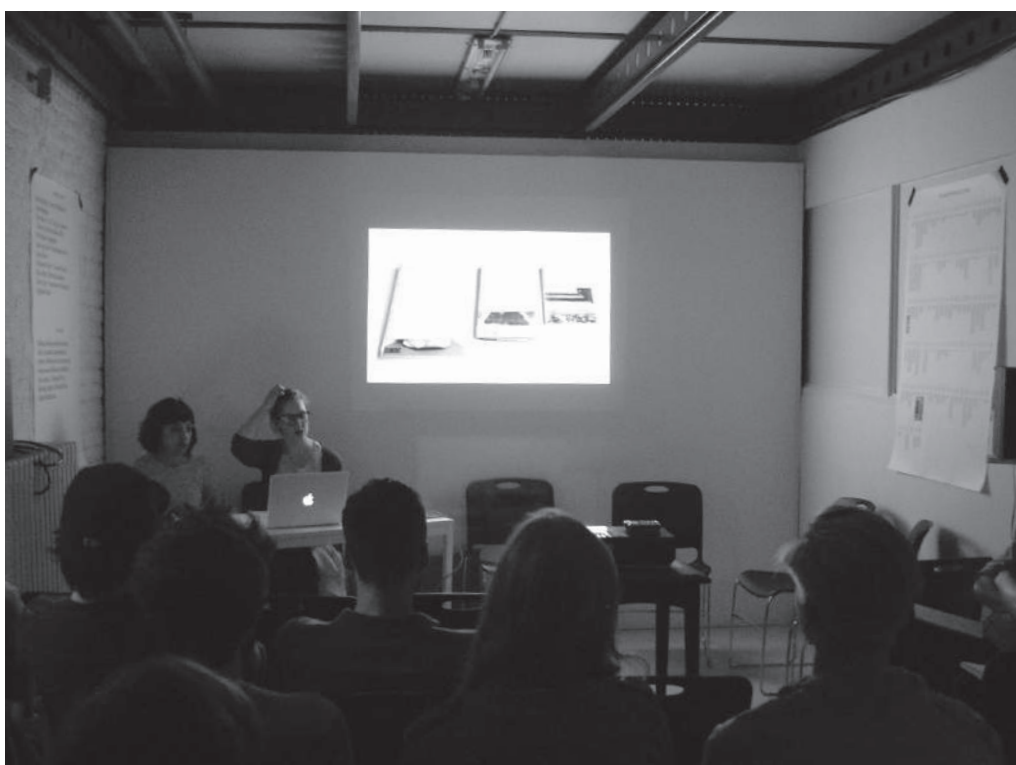


Corinne Gisel and Nina Paim – Rietveld Academie
Unopened Book/Library Talk



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Library Talk

CORINNE Hi, I'm Corinne and this is Nina, we are in our final licence in graphic design at the Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam, and Loraine approached us when we were at Bold/Italic about a project we did, which is actually that we gave an assignment, the two of us, to students at the Rietveld in the basic year, which is the foundation year. This happened in the context that we were doing things for the library at the Rietveld, and so we are going to talk a bit about that.

NINA We started to work for the library since january. Everybody thinks that the Rietveld is a really great school, full of interesting things happening, but actually the library is not a good place.

CORINNE It's kind of unclear, and it's always a disappointment to go there, and it's always been, people aren't studying there. But they're changing now, that's why they wanted to bring in students to also make a change visually.

NINA So the brief we had in january is that we had to integrate better the library.

CORINNE We brought some quotes and texts, in between, that we wrote together, with some thoughts on libraries that we started writing even before this work at the Rietveld library.

(CORINNE)

Even though reading is a solitary act, books are not solitary objects. Books need their peers, their fellows. They want to be with others of their kind, they want to form friendships with their kindred. They are dependent on their predecessors, their followers and their contemporaries. As Christoph Keller says: "books make friends".

NINA Last semester we were writing our thesis, and both of us were going a lot to all the possible libraries in Amsterdam that are not ours to get books and this experience really made us think about what happens with books in the context of a library. We made very different things for the library and we're going to show a few. From the very basic...

CORINNE Opening hours.

NINA The whole idea was to use the library as a source material. To communicate this attraction, to get people into the library. It was quite messy and it was used to put flyers of exhibitions in Amsterdam and things that are not so interesting, and our work was really to go to the library and find interesting pieces, and bring these pieces to the outside.



(IN THE PROJECTION)

Reading is like boarding the train that speeds in slow motion through the exhilarating effect of literacy. The act of boarding it might define the rest of your life, you may be doomed to stay in the wagon for all your ephemeral eternity. Every book takes us to the next and the next and the next and every book takes us to the previous and the previous and the previous. Ought one to start with the first book ever written? Ditch all the books, read the greeks?

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CORINNE To make it visually more attractive, and to attract attention without the need for a poster, basically using the collection, and it's just the way of displaying, we were using the display instead of all the existing one.

NINA We were also very much interested by how a book... not only by the content of the book, but how a book can be represented in a tridimensional space. How do you approach it, how do you see it. For instance for this display we selected books roughly on book format or book materials or book making, and this display is really the entrance door.



(CORINNE)

If books are a natural space for meeting, then libraries are even more so. Libraries are the physical space where readers accumulate to circle and consider books. A crossroads for readership is established. It holds a repository of books, it is the stacks of past, future and present readings. It is the place where you dig for possible new readings or reconsider old readings.



NINA We were also very interested in the visual elements of the library, what we remember from our childhood. And these elements have now disappeared, with the digitalization. For instance the very traditional library card which holds these single stamps, like these dates.

FACTS

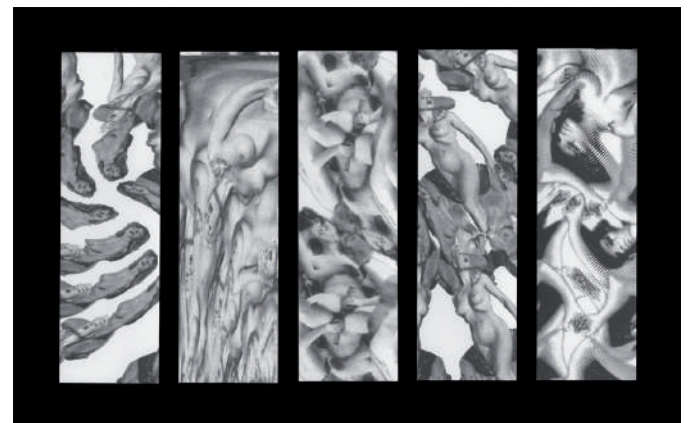
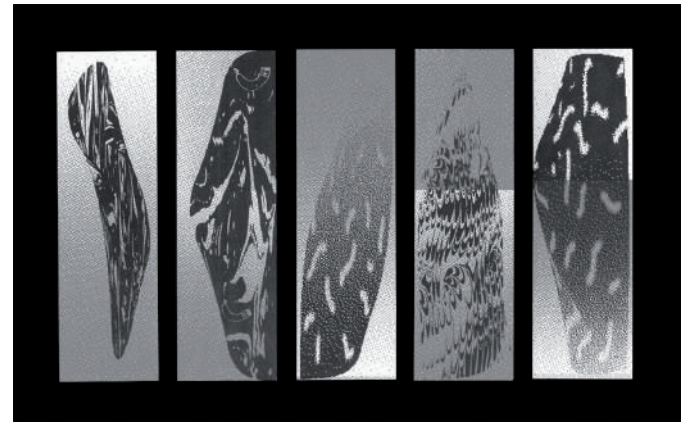
CORINNE Which was actually in a book, and marked the book. It's kind of messing with the object book

NINA This doesn't exist anymore, because now everything is digitalized, with a barcode, and the books are in the files, and then we decided to bring it back to life, and to transform it in a bookmark. And we turned it into an assignment and every month invited different friends or colleagues to design its cover. Basically, our assignment or restriction was that everybody had to be inspired by the traditional materials of book making, marbled paper for instance. This is the february contribution. We started working in january so this was the first. And march is a bit more pornographic approach of the subject.

NINA Maybe a really quick note on the design. Our whole design system is to use Lectura, which is a font designed by Dick Dooijes, that has been digitalized by a former student [Ibrahim Öztaş] at the Rietveld, and Dick Dooijes was the director of the school in the sixties, and he also designed Mercator maybe some designers have heard about it, which is the font actually used in the identity of the school. The identity of the school is the Mercator and the three basic colors, red blue and yellow. So we threw this identity to the looking-glass, and we came out with Lectura and secondary colors.

CORINNE Green, orange, purple.

NINA Again in the display area, in march, speaking of march there is always this big conference at the Rietveld



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called Studium Generale, is takes a week and it's always a week of lectures, performances, different things, and this year the topic was "We are the time". So this is a lot about manifestations and protest in art. What we decided to do for that was to find a lot of different characters in the library and use the structure of the spread, like it always has two pages and always one image on each page. And bring different kinds of portraits. So we

put a contemporary Dutch photographer next to something very old. All these people together become somehow "we are the books", so it's our answer to "we are the time" program. And by doing that, and by changing the display constantly, it's also reviving the library, making people more interested and going there, and saying "Oh, what is this book? maybe I should borrow it". And that's actually being happening.

CORINNE The library is made with glass all around, so you can see into the library from everywhere. Making those displays, which are also form far away visually attractive, people really see it and think "Hey, something is going on there, something has changed".

(CORINNE)

When you pick a book from a shelf at a library you are trying to grasp this book's essence hoping to find out whether this particular one could be considered of significance to yourself. You only brush over the content, reading superficially, sniffing up extracts, dissecting the pages and mentally glueing them together into a possibly representative construct.

NINA The cover as being the main thing that gives you information.

CORINNE It's the first thing.

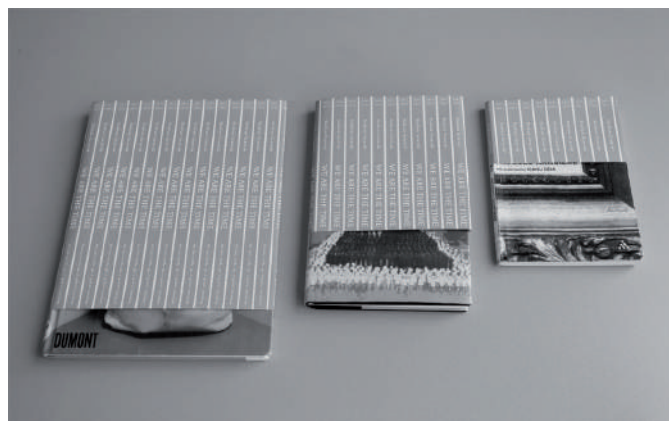
NINA As the Studium Generale is a mainly theoretical event, together with the librarians, we selected a collection of books that should be read or suggested to students during these conferences, about these topics of protest and activism in art, etc. And these books had to be collected together and to do that we simply decided to do these quite obstructive jackets that hide almost completely the content. And then at this moment the books are more connected, because they are part of the collection, and not because they are...

CORINNE They are first identified as part of a collection and not as a singular text, so the title and the author, at first sight is not significant. You actually have to open the book to find out what the content is about.

NINA So during the Studium Generale, there was a huge table with all of these books, green books, and everybody was like "what is it?", so we made a little list of books, to help people find what they could find, but then we made them open it and read it.

CORINNE There was kind of, while they were at this place they looked at it, and there is just this design thing, it's a jacket, a long print that we cut to different sizes, and the longer one would just add more information.

NINA In a shelf, they also mark one part of the book and somehow it's also an act over the book. This books will keep this track, it was part of this event that happened in the school. The library is always working with stickers and barcodes, and it's also kind of violent to the books. So we also



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though that in this library it made sense.
So finally the project we were invited to talk about,

(CORINNE)

The Unopened Book, an Assignment.
You may head for a particular shelf with the precise pretense of looking for this one book that the electronic catalog of the library was urging you to find. However, books are grouped together, they stand in a line with their peers, the spines are all asking you to pluck them along with their neighbor. Libraries motivate the multiplying of reading. Libraries change the perception of each individual book in perspective of a collection.

NINA So this thought came when we were going to this libraries, and there is this amazing library in Amsterdam from the University of Amsterdam and it has a really great online catalogue, so we would find the books we want to read in this catalogue and go to the library. But then once we would go to the selves, we would actually find ten or fifteen other books that we wanted to read.

CORINNE Instead of taking one, we would go gone with ten.

NINA This thing that happens when you go to the shelf, and how one book somehow changes the meaning of the books that are next to it, motivated us to this this assignment to basic year students, who were very fresh and naive almost...

CORINNE Yeah, maybe they've never been to the library, so it was also nice to actually bring them to the library. The first lesson was in the library. We asked them to pick a book, only by its spine, and they had around five minutes, so it was kind of a quick, subconscious decision that they had to take. Then we quickly asked them to explain and reflect on

their choice. They were not allowed to open it. They were not even allowed to take it out of the shelf, they just marked it and we collected them. Those books that remained unopened were obviously the “unopened books”. Then we asked them to fabricate the content according the two books that were standing next to that book, the two neighbors, on the left and on the right, and they had to do that in the form of writing a blurb, this kind of text on the back of the cover or on the jacket that introduces the book but is also a text to sell the content.

1. *Pick a book by its spine.*
You have 5 minutes.
2. *Don't open it:*
this is your “unopened book”.
3. *Based on the two neighbors of*
your book, fabricate its content.
4. *Write a blurb.*
5. *Represent the content of your*
book in a vitrine display.
6. *Open your book.*



NINA They had to represent this context in a vitrine, and then they finally could open the books. And they had only two weeks to do it, one week for the blurb and one week for the vitrine. So basically, it's a selection of books, and that of course causes tremendous sorts of issues, because the library is of course ordered in very different ways, for instance the Rietveld library has a whole section on monographs where the books are in alphabetical order. For instance Jacob chose Popova this book here, because it's very big, bold type, thick etc, and he had no idea he would have to find who Popova was based on Pontorno and Poussin, which are radically

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different, Popova was a Russian Avant-garde artist. We will read a little extract from his blurb.

(CORINNE)

A revolutionary figure in the fine arts avant garde of the 20th century, Florence Deborah POPOVA (1885-1972) is nowadays also seen to be central for the emancipation of the female Eastern European Art. Born in 1885 in Omsk, Siberia, close to the border of Kazakhstan to a Jewish-Hungarian mother and a French aristocratic father she soon discovered the human body as her source of warmth and inspiration in the unreal and remote surrounding of her homeland. At the age of six POPOVA had her first gaze at Italian and French paintings of the 16th and 17th century and they immediately took away her breath and would later form a huge influence on her process of work. After graduating in Sculptor from the Russian Academy of Arts in Moscow in 1906 she agitated the conservative local art lovers and mingled among the intellectual elite. Her new conception of the nude shattered all previous thoughts and shocked the consistently male art scene.

NINA He wrote this because Popova for him is close of “popo”, the butt, so he imagined that he was an artist who had a work based on the ass.

(CORINNE)

Once established in the most vibrant, stimulating and lustful city on the planet whose charm had been haunting the foreign artist's souls with the

vague promise of the muse's kiss POPOVA was able to unfold all of her thoughts and skills. Liaison after liaison followed and she became an integral part of Parisian art scene. POPOVA's "Cycle of Butt" (1912) was heavily disputed by the critics

CORINNE I'm going to skip a bit... and then:

This book deals with POPOVA's fascinating life and manifold oeuvre and tries to focus upon the influences of old masters (such as Poussin and Pontormo) on her paintings and drawings. New extracts from POPOVA's diary give a an insight into her inner feelings and experiences and never before shown images let one of the most mesmerizing artists of the 20th century appear as if back to life again.

NINA So it was totally delirious but really great. And the other example is this little yellow book, that is a little bit the opposite, it's a very small and humble one, it doesn't have any type on the spine. The two neighbors are by an artist called Henk Visch, so all of these books were from here, there's no escape. Marion really likes to draw, and she decided to actually make the book. So she made a book that was exactly the same format that the book she couldn't open. And then finally when we opened the books together we found it very funny. She had this obsession with the fish, and fish and viscid, and in the

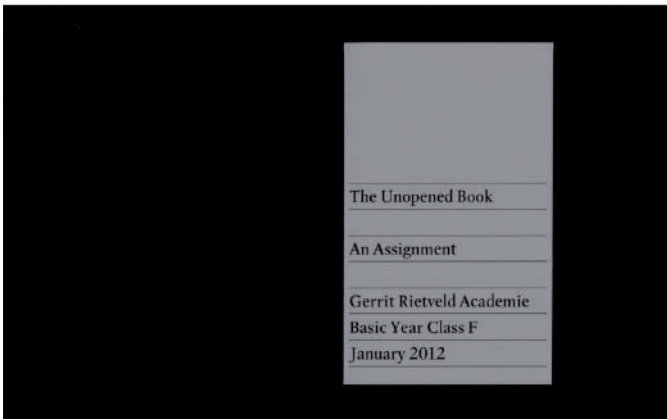


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inside there are really nice coincidence happening.
Then we combined all of these blurbs and the images of the projects, in a little publication which is basically only for us and the library.

CORINNE It's not going to be printed as an edition.

NINA No it's a way to show the results, and they are very different, because of the position of the books in the library. And it also brought a lot of discussions, like this girl who had a book about drags — dragqueens — and it was just next to a book about conceptual art. And we were wondering does the book about conceptual art make the dragqueens more 'art', what happens when you put a conceptual art book next to a dragqueen book.



And then just to finish:

The Pearl Catalog

(CORINNE)

How does one make a selection from a library?

How do you define the jewels of a collection?

What makes a book special, anyway?

It is the race for knowledge that drives research.

A physical investigation in a library is a good way to create detours and take you to the unexpected.

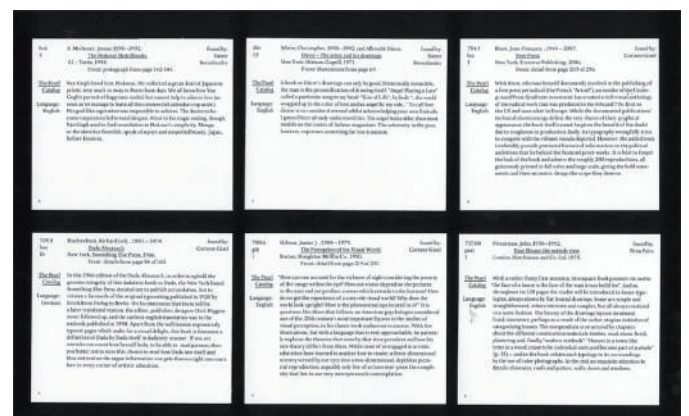
NINA We were also amazed by the unexpected things that happen when you go to visit a library, and how our library

was kind of bad — everybody says it's really bad — but even though we wanted to have an optimistic look at it, and we actually ended up finding really amazing books, like books that are bizarrely strange or incredibly valuable, or just rare, or milestones hidden in the books... So we thought that maybe a positive way to look at the library is not only to stress the fact that the collections should be updated but to show the things that are already there.

CORINNE There was this intention to bring back this old-fashioned card drawer that was used back in the days. And it's also that our library's digital catalog sucks, you can't find anything, it's only in dutch... On these cards were usually only bibliographic informations, maybe a very quick description of what it's about, and there are always three copies of the same card, ordered by subject, title, author. But we wanted to also introduce a visual layer into it.

NINA The cards hold various things, on one side is an image, that for us represents what drove us to it, made us pick that book. It could be a text, or an image. On the back side there are very bureaucratic informations, and a text.

CORINNE A text written by the person



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who chose this book, who chose to recommend this book.

NINA In fact we initiated it but the librarians are already taking part a litte bit ..., and the idea is to open this to anybody who wants to contribute. This was the first we did, so we thought it would be nice to show it.

It's a book about snowflakes. It's a book that has about two-hundred page of cataloguing snowflakes, all the possible kinds and how the combine, in a progression from more simple to more complex. Why would a library in an art school need a book like that clearly outdated and old one, but it's really amazing and it's so inspiring...

[READING THE TEXT]

568.5 ben 1	Bentley, W.A. , 1865 – 1931. <u>Snow Crystals</u> Mineola, Dover Publications, 1962. Front: detail from page 197 of 226.	found by: Corinne Gisel & Nina Paim
<u>The Pearl Catalog</u> Language: English	Like the snow crystals, which through their very minuteness remain concealed from instant perception, the aging books, that reside uncared-for on the shelves of our library, reveal their preciousness only upon closer inspection. The depicted attractive detail metonymically stands in for the rest of the 203 black pages decorated by the frail white wonders. It is in print that the evanescent crystals, captured in freezing efforts by W.A. Bentley in the early 20th century, are preserved up to the present day. His devotion brought us unprecedented imagery of snow crystals; the microscopic marvels that appeal both to the factualist and the aesthete, as they are at the same time of scientific value and of jaw-droppingly intriguing beauty.	

*... and they lived happily
ever after!*

MARIE LÉCRIVAIN Who chose the books of the Pearl Catalogue? Is it you colleagues, friends...

CORINNE It was the two of us who started.

NINA And one librarian. And then we plan to — we're not sure yet — I think we'll give the instructions, how to operate to the librarian. And also the topic of the index cards itself became interesting, so it's very likely that we'll develop it in a more autonomous way and not related to the library, but we would be very happy if they would keep on... Like, I don't know... asking people to go there. Because it's also not necessary to have to find a book at the moment, but it can also remember something that you saw, that was really great and just make a little note about it.

CORINNE We will see.

MANUELA DECHAMPS OTAMENDI I have one question, the texts that you showed about the library, who wrote that?

BOTH Us.

MANUELA DECHAMPS OTAMENDI Very nice.

BOTH Thank you.