

The Milcom Shelfmark

An Installation



Project Statement

The key role played by “Hogfoot” Milcom (1928-1972) in the modern constitution of the ESTAR(SER) community has been the subject of several recent studies.¹ In 2016 new documents came to light in the W-Cache suggesting that it had been Milcom’s intention, at the very moment of his expiration, to bequeath to ESTAR(SER) a number of personal effects — including, significantly, his extensive personal library (now, it would seem, largely dispersed). A working group, chaired by Catherine L. Hansen, is currently conducting a preliminary investigation into these documents (the “Milcom Shelfmark” file) and the larger story of the unsuccessful bequest. It is to be hoped that a fuller account of the fate of Milcom’s estate will be brought to publication in good time, and will inform the experience of visitors to the *Milcom Memorial Reading Room and Attention Library*, currently installed at Mana Contemporary in Jersey City.

The Trustees of the Reading Room and Alison Burstein, Curatorial Director, are pleased to announce a temporary intervention in the Library, *The Milcom Shelfmark*, the work of artist-archivist Molly Orbon. Orbon, working from fragmentary annotations in the Milcom Shelfmark file of the W-Cache, has configured a portion of the current ESTAR(SER) book collection according to an idiosyncratic filing system that activates a series of what have been identified as Milcom’s marginalia (several of which are reproduced overleaf). There is reason to believe that these scribbles, in conjunction with the books that Milcom intended to convey to ESTAR(SER), outline the protocol for an attentional rite of bibliotechnical organization and reorganization — one presumably meant to be practiced on the shelves of his carefully curated library. More research is needed.

¹ See, in particular, the introduction to the recent *Gedenkschrift*: “Presenting and Re-Presenting the W-Cache,” *Proceedings of ESTAR(SER)*, New Series, Part VII, Supplement (2016).

The Milcom Shelfmark File (excerpts)

A selected and preliminary transcription of assorted annotations.

The structure of the library evolves. It depends on the reader's participation.

First shelf ranks - Encounter - wind instruments, Italian satire, serials.

Second shelf ranks - Attending - herbaceous plants, hygiene, American literature, love, rhetoric, building materials, fossil cold-blooded vertebrates, etc.

Third shelf ranks (or omitted) - Apophasis - fishing, hunting, shooting; GLASS, related vibrations, shorthand, cytology.

Fourth shelf and related (beyond, other libraries also) - Realization - small forge work.

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Most books displayed with spines innermost. Others not. Consecutive titles of latter ask to be read. Pockets of prose, nestled between rows of white and yellow.

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Read and reorder the library's contents:

1. Select a book - one with spine visible or concealed
2. Peruse pages
3. Place book back wherever it seems to belong
4. Repeat as needed

In practice, practice.