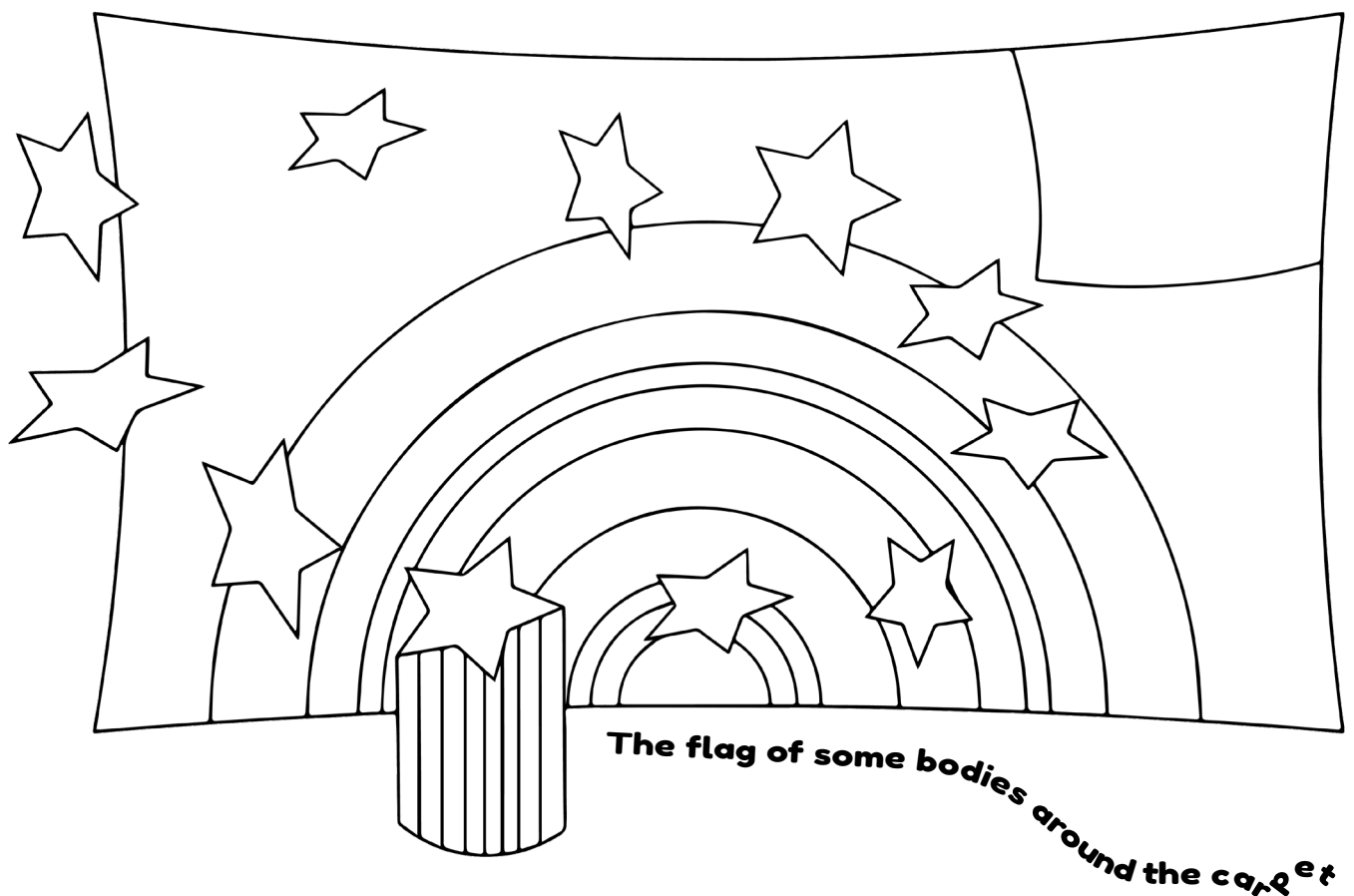




The radical house is hosting "Caveat Reading Room #15 : Rising Warmth", featuring Clémentine Vaultier's work. We are invited to sit on the light-grey floor, in a constellation of bodies ringed around her famous carpet.

I've sat on this carpet before. It was at KASK School of Arts in 2019 when she presented her master project in Autonomous Design. I sat on it again fifteen days ago at another event in the house (CODISCO, July 10, 2021). Clémentine wasn't there. It seems like the carpet lives a life of its own, hosting other human gatherings in her absence, flying from reading sessions to geology lessons to birthday parties.



The carpet represents the single most exciting rendering image I remember seeing as child: a cut-section of the earth ball. Assuming that the earth isn't flat. Assuming that the earth has a heart of fire. Assuming that the earth isn't unlike a gobstopper ball candy: composed of concentric layers. My body (headless) fits from the red fire inner core of the mat to its cooler temperature edges. I sneakily rolled on it like a Rugrat the last time and dug my hair into the white fibres, slightly darkened, showing signs of use. Whoever surfed on this tufted turf before will notice that, today, it is folded outside out like a reversed calzone pizza. The typical turn-of-the-century Brussels row-house width doesn't allow it to lay fully open.

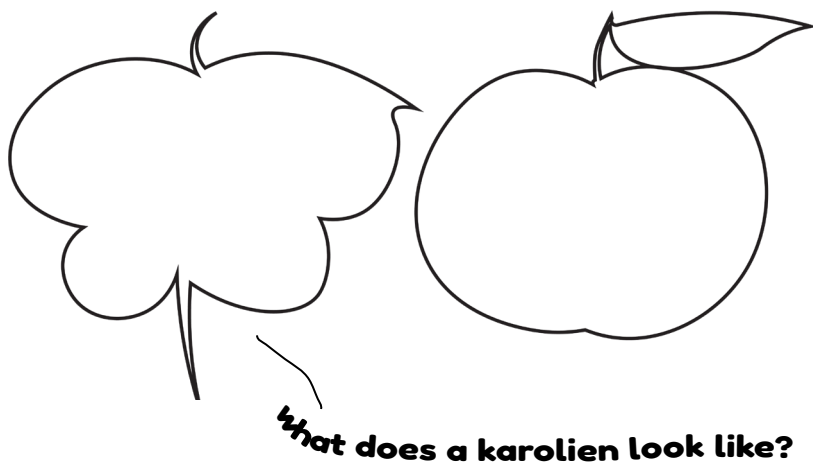
The reading focuses on Clémentine's master research, an evolving .pdf document titled "a research on rising warmth and a few detours" (2019), in which she compiled hundreds of images relating to heat and fire. I had scanned through it two years ago, when I was a Bachelor newcomer in Autonomous design and Clémentine was finishing her master's. This was a pandemic before I accepted to be the local scribe at this event, recording what I hear through writing. The session is starting and I'm ready to scratch square-shaped cream-coloured paper scraps I found in a garbage can once, trying to keep my tongue inside my mouth. Who else is thrilled to be sitting on and around this flaming carpet?

About twenty guests, shoeless but masked, are sitting all around the floor. A dozen printed versions of the .pdf are distributed around the group. There are fewer booklets than humans. Smart. I choose to believe it's a strategy: creating proximity from limitation. Unrelated bodies are going to have to lean on the same booklets together. Strangers will be reading side to side with strangers.

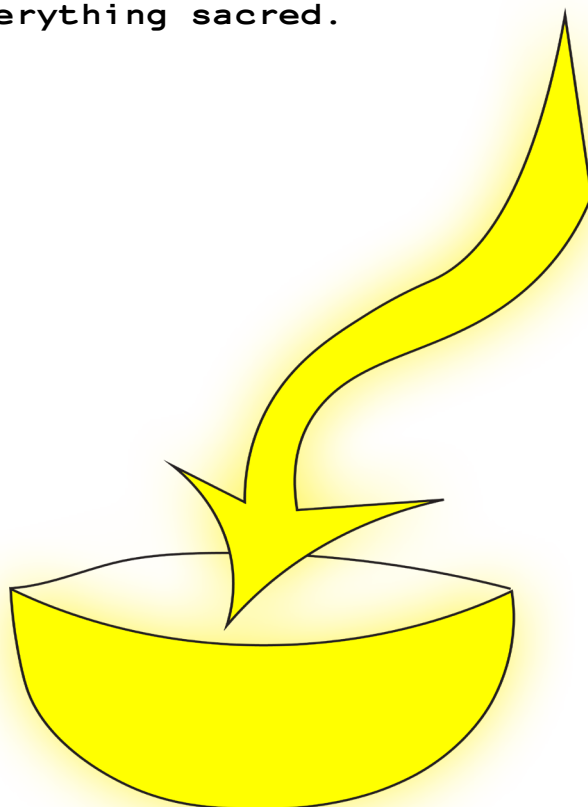
As soon as I open the booklet, I feel like I'm being skewered into a transversal journey through theory and imagery, like a 2021 Space Odyssey from "cavemen" to thermodynamics, and up the curve of rising temperatures: ovens, chimneys, mammoths, archeological artefacts, ceramic kilns, barbecues, steaks, backyard fun, social rituals, baking recipes, lava flows, the earth crust and so on.

The booklet we are looking at is a bundle of eighty A4 sheets of basic printer paper, spiral bound. My friend Lau once explained their fascination for the iconic standard of the single plain white A4 sheet of paper. I haven't been able to look at A4 paper the same way since this nerdy initiation. The first time you start questioning a standard object's *raison d'être*, it starts fucking with your mind, right? If it was a subculture, I would call this "stationery-core". Clémentine's pages are a compilation of internet screenshots and her own scrambled sketches, roughly scanned and collaged together. It looks like she used highlighters, pens, glue and paper scissors. The format itself calls others to print it at home, scribble on it and plaster it with post-its.

Clémentine introduces the reading session. She prepared it together with Karolien Chromiak. They met last summer by a lake. Clémentine and caroline... "What does a karolien look like?" I wonder. The two had started a conversation about their artistic practices and exchanged about Ursula Le Guin's 1988 essay "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction". The essay itself draws from anthropologist Elizabeth Fisher's 1970s "Carrier Bag Theory of Human Evolution", which was a research on early human development. Instead of pointing to knives as the first human tool, Fisher proposed containers as the first "cultural devices" because they allowed to carry food.



I start writing down words I gather from Clémentine's introduction: **Tools that take energy home. Pouches, nets, bags or bowls might have been the first recipients of everything sacred.**



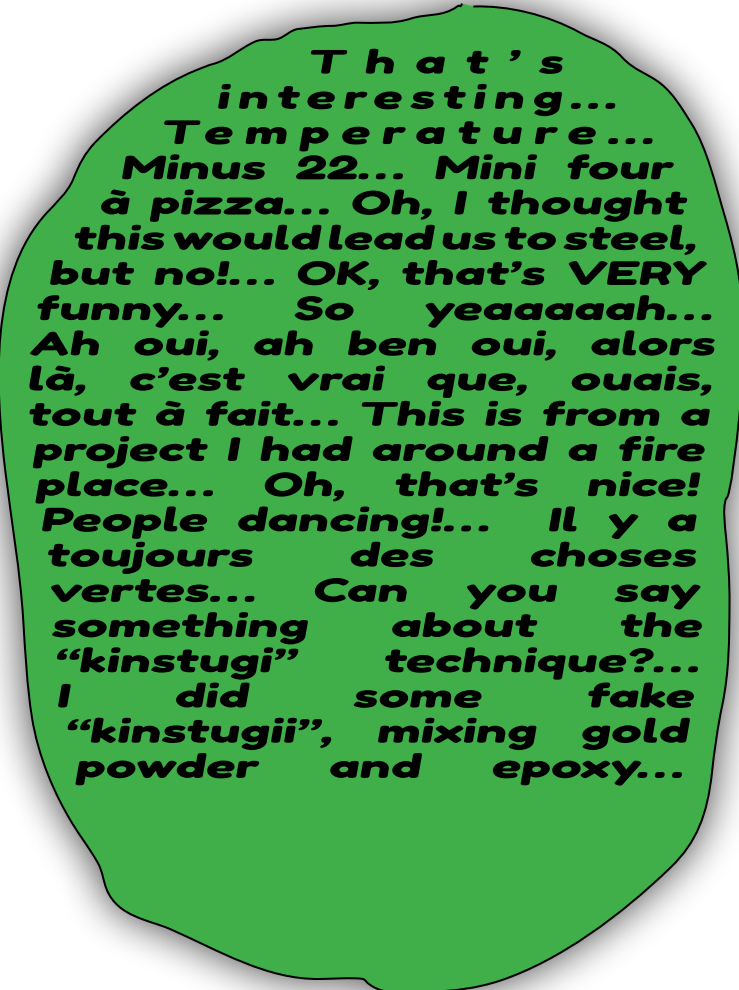
For some reason, I immediately think of the armpit-purse and chihuahua lifestyle: Hmmm, what's in her bag??? I like the idea of acknowledging the dynamic power of an empty cavity! Is a vessel still a vessel when it doesn't carry? I imagine placing a single lipstick in a little handbag and carrying it around town, being the sole carrier of my secret: my bag is almost useless, yet essential...

Karolien and Clémentine met again at Kunsthal Gent, thinking about the meaning of "carrying" and "bringing home". Ursula speculated on early human anthropology, suggesting that humans were more likely to have been "gatherers" than heroic "hunter-gatherers". **Seeds, nuts, grains. Small fried octopuses. Fish with fish. Berries against berries, bumping in a basket.** The two artists met a third time at another lake to apply clay on baskets.

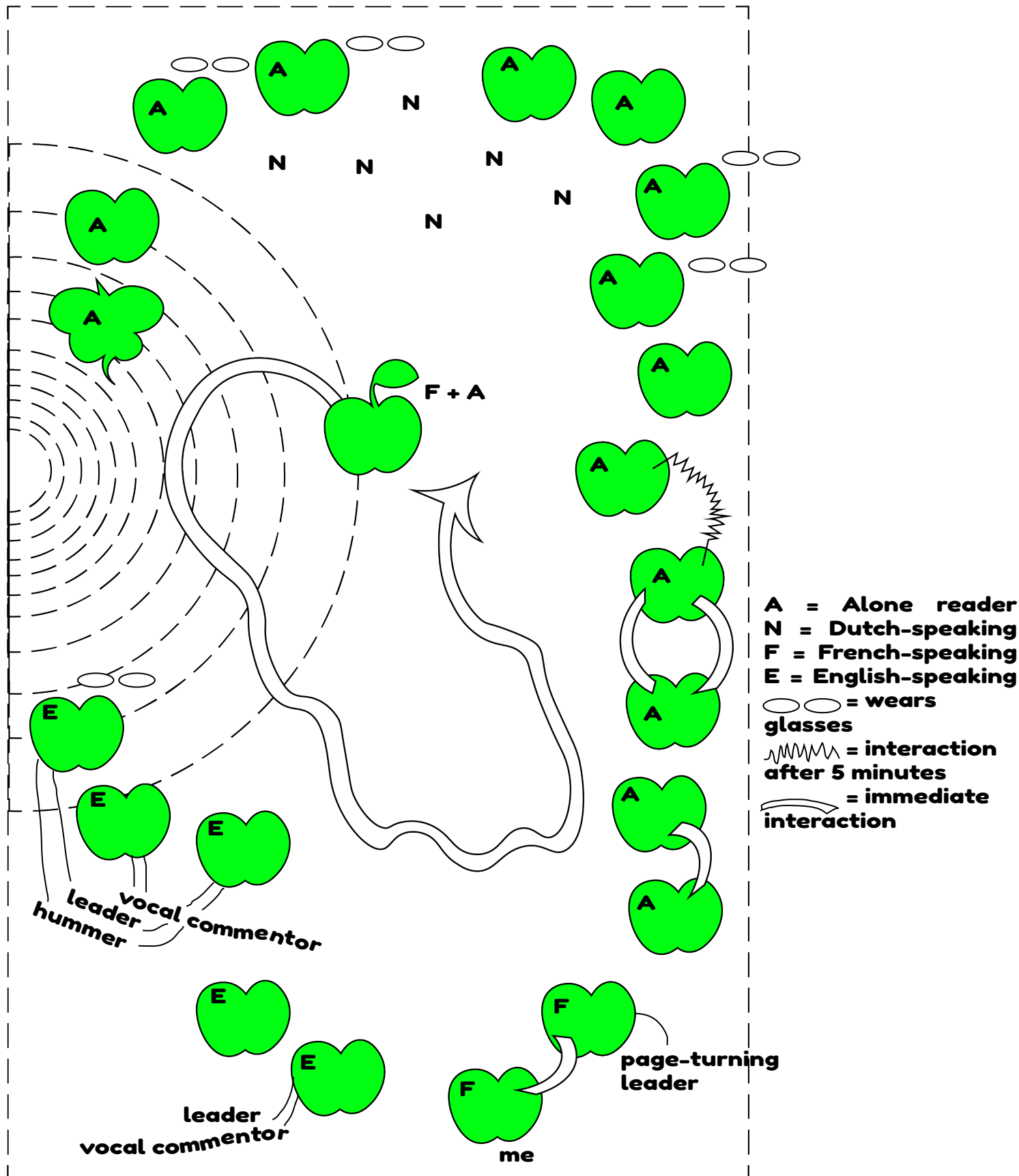
Clémentine now stands up announcing that she will make more coffee and that we will drink forbidden wine later. With that, groups of readers organically form around the booklets and I wonder: How do you read along with a stranger? Do you talk? Who leads? Who turns the pages? Can they smell you came on bicycle? That you are in the process of cooling down? I'm sharing a booklet with a French-speaking person who takes the lead on the page-turning, but doesn't talk much. There's a group of two sitting to my left. One of them speaks with a North-American accent. **What is a "hutte" in English? It's this**, says I, pointing to a hut on a picture. **Ah... A "hut" !!**

Clémentine is explaining her process to people asking about it. She mostly "adds stuff" to the compilation. The way the images are put together allows a fluid reading through the content. **What's the role of the post-its? They are notes to myself**, she says. I'm sitting on the south side of the room, where there is more chatter. **This is too eggy for me... I like the less eggy clafouti**, says the N-A voice (North-American). She's staring at two baking recipe, a chocolate cake recipe and clafouti. A clafouti is a French flan-like cake made with cherries. Clémentine is still speaking:

Yes, there is a limit to the structure but i don't know when that is... N-A accent coughs and whispers to her silent neighbour: **Uh-uh... I have a cold! It's not Covid.** She keeps speaking her mind in parallel with Clémentine's voice. **There are very queer transitions between contents.** As someone from the Z generation or whichever letter, I reflect for a second on the choice of using the word "queer" literally, and nod, thinking, why not. It feels like I'm sitting next to Oscar Wilde or something. A friend of Clémentine brushes his finger on a photo of a Youtube screenshot: **We noticed that when we press play on the videos, they don't move...** I send this person many prayers of respect in my mind. And as soon as Clémentine lets loose of the floor, whispers bloom everywhere around the room from engaged faces:



That's interesting... Temperature... Minus 22... Mini four à pizza... Oh, I thought this would lead us to steel, but no!... OK, that's VERY funny... So yeaaaaah... Ah oui, ah ben oui, alors là, c'est vrai que, ouais, tout à fait... This is from a project I had around a fire place... Oh, that's nice! People dancing!... Il y a toujours des choses vertes... Can you say something about the "kinstugi" technique?... I did some fake "kinstugii", mixing gold powder and epoxy...



My eyes spot a page that speaks to me: it's about kindle, tinder, fire, energy and logs. There's a little scribble that reads "Lit fast, last long". It feels like a soothing rub on my back. I think of my all-time favourite mystic, the Log lady. I see my Dad's whole North-American family sitting on camping chairs with bare calves before my eyes. "My log doesn't judge." For a minute, I wonder off in memories of warm smokey summer barbecues around a lake where my Dad grew up, in the land of 10.000 lakes. A scene from the film Fargo (1996) was shot there, starring Frances McDormand as a police chief, but it takes place at the antipode of the continental climate: in the snow, in the cold-ass Minnesota winter I never got to experience, growing up in temperate Brussels. I think of how much my dad misses seasons. He believes that transitions between contrasted seasons bring people closer together around specific rituals. A voice calls me from accross the lake, poking away my minute daydream. It's the N-A accent, crawling onto the discreet hum of other readers.

It's been 100 years since I went to Disneyland... We are looking at a collage of different depictions of gardens: suburban BBQ backyards, park design plans, fake grass, heterotopias, or Disney gardens of delights, which benefit the origin myths of the United States' dominating class. The French voice says she went to all the US Disneylands.

I wanted to make a film about it. The Disney castle outside of Paris is the one that involved the most money and research! Because they were super afraid of Europeans' reaction about a medieval-looking castle! Did you know Walt Disney was a good friend of Salvador Dali? Yes, Dali had directed a short film with Disney called "Destino". It was only completed in 2003!

Hmmm, answers my North-American neighbour: **What I hate about Disney is they never invented anything original...**

I'm trying to imagine the rest of her thoughts as she silently nods to the photos.

I decide to move to the north side of the room to record a new geography. New ways of reading? New commenting styles? New ways of relating to pictures? Other semiotics? Other semantics? Other languages? I settle my body discreetly against a pillar and gently place my sheet of paper next to my foot on the floor, pushing it in the direction of the sound, as if it's a microphone. The group of eyes briefly glances down at the crème-coloured square, with no other reaction. My presence, which was publicly announced at the beginning, seems to be allowed.

This is where I drift in: **In order to have a flower meadow you need to...** I've always wondered how you create a meadow but I skipped a beat on the way into this new story. Is it about non-intervention? Or do you need to maintain it?

Do you have fireplace in your garden? No no no!

What we would like to do is...

Didn't catch that. Is it about using ashes as fertiliser? **But that's a whole preparation! It burns for hours.** What does? Wood? **It inverses the purpose of burning. Not for destruction but for CREATION.**

From what I gather from this narration, I imagine a tall spiky godlike device, made of steel, getting rusty in a meadow. A device that was once the ultimate fertiliser machine before lord Glyphosate was created to rule the world with his evil cane. **We have eleven oak trees.** It's becoming more fairylike. **It was a wasteland my father bought when he lost his work in the nineteen...** I didn't catch the date. **Nettles. Most people don't like them but they're super important in cultivation, especially in combination with tomatoes.**

I migrated from a Disney landscape to find myself in the middle of a fertile meadow buzzing with butterflies and insects. Is the whole room unknowingly reading at the same pace, currently flipping through the chapter on gardens?

Suddenly, the mysterious person to my left, who up until now was silently listening to the conversation, addresses Clémentine. I have the sensation that a shadow on the wall just morphed into a human. They ask, starring at my writing hands from time to time: **Do you have a source for...** And once again, the most important word of the sentence mutes itself. They start explaining their question before five attentive pairs of eyes.

I work in logistics, in freight, looking at social structures around labor to see how it affects individuals. And how it effects you! someone else interrupts. **Yes, true, it's becoming a little extreme now...**

I loose track again.

What do you mean? someone interrupts again, as if reading my mind. **Recently, I became the coordinator of my team, doing extra time to improve work relations. Then Covid happened... There was a snowball effect...** My ear to hand connexion is buffering again. **It's not uncommon... Pressure... In a competitive privatised context. In Belgium, it was privatised 20 years ago... How easy it is to get sucked up. The process of being promoted was really confronting, putting myself in a position to move up the**

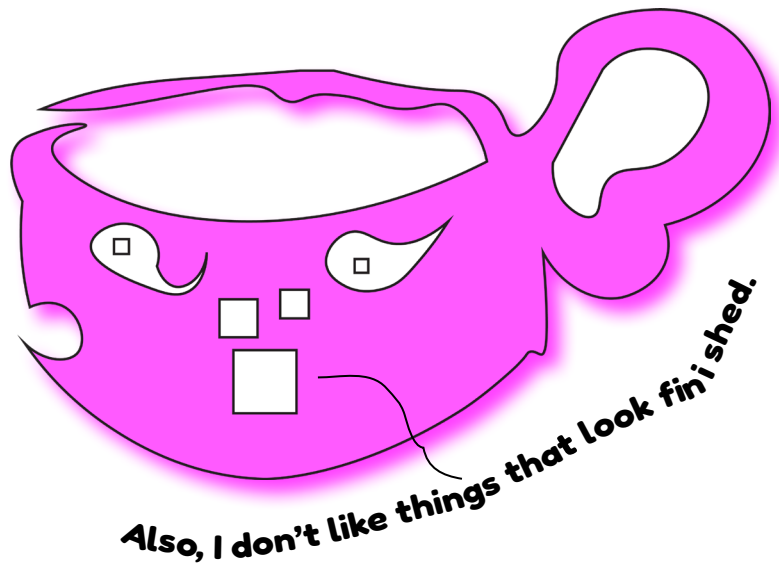
ladder. I started at the bottom so I could not go down. I could only move upwards. These kinds of companies are organised vertically. It affects how decisions are made. It's pretty catastrophic at the moment. Right now, I'm hanging on to see if things will change. It's a huge machine. Changing something is not easy. There's all this management guru jargon. There will be change in a company and employees have to accept it. How do you accept it?

The reasons I stayed so long is that I needed time for...

I didn't hear what the person said because I got caught up in the long winding road of their story's context and in trying to record it. Is it a comparison between rising heat and climbing up the ladder of capitalism? So I'm wondering... Are there people who are trying to warm up? SO IS IT? Is it actually about HEAT?? Is the person getting to the point I was trying to anticipate...? Meanwhile, something is happening in the room. Body weights and limbs are being shifted around. It's contagious. Clothes are ruffling. The words are getting muffled in the fabric of bodies. The collective attention span is dying. The point is lost for good. I decide not to break my silence to ask questions.

Before we go up for the VSW (very special wine), let's have a collective conversation. Someone begins with a question: How do you relate the paper of the printed .pdf or to the material aspect of your work? Which seems to include touch, matter, etc.?

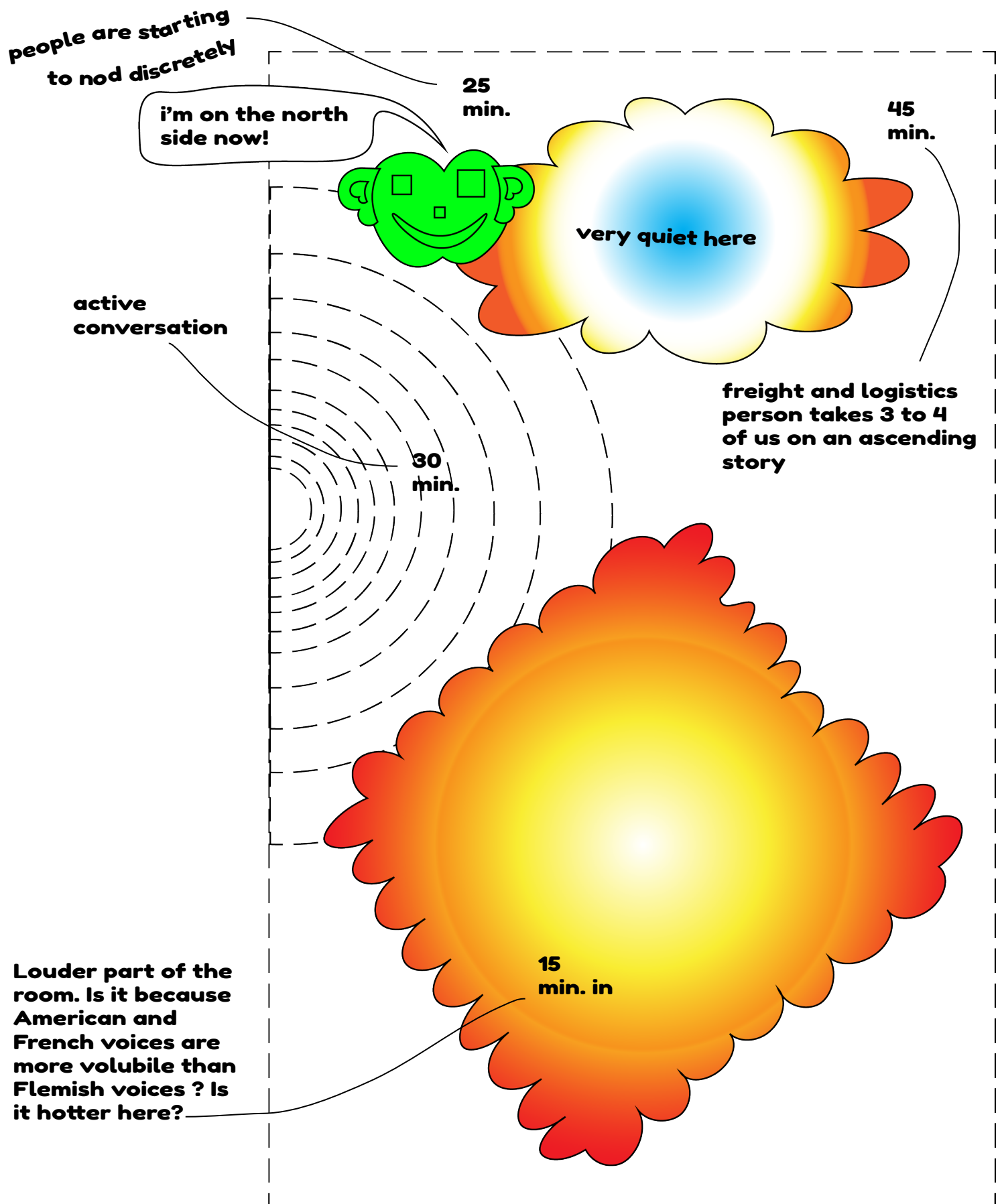
Oh! Is this person into what I called "stationary-core" earlier? Do you also have a fascination for crispy A4 paper sheets like my friend Lau? I pick up what Clémentine is saying: I was making a lot of ceramics, making lots of pots. Telling stories about objects. So this some kind of storytelling? Yes... I use to tell stories around the cups but also around the carpet... During the master's, I realised I was more interested in the research. The carpet is a tool for the research.



A guest highlights that humans have a complicated relationship to fire, based on the scan of a French translation a John Steinbeck extract: **L'humanité avait mis des millions d'années à s'habituer au feu, comme objet et comme idée. Entre le moment où un homme s'était brûlé les doigts aux restes carbonisés d'un arbre abattu par la foudre et où un autre les avait transporté dans sa caverne et découvert que cela le réchauffait, cent mille ans peut-être s'était écoulés; et de ce moment aux hauts fourneaux de Détroit, combien de temps?**

What it says, is that it took millions of years for humanity to get used to fire. It says that one thousand years went by between the moment a guy (not a woman) burned his fingers on a tree which had been struck by lightning and the moment the next guy (not a woman) decided to bring the tree home to warm up his cave. It also asks how much time it took for humans to built the industrial furnaces of Detroit. In one word, our understanding of how to use fire came: slowly. I would add: Might have been faster if guys hadn't been in charge of discovering fire, building industries and permanently impacting the geology of the Earth. Would we have been quicker to understand that we need to cool down?

Next, we enter in a material versus immaterial opposition. Clémentine observes:
I'm more interested in what happens around the oven than inside. People gathering to bake, eat, celebrate, etc. are culture-producing moments. Someone suddenly declares: Oh, this reading group was very HOT. This reading group makes us warmer! Connexions can wind up to moments where you feel like you want to say something. So for example, I say something out loud. And hearing my voice makes me warmer because I'm suddenly occupying the space.



And then this magical thing of agreeing on a common collective feeling happened: **It's quite something to be in a room reading together. It's physically connecting when someone says: This thing in the group connects to me.**

My North American neighbour speaks again, saying the coolest (or hottest) thing I heard her say so far. I really value her remarks: she is the warmest voice in the room.

Well actually... It's not a reading group... it's a BROWSING group. And it's not unstructured at all. It's a giant octopus. You read a dead-end, then you jump onto a new branch. The browsing mentality is to never get stuck!! She goes on: **The carrier bag theory. Your book is an example of that! How it affects a reading group! People's chatter is catalysed by your book. That's the principle of the carrier bag!**

Clémentine agrees: **They are moments of oral transmission. I often wonder "Does everything have to be written down?"**

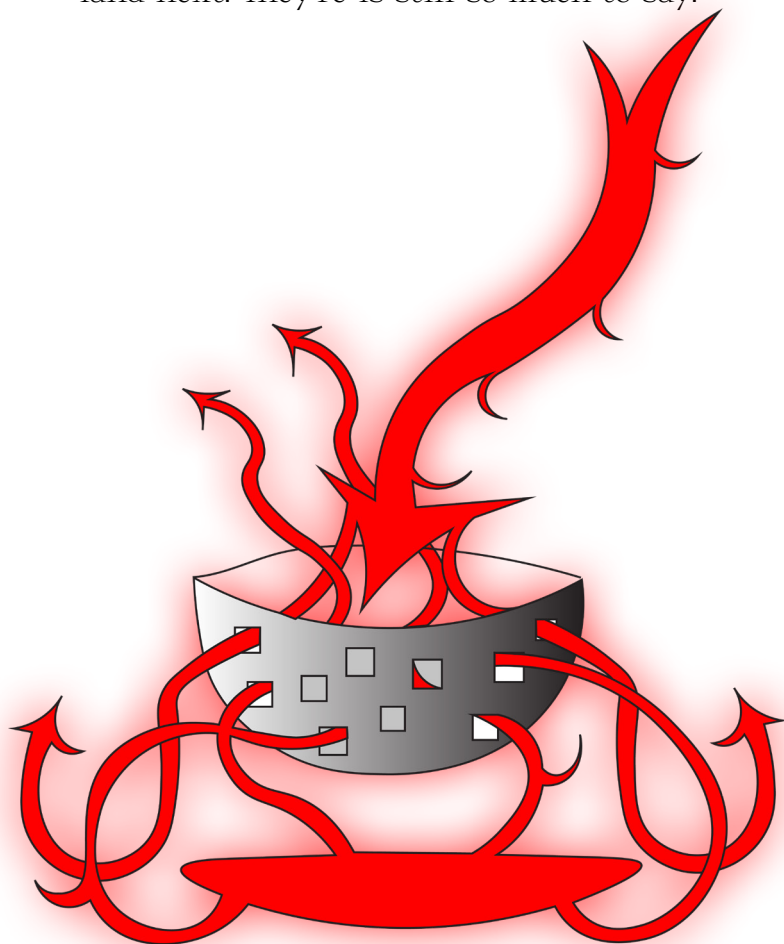
Heike comments: **I think this is what May is experimenting with as she's taking notes during the session.** And just like that, the scribe is suddenly being acknowledged publicly. I didn't expect to be mentioned as an exterior body in my own account of the session. *L'arroseuse arrosée.*

Should we wrap it up with a glass of wine? We've been nourished by Clémentine's book but it's time to drink!

Fourty hands clap for a few seconds. Are they creating heat? Where do we NOT see any creation of heat, come to think of it? Is everything calorific???

As people are leaving the room, I open the booklet at the garden chapter again. I'm intrigued by an image of a little pixellised bush with red berries. Is it a coded decor element in a gamespace backyard? Is it a *boompje* in a Flemish *tuintje*? I click on it with my finger pressing on the A4 to see if it moves. To see if something supernatural happens, like a bush catching fire but not burning. Like water slicing itself open, offering a dry path for humans to cross a sea. I've been tuning my left hand to my ears and eyes for an hour. I believe anything is possible.

The flipping page Odissey gave me warm cheeks. I feel like we've been flying around the sun in many directions. From up there, the research looks like a cool stream of collective consciousness hosted by material objects like a rug, a book of images and drinking cups. An open source generating thought and connexions between co-pilots. I wonder where the research will land next. They're is still so much to say.



The pages on which I recorded this session travelled over the summer from Brussels to Ghent to Antwerp to Ghent to Brussels to Bretagne to Marseille back to Bretagne and back to Brussels, for no reason. In Brussels, they were typed into a computer.