

# THE FREEDOM OF THE [OP]PRESS

## MANIFESTO

Situated in Oxford's hyper-commercialised city centre, 'Freedom of the [OP] Press' reclaims the private boundary of the Westgate mall for the public and grassroots movements. Responding to the modern 'reading recession' and the spatial isolation of the civic archive, this intervention transforms the hidden library from a passive repository into a kinetic factory for civic protest. By piercing the commercial façade with a parasitic steel bridge, the design integrates a screen-printing facility that democratises knowledge. It provides vital social agency by replacing consumption with mechanical production, empowering citizens to reclaim their spatial rights and project uncensored voices back onto the streets.



## SPATIAL ACTIVATION: WESTGATE DIORAMA



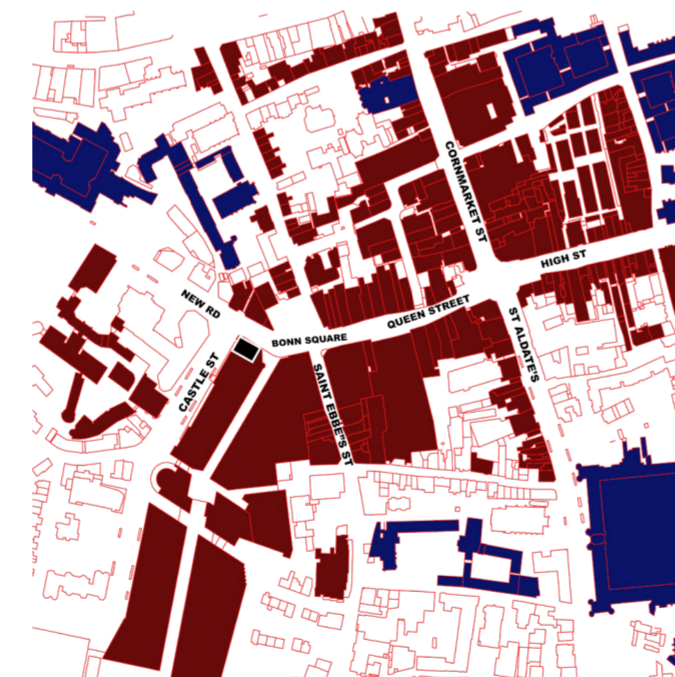
## THE WESTGATE MALL

One of the main powerhouses is Westgate mall located in the very center of the city alongside the historic colleges. The main Oxford Public Library happens to be located in the Westgate Mall, which creates a contrast of the commercial versus the public space. The project investigates how we can bring back the importance of the library and build a stronger identity.

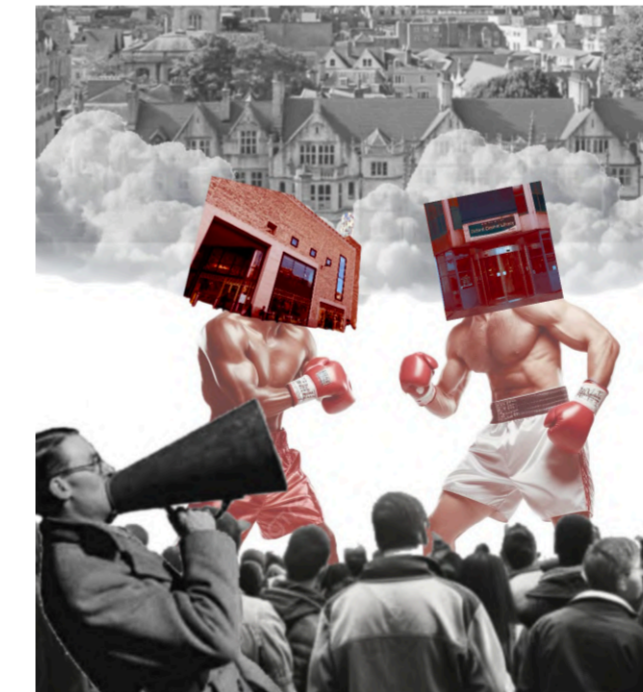
## WHY IS THE CITY'S MAIN LIBRARY A WELL-KEPT SECRET?

What used to be the storage of accessible knowledge became shadowed by consumerism. What this project revealed is that most people in Oxford do not know about the main Public Library of Oxford even though it is right in the center of the city on the most active road of the city. What was observed was that the main entrance to the Library is located within the Westgate and wasn't very noticeable. Whereas previously it had its own clear entrance. What this Diorama represents is how the library can become the heart of the city rather than just a storage place. The project aims to make the library part of the street and the street come into the library.

## COMMERCIAL VS. COLLEGES



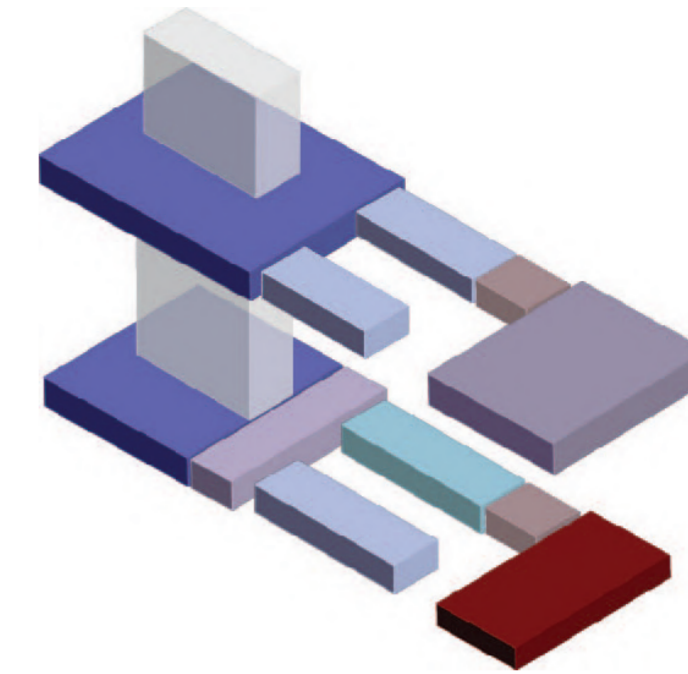
## THE FIGHT FOR THE CITY



## THE SPATIAL MONOPOLY OF THE GATEKEEPERS

Historically, the curation of knowledge was an exclusive privilege, sequestered within private institutions and heavily restricted by class. We can still see a spatial divide still visible across Oxford's urban fabric. The present city is still rich with historic colleges which attracts students and tourists. However how does Oxford work as a city that is designed for its citizens? The city lacks public spaces that are truly accessible and free to people. The current center of the city has turned into a commercial hotspot, people have less and less public spaces that the citizens can feel like they are not controlled.

## CURRENT LIBRARY ZONES



*"Bad libraries build collections, good libraries build services, great libraries build communities"*

by R. David Lankes, a professor of Library Science

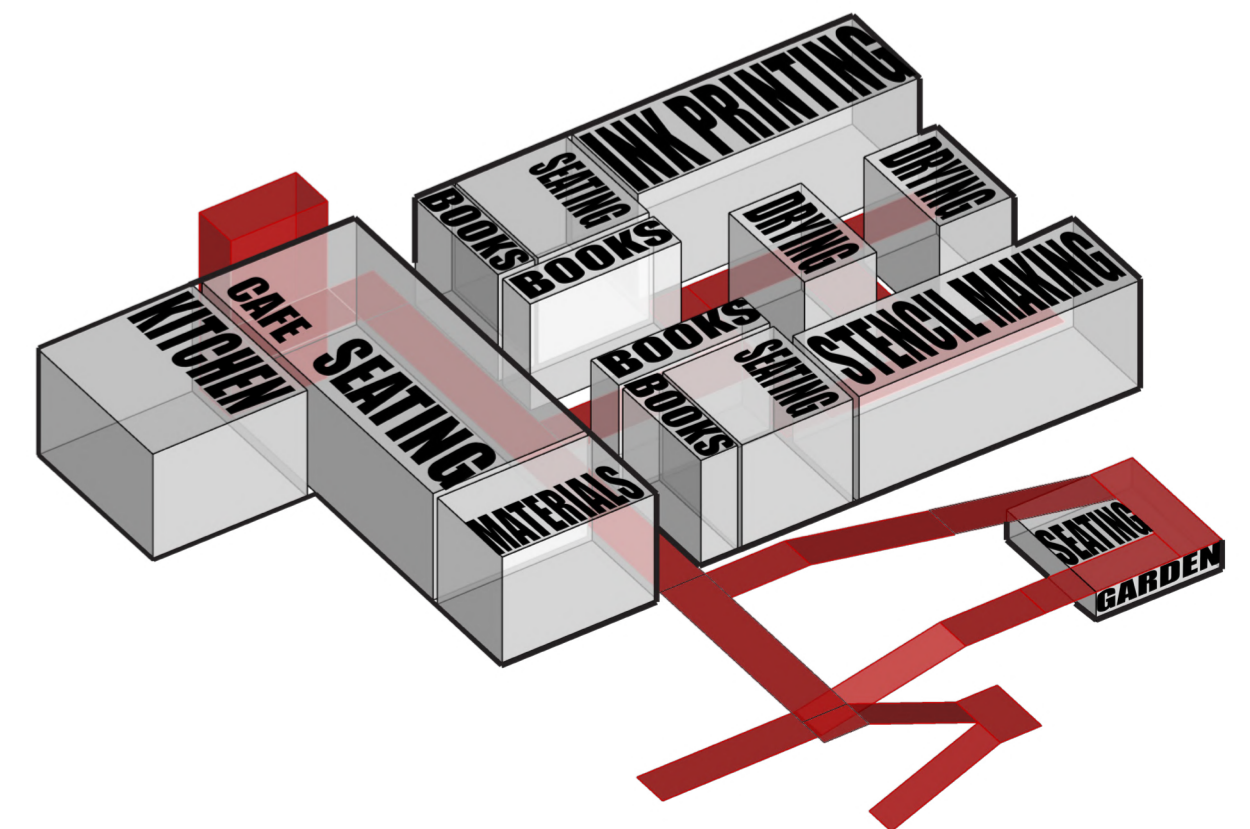


## PEOPLE'S DESIRE FOR A COMMUNITY

The current library provides services for citizens and provides a safe place for activities however most of the activities do not include reading anymore. The library provides a civic hub for people to go to. Now in a digital age people desire public places to go to find community and the library can provide that but less and less people use it.

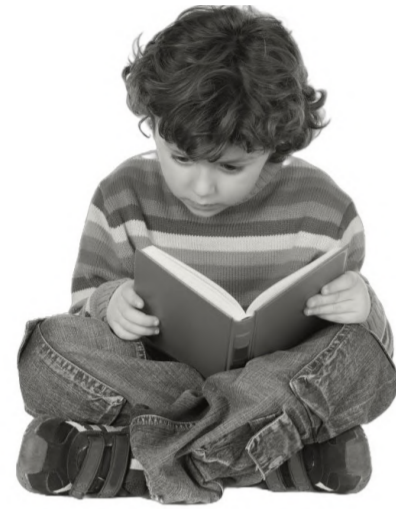
## THE 21st CENTURY LIBRARY

How can we design a library in a time where every book is accessible online and we have access to any type of entertainment in the reach of our hands. This project takes the standard and creates an unconventional library that gives back the right of the city to the people. The main part of the library will stay but the current Childrens Library will be transformed into a Democratic Printing zone where people can print posters and then put them up on the streets.



## THE READING RECESSION

A strong democracy depends on informed citizens, and historically, public libraries have made this possible by giving everyone **free access to knowledge**. However, as James Marriott highlighted on the Radical podcast, we are currently facing a 'reading recession.' People are reading significantly less, although the public library creates an easy access it does not make people participate in it. **This project aims to fight that decline.** Instead of a traditional, quiet library, the intervention proposes an **active, democratic space that breaks through normal commercial boundaries.** By pushing reading out into the public street in unexpected ways, the design makes picking up a book easy, accessible, and an everyday part of community life.



**4.4%**

Year-on-year drop in books read. The first structural decline recorded since 2008.

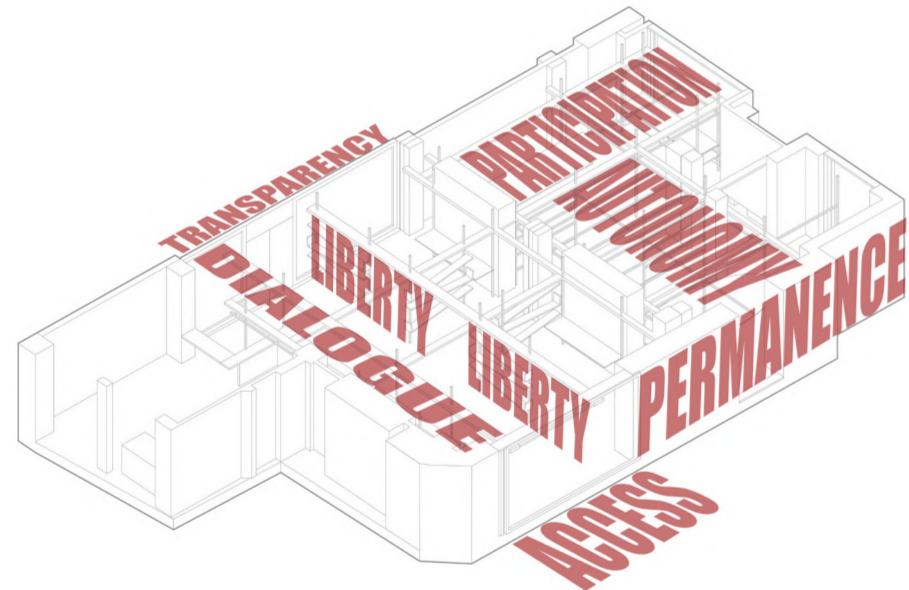
**1.15 million**

Fewer books read

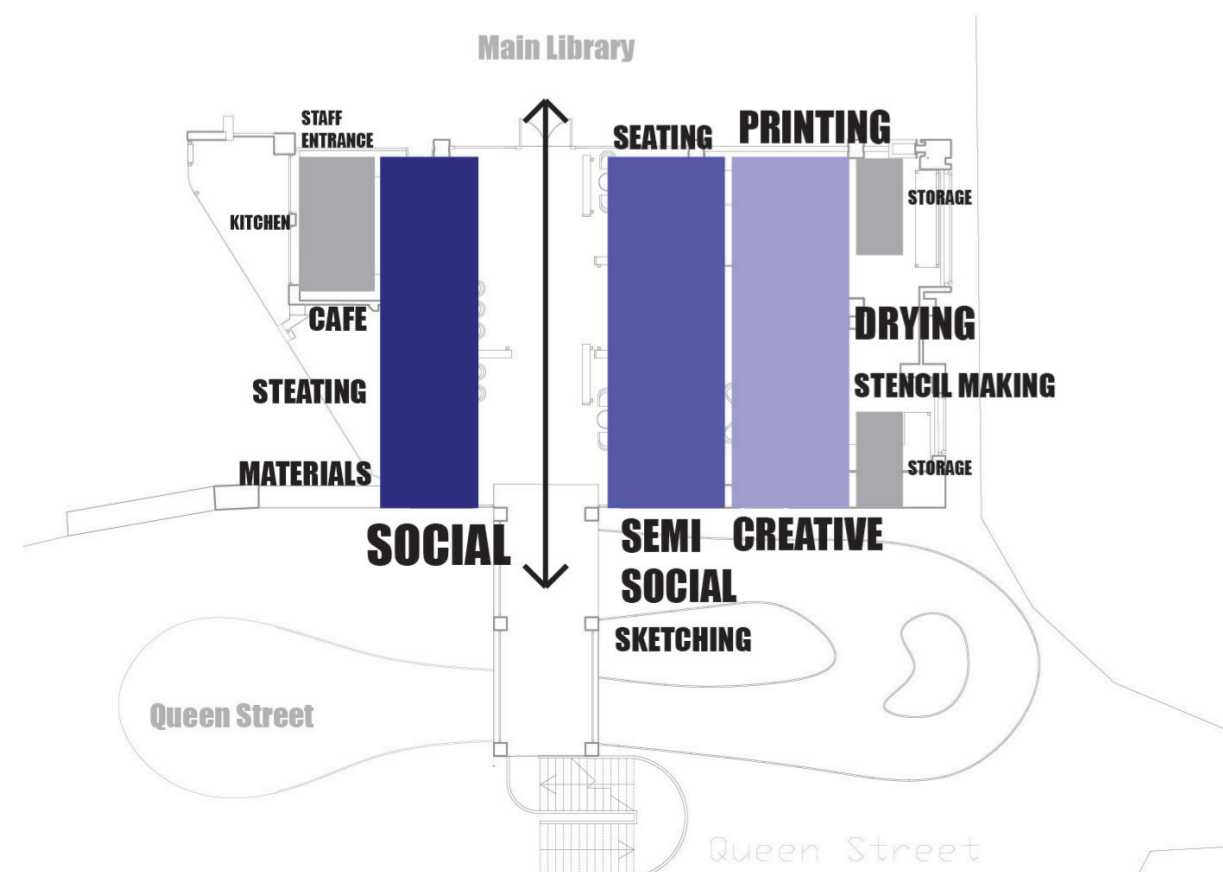
**33%**

Proportion of students classified as weak readers.

## SPATIALLY MAPPING THE DEMOCRATIC SPACE



## BREAKING THE TRADITIONAL LIBRARY



## HISTORY OF PRINTING IN OXFORD

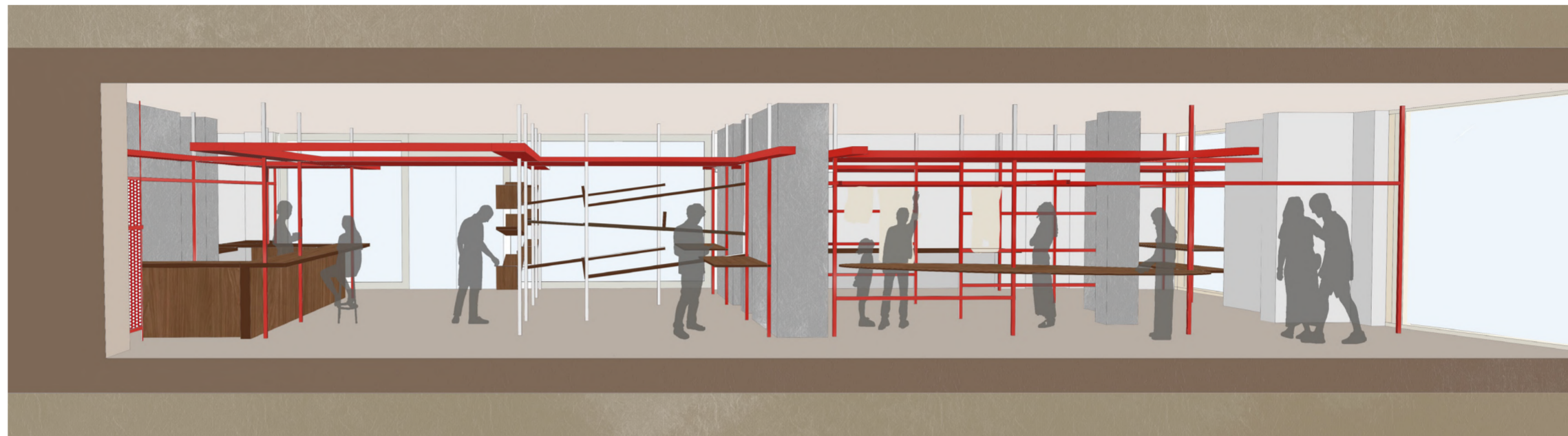


### WHY PRINTING?

Oxford was the second location in the UK in 1586 that got permission to print books. This provided the **access to mass produced books and easier access to knowledge**. However it was still very **unequally distributed** as it was mostly available to the higher class. The project incorporates printing in the interior to honor the history of printing in Oxford and also highlights the **importance of production of physical permanence in our digitally filled world.**

### MODERN AGORA

A true civic space is not defined by **passive consumption**; it is defined by **active production**. Just as the historic printing presses of Oxford **bypassed the academic elite to distribute radical ideas**, **modern street culture reclaims the physical city**. Skateboarding, street art, and public demonstration are the spatial equivalents of the printed pamphlet. **Bonn Square is Oxford's modern Agora.** It is **loud, public, and democratic**. Our architecture extends this unprogrammed civic energy directly into the building.



### THE ENGINE ROOM WORKFLOW

The library will provide with a ink printing area. The space will create a natural walk through the area and guide them through the steps.



STENCIL MAKING



DRYING & DISPLAYING



IDEA GENERATION



PRINTING



STENCIL MAKING

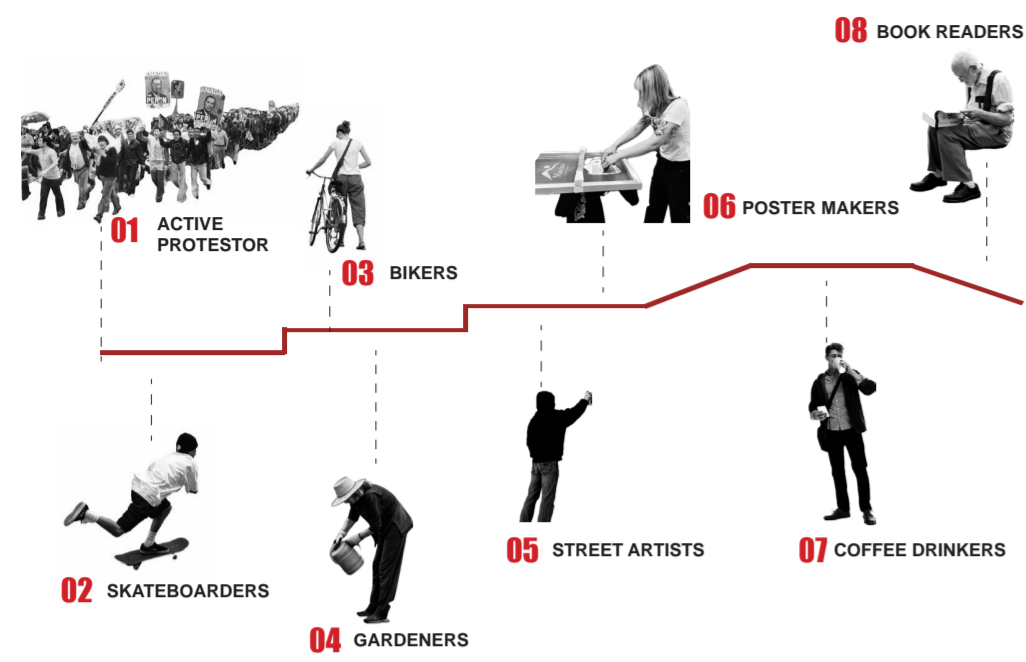


PRINTING

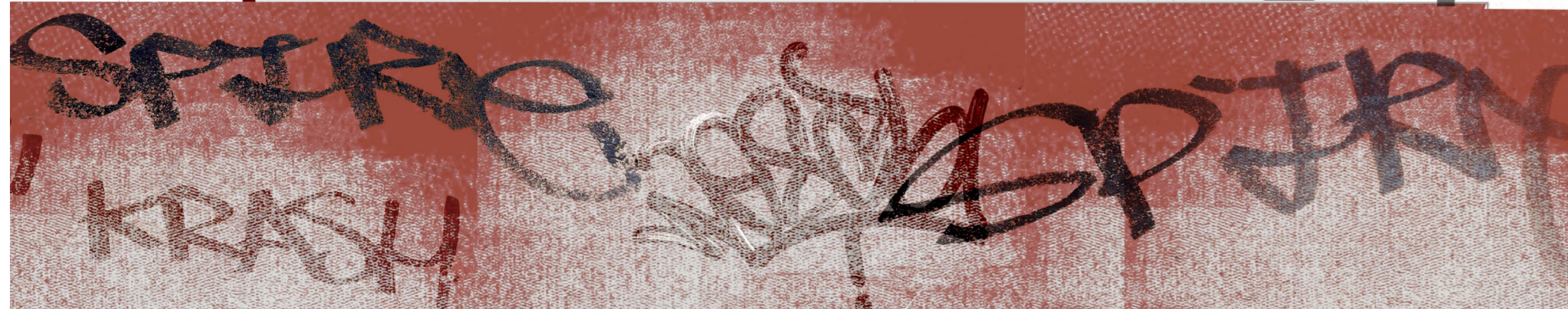
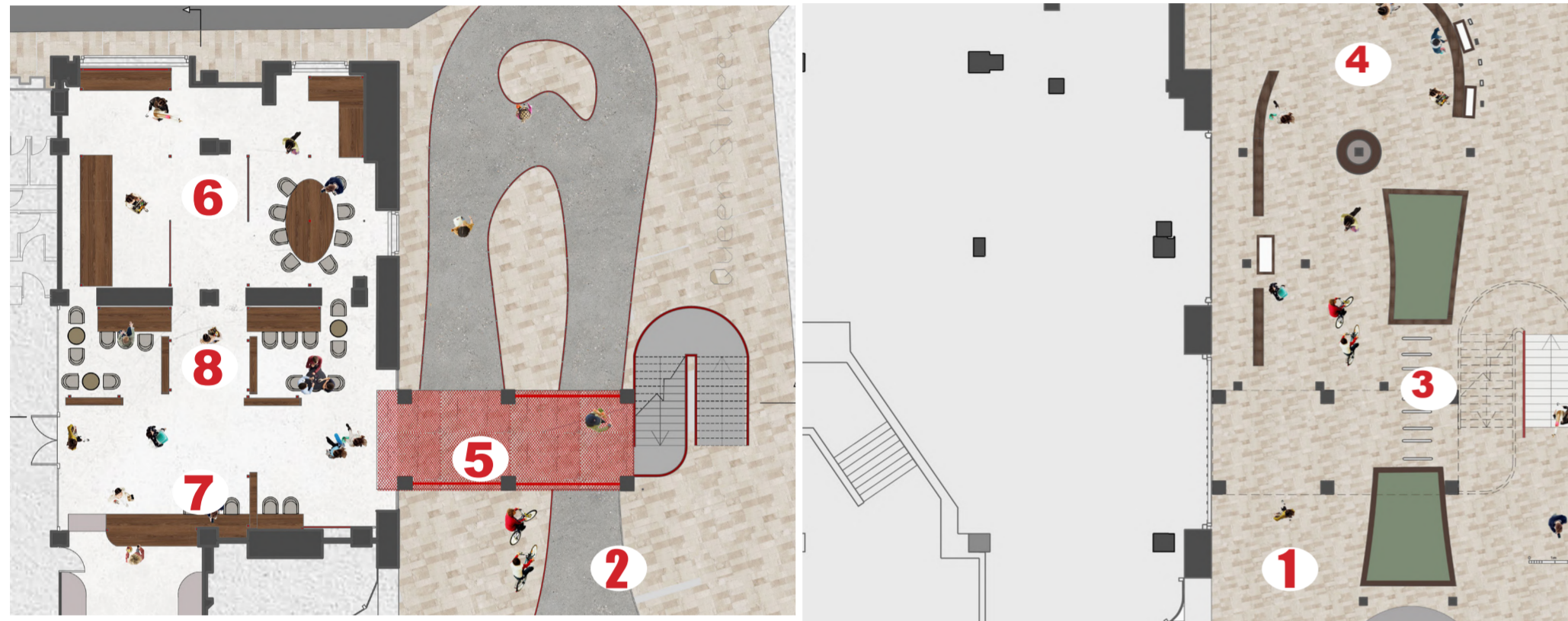


DRYING

## INTENDED USERS AND THEIR AREA



The space creates a journey through the space through **different ways of self expression** as it is not only a political printing space but it can accommodate different users through the space. Each user will interact and see the space in their own way that they perceive it. The activities would stretch from the outside of the library on the street through into the library making that connection with the city. The new library will aim to create belonging within the city to make meaningful communities.



## STORY BOARD

This story follows a man who used the library and found literature that caused him to reflect on the rough sleeping topic and then acting up upon on it using the space in the library to plan how he can mak more people aware of it.



John pulls a copy of Rebel Cities from the open shelves. The theories on spatial justice spark a sudden need to look beyond the text and understand the reality of Oxford's streets.

After designing the poster, they started the printing process. Mark was able to learn how the printing process works and participate in the making.



John was seeking genuine perspective, so he shares a coffee at the cafe with Mark, a local man currently rough sleeping. Their conversation turns abstract housing data into a harsh, lived reality.

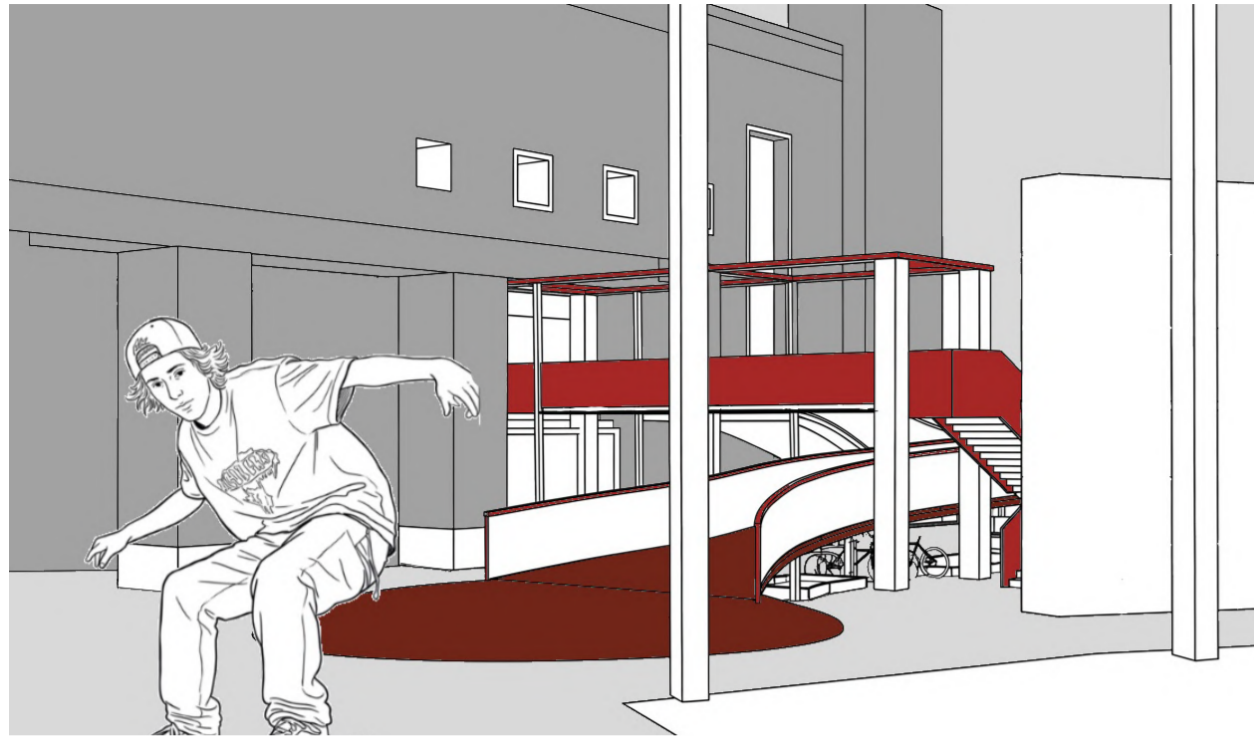


They decided that they can do something to inform others about this issue. They got some people together from the community to brainstorm how they can publish their ideas in Oxford.



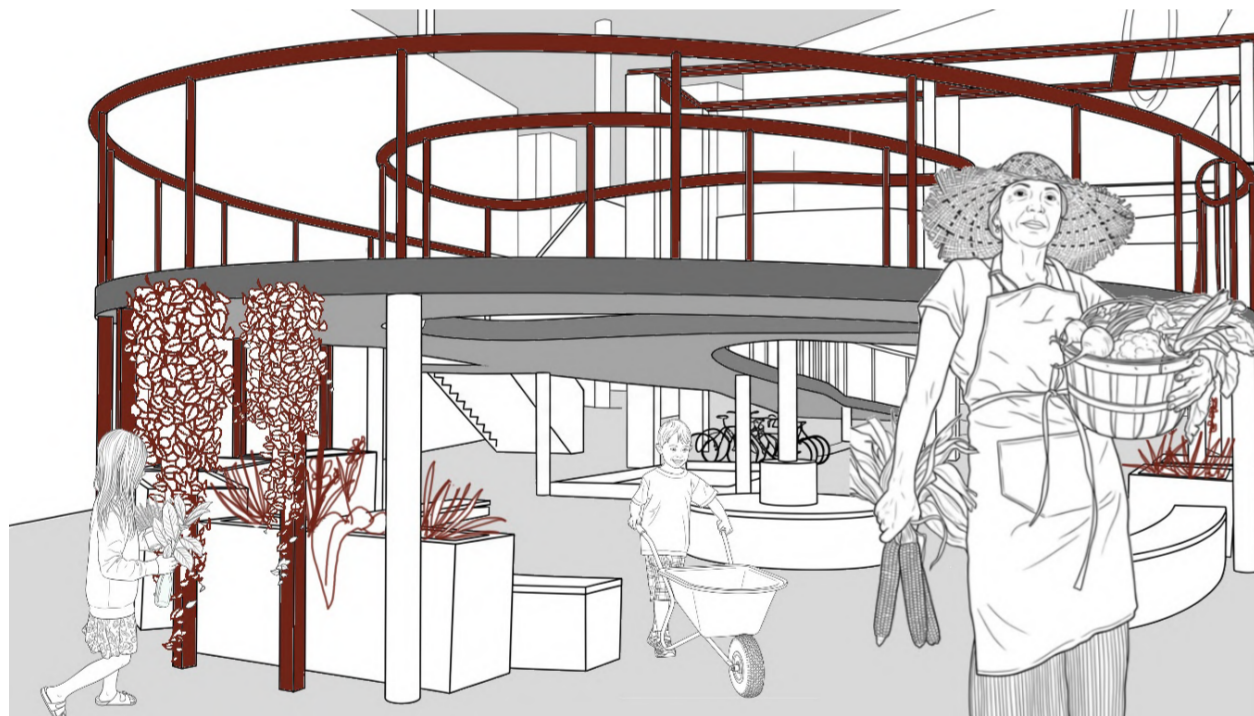
Once the posters were all printed, they were able to hang them up on the bridge and around the city for people to see and participate in the community to fight rough sleeping in Oxford.

# THE CITY REBELS



## SKATEBOARDERS

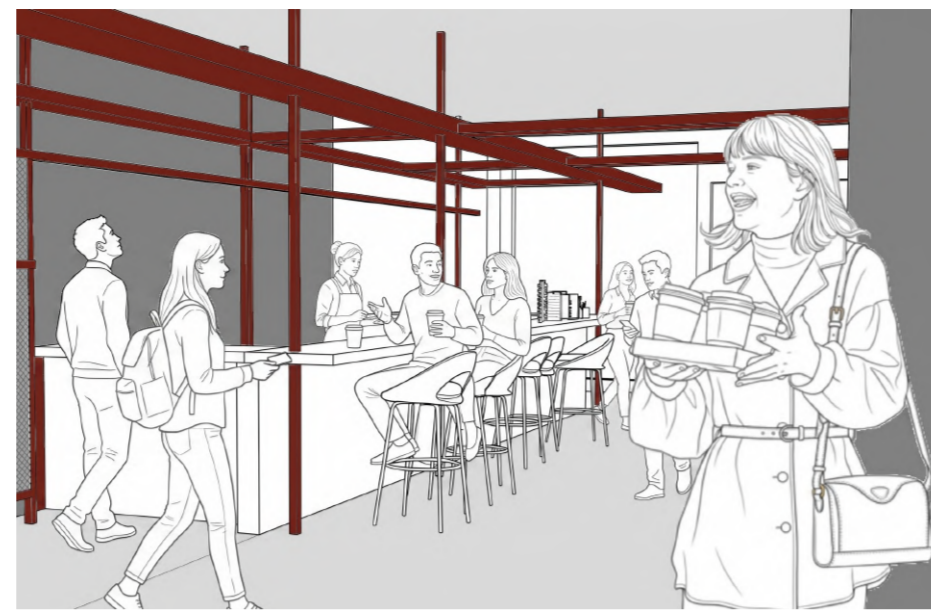
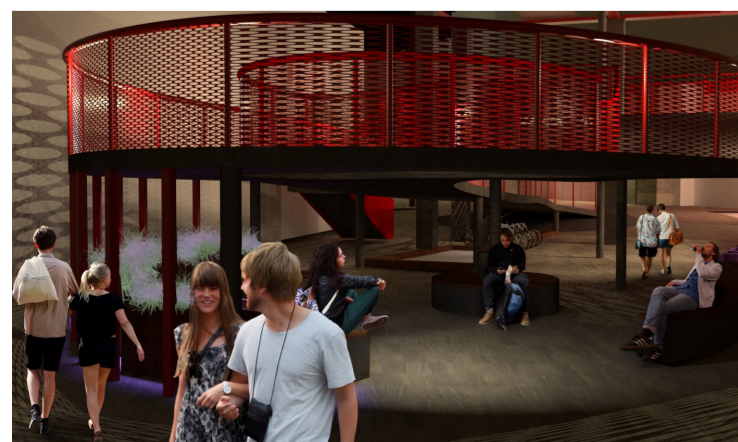
The ramp doesn't only provide a place for posters but also can be used by skateboarders as they are users that are usually undesired in private owned areas such as mall, the ramp welcomes them to interact the architecture and rebel against the Westgate.



## GARDENERS



The area under the ramp which is usually unsafe in urban environments will be **transformed into a community garden** that can be **used by organized groups to take care of**. The garden will create greenery for the space but also provide **lighting at night with night LED lights** to help growth of the plants.



## COFFEE DRINKERS

The library will also have a coffee shop that will accommodate social gatherings that will encourage people to go through the library and make it a destination and a place of connections.



## BOOK READERS

The library will have books that have more political and activists themes that are not as common to see at public libraries. The space also gives a place to reflect and critique the ideas.



## ACTIVISTS/ARTISTS

The main activity would be the printing area that would be an area for activists and artists to create posters that they can present on the bridge or around the city which gives access to tools that are less accessible for the average person.



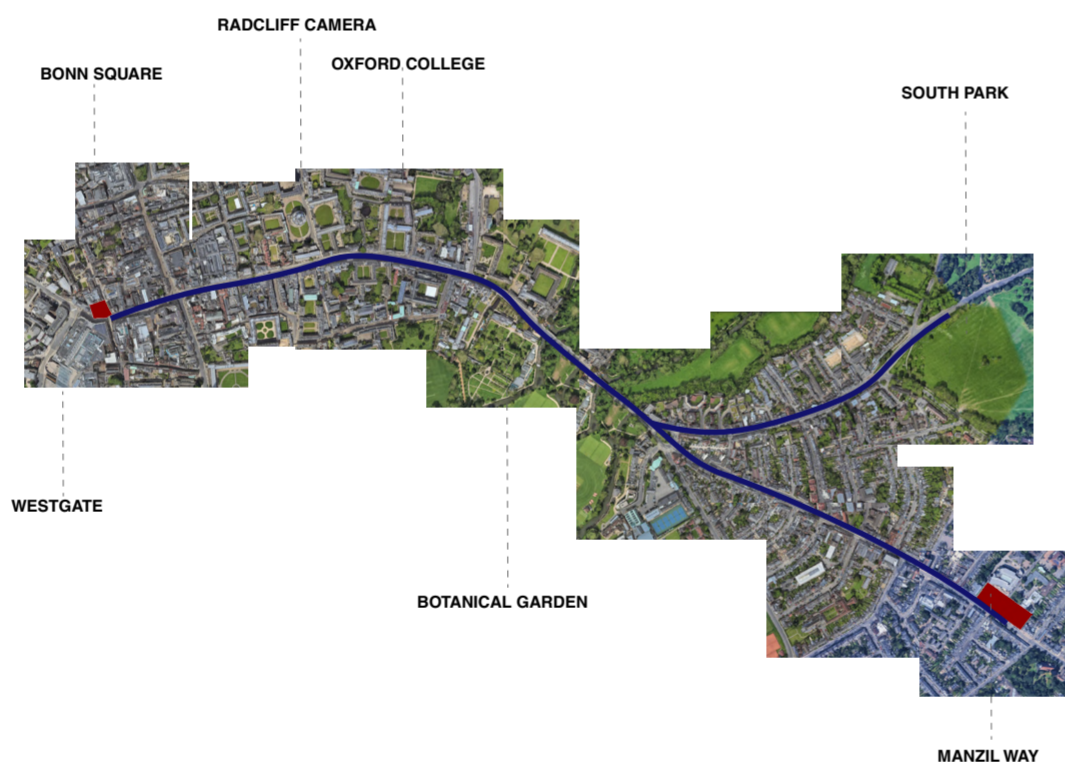
## BOOKS AVAILABLE AT THE LIBRARY



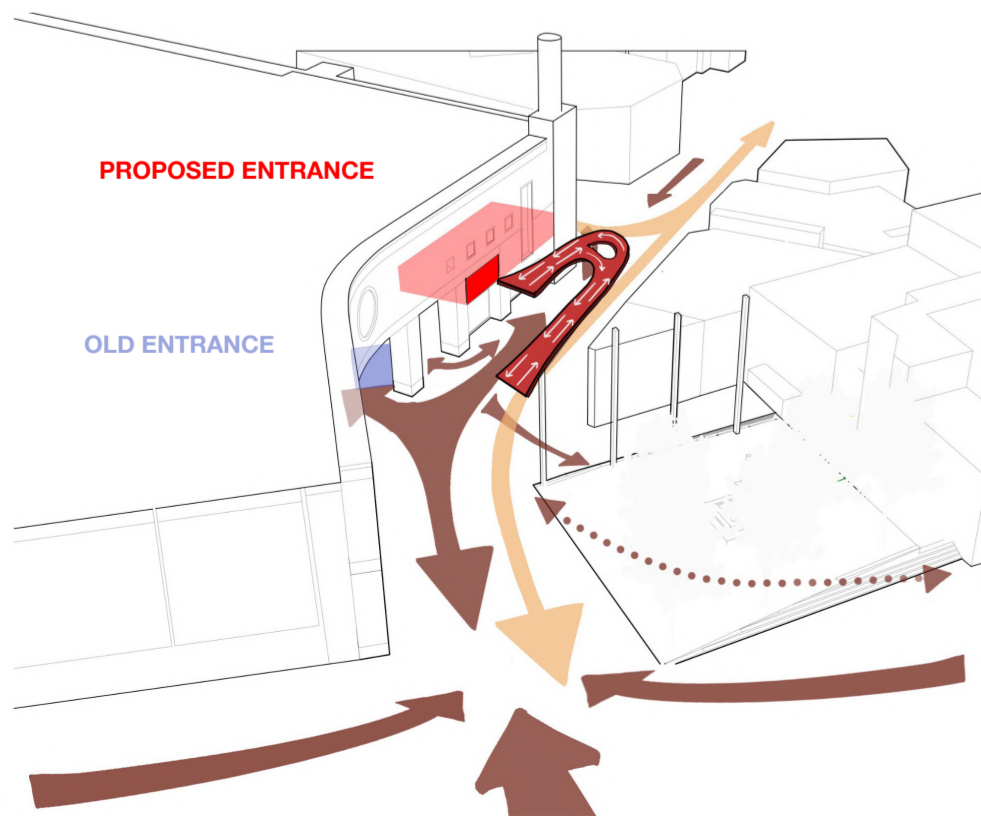


## THE ARCHITECTURE OF PROTESTS

Oxford doesn't accommodate for a very political culture but historically people have had demonstration that go through the main road of the city passing the main historic destination. The protests usually start or end at Bonn Square in front of Westgate, therefore placing the rebellious bridge in Westgate creates an optimal place for the flow of the current journey people take during a demonstration.



OXFORD'S POLLITICAL GROUPS



## CITY AS A CANVAS

To bring the library out onto the street and the street into the library, the design proposes a ramp coming up from the street into a new entrance that is visually more bold and accessible than the previous entrance. The bridge and ramp as visual eye catcher for people to freely vandalize and hang up their posters.



*“The right to the city is like a cry and a demand... It is the right to appropriation, clearly distinct from the right to property.”*

Henri Lefebvre, Right to the city, 1968