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HARRIET FITCH LITTLE: Welcome to you *Design Now,* a podcast from the Harvard Graduate School of Design. My name is Harriet Fitch Little, and I'll be your host for this fifth episode. So far, the podcast has focused on holistic topics in design, health, social justice, climate change, and the housing crisis. In this episode, we're doing something a bit different and looking at a particular sort of building, the library.

Designers and architects spend their time thinking about how to fit the form of a building to its function. So what happens when that function changes? You don't need to go back too far, a decade perhaps, to remember a time when libraries were physical repositories of human knowledge. The best libraries were, logically, those with the most books in them. But today, it's possible to study a subject deeply without ever accessing a physical text.

So what is a library today if not a museum of obsolete artifacts? We're going to hear from three people who've taught at or studied at the Harvard GSD about how they've reckoned with this question. First up is Francine Houben, who previously taught a class at the GSD relating to city design.

With her firm Mecanoo, she's designed libraries in places including Birmingham in England, Delft in Holland, and Taiwan. She also led the redesign of New York Public Library. Despite wider questions over their function, Francine believes that libraries are the most important public building, as central to societies as cathedrals once were.

FRANCINE HOUBEN: Libraries are the most important public buildings, like cathedrals were many years ago. And I started to say this in, I think, 1995 when I did the very first library. You have to realize at that time and sometimes still people think libraries are not needed anymore. They are thinking, oh, then there will be no books anymore in the future, people can do everything online.

But I said, they will be different from the former libraries. They are so extremely important. So I also wanted to exaggerate that, but I really believe in that. It's really the place where everybody comes together. It's really designed for everybody, and it's very much part of the society.

Another thing is that every library is different. Like the first big one I did was for the Technical University in Delft. That's something totally different from a public library or a neighborhood library or a library in New York, Washington, or Tainan. They are three different cities and they need three different libraries. So I really try to observe what kind of collection we are dealing with, or what is the audience, who are the patrons, who are the users, and design the building according to that.

What the library is is of course extremely changing. You have to realize many libraries, even here the one-- I'm now in New York, the New York Public Library, or even the one in Washington, or other libraries worldwide were very much designed to impress people, and that people maybe have the feeling, oh, I'm not intelligent enough to enter this building. I think that should really change.

So of course it's a place of empowerment for everybody, but that the old libraries didn't feel often like that. And what I also try to do is that in a library are many different libraries, because there's different kind of populations with different needs. So for instance, the one we did in New York has maybe six different libraries in it with six different atmospheres where you can how you feel pleasant as a teenager or like a kid.

Or maybe you come into this library and you want to learn English as a second language. You want to be in a rather modest place in a quiet area where not everybody can see you. Or how looks the library where you want to learn to do business or where you want to just get a book, grab and go. So I try to make different atmospheres so not that the whole building has one atmosphere. Of course it should be coherent and feel still like one building.

And another thing I think what for me is extremely important that a lot of architects still think-- I'm now a little bit critical-- that it's a storage place for books. So they put everywhere books on the walls. But if they want to grab for a book, it should be accessible. You can't put books that high. Somebody has to stand or in a wheelchair and need to get a book, that's extremely important.

But in a way, a library is not a storage space of books. It's sharing knowledge. Of course that also happens by books. It also happens by computers. It also happens by just sitting next to somebody else sharing knowledge and get inspiration. And libraries are now about programming the space, what kind of lectures will be given there, or teaching languages, for instance in the United States, English as a second language. It's very important to have all these things happening in the library.

HARRIET FITCH LITTLE: We'll come back to some of Francine's other projects in more detail later. But for now, we'll linger a while on this existential question. What are libraries for? Joshua Ramus is founding principal of REX Architects. A GSD alumnus, he is best known as the architect of Seattle's Public Library which he designed together with Rem Koolhaas in the early 2000s.

At the time, the building was heralded as a library whose architects had seen the future and built a space to match it. But as you'll hear now, what that meant for Joshua was something very different to what it meant for Francine. He wanted to put the people of the library in charge.

JOSHUA RAMUS: I think it's important to note that my thinking about contemporary libraries is inextricably linked to our work in developing the Seattle Central Library. And when we started that project in 1999 in Seattle, it was obviously a really interesting, challenging moment to do such a project in that city. Its dotcom explosion. It was the center of Microsoft and RealNetworks and soon to be Amazon. So there was an incredible amount of intelligence and optimism about what technology could do and bring.

There was also equally huge support for the development of, basically, we're reincarnating the entire library system. And it passed with a bond measure that was wildly popular, and that was to renovate or build new the entire 28-branch library system. So there was both optimism in technology and huge support for libraries, and there was zero consensus on what a library should be.

By example, it went from as kind of retrograde as people saying, well, we should actually tear down the existing modernist library and rebuild the Carnegie Library which was originally on that site, to people in the tech world saying why do you need a physical space for books? We're doing everything we can to make books disappear. You should just take the money, buy every book known to man and put it in a storage facility.

There was, as I said, zero consensus on what the building should be. There was also a lot of very enlightened research on the digital divide and things like that, where technology was both solving problems, it was also exacerbating problems. And explorations were very practical in a compelling way.

One of the big studies that was being done through a philanthropic organization funded by Microsoft was looking at what the impacts of the fact that fiber cable was generally being installed by private entities. Those private entities, therefore, would go to places that were wealthy. And so you could just literally see that based on where fiber optics were getting added into cities, that they were leaving behind whole swaths of the population. So it was within that context that we started to think about a physical building.

And we convinced the library board to suspend design for four months and just to think with us and to hold seminars on issues about the digital divide, to go visit other libraries and see what worked and what didn't work, to have discussions about serendipity and how serendipity was incredibly important to libraries, and that technology actually, generally speaking, is designed to be incredibly precise and therefore almost at odds with serendipity. And so there were also a lot of discussions about how you can reintroduce serendipity into technology. Search engines that did it, by example, which were actually really interesting.

And it was through that exploration that we took, I think, two really important positions. The first is that libraries were no longer dedicated solely to the presentation of physical materials, books, but had to share its focus onto all important forms of media. That was the first half of that one.

And the second half was, well, that was incredibly important. Actually, maybe a more fundamental role for libraries was that within the explosion of accessible sources of information, curatorship of information would become ever more important. And that first point, that actually created a fundamental shift in how we propose to organize the building.

Basically, we argued the building had to be librarian-centric, not material or even information-centric. We had to create the ability for librarians to provide interdisciplinary help, search, support, working within this idea that-- we're seeing this in almost all spheres of exploration that there's a Pangaea of information.

For centuries, information got more and more discrete and more and more siloed. And all of a sudden, we're seeing that those silos are all interconnected. That the more you delve into mathematics, it becomes philosophy. The more you delve into physics, it becomes the same as social theory. The more you dive into architecture, it becomes botany.

The idea of explosion of information and the idea of interconnectedness meant that librarians-- you couldn't create library organization that forced them to stay docents, people that were locked in a fiefdom. That's a history librarian and as the history materials grow, they're just ever more isolated within their history fiefdom. We had to figure out an organization that could liberate them from that and allow them to come together in one centralized area we ultimately called the mixing chamber.

That idea then leads me to the second observation about libraries is that the library's mission was evolving rapidly then, but frankly it was always evolving. If you look at where it started in the United States, major libraries largely were from the Carnegie tradition and they had a certain purpose and they were dedicated to keeping young men off the streets. And so it was both access to information, but it was also boxing and physical training. And you just saw that through modernism and everything else, the evolution of the library was constant.

And it, of course, was like everything else. It was kind of exploding by the late 1990s, all these different social functions and responsibilities. And what we saw is that contemporary library design at that time was relying on a kind of generisism, universal flexibility. Make spaces that can be anything, because we don't know if this section of the library will be a children's collection or a magazine collection or a reading room. We just don't know.

So it started to make libraries that even though architecturally there are many really important libraries done in the 1990s, but many of them necessarily succumbed to that idea of flexibility and it started to make bland buildings. Buildings that while they might have architectural features that were compelling, as I said important buildings, that the spaces inside were generic.

And we argued then that in fact you needed to almost invert your idea of what flexibility was. Instead, we looked for clusters of uses that were very similar and we would put them into a compartment and then we would give that compartment incredible specificity. Very specific circulation, very specific architecture, very specific mechanical system, very specific idea of flexibility.

And so it almost, instead of providing generic spaces, we provided an array of very, very, very specific tailored spaces. They all had their own form of flexibility, but they were still very specific experiences, very specific architecture, very specific solutions. And our feeling was that that would ultimately provide a library much more freedom to grow and evolve than the other form. And I think our conclusion through the success of the Seattle library and that it's become a model, I think there's a lot of evidence that would support that.

HARRIET FITCH LITTLE: At the beginning of this episode, Francine spoke about the grandness of libraries being something to push back against. The silent reading room patrolled by severe librarians. But perhaps there is still a place for greatness in library design, and that's what our third speaker John Ronan believes.

John's firm designed the Independence Library and Apartments in Chicago, a public space that was also an affordable housing project. As he explains now, key to his thinking was a desire to rise above the uninspiring pragmatism that had defined many of Chicago's public projects.

JOHN RONAN: One thing I was trying to do with the Independence Library is bring back a sense of dignity that these spaces once had. After I graduated from Harvard, I got a Traveling Fellowship and I went around Europe looking at these libraries in Paris and other places, and they were world-class spaces. The great space, I would call it.

And Chicago had been building these cookie-cutter one-story libraries that were very efficient and economical, but they had lost some of the dignity of grand reading rooms of the past. And I wanted to restore that sense. Even though it was a very small budget for our project, I wanted to restore that sense of the great space and the dignity that these cultural spaces once had.

So the ceilings are very tall. They're 40 feet tall. A very uplifting space, and it has daylight coming in from three sides. Which I think is important in a library, how the daylight comes in. If you think about the Bibliotheque Sainte-Genevieve in Paris and how the light comes through these domes, it's a hallmark, let's say, of that kind of architecture.

Now what architects used to be when I started being an architect and what they are now is changing, and it's not the same typology as it once was. And it's in a state of flux, and so it's an interesting time to be a library architect. Because I guess the shorthand way I could put it, is that libraries were once designed for the books and now they're designed for the people.

And with the advent of the internet and computers and browsers and what have you, the role of the library in society is changing. So it's no longer this repository or place where I go to access knowledge, because a lot of that is readily accessible to everyone. It's becoming more of a community center. So instead of a place where I go to have knowledge transferred to me, let's say, it's a place where knowledge is generated.

So it's much more common now in libraries that they function more like community centers, and they'll have makerspaces. So the Independence Library, which we did, has a makerspace for teens with 3D printers and looms and what have you. It also has a recording studio where kids can do a blog or cut a record and so forth. So it's more about a community place, a place where the community comes together to generate content and not only consume content. But it's fun to be part of that transition. It's fun to think about the way ahead for libraries as society evolves and technology evolves.

HARRIET FITCH LITTLE: Although John clearly cares about the greatness of the space, you can see that his approach is in fact radical. It's grounded in the idea that a library is a place where connections are made and knowledge is generated. We'll return now to hearing from Francine who describes her experience of redesigning one of America's most beloved libraries, the New York Public Library.

FRANCINE HOUBEN: You have to realize there are different kind of libraries. For instance, maybe the most interesting example is the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue that has two buildings. It has a research library-- it's the one with the two lions-- and it has a circulating library diagonally across the street. And what is interesting-- I always explain it in a very simple way-- one library no books goes out at the research library, and the other one, the circulating library, of course the books are circulating.

But what is extremely interesting I think about the New York Public Library, first, they want to make it accessible for all. So they also start to digitize their research collection, which of course is an enormous kind of work to get that done. But also, they want researchers to use the collection. But also what we are trying to do by making also an extra entrance to be connected to make a new research center for young adults.

Because the big issue if you have such a great collection is that you want also the young generation and the future generations to use it. So for them, it's extremely important to also make an education center just across the street from the circulating library to stimulate young adults to go across the street, enter this building that doesn't just impress you but that you really want to use the collection what's inside that building.

So to make research-driven people and make the young generation who's interested in that and make it easy to do that, to stimulate them to do that, to seduce them to do that, was and still is for them and also for me a very important goal by also adjusting New York Public Library Research Library, the Stephen A. Schwarzman building it's named, to make it accessible also again for all.

But we also know that not everybody is interested in research. But especially also the young generation of people who thought, hey, this is not for me. This is just for professors. Now we also want to make the research libraries more accessible for a much wider audience.

HARRIET FITCH LITTLE: Although the circumstances of each library discussed here are very individual, the principles that the architects are applying in order to come up with their novel solutions are cross-disciplinary. We'll hear again from Joshua, who explains why the concept of critical naivety is so important when designing for any space whose function is going through a period of flux.

JOSHUA RAMUS: The experience on the Seattle Central Library completely formed all subsequent ways in which I approach architecture and the way our firm has grown in the way we do our work, and the belief in hyperrationality is at its core. The problem with the word hyperrational is that people almost immediately assume what we're talking about is a kind of newfangled version of form follows function. And it kind of misses the point, because frankly, form is also functional.

I'll give an example, the Saint Louis Arch. It has a function. It's a ceremonial and iconographic one, but it's a function and it could only really have been solved through that iconography. So we don't really buy into that whole idea, and so we've stopped really using the word hyperrational-- even though I think it is a good word, but it's just because it gets misunderstood a lot-- and we've started talking about critical naivete.

And what we mean by that is the idea that I think there's so much in architecture, but I think probably in all fields of inquiry, that has been handed down. It becomes convention. It becomes gospel, and this is how you do it, and it makes sense. And no one continues to challenge it to figure out if it, first, was its convention correct, and second, is it still applicable?

And this idea of hyperrationality or critical naivete is that you just challenge things and you get as many likeminded people from other disciplines-- so in our case as architects, it's us and it's our engineers, and if it's a performing arts center, it's our acoustician and our theater consultant. And we also ask advisors from the arts world to go back and to challenge and to question the first principles of the particular problems that building type is currently facing.

And so in Seattle at that time, we were looking at libraries and the proliferation of materials and the implications of new forms of technology and search engines and the internet and everything else. And so that created a new challenge, and so we got all these people together to go back to first principles and think about it together and take positions on those principles.

And that really comes back to what I said about the library board being so sophisticated, but also saying we're going to do something but we have to be able to look the citizens of Seattle in the eye and be able to explain to them why we did it. So we took very clear positions on all the information we were getting, and then we looked for ways in which we could make a physical embodiment of those positions.

And because the positions were so clear, it was also very easy to critique and to iteratively refine the architecture that followed. I mean, Seattle, the building, in a way it looks nuts. But what's interesting about it is, and I think it's a great example of the results of hyperrationalism or critical naivete, is that everyone knows every reason why that building is the way it is, from its basic organization to why the boxes are pushed around on the site to why the facade has a diagrid which was for structural reasons.

Everything can go back to a very clear rational exploration that in aggregate took us to a place that was simply nowhere people had gone before. But we knew it was highly performative and we knew why we were doing it.

HARRIET FITCH LITTLE: This idea of finding a library that works for the community it serves is equally important for John Ronan who will now explain how he thought about this in the context of Chicago. You'll see again that despite his talk of wanting to make libraries feel like great buildings, the way he envisages that is a world away from the austere solemnity of older institutions.

JOHN RONAN: Libraries are evolving, moving away from being a warehouse repository for physical books and more towards orienting themselves to the community. And so they're much more tailored to the needs of the individual community. Whereas if you think back at the libraries, let's say the Carnegie libraries, those were beautiful buildings, but somewhat cookie cutter in their mission. And you would go in and you'd have librarians there waiting for someone to walk up and ask a question.

And that's all changed. It's not about serving the books anymore. It's about serving the community. So in the Independence Project we have a big grand staircase, sort of a tribune stair where community lectures and events can happen and children's story time. So it invites the community to really take ownership of the place. And it's all glazed on the street, so I can look in and see the activity.

Then there's also a community space there that operates as part of the library during the day, but it operates independent of the library at night. So people can rent that out for community events, meetings, and so forth. And so if I use Independence as an example, the old libraries were largely opaque on the outside because they were protecting the books. So daylight was something somewhat dangerous, because the ultraviolet spectrum degrades books.

So if you look at an old library from 100 years ago or even 50 years ago, it would be mostly solid and opaque on the outside with smaller windows. And now it's kind of reversed. So the Independence Library is all glass. I mean, the entire facade is glazed and you can look in and see all the different activities that are happening. That then invites you as a member of the community to come in and join in.

And there's a real emphasis-- shifting that emphasis from the books to people, there's much more sensitivity now to different age groups. So the library wants to serve people of different needs, at different income levels, and also different ages. So there's areas for kids, there's areas specifically for teens, and there's areas for adults and senior citizens. There's areas for people that don't have computers at home and they can come and use the computers or even rent them out.

And so the library used to be introverted and inward-focused and largely opaque on the exterior, more of a monument, and now it's more outwardly focused, more inviting, welcoming space. Where the old libraries tend to be somewhat intimidating or could be intimidating to some members of the community that maybe feel like they don't belong there, but now I think there's an effort to make them more comfortable and welcoming, a place where you'd want to spend time and learn new things and even generate content that you could share with other people. So I think it's been a sea change in the design of libraries.

HARRIET FITCH LITTLE: So libraries are places where people with limited access to computers can do the things that most of us do at home, filling out online forms, sending emails. There's a clear parallel here with the earlier function of public libraries. The richest in society would have had no need for them. They'd have had access to books at home, even whole libraries of them sometimes.

So this function of libraries is also a reminder of how important the people who staff them are. I've seen firsthand that my local librarians are as skilled at guiding people through online bureaucracy as they are at finding books. We'll hear again from Joshua Ramus who expands on the importance of libraries for disenfranchised people.

JOSHUA RAMUS: For a certain segment of the population, specifically the disenfranchised segment of the population, public libraries still are their primary access to information. It used to be because books were the access to information, it was about books. Now it's been replaced by technology.

But for many, many people who don't have a computer-- that may sound shocking to many people listening, but there are still many, many, many people who don't have a computer, who don't have a smartphone, or if they do, they don't have access to internet or they don't have access to fiber connections, for whom a library still is their main point of access to what most people take for granted.

And you can see that in the Seattle Central Library. If you go into the mixing chamber at any time of day, any time of year, it's packed, and a huge number of the people on that floor are doing things just as banal as trying to get online to do their taxes or watching a movie. So I will say that all of the more changing the paradigm things I said in the beginning, that part hasn't changed and it can't change and shouldn't change because it's a lifeline for a certain segment.

I will say that from a social standpoint-- I don't know that this is a universal problem, I think it's certainly an American problem-- that urban centers are becoming privatized, that public space is becoming privatized. In Seattle-- I should say as a footnote, I'm from Seattle. So if I'm critical, allow me to be critical. I think I have a certain license to be critical of the city as someone who grew up there. In 1999 when we started, there was basically no free public space in the city. In fact, there were very few free exterior public spaces in the city.

And for a city that is so socially oriented and which has generally inclement weather, that was a fatal flaw. And when we were doing this research phase with the board and the library, one major observation that came out of that was we had all this stuff that they felt they needed, is that we claimed a lot of stuff out of what they needed to make sure, yes, there was an important reading room.

We made the decision to put it very, very high up in the building, because that was typically an advantage that most people don't have. And so we felt it was important if we were going to do a building that was 11 stories, that at least when you get to one of the highest floors that should still remain public as an important acknowledgment of the empowerment of the building.

And the second function that we carved out of all the stuff was actually a non-function. We called it the living room. And while it was within the security line of the library, the purpose of the living room was to be that free public space. And that it would provide a space in which, while behavior had to conform to certain expectations-- you had to be at least dressed to X point, you couldn't bring in a bag larger than Y-- contrary to what you might expect, the librarians actually said speaking loudly was OK. They in fact encouraged. They wanted people to be excited and to talk and not to feel restrained.

So as long as you abided by a pretty liberal code of conduct, you could do whatever you wanted in there. You could have a chess club. You could rehearse your high school play. And that the building should accommodate that in a really profound way.

And so the two most important spaces in the building are almost at opposite ends of the building. One is at grade, and that's the living room, and one's at the top of the building and that's the reading room. And they're the two grandest spaces in the whole building with what we hope very inspiring, large, beautiful, but also equally accessible environments as a way of the city fulfilling this underrepresented social need.

Deborah Jacobs, who was the city librarian at that time and was along with the board our main client, as much as she is an exceptional librarian, she's an even more exceptional proponent of public process. And she designed and then demanded we engage a very intensive public process where we were constantly doing a call and response with the public where we would talk about an idea and present it. We'd get feedback. We'd go back. We'd develop it, and then we would come back and present it.

And she was clear, we are collectively not always going to do what we heard. But we as the professionals-- and I included within that very importantly the library staff-- there are certain things that we know and understand and certain trade-offs that we can evaluate that the general public might not be able to evaluate. But it's important that we come back and we say, this is what we heard you say, and this is what we've done in response, and we may have included the idea, we may not have, but this is why.

And what was interesting-- this might sound like a bit of a segue into things that don't talk about social responsibility. But strangely, what it meant is that even though the building didn't look like anything anyone in Seattle had ever seen before, and to be honest I think there was a lot-- I know there was a lot of trepidation and certainly criticism before the doors opened about what the experience was going to be.

Once people started to use it, they loved it and they said it was of Seattle. Even though, again, there was no precedent for it, but it was a product of such a legitimate engaged process with the citizens that it was quote, "contextual" but in a way that I think is way more important than the way architects conventionally talk about contextualism.

I'm going to channel Deborah Jacobs, the city librarian, and if I don't literally quote her, it certainly would be close, which is libraries are simply the most democratic institution we have and they have to embody democratic process. They have to empower democratic process. And that also means they have to be designed through democratic process. And if you design them through democratic process, you are most likely to create, the result will be one that continues to beget democratic process.

HARRIET FITCH LITTLE: So the design of libraries is changing to meet future needs, but don't get the impression that there's ever going to be a one-size-fits-all solution. Well now hear from Francine Houben again about the importance of local knowledge, which she discusses in relation to her library project in Taiwan.

FRANCINE HOUBEN: To understand all these different cultures, it's very much about observing. For instance, the library we did in Taiwan-- and first of all, what I always do when I'm in a city or wherever I am, I also visit the local library because I think it's nice to see them.

But of course, we also know the Taiwanese culture, for instance, the kids always take off the shoes before they go into the children department. Or what is extremely important are the elderly in Taiwan, so they have a whole department often on the same floor as the children for the elderly.

And they still really like to read the newspapers, so we create beautiful reading tables just with Taiwanese Chinese newspapers. Or in Taiwan it's important all the comics. They have an extreme collection of comic books, so we really made a department just for the comic books.

And another thing what I really liked in Taiwan is that cooking is extremely important. I think food and cooking is anyway extremely important in libraries, so we also make a space for cooking classes. That we tried to do also in the Netherlands in the LocHal we did in Tilburg to make also these cooking classes.

That was, at that time, still not possible. But we are still prepared because we really want it. Because you have to learn that now, especially in Europe and of course already here in the United States, we have so many immigrants, the whole melting pot of people coming together in the library. Cooking is one of the things that really brings everybody together. And we try even that, to integrate that if possible-- it's not always possible-- in libraries.

One other thing I want to mention is for me the local climate. For instance, we made on top of the Washington Library there, the Martin Luther King Memorial Library, a beautiful garden and a huge canopy to protect you from the rain and the sun, because Washington has this subtropical climate. I want to create a space what is not air conditioned and that you can sit outside and is also adding this roof garden on top of the building is also very pleasant for the heat stress.

We did something similar but smaller here in New York, the New York Public Library. But for instance in Taiwan, in Tainan, the big library, we didn't put it on the roof, but we made a sunken garden. Because it makes much more sense in Taiwan to have your garden in a lower area, again because it can be extremely warm in Taiwan, especially in the summer. And to have protected again from the rain and the sun. It's really nice. So what is a library without a garden?

HARRIET FITCH LITTLE: All the library projects discussed here present a contradiction of sorts. They're libraries that have thought about the future, but that future is now in the past. If anyone's starting from scratch today, the challenges and opportunities will have evolved once again. We'll hear once more from John Ronan about what might come next.

JOHN RONAN: If the library of the future is a hub of learning, I would as an architect like to engage with people that are experts in these different ways of learning. I think where the library is in its evolution is it's hit on some of these already. But I could see the library of the future being part recreation center, part school, part innovation center, part music center, where all these different things are happening.

So the library is expanding beyond books right now. And so it's, in this evolution I would say, it's still in its infancy. It still has books, but it's moving away from that and now it's like, well, we're generating content in the form of podcasts or making things in the makerspace. And so it's moving away from a more passive, one-dimensional form of knowledge acquisition, to more active generation of content and learning by doing.

And so the economy is sometimes called the innovation economy, or there's this notion-- I did an Innovation Center at IIT, and basically it's a place for interdisciplinary collaboration between students and faculty of different departments. And I think it's almost common knowledge now that this is-- people with different forms of expertise working together can achieve more.

And the university has had an epiphany, not unlike the library world. And the epiphany was, well, the university used to be a place where knowledge was transferred. Have things put in my head. And with the advent of the internet and changes in technology, the mission of the university has changed. It's no longer that place. It's a place where knowledge is generated.

And so there's this notion across society that we're in a period of innovation where it's not so much what you know, but it's about what you can do with what you know, let's say. And the library has a really important role to play in that evolution. It's always taught you things to know, but now it's becoming more about what you can do with what you know.

HARRIET FITCH LITTLE: Thanks to all our interviewees for speaking about their work on libraries for this episode. You can find out more about the buildings they've worked on via the show notes. If this is your first time tuning in, make sure to also listen back to our first full episodes on health, social justice, climate change, and the housing crisis.

This podcast was produced and edited by Maggie Janik and hosted by Harriet Fitch Little. To learn more about the Harvard Graduate School of Design, visit us at gsd.harvard.edu and follow us on social media at Harvard GSD.

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