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*Folklore*

edited by

Anna-Sophie Springer

& Etienne Turpin

# FANTASIES OF THE LIBRARY





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## Fantasies of the Library



### Fantasies of the Library

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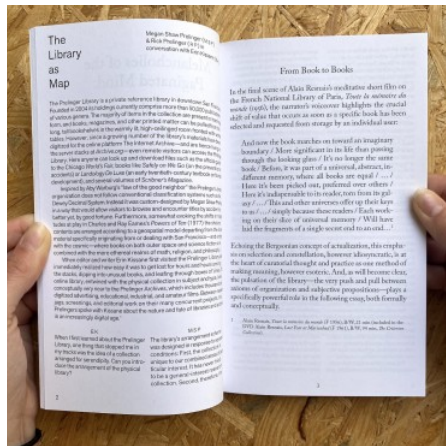
A book that acts both as library and exhibition space, selecting, arranging, and housing texts and images, aligning itself with printed matter in the process.

Fantasies of the Library lets readers experience the library anew. The book imagines, and enacts, the library as both keeper of books and curator of ideas—as a platform of the future. One essay occupies the right-hand page of a two-page spread while interviews scrolls independently on the left. Bibliophilic artworks intersect both throughout the book-as-exhibition. A photo essay, “Reading Rooms Reading Machines” further interrupts the book in order to display images of libraries (old and new, real and imagined), and readers (human and machine) and features work by artists including Kader Attia, Wafaa Bilal, Mark Dion, Rodney Graham, Katie Paterson, Veronika Spierenburg, and others.

The book includes an essay on the institutional ordering principles of book collections; a conversation with the proprietors of the Prelinger Library in San Francisco; reflections on the role of cultural memory and the archive; and a dialogue with a new media theorist about experiments at the intersection of curatorial practice and open source ebooks. The reader emerges from this book-as-exhibition with the growing conviction that the library is not only a curatorial space but a bibliological imaginary, ripe for the exploration of consequential paginated affairs. The physicality of the book—and this book—“resists the digital,” argues coeditor Etienne Turpin, “but not in a nostalgic way.”

#### Contributors:

Erin Kissane, Hammad Nasar, Megan Shaw Prelinger, Rick Prelinger, Anna-Sophie Springer, Charles Stankieveh, Katharina Tauer, Etienne Turpin, Andrew Norman Wilson, Joanna Zylińska.



# The Library as Map

Megan Shaw Prelinger (MSP)  
& Rick Prelinger (RP) in  
conversation with Erin Kissane (EK)

The Prelinger Library is a private reference library in downtown San Francisco. Founded in 2004 its holdings currently comprise more than 50,000 publications of various genera. The majority of items in the collection are present in hard-copy form, and books, magazines, and other printed matter can be pulled from the long, tall bookshelves in the warmly lit, high-ceilinged room fronted with work tables. However, since a growing number of the library's materials have been digitized for the online platform The Internet Archive—and are hence living on the server stacks at *Archive.org*—even remote visitors can access the Prelinger Library. Here anyone can look up and download files such as the official guide to the Chicago *World's Fair*, books like *Safely on We Go* (on the prevention of accidents) or *Landology De Luxe* (an early twentieth-century textbook on farm development), and several volumes of *Scribner's Magazine*.

Inspired by Aby Warburg's "law of the good neighbor" the Prelinger Library organization does not follow conventional classification systems such as the Dewey Decimal System. Instead it was custom-designed by Megan Shaw Prelinger in a way that would allow visitors to browse and encounter titles by accident or better yet, by good fortune. Furthermore, somewhat evoking the shifts in magnitudes at play in Charles and Ray Eames's *Powers of Ten* (1977) the shelves' contents are arranged according to a geospatial model departing from the local material specifically originating from or dealing with San Francisco—and ending with the cosmic—where books on both outer space and science fiction are combined with the more ethereal realms of math, religion, and philosophy.

When editor and writer Erin Kissane first visited the Prelinger Library she immediately realized how easy it was to get lost for hours and hours among the stacks, dipping into unusual books, and leafing through boxes of 'zines. The online library, entwined with the physical collection in subject and type, lives conceptually very near to the Prelinger Archives, which includes thousands of digitized advertising, educational, industrial, and amateur films. Between research jags, screenings, and editorial work on their many concurrent projects, the Prelingers spoke with Kissane about the nature and fate of libraries and archives in an increasingly digital age.<sup>1</sup>

EK

When I first learned about the Prelinger Library, one thing that stopped me in my tracks was the idea of a collection arranged for serendipity. Can you introduce the arrangement of the physical library?

MSP

The library's arrangement scheme was designed in response to several conditions: First, the collection is unique to our combined areas of particular interest. It has never tried to be a general-interest research collection. Second, therefore, the

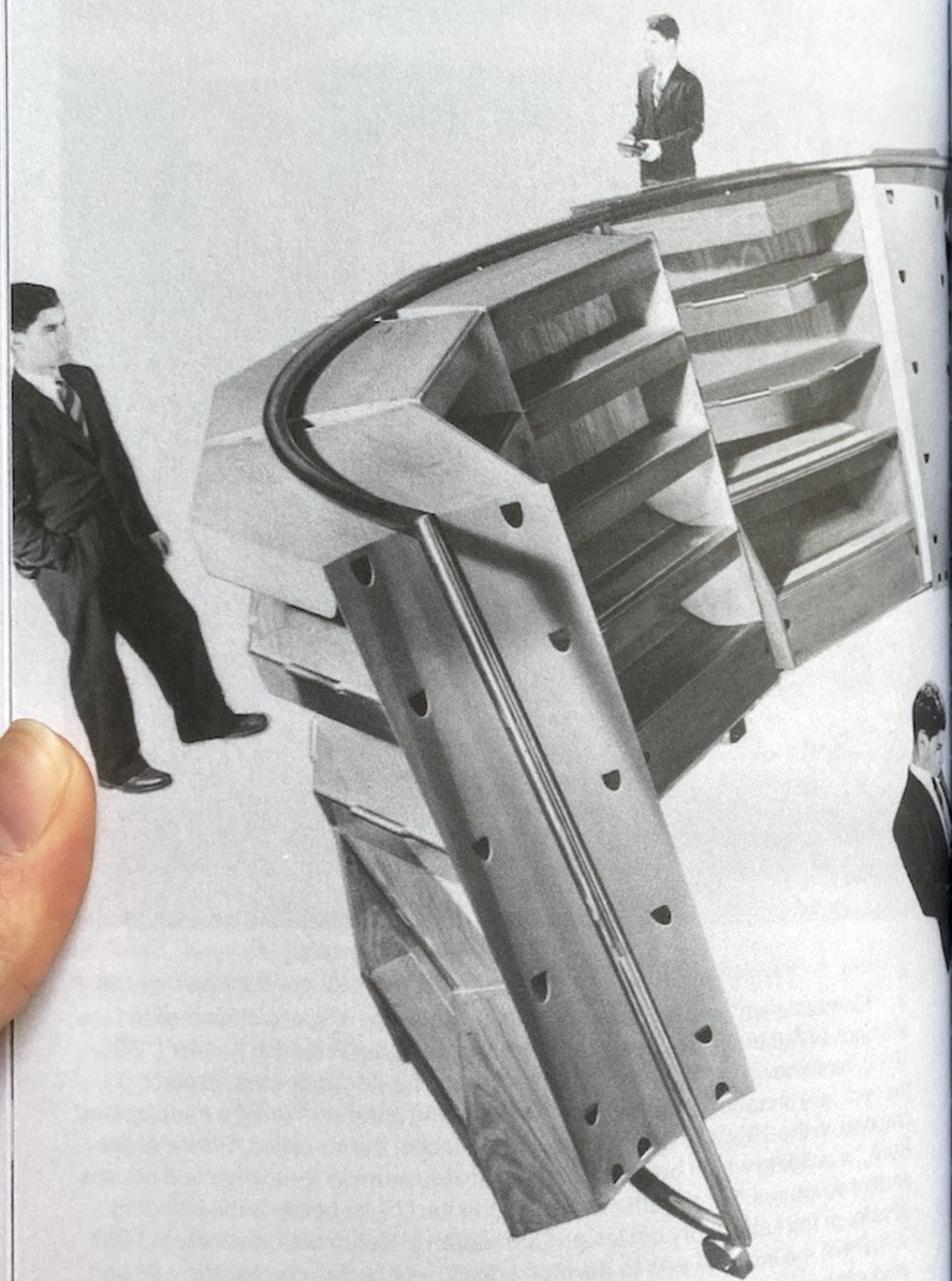
## From Book to Books

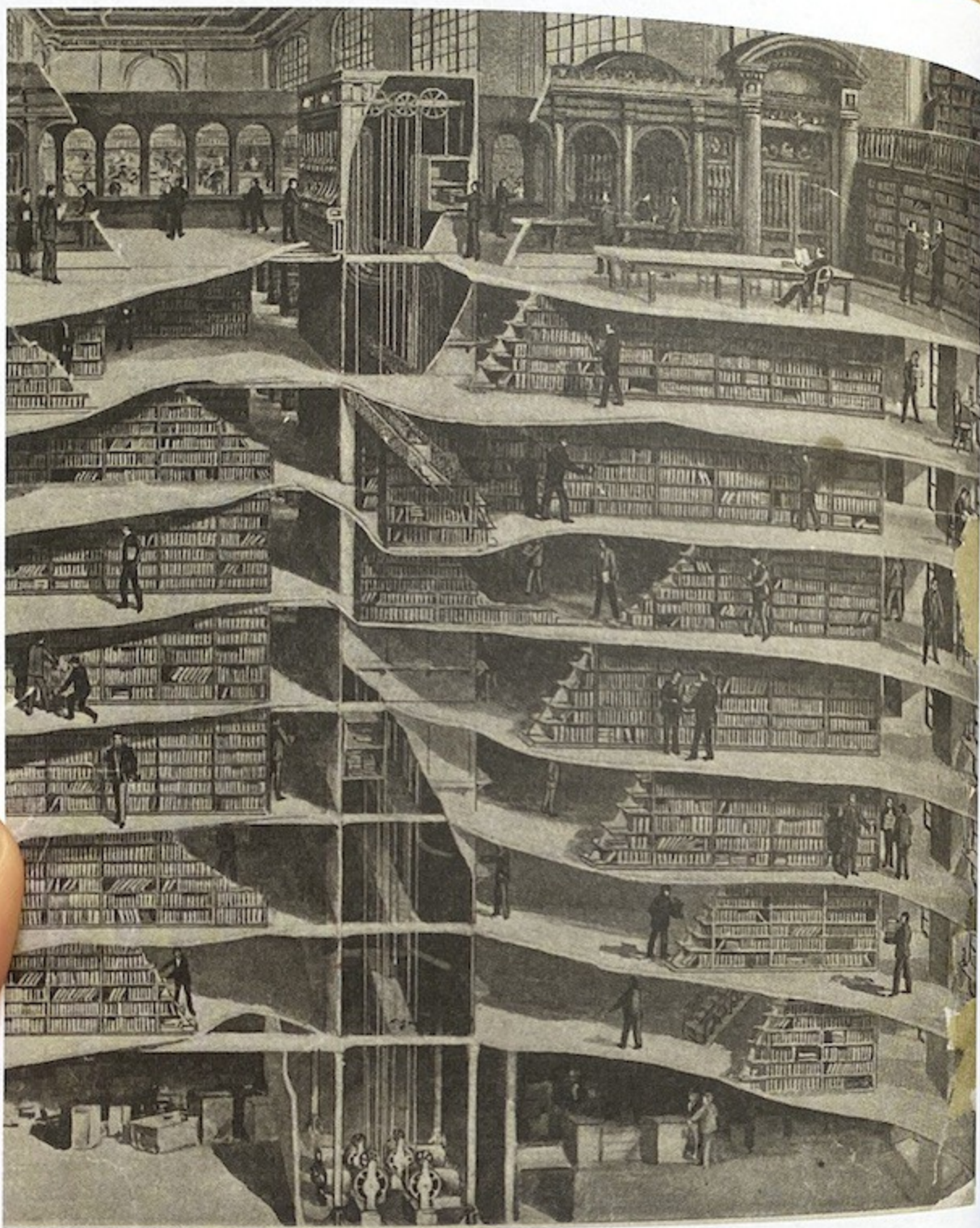
In the final scene of Alain Resnais's meditative short film on the French National Library of Paris, *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1956), the narrator's voiceover highlights the crucial shift of value that occurs as soon as a specific book has been selected and requested from storage by an individual user:

And now the book marches on toward an imaginary boundary / More significant in its life than passing through the looking glass / It's no longer the same book / Before, it was part of a universal, abstract, indifferent memory, where all books are equal / ... / Here it's been picked out, preferred over others / Here it's indispensable to its reader, torn from its galaxy / ... / This and other universes offer up their keys to us / ... / simply because these readers / Each working on their slice of universal memory / Will have laid the fragments of a single secret end to an end...<sup>1</sup>

Echoing the Bergsonian concept of actualization, this emphasis on selection and constellation, however idiosyncratic, is at the heart of curatorial thought and practice as one method of making meaning, however esoteric. And, as will become clear, the pulsation of the library—the very push and pull between axioms of organization and subjective propositions—plays a specifically powerful role in the following essay, both formally and conceptually.

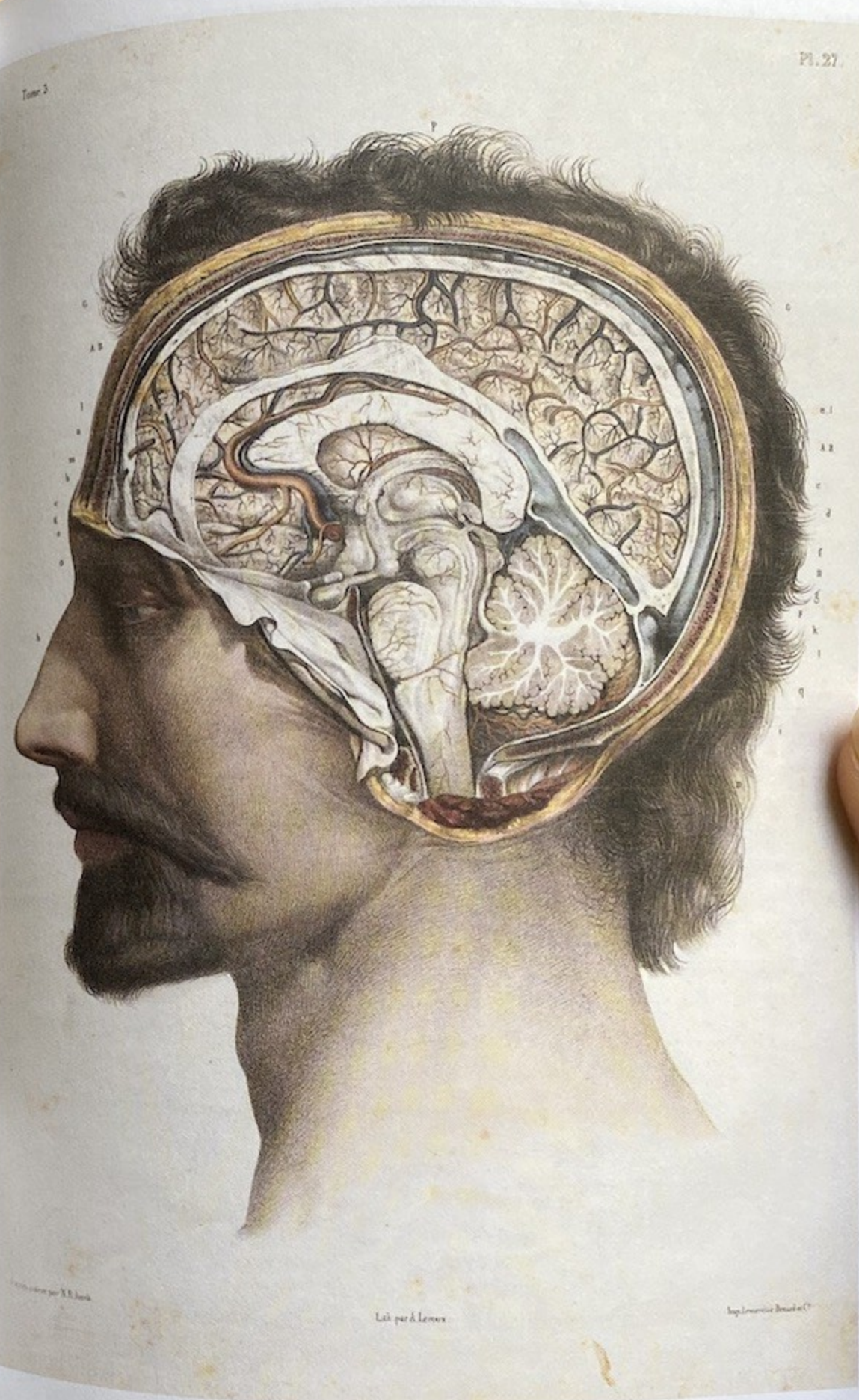
<sup>1</sup> Alain Resnais, *Toute la mémoire du monde* (F 1956), B/W, 21 min (included in the DVD Alain Resnais, *Last Year at Marienbad* (F 1961), B/W, 94 min, *The Criterion Collection*).

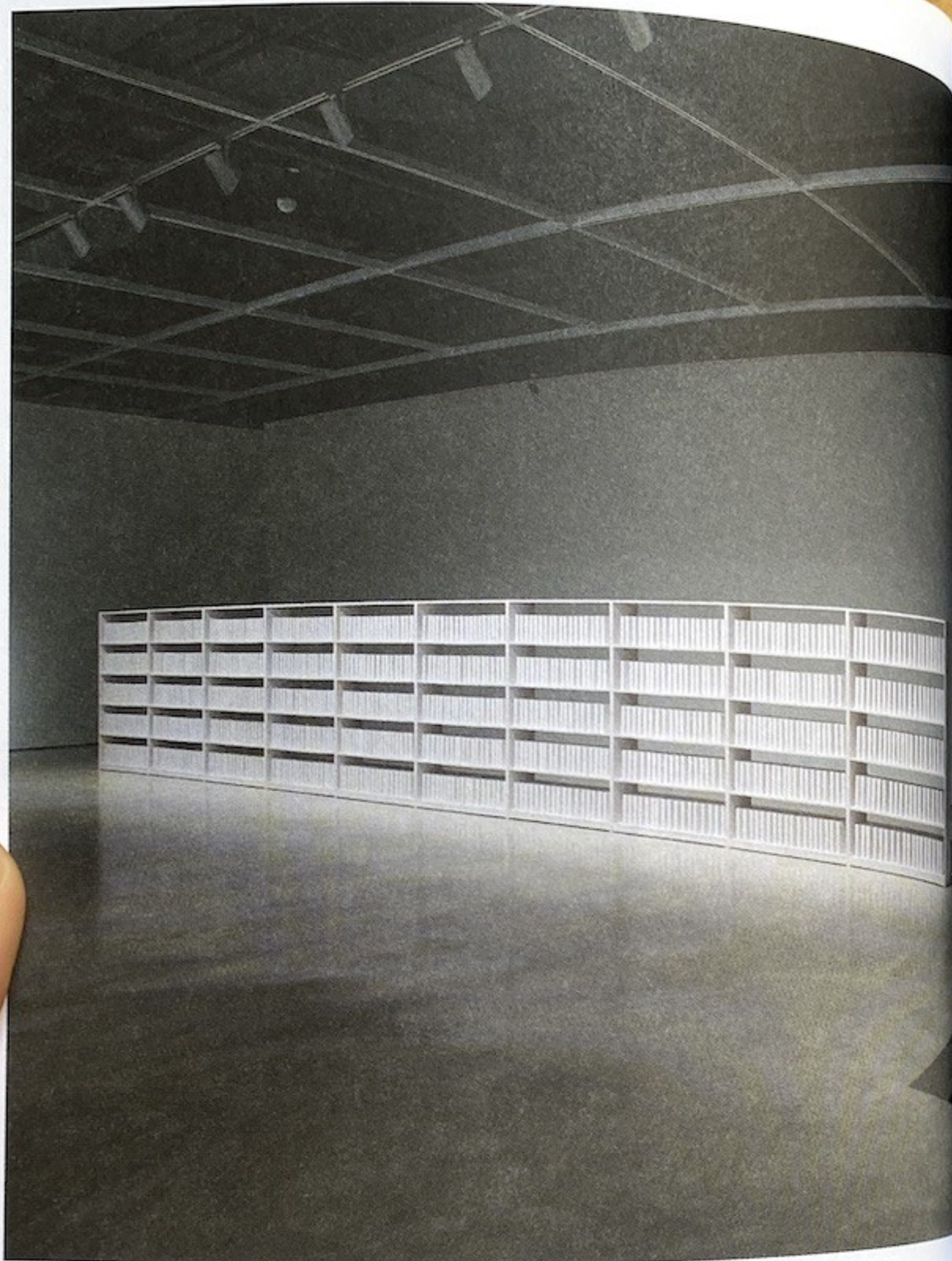




"It felt like being inside an enormous brain."  
 — Robert Musil on the library, 1930

No matter how advanced our technologies, humans remain the most essential of all Reading Rooms and Reading Machines; it is the boundless dimension of the literate minds, senses, and correlate imaginaries which surround the material repository of the library, the book, and the computer. Image on the left: A sectional view of the New York Public Library, Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, 42nd Street. Cover illustration, *Scientific American*, 27 May 1911. Image courtesy of the New York Public Library. Image on the right: Sectional view of the human brain, Plate 27 "Coupe de l'encéphale sur le plan médian," Jean Marc Bourgery, *Traité complet de l'anatomie de l'homme comprenant la médecine opératoire par le docteur Bourgery, avec planche lithographiées d'après nature par N. H. Jacob*, Atlas, Vol. 3 (Paris: Delaunay, 1844). Image courtesy of the Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg (Creative Commons).





While many famed libraries have been lost throughout history, few have been given the chance to rebuild through the art of crowd-sourcing. During the war in Iraq, looters set fire to the library of the College of Fine Arts at the University of Baghdad, leading to the loss of over 70,000 books. In 2016, Wafaa Bilal created the installation *One Hundred Sixty-Eight Hours and One Second* at the Art Gallery of Windsor, Canada. The installation began with a library of blank white books as a monument to the loss of the library intended to activate the potential for rebuilding.



The project used the crowd-funding platform Kickstarter to raise funds for the purchase of new educational texts from a list compiled by faculty at the College of Fine Arts. *168:01* is thus a library of exchange, wherein each new text replaces a blank white book from the original installation. At the end of the exhibition, all of the books will be shipped to the College of Fine Arts in Baghdad to begin rebuilding the library. On 9 February 2016, the fundraising campaign ended; with the support of a platform-enabled community of donor-readers, the project was 654% funded. Wafaa Bilal, *168:01*, participatory installation, 2016. Copyright Wafaa Bilal. Courtesy Art Gallery of Windsor. Photo by Frank Piccolo.



Andrew Norman Wilson, *North Of England Institute of Mining Engineers. Transactions*.  
Volume 9 – 306, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.

foundation for the LCC and other academic classification systems. One of the reasons the DDC has survived for so long is that its mathematical sequences can be broken down infinitely in order to add new categories to the nine conceptual “classes” that Dewey initially conceived. Despite its relative flexibility and ubiquity, Dewey’s invention has been criticized for reflecting a culturally narrow interpretation of objectivity, privileging white, Anglo-Saxon, and Christian worldviews, and thereby excluding a range of alternative perspectives on human knowledge.<sup>15</sup> But the imposition of a particular standpoint is not unique to the DDC. Since it is usually possible to assign one book to multiple categories at once, any chosen library system—whether in a private, “individual bureaucracy” (Georges Perec) of free associations, or in a public context—will reflect particular assumptions, while operating through a combination of various classificatory modes. Library classification systems are rational structures inherently motivated by a “fear of being engulfed by this mass of words,”<sup>16</sup> and yet, even if they are powerful enough to suppress this fear, in so doing they proliferate other limits, cracks, and misguided trajectories.

“How do you find your way in this madhouse of books?” asks Robert Musil’s General Stumm of the librarian. The following reasoning suffices to inform the General: “The secret of a good librarian is that he never reads anything more of the

<sup>15</sup> See Melvil Dewey, *A Classification and Subject Index for Cataloguing and Arranging the Books and Pamphlets of a Library* (Amherst, MA: 1876), [www.gutenberg.org/files/12513/12513-h/12513-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12513/12513-h/12513-h.htm); “Decimal Classification Beginnings,” *Library Journal* 45 (February 1920). Dewey biographer Wayne A. Wiegand called for a critical analysis of the DDC’s approach to categorization based on the writings of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, in Wiegand, “The ‘Amherst Method’: The Origins of the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme,” *Libraries & Culture* 33, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 175–94.

<sup>16</sup> Resnais, *Toute la mémoire du monde*, 02:35.

# The Ethics of the Book (Beyond Species Nostalgia)

Joanna Zylinska (JZ) in conversation  
with Anna-Sophie Springer (AS)  
& Etienne Turpin (ET)

Our *Fantasies of the Library* would remain incomplete without an attendant reconsideration of the book as printed matter in the age of the Anthropocene. As readers are increasingly drawn to digital sources for access to materials and to digital platforms as reading devices, the efficacy of the book seems more unstable than ever. Despite these trends, philosophers and media theorists insist on the fundamental instability of the book, not merely as a result of the digital turn, but as an essential dimension of the codex understood as a technology of thought. In this interview, conducted in London in October 2014 following the book launch of Joanna Zylinska's *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene* at Goldsmiths, University of London, editors Anna-Sophie Springer and Etienne Turpin discuss the contours of the book as a series of platforms, enterprises, and collaborations with Joanna. The following edited version of this conversation is an attempt to delineate an ethics of the book as a decisively human technology of thought, beyond any species nostalgia, be it humanist or posthuman.<sup>1</sup>

ET

I'd like to begin with the question of how you approach the book in the *Living Books About Life* project. As I understand it, you invite humanities scholars to curate living publications of scientific content. Why?

JZ

*Living Books About Life* is a project run by myself and media theorists Gary Hall and Claire Birchall, in association with Open Humanities Press. What we were originally trying to achieve with the curation of science content was to go beyond the public-understanding-of-science agenda—the one that says

"let's just make science palatable to humanities scholars and to the lay public." We also took inspiration from the sciences themselves. Indeed, scientists have been much more radical in their adoption of open access, as you well know, than humanities scholars ...

ET

Some of the highest ranked journals in biology and the biological sciences are open access.

JZ

Yes, similarly arXiv.org is a very important online repository for physics scholarship. One of the reasons scientists

the former is based on a series of sacramental characteristics, while the latter is premised on the melancholic. For, following Benjamin, the original work of art and the reproduction differ in terms of "cult value" versus "exhibition value"; while the former is charged with an aura of rarity and authority, the latter is characterized by ideas of both loss and replacement—a dynamic, in his words, of "melancholy, incomparable beauty."<sup>63</sup> Although Malraux did actually produce and edit a new trilogy of art books, his *Musée imaginaire* nevertheless directly points to the library as an alternative space for experimental curatorial practice because it is here that the absence of artworks transforms into a different form of presence: in the form of their images—as well as their various relationships.

According to Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin and Malraux differed in their conception of originality. While for Benjamin a copy always impinges on an original with destructive consequences for its aura, in Malraux's estimation, photography yields a radical transformation of an object, thereby allowing for a new and different auratic charge. In language similar to Forster's description of Warburg, Krauss writes, "the imaginary museum was filled with a continued, though transformed, condition of aura. Which is to say that the imaginary museum was filled with 'meaning'."<sup>64</sup> In Malraux's case, this new charge consisted of the emergence of a transcendently recognizable "style" based on the "premise ... that each work of art contains a potential for dialogue,"<sup>65</sup> that is, a dialogue among the works themselves and with their respective viewers. Regardless of the

<sup>63</sup> Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 226.

<sup>64</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "The Ministry of Fate," 1002.

<sup>65</sup> Jacqueline Machabéïs, "From East to West and Beyond," in *André Malraux: Across Boundaries*, ed. Geoffrey T. Harris (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 197.

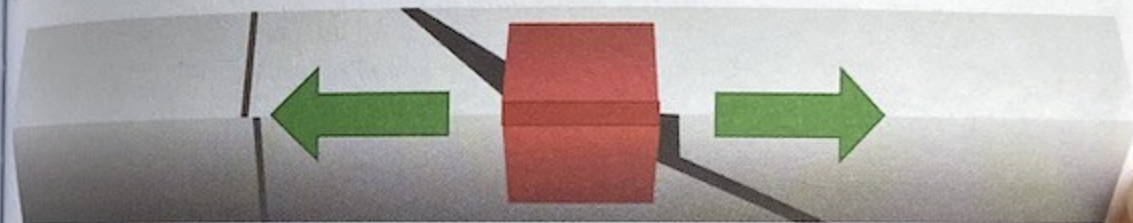


Melvil Dewey (1851–1931) was the inventor of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system and an important figure in the development of modern library science and rationalistic library standards. He is less known for how he propagated these standards, not only through educational means such as founding the world's first school of librarianship at Columbia University in 1887, but also by establishing a company for library furniture and supplies in 1876. Aptly titled the Library Bureau, the firm advertised its product designs—and those of certified manufacturers such as Faber pencils from Germany or fireproof, cast-iron shelving systems made in the US—in sales catalogs for customers to order from. In the introduction to the *Illustrated Catalog* from 1890, the Library Bureau is described as supplying “everything needed” by public and private libraries and book owners, including several groundbreaking innovations: “The Card Index and a wider field today in business life than as the principal library catalog. The Shelf cases for catalogs and price lists, scrapbooks for advertisements, notices and general notes.” While these technologies today seem somewhat old-fashioned, the “L.B. Book Support Pat. 6 F. 1886” remains one of the most common bookstand designs to date (a metal plate cut once and bent into a ninety degree angle so that the weight of the books placed on the horizontal end ensures the vertical end to hold the books upright on the shelf). These pages display items seen much less frequently today: a series of reading stands with various shelving options. From *The Classified Illustrated Catalog of the Library Bureau Inc.: A Handbook of Library and Office Fittings and Supplies* (Boston: 1890), 144–45.

Many readers are now regularly exposed to reading rooms and reading machines that, in the 1890s, were still pure science fiction. As most of our reading today takes place online, mediated through the electronic screens of computers, smartphones, e-readers, etc., the internet might well be the biggest reading room ever—and thus maybe the closest realization of a Borgesian Library containing all text and hypertext, all knowledge and hyper-knowledge. Several large projects are currently processing entire libraries in order to transform actual books into digital records and thereby make their contents remotely accessible. The most extensive experiment in digitization is Google's Library Project, initiated in 2004 in collaboration with major university libraries; but there are also others, such as the Internet Archive, HathiTrust, and Project Gutenberg (all of which in part still draw on resources scanned by Google). The online community Arg.org remains exceptional among these services in that it is nearly entirely dependent on the participation of the community of its users to both upload PDFs and e-book files, and to organize this material by filling out “index cards” and creating thematic “stacks.” This active participation in developing and maintaining the Arg.org library stands in stark contrast to Google's efforts of producing the impression of a seamless and fully automatized digitization process. Resonant with Arg.org's spirit of do-it-yourself scanning, this image belongs to an open-source tutorial on how to cheaply build one's own Linear Book Scanner, a device that prevents book spine damage and which was originally developed for no other client than Google itself. Image courtesy of Dany Qumsiyeh from <http://linearbookscanner.org>.



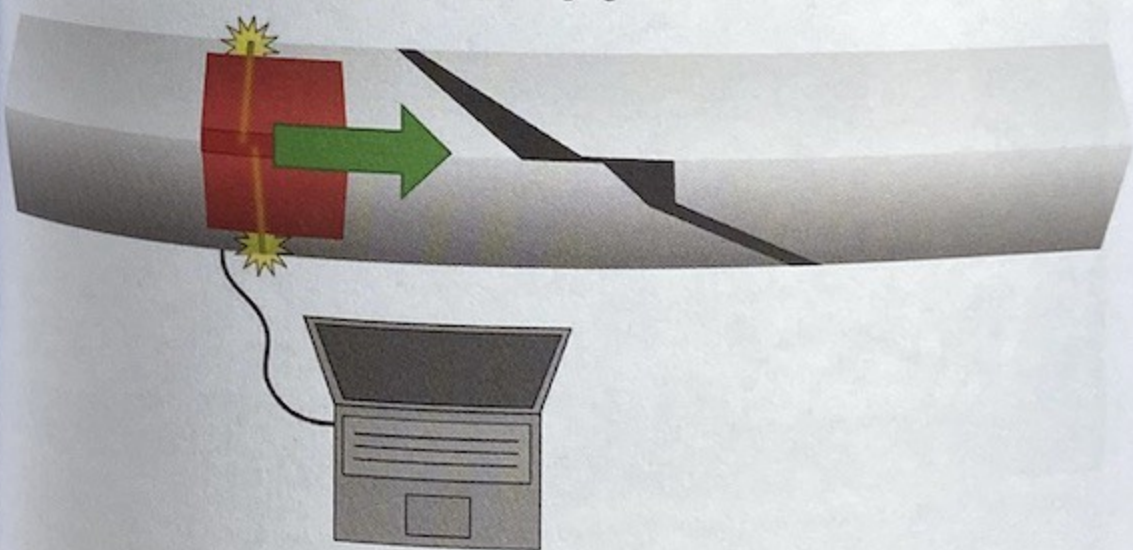
A book moves back and forth over the machine.



Each time across, a vacuum sucks a page from one side to the other.



The pages are scanned as they travel across two imaging sensors.



# Letter to the Superior Court of Quebec Regarding Arg.org

Charles Stankievech  
19 January 2016

To the Superior Court of Quebec:

I am writing in support of the online community and library platform called "Arg.org" (also known under additional aliases and urls including "aaaaarg.org," "grr.aaaaarg.org," and most recently "grr.aaaaarg.fail"). It is my understanding that a copyright infringement lawsuit has been leveled against two individuals who support this community logistically. This letter will address what I believe to be the value of Arg.org to a variety of communities and individuals; it is written to encompass my perspective on the issue from three distinct positions: (1) As Director of the Visual Studies Program, Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design, University of Toronto, where I am a professor and oversee three degree streams for both graduate and undergraduate students; (2) As the co-director of an independent publishing house based in Berlin, Germany, and Toronto, Canada, which works with international institutions around the world; (3) As a scholar and writer who has published in a variety of well-regarded international journals and presses. While I outline my perspective in relation to these professional positions below, please note that I would also be willing to testify via video-conference to further articulate my assessment of Arg.org's contribution to a diverse international community of artists, scholars, and independent researchers.

→ Essay continuing from page 49

"Warburgian tradition."<sup>47</sup> If we consider the Warburg Library in its simultaneous role as a contained space and the reflection of an idiosyncratic mental energy, General Stumm's aforementioned feeling of "entering an enormous brain" seems an especially concise description. Indeed, for Saxl the librarian, "the books remain a body of living thought as Warburg had planned,"<sup>48</sup> showing "the limits and contents of his scholarly worlds."<sup>49</sup> Developed as a research tool to solve a particular intellectual problem—and comparable on a number of levels to exhibition-led inquiry—Aby Warburg's organically structured, themed library is a three-dimensional instance of a library that performatively articulates and potentiates itself, which is not yet to say *exhibits*, as both spatial occupation and conceptual arrangement, where the order of things emerges experimentally, and in changing versions, from the collection and its unusual cataloging.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Saxl speaks of "many tentative and personal excrescences" ("The History of Warburg's Library," 331). When Warburg fell ill in 1920 with a subsequent four-year absence, the library was continued by Saxl and Gertrud Bing, the new and later closest assistant. Despite the many helpers, according to Saxl, Warburg always remained the boss: "everything had the character of a private book collection, where the master of the house had to see it in person that the bills were paid in time, that the bookbinder chose the right material, or that neither he nor the carpenter delivering a new shelf over-charged" (Ibid., 329).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>50</sup> A noteworthy aside: Gertrud Bing was in charge of keeping a meticulous index of names and keywords; evoking the library catalog of Borges's fiction, Warburg even kept an "index of un-indexed books." See Diers, "Porträt aus Büchern," 21.



What became known as The People's Library at Occupy Wall Street is an exceptional example of the important role books continue to play—despite the internet—whenever people are trying to change or challenge the systems that govern us. A cataloged system itself (with the first-ever recorded title paradigmatically being Hakim Bey's *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone*), this community-driven and activist makeshift library, housed in tents and plastic boxes on the pavement of the Financial District, grew out of books that were dropped off at the site of the Wall Street protests since their beginning in September 2011. Its actual duration was rather short-lived; on November 15 of the same year, the NYPD seized and destroyed more than two-thirds of this

collection (originally almost 3,000 books) when they raided and vacated the premises of Zuccotti Park. Today this library no longer exists. As a result of a lawsuit filed by Occupy Wall Street against the City of New York (then still governed by Mayor Bloomberg), the material damages and loss of the book collection were met with a payment of \$47,000 the following spring. The activist group distributed this compensation among other social groups, public institutions, and politically engaged businesses—many of them also working with and through books—such as Bluestockings Books, Books Through Bars, Free Press, and The New York Public Library. Photo by David Shankbone, 2011 (Creative Commons).