Safe Space for Disagreements

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**INTRODUCING THE SAFE SPACE**

→ What?

*Safe Space for Disagreements* is a collection of four independent interactive comics, that connect thematically by approaching matters of communication, emotion, and disagreement. These stories make use of the interactive features of the web format and animation, in addition to text and image-based, more “traditional” comic characteristics.

screenshots of the stories within *Safe Space for Disagreements*. 
Why?

I started my Master’s not knowing what kind of project I would like to create. To find out, I started by accessing what subjects had been of interest to me in the past to create work on. In my body of work, I feel like one can tell that there is a longing for connection. I have dealt artistically with feelings of loneliness, out-of-placeness, coming-of-age, friendship, love, and heartbreak. I have always liked to make drawings and tell stories about these things that do not have a specific shape, because I like to try and imagine what they can look like. During the first semester of the MA at Konstfack, I began thinking about another thing that does not have a physical shape, and that I would like to imagine through drawing — dialogue.

Dialogue seemed like something magical and mysterious to me, as I was very interested in the processes behind human connection and relationships. But the MA programme prompted me to think about dialogue further, more politically. I had been feeling frustrated with some online discourse I would see on Facebook comment sections and on Twitter, and I tried to dig out what exactly was frustrating me. On one hand, I would read posts commenting on local politics or current events that seemed uninformed and bigoted, often hateful, and this type of content would sometimes come from family members or people I knew in real life. But, on the other hand, the people I would see commenting against these messages often came across as arrogantly and aggressively as the original-posters, replying with a sense of moral superiority that was also quite annoying and seemed to be contra-productive in most cases.

Mind you, some of these bigoted posts would come from downright trolls, or people too stuck in their harmful beliefs that they would likely not budge — “direct biggots”, as Natalie Wynn would call them. But some of the people that share these posts do so because they see their anger and dissatisfaction being successfully exploited by populist interests; I also believe that some people might share these posts out of confusion, genuine not-knowing, and being “out of the loop” regarding certain current issues; And some people might share these posts because they feel threatened about the pace of change. This last example usually reflects a privileged stance — one that struggles to see the real effects of civil rights movements in the lives of real people, because they have never personally felt the need to worry about

→ some work I have made prior to Konstfack (2017-2018), about heartbreak and growing up.
such concerns. And although some of these situations I just described would not be exempted from being defined as “indirect bigotry” — a type of bigotry that is more sophisticated and discreet than blatant hate, one that appears to be more defensive and rightful — I personally still think that there are people in these types of situations who could be persuaded into considering alternate narratives if someone was willing to be patient and dialogue with them.*

So, I was wondering about the communication issues that ensue when different beliefs and narratives clash, and thinking whether it is possible to reach agreement, or, at least, to spark interest, curiosity, anything that could open the hearts more.

My research lead me through many tangents surrounding these questions — I skimmed briefly through topics like dialogue, non-violent communication, mindfulness, and then mindfulness and wellness culture criticism, internet trolls and propaganda, emotions, emotional regulation, phenomenology, neuroscience, psychology, and lots of comment sections and Twitter beef.

*And while marginalized people should not feel obligated to educate people on these matters (because it is surely exhausting to live through discrimination and have to debate against people who downplay it), I think it is an ally’s work to help spread information and resources. Internet has helped facilitating access to this, but there are also algorithms that push misinformation for profit, as well as lack of time, availability, and support networks — all of which are important in the process of unlearning. It’s not that easy as to simply tell someone to “go get informed”.
This is very naive and a bit embarrassing, but at first I felt like I wanted to make a guidebook about how to engage politically with people “the right way”. Like, a “guide to empathy”, unlocking the secrets of productive dialogue and persuasion. I thought that there had to be a common denominator that made people so unwilling to listen to non-hegemonic narratives and narratives told by marginalized groups, and consequently, that there had to be a simple trick to overcome this. If all of the World’s problems and struggles could be reduced to a global-scale communication problem...! But, although I do think that there are some common factors, and although there are communication problems, I have learned that there isn’t a right way to disagree or to be angry. Today’s problems are very complex, and require collective action coming from multiple places, over many years — surely not coming from a guidebook made in 2 years by a MA student (or made by anyone, in whatever amount of time, for that matter, I think).

Still, instead, I worked on four stories that revolve around the central issue of communication/disagreement, that are very much about my doubts, questions, and insecurities on how to navigate these extremely nuanced and complex topics — these stories are my way of entering the “question” of communication.

I decided to use the webcomic format because from the moment I first started playing with it in October 2020, it felt very natural and comfortable and it allowed me to include interaction and animation in my storytelling. It also didn’t raise the same logistic concerns that printing a book would (printing and material costs, mostly), and it can be spread more widely. And since my whole project started with frustration over online interpersonal exchanges, it felt rightfully ironic to go into that same path, in the end. I will be talking more about my formal choices and specific decisions that were brought up by this specific format later on as well.
“Safe space for disagreements” was a phrase that appeared spontaneously while discussing the project with my external tutor Hanna Heilborn in one of our first sessions. We were wondering about the “Ideal conditions” for a good argument. “Good” in this case meant a constructive dialogue, where people would try to find common ground, despite having different opinions on a topic. Hanna had commented on how these conversations require time, but also how they require some level of trust between the speakers. Enough trust to allow each other to feel frustrated, enough trust to allow each other to be uncertain, enough trust to allow oneself to let go of an idea and change one’s mind. A safe space for disagreements was also something that sounded funny to me, because it juxtaposed two seemingly opposing ideas — the idea of a safe space and the idea of a disagreement. In a way, my own biases were already showing — why was I deeming a disagreement as an inherently “unsafe” occurrence?

The concept of a safe space for disagreements raises interesting questions, from a visual communication standpoint, but also a political one. What does a safe space look like? Is it big? Warm? What colour is it? But also, who feels safe in this space? Why is there the necessity to feel safe? These were some of my initial questions on the topic that permeated my comics — particularly, the last comic I worked on.

But as I have come to learn, the phrase “safe space” is quite charged. Safe spaces, in their genesis, are important platforms where victims of abuse or trauma can come forward and seek support, sharing their experience with people who have gone through similar things, which can be an important step towards their healing. But safe spaces have since become associated with the “politically correct agenda” by (usually conservative) critics. These folk are usually the same people that criticize the need for trigger warnings, because they may have been led to believe that “nobody can say anything anymore” and that people who need these spaces should get used to the real world. These arguments invalidate real people’s trauma and needs and are exclusionary, rather than inclusive.

On the other hand, the phrase “safe space” has been so widely used, that sometimes it will also appear associated

*The last comic I worked on is the ‘title comic’ of the bundle, also called Safe Space for Disagreements.
with spaces that, despite appearing open-minded and keen on engaging in conversation with its members, will be quite reluctant in taking in criticism, handling conflict, and won’t allow for people to freely express their needs and emotions, which can feel performative.

Basically, the phrase “safe space” now feels a bit like a cliche. I wanted to make it appear fresher and a bit cheeky by adding the “for disagreements” part, but I also felt conscious about the fact that, in its origins, safe spaces are healing tools and mostly offer support, not disagreement. Not every safe space should be a space for disagreeing, I believe.

But my intention with the title was truly to think about what is needed for there to be a constructive disagreement or dialogue, to think about safety in relation to conflict, and how power dynamics work in those cases — who can feel safe in this space? Who can’t? Why? How?

Why these four stories?

The four stories that make up the safe space for disagreements are, as aforementioned, four moments in which I explore visually and narratively the topics of communication, anger, perception, “safe-spaces”, and conflict/disagreement. The stories are, in chronological order of creation, Inbetween Words (or Kerning/Tracking), Anger, Perception, and Safe Space for Disagreements. There wasn’t really a moment where I planned this collection of themes, deeming them as key topics for conveying my master project. It kinda happened as I researched and as I inquired. I would come across an interesting topic or point of view, and in order to fully process it, I created a story about it.

Together, these stories are my own mind map, that I used to visualize and organize information. But I believe that as a whole, these stories also translate what I find important to build a safe space for disagreements.
Inbetween Words (or Kerning/Tracking) was not originally meant to be part of my final project, but ended up making an appearance in the Safe Space website, catalogued as one of my four final stories about the themes of communication and disagreement.

It was a short story I developed during a course our class had with Hanna Heilborn in our first semester at Konstfack. The theme of the assignment was “inbetween” — we were supposed to think of ourselves as somewhere inbetween two different things (maybe in between two different practices? Two different labels?) or to simply think about the concept of existing inbetween — what does it mean, and what is there, in that space. I was already playing with the ideas of dialogue and communication in my head — I started to think about what exists in between dialogue itself, in between words.

If between people there is dialogue, what happens in between dialogue in itself? Something must happen, because even though dialogue is there, there are also misunderstandings, conflicts, and disagreements. Dialogue is advertised as being that which leads people to find common ground together — but why is it that it can also lead to distance?

At this point in my process I was thinking a lot about communication in digital contexts — comment sections on social media, messaging apps, and texts. I thought about the space that exists in between the two speech bubbles in Messenger, and also how someone I am talking to feels so, so far away as I see the little icon appear, telling me that they are “writing”. I have no idea what facial expressions this person is making, what are their hesitations, or whether they have written the same sentence multiple times, until finding the words that suited them best at the moment. For the internet’s sake, there are words — but the hesitations, and the time, and the frustrations of communicating exists in between those words.
Non-verbal communication

I decided to focus on non-verbal communication for this assignment. My theory was that, in between words, there are gestures, sounds, and hesitations that also contribute to communication and to mutual understanding. Although these non-verbal queues cannot be classified in the same way we classify language, I believe that their worth for our communication lies in their capacity to show one’s vulnerabilities, unfiltered. As we see someone fidgeting, or fumbling with their words, we are reminded of our own vulnerabilities, our own fumbles, and we become more empathetic and attentive. These cues are a reminder of our humanity, and help us relate to one another. They also help expressing tonality — often in purely written conversation it is difficult to understand, for example, sarcasm, or humour. This may lead to misunderstandings, because the tonality of the message is not clear. With the help of non-verbal queues, these misunderstandings can be minimized, or at least, easier to resolve.

I focused my attention on some of the types of non-verbal communication — vocalics, kinesics, chronemics, and proxemics* — and I tried to convey them visually. I had the idea of literally filling in the spaces between words with illustrations representing these non-verbal queues, and from there, a short printed zine was born.

The zine

We had a short time span to work on this assignment, so I couldn’t get too carried away with my project. I wrote a short reflection on the subject and illustrated the space in between the words with visual queues meant to represent non-verbal queues. These had to be very iconographic, because I did not have much space even though I fiddled with the kerning of the words, and had to translate sound, movement, the passing of time, and the position of someone (close, or faraway) through image. It was challenging at times, but made me think in alternative ways to express concepts I would never have thought of otherwise. The whole process felt like I had found a new way of making comics, using the spaces in between words as I would use the panels on a page.

*Types of non-verbal communication, based on sound/entonation (vocalics), body movement (kinesics), usage and importance given to time (chronemics), and the way one might use touch or take up space (proxemics).
Finally, I printed it in cheap, pink printer paper on the school’s photocopier machines, and stapled it. This is a detail, but because this zine had such a good reception amongst my classmates, I wanted to produce some copies to sell. Unfortunately, I have deleted this zine’s files by mistake, so the only trace of it I have is the copy I printed to show in class, and the scans I made from it.

→ Webcomic

This publication is featured on the website Safe Space for Disagreements, even though it was made much earlier than the rest of the comics, and it was not thought of as a webcomic at any point in its process. It appears in the website as a simple slideshow, where readers can click on the picture and skim through the pages — a lesser experience of a printed publication. I was given feedback by some classmates saying that Inbetween Words should probably not be present amongst the rest of my webcomics, but I decided to keep it, as I think it is already me entering the question of communication, and it is part of my ‘mind map’ and of my process. I don’t think it’s that problematic that it was not thought of as a webcomic — I think that one of the wonders of the website is that I can link as many resources as I want, and use it to archive my all my explorations surrounding communication and comics that communicate communication.

↗️ screenshot from the website; how the reader sees Kerning/Tracking.
ANGER

Why talk about anger?

I had to come to terms with anger (anger in general, but also my own) to be able to progress with my project. I remember back in Autumn 2019, talking with my classmate Aziza about it. She had just produced a riso-printed illustration titled “Angry”. We were in the graphic department room after hours, as we would often do, and the topic of the conversation steered towards her piece. I remember saying something like “I don’t really understand anger. I don’t like feeling angry” and I finished with “anger isn’t really for me”. I remember what Aziza said next — “I know how you feel, and I used to think like you… but I have seen and met so many people that showed their anger in such beautiful and gracious ways…!” I don’t remember exactly how she said it, but I remember I sensed intensity, and a great deal of admiration in her words, in regards to those people’s anger.

Anger appeared more and more as I was researching about disagreement. At the time I was focusing a lot on internet discussions, and comment sections’ fights due to diverging political views. It seemed clear to me that things escalated because anger had a way to seep into people’s written words, consciously or unconsciously, causing a wall to form between the parts involved, and constructive communication to be interrupted.

I was also reading about nonviolent communication (NVC), interested in how it could be applied in the context of internet discussions. NVC is described as an empathetic way of communicating where, as one’s feelings and needs are honestly expressed, they have more potential to be addressed, rather than just by using methods of complaining or pointing fingers. It is a method of conveying information that does require learning to communicate within a specific structure, with a learned set of rules, but that is promised to bear results. However, on reading Miki Kashtan’s piece on nonviolent communication, I realized that the “problem of anger” is not merely an individual’s anger management issue that should be “fixed” through conflict-resolution education or workshops. The recent popularity of nonviolent communication may lead one to think that manifestations
of angry behaviour can be solved by individual action, and if one fails to solve them, it’s one’s own fault because there are plenty of resources for nonviolent communication and mindfulness available online.

This is, I believe, a wrong perception of what anger really means in today’s systems. Anger can be very much valid, and sometimes the only way to solve a situation that causes anger is not through meditation or yoga or mindful communication — sometimes the only thing that could help is direct action towards the roots of the problems, that can be buried as deep as at the core of our social, political, and economical systems.

This was the beginning of me starting to look at anger as a symptom, rather than an issue in itself. Anger is a core emotion and is very much related to fear. Fear induces physiological reactions in the body that are very similar to the ones that anger induces — the hormone adrenaline is produced and distributed, which causes body temperature to rise, heart to pump blood and oxygen faster, muscles tensing up. These changes will put someone in a fight-flight-freeze state, that will ensure their self-defense and thus, increase their chances of survival.

People can feel angry when scared, but also under pressure, stress, etc. And it’s easy to feel anger — not just because of what may happen in our convoluted private lives, but also because of the way the neoliberal economic systems we are forced to live within work. Trauma accumulates in our bodies from enduring long, stressful routines, enduring lack of rest, enduring poverty, enduring feelings of anxiety towards the future, enduring abuse and discrimination from racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, etc. Anger is a completely natural symptom of the conditions one lives in, and it’s a good thing that is — directed anger is what makes one say “enough”. Directed anger is what sparks political activation, demonstrations, organizing, strategies of mutual help — anger can spark change. It is wrong to assume anger is a “bad” emotion, and it may even be a privileged mindset to think so.

“Tone policing” is when an argument is invalidated because of the (often pointed, direct/aggressive/imperative) tone in which it is delivered, and it’s a strategy often used to delegitimize valid concern and injustice. Similarly, public demonstrations of dissatisfaction may be called “riots”, and can be dismissed because of the exhibitions of collective anger — that can, indeed,
sometimes result in violent behaviour. This was the case for the BLM protests that sparked following George Floyd’s murder by a police officer in the United States, in the summer of 2020. These demonstrations were very criticized because they involved the destruction of private property (storefronts, big supermarkets, etc) and clashes between protestors and the police. Although I am personally not inclined to believe in violence as a solution*, in this case my personal takeaways are that 1—destruction of private property (especially stores that profit immensely and more often than not, exploit their workers) does not consist of violence if nobody gets hurt; 2—the public commentary on these protests got too stuck on the exhibition of anger, instead of addressing the main issue — where is that anger coming from? What does living within racist structures and feeling discriminated and endangered by the forces that should be protecting oneself, what does living with that burden constantly do to a person’s well being? What other emotion can be sparked by all this, if not anger?

But anger is something that every human will experience. Trump supporters, anti-vaxxers, Neo-fascist party members (hello Portugal) will also experience and demonstrate their anger. In some of these cases, we can see how fear and anger are weaponized by leaders. Understandable concerns and anxieties (many of them stemming from the economic/political system we live in) will be redirected onto scapegoats, minority groups, immigrants, science, and the fear will become more real, and the anger people feel will become directed to these groups, to the most violent consequences.

So anger is complex. In writing this comic, my main goal was to find out what makes anger “valid”, and how can anger be rightfully used. It is a bit contradictory to look at anger in those terms though, especially after having established that anger is not a problem that should be fixed, or solved. Sometimes anger just is, and we have to sit with it, as so many therapists and yoga practitioners say. But what does that mean!

In that sense, I am not sure if my comic provides any answers, but it was never really my intention to tell people what to do. Rather, I think it is interesting to explain this situation — recontextualizing anger from a “bad”, “negative” place, and showing how anger can be hopeful — and invite readers to think about their own anger for a moment, and then think about what everyone's anger, from every corner of the world, what does it all mean.

*Although yes, our political, economical, social systems consist of normalized violence. One can argue that nothing in the story of Humanity has happened without violence, so perhaps violence as a way to solve inequality is inevitable?
Addressing the web-elephant in the room

Anger actually started being planned as a printed comic. I had already sketched out the first two chapters, thinking about it in a book format, but decided to re-adapt it into a webcomic. I think I wasn’t used to plan a comic that wasn’t to be made for print, and I absent-mindedly started planning it the way I knew how. Or maybe I still wanted to print something at that stage. But I got a subscription for Readymag—a webpage hosting and design tool—and started playing with it right away.

Soon the possibilities of interactivity started to unfold themselves in front of me. I didn’t reconfigure the concept of Anger fully to accommodate these new capabilities—so much so that sometimes interactivity may appear in a somewhat “clunky” way—almost as an afterthought (which it was).

But it was fun to become familiar with the medium as I continued to craft the story. In Anger there are many visual mentions of the web format—such as the popup windows (the mind-assistant.exe), the notification buttons, the pixel nature of some illustrations, and the default font choices (I used Arial for most of the text). These seemed like unconscious choices at the time, but I believe I was addressing this new format—the webcomic—even though I was not fully aware of it.

I think it had mostly to do with the aesthetics of the “default” web page visuals, and how it suggested to me a feeling of ominousity, oppressive neutral, empty, silent space juxtaposed with the complicated inner dialogue that the main character goes through.

This “default webspace” is also a character in itself. The dialogue boxes that are reminiscent of the Macintosh System 1 ones, and the more modern “notification” buttons, participate (although a bit more skeptically) in the main character’s struggle, providing commentary, but not really giving them any direction. But this voice is also part of the inner dialogue about anger—it is also the character.

↗ from the original draft for Anger: I’m noticing now that I was already alluding to the digital environment as I chose to represent the question “what does your anger look like?” with an empty MS Paint window. I could have just drawn in the traditional empty canvas/sketchbook, and paint brushes. Am I really a product of the computer age?

↗ from the original draft for Anger: there are more visual appearances of the character on the monologue moments.
A screenshots from Anger: several allusions to the operating-system character that comments on/participates in the internal monologue of the main character throughout the story.
Chapter 0
aka The Intro

The intro chapter works as exposition and sums up the plot of this comic — there is a character that does not acknowledge their own anger, and puts it inside a box, where they cannot see it. This character has never learned how to address it, because of societal expectations that push the belief that anger is something negative and morally wrong. However, the character seems to be trying to “see” their own anger, and sit with it, and that becomes the motor of the story.

Main character

The story is told through the perspective of a blobby character, who doesn’t really introduce themselves. This character is drawn in a very simple way, mostly just outlines, a simple body with long limbs, and a blobby head. The character will slightly change their shape throughout the comic, and the outlines also change expression slightly — in chapter 2, they appear rounder, chapter 3 they are more energetic, etc.

This character is speaking to the reader and themselves about their relationship with anger, in an inner monologue set in the webcomic space. It is revealed in Chapter 4 that the character is supposed to be the author (me!!), but until then, the character is a nice, genderless, shape-shifting white cloud. I wanted to draw a character that I wouldn’t get bored with, and that I could relate to, without giving away immediately that it was supposed to be a real-life human person called Margarida. I decided that I could change their shape and appearance in relation to what was happening in the narrative, but always keeping it light and simple.

Writing and drawing directly from my experience and thoughts is what comes most naturally to me, when creating stories or illustrations. I have never ventured much into creating characters that are very far from my perspective and experiences. Writing from this space feels both safe and frightening — safe because I am using my words and describing my experiences, and thus not trying to prove anything or making a point for some objective truth — it is, ultimately, just my opinion and just my musings, and I feel like that clears me from responsibility. At the same time, writing about
emotions from this personal place can be scary, as I will be revealing parts of myself that I am still figuring out, and not fully comfortable with. Interestingly, from the feedback that I have gotten from teachers, friends, and colleagues for these past 2 years, it is in the moments where I show more vulnerability in my comics that I succeed in engaging the reader the most. So, in the end, it is a give and take, and that’s why I enjoy using comics rather than just writing anyway — if words fail me, or I become too afraid to use them, I can turn to visual metaphors and hope that some people will get it, and some people won’t.

Do you know what I mean?: I think this was one of the first projects in which I shared internal struggles and feelings of guilt and shame with my classmates and teachers. I never ended up publishing it, but the feedback I got from my peers gave me both reassurance regarding this type of work/tone, but also in regards of what I was going through at the time — which was great! As I opened up, my classmates generously opened up too.
Moa said that the box reminded her of Saint Exupery’s *The Little Prince*, in the beginning chapter when the aviator offers a sheep to the Little Prince, that is kept inside a drawn box. Imagination fills in the gaps, and the sheep can look however the Prince wants it to. The box in this comic was not a reference to Little Prince, but I appreciate the connection!

The box is a pretty straightforward visual metaphor for not knowing how to deal with the emotion of anger, and thus, hiding it, in denial. It is drawn in quite a default way as well, an out-of-place object made of straight lines and volume in this 2d void. The box is clickable by the reader. There is an “aura” of darkness around it that pulses lightly — a strategy of web interactivity, that will prompt the user to hover this object. On hover, the box enlarges, and if clicked, it will move, but it will not reveal what lies inside.

→ What does your anger look like?

An initial prompt that I used to make this story was to imagine what my anger would look like. I asked that same question to my classmates during a group tutorial, and it ended up being a fun, five-minute drawing exercise, where we discussed our individual angers and showed their sketchy portraits to each other.

The overall impression was that my classmates viewed their anger as something inconvenient, with a will of its own, uncomfortable. But there was also a representation of anger as a shared emotion between friends. And also, a representation of anger as something that is in fact a facade for sadness. It was really inspiring and a fun exercise I wanted to invite more people to do!

In the context of the story, there is a MS Paint reminiscent window that invites the reader to draw their own anger — syke! Up until the present moment, I was not able to code it in a way that actually allowed the reader to draw and submit their depiction of their own anger :-) but maybe someday!

→ The photographs

The photographs illustrate moments in the main character’s past where they have interacted with anger. Anger is depicted as a child, much like the character themself — they are two faces of the same coin.
Anger’s face is blurred/glitched, because of the refusal in seeing anger, even in remembering the times it has emerged. In these little snippets of the main character’s backstory, I was trying to portray anger as a “wild” child, a bit chaotic, that destroys your sandcastles or tears apart your drawings and you don’t understand why.

→ Chapter 1
— a Match

The first chapter will reveal anger’s shape when anger is expressed through aggression. If we think about the fight-flight-freeze theory of how people relate to conflict, this chapter would be about the “fight” response.

I decided to colour code the different chapters according to how events unfold. The colour of expressed anger is red — the most commonly used colour to represent anger, because of how it relates with heat, blood, danger, strong feelings and sensations. In this chapter, the character reflects on the moments they have expressed anger, and how it had hurt people dear to them. They also muse on how this pattern of behaviour (explosive, misdirected anger) seems to be present in their family’s relationships.

The fight-flight-freeze theory is brought up by mind_assistant.exe, which explains the relationship between anger and fear — anger as a means of self-defense when one feels threatened. The graphics of the mind_assistant.exe mean to look outdated, and again, follow the aesthetics of old computer software. I have a fascination with scientific drawings aesthetics, and I channeled it into this particular drawing.

Finally, the character realizes that their anger is still at a “child-like” stage, because they have never learned how to work with anger and how to express it properly. Emotions require a certain level of literacy to be properly interpreted and processed, but because anger is so widely seen as a “bad” emotion, the common misconception for it is that it should simply be avoided, and not expressed. The box of matches symbolizes this volatile, untamable, and destructive nature of anger.
Chapter 2
— Leeches

If chapter 1 sees anger in its expressed, “fight”-like form, chapter 2 focuses on internalized anger — a “flight” response of denying that anger exists, but that sees it transforming further into self-hatred. The colour is blue, because this type of anger ends up being quite close to the emotion of sadness. The outlines are rounder than in the previous chapter, almost making the character look “cloud-like” — an attempt at portraying softness, or rather, the performance of “not being angry”.

In order not to be “an angry person”, anger is not processed, or rather, is rushed to be “dealt with”. There is a visual reference to meditation and yoga, in an illustration in which the character is making the Karana Mudra gesture with their hand. Again, this is thinking about how the culture surrounding methods that are typically used to deal with anger and unrest (such as meditation and yoga) can often fall into “toxic positivity” culture territory — a (mostly western) view that any “negative” feeling needs fixing and closure.

Turns out that denying anger is not a sustainable solution — it is simply bottling things up. And because the character still believes that anger is something “bad”, the mere existence of an angry state within themselves will cause them to feel as if they are bad and unloveable — thus becoming angry at themselves.

In yoga and meditation, people are often asked to “notice how they feel”. In this case, I tried to notice how anger feels in my body. I have discovered that, for me, anger feels a lot like anxiety and sadness — which can very well be a result of my dysfunctional relationship of shame/guilt with this emotion.

In this chapter, anger appears first as a black blob that takes up space inside the body, refusing to leave peacefully. It gets pushed further and further inside in an attempt to be hidden, until it turns into a “bunch of leeches” — or bloodsuckers. Similar to leeches, internalized anger clings to oneself and sucks out their energy and force — in this case, it clings to one’s self-perception, becoming self-hatred, sadness, and anxiety.
In this chapter, anger starts to reveal itself as a trigger for social change. The colour of the chapter is green, signifying hope and growth. Lines are energetic, and the tone of the writing is more uplifting than in the previous chapters. There is a realization that anger can be "molded" into beautiful shapes, but also an awareness that it is not an easy thing to do, especially living in a world that denies the existence of anger, and that tries to suppress it (ex: toxic positivity) — but at the same time, in certain contexts, that tries to exploit it and weaponize it (ex: populist movements).

The conclusion I arrive at is that, first, the character must forgive themselves for ever being angry, and also forgive themselves for the times they have tried not to be angry. Forgive themselves in a way that is freeing for the self-hatred and anxiety caused by the internalized anger, and that allows for other uses of angry.

> from log book: first sketches of Anger as Tiger

> from log book: I did a big deal of the writing for Anger in my log book. Sometimes writing happened alongside drawing, other times I would just write a chunk of dialogue and then edit it. This bit I wrote for chapter 3 is actually very similar to the final text in the webcomic.
Chapter 4 — Wrapping Up

The final chapter, colour-coded in “rainbow”, signifies all the different shapes anger takes, and is meant to evoke a sense of whimsical and fantasy. The first thing we see is a black tiger, that through the reader’s interaction becomes painted with the colours of the rainbow. It’s Anger in its tiger form, and it addresses the main character for the first time.

The main character finally faces Anger without a box to mediate this interaction, and asks various questions. From here on, the comic refuses to give further definite answers. I struggled while writing the ending, being once again conflicted by the notions that while anger can be used in transformative ways, I don’t want to force the idea that one should rush into turning anger into something “productive”. Anger is a complicated emotion that requires processing, and that will be different for everyone. Turning anger into its potential for action and change, while desirable and beautiful, can be compared to “fixing” anger and solving it. I really want to step away from this idea, as I believe people, in general, are not given enough time and conditions to feel and process their emotions, in a culture of hyper-productivity, positivity, and constant movement.

In failing to “wrap things up” neatly and turning this into an open-ended comic, I am hoping not to appear selfish or lazy to the reader. It’s just that I simply didn’t...
know, and still don’t know, if there is even a “right” thing to do regarding anger. I don’t want to tell people how to address their anger, and whether their anger is rightful or not — but I do want people to question it, and that’s my personal belief on what it means to “sit with anger”.

→ Anger Dating Sim

I do not remember exactly how I came up with the idea of finishing the story about Anger referencing the infamous dating-sim (from dating-simulator) game genre. I just know that it was late at night after a full day of trying to resolve the comic, and that might have had something to do with it.

In my mind, I thought that the readers would have to choose how to resolve the comic themselves. Many perspectives on anger are presented, and many possible “solutions” or ways to engage with anger are referred to. Given this, I wanted the reader to access their own angry patterns, their own causes for anger, and decide what’s best. A dating-simulator game idea popped up in my head as an example of a format where the player chooses their narrative and their own ending through dialogue choices and other in-game decisions, and I decided to run with it.

The visuals of this last bit are very influenced by dating-game aesthetics, featuring a typical dialogue box on the bottom half of the frame, minimal character animation (basically a png that changes between a few different options, that communicates visually what emotion the character is feeling), and a pixel-y calm and relaxing background, referring to much older RPGs in 8-bit style.

Here, the reader is supposed to choose the ending of the story, by being able to pick what type of anger they would wanna “date”, in the supposedly last scene of this fictional game. Externalized/aggressive anger (The Match), internalized anger (The leeches), and anger as moving force (The Tiger) are the options the reader can chose, and although their character designs are a bit different from the webcomic originals, there is a visual link through their colour (red, blue, green) and their names (Matchy, Sucky, and Stripes).

The comic as a whole is very vague regarding the setting where the action (the inner dialogue with anger) is happening. I personally think the setting is the webcomic in itself. However, I feel like there is a change in the tone and in the events unfolding in this last chapter, where things get even vaguer as you approach a “conclusion”, which is the unexpected dating-simulator ending. I
think that unconsciously I was inspired by the ending
of the original anime of Neon Genesis Evangelion where
suddenly we are transported from the events unfolding
in the physical setting on this narrative, to an alternate,
space (the main character's unconscious?) where the
main character engages in dialogue with himself, and
with his mental projections of the rest of the cast. It ends
in a very ominous way — it's a cheerful ending where
this character is congratulated on having successfully
overcome his development arc, but this happens in a way
that feels too dream-like, with little logical and spacial
connection to the events of the previous episodes.

> screenshot from episode 26 of Neon Genesis
Evangelion. Surreal celebration due to the main
caracter having overcome their development arc.

> screenshots of the final chapter of Anger.
PERCEPTION

Why perception?

The idea of writing a story about perception came from a belief that many disagreements result from a difficulty in accepting experiences unfamiliar to our own, and perspectives that might challenge what we believe to be true. I say this from personal experience, as I have been very stubborn before, unconsciously gaslighting and invalidating people's own lived experiences just to protect my own manufactured conception of reality. I often see similar behaviour from people close to me and from strangers, when faced with new information regarding a topic they don’t know much about.

The narratives we are born into and which we learn — our culture — is not our nature. Perception, which is the capacity of being aware and understanding something through the senses, is also shaped by our culture. David Bohm suggests in his book “On Dialogue” that the art of dialogue lies in the process of, together in a group, observing individual and collective thought patterns and assumptions — which is precisely to try to understand the mechanisms that shape our perception. I agree with Bohm’s proposal, and I believe that in the process of thinking together and observing assumptions, our individual perception ends up expanding to hold space for the acknowledgement of other people’s perceptions. Even if others’ perceptions might oftentimes challenge our own, I believe that they never invalidate them, but merely expand on the knowledge we previously had, shedding a new light in a different direction.

For this story about perception, I wanted to explore how one’s perception is just a fragment of a whole, the things that shape one’s perception, the complicated feelings that may arise if one’s perception is challenged, but also the potential of building something together, and becoming closer to someone through sharing different meanings of the same thing.
digital sketches: trying to portray how different perceptions expand on one's knowledge of reality, and not the opposite.
I was very inspired by Disa Wallander’s zine “The Nature of Nature.” In this work, Disa’s character explores nature in a national-geographic-documentary fashion, followed by an imaginary camera-crew, and interviewing various characters — rocks, plants, trees, etc. Disa’s witty narrative points out almost immediately the mystery of Nature — after all, it is almost impossible to access its true nature, because humans can only observe it and understand it under anthropocentric lenses, and give it anthropocentric meanings.

I think Disa makes a very valid point about perception, one that I try to explore as well — how human beings are so inclined to project their personal narratives on everything, and how this projection blocks us from seeing what is actually there. To truly get to know something, we have to get to know our systems of cognition and of meaning-making. We have to understand what shapes our perception.

The anthropocentric vs nature view is very interesting, because it really shows how silly it is — to assume non-human things mean something, when in reality they don’t exist for our human sake, and thus, they don’t mean anything at all. That got me thinking in a similar fashion to Disa’s character — talking to an imaginary camera crew, asking questions to animals and plants and non-human beings, wondering how they perceive and understand the world around them, and wondering if it actually matters.

I wanted to write a comic that was dialogue driven rather than monologue driven, in contrast to what I did in Anger. In Perception, I experiment with a first-person POV in which the reader is established as the main character, and introduce a vast cast of creatures that will make the narrative move through their conversations between each other, and with the reader. In a way, the moments where the characters “talk” with the reader are, again, monologues, because the reader will not be actively responding to their words. However, more than experimenting with dialogue, I was eager to create characters that would not be a blatant projection of me in the story. To write Perception, I was determined to create many characters with different personalities and different points of view on the issue of perception, that could sometimes clash.
Designing and writing these characters was at times challenging. I started out my process doing loose sketches while watching nature documentaries, and I would try to draw different animals in fun, non-realistic ways, looking to achieve an art style that would contrast with the one I used for *Anger*. For this process, I was inspired by the way comic-artist Michael Deforge creates his own unique and intriguing depictions of animals and plants.

As I was drawing, I was already writing some bits of dialogue, in a string-of-consciousness manner and inspired by the figures I would come up with. This was a process that made me laugh at times, because of the ridiculous things the characters seemed to be saying to me. I took a mental note to cherish the really great feeling of being surprised in the process of drawing and writing. At the end of these sessions, I would pick the best drawings and the best writings and try to weave them into a structured narrative.

→ **mini comic:** I had an idea and transformed it into a short comic before I started properly planning *Perception*. I ended up utilizing this bit of dialogue in the webcomic, although I created different characters, more animal-like.
Turns out that while this method allowed me to be surprised by chance encounters with strange creatures, it didn’t allow for an easy structuring of the narrative. The first drafts of Perception were quite disjointed, and the beta readers I asked to check my comic didn’t grasp the “point” of the story, and what the creature’s words were leading to. Me also, as I was writing, did not have a clear clue of how the topics I wanted to cover would connect with one another. My external tutor, Hanna Heilborn, suggested that I first write a whole script for the story, to have a clear overview of the main topics and key moments I needed in my story, and how they would succeed one another. This was challenging as well, because I wanted to explore topics related to perception through the lenses of various non-human creatures. I wanted the creatures’ shape, biology, and character design to relate to the concepts and ideas they would convey in their dialogue, so I couldn’t write whatever I wanted. I had to have the creature in mind while writing their script.

Therefore, as I was writing the script for perception, I had to “cast” the right creatures that could take the different parts of the story. Once those characters were found, I would re-evaluate the script, and rewrite it in a way that contemplates the character more, giving it space to show its own particular quirks and its personality. Drawing alongside writing helped me in this process — once I start seeing what or who I am writing about, I can describe it better, and imagine it better.

Hannah also pushed me to write believable characters. When writing dialogue, she said, you can’t really cut corners and go straight to the message you want to get across. It takes some time to get there, but the upside is that every sentence can be an opportunity to show the character’s personality, in the way they give dry, one-worded answers, or in the way they won’t shut up about a topic they are passionate about. Hannah taught me that if I wanted to convey something about the character’s personality, I would have to go all out —for example, if I’m writing a chatty character, I really have to make them appear chatty and have them talk a lot.

I feel like some characters could have been made more believable or likeable if I had spend more time tweaking the script, but alas, I had to play with my timeline as well. Overall I think there’s an interesting mix between “philosophical” monologues and more casual, expressive dialogue that had more care put into it, and hopefully that contributes to a reading that is not too tiring and dense.
The cast of characters that make appearances in the webcomic.

from *Perception*
I used the idea of a flashlight that shines light upon the forest beings as a narrative device and visual representation of perception. The flashlight will limit what the reader will see in the webpage, referencing how perception depends on the senses and on cognition. This will make the reader search for the characters, and they might miss out on some details, or even read the story in the “wrong” order — and all of that is ok! Like my classmate John once said during a group tutorial session, “perception is the parts of a forest that you see through the branches of the trees”. But, as aforementioned, perception is also the branches of the trees, and the animal/plant/fungi characters of this comic will be reflecting on this as well, through their dialogues and musings.

Although there are not explicit instructions on how to read this comic, I believe that internet natives and video game enthusiasts don’t have many hesitations on how to read it, and are usually keen on exploring the setting. My friend Mafalda said that this interactive experience reminded her of a “point-and-click” computer game, and commented on how she felt excited and motivated to search for all the hidden characters and details in the playfield, like in an Easter hunt. People who are not as acquainted with this kind of “point-and-click” format, or not as confident as to simply explore a webpage without a clear purpose, face more difficulties both in getting started with the reading, but also in feeling engaged by the story itself.

I wanted to make the reading as seamless as possible, with minimal clues on how to navigate the story. The clues are meant to be part of the plot of the narrative in itself — the whole plot of the lost keys that the reader/narrator has to find, that explains the need to point a flashlight everywhere in the middle of a forest at night. Nevertheless, I ended up adding a “help” button in the corner of the page, with simple guidelines on how to navigate the story — more than creating an immersive and mysterious narrative, I would like my readers to be able to read my comic!

I understand that maybe it isn’t a storytelling format as accessible as the one I used for Anger — but I think it’s a fun one nevertheless, and I really enjoyed telling this story in this way. For me, finding the adequate “gameplay” of a story (not quite “the format”, but rather the way the

screenshots from Perception: indirect interaction cues, meant to instruct the reader on the game-play of the comic (and the ‘help’ button).
reader will engage with the narrative) is part of the charm of storytelling for me, and I think this one translates quite well the kind of ideas I wanted to explore.

→ The Structure

Even though there aren’t chapters as explicitly as in Anger, Perception follows a structure as in the way the topics that the creatures discuss are interwoven together and succeed one another. There’s a short introduction that places the reader in the story and that instructs in how to navigate the story. Then, the following three pages will focus on the questions “what is perception?”, “what shapes perception?”, and “what happens when perception is challenged/expanded?”.

* from Perception: the backgrounds of Perception. I wanted to create a fun setting with colours and elements that motivated the reader to explore. The story happens in a forest setting initially, but it eventually moves to an under water space for the sake of ‘shaking things up’; and also allowing me to introduce other types of creatures (algae, amoebas, a merman...)
SAFE SPACE FOR DISAGREEMENTS

.imagining a space

At this point in my Master’s Project Journey, it was already April and the Spring Exhibition was nearing fast. I could have spent the time I had left perfecting Anger and Perception (and they could have used some more polishing indeed) but I still felt like I needed to address the title of my project and disclose my intentions by exploring the idea of the safe space for disagreements through a webcomic.

In the beginning of March, our class had a workshop directed towards exhibition planning, which was meant for students to start thinking on how to present our project in the physical space. Because of my project’s title, I imagined that it could be fun to create the “safe space for disagreements” in the space of the exhibition, and I started to sketch what it could look like. Soon I faced a few decisions that made me stop and consider — I was only using black outlines and the colour white. Why white? Why was I associating the colour white to the feelings of safety, dialogue, and peace? Why did this space have walls? Was I unwillingly already creating norms within this space, and gatekeeping what was outside this norm? I was also drawing this space’s furniture in a cloud-like fashion, using many round, fluffy shapes to represent the interior of this space, but why? Why does a safe space for disagreements have to follow all of the visual cliches? Especially since I had already established that a safe space for disagreements has to hold space for anger and for nuance and complexity. Why was I trying to make things look so simple?

This workshop finally got me started in thinking on how to represent this space visually. I figured that this comic’s narrative could be about that exactly — how the mere idea of making a space for disagreements is also subject to disagreement, and how that is an important step towards making a space that is open for whoever needs it, and that allows for all possibilities of dialogue, within the limits of safety (which is a whole other concept...
that had to be explored as well, and that possibly needed its own story. What does safety mean? Who knows it, and who needs it?)

→ Back to the beginning — agree to disagree

I used my own questions about the safe space for disagreements as the main inspiration for the plot in itself. However, I was still thinking back to my initial intention for this project — a sort of “guidebook” for disagreement and for “conflict etiquette” (cringy, I know). It seemed like I was going back to the idea of rules, now that I was thinking about the conditions for a safe space for disagreements. I decided to try and write what these conditions or rules would be — and they turned out to be 10, quite literally the ten commandments.

Of course, writing ‘rules’ lead me back to the whole problem of there being an element of authority limiting who can enter and what can be said in the safe space for disagreements. I tried to be as mindful as I could for the sake of making this comic, and carefully write these rules, having as a guiding principle the notion of mutual respect, and thinking that the responsibility to manage and enforce the rules should be shared amongst the participants of the safe space. Ideally, the process of writing the rules of a hypothetical “safe space for disagreements” should result from a collective effort rather than a centralized power. The terms and conditions of this “space” should also consider that one might, and can, disagree with them. The notion of safety is subjective, and the level of comfort one feels in the space will always vary — so the rules of the safe space should be as mutable as its participants.

→ Pushing things around

Similarly to Perception, I tried to come up with the best gameplay to engage the reader in this story, and, similarly with perception, the answer revealed itself when browsing through the open code widgets available on Readymag’s website. I noticed that Readymag had available a “drag and drop” code that worked within the website’s own plugins. Because I was thinking about the safe space for disagreements as something that should be built collectively, the idea of inviting the reader to build this
space alongside the characters through dragging and dropping various elements (“building blocks”) on the webpage seemed fitting.

Like *Perception*, this webcomic has a big component of exploring the setting, and clicking and hovering things without a clear purpose. But in *Safe Space* the direction of the narrative is more clear — as the reader scrolls down, the text reveals itself, pacing and guiding the reading experience. There is also a “goal” — some of the building blocks of the safe space appear to have colours, and they react on a hover interaction. When clicked, these objects will reveal one of the ten principles of the safe space, and it becomes the reader’s mission to find and collect them.

*Safe Space for Disagreements* had further potential to be an even more collaborative experience, but my lack of knowledge in coding and lack of time didn’t allow for that. Ideally, the comic could have allowed the readers to participate in creating the building blocks, or to really build their interpretation of a safe space, and submit a screen capture of it into a collective gallery of safe spaces. They could have even drawn into the comic, and adding their own thoughts and their own principles for the safe space, that could be expanded again and again and again...

→ Characters

The two characters from *Safe Space for Disagreements* resemble the sort of short, cute characters you would see in a RPG like Pokemon. I wanted to create characters that didn’t look exactly human, but that could be identified as such by the readers. The story is, again, written in the first-person (similarly to *Anger*), and the pink character is implied to be the “I”, whereas the blue character is implied to be the “you”.

It was interesting showing this comic before it was complete to my friend Bia (also in the VK programme) and hearing her say how she didn’t want to identify herself with the “you” character. It’s interesting because she assumed the “I” character would be me, the author, but also because she noticed how the “you” character appeared gloomier and more sad than their counterpart. I guess, in a way, the pink character is indeed “I”, the author, trying to create a safe space for disagreements of my own accord. I am the one coming up with what it looks like, what is it for, and inviting who gets to enter this space — I have the authority and the power. In the beginning of
my master project, I was also looking for a way to seek control in a disagreement, to persuade people to accept my ideas and opinions, and to create a norm for how people should communicate with each other. So I totally understand Bia when she said she didn’t want to be the ‘other’ in this space — the other didn’t get a saying!

I purposely drew the “you” character to look less conventional than the “I” character — their limbs are asymmetrical, their ears as well, and their expression is indeed a bit more confused. I guess one could argue that the “you” character looks like an outcast, and the reason for that was to further push this power dynamic between the character who gets to decide the rules of the safe space, and the character who has to bend to them.

↑ from Safe Space for Disagreements: Ideal representation of the Safe Space for Disagreements (according to main character).

↗ from Safe Space for Disagreements: Many instances of the two main characters.
Preparing for the exhibition was a bit stressful — because I work mostly with digital art, I am not used to think about the logistics required for my work to exist in the physical space, nor how much time do things require to get done. Furthermore, I would be presenting a project that could very well be seen at home — a website — and in a mid-pandemic-world where people were quite sick of all things screens, I would have to create a compelling argument to make someone want to touch and explore a webcomic in a public space.

Because my project alludes to a “space” and my website’s landing page already tries to represent it visually through illustration, I decided that I would bring these aesthetics to reality with my installation, and create a little set of furniture with cloud-like shapes and bold outlines. To create these pieces, I used simple podiums as support, and cut out the blobby shapes on top out of plywood, by using a handsaw. I also included the fallen jar of flowers to add some colour and drama, and printed out a set of stickers and postcards that included the website’s url on them.

As for the digital equipment, all that was needed was a laptop (mine), a TV screen, attached to the wall, a HDMI cable to connect the laptop to the screen, and a mouse.
Safe Space for Disagreements (the physical realm edition): Exhibition space, shared with colourful John Molesworth, and Stella Tallinger (not pictured! Unfortunately)

Safe Swpace for Disagreements (the physical realm edition)
more pictures of my corner.
I went into the safe space for disagreements and I cried :)

I want to disagree with you because I love you <3

I went into the safe space for disagreements and I didn't yell at anyone :)

I feel safe when I disagree with you <3

I don't put my anger in a box, I deal with my emotions in healthy ways

I'm sitting with my anger right now

Sorry, I can't make it

No, I don't mind being perceived by others!

affer free stickers for the visitors of the Safe Space for Disagreements, at the Konstfack's Spring Exhibition 2021
The Examination

Leanne Shapton was my guest critic during my final examination, and what I was projecting to be a very confrontational and full-of-disagreements moment (because my project’s title could perhaps provoke that!), turned out to be a very pleasant and engaging conversation. Leanne referred to her own background in writing, saying how visual storytellers should consider themselves authors in the “writer’s sense” of the word. I didn’t immediately agree with her, simply because I was not used to see myself in that way (if I was able to express myself with words, maybe I wouldn’t be using drawings to tell my stories?) but I think that she was very right in that. There tends to be a distinction between comic artists for example, and novel writers, when in reality both show a high understanding of language and communication devices.

I really enjoyed listening to Leanne’s commentary on my writing — she was very good at identifying the bits where I could have invested more work in polishing the tone — for example, some dialogue parts in Perception. She also commented on how the tone in Safe Space seemed more sanitized, and reminiscent of self-help books, and I agree with her.

However, the feedback was very positive, and it seemed like Leanne was really interested and captivated by the format of the webcomic. She seemed like one of those readers who explored the various stories in depth, looking for all the easter eggs and finding joy in that process, and that made me very glad.

Final Considerations

Safe Space for Diagreement allowed me to explore a wide variety of themes, visual communication strategies, and storytelling devices and formats. I am glad I chose to do a ‘fragmented’ project that consisted in different stories, instead of a single story or object. This format allowed me to explore the subject and the techniques I was interested in without compromising too much, and I think it’s the best way to show the readers that this, my participation in the question of communication and conflict, is still a work in progress — hopefully I was able
to make visible this process as well.

Ideally, the Safe Space for Disagreements will be a work in progress forever. The beauty of websites is that they can be forever tweaked, forever updated, forever expanded, as they are not bound to any physical form. I would love to continue expanding on the universe of stories that I have created so far, as the discussion about modern communication, digital communication, and political polarization progresses.

As I am writing this, in October of 2021, I still haven’t shared my website with the world officially (I haven’t properly introduced it to my portfolio or social media), but I am planning to do so very soon. Even though Readymag has proven to be very sufficient for the stories I wanted to tell, it also limits me in some ways (it’s not super intuitive if you want to write on the code yourself), and it is still, of course, a monetary investment. Ideally, I would like to team up with a proficient web-developer and code the whole site from scratch, as well as add interactive features that allow users to participate in the narrative (such as the “what does you anger look like?” drawing pad, and other similar ideas).

I am excited to show these stories to people, but also nervous. I am afraid my perception of things might at times be too naïve and simplistic, ignoring the very real injustices and power inbalances that make it impossible to simply rely on communication to solve the world’s problems. Even though my project is called ‘A Safe Space for Disagreements’, I am a little bit terrified that someone will disagree with me. But I know I must follow my own conclusions, and accept that this eventual disagreement will only help me expand my knowledge about this subject, and allow me to continue investigating and be forever curious about communication.

Finally, working alongside passionate and curious classmates made this very complicated process much more bearable, even as we went through the unprecedented during 2020. We allowed ourselves to be seen and we saw eachother during our feedback sessions and in our after-school hangouts, and it was beautiful! It was very important for me to recognize the need for feedback, especially during the most arduous bits of the process. As well as my classmates and teachers, I am much grateful for my friends outside Konstfack, who were so patient in listening to my woes, and so generous in giving me advice.
I don’t want to mislead any reader of this DROP by saying that this project was heavily informed by intense research, academic documents, and classic literature pieces. I have spent some time looking at books and articles and I did take amazing bits of information from a few of them, but I’m ultimately a very distracted reader, and many of my sources and inspirations for this project came up from conversations with friends, classmates, teachers, and tutors. A fair share of ideas can probably be traced back to things I have read on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram — things that I haven’t properly sourced, or remembered to look up the authors. Still, I compiled a short list of articles and books that have impacted my research and my project at some point:


Miki Kashtan, *Can the Social Order Be Transformed through Personal Practice? The Case of Nonviolent Communication*, Thefearlessheart.org, 2019

Dr Zuleyka Zavallos, *Tone Policing People of Colour*, othersociologist.com, 2017


Peter Pomerantsev, *This Is Not Propaganda*, PublicAffairs, 2019

Angel Kyodo Williams, Emmanuel Vaughan–Lee, *Radical Dharma — an interview with Angel Kyodo Williams*, Emergence Magazine, 2019


Jenny Odell, *How to do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*, Melville House, 2019


Do You Know What I Mean?

Few months into researching about communication and the means to understand, I began to wonder...

...At all my life, I just haven't been listening.
Do You Know What I Mean? April 2020
Look at my life...

...and it doesn't feel like enough.

So I look at it more intently...

And it shatters the illusion of me.
AND I’M STILL UP IN WHAT WAS LOST FOR A WHOLE...

BUT WHEN I LOOKED BEYOND THAT...

THINGS HAVE MADE SENSE CLEARER...

SOMETHING MAGICAL HAPPENED...

BECAUSE I WAS BORN AND RAISED INTO THIS SYSTEM, I’VE BEEN TOLD TO NOT NOTICE THESE THINGS!

I’VE BEEN AN ACCEPTANCE OF RACIAL AND DISCRIMINATION AND FELL OUT OF TOUCH WITH MY OWN EMPOWERMENT!

ALL BECAUSE OF YOU!
Do You Know What I Mean? April 2020
Do You Know What I Mean?, April 2020

Page 49
in typography, we call kerning and tracking to the processes of adjusting the space in-between letter → ← forms.

in a text block, the spaces between words should contribute to a homogeneous text distribution that allows for fluid reading.
what lies in these spaces in-between words?

maybe there is sound?
can you imagine my voice when you read these words?

>Kerning/Tracking, October 2019
maybe there is a dance?

does your body move towards my words, or does it shy away from them?

maybe there is time?

time to think, time to forgive, time to heal. years could go by in-between these words. can you read my hesitations?
maybe there is a whisper, a touch, an embrace?

and maybe there are words that would be spoken so close and so softly, that there is almost no space at all in-between.

in-between these words there is a space for you and me to understand each other better. there is distance, but there is also an opportunity for togetherness. should we expand these spaces or should we try to close them? should we learn how to kern, or perhaps should we focus on learning how to read them?
Anger (1st draft), October 2020
Anger (1st draft), October 2020
Anger (1st draft), October 2020
misc. support drawings to help me explain my project in the December Presentation, December 2020
misc. support drawings to help me explain my project in the December Presentation, December 2020
misc. support drawings to help me explain my project in the December Presentation, December 2020