

# **The Bootleg Library**

**Simon Browne**

**B09K**

## THE BOOTLEG LIBRARY

The *Bootleg Library* is an experimental library project initiated in 2018 by Australian artist and researcher Simon Browne as part of the XPUB (Experimental Publishing) program in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Integrating digital, physical, and social elements, it challenges the boundaries of traditional publishing and knowledge access, aiming to build a reader-driven network for shared and evolving knowledge.

The library includes not only digital books and audio materials but also a mobile physical library installation, allowing people to freely borrow, read, annotate, and even remake books. Readers are not just users—they are also maintainers and expanders of the library.

Within The *Bootleg Library*, “Tasks of the Contingent Librarian” is a set of A6-sized index cards created by Simon Browne. Each card begins with a verb—such as scan, annotate, organize, or share—describing a task a librarian might perform under specific conditions. The reverse side includes images and references that further contextualize these tasks.

These cards serve both as a material manifestation of theoretical ideas and as practical tools. In various *Bootleg Library* activities, participants are invited to use them to spark reflection and discussion on the roles of libraries, systems of knowledge organization, and the agency of readers.

Designed for interaction and reconfiguration, the cards can be shuffled, reordered, flipped, or annotated with new tasks. Each participant is invited to act as a “contingent librarian,” rethinking how the library might be managed, organized, or reactivated. This open structure encourages readers to become co-builders and caretakers of the library, embodying The *Bootleg Library*’s ethos of collaboration and sharing.

Through this set of index cards, Simon Browne poses a central question:  
In an age of digitization and decentralization, can the role of the librarian be collectively assumed by every reader?

Presented at B09K, the *Tasks of the Contingent Librarian* project invites you to engage with and borrow these cards. Through open access and collaborative practice, the exhibition encourages visitors to reconsider: What is a library? How should knowledge be accessed, used, and circulated? In this process, The *Bootleg Library* becomes not merely a repository of books, but a public space continually shaped and re-created by its readers.

## 伪版图书馆 (The Bootleg Library)

“*伪版图书馆*”是澳大利亚艺术家兼研究者 Simon Browne 于 2018 年在荷兰鹿特丹 XPUB(实验出版)项目中发起的实验性图书馆计划。该项目融合数字、实体与社交实践，打破传统出版与知识获取的界限，旨在构建由读者驱动、共享且不断演变的知识网络。

图书馆包含数字书籍、音频资料，以及一个可移动的实体图书馆装置，人们可以自由借阅、阅读、标注，甚至再创作书籍。读者不仅是使用者，亦是图书馆的维护者与扩展者。

其中，“临时图书管理任务”(Tasks of the Contingent Librarian)是一套由 Simon Browne 制作的 A6 任务卡。每张卡以“扫描”“注释”“整理”“分享”等动词开头，指向特定条件下图书管理员可能执行的任务；卡片背面附有图像与参考资料，为这些任务提供进一步的背景。

这些卡片既是理论的物质化呈现，也是实践工具。在*伪版图书馆*的各类活动中，参与者被邀请通过卡片思考并讨论图书馆的角色、知识组织系统，以及读者的能动性。

卡片设计为可互动、可重组的形式：可洗牌、重排、翻面，或加入新的任务。每位参与者都被邀请成为“临时图书管理员”，重新设想图书馆如何被管理、组织或重新激活。这一开放结构促使读者成为图书馆的共同建构者与照看者，体现*伪版图书馆*强调的协作与共享精神。

通过这套任务卡，Simon Browne 提出一个核心问题：  
在数字化与去中心化的时代，图书管理员的角色能否由每一位读者共同承担？

在 B09K 展出期间，“临时图书管理任务”邀请你取用并实践这些卡片。通过开放获取与协作方式，展览鼓励观众重新思考：什么是图书馆？知识应如何被获取、使用与流通？在此过程中，*伪版图书馆*不再只是存储书籍的场所，而是一片由读者持续塑造与再造的公共空间。



## about the bootleg library

the bootleg library is a digital, and physical collection of texts. the library consists of bootlegged texts, not in the sense of cheap knock-offs, but instead as unauthorised, fairly faithful reproductions of source publications. development of the library is ongoing, in line with feedback given during sessions.

the physical library is a growing collection of republished books, currently stored in an old champagne case. most of these are bootlegged by library members, some donated by visitors. the digital library (running on the open-source software calibre-web) is available at this URL:

[hub.xpub.nl/bootleglibrary](http://hub.xpub.nl/bootleglibrary)

then enter in the following login details:

user: THENWHO

password: WASPHONE

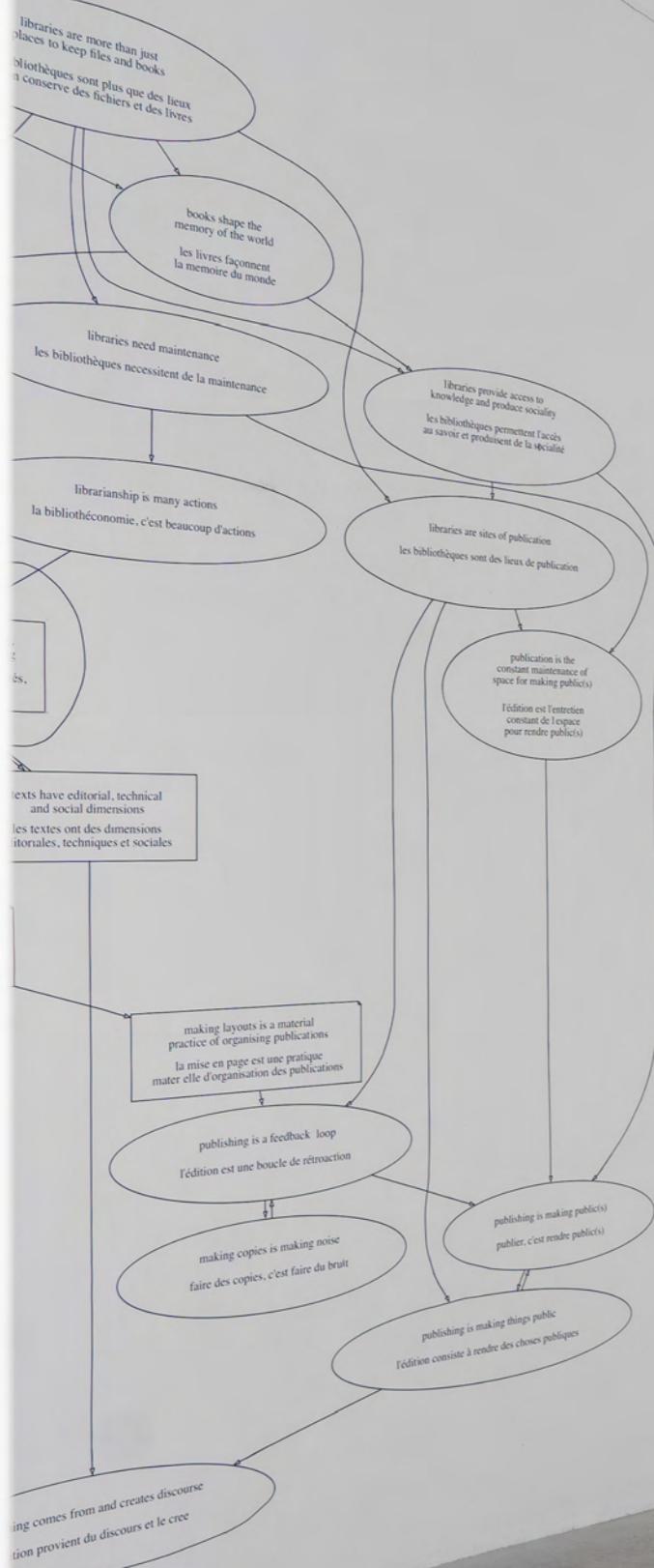
## user accounts

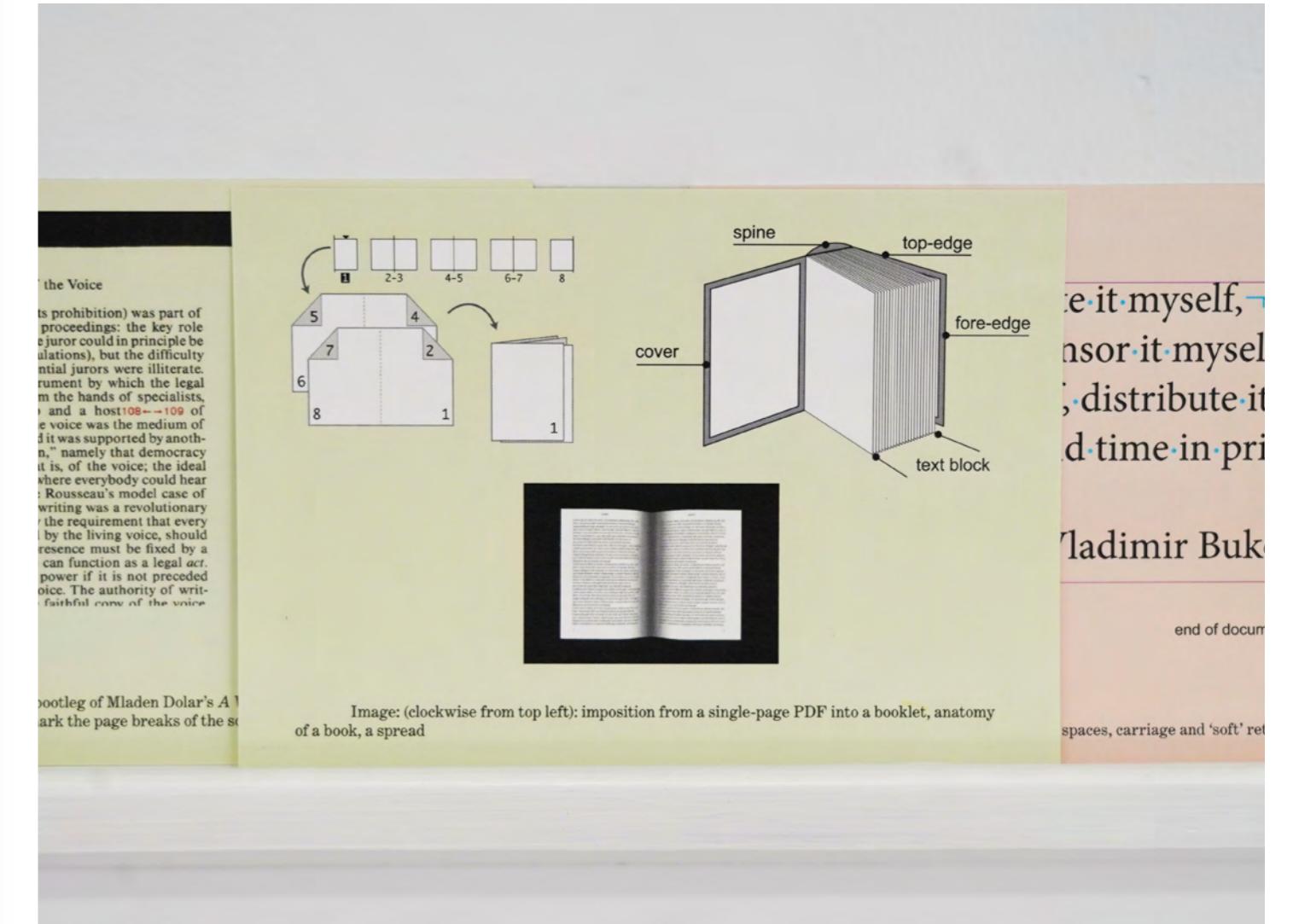
registered users can access all of the features of the library, including creating and editing public and private “shelves”, which are ways to organise the collection together, or individually. user account registrations can be made at bootleg library sessions, or by request (send an email to simon at bootleglibrarian@gmail.com).

## the current collection

the bootleg library is small but growing, individually uploaded and catalogued by readers who are motivated simply by the desire to share the texts they read. and so the collection represents the readers interests, which range from critical theory to feminisms to literature to technical manuals and zines (and a lot more).







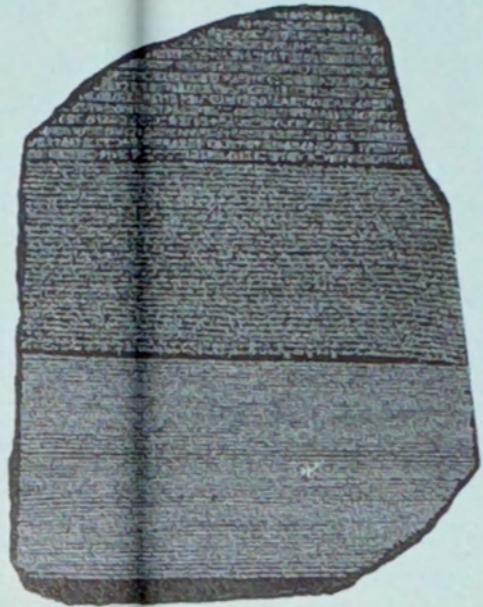


Image: The Rosetta Stone, a tablet discovered in 1799, inscribed with three versions of a decree written in Ancient Egyptian and Ancient Greek

\*1 Vilém Flusser 'The Future of Writing', from Flusser, V. and Ströhl, A. (2002) *Writings. Electronic mediations v. 6.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

\*2 Ong, W.J. and Hartley, J. (2012) *Orality and literacy: the technologizing of the word.* Orality and literacy. 30th anniversary ed.; 3rd ed. London ; New York: Routledge.

"When everyone is librarian,  
library is everywhere"

备注

Image: Quote from Why and How to Become an Amateur Librarian by Marcell  
Mars, Manar Zarroug and Tomislav Medak, available at [https://www.memoryoftheworld.org/  
blog/2014/10/28/why\\_and\\_how\\_to\\_become\\_an\\_amateur\\_librarian/](https://www.memoryoftheworld.org/blog/2014/10/28/why_and_how_to_become_an_amateur_librarian/)

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THE LIBRARY PROJECT

An exhibition project by B09K  
Ruidan Zou, Mengyu Sun, Yue Yuan