3
The Case: The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts

In the previous chapter we shed light on the group of monospace buildings and the traditional understanding of space in the field of architecture. Based on the thesis that a monospace develops its architectural quality in the joint action of building, objects, materials and people, we furthermore have examined the possibility to access the relation of architecture and the social with a processual understanding of space as provided by ANT. In the following, we turn to the case study and gain a first overview of the architectural body and existing literature.

The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts by Foster Associates in Norwich, UK opened its doors to the public in April 1978. The Centre has originally been conceived to house the collection of Sir Robert and Lady Lisa Sainsbury, which they had donated in 1973 to the University of East Anglia (UEA) in Norwich.[1] An endowment by their son Lord David Sainsbury made it possible to realise a new building on the university grounds, especially for this purpose. The building programme was then extended during the design process by further activities with the idea of creating a new academic and social hub on campus. Today, in addition to the permanent exhibition of the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, a restaurant and a café, a museum shop, temporary exhibitions and the university's art history department and the Sainsbury Research Unit share a single volume inside the building's envelope without separating walls in a conventional sense.[2]

1 Robert James Sainsbury (1906–2000) was the grandson of John James and Mary Ann Sainsbury, the founders of the UK supermarket chain Sainsbury's, and ran the family business together with his brother Alan John Sainsbury between the late 1930s and 1960s.

2 The Sainsbury Institute for Art (SIfA) is the subordinate venture that brings together the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (the museum), the department of Art History and World Art Studies and Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Oceania, Africa and the Americas (SRU), but also the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures (SISJAC) and the South Asian Decorative Arts and Crafts Collection Trust (SADACC Trust), the latter both located in the city centre of Norwich.

The building is widely known for its iconic appearance and radical design approach. Characteristic of the Sainsbury Centre is the creamy white double-layered skin, with open ends. Here the all-glass walls are drawn back prominently presenting the inner steel framework (**Fig. 3.1–3.2**). And while there is a decent body of literature on the Sainsbury Centre and it has been viewed in the light of many different contexts, the building as an actor in everyday life has not yet come under scrutiny.

The typical introduction to the Sainsbury Centre is concerned with the 'box' and its technicalities stating that it is a Late-Modern building and an example of British High Tech architecture, which the architect Norman Foster next to Nicolas Grimshaw or Michael Hopkins is known for (Pavitt and Thomas 2018a). The story of the building has been told many times and we will explore the literature in the course of this chapter. There is even a biography dedicated to the building following its development and exposing the close relationship between the donors, the architect and the university (Rybczynski 2011). There exists a rich reference system, as we will learn, that is commonly mobilised to put the building, or specific features of it, into bigger stylistic, historical or cultural contexts. Here different 'perspectives' on the building can be collected, which are tied to specific narrations that tend to either freeze frame the building or make us lose sight of it (Latour and Yaneva 2008).

Let us start, however, with the architectural object, the monospace, which due to it is open plan layout and the one all-encompassing shell became part of this study. I will introduce the Sainsbury Centre from a traditional architectural point of view first, look at its location, plans and sections, show the functional allocations and point to different structural elements and materials, to work out in detail what the architectural body consists of. Thus, for a start, let us deliberately bracket the mundane life of the Sainsbury Centre and focus on the building in its pure and present appearance and the existing literature. Of course, this will not help understanding the specific qualities and relations, the everyday sociality, or the internal latent spatial structures of the Sainsbury Centre, but it will shed light on the abstract architectonic body and help to reveal the tension between a formal typological and a pragmatic approach to this specific building. Against this background, we will be able to better grasp how ANT can help to access the reality of the building in practice and thus to understand how spacing is different from the traditional understanding of space as contained *in* monospace in the following chapter.

The typology of monospace can be considered as architectural withdrawal from the use of matter as means to create spatial separations. Yet the Sainsbury Centre is not empty and I will include materials and furniture into the building's description. Here the classical disciplinary borders (to interior design) are already beginning to blur. As I am concerned with the monospace, this introduction will

focus on the upper part of the building and neglect, to a certain extent, its areas below ground that follow a traditional spatial layout.

3.1
Exploring the Building According to the Plans

Approaching the Sainsbury Centre from the exterior, the white longitudinal container with its rounded corners lies at the west end of the campus of the University of East Anglia, near the River Yare (**Fig. 3.1–3.4**). The campus was newly established in 1963 west of the city centre of Norwich and has a strong relation to the landscape. Situated on sloping terrain, the building is about 130m long with a width of 35m and height of 10m. Positioned on a southeast to northwest angle with full-height windows at each end, the building is orientated into the greenery. A pedestrian bridge punctures the façade diagonally and connects the Centre with the elevated walkways of the adjacent university buildings designed by architects Denys Lasdun and Partners.[3] The façade is cladded with panels; both walls and roof are covered with the same five types of elements: glass, solid and grilled, and additional curved panels (glass and solid) shape the junction between wall and roof. While the northern façade remains closed, except for two entrance areas on ground level, two vertical glass strips organise the appearance of the southern façade. Here, the conservatories are located inside the building. The roof plane has also been designed as a fifth façade; five strips of glass serve as skylights. The building furthermore includes extensive areas below ground, visible outside at its east end with the curved glass wall of the 'Crescent Wing' added in 1991 (see **Fig. 3.7** for steps of extension).

In the following we move into the building along with the plans and have a look at the building step by step. We will first explore the overall structure to then move closer to discuss its zoning and circulation, before going into details about the construction in connection to the modulation of its climatic environment.

3 For a detailed introduction to the expressive concrete architecture by Sir Denys Lasdun and Partners for the UEA (1962–68) see Architectural Design, 5 ('University of East Anglia, Norwich; Architects: D. Lasdun & Partners' 1969). For details on the different possibilities of sites and a critique on choice of location see Peckham (1979, 6–7).

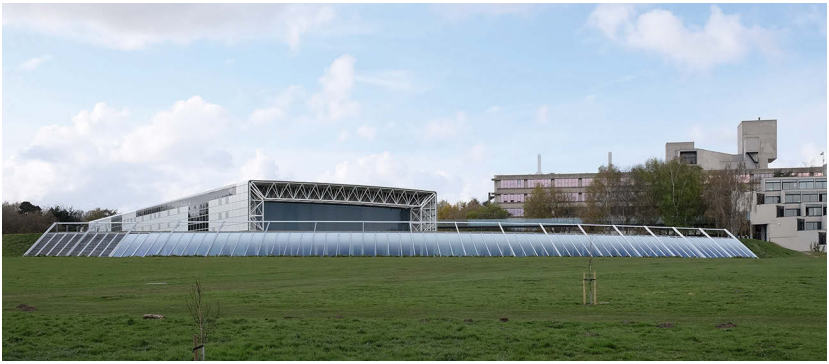


Fig. 3.1:

View of the eastern end of the Sainsbury Centre (2017). The bridge connects the building with the walkways of the university campus.

Fig. 3.2:

View of the building from the lake Yare with the curved façade of the Crescent Wing in the front (2016).

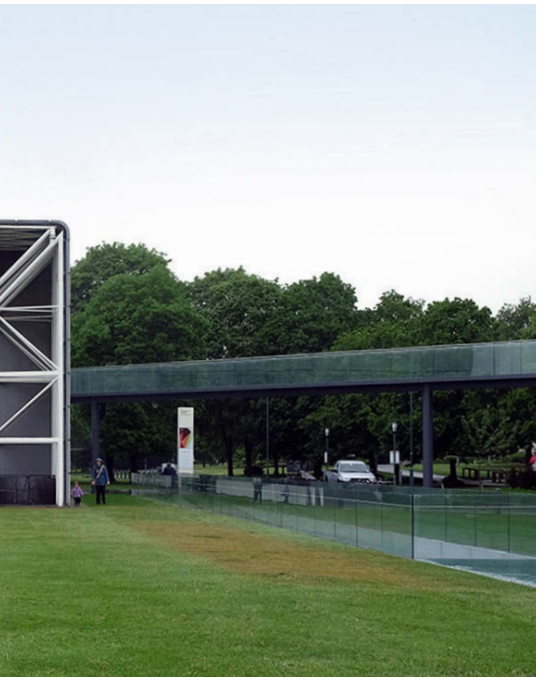


Fig. 3.3:

Southern façade (2016). The two glazed conservatories orient themselves here into the green of the landscape. The left glass band serves the School Area, behind the right is the East End Café.

Fig. 3.4:

Site plan. The building is located in the south west of the campus of the University of East Anglia, Norwich.

3.1.1 A Single Volume

The Sainsbury Centre is first of all a monospace because its all-encompassing shell creates a large continuous interior. What is special about this monospace is that it combines different functions. This is architecturally demanding, especially considering the uses of a public museum, restaurant, café, and shop in combination with teaching and research facilities, which all require their respective service areas. Instead of separating these functions into different buildings or detached building parts, they are largely integrated under the single shell. However, the continuous interior without dividing walls is only possible because two central building elements allow them to remain empty: the double-layered skin and the basement.

Firstly, there is the double layer of wall and roof. A system of triangular vertical trusses creates an open framework that provides a zone of a uniform depth of 2.4 meters between the inner skin of wall of perforated louvres and the outer façade of panels. This zone accommodates service rooms and secondary functions. Above ground, it houses runs of pipes and ducts, and electrical and mechanical systems that provide ventilation and lighting for the interior. Corresponding trussed beams span the width of 35 meters in the roof plane, and service catwalks in the depth of the structure give access to the gallery lighting up to a height of 7.5 meters, which can, as a result, be handled from above (**Fig. 3.8, Fig. 3.23**).

Secondly, there is the basement (**Fig. 3.7**). A spinal corridor runs beneath the full length of the building, housing storage and technical facilities. A loading bay allows for secure delivery and the unloading of exhibition materials in the basement. In the south of the building, the Crescent Wing, which was added between 1989 and 1991, emerges in the sloping terrain with a curved glass façade that looks out on the lake. This wing provides more office, workshop and laboratory space. Furthermore, it supplies a gallery/lecture space and a space for the reserve collection, each of which were functionally rededicated to gallery space during another refurbishment between 2004 and 2006.[4] These building parts are accessible from the outside through a long glass-roofed ramp and connected inside by various spiral staircases and lifts.

However, skin and basement are not the only devices that nourish the monospace. Simply by looking at the plan and section one can also readily see that there are mezzanine boxes positioned independently from the enclosing structure as well, low enough to allow for long vistas through the entire room (**Fig. 3.5, 3.6**). They house the offices for the university professors and lecturers, the library and seminar rooms and the kitchen for the restaurant; all necessary and subsequent elements of the building's programme are to great extent only separated by full-height glass walls.

4 For a detailed description of the development of the design scheme see Powell (2010).

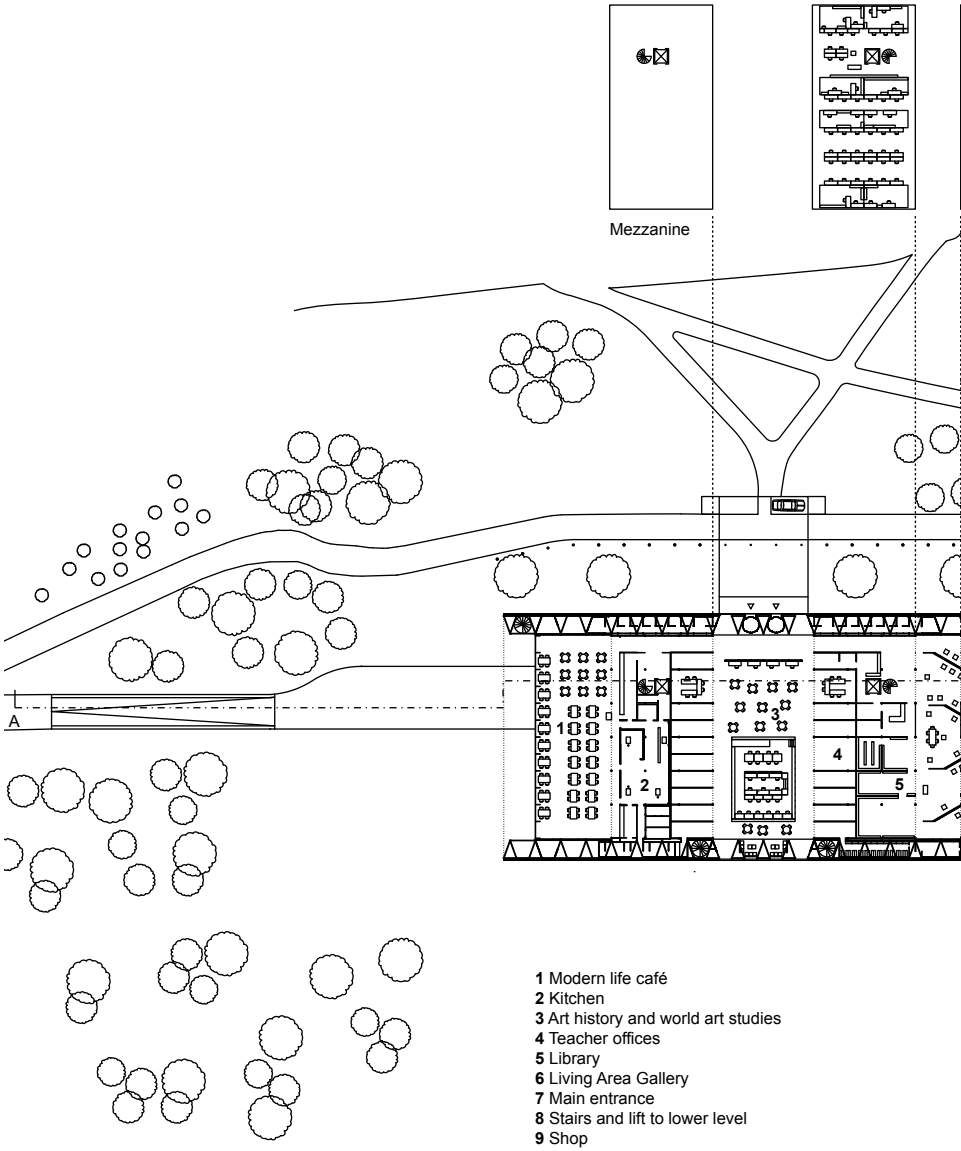
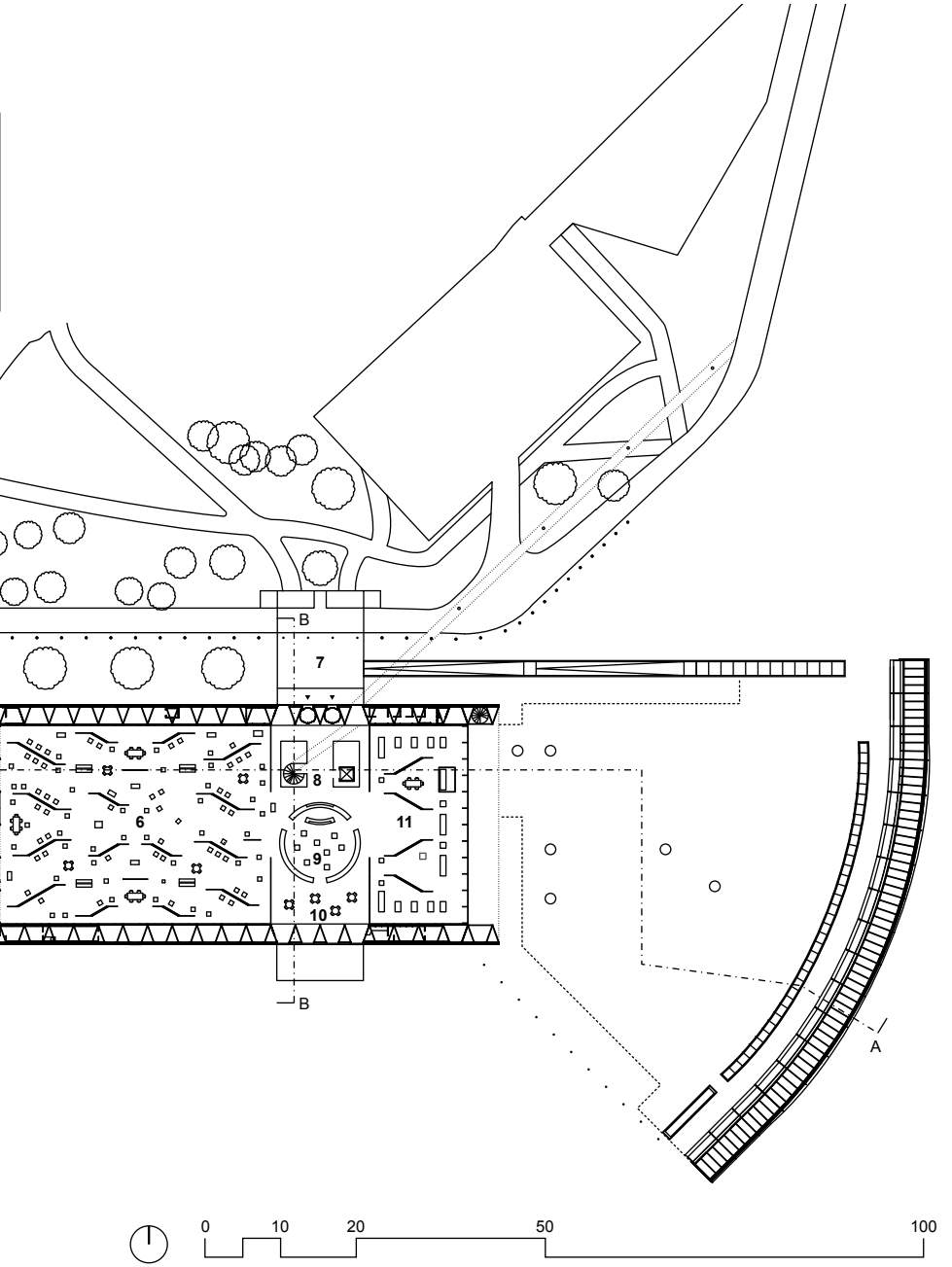


Fig. 3.5:
Floor Plan. Groundfloor.



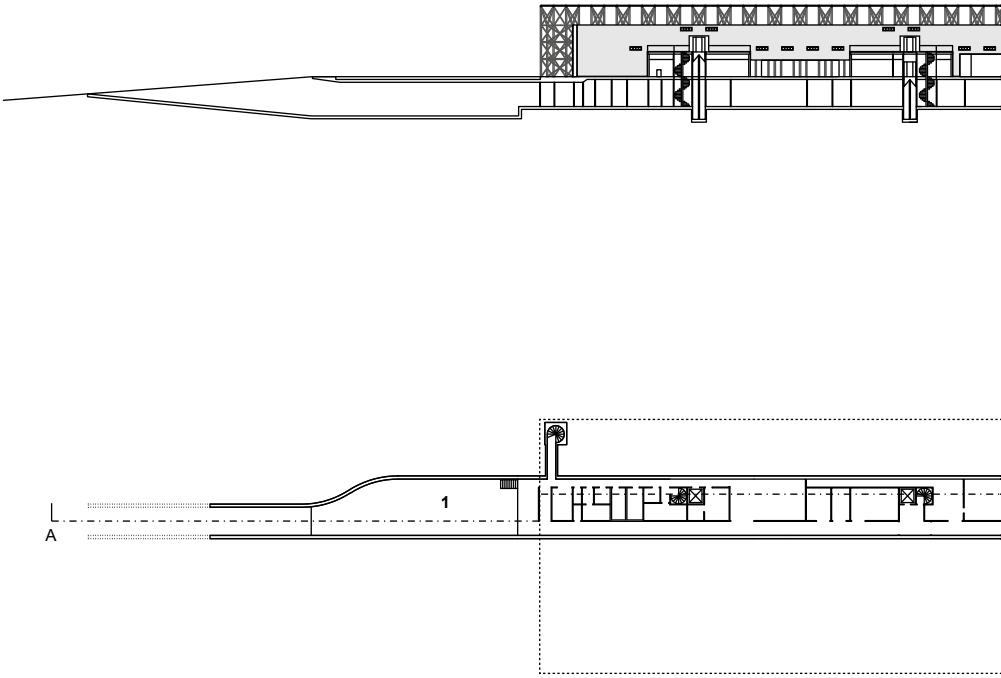
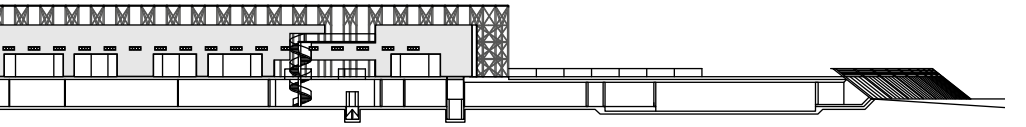


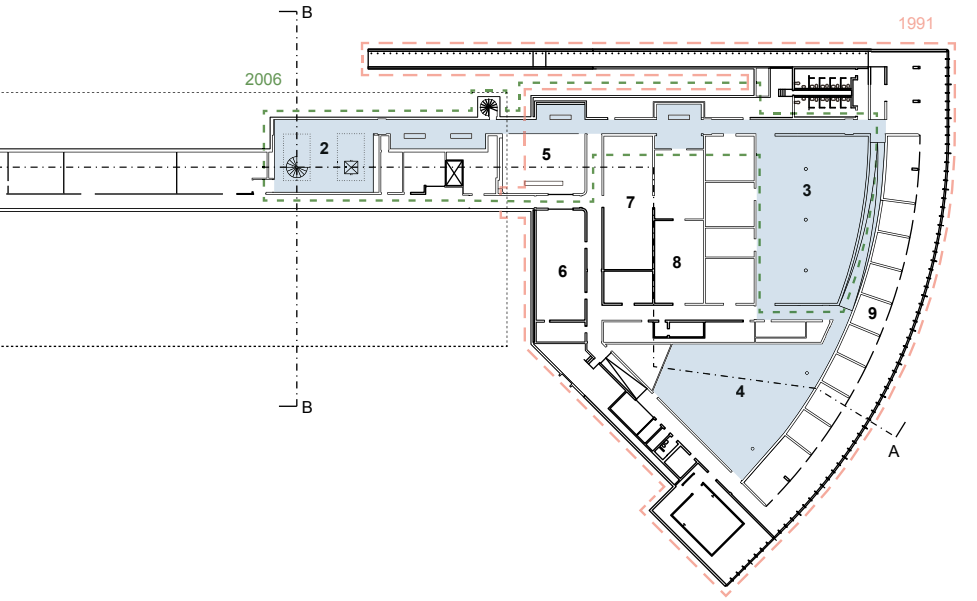
Fig. 3.6, 3.7:

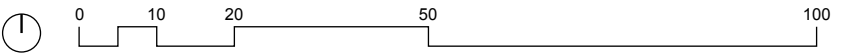
Section A–A.
Floor Plan. Underground, with phases of extension.

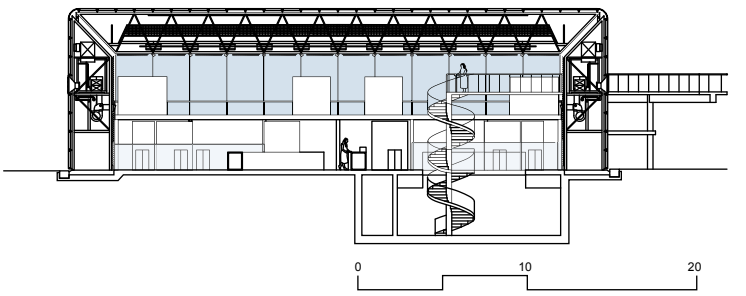
Fig. 3.8:

Section B–B.









3.1.2 Zoning and Circulation

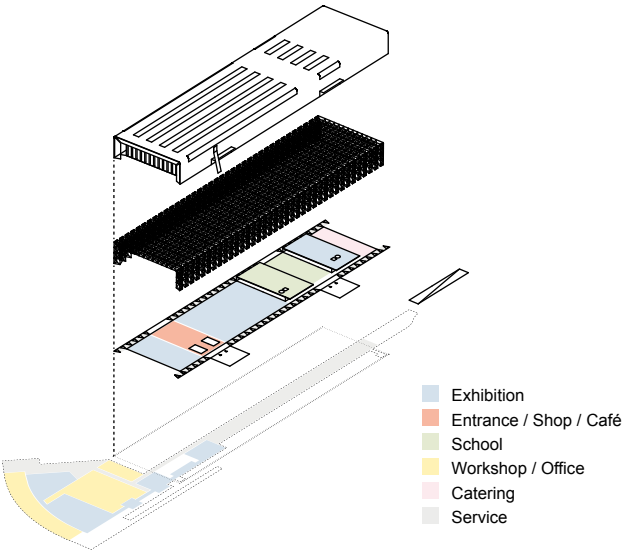


Fig. 3.9:
Isometric exploded view with functional aloctations.

The room in the 'shed', as the building is often called, is not simply empty. The different activities inside are located in neighbouring zones, like adjacent vertical bars; each of them articulated in a specific way, but connected by the all-encompassing building envelope (**Fig. 3.9**). Different devices help to structure the building (see **Fig 3.5**; use of numbers follows the plan).

Outside, there are two entrances that are the same in appearance—both with cantilevered canopies against rain and automatic glass doors to walk through (both added during the refurbishment in 2004–06). As there is a monospace behind, it might be surprising that there are two entrances (**Fig. 3.11**). It is only two triangular signposts, one rather large and the other small, both positioned at some distance to the entrances, which inform the visitor about the different functional allocations inside. Both face the campus, one entrance dedicated to serving the museum (**7**), the other to serving the Art History Department, the Sainsbury Research Unit and the restaurant.[5] These areas have different opening hours. While the museum entrance is closed during early morning or on Mondays, the university entrance remains open. This results in the necessity of being able to separate the different areas, public, semi-public, private, and to organise the building according to daily and weekly rhythms.

5 For more information on the specially established Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Oceania, Africa and the Americas (SRU), see the interview with Robert and Lisa Sainsbury by Jonathan Benthall (1989).

The two mezzanine boxes, in particular, take over this task. Glass doors at their underpasses allow dividing the building into three main areas: The East End Gallery (**11**) and Living Area (**6**), with reception, shop (**9**) and café (**10**) in between; the Department of Art History (**3**) with lecturers' offices (**4**) under the mezzanines on either side of the central court; the public restaurant (**1**).

There are many devices that help to redirect flows of movement and to indicate allocations for different uses. Arrival via the main gallery entrance is into the area between the East End Gallery and Living Area. Here, the reception is part of the round shop of low white furniture with more cubes inside for presenting tenders (**Fig. 3.12, 3.13**). Behind the shop with a group of white tables and chairs, the East End Café is situated. The counter is hidden within the double-layered skin, which opens up to this area offering a view outside into the parkland. The floor covering a dark grey studded rubber floor sets the entrance hall apart from the exhibition areas fitted with carpets. In addition, partially shoulder-high glass railings support the separation of these zones and lead the flow of movement to the centre of the building.[6]

Let us slowly walk through the different areas along the plan. Firstly, we will move through the Living Area and the East End Gallery and then on to the first mezzanines, the school area, the second mezzanine and finally the restaurant.

The Living Area exhibits the collection of Robert and Lisa Sainsbury. Without walls to create a linear narration, it flouts convention—at least at the time of set up in 1978. The Sainsbury's collection is not the only collection of the Sainsbury Centre. That said, it forms the starting point of the collection and acts as an anchor for the institution's activity even today.[7] The art collection is not presented chronologically. On the contrary, the viewer enters a field of paintings and sculptures divided by screens grouped roughly into geographical regions, while the art of the late 19th and 20th century mixes in and spreads over the whole floor (**Fig. 3.14**). The patron envisioned presenting the art in an informal setting that allowed people to experience the object intertwined with their daily lives (Rybczynski 2011; Powell 2010). The Living Area has been rearranged several times, however without major changes during the last 40 years. Designer George Sexton (2003) depicts the following characteristic design factors, which still remain applicable: Freestanding objects allow viewing from all sides, two-dimensional works hang on free-standing screens, the walls of the Centre remain empty and comfortable seating and low tables (some with books on display) are spread throughout this area. Labels are only minimal, and the display uses daylight combined with artificial light. Special tables to study particularly

6 This is a relic from an earlier period. Initially, the glass railings ran over the entire width of the building and turnstiles controlled the galleries at their entrances.

7 The Sainsbury Centre holds next to the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, the Lisa Sainsbury Ceramics Collection and the Sainsbury Abstract Collection also the Anderson Collection of Art Nouveau and the University's Abstract and Constructivist Collection (Sainsbury Centre 2018b).

small objects were subsequently added, and some bookcases and seating elements have been removed to allow for the display of a growing number of artworks.

While the Living Area is reserved for the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, the East End Gallery, on the other side of the entrance area, shows objects of the reserve collection on a rotary basis. The exhibition furnishings are similar to that of the Living Area, but especially for this spot large glass showcases have been recently installed.

Another option to enter the building is via the pedestrian bridge. Inside, it leads to a spiral staircase, down to the entrance area and even further down to the basement, where the temporary special exhibitions in the Exhibition Suite are displayed (**Fig. 3.15**). The end of this bridge and the spiral staircase offer a prominent view over the whole interior (**Fig. 3.16**). At its back end, adjacent to the Living Area, is the library under the first mezzanine and beside it the gallery assistants counter. The first mezzanine has formerly been used for teaching and exhibitions. Today, it is divided by glass doors into postgraduate desk areas for the Department of Art History and the Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Oceania, Africa and the Americas (SRU). Eight offices for academic staff as well as for members of the Sainsbury Institute of Art are also located in the same area. These offices situated in boxes with full-glass fronts are open at the ceiling and thus acoustically connected.

The school section includes a gathering and social area with groups of tables and chairs which are used by students as temporary workplaces or during lunch as well as for meetings (**Fig. 3.17**). To the left and right under the mezzanines, there are offices and seminar rooms detached from the spatial continuum by glass doors and walls with and without lowered metal blinds. An integral working area for undergraduate students is located on a rectangular lowered platform in the area between the mezzanines (**Fig. 3.18**). Surrounded by cabinets with a second elevated platform positioned in the middle of it, students working in the first lower area are visually disconnected while sitting. For the second group, however, the lower area serves as a moat, providing spatial distance, while still being visually connected to the surroundings in a sitting position. Behind the rectangular undergraduate working area, some lounge chairs and tables offer withdrawal next to the façade. The staircases, on both the left and the right, are hidden inside the double-layered skin, and serve the mezzanine levels. Through the last offices on this side of the building, there are further rooms, a tea kitchen for students and academic staff and a photo archive (a former photography laboratory) (**Fig. 3.19, Fig. 3.20**).

A white partition with closable sliding doors and signs separates this school area from the public flow that passes by from the Living Area to the restaurant, or an exhibition on the second mezzanine (**Fig. 3.21**). This also acts as a hindrance to the public; from the entrance, they are re-directed to the left and right.

The second mezzanine served various purposes throughout its career: senior common room and postgraduate desk area, office space—today, it provides an-

other floor for temporary exhibitions. Underneath, the kitchen for the restaurant is hidden, and while as far as possible all areas below the two mezzanines are covered with full-height glass walls, the kitchen remains invisible. Here, at the west end of the building, the full-height window offers a view from the restaurant, the Modern Life Café, to the lawn with a sculpture by Henry Moore surrounded by trees (**Fig. 3.22**). Hidden amongst the trees, the delivery ramp disperses in the underground avoiding the necessity for a serving façade at one side of the building.

After walking through all areas inside the building according to the plans and stressing the aspects that make them into separate domains, it is important to emphasise how each are also in someway related: the different materials, barriers and thresholds, create loose or strong boundaries between different zones, yet, the shell joins them. While various further analyses of the plan or even a 3D model (e.g. in terms of acoustics) are possible, I find the consideration of the understanding of the conditions of visibility particularly revealing. Analysing the floor plan with the help of Space Syntax with a Visibility Graph Analysis (VGA) at eye-level using Depthmap (Turner, 2010),[8] we see that the reception and shop are positioned in the area with the highest visibility inside the building (**Fig. 3.10**). Four zones can be distinguished in their visual integration. Firstly, areas with a very high degree of visibility (in red and orange) around the centre of the entrance area; secondly, areas with a high degree of visibility (in green and yellow) in the Living Area; thirdly, areas with a medium degree of visibility in the front area of the School Court and in the restaurant; and lastly, areas with a low degree of visibility in the rear part of the School Court and the adjacent offices (despite glass walls). VGA demonstrates that the interior can be divided into distinct zones with different degrees of visibility, which initially seem to correspond to the functional assignments.

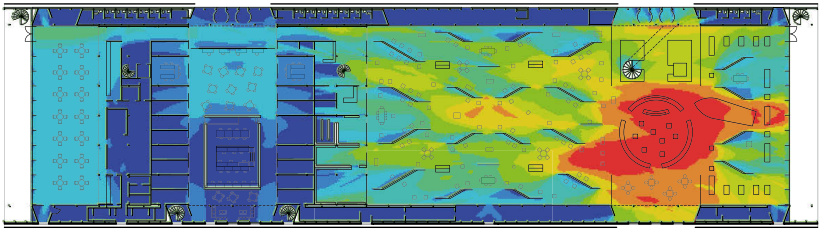


Fig. 3.10:
Visibility Graph Analysis at eye-level.

8 A Visibility Graph Analysis (VGA) represents the number of points visible from any given standpoint in the building. To create a VGA at eye-level only furniture and display cases smaller than 1.5 meter have been included and regardless of size, glass elements have been considered transparent and excluded. The results are displayed in form of a heat map.

Fig. 3.11:
Entrance area of the museum with information stele (2017).

Fig. 3.12:

View from the pedestrian bridge (2016). Reception and shop with East End Gallery to the left, and Café in the back.

Fig. 3.13:

Reception desk (2017).

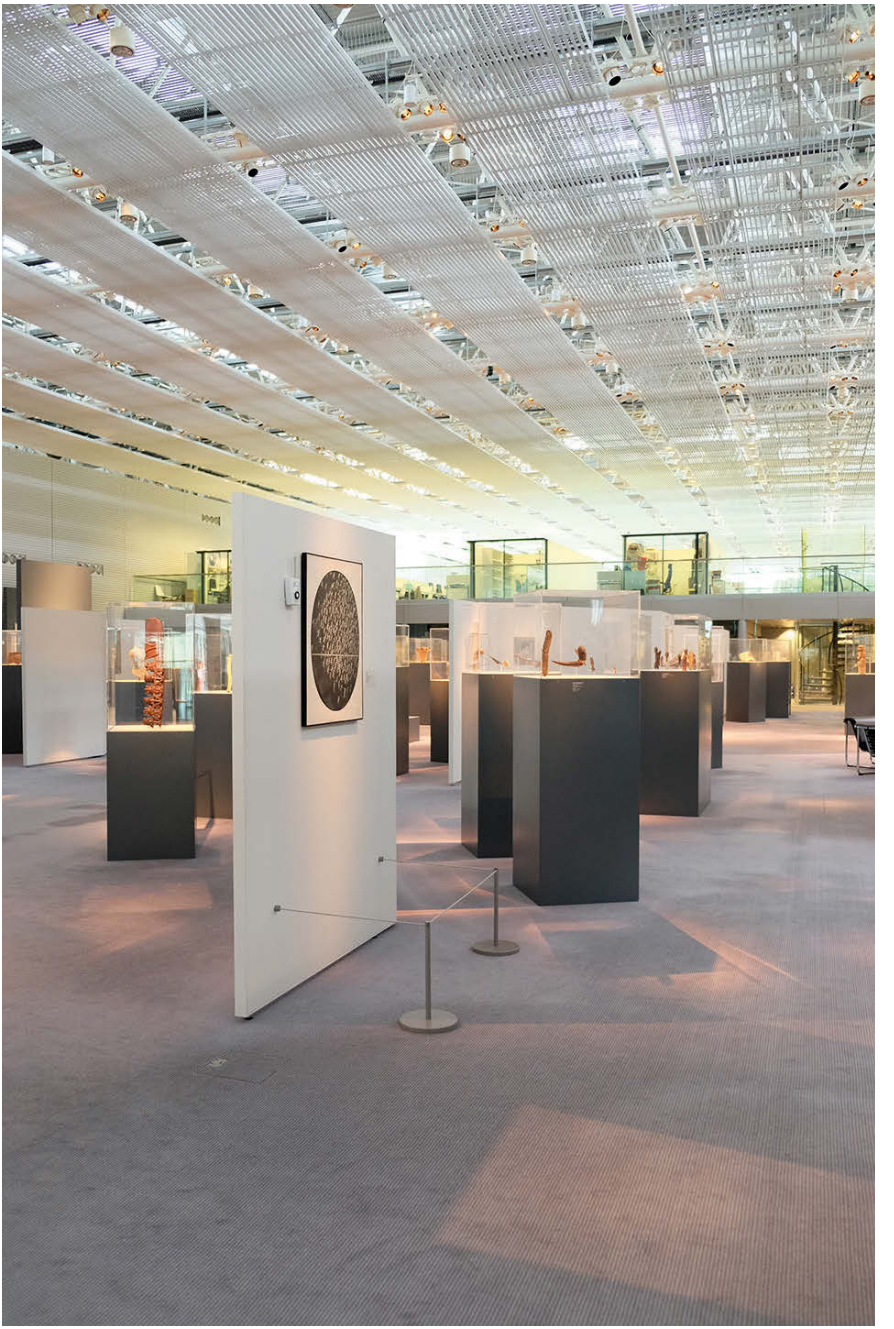


Fig. 3.14:
Living Area (2017).

Fig. 3.15:

Inside the East End Gallery with large glass showcases in the foreground. Behind, the spiral staircase leading further down to the underground level (2016).

Fig. 3.16:

View from the pedestrian bridge towards the first mezzanine (2016). In the background the second mezzanine with theater curtain is vaguely visible.

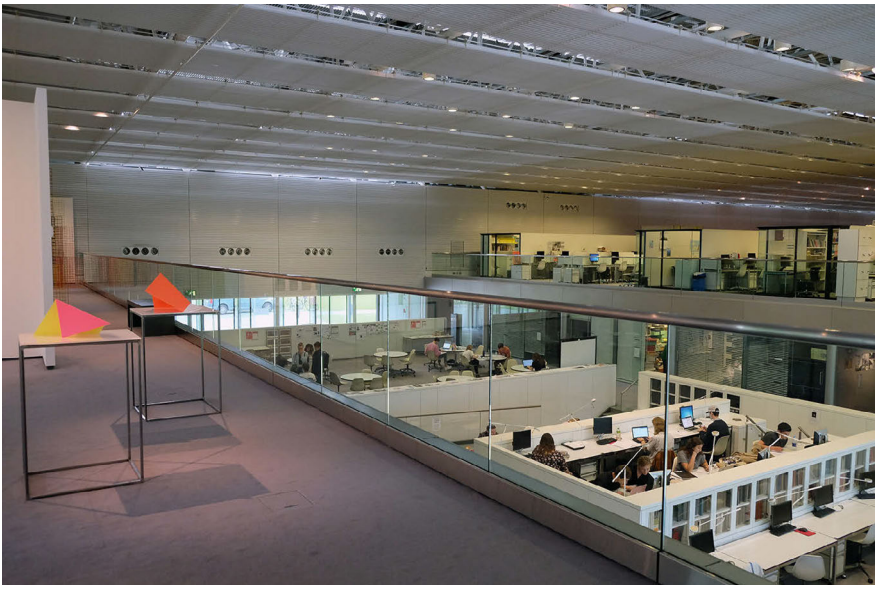


Fig. 3.17:

Social area of the department of Art History and World Art Studies between the two mezzanines (2016). Students gather here to study and socialise.

Fig. 3.18:

View from the second mezzanine (2017). Students work next to the exhibition area.

Fig. 3.19:

Photo archive inside the double-layered skin (2016).

Fig. 3.20:

Conservatory of the School Area (2016). Behind the doors staircases are hidden serving the mezzanine level.

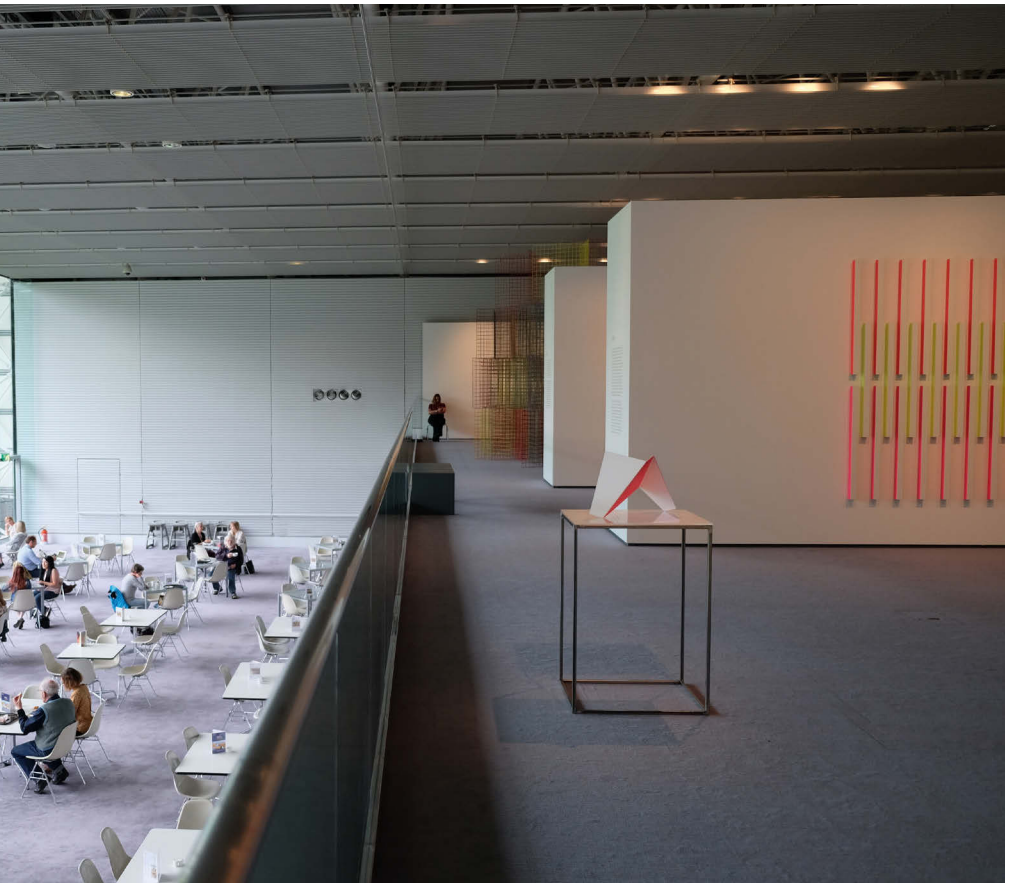


Fig. 3.22:

Directly adjacent, the second mezzanine and the restaurant (2017).

Fig. 3.21:

Low separating wall between entrance and School Area redirecting visitors to the left (Living Area) or right (restaurant) when entering the building (2017).

3.1.3 Construction and Conditioning

The Sainsbury Centre belongs to the group of monospace buildings because of its decisive feature of one air volume created by the all-enclosing first climatic envelope. However, just like the zones that emerge with the rich material world and structure the open plan layout, the immaterial world of light, climate and acoustics are modulated and adjust the interior in a similar way. The internal environment is subject to a constant process of conditioning.

Closely developed with engineer Anthony Hunt, the envelope of the Sainsbury Centre is of a permeable and lightweight building structure. Except for the basement and ground slab made of reinforced in-situ concrete the building has been mostly prefabricated and assembled on site. It is a modular 'kit of parts' (**Fig. 3.23**) that allows for the replacement of elements (services and the cladding, for example). The triangular truss structure of welded hollow steel tubes aligns in the base of each triangle with the external façade while the third column, the vertex of the triangle (the apex), carries the inner walls. A continuous net of neoprene gaskets seals the external cladding. Six bolts from inside the building fix each panel. The original solid façade panels had been of silver-grey anodised aluminium with a ribbed surface, a sandwich construction, which contained an insulating layer of phenolic foam. After having had problems with corrosive action in some panels and leaks for some time, the whole building was stripped and re-cladded with new and completely flat cream-white panels of honeycomb aluminium with rock wool insulation and a PVF2 finish (in spring 1988). This process of re-cladding was also used to improve the ultraviolet filtering of the transparent glazing panels and the drainage system.

This construction method generates materials that have very meagre capacities to buffer humidity and temperature. Numerous thermal bridges and areas with single glazing make for a poor rating in the Energy Performance Operational Rating visibly posted in the building today. It comes as a surprise that the building has no air conditioning. Stressing that also previously the collection had been kept under normal domestic conditions, Fosters Associates' approach is a modification of the surrounding external damp British climate, rather than a hermetically sealed climatic chamber (Powell 2010). In contrast to the new underground areas, the storages and the workshops, which are indeed equipped with air conditioning, a simple air heating and cooling system handles the temperature in the shed centrally controlled by the UEA building management system. The air handling units (AHUs) are located in the double-layered skin and work by introducing fresh air into the interior, which they draw in through the grilled panels in the external façade, and blow through four nozzle diffusers prominently placed in the aluminium louvred interior walls.[9] It is a supply-only system, louvres in the upper part of

9 This system does also provide modes of recirculation or partial recirculation, which allows for the recovery of heat during winter months; however it does not

the façade can be opened manually during hot summer days to support air circulation; the height of the room helps in this respect as well.

The ventilation has another effect: the hum acts as a white noise, which minimises the noise interference caused by neighbouring activities. Furthermore, the grey aluminium louvres along the walls conceal acoustic material (wood wool slabs) that lines the solid wall areas and just like people and furnishing the wide areas of carpet has an additional sound-absorbing effect.

The building is open and permeable to temperature and humidity as it is to light. In the roof, the dissolved load-bearing structure allows daylight to pass through. Double layers of aluminium louvres, the upper one of the two motorised, permit the regulation of how 'natural' light penetrates and enters through the glazed parts of the roof.[10] In addition to the two full-glass façades at both ends of the building and the two conservatories facing south, these strips of roof-lights generate a lot of 'natural' light inside the building. However, it is only in the early pictures, that the louvres are open and the play of sun and shade exploited to its full extent. Conservation concerns have led to the fact that the Living Area today is illuminated mainly with artificial light (see Chapter 6). Georg Sexton together with Roy Fleetwood from Foster Associates designed a flexible lighting system, which can be handled from the rear via the catwalks. The monospace allows the light to travel, however the interplay of 'natural' and artificial light modulates zones of different lighting conditions and different degrees of connection to the outside world.

A multitude of devices support the monospace, and its huge inner air volume is not simply empty. The building generates or filters light, tempers and distributes air, reflects and absorbs sound, keeps rain outside while it allows humidity to travel. This brief technical overview provides an idea of how the interior world of the building is actively modulated; it is not simply empty and homogeneous. Diagrammatic analyses enhance in this sense the readability of the plan and allow assuming aspects like pathways, visibility, and functional engagement, when taking furniture and materials into consideration. There are indications of a complex world that suggests a close interplay of shell, materials and objects. Physical and non-physical devices, like the mezzanine boxes, glass railings, the different furnitures and materials, light, sound and climate modulate the inner world and build up distinctions between here and there, while other elements like the carpet or the aluminium louvres connect and emphasise unity. The shed is holding these different zones together. However, this is a lifeless material world if we do not consider its social entanglement. We do not know if this building indeed is flexible and adaptable, if it is changing. We do not know about its rhythms and constraints and as such about its possibilities.

provide a humidification control and thus poses a challenge for meeting museum conservation standards (Ledinskaya 2015; Camuffo 2001).

10 As I will argue later, light is never 'natural' but made with a lot of devices (Chapter 6).

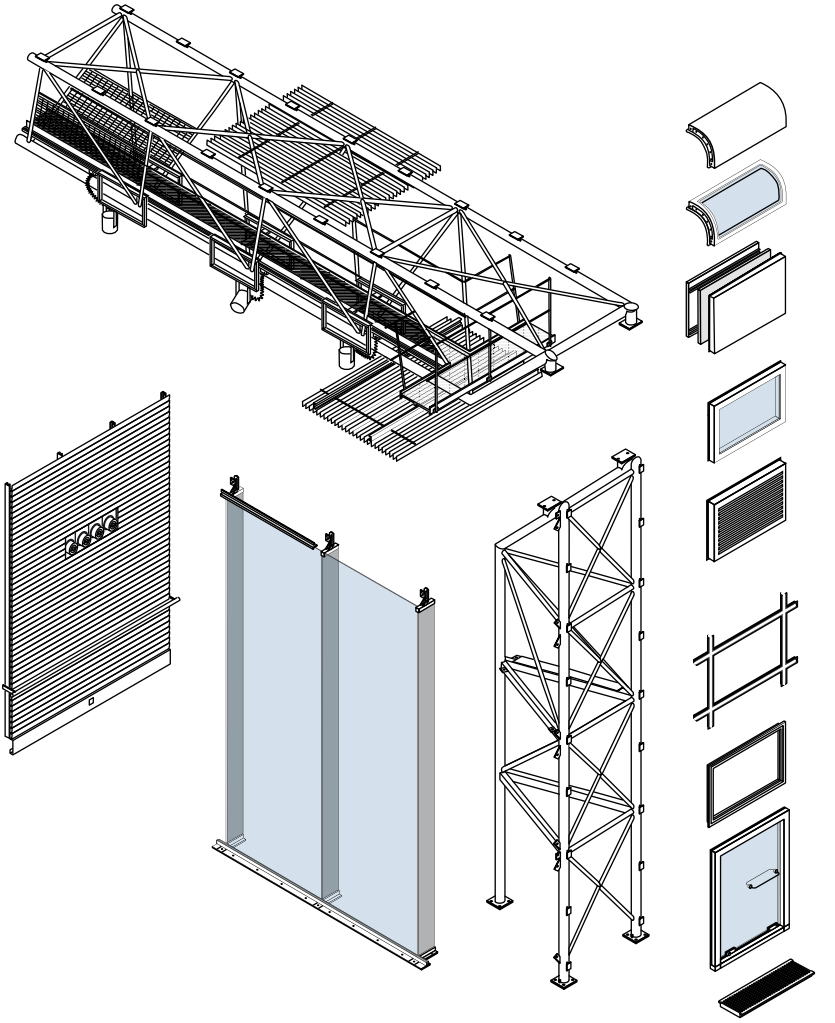


Fig. 3.23:
'Kit of parts'.

3.2
Perspectives on the Building as …

Approaching the building by technical and functional description by way of its plans, by visual examination and initially diagrammatic analysis we can gain a clear understanding for the abstract architectonic body of the Sainsbury Centre. That said, so long as we do not turn to its lived reality we only face an abstract and static object. However, reviewing the literature on the building we find little indication for this mundane world. In the following we turn to the body of literature about the building more closely. What has been said and written about the Sainsbury Centre? What can we learn from 'outside'? With the term outside I refer to the many contexts, social and cultural that made this building possible, the biography of the architect, as well as the philosophical, historical and stylistic frameworks commonly mobilised to analyse and contextualise this building. Thus, we will enter a discourse that is predominantly concerned with the question, '*Why* is the Sainsbury Centre like it is?'. That is an interesting question, especially given the emergence of this project in the transition phase of the 1960s and 1970s. Instead of retelling these stories one more time, I will give a brief overview and point out the specific and dominant narratives: Firstly, the theme of flexibility, material lightness, and their close connection to questions of style; secondly, the star-architect and the reference system that is mobilised through and with it; thirdly, the founding myth of the Sainsbury Centre.

3.2.1 … a High-tech and Late Modern Museum Building

Turning to architectural history and theory, there are many categories, concepts and interpretations that we can take up to discuss the Sainsbury Centre.

> It is a contradictory building—a hybrid exhibition, gallery, and museum building; its form, a light-weight flexible enclosure, supported as a monumental and spectacular structure; a cultural building housing "art" yet constructed in a tradition of the 19th century engineering "technique". (Peckham 1979, 25)

Each aspect here does indeed come with its own particular discourse and framework and there are different ways of contextualising this building.[11] As already

11 The most recent contextualisation of the building took place with the exhibition *Superstructures: The New Architecture 1960–1990* (24 March – 2 September 2018) at the Sainsbury Centre on the occasion of its 40th anniversary. The accompanying catalogue presents the building in the context of High Tech architecture, in the tradition of engineering and industrial material experimentation and the utopias and megastructures of the 1960s and 70s.

discussed (Chapter 2), the topic of open space is an especial concern of Modernism. Following English architecture critic Reyner Banham, we can understand the Sainsbury Centre as the realisation of a modern dream, 'the dream of the infinitely flexible and perfectly conditioned art gallery' (Banham 2000, 85). Generally speaking Foster is considered a modernist architect. When architect and architectural theorist Charles Jencks announced modern architecture was dead and postmodernism as its successor (Jencks 1991 [1977]), Jencks invented a further category, the 'late modern' for architects like Foster. At a time when the ideal of modernity was already in question, buildings like the Sainsbury Centre but also the Centre Georges Pompidou (1977) by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano explored similar technical and architectural themes. While these were rooted in Modernism, they now were able to push architectural boundaries towards industrial production. The connection between Foster and Rogers is not accidental but stems from time studying together at Yale and subsequently from the joined office Team 4.[12] With the Reliance Controls Factory (1966), an elegant box of metal cladding with wall-high glazings and exposed structural stiffening, they had explored architectural aspects such as fluid open space, flexibility and prefabricated components together before their partnership broke up in 1967.

Thus, when approaching the Sainsbury Centre the literature suggests looking at the project genealogy of Team 4 and then Foster Associates.

> Foster Associates' development of the modular pavilion from the industrial box is fascinating to behold. Throughout the '70s, boxes, large and small, were their speciality. After Reliance Controls there followed Computer Technology, Hemel Hempstead, IBM Cosham, the Modern Art Glass warehouse at Thamesmead and the SAPA aluminium extrusion plant at Tibshelf outside Derby—about as minimal and enigmatic a box as one could wish to see. None of these seems very remarkable now. They are largely of academic interest as precursors to the Sainsbury Centre—the last word in sleek sheds and the end of the line for that particular built form. (Best 1982, 41)

12 At Yale, one of Foster's classmates had been Richard Rodgers with whom he would become friends. Rogers joined Yale coming from *Architectural Association* (AA) in London. This was at a time when Peter Cook and David Greene started Archigram, a famous student magazine at *AA* that featured high tech and lightweight utopian projects. In 1963, one year after graduation and a short period of work in the USA, Foster returned to England and joined Rogers in setting up the architectural studio *Team 4* together with the two wealthy sisters Georgie Wolton (who left after a few months) and Wendy Cheeseman. With some starting help from the family of the soon joining Su Brumwell (Rogers' first wife), they managed to realise several projects and entered some competitions.

It can indeed be revealing to have a look into the early projects, as it becomes clear that the Sainsbury Centre is not the result of an ingenious idea. Many earlier projects allowed these thoughts to be developed and tested. Thus, it is a development *with* many projects. However, we need to be aware that such a discussion bears the risk of presenting the project genealogy as a linear development. This could underexpose the detours, discontinuities and innumerable ramifications. Nevertheless, there is also the chance here to show the many repetitions, imitations and small shifts that determine the emergence of something new. This is a path that follows the details of the architectural practice (Yaneva 2009a; Houdart and Minato 2009). As early as 1970 the *Architectural Design* magazine featured the work of Foster Associates with a special issue (Foster Associates 1970). Here 'the reduction of the building design into a series of zones', the 'integration of structure, service and external skin, to the point of single elements performing dual functions' and the aim of 'providing a maximum degree of flexibility', was already developed programmatically for the office at this point in time (ibid. 237).

The aspect of material treatment goes along with a further category of British High Tech. And here Foster Associates is named in the line with James Sterling and James Gowan, and Richard Rogers Partnership as a pioneer (Sudjic 1986). The Sainsbury Centre is considered 'High Tech, in the sense of the rejection of conventional building materials and constructional practice' (Dormer and Muthesius 2001, 38). Stemming from a 1960s approach, most of the components are prefabricated and the centre was rather assembled than built. Except for the in situ concrete foundations and the basement, which famously make up the bulk of the building's weight (Pavitt and Thomas 2018b, 18), the building is produced out of prefabricated, dry machine-made components. As such the elements of the façade are interchangeable, glass and solid elements could be relocated. Prior to the installation of the rain canopies above them, even the two main entrances would have been easy to relocate—this never happened, however. The former anodised aluminium panels had to be replaced a few years after opening due to leakage. The purpose-designed panels are part of Fosters Associates' approach towards new materials. An interest which is said to be driven on the one hand by the ability to free buildings from their masses and on the other hand to reduce energy consumption (Sudjic 1986). Foster's biographer Deyan Sudjic stresses that '[p]erformance is one of Foster's most consistent goals' (ibid, 39) and as such the question of being modern would be 'an attitudinal stance, rather than a commitment to a particular style.' (Ibid. 46)

Looking only at the built materiality the Sainsbury Centre offers flexibility and adaptability to meet future changes. It looks as if it can extend itself at both ends, which stresses the idea of the 'building as an unfinished process' (ibid. 59). Flexibility, as associated with the idea of opening architecture to the unknown by making it easily changeable or adjustable, was a term that came about particular-

ly in the 1950s (Forty 2004, particularly 142–48). And while flexibility underlies a non-deterministic touch, 'that the architect should conceive buildings not as monuments but as receptacles for the flow of life which they have to serve' (Gropius 1954, 178), this was controversial from early on and criticised in connection to functionalism. As Forty stresses, 'The incorporation of "flexibility" into the design allowed architects the illusion of projecting their control over the building into the future, beyond the period of their actual responsibility for it.' (Forty 2004, 143) Flexibility in relation to the Sainsbury Centre consists of two different aspects. On the one hand, there is the large interior, which potentially allows various installations and, on the other hand, there is a technical flexibility concerning the interchangeable façade and technical equipment. The latter of which creates a certain proximity to Cedric Prices Fun Palace.[13]

Approaching the question of style not only do other buildings and practicing architects, the comparison of categories and terms, materials and construction methods move into focus but also the architectural company Foster Associates and the person Norman Foster.

3.2.2 … the First Public Commission of a Star Architect

When commissioned with the new museum on the Campus of UEA in 1974 the young London-based architectural firm Foster Associates had been involved with several low budget and industrial buildings. Considered in terms of years of practice and also building experience, Foster Associates was relatively young—neither had built a museum nor any sort of campus building. The major commission of the Willis Faber & Dumas Headquarters in Ipswich (1975),[14] that would become award winning and together with the Sainsbury Centre establish Foster as a leading architect amongst his generation, however, was not yet completed. It is unclear how exactly Foster Associates got into the smaller selection of architects considered, but the Sainsburys took an interest in Foster after a visit to London's Millwall Docks seeing the Operations-Amenity Centre (1969) and the Passenger Terminal (1971) that Foster Associates had realised for Fred Olsen Ltd. The former was a two-story building with a steel and glass façade built into the fire separating strip between two cargo halls. Amenities (canteen, showers and games room) were provided to dock workers and managers alike on the lower level and an open plan administrative office on the first floor (again shared facilities and the functional mixture was exceptional).[15]

13 Compare Hill (2003) on flexibility by technical means with regard to Price's work.

14 See Bramante (1999) for a detailed introduction to the Willis Faber & Dumas Headquarter.

15 For a detailed introduction to the Operational-Amenity Buildings see Architectural Design 5/1970 (Foster Associates 1970, 240–51).

Norman Foster, is regarded today as one of the world's most prominent and influential figures in architecture (Sudjic 2010) and 'as a leading figure in British intellectual culture generally' (McNeill 2005, 502). With the Sainsbury Centre commission, it has been emphasised that 'at the age of 42, *he* had joined the small rank of world architects' (Jodidio 1997, 14; emphasis added).[16] Subsequently in 1979 the office was commissioned to build the new headquarters for the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation in Hong Kong China (completed in 1986)—one of Foster's most prestigious commissions, followed by the Reichstag Building in Berlin, Germany (completed in 1999).

It is four decades ago that the Sainsbury Centre opened its doors. Today Foster + Partners is an international company involved in architectural and design projects ranging from urban master plans and airports to private houses and furniture design. The significance of the office does not only derive from the sheer size and number of fee-earning architects, and the fact that the firm has produced iconic buildings around the globe, but also because Norman Foster has been awarded numerous prizes,[17] and was honoured with a life peerage, taking the title Lord Foster of Thames Bank. All of this produced recognition, professionally within the architectural domain, commercially and publicly (outside the architectural profession) as urban and cultural geographer Donald McNeill (2005) analyses. With a view to this, McNeill points out the importance of public communication in the form of marketing and public relations to the office. It is said that Foster is largely in control of publications and has an 'extraordinary influence over British architectural critics' (Moore 2002), and as a result what we can learn about the Sainsbury Centre from the body of literature descends largely from the office or has been published with the approval of Foster + Partners.

Furthermore, the office is very active in publishing: there are extensive volumes, an on-going series dedicated to the Complete Works of Norman Foster edited by David Jenkins (Jenkins 2002–), monographs on selected projects, an anthology of writing on Foster, and by Foster (Jenkins 2000), as well as the biography *Norman Foster: A Life in Architecture* by Deyan Sudjic (Sudjic 2010) to name only few. Each of these examples discusses the Sainsbury Centre in detail. The most comprehensive presentations can be found in *Norman Foster: Buildings and Projects of Foster Associates Vol. 2 and 4* (Lambot 1989, 1996), *Norman Foster: Works 1* (Jenkins 2002), and the

16 The building has received a number of awards, amongst others: British Tourist Board Award; R.S. Reynolds Memorial Award; 'Museum of the Year' Award; Ambrose Congreve Award; 6th International Prize for Architecture, Brussels; Structural Steel Finniston Award; Royal Institute of British Architects Award; LABC East Anglia Built-In Quality Award – Best Public Community Project, Highly Commended. In 2012 it became a Grade II* listed building (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and Vaizey 2012).

17 Amongst them the Royal Gold Medal for Architecture (1983), the American Pritzker Architecture Prize (1999), the Japanese Praemium Imperiale (2002).

monograph Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Foster + Partners (Foster and Powell 2010).

Consequently, when turning to the body of literature on the building one is continuously led back to Foster. Here we find the narration of the star architect that takes us into the world of ideas of the creator and his biography. This is a meta-level form of explanation that tries to understand how Foster came to build this structure. We can additionally turn to the larger socio-cultural framework, which guides us into his childhood in a working-class environment, and leads us to the USA and the people he met there while studying. Furthermore, this touches on Britain's emergence from the war, the building politics and the driving utopian power of the young architectural scene during the 1960s and 1970s in the UK. We can learn about Foster's passion for aeroplanes and bicycles and his friendship with architect and inventor Richard Buckminster Fuller. If we were to try to explain how Foster came to be the architect he is, however, we would quickly lose sight of the building he constructed.

Another path closely related to Foster is a rich reference system that is mobilised around the Sainsbury Centre. When reading the office's publications on the building references can be found that were explicitly taken during the design phase and references most likely added after it was completed. Three buildings are most prominently alluded to: the Jutland Art Museum at Ålborg by Alvar Aalto (1972), the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humblebæk near Copenhagen (opened in 1958) and New National Gallery (1968) in Berlin by Mies van der Rohe. On a four-day study tour, Lisa and Robert Sainsbury visited these buildings in September/October 1974 together with Wendy and Norman Foster. All of them said to be inspiring and influential to the design process of the Sainsbury Centre (Powell 2010; Rybczynski 2011): The Jutland Art Museum affected or at least coincided with the selection of the remote site next to the woodland and was admired for its use of top lighting and practice of flexible screens to subdivide the main exhibition area. The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art was regarded for its informality, while the security standards and access to storage facilities seemed problematic. Finally, the New National Gallery in Berlin, albeit seemingly inappropriate as a model, is said to have, however, served Foster as a reference for a flexible building structure—and one that maintains openness to the future. As such, these references influence the design process just as other constraints, for example the site or the economic situation, suggest certain solutions. The site conditions with a sloping terrain recommended lining the building programme along the existing access road and while the different functions of museum (comprising permanent and special exhibitions), school of fine arts, restaurant and senior common room (abandoned later) suggested several separate buildings, the comparatively low budget for the construction and in a period of steep inflation in Britain a single open plan building seems to be an economic solution (Rybczynski

2011). Moreover, the open plan solution was something that previous projects had developed and had successfully proven several times.

Other connections concern the proximity of the initial ribbed aluminium panels of the façade to the Citroën 2CV and the Airstream caravan designed by Wally Byam (Lambot and Vickers 2002, 398–99). Furthermore, the resemblance between the service catwalks in the roof plane of the Sainsbury Centre to the service gangways in the airship Graf Zeppelin and its 'structural lightness' in general (Powell 2010, 26) has been mentioned in the literature, as has the Boeing 747 galley as an example of ergonomic efficiency presented next to photos of the dark room and lavatories of the Sainsbury Centre (Lambot and Vickers 2002, 384). These and other comparisons and 'sources of inspiration' accompany the project descriptions. Whether or not these images were already circulating during the design process cannot be determined with any objectivity anymore. It would be a separate work to study the active role of these kinds of images in the design process. If present, however, we must not understand them as mere passive sources for human inspiration but as active influences: supporting, redirecting and shifting design trajectories.

Thus, it can be stated that the building, like any other architecture, is shaped by numerous demands and influences. As any project, it develops along a meandering trajectory and is of course never the work of a singular star architect. In the end, it is highly problematic to determine a building on the basis of a narrative of the creative genius, which is produced by the system of architectural stardom. McNeill's analysis of Foster + Partners traces processes of architectural globalisation and questions the singular authorship produced by this system (McNeill 2005). As discussed earlier (Chapter 1), given the complexity of the design process the notion of 'starchitect' is highly reductionist. As Yaneva shows, however, not only complex human reference systems have to be considered (Yaneva 2009a, 2009b).

Before we remove the architect from the focus in the following, two remarks should be made here: Since Foster + Partners are, as noted above, largely in control of the publications about the building we also have to consider these images as tools for a referential game with historians of art and architecture. The addition of images of the Citroën 2CV or the airship Graf Zeppelin to the project explanations, suggests a reference system in which the building is to be deciphered today. In doing so, they actively take the authority to interpret their buildings.

> Foster has decorated drawings of [his] buildings with helicopters or else his pure-white Caproni sailplane gliding overhead. These intrusions are significant. Most of Foster's best buildings are elegant machines, either complex in form (like the Renault Centre) or else simple, smooth skinned structures like a glider (Sainsbury Centre). (Glancey after Jenkins 2002, 387)

Even small hints like the sailplane gliding over the building give incentives to the chain of interpretations. It is a referential game—a giving and taking of references with architectural critics and theorists.

However, Foster does not only have the far-reaching interpretive authority, but also, and this is quite unusual within the field of architecture, he still has great influence on all changes that are made to the building to this day, as we will see in the next chapter. As such, we will meet him again in the building but no longer as a starchitect who hovers over it but in his worldly influences on concrete decisions and spatial processes. The special relationship between building and architect can be partly explained by the importance of the Sainsbury Centre for the course of Foster's career, but it is also certainly based on his relationship with the founders, which elevated the building to a work of art.

3.2.3 … a Piece of Art

David Sainsbury ends his foreword to the catalogue *Superstructure: The Making of the Sainsbury Centre* with the words: 'my father always used to say that it [the building] was the best object in his collection.' (Sainsbury 2018)[18] The building, as a piece of art, is part of a narrative that describes the founders' close ties with the artworks and the individual artists with some of whom they shared lasting friendships—Norman Foster amongst them. In his book *The Biography of a Building: How Robert Sainsbury and Norman Foster Built a Great Museum*, architect and writer Witold Rybczynski provides a particularly noteworthy insight into how the collection, and the desire to ensure its afterlife, led to the founding and building of the Sainsbury Centre (Rybczynski 2011). The book opens with the acquisition of the first works of art by Robert Sainsbury, a pair of drawings followed by the small bronze sculpture *Baby Asleep* both by Jacob Epstein (ibid., 24ff.). What starts with a small rebellion, following Rybczynski, within a seemingly aesthetically and artistically alien upper-class family, develops into a full-grown collection which contains today over 1400 items (Sainsbury Collection 2018a). The collection comprises works of African 'tribal' art, the Pacific, the Americas, Asia, and the ancient Mediterranean cultures, and furthermore includes some important works of European modern art. Next to Jacob Epstein, Henry Moore had been one of the first acquisitions; Pablo Picasso, Alberto Giacometti, Amedeo Modigliani and Francis Bacon amongst others should follow (Hooper 1997). The Sainsburys had lived with the art in their house in Smith Square in London, arranging it to aesthetic criteria. When announcing to give the group of 500 works of art (at that point of time) to the relatively young University of East Anglia this idea was also driven by the wish to keep the collection together instead of splitting up the eclectic group of art-

18 The catalogue was published in association with the exhibition *Superstructures: The New Architecture 1960–1990*, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the opening of the Sainsbury Centre on show from 24 March until 2 September 2018.

works, as would have been most likely the case at other Universities with existing collections. This story of the domestic environment and the close connection of the collectors with their aquisitions and the artists, but also of a nonconformist couple who did not see themselves as collectors, we will encounter again when approaching the building in practice (Chapter 4).

Prior to giving the impetus for the construction of a building, the Sainsbury's collection had been exhibited in the Rijksmuseum Knöller-Müller in the Netherlands in 1966. Here the art was presented in an unorthodox juxtaposition of modern, ancient and 'primitive' or 'tribal' art—for the first time presented to the public. Kho Liang Ie designed the exhibition layout, which would serve as a model for the Sainsbury Centre by allowing for the viewing of objects from all sides, the use of small labels and reserved colours. The Sainsbury Centre differs from the above examples, however, in that it integrates university facilities into the museum, a decision that was made early on in the project to ensure an entanglement with the life of the university. The project starts to take shape once the architect is introduced. Rybczynski describes the progress, touching on controversies, particularly during design and construction between the patrons and the university but also after its inauguration.

Rybczynski's book provides the most comprehensive description of the development of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts. Its importance, however, also lies in the fact that it is still being sold in the building today and it can be assumed that, in addition to the Sainsbury Centre website, it is an important source of information for the staff as well as for visitors. Based on interview material with central figures, sponsors, planners, clients, historic witnesses and present users as well as reflecting on archival data, Rybczynski presents the building in its historical evolution and shows how it is intertwined in a network of interests. As the subtitle *How Robert Sainsbury and Norman Foster Built a Great Museum* already suggests, Rybczynski puts emphasis on the relationship between the patrons, and the architect. To a certain extent we can read this (commissioned) book as a success story of two gentlemen. Rybczynski himself remarks that 'great architecture does more than simply enclose, of course: it creates an interior world' (2011, 213). Moreover, he holds the Sainsbury Centre to be 'a congenial setting for human activities: looking at art, studying, eating lunch, staring out of the window' (221). That said, he does not close in and focus on detail. And while it is entitled a 'biography of a building', the building as an actor is less important to his explorations than the human protagonists. Whereas we learn much about the Sainsburys and Foster, this stands in stark contrast to what we *do not* learn about: the special qualities and reciprocal relationship that occur *with* the building. Although the process of creation is revealed here and various turns in the design process as well as the conversions after the opening exposed, the understanding of the building as a rigid object that forms a mere 'setting for human activities' is reproduced. The

rich experience of the daily life of and with the building is missing. As such, this belongs to a traditional discourse about a building that contains space similar to the countless building reviews which all rather move around the building reproducing the same iconic images, presenting historical developments, technical details and aesthetic impressions, next to stylistic classifications (Peckham 1979; Sudjic 1986; Jenkins 2002; Pavitt and Thomas 2018a). They give little or no insight into the rich field of interactions and possibilities that this building promises and most of the associations between human and nonhumans remain invisible. That said, at least doubts and clues can be found that point to the worldly reality of the 'work of art'.

When opening, the building caused controversial attention—on campus, in the general public, amongst practitioners and academics. During the three day inauguration, 6–8 April 1978, students demonstrated against the building and handed out 'a Marxist pamphlet denounc[ing] the Sainsbury Centre as a "monument to the bourgeoisie" and a "costly white elephant"' (Rybczynski 2011, 151). The building was not only contentious amongst students who had recently experienced cutbacks in the financing of the universities, concerns which were shared to some extent by the staff and lecturer's union, there were also reservations on the part of the university already before the building was opened about the smooth metallic appearance that was in stark contrast to the adjacent concrete architecture, as well as about the location of the offices inside the building without direct access to daylight (Dormer and Muthesius 2001).[19]

Amongst the critiques of the Sainsbury Centre, Martin Pawley's *Buildings Revisit* stands out. Celebrating the 'neutral timelessness' (Pawley 1984, 44), he hints at the material deterioration, problems with heat loss and air pressure and by consequence the instable climate, which he indicates cause difficulties for potential exhibitors and in getting loans for exhibitions (ibid.). As the architectural critic Rowan Moore describes, the building as 'illogical', 'creat[ing] a space too vast for the delicate exhibits, and caus[ing] problems in the acoustic separation of exhibition, teaching and eating' (2002). These are rare moments amongst the existing reviews, which allow a brief glimpse into the building's life. Another rare account which furnishes a critique from 'inside', from people working and experiencing the building on a daily basis is provided by Muthesius and Dormer (2001). Architectural and design historian Stefan Muthesius, who as a teacher moved into the Sainsbury Centre when it opened, published in 2001 together with Peter Dormer, who for his part had experienced the building as a fellow in the

19 The magazine Architectural Design in 1979 dedicated one issue to the Sainsbury Centre with a detailed critique by Andrew Peckham supplemented by invited comments (Beck 1979).

School of World Art Studies and Museology (1994–96),[20] on the architecture at the UEA. They report on the mundane problems comprising the sound insulation of the offices for lecturers, the initial lack of lecture halls, the door-locks embedded in the floor (forcing the users to bend down for unlocking) and high temperatures during hot summer days (Dormer and Muthesius 2001, 32–35). These problems, most of which were solved in later refurbishments, are not interesting because they make the 'masterpiece' a worse or a less beautiful one, because they do not tune in to the praise of the starchitect, they are interesting rather because they point out the simple practicalities of the building in practice. There is a pragmatic way of knowing the building. The building is connecting one lecturer with the next behind the wall by audible transparency, it is forcing people to do certain movements when opening doors, and allowing or hindering assemblies of people by providing appropriate locations.

3.3
Approaching the Building in Practice

Foster Associates did not create a sequence of rooms for the different activities but used an open plan typology that does not utilise walls as a tool of spatial organisation. Hence, reading the plan and talking about the spatial layout does not tell much about the lived reality of this building. However, we gained a first idea of the overall organisation and the different parts that make up the building. We understood for example that the double shell and the underground corridor are important to allow for the type monospace to emerge and that the Sainsbury Centre is not simply an empty box but structured into areas with different layouts and material qualities. Nevertheless, this understanding remains abstract and developed in diagrams. How people meet and move and how they interact with the building, the art, and the multiple objects, which are granted with a special presence inside this monospace remains open.

Discussing the building through its aesthetic qualities and relevance and taking up the many concepts that exist around open plan architecture may indeed seem interesting, just as assigning the building to stylistic periods or historical developments, but this simply reproduces a formal object located in space and in time. We do not get access to the processes the building is part of. Yaneva suggested turning to the controversies and following how the building holds these sometimes seemingly contradictory aspects together (Yaneva 2012, 2009b). Then, approaching these contexts is not a question of following interpretations and opinions but of

20 The name of the school changed several times. Today it is the department of Art History and World Art Studies.

understanding that the building allows for discussion of all these different aspects, giving it new depth and direction. Hence, we can follow these discourses without trying to understand what the building is (in terms of definition) but rather by what it does.

My focus, however, remains with the question of space. And particularly with space 'inside' the building as this is how we so far have come to know the type of monospace—it contains one space inside. Yet as I argue, the monospace demands that we turn to the doing of people and objects, of building and practices if we want to understand its architectural quality. This quality is not conceptual and abstract but emerges from 'within'. Thus, I aim at looking beyond the building as a solid object by focusing on mundane practices with the building, today. Given the apparent simplicity of the typology of monospace, it is tempting to believe that these buildings are easy to understand. This is only the case if we turn to architecture as product or as a beautiful object in a collection. The critiques about noisy offices and missing lecture rooms remind us about the everyday networks the Sainsbury Centre is part of. It does not reside outside the social but the social is one of the many dimensions of the architectural process. It is particularly with the monospace that we need to understand and get a better grasp on architecture as a process and as such as something that is never finished. To comprehend the building in its architectural quality we have to move closer.

So, let us take up the trail of ANT that we left behind in the course of this chapter. I claimed that ANT allows empirically investigating the joined doing of people and building and thus provides access into the rich and ephemeral world of monospace buildings. Leaving the container thinking behind and turning to spacing we approach the Sainsbury Centre 'in practice' in the following chapters. By following spacing, the social life of the building—tracing how it connects in interaction, how it shifts and supports certain courses of action—will arise. By uncovering what it does, we will be able to gain a different understanding of what this building is.