Online Articles

The student architect and the university library

Carnegie Mellon is home to one of the country's finest Schools of Architecture, and I have truly enjoyed opportunities to interact with Faculty and students. It is wonderful to learn more about their understanding of the library as place, and to be inspired by their understanding of design both as users and practitioners.

In the past two weeks, I have had opportunities to engage with student groups in some detail, and I wanted to share some of the insights I gathered. The first interaction was a panel discussion with the entire first year class. I was joined on the panel by my wonderful architecture librarian, Martin Aurand, and by the class professor, Kai Gutschow, who, coincidentally, chairs CMU's Faculty Senate Library Advisory Committee.

These students had already completed a library study: each had been assigned a library which they were to examine in detail, identifying existing analysis work including detailed plans and building sections, design process sketches, structural diagrams and drawings, and other drawings that reveal space & structure. They were expected to read a number of articles, including a couple of my own, visit libraries, and prepare a poster summarizing their work. The case study libraries were drawn from around the world, representing both old and new buildings, and academic, public, and national libraries.

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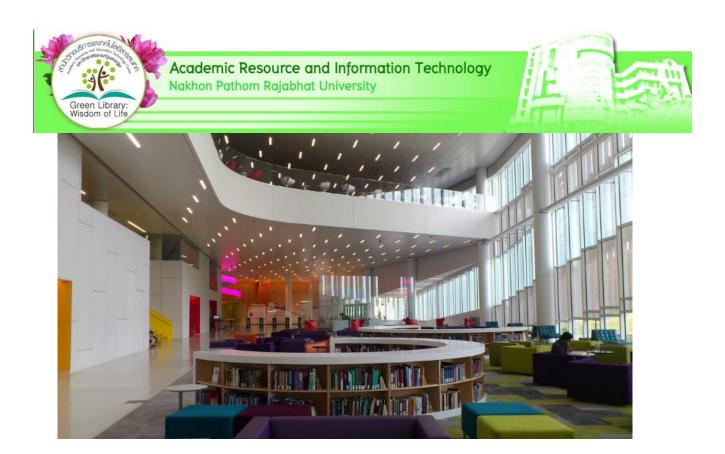
HUNT LIBRARY, CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

Our discussion was intended to launch the second phase of the coursework - each student was to design a small addition, insertion or installation for the Hunt Library. [I should point out that there are at least two Hunt Libraries - the 1960s building at Carnegie Mellon and the 2010s facility at North Carolina State University. The students were, as you might expect, looking at the Pittsburgh version. I suspect they would have much rather been in the wonderful NCSU site.]

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HUNT LIBRARY, NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY, IMAGE CREDIT: PAYTON CHUNG HTTPS://WWW.FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/PAYTONC/8758631495/

The conversation was stimulating and wide-ranging. Their earlier engagement with library architecture revealed a deep understanding of the evolution of libraries in the 20th and early 21st centuries, and our conversation helped to fill in some of the gaps. What are the trends in the use of books and journals? Why are some European library collections predominantly closed access? What impact does climate have in the inside/outside flow of the building?

I've had the privilege of working with extraordinary architects and in many marvelous buildings over the years, I have conducted many studies on students and their use of library space, and their 'dream' spaces for different types of learning activity. One student asked me to distill that experience into a piece of advice. I encouraged them to visit as many different libraries as possible, but to recognize that whilst you can be inspired by any design, you cannot

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simply lift it form one campus and recreate it on another site. Each library has to be part of its community, and must reflect the needs of the campus, and of its disciplinary strengths.

I was struck by the deep affiliation these students have with books. Martin explained that many new architecture books only appear in print, but their passion for the printed word went far deeper. I can sense a study next semester of student interaction with printed books!

I look forward to seeing the outcome of their work, and will report back.

Yesterday, I attended a discussion with two final year students, Joel McCullough and Jose Periterra, with whom I spent time earlier in the year. The scope of their work was much more ambitious - to design a completely new learning commons. Their chosen site on campus would involve demolition of the little loved building that houses the university administration (but presumably not the administrators). Their site would truly position the library at the heart of campus, and at a visible point on the innovation corridor that runs through this part of Pittsburgh, connecting Silicon Valley with New York City. Their design involved housing the collections underground in a robotic store, like the one found in the *other* Hunt Library, visible through a glass floor. That does provoke a question - how to provide for serendipity in a facility like this? Can we recreate the browsing experience online? What triggers someone to pull an item off the open shelf?

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JOEL McCULLOUGH · JOSE PERTIERRA

The Learning Commons

TRADITIONALLY, THE LIBRARY WAS A SPACE IN WHICH LARGE QUANTITIES OF KNOWLEDGE WERE ARCHIVED. IN ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS, PUBLISHED RECORDS WERE OF PARTICULAR VALUE DUE TO THEIR ORIGINALITY. WITH THE INVENTION OF THE PRINTING PRESS, THE MASS PRODUCTION OF PRINTED DOCUMENTS ENABLED THE UNRESTRICTED DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE. THIS TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCE, AND THE EXPANDING LITERACY, MARKED THE BIRTH OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY. INFORMATION WAS NO LONGER SOLELY COLLECTED BUT CURATED AND SPREAD. LIBRARIES TODAY ACCOMMODATE INFORMATION NO LONGER BOUND TO PRINT, WHICH CHALLENGES THE BUILDING TYPOLOGY TO EMBRACE NEW FORMS OF MASS COMMUNICATION. KNOWLEDGE NOW EXISTS IN AN OPEN SOURCE EXCHANGE ENVIRONMENT SERVING AN INCREASINGLY DIVERSE AUDIENCE. AS A RESULT, ARCHITECTS MUST REENVISION THE LIBRARY AS A PLACE THAT TRANSCENDS INFORMATION STORAGE AND ADDRESSES THE PROCESS OF LEARNING.

The project required that the building respond to one of the challenges I gave the students: in a finite space, how do we respond to the tidal wave of the semester? In the first few weeks, students look for guidance from us, demanding accommodation for a more visible staff presence. As the semester progresses, students then need space for groupwork, makerspaces, and facilities for reflection and study. Towards the end of semester, the focus turns to exams and the demand is for an abundance of quiet study space. The students worked wonders, providing a range of spaces that could be created, broken down, reconfigured, and re-established.

They also sought to address once of the concerns about makerspaces in libraries: are these, essentially, places for tinkering, with little relevant or useful output. The location for this study is adjacent to the university gallery, home at present <u>to this student project, along with the work of their fellow graduates</u>. But rather than have the buildings sit beside each other, they boldly built a connecting bridge, from an exhibition floor directly into the makerspace. For the past day I have been thinking about, and excitely sharing with anyone who would listen, the possibilities this co-location can bring.

Libraries have long been about knowledge creation - conventionally through the medium of the written word. As digital media and technologies offer new forms of expression, surely we have a duty not only to foster that possibility, but also to ensure that an audience can explore and interact with what emerges.

What would your students tell you about their desired library environment?

From : http://www.libraryofthefuture.org/blog/2015/4/24/when-your-students-are-nascent-architects

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