

Welcome to Behind the Mask, the first year collective presentation from the Design Department 2020. This event was supposed to be in person, but reacting to the newest corona measurements we decided to move the event online. Instead of having a traditional project presentation, we want to share insights through a collective reading. Everybody will read out their text in different online rooms. The links to the rooms will be in your e-mail. Please have a look in which room you have to go. This afternoon will be full of reading, listening, drinking and burning. Enjoy!

BEHIND THE MASK  
1st Year COLLECTIVE  
PRESENTATIONS  
15 December 2020

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| 13:40       | MEETING EVERYONE at Main Lounge   |
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| 15:40-17:00 | Round TWO:<br>Room ONE: ALIX, KATHARINA, KATTI, JAN, MICEALA, HOAI, ZGJIM, PERNILLA, TINA, SILVIO, ZHENIA<br>Room TWO: YANNESH, LADIPO, SHEONA, LEITH, TAL, LUKAS, INSA, TONI,<br>STELIOS, DANIEL, ANJA                           |
| 17:00-      | BURNING CEREMONY, CHILLING and SAYING GOODBYE in Lounge room  |

## PROGRAMME

Welcome to the reading room! In two sessions the first years will be reading a short text chosen in relation to their research, work and practice. In listening to each other we hope to gain an insight into our collective interests. We will be asking how the text relates to our research, why we chose the text and what we would like to get out of reading this text in relation to our work. The readings will be followed by an opportunity to discuss these questions together in your reading groups and with your tutors. Be nice and respectful to each other. Enjoy!

## THE READING ROOM

### Introduction

Choose Life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a family. Choose a fucking big television, choose washing machines, car, compact disc players and electrical tin openers. Choose good health, low cholesterol and dental insurance. Choose fixed interest mortgage repayments. Choose a starter home. Choose your firends. Choose leisurewear and matching luggage. Choose a three-piece suite on hire purchase in a range of fucking fabrics. Choose DIY and wondering who the fuck you are on a Sunday morning. Choose sitting on that couch watching mind-numbing, spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing fucking junk food into your mouth. Choose rotting away at the end of it all, pishing your last in a misearble home, nothing moe than an embarrassment to the selfish, fucked up brats you spawned to replace yourself. CHOOSE YOUR FUTURE. CHOOSE LIFE.

YANNESH's reading

from

*Trainspotting*

By IRVINE WELSH

(1993)

The positivist dream: We, the natives; They, the natives The story of man's infatuation with his language is an unending one. In a remote village of Africa, a wise Dogon man used to say "to be naked is to be speechless. "2 Power, as unveiled by numerous contemporary writings, has always inscribed itself in language. Speaking, writing, and discoursing are not mere acts of communication; they are above all acts of compulsion. Please follow me. Trust me, for deep feeling and understanding require total commitment. In the global village, what concerns me concerns you. The attempt to impose a human reality onto an inexplicably indifferent world is as obvious, as tangible as language can be in its crude being. A thoughtful white man observed not long ago that "there is no reality not already classified by men: to be born is nothing but to find this code ready-made and to be obligated to accommodate oneself to it. "3 Power therefore never dies out: tracked, pursued, worn out, or driven away here, it will always reappear there, where I expect it least. And language is one of the most complex forms of subjugation, being at the same time the locus of power and unconscious servility. With each sign that gives language its shape lies a stereotype of which I/i am both the manipulator and the manipulated. Transposed onto another plane, such is the relation, for example, between we, the natives, and they, the natives. From a voluntary to an enforced designation, the distance is plain but the appearance remains intentionally ambiguous. Terming us the "natives" focuses on our innate qualities and our belonging to a particular place by birth; terming them the "natives," on their being born inferior and "non-Europeans. " As homonyms, these two "natives" sometimes claim to merge and other times hear nothing of each other. The further I disentangle social anthropology, the deeper I entangle myself. Where is that ethnic me? the Other? The more I accept his word-prescriptions, the more my competences shrink. From "forget who you are and forget me not" to "know who you are and copy me not, " the point of view is the same: "Be like us." The goal pursued is the spread of a hegemonic disease. Don't be us, this self-explanatory motto warns. Just be "like" and bear the chameleon's fate, never infecting us but only yourself, spending your days muting, putting on/taking off glasses, trying to please all and always at odds with myself who is no self at all. Yet, being accused of "ignoring one's own culture" and "looking whiter than Snow White herself" also means taking a trip to the promised land of White Alienation. The language in which I perceive (quite a deception) myself-culturally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually (What hasn't he contaminated? Can you name it?)-and become aware of my needs is permeated with professional definitions. Anthropological Hegemony, a non-universal homocentrism that brings in light where obscurity reigns. I name the way he names, aspire to the same freedom he cherishes, and look carefully at my "roots, " not venturing to speak about any single (my) traditional society without his advice, the expert anthropologist's. Has anything changed since "indigenous" took over, rendering "native" obsolete?

KATTI's reading

*Woman, Native, Other*  
By TRINH THI MINH HÀ

### **The Perfect Love Poem**

Every time  
I see your face  
it reminds me  
of you.

### **Kiss Me Quick**

Kiss me quick  
before I have  
that dream again.  
The one where I'm  
riding a zebra naked  
through Chelsea  
during rush hour  
and you go whizzing by  
on a shiny silver scooter  
yelling something like,  
„I love you!“  
But I can't be sure  
because of the police sirens  
so I yell back,  
„I love you too!“  
When a nun carrying  
a huge red bong  
comes up and says,  
„She didn't say 'I love you.'  
She said 'You have toilet paper  
stuck on your shoe.'“

### **Sandy Dennis Briefly**

I wake up  
to my cats  
judging me.  
They stare  
blankly  
as if to say,  
„Is this what  
you had in mind  
for your life?  
If it is, you may  
want to consider  
sleeping pills or  
a tall bridge  
because in our view,  
you're pathetic“

Or

They're hungry.

ALIX's reading

from

*B is for Bad Poetry*

by

PAMELA AUGUST RUSSELL  
(2009)

## **Elephant**

There's an elephant  
in the room.  
He's wearing your  
favorite T-shirt,  
cooked us a delightful  
lasagna for dinner  
and left a note  
on the fridge that says,  
„You should break up.“  
I wonder what he wants?

## **Capitalism Can Fall Not Like I Fell For You**

I should sell my broken heart  
on the open market  
in Europe or Asia  
fill up my empty cavity  
with gold bars, diamonds and yen  
maybe then you'd take stock  
of how much we lost.

## **Urbane Decay**

There are weeds now  
where your tongue  
once circled  
broken beer bottles  
and rusted car parts  
where your hands  
once caressed  
graffiti and paint chips  
where your lips  
once kissed  
and a tow truck  
taking away  
the only orgasm left  
on this empty lot

## **Popeye, Hamlet & Satre (A Rendering)**

I am what I am  
today, anyway  
which is to say  
this is not  
what I was  
yesterday, or that  
I'm even thinking  
about tomorrow,  
so for the most part,  
you're looking at it.  
Sort of.



*'I felt like a tank. I felt like a large mammal. A big beast. When I'd walk through the corridors or across the lawn, I'd just felt like I could knock anyone out of my way, you know. I was a solid, man. It's terrible to be thin and wispy, because, you know, you could get knocked over by a strong wind or something. Fat is beautiful.'*

- said by Jim Morrison in 1969, during an interview in which he discussed his weight gain before fame.

A link to this interview was shared on Humpty's blog.



ED'S DINER

When I chose to meet Humphrey for the first time, I decided that it would only be appropriate to meet somewhere as equally insipid as his general being. We

INSA's reading

from  
*Dining With  
Humpty Dumpty*  
by REBA MAYBURY

had arranged to go for dinner and it was up to me to choose the restaurant.

There are many Ed's Diners in London, but I chose the one in Angel situated in a monotonous shopping complex built 14 years ago. Ed's website describes the chain as a 'Funky diner with a 1950s vibe serving burgers, hot dogs and American comfort food.' There is a particularly distasteful irony to a retro restaurant, neighboured by the most commercially popular phone shops and fashion chains that are filled with clothes probably made by Bangladeshi children.

I was already fifteen minutes late to meet Humpty when I walked up the stairs to the first floor restaurant. The songs of a nostalgic past that even our grandparents can hardly remember stagnated in the air. Cheaply framed record covers hung on the walls alongside cheerful mid-century Coca Cola adverts. The interiors made vague efforts towards claiming a sort of historical accuracy, but failed to achieve any kind of authenticity.

Humphrey was sitting alone at the end of the almost empty diner, inside a red leather booth and next to a large window with a view of the shopping centre at rush hour. My high heels landed loudly on the black and white tiled floor and he froze when he heard me before lifting his head to watch me walk towards him. The

waiters played on their phones.

As he watched me approach, he seemed instantly panicked, but it was hard to work out whether this look of anxiety was simply the natural disposition of his frail facial features. Humphrey's eyes looked as if they might ever so slightly want to pop out of his face. Facing him, I began to unbutton my coat in silence before I sat down. He wasn't sure whether to get up to greet me or not and, for a second, he levitated his body in an awkward motion before resting again and mumbling vague greetings.

Humphrey's face is so forgettable, so intrinsically English in its palatable mousy demeanour, that it is difficult to imagine him having a conversation about anything other than what is currently happening in the mainstream media. He is shorter than the average man at roughly 5'8, 33-years-old, and he grew up in an idyllic part of the south of England. Now he owns a brand new apartment in the middle of the radically lifeless gentrification of Kings Cross, an area of London that currently exists mainly as a building site for half-completed, multi-million pound highrises, each of which possesses an aesthetic of barren sterility and proximity to a carefully-planned area filled with restaurants and wine bars. His job has something to do with media, marketing, communication and production but that could essentially mean anything. Those four words sitting next to one

another incite a lighting bolt of tedium into my soul. What exactly does it mean? What does he do all day? And does he, or anyone for that matter, get any fulfillment out of it?

While speaking online, Humphrey told me that he voted for the Conservative Party in the last election and was privately educated. He completed his degree at a coastal university and then went on to gain a Masters. He is single and often travels for work.

A female waitress came over to take our order. She had a Czech accent and a sweet, but bored attitude.

'He is incredibly hungry this evening and has a huge appetite, so he would love to have the double cheese burger with bacon and a fried egg.' I paused and peered at him before completing my sentence.

'Oh, but it is essential that he has extra fries, and we can't forget extra onion rings.' I prolonged the 'x' sound every time I said 'extra.'

'And I think we're going to have get a side of baked beans, too.' I examined the back of the menu and took my time choosing his next order.

'To go with that, he is also going to have a chocolate milkshake'. I inspected the menu for another five seconds. The waitress began to look a little confused.

'We really can't forget to add malt to the milkshake, and he is going to have to have an extra large Coca-Cola. However, I am nowhere near as hungry as he is, so I'll be sensible and just have a green salad and a mineral water, please.'

The waitress left, clearly confused to why I had ordered for him, and Humphrey instantly said:

'Thank you, Mistress Rebecca. Those were wonderful choices.'

I looked at him with semi disgust. Although my work as a dominatrix is predominantly concerned with maintaining a power balance and remaining in a character, Humphrey really does revolt me. However, I have a perversely mundane fascination with him. The usual stereotypes of BDSM often seem too affected for me to participate in, but searching out instinctual formations of unconventionality, sexual or not, has always been one of my biggest passions.

Humphrey approached me on a fetish website under the username 'humpty-dumpty,' and asked me if I had the capabilities to help him 'balloon in size.' He had messaged me many times before I had decided to reply; he is eager to please me. For his profile picture, he appeared to be wearing a suit with his chin pushed towards his collarbone and chest pushed out to suggest



that he was physically rounder than he naturally is.

We began to speak on Skype and I decided that he should order Indian food, which would be followed by me ordering him to eat it over a video call. Humphrey, or as we shall now call him, 'Humpty,' told me all about his serious dedication to being fed. It is not so uncommon to hear of 'feeders,' predominantly for the controversy surrounding the concept of both parties getting erotic pleasure from making one half monstrously overweight. This fetish is best known for being associated with men feeding women, most often resulting in a stereotype of misogynistic abuse both physically and sexually.

He had told me online that he was aiming to lose mobility from feeding -- that he was willing to relocate for this goal and that it was only through a sadistic woman controlling and humiliating him that he could become 'the fat pig that he'd always dreamed of.' His weight gain would turn him into a humiliating spectacle and it would be through the dominatrix's control that he would become trapped inside of his body. This imprisonment within his own flabby skin was his obsession.

His lacklustre burger arrived, wobbling in size with a dry selection of chips littering it. He went to pick up the milkshake but, before he had the chance, I stopped him.

'Did I tell you that you could drink that?' I stared at him straight in the eyes for the first time which made him shiver faintly before dropping his glance to the floor.

'No, Mistress. I'm sorry, Mistress.'

'You can now.'

'Thank you, Mistress.'

'Start with the burger.'

'Thank you, Mistress.'

Humpty had already told me online all about how this has been an obsession of his since as far back as he could remember. As a small child, he has some hazy recollection of a nanny trying to get him out a high chair and him getting stuck in there. The sensation of his body being too large to escape stayed with him ever since. A few years later, he became vaguely ill, losing weight and not putting any on for a few years. This enraptured him with memories of the women in his family constantly trying to feed him. The way he spoke felt like he was indulging me with special information, as if I should care or even feel sorry for him.

Humpty's sad, small hands grasped on to his burger. 'You look very beautiful this evening, Mistress.'

I rolled my eyes and stared at the commuters walking in and out of Pret A Manger as they ignored a woman

begging through the window. Receiving a compliment from a submissive is like receiving a really dated greetings card. Good intentions but empty, with the ability to make you cringe.

'Mistress, I have a question, but I would like your permission before asking.'

'You have permission.'

'Thank you, Mistress. Are you a female supremacist?'

For a moment, I thought that Humpty may have been trying to challenge me. Say no and I'll lose a certain level of dominance only to discover that he's a secret sexist, using this set up to get his twisted revenge for women rejecting him in his life. Or say yes and play into his fantasy, a form of flirting which I didn't think he deserved.

'Of course I'm not, because I'm not a fascist. I believe in equality, but unfortunately its existence between the sexes is ridiculously far-fetched, even for the luckiest women. I love men.' I stopped and looked at him.

'Well, the right men anyway.'

'You know, I'm ready to give everything up for this. I'll move away from my friends and family, change my work so I only have to work from home. This means no one will see the flabby mass that I become. I want to give

you control of my body.'

'I know.' I said, meeting his beady eyes. 'You must realise that anything that happens in my presence means that I am correct. Everything I do is good for you. Do you consent to this?'

He was now halfway through his burger and I nonchalantly picked at my crisp salad.

'Oh absolutely, Mistress. Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity. You are so wonderful and I am so pathetic! I can't believe how beautiful you are. I am in awe of you. I have no limits, but I know that you could push me to them. I want you to punish me!'

There was something irritating about Humpty, the kind of annoyance that you only get from really conventional people after they get short tempered when you misunderstand their simple desires. Or perhaps, it is the irritation you feel from someone whose opinions and taste you wholeheartedly know you disagree with. An awareness that your own effort towards them can only reach so far.

The concept of a submissive coming from the place of cis male, white, heterosexual, upper middle class privilege is endlessly fascinating. A total role reversal from everything they've been fed. The individual who has everything, every opportunity, every form of

gratitude, then superficially rejecting it as they please.

'Mistress, I want you to know that I hate male ego. I always have; I've even stopped important friendships because of it.'

He was about to start speaking again --

'Carry on eating,' I ordered.

'Yes, Mistress. Sorry, Mistress.'

Elvis Presley's version of 'Hound Dog' started playing and no one in the diner reacted to its sounds.

He finished his burger, wiping solidifying egg yolk from his chin and looking at me timidly from below his eyebrows.

'Finish what you were saying but drink some more milkshake first.'

He was wearing a bland shirt. I wasn't sure if he had chosen to wear a shirt a bit too small for him or not as the buttons started to stretch revealing the grey of his T-shirt underneath. It is important to now mention that Humpty is in no way overweight; he's really very average. In no way fit. He's a bit loose; he definitely possesses small love handles and lacks any definition.

'Is this something you think you could achieve with me, Mistress? To make me really very large?' he pleaded.

I purposely dodged eye contact with him and sighed.

'Yes, but it's a long-term goal. What has to change now is your attitude to food. Before today, you've been photographing your meals for me. You are eating an average amount of food. I see photos where you have two pieces of toast and a banana for breakfast. I don't know how seriously you are taking this. I can not tolerate you wasting my time. I've told you that you need to be eating bacon, eggs, pancakes and such instead.'

'Oh, Mistress, I really am. I've already noticed the changes. My body already feels looser since we began speaking online last week, but what I really want is a woman to have made me this huge. I can't do it alone.'

Before we met, I made Humpty create a blog where he posted photos of all of the meals he ate over the last week. It was true; his intake of food was entirely average.

'You're not trying hard enough,' I affirmed.

'I want to please you, Mistress, but I recently read that processed meats can cause cancer. I'd rather stick to healthier fats like avocado, nuts and yogurt instead.'

I stared at Humpty severely, totally deadpan.

'Are you wasting my time?' I asked.

Humpty trembled melodramatically. 'No, Mistress. I



The first configuration is what I came to call the Vampires' Castle. The Vampires' Castle specialises in propagating guilt. It is driven by a priest's desire to excommunicate and condemn, an academic-pedant's desire to be the first to be seen to spot a mistake, and a hipster's desire to be one of the in-crowd. The danger in attacking the Vampires' Castle is that it can look as if - and it will do everything it can to reinforce this thought - that one is also attacking the struggles against racism, sexism, heterosexism. But, far from being the only legitimate expression of such struggles, the Vampires' Castle is best understood as a bourgeois-liberal perversion and appropriation of the energy of these movements. The Vampires' Castle was born the moment when the struggle not to be defined by identitarian categories became the quest to have 'identities' recognised by a bourgeois big Other.

The privilege I certainly enjoy as a white male consists in part in my not being aware of my ethnicity and my gender, and it is a sobering and revelatory experience to occasionally be made aware of these blind-spots. But, rather than seeking a world in which everyone achieves freedom from identitarian classification, the Vampires' Castle seeks to corral people back into identi-camps, where they are forever defined in the terms set by dominant power, crippled by self-consciousness and isolated by a logic of solipsism which insists that we cannot understand one another unless we belong to the same identity group.

I've noticed a fascinating magical inversion projection-disavowal mechanism whereby the sheer mention of class is now automatically treated as if that means one is trying to downgrade the importance of race and gender. In fact, the exact opposite is the case, as the Vampires' Castle uses an ultimately liberal understanding of race and gender to obfuscate class. In all of the absurd and traumatic twitterstorms about privilege earlier this year it was noticeable that the discussion of class privilege was entirely absent. The task, as ever, remains the articulation of class, gender and race - but the founding move of the Vampires' Castle is the dis-articulation of class from other categories.

The problem that the Vampires' Castle was set up to solve is this: how do you hold immense wealth and power while also appearing as a victim, marginal and oppositional? The solution was already there - in the Christian Church. So the VC has recourse to all the infernal strategies, dark pathologies and psychological torture instruments Christianity invented, and which Nietzsche described in *The Genealogy of Morals*. This priesthood of bad conscience, this nest of pious guilt-mongers, is exactly what Nietzsche predicted when he said that something worse than Christianity was already on the way. Now, here it is ... The Vampires' Castle feeds on the energy and anxieties and vulnerabilities of young students, but most of all it lives by converting the suffering of particular groups - the more 'marginal' the better - into academic capital. The most lauded figures in the Vampires' Castle are those who have spotted a new market in suffering - those who can find a group more oppressed and subjugated than any previously exploited will find themselves promoted through the ranks very quickly.

**The first law of the Vampires' Castle is: individualise and privatise everything.** While in theory it claims to be in favour of structural critique, in practice it never focuses on anything except individual behaviour. Some of these working class types are not terribly well brought up, and can be very rude at times. Remember: condemning individuals is always more important than paying attention to impersonal structures. The actual ruling class propagates ideologies of individualism, while tending to act as a class. (Many of what we call 'conspiracies' are the ruling class showing class solidarity.) The VC, as dupe-servants of the ruling class, does the opposite: it pays lip service to 'solidarity' and 'collectivity', while always acting as if the individualist categories imposed by power really hold. Because they are petit-bourgeois to the core, the members of the Vampires' Castle are intensely competitive, but this is repressed in the passive aggressive manner typical of the bourgeoisie. What holds them together is not solidarity, but mutual fear - the fear that they will be the next one to be outed, exposed, condemned.

LEITH's reading

from  
*Exiting the  
Vampire Castle*  
by MARK FISHER  
(2013)

**The second law of the Vampires' Castle is: make thought and action appear very, very difficult.** There must be no lightness, and certainly no humour. Humour isn't serious, by definition, right? Thought is hard work, for people with posh voices and furrowed brows. Where there is confidence, introduce scepticism. Say: don't be hasty, we have to think more deeply about this. Remember: having convictions is oppressive, and might lead to gulags.

**The third law of the Vampires' Castle is: propagate as much guilt as you can.** The more guilt the better. People must feel bad: it is a sign that they understand the gravity of things. It's OK to be class-privileged if you feel guilty about privilege and make others in a subordinate class position to you feel guilty too. You do some good works for the poor, too, right?

**The fourth law of the Vampires' Castle is: essentialize.** While fluidity of identity, plurality and multiplicity are always claimed on behalf of the VC members - partly to cover up their own invariably wealthy, privileged or bourgeois-assimilationist background - the enemy is always to be essentialized. Since the desires animating the VC are in large part priests' desires to excommunicate and condemn, there has to be a strong distinction between Good and Evil, with the latter essentialized. Notice the tactics. X has made a remark/ has behaved in a particular way - these remarks/ this behaviour might be construed as transphobic/ sexist etc. So far, OK. But it's the next move which is the kicker. X then becomes defined as a transphobe/ sexist etc. Their whole identity becomes defined by one ill-judged remark or behavioural slip. Once the VC has mustered its witch-hunt, the victim (often from a working class background, and not schooled in the passive aggressive etiquette of the bourgeoisie) can reliably be goaded into losing their temper, further securing their position as pariah/ latest to be consumed in feeding frenzy.

**The fifth law of the Vampires' Castle: think like a liberal (because you are one).** The VC's work of constantly stoking up reactive outrage consists of endlessly pointing out the screamingly obvious: capital behaves like capital (it's not very nice!), repressive state apparatuses are repressive. We must protest!

Introduction  
No Wrong Doors: An Entryway

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.

–J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

Reading from Behind is a short book on the role of the anus, the rear, the posterior, the behind, the bottom, the ass in literary theory and cultural criticism. I have a basic hunch that the ass is more important than we have cared to admit, or than we have admitted, but only in part. I will argue that the rear can help us to understand a wide range of textual expressions and that “reading from behind” can illuminate literary and cultural texts in new and exciting ways. However, to do this, we must change our critical postures and anxieties and address what is arguably the most pressing issue: our discomfort with anal things, with other people’s asses, and with the fact that perhaps the ass is filled with meaning that we have not yet attended to for any number of reasons. It’s tricky, for despite the apparent discomfort with, and avoidance of, the anus, it fascinates us.

[...]

With only these few examples given but so many available to offer, it seems fair to say that the ass captivates us. And though some might insist that these popular cultural references are simply oddities or passing fads and curiosities, I believe that we need to think deeper about their meanings and how we respond to them. So many of these ideas of the behind, the ways in which we speak and don’t speak about the ass, fold into one another, leading me to conclude that the anus is a governing symbol that can and does explain a wide range of phenomena but that we have—for many reasons that run the gamut from the taboo, to the fear of embarrassment, to the practical question of “Who’d fund this research project?”—until now left largely untouched and unread. I am interested here in why the anus remains covered, hidden away, a site of humiliation and disgust, even though we seem to see the fascination with it everywhere, from popular music to royal weddings. Interesting too is that, while we have had for a long time theories and discussions of the phallus in particular, but also the womb and clitoris, we do not yet have what might be called an “anal theory” or a “methodology of the anus”—a way to read from behind. This book sets out to overturn this failing—to turn theory on its head by asking different questions, using other modes of reading, of thinking, and of critiquing. What would happen, for instance, if we uncovered and revealed the anus and anal dimensions—tunnels, holes, crevices, enemas—in literary, filmic, and visual texts?

[...]

Reading from Behind thus participates and intervenes in a series of discussions ranging from masculinity studies, to queer theory, to literary and cultural analysis. I dwell on the anus, its meanings and signs, in order to deflate, critique, and expand our understandings of it. We shall come to see, by the book’s end, that it is a remarkably complex organ, sign, and symbol that appears repeatedly in literature and culture.

[...]

With respect to the anus, “The prevailing social consensus,” writes sexologist and therapist Jack Morin, “can still be described as, ‘Don’t ask, don’t tell’”. Reading this assertion, published in 2010, I am struck by how much one thing has changed—the resonance of “Don’t ask, don’t tell.” Yet so much has also not

MICAELA’s reading

from  
*Reading from Behind*  
by JONATHAN A. ALLAN  
(2016)

changed. As much as gays and lesbians might not be forced any longer into the closet, the anus—and discussions of it—continue to remain guarded, closeted, limited.<sup>5</sup> We are still anxious about it. It remains taboo. As I began to think about writing *Reading from Behind*, I realized early on in the venture that Morin's words would ring true for many readers, and I imagine that they will remain true for a long time to come. No doubt conversation about it evokes discomfort for many. It is, after all, central to elimination, shit, the abject. But it also entails eroticism, pleasure, affect, sexuality. Still, it makes people extremely uncomfortable, and perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in academic conferences, during the scholarly peer review process, and the like. So, though it is certainly true that postmodern scholars and their philosophies have allowed scholars in general to ask many new questions, other questions still remain unasked, let alone answered. So as much as the anus might well be a valuable area of inquiry, the discomfort persists, the giggles continue, and the dirtiness of the subject matter continues to taint those involved.

[...]

There was the uncomfortable experience, for example, when an American border agent read my conference paper on "Rectal Reading" in its entirety, presumably because it was a threat to national security (or maybe because it was during a government shutdown and—being a particularly slow and boring time, like constipation itself—the guard had nothing better to do). As I have thought about these experiences evoked by my research and writing, I have become more and more convinced that "most of us still feel somewhat uneasy"<sup>6</sup> with this subject matter. But what causes this uneasiness? Why are we, or at least so many of us, uncomfortable with discussions of the anus?

[...]

The anus, unlike the vagina or the vulva, for instance, is not always the opposite or inverse of the penis, yet it would be difficult to argue that the anus is not rich in meaning. Although the penis is undoubtedly fascinating insofar as it highlights many anxieties, desires, and fears, and though its symbolic form could certainly be the governing figure in an attempt to outline a history of sexuality (as a critic such as Ilan Stavans has argued), I argue that the anus provides an equally provocative site to begin critical analysis. I also ask questions about the nature of literary and cultural criticism, not because I believe these modes of criticism to be in need of revision or correction but because I am committed to opening up new lines of inquiry or repressed lines of inquiry that have hitherto remained largely uninvestigated—sealed tight, so to speak.

Indeed, readings of the texts that I explore in *Reading from Behind* have been incomplete because critics have failed to account for the anus. The anus is an opening to the text that has remained obscured by critical, intellectual, and affective anxieties that have not permitted readers the chance to engage with the other side of textuality.

[...]

It is this critical work, as a kind of imaginative reading, that motivates *Reading from Behind*. I intend to explore and consider what happens to gender, particularly masculinity, when the anus is incorporated into textual analysis.

[...]

In a sense, Reading from Behind proposes that the anus is “complex, ambiguous,” and this is what we need to recognize in our critical theories; and we must equally admit that the anus seems to be caught up in a grand narrative: “the very ground zero of gayness.” This tension needs to be exposed, explored, and understood. The anus, as we have witnessed briefly here, calls into question masculinity, sexuality, and orientation. Even in a scenario involving a male and a female, the anus seems to disrupt one’s claim to a given sexuality and by extension one’s gender.

One of the challenges that must be overcome while “reading from behind” is the less than critical imperative that we orient the anus in a particular fashion. Indeed, one of the goals of this study is to decentre the orientation of the anus. This is not to deny that it has an orientation but to claim that its orientation is not the same for everyone. Further, what would happen—if only as a thought experiment—if we privileged the anal dimensions of texts? Can we read for these instances, these moments, and imagine other readings not indebted to a particular orientation or to the obvious prominence of the phallus, a site of difference, and move toward a space of inclusion? What if the ass, the booty, the moneymaker, the tukhus were a fully loaded sign endowed with rich and complex meaning much like the numerous nerve endings of the anus? What if we loosened up our critical inquiries, embraced the pleasure of the text, and removed ourselves from the paranoid, sphincter-tightening hermeneutics of suspicion? Indeed, is it possible to find a way to read texts that engage the anus but not fall victim to a hermeneutics of suspicion, a paranoid, anxious, or nervous reading practice, one that always insists on a certain orientation?

Most of our lives we live closed up in ourselves, with a longing not to be alone, to include others in that life that is invisible and intangible. To make it visible and tangible, we need light and material, any material. And any material can take on the burden of what had been brewing in our consciousness or subconsciousness, in our awareness or in our dreams.

TAL's reading

from

*Material as Metaphor*

by ANNI ALBERS

Let me begin by saying that I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing.

I came to theory young, when I was still a child. In *The Significance of Theory* Terry Eagleton says:

Children make the best theorists, since they have not yet been educated into accepting our routine social practices as “natural”, and so insist on posing to those practices the most embarrassingly general and fundamental questions, regarding them with a wondering estrangement which we adults have long forgotten. Since they do not yet grasp our social practices as inevitable, they do not see why we might not do things differently.<sup>1</sup>

Whenever I tried in childhood to compel folks around me to do things differently, to look at the world differently, using theory as intervention, as a way to challenge the status quo, I was punished. I remember trying to explain at a very young age to Mama why I thought it was highly inappropriate for Daddy, this man who hardly spoke to me, to have the right to discipline me, to punish me physically with whippings: her response was to suggest I was losing my mind and in need of more frequent punishment.

Imagine if you will this young black couple struggling first and foremost to realize the patriarchal norm (that is of the woman staying home, taking care of household and children while the man worked) even though such an arrangement meant that economically, they would always be living with less. Try to imagine what it must have been like for them, each of them working hard all day, struggling to maintain a family of seven children, then having to cope with one bright-eyed child relentlessly questioning, daring to challenge male authority, rebelling against the very patriarchal norm they were trying

so hard to institutionalize.

It must have seemed to them that some monster had appeared in their midst in the shape and body of a child—a demonic little figure who threatened to subvert and undermine all that they were seeking to build. No wonder then that their response was to repress, contain, punish. No wonder that Mama would say to me, now and then, exasperated, frustrated: “I don’t know where I got you from, but I sure wish I could give you back.”

Imagine then if you will, my childhood pain. I did not feel truly connected to these strange people, to these familial folks who could not only fail to my grasp my world view but who just simply did not want to hear it.

Living in childhood without a sense of home, I found a place of sanctuary in “theorizing,” in making sense out of what was happening. I found a place where I could imagine possible futures, a place where life could be lived differently. This “lived” experience of critical thinking, of reflection and analysis, became a place where I worked at explaining the hurt and making it go away. Fundamentally, I learned from this experience that theory could be a healing place.

When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experience makes more evident is the bond between the two—that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other.

Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end. When I was a child, I certainly did not describe the processes of thought and critique I engaged in as “theorizing.” Yet, as I suggested in *Feminist*

*Theory: From Margin to Center*,<sup>4</sup> the possession of a term does not bring a process or practice into being; concurrently one may practice theorizing without ever knowing/possessing the term just as we can live and act in feminist resistance without ever using the word “feminism.”<sup>5</sup>

KATHARINA’s reading

from

*Theory as  
Liberatory Practice*

by BELL HOOKS  
(1991)



Catharine

MacKinnon reminded us that “we know things with our lives and we live that knowledge, beyond what any theory has yet theorized.”<sup>17</sup> Making this theory is the challenge before us. For in its production lies the hope of our liberation, in its production lies the possibility of naming all our pain—of making all our hurt go away. If we create feminist theory, feminist movements that address this pain, we will have no difficulty building a mass-based feminist resistance struggle. There will be no gap between feminist theory and feminist practice.

“Western Melancholy” . . . the process in which a designer focuses on the consequences of the current situation instead of dealing with the causes of a particular problem. This concept is not limited only to “design thinking” or the technological sphere. For example, Evgeny Morozov, a publicist analysing relationships between technology and society, talks about “solutionism”, a concept that is particularly present in the world of start-ups, and which implies that technology can resolve all social problems. “Western melancholy” in design also refers to the contemporary scientific and technological determinism embodied in the movements such as Ecomodernism. This paradigm is rooted in a number of dogmas, i.e. the one that “we have always been and we continue to resolve problems with knowledge” and that “the future will be hyper-ultra-turbo interesting!” This belief celebrates the position where a human being evolved from an observer into a creator and in the name of progress and growth, he or she can and must change the nature while the consequences of human activities are to be resolved by means of science and technology, anyway.

So is the time right to be challenging our most deeply held notions about how knowledge is made? Despite the risks, the answer is surely yes, and besides, the tide seems unstoppable - even science is being repositioned amongst some of the most serious commentators as more the product of scientific enquiry than a specific and consistent method leading to hard facts. This is a point that French philosopher Bruno Latour has been arguing for decades - that science should be understood as a social practice. It does depend, after all, on the bringing together of a complex combination of humans and objects to decode the world. He found the division between facts and values a bit dodgy, preferring to expand on the idea of a networked reality, defining a clear connect between, as he put it; ‘both the history of humans involvement in the making of scientific facts and the sciences’ involvement in the making of human history.’ Facts survive based as much on their legitimacy as on the culture that produced them. Institutes, their directors and teachers, as well as the systems, values, evaluations and communication that stems from its existence gives knowledge life, and if this network breaks, the facts go with them.

Sometimes the shape of the new paradigm is foreshadowed in the structure that extraordinary research has given to the anomaly. Einstein wrote that before he had any substitute for classical mechanics, he could see the interrelation between the known anomalies of black-body radiation, the photoelectric effect, and specific heats. More often no such structure is consciously seen in advance. Instead, the new paradigm, or a sufficient hint to permit later articulation, emerges all at once, sometimes in the middle of the night, in the mind of a man person deeply immersed in crisis. What the nature of that final stage is-how an individual invents (or finds he they have invented) a new way of giving order to data now all assembled-must here remain inscrutable and may be permanently so. Let us here note only one thing about it. Almost always the men those who achieve these fundamental inventions of a new paradigm have been either very young or very new to the field whose paradigm they change. And perhaps that point need not have been made explicit, for obviously these are the men they who, being little committed by prior practice to the traditional rules of normal science, are particularly likely to see that those rules no longer define a playable game and to conceive another set that can replace them.

. . .

Given the slightest reason for doing so, the man person who reads a science text can easily take the applications to be the evidence for the theory, the reasons why it ought to be believed. But science students accept theories on the authority of teacher and text, not because of evidence. What alternatives have they, or what competence? The applications given in texts are not there as evidence but because learning them is part of learning the paradigm at the base of current practice. If applications were set forth as evidence, then the very failure of texts to suggest alternative interpretations or to discuss problems

LADIPO’s reading

from

*“Western Melancholy”  
/ How to Imagine  
Different Futures in  
the “Real World”?*  
by IVICA MITROVIĆ  
(2018)

from

*IN/SEARCH RE/SEARCH:  
Imagining Scenarios  
through Art and De-  
sign*

by GABRIELLE KENNEDY  
(2020)

from

*The Structure of  
Scientific Revolu-  
tions*

by THOMAS S. KUHN  
(1962)

for which scientists have failed to produce paradigm solutions would convict their authors of extreme bias. There is not the slightest reason for such an indictment.

**This paradigm is rooted in a number of dogmas...  
...and if this network breaks...  
...conceive another set that can replace them.**

“Which is why I think he should have explained all that to Reda, to reassure him. Then Reda would have known how it was and who he was dealing with. Maybe things would have gone another way. He would have seen that Édouard wasn’t so different from him, because I’ll tell you why he came up to Édouard on the square—well, not the whole reason why, but mainly, it’s the way he carries himself, Édouard, I mean, the way he carries himself now but didn’t use to. Life is so ironic, when you think about it. It’s actually kind of funny. Édouard goes around in that mask of his, and he plays the part so well that in the end guys like him attack him, they think he’s from the other side of the tracks. If he’d told Reda these same stories I’m telling you now, of course it would have reassured him, and things wouldn’t have gone the way they did, they didn’t need to (I agree with her. I agree, but doesn’t this undermine her theory that the whole thing was planned in advance and immutable—because I know that isn’t the case. I have another memory to prove it, namely the look on Reda’s face when I took the iPad out of his coat, the face that replaced his face; I can’t remember it in detail, I couldn’t draw you a picture, but I do remember the way his face looked, and it was nothing like the determined face he had later on, it was nothing like the face of cold-blooded destruction, because I’ve seen that face several times in my life, it’s a face I know. When I took my iPad away from him, what I saw on his face was surprise, fear, even stupidity—but it was no use explaining this to Clara, a face doesn’t prove anything to anyone, not to Clara and not to the police). But Édouard didn’t say anything. All he had to do was explain in simple language, and for fuck’s sake it’s not exactly hard to understand. If I had been there I would have taken him in my hands. I would have shaken him, I’d have said: Fess up, tell him you’ve stolen things too and it’s no big deal, if that’s what you really think. If that’s what you really think. So what if I don’t see it your way, if that’s what you really think, then tell him. Tell him about the scrap metal. But the trouble is he’d need to say it right away, and sometimes Édouard can be so slow. He wasn’t exactly conceived in the winner’s circle. He doesn’t say a thing.

“Instead he takes the iPad out from Reda’s jacket. As if it were nothing. He takes the iPad and puts it on his desk. He does this not saying a word, mind you. Not a word. He tells me: In the moment I hoped Reda would suddenly burst out laughing, that he’d laugh and tell me it was all a joke and I’d gotten scared over nothing. I kept waiting for him to laugh. I was waiting, he tells me, and all the while thinking, Go on and laugh, Reda, laugh. What would it hurt you to laugh? But he didn’t laugh.

“So what does he do? He asks if Reda had happened to see his phone. He didn’t say: You’ve taken my phone, no, the exact words he remembers saying are: You didn’t happen to see my phone, did you? You didn’t see me put it down somewhere, by any chance, it was right there in my pocket, I saw it there five minutes ago. [...]”

HOAI’s reading

from *History of Violence*  
by ÉDOUARD LOUIS  
(2016)

### **Moral**

Ladies, you should never pry,-  
You'll repent it by and by!  
'Tis the silliest of sins;  
Trouble in a trice begins.  
There are, surely-more's the woe!-  
Lots of things you need not know.  
Come, forswear it now and here-  
Joy so brief, that costs so dear!

### **Another Moral**

You can tell this tale is old  
By the very way it's told.  
Those were days of derring-do;  
Man was lord, and master too.  
Then the husband ruled as king.  
Now it's quite a different thing;  
Be his beard what hue it may-  
Madam has a word to say!"

from *Perrault's  
Fairy Tales:  
Bluebeard,*  
by CHARLES PERRAULT  
(1697)

*How To Do Nothing*  
by JENNY ODELL  
(2019)

"THINGS MAY SEEM bad now, but some would argue that the late 1960s were worse. Nixon was president, the Vietnam War was raging, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy were assassinated, and unarmed student protestors were shot at Kent State. Signs of environmental devastation were accumulating, and large-scale urban redevelopment projects and freeways were destroying the fabric of "blighted" ethnic neighborhoods. All the while, successful adulthood was pictured as a two-car garage house in a white suburb. To young people, this looked like a sham, and they were ready to quit.

Between 1965 and 1970, more than a thousand communal groups formed across the country. The writer Robert Houriet, who visited fifty American "communal experiments" between 1968 and 1970, described this movement as "the gut reaction of a generation" who saw no other way to resist:"

"To a country seemingly entrenched in self-interest, deaf to change and blind to its own danger, they said "Fuck it" and split. If the cities were uninhabitable and the suburbs plastic, they would still have to live somewhere. If the spirit of humane community and culture were dead in urban Amerika, they would have to create their own"

"Those who fled to the communes took a particularly ahistorical view of time; according to Houriet, the communes were relatively unaware of the history of utopian experiments—maybe even Epicurus's garden school. But this is perhaps to be expected from anyone desperately seeking a complete break from everything. Houriet writes that those who fled "had no time to assess the historical parallels or to make careful plans for the future...Their flight was desperate." After all, this wasn't the 1960s; it was the Age of Aquarius, an exit from time and a chance to start from scratch:"

"Somewhere in the line of history, civilization had made a wrong turn, a detour that had led into a cul-de-sac. The only way, they felt, was to drop out and go all the way back to the beginning, to the primal source of consciousness, the true basis of culture: the land"

"In his description of the Drop City commune in a book by the same name, Drop City resident Peter Rabbit describes the general outline: "put together some bread, buy a piece of land, make the land free, and start rebuilding the economic, social, and spiritual structures of man from the bottom up." He adds, however, that "none of these people had any idea that that's what they were doing... We just thought we were dropping out."

Some of the communes Houriet visited on his tour became viable for a few years or more; others he heard about were gone by the time he arrived. At an old resort hotel in the Catskills, Houriet found just two people left, and they were on their way out. Left over in one of the bedrooms were a mattress, a crate, the stub of a candle, and some roaches in an ashtray. "They had burned all their furniture and smoked the last of their grass. On the wall, writ in Magic Marker, was the self-epitaph of a community that never was: FOREVER CHANGE."

"What the communes did have in common was a search for "the good life," an experience of community opposed to the competitive and exploitative system they had rejected. At the outset, some were inspired by the articulation of modern anarchism in Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System*. In that book, Goodman had suggested replacing capitalist structures with a decentralized network of individualized communities making judicious use of new technology and supporting themselves with cottage industries."

"Understandably, this turned out to be much easier said than done in 1960s America, and most of the communes had vexed relationships with the capitalist world outside. After all, mortgages had to be paid, children had to be raised, and most communes couldn't grow all of their own food. Even if they were far from the city, they were still in America. To manage, many members had to

continue working regular jobs and some communes relied on welfare. The eclectic menu at High Ridge Farm in Oregon illustrates this mixed bag of income. Among the many jars of homegrown produce, Houriet observed expensive store-bought organic food and commodities donated by the US Department of Agriculture (“commodities cheese” was a favorite). Along with “exotic salads with Brussels sprouts and kohlrabi,” they had “a commodities hash or a curry made from turkeys donated last Thanksgiving by the Welfare Department.”

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“Much as they wanted to break with capitalist society, those who escaped from it sometimes carried its influences within themselves, like ineradicable contagions. Writing about a communal house in Philadelphia in 1971, Michael Weiss says that all eight members of the group were “more or less anti-capitalist” and hoped the commune would offer an alternative in the form of equal wealth distribution. But because some of the members made so much more than the others, they agreed to a compromise: each person would contribute half, not all, of their earnings to the house fund. Even so, Weiss writes that any conversations about money were marked by “defensiveness, self-righteousness, inexperience with money sharing, and the fear of having to relinquish one’s most cherished comforts and pleasures for the sake of group amity.”<sup>18</sup> In his commune, the first “money crisis” ends up not being a shortage, but hurt feelings when one of the wealthier members comes home with a sixty-dollar coat. The coat sets off a long house meeting about class consciousness, which, like many of the other meetings chronicled in *Living Together*, is ultimately left unresolved.”

“Other ghosts of the “straight” world complicated the communes’ dreams of radicality. Like the hippie movement they came from, commune members were mostly middle-class and college-educated—a far cry from Epicurus’s radically reconstituted student body. They were overwhelmingly white; several times in *Getting Back Together*, Houriet mentions talking to “the only black” in a commune, and he describes a strangely tense scene between a Twin Oaks community member and a local black family. The rural setting sometimes created “a natural impetus to revert to traditional roles: Women stay inside, cook, and look after the children, while men plow, chop, and build roads.”<sup>19</sup> In *What the Trees Said: Life on a New Age Farm*, Stephen Diamond states it outright: “None of the men ever washes dishes or hardly cooks.”<sup>20</sup> A spatial move to the country, or into an isolated communal house, did not always equal a move out of ingrained ideologies.

“Probably the biggest problem that the communes faced, though, was the idea of starting from scratch. In many ways, “going back to the beginning” meant rehashing timeworn struggles over governance and the rights of the individual, albeit in capsule form. There was, after all, a potential paradox at the heart of the whole endeavor. Retreat and refusal are the precise moments in which the individual distinguishes herself from the mob, declining to buy a house and a car and conform to a stodgy, oppressive society where, as Diamond puts it, “there was always some Total Death Corporation job with your name on it.” But in order for these refuseniks to stay out there and function as a commune, they needed to negotiate a new balance between the individual and the group. As Weiss recalled of the Philadelphia commune, “the slipperiest decisions always



involved reconciling privacy and communality, the individual and the house”<sup>21</sup>-  
in other words, the very fundamentals of governance.”

Equally disturbing by now is a postmodernist aesthetic activism that due to this need for tranquillity in artistic production, increases the atrophy of its emancipatory capabilities and ends up in a frankly classic practice using a revolutionary terminology, but in actual practice fulfils no other than a kind of institutional opposition. This is like leaders who call for revolution, but whose social strategies, procedures and language use are routine.

Now that the democratic public sphere has collapsed in the profit-driven, managerial and academic inflation of the worldwide neo-liberal climate, communication design's optimistic pragmatism and belief in providing great services ends in an attractive speechlessness, knowing no other way to stay in place than the personal fashion of unbounded influence. It is a type of cultural production of the creative industry that Fredric Jameson (2015) –correctly in my opinion–compares with the derivatives of the financial economy that subsume our experience under the empty fictions of conceptualisation and promotion.

[...]

This is why our situation today first of all calls for the rediscovery of a politically aware, empirical form of operationalisation of the means. After all, the choice of a political subject or a critical position does not in itself make the message political. It is the way the message is intended and shaped that is by definition political. Even though the word strategy is common in postmodern design discourse, its programmatic and strategic considerations underlying the intentions regarding the effects of the message on the recipients are hardly considered today. A more aware, investigative visual communication, however, should realise that the socio-public space is not something given, but a condition outside the capsule of design to be dealt with critically and practically at the same time: doing away with the autonomy of the design object, actively trying to explore the freedom of the symbolic field, striving for more meaningful and transparent action.

[...]

The creative process that results from this is not only a great pleasure but also a constant investment in the meaning and visual richness of the message. Here too the estrangement of the dialogic model replaces the conventional relation between performers and spectators. As a practice that seeks to demonstrate the why and what of the subject, it is thus unable to act without a well-spoken, polylinguistic language use – a form of hypertext as a visual, spatial, digital, etc. multi-literacy that shows its argument and exposes it in a variety of forms, leading to what Pier Paolo Pasolini (1972) calls the “free indirect style”. The consequence is a language use that establishes an inverted order to deconstruct and chart the world in an unusual sense, enabling activity and interpretation, so that the final word is never spoken.

It is from here that the real work starts, investing in the far-reaching skills of the verbal and non-verbal forms of expression – bearing in mind that the liberation of the viewers and readers is not so much to unify as to share our differences, to undo the supposed factualness of representation and replace it with the controversial figures of interpretation.

JAN's reading

from

*Operationalising the Means: Communication Design as Critical Practice*

by JAN VAN TOORN  
(2016)

Els [Kuijpers]: I think you can secure a share of this room yourself in relation to your assignments. Each time round, the opportunity to gain freedom of movement can present itself in a different guise. I agree that many organisations no longer have people who are competent to commission a good design. But the designer's mission to reformulate - to create a link with the renewal of the viewer's perception and of the public debate - remains unaltered. Although it's true that nowadays designers have very little room to play around in. But just talking about it won't help much. Many designers - many of 'my' students - have no trouble analysing their intentions and personal engagement: there's a flourishing discourse, but this criticism isn't given any further shape. It remains generalised and abstract rather than specific and concrete. Only rarely do they wonder which form should be associated with their professed positions. Which images, shapes and structures present this opportunity for dialogue and exchange, for public involvement? What do I make in this context? Concepts win out over visual devices: analyses are no longer interpreted in visual terms. This reduces the political scope to politically charged subjects, to semantics; rather than translating it into visual language, syntax. That's why I believe the contemporary design practice is often such a descriptive and moralising affair.

from  
*The Playground of  
the In-Between  
Conversation between  
Richard Niessen, Els  
Kuijpers & Julius  
Vermeulen  
(2018)*

Imagine you are falling. But there is no ground.

Many contemporary philosophers have pointed out that the present moment is distinguished by a prevailing condition of groundlessness.<sup>1</sup> We cannot assume any stable ground on which to base metaphysical claims or foundational political myths. At best, we are faced with temporary, contingent, and partial attempts at grounding. But if there is no stable ground available for our social lives and philosophical aspirations, the consequence must be a permanent, or at least intermittent state of free fall for subjects and objects alike. But why don't we notice?

Paradoxically, while you are falling, you will probably feel as if you are floating—or not even moving at all. Falling is relational—if there is nothing to fall toward, you may not even be aware that you're falling. If there is no ground, gravity might be low and you'll feel weightless. Objects will stay suspended if you let go of them. Whole societies around you may be falling just as you are. And it may actually feel like perfect stasis—as if history and time have ended and you can't even remember that time ever moved forward.

As you are falling, your sense of orientation may start to play additional tricks on you. The horizon quivers in a maze of collapsing lines and you may lose any sense of above and below, of before and after, of yourself and your boundaries. Pilots have even reported that free fall can trigger a feeling of confusion between the self and the aircraft. While falling, people may sense themselves as being things, while things may sense that they are people. Traditional modes of seeing and feeling are shattered. Any sense of balance is disrupted. Perspectives are twisted and multiplied. New types of visuality arise. This disorientation is partly due to the loss of a stable horizon. And with the loss of horizon also comes the departure of a stable paradigm of orientation, which has situated concepts of subject and object, of time and space, throughout modernity. In falling, the lines of the horizon shatter, twirl around, and superimpose.

SHEONA's reading

from

*In Free Fall:  
A Thought Experiment  
on Vertical  
Perspective*

by HITO STEYERL

## CLEANSING RITUAL: THE BURNING

A burning ceremony is a transformative ritual traditionally performed as a way of releasing something that no longer serves you. This year has been exhausting for many of us for different reasons. We want to use this collective presentation to leave things behind in 2020 to start fresh in 2021.

Everything you do not want to continue or bring with you in the year 2021, write it down!

This can be any regrets, resentments, sufferings, negativity, which influenced your start at the Sandberg Design Department. Roll the paper up and secure it with a piece of string and bring it with you at 5pm to the rooftop.

Before burning, try to relax and shake off your negative mindset. Light the piece of paper on fire, and place it in the burn-friendly receptacle. Try to let go of any attachments you have towards these negative feelings.

Now take a sip of your drink and maybe dance a little or talk to the person next to you.

See you in 2021!

