Libraries

You don't have to buy any of the books listed in the **Epilog** *or* **Catalog.**

Your local library can borrow any book they do not carry through the inter-library loan system. Many people are not aware of this service. Thelma Percy, our local librarian says often a person will come in, ask for a book, and she'll reply. "We don't have it, but we can get it for you."

"You can?"

You may have to wait a few weeks and pay postage, but it's a way to see books you're not sure of, or can't afford. An outstanding service of the American library system, which, as Mrs. Percy says, is the best in the world.

NOTE TO LIBRARIANS: why not set up a Whole Earth section in your library? Composed of all the books in the **Epilog** *and* **Catalog.**

—Lloyd Kahn

This bulletin evolved from an exhibition, "Access to Tools: Publications from the Whole Earth Catalog, 1968–1974," organized by David Senior at The Museum of Modern Art, New York City. See: http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2011/AccesstoTools. A follow-on article by David titled "The Whole Earth Library" was published this Fall in *C Magazine* (Toronto), whose editor Amish Morrell was then interviewed for the second half of the present text.

Cover image: Note to Librarians, *The Whole Earth Epilog* (1974)

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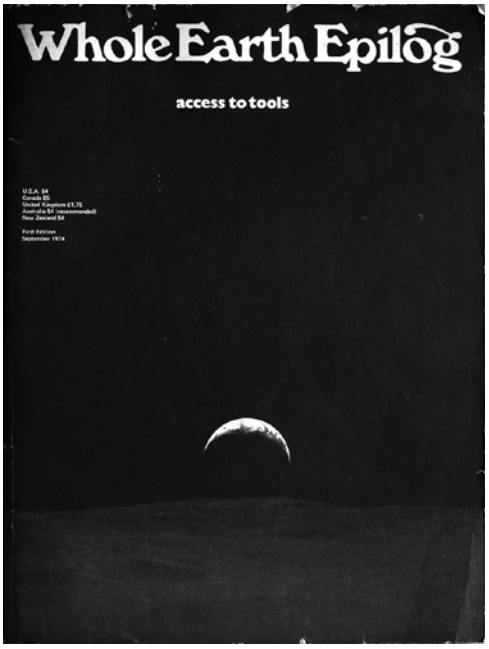
The Note to Librarians is a brief entry in *The Whole Earth Epliog* that I discovered towards the end of my research for a small exhibition at the MoMA Library in New York. The exhibition is essentially a collection of publications, the idea being to tell the story of counterculture bible *The Whole Earth Catalog*—its form, content, and publication history—through a specific set of books, a library. As such, the note was as concise a readymade curatorial statement as I could have hoped for.



One of my goals was to relate the conditions that allowed a little self-publishing project out of a small office in Menlo Park, CA to expand into a major North American cultural phenomenon which influenced hundreds of thousands of young minds from the late 1960s through the 1970s. Another was to emphasize how the *Catalog* amounted to an extended reading list for a coming community—one that editor and founder Stewart Brand and his colleagues conceived as a new kind of educational service and community-in-print. Brand was primarily interested in alternative education practices derived from new media formats, and the *Catalog* itself was a new kind of communication technology, a network of information directly influenced by the high-profile contemporary communications theorists of the period, such as Norbert Wiener, Buckminster Fuller, and Marshall McLuhan.

In 1968, as a 29-year-old in San Francisco, Brand began to imagine some kind of information utility for his friends, a geographically dispersed generation of dropouts and dreamers headed back-to-the-land:

What I'm visualizing is an Access Mobile (accessory?) with all manner of access materials and advice for sale cheap. Including performances of stuff, books, dandy survival and camping equipment, catalogs, design plans, periodical subscriptions, copy equipment (and other gather equipment — some element of barter here). Prime item of course would be the catalog. Prime then the Road show. Educational materials esp. self-education. Books on amateur education. Everything for small scale access.

What became *The Whole Earth Catalog* was first a truck, loaded with books and driven to communes in New Mexico and Colorado that summer. Packed with samples Brand had collected and "a mimeographed 6-page 'partial preliminary booklist' of what I'd gathered so far (Tantra Art, Cybernetics, The Indian Tipi, Recreational Equipment, about 120 items)." It was a bookmobile for self-education and according to Brand, "did a stunning $200 of business."

Tens of thousands of young people had already sought to escape contemporary culture in a combine of drugs, politics, music, and holistic consciousness. Those involved in experimental living environments such as Drop City, Hog Farm, and Libre, espoused a countercultural communitarianism, definitively rejecting their parents' values and the post-war consumer culture in which they were raised. In a fairly short period

of time, these new spaces attempted to create new kinds of families and other communal groups. Brand felt that these experiments needed greater access to information to foster self-reliance and sustain the initial energy.

Within the rubric of *The Whole Earth Catalog*, self-reliance was equated with "access to tools." The *Catalog* proposed an extremely broad view of self-education, spanning a near-comical gamut of subjects: John Cage, airplane building, emergency medical care, knot tying, architectural design, cooking, filmmaking, computer design, art instruction, bookmaking, librarianship, government services, education theory, puppetry, and so on. The *Catalog*'s section headings represented the working categories of the self-education project: "Understanding Whole Systems," "Shelter and Land Use," "Industry and Craft," "Communications," "Community," "Nomadics," and "Learning."

For a generation of young educators, school reformers and parents, the "Learning" section offered an active and evolving account of new and available resources such as publications, games and toys, all documented in the *Catalog*'s extensive reviews. Featured titles included *The Open Classroom*, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, *Escape from Childhood*, and *Big Rock Candy Mountain*. John Holt was a middle school teacher for several years , who, through his first-hand accounts of classroom experience, became one of the leading voices against compulsory schooling in the U.S. His books *How Children Fail* (1964) and *How Children Learn* (1967) were two early attempts to describe how and why the classroom had ceased to be a place of learning.

But it was Ivan Illich's more polemical *Deschooling Society*, published in 1974, that really pushed things forward. The book appeared in the pages of *The Whole Earth Catalog*'s "Learning" section the same year. Illich would have already been familiar to Brand and co. as the founder of CIDOC (Centro Intercultural de Documentación), an institute popular among young intellectuals and activists of the time. Ostensibly, CIDOC was a language institute aimed at teaching Spanish to the large numbers of young people traveling to undertake development work in the South. Under Illich's guidance, however, it simultaneously became an international gathering place for a cast of notable thinkers and activists concerned with reforming schools and other areas of public education.

Deschooling Society

Very few parents look at teachers and schools with Illich's true understanding of their powerful influence within our society today. He gives a devastating analysis of the ways in which educational institutions act to minimize learning and maximize conformity and social stratification. When we look for positive moves, are Illich's solutions practical, or in fact real, given the current state of education? Deschooling Society *clarifies many of the problems, but if readers are anxiously looking for ready answers, they might be in trouble. Or is this what Illich meant to achieve? If so, he has done a right-on job.*

—Diane and Eddie Grayson

Deschooling Society
Ivan Illich
1970; 186pp.
$1.25 postpaid
from:
Harper & Row
General Books
Keystone Industrial Park
Scranton, PA 18512
or Whole Earth

We have come to realize that for most men the right to learn is curtailed by the obligation to attend school.

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School initiates, too, the Myth of Unending Consumption. This modern myth is grounded in the belief that process inevitably produces something of value and, therefore, production necessarily produces demand. School teaches us that instruction produces learning. The existence of schools produces the demand for schooling. Once we have learned to need school, all our activities tend to take the shape of client relationships to other specialized institutions. Once the self-taught man or woman has been discredited, all nonprofessional activity is rendered suspect. In school we are taught that valuable learning is the result of attendance; that the value of learning increases with the amount of input; and, finally, that this value can be measured and documented by grades and certificates. In fact, learning is the human activity which least needs manipulation by others. Most learning is not the result of instruction. It is rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting. Most people learn best by being "with it," yet school makes them identify their personal, cognitive growth with elaborate planning and manipulation.

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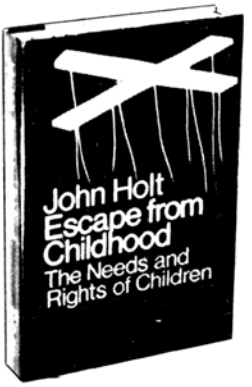
A much more radical approach would be to create a "bank" for skill exchange. Each citizen would be given a basic credit with which to acquire fundamental skills. Beyond that minimum, further credits would go to those who earned them by teaching, whether they served as models in organized skill centers or did so privately at home or on the playground. Only those who had taught others for an equivalent amount of time would have a claim on the time of more advanced teachers. An entirely new elite would be promoted, an elite of those who earned their education by sharing it.

Escape from Childhood

In his latest book John Holt concentrat children, and their effects on adults. He "modern childhood is hard on adults as it is as hard to raise a child as to be a ch harder all the time." The book examine institution with its own rules, roles and repercussions. The chapters on the way threaten children (e.g., "love objects", being "cute") are outstanding. In schoo attitude becomes even more demeaning when children are treated as possession class, my group.

Holt provides a readable concise overvie voting, legal, sex, drugs, travel, financia steps that adults and children might tak rights. He will surely anger those who f olds are too young to determine their o that fourteen year olds cannot think fo highly recommend the volume to the u those who think they are informed.

—Woody Cl



Escape
John Ho
1974; 28
$7.95
from:
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For many reasons children need a muc people to relate to. The small family is or destructive because it is so small. Th too intense, too much is always at stak if hard to say no to their children even much too often, because it seems to th relationship with the child. They have they can say no, and then they are dou for "making" them say no. The family these highpowered feelings, so shut in involved with others or with the comm purposes outside of itself, that it is frag by a quarrel.

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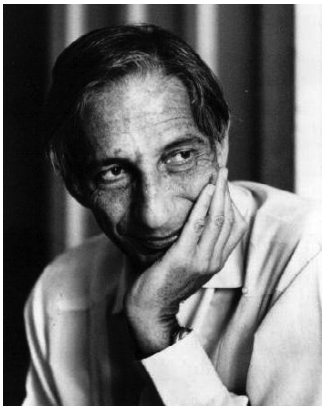
Almost all adults, men and women, use might call love objects. We think we ha duty, to bestow on them "love," visibl of affection, whenever we want, howev whether they like it or not. In this we them for our purposes. This, more thar what we use children and childhood fo with love objects. This is why we adul owning and the institution of childhoo in spite of their great trouble and expe

LEARNING



In 1970, Illich first presented a series of lectures that would become the foundation of *Deschooling Society*. He called into question three basic assumptions: that children BELONG in school,that they LEARN in school, and that they CAN BE TAUGHT ONLY in school. The philosophy of "deschooling," on the other hand, asserts that learning flourishes outside conventional spaces of instruction, and proposes a shift from a dependence on teaching to an ethic of facilitating. In short, Illich sought to distinguish schooling from learning, then worked to conceive new kinds of learning environments. He was convinced that the resources for education were plentiful, but that schools and related institutions typically rendered these resources inaccessible or scarce, especially for the poor. "Technology is available," Illich wrote, "to develop either independence and learning or bureaucracy and teaching."

Obvious parallels can be drawn, then, between the techniques of reform advocated by Illich and the practical function of Brand's networked publication. In both cases, the keyword was Access.

In the mid-late 1990s, I lived with a close friend in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Ezra was a child of back-to-the-land parents and grew up in a valley of the Margaree River called Big Intervale. Between his semesters at the College of Art & Design in Halifax and afterwards in our post-college years, a group of friends made regular trips to the property where Ezra grew up to help build a log cabin. Ezra was the brains and skill behind the operation; we provided labor and rowdy, convivial scenes of broke young men in a beautiful place. Ezra and his brother Amish had a highly refined knowledge of their childhood environment—a landscape comprised

of stunning wilderness, empty old homesteads, and derelict dwellings from other back-to-the-landers scattered about the valley and beyond.

We scavenged materials at these sites, such as the empty geodesic dome up the glen from where we stayed. One comic yet tense afternoon, we pulled a fairly large wood-burning cook stove out of the dome by tractor. We hauled it down a steep ravine, across a brook and back to the house. A few days of cleaning and patching made it almost usable, though we found a better one soon after. Sometimes these places housed abandoned books , often identical to those in the library in the house where we stayed. I remember seeing *The Whole Earth Catalog* there along with *Mother Earth News* and many other how-to manuals.

As a kid from Northeast Philadelphia, these things were completely new to me—the legacy of a historical moment when young people abandoned the cities and suburbs, and dispersed to forge communities across North America. In retrospect, it's clear that we were playing in the footprint of one of these experiments, reapplying the remains to our own modest endeavors. In some of these places, you had the feeling someone had just left in a hurry, their backwoods life laid bare in the remnants. Ezra often knew what had happened to these phantom residents, and I listened attentively. They were the characters I eventually projected onto the arc of the story of the *Catalog*, the intended readership of Brand's "Access Mobile" and the floating community that eventually populated its pages.

Some 15 years on, I had the opportunity to ask Ezra's older brother Amish about growing up in this environment.

D: Having spent time in the house where you grew up in Cape Breton, I remember seeing several of the publications that became synonymous with the back-to-the-land movement—things like *The Whole Earth Catalog*. Did you have a relationship to these books when growing up?

A: It's funny, *The Whole Earth Catalog* wasn't of great interest to me, at least until I discovered, when I was about 12, that there were some sections that dealt with sex, and there was a sample of erotic literature in one of the catalogs. Aside from that, it didn't really have anything we wanted. I took it at face value as a catalog, like the Sears catalog, which came in the mail at least once a year. It mostly described what we already had, and seemed like it was for people who wanted to live like we did.

Other books, though, did play a profound role in our lives. They were the most accessible form of media available to us, and I had a lot of time to read. I read everything I could. I had a series of books called *The Rover Boys*, about three brothers who grew up on a farm somewhere in the Eastern United States, that my great-grandfather had read as a child in the late 1800s. To some extent, I assumed not only the narrative of the characters who grew up on a farm, left it as teenagers to go to a private school and then went to college somewhere, but the sense of time in which the series was set.

We were quite asynchronous with the rest of the world. I didn't apprehend things like touch-tone phones, disco, Velcro shoes, and digital watches as part of a linear historical progression, but as urban aberrations. They seemed to exist outside of our space and time. Also, almost all of the vehicles we had were antiques, old farm trucks, a car from the 1950s with rounded fenders, and another one from 1928 that we drove to parties on the weekend, or to the beach. Even though we knew about skyscrapers and elevators, they felt like science fiction.

My brother Ezra's reading was more practically-oriented. Our library was filled with manuals, so when he wanted to build a log cabin, he went

to the library and found *How to Build a Log Cabin*, a book from the 1930s that had been reprinted in the 1970s. And over the following decade he went ahead and built a log cabin based on these instructions. As we both grew older, books like the ones you mentioned took on new importance, as they became a way not only of connecting to our past, but a means of realizing things we wanted.

D: What first brought your parents to Cape Breton?

A: In the early 1970s my father had just finished an MFA at Rutgers University, and also completed the Whitney Studio Program. My mother had finished several years of college and was working as a professional horse trainer. Both of them were disenchanted by the cultural and political climate of the United States in the early 1970s and were looking for some kind of alternative. In 1971, they both went to visit my mother's brother, who had found his way to Margaree Valley in Cape Breton, through friends who came to Nova Scotia to teach at the College of Art & Design. After visiting several times, they bought land there and began to figure out how to make a living and develop skills to be self-sufficient, growing their own food and raising animals. My mother wanted to buy her own farm, while my father, who had written his MFA thesis under the supervision of Robert Watts, one of the early Fluxus artists, partially conceived of the idea as continuing some of the ideas he'd been exploring as an artist.

D: So then you and your brother became part of project too. Do you have a sense of how your parents' original ideas evolved as they had kids?

A: In Cape Breton, almost all of the back-to-the-landers, at least those who stuck with it for more than a year or so, had children. I think part of the reason a lot of the people went back to the land there in the 1970s was so they could have children without having to maintain regular nine-to-five jobs and put their kids in daycare; they could bring them up in a way that was more congruous with their ideas and values. My parents were more specifically interested in living in a way that was simple and self-sufficient, retreating from a society that was heavily industrialized and militarized. While there were a lot of back-to-the-landers where we lived, many of my parents' strongest social ties weren't to the counterculture

community, but to people who had lived there for generations, some of whom continued to survive through self-sufficient farming and by meeting their own needs with what was at hand—cutting their own firewood or logs for lumber, for example.

Kids played an active role in such families, assuming various responsibilities from a young age. As young children we quickly went from being observers of all these activities to being participants as soon as were able. The roles we had were very different from those my parents had as children, growing up in the outskirts of Philadelphia, but not dissimilar from other children in Cape Breton, where children were an important part of economic self-sufficiency. From about the age of seven onwards, I milked the cows and fed the animals each day, and my brother and I had various recurring responsibilities, including piling firewood for the winter, peeling fence-posts, helping with haymaking, storing vegetables for the winter, picking rocks from the fields so that they wouldn't break the plow or hay machinery, and so on. There was a sense that our work was not only important, but was essential to our survival.

D: In this context, was there a sense that the farm and the surrounding landscape was simultaneously a space of work and play?

A: At the time it felt like our play activities were different from those of many other children, or at least how we thought children were supposed to play. We didn't have many toys, for example, but we had the means to make toys. We had hammers, saws, access to building materials, and so on. I got my first handsaw when I was five, and promptly cut myself. My brother and I salvaged lumber and nails to renovate and expand a former pigeon-house that we occupied—sometimes sleeping there overnight—and we made copies of things we wanted, provided they were simple enough, such as stuffed Disney characters that we borrowed from other kids in order to make homemade versions using my Mom's sewing materials.

But play generally consisted of doing almost the same things adults around us did—like cutting trees, clearing trails in the woods, or building things. The idea of self-sufficiency that my parents sought to realize also became the structuring principle of our play activities. We studied the people

around us and modeled our play on what they did. In the way that children play at being grown-ups, we played at being self-sufficient. We felt we had serious responsibilities—projects to finish and so on.

D: Do you think other back-to-the-land kids had more or less the same experience—a less clear-cut sense of the categories and activities of childhood as they played out in the cities and suburbs?

A: It's difficult to compare. Where we were, there were initially three other back-to-the-land families within a six-mile radius. Within all of these families the couples broke up and they moved away after several years. There were other back-to-the-land children much farther away, but we only saw them once every several months, and I remember them all being quite varied in their interests and what they did. Some were on farms where they had to share chores with their parents, and others had much less responsibility. Some were home-schooled by their parents, with structured activities designed to help them explore and understand their surroundings, and others were thoroughly integrated into the local school system. All in all, I had little sense of being a child, perhaps because my brother and I were relatively isolated from other children, we didn't have television, and were otherwise thoroughly occupied by the life we had with our parents.

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