

Public Library Architecture in Trans-Atlantic Comparison (1880-2010)

Initiative: Postdoctoral Fellowships in den Geisteswissenschaften an Universitäten und Forschungsinstituten

in Deutschland und den USA

Ausschreibung: Postdoctoral Fellowships in den Geisteswissenschaften an Universitäten und

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This project seeks to research public library architecture in the United States and Germany during the time after the establishment of public libraries (after c. 1880). Through seven case studies, this project examines the question of what constitutes the characteristics of the public library and how expansions or new constructions relate to existing or past architecture. The project also scrutinizes how architecture either seeks out or avoids an encounter with history or architectural history, and what relationship urban society has with its library buildings. In the end, this investigation aims to contribute to the historiography of public library architecture - which remains in its very early phases in Germany - and to enable a critical understanding of public architecture and its relationship to history. A comparison of German and American public libraries makes sense because the public library system of the USA has been an important reference point for Germany since the institutionalization of public libraries in the latter country. Both countries' approaches toward existing or past architecture - be it destroyed during war or demolished later - offer an interesting object of study for the question of the meaning of architectural history and historical consciousness. Serving as case studies for the research project are libraries that are partly no longer preserved, but for which there exist extensions, or preserved libraries with expansions: specifically, the Central Library Cambridge (1888/2009); Volksbücherei und Lesehalle Görlitz (1907/2009); Stadtbücherei Hannover (1931/1956/1978); Seattle Central Library (1906/1960/2004); Zentralbibliothek Köln (1979); Chicago Public Library (1897/1991); Stadtbücherei Münster (1993). Overall, this project is motivated by the question of how society's relationship with architecture informs its conception of history - and, conversely, how its relationship with history informs its architecture.

Projektbeteiligte

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