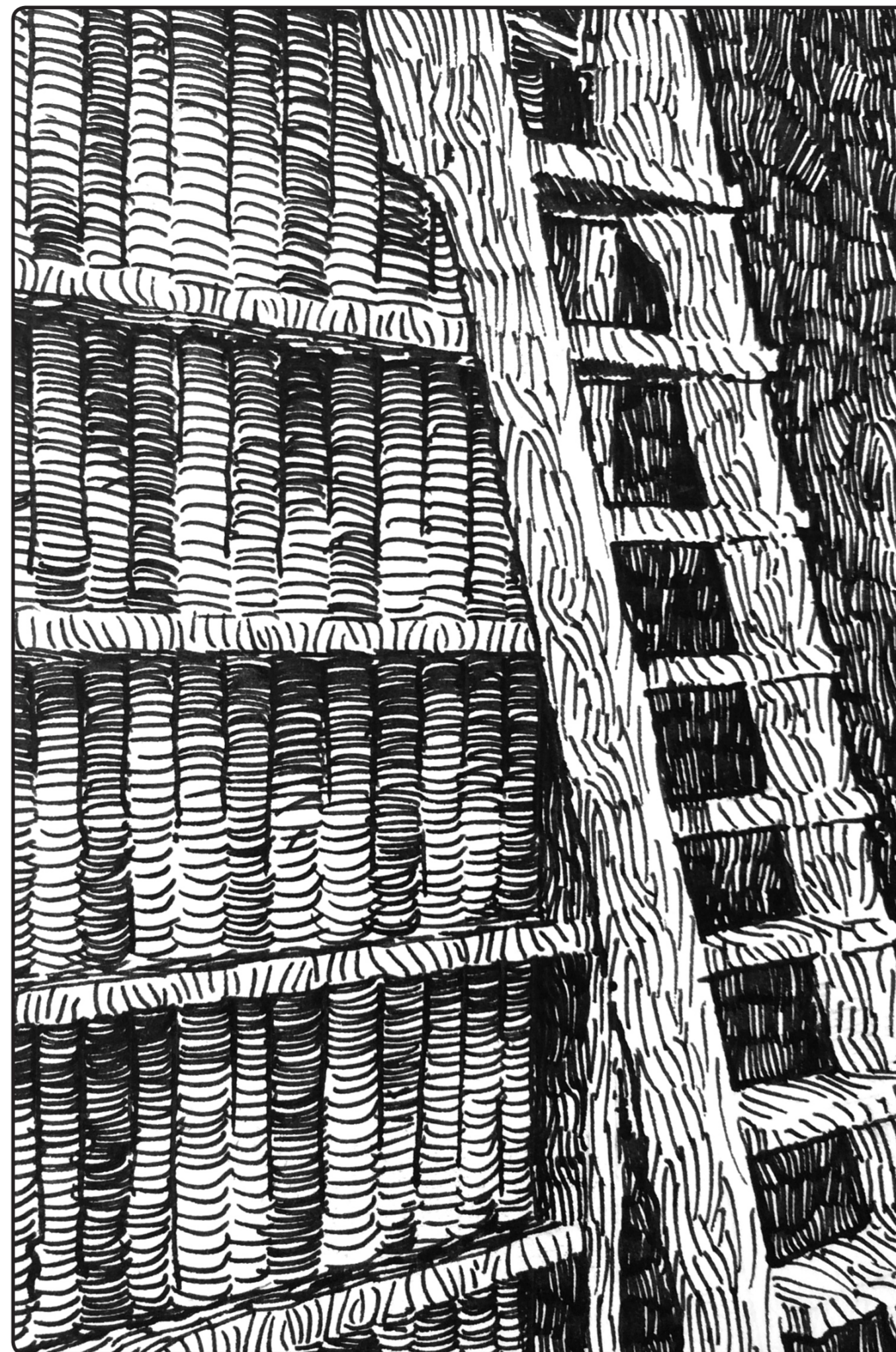CHAPTER

03

THE LIBRARY

Understanding the essential character of the library through an
investigation into its history and contemporary role.

3.1

THE TYPICAL

As a means of creating places of significance and meaning, Peter Zumthor (2013) argues for the design of places that attempt to be typical as opposed to special as this will ensure that they effectively fulfil their functional role. Verschaffel (2009:144) elaborates on the importance of this notion in relation to the critique of institutional architecture, arguing that if critique takes the form of rethinking the existing nature of an institution, it negates the possibility for any real criticism and undermines the autonomy and relevance of the institution in question. Therefore, in order to effectively address the issue of institutional placelessness, the essential character of the institution in question needs to be embraced and celebrated as a key component of its character of place.

3.2

THE CHARACTER OF THE LIBRARY

The public library as an institution is one popularly believed to be in its death throes, a perceived crisis that finds it origins in a branch of literature dating from the 1970s that somewhat presumptuously predicted the disappearance of all libraries by the end of the twentieth century as a result of the printed word being made irrelevant by the computer (Campbell and Pryce 2013:291). This popular belief persists even today, despite the global public library building boom of the early years of the twenty first century and the fact that the number of codices printed annually currently exceeds that of any given point in human history (Campbell and Pryce 2013:19). In a near hysterical response to this perceived crisis of the library's relevance, the public library was reimagined as the learning resource centre, the multimedia lab or the information hub. However Mickiewicz (2016) argues that the attempt to legitimise their existence through a blending of functions, technologies and scales, these new spaces

have effectively eroded the essential character and autonomy of the public library as an institution. In order to create place in the form of a public library and despite technological developments that influence the role it plays, the library should in its essence, remain a library (Verschaffel 2009:144).

Various conditions define the library as a unique public institution. The first defining characteristic is its nature as a semi-public space, existing as an enclosed space accessible via a threshold, where according to Verschaffel (2009:142), due to its inherent rules and structures, the library is only accessible on the condition that those who enter 'play the game'. Once within, the function of the library as a repository becomes clear (Huff 2003:36). Campbell (2013:19) reminds us that the definition of a library is a building designed to house books, the spatial expression of the library celebrates and is defined by the format of the books it con-

tains. The necessity for the storage and accessibility of these books also makes the library's furnishings and fittings essential spatial components that characterise and define it as a unique institution (Campbell and Pryce 2013:23). Along with the presence of books and furnishings, the presence of the librarian also characterises the library (Brawne and Pehnt 1970), responsible for structuring the collections, providing assistance and enforcing rules, the presence of such a guardian is as integral to the nature of the institution as the collections it contains. The final defining characteristic of the library relates to its appropriation by the public, as the public institution that evokes the strongest feelings of ownership and identity, the library provides an enclosed, indoor public space where those that enter come not as clients or consumers, but rather as participants or citizens (Verschaffel 2009, Kay 1974).

3.3

STOCKHOLM PUBLIC LIBRARY

ARCHITECT :

Erik Gunnar Asplund

LOCATION OF PROJECT	DATE OF COMPLETION	REASON FOR INCLUSION
Observatorielunden, Stockholm, Sweden	1928	Designing with an understanding of the typical library

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

A clear understanding and implementation of the historic ideals of the library type defines its institutional role and establishes the Stockholm Public Library as a distinct and memorable place. Asplund was appointed to design the library after presenting a thorough report commissioned by the city that would be used to inform the brief for a new library. The design was heavily informed by the architectural traditions surrounding library design in Europe and North America, of which he had a thorough understanding, thanks to the analysis he had completed for his report.

According to a belief that public buildings should be monumental landmarks in order to celebrate their community purpose and be given prominent sites so as to allow them to act as focal points for the city, Asplund recommended that the library be sited at the corner of the hill atop which stood the old Stockholm Observatory (Wrede 1980). In response to its site, the library was designed as a massive compact bulk so as to not be overpowered by the hill with the final version manifesting as an austere stripped classical monument made up of a square base with a cylindrical drum projecting from its centre. The library is set back from the urban edge, wrapped by an active commercial front that insulates the main building from the activities of the street, allowing the programme to retain its autonomy, separa-

tion and significance whilst exaggerating the approach up towards the main building. The projecting drum suggests the importance of a centralised and enclosed space within, whilst the openings in the façade are treated differently in order to communicate their relative importance. Where entrance thresholds are stretched and tapered to exaggerate visual perspective and edged with mouldings in order to articulate them, windows and other openings are simply punctured into the red render of the façade and left unadorned. Along with a celebration of thresholds, the mass and thickness of the building's walls have also been exaggerated in order to enhance a sense of enclosure within and give the building a monumental presence according to its civic importance (Jones 2006). After ascending the external stairs and passing through the main entrance doors one is greeted by a dark foyer where on needs to ascend an additional staircase in order to enter the tall, bright, central reading room. Conceptualised as a representation of the human mind and all that it contains, once within the material palette changes and the user is confronted with white render, dark wood and surrounded by books on all sides which are lit by high level windows which permit diffused light but deny views to the outside world. The Stockholm Public library effectively encloses its own unique internal world which despite being mathematically and geometrically sophisticat-

ed, is also experientially powerful thanks to Asplund's intention to create an ideal library based on the design elements typical to the architecture of libraries, along with his belief that form and beauty are ends in themselves. A belief which was expressed through his use of the human body as a measure for the geometry and spaces of the building. Instead of seeking mathematical perfection, the geometry of the library was manipulated in order to achieve perceptual effects such as in room sizes that were determined by the number of steps a person would take to cross it and façade proportions that were determined by what looked pleasing to the eye (Wrede 1980).

Figure 3.2 - Urban presence of the library

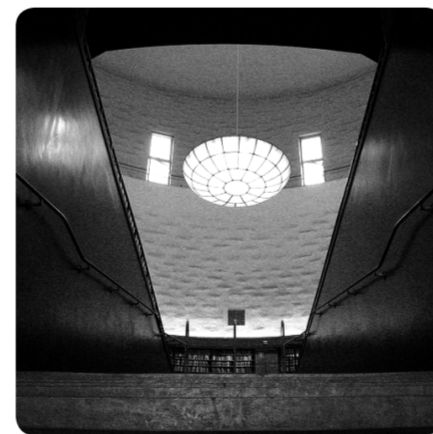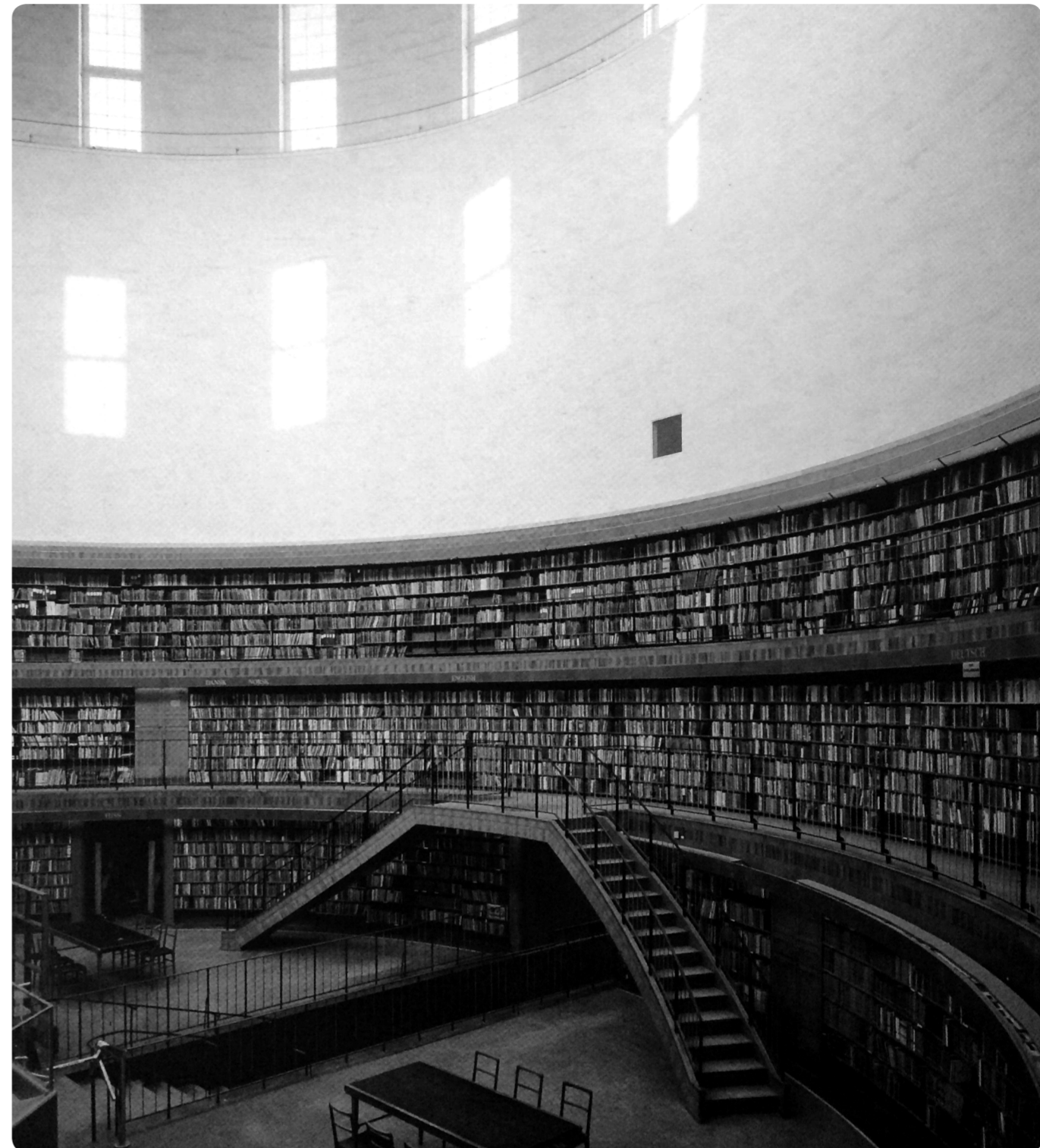Figure 3.3 - The central reading room

Figure 3.4 - Approach to the centre of the library

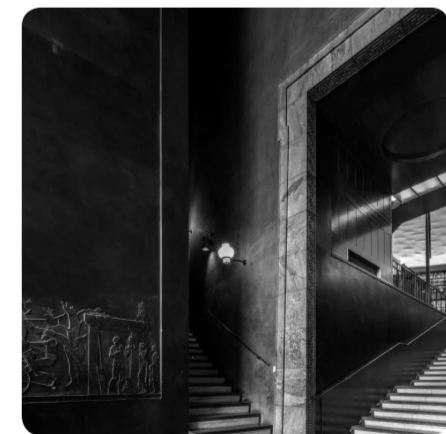
Figure 3.5 - The children's library

Figure 3.6 - Main vestibule

3.4

THE HISTORY
OF THE LIBRARY

The public library as we understand it today has a relatively short history compared to other public institutions. As a unique civic institution we can trace its origins to 18th century Europe where it flourished thanks to its nature as a built symbol of the ideals of the Enlightenment (Prizeman 2011). By comparison, the ancestor of this unique institution, the non-institutional library has a history stretching back to the genesis of civilisation. Originating from the ancient Mesopotamian store rooms used to house records of agricultural transactions inscribed on clay tablets, libraries existed across multiple civilisations throughout the ages although never as their own autonomous building type until the invention of the printing press (Campbell and Pryce 2013).
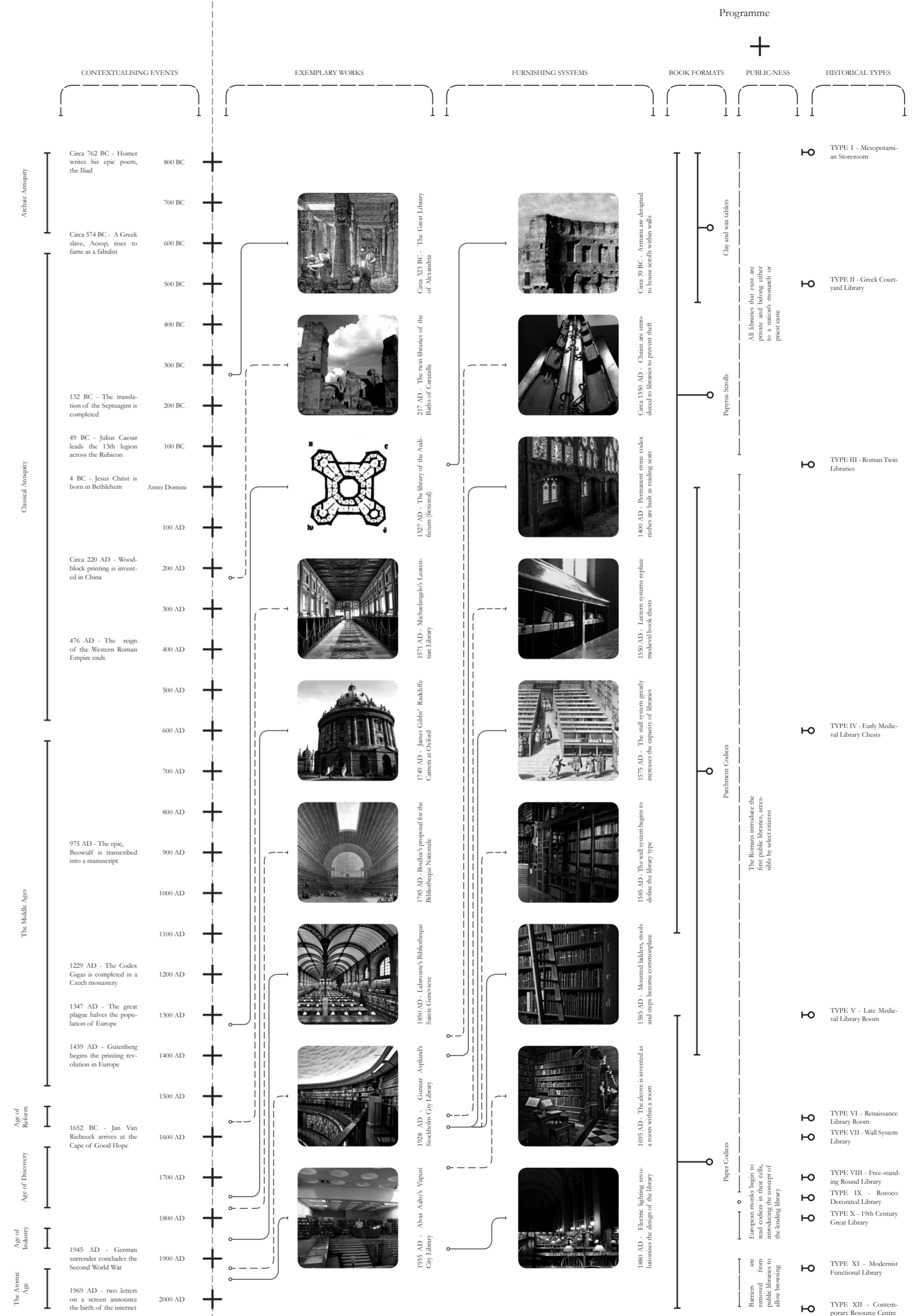
Due to the comparatively small collections housed in historical libraries, the library existed as a subsidiary function attached to palaces, religious complexes or museums occupying a single room as compared to an entire building (Brawne and Pehnt 1970). Its occupation of a single room established the ideal notion of the entire library contained within a single great hall as a means of facilitating lateral thinking and symbolising the totality of the knowledge it contains (Campbell and Pryce 2013:205). In addition to existing as a single room, the library was usually located on the first floor in the interest of reducing the risk of precious books suffering damage incurred by damp or flooding: a pragmatic decision that established the experiential norm of the library threshold existing as an ascension of stairs that connect the lower outer realm to a
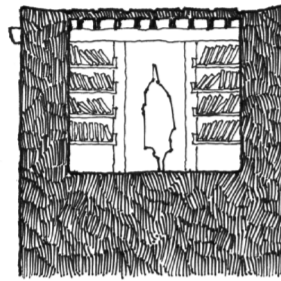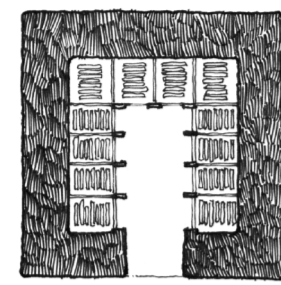
raised inner realm (Pickard 2002:3, Campbell and Pryce 2013:100). The dangers of damp and flooding were not the only threats that informed the design of libraries. Historically, the protection of books from harm was the key informant that defined the architectural expression of the library: threats of fire, theft, vermin and dust defined not only the rules and policies of libraries, but also informed material choice and detailing in their design as well as establishing the norm of the central placement of the librarian's desk for surveillance purposes (Campbell and Pryce 2013:29, Capillé 2018:418).

In addition to pragmatic concerns, symbolic aspirations have also informed the design of libraries throughout their history. Exaggerated height has always been an important spatial characteristic of libraries, used to achieve a sense of monumentality and isolate individuals as a means of improving concentration (Brawne and Pehnt 1970). The height of the book lined walls also established steps, ladders and galleries as unique furnishings that came to define the library (Campbell and Pryce 2013:25). Along with a monumentalised height, certain forms also characterised libraries, where the cube or rectangular prism was deemed appropriate for storage halls, the dome came to typify reading rooms. Of these two, the dome had particular symbolic significance for the library due to the fact that it vaguely resembles the form of the human cranium, meaning that it was used as a spatial reference to the human mind and all that is contained within (Pickard 2002:3). Finally, when collections grew large enough to warrant the design of separate build-

ings, early free-standing libraries took the form of pavilions in gardens, physically separated from surrounding buildings so that their elevations could be experienced in the round - this free-standing form was used to celebrate the autonomy and unique identity of the library (Pickard 2002:4).
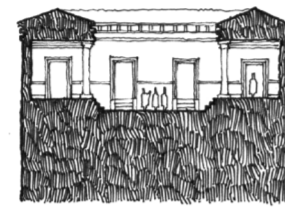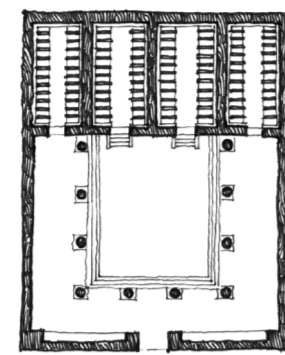
Figure 3.7 - Timeline of the library's development

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Figure 3.7 - Timeline of the library's development

CONTEXTUALISING EVENTS

- Circa 762 BC - Homer writes his epic poem, the Iliad — 800 BC
- 700 BC
- Circa 574 BC - A Greek slave, Aesop, rises to fame as a fabulist — 600 BC
- 500 BC
- 400 BC
- 300 BC
- 132 BC - The translation of the Septuagint is completed — 200 BC
- 49 BC - Julius Caesar leads the 13th legion across the Rubicon — 100 BC
- 4 BC - Jesus Christ is born in Bethlehem — Anno Domini
- 100 AD
- Circa 220 AD - Woodblock printing is invented in China — 200 AD
- 300 AD
- 476 AD - The reign of the Western Roman Empire ends — 400 AD
- 500 AD
- 600 AD
- 700 AD
- 800 AD
- 975 AD - The epic, Beowulf is transcribed into a manuscript — 900 AD
- 1000 AD
- 1100 AD
- 1229 AD - The Codex Gigas is completed in a Czech monastery — 1200 AD
- 1347 AD - The great plague halves the population of Europe — 1300 AD
- 1439 AD - Gutenberg begins the printing revolution in Europe — 1400 AD
- 1500 AD
- 1652 BC - Jan Van Riebeeck arrives at the Cape of Good Hope — 1600 AD
- 1700 AD
- 1800 AD
- 1945 AD - German surrender concludes the Second World War — 1900 AD
- 1969 AD - two letters on a screen announce the birth of the internet — 2000 AD

Side labels (eras): Archaic Antiquity, Classical Antiquity, The Middle Ages, Age of Reform, Age of Discovery, Age of Industry, The Atomic Age

EXEMPLARY WORKS

- Circa 323 BC - The Great Library of Alexandria
- 217 AD - The twin libraries of the Baths of Caracalla
- 1327 AD - The Library of the Aula Room (Rilievall)
- 1571 AD - Michelangelo's Laurentian Library
- 1749 AD - James Gibbs' Radcliffe Camera at Oxford
- 1785 AD - Boullée's proposal for the Bibliothèque Nationale
- 1850 AD - Labrouste's Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève
- 1928 AD - Gunnar Asplund's Stockholm City Library
- 1953 AD - Aalto's Viipuri City Library

FURNISHING SYSTEMS

- Circa 50 BC - Armaria are designed to house scrolls within walls
- Circa 1550 AD - Chains are introduced on libraries to prevent theft
- 1460 AD - Permanent stone codex niches are built as reading seats
- 1550 AD - Lectern system greatly increases medieval book chests
- 1585 AD - The wall system begins to define the library type
- 1575 AD - The wall system greatly increases the capacity of libraries
- 1565 AD - Mounted ladders, stools and steps become commonplace
- 1695 AD - The alcove is invented as a room within a room
- 1880 AD - Electric lighting revolutionises the design of the library

BOOK FORMATS

- Clay and wax tablets
- Papyrus Scrolls
- Parchment Codices
- Paper Codices

PUBLIC-NESS

- All libraries that exist are private and belong either to a nation's monarch or priest caste.
- The Romans introduce the first public libraries, accessible by select citizens.
- European monks begin to read codices in their cells, introducing the concept of the thinking library.
- Barriers are removed from public libraries to allow browsing.

HISTORICAL TYPES

- TYPE I - Mesopotamian Storeroom
- TYPE II - Greek Courtyard Library
- TYPE III - Roman Twin Libraries
- TYPE IV - Early Medieval Library Chests
- TYPE V - Late Medieval Library Room
- TYPE VI - Renaissance Library Room
- TYPE VII - Wall System Library
- TYPE VIII - Free-standing Round Library
- TYPE IX - Rococo Decorated Library
- TYPE X - 19th Century Great Library
- TYPE XI - Modernist Functional Library
- TYPE XII - Contemporary Resource Centre

TYPE I - Mesopotamian Storeroom
Origin - Circa 3400 - 3000 BC

Built to house records of agricultural transactions, The Mesopotamian library existed as a small windowless store where clay and wax tablets were stacked facing the user on wooden shelves that lined the walls.
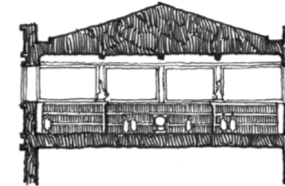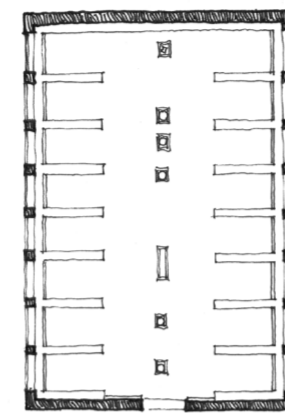

TYPE II - Greek Courtyard Library
Origin - Circa 500 BC

The Greek library consisted of a series of windowless storerooms and niche-lined corridors that were arranged around courtyards, where scrolls would be taken out from storage in order to be read and discussed in the sunlight.
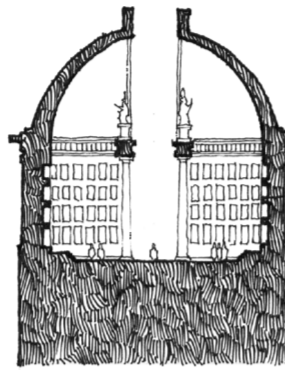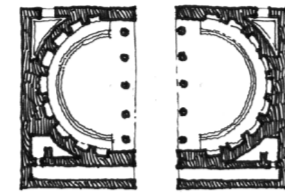
TYPE III - Roman Twin Libraries
Origin - Circa 39 BC

Usually found in pairs, one for Latin and one for Greek, Roman libraries were architecturally celebrated as grand spaces where storage was integrated into the structure in the form of timber lined armaria and raised stone platforms used for security and seating for listening to lectures.
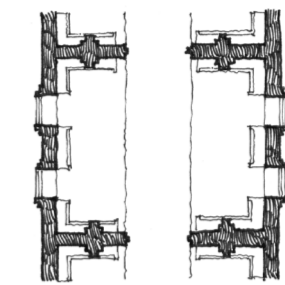

TYPE IV - Early Medieval Library Chests
Origin - Circa 600 AD

Due to the small size of collections, the library was for a long time a piece of furniture instead of a room, raised on legs to protect its contents from damp, the timber book chest provided a secure storage solution for a time when codices were incredibly valuable and highly coveted.
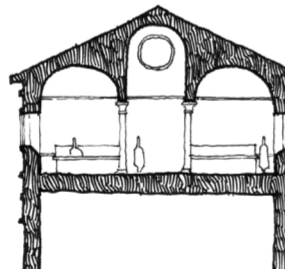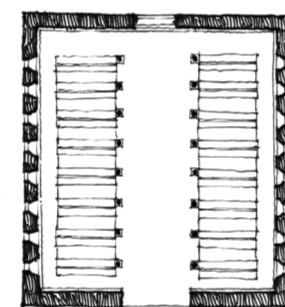
TYPE V - Late Medieval Library Room
Origin - Circa 1290 AD

Comprised of a central vaulted aisle lined with perpendicular lecterns and narrower outer aisles, in the late medieval library, codices were kept stationary and the reader would be lead to a codex to read it in place rather that have it brought to them to be read in a seat of their choice.
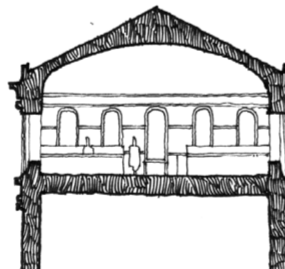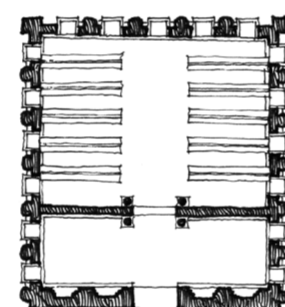
TYPE VI - Renaissance Library Room
Origin - Circa 1564 AD

Housed on the first floor to protect from damp, the Renaissance library was superficially similar to the late medieval type but only had a single vaulted aisle and was usually entered through a vestibule that extended its threshold and began to spatially separate it from the outside world.

TYPE VII - Wall System Library
Origin - Circa 1584 AD

Usually filled with both codices and museum artefacts, the wall system library was designed to make its shelving appear integrated into the walls of the room and visually separate the roof plane from the wall plane whilst using alcoves to subdivide large spaces into rooms within rooms.
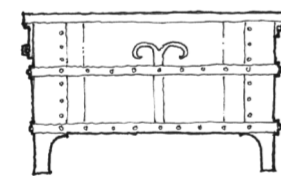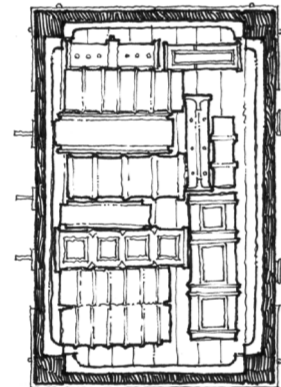

TYPE VIII - Free-standing Round Library
Origin - Circa 1710 AD

When collections grew large enough to warrant the design of the library as its own building instead of a room, this separation was architecturally celebrated in the form of free-standing cylindrical buildings, domed for height and placed in courtyards in order for them to be viewed in the round.
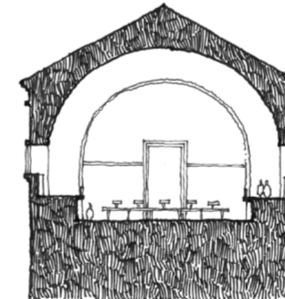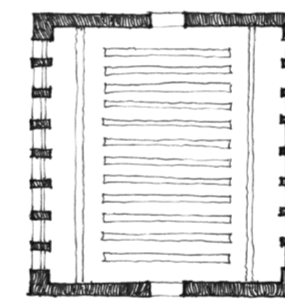

TYPE IX - Rococo Decorated Library
Origin - Circa 1728 AD

As the last libraries able to house their entire collections within a single space, Rococo libraries made use of intricate and symbolic decoration to convey narratives, where the architecture was intended to be read as one would read a codex.

TYPE X - 19th Century Great Library
Origin - 1785 AD

Characterised by huge windows, high volumes and an austere neoclassicism, libraries of the industrial age were great halls where codices lined the walls and reading desks filled the interior, timber furnishings were replaced by iron and gas lighting allowed for evening use.
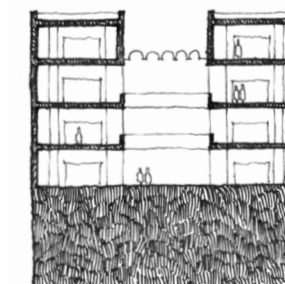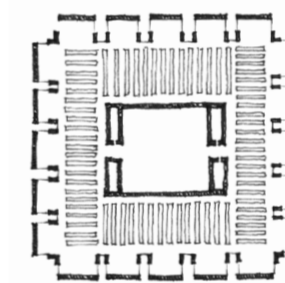
TYPE XI - Modernist Functional Library
Origin - 1960 AD

Driven by utilitarian concerns, the Modernist library was a free, adaptable space where furnishing was inconsequential to structure, roughly square in plan, codices were stored in the central deep spaces whilst reading spaces were arranged around the edges to utilise natural light.
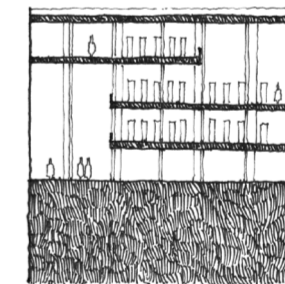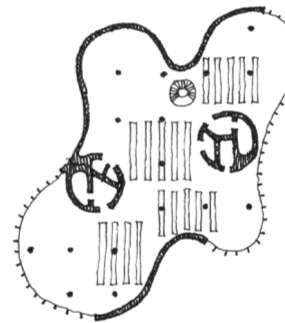
TYPE XII - Contemporary Resource Centre
Origin - Circa 1990 AD

Often wrapped in a facade that makes use of text as a decorative motif, the contemporary resource centre is closely related to its Modernist predecessor and also makes use of the system of central storage spaces surrounded by reading spaces but houses them behind a novel exterior form.

3.5

THE CONTEMPORARY LIBRARY

Rather than damage the relevance of the institution, the popularisation of the computer and the growth of the internet has not only increased the necessity of the existence of the physical public library, but has also served to update its contemporary civic role (Prizeman 2011). The internet has effectively absolved the library of its responsibility to collect, store and make accessible the entirety of human knowledge and in doing so has shifted the focus of the library towards facilitating the meaningful experience of accessing content (Capillé 2018:409). Where the internet exists as an infinite, amorphous, digital realm of uncontextualised information accessed by individuals through a screen, the physical library exists as a datum, offering structure, context and the possibility for (non-digital) social interaction (Bennett 2013:175).

The contemporary public library is a place of order in the chaos of a disembodied digital age. Compared to words that simply appear on a screen, the information within a library is classified, ordered according to a hierarchy and contextualised within the discourse of its intellectual neighbours on the surrounding shelves (Bennett 2013:175, Huff 2003:36). The library as a physical space structures how content is experienced, creating an environment of discovery, musing and inspiration (Bennett 2013:175, Aurand 2011:13). The accessible nature of the institution also defines it as a place of gathering, discussion and chance encounters, a place which creates opportunities for individual itineraries to overlap and for formal or informal congregation to occur (Brawne and Pehnt 1970).
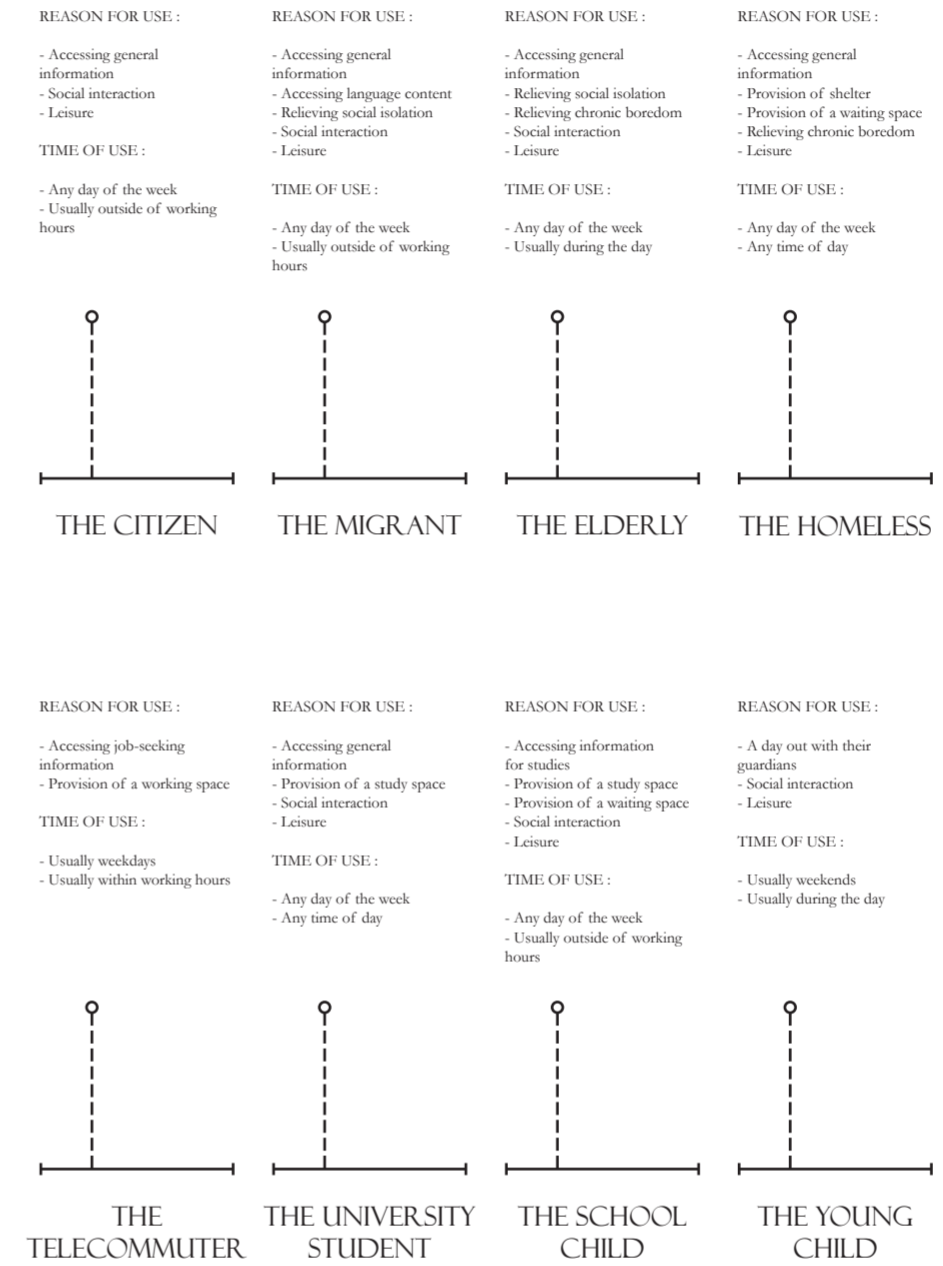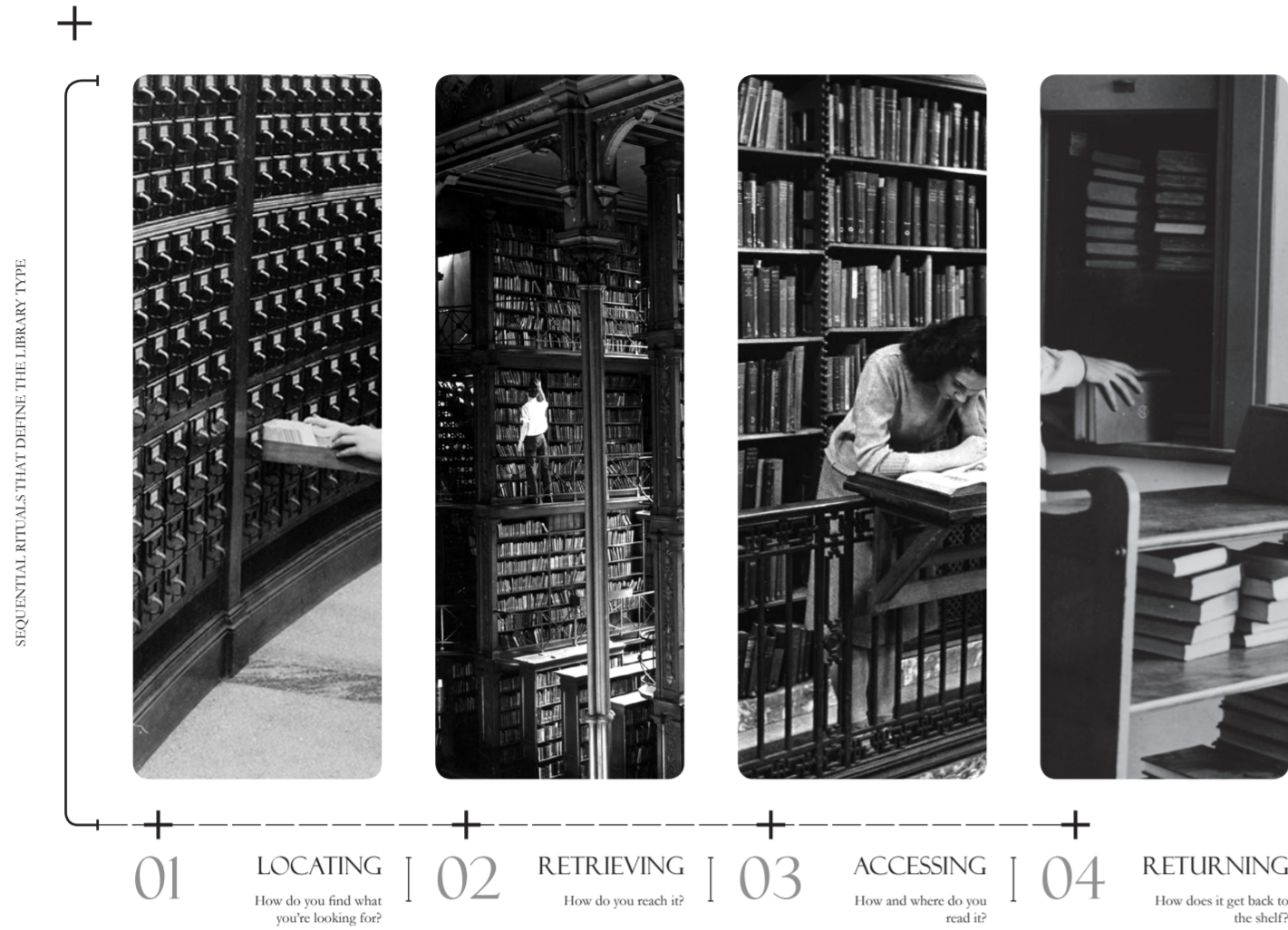
3.5.1 - THE CODEX

Physical codices necessitate a physical space within which to be stored and therefore demand that the library exist as an embodied and real space, meaning that the material nature of the codex is essential to maintaining the library's role as a fixed point of order and gathering in the face of the infinite and the unstructured (Bennett 2013:175). This nature of the public library as an enclosed physical space has ensured its relevance in the face of changing technologies but if it is to retain that relevance it cannot allow itself to be absorbed into the amorphous digital realm it provides respite from. Thus, the presence of physical codices offers a functional legibility and identity to the institution that defines its essential character and differentiates the library from the internet cafe or the airport lounge.

3.6

THE USER

Due to the fact that the public library is free to be used by anyone on the condition that they abide by its rules, this highly democratic institution serves a diverse range of individuals, each using the library at a different time for a different reason.

REASON FOR USE :

- Accessing general information
- Social interaction
- Leisure

TIME OF USE :

- Any day of the week
- Usually outside of working hours

THE CITIZEN

REASON FOR USE :

- Accessing general information
- Accessing language content
- Relieving social isolation
- Social interaction
- Leisure

TIME OF USE :

- Any day of the week
- Usually outside of working hours

THE MIGRANT

REASON FOR USE :

- Accessing general information
- Relieving social isolation
- Relieving chronic boredom
- Social interaction
- Leisure

TIME OF USE :

- Any day of the week
- Usually during the day

THE ELDERLY

REASON FOR USE :

- Accessing general information
- Provision of shelter
- Provision of a waiting space
- Relieving chronic boredom
- Leisure

TIME OF USE :

- Any day of the week
- Any time of day

THE HOMELESS

REASON FOR USE :

- Accessing job-seeking information
- Provision of a working space

TIME OF USE :

- Usually weekdays
- Usually within working hours

THE TELECOMMUTER

REASON FOR USE :

- Accessing general information
- Provision of a study space
- Social interaction
- Leisure

TIME OF USE :

- Any day of the week
- Any time of day

THE UNIVERSITY STUDENT

REASON FOR USE :

- Accessing information for studies
- Provision of a study space
- Provision of a waiting space
- Social interaction
- Leisure

TIME OF USE :

- Any day of the week
- Usually outside of working hours

THE SCHOOL CHILD

REASON FOR USE :

- A day out with their guardians
- Social interaction
- Leisure

TIME OF USE :

- Usually weekends
- Usually during the day

THE YOUNG CHILD

SEQUENTIAL RITUALS THAT DEFINE THE LIBRARY TYPE:

| 01 | LOCATING How do you find what you're looking for? | 02 | RETRIEVING How do you reach it? | 03 | ACCESSING How and where do you read it? | 04 | RETURNING How does it get back to the shelf? |

3.7

USING THE LIBRARY

Figure 3.8 - Rituals that define the library type

Figure 3.9 - Accommodation schedule

Public libraries usually serve multiple roles in their civic context, because of this they can be understood as having essential and ancillary functions. Essential functions refer to spaces and services that are necessary for the library to operate effectively whilst ancillary functions, if removed, their absence would not affect the library's day to day operation. In order to celebrate the autonomy and relevance of the institution, the number of ancillary functions included in this scheme was limited so as not to dilute the library's civic role and value. Regarding the library itself, four sequential rituals characterise the way that a public library is used. These rituals are namely (in order); locating the content, retrieving the content, accessing the content and returning the content. Depending on the type of library, these rituals will take place differently. For example, the act of returning content in a specialist library may take the form of the librarian carrying a single book back to its shelf or cabinet, whilst a large national or university library will require a far more involved logistical effort which may even necessitate complex book-moving machinery or off-site storage facilities. Informed by the differences in the way libraries are used and the importance of human experience in the context of this investigation, the community library was deemed to be the most appropriate library for this investigation into addressing institutional placelessness. The small size of the community library along with the generally unspecialised nature of its collections means that the library user will usually locate content by browsing its collections instead of via a remotely accessed catalogue. The necessity of browsing makes the majority of community library's spaces accessible for the user to explore and discover, increasing the potential for meaningful and rich spatial experiences to occur. The programme of the community library designed for this dissertation includes both essential and ancillary functions.

Essential functions

GENERAL COLLECTION	Book storage, 28 workstations, 13 reading seats and 10 laptop stations	615 m²
PERIODICAL COLLECTION	magazine and newspaper storage, 8 reading seats and 6 laptop stations	98 m²
REFERENCE COLLECTION	Book storage, 15 workstations and 9 reading seats	80 m²
CHILDREN'S COLLECTION	Book storage, 22 reading seats with additional beanbags	217 m²
CHILDREN'S LIBRARIAN'S OFFICE	Workstation and storage for 1 person with meeting desk	20 m²
CENTRAL FOYER	Circulation desk for 2 librarians, bag check in and exhibition space	139 m²
GROUP MEETING BOARDROOMS	5 x ten seater boardrooms and chair store	117 m² (22.5 m² each)
PRIVATE STUDY CELLS	6 x private workstations	48 m² (6 m² each)
STORE ROOMS	Children's games and chair store, deep storage and cleaner's store	60 m²
PUBLIC TOILETS	Female: 2 wc and 1 basin Male: 1 wc, 2 urinals and 1 basin	25 m²
STAFF LOUNGE AND KITCHEN	Lounge and kitchenette with basin	12.5 m²
REPAIR AND SORTING OFFICE	Workstation and storage for 3 people	12.5 m²
ADMINISTRATION OFFICE	Workstation and storage for 3 people	12.5 m²
HEAD LIBRARIAN'S OFFICE	Workstation and storage for 1 person	12.5 m²

Ancillary functions

AUDITORIUM	80 seater hall with covered outdoor spill-out space and bar	217 m²
EXHIBITION GALLERY	Sales counter and main gallery	98 m²
CAFE	Restaurant seating, kitchen, front desk, waiter's station, and back of house	117 m²
BUS STOPS	2 x Covered areas and 20 seats each	100 m² (50 m² each)
PICNIC AREA	Seating for 44 park users	136 m²
PARKING FACILITIES	Streetside parking for 32 cars	430 m²