

THE SERVING LIBRARY COMPANY, INC.

Statement of intent
(draft)

'I had an advance from Polygram, the record label. I wasn't living it up or anything. I spent a lot of time in these small, specialised science and law libraries. They were the perfect places to go and kill a few hours before you had a drink. I'd peruse all these great psychiatric reports and law files. I spent a lot of time in there, just reading bits and pieces from these strange papers. It was like a second education in a way. I'd never read anything quite like that before. And more importantly, it was all free. Anybody was allowed in there. It's not closed off like it is here, where only a doctor knows what a doctor does. You could have a cig in some of them as well. Some fellows used to bring hip flasks in: you'd see them nipping away while reading about 19th-century law. It was very civilised. That's how it should be in England. Go into a library round here and you've got a load of repressed stormtroopers gawking at you. It's no wonder kids don't read as much as they used to.'

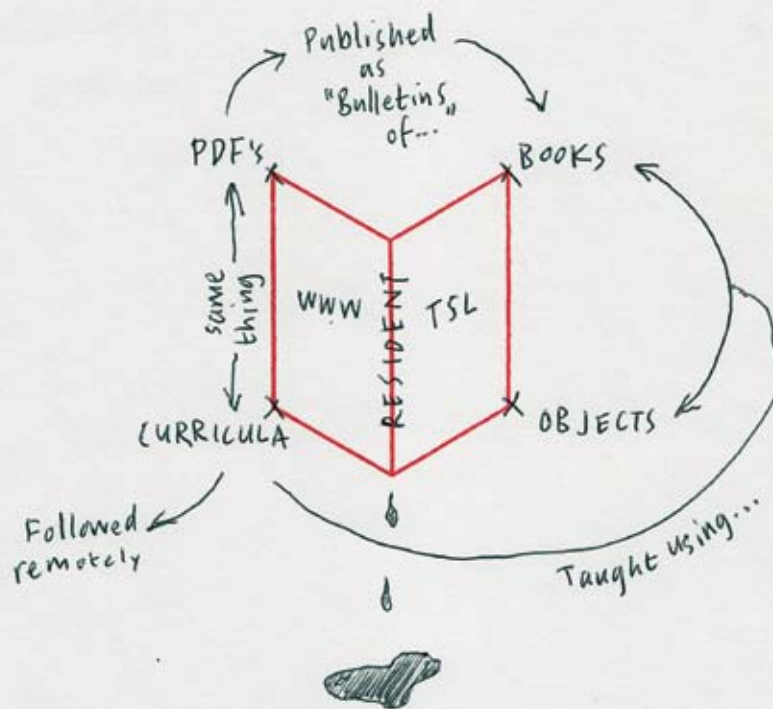
Mark E Smith, *Renegade*

The Serving Library Company, Inc is a non-profit organisation established to manifest and model a culture of publishing rooted in the fields of art and design. It enacts this commitment forwards, as a publishing engine, and backwards, as an archiving mechanism, making the circular relationship between the two activities explicit.

In the spirit of the first public circulating library, founded in 1731, The Serving Library is a practical response to changing circumstances. It is a set of conditions to address the urgency of contemporary publishing proactively by a) providing a frame through which the evolving physical and social mechanics of publishing can be considered and affected outside the expectations fostered by the habitual trajectory of commercial publishing and distribution; b) reclaiming the library – whether online or physically sited – as a space for public use, where resources are pooled to generate and maintain a network of shared information that serves the interests of a committed community; and c) channelling time and energy into defining, developing and making available a vital core of knowledge around a broad definition of *design as a cultural activity* that produces rather than simply promotes.

Neither anachronistic nor reactionary in outlook, The Serving Library takes a long view. It is built upon a body of work initiated through the biannual arts journal *Dot Dot Dot* (2000–2010) and its eventual publishing imprint Dexter Sinister, which has expanded gradually over the past five years from a modest design workshop, run from a basement space on the Lower East Side of New York, into a variety of activities designed to explore publishing in its loosest, most expansive sense. These have included running a physical and online bookshop, programming events such as talks, book launches and film screenings, and exhibiting work in museum and gallery shows. The Serving Library is intended to render such diverse projects more coherent by collecting them under a new umbrella institution with a deliberate set of aims and intentions. Its form will continue to expand and change through the participation of an ever-growing circle of collaborators. Its mission is its motto, HOSPITIUM AD INFINITUM – the principle of Infinite Hospitality.

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33 Production

The Serving Library will develop and maintain an extensive online website (1) at www.servinglibrary.org as a public archive of Portable Document Format (PDF) texts (2) contributed by a rotating group of invited editors, to be published bi-annually. The online library will serve as the primary publication channel for the articles and will offer a sustained, multi-faceted and cogent examination of a specific area of interest over each half-year period. Each PDF in the library will be free to access and download separately, but each editorial series is deliberately designed to constitute a semester-long curriculum for a dedicated school class.

At the end of each six-month curriculum period (3), the digital documents distributed from www.servinglibrary.org will be collected, printed and distributed as *Bulletins of The Serving Library* (4). This publication will effectively carry on where *Dot Dot Dot* left off, but with the new production mechanism of immaterial PDFs dispersed in advance of the physical publication, where each issue will be devoted to a homogenous theme. In addition to publishing the *Bulletins*, the varied and intermittent publishing programme of Dexter Sinister will be continued at The Serving Library.

Alongside the digital library, the physical library space of The Serving Library will contain and cultivate two main collections: of books (5) that map the far-reaching but still particular interests of the constellation of writers and other contributors that have appeared in *Dot Dot Dot* since 2000, plus the limited but focused backlist of book titles offered at the Dexter Sinister bookshop over the past five years, covering a wide gamut of contemporary publishing; and of objects (6) derived from illustrations in *Dot Dot Dot*, which Dexter Sinister have been accumulating since 2004. Conceived as a parallel operation to the printed journals, irregular exhibitions of these objects perpetuate an interest in physical artefacts as material carriers of culture – of experience over convenience.

The Serving Library will host a design residency programme (7) of invited guests to live in or near The Serving Library building temporarily, to oversee the library and use its facilities to pursue self-directed projects and to participate in developing and teaching workshops. The librarian position will rotate roughly every six months.

The Serving Library intends to research, develop, and organise a speculative pedagogical programme (8) for free use in the public domain, based on a reconsideration of the Bauhaus Foundation Course, as conceived through the standard toolbox of contemporary design software. This reconsideration proposes – initially for the sake of argument – that colour wheels, circles, triangles and squares and other principles of cross-disciplinary ‘basic design’ are less relevant than a communal effort to observe and relate contemporary conditions, by practicing the forms of reading, writing, and speaking that facilitate its articulation. In other words, the course aims to build a critical faculty, which works in advance of (or parallel to) comprehending the culture in which art and design operate.

(9) The Serving Library will offer intermittent workshop courses during the year, lasting anything from two weeks to two months, depending on the precise nature of the curriculum, and will stage exhibitions, events and other public programmes.

The Serving Library is a sober institution, though not a dry one. A private-label black whisky (10) made at Christoph Keller’s Stählemühle will be available for consumption on the 12th anniversary of the Library’s founding, in 2022. In the meantime, a placeholder alcohol will be on-hand, under the counter.

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