

I

Ed Ruscha's Letter • An Alternative Information Service • There is No Such Thing as Neutral Knowledge.

INNER VOICE: Why start with Ed Ruscha's *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*?

EVA: Simply, because he is *the* pioneer of artists' books and because he gives interesting insights on the topic in a letter we have in The Piracy Collection in London.¹ In it, he writes that it was "a terrible mistake" to number the first edition of *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*. He saw, that numbering the individual copies creates a "limited edition" rather than "just another book." He wanted his books to circulate freely. So it seemed quite counterproductive to turn the book into a collectible. Numbering creates a scarcity that hikes up the value. He actually was right: a copy of the first (numbered) edition of *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* sells today on AbeBooks for 17,432 £ [fig. 1]. It has become an object of desire for private collectors and big art institutions likewise.

INNER VOICE: Remind me, what was Ruscha's initial print run?

EVA WEINMAYR: He numbered and signed the first run of 400 in 1963. This had been followed up by a second edition of 500 in 1967. In 1969, he printed a third edition of 3,000. A huge print run for an artist-booklet. In my view it can be seen as the attempt to flood the market in order to undermine the trading of the books as expensive collectibles.

INNER VOICE: But what's wrong with that? Why can't books primarily be a collector's spoil and reading matter only as a secondary function?

EVA WEINMAYR: Books need to circulate to have an impact by being read. That is why books came about in the first place. Owning a book is fine but it still needs to be accessible. It's quite interesting that, roughly at the same time in the 1960s, a few hundred miles north of Los Angeles another publishing project took off. Stewart Brand, Lois Jennings, and a group of friends kicked around ideas to finally set up a serial publication in 1968: the *Whole Earth Catalog*—an alternative information service and distribution system [fig. 2].

INNER VOICE: I guess it was more about providing information to friends, who like themselves, attempted to live in communes. It was more a newsletter than a real book.

EVA WEINMAYR: The decisive point is that its publication gave it freedom to circulate. It was published twice a year—with more frequent updates in the form of supplements. The *Whole Earth Catalog* collated reviews of self-published counterculture literature, manuals, information about new tools,

¹ Letter to co-founder of *Village Voice* John Wilcock, February 25, 1966.

building and land use designs, as well as general philosophical texts. It provided practical “News to Use” for everybody in the community and source ideas for potential community building. Imagine the perversity, had such a rich tool been put into the cupboard of a solvent collector. David Senior, bibliographer at the MoMA Library, wrote a fantastic text about it in *Fragments from Access to Tools: Publications from the Whole Earth Catalog 1968-1974* [fig. 3].

INNER VOICE: If I am correctly informed, it also listed and reviewed a wide range of products such as books, manuals, tools, machines, but did not sell any of the products directly. Instead, the vendor’s contact information was listed alongside the item and its review. In that it was decidedly anti-commercial.

EVA WEINMAYR: No doubt. And in a way it resembled an alternative library project—a kind of “reading list for a coming community,”² as Senior put it. And as such the *Whole Earth Catalog* was not just informing about tools, it was a tool in itself, a publishing concept and a community-in-print. It was also a kind of educational service. Before they started the magazine, Stewart and his wife Lois embarked on a commune road trip with a truck touring the country and doing educational fairs. The *Whole Earth Truck Store* was not only “a store, but also an alternative lending library and a mobile micro-education fair.”³

INNER VOICE: Interestingly, David Senior describes the catalog project as a precursor of today’s online communities as the publication talked directly to its readership, asked its readers questions and completed the feedback loop by publishing reader letters, reviews and announcements.

EVA WEINMAYR: Yes, and that’s why the catalog became very popular and kept growing. In the years 1968 to 1975, more than 2.5 million copies were sold. It was a living organism, alive and kicking, rather than something dead put on a plinth for worship. They were widely distributed through informal channels like mail order, alternative bookshops, and in community libraries.

INNER VOICE: Libraries were an important reference point at the time, as it seems.

EVA WEINMAYR: Indeed, one of the many ads in the *Whole Earth Catalog* announced the 158-page library press publication *Revolting Librarians* [fig. 4] which campaigned for the inclusion of neglected topics in their library information service. Materials produced by independent and small-scale publishers had up to then not been reviewed in the library press, therefore not acquired for the libraries. Subsequently, they were not accessible for the readers, who had to do with the fairly limited range of publications by commercial publishing houses. Those, of course, would pick up alternative topics only when profit could be sensed.

2 David Senior, *Fragments from Access to Tools: Publications from the Whole Earth Catalog 1968-1974* (Portland, Oregon: Publication Studio, 2013), 2-3.

3 Andrew Kirk, *Counterculture Green*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 48.

QUESTION: Do you know Celeste West?

EVA WEINMAYR: Yes, she is brilliant! She actually co-edited the *Revolting Librarians* book. She was a feminist librarian and, in 1967, the founding editor of *Synergy Magazine*, an alternative library newsletter. She campaigned for librarians to become pivotal to enforce the Library Bill of Rights issued by the American Library Association in the 1930s (see Appendix).

INNER VOICE: Free and neutral provision and access to knowledge for everybody is the famous creed of that bill.

EVA WEINMAYR: Neutral? I don't think there is such a thing as neutrality when it comes to knowledge! Librarian activists such as *Synergy Magazine* demanded to address and recognize the political context of the work of librarians.

They looked at the nature of library catalogs, indexes and search tools because they believed that “these tools were mostly ‘rear-view mirrors’ that provided little or no bibliographic access to the actual information needs.” From April 1968 on, a feature section was included in an attempt “to concentrate on subjects of current interest or on popular subjects for which we feel there is a lack of available information.”⁴ These were subjects such as Women's Liberation, Gay Liberation, Dope, Native Americans, Ecology, Changing the Family Structure, Independent Publishing and the Underground Press.⁵

INNER VOICE: (Holding up a back cover of *Synergy Magazine*) This list of subjects here gives an instructive overview of topics important to them [fig. 5].

EVA WEINMAYR: New cataloging and new subjects were just one thing. Celeste West's aim was also to fundamentally shift the concept of the library from “conserving and organizing information to generating or promoting” it.⁶ She initiated an alternative library culture that was less preoccupied with archiving of cultural records then more with activating them.

INNER VOICE: It sounds as if you also came across Anna-Sophie Springer's book *Fantasies of the Library*?

EVA WEINMAYR: Andrea Francke just sent me a copy [fig. 6]. It basically builds on Celeste West. The book looks at libraries from a curatorial perspective. It says that the library's primary function privileges active use over passive display and presentation, whereas museums and archives normally store objects and information only after the time of their utility has expired. So the library is really about being switched on by its readers. And that is a good thing.

4 “Index for 1967–71,” *Synergy Magazine* (San Francisco: Bay Area Reference Center, 1972).

5 See Tony Samek, “Intellectual Freedom within the Profession: A Look Back at Freedom of Expression and the Alternative Library Press,” *Library Juice* 6:6 (2003), http://libr.org/juice/issues/vol6/LJ_6.6.html.

6 Celeste West, “Conversation with Celeste West,” interview by Milton Wolf, *Libraries for Social Change: Women's Issue*, 31/32 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983), 29–35, 29.

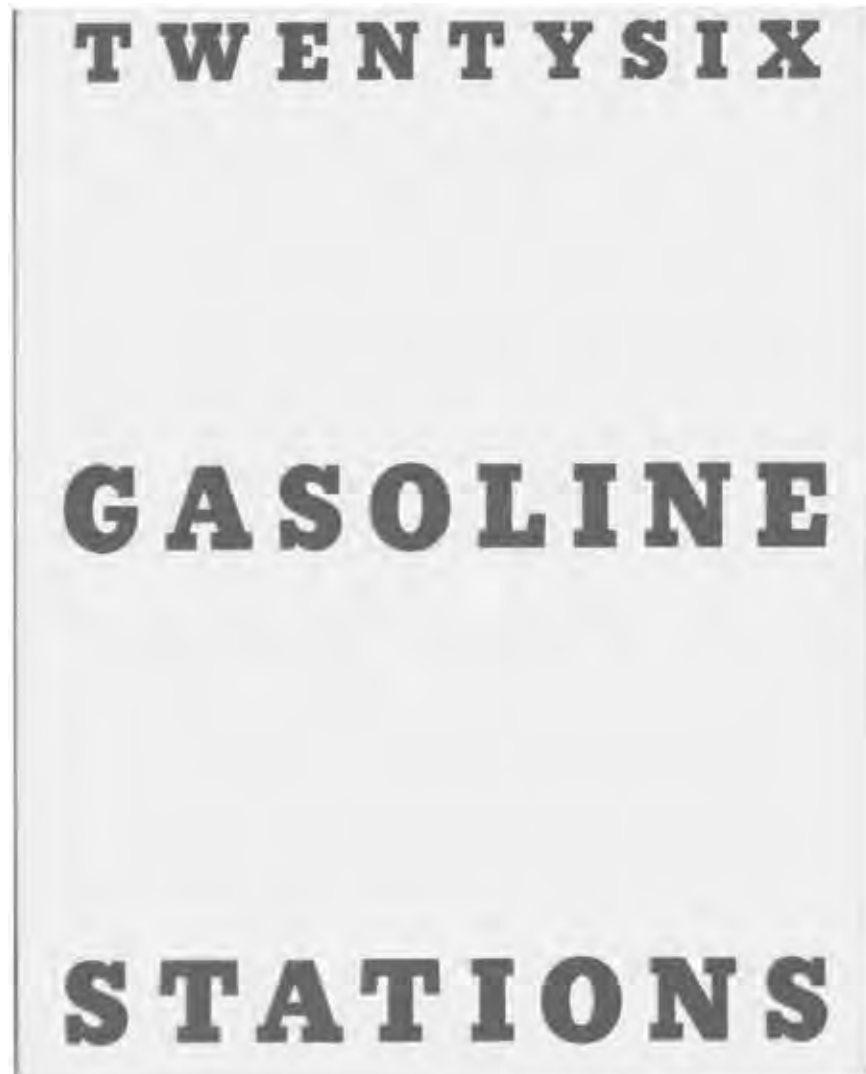


Fig. 1. Ed Ruscha self-published the first edition of *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* in his own imprint National Excelsior Press in 1963. It had a print run of 400 copies, which he numbered.
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→ **Fig. 2.** Stewart Brand, *Whole Earth Catalog*, Fall 1969, front cover.

WHOLE EARTH CATALOG

access to tools



Fall 1969
\$4

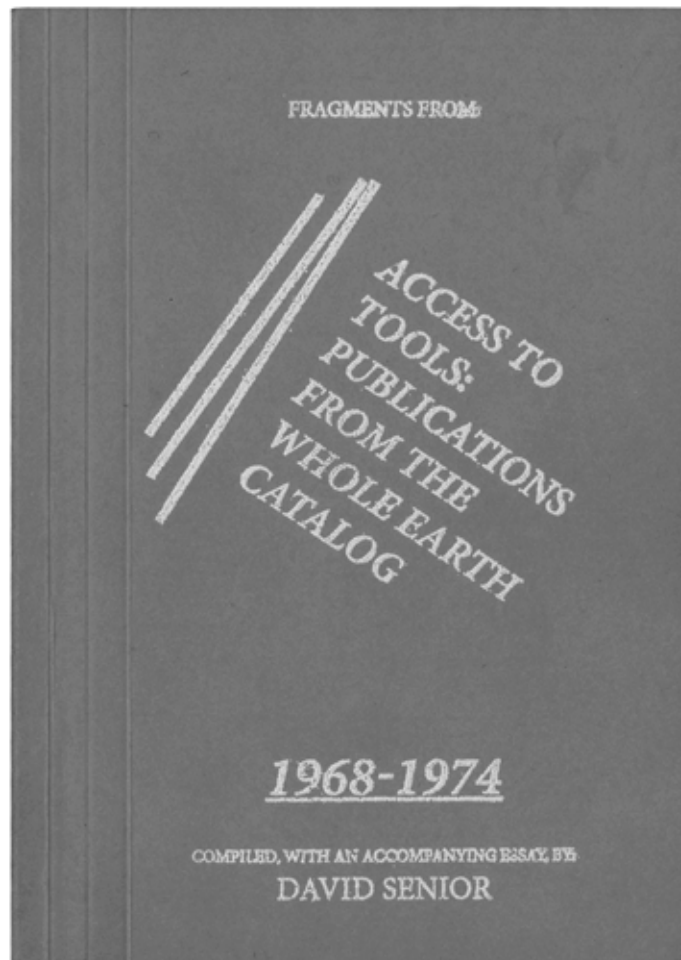


Fig. 3. David Senior (ed.), *Fragments from Access to tools: Publications from the Whole Earth Catalog 1968-1974*, Portland, Oregon: Publication Studio, 2013 (first edition Wooden Leg Press, 2012), front cover.

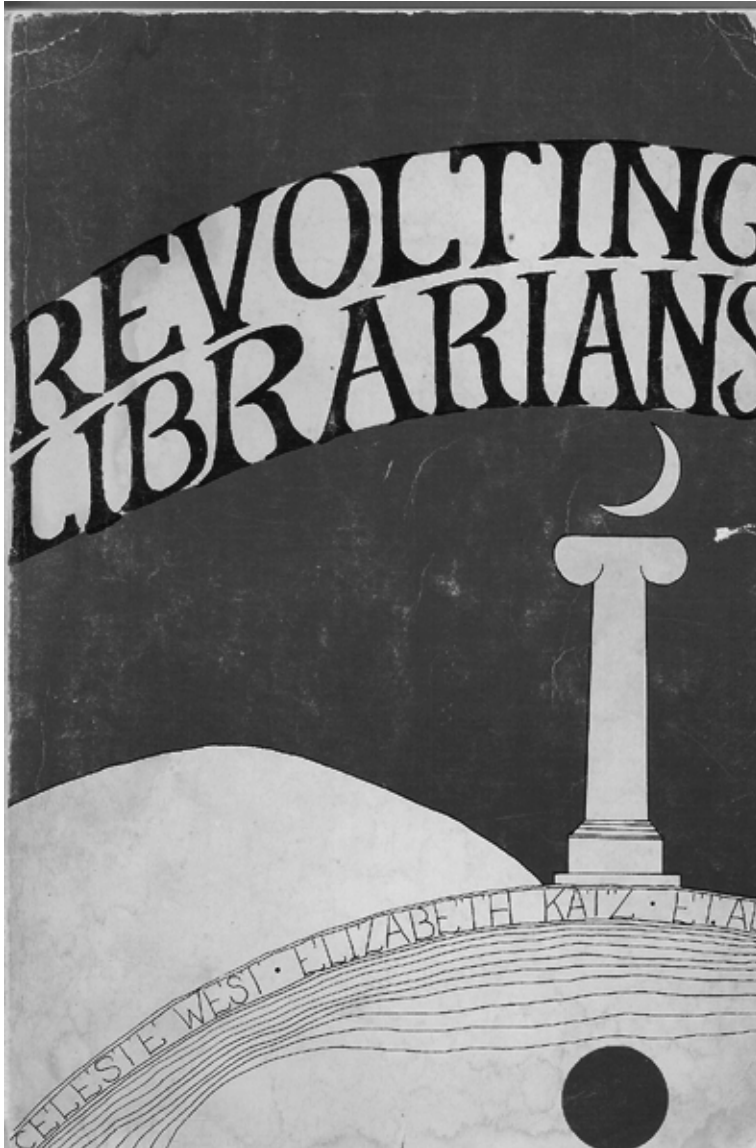


Fig. 4. Celeste West and Elizabeth Katz (eds.), *Revolting Librarians*, San Francisco: Booklegger Press, 1972, front cover. The price was \$2.00 and the book was distributed by the American Library Association, Chicago by prepaid post. Photo: Sarah Mae, CC-BY-NC, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0>.



SUBJECTS BY ISSUE NUMBER AND DATE

- 1-4—DEC '67-MAR '68: REFERENCE INFO AND NEWS ABOUT DEVELOPMENT OF THE
BARC PROJECT
- 5—APR/MAY 68: BONNIE AND CLYDE
- 6—JUNE 68: ASTROLOGY
- 7—JULY 68: NEW TERMS IN ART
- 8—AUG 68: CONTEMPORARY POETRY
- 9—SEPT 68: SAN FRANCISCO SWITCHBOARD
- 10—OCT 68: SCIENCE PROJECTS AND EXPERIMENTS/THE OCCULT AND ESOTERIC
- 11/12—NOV/DEC 68: THE UNDERGROUND PRESS
- 13—JAN 69: SAN FRANCISCO STATE COLLEGE—STRIKE
- 14—FEB 69: FOCUS ON OURSELVES *THE BARC PROJECT (REVISED DEC 69)
- 15—MAR 69: EARTHQUAKES
- 16/17—APR/MAY 69: NEGLECTED NOVELS
- 18/19—JUN/JUL 69: RIGHT-WING PERIODICALS
- 20/21—AUG/SEPT 69: THE CREATIVE ALTERNATIVE
- 22/23—OCT/NOV 69: FOOD
- 24—DEC 69: WOMEN'S LIBERATION
- 25—JAN 70: NATIVE AMERICANS
- 26—MAR/APR 70: ECOLOGY
- 27—MAY/JUN 70: SAN FRANCISCO SCENE
- 28—JUL/AUG 70: RADICALS IN THE PROFESSIONS
- 29—SEPT/OCT 70: GAY LIBERATION
- 30—NOV/DEC 70: DOPE
- 31—JAN/FEB 71: PRISONS
- 32—MAR/APR 71: SPRING! GREENFEEL
- 33—SUMMER 71: INSURGENT LIBRARIANS
- 34—AUTUMN 71: OCCULT
- 35—WINTER 71: CHANGING FAMILY STRUCTURE

a barc production + LSCA
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Fig. 5. Synergy Magazine, San Francisco: Bay Area Reference Center, 1972, Index for 1967-71, back cover. Source: <https://celestewest.wordpress.com/synergy-magazine>.

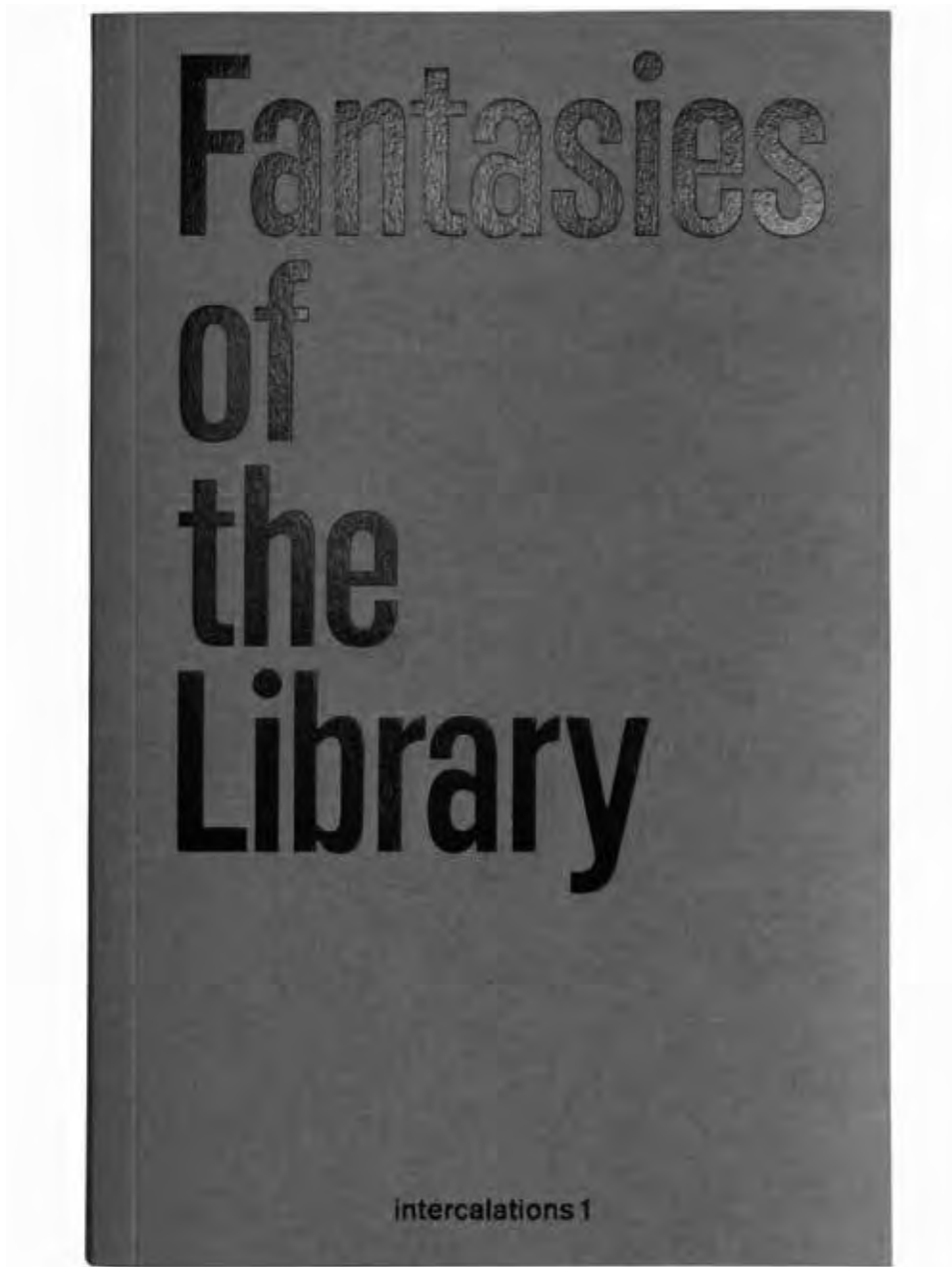


Fig. 6. Anna-Sophie Springer & Etienne Turpin (eds.), *Fantasies of the Library*, Berlin: K. Verlag & Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2015, front cover. Photo: Anna-Sophie Springer.

II

Infinite Hospitality • The Library is a Growing Organism • Melvil Dewey as One-Man Silicon Valley.

EVA WEINMAYR: The library essentially is also a structure that is animated by the use of its reader. And therefore it's important to make it easy to retrieve information. David Senior writes in his essay *Infinite Hospitality* [fig. 7] about the Indian mathematician and librarian S.R. Ranganathan and his *Five Laws of Library Science* (1931). "The library is a growing organism" is one of these laws. Ranganathan developed an unorthodox classification system using "facets" where several topics can be linked in a series of keywords in order to describe the various subjects present in a single book.⁷

INNER VOICE: This system creates relationships between the concepts instead of a hierarchical delineation as it is used traditionally by libraries and developed by Melvil Dewey.⁸

EVA WEINMAYR: Melvil Dewey's model is still the standard organizing system in many public libraries. But it is not without criticism: his biographer Wayne A. Wiegand interestingly argues that Dewey's narrow interpretation of objectivity is fully based on "a patriarchal White Western (and, of course, Christian)"⁹ worldview. What is left out here is a whole range of alternative perspectives on humanity's knowledge.

INNER VOICE: Are you aware that writer Shannon Mattern has described Melvil Dewey "as a one-man Silicon Valley, born a century before Steve Jobs"¹⁰? Because in 1876, just after graduating from College, he copyrighted his library classification scheme.

EVA WEINMAYR: More than that! He simultaneously even started a hugely successful furniture business providing the 'right' chairs, tables and shelves to

7 S.R. Ranganathan outlines the Five Laws of Library Science. "1. Books are for use. 2. Every reader his [or her] book. 3. Every book its reader. 4. Save the time of the user. 5. The library is a growing organism." "Infinite Hospitality," in *Every Day the Urge Grows Stronger to Get Hold of an Object at Very Close Range by Way of Its Likeness*, ed. David Senior (New York: Dexter Sinister, 2008). This unbound collection of 14 folders has been reprinted in *Portable Document Format* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009) and can be found online at www.dextersinister.org. French writer Georges Perec also came up with a set of unusual categories to organize his personal library—"alphabetically, by continent or country, by colour, by date of acquisition, by date of publication, by format, by genre, by major periods of literary history, by language, by priority for future reading, by binding or by series." Georges Perec, "Brief Notes on the Art and Manner of Arranging One's Books," in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, ed. John Sturrock (London: Penguin, 1999), 148–155.

8 The Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system, based on numbers attributed to nine main categories, was invented in the 1870s. It is extendable, as its numerical sequences can be split up infinitely and new categories added.

9 Wayne A. Wiegand, "The 'Amherst Method': The Origins of the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme," *Libraries & Culture* 33:2 (spring 1998), 175–194, 183. Wayne A. Wiegand examines meticulously how the conservative mindset at Amherst College, where Dewey was a student and library assistant, shaped Dewey's concepts of classifications and their hierarchies. "Its moral center was located in 'Anglo-Saxonism' a doctrine that defined 'objectivity' and touted the unique virtues, mission, and destiny of the Anglo-Saxon 'race.'" Ibid. It is quite important to understand, that with the very headings, he came up with, Dewey framed and cemented "a worldview and knowledge structure taught on the tiny Amherst College campus between 1870 and 1875 into what became the world's most widely used library classification." Ibid., 188.

libraries. Even in that respect he imposed his control on how libraries had to function according to him.

INNER VOICE: Megan Shaw Prelinger from the Prelinger Library in San Francisco talks about the shortcomings of Dewey’s system: “First,” she says, “[our] collection is unique to our combined areas of particular interest. It has never tried to be a general-interest research collection. Second, therefore, the library did not really fit the taxonomic systems of either the Library of Congress or Dewey Decimal. For instance: Art and politics? Handmade films? Nature-culture interface? The history of the demonization of the youth in society? These are just a few of our subject areas that are not clearly articulated in pre-existing taxonomic systems.”¹¹

INNER VOICE: Do you know of any examples where people have organized publicly accessible libraries in an alternative way?

EVA WEINMAYR: The Ethical Culture School in New York City for example carried out a radical experiment. They wanted for their students a more independent and empowered seeking practice in their library. Therefore they ditched the Dewey system and developed the Metis system instead, named after the mother of Athena in Greek mythology. They responded to the problem that students frequently were more focused on actually seeking materials rather than using them and along with the kids developed a more usable classification system.¹²

INNER VOICE: For example?

EVA WEINMAYR: They discovered, that kids were interested in topics rather than in authors. Some sections were under-used such as “Languages” which were turned into “Community,” “Craft” is now labeled “Making Stuff.” But the most radical step was to mix the classic categories of “fiction” and “non-fiction.”

INNER VOICE: Really? That sounds pretty radical.

EVA WEINMAYR: Yes, they found out, that this move triggers thoughts and discussions, where students have to evaluate on their own what is imagination and what is information and discover the blurred lines in between.

¹⁰ Shannon Mattern describes Dewey as “the quintessential Industrial Age entrepreneur. [...] He helped found the American Library Association, served as founding editor of *Library Journal*, and launched the American Metric Bureau, which campaigned for adoption of the metric system. He was 24 years old. He had already established the Library Bureau, a company that sold (and helped standardize) library supplies, furniture, media display and storage devices, and equipment for managing the circulation of collection materials. As chief librarian at Columbia College, Dewey established the first library school—called, notably, the School of Library Economy.” Shannon Mattern, “Library as Infrastructure,” *Places Magazine*, June 2014, <https://placesjournal.org/article/library-as-infrastructure/>.

¹¹ “Erin Kissane in conversation with Megan Shaw and Erik Prelinger,” *Fantasies of the Library*, ed. Anne Marie Springer and Etienne Turpin (Berlin: K Verlag & Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2015), 2–18, 4.

¹² Tali Balas et al., “Are Dewey’s Days Numbered? Libraries Nationwide Are Ditching the Old Classification System,” *School Library Journal*, September 28, 2012, <http://www.slj.com/2012/09/collection-development/are-deweys-days-numbered-libraries-across-the-country-are-giving-the-old-classification-system-the-heave-ho-heres-one-schools-story/#>.

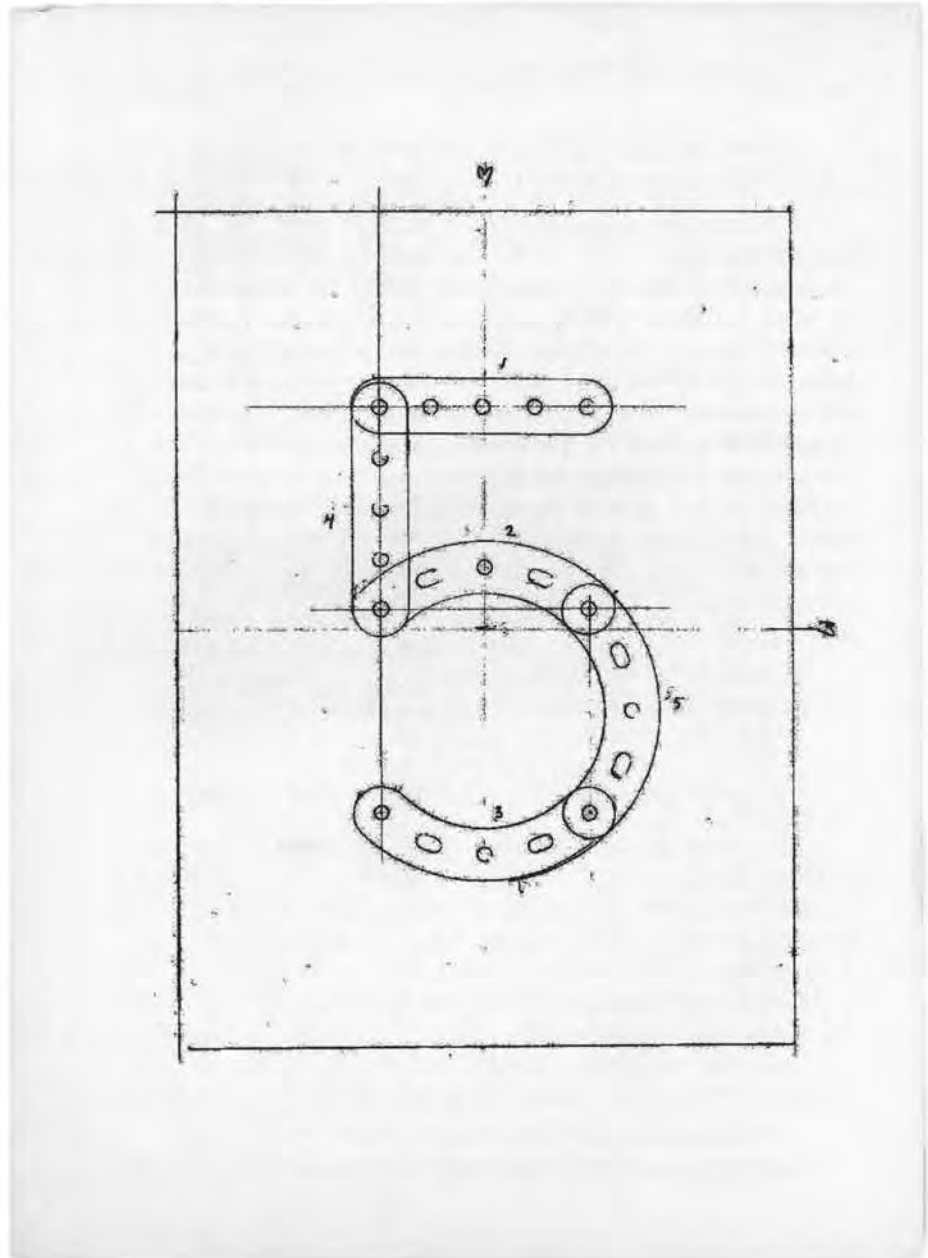


Fig. 7. David Senior, *Infinite Hospitality*, in *Every Day the Urge Grows Stronger to Get Hold of an Object at Very Close Range by Way of Its Likeness*, published by Dexter Sinister as an unbound collection of 14 folders, New York: The Art Libraries Society and Museum of Modern Art, 2008, folder front cover.