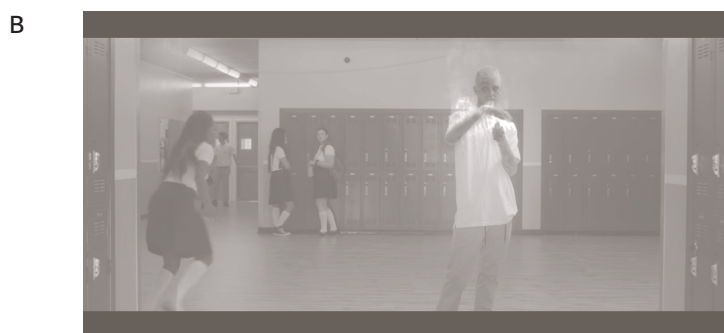
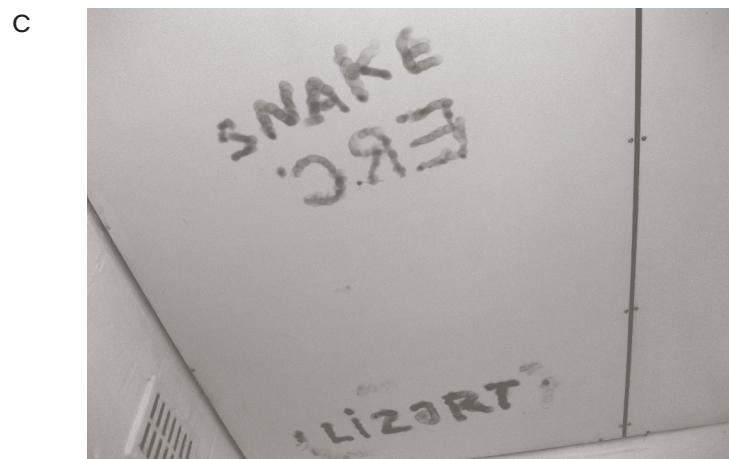


In the 2017 music video for 'Awful Things', after a heavy petting session with a classmate in their high school's bathroom, the late 'third-wave emo heart-throb' Lil Peep is given a (white) BiC J1 lighter by his departing BAE. In the following scene a close up—nestled in Peeps heavily tattooed hand—of the J1 reveals a text printed on its milky surface: ASH IS OUR PUREST FORM. This text is rendered in a typography that resembles the uneven and burned letters made by the device itself. Words that you might see burned into ceilings with a common cigarette lighter, in (mostly) public places and thoroughfares—hidden spaces of anti-social behaviour. Later, in the school's corridor, Peep happens on his love interest kissing (vampire style) the neck of what looks like the class jock. Peep's happy face flicks to apathy and he proceeds, on his down-facing right palm, to light himself on fire—using the same lighter given to him by his crush (of course). His palm a ceiling to the lighters promise, Peep becomes some kind of elliptic ... typography, his stare locked to the person who will (always) cheat on him. The fire spreads and engulfs the whole school. In the inferno Lil Peep and his BAE are once again reunited in (type-like) silhouette, the video ends with a rainbow and animated sparkly light-flares over the school campus. I don't really understand what this means.

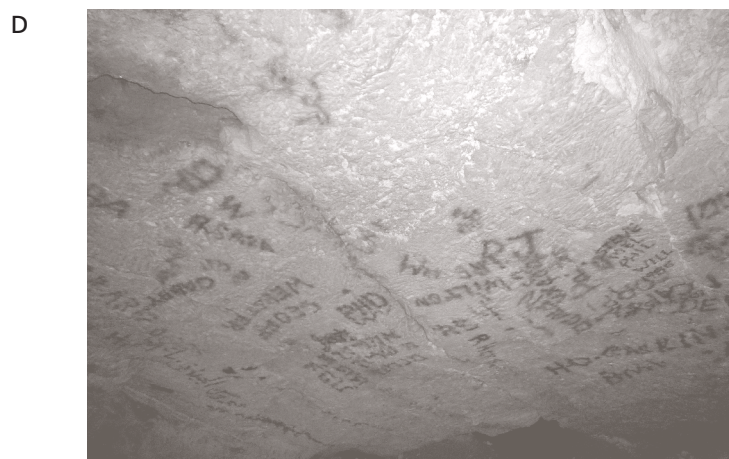


Cut back to the 6th of May 2009 and I'm visiting Sint Lucas art academy in Antwerp to give a lecture. Taking a nervous pre-lecture wee in the unremarkable school toilet adjacent to the students

studio, I exhale. A deep exhale that jerks my head back, raising my eyes to focus on the ceiling. On which, burned into the laminated plate, I see words: LizaRT, SNAKE and E R C (mirrored). I became immediately transfixed by this collection of ashen circles, burned smouldering marks—looking like some deformed dot matrix—made with a lighter. Instead of vandalism, I think about typography, and about doing typography. I think of these burned letters as getting close to what a typography is for me, in spirit at least. Yet, in lacking a (digital or physical) matrix, the letters miss typography's object. Or maybe these letters are typography's chemical [gassy] deviant (made with a device not used for its original function), they depict a kind of intent that is relatively free of the conventions that define it. Right Peep?

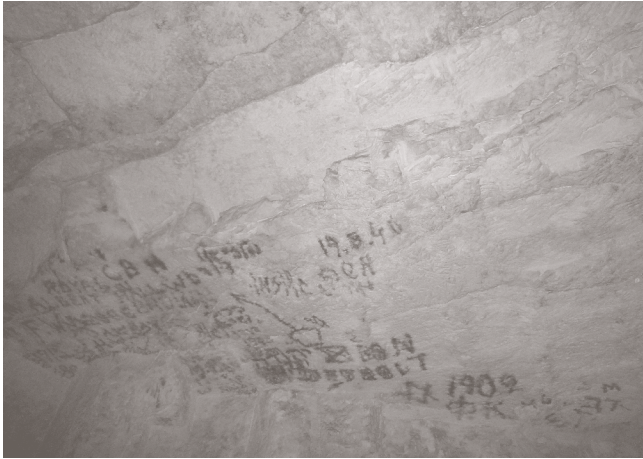


I'm standing in an underground limestone quarry below the Muslim Quarter in Jerusalem—Zedkiah's cave (also called Solomon's Quarries). It's 2011 and I'm on holiday with my brother and his girlfriend. On the lower parts of the cave's ceiling are many burned-in texts: including dates, names and symbols; in Latin, Hebrew and Greek. There are burned crucifix, single glyphs, unintelligible—perhaps secret—marks. There is the Greek symbol  $\Phi$  [Phi], which can mean many things, in philosophy—interestingly—it represents a 'generic act'. There is also the symbol of the Freemasons, made up of its allegorical square and compasses.



Since the 1860s the cave has been used by the Freemasonry for their ceremonies, the marks on the cave ceiling seem to record acts of pilgrimage. It is not hard to imagine these texts with an almost bureaucratic function in mind, texts that reinforce a claim to, or ownership of, this place.

E



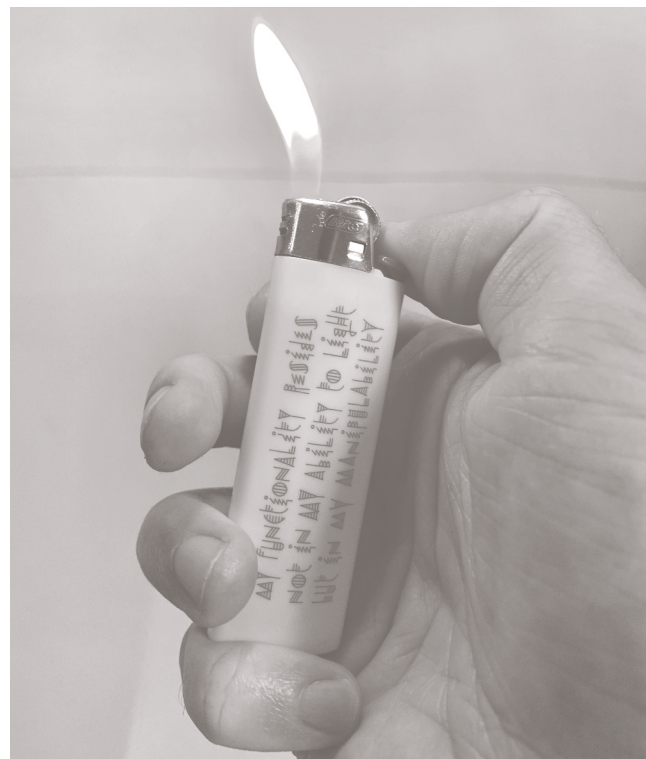
I'm looking at a set of images of prison holding cells, sent to me by my friend Lotte in September 2016. The ceilings of the cells, at least the parts that can be reached by standing on a bench or bed, are filled with burned texts. These holding cells are located in one part of the Bijlmerbajes, a former inner-city Amsterdam prison which up until recently was being used as a centre for processing asylum seekers. Another part is being rented to 'cultural entrepreneurs'—in line with South-East Amsterdam's rapid gentrification plan. [With much of the former prison infrastructure still in place you can do a tour to see and experience the place when it was used for its original function.] The site is being developed and by 2020 the former prison towers will become affordable accommodation for students. In the holding cells the burnt texts seem more like a way of killing time for a misdemeanour (I guess you could smoke), its mostly the names of the cells occupants that are rendered. But there's also the name of Rotterdam's football team burned into the perforated metal ceiling. They have a kind of boredom or apathy to their reading. Right Peep?

F



In 2013 I was able to design graphics for an edition of my own J1. The text printed on it 'My Functionality Resides Not In My Ability To Light But In My Manipulability' paraphrases a sentence by Jean Baudrillard taken from the chapter 'Functional Form: The Lighter', from his 1968 book *The System of Objects* (*Le Système des objets*). [The text is typeset in a font that I designed based on graffiti that caught my eye in the toilet of an Amsterdam fondue café.] Baudrillard's quote inspired the text on the lighter in the sense that it suggests that any object (in this case a lighter) can be manipulated in ways to which it was not intended. Here, a device used to light things on fire becomes, instead, a tool for (deviant) inscription. In terms of writing / typography the act of making letters with a lighter redirects the objects teleology. The action of doing typography is 'thus echoed by the hand creating fire'<sup>1</sup>; touching on a desire to communicate, 'in the very practical essence of an industrial object.'<sup>2</sup>

G



Through these meetings and actions described above we can see the lighter being used in a sometimes subversive way, in the production of sometimes subversive (but also generic) messages. The lighter as an object is embedded in popular culture and therefore our imagination. The BiC J1 is a part of the design collection at MoMA (it is also important to note that BiC also makes disposable pens—the connection between the object of the pen and the lighter are in close proximity to each other, often a pen company has a line of lighters.) Borrowed, bought, stolen, lost, found, we can all find fascination and relation within a flame coming from a simple flick. Like the

flame on Charmander's tail on my son's Pokemon card [Charmander is a Pokemon that does damage to itself. Right Peep?]. Like the thousands of lighter flames in the audience of a stadium concert [which are now being replaced by smartphone torches]. Tinashe licking a lighters flame on the cover of DAZED Winter 2015. Holger Czukay flicking along to the tune of 'Cool in the Pool' in the song's music video. Lil Wayne's consistently audible lighter flick and inhale before going in... . Making letters with a lighter is a coercive kind of writing and typography, and hereunto is the danger or threat of setting something on fire. Even though these texts can be thought of, or described as, some kind of graffiti, I can't help but want to elevate and connect their representational qualities to what it means to use, design, consume and publish text into civilian life. The production and design of letters is something that nowadays exists in a collective unconscious, writing or making letters is second nature to us. Looking at typography through this narrow opening, a peep, orientates me back to the craft itself: its making, meaning, histories and possibilities. Language burns. It is not usual to check the ceiling (to the roof) for typography, and I always have to remind myself to 'look up'.

\* LIX is a readability measure indicating the difficulty of reading a text developed by Swedish scholar Carl-Hugo Björnsson.

1. Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (Editions Gallimard 1968, Verso 1996), pp 61-62.
2. Ibid.
- A. Lil Peep, *Awful Things*, ft. Lil Tracy, directed by Sus Boy & Nick Koenig, produced by Daniel Ostroff, 2017. Screenshot, 2019.
- B. Lil Peep, *Awful Things*, ft. Lil Tracy, directed by Sus Boy & Nick Koenig, produced by Daniel Ostroff, 2017. Screenshot, 2019.
- C. The first time I noticed lighter made text. Sint Lucas Antwerpen, 6 May 2009. Photo by author.
- D. Zedkiah's cave, 28 July 2011. Photo by author.
- E. Zedkiah's cave, 28 July 2011. Photo by author.
- F. Bijlmerbajes holding cell, 18 October 2016. Photo by Lotte Schroeder.
- G. 'My Functionality Resides Not In My Ability To Light But In My Manipulability', BiC J1 lighter with customised typography, edition of 250, published by Split/Fountain, 2013.