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Lucky Strike Branch Library

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This thesis project is an examination of how design can reinvigorate interest in reading through the creation of a branch library. The primary focus of this study is to generate a space that successfully binds intellectual interests, social and economic groups to re-establish community.
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Vanessa Vinsant
I believe in efficiency...

I believe all design should cherish efficiency. Not in the common connotation of the word, conjuring images of stern schoolmarm or cooperate sweatshops churning out trinkets at third world labor prices. Rather, my concept of efficiency embraces the maximizing of potential. Efficiency, creativity and flexibility are intricately intertwined.

I believe efficiency is complex:

Efficiency is the ability of one to become many. On a recent trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a mylar tape installation by artist Tara Donovan struck a primal cord with me. The metallic tape was curled into circles and dappled across the wall. The perception of the material fluctuated depending on one's perspective, changing from metal rings, to beads of water, to glass pebbles. From one ordinary material, she ingeniously created a new thing altogether. Much like life, the perception of reality and experience, her work ebbed and flowed across the wall, morphing as it went. Using one ordinary material in an unexpected way created a myriad of visual cues, emotive responses and analytical reactions.

To design an object or a space with only one meaning is to subjugate the mind and stifle the human spirit.

I believe efficiency is gracious:

I believe the beauty of efficiency is its ability to adapt, to transmogrify the mundane into the sacred. Efficiency represents a reverence for life. When an Indian kills a deer, out of respect for the spirit of the animal, every inch of the deer's material being is utilized. There is meat, leather, rope, paste etc. produced from one animal, with no waste allowed. The belief is that one must only take what you need and use the minimum. Contrary to producing a simple, singular culture, devoid of beauty and expression, adherence to this principle generated a vast array of artifacts and societies.

To design an object or a space with only one program in mind is to kill a deer only for his antlers.

I believe efficiency is adaptable:

I believe efficiency is gracious:

I believe efficiency is complex:
I believe efficiency is adaptable:

Efficiency is found in adaptation which continually responds to the stimulus of change, providing new uses for everything. If we look at the world around us through the lens of the law of conservation of energy, what we are seeing is a beautiful efficiency. The law states that nothing is created nor destroyed, merely transformed. Einstein’s theory of relativity, E=mc², binds energy and mass, time and space. Everything around us is the product of efficiency, designed to be used and reused. Take the simple act of breathing. Oxygen makes its way into our lungs, is filtered through our bodies becoming carbon dioxide, which we release back into the atmosphere. That carbon floats along until it is absorbed by plants and trees, who in turn “breath” our waste and in doing so, exhale oxygen. In the natural world around us, cycles like this one are manifested ad infinitum. Nothing is wasted.

To design an object or a space that has an “expiration date” is to break the laws of physics.

I believe there is a certain divinity in efficiency that should act as a guiding principle for design. To design objects and spaces that are flexible, adaptable and complex is an act of graciousness and respect for the profound depth and versatility of the human experience.
Better Libraries = Better Citizens

OVERVIEW:

According to a 2004 report issued by the National Endowment for the Arts, a startling 40% of Americans read one book or less per year. Even more striking are the conclusions derived from a comprehensive report on the state of reading in the US published by the same organization in November 2007. Americans are spending less time reading, reading comprehension skills are eroding, and these declines have serious civic, social, cultural and economic implications. Individuals with a developed interest in reading for pleasure have good job prospects, vote and volunteer with regularity, participate in cultural activities and even show tendencies to lead more active and healthy lifestyles. It is of vital importance that we utilize design to re-invigorate interest in the programs and materials made available at a public library.

Further research indicates that the educational level of a user is generally inversely related to the economic need of the user population. How do we create an environment that is as inviting as private sector bookstores like Barnes & Noble or Borders while retaining the qualities associated with the civic program of a public library? The challenge is to create a library which is an economically neutral ground that is stimulating enough to attract an intellectually diverse population of users.

To complicate the issue, there is currently a debate over whether or not the availability of digital media has made the presence of a physical library obsolete. While some argue that the internet has provided a research and information venue so vast that hardcopy materials are soon to be relic of the past, the contrary is true. The growing need for skilled researchers and computer storage space is added to the spatial needs of preserving existing hardcopy materials, resulting in the need for larger libraries rather than rendering libraries outdated. There is something irreplaceable about the act of physically reading a book, either alone or in the context of a group. The social isolation associated with the solitary act of working only in digital format is increasingly taking its toll on the American public. The opportunity to generate interest in the civic program of the library is critical to social and intellectual health of the public.

CONCEPT:

The concept behind the Lucky Strike Branch Library is based on the principle of binding. How can we create a space that successfully binds intellectual interests, social and economic groups to re-establish community?
Spatial Binding
The perception of edges

Physical Binding
The perception of connections

Mental Binding
The perception of similarities

You don't have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them. ~ Ray Bradbury ~
Research: Case Studies

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Located in one of Seattle’s most densely populated neighborhoods, a block away from the area’s main shopping street, this library offers an innovative approach to generating an architectural response to the site in question on a contextual level.

In reaction to the manmade context of a lively urban setting, the building is harnessed with metal meshing such that vines will eventually envelope the building in a living facade. The inclusion of organic material is intended to create a structure that is as vibrant as its surroundings.

As for the natural context, the orientation of the building and the planimetric layout are based on the winter solstice. The prow shaped extension and the glazed corners create a sunlight filled central reading area.

The architectural response to the site in terms of its natural and manmade context enhances the programmatic goals of creating a library as a place for both learning and community.
SITE CASE STUDY I

Located in what was once an old Scandinavian neighborhood with maritime roots that is reinventing itself as an area for active, diverse, young professionals, this library is a programmatic collaboration between the Seattle Public Library and the Neighborhood Service Center, providing both facilities under one roof. The curvilinear form of the roof as well as the materiality of the building speak to the cultural context of the Ballard neighborhood, both its past and future.

The most striking architectural element, the dramatic sweep and extension of the roof structure, is vital to the success of the library as a public place. The creation of an intermediary space between the neighborhood and the interior of the building activates often overlooked space in engaging the site on a large scale.

The collaborative effort that resulted in the combination of a library with a community service center is also one of the primary elements that generates so much success for this project as a public space. In providing a joint program that incorporates activities that are necessary to a broad range of the population, the library can draw in users initially engaged with the community center and vice versa, creating a space that exudes “community.”
The Barn at Fallingwater is a renovated 19th century barn with a 1940’s dairy barn addition that is located on a 5,000 acre lot adjacent to Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater. Home to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, the interior successfully accomplishes a modern aesthetic while respecting the historic quality of the existing structure.

The use of straw bale panels, exposed timber mortise and tenon framing, local field stones, recycled maple gymnasium flooring and an operable wooden slat sunscreen accomplish the goal of updating the space and accommodating the programmatic needs of the users.

This site offers a beautiful example of what Paul Goldberg describes as “romantic modernism), determined to use the forms of modernism to achieve the emotional impact of traditionalism.” (Arcadian Architecture)
Planning Influences

Three major elements influence the initial planning and conceptualization for any branch library. Proximity to the intended audience affects the volume of use for a given facility. A site that is integral to a neighborhood rather than a destination is optimal. The education and income level of the intended audience will dictate the content of materials included in the library’s collection.

User Profile & Related Issues

The educational level of a user is generally inversely related to the economic need of the user population. The challenge is to create a library which is an economically neutral ground that is stimulating enough to attract an intellectually diverse population of users.

Usage Types

There are two main ways in which the media format of information affects library usage patterns. In one scenario, a user may come to the library for a hardcopy book looking for information on, say, travel to a particular country. Once the general information is gleaned from library materials, specific information, like particular restaurant reviews, will be sought online. Conversely, if looking for general information on an author, a user may consult the web prior to using the library facilities to check out specific books.
Seattle Universal Branch Building Program
The first two pie charts above are generated from the guidelines laid out in the Universal Branch Building Program created by the Seattle Public Library - Libraries for All committee. The third chart was created in response to the percentage allocations found in the above mentioned data as it relates to the square footage of the proposed building site.

Seattle Public Library, Libraries for All - Universal Branch Building Program: Table 1: Summaries by Building Size, http://www.spl.org/ffa/capplan/libforall/cp98prop.html
From a place to read to a social center with multiple responsibilities.

“Each library houses a proliferation of adjunct conditions that creates a conceptual imbalance: since its format has never been fundamentally adjusted to accommodate its new social role, the library is like a host organism overwhelmed by its parasites.” (18)

Goal: Reinvent the library as an information store.

“In an age where information can be accessed anywhere, it is the simultaneity of all media and the professionalism of their presentation and interaction, that will make them new.” (8)
Restructuring of Programmatic Needs

Program to Concept

Catalytic Constraints

Invention Sprawl

Paradoxical Pleasures

Alchemical Assemblies

Over Drawing

Five Tactics for Opportunistic Architecture

Catalytic Constraints

Invention Sprawl

Paradoxical Pleasures

Alchemical Assemblies

Over Drawing

Catalytic Constraints

What if constraints and limitations of architecture became the catalyst for design invention?

The seed for the most radical solution can always be found within the items that initially pose the greatest resistance. Through the selective application of the principle of efficiency, one can discover relationships within a project to be explored.

Restaurant examples:
“the strict adherence to planimetric efficiency compels an inspired investigation into maximizing the possibilities – material and pragmatic – of the interior skin of each space.” (168)

Invention Sprawl

Based on Gaston Bachelard’s Surrationalism “a conscious, critical and rational process that…rigorously applies logic to the limits of rationality itself.” (170)

Pushing the boundaries between rational and absurd.

Unlike linear scientific approaches designed to prove or disprove a given end, design is more open – research is intended to lead to new areas of research and exploration.

Paradoxical Pleasures

The modernist paradigm forces organization along the lines of definitive distinctions – LTL hopes to intensify the beauty and playfulness of these boundaries in their juxtaposition rather than separation.

Surrealist game – Exquisite Corpse
Meant to highlight the absurdity and artificiality of boundaries and opposites.
Alchemical Assemblies

Deploy common materials in unusual ways. Analogy of comedic technique of repetition with use of materials.

"a carefully repeated phrase can transform material from the banal to delightful" (174)

Over Drawing

Mixed use of hand drafting and computer generated images is critical to both process and presentation.

Insights

How do I apply these categorical process methodologies to the project in question?

What are my constraints?

How to keep a small footprint with maximum impact.

How to make the library integral to the neighborhood in the given location rather than simply a destination

What are my paradoxes?

Digital v. Hardcopy
Audience Need v. Audience Interest
Social v. Private
Old v. New
Reading - Mind is active/ Body is still

Where is the alchemy?

Use books, newsprint, text, computer pieces etc as textural or spatial organizers

Sent Staffer on bus trip through Europe – video and written documentation was synthesized into a graphic representation of the timeline as it related to movement, activity and location.

Once collected, the data presented the following conclusions:

Tours spend the least amount of time in the cities they are designed to highlight.

Majority of experience oscillates between memory and anticipation.

Routes are dictated by union bus driver limitations, making destinations out of pragmatic requirements.

The above two experiences combine with the act of leaving and arriving to create interest.

Size of tour buses are incompatible with European cities, forcing tourist into hotels on the perimeter.

Design should incorporate large vehicles, large groups of people and large variations in economic needs.

This speculative project takes the data collected and uses it to generate new areas of study that ultimately synthesize into a conceptually coherent architectural manifestation of the experience of touring Europe via bus.

Tourbus Hotel

Tourbus Hotel: Reverse Process Diagrams

Economic Spatial Differentiation

Programmatic Spatial Differentiation

Planimetric Spatial Differentiation

Exploration Of Form

Extruded Bus

Hotel As Filter

Shared v. Private Space

Circulation

Memory & Anticipation
Santiago Calatrava
Calatrava’s body of work expresses a deep interest in the relationship between movement and form. All of his projects explore the boundary between static and plastic, kinetic and potential energy. In a presentation to MIT students in November of 1995 with regard to his process and inspiration, he says: “even in its static condition, the most stable thing, movement is hidden.”(83)

He discusses his interest in nature and the human form as vital to the exploration of the relationship between time, space, form, forces, light and movement. “In the tectonics of our own bodies, you can discover an internal logic that can be valuable in the making of buildings.” (91)

Calatrava also utilizes study models as a process method for delving further into the mechanics and form of the natural phenomena he draws inspiration from. As illustrated in the drawings seen here, observational sketches of the human form are translated into sculptural iterations of how the forms and forces inherent in nature can inform building, engineering and architectural forms.


Stadelhofen Station, Zurich
“Anthropomorphism & Architecture = Expression (Mass)

Mass & Light bind the idea of Space to Architecture

Forces bind the idea of Time & Space

Movement brings the idea of Time to Architecture” (12)
Insights: Stadelhofen Station, Zurich

The Hand as Form

Pulling directly from his experience with the human body, Calatrava explicitly invokes the form of an upturned open hand in the construction of the structural columns for this project.

The Head as Form

Utilizing the lessons learned from his sculptural studies of the human head, Calatrava translates the mass of the human head into the mass of the earth where the structure of the station functions as the spinal vertebrae.

Building As Argument
As a philosophy major in undergraduate school, I was always more interested in what I considered the psychological process involved in the development of a lifelong devotion to an argument. After a year of design school and many hours exploring the avenues of creative process, I want to explore the correlations between philosophical process and creative process.

Revisiting the arguments of several philosophers ranging from Thales and Anaximander to Plato, Descartes, St. Augustine and John Rawls, the commonality was a fundamental world view, a primary goal or organizing principle that led to a re-examination of logic, world observation or, in some cases, a manipulation of the above in order to retrofit reality such that it conforms to a given argument. The question became, how can this common element relate to interior design and architectural process? Can buildings be understood as arguments?

Looking at the work of Frank Lloyd Wright proved to be an illustrative exercise. His lifelong devotion to the pursuit of organic architecture functions as the motivating element found in classical philosophy. A tripartite exploration of Wright’s early, middle and late manifestations of residential design show how his creative process developed in response to time, site and cultural influences.
Robie House, Oak Park Illinois (1906)

Frank Lloyd Wright

Organic in that it fosters the connections between man and nature as well as social connections.

Quintessential “Prairie House”

Heavy Horizontal, firmly grounded in the earth

Cantilevered overhangs, mimic vastness of prairie.

Open Plan, central hearth

Contains a service area that is separate yet unified with the home.

Balanced asymmetry.
Storer House,
Hollywood California
(1923)

Organic in how it addresses the relationship between man and machine

Textile Block House – Romanzas Period
Pre-fabricated concrete block
Unique Repetition
Open plan, central hearth
Contains a service area that is separate yet unified with the home
Balanced asymmetry
MAIN ENTRY LEVEL

SECOND LEVEL
Fallingwater,
Bear Run Pennsylvania
(1935)

Organic in response to place.

Open plan, central Hearth
Contains a central service/work area
Balanced asymmetry.
Site Influences

The proposed site is a 6200 square foot masonry and steel frame building originally constructed in the 1930's as the Lucky Strike Power Plant Maintenance Garage, part of the American Tobacco Complex in the Historic Shockoe Valley and Tobacco Row District.

Nestled in a historically industrial area to the West, the mixed income residential neighborhood of Church Hill to the North, a railway and the Canal to the South, the building is located in a rapidly developing area. There are approximately 3,000 condominiums and apartments under construction as adaptive reuse of many of the existing warehouses and production plants in the Tobacco Row Residential District along side various mixed use commercial spaces.
50 Pear Street, Richmond Virginia 23223
Photographs & Elevations
East
The primary entrance to the building is located on the east facade. There is also a 10’hx22’lx10’w irregularly shaped built out space that extrudes forward at the NE corner.

West
The rear entrance to the building is equipped with a loading ramp. There are five 10’3”x6’2” windows with operable 3’6”x3’6” insets at eye level, also present along the South and East facade.

North
The north facade of the building faces East Cary Street. There are eight 12’6”x11’ stationary garage doors with frosted glazing between 2’ and 6’ above finished floor.
Diagrams

Mezzanine Plan

First Floor Plan
Blocks are proportionally based off of the square feet allocated for each area according to the proposed program.
In order to become more familiar with the needs of each program space, these concept models are scaled to represent the allotted square footage based on earlier calculations. Each side of the cube represents a physical need or action that needs to be accounted for in the space.

The circulation area is typically the busies area of the library. This is the area where day-to-day activities like checking out books, issuing library cards, paying fines etc. Of primary importance in this area are the following:

• Work surface for staff
• Book and media drop space
• Delivery and shipment of books and materials
• Adjacent copy niche
• Direct adjacency with Reference Desk
• Hidden workroom area/storage
• Visual connectivity with library
• Acoustical privacy considerations
Reference Desk

The reference desk functions as the main point of service for research and information. Of primary importance in this area are the following:

- Work surface for staff
- Adjacent to computer workstations
- Reference materials collection
- Adjacent copy niche
- Direct adjacency with Reference Desk
- Hidden workroom area/storage
- Visual connectivity with library
Main Adult Stacks

The main adult stacks house the majority of the library's collection. Within this area, space can be made to incorporate reading areas, work areas, periodical and large format materials. Of primary importance in this area are the following:

- Visual signage and wayfinding
- No dead end shelving
- Encourage browsing
- Dispersed seating
- Easily navigable
- Space for reference computers
- Visual connectivity with staff
The multipurpose meeting room has a variety of design considerations. This space can be used as a conference room, seminar space, child story area or as a private reading room. Of primary importance in this area are the following:

- Interior entryway
- Accessible from the exterior of the library to be available after hours.
- Flexible furnishings
- Deep storage closet
- Tackable work surface
- Projection screen
- Adjacent to restrooms
- Lockable kitchenette
The children's collection must consider the needs of a diverse range of users, from toddlers to caretakers. Of primary importance in this area are the following:

- Variety of shelving, seating and worksurface heights
- Flexibility of furnishings
- Safety considerations
- Visually distinct from other spaces in the library.
- Range of materials and textures.
- Acoustic control
Young Adult Collection Area

The young adult collection should function as a transitional space between the children’s area and the main adult stacks. Of primary importance in this area are the following:

- Visually distinct, particularly from the children’s area
- Informal, comfortable
- Visual supervision
- Acoustic control
Existing Conditions

View from recessed floor area to the mezzanine (looking North)

View from first floor to the recessed area (looking South-West)

Section looking West - incorporates an extended mezzanine level.
This is my initial floorplan for the library layout. Using the East-West axis of the building as a spine around which various elements emanate from, the circulation/reference desk is centrally located in an attempt to establish visual connectivity throughout the space. In an attempt to preserve the existing building, the mezzanine level is maintained as is, functioning as a periodical and reading area. The existing restrooms and staff kitchen area are also un-altered. The floorplan is functional, but is not clearly organized around one principle. Is it a line (the libraries “spine”) that dictates the arrangement of the library or is it the central point of the circulation/reference desk?
These drawings represent my exploration of how a line versus a point can organize a plan. If the circulation/reference desk organizes the space in a radial form, how do you maintain visual connectivity in the space? How can you utilize the vertical dimensions in the space to imply the act of binding or folding around a perceived line in space? How can the stack heights and their placement encourage interaction as well as function as way-finding objects?

It is at this point in the development of the project that I decided to incorporate elements for seating, work and rest into the design of the stacks.
From the previous process work, I decided to move the children’s area from the main open area on the first floor to the upper mezzanine level, which is expanded. With an uninterrupted plane of space to work with, how can the placement of the stacks organize the spatial layout of the building?

Aldo Van Eyck’s Sonsbeek Pavilion in Arnheim (1966) was built as a temporary outdoor sculpture exhibition space. Each wall is 4 meters high and 2 meters apart. From the exterior, the pavilion presents itself as a predictable, monolithic whole. Once the user is inside the pavilion, a series of curvilinear forms and apertures create a delightfully rich contextual framework for viewing the sculpture collections. Working off of the idea of using a repeated form to create a series of framed views, the diagrams on the far left are preliminary sketches of how the stacks could function in the same way.
The plan to the left incorporates the ideas generated from my exploration of the Sonsbeek Pavilion. Rather than using curvilinear forms, the stacks are removed in certain areas to carve out space for the programmatic needs of a work space and a reading space. In this plan, the circulation/reference desk is immediately adjacent to the staff work & break area. It became apparent that if it is the stacks that function as the binding element in the space, they should organize the floorplan as well as the form of the casework throughout the space. How can the stacks dictate the placement of the circulation/reference desk in a way that allows the user to discover it in the same way that he/she might discover the reading and work areas?

The bottom two images illustrate continuing efforts to establish a pattern for the placement of the stack variations of desk, seat and shelf.
Stack Element & Circulation/ Reference Desk Placement

These images explore the incorporation of the circulation/reference desk into the existing field of stacks as well as how the placement of the stack elements can create connections in both plan and elevation.
Ceiling Ideas

The base building has 16 foot ceilings with exposed HVAC. These drawings are examples of how a lowered ceiling treatment might be used to exaggerate the feeling of grandeur and intimacy in the space. In the same way that material changes in the stacks call attention to the special variations within them, I wanted to incorporate the same type of movement on a larger scale in a longitudinal building section with the ceiling heights. With the children's area on the mezzanine level, the lowered ceiling plane over the circulation/reference desk would extend to meet the top of the stairs leading into the mezzanine area. The issue with this idea is how it would effect the user's view from this raised plane given the amount of existing exposed duct work.
After establishing the placement of the circulation/reference desk as well as the stack variations, these plans are the final round of changes made to the design prior to presentation. Based off experimental models used to better understand how ceiling heights would effect the space, I decided to use only one folded plane over the circulation/reference desk, with an aperture to allow sunlight to filter through to the floor from the skylight above. The second plan reconfigures the restrooms and the placement of the elevator in an attempt to return to the idea of a central spine. The third plan moves the staff work area, meeting area and restrooms to the mezzanine level, which allows the entire first floor to be organized by the placement of the stacks. The fourth plan is the final floorplan.
The stacks are designed to encourage the potential for both public and private interaction. A regular rhythm combined with consistently aligned stacks creates the initial impression of a monolithic unit; a dense field of materials. Interior spaces are carved out of these stacks, providing places for a circulation/reference desk, a group work area and a quiet periodical and reading area. Functioning as space makers, shelves and catalysts for social and mental discovery, the stacks maximize the potential for a variety of actions within the context of a library. The discovery of the various spaces and elements within the stacks invites exploration and delight.
The mezzanine level houses the restrooms, staff work area, outdoor patio and a multipurpose meeting room. Utilizing this space for specifically programmed functions allows the library stacks to encompass the entire first floor.

The young adult area incorporates a 200 square foot space that is recessed 5 feet below ground. The central staircase functions as shelving, leading down to a room lined with stacks. The result is the perception of descending into a niche lined with books.
Each stack component contains one or more shelf variations designed to provide the user with a range of possible actions and maximize the elements of discovery and surprise. In the main adult collection, seats, desks and open shelves are incorporated into the stack along parallel lines, creating a series of views through the space. The placement of these elements is designed to stimulate interaction on multiple levels: between material and user, patron and staff as well as amongst the users as a community. The stacks continue into the space beyond the main load bearing wall to form the children’s area. The stacks are modified in this area to incorporate niches within stacks in which a child could walk through or use as a reading cubby.
A place to read
A place to pause
A place to work
A place to discover
Circulation/Reference Desk
The stacks are constructed of metal and wood. The structural form is made of black and grey powder coated steel. The exterior edges of the stack unit is lined in oak, which is also used to line the interior edge of the open shelf elements. The books function as a visual barrier between each stack with the exception of the empty shelf designed to invite interaction between patrons. The material change from metal to wood indicates a change in usage within the context of a larger whole while also providing an inviting surface for seating and work surface.
Stacks: A Place to Work
Stacks: A Place to Pause
Stacks: A Place to Read
Floorplan with Programmatic Overlay
Circulation & Reference Desk
Computer Work Area
Group Study & Work Area
Quiet Reading & Periodical Area
Building Use Group: Assembly, A3
Total Square Feet: 9,568
Usable Square Feet: 6,698
Occupancy Load: 76
Drinking fountains: 1
Male Lavatories: 2
Female Lavatories: 2
ADA Elevator: 1
Exits: 3