EXISTENTIAL DESIGN

This thesis aims to discuss ways of opening up the design brief when designing for extreme environments such as intensive care units and remand prisons. Focusing on “designials” (fundamental forms of design being), the methodology intends to illustrate the fact that objects may directly impinge upon certain “existentials” (fundamental forms of human being). Moreover, the method is a form of critical design that enables designers to shift focus, from analysis of the functionality of a design in use, e.g. by performing a functional analysis, to analysis of the form of being human that a design in use defines. More importantly, this thesis considers what may happen if we do not take into account this aspect of design; in other words, the “dark side” of design thinking.
EXISTENTIAL DESIGN

-Revisiting the
“dark side” of design thinking

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This thesis aims to discuss ways of opening up the design brief when designing for extreme environments such as intensive care units and remand prisons. Focusing on “designials” (fundamental forms of design being), the methodology intends to illustrate the fact that objects may directly impinge upon certain “existentials” (fundamental forms of human being). Moreover, the method is a form of critical design that enables designers to shift focus, from analysis of the functionality of a design in use, e.g. by performing a functional analysis, to analysis of the form of being human that a design in use defines. More importantly, this thesis considers what may happen if we do not take into account this aspect of design; in other words, the “dark side” of design thinking.
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Suppose you are in charge of the design of a new bench; a quite ordinary bench, intended for people to sit on in public parks. Where would you start? The design manual, brief, program, or similar guide, which was provided by those who initiated the project, i.e. your employer(s), probably outlines the various objectives, major constraints and possible considerations, so it should just be a case of getting to work, should it not?

Initially, you will probably do some research concerning the product itself, i.e. market, principles, ergonomics, materials, technology, appearance, etc., as well as into the rules and regulations governing the product type such as safety codes, environmental issues, guidelines for inclusive design, and so on. From that point, you do everything within your power to have the project move forward, by performing something like a functional analysis, in order to draw conclusions based on the various requirements of the bench. Next comes the ideation stage, which transitions into concept development in two and three dimensions, and leads to the creation of a prototype; this is then tested, evaluated, perhaps improved on, and eventually manufactured. If everything proceeds according to plan, the bench will be put on the market after a year or so, and the mayor will be present at the opening, which will be a large event with full-blown media coverage. The national press will feature articles with headlines such as “Town parks have been given a makeover by young, talented designers”.

Shortly afterwards, the city council orders benches for the three parks it is in the process of finishing in the city.

Let us assume that you accept another full-time project and time goes by. After eight months or so, your previous employer summons the design team to a meeting, at which you are informed that one of the three parks has become a shelter for homeless people and, on top of that, a hub for alcohol abuse, drug dealing, violence, etc., and the police have received reports of several incidents of robbery and even an attempted murder. The city council had conducted a thorough investigation of the matter and it seems that the benches are absolutely perfect to sleep on, both in terms of length and depth, plus the backrest is designed so that one will not roll off and onto the ground when sleeping. As a consequence, the park has become ideal to live in, however ironic that may be. Unsurprisingly, the park is situated in an area of the city which is under a lot of societal stress, which was the very
reason the city council decided to build the park there to begin with; to buck the trend and, hopefully, influence people to include it as part of the city again.

Feeling moved by the situation, and on top of that ashamed for not having foreseen all the challenges, you take on the project of re-designing the bench. How would you go about solving this new problem? It appears that situations such as this one require an alternative design method alongside the established ones, because the ones you have already applied appear to be insufficient.
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.

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.
1 DESIGN MANUAL
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 frightenened, 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 prisons, hospitals 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, pp. 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 (i.e. to have an existential outlook on the design work).
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 remand prisons and intensive care units, 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.

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, the 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 while also fulfilling the 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 penalty 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 designtial 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 what it means to design for the given existential – whereas an existential is synonym with what it means to be human (in e.g. 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 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 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 desigial analysis first need to observe the relevant group of people and next – through critical analysis – try to identify the fitting existential. A general existential desigial analysis would be executed in this manner:

1) Initiate by asking: What does it mean to be such a person?
   = The designer identifies the basic form of being human [i.e. the existential].

2) Continue the examination: What 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) 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 desigial analysis, executing the analysis could look something like this:

1) Initiate by asking: What 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. confinement or absence.

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

3) Finally, identify the defining elements, i.e. the sub-designials determining the overall designial.
   = The designer opens up for the central sub-designials, e.g. deprival or substitute.
Let us study two design briefs relating to Antoine, the main character of Sartre’s *A Nausea*.

A) 30-year-old Antoine Roquentin is living in **confinement (existential)**, 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, locks himself in the house and so departs on a desperate search for meaning in all the things which once fulfilled his life.

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. the sub-designials determining deprival.
   - The designer opens up for the central sub-designials, i.e. *punishment and threat*.

B) 30-year-old Antoine Roquentin suffers from what he calls a “sweetish sickness”. This condition takes him into a state of **absence (existential)**. His world increasingly impinges on almost everything he does. The research project he is working on, all human relations established since he came to Bouville – even the memories of his ex-girlfriend Anny, along with his own body and the beauty of nature in general – are affected by this. Over time, Antoine’s aversion towards life turns him into near-insanity. He develops angst, does no longer recognize his own body and so departs on a desperate search for meaning in all the things that once fulfilled his life.

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. the sub-designials determining substitute.
   - The designer opens up for the central sub-designials, i.e. *protection and anchor*.

As is shown in the two analyses above, the answer to question 1 will result in (at least) one existential for each situation, respectively confinement or absence – notably in the context of prisons and hospitals. What is more, the fundamental forms of being human are results of the existential analysis and both of them describe what it means to be Antoine.

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. substitute (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-step approach forms 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.
DEFINITIONS

What are 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 ICU’s. 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 and designials are exchangeable due to the character of the environment being analyzed.)

In order to understand the similarities, I 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 – 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.
**DEFINITIONS**

**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 and so 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, and, 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.

See pp. 60-63, 64-67, 76-79, 80-83 for examples.

**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 do, 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 devices that keep the heart 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 social environment and so forth. Consequently, this will affect the tasks and skills involved in being a parent, a good spouse and/or friend.

See pp. 52-55, 56-59, 68-71, 72-75 for examples.
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 best practice the designial analysis, each of the terms are to be understood according to the following definitions:

**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 explain *deprival* and *substitute* more extensively, many more factors needs to be brought forward than presented by the following pages and the fictive examples. 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 – as it implies 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.
DEFINITIONS

**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 – thus 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 dispossess 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**.

To further clarify **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 woman 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.

See pp. 60-63, 64-67, 76-79, 80-83 for examples.

**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 instead 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 the fundamental from of **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 man’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.

See pp. 52-55, 56-59, 68-71, 72-75 for examples.
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.

In order to best make use of the last step of the designial analysis, each of the terms must be interpreted in line with following definitions:
**Punishment**

- *Punishment* as a fundamental form of being stands for basic forms of design being such as that of 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. 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 crochet butterfly 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 pp. 60-63, 80-83 for further examples.

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**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, especially in terms of constituting a “danger” to the person in prison. As *threat* 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 rag mat takes on the fundamental form of *deprival* the moment it is removed from the main character. Because the threat-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 tension, physical discomfort, self-harm, pain, injury, and the like onto the person in retaliation.

See pp. 64-67, 76-79 for further examples.
**DEFINITIONS**

**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 designial 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 designial - sub-designial 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.

See pp. 52-55, 72-75 for further examples.

**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 designial - sub-designial is meant to work, Film No. 2, Absence - Design for substitute (Torkildsby 2010) is used as an example for the last time. The institutional blanket takes the fundamental form of anchor because the crochet quilt is inaccessible to the main character. Even though the anchor-thing occupies the place of the crochet quilt, thus keeping the main character from having "my" quilt, "my" remaining belongings, "my" home, "my" life, etc. it still exists as an extended-care, literally covering the person being subjected to critical care.

See pp. 56-59, 68-71 for more examples.

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

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 was there with me. I thought 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.

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.
**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 Jacky 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.

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 designal, 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 designal analysis. As a result, anchor forms the sub-designal and defines the secondary mode in which the object exists as a design: constantly relating to the higher level in the existential designal 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 designal, 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.
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 a potential critical design example, i.e. punishment in the form of a washbasin.

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 metal sheet in front of the washbasin, if I’m not mistaken – just made me sick to the bones.
Example 4:

Prisoner diary, Tom, S30912 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 this way 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.

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 a potential critical design example, i.e. threat in the form of a pair of socks.
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 irresponsive (as if in psychological shock). The ambulance personnel had given him all necessary treatment and his pulse was weak but 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. [...]

In this example, Carl is in circulatory shock. Put another way, he is partly unconscious and so living in a mode of absence, which is central in regard to what forms this way of being human. The institutional bedding set, which embraces Carl – however, only as an alternative for his bedclothes – constitutes the overall designial, i.e. substitute. What is more, the bedding surely gives him comfort – although in a substitute-way according to the designalial analysis. Anchor 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 designalial analysis.

1) What does it mean to be Carl?
   = 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 designalial, 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 bedding set.
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 supporting 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, to be 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 headrest.

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 around 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 “cell”. 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 Karolina had tried to hurt herself also under our care and control, we were in the process of transferring her 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 Karolina 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 say – although strictly speaking only as representative for her glass – makes up the overall desigial, i.e. deprival. Moreover, the glass is there for her convenience – although in a deprival-way according to the desigial analysis. Threat therefore forms the sub-desigial and describes the secondary mode in which the object exists as a design: relating to the level above in the existential desigial 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 desigial, to be deprival

3) Finally, identify the defining elements, i.e. threat determining deprival.
   = The designer opens up for a potential critical design example,
     i.e. threat in the form of a (drinking) glass.
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 damn mattress. It made me feel like I was sick – constantly. I remember asking for more bed sheets in 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 “The Princess and the Pea”, 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, but 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. deprival. Furthermore, the mattress is certainly providing Madeleine with some kind of comfort – although, in a deprival-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 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 mattress.
Sometime during the Spring 2012, two former classmates spend an afternoon together in the name of design. One of them, A, worked as an industrial designer until four and a half years ago, when she began to study for a doctorate in design, and the other, B, has spent the eight 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”.
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, pp. 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 design 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: What about a little hint, 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, pp. 333) and actually continue “[…] falling over […]” ourselves “[…] to kiss corporate ass” (Design Council 2007) – as I believe Barnbrook¹ 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.

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.
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: You seem rather sceptical to this concept. Why is that?  
B: First of all, I’m not sceptical – only intrigued. The “dark side” turns me on, so to speak. That out in the open, there’s a lot I just can’t identify with in this approach to design.

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, design practice? We proceed by basically expanding upon your “designerly” (ibid) ways of working, in relation to the existential designal 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 the 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, pp. 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 possibly launched in a new edition). 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, pp. 27) 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 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.

A: Correct. Speaking of development, 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 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 would 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 manifesto3 (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: “[...] the next generation of global design [...]” (Droog 2011).

B: Well, when you put it like that, of course not.

A: So, let me ask you something: 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?!

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.

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: 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.

A: Well then, with what can the outcome of this critical methodology, i.e. the critical design examples, contribute?
B: A new way of attacking design problems that challenges the designer’s “[…] assumptions and preconceived ideas about the design being per se […]” (Design manual, pp. 20). But what’s even more important, “[…] bring to light and call into question 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). 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, pp. 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
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 ought to 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 name-dropping 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: You make it sound like I am in denial of the rest of the design world.

B: Aren’t you?

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: 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 inherently 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, pp. 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, pp. 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, pp. 170).

B: What are you getting at?

A: Well, in my view there is a clear distinction between a mass-produced, commercial product and an object of for instance the existential type, such as the noteworthy rocking chair crafted for someone’s grandma. I agree with Jongerious on this point: products today are not designed “[...] to have a long, secluded existence – not even in memory” (Schouwenberg 2003, pp. under the headline “For the love of things”). Moreover, I agree with there being many reasons for this and amongst them “[...] the increased mobility that leaves us less scope for cherishing context-bound objects, and the dazzling pace of technological innovations, which follows a logic entirely its own” (ibid). Also, Verbeek discusses this in his book What things do: philosophical reflections on technology, agency, and design. With the purpose of understanding why, “Most contemporary approaches to industrial design pay little attention to the mediating role of artifacts” (Verbeek 2005, pp. 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 Borgman. 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” (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, pp. 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
with which it renews itself" (Schouwenberg 2003, pp. 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. Anyhow, to sum up, the chair clearly has qualities relating to designials – more than for example commerce – and this in particular is what the 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, (…)

B: Oh, just forget it! (Let grandma X rest for now.) But while on the topic, there’s something else I’d like to discuss. I’ve read some of Csikszentmihalyi’s stuff, mostly what he’s written about the interviews he and a colleague carried out on – I believe – something like a hundred families in the US concerning their “feelings” about ordinary household products. One of his conclusions is: “A person finds meaning in objects that are plausible, concrete symbols of the foremost goals, the most salient actions and events in that person’s life” (Csikszentmihalyi 1991, pp. 29). The interesting thing is that most of the people listed memories of family members or other near and dear ones as the main important feature in such products (Csikszentmihalyi, Rochberg-Halton 1981, pp. 278-89). And in grandma X’s case, the fact that her son gave her the rocking chair, although he had no hand in making the chair but simply bought it, could just as well give plenty of meaning to her. (…) Actually, according to the findings of these guys, furniture – such as a chair – scores high on all sections. It doesn’t matter whether the interviewee is female or male, is a child or a grandparent, is considered upper class or lower-middle class (ibid). I take it not all of their furniture 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, pp. 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, pp. 28) 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, pp. 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 designial 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, pp. 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, pp. 28). 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, designials vs. semantics. (…) I simply believe anyone designing (and doing research for that matter) with respect to the existential designial 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 designials (forms of design being) and product semantics (relating to use), but how do you place designials 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 “designial” 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 designials 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, i.e. with functions as the only underlying scheme of a product or “method of construction” (ibid) 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 designial.

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 I've changed my 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, pp. 4).
B: Adding this to what we just agreed to, a spade, or any kind of product 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 desigial 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 the wall).
B: And what you found was the “dark side” of design thinking? Now, that's ironic...

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

A: I assume you understood “thing” as “thing” in its general sense?
B: I think so. (…) I stick to what I just said no matter what. I frankly don't see where this leaves the person intended to use the product, regardless if it's a Lamborghini or a rocking chair.

A: Are you familiar with the concept of “Dasein”?
B: No.

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"? (Karlstrom 2006, pp. 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.
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 designial 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 (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 (Existentielle). 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 designial 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), and yours as well, 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 designial 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, pp. 123; Husserl 1970, pp. 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 to say 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 mid-life 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, pp. 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, pp. 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 mid-life 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, pp. 52-83); 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 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 bitch 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, pp. 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 […]” (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 actual people, if you know what I mean.

**A:** In what way is this problematic to you?

**B:** 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 mid-life 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, pp. 52-83); I regard the logics in them to be quite simple.

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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 artefacts, or as I prefer to call them “critical design 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, pp. 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). Lenskjöld 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.

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, pp. 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, pp. 12). Furthermore, pertaining to the existential analysis, helplessness, etc. is yet another way of existing that adds to the fundamental form of absence.

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, pp. 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
altogether – 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 is illness, “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, pp. 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, pp. 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 as 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. (Perhaps later down the road.)

**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 (Torkildsbj 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, pp. 45).

**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, pp. 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).
**DIALOGUE**

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, pp. 27-28).

B: Fascinating! (…) Speaking of insects – and somehow alienation – I saw this great movie a few years ago, the Kafka-esque nightmare Naked Lunch (Burroughs 1992), from the early 90’s 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, pp. 22). (…) 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, simply because existentials originate from examining the design brief and not from analyzing the extreme environment in itself. But, at the same time, criticizing the brief in such a way clearly assumes that the designer has already analyzed what it refers to, i.e. the environment in question, if you understand what I mean?

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...
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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 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, 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 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, lightning and sound specialists, textile designers, etc.) spent two years building up a fully functional alternative to the conventional patient’s room at Södra Älvsborg 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, that is to say less equipped as a working space for doctors and nurses – where by the way the amount of equipment “[…] makes it difficult to create an environment where technology and people can meet and interact comfortably” (Olausson et al. 2012, pp. 2) – and more like “[…] a room to care for severe ill persons […]” (ibid; Fridh et al. 2009). Keeping in mind that previous research indicates that the current environment in the ICU patient room affects the patient’s recovery process negatively and, further, that e.g. “The prevalence of strong lighting and noise affects physiological parameters such as blood pressure, heart rate and sleep” (Olausson et al. 2012; Li et al. 2011; Ryherd et al. 2008); which in turn “[…] can have an impact on the patient safety and treatment outcomes” (Olausson et al. 2011) as a whole, tells us that what this group is doing is seriously needed. 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 the 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 benefitting 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, pp. 22) 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).

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. Plus, I got to know that patients’
rooms in ICUs can easily be compared to Foucault’s (1977) panoptical rooms in prison – like Olausson points out in one of her articles on the subject: “These rooms are full of control and everything is in order; every minute is regulated by timed routines, as they are built for surveillance” (Olausson et al. 2012, pp. 7) – which was an intriguing thought indeed. 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. (...) On top of this, I soon came to learn about Dunne’s “Heterotopia” (Dunne 2005. pp. 52, 100) and, furthermore, found that it provides good grounds for critical design thinking. This in turn lead me to Foucault (again) 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). And finally, the fact that he exemplifies such places as hospitals and prisons – or even homes for the elderly, cemeteries and travel journeys – definitely 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 penalty) in a remand prison, and also the factor of 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, pp. 38). (...) 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 2013*).
fall from grace which I must assume” (ibid, pp. 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. Apropos, van Lennep (1969) suggests that a room speaks a silent language connecting people to different modes of being, such as that of familiarity or hostility. Further that “Dwelling in the room is like wearing a garment, you exist in the room as in clothes. Entering someone else’s room [...] one feels hesitation and uncertainty, in a way like borrowing a stranger’s garment, therefore there is a need to be invited and received into the room, otherwise one feels naked and homeless” (Olausson et al. 2012, pp. 7; van Lennep 1969, pp. 33-40) (…) 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, pp. 178).

B: No big surprise, really.

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, pp. 40). Further, in the same breath as criticizing the famous Panopticon (Bentham) (which, apropos, reformed 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, pp. 201). Moreover, this design creates what Foucault calls “a machine” which aims at: “[...] dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric 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” (ibid), which in turn creates “[…] anxiety and powerlessness, affecting the person’s self-esteem, integrity and dignity […]” (Design manual, pp. 38) 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 people 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 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* "The reaction to the real or imagined creator of suffering is pictured in the Old Testament itself as wrath, ill temper. Suffering produces fruits like curses, imprecations, and prayers for vengeance more readily than reform and insight. Suffering causes people to experience helplessness and fear; indeed intense pain cripples all power to resist and frequently leads to despair" (Sölle 1984, pp. 22). This adds to the ground of the existential designial analysis and yet again confirm how closely related the existentials are to each other, and also how their characteristics are linked together.

B: You know what, that actually sounds a little like you’re justifying crime?!

A: That was not my intention, nor was it meant as a personal opinion. (…) I am not at all taking an ethical stand with this work. More explicitly, I only take position in terms of design and do so indirectly by putting question marks on the way we think (and do) design for environments outside what is considered “normal” (Design manual, pp. 22), such as the institutional ones. (Hey, listen, what do you say I empty myself of confinement – including a reference that will definitely keep us awake – and then we take a break?)

B: Perfect.

A: Excellent. A contribution to this somewhat murky path of confinement is also the view of Nietzsche. In his book, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, he particularly addresses the existential in the second essay *Guilt, Bad Conscience, and Related Matters*.

B: Eh, this must be The perfect title for a Spaghetti Western?!

A: With all respect, it is considered to be his masterpiece. (Ha ha, sorry about that.)

B: About punishment, guilt, suffering, remorse, and moral in general, he says for example: “[…] he receives a hint, he receives from his sorcerer, the
ascetic priest, the first hint as to the ‘cause’ of his suffering: he must seek it in himself, in some guilt, in a piece of the past, he must understand his suffering as a punishment” (Nietzsche 1989, pp. 140).

B: Yet, I've to say that if I didn't know better, I'd guess you're campaigning for suffering as a way out of (legal) punishment. You better read it once more.

A: “[...] he receives a hint, he receives from his sorcerer, the ascetic priest, the first hint as to the ‘cause’ of his suffering: he must seek it in himself, in some guilt, in a piece of the past, he must understand his suffering as a punishment” (ibid).

B: 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? Speaking of which, 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”.

A: 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.

B: 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 percentiles – it doesn’t really matter which one.)

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 (i.e. the largest 5% and smallest 5%).

4

DIALOGUE

A: 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.

B: I’d like that.

A: Up next is Sartre (to fulfil my promise). In his book The wall – the eponymous short story of the same name which, in brief, portrays a situation where prisoners are condemned to death – Sartre expresses the fundamental form of confinement as perceived by one of the inmates, Pablo. For instance, he writes: “Perhaps I lived through my execution twenty times; once I even thought it was for good: I must have slept a minute. They were dragging me to the wall and I was struggling; I was asking for mercy. I woke up with a start and looked at the Belgian: I was afraid I might have cried out in my sleep. But he was stroking his moustache, he hadn’t noticed anything” (Sartre 1969, pp. 10).

B: How can this not be Pablo’s (subjective) experience?

A: It is obviously Pablo’s experience; however, that is not the point. I am providing you with some examples where confinement is “[…] pictured in more twisted ways […]” because “[…] you know how we’re always seeking poetic input […]”. Does this ring a bell with you?

B: Guilty as charged.

A: Rumors say it was during a period of imprisonment, as a prisoner of war sometime in 1940, that Sartre read Heidegger’s Time and Being – which later became a major influence on his work. How is that for an ending to existentials?

B: I’m speechless! (…) Joking aside, I feel the need to add a little something – again – on experience. Less academic and more pop culture-ish than what we’re talking about, but still. May I?

A: Please, go ahead, but try to make it brief.

B: You know Pete Doherty, the lead singer of Babyshambles? (…) Well, some 4-5 years ago he spent 13 nights in custody while awaiting his trial
(after pleading guilty to seven counts of possessing drugs). Anyway, The Guardian published his diary exclusively during this period and I remember thinking it was quite exciting to follow. I’ve kept clippings of it on my fridge ever since, for some reason. Some of the things he wrote were:

“February 2. [...] I’ll do my hair a-while, and even make my bed. Top bunk, yellow fire blankets aplenty coz I’ve been on the lookout see. Even nabbed a rare old prison shirt off a passing trolley, a boiled egg and a nice blue prison vest. To say nothing of the many packets of Butler I just found on the side [...]” (The Guardian 2006).

“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 woman 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.” (Design manual, pp. 44). 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’ll 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.
**DIALOGUE**

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 seem 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 people in remand prison to end their lives […]” (Design manual, pp. 20) – and, more importantly, choose to do so “[…] by e.g. stuffing a sock down the throat and therefore suffocate?” (ibid). Likewise, “[[…] 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?” (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, i.e. the product 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/existing, as a design (object)
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(Design manual, pp. 20).

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 […] being cared for in a hospital ICU bed.

B: […]

A: Correct. (…) Did you recognize any differences between the two cuts?

T: No.

A: Allow me to rephrase the question. Did you see any textiles at any point?

T: His clothes I guess (…) And the sheets of course.

A: Nothing that, one way or another, appeared more prominent than the rest?

T: There was this cover. In the beginning I think.

A: A keen observation, T. What about the situation, especially regarding the person, at this point in time?

T: Colorful, a little like the film was old.

A: I am grateful to you for saying that.

T: Saying what?

A: “Colorful”. Do you recall what happened next?

T: The film turned black and white and everything seemed to rush.

A: Please explain “rush”.

B: Give him a break from the Platon-act you’ve got going on there, will you?

T: No stress. With “rush” I mean that the bed moves at high speed.

A: So strictly speaking, the bed moves as if the situation were in fact critical?

T: Right.

A: And how do the textiles look, at this point?

T: There’s nothing special about them (?) [Shoots a quick look at B.]

A: In other words, “normal”?

B: [Laughs out loud.]

T: Yes, normal.

A: Which in the context of an ICU is likely to imply a uniform, dull and/or unimaginative appearance?

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 [...]" (Design manual, pp. 28) the thing is to be used, we will not be able to fully determine its intended use, purpose and goals 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 – no doubt about that, but I sure 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: That is actually a nice way of putting it. And yes, I am fully aware of the strangeness of the concept. Likewise, I am sensible to the fact that I am not a textile designer, as you so righteously insinuated. In this situation, however, I see that as an advantage for the very reason that I was taught to initiate projects with a design manual, brief, program, or similar, and from there –
through the development process – decide on what material(s) is required/suitable in order to fulfill the intended function(s) or purpose. This is how I came to understand textiles to be just another material – on the same grounds as all other materials – but that is a story for another time.
T: Who says A must say B. [Pours himself some more coffee.]

A: Then consider a hand-woven organic cotton yarn blanket: hand-dyed with natural dyes. How is it brought into being? (…) Next think of a tarpaulin: a sheet of heavy, waterproof material used to cover for example a car. Then, again, ask yourself how it is brought into existence? (…) In terms of design methodology, do they not share – principally speaking – the same steps of development, namely from idea to final product?
T: Of course.

A: And where do ideas come from?
T: Nowhere and everywhere.

A: Put differently, they could very well originate from a design manual, brief or program stating the design objectives?
T: Sure.

A: Now, let us say that both the cotton blanket and the tarpaulin where developed from such a document. Still, would they not be equally suitable for suffocating someone?
T: This is absurd.

B: My response exactly!
T: [Leans back in the chair.] I see your guns are loaded.

[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. (Perhaps 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 desigital 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, pp. 30). 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 works best for you.) Well then, shall we put the existential designal analysis into play? And – by all means – let us be creative, imaginative, fictitious and everything in between.
B: I like the sound of that!

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, pp. 98).

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

A: Sorry, I did not entirely understand you. Could you please repeat 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* have 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 for a second, 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: Because I feel empathy for the guy. Simple as that.

A: 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, pp. 38). 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 intension of somehow comparing them as two extremes and thus more easily find both similarities and differences regarding ways of being in remand prisons and ICU’s” (ibid).
DIALOGUE

**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 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, pp. 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, pp. 10).

**B:** Because there’s 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 *deprivation*, 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 do with 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, pp. 30) 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 web page. (...) 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, if I may ask?

**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.

[A 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, which is 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 disorientation and overall miscordination – 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 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 examine the brief. (…) And because step 1 and 2 are given, it’s just step 3 left to do really (right?), meaning I’ll continue with: “Finally, identify the defining elements, i.e. the sub-designials determining substitute” (Design manual, pp. 33). By answering this, I’d be able to open up “[…] for the central sub-designials, i.e. protection and anchor” (ibid). (Which is what designers “[…] otherwise tend to forget” (ibid, pp. 20))

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 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 explain and justify the reasons behind your choice of sub-designial?

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, pp. 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 [...] 

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: Shit! (…) 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, the bedridden one(s).

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 (MA1-TD-THS 2010).

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 designial 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, pp. 41).

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 props, newspaper articles and other means to entice and coax the audience into the discussion” (ibid). B: First time I’ve heard about Auger, but Dunne & Raby. (…) Their names come up a lot. Great inspiration, I understand? I’ve to confess that I’d actually never heard of them before I read the manual. Perhaps if there’s time later, could you tell a little more about your creative triggers?

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 (a propos, 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 neighborhood – 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 web page 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.

A: Very well, then assume that you are in charge of designing a curtain collection intended for remand cells and do with it what you did with the previous example: start by coming up with a problem description, followed by a functional analysis, and so forth.

B: Yep.

[After something like 5 minutes of peace and quiet.]

B: “Finito”. The problem is as follows: The remand prison in X city has in recent years experienced an increase in severe self-inflicted injuries – many of them with fatal outcomes – pertaining to people having tried to commit suicide. (…) Prospects show that the number will gradually increase in parallel with the increase of unemployment figures. What’s more, the percentage of people suffering from depression is higher than ever. All of this naturally worries the city council, not only on the behalf of the council members themselves, but also on behalf of the prison and its
reputation (which by now is rather poor). (…) That’s the background. Now to the goal of the project, namely the ridicule: the actual problem, which may also lie in the fact that the inhabitants of X city are mostly miserable people, doing everything in their power to get in touch with their “real self” (in this way perhaps gaining a little glimpse of happiness, too), and set out to achieve this by committing frauds and other crimes. However, since this is far from what ordinary design solutions can do, I stick to the obvious: the secondary problem is that people in remand dread their own lives so much that they try – again and again – to put an end to it all. (…) As a solution to this problem, a psychologist (an expert on prison environments with focus on well-being) is called in to interview groups from both sides of the fence so to say and, further, to analyze the situation. What she comes up with is a list of improvements to make those on the inside to feel more comfortable, sort of more at home, and to make the staff feel less worried about the trend of suicides. At the top of that list are textiles, or curtains to be exact. This is when the management understands they’re in need of a designer. (…) To summarize, the problem is that people on remand want to die (expectation vs. ideals), the solution is to design a product to cover up the windows, one which aids in the process (functional requirement vs. designial) and like so the designer will please all citizens of X city, criminals or non-criminals. Do you follow?

A: Yes, and I must say you have a very vivid imagination.
B: You’re not the only one who can “make soup of a nail” to recall an old Scandinavian folk tale.
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 sure 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.

[Some minutes later.]

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 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.)

(Let’s jump directly to the next step.) When it comes to the EDA, I’ll just copy
the actions from before. Meaning, I’ll go straight to the point and identify
the defining elements, that is sub-designials determining the designial,
and so reveal the central sub-designials. Then I’d look at what factors have
the biggest say in deprival as a form and as always, I’m tempted to answer
both sub-designials, but I’ll go with threat, which makes the EDA look like
this:

1) What does it mean to be such a person?
   - 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 a potential critical design example,
     i.e. threat in the form of a “curtain”.

A: Indeed, you are starting to sound more and more like an expert! Why did
your choice fall on threat by the way?
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.

[A walks away and comes back something like 5 minutes later.]

A: You look 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 of 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 or 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 or 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 (MA1-TD-THS 2010).
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 deprivation (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 or 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 to say 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?
With a travel bag in one hand and the design manual in the other, I started the final part of the journey that would take me around Scandinavia; up hills, down hills, and through dark woods. Rather than dreaming up my own critical design examples, I was curious to see what design students in Finland, Denmark, Norway, and (of course) Sweden were capable of designing. Four months and five design schools later, I had collected enough critical design examples to shake the ground beneath the feet of even the best designers and, moreover, I had collected the feedback needed to polish the somewhat rough edges of the existential designial analysis, critical method, and the design manual itself.
3 CRITICAL DESIGN

EXAMPLES
Preliminary workshop layout:

In order to begin to find my footing and to develop the structure of the workshop sessions, prior to the first “real” full-length workshop I was going to hold in Helsinki in the fall of 2011, I held two “preliminary” sessions at the Swedish School of Textiles, one in the fall of 2010 and one in the spring of 2011. At this point in time, the workshop was structured as follows:

Start-up:

A1) Introduction: A brief presentation of the undersigned as designer and doctoral student, and an opportunity for the students to present themselves individually and as a class (i.e. educational background, current focus of the study program, future plans, etc.).

- This is not only good manners when meeting new people, but also a way to break the ice, i.e. demystify the undersigned as a doctoral student, and so make the students feel at ease in the situation in order to jump-start the workshop session.

- Depending on the number of students/groups, the time required to complete this step was estimated at fifteen to twenty minutes.

A2) Brainteaser: Introduction of a hypothetical assignment, and the students brainstorming briefly (in plenum) regarding what should be considered first, methodologically speaking, as well as how and why, when designing a set of bedclothes for an institutional environment, such as a remand prison or an intensive care unit (ICU).

- The idea behind this step of the process, as well as the next, was to convince the students that the overall exercise (i.e. A12) was concerned with the development of a product using traditional design methods, only to change course later on, in AS, and so bring attention to the divide between traditional ways of thinking and designing, and the critical way.

- The oral presentation was supported by Powerpoint slides, which displayed inspirational pictures from the respective environments; these were shown in order to put the students in the right frame of mind. The time required to complete this step was estimated at five to ten minutes.

Presenting the existential designal analysis:

A3) Background: An introduction to functional analysis as a method of starting up a design project, and a brief run-through of the different steps of a traditional product development process (i.e. research, design brief, list of requirements, product development, evaluation, adjustment, and so on – all, of course, in accordance with the respective requirements. (For more details, see pp. 24-28.)

- As was mentioned above, this step was intended to demonstrate the contrast between the functional analysis and the existential designal analysis.

- The oral presentation was supported by a slide, which presented a very general example of what a functional analysis for a set of bedclothes intended for use in an institution could look like. The time required to complete this step was estimated at five to ten minutes.

A4) Fictive personas and scenarios: Presentation of four fictional personas and scenarios, two of which are confined to a remand prison (Olle; pp. 60-63, and Karolina; pp. 76-79) and two who receive care in an ICU (Anna; pp. 56-59 and Petter; pp. 52-55).

- The intention with this action was to gradually familiarize the students with the existential designal analysis (and the “dark side” of design in a general sense), by introducing the concepts step by step, i.e. existentials and designials, to each of the four personas and scenarios, while emphasizing the fictive nature of the situations, regardless of how realistic these examples may have been.
- The oral presentation was supported by handouts, which prompted randomly selected students to describe the fictional personas and scenarios; this functioned alongside the slide show, which displayed pictures of the fictive personas, accompanied by the conceptual keywords. The time required to complete this step was estimated at twenty to twenty-five minutes.

A5) Existential desigial analysis: A linking of the four fictive personas and scenarios to the concept as a whole, i.e. a thorough explanation of the various concepts (existentials and designials), using the examples/fictive settings.

- By introducing the existential desigial analysis in three steps (A4, A5 and A6), the students were given a comfortable introduction to this way of thinking, which hopefully resulted in an increase in the likelihood of them relating to the theory in its entirety. As expected, a demonstration of the divide between the traditional way of thinking and designing, as opposed to the critical way (A3-A5), produced an interesting “moment of revelation” on the part of the students, which in turn led to very fruitful discussions; these concerned anything from how to better determine the various functions of a product and whether there is such a thing as foolproof products to how products are tested prior to their introduction on the market, e.g. in so-called testing institutes, where technologies, materials and even processes can be developed, tested and evaluated. These discussions allowed the students to meet the existential desigial analysis with more open minds and a greater curiosity.

A6) Critical method: A demonstration of how these steps all go together, i.e. how to utilize the critical method by applying the three-step approach, how the concepts, more specifically the four combinations of existentials and designials, form the hierarchical structure of the existential desigial analysis and, finally, how they relate to each other.

- The oral presentation was supported by a couple of slides, in which the structure of the existential desigial analysis was presented. The time required to complete this step was estimated at five to ten minutes.

- Besides providing a step-by-step guide to the application of the critical method, which in this way was established as a straightforward tool for the students to use in the creative process, this step provided an overview of the hierarchical structure of the existential desigial analysis (which may come in handy in the form of a “map”, which visually represented the various concepts, ensuring that none of the students were lost in the process).

A7) Critical examples: An illustration of how it could be achieved: what a critical design example could look like, including the fictive personas and scenarios (depicted in sketches, with one for each environment, made by the undersigned on the night before the presentation).^{5}

- The oral presentation was supported by a couple of slides, in which the pictures of the four fictive personas were shown, accompanied by the three-step approach (critical method) to each of the examples/fictive settings (for more details see Petter; pp. 52-55, Anna; pp. 56-59, Olle; pp. 60-63 and Karolina; pp. 76-79). The time required to complete this step was estimated at ten to fifteen minutes (this was also the point at which it was normal to have a short break, in order to keep the students focused).

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5 The critical design concept for the remand prison setting is a door handle made of chocolate, which melts a little more every time someone uses it, meaning that it will eventually become impossible to open the door; moreover, it gives the person trying to open the door a taste of the “bitter sweetness” with every attempt (confinement, deprivation, punishment).

As for the ICU setting, the critical design concept is a Ku Klux Klan-inspired bedding which covers the whole body when the inmate is in a recumbent position, except for the eyes, nose, mouth and arms, which must be easily accessible in order to monitor the patient, and is fastened to the mattress/bed using a zipper, ensuring that the patient will not fall out of bed and injure themselves (absence, substitute, anchor).
- The presentation was supported by a couple of slides, in which illustrations of the critical design examples were displayed. The time required to complete this step was estimated at five minutes.

**A8) Handing out the assignment: Incorporation of theory by the division of the students into an appropriate number of groups (a maximum of five in each), and the distribution of the assignment, which involves generating one or more critical design examples from a given pair of existentials and designials.**

- In terms of who was given what, when and how, etc., no decision as to what type of critical design examples were to be used at a particular school/university was made and the process was random, except for considerations regarding the nature of the design traditions at the current institution. For example, the Swedish School of Textiles was given the chance to create “soft” products, and Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences were instructed to create products related to their traditions, i.e. ones likely to be produced in hard materials such as wood, plastic and metal. However, all possible combinations of existentials and designials were tried out, which is to say confinement/deprival/punishment and confinement/deprival/threat for the remand prison setting, and absence/substitute/protection and absence/substitute/anchor for the ICU setting. Also, during the course of the workshops, the product categories selected for developing critical design examples were, for the remand prison setting, curtains, a prison jumpsuit, bedding, and door handles and, for the ICU setting, a patient uniform, bedding, curtain room dividers, and bed lights.

- The oral presentation was supported by handouts – a different one for each group – showing the general three-step approach and also the selected set of existentials and designials. The time required to complete this step was estimated at five to ten minutes.

**A9) Inspiration: Presentation of facts, design philosophies, manifests, quotations, design examples, etc. from Dunne & Raby, Jurgen Bey, Noam Toran, James Auger & Jimmy Loizeau, Elio Caccavale, and others in the field. Some are mentioned only briefly by referring to examples of their work, and some are given longer introductions both in the form of text and by showing examples.**

- Essentially, this section was intended to function as a springboard for ideas, in the event that some of the students were interested in learning more about critical design and/or the ones practicing it.

- This presentation was carried out in the form of text in the slide show, e.g. names of people active in the field, project titles, and links to various homepages, and orally, as people and projects came to mind while presenting. The time required to complete this step was estimated at five minutes.

**A10) Reference list: References to material related to anything from traditional design methods (e.g. Jones, Cross), the Radical Design movement of the 1960s and ’70s, or contemporary critical design practitioners. Additionally, refer to existential movies and literature (Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal*, Tarkovsky’s *Solaris*, Kubrick’s *Paths of Glory*, as well as Sartre, Camus, and Kafka, to name a few).**

- By listing some of the sources used as a basis for the research of the undersigned, it was hoped that at least some of the students would be inspired to investigate further.

- The oral presentation was supported by a slide, which displayed the literature list (which was also distributed as a physical copy). The time required to complete this step was estimated at three to five minutes.

**A11) Formalities: Informing of the students regarding the necessary procedures, including the fact that they are required to sign a consent form in order for the undersigned to use the material developed during the workshop (photos, sketches, critical design examples, quotations, etc.) in her research.**
- This step is essential in order to avoid ethical dilemmas, and was carried out by handing out the consent forms and receiving them back before the conclusion of the workshop, and was estimated to take approximately three to five minutes to complete.

Exercise:

A12) Group work: The students commence group work that lasts between one and four days, depending on the length of the workshop, and the undersigned shifts between the active role of the “teacher”, who provides guidance when needed, and the passive observer, “drinking in” as much of all kinds of information as possible. It is of particular interest to observe the way in which the students take in the existential designial analysis and how they work with the critical method; furthermore, it is also valuable to note how they reflect upon this way of thinking about design, as opposed to the traditional way.

- As stated in step A8, the students were encouraged to develop one or more critical design examples within the product category they had been assigned. Thus, they either worked until they were fully satisfied with the result or, for the sake of valuable experience, until they ran out of time, and did so according to the design methods they were at that time familiar with which, in most cases, followed the process of ideation, development, actualization, etc. However, they were strongly recommended to develop ideas and concepts in multiple directions and, in fact, three was found to be the optimal number: this allowed the students to maintain two “extremes” while simultaneously developing a more moderate alternative, which allowed them to keep the development as open as possible. Later, they were free to materialize the outcome, i.e. the critical design examples, in whatever form they chose (tangible or intangible), and the same went for optional techniques and mediums, provided the critical aspect came through loud and clear and they were able to substantiate their choices in the presentation.

- This step utilized all forms of presentation, i.e. text, sketches, storyboards, images, role-play, film and animation, etc. As was mentioned above, the time required to complete this step was dependent on the number of students/groups, and varied between four hours and three-and-a-half days.

Presentation:

A13) Presentation and discussion: Each group presents their final concept(s), namely the critical design example(s) created, together with an overview of the design process. Furthermore, the group explains what makes their design example(s) critical, what they reveal, and also why this is desirable (which is not to be done until the other students have guessed which combination of existentials and designials the design example illustrates, naturally). Finally, before concluding the workshop, the students discuss their experience, either in pairs or as a group, with a focus on whether or not they are able to differentiate between traditional design methods and the critical method, as well as whether they understand the potential impact of the existential designial analysis on a design brief and the design process itself and, most importantly, why this is crucial.

- Due to the wide variety in presentation form, this step was undertaken in many different ways. To mention some, there were projected animations, a one-woman show performed in a restroom, and straightforward oral presentations of three-dimensional models, as well as various combinations of several of the forms. Depending on the number of students/groups, the time required to complete this step was estimated at forty-five minutes to one-and-a-half hours.
Observations/tendencies towards improvements/changes:

For the purpose of effectively develop the structure of the workshop sessions, it was important to continuously evaluate and improve it along the way. The key elements in the process are briefly explained below:

From the first and second “preliminary” workshops:

General observations/tendencies: Some students wanted to go back to earlier slides in the Powerpoint presentation (A4) and re-read texts about the fictional personas. My guess is that they wanted to take inspiration from the examples and further imitate this way of starting the creative process.

Improvements/changes: Simply print out the texts and make them available to the students when they go to work, along with the existential designial analysis, i.e. the step by step guide to the critical method, and the given assignment (A8).

General observations/tendencies: One group out of four misunderstood and turned their concept (the patient’s uniform) around at the last minute, instead creating a fully functional product. According to the students, the reason was that they felt pity for the patient.

Improvements/changes: The point of criticality vs. functionality must be more heavily emphasized.

From the specific test workshops to Aalto University, School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Helsinki, Finland:

General observations/tendencies: It appears that students found it difficult to start from nothing, without any context, “design problem”, or some such, in terms of a specific starting point.

Improvements/changes: By developing a fictional setting in terms of personas and environment, the students are provided with a narrative to work from and are thus able to implement a frame for the upcoming critical design examples. This proved to be helpful and, starting from the workshop after this one, the students were encouraged to develop such settings (in groups) for their particular critical design examples prior to beginning to develop their ideas.

General observations/tendencies: A substantial share of the students did not respond well to the notion “existential”.

Improvements/changes: Two texts from existentialist literature were added to the digital presentation directly after the motivational pictures (A2); one by Sartre (portraying confinement) and another one by Kafka (touching upon absence). I read it out loud and afterwards led a short discussion on the meaning of “existential”, referring back to these two texts.

6 “Tom was alone too but not in the same way. Sitting cross legged, he had begun to stare at the bench with a sort of smile, he looked amazed. He put out his hand and touched the wood cautiously as if he were afraid of breaking something, then drew back his hand quickly and shuddered. If I had been Tom I wouldn’t have amused myself by touching the bench; this was some more Irish nonsense, but I too found that objects had a funny look: they were more obliterated, less dense than usual. It was enough for me to look at the bench, the lamp, the pile of coal dust, to feel that I was going to die. Naturally I couldn’t think clearly about my death but I saw it everywhere, on things, in the way things fell back and kept their distance, discreetly, as people who speak quietly at the bedside of a man. It was his death which Tom had just touched on the bench” (Sartre 1964, pp. 22).

7 “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. But as he looked for something to hold onto, with a small scream Gregor immediately fell down onto his numerous little legs. Scarcely had this happened, when he felt for the first time that morning a general physical well being. The small limbs had firm floor under them; they obeyed perfectly, as he noticed to his joy, and strive to carry him forward in the direction he wanted. Right away he believed that the final amelioration of all his suffering was immediat ely at hand. But at the very moment when he lay on the floor rocking in a restrained manner quite close and directly across from his mother (apparently totally sunk into herself) she suddenly sprang right up with her arms spread far apart and her fingers extended and cried out, ‘Help, for God’s sake, help!’” (Kafka 1999, pp. 27-28).  

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General observations/tendencies: The students also appeared to find it difficult to connect the existential (fundamental forms of human being) with the designial (fundamental forms of design being), especially in a nonfiction context.

Improvements(changes): The reading of existentialist literature was followed up by two real-life examples which I put forward as critical; a concept bed shaped like a person in the fetal position (confinement, deprival, punishment) by the designer Dominic Wilcox (Wilcox 2012), and a randomly selected version of the commercial pacifier (absence, substitute, anchor). This was done simply to link the existential designial analysis to “reality”, and so make the various notions clear and comprehensible.

General observations/tendencies: I came to realize that the critical design examples I used to illustrate how it could be done (A7) were simply cobbled together, last-minute concepts; as was mentioned above, I had completed the examples on the night before the presentation.

Improvements(changes): Two superior examples, created by students in previous workshops, were substituted for these (MA1-TD-THS 2010).

From Aalto University to the Swedish School of Textiles, Borås, Sweden:

General observations/tendencies: The presentation lasted for almost two hours, including a break, before the students began working in groups.

Improvements(changes): For this reason, both the material and my presentation were streamlined and improved, which made the presentation more effective. One of the things I did was to remove the critical design examples made by the students (A7), not only because they made the presentation longer and made it feel somehow “stretched”, but also because they became unnecessary as the students appeared to have understood the idea and were eager to start working. Moreover, I feared that the students would follow the examples too closely, instead of finding their own way.

General observations/tendencies: The section where the functional analysis was compared to an existential designial analysis, in order to demonstrate the contrast between them (A3), instead appeared to confuse the students.

Improvements(changes): The functional analysis part of the presentation was moved from step A5 to A4 and replaced with a creative task. The students were divided into groups and two of those groups were asked to come up with one fictive persona and one fictive environment each, having examined a randomly selected picture of a person being cared for in remand prison. The two remaining groups did the same for pictures from an ICU setting, all groups believing that they were about to develop traditional design concepts, namely an ordinary set of curtains (remand prison) and traditional patients’ clothes (ICU). After the groups had spent forty-five minutes on this activity, however, I introduced the hypothetical assignment (A2), accompanied by inspirational pictures from the relevant environments, just as I did with the prior assignments.

General observations/tendencies: It appears that the students were able to identify with the examples of the bizarre-looking concept bed and the pacifier, although they were not critical in that sense, which became evident in their statements, such as that the examples were easy to relate to and that they made the existentials and designials easier to grasp.

Improvements(changes): Keep them for the time being!

General observations/tendencies: Prior to introducing the students to the critical examples, they tended to develop ideas and concepts in one direction only; to be exact, they chose a single idea and developed it into a final concept (naturally, this was more common for the one-day workshops than for the longer ones).

Improvements(changes): The students were first encouraged to, in Faulkner’s words, “kill all your darlings”, or at least let them rest for a while. Furthermore, they were motivated to generate ideas and concepts in at least three directions simultaneously; two “extremes” and one more moderate (as was mentioned in step A12), in order for them to discuss and reflect on everything in between, instead of exploring a single direction.

General observations/tendencies: Together with the final result, i.e. the critical design example, both groups presented some form of “product description” (which in the world of consumer products is the term normally used to refer to both the features and the benefits of a product), explaining
the various concepts. As far as I understood, this was done in order to be able to relate to and talk about the critical design example in the class later on. In other words, the students of these groups displayed a lack of “dark” experience, i.e. the proper terminology (existentials and designials).

**Improvements/changes:** Present this way of describing the critical design example as a valid option for the presentation of them in upcoming workshops. To further elaborate on “product description”, the basic characteristics of the product ought to be defined, along with its major advantages. The following is an example of this: “These curtains aim to lower the need of staff resources and at the same time give a small sense of autonomy back to the prisoners. They’re bubble wrap curtains in which the bubbles are randomly filled with drugs, different types of medicine, vitamin pills and candy. The prisoners can self-medicate as they see fit. If they need sleeping pills, the curtain will provide them sooner or later. If they just want a fresh mint, the curtains will provide them sooner or later. If they don’t need any pills, they can deal them to other prisoners. Or if they’re sick with their lives, they can pop them all at once. […] The curtains are fairly cheap to produce, easy to maintain and contain up to thousands of pills. They also give the boring prison cell a nice visual touch […]” (MA1-TD-TaiK 2011). That being said, more than half of the students chose to enliven the presentation of their result(s) in far more original and breathtaking ways than simple descriptions of the features and benefits of the product.

From the Swedish School of Textiles to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts - the School of Design, Copenhagen, Denmark:

**General observations/tendencies:** I came to understand that one of the two “real-life” examples I put forward as critical, the strange looking concept bed (A7), was rather restrictive as an example; more particularly, it could have been a critical design example in itself, why it limited the students and prevented them from coming up with similar design examples. Additionally, the concept bed (which is non-commercial) belongs to a different group of objects than the pacifier (which is a commercial product), which thus made it unsuitable as an example, due to the fact that I intended that the two present the same basic, inherent values in order to make the distinction between them and a critical design example even stronger.

**Improvements/changes:** The concept bed was exchanged for a conventional prison jump suit (absence, substitute, threat), which better matched the commercial pacifier (absence, substitute, anchor), owing to the fact that both products are highly commercial and available on the market.

**General observations/tendencies:** Three to four students in each group seemed to work better than larger groups.

**Improvements/changes:** Continue on the same path.

**General observations/tendencies:** Some of the groups tended to dig so deep into the fictive setting that they lost sight of what was important in the exercise. On the other hand, it appears they really enjoyed this way of working – a good sign indeed.

**Improvements/changes:** Put even more emphasis on the importance of keeping the critical design example general in character, i.e. the critical design example cannot be so character-specific as to lose its power. Additionally, reduce the timeframe for completing this assignment in order to decrease the risk of the participants losing sight of what is important.

**General observations/tendencies:** My impression is that the students became somewhat bored with reading and listening to the more lengthy texts about the fictive personas and environments. On the other hand, they were excited about the final outcome, i.e. both presenting their own and learning what the other groups had come up with.

**Improvements/changes:** In the upcoming workshops, challenge the students to illustrate their concepts in a way that will leave the audience room to interpret them and thus ascertain for themselves what this critical design example is inquiring into, without an extensive oral presentation. Accordingly, changes have to be made to the digital presentation as well, as it cannot be allowed to affect possible interpretations by revealing the combination of existentials and designials of a group.

**General observations/tendencies:** After listening to the students’ reflections and discussing with them during the final steps of the workshop (A13), it became clear to me that some of them had yet to reach complete awareness of the potential contribution to the design process of this way of thinking, namely the importance of asking critical questions.
**Observations/Tendencies Towards Improvements/Changes**

**Improvements/changes:** Augment this discussion by asking questions such as “What does this way of working do to the design brief, that is to say in what ways does it affect the design process? Do the students understand the brief differently now when they have experienced all of this?” Also, this should be the last thing I say during the workshop, and thus the last thing they have in their minds before we part.

From the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts - the School of Design to Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA), Oslo, Norway:

**General observations/tendencies:** Because it was a four-day workshop and the number of participants was greater than before (fifteen students divided into four groups), we needed to structure the day in order to ensure that we did not “misguide” anyone or “lose” them along the way.

**Improvements/changes:** We started each morning and afternoon session by “summing up” and “refreshing previous discussions”, to ensure that everyone was on board at all times.

From Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences to Umeå Institute of Design, Umeå, Sweden:

**General observations/tendencies:** The presentation is still too long (unless I am simply growing tired of repeating it), considering the amount of time available.

**Improvements/changes:** Streamline the presentation even more by, e.g., combining some of the slides, perhaps even skipping some of them altogether, and examining the manuscript again in order to cut out everything that stands out as repetitive, unnecessary or superfluous.

From Umeå Institute of Design to the Swedish School of Textiles, Borås, Sweden:

**General observations/tendencies:** There are no longer any serious misunderstandings; the students take to exercise A12 very well and the flow of the presentation and discussion (A13) is surprisingly good. Moreover, the students appear to like the idea of spending a day, or four, in the name of existential design, as a break from their busy schedules.

**Improvements/changes:** I find that I can only interpret the observations/tendencies of the students towards the end of the “tour” to lean more towards the “dark” than the “bright side” as a good omen. However, I cannot but be grateful that the participants so far have been students for whom I am a “teacher”, which makes me wonder what it will be like to hold a similar workshop with a group of experienced design professionals working in, e.g., a well-established manufacturing company. This remains to be seen.

I will conclude by summarizing some general trends from the observations I made along the road. Firstly, it appears that a better mix of people, i.e. people of different nationality, gender, and age, as well as people with different educational backgrounds and experiences, results in a better group dynamic, design process and overall outcome. Secondly, the longer I spent working with the students, the better my relationship with them became, and this led to more productive discussions, again giving a better learning outcome, for both them and myself. Thirdly, the more time they spent working on the assignment, the more thorough the design process, as providing more time to reflect on the subject and let ideas mature led to a better correspondence to the traditional design process. Incidentally, it would be truly exciting to see what would happen if a group/class was left to work with the critical method for a longer period of time (possibly one to two months), and to then compare the results with those of the shorter workshops. This too, however, is a story for another time. To end with a quote from one of my students: “I’m happy to be a student again. In real life there’s no time for mistakes, and THIS [the ‘dark side’ of design thinking] must be the best mistake I’ve made in a long time...” (MA2-APD-UID 2011).
Concluding workshop layout:

By the end of the journey, the structure of the workshop looked something like this:

Start-up:

B1) Introduction: A brief presentation of the undersigned as designer and doctoral student, and an opportunity for the students present themselves individually and as a class (i.e. educational background, current focus of the study program, future plans, etc.).

- This is not only good manners when meeting new people, but also a way to break the ice, i.e. demystify the undersigned as a doctoral student and so make the students feel at ease in the situation and so jump-start the workshop session.

- Depending on the number of students/groups, the time required to complete this step was estimated at fifteen to twenty minutes.

B2) Writing exercise: Division of the students into groups, with the task of creating a fictional persona and accompanying environment (i.e. the fictive setting), based on a random picture of a person being cared for in a remand prison or an ICU.8

- The intention of this step was simply for the students to create a foundation to work from in the upcoming critical design examples, which would make beginning to work on the assignment (B13) easier.

- The oral presentation was supported by Powerpoint slides, in which the pictures are shown as stimuli. The time required to complete this step was estimated at forty-five minutes.

B3) Brainteaser: Introduction of a hypothetical assignment, and the students brainstorming briefly (in plenum) regarding what should be considered first, methodologically speaking, as well as how and why, when designing a set of bedclothes for an institutional environment, such as a remand prison or an intensive care unit (ICU). If the students find that it facilitates the brainstorming process, they are recommended to use the fictive setting from B2 as a starting point.

- The intention with this step was to convince the students to think that the overall exercise (B13) was concerned with the development of a product using traditional design methods, only to change course later on, in B4, and so bring attention to the divide between traditional ways of thinking and designing, and the critical way. One of the things that was generally brought up and discussed during this step was that the list of requirements, or a similar list of specifications, and a method frequently used to generate such lists, i.e. the functional analysis, was often found, due to the perceived requirement, to meet the needs of the “customer”, which in this case would be either of the two institutions. (For more details, see pp. 24-28.)

- The oral presentation was supported by a slide, in which a very general example of a functional analysis for a set of institutional bedclothes was displayed. The time required to complete this step was estimated at five to ten minutes.

8 The picture of a person being cared for in remand prison is simply illustrated by an empty traditional jail cell, which I state is inhabited by the fictional person Lisa Marie (black and white photo). As for the picture of a person being cared for in an ICU, a person’s feet – which I state to belong to a man called John – is sticking out from under a blanket in a hospital bed in a classical hospital environment (color photo).
Presenting the existential designial analysis:

**B4) Background:** A shift in focus and the introduction of the existential designial analysis as a method of opening up the design brief, by asking analytical questions and inquiring into the way we design products today. Additionally, some follow-up questions are included to function as eye-openers.

- As was mentioned above, this step is a turning point for the students as it reveals the disparity between traditional ways of thinking and designing, and the critical way. Moreover, it is designed in order for them to be enticed towards the "dark side".

- The oral presentation is followed by a couple of slides showing concept-engendering pictures from the respective environments, intended to put the students in the right frame of mind. The time required to complete this step was estimated at five to ten minutes.

**B5) Existentialist literature:** Introduction of two texts from the existentialist literature canon, one by Sartre (confinement) and another by Kafka (absence), prompting discussion of the fundamental forms of being human, followed by the question of if, and potentially how, they relate to those forms. For example, what is the role of the bench to Pablo in Sartre’s *The Wall* and, similarly, in what way does the room appear to have changed to Gregor as he wakes up one morning and finds himself transformed into a monstrous insect in Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* (for more details, see footnotes, pp. 171).

- By first identifying existentials and designials in literature, this step was intended to gradually introduce the students to the concepts they have to deal with later. Both texts are read out loud by the undersigned and afterwards the meaning of “existential” and “designial” were discussed until it seemed that everyone agreed on a common understanding of the two terms. Furthermore, questions such as these were asked: “How do you think people in confinement - the situation of prisoners, as they are locked up and strapped down, mentally and physically, whether they are in a remand prison or a similar facility – perceive objects? Do they make sense? Is the uniform in the example of Pernilla just a ‘set of clothes’, or has it become a source of a real danger, all of a sudden?” and, “Do you think a patient perceives the hospital blanket they have been given simply as ‘a piece of soft fabric’ or could it be the one thing that makes the person, when lying in bed, feel safer and so make the sensation of absence, the separation from their ordinary blanket, bed, room, or even life, a little less immediate?”

- The oral presentation was supported by a couple of slides in which the texts were displayed. The time required to complete this step was estimated at ten to fifteen minutes.

**B6) Critical examples:** An illustration of how it could be achieved: What a critical design example could look like, including the fictive personas and scenarios. The examples used are the conventional prison jump suit (absence, substitute, threat) and the commercial pacifier (absence, substitute, anchor).

- Although the “preliminary” versions of the workshop demonstrated that surprisingly few of the students were unwilling to move away from the traditional way of doing things, i.e. focusing on solving problems, and that they were able to see that, rather than solving problems, the critical method aims to illuminate them, I wanted to show the students existing critical design examples in order to demonstrate the potential of such an assignment.

- The presentation was supported by the slide show, in which illustrations of the critical design examples were shown. The time required to complete this

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9 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?

- 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 – where 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?
step was estimated at five minutes, and it was normal at this point to have a short break in order to keep the students focused.

B7) Fictive personas and scenarios: Presentation of four fictional personas and scenarios, two of which are confined to a remand prison (Olle; pp. 60-63, and Karolina; pp. 76-79) and two who receive care in an ICU (Anna; pp. 56-59 and Petter; pp. 52-55).

- The intention with this action was to gradually familiarize the students with the existential designial analysis and the “dark side” of design in a general sense by introducing the concepts step by step, i.e. existentials and designials, to each of the four personas and scenarios, while emphasizing the fictive nature of the situations, regardless of how realistic these examples may have been.

- The oral presentation was supported by handouts, which prompted randomly selected students to describe the fictional personas and scenarios; this functioned alongside the slide show, which displayed pictures of the fictive personas, accompanied by the conceptual keywords. The time required to complete this step was estimated at twenty to twenty-five minutes.

B8) Existential designial analysis: A linking of the four fictive personas and scenarios to the concept as a whole, i.e. a thorough explanation of the various concepts (existentials and designials), using the examples/fictive settings. Also, a demonstration of how these steps all go together, i.e. how to utilize the critical method by applying the three-step approach, how the concepts, more specifically the four combinations of existentials and designials, form the hierarchical structure of the existential designial analysis and, finally, how they relate to each other.

By introducing the existential designial analysis in four steps (B4, B5, B7 and B8), the students were given a comfortable introduction to this way of thinking, which hopefully resulted in an increase in the likelihood of them relating to the theory in its entirety. Besides providing a step-by-step guide for the application of the critical method, which in this way is established as a straight-forward tool for the students to use in the creative process, this step also offers an overview of the hierarchical structure of the existential designial analysis (which may come in handy in the form of a “map”, visually representing the various notions, in case some of them are lost in the process). As expected, a demonstration of the divide between the traditional way of thinking and designing, as opposed to the critical way (B4-B7-B8), produced an interesting “moment of revelation” on the part of the students, which in turn led to very fruitful discussions; these concerned anything from how to better determine the various functions of a product and whether there is such a thing foolproof products to how products are tested prior to their introduction on the market, e.g. in so-called testing institutes, where technologies, materials and even processes can be developed, tested and evaluated. These discussions allowed the students to meet the existential designial analysis with more open minds and a greater curiosity.

- The oral presentation was supported by a couple of slides, in which the pictures of the four fictional personas were shown, accompanied by the conceptual keywords. The time required to complete this step was estimated at twenty to twenty-five minutes.

B9) Handing out the assignment: Incorporation of theory by the division of the students into an appropriate number of groups (a maximum of four in each), and the distribution of the assignment, which involves generating one or more critical design examples from a given pair of existentials and designials.

- In terms of who was given what, when and how, etc., and the decision as to what type of critical design examples were to be developed by students from a certain school/university, I would recommend considering the nature of the design traditions at the higher education institution in
question. For example, the students from the School of Arts, Design and Architecture at Aalto University were given the opportunity to create “soft” products and, similarly, the students from the Umeå Institute of Design were assigned creating products more related to their traditions, i.e. products produced in hard materials such as plastic and metal. That said, all possible combinations of existentials and designials must be tried out, which is to say confinement/deprivation/punishment and confinement/deprivation/threat for the remand prison setting, and absence/substitute/protection and absence/substitute/anchor for the ICU setting, in order for the concept to be fully explored and illustrated at every stage of the journey. Also, during the course of the workshops, it was deemed to be important that the product categories selected for developing critical design examples covered a reasonable share of the market; for instance, curtains, prison jump suits, beddings or handle bars for remand prisons and, similarly, patient uniforms, beddings, curtain room dividers or bed lights for ICU.

- The oral presentation was supported by handouts for each group, which showed the general three-step approach along with the given set of existentials and designials. The time required to complete this step was estimated at five to ten minutes.

B10) Inspiration: Presentation of facts, design philosophies, manifests, quotes, design examples, etc., from Dunne & Raby, Jurgen Bey, Noam Toran, James Auger & Jimmy Loizeau, Elio Caccavale, and others in the field. Some are mentioned only briefly by referring to examples of their work and some are given longer introductions both in the form of text and by showing examples.

- This section is basically meant to function as a springboard for ideas, in the event that some of the students were interested in learning more about critical design and/or the ones practicing it.

- This presentation was carried out in the form of text in the slide show, e.g. names of people active in the field, projects titles and links to various homepages, and orally, as people and projects come to mind while presenting. The time required to complete this step was estimated at five minutes.

B11) Reference list: References to material related to anything from traditional design methods (e.g. Jones, Cross), the Radical Design of the 1960s and ’70s, or contemporary critical design practitioners. Additionally, refer to existentialist movies and literature (Bergman’s The Seventh Seal, Tarkovsky’s Solaris and Kubrick’s Paths of Glory, as well as Sartre, Camus, and Kafka, to mention a few).

- By listing some of the sources used as a basis for the research of the undersigned, it was hoped that at least some of the students would be inspired to investigate further.

- The oral presentation was supported by a slide, which displayed the literature list (which was also distributed as a physical copy). The time required to complete this step was estimated at three to five minutes.

B12) Formalities: Informing of the students regarding the necessary procedures, including the fact that they are required to sign a consent form in order for the undersigned to be allowed to use the material developed during the workshop (photos, sketches, critical design examples, quotations, etc.) in her research.

- This step was essential in order to avoid ethical dilemmas, and was carried out by handing out the consent forms and receiving them back before the conclusion of the workshop, and was estimated to take approximately three to five minutes to complete.

Exercise:

B13) Group work: The students commence group work that lasts between one and four days, depending on the length of the workshop, and the undersigned shifts between the active role of the “teacher”, who provides guidance when needed, and the passive observer, “drinking in” as much of all kinds
of information as possible. It is of particular interest to observe the way in which the students take in the existential designial analysis and how they work with the critical method; furthermore, it is also valuable to note how they reflect upon this way of thinking about design, as opposed to the traditional way.

- As stated in steps A8 and B9, the students were encouraged to develop one or more critical design examples within the product category they had been assigned. Thus, they either worked until they were fully satisfied with the result or, for the sake of valuable experience, until they ran out of time, and did so according to the design methods they were at that time familiar with, in most cases, followed the process of ideation, development, actualization, etc. However, they were strongly recommended to develop ideas and concepts in multiple directions and, in fact, three was found to be the optimal number: this allowed the students to maintain two “extremes” and while simultaneously developing a more moderate alternative, which allowed them to keep the development as open as possible. Later, they were free to materialize the outcome, i.e. the critical design examples, in whatever form they chose (tangible or intangible), and the same went for optional techniques and mediums, provided the critical aspect came through loud and clear and they were able to substantiate their choices in the presentation.

- This step utilized all forms of presentation, i.e. text, sketches, story boards, images, role-play, film and animation, etc. As was mentioned above, the time required to complete this step was dependent on the number of students/groups, and varied between four hours and three-and-a-half days.

Presentation:

B14) Presentation and discussion: Each group presents their final concept(s), namely the critical design example(s) created, together with an overview of the design process. Furthermore, the group explains what makes their design example(s) critical, what they reveal, and also why this is desirable (which is not to be done until the other students have been given a chance to guess which combination of existentials and designials the design example illustrates, naturally). Finally, before concluding the workshop, the students discuss their experience, either in pairs or as a group, with a focus on whether or not they are able to differentiate between traditional design methods and the critical method, as well as whether or not they understand the potential impact of the existential designial analysis on a design brief and the design process itself and, most importantly, why this is crucial.

- Due to the wide variety in presentation form, this step was undertaken in many different ways. To mention some, there were projected animations, a one-woman show performed in a restroom, and straightforward oral presentations of three-dimensional models, as well as various combinations of several of the forms. Depending on the number of students/groups, the time required to complete this step was estimated at forty-five minutes to one-and-a-half hours.
Workshops:

As regards the process of selecting which critical design examples to
include in the thesis, this choice was made by the students themselves. The
examples displayed below have been selected because they were considered
to best illustrate the respective sets of existentials and designials, which is to
say that these critical design examples were presented during the final steps
of the workshop (A13/B14). The reason for this selection method is partly
that I did not want to censor the research by subjectively grading the various
critical design examples, but also because I respected the students enough,
at that stage, to consider them to have formed strong opinions of their own.
Concerning the representation of the various critical design examples, the
sketches are material collected on the road, so to speak, while as the photos
are merely illustrating them.

AALTO UNIVERSITY, School of Arts, Design and
Architecture (TaiK) / 19-21.09.2011

It was late September and the autumn weather had already kicked
in. I remember stepping off the streetcar not really knowing what
to expect of the coming three days, although I knew my way to the
lecture hall and who to call if I did not find my way. I headed down the
street and was barely able to make out the people passing by from
under my umbrella. However, within a couple of minutes I saw the
beautifully designed building appear before me with “ARABIA” written
in huge letters on one side. I had arrived at my first destination.

The buildings at Hämeentie 135 C – also called the Arabia Campus
– were built in 1874 by Swedish ceramics manufacturer Rörstrand.
As this was my first time in Helsinki, I must admit to feeling a bit
star-struck. I do not know if it was me being impressed with the city
in general, the somewhat cinematic buildings themselves (no need
to mention that I am a Kaurismäki fan and that as I came face to face
with his trademark I found it to be exactly as dry as dust, simple and
honestly charming as I had expected), or the fact that I flew in late the
previous night and thus had not slept all that much. Nevertheless, I
could tell that the factory held the secret of over one hundred and
thirty years of hard work, as the place impressed me with an air of
authority. Today, however, it is crowded with design students, six of
whom were waiting for me in room 822.

Pre-critical design examples:

Handing out the task (A8/B8): MA 1, textile design, consisted of five
female students and one male. The class was divided into two groups, one
tasked with developing one or more critical design examples in the form of
a set of curtains intended for use in a remand prison setting (confinement,
punishment, threat), and the other was assigned the development of a set of
patient’s bedding (absence, substitute, protection) for use in an ICU setting.

Group work (A12/B13): The students found it difficult to begin the
process, as it was easy to jump straight to the final stage without having
really worked through the critical method, until the two groups decided
to work together. They then identified a common underlying theme (with
variations concerning the persona and the environment) for their critical
design examples, which made it somewhat easier for them proceed from
that point. Both groups then used this fictional setting as a foundation
on which to base their work, just as the previous class did. As for the
development of ideas and concepts, it proceeded according to the normal
procedure, although both groups were advised to keep the development
open and broad by striving for the three-concept principle discussed in
A12/B13, and began sketching models early in the process. (For more
details, see pp. 172-174.)
Critical design examples (A12/B13):

Example 1, Curtains 1

Prison is a harsh environment. In a remand prison, one is shut in and alone with oneself most of the time, with perhaps the exception of occasional walks in the exercise yard or visits to the doctor. The days are long, as are the nights, and so too are the weeks and months. Ironically, time is the only thing that is not in short supply in a prison, and someone held in custody may spend most of his or her days in a small “room”, reading or watching television. Apart from these activities, they mostly wait; for breakfast, lunch, dinner and supper, for a letter, a telephone call, a visitor or perhaps even an opportunity for home leave. If the cell has a window, it is safe to assume that they will spend a considerable amount of time in front of it, waiting for a bird to pass by.

The curtain set is simply intended to cover the window(s), further isolating its inhabitant (to a certain extent), and also to provide some privacy and, of course, a degree of softness, texture and color to the room. What is special about this set of curtains, however, is the power of confinement it has been imbued with. Ordinarily, curtains are handpicked by the “user” to please him or her in one way or the other, but these have been made to be pleasing to those suffering the consequences of addiction. The bubble wrap curtain is not only efficient as regards operating costs, as it makes medication rounds redundant, but allows the person access to drugs at any time. This will return to the individuals some sense of freedom and, paradoxically, erode their self-control by tempting them to enter into or continue a cycle of addiction. In addition, it offers an element of excitement as the “pockets” are filled (and refilled) with medication at random, and so the person never really know what they will receive. The pills they take may make them sleepy, heal an ulcer they did not know they had (or may not have at all), send them on a bad trip or simply make their mouths taste minty fresh. In other words, this product is perfect for an institutional environment where boredom is everywhere and independence, or the illusion of it, is much sought-after (MA1-TD-TaiK 2011).

Keywords: confinement, deprival, threat
Example 2, Bedclothes 1

The hospital is a very busy place; doctors, nurses and other personnel constantly busy themselves with trying to save lives. They have to keep a record of everything, from the nutritional and fluid intake of each and every person, to their body temperature, pulse, and respiration. A hospital never sleeps. A person at an ICU, for example, is more than likely to share a room with others, and there is no telling what sort of people these other persons may be, what they do while recuperating, and what kinds of (strange) visitors they receive. They are very different from one another and, not to forget, total strangers. As someone who is already in the care of others, a person at an ICU would probably do their best to hold on to the little privacy and decency left in the situation, provided they are in a conscious state, of course.

In a basic sense, the set of bedclothes is no different from other, in that it is intended to protect the mattress, duvet and pillow – which is particularly important in public establishments such as hospitals, prisons, hotels, and military or educational institutions – and also to cover the person when he or she rests or sleeps in bed, keeping them as warm and comfortable as possible. What makes this set of bedclothes stand out, however, is the power of absence it has been imbued with. This is what the group of students who designed the concept state about it: “The patient is simply placed in a big plastic bag and the air is sucked out. Medication, food and water are fed in with tubes, and urine and feces are washed out by a sterilization shower. The bag monitors all vital signs. Temperature is stable inside the bag and ventilation is solved by using breathable plastic. […] The vacuum package keeps the patient still, so things like patches and plaster casts are no longer needed. Besides the doctors can follow injuries and visible changes very easily. This protects the person from falling out of bed or hurting him or herself in any other way. Also the personnel are safe from possible patient attacks” (ibid). To cut a long story short, instead of offering people wellbeing and thus a certain feeling of safety and dignity, this set of bedclothes literally strips away humanity and guarantees total exposure at all times, whether or not the sterilization shower has performed its function. (See next page for sketch.)

Keywords: absence, substitute, protection
Post-critical design examples:

**Discussion and reflection (A13/B14):** As this was the third workshop in total, and two of these were held at the same school, the basis of comparison between the different schools/classes regarding ways of working with the critical design method had not yet been established. However, as this was the second school and the third class in a row in which the workshop consisted entirely of textile design students, I venture to stake my reputation somewhat in saying that already at that point, a slight tendency could be detected (to the extent it can be described as a tendency, after only three workshops) for the critical design examples to be more oriented towards specific materials and/or techniques than towards particular concepts. This tendency was visible in both the execution of the design and in the resulting designs; for example, during the second “preliminary” workshop, one group of students used flexible and inflexible threads and weaving to create a textile version of Russian roulette (for more details see pp. 153), and now this group at TaiK having initially chosen to use bubble-wrap and transparent plastic, and so let their material choice, and to some extent shape, dictate their final concepts (for more details see pp. 190). This is as opposed to them first coming up with a concept, finding suitable material(s) to fulfil the requirements and, finally, deciding on which technique(s) would be used. As far as I understand, this is the result of knowledge which is founded primarily on materials and techniques, rather than on for example problem-solving methods. Another possibility is that this could be attributed to traditions rearing their heads, in that what is and has been taught (method) in that specific institution and/or the personal background of each individual student (skills and experience), both individually and as a class, could have influenced the design choices. It is important to note that I do not claim that the learning outcomes are insufficient in any way; neither do I claim that good critical design examples cannot emerge from experimenting with materials and techniques in an unusual or unexpected way, and nor, for that matter, do I intend to evaluate any of the current or former design methods taught at the schools in question. What I am interested in is the different ways of employing the critical method in the creative process, with the intention of improving it. Nevertheless, I should probably add that the critical design method aims to challenge the individual student’s way of thinking design per se, thus “rocking the boat”, regardless of a person’s educational level, background, or situation. Furthermore, as I have carefully selected schools/classes in order to have them represent a wide range of institutional traditions, and have also gone to great lengths in considering the specific traditions of students at the schools in the design of the assignments given to the students (mentioned in A8/B9), it is obvious that I expected the results to differ slightly from each other. Frankly, it may be that I am guilty of adding fuel to the fire. When all is said and done, the critical method focuses on opening up the design brief, thus shedding light on the “dark side” of design thinking, and so suggesting why it ought to be efficient, regardless of design method, material and technique. Put differently, the method and concept precedes the choice of material and technique, and my hope is that the students at TaiK, among others, will remember this critical approach to design.

Likewise, because this was only the second workshop based on this exact combination of existentials and designials, i.e. confinement, deprival, threat, and absence, substitute, protection, in combination with curtains and bedclothes, there are too few critical design examples to weigh them against each other in terms of “criticalness”. What is interesting is that the examples appear to be related to the learning of the students and, more importantly, to the learning outcome. First of all, as the workshop takes the students on an intense journey through the “dark side” of design that lasts for between one and four days, the critical method may be said to represent a map which the students are given when they meet with their passport and travel guide at the station with their baggage in hand. In this metaphor, the critical design examples represent souvenirs which the students return home with when the trip is over, and perhaps share with others. In other words, by first introducing the students to the theory (A3-A6/B4, B6), then exemplifying it (A7/B7-B8), and finally letting them implement it into their own working methods (A12/B13), I am fairly certain the concept as such will make a deeper impression than if the students had concerned themselves only with the theoretical aspect. In truth, I am not sure that, without a practical part, the students at TaiK, or at any of the schools for that matter, would make it to the other end (myself included). In a nutshell, the fundamental purpose of the critical design examples is to embody the existential designial analysis, i.e. the critical method, and so become representative of the
workshop itself. The fact that the students always present their outcome by the end of the workshop, thus sharing their knowledge and experience with the rest of the class, improves the learning outcome even more.

Apropos the presentations (A13/B14) and the question of whether or not the nature of the presentations influences the learning outcome, I would argue that tasking the students with presenting their work is the reason for their developing and honing both their design concept, and arguments for ways of illustrating the critical design example in the final presentation, thus validating the overall process. Moreover, as it is made clear at the beginning of the workshop that the critical design examples represent the learning outcome, they function as carrots, luring the students forward, and the actual presentations, whether performed as sketches, simple models, “product descriptions” and/or written scenarios (as in this case), become products of the development process itself.

Regardless, this final step, along with the summing up of the workshop, clearly benefited the group of students performing the presentation and, as discussed above, the other group(s) as well. For instance, the students are made aware of the set of existentials and designials that the other group(s) have been working with and, furthermore, how they went about solving the assignment. What is more, because the workshops are concerned just as much with awareness and reflection as with actually producing a final outcome (for more details, see pp. 20-21), any discussion taking place during the course of the workshop is equally valuable, both for the students and for me.

However, I would like to add some minor observations that I picked up during the presentation in Helsinki: firstly, the less finished or polished a critical design example was, the more (critical) questions were asked and fruitful discussion was created, leading, naturally, to better understanding and knowledge being generated. Also, the more loosely structured the presentations were, the more comfortable in the situation the class became, which may be due to the fact that it seems that the students were afflicted with a degree of uncertainty as to the character/quality of the work they presented. That being said, gathering everyone around a table and talking informally about what they had achieved, and about how and why, rather than “selling” the result with renderings and flashy models, appeared to be the key to open up discussions, at least with this particular class.

Memorable moments: As was touched on above, the students found it difficult to begin work on the assignment, but solved this brilliantly by deciding that the groups should begin their work together, as a class, and created the fictional setting used by both groups (which resulted in the creation of step B2 in the revised workshop structure). Using a common point of departure, they managed to ease the tension and set to work (for more details, see pp. 170, 189).

Quotes: “But this is like upside down?!” (ibid).
After surviving the first workshop out in the big world, it was nice to run a session in a safe environment "at home". I remember well the second time I set foot in the Swedish School of Textiles (the first was to attend the PhD interview, a couple of months prior). It was back in 2008 and my father, of all people, drove me to my first day at the university. I recall walking up those stairs wearing all black, and with a white and orange striped scarf around my neck. On the fourth floor I met my future classmates, and we attended our first lecture in design methodology together.

The façade of the building at Bryggaregatan 17 was not particularly striking (pardon me for saying so), but the inside, and more particularly the people in it, were certainly something out of the ordinary. For twenty-five years, design and fashion students (among others) from all over the world have worked on all kinds of exciting projects inside these walls. Today, the minds of all twelve students in MA 1, Fashion and Textile Design, would be mine to shape.

Pre-critical design examples:

Handing out the task (A8/B8): The class was split into four groups, two of which would develop one or more critical design examples in the form of a set of curtains for a remand prison setting (confinement, punishment, threat), while the other two would develop a set of patient's bedding for an ICU setting (absence, substitute, protection).

Group work (A12/B13): As we had only a single day on our hands, it was important to start working as quickly as possible. This meant that the four groups essentially jumped straight from creating the fictional setting (persona and environment) to developing a single, “strong” concept, followed by a discussion regarding how they would present it. I think that this was inevitable, given that there was so little time for a proper development process, i.e. application of the three-concept principle, within an eight-hour timeframe. Nevertheless, the students were asked to go back and at least briefly consider other ideas, in order to reflect on the choices they had made that led them to the concept they had selected. This appeared to have the desired effect, and some of the groups changed direction in favor of the existential designdial analysis, thus strengthening the sense of the ludicrous and bizarre in the example. As for the actual development of the critical design examples, all four groups worked strictly in two dimensions, by sketching, printing, cutting, and pasting images; this is another consequence of the limited time, in my opinion. (For more details, see pp. 174-176.)
Critical design examples (A12/B13):

Example 3, Curtains 2

People held on remand, or, indeed, in any confined space, suffer great psychological distress. Anxiety and insomnia are not uncommon; neither are physical health problems such as dermatological, respiratory and circulatory conditions. On top of that, there is the issue of substance abuse, including drugs or anabolic steroids. These complications, together with the fact that the person held on remand is suddenly deprived of their freedom, may trigger extreme reactions which may lead to self-harm and/or attempts at suicide. Studies show that the suicide rate among men on remand in the UK is approximately five times higher than that of the general population, and for women this figure is twenty times the norm (Swedish Prison and Probation Service post 2010, pp. 5). In 2013, two suicides were committed in Swedish remand prisons (Swedish Prison and Probation Service post 2013).

Imagine being inside a small cell. There is no furniture to speak of, except for perhaps a TV. Nor are there any other objects; possibly a couple of books and CD’s, a picture of your daughter, and, if you are lucky, a prayer rug that you can identify with. Imagine that on one of the worn, white walls there is a window and, covering it, a roller blind that constantly displays dots that form random patterns at equally random intervals during the day and sometimes not at all. The dots appear one by one or in pairs, in intervals of anywhere from two hours or two weeks. They may suddenly disappear, save one, and return during the night, when there are three times the number. Sometimes they change colors, pile up in a kind of grid, and every now and then the lights go out almost entirely. “[…] The dots. Slowly filling up your window. Your view. Your mind. […] It’s hard not to keep counting. What do they really mean? […]” (BA3-TD-THS 2011). (See next page for sketch.)

Keywords: confinement, deprival, threat
Example 4, Curtains 3

Suicide and self-injury in prison are, unfortunately, quite common. It has been estimated that more than 40% of those who committed suicide in prisons in the UK in 2011 were on remand (BBC 2012), despite the fact that remand prisoners make up only a fifth of the prison population in England and Wales (BBC 2005). As remand prisons are not intended to be places where anyone should stay for an extended duration, they are not designed to be inhabited by any one person for more than a couple of days or a few weeks. There are 31 remand prisons in Sweden, with an estimated 1800 people held on remand (Swedish Prison and Probation Service post 2013b).

The curtains, or “Razor blade-blinds”, as the group of students called it, are designed to simply shut out light and perhaps provide a small sense of privacy for the person inside. This could be the description of any other product which has the function of covering windows; however, this one has been imbued with the power of threat. It offers multiple ways to commit suicide: as implied by the name, the material/structure is made of razor blades, but looks exactly like any other Venetian blind. Let no one be fooled by its appearance, however, for anyone who reaches out and tries to open, close, or rearrange it will have their fingers or hands cut! Conveniently enough, the wire that holds the blades together is not only longer than those of traditional blinds but is super strong, and so perfect for suicide via hanging. What’s more, an electrical current of 200 mA (0.2 A) runs through it, if the person desires severe burns, unconsciousness and/or death (BA3-TD-THS 2011).

Keywords: confinement, deprival, threat
Example 5, Bedclothes 2

Almost all of the things in a hospital are on display in one way or another, e.g. instruments, people and, last but not least, peoples’ health. Picture an operating theatre, people sitting or lying in beds in the corridors outside wards, and all sorts of health monitors. This is all because of the need for accessibility, functionality and efficiency, which improves the quality of the care given and may save lives. Thus, one of the risks of hospitalization is the danger of becoming nothing but a product of that same accessibility, functionality and efficiency, i.e. to be at the disposal of others at all times. Why not merge these three properties?

Owing to the fact that the situation of the person has been imbued with absence, the “showcase”, as the students call their critical design example, will replace the traditional bed and bed linen; together, the fluorescent lights and the glass keep the person comfortable and warm, thus making textile items such as blankets and clothes superfluous. Moreover, this is not only more convenient and sterile for the medical staff when the person needs urgent surgery, but also assists in keeping the rest of the hospital safe from a range of infectious diseases, and moreover lowers the cost of laundry. All in all, this critical design example unquestionably ensures access to the person whenever it is needed and makes monitoring the person’s health and transportation of the person within the hospital very easy. Moreover, the case stands on wheels that rotate 360 degrees, which add to the sense of the “exhibited piece on wheels” which the group strived for; beyond that, the properties of the example are perfectly compatible with the totality of such an environment, as it provides unparalleled accessibility, flexibility and innovation (ibid). (See next page for sketch.)

Keywords: absence, substitute, protection
Example 6, Bedclothes 3

In many ways, hospitalization means being held captive until one’s condition has improved. Although this is entirely for the person’s own good, and often is a conscious choice if the person happens to be conscious, the experience may be traumatic, long after one has been discharged from the hospital. As the bedridden ones receive more or less medication, which causes them to enter a (semi-)conscious state, as one might say, they do not have any real freedom to act, speak, or think in such circumstances. Peoples’ recollections of being hospitalized can be associated with anything from being abducted by aliens or held as a prisoner of war, to experiences of being next in line at a slaughterhouse.

The cast steel bed sheet blanket covers the most important parts of a person, just as bed sheet blanket ought to, and, with it wrapped around their body, the person is more than safe, so to speak, and their privacy is ensured. In addition, there is no way they will accidentally fall out of bed and pull out tubes, sprain a wrist, and so on. What sets these bed sheet blanket covers apart, however, is the absence they have been imbued with. While other products in the same category are warm, soft and comforting, this one is made of cold, hard, steel, and weighs approximately fifty kilograms (ibid).

Keywords: absence, substitute, protection
Post-critical design examples:

**Discussion and reflection (A13/B14):** As this was the second school (and fourth class) in a row where I worked solely with textile design students, the trend first mentioned on pp. 196 (concerning the implementation of the critical method) was not exactly strengthened by the performance of the students in this class. Moreover, it may already have been refuted, as approximately half of the students in this class managed to free themselves, more or less, from what I will boldly call the “textile way of thinking”, i.e. selecting a material and technique before coming up with a method and concept, by reversing this process and prioritizing the concept. Proof of this is found in examples no. 3 and no. 5, the former being made of glass and electronic components, and the latter of metal, thus illustrating *confinement, deprival and threat*, and *absence, substitute and protection*, respectively. The remaining students, however, instead employed the following approach: “We have a curtain and set of bedclothes; what can we do to make it into a punishment and an anchor, respectively?” The reason may be as simple as this being the favored working method of the students at THS, or possibly the class was put together in a different way than the one at TaiK (it was, for example, larger), and so the students represented a different mix of competencies/skills. Other reasons may include the fact that we only had one day on our hands and I was pushing hard to emphasize the importance of “killing your darlings” (Faulkner) and, as a result, the students did not seriously consider ways of implementing textile materials and techniques, or the fact that the structure of the workshop had been improved, the assignment made more suitable, and/or I had improved my supervision of the students. The final suggestion may be that it was merely a coincidence, and that the results would be different next time (or, perhaps positing a trend was rather unwise to begin with); regardless, let us see down the road. Besides these general observations, other interesting things occurred that day, including during the brainteaser step. As MA 1, Fashion and Textile Design, was the first group of students with whom I tested the hypothetical assignment (A2/B3), it was easy to discern a change of direction in their approach. It appears that they saw the critical method more clearly, and so were able to start working much earlier in the process, which was very convenient, what with it being a one-day workshop. That said, this new-found determination to work in a more focused fashion also meant that the students were in something of a hurry to settle on a single concept and to carry it out, despite the fact that they had more time to complete the assignment, compared to the previous one-day groups (i.e. the two “preliminary” workshop sessions), and I, as was mentioned above, may have been better at emphasizing the importance of keeping the field of development broad by stressing the usefulness of developing ideas and concepts towards two “extremes”, while simultaneously maintaining one in the middle. Regardless of these circumstances, during the reflection step (A13/B14), the students agreed that, even though eight hours is a short time-frame, there had, in fact, been enough time to take in and briefly test the critical method; this opinion was widespread enough for the students to admit to having been tempted to try it again, later on. The reflections also revealed that the twelve MA students had also been somewhat energized during the workshop, and one of them said it was “a little like a vitamin injection” (ibid). Coming from different schools and with all kinds of backgrounds, the students pointed out that whatever design method they were using in their respective work, this way of thinking “[…] skadar ju ingen […]” (doesn’t hurt anyone) (ibid), but opens one’s eyes, even if one does not deal with critical design on a daily basis.

Because these were the second and third groups thus far to base their critical design examples on the combination of *confinement, deprival, threat* in the development of curtains, and *absence, substitute, protection* as related to bedclothes, they should be analyzed in the light of some of the other examples. For instance, examples 1, 3 and 4 share qualities, as all three objects act as a threat and involve a physical form of penalty, in terms of the object constituting a danger to the person (for more details see pp. 49). Examples 2, 4, and 5 have in common the fact that, due to the object existing as a form of protection, it includes an aspect of care which will provide a “shield”, a form of fortification against the surrounding environment (for more details see pp. 50). Whether or not the critical examples are successful attempts at manifesting threat and protection is an entirely different story. Moreover, I will not assess whether the examples are generally more or less critical, if criticalness can even be measured or quantified, as I do not consider it to be my judgment to make. What I can state, however, is that all of the examples focus on slightly different aspects of the remand prison and ICU settings, which is certainly part of making the
(critical) portrait of the respective environments more holistic. As I wish the critical design examples to speak for themselves, I will not offer any further explanations as to what this or that example brings to light or calls into question.

As for the presentation of the critical design examples by the students (A13/B14), all four groups produced written scenarios and various accompanying illustrations. As was mentioned above, I believe the limited time somehow altered the parameters of the actual execution, i.e. influenced the presentation method in favor of drawing rough sketches, cut-and-paste illustrations, creating simple models, and/or simply describing the design in writing. The presentation itself was relaxed and open, just as the one at TaiK, and “sitting around the table and talking” appears to be a preferable presentation method, as the students seem to be more comfortable doing so and it appears to help the discussion flow more freely. As for the general reflections and discussion, this stage was similar to that at the previous school, in that both were concerned with working methods regarding the critical method and designing the critical design examples, as well as the presentation of the results.

**Memorable moments:** The group behind the concept “Razor blade blinder” decided to demonstrate how the critical design example could work (A13/B14). The girl who was assigned the job of demonstrating ended up with a bleeding fingertip.

**Quotes:** “This is like bad and fun at the same time” (ibid).
I probably shouldn’t say this, but it’s wonderful to be a Norwegian in Denmark. Waking up in a hostel just a stone’s throw from Nyhavn, going out during a break to buy freshly baked bread and eating it just the way it is, directly from the paper bag - damn Copenhagen idyllic! Fully aware that I was living the Danish cliché, I strolled down to the “Havnebus” (ferry bus) and headed towards the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, commonly known as the Danish Design School. Can you imagine a better way to start a Thursday morning than taking a ferry across the channel to school? Picture the fresh autumn air and all of the beautiful scenes around me - first the opera house, and then the next stop, the historic buildings of Holmen, where I was getting off. The feeling of excitement was building.

When I had planted my feet on land, I met with Mary-Ann. The school is situated quite literally in the harbor, and the lecture hall was only a short walk away, during which I was busy absorbing impressions of the surroundings as Mary-Ann told me a little bit about the history of everything, from the paving stones and the charming old brick houses, to the ubiquitous bikes (with baskets). The late 17th century naval buildings have housed and inspired architecture students from 1996 until the present day (June 2011). Entering the School of Design with its high roof, enormous windows, white walls, and (in my opinion) somewhat rough construction style, I was looking across the Sound, where countless ships occupied my field of vision, together with “Mastekranen” [The Masting Crane], and all I could do was wish that the workshop would last forever. At quarter past nine, all six students of MA 1, Textile Design, had arrived, and we were able to start our two-day journey together.

Pre-critical design examples:

**Handing out the assignment (A8/B8):** The class was divided into two groups, one of which was assigned the development of one or more critical design examples of a prisoner’s uniform for a remand prison setting (*confinement, deprival, punishment*), and the other with developing a critical design example involving a curtain room divider for an ICU setting (*absence, substitute, anchor*).

**Group work (A12/B13):** The students spent the time after lunch discussing the themes in groups, which brought up topics ranging from how, in the *Alien* movie series, alien eggs are often covered by a soft, protective membrane (relating to the ICU setting), to how it appears that the improved library services at the prison in *The Shawshank Redemption* cause the self-esteem of some of the inmates to return (relating to the remand prison setting), and the students gradually began creating their fictional settings. Despite time being in short supply, they did not begin developing their design ideas until the next morning (which I ascribe to the students requiring an “incubation period” prior to setting to work). One of the groups worked mainly with keywords and matching pictures to illustrate their ideas, whereas the other seemed to have forgotten their fictive setting from the previous afternoon, but progressed well regardless and quickly came up with multiple different concepts: the “noise”, “smell”, “fat”, “voodoo” and “slim” suits. In the end, the group which had been assigned the ICU setting began a heated discussion regarding which of their concepts ought to be finalized and presented in the afternoon, while the group assigned the remand prison setting did not manage to choose and instead presented all of their ideas. (For more details, see pp. 176.)
Critical design examples (A12/B13):

Example 7. Prisoner uniform

In short, a uniform is designed to inform us about the person who wears it; one could say that it has a “tailored meaning” (Rafaeli & Pratt 1993), and a prisoner’s uniform is no different. Although all prisoners’ uniforms are similar to some extent, i.e. they all make escaping more difficult for example, they are not identical. Furthermore, aside from the gender of the person in prison, their uniform may tell an onlooker something about where and what kind of sentence they serves (long or short term, etc.) and it may also reflect the hierarchy of the inmates in the prison in question.

In addition to fulfilling their functions of covering the wearer (for protection and/or warmth) and facilitating easy identification, the three critical design examples are used as a power of punishment. For instance, the “Slim suit” utilizes a series of surgical interventions, allowing a marionette-like control of the person by reducing the size of e.g. the chin, breasts, stomach, hips and thighs, to the point of them becoming unrecognizable. This causes the person to slowly lose all ability to relate to the world in general in terms of identity, culture, and perhaps even language, and thus the value of life. The “Smell suit”, on the other hand, is constructed using foodstuffs such as cheese, which in time begin to decay and release bacteria, ultimately causing a terrible smell; the consequence of this will be that the person becomes isolated from others, whether they want to be or not. Naturally, this will only occur after the period when the cheese is still fresh, during which time its main drawback will be that it attracts mice and other kinds of vermin. As for the “Voodoo suit”, it is coated with sharp objects, e.g. spikes, razor blades, needles, shards of glass, etc., and so disciplines the wearer in two senses; firstly, people keep a certain distance from them, in order to avoid injury (social/psychological) and, secondly, it restricts the person’s freedom to move, as the suit will pinch the skin at even the slightest movement (physical) (MA1-TD-DKDS 2011). (See next page for sketch of the “Slim suit”.

Keywords: confinement, deprival, punishment
Example 8, Curtain Room Divider 1

“John is a 40-year-old family man and works as a scaffolder. He arrives at the hospital after a falling accident, and is given a neck support to prevent him from moving his head, which limits his field of vision. Just before his radiographic examination, he lies on his hospital bed thinking of his family. He is in a state of shock and barely notices what is happening around him, his hands and feet are cold, he is nauseous and the feeling of being unable to move his neck is extremely unpleasant. The smells at the hospital, the cold lights and the metallic sounds all affect him in a negative way. He is in a state where visual and haptic sensations do not correspond.”

What sets this curtain room divider apart from other products of the same type is the way it literally secures the person, not only in their bed and in the room, but also in the room within the room. Where the primary aim of traditional curtain room dividers, sometimes called hospital curtains, is to give the person a measure of privacy in an otherwise public environment, the critical design example is somehow intangible and offers an additional form of privacy by allowing the person greater separation from the rest of the environment through constant rotation around a central axis, which ideally restricts access to the person’s sphere. Furthermore, the critical design example has been programmed to make stops in order to create the sense of daily structure for the bedridden ones, meaning they will never have to worry about their having nothing in store. For patient no. 4186, these stops may involve numerous injections, chocolate pudding for dessert, deafening laughter from the neighbor’s bed, or receiving a lethal staph infection. (See next page for sketch and DVD for film clip.)

Keywords: absence, substitute, anchor

10 (John er en 40-årig familiefar og stilladsarbejder. Han ankommer til sygehuset efter en faldulykke, og får en nakkestøtte på som gør at han ikke kan bevæge hovedet, og at hans udvendige begrænses. Undervejs til X-ray ligger han og tænker på sin familie. Han er i en choktilstand og fornemmer blot hvad der sker omkring ham. Han fryser på hænder og fødder, har kvalme og føler det ubehageligt, at han ikke kan bevæge nakken. Han påvirkes af de kliniske lugte, det kolde lys, og de metalliske lyde han fornemmer. Han er i en tilstand, hvor de visuelle og haptiske oplevelser ikke stemmer overens) (ibid).
Post-critical design examples:

**Discussion and reflection (A13/B14):** As the DKDS group consisted of equal proportions of textile and fashion students, they obviously displayed a wide variety of skills and expertise; at the same time, they roughly compare to all three groups I worked with at THS. Looking back, the approach to the critical method, particularly as concerns the representation of ideas and concepts, at both THS and at the DKDS differs slightly when compared to the approach at TaiK. This is more apparent in the students’ working methods, i.e. their sketching, than in the results; in a nutshell, the group work (A12/B13) involved more cutting and pasting from magazines and sketching silhouettes, and the results were generally more body-oriented (at least in my opinion), rather than being what I would describe as good old-fashioned sketching and “hands-on” regarding materials, as was the case at TaiK. Once again, as was discussed on pp. 196-199, it is difficult to know whether this is due to the fact that the students at TaiK came from a more homogeneous background (all of them being textile design students), or as a result of the fact that one of the assignments given to the students at DKDS was a prisoner’s uniform, which, one would assume, would be more relevant for students with a background in fashion. Another explanation for the varying results may be that the students had more or less time on their hands, or even that this is simply a coincidence, which is always a possibility. Regardless, utilizing a way of thinking inspired by fashion design, an area I know very little about, along with a methodology which is textile in character, removes all points of reference to the work of other students, if any such points exist at all; in the end, how the students employ the critical method still remains to be seen. What I can contribute to the overall discussion from this school, however, is that the “score”, in a competition between the material and technique vs. method and concept approaches, is something like 1-1, as one of the groups began their work with the uniform and then worked their way to a concept (example no. 7), while the other established out a concept first, and then worked out which materials and techniques to use (example no. 8).

Regarding the critical aspect of the examples, there are no others that relate to those from DKDS, as this was the very first workshop based on these particular combinations of existentials and designials, i.e. confinement, deprivation, punishment and absence, substitute, anchor. What may be worth mentioning is which aspects of these examples make them critical in the first place. Critical design example no. 7 exists as a punishment, as the prisoner’s uniform embodies a material manifestation of penalty, enforcing a kind of “predetermined consequence” on the wearer (for more details, see pp. 48). Similarly, critical design example no. 8 exists as an anchor, which is seen in the way the curtain divider materializes critical care, thus keeping the hospitalized person calm, holding him securely “rooted” in the hospital bed (for more details, see pp. 51).

The students’ presentations of their work (A13/B14) were very similar to those at the previous schools, i.e. relaxed. This was the first time, however, that a group used a video clip during their presentation; they made a cardboard model of the concept, filmed it in action and then added music (example no. 8). This was interesting because it appears to add another dimension to the critical design example, and shows that the students had begun to understand how people outside of the class could perceive it. The other group presented a mixed media-collage (example no. 7), which also brought in a new dimension, namely the smell of cheese. As the structure of the presentations had been altered slightly this time, the other students were left to interpret the specific group’s critical design example and discuss what it was trying to shed light on. Due to the fact that the group did not overly promote the critical design examples, the discussion and its outcome became very productive. After the students had presented their work, just over an hour was left for them to sit down and talk: firstly, it seems that they had a good time, and that they were satisfied with the freedom they had been given to choose whichever material and technique they wanted, concerning both the critical design example and the presentation. The students also offered critiques regarding the length of the workshop, saying that they would have liked to have had more time to generate ideas and concepts, as well as to finalize their chosen concept before the presentation. For example, they were curious to see what emotional reactions a mock-up of the critical design example “Voodoo suit” exhibited on a human model would trigger, both among the other students and staff at the school, and for people in the street - I could only agree as to how interesting this would be!
Memorable moments: When it was time for their presentation (A13/B14), the group which had been assigned the ICU setting invited us into the restroom next to the lecture hall, closed the door, turned off the lights, and performed a private animation session for us. (See DVD for film clip.)

Quotes: “But that’s evil!”, “Oh my god, this is gross”, “Vilken sjuk ide!” (This idea is sick!) (ibid).
I am back in the place where I received my BA in product design (1998-2001), where I lived for three years in a room of eight square meters (eighty-six square feet), where I stopped eating red meat, where I bought my first (and so far only) mountain bike, where I fell in love with a guy just because he could tell old Scandinavian folk tales for three hours straight, and where I had to present the exam project for my BA with white latex gloves because the paint on the models was still wet. Those were glory days, I tell you!

Back then, the university college was located in a mid-18th century military fortress and was catered to a total of approximately 150 students. In 2001, the university college partnered with the university college in Oslo, and the annual student enrollment grew to over 16,000. Today, I will meet fifteen of them; namely the students of MA1, Product Design. In the hallway leading to the lecture hall “Come on over to the dark side! We’ve got free cookies!” was written on the wall. I cannot but take it as a sign; I am in the right place at the right time.

Pre-critical design examples:

**Handing out the assignment (A8/B8):** The fifteen students were divided into four groups; two were tasked with developing one or more critical design examples in the form of a door handle for a cell door in a remand prison setting (*confinement, deprival, punishment*), while the remaining two developed a bedside lamp for a person in an ICU setting (*absence, substitute, anchor*).

**Group work (A12/B13):** The four groups seemed to be more structured than the ones I had worked with before and, by the end of day one, the students were developing a multitude of ideas; the next day, they continued by organizing their ideas into categories based on character/type (e.g. form: tangible or non-tangible, impact, context, etc.). These categories would later evolve into the various different concepts, and ultimately led to the selection of one or two particularly strong ones which fit the critical design criteria, i.e. all ideas were evaluated with regard to the existential designial analysis. Other than that, it may be worth mentioning that one group interviewed some nursing students (this was possible due to the fact that the nursing program is run within the same building) concerning existing issues and challenges in an ICU environment, and integrated their findings into their work; this kind of research into users’ needs is integrated into even the most basic of product design programs.

By the second day, all of the groups had decided which concept they were going to develop further, and the students spread out over the different workshops and involved themselves in hands-on work. On the third day, the students planned their presentations of the critical design examples, discussing anything from movies to real-life scenarios, and, after lunch on the fourth and final day, we all, students and teachers, gathered in the lecture hall to conclude the workshop. (For more details, see pp. 176.)
Critical design examples (A12/B13):

Example 9: Door Handle 1

Someone confined to a prison cell will, perhaps, dream of what would happen if the door would, just once, become unlocked and offer a chance to escape. The thought of doing whatever one wants, whenever one wants to is priceless; dreams, too, are priceless, particularly in situations such as this one.

The door handle is simply a mechanism for opening or closing the door; one which could allow the person access to anywhere or, at least, somewhere else. What is exceptional about this one, however, is the power of punishment it has been imbued with. What awaits anyone who attempts to use it is downright psychical torture, which is possibly even more painful than being locked up in the first place, for every time the person grips the handle to open the door, the room becomes smaller (MA1-PD-HIAO 2011). (See next page for sketch and DVD for animation.)

Keywords: confinement, deprival, punishment
Example 10: Door Handle 2

Imagine being a prisoner in your own home. You cannot look out through the windows or leave the house to pick up the kids at the day-care center unless he is with you. Nor can you eat or shower without him in the house. There are cameras following your every move inside the house; even your house phone is tapped, and your cell phone was taken away a long time ago. When you violate his terms, he becomes very, very aggressive in a physical way. Verbal and sexual abuse is part of your daily life. Your door is locked from the outside. Imagine being convicted of manslaughter in the first degree, and serving thirteen years in prison for the death of your abuser.

Where an ordinary door with an ordinary handle would, ordinarily, give you a way out, perhaps in order to see your children or other family members, this door handle works by automatically unlocking the door at random times during the day or night. However, as you try to open it, you cut yourself on the handle, which is sharp and shaped like a knife. Furthermore, at night, the door handle sometimes subtly plays the sound of children screaming and crying and you, believing the children crying outside the door are your own, reach for the handle again and again. At other times, you can hear the voice of your deceased spouse when the door unlocks. In short, the critical design example constitutes a rather sly, terrifying punishment – both physical and psychological – that serves to augment the penalty inherent in the prison sentence (ibid). (See DVD for film clip.)

Keywords: confinement, deprival, punishment
Example 11: Bedside Lamp 1

Providing round-the-clock care in an ICU ward means, by necessity, that there is always activity at the ward; at all hours of the day, on all days of the year. This in turn means that individuals registered to receive medical treatment are very likely to suffer from disruption to their sleep due to noise, light, equipment monitoring vital signs, care activities such as medication management, etc. Naturally, these disruptions are not optimal for the persons’ healing processes, or for successful treatment.

Many people associate bedside lamps with curling up under a warm blanket with a good book and relaxing after a busy day. This critical design example, however, has anchor written all over it, and so brings about the obverse; the lamp-head hangs just above the bedridden one, and has an arm that has been designed to be able to track the person’s every movement, however small it is, constantly directing light into their face. The light will haunt him or her throughout most of their waking hours, and ultimately make the hospital stay a true nightmare (ibid). (See DVD for film clip.)

Keywords: absence, substitute, anchor
Example 12: Bedside Lamp 2

(This is a role-play and the action starts as the main character, John, wakes up from anesthetic in the middle of the night.)

“John: [Thinks] Where am I, what happened to me?
It’s so dark in here.
Where’s the door, I need to get out!
I’m thirsty. Is there anyone here to help me?
Narrator: John looks down at the floor, but it’s too dark to see properly and he hesitates to step out of bed wearing nothing on his feet.
Besides, there are a lot of tubes attached to him.
All of a sudden he gets confused: is he alone or is there someone else in the room?
John sees the emergency string hanging in front of him.
John: [Thinks] maybe if I pull the string, someone will come?
Narrator: John pulls the string and all hell breaks loose” (ibid).

As John pulls the string, a surrealistic graphical interface in the ceiling activates and starts playing; all he manages to accomplish by pulling the cord again, hoping it will stop, is to make it play even faster. He thinks to himself that if he holds for a while and then tries again, it will cease. It does not; the graphics keep spinning, faster than before. Stuck in the bed and entirely alone in the room, he has no other choice than to try to turn his head away and close his eyes in order to somehow endure the ordeal. Nevertheless, after some time he is hypnotized and almost paralyzed, a victim of the anchor. His head is aching and he feels sick. (See DVD for film clip.)

Keywords: absence, substitute, anchor
Post-critical design examples:

**Discussion and reflection (A13/B14)**: As regards working methods concerning the critical method, the students participating in this workshop used the existential designial analysis exactly as was intended; this should come as no big surprise, as this is where I received my basic training. Functional analysis is still taught at HiAO, which reduced the unfamiliarity of the process, meaning that the students found it far less complicated, thus giving them an easier point of departure. This is merely speculation, but perhaps one of the reasons that the students at HiAO found the time to carry out such steps as the interview with a "user" and the building of models is that they did not need so much time to adjust to the concept, as such. Having said that, we should not forget the fact that they had four full days at their disposal and, besides this, I know from personal experience that the practical traditions are strong at this school and that the facilities are well equipped and easily accessible for the students. On the subject of time, although the students appeared to have an excellent understanding of the critical side of the workshop, i.e. after concluding that this assignment was not about problem-solving per se (which seems to be an inevitable step in the process, which every group at every school I have visited so far has gone through at the very beginning of the workshop), it may have been the case that they took a fancy to the freedom which they had been given to make something so different, and, furthermore, to present it in whatever way they wished, rather than to the critical method itself. By the end of the workshop, I was actually unable to tell either way. Reviewing the previous workshops, i.e. three one-day (including the preliminary sessions), one two-day, one three-day, and now one four-day workshop, could it be that three days is the perfect number? It may be that three days is long enough for the participants to grasp the concept, experiment with it for a while and, finally, develop a few acceptable concepts in suitable formats, and yet short enough to prevent them from drowning in fictional settings, nice renderings, model building, and supplementing films. Well, time will tell.

The students worked hard and, as this was the only workshop stretching over four days, they had more time to absorb the material and reflect on it. This fact was made evident in the discussions we had during the week, in which the students displayed a progressively deeper understanding of this way of thinking, each successive day. One of the students even chose to work with “critical-ish” design in her exam project that year, and I was afforded the privilege of taking part in the milestones of her work. Concerning the comparison between the two types of schools, i.e. the material and technique-oriented (e.g. TaiK and THS), and those with a more concept-oriented curriculum, and as regards which students found it more easy to engage with the “dark side” of design thinking, I can only state that this class began their work by developing a concept and thus indisputably made the design process as a whole more organic and spontaneous, which may be the reason for the better results (or not).

Regarding the critical design examples, their being more or less critical is in no way dependent on the students having more time on their hands or being more experienced in adopting the existential designial analysis in the manner described above. That particular experience is definitely apparent in the design process, but not necessarily in its outcome, i.e. the critical design example(s). I suspect the reasons to be rather complex and, to be honest, I cannot offer any comprehensive solutions at this point. What I can say is that, similar to critical design example no. 7 (a prisoner's uniform), examples 9 and 10 both take the form of punishment-things, and thus the fundamental aspect of both is *deprival*, as the designs have taken the place of the two protagonists' door handles, which will ultimately encroach on their respective life situations; i.e. the fundamental form of being human is *confinement* (for more details, see pp. 40, 42-43, 46-47). In the same way, critical design example no. 8 (the curtain room divider) and examples 11 and 12 exist as anchor-things and, consequently, the fundamental form of the design is *substitute*, simply because they have replaced the two fictional characters' own bedside lamps, which will eventually also impinge on their respective life situations; the fundamental form of being human in these examples, then, is *absence* (for more details, see pp. 41, 42-43, 46-47). This is the logic of existential design in a nutshell, and I hope that the students at HiOA will adopt and perhaps utilize it in future projects.

As for the presentations; strangely enough, all of the groups chose to work with animation, video clips, and live scenarios in the form of role-play and so on. I can only assume that the ideas spread between the students, so that when one group wanted to create a video clip, the participants in other
groups took note and wanted to do the same. Although there is no doubt that the students enjoyed the presentation stage, the preparation aspect may have been allotted too much time (as was argued above), particularly since one of the groups presented a functional model of their concept which had already been fixed to a door (example no. 10). Furthermore, making a video clip of the knife, including a voice-over and musical soundtrack, did nothing to strengthen the concept, in my opinion (See DVD for film clip). On the contrary, it seems that the critical design examples became sharper and more focused when they were not over-thought. I would rather that the students spend more time on developing several ideas and concepts (A12/B13), through which they will learn more about existential design in itself. Regarding the presentations themselves, the students had sent out unofficial invitations, meaning that the groups had an audience, consisting of teachers and other design students. I take it that this was because the students were somewhat proud of what they had achieved, which is certainly a good thing. Concerning the audience, I found it to be rather amusing to watch the show from the side-lines and witness their expressions, which varied from “what the fuck?!” to “cool!” and, moreover, to watch the students defend their concepts against the questions from the audience.

**Memorable moments:** When we discussed what the concepts of *punishment* and *anchor* could mean in the real world, I asked the group if anyone could come up with an example; one of the exchange students told us that, as a child, he once experienced something similar to *anchor*. One night, his parents placed a white blanket or something similar in front of the door to the room where he and his siblings slept, with the intention of shutting out the light from the bedroom; this, however, only diffused the light coming from the other room and created a “ghost”. This made him afraid to leave the room to go out and urinate, leading to him remaining uncomfortably in bed all night.

**Quotes:** “So we’re not supposed to be ‘nice’?!”, “Yesterday I felt sick. Today it’s just fun!” , “Morro å være litt kunsterisk...” (It’s fun to be a bit artsy…) (ibid).
The previous stop was where I received my BA, and the next one was where I studied for my MA, from 2002 until 2004. Lots of things have changed since then; I have, Umeå has, the school most certainly has, the Master’s program [advanced product design] has, as have those directing the program [they are younger now]. The students, however, are still the same. Not in the sense that my peers had been so keen on the two-year program that they had stayed on to graduate from it five times, but in the sense that the students currently attending the program are the same type of people as those that I studied with during my time at Umeå. I remember practically living at the school; consuming most of my meals there, often showering there [mostly because one of the facilities had a sauna, but still], changing tires down in the workshop, socializing with friends from all over the world, throwing parties, and even sleeping on a couch when the situation required. The moment I stepped through the door, I could tell nothing had changed: Designhögskolan is not just a school, it is a way of living.

Pre-critical design examples:

**Handing out the task (A8/B8):** The six students were divided into two groups, one of which was assigned the development of one or more critical design examples in the form of a door handle for a cell door in a remand prison setting (*confinement, deprival, punishment*), while the other was tasked with developing a bedside lamp for a patient in an ICU setting (*absence, substitute, anchor*).

**Group work (A12/B13):** I had forgotten that travelling north in the winter often means encountering lots of snow, which is generally synonymous with “delay”. Thus, I was late for the first day of the workshop. However, knowing from experience that two days go by very fast, I performed the most time-effective presentation that the “tour” had so far seen, and proceeded to dividing the students into groups. However, despite the fact that I had beaten my personal record for the presentation, we only managed a brief group session before the afternoon darkness fell and very nearly put us all to sleep.

The students, however, kept the discussions going, which among other things revolved around what life is like in a remand prison or an ICU ward, and what the roles of those institutions really are. The students continued generating ideas until lunch the following day and, as they realized that they were about to run out of time, they quickly evaluated their ideas with respect to the existential designial analysis/critical method, and chose one to develop into a final concept. It may be noted that there were some excellent discussions during the course of the workshop, in which the students showed awareness, a genuine interest in this kind of unusual environment, and a degree of maturity and depth regarding design-thinking. In the afternoon, they illustrated their critical design example as best they could, considering the amount of time they had left, and prepared their presentations for the next day. (For more details, see pp. 176.)
Critical design examples (A12/B13):

Example 13: Door Handle 3

What is worse than always being able to see what one cannot have? Be it a doughnut, one’s ex-partner, a bag full of twenty dollar bills or a door handle. Imagine the constant temptation, slowly turning into terror and ultimately developing into psychological distress, which is known to take a severe emotional toll if the circumstances are right. A couple of days are manageable, perhaps even a week, but two weeks or maybe a month; almost no one can endure that long, and several months – it is just not possible!

This door handle exists; that much is true. However, more factual than even the physical presence of the door handle is the concept represented by it, i.e. the idea of using the door handle to escape; this is as strong as the outline of the door handle itself. Although this is not a tangible door handle, what causes this critical design example to become a symbol of deprival is the fact that it embodies punishment – if not in every door handle the person meets on their way, then definitely in the one they use the most, that which they use when they return home (MA2-APD-UID 2011).

Keywords: confinement, deprival, punishment
Example 14: Bedside Lamp 3

Imagine one of those nights; when you wake up from a dream and just need to read for a few minutes in order to fall asleep again; when you wake up because you are incredibly thirsty and want a glass of water; when you simply cannot sleep because you are unable to keep your mind off the first round of doctors, and when to expect them. In these situations, a bedside lamp comes in handy. Everyone has different needs, and people admitted to a hospital are no different.

The lamp is a rather low-tech light source, similar to those used to illuminate a room or other space in order to have an overview of things; to feel in control, to feel at home, etc. This one, however, follows your movements and, whichever way you turn your face, the lamp casts a shadow which prevents you from seeing what is in front of you. In addition, a red light appears at random places in your field of vision when the main light is off, instilling a sense of danger and emergency. Unable to see clearly (at least straight ahead), and unable to understand fully what is going on around you, the bedside lamp assumes the power, and becomes a form, of anchor to you (ibid). (See next page for sketch.)

Keywords: absence, substitute, anchor
Post-critical design examples:

**Discussion and reflection (A13/B14):** As was mentioned above, it is easy for two full workshop days to go past without one really having an opportunity to reflect much on what is happening, and to instead simply do; and so they did. The Umeå students solved their tasks just as brilliantly as the groups in the previous school. Being a second year Master’s student by necessity involves a certain amount experience in design methodology and in designing (at any scale), which meant that the students were capable of completing the workshop assignment more effectively than, for example, a second year Bachelor’s student. This level of experience and expertise, which obviously included some form of analysis concerning the functionality of the product (despite the fact that all of them used different terms to describe what they did, they all performed a form of functional analysis), helped them to immediately realize what they were supposed to do and, of course, how they were supposed to do it. Moreover, this is the only group of workshop participants who did not question the critical side of the assignment, i.e. why they were to explore the “dark side” in the first place, although none of them had ever worked in similar ways before. The reason for this may be that they were the most international group of students I visited during my tour, and so displayed an unparalleled breadth of experience as a class. It may also be due to them having heard of critical or reflective design elsewhere or, as has already been mentioned above, because they were second year Master’s students and as such had already acquired certain skills. I may be in danger of playing favorites when I say that this class was probably the “quickest” group of students I met on my tour; indeed, this should be considered alongside the fact that I have never worked with a class who spend so much time talking; on the sofa, sitting around a table in the kitchen area, or standing around one of their desks (reflecting, philosophizing and solving problems, I can only assume) and, on top of that, smiling and laughing almost constantly. This may have been something to do with the upcoming holiday that occupied their minds and, on a related note, the fact that this assignment was one of the last they worked with as a class before starting their exam projects after Christmas. Regardless, it was rather exciting to have the opportunity to expose them to something this different, just before they were about to “go solo”, and I hope that the students, at the back of their minds, considered their workshop experience with me as they began working on their exam projects. I highly doubt that they openly carried out any form of critical analysis in their exam projects, however, but they may have used some of the techniques, such as the fictional settings, in order to create a contrast between the extreme and the ordinary, thus revealing the darkness, or perhaps a hint of the critical reflection used in the workshop. For example, some of the students mentioned that it was rather liberating to work like this, and something of a break from the “problem-solving” world they normally dealt with, although, somewhat paradoxically, the critical method solves problems further down the road as well. This kind of feedback is all I need for now. After the exam projects were completed, I contacted the director of the program, and he told me that the only thing that came close to constituting critical thinking in the students’ projects was that one of them had used quite provoking methods to illuminate a certain health problem in his presentation, but that his products also offered a solution in the traditional sense. Concerning the issue of material and technique-oriented vs. concept-oriented working methods, the Umeå students were definitely concept-oriented; i.e. they began their work by creating a concept and worked from there, which apparently allowed them to adapt more easily to the existential designial analysis, just as the class at HiAK did. Finally, regarding the issue of an optimum time period for the workshop, in order to achieve the highest possible efficiency, the results from Umeå unfortunately suffer from the fact that I was delayed by the weather, meaning that the time was not sufficient. I very much wish that I could have observed the students in action for another day or so, in order see what other ideas and concepts they would have come up with if they had had the time. Similarly to the critical design examples generated by the students at HiAO, the ones created by the Umeå students illustrate the combinations of confinement, deprival, punishment (example no. 13) and absence, substitute, anchor (example no. 14). The door handle simply exists as a punishment because the person in question has been forcibly placed in detention; this, they suffer from severe restrictions in multiple ways. Meanwhile, the bedside lamp exists as an anchor, because the affected person is left with no other choice than to be taken care of, meaning that they have essentially been bedridden and thus have become powerless and incapable of taking control. The relative value of these as critical design examples, compared to
the ones created by the students at HiAK, on the other hand, is connected to the fact that they all criticize different aspects of the remand prison or ICU ward settings, and can therefore be considered to be equally valuable in one way or the other. Alternatively, if the examples had illuminated exactly the same factors in either of the two environments, it would have made a difference. Moreover, as mentioned above, I do not wish to evaluate to what extent the examples are critical, as this is entirely up to the audience to decide.

The presentations were short and unpretentious, which appeared to have become an established pattern at this point, and was good in terms of the lessons the students (hopefully) learned, despite a lot of talking and laughing of course. As the workshop participants were relatively few and extremely effective, the presentations were completed in around ten minutes, thus allowing more time to discuss and reflect together than during other workshop sessions; further, because of the small group size, I was free to spend more time talking with the students, both individually and as a group, throughout the workshop. As for the actual techniques that the students used to present their concepts, one group drew on a door-sized blackboard with a piece of chalk and the other group presented a large selection of marker sketches.

Memorable moments: The moment of revelation for the students came when I explained the relationship between the functional analysis and the existential designial analysis (A3) in more detail after the presentation, at which point their faces lit up with excitement at the thought of the critical method replacing their problem-solving techniques.

Quotes: “I’m not that into critical design – at least not until now, but I sure like this way of working with fiction to prove a point” (ibid).
I was back where I started four months ago. The difference between
then and now, I think, is, quite simply, me. The existential designial
analysis has been exposed to the light of day (and survived), the
critical method has been put to the test (and passed), and my suitcase
is full of critical design examples. There is not much else to say,
other than that it will be exciting to see if the students in BA 3, Textile
Design, have the stomach for a day of darkness – while, at the same
time, doing me the honor of closing the circle, so to speak.

Pre-critical design examples:

**Handing out the assignment (A8/B8):** The class was split into two
groups, one of which was tasked with developing one or more critical design
examples in the form of a prisoner’s uniform for a remand prison setting
(*confine*, *deprivation*, *threat*), and the other with the development of a
curtain room divider for an ICU setting (*absence*, *substitute*, *protection*).

**Group work (A12/B13):** As with the other one-day workshops, this
one seemed to pass by in the blink of an eye. At this point, it is perhaps
unnecessary to repeat the steps prior to the commencement of the creative
work; in short, the six students started out by rejecting the idea (as was
usual by now), but in time became very favorably disposed towards it
(also somewhat expected). Furthermore, they jumped from creating the
fictional setting to beginning to develop ideas, which very quickly became
concepts, and soon after that turned into different kinds of illustrations.
Nevertheless, they completed the process without encountering any major
problems. Concerning the presentations, both groups worked strictly in two
dimensions, either in the form of cut-and-pasted images made in Adobe
Illustrator, or in the form of sketches/painting on A2 paper. (For more
details, see pp. 176-177.)
Critical design examples (A12/B13):

Example 15: Prison Uniform 2

Wearing a uniform makes a person look exactly like everyone else in that particular environment; they cannot hide and, moreover, completely lose their identity. In fact, a prison setting gives him or her a new identity in the form of a number, as well as a patch, informing both staff and other inmates who they are.

The orange prison jumpsuit is a piece of clothing designed for use in men’s prisons. Originally intended to cover the individual’s body, thus affording protection and a degree of physical isolation, this version does the opposite; it covers the person’s body, including the head, while leaving his behind open to e.g. anal penetration, and so the uniform is imbued with the power of threat in a very disturbing way. From now on, the individual is to be identified only by his prisoner number, 3737 (BA3-TD-THS 2012). (See next page for sketch.)

Keywords: confinement, deprival, threat
Example 16: Curtain room divider 2

“How much seclusion or privacy can one have at a hospital? How separated does a curtain room divider make someone? What is a curtain room divider really a substitute for? The illusion of safety – does anyone really fall for it?”

Normally, curtain room dividers do exactly what the name implies; they divide a room into smaller rooms in order to create a small amount of privacy for the individuals within. These three versions of the curtain room divider, on the other hand, all exist as the basic forms of design being defined as substitute and protection, as they do shield the person to a certain extent, but only temporarily, in the way a substitute does, by making him or her exist in the fundamental form of being human defined as absence. The first critical design example does this by imitating the flexible PVC strip curtains which are used in doorways at warehouses, food processing environments, slaughterhouses, and so on, which also alludes to an industrial preoccupation with quantity and efficiency, giving the object an antiseptic and emotionally barren appearance. The second example essentially “frames” the person in the hospital bed, surrounded by drapes; these, however, focus attention on the individual lying there, rather than affording them privacy (picture a floor-to-ceiling curtain; though with an opening exactly where the person is lying). The third and final example is designed to function in a similar manner to a one-way mirror in a police interrogation room; those outside can see in, but the person cannot see out, causing them to be completely exposed at all times.

Keywords: absence, substitute, protection

Post-critical design examples:

**Discussion and reflection (A13/B14):** One of the things that I picked up during the day confirmed what I had heard during the other one-day workshops; that the students agreed that eight hours is an acceptable period for the workshop to function as a teaser. However, for them to have a deeper learning experience and achieve a more longer-lasting learning outcome, more time should be added to allow the students to think (and, moreover, to reconsider) and play with the material in general, before settling on a single concept. As concerns working procedures regarding the critical method, this group of students used the existential designial analysis in a similar manner as the other groups with textiles backgrounds (TaiK and THS), i.e. in a material and technique-oriented manner rather than a method and concept-oriented one. This was evident during both the working process with the assignment and in their results: One group began their work on the uniform and worked towards a concept (example no. 15), which resulted in a critical version of an already existing uniform, and the other group did much the same, starting with the room divider rather than a concept (example no. 16), and thus creating a critical version of an existent type of curtain room divider. At this point, I am uncertain as to who learned the most; the students beginning their work by creating a concept or the students beginning with the product and coming up with a concept in the process of doing so. Moreover, there is no way to find out, as I have not had the opportunity to revisit the schools and discuss these issues.

At this point, I must add that the observation regarding the two working methods appears to have had very little to do with the degree of “criticalness” of the design examples, aside from the fact that they are fewer in number; this, however, is only natural, considering the fact that the students spent more time figuring out how to apply the critical method than coming up with ideas and concepts. Therefore, despite example no. 15 being essentially a variation on the traditional orange jumpsuit, it is not un-critical so much as it is undeniably shocking and thought-provoking. Similarly, example no. 16 is no less critical of the environment at ICU wards because it is based on an existing curtain room divider; on the contrary, it is likely that some would argue that, as all of these objects are found in our daily surroundings, we are easily able to identify with and make sense of them. So why are the different ways in which the critical method has been employed not evident in the examples? The reason for this may be, as has been mentioned many times before, that even though the students at TaiK and THS perhaps differed in their educational background from the students at HIAK and UID, this did not impact their ability to grasp and put the critical method to use, or negatively affect the quality of their results. This could be partially due to the fact that I was there as an observer/teacher and so always ready to escort them through difficult passages, and partly a result of the way the critical method itself works to guide the student, regardless of educational background (skills and experience), the traditions of the school (concerning methodology), group dynamics, etc. One must not forget that the structure of the workshop was continuously improved to further enhance the learning outcome of the students. Also, there is the further question of where the above leaves the group of DKDS students, which was composed partially of textile and fashion students: my answer is that they are somewhere in the middle, or perhaps that individual students at DKDS fall into one of the two categories. As far as I can understand, these students may be considered an exception in this context, as their working methods differ slightly from those of the two categories identified above, and they do not really fit into either when the categories are viewed as groups of students. This would, perhaps, have been the case if I had been given the opportunity to work only with fashion students, rather than mixed groups, as at DKDS and THS. At this point, I can only speculate as to the reasons; it may have depended on the composition and dynamic of the group of students itself, possibly it was a result of there being more students with a background from other disciplines/schools, or this may simply be the standard working method at DKDS, an old architectural school with a different philosophy. In the same vein, it may be interesting to consider taking the critical method to an architectural school, or a class consisting entirely of fashion students for that matter, and studying their approach to the “dark side”. The considerations above got me thinking that, were I to hold similar workshops again, I would perhaps have to better adapt it to what I know of the approach to design thinking of an area, be it textile, fashion, product or industrial design, etc., in order to attain more consistent results. Concerning awareness and professional growth, it appears to me that most of the students understood the purpose of the workshop and, perhaps more importantly, even those who did not understand it at least...
experienced some of the potential consequences of failing to consider the “dark side” of design.

Regarding the presentations, both groups began by reading a text which introduced the fictional setting, before presenting their critical design example in two-dimensional illustration, without giving away the subdesignial, and then opened up for questions from their peers. In a similar manner to the other workshops, the discussion eventually lead up to the question of whether or not the students could see what this way of thinking could potentially do for the design brief, i.e. in what ways it could benefit the design process, and, furthermore, what the students, as future design practitioners, can contribute to the field of design. Do they understand the starting point, challenges, and motivation behind a project differently, following their workshop experience?

Memorable moments: During the presentation, (A13/B14), the group of students who had developed the orange jumpsuit were so embarrassed of what they had accomplished that they did not want to show the results to the other group or say anything about the process that had led them to create it.

Quotes: “Actually, I’m a bit ashamed that we came up with this…” (ibid).
The critical design examples in a nutshell

**Confinement, deprival, punishment or threat:**
(Examples 1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 13 and 15; curtains, prisoner's uniform and door handle)

In these examples, the person is held in a remand prison, which means that he or she is (forcibly) isolated from everything and everyone, and suffers severe restrictions in almost all aspects of their life. This mode of living constitutes the fundamental form of being human (existential) as *confinement* (item 1 below), which is essential regarding what defines this way of existence; it makes “me” become “a prisoner”.

The institutional curtains/uniform/handle are obviously there for the person to use, while at the same time merely standing in for their “own” curtains/uniform/handle at home, as it prevents the person from accessing their things. This represents the fundamental form of design being (overall designial) as *deprival* (item 2 below). What is more, because the curtains/uniform/handle exist as a form of *deprival*, according to the existential designial analysis, it describes the secondary mode in which the object exists as a design (sub-designial) as a *punishment* or *threat* (items 3/4 below). Here, it may be worth pointing out that the reason for this secondary mode is that the person exists within *confinement* to begin with.

1: Confinement as a fundamental form of being human/way of existing/mode of living represents forms of being such as those of restriction and limitation - as opposed to freedom.

2: Deprival as a fundamental form of being signifies basic forms of design being such as *punishment* or *threat*, both of which feature in remand prisons together with *confinement*, and thus manifest the overall function of penalty.

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

4: Threat as a fundamental form of being signifies basic forms of design being such as deprivation.

**Absence, substitute, protection or anchor:**
(Examples 2, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14 and 16; bedclothes, curtain room divider and bedside lamp)

In all of these examples, the hospitalized person is bedridden and thus left with no other choice than to be taken care of. This mode of living defines the fundamental form of being human (existential) as *absence* (item 5 below), which is essential regarding what defines this way of existing: it makes “me” into “the patient”.

The institutional bedclothes/room divider/lamp, which are clearly there for the person’s convenience, at the same time exist as a replacement for the patient’s “own” bedclothes/place of privacy/lamp because they take the place of their personal items, thus defining the fundamental form of design being (overall desigial) as substitute (item 6 below). Additionally, because the bedclothes/place of privacy/lamp exists as a substitute, according to the existential desigial analysis, it defines the secondary mode in which the object exists as a design (sub-desigial) as an object for protection or anchor (item 7/8 below). Here, it may be worth pointing out that the reason for this secondary mode is that the person exists in the particular form of absence to begin with.

5: Absence as a fundamental form of being human/way of existing/mode of living represents forms of existence which are similar to those of ill health and sickness.

6: Substitute as a fundamental form of being signifies basic forms of design being such as protection or anchor, both of which feature in intensive care units together with absence, and so manifests the overall function of caring.

7: Protection as a fundamental form of being represents basic forms of design being, such as substitution.

8: Anchor as a fundamental form of being stands for basic forms of design being, such as substitution.
(INSTEAD OF)

DISCUSSION
As I have now exposed the existential designial analysis to daylight by testing and improving the critical method, design manual and structure of the workshop, and collected enough critical design examples to illustrate the concept of “existential design” as such, let us go back to the point where my journey began in 2008; to critical design and the resulting existential designial analysis. Let us apply it to something that is familiar to us, something that already exists, quite simply to view the critical method from another perspective. In 1997, a group of researchers from the RCA carried out a two-year project, funded by the EU, called The Presence Project: Helping Older People Engage with Their Local Communities (Gaver et al. 2006). The researchers, W. Gaver and J. Beaver, among others, teamed up with five partner groups and fifty-eight older people in three small communities in Europe: Peccioli (Italy), Majorstua/Oslo (Norway) and Bijlmer (the Netherlands).

In brief, the project used design-driven methods (cultural probes) for the development of provocative conceptual designs, with the aim of exploring older people’s attitudes towards technology, in order to force researchers and designers to rethink their attitudes regarding the capabilities of older people, how designers and researchers interact with them, and what methods ought to be used when developing conceptual designs. One of the early proposals connected to the community of Bijlmer was something the researchers called “municipal cages”, into which “older inhabitants could lock themselves and enjoy the outdoors without trepidation, just like their songbirds” (Figure 1, pp. 281; Gaver 2013). This concept, which started out as an attempt to create a system which would protect elderly people but ended up caging them, is certainly interesting from the point of view of the existential designial analysis as it would fit perfectly on the “dark side” (for more details, see pp. 280-281). The final proposal for Bijlmer, however, was the Sloganbench (Figure 2, pp. 282; ibid), on which people were able to sit and read random statements about the city (the material was derived from replies to the Probe), or browse through a list of these communiqués and select one for themselves, and discuss some of the aspects of Bijlmer; this could also be interesting to explore from the perspective of the existential designial analysis because the bench literally represents the inhabitants of Bijlmer (for more details, see pp. 282-283). On a related note, the term “proposal” in many ways has the exact same function as a the term “critical design example”; in the words of Gaver: “the ‘municipal cage’ was not a serious suggestion, but part of the process of working out some of the possible trajectories that the work might go in (and which we wanted to avoid)” (personal correspondence, April 19th, 2013).

At this juncture, it may be prudent to clarify that the overall objective of the research project was to improve conditions for the elderly in these communities. Although the research presented in this thesis deals with a different demographic, the essence is the same as in the project mentioned above; a designer, whether or not they are a researcher, needs to understand the human-object relationship in order for development to proceed, and the existential designial analysis, the critical method, and the critical design examples are the method I have chosen to accomplish this. Let us therefore apply the critical method to both of the proposals mentioned above and see which one is “darker”.

(INSTEAD OF) DISCUSSION
Let’s say that the lady in the picture is named Laura, and that the following two design briefs relate to her.

A) Laura is seventy-seven years old and lives in Bijlmer, a housing community south of Amsterdam. She moved there with her husband in the 1970s, as they had both grown tired of living in the inner city. They wanted to be closer to nature and have some space in which to move, which made Bijlmer perfect. Fast-forward to 1997, however, and Bijlmer has become notorious for its high levels of unemployment, drug abuse and crime. What began as a dream-come-true turned out to be a nightmare.

Laura remembers the summer of 1985 like it was yesterday; the fresh smell of grass after a light summer rain, flowerbeds at the corner of every house, and birds singing all day long. There were people in the streets and in the gardens at all hours of the day, picnicking on the lawns during the day and having their neighbors over for a barbeque in the evening. It was a good summer. It was also the time when they got a dog: they had both retired a long time ago, and the apartment felt empty and quiet. The robust little creature quickly became part of the family, and they spent some very good years together, the three of them. Since then, however, life has taken several drastic turns. Laura’s husband passed away only a few years later, after she had nursed him for a long time, and now she is alone with the dog. After being married for more than fifty years, Laura feels that she has no purpose; she is confused and alone, lost and without anywhere to go (confinement) – a fundamental form of being human that governs disorganization and personal chaos, as she tries to adjust to life in a world without her loved one.

B) Laura is seventy-seven years old and lives in Bijlmer, a housing community south of Amsterdam. She moved there with her husband in the 1970s, as they had both grown tired of living in the inner city. They wanted to be closer to nature and have some space in which to move, which made Bijlmer perfect. Fast-forward to 1997, however, and Bijlmer has become notorious for its high levels of unemployment, drug abuse and crime. What began as a dream-come-true turned out to be a nightmare.

Since Laura lost her husband a couple of years ago, she has been left without any relatives who live close enough to visit her or take her out, and so she is more or less alone. However, her charming little dog gives her company in the apartment, and as it needs walking she has an unavoidable reason to go out for some fresh air every now and then. Otherwise, her days are fairly similar to one another; she wakes around seven, has breakfast and reads the newspaper, walks the dog, listens to music or the radio, knits for a while, sometimes solves some crossword puzzles, makes and eats her lunch, walks the dog again, watches TV, perhaps calls someone or visits a neighbor.

1) What does it mean to be Laura?
   - 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, identification of the defining elements, i.e. the sub-designials determining deprival.
   - The designer opens up for the central sub-designials, i.e. punishment and threat.
down the hall, gets ready for dinner, walks the dog one more time and, finally, goes to bed. Laura looks forward to Wednesday, which is the day when someone from the home care service comes to clean or take her out to do errands; this may well be said to be the highlight of the week, to Laura. During the rest of the week, she is mostly bound to her home, her street, her town, and clings to the same routines (absence). This is a fundamental form of being human that one way or another represents her escape from the reality of life, if only temporarily, and so puts off the pain of losing her other half.

1) What does it mean to be Laura?
- 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, identification of the defining elements, i.e. the sub-designials determining substitute.
- The designer opens up for the central sub-designials, i.e. protection and anchor.

Next, let us assume that confinement and absence are the focal existentials, i.e. the starting point for the future design of furniture for public parks. Read the two following texts while keeping the second question in mind:

C) Without the dog, Laura would be very lonely in the apartment. The dog is always there, just a whistle away. When Laura wakes up in the morning, the dog waits patiently for her at the door; when she eats her meals, the dog is under the table; when she takes her nap in the afternoon, the dog sleeps at her feet; and when she goes to bed at night, the dog sleeps at the foot of her bed. The dog gives her comfort. Laura tells the dog everything; the dog knows all of her secrets. In many ways, the dog is the reason she lives, the reason she is still alive. It’s a shame she barely dares to take him outside anymore; they could both use some fresh air, but the park is full of alcoholics and drug addicts. On every other bench in the park it seems that someone has spread their life; blankets, food containers, plastic bags, etc., and there are garbage and drug detritus everywhere. It is simply an unsafe environment. The park that used to be so green and well-kept is now wild; it is not what it used to be (deprivation). Just thinking of it makes her sad. That afternoon, Laura put on the collar on the dog, quickly walked it around the building, and then rushed back up to the apartment again. When she closes the door and locks it, she thinks to herself, “this is the last time”.

1) What does it mean to be Laura?
- 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, identification of the defining elements, i.e. the sub-designials determining deprivation.
- The designer opens up for a potential critical design example, i.e. threat in the form of a municipal cage.

Fig 1. “Municipal cages” [Gaver 2013].
D) These days, Laura likes to take the long route around the park during her morning walks, passing by the municipal center and across to the other side of the park. There, a stone’s throw from the road, an oasis comes into sight: In the beginning, she didn’t really understand what the fuss was all about; her neighbors talked about some kind of research project, but she couldn’t let it go, and went to find out what it was. She was obviously not the only one to go there, and it appears that more and more people go there on a daily basis. Now, a few months later, it is without doubt her favorite part of the park, perhaps the best place in the whole of Bijlmer. It is a blessing. It is difficult to explain exactly why, but one of the things Laura likes the most is the fact that she can hear children playing and people chatting, even when she is on her way there. Moreover, she feels safe when she is surrounded by people, and this is probably the reason that she and the dog go there every day; besides, the dog really likes to be outside more. What’s more, there is so much to look at, and always someone to talk to. She never feels alone there, not even during parts of the day when there are just a few others in the park. Sitting on the funny-looking bench and closing her eyes always brings back memories of how it all used to be; the lively neighborhood, the summer rain and the peace she used to feel (substitute). It must be something magic about that bench. She truly wishes her husband was there to see it and sit beside her.

1) **What does it mean to be Laura?**
   - 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, identification of the defining elements,**
   - i.e. the sub-designials determining substitute.
   - The designer opens up for a potential critical design example, i.e. protection in the form of a park bench.
Dear reader,

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I feel that I owe you an explanation regarding some of the issues that were, for the most part, not included in the thesis itself, such as the research methodology and a discussion on artistic research; these discussions are instead included here as I do not know exactly where my research fits in, methodologically speaking. Perhaps it constitutes research into, through and/or for art and design (Frayling 1993), or even all three at once, in a practice-led format, including a bit of action research to top it all off. On the other hand, maybe the whole point of my research was that it had no exact methodological position, nor did it ever need one.

As many others in the field have done in the past, I have bet my money on “epistemological anarchism”, as proposed by Feyerabend in his magnum opus, Against Methods, which was written in the mid-1970s (SEP 2013); similar ideologies used are the “democracy of experience” and “methodological abundance”, which have caused me to focus on the “[…] possible starting point for artistic research” (Hannula et al. 2005, pp. 24), rather than slavishly following this or that method. Frankly, my research has been conducted according to the Dadaist “anything goes” approach with, however, the ever-present objective of exploring “[…] the world as it could be, on the imagination and realization of possible futures […]” (Grand and Wiedmer 2010, pp. 2), with the overall aim of finding “[…] an alternative way of thinking about design” (Design manual, pp. 28).

Let us, however, return to the place where it all began. It may well be said that I had already started on this “dark” voyage during my Master’s project at Designhögskolan in Umeå in 2004. At that point, my goal was to learn how people continue with their daily lives after a stroke, with the objective of developing future design concepts which could assist them in these circumstances and help them to have better lives by e.g. performing basic activities such as eating, dressing and grooming themselves without assistance. This somewhat naïve desire, to increase or at least partly restore the feeling of independence to stroke victims, resulted in many weeks spent (in the guise of a nurse) in the rehabilitation unit at Norrland’s University Hospital, Umeå. This was an experience that opened my eyes to institutional
life, and showed how intense and extreme it must be to live in such a way. However, it was only many years later, after I had begun working on my PhD thesis, that I learned what “such a way” really meant.

Over the following year or so, and due to the influence of a certain professor, I began to read up on everything from existentialism and Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, Beauvoir, Dostoyevsky, and Kafka, to phenomenology and the life-world in the world of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty; I even looked into Eastern philosophy, in an attempt to attain an overview of the subject and, thus, a more clear idea of what I was looking for. I would say that this stage of my research could broadly be called a literature review or survey, despite parts of it consisting of movies and, to a certain extent, exhibitions; regardless, it was instrumental in me developing an answer to my research question. Concerning this overall question, I must honestly say that mine was not more precisely formulated than “What does it mean to be shut up, boxed in, and strapped down, physically and/or psychologically in a design perspective?” Also, this turned out to be merely a preliminary brief, and continued to develop until it finally read “What is existential design?”. On the topic of this question, it is one that I have asked myself on numerous occasions over the years, and which I have only recently begun to make some sense of. Nevertheless, the initial stage provided my research with a point of departure, i.e. a context for my work, and, more importantly, a way forward.

The next issue concerned observations. The objective was to extract truth from “real experiences” (Dialogue, pp. 112), whether they are existentials or not, and to do so by “[…] observing so-called real environments and talking to real people […]” (ibid, pp. 110). In order to accomplish this, I had to let go of some of my old assumptions, as I have been trained as a “problem solver” (Cross 2006), and open my mind in order to fully absorb new data without really knowing what it could be; this is, in many ways, in line with Borgdorff, who argues that “It is an inherent quality of research that ‘one does not know exactly what one does not know’” (Biggs and Karlsson 2011, pp. 55).

At first, I conducted observations in various hospital environments, and I particularly saw to it that I visited ICU wards, as I was unable to do so in 2004. Next, I visited every type of facility within the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, from open to maximum security prisons, as well as psychiatric wards, etc., and ensured that I experienced facilities used by both genders. In other words, I watched, listened, smelled, touched, and tasted my way through the entire prison system. What I discovered, in brief, was confinement (Design manual, pp. 40), which somehow brought with it absence (ibid, pp. 41), because if one exists in confinement, one is no longer present in the way one normally would be and so “[…] fall[ing] outside what is considered a ‘normal’ state of existence for the person in question […]” (ibid, pp. 22). Furthermore, these two existentials did not only constitute a good pair, which has been mentioned already, but also a fair representation of two extremes within the institutional world. In both cases, the two represent the “overall function”; for inmates in remand prisons, this is “penalty”, and for patients in ICU wards, it is “critical care”. This could only be beneficial to further development as the different characteristics (i.e. the “truths” discussed above) would be easier to detect and extract in this way.

Considering the different uses of the notion “observation” in the three disciplines, i.e. design practice, nursing, and criminal justice science, which I have been flirting heavily with for the last five years, I believe I am not far from the truth when I state that, instead of conducting research in an empirical, qualitative sense, or utilizing a well-established research method, what I needed was to see for myself what was really going on (not unlike the story with the rehab-unit in Umeå), rather than depend on respondents’ accounts of occurrences, etc. In brief, my research methodology ended up somewhere between ethnographic research, i.e. a qualitative research method that allows designers to “[…] gain insight into complex issues: moving beyond what people say they do to what they really do” (Design Council 2013), and field observations and participatory observations, concerning the observational studies conducted in the two environments. Furthermore, I employed whatever information I found to be interesting and important, during the construction of my theoretical framework and as a way of nurturing the fictional settings (personas and environments). However, I have not measured or analyzed the results per se, in the traditional sense anyhow, having only transferred the data to my “internal hard drive” in order to create a bridge between the “[…] worlds of
imagination […]” and “[…] pure reason […]” (Biggs and Karlsson 2011, pp. 49). That is to say that I watched, listened to, smelled, touched, and tasted the individual(s) and/or their natural settings, and I sometimes participated in their activities, whether that was combing an old lady’s hair at an ICU ward or playing pool with the male inmates of an open prison; here, it should be noted that I was known to everyone as a researcher.

I performed a form of analysis as I inevitably came to break down all that I had observed, in order to understand and so organize/categorize it all. Moreover, the fact that observation necessarily involves the researcher’s interpretation of the data, together with Einstein’s declaration that, “It is quite wrong to try founding a theory on observable magnitudes alone. In reality the very opposite happens. It is the theory which decides what we can observe” (Kumar 2009, 226), clearly implies that I had a vague idea what I was looking for, or at least what hoped I would find; either way, this idea pervaded the entire process, including the findings. All in all, I strongly believe that this is where our experience, our “theoretical and methodical baggage” or “tacit knowledge” (Polanyi) of design comes in. Although we as designers are dreamers, luckily enough we are also knowledgeable in ways of making dreams come true; we simply put things together to form a new object, and do so with whatever means we have at hand or can find. As Dyrssen writes, “[…] it is through the conscious operation with fiction, innovation and composition that knowledge is produced, and new meaning emerges” (Biggs and Karlsson 2011, pp. 239). That, dear reader, is how the existential designial analysis was brought into being.

Concerning my research process, it appears that Borgdorff is absolutely correct when he states that “[…] as a rule, artistic research is not hypothesis-led, but discovery-led” (ibid, pp. 56). What I had gathered up to this point was a large collection of stories and also a whole lot of hunches, thoughts and ideas, i.e. what Nowotny calls a “play of possibilities” (ibid, pp. xviii). Better still, I had gathered a lot of “fictions” (as in the opposite of hypotheses), something that “[…] we know to be untrue, but, like a tool, it proves useful to us at the moment to clarify something or to help us see it in a new way” (ibid, pp. 230-31; Fisher 2000), about the environments, in addition to the two existentials confinement and absence. At the time, these had been turned upside down and inside out, assessed (as in double-checked with “reality”, i.e. the current research context), defined, classified and put into a system. Most importantly, the designials, overall designials, and sub-designials had been identified, which in turn signaled the completion of my theoretical framework. Ultimately, it had all been formulated at a more practical level, namely into the existential designial analysis, which challenges the designer to “[…] question his/her assumptions and preconceived ideas about the design being per se […]” (Design manual, pp. 20).

For the existential designial analysis to work effortlessly, however, and thus come into use, it obviously needed to be applicable. This is the moment when the critical method was born. I shaped and formed my ideas into a three-step approach that would carefully guide the designer towards cultivating critical design examples, which aims to “[…] define and illustrate the given series of designials [and…] accordingly illuminate existential design as concept […]” (ibid, pp. 21). In order to make this way of thinking available to students and practitioners, “[…] who see themselves involved in e.g. planning, constructing or maintaining future hospitals, prisons, etc.” (ibid, pp. 22), I compiled it all in a design manual, which was made up of definitions and examples which illustrated the theory, the existential designial analysis. The critical method was ready to be tested, which meant that the “dark side” of design thinking was ready to hit the road. Please bear in mind that in real design scenarios, the existential designial analysis is intended to be applied during the initial stages of a project, just as the designer has been presented the design brief.

Allow me to sum up the journey so far: If I were to define my contribution to this field, I would say it is the existential designial analysis/critical method/design manual. Although I have already accounted for these three, there are still a few things to say regarding their respective contributions. In brief, the existential designial analysis informs us of “[…] the form of being human that a design in use defines” (ibid, pp. 30), while the critical method tells us how to employ the existential designial analysis, and the design manual tells us how to use the critical method in the design process. The contribution of the concept of “existential design”, on the other hand, is more significant, which is owing to its importance or, more exactly, to “[…] the complications which may arise if this aspect of design thinking
is ignored” (ibid, pp. 20). This is achieved by generating critical design examples, which in turn embody a critique of or comments on existing values and practices in remand prisons and/or ICU wards as environments; this is a discussion for another time, however. I will proceed to address the fictional dimension of my research, which more or less goes hand in hand with a critical way of looking at the world or, as I call it, the “dark side” of design thinking.

Like most scientific disciplines, design research (and design per se, for that matter) does not primarily focus on the world as it truly is. Instead, design researchers have a lot in common with engineers and architects, who focus on “[…] the disclosure of new worlds” (Grand and Wiedmer 2010, pp. 2). Borgdorff calls this phenomenon “the performative and critical power of art” (Biggs and Karlsson 2011, pp. 61), and goes on to argue that “It does not represent things; it presents them”; this, in turn, is true for design, as it contributes to “[…] making the world into what it is or could be” (ibid). This fundamental distinction was introduced by Herb Simon (ibid, pp. 1; Simon 1969), who simply stated that “Engineering, medicine, business, architecture and painting are concerned not with the necessary but with the contingent - not with how things are but with how they might be – in short, with design” (ibid, pp. 5, Simon 1969, pp. xii).

However, let us go back and try to link “[…] fiction, innovation and composition” (Biggs and Karlsson 2011, pp. 239) to critical design. Although the perspectives of both Dunne and Ruby, and Gaver and Martin have already been referred to in this thesis, there are other opinions worth mentioning, including one which is expressed in an article I stumbled across the other day. In it, the authors propose that design fiction is a form of meta-method for design research; essentially, that design fiction can be understood as a new strategy which is founded on the “designerly way of knowing” (Cross 2006), and also on the on-going discussion concerning whether practice, theory, methodology, and epistemology of design research meet the standards of scientific research. Regardless, the authors suggested that this was to be achieved by “[…] systematically questioning and deconstructing the self-evident, transcending it towards new, possible futures; concretely materializing, visualizing and embodying relevant controversies and perspectives in the form of artifacts, interfaces, installations and performances […]” (Grand and Wiedmer 2010, pp. 5-6). What they suggest is that in order to evaluate the individual scientific relevance of design practices, design methods and tools for design research, these must be differentiated into six dimensions, in contrast to scientific knowledge, which apparently has no more than three (ibid; Elkana 1986). What is particularly interesting in this context, however, is dimension no. 1, which is labeled “creation and construction of possible future worlds”, in connection to which the authors mention critical design and refer to Dunne and Raby’s “[…] promising approach […]” (Grand and Wiedmer 2010, pp. 6) towards reaching this goal. As the creation of possible future worlds implies referring to the world as it is, it is understandable that the critical method will present itself in a favorable light, as it not only criticizes the existing situation, but goes on to explore alternatives as well. Furthermore, the authors’ attempt to strike a balance between the outright utopian, “[…] which is too far away from our current concerns and issues to have an impact on the current controversies and approaches […]” (ibid) and the overly realistic, which is “[…] so close to what we already know and experience that no real provocation, relevant challenge, new perspective can emerge” (ibid), is absolutely applicable to my fictional scenarios. Likewise, their use of “utopian” can easily be linked to Dunne’s “heterotopia” (Dunne 2005, pp. 52, 100), which is already regarded as an excellent condition for critical design thinking, and most likely traces its origins to Foucault’s version of the concept. All of the above appears to confirm what I have already experienced, namely that the fictional personas and environments are a perfect fit with the “in between” of Grand and Wiedmer, and which thus form an excellent foundation for an attempt to explore, define and illustrate “existential design” as a concept. Finally, I will go out on a limb and stretch this (already too long) paragraph a little further, as it just occurred to me that one could say that the fictional settings are no different than, for example, the way Heisenberg used thought experiments to illustrate the significance of the uncertainty principle (I am in no way trying to compare the importance of my work to his, but the comparison is not, I feel, outrageous). Furthermore, it may be argued that I used imaginary experiments to “[…] employ perfect equipment under ideal conditions” (Kumar 2009, pp. 234), which may be interpreted in order to state that the way that we perform design research may not be so far-fetched after all.
It feels as if I have been writing for hours, and I still have not touched on the workshops. To continue the story, I took the design manual on a “tour” and, rather than dreaming up my own critical design examples, I handed the responsibility to students all over Scandinavia. During the fall of 2011 and the spring of 2012, I led eight workshops at five different schools, and I believe that I don’t stray far from the truth if I say that approximately eighty students were exposed to the critical method. The practicalities and results of the “tour” have been more or less described in the chapter describing the workshops, meaning that there is no need to repeat the details here. Something I have not discussed there, however, is what I gained from holding the workshops, i.e. my personal learning outcome from employing the critical method in the different classes at the different schools. Above all else, I must say that, through working with the students, who were all eager to try something new, and many of whom ended up taking the “dark side” of design thinking to heart, I received the proof I needed to verify my belief that the existential designial analysis/critical method works in reality. In addition, the students apparently understood how to successfully apply it to the design process, and most importantly the reason why, which is enough in itself. Furthermore, by espousing the concept to the students, I had an opportunity to test and make adjustments to it while still on the road; this was true for the existential designial analysis and the critical method, as well as the design manual. Although I know I have written this somewhere in the thesis, if not in several places, I would like to emphasize that the students also helped illustrate existential design as such, while also indirectly assisting in the improvement of the structure of the workshop throughout the process. At the risk of sounding arrogant, I would like to say that, although the students started out as guinea pigs who were supposed to test the critical method and workshop structure, they survived the journey and reached the destination, i.e. the “dark side” of design thinking, very much alive and, for what it is worth, they did not seem to be repelled by what they had heard and seen along the way. Last but not least, the sixteen critical design examples appear to have opened people’s eyes (without too much resistance, I may add), and from what I understand they still remain open, which is a happy ending indeed.

So at the end of the road, while people such as myself are carrying out design research, where will the path to the “dark side” of design thinking lead, if not towards new possibilities?

These possibilities may be sudden and unpleasant, weird and even stupid at times, but they are the starting point for someone else, nonetheless. As I said, in the guise of A in the Dialogue, concerning the existential designial analysis/critical method/design manual; it has been brought into being “[…] not as a substitute for solving problems, but as a possibility to find new directions in design work” (Dialogue, pp. 112), and through this project I hope to “[…] provide designers with a tool to critically analyze the existing methods – hence ‘rock the boat’” (Design manual, pp. 28). Well, I guess this is goodbye, then. Bon voyage! Have a safe journey!

Love,
To continue the metaphor of the title, I would firstly like to thank Lars Hallnäs, who bought me a ticket to the “dark side” of design thinking back in 2008 and who, along with Hanna Landin, provided me with reliable maps, a compass, a flashlight, and many other invaluable tools, whenever I became lost or otherwise needed a guide. My gratitude also goes to Johan Öberg, who picked me up at the station and drove me the first few miles; to Birgitta Göransson, who welcomed me with open arms to the somewhat impenetrable fortress of the Swedish Prison and Probation Service; and to Tommy Nilsson, Elsa Ivarsson and all of the others who showed me around and helped me to discover the different parts of the fortress. I also want to take this opportunity to thank Sepideh Olausson, who sat down in the empty seat next to me at the beginning, and who became my much-appreciated travel partner during parts of the journey through the world of the Swedish health care system, and also Berit Lindahl, for granting Sepideh the opportunity to accompany me. My gratitude also extends to my colleagues at the Swedish School of Textiles for being such exemplary fellow passengers, for providing me with company and coffee discussions about everything and nothing, with special thanks to Jonas Larsson for pushing the bed in Film No. 2, Barbro Scholz for the illustrations in part two (the Dialogue) and of course to all of the other students I met along the way. Last but not least, I would like to thank my family and friends, who have been waving and smiling encouragingly from the side of the road, and special thanks to my best friend Tonje Louise Finne, for making the films become reality, and to my very good friends Elizabeth Higson, for putting a face to my extreme personas and the critical design examples, to Britt Jorunn Myhren, who made sure my graphics were A-OK, and, finally, to an incredibly nice hitchhiker who I picked up along the road. I owe you all one!
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