

Application to Library Lab

Project title: COLD STORAGE

**Proposed by Jeffrey T. Schnapp (RLL/GSD) and
Matthew Battles (Associate Director, metaLAB);**

Background and Introduction

For the past two years, with support from the Library Lab, metaLAB has run a series of hybrid seminars/design studios on the past, present and future of libraries. These began in 2012 with *Bibliotheca*, a course co-taught by Jeffrey Schnapp (RLL) and John Palfrey (HLS); and continued over the subsequent two semesters in the form of *Library Test Kitchen* (co-taught by Ann Whiteside [director, Loeb Library, GSD], Jeffrey Schnapp and Jeff Goldenson [Library Innovation Lab]). From the outset, the courses in question sought to build a productive space of engagement and design studio that tied together the challenges that Harvard is confronting with regard to the reorganization of its library system, emerging developments in the domain of digital libraries (Europeana, DPLA), and a larger worldwide conversation regarding the future of libraries as physical institutions.

The results of the above initiatives have been numerous. Among them are two DPLA-funded initiatives: extraMUROS (winner of the DPLA beta sprint competition in 2011) and Library Observatory (<http://www.libraryobservatory.org/>), winner of a 2nd round DPLA competition. They include experiments such as the fall 2012 LABrary, a popup library space that was run at 92 Mount Auburn Street, involving courses, curatorial micro-exhibitions, a speakers' series, and project fairs. They also include student projects that have gone on to win awards: among them, the top GSD award for M.Arch students (Ben Brady's *cold spot* project [1st prize, 2011-2012]). These and other initiatives have received recognition in the press, from the architectural press (*Metropolis*) to the specialized library press (*Library Journal* and *Project Information Literacy*) to *Harvard Magazine* (July/Aug. 2012). Last but not least, these initiatives have resulted in a book on the future of libraries by Matthew Battles and Jeffrey Schnapp entitled *The Library Beyond the Book*, forthcoming with Harvard University Press in 2014.

We are applying to the Library Lab to undertake a new initiative that builds upon the past two years of work. The initiative in question assumes the form of a video/database/web documentary on the subject of the Harvard Depository (HD), entitled *COLD STORAGE*, to be realized within the framework of a two-unit hands-on studio course offered in the spring semester of 2013-2014 at the GSD in consultation and collaboration with the HD's leadership.

Though imperceptible to most campus users, the HD is of course the core facility of the university's library system. Within it reside the 8 million books, pamphlets,

posters, papers, films, magnetic tapes, photographs and microforms that make up the bulk of university collections. Conversations with the HD leadership and visits to its facility in Southboro have been integral to the past two years' work, not to mention providing an eye-opening experience for participating students (over 60 in all). It is perhaps worth noting that *The Library Beyond the Book* concludes with visual/verbal essay on the HD.

We would now like to translate those conversations into an experimental documentary that explores the universe of deep storage facilities like the HD, the sorting and retrieval systems that sustain them, the people who work there, the physical and architectural universe inhabited by the objects being stored, and the stories that they tell. The documentary in question will be shared not only with the Harvard community but distributed via multiple channels (such as a purpose-built website, documentary film festivals and library congresses).

The main components of the project are two-fold: a conventionally produced video documentary (30 mins. approximately) that dialogues with Alain Resnais' *Toute la mémoire du monde* (*All the World's Memory*; 1956) and a cluster of video shorts that excavate one or another feature of the HD, including interviews with personnel, a portrait of the book processing pipeline and van delivery system, the building's architecture, lighting and cooling systems. These contents will be made available for expansion, annotation and augmentation via Mozilla Popcorn, Zeega and other interactive, database formats on the project website. Much of the work involving the development of the core documentary, the video shorts, and the annotations and augmentations will be carried out by students (spring 2014). In the post-production phase of the project we envisage others that will be commissioned and involve experts in various library-related fields (fall 2014).

The HD

Though largely invisible to patrons, the HD is situated twenty five miles from campus atop a remote hill, within a guarded compound near Harvard's primate labs. From outside, it is a faceless emplacement of corrugated concrete. Seven storage modules have been built to date; eight additional slots remain available. The HD is an analog server farm, comparable to and distinct from the actual server farms Harvard maintains in other off-site locations. It delivers physical packets of information via a pipeline of vans that shuttle back and forth to campus four times a day at approximately 60 miles per hour.

As in patrician libraries of the early modern era, artifacts that reach the Depository are sorted by size once removed from the plastic bins in which they arrive. Each is baptized with a color dot, indicative of a volumetric rank. But here the avoidance of voids and pinpoint placement trump the patrician dream of a taxonomically or chromatically harmonious shelf.

The HD is a world designed for the eyes of laser scanners, inventory tracking systems, and mechanically-aided acts of retrieval. Its corridors are narrow and tall, devised to accommodate not inquisitive readers but the inhuman girth and reach of electrical lifts. The shelves are adjustable, calibrated to the varying dimensions of acid-neutral boxes contained in trays of exactly equal depth. Only the bottom fifth are visible to the pedestrian; laterally so, because the coded sidewalls of trays, not the spines of books, face outward. The HD reduces its sparsely-distributed human agents to parts in a cybernetic machine that speaks a language not of authors, subjects, and titles, but of barcode label identifiers and the ID numbers they encode. But even this networked state of the depository is a difference in degree and not kind, in vernacular rather than in tongue, from the state of the library in different times and places. Whether acting as mausoleum, database, or civic making space, libraries of different times and places can be understood as networks compounded of humans, systems, and materials affordances, evolving to preserve and circulate things called books. HD's differences are of degree, albeit in extremis—to make the minimum viable use of humans as agents; to advance the interests of, and the prospects for, information systems and schema.

Cold Storage

As indicated above, the proposed video project will be designed around two main layers: the first, will assume the form of a conventional linear documentary with relatively high production values; the second will assume the form of a set of ethnographic and other in-depth inquiries into features of the depository with lower production values. The two will be integrated via a website that uses the floor plan of the HD as its organizing structure.

We envisage the first component as a meticulous but playful contemporary reworking of Alain Resnais' now classic documentary short on the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *Toute la mémoire du monde* (*All the World's Memory*; 1956). Resnais' evocative tracking of the trajectory followed by a book from the time of its arrival at the BN to its delivery in the reading room will serve as a counterpoint for an exploration of the HD as a new kind of physical warehouse of information, made up of large numbers of analog objects but inconceivable without a digital infrastructure and retrieval system.

Shot during the spring of 2014, this core feature of the project will mix a voice-over narrative (crafted by the project directors working with students), an ethnography of HD workers (in the form of on-site interviews carried out by students), footage of the defining processes and spaces that constitute the HD, and the tracking of a book's "bi(bli)ography" within the HD.

As also noted above, a wide array of side projects, branching narratives and ethnographic and interview-based material will be developed as part of the structure of the two-unit studio and will be integrated into a web environment that allows visitors to "explore" the world of library deep storage facilities.

The documentary work will be shot in digital HD with a professional quality video camera, a GoPro Hero 3 (for simultaneous secondary shots), several pocket HD video devices, and 2 Zoom H4M recorders. It will be assembled, edited and produced in Final Cut Pro X. Whenever possible, existing metaLAB equipment resources will be employed, but these are limited, so there is a need for some investment in equipment to support the project (cameras, dollies, tripods, software).

Budget

We have managed to secure \$4,500 in funds from the Provostial Fund for Arts and Humanities to cover 1/3rd of our budget needs. We are seeking an additional \$9,000 match from the Library Lab to cover the remaining portion of the budget.

Equipment: metaLAB has a DSLR camera, some lighting equipment, some HD pocket video devices, a hand-held mic, a pico dolly and stands, as well as editing work stations. Execution of the project will require the following equipment purchases: 1 Sennheiser EW 112 series wireless lavalier mic + receiver kit (to minimize ambient sound interference); 1 DSLR steady cam unit like the Merlin2 (to enable walking/strolling interviews without camera shake and bobble); 1 Cinevate Atlas Slider for tracking / crane / pulley shots; and 1 wide-angle lens for shooting in confined spaces; and 1 high-power LED light mount for on-the-go lighting; 1 basic reflector disk for fill light. We have priced the major items on the rental market and the costs of rental would exceed purchase costs. SUBTOTAL: \$3900.

Transportation and logistics: The Southboro site is located 25 miles from Cambridge. We estimate the need for five class site visits/shoots, with a per visit cost of \$120 (van rental and fuel). Some equipment for tracking and dolly shots that cannot be realized with the Atlas Slider will also be required. SUBTOTAL: \$900.

Personnel: We envisage four support personnel for the realization of the project with expertise in the areas of video production, library and information science, digital media and web development. They are:

Cristoforo Magliozzi, a documentary filmmaker (the former videographer in the Obama White House) will serve as technical assistant, editor and project producer. We are budgeting for 50 hours of his time (8 hours per week over twelve weeks) x \$50 per hour (\$4800).

Caitlin Christian-Lamb, a recent graduate of Simmons College's M.S. Library and Information Science, will serve as project manager and will provide support for the two unit studio course at the GSD. We are budgeting for 50 hours of her time at \$30 per hour (\$1500).

Pablo Barria and *Jessica Yurkovsky*, two web programmers and development specialists with extensive experience with web video and advanced degrees in

architecture, will develop the project website. We are estimating 8 hours per week of their time over six weeks x \$50 per hour (\$2400)

SUBTOTAL for personnel: \$8700

Total resources needed: \$13,500

minus funding received from the Provostial Fund for Arts and Humanities: \$4,500

Total budget request: \$9000