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July, 2022

Of Architects and Libraries: A Simple Discourse Analysis

John Buschman, *Seton Hall University*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/john_buschman/96/

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ABSTRACT

Who plans for new and renovated libraries? Architects deploy master planning–based analyses to guide future development over the long term, heavily tilted toward analytical conclusions. In contrast, librarians tend to deploy design theory—solving problems in iterative solutions and re-designing for changing problems. Building and renovation projects inevitably bring interplay among groups (architectural firms, governing and financing entities) with their own influences, lenses of analysis, and social positioning. This study seeks to answer this question: Have we been or are we engaged in building or renovating libraries around master planning (architects), or are we solving library problems (design theory and librarians)? And what does the answer tell us about libraries and how they are being guided and shaped as they are built and renovated? A discourse analysis is performed on a sample of 15 years of library literature on building and renovation plans to answer the question.

Who plans for new and renovated libraries? Building new libraries or adapting library spaces on nearly any scale necessarily involves librarians but also architects, if only for their technical qualifications and for building safety. That, then, inevitably brings interplay among groups and roles—architectural firms, governing and financing entities, a variety of building laws and codes and inspectors, librarians—with varying influences, lenses of analysis, and social positioning (Day 1998; Buschman 2020a, 2020b). The issue is now heightened in a time of pandemic, with libraries pictured as in intense flux, accelerating changes perceived to be well underway (Cox 2020; Mevorah 2020; Carlson 2021). In its broadest sense, master planning for a library “provides a conceptual layout to guide future growth and development . . . and proposals for a site’s [people]” (World Bank 2015) and how they use the library over the long term. By its nature, master planning is thus heavily tilted toward analytical conclusions (“conceptual layout”) projecting decades out and shaping the library building toward that end. It is a process conducted by architects within the confines of their professional influences and constraints, with financing of the project among them (Buschman 2017a, 602; 2017b). In contrast, design theory has arisen in both library and information science (LIS) practices and research and in architecture—the design of buildings and spaces (Clarke 2018a, 2018b). It is essentially “the creation of things that solve problems” and is iterative—that is,

it involves adaptation and revision (redesign) to address less successful solutions or changing problems (Clarke 2018a, 41, 47). It is a natural perspective for analyzing and (re)shaping library spaces—arguably, a process more often conducted by librarians in libraries (Clarke 2018a, 2018b).¹ The deceptively simple question this study seeks to answer in this environment is, Have we been or are we engaged in building or renovating libraries around an analytical framework (master planning done by architects), or are we solving library problems (design theory done by librarians)? And what does the answer tell us about libraries and how they are being guided and shaped as they are built and renovated?

Study Sample

Given the immense output of the internet and published sources on the topic, the universe of units to analyze had to be narrowed. *Library, Information Science, and Technology Abstracts* (LISTA) was chosen because it indexes a robust selection of more than 600 core LIS journals and LIS-related publications back to 1960. The database was queried on March 29, 2021, with a Boolean combination of the sets (architect OR architectural practice OR architects) AND (library OR libraries). This was done to get at the issue of new library spaces and buildings, as the combined terms “architect” “architectural practice” and “architects” have a more precise meaning in the database thesaurus than terms such as “design,” “renovation,” “building” or “construction” for the purposes here: libraries engage architects for new buildings or renovated spaces. The results were then limited to trade publications, magazines, academic journals, and reviews in English from 2005 to late March 2021 so that the projects were recent, resulting in 161 numbered citations exported into a file. To eliminate selection bias, simple random sampling was conducted (Scheaffer et al. 2012, 78–79) with a web-based random number generator (<https://tinyurl.com/3kpcz3sa>) with the parameters set to 1–161. Duplicate numbers and not-possible-to-locate citations (indexing problems) were eliminated in three successively smaller rounds until a 20% sample was reached to start, and the articles were then gathered: 32 of the 161 articles. When compared with US national proportions of public, academic, and special libraries, the sample roughly matched those proportions: 52% of the articles included public libraries, 30% included academic libraries, and 18% included special libraries (table A1).²

The result fell into two types of documents. The largest group by far—27 articles—consisted of write-ups of notable or award-winning library designs, ranging from the very brief (approximately 70 words) to longer pieces that simply gathered many of these same types of write-ups

1. I am indebted to my colleague Kaitlin Kehnemuyi for this observation.

2. National data were taken from the American Library Association (2022), with three adjustments for consistency with the literature: (a) Armed Forces, government, and school libraries were eliminated from the totals; (b) the “Special” libraries category in the data included corporate, medical, legal, and religious libraries that were estimated out of the count; and (c) law libraries affiliated with academic institutions were counted in the academic category (table A1). This is not far off from the proportions of the subjects (public, academic, special) internal to the write-ups noted in the next paragraph.

(and accompanying pictures) into an article. This formula is familiar to readers of the architecture issues of *Library Journal* or *American Libraries*, and many other publications follow suit. The longest article, and the only true exception (approximately 3,400 words) among this group, was an extensive write-up on one notable renovation. The remaining five articles varied: universal design, a description of a library architecture seminar over the years, selection of design professionals for libraries, a consultants directory, and selling the public on a library project. All but 4 of the 32 articles came from LIS publications, and those 4 outliers were all architectural publications reflecting LISTA's stated coverage. Finally, the projects reviewed were in the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Latvia and included public libraries (33 write-ups), academic libraries (including law school libraries; 14 write-ups), and archives and special libraries (6 write-ups) in urban, suburban, and rural settings in socioeconomically stable communities and institutions.

Methods

The method of "simple" discourse analysis was chosen for a variety of reasons. First, in the broadest sense, its close cousin, content analysis, is meant to produce data from the fixed meanings of texts, whereas discourse analysis "is a methodology for analyzing social phenomena that is [sic] qualitative, interpretive, and . . . explores how the socially produced ideas and objects that populate the world were created and are held in place" (Hardy, Harley, and Phillips 2004, 19). Second, the selected literature compose one of many ordinary, "naturally occurring discourses, i.e. they occur prior to and independent of the research" (Haider and Bawden 2007, 540). Third, these are texts, not interviews subject to the variety of self-construction and self-presentation to which that modality is prone (Labov 1999). Finally, the texts themselves are relatively short and time bound, consisting of a limited topic that relates them to one another in "clearly regulated ways" not calling for a Foucauldian unpacking (Haider and Bawden 2007, 537).

What is meant by discourse analysis requires some explanation. It is emphatically not a set method to simply sort and screen texts. Rather, when text is produced about library designs and renovations, it can and should be taken seriously as "data" (Jaworski and Coupland 1999, 135). In turn, texts display a formula or a structure of elements (Labov 1999) that can vary with the topic or genre (Bell 1999; Caldas-Coulthard 1999). Classically, a narrative generally consists of five elements: (1) what it is about; (2) who, what, where, and when; (3) complications; (4) evaluation; and (5) the result (Labov 1999, 234). Although these texts are generally short, they are not simple or transparent. In this case, we already know what they are about. The sampled texts consisted of near parallels to the classic structure just noted in the setting or location (element 1), the challenge or opportunity (element 2), and the solution to the challenge or opportunity (element 3) and (often) revealing socioeconomic clues about the project (element 4). Therefore, a relatively simple and consistent formula across these varied articles should not be surprising, as discourse analysis tells us.

Results

The sample of 32 articles quickly reached data saturation in both senses of the word: first, with actual saturation, “when data collection ceases to provide new information and when relationships and patterns . . . are fully developed,” and second, with theoretical saturation, when the “data categories are ‘full’ (i.e. fully depicted) in terms of their properties and dimensions” (Powers and Knapp 2011, 166, 185; see also Strauss and Corbin 1998, 136, 143). The broader thrust of elements 1–4 build as their specifics are unpacked. They fit together, coalescing into a picture, and give us a strong sense how libraries are guided and shaped as they are being built and renovated.

Element 1: Setting or Location

This element was not simply an address. These texts consistently took some trouble and space to identify geography, social geography, or even the orientation on a compass: “multifamily urban structures” (Forrest 2005, 201), “south face” (198), a “work environment” (202); a 1907 building (“Public Library Buildings,” 2008) or an “iconic 1911 building” (Oder 2008, 17); the site’s unusual size or a nearby tree grove (“Expert Opinion,” 2005), an “adjacent parkland and creek” (Todaro 2019, 45), or the Rocky Mountains (“Public Library Buildings” 2008); London’s Southbank (CILIP 2012), central Washington DC (Hinson 2007), and Saint Louis (Dugas and Custer 2015), and the mountains bordering the dense central grid of Barcelona (Gregory 2006); passing traffic and intruding retail on nearby countryside (Harding 2006, 80); a planned community (Chrastka 2018), an “affluent suburb” (Parrott 2019, 42), an “established suburban neighborhood . . . [with] a mixed clientele . . . of the most and least affluent” (Rodgers 2015, 9), or a combination of high-tech professional and immigrant communities (Fialkoff 2019, 41); a campus crossroads (Hoeppner 2014). These examples by no means exhaust the supply. Less important than piling up more of them is the idea that this element is signaling something about planning for libraries: the perspective is that of architects and master planning, “a conceptual layout to guide future growth and development” and situating of a site, not the internal shape and use challenges of a library as it actually functions. Those signals will come into more focus as we examine further elements.

Element 2: “Challenge/Opportunity”

These words seem like a natural pairing but not in the way we now use them. Currently, when a difficult or politically sensitive situation arises for a leader or manager, “challenge” is the euphemism for outright problems or difficult conflicts, and “opportunity” is the happier surrogate that very often slides over to replace it, thereby recasting an often serious problem or conflict as a positive chance for progress or success (see, e.g., Busch 2022). In element 2, they are more mirror images of one another: a challenge is always to be met in a design, and an opportunity always implies a challenge. It is less a matter of eliding a problem to smooth over conflictual

issues, as happens in current usage now, than making them equivalent. The explanatory task here is made easier by the frequent use of these terms in the write-ups:

- Challenges: library entrances and current site presentation prevent “the best experience” for users (Fialkoff 2019), a “fortresslike and foreboding” entrance (Hazlett 2017, 26), a “dark, monolithic building” or a “nondescript, two-story concrete block” (Forrest 2005, 199, 203), a building in need of “unlock[ing],” another appearing “raw and uninviting” and yet another that was “traditional” (“Regional RIBA,” 2008, 15); an expired lease and “wasted or ‘dead’ spaces” (Blyton 2008, 12) in the old facility; nonflexible, difficult, and obscure spaces (Spina 2017); a “200-year-old building that was never meant to house a library” (Klos 2007); a building that had undergone numerous expansions and renovations in need of a complete rethinking (Schwartz 2013); a “botched construction job” (Oder 2009, 15); access and parking (“Expert Opinion,” 2005).
- Opportunities: open up spaces and market the library (Schwartz 2013; Dugas and Custer 2015; Fialkoff 2019); invoke a national legend or echo the surroundings—whether of water or a romantic idea of the countryside (Hazlett 2017, 25–26); foster comfort and draw more visitors (Naru 2013; Spina 2017); guide and control collection use and access (Forrest 2005, 199; Klos 2007; CILIP 2012); bring together old and new (Webb 2006; Forrest 2005, 199; Klos 2007; Oder 2008); create a landmark and a prominent public space (Forrest 2005, 204–5).

As can be seen by the multiple sources for similar points, opportunities tend to be repeated. This short list does not quite get at the depth of that point. With numbing regularity, the write-ups valorized access to light and, subsequently, to comely views within and without the buildings, consumer-like choice in spaces (flexibility), collaboration, and retail or consumption spaces: “a core move to ‘customers and not the collection’ that [takes] the form of aggressively marketing electronic resources, with space flexibility as a core end-target” for library buildings (Buschman 2017a, 608). Technology is nearly ubiquitous as an opportunity, with the stand-in phrase “21st-century library” repeated frequently. A (very) few examples of these will suffice: an academic library upgrade fostered the model of one-stop-shopping services and technology-based social learning and collaboration (Hoepfner 2014); a public library upgrade created an “observational beehive” and included a skylight and a glass mosaic for light in creating a “space perfect for the 21st century” (“Public Library Buildings,” 2008); a new urban central library built “programmatic cluster[s] . . . architecturally defined and equipped for maximum performance” (i.e., flexible non-purpose-built spaces), and the “spaces between [them] function as trading floors” to drive the commercial imagery home (Forrest 2005, 205). The language movement from challenge to opportunity reflects reimagined space for reimagined people using a library over an imagined long term (architects, master planning), not problem-solving for actual use (design, librarians).

Element 3: Solutions

The solutions proffered in turn flow directly from the settings and their challenges/opportunities. The urban setting challenge was that the building appeared as an unwelcoming fortress, thus the solution was to create “vibrant . . . open spaces [with a] great use of color, and excellent spatial planning, representing what a library is supposed to be” (Hazlett 2017, 26). Over and over again, the mirror images of the challenges and opportunities “drove” solutions “incorporating atriums, coffee shops, and fireplaces and employing bold color palettes, striking design themes, and a strong ‘wow’ factor” (Forrest 2005, 197). The south-facing wall became a “curved limestone” windowed surface, and the library was suffused with light while accommodating “group rooms [and] multimedia classrooms,” along with a “two-story-high reading room [that] looks over the campus green.” In all it was a “dramatic and elegant gesture”—that is, a design element to communicate an idea or effect to library users—“to rescue the building and bring it into the twenty-first century” (Forrest 2005, 198). Those solutions instantiate explicit judgments as to what libraries were before the gestures and what they should become with the “latest ideas in library construction and most interesting ideas” applied to them (Niederer 2006):

- A small branch was “envisioned as a library for a new generation, as much community center and tech portal as a place to discover books” (Hazlett 2017, 24) and a “transformation of a traditional library” into a “busy, vibrant cultural focus” (“Regional RIBA,” 2008) was the similar point in another renovation.
- Universities seek to “creat[e] an environment that is flexible enough to meet the evolving . . . requirements of the library. What we once knew as a storehouse of printed material is now becoming the technological hub of the campus” (Pruett 2010, 14), whereas others seek to satisfy students who now simply want “a comfortable, modern, high-tech space” that is conducive to “today’s collaborative learning styles” (Naru 2013, 12; see Noll 2008 for a similar point about public libraries); print and reading areas are grouped with needs like “toilets and photocopiers” (Jones 2008, 83).
- Another renovation “takes the hermetic archival library and turns it inside out . . . and promotes a positive dialogue between past and future” (Forrest 2005, 199); another signals to an urban public in very large “playful” lettering graphics to mark the library’s place (Harding 2006, 80).
- Yet another “open[s] up the space and connect[s] the two floors” (Fialkoff 2019) with an atrium, pruned shrubs in the library’s moat to promote visibility from the outside and “activate[s] the adult area with computers and technology,” glass and a skylight “to better market the library.”
- A “modernization of library services” included cedar siding, a wood-lined ceiling, a trellis, canopies, an agora, clerestory windows, and visibility from the street for the activities in the library—“library as lodge” as it was called (Forrest 2005, 201).

In short, many of these projects tout “a complete overhaul of the concept of library” in their imagined use and future (Schwartz 2013). Indeed “retirees looking for a traditional library experience” (Parrott 2019) seemed to be reluctantly accommodated in some of the projects. Larded into the language of elements 1–3 are underlying assumptions: “traditional” libraries are dark, uninviting with dead spaces, uncollaborative, antichoice, anticonvenience, non-technological and print centric (an equivalence the write-ups imply), appealing primarily to the “not young.” The solutions are not library solutions but rather architectural ones—flourishes and gestures that invoke a reimagining of libraries as a substitute for (or as instructive to) current library practices: granite facades (Oder 2009), “hanging bronze mesh [and] timber bookcases” (CILIP 2012), a petting zoo and a “modernized glass take on a ‘silo’” (Schwartz 2013) to evoke the pastoral history of the community, “hand-patinated bronze panels . . . slate floors and well-detailed solid oak” (“Regional RIBA,” 2008) for the fittings, retail (“Plans Unveiled,” 2008), and a “glass-enclosed children’s pavilion [and] a cantilevered space that ‘floats’ over” a flood-prone area (“Public Library Buildings,” 2008). These, in turn, represent an economic set of design choices as to where to invest limited construction dollars and to what effect: building gesture versus library services, design significations versus materials or library-specific programmed spaces are the implied binaries. There is an inherent hierarchy in the choices made and who is making them, bringing us to our fourth element.

Element 4: Socioeconomic Clues

Reported costs are a key feature of the write-ups. Essentially, they function as a what-you-can-do economic illustration for other libraries, boards, and administrations. Some are quite explicit about the point—for example, “a small budget does not equal a banal building” (Hazlett 2017, 24). The result is the frequent emphasis on the architects’ inexpensive choices of paint color to reflect, mimic, or maximize light and adding windows and the weight of design choices for tightly budgeted projects. There is, however, a subset of experiences within the sampled write-ups that differ:

I must confess to a certain distrust of architect’s motives when given the chance to design a library . . . and the results too often bear little semblance to the environment in which collections must be housed and library staff and researchers must engage in their work.³ . . . [But] while it cannot be said that money was no object, Dumbarton Oaks has the good fortune of being fully endowed [with] all the necessary funding. . . . There is nothing to calm one’s nerves more than remembering the building is essentially already paid for. (Klos 2007)

3. Indeed, architects themselves advise librarians to “use architects who use libraries—not just ‘design them’” (“Expert Opinion,” 2005), and there are publications in LIS on how to vet and work with them (Ames and Heid 2012). On architects and their “visioning” tendencies, see Eskins and Burshtein 2018.

The architect for that project was the famous Robert Venturi, and he approached Harvard's historic Dumbarton Oaks (located in a landscaped garden in the District of Columbia) and its head librarian with respect and a willingness to meet the institution's needs *as a library*. The same can be said for the Renzo Piano renovation of the Morgan Library (Webb 2006), the renovation of Harvard's Widener Library, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, large urban central library projects like those in Seattle and Salt Lake City (Forrest 2005, 200, 204–5). High prestige and expensive projects go forward confidently like New York Public Library's \$1 billion renovation plan: "anyone with a minimal imagination will realize the dramatic possibilities" (Oder 2008, 17) of the project. The law libraries were keen to display both prominent and expensive architectural gestures and to accommodate and encourage a particular kind of use of the library in their designs, and they shaped them as such (Hinson 2007; Dugas and Custer 2015) reflecting the power, prestige, and wealth often associated with the law.⁴ These points and perspectives are lacking in the vast majority of the write-ups.

Analysis and Conclusion

What then have we learned from this simple discourse analysis concerning library building and renovation projects and architects? Though it is largely latent, it is clear from the interlinking elements 1–4, first, that architects have the upper hand and the greater authority in these projects and, second, that their *modus operandi* is to design for an imagined, projected vision of libraries—the master planning approach (vs. design and problem solving). Invoking the "twenty-first-century library"—that is, what libraries will become and a future contrasted so consistently with an unattractive present or past—implies a clear vision and analysis of what will or should come to pass and a resulting concept of how to design a building or renovation to see it through. That vision is largely neoliberal, an "oversimplified image of cultural change" welded to technology, its media, and marketing infrastructure, which shape public and library spaces too (Haidt and Bawden 2007, 547, 546–49 *passim*; Buschman 2017a). To enact a design theory approach would mean that the framing of the problems to be solved would be grounded in what libraries have actually become and how the people working in them and using them have adapted physical surroundings to meet needs and desires for materials and services. The language of the sample does not support that interpretation. It would also mean repositioning librarians as minimally equal in influence over these projects, which is not the case. Why is this so?

First and classically, librarians do not display the level of control and ability to enforce boundaries over their domains of expertise the way that medical doctors, lawyers, or architects can and do (Abbott 1988). In other words, librarianship is a lower status and gendered profession (those are related), long subject to buffeting by trends and influences, which continues (Buschman and Carbone 1991; Winter 1993, 2009; Harris 2009; Buschman 2020a, 2020b). Second

4. This was before the great law school enrollment and employment downturn (Buschman 2015).

and illustrative of this point is that so many of these write-ups, including many in LIS publications, are authored by architects themselves—that is, librarians are often not the ones writing about libraries when significant monies are being spent on them. Third, when LIS-affiliated authors do the write-ups, they take pains to quote the architects at some length or mimic the language of architects' *métier*, always noting the architectural firm—a form of free advertising (e.g., "LAMA," 2005). Librarians thereby attempt to strengthen their position by adopting a discourse fashion in the form of innovative or updated language borrowed from a more prestigious source (Day 2002). Fourth, architects—and not the inhabitants or users of these library buildings—are the judges of the awards and recognition being bestowed and written about. An LIS publication on selling a community on the investment in a library sums up the relationships perfectly: librarians need the architect to "help create a vision for the project," including visuals like a maquette or color design sketches for the purpose; librarians need to be sensitive and responsive to their "audience," "market" and "who's paying the bills"; finally comes the near ubiquitous "twenty-first-century library" trope that "libraries are no longer just about books" (Anderson 2005). The lesson is that librarians must rely on their architect (and the guiding ideas they bring to the project) to convince their publics and the sources of funding: they are not in a position to do so themselves. The many fewer contrasting accounts of library projects at more wealthy and powerful institutions serve to illustrate this point. In the end, libraries are subject to master planning driven by a projected vision based on an analysis of the institution that architects articulate in design plans and language around them. But that raises another question: What is that analysis, and what is it based on?

Discourse analysis tells us that workaday write-ups like these are worth reading and thinking about because "narrative structures and subjects are like working apparatuses of ideology, repositories for . . . meanings" (Caldas-Coulthard 1999, 537). These texts are evidence of social relations, processes, and structures—how power, social as well as political, becomes effective in particular situations (Fairclough 1999, 204–5). The broader thrust of elements 1–4 is that they interlock, building from sociologically significant specifics of location (element 1) translated into the mirror images of a challenge and opportunity (element 2) "responsive" to the specifics of the location. The word "responsive" is used because, remarkably diverse though the sites are, thematically they seem to call for a very limited toolbox of solutions (element 3): windows, light, views, flexibility, color, retail, technology, and a "wow factor." The anomalous cases (element 4) are notable by their wealth and status or power to force exceptions and acknowledge library needs or desirable library outcomes without sacrificing the "wow factors." In other words, all of these write-ups, including the outlying five, assume an underlying set of ideas and values (meanings) driving this analytical framing (imagining) that produces certain outcomes.

What is that analytical framing/imagining? Primo Levi wrote of "subject[ing] himself to the trials of abnegation that were demanded . . . to consult the volumes. The library's schedule was brief and irrational, the lighting dim . . . in the winter, no heat; no chairs but uncomfortable and

noisy metal stools; and finally the librarian was an incompetent, insolent boor . . . stationed at the threshold to . . . howl [at] those aspiring to enter” (quoted in Manguel 2006, 114). Umberto Eco (1980), writing about medieval libraries in *The Name of the Rose*, implicitly comments on contemporary “libraries in their reality, as institutions still clinging to an outdated, quasi-sacred mission” (Garrett 1991, 377). Both authors clearly intend to say something about libraries as such, but their observations have been appropriated into a discourse shaped by neoliberalism (Buschman 2017a). It is this image and story about libraries that constitutes the underlying “analysis” that has been deployed so often and for so long to argue for changed libraries, or even no libraries at all:

- 1970s: The paperless library would render an institution centered around the book obsolete and librarians would not be needed.
- 1980s: An information age had caught libraries and librarians unawares, and libraries would become deinstitutionalized as free-floating services in place of spaces and collections.
- 1990s: These same predictions were recycled in the form of disappearing services and a marginalized profession due to technology and the persistent association with the format of the book.
- 2000s: Libraries are not a part of the information revolution or future.
- 2010s: Libraries are not being used and will fade away due to the competition from inexpensive online books and online sellers of books (Buschman 2020c, 159–60).

In other words, these perspectives are not uncommon, and this neoliberal narrative has been around for decades.

The influence flows this way: buildings and renovations are expensive, requiring substantial investments; those investments come from loans or bonds provided by financial markets; the cost (interest) of the money is determined by firms doing ratings; the ratings are determined by how well the institution is managed and its vision; that, in turn, is measured by the presence of fiscal-control mechanisms and management plans that reflect a positioning for a “market” and where libraries users are headed in the culture—an ineffable grasp of the *zeitgeist* (Buschman 2017a). We circle back to an “oversimplified image of cultural change” so present in culture and the media reflected in the above predictions for libraries from the 1970s to the present. In the end, architects are themselves only parroting dominant neoliberal themes with their rhetoric and constant invocation of the “twenty-first-century library.” It is in their interests. Neoliberalism guides the fiscal mechanisms that must be activated for the projects they design, reflecting not what matters most to librarians and users but rather that “what counts” is “future relationships [with] the funders [and] managers” (Roma Harris, quoted in Buschman 2017b; see also Buschman 2014, 2017a). If this seems irrational, it is: libraries are “a largely popular public

service, often willingly paid for by [tuition payers and] taxpayers who are happy with their libraries. . . . It is not that data and arguments that . . . libraries improve quality of life, that they build and enrich [learning,] community and cultural heritage, that they are viable and loved ‘third places,’ or that they economically assist during hard times and extend the service reach of [classrooms and] government fall on deaf ears but, rather, that ears have been re-engineered not to hear (or value) such data and arguments” (Buschman 2020a, 166).

The reality is people want and use their libraries, but we are not debating reality, we are debating the neoliberal *image* of libraries. Words may be understood, but images are simply to be recognized, immune to rational analysis (Postman 1988). Buried not very deep in these write-ups of library building and renovation projects is the persistent guiding image—not analysis—of an institution in need of a vision informed by architect’s imbibing of neoliberalism to shape its space toward ends dimly understood or in need of transformation. In contrast, literature reviews find a longstanding LIS discourse that recognizes social and technological changes and that seeks to articulate and “acknowledge the open texture and fluid approach taken . . . when it comes to space design and interventions to support” users’ demonstrated needs and articulated wishes (O’Donnell and Anderson 2021; see also Fiels 2011; Kajberg 2013). The risible notion implied behind the rhetorical positioning of the write-ups is that users’ benefits and the library affordances to realize them have often been sacrificed to the profession’s inertia and a desire to simply hang on to an older way of doing things. This is instantiated in the challenges/opportunities as they are described. Equally risible is the idea that librarians do not want comfortable, functional, pleasing, light-filled spaces that their users like and that they would not jump at the opportunity to put those things in place themselves. It is well past time that we understand and reject the image that passes for an analysis instantiated in these write-ups and use what leverage we have to shift from a master planning approach guided by architects’ neoliberal assumptions to a design approach that more organically addresses the needs and opportunities of our spaces and their design.

Appendix

Table A1. Articles Sampled from the LISTA Search of March 29, 2021

	Article Citation	Numbered Place in Search Results	Type(s) of Libraries or the Topic Written Up
1	Niederer 2006	1	Library architecture seminar
2	Forrest 2005	3	Public, academic, special/archive
3	Hinson 2007	9	Special
4	Spina 2017	12	Universal design
5	Rodgers 2015	23	Public
6	Gregory 2005	24	Public
7	“BFI’s” 2012	25	Special/archive

Table A1. (Continued)

	Article Citation	Numbered Place in Search Results	Type(s) of Libraries or the Topic Written Up
8	Fialkoff 2019	32	Public
9	Schwartz 2013	45	Public
10	Hoepfner 2014	46	Academic
11	Klos 2007	52	Special/archive
12	"Expert Opinion" 2005	55	Public, academic
13	Dugas and Custer 2015	65	Academic
14	Anderson 2005	70	Selling a new library project
15	"LAMA" 2005	78	Directory of library consultants
16	Pruett 2010	97	Academic
17	Harding 2006	99	Public
18	Blyton 2008	102	Public
19	Noll 2008	105	Public
20	Oder 2008	107	Public
21	"Plans Unveiled" 2008	113	Public
22	Chrastka 2018	114	Public
23	Parrott 2019	115	Public
24	"Public Library Buildings" 2008	117	Public
25	"Regional RIBA" 2008	123	Academic, public
26	Webb 2006	124	Special/archive
27	Ames and Heid 2012	129	Selecting library design professionals
28	Hazlett 2017	145	Public, academic, special/archive
29	Oder 2009	147	Academic
30	Naru 2013	150	Academic
31	Jones 2008	151	Academic
32	Todaro 2019	161	Public

Note.—Search terms: (architect OR architectural practice OR architects) AND (library OR libraries). LISTA = *Library, Information Science, and Technology Abstracts*.

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John Buschman: dean of University Libraries at Seton Hall University. Buschman is author of *Dismantling the Public Sphere: Situating and Sustaining Libraries in the Age of the New Public Philosophy* (2003). His most recent book is *Libraries, Classrooms and the Interests of Democracy: Marking the Limits of Neoliberalism* (2012), and he is the author of numerous articles in the *Library Quarterly* and other leading journals. He holds a master of library science degree from Ball State, a master of arts degree in American studies from St. Joseph's University, and a doctor of liberal studies degree from Georgetown University. Email: john.buschman@shu.edu.