

DEAR FRIEND,

I've been stacking a lot lately. Lots of the same things.

With the archivists of de Appel and artist Mariana Lanari, we have placed an RFID tag in every book. Then we moved the entire archive 100 meters away to the exhibition hall of de Appel for the installation by Mariana Lanari—*Catching Up in the Archive*—last April and May.

The Archive of de Appel is composed of the library, the archive and the collection (unintended). It tells a multitude of stories about de Appel's living past and lively present through books, ephemera, video, audio, manuscripts, correspondence, witness reports and art.

The 16,000 books and periodicals were picked up and assessed at least three times, and in order to arrive at the final stacks in the exhibition, most of the books were also picked up a few times in between to be placed in an increasingly specific stack. And, after the exhibition, they were picked up and stacked a few times again to get them back to their usual placement in the cabinets in the archives of de Appel.

I am an archivist at heart.

Books, videos, photos, correspondence and everything else that is kept in the archive have their own placement per group, because the different materials have their own treatment and way of preservation. Climate, packaging and size influence this, but also the human way of organizing and retrieving. They all become different stacks of the same materials.

When nearly all 16,000 books and magazines were returned to their usual place in de Appel Archive, a bicycle battery exploded in my house. It wasn't too bad, a small fire that was quickly extinguished, but the whole house, everything was black with soot. "Worthless—in the dumpster," said the salvage expert. I decided to salvage things anyway so I wouldn't have to buy so many new ones.

I was standing in my black kitchen with stacks of black things on the counter and a stack of cookies on a cookie package caught my eye. One cookie is not a cookie, I thought. I've gone into overdrive over the past few years when it comes to gear and stuff. One wooden spoon is not a spoon. Five wooden spoons are an open-ended collection that grows by buying from thrift stores where an endless stream of things converge. Biscuits that are nicely placed in a stack in a silver foil sleeve are placed nicely next to each other, mechanically, but neatly stacked one by one.

So, the first stack were the jars and bottles with creams, shampoos, toothpaste, perfumes and detergents. Then the stacks with the soft stuff—towels for swimming, for the kitchen and bathroom, rugs, pillowcases and bed linen. Then stacks of little things made of reed and wood, baskets, boxes and spoons. Then stacks from the kitchen—plates, glasses, pans and cutlery. The stuff with solid surfaces I brought to the beach. Sand and salt are good polishing agents. The soot from the fire is a greasy emulsion and you have to apply a lot of pressure. It doesn't just come off. You really have to sand thoroughly.

Collections can always be rearranged and re-stacked. Two years ago, I invited artist/researcher Mariana Lanari to think along with me. I had made plans with designer Bert Kramer to make the entire archive

of de Appel mobile. Travel to places, connect with other archives or collections instead of being a waiting body that stays in the same location and more or less presents itself in the same form.

Spaces-Run-Archive

One of the questions to Mariana was: whether we can implement RFID to minimize the size of the archive and give serendipity a helping hand. People often pull a book off the shelf that was next to the book they came to the archive for. I'm curious what happens when books no longer have a permanent place. And how that differs for the archivist and the user.

Still, I had to buy a lot of new things after the fire. You need certain things right away, like clothing, toothbrush, laptop, underwear, shoes. And while googling product photos, I noticed that products are increasingly being presented with more of the same, purchasable product in the photo. Especially things that serve to put other things in, to group, to store, to stack, and to make it discoverable, boxes, chests, containers, bags, drawers. Simply because the materials determine the way of storage. Photos and shoes need a different conservation than pans or works of art.

Mariana Lanari's project, *Catching Up in the Archive*, was a first stress test for Spaces-Run-Archive. For this work, Mariana, who desired a display of books that is not hidden behind a digital search bar, developed a technology application with Remco van Bladel (Archival Consciousness) intended for cultural libraries. Biblio-graph.org works as a tool to create a digital representation of fragments of physical collections. It is a community-sourced environment for data aggregation, mapping and visualization. *Catching Up in the Archive* was realized as an interactive installation in the exhibition space, a merely 100 meters from the archive space, where the entire archive was stacked horizontally. Without dividing them by substantive themes or alphabetically by name, the books went into neat stacks, sorted only by size. Each book was held and judged for size, color and shape. Neat stacks of books that have no made-up connection, except that they come from one collection presenting the history and story of de Appel. The visitors wandered among the stacks, their eyes wandered over the stacks and they made their own choices and connections, rearranging the stacks again and again.

The archivist in me experienced some tense moments. In the archive I know roughly where a book is, but in this sea of book stacks.....? When people asked for a specific book, I could find it by wandering through and letting my eyes scan, which was surprising. I thought I could only locate books because I knew where they were on the shelves, but apparently size, shape, design and color are also stacked somewhere in my brain.

For now, I'm wandering and looking around my black house, seeing what can be salvaged and grouping, stacking and enclosing my things as if in the archive.

I am an archivist at heart.

PS: Only charge batteries when you are present and awake!

NELL DONKERS