EXISTENTIAL DESIGN -
The "dark side" of design thinking

ANNE BRITT TORKILDSBY
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"I lean my hand on the seat but pull it back hurriedly: it exists. This thing I’m sitting on, leaning my hand on, is called a seat. They made it purposely for people to sit on, they took leather, springs and cloth, they went to work with the idea of making a seat and when they finished, that was what they had made. They carried it here, into this car and the car is now rolling and jolting with its rattling windows, carrying this red thing in its bosom. I murmur: "It’s a seat," a little like an exorcism. But the word stays on my lips: it refuses to go and put itself on the thing. It stays what it is, with its red plush, thousands of little red paws in the air, all still, little dead paws. This enormous belly turned upward, bleeding, inflated – bloated with all its dead paws, this belly floating in this car, in this grey sky, is not a seat. It could just as well be a dead donkey tossed about in the water, floating with the current, belly in the air in a great grey river, a river of floods; and I could be sitting on the donkey’s belly, my feet dangling in the clear water.

Things are divorced from their names. They are there, grotesque, headstrong, gigantic and it seems ridiculous to call them seats or say anything at all about them: I am in the midst of things, nameless things. Alone, without words, defenceless, they surround me, are beneath me, behind me, above me. They demand nothing, they don’t impose themselves: they are there. Under the cushion on the seat there is a thin line of shadow, a thin black line running along the seat, mysteriously and mischievously, almost a smile. I know very well that it isn’t a smile and yet it exists, it runs under the whitish windows, under the jangle of glass, obstinately, obstinately behind the blue images which pass in a throng, like the inexact memory of a smile, like a half forgotten word of which you can only remember the first syllable and the best thing you can do is turn your eyes away and think about something else, about that man half-lying down on the seat opposite me, there. His blue-eyed, terra cotta face." (Sartre 1964, p. 125).
DESIGN MANUAL
INTRODUCTION

Why existential design?

- What makes it possible for people in remand prison to end their lives by e.g. stuffing a sock down the throat and therefore suffocate?

- Or, why is it that people in intensive care units wake up from induced comas confused and frightened, fully convinced that they have been robbed of everything they own and have been made to walk down the street – completely in the nude – while people everywhere were grabbing at their arms and legs and pulling them in every direction, and when they tried screaming no one seemed to hear as people around them were all busy talking to each other in a language they did not understand?

This design manual presents another way of thinking about design: a method of designing with a focus on ‘designials’ (fundamental forms of design being). The designer who implements this method into a project will, above all, open up the design brief and thus bring to light and call into question perspectives which he or she would otherwise tend to forget. One may ask: what good will it do? Well, besides stimulating critical thinking about the topic it provides space for reflection: this way of thinking aims to guide the designer into elaborating on the idea that design holds intentions, purpose, and goals, giving concrete gestalt to certain ‘existentials’ (fundamental forms of human being). Most importantly, however, the designer comes closer to understanding the “dark side” of design thinking, or - more expressly - the complications which may arise if this aspect of design thinking is ignored.

In short, the critical method consists of an existential and a designial analysis. It is through carrying out both analyses, i.e. the existential designial analysis, that the designer will be challenged to question his/her assumptions and preconceived ideas about the design being per se and furthermore generate critical design examples, namely the outcome of the existential designial analysis. These examples, moreover, are intended to invite other parts of society to consider the alternative values – thus fostering knowledge about why things are the way they are – which may ultimately stimulate more designers to bring about originality pertaining to the object, its use, and the surrounding environments, as exemplified here through the contexts of hospitals, prisons and institutional settings.

Just as Dunne, who refers to conceptual tools by means of electronic objects as “the fit between ideas and things, particularly where an abstract idea dominates practicality, allow design to be a form of discourse, resulting in poetic inventions that by challenging laws (physical, social, or political) rather than affirming them, take on a critical function” (Dunne 2005, p. x), the existential designial analysis will perform a similar role – though in the form of cultivating critical design examples which define and illustrate the given series of designials – and, as was mentioned above, accordingly illuminate existential design as a concept.

How to get to the “dark side” of design thinking?

The methodology presented below is to be understood and put into practice the same way most designers use functional analysis or similar forms of analysis, i.e. starting at the top: analyzing the situation all the way through to the final outcome, e.g. a product, system or something similar, constantly focusing on the person in question.

Notice that even though the design manual focuses on dealing with the many individuals being cared for in intensive care units and remand prisons, the same way of thinking about design is applicable to a number of “extreme environments” (i.e. contexts where a person is unable to leave a place – no matter if it is physical or mental or whether the duration is temporary or permanent – which does not support what is considered a “normal” state of existence for the person in question).

Considering the fact that students are the next generation of designers – who are, overall, brilliant minds, eager to explore and so become lost, which in turn will compel them to learn in order to find their way – the following document is primarily intended for them, whether studying design, architecture, engineering, or something similar. Also, practitioners of various professions who see themselves involved in e.g. planning, constructing or maintaining future hospitals, prisons, etc. will surely benefit from this way of opening up the brief and are thus encouraged to give it a try. Likewise, so is anyone born with an adventurous mind, ready to put design to the test, and, last but not least, those who feel even the slightest bit curious about taking a trip to the “dark side” of design thinking.
Functional analysis vs. existential designial analysis

Most design projects are initiated by a brief, outlining objectives, major constraints and possible considerations. The brief is focused on the required outcome(s) and, when given as a comprehensive document, describes and explains in detail the planned development.

Let us take an example of this from within the framework of existential design. Suppose that the description of the potential problem, i.e. the reason why the project is introduced to begin with, is expressed something like this: more than a quarter of the men and up to 40% of the women on remand have, at some point in their life before entering prison, made at least one attempt at suicide; while in remand, the risk of self-inflicted deaths for this group is about 50 times higher than it is for the entire prison population.

- How does the designer go about opening up the design brief for a project where the main objective is to design the totality of the cell, with the purpose of reducing intentional self-injury and suicide attempts in remand prisons, and, further, how does he/she go about ensuring an effective development process as well as a successful outcome – notwithstanding the potentially wide variety of product types involved?

Well, the designer could develop a functional analysis, or its equivalent, as a method to determine the requirements on the particular product/system/etc. to achieve the desired function. With respect to the functional requirements, i.e. the result of the analysis, the designer will then begin to realize the project and so make sure the design outcome meets the requirements. In turn, this implies satisfying “customers, consumers, and users” (Norman 2006) – or, put in a different way, “people” (Ibid). A typical functional analysis (although very simplified in this context) could be carried out as follows:

1) Identify the primary function of the intended product, system or similar.
   = The designer defines the overall function.

2) Then ask “How?” one can achieve this.
   = The designer discovers the sub-functions. (If one sub-function is removed, the overall function is not fulfilled.)

3) Continue to trace through each sub-function chronologically and organize them into a hierarchy.
   = The designer classifies sub-sub-functions. (These functions are either crucial to the overall function or the sub-functions, but express more or less desirable features of the product/system/etc.)

Taking into consideration the prison project mentioned above, execution of the functional analysis would typically look something like this:

1) Identify the primary function of the intended product, system or similar.
   = The designer defines the overall function of the cell (preferably the institution as a whole) to be “suicide-proof”.

2) Then ask “How?” one can achieve this.
   = The designer discovers the sub-functions: covering all possible factors making an individual cope with life within such an extreme environment – an environment which paradoxically enough makes the person want to die. (If one sub-function is removed, the overall function is not fulfilled.)

3) Continue to trace through each sub-function chronologically and organize them into a hierarchy.
   = The designer classifies sub-sub-functions: including everything from sustainable solutions (regarding aspects such as performance, duration and maintenance as well as inclusivity and environment) to general comfort – all with respect to national and international regulations and fulfilling requirements on the requested project completion date and budget. (These functions are either crucial to the overall function or the sub-functions, but express more or less desirable features of the product/system/etc.)
Next, imagine that the designer performs a user-group study to help the project move forward, in which two of the participants provided the following information:

**An ex-prisoner read this from his diary:**

"The first weeks were extremely tough. I was waiting for my approval, entirely unaware what the sentence would be – not mentioning how long it would take for my case even to be addressed. The longer I waited, the more sure I became that the outcome would be unbearable. I was thinking of my family night and day: of how my two daughters and my wife were unaware of my crime until the police knocked on our door. Can’t imagine what it must have been like for them... Not one second passed when I didn’t think of the small, everyday things – all of which I’d taken for granted until then. Memories of my children hugging me goodbye as I dropped them off at school, how our dog Pluto used to jump up on me when I entered the house after a long day at the office, the taste of freshly grinded coffee in the morning, my wife’s scent lingering on the bed linen even hours after she got up, etc. occupied my mind. Yet everything seemed so far away. I thought of ways of keeping my family close to heart. I arranged my duvet and sleeping pillow with military precision, just the way my wife liked it, put the towels neatly on top of each other like we once taught our daughters and threw my socks on the floor, hoping that Pluto would pick them up and proudly give them back to me. I was stupid to think that by keeping some of the habits I’d feel more alive; more at home. It didn’t work of course. The foolish routines didn’t make my family more present. On the contrary, the whole thing made me suffer even more... I realized how deeply I missed them, it felt like a punishment just touching the pale blue worn-out bedding I was stuck with now. I remember smelling the cushion cover once, only to realize that it actually reminded me of urine. (I wonder what detergent they used?) Surprisingly, this episode made me furious. I pretty much destroyed everything I got my hands on from then on."

**A guard read the following from the Prisoner’s Log Book:**

"Pernilla came to our institution on Friday, April 23rd, 2010 at 02:10 PM. After two weeks on the run, she was brought in by the police in Skövde. She was wearing a black sweater jacket, jeans and sneakers and carried no other belongings. She was strip-searched and given an inmate uniform. During this procedure, she refused to give up her jacket. We explained the rules and how her personal clothes would be safely stored and given back to her at her release. All of a sudden she attacked one of the wardens and managed to stab him in the eye with a pen that was lying around. She continued to act out aggressively and was given sedation by one of the doctors on duty. She did not calm down and had to spend the night in isolation. We checked on her every 15 minutes. At 05:45, a warden found her hanging from the window bar with a piece of fabric – strips of the uniform bound together – tightly tied around her neck. She was without pulse [...]

- Knowing this, in addition to what other people in prison could tell him/her, how would the designer proceed in order to make certain the total outcome of the process comes as close as possible to meeting all objectives, constraints and considerations, thus performing its desired function? And, hoping to make a difference regarding the rates of self-injury and suicide in remand prisons, what is more important: fulfilling people’s needs, requirements or expectations?

Adhering to traditional methods of product development, the designer would probably do some more research on the topic and then develop both the bed clothing and the uniform with respect to the identified functional requirements – also taking into account important new findings. After many hours spent on bringing out multiple concepts, discussing back and forth with the prison board and so on, the designer would launch a range of products for the respective prison facilities. The designer would successfully execute the project and the various products would fulfill all requirements stated in the brief – yet, the bed clothes contribute to two more suicides inside three months and the prison jumpsuit becomes the No. 1 element of frustration (later evolving into a brew of pure hatred and rage). All in all, nothing has changed. According to the prison board, life in the remand prison carries on just the way it did before. This is when the designer starts thinking about what went wrong in the process and despite arriving at the conclusion that everything in fact proceeded as planned, the designer feels compelled to reflect further on why things are the way they are.
One of the most important thoughts coming to his/her mind is the one regarding the typical way of viewing products, such as a set of beddings, or, for that matter, a prisoner's outfit. Furthermore, since no one really knows when, where, why, by whom and, most importantly, how the product is to be used, not even an internationally recognized designer would be able to fully determine its intentions, purpose and aims in circumstances such as these.

Extending this line of thinking further: because the intention of things, products and objects is produced by human beings in a certain way, the bed clothes or the uniform has its own method of construction: it comes with an outline saying that its essence is e.g. to offer someone cover and/or protection and, in doing so, it is also to provide some kind of isolation. This “fundamental nature” is given even before the bedding or uniform exists, allowing designers to bring another piece of the product into life by following its specific manufacturing template. This is where the above-mentioned dilemma of (industrial and commercial) product expectations in relation to existential objects’ ideals/values, or e.g. the notion of “focal things” (Borgman 1984), comes into the picture.

- How then may the designer avoid this problem in the future?

Since it is obvious that, as a method alone, the traditional way of dealing with design being (and, inevitably, the development process as a whole) is not sufficient when designing for environments such as remand prisons and intensive care units (ICU’s), this work takes on itself to effect change. Moreover, the existential designial analysis is a critical method that is developed to become an alternative way of thinking about design. Or, more extensively, it attempts to provide designers with a tool to critically analyze existing methods – hence, “rock the boat”. This, in turn, will help designers examine forms of design being and make its design existence as such the center of attention – as opposed to focusing merely on functional performance of the product in use, i.e. the way it is intended to work.
Existential designial analysis

The existential designial analysis introduces a pair of “existentials” and a number of “designials”. A set of designials define \textit{what it means} to design for the given existentials – whereas an existential has a direct say in what it is like to be human (i.e., remand prisons or ICU’s).

As the functional analysis is a tool of, among other disciplines, industrial designers, the same function will be performed by the existential designial analysis, i.e., it will strive to provide guidance in the product development process. However, when a functional analysis asks questions pertaining to what the thing we design is intended to do as we use it, the existential designial analysis asks questions about \textit{what it means} to design for a fundamental form of being human. The basic difference is a change of focus from analyzing the functionality of a design in use to analyzing the \textit{form of being human that a design in use defines}.

Instead of asking e.g.: “What does a prison uniform do?”
- the emphasis is on: “What is a prison uniform as a design?”

A design brief traditionally calls attention to “people” as being someone – whether that is a prisoner or a patient, a member of the royal family or the girl next door. This is rather inevitable, as most designers are taught to understand and specify the context (of use), i.e., to determine the needs, desires and constraints of the intended users, in order to optimize the product. Various product design philosophies, such as user-centered design ( personas, scenarios, doing thorough user research, etc.) as well as other design philosophies where the “end user” is given extensive attention all through the design process, are often implemented in the project – simply to ensure reaching the best possible result. Similarly, designers applying the existential designial analysis first need to observe the relevant group of people and next – through critical analysis – try to identify the fitting existential. A general existential designial analysis would be executed in this manner:

1) \textbf{Initiate by asking: What \textit{does it mean} to be such a person?}  
- The designer identifies the basic form of being human (i.e., the existential).

2) \textbf{Continue the examination: What \textit{does it mean} to design for that existential?}  
- The designer will be able to uncover the basic form of design being, i.e., the overall designial.

3) \textbf{Finally, identify the defining elements, i.e., the sub-designials determining the overall designial.}  
- The designer opens up for the central sub-designials.

If a remand prison or an ICU were to be the objective for the existential designial analysis, executing the analysis could look something like this:

1) \textbf{Initiate by asking: What \textit{does it mean} to be e.g. a prisoner or a patient?}  
- The designer identifies the basic form of being human (i.e., the existential), as e.g., \textit{confinement} or \textit{absence}.

2) \textbf{Continue the examination: What \textit{does it mean} to design for e.g., \textit{confinement}, or \textit{absence}?}  
- The designer will be able to uncover the basic form of design being, i.e., the overall designial, to be e.g., \textit{deprival} or \textit{substitute}.

3) \textbf{Finally, identify the defining elements, i.e., the sub-designials determining e.g., \textit{deprival} or \textit{substitute}.}  
- The designer opens up for the central sub-designials, e.g., punishment, threat, protection, anchor, etc.

Let us study two design briefs relating to Antoine, the main character of Sartre’s \textit{A Nausea}.

A) 30-year-old Antoine Roquentin is living in \textit{confinement (existentail)}, i.e., in a state of nausea. His world increasingly encroaches on almost everything he does: his research project, all human relations established since he came to Bouville – including his memories of his former girlfriend Anny. Even his own body and the beauty of nature are invaded by nausea. Over time, his dislike towards existence drives him to self-hatred. He develops angst and departs on a desperate search for meaning in all the things which once fulfilled his life.
With confinement and absence as given existentials, the next step in the process is to explore what it means to design for each of these forms of being human – an action that consequently forms the designial analysis. The search for answers will allow the designer to discover the fundamental forms of design being (i.e. the designials).

- But what happens if the designer takes this one step further, namely to the real world – i.e. into an actual product development process?

Next, let us assume that confinement and absence are focal existentials: the starting point for the future design of a bench. Read the following texts with question 2 in mind.

C) The upholstery of the bench in tram No. 6, which takes Antoine to and from the central railway station, is in soft red plush and makes him think of Anny, i.e. deprival (overall designial). It also reminds him of how he used to gently caress her cheek when she was sad and how incredibly soft her skin was. Furthermore, it makes him feel how deeply he misses her and he cannot forgive himself for not putting up more of a fight back then. It was truly a big loss. Every time Antoine needs to run errands and is forced to go down to the station, he constantly thinks of what life with Anny would be like. Taking a seat, his hands resting on the red plush, makes him realize how radically different his life could have been. It might perhaps have been filled with love and joy – not loneliness and meaninglessness. He wonders why Anny has not replied to his last letter (at least as an act of politeness). Maybe they are married by now, the Egyptian guy and she. It is painful. The 10 minute trip actually makes him sick. In spite of this, Antoine sometimes takes the tram exclusively to remember Anny: pretending to pick her up at the station and holding her in his arms – forever. The “ritual” is some kind of punishment (sub-designial), i.e. an insane act in order to feel pain and thus more human.
1) **What does it mean to be Antoine?**
   - The designer identifies the basic form of being human (i.e. the existential), as confinement.

2) **What does it mean to design for confinement?**
   - The designer will be able to uncover the basic form of design being, i.e. the overall designial, to be deprival.

3) **Finally, identify the defining elements, i.e. punishment determining deprival.**
   - The designer opens up for a potential critical design example, i.e. punishment in the form of a bench.

D) The upholstery of the bench in tram No. 6, which takes Antoine to and from the central railway station, is in soft red plush and makes him think of Anny, i.e. deprival (overall designial). Antoine remembers when, just a few months ago, he took the tram only to put his hands on the seat and so remember her soft skin – merely to spark the strong satisfaction of self-harm a few seconds later. Nowadays, this feeling has turned into a calming sensation, providing a kind of safety, which is best explained as a lifeline: a root to reality or an anchor (sub-designial), so to say. He practically needs to take the tram just to feel alive. The last couple of weeks have made Antoine feel both safe and more at ease with himself than he has been in a long time. He decides to write another letter to Anny that very evening.

1) **What does it mean to be Antoine?**
   - The designer identifies the basic form of being human (i.e. the existential), as absence.

2) **What does it mean to design for absence?**
   - The designer will be able to uncover the basic form of design being, i.e. the overall designial, to be substitute.

3) **Finally, identify the defining elements, i.e. anchor determining substitute.**
   - The designer opens up for another potential critical design example, i.e. anchor in the form of a bench.

As pointed out by the examples, the answer to question 2 will create a single overall designial for each of the situations, more expressly deprival (A + C) and substitute (B + D). Accordingly, the sub-designials punishment and anchor will follow as answers to question 3. Moreover, the pair of designials (overall designial + sub-designial) represents fundamental forms of design being and – with respect to the existential designial analysis – decides what it means to be the bench as a design object.

To sum up, step 1 of the existential designial analysis leads to insight regarding what it means to be such a person, i.e. identifying the existential, whereas step 2 provides information on what it means to design for the relevant existential, i.e. uncovering the overall designial, and, finally, step 3 provides further direction on how to design with respect to the overall designial, i.e. opening up for sub-designials. Expressed differently, the three steps taken together form the critical method – the intention of which is to guide the designer through the process of generating critical design examples.

However, when putting the method to use, there are a few points which are important to bear in mind. First of all, the notion that the existential analysis as a whole is strictly about “forms of being human”, e.g. confinement, absence, etc. – and not about the “experience of being” such as when someone “feels restricted” or “appears to be unconscious”. One example of this would be a designer who designs a set of bed clothing for the “form” of sleeping – as such – and not for the person’s experience of sleeping. Similarly, a designer designing a uniform for the “form” of wearing – per se – and not the person’s experience of wearing it. By the same token, both the existential and the designial analysis distance themselves from empirical knowledge or, for that matter, any form of product semantic analysis, simply in order to focus on forms of being as such.

- In a few words, what is the main difference between an existential designial analysis and a functional analysis?

As specified in the introduction, the existential designial analysis looks at fundamental forms of being – human or object – in contrast to the functional analysis, which, as is implied by the name, addresses function. The difference lies first and foremost in the way the existential designial analysis describes existence as defined by the potential design – as opposed to the functional analysis, which analyses functionality defined by the intended design object.
What is confinement and absence as existentials?

As previously stated, the designer identifies fundamental forms of being human by asking what it means to be such a person. Regarding confinement and absence in particular, they are related principally through the way both of them refer to situations where a person is unable to leave a place – no matter if it is physical or mental or whether the duration is temporary or permanent – which does not support what is considered a “normal” state of existence for the person in question.

Although there is clearly a strong interrelation between confinement and absence, they are considered parallels in this context. These two existentials were originally chosen with the intention of somehow comparing them as two extremes and thus more easily find both similarities and differences regarding ways of being in remand prisons and ICUs. That being said, confinement and absence are merely two examples of – many – ways of existing as a human being in suchlike situations. (This, moreover, indicates that the existentials/designials are exchangeable due to the character of the environment being analyzed.)

In order to understand the similarities, we will bring out two of the most obvious parallels as represented by the two factors waiting (in order to receive a sentence in a remand prison and for healing in an ICU) and observing (in the form of surveillance in a remand prison and as a way of monitoring biological data in an ICU). On the other hand, what makes confinement different from absence is, above all, the aspect of penalty. In the same way, confinement brings to focus the (public) function of being held, indefinitely, as a suspect for doing something wrong – whereas absence boils down to being subjected to critical care.

Other shared characteristics worth mentioning are vulnerability resulting from being completely exposed and along with exposure and vulnerability follow the aspects of power and torture, which result in anxiety and powerlessness, affecting the person’s self-esteem, integrity and dignity and, finally, on top of that the element of suffering. In short, all of the above characteristics are good examples of how confinement and absence may manifest themselves in people.

In order to best make use of the existential analysis, each of the terms ought to be interpreted according to the following definitions:
Absence

- Absence as a fundamental form of being human/way of existing/mode of living represents forms of being such as unhealth and sickness (as in incapacity).

Situations best represented by the characteristics of absence are ones where the affected person is left with no other choice than to be taken care of and so is more or less put out of action – thus powerless and incapable of taking control – through periods of time spent bedfast. Accordingly, even though it is found to be in the best interest of the individual, absence leads to situations (falling outside what is considered a “normal” state of existence for the person in question) where the person is detached from his/her everyday ambience, including abrupt separation from near and dear ones and a distance from the normal or usual self – and is reduced to a mere patient.

To exist like this removes every chance a person has to perform as he/she expects to be able to, i.e. to be in charge of his/her life, both in the physical and psychological sense. The physical sense could e.g. include making decisions about when to turn in bed, take a deep breath or simply close one’s eyes, receive visitors, or tell the nurses to turn off the lights and to stop being so loud and annoying all the time. (In a worst case scenario: to make the decision when it is time to end the suffering by stopping the heart from beating.) Similarly, the psychological part may concern e.g. the fact that the individual no longer (at least for the time being) may decide whether or not to initiate, maintain or enjoy – even end – relationships, intimacy, etc. and, furthermore, what role to play in the sociocultural context (social status) to the test.


Confinement

- Confinement as a fundamental form of being human/way of existing/mode of living stands for forms of being, such as restriction and limitation (as opposed to freedom).

As touched on before, most situations characterized by confinement are those where the person in question is placed in forcible detention and because of this suffer from severe restrictions in multiple ways, regardless of the time spent pending. Owing to this, confinement, even though it involves being taken into governmental care, results in situations (falling outside what is considered a “normal” state of existence for the person in question) where the individual is being cut off both from people and the world outside the ward. Furthermore, the individual is dispossessed of all the things which define his/her character and individuality – thus reducing him/her into a mere prisoner.

To exist this way takes away everything which normally forms a person (physically as well as mentally), such as the power to choose whether to go for a long walk in the morning in order to have some fresh air or whether to go back to sleep. On the same note, choosing between fish and pork for dinner, when to take a shower, what clothes to wear or, in a more general sense, what things to surround oneself with (and to identify with). Under certain circumstances, this extends all the way to with whom to socialize, how much, and, beyond that, the requirement to fully comply with whatever form of communication legalized in that explicit facility – and so, putting personal relations as well as his/her place in the sociocultural context (social status) to the test.

As food for thought, the conclusion of this section is a fictive example, a quote from the well-known movie One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, which illustrates both deprival and substitute. The film is set in a mental institution and Mr.Cheswick – one of the patients – blows up in Nurse Ratched’s face during a therapy session over cigarettes that are being kept from him: “Look, I don’t want his cigarettes. And I don’t want his, or his, or his...or his, or his, or his... Or even yours. Do you understand that? I want my cigarettes, Miss Ratched! I want my cigarettes! I want mine, Miss Ratched! What gives you the damn right...to keep our cigarettes piled up on your desk... and to squeeze out a pack only when you feel like it, huh?” (Milos 1975).

In order to best practice the designial analysis, each of the terms are to be understood according to the following definitions:

What are deprival and substitute as overall designials?

As explained above, ‘designials’ are fundamental forms of design being and in order to identify the overall designials, the designer search the answers to what it means to design for the given existential. It is also important to remember that together, the overall designial and the sub-designials form the designial analysis, which – along with the existential analysis – generates critical design examples.

In order to explain deprival and substitute more extensively, many more factors needs to be brought forward than presented by the following pages and the examples at the back. The best way of doing so is to take theory into play and simply learn by doing. However, it is crucial that all explorers keep two things in mind. First of all, the “overall function” of penalty in the combination of deprival + punishment/threat – and, secondly, the one of caring in the combination of substitute + protection/anchor. (Here, a similarity to functional analysis may be noted: when a sub-function is removed, the product does no longer work – i.e. the critical design example loses its power if a overall designial is removed.)

Secondly, the fact that since both of these combinations will unquestionably stress the fundamental form of being human, i.e. the existential, the overall designial – whether deprival or substitute – will directly impact on the person’s life (with various outcomes) as it imposes a new set of principles onto his/her way of living. This situation may very well be expressed through the specific individual’s life-world (“Lebenswelt”: all the immediate experiences, activities and contacts that make up the world of an individual or corporate life. (Oxford Dictionaries 2011)). Moreover, it constitutes a paradox – one which actually nurtures the existential designial analysis in its entirety – to imply that only through first designing with the intention to e.g. cause discomfort, stress or harm to the person using the object, the critical design example can be considered fully functional or, so to say, to have fulfilled its purpose.
Deprival

- **Deprival** as a fundamental form of being signifies basic forms of design being such as that of *punishment* or *threat* – both of which feature in remand prisons and in *confinement* in this context – so manifesting the “overall function” of penalty.

When one or more design products, systems or similar exist as deprival, taking away or keeping back all that which normally embodies an item (such as memories, affiliation and the general prospect of giving it personal importance and thus also a definition according to oneself), the thing itself will disposess and deny the person in question his/her “*own*” version of the object. What is more, the deprival-thing will serve as a reminder of what is lost – and also why it is lost – with all the consequences that may entail. This overall designial can induce sub-designials such as *punishment* and *threat*.

Further clarifying deprival as a fundamental form of design being: in one way or the other, all of the things discussed so far give an idea of how the relation existential - overall designial is meant to work, i.e. the design object exists as deprival because the person in detention is in *confinement* to begin with. This particular situation is illustrated in *Film No. 1, Confinement - Design for deprival* (Torkildsby 2010), where the personal crochet butterfly – originally granting a sinful kind of contentment to the girl in question – takes on the fundamental form of deprival simply because it is removed from her and implicitly denies her having “*my*” belongings, “*my*” home, “*my*” life, etc.


Substitute

- **Substitute** as a fundamental form of being means basic forms of design being such as that of *protection* or *anchor* – both of which are present in ICU’s and in absence in this context – so manifesting the “overall function” of being subjected to critical care.

When one or more design products, systems or similar exist as a substitute, i.e. a stand-in, a (poor) replacement for the private item which has been chosen especially to coexist with the person in question, the thing itself takes the place of the private item and consequently serves in the stead of the original item. Such a product will serve to keep the individual away from his/her “*own*” version of the object, thus endangering feelings of recognition, belonging, safety, etc. which are particularly important in the process of healing. Similar to the overall designial above, a thing existing as a substitute is a reminder of what it compensates for – and perhaps even why – whatever implications that may bring about. As the designial analysis proposes, this overall designial will introduce sub-designials such as *protection* and *anchor*.

Also here it is better to make clear substitute as a fundamental form of design being. Everything that has been discussed up until now provides an idea of how the relation existential - overall designial is meant to work, i.e. the design object exists as a substitute because the person being cared for is in absence. In turn, this results in e.g. the institutional piece of textile from *Film No. 2, Absence - Design for substitute* (Torkildsby 2010): covering the person’s body, plainly existing as a representation of (i.e. a substitute for) his private crochet blanket – a fundamental form of design being that consequently takes away “*my*” bed, “*my*” home, “*my*” life, and so forth.

What are punishment, threat, protection and anchor as sub-designials?

Just as the overall designials are strongly related, so are the sub-designials. However, what first and foremost distinguishes the two is, in short, the idea that where the overall designial provides an answer to the question what it means to design for the given existential, the sub-designials identify the defining elements which determine the overall designial, thus completing the existential designial analysis. Furthermore, identifying the sub-designials will see the designer searching answers to the question what it means to define the particular overall designial.

Next is the element of significance. Just as in the functional analysis, where altering or removing a sub-sub-function will leave the overall function working normally, the overall designial stays unchanged even though a sub-designial may be altered or cease to function. Put differently: sub-designials are, as the name implies, subordinate and merely express a supplementary feature to the overall designial. Punishment and threat are somehow means of penalty, i.e. two basic forms in which deprival manifests itself, whereas protection and anchor, on the other hand, are additional modes of critical care, i.e. two basic forms in which substitute manifests itself.

As a consequence of the existential designial analysis, the sub-designials will not only add more tension to the relationship between the person in question and the specific institutional object, i.e. the punishment-thing, threat-thing, protection-thing or anchor-thing, in its present state as well as in future perspectives. They will also, as stated before, ultimately encroach on the fundamental form of being human (the existential), i.e. the person’s life situation. The main reason for this is simply that the fundamental form of design being, whether it is a product of deprival or substitute, has (temporarily) taken the place of the person’s own belonging. Add to this the fact that the totality of the circumstances, which is considered unreasonable to begin with, and the sub-designials basically make the individual suffer even more.

Remember also, before setting foot on the “dark side” of design thinking, that the basic distinction between a functional analysis and an existential designial analysis is this: a change of focus from analyzing the functionality of a design in use to analyzing the form of being human that a design in use defines.
Threat

- Threat as a fundamental form of being signifies basic forms of design being such as that of deprivation.

When one or more design products, systems or similar objects exist as a threat, there will be a material form of penalty in them, in particular the enforcement of some kind of “predetermined consequence” upon the person in prison. In addition to what has already been stated about the overall designial deprival, the punishment-thing will serve as a warning of what he/she is dispossessed of, why it was taken away and also what is being paid back for, i.e. the offense or fault, in either case resulting in the loss of something, whether physical or mental.

To exemplify how the relation overall designial - sub-designial is intended to work, Film No. 1, Confinement - Design for deprival (Torkildsby 2010) is referred to again. The rag mat takes the fundamental form of deprival the moment it is removed from the main character. Furthermore, the fact that the punishment-thing holds her back and so denies her having “my” crochet, “my” remaining belongings, “my” home, “my” life, etc. makes it an extended-penal: serving to impose shame, remorse, penance and so forth onto the person in retaliation.

See p. 46-47, 66-67 for further examples.

Punishment

- Punishment as a fundamental form of being stands for basic forms of design being such as deprivation.

When one or more design products, systems or similar objects exist as a punishment, there will be a material form of penalty in them, in particular the enforcement of some kind of “predetermined consequence” upon the person in prison. As punishment shares most of its essential elements with punishment, there is no need to repeat them. What differentiates the two sub-designials from one another, however, is the notion that not only will the threat-thing exist as a signal of what has been taken away and also why it was taken – but, as is mentioned above, because of that put him/her in jeopardy and so potentially induce further damage (physical as well as mental).

To illustrate how the relation overall designial - sub-designial is meant to work, Film No. 1, Confinement - Design for deprival (Torkildsby 2010) is used once more. The crochet butterfly takes the fundamental form of deprival the moment it is removed from the main character. Furthermore, the fact that the punishment-thing separates, thus removing “my” mat, the fear of losing even more, such as “my” remaining belongings, “my” home, “my” life, etc. becomes stronger. All in all, this forms an extended-menace: primarily serving to cause the person in retaliation suffering in the form of tension, physical discomfort, self-harm, pain, injury, and the like.

See p. 50-51, 62-63 for further examples.
Protection

- **Protection as a fundamental form of being means basic forms of design being such as that of substitution.**

When one or more design products, systems or similar objects exist as protection, there will be a material form of care in them, particularly providing a “shield”, a fortification against the surrounding environment. Above all, this will work in favor of the person who is bedridden, but it will also create a distance between the bed or a similar object and everything else – indicating and establishing a certain degree of privacy. Other than what has already been said about the overall designal substitute, the protection-thing will serve as an indirect suggestion of what is missing and also why it is gone, i.e. what is being restored (to health), i.e. the medical condition, with all the confusion that may bring along with it, either physical or mental.

To illustrate how the relation between overall designal - sub-designal is intended to work, *Film No. 2, Absence - Design for substitute* (Torkildsby 2010) is cited yet again. The institutional pillow takes the fundamental form of protection once the teddy bear is unavailable to the main character. However, the fact that the protection-thing takes the place of “my” teddy – and also distances him from having “my” remaining belongings, “my” home, “my” life, etc. – makes it a mere extended-care: offering a temporary safeguard to the person undergoing care.


Anchor

- **Anchor as a fundamental form of being stands for basic forms of design being such as that of substitution.**

Anchor is similar to protection in that when one or more design products, systems or similar objects exist as an anchor, there will be a material form of care in them, especially in terms of keeping the person in question calm: holding him/her securely “rooted” e.g. in bed. Because anchor shares most of its essential elements with protection, there is no need to develop them any further. What differentiates the two sub-designials, however, is the idea that the anchor-thing will – besides from existing as an indirect suggestion of what is missing and why it is missing, i.e. what is being restored (to health), also, as is mentioned above, serve to keep him/her safe (physically as well as mentally).

To give an example of how the relation overall designal - sub-designal is meant to work, *Film No. 2, Absence - Design for substitute* (Torkildsby 2010) is cited yet again. The institutional blanket takes the fundamental form of protection once the teddy bear is unavailable to the main character. However, the fact that the protection-thing takes the place of “my” teddy – and also distances him from having “my” remaining belongings, “my” home, “my” life, etc. – makes it a mere extended-care: offering a temporary safeguard to the person undergoing care.


To further illustrate the outline of designials, eight fictive scenarios are presented as food for thought:
Example 1:

Memories from the ICU, Petter, 030812 XXXX

I've no memories from the actual accident. But from the hospital stay, I remember most of all a big monstrous animal hanging from the roof. It was looking at me with the biggest eyes I've ever seen. I was afraid it was going to eat me. I desperately wanted to hide under the blanket, but it was too short to cover my face, the arm, which by the way was encased in a plaster cast and was pointing straight out, and my feet. I really didn't want my feet to be left out in the open either... Anyhow, I've been told that I embraced the pillow right away; I held it so tightly my knuckles turned white. I apparently buried my nose deep in it, he he. I guess I felt alone or afraid, or both. I don't know. After I woke up, a nurse told me that I'd screamed, even cried during the first night. A bit embarrassing really, being almost 14 and all... I also remember at some point sensing a familiar smell and the feeling of a specific kind of softness, as if my teddy bear Ozzy were there with me. I though it was another dream. Yet, I felt safer: the nightmares went away and later the nurses told me that I'd slept the whole night through. A couple of days later, I came back to full consciousness. Strange experience!

In this example Petter is in physiological shock. Expressed differently, he is living in a mode of absence, which is central in regard to what forms this way of being human – a way of existence that moreover makes "me" into "a patient". The institutional pillow – which somehow comforts Petter – but merely as a replacement for his teddy bear – constitutes the overall designial, i.e. substitute. This condition comes into being only because Petter exists in the particular form of absence in the first place. What is more, the pillow is giving him support, although in a substitute-way according to the designial analysis. Protection thus makes up the sub-designial and describes the secondary mode in which the object exists as a design: always relating to the level above in the existential designial analysis.

1) What does it mean to be Petter?
   = The designer identifies the basic form of being human (i.e. the existential), as absence.

2) What does it mean to design for absence?
   = The designer will be able to uncover the basic form of design being, i.e. the overall designial, to be substitute, etc.

3) Finally, identify the defining elements, i.e. protection determining substitute.
   = The designer opens up for another potential critical design example, i.e. protection in the form of a pillow.
This case depicts Anna in drug-induced coma, i.e. heavily sedated and in a deep state of unconsciousness. Pertaining to the existential analysis, she is living in a mode of *absence*, which is crucial regarding what forms this way of being human – a way of existence that, in addition, makes “me” into “a patient”. The institutional cotton blend blanket, which in some ways bring Anna relief by covering her – however, only temporarily taking the place of her crochet blanket – makes up the overall designial, i.e. *substitute*. The reason behind the condition can be found in the fact that Anna exists in the specific form of *absence* in the first place. Also, the cotton blend blanket is keeping her comfortable – but only in a substitute-way according to the designial analysis. As a result, *anchor* forms the sub-designial and defines the secondary mode in which the object exists as a design: constantly relating to the higher level in the existential designial analysis.

1) **What does it mean to be Anna?**
   = The designer identifies the basic form of being human (i.e. the existential), as *absence*.

2) **What does it mean to design for *absence***?
   = The designer will be able to uncover the basic form of design being, i.e. *the overall designial*, to be *substitute*.

3) **Finally, identify the defining elements, i.e. *anchor* determining *substitute***.
   = The designer opens up for another potential critical design example, i.e. *anchor* in the form of a blanket.

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**Example 2:**

**Patient diary, Anna, 340907 XXXX,**

Anna came to us on Monday, January 11th, 2012 at 11:20 AM. She had just had a heart transplantation and was here to recover. The procedure went on as normal: we inserted an endotracheal tube to assist her breathing, gave her medications through intravenous tubes and tucked her in blankets to keep the temperature stable. There were no complications during the day. In the night her temperature rose to 40.1°C, so we called for a doctor. Dr. Ivarsson found a deep sternal wound infection and decided to increase her drug dosage. She calmed down gradually and appeared to be asleep around midnight. A couple of hours later, Anna suddenly started to struggle with the balkan frame; she had pulled out all the tubes, so we had to put them back in. The cover was lying on the floor and she was all wet with sweat – even though her feet and hands were ice-cold. Her eyes were open and her face expressed severe stress. The body temperature was now 40.7°C, so we called for medical assistance again. Dr. Ivarsson further increased her dosage. Anna kept fighting throughout the night. At one point she managed to kick out the frame completely and was about to fall out when Nurse Jack came to rescue. Her relatives were notified about her condition early next morning and her husband came to visit at lunchtime. He was obviously worried, asked a lot of questions and took care of her as best as he could. He had brought a bag full of personal things, some clothes, her hairbrush and a picture frame and put them out on the night table. One of the things was a worn-out crochet blanket and he asked if it would be OK if he replaced the one from the hospital. Anna was heavily sedated and we could not communicate with her, but she seemed to react on touch and sound. When he swaddled her with the crochet from home, she somehow settled down – no more kicking legs or other involuntary movements. During the day she calmed down entirely, was receptive to all necessary treatment and communicated thirst, among other things. The fever is reducing every hour now and the wound seems to be healing well. We will keep her at the unit another day for precautionary reasons.
Example 3:

Memories from remand prison, Olle, 610113 XXXX,

I remember the first day in remand as it was yesterday. The first thing I got to know was that the guy who lived in the cell before me had strangled himself from the sink – which is no more than 40 inches off the floor, believe it or not. (How is that even possible?) Well, I couldn't stop imagining him lying there, I even smelled someone in the room. I felt truly sorry for him. I wish I knew what had happened, what was going on in his mind. To be honest, I was terrified the spell would pass on to me or something. Fuck, imagine if walls could speak... Ugh. I instantly got restless. I wanted to get out of there: go home to my own bathroom where I'd brush my teeth and wash my face in peace and quiet. I asked to swap cells, just to get rid of this feeling, but of course I had no say. The fact that someone had cleaned up and made it look like nothing had happened before letting me in – even replaced the sheet in front of the washbasin, if I'm not mistaken – just made me sick to the bones.

In this situation, Olle is locked up in remand prison. More precisely, he is living in a mode of confinement, which is essential with regards to what forms this way of being human – a way of existence that further makes "me" into “a prisoner”. The institutional sink, which by some means is accommodating Olle's needs – however, merely as a provisional for his washbasin at home – forms the overall designial, i.e. deprival. Similar to the logics of the two previous examples, this condition comes into being simply because Olle exists in the form of confinement in the first place. Moreover, the sink is convenient for him – although in a deprival-way according to the designial analysis. Punishment therefore makes up the sub-designial and describes the secondary mode in which the object exists as design: relating to the level above in the existential designial analysis with no exceptions.

1) **What does it mean to be Olle?**
   = The designer identifies the basic form of being human (i.e. the existential), as confinement.

2) **What does it mean to design for confinement?**
   = The designer will be able to uncover the basic form of design being, i.e. the overall designial, to be deprival.

3) **Finally, identify the defining elements, i.e. punishment determining deprival.**
   = The designer opens up for another potential critical design example, i.e. punishment in the form of a washbasin.
This narrative describes how Tom exists in prison. He is, according to the existential analysis, living in a mode of confinement. A mode which is crucial regarding what forms this way of being human – a way of existence that, in addition, makes “me” into “a prisoner”. Furthermore, Tom is living like this in two senses: the first one is quite obvious, i.e. the geographical sense, and the second one relates to Tom having some kind of psychological imbalance that defines his situation even further – mentally. The institutional uniform or, to be exact, parts of it which, initially, is there for Tom to wear – although it absurdly robs him of wearing his clothing – makes up the overall designial, i.e. deprival. This condition arises simply because Tom exists in the particular form of confinement. Furthermore, the uniform is providing him with some kind of cover – however, in a deprival-way according to the designial analysis. Consequently, threat forms the sub-designial and defines the secondary mode in which the object exists as a design: always relating to the higher level in the existential designial analysis.

1) **What does it mean to be Tom?**
   = The designer identifies the basic form of being human (i.e. the existential), as confinement.

2) **What does it mean to design for confinement?**
   = The designer will be able to uncover the basic form of design being, i.e. the overall designial, to be deprival.

3) **Finally, identify the defining elements, i.e. threat determining deprival.**
   = The designer opens up for another potential critical design example, i.e. threat in the form of a pair of socks.

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**Example 4:**

**Prisoner diary, Tom, 530912 XXXX,**

Tom came in Monday, August 2nd, 2010 at 20:30 AM. He was escorted by the local police after acting out violently in a public park nearby. He was under the influence of drugs and appeared somewhat upset, although still capable of rational behavior. Tom was given a uniform and a cell, and did not resist the procedures. He seemed to settle in quite quickly. After a few hours, the warden heard a distinct noise (someone hammering the door from inside one of the cells) and immediately went to see what was going on. She found Tom on the floor – with no clothes on – all sweaty and struggling, his arms and legs all over the place. Another ward was summoned. Together they managed to hold him down and so control the situation. Tom had a pair of socks stuffed down his throat. He was obviously in despair; panicking. His heart was pounding and he was shaking. The doctor on duty gave him sedatives in order to calm him down and, ultimately, allow him some sleep. It was clear that Tom was in critical need of medical care. However, due to regulations he had to stay the night in detention. A warden checked on him every 15 minutes and Tom seemed stable. The morning after someone from Forensic Psychiatry came to pick him up.
Example 5:

Patient diary, Carl, 091709 XXXX,

Carl was brought in on Sunday, December 2nd, 2011 at 21:15 AM. He was the only survivor of a car accident where both his parents and his sister died. Carl's skin was cold and clammy, his lips were blue and he was partly irresponsible (as if in psychological shock). The ambulance personnel had given him all necessary treatment and his pulse was weak and steady. Once registered at the unit, we did everything in our power to secure his medical condition. After a few hours, his EKG was back to normal, however he would not stop crying and his breath was rapid and shallow. Carl seemed to be in constant pain and his sleep was uneasy. Dr. Söderberg increased his dosage and two nurses stayed with him throughout the night. Early next morning, his other sister and grandparents came to visit. They were devastated and deeply marked by the situation. Carl was responding to their voices and seemed to turn his face to them – which in retrospect could be said to be the turning point of the recovery. Although they clearly wanted to hold him, the various tubes made it impossible. We could not arrange for that until Carl was more stable and at the time he was still struggling to breathe properly. The family sat next to his bed for hours. We left them alone. [...]
This case gives a picture of Victoria recovering from a traumatic experience. Pertaining to the existential analysis, she is living in a mode of absence, which is crucial regarding what forms this way of being human. The institutional head support, which by some means provides Victoria with comfort – however, only as a stand-in for her pillow, occupying the space where her personal stuff ought to be – makes up the overall designial, i.e. substitute. Also, the pillow is shielding her – but in a substitute-way according to the designial analysis. As a result of this, protection forms the sub-designial and defines the secondary mode in which the object exists as a design: constantly relating to the higher level in the existential designial analysis.

1) **What does it mean to be Victoria?**
   = The designer identifies the basic form of being human (i.e. the existential), as absence.

2) **What does it mean to design for absence?**
   = The designer will be able to uncover the basic form of design being, i.e. the overall designial, as substitute.

3) **Finally identify the defining elements, i.e. protection determining substitute.**
   = The designer opens up for another potential critical design example, i.e. protection in the form of a head rest.

Example 6:

**Memories from the ICU, Victoria, 950312 XXXX,**

I remember thinking when I first opened my eyes: Why is everything white? Where am I? Am I dreaming? After a few minutes a nurse came to my bed. She leaned over to see if I was awake – I jumped half a meter up in the air. Seriously, a stranger was in my face! I know she’s a nurse and all, that I should be happy she cares for me. I truly do, it’s not that... But honestly, couldn’t she at least announce that she was approaching me? I mean, people in general?? For sure, when they’re sticking their face like 30 cm from yours... You have no idea who they are or what they want. Not to forget, you just woke up and realized that you’re alone, some place far away from home. Anyway. I admit I didn’t feel very comfortable, more like abandoned and a bit scared. My first reflection was to hide. And so I did. I buried my face deep down in the pillow, cushion or whatever it’s called and kept quiet as a mouse. After some time, I looked up and realized she was gone. Good. The hours were extremely long. I asked for my parents, meaning I was REALLY bored! I couldn't read or watch TV and I got tired just lifting my arms, so I stayed in bed with my MP3-player on all day long. Mostly dozing off, I guess. My mum and dad came and stayed as long as visiting hours allowed them to. They brought chocolate. After that I slept some more. The next day I felt like moving about and I asked a nurse if I could get out of bed. She said yes, but told me to be careful. I actually sat in a wheelchair until the next visiting hour - slowly rolling around, trying to stay out of people's way. Quite an atmosphere at an ICU I must say: machines buzzing, nurses running, people weeping, some of them even crying their hearts out. On top of that it’s so cold and anonymous. Ah, everything is just wrong! I felt like I was on another planet, in a movie or something... At about 06:30 PM (visiting hours), I couldn't find my room. I was lost. (He he, pretty incredible even for me.) I asked a nurse, who had to check with the reception, but came back quickly to take me to my “box”. Lucky me...
Example 7:

Prisoner diary, Karolina, 830122 XXXX.

Karolina arrived at our facility on August 15th, 2011 at 21:07 PM. She had been awaiting her trial for three weeks and was starting to show symptoms of psychosis. Karolina had a history of depression and also a record of self-harm, so she was given regular therapy by one of our psychologists. Since she had tried to hurt herself also under our care and control, we were in the process of transferring Karolina to a psychiatric ward and expected the transfer to go through soon. Until such a time, she was kept under constant observation. On the regular route this morning, the warden found her lifeless in bed. The doctor who performed the autopsy said that it would have taken up to a week for the bowel perforations to have become fatal. (As of today, no one in the staff knows how and from where she got the means to do it.)

In this situation Karolina is imprisoned in a correctional facility. More precisely, she is living in a mode of confinement, which is essential with regards to what forms this way of being human. Besides, Karolina is living like this in two senses: the first being the most obvious one, i.e. physically speaking, and the second one relating to her having some kind of psychological imbalance that defines her situation even further, i.e. mentally. The institutional (drinking) glass, which is at Karolina’s hands so to speak – although strictly speaking only as representative for her glass – makes up the overall designial, i.e. deprival. Moreover, the glass is there for her convenience – although in a deprival-way according to the designial analysis. Threat therefore forms the sub-designial and describes the secondary mode in which the object exists as a design: relating to the level above in the existential designial analysis with no exceptions.

1) **What does it mean to be Karolina?**
   - The designer identifies the basic form of being human (i.e. the existential), as confinement.

2) **What does it mean to design for confinement?**
   - The designer will be able to uncover the basic form of design being, i.e. the overall designial, to be deprival.

3) **Finally, identify the defining elements, i.e. threat determining deprival.**
   - The designer opens up for another potential critical design example, i.e. threat in the form of a (drinking) glass.
EXAMPLES
Example 8:

Memories from remand prison, Madeleine, 631120 XXXX,

The one thing has stuck in my mind from those months in remand is the god dam mattress. It made me feel like I was sick – constantly. I remember asking for more bed sheets to in an effort to reduce the plastic feeling, but they could not give me more than the one I already had, of course. (One warden even asked if I was the princess herself in the “Princess and the pie”, the rude bastard!) I understand their motives, but still – I was a responsible adult and not at all suicidal. During the period I was sick with fever, I recall waking up in the middle of the night thinking I wet myself. I got up, took everything off and spent the rest of the night on the humid, sticky plastic mattress. And, as one would expect, it was too cold to use the blanket as a sheet. The next morning I had to tell the warden. I was afraid to suffer the comments again. On top of that I was embarrassed, because, frankly, I was not 100 % sure what had happened...

This last narration exemplifies how Madeleine exists in prison. She is, with respect to the existential analysis, living in a mode of confinement – which is crucial regarding what forms this way of being human. The institutional mattress, which is there for Madeleine to rest on – although paradoxically robbing her of having her mattress, her beddings, her bed, her home, her life, etc. – makes up the overall designial, i.e. deprivation. Furthermore, the mattress is certainly providing Madeleine with some kind of comfort – although, in a deprivation-way according to the designial analysis. Consequently, punishment forms the sub-designial and defines the secondary mode in which the object exists as a design: always relating to the higher level in the existential designial analysis.

1) What does it mean to be Madeleine?
   = The designer identifies the basic form of being human (i.e. the existential), as confinement.

2) What does it mean to design for confinement?
   = The designer will be able to uncover the basic form of design being, i.e. the overall designial, to be deprivation.

3) Finally, identify the defining elements, i.e. punishment determining deprivation.
   = The designer opens up for another potential critical design example, i.e. punishment in the form of a mattress.
Two former classmates spend an afternoon together in the name of design. One of them, A, worked as an industrial designer until three and a half years ago, when she began to study for a doctorate in design, and the other, B, has spent the seven years since graduation in various consultancies: working both as an in-house and a freelance designer – at home as well as abroad. The main reason for the reunion is not merely an occasion for a trip down memory lane, catching up on their lives so far and consuming a considerable amount of coffee; its primary motivation is a discussion on whether, and if so to what extent, designers are open to critical methodology asking questions about how we traditionally do design – and also why – and in this way “rock the boat”.
DIALOGUE
A: Lately I have been giving the “dark side” of design thinking a lot of reflection. What are your thoughts about this subject?1
B: What do you mean, “dark side”?

A: What! Is there any difference between “dark side” and “dark side”, in this particular point of being “dark side”? (Plato 1927).
B: Can’t quite see what you’re getting at, but I’m pretty sure there’s more than one side to this – just like everything else in life.

A: If that is the case, then please enlighten me.
B: Well, for starters, there’s the one, perhaps even the mother of them all, pointing to consumption. I’m not just thinking about the throw-away culture we live in – literally threatening the environmental resources and feeding global inequality: making high-income consumers consume more, poor producers poorer, etc. – but rather the kind of darkness that we’re (at least partly) to blame for. I mean, as designers.

A: Although these are issues of huge importance, undeniably so, and interesting to bring to the table for the same reason, they are not among the topics of today’s discussion, so I suggest we leave it at that.
B: But I’m getting there – just hear me out.

A: Of course.
B: It’s like this book by Papanek I read once, where he starts off by saying: “There are professions more harmful than industrial design, but only a very few of them.” (Papanek 2000, p. ix). And Nussbaum, Business Week’s innovation and design guru, simply opened a speech (at Parson’s) a few years ago with “DESIGNERS SUCK” (Nussbaum 2007). Isn’t this exactly the message you are trying to push through with this manual?

A: Indeed, you make a valid argument and it would work fine as a starting point. However, first we need to make clear something that is quite essential. Now, what can the “dark side” of design thinking be?
B: A little help, perhaps?

A: Let us consider it from a different angle. Suppose someone had asked us to elaborate upon what makes design “harmful” and, further, how to deal with the complications that may arise from this; possibly even come up with suggestions for how to do design differently. What would the answer be? (Plato 1927).
B: Aha! I see. Well, I’d say the fact that we (as designers) still – despite experiencing all the earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, droughts, forest fires and you name it of the last few decades – support what Papanek calls “the worst excesses of a profit-seeking system” (Papanek 2000, p. 333) and actually continue “falling over” ourselves “to kiss corporate ass” (Design Council 2007) – as I believe Barnbrook2 declared once – is the biggest reason why. How to deal with it, on the other hand, is another story – though […]

A: I am sorry to interrupt, but if you are implying “true” market needs, hence also sustainability, lifestyle and so forth as an answer to the question, that is not exactly what I had in mind.
B: What about SRD (“Socially Responsible Design”) in the bigger scope then? Not only design to deal with environmental issues – but social, economic and political issues as well (Davey et al 2005). And, to finish off, the fact that we’ve got a long way to go yet.

A: You are definitely drawing nearer to darkness.
B: Oh right, what else but existential design?! (…) So, pretty much what I said, but with different twist.

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1 Plato’s dialogue “Minos” begins with Socrates asking his companion: “Tell me, what is law?”. From there on, the discussion is driven by questions and answers (The Socratic Method): putting claims and beliefs to the test of reason and analysis. This form of debating has inspired the development of this work as well. First of all, for argumentative purposes, i.e. to move the discussion forward – stimulating critical thinking and making clear ideas – between the two (A and B) or sometimes three (A, B and T) characters in a way that helps them (B and T) explore and understand the concept of “Existential design”.

2 According to the Design Museum, Barnbrook is one of the UK’s most active graphic designers. By successfully combining “originality, wit, political savvy and bitter irony” (British Council 2007), he makes strong statements about e.g. corporate culture, consumerism and politics. The Design Museum also claims he is “pioneering the notion of graphic design with a social conscience”, which may be one of the reasons why the Design Council highlights Barnbrook as a good example of a designer who takes sustainability to heart.
DIALOgUE

A: Obvious, isn’t it? Sorry for the confusion, I am aware that the term is just barely mentioned in the Design manual. I am glad to know, however, that we are on the same side before loosing ourselves to discussion.
B: In my book, you’re deep down there and I’m up here with my feet safely planted on the ground. But I trust this conversation to be about demonstrating “existentials” (fundamental forms of being human) and “designials” (fundamental forms of design being) and so make sure we come to some kind of agreement. Or more correctly, you persuading me of when, how, and, finally, more in detail why to implement critical methodology into our “designerly ways of knowing” (Cross 2002)?! (You look surprised, of course I read Cross back in my day.)

A: Would you care to explain more thoroughly?
B: Yeah, sure. (…) Actually, except from the obvious fact that critical methodology brings thoughts to my mind I wouldn’t dare regard as coming even close to design before reading the manual, I don’t know where to start.

A: What about in your own backyard then, design practice? We proceed by basically expanding upon your “designerly” (Ibid) ways of working, in relation to the existential designial analysis that is, and take it from there.
B: Fair enough.

A: A couple of minutes ago you pointed out that the purpose of this reunion is for us to reach an understanding of why, how, when, etc. to put critical methodology into practice. If we manage to do just that, will you be slightly more convinced about its significance? (Or at least tempted to give it a try just for the sake of curiosity?)
B: Sure!

A: Excellent. Designers always speak in terms of “problems” and how best to solve these, which makes us “solution focused” as defined by Cross (Ibid, p. 12). Am I correct?
B: Yep.

A: What if the method(s) applied to a development process is not sufficient. How would we know?
B: Guess not until after someone, or I’d better say far more than one, files a complaint about the product.

A: What do you think would happen next?
B: That would, of course, depend on the context, but if the product contains hazardous materials or parts which are unsafe and dangerous to e.g. small children, the product would immediately be withdrawn from the market (and hopefully well revised throughout the whole chain, before the possible launch of a new edition of the product). However, if the product has minor shortcomings, such as a defect in the glaze or similar, the consumer would probably shortly receive a new one.

A: Supposing the product was Pernilla’s uniform (Design manual, p. 15) and you were the warden who found her hanging from the window bar with strips of the uniform bound together tightly and tied around her neck, would it not be too late to first track down the manufacturer’s e-mail or phone number, then prepare for a never-ending process of getting hold of the person(s) in charge of the product line, and finally – if luck was on your side – make a formal statement of the dissatisfactory nature of the uniform, in other words, that it does not function the way it was intended to: covering, protecting and to various degrees isolating the wearer from the surroundings?
B: This is absurd.

A: Absurd indeed, but do I have a point?
B: Absolutely, that’s what’s so absurd.

A: Why is that?
B: Because. (…) Just like you’ve written in the manual, we have absolutely no power over this. If Pernilla wants to die, she’ll ultimately find a way to commit suicide. Sad but true.

A: Hence there is no point of even trying to develop better products for environments such as prisons (or possibly any at all)?
B: That’d be the same as denying development.
DIALOGUE

A: Correct. So, what is it that designers do?
B: Quite simply help people (if I may use such a cliché). Designers make an impact, a difference, in one way or the other, whether it concerns our wellbeing or that of our successors. In a way, we create future conditions. Or as I remember reading somewhere about Droog – and I’d like to think it’s this straightforward – that we should aim to “[...] define the next generation of global design [...]” (Droog 2011).

A: In other words, we ought always to look for a superior way of developing products, regardless if it is a professional chef’s knife or an artificial pacemaker, and thus get closer to the “problem”?
B: Couldn’t agree more. I still find it difficult though, when you indicate (in the manual) that, today, product designs do not embody any kind of essential value or, if you like, express meaning: in my opinion that comes close to insulting the entire design profession. I mean, where do you put – let’s say – Behling & Co’s many time award-winning Serpentine Solar Shuttle (SolarLab 2011), driven entirely by the sun and thus completely pollution-free, inspiring others to follow in the same direction, or the life jackets (Norsk Form 2010) some colleagues of mine re-designed for Ugandan fishermen a couple of years back – by making the most of locally accessible materials and already established production techniques, they made sure the indigenous people themselves are able to sustain the life jackets, as well as manufacturing them, thus not only making the product available but most of all affordable for the fishermen, or for that matter, last year’s Red Dot winner Chess* (HKPolyU 2011): a chess game for the visually impaired, if not under essential and meaningful design?!

A: And, one “solution” to the things we are discussing is? (I will respond to the rest of your argument later.)
B: Can’t believe you got me right where you want me: next to you, deep down where everything is dark and cold and designers think of all possible solutions to a design problem rather than making a fair attempt at actually solving it.

A: Although you have to agree that it is a pretty romantic idea?
B: You forgot naïve and totally unrealistic. Where I come from (and you come from as well, although it seems to have slipped your mind) practitioners are expected to produce innovative design solutions – mostly consumption-driven and mass-producible – hoping to sell millions of copies. To do so, designs must be neutral, clean and pure. Right?

A: I’d like to believe otherwise, but time will tell.
B: I’m completely with you on the consumption part, yet I’m not ashamed to admit it is the industry which is doing the string-pulling. We’re simply puppets. No? And about the mass market or average consumers to be exact, it’s needless to say they’re (including me, sometimes) just “tagging” along – more or less blindly.

A: Are you indicating that commercial design is entirely without any form of ideology – a design philosophy, completely unaffected by values? Expressed differently, the design process is at no point influenced by e.g. religion, politics or other world views or, for that matter, ways of viewing reality in general? If that is so, how would you explain (although they exist somewhere between commerce and conceptualism) e.g. Droog’s latest manifesto (Droog 2010)? Not to mention Papanek’s philosophy, which challenged contemporary practitioners to address global challenges and accordingly involve in what he termed "Design for the Real World" (Papanek 2000) – and, I dare say, stimulated all that which you spoke so warmly about, namely the concept of “Socially Responsible Design” in its broadest sense? Besides, in my opinion they both say something about your first quote, namely that the role of the designer ought to include defining: “[...] define the next generation of global design [...]” (Droog 2011).

B: Well, when you put it like that, of course not.
A: Thank God! So, by designing with respect to the existential designial analysis or the like, you could purposely add something more valuable to the world of mass consumption than a shiny product ready to replace the all too fast-fading model from last year?
B: Guess so. You’re starting to sound a bit sarcastic by the way.
A: Sorry, but you must understand it as engagement.
B: Understood.

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3 “We need a new design integrity. We redirect creative energy. We redefine the lifecycle. We create ongoing value. We start with what’s easily available. We want sensible innovation. We redesign until we find an owner. We care about where it goes. We invite everybody to participate. We celebrate the new owners. We enable you to share.” (Droog 2010).
A: Well then, with what can the outcome of this critical methodology, these critical design examples, contribute?

B: A new way of attacking design problems that “question [the designers’] assumptions and preconceived ideas about the design being per se” (Design manual, p.10). But what’s even more important, “bring to light perspectives […] which [the designer] would otherwise tend to forget […] [thus] comes closer to understanding […] the complications which may arise if this aspect of design thinking is ignored” (Ibid, p. x). I get the picture.

A: Yes, absolutely. Nevertheless, I would like to add something. Dunne & Raby argue that there are two categories used to describe design: affirmative design and critical design. They are defined as follows: “The former reinforces how things are now, it conforms to cultural, social, technical, and economic expectations” (Dunne & Raby 2001, p. 58) and this description fits most design. Whereas, “The latter rejects how things are now as being the only possibility, it provides a critique of the prevailing situation through designs that embody alternative social, cultural, technical or economic values” (Ibid). In my opinion, this is a very good observation and still highly relevant a decade later.

B: And in the name of the existential designial analysis, this perspective could be outlined to – say – commercial design driven by expectations vs. existential design fuelled by something else (…) such as ideals? Or maybe value? (By the way, I reckon this is critical design examples in a nutshell?)

A: Exactly.

B: Meaning the designer will have to give up some of the income, alternatively spend periods of his/her life working two jobs, to have a better conscience?

A: That is one way of looking at it. (You make it sound so dramatic.)

B: You’re aware that this may be considered bad news for designers (such as myself) practicing out there in the “real world” – not to mention purely artistic work?

A: I do not mind at all actually, particularly the last point. (…) This surely is an interesting topic, however, let us keep it for later and stick to the subject for now.

B: OK. One last thing… You better check out – if you’ve not already done so – a website I stumbled over like half a year ago, called “Apocalypse Faster!” (Marttila 2011). Ever heard of it? It’s a web campaign where designers, or anyone really, can “propose” concepts as food for thought. However, instead of adding new perspectives on design in the “existential way”, their focus is on sustainable design. Nevertheless, critical. And of course, this Danish artists group I found when I did research on biogas several years ago (I believe they call themselves Superflex or something similar). Anyway, I particularly remember the project Supergas (Superflex 2011), which was pretty much a huge balloon full of animal waste, which, hooked up to the “famous” Poul Henningsen lamp, delivered light to a “poor” (sorry, but I just hate to take the word “poor” in my mouth) African family. If you ask me, they both touch upon global inequality and climate problems in a critical way – plus Supergas does it in a design porn kind of way if you know what I mean.

A: Thanks! I will definitely look into that. (…) In case you did not notice, we just answered the “Why” in our agenda for today, that is why the existential designial analysis ought to be born and bred in the first place, leaving us with 2h 10 min and a “How” and a “When” to implement it.

B: Can’t say I’m fully satisfied with crossing out the “Why” though.

A: May I ask why?

B: I simply don’t see the user in all this: the reason we do design to begin with. (…) I know many designers have said similar things about user experience and so on – and I’m far from an expert – but I especially remember this UX-guy, Brown (Eightshapes 2011) (who either was supposed to or actually did hold a lecture at the university. I don’t remember, I wasn’t there). Anyway, I clearly recall the advertising prior to the event. Put into one sentence it would be something like “although clients seem to think it’s possible to solve all the problems of the world in a single go, it’s of course so much more complicated”. (…) You see, I’m following Hess’s blog, “Pleasure & pain” (Pleasure & pain 2011) and some years back she wrote an article on this “misconception” where Brown was mentioned amongst others. His take on this was: “It must be an ongoing effort, a process of continually learning about users, responding to their behaviours, and evolving the product or service.” (Ibid). My point being, I believe this applies to all kinds of design – not only information architecture, interaction design, interface design, user experience design (UXD), or whatever its proper name is. This makes critical methodology more a way of expressing ideas for me, you marking ground so to speak, than design for the customer, consumer and user.

A: You make it sound like I am in denial of the rest of the design world.

B: Aren’t you?
DIALOGUE

A: On the contrary. If I had no consent in what has been done, said, written, etc. about design – in all its disciplines – we would never be sitting here having this discussion.
B: Big words.

A: Indeed! I dare say some big accusations from your side as well.
B: Point taken.

A: Later on, remind me to bring up the difference between design research and design practice.
B: Okay.

A: Let us go back to experience design (XD). Did you intentionally use the words “customers, consumers, and users” (Norman 2006), even though the Design manual encourages doing otherwise?
B: Sorry, I guess it’s the practitioner in me talking. (…) Actually, we always used these terms when referring to the person(s) intended to use the product we design – throughout the entire education.

A: I know; I was there. All the more important to stress the fact that this way of talking about individuals brings us to the very backbone of the existential designial analysis: those who are admitted to an ICU or a remand prison are people – not mere “patients” or “prisoners” – why we may further free ourselves from applying these rather degrading labels. Doing so might open some doors.
B: I remember that discussion, some 10 years back, right? (Don’t expect me to do any namedropping though.)

A: It was Norman, the advocate for Human-centered design (HCD) himself, who coined the phrase, “Talk about people: not customers, not consumers, not users” (Ibid). He managed to engage most of the experience design-community with his points of view.
B: Aha, of course. (…) I read his bible, *The Design of Everyday Things* (Norman 2002), at some point, but I’ve kind of lost touch with him since then.

A: In that case, I will take the opportunity to elaborate his idea: “Customer – you know, someone who pays the bills. Consumer – one who consumes. User, or even worse, end user – the person who pushes the buttons, clicks the mouse, and keeps getting confused.” (Norman 2006). Although UXD, XD, HCD and similar design movements are beyond the focus of the existential designial analysis, the latter approach – call it ergonomics, human factors or Human-centered design – is interesting, since the state of being depersonalized appears at both of the institutions discussed in the Design manual.
B: Totally. “End user” (Ibid) etc. is off!

A: Having cleared that out of the way, I would like to return to something you said earlier. Firstly, an existing design product does express meaning – by its very nature – to people and, further, this is already being achieved without employing the existential designial analysis or a similar method. Secondly, commercial products must be neutral, clean and pure in order to sell with high profits. Do I remember your words correctly and is this still your opinion?
B: Yeah (?)

A: Then I would first like to place emphasis on the contradiction these statements hold, that is if a product is developed with the plan to be neutral, clean and pure – how can it be meaningful at the same time?
B: All products simply begin to express meaning, in one way or another, as soon as they’re taken into use. (That’s what product semantics are all about, aren’t they?) Like, if I use the oven to bake my bread, it has one purpose. However if I use it to dry up my shoes, because I desperately need them in 30 min, it has a different purpose.

A: Hence, meaning relates to use and is not present in the thing itself? Put in other words, it is something we pass on (as humans) and not something that is emitted by the oven itself (as an object)?
B: Never thought of it this way – but sure, it sounds reasonable.

A: It is tempting to ask what meaning the oven has – as such – but we are progressing towards that anyway. (…) While on the subject, I would like to add that in products which are mass produced there is nothing in the thing itself that makes it different, and thus meaningful, just because it is supposed to fulfill the needs of “customers, consumers, and users” (Ibid). Conversely, a craftsman carving a rocking chair to suit his grandma perfectly represents a different set of values. In many ways, Borgman (Borgman 1984, p. 196) argues along the same lines when he uses the kitchen utensils of a gourmet cook to exemplify “the depth of design” or “focal things” as he terms objects which “[…] require a practice to prosper within […]” (Ibid), meaning
that the family dinner is a focal thing since it is such a substantial part of social life, why it has also become tradition and culture, and accordingly its preparation forms a focal practice. He further states that the utensils do not represent the world – as opposed to technological devices – but “[... ] allow the world to be present in its own right.” (Ibid). Yet, more importantly he says that “[... ] things, however, can have and hold this deeply disclosive power only if they are so designed [...]” (Borgman 1995, p. 20) and, of course, preserved by a close relation to practice. Also, Heidegger’s example of how a “thing” is defined by its “nearness” – as opposed to “remoteness” (Heidegger 2001) – in relation to its potential user (in particular by its offering of gifts) is along the same line of thinking. Moreover, what makes up for example a jug as a “thing” is illustrated in his essay “The Thing”, where he writes: “The spring stays on in the water of the gift. In the spring the rock dwells, and in the rock dwells the dark slumber of the earth, which receives the rain and dew of the sky. In the water of the spring dwells the marriage of sky and earth. It stays in the wine given by the fruit of the wine, the fruit in which the earth’s nourishment and the sky’s sun are betrothed to one another. In the gift of water, in the gift of wine, sky and earth dwell. But the gift of the outpouring is what makes the jug a jug. In the jugness of the jug, sky and earth dwell.” (Ibid, p. 170).

A: What are you getting at?

B: Most contemporary approaches to industrial design pay little attention to the mediating role of artifacts (Verbeek 2005, p. 204) and presenting his own contribution on the matter, he reflects on work done by philosophers before him, for example Jaspers, Heidegger, Ihde, Latour and Borgmann. He addresses Jasper’s analysis of the “implications of mass production” in these words: “The relation between human beings and artifacts comprise more than what is visible when one pays attention to the origin of the artifacts. An artifact can play more roles in human life than functional ones.” (Verbeek 2005, p. 30). Following this thread, there are surely many sophisticated ways of “[... ] fusing industry and craft, high and low tech, tradition and the contemporary [...]” (Jongerius 2011), just as Jongerius states – although many (designers) seem to have forgotten they exist. She continues this argumentation in the book I suggested for you to read for today, saying, “Now, in 2003, low-cost production no longer plays a significant part in the design philosophy of most people in the field. Industrial mass production, therefore, is under fire. Ironically, this is accentuated by the most positive quality of the industrial product: the speed with which it renews itself.” (Schouwenberg 2003, p. under the headline “Beyond nostalgia”). This gives a good indication of what awaits future design professionals and, above all, it shows the importance of developing alternative approaches to design. Anyway, to sum up, the chair clearly has qualities relating to design not merely for example commerce and this in particular is what critical methodology attempts to address and, subsequently, spur debate over. Are you with me?

B: You couldn’t possibly mean that if grandma X got her rocking chair from her beloved son – who bought it in an expensive furniture shop, although a member of a chain of stores – she wouldn’t be able to find any significance, meaning, value or importance whatsoever in that piece of furniture? But, on the other hand she’d find it immediately with a chair flawlessly tailored just for her? (…) I’ve a hard time believing this to be true - isn’t this up to grandma X?

A: Well, [...]
was handmade by someone they care deeply for?

A: May I ask, what is your point?
B: That it’s all about personal experience! (Haven’t you read for example Proust? I know this is a bit off, but he’s basically looking for time lost in seven volumes or so – and at least in the one I’ve read he seems to have found just that in practical, everyday things.) (Proust 1982).

A: In your opinion, for the moment putting phenomenology aside, does the meaning come with grandma or the rocking chair?
B: Autsch! (…) Whatever, it’s difficult not to attribute this to some kind of semantic feature – if you know what I mean.

A: You seem to be confused regarding the distinction between designials and the umbrella of "product semantics". Tell me, what does the latter term mean to you? (Plato 1927).
B: Coming from a rather transport-oriented design institute, I’ll never forget the example of the Lamborghini (Krippendorff 2006, p. 48) and its "semantic turn" (Krippendorff). Partly because of the picture my (by then former) professor painted of the driver as a stereotype with long chest hair and gold chains, but nevertheless, Krippendorff, right? As I remember it, he argues that design should focus more on what things actually mean, what value they have to us, and less on how they ought to function. Since we’ve got no say in “when, where, why, by whom and, most importantly, how the [thing] is used” (Design manual, p. 16) anyway, this makes perfect sense. Did I answer your question?

A: Not really. All the same, let me rephrase what I said or should have said. Take the Lamborghini, for example. Does the fundamental form of design being come to mind – at all – when thinking of the car as a design in terms of semantics?
B: Not when you say it like that.

A: What does strike you, however?
B: Lots of thoughts on why the Lamborghini makes him feel good, what driving it shape him into – also, what it communicates to others – even though it’s only for a short time. Further, how important this car is to him and, finally, how common it is to have such a “lifeline” when existence seems hopeless.

A: Put differently, you are speaking of gaining an understanding of how “perceptible features”, that is to say “the subjective quality of his experience” (Sosa, Villanueva 2004, p. 70), has impact on the situation as a whole. Thus also culture, tradition, symbols, meaning and so on?
B: Definitely not my choice of words – but yeah, something like that.

A: And all of this would be an explicit part of the process when designing a car with respect to the existential desigual analysis?
B: Guess not, since you’re asking with this rather hilarious Platonic undertone again. Anyhow, not directly (or intentionally).

A: Can you explain why, in a few words?
B: Sure. As you repeat over and over again in the manual: it’s all about the design being as such and not – let’s say – the driver’s feeling of ecstatic satisfaction when driving the Lamborghini way above the speed limit.

A: Good.
B: Phew…! I must admit it’s rather tricky to keep it this abstract.

A: I agree with you completely. What might help, though, is to remember this next time semantics comes to mind: “Design concerns itself with the meanings artifacts can acquire by their users.” (Krippendorff 1995, p. 153). These are in fact Krippendorff’s words and, later in the article, he responds in connection to this statement that: “Artifacts by themselves, much like figures without a ground or words without a context have no stable meanings.” (Ibid).

B: Appreciated. So, correct me if I’m wrong, but you’re looking to establish a way to design objects without a ground or, to use Krippendorff’s words, without a context and this way get to the various forms of design being? Meaning, you don’t really care about things here and there and what they may mean – aside from the actual blueprint of them or, as I think you call it somewhere in the manual, their “method of construction” (Design manual, p. 16). Yes?

A: Well, yes, but let me explain it more accurately. It is about the distinction form of design being vs. what design expresses when considered to be a sign or a symbol, that is form, color and other visible features of a product, or in other words, desiguals vs. semantics. (…) I simply believe anyone designing (and doing research for that matter) with respect to the existential desigual analysis will come closer to
understanding “existential design” and, in this way, “rock the boat”. (...) All right then, we have succeeded in making a distinction between designals (forms of design being) and product semantics (relating to use), but how do you place designals in relation to function?

B: Easy. “Function” is of course what the product we design is intended to do while using it (its task, so to speak) and, as I’ve said earlier, a “designal” is a basic form of design being. (...) Hey, wait a second!

A: Something wrong?
B: No. Well, yes. I can’t understand this in any other way than designals already being part of the product.

A: In what way?
B: Not directly, but still, in the form of functional requirements (later becoming the various functions). Finally, also that which makes a product what it is – whether it’s a bench or a car, bed clothes or a uniform – thus also in the “form”. It has to be! If not, no benches or cars, bed clothes or uniforms would work as well today (I mean, as benches, cars, bed clothes, uniforms, etc.) as they’ve always done before.

A: The point is that they do not – and they never have – not in the sense you seem to think, anyhow, that is with functions as the only underlying scheme of a product or “method of construction” (Design manual, p. 16) as you concluded some minutes ago. (For instance, think of the oven you used as an example when we discussed semantics.) In fact, this is what the whole thesis is about; moreover, what we have been discussing for over 45 minutes now. (...) To avoid further confusion, forms of design being are parts of products in the way/mode of being in which the object exists as a design, hence designal.
B: So we can’t call a spade a spade?

A: Exactly.
B: You got me confused. What’s a spade then?

A: Do you prefer the long or short version?
B: Long’s fine.

A: Heidegger (Heidegger 2004) differentiates between “presence-at-hand” (Vorhandenheit) and “readiness-at-hand” (Zuhandenheit) when describing two notions of entities in the world, or “Being-in-the-world” (In-der-Welt-sein) to be conceptually coherent to his work. Picture a spade: it is invisible to us (“ready-at-hand”) when we dig a grave, that is to say we are occupied with digging and not the spade (tool). If the handle breaks, however, your hand starts bleeding and the spade become the focus of our attention, it is “present-at-hand”. The latter is more of a theoretical approach in contrast to the [...] 
B: Sorry, but can a girl change her mind?

A: Let it be so then. In short, a spade may also be explained like the authors of The Things That Matter do when discussing the “turn towards things” and how this brings science and technology closer to industrial design. A tool – such as a spade – could be described by the same token, namely: “[...] when we strip all nonmaterial aspects of a product, something remains that is more than language, more than symbol, meaning, function, or icon. What remains is the thing as thing.” (Verbeek & Kockelkoren 1998, p. 4).
B: Adding this to what we just agreed to, a spade, or any kind of thing really, can be the “[...] thing as thing [...]” (Ibid) – just as “[...] figures without a ground or words without a context [...]” (Krippendorff 1995) – but only if it’s designed like that – say – by the existential designalial method?

A: Amen.
B: Are you being sarcastic?

A: Quite the opposite. You should know that I have spent the last three and a half years reaching the “bottom” of this (and, off record, it has involved a lot of banging my head against a wall).
B: And what you found was the “dark side” of design thinking? Now, that’s ironic – somehow.

A: I am well aware of that.
B: Guess I can take a little comfort in that. Anyhow, I’ve still got trouble identifying people in all this. The fact that the “user” is no longer the center of the development process tears down just about everything we’ve learned.

A: People are indeed in focus, in fact, they are absolutely essential in the existential designalial analysis. I had the impression that you read the Design manual thoroughly?
B: I did, I did. But you’re now fronting the critical method as a way to design
DIALOGUE

products without a ground or a context towards things as things. Besides, as a designer I focus on nothing else but fundamental forms of being (human or design), which isn’t exactly making this any easier.

A: Are you familiar with the concept of Dasein?
B: Nope.

A: But you seem to grasp the notion of being an object – as such – as in its ontological and philosophical sense or in “[...] the kind of being that for which its own way of being is an issue.”? (Karlström 2006, p. 2).
B: Yep (though, it seems I do so only to some extent).

A: In any case, this is truly an ideal way to go on with the discussion. However, I suggest that we do it properly and start from the very beginning – which is to say, with fundamental forms of being human (existentials).
B: Sounds like a plan.

A: What do you think, ought we to grab a cup of coffee first?
B: Perfect.

(After something like 5 minutes.)

A: As we proceed, keep in mind that the most important thing to understand about the concept of existentials is its relation to the initial part of the existential desigial analysis, that is, firstly, focusing on asking what are the questions, the answer to which initiates the existential analysis, and, secondly, what are the answers, the answer to which state the relevant existential.
B: Bring it on.

A: Existentials as a method of defining and illustrating ways of life (hence the notion designials, obviously) is used to examine and so come to an understanding concerning fundamental forms of being human, such as those of absence and confinement. In his magnum opus of 1927, Being and Time (Sein und Zeit, Heidegger 2004), Heidegger presents three modes of being human, and one of them, “Dasein”, is used to characterize the various forms of “existence”. In order to understand this, he analyses, describes and organizes them into different categories, formally known as existentials (Existentiale). I have openly borrowed this method of identifying, accessing and coordinating what it means to be human from the philosophical movement, merely because it made sense according to my approach.
B: Sorry, I just need to ask something. (…) Always when I hear “life”, “human beings” and “big thinkers” in one sentence, phenomenology comes up next. And if I’m not completely off track (again), I’m kind of missing Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, etc. in all this. No?
A: In fact, I am glad you bring it up. I would say the existential desigial analysis as a concept has been developed with an awareness of the study of phenomena (inevitably so) since, after all, phenomenology is learning about “[...] the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience.” (SEP 2008). Furthermore, experimental approaches to design, including human experience, perception, behavior, etc. greatly impacted on or, more rightly, gave birth to many design disciplines – not to mention design methods and design research – back in the 60’s and 70’s.
B: Meaning there are traces of this in your existentials (and therefore also in the designials)?
A: This falls outside the scope of what we are talking about, but I can briefly say that since my design method(s) originates in traditional industrial design, which in turn is founded on the works of Archer, Jones, Cross, etc. (all of them prolific in these issues), the existential desigial analysis has clearly been influenced. Even though the latter way of design thinking may be traced back to for example Husserl and his view on matters such as the ones cited in Hermeneutics and the human sciences: Essays on language, action and interpretation: “Everything that is, can be known ‘in itself’. Its being is a being definite in content, and documented in such and such ‘truths in themselves’…” (Ricoeur 1981, p. 123; Husserl 1970, p. 223) – or Heidegger if it comes to that – it is simply not relevant for the same reason subjective experience is not.
B: Okay.
**A:** The existential absence, or confinement, is not a “functional requirement” of a person (be able to sense, respond to, communicate, move, etc.). Similarly, the functional requirements of a product (accessibility or openness, semantics or affordances, usability, durability, reliability, etc.) are not fundamental forms of design being. Besides, designials concern what a design is as a design in a more fundamental sense, that is the primal nature of “Being” (Sein), not what it does or what it may express in use. Take, for example, the hospital blanket from Film No. 2, Absence - Design for substitute (Torkildsby 2010). Despite what it does or expresses – as a design, it is still a substitute. We already agreed on this.

**B:** True, but […]

**A:** Consider again the example of the Lamborghini. The guy apparently suffers from some kind of midlife crisis: his children may have moved out and perhaps his wife no longer found a reason to stay in the marriage. As a result, he slowly disappears into a dramatic state of self-doubt. He senses the passing of his youth and the imminence of old age and tries to compensate with countless hours at the gym, frequent romantic relationships and expensive cars. Neither his wife nor his children recognize him, but trust this phase will eventually pass. This way of existing is a fundamental form of being human: a mode of living that forms situations such as absence – which initially is set by the overall designial substitute, namely the car.

**B:** I get the story behind the guy. But what I don’t understand is how the car, or any single product really, could possibly have a direct say in his (well)being? (Especially since you told me to keep out “subjective experience” (Sosa, Villanueva 2004, p. 70) – as you so neatly put it – just before the coffee break.)

**A:** The strength of character typical of the existential designial analysis is exactly that: a set of designials define what it means to design for the given existentials – consequently adding up to what it means to be human. Do we have the same understanding on this?

**B:** Think so. In one way or another, this is close to what Krippendorff actually says about the car. Quote: “That design has everything to do with what a Lamborghini means for their drivers and for the public is unquestioned.” (Krippendorff 2006, p. 48).

**A:** In one way, absolutely. (…) Once and for all, let us leave semantics behind and continue with the Lamborghini. In this case, I would open up the brief by asking: what does it mean to be such a “guy”? The answers would then bring in midlife crisis as one of many indications that may help identifying this particular existential. Next, in order to get the whole picture, I would continue inquiring into what are the questions, the answer to which will initiate the existential analysis, and, secondly, what are the answers, the answer to which will state the relevant existential. The Design manual attempts to illustrate this by a series of examples (Design manual, p. 38-67); I regard the logics in them to be quite simple.

**B:** Yeah – but strictly fictional, nevertheless?

**A:** Yes, indeed, for the very reason that I am not conducting empirical research – thus following qualitative analysis and so forth. This, however, does not change the fact that the illustrations, just like other case histories, give more or less detailed examples of the concept. Besides, each and all of them are “based on true stories” to use terminology from the film industry. I have had the advantage of visiting all kinds of institutions, both in the health sector and in the criminal justice sector, observing so-called real environments and talking to real people and through this thus I have been able to bring life to the extreme personas and fictional scenarios in the Design manual (Ibid).

**B:** I don’t mean to nag about this, but what you’re saying doesn’t change the fact that the examples are fictional.

**A:** Absolutely not, but I do not consider this a weakness. On the contrary, there is strength in keeping it imaginary, particularly when targeting designers, who are always looking to explore something original. Do you not agree? Additionally, to bring in another perspective on the matter – in contrast to science fiction, Gaver & Martin designed a series of something that Dunne calls “value fictions” (Dunne 2005, p. 84) where they used critical reflection to define a specific problem area of interest. According to Gaver & Martin, the value fictions “[…] propose practical technologies for implausible social goals […]” (Gaver & Martin 2000, p. 3) or, as they suggested in the same article, they “[…] can be valuable as criticisms of culture and technology […]” (Ibid).

**B:** I agree that all kinds of imaginary things trigger creativity (at least in most of us) and I definitely like the idea of designers as visionaries, but fiction – whether “science” or “value” – as the only source of information to solve a problem? There’s something in this that just doesn’t sound right to me.
A: In what way is this problematic to you?

B: For starters, I look upon myself (and upon other designers as well, I guess) as solving real problems with real solutions for real people as we just talked about – not developing concepts with only one foot planted in reality. That, on the other hand, would fit perfect in a science fiction novel. Cool thing, don’t get me wrong, but not when dealing with real people, if you know what I mean.

A: I strongly disagree with you on that. Allow me to put forward Karlström again, whom I can totally get behind on this matter: “There is, however, nothing inherently wrong with solving problems. What is wrong is that we treat this problem-solving way of thinking as the only acceptable kind of thinking. We stand to lose meaning and commitment, and find ourselves in a passionless, reflective way of being.” (Karlström 2006, p. 2). Apart from aiming to avoid this, obviously, my intention is that by explaining the existential designial analysis using narratives, as in the Design manual or the short films, and then going on to generate critical design examples based on a critical methodology, as in the ongoing workshops I briefly mentioned during the coffee break, I hope to extract some truth from these “real experiences”. The latter is the very reason I invite people to (re)act to the specific settings in the first place: firstly designers and then the rest of society – not as a substitute for solving problems, but as a possibility to find new directions in design work. Bowen explains why critical design examples or related examples can serve this purpose (function) in his doctoral thesis. He writes as follows: “[...] critical artefacts are ‘artefacts-as-critiques’ that express alternative product functions and roles, social practices and applications of technology to prompt people to reflect on the assumptions underlying what they consider possible.” (Bowen 2009, p. 190). Similarly, as “critical artefacts” are the “output” (Ibid) of the practitioner’s (or in my case, primarily the student’s) design process, a “critical artefact methodology” “[...] uses critical artefacts instrumentally within the design process to foster innovation.” (Ibid). Lenskjold also says something along these lines in a recent interview, namely that since, “User-involving design processes typically have a great emphasis on reaching consensus, which means there’s often a risk of picking the easy solutions, so the outcome of the design process tends to conform to the lowest common denominator.” (Mind Design 2011), he suggests implementing critical design in the process as “[...] a provocation to make people leave their comfort zone and dare to think outside the box in order to find a better solution to the design problem [...]” (Ibid). This gives an idea of what role the critical design examples may take on down the road: making innovation possible despite its starting point in the “dark side” of design.

B: I’m totally with you on the innovation-part, but why make it so hard?

A: I have to say, you still seem somewhat skeptical to this concept. However, I did agree to persuade you and so I shall.

B: I sort of get what you’re saying and you seem to know your thing, it’s not that. But the basis for it all: the fundamental forms of being, no matter human or design, is still too abstract. I guess if you brought it down a bit and provided some more examples – more flesh on the bone so to speak – we’d be more in sync.

A: By all means. One can say that in the framework of the existential designial analysis, absence as a fundamental form of human being boils down to being subjected to (critical) care – thus suffering, in one way or another. This is to say, being incapacitated through unhealth and sickness is one way in which absence manifests. There are numerous issues to bring out in order to outline the situation and this way try to understand, such as those in The Body in Nursing (Lawler 1997). The book presents many essays, written by medical professionals, on people who have experienced disease or injury, illustrating how modern medical practice greatly impact on people’s physical embodiments in situations of this kind. The content is rather critical – with the intention of rousing a debate concerning the health care practices of this decade – and gives a many-sided face to absence as a way of being. As Madjar describes it in her essay, “The body in health, illness and pain”, about how illness and pain bring forth the awareness of the body (often ignored). To expand upon this she says: “It is only when our gaze is turned away from the world and the activities which connect us to the world, and towards ourselves, that we become consciously aware of the effort involved in the usually taken-for-granted bodily activities.” (Lawler 1997, p. 56). Madjar continues to exemplify how illness and pain, among other experiences, sprout such “turning toward ourselves” and further how this affects our self-concept, that is our body functions and appearances, toward our own selves as well as to other people.

B: Aha.

A: Another perspective where being ill takes the form of absence is that of Sölle, a German liberation theologian and writer. In her book Suffering she suggests that, “The consciousness that one is powerless is a fundamental element in suffering.” (Sölle 1984, p.12). Furthermore, pertaining to the existential analysis, helplessness, etc. is yet another way of existing that adds to the fundamental form of absence.
**DIALOGUE**

**B:** Speaking of which, I'm totally into Yoga and the foundation of Buddha’s teachings rests on something called the Four Noble Truths – all of them actually concerning suffering, though the first one would be especially interesting to add. Just listen to this: “(1) No one can deny that suffering is the condition of all existence.” (Soccio 2009, p. 47).

**A:** That is an interesting thought.

**B:** Yes. So am I wrong to say that there would be no absence (in the pain kind of way) – not to forget fundamental forms of being human all together – without suffering?

**A:** Well, that seems a bit extreme to me. You must bear in mind that absence can be a relief as well, for example when someone is given life-saving medication. As we move on, let us try not to value the notion, neither absence nor confinement, and instead focus on how they relate to the designials. (…) Now, there are many aspects which make up and structure the various modes of being, all of which results from the specific existential. In the light of that, suffering is just one form in which absence shows itself. Likewise, illness is “awareness of the body”, “turning toward ourselves”, powerlessness and numerous others. You will get to know more as we move along.

**B:** All right.

**A:** Back to Sölle, she also speaks quite strongly about absence as a form of being in situations regarding Christ and God. For instance, she declares this in *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle:* “[…] Christ does not replace God. Christ is not God’s complete self-emptying in human form, or else we would now be experiencing all that is possible of God. Instead, God appears as a ‘mediated immediacy,’ with Christ as the mediator or representative, playing God’s role in the world […].” (Pinnock 2003, p. 115) and further, “Indeed, the traditional God, our ‘father above in a starry sky,’ is dead. His omnipotent ‘identity’ is no longer meaningful. Because of Christ, we can regard [God’s] absence as a possible mode of his being-for-us.” (Ibid, p. 228).

Although this is a rather extreme version of absence as a fundamental form of being, it is nonetheless an interesting perspective to bring into critical care, principally concerning life and death – aspects which to many people certainly relate to religion. Most importantly though, Sölle presents God in the way the existential absence is intended to work, explicitly how God is not “present” in the physical world – which is why Christ represents him by acting as a go-between or substitute, forming the link to an overall designial – and in this way showing that the living God (absence of God) is much more than a mere replacement for God.

**B:** Hey, did you just compare your ideas with God and Christ?

**A:** Ok, that was definitely not my intention. Instead, you must understand the citation as an example of how the existential and the overall designial go together. (…) Before we move on to confinement, I would like to sum up absence as a fundamental form of being human. Or, would you like to do the honors?

**B:** Oh, I'd rather not. (Not this early in the conversation, anyhow.)

**A:** Well, all of these references form a sketch of how the relation existential-designial is proposed to work. To recapitulate, the design object exists as for example a substitute because the person in care is in absence to begin with. This, in turn, results in for example the institutional piece of textile covering the person’s body in *Film No. 2, Absence - Design for substitute* (Torkildsby 2010) existing plainly as a representative (that is substitute) for his private crochet blanket – a fundamental form of design being that consequently takes away “*my*” blanket, “*my*” bed, “*my*” home, “*my*” life, etc. and further “will serve to keep the individual away from his/her *own* version of the object – thus endangering feelings of recognition, belonging, safety, etc. which are particularly important in the process of healing” (Design manual, p. 31).

**B:** You make it sound so simple. (…) By the way, I've a comment. In the manual you refer to Sartre – quite often I’d say – and I know he wrote some bizarre, but great stuff. Would you mind, maybe later, giving some examples where absence is pictured in more twisted ways than the ones presented so far? (Not that the previous ones don’t illustrate the idea, but you know how we’re always seeking poetic input to add to the nonfiction ones. It could be literature, films or whatever.)

**A:** It would be my pleasure. Sartre is indeed worth mentioning in this context. In *Being and Nothingness*, he discusses the infamous episode where he enters a café to meet Pierre and discovers his nonappearance at his usual place (Sartre 1992, p. 40-41). Sartre talks of this absence as “haunting the café” – just as, for instance, a person takes the form of absence when he/she is strapped to a bed in an ICU and no longer is with us in the way he/she normally is.

**B:** This may sound a bit strange, but how do you differentiate your absence from what we normally say when we are overcome by the feeling that someone is there, yet he or she is not. (…) You know, like the saying “Absent in body, but present in spirit”? (The Holy Bible 2007, 1 Corinthians 5:1).
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A: Did you just quote the Bible? (This is interesting coming from someone who, a few minutes ago, accused me of placing my notions side by side with God and Christ). As a matter of fact, absence involves absolutely no kind of symbolism, embodiment, incarnation, spirit or the like. As we have discussed many times before, when I talk about absence, I always refer to absence as such – namely as a fundamental form of being – which is to say, not through for instance experience of the senses (Empiricism) as in the perception of being absent. In the same vein, I might add that it may help if you consider, for instance, the Lamborghini like this: you design the car for the mere “form” of driving – not particularly for this guy's experience of driving (as we touched upon before). Or as in the example of Antoine in the Design manual: you design the bench for the “form” of sitting per se – not his experience of sitting. In this fashion, as designer you will be able to abstract, hence identify the designials, which in fact are the very “objectives of design”. Does this make sense to you?

B: Yes. You are starting to repeat yourself, by the way.

A: My apologies if I am being tedious or pugnacious. My repeating is not intentional, I simply want to stress the fact that this is the very essence of the existential designial analysis – no more, no less.

B: The abstraction again, I see. (…) Back to Sartre. No examples from his fictional work?

A: Oh, again, it will be my pleasure. (…) Actually, let us keep him with us until we move on to confinement. Alternatively, Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (Kafka 1999) gives a rather lively idea of how absence might manifest itself in human beings. In brief, it deals with Gregor, a travelling salesman who wakes up one morning to find he has been transformed into a monstrous insect. This new life (understandably) meets with a set of unknown challenges, both in the corporeal and spiritual sense, such as the following: "Without thinking that as yet he didn't know anything about his present ability to move and without thinking that his speech possibly (indeed probably) had once again not been understood, he left the wing of the door, pushed himself through the opening, and wanted to go over to the manager, who was already holding tight onto the handrail with both hands on the landing in a ridiculous way." (Ibid, p. 27-28).

B: Fascinating! (…) Speaking of insects – and alienation, in a way. I saw this great movie a few years ago, the Kafka-esque nightmare Naked Lunch (Burroughs 1992), from the early '90s or so, by Cronenberg. And even though Weller's character, Bill Lee, was pretty much on drugs throughout the story, the world he was captured in basically hypnotized me: swarming with mutated insects and vulgar monsters and their quasi-sexual functions. I'll never forget Lee's confession halfway through the movie: "I understood writing could be dangerous. I didn't realize the danger came from the machinery." (Ibid). This is right up your street, yes? (…) Imagine how it would be to design a pair of trousers for Gregor or, while we're at it, a new typewriter for the junkie in Naked Lunch.

A: Good thinking! (Save those ideas for later.) (…) Both Kafka and, apparently, Burroughs/Cronenberg paint a good picture – although a bit far-fetched – of how a person, existing in the fundamental form of absence, may encounter the world when existing “without control” or as the Design manual suggests: modes of being which “does not support what is considered a ‘normal’ state of existence for the person in question” (Design manual, p. 11). (…) It did work however.

B: What worked?

A: Fiction as a way of providing food for thought.

B: I never doubted that. I love fiction! It's something about “product development” – not to forget “research” – that brings the very opposite to mind, I guess.

A: So, before we leave the subject of absence as a fundamental form of being human, let me add that any extensive attempt to illustrate the situation from a phenomenological perspective, or any similar one, will not be performed, because existentials originate from examining the design brief and not from analyzing the extreme environment in itself. At the same time, criticizing the brief in such a way clearly assumes that the designer has already analyzed what it refers to, that is the environment in question, hence the existence of an implicit connection which has to be considered.

B: Understood. (…) Can I just add something small on experience anyways?

A: Be my guest.

B: You see, I happened to be at an ICU about six months ago to visit my old auntie (who was there for a couple of days) and my first thought was, what's the deal with all the plastic? The nurses wore plastic aprons and gloves, sometimes even face masks and hoods, and the curtain-dividers were made out of a plastic-like material – plus everywhere there were huge bins, for throwing away all the disposables, I guess. My aunt said that even the bed felt like plastic: cold and crispy. I checked, and yes, the mattress was covered in thick dark blue plastic. (…) I mean, what's the philosophy
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behind that? I totally get the issues with sterilization, hygiene, overall cleanliness, etc. and I also understand that disposable items are plausible and practical for the very same reasons, but I seriously thought we’d come further than that. I know it all comes down to politics and money, but, hey – it’s us in 50 years! Honestly, I felt like I was in outer space and there was my aunt on some kind of assembly line: ready to be assembled and spit out in a hurry. Poor auntie, she didn’t dare change her underwear during the whole stay, fearing the other patients might see her. (…) I completely understand this, because it’s no more than two meters between the beds. Forget privacy and integrity! (…) My aunt even mentioned she could hear her closest neighbor, a lady who by the way suffered from an incredibly irritating cough, turn in her bed. I believe it all somehow made her very concerned about whether the lady was actually suffocating – or not – and if so, how she could get help. Auntie must have been totally exhausted when she finally returned home.

A: You have my full sympathy for what your old aunt went through. (Must admit the observations I carried out for the project truly made me reflect on things as well.) Before we wander off to the existential confinement, I would like to reassure you that there is research going on in the field, such as a project which originated at the University of Borås which is titled: Patientrummets interiör och utformning på intensivvårdsavdelning (IVA) samt dess betydelse för hälsa, välbefinnande och trivsel (“Patient room interior at an ICU”, in short) by Lindahl et al. (Andréasson 2010). This interdisciplinary project group (mainly consisting of specialists in caring science, from an academic point of view, but also practicing nurses, architects, lighting and sound specialists, textile designers, etc.) spent two years building up a fully functional alternative to the conventional patient’s room at Södra Alvsborg Hospital, Borås, Sweden. I was invited to the opening of the research room (late fall, 2010) and the atmosphere is remarkably different from that of an “ordinary” patient room. Keeping in mind that previous research indicates things like: “[…] the design of patient rooms in ICU can be one of the causes of developing ICU delirium […]” (Olausson 2011; Dubois, Bergeron, Dumont, Dial och Skrobik 2001) and that “[…]there is an increased risk of medical errors in ICU environment due to high levels of sound […]” (Olausson 2011; Christensen 2002), etc., what PhD student Olausson (who is part of the group mentioned above) points out in one of her articles on the subject is made clear: “The design and interior of ICU can have an impact on the patient safety and treatment outcomes.” (Olausson 2011). Anyhow, it will be exiting to follow their research, which collects qualitative data concerning patients’ experiences in this new setting and compare it to those of patients who stayed in a “conventional” patient room. They will certainly gain valuable insight as to what is a “healing” environment – information that in turn could benefit my research and, down the road, my work will hopefully be able to reciprocate by benefiting theirs as well.

B: Back to the darkest of darkness. What about confinement?

A: You seem excited?

B: I’m curious to hear the mind-blowing reference to Sartre, that’s all.

A: As the Design manual suggests, confinement as a fundamental form of human being is principally related to absence in the way that, as has already been stated, neither of them “support what is considered a ‘normal’ state of existence for the person in question” (Design manual, p. 11) and refers to “contexts where a person is unable to leave a place – no matter if it is physical or mental or whether the duration is temporary or permanent” (Ibid, p. x).

B: You’ve probably already explained this in the manual, but why did you choose ICU’s and remand prisons to begin with?

A: To cut a long story short, I started with an overall interest in health care, later on concentrating on ICU’s in particular and from there on it just expanded to include remand prisons as I realized how much the atmospheres resembled one another. Furthermore, dealing with these two environments simultaneously made it possible to somehow compare them as two extremes and thus more easily find both similarities and differences regarding ways of existing in the given environments. (…) Besides, I soon came to learn about Dunne’s “Heterotopia” (Dunne 2005. p. 52, 100) and, furthermore, found that it provides good grounds for critical design thinking, which in turn lead me to Foucault and his version of heterotopia, which he describes as: “There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.” (Foucault 1967). What is more, the fact that he exemplifies such places as hospitals and prisons or even homes for the elderly, cemeteries and travel journeys – certainly got me looking in that direction.

B: I’m just curious, what key similarities and differences did you find?
A: Well, I just mentioned the basic resemblances, which are all described (some more explicit than others) in the Design manual. Something that I would like to emphasize, however, is the factor of waiting for healing in an ICU and in order to receive one's sentence (probably followed by some kind of punishment) in a remand prison, and also waiting while observing, as a way of monitoring biological data in an ICU and in the form of surveillance in a remand prison. And again, “what makes confinement different from absence […] is above all the aspect of penalty” (Design manual, p. 24). (…) In danger of being misunderstood, I would like to bring in The Swedish Prison and Probation Service post’s perspective on the matter: “Being on remand means waiting for a trial or a place in prison or an institution; waiting for an investigation to be completed or waiting for deportation.” (Swedish Prison and Probation Service post 2011).

B: Let me see if get this right. You're basically saying that both ICUs' and remand prisons deal with challenges, not unlike how most of us – I'd say – would respond when being forced to give up control of “my” world, right? (No matter if it’s "by accident", for example when someone who is recovering from surgery ends up strapped down in an ICU or, "intentionally", when someone has committed a crime and because of that is locked up in a remand prison – either way, in the hands of an institution.)

A: You are starting to sound like me.

B: I'm not sure that's a compliment or not. (…) Regardless – off the record – what is it that makes people in remand prisons unfree? I mean, really. (Apart from obvious things like them being kept isolated, restricted and thus deprived of all their personal stuff, even robbed of human contact, at worst.)

A: Are you sure you want to go down this road?

B: Why not?

A: Well, I had another example in mind when I promised you Sartre. However, since you insist, let us save it for later. Have you ever heard of "the Other"?

B: If we’re talking horror-film (Mulligan 1972), so yes – but something tells me we’re not?

A: Great movie, but no. There are surely many aspects of the concept of "being observed vs. observe" that could be brought to light. What has fascinated me the most, though, is once more a notion of Sartre’s. I believe the notion (of "the Other" as an element in self-consciousness) was introduced by Hegel (SEP 2010), but in the context of confinement, Sartre’s notorious description in Being and Nothingness adds perfectly to the fundamental form of human being. The citation reads like this: "[...] let us imagine that moved by jealousy, curiosity, or vice I have just glued my ear to the door and looked through the keyhole", somewhat unrealistically given the difficulties of both putting one’s eye and one’s ear to a door, "But all of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me ... I shudder as a wave of shame sweeps over me." (Sartre 1992, p. 247). Moreover, in the same book he writes: "It is before the Other that I am guilty. I am guilty first beneath the Other’s look I experience my alienation and my nakedness as a fall from grace which I must assume.” (Ibid, p. 531).

B: (Wow, I'm starting to see why you've got a crush on Sartre!) (…) Am I right to say "the Other" functions a little like the concept of "Big Brother" (Orwell), or “Big Brother is Watching You” (Ibid)?

A: Well, not quite, but something along those lines. Briefly, “the Other” is normally used to define an individual who is perceived by someone (Other) as not belonging, that is to say different in some fundamental way. The example is interesting in the sense that it somehow mirrors the person vs. institution relationship in a prison setting, or in an ICU for that matter. (…) Although this could be successfully developed into a critical discourse about the history of criminology, penalty, justice, and ethics – not to mention the role of authorities in general – we should stick to the agenda.

B: Yup. (…) Just a quick question. Is this why the book cover looks the way it does?

A: Could you be more specific?

B: The peephole.

A: Alright then, let us open up confinement as a fundamental form of being human. In the same way absence boils down to being subjected to (critical) care, confinement aims the attention at the (public) function of being held, indefinitely, as a suspect of committing a criminal act and so endure whatever consequences comes his/her way. That is to say, being unfree because restriction and limitation are two forms in which confinement manifests itself. Similar to absence, there are a number of factors to draw out in order to gain knowledge about this particular existential. According to Smaus, one of the contributors in Institutions of Confinement: Hospitals, Asylums, and Prisons in Western Europe and North America, 1500-1950, ideas concerning the reformation
of the penal system (implemented during the last century) states imprisonment – as a means for punishment – as number one, followed by: “ [...] acceptance of the principle that inmates should undergo reeducation or correction, and not be exposed only to physical pain; classification of prisoners and the introduction of solitary confinement; demand for the introduction of gradual or progressive administration of punishment.” (Finzsch & Jütte 1996, p. 178).

A: Perhaps not. Nevertheless, someone who, possibly more so than others, dedicated parts of his life to the prison system is Foucault (as you may know). He greatly impacted on the academic world with his philosophy and critical studies on social institutions. Much of his work is presented in Discipline & punish: The Birth of the Prison, where he talks about the phenomenon prison as a series of power processes – where relations correct people, resulting in prisons not only executing detention, but also making individuals into objects – or as the Design manual suggest: “reducing him/her into a mere prisoner” (Design manual, p. 26). Further, in the same breath as criticizing the famous Panopticon (Bentham) (which, apropos, reform the criminal institutions of the 19th century and still today, evidently, influence prison architecture) he says about its “transparent” structure – allowing full surveillance – and thus constant control, both through visible and unverifiable power: “Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so.” (Foucault 1995, p. 201). Moreover, this design creates what Foucault calls “a machine” which aims at: “[...] dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the periphereic ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.” (Ibid). Please take notice that the latter part is particularly significant in order to understand confinement as a fundamental form of being.

B: You obviously forgot Florence Nightingale and the entire history of nursing!

A: Please accept my apologies. It is easy to get carried away.

B: Oh, don’t mind. I quite like your passion.

A: I just recalled that vulnerability, resulting from being in total exposure, is another factor that remand prisons shares with ICU’s – and along with exposure, vulnerability and power comes the aspect of torture. As put forward in the article “The greater and the lesser evil”, Andersen W. suggests that there are two types of torture in the practice of nursing: namely intended (for instance when the caretaker becomes “the long arm of the system”, that is when pressure, stress, frustration, etc. practically makes the individual become the cause of the problem – hence, an enemy) and unintended (for example a caretaker who practices the profession in a manner which offends the dignity of a person and so makes him/her into an object) (Andersen W. 2006). The author continues to explain that a nurse performs the lesser evil in situations where, “She may not be aware of the effect of her care if the patient intended no longer has control of his own time, if rooms are used for purposes other than those for which they are, if communication is inadequate, the language used is jargon or renders the patient an object, if their body is exhibited to others or is used for practice purposes or if the nurse assumes control ‘with the best of intentions’”. Accordingly, this may make the person’s feeling of being less (worth as a) human being stronger or, as Andersen puts it, “som en patient” (“as a patient”) (Ibid), which in turn “creates anxiety and powerlessness offending the person’s self-esteem, integrity and dignity” (Design manual, p. 24) and, finally, she goes on to explain what makes this another example of how power relations in institutions have a crucial say in the (well)being of people.

B: I’ll add it to the list. Power and torture.

A: I must point out, however, that since then and up until now, prison – as a model – has principally transformed from having a function to offering a place to wait: starting out as a place where inmates are put on hold until sufficient punishment was set (Bentham), through functioning as a place to serve sentence while waiting (by perhaps carrying out penal labor), to the prison of today, where rehabilitation through education and skilled labor is the standard goal. (…) On second thought, let me quickly go back to the Swedish Prison and Probation Service post site again and simply read parts of the introduction: “Our vision is that spending time in the prison and probation system will bring about change, not simply provide rehabilitation through education and skilled labor is the standard goal. (…) On second thought, let me quickly go back to the Swedish Prison and Probation Service post site again and simply read parts of the introduction: “Our vision is that spending time in the prison and probation system will bring about change, not simply provide secure custody. We want to encourage our clients to live a better life after serving their sentence.” (Swedish Prison and Probation Service post 2011).

B: OK, I got it. More similarities to absence I should know of?

A: I am certain we have mentioned the most important aspects by now. (…) Of course! In fact, you ought to know more extensively about suffering – in relation to confinement – as well. In that case, I would like to go back to Sölle once more. She writes in her book Suffering that, “The reaction to the real or imagined creator of
It's rather twisted, but strangely enough it makes sense. (…) This is, of course, taken completely out of context – not to forget, I don't have any personal experience. However, well, if it was me in prison, I'd definitely see my suffering (probably caused by shame, regret, etc., etc.) as the best (and possibly only) way to actually “survive” such an absurd situation. No? On the same note, I would guess that the hope of someone admitted to an ICU is that – rather sooner than later – the healing process will come to an end and everything will go back to “normal”.

That is some good thinking there. As much as I would like to continue on this subject, time is running out and we must proceed.

Copy that. I must say, though, that the two environments you've chosen are definitely something “out of the ordinary” and extremely interesting from a design point of view. (Flashback (…) Do you remember the books we had back then, about anthropometry? (Peebles. L. el at. 1998; Norris, B. el at. 2000; Smith, S. el at. 2000). I take both of your “target groups” are very good examples of the 5th or the 95th percentiles1 – it doesn't really matter which one.)

Yes, I have fresh in mind the design myth of designing for the “average” person. (…) Concerning the respective environments, I definitely agree with your view. In addition, they make it all seem so much more true-life and thus meaningful – if I may speak as a “problem solver” (Cross 2000). In case we have time left in the end, I will share more of my experiences from that part of the research.

I'd like that.

4  Today, anthropometry plays an important role in several design activities (industrial, architectural, etc.). In short, the term covers statistical data about the distribution of body dimensions in the population – which in turn is used to optimize products. Among anthropometric approaches, designing for a broad range of users (5th to 95th percentiles) is often the most practical and accommodating, although it intentionally excludes the most extreme 10% of the relevant population (the largest 5% and smallest 5%).
“February 3. Things that break up the day in fits and starts: food, medication, showers, a game of pool if you're lucky, walking in circles round the yard. A legal visit, or any visit. (…) Later that morning ... Shot a few rounds of pool including a thrashing by one of the nurses. Can't believe there's a telly in me room cell. Compensates a bit for the cold I 'spose. [...]” (Ibid).

A: Well, it is clear that Doherty knows how to tell a good story and he obviously manages to capture the reader's interest. Although, I am doubtful this is how most people would manage 13 days in remand. All the same, I agree he is certainly portraying emptiness, hence boredom – and a tiny bit of indifference on top – in a good way. He surely must have received money for this article?
B: No. Actually, I think the paper made a donation to some kind of Prison Reform Trust.

A: So, then, it is time for another break (and maybe even some fresh air)? One last thing before we leave the subject. (…) In one way or another, all the things we have been discussing so far provide us with an idea of how the relation existential-designial is meant to work. That is to say, the design object exists as for example deprival because the person in detention is in confinement in the first place. This exact situation is illustrated in Film No. 1, Confinement - Design for deprival (Torkildsby 2010) “where the personal crochet butterfly – originally granting a sinful kind of contentment to the girl in question – now takes on the fundamental form of deprival, simply because it is removed from her and implicitly denies her having ‘my’ belongings, ‘my’ home, ‘my’ life, etc.” (Design manual, p. 30). Furthermore, suchlike situations keeps the individual away from “his/her ‘own’ version of the object” (Ibid), possibly jeopardizing the perception of time, place, and reality as a whole - which is absolutely essential in sustaining a “normal and healthy” life and thus also in any attempt to ensure the safety of everyone in the surrounding environment.
B: Wow, I never thought I'd say this – but, it's starting to make sense.

A: Considering the amount of time you had taking in this new information, I must say that you show exemplary progress.
B: Speaking of which, what's the time?

A: It is close to five.
B: You see, I asked my friend, T, to drop by after class. Hope that's OK with you?
A: I do not mind at all. Is she, or perhaps he, into design as well?
B: Yes, he is into textiles.

(A and B leave the table and return with a full pot of coffee and a visitor…)

A: So, I understand that you are about to become a textile designer, artist, or what it is that would you like to be called?
T: My MA will be in Textile Art, but I've got a BA in product design. (...) I guess that’s make me a hybrid like so many other creative people.

A: No shame in that. In fact, I see this as an advantage of the newly educated, which is to say that you have the advantage of a multidisciplinary approach – such an approach to design is never wrong. And most importantly, you can move freely between the fields.
T: Good point.

A: You must be excited. What are your future plans after your graduation?
T: I'm eager to wrap up five years of education, that’s for sure. What comes next, I don't know. (...) Must say I'm anxious to see what’s really out there for me.

A: I understand commissions are hard to come by these days?
T: On long-term and permanent basis, definitely. (...) I’ll look around for all kinds of projects of course. Even apply for stipends, legacies, etc. to have more than one leg to stand on. People say it’s the first years that suck.

B: You bet!

A: What kind of experience do you have? Or, even better, what are your interests?
B: Tell A about your exam project. It’s spot on what we’ve been talking about.
T: Is that so. Aha! Sure. (...) Can someone fill me in?

A: I am sorry, my fault. On second thought, I will leave that to B. She is my “student” for today and I trust her to have a full overview by now.
B: (That’s right, A, rub it in!) Well, we’re discussing if designers are up to a shift in ways of thinking (and doing) design for “extreme environments”, such as ICU’s and remand prisons.

T: ICU’s?
B: Intensive Care Units.
T: What’s the problem with the old way?
A: It is old, as you indicate, and as a consequence of that in need of some thought-provoking alternatives.
B: A thinks there are too many holes in the existing one. Moreover, she also thinks that everyone, on both sides of the fence so to speak, will benefit from using a method where the design brief is opened up and, through this, find new ways of developing products.
A: A more thorough (and correct) description of the existential designial analysis is: [...] 
T: The what??
B: The critical method she has spent the last three and a half years on.
T: (Turns to A.) Sorry to cut you off!
A: No apologies needed. We have been discussing this for almost 2 hours now and it seems that it was only shortly before you arrived that we were coming anywhere close to a common understanding – and that is, as of yet, only on paper.
T: If you say so. (...) What’s making this concept such a hard nut to crack?
A: On top of what has already been said, the existential designial analysis is about bringing to light and calling into question perspectives which the designer would otherwise tend to forget – thus understanding the difficult situations which may arise if these are neglected. (...) Put another way, the design challenge per se may very well be expressed through the following questions: “what makes it possible for so many to end their lives in remand prison” (Design manual, p. 10) – and, more importantly, “choose to do so by e.g. stuffing a sock down the throat and therefore suffocate? Or, why is it that people in ICU wake up from induced coma confused and frightened, fully convinced that they have been robbed of everything they own and have been made to walk down the street – completely in the nude – while people everywhere were grabbing at their arms and legs and pulling them in every direction, and when they tried screaming no one seemed to hear as people around them were all busy talking to each other in a language they did not understand?” (Ibid).
T: Reckon this is the “dark side” you mentioned, B?

B: Yes! I hope you’re not easily scared. (Winks at T.)
T: I think not.

A: Great! Through the notion of “fundamental forms of design being”, the critical method, that is the result of the existential designial analysis, offers an analytical approach to design. This methodology will finally result in critical design examples – which invite viewers to reflect on alternative values and so make them aware of the ideologies embodied in design solutions, and hopefully, over time, also inspire and motivate other designers to become more critical in their design thinking.

T: And the “design being” is?

A: Good question. It is simply being, existence, as a design (Design manual, p. 18).
B: Just put on one of your films?!

A: Good idea! I will do exactly that. (…) What you will now watch is Film No. 2: Absence - Design for substitute.

(40 sec later.)

T: Holy shit, that was fast! Can you play it again?

A: Absolutely.

(40 sec later.)

T: I don’t get it.

B: (Laughs softly as she looks over to A.)

A: (Bends over the table to get closer to T.) Did you get the essence of the story, the message? Or, putting it another way, what did you see?

T: A guy in a bed.

A: Yes, that is one way of putting it. We could also be consequent to the existential designial analysis and say that he is a person […]
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T: Guess you can say that. (…) What does this have to do with Absence - Design for substitute?

A: Everything, I would have to say. Let us consider it another way. (…) Suppose someone had asked us, as an interdisciplinary team of designers, to elaborate upon what objects would make up a home – in the general sense – and, further, how to cope with the complications that may occur if these objects were nowhere to be found (in any case, there was no way of getting them there soon enough) and people were to move into that home within a couple of days. What is more, the people moving in are ignorant as to the fact that their stay could last for anything between three days up to three months. Our challenge, however, would be to come up with suggestions for (re)creating the comfort of a safe, private refuge in the respective situation(s) – totally unaware of the physical condition and mental state of the inhabitants. (…) Then what could the answer be? (Plato 1927).

T: I take it you already know about my exam project?

A: No, unfortunately, I learned about it only when you arrived. Since you ask, I assume there are similarities to the case at hand.

B: Can I? (Turns to T.)

T: Why not.

B: You know, I’ve been following your work quite closely these last months, T, and just before you arrived here, I realized there’s an absolute match between your project and this one. The match is perhaps most evident when it comes to how certain (personal) items seem to have this incredible emotional value to us. What’s more, what kind of items we’d bring along to for instance a safe house in event of a natural disaster, war or another kind of catastrophe (Shelter 2009) – such as my brooch, for example. (…) This may sound funny, but this (points to her chest) is my grandma and I’ve to admit that without it, I would simply feel a bit off. (No need to say I wear it all the time. Cliché, I know.) Why this is so, I’m not exactly sure. Of course, it belongs with the entire spectrum of personal feelings, interpretations, meanings and so on. And, on top of that, I’d say memories of how she made me feel safe and loved. Anyhow, it’s impossible to put the finger on unless we enter “subjective experience”, which we agreed not to do. (…) So, what do you think of existential design so far, T, do you see how it’s somehow related to your project?

T: (Reaches out to take his coffee cup.) Taking a step back – and trying to answer what (design) objects would make up a home – I’d first need to know whose home it is.

A: It is interesting that you bring this up, as I have been giving this exact dilemma a lot of reflection lately. The home belongs to no one in particular. It is a home of the temporal kind, just like the prison and the hospital, or homes for the elderly, boarding schools and hotels for that matter, where people move in and out – why, first of all, it needs to suit a wide range of people.

T: If that’s the case, the question is impossible to answer.

A: I am pleased to hear that.

T: How come?

A: To cut a long story short: from where I stand, I consider an object, such as a cover, to be produced by human beings in a certain way or fashion. That is, the cover has its own method of construction; it comes with an outline saying that its essence, in functional terms, is for example to keep someone or something warm. This “fundamental nature” is given even before the cover exists, so that we as designers can bring another piece into life by making it according to this specific plan. (…) However, there is a dilemma with this way of thinking: since none of us really know when, where, why, by whom – and most importantly, how – the thing is to be used, we will not be able to fully determine its intended use, purpose and goals (Design manual, p. 16) in situations such as the “home” we just discussed (if any at all).

B: And this is where the designial comes in, of course.

T: To make inmates and patients “feel at home”? (…) And then what? Cross fingers and hope the suicide rate in prisons will drop and that hospitals will be widely known for offering safe dreams, quick recovery, etc.?

A: Seeing past the exaggerations, which I by the way interpret as engagement, that is exactly what I mean.

T: (Pushes out a little smile.) You got my attention, but I need some convincing.

A: (Hands over the licentiate thesis to T.)

T: (Skims the introduction.) Still, you’ve nothing concrete to show? No examples to hold up?
A: Welcome to the “dark side” of design thinking!

T: Thanks, I guess.

(A and B walk T to the door, take farewell and return to the table.)

A: Interesting to hear another approach to the subject.

B: I know. (You should do it more often.)

A: All right then, as I recall it, we left off at functional requirements vs. fundamental form of design being (designial) sometime before the break, why we need to pick up the thread and see it through.

B: After you.

A: In your opinion, what is “functional analysis”?

B: Thinking back on what we’ve learned and how I actually use it, plus what you’ve written in the manual, a functional analysis is something like a method to help analyze and develop all requirements needed in a product, system, etc. for it to perform its desired purpose. Yes? (…) So in a nutshell, it focuses only on the functionality, that is the way in which it’s likely the product, system, etc. will work. Or the “expectations”, as we put it earlier.

A: Perfect. And the “existential designial analysis”?

B: Puts focus on what it means to design for e.g. confinement or absence.

A: And finally, what is the difference?

B: (…) The difference is: “a change of focus from analyzing the functionality of a design in use and to analyzing the form of being human that a design in use defines” (Design manual, p. 18). It’s easier to remember it from the two questions you put out as help in the manual. So instead of asking: “What does a prison uniform do?” (Ibid) we should focus on: “What is a prison uniform as a design?” (Ibid).

A: (Apropos method, you are entirely free to choose whatever way feels best for you.) Well then, shall we put the existential designial analysis into play? And – by all means – let us be creative, imaginative, fictitious and everything in between.

B: I like the sound of that!
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A: I will provide you with two texts. (...) First of all you will have to identify the existential in them, then the overall designial and, finally, the sub-designial.

B: Shoot.

A: Given a potential design brief relates to the title character, Meursault, from Camus’s The Stranger, who unreasonably kills a man and has to face the consequences: how would you proceed in performing the existential and then the designial analysis based on the following information: “Yet again, the whole problem was: how to kill time. After a while, however, once I’d learned the trick of remembering things, I never had a moment’s boredom. Sometimes I would exercise my memory on my bedroom and, starting from a corner, make the round, noting every object I saw on the way. At first it was over in a minute or two. But each time I repeated the experience, it took a little longer. I made a point of visualizing every piece of furniture, and each article upon or in it, and then every detail of each article, and finally the details of the details, so to speak: a tiny dent or incrustation, or a chipped edge, and the exact grain and color of the woodwork.” (Camus 1954, p. 98).

B: Quite easy I’d say. (Even though it seems you inserted a trap.)

A: Sorry, I did not entirely understand you. What was that?

B: Confinement, the existential that usually goes with imprisonment, looks as it has been replaced by absence in this case.

A: On what basis did you make that decision?

B: Simply on the fact that Meursault seems to find such great comfort in listing his things (or the memory of them to be correct). Also, that this activity – let’s call it some kind of mind-game – appears to fill in for his personal belongings. (...) Hey, they could be the single reason he stays sane, which makes me think the overall designial is substitute and so the story goes. Meaning the existential is set to be absence (although, primarily through being locked up as prisoner).

A: You basically started from the middle?

B: Let’s say I took the easiest way out.

A: Interesting. (...) And what are your thoughts on the sub-designial?

B: That’s a bit trickier, since both protection and anchor display matching specifications.

A: Feel free to elaborate.

B: Protection, for starters, comes to surface in the way memories of his personal possessions (apparently at home) look as if they shield him, fortifying Meursault from the harsh reality. This, in turn, means the designial is somehow trigged – paradoxically – by the cell he’s locked up in until his sentence is set in stone.

A: Goodness, there is darkness in you.

B: Anchor, on the other hand, manifests itself in the way they (the memories) keep him calm and are rooted inside the room. Maybe even helping him to stay sane, I don’t know. As I said, this is more difficult.

A: It might be of help if you think as a (commercial) designer, more exactly in terms of what set of functions you would like to directly affect the person in focus (the “user” to reject everything we have agreed on so far), and through them define what it means to design for the given expectations or, if you like, requirements. Likewise, as an (existential) designer, the logics would be conducted in similar manners, namely first deciding on what designials will have a direct impact on the relevant person (whom you already linked to an existential) and through this defining what it means to design for the given existential.

B: Hearing it like that, I’d definitely say protection.

A: Why?

B: Because I feel empathy for the guy. Simple as that.

A: Not so dark after all?

B: Obviously not. (...) By the way, you didn’t object when I choose the “wrong” existential to break down the prison-situation?

A: Well, as the Design manual suggests: “Although there is clearly a strong interrelation between confinement and absence, they are considered parallels in this context” (Design manual, p. 24). Having said that, “[...] [they] are merely two examples – of many – ways of existing as a human being in suchlike situations” (Ibid), but are “[...] chosen with the intention of somehow comparing them as two extremes and thus more easily find both similarities and differences regarding ways of being in remand prisons and ICUs” (Ibid).

B: Right. (...) It’s easy to forget that the whole thing really comes down to reading the brief with “new eyes” – not a perfectly complete method to develop
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fully functional products?! Or, as I think Proust once said: “The only true voyage of discovery, the only fountain of Eternal Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes [...]” (Proust 2006, p. 657).

A: Since you so kindly brought up irony, we must not forget that the critical method is intended to – more or less daringly, depending on the designer – examine the design brief with the objective to perhaps someday “(...) stop mass-producing and start mass-communicating.” (Hustwit 2003).

B: Yes, I know, I know.

A: Up next is the main character Antoine from Sartre’s A Nausea. (...) Imagine another design brief, one which relates to him and where you are given this information about the circumstances: “Objects should not touch because they are not alive. You use them, put them back in place, you live among them: they are useful, nothing more. But they touch me, it is unbearable. I am afraid of being in contact with them as though they were living beasts. Now I see: I recall better what I felt the other day at the seashore when I held the pebble. It was a sort of sweetish sickness. How unpleasant it was! It came from the stone, I’m sure of it, it passed from the stone to my hand. Yes, that’s it, that’s just it – a sort of nausea in the hands.” (Sartre 1964, p. 10).

B: Because there’re just two existentials, with a single suitable overall designial for each of them, there’s no need to answer this one really. (Though what is a bit confusing here as well is the fact that you applied another existential to Antoine in the manual.) But, since I’m familiar with the book and know for a fact that he’s trapped within his own body – besides, confinement is, as you’ve said, a great deal about suffering – I’ll buy it. (...) As for the sub-designial, I’m tempted to say both punishment and threat because they equally fit, but then you’ll question my analyzing skills, so my answer is punishment.

A: Could you also share your way of sorting out this analysis?

B: I’d say punishment shows in the way the stone gives him nausea. Firstly, because he seems to believe that he got sick from actually touching it and, secondly, because he’s dreading other objects will actually come to life just by being close to them. When it comes to deprival, it’s quite simply above in the system and so makes up the overall designial. (...) When I come to think of it, the whole thing is like examining whatever texts for this or that. Pure logics and rather fun. It’s interesting though, how you put what I’d call a user-analysis side by side with an existential one – just as you put a functional analysis on the same level as a designial one.

A: I am very pleased that you do, it may make the remainder of the afternoon a walk in the park. (...) Perhaps we should sit back and digest all of this for a minute or simply proceed until the existential designial analysis is completely “demystified” (Lawson 2005)?

B: “Vamos.” I sense that the fun part is about to begin now!

A: I trust you to make sure of that. (...) Well then, over to the ultimate and, in many ways, the most important question today: how do designers implement the existential designial analysis into their ways of working?

B: The same way they did the functional one.

A: Correct. (...) Assume you are in charge of designing a new product line for each of the two extreme environments. That is to say, one collection of bedclothes intended for ICU’s and another collection with the purpose of covering up windows in remand cells.

B: But there’s no such thing as curtains in prison.

A: Precisely.

B: Okay, there’s the challenge, I see.

A: Before we begin. What do we need to take into consideration when performing an existential designial analysis?

B: Except from focusing on: “What is a prison uniform as a design?” (Design manual, p. 18) instead of: “What does a prison uniform do?” (Ibid) (...) Well, perhaps that the whole thing is about the very “objectives of design”, as you’ve mentioned a couple of times now?

A: Exactly! (...) Since we are flirting shamelessly with Critical Design, I just recalled something: allow me to quickly have a look at Dunne & Raby’s webpage. (...) It is adding to what we have already discussed, that is “What role does humour play?” (Dunne & Raby 2011). As they express it themselves: “Humour is important but often misused. Satire is the goal. But often only parody and pastiche are achieved. These reduce the effectiveness in a number of ways. They are lazy and borrow existing formats, and they signal too clearly that it is ironic and so relieve some burden from the viewer. The viewer should experience a dilemma, is it serious or not? Real or not?
For Critical design to be successful they need to make up their own mind.” (Ibid). Also, Guixe responds in an interview from 2007 that, “if I want to be very analytic, humour is the tool that allows you to be critical in consumerism.” (Z33 2009). And lastly, some things written about Toran from an interview carried out the year before: “In almost all of his work there is a darkly humorous conflict: What types of identity do we project onto objects? What does this reveal about the human condition and the systems that organize society?” (We make money not art, 2006). These are examples that point out that humour, particularly satire, is as a good way of carrying out the critical design examples. (…) However, as Dunne & Raby emphasize: it is imperative that the viewer “[…] experience a dilemma, is it serious or not?” (Dunne & Raby 2011) and moreover, as Rumpfhuber says in an interview from 2011, because any good design basically holds some kind of critique, “The main purpose of critical designs is to make the invisible visible by showing us something we didn’t know existed” (Mind Design 2011).

**B:** Satire it is! But first, the analysis part.

**A:** Well then, how would you begin?

**B:** That depends.

**A:** Depends on what?

**B:** Requirements, for starters.

**A:** Where are requirements listed as a necessity for conducting the existential designial analysis?

**B:** (Whoa! Plato tone of voice.) I’d say absolutely nowhere.

**A:** But still you need them, why is that?

**B:** Maybe I don’t, but I’d like something to compare the designials with – to provide some kind of contrast.

**A:** I understand where you are coming from. In that case, I challenge you to make a problem description: taking into consideration the most general product specifications.

**B:** Okay, off I go.

(After 10 minutes in total silence.)

**B:** Done. (…) The problem description goes like this: The ICU in X city has ever since the opening day experienced acute injuries (many of them with tragic endings) on persons who couldn’t keep still in their beds and therefore end up on the floor, especially during night time. Due to the elderly boom – or the ageing of Europe in the words of the newspapers – which has been predicted to present us with an increasing impact on society in the future, the city council is concerned and wants to plan ahead the best way they can. The major obstacle, though, is the fact that the budget for health care is low, which is also why the number of medical staff will (probably) not increase hand-in-hand with the number of those in need of nursing. Nevertheless, the plan is to supply all ICU wards with the newest and best furnishing, equipment, clothing and all that, available on the market (within budget, of course) and so accommodate for the inhabitants of X city. (…) That’s the background. Now to the goal of the project: Since the actual challenge is the general growth of elderly in society, it is impossible to overcome with ordinary design solutions, why the problem is instead defined as how to deal with those who cannot keep still in their beds while sleeping because of problems due to this or that, such as sedation (causing for example lack of corporeal sense, which may result in symptoms such as dis-orientation and overall miscoordination – including involuntary spasms or general shaking – severe nightmares, etc, etc,.) The way out of this is a design concept, “smart textiles” to be specific, that helps the sick person stay calm at night, ensuring an improved sleep and a better stay all together. (Who knows? Perhaps even a shorter one.) (…) To sum up, the concept improves on the healing environment (person) and the working environment (for example for health personnel and those in charge of cleaning) as it becomes more resource-effective. Plus, on top of that, it fits the budget!

**A:** It sounds like a very good starting point. Please proceed.

**B:** To get a grip on this, I’d first like to carry out a light version of the functional analysis (FA) and then the existential designial analysis (EDA). OK?

**A:** Be my guest.

**B:** Then I’ll quickly outline the FA (…) something like this (and forgive me for stealing one from the manual):
1) Identify the primary function of the intended product, system or similar.
   = The designer defines the overall function of the “sleeping alternative”, which is
   – over anything else – to keep the person safe and secure while sleeping or resting.

2) Then ask “How?” one can achieve this.
   = The designer discovers the sub-functions, which includes all factors which could possibly
   support the physical body parts of the person in question and also offer cover and isolation.
   (If a sub-function is removed, the overall function is not fulfilled.)

3) Continue to trace through each sub-function
   chronologically and organize them into a hierarchy.
   = The designer classifies sub-sub-functions, which covers everything from identity
   (help to make hospitalized persons easily identifiable to employees), safety
   (e.g. fireproof materials), environmental hygiene (e.g. the possibility to disinfect and sterilize),
   ergonomics (e.g. comfort, allowing easy access for examinations, etc.), sustainability (regarding
   manufacturability, performance, maintenance and duration, as well as inclusivity and
   environmental aspects) to competitiveness (e.g. a broad range of products, possible to customize,
   etc.) – all in congruence with national and international regulations. (These functions are either
   crucial to the overall function or the sub-functions, although expressing more or less desirable
   features of the product, system or similar.)

A: And how would you go on?
B: As for the EDA, I’ll start with the guiding questions and so open up the brief. (…)
Step 2 comes first, simply because step 1 is given: “What does it mean to design for
absence?” (Design manual, p. 20). By answering this, I’d “be able to uncover the basic
form of design being, i.e. the overall designial, to be substitute.” (Ibid).

A: That went off without any problems or issues. Please proceed!
B: Now, regarding the second part of the EDA, I’ll start off by performing step 3:
   “Finally, identify the defining elements, i.e. the sub-designials determining substitute”
   (Ibid) and like this open up for the central sub-designials. (Which is what designers
   “tend otherwise to forget”, right?)

A: Right.
B: Then, looking at what’s influencing substitute the most, I’m tempted to say both
sub-designials, that is protection and anchor, but I’ll go for protection. That makes the
EDA look like this:

1) What does it mean to be such a person?
   = The designer identifies the the basic form of being human (i.e. the existential), as absence.

2) What does it mean to design for absence?
   = The designer will be able to uncover the basic form of design-being,
   i.e. the overall designial, to be substitute.

3) Finally, identify the defining elements,
   i.e. protection determining substitute.
   = The designer opens up for a potential critical design example,
   i.e. protection in the form of a “sleeping alternative”.

A: How do you justify these choices?
B: Well, because they’re so tightly linked together, such as if you’re secured in the
room – so to speak – you’re somewhat safe and vice versa, it was a little bit tricky.
(…) That said, I agreed on protection for the simple reason that people’s safety should
come first (bedridden or not).

A: I must say, so far so good. (…) Then I will let you have 10 minutes by yourself for
a short development phase. That leaves no time for incubation, the “leap of insight”,
and very little time for synthesis or “putting the pieces together” (Jones 1992, p. 29,
47, 49, 63) to use Jones’s words.
B: I’ll get right on it.

(A smiles, walks away and comes back 10 minutes later.)

A: Now, I have to say I am very excited to see what great concept(s) you have come
up with. Would you be so kind as to explain on the white board?
B: Sure thing. The concept would basically consist of an all-in-one sleeping
alternative: safe for the person using it and outermost practical for the staff. It’s
made of 100% smart textiles, which means that all necessary equipment, such as for
administering medication and monitoring health, is integrated in the material. (…) The
textiles are of course comfortable to the skin, that is isolating, soft and breath-
able, easily maintainable (although the material needs to be treated with extra care
in the laundry) and multi-functional as I […]

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A: Sorry for interrupting you, but I have a brief comment on this before you proceed. (…) Although this sounds like a sensible concept, not to mention very futuristic, and it would be interesting to hear more extensively about your ideas and so on, both of us will benefit from doing this short and precise – thus allowing more time for summing up and reflection later on. (In other words, focus on the critical feature of the design example.)

B: Oops! Can I have just a few more minutes?!

(A smiles again, walks away once more and comes back a couple of minutes later.)

A: So, show me what you’ve got!

B: In addition to what I’ve already said, the concept turned out to be exceptionally practical, and – not to forget – semantically strong. Let’s say the identity-aspect is taken care of in a good way, making it easy to keep an eye on or “monitor”, to use a proper term.

A: And how does it look? (I must admit that by hearing your explanation, it sounds like an extreme version of the sleeping bag.)

B: Not far from it actually, although this one gives no associations whatsoever to camping in the woods, fire places and late night socializing (DesMa 10).

A: Indeed, the expression is surprisingly powerful – plus, I am pleased that you took the satire to heart, which accordingly makes it an interesting critical design example. Could you also explain how this answers to the overall design concept substitute.

B: Easy. The new way of sleeping is clearly an alternative, a replacement, which is an extremely poor version of his/her “own” bed, sheet, blanket, pillow, and so on. Yes? (…) Nevertheless, this doesn’t change the fact that the substitute-thing literally keeps the person in question safe and secure while sleeping or resting at night. (Or, at any time of the day really.)

A: Good comment, I agree with your reasoning. (…) While on the subject, what about expanding a little on the “dark side” of the example?

B: Well, by making critical nursing this up-to-date, smoothly operated and streamlined, particularly from the perspective of the personnel, I’d say the concept pretty much speaks for itself. And not to forget, it will make everything so much more cost-effective, probably saving the hospital some money, while still managing to reduce the individual “into a mere patient” (Design manual, p. 27).

A: May I ask how the extra minutes changed your way of thinking?

B: No.

A: In any case, I will take the opportunity to express my satisfaction for the sense of understanding you have displayed so far.

B: Appreciated. I feel a bit bad though – sad even, especially when I had to say it out loud. (…) I guess it’s the “problem solver” (Cross 2000) in me talking.

A: Trust me, I know what you mean. That being said, I will underline the role of critical design examples, which, alongside Critical Design, is: “[…] to make us think. But also raising awareness, exposing assumptions, provoking action, sparking debate, even entertaining in an intellectual sort of way, like literature or film.” (Dunne & Raby 2011). Expressed differently, the critical design examples will purposely illustrate and suggest (fictitious) rather than confirm (real/true). In an interview, Auger says something in the same vein, namely: “Successful ‘Critical Design’ comes about from good balance and application of three things: 1. The application and usage of technology should be relatively feasible, i.e. the concept cannot easily be dismissed as science fiction. 2. The design concept, product or service needs to be desirable in both form and function. 3. Communication is of fundamental importance.” (Auger 2005). He continues to explain that “[…] a sophisticated ‘Critical Design’ proposal can utilize
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props, newspaper articles and other means to entice and coax the audience into the discussion.” (Ibid).

A: I am afraid there is a whole lot we already agreed to save for later, but sure. If I do forget, however, or time runs out, have a look at my list of references. I strongly recommend that you start with the design-duo we just mentioned (apropos, Dunne in fact coined the term “Critical Design” in his book, Herzian Tales), as well as other teachers, researchers and graduates of the Royal College of Art (RCA) such as for example Lee (Lee 2012). Likewise, simply get familiar with things that are going on in our own neighbourhood – for instance with the project Design Act, and reflect on their thinking about “critical practise”, etc. (Design Act 2012). (That is of course if you are not willing to go all the way to what can be said to be its very beginning: the Italian Radical Design movements of the 60’s and the 70’s (Branzi 1985; Sparke 1988)). Whatever the case may be, if you are into photography and film or installations for that matter, have a look at Toran’s projects, for example Object for Lonely Men (Toran 2001) and Desire Management (Toran 2006) and assuming you are interested in what happens with the debate when critical artifacts leave the museums, galleries and classrooms to enter the streets, as one may put it, search for Yauner’s The Fastest Clock in the World, for example (Yauner 2008), or not to forget: next time you are in that part of Norway, visit Dale and look for the seven meter tall Telemegaphone (Unsworn 2009) standing on the mountain overlooking the Dalsfjord. (The webpage advertises: “When you dial Telemegaphone’s number the sound of your voice is broadcast across the fjord, the valley and the village of Dale below.” (Ibid)). It may raise some questions about democracy, communication, control, etc. Also, Thwaites’s toaster project (Thwaites 2011) is interesting in many ways. (…) Actually, on second thought, people who do projects in this direction are increasing in numbers and you have already found “Apocalypse Faster!” and Superflex, so keep hitting Google. But be aware; think critically also about this.

B: Be critical to critical design! Noted.

A: Should we move on then? (Leave the drawing on the whiteboard, by the way, so we can more easily discuss later on.)

B: Definitely. I’m in the mood for confinement.
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A: No, clearly not. (…) Does it hurt by the way?

B: What hurts?

A: The fact that you are now doing your job, perfectly well I might add, by cruelly suggesting suicidal-proof curtains – not in the sense of preventing them from happening, but the very opposite – as a way to achieve good results, accordingly also satisfying the client?

B: I'm not sure “hurt” is the word I’d use, though. I'm a little surprised – and also amused (as you've probably noticed) – first of all, because I seem to find the “dark side” rather exciting and deliberating, even if, at first, it takes some getting used to. It’s almost like doing extreme sport if you know what I mean. (…) That off my chest, it’s definitely an upside-down way of looking upon a problem, brief, project – or, as I see it, actually the whole purpose of design. But, again, once you wrap your head around it, you don’t quite know what’s next and there’s some excitement in that. No?

A: In fact, other design students have said the same thing. (…) All right, I will let you have a few minutes to yourself to develop a functional analysis for this setting as well.

(B: Okay. The FA would look as follows:)

1) Identify the primary function of the intended product, system or similar.
   = The designer defines the overall function of the “curtain”, which is quite simply to shut out/let in light.

2) Then ask “How?” one can achieve this.
   = The designer discovers the sub-functions, which includes all possible factors that could support the controlling of light. (If a sub-function is removed, the overall function is not fulfilled.)

3) Continue to trace through each function chronologically and organize them into a hierarchy.
   = The designer classifies sub-sub-functions, which covers everything from safety (e.g. fireproof materials), isolation, environmental hygiene (e.g. the possibility to disinfect, sterilize and/or wash in industrial machinery), ergonomics (e.g. light-proof, easy to hang, etc.), and also identifies aesthetics, sustainability (regarding manufacturability, performance, maintenance and duration, as well as environmental aspects), competitiveness (e.g. a broad range of products, possible to customize, etc.) – all in congruence with national and international regulations. (These functions are either crucial to the overall function or the sub-functions and express more or less desirable features of the product, system or similar.)

(…)

A: Why did your choice fall on threat?

B: Simply because I believe it to be the best and ultimate solution – for both sides of the fence, obviously – to take away the problem.

A: Hence “life” itself?

B: Yes.

A: Nicely performed and very well executed I must say! (…) Next up is concept development. I believe 5 minutes should be enough, considering how efficient you have become. I hope it is fine with you.
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(A walks away and comes back something like 5 minutes later.)

**A:** You seem to be very trigger-happy, so bring it on!

**B:** The concept would basically consist of an exceptionally functional (perhaps less semantic this time) – however, aesthetically desirable nevertheless – set of curtains. Apart from bringing in an element of craft to, in this way, make it cozier, they'll provide insulation, shut out the sun on bright days and improve the acoustics of the room for the benefit the inhabitant(s). What's more, the curtains follow all regulations regarding environmental hygiene as well as those pertaining to fire protection and, on top of this, the yarn is 100% recyclable – a concept totally in tune with today's environmental issues.

**A:** May I ask what could be a typical usage scenario, that is person vs. object? And, last but not least, how does it look? (...) Please make a quick sketch of this concept as well.

**B:** In a nutshell, it starts as soon as the person in question unfastens the end of the curtain – with a single snap – and pull out the length of fabric required to actually perform the action. What happens next is really out of my hands, but I'd put my money on that he/she would continue by making a loop (big enough for a head) and tighten it real tight. Ultimately, the person will find a place to fix the rope and then he/she will go on to jump, twist or do it in some other way. (...) I also put in an element of chance (for the sake of satire) by making the thread in such fashion so that it's inflexible in some places while elastic in others (DesMa 10).

**A:** Splendid! Could you also briefly explain the various designials and also how the critical aspect comes in?

**B:** I'd say the collection “with the plan to cover up windows in remand cells”, as you said earlier, serves all criteria – from threat to deprival (to confinement of course). (...) What's more, the fact that the ideal function of the curtain (vs. expectation) is equal to that of a lethal game of chance – and the fact that the person is likely to be strangled, if not the first time, perhaps the second or the third, etc., plus he/she will hopefully gain some insight into why things are the way they are in between every attempt – this is as critical (and crime prevention-oriented, for that matter) as I've ever been to curtain design.

**A:** In other words, your contribution is something of a textile version of Russian roulette?

**B:** Exactly.

**A:** Speaking of gambling, what about the chance that people in remand are in fact not yet convicted of anything, thus merely under suspicion and therefore per definition “free”?

**B:** Then I certainly hope luck is on their side.

**A:** I guess one of the last questions to ask is: do you see how an existential designial analysis differs from a functional analysis?

**B:** Absolutely.

**A:** What do you think is the main reason for this?

**B:** Oh, I'd say designials or, as you like to call them, the “objectives of design” as a package. Easily. I mean, now I see how being locked up in jail could simply make things around you into some kind of punishment or threat because your own stuff is taken away – likewise, how substitute-things can serve as protection or anchor to you, just because you're strapped down in a hospital bed and so very far from home, to put it like that. Also, as I said earlier today, this critical way of thinking has revealed to me a whole new side of design I didn’t even know existed – much less knew served a purpose. And, as you've probably figured out, I like that. Purpose.
A: And, finally, is it clear to you how critical methodology could successfully open up the design brief, hence aim to help designers better understand the respective context, that is extreme environments, and, even more importantly, what situations may arise if they do not?
B: Yep! (Are you all right by the way? You seem pale.)

A: So then, my companion (Plato 1927), in case you haven’t noticed, we have now answered the remaining items on our agenda today, namely “When” and “How” to employ the existential designial analysis in order to achieve critical design examples.
B: Really?

A: Really.
B: So, what’s up next?
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To continue the metaphorical escapade from the title, as well as throughout the licentiate thesis, I would like to give a big thanks to Lars Hallnäs who bought me the ticket to the “dark side” of design thinking back in 2008 – and moreover has, together with Hanna Landin, provided me with reliable maps, compass, flashlight, etc. whenever I got lost or otherwise needed a guide. Furthermore, Johan Öberg who picked me up at the station and drove me the first miles, Birgitta Göransson who welcomed me with open arms to the somewhat impenetrable fortress of Swedish Prison and Probation Service and likewise Tommy Nilsson, Elsa Ivarsson and others who showed me around and helped me discover the different parts – similarly Sepideh Olausson who sat down in the empty seat next to me already at the start and became my appreciated travel partner on parts of the journey, heading down to explore the world of Swedish health care system (plus Berit Lindahl for letting her). Also big thanks to my colleagues at the Swedish School of Textiles for being excellent fellow passengers providing me with company and coffee talks about everything and nothing, as well as Jonas Larsson for pushing the bed in Film No. 2 and Barbro Scholz for making the illustrations – and last but not least family and friends who have been waving and smiling nonstop from the side of the road (special thanks to my best friend Tonje Louise Finne for making the films come through, my good friends Elizabeth Higson for putting a face to my extreme personas and Britt Jorunn Myhren who made sure my graphics were A-OK, and finally this super nice hitchhiker I picked up along the road). I owe you one!