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I APOLOGIZE

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PROLOGUE



apology for ignorance

“I must go to all who appear to know. And I swear to you the result of my mission was just this: I found that the men most in repute were all but the most foolish; and that some inferior men were really wiser and better.

And so, I went to the artisans, for I was conscious that I knew nothing at all, and I was sure that they knew many fine things of which I was ignorant, and in this they certainly were wiser than I was. But I observed that even the good artisans fell into the same error as the poets; because they were good workmen they thought they knew all sorts of high matters, and this defect in them overshadowed their wisdom.

Therefore I asked myself whether I would like to be as I was, neither having their knowledge nor their ignorance, or like them in both; and I made answer to myself that I was better off as I was.¹”

1 *The Apology of Socrates, I. Euthyphro / Plato*

INTRODUCTION



the path we walk

In the following text we will dive into the notion of *ignorance*, in order to see what this could mean for the marginal areas of design. Hence the question *Why can't I use my ignorance?* This is a question I will try to resolve, by walking past different subjects. Exploring the unknown by shifting context.

First we will conclude what *ignorance* means: what it means in society, and what it means for me, personally. Next we will develop questions; in order to see how *ignorance* relates to the *primitive*, and we will see how the notion of *anthropology* has a say in this matter.

All we learned, I will transform into an abstract notion, which may help us to link my questions directly to my own practice and my own desires. And so, in the end we will deal with storytelling, *truth*, flickering perspectives, and finally a way in which *ignorance* has found its place within my design process.

You must wonder, *Why ignorance?* This is a question I ask myself regularly. Inside of me lies a desire to call a bluff from time to time, which I guess goes for everyone. In order to see what would happen if I were to invent a certain *knowledge*, and thus would put my *ignorance* to a different use. How far could I take someone along in this dreamed-up universe? And, why am I attracted to this invented *ignorance*? These are all questions we will deal with. Some we will answer, some we will not.

I invite you to take this journey with me, and see where *ignorance* might take us.



A JOURNEY BEGINS



Yesteryearn

As I wander through these barren streets, I cannot help but notice your glance. A feeling of discomfort, and alertness rises in me. Your face is suddenly surrounding me. A whole array of expressions, lying under that one surface. Who are you?

Your estranged faces, are faces from a different place. They look at me and I stare at them, returning the empty glaze. Could you tell me what it is I am looking at? What meaning lies in these thousand expressions, forced upon me. You work as a substitute for my self, a spirit of the past; incorporating something that does not exist and perhaps never has.

We look at all we find primitive, and then we look back at ourselves. This is how we measure society. We look at the archaic, and then we look back at ourselves. This is how we measure progress. Absorbing, analysing and contextualizing foreign customs and beliefs, in order to classify them in comparison to ourselves. But yet, not to ourselves directly, but a concept we have of ourselves, the concept of our embodied specters. We find artefacts from times long past, and find a place for them in our contemporary world. Again, we draw a line. A linear line; starting from what once was, passing us by; pointing out towards where we are heading. Where do we place ourselves on this line? Are we moving forwards, or more so sideways? I believe we are living in a state of *yesteryearn*.

There are different ways of looking out, of looking for new perspectives. Perhaps my fascination with the ancient explorers and their narrations lies not so much in narrative, but lies in their approach. It does not interest me to revisit their voyages, but to commence my own. To adopt their naive, *primitive*, and subjective way of seeing the world, in the new encounters they made. Making many assumptions on the way, and never finding the entire truth; or any truth for that matter.

This narrative of transition, it is a fictive journey. Finding yourself opposite an unknown phenomenon, as in the explorers' journals: the multitude, yet incompleteness. Many truths, many ideas, and much more assumptions. Diving into different disciplines, using them all; perhaps taking pieces that were not meant for me. I'm not looking for the strength of singularities; but for humble pluralities.

IGNORANT MATTER

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part I

WHY CAN'T I USE MY IGNORANCE



The only means of compelling fate is to venture into those hazardous marginal areas where social norms cease to have any meaning, and where the protective laws and demands of the group no longer prevail; to go right to the frontiers of average, ordered living, to the breaking point of bodily strength and to the extremes of physical and moral suffering. In this unstable border area, there is a danger of slipping beyond the pale and never coming back. Society shows complete indifference to what might be called the rational outcome of such adventures. What counts is the attempt in itself, not any possible aim.¹

What would happen if I, as a *maker*, were to rub against the marginal areas of *ignorance*, and see if I could indeed take it to a place where social norms cease to have any meaning. *Ignorance*, the art of *not-knowing*? Could entering this unstable area bring about new parameters? I wonder if, when putting *ignorance* to a different use, one could indeed compel fate, and claim this as an attempt to look on the field of design through a different lense. One thing is certain; there is no sure way to succeed and this notion of *forced ignorance* is deemed to fail. But isn't the only thing that counts the attempt in itself?

CONCEALED IGNORANCE

Defining *ignorance* is not an easy task. Above, I mentioned it has to do with the art of not knowing. Here we find a certain power which lies in this absence of knowledge. It is a state of being ignorant; a lack of knowledge, education, or awareness. This definition has two ends, however. One is the lack of knowledge, which is a parameter enforced by society. This side of *ignorance* revolves around a fear for the unknown; whether phenomena or knowledge. And so, we see a negative connotation attached to the notion of *ignorance*. This is mostly, I can conclude, because we try and are used to, keeping all in control - at all times. *Ignorance* is a source of unpredictability, which gives us a feeling of unease. This is what I call the social end of ignorance, and the judgement that lies attached to it.

Next there is the lack of awareness. This is a void which is more difficult to measure, and lies within the *self*. This is the side of *ignorance* we will be focussing on.

They say *Ignorance is Bliss*, when not knowing is a less painful approach to a situation. However, this context hangs more towards the previously discussed social-end of *not-knowing*. I would be curious to see what happens when you take ignorance out of this social field, and approach it by a practical way. Can *ignorance* become a tool?

1

Tristes Tropiques / Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1955

Let us dive into the possibilities and see what happens when you *use your ignorance*; developing the science of *not-knowing*. Discovering the capacities of ones own incapacities and in-experiences. How far could my current knowledge take me, when I go looking for undiscovered ground. And how, furthermore, will I deal with these new encounters and unsolved problems. Being a modern traveller, and at the same time, a primitive pioneer.

As I ask the question, *why can't I use my ignorance?* - why actually can't I? There are two ways of dealing with this verb *can not*, when referring to the subject of *ignorance*. First we could classify it as a impossibility, and next as an incapability. These two ends seem to be very simmlar, yet there is a great difference, since one lies on the inside and the other on the outside. Let me elaborate on this. When looking at the impossibility of *ignorance*, we see lines appear formed in our direct social surroundings, showing us to move within what we find is rational. In this context *ignorance* becomes a weakness as soon as we move in an opposite direction. I *auto-reject* what is ignorant inside of me when trying to keep up with society. Skipping steps in doing so, responding to outside demands. One could wonder, why is this a point of discussion; isn't it better to stay away from *ignorance* in the first place?

When approaching *ignorance*, it is often marked with negativity. It means not participating in a situation, or in a field of knowledge; it means standing on the outside looking in - not realizing what is going on. I experience that yet from a young age a certain expertise is demanded, a certain state of *all-knowing* and a state of mind that fits the current framework of our society. I seem to know what I am doing, yet I haven't got a clue where I am heading. We keep fooling ourselves with our *concealed ignorance*. This is an *ignorance* which is hard to define; it is present - but we do not acknowledge it. Wouldn't we enter a different dialogue if, from the early beginning, we assume that we know nothing?

SOCRATIC IGNORANCE

Socrates was the one to observe, and conclude, that men are foolish and ignorant, but knowing this they could pursue knowledge or wisdom. In his philosophized realm of *ignorance*, a connection was made between *Self-knowledge*, and its direct negative *Ignorance*. As I see this negative as an absolute 'thing' or obstruction, it pleases me to see how Socrates succeeds in decomposing its elements to make this matter easier to digest. He speaks of several kinds of *ignorance*. As there are, in the first place, matters which are unknown but supposedly discoverable through research and exploration. These are the starting matters the whole concept of knowledge is based on.

Yet sometimes Socrates acknowledges that *certain matters could not come to be known at all by means of a certain method. Finally it is suggested that certain items of desired knowledge could not be discovered at all, by using any method possible.*²

To break down *ignorance* in this way, as a matter of degrees in which a situation, or any other given feature, is judged by which means one could tackle it by investigation, and thus push his self-knowledge to a new level. In this context *ignorance* hardly exists, but consists merely of a degree of solvability by a number of methods. Yet only when no method is successful one could truly speak of *ignorance*. For man to be able to go through this whole process of inquiries, he obviously requires *self-knowledge*. In this self-knowledge we speak not only of the knowledge of the whole man, but also of the whole context of and situation in which man finds himself.

Socrates believes that an *ignorance* of stupidity is temporary and avoidable. Man can take faith in his own hands when he uses this so-called *self-knowledge*, which could be divided in three parallel kinds of self-knowledge. The engaged and *active self*, the *ideal self*, and at last the *enduring self*. In the analysis of these three sorts of self-knowledge we encounter the so-to-speak remedy for *ignorance*.

The first, involving the *active self*, deals with a dynamic approach. It uses logic in order to prove wrong, as to uncover, until now, missing beliefs and habits; next the *active self* continues with a critical construction and uses different disciplines for cultivating its talents. This is a dynamic I feel closely connected to, as it relates to my own experiences with a design process. It does good to dissect these words immediately and see how they would, and could, behave when put into a fixed context. The *active self* keeps us alert; on lookout for things, or ideas gone wrong - in order to investigate and correct, learn and move on. Bluntly put. Yet, this is not all there is to it.

When dealing with the *ideal self*, we can conclude that this analytic method of the *active self*, could result to the point of revealing a certain need for definitions, and it becomes a method for the discovery of concepts. A constant longing to find the essential truth, and all embracing manner of getting to results.

All in all this boils down to the combination of both of the above into the *enduring self*, where there is a constant effort to grasp what ones weaknesses are, and where the domains are of less knowledge, or even *ignorance*. This goes on to the point where one is very well aware of what is standing in the way of becoming fully intelligible.³

2 *Socratic ignorance, an essay on platonic self-knowledge* / E. D. Ballard

3 *Socratic ignorance, an essay on platonic self-knowledge* / E. D. Ballard

As we have vigorously chewed on these dense paragraphs of information, I would like to continue by re-instating the link between the notion of *ignorance* and the notion of the maker. We will rediscover the first hand story of Socrates' *Apology*; in which we, again, will pass by the three ignorant *selves*. We could make a link between the above three named forms, and the souls he met on his search for the wisest man alive.

First he would pass by, whom he expected to be the wisest man amongst all: a well regarded politician. As they began to talk, he slowly found out that this man was not so wise at all, but thought himself wise most of all. When Socrates pointed this out to him, this remark was not taken with gratitude. In this tale one could approach the intellectual politician as the ultimate *ignorant*. As he who is ignorant is the only one not to see it, and refuses to acknowledge. Socrates proclaims this, as he analysis why he himself must be wiser than the man he had just spoken to, as he was the only of the two who did not pretend to know, that what he does not know. After seeing the politician, he went on to see a poet. Here Socrates comes to the stunning conclusion that even the poet has no clue of whatsoever he is writing about, even though it all sounds and looks sincere and intriguing.

Here lies, in my opinion, an opportunity to interpret Socrates' words and bring them to the realm of the maker, as I see a perfect resemblance between his narration on the pretending poet as on our notion of the amateur. As Socrates suggests that the *poets* write their poetry by a kind of nature of inspiration, but do not know anything of what they say. And so they say many beautiful things, yet in the end it boils down to nothing. This is much how we look down on the amateur nowadays, as someone who makes many beautiful things, but without substance. The amateur who is proud, involved and keen on sharing ideas, much like the *poet*, but has a chronic insufficiency of knowledge.

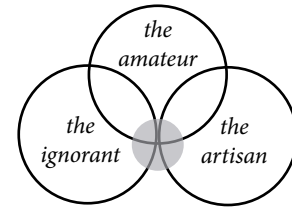
Socrates concludes that the men most known to be wise were in fact foolish and ignorant, and that those men who are often considered inferior were in fact wiser and better. He shows us this, upon his visit to the *artisans*, where he was sure to find out about the many fine things they could enlighten him about, of which he had been ignorant before. But again he came back disappointed, by coming to the conclusion that even how gifted and skilled these workmen were, they still fell into the same error as the poet; they thought they knew all sorts of high matters, and this defect in them overshadowed their wisdom.

And so Socrates came to his final conclusion, where he was proven to still be the wisest man of all. Even though by his own means of relying on the active self- to investigate this matter were true or not. He was proven wrong in his expectations about mankind and asked himself whether he would like to be as he was, neither having their knowledge nor their *ignorance*, and so he decided that he was better off as he was.⁴

4 *The Apology of Socrates, I. Euthyphro* / Plato

This abstract notion of being in between ignorant and knowledge, is of interest to me. Could I initiate a more humble approach towards design as soon as I place myself in between the *ignorant*, the *amateur* and the *artisan* - all at the same time? This is not a final question, but the start of inquiry, dialogue and investigation, as to see what partaking in such a context would be really about.

If we were to draw three circles, one the *ignorant*, the second the *amateur* and the third the *artisan*. Where and how, would these circles meet? Where would we draw this field? This will become a recurrent question in our discoveries regarding *ignorance*. As I would be curious to see where the ignorant meets the amateur, and where the amateur meets the artisan.



THE PRIMITIVE MAKER

When we think of a *naive maker*, or a *primitive designer*; I would like to discover the possibilities of what these terms could mean. For instance, I am not a seamstress, nor a costume maker or fashion designer. Yet I am able to make garments. In this process I find it interesting to see, which decisions one would make; out of naivety, out of necessity; out of *not-knowing*. To forget all we know about the construction of sleeves, seams and buttons, if that is even possible, but imagine it is. Would an inventive spirit come to appear, or does one result to archaic solutions? I wonder.

This could be a rather naive statement, as we are never to forget entirely what we already know, yet I am intrigued by my own desire for *ignorance*. Where is it coming from? As I see society shifting around me, I wonder where my place lies. I try to figure out how this machine is running, and what is fueling it. Perhaps not what we see at first glance, but what lies just a bit further, hiding behind the coffee table and underneath the curtains. It is a different way of looking and searching. In fact, chasing the ignorant could, for me, become a way of finding, and dealing with the unknown, the undiscovered. Acquiring new perspectives and pushing my boundaries. Dealing with matters in an abstract way that calls for a strategy that is beyond my knowledge. And thus I detect a possibility to go and take a swim with my old comrade called *ignorance*, whom I lost touch with for some years.

The maker went through a complete identity make-over, and went from well respected artisan, to an industrial worker, to - what has he become, actually? One could say that we go about places while being *semi-skilled*. For one part we are blessed with skill or knowledge and the other part consist merely of bluff, *ignorance*, a good pair of shades; our own subjective version of the story. What will happen when we approach matters using only this subjective approach, and when we learn from what we don't wish to know; or wish to achieve. Or from what we simply are not able to grasp, being the *ignorant amateuristic craftsman*.



Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts, August Sander

FLICKERING PERSPECTIVES



marco and claudé

In the midst of this enclosed park, where there is a beautiful grove, the Great Khan has built another large palace, constructed entirely out of canes. (...) The roof is also made of canes, so well varnished that it is quite waterproof. Let me explain how it is constructed. You must know that these canes are more than three palms in girth and from ten to fifteen paces long. They are sliced down through the middle from one knot to the next, thus making two shingles. These shingles are thick and long enough not only for roofing but for every sort of construction. The palace, then, is built entirely of such canes. As a protection against the wind each shingle is fastened with nails. And the Great Khan has had it so designed that it can be moved whenever he fancies; for it is held in place by more than 200 cords of silk.”⁵

This is an excerpt from Marco Polo's travels; his travels to China to be precise, dating from around 1271. Around this time the world was opening up for the first time, and merchants were exploring regions for adventure, trade and exploit. The emperor of China, Kublai Khan, commissioned Marco Polo to perform diplomatic missions; to travel from one region to the next, visiting every corner of the enormous empire. And thus, every village and every region, Marco documented with precision; yet subjective precision. These are of interest to me, these first encounters - where it all started. Our first experiences and reflections on other civilizations, our fascinations, our fears, the wonder and marvel. It is a story on how we see the other, how we reflect on the other, and perhaps, how we have become the other. In this narration we add layer upon layer, constructing our own truths. Narrating from memory, and putting the pieces back together, but not necessarily in the right places. It is a certain recreated realism. And if in the end our story will be chaotic and confusing, it will not matter. Because every detail was added with sincerity.⁶

THE TRAVELLERS

The study on mankind, anthropology, originates in the concept that there are physical and cultural differences among human populations; which must be taken into account in any attempt to generalize about mankind.⁷ The essence of the anthropological point of view is that in order to understand ourselves we must study others first. In a sense, this is what Marco Polo was doing, but under the guise of the empire of Kublai Kahn. It was not

5 *The travels of Marco Polo* / Marco Polo

6 *Shanghai Gesture* / own text for exhibition curated by Alexander van Slobbe, Museum Willet Holthuysen

7 *The Renaissance Foundations of Anthropology* / John Howland Rowe

out of his own interest that he showed a curiosity in others than himself; it was a mission he was on. It was in a sense propaganda for Kublai Khan.

In the times of Marco Polo the study of other peoples was still an unknown phenomena; a special interest in peoples other than ones own population had still to arise. This was something that arrived at a later time, around the travels and discoveries of Columbus in 1493. So one could almost say that Marco Polo learned and adopted his interest in cultural differences from the Great Khan himself, and that he copied his visions and curiosities.

At one point in his life, while in prison, Polo put his adventures and stories into written words. He is known to have said: "*I did not tell half of what I saw, because no one would have believed me*"⁸. Sadly, this is still what happened. People were not yet ready to hear about the unknown worlds he described, and so they called him *the man of a million lies*. The same goes for most similar written accounts in his time, which were either neglected or disbelieved. Nor was his ethnographic information very accurate or extensive, according to contemporary criteria. One comes across much invented stories and other fantasies. Nevertheless, it brings to light something else. It shows how one could take ones surroundings and reflect upon them with a *hyper-subjective* view.

THE START OF ANTHROPOLOGY

When dealing with our own *primitive ignorance* we sometimes fail to see how mistaking a cotton plant for a sheep tree consists of something different, than just objective mistakes. *On the intellectual level they are to be considered rather as lapses in taste; a defect of the mind. (...) This should not cause us to censure these lapses: rather should we respect them for the results they obtained in spite of such shortcoming.*⁹ While being in a state of awe, seeing what you have never seen before - marvel wins from rationally documented experiences. This tradition continues in modern day story telling, while the science of anthropology focuses on a more precise account of what is perceived in the acquaintances with the new. I wonder where this rational approach and a more subjective view could merge.

The anthropological vision developed into a domain, where man studies man in order to understand our own manners of behavior. It has become a matter of adapting and adopting, regarding manners, visions and approaches. Man puts himself in a partly ignorant position and adapts to his surroundings. Spending time on the inside, while trying to stay out; a dual approach. *Since we are permanently unable to escape from the norms by which we have been conditioned, our attempts to put different societies, including our own, into perspective, are said to be no more than a shamefaced way of admitting its superiority over all the others.*¹⁰

8 *The travels of Marco Polo* / Marco Polo

9 *Tristes Tropiques* / Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1955

10 *Tristes Tropiques* / Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1955

This is, however, not the only way to look at it. As I am not an anthropologist myself, and so would find it hard to argue with the position Strauss takes when analysing his own profession - I must say that he looks at this part rather one-sided. Isn't the role of the anthropologist not just to observe but also to play the part of a human adapter. The anthropologist becomes a link between two stories - an encounter that will create a certain narrative between the two parties. Certain concepts, ideas and customs are to be exchanged. Some are rejected, others are taken along into another form of adoption; which works both ways. A gun in exchange for knowledge of native plants; a coloured necklace in exchange for an ancient creation-myth. Do both ends of this trade-off, lie within the same scale of value?

Let us look at an example expressed by *Pietro Martire d'Anghiera*; an Italian scholar attached to the Spanish court at the end of the 15th century. He was one of the first to note down the accounts of explorations in Central and South America in the time of the New World discoveries. This resulted into his written work *New World Decades*, where he described the first contacts of Europeans and Native Americans. Although he never visited the New World himself, he became a consistent reporter on all events. He collected his knowledge from first hand accounts; as many travellers went through his thorough questioning after their return from the New World. Next to an evidence derived from narrative, other pieces of information were also supplied. Namely objects and artefacts, and even native inhabitants themselves. Being one of the first exploring the unknown grounds of anthropology, *d'Anghiera* has a surprisingly objective attitude towards both the cultural and physical differences he found between man and man.

*"I do not remember ever having seen anything more repulsive; they, however, consider that there is nothing more elegant, an example which teaches us how absurdly the human race is sunk in its own blindness, and how much we are all mistaken. The Ethiopian considers that black is a more beautiful colour than white, while the white man thinks otherwise. The hairless man thinks he looks better than the hairy one, and the bearded man better than the beardless. It is clearly a reaction of the emotions and not a reasoned conclusion that leads the human race into such absurdities, and every district is swayed by its own taste"*¹¹

It is remarkable to see that *d'Anghiera* blames emotion, when coming short in our human way of judgement. And so, I wonder if this is truly just an emotional reaction towards the unknown, or that our entire cultural heritage has a say in it. In our different ways of being ignorant towards the other and towards the unfamiliar - would our conclusions be different if our cultured reason would be to interfere?

Strauss puts it in an intriguing manner and addresses the problem of judging the manners and achievements of the *other* (social group) in relation to the kind of objectives we set ourselves. According to him the problem lies in the fact that, at times, we have to acknowledge *their* superiority; but in doing so we acquire the right to judge.

11 *New World Decades* / Pietro Anghiera (Decade 4, bk. 7)

What follows is perhaps that we would condemn all other objectives which do not coincide with those we approve of. Strauss raises the question, that if this being so, how can the study of anthropology claim to be scientific? If we are to re-establish an objective approach, we must abstain from making judgements of this kind. We must accept the fact that each society had made a certain choice, within the range of existing human possibilities, and that the various choices cannot be compared with each other: they are all equally valid.¹² And so, we consider the whole range of human expressions as a large repertoire of possibilities, much like a jukebox. When taking this approach all parameters for judging disappear, and the position of anthropology becomes much like taking two different songs from a jukebox and finding some common notes in their composition.

12 *Tristes Tropiques* / Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1955



Illustrations hors texte, Tristes Tropiques / Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1955

how to deal with the primitive



Currently the cognitive approach, that is to say *reasoned*, towards the primitive or foreign, has changed into a moralised fear of making the wrong judgement or taking the wrong approach. When one speaks of the primitive, it has an unnecessary negative feeling. Is this due to a certain tension that lies in the word? It brings to mind western colonial ways from the past, and our judgement that lies in approaching the primitive as nonindustrial and often nonliterary people. Perhaps this isn't something that lies in the past, because it still brings a feeling of unease.

A COLONIAL PAST : THE SUBJECTIVE APPROACH

In his work, whether it is photography, print or film, Sven Augustijnen deals with the recurrent theme of the colonial past of his country in Congo. He does this, however, from a strict personal point of view. Collecting his own information, and digesting this using his own perspectives, much like the example of the explorers of earlier times.

How does this relate to the ignorant or the primitive? It shows how we react in situations which are unfamiliar to us, and give a bit more information on where we stand in the field of *ignorance*. In this case I wouldn't want to judge and label the western world as ignorant in dealing with different peoples, or the other way around. But I would try to look at these situations with a different eye. In this case, the eye of Sven Augustijnen, the eye of the artist.

It becomes a very precise and ambiguous analysis of situations, not necessarily a naive approach to these complex matters but more a matter of daring to ask simple, but direct questions. These questions are not literal, but lie on a deeper layer in his working methods. "Who says what, and why?" "What is the truth?" The questions raised by Augustijnen go beyond the colonial events, and touch upon ways how we base our judgement, how we analyse, and how we deal with new information.

"Augustijnen makes us as viewers think about how written history is partly determined by the secret intentions and sometimes even the lies and manipulations of politicians, historians, journalists and documentary filmmakers. He makes us aware that memories and testimonies are never pure, even if they are presented as being objective and scientific. Words and images which refer to or reveal history never entirely coincide with the historical facts".¹³

I guess we could say Augustijnen explores the boundaries between fiction and reality. Seeing where the subjective approach towards information becomes a problem or when it becomes and interesting fresh insight on a known topic. His way of analysing these

boundaries lies in placing himself in different roles, approaching his topics from different angles. Taking the angle of the documentary maker, the journalist, the historian, the photographer, the director, and finally the artist. In my opinion this allows him to take a step back, and approach a phenomenon from different angles - shifting his perspectives each time he moves. This way, one gets in a new position each time, but brings along knowledge from different and older disciplines.

This is similar to the way Marco Polo approached the things he encountered on his travels, but unlike Augustijnen his switch in perspective was not a choice, but a intuitive habit. You could look upon him as different characters all hidden within the same person, when talking about his surroundings in the empire of the Great Khan. First, his dominant remarks are made as himself, as *man*. Responding instantly in awe and marvel towards the things foreign to him. In his enthusiasm superlatives were born, as he was a drowning man in all he saw new around him - blinding his rational judgement. But we have to take into account that at his time around the end of the middle ages, there was a strong fashion in writing and storytelling that leaned towards the fantastic. This must have influenced him - I may assume.

However, I was surprised in reading his work, finding that his tone of voice could change from one moment to the next, when dealing with different subjects. As he approached the direct surroundings around him in a direct subjective way, he became a different man than when talking about trade, or women. He would become the archetypal man, where he for instance judged women first by their looks, symmetry of body, face and proportions; and next by her social status. All other he saw around him, he approached as the merchant he was, looking at different ways of trades, transport, value, and ways of paying and using credit. And lastly, Marco Polo was aware of his position as an explorer and pioneer, so he would meticulously talk about the surprising things around him, as in trying to reach an audience back home - who had never seen such marvel. But also he was trying to make links to the things familiar to him before, which resulted into interesting conclusions. As he had never seen coals before, for him they were burning black magical stones. Showing where imagination, *ignorance* and trying to contextualize, can lead to interesting conclusions.

In a sense, Marco Polo was doing the same as Augustijnen, when switching between domains, noting down his experiences, but also meeting the expectations of the emperor. It interests me to see how these shifts in domains lead to rich narratives, and rich, yet humble, truths. Both of them sharing an interest in falling back on what one knows, departing from ones own current state of knowledge; and placing this in a certain context. Whether this event lies in the present, in the case of Augustijnen or in the past, like Polo, this recurrent theme is something evident and important. It shows how dealing with information in a *primitive* way, by flickering our perspectives, can lead to interesting truths.

SPECTERS

In his film and exhibition title, Augustijnen refers to the *Spectres*. Derived from the work of french philosopher Derrida who refers in his work '*Specters of Marx*' to the *revenants*; the spirits of the past which constantly return in the present.

According to Derrida the *specter* is a *paradoxical incorporation*; the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and earthbound form of the spirit. It becomes some *thing* that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor a body - and both one and the other at the same time. *The specter is something that one does not know, and one does not know precisely if it is, if it exists, or if it responds to a name. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge.*¹⁴

And so, the *specter* becomes this fleeting thought, it turns into exactly what I want it to. As it has no form, I could give it any body I wish it to. Perhaps that this is what I am looking for in my search for the *ignorance*. It is not *ignorance* itself, but a certain *revenant* I am chasing. Something ungraspable, which keeps coming back in some vague form. It is something undefinable, yet very seducing. And now, I am sure of it, you ask me: "what do you mean?" I assume it is my way of dealing with society, and how this way of analysing my surroundings sets into a clearer picture. I guess I have trouble accepting things as they really are, or seem to be, and want to know what more is out there. For me the *specter*, the *non-object* or *non-presence*, is a sort of excuse to keep looking. And again. Trying to discover new possibilities, perspectives and perhaps revelations. Each time over again. One could call it a repetition, yet it is not entirely, it is not the same *specter* that returns, but a muted or even mutated form of its predecessor. And so a *specter* is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back.¹⁵

REVENANT

Any analysis should in fact start; whether regarding artistic research or an autonomous design process; not at where it started, but at the point where it comes back. At the point of the *revenant*. This is where its actuality lies; where it is the hardest to reach, but the most vulnerable. How would this work?

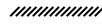
My so often-named term of *ignorance* is no more than an abstract *revenant*. Could I not force this *revenant* loose from its old contexts and apply it to my own questions? Keeping an eye out for the ones that return after a lengthy absence, dealing with this non-presence which chronically haunts all that is told. This could be seen as a collection of truths which have been repressed in the final process of finding meaning. Yet all such attempts in identifying the *revenants* seem to be in vain, and *half-truths* continue to haunt the final story.

14 *Specters of Marx* / Jacques Derrida, 1993

15 *Specters of Marx* / Jacques Derrida, 1993

This is how I experience *ignorance*, when my thoughts are under a constant cloud of smog. A collection of *half-truths*, concealed by the *revenant*. Hard to find, hard to define, yet when they come back to me - something happens. The way Derrida analyses the *specters* of Marx, comes close to my way of seeing. It's not just about abstract thoughts and theory; but this also deals with different ways of analysing our direct surroundings. How we fit in them, and how we move about them. The travellers might have been the first to haunt us, teaching us forever what it means to stand opposite the unknown. This is much like how I experience the current phase of starting up as a young *designer* - whatever this word means today. With a background in textiles; and thus a fascination for detail, structure, placement and layering. This makes me very aware of the way systems are inter-connected, and how contexts are linked. Seeing too much, paying too much attention, these constant *specters* keep troubling me, as I try to shake them off in my hunt for the *ignorance*.

the object



The Surrealists' anti-colonial attitudes were motivated by the belief that the so-called 'primitive' African artists produced these objects because they still existed in a natural, unconscious state. Certainly this assumption is just another, rather romantic, fantasy marking the primitivism movement within Western modern art.¹⁶

A COLLECTION ON DISPLAY

In her recent article *Stored Code, Remediating Collections in a Post-ethnographic Museum* Clementine Deliss; director of the Museum der Weltkulturen, Frankfurt; mentions the thoughts of Carl Einstein. This German art historian and critic, a contemporary of philosopher Walter Benjamin in the start of the twentieth century, claims that the strength of a (ethnographic) collection lies in its mobility. I am referring to this, to bring up once more the notion of *changing perspectives*. According to Einstein, the rearranging of *primitive* objects within a collection should make people look again. This way they could get a better grip on what they saw, and take apart what they believed or assumed. These collections on display should thus give people the framework in which to make their own observations and conclusions, and as this framework changes shape once more - this change reflects into other results of exploration; and finally *human* knowledge.¹⁷ Deliss explains that we can respect and critically incorporate earlier narratives written by anthropologists, just as we need to take on the existing evidence that originated from the makers and users of the artefacts themselves. But, according to Deliss, we also need to expand the context of this knowledge by once again taking these objects as the starting point and motivation for contemporary innovation, aesthetic practice, and even future product design.¹⁸

We can conclude that it is possible to approach an object, or product, whether primitive or not, from three different angles. Firstly there is the interpretation of the specialist, in this case the anthropologist, who is to make a verdict and analysis on how this object behaves and which rules are tied to it, according to his distant, though subjective, analytical observations. Next we look at the objects according to the way they were brought to existence by the original makers, and the different motivations lying behind. And last, we see what this object could mean for the here and now. To see what it actually does when it is put in the current context, and how it behaves according to its original status. It will function as a starting point for a new concept, and get a new role in society. Furthermore, other objects and new ideas will feed on it, and before we know it, the context shifts once more.

16 A Sign of Aumtumn / Vincent Vulsma - SMBA newsletter N°124

17 *Stored Code, Remediating Collections in a Post-ethnographic Museum* / Clementine Deliss, 2011

18 *Stored Code, Remediating Collections in a Post-ethnographic Museum* / Clementine Deliss, 2011

I believe that when encountering new *objects* and ideas, we look once more at our own with a closer eye. At least, I feel I could draw sharper conclusions, when analysing an object in different contexts. Though, this is exactly where my background lies as a young designer; switching between disciplines and changing perspectives. I see a strong possibility for future product or fashion design, just like Deliss stated earlier, that departs from the current analysis of objects.

In advance of immediately starting something *new*, I find it important to analyse what already is; in order to react in a proper manner to a *design problem*. This is a long term commitment, that could nourish design objectives in a different manner.

OBJECTS OF DESIRE

To go back to the analysis of objects, we could take the axe as an example for analysis. When we look at the analysis the expert might give, let us follow Andre Leroi-Gourhan. His expertise is lying in a mix of disciplines, as he discusses his subjects though the fields of theory, history, technics and ethnology. The perfect, and necessary, mix to analyse a tool like the axe. Here he might put on the full analysis, from the direct experience of the object in its use to hunt down food, as a weapon for battle or a token for ceremonial duties. Next he might explain us more about the construction of the tool, how the length of the handle balances the heavy top, and for which type of gesture the axe was made. We could conclude that it is one of the few objects that behaves both as a weapon, and as a common everyday tool. In the strong hand of the pioneer and lumberjack, this axe chopped down entire forests to start the thing we call civilisation now.¹⁹

Then we move on to the ideas the original maker might have about this tool. I guess, all the above considerations are a part of its construction, but lie simmering beneath the surface and are a more unaware power that propels the making of this tool. For the direct user it is just a common artefact, serving the everyday life use.

If next, we look at how this object behaves in a current condition, we could perhaps see how it parted from its intensive use, and got transported into the role of a mere ceremonial object; only used for leisure - becoming a symbol for status and power.

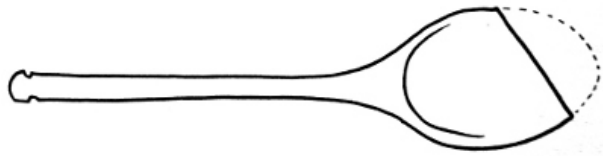
“Go into the kitchen and open the first drawer you come to and the odds are you’ll find the wooden spoon that is used to stir soups and sauces. If this spoon is of a certain age you will see it no longer has its original shape. It has changed, as if a piece had been cut obliquely off the end. Part of it is missing. We have (though not all at once, of course) eaten the missing part mixed up in our soup. It is continual use that has given the spoon its new shape. This is the shape the saucepan has made by constantly rubbing away at the spoon until it eventually shows us what shape a spoon for stirring soup should be”²⁰

19 *The Book of Symbols, reflections on archetypal images* / Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010
[Based on Jung’s work on the archetype and the collective unconscious.]

20 *Design as art* / Bruno Munari, 1971

As we look at the example of Munari's spoon, we find that the real object we thought was the entire spoon, is in fact a left over of various acts that now define the spoon. I guess we could conclude that of which we thought was actually the spoon, we have eaten it. Consumed it until no such meaning was left. The *half-spoon* becomes the *revenant* we should be looking at, for analysis.

According to Munari, this is a case in which a designer can learn what shape he can make the object he is designing, especially if it is a thing destined to come into frequent contact with other things, and which therefore takes its particular shape according to the use to which it is put. The fact that this faulty form is perceived as *knowledge* and the *half-spoon* our *ignorance*, a residu. Should not they be reversed?





True Colours / Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky

sad tropics

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Nowadays being an explorer is a trade which consist not as one might think, in discovering hitherto unknown facts after years of study, but in covering a great many miles and assembling lantern-slides or motion pictures, preferably in color, so as to fill a hall with an audience for several days in succession.²¹

I admire the precision of Lévi-Strauss' quote. He takes the courage to reduce his entire discipline of anthropology, to the act of showing lantern slides and colour photographs. As if, by the use of photographic representations, one could come closer to a certain representation of the truth. He shows us how among every anecdote, bits and pieces can be found of different truths and other sediments of information. All presented as valid and valuable new input and discoveries. And so, one could trace back a line of one root of information, feeding perhaps a hundred more in its lifetime. But according to Strauss, no doubt that there are exceptions, and that every period has had its genuine travellers.²²

RED, GREEN AND BLUE

Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky must have been one of them. He who made colour photographs of his surroundings in the Russian empire, back in the start of the twentieth century. This was owed to his technical invention of using red-, green- and blue color channels and assembling these later on into one composite picture. He did this by taking a series of three monochrome pictures, each through a different colored filter.

Tsar Nicholas II, being very impressed with Gorsky's experimental discoveries on the field of color photography, gave him the assignment to document every region of the whole Russian empire. And so, under the commission of Tsar Nicholas II, Prokudin-Gorsky travelled through the vast reaches of the Russian empire, photographing, the things of interest and significance he came across. Again here, we witness a dual approach, much like which was the case during Marco Polo's travels. A big part of Gorsky's oeuvre consist of landmarks, infrastructure, churches and icon paintings. Which was, of course, all of interest to the Russian Tsar. But aside this more pragmatic approach towards documentation, one comes across jewels of photographs; of men, and their beasts, of ways of dress, cloth, textiles and interiors. Pictures of the countryside life; lumbermen and freshly planed timber, building clean-cut wooden houses.²³

Only now I realize how much we have become accustomed to the grey haze of the lumber mens' working shirts. It is evident this was a colourful hue of reds, blue, purples

21 *Tristes Tropiques* / Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1955

22 *Tristes Tropiques* / Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1955

23 *True colours; Trichromatic Photography* / S. Prokudin-Gorsky, 2008

and greens. Now, as soon as I see a man wearing this red worker jacket, it is as if he becomes a real man.

The clothing becomes luminescent and the contrast in material, the richness in structure, is at once visible. It is almost as if it becomes easier to relate to these *men*, now their skin has colors other than sepia tones. Their stories come to live. In my opinion, by making these first colored photographs, Prokudin-Gorsky caught a certain truth. We could look back at these photographs today, and see the people depicted as our equals, as our predecessors, and not as *others*. And so, a new reality is captured in his work, which becomes a *geographic catalogue within existing borders*.²⁴ It is here, within these existing, yet abstract borders, where we place ourselves.

If we, following this conclusion, were to make our notion of *ignorance* more abstract, let us consider the black and white photo as *ignorant*, and the colour photograph as an illusion which touches upon the *primitive*. It is necessary to make a distinction at this point, between the ignorant and the primitive. Perhaps using the words in this context will give them a different value, and will it make it easier for us to relate. The ignorant is linked to the black and white photo, to put an emphasis of what is lacking. The primitive notion is linked to colour photographs, not because it is a whole truth, but exactly of what it appears to stand for - but lacks to make real. The illusion of a promise, a suggestion, a story created for us to believe.

Then, why my attraction to black and white, often archival, photography? Is it because clearly information is lacking, but the basic idea or setting of the photograph is still clearly communicated; like an amputee? Or is it exactly the fact that all meaning becomes abstract, and so there is room for my own interpretation.

NOSTALGIC SEASONINGS

I look at the men in the photograph, inspecting if, today, I would find among them a handsome man or not. As in trying to look for points of reference and connection. Now I wonder, would I look the same way at them, if there was no historic difference? Being acquainted with the nostalgic side of the current loss of manual labour, and the loose fitting work clothes. Mind the double-mindedness here - On one side, us not knowing the world of colour and finding out another view on history, is like getting acquainted with a new reality. On the other hand the dual meaning which underlines our current incapability to relate to stories and events other than our own; in narrations and bits and pieces of abstract information. We are all living in one big colour photograph. Which has become closer to us, than a narrated story.

To get back to Strauss, who refers to our flickering perspectives as “*experiences which were deemed to have only a very remote resemblance to the inevitably false picture we were already carrying up, as travellers are always fated to do.*”

24 *The International Research Project: the Legacy of S.M. Prokudin-Gorsky / Vasilii V. Dryuchin, 2008*

According to Lévi-Strauss, even though his words echo from the mid fifties, the modern Marco Polo, brings back the *moral spices* of which our society feels and increasing need, as it is conscious of sinking further into boredom, but that this time they take the form of photographs, books and travellers' tales.²⁵

I would be curious to see how this semi-truth full conclusion of photographs and tales could be linked to our, and my, current state of mind. As I always finds it charming to toil with information long expired, and to make it relevant again within a different context. What would be today's marvels and goods which eliminate all boredom? Do we, then, talk about goods instead of information or knowledge or could it become something else? An approach? If I were to link Strauss' statement back to our modern day society, some sixty years later, one could see his reference to moral spices as the current status of consumerism, production, product development and finally design.

These moral seasonings should satisfy our craving for the exotic spice that has slowly turned into a need for a closer connection to the objects and artefacts that surround us. Our craving has become a sentimental longing for all that has gone by. We look up to the glorified modern craftsman; from times long past, to get our grasp back on this fast-moving society. Whether they are eighties fashion influences, or instant polaroids; it is like re-discovering colour photography through the use of color filters - all over again.

So who is this modern craftsman? As Strauss goes on; he finds that intentionally or unintentionally, these modern seasonings are falsified. *"Not because they are of a purely psychological nature, but because, however honest the narrator (designer) may be, he cannot - since this is not longer possible - supply them in a genuine form. For us to be willing to accept them, memories have to be sorted and sifted; through a degree of manipulation which, in the most sincere writer, takes places below the level of consciousness. And so, actual experience is replaced by stereotypes"*.²⁶

Is it about being part of the actual experience of something that is made by two hands, instead of a machine? Or is the modern craftsman still the ultimate traveller, the ultimate liar, and supplies us merely with an image, a colour photograph, of what is happening behind the scenes. In this context, could we be talking about a certain perversion of craft and skill?

*"But I refuse to be the dupe of a kind of magic which is still more feeble than their own, and which brandishes before an eager public albums of colored photographs, instead of the now vanished native masks. Perhaps the public imagines that the charms of the savages can be appropriated through the medium of these photographs."*²⁷

These colour photographs now function as a replacement for the actual artefacts, *the native masks*; but still arise the same wonder, amazement and satisfaction.

25 *Tristes Tropiques* / Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1955

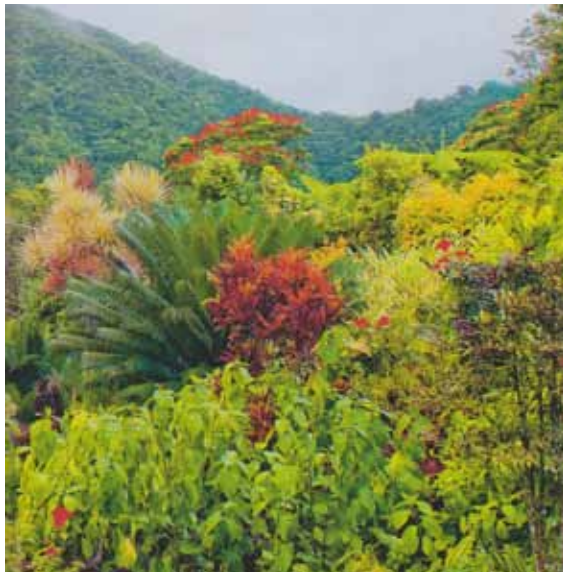
26 *Tristes Tropiques* / Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1955

27 *Tristes Tropiques* / Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1955

The public believes in the illusion of a lantern slide projection, and fails to notice what in reality lies behind the screen. Strauss' approach towards the *native magic* comes close to our current relation to objects, or at least touches upon a similar illusion.

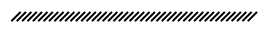
As we look at the discussed longing for the craftsman and for other subjects, and objects of desire. I can only conclude that we, as the *public* mentioned in the paragraph above, are falling for the same charms, however this time they are not photographs. We encounter another representation of reality, which comes close to the imagined stories of the *travellers*. To some levels, we only see one side of an object, whether it is material, price or representation.

I cannot help but notice the side of the maker which is arising nowadays. You might wonder why I speak of perversion, which is a large statement. But I feel the same wonder, and defeat as I hear Strauss mention *the nostalgic cannibalism of history with the shadows of those that history has already destroyed*.²⁸ A false picture is painted of the maker, as a shoe salesman is portrayed in a workers apron, which has become a uniform for selling. A perversion regarding skill, and a benefit of ignorance on the part of the consumer.



Derek Galon & Margret Gajek

MAN WITHOUT TOOL



part two

THE TOOL SHED



L'ARTISAN ISOLÉ OR HOMO FABER

In his book *L'Homme et la Matière*, André Leroi-Gourhan analyses the history of *man as maker*; the specialised individual moving within the field of the slow evolution of skill. Gourhan talks about the different classifications of the *artisan*. He walks from the *préartisanal*, using skill to supply in ones own necessities of life, to the *proto-artisanal*: the making of objects to supply in the fundamental needs of a group, and finally to the *artisanal isolé*, where we see the individual as a full time specialist, the isolated craftsman. Of course, these classifications overlap from time to time, but Gourhan puts down a clear image how we could categorize the maker from a theoretical approach. My question is; what are our contemporary classifications and desires? *L'artisan isolé*; the contemporary designer?

So who is this modern craftsman? If we were to take a step back, to change our perspective from the artisan to the *homo faber*; the tool using man. The man as a maker, the man with his axe. Who is he exactly? What happens to him as soon as his tool would disappear? From *tool-using-man*, to *man-without-tool*.

Man lost his tools with the dawn of the industrial revolution, and with it lost his identity as maker as well. His surplus tools disappeared in a shed, stacked up until the roof, arranged according to discipline. Never to be used again. Or is it?

These surplus tools have slowly transformed into objects of desire. A real man knows how to handle his axe, and can build whatever he pleases. But what would be our conclusion when this very axe becomes a fashion accessory, as presented by the American *Best Made Company*. Now, what is left of this *homo faber*? Our image of man has completely shifted this last century; we still hold on tight to different archetypes considering this matter. I would be interested in researching and placing these objects of desire within our current society.

How does masculinity relate to our use of tools? Would a man without tools become a useless man? Men become *gamekeepers without game*; feverishly we see him looking for his grip on his masculinity.

AND AND AND WHAT IS A MAN?

As we look at the images of August Sanders' *Menschen des 20 Jahrhunderts*, photographed in at the start of the 20th century, ones see a great deal of difference in dress, when one looks at the worker and the maker. The maker would be portrayed in his working overalls, accompanied by fitting tools. A proud man, often filthy. He, however

dirty, seems to stand in a higher regard than the farmers; portrayed wearing their special Sunday dress. It looks as if they would try to hide a certain shame concerning their own acts of labour. Much like the mine workers from the south of Holland, who after their shift was over, would walk back home; as much scrubbed and cleaned as possible; carrying their black and dusty work clothes home in their briefcase. Now it becomes clear to which level the interpretations and meaning of objects are depending of their time period and context. Where before the briefcase was a solution to cover-up ones *real* activities, now a highly polished axe is thrown in the game, to make man feel like man. This notion is in close relation to our analysis regarding the object in part III of chapter two.

In Wim Wenders' documentary *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*, made in commission for the Centre Pompidou, we follow a conversation between Wenders and legendary Japanese fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto. His philosophy of work gets discussed, and so the topic of work overalls and garments from the twentieth century returns. The workers would wear loose supple clothing, which indeed gave away a piece of their role as a maker. People actually looked like their profession and their background. *I watch their faces and their clothing and then I imagine their professions.*²⁹

THE NOTION OF THE HAND MADE

We know for a fact that manual labour has fallen in decline, this is something we had noticed; and have been staring at; a while now. Though it has come back with a certain revival, it has become a newborn *specter*. It haunts us, and makes up cope in distorted ways, with what happened as a result of its absence, with the objects directly surrounding us. As there is a greater and greater awareness around the facts regarding production conditions in the east of the world, a reality check is not to be avoided. The notion of the hand has once more becomes important. I can tell you this from my own experience; I will come back to this at a later point. As soon as we know that hand touched matter it captivates our attention, and we keep this item in much higher regard, and value, than a machine fabricated object. Yet, we are still sensitive to the flaws of the handmade and see these human errors as a flaw in quality. So there is a duality here. The same duality exists when we look at the difference between the handmade Italian shoe and a handmade dress from a *sew-it-yourself* magazine. Here we find a link between the amateur, the machine and the artisan. Machine stands in between these two men, and functions as a sort of buffer that can always supply the same demand and the same quality, as the hand is feeble to skill, injury and repetition.

As I before referred to my own experiences in dealing with the handmade, let me enlighten you on what I call this perversion around the idealised handmade object, which is still kept in higher regard disregarding its flaws. One day, a woman seduced by a window display, enters my store to ask about a big robustly knit pillow she had noticed. She asked me if she might have a closer look, and if I might have a second one. On the first

29 *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*, Yohji Yamamoto, 1989

pillow she had nothing to remark. Yet, as soon as the second one arrived, she was left speechless, though not in a positive way. The two pillows, who ought to have been identical according to her standards, were a mismatch. One was slightly bigger, and had a slight different texture in its pattern. She was clearly displeased about this, but the moment I made it clear to her that these pillows had been hand-knitted in a sheltered workshop, a place that provides work for physically or mentally challenged people, her attitude changed. At once, this notion of the hand-made had added a ridiculous sort of value on these products, one that I had never noticed before in this context.

The fact that the craftsman gets recognition for his work, when we look at the Italian shoemaker, makes perfect sense to me. However, something else seemed to be happening at the moment where this shift occurred and the *amateur's* work was valued just the same amount. All because an item is created by the hand and, perhaps, that it has flaws. It makes me wonder why this kind of shift, in keeping a higher regard for the handmade, is happening right now. Even though this not entirely true, as it is a process that already took quite a bit of time to evolve, I guess it is the case that my own involvement has recently opened up.

However it came to be, I think it is an interesting change. It is a moment where *ignorance* has been given value; because it is placed in a different context; and the amateur gets value just because of the change in regard to the medium. Could we now state that this shift could result into a *maker without discipline*, who is not necessarily an expert or a craftsman. Could this become the new standard?

THE MAKER WITHOUT DISCIPLINE

*"The conditions in which he lives and works cut him off physically from his group for long periods; through being exposed to such complete and sudden changes of environment, he acquires a kind of chronic rootlessness; eventually, he comes to feel at home nowhere and he remains psychologically maimed."*³⁰

The mentioned quote above is a part of Strauss' conclusion from *Tristes Tropiques*. It is remarkable to see how near the end of his writings Strauss became more and more critical towards his own discipline; his own field of study. I wonder if this is a direct reaction from getting confronted with his writings, which were working against his person. A confrontation with the things he encountered and his own positioning; or perhaps we might say that the jungle fever and isolation had gotten to him. In his conclusion he opens up about *the anthropologist* and what it takes for him to detach himself from his surroundings in order to work efficiently. His own capabilities of coming to such a precise analysis of the prison he had created for himself, show how this rootlessness is buried in his very being. It is no longer a part of his profession, but has become a part of himself. And so I wonder if his approach, or even reproach, towards his own discipline of anthropology could have a link with my own experienced *rootlessness*. My own jungle fever, the high temperatured rush that resulted from this intense focus on all possible matters surrounding me. From a refusal to choose one direction, one disciplined road, a multitude of options exponentially kept growing.

I wouldn't say, like Strauss, that this resulted in one becoming psychologically maimed, which I could relate to being in his situation, but more so, this resulted in a certain haziness in my case. A general confusion as to where to place oneself, a feeling of dividing a pitcher of water amongst ten large glasses. Leaving them all, not even half full, but giving them with a small layer of water each, instead of filling one single glass to the rim. Did I misinterpreted this haziness, and the small layer of water for *ignorance*?

When referring the *maker without discipline*, let me make clear that this term got distilled from the above analysis regarding the amateur. He, who creates but without earning a living or having a degree; but works at the same level as the craftsman or the professional, or even a higher level. He makes a constant effort to keep improving his knowledge and to benefit from the fact of being the amateur, and thus bathing in a small bath of *ignorance*, for his own good. He who is the maker without discipline has found another way of getting recognition for his work and profits from this *non-discipline*, defined as a *non-field of study*, a *non-corrected* molding and training of ones self, and perhaps even *non-selfcontrol*.

And so let us talk about discipline. Here I do not mean to refer to dressage, although not entirely. In discipline, I'd rather talk about the fact of belonging to a certain *form*; from which one reflects, moves around and derives its content from. This *form* is the place where all comes from, this is a form created by society and ones social surroundings. With the aid of awareness and self knowledge I believe one could shake free, or even ignore this form. From my own sense of being lost, while giving directions to myself; a new method was born.



HORS CONTEXTE

closing matter

HORS-CONTEXTE

To work *hors-contexte*. This *new genre*, is a mix and match of all different disciplines; which does not come from a weakness or incapability to choose, but from finding the richness of these flickering perspectives and a possibility to find different ways of connecting these. This is where I would like to place myself, out of context. As you may have noticed, I have been very vague up until now about my own practice, and have been constantly referring either to the maker or to the designer, without underlining what actually happens within these field. I think which played a big part in this choice, was my own incapability to pronounce these fields in a more precise matter.

Perhaps my practice is in the end best described as a Memphis decorated room, which is as close as I get to finding a more suitable manner as explanation. In this room there is a *non-hierarchy* amongst material. Marble becomes laminate, and is applied to furniture instead of kitchens. The awareness of these relations arises, when real marble touches fake marble on equal terms. Something interesting is bound to happen. We are dealing with a *new language*, when we see how these unrestrained and anarchic combinations of cheap and expensive, coarse and sophisticated materials lead to a rather confusing rearrangement of conventional material vocabulary.³¹

The impact of this *new language* is a mere example to show how, when letting go of discipline(s), an interesting mesh of new information arises. Many of their pattern designs were soon transferred to other materials and began to appear on sweatshirts, shoes, and wrapping paper. A loss of all possible context we might conclude, but yet the gain of another.

*There is no way out this dilemma: either the anthropologist adheres to the norms of his own group and other groups inspire in him no more than a fleeting curiosity which is never quite devoid of disapproval, or he is capable of giving himself wholeheartedly to these other groups and his objectivity is vitiated by the fact that, intentionally or not, he has had to withhold himself from at least one society, in order to devote himself to all.*³²

I find myself in contrast to this notion. I do not believe it is necessary to withhold from at least one society, or discipline, in order to devote to all. As soon as I try to find this mere essence, my spectrum only seems to get larger. If I would take the anthropological approach of letting go of one practice; that of a singular knowledge; would it be

31 *Design Heroes: Ettore Sottsass. The barbarians and emperors of design* / Jan Burney, 1991

32 *Tristes Tropiques* / Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1955

possible to benefit from a more plural form of knowledge? Instead of a fleeting curiosity towards insignificant subjects, wouldn't it be more nourishing to turn my attention to this void of being hors-contexte. *Let's see what we find at the bottom.* Yet, regarding our topic, this is about letting go in a different matter.

AS MEANING LEAPS FROM THE PAGE

As we stroll along this path of *ignorance*; though not literally; we seem to have ended up on a crossing behind context, behind form. Let us look at a small example, to put this hors-contexte, into a context. I've been vividly quoting Strauss, not out of a misplaced adoration as I not always agree with his writings, but more so for the reason that his words are easy to morph into other contexts and analyses. Alas; we have come to our last section of his writings, but it is a good example to help me plead my case. We go back to the very start of knowledge, as we know it, and talk about writing and the teacher.

*"This tribe has no written language. Nevertheless, I handed out sheets of paper and pencils. At first they did nothing with them, then one day I saw that they were all busy drawing wavy, horizontal lines. I wondered what they were trying to do, then it was suddenly borne upon me that they were writing or, to be more accurate, were trying to use their pencils in the same way as I did mine. The majority did this, and no more, but the chief had further ambitions. No doubt he was the only one who grasped the purpose of writing. So he asked me for a writing-pad, and when we both had one, and were working together, if I asked for information on a given point, he did not supply it verbally but drew wavy lines on his paper and presented them to me, as if I could read his reply. He was half taken in by his own make-believe; each time he completed a line, he examined it anxiously as if expecting the meaning to leap from the page, and the same look of disappointment came over his face. But he never admitted this, and there was a tacit understanding between us to the effect that his unintelligible scribbling had a meaning which I pretended to decipher."*³³

I feel a similarity arise between myself and this *chief*. Both left disappointed with some half accomplished tools and signs, that were once laid under our disposition. Yes, our cases are different by the maximum, but let me use this as an example to illustrate my case. I mean to add that I see a positive side to this lacking of knowledge, as there is a way around this occurrence, which could help me believe to benefit from my *ignorance*, or my *half-knowledge*. As the tribesman did in scribbling down waving lines, and yes, expecting meaning to leap from his page. Who could say, that perhaps right this instance, I am not trying to do exactly the same? Writing down word after word; getting more caught up by the minute, in a search I can no longer call my own. It has transformed; and has become the same search for recognition, and of enlarging one's knowledge and power position, as it was the case of the *chief*. What Strauss adds regarding the topic of

these *imaginary writings* is that writing had made its appearance; “But not, as one might have imagined, as a result of long and laborious training.

It had been borrowed as a symbol, and for a sociological rather than an intellectual purpose, while its reality remained unknown. It had not been a question of acquiring knowledge, of remembering or understanding, but rather of increasing the authority and the prestige of one individual.”³⁴

Now, it would be the proper thing to write that I would state, never to use my *half-knowledge* (or *ignorance*) to my own benefit, and to increase my authority or prestige in this manner. But I will not. Instead I will write down, that yes, developing skill should have to do with acquiring knowledge and growing a better understanding, but this is not always the case. Instead, I plead for using the knowledge one has, and to compensate for the rest; but in my own manner. This compensation, being it make-belief or borrowed as a symbol, is something that could grow out of a laborious study as well. Whether knowledge is derived from calling a bluff or if it is the result of tedious studies, should the outcome matter? It did not, in the case of the explorers, as it became part of their stories, as this very story will become part of my narrative.

THE IGNORANT SCHOOLMASTER

It is no longer about shaking loose from all form entirely, but to shake loose a bit, in order to be able to re-attach to a different form. This being a different discipline, strategy or craft, that is not necessary to specify. To use a tool for its sociological purpose; as the modern man has found back his masculinity in the use of an axe; perhaps that I could find my own tool in knowledge and in the *deformation* of knowledge. And so, I might develop my own way of shaping knowledge, in ways so that I can benefit from them within my own context. Using part *ignorance*, part *self-knowledge* and part *make-belief*. Being the ignorant, the amateur and the craftsman all at the same time. The *self-taught primitive craftsman*?

*Mistrust your opinions. Mistrust your beliefs.*³⁵ Radical words learned from a fictive *ignorant schoolmaster*. Is he about to teach us, to no longer write pretentiously, to no longer educate, guide, moralize, or edify our fellow-men; and thus ourselves? Our aim would be our own elevation and our own progress; and I would write, not because I am mature and have found my form, but because I am still immature and in my efforts to attain form I am humiliating himself; making a fool of myself; and sweating like a lumberjack still struggling to take down tree after tree, being a man still on the way to self-fulfilment.

34 *Tristes Tropiques* / Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1955

35 *Ferdynand: Introduction to Philifor Honeycombed with Childishness* / Witold Gombrowicz, 1937

And if I should happen to write a worthless or silly text, I would say to myself: “Well, I have written some rubbish, but I have signed no contract with anyone to write clever or perfect words.”³⁶

I have never promised you I would write the entire truth. Neither have I ever promised to lead you to a stunning ending, or to an ultimate destination for our journey. And thus, I welcome you to this abrupt farewell. I greatly appreciate, you joining me for this *voyage*, and having come so far along.

36 *Ferdydurke: Introduction to Philifor Honeycombed with Childishness* / Witold Gombrowicz, 1937

EPILOGUE

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someone comes forward

“Someone, you or me, comes forward and says: I would like to learn to live finally. Finally but why? To learn to live: a strange watchword. Who would learn? From who? To teach to live, but to whom? Will we ever know? Will we ever know how to live and first of all what “to learn to live” means? And why “finally”?

By itself, out of context - but a context, always, remains open, thus fallible and insufficient- this watchword forms and almost unintelligible syntagm. Just how far can its idiom be translated moreover?

A magisterial locution, all the same-or for that very reason. For from the lips of a master this watchword would always say something about violence. It vibrates like an arrow in the course of an irreversible and asymmetrical address, the one that goes most often from father to son, master to disciple or master to slave; “I’m going to teach you how to live”; such an address hesitates, therefore: between address as experience; is not learning to live experience itself?; address as education, and address as taming or training [dressage]

But to learn to live, to learn it from oneself and by oneself, all alone, to teach oneself to live; “I would like to learn to live finally”; is that not impossible for a living being? Is it not what logic itself forbids? To live, by definition, is not something one learns.”³⁷

37 *Specters of Marx : the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* / Jacques Derrida, 1993

