

SECOND YEAR UNDERGRADUATE DESIGN STUDIO
FOCUS ON MATERIALS AND ASSEMBLY
Carnegie Mellon University Spring 08
Project Four: Library Research Center for Study of Modern French Literature



'I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.'
- Jorge Luis Borges

'We may sit in our library and yet be in all quarters of the earth.'
- John Lubbock

'But the book whose source is art has no guarantee in the world, and when it is read, it has never been read before; it only attains its presence as a work in the space opened by this unique reading, each time the first reading and each time the only reading. This is the source of the strange freedom exemplified by reading, literary reading. It is free movement, if it is not subject to anything, if it does not depend on anything already present. The book is undoubtedly there – not only in its reality as paper and print, but also in its nature as a book, this fabric of stable significations, this affirmation that it owes to a preestablished language, and also this precinct formed around it by the community of all readers, which already includes me even though I have not read it, and also made up of all other books, which, like angels with interlaced wings, watch closely over the unknown volume, because if even one book is threatened, a dangerous breach is opened in the world's library. And so the book is there, but the work is still hidden, perhaps radically absent, in any case disguised, obscured by the obviousness of the book behind which it awaits the liberating decision, the *Lazare, veni foras!*'
- Maurice Blanchot, 'Reading' from *The Gaze of Orpheus and other literary essays*

The Library is rooted in our collective psyche as the symbol of our collective knowledge. Its image is of a vast repository for all that is known, a living receptacle for the collection and distribution of our thought. It is how we think, it is who we are. In essence, the Library reveals the definition of our culture and the definition of ourselves.

The library as an institution facilitates private access in a truly public place. The seeking of knowledge is often a private act, the relationship between an individual and book is sacred. As one reads, one is at once within the realm of the book and the place of the library; reading allows for this spatial coexistence, the conflation of imaginative thought and conscious reality. Space collapses in the simultaneity of places; you are at once physically here and mentally there. This spatial configuration reflects the spatial conditions of our cultural context.

In this project, students are asked to question the existing model of the Library. The studio should become a laboratory of investigation through which to analyze, challenge and critique this existing paradigm. Work will begin with development of personal theories regarding both program and context, and the nature of the Library as a facilitator of the relationship between the individual, knowledge and society. The objective of the project is for students to personally redefine the meaning of library in our society and to create a new vision of the Library, engaged with and expressive of our current culture, and simultaneously theoretical, experimental and specific in nature.

Throughout the development of this project, the studio will focus on how materials support architectural ideas and the creation of architectural form. In the design studio, the materiality of the lexical elements of architecture are often represented by the elusive vacuity of chipboard. In reality, these elements are made of tangible physical materials which allow for human experience. Material is the corporeal medium through which we can experience the ineffable qualities of space. The studio will study the use and expression of materials and how one's sensory engagement with materials can shift the perception of space.

Readings will include: *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, Jean-Dominique Bauby; *Snapshots*, Alain Robbe-Grillet; *The Absence of the Book*, Maurice Blanchot. Films may include: *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, Julian Schnabel; *Alphaville*, Jean-Luc Godard; *Le Samourai*, Jean-Pierre Melville.

'Recently, architecture has retreated from its project of creating new possibilities of form, retreated, that is from dislocation, and placed itself in the service of institutions, therefore in service of perpetuating the current metaphysics of architecture. ...Architecture is intrinsically bound up with the fundamental need for shelter; but that shelter has both physical and metaphysical implications. The physical aspect requires that architecture be constructed, be a material reality. This situates architecture inescapably as a condition of presence. But as shelter also exists in the mind as an idea, in its metaphysical state architecture is a conceptual reflection of physical presence, an "absence" in a material sense. From this perspective, what was earlier described as a traditional architectural history founded on dominant vectors of truth can also be seen as an ideological effort to screen architecture's intrinsic absence behind an emphasis on its physic. It could be said that this screening is a sign of the endurance of anthropocentrism's privileging of presence and centeredness, even beyond its own crisis. Precisely because shelter always manifests presence in construction, it will tend to stabilize and in so doing ultimately lend itself to institutionalization. Any act of building will necessarily be an act of presencing. But, as stated earlier; the conceptual act of architecture is the critique, transformation, and creation of institutions. Thus architecture can be considered, paradoxically, contradictory to building, to its institutionalizing presence. As such, architecture cannot be except as it continuously distances itself from its own boundaries; it is always in the process of becoming, of changing, while it is also always establishing, institutionalizing. It has the potential to be simultaneously a creation and critique of the institution it builds. This is what might be termed the challenge of dislocation for the architect and for architecture. As every dislocation of presence also requires, to some extent, its reaffirmation, any activity that would entirely abandon the terms of both the metaphysic and the physic would not be involved in the activity of dislocation but of destruction, for dislocation is enabled only by the play of absence against presence, by the work on and within the contradictory terms of the discourse. This condition is particularly significant in architecture as opposed to, for example, the discourses of philosophy, because in the latter the presence of the material, language, can be made to disappear into signs characterized by their transparency, a type of absence in language. Because of the unavoidable imperative of presence in architecture, it risks entering into a stabilizing metaphysic where, for example, scale and form succumb to an authoritative center. Hence architecture is an activity that is highly resistant to dislocation and decentering. This is the paradox of architecture.'

- Peter Eisenman, *Misreading Peter Eisenman*