The Architecture of the Illusive Distance

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3

The Logic of Encampment

THE LIBRARY

 "There is a small painting by Antonello da Messina which," Michael Brawne in introduction to *Libraries, Architecture and Equipment*, tells us: "shows St. Jerome in his study; the Saint is sitting in an armchair in front of a sloping desk surrounded on two sides by book shelves" (9). The desk and the shelves are part of a wooden structure raised three steps off the floor of a vaulted Gothic hall that overlooks an anonymous Italian landscape of hills and buildings (Figure 3.1). In this picture, the author writes, "we have an accurate and brilliant portrayal of the characteristics most needed if there is to be a successful communication between the accumulated store of knowledge and the reader" (9). Here, condensed into a single picture, we have a summation of "the problems and the solutions" that are unique to the library as a building type (9).

A primary purpose of the library is, Brawne contends, "to aid the communication between the book and its reader," that is, to give the reader access to the accumulated store of knowledge, expressed in written form, placed within the protective cover of the book, held well within the bounds of the library (*Libraries, Architecture and Equipment* 9). To create a library, Brawne argues, it is necessary to manipulate, as the painter has done, "the furniture, enclosure, space, light, and outlook," to create "an individual and particular space delineated and in some measure separated from the greater space beyond" (9). A successful library allows the reader to make not only "a place for himself," but at the same time "detach himself," as Saint Jerome has done, from an inhospitable ground that is in turn clearly delineated and separated from the greater landscape in the background.

This prerequisite detachment, it is important to note, is augmented in this picture by a heightened sense of transition from the anonymous landscape in the background, past a set of doors whose absence from the picture heightens both the perception of separation and processional transition, through a vaulted arcade to the right, up a flight of steps, from a patterned mosaic floor onto a plain wooden

Fig. 3.1   Antonello da Messina, *St Jerome in his Study,* 46 x 36 cm, oil on panel, c.1460, National Gallery, London *Image* source: Art Resource, NY

platform, into an enclosing chair, within reach of the books, kept well within the delineated boundaries of this individual and particular space, on shelves.

Therefore, what is required of a library, the constitutional formal gesture, as well as the primary condition of the library's success is, as the author aptly points out, a clear processional organization and transition to "an individual and particular space" delineated and detached from its place, in that perspicuous manner center stands detached from the periphery, foreground from the background, inside from outside, wood from stone, open from closed, light from dark, upper from lower, and so on.

The library, we may conclude from this account, is analogous to a protective frame that one must traverse from its fortified outer edges through the sanctified inner borders that define and protect "an individual and particular space." What is

framed, the object of this ritual frame-up, it is important to keep in mind, is the book or rather what the book itself keeps well within its own protective frame: Writing. The difference between the library and the book is, in a manner, none. One repeats the other as a delineated and detached space keeping the written word in place.

Why, one might ask, should these particular, if not peculiar, processional and formal characteristics be required of a building whose primary purpose is to hold books? Why must this elaborate ritual of detachment and separation be put in place "to aid the communication between the book and its reader?"

We find a potential answer in Ruskin's discussion of ornamentation in the *Seven Lamps of Architecture*. In an attempt to distinguish between proper and improper ornamentation for architecture, Ruskin argues that there are certain "false forms of decoration which are most dangerous in our modern architecture as being legal and accepted" (112). He feels compelled to warn against these dangerous and false forms of decoration "rather for the barren satisfaction of bearing witness against them, than with hope of inducing any serious convictions to their prejudice" (112). One such hopelessly dangerous form of decoration is the motto. Ruskin writes:

> If any one part of heraldic decoration be worse than another, it is the motto; since, of all things unlike nature, the forms of letters are, perhaps, the most so. … All letters are, therefore, to be considered as frightful things, and to be endured only upon occasion; that is to say, in places where the sense of the inscription is of more importance than external ornament. Inscriptions in churches, in rooms, and on pictures, are often desirable, but they are not to be considered as architectural or pictorial ornaments: they are on the contrary, obstinate offenses to the eye, not to be suffered except when their intellectual office introduces them. Place them, therefore, where they will be read, and there only; and let them be plainly written, and not turned upside down, nor wrong end first. It is an ill sacrifice to beauty to make that illegible whose only merit is in its sense. (106–7)

As frightful as letters may appear to Ruskin, he can suffer their presence, for the sake of their sense, so long as they are *placed* and in that place, bereft of any aesthetic appeal, they are clearly seen as obstinate offenses to the eye, introduced solely for the sake of their sense. Letters become frightful and dangerous, on the other hand, when they are not in place, that is, in a place where the sense of the inscription is of greater importance than external ornament. When the material form of the inscription is allowed to assume any role other than the transparent conveyer of sense, when with a "dash" or a "tail," turned "upside down or wrong end first," the inscription is allowed to assume a decorative role, it becomes at once frightful and dangerous (*Seven Lamps* 107). This danger against which Ruskin so emphatically warns is, of course, the danger of losing the primacy of the sense or the signified to the form of the signifier. It is the danger of becoming conscious of the materiality of the signifier and of reading the form and not the sense. The danger is the letter not standing apart and being transparent and subservient to its sense, but assuming aesthetic appeal and merging with its background as a form of decoration at the expense of its sense.

To obviate this frightful danger, Ruskin asks us to always place writing in a place where, plainly written, it "will be read, and there only." This singular place, Ruskin tells us, is not on a "scroll" or a "riband," but "a tablet or book, or plain roll of paper" (*Seven Lamps* 108). The difference between an "honest and rational" tablet or book or plain roll of paper and "the riband, or the flying scroll" is that neither of the former three is "considered as an ornament, and the riband, or flying scroll is" (108). Whereas "the tablet, as in Albert Durer's Adam and Eve, is introduced for the sake of the writing, understood and allowed as an ugly but necessary interruption," the riband, or the flying scroll is not an interruption, but a form of decoration that readily merges into its background (Figure 3.2).

What Ruskin hopes to prevent by the placement of the inscription on a tablet or a book is the loss of its detachment from its ground or background. The proper

Fig. 3.2   Albrecht Dürer, *Adam and Eve*, 24.7 x 19.1 cm, engraving on laid paper, 1504, The Metropolitan Museum of Art *Image* source: Art Resource, NY

place for writing is a place marked by an "interruption"—in Michael Brawne's term, "an individual and particular space delineated and in some measure separated from the greater space beyond." So long as inscription is placed where its "only merit is in its sense," so long as we do not focus on its materiality or see any merit in it other than its sense, so long as it is placed on a ground that Ruskin can readily detach from the background, it can remain. When it is not part of the architecture, when it clearly appears as an "interruption" and an addition, the inscription is acceptable. Else, it is a frightful and dangerous form, in the least, to those particularly concerned with the aesthetic performance of forms, for example, Ruskin.

Why writing should be a frightful and dangerous form outside its particular place is a question that we shall have to address later. For now we should note that although Messina's picture was not construed in response to Ruskin's demand, the inward layering of space, leading to a well delineated and detached center where the book is safely kept in place, clearly meets it. Michael Brawne's emphasis on delineation and separation as the inaugural formal gestures in every successful library does as well. This is in part because the same logic is at work in each of these formulations, as well as in the formation of the library as a building-type. This logic is what I propose to call the logic of encampment, whose manifestations can be as diverse as the Medieval book-press and the modern stack-system library.

By the logic of encampment, going back to the military root of the word camp and campus, I mean the demarcation of a place on a ground that defies a sense of place. I mean the imposition of a protective boundary—literal or conceptual—on an otherwise undifferentiated ground with the intent to put in place of this non-place, a confined, ordered, and controlled interiority as distinguished and opposed to what lies beyond the demarcated boundary. Crucial to this placement is a heightened sense of transition from the exterior to the interior and a clear perception of confinement, order, and control within, that is, the two processional and spatial characteristics of the library as a type aforementioned.

The Medieval book-cupboard or press is a simple, though not a simplistic, example of the logic of encampment at work in the formation of the library as a type. Here the book, as we know it, is not given to any place, but confined to a well delineated, separated, and defined place. Transition and access to this particular place are subject to a simple, though effective ritual of retrieval and return—of locks and doors that need be opened and closed. In its press, writing is given to be endured only on occasions of reaching its sense or endowing it with sense, as in the case of Ezra, the inscriber of law, depicted in the frontispiece to the Codex Amiatinus, dating back to the sixth century A.D. (Figure 3.3). Else, writing remains in place, hidden from the gaze that may otherwise be subject to, insofar as Ruskin is concerned, its fright and danger.

The practice of keeping books in locked cupboards or presses was to continue, as evidenced by Domenico Fontana's Vatican Library, well into the sixteenth century, and to an extent, beyond (Figure 3.4). The bookshelf, as we know it, is, in a manner, an extension of the logic that informs the Medieval book-press. It too is a delineated and defined place which, though open to the gaze, nevertheless, retains the book in place, by affording it a particular place.

Fig. 3.3   Ezra writing the law, Frontispiece to the codex Amiatinus, 35 x 25 cm, parchment, sixth century, Laurentian Library, Florence
Photo Credit: Scala/ Art Resource, NY

CODICIBVS SACRIS HOSTILI CLADE PERVSTIS
ESDRA DŌ FERVENS HOC REPARAVIT OPVS

In the above example as well as in the following genealogical overview of the library as a type, my intent is not to diminish the value of shelter and protection that are clearly the overt reasons for the formation of the library as a type, but to focus on the consequences of each particular solution adopted to shelter and protect, as well as, in Michael Brawne's words, "to aid the communication between the reader and the book." I am, in other words, concerned with the surplus value of the shelter and the protection afforded to the book, with the communication between the reader and the book in mind.

The post-Medieval chained book, lectern and later stall-system library is a literal, if not an exaggerated example, of the logic of encampment at work in the formation of the library as a type. In this particular example, best represented by Leiden University Library (Lieden, sixteenth century) and Michelangelo's Laurentian Library (Florence, 1523–71), the shell of the Medieval book-press assumes human proportion, as the shelves of the old press take on the form of lecterns arranged in rows on two sides of a central aisle (Figure 3.5). The books are no longer locked away, but being exposed to the gaze, they are now chained in place, less, it appears, they venture out of their new delineated and detached place (Figure 3.8).

Should these chains appear to be a simple safeguard against theft, reflecting the high material value of the book at the time, it is important to keep in mind that this admittedly cumbersome and to an extent self-defeating practice continued well into the eighteenth century (Figure 3.6).[1] This is nearly 300 years after the invention of the printing press that radically diminished the material value of the book. The perceived value of the chain, in other words, may well have exceeded the protection it afforded the book against theft. The chain not only kept the book in place, but it also literally tied the book to its new, though equally "delineated" and "particular" place.

As the shell of the Medieval book-press assume human proportion in the post-Medieval library, the doors and the locks of the old press also assume a new spatial dimension. They give way to a new heightened sense of procession and transition to the world of books. A telling example is the Ricetto of the Laurentian Library (Figure 3.7). The sole purpose of this tense and complex space is to detach the *particular* place of the books behind from its greater monastic context.

Entering below what appears to be the floor line, articulated by string courses and recessed columns, one is confronted with a monumental staircase whose highly articulated form offers as much resistance to transition as it gives access to the reading room from which it cascades down into the vestibule. The drama of delineation, separation, and processional transition can hardly be given to greater exaggeration, and for that matter greater economy of space and form, than it is here. The processional experience from the monastic context to the

Fig. 3.4   Domenico Fontana, *The Sistine Hall of the Vatican Library*, Vatican, sixteenth century *Photo* Credit: Left to Right (3.4.a) Michal Osmenda, (3.4.b) John Willis Clark

Fig. 3.5   Paul Lacroix, *Library of the University of Leyden*, engraving, London, 1870 *Photo* Credit: HIP/ Art Resource, NY

reading room is analogous to an apprehensive leap over a void separating two mutually exclusive worlds. One enters this tense and contradictory space only to depart without ever having had a chance to occupy it. [2] The staircase that leads to the upper level also leads out of the vestibule to a space that cannot be any different in articulation. Here, in the resting place of the book—having had to earn the privilege of access—order and clarity prevail in glaring contrast to the slithery vestibule behind (Figure 3.8). As opposed to the preceding contradictory movements of the receding columns and the projecting aediculea, in competition with the overlapping upper thrust of the vestibule and the lateral movement of the staircase, here all is resolved and in place, well within a highly articulated frame. As compared to Michelangelo's library, Messina's delineation and articulation of Saint Jerome's reading room may well appear subdued, if not anticlimactic. Both are, however, equally effective.

The heightened sense of transition to the world of books, with an emphasis on a clear perceptual and experiential separation, in place of the literal separation of the Medieval press, was to remain a requisite part of the library as a type in each of its future modifications.[3] The bureaucratic and technological apparatus overseeing access to the stacks of the modern library is, in a manner, a modern supplement to this experiential separation.

In the next phase of its development, the reading room of the post-Medieval library became the subject of greater subdivision as the lecterns of the early phase were replaced by book-stalls (Figure 3.9). Adding another layer of definition, delineation, and separation to the existing layers, the greater interior space of the reading room was divided into smaller, more individualized spaces. The reader is now literally surrounded by walls of books, often in close, if not overwhelming proximity. The books, still in chains, are now not only in place, but they also
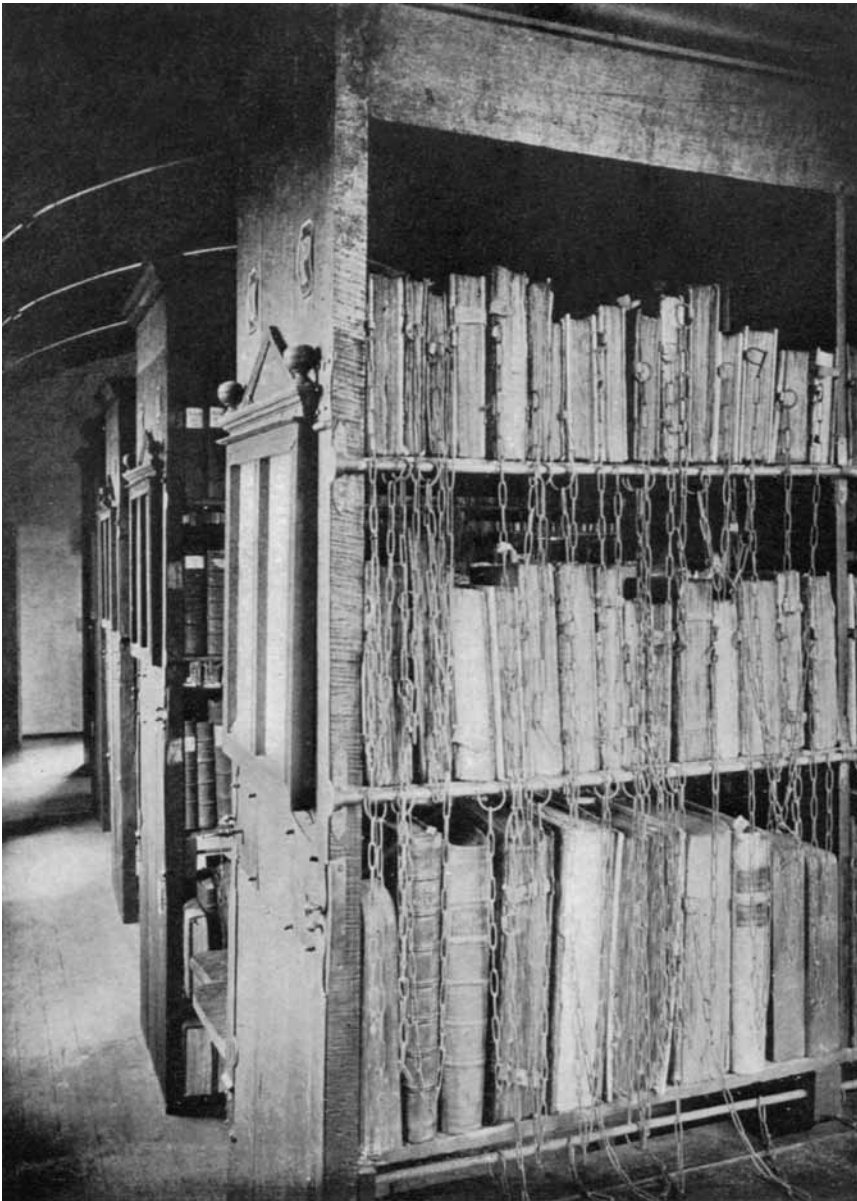
constitute the boundaries that define their individualized and particular place. We have here, in a manner, a cross between Messina's reading room and Michelangelo's library, all with the greater good of communication between the reader and the book in mind.

Although from the stall-system to the "Saal-System" libraries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with their impregnated walls of books en masse, we witness at once a simple extension and a major transformation of the post-Medieval book-stall library, the informing logic remains fundamentally the same. In the "Saal-System" library, the books, withdrawn from the middle to the inner edges of the reading

Fig. 3.7
Michelangelo,
*The Ricetto of the
Laurentian Library*,
Florence, 1523–71
Photo Credit:
Alinari/Art
Resource, NY

room, and in the process having shed the chains that literally tied them to their place in the previous example, become an integral part of the frame that delineates and defines their place (Figure 3.10). The chains are, to an extent, no longer necessary, as the books are now well entombed within their own protective boundary and subject, not individually but collectively, to the gaze of the spectator.

In this "superb amphitheater" of books, as Boullée referred to his own proposal for a library, the book is as much the subject of spatial manipulation as the reader (105). Whereas the focus of the Medieval and the post-Medieval libraries was on the book, in the "Saal-system" library, the books assume the position of the spectator

Fig. 3.8
Michelangelo, *The Laurentian Library*, Florence, 1523–71
Photo Credit: top—Scala/Art Resource, NY, bottom—John Willis Clark
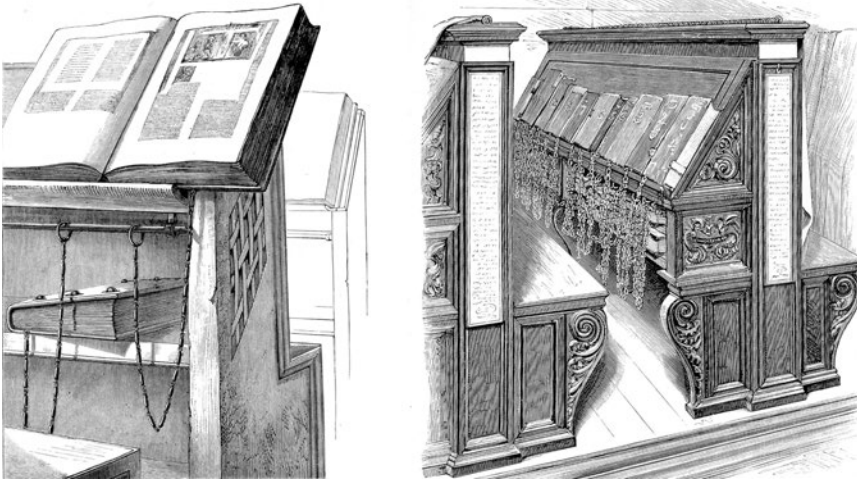
and the reader is left to assume the role of an actor who, at the open expanse of the center stage of this "superb amphitheater," is given to the performance of reading, in place (Figure 3.11).

As opposed to the Medieval book-press that hid the book from the gaze and the post-Medieval library that exposed it, chained in place, the "Saal-system" library celebrates and opens the materiality of the book to public spectacle as a sublime self-enclosing frame. Superimposing the logic of sublimity on the logic of encampment, the "Saal-system" library sacrifices the individuality of the book to

Fig. 3.9
Christopher Wren,
*Trinity College
library*, Cambridge,
c. 1870, album
of 58 Cambridge
University
photographs,
New Boston Fine
and Rare Books

the sublimity of a collective expression. The sheer number of books amassed at the self-enclosing inner edges of the new library present the viewer with an image that is at once impenetrable and incomprehensible, less one withdraws from the edge to the center stage, where the ritual of reading is given to performance.

If the chains of the old library are superfluous to the new, this may be in part because, what is now held inescapably in place within the renewed bounds of the library is, with greater economy, the *identity* of the book, as opposed to its individual expressions. Along with the chains of the old library, what has also disappeared from the new is any literal or presumed line separating the book from the library. As an integral part of the frame that delineates and defines its *particular* place, the book, whose identity is now indiscernible from the library's, no longer requires a chain, in part because it is now chained to itself.

A telling, though late example, of the "Saal" or "wall-system" library is Henri Labrouste's Bibliothèque Ste.-Geneviève (Paris, 1842–50). Consciously modeled after a book, the building presents itself to the viewer from the outside as a freestanding, inwardly layered, masonry shell that wraps around a well delineated interior space (Figure 3.12). The content of this space, like a book, is announced on the cover. The title of this edificial book is inscribed on a series of panels bearing the names of the authors whose books are kept safe within the masonry cover. The placement of these panels within the arcade of the upper level is reminiscent of the flank of Alberti's Tempio Malatestiano (Rimini c.1450), where the sarcophagi of

Fig. 3.10   Lelio Buzzi, *Biblioteca Ambrosiana*, Milan, 1603–9 *Photo* Credit: John Willis Clark
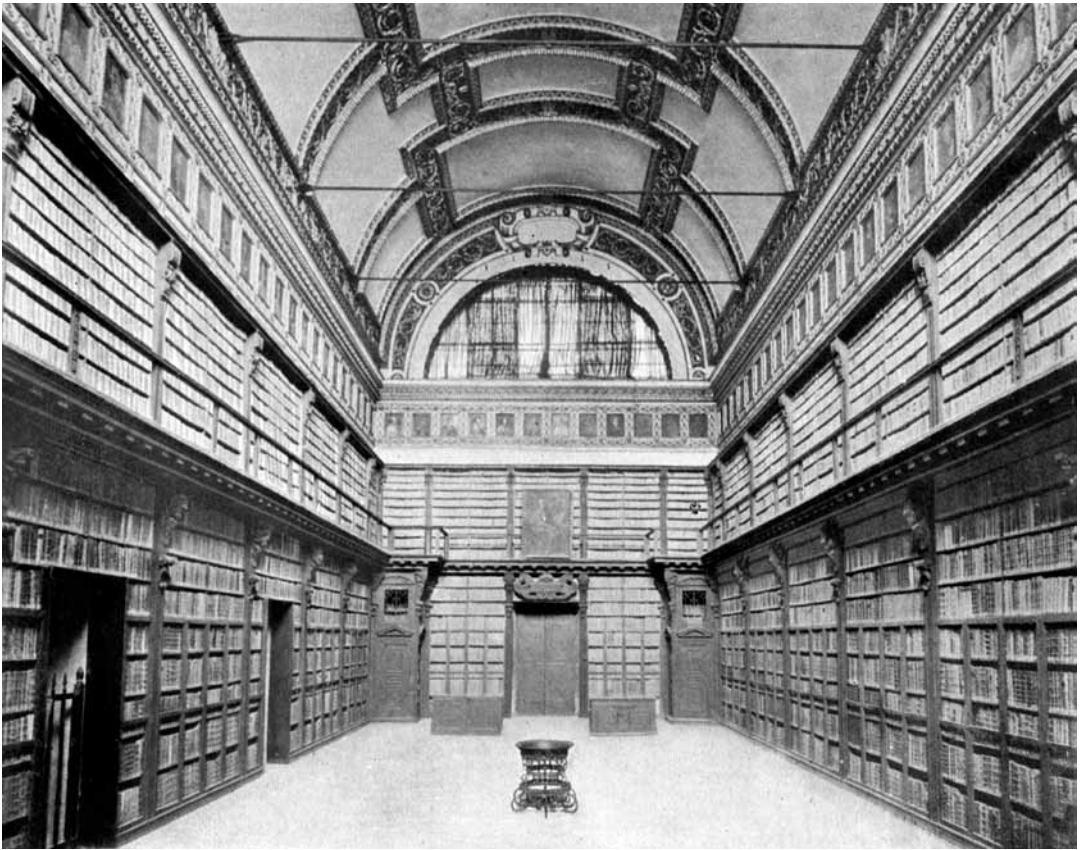
Malatesta's courtiers are held within a similar arch on pier structure. The reference here is not accidental. As we shall see later, the themes of writing and death are intimately connected.

Labrouste had initially intended "a large space planted with big trees and decorated with statues were laid out in front of the building to shield it from the noise of the street outside and prepare those who come there for meditation" (Van Zanten 238).[4] Had it been implemented, it would have added greater intensity to the separation and the transition to the building's interior. Nevertheless, the processional arrangement of the building's interior more than compensates for the garden's absence. Past the masonry frame of the building, the ritual procession to the world of books in this particular expression of the logic of encampment takes the form of a relatively dark corridor that takes the participant, from the front entry, through the entire width of the building, before leading up to a vestibule filled with light and a characteristic monumental staircase (Figure 3.13). This processional arrangement, though not as dramatic as Michelangelo's, is equally effective in divorcing the participant from the world behind, before leading the participant up and around, through another set of doors, into the reading room on the second level. The processional move up into the place of writing is a gesture of delineation for which precedent is found not only in Messina's picture or Michelangelo's library,
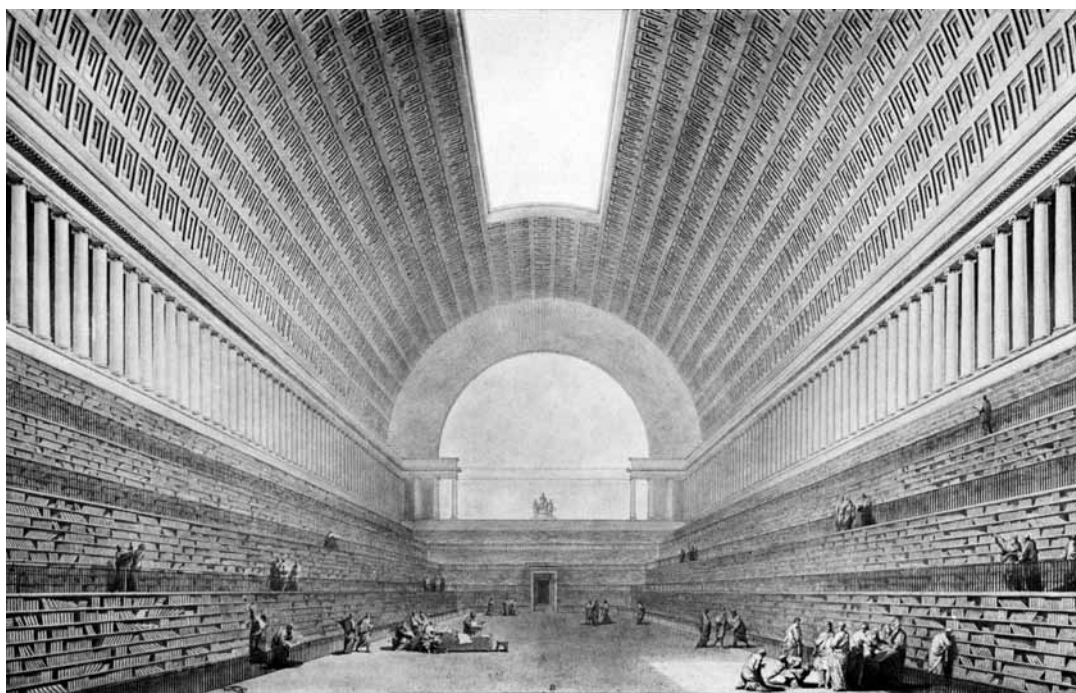
Fig. 3.11   Étienne-Louis Boullée, *Bibliothèque Nationale*, 1785, Bibliothèque nationale de France

but in numerous other examples as well. In effect, the stairs detach the place of the book from the ground, as the corridor, in this instance, divorces it from the greater space in the background. This double gesture of exclusion displaces and then re-places the participant in the delineated and detached place of writing.

Entering the reading room, past the watchful gaze of the librarian at the circulation desk, that is, the gaze of the guardians of the gate to the place of writing, or the nineteenth century equivalent of the key to the Medieval press, one is surrounded, at the center stage of this superb amphitheater, with rows upon rows of books on shelves, whose outward layering from the first through the massive piers of the second level is counteracted by the light penetrating through the shell from above and an unseen beyond, in anticipation, one may venture to guess, the sense awaiting its return to light, pending the performance of reading at the center stage of this well delineated and sealed space. The books here form a sublime cover to the light that readily gives one the assurance of a greater presence beyond the solid materiality of books en masse. In this place, where any presumed line between aiding and dictating communication between the reader and the book becomes at best thin, Ruskin, I presume, would have no difficulty seeing that the only merit of this frightful mass is in the sense it hides behind its cover, pending the ritual performance of the act of reading.

As reinforcement and a variation to the above theme, the circulation desk was to find its way from the gates, now de-emphasized, to the center of the reading room. This is best seen in Sydney Smirke's radial reading room of the British Museum (London, 1854–6). The entombment of the book at the edge is now subject to the
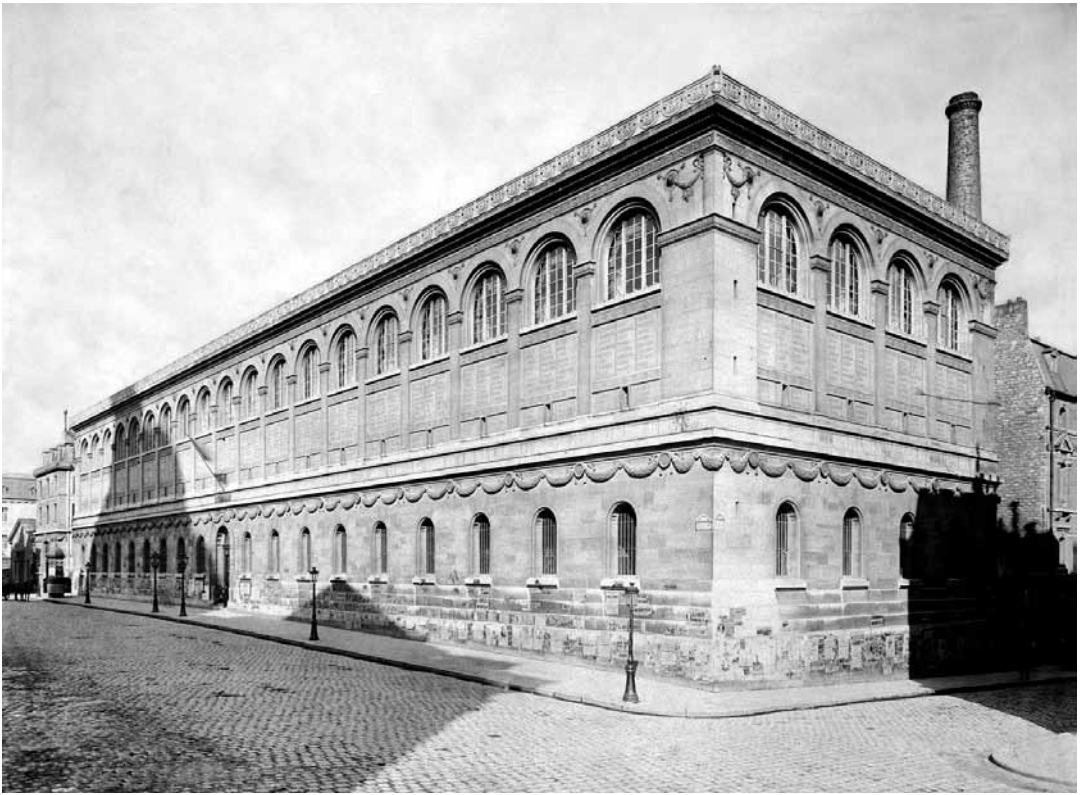
watchful gaze of its guardian, placed at a center to which it must return and from which it radiates back to its resting place at the boundary (Figure 3.14).

The modern stack-system library is both an extension of the "Wall-system" library and a reversion to the lectern and stall-system libraries. It assumes and further delineates the three operational parts of the "Wall-system" library: the circulation space, the reading space, and the stack space. However, as yet another manifestation of the logic of encampment, the modern Stack-system library achieves its predecessor's end, not by integrating the books within its protective frame, but by separating and enveloping itself around the books, in a manner reminiscent of the post-Medieval library, with its clear divorce between the books and the library's enveloping frame.

Although the reading room retains its central position in most early examples of the type, for example, Asplund's Public Library (Stockholm, 1920–8) and Alto's Municipal Library (Viipuri, 1930–5), in most later examples, including most modern university libraries, the reading space and the resting place of the books exchange position. In a variation on the theme of center and edge that are the building blocks of a well delineated and detached *place*, the books move away from the edge to the center stage of the old amphitheater, now multiplied and stacked one on top of the other. The outer edges are, in turn, given to fragmented and individualized reading spaces or carrels that together form a chain around the new resting place

Fig. 3.13   Henri Labrouste, Interior of Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, 1855–96
Photo Credit: Clockwise from top 3.13a—Stéphanie Benjamin, 3.13b—Marie-Lan Nguyen, 3.13c—Jason Whittaker
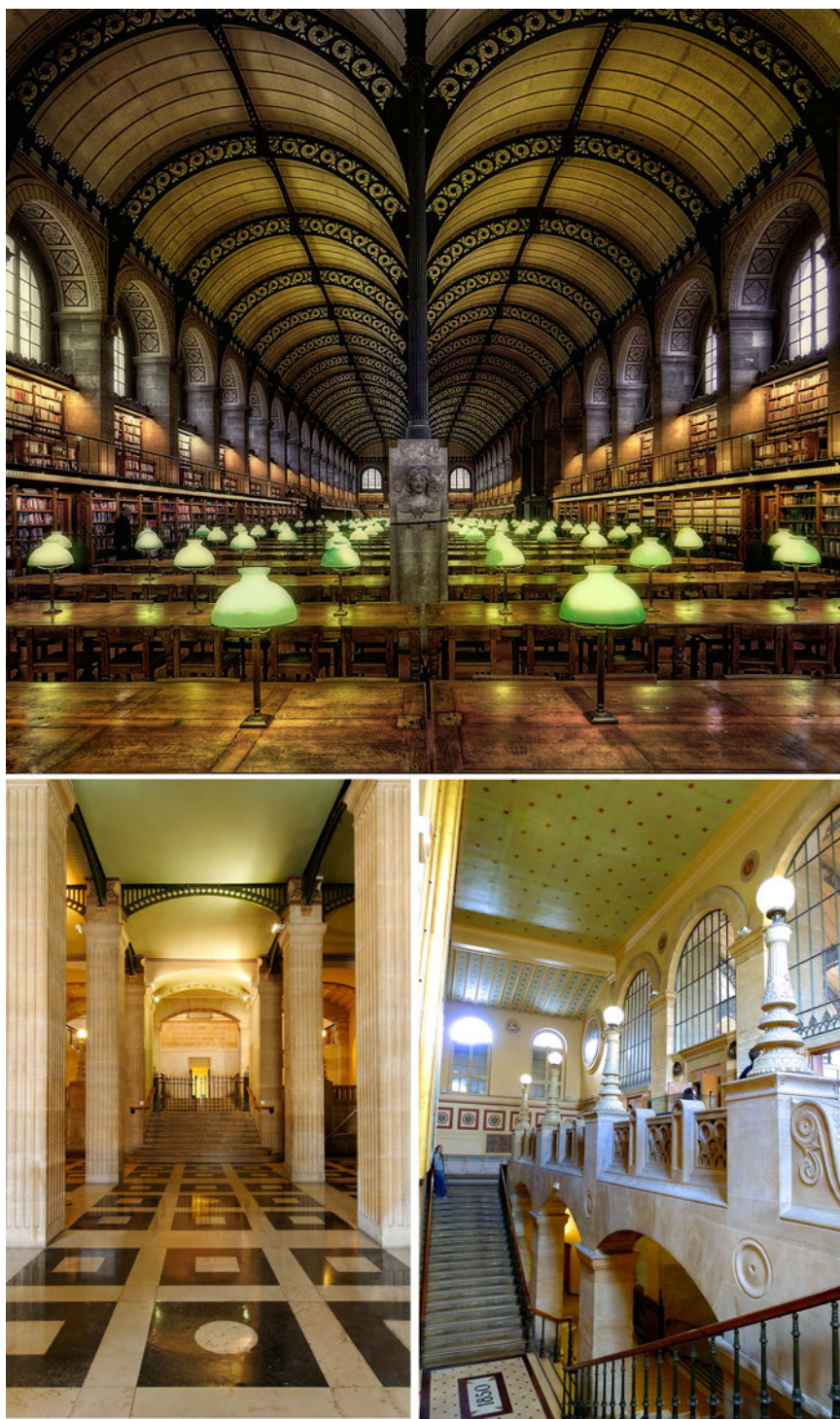
of the book: the modern stacks at the conceptual, if not the literal center of the modern library.

Having returned the books to the center-stage, in the post-Medieval fashion, the modern library, in turn, substitutes the decimal system in place of the post-Medieval chain.[5] As opposed to a literal chain, the modern library inscribes the identity of each book within a figural chain. Although the books may readily leave their sanctified and entombed place within the modern library, pending the elaborate ritual of circulation and discharge, their identity never does. It remains in place within the protective cover of the stack space.

Along with the reading space and the stack space, the circulation desk also assumes a more autonomous and detached position within the modern library. In a manner reminiscent of the Ricceto of the Laurentian Library, the circulation space takes on the form of an additional layer of physical and ritual separation that sees to the detachment of the book from both the library's ground and background, employing the supplemental aid of all the bureaucratic and technological apparatuses presently afforded it.

A telling example of this reformulation is Louis I. Kahn's Exeter Academy Library (Exeter, New Hampshire, 1965–72). Here, past the doors and a low vestibule, one enters a second vestibule with the requisite monumental staircase that leads, on axis, through a central atrium to an equally monumental circulation space (Figure 3.15). The stacks, placed characteristically above, remain divorced from the ground, though exposed to the librarian's gaze from its new mediating position

Fig. 3.14   Sydney Smirke, *Reading Room*, British Museum, London, 1856 *Photo* Credit: British Library

between the world outside and the stacks delineated and held above, within the open concrete frame of the inner atrium and the punctured masonry frame of the library.

In the above, as well as numerous other examples, the exposure of the materiality of the book to public spectacle in the stacks of the modern library, is conjoined to a view out. The modern library is, in a manner, a delineated room with a view. Here, light, coupled with a view out, no longer shines from a presumed and mysterious beyond through a self-enclosing frame amassed with books, as it was in the previous model. Rather, it readily penetrates the opened frame of the library to illuminate the enveloping outer boundary of the stacks, given to the performance of reading (Figure 3.15b, opposite).[6] Surrounded by a ring of light, the books en masse appear in the center stage of this delineated and detached place as the holders of a hidden secret that one must decipher at its illuminated edges, caught between the sublime spectacle of the books piled in repetitive rows of stacks to one side and the enveloping frame of the library with a view out, to the other.

The view out from the library, as James Siegel explains in "Academic Work: The View from Cornell," offers a "stable" image whose lines and curves "seem to be linked to the features of the landscape they designate" (40). In contrast, the view in is an unfathomable representation dominated by "the straight lines of the rows of books" that "repeat themselves regardless of the particular books they stand for" (40). In the face of this "profusion of impressions," of "books that have lost their identity because of their great numbers," as indicated by virtually every one interviewed, there is, "a feeling of incomprehension," "inaccessibility," and "chaos," coupled as they are with a sense of being "trapped" or "caged in" by the books (41). "This sense of being in forced proximity to the books," James Siegel explains, "is an expression of being in the grip of language over which one has no hold" (41). A language, one might add, whose lines and curves in written form are not linked to the features of the landscape of sense they are meant to summon.

The choice here is "either to be controlled by repetition or to sense that something is hidden" and "the urge to figure out the 'mysteries' of what is felt to be obscured," that is, as Ruskin would have it, either to confront this frightful and dangerous mass of books as form or to assume that there is a hidden merit to it—its sense—which one must yet decipher, locate, and place. "It would be by interpretation, by reading the books," that one is freed of the sense of being "trapped" by form, in proximity to the view out which "offers the reassurance of an outside to which one can always turn for escape" (Siegel 41).

"The condition of academic work," however, is not to escape, but to "remain turned toward the books." From the vantage point of the reading space, one may safely turn to the books, assured of the distance and the difference between the surrounding two images: the comprehensible image of a landscape on the outside and the incomprehensible material mass of the books on the inside. In this delineated and illuminated place of reading, one may safely seek authorial intentions in a landscape of letters whose lines and curves are not linked to the features of the landscape of sense they summon in absence, all the while assured of the presence of another, distant and different landscape whose forms readily

Fig. 3.15   Louis I. Kahn, *Phillips Exeter Library*, New Hampshire, 1972 *Photo* Credit: Clockwise from left 3.15a—Pablo Sanchez, 3.15b and 3.15c—Jacqueline Poggi

coincide with the features of the sense they summon without delay or deferral—the transparent and immediate landscape of speech, of which the place of reading is an exclusive space by an "ancient rule."[7]

In the space of reading, one may safely summon the absent intentions of the author, having the means to *locate* their presence, at a distance, outside the opaque materiality of the book that is kept safe within the confines of the modern library.[8] Else, one may have no place to locate the deferred presence of what the letters summon in absence. This may well be the fright and the danger Ruskin foresaw in the form of the letters that are not detached and well placed—the fright and danger of losing the line that safely separates presence from absence, and reality from representation. The perception of an exterior presence, whether literal as it is the case in the modern library, or presumed as it is the case in the Wall-system library is, in other words, crucial to the communication between the book and its reader, which after all, as Michael Brawne put it, is a primary purpose of the library as a building type.

Whether or not the library's primary purpose and along with it the library's design will have to be modified or changed in response to the advance of the digital

information technologies are questions to which the answers will have to await time. What is evident so far is that, early predictions to the contrary notwithstanding, the digital information technologies have not led to a fundamental change in modern library design, analogous to, for instance, the shift from the wall-system to the modern stack-system library. Nor have they led to a diminished demand for new libraries, large or small. In part, this is because the digital apparatus, in its various guises, is predicated on and readily supports the rituals of access and retrieval for which the library has been legend. From the start-up screen to all the intermediary steps and processes, access and retrieval of writing in the digital apparatus follows a trajectory that closely parallels the library's. Understandably, the analogous operations of the library and the digital apparatus have and continue to instigate trepidation and fear of displacement and substitution. However, the analogous operations of the digital apparatus also allow it to be, as it has been, appropriated and subsumed within the library as a complementary apparatus furthering the library's age-old institutional agenda. This latter is the path new and old libraries alike have followed in the past three decades. Two examples should suffice to demonstrate this trajectory, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) and the Seattle Public library, the former for its alleged failings, and the latter for its purported successes in upholding and furthering the library's unwavering aim in the digital, much as the analogue age.

The BNF was intended to be one of the largest and most modern libraries in the world, incorporating cutting edge technologies to make every form of knowledge accessible to researchers in the twenty-first century and beyond (Perrault, Jacques and Lauriot 8).[9] Although BNF was to be the forerunner of "an entirely new type" of library, almost from the moment the competition winner was announced in 1989, the BNF's design has been the subject of often-severe criticism for its failings as a library. The criticisms have centered, as Jack Kessler summarizes, "upon three of the basic elements of the design scheme: the towers, the garden, and the subterranean readers' quarters" (202). The library is built above and below a raised rectangular platform, with a large sunken garden at its center. Four proportionally thin, L-shaped glass towers rise over the four corners of the raised platform to frame an open "void" over the platform and the sunken garden (Figure 3.16). A ring of long rectangular moats that are burrowed into the raised platform links the widely spaced corner glass towers, separating the central "void" from the outer parameters of the platform. In turn, a ring of open stairs and tightly spaced, literally caged, tall, rectangular planters frame the outer boundaries of the platform.

The glass towers, being the most visible and prominent feature of the BNF's design, were intended to house the majority of the library's book collection and read as "four open books" framing a "void."[10] Had the book collection been left visible through the towers' transparent glass curtain wall, the library may well have read as a conceptual reversion to the wall-system library of a bygone era. In contrast to Labrouste's Bibliothéque Ste.-Geneviéve that was also modeled after a book, at the BNF one would have seen, not the name of the authors inscribed on the library's external frame as it is in Bibliothéque Ste.-Geneviéve, but the books themselves and at that as an illegible and incomprehensible mass from below.[11]

Fig. 3.16
Dominique
Perrault,
*Bibliothèque
Nationale de
France*, 1989–95
Photo Credit: Mirco
Giglioli

The towers would have assumed both texture and depth and bore an experiential analogy to a book, from the outside. However, in response to the immediate outcry of critics, wooden shutters were incorporated into the tower design and located at a distance behind the glass curtain wall to save the book collection from exposure to sunlight, and thereafter the gaze of the spectator from the outside.

The unintended opacity of the glass towers has rendered them mere markers to an encampment that seemingly holds and protects nothing. The towers' "glass façades," according to one reviewer, "behind which the entire knowledge of a nation is preserved, are too flat" (Cowan, Part I, 63). They are, another reviewer clarifies, "too insubstantial to anchor themselves or their surroundings in place." Their "smooth facades offer no friction or detail to arrest attention and the flow of space" (Buchanan 66). To rectify this fault, this reviewer wishes Perrault had placed "covers" around the towers to clarify the "open book" metaphor, and allow the towers to "form a single whole, to define a central location, and perhaps also to convey some civitas" (66).

It is not clear the design of this library would have appeared any less enigmatic had the towers had covers. The four "open books," with or without cover, appear to the viewer to be bereft of content. Though one can clearly see through the glass façades, there is nothing there for one to see! The metaphoric pages of these "open books," front or back, are blank sheets that "offer no friction or detail to arrest attention" in the way a book does and Labrouste's Bibliothéque Ste.-Geneviéve did. Yet, the problem exceeds the unintended open book without content metaphor.

The basic premise of BNF's design, as one prominent reviewer decries, "directly contradicts the typological care and contextual premises taught by respected architectural ideologues" (Vidler 117). This library is, in the typological sense, not a library. If typologically the library, in its various historic manifestations, has been predicated on the logic of encampment, the BNF has all the trappings of that logic, without the requisite effect.

The ritual of entry and access at BNF is as elaborate, forceful, and dramatic as any critically lauded library. Entering from either of the two streets flanking the short side of the library's raised rectangular platform, the visitor has to climb a chorus of steps, to reach a long and narrow rectangular space flanked by the stairs to one side and a dramatic gateway defined by a solid volume perforated by tall and deep, caged planters. To cross, one must traverse between the tightly spaced caged planters only to enter a long rectangular empty space extending in both directions to nowhere, on a transverse axis to the path of movement. Beyond the formidable depth of this empty field, what awaits is yet another and far more monumental gateway articulated by two flanking glass towers and the deep moat that connects them. To go past the gate, one must cross the moat on a nefariously balanced narrow bridge, bordered by a partition wall to one side. What awaits beyond this monumental gate, at the apparent end of this elaborate journey, is a large empty space flanked by the two glass towers and a long blank parapet at some distance in front. Beyond the parapet, one glimpses into more empty space reaching up to the other two glass towers. The absence in this well-defined "void" is as profound as the journey's end is anticlimactic. The camp reached is empty and the encampment is, monumental as it is, palpably senseless. The experience here is akin to entering the Ricetto of the Laurentian Library, ascending the stair, only to find oneself not inside the reading room, but outside on the roof, searching for the missing reading room. Variation on the theme would be a depiction of St. Jerome having entered the Gothic hall and ascended the platform only to find neither an armchair, nor a

sloping desk, nor for that matter any books.[12] The BNF journey has, in other words, much of the drama of a typologically correct library without the requisite ending. The palpable and lingering absence at the climax of BNF's dramatic delineation, separation, and processional transition leaves "the overall impression," according to one reviewer, "of something soulless, ghastly, and oppressive" (Bottomore 92). According to another reviewer "with its gigantic book-sculptures dominating a vast wooden plaza, the whole complex resembles a mausoleum commemorating the passing of print's hegemony" (Buchanan 66). Other reviewers liken the complex to a "gigantic carcass, bereft of a soul," and "an enormous animal lying on its back, with its four legs pointing heavenward" (Dawson 65). Yet another reviewer tells us: "the heart of the library, once reached, this heart is revealed not to be there" (Vidler 122). What these analogies have in common is, of course, a missing and missed presence that all the reviewers assume ought to have been there in a library.

To find the library's missing "heart" or "soul," one must as yet diagonally cross the void one had entered to discover a walled-in escalator behind one side of the bordering parapet. Extending from the top of the raised platform down the short edge of the enormous tree-lined hole at the center of the platform, the escalator delivers one at long last to the doors of the library a level below.[13] Having finally reached the library's interior, both the mood and the reviewers tone change considerably. Here, we are told, "surprisingly, the library takes on a different aspect and is rather pleasant, with the reading rooms surrounding a courtyard/garden at the very center of the library edifice" (Bottomore 92). The library's "external form, both forbidding and exhilarating in its enormous scale and Cartesian austerity," it turns out, "shields a rich and surprising interior," an "interior rich in colour." An interior, in sum, that is, to a measure, a typologically correct stack-system library, where the reading rooms flank the tree-lined courtyard on multiple levels, while the stacks, devoid of any reading space, hover above the periphery. The only concession to the digital age in this surprisingly conventional library interior is the omnipresent computer terminals that "will naturally be an indispensable instrument for our management of men, books and movements. It will be the tool for the public's access to our treasures. But, like the taperecorder and the video machine, it will be an intermediary for a part of our heritage; a tool which will be, like the book itself, fully available to the reader" (Perrault, Jacques and Lauriot 14). Despite this reserved and measured appeal to the digital technologies, the BNF is remarkably similar in both design and experience to the quintessential digital apparatus: the personal computer. To the viewer, the BNF similarly presents a blank screen that provides access to an otherwise invisible content through the multistep rituals of transition and access that are experientially akin to operating system and application boot-ups, only to give access to the books it holds for the duration of reading—keeping them otherwise out of sight in hidden storage.

Although the BNF's interior is "surprisingly" rich and colorful and to a large extent conventional, it too does not fail to raise typological trepidations. The BNF's interior has, similar to its exterior, all the requisite parts without the typologically requisite effect. In the BNF interior, similar to any typologically correct stack-system library, the spaces of reading are conjoined to a view out onto a tree-lined exterior. However, unlike other

libraries, this is not an out where one has been and will be, or for that matter, could be. Similar to the caged plants encountered outside, one reviewer reminds us that "the pine forest in the courtyard is sealed off, as remote as a mirage" (Buchanan 66). In addition to being the mirage of an outside, this garden, another prominent reviewer laments, "is gratuitously introduced without reference to its typological place within the system of the library per se" (Vidler 126).[14] "The obvious solution would have been," another reviewer notes, "to have the reading rooms and so on in the center and the garden extended around them" (Dawson 83). This would have been the typologically correct place for the garden. However, instead of surrounding the building, the BNF garden is surrounded by the building, and the view out is a view in. Offering the reader "no view of the city from the reading rooms or even of the river" (Dawson 83), the BNF reading rooms effectively offer no "reassurance of an outside to which one can always turn for escape," as any typologically correct reading room would (Siegel 41). In addition to lingering and unabated impressions of being caged-in, "after a visit to the BNF, walking through the old areas of Paris (and even some of the new) comes as an incredible relief—to be once again among people in everyday surroundings, buildings on a human scale, and trees that are not locked in cages" (Bottomore 94).

In contrast to Dominique Perrault's winning entry for the BNF design competition, Rem Koolhaas' competition entry, Anthony Vidler tells us, "took seriously the mandate to produce a library for the electronic present" (130). Koolhaas' entry was conceived not as a computer, but "conceived like some vast three-dimensional information chip," that is, "a solid block of information, a warehouse of all forms of memory: books, disks, optical instruments, microfiches, computer" (131).

> But the solid block of information is in fact conceived as a translucent cube, luminous, and radiating the secrets of its interior to the exterior. On this outside surface, the shadows of the public spaces within are projected like ghostly manifestations. (131)

It was not the internal content, that is, the literal or even the figural "warehouse of all forms of memory," that distinguished Koolhaas' proposal as a "library for the electronic present." Nor was it the external metaphor per se—the open-book versus the three-dimensional information chip. The difference was crucially and essentially lodged in the relationship of the contained to the container, or else the internal to the external, that is, the extent to which "the exterior" attested to and revealed "the secrets of its interior" (Figure 3.17).

Whereas Perrault hid "all forms of memory" underneath and around the periphery, leaving a void in the center, Koolhaas not only located that "memory" in the center, as many critics of BNF wished Perrault had done, Koolhaas also gave that memory a protective cover—the translucent cube—whose outside surface bore the "secrets of its interior" as cast "shadows" that vividly and directly attest to an internal presence. In other words, much as Perrault's warehouse appears empty to the onlooker, Koolhaas' warehouse appeared otherwise by virtue of making its contents thematically visible on the exterior, without rendering them transparent. "The result is," we are told, "a brilliant and architecturally original evocation of the poetics and pragmatics of information technology, and by far the most successful of all the competition entries."

This is apparently by mere virtue of that one all-important difference in the relationship of the interior to the exterior, the container to the contained. Yet, on that score, the rhetoric of the "poetics and pragmatics" of information technology notwithstanding, Koolhaas' design had much greater affinity to a traditional book than a computer chip, in much the same way Perrault's design had much greater affinity to a computer than to an open book. Koolhaas' play on the thematic of enclosure and disclosure has its parallel in traditional book design, where the cover envelops and hides a content that remains, nevertheless, visibly present within its volumetric thickness as the sum total of all the pages. This is a content whose presence the outer surface of the book perpetually summons by title, and claims it in the name of the author.

To be a library for the "electronic present," what is requisite is, it appears, the conjoining of the traditional enclosure of content to the testimonial disclosure of its presence. This is to say that the library for the "electronic present" is not one that is per se digitally savvy or technologically up-to-date. Rather, it is a library that ameliorates the consternations that are omnipresent in the "electronic present."

The mechanically (re)produced book has, from inception, offered a direct correlation between its physical outward form and its content (writing). Nunberg, in the same volume as Vidler's account above, tells us:

> A book doesn't simply contain the inscription of a text, it is the inscription. It is as fat as the text is long, it opens at the beginning of the text, and if we break off our reading, we are left literally in media res. This property is crucial to the way we read any book whose content is essentially linear or narrative, as we

> *subconsciously register the external boundaries of the volume in terms of the*
> *space between our thumb and forefinger, and reckon our place in the text*
> *accordingly. (18)*

In contrast, much as the book gives its written content the appearance of permanence and immutability, the digital media does the opposite. Not only is the computer screen not correlated with one content, within the physical bounds of the screen, every content becomes temporal, mutable, and seemingly limitless.

> *A computer doesn't have to store texts in a form that corresponds to the space*
> *they occupy when they are displayed; that is the source of all its informational*
> *capacity. But for just this reason, there is no perceptible correlation between the*
> *boundaries of the texts we read on a computer and the physical properties of*
> *the artifact or the display itself. So there is inevitably a sense of disconnection*
> *between the text that is immediately present to the senses and the text that*
> *stretches out indefinitely and invisibly on either side of it … You literally cannot*
> *grasp an electronic text in its entirety. (Nunberg 18)*

Wherever and whenever the "electronic text" appears, it is de facto partial and transitory. Its bounds are not elsewhere; they are nowhere. Unlike the book, the "electronic text" is spatially beyond grasp. It is incapable of offering a direct correlation between the appearance of the text and its literal presence, that is, between where the text is seen (read) and where it is, between its temporal appearance (the screen) and its spatial presence (the disk) as indiscernible digits. The "electronic text" does not forego its physicality as writing. Its physicality is dissociated and displaced. In other words, the "electronic text" acts like writing, but it is not like writing. What the placeless "electronic text" offers in place of the correlation that the book has perpetually offered is spatial and temporal challenges akin to those Ruskin foresaw in ornamental inscriptions. In the latter case, the text was physically present as ornamental form, whereas its sense was de facto displaced, if not dispensed with. The problem with the electronic text is the inverse—the sense is present, though the text actually and durably is not. It is there only in proxy. There is, in both cases, a spatial and temporal dislocation and dispersion that a supplementary encampment is hoped to recompense. Be this encampment that of "a tablet or a book" or an encampment whose outer limits are as directly correlated with its content as a book.

Of course, the library has been a supplementary encampment to the mechanical text from inception. However, to incorporate and encamp the "electronic text" as well, the "library for the electronic present" is additionally asked to compensate for what is missing and missed in the "electronic present." It is asked to provide, by way of substitution and supplementation, what the "electronic text" cannot: a "perceptible correlation between the boundaries of the texts" and "the physical properties of the artifact." The less the "electronic text" is like writing, the more the "library for the electronic present" is wished to be like a book, that is, to enclose and disclose its content at the same time. This is what Koolhass' proposal does and Perrault's does not—even though to a measure Perrault's initial competition entry did. Whereas Perrault's final design amplifies all the consternations digital

technologies raise regarding spatial and temporal bounds for writing, Koolhaas' design correlates, compensates, and reassures. Nevertheless, Koolhaas' design was not selected as the winning entry! The reason this typologically correct library "for the electronic present" did not win the competition was, Vidler speculates, because of one mistake.

> Koolhaas' mistake was to configure information under the sign of translucency and shadowy obscurity; the politics of the moment insisted, and still insist, on the illusion that light and enlightenment, transparency and openness, permeability and social democracy are not only symbolized but also effected by glass. Such simple wisdom, effective enough in the rhetoric of ideology, is well served by an architect who asserts: "I dislike walls; I like transparencies" (131–2).

In time, Koolhass would have a chance to correct the asserted mistake of the BNF entry in the competition entry for another "library for the electronic present:" the winning entry for the Seattle Central Library, completed in 2004 to critical applaud. Whereas in Koolhass' BNF proposal the requisite enclosure and disclosure of content were tenuous and tangential, consisting of shadows cast on the autonomous form of a translucent cube, in the Seattle Central Library, under the banner of transparency, Koolhass was to establish a direct correlation between the container and the contained (Figure 3.18).

The Seattle Central Library (SCL) was intended to "honor books and prepare for ambitious technology" (Kubo and Prat 66). It was intended to "redefine the library as an institution no longer exclusively dedicated to the book, but as an information store where all potent forms of media—new and old—are presented equally and legibly" (11). Although, "at first glance," we are told, "it is easy to miss the logic" of the building's exterior form, leading some critics to conclude that "not only does it not look like a library; it does not look like a building" (Mattern 10), the "irregular form" of the building we are assured by another reviewer "arises from an almost slavish devotion to a detailed program developed by the library board and staff" (Olson 88). The exterior form, "striking, even startling" as it may seem is merely the correlated outward expression of what is inside (Kubo and Prat 66).

> After analyzing functions and space requirements, five broad categories emerged: administration and staff, collections, information, public space and parking. The architects visualized the space as five stacked boxes and used that as starting point for the building's design. The boxes, or sections, were repositioned to allow better views and light. The headquarters on top was pushed east to look down Fifth Avenue toward Mount Rainier, and the area holding the main book stacks was nudged north to offer reading-room views of Eliot Bay. Moving those upper floors also let more light into the lower floors. (66)

Having pushed and pulled the programmatic platforms in deference to the view out—a feature no stack-system library can be without, and not be censured as was the BNF—the "stack of shifting, precariously balanced volumes" on the inside were "shrink-wrapped" in a "taut skin of steel and glass" that "captures the five floating boxes like a butterfly net" (Kubo and Prat 66). The relationship of the building's

Fig. 3.18   Rem Koolhaas, *Seattle Central Library*, 2004 *Photo* Credit: Author
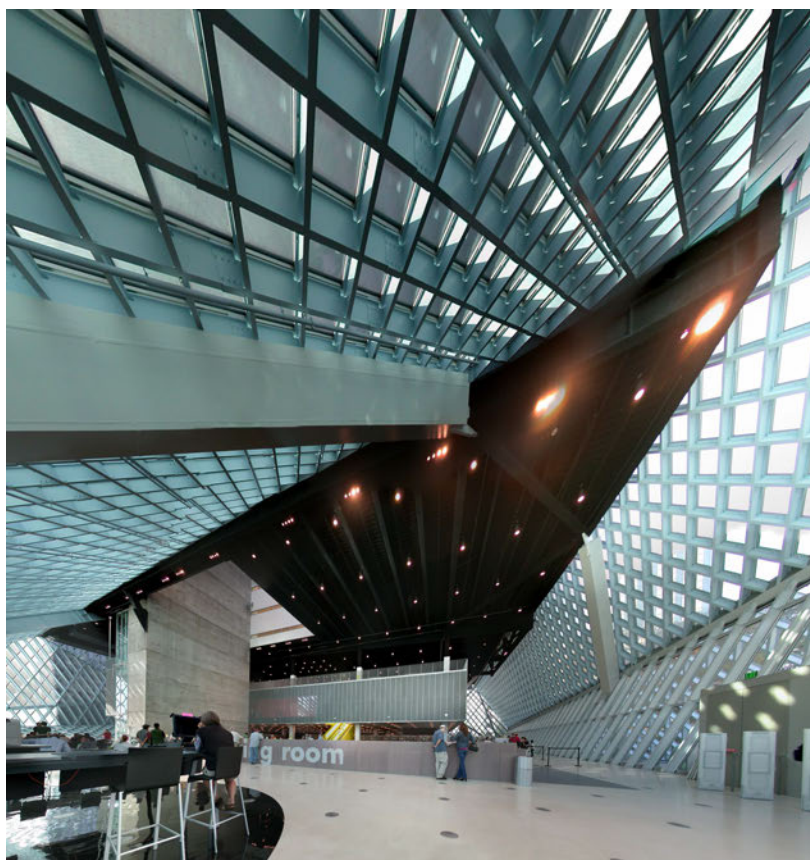
exterior form to its interior is, as Andreas Zoch, the project manager notes, "like the relationship of skin to body" (qtd. in Swimmer 44). An equally apt analogy would be the book whose outer form directly correlates with the content it envelops. If SCL does not look to some like a library, or even a building, it is because, unlike the libraries of the mechanical age, and most conventional buildings, it is not the external envelop that gives the interior its outline; it is the interior outline that dictates the external form. The outer skin, literally conceived, is so closely fused to the irregular outline of the internal body—shaped in deference to the requisite views out—that "illuminated at night, it glows like a giant X-ray, exposing its vital organs through its exoskeleton" (Olson 88). In daylight, the literal nighttime transparency is supplanted by the formal transparency of the building's interior outline, articulated with a steel and glass curtain wall that much as it reveals the form of the interior as a whole, it forcefully envelopes and separates that interior from all that is beyond it. Although the glass panes of the building's diamond patterned skin are, for the most part, transparent, one's gaze is not led through the skin from the outside. Rather, it is dispersed across the building's uniform outer surface, if only to underscore its enveloping function. From the interior, on the other hand, the same seemingly thin enveloping skin reads as a thick and forceful divider as one's gaze is arrested by and led through the considerable depth of the aluminum clad, diamond patterned frame, whose cage-like transparency locates the view out at an imposing distance from the viewer.

Aside from the shift in the relationship of the container and the contained, SCL is experientially as familiar a library as any preceding it. The logic of encampment informs every facet of the design, from the carefully layered entry sequences, to the book-stacks that are separated and enclosed in a spiral and lifted well above the lower floors, toped and sided by reading spaces with obligatory views out through the deep cage-like frame, all arrived at not by the familiar monumental staircases of prior libraries, but brightly colored escalators that play much the same role in a different form.[15]

In the preceding discussions, I have tried to point out that despite various manifestations and numerous stylistic discontinuities, the processional organization and the spatial characteristics of the library as a building type have remained essentially the same from the Medieval book-press to the modern stack-system library and beyond. This is not to decry the significance of the differences and the important transformations in the history of the library as a building type. One may readily trace the specifics of these differences and transformations, as I have tried to do with SCL and BNF, to, among other factors, the specific modalities, shifts, and changes in the cultural perception and definition of what constitutes knowledge, how and where it is located (localized), and in what relationship it is placed with respect to its manifestation(s) and/or representation(s). For instance, in contrast to the Medieval book-press that was predicated on the idea of knowledge as a locked and hidden secret awaiting revelation, in the Laurentian Library, having climbed one's way up the taxing stairs of the slithery vestibule into the calm of the reading room, one may be well inclined to agree with Alberti that the path to knowledge is fraught with difficulties and it is on "industry and diligence no less

than in the favours of Nature and of times" that "the ability to achieve the highest distinction in any meritorious activity" relies (*On Painting* 33). Imagining oneself arriving in the reading room of a "Saal-System" library, surround by walls of books en masse from behind which light penetrates and pervades the space, one may be readily inclined to agree with Marc-Antoine Laugier among other proponents of the enlightenment, that "truth," "indelible as it is," is "hidden" behind the "outer cover" that hides it from view. To discover the truth, one must "tear away the veil which covers it," if only to see the "light" that awaits only those who make the effort to "penetrate the outer cover" (2, 7). In a similar vein, confronted with sublime spectacle of rows upon rows of books on shelves in the stack-system library, one may be well inclined to agree with Ruskin that the "only merit" of this "frightful" mass is "in its sense" (*Seven Lamps* 107). Nevertheless, these diverse manifestations, including the reassuringly *transparent* libraries of the digital information age, share a common logic. Each, at a certain level, is a different expression of the logic of encampment and as such an attempt to purvey to the viewer a sense of confinement, control, and order, that is, to assure the participant that the books are in place and under control. This latter is, in no small measure, a reflection of the ambivalence of Western culture toward what the library seeks to *place* and keep in place: the written word.

THE PHARMACY

Inscribed between reflections on the Coliseum—the locus of the ephemeral body and the "celebration of life"—and the Cenotaph—the locus of the immortal soul and the consecration of death—we find Boullée's reflections on the library (103–5). This seemingly innocuous siting is neither accidental nor altogether arbitrary. It marks a step on a much-traversed historic path and ascribes to the pervasive logic of a powerful myth that the library as a cultural institution and a building type at once embodies and promotes.

Time and again, we find reflections on the library intertwined with questions of mortality and immortality, body and soul, life and death, and relatedly, order and chaos.[16] Yet, the library is the locus of neither of the polar opposites it appears to evoke in reflection. It falls, as Boullée's siting already indicates, somewhere between the two. It marks their meeting place where Boullée tells us: "one experiences … those noble transports, that sublime impetus that seem to draw forth soul from body." It is, in other words, the place of a forced displacement, of body and soul enjoined and dis-joined at once—the place of writing.

Writing has been, Jacques Derrida points out, the subject of simultaneous condemnation and praise throughout the history of Western culture for being the purveyor of life and the agent of death at the same time.[17] It has been commended and censured for immortalizing and supplanting the author by preserving and dispensing with living thought at once.

As a device, deemed external to the normal functions of language and thought, writing allows the living thought to leave of itself a material trace that though

inanimate and dead, unattended and intractable, nevertheless immortalizes the life it supplants and/or substitutes. Whereas speech functions in the immediacy of thought as a transparent and seemingly immaterial realization of its presence, writing entombs and defers thought. It makes the absent present, though devoid of the immediacy and the pliancy that are its distinguished marks.

Regardless of its immortalizing virtue, or rather because of it, writing has been consistently assigned a secondary, subservient role with respect to speech and condemned for being, among others, a bastardized form of speech, a "dangerous supplement," or in Plato's term, a *Pharmakon*: neither simply a remedy nor simply a poison, but both at once (Derrida, *Dissemination*).

If writing is deemed to be a precarious and pernicious drug, it is in part because its effect cannot be delimited in space and to its assigned place and role as the dead imitation of a living speech. If it is deemed to be a dangerous substitute for speech, it is in part because writing does not simply insinuate itself in the place of speech from outside. It also permanently dis-places living thought and the speech that is presumed to be the privileged locus of its presence.

The "alleged derivativeness of writing, however, real and massive," Derrida notes, is "possible only on one condition: that the 'original,' 'natural,' etc. language had never existed, never been intact and untouched by writing, that it had itself always been a writing" (*Of Grammatology* 56). Writing can take the place of speech as a poor substitute and a dead imitation of it, if speech itself is a form of writing, that is, if speech itself functions by virtue of the same difference and deferral that is presumed to be peculiar to writing. Speech can only be substituted, imitated, or represented by writing, if it has a repeatable, imitable or re-presentable form whose signifying function is not governed, or determined by what it signifies. If the seemingly transparent face of speech was indeed linked to the features of the landscape of thought it designates, it could never be substituted, imitated, or represented. If, on the other hand, the landscape of thought can only be located in the space of representation, if speech itself must necessarily defer the presence that it can only represent, then the living thought itself must forego its privilege as a simple presence in order to appear in representation as a deferred presence, that is, to appear at all. In short, "what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence" (159), along with, one might add, the disappearance of a decidable place within whose demarcated boundaries writing may be put to rest as a substitute representation.

Writing has no decidable place. It cannot be readily placed, because what we shall find outside every assigned place is only more writing—an "arche-writing" always older than the speech of which writing is said to be a poor and dangerous imitation (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 56). The writing that "opens language and meaning," at once exceeds and defies any sense of place or any act of placement, predicated on, in the simplest terms, a clear boundary separating two opposite terms, for instance, an interior and an exterior. Writing is, in a manner, that undifferentiated ground that precedes the act of encampment.

Should one wish, however, to retain the privilege of speech as the locus of a living, present thought—all the metaphysical, theological, and socio-political

implications of this assumption withstanding—then one must indeed make every effort to delimit the dangerous effect of this paradoxical drug to a decidable place. Should one wish to heed the imperative call of a world view that assumes presence and absence, life and death, reality and representation, speech and writing, and so on, to be mutually exclusive terms, separated by a line, or what amounts to the same, by various shades of gray, then there is little choice but to resort to the logic of encampment. One must make every effort to place writing: be this in a subservient supplemental position with respect to speech or within the protective cover of the book, held well within the bounds of the library. One must substitute a clear sense of place for the missing place of this dangerous pharmakon: a place from which speech can be withdrawn to the outside, safe and untouched by its effects.

The book is, of course, one such place. The "idea of the book which always refers to a natural totality," Derrida notes, "is profoundly alien to the sense of writing. It is the encyclopedic protection of theology and of logocentrism against the disruption of writing, against its aphoristic energy, and, … against difference in general" (*Of Grammatology* 18).

The library is another place: a supplemental, immobile, and generalized doubling of the book, encompassing and placing the written word in place. This is to say that the logic of encampment at work in the formation of the library is, to a measure, an ideological response and an institutional solution to the enigmatic place of writing. It is, in a manner, a defensive measure against the "disruption" and "aphoristic energy" of writing: a defensive measure that sees to the encampment of the book in a "heterotopic space,"[18] that is construed to keep in place that which has no decidable place.

As much as writing confounds and defies a sense of place, the library—the institution and the building type—systematically seeks to delineate, order, and place. In the space of a non-place—the undifferentiated space of representation—the library insinuates a defensive outpost. It differentiates an otherwise undifferentiated ground into two distinct and separate realms: the realm of writing and a realm for all that one may wish to safely withdraw and oppose to writing, that is, a realm for the presence, the sense, or the living thought that writing defers.

The concerns of the library are, in other words, as much external as they are internal. Mindful of the pernicious nature of the drug it is given to administer, the library, as a cultural institution, substitutes a formal, spatial, and experiential clarity of place for what writing fundamentally lacks and denies: a decidable place. This is not only a place for itself, but also and of greater concern, for the presence it defers. Within the delineated, distinguished, and highly elaborated confines of the library, writing assumes a spatial dimension. It assumes an outside. As the library localizes and brackets the book, it also renders what lies outside its assigned spatial limits, immune to the disruptive energies of writing.

As a building type, informed by the cultural/ideological agenda of the institution it serves, the library provides the participants a conceptual vehicle for thinking the resolution of the paradox of writing in binary terms. It offers the participant—by design—a spatial experience that is profoundly alien to writing as the space of a non-place.

The careful delineation, separation, and processional transition that are the hallmarks of a successful library, put the relationship between writing and all that one may wish to escape its grip, in the proper cultural perspective. Following a totemic logic,[19] within the confines of the library as a requisite "individual and particular space," writing is given to stand in the same relationship to the presence it defers, as inside stands to outside, path to place, foreground to background, open to closed, light to dark, upper to lower, center to periphery, and all other binary spatial and formal terms that are called on to create "an individual and particular space," delineated and detached from its greater place. Should one even wish to conceive of the relationship between writing and the presence it defers, in any terms other than in binary terms, one must confront and contradict the immediate experience of the library. As much as writing resists a sense of place, the library successfully resists its defiance of a sense of place, to the point of invisibility.

If, within the confines of the library, writing is given to assume a spatial dimension, outside the delineated boundaries of this cultural and institutional construct, writing assumes a temporal dimension. There, it is a figure in transition and/or circulation by virtue of that "individual and particular" place to which its identity is irrevocably tied: the library. The production and consumption of this pernicious drug outside the bounds of the library has the assurance of a destination that keeps its malevolent and disruptive energies in check and under control.

If writing is a *pharmakon*, we may conclude, the library is a pharmacy and the institution the pharmacist who sees to the proper dispensation of the drug. The cultural participant is, in turn, the consumer of the myth of writing as a pure remedy, in search of a decidable verity, kept in proxy, deep within the cover of the book, well within the bounds of the library, frequently found at the conceptual center of the modern university campus.

THE CAMPUS

Turning away from the center to the boundaries of the modern campus itself, we find ourselves, once again, within the bounds of a well-defined camp. Although the subject of this particular encampment is not writing, but education, the logic of this encampment is not fundamentally different from the logic that has seen to the encampment of the book within the library at the conceptual center of the campus (Figure 3.19).

"While designing the University of Virginia," Paul Turner points out, "Thomas Jefferson described his goal as the creation of an 'academical village'" (69). Although "this term expressed Jefferson's own views on education and planning," Turner argues, "it also summarized a basic trait of American higher education from the colonial period to the twentieth century: the conception of colleges and universities as communities in themselves—in effect cities in microcosm" (69).

Since the inception of the modern campus, and through each modification, what has remained virtually constant in the design of the campus is the assumption that the pursuit of higher education is best confined to a well-defined and distinct camp whose clarity of outline is best summed up by analogies that bring to mind

Fig. 3.19 Thomas Jefferson, *University of Virginia*, Charlottesville, 1819
Photo credit: Karen Blaha

distinct boundaries and a clear sense of place—a "village," a microcosmic city, or a community in itself. Even though, over time, most campuses lose the clarity of their original boundaries to growth, University of Virginia being a case in point, the presence of these boundaries remain, in part, assumed and implied by the word *campus* that "sums up," Turner tells us, not only "the distinctive physical qualities of the American college, but also its integrity as a self-contained community" (4).

The desire and the attempt to give education a distinct place, that is, to localize it within the spatial bounds of a "self-contained" camp is, as compared to the library at the center of the campus, yet another cultural and institutional response to the dilemmas and the paradoxes of the subject of the encampment: in this instance, the dilemma of education, commonly viewed as an external, cultural supplement to human nature.

Education as a supplement, Derrida points out, is neither a pure addition nor a simple accretion (*Of Grammatology*). If education as a supplement adds to and completes human nature, it also speaks of a fundamental gap and an internal deficiency in that nature. The supplemental education makes it impossible to identify an internal human nature that is not burdened by the weight of things external to it. If education supplements and completes human nature, it also dis-places it, that is, the supplementation denies the nature it completes a location or place within or without, inside or outside the human subject.

It is in place of this dis-placement that the logic of encampment substitutes a clear sense of place in the form of a campus. If the modern university seeks to

encompass education as supplementation to nature within the bounds of a well-defined place, the motivating concerns are as much practical as they are ideological. The campus is the formal and spatial vehicle that allows us to conceive the deficiency to which education points as having temporal and spatial boundaries—not endemic but specific to time and place. It allows us to conceive of a complete nature residing, not within, but outside the boundaries of the university as the place of supplementation. If the library tries to withhold its subject within, we may conclude, the campus tries to keep it without, only to have an ideal to reflect back on from within.

NOTES

1   The following is a telling case in point:

"I would have you know that in the year 1617 the library was completely altered and made to assume an entirely new appearance. This alteration was rendered necessary by the serious damage which, to our great sorrow, we found the books had suffered—a damage which was increasing daily—partly from the sloping form of the desks, partly from the inconvenient weight of the chains" (J. W. Clark 160).

2   For a comprehensive discussion of the unique formal characteristics and insolubly contradictory readings of this space see Wittkower.

3   Henry James had a specific term for this requisite experiential separation (242): "penetralia," that is, "the sense of penetrating out of the everyday hustle and into the shadowy preserve of learning" (249).

4   Also see Levine; Bressani and Grignon.

5   This is not to imply that the invention of the decimal system coincides with the formation of the modern library, but that the system is an effective aid to the modern library.

6   "By finding space for carrels under the eaves of a building," one library architect tells us, "we not only increase the utilization of the building and improve efficiency, but create a memorable space to which people are attracted and want to return" (Freeman 173).

7   "It was required, by the ancient rules of the library," Claude Héméré, the librarian at the Library of Sorbonne from 1638–43 tells us: "that reading, writing, and handling of books should go forward in complete silence" (qtd. in J. W. Clark 160).

8   One library expert tells us: "Trees also go well with books. The idea of readers being able to 'take a good book out to read it beneath a tree,' or being able, at least, to see trees through a window as they read, is as attractive to the French as it is to Americans who know Joyce Kilmer's poem" (Kessler 200).

9   Jean Favier notes:

Hence the new library had to supply not only a new dimension to our original Bibliotheque Nationale, but also a whole new concept of our contribution to the civilization of the Third Millennium. The computer will naturally be an indispensable instrument for our management of men, books and movements. It will be the tool for the public's access to our treasures. But, like the taperecorder and the video machine, it will be an intermediary

for apart of our heritage; a tool which will be, like the book itself, fully available to the reader. (14)

10   Perrault notes:

The "four open book" evince a concept with absolute clarity and conciseness. It's part of the new library's dialogue with people. For many of those people their first act of reading in association with the library will be done in those four open books. This relationship between the architectural ensemble and the language is necessary if we are to initiate communication; it supplies a mnemotechnical means of identifying and locating the library within the city. Afterwards, less immediate, more contradictory and complex perceptions will lead to other levels of reading. (qtd. in Favier 48)

11   This latter would have been conceptually similar to the imprinted glass skin of the Herzog & De Meuron's Cottbus Library (2001–4).

12   A similar experience would be to cross the masonry shell of Bibliothéque Ste.-Geneviéve, go through the corridor, up the stairs, through the doors, only to find oneself outdoors.

13   One reviewer notes:

The architect shunned conventional wisdom, which states that the entrance to a building should be on the outside. Instead, in order to enter these reading rooms, you must first climb over them, the entrance being on the inner, courtyard side. This absurd journey exposes the sheer stupidity and full ugliness of the building. (Bottomore 92)

14   Also:

The area reserved for researchers will have a view over a patch of forest, a quintessential Fontainebleau which will nevertheless be inaccessible, save in the unexpected event of a disaster. These favored researchers will thus have a view over this garden, but they will not be able to stroll round it. The entrances for the general public are on the upper floors only, … The public will not be entitled to the view over the garden, except by going to a walk-cum-resting-place, separated from the reading rooms by a partition, and in effect prohibiting the concurrence of work and contemplation of nature. (Edelmann 22)

15   Much of what was said about SCL applies to other aspiring libraries of the "digital present." Prominent among these is the SCL's contemporary, amoeba-shaped, etched-glass-clad Cottbus Technical University Library by Herzog & de Meuron.

16   For an insightful discussion of this subject please see Siegel.

Also a poignant case in point is Umberto Eco's The Name of the Rose, where the themes of life and death are intimately connected to a labyrinthine library and the book posed as the literal agent of death (Eco).

17   Please see Derrida, *Dissemination*; *Of Grammatology*.

18   Please see Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 22–7.

19   Please see Lévi-Strauss.