CFP: Library Architecture in North America (Workshop, Madison, WI, 26-28 March 2020)

Department of Art History, Madison, WI, USA, March 26 - 28, 2020
Submission Deadline: 11/25/2019
Keynote speaker: Kenneth Breisch, USC
Organizer: Maxi Schreiber (Darmstadt/Madison)

Today, the United States of America has almost fourteen times as many Libraries as McDonalds restaurants. The tax supported Free Public Library is an essential part of American culture and, in the words of the architect Rem Koolhaas, "the last of the uncontested moral universes". Academic libraries and research libraries are equally important to students and scholars and remain an indispensable part of American education and campus life. As an institution, the library serves as part of the cultural memory of the nation.

At the same time, libraries today are changing. If, for a long time the hierarchy and relationship of librarian, book and reader were the driving factors of library design, today library architecture oscillates between open work and meeting spaces and utterly specialized spaces. University libraries like the James Hunt Library (2009–2013 by Snøhetta) in North Carolina show this new quality of high specification to students' needs in the design process. Here, interactive spaces, specialized furniture, 360 degree projection, high tech screens, media and design laboratories, sound proof rooms for music recording and highly mechanized equipment are finding its way into library architecture. Spaces like these are possible due to an economization on shelving space, in the form of highly compressed stacks, where books are stored and "bookbots" (robots) are unimaginably fast in retrieving books and delivering them to the front desk. One could debate whether virtual shelf browsing is comparable to "physical" browsing, or, if this invention marks a return to the time of closed stacks. Examples like the James Hunt Library show how today's library design can be dominated by new virtual possibilities as well as work and communication processes rather than book shelfs.

In addition to this, commercialization in the form of cafés and library shops has been introduced to public library architecture. Further, Amazon comes into the picture. In Berkeley, Ypsilanti and Madison, among many other cities, Amazon pick up stores are oftentimes located temptingly close to university libraries, housed in prominent university buildings on American campuses and benefit student members with unlimited access to streaming, free item shipping and even free audio book and e-book access.

This workshop seeks new approaches to the study of library architecture. Taking place at the Department of Art History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison from March 26 to March 28, it welcomes contributions that address the following themes:

- the library as a building type
- frameworks for narrating the history of library architecture theoretically and architecturally
- the change of the cityscape with the architectural appearance of iconic and unique library buildings vs less appearing library buildings
- the effect of architecture on public debates when new library buildings are designed
- possibilities of historic preservation
- the role of historic preservation when it comes to building annexes to existing structures
- the involvement of community groups in library architecture and the design process
- the social function of public spaces in contrast to academic spaces
- city scape, environment and the public sphere

This workshop seeks to stimulate discussions about architectural history as well as the social, political and economic role of libraries and the public realm. While the focus of this workshop is on North American library architecture, proposals that look at international topics are encouraged. Scholars from all fields, as well as librarians, architects, journalists, teachers and volunteers are welcome to contribute. The preferred format would be a pre circulated paper. Interested participants from outside academia are welcome to contact the organizer about alternative formats such as oral presentations, PechaKucha etc.

The workshop is organized with a keynote lecture by Kenneth Breisch, discussions of pre circulated papers, a panel discussion and an open session. The cost for domestic flights and flights for participants from Canada and accommodation will be covered by the sponsor of the workshop. The funding for this workshop will be provided by the Volkswagen Foundation.

Submission Guidelines:
Deadline for submission of application with abstract (300 words max.) and short biography (100 words max.): November 25, 2019.

Deadline for submission of accepted papers (in English, 4000 words max.): February 20, 2020. Alternative contributions should not exceed 20 minutes.

Please send your proposals (as PDF file) to: **mschreiber4@wisc.edu**

March 26 to March 28, Department of Art History, Madison, WI