

TOWNHOUSE LIBRARY

CAIRO, EGYPT

22 JULY – 12 AUGUST 2026

Between 22 July and 12 August, 2026, I spent twelve days dusting, reorganizing, and categorizing Townhouse's library, which contains approximately 2,000 books and catalogues, and currently resides in Access Art Space at 10 Nabrawi St. in Cairo's Downtown.

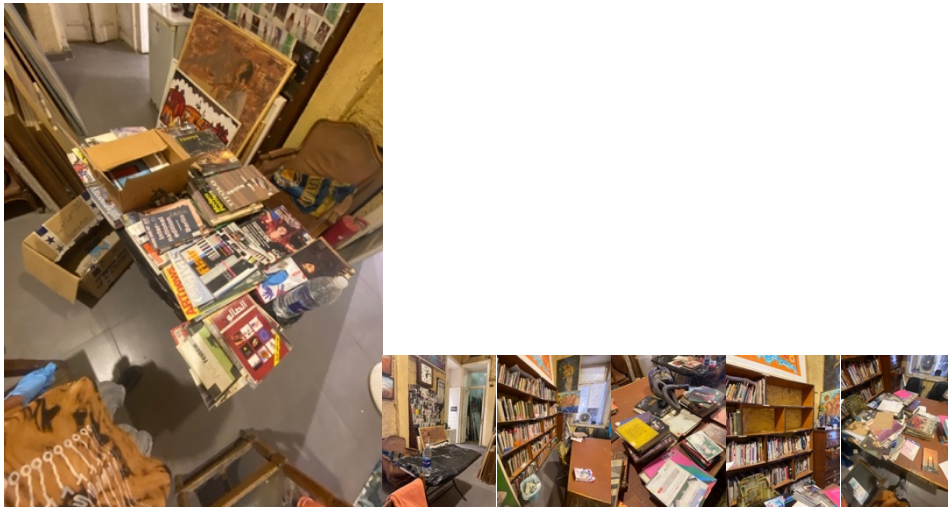
As it currently exists, the library is divided between the lower level on the first floor, which houses Access' storage space, and the Studios, which sit two storeys above. Two bookcases on the first level and two others on the second. Apparently, a couple of years ago, a third bookcase fell, leaving behind it around 500 books which were shoved inside and behind a cupboard like this:



On 11 August, 2026, after consolidating and moving things around, I donated an extra bookcase, which I plan to shuffle a few books into to take the load off the rest. The bookcase was made specifically for the space by the same carpenter, completed and installed on 16 August.

It took me six days to finish de-dusting and organizing the bottom section. I would go in for 1–2 hours; Hani and Mr. Atef, Access' technical assistants, would dust (I have asthma), and I would compartmentalize the books.

Day 1 – 21 July 2026



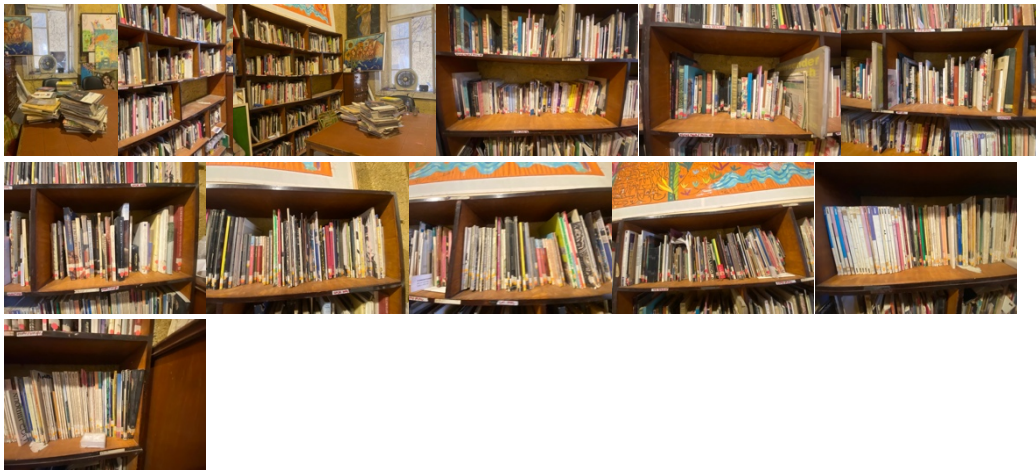
Day 2 – 22 July 2026



I separated sections using business cards.



Day 3 – 25 July 2026



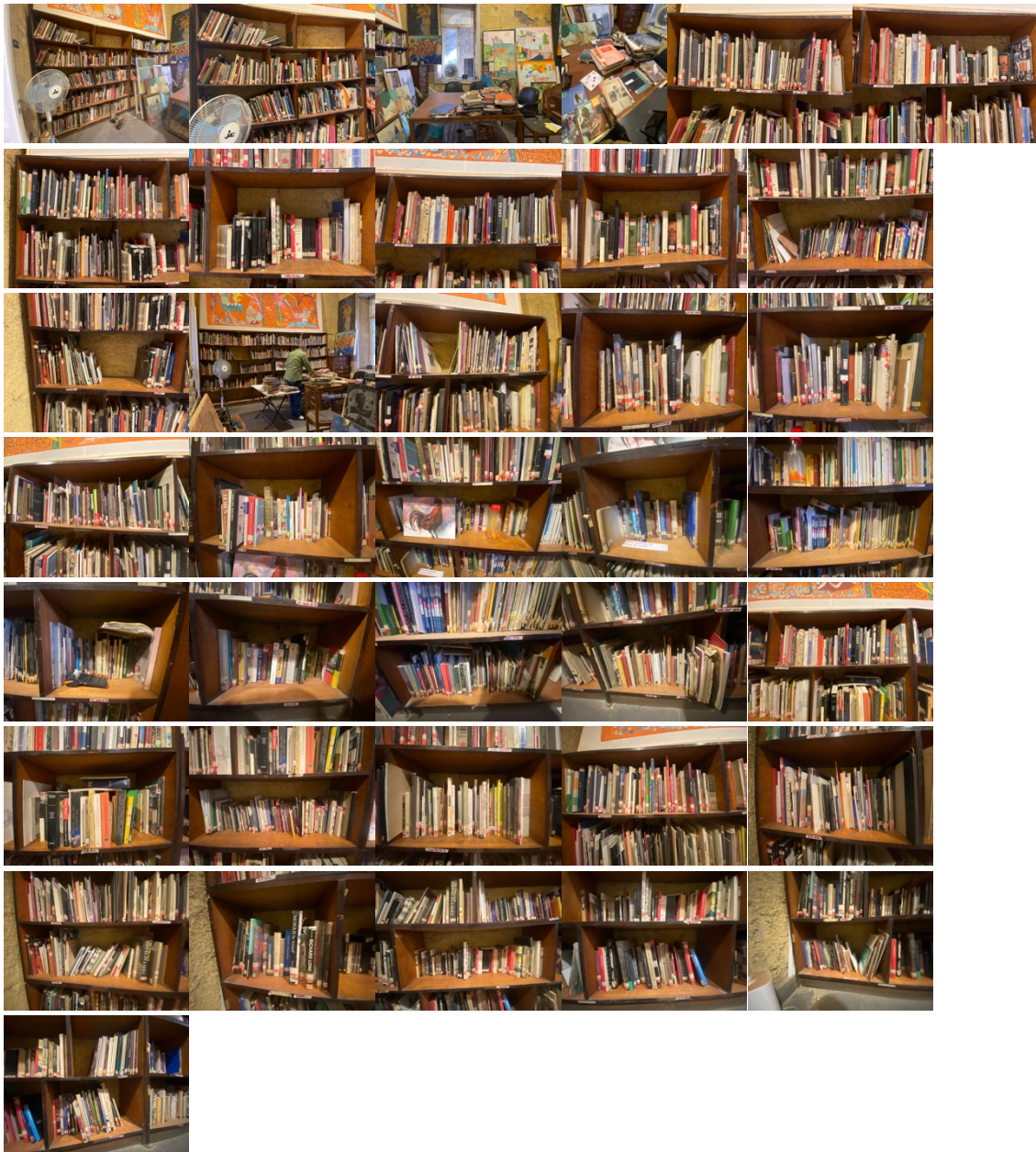
Day 4 – 26 July 2026



Day 5 – 27 July 2026



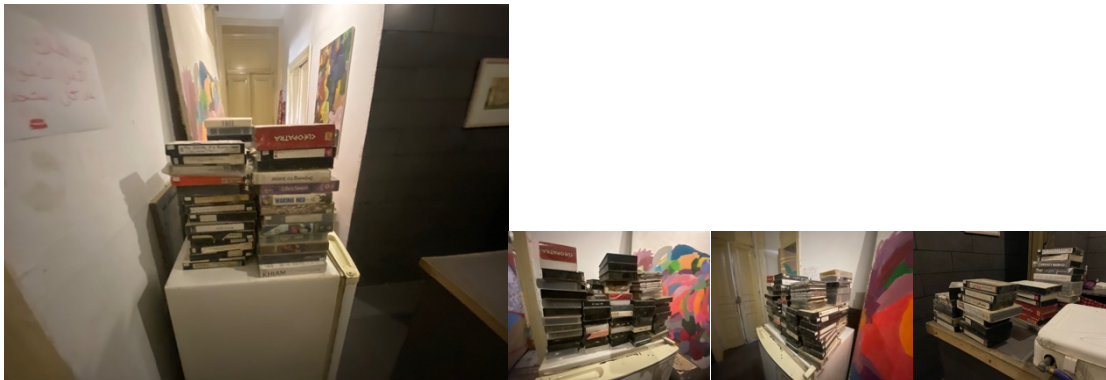
Day 6 – 28 July 2026



The downstairs was now done. The upstairs bookcases looked like this.



Part of Townhouse's video archive was left as such:



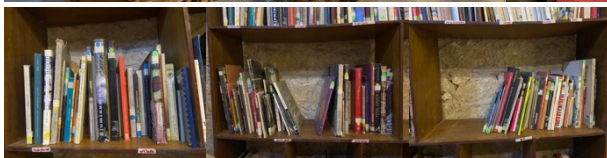
And one of the artists took books into her studio as such:



Day 7 – 1 August 2026



Here we go again ...



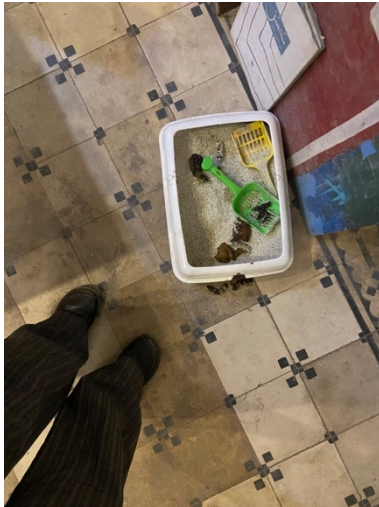
Day 8 – 2 August 2026



I had an asthma attack that day while we were dusting. I asked Mr. Atef to dust the books prior to my coming. I haven't had an asthma attack in years ... !

Day 9 – 4 August 2026

It was obscenely smelly on Day 9



Day 10 – 5 August 2026

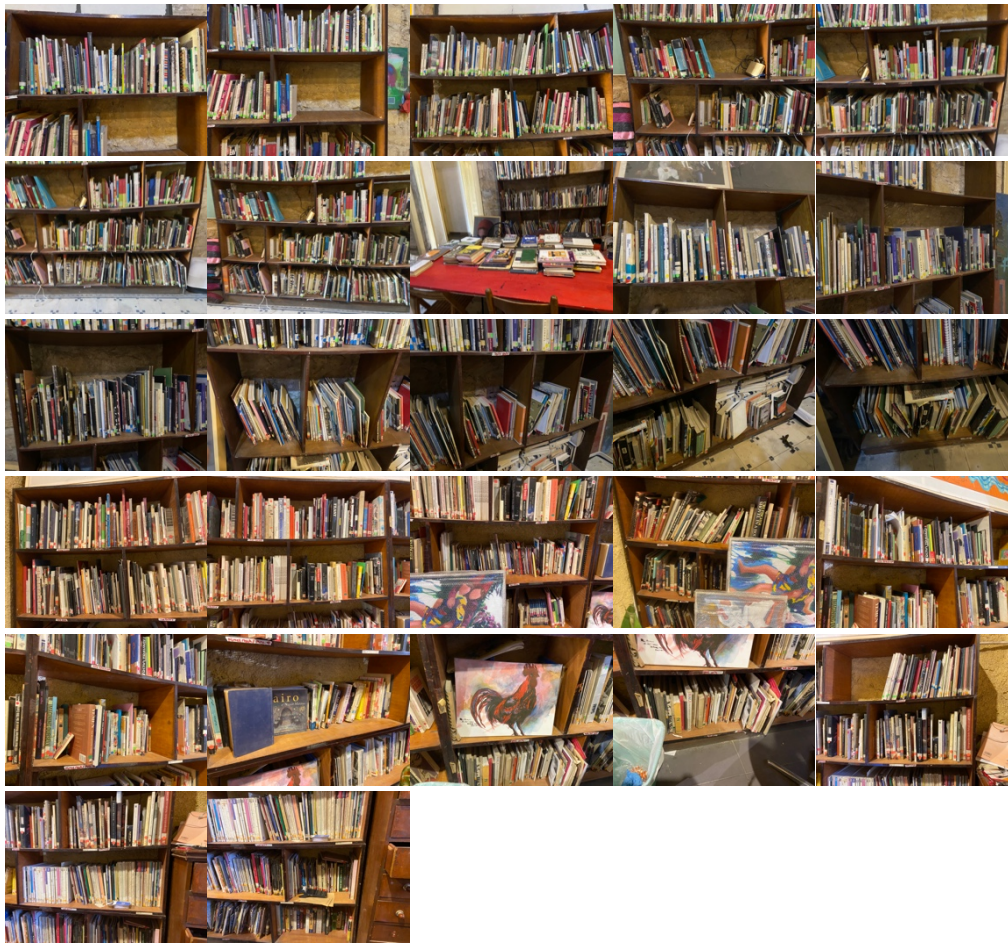


Day 11 – 8 August 2026

Day 11's overture was premiered by a stark realization during a gentle morning walk that Manial is getting demolished:



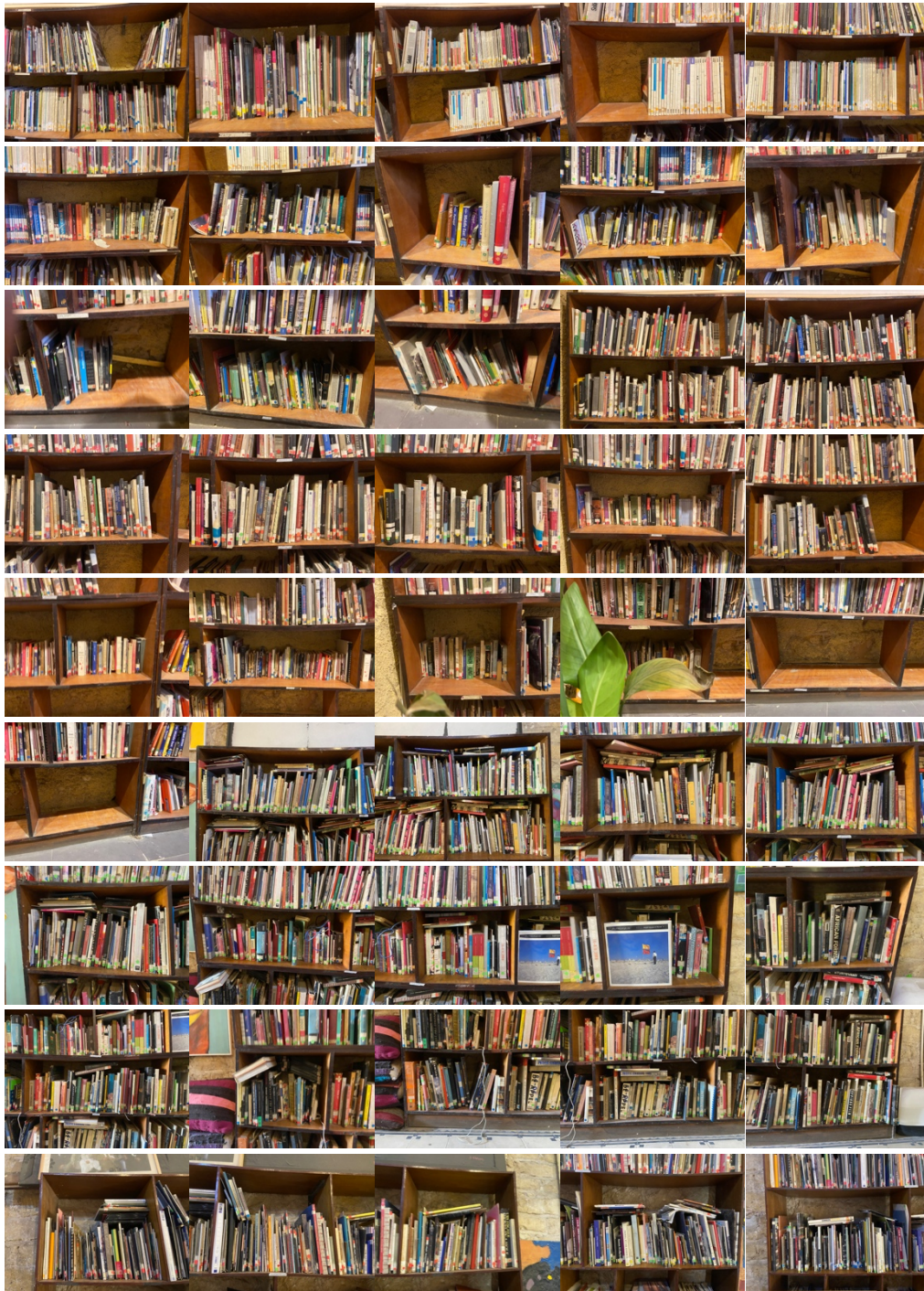
But we persist ...



By day 11, the library was dusted and I was ready to consolidate the identified categories, as I hadn't grouped the shelves and they were spread across floors. For example, I had forgotten to separate the non-fiction art/non-art books, separating them by language instead, so I was to redo that the following day.

Day 12 – 9 August 2026

Mr. Atef hired two men to move things up and downstairs, bless them. In tandem, I was separating the downstairs non-fiction art/non-art still...





... six hours later, the top bookcases looked like this:



But then I had to take a load off so that they don't collapse ... I placed some books in the closet:



The bottom bookcases looked like this:



Between Days 12 and 13, on 10 August, I invited Omar Nagati, representing CLUSTER (Cairo Lab for Urban Studies, Training, and Environmental Research), to assist Access in acquiring a grant and hiring a caretaker for the library. CLUSTER offered to provide training and their platform, PILOT, for free, to allow Townhouse's library to be publicly accessible.

Day 13 – 11 August, 2026

On day 13, I was really excited to finally place the Townhouse video and press archive that I found inside a dust-free box. I had ordered a good one a couple of days back from El Helal & Golden Star in El-Mosky.

Since I was to leave for a month-long residency on the 13th, I wanted to make sure no more cat excrement reaches the books, and that the categories are preserved. So, I bought thick plastic wrapping made to fit the two upstairs bookcases, in the hope that they would serve as curtains ...



I took my goods to Access.

Turns out I needed to unload a few books off this bookcase upstairs so it doesn't fall apart:

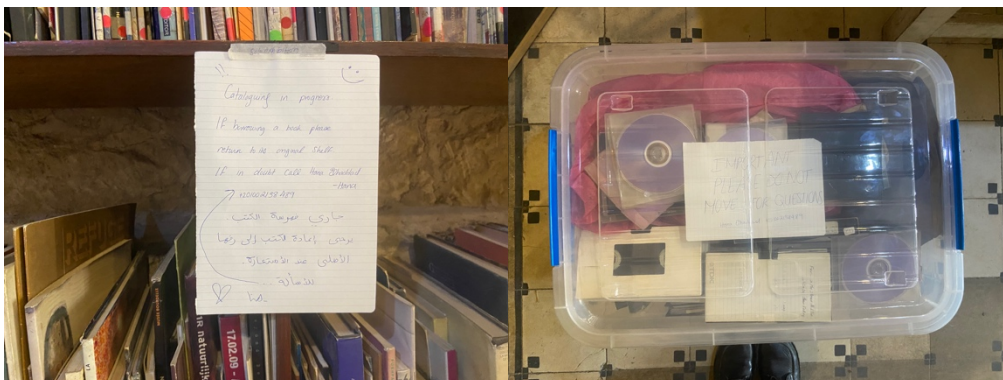


Myself measuring the plastic wrapping with Mr. Atef ...



... when we received unwarranted hostility from a studio tenant saying that her visitors will think the plastic is ugly ... I was at a loss for words ... I was only to leave the plastic up for a month while I figure out cataloguing with Access.

We try our best.



I then had multiple errands to run downtown, so I thought to print out sticker labels for the shelves– I ended up cutting them in the street:



That day, I also commissioned/donated/asked for an extra bookcase to be built to transfer the books in the upstairs cupboard and take the load off of the upstairs bookcases.

Day 14 – 12 August, 2026

The next day, I dropped by to place the labels and QR codes I laminated the same morning:





At that point I was ready to retire my Mada Masr T-Shirt, which had carried me through the dust.

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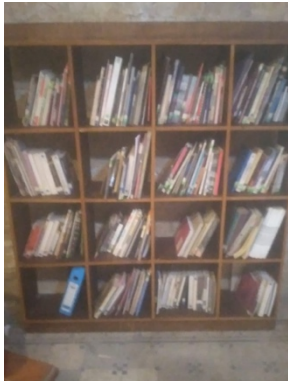
- de-dust/clean
- separate-by-genre
- get dust-free container-for-ephemera
- make-a-shelf
- create a library catalog
- re-add-books
- create a system for checking in/ cleaning yearly

CODA

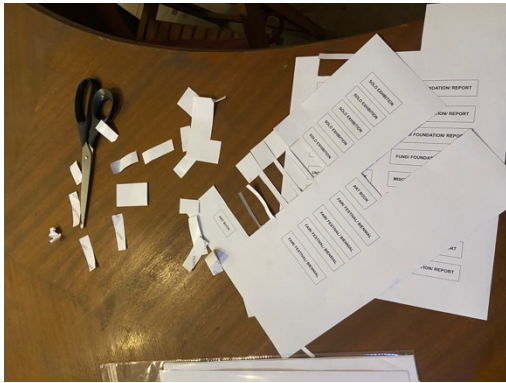
On Friday, 14 August, the bookcase I donated was completed. It was installed by Mr. Atef on Saturday, 15 August on the upper floor.



On Saturday 14 August, Mr. Atef sent me this picture of the bookcase:



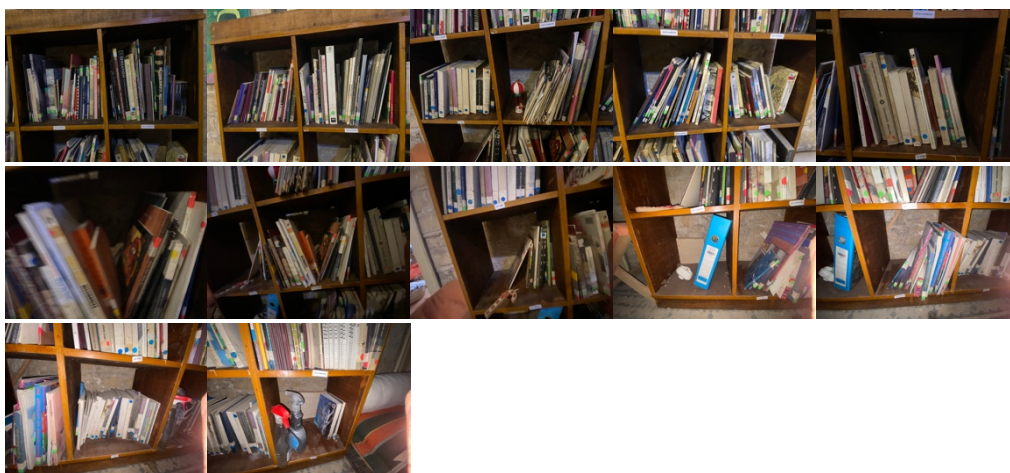
I came back on Tuesday 29 September to install re-organize the new bookcase and label the remaining shelves.



As expected, the bookcases I organized on both floors were not left untouched. On the upper floor, I rearranged what I could and replaced labels which had mysteriously fallen off.



Then I started labelling and arranging the new bookcase.



Cheers,

Hana

30/09/2026