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The Library  
Beyond the Book

metaLABprojects

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## SCENARIOS

figures instead of just collecting. Amenable to the whims of individual or collective thinking, speculative probing or perceived need, generative in character, a countermeasure to what Walter Benjamin refers to as “the mild boredom of order;” it conforms to criteria that are exploratory rather than definitive, playful rather than predictable.<sup>48</sup> The programmable library delivers provisional lines of inquiry and lanes of action that can provide the basis for future acts of reprogramming.

However peaceable it may seem, the library remains a scene of ceaseless struggle between epistemology and the material: here, intellectual repletion and physical constraint meet in suspension, like oil and water bubble and pool without intermingling. The paradigmatic apprehension of the contents of the thoroughly-cataloged library is computationally trivial. And yet in its granularity and scale, the book stack resists immediate human comprehension. The computer, by contrast, loses purchase precisely where we humans excel: in the perception of pattern amid noise, in the identification of the camouflaged figure against cluttered ground, in the oblique sorting and sifting of titles hovering at threshold of an information seeker’s peripheral vision. Browsing the library—seeking not only sense but inspiration in the flux—is not only a joy; it’s also an efficient Turing Test, sorting the human qualities from the machinic.

It was Horace Walpole who put the word “serendipity” into circulation; his coinage was inspired by a Persian tale about three princes “who were always making discoveries, by accident or sagacity, of things they were not in quest of.”<sup>49</sup> Longstanding modes of scholarly and contemplative activity have evolved to incorporate serendipitous drift as method—as an exploratory mode quite different from, indeed opposed to, notions of fortune. Where luck is necessarily random but fickle and capricious in the bestowal, serendipity relies on the sagacity Walpole mentions, a “prepared mind,” in Pasteur’s

**Neogymnasia – libraries are built that revive the ancient ideal of the gymnasium (γυμνάσιον) as a place of physical, intellectual, and social exertion. Neogymnasia combine a gym with places of conversation and study and lecture halls. Staffed by trainer-librarians-public health workers, it provides counseling and testing. (JS, MB)**

# Scenarios

- Living Mausoleum
- Neocloister
- Database
- Accumulibrary
- Programmable Library
- Libraries of the Here and Now