

Critical Conversations 2022–23

In partnership with Analog Sea, an offline publisher of printed books, we're delighted to announce the fourth season of Critical Conversations, an expert-led discussion series that allows Library members to ponder the most important issues of our time. This season, we will reflect on how to lead a contemplative, vital, and unmediated life in an ever-faster digital world. We will discuss questions such as: What do we gain from disconnecting, and how can we do it? How can we sharpen our senses and redirect our attention in order to change our thoughts and actions? And most of all, how can we live in contemporary society with nuance and intention?

Some details:

The 2022–23 series will unfold over nine sessions, from November 2022 to July 2023. The conversations will happen in person at the Library, beginning at 19h00 CET and running for ninety minutes; technology of all description is happily forbidden. Each participant will receive copies of all four published issues of *The Analog Sea Review*. Course reading and discussion will, for the most part, be based on work published in *The Analog Sea Review*. Jonathan Simons, founding editor of Analog Sea, and Alice McCrum, Programs Manager, will begin each meeting with some opening remarks, before guiding a group discussion.

About Critical Conversations:

Whether in France or America, debate is central to healthy democracy. Critical Conversations encourages both disagreement and agreement through thinking, talking, reading, and actively participating in community. Since the series' inception in 2020, we have tackled race in America, the climate crisis, and migration. Across seasons, participants have challenged themselves, their peers, and the world in which we live.

Please write to Alice McCrum at mccrum@americanlibraryinparis.org with any questions or thoughts.

Groundwork:

The Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset writes that agitation dazzles, blinds, and compels us to act mechanically, like “frenetic sleepwalkers.” To address the perils of today is, first of all, to name them. Whether distraction, compulsion, and isolation, or noise, bright light, and convenience, during meetings one, two, and three, we will identify and begin to understand the snares of today’s increasingly digital world.

Meeting One: Overstimulated in a Hyperstimulated World

November 17, 2022

“We have to accept that technological products are not neutral,” Pope Francis writes in *Laudato si’*. How did we get here? And what have we lost along the way?

Readings:

Pope Francis, “The Technocratic Paradigm,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, pp. 70–73.

Urs Hafner, “The Audible Breath,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number One, pp. 27–29.

Geert Lovink, “Alone Together,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, p. 86.

Oliver Sacks, “The Machine Stops,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, pp. 61–67.

Jonathan Simons, “Letter to the New Generation,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, pp. 1–3.

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Meeting Two: The Cult of the Image

December 8, 2022

“Today,” Susan Sontag writes, “everything exists to end in a photograph.” Are we all image-junkies? Are images mental pollution? What lurks outside the frame of our image-dominated society?

Readings:

Kevin Fox Gotham, “Back to the Spectacle,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, p. 89–99.

Susan Sontag, “The Photographic Experience,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, p. 52.

Alan Watts, “Eating Menus,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, p. 100.

Wim Wenders, “A Language of Images,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, p. 51.

Meeting Three: Culture Imperiled

January 12, 2023

“Where to find the energy to engage with a culture in crisis when the crisis consists in the impossibility of engaging with the culture?” Jonathan Franzen asked in 1996. Was culture in crisis then? Is culture in crisis now? And if so, why?

Readings:

Jonathan Franzen, “Why Bother?” in *How to Be Alone* (Picador, 2003).

Alberto Manguel, “Where Are the Intellectuals?” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, pp. 118–124.

Will Self, “The Printed Word in Peril,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, p. 179.

In the Midst of the Crowd

“The great man” (or indeed woman), Ralph Waldo Emerson writes, is he or she “who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.” During meetings four through nine we will wonder how to live in the world rather than as a product of it.

Meeting Four: Attention

February 16, 2023

How have we come to regard attention as both spiritual and commodified? What, after all, is the power of attention? How do we use and misuse it? And how might we improve our own?

Readings:

Joshua Cohen, “Inattention,” in *Attention: Dispatches from a Land of Distraction* (Random House, 2018).

Thomas Merton, “Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number One, p. 22.

Edmund de Waal, “On Looking,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, pp. 174–175.

Richard Whittaker, “Interview with Godfrey Reggio,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number One, pp. 94–99.

Stefan Zweig, “The Eternal Secret,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, pp. 17–19.

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Meeting Five: Space, and the Idea of North

March 23, 2023

Why are silence, space, and solitude “good fertile ground / for a sower of verses”? What are the consequences of loud societies, busy societies, and interconnected societies?

Readings:

Sergio Benvenuto, “The Dream Bird,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, pp. 144–145.

Jorge Luis Borges, “The Forging,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, p. 23.

Howard Fink, “The North as Archetype,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, pp. 62–68.

Glenn Gould, “The Idea of North,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, pp. 69–78.

Byung-Chul Han, “Vita Contemplativa,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number One, pp. 69–83.

Rainer Maria Rilke, “What Is Difficult,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, p. 174.

Patrick Shen, “Form out of Formlessness,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number One, pp. 23–25.

Meeting Six: Wonderment

April 20, 2023

If to wonder is to marvel at the beauty, subtlety, and harmony of the natural world, when did you last wonder?

Readings:

Trebbe Johnson, “Seeing Beyond the Periphery,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, pp. 204–205.

C.G. Jung, “Where It All Began,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, p. 135.

C.G. Jung, “Confrontation with the Unconscious,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, pp. 147–148.

Geoff Pevere, “The Pursuit of Wonder,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, p. 15.

Meeting Seven: Nature

May 11, 2023

We find ourselves firmly in the Anthropocene, the period in which human activity has been the dominant influence on the natural world. How, then, to return to and be guided by nature?

Readings:

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Wunderkammer,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, p. 83.

E.M. Forster, “The Tree Rustled,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, p. 199.

Byung-Chul Han, “Natural Beauty,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, pp. 125–126.

Jerry Mander, “The Mediation of Experience,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, pp. 83–84.

William Oxley, “A Sunset and a Cone,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number One, p. 100.

William Stafford, “Every Morning All Over Again,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, p. 209.

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Meeting Eight: The Writing Life

June 15, 2023

“And they were all, when their souls grew warm, poets,” Ray Bradbury writes. Why create art? Why write? And how to do both in the digital age?

Readings:

Gaston Bachelard, “Literature Contains All Art,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, pp. 5–6.

James Baldwin, “The Creative Process,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, pp. 158–163.

Ray Bradbury, “How to Keep and Feed a Muse,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, pp. 149–157.

Interview with Peter Mettler, in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, pp. 17–36.

Interview with Joseph-Antoine d’Ornano, in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number One, pp. 49–60.

Interview with Patrick Shen, in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number One, pp. 8–20.

Jameela Siddiqi, “Music, A Life-Changing Force,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number One, pp. 102–112.

Interview with Wim Wenders, in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, pp. 25–42.

Meeting Nine: Life

July 6, 2023

“I don’t want to end up simply having visited this world,” Mary Oliver writes. Our time on Earth is brief. How to ensure that we do not end up simply having visited?

Readings:

Martha Graham, “There Is a Vitality,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number One, p. 61.

Mary Oliver, “When Death Comes,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number One, pp. 136–137.

Nina Simone, “Where Did the Time Go?” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, p. 208.

Henry David Thoreau, “On the Deck of the World,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Two, pp. 141–142.

Stefan Zweig, “Remaining Oneself,” in *The Analog Sea Review*, Number Three, p. 183.

About **Alice McCrum**



A Master's student of public policy at Sciences Po Paris, McCrum runs cultural programming at the American Library in Paris.

About **Jonathan Simons**



Simons is the founding editor of offline publishing house Analog Sea and its literary journal, *The Analog Sea Review*. A poet and essayist, he has written for publications including *The London Magazine*, *PN Review*, and *El País*. He researched Buddhist poetics at Naropa University and McGill University and was a visiting scholar at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Center for Humans and Machines, in Berlin.