

**The Book and the Wall:
The Isaac Bashevis Singer Memorial Archive Library**

by

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SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE
AT THE
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
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ABSTRACT

The design of this library is based upon two architectural concepts: the concept of defensive architecture, which is the architectural response to perceived threat, and the concept of the building as metaphysical model of the universe, having domains of sacred and profane space.

I have long been intrigued by defensive architecture, by the forms it generates in response to perceived threat. The towers, mask-like facades, and labyrinthine passageways remain intriguing long after the war is over. Castles and fortifications are the architectural manifestation of an abrupt discontinuity in the organization of space. A stark polarity is created, a partition between inside and out, ours and theirs, *us* and *them*. The stark form of a defensive structure derives enormous formal power from this conflict of opposites.

Tamer, gentler forms of this concept may be found in the form of monasteries, and madrasas. These share the qualities of retreat and seclusion, but for a different purpose - to be able to concentrate better on learning, and/or prayer. Their seclusion from the outside world is not a hostile act but rather a desire to intensify their inner world of prayer and study. These building types share qualities of having walls which segregate opposing conditions, as in defensive architecture, but differ in that the thing being excluded from the protected domain are of a spiritual nature, rather than physical threats. Sacred space is a domain generated by an origin which marks a vertical break in space from the ordinary

world to the cosmos above. The perimeter wall of the building marks the horizontal discontinuity in space between the inhabited ordered space inside the wall and the uninhabited chaotic space outside. There are ancient examples in which a sacred space was created with no more than a pole surrounded by a carefully-laid ring of stones. All that is inside is ordered, and all that is outside is chaos.¹

In the library, there is just such a division of space - but in this case the space being sequestered forms a language environment. Yiddish, the language of European Jews, had a language community of over eleven million speakers before World War Two. It is now in danger of extinction. The Yiddish language community, both in Europe and the United States, were also avid readers, and left a staggering number of books behind them. Very few people are left who know how to read them. A volunteer organization has collected over a million of these books, and has warehoused them for safekeeping. One of the main purposes of the library is to defend these books from the main threat against them - namely the threat of being thrown in the garbage.

The books are the actual objects which the library protects, but to encourage people to speak this language again requires the creation of a sacred space - a language sanctuary. The purpose of the library, aside from being a place to simply keep Yiddish books, is to aid the regeneration of the language by creating a special, spiritual place in which the few remaining native speakers can gather together with people who want to learn Yiddish, and pass the tradition on for another generation.

Finally, one of the most interesting aspects of this project was the realization that older architectural forms which were thought obsolete can have great relevance today as symbols of cultural and philosophical continuity. The recycling of older architectural forms and the ancient religious concepts which led to the creation of the first durable buildings into symbolic forms can provide powerful formal metaphors for an ancient people in a modern world.

Thesis Supervisor: Professor John R. Myer

Title: Professor of Architecture

¹Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1959.

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Part 1: The Yiddish Language

I. History of the Yiddish Language

Linguistic Origin

Yiddish was the vernacular language of European Jews. Its grammatical base originated as a fusion of Slavic lingual root stocks and Mediaeval High German, with a large admixture of Hebrew and Aramaic vocabulary. Though written in Hebrew characters from right to left, and despite the large proportion of Hebrew vocabulary, it is a Germanic language not a Semitic one, as different from Hebrew as English is from Arabic.

Yiddish was originally spoken by Jews in eastern and western Europe. Previous to World War II, there were eleven million native speakers of Yiddish. The Holocaust decimated the language community, reducing it to less than half its size, and assimilation into other languages since has reduced most of the remaining language community. Today there is no accurate information on how many native speakers are left. The only existing intact language communities are the Chassidic communities in North America and Europe, and in Israel where there are still some secular Yiddish-speaking enclaves.

Modern Yiddish

As secular rationalism and thought spread throughout the European Jewish community in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the number of titles published in Yiddish skyrocketed. Newfound interest in the Arts and Sciences created a vast demand for scientific and literary works translated into Yiddish. This momentum of literary activity



Reading the Forwards

produced a blossoming of indigenous Yiddish literature and culture the likes of which have not been seen since.

Yiddish underwent a period of rejection in America in the years after World War II, and much of the scorn directed at the language ironically came from Jewish people. In a magazine interview, the singer and entertainer Claire Barry (of *The Barry Sisters*) described a performance in Las Vegas in the 1960's in which she and her sister attempted to sing a song in its original Yiddish, and were almost booed off the stage by their largely Jewish audience.

Hebrew and Yiddish in Competition

Hebrew and Yiddish have long existed symbiotically, Hebrew being reserved for religious study and holy matters, with Yiddish being used as the everyday workhorse language. The linguists of the Modern Hebrew movement borrowed many Yiddish words for items which were not in the Bible but were part of daily life in the 1920's: tomatoes, automobiles, socks, etc. They were also hard pressed to come up with the vulgar expletives that all normal languages possess. Hebrew had been used for religious purposes for so many centuries that no examples of such vocabulary remained. Yiddish, however, was *gebentscht* (bountifully blessed) with such terminology, having been well-used for the parts of life that religion tries to ignore. Now as the desire has been rekindled for Yiddish to be spoken again, Hebrew will be heavily borrowed from as Yiddish struggles to catch up with the everyday vocabulary of the 21st century.

“Yiddishkeit” - The Culture of Secular Judaism.

The Yiddish language was a part of a culture which was informally called *Yiddishkeit*. Literally translated, it means “Jewishness” even though religion did not play a major part in it. It describes the culture of the Yiddish language community in the same manner that “*La civilisation Francaise*” describes the French language community.

Though *Yiddishkeit* was the term Jews used to describe the culture of their co-religionists, ironically there was little religiosity implied by the term. The culture of *Yiddishkeit* occupied a paradoxical position somewhere between religion and nationality, being a bit of both but all of neither.

A manifestation of this was described by Max Dimont in his book *The Jews In America..* At the early part of this century the secular Jews of Europe and America embraced a plethora of political and ideological ideals. They were termed “freethinkers” embracing such revolutionary philosophies as socialism and atheism:

“ The “ungodly” Jewish socialists led the pious toilers from the gloom of the sweatshop into the sunshine of the union hall. Here the new faith of “irreligion” was revealed to them by their socialist redeemers. The Jewish workers joined the socialist dominated unions and voted the socialist ticket; they read the socialist newspapers, digested the editorials denouncing Jewish religion as the “opiate of the Jews”, and then went home and lit the Sabbath candles.”¹

One freethinker asks another:

“So, Cohen, why do you still go to shul (synagogue) if you say you’re an atheist?”

“Well,” Cohen replies, Yoske Klein goes to shul to talk to G-d.”

“So?”

“I go to shul to talk to Yoske.”



Italian and Yiddish Picket Signs

¹ Dimont, Max. *The Jews in America: The Roots, History, and Destiny of American Jews*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1978. p.167.



Nobel Laureate
Isaac Bashevis Singer
1902 - 1991

Isaac Bashevis Singer

The Jewish Daily Forwards was also the platform from which Issac Bashevis Singer's fiction reached the American Jewish community. The Forwards made an important contribution to the development of original indigenous Yiddish literature of local manufacture; serialized novels in weekly installments helped popularize new Yiddish writers. Isaac Bashevis Singer was the most prominent of them. He continued to write his weekly column until his death in 1991.

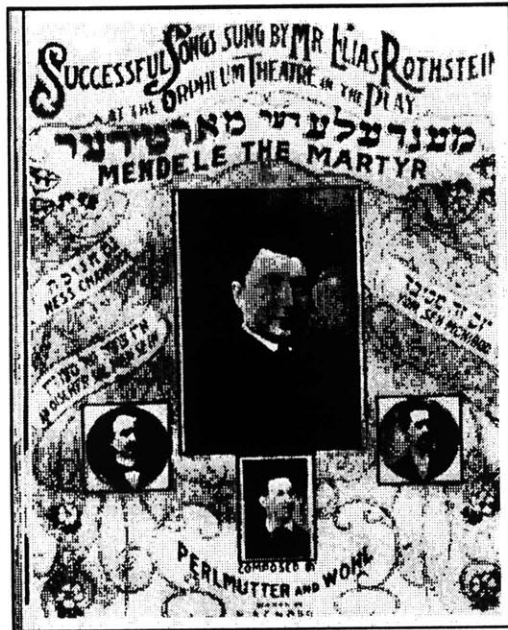
The voice of Isaac Bashevis Singer is unique in its bridging of two worlds, from the Jews of the ghettos of Eastern Europe to the dazed survivors in America. Spending the first half of his life in Poland, where he was born, he documented a world now completely erased by the Holocaust. He described its people as they were, rich and poor, scholars and fools, saints and criminals; no one was spared from his sharp eye and pen. He himself was full of contradictions: A Rabbi's son who scoffed at the idea of religion, a sworn secular freethinker who was also an intensely spiritual man who grappled in anguish with the enigmas of the universe. His work resonates with the paradoxes and contradictions he found in himself and his world. He was heavily criticized by his colleagues for revealing the seamier sides of the Warsaw ghetto, on the premise that such things must never be revealed lest they fall into the wrong hands. Part of the power of Singer's storytelling was indeed this ability to dispassionately observe his world, and then describe it in the most passionate terms.

In New York his stories described the Jewish community, and their relationship with their Eastern European counterparts, the anguish of people who could not decide whether to go or to stay, to return or to wait. His later stories, written as serials for the *Forwards*, echoed

the experience of the few survivors arriving bewildered and confused to America after the war. These stories were written and originally published in *The Forwards* in Yiddish. The English translations were published later, from the sixties onwards. In 1978 he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Three of his novels and stories, *The magician of Lublin*, *Yentl the Yeshiva Boy*, and *Enemies, a Love Story*, have been made into full-length films in English

Singer played a special role. A person of great personal contradictions himself, he was practically the only writer who would relate to the paradox in the Jewish experience. Contradictions abound in Singer's world, his characters possess incredible tangles of conflicting characteristics and experience abrupt dislocations in space and time. Freeing his writing of all sentiment enabled him to draw these strong contrasts, which vividly represent the Jewish experience, whether in 1939 or 1989.

II. A Brief History of Yiddish in the United States



Yiddish Sheet Music

I recall countless anecdotes of second-generation children being rebuked by their parents for using Yiddish words in public:

Mother: "Don't use that word in front of other people!"

Child: "Which one, hamburger or farshtunkener?"

First Generation Americans

Embarrassed of their old-fashioned parents, the first generation of American Jews did not teach the second generation Yiddish. Yiddishisms peppered their speech, however, and the children would pick these up without knowing that they were from a different language. Yiddish was spoken only when there were secret matters to be discussed in front of the children, never for use outside the home. Despite my parents' generations' efforts to conserve Yiddish as a secret language, my generation nevertheless picked up a little bit of it. Enough to know that we really missed something.

Second Generation Americans

Jewish people of my generation are witness to the near-extinction of Yiddish. No longer native speakers, we are the last generation of native listeners. A generation has been lost, skipped. At this point in time fluent native Yiddish speakers are so few and far between that a person wishing to learn Yiddish would be hard pressed to find a teacher on their own. In the past ten years or so, many young people of my generation have turned to the Yiddish language as a means to reconnect with their half-lost heritage, and a grass-roots movement has sprung up, where small groups of people learn Yiddish by studying together. One of the phenomena related to the Yiddish renaissance that has most surprised me has been that each of these people I meet who want to learn Yiddish assume that they are probably the only person *meshuggeh*¹ enough to want to learn Yiddish. A summer seminar for Judaic studies teachers to learn and teach Yiddish was organized a few years

¹ *meshuggeh* = crazy, demented.

seminar for Judaic studies teachers to learn and teach Yiddish was organized a few years back by the National Yiddish Book Center. The organizers worried that there might not be a hundred responses, enough to cover the expenses of the seminar. Nothing doing! Over a thousand teachers clamored to come to the seminar; the Book Center had to repeat the seminar four times that summer. And they were all astonished to realize their numbers.

The National Yiddish Book Center

The National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts is a non-profit organization devoted to the preservation of Yiddish books, language, and culture. Its main activity has been the collection (often this literally means rescue), and cataloging, of Yiddish books donated by people all over the United States. When elderly Jewish people pass away, they frequently leave behind them large Yiddish book collections. Younger relatives going through the estate invariably don't know how to read them (This is the time when a person asks the rhetorical question "why was I never taught...?") but keep them anyway, hoping that sometime someone will be able to read them. The National Yiddish Book Center will arrive and collect any and all Yiddish material. As of 1987, the Book Center had collected 600,000 volumes. Today their collection comprises over a million volumes. Records showed that there were approximately 40,000 titles published; today the number has reached 60,000 titles: books were found which no one knew existed.

Among the many efforts of the Book Center is the Yiddish Library Development Program, which sends books, after sorting and cataloguing, back into circulation, mostly to university libraries and Judaic research institutions around the world. There are other programs devoted to the teaching of the Yiddish language, and to the development of Yiddish film and theater.



Yiddish Newspaper Kiosk

The existence of the National Yiddish Book Center as a resource makes possible the establishment of new libraries and cultural centers which otherwise would not be able to collect enough books, funding, and teachers to get off the ground.

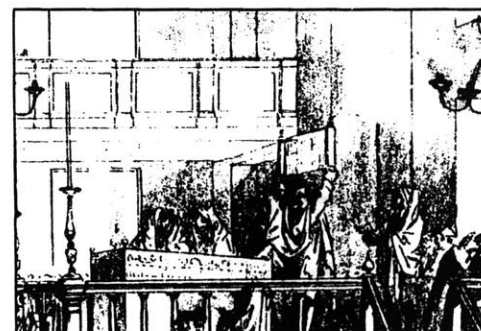
III. Jewish Attitudes Towards Books and Libraries

Books

Books play a central role in Jewish culture. Their importance can not be underestimated, as objects go, they are to us among the most precious of things. The religious customs related to the handling of books reflect this attitude.

When a religious text accidentally falls to the floor, the person who dropped it will pick it up and *kiss* it, before returning it to the shelf. To willfully throw or do violence to any kind of book is considered to be a heinous thing. When religious books grow tattered beyond any use, they are not thrown away, but buried in the cemetery. The *Torah*¹ scrolls which are read aloud in the synagogue are still produced in their ancient form, a scroll of parchment written by hand by a scribe who can recite the entire text from memory. Should the synagogue or study-house catch fire, the rabbi must charge through the flames, often at great risk, to rescue the *Torah*. Chasidic legends abound with miraculous tales of how courageous people took great risks to save the *Torah* from destruction and emerged alive. In the matchmaking activity of the *shtetlach*,² scholarly achievement was considered equal to great material wealth when matching up husbands and wives.

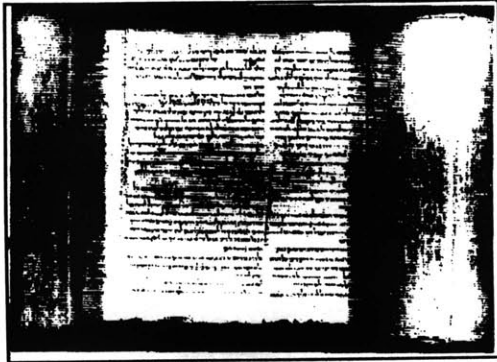
The importance placed upon books did not die out with the shift to secular culture. On the contrary, as the range of subjects widened, books and learning were more important than ever. The preciousness of books is still a prominent cultural value for Jews today as much



Part of the Sabbath service is the display of the Torah to the Congregation

¹ *Torah* = The Five Books of Moses, Pentateuch.

² *Shtetlach* = Jewish villages in the Pale of Settlement in Russia



One of the Dead Sea Scrolls

as in the past. In Israel, an entire museum was built just to house a single old book - the Dead Sea Scrolls. The scrolls, found in a cave in the Qumran desert in 1947, are the oldest physically surviving manuscripts of the Old Testament in existence, dating from the first century B.C.E..^{3 4} They are handwritten scrolls of parchment, the same form as any Torah written today.

Libraries

An article written in 1906 by a reporter writing for the "Spectator" column of the non-Jewish magazine *The Outlook* gives an invaluable insight into books and reading in the Jewish quarter of the Lower East Side. He was astonished to find scores of bookstores among the tenements, each doing a roaring business, packed with people buying and discussing books of all kinds.⁵

Libraries appear very frequently in Jewish fiction. The American writer Chaim Potok frequently describes the sense of discovery experienced by Chassidic children when discovering the New York Public Library. His characters find refuge from a crazy world in the library, look for answers to painful questions, only to discover more questions. For countless Jewish children of the Lower East Side, the public library was a heaven-sent refuge from the squalor of the tenements. For others, it was a portal into another world.⁶ I recall being taken to the library when I was about three years old. My sister and I knew it was an important place because we had to be properly behaved to go there, and we would

³ Kedourie, Elie, ed. *The Jewish World: Revelation, prophesy, and History*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1979. p.30.

⁴ In keeping with Jewish tradition, the terms B.C. and A.D. are replaced in this text by the terms B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era), and mention of G-d is given in incomplete form, in keeping with the Second Commandment.

⁵ Reprinted from *The Outlook*, c.82, no 12 (Saturday, March 24, 1906). Appeared in *The Book Peddler*, Summer, 1992, no. 17, p. 20

⁶ Refer to Appendix B for an excerpt from a newspaper article from 1903 about children and libraries in the Lower East Side.

go there once a week. I remember toddling home clutching as many books as I had been allowed to take by the ever-patient librarian. For the members of the Jewish community, the library has always been a sacrosanct place.

Repair of the World - *Tikkun Olam*

Tikkun Olam is a Hebrew term which means "mending of the world". The word *tikkun* means mending, and the word *olam* means world. There is another meaning for *tikkun*, however, and it describes an activity. "To do a *Tikkun*" means for a number of Jews to gather for a joint intensive study-session of a portion of the Old Testament or Talmud. The act of reading and the act of studying is considered to be a holy one: even the study of a single person is considered to effect some small rebuilding of a broken world. Chassidic mystics believe that if enough Jews study long and hard enough, they can bring the Messiah.

Can the concentration of a child standing totally absorbed in a book somehow repair some tiny part of a shattered world? Can the reading of a Yiddish story to a grandchild by a grandfather with a blue number written on his arm in some way neutralize the evil of that writing? The incomprehensible insanity that attempted to exterminate our community and erase our language did not succeed, yet the breakage it affected was total and irreparable. Yet we still study, and we still go on. *Tikkun*, by its nature, is both futile and necessary. I cannot describe it any better than the Judaic scholar Emil I. Fakenheim (italics are his):⁷



Torah scrolls destroyed in the Kishinev Pogrom, 1903

⁷ Fakenheim, Emil. L. *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought*. N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1982

"...the radical problematic in the logic of the *Tikkun* comes clearly to light. The 'exile of the *Shekhina*⁸ and the 'fracture of the vessels'⁹ refers to cosmic, as well as historical realities: it is *that* rupture that our *Tikkun* is to mend. But how is this possible when *we ourselves* share in the cosmic condition of brokenness? Yet just in response to this problematic the kabbalistic *Tikkun* shows its profoundest energy. It is precisely when the rupture, or the threat of it, is total, that all powers must be summoned for a mending. If the threat is to man, there is need to invoke divine as well as human power. If the threat is to G-d - the 'exile' is 'an element in G-d Himself'¹⁰ - then human power must aid the divine."¹¹

"For centuries the kabbalists practiced their *Tikkun*, their 'impulse below' - "*Torah*, prayer and *mitzvot*"¹² - calling forth an 'impulse from above': In the Holocaust their bodies, their souls and their *Tikkun* were all indiscriminately murdered, No *Tikkun* is possible of that rupture, ever after.

"But the impossible *Tikkun* is also necessary. Then and there many doubtless thought of their Torah, prayer, and *mitzvot* quite consciously in terms of a *Tikkun*. Others, when engaged in the act of *kiddush ha-chaim*,¹³ doubtless did not. Yet we on our part must think of *all* such acts as *kiddush ha-chaim* as a *Tikkun*...Does is or does it not matter whether or not Pelagia Lewinska¹⁴ lived or died, or, had she died, whether she died with dignity? Is the world different or the same because...the Warsaw Ghetto fought back? A *Tikkun*, *here and now*, is *mandatory for a Tikkun*, *then and there was actual*. It is true that because a *Tikkun* of *that* rupture is impossible we cannot live, after the Holocaust, as men and women have lived before. However, if the impossible *Tikkun* were not also necessary, and hence possible, we could not live at all."

8 *Shekhina* = (approximately) a state of grace.

9 "fracture of the vessels" - this and the former term, *shekhina*, are symbolic language in a verse of the Prophecy of Isaiah being discussed.

10 Fakenheim here quotes Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. Schocken, 1965.

11 Fakenheim, p.253.

12 *mitzvot* = good deeds

13 *kiddush ha-chaim* = sanctification, reaffirmation of life.

14 I have found no other mention of this name; I suspect the name is used as a figure of speech, something akin to "Jane Doe".

IV A Language Environment

The Purpose of the Singer Library

Michael Leininger, a reference librarian at the Rotch Library of M.I.T, remarked about Yiddish books: "These books are in more danger of being thrown in the garbage than of being stolen." There is great wisdom in this simple remark. Books are thrown out because no one can read them. It's not enough to save the books - the language must be spoken again, the language community must be restored.

The purpose of the Singer Library is to support and augment the grass-roots renaissance of Yiddish already underway, and provide new outlets of expression so that the Yiddish language that emerges from the process will be relevant to our lives today. This wave of interest has at this point the critical mass of people needed to begin the process, and the Library will function as a language community incubator.

Library Start-up

The National Yiddish Book Center would of course be the source for the initial supply of books, and the computerized catalog listing of those books. The NYBC has a Library Development program which can be of great assistance in the setting up of these catalog systems and linkage into the OCLC and RLIN, international catalog networks. There is a problem in the cataloging of Yiddish books in that the non-Latin alphabet and the reverse direction of writing are difficult to enter in databases designed for Latin languages. The Library Development Program has devised a consistent system of transliteration into Latin characters which will enable use of a catalog system by users who do not read the Hebrew alphabet. The Library will then pick up where the NYBC leaves off: once the NYBC saves

books from physical destruction and records their existence and location, the Singer library will make them accessible, not only by making them available to the public, but also by teaching the tools to use them, and helping to restore the language community.

Educational Aids

Towards that end, the library will not only provide information in the form of books, but with all kinds of information sources. Yiddish language classes will be offered in small groups on a weekly basis, and in intensive courses for schoolkids and teenagers in the summer. One of the problems of in teaching Yiddish today is that most Jews in the United States (apart from the Orthodox and Chasidic communities, who are a minority) can read the Hebrew alphabet poorly, if at all. The task of learning to read the Hebrew alphabet fluently and learn Yiddish language concurrently is too daunting for most busy young people today. The standard system of transliteration devised for cataloging books might be used as an alternative, and learning materials presented in a tripartite format, with English translation on the left, Yiddish on the right, and transliterated Yiddish in the middle or at the bottom.



A schoolroom in the Lower East Side

Interactive Computer Software

The experience of libraries has changed drastically since the introduction of computer technology, and all agree it is a change much to the better. Rather than replacing the book, the computer streamlines and accelerates the book location process so that more time can be devoted to reading, and less to futile searches. In addition to replacing paper-card catalogs, periodical searches, and inter-library book searches, the computer can provide additional tools that libraries and language schools have never had: interactive computer technology.

An interactive computer program to teach language would integrate voice-recognition, linguistics software, and interactive computer technology. The result would be a software program which could teach language. The computer would emit words or phrases in the correct pronunciation for the student to repeat, and would receive inputs from the student via microphone from the student. The computer could correct the pronunciation and provide feedback on the screen in the form of Audio Spectrum Graphic Analyzer ¹ and video clips of a person's face as they pronounce the word or phrase, until the student learns the word properly. One of the technological precursors to this concept is the recorded language record/tape. Conceivably, if the technology will continue to be developed, one could actually learn grammar and syntax interactively from a computer.

These interactive language computers will be situated in the round carrels on the mezzanine which will be equipped with sound-damping doors. These computers will be an attractive alternative to formal scheduled lessons for people who work long, crazy hours (who doesn't, these days?). They also offer an alternative for exceptionally fast/slow learners, as one can learn at one's own pace. They will also be very intriguing to children, who adapt to computers a great deal faster than adults.

Though the printed materials for language classes would be in a multi-lingual/alphabetical format, classes should be taught by the immersion method, i.e. in which the teacher speaks no language other than the one being taught, but brings ideas across via pictures, puppets, and playacting. Singing and poetry are used extensively to augment vocabulary retention.

¹ The Audio Spectrum Graphic Analyzer has been in use for the past 25 years in teaching deaf people to speak; not being able to hear feedback, the graphic on the screen would give them an idea if their pronunciation was in range.

The American Foreign Service has language schools in which students live in residence for 6 weeks, forbidden to speak any language but the one being taught. This, of course, is inappropriate for the Yiddish Library, but the concept of creating a language environment is a compelling one. One needs to *hear* a certain amount of a language spoken in order to learn to speak it. The Library should be a place where the language is spoken, where one can eavesdrop on conversations, find someone to practice with, and become comfortable with the language.

Teaching Yiddish to Children

Songs, puppet theater, and children's stories are powerful tools to learn languages, and are wonderful things for parents and children to do together. There are many Jewish families today who are uncomfortable with the formal religious aspects of Judaism, but still seek a way to express and identify with their ethnic *Yiddishkeit*. Young Jewish parents are looking for "something Jewish" to do together with their children that they can feel comfortable with. I speculate that some of the first literary efforts of new Yiddish speakers will be in the form of children's books written by these young parents, who are familiar with the vocabulary and format of these books from reading them to their children.

Often Yiddish-speaking grandparents are remembered fondly by these people. Frequently their children are named after the great-grandparents, especially if they were born just after the great-grandparent passed away. I was named in this manner, after my grandfather Herschel Tzvi Lerner who passed away several months before I was born. Yiddish, like blue eyes, often skips a generation or two.

Audio-Visual Yiddish

There are many older Jewish people who speak Yiddish but are unable to read it. This group of speakers will take great pleasure in recorded music and in videotapes of films and

A Language Environment

performances. A books-on-tape program could be created. These tapes will be useful for those learning the language, a pleasure for those who speak Yiddish but don't read fluently enough to enjoy reading a book, and a g-dsend and a delight for the eldest members of our community, who are invariably the best speakers but are far likelier to be vision-impaired. Subtitled videotapes of films and plays are also a good way to learn a language, as one hears and reads and sees simultaneously, grasping the language in its own context.

Teacher Training Seminars

For this crazy scheme to work Yiddish teachers will be needed in numbers. The Library together with the National Yiddish Book Center, could hold Teacher Training seminars at the library to help the entry of competent Yiddish teachers into the process. Teacher training would have to be adapted to both trained Hebrew teachers who can teach but don't know enough Yiddish, and for native speakers whose language skills are excellent but have no teaching experience.

Yiddish Clubs: The Bootstrap Method:

Yiddish clubs, which are clubs in which people meet informally to study Yiddish together, have existed independently for many years as part of Workmen's Circle, local synagogues, or in people's homes. Recently these clubs have popped up in the most unexpected places, such as northern California. ² The library can provide these clubs with a place to "dock", and provide assistance with textbooks, and speakers, etc., without disturbing the vibrant energy of the grass-roots organization. These independent clubs are likely to produce a few competent speakers - who will then turn to teach Yiddish to others.

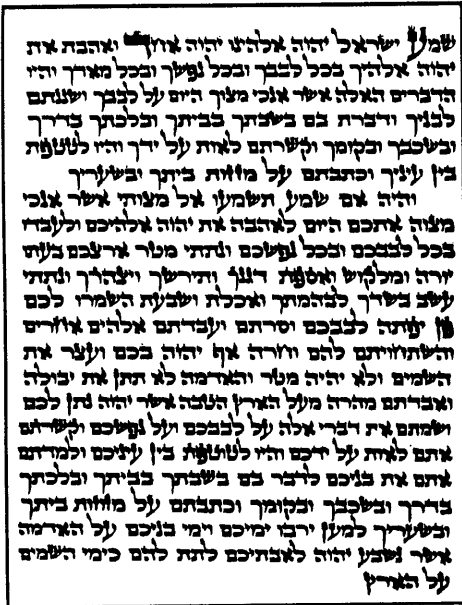
² For an article describing the founding of a Yiddish club in northern California, refer to Appendix C.

V. Our Relationship with Architecture

The Jewish culture, like many other close-knit cultures, is very much communally-minded, as opposed to societies in which the emphasis is placed on the individual. This plurality of thinking binds not only the members the present community together but also to previous communities back in collective memory. Consequently, the community has a different sense of time. - The conscious "I" of any person is 65-70 years, but the "we", the collective tribal consciousness, is 3,500 years old. The cultural cohesion and the deeper sense of time are both factors which must be taken into consideration when designing for this community.

In contrast to their intense verbal and literary activity, the Jewish people have almost no visual tradition. Similar to the Muslim people, there is a prohibition in Judaism against creating graven images. Consequentially, indigenous visual arts never developed. Unlike many other cultures, however the Jewish people have little surviving architecture. Most of what was built in the kingdom of Israel by the time of King Herod was pulverized in the Roman conquest, and all that remains of them is a few rows of stones, mere outlines in the dust, of more interest to archeologists than architects.

The condition of constantly being uprooted and moved from one place to another was not conducive to the development of an architectural tradition. Had the Jewish people not been conquered by the Romans and sent into exile, they too might have diverted their creative spirit into the development of an indigenous architecture. The building most important to Judaism was the holy Temple in Jerusalem. Built in King David's time, it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E. The only remaining identifiable fragment is the



The Scroll of a Mezuzah, which is affixed to the right doorjamb of the entry to a home or one of its rooms.

The text is a phrase from the Old Testament: "Teach (the laws) to your children and discuss them, while sitting in your house or while walking along, and tie them as a sign on your hand and between your eyes, and write them on the doorjamb of your house and your gates."

Western Wall,¹ which is actually a section of the external boundary wall of the entire compound housing the Temple itself.

The Western Wall's cosmology is one of symbolic centripetality, as in many other holy objects/sites. The Qa'aba in Mecca is another excellent example. Spiritual powers are attributed to a physical object or point on the ground which thus indicates and defines a domain. Inside the domain, space is ordered in relation to the object, and the space outside the domain remains unordered chaos. The transition point is marked by a wall enclosing and defining the edges of the two domains, sometimes even expressing the duality on its two faces. The ordered cosmos inside the walls is considered to possess special powers to facilitate communication with the heavens above. The object becomes a cosmic conduit.²

The crevices between the Western Wall's huge stones are crammed with tiny rolled-up scraps of paper upon which are written all manner of prayers, hopes, and desires, from the ridiculous to the sublime. This fragment of wall is today the most holy site in Judaism. In the Jewish tradition, its site is considered the holiest place for prayer in the world, and the wall itself has taken on iconic qualities.



The Western Wall , 1897

¹ Commonly called the "Wailing Wall".

² Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., pp. 20-64.

Part 2: The Singer Library

I. The Program



Breakfast with the Algemeiner Journal

Process of Evaluation

To properly address the needs of an ethnic library, a careful evaluation must be made of the reader population, the facilities necessary for the language environment, and the special programs differing from an ordinary public library. The reader population must be estimated and the standard ratios of population to library size and holdings must be adapted to reflect the reading needs of the ethnic language group.

How many people Speak Yiddish?

It was difficult to calculate the number of readers for this library, because there are no statistics available on the number of Yiddish speakers in the Greater Boston area. The Federal Census counted only Yiddish speakers for whom Yiddish was the only language spoken. This doesn't accurately represent the user group of the library, because it excludes native speakers who speak English, and people who speak Yiddish as a second language.

In my estimation, at least 5% of the Jewish population speak some Yiddish. Considering that of the Jewish people I know personally, approximately thirty to forty speak Yiddish, 5% is probably a conservative figure; there are probably more. The Jewish population of the Greater Boston Area is 150,000 people.¹ Five percent of that number is 7,500 readers. We will function under the assumption that number of readers may double within the next ten years, possibly resulting in a reader community of 15,000 readers in the future.

¹ Statistic taken from the American-Jewish Year Book of 1985.

Concurrently, the number of books written in Yiddish would rise, though not as drastically as the reader population. A ten percent increase of new titles over ten years would seem a good projection.

Specifications

The following are calculations of readership and seating for the present language community. The variables presented differ from standard calculations in that the number of seats per reader is doubled, the number of books per reader quadrupled, and the number of books per square foot reduced by 10%. A conversation with a librarian of the Coolidge Corner Library reconfirmed my guess that reader activity in the Coolidge Corner area (which has a considerable Jewish population) is quadruple of the average. She gave a figure of 9 books per capita, which is four times the national average of 2.3 books per capita.² The reduction of volumes per square foot is due to the height limitation I have placed on stacks in consideration of the proportion of elderly readers.

For the present reader population of 7,500 , the figures are as follows:

1 seat per 100 of reader population	=	75 seats
10 volumes per reader	=	75,000 volumes (at present there are only 60,000 titles known)
27.5 ft ² . per seat x 75 seats	=	2,062.5 ft ² of seated reading
9 volumes per square foot	=	8,300 ft ² of stacks

² Telephone conversation with Mrs. Ann Abraham, librarian, of the Coolidge Corner Branch of the Brookline Library system, October ? 1992.

For a future reader population of 15,000, the figures are as follows:

1 seat per 100 of reader population	=	150 seats
10 volumes per reader	=	150,000 vols. (Number of titles will have increased to 66,000)
27.5 ft ² per seat x 150 seats	=	4,125 ft ² of seated reading
9 volumes per square foot	=	16,700 ft ² of stacks

The assumption will be that additional stacks will require the most space in the future, followed by seated reading.

Staff required

The staff required to run the library comprises a Head Librarian/Administrator, two reference librarians, two para-professional staffers, an Archivist, two volunteer interns from Brandeis University or the National Yiddish Book Center, and one Office Person.

The Head Librarian/Administrator

will be in charge of official matters of the library, including its budget personnel, and public relations, and will oversee the exhibition and archiving projects of the library.

The Reference Librarians

will provide the link to all other libraries, will manage databases for periodical search and maintain the necessary reference volumes for public access. They will have an ongoing research project to catalog as-of-yet unknown Yiddish books and formerly unknown publishers as previously undocumented titles are discovered.

Two part-time Paraprofessionals

will work in cataloguing and in more difficult book restoration, reshelving, and circulation. One of the para-professionals will be in charge of organizing and

mounting the series of rotating exhibits in the main hall and the other will be in charge of an Oral History project, namely the recording of first-hand accounts from older Jewish people in the greater Boston area , and their experiences with Yiddish.

A General Office Person

will handle : correspondence, communications, bookkeeping etc.

A Part-time Archivist

will be in charge of the Singer archive - the conservation of its contents, release of the materials to and supervision of scholars in the reading area, and acquisition of newly discovered material into the archive.

Two Interns

from the National Yiddish Book Center will assist in reshelving, circulation, book receiving, repair, etc.

Administration and Staff Offices

The Administration and staff offices will be clustered together in one point of the triangle, double-loaded on a broad corridor. Following are the requirements for the offices:

- The Head Librarian/Administrator should have a private office, on an exterior wall, with access controlled by the office person.
- The Reference Librarians' office space office should be closest to the reference area of the library floor and have one side open to it with a reference desk for the public.
- The General Office Person will have a workspace closed on three sides and open on one side to the corridor, controlling access to the Head Librarian and to the Reference Librarians' office.

- The part-time Archivist will have a desk in the Reference Librarians' office. The archival material will be stored in a climate-controlled storage space adjacent to the archive reading area.
- The Cataloging area will be fitted with shelves for books in process and a workspace for binding repair, and conservation of incoming books. Incoming books which require fumigation will be sent out to be fumigated.
- The Administration area will include a small loading dock to permit the unloading of a 14-foot panel truck on Sewall Avenue, which is the least trafficked of the streets bounding the Library. There will be a closed vestibule between the loading dock and the interns' and cataloging rooms, to keep exhaust fumes entering the administration area,
- The two interns will share a small office adjacent to the cataloging room and the loading dock, since the interns would be the likely candidates to unload the truck, and do a first sorting of a shipment.



A Discussion

Discussion Rooms

One of the unusual features of this library will be the nine "discussion rooms". These are contained in the three large concrete structures embedded in the eastern wall of the library, on Sewall Avenue. Each structure contains three large rooms stacked one on top of the other. They are entered from each of the three library floors. There will be no mezzanine level, however, so the bottom room of each stack will have a lofty 17-foot ceiling. The walls facing the street and the inside of the library will be glass curtain-wall, with UV-blocking glass.

Traditional Customs of Study

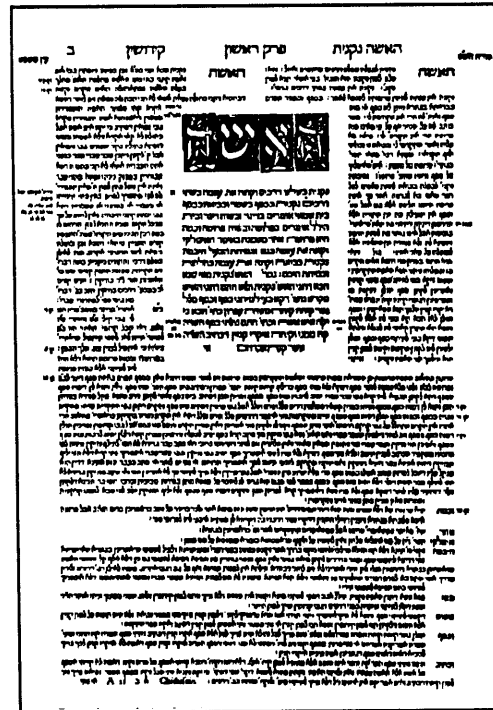
In traditional Judaism, study took place in the *Beis Midrash* (= House of Commentary) which was effectively a very crowded library of one or more rooms, their walls totally obscured with bookshelves. Typically, there was a large table in the middle of each room. The teacher (or in absence of a formal teacher, the eldest man of the study group) would sit at the head of the table. The lesson would not be a frontal lecture, but rather intense discussion and exegesis of a particular section of the Old Testament or *Talmud*.

The discussion rooms are intended to function in a similar way. The inner wall adjacent to the library floor will be closed off with glazing and fitted with doors. The two side walls will be covered with shelves and will be filled with books. Each room will have one large table in the middle and a dozen or so chairs. The floors of the discussion rooms will be carpeted and the ceilings fitted with acoustic panels to soak up the noise generated. This will allow the holding of discussions without disturbing other readers.

Kibitzing

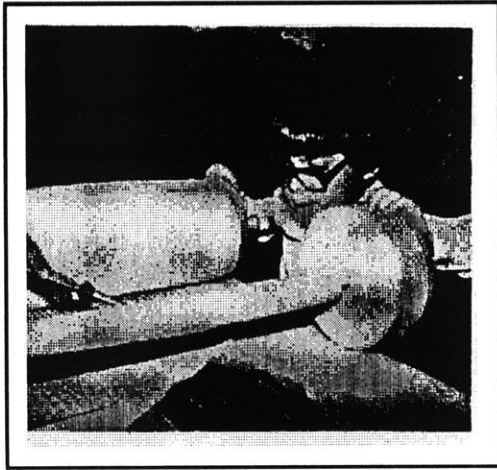
Ordinarily one would assume that placing stacks inside a classroom would pose a problem for those looking for books while the lesson is in progress, and those in the middle of the lesson. In practice there is little problem with this arrangement due to the cultural pattern of learning by informal (and often noisy!) discussion and the cultural practice of *kibitzing*.³

³ "To *kibitz*" means to butt in or to meddle. Items liable to be *kibitzed* are card games in which one is not playing, and other people's philosophical discussions already in progress. Several of the newspaper articles in the Appendix describe people *kibitzing* in a bookstore-owner's newspaper interview, and people *kibitzing* into other people's discussions in the café. The practice is usually met with amusement rather than annoyance. The *kibitzing* of personal private conversations, however, is considered rude.



Page from an old Talmud. The discussion of a single page of Talmud could last all day.

My assumption is that not only will readers come into the classroom to browse for books, but that they will probably *kibitz* the lesson (hopefully with a germane comment) as well! I have seen modern examples of the *Beis-Midrash* type of classroom both as student and as intruder, and though it might not work for other communities, the users of this library would probably appreciate this configuration.



The Children's Library

Children and their education are one of the highest priorities in the Jewish community. Parents spare no effort to help their children excel in school and to obtain the best academic education for them that they can afford. Yet the teaching of a cultural heritage has often been trivialized or neglected. We have raised a generation of rocket scientists who know little about their own heritage. The Yiddish children's library is intended to function not only as a children's library but as a means of education as well.

The children's library should provide a wide range of activities for children from the tiny ones up to age 12. Programs would include songs and music, story hour, and children's films. An Arts and Crafts program could include Puppet-making instruction and Puppet-Play in Yiddish. There could be a large Puppet theater as part of the Children's Library. The programs could be run in a combination of Yiddish and English, and could be planned in such a way that parents and children could participate and learn Yiddish together.

The library will start out with whatever collection of Yiddish children's books that have come to light in the National Yiddish Book Center's book hunt. This will probably not be sufficient. Within the context of the Oral History project, elders of the community could be asked to tell whatever children's stories and word games they remember. These can be translated into Yiddish and illustrated, possibly by the children themselves. Desktop

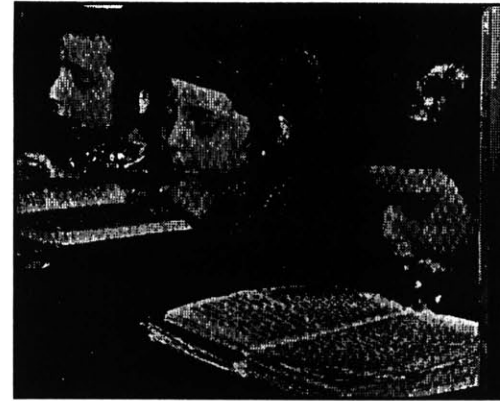
The Program

publishing can be used to generate copies of the books for circulation and even for other libraries. Hopefully some of the parents who are inclined to writing will learn Yiddish well enough to write a few children's stories. In addition to book lending, the children's library should have a very big stock of recorded cassettes/CD's of children's stories and songs for circulation.

The children's library is in a contained, glazed section on the first floor. It is split into two levels by a mezzanine. The two resulting floors have 8-foot ceilings, which feel much better to three and four-foot people. It has its own staircase to its mezzanine, with several heights of banisters. Likewise, chairs and tables will be provided in various sizes. Stacks will be placed on both levels. The carrels on the eastern side of the library will also be split by the mezzanine, to create four carrels. The two upstairs ones should be used for interactive language computers, and the two downstairs ones can be carpeted and used as fun places to crawl in and play, read, or listen to songs.

Audio-Visual Materials and Circulation

The audio-visual materials circulation section of the library will circulate videotape copies of Yiddish films and theater performances, and music recordings of both Yiddish-language Klezmer music. This section of the library is probably going to be heavily used, as the spoken form of Yiddish is accessible to the greatest number of people.



Boys in a *Cheder* (elementary school). These boys probably were taught to read at age three.

The Archive

The archive will be a depository for the papers of Isaac Bashevis Singer. After cataloging and conservation, they will be stored in special conservation boxes. A collection of boxes is not displayable, and the papers should not be exposed to unnecessary light. They also need to be stored in a climactically controlled environment to prevent their deterioration. One of the carrels in the west side of the library can be converted into a climactically controlled storage room for this purpose.

The Archivist and one of the paraprofessional library staff will create an exhibit using photographs and copies of archived materials in addition to other documentation of Singer's. This exhibit will be displayed in the display cases surrounding the archive reading area in the atrium on the first floor. Additional rotating exhibits about Yiddish authors and history of the Brookline Yiddish-speaking community will be mounted on movable partitions on the first floor.

One of the most interesting aspects of archives today is the possibility of collecting recorded and videotaped interviews of people. This is a recent development, of course, that came with the invention of audio-visual recording devices. Before that point, an interviewer would take notes and remember as best they could, but one was never sure how much of the account was from the interviewee and how much was from the bias of the interviewer. The oral history archive could be made up of videotaped interviews of elderly Yiddish-speaking Brookline residents about their experiences. In addition to the information itself, these tapes will provide a vivid record of various regional accents, pronunciation, and gestures, which will not be easy to find even twenty years from now. This collection need not be displayed; it is essentially a collection of videotapes. The inclusion of the auditorium

in the library will allow presentations and seminars to be made of collections of interviews of a particular subject.

Auditorium

The Auditorium is designed as a multipurpose room to seat 300 people in various configurations - for screening of films, panel discussions, poetry readings, lectures, and musical performance. The windows will be fitted with drapes and movable acoustic wall panels so that the lighting and acoustical reverberation time can be adjusted to suit the particular need. A small stage will be provided at one end sufficient for a musical performance. There will be a projection booth at the opposite end.



Mrs. Greenblatt was the widow of Rudy Greenblatt the famous head waiter of the Piltz café. She missed her husband so much that she decided to try and contact him through a psychic medium. She invited all of her and her deceased husband's friends to participate in a séance to try to make contact with the deceased head waiter.

They all gathered in the Piltz café one night after closing, lit candles and joined hands all round the table, and chanted with the psychic:

"Rudy, Rudy, can you hear us?"

No response.

"Rudy, Rudy, can you hear us! Rudy, we all miss you!"

Ten, fifteen minutes they chanted. Nothing. The psychic looked very embarrassed.

They tried one last time:

"Rudy! Rudy! Please give us a sign!" All of a sudden they heard:

"WAAADAAYAAH
WAAAAAAAAANT!!!!!!!!?????"

Mrs. Gruenberg cries out: "Rudy! We've missed you so! We were calling for you over an hour, why didn't you answer?"

"BECAUSE THAT'S NOT MY
TAAAABLE!"

The Yiddish Café

A Cultural Institution

The café (sometimes referred to as a *dairy cafeteria*)⁴ is a cultural institution in *Yiddishkeit* in and of itself. Dairy cafés were the places where revolutions were planned, matches made, deals concluded, and all manner of grand ideas discussed. It was a particularly important institution to Yiddish writers as well, as the place where stories were compared and ideas proposed, inspiration received and people observed. Many would actually sit and write there.

The dairy café played an important social role in the Jewish community. It was an intimate place yet a public place, a neutral ground where one can meet with friends and neighbors and talk for hours. The cafés were generally lively and noisy as any English pub, even though the main potable was tea (in a glass, of course!) instead of beer, and the game played was chess instead of darts.

Shmoozing

The main activity of the café was called *shmoozing*. The verb "*to shmooze*" is difficult to translate into a single English word, as it is a set of customs rather than a single thing. It can be roughly translated as *to socialize, have a bull session, mingle*, but it is more than small talk -*shmoozing* is a group discussion of any subject from the earthbound to the abstract, from the sublime to the ridiculous. It is generally carried out in groups of three or more

⁴ The term "dairy" means that the establishment is kosher, and serves dairy products only, with no meat being permitted on the premises. Kashruth (Jewish dietary laws) prohibits the mixing of milk and meat. The origin of the custom is in the Bible: "Do not cook a calf in its mother's milk" which is one of a set of Biblical laws forbidding cruelty to animals.

with people entering and leaving the group at random, and the café was the traditional institution where a lot of it was conducted.

Dairy Cafeterias

The café changed over time. Mainly the menu, but also the age of the people. In America in the 1940's and 50's the café transformed into the dairy cafeteria, having added coffee, sandwiches and small dairy items to the menu. There are few existing examples left in America mainly in New York and Miami Beach, as the people who were part of this custom have mostly passed away. Isaac Bashevis Singer used to hold court in a dairy cafeteria in the upper East Side in New York, and sit and talk for hours with the other writers and hangers-on. The dairy cafeterias he describes in his stories (particularly in the story *The Cafeteria*) in the postwar seem deserted and sad compared to the ones my father has told of in Brooklyn in the 30's which sounded far more lively. A New York Tribune writer at the beginning of this century, visiting one of the cafés in the Lower East side was astounded at the intensity of socializing and the amount and scope of intellectual conversation going on there.⁵

All Dressed Up and No Place to Shmooze

The common wisdom is that Yiddish is dead and the Yiddish café is kaput. But just as we have discovered that there are far more Yiddish speakers alive and kicking than we thought, the café shouldn't be left for dead yet either. I walk down Harvard Street in Brookline every day. And more times than I can count, I have run into a half a dozen young Jewish people standing on the sidewalk outside a bookstore (many with purchases

Two anarchists enter a café, arguing socialist politics loudly. Without losing a breath or a word they continue to vociferously argue their points of view as they sit down at a table. And continue to argue.

"Lenin!"

"Trotsky!"

"Lenin!"

"Trotsky!" The waiter came over to take their order.

"So, gentlemen, what do you want?"

"Bring me a glass tea." said one anarchist.

"And you, what do you want?"

"Also, a glass tea. You should make sure the glass is clean!"⁶

The waiter goes to get their order and the two men continue arguing.

"Lenin!"

"Trotsky!"

"Lenin!"

"Trotsky!" until the waiter returned, and plonked the glasses down on the table:

"Two teas. Who wanted the clean glass?"

⁵ See Appendix D for an excerpt of this article.

⁶ This is a classic example of Yiddish syntax applied to English.

in hand) and invariably I know one or two of them, and end up standing on the sidewalk, talking for hours. It seems to me that the shmoozing is going on, but it has no place to be yet.

There are two or three places in the Coolidge corner area where this crowd congregates, but all lack the street exposure necessary for a good cafe. A good cafe should have a couple of rows of tables outside in the summer, and maximum plate-glass frontage. The “skin” of the place has to be transparent as possible. This permits people see a friend or neighbor there and stop for a chat.

The location at the southern tip of the triangular lot is optimal for a very successful cafe, as it offers maximum exposure to the street in relation to its floor space, and occupies a very heavily pedestrian-traveled street. The wide sidewalk space permits the placing of several tables outside in the summer. With a bit of luck, the addition of a small book store inside, a rack of Hebrew and Yiddish newspapers to read, and a really good selection of gooey cakes, the sidewalk *shmoozeoisie* (among which, to my knowledge, number quite a few journalists and writers), will hopefully come in off the sidewalk with their laptops .

It is important to incorporate this café into the design of the library, because it played an essential role in the activity of the Yiddish writers in the past and it is needed now to help generate a new generation of writers.

The Carrels

There are two different types of carells in the library. On the Western side there will be free-standing wooden carells of the type commonly found in public or university libraries. The round carells are for solitary individual study . Towards that end, the carells will be fitted with doors and should be well-insulated acoustically. The space of the round carells is "carved" out of the mass of the exterior wall. The wooden tabletop will be built into a ridge in the brick wall, together with niches in the wall to place books while studying. The windows will be placed at standing eye level , not at seated eye level, so that light shines in over one's (seated) head and diffuses on the opposite wall. Skylights will add light from above, each one covering an inhabited cavity in the wall.

The net effect of this configuration is a blocking of stimuli from the outside while working but allowing view out when one takes a break. While seated, the reader will receive indirect natural daylight from the window and direct light from the overhead skylight. This configuration is optimal for both text reading and computer study. If there were a window behind the computer throwing light directly into the reader's face, this would cause severe eyestrain. Having light come from above and indirectly from the high window provides plenty of light from the right directions for both types of study.

Changes in the outside environment will be sensed in the carrel as changes in daylight intensity and direction. It will be possible to know from inside the carrel whether it is morning or evening, when a cloud passes in front of the sun, or possibly the moon on a very clear night.

The Issue of Growth in the Library

All new libraries must take into account that their collection will expand, and generally libraries are planned to enable growth of the collection by 30%. The program calls for 37,000 ft² and the gross built floor space is 45,000 ft², so there is 8,000 extra feet which can be developed at a later date. There is also about 1,500 ft² of unoccupied floor space on the mezzanine, and if necessary, the mezzanine itself might be expanded. This is hard to estimate, though, when trying to resuscitate a language. There are 60,000 known titles published in Yiddish. Books keep surfacing that no one knew existed so perhaps there might be a maximum of 75 - 80,000 titles. This would be the most comprehensive collection of Yiddish books in existence. New writing is published by over a hundred Yiddish newspapers and magazines both new ones and ones still in publication. Half a dozen Yiddish publishing houses have been started recently. The periodicals section, therefore, will expand faster than the shelves of published books but at a slower rate than an English periodicals section. Major efforts will be devoted to expanding the children's library, so the customary 30% should be taken into account there.

In the audio-visual section there will be a lot of expansion, and there will be a high circulation rate of this material. There is a considerable amount of new Klezmer music being written and performed in the past few years, so there may be an expansion that area. Videotapes of Yiddish Theater performances in the U.S, Europe and Israel are numerous, and they will add to the collection each year. All in all, one could project that this library would continue to fulfill its functions for the next thirty years before it would start to get crowded.

Accessibility

All Libraries should be accessible, but this one more so than usual, as more of its readers will be elderly. The lowest bookshelf should be 12" and the highest at 62". These heights are reachable by hand without the necessity of climbing up on a stool, which might be difficult for an elderly person. Mechanical "grabbers" will be available for wheelchair users so that they can browse without assistance. The elevator will be large enough to accommodate a wheelchair. It will service all floors, including the mezzanine. A ramp will be installed at the entrance at a slope not exceeding 1:12. Fire exits will be ramped.

Space requirements:

Following are the space requirements for all the functions of the library:

Vestibule	300
Lobby	1,000
Circulation desk	500
Reference, information, and computer catalogs	1,500
Exhibition	750
Archive	500
Children's Library	2,500
Periodicals	1,500
Dairy Cafeteria	1,500
Auditorium	2,000
Audio Visual	1,500
Stacks (including 25% future expansion)	6,000
Seated Reading	2,000
Discussion rooms, 6 @475 ft ²	2,850

Administration

Head Librarian/Administrator	250
Reference office	250
Cataloging	200
Two para-professional librarians	200
Part-time archivist	100
Gen Office/Reception	150
Loading dock and book elevator	100
Interns' office	150
Bindery	50
HVAC	<u>2,530</u>
	28,558
10% circulation:	<u>2,855</u>
Total:	31,413 ft ²

The area of the lot to the boundary lines is 28,000 ft².

The setback from the lotlines will be ten to fifteen feet.

The area of the footprint is 18,000 ft²

Cut- out floor spaces total 13,000 ft².

II. The Site

The Community

For this endeavor to be successful, the library should be located in an active Jewish community of some numbers, in an urban area and accessible by public transportation. There is a Jewish community which is well established in Brookline, and it probably has the critical mass of native speakers to catalyze the learning process, as well as many young people like myself who are actively interested in relearning their cultural heritage. This is one of the few places where Yiddish speakers from all generations are to be found - many of the Soviet émigré families settled in Cleveland Circle speak Yiddish. Brookline also possesses a sense of the cohesive community in which the Library would flourish. It is very accessible by public transportation, and has just enough urban density to be stimulating without introducing the problems which accompany the inner city.

Observations About the Coolidge Corner Area

A Crossing

The Coolidge Corner intersection is a major public transportation node. Much traffic goes through Coolidge Corner on its way to somewhere. At the corner of Beacon and Harvard streets once stood the "General Store of Coolidge and Brother, Est. 1857 Provisioners of Hay and Feed". The historic Pierce Building now occupies its corner. This crossing is a landmark, yet its scale retains some of the qualities of a village square.

Skyline and Urban Fabric

The skyline in the Coolidge Corner area is much like its urban fabric. There is a fairly even skyline of two and three story buildings, punctuated at regular intervals by the domes and spires of civic and religious buildings. The closest to the site is the Harvard Congregational Church on Harvard street, diagonally opposite the southern tip of the site, which has a 125-ft. spire. The steeple of the reform synagogue at the end of Sewell Avenue is also visible from the site, as is the massive tower of the Pierce building.

In terms of size, the largest buildings in the area are the church and a nursing home on Webster Street, which is very visible from Harvard street. The nursing home is six and eight stories, though the impact of its height is mitigated by the top four floors being stepped back from the street.

View Corridors

Another striking feature of the site is the way it sits in several view corridors and shifts as one progresses towards the site, particularly on the northbound approach up from Brookline Village on Harvard street. The spire of the church, the tower of the Pierce building, and the pediment of the Coolidge building are visible over the three-story roofline, and they shift back and forth in relation to each other as one progresses up the street. There is another view corridor down Stearns Road. There is no shifting effect here, as Stearns road is practically straight, but since it slopes downwards from Harvard street, the view corridor is a very long one.

A Neighborhood Pattern

Though the four corners were built at various times and styles, there are some characteristics which they share, specifically the ones which relate to the entrances and the

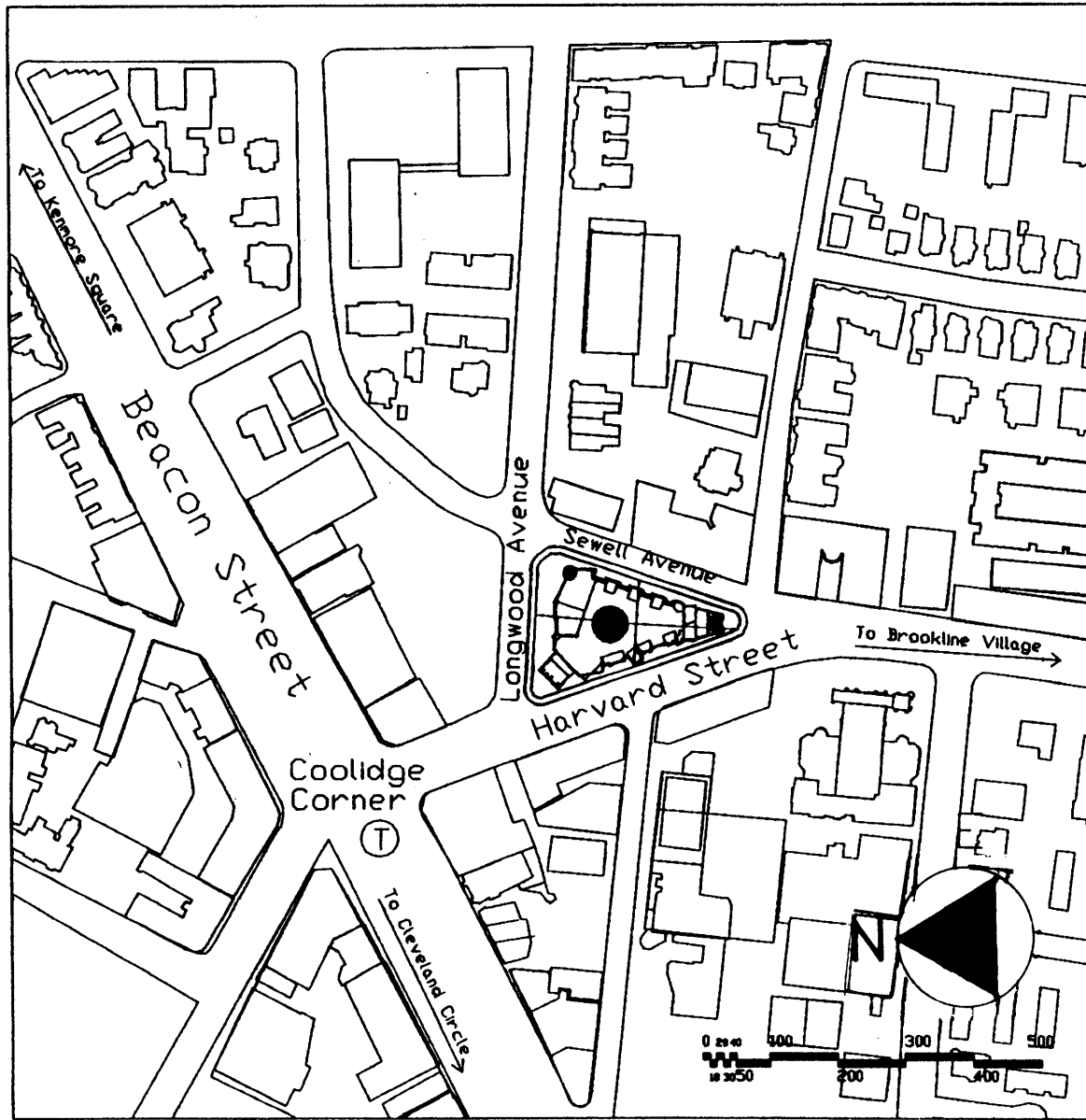
corners. The four corner buildings each have corner entrances. Three out of four of the buildings have a small decorative marker on the roofline above the corner entrance. This is very common in most of the building entrances in Coolidge Corner, whether on a corner or not. They seem to mark the entry place in the sky. In the case of the bank and the Pierce building, various cosmic contraptions, such as antennae, lightning rods, and weather vanes accompany the roofline markers. The southwest corner is occupied by a software and electronics store. The building is rather nondescript and dates from the 1930's. It is the weakest corner, having no roofline markers, towers, poles or anything else. It is the most boring of the set and the least likely to be hit by lightning. Except for the corner entrance, it does not have much in common with the other three.

A Fifth Corner

As mentioned before, the existing two-story building on the northern half of the site also has a corner entry with a roofline marker, though it is dwarfed by the size of the four-story bank. If that corner of the site had a three-story corner entrance with a marker, it would be highly visible from the crossing. It could become, in effect, a fifth corner.

Neighbors

The neighboring properties facing the three sides of the site are very different one from the other. The side on Harvard street is quite consistent, a row of one-story brick "Mom and Pop" stores. The side on Sewall Avenue is occupied by "The Coolidge", a three-story brick residential building, on the south end, and a one story brick residential building on the north end. The Coolidge is a block of "French Flats" from the 1920's, and the one-story building is a nondescript modern residential building from the 1970's.



The Site

The Site

The site selected in Brookline is a small triangular block bordered by Harvard Street, Sewall Avenue, and Longwood Avenue. At present two office/commercial buildings and a filling station occupy the site. The commercial buildings are brick buildings very similar to most of the one and two story commercial buildings in Coolidge Corner, but they are not in any way extraordinary. On the corner of the two-story building occupying the north part of the site, there is a gift shop which has been in business for many years. It has a corner entrance and a roofline marker. I am told by veteran Brookliners that this corner entrance seems to represent the entry to the block in the collective memory of the community. The gas station isn't exactly an architectural gem either. We will assume for the purpose of this project that the hypothetical client has purchased all three properties and has permission to demolish the structures on it.

Visibility

This block has very high visibility, due to its location on a relatively high record grade. Longwood Avenue and Stearns Street slope down steeply from the site, and Harvard Street slopes down towards Brookline Village. It occupies the end of several view corridors: looking both north and south on Harvard Street, and from a long section of Beacon street at the Coolidge corner intersection. The site is plainly visible a block away from the Green Line T station at the intersection of Harvard and Beacon Streets, and is visible at the top of a long view corridor on Stearns Road.

The surrounding structures adjacent to the site are mostly one and two story commercial buildings and one three-story residential building, but the height limit for the site is 45 feet, leaving a possibility of intensifying the natural visibility of the site into an addition to Brookline's skyline.

Zoning

According to the Brookline Zoning By-Laws (1987) the district in which the site is located is designated Coolidge Corner District G-1.75 (CC), which is a general business zoning with certain restrictions of its own in addition to normal business district regulations. It is also designated a Buffer Zone, mediating between changes in adjacent districts. The by-laws restrict the site to an F.A.R. of 1.75. Since the area of the lot is 35,000 ft², and the gross built floor space is 45,000 ft, the resulting F.A.R. is 1.28, well within the margin, and allowing for potential additions. The regulations require that new construction to closely match adjacent structures on the same streetwall. As the library will occupy an entire block, albeit a small one, these regulations will apply only in the general sense.¹

¹ For the exact citation, refer to Appendix E.

A Hole in the Urban Fabric

Here comes the problem: the Longwood Avenue edge of the site contains parking lots for the bank and commercial properties on Harvard street. The rear façades of those buildings is approximately 150 ft. away from the site edge. This is a gaping hole in the urban fabric, and it will be difficult to respond to. Both Harvard and Sewell have street sections of 1:2 ratio or better of building height to street width. The Sewell Avenue street section is even more closed and private than Harvard, the street being only 30 ft. wide and the buildings rising three stories (a ratio of 30:30, i.e. 1:1). Even if the Library would be four stories on the Longwood Avenue side, the ratio of street width (façade to façade) to building height would be 150:40 which indicates that there would be no sense of closure unless buildings were constructed on the other side of Longwood Avenue.

Conclusions

From this analysis I drew the following conclusions:

- The Sewell Avenue side of the site should be built three stories straight up to match the Coolidge building, which it faces.
- The Harvard Street side should be built up to three stories, but with the third floor set back at least 10 feet.
- The Longwood Avenue side should be built up to three stories, but with the third floor set back at least 10 feet.
- There should be some sort of projection from the roof to mark the Library's place on the horizon.
- The design of the southern tip of the site should incorporate a cylindrical drum of some kind. As one proceeds up the view corridor Harvard street towards the Corners, the road splits into Harvard street and Sewell Avenue. This small tower should function as a kind of "newelpost" at the fork in the road.
- The main entry to the building should be on the corner facing the intersection, and there should be some sort of marker on the roofline directly above to mark the entry's location in the skyline.

III. Design Criteria

Spatial Organization

The spatial organization of the library is based upon the concept of the building as a metaphysical model of the universe and upon the concept of sacred and profane space. These spatial concepts differ from a modern conception of space and are based more upon an abstraction of space than an interaction with it. Though it does not directly clash with or contradict its urban surroundings, the library also does not relate to and harmonize with its environment in the same way that most modern buildings purport to do. Though its materials and massing are similar, the library is not subordinated by the cityscape, but rather is a noticeable ingredient in the urban aggregate. As an abstraction, it is not dependent upon context and exists to a large degree on its own internal logic. My understanding of the concept of sacred and profane space originates in the writings of Mircea Eliade, an anthropologist/theologist.¹

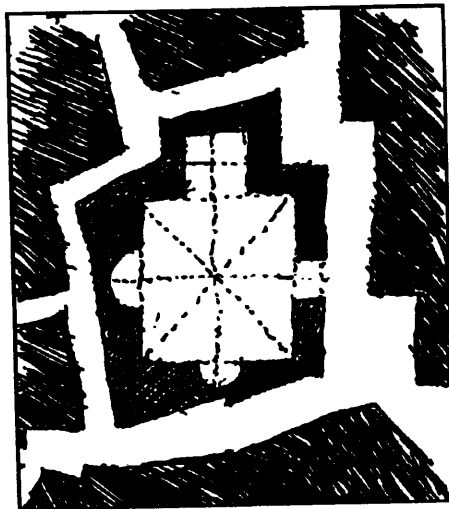
According to Eliade, sacred space is a domain generated by an origin which marks a vertical break in space from the ordinary world to the cosmos above. The wall marks the horizontal discontinuity in space between the inhabited ordered space inside the wall and the uninhabited chaotic space outside. In the library, the edge of the domain will be bounded by an impervious wall which allows only selected stimuli to pass from inside to outside. This interruption is reinforced further by the opacity and physical mass of the wall.²

¹ Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*.

² *Ibid*, p.

Entry into the ordered domain necessitates a breach in the wall, a significant occurrence which must be intensified and should involve the creation of one or more intermediate zones as one passes through the breach. A path leads from the entry towards the center, to the archive. The importance of the path is reinforced by the creation of an axis which transverses the intermediate zones and culminates at the origin point at the center of the building.

This axis reinforces and intensifies the act of entering the library. The progression along an axis marked by a series of portals builds up anticipation as one crosses intermediate thresholds as the path is transversed from the perimeter to the center. Reaching to the center should be akin to the experience of following a trail and finding a prize at its end.



A typical example of geometry on an irregular site in Islamic Architecture

Symbolic Form in the Library

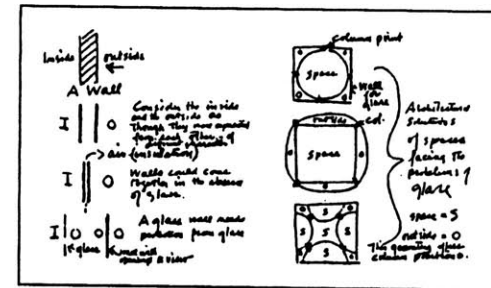
The spatial organization symbolizes various aspects of the Yiddish culture. The discontinuity in space generated by the wall expresses the break in time and space experienced by the Yiddish culture and by Isaac Bashevis Singer personally, who in his lifetime lived in and wrote about the Yiddish culture in both Europe and the United States, before and after World War II. The location of the archive in the center of the building (to which all other parts of the building refer) magnifies the sense of preciousness of Singer's work and indicates the inestimable value of his contribution to the ongoing project of regenerating the Yiddish language. Entry and the path along the axis symbolize the process of reviving the language - retrieving and reorganizing books, speakers and learners into a coherent language community to repair and regenerate the language and culture.

Rather than merely recreating the past, the purpose of the library is to generate a contemporary continuation of past traditions. As such, the project cannot merely be a museum replica of places and ideas from before World War II, but must be innovative in design and program. At present there are indications that hundreds and possibly thousands of people would like to have an opportunity to learn this language and reincorporate its traditions into their lives, but if the library does not relate to the present day reality of those lives, it will rapidly fall into disuse after the last generation of speakers dies out. As such, there are new elements in the program that would not have been a part of a Yiddish library of fifty years ago. Aside from technological developments such as videotapes, magnetically recorded music, and interactive language computers, the program adds Yiddish-language classes, a growing archive of oral history of the community made possible by modern recording equipment, and the incorporation of film and theater into the fabric of the library and its program.

Accordingly, it is important that the form of the library should not be a replica or a relic, but rather a timeless form, relevant to our long history, our changing present and hopefully our future as a community. The concept of timelessness immediately brings to mind the famous statement of Louis Kahn:

“But really, I am interested only in reading Volume Zero, which has not yet been written. And then volume minus one. History could not have started in the places they speak of. History preceded this; it just is not recorded. The beauty of architecture is that it deals with the recessions of your mind, from which comes that which is not yet said and not yet made.

“Of all things, I honor beginnings. I believe, though, that what has always been and what is has always been and what will be has always been. I do not think the circumstantial play from year to year, from era to era, has anything to do with what is available to you. The person of old had the same brilliance of mind that we



A sketch from Louis Kahn in which he explores space inside walls.

assume we have now. But that which made a thing become manifest for the first time is our great moment of creative happening."³

Kahn and Eliade share in common an interest in the physical manifestation of spirituality in architecture and the concept of ordering these manifestations with geometry.

Symbolism

The form of the library is intended to be symbolic or functionally appropriate in form for symbolic activity. It must reflect the Jewish relationship to books, libraries, and the act of study. The act of study as a spiritual repairing of the world is in itself symbolic, and the library must not only provide place for study, but must relate to and provide for its spiritual aspect as well. The library should have a degree of formality and civic presence to represent the importance of the pursuit of knowledge in the Jewish community. And through all this, the library should accommodate the strange paradox of a people who study the secular aspects of the world with what can only be termed as a religious fervor.

The library's form should reflect the sense of immense spans of space and time and their interruption in the history of the Jewish people. There should be no sense of any specific time, yet there should be a sense of the connection between far-flung communities and between the past, present, and future. The library should serve as a receptacle of collective memory and tribal mythology, and as a place where Jewish people can gather to tell and retell those stories.



A synagogue in Algeria.

³ Kahn, Louis I. "Silence and Light" *Architecture and Urbanism*, vol. 3 #1, p. 54.

Finally, the library must express and relate to the contrasts and paradoxes in the Yiddish culture - the cross-borrowing between Yiddish and Hebrew and other languages, the paradox of highly spiritual agnosticism, the conundrum of a people who strive to reach outward, participate in and contribute to the societies in which they live, yet maintain a clannish sense of tribalism.



IV. Design Themes

Concept to Site to Design

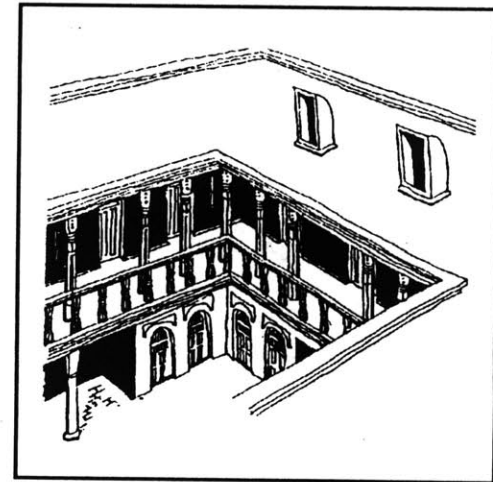
The design process for this thesis started with an investigation of the concept of defensive architecture. Countless architectural examples, were researched, from both vernacular and designed buildings, and many related issues were researched in anthropology, sociology, comparative religion, literature, and art history. The definition of defensive architecture arrived at was that defensive architecture is an architectural response to perceived threat. A defensive wall is the architectural manifestation of an abrupt discontinuity in the organization of space. A stark polarity is created, a partition between inside and out, between ours and theirs, us and *them*, The stark form of a defensive structure derives enormous formal power from this conflict of opposites.

The question then arose of what purpose this form could serve in the modern world. The actual physical form is of little relevance to post-feudal societies, and in this age of nuclear and chemical warfare, it provides little more physical protection than a grocery sack. Aside from building dungeons, what then could be the contemporary relevance of defensive architecture?

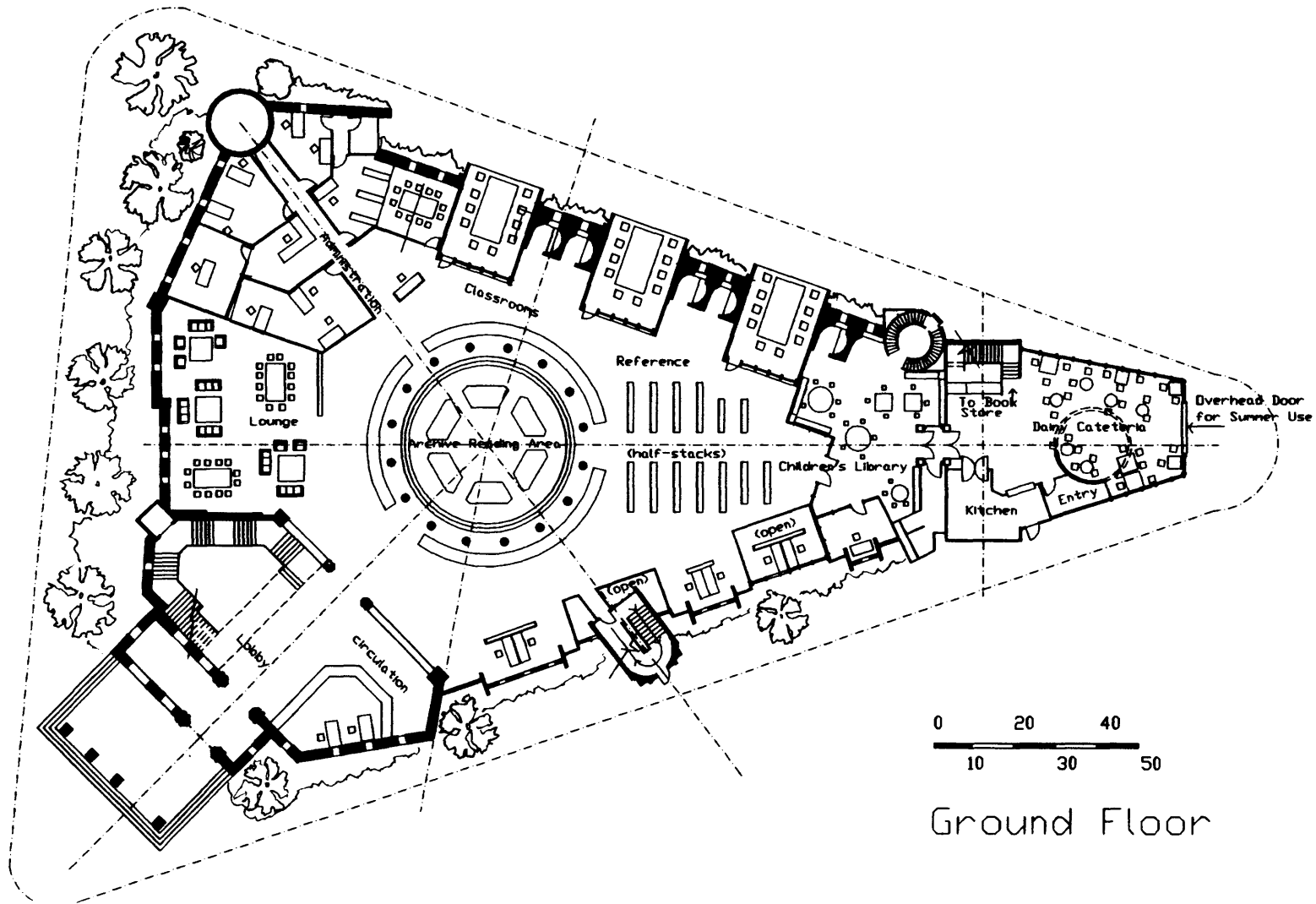
Perceived threats can be physical and/or metaphysical. A fortress is built to protect its inhabitants from attacks which are very physical and real, for instance, whereas a monastery wall serves to isolate the inhabitants from unwanted thoughts and distractions more than from intruders. The metaphysical defensive wall secludes its inhabitants and intensifies their inner world, enhancing their concentration on prayer and study. Their self-isolation from the outside world is not a hostile act but rather comes from a desire to intensify their inner world of prayer and study.



The royal palace of Topkapi in Istanbul.



A typical Middle Eastern vernacular courtyard house.

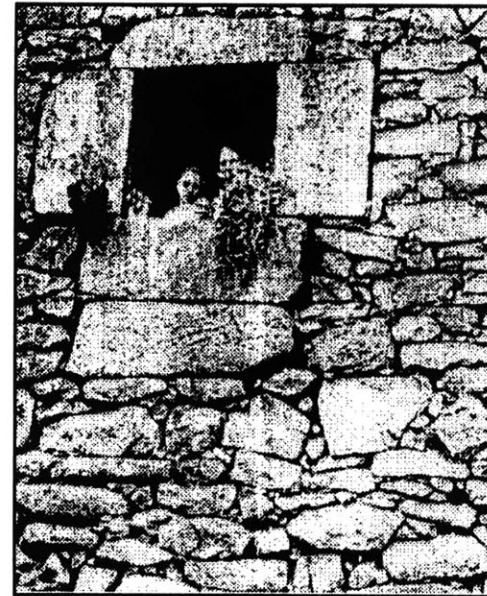


The model of a defensive architecture which serves to isolate its inhabitants in order to intensify their inner world certainly has some relevance to our lives today. The modern library is in many ways the contemporary equivalent of the monastery. Many early libraries started in monasteries. Libraries in general tend to be more introverted in form, and the issue of isolation for the purpose of language study is certainly a reasonable proposal.

The development of a program for a Yiddish library led naturally to a site in Brookline, due to its large concentration of Jewish population. The particular site on Harvard street was selected due to its combination of isolation and prominence. Defensive structures usually occupy a commanding position, visible from and providing views of all approaches. The site chosen is visible along four major view corridors in Coolidge corner, and is in a position so prominent that it might be considered a "fifth corner" of the Coolidge corner junction.

The site itself is isolated in that it occupies an entire small urban block, so it will not share frontage with other existing buildings. This is reflected in the building code, as well. Aside from a height and F.A.R restriction, the site is exempt from most of the regulations requiring side and back yards, matching materials and massing applicable to buildings in that neighborhood simply because it does not abut other buildings.

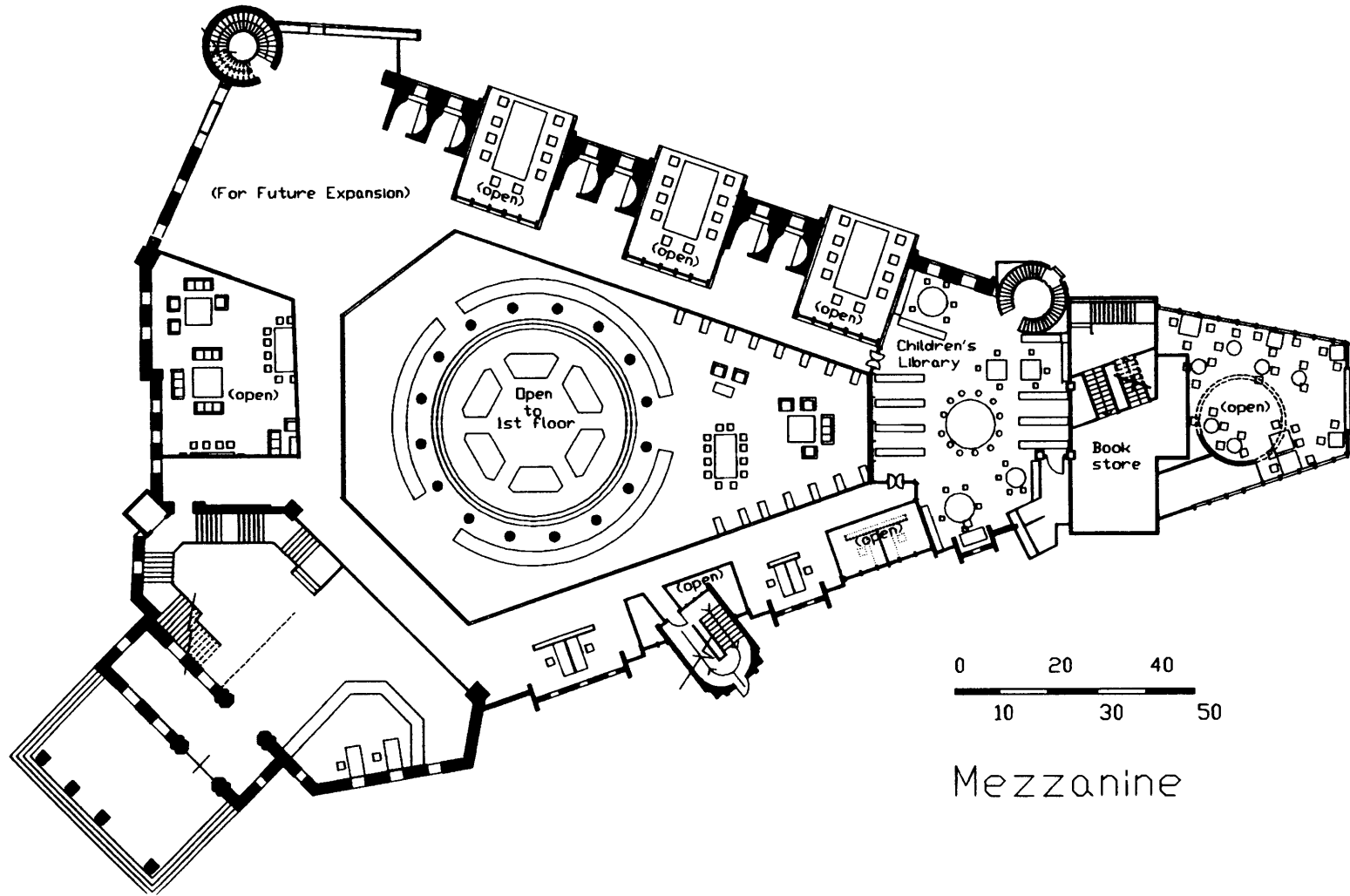
Finally, the site offered the opportunity to create a building having a large perimeter wall encircling an origin whose location is marked in the city skyline. The concept of centripetal symbolism stands cheek and jowl with the concept of defensive architecture. Once the aspect of real physical defense is deemed irrelevant, the question arises of what is the wall



A window in Portugal



The Western Wall



Design Themes

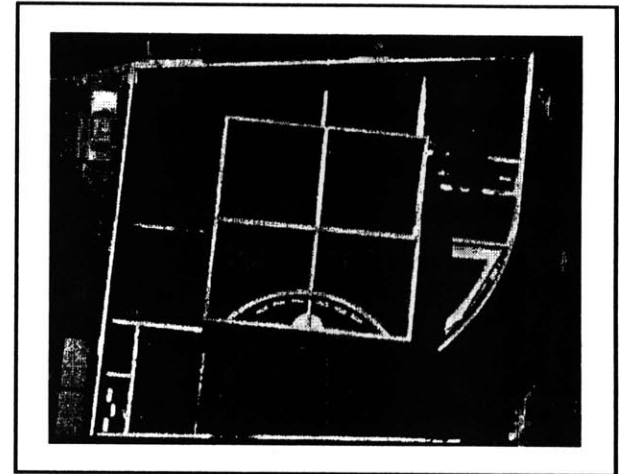
guarding, and from what, if not from physical destruction? When viewed from the perspective of centripetal symbolism, the wall marks the extent of the spiritual domain generated by an origin which in turn marks an irruption into the cosmic plane. The wall guards a holy place, and the origin, the domain and the perimeter wall together form a metaphysical model of the universe. Classic examples of this pattern are found in most ancient cities, where the origin is marked by a religious building, its exact holy spot indicated by a dome indicating the escape into the celestial plane, and the perimeter wall providing and controlling access. The buildings themselves are commonly sited at the intersection of two main roads leading to the four cardinal directions. The perimeter wall is a distinctive feature of defensive architecture, and it is one of the primary issues investigated in the design. How can a perimeter wall be articulated to control passage of people, books, and stimuli in and out of the building? What constitutes an opening, an entry, and what conditions the act of entry? The design is conceived as a partial answer to these questions.

The Floor Plan

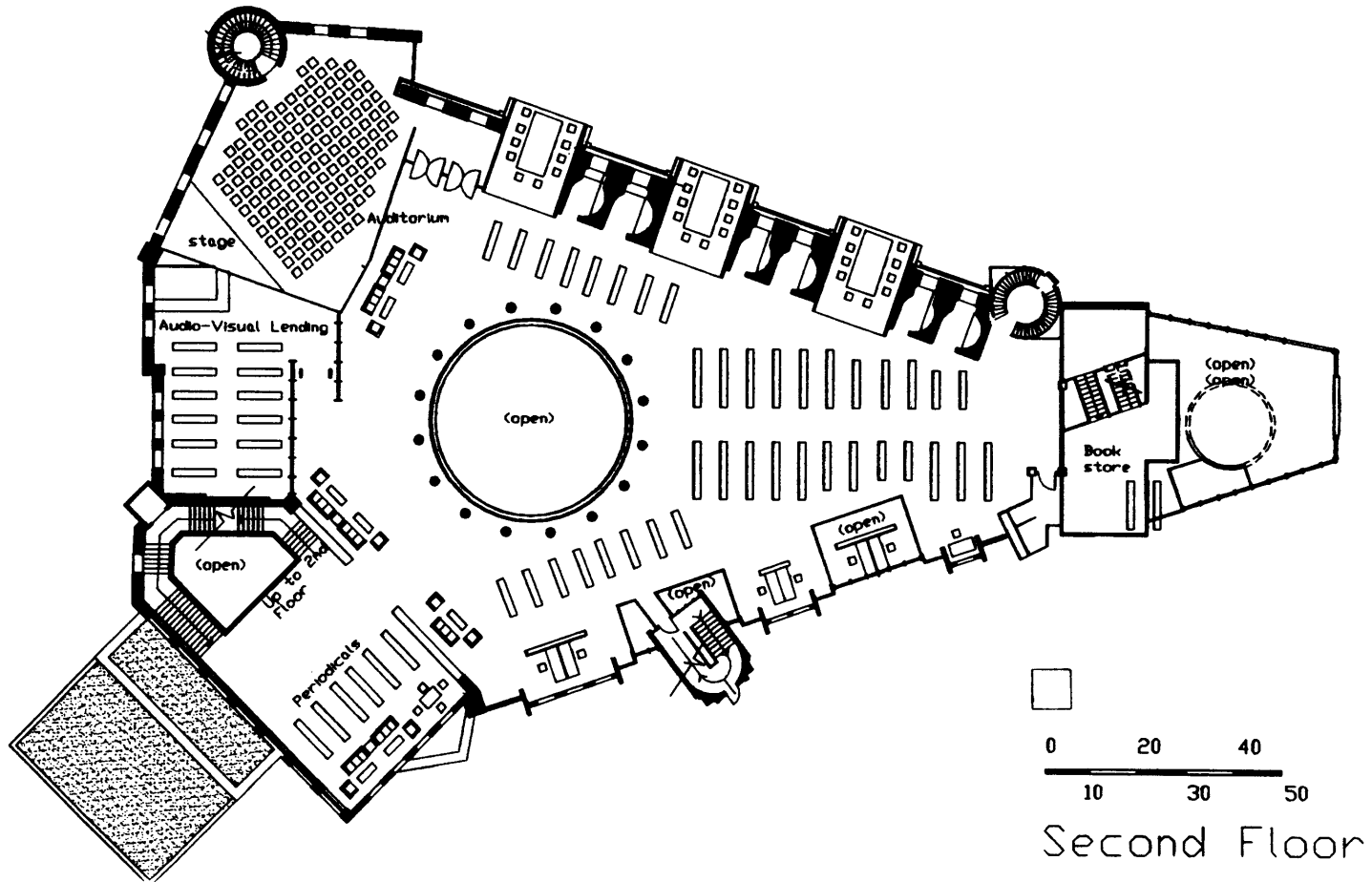
The layout of the library has much in common with other public libraries, in terms of the way the public uses it. Aside from its symbolic aspects, the differences lie in its partial function as a research institute, and in its cultural programs to renew the Yiddish language. Facilities are added to the design to accommodate these extra functions.

The library comprises three floors, with a mezzanine level added to the lofty ground floor. The ground floor comprises the entry and circulation desk in the lobby, the administrative offices, three large discussion rooms, the catalog and reference section, the children's library, and the café. These are functions which belong on the ground floor, as they will be heavily used.

Design Themes



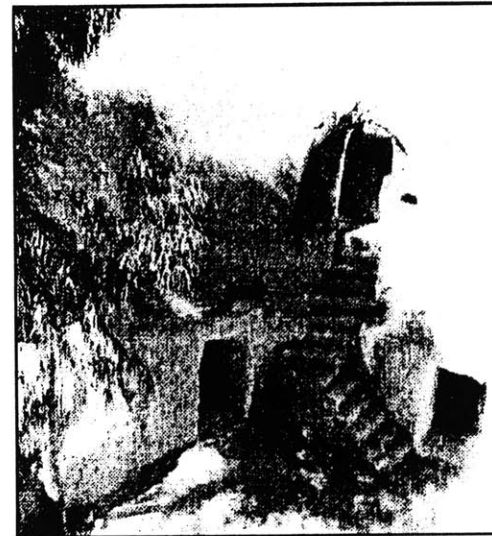
Kidosake residence. by Tadeo Ando.



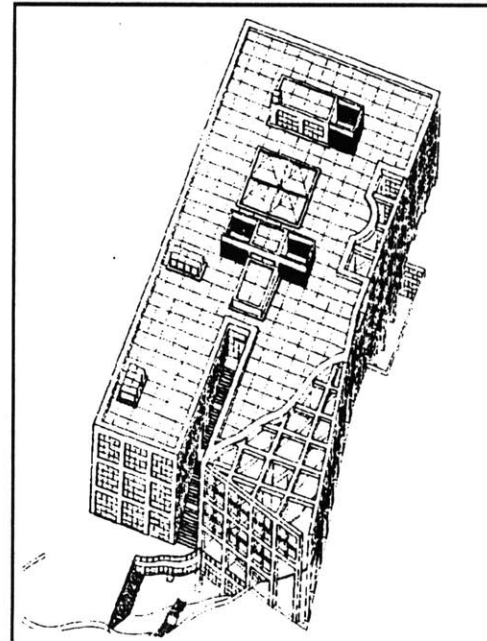
At the entry, the visitor will pass through two successively smaller doorways into the lobby, where they will see the circulation desk, and the main staircase and elevator. As the visitor passes the circulation desk and book security control, they will arrive in the central atrium of the library. From this point of arrival they will easily see all the functions on the ground floor and the mezzanine, and standing in the atrium, they will see all the floors above. There may also be an exhibit arranged in the atrium's showcases and on movable partitions. To ensure that the children's library will be especially visible by a three-foot person from the entry, the reference stacks will be half-stacks, so as not to obscure the line of sight. The secondary staircase will be visible as it opens on the ground floor and the mezzanine.

There is an entrance to the café at the back of the children's library on the ground floor, though it will not be immediately obvious. This is because the entrance is intended mainly for library personnel and regular users of the library, and not for people who only want to use the café or bookstore, who should use the café's street entrance. The cash register next to the library entrance inside the café is a control point for both café and bookstore customers, and also controls this exit from the library.

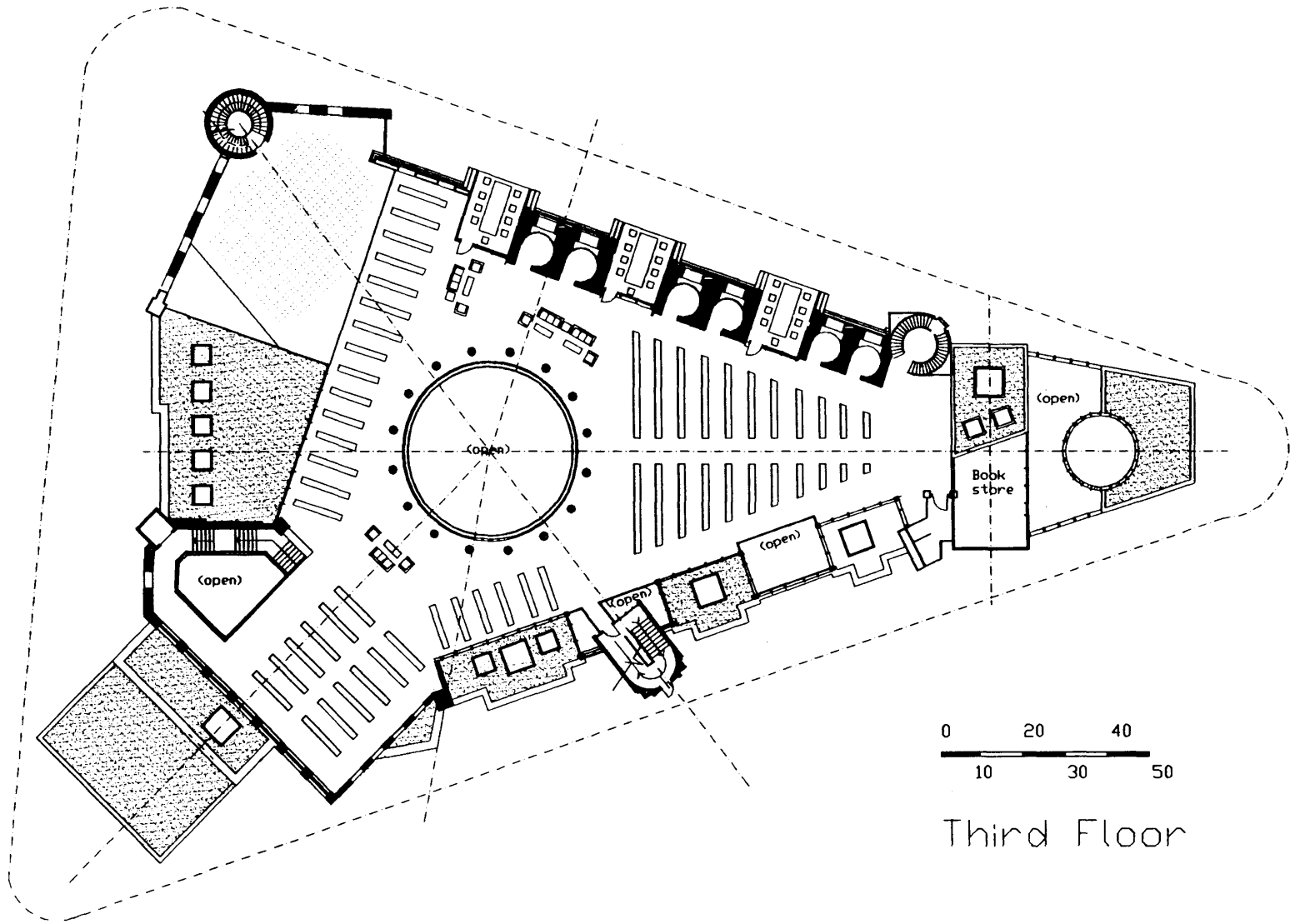
The mezzanine level, reachable by all staircases and by the elevator, provides access to the children's library upper level and to the carrels on that level. The classrooms on the ground floor have twenty-foot ceilings which are lined with booksheves, so there will be access to the upper rows of books via narrow walkways accessible from the mezzanine level. There is no passage to the bookstore and café from any floor except the ground floor.



An entry stair carved out of the wall.



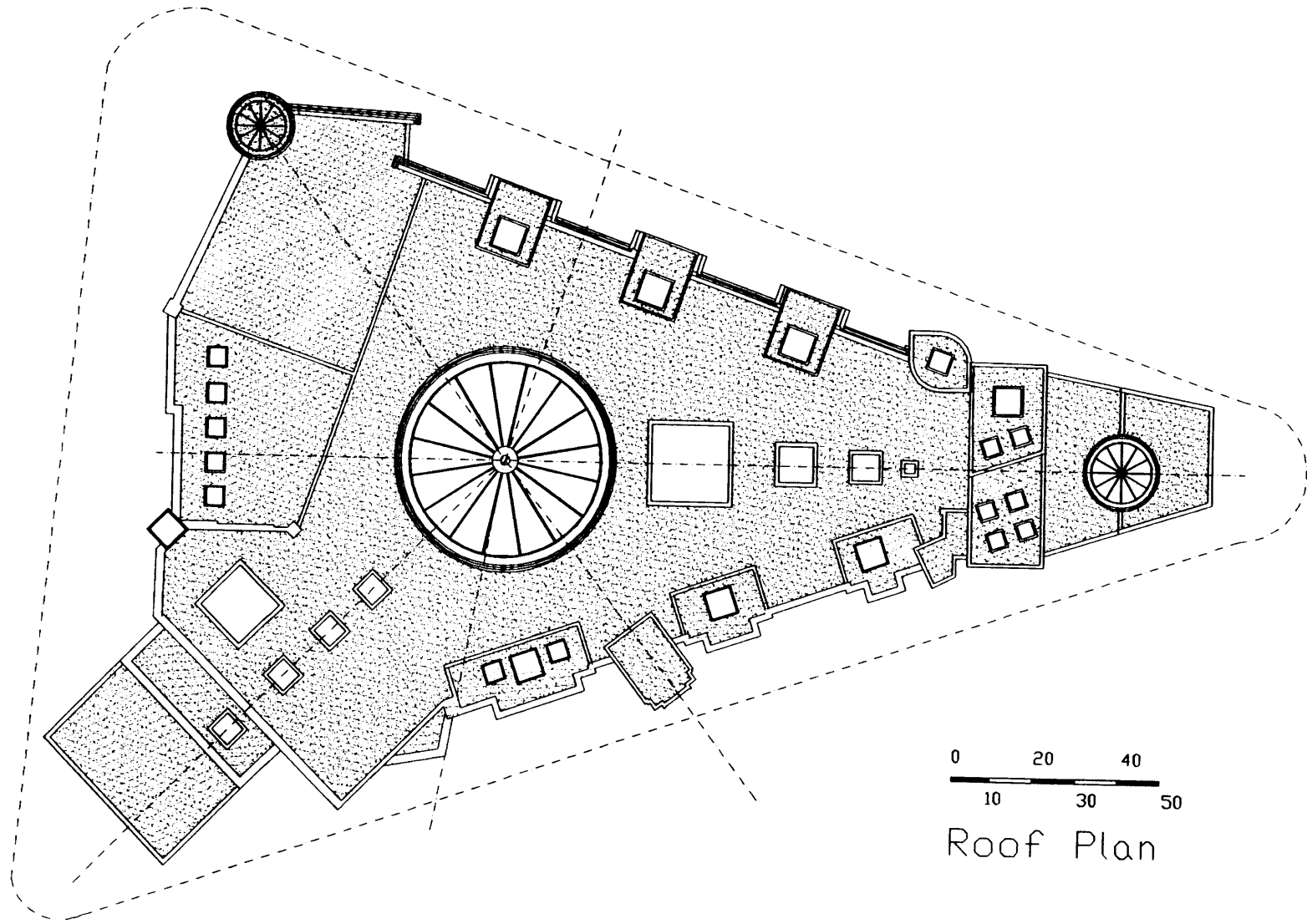
A design by Kisho Kurakawa with entry stairs carved out of the mass of the building.



In addition to the large central opening of the mezzanine, there are sections of floor cut out over the ground floor lounge, and next to the Harvard street wall. These light wells are intended to allow light to penetrate to lower floors from above, and to reveal the vertical connection between the sky and the ground throughout the library.

The second floor comprises the auditorium, the audio-visual collection, the periodicals section, stacks, carrels, and three more classrooms. The auditorium may show films or have performances past the normal closing time of the library, so it is important that there be a direct access from the lobby to the auditorium without entering the stacks. The auditorium is directly reachable by the main staircase or elevator from the lobby. It has a two-story ceiling, extending into the third floor. To prevent auditorium patrons from entering the stacks on the second floor, the stacks will be roped off during after-hours auditorium activity. Further measures will not be necessary - as Michael Leininger so aptly said, these books are in more danger of being thrown in the garbage than stolen.

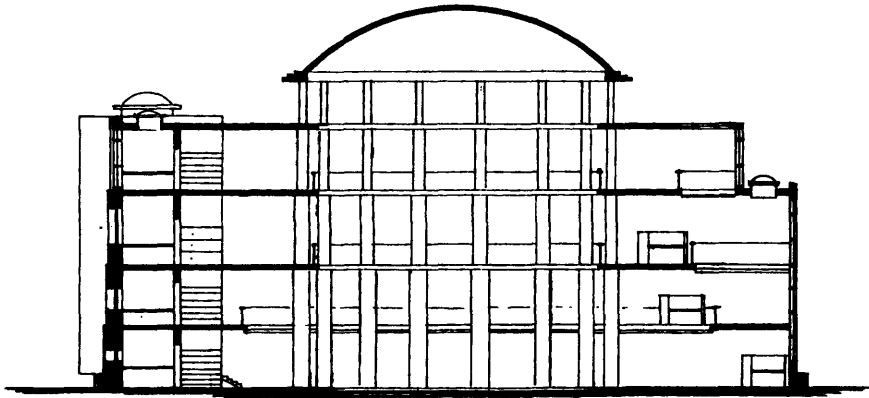
Audio-visual lending is next to the auditorium. This facility would have been better served on the ground floor, as it can expect heavy traffic, but is certainly equally serviceable at the top of the stairs. The periodical section has a small lounge also at the head of the main stair, and stacks extending into the main floor. There has been a proliferation in the past ten years of new Yiddish-language periodicals, (there are over a hundred published at the present time, and more appearing every year), so the periodical section could eventually take up a good part of the second floor. Three medium-sized classrooms occupy the Sewell Avenue wall, alternating with closed carrels. These closed round carrels are intended to provide maximum isolation for intense concentration. They have a closable door, and the light entering the carrel from the street is modulated by the thickness of the wall, making



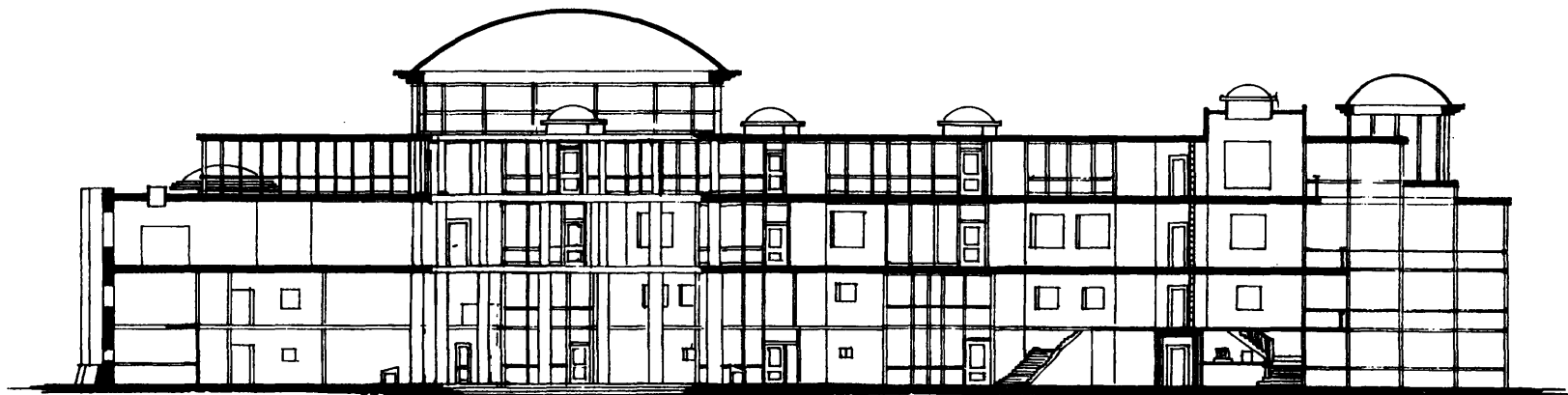
the windowsill is so deep that it is practically an inhabitable space. The bulk of illumination will come from skylights. The third floor will hold the remainder of the stacks, three small classrooms, and seated reading areas.

Exterior Form

The exterior form of the library is a congregation of different forms. The front wall on Harvard street is a series of vertical bays alternating between solid masonry wall sections having small cut-out windows, and sections of curtain wall. The large expanses of glass will enable passers-by to catch glimpses of activity inside the building, though not to an extent that would compromise the intimate nature of the library. The Sewell Avenue side is a thickly built dense wall with receding horizontal string courses marking each story. This wall is a bit cryptic, as the mezzanine level is marked by a string course and so seems to express four stories instead of three. Fenestration of this wall is very restricted in the defensive architecture mode. These windows are intended for the inhabitants to see you, not the other way around. The three stacks of classrooms are insertions poked through the dense fabric of the wall, suspended a few feet above the street as a kind of bay window. They intentionally do not extend downwards to the ground as the Harvard Street glazing does so that they may not be perceived as a place to create a new entry. Their open faces are veiled with thick decorative screens in the manner of Arabic Mush'harabieh (traditional wooden lattice work placed over windows to ensure privacy) enabling view out and preventing view in. The north wall faces the most difficult part of the site, the section overlooking Bildner's parking lot which lacks urban closure. The response here is one of isolation. The wall allows light to penetrate, restricts views of the inside, and does not encourage looking out from the inside, either.



Transverse Section



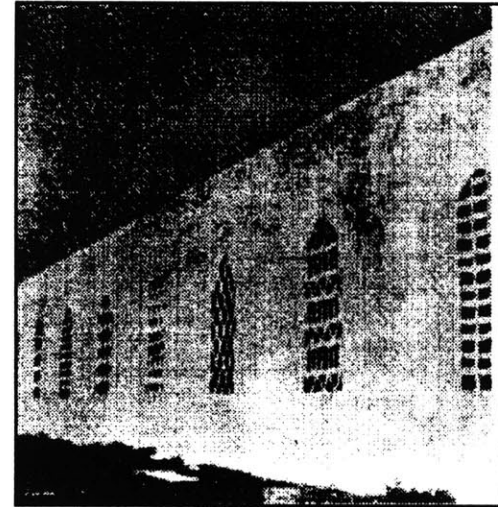
Lengthwise Section

Design Themes

The southern tip of the building, on the other hand, is visual and social to the extreme. This is the location of the café and bookstore. The walls here are as transparent as possible, because here people *should* look inside as they pass, in case a friend or neighbor is there. The ratio of glass to floor space is very high, due to the triangular configuration, to enable the maximal view inside and a view of the human parade on the sidewalk to the *shmoozers* inside.

The form of the bookstore is also purposely different. Though it repeats the graduated window pattern common to most of the building, it will differ in material - it will be constructed of naked sitecast concrete sections, snapties and all, without brick cladding. The cafe will also differ in material, being constructed entirely of steel and curtain wall, as opposed to the main part of the library, which will be constructed using various masonry techniques.

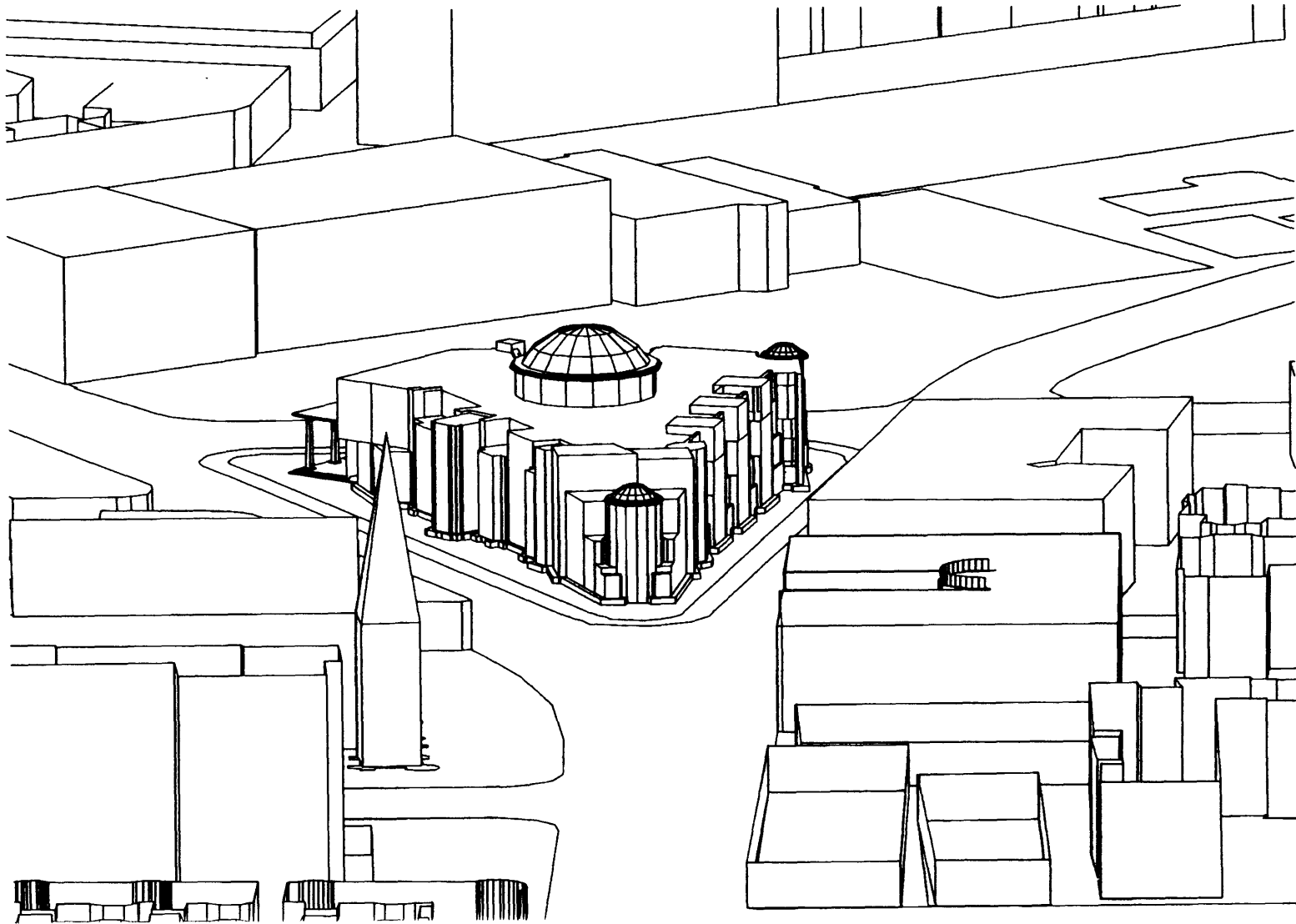
The masonry sections which compose most of the exterior wall will be constructed of load-bearing Roman brick, or of concrete and block construction clad with Roman brick. The windows in these sections will be square, and the sizes will increase with each story, from two foot square on the first row of windows, to four foot square on the second floor, so that the glass-to wall ratio reverses as the building rises. The third floor walls will be made of glass curtain wall and will have no masonry at all, thus finishing the sequence. The third floor is set back from the outline of the previous floors, allowing a view of the dome from the sidewalk and visually reducing the bulk of the building. The roof will sprout a constellation of light wells, skylights, and domes, some of which may be visible from the street. The roof will be constructed of a concrete slab and flat membrane assembly with pebble ballast.



Mush'hahrabieh in a project by Hassan Fat'hy



Dwellings on the edge of a ravine in Jerusalem.



Aerial view of the library from Brookline Village.

Design Themes

Symbolic Form

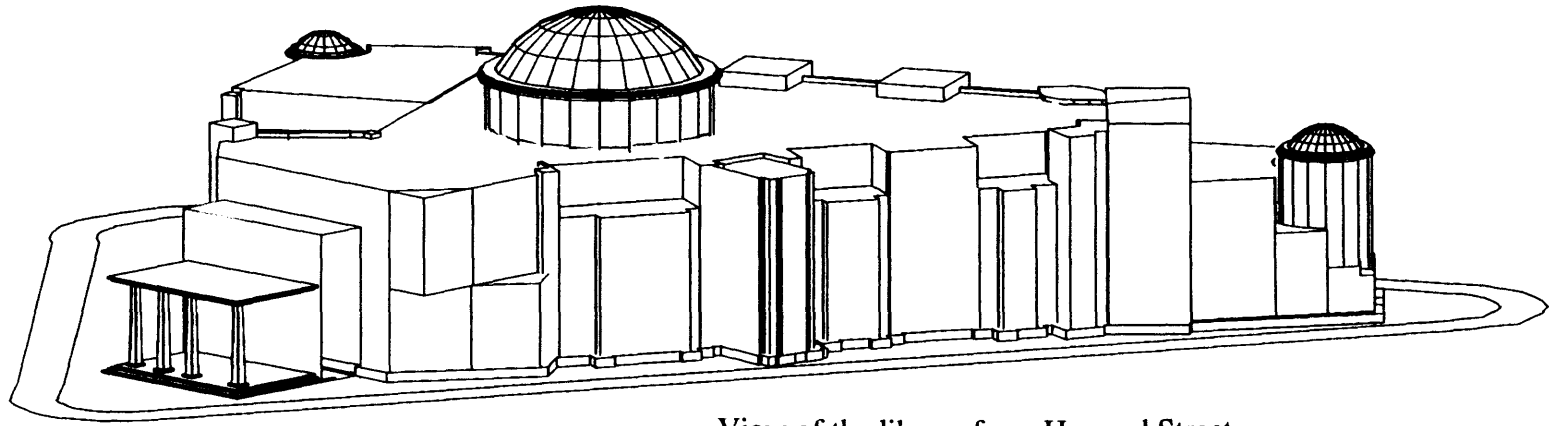
A wall is commonly employed to designate the boundary between two discontinuous domains. It can mediate between the two domains, buffering the friction between the two. By the same token it can also reinforce the discontinuity, intensify the dissimilarity. It can act as a filter which selectively screens passage between the two sides, revealing some things, concealing others. A wall marks the boundary we make to separate ourselves and our ordered space from the chaos outside our control.

The mass between these two surfaces is the interface between sacred and profane, between ordered space and chaos. The character and configuration of this matter and the voids which it may enclose within its bulk are the critical elements to be manipulated to create a balance of tension between two opposing worlds .

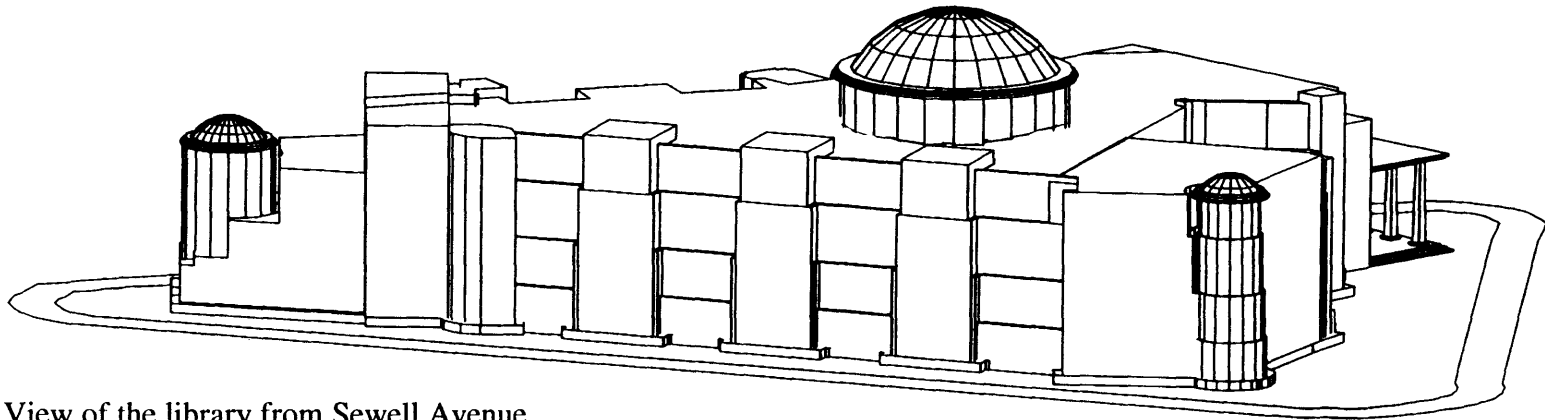
The separation between sacred and profane space symbolizes the library's retreat from the outside world. There are examples from ancient times where a sacred space was created with no more than a pole surrounded by a carefully-laid ring of stone. The wall is a closed ring or square, all that is inside is ordered, and all that is outside is the Void.¹

When a wall delineates two very different domains and conditions it can readily express the contradictions and paradoxes abundant in the history of the Yiddish speaking culture. The enigmatic space inside the walls can be a powerful vehicle to express how the language and the books can span the discontinuity in space and time between the world lost and the world found, to create a kind of incubator for an endangered species. The

¹ Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1959.



View of the library from Harvard Street.

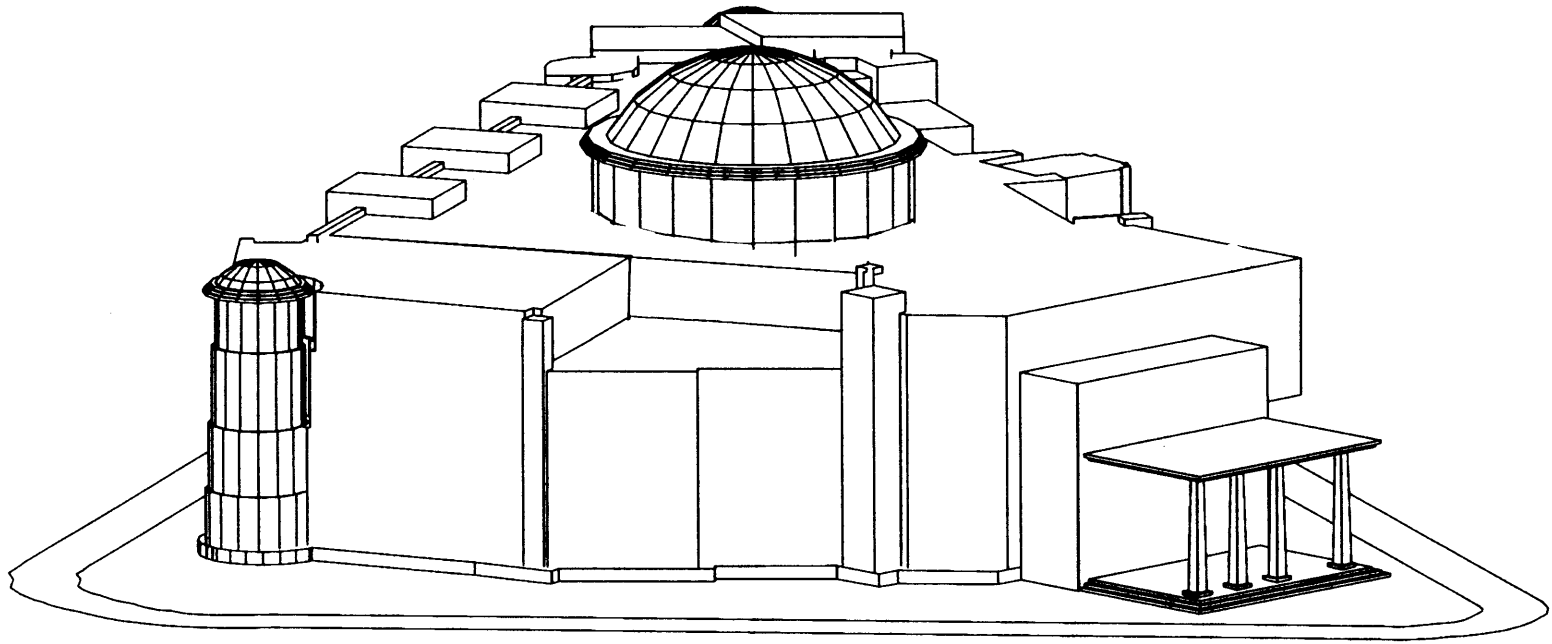


View of the library from Sewell Avenue.

feature of the library which was created in this spirit is the round carrels inside the east wall. The inner walls of these carrels are round, reinforcing the experience of being one person alone in thought and study. The light coming from above reinforces the upwards directionality of the study spaces, and the idea of thoughts and words coming out of the inhabited wall, and floating upwards to the sky. These carrels are not so much symbolic in and of themselves as they are functionally appropriate for the symbolic activity of the *Tikkun* - the repair of the world through study.

The various materials and construction techniques used in the library are very symbolic of the many times and places of the Jewish community. The eastern wall that holds the carrels and classrooms is very thickly built of flat Roman bricks. This wall should be built of ancient bearing-wall construction if possible, including the round carrels. The north side should be built in a similar manner, but only a foot or so thick. The western wall is thinner, built of reinforced block construction with a brick veneer. There are sections of modern curtain-wall inserted into the western side, and the café is built completely of steel frame and curtain wall. The atrium is built of reinforced sitecast concrete, as are all the floors and roofs. The entry and bookstore are both constructed of sitecast concrete, but the entry is carefully veneered with brick, whereas the bookstore is left stark naked.

All of these materials and techniques are associated with different times and places - brick bearing-wall construction of the Roman empire, twentieth-century sitecast naked concrete, Medieval Ottoman lead-clad domes, "vertebrate" steel-framed construction versus "mollusk" type spaces supported by their shells, etc. They all coexist cheek and jowl, a puzzling situation, but very, very, similar to a Yiddish newspaper, where one may find beautiful poetry, sob-story letters, Nobel-prize winning literature, savvy political



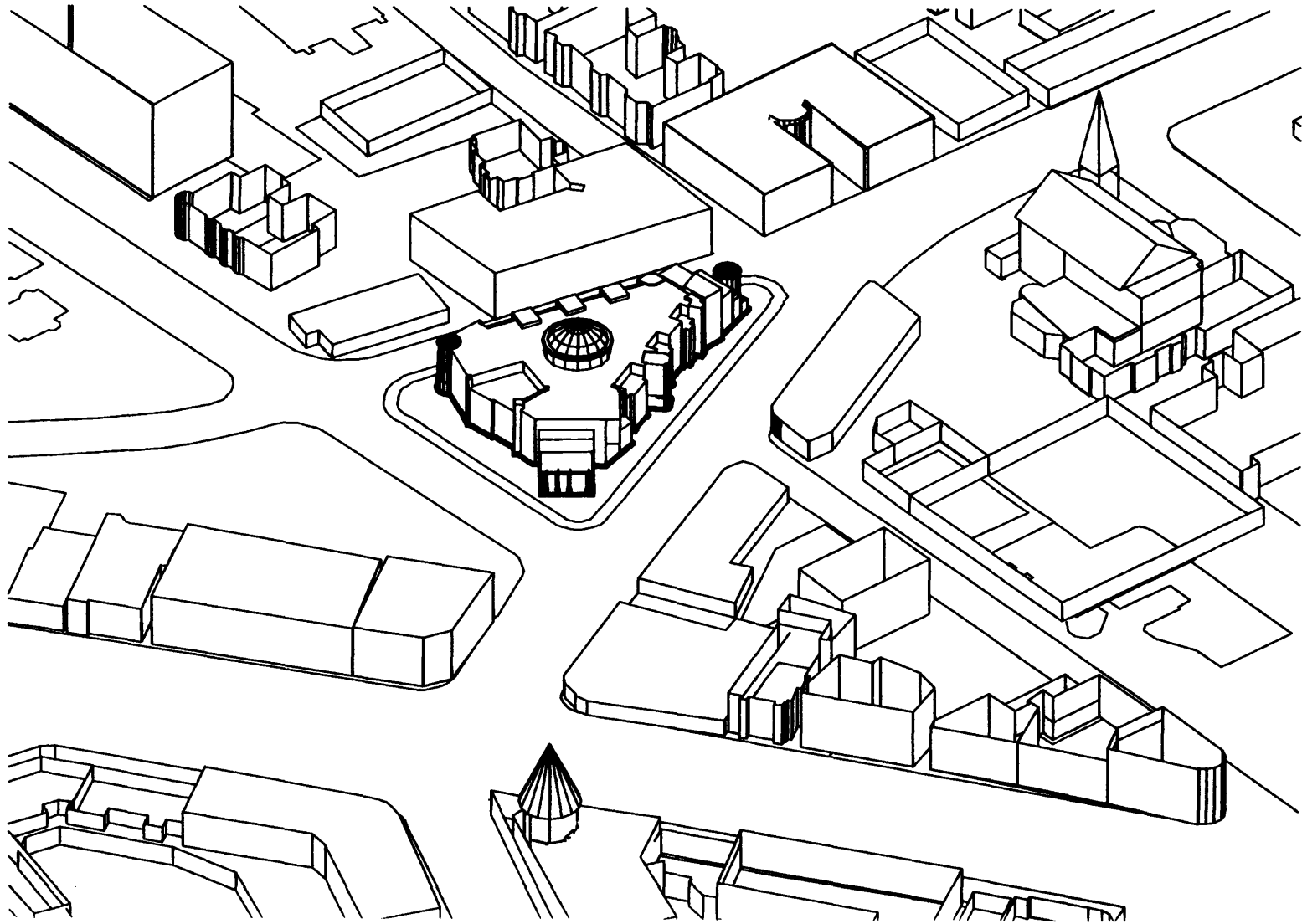
View of the Library from Longwood Avenue.

commentary, inane, banal reporting, and irritating editorials all in the space of a few pages. The organization is totally confusing, the quality is uneven to say the least, but at least everyone gets to participate!

The east and west walls of the library are intentionally different. The east wall on the Sewell Avenue side is much thicker, being constructed of older bearing wall construction, has small, restricted, fenestration, and receives more of its light from the roof than from the street. Sewell Avenue itself is a narrower, darker street than Harvard Street, but this is not the main reason. The eastern wall holds the classrooms and the round carrels for intense study. In the little Jewish architecture that has been built in the dispersion since the destruction of the Temple, the eastern wall of a building has always had special significance; east was the way back home. But learning is also a way back home.

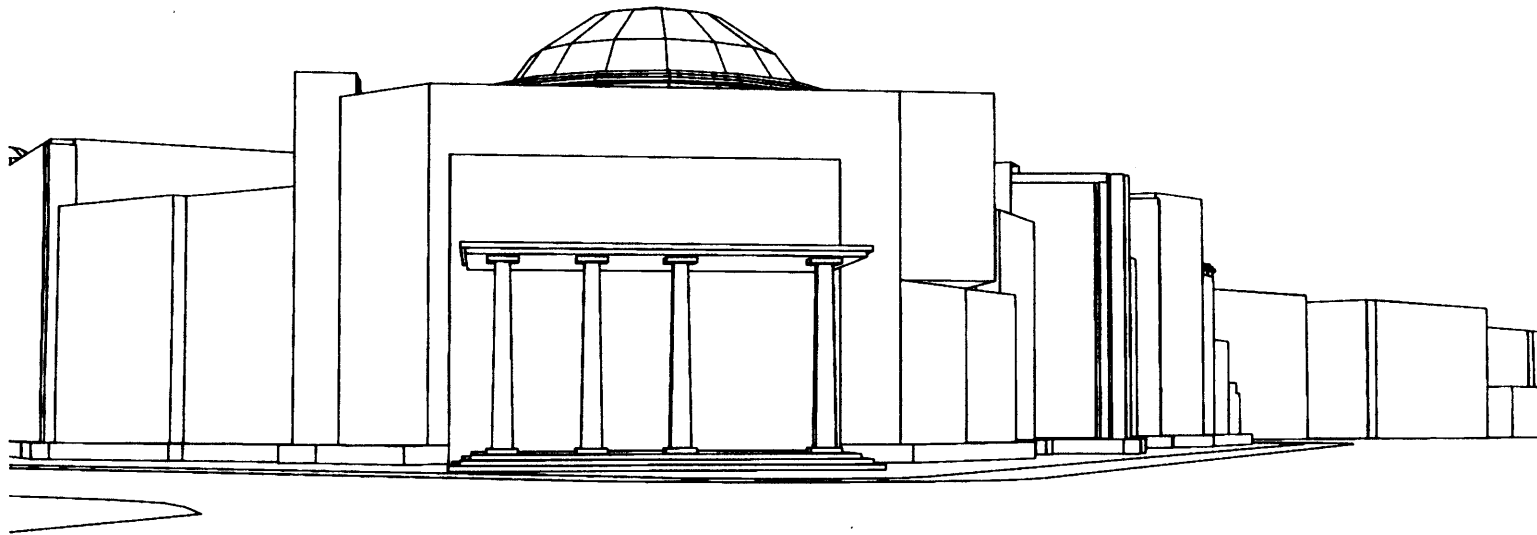
The western wall fronting on Harvard street is more open and public, the road being twice as wide and the buildings opposite being low. Harvard Street is also an important street with a lot of traffic, both vehicular and pedestrian. The western wall therefore is much more open, thinner, more transparent. It is the only wall through which inside activity may be observed from the street, revealing the purpose of the building.

The contrast between these two walls is symbolic of the conflicting desires of the Jewish community between wanting to participate in and contribute to larger society and the desire to maintain ancient tradition and their special connection to their own people.

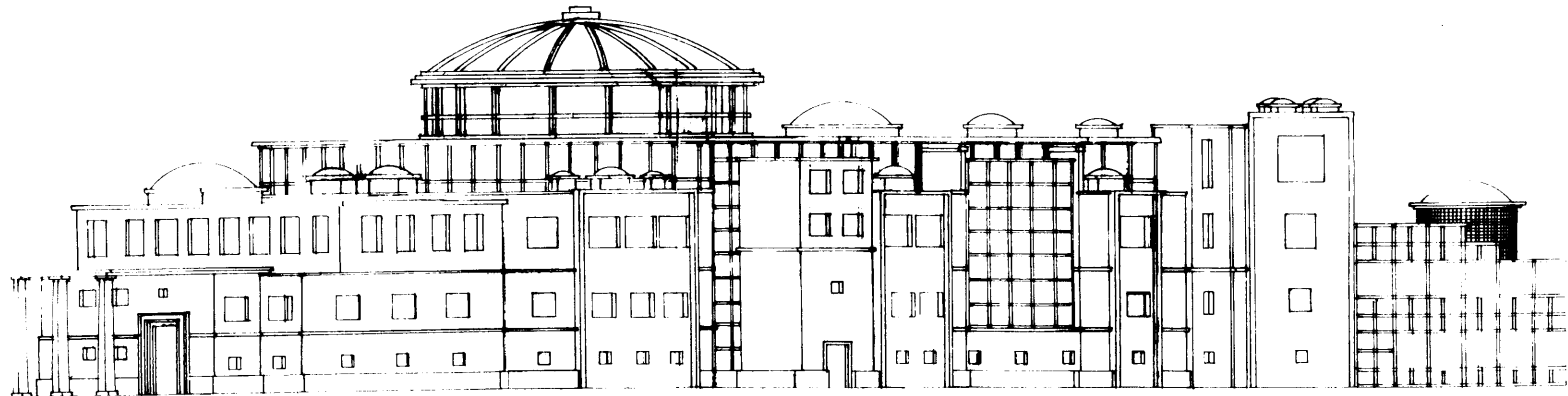
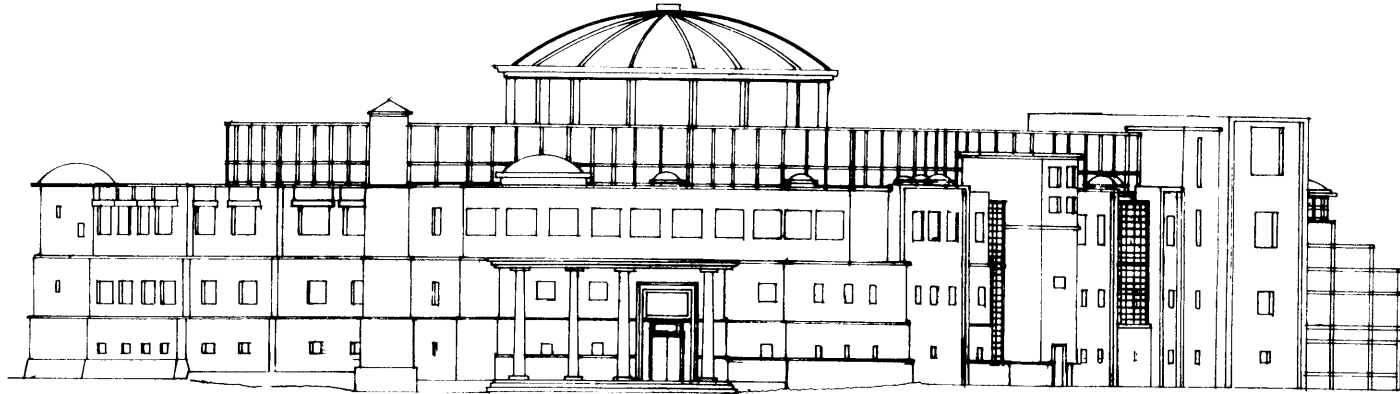


Aerial view of the library from Harvard Street on the north side of Beacon Street.

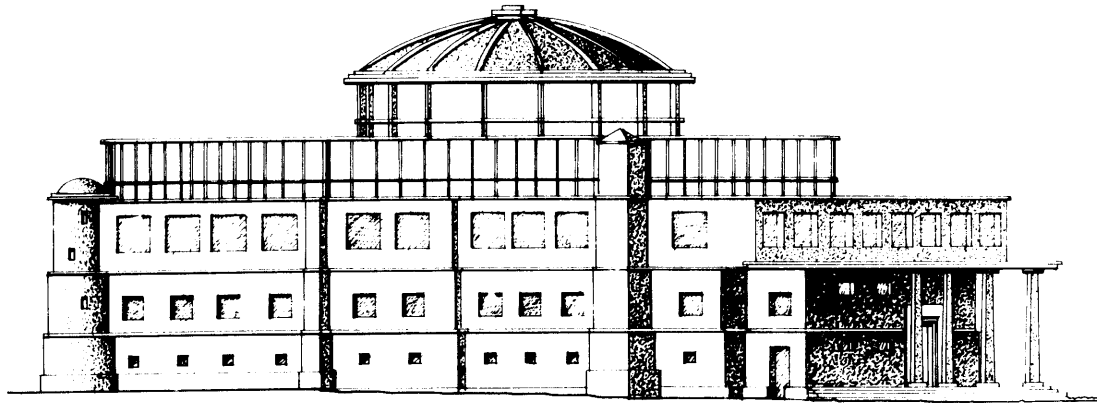
Finally, the atrium and dome is the feature to which all parts of the library refer back to. The atrium ties all of the floors and the different pieces together makes them all visible, and connects them to the light above, to the sky. It establishes the library's place on the ground and in the sky. The atrium is the archetypal smoke hole in the yurt, through which all the prayers and thoughts and questions float up into the sky and come back down as rain or hail, manna or locusts. Is there anyone up there, beyond the dome? Nobody knows. But it's a good question. Maybe you'll find the answer in the library.



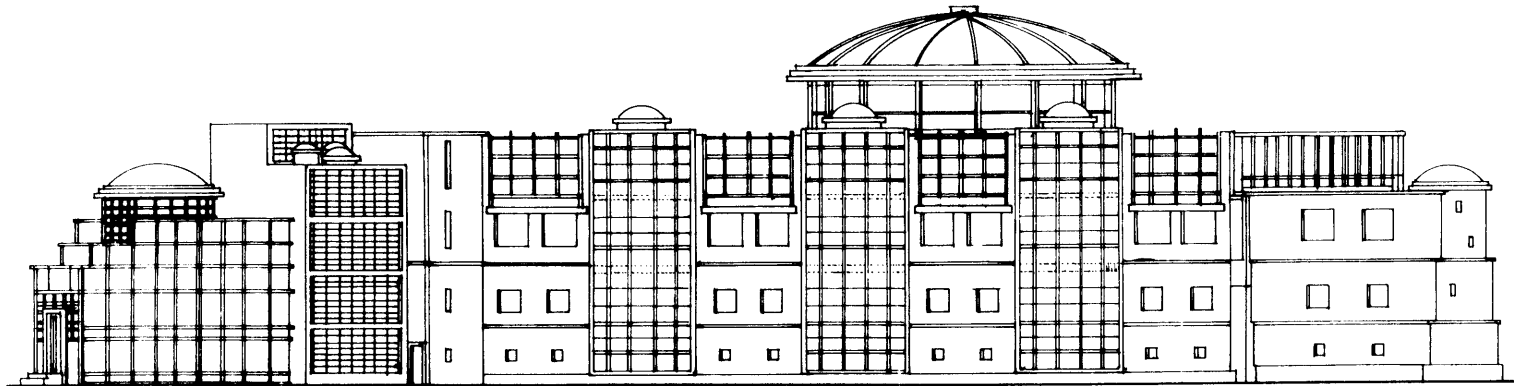
The entrance to the library.



Harvard Street Elevation



Longwood Avenue Elevation



Sewell Avenue Elevation

Appendix A

The Outlook, v. 82, no. 12,
Saturday March 24, 1906

"There is not another district of the same restricted area in the whole of greater New York that supports so many book stores as the so-called 'slum' of the Lower East Side...The people of the neighborhood are poor, but they are not so poor that they cannot always spare a little for a good book. They have a natural and instinctive hatred of trusts but they will put up with a trust¹ if they must in order to satisfy their hunger for reading. The four largest of these book stores are strung along Canal Street from the Bowery east to Allen Street...As you enter and engage in conversation with the proprietor, every man in the shop will instantly abandon whatever is holding his attention at the moment and without removing his hat, will step briskly forward and settle himself to listen frankly and with undisguised interest to the colloquy. If he finds he has anything to say, he will break in with it without hesitation or embarrassment. This is no more due to bad manners than the wearing of the hat - a ritualistic survival - but to the most striking of all East Side characteristics, that

¹ The author was referring to the National Hebrew Publication Society, which he compared to a trust in that they published most of the Hebrew and Yiddish books available at that time.

Trusts and anti-trust laws were the issue of the day, so it is not surprising that it be brought up in other contexts.

where a discussion is the issue, all else is forgotten.

Proprietor of the bookstore: 'We have here in New York some few writers of real distinction. There is Morris Rosenfeld, the poet, Jacob Gordon and David Pinski, the playwrights, and Abraham Cahan, the novelist², and Eliakum Zunzer, the folklore bard. Mr. Cahan can, however, only be called a Jewish writer because he is a Jew and writes of the Jews. His medium is English.'

'And are all these books printed here in the United States too?' asked the Spectator, with a wave of his hand about the book-lined shelves.

He was answered by a chorus:

'Sure not, no sir - all imported - from Russia.'

'And there are none but Yiddish and Hebrew writers here?'

Again the chorus spoke:

'Sure there are - all writers there are.'

Again the unwashed intellectual silenced the group with his imperative, 'Wait a while!'

'In all these Jew bookstores,' he said, 'They have only the Yiddish in Hebrew languages, but they have translations of the best books in all literatures into Yiddish and Hebrew. Here in this shop you may get in Yiddish Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Tolstoy, Gorki, Voltaire, Victor Hugo, Dante, Swinburne, Shelley, and various other great writers in all languages.'

² And editor of the Jewish Daily Forwards!

This sounds remarkable to the ear of the novice, but it becomes even more extraordinary when it is remembered that up to thirty years ago the Yiddish [language] - or Jew-Deutsch - was despised as a vulgar dialect even by those who spoke it; and also that the few scattered writers who made use of it as a vehicle for literary expression systematically offered their works with the apology that it was only through the 'jargon' that the people could be reached.

Today all the Jews who are not writing are reading. With a voracious appetite they devour Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, German, and English in all forms of their literatures, with the notable exception of popular contemporaneous fiction. On the East Side in New York, every soda fountain is a circulating library. The principal East Side branch of the Public Library, located at Chatham Square, numbers a membership of fifteen thousand, and it has been in existence only four years. One thousand books are taken out of this library by Jews every day. It ranks first among all the branches of the city in the circulation of works on history, abstract science, and sociology. It ranks last of all in the circulation of light novels."³

³ Reprinted from *The Outlook*, v.82, no 12 (Saturday, March 24, 1906). Appeared in *The Book Peddler*, Summer, 1992, no. 17, p. 20

Appendix B

A contemporary newspaper article of 1903 describes a certain fondness for the library:

Evening Post, October 3, 1903 Jew-Babes in the Library⁴

“Lines of children reaching down two flights of stairs and into the street may not infrequently be seen at the Chatham Square branch of the New York Public Library. On the newsstands round about only Yiddish and Italian newspapers are sold. These are read by the grown-up people. Meanwhile the children are drawing books in English at the rate of 1,000 a day...Opened four years ago, the branch has 15,000 members. It stands third in the number of its circulation, and since its opening has ranked first in the proportion of history and science taken out. It is almost wholly used by Jews. A few Italians from Mulberry Street, a handful of Chinese from Mott and Doyer, and a scanty representation of other races come there occasionally.”

“The Jewish child has more than an eagerness for mental food; it is an intellectual mania. He wants to learn everything in the library and everything the librarians know. He is interested not only in knowledge that will be of practical benefit, but in knowledge for its own sake. Girls and boys under twelve will stand before the library shelves so much absorbed in looking

4 What a lovely term...!

up a new book that they do not hear when spoken to.; No people reads so large a proportion of solid reading. In fact, the librarians say that no other race reads so much fiction as the American.”

“Excuses for maltreated books give glimpses of home life. ‘The baby dropped it in the herring.’ is the favorite explanation for a soiled cover.”

“There is one little table at the rear of the ground floor, the only place in the building where one can sit and study. many boys and girls have graduated from that little table into universities having accomplished there the study necessary to pass their examinations. Several of the boys have entered Cornell and New York University. One girl graduated from the table into a scholarship at Barnard, where she took sophomore honors this year.”⁵

⁵ *Evening Post*, October 3, 1903.

Appendix C

In a recent issue of NYBC’s quarterly *The Book Peddler*, Dr. Patricia Glatt of Port Reyes, California and Jeff Graham, of Bolinas, California, recount the forming of their Yiddish Circle:

Dr. Glatt: “I initially drove forty minutes to attend a beginner’s Yiddish class, taught at the nearest Jewish community center. It became apparent to me that the instructor was speaking an Anglicized form of Yiddish which he had learned from his parents. He wasn’t very serious about teaching, certain that his students could never become fluent. I began to wonder if perhaps among the many individuals in my hometown who, I began to realize, were Jewish, there might not be someone who could teach me Yiddish in my own backyard.”

This is the birth of what became a large Jewish community, affectionately as “The Lost Tribe of West Marin”. With the help of a few Jewish friends, Patty initially collected 35 names. She sent them notices to determine if there was an interest in forming a local Jewish community. Of this group, 15 came to the first meeting. Their enthusiasm was matched only by their diversity of backgrounds and interest. Within ten months, the list had grown to include over 190 individuals and family members.

One of the first respondents to the survey was Jeff Graham, a 38-year old

horticulturist living in the nearby town of Bolinas...He responded that not only was he interested in the formation of a Yiddish class, but that he could teach it! He had learned Yiddish from his great-grandmother, a Byelorussian Jew who spoke a modified Litvak dialect. He went on to study Yiddish...at the University of Miami. He relates:

‘We are probably the last young generation to have a personal, intimate contact with a population for whom Yiddish language and culture were its primary means of expression. For me this creates an aspect of urgency to share the best of their culture which has been transmitted to me by family and friends. My main goal in joining The Lost Tribe was to find others with whom I could socialize in this old and vibrant language, even if I had to teach them how to speak it first!’

Realizing that it was important for their Yiddish teacher to advance his academic foundation, Jeff’s students sent him last December to “Yiddish by the Sea” the National Yiddish Book Center’s week-long Winter Program in Yiddish Culture in San Diego...of particular value was meeting fellow participant Marion Herbst, the author of the recently released textbook *Learning Yiddish in Easy Stages*. This has become the textbook used by Jeff’s students...Jeff concludes gleefully: “I never thought the day would come when I would walk down the country lane of our seaside village and be greeted twice within a few minutes by

loud voices yelling happily to me in Yiddish.”⁶

⁶ “The Lost Tribe of West Marin.” in *The Book Peddler*, summer, 1992, number 17, pp.58-9

Appendix D

This clipping from the New York Tribune gives an idea of Yiddish cafés in the Lower East Side at the turn of the century:

New York Tribune, September 30, 1900 In the East Side Cafés

At this season the subject of politics claims the chief attention of every one, but one kind of politics which is certainly as interesting if not as important as many is invariably overlooked. Newspapers keep us informed of the doings of the great parties; writers of fiction have made “saloon politics” an open book; the spellbinder receives attention; the wizard of the stump is exploited, and so on. But few people know of the sort of thing that goes on in the Russian quarter of the city.

There must be some clubs, for the gregarious insitnct is strong there as everywhere and the need is well supplied by the Russian cafés These people want no saloons. When they drink liquor, they drink at home in a properly well-bred fashion. But their tea they take in public and over it discuss the questions of the day for hours at a time. In these cafés there is much political work done, much earnest and clever talk on the problems of government. They are in a sense intellectual centers.

At most hours of the day and night until three o’clock in the morning, these places are filled with men who have come there to

sip Russian tea out of tumblers, meet their friends and discuss everything under heaven. They are the intellectual aristocracy of the East Side although aristocracy is a word tabooed among them, for they are almost all socialists or dreamy and peaceable anarchists. The socialistic feeling is widespread on the East Side and in these cafés most of it is fostered.

As one steps into them, he has taken a journey into another world. At the little bare tables there are groups of men with here and there a woman, all of them bearing the stamp of intelligence and earnestness on faces which testify only too plainly to the life of unnatural confinement led by most of them.

"She must have just come over," remarked an habitu  of the caf s the other evening of a girl sitting near, "she looks so fat and healthy." The characteristic face is pale, sharp-featured, intensely eager, and earnest - the face of one who thinks too much and breathes the air of heaven too little. They drink their tea slowly, biting off bits of the sugar in true Russian style instead of dropping it into the glass.

There is a general air of cheerfulness, however, The East Side loves a joke, and many go the rounds. There is always fun of some sort in the Russian caf s, together with the earnest discussion which characterizes the places. Games of one sort or another are frequently played. A group of men will gather in a corner and crowd together in such earnest conference that a timid visitor might suppose that they were

plotting the destruction of society, while in reality they are only watching a game of chess and discussing the good or bad points of the play. Being Russians, they are all chess players, and intellectual strain marks even their recreation. One might think that for overnervous people there might be a better prescription, but it seems the nature of these folk to live at high pressure.

Anyone who knows the East Side well will easily recognize a fair proportion of the men in any of the well-known caf s on any evening after eleven o'clock. At that time the intellectual East Side sets forth to enjoy itself. The humdrum worker is asleep, but these men cannot exist without companionship and this is the time to find it. When the theatres are closed and the meetings ended, the caf s begin to fill. If there has been a great socialist gathering, the talk is of that. If the brilliant playwright who gives the Jewish stage plays considerably stronger⁷ than those produced in English has just brought out a new work, that is the general theme.

Among the tables moves the proprietor. He is not a man who stands behind a counter or who holds himself aloof amid his guests. He is a true host, and in more than one caf  he is the chief attraction. The proprietors of these caf s are social powers in the neighborhood. They are clever, well-informed men who can talk well on any subject with their guests. Most of the clever men on the East Side patronize some one

⁷ (Strange grammar in the original article.)

caf  in particular, and the choice is frequently decided according to their personal liking for the proprietor. He must need be a bright man, for his visitors are men of education and ability.

Everybody is clever-looking; everybody knows everybody else; all is sociability and bright talk. The earnest groups who are talking politics retire to the corners, if there is not a special meeting in some room at the rear. Any one who wishes is at liberty to join in the talk. It is Bohemia; a socialist as well as literary free missionary prevails, Introductions are not necessary, beyond that of a smile and an appropriate remark.

To those who know it, this life is fascinating in the extreme. It is a phase which is little known, for few not born in it can lay aside preconceived notions so far as to permit themselves to recognize in the habitu s of these places their intellectual equals or superiors. If students and sociologists and workers in the political field would turn their attention to these happy hunting grounds of radical thinkers, they would find out how limited is their knowledge of conditions in this great city.

**Appendix E - Brookline
Zoning By-Laws**

Section 5.00 of the By-Laws gives the following information about regulations in the G-1.75 (CC) District:

Lot size (min.):	none
Floor Area Ratio (max.):	1.75
Lot width (min.):	none
Height (max.):	45 feet
Front yard (min.):	none
Side yard (min.)	none
Back Yard (min)	
{10 + L = Y} = 10 + 200 = 10 feet-----	
- - - - -	
10 10	
Landscaped open space: (min.)	none
Usable open space: (min.)	none

Finally, Section 5.09(d)[13] gives instructions specific to Coolidge corner about setbacks, matching roof lines and cornices, color and detail:

Specific standards for Beacon Street and Coolidge Corner General Business District:

{i} A front setback may be required greater than would be required under Section 5.54(b), if deemed necessary to preserve the line of existing facades where this is essential to the purposes of this Section.

{ii} Where preservation of the existing roof or cornice line of adjoining buildings is considered necessary to the

preservation of the desirable visual quality and property values of a particular part of Beacon Street, or the G1.75 (CC) District, conformance with that roof or cornice lines may be required; or in the case of new buildings permitted to be taller than such adjoining buildings, a setback of the building may be required at the level of the adjoining roof or cornice lines.

{iii} Where the nature of the following design features is considered significant to the preservation or enhancement of the desirable visual quality and property values of a particular part of Beacon Street, or of the G-1.75(CC) District, any new structure or alteration shall be harmoniously related to nearby pre-existing structures and the street facade in terms of color, texture, materials, scale, height setbacks, roof and cornice lines, signs, and design elements such as door and window size and location, door and window detailing, including materials for sills, lintels, frames and thresholds, and any other major design elements.

These regulations require the new construction to closely match adjacent structures on the same streetwall. As the library will occupy an entire block, albeit a small one, these regulations will apply only in the general sense.

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