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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

special issue / numéro spécial :
Vancouver Public Library

PRÉSENTATION :
Safdie, Vancouver et le «Library Square»

En mai 1995, la Bibliothèque municipale de Vancouver a inauguré un nouvel édifice conçu par Moshe Safdie en partenariat avec Downs Archambault de Vancouver. Le débat que ce projet a suscité dans les journaux et dans les revues spécialisées reste sans aucun doute un moment particulièrement intense de l'histoire de l'architecture au Canada dans la dernière décennie du XXᵉ siècle. On s'est questionné sur le caractère approprié de ce nouveau «Colisée romain» à Vancouver, mais, en même temps, on a consacré ce bâtiment en l'associant de façon définitive à l'image de la ville. On a aussi reconnu ses qualités fonctionnelles, tout comme la convivialité très urbaine de son atrium rappelant les grands passages, couverts de verre et bordés de boutiques, de la fin du XIXᵉ siècle en Europe.

Avec quelques années de distance, et maintenant que la nouvelle bibliothèque fait partie du quotidien de nombreux résidants de Vancouver, nous pouvons appréhender ce bâtiment de façon plus historique, en tenant compte, d'une part, des débats architecturaux qui ont orienté sa lecture à l'origine, et, d'autre part, du succès indéniable du bâtiment dans la ville actuelle.

Ce numéro spécial du *Journal de la Société pour l'étude de l'architecture au Canada* vise à jeter un nouveau regard sur ce bâtiment et à mettre en perspective le débat qui l'a entouré. L'article de Rhodri Windsor Liscombe compare le bâtiment de 1995 à celui qui l'a précédé, un édifice moderniste conçu par la firme Semmens Simpson en 1957. Liscombe montre, entre autres choses, comment les étiquettes de «moderniste» et de «postmoderniste» obscurcissent la compréhension de ces deux bâtiments plutôt qu'elles ne permettent de l'éclairer. Puis l'article de Linda Lewin Graif situe le projet de 1995 dans un contexte historique plus large, tout en examinant de façon détaillée le rôle des divers intervenants dans le processus de sa conception.

J'aimerais remercier Irena Murray, Conservatrice en chef des Collections spéciales et Livres rares de la bibliothèque de l'Université McGill, ainsi que les auteurs, Rhodri Windsor Liscombe et Linda Lewin Graif, pour la part importante qu'ils ont joué dans la réalisation de ce numéro spécial du journal.

Marc Grignon, rédacteur

PRESENTATION:
Safdie, Vacouver, and "Library Square"

In May 1995, the Vancouver Public Library inaugurated a new building designed by Moshe Safdie in partnership with Downs Archambault from Vancouver. The debate that erupted about this building in the newspapers and in the specialized journals undoubtedly remains a moment of particular intensity in the history of Canadian architecture during the last decade of the 20ᵗʰ century. Some critics have questioned the appropriateness of this new "Roman Coliseum" in Vancouver, while at the same time contributing to the recognition of the building by associating it forever with the image of the city. Some others have insisted on its functional qualities, and on the conviviality and the urbanity of its atrium, which recalls the great European passages, covered with glass and bordered with shops, of the late 19ᵗʰ century.

With the distance of a few years, and now that the new Public Library has become part of the daily experience of many Vancouver residents, the time is right to examine that building in a more historical way, taking into account, on one hand, the architectural debates that originally framed its interpretation, and, on the other hand, the undeniable success of the building in the city of today.

This special issue of the *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada* aims at studying this building — and the debate surrounding it — from a fresh perspective. In his article, Rhodri Windsor Liscombe compares the 1995 library with its predecessor, a modernist structure conceived by Semmens Simpson in 1957. Among other things, Liscombe shows how the labels of "Modern" and "Postmodern" may have prevented rather than facilitated a better understanding of these two buildings. Then, Linda Lewin Graif's article situates the 1995 project within a broader historical context and examines the role of the different participants in its design process.

I would like to thank Irena Murray, Chief Curator of the Special Collections and Rare Books Division of the McGill University libraries, and the authors Rhodri Windsor Liscombe and Linda Lewin Graif for their significant part in making this special issue of the journal possible.

Marc Grignon, editor

Fig. 1. Semmens Simpson, Vancouver Public Library, 1957, Vancouver. (photo R. W. Liscombe, 1995).

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R h o d r i   W i n d s o r   L i s c o m b e

Conditions of Modernity: Si[gh]tings from Vancouver

In memory of Alan A. Macnaughton, P.C., O.C., D.L.

The discussion of the relative chronologies and properties of Modernism and Postmodernism tends to the rhetorical and global.[1] Comparative analysis of specific architectural commissions supposedly representative of each phenomenon but within single typologies and locations remains to be attempted, especially in the Canadian context. This paper will compare the two central public libraries built in post-war Vancouver, each of which has been held to represent, or embody, the respective conditions of Modernism and Postmodernism. Modernism and Postmodernism are here defined, respectively, as a universalizing anti-historicist design process centred on the technical solution of functional need and concerned with social improvement, and as a contextually generated, historically-referenced style seeking to attain both more particular and symbolic architectural expression. The comparison indicates that the relationship between Modernism and Postmodernism is less discontinuous than reflexive and revisionist in nature, and that neither has been as homogeneous as presumed. The current dependence upon either a visual or a sociological reading underplays the impact of what might be called the internal discourse of architecture, including the conditions of practice. Such readings also oversimplify the discussion of architectural contextuality and consumption.

Vancouver is unusual among most major cities in having commissioned two central or civic libraries since 1945.[2] While these buildings, respectively opened in 1957 and 1995 to markedly divergent critical acclaim, they are equally remarkable for their aesthetic, symbolic and functional difference[s].[3] The 1957 library by the local firm of Semmens Simpson was incisively rectilinear and chiefly dependent upon the interplay of line and plane for the formal expression of purpose and meaning (fig. 1). It was largely glazed and metallic in fabric, including even its external ornamentation, and hence transparent and relatively weightless in appearance. These qualities are particularly evident at the main entrance. Recessed at the intersection of its Burrard and Robson Street facades, this arrangement clearly embodies the library's declared mission of public accessibility and civic engagement (fig. 2). By contrast, and as a consequence of significant redefinition of those socio-political concepts, the

Fig. 2. Semmens Simpson, Vancouver Public Library, 1957, Vancouver; Burrard Street facade (photo G. Warrington, 1958). (J.R.A.I.C., by permission)

1995 library is integrated into a multi-use bureaucratic and commercial complex. The library component is curvilinear, or more properly eliptical (fig. 3); enclosed if not entirely opaque; masonry finished and monumental. The team of architects — now a celebrated international practitioner, Moshe Safdie, in partnership with the Vancouver firm Downs Archambault — reverted to the semblance of historical tradition. The profile and columnation of the library recall ancient Classsical and Renaissance precedent which is reiterated by incised mouldings delineating triadic patterns in its upper register (fig. 4). Where the interior of the Semmens Simpson library was open-plan and inoffensively utilitarian, the Safdie/Downs Archambault facility is spatially and functionally diverse as well as deliberately spectacular.

The visual differences reflect individual architectural taste and changes in technology, professional practice and cultural attitudes. Yet, notwithstanding their contrasting appearance and impact, the libraries had similar requirements. Both in the 1950s and the 1990s these requirements were to accomodate expanding print, publication and such new media as records and microfilm, as well as an increased role for the public library in what is now usually termed cultural production. Moreover, despite discrepant iteration or realization, the architects concurred in many of their declared design objectives. Uppermost was maximum spatial and technical efficiency through the integration of stack with service and public areas, arranged as much by pattern of use as by pedagogical system. An imagery of transparency is architectonically appropriated through the extensive glazing of both libraries, and most notably in the 1995 building by the glass "community wall" across the internal entrance front (fig. 5). In both, the window onto an information resource functions as a symbol of rapid accessibility.[4] Thus in their initial scheme for the 1957 library, the local firm of Semmens Simpson stated that the building was "[d]esigned to invite [in] the citizens it will service," to be durable and substantial while functional, with "overall flexibility which provides for ready reallocation of space" and expansion.[5] The curtain wall was intended "to show to advantage the book stacks and study access within and to encourage passersby to enter and become users."[6] Some thirty-five years later, in his "Vision Statement" for the second library, Moshe Safdie defined its design concept (for which he was primarily responsible) as "display, with books enveloping the user, everywhere proclaiming visually what it has to offer."[7] In each library the building and librarian operate less as defenders of culture — and its implied socio-political hierarchy — than as facilitators of infor-
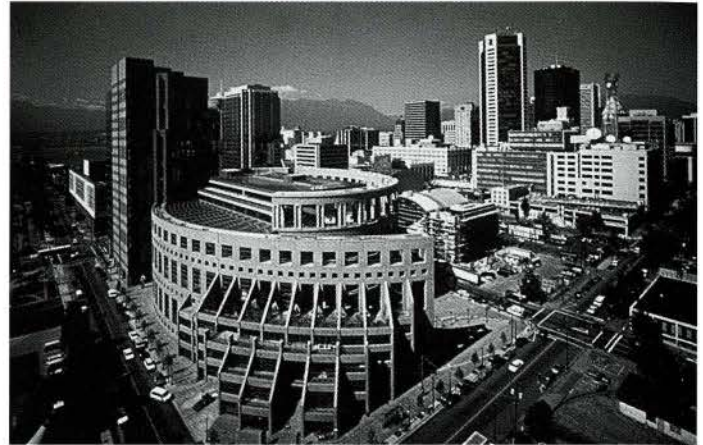
Fig. 3. Moshe Safdie/Downs Archambault, Vancouver Public Library, 1995, Vancouver; aerial view (photo Barry Downs, by permission)

mation retrieval and leisure reading. Lastly, the original program for the 1957 library included plans for commercial rental space that, actualized in the 1995 building, has contributed to its negative critical reception as a facility more for commodified information/exchange than for public literacy.[8]

What had changed profoundly between the 1950s and 1990s was the diminution of social democratic principles in the framing of urban policy.[9] This in turn impacted the definition of the overall architectural agenda and thereby the relative conceptual agency of the architects. The simpler service objectives of the mid-1950s were replaced forty years later by the preoccupation with symbol and imagery required by the municipal and institutional patron and largely endorsed by the public. The competition documentation was now prepared by professional program consultants. Picking up on its rhetoric, Safdie/Downs Archambault revealed their strategy in a corresponding epistemology of what they termed "Ritual and Ceremony."[10] They satisfied the functional requirement through the superimposition of symbolism — even visual pageantry — in the architectural satisfaction of practical requirement. Their written description also neatly articulated, and thereby partly redirected, the cruder materialistic ambition masked by the grandiose and aestheticized language in the competition literature: "We [the public] yearn for our institutions to engender civic pride," adding in subtle contestation of the entrepreneurial values re-emphasized in the resurgence of conservative capitalist, or neo-liberal, politics over the preceding decade, "[w]e want them to counteract the pervasive commercial culture."[11] Nearly half a century earlier, Semmens Simpson had not confronted such sophisticated if fundamentally contradictory, even conflictual specifications.

The concern with spectacle and discourse was a consequence of altered socio-cultural attitudes that intersect with aspects of Postmodern theory. But equally significant — and not unrelated — was the emergence of the professional program consultant and the revival of the limited public competition. In this competition Safdie/Downs Archambault were matched against two accomplished United States firms with expertise in commercial as much as institutional design: Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer of New York in association with Waisman Dewar Grout Carter of Vancouver, and Kuarabara Payne McKenna Blumberg of Toronto

Fig. 4. Moshe Safdie/
Downs Archambault,
Vancouver Public Library,
1995, Vancouver:
colonnade.
(photo M. Grignon, 2000)

Fig. 5. Moshe Safdie/
Downs Archambault,
Vancouver Public Library,
1995, Vancouver; atrium
and "community wall."
(photo Barry Downs,
by permission)

with James Cheng of Vancouver, who would later be commissioned to revamp the 1957 library. The competition was judged by four architects: two local and two international.[12] They were charged with selecting a design that expressed cultural tropes appropriate to the promotion of learning, civic dignitas and consumerism. The embrace of consumerist values was partly an outcome of the funding of construction through market financing. This policy included the sale for redevelopment of the 1957 building despite its heritage designation. The once stoically elegant exterior and spacious interior were substantially altered in 1996-97 to accommodate garish and generic outlets for Planet Hollywood and Virgin Records — each business, however, exemplifying the continuing internationalization of commercial practice and standardization of popular taste associated with the Modern ethos. A different expression of continuity comes in the descriptive phrases — an oasis of "calmness and security," and a "treasury of culture" — used by Safdie and Barry Downs to attune their project to current attitudes.

The uncompromising abstract functionalism of the 1957 library embodied the values of an era preoccupied by world conflict and the Cold War, when library buildings seemed to signify "free access to the world's knowledge for all people," and the construction across Canada of community centres with integral libraries intended to promote "better citizenship" and "enrich the cultural and post-educational life."[13]

The Modernist rhetoric of post-war Canadian libraries melded culture and education with free market democracy, paralleling the conventionalization of Modernism in Cold-War North America as a project divided between urban high-rise commercial and suburban residential architecture. That division, with its adverse impact on transportation and community, would undermine the comprehensive and collective tenets of Modern movement design as well as its public endorsement. The positive aspect of modernization was articulated by E.S. Robinson, Director of the Vancouver Library system up to 1957. In the February 1947 issue of the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada*, he declared: "The time has come to prove to our citizens that the public library is not a remote institution holding no attraction for the working man or the business man."[14] Surely alluding negatively to the still operating 1903 Carnegie Library (designed by H.W. Grant), Robinson privileged the following design attributes: "friendly, inviting and functional [...] simple though distinguished." The plain language manifest in the periodic articles on library design in the *J.R.A.I.C.* through the 1950s reflected the clear sense of objectives, means and expectations of that era and the legacy of the missionary zeal of the between-the-wars Modern movement.[15] Such clarity was intensified by

the onset of Cold War propaganda, to the advantage of library expenditure. In his 1948 annual report to City Council, titled *Growing with the Vancouver Public Library*, Robinson described the public library as the "University of the People," making available everything from Robert's *Home from the Cold Wars* to the writings of Churchill, Eisenhower, Huxley, Kinsey and Mailer. "Good readers," he asserted, "make good citizens and the library is the ounce of prevention which will keep our people informed, balanced in their judgement and firm in their belief in democracy as our way of life. An intelligent vote cannot be cast by an ill-informed citizen. A public library is truly an 'Arsenal of Democracy.'" While announcing initial plans for a new main library in addition to the construction of several smaller branches, Robinson's 1948 report further stated the contemporary political consensus for expenditure on social infrastructure. The new library would be flexible in plan, modular in construction and include "space for commercial purposes [...] until such time as the library needs it."

Robinson's comment underscores the need to nuance the Modern/Postmodern dialectic. For in commending the Modernist project, Robinson was also appeasing those civic politicians who regarded the library as a contribution to either the monumental hubris of the city or its economic growth. A civic centre, including a new main library and Federal offices, had been promoted in the 1930 Harland Bartholomew City Beautiful Plan (renewed by the conservative council in 1944 and 1947) as "stabilizing and enhancing the business district."[16] For its part the civic Library Board "insisted that its new proposed main library building had to be located as near the heart of the business district as possible." That notion would recur in the caption to a photograph on the cover of the City Library 1957 annual report: "Bang in the middle of the business district." It also articulated the belief of Tom Ingledow, Chief Engineer of the major provincial corporation B.C. Electric, and Chair of the Trustees of the Vancouver Art Gallery, that "cultural development must keep pace with the industrial and economic expansion."[17]

The argument of commercial potential in cultural expansion had almost succeeded in accelerating construction of a new main library in 1947, no longer at the proposed civic centre on Georgia

5

Fig. 6. Fred Lasserre, photomontage scheme for a new public library and civic auditorium, 1949-50.
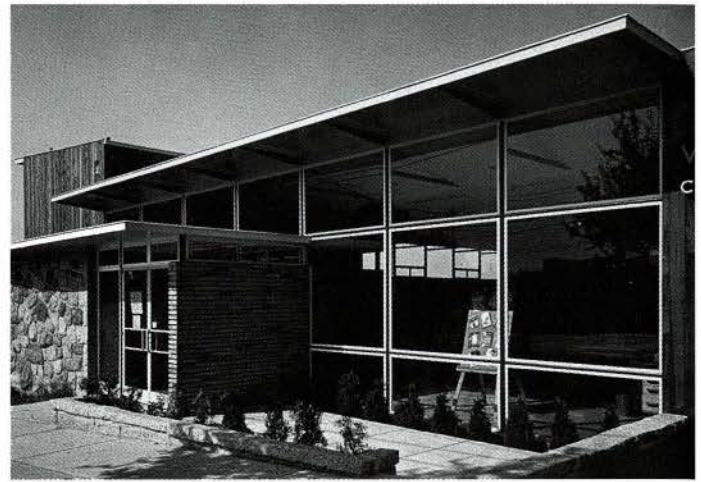(L. Maranda archive, by permission)

Fig. 8. Semmens Simpson, Collingwood Branch, Vancouver Public Library, 1952
(photo G. Warrington). (B. Simpson archive, Collection Centre Canadien d'architecture/
Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal)

Fig. 7. Sharp and Thompson Berwick Pratt, South Hill Branch, Vancouver Public Library, 1950
(photo G. Warrington). (*J.R.A.I.C.*, by permission)

Street but at the core of current re-development along Burrard Street. This move was anticipated in the earliest Modernist design for the library by Frederic Lasserre, who then had been recently appointed inaugural Head of the University of British Columbia Department of Architecture.[18] Aware of the Library Board's insistence on a site in the business district, he won support of the Downtown Business Man's Association for a strikingly lucid Modernist complex: an 11-storey office block, auditorium, radio station and linking 3-storey library around a landscaped court within the perimeter of one city block (diagonally southeast of the final location). This combination of civic and popular culture with commerce narrowly failed to win public approval in March 1947 for a tax increase to raise the $2.5 million for site and construction. The comparatively small local economy also aborted Lasserre's later and more comprehensive 1949 scheme for a civic cultural centre on the Georgia Street site (fig. 6).

Nevertheless, over the next decade, the electorate endorsed the funding of eighteen beachheads of literacy in schools or firehalls, mobile branches or "Bookmobiles" — a telling icon of the mechanical and social episteme of Modernism — and the building of eight branch libraries. The most highly regarded were the South Hill Branch, 1950, by Sharp & Thompson Berwick Pratt (S. & T.B.P.) (fig. 7) and the Collingwood Branch, 1952, by their chief rivals in the vanguard of Modernist architecture, Semmens Simpson (fig. 8). Each adapted aspects of British, European and United States Modernist design to local conditions and materials. Not surprisingly, Semmens Simpson and S. & T.B.P. were invited by the Library Board to present separate preliminary designs for a new main branch in this period. At first, C.E. Pratt of

S. & T.B.P. became front-runner with a design influenced by Gordon Bunshaft's Lever House in New York (fig. 9). A glass curtain-walled library block was allied to a 14/16 storey office tower, probably intended for the 210′ x 120′ plot, adjacent to the Hotel Vancouver, that just purchased by the City. Then the initiative passed to Semmens Simpson in conjunction with C.B.K. Van Norman. Together they designed a single tall slab block, compacting lower floor library with upper floor commercial space, faced with a tartan pattern of metal frame and glass and panel infill. In each case the architects deployed the Modernist strategies of modular reinforced concrete and steel structure, open plan and curtain wall; these were still symbols of technological innovation validated by the war and now accepted as economical by commercial developers with considerable provincial and municipal clout. Those strategies also satisfied the professional librarians' post-war requirement for open stacks directly integrating departmental with public areas, and their self-image as agents of social enlightenment and personal empowerment through literacy. Finally in 1955 the Library Board endorsed a revised 5-storey scheme by Semmens Simpson, who, due to budgetary restraint and the small site, only had to accommodate the library (fig. 10).

This design presented glazed facades to the two downtown streets bounding its site. The architectural implementation of user-attracting access was achieved by recessing the lobby at the intersection of the glazed public facades, behind which the floor plate was cantilevered 12 feet from the periphery of the structural steel grid. This counterpoint was augmented by the contrasting deep eave, and by the use of opaque components such as the painted concrete and marble veneered walls alongside the adjacent buildings. These formal metaphors of modernity were to have been reinforced by a Corbusian curved elevator shaft (built square) and photocell-operated, vertical aluminum slat sun screen on the upper level of the Robson Street facade. That screen exemplified the extensive research undertaken by the architects and their engineer, the Norwegian-born, Swiss-trained, Per T. Christoffersen. He adapted new photographic techniques to record the performance of a plastic model under different weight-

Fig. 9. Sharp and Thompson Berwick Pratt, photograph of the model for a new public library, 1953. (Annual Report, VPL, by permission)
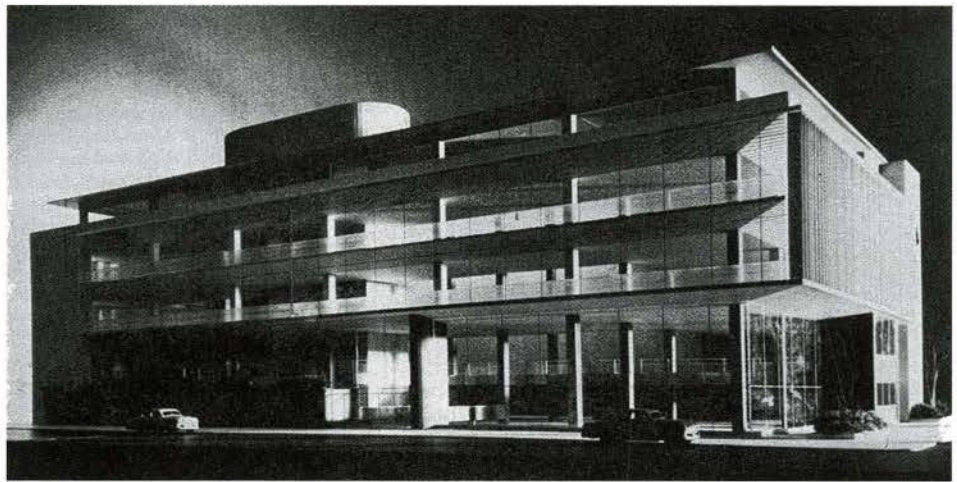

Fig. 10. Semmens Simpson, Vancouver Public Library, 1957, Vancouver; photograph of the model for the accepted design, 1956. (B. Simpson archive, Collection Centre Canadien d'architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal)

ing conditions.[19] This technique enabled the 3.5 air-conditioned public service floors above the two-storey basement (fireproof) book storage to sustain maximum stack weight at all points. Moreover the structure could support the addition of two more floors above the upper administrative floor. A capacity of over 800,000 volumes was attained together with the provision of designated subject departments, those most heavily used, like general information, history, applied or social sciences on the ground floor and mezzanine (fig. 11). Each area was easily reached by elevator or separate sets of public and service stairs, including one set on the Robson Street front for the capacious children's department. And much of the library interior was intriguingly visible to the passerby.

That feature especially gratified the City Librarian, who in his 1956 annual report had responded in the affirmative to his own question, "Should librarians live in glass houses?" After all, his Modernist branch libraries had helped boost library usage twelve percent over the previous year despite the advent of television. Yet the new main library also achieved the monumentality and visual relevance that had been commended in 1943 by Siegfried Giedion, secretary of the C.I.A.M. [Congrès Internationaux de l'Architecture Moderne][20]. Semmens Simpson resolved volumetric, planar and textural asymmetries through formal structural integrity and proportional consistency. They were also responsible for the commission from the local artist Lionel Thomas of the bronze and plexiglass exterior sculpture — backlit by automobile headlights — evoking Babylonian and Assyrian cuneiforms, and the mosaic mural of the runic origins of language in the lobby (fig. 12).[21] Signifying the classless social mission of the contemporary library, Thomas used abstract forms to assert Modernist belief in their communicative universality, as well as to integrate ornament with architectural effect. At its official opening on 1 November 1957 the library was lauded by the National Librarian and Archivist, Dr. Kaye Lamb, as "a model of functional design and architectural beauty."[22]

The critical response to its successor was almost diametrically opposite. In the January 1997 issue of *Architectural Review*, in his regular editorial article entitled "Outrage," Peter Davey convicted the new library of "aggressive pastiche" inimicable to its picturesque and architectonic setting (fig. 13). He did so on the single indictment that it represented a "pre-cast miniature of the Colosseum."[23] This allusion prevails as a mark of both popular favour and professional-critical disapproval, compounded by imprecise accusations of functional deficiency.[24] However, there exist significant iconographic variations between the Roman original and the Vancouver edifice. In particular, the library is neither detached nor of dominant scale like the Colosseum, it involves peripheral containment rather than punctuated structure, and it is not fully arcaded. Nevertheless, in devising their composition to solve functional and symbolic objectives, or their structuration of cultural signification,[25] Safdie/Downs Archambault certainly anticipated this popular allusion. Their presumed historicist intention caused many commentators to invoke the by-then pejorative association with so-called Postmodernist architectural practice: the resurgent taste for historically referenced exterior ornamentation — facadism — that coincided with the rise of conservative political and economic ideology from the mid-1970s.

Reaction against Modernist architectural and socio-political attitudes emerged before the construction of the 1957 library. The Modernist legacy in Vancouver increasingly seemed to be what a prominent group of architects in 1958 termed "urbanicide" — the destruction of the downtown core through unregulated demolition and construction.[26] The rejection of their "Project '58" proposal for a downtown participatory planning agency in conjunction with the centennial of the Province heralded the decline of the social democratic agenda in provincial and civic politics and the consolidation of the entrepreneurial and commercial dicta that had predominated before 1945.[27] Although several entirely speculative real estate schemes such as that for Coal Harbor [Milltown] were rejected and parts of the historic Gastown district and Chinatown were preserved, the civic fabric was primarily determined by property speculation.[28] This financial and cultural construction of the city arguably reached an apogee with Expo '86 and related real estate development. Each reflected the laissez-faire business attitudes of the Social Credit administrations which regarded the city as a site of trade and diversion wherein public space was to generate revenue rather than community.[29] These profound changes — again reflecting federal and international phenomena, including the steady withdrawal of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation from low-income
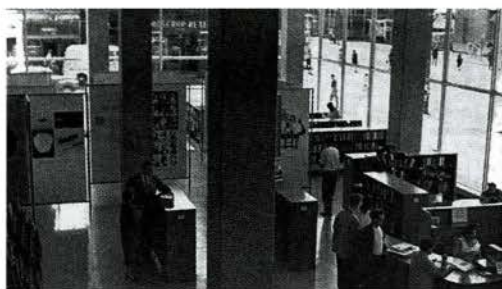
Fig. 11. Semmens Simpson, Vancouver Public Library, 1957, Vancouver; ground floor, from mezzanine.
(photo G. Warrington, 1958). (*J.R.A.I.C.*, by permission)

Fig. 12. Semmens Simpson, Vancouver Public Library, 1957, Vancouver; mosaic main hall, by L. and P. Thomas.
(Annual Report, VPL, by permission)

housing and changed regulations for immigration — are visible in the striking contrast between the topographically unobtrusive low-rise community False Creek development (from 1964) and strident high-rise construction of the Expo lands (from 1993).[30] Notwithstanding a generally higher level of architectural design, including work by Downs Archambault, and communal spaces and facilities, the Expo lands follow the Yaletown and other more recent downtown building campaigns in privileging higher income residential or office accomodation. Together they represent a successive gentrification of a formerly depressed area of the city in which the Vancouver city council wanted the 1995 library to play a part by raising land values in contradistinction to the communitarian "New Community" vision still redolent in the 1957 library.

This return to unmediated commercial urbanism followed upon various local architectural manifestations of the wider revision of Modernist design conventions. Some aspects of that revision are typified in three high-rise buildings standing along Burrard Street. The earliest is the Daon Building (Musson Cattell Mackey Partnership; 1980-81) which heralded the transformation in Vancouver of Modernist glass-curtain walling from signifier of functional transparency into a High-Tech icon where reflectivity is a surrogate for contextuality and a means to reduce actual size. Those latter ploys are even more evident in the hotel and office complex developed by Peter Wall (Wall Centre, 1990-94, designed by Hamilton Doyle and the Wall Design Group). Altogether different from the sheer surfaces of the Wall Centre is the Canada Place complex, including the Pan Pacific Hotel, convention and cruise ship docking facilities (1983-86, Zeidler Roberts Musson Cattell Mackey and Downs Archambault), and Cathedral Place (1989-91, designed by Paul Merrick), where the architectonic vocabulary of each derives from associative and contextual formal models. The roof of Canada Place recalls ships' sails and the hotel a naval vessel's conning tower. At Cathedral Place, the Neo-Gothic arches and pitched roof are copied from the adjacent Christ Church Cathedral (1889-95, C.O. Wickenden) and Hotel Vancouver (1929, 1936-37, Archibald and Scholefield) (fig. 14). The masonry-clad but essentially Modernist steel frame is decorated with versions of the figural sculpture from the heritage Art Deco building it supplanted (Medical Dental Building; 1929-30, McCarter and Nairne).

A less straightforward, if potentially less ephemeral, contextuality can be discerned in the high-rise architecture of Richard Henriquez.[31] Although basically Modernist in structural practice, Henriquez conceived the facade as a separate entity through which to narrate the place of the new building in its existing context. This s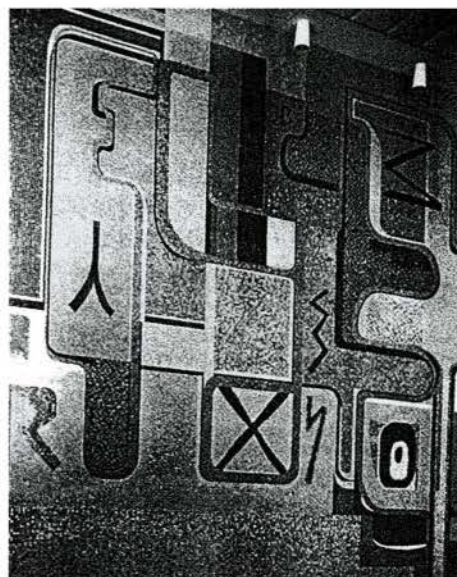trategy arguably succeeds best in the Sylvia Tower (1988-90) but is more contrived in its neighbour the Eugenia Place high-rise condominium (1993-94). The fenestration and detailing of the Eugenia apartments adapt features of the hotel. Then the central bay has a semi-circular projection, conical at the entrance and flared at the uppermost level of the main facade, intended to invoke a nail or screw. The memorialization of the successive building activity on the once forested location is further and ironically conveyed by a tree planted at the top of the mythic nail. Elsewhere, however, the local progeny of Postmodernist facadism seldom rises above a superficial historicism, with which the Safdie/Downs Archambault library was implicated by several local critics.[32]

The architectural historical references in the 1995 library were more considered and integrated with the formal solution of functional and planning requisite. The referencing alike played better in the public arena.[33] This derived in part from the much greater consultative process that preceded the competition for the second Vancouver Public Library. The extent of that transformation in client-architect relationship is most evident in the variation between the respective program and commission documents. The 15-page ring-bound proposal Semmens Simpson submitted in 1956 contained a mere two typed pages of conceptual and factual explication prefacing photographs of their model and plans. It was considerably smaller even than the "Call for Expression of Vision" compiled in 1991 by the Director of the Vancouver Public Library, Madeleine Aalto. Derived from a series of studies commenced in 1980, each page was densely written around such headings as 'Architectural Concepts,' 'Key Design Issues,' or 'Design Challenges' — the latter alone comprising sixteen subheadings. In fact, the materials on the aesthetic program distributed to potential competitors and then to the four co-partnerships selected for the second, final round in the Fall of 1991 exceeded those concerned with technical requirements for the library — notwithstanding its objective of correcting the inadequacy of the 1957 building to accommodate the supposedly imminent transfer of knowledge to hypertext and cyberspace. The very organization of a competition that favoured the teaming of local firms in subsidiary partnership with central Canadian and/or international practices — exemplified by Moshe Safdie with offices in Toronto and Jerusalem — betrays the preoccupation with information technology and civic pomp.[34] In-
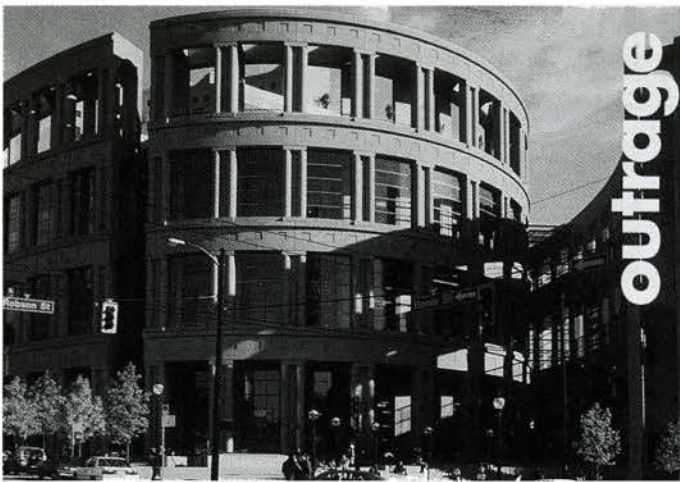
Fig. 13. Moshe Safdie/Downs Archambault, Vancouver Public Library, 1995, Vancouver.
(photograph from P. Davey, "Outrage," *Architectural Review* 201, no. 1199 (January 1997): 21/1)

Fig. 14. Paul Merrick,
Cathedral Place, 1989-91,
Vancouver.
(photo L. Noppen)

Fig. 15. Moshe Safdie/Downs Archambault, Vancouver Public Library, 1995, Vancouver;
model of the competition scheme.
(photo Barry Downs, by permission)

deed, architecture was appropriated to manifest the essentially technocratic and commercial polemic of "world city" status as motor of entrepreneurial connectivity vaunted by Vancouver municipal politicians and their federal and provincial peers. A corollary is the absence of an accompanying campaign of branch library construction. The exception is the Renfrew Branch by Roger Hughes (1993-95), recipient of the Governor-General's Award for architecture. In company with John and Patricia Patkau's Newton Library (1989-90), in the nearby municipality of Surrey, the Renfrew library exemplifies the more self-conscious manipulation of structure and space in the resolution of functional factors that characterize renewed Modernist design on the west coast.

The 1991 commission was conceived primarily around symbol and signage, with the library officially defined simultaneously as agent of cultural promotion, information commodification and technological populism. Equally unresolved was the language of the documents distributed to the competing architects. The competition documents contained elements of semiotic, phenomenological and critical discourse theory. The architect reading them thus confronted a slippery melange of only partially synthesized criteria. Take one sentence from the 'Architectural Concepts' section: "The external image of the library [including the Federal office tower] should act as a directional and informational device for the library patron and should make a symbolic statement about the historical social values which the library embodies." Aside from the imprecise definition of those social values, the architects had to valorize the book as cultural object while also institutionalizing the electronic galaxy; put another way, the program material failed to indicate whether information technology, and its inherently rapid evolution, was intended to service or subsume the permanency of print culture. Moreover, the question of imagery was complicated by instruction to, on the one hand, introduce a dramatic and inviting outdoor space that would enhance the decrepit surrounding urban environment and, on the other, establish a grand enclosed civic space. The architects replied in kind, devising a conceptual fabric that inflected linguistic with architectonic tropes. Literal, or rather literary and iconographic equivalence was most evident in the scheme by

Safdie/Downs Archambault (fig. 15), which, it should be acknowledged, scored highest in the non-binding public as well as the professional adjudication despite declared distaste for its historicism.[35] The adjudicators unanimously concurred that only Safdie/Downs Archambault had resolved the several design problems and attained an integrated use of site and clear definition of circulation and library access.

Although in his "Vision Statement" Safdie invoked Louis Kahn's reinvestment of functional space with intrinsic spiritual value, the formal composition he and his partners devised manifests descriptive representation.[36] The parti depends on four conjoined strategies, here defined from issues of ambience to that of plan-form. First, the maximization of natural light without detriment to the books, as signifier of their power to enlighten.[37] Second, the glazed entrance "community wall" that invitingly displays the private act of reading to the public gaze. Third, the functional primacy of openness and flexibility facilitated by central escalators between floors, moveable stacks, bridges to contiguous reading galleries, and the housing of ducting and wiring under a carpeted service floor thereby eliminating the need for partition walls. Fourth, the Renaissance Vitruvian-figure-inspired plan of library rectangle within oval to accommodate its specified distinct floor plate with separate reading areas, accessible yet impressive civic space, pedestrian transit across the sloping site, and integration with the Federal office. (Several of their

Fig. 16. Moshe Safdie/Downs Archambault, Vancouver Public Library, 1995, Vancouver; massing models.
(photo Barry Downs, by permission)

Fig. 17. Thompson Berwick Pratt and Partners, CBC Building, 1973-75, Vancouver.
(photo L. Noppen)
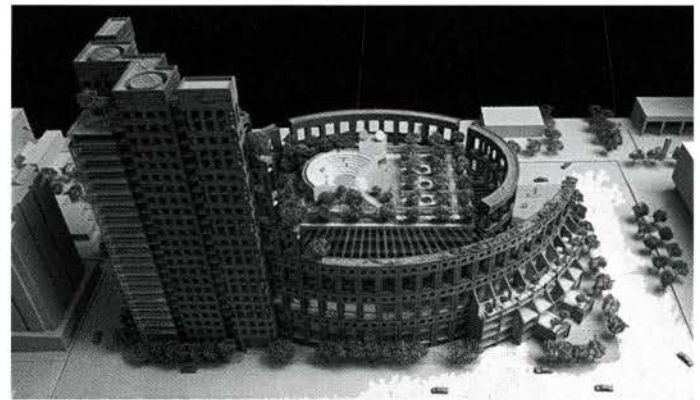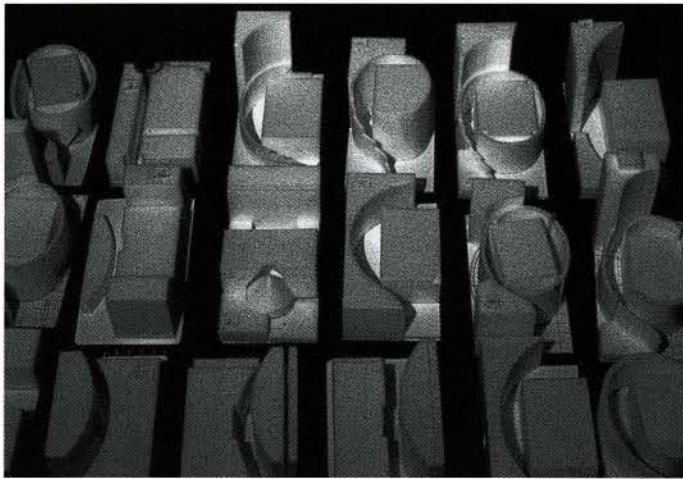

Fig. 18. Moshe Safdie/ Downs Archambault, Vancouver Public Library, 1995, Vancouver; interior.
(photo Barry Downs, by permission)

massing models (fig. 16) envisaged a more peripheral arrangement of library and Federal office not involving an ovoid block.) The addition of columnar structural service mullions to the resultant oval external mass of the library, coloured at Safdie's insistence to resemble stone, clinched its reading as a transplanted Colosseum.

The columnation became the chief object of criticism as being inappropriate to the indigenous as well as settler architectural traditions and predominantly wood vernacular building. But Safdie grounded his design conception in the typological and cultural heritage of library design as well as customary public expectation.[58] He specifically associated the columnar motif with the ancient library of Alexandria and neoclassical libraries in London, New York, and Paris, and most especially with Jacopo Sansovino's library in Venice, that were similarly contiguous to public spaces appropriated to commerce and spectacle. It is worth noting that Semmens Simpson also contested the prior design idioms of Vancouver in favour of a largely imported Modernist architectural vocabulary. The 1957 library altered rather than accommodated the architectural context, and in a manner more deliberately autonomous than the Safdie/Downs Archambault edifice. Nor can the major official building adjacent to Library Square be accounted any less obtrusive aesthetically or intrusive upon the physical environment. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation building (1973-75, Thompson, Berwick Pratt and Partners, Paul Merrick project architect) is inimical to conventional views of West Coast architecture and cultural ethos, if more formally experimental (fig. 17). It has been popularly dubbed "the bunker" for the uncompromising, New Brutalist, external statement of internal organization, structural-service system and functional materials.[39]

By contrast, Safdie's recourse to fundamentally classical disciplines of plan and form correspond with those encyclopaedic systems of knowledge instituted on classical grounds in the 18th century. Their architectural embodiment reverberates in the conscious monumentality of the 1995 library, which recalls the preeminence accorded to knowledge by the architect Etienne Louis Boullée when describing his 1785 design for the Royal Library of France: "The building that is most precious to a Nation is undoubtedly one which houses all acquired knowledge."[40] Yet there are still further dimensions to Safdie's frankly classical monumentality. By virtue of being consistently embodied in each element and aspect of the complex, the library images continuity and collective social memory in an urban environment of rapid change and reconstruction; indeed, the satisfaction of a desire for formal recognition and durability is a consistent feature of popular reaction to Library Square.[41] In addition, the classical monumentality is abstracted to the point of being reconfigured in a manner comparable to the hybridized western core of contemporary popular culture, itself globalized by the information technology integrated into the 1995 library. In this respect Safdie attempted an inclusionary re-inscription or regenerative inversion of once-dominant cultural forms quite different from the commodified populist historicism of the late Modern cultural industry and much Postmodern architecture.[42] This process of re-inscription, or redemptive transformation of iconographic symbolism, parallels contemporary practice in other cultural domains. For example in the western Canadian context, British Common Law, formerly an agent of imperial expropriation, is now being operated to establish rather than erase indigenous political and cultural identity. In a similar process, the Vancouver-based First Nations painter Lawrence Yuweluptun represents his powerful critique of colonialism by deliberate and ironic inter-
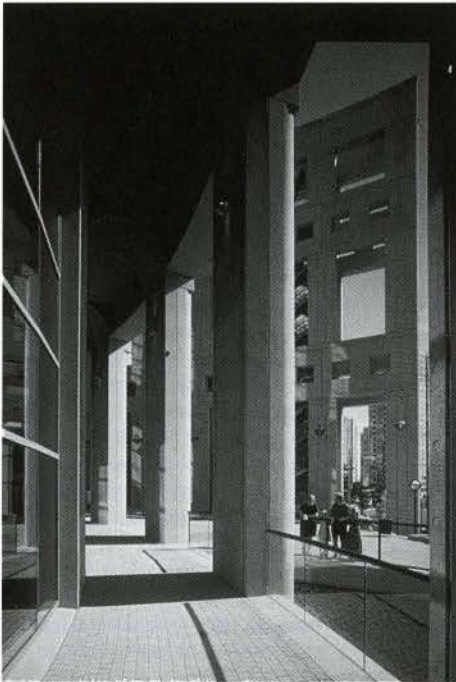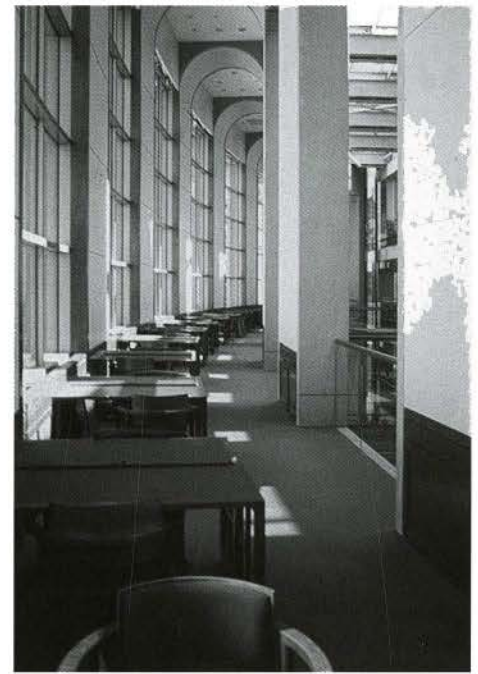
restitution of recreative landscape lost through construction. Safdie had endorsed these themes in his book *For Everyone a Garden* (1974). Downs, in addition, interpreted the roof garden contextually, describing it as a microcosm for Vancouver as a "place of small urban gardens and parks, returning nature to the city."[45] Regrettably, the roof garden fell victim to neuroses about public mischief and security, although the central part of the library building is covered by a sod [grassed] roof, sought but seldom achieved by earlier west coast architects. The omission of the public roof garden exaggerated the contrast between masonry external walls, reminiscent of the partially collapsed fabric of the Colosseum, and the library's glass community wall. Nevertheless, as Downs claimed, the outer walls "hook" potential library and office client, or casual visitor, into its circulation pattern just as they hook the edifice into the urban landscape (fig. 19). The urban connectivity of the complex is reinforced by the twenty-one storey Federal office tower, especially after its relocation by order of the Urban Design Panel from Robson to Georgia Street. The tower does act in the guise of what Downs termed a "slender spire, a campanile on the piazza"[46] which, being visible from many sectors, creates an organizing civic focal point. In addition the powerfully modelled tower and library complex counteracts the disparate scale and quality of the dislocated commercial, rather than comprehensive civic, development in nearby Yaletown and 'Expo Lands.'

Classical disciplines also inform the modular planning and furnishing of the Safdie/Downs Archambault library proper, including the chairs devised around a rectangular frame and elliptical arm rests. The seven floor levels are arranged in an ascending subject-use hierarchy from the childrens' section occupying the south quadrant of the first, below grade, floor to the uppermost administrative quarters, and Special Collections. The changing social and political patterns of Vancouver are signified to some extent by the placement on the second, entrance level of the Multilingual Collection, the popular Reading Library, Youth Collection, and Library Shop; this last is close to the circulation counter. However, the central escalators introduce a vertical axial organization that corresponds with classically inspired Academic practice. Similarly, the architectonic articulation emphasizes the

mixing of native form with western pictorial convention.[43] Safdie intended — and conveyed, to judge from the popularity of the 1995 library — the visual and formal invocation of shared and durable meanings amidst the volatility of multi-cultural society and advanced communication technology. Moreover Safdie/Downs Archambault recovered the spectacle of the street through external and internal forms and spaces that accommodated the temperate climate but high rainfall of Vancouver.

Undoubtedly Safdie/Downs Archambault eschewed merely gestural classicism through allegiance to Modernist structural rationalism recurrent in their respective work. The library "columns" are load bearing and of standardized pre-cast sections, in company with the poured-in-place reinforced concrete cladding; both include aggregate of granite from Horsefly, B.C. Their classical and humanist narration of Modernist design strategies reverberates most clearly in the formal "atrium" forecourt. Here hi-tech glass and steel replace antiquarian referencing and retailers take the place of trader and scribe.[44] Furthermore, entry to the library lies across a ritualistic entry bridge, initiating a transformative experience that is repeated in the more vertiginous bridges to the reading gallery (fig. 18). This process was to have culminated in a roof garden replete with trees visible from street level. The garden would have signified features of early modern thought and Modernist design: respectively the benign moderation of knowledge in the human use of nature, and Corbusian

Fig. 21. Moshe Safdie/Downs Archambault, Vancouver Public Library, 1995, Vancouver; atrium and "community wall."
(photo M. Grignon, 2000)

dignity of civic literacy by contrasting the lower arcaded and artificially illuminated service and stack areas with the peripheral expansive and naturally lit spaces (fig. 20). This contrast also recognizes the dialectic in current librarianship between the literary (the book/print) and the technical (the screen/digital) as well as the traditional demarcation between reading and browsing, individual study and consultative research. The positioning of carrals next to the community wall integrates the private act of reading with the public activity of literacy through formal structure and spatial volume that conjoins the monumental with the functional, the technical with the aesthetic and the spectacular with the commercial (fig. 21). In that respect the 1995 library most clearly unites properties and effects customarily associated with both Modernism and Postmodernism.

The reintegration of symbolism and contextualism into abstract functionalist Modern movement design had been predicted by one of its most ardent advocates: "Everyone is susceptible to symbols,"[47] Siegfried Giedion averred in his 1943 essay. Vancouver's post-war civic libraries demonstrate that this process has come to be one of reflexive continuity wherein architectural form and imagery are successively redefined through public ideology, professional intent, and commercial interest. The two Vancouver library commissions map both the endurance but complex changes, or slippages, in Modernist theory and practice across the transition from post-war Reconstruction to later century consumerist technocracy. In the final analysis, their evident architectural differences reflect a reconfiguration more than caesura of Modernism that is emblematic of the increasingly hybrid social and economic conditions of modernity.

Notes

1 The extensive literature on their attributes is typified by J.F. Lyotard, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 1984), David Harvey ed., *The Condition of Post Modernity* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989), Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, Ca., Stanford University, 1990), Tim Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000), and Gary Genosko ed., *The Guattari Reader* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1996); and with specific reference to architecture: Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture. A Critical History* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1991 rev. ed.), Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York, Rizzoli, 1977), Heinrich Klotz, *The History of Post Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass., M.I.T., 1988), and Neil Leach, *Rethinking Architecture. A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London, Routledge, 1997). This article derives from a paper read at the 1997 Society of Architectural Historians Annual Meeting in Baltimore, and from research for *The New Spirit. Modern Architecture in Vancouver 1938-1963* (Montreal, Vancouver and Cambridge, Mass.; Canadian Centre for Architecture, Douglas & McIntyre and MIT Press, 1997).

2 Civic library architecture in North America is examined in a series of articles, chiefly on the Evanston Public Library, in the *Journal of Architectural Education* 47, no. 3 (Feb. 1994): 126-161, edited by Nicole Pertuiset, who, in her article on "The New American Library Design," refers to the 1995 Vancouver Public Library as Safdie's "Forum Romanum," 127.

3 Obviously size was also a factor, the second library doubling the square footage of the first to over 280,000 for a fifty-fold increase in construction cost to almost $100 million, albeit including the Federal Office Tower. These figures are based upon documents in the archives of the Vancouver Public Library and of Downs Archambault and Partners, together with the booklet, *Vancouver Public Library*, distributed at the library. For the architectural historical contexts of both libraries see Harold Kalman, Robin Phillips and Robin Ward, *Exploring Vancouver. The Essential Architectural Guide* (Vancouver, U.B.C. Press, 1993), and for the growth of the Vancouver library system, especially in the post-1945 era, and the socio-cultural phenomenon see R. Windsor Liscombe, "The Culture of Modernism: Vancouver's Public Libraries 1947-1957," in *Architecture and Culture* (Ottawa, Carleton University, 1992), 358-361.

4 The impact of new communication technologies on library design is examined in Dean Harrison ed., *Library Building 1984-1989* (London, LSL, 1996), and *Library Building in the United Kingdom 1990-1994* (London, LSL, 1995), and on librarianship in *Technology in Public Libraries* (London, Library Association 1994), Herbert F. White, *The Myth of the Electronic Library: Librarianship and Social Change in America* (Westport Conn., Greenwood, 1994), Anne G. Lipow ed., *Building Partnerships: Computing and Library Professionals* (Berkeley, Ca., Library Solutions Press, 1995),

and William F. Birdsall, *Information Superhighway: The role of librarians information scientists and intermediaries* (Colchester, Essex, University of Essex, 1995). For a broader contextualization see Roger Chartier ed., *The Culture of Print* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989) and George P. Landow, *Hypotext. The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1992).

5 Explanatory statement in the illustrated ring-binder submitted by Semmens Simpson to the Library Board, Douglas C. Simpson archive, CCA.

6 E.S. Robinson reiterated the idea of access oriented transparency in his article, "Public Library, Vancouver, British Columbia," *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (J.R.A.I.C.)* 33, no. 10 (1956): 368-372.

7 Safdie, "Vision Statement," October 1991, Downs Archambault archive. This was in deliberate contradistinction to the massively contained new Chicago Public Library (1988-90) designed by Hammond Beeby and Babka with particular emphasis upon monitored access. The continuing respect for, but fundamental reconfiguration of Modernist principles, and especially functional analysis and structural technology as generators of design, is evident in Safdie's sentence from the "Vision Statement": "It must have a sense of permanence, and must transcend the fashion of the day when its conception is deeply rooted in its program, in a passion for those who use and work in a building, and in understanding that style emerges from the materiality of a building and the authentic expression of the modes of its construction." In a subsequent passage, Safdie declared: "The library is for everyone, and everything about the architecture must say, 'Here I am, come in, see what I have to offer'." Safdie's architec-

tural concept and practice are outlined in Irena Murray ed., *Moshe Safdie: Buildings and Projects 1967-1992* (Montreal, McGill University, 1996) and the architect's own *Beyond Habitat* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University, 1970).

8 Discussed by Pertuiset, "The New American Library Design," and variously in Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London, Routledge, 1990), Richard Sennet, *Flesh and Stone. The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York, Norton, 1994), and Noam Chomsky ed., *The Cold War and the University: Toward an Intellectual History of the Postwar Years* (New York, New Press, 1997).

9 The demise of social democratic thought in urban and cultural terms is mapped by Detlef Mertens, *Metropolitan Mutations. The Architecture of Emerging Public Spaces* (Toronto, Little Brown, 1988), Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1991), Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin. Alternate Geographies of Modernity* (London, Routledge, 1991), and Michael Keith and Steve Pile, *Place and the Politics of Identity* (London, Routledge, 1993), among others.

10 "Vision Statement," October 1991.

11 Ibid.

12 They were, from Vancouver, Bing Thom, chair, and Jerry Robinson, serving President of the Architectural Institute of B.C., and, interestingly, an architectural programmer; the external judges were Bill Pedersen of the major New York firm Kohn Pedersen Fox, and the current recipient of the prestigious Pritzker Prize for Architecture, Fumihiko Maki. They were joined by the Mayor, Gordon Campbell, Les Mitchell, chair of the Library Board and Councillor Libby Davies.

13 This definition of Modernist architecture is chiefly based upon both the theoretical writings of its

main proponents and the contemporary professional publications, journals and books. It is also informed by recent histories of the movement, most notably Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture*, and Joan Ockman, *Architecture Culture 1943-1968* (New York, Columbia University Press and Rizzoli, 1993). The quotation is from the submission of the Canadian Teachers Federation to the Federal Committee on Reconstruction and Re-Establishment in 1944, National Archives of Canada, Record Group 14 (House of Commons) Aa 87-88/146, vol. 39, Feb. 2, p. 7-10.

14 E.S. Robinson, "Libraries for Today," *J.R.A.I.C.* 24, no. 2 (1947): 60

15 In April 1959 (vol. 36, no. 4) the library issue included an article by Jean Scarlett of the Calgary Public Library Board pronouncing "[t]he use of the library is no longer a privilege granted, it is a necessity for citizens of a democracy" (p. 105). However, Hilda Gifford, librarian of Carleton University, regretted "the current compulsive use of large expanses of glass in public libraries."

16 The latest version of the Bartholomew Plan is reproduced in J.A. Walker, "Vancouver British Columbia. Planning Comes of Age — After Twenty-One Years of Successful Pioneering Vancouver Revises its Town Plan for Future Growth," *J.R.A.I.C.* 24, no. 9 (1947): between p. 310-311.

17 From an article on Ingledow in the *Vancouver Sun*, 29 March 1959. Ingledow was encouraged by the local Maecenas Albert Grauer, Chairman of B.C. Electric, whose patronage of architecture and the arts is recounted in Liscombe, *New Spirit*, 52, 102-104.

18 This section summarizes Liscombe, *New Spirit*, 94-98 and "Vancouver libraries."

19 Interview with Per T. Christoffersen, 1995; a brief biography appears in Liscombe, *New Spirit*,

202. Chirstoffersen described the process in "Structural Design by Model Analysis," *J.R.A.I.C.* 33, no. 8 (1956): 286-290.

20 In an essay entitled "The New Monumentality," in Paul Zucker ed., *New Architecture and City Planning* (New York, Philosophical Library, 1943), 549-68.

21 The conceptual and formal program for each work (the mural being designed in collaboration with his wife, Patricia), are described in a pamphlet printed by the Library in conjunction with the opening of the main branch.

22 From the speech delivered by the National Librarian and Archivist of Canada, Dr. Kaye Lamb, quoted in the 1957 *Annual Report*, describing the new library as "a vital weapon [...] to help with the battle for men's mind [...] being in the middle of the business district." The complimentary rhetoric recurred in the local press, typified by an extensively illustrated article in the *Province*, 16 November 1957, especially praising its "spaciousness [and] ultra-modern" style.

23 Peter Davey, "Outrage," *Architectural Review* 201, no. 1199 (1997): 21/1. Davey, in justly acknowledging Arthur Erickson's Provincial Law Courts (1979-1983) as a "masterpiece of modern public building," failed to commend the 1957 Library. The more conciliatory comments on the new library itself include this assessment: "a comparatively simple, modest, rectangular building completely concealed from the outside by the overblown cardboard stage set. Perhaps there is something to be said for working from the inside outwards after all." Trevor Boddy sought to identify the library with facadist architecture in Vancouver in "Plastic Lions Gate," Paul Delaney ed., *Vancouver. Representing the Post Modern City* (Vancouver, 1994). Incidentally, the curving facade and repeated fenestration might equally be likened to B.H. Latrobe's radial plan Vir-

ginia State Penitentiary, Richmond Virginia, 1798-99; see J.A. Cohen and C. Brownell, *The Architectural Drawings of Benjamin Henry Latrobe* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994).

24 The press criticism is legion, typified by Andrew Brown, "Colossal Blunder," *Vancouver Sun*, 16 May 1992, or the shorter piece in Shawn Blore, "Building Smileyville," *Vancouver Magazine* 32, no. 9 (November 1999): 51. The sharp division between public and professional reaction partly corresponds to the distinction between plebian culture and patrician taste drawn by C.P. Thompson in the *Journal of Social History* 7 (1994): 382-405; Ian Chambers would add the third category of official culture.

25 Peter Jackson, *Maps of Meaning. An introduction to cultural geography* (London, Routledge, 1989), esp. p. 175-77, and Derek Gregory and John Urry eds., *Social Relations and Spatial Structures* (London, Routledge, 1985).

26 Briefly examined in Liscombe, *New Spirit*, 57. The proposers were Arthur Erickson, Geoffrey Massey, E.J. Watkins, Peter Oberlander and Wells Coates, the Canadian who had moved to Britain in the 1920s there to become the leading industrial designer and proponent of Modernism.

27 The most useful sources for the development of Vancouver, and of its place in provincial affairs, are Graeme Wynn and Tim Oke eds., *Vancouver and Its Region* (Vancouver, U.B.C. Press, 1992), Patricia E. Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History* (Toronto, Lorimer, 1980), and Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1991).

28 Liscombe, *New Spirit*, and Kalman, *Exploring Vancouver*. The promotion and contestation of these schemes circa 1958-1978 are the subject of a forthcoming article by this author.

29 Discussed in Habermas, *Public Sphere*.

30 An uncritically laudatory account of the early Expo Lands development appears in Anthony Chan, *Li Ka-Shing: Hong Kong's Elusive Billionaire* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1996). The unmaking of the comprehensive regional planning regulations by the Social Credit Party in the mid-1980s and generally pro-development policy of the Vancouver City Council — typified by the failure to moderate gentrification in the downtown Eastside and the failure of low-income housing schemes for the former Woodwards building — have coincided with the undermining of the professional status of the architect, both through fee undercutting and diminished input in the planning process.

31 A complementary view of Henriquez's work was argued by Howard Shubert, curator of the C.C.A. and Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition and catalogue *Richard Henriquez and the Theatre of Memory* (Montreal, C.C.A. 1993); see also Andrew Gruft, *Measure of Consensus: Canadian Architecture in Transition* (New York, 49th Parallel, 1985).

32 Especially Boddy, "Plastic Lions Gate"; a more measured analysis appears in Christopher Thomas, "Canadian Colossus," *Architecture* 84, no. 10 (October 1995): 72-79.

33 Safdie had already experimented with the rotunda and arcade in his unsuccessful scheme for the extension of the National Museum of Scotland, illustrated in Sophia Dekel, *Moshe Safdie: Museum Architecture 1971-1998* (Tel Aviv, University Art Gallery, 1998), 107-108.

34 The emergence of a new genus of civic ideology (apparent in the promoting of Expo '86 in Vancouver) is addressed by Jill Delaney in "Re-Vision and Representation: The Public Square in the Privatized City," *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada* 22, no. 4 (1997): 88-93, citing recent studies of this phenomenon.

35 Urban Design Panel Reports and interview with Bing Thom in November 1997. The competition judges noted that the Safdie/Downs Archambault scheme C, was "referred to as the 'Colosseum'" (p. 14) and that "a large part" of their discussion "had to do with the literal aspect of the 'Coliseum' expression and the potential for 'folly'" (p. 9). They "recommended that design development of the architectural detailing take a direction that conveys a more uniquely Vancouver character rather than one borrowed from antiquities" even if it had "potential to become a great library with broad recognition" (p. 9).

36 Safdie, "Vision Statement," Downs Archambault archive. Safdie was primarily responsible for both the conceptual and planning processes of design, as well as for identifying the architectural historical exemplars which are cited in the text below. Those libraries are related to the development of the typology by Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types* (Princeton N.J., Princeton University, 1976), 91-110.

37 The "Vision Statement" commended Kahn's Exeter Library and Philips Academy (1968-70) and Raymond Moriyama's Metropolitan Library, Toronto (1974-76).

38 The conservative expectations of those who visit or use cultural institutions and especially the preference for authorizing strategies, are documented in Nicola Lisus and Richard Ericson, "Authorizing Art: The Effect of Multimedia Formats on the Museum Experience," *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 36 (May 1999): 199-216.

39 On the site selected for the 1995 library, Arthur Erickson had in 1975 devised a dramatically techno-functionalist scheme for the Federal office that envisaged two glass and steel octangular tubes elevated on stilts; reproduced in Edith Iglauer, *Seven Stones. A*

Portrait of Arthur Erickson (Madeira Park, B.C., 1981): 82-83; see also Liscombe's introductory essay to Barbara Schapiro, *Arthur Erickson: Selected Projects 1971-1985* (New York, Centre for American Relations, 1985).

40 Paula Lee, "Standing on the Shoulders of Giants. Boullée's 'Atlas' Facade for the Bibliothèque du Roi," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 57, no. 4 (December 1998): 404-31.

41 As evident from a poll taken of mature learners from the Vancouver downtown east side attending the segment of Humanities 101 taught by the author in October-November 1999. An excellent summary of the deeper problems of architectural practice in an era of cultural dislocation and what Alvin Toffler has denominated "After Shock," appears in Gilbert Herbert, "Architecture in an Age of Uncertainty," in *The Search for Synthesis. Selected writing on architecture and planning* (Haifa, Technion, 1997): 319-24.

42 See Homi Bhabha, "Dissemi-Nation" in *Nation and Narration* (London, Routledge, 1990), 255-66, where the author proposes this potential shift in meaning. The uncritical commodification of historical culture was condemned by Theodor Adorno, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 1997). Aspects of these ideas are discussed in Richard Cavell, "Theorizing Canadian Space: Post Colonial Articulation," in T. Goldie, C. Lambert and R. Lorimer, *Canada: Theoretical Discourse/Discours théoriques* (Montreal, Association for Canadian Studies, 1994), 75-104.

43 Charlotte Townsend-Gault, *Lawrence Paul Yuweluptun, Born to Live and Die on Your Colonialist Reservations* (Vancouver, Helen and Morris Belkin Art Gallery, 1995). A particularly interesting example of such transposition, however ironic or parodic, is his "Blue Lady" of 1986 referring both to French *Fauve*

and Haida stylisms — neither native since his ancestry is Kootenay.
44 This humanist element becomes more apparent in comparison with two comparable almost contemporary civic libraries: the Central Library in Mississauga, Ontario, 1988-90, by Shore Tilbe Henschel Irwin Peters, where the quasi-classical referencing is more attenuated and commercially packaged, and Will Bruder's Phoenix Public Library, 1992-95, where the heritage of French library architecture is reconstituted as monumentalized technocracy. See Abby Bussel, "Will Power," *Progressive Architecture* 76, no. 7 (July 1995): 80-89.
45 "Vision Statement," October 1991, Downs Archambault archive.
46 Ibid.
47 See note 20, quoted on p. 568, in Paul Zucker (1943).
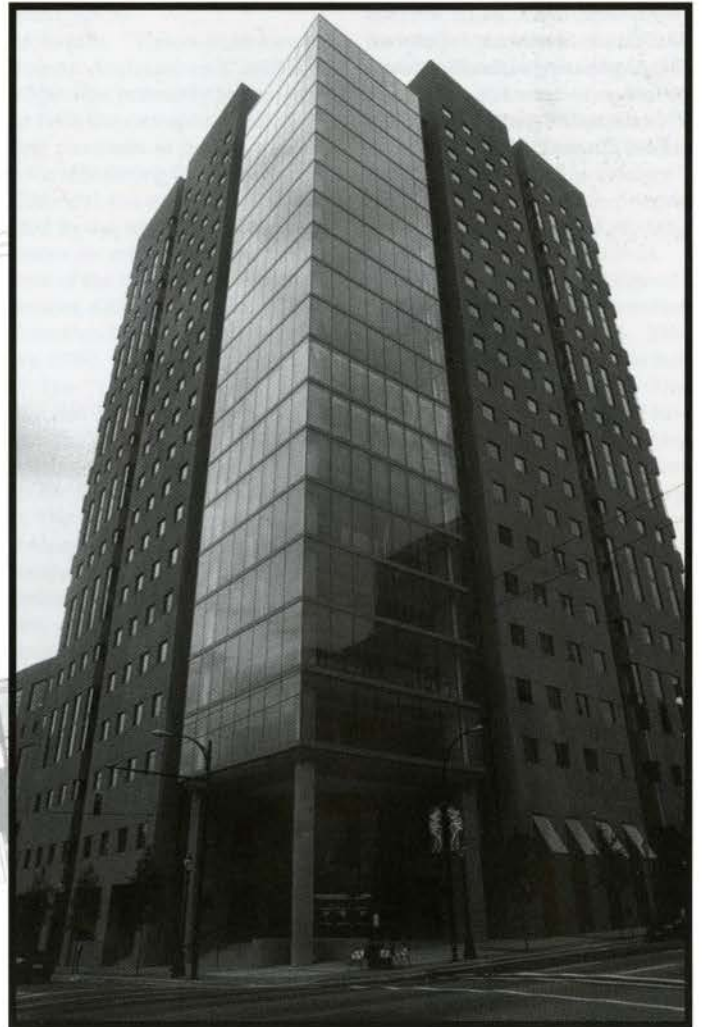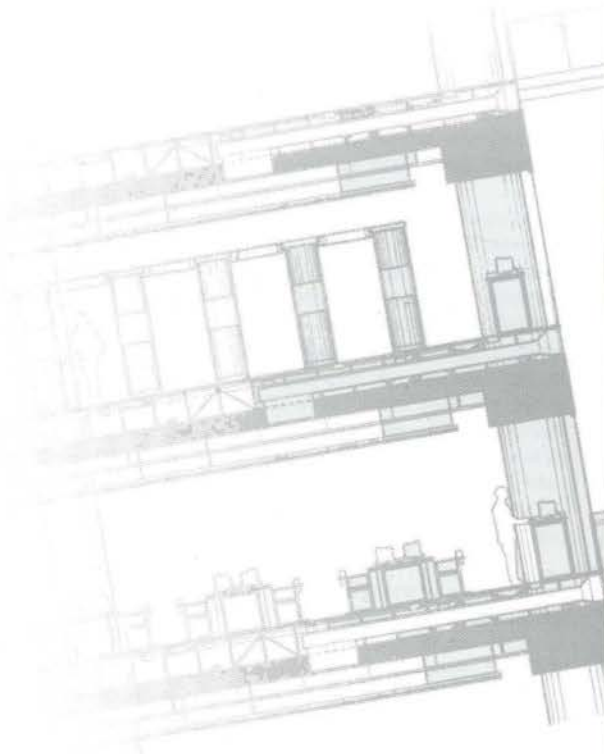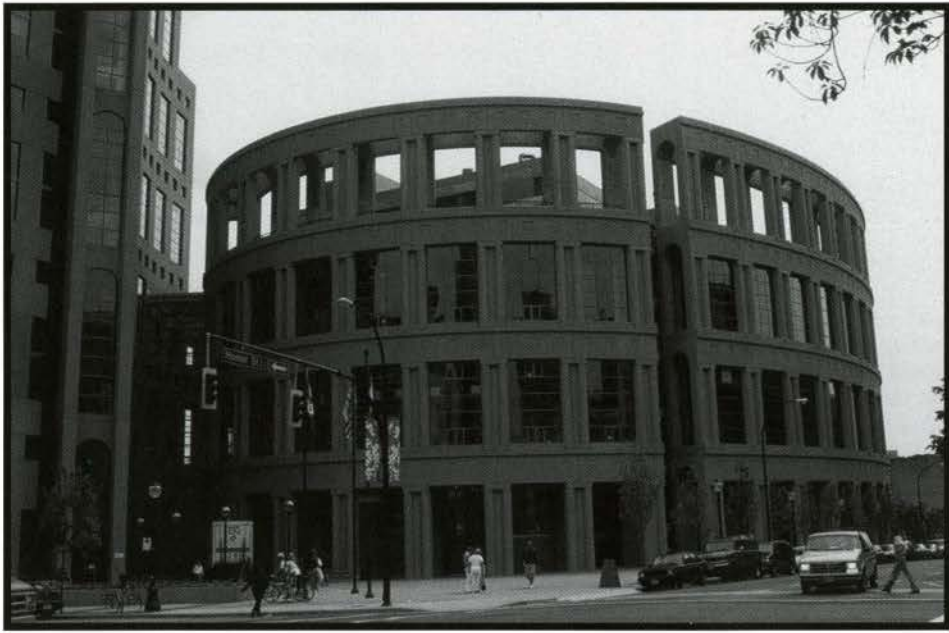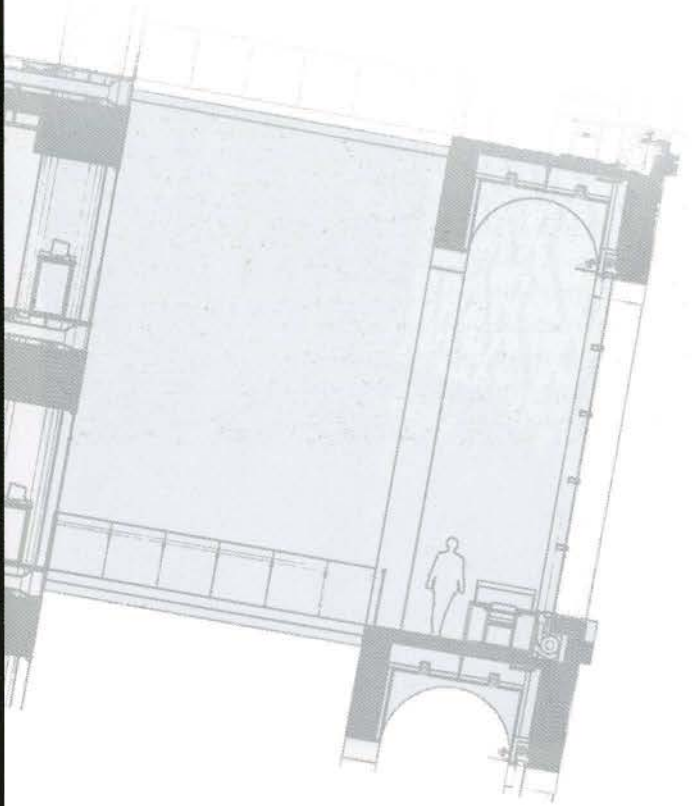
Linda Lewin Graif

The Paradox of Public Discourse: Designing Vancouver Library Square

Architecture is a discipline that operates in a complex public arena. While architecture may be defined as the art and science of conceptualizing the built environment, the journey from the drawing board to the constructed artifact is a perilous one. The architect's initial concept, itself subject to constraints of many kinds, must be negotiated with clients, engineers, contractors, financial partners, special interest groups, and the general public. Architecture, particularly public architecture, is inherently non-hermetic and, as such, is open to challenge and debate.

Of all Moshe Safdie's Canadian projects, Vancouver Library Square produced one of the most exhaustive and comprehensive discussions about the role of architecture in public life. Of particular interest are the nature and scope of the public discourse arising from the singular set of circumstances surrounding it. A wide range of issues related to preservation, politics, economics, culture, and aesthetics converged in an atmosphere of vigorous and often heated debate. This essay examines the public and professional exchanges engendered by the Vancouver Library Square project and illustrates the potential conflicts inherent in the public nature of architecture.

Despite the apparent dialogue between the public and the professionals on the Vancouver Library Square project, I would argue that this discourse had a negligible impact on the outcome of the design. Rather than emerging as a vital part of the discussion, public response was solicited but then disregarded by professionals in the fields of architecture and politics.[1]

> **"Libraries have always represented the cultural heritage of a society. As such, they must transcend the commercial architecture of our time."**
>
> Moshe Safdie
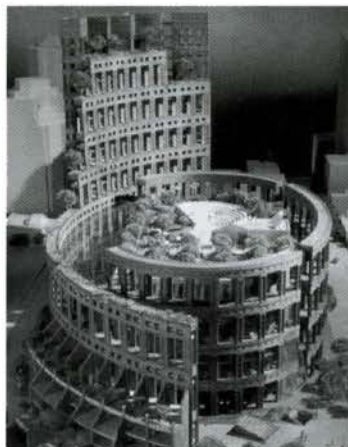
> **"Probably you'll love it. You did vote for it after all. Highbrow critics may attack it as Caesar's Palace but for you *faux* is fine. You don't know the difference between modern and post-modern, anyway."**
>
> Doug Ward,
> *The Vancouver Sun*, 24 May 1995

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This essay will examine the evolution of the library as a building type; the background of the development of Vancouver Library Square; the design selection process that encompassed the architectural competition, public response, and the impact of public opinion on the final choice; Safdie's original design for Vancouver Library Square and the goals and philosophy out of which it arose; the design revisions recommended by the jury before construction commenced; an overview of the professional and public response to the completed building; and a look at Vancouver Library Square five years after its inauguration — the response of its administrators, users, and the general public.

The Evolution of the Library as a Building Type[2]

The library was a place designed specifically for the storage of texts and the provision of access to them. As such, its history has been characterized by the nature of the texts it holds, from papyrus rolls and cuneiform tablets, codices and printed books to microforms and digital forms. The technology of storage and the notion of access have had to keep pace with textual developments, and so the very buildings that house them have undergone radical changes.

Ancient Greek and Roman libraries were located in palaces, municipal buildings, and temples, and some were open to the public. Following their dissolution, literature in medieval Europe survived in monastic and cathedral collections. The typical library consisted of a long narrow room lighted on both sides with windows and furnished with rows of lectern desks. While the desks were gradually replaced by the alcove system at the end of the Middle Ages, the longitudinal rooms were retained as late as the eighteenth century.

In the early Renaissance private collections began to grow, inspired by the revival of humanistic literature. Wall shelving and galleries were introduced, resulting in a spacious hall. Eventually the wall system proved inadequate, and by the early nineteenth century the reading hall was separated from the storage area. The need for light engendered ingenious solutions such as clerestoreys, lunettes, and skylights.

By the late nineteenth century social pressures led to the development of the public library in its modern form. The Boston Public Library, the Italianate *cinquecento*-style building by McKim, Mead and White inaugurated in 1895, was the prototype of the public library as we know it today, a building designed especially as a library.

A basic functional change began to affect the interior planning of libraries. The public library not only provided places for study but now also loaned books for use off the premises. Toward the end of the nineteenth century the system of "open access" was instituted, revolutionizing library layout in two ways: first, bookshelves had to be low and spaced far enough apart for readers to use; second, as a means of preventing theft, the "checkout" counter near the exit doors became almost universal in public library buildings for most of the twentieth century.

In the last years of the nineteenth and the first years of the twentieth century, public libraries became ubiquitous features of the North American landscape when Andrew Carnegie established thousands of library buildings across the continent. Referring to the library as "the people's university," Carnegie believed that free libraries would elevate the status and productivity of the community as a whole.

The design of the library building up to World War II rarely indicated the activity within. Life inside the institution was clearly separate from that of the community at large. The prevailing style tended toward the monumental — buildings dramatically set on podia, symbolically elevated above the quotidian as befitting an edifice devoted to scholarly pursuit and intellectual activity. Following World War II, a great explosion in the amount of published material resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of readers. Library use grew exponentially, and the programmatic scope of the building reflected social and political change. The assumption that the contents of the library were understood and appreciated by only a few gave way to the notion that the formerly sequestered temple to culture was to serve as a resource for the general public. This paradigm shift was reflected in the dramatically altered scale and complexity of the building.

The library building of the last part of the twentieth century has become a multi-use complex conceived as a centre of activity and consumption, a hybrid structure in which the library is but one element of a cultural setting. Retail, dining, entertainment, lectures, exhibitions, day-care facilities, and fund-raising now vie with the original mission of the library as a place for study and reflection. The glazed entrances and grand atria speak to new intentions that encourage communication between the library and its expanded audience and demonstrate the extent to which the library has become primarily a public institution. Today's library complex reflects a more ludic definition of culture, attracting patrons to the library's threshold in an atmosphere of fun and expectation. Jefferson's dictum that "Nothing of mere amusement should lumber a public library" seems far removed from modern-day applications.[3]

Among the consequences of the increase in the number of people frequenting cultural institutions is the more vulnerable position of culture in the realm of public policy. While the com-
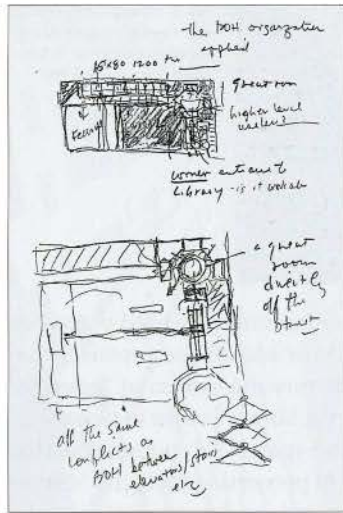
Fig. 3. Moshe Safdie
Sketchbook No. 72
(27 December 1991).
(Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC,
McGill University Libraries)

Fig. 4. View of concourse
looking northward
(photo L. Noppen).

Fig. 5. Sketchbook No. 78 (23 December 1992).
(Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC, McGill University Libraries)

munity to a greater or lesser extent supports government funding of the arts, this support has inevitably invited public participation. By the end of the twentieth century, few public cultural institutions can expect to revise or reform either their programs or their architecture without wide-open and often lively discussion.

For most of the twentieth century a library was defined by its holdings. Indeed, the greatest of the world's libraries were judged by the number of their catalogued items. The vastly expanded and transformed information network makes the library of the late twentieth century a very different place from what it was even a few decades ago. The contemporary library has been undergoing a shift from a print-based repository to a global digital information service. The introduction of new technologies into the library setting has created new imperatives for the physical environment.

The card catalogues near the entrance have all but disappeared, superseded by the computer-filled "Information Mall," "Information Commons," or "Information Café." Buildings provide the metaphor for the ways in which information is stored and presented. The proliferation of linguistic definitions illustrates how libraries are appropriating models from the business and academic domains, thus bridging private and public realms. Public spaces — the mall, commons, café — are non-hierarchical communal spaces inhabited by people and housing computer work stations with access to online catalogues, databases, CD-ROM networks, and the World Wide Web, thus collapsing borders between media, time, and space.

It can be argued that with the emergence of the digital library the need for a building in which to house it has waned. Yet the library structure continues to serve a vital role: it affirms our belief in knowledge as an essential element of our culture as well as responding to a desire for collectivity. A library requires a physical setting to give it identity and to support its activities and services. This communal character guarantees its perseverance as a building type.

Background of Vancouver Library Square

In North America the 1990s were distinguished by a resurgence of library building on a scale virtually unprecedented in any previous decade. This ten-year period saw more than US $2.7 billion in library construction and renovation, almost 50 percent more than was spent throughout the entire 1980s.[4] New central libraries that opened during this per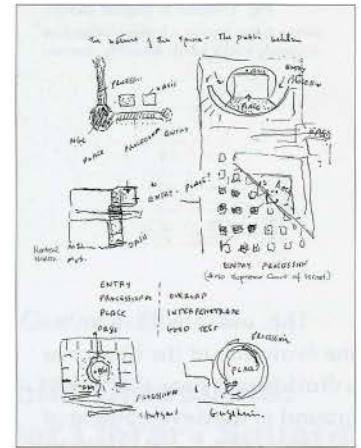iod include such major buildings as Mississauga Central Library (Ontario), and, in the United States, Chicago's Harold Washington Library (Illinois), Phoenix Central Library (Arizona), San Antonio Central Library (Texas), and San Francisco Public Library (California). A special issue of *Architecture* notes the role of the library in the cityscape: "No longer simple reference centers, these new libraries are being conceived as civic magnets — cornerstones of urban revitalization designed to bring people back downtown."[5]

The construction of Vancouver Library Square took place during this period, the political impetus for which was provided by then-Mayor Gordon Campbell during the municipal elections in 1988.[6] He explained, "I had been Mayor for two years and I wanted to have a building that 'belonged to the citizens of Vancouver' and that they all felt had as much to recommend it as did our natural surroundings [...] this was one of the most positive projects that I undertook as Mayor."[7] It was also to be Campbell's only major civic project.

The program of Vancouver Library Square called for a dynamic, people-oriented information and cultural centre that would reflect the idea of a "people's university" for the citizens of Vancouver. Because the library was intended as the most important civic and cultural facility in the area, it was part of the city's plan to shift urban renewal to the south and east, thereby energizing future development and the growth of the downtown area.[8]

Since 1957 the Vancouver Public Library had occupied the premises at 750 Burrard Street,[9] an International-style building designed by Howard Semmens and Douglas Simpson.[10] After 35 years the library had outgrown its physical plant and technological capabilities; only half of its collection was accessible to the public. According to Madge Aalto, director of the Vancouver Public Library since 1988, "It was overcrowded, overused, overaged."[11]

In January 1989 the Vancouver Public Library board commissioned an exhaustive twenty-month, $300,000 study to reassess and consolidate previous planning efforts and to outline the scope of services required by all branches of the Vancouver Public Library system into the twenty-first century. The findings were summarized in a 300-page report that called for a new central library to replace the existing building, a new branch in the Renfrew-Collingwood area, the examination of the collection, and finally the redevelopment of the system over a 25-year period.[12] The report represented the outcome of an intense period of assessment,
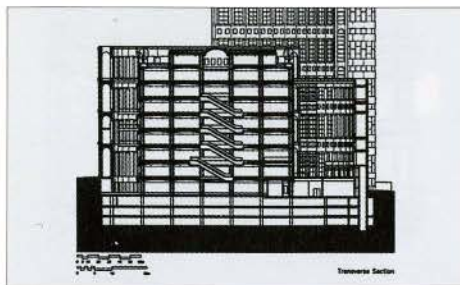
Fig. 6. Transverse section through library.
(Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC, McGill University Libraries)

Fig. 7. View of access floor
(photo Michal Ronnen Safdie).
(Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC, McGill University Libraries)

analysis, and decision making by the staff of the library system, public meetings, and an analysis of written responses from the public. This information would form the basic instructions to the architects who would eventually compete for the commission.

Kyle Mitchell, chair of the library board, spoke of a continuous level of public engagement: "Vancouver Public Library is one of the most utilized public library systems in North America [...] During the initial planning phase, we spent considerable time in communities throughout Vancouver [...] listening to people speak about what they wanted in a new central library. We also had to undertake a city-wide campaign to generate support for a referendum that would be needed to fund the project [...] This was the largest project the City of Vancouver had ever undertaken. We wanted them involved."[13]

In November 1990 a referendum was held as part of the municipal elections. Sixty-nine percent of the voters approved the expenditure of $29.5 million for the new main library and a branch in Renfrew.[14] This would bring the total number of branches in the library system to 21. On 21 August 1991 city officials selected the site for the proposed library complex: a vacant block owned by the federal government and known as Block 56. On 6 December 1991 the city purchased the block for $14 million (although the market value of the land was $26 million).[15] The site was bounded by Georgia Street on the north, Hamilton on the east, Robson on the south, and Homer on the west. A car park occupied the site surrounded by the CBC building, the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, and the main post office building.

The financing of Vancouver Library Square involved three levels of government. In addition to the $29.5 million approved in the 1990 referendum, the city sold municipal bonds totaling $27 million. Another $22.9 million was eventually realized from the sale of the old library building. Income from retail establishments, restaurants, and parking fees from Library Square was to be added to the capital. A private fund-raising initiative, the Library Square Capital Campaign, was to add another $12 million.[16]

More creative, however, were agreements with the federal and provincial governments. The federal government agreed to a 25-year lease-purchase deal for the office tower, an arrangement designed to help pay Library Square's mortgage. The federal government would assume ownership at the end of that period and contribute $7 million to the project. The provincial government through the B.C. Building Corporation agreed to contribute $8.4 million to build two additional storeys above the library building, which would serve as provincial office space. These floors would revert to the library for expansion or revenue in 20 years.[17]

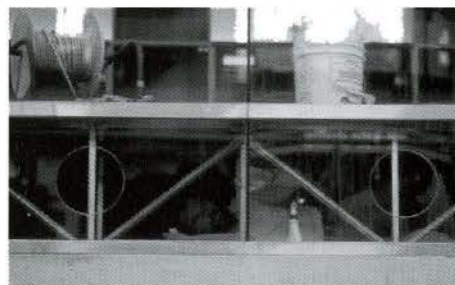Yet the undertaking met with resistance almost from its inception.[18] The earliest critique questioned the selection of the new site and the relocation of the library from a prominent downtown intersection at Robson and Burrard to a new facility on the eastern fringe of downtown, away from the pedestrian and public transit facilities. It was seen as an "opportunity to develop an orphan block on the coattails of the federal government, rather than the public interest."[19] While Bing Thom, architect and chair of the Library Steering Committee, conceded that no site could improve on that of the old library, the price for a new location was right, especially as the downtown core had begun to shift east to Cambie and south to Pacific Streets. The block was expected to become the hub of a new city centre within the decade.[20]

A second line of criticism focused on the fate of the old library building. The city council had earmarked the building for demolition as the high-density zoning of its real estate would help pay for the costs of the Library Square project.[21] The site was rezoned for the highest density available, a 26-storey development. Nevertheless, a movement emerged to save the existing library and grant it heritage status. University of British Columbia professors, Andrew Gruft and Rhodri Windsor Liscombe argued for the building's preservation, citing it as "one of the best examples of buildings of the modern movement."[22] Regarding Gordon Campbell's insistence that the former library was a liability, Toronto architectural critic Adele Freedman observed, "[i]f you were mayor of Vancouver intent on raising a crowd-pleaser, would you let something like heritage get in the way of maximum bucks?"[23]

The city council's decision to sell the building with a demolition permit was a crucial step in raising the estimated $30 million to finance the new library. The sole councilor to vote against the sale and demolition was Lynne Kennedy, who had recently resigned as the city's Heritage Advisory Committee's chair to take a council seat. She noted, "100 years from now people will look back and say, 'Those barbarians, they destroyed a whole style of architecture for purely economic reasons'."[24]

The library was sold for $22.9 million in December 1994 to the Edgecombe Group Inc. and was designated a landmark heritage building. Completely renovated as a commercial building, it currently houses Virgin Records, a TV station, and a branch of the Planet Hollywood chain of restaurants.[25]

Selection Process

Because Vancouver Library Square would be a vast project dependent on public funds and goodwill, the city council, acting on advice from Bing Thom, wanted to avoid the controversy that would doubtless surround an outright patronage appointment. Its members elected instead to hold a limited competition requiring the competing architects to present and defend their vision in a public forum.[26]

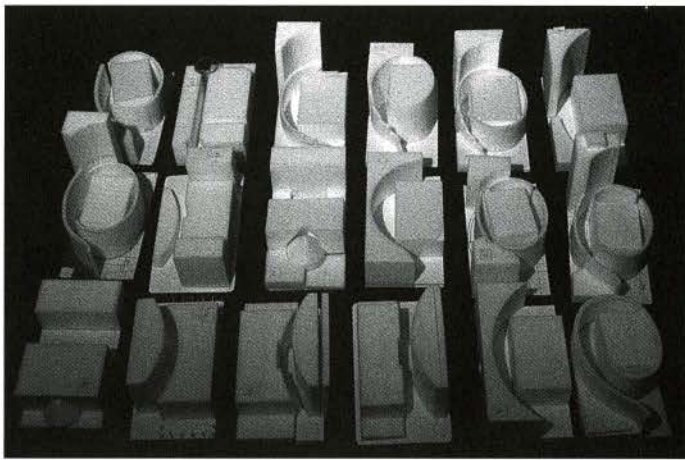But the idea of establishing such a forum was instantly ve-

Fig. 8. Massing study models (photo Michal Ronnen Safdie). (Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC, McGill University Libraries)
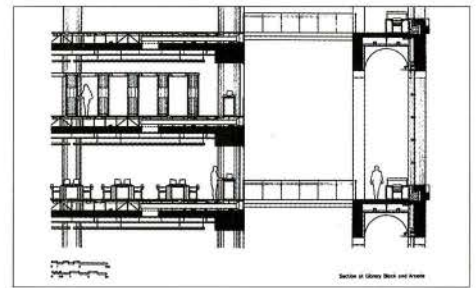
Fig. 9. Section through library block and arcade. (Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC, McGill University Libraries)

toed by the Architectural Institute of British Columbia (AIBC), which feared that the competition process "would become a circus. Architectural excellence — not personality, and not rhetoric — is the whole point of a competition."[27] Moreover, the rules of competition insist on anonymous submissions. A discussion between city representatives and the AIBC resulted in an extension of the rules of the Royal Architecture Institute of Canada (RAIC) to include an anonymous public presentation of the three finalists in Stage 2 of the competition, called "Expression of Vision."[28]

While many architects would have preferred an open competition, this decision was not theirs to make. Not only did the AIBC endorse the competition, but it also provided a professional advisor, Rand Thompson, architect of Chernoff Thompson Architect, to ensure the fair administration of the process.[29]

In September 1991, the City of Vancouver launched a two-stage process for the selection of an architectural firm. Stage 1, the "Call for Expression of Interest," was a pre-qualification stage to select three firms that would participate in a limited design competition.[30] Implicit in this "Call for Expression of Interest" was the search for an international "star" who would guarantee world-wide interest in and publicity for the project. All respondents were to be affiliated with a British Columbia firm and reviewed by a seven-member Proposal Evaluation Committee coordinated by Rand Thompson.[31]

Each team of architects would make a formal presentation to the committee, including written proposals that outlined its approach. Then each team would be interviewed: How would it analyze the different site requirements, slope, traffic, and proximity to downtown? How would it handle design direction? How would it administer the construction phase? What kind of vision did it have for this building?[32]

The competition parameters outlined that the architects were to "create facilities which have symbolic meaning, that are functional, that respond to the needs of their users and can be constructed on time within their budget." Twenty-seven firms responded to the "Call for Expression of Interest." On 15 October 1991, eight semi-finalists were culled from this list of 27.[33] This was reduced further to seven consortia following the withdrawal of James Stirling, who cited dissatisfaction with the committee's "unrealistic" expectations of preliminary design work and what he saw as the paucity of qualified judges.[34]

Adele Freedman cast a scornful eye on both finalists and jury as "a mix of local heroes, outsiders from Ontario, and big-time U.S. operators […] It goes without saying the city of Vancouver wasn't shooting for the dreamer or the little guy […] Much less encouraging is the makeup of the jury, which looks to be another case of cultural immaturity."[35] Freedman's trenchant stance may be the point from which to question the entire process of engaging public discourse in professional consideration for the design of Vancouver Library Square. At the outset, Freedman identified caustically the political and civic yearnings for a world-class building that would put Vancouver on the architectural map, as it were. And the professional community divided itself along several lines: the matter of "outside" versus "inside" firms became the subject of heated debate. Moreover, one position held that only established firms had the wherewithal to bring the project in on time and under budget, while the other decried the limited competition as forcing out talented younger architects.

The three finalists were announced on 27 November 1991: Boston-based Moshe Safdie and Associates, Inc., working with Downs/Archambault & Partners; the Los Angeles-based Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates in joint venture with Waisman Dewar Grout Carter Inc.; and the Toronto firm of Kuwabara Payne McKenna Blumberg Architects in association with James K.M. Cheng Architects and Musson Catell Mackey Partnerships.[36] The process of selecting a winner from the three finalists was entrusted to the Selection Advisory Committee (SAC), a nine-member jury.[37] The jury's deliberations were based, in part, on reports and recommendations from the Urban Design panel, the Technical Advisory committee (primarily city and library staff), and the Library User Advisory committee.

The six evaluation criteria used by the Technical Advisory committee to assess the planning and urban performance of the three final submissions were built form, public open space, street response, accessibility of library, Library Square as catalyst, and image. Safdie's scheme, known as Submission C, scored a total of 45.5 points out of 60.[38] The Urban Design panel, composed exclusively of architects, landscape architects, engineers, and planners, reviewed the schemes on 25 March 1992. The panel voted 8 to 1 in favour of Submission C. However, the Library User Advisory committee believed that Proposal C contravened the functional criteria and scored it only 47 out of a possible 85 points.[39] The findings of the individual committees would form the basis of the required modifications to the winning design and will be discussed in the section "Vancouver Library Square as Built."

Community Phase

On 3 March 1992, the Vancouver City Council and the Vancouver Public Library launched the final stage of the Library Square competition by unveiling the three finalists' designs submitted anony-

Fig. 10. View of reading arcade.
(Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC, McGill University Libraries)

Fig. 11. Moshe Safdie Sketchbook No. 74 (19 March 1992).
(Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC, McGill University Libraries)

mously as Proposals A, B, and C, consistent with RAIC competition rules.[40] They were presented successively at City Hall, the existing library, two community centres, the Vancouver Art Gallery, and a shopping mall for three weeks in March 1992.[41]

This community phase was coterminous with the jury's deliberation and was intended to continue the level of public engagement with the project. At this time the public was asked to respond to a questionnaire seeking its opinion on which of the three finalists' schemes it found most appealing. An initial printing of 500 questionnaires proved inadequate as some 7,000 people responded, voting overwhelmingly — 70 percent — in favour of the "Roman Coliseum," as Proposal C was dubbed.[42]

"Like everything, very interesting"

"Only design that is interesting"

"Very striking, but too Disneylandish, tacky"

"Classy, historical"

"It is aesthetic to the maximum. It would look great in Italy"

"The coliseum model seems an ironic historical parallel,
  a joke on Vancouver. The decadence and conceit of Rome"

"Most memorable and different"

"Classical, will not fade with time"

"Will bring in tourists to see this one"

"Why are we drifting back to the past?"

The written responses ranged from enthusiastic acceptance to bewildered resistance.

Christopher Hume called the display "In a city where architecture is a spectator sport […] the hottest show in town," and apparently had no difficulty in identifying the source of Proposal C: "Submitted by none other than Moshe Safdie […] it is pure Disney, an instant ruin." Commenting acidly on the library structure flanked by a 21-storey tower "in the manner of a toilet bowl and its tank," Hume cited Vancouver's "California-complex" and concluded, "Proposal C has a good chance of taking the prize. It's like, really neat."[43]

A special council meeting at City Hall on 24 March 1992, offered citizens an opportunity to present their views. Although the public consultation process was unprecedented in Canadian architectural competitions, it actually served as only one of the factors that the jury considered. One might challenge the validity of public engagement in a discourse with professionals and experts in the field. Certainly the use of this discourse to further the requirements of political expediency might seduce the public into believing the myth of its own authority. Gordon Campbell said: "As it was the public's embrace of the project meant that it belonged to the public, which was one of the critical components of the project for me when I initiated it as Mayor." [44]

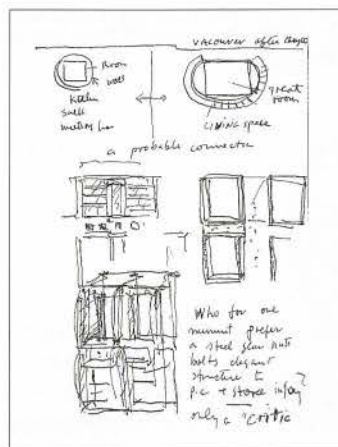That a "public" building can "belong" to the people is at once a visionary ideal and a disingenuous pose: public opinion, in the form of "comment" cards, was solicited for a vote to contribute municipal funds for a building and not to achieve some vast utopian goal. And yet even seasoned professionals had to acknowledge that the project tapped into a yearning for the expression of civic pride. "People seemed to like the boldness of the scheme," Bing Thom observed. "It really represents what Vancouver wants to be."[45] Similarly, Madge Aalto commented, "I believe that the jury saw the Safdie design as having the potential to be a 'great public building'."[46] By appearing to encourage public appreciation for the design before its implementation, the politicians involved in the process managed to obtain much of the necessary funding for the project. And Safdie himself delineates the possible uses of "public" opinion: speaking five years later on the role of community participation in the building of the Salt Lake City Main Library, he allowed, "I would like to encourage Salt Lake people to take an interest, to come to all the public presentations and feel free to express their views *when it is appropriate*" (italics mine).[47]

The architect's own qualifying phrase underscores the archness of canvassing "the people" for their response to a project actually undertaken by highly trained and vetted professionals. Andrew Gruft is similarly skeptical: "You can't solve things like this [Library Square] by popularity poll. That's making a mockery of public participation. Safdie's building was clearly the most popular, but why? Because it's splashy! It's easy to 'read.' It made the biggest gesture."[48]

Gruft's frankness illuminates the possible and serendipitous convergence of popular taste with the more sophisticated and informed aesthetic that determined the jury's choice of design. Safdie himself outlines the perils of offering the public a deceptively inflated sense of its own power. "One side of me says 'Trust the public, their instincts are probably better than the more complicated thinking of the professionals.' Another side of me shudders at the fact that it [public opinion] could eliminate any kind of *avant garde* solution which, by its nature, takes time to get used to."[49] And so the apparently sincere and democratic attempt to include *vox populi* in the design considerations of an architectural project is revealed as choreography by self-interested politicians currying favour with the voting citizenry.

The Selection of Moshe Safdie and Associates

On 14 April 1992 the architects of Proposal C — the joint venture of Moshe Safdie and Associates, Inc. and Vancouver architects Downs/Archambault & Partners — were declared the winners of the Vancouver Library Square competition, subject to clarifi-
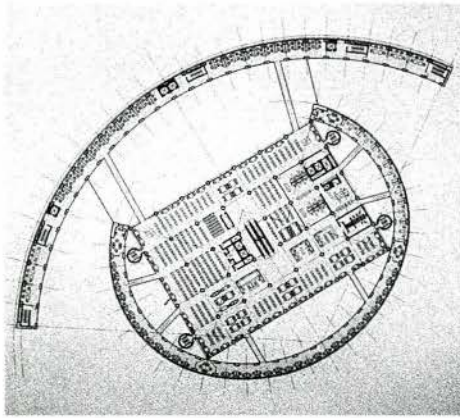
Fig. 12. Shenzhen Cultural Center. Plan of library level 5.
(Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC, McGill University Libraries)

cation of design concepts and budgetary issues.

The Selection Advisory Committee (SAC) underlined the fact that the competition had not been held to select a detailed design but was concerned instead with discovering the architect who, in its opinion, demonstrated an understanding of library design and who possessed an ability to respond to the unique features of the site, providing the city with not only a practical but an inspiring building. Responding to the distinctive and compelling features of Safdie's proposal, the report stated, "The Committee particularly commends this design for its elliptical form, double wall appearance, loggia at the roof and galleria space."[50]

Yet the final decision of the jury in favour of Safdie's design provoked immediate opposition from within the architectural community: "once again, a team spearheaded by Moshe Safdie, […] emerged from a restricted architectural selection process to design one of Canada's landmark buildings […] Architects and critics are cringing at the literal historicism, and questioning the appropriateness of the imagery."[51]

James Cheng, who worked with Kuwabara Payne McKenna Blumberg on Submission A, concedes that their design was too conservative and accords Safdie a certain praise: "If I were the city fathers and I wanted to build the biggest legacy of the past fifty years, I'd raise a statement that my grandchildren would be proud of. And Safdie's strength is that he understands the big statement."[52]

Perhaps the clearest understanding of what is entailed in a world-class architectural competition was articulated by Richard Archambault, principal of Downs/Archambault & Partners: "I think that it is important to win the job, and then benefit from the users' input on functional and relationship matters, as we were able to do during the design development stage."[53]

In the public press the response was mixed, although it was clear that the project generated considerable excitement. Admirers felt that the building would be an interesting and long-overdue addition to the cityscape, while critics grumbled about the "Coliseum," seeing it as the emblem of an ancient culture and therefore inappropriate for a young, vital city like Vancouver. Coverage of the story appeared almost daily in the local press and on the day the winner of the competition was announced, the local CBC television station led its newscast with the story.[54]

Design

Any discussion of Safdie's vision for Vancouver Library Square must consider the project in relation to its original intentions and design philosophy. Safdie's proposal was guided by three primary concerns as articulated in his submission:

1. […] the design for the Library must create a meaningful symbol for Vancouver, one with an appropriate image and character.
2. The design for the Vancouver Public Library must recognize a fundamental change in the social and political structure and values of our society. The library is for everyone, […] the library is open and accessible to all.
3. […] we shall again seek an architectural language particular to the character of Vancouver — set upon the rim of the Pacific, its cultural roots extending east to Europe and west to Asia, its rugged landscape of sea and mountains, its specific fauna and flora, indeed, extending to the cultural roots of its native people.[55]

Safdie's design centres the building on the site — one square block with a total area of 12,000 m² (fig. 1).[56] The library consists of a seven-storey rectangular core containing open book stacks, library services, and circulation. The core is encircled by an ellipse — a free-standing, precast concrete double shell that holds reading and study areas accessed by steel bridges spanning skylit light wells at intervals between rectangle and oval. The library's internal glass façade overlooks an enclosed concourse formed by a second elliptical wall that defines the east side of the site. The glass-roofed concourse serves as an entry foyer to the library. One side of the concourse holds retail shops and cafés; on the other side is the library. The second elliptical wall anchors a 21-storey federal office tower on the southeast (northeast as built) corner of the site. At the northeast (southeast as built) corner, a series of buttress walls extends out from the concourse wall consisting of three levels of additional retail space and day-care facilities.[57] The design for the library made it more than twice as large (32,516 m²) as the previous structure, with seating capacity for 1,400 as compared with 350 and room for more than two million volumes.[58]

The rectangular core is topped by a landscaped roof garden and amphitheatre. Piazzas, located at the corners of the block facing Robson and Homer on the south and Georgia and Homer on the north, lead into the concourse. The south piazza encloses a small stepped circular amphitheatre replicating the curve of the building and intended as a venue for street theatre (fig. 2). Below the concourse on the ground level are an auditorium and meeting rooms. A three-level underground car park accommodates just over 700 cars.

The library is clad in sandstone-coloured precast concrete, as is the office tower, whose glazed corner faces the city and the bay.

In designing Vancouver Library Square, Safdie had to resolve the many contradictions of the contemporary library: an imposing public structure providing intimate space for personal study and intellectual pursuit; the ideal of solitary endeavour giving way to community enrichment; elitist vision underscored by democratic

endorsement. It had to function as a civic monument, visible from surrounding areas and adjacent buildings, thus establishing itself as the preeminent public building in the city. The challenge for Safdie was to design such a building while remaining true to his overall philosophy and specific project goals: "And in Vancouver which is screaming modern, towers all over the place, different coloured glasses, the best and […] mostly the worst of contemporary commercial architecture in a wonderful setting, I did a building that is nicknamed the Coliseum which is […] in some ways a high-tech building and in other ways has a memory of ancient libraries."[59]

Safdie artfully addressed the site's considerable slope.[60] The piazzas on either end of the square form a single warped plane that accommodates the natural grade without recourse to complicated level changes and barriers. The height of the outer wall increasingly opens up as the elevation rises toward the south side (north as built), providing an inviting, dynamic sequence for both those using the building and passersby, thus establishing a connection with "life beyond the block." Bing Thom acknowledges this feature as the one that ultimately determined his decision: "I think this was a brilliant stroke of thinking in terms of the urban design solution to this unique problem."[61]

As Safdie indicated on a sketch, the challenge of this project was similar to that of the Ballet Opera House (Toronto, Ontario, 1987-1990; unbuilt): designing for a city block that divided downtown and midtown and that was itself bordered by streets with distinct characteristics. In both projects he explored the idea of a corner entrance leading to a "Great Room" (fig. 3).

The architect separated the building's various features — especially the entrance foyer or concourse (referred to in the original submission as the "Urban Room") and other public amenities — from the library proper. This crucial decision allowed him to create two quite different environments with separate public profiles as stipulated by the building program.

The glazed concourse is the most dramatic feature of Vancouver Library Square, reflecting Safdie's predilection for vast, naturally lit spaces (fig. 4). It serves as the interior focus, the "spine" of the complex, and connects the exterior and the library itself, providing a meeting place for social, cultural, and commercial activities in all seasons. Thus the animation and vitality of a mercantile artery are captured within the concourse. According to Madge Aalto, Safdie envisioned the concourse as a kind of Burlington Arcade, but as the city owned the building, it negotiated for the most lucrative retail establishments, "And so it was Burlington

Arcade out the window and Yogen Fruz in the front door."[62]

Safdie himself calls the promenade "the best public room I've ever designed."[63] The vast welcoming concourse, from which the entire organization of the building can be instantly perceived, orients visitors, unifies the structure around it, and facilitates a broad field of vision. In a letter to Christopher Hume, the architect wrote: "I wanted a scheme where upon arrival you could see each and every level for orientation. I decided to make the concourse […] into a space where library meets city, and to make that space feel as the foyer of the library as well as an urban room of multiple activities."[64]

Safdie pursued the theme of orientation, juxtaposing the nature of public space and "the nature of spine" with the elements of entry, procession, place, and oasis. Vancouver Library Square extends previous studies in the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa, 1983-1988) and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (1985-1991) (fig. 5), while the curved, glazed concourse and elliptical spine as elements of public meeting places would become features in future projects such as the Shenzhen Cultural Center (Guandong Province, China, 1998; unbuilt), National Library Board (Singapore, 1999; unbuilt), and Salt Lake City Main Library (Utah, 1999; in design). The competition proposal for Shenzhen Cultural Center featured a seven-storey-high glass wall by means of which visitors might orient themselves to the entire building. Similarly, the Montreal Museum makes use of a vast, ritualized staircase that traces the route through all floors of the museum, while the courtyard, which rises five storeys, permits visitors to orient themselves both within the building and to the adjacent urban landscape.

The overall transparency of the Vancouver Library Square design not only permits orientation but, equally importantly, expresses in symbolic terms the importance of an inclusive institution and the accessibility of its collections to the public. And here, Safdie has succeeded admirably in two of the three intentions stated in the submission brief: he has designed a building that reflects the youth and vitality of the city and that recognizes the public nature of the library. Only in the third goal can he be said to have fallen wide of the mark: the "cultural roots" of Vancouver are not addressed in the Vancouver Library Square design. Nevertheless Safdie's vision that "the library is for everyone […] accessible and clearly organized" has been achieved. His design embodies the idea that a library should be more than a repository of books and computers — that it should reflect a city's collective imagination and aspirations.

As in most of Safdie's œuvre, natural light remains a vital feature of his design, an organizing principle to clarify space. The architect noted in his submission brief that the library must be a luminous building, for both practical and symbolic purposes. In the concourse Safdie uses natural light to dramatic effect. While provid-
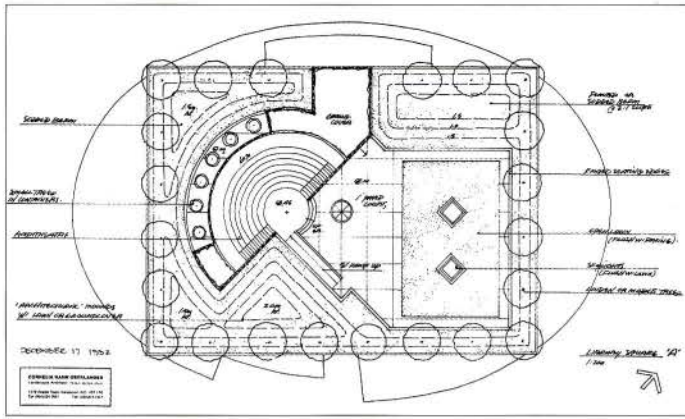
Fig. 14. Cornelia Hahn Oberlander.
Original submissions: roof garden and amphitheatre (17 December 1992).
(Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC, McGill University Libraries)

ing protection from the elements, the concourse permits light to filter deeply into the space, animating it with ever-changing patterns.

The main entrance to the library is located off the concourse, thus making the transition from social meeting place to cultural repository in a carefully conceived modulation between the bustling activity of the concourse and the quiet and serious study within the library.

Safdie's commitment to orientation and clarity of circulation is likewise demonstrated within the library. The entry level (level 2) functions as an "Information Commons" with approximately thirty computer work stations replacing the traditional card catalogues and permitting access to online catalogues of the library's collections, databases, the World Wide Web, and a CD-ROM network. The objective was to create a building in which users can immediately find all departments, facilities, and amenities, which are placed identically on each floor. The organization is revealed by the transverse section (fig. 6).

To achieve flexibility and to accommodate inevitable changes in computer technology as well as possible adjustments in library configuration, the architect specified open-ended raised access floors on each level. From the atrium, the maze of supply and return ducts, sprinkler piping, and cable trays with electrical and communication wiring is clearly visible through continuous glass panes that stretch from each ceiling and terminate at the concrete slabs between floors. This configuration gives the public a bracing glimpse of the structural, technical, and mechanical workings of the building, evoking in yet another way the spirit of enquiry animating the library (fig. 7).

Within the library, Safdie addressed the paradox inherent in large libraries that must reconcile two contradictory functions: open, communal areas for discussion and collective learning and smaller spaces for concentrated study. The carrel associated with medieval monasteries provides one early example of how to offer personal space within a larger whole.[65] Safdie spoke of wanting to reinvent the traditional nineteenth-century reading room, "a new type of linear reading room where one sits in contact with both the city and the library in the presence of others but with much more privacy […] So I began modeling this square surrounded by a free-standing circular wall […] This did not fit on the site, so I made it rectangular and the circle became oval."[66] Once the model was massed, Safdie recognized that the four-tiered organization suggested not only the Coliseum but other circular Graeco-Roman structures. "I was surprised — even

shocked — as my search had begun without any preconceived image of what this library should be as an object in the city."[67] A photograph of eighteen massing models (fig. 8), oddly evocative of an exhibition of student works in the Russian Constructivist basic course of space discipline of the mid-1920s,[68] provides valuable insight into this process — exploring the various options within the context of the site that was ultimately transformed into the built form of the Vancouver Public Library.

Once inside the library, users move throughout the centre rectangular block to collect books and study materials and cross light steel bridges on levels four, five, and six, leading to reading arcades with tables and carrels (figs. 9 and 10). The bridges span interstitial light wells, which not only provide daylight throughout but also articulate the spaces into zones, separating and identifying the structural components and lending a sense of scale to a building of this size. Safdie has devised an innovative and elegant method of bringing daylight to all levels of the building without compromising the needs of conservation.

The conventional reading room is reinterpreted into a sequence of linear reading galleries that preserve the concept of a community of readers and the ritual of the library visit while providing a greater level of privacy and connection to the city. Windows along the perimeter offer views out onto the neighboring urban landscape.

The library develops from Safdie's earlier experience and vocabulary, acknowledging a memory of Kahn's meeting room at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California, which prompted the idea of a room surrounding the free stacks block (fig. 11).

Earlier in Queen's University Library (Kingston, Ontario, 1990; unbuilt), however, Safdie incorporated the idea of intimate study spaces in the "house-like" forms surrounding the large stack block. And in the National Gallery, instead of locating the public spaces at the heart of the building and surrounding them with galleries, Safdie reversed the plan and located the colonnade on the exterior.

Kahn's "meeting house" and its composition of a square within a circle inspired Safdie's rectangle within an ellipse in Vancouver. Safdie once again used one geometric shape contained by another as a point of departure in Shenzhen Cultural Center. There the main rectangle was to have been surrounded by an elliptical wall linked by bridges to small work areas (fig. 12). There are also many formal similarities in Salt Lake City Main Public Library where a free-standing elliptical reading spine surrounds a triangular form containing the stacks (fig. 13).

One might ask: did the architectural language of the Vancouver Public Library emerge spontaneously, as Safdie claims in his letter to Jardinat, as a marvelously historical "answer" to the problem of housing texts and one that he "realized" after the
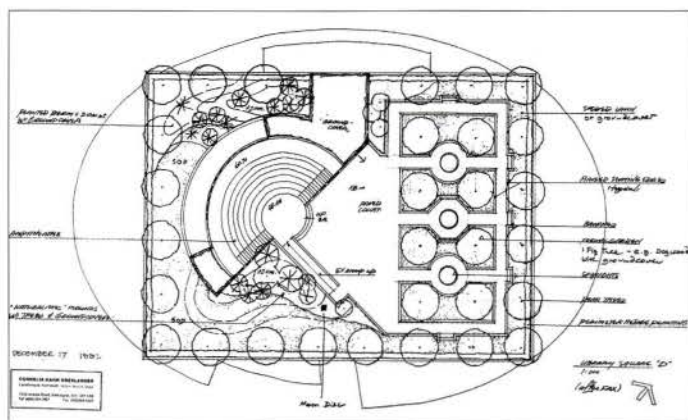
massing of the model? Or did the architect envision a classically allusive structure to anchor — or, indeed, to surpass — the disparate architectural elements of a young city like Vancouver? Safdie has demonstrated some defensiveness on this issue: questioned by David Beers about the library's mimicking the Coliseum, he responded brusquely, "What people call it is their business. At moments undoubtedly it looks like some coliseum […] But when you enter it […] [y]ou move through the building, and feel the technology of construction at each and every moment […] and you're sure to forget the Coliseum. So the fact that you can come from outside, with its roots in the past of Rome and Europe, and enter this world is to be the success of the building."[69]

The jury debated the Coliseum comparison, which according to Bing Thom "worked as a negative element."[70] Clearly the jury was concerned that the reference to the classical past might undermine the project's appeal, intimating a grandiose and extinct structure completely antithetical to the architect's claimed vision for a building that would both reflect and inspire the city and its citizenry.

Behind many of Safdie's projects is the ideological impetus to provide everyone with access to a garden: "Both in urban institutional and residential projects, the metaphor is for an approach […] harmonious with nature."[71] As originally conceived, the roof garden and amphitheatre were to be an integral part of Safdie's design, located above the rectangular core of the main library block and accessible from both staff and visitors' elevators. The garden was designed by Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, a Vancouver landscape architect with whom Safdie had collaborated at the National Gallery of Canada. Oberlander's two design concepts show paved areas surrounding formal gardens with seating and flowering trees around the perimeter (figs. 14 and 15). But Safdie proposed a less formal approach.[72]

At ground level, Oberlander conceived of paved plazas and *Liriodendron tulipifera* trees encircling Library Square and Morgan maple trees, as requested by the city, on Georgia Street. The northeast (southeast as built) side of the building, which housed retail and day-care facilities, featured cascading roses and white flowering dogwoods in planter boxes.

The comparison between Vancouver Library Square, Shenzhen Cultural Center and Salt Lake City Main Library continues. In Shenzhen a roof-top garden was to have included an amphitheatre. Likewise the design for Salt Lake City's library incorporates a roof-top garden above the triangular core.

Safdie uses the façade to comment on the passage of time in practice, technology, and tradition. The multi-tiered elliptical shell of both the library and the tower is constructed of an outer facing of large-scale precast concrete panels made with local red granite aggregate. During the construction process, these elements served as form work for the cast *in situ* concrete structure (fig. 16).

The fenestration, tiers, and columns provide a rhythmic subdivision of the long elevation and moderate the difference in levels between the tower and library. The precast cladding of the outer shells — dense, gravity-bound, classically detailed — gives way to a modernist glazed interior. Inside and out, the building changes with context and circumstance (fig. 17).

The building is composed of two kinds of space: the public space — exuberant, flooded with light and activity — and that of the library proper — introverted and calm, with controlled soft light and removed from the hustle and bustle of urban life. The contradictions of the contemporary library are thus not hidden but affirmed. Moreover, the transparent concourse makes the library appear open and inviting. From the exterior one thus sees a building that celebrates people and movement. Vancouver Library Square's symbolic impact derives not from its stated mission as a repository of knowledge but from its social function. Perhaps this is a true reflection of the library's evolved role as a "high-traffic showplace for information and technology."[73]

Safdie has spoken of the concourse as "a new kind of public space […] an active city room which transcends the urban shopping center."[74] This it does: facing each other across the concourse are the library and the shops, and so while sipping coffee at one of the cafés, one can see the library, its taut, glazed skin revealing the building. The social and educational realms are thus brought together in a welcoming habitat.

Vancouver Library Square as Built

Safdie's original design did undergo a number of modifications as stipulated by the jury prior to the awarding of the commission. None of these, however, affected the elemental spirit of the project.[75]

The principal design modification involved relocating the federal office tower from the Robson/Hamilton corner on the southeast to the Georgia/Hamilton corner on the northeast in order to solve three problems: the tower as originally designed intruded 42 feet into the Cambie Street and Tenth Avenue view corridor, presenting its widest dimension there; moreover, the tower placed the scheme's open space on Robson Street and the library roof into shadow for much of the day. And the tower would be too close to an approved 16-storey hotel tower across Robson Street. The reconfiguration would provide full sunlight on the public spaces on the Robson and Hamilton sides of the site[76] (fig. 18 and see also fig. 1).
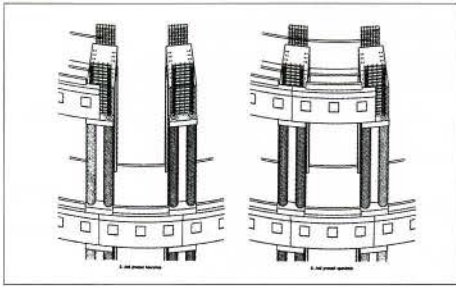
Fig. 16. Details of outer precast concrete panels. (Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC, McGill University Libraries)

Fig. 17. Southwest elevation: Robson and Homer Streets (photo T. Hursley). (Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC, McGill University Libraries)

The position of the tower better reflects the formality and ceremonial scale of Georgia, a street of commercial high-rises, and the shops at the lower level of the building, now moved to the southeast side, respond more fully to Robson, one of Vancouver's informal, pedestrian-oriented shopping streets (fig. 19). On the other hand, the tower now blocks the view of the library where it would have been visible from the Georgia Street viaduct with its piazzas blending with rather than challenging the neighbouring Queen Elizabeth Theatre and the CBC plazas.

Major changes were required to meet the functionality of the library program. One of the key issues was the need to modify the library floor plates by filling in the atrium spaces, eliminating bridges, and reducing the perimeter of the library. Aalto was concerned that the floor plates as designed exposed galleries at each end of the building: "The galleries are not only difficult to supervise, but of greater concern to us is the difficulty for our staff to interact with our patrons."[77]

Safdie was unhappy with this proposed solution, noting that filling in the end spaces would result in "continuous undifferentiated" floor plates. More importantly, he saw the question of the light wells as a matter defining the architect's role: that is, the process of consultation with library staff members was intended to open up discussion, particularly about utilitarian or functional matters, but the aesthetic authority and vision of the architect must not be compromised. "As such, the light wells are not an idea put forward by the architect to be decided by referendum, but are a design position and a firm recommendation [...] There might not be much reference in the program to such issues but I assure you that it is those subtle questions, in addition to obvious operational issues, that will make the difference between a great and a mediocre library"[78] (fig. 20).

The result was that Safdie partially filled in the north and south atria but maintained the bridge links and so retained the geometric identity of the rectangle and ellipse (fig. 21). One below-grade floor was eliminated while a second was "raised," thus providing natural light in all staff areas.

It was also stipulated that all unprogrammed space (1,291 m²) be deleted. The original design, which was estimated at $15-25 million over the $100 million budget, was revised.

The presence of the garden and amphitheatre was greatly reduced in the modified plan for Vancouver Library Square. While the complexity, cost, and appropriateness in Vancouver's weather were debated, the city council was unanimous in its decision that the roof garden be off limits to the public.

In a letter to Clyde N. Hosein, Facilities Development manager, Safdie wrote, "The roof garden was incorporated as a fully landscaped and accessible garden in the design submitted to Council [...] Given the enormous public interest in the roof garden its deletion signals a lack of credibility in the public process."[79] But Aalto considered the logistical nightmare of administrating such a garden: "From the library's point of view, it offered little but problems, [patrons] taking books [there] and leaving them behind, dropping them off the edge of the building. You may be thinking that people wouldn't do that but I can assure you they would [...] No, I don't regret its loss other than sympathizing with Moshe and Cornelia's vision of what could have been."[80]

Archambault explains that "the demise of the roof garden was ultimately caused by the addition of a two-storeyed shell space for future expansion. Outdoor space was limited to two small terraces at either end of the oval and the roof was designed to be viewed from the Public Works Canada office tower and other future high-rise buildings adjoining the site."[81]

The addition of the two floors had further repercussions. In a letter to Mayor Campbell, Safdie expressed his concern that the addition of the two floors would render the building "extremely top heavy, losing the airy quality of the original design." Safdie proposed adding only one floor, but Campbell remained adamant.[82]

The redesigned garden could be seen only from the two-storey provincial government space, set back from the central volume. Oberlander described the final roof garden as a "new concept in 'greening' tall buildings. As seen from adjacent towers, the only visually accessible roof of the Library simulates the Lower Mainland. The blue grass echoes the Fraser River while the green grass is land. Higher elevations are represented with the rich deep green of kinnikinnick. It is a low maintenance planting"[83] (fig. 22).

On 12 June 1992, following twelve weeks of negotiations and design modifications, Safdie presented his newly revised plan to the city council. He was awarded the commission and authorized to proceed with the design of Vancouver Library Square and, when asked what compromises had been made, publicly stated, "There are none."[84]

Inauguration

Fast-tracked construction permitted the library to be ready in an astonishing 26 months, "on time and on budget."[85] The inauguration of Vancouver Library Square was highlighted by "Litterazzle: A Family Festival," a ten-day celebration leading up to the opening of the library. The festivities began with "Operation Bookworm" on 21 May 1995, a symbolic transferral of 10,000 books from the old library to Library Square, followed by Literazzi, a gala event on 24 May and culminating in the official opening ceremonies on 26 May presided over by Mayor Philip Owen, who had succeeded

Fig. 18. Vancouver Library Square as built. Aerial view (photo T. Hursley). (Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC, McGill University Libraries)

Fig. 19. View of south-east corner: Robson and Hamilton Streets. (Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC, McGill University Libraries)

Gordon Campbell in 1994.

Twelve hundred people filled the concourse for the opening ceremonies while another thousand lined up outside the doors. Much of the discourse in the architectural community was negative in tone and focused on the exterior of the building, the alleged excess of its concrete envelope, its Coliseum-like form which was seen as an inapt trope, its assertiveness, and its irrelevance to Vancouver. In an essay entitled "Toga Party," Bruce Haden censured both the building and the public that endorsed its construction: "The Coliseum offers an easily imageable monument, a reassuring adornment to a city uncertain of its status. Obviously the graphic pow appeals to Vancouverites, but so does its anti-modernity."[86] And John Bentley Mays was scathing in his appraisal: "Mr. Safdie's $106 million mixed-use complex is my first encounter with a wholesale plunk-down of the Roman Colosseum's imposing ruin in the middle of a North American city. Or something like a ruin, anyway [...] The result of this gaming with historical types and figures is phantasmagorical [...] which perhaps helps explain why almost every architect and architectural historian I spoke with in Vancouver considers it an abomination."[87] Yet Safdie may have answered Mays's caustic charges in a lecture he delivered in 1989: "There is a clear if confusing difference between the world of stage sets and real life. Or, as beautifully stated by August Peret, 'Will the building make a beautiful ruin?' "[88]

Witold Rybczynski sounded a positive note: "Safdie's approach is understandable. Western cities, unlike Montreal and Toronto, aren't lucky enough to have a solid heritage of nineteenth-century buildings [...] The Colosseum-like structure is memorable, but it is also an ingenious architectural solution [...] Most library lobbies are forbidding sorts of places. This one isn't. It's a sunny, informal and bustling sort of place that appears to suit Vancouverites to a T."[89]

Despite his scorn, Mays acknowledged the pleasure that the public apparently took in the library: "The crowds of patrons and visitors I observed during drop-bys seemed to be minded otherwise, however, zestily using both library and commercial concourse as though grumpy architects did not exist."[90] Mays's admission is significant: along with Haden and Rybczynski, he acknowledged the disparity in tone between the professional and public discourse on Safdie's design, and observed that in so many of the architect's public projects the critics are harsh while the public — along with the popular press — embrace the work wholeheartedly. *The Vancouver Sun* devoted an entire section to "Your New Library" in its edition of 24 May 1995, just before the inauguration, and *The Link* of 31 May 1995 announced the opening of "Vancouver's gorgeous new library," emphasizing its role as "[a] community resource beyond compare." [91] *The Vancouver Courier* touted the public's enthusiasm: "It's obvious Vancouverites like the new design [...] People haven't stopped talking about the ancient-looking design and it would be difficult to find a Vancouverite not excited about touring the complex. Ambivalence is scarce."[92]

Ambivalence may have been scarce, but uncertainty was articulated by Robin Ward, writing in *The Weekend Sun*: "It's stop-you-in-your-tracks architecture, but will Library Square patrons encounter a functional environment as they explore a building based on the artifact of a crumbling European civilization?"[93] And criticism also focused on the city council's decision to reduce the library's operating budget, thus curtailing sharply the library's hours: "What did Vancouver council think voters were saying in 1990 when they approved $30 million[...] We're pretty sure they wanted a bigger, better library, not a $100 million-plus monument they could admire from outside its closed doors."[94]

Five Years Later

On 26 May 2000, Vancouver Library Square celebrated its fifth anniversary with a five-day festival that included readings, music, theatre, and children's entertainment culminating in an all-day street fair. Five years seems an appropriate point from which to judge the impact of the project. On a pragmatic level, the primary rationale for the building of the new library was the inadequacy of the former building. Library Square was designed to expand with the needs of a growing population and increasingly sophisticated technology.

In an interview, Madge Aalto emphasized her satisfaction: "The design works as we had planned it to do [...] people coming in for a quick piece of research or a book to borrow come into the core of the building and spend relatively little time there; those coming in for a day or an extended period of research and study tend to settle in the reading galleries."[95]

Sue Yates, planning librarian, was equally enthusiastic about the functionality of the library. Asked what she would change in terms of the design, she said the escalators that rise through the centre of the building produce an irritating "white noise," but she conceded that they provide the patrons with immediate orientation in the library.[96]

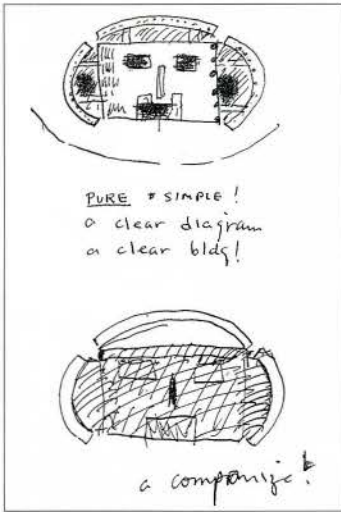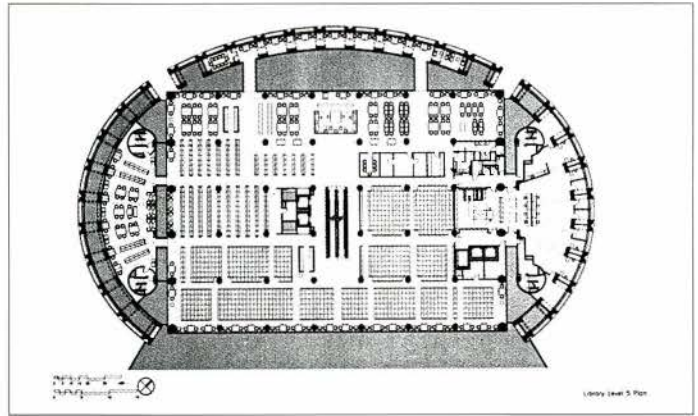Aware of the changing role of libraries at the end of the twen-

Fig. 20. Moshe Safdie Sketchbook
No. 75 (12 June 1992).
(Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC,
McGill University Libraries)

Fig. 21. Plan of library level 5.
(Moshe Safdie Archive, CAC,
McGill University Libraries)

tieth century, Yates spoke of the library's expanding mission to connect with the larger community. Despite the fact that people are accessing the library's resources increasingly from the workplace, home, and schools, she maintains that the library must continue to preserve its communal character by establishing in a physical place a sense of collective endeavor.[97]

Michael Seelig, Professor of Urban Planning at the University of British Columbia, saw "a great opportunity missed […] which could have created a public precinct. In the evening nothing is happening in the area." Nevertheless, he notes that most people enjoy the building: "regardless of what they think of the outside […] its huge indoor street is outstanding. The library is well equipped, well run. Many people use it. It is amazing."[98]

On the issue of the library's role as an anchor in an area that the city had slated for urban renewal, Kyle Mitchell observes that the library was "most definitely a catalyst in the redevelopment of the eastern part of downtown." He credits the building, along with the upgrading of zoning in Yaletown, as having created "a vibrant residential area with great restaurants, commercial spaces, and a proliferation of high-tech companies." Yet he indicates that urban development was only an ancillary issue: Library Square's primary goal was to establish a central downtown library as a civic symbol.[99]

Shortly after the Library Square project began, plans were approved for the building of GM Place, a sports and entertainment arena located to the east of Library Square. In late 1994, the Ford Centre for the Performing Arts, also a Safdie design, opened on Homer Street. Several high-rise residential buildings and hotels have since been integrated into the surrounding area.

In order to get an overview of patron response to Library Square, four interviews were conducted at the library on the evening of 18 July 2000.[100] Each person was asked 18 open-ended questions, and each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes.

A 29-year-old journalist works at CBC across the street and frequents the library daily during work breaks. "I like it. My favourite things are the colours and the lighting. It has a light and airy feel […] I feel comfortable spending time in this building […] I don't use the arcades. Walking over the bridges is too creepy. I get vertigo. The concourse could have been more selective with the choice of vendors. It feels a little too corporate/commercial […] A garden would have been really nice to get out of the city fray."

A retired printer about 65 years old visits the library four or five times a week. "I think it's terrible. It's a very poor copy of an old Roman building. There is tremendous wasted space and it func-

tions poorly. The library shouldn't have moved to such an expensive building if it couldn't afford it." He thinks the concourse is "probably the best place in the building. It's a good communal place for chatting." Asked about the roof-top garden, "It's an example of poor planning again. A public garden would have been very nice."

A bank officer in her early fifties uses the library twice a month and says that she never went to the old library. "It's a nice building. Since it's Roman-style architecture that is rare in Canada, it's unique. Also it's a new building. It's quiet and spacious; even when the library is really busy [it] feels quiet. However, there's too much concrete around the building; it would be better with more greenery. The concourse is bad; it's dirty. The area conflicts with the main purpose of a library."

A university student in his twenties visits the library once a month. "I like the aesthetic. The social element of the concourse is good; it's nice that it's close by. The atmosphere is nice, there's lots of glass, the shape is cool; it's clean and the chairs are comfy." He spends most of his time in the arcades: "I like them. Looking down from them is interesting. I'm not scared." He likes the concourse: "It's convenient to go down for a snack. I'm mad that McDonald's is part of the complex and the food in general is too expensive. This is a community building and the stores don't relate to the community." When asked about the proposed roof garden, he said, "I would like to see it."

Conclusion

Although the considerable strength of public support for Safdie's design for Vancouver Library Square helped to defend the project against its critics, the almost unanimous desire to keep the roof garden did not manage to save this element in the final version. The fact remains that the inclusion of public discourse did not significantly influence design issues in Vancouver Library Square. Although, as Adele Freedman points out, during the community phase of the project the media became an extension of public opinion,[101] there was little real dialogue between the architect and the public. Certainly the professional sniping over the design of Vancouver Library Square impeded the project's reception not at all; if anything, the rancorous discourse seemed to fuel popular approval of the design. Ultimately this aesthetic debate seems to crystallize the ambiguous role of public opinion in civic architecture: the apparent tension between popular acceptance of a building intended for community use and professional disdain for exactly the sort of design that might engage the imagina-
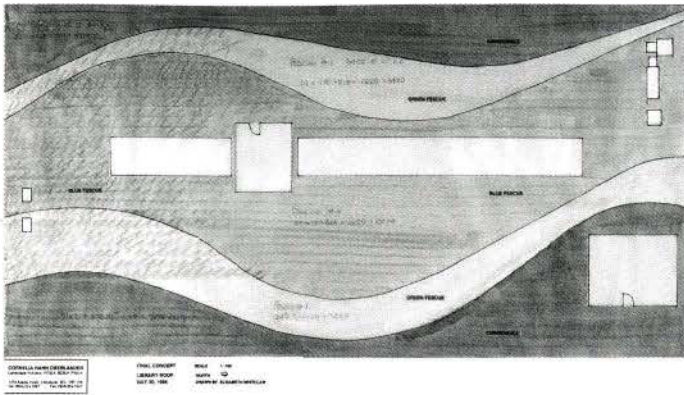
tion of a layperson. Despite the resistance and even outright opposition to the design of the complex, Vancouver Library Square is a remarkably compelling public building, encompassing as it does a vibrant community centre and a library dedicated to the city's idealism and spirit of intellectual endeavour.

Notes

1 I am indebted to Irena Murray, Curator of Canadian Architecture Collection (CAC) and Chief Curator Rare Books and Special Collections Division, McGill University, for her encouragement and guidance in the writing of this essay, her careful reading, and her incisive commentary.

This essay is based on research conducted by Ewa Bieniecka (EB) at CAC from June to September 1999. The CAC is the principal repository of more than 100,000 drawings, models, and personal papers that constitute the Moshe Safdie Archive. Donated by the architect in 1990 as part of an ongoing bequest, this substantive body of primary documents is one of the most extensive individual monographic collections of architectural documentation in Canada. The extraordinary richness and scope of the material in this archive have been the catalyst for a significant number of research-based projects.

Based entirely on the archive, the book *Moshe Safdie: Buildings and Projects, 1967-1992*, published by McGill-Queen's University Press, provides a thorough documentary record of the first 25 years of Safdie's career.

Funded by Industry Canada, the *Moshe Safdie Hypermedia Archive* website (1999-ongoing) presents a survey of Safdie's past and recently completed projects and works-in-progress in the form of 1,000 images, numerous audio and video clips, and an indexed bibliography. The website is designed as a regularly updated version of *Moshe Safdie: Buildings and Projects, 1967-1992*.

Finally two new components have been developed from the *Hypermedia Archive: Building for Culture* and *Habitat '67*. The former, a virtual exhibition, highlights what has become the single most dominant aspect of Safdie's work: large-scale public projects with a distinct cultural and educational mission. The latter examines the internationally renowned Habitat '67 complex against the backdrop of a comprehensive online analysis of the continuing viability of high-density, urban cluster housing.

Together these undertakings have generated a considerable amount of new information, and several research directions have emerged as a result. It is hoped that this essay will be the first in a series aimed at providing comprehensive insight into the work of this Canadian architect.

2 The information in this section is drawn from: Jane Turner, ed., *Dictionary of Art* (New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 1996), vol. 19, 311-321.

3 Ibid., 319.

4 Robert Neuwirth, "Library Science," *Metropolis*, March 1996, 45-58, 82-87.

5 *Architecture* 84 (October 1995): 55. A special issue on libraries.

6 Campbell is currently provincial Liberal leader.

7 Gordon Campbell, letter to EB (11 July 1999). CAC.

8 Stage 1 Guidelines: "Call for Expression of Interest," September 1991. CAC.

9 Irene Scott, "Vancouver Public Library," *Pioneer News* 15 (June/July 1992): n.p. The Vancouver Public Library was officially established as a free public library in November 1887. It was founded with a grant of $250 from the city council and was operated from several successive locations. In 1903 the library moved to a new building at Hastings and Main Streets. The funds for this building, which the library occupied until 1957, were provided by Andrew Carnegie.

10 Adele Freedman, "Modernism versus Money: The Case Unfolds on the West Coast," *The Globe and Mail*, 7 September 1991, C-11. The building was awarded the Massey Foundation Silver Medal for architecture in 1958. In 1953 Semmens and Simpson had the distinction of winning the first Massey Gold Medal ever awarded for an office building, since destroyed.

11 Ann Jarmusch, "The Vancouver Library," *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 1 April 1996, A10.

12 Vancouver Public Library Planning document (unpublished report, September 1990). CAC.

13 Kyle Mitchell, letter to EB (28 May 1999). CAC.

14 Kyle Mitchell, telephone interview with Linda L. Graif (LLG) (12 July 2000): the cost to the owner of the average Vancouver house was $14.55 a year over a period of ten years.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid. As of July 2000 most of the $12 million had been raised.

17 Ibid.

18 An examination of the literature throughout the project reveals a disparity in the amount of coverage that Vancouver Library Square received in the professional as opposed to the popular press. About twenty-five articles have appeared in approximately eight professional journals, such as *The Canadian Architect*, *Architecture*, *The Architectural Review*, *Canadian Consulting Engineer*, whereas the public press covered the project in more than 200 articles, most of which appeared in local papers. While no books have been written exclusively on Vancouver Library Square, the project is featured in Michael Brawne, ed., *Library Builders* (London: Academy Editions, 1997), 178-181; Wendy Kohn, ed., *Moshe Safdie* (London: Academy Editions, 1996), 285; Murray, *Moshe Safdie*, 204-205; Jeremy Myerson, New Public Architecture (London: Laurence King Publishing, 1996), 188-191.

19 Sandra McKenzie, "Mistake or Masterpiece?" *Vancouver* 26 (January/February 1993): 42-50.

20 Sean Rossiter, "The Birth of a Statement: The New Library is an Instant Landmark, But is it our Landmark?" *The Georgia Straight*, 26 May 1995, 9.

21 Sandra McKenzie, "Closing the Book," *The Vancouver Step*, (June/July 1992): 32-33.

22 Andrew Gruft and Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, "For the Love of Modern, Save the Library," *The Vancouver Courier*, 11 October 1992, A15.

23 Adele Freedman, "Modernism versus Money?"

24 Sean Magee, "'$30 Million Estimate 'Too High',"" *The Vancouver Courier*, 19 August 1992, 1.

25 "Vancouver City Library Now a Designated Heritage Landmark Building," *The Vancouver Sun*, 18 January 1995, A6. The $7.1 million shortfall was due to a depressed real estate market.

26 Sandra McKenzie, "Mistake or Masterpiece?" 45.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Clyde N. Hosein, letter to Rand Thompson, MAIBC (6 May 1992). CAC.

30 "Call for Expressions of Interest from Architectural Firms," *The Vancouver Sun*, 7 September 1991.

31 Sandra McKenzie, "Mistake or Masterpiece?" 45.

32 Ibid. 45.

33 Clyde N. Hosein, letter to Richard Archambault,(15 October 1991). CAC.

34 Sandra McKenzie, "Mistake or Masterpiece?" 45.

35 Adele Freedman, "Squaring Off for Library Square," *The Globe and Mail*, 16 November 1991, A2.

36 Bronwen Ledger, "Queen's University Library Competition," *The Canadian Architect* 36 (March 1991): 33-36. In 1991 Moshe Safdie and Associates (MSA) and Kuwabara Payne McKenna Blumberg Architects (KPMB) had participated in a limited design competition for a new library at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. The schemes for the five finalists were displayed for a week, and the public and students were invited to submit their comments. According to an unofficial count from 70 responses the "favourites" were the designs by MSA and the winning competition proposal by KPMB.

37 The members of the Selection Advisory Committee (SAC) included four architects (Fumihiko Maki, William Pedersen, Gerald Rolfsen, and Bing Thom), two aldermen (Tung Chan and Henry Rankin), the chair of the library board (Kyle Mitchell), the city manager (Ken Dobell), and the Mayor of Vancouver (Gordon Campbell), who served as chair of the committee.

38 Review of Library Square Competitions Submissions by the Technical Advisory committee and Urban Design panel. April 1992. A simplified rating system was adopted by the Technical Advisory committee that assigned a value of ten points for each of the categories for a total of 60 points. CAC.

39 Ibid.

40 Proposal A: KPMB; Proposal B: Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer.

41 John Kirkwood, "Choosing Library Democracy in Action," *The Vancouver Courier*, 18 March 1992, 4.

42 Public Questionnaire Evaluation; Sample of Public Responses. CAC.

43 Christopher Hume, "Library Designs Have Vancouver Abuzz," *The Toronto Star*, 14 March 1992, H12.

44 Gordon Campbell, letter to EB (11 July 1999). CAC.

45 Stephen Godfrey, "A Colossal Exercise in Denial," *The Globe and Mail*, 9 May 1992, n.p.

46 Madge Aalto, letter to EB (6 October 1999). CAC.

47 Douglas D. Palmer, "Libraries Termed a 'Treasury' for Culture," *The Salt Lake City Tribune*, 6 April 1999.

48 Sandra McKenzie, "Mistake or Masterpiece?" 46.

49 Ibid.

50 Clyde N. Hosein, Report to Vancouver City Council: Announcement of Competition Winner. CAC.

51 Bronwen Ledger, "Vancouver Library Square Competition," *The Canadian Architect* 37 (July 1992): 20-23.

52 Sandra McKenzie, "Mistake or Masterpiece?" 48.

53 Richard Archambault, letter to EB (17 June 1999). CAC.

54 *CBC Evening News* with Ken Evans, 14 April 1992. (videotape). CAC.

55 MSA: Supplementary Qualification Documents re: The Library Square Project (October 1991). CAC.

56 Stage 1 Guidelines: "Call for Expression of Interest," September 1991. CAC.

57 Administrative Report submitted to Vancouver City Council by City Manager for Library Square Building committee (15 June 1992). CAC. The library was originally intended to be 40,900 m². It was subsequently reduced to 34,500 m² and finally to 32,514 m². The federal office tower and the additional retail and daycare facilities are 28,340 m².

58 Sue Yates, telephone interview with LLG (19 July 2000).

59 George Goodwin, interview with Moshe Safdie (17 October 1992) (audiotape). CAC.

60 The site terrain descends by almost two storeys to the southeast corner.

61 Sandra McKenzie, "Mistake or Masterpiece?" 49.

62 Madge Aalto, telephone interview with LLG (15 June 2000).

63 David Beers, "Architect of Boom," *Vancouver* (May/June 1995): 61-66.

64 Moshe Safdie, letter to Christopher Hume (17 April 1992). CAC.

65 Michael Brawne, *Library Builders*, 6.

66 Moshe Safdie, letter to Donald R. Jardinat (20 July 1992). CAC.

67 Ibid.

68 Selim O. Khan-Magomedov. *Pioneers of Soviet Architecture: The Search for New Solutions in the 1920s and 1930s* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), 121, fig. 335. Daniella Rohan, assistant curator, CAC, brought this analogy to my attention.

69 David Beers, "The Architect of Boom," 65.

70 Stephen Godfrey, "A Colossal Exercise in Denial."

71 Marjie Hadad, "Moshe Safdie: Vision in Concrete," *Real Estate Investment in Israel*, 13 September 1996.

72 Phillips Matthews, memo to Cornelia Oberlander (29 January 1992). CAC.

73 Laura Shapiro, "A Mall for the Mind," *Newsweek*, 21 October 1996, 84.

74 Moshe Safdie, letter to Christopher Hume (17 April 1992). CAC.

75 The information in this section is drawn from the Administrative Report (15 June 1992). CAC.

76 The tower also had to be lowered by two storeys although it still protruded into the view corridor. The shape of the tower had to be modified as well in order to provide marketable floor plates.

77 Stephen Godfrey, "The Image Builder," *The Globe and Mail*, 27 June 1992, C1-C2.

78 Moshe Safdie, letter to Clyde N. Hosein (1 September 1992). CAC.

79 Moshe Safdie, letter to Clyde N. Hosein (6 August 1992). CAC.

80 Madge Aalto, letter to EB (6 October 1999). CAC.

81 Richard Archambault, letter to EB (17 June 1999). CAC.

82 Correspondence between Moshe Safdie and Gordon Campbell (8,23,25 February 1993). CAC.

83 Cornelia Oberlander, "Library Square Vancouver," (unpublished report, n.d.). CAC.

84 Sandra McKenzie, "Mistake or Masterpiece?" 49.

85 Jeff Lee, "New Library: Finding Old Horseshoe Called a Lucky Omen at Ground-breaking," *The Vancouver Sun*, 2 February 1993, B4.

86 Bruce Haden, "Toga Party," *The Canadian Architect* 55 (August 1995), 32-33.

87 John Bentley Mays, "A West Coast Cityscape Reels From the Oz Effect," *The Globe and Mail*, 2 November 1995, D3-D4.

88 Moshe Safdie, "The Language and Medium of Architecture," lecture delivered at Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 15 November 1989.

89 Witold Rybczynski, "A Sight for Sore Eyes," *Saturday Night* 111, No. 2, March 1996, 82.

90 Mays, "A West Coast Cityscape."

91 "Vancouver's New Landmark Library Opens," *The Link*, 31 May 1995.

92 Fiona Hughes, "Beauty and the Books," *The Vancouver Courier*, No. 42, 86, 24 May 1995.

93 Robin Ward, "Roamin' the Ruins," *The Weekend Sun* (Vancouver), 3 June 1995.

94 Editorial, "Operating a Library," *The Vancouver Sun*, 30 May 1995.

95 Madge Aalto, letter to EB (6 October 1999). CAC.

96 Sue Yates, telephone interview with LLG (19 July 2000).

97 Ibid.

98 Michael Seelig, letter to EB (10 June 1999). CAC.

99 Kyle Mitchell, telephone interview with LLG (12 July 2000).

100 These interviews were conducted by Matthew Soules. (typescript). CAC.

101 Adele Freedman, telephone interview with LLG (14 July 2000).

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