted within the *Espace Jeunes*, the children's and youth section located on the basement level of the library. In any other space of the library, Websense is not employed, making any sites, desirable/legal or not, fair game. The reasoning behind this is that restrictions on illicit sites through a software program such as Websense, would also mean censoring completely legitimate sites that many patrons use the space of the library in order to visit. There are many patrons who consider the library a safe space in which they can access information on possibly otherwise

uncomfortable subject matters, such as sex, STDs, pregnancies etc. This is the double-edged sword of a software program such as Websense.

In general, the GB is not very keen on imposing filters and promoting any kind of censorship. Monitoring patron activity online is still quite difficult, for although you may be able to detect that an illicit site has been accessed from a particular computer within the library, it is almost impossible to pinpoint who exactly visited the site. Additionally, the GB often uses these types of surveillance systems as tools to supervise their own library staff. At the same time, the GB, like most libraries, gathers statistical data, which mostly pertains to its patrons. Through a statistical gathering tool called the Oracle Warehouse Builder (OWB) the GB is able to keep track of statistics pertaining to how many visitors are received at the library, what books or other documents or materials are being borrowed, how many times, how much in general, the languages of the books being borrowed, and so forth. A statement on the BAnQ website addresses this fact:

> BAnQ keeps the data required to compile statistics on numbers of visitors, most frequently visited pages, technologies used by clients of the portal, referencing sites and countries of origin of Internet users. This information is used solely for **denominalized** technical and statistical purposes and will never be used to draw up, communicate or exchange lists of users. In addition, spyware may detect a cookie associated with the WebTrends statistical tool on the BAnQ portal. The cookie poses **no security risk** to you (Confidentiality, BAnQ).

Here again an instance of the uneasy relationship between publicness and publicity and security and privacy within the public library presents itself. The public library is very much a site in which patrons can be private in public, and this is demonstrated on both a physical and technical level. It is physical in that

within a public library one can be alone and yet simultaneously with others, and on a technical level in that the patron information that is protected is protected from the library's public not from the institution itself. Furthermore, the only information that might be entirely protected even from institutional use, is only that information which is not deemed necessary or valuable to the library. Information valued by the library seems to be considered fair game and an acceptable exchange for the use of the library's free Internet (and other) services. This raises crucial issues surrounding questions about whether patron privacy within the public library is driven by ethical imperatives first, or if they might be secondary to technical ones, or others. I do not wish to question the integrity of the library here, only to point out that given the public library's commitment to issues surrounding publicity and privacy (that was discussed in more depth in Chapter 3) the ways in which patron information is used is complexified in ways it might not otherwise be within other public institutions.

Adapting

Technological sophistication, as much as it has been one of the more impressive achievements of the 21st century library has also been a major source of concern and not always positive pressure. Libraries have been expected to become ever increasing "technological zones," and as such have also had to be relatively adaptable to the constant flow of newer and faster technologies. This particular imperative has not always had a positive effect on libraries. In fact, in many ways, it has at times become a source of their demise.

In November of 2000, the Branch Library Bond Measure was approved for the San José Public Library System in California. The bond measure allotted $212 million (US) over ten years for the construction of six new library branches and the expansion and renovation of fourteen already existing ones in San José. Although the bond measure, which was passed "at the height of the Internet bubble," did succeed in expanding many already existing libraries within the San José area, it was nevertheless somewhat wasted on four of the newly constructed, cutting edge libraries, that have been built but will most likely not see their grand opening anytime in the near future. As explained by Jamie Hansen in an article from *The New York Times*, the four libraries "that amount to 68,000 square feet of library space," and that have incorporated spaces such as a technology center into their design, have "no staff to run [them] until the financially pressed city can find a way to pay salaries" (July 9, 2011). In the San José example, the expectation for libraries to become technology-intensive, state-of-the-art spaces, and the budgetary demands attached to such expectations, literally left the human aspect, a central resource for the functioning of a new, "state of the art" library, by the wayside. Furthermore, it highlights a glaring assumption, one that is also apparent in the case of the GB: that the promise and even the pretence of technological sophistication is more important than technological sophistication itself.

The impression of technological superiority that architecturally experimental library designs have made on their publics, has masked the complexities involved in maintaining and also redesigning library technologies. The reality is that library technological infrastructures, namely collecting and

cataloguing systems, are subject to many competing priorities that considerably slow down the possibilities for timely technological advancement and improved user experience. Gloria J. Leckie et al. (2009) claim that the integrated library systems (ILS) so vital to a library's operating functions need to be understood within the capitalistic framework in which they were born. They write:

> The fact that library catalog and Web-management systems are designed, sold, and purchased for purposes deemed to be a social good sometimes obscures the fact that such technologies are not necessarily socially neutral or benign but operate very much within the capitalistic marketplace and framework. In the library realm, the production-consumption system that results in the online publicly accesible catalog (OPAC) and the library portal is relatively invisible yet has real implications for both the character and functionality of such tools and the success of information searchers who must use them to meet their information-related needs (p. 221).

For Leckie et al. although the move from the card to the computer catalogue has undoubtedly been one of the most important technological advancements in library history, the move from "the development of in-house [library] systems" to the development of these systems by commercial vendors in the early 1980s has had a major impact on the narrowing of options when it comes to ILS products available to libraries (p. 228). As a result, although new trends in library information technologies exist, such as "an interest in integrated portals, metadata harvesting, and semantic Web innovations" (p. 229), the library IT market is centered on MARC (MAchine-Readable Cataloging) related products, which has remained the cataloguing standard for more than fifty years.

Developed in the 1960s by Henriette Avram, a computer programmer and systems analyst, MARC is the international norm for library cataloguing systems. MARC is what allows libraries to encode and share information about books and

other resources that they collect. Although the system is still widely used as the basis for most online public access catalogues (OPAC), it is one that is quite restrictive in the ways in which it allows patrons to search through a library's collection. This is largely due to the fact that MARC was originally designed for card catalogues and not for OPACs. As a result, MARC is not based on a relational model, but rather on a sequential or linear one, like a tape, which draws a trajectory from point A to point n. For instance, "[t]his card-centered design appears in the order of the MARCs fields, which place numbers like call numbers at the beginning of the record and the tracings (i.e., additional access points beyond the main entry) at the end" (Leckie et al., 2009, p. 230). MARC was also developed when computers were exponentially less powerful and had reduced memory space, therefore simplistic equations, like three digit numeric codes that would identify a specific document, were the norm (Leckie et al., 2009). MARC has largely lost its relevance when it comes to paving the way for future cataloguing designs yet stubbornly remains at the center of integrated library systems.

For Leckie et al. this phenomenon is due to "entrenched patterns of social regulation" (p. 229), which are extremely difficult to overturn:

> The extraordinary resistance of catalogs and cataloging to change comes from two levels of regulation: regulation that sustains accumulation in terms of bibliographic and economic wealth, and that rests on entrenched procedures and customs. Furthermore, this regulation often relies on appeals to the broader ideals of librarianship (p. 230).

In other words, several factors are at play that have kept library cataloguing systems from being truly revolutionized. As was previously mentioned, complex

standards about how information is digitally collected, stored, displayed, retrieved and transmitted have become deeply imbedded in commercial and economic priorities. Decisions about the production of IT systems for libraries are made by engineers and graphic designers (who design according to what they think libraries need not according to what they know for certain), and not by archivists, librarians, or even library users. Furthermore, ideas about the role of the librarian as well as standardized bibliographic codes are also deeply entrenched. For instance the notion that the librarian is the ultimate mediator of information implies that a standard language for the analysis of information and for bibliographic description must exist. Similarly the necessity of "universal bibliographic control" (the idea that library catalogues around the world should be standardized or at the very least consistent so users can rely on a stable search method no matter where they are), is predominant in library cataloguing development (p. 230). Finally,

> The MARC standard has been all the more pervasive for the fact that the standard explicitly refrains from dictating specific cataloging rules. As a coding standard that theoretically supports multiple cataloging approaches, MARC exists beneath the cataloging rules, and its modest objectives to provide a standard means of encoding bibliographic data disguise the degree to which it has become an integral part of the infrastructure of library operations (Leckie et al., 2009, p. 228).

These layers of procedure and regulation as they pertain to library cataloguing systems are not only extremely difficult to overturn but they also tend to undercut "the demands of the local user" and assume that "cataloguing is an intricate network of regulatory practices that involve constant scrutiny and that tolerate neither error nor deviation from the norm" (p. 231).

This raises the crucial issue of what "access" and "interactivity" truly mean in the context of the "technological" library. Within the technological environment described above, library users have little control over how they access information not to mention the fact that their input is entirely non-existent with regards to the kinds of "norms" that are considered when information is classified. This is well illustrated by the struggle in the 1970's to reclassify books about the gay liberation movement from HQ 71-471 (Abnormal Sexual Relations, Including Sexual Crimes) to the new category HQ 76.5 (Homosexuality, Lesbianism – Gay Liberation Movement) (Duhigg, 2012). Moreover, although one could argue that control over the classification and cataloguing system is one of the crucial ways in which libraries enact control over the knowledge regime to which they grant access, they too seem to have been largely left out of the equation. As Leckie et al. (2009) write:

> The overall result of the greater reliance on institutional/commercial cataloging sources is that numerous libraries have radically downsized or completely divested themselves of their internal cataloging departments, preferring to rely on outsourced cataloging records. Also, much of the cataloging that is still done by libraries has been deprofessionalized: so-called copy-cataloging is now routinely done by library assistants and clerks rather than more-expensive librarians (p. 228).

An increased reliance on industries when it comes to the classification and cataloguing of information is worrisome. As was seen above with the example of the Gay Liberation Movement, even when libraries were in more or less full control of their classification standards, serious questions still arose about what kinds of impacts the ways in which information might be categorized had on how certain marginalized groups could be viewed; and there are most certainly many

more such examples that have yet to be unmasked. In their eye-opening case study of race classification under Apartheid, Bowker and Star (2000) highlight just how much classification can matter. They argue that "[c]lassifications are powerful technologies. Embedded in working infrastructures they become relatively invisible without losing any of that power" (p. 319). In fact, it is the invisibility of classification standards that give them so much power, as unseen entities they become part of their technological environments and seemingly natural. As Bowker and Star rightfully point out, "[e]veryday categories are precisely those that have disappeared into infrastructure, into habit, into the taken for granted. These everyday categories are seamlessly interwoven with formal, technical categories and specifications" (p. 319), and an increased control of these systems by industries, will only exacerbate the invisibility of seemingly natural categories and make them harder to trace. Classification systems thus become what Andrew Feenberg (2009) has described as "technological power…realized through designs that narrow the range of interests and concerns that can be represented by the normal functioning of the technology and the institutions that depend on it" (p. 32).

Whether they realize the gravity of handing over control of cataloguing infrastructures to commercial priorities, libraries and more specifically librarians are not complacent about being left out of the decision-making processes involved in catalogue development. On the contrary, an interest in the development and application of new kinds of catalogues is very strong, all the more so as library scientists and librarians alike have recognized that the current OPACs are

extremely difficult for patrons to understand and use. Joshua Barton and Lucas Mak (2012) write that "[t]he inherent monolithic structure of the ILS-bound, MARC-based OPAC is not compatible with the size and heterogeneity of the current information environment." Moreover, "the gradual failure to bring everything into the traditional catalogue infrastructure" is coupled with "the fact that the catalogue search experience itself is riddled with high transaction costs—a turnoff to library users" (p. 93). Barton and Mak are pointing out two important issues that are currently at the forefront of library technological debates. The first points to the fact that rather than developing a new catalogue that will be compatible with the changing materiality of library collections, and the changing search habits of users, emergent bibliographic codes and standards are being rewritten in order to fit into the traditional cataloguing infrastructure (p. 93). This in turn relates to the second issue that Barton and Mak highlight, that the traditional infrastructures of search and retrieval do not take new user search practices into consideration. As Gretchen Hoffman (2009) writes "[a]lthough cataloguing claims to focus on users, the cataloguing field has generally not taken a user-centered approach in research and cataloguing standards have not been developed based on an understanding of users' needs" (p. 632). What many library scientists and librarians are calling for is an implementation of so-called "next generation catalogues." The definition of what these kinds of catalogues should look like varies but there is a general agreement that next generation catalogues need to move away from being considered as merely ways of organizing a library's collections and need to "becom[e] […] collaborative,

interactive tool[s] extending beyond […] physical [library] branch[es] into users' homes or wherever they are" (Tarulli & Spiteri, 2012, p. 108). Laurel Tarulli and Louise F. Spiteri (2012) suggest that, for instance,

> [t]he medium by which these catalogues are used should be varied. For example, next-generation catalogues may be found on a variety of mobile devices, from iPhone and iPads to Blackberry Tablets as well as on the Internet. In essence, next-generation catalogues are about ideas, function, and possibilities rather than a specific format by which it is accessed (p. 109).

In many respects the GB is unique, and perhaps fortunate, as an institution. Although perhaps behind on many aspects of technological development, the GB has been innovative in improving user search engines within their own MARC based cataloguing system. Archivists and web developers such as Gauvin, along with consultants from the Apache Software Foundation (the development team behind the project), have mostly succeeded in making indexing, and as a result searching, more efficient. They created an open source search platform called Solr within which it would be possible to obtain a more precise description of collected documents and materials. Novels within a library catalogue, for example, are often indexed by genre or theme, such as science fiction/fantasy, mystery/crime, romance, comedy, etc. They are however not classified in more relational ways. For instance, if a patron is searching for a mystery novel in which the protagonist is a young female, and the secondary character is a male, middle-aged lawyer, this would be almost impossible to find within a regular search platform that works by category rather than relationally. A subsystem such as Solr makes it so that the library's classification system becomes more precise, giving a patron the possibility of searching for details such as who the main character of the novel

might be, who the secondary character is, where the novel takes place, etc. This is what the GB web developers have called their "système de valorization," and they have worked hard at developing this more efficient way of classifying documents (Gauvin, personal communication, December 14, 2011). Again, however, here we see an instance of a library working with what they have (a traditional combination of a MARC-OPAC catalogue) in order to improve user experience, and not attempting to develop what might be a next generation catalogue. The development and application of a purely folksonomic/crowd-sourced cataloguing and indexing system that would enable the sort of relational classification and searching described above is nearly impossible for a library such as the GB given the layers of regulatory practices and procedures that need to be addressed for real change to take place.

Migration between different versions of systems, even the most minute, is often painful and labour intensive. Libraries have developed slowly over the years, not only because the systems that they use have aged, but because technological and socio-cultural path dependency has made it difficult to replace the old with the new. Like the GB, libraries can really only hope to improve on what they already have. Replacing MARC would not only be labour intensive and costly for libraries, it would also require that major software producers either reverse-engineer or scrap altogether products they have spent considerable resources developing over the past several decades. For the GB, and for all libraries, these types of issues have been at the forefront of debates about potential technological advancement. Although for the contemporary public library a next

generation catalogue that might look like the technologically enabled folksonomic cataloguing system described above seems to be a priority, it appears as though the library's hands are tied. The questions that are being raised within these debates revolve around concerns about whether the uncertain outcomes of change are worth the effort and whether the industry will follow. This, however, has major implications about the authority of the library as a knowledge institution, for if industries not libraries dictate the ways in which information is stored, displayed, searched, and retrieved, then the democratic assumptions surrounding libraries and technologies are thrown into question.

"Technological Citizenship"

Emerging information and communication technologies are not only transforming the library's infrastructure, but also the ways in which we think about the library's purported object, the informed and engaged citizen. For Andrew Barry (2001) we have increasingly become preoccupied with what he has termed as "technological citizenship." He writes:

> The citizen of a technological society expects and is expected to be informed and updated. She should be knowledgeable about the risks of smoking and the side-effects of drugs, be ready to learn about the latest advances and advantages of new information technologies, the strengths and weaknesses of 'medical' and 'natural' approaches to childbirth, the possible consequences of eating fats, sugars or GM foods, and the advantages and disadvantages of different forms of exercise and diet. She has to be knowledgeable about the multiple intersections and connections between her body and pollutants, drugs and technical devices, and the dangers and possibilities such connections may open up. Her health and her environment are matters of choice. Technological innovation forms new artefacts. The government of a technological society implies the formation of new human capacities and attributes (p. 4).

There are multiple layers to the technological citizen, the first being the expectation that emerging media technologies have made it easier than ever to be informed; consequently, we have a moral obligation as citizens to inform ourselves as well as to stay informed. We also, however, need to have the capacity to manipulate the technologies that provide us access to information, skills that we are expected to learn and a formation that educational institutions such as schools, universities, and libraries are expected to offer us. Libraries have the added responsibility of being expected to offer this formation to *all* citizens for free.

In the case of the Grande Bibliothèque there is a tension that exists between the emphasis placed on the importance of technology in forming a new type of engaged, empowered, and informed "technological citizen" and the library's mandate "to provide democratic access to the published heritage constituted by its collections, to culture and to universal knowledge" (Mission Statement, BAnQ); between the traditional responsibilities of the library centered on collection and pedagogy, and the more modern preoccupations of networking and democratization. Lise Bissonnette, in attempting to define which type of institution the GB is aiming to be, highlights this tension:

> [T]he library was first and foremost a cultural proposal, and somebody told me well you can talk about culture but we're mostly about information, and I was struck because I thought this was sort of a cliché that I was saying this was a cultural proposal, and we have to fight that all the time. I must tell you that in libraries this is really becoming a problem because of the technologies and because of this idea that information is first and foremost […] there's been a trend in the past twenty years to think that information is more important than anything else, that if you have information you can sail through life and that if you have information you have power, it's not true certainly, but they have succeeded in putting that in the head of young people. So we have again to resist that […] and I think that culture has a tendency to go out of libraries as it went out of universities and colleges, so

> we must resist that. That's why this building is like it is […] We've been infatuated with all this information technology, yes, but what we're doing with IT here is really a cultural proposal, also because we're digitizing our heritage at a fast pace and it's very interesting (interview, May 22, 2007).

For Bissonnette, although she admits that technology is a necessary and expected component of the 21st century library, she argues that it has simultaneously taken precedence over the cultural and civic responsibilities that the institution should be first and foremost in promoting. For Bissonnette, however, this tension is interestingly resolved in the Grande Bibliothèque, first as a site that not only houses a general reference library as well as Québec's national heritage collection, but also one that includes such cultural spaces as a café, a lecture theatre and an art gallery, and second as an institution that through digitization has taken advantage of technology to concurrently fulfill its mandate in forming a "technological citizen" as well as a national one. For Bissonnette, the existence of a library building is crucial to fulfilling the civic role of the library, and at the same time necessary for harbouring the technologies that through digitization will enable access to Québec's national patrimony. For the GB "l'accès au patrimoine culturel constitue un droit pour tous les citoyens" (Appel à la numérisation, BAnQ). The Grande Bibliothèque, and particularly its digitization initiatives, is an interesting instance in which the undetermined future of what a library can be is displayed. Because of its mix of both national and public characteristics, the GB evokes competing narratives around what forms of citizenship—technological, national, civic—the library as a mediating technology will or should foster.

On December 6, 2010, the Grande Bibliothèque along with the Société des musées québécois (SMQ) and 18 other organizations launched an appeal for the digitization of Québec's cultural heritage. The press release reads as follows:

> Faced with the need to guarantee that Québec's cultural heritage be preserved, and to ensure that it is available on the Web, the multidisciplinary committee of the Réseau québécois de numérisation patrimoniale (RQNP) is inviting citizens and professionals involved in information, education and culture to support its actions by signing the Appeal for the digitization of Québec's cultural heritage (BAnQ, the SMQ and 18 organizations launch an appeal, BAnQ, 2010).

The appeal responded to an initiative that had been launched by the GB in 2006, and that was published in a final survey in 2009, which sought to look into the state of digitization of Québec's cultural heritage. The survey reported that a mere 6 percent of Québec's heritage collections had been digitized, an unacceptable number given that the GB as a national institution seeks to offer the same kinds of democratic access to Québec's national patrimony to all citizens of Québec, as it is able to offer on site to those citizens fortunate enough to be living in its vicinity on the island of Montreal. The report also highlighted that 74 percent of the survey participants declared that they were "extremely interested" in participating in a networked digitization project of Québec's national patrimony, however 79 percent of the interested participants admitted to not having the adequate human or financial resources at their disposal in order to properly realize such a vast digitization goal. In response to these findings, in a speech delivered on November 13, 2009, current Chair and Chief Executive Officer of the Grande Bibliothèque, Guy Berthiaume, asked for a collective engagement, not only from cultural institutions in Québec, but also from the general public, in support of a

national digitization project (Discours et Allocutions, BAnQ, 2009). Only through a collective engagement would it be possible to hope to respond to the technological expectations of the moment, and to be somewhat competitively positioned with regards to the commercial initiatives of corporate enterprises such as Google. In the press release from 2010, Berthiaume is quoted as saying that "As has rarely happened in the past, we find that our professions are at the heart of what is truly a societal issue. With the abundance of possibilities that new technologies are opening to us, our responsibility is fundamentally engaged in the survival and the spread of our heritage" (BAnQ, the SMQ and 18 organizations launch an appeal, BAnQ). As much as new and emergent technologies are facilitating the preservation as well as the dissemination of cultural heritage and broader forms of knowledge, Berthiaume makes an important point when he brings up the notion of responsibility. In calling on the support of the citizens of Québec as well as various cultural institutions in the province, one could argue that a claim is being made in support of the idea that the responsibility of preserving culture and making it more accessible, should really be the responsibility of society as a whole. Libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions could be mediators of various decision making processes, but these decisions should not only be made public but should also come from the constituent publics themselves.

What I wish to emphasize here is that there exists a tension between technology being at the forefront of new library design and an imperative for civic institutions such as libraries to, under the pretence of technological sophisication,

form technological citizens, and at the same time, as is seen with the example of the Grande Bibliothèque, the persistent pragmatic and ideological reservations about the potential of technology to solve every problem put to it. Both Berthiaume and Bissonnette echo a concern over the increasing expectation that technologies will correct societal failures. For them, technology alone cannot account for the preservation and dissemination of Québec's cultural heritage. Public engagement and an interest in maintaining a cultural heritage is as necessary as the mediating technologies that have opened up the possibilities for these types of projects to exist. People are part of the library's "resources," and this is not meant to be exploitative, rather, it is a materialization of our participation in the public spaces of technological citizenship. Libraries are burdened with the task of combining the allegedly democratic character of networks with their more traditional civic priorities.

Library Mediations

What this chapter has intentionally left in the background is an irony that is in fact at the concealed core of the modern technological library. Although the modern library is a highly and increasingly technologized space, it is also a space that tends to render these very same technologies invisible. Technologization, as I have hopefully made clear, is a contingent process made up of multiple actors, both material and immaterial, from architects and their designs to web developers and their struggles, and library officials with their calls for digitization. Just as the regenerative agency that Barry's "technological zones" relies on is strategic, those

selfsame strategies are so often concealed behind both grand architectural façades and complex technological infrastructures. Lisa Gitelman (2008) argues that "the success of all media depends at some level on inattention or 'blindness' to the media technologies themselves (and all of their supporting protocols) in favor of attention to the phenomena, 'the content,' that they represent for users' edification or enjoyment" (p. 5). What is so interesting about what I call "experimental" library design is that, not only has the contemporary library demonstrated a new commitment to the technological, most clearly manifested through architectural grandiosity, but it has also, possibly unintentionally, generated an inattention or blindness to the technology that surrounds us. The invisibility of media technologies has been built into the very structures of the buildings themselves. In the Grande Bibliothèque for example, all the wiring necessary for computer networks and other electrical devices is hidden within the floors of the building, and connects to our computers, for instance, by way of the furniture. The desks are designed in such a way that wiring is camouflaged within the foot of the table and in turn connected to the wiring within the floors. Patrons are meant and even encouraged—by librarians, architects, public officials—to forget the media technologies within the library. Libraries are focused on making their patrons feel "comfortable," and although technologies have become so pervasive in our lives there is yet an element of distrust, to return to Manguel (2006), when it comes to that which we cannot entirely grasp. As this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, this discomfort may lie in the fact that we seem to still hold on to the simplicity of the traditional library even though we expect the complexities of the newly

technologizing library. The tensions put forth throughout this chapter that highlight the somewhat contradictory nature of the contemporary library as combining new technological imperatives while simultaneously trying to uphold them with the older idea of the library as a civic institution, is a testament to some of these discomforts. As a result, although, as Gitelman (2008) argues, we might tend to naturalize or essentialize technology, there exists, as was seen with the example of the Grande Bibliothèque, a conscious and necessary resistance to this so-called essentialization in order to allow for the library to retain its more traditional cultural and civic commitments. Rather than becoming spaces that merely celebrate the technological, libraries have adapted to and incorporated the environment of technological agency by becoming the containers in which technologies can be accessed, stored and also navigated. In her article "Container Technologies," Zoe Sofia (2000) writes that

> [p]rocesses of containment and supply, and the utensils, apparatus, and utilities that help extract, store, and distribute resources from the standing-reserve, are not relics of pre-modernity but continue to define a fundamental aspect of what technology *is* in the late modern epoch: it is about supply, securing access, rapidly making resources available for distribution and consumption (p. 196).

In this vein the library can be seen as more than just a cultural institution today, I would argue that the library is not only a storage facility for a multitude of technologies but also a mediating technology in itself, one that contains technological objects but also contains an important civic-technological imperative, and could be considered, to borrow from Sofia (2000), as "a technology of re-sourcing: it can be filled from a source, then itself becomes a source of what it has kept and preserved" (p. 192). In this sense, the library also

enacts mutliple containments that are simultaneously failures to contain. It contains/supplies books, heritage, and cultural patrimony etc., yet it also contains technologies that undermine its tightness or integrity as a container. The Internet, for instance, allows knowledge and informtion to leak into and out of the library in ways that undermine the fiction of the library as a container of knowledge. Even the technology of the book, though contained by the library, has not always enacted containment. The book transports its readers elsewhere in both time and space. Contemporary technological developments can be read as bringing the library to a more crystallized form of what it has always been: a leaky container; a container that never succeeds to completely contain. Perhaps the anxiety about technology's purported corruption of the library is really a fear of a loss of containment (which, ironically, has always been definitive of what the library is).

Chapter 5

When Does a Library Stop Being a *Library*?

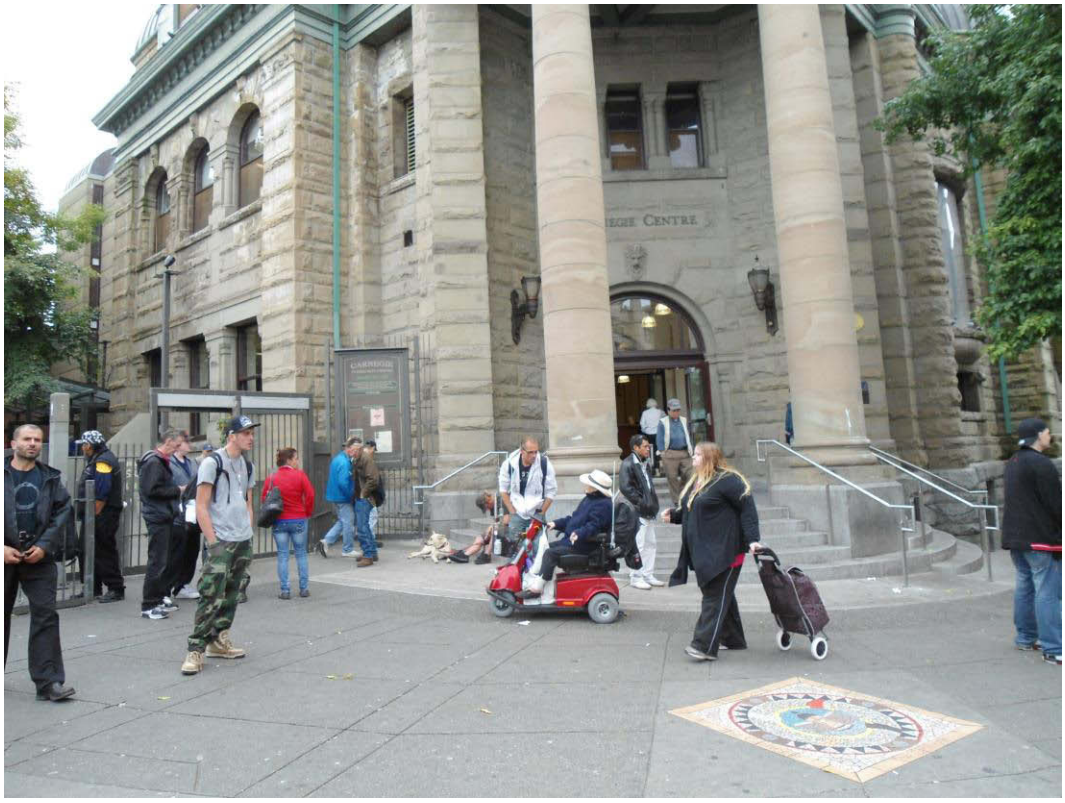
At the corner of Hastings and Main, in the heart of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, stands the Old Lady Sandstone, Vancouver's original Carnegie Library (one of only three that were built in British Columbia). The building's cornerstone was laid in 1902, and when the library opened to the public in 1903, it shared its facilities with the Vancouver Art, Historical and Scientific Society, which opened a museum on the second floor of the building. During the early part of the 20th century, Vancouver's Downtown Eastside was not overwhelmed as it is today with the poverty, homelessness, crime, drug addiction, and prostitution, for which the neighbourhood also currently provides a home.

The Old Lady Sandstone, Vancouver's original Carnegie Library, now The Carnegie Centre.

In fact, Vancouver's Downtown Eastside was considered "the 'old' heart of the city" (Curry, 2007, p. 62) in relation to the newer up and coming West End. Over the years, as the affluent residents of the Eastside began to relocate westward following the business boom that was taking place on the other side of the city, the Downtown Eastside devolved into a neglected part of the city's core and became a home for some of the poorest residents in Canada. The Downtown Eastside has been characterized by the rest of the city as a degenerate zone "designed to demarcate degenerate bodies—those that society deems as being unwanted, unmissed, and ultimately disposable" (Jiwani & Young, 2006, p. 900). Only a few blocks to the northwest of Main and Hastings is the city's oldest neighbourhood, Gastown, which is characterized by trendy fashion and interior design boutiques, as well as a hot spot for chic restaurants and tourist attractions. Gastown renders Hastings and Main all the more invisible and simultaneously exacerbates the shocking disparity that exists in such proximity between the most affluent and the poorest residents of Vancouver.

What is particularly poignant about the history of this Carnegie Library is that it has become a space where those that are 'unmissed' and 'unwanted' can become visible where they may otherwise have been invisible. Indeed, when I was standing across the street from the Carnegie Library, I was struck by how visible the library seemed to make those who took to milling about in front of it or sitting on its front steps. The library made those without a home, with addictions, with criminal records, seem all the more "legitimate" or "credible" because they

not only sought out a haven to read and to be with others, but also because the library invited them in, as it would anyone.



The Carnegie Centre

They became patrons and readers, that library's public. Ann Curry (2007) writes that,

> the Carnegie Library established itself as a place where all were treated with respect, no matter how poor or ill-dressed, where one could find a friendly atmosphere very different from the shabby hotel room, litter-strewn alley, or cold dumpster where patrons spent many hours alone. At the Carnegie, even patrons who had veered farthest from society's norms were treated "like everyone else"—valued as having intelligence and a right to access information and read for pleasure (p. 72).

The Carnegie Library has established itself as "the living room of the Downtown Eastside" (The Carnegie Centre). Following a tumultuous history and a twelve-year closure, the library reopened on January 20, 1980, this time as The Carnegie Community Centre. The new Centre includes a library and reading room that is

run as a special Vancouver Public Library branch, which was specially designed to accommodate the needs of the neighbourhood's potential patrons (no proof of address is required to borrow a book at this location, for instance). Furthermore, as Curry (2007) writes:

> Providing a sanctuary amid the hard and unforgiving reality on the streets outside is not always easy, and the Carnegie library staff have special mettle, deeper compassion, and true grit. It is not uncommon for drug addicts and alcoholics to be using the Library facilities at the same time as senior citizens and children (p. 72).

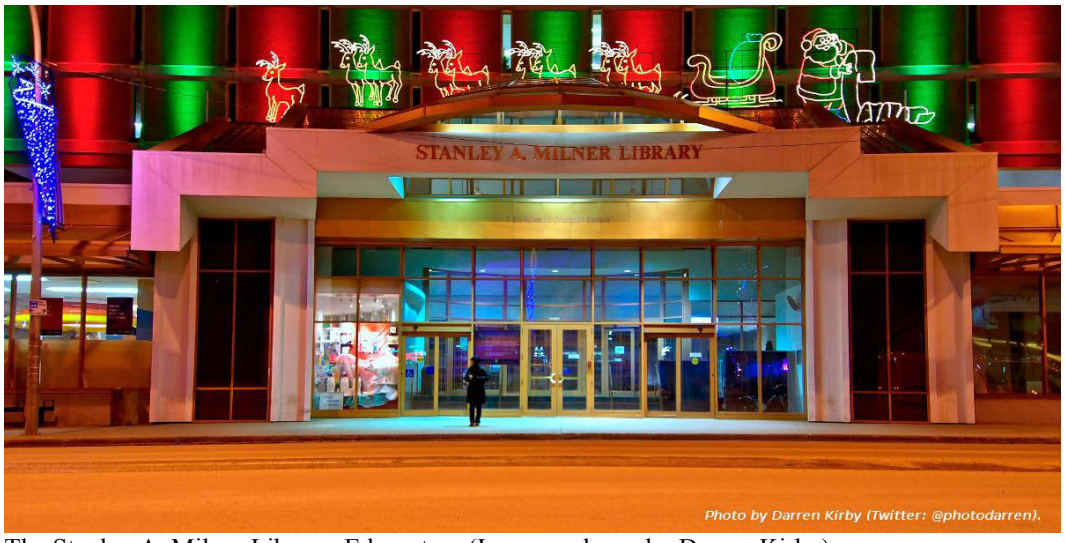
While Curry may be extolling a compassionate librarianship that may or may not exist, it is true that its varying community services range from offering a low-cost not-for-profit kitchen to organizing theatre and dance workshops. The Carnegie Centre in partnership with the Library also has a strong educational program in place that attempts to combat the high levels of illiteracy that are common for the neigbourhood. Since it opened in the 1980s, the Centre offered English as second language courses for new immigrants, and has dedicated itself to not only addressing literacy issues but also social ones as well, offering a wide range of books and programs that deal with "poverty, addiction, housing, and mental health" (Curry, 2007, p. 73). Currently, the Carnegie's learning centre is run by Capilano University on a volunteer basis, where patrons are offered one-on-one tutoring in reading and writing, are helped with completing high school courses, and are also offered computer training. During a recent visit to the library it was clear that this was a highly valued and essential site but still very obviously in need of more resources, not only monetary but also in terms of volunteers, who were needed to run the kitchen, the educational programs, the library, etc.

The Carnegie Centre

As I toured the building it was interesting to find that most people were in fact in the library proper, either reading, on the computers, napping, or chatting with the librarian, as opposed to the other spaces that they could have occupied, such as the lounge or the dining hall. The library was crowded in a comforting way; although small and cramped it was a space to which people seemed to gravitate. This could in part be explained by the fact that, as Rebecca Gray (2012) writes: "At the library, some of the people who share our city but are mostly ignored become fellow book-lovers, and it's a great equalizer. In the rest of their lives,

they are asking for help, or being told what to do; here they are just people who are welcome to take a book" (p. ix).

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside public library is not the only library to have made the transition from library to hybrid community or learning resource centre. In May of 2011, the Edmonton Public Library (EPL) received a $605,402 grant from the Provincial Government in order to create a community safety and outreach program (The Edmonton Public Library, Press Release, 2011). The program operates out of the EPL's Stanley A. Milner Library located in Edmonton's downtown core.



The Stanley A. Milner Library, Edmonton. (Image: epla.ca, by Darren Kirby)

Whereas the old Carnegie in Vancouver was renamed a community centre, the Stanley A. Milner Library still remains first and foremost a library with a focus on offering special types of services that answer the needs of the city's marginalized communities.

> The project's goal is to reduce the social disorder, victimization and isolation that at-risk individuals encounter. The Stanley A. Milner Library is seen as a safe daytime refuge for many Edmontonians, and the goal of this program is to empower them through literacy and social support as

> offered by both EPL community librarians and outreach workers working within and outside the library walls (The Edmonton Public Library, Press Release, 2011).

Before the program was created, library officials found that many troubled individuals preferred to seek refuge within the walls of the library, rather than at actual community centres or shelters. Most patrons find the anonymity of a library comforting, and it is a space within which they can find resources without feeling as though their privacy is being infringed upon. Yet those who are marginalized also feel trusted within the library, where in other contexts they might not be. "[I]t's a symbol of trust that when you're on the streets, and someone lends you a book, it builds your confidence and becomes an emotional investment" (Gray, 2012, p. viii). The goal is therefore to target "individuals who may not access existing social services, but will access libraries because they are safe and welcoming places" (The Edmonton Public Library, Press Release, 2011). What is particularly unique about the outreach program at the Stanley A. Milner Library is that, in addition to librarians, they have also hired outreach workers specially trained to assist people struggling with addiction, poverty, and homelessness, and pointing them to the necessary resources.

These two examples highlight both an ideological and organizational shift that has taken place within the contemporary public library. There has been a significant move away from the library as a space of autonomous learning to the library as an institution now offering more formal educational programming, and increasingly, as I touched on above, a community service oriented outlook. As such, librarianship has been equally transformed from being a relatively passive

profession of custodianship and organization to a more proactive presence in the facilitation of education. What I wish to explore within this chapter is how and why this move has taken shape and what the implications are for the future of libraries more generally. Under the auspices of new and emergent media technologies the discourse around libraries has shifted from a modern pre-occupation with collections, pedagogy, and authoritative knowledge, towards a postmodern emphasis on interfacing, empowerment, democratization, communitarianism, and life-long learning (Hand, 2008). It is commonly argued that libraries have continued to thrive in the face of digitization and the supposed decline of books because they have embraced the technologies that have threatened their existence and have become spaces of free access to wireless networks that work to bridge the digital divide. However, libraries have continued to thrive, not only because they have embraced new and emergent media technologies (libraries have always done so throughout their history), but primarily because they have become new social and educational institutions for the 21st century. There is a tension that lies within this transformation as libraries struggle to hold on to an older version of themselves while simultaneously coming under pressure to fill in the gaps that other cultural and educational institutions often leave behind. The transformation of the library is not a new phenomenon, the library has continuously reinvented itself and adapted to new cultural environments. The contemporary challenge that libraries face, to become more like *something else* or to step in where other institutions might be struggling or failing, is a new kind of challenge; a challenge that is specific to the library

finding itself within a new digital cultural reality. This chapter seeks to address the potential consequences of transformative pressures on the defining characteristics and identity of the library. In other words, where is the line to be drawn? At what point does a library stop being a *library* and become something else?

Why Libraries?

In 1976, André Cossette, a Québécois librarian, published a short text entitled *Humanisme et bibliothèques: Essaie sur la philosophie de la bibliothéconomie*. Cossette was in search of a coherent philosophy of his profession, which he claimed it had hitherto been without. He argued that librarianship was mostly oriented towards the more practical or scientific applications of the profession rather than to its philosophical raison d'être. The question that Cossette was attempting to answer within his insightful essay was: "why libraries?" (2009, p. 5). For him, "[t]he philosophy of librarianship consists […] of research into the ends that justify the existence of libraries" (p. 5).

Despite the predictions that declaimed their inevitable demise, libraries are in fact thriving today. Michael Harris writes that:

> The Canadian Urban Libraries Council, which monitors activity across Canada's 2,000 libraries finds that visitor rates are rising across the board. Toronto's system, by far the country's largest, sees increases every year, with 18.3 million personal visits in 2010, two million more than a decade ago. Calgary has earmarked $175 million to expand its central library, and similar projects are under way in Regina, Halifax, and Kitchener, Ontario (April 2012, p. 20).

The Grande Bibliothèque has seen similar success, having become one of the

most visited libraries in North America. In 2011, it had over 2.7 million visitors (BAnQ, the Grande Bibliothèque is head of the class!). Despite these high visitor rates, the existence of the library as a necessary social institution is still being called into question. Libraries (especially smaller branch libraries) are constantly under the threat of budget cuts, closures, and privatizations (private libraries already exist in the United States, Great Britain, not to mention the threat of closure and privatization that the Toronto Public Library System was recently facing, and despite public opposition, continues to face).[34] As Ann Prentice (2011) writes:

> Public libraries' growth and prosperity depend on the state of the economy and the funds available. As has always been true, public libraries, despite their proven contribution to the community, the pride with which communities support their libraries, and the increasing need for public libraries, are often the first agencies to suffer cutbacks when the economy is not strong (p. 12).

The contradictory reality that libraries face in both being necessary while simultaneously expendable institutions, stems from a disconnect between the social, ethical, and philosophical needs for the existence of the library and the economic priorities and quantifiable indicators that are used today in order to assess the relevance of public institutions. What Cossette bemoaned in 1976 as the lack of a consistent philosophy of librarianship still rings true today, and might explain in part the difficulties libraries (and librarians) have in defending the

[34] With the election of Toronto's Mayor Rob Ford in the fall of 2010, came a proposed $2.2 million budget cut to the Toronto Public Library (TPL) system, which would translate into employee lay-offs, the reduction of branch service hours, and the closure of a large number of Toronto Public Library branches all together. The TPL is one of the most successful city library systems in the world and despite the public outcry in opposition to the proposal, the TPL is still a major target for cuts in Toronto's 2012 municipal budget. Mayor Ford's municipal government views supporting the TPL as a waste of resources. "Why do we need another little library in the middle of nowhere that no one uses?" (Ford qtn in Moloney, July 26, 2011).

library as a vital contemporary social and cultural institution. As Rory Litwin (2009) writes in the introduction to *Humanism and Libraries*:

> Cossette's intention was to build a foundation for the practice of librarianship that was a simple, solid and comprehensive structure, and not a mixture of diverse ideas that sound appealing but are never thought through one against another. This is not a familiar approach for American librarians. We tend to find our philosophical foundations, such as they are, in inspiring statements of ideals that become fuzzy when inspected closely or juxtaposed, but find them useful enough to keep us going. We are generally not concerned with their logical connections or lack of connections (p. viii).

Indeed, the role of the library and of librarians, as well as their place in society at large, is almost always and unanimously described in idealistic and honourable terms. The descriptions of both the Carnegie and the Stanley A. Milner libraries that I put forward above, attest to this: Libraries are the pillars of democracy, they are "centers of applied technological innovation" and "key sites in the creation and transmission of knowledge" (Winter, 1994, p. 118). Libraries are free; they provide access to knowledge for everyone irrespective of their social, cultural, or economic backgrounds. Libraries are inclusive; they offer services for those with disabilities, for those who are unemployed, for those who are homeless, and so on. Librarians are similarly described as "innovators, activists, and pioneers" (Johnson, 2010, p. 7), they are facilitators, educators, social workers, they fight censorship, and protect patron privacy. These somewhat romanticized, so easily ironized, iterations of what libraries and librarians are or mean to society have become all the more prevalent as the need for libraries in an increasingly digital cultural reality has been called into question. The point here is not to say that all the above characterizations are false or that they are even exaggerations, for the most part they are in fact relatively accurate descriptions of what libraries and

librarians are, or at least what they strive to be. Strung together, however, the above descriptions do not necessarily form a cohesive philosophy of libraries, or librarianship for that matter. They are, as Litwin aptly points out, “fuzzy” ideals at best which, although essential, make it difficult to form a strong argument about what the library is and why it should be protected. Furthermore, if the definition of the public library is ambiguous (and perhaps this has been helpful to its transformative abilities, and, by extension, survival over the course of its history), so to is the line by which it is measured. In other words, it is then very difficult to say when the public library has stopped being a library and has become a different cultural institution altogether.

As in 1976, the library today is still considered to be a secondary or supplemental institution to the university, school, or college, and its reason for being is increasingly embedded in the language of “service” to the public. At present, this secondary role seems also to extend to other institutions such as community, career placement, and language centres, with an increasing amount of library programs offering similar types of extended learning curricula.

> This vision of libraries as secondary institutions with the principle role of “service” has considerably retarded the development of library science, because it has placed theory—the principles and knowledge base of the discipline outside of professional practice—in a region outside the sphere of influence of librarians themselves (Cossette, 2009, p. 39).

What is problematic for Cossette is that libraries are not considered as autonomous institutions within society, that set their own goals and ends, but rather that these goals are guided or even set by other institutions, such as universities and possibly community centres. Libraries supplement the needs of

other cultural and educational institutions. They exist to complete the goals and ends of the institutions that make use of them; libraries are the tools or instruments of an extended kind of learning, not the source of it. For Cossette this is at the root of the problem that libraries and librarianship have had in establishing a true philosophy of the institution and the profession. For although it could be argued that the library and librarians might consider themselves autonomous with regards to their goals and ends, that they work with rather than for other institutions, the social perception is that their roles are in fact subordinate. This is of course arguable, both in the context that Cossette is writing in and within the contemporary conjuncture. For instance, some would claim that the library deserves as much credit for their educational upbringing as their schools or universities. Alan Bennett writes that,

> Of the boys who worked in the reference library a surprising number must have turned out to be lawyers, and I can count at least eight of my contemporaries who sat at those tables in the 1950s who became judges. A school—and certainly a state or provincial school—would consider that something to boast about, but libraries are facilities; a library has no honours board and takes no credit for what its readers go on to do but, remembering myself at 19, on leave from the army and calling up the copies of *Horizon* to get me through the general paper in the Oxford scholarship, I feel as much a debt to that library as I do to my school (2011, p. 5).

Yet Bennett's anecdotal assessment of the library and the role that it played in his education upholds Cossette's point. Although the library was a crucial part of Bennett's educational and cultural life, it was not necessarily recognized as such. Although he personally feels indebted to his library, it is not common to regard libraries as sources of education or culture, but again as facilitators, as adding to an education which has its roots elsewhere. The library not being viewed as an

educational institution is not the problem for Cossette, in fact he would prefer that it not be. It is, however, the perception of the library as secondary or subordinate to other institutions of knowledge that for Cossette is what keeps it from maintaining a unique identity. It is this association, the library as always in the supplemental background, that makes it so that its priorities are always confounded with the missions and priorities of other institutions. The library is defined in relation to another institution; it is defined by what it is not, not by what it is, or what it might become.

For Cossette, the difference between the library's aims (its end goals) and its functions are often confused when attempting to define what the library is, what it does, and what it is for. For instance, he writes that "[t]he conservation of texts is not the ultimate aim of librarianship" (p. 43). Librarianship understood only in this framework reduces the librarian to being merely a technician and not a professional, a scholar, or a scientist (p. 44). Conservation is a function of the library and of librarianship, not its ultimate aim. This is also true with regards to education. By being associated as secondary to educational institutions, the library's goal is perceived as being primarily educational. This is perhaps not that surprising considering that libraries have gone from predominantly conserving and organizing knowledge, to later disseminating that knowledge, and eventually becoming "agent[s] of education," by allowing free access to knowledge (Cossette, 2009, p. 42). However, at least in the contemporary context, (and this will become more apparent when the current GB programming is discussed further on in this chapter) if you read the mission statements of many libraries,

their aim is primarily to acquire, preserve, disseminate, and facilitate access to knowledge while at the same time encouraging reading, research, and self-education. The promotion of education is understood as a function of the library, rather than an overarching goal, and it is often presented as secondary to functions related to the library's primary aims of preservation, dissemination, and access. Yet educational programs and services are often given more prominence when it comes to promoting library use, and are an increasingly important part of what libraries actually do. In practice, what is taking place is a shift from an emphasis on collection and preservation towards education and life-long learning, although this shift is not necessarily reflected in formal expressions of the institution's primary purpose.

In *Libraries and Identity* (2010), Joacim Hansson writes that this organizational shift that we see taking place within libraries is due to "the new economised ideology which tends to formulate public endeavours and institutions in the same economic terms as private enterprises" (p. 40). A library's future has become dependent on whether or not the services that it offers can in some way be measured and quantified. This is of course an extremely problematic way of considering an institution such as the public library which has garnered public trust because it "constitute[s] a non-regulated sphere around citizens for them to be able to create meaning in their lives" (p. 40). Yet it could in part explain why libraries have moved away from offering patrons an informal educational space to providing more formal educational services alongside varying types of social support, which are on some level being sold and advertised to the public in the

language of empowerment, access, and freedom. As Hansson writes: "By attaching librarianship to the educational sector user needs are much easier to define and it thus becomes easier to put an adequate price tag on library activities" (p. 41). This is not to say that the new kinds of services and support that were seen offered at Vancouver's Carnegie Library and Edmonton's Stanley A. Milner Library, amongst others, are not worthwhile, progressive, and even necessary, only that providing educational services whose outcomes are directly measurable might be key to the economic and policy rationale for funding public libraries now and in the future.

While public libraries might have much to gain economically by adhering to an expanded educational mandate, this shift comes with a price. For example, according to Cossette:

> In maintaining the illusion that the ultimate goal of the library is education, thinkers in library science perpetuate an ideology that is inseparable from the division of society into classes, which exists in the interests of the dominant class. This bourgeois librarianship, which aims to disseminate high culture, to grant access to the treasures of civilization, is alienating for the vast majority of working people (p. 46).

In this view, libraries should not be considered spaces of formal education (which for Cossette are aimed at maintaining the status quo), where librarians take on pedagogical roles that might be confused with those of teachers. Cossette considers the function of the teacher to be "normative, hierarchical, and distanced" (p. 50). Educational institutions and educators tend to impose a certain type of education, they inform thinking, whereas the library should be a space wherein how you think about what you read is not guided or influenced. The

librarian's role should differ from that of the teacher, whereby he/she does not impose certain ideas but rather

> provide[s] th[e] additional opening to the world that allows for informed choices in a state of clarity. They [librarians] provide free access to all to a collection that contains controversial texts and ideas. This impartiality is made possible by their professional "indifference" to all competing opinions. "If he [the librarian] has no politics, no religion, and no morals, he can have all politics, all religions, and all morals." The contemporary library is a center of liberalism, "but its function is not to preach it but to be liberalism in operation" (p. 57).

For Cossette, librarians cannot be instructors as their role is to be neutral when it comes to the subject matter contained in the books to which they provide access. While libraries and librarianship might have the universalist goal of improving and maintaining "the well-being of humankind" (p. 59), tying the library's legitimacy to more specific pedagogical projects of civic education exposes it to becoming an institution of social engineering and political legitimation. The risk is that in becoming a service-oriented organization, even one oriented to education, the library opens itself to being instrumentalized to purposes—social, cultural, and ideological—that are not its own and which are anything but neutral or universal. The prospect suggested here is that libraries' success in filling in where other institutions are failing, whether as job centres or publicly-funded language instruction institutions, might also be the condition of their demise *as libraries*.

More specifically, the question would appear to be whether the library's traditional role as a support for radically democratic *self*-education can withstand its repositioning as a location for the provision of educational services that are more socially and pedagogically purposeful. It is in this respect that André

Cossette's reflections on the philosophy of librarianship and the place of education in libraries are akin to Jacques Rancière's theories published a few years later in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991) concerning the relationship between equality and education. Rancière agreed that the formal educational system exacerbated and perpetuated inequalities rather than minimized them. For Rancière, the role played by educational institutions in reproducing structural inequality was not primarily that of denying access to working-class youth but, rather, their perpetuation of the myth that the only way to learn was to be taught by masters authorized by those institutions. Those on the margins of society were quite aware of their own exclusion, and what kept them from overcoming it was not necessarily their lack of access to formal educational institutions such as the university, but rather the belief that they were not as intelligent as those more favourably positioned within society. He writes: "What stultifies the common people is not the lack of instruction, but the belief in the inferiority of their intelligence" (1991, p. 39). In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière offers a radical proposition in which he claims that a formal education is not necessarily the key to emancipation and equality. Rancière's point of departure is that all people have an equal capacity for learning, "there is no hierarchy of *intellectual capacity*" (p. 27), and that this capacity for learning does not necessarily need to be guided by someone else. With access to the proper "tools," in large part books, people are capable of teaching themselves, all they need is the motivation and desire to do so, and the belief that they are as equally capable to learn as any other. "The method of equality was above all a method of the will. One could

learn by oneself and without a master explicator when one wanted to, propelled by one's own desire or by the constraint of the situation" (Rancière, 1991, p. 12). For Rancière, to educate oneself was much more emancipatory than to be taught by someone else, as mediation in teaching always necessarily imposed someone else's thoughts on our own, and in turn maintained the unequal hierarchy that exists between teacher and student, rather than allowing for the student to reach the status of teacher. "The materiality of the book keeps two minds at an equal distance, whereas explication is the annihilation of one mind by another" (p. 32).

Rancière's theorizations have important implications for the place that libraries currently hold within society. It could be argued that both Rancière and Cossette would agree that the move away from the library as an informal space of learning—where one can teach oneself—towards a more structured, formal, educational institution, would call the democratic ideals of the institution into question, and for Cossette would again assume education, rather than dissemination and access, to be the principal aim of the library. However, in the contemporary context, whether or not libraries are becoming more or less democratic, whether they are exacerbating rather than lessening inequalities, becomes a more complex issue. There is no doubt that libraries are much more instructional in their approach to learning than they once were, yet the question worth asking is what kind of education is the contemporary library offering? Due to their accelerated privatization, institutions of higher education have become increasingly inaccessible (particularly within the North American context), even to those within the middle class. This has created a need for alternative spaces of

learning. As other institutions of knowledge collapse, the contemporary library is picking-up the burden (Tattoni, personal communication, July 14, 2011). In this context, the public library could be viewed as having become "the working man's university" (Prentice, 2011, p. 4).

The contemporary library is not offering the traditional, formal education of the university, but rather a more hands on, practical and professional education, the teaching of skills, that of late seem to be in higher demand than a more conventional post-secondary education. New and emergent media technologies have created a need for more instructional learning. In the past, patrons did not visit the library with the assumption that they would be taught how to read; rather they were offered a space in which they could access the tools that would facilitate their literacy. Today the library is faced with new forms of literacy, most notably digital literacy. It is no longer a space that merely facilitates literacy, one that offers the tools for engagement with the digital, for instance, but also a site in which literacy (primarily digital) is taught. Digital literacy has come to be understood within the space of the library as a way of combatting societal ills and a tool for promoting equality. The library, once a central institution for promoting old-fashioned bookish literacy, is now at the forefront of new forms of digital and technological literacy, and these new forms of digital literacy, are often understood in quite a broad sense. Gary Meek, the CEO of the Calgary Public Library claims that:

> We've tended to look [at literacy] in libraries as sort of, I'll call it a pan notion of literacy, that is quite extended, and we call it a 21st century definition of literacy. And it extends beyond just basic reading and writing, but into health literacy, it would look at civic literacy, environmental

> literacy, consumer literacy, financial literacy, all of those skillsets that are important to function in a kind of world that we're able to move towards. And if you think about digital literacy in these terms, how do you navigate within that space (Spark, 2010)?

Finding a coherent definition of literacy as it might be understood within the contemporary library has been just as challenging as identifying a consistent philosophy of librarianship, though this is not unique to libraries. The meaning of literacy has gone beyond simply knowing how to read and write, to equally indicating whether a given person has a more than elementary knowledge within a particular field, which could be, as Meek pointed out, anything from environmental and health issues to economic and political ones. Yet, the term literacy also implies not only what we may or may not be knowledgeable of or about, but also how we learn, particularly in the digital age. Scholars, such as Gunther Kress (2003), highlight the fact that notions of literacy have moved far beyond only being about issues of language. As our reading and writing practices have increasingly and rapidly moved from the page to the screen, the image has become a central factor within the learning process. The image has also become essential in how we represent and communicate our thoughts. This is not entirely new ground, as historically the transition from oral to written speech had already introduced the predominance of the image or the visual over that of sound, for instance, in the ways in which we create meanings (Ong, 1982, p. 117). For Kress, however, print has somewhat lost its position of control in space. He argues that although speech might remain our primary mode of communication, writing, meaning print, will increasingly be displaced by the image, in a broad sense of the term. Our informal spaces of learning are dominated by televisions, video games,

the Internet, even e-readers, which are producing what Patricia Greenfield calls "learners with a new profile of cognitive skills" (2009, p. 69). Consequently, language is no longer the sole or primary form of meaning making, or of learning for that matter. We make meanings through a multiplicity of forms, what Kress (2003) has termed "multimodal literacy."

> The modes which occur, together with the language-modes of speech and writing, on page or screens, are constituted on different principles to those of language; their materiality is different; and the work that cultures have done with them has differed also. The theoretical change is from linguistics to semiotics—from a theory that accounted for language alone to a theory that can account equally well for gesture, speech, image, writing, 3D objects, colour, music and no doubt others (pp. 35-36).

The move from the page to the screen and the correlation with how literacy has been continuously redefined has not been lost on libraries. Libraries, too, recognize the complexities of contemporary literacy, yet libraries understand literacy more in its relation to praxis than in its theoretical underpinnings. Within the library the term "information literacy" is often used to designate a multiplicity of literacies. In this sense information literacy can mean several things at once. As Kathleen Tyner (1998) writes:

> Information literacy is an abstract concept. As a metaphor, it is a neatly packaged, imaginative, and descriptive phrase that is not literally applicable or easily interpretable, employing something more qualitative and diffuse than is evident in the historical meanings of both literacy and information (p. 97).

Within the library context, information literacy can mean being or staying informed about current events, but it can also mean having the ability to apply information resources to one's work, as well as being capable of using information as a tool for problem solving. Yet there also exists a distinction

between being information literate and computer literate. In the digital age "information" is often associated with "information technology," however, being information literate does not always equate computer or even technological literacy, in the sense that one has the ability to understand and manipulate the tools or technologies that allow us to retrieve information. Information literacy could better be understood then as our awareness of an abundance of information and an understanding of how to locate, organize, and use the information that we need for our own purposes (Tyner, 1998, pp. 98-99).

Within the library, to be information literate, although it might indicate and even require some sort of technological skill, has a much broader significance and importance than being only technologically literate. The library associates information literacy with democracy, and it is considered "a prerequisite for active citizenship" (Tyner, 1998, p. 98). In 1989, the American Library Association published a report that provided a definition of information literacy, which is still widely used today, at least within the North American context. It stated that:

> To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information […] information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how information is organized, how to find information and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them. They are people prepared for lifelong learning, because they can always find the information needed for any task or decision at hand (ALA, 1989, p. 1).

The educational programs that are being offered by libraries today are largely promoting this definition of literacy. In a sense then, libraries are doing what they have always done, they are providing access to information that will hopefully

produce a more active citizen. Information literacy understood in this way is within the range of what libraries have always taught people, whether it was a matter of teaching patrons how to use an index or catalogue, or how to differentiate between reference books and other sorts of volumes, for instance. In the contemporary media environment, "information literacy" programming, could then be considered access to the necessary "tools" that Rancière might argue are required in order to provide people with the possibility of teaching themselves. Yet, what I wish to highlight here is that information literacy programming, is not the only kind of educational programming being offered and promoted by libraries. With the development of more official educational programming, libraries are not only offering a space of teaching of the neutral sort of skills that allow for the self-education that Rancière endorses. The contemporary public library is not only offering a space of the neutral kind of *teaching* that might allow people to learn how *to learn*. As Gary Meek has put it "we're [the library] an easy instrument of mass instruction that's cleverly disguised as a leisure time service" (Spark, 2010). In the spirit of Cossette's argumentation then, it could be concluded that libraries are no longer neutral (perhaps they never truly were) when it comes to what and how people learn, they are no longer only "liberalism in operation" (p. 57), but possibly (inadvertently) promoting a specific kind of (digital) cultural citizenship.

That being said, the more important issue might be the broader range of educational programming that public libraries are now taking on as service points. It is the emerging pressures of "need" and "service" that libraries, such as

Vancouver's Carnegie Library, are facing and responding to, that are becoming even more crucial aspects of library programming than information literacy. It is these sorts of civic education and social work that are taking public libraries well beyond their traditional roles as places where people can come to learn by engaging with texts in a more or less self-directed way, and signals the real change in the status and role of the public library.

Learning at the Grande Bibliothèque

> The lack of consistency in library mission and ideology is reflected in the diversity of library programming. From the athenaeums of the nineteenth century, with their lectures and dances, to the Carnegie libraries of the early twentieth century with their bowling alleys and music halls, to the modular libraries of the mid-twentieth century, libraries have been many things to many people [...] But what are the 'many things' a library must be and the 'many people' it must serve in an age of consumer capitalism (Mattern, 2007, p. 5)?

Located on rue de la Visitation in Montreal, in the heart of the city's less affluent Centre-Sud Quarter, stands the Bibliothèque Père-Ambroise, Montreal's library with a swimming pool. The Bibliothèque Père-Ambroise can be viewed as a very cool library with a short course Olympic pool and a garden rooftop. Or alternatively, it can be seen as simply a library that shares its facilities with and is part of the neighbourhood's community centre. Located on the third floor of the Association sportive et communautaire de Centre-Sud, the library opened in September of 2002, and was enlarged and renovated along with the rest of the Community Centre in 2007, reopening in January of 2009. When the library opened in 2002 it very quickly became "l'un des endroits les plus *cool* où l'on peut faire ses devoirs après l'école!" (Marsolais, 2004, p. 80).

Bibliothèque Père-Ambroise. (Image: lesfaubourgs.ca)

At this particular library, 95% of the clientele[35] is between the ages of six and twelve and uses the library primarily as a space where they can find someone willing to help with their homework. The majority of the children frequenting the library come from families where reading is not actively encouraged or pursued. As a result, in addition to their administrative, organizational, and managerial duties, the librarians at this particular library have also taken on the role of educators offering the kind of after school help normally provided by teachers or private tutors. The library has also become central in educating their young patrons on sexual diversity and tolerance. The library's proximity to Montreal's

[35] Earlier in this chapter I have described the library patron as a "user." My shift here to "client" is intentional. Libraries have often used the terms "user" and "client," interchangeably. The GB, however, made a conscious break with "client" as GB patrons do not pay for the library's services (Grenier, personal communication, August 2, 2011). Yet, patrons do pay for library services through taxes, and what will become more apparent within this chapter, is that although patrons may be called "users" at the GB and in other public libraries, they are often catered to as though they would be customers or clients.

gay village means that many of its young patrons have encountered children that come from families with same-sex partners. It was therefore important for the former director of the library, Kathleen Wynd, to create awareness about issues of diversity. In 2004 she launched project Marius, adding a collection of books to the library's repertoire on subjects pertaining to sexual diversity that would be suited for youth.

At the opposite end of the city, in Montreal's Park Extension neighbourhood, on the rue Saint-Roch, you will find the bright and cheerful Bibliothèque Parc-Extension. This library, although it may not have a pool, prides itself for being one of the most multicultural libraries in the city; "On peut l'entendre. On peut le voir. On peut le lire" (La bibliothèque de Parc-Extension: une mosaïque culturelle).

Bibliothèque Parc-Extension. (Image: ville.montreal.qc.ca)

Upon entering the library you are greeted by a collective sound work that welcomes you in 40 different languages. In the same vein as the Bibliothèque Père-Ambroise, this library serves the needs of the community in which it finds itself, offering an impressive collection of books in a variety of languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Greek, Punjabi, Gujarati, amongst many more. Just as the Bibliothèque Père-Ambroise, this library goes beyond its more traditional functions of merely offering the right kinds of resources to its patrons. The Bibliothèque Parc-Extension also includes a day care centre, a "Francization" centre, and offers French conversation workshops with members of the library staff.

As Mattern (2007) points out, there is clearly a lack of consistency in library programming, at least when comparing the two aforementioned examples, and this might even be reflected in their missions. One library seeks to provide a safe space for learning while encouraging the curiosity for reading in a young generation, the other works at integrating new immigrants into French Montreal and Québécois life. Their missions may not be entirely the same, but where the two libraries do overlap is in their existence as institutions of "service." The lack of consistency in programming between these two libraries exists precisely because the library has moved away from being a self-defined cultural institution and is increasingly defined by how and why its patrons use it, and what they need it for. As was discussed in the previous section, the language of service as it relates to libraries usurps the institution's autonomy in how it identifies itself and how it understands its own purpose. John Buschman (2003) argues that this is

largely due to the fact that since the 1980s, the importance and relevance of public institutions, such as schools, museums, and libraries has been considered within the framework of the "new public philosophy," as outlined by political theorist Sheldon Wolin, which takes economics as a basis for all public questions (p. 16). Economics has displaced "an older language of civic values as a framework of public and political choice" (p. 16). The new "economised ideology" that Hansson (2010) speaks of that places value on what can be measured and quantified within a public institution, is what is making it increasingly difficult to distinguish between a library and other institutions of service. The Bibliothèque Père-Ambroise and the Bibliothèque Parc-Extension, like all contemporary public libraries, are subject to an

> [i]nstrumentalist rationality [that] primarily defines the library's activities and the character of librarianship in economic and user-oriented (or customer-oriented) terms. Public libraries have value in society if they are used in accordance with certain measurable criteria, otherwise—in the extreme case—they are not needed. They do not encapsulate inherent values or maintain certain norms in society just by being there (Hansson, 2010, p. 38).

As a result, the pressures of need and service that libraries are facing and responding to provoke the above-cited question: "But what are the 'many things' a library must be and the 'many people' it must serve in an age of consumer capitalism?" (Mattern, 2007, p. 5). This question is simpler to answer for smaller branch libraries such as the Bibliothèque Père-Ambroise and the Bibliothèque Parc-Extension. What they should be and who they should serve are dictated by those who live in their neighbourhoods. They serve a smaller community (thousands of people rather than millions). Smaller branch libraries depend and

thrive on the needs of their communities. This is how they survive. If they can prove that they are relevant and necessary to the communities that they serve then they will continue to be funded and their services will grow and be improved. Viewed in this way "the presupposition is that libraries provide collections and services (and 'account' for and evaluate them) not as an end but *in exchange* or as a *means*, and the 'desired end is really the material success of the library'" (Buschman, 2003, p. 110).

What the 'many things' a library must be and the 'many people' it must serve, is a much more difficult proposition for a downtown public library such as the Grande Bibliothèque. Since before it was even built, the basis for the launch of the project depended on what it would do for the citizens of not only Montreal but also all of Québec:

> [L]a GBQ devra "répondre aux besoins croissants de la société québécoise en matière d'accessibilité des citoyens au savoir universel, de promotion du goût de la lecture, de conservation et diffusion du patrimoine documentaire québécois et de développement de l'expertise québécoise dans la nouvelle économie du savoir" (Goulet, 2009, p. 171).

But how do you translate the needs of all of Québec into a handful of services? The 1997 Richard Report suggested a broad range of services that the GB would be expected to offer (and currently does) if it hoped to satisfy the needs of the citizens of Québec. These translated into services destined for the general public that included the more traditional expected library services such as loan and reference (particularly for those outside of Montreal), a section reserved for children and adolescents, informational tools, meaning access to the GB's digital collections, but also access to computer work stations and other multimedia posts

within the library. This also included information technology training services as well as activity-oriented cultural services, such as guided visits of the library, the accommodation of schools or other specialized groups, and the staging of exhibitions. The services that are perhaps more interesting for my purposes here, are those that were suggested by the Richard Report to respond to the needs of a specialized public. These included services for people with disabilities, adapted book services for the visually impaired, a career centre, a business connection centre, a centre for newcomers, a Québec centre for children's literature resources, as well as a language laboratory. What is noteworthy about all of the above services is that, on the one hand, some can be seen as stemming from a value-based rationale, in other words, certain services exist because they are at the root of the GB's mission (and identity) to collect, preserve, disseminate, and allow democratic access to Québec's heritage as well as other sources of knowledge. On the other hand, some of the other services offered at the GB, particularly the integration of the career, business, and language centres, are rooted in a more instrumentalist rationale, where the benefits to taxpaying users can be more easily quantified. In fact, in the GB's annual report from 2005-2006, it was stated that the library was in search of funding partners that would benefit their (financial) strategic positioning for the next three years. They sought to attract funding by submitting projects related to three target groups: the young, the business community, and seniors (Rapport Annuel 2005-2006, p. 19). I do not wish to denigrate the intentions behind these services as being entirely strategic, I only wish to highlight that some of these services might not exist within the space of

the library if libraries were not subject to the new public philosophy critiqued above by Buschman (2003).

In Chapter 4, I discussed how there are two competing discourses at play within the GB, between both embracing and resisting technological agency, the contradictory nature of the contemporary library as combining new technological imperatives while simultaneously trying to uphold them with the older idea of the library as a civic institution. Here we see a similar competing discourse, only this time it is between value-based and instrumental rationales, but it can also be understood in traditional vs. modern terms. As Hansson (2010) argues:

> Public libraries have long been swinging like a pendulum between these two idealized rationales, and some of what makes public libraries unique in relation to other types of library institutions is the complexity that is represented by the various forms in which the value-based and instrumentalist rationales interact and coexist (p. 38).

What stems from a value-based rationale within the contemporary library is almost always correlated with what were the traditional priorities of libraries: preservation and organization, autonomous learning, quiet spaces reserved for the individual and the book. The library's more modern preoccupations with access, life-long learning, comfort, informal (noisier) spaces, new information technologies, and the transition from page to screen, have all been ways in which the library has remade itself over the years, has made itself continuously relevant in a changing environment. The quest for survival is what has made the library's modern concerns less steeped in the principles of its own identity, in the values that it seeks to uphold within society, and more subject to the things that it can do in order to prove its worth. These value-based and instrumentalist rationales do

indeed interact and coexist, but they also become confounded. Consequently, the library's more modern priorities are often considered to be a natural evolution from its traditional ones, a mere progression of former values rather than the result of external pressures which measure significance.

In 1997, the Richard Report had suggested a number of funding bodies that would support the Grande Bibliothèque's operational costs. These included the City of Montreal, which would be responsible for the Montreal public collection's loans and acquisitions (an estimated $8.1 million), the Ministry of Culture and Communication, which would cover the costs involved in the Québec national collection ($2.5 million), the Ministry of Health and Social Services, which would support the needs of those with disabilities ($1.3 million), the Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity, which would fund the promotion of career path searches ($1 million), and the Ministry of Citizen Relations and Immigration, which would help integrate newcomers to Québec (the amount was to be determined) (p. 80). By the time the 2009-2010 annual report was published, the GB was receiving funding as well as donations from a long list of both public and private contributors. These included, amongst others, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Recreations, the Ministry of International Relations, and the Ministry of Tourism. The most recent contributor to the GB is the Toronto Dominion (TD) Bank, sponsoring a story hour that is intended for children of new immigrants and is currently offered in five different languages, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Arabic, Romanian, and Mandarin (Rapport Annuel 2010-2011). What I wish to point out here is not that libraries are subject to both governmental and

commercial priorities and pressures, or that they are clearly in the center of competing interests; public libraries have always faced these sorts of challenges. What is new, and problematic, is that libraries as institutions are increasingly being made to fit "into the realm of formal education" (Hansson, 2010, p. 40). Hansson writes that,

> the one movement which has had the biggest effect on the organizational character of libraries today is perhaps the one decreasing the influence of the informal sector of adult education and increasing that of formal education. There has always been a tight connection between public libraries and public schools, colleges and universities. In previous decades, however, much effort has been made to fit them into the realm of formal education. This is a transition which goes well in hand with the development towards a more instrumental and customer-oriented view of public librarianship. It is also a way of securing the legitimacy of public libraries by way of use (p. 40).

Libraries have always been valued as informal spaces of learning, and as this becomes displaced with more formal programming, and learning becomes increasingly mediated, libraries will lose rather than maintain their distinctive place in society. Society already has institutions that teach. The library has always been unique in that it has been one of the few places where one has been free to think rather than be taught. The library evolving into a space that includes both teaching and learning is not necessarily ethically problematic (although Cossette might disagree), particularly if it might be filling a much-needed gap. What is troublesome is that this organizational shift within the institution has been almost imperceptible. Education has always been a function of the library. As a result, the new kinds of services offered by libraries such as the GB seem to be inherently part of what they do, and are considered by the libraries themselves as simply facilitating "continuing independent learning" (BAnQ online, Mission).

Yet at the GB's job/career centre, for instance, although users are welcome to use the online services that will inform them about "labour market trends, and […] trades and occupations currently in demand or with good employment prospects" (BAnQ online, Services, Services for job seekers), they are also offered "assisted service" or "training" in writing résumés, navigating job sites, as well as sending faxes and communicating with potential employers. Terms such as "training" and "assisted" are a perfect example of the instrumental and customer-oriented view of public librarianship that Hansson discusses above. They also mask the fact that what is increasingly common and expected of librarians, is not only to "assist," but also to "train;" in other words, to teach. Librarians are faced with similar expectations with regards to new and emergent technologies. For now they are still primarily expected to know how to use and navigate information technologies, but they are increasingly involved in programming and design as well. Pascale Grenier, a librarian in the *Espace Jeunes* section of the GB, was involved in creating and continues to update and redesign the library's *Espace Jeunes* website, for instance, in combination with her other duties of outreach, project development, and daily administrative tasks (personal communication, August 2, 2011). As Marylin Johnson (2010) writes "[i]n the next phase of library history, librarians won't simply provide access to computers and use them to catalog, communicate, and network—they'll write the programs as well" (p. 43).

On October 25, 2012, the GB officially launched a section of its website entirely dedicated to education. This stemmed from an earlier five year partnership agreement signed in 2011 with Québec's Ministry of Education that

would allow the GB to be more formally involved in the Ministry's educational projects. "Ever faithful to its mission as a knowledge institution, BAnQ intends to assert itself as a special partner of the education community" (BAnQ, Press Release, October 25, 2012). The website offers, primarily to teachers (students will soon be offered a similar service), resources, suggestions, and pedagogical tools to improve the courses that they teach. By using the suggested textual, visual, sound and other sources that are provided by the GB online, the website offers new ideas on how to create a more effective teaching curriculum.[36] Guy Berthiaume, the current Chair and CEO of the GB, is quoted as saying that the library has "'felt a pressing need to enhance our [the GB's] reading and literacy content offering. We have therefore organized our programme according to the Ministère's curriculum guidelines'" (BAnQ, Press Release, October 25, 2012). This partnership, as well as the resulting new website, is an example of how the library's understanding of itself as a "knowledge institution" has changed, in that it now considers its role to be not only to preserve, disseminate, and facilitate access to knowledge, but also to influence and affect the ways in which that knowledge is used and circulated. Furthermore, in offering resources to teachers following the Ministry of Education's curriculum guidelines, it also highlights Cossette's earlier arguments that suggest that the library is often under pressure to realize the missions of other institutions, and these habitually get passed off as their own.

[36] The website can be accessed here:
http://www.banq.qc.ca/services/services_specialises/milieu_education/index.html?language_id=3

There has been a range of mutually enabling factors, such as the emergence of new media technologies, a lack of a philosophy of libraries and librarianship, a new public philosophy, instrumentalist vs. value-based rationales, amongst others, that have had an impact on the ways in which libraries are understanding their educational roles within society. Emerging pressures of "need" and "service" have moved libraries towards providing patrons with a new kind of educational experience. This educational experience, economically and strategically made to fit "into the realm of formal education" (Hansson, 2010, p. 40), through programming, official partnerships, and assisted services, can be distinguished from the education provided within the university, where students are taught *how to think*, and can better be understood as attempting to teach "self-improvement," a form of teaching people to learn *how to learn*. "In recent years, however, the liberal conception of culture as a means of individual improvement has had to run alongside – if not compete with – neo-liberal notions of culture as a consumer product" (Barry, 2001, p. 133). As a result, the stakes of this new educational experience are high, as they risk turning education into a commodity that displaces the independent learner with the consumer (a direction that many educational institutions have already taken) and thus throwing the democratic assumptions that libraries value so highly into question. It is the turn towards the user, the customer based approach that libraries have taken on, that calls upon them (as well as librarians) to be 'everything' to 'everyone' in an age of consumer capitalism.

"The Community Garage"

> "[W]e're not concerned with digital technology for its own sake. We're not concerned with the collections for their own sake. We're concerned with people's experience. There are certain tools like 'user experience design' or 'user analysis' that have been integral to the way that the dot-com world works and are just starting to make their way into the library world. This turn towards the user is huge in libraries right now" (Joshua Greenberg, The Digital Experience Group, qtd in Johnson, 2010, p. 189).

The aim of this chapter was not to bemoan the current state of the library, nor to suggest that the library has moved so far away from some imagined golden age that it is now almost unrecognizable. My purpose has been to highlight some of the relatively recent pressures that have had an impact on what the contemporary library looks like at the present moment, and what new directions it might be taking. The turn towards the user and the library's new educational role, even at risk of becoming commodified, opens up novel institutional possibilities. The library is no longer a site in which knowledge is preserved, disseminated, and reproduced, but also a space where culture and knowledge together are generated (Basu & Macdonald, 2007). The contemporary library might better be understood as not only a container in which we store the cultural artifacts that are made outside of its walls, but one from which culture is born. For some scholars, the library as a source of culture, as an institution where culture begins, also extends to possibly imagining the library as a foundation for future technological innovation. Individuals are constantly transforming and re-appropriating public spaces often regardless of the kinds of uses for which that space was originally conceived to provide (de Certeau, 1984). In *Designing Culture: The Technological Imagination at Work* (2011), Anne Balsamo contends that the

contemporary library has the potential to become a new "institutional form," a site in which technologies, relationships, and physical communities not only come together but can also be made (pp. 180-181). The interaction between human and non-human actors has reshaped traditional conceptions of the library as a public space. People, things, concepts and technologies all come together to make up a whole that is constantly being reassembled or remade (Latour, 2005). As a result, according to Balsamo (2011), the contemporary library's cultural and educational work could be extended to what might better be understood as "the community garage" or the "tinkering shop" (p. 180). Balsamo maintains that "[t]he role of the body in the process of learning and making culture" (p. 177) has been overlooked within discourses surrounding digital literacy. She defines 'tinkering' as:

> A mode of knowledge production that involves the hand, the use of tools, and mentoring relationships among people in close physical proximity. Tinkering in the twenty first century also involves the use of digital networks, tools, and materials […] Tinkering names an important set of practices for developing the technological imagination (p. 177).

She imagines a future library wherein the technological imagination can be formed. Libraries should embrace their new roles as generators of culture, only they should extend this to include technological innovation. People learn and create in a multiplicity of ways; creativity, however, is often understood as always exclusively taking shape within our thoughts. Balsamo sees the future library as a site that gives importance to the body. She imagines future public libraries functioning as "community-based make spaces" (p 180), where the library's mission would be to become a site in which patrons come together in a communal space and have access not only to books, maps, dvds etc., but also to various tools

and materials (some of which would normally be found in someone's garage) which they can "tinker" with and also borrow. The library already has many of the makings required to become this new institutional form. It is a

- […] communally accessible physical space that provides access to creative digital technologies.
- […] a community-based physical space that supports the development of learning relationships between members of different generations (youth and adults).
- [and has a] network of institutional professionals (librarians, museum docents, for example) who can mediate between learners, mentors, physical spaces, tools, and technologies to foster communities of (tinkering) practice (pp. 177-178).

What is important for Balsamo is that this tinkering happens with others, cross-generationally, where younger and older patrons might teach each other. She gives the particular example of the young learning how to sew and the old learning to edit a video. The role of the librarian would be to "nurture the technological imagination to think differently about our technocultural futures" (p. 181). For Balsamo, this type of learning with others, but also learning through the body and not only the mind, opens up a new set of possibilities for not only cultural preservation and circulation, but also for the practice of culture making. In her view, it is crucial that the past and the present coexist and comingle in order for future creative projects to be born. The technological imagination is born out of both new and past ideas.

Balsamo's notions about an alternative future for the public library are indeed positive reinforcements of the potentials surrounding the institution's current educational goals. Contemporary libraries are both representative and generative social institutions that are increasingly central to marginalized urban

communities as was seen with both the Vancouver Carnegie Library and Edmonton's Stanley A. Milner Library. Consequently, the library cannot consider education as something static that their patrons already necessarily possess. These are unfortunately often the assumptions of the neo-liberal understandings of self-improvement that libraries are under pressure to uphold. Balsamo's vision of the future public library as a "community garage" or "tinkering space" is more inclusive, allowing for a broader consideration of the different ways in which people learn and are creative. This way of conceptualizing the library, although it positions education centrally within its mission, reduces the risk that the library now faces of becoming a hierarchical institution aimed at maintaining the status quo and perpetuating a division of classes. The question remains, however, of whether this new way of conceiving the future public library moves the library further away from itself? Is this the point at which a library stops being a *library* and becomes something else? Or is this yet another version of what a library needs to become in order to assure its existence?

Conclusion

While visiting Boston for a few days in February, I was delighted to come across a small wooden box filled with books. The sign on the box read: "Little Free Library," "Take a book, Return a book," "Celebrating Healthier Neighbourhoods." The box was located on Cambridge St. where I was staying, not far from Harvard Square.

The Little Free Library on Cambridge Street

You would think that after five years of researching libraries I would have seen it all, libraries these days come in all shapes and sizes from stark looking bungalows in Port au Choix, Newfoundland, to empty shelved, glass encased monuments in Tokyo, from bookmobiles to virtual libraries in Second Life. It was, however, the first time I had seen the Little Free Library (LFL). In 2009, Todd Bol (co-founder of the Little Free Library), built a wooden schoolhouse, about the size of a

dollhouse, filled it with books and placed it in front of his house in Hudson, Wisconsin, as a tribute to his late mother who loved books. He encouraged his neighbours to come by and borrow the books, a concept that eventually led to what is now known as the Little Free Library Movement. In May of 2012, the Little Free Library became an independent, nonprofit organization based in Wisconsin. The goal of the movement was to surpass Andrew Carnegie's creation of 2,509 libraries by one. By January 2013, the Little Free Library Movement had easily exceeded its goal. There are an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 Little Free Libraries around the world, across a total of 36 countries. When I came across the one on Cambridge St., I automatically assumed this was an initiative started by the Cambridge Public Library, an impressive, newly renovated library only a couple of blocks away from the LFL.

The Cambridge Public Library

I later realized that the LFL on Cambridge St. was actually put there by a resident who built the box to mirror a small house behind his own. What is particularly intriguing about the Little Free Library Movement is that anyone can become a part of it by building a LFL in their neighbourhood. In a 2012 documentary about the project, "A Small Wooden Box: The Little Free Library Movement," it is clear that people are fascinated by the ways in which the sharing of books has brought them together as a community. The Little Free Library can be understood as a return to the more traditional idea of sharing books as a sign of personal friendship. Ironically, books are known to be both deeply social and simultaneously asocial. In *Book Was There: Reading in Electronic Times* (2012), Andrew Piper writes that, "[o]ne of the fundamental identities of book reading as it emerged over time is the challenge it poses to producing a sense of commonality. Reading is a technique of socialization with a deeply asocial element" (p. 85). Reading may be asocial, but the appeal of movements such as the Little Free Library seems to be the sense that the exchange of books can support relationships of community that computer terminals cannot, even in the age of so-called 'social' media. Furthermore, the notion of "free" is also more pronounced, in that there are no permits, finances, taxes, or other institutional restrictions or constraints to be considered with the Little Free Library. As David Laufer, a LFL steward who built one on his property in Atlanta, Georgia, says: "I like the relatively open nature of it. You don't need to get a permit, there's no library card, there's no overdue fines. If somebody takes a book and doesn't return it, it doesn't matter. In a society where we feel the continuous

encroachment of rules and necessary procedures, here's one with no limits" ("A Small Wooden Box: The Little Free Library Movement," 2012). However, there is more to be said about the notions of commonality and freedom incited by the Little Free Library Movement. LFLs, because they are cute, small, and personal, have also provoked an affective response in that they are often reacted to in a way that an individual might react to a small child or a puppy (which would explain my own "delight" at coming across one). They are also often built as memorials to lost loved ones. The affective nature of LFLs is largely what draws people to them. Because book sharing is both a deeply individual and social act, "[g]iving a book […] is a way of giving a piece of oneself," (Piper, 2012, p. 87), people feel that they can trust one another, and this in turn translates into a sense of "community empowerment" (Mattern, 2012). Shannon Mattern writes that

> Given the rise of proprietary platforms and ephemeral content, the LFL believes that the tactility, the originality, the *aura* of these structures—plus the fact that they're communal property—generates an *affective* response. Ideally, that affect would translate into politics; it would inspire citizens to question why the presence of freely accessible books in public space elicits such emotion (Marginalia: Little Libraries in the Urban Margins, 2012).

LFLs are not the only Do-It-Yourself libraries that have popped up over the last few years. One has only to look at examples such as the People's Library in Zuccotti Park that was created with the Occupy movement, to conclude that the creation of libraries, even DIY pop-up ones, has gradually become correlated with an increasing need for social change. The People's Library was not only one that allowed those part of the Occupy movement to come together and discuss the issues and beliefs that they held in common, but also became a symbol of resistance, for the 99%, as well as for libraries. Mattern writes that

> Although in principle our public libraries are ideological kin of Occupy, sharing a commitment to democratic access and opportunity, the Occupy libraries offered, for some, an alternative to the big institution. Among the camps' volunteer librarians were many professionals disheartened by the challenges facing their field. Mandy Henk, the DePauw librarian, who volunteered at Zuccotti Park, has pointed out that in recent years librarians have "lost more and more control over budgets and collections. The information resources that people need are controlled by corporations, while we keep getting hit by the push for austerity." For patrons, these challenges translate into decreased access, unpredictable service and, ultimately, disenfranchisement. For librarians, participating in Occupy has been, Henk said, a way to "begin taking power back ... the power to create collections and to define what a library is for (Marginalia: Little Libraries in the Urban Margins, 2012).

As I touched on in my final chapter with the example of the Carnegie Library in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, and what has become increasingly apparent with the examples above, is that libraries are not only popping up within urban margins but are also being re-appropriated by those who feel marginalized. Individuals are constantly transforming and re-appropriating public spaces, often regardless of the kinds of uses those spaces were originally conceived for. Marginalized communities, such as those living in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, are often overlooked as not contributing to the cultural fabric of a city. Libraries are sites in which precarious publics, whose members already suffer from established forms of discrimination and exclusion, come together to form a new iteration of Will Straw's (2004) notion of *the scene*.

> Scenes take shape, much of the time, on the edges of cultural institutions which can only partially absorb and channel the clusters of expressive energy which form within urban life. Just as they draw upon surpluses of people, scenes may be seen as ways of "processing" the abundance of artifacts and spaces which sediment within cities over time (p. 416).

These marginal scenes offer novel institutional possibilities for what libraries mean and what and whom they are for in the contemporary city. Marginalization,

when integrated into a semi-public space and institution such as the library, creates a generative scene that holds the potential of fostering nascent forms of both cultural and political association and education amongst marginalized groups themselves. They are a scene with a particular set of knowledge practices that the library shapes and is actively shaped by. As such, marginal scenes can serve to situate knowledge regimes, both self-produced from below and administered from above, that are both responsive to and generative of new institutional iterations of the urban public library.

There is no doubt that the public library has undergone a major transformation. My case study of the Grande Bibliothèque offered here is one instance of this transformation. What is perhaps an unexpected, if not all that surprising, finding that has come out of my research, is that the changing technology of the book and our new practices of reading are not the sole or, I would argue, even primary drivers of this change. I do not wish to diminish the role of the history of the book as it relates to the changing faces of the library, for indeed it is crucial. I only wish to emphasize that whether the technology of the book persists or its materiality is altered will not necessarily dictate the future of the public library. Booklessness may influence what the library will look like in the future, but not whether it will continue to exist or what societal functions it will perform. These determinations involve a range of social factors that bear on the library as a mediating societal institution in itself, and pertain quite aside from the question of whether there will still be books on the shelves.

At the outset of my research, when I was asking myself those crucial early questions, I began with the proposition that the Grande Bibliothèque project exhibited all the complexity, tension and contradictions characteristic of contemporary Québécois subjectivity, identity, and citizenship. I proposed that the GB mirrored the tensions and dualisms that exist in Québec society. In other words, the tensions that are present in the cultural history of Québec were possibly present in the site, project, and discourse of the GB. I abandoned this proposition quite early on, deciding to focus on the GB project as an instance of what is happening to libraries more broadly, rather than centering on what it might be saying about Québec society. What I have found is that this hypothesis is not altogether false, only that it should be reformulated in order to consider the broader and increasingly centralizing digital culture (at least in the North American context). Libraries have not only been architecturally (and infrastructurally) transformed due to new and emergent media technologies, but have also mirrored the societal changes in which these technologies are implicated. This is not necessarily new, as libraries have always in one way or another mirrored and reflected societal change. What is new, and what was emphasized both in Chapter 5 and with the aforementioned examples, is that libraries have not only mirrored these changes and become a reflection of them, but have equally become the institutions called upon to respond to the more often than not negative repercussions of many of these changes. Tensions surrounding old media vs. new media, copyright vs. open source, the increasing privatization and corporatization of education troubling our notions of democratic access to

knowledge, precarious employment and flexible work arrangements, the formations of new digital literacies, etc., have put an unprecedented demand on libraries not only to retain their traditional roles as preservers and disseminators of cultural memory and knowledge, but also to play a role in addressing social problems and controversies that far exceed the cataloguing, storage and retrieval of texts.

In Chapter 3, I briefly discussed the changing architectural priorities of the modern library, which saw its gradual redesign in order to spatially favour the reader as opposed to the book. In the same vein, it has been argued by architects and librarians alike that the contemporary library, although it still reserves a place for books, has been reconfigured in order to allow room for not only the reader, but also for new technologies. This is indeed a fact, yet things are again rapidly changing. Technologies have become progressively smaller, more affordable (at least for the middle class), and most importantly have increasingly converged. As Piper writes, "everyone is searching for the magical potion of convergence—the single gadget that can perform all of our computational tasks, like the universal remote control" (2012, p. 157). Consequently, technologies have become simultaneously invisible and visible within the space of the library. They take up less space, but more and more patrons are bringing their own gadgets to the library with them. The shift that seems to be currently taking place within the library, is that books are on their way out, being moved into basements and warehouses as well as other offsite storage facilities, but instead of making room for the reader or the gadgets, what this shift has actually made room for is the

individual and his or her needs. The current debates surrounding The New York Public Library's (NYPL) $300 million renovation plans attest to this. Architect Norman Foster has proposed to redesign the NYPL by removing seven levels of book stacks under the Rose Main Reading Room in order to create a spacious circulating library.

The projected design for the Rose Main Reading Room at the New York Public Library. (Image: artsJournalblogs.com)

The plan has caused much controversy as it originally proposed to move approximately 3 million books into a storage facility in New Jersey. This proposal has since been revised, and the library now plans to keep around 2 million of the books on site; in this case "on site" means "in a storage space under Bryant Park" (Maloney, 2013, January 15). Much of the controversy surrounding these renovation plans has centered on both the architectural integrity of the century old library as well as the proper preservation of its books. In light of the diverse expectations, needs and practices of contemporary library users, and the very genuine social needs that libraries are increasingly called upon to address, such concerns are sometimes hard to distinguish from straightforward nostalgia for an

abstract image of a library that has never actually existed. As Lee Rosenbaum writes:

> As much as I now like my life in New Jersey, this native New Yorker (who grew up in the branch libraries) thinks that the idea of shipping out more than a million books to be stored in my present home state is privileging modern amenities over the central library's most basic *raison d'être*—to have on hand all the research resources that the library owns and that researchers might conceivably need. The NYPL board needs to keep its priorities straight (artsJournalblogs, February 13, 2013).

I would argue, however, that the NYPL's decision to privilege "modern amenities" over "its most basic *raison d'être*," is much more complex than it appears. What is the library's *raison d'être*? If it is in fact "to have on hand all the research resources that the library owns and that researchers might conceivably need," as argued by Rosenbaum, perhaps this *raison d'être* has changed. As was discussed in Chapter 5, it always has been, and is becoming, increasingly difficult to come up with a coherent and universal definition of what a library does and what it is for. It appears that the current societal need for the library is not primarily to access the technology of the book. From DIY libraries to the GB project to the number of notable libraries that I have discussed in the preceding chapters, it has become evident that there exists a spectrum of libraries, small LFLs and large downtown urban libraries, and their current roles are to mediate different kinds of social relations, whether these might be those between the mostly middle class patrons of the GB carrying around their gadgets or the marginalized groups congregating around the Carnegie Library in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The trade-off taking place between books and living, practicing human beings is not a simple "books out, modern amenities in"

equation, but rather a response by libraries to what people actually need. And what they seem to need, is a new kind of social space.

Whether this is a fair trade, or even a good one, is difficult to assess. It is, however, the library's current reality. Certainly this need for a new social space and the library's response to it has its own set of social consequences that might be conceived as positive or negative depending on what the library means to different individuals. Concern over the future of the book has sometimes served as a proxy for concern about the future of the library, on the assumption that what the library is primarily for is the housing and borrowing of books. But what are books for? If we consider the possibility that the traditional library's storage of books has itself always been a proxy for the (arguably more primary) function of providing time and space for reading, our assessment of changes underway at the library might be more encouraging. The death of reading has been as pervasive a fear as the death of the book, and yet perhaps reading is not dying so much as it is being resituated, just like books. Projects such as The Underground New York Public Library, an online photo series of "Reading-Riders" within the New York City subway system, and a visual library in itself with the aim of sharing what others are reading, points to the multiplicity of alternative spaces of reading. Reading has never been more easily available to us, particularly while in transit. Consequently, the library is no longer the sole producer of our contemporary reading practices. Its reimagination and redesign as a space of reading—regardless of the technology being used to access words and images—might be

less of a loss than a partial recovery of a function that has always been central to the library's purpose.

A waiting commuter reading: "The O.Henry Prize Stories 2007: The Best Stories of the Year," compiled by Charles d'Ambrosio, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Lily Tuck; edited by Laura Furman. (Image: The Underground New York Public Library).

That said, it is undeniable that the contemporary library is becoming something other, and something more, than either a preserver and disseminator of cultural heritage and knowledge or a renovated space for reading. The role of libraries in the production of human subjects was once confined to providing access to great cultural and literary works that would cultivate the intellect. Today's public library is still charged with contributing to the cultivation of human subjects, but it has moved from stimulating intellects, to caring for citizens in ways that are both more pragmatic and more comprehensive. What the library today wants to improve is not only an individual's intellectual capacity but also their quality of life by, for example, providing them with the skills necessary to

survive in a digital economy and culture. Beyond this, to care for their patrons, libraries must equally be spaces where people might have the opportunity to get back on their feet (The Carnegie Library, Vancouver), spaces to meet other people (LFLs), sites where people can come together in protest (The People's Library), or simply safe spaces to be alone but with others (the GB). These are the numerous, almost therapeutic, roles society currently needs the library to perform. Laments over the death of the book at the hands of new technologies do not even come close to addressing the question of what the library is, and what it is for, in the contemporary context.

We are constantly tempted to ask the same questions about the future of the library: Will it remain an archive of knowledge or will it follow the path of care proposed above? When it meets its end, what will the library look like as an institution? Perhaps these teleological questions are the wrong ones to be asking. Libraries, just as books and reading, do not necessarily need to be understood as evolving down a path that will lead them to their inevitable ends having served their purposes within a given time. Instead, they should be considered as ongoing processes of social mediation. What I have attempted to do with my case study of the Grande Bibliothèque is not necessarily to provide an answer to the question: What is the future of the public library? Rather, I have wanted to explore the question: how do we talk about the library as an institution today? The study of the Grande Bibliothèque has been an attempt to read an institution such as the library in an alternative way, one that reads the library against its prevailing historical and cultural selves, in order to get at a library agency that is a

combination of media processes, objects, artefacts, people, contexts, discourses, all pieced together to form a specific, if unstable institutional whole whose meaning cannot be assumed based on any traditional conceptions of libraries as didactic institutions. To move between "the library" and "libraries," as I have done throughout, is to perform this semantic institutional instability—the GB, for instance, is both the library of tradition and a multiple of its users' lives. When we speak of libraries today we tend to essentialize them in terms of what they are supposed to represent as a socially constructed institution. This leads us in turn to fear their demise because social constructions are never static. Yet libraries are unique in that they have an inherent affective quality, an affective quality that is strong enough to build communities around or to serve to organize political protests. Libraries are and always have been what people have made them to be. We all have a personal library story to tell. It is the personal and affective power of these institutions that define them, this is what they cultivate, preserve, and ultimately circulate.

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