

In collaboration with Casco, Utrecht

THERE IS
NO SUCH THING
AS AN INNOCENT
READING!

READ-IN

THERE IS
NO SUCH THING
AS INNOCENT
MEMORIZING!

READ-IN

20-23. January 2014

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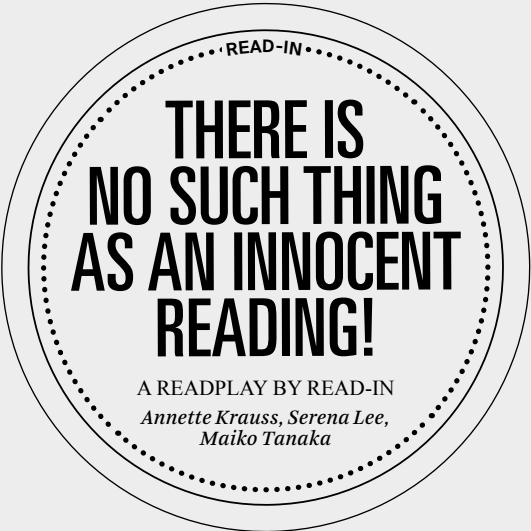
**READ-IN /
WORKSHOP AND PRESENTATION**

Read-in members for this workshop:
Hyunju Chung, Annette Krauss, Serena Lee
and Laura Pardo

**‘When reading
turns into memorizing’**

Regimes of Memorizing

There is no such thing as innocent memorizing





*Filmstill from: Fahrenheit 451, 1966, directed by François Truffaut,
based on the 1953 novel of the same name by Ray Bradbury.*

SCENE 1

FILMSTILL FROM FAHRENHEIT 451
(François Truffaut)

.....

A resistance group forms on the wooded margins of society, dedicated to memorizing books as a means of founding a new society.

Each member of the resistance chooses a book to commit to memory; they recite the books out loud to one another to maintain their grasp of the words.

SCENE 2

EXCERPTS FROM RAY BRADBURY'S (1953)

FAHRENHEIT 451

P. 112-113 – WITH AN INTERVENTION BY READ-IN

.....

“I don’t belong with you,” said Montag, at last, slowly
“I’ve been an idiot all the way.”

“We’re used to that. We all made the right kind of
mistakes, or we wouldn’t be here. When we were sepa-
rate individuals, all we had was rage. I struck a fireman
when he came to burn my library years ago. I’ve been
running ever since. You want to join us, Montag?”

“Yes.” “What have you to offer?”

“Nothing. I thought I had part of the Book of Ecclesi-
astes **Ain’t I a woman?** and maybe a little more of Rev-
elation **Sojourner Truth’s speech at the Women
Rights Convention**, but I haven’t even that now.”

“The Book of Ecclesiastes **Ain’t I a woman?** would
be fine. Where was it?”

“Here,” Montag touched his head. “Ah,” Granger
smiled and nodded.

“What’s wrong? Isn’t that all right?” said Montag.

“Better than all right; perfect!” Granger turned to the
Reverend. “Do we have **Ain’t I a woman?**”

“One. A man named Harris of Youngstown.”

“Montag.” Granger took Montag’s shoulder firmly.
“Walk carefully. Guard your health.
If anything should happen to Harris, you are **Ain’t I a
woman?** See how important you’ve become in the last
minute!”

“But I’ve forgotten!”

“No, nothing’s ever lost. We have ways to shake down
your clinkers for you.”

“But I’ve tried to remember!”

“Don’t try. It’ll come when we need it. All of us have
photographic memories, but spend a lifetime learn-
ing how to block off the things that are really in there.
Simmons here has worked on it for twenty years and
now we’ve got the method down to where we can recall
anything that’s been read once. Would you like, some
day, Montag, to read Plato’s Republic?”

“Of course!”

“I am Plato’s Republic. Like to read
Marcus Aurelius? Mr. Simmons is Marcus.”

“How do you do?” said Mr. Simmons.

“Hello,” said Montag.

“I want you to meet Jonathan Swift, the author of that
evil political book, Gulliver’s Travels!

And this other fellow is Charles Darwin, and this one
is Schopenhauer, and this one is Einstein, and this one
here at my elbow is Mr. Albert Schweitzer, a very kind
philosopher indeed. Here we all are, Montag. Aristot-
phanes and Mahatma Gandhi and Gautama Buddha
and Confucius and Thomas Love Peacock and Thomas
Jefferson and Mr. Lincoln, if you please. We are also
Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.”

Everyone laughed quietly.

“It can’t be,” said Montag.

“It is,” replied Granger, smiling. “We’re book-burners,
too. We read the books and burnt them, afraid they’d be

SCENE 3

found. Micro-filming didn't pay off; we were always travelling, we didn't want to bury the film and come back later. Always the chance of discovery. Better to keep it in the old heads, where no one can see it or suspect it. We are all bits and pieces of history and literature and international law, Byron, Tom Paine, Machiavelli, or Christ, it's here. And the hour is late. And the war's begun. And we are out here, and the city is there, all wrapped up in its own coat of a thousand colours. What do you think, Montag?"

A MEMORIZING SESSION. INSTRUCTIONS: READ THE TEXTS OUT LOUD COLLECTIVELY - OVER AND OVER AGAIN - UNTIL READING TURNS INTO MEMORIZING. FOUR TRANSCRIPTIONS OF SOJOURNER TRUTH'S SPEECH 'AIN'T I A WOMAN?'

.....

a) May 28, 1851 – Akron, Ohio

Women's Rights Convention

Source: National Anti-Slavery Standard 2 May 1863:

4. Sojourner Truth

By Mrs. F. D. Gage [1863]

"Well, chillen, whar dar's so much racket dar must be som'ting out o' kilter. I tink dat 'twixt de niggers of de South and de women at de Norf, all talking 'bout rights, de white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all dis here talkin' 'bout? Dat man ober dar say dat women needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mudpuddles, or gives me any best place,"; and raising herself to her full height, and her voice to a pitch like rolling thunder, she asked, "And ar'n't I a woman? Look at me. Look at my arm," and she bared her right arm to the shoulder, showing its tremendous muscular power) I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me - and ar'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man (when I could get it) and bear de lash as well - and ar'n't I a woman? I have borne thirteen chilern, and seen 'em mos' all sold off to slavery,

and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard - and ar'n't I a woman?

"Den dey talks 'bout dis ting in de head. What dis dey call it?" "Intellect," whispered some one near. "Dat's it, honey. What's dat got to do with women's rights or nigger's rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yourn holds a quart, wouldn't ye be mean not to let me have my little halfmeasure full?" and she pointed her significant finger, and set a keen glance at the minister who had made the argument. The cheering was long and loud.

"Den dat little man in black dar, he say woman can't have as much rights as man, 'cause Christ wa'n'n't a woman! Whar did your Christ come from?" Rolling thunder could not have stilled that crowd as did those deep, wonderful tones, as she stood there with outstretched arms and eye of fire. Raising her voice still louder, she repeated, -

"Whar did your Christ come from? From God and a woman. Man had not'ing to do with him." Oh, what a rebuke she gave the little man. Turning again to another objector, she took up the defense of Mother Eve. I cannot follow her through it all. It was pointed and witty and solemn, eliciting at almost every sentence deafening applause; and she ended by asserting:

"that if de fust woman God ever made was strong enough to turn de world upside down all her one lone, all dese togeder," and she glanced her eye over us, "ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again, and now dey is asking to do it, de men better let 'em." (long and continued cheering). "Bleeged to ye for hearin' on me, and now ole Sojourner ha'n't got nothing more to say."

b) May 28, 1851 – Akron, Ohio

Women's Rights Convention

Source: History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1

(New York: Fowler & Wells, 1882) 116.

Sojourner Truth

By Mrs. F. D. Gage [1882]

"Well, chilern, whar dar is so much racket dar must be somethin' out o' kilter. I tink dat 'twixt de niggers of de Souf and de womin at de Norf, all talkin' 'bout rights, de white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all dis here talkin' 'bout?

"Dat man ober dar say dat womin needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mudpuddles, or gibs me any best place!" And raising herself to her full height, and her voice to a pitch like rolling thunder, she asked, "And a'n't I a woman?

Look at me! Look at my arm!" (and she bared her right arm to the shoulder, showing her tremendous muscular power) I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And a'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man -when I could get it- and bear de lash as well! And a'n't I a woman? I have borne thirteen chilern, and seen 'em mos' all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And a'n't I a woman?

"Den dey talks 'bout dis ting in de head; what dis dey call it?" (Intellect," whispered some one near.)

"Dat's it, honey. What's dat got to do wid womin's rights or nigger's rights. If my cup won't hold but a pint,

and yourn holds a quart, wouldn't ye be mean not to let me have my little halfmeasure full?" And she pointed her significant finger, and set a keen glance at the minister who had made the argument. The cheering was long and loud.

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"Whar did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothin' to do wid Him."

Oh, what a rebuke that was to that little man. Turning again to another objector, she took up the defense of Mother Eve. I can not follow her through it all. It was pointed, and witty, and solemn; eliciting at almost every sentence deafening applause; and she ended by asserting:

"If de fust woman God ever made was strong enough to turn de world upside down all alone, dese women togedder (and she glanced her eye over the platform) ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now dey is asking to do it, de men better let 'em." Long-continued cheering greeted this. "Bleeged to ye for hearin' on me, and now ole Sojourner han't got nothin' more to say."

c) May 28, 1851 – Akron, Ohio

Women's Rights Convention

Source: Internet Modern History Sourcebook, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/sojtruth-woman.asp>

Sojourner Truth

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me!

And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't

a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.

d) May 28, 1851 – Akron, Ohio

Women's Rights Convention

Source: Anti.Slavery Bugle (Salem, OH) 21 June 1851:

4. Sojourner Truth

One of the most unique and interesting speeches of the Convention was made by Sojourner Truth, an emancipated slave. It is impossible to transfer it to paper, or convey any adequate idea of the effect it produced upon the audience. Those only can appreciate it who saw her powerful form, her whole-souled, earnest gestures, and listened to her strong and truthful tones. She came forward to the platform and addressing the President said with great simplicity: May I say a few words? Receiving and affirmative answer, she proceeded; I want to say a few words about this matter. I am a woman's rights. I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have power and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that? I have heard much about the sexed being equal; I can carry as much as any man, and can eat as much too, if I can get it. I am as strong as any man that is now. As for intellect, all I can say it, if woman have a pint and man a quart – why cant she have her little pint full? You need not be afraid to give us our rights for fear we will take too much, – for we cant take more than our pint'll hold. The poor men seem to be all in confusion, and dont know what to do. Why children, if you have woman's rights give it to her and you will feel better. You will have your own rights, and they wont be so much trouble. I cant read, but I can hear. I have heard the bible and have learned that Eve caused man to sin. Well if woman upset the world, do give her a chance

SCENE 4

to set it right side up again. The Lady has spoken about Jesus, how he never spurned woman from him, and she was right. When Lazaus died, Mary and Martha came to him with faith and love and besought him to raise their brother. And Jesus wept-and Lazarus came forth. And how came Jesus into the world? Through God who created him and woman who bore him. Man, where is your part? But the women are coming up blessed be God and a few of the men are coming up with them. But man is in a tight place, the poor slave is on him, woman is coming on him, and he is surely between a hawk and a buzzard.

“DID YOU DO THE READING? THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF READING GROUPS IN THE ART WORLD”, EXCERPTS FROM A TEXT BY READ-IN MEMBER MAIKO TANAKA (THE WHOLE TEXT IS PUBLISHED IN FUSE MAGAZINE, 36-4 FALL 2013, DECOLONIAL AESTHETICS)

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[...]

This past March, three members of Read-in orchestrated a reading group of over 75 people at the Museum of Modern Art, Vienna. We guided the public audience in simultaneously reading out loud and collectively memorizing three different transcriptions of the speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” by Sojourner Truth, abolitionist and self-emancipated African American former slave. Questions around embodied and collective reading were entangled with gender, race, memory and language in this twenty-minute reading session, and were facilitated later in a smaller group discussion with interested participants. The event was unique as this was the first time Read-in had manifested our experimental reading sessions for a formal performance event, as opposed to the more informal and “backstage” spaces we normally worked within, opening up an opportunity for insight into a movement from “supplement” to “content.” In order to keep with a critique of the “un-innocence” of neo-liberal life-long learning ideologies, and the elitism that reading groups can reproduce even in non-institutional contexts, I’ll attempt to critically assess a few

moments that stood out from the event, structured around the following question:

What, how and for whom do we read?

The speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” was never written down by the celebrated orator. The printed handouts that we passed around to the audience were three of several transcriptions that exist of the speech, written from memory by white abolitionist journalists who witnessed the event. Of the versions we used, two took the racialized and politicized words and phrases spoken by Truth (who was born in New York and sold to a Dutchman) and falsely attributed an imaginary accent of a universalized Southern slave in its transcription. [a, b] The third transcript we gave out was written in “standard” late twentieth-century American English, [c] removing the trace of any accent at all. Right off the bat, the text already offered a complicated matrix of relations for us and our fellow readers. The **what** to read in this case included contested authenticities, multiple versions inflected with different accents, racist appropriations and projections, and the utterly undeniable physical body which Truth constantly makes present in her spoken words.

There were several problematic power relations we left critically untouched in terms of what we read. For instance, to present such texts in Vienna, an environment in which English is not the primary spoken language, reproduced the dominance of English as the standard language for the Western-centric contemporary art world.

This blind spot emerged in a conflict between the members of Read-in during our rehearsals, as well as after the event when one member expressed frustration with the speed and aptitude of English speaking and the difficulties this presented for nonnative listeners. when collective listening was highlighted as a crucial aspect of collective reading.

Another unintended effect was the power of novelty in the experience of reading a text out loud with a large group of people. Reading out loud is a consistent strategy for Read-in, as a way to stay with the physicality of reading, and to have participants engage with the texts in the present rather than prepare them individually in advance.

This **how** to read, for the Read-in collective, has been our way of trying to counter the urge to “go solo,” virtuoso contributions of something smart or performing one’s expertise in the presence of one’s peers.

[...]

In considering the **for whom**, perhaps the most challenging aspect of collective reading in a highly public environment is that aside from the people we invited to join, we had no idea who would be participating. By taking on a practice that calls into question the borders between public and private spaces, as demonstrated in our door-to-door activities, this was perhaps the most generalized public environment we had encountered. The usually small size of the kinds of spaces we read in limit the accommodation for larger attendance. Our

SCENE 5

.....

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regulars, and most other people who join our sessions, find out about them through our mailing list, or through common networks and personal or institutional invitations, depending on our hosts. As much as such a “self-selecting” audience can create an enriching and productive reading group environment by constituting a group whose members share critical questions,

political trajectories and/ or living and working lifestyles, these conditions can also produce more homogeneous profiles than open and diverse interactions, and at worst, they reproduce elitist segregations.

[...]

How can we critically investigate alternative practices to draw out different potentials and in what ways might such an investigation play out in the form of a reading group?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

COLOPHON

**Design: Anja Groten in collaboration with Read-in
(Hyunju Chung, Annette Krauss, Laura Pardo
and Serena Lee)**

**Produced in the context of the exhibition
'Made in Commons' by Stedelijk Bureau Amsterdam
and Kunci Yogyakarta and in collaboration
with Casco, Utrecht**

2013

About Read-in:

Read-in (active since 2010) experiments with the political, material and physical implications of collective reading and the situatedness of any reading activity. Developed in collaboration with GDR, Grand Domestic Revolution, Casco Utrecht, Read-in started off making instant reading sessions in other people's homes. In 2011, a few members of the current Read-iners formed a research team to contextualize the reading practice and expand it toward other ends, as well as to grapple with ideas of representation of this practice for various contexts. Recurring investigations include the legacy of feminist reading groups, reading aloud, the infectiousness of words, memorizing, (un-)disciplinary pedagogies and listening intonationally.

Read-in has memorized collectively in the former boys' school of De Appel (Amsterdam, 2012), in the MUMOK auditorium (Vienna, 2013) and in SMBA/Casco (Amsterdam/Utrecht, 2014).

www.read-in.info

**20 – 23. Jan 2014
11 – 16h**

**Casco, Office for Art, Design, and Theory is Read-in's central location; we will meet at Casco and depart to other locations from here.
Nieuwekade 213-215, Utrecht**

**23. January:
Presentation
SMBA
Rozenstraat 59,
Amsterdam
Time to be announced**

Important note:
All are welcome to participate in the workshop; reservations are required – please RSVP via email to:
readin.research@gmail.com
For more information see:
www.read-in.info

In the context of the exhibition 'Made in Commons' by Stedelijk Bureau Amsterdam and Kunci Yogyakarta and in collaboration with Casco, Utrecht, Read-in invites you to a workshop in which we continue our research into the political, material and physical implications of collective reading and the situatedness of any reading activity. In this workshop we will focus on the links between reading and memorizing and experiment with memorizing collectively, referencing the varied aural/oral histories of Sojourner Truth's speech, "Ain't I a woman?", (1851, Ohio). Stemming from the divergent transcriptions and testimonies of Truth's orating, we explore techniques of (re/dis)locating and embodying text, (un-)disciplinary pedagogies and listening intonationally.

'Made in Commons' by Stedelijk Bureau Amsterdam and Kunci Yogyakarta

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When reading turns into memorizing

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READ-IN / WORKSHOP & PRESENTATION

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