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Issue no.4

# **COLLECTIVE** *thoughts.*

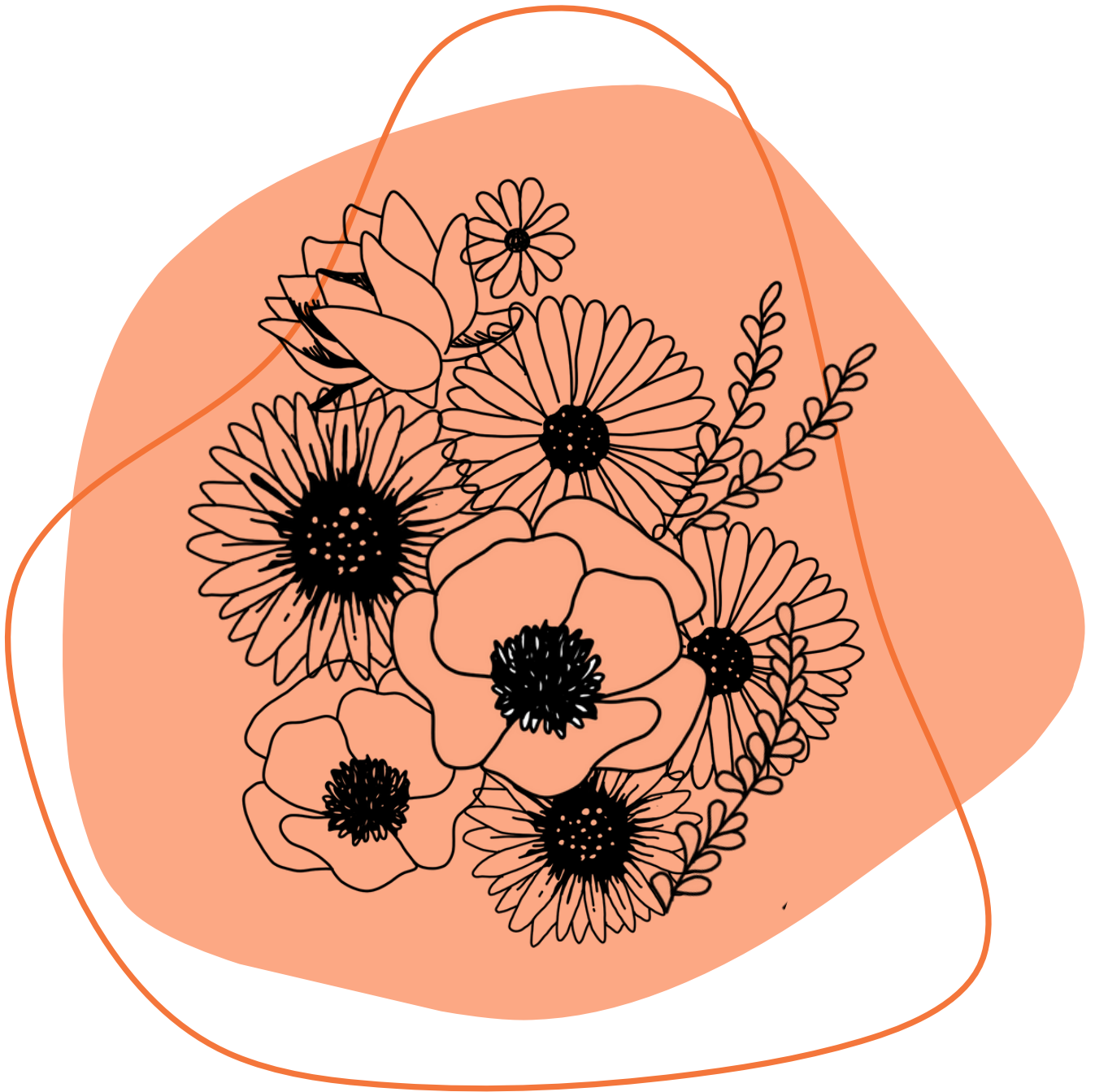


"I wonder if perhaps it is simply a part of the human condition and that freeing oneself from comparison and expectations is simply an illusion, unachievable and certainly unattainable."

"Am I the only one seeing this? Am I the only one scared to just exist without actually living?"

**C.**  
**THE HAGUE**

"The peaceful and stable lifestyle offers so much comfort, a warm blanket over everyday life, until one day we realise we have missed on chances we dreamed of taking, yet felt too comfortable and scared to do so."



# Note From the Editors

Welcome to the Spring edition of Collective Thoughts. This magazine has been a place for the mind and it's thoughts to appear on paper for three wonderful editions now. Unravelling our own mental mysteries as well as those of our surroundings. Exploring the if's and maybe's of our stories and trying to understand those of others. This edition is no different.

As Spring prescribes the old is making room for the new and our thoughts often go through a bit of a 'Spring cleaning'. One could say that this editions is a bit of a 'Spring cleaning' as well. Writing down our thoughts, frustrations, or anything that keeps our mind occupied often results in a peace of mind. It's not a coincidence that many people who have experienced something traumatic are advised to write it down on paper. It can work as a processing mechanism or as a way to lift the weight of the experience of your shoulders.

It can simultaneously make the reader feel like their not alone. Your story can make others feel lighter too. Knowing that they're not alone and that someone else has been through the same or something similar. Whether it be a positive or negative experience. That's what Collective Thoughts hopes to achieve with every new edition. A way to connect to others even if we've never met before.

I wish you a peaceful read.

*Handi van Uliet*

**COLLECTIVE CHAIR  
& EDITOR**

Welcome to Collective Thoughts, our space for self-exploration, personal expression and creative writing. We are proud to present to you a new edition of our magazine, for which we have our team to thank. Without the work, effort and commitment put into creating the articles, design, marketing and organization necessary, this magazine would not be in your hands today.

Throughout this edition, our writers have explored the effect of expectations and comparison to others, different experiences linked to growing up and changing, how different perspectives can shape our perception of a situation and the complex nature of our society. The articles contained in this edition broadcast the voices of young people in search for a better understanding of themselves and the world around them. We are all burdened by our own issues, battling problems and making decisions.

We hope that, by sharing ours, we can inspire you to see your reality and those of the people around you through a new lens. We are grateful to everyone that contributed to this magazine and we hope it inspires you to take action: to seize opportunities and find value within yourself.

Wishing you a happy read,

*Tu Laclau Massaglia*

**C.THOUGHTS MANAGER,  
EDITOR, AND WRITER**

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# where do we go now

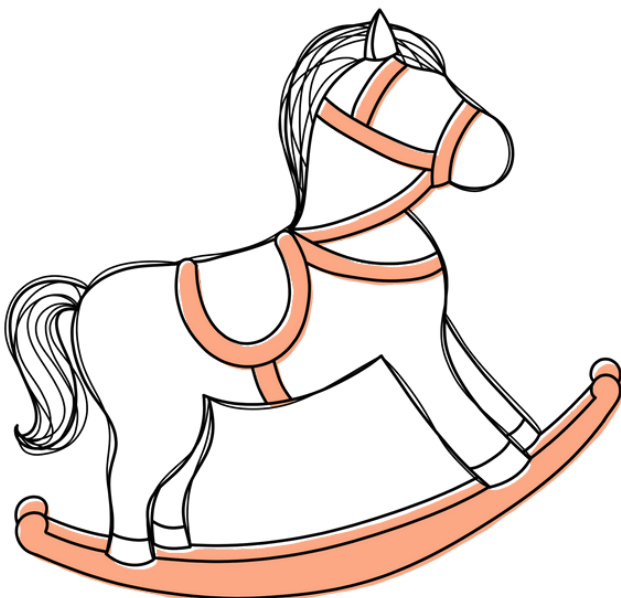
Have you ever wondered where did all the time go?

My grandma loves using this phrase while looking through my old childhood photos. It wasn't until now though, that I have truly grasped the meaning of this wordplay.

When we are fifteen we wish to finally be older enough to be able to go places without permission, to have an occasional drink, to go to bars or to drive a car alone to our friend's house.

Once we turn eighteen, we experience all these things. We are unaware of the few careless moments we have left while we dive into so-called adulthood, without a mere realisation of our dying childhood.

Then we blink twice and we wake up in our twenties, with ghosts welcoming us at the table. Say hi to newly-wed responsibilities. Say hi to taxes and endless apartment hunts. Greet your new best friend: balancing university, work, fun and sanity.



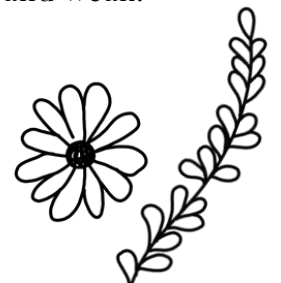
## "inner childs"

they say 20s are for finding ourselves,  
they say 20s are for showing one's progress.  
but what they fail to tell is,  
how painful these years are.  
healing from childhood demons,  
while navigating adulthood monsters.

blown away by responsibilities,  
in search to avoid being someone's liabilities,  
we thrive to make it on our own,  
in a world which doomed our inner childs.  
with our hearts aching to be loved,  
yet taking pills to cease the noise,  
that our brain refuses to stop.

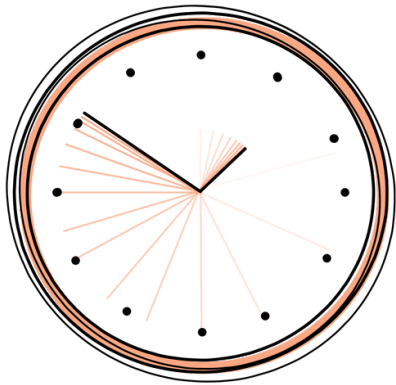
capitalism haunts us in dreamland,  
reminding of things we never had.  
waking up from morning to morning,  
just to discover.  
everything we strived for,  
has left us deaf.

However, after some time, we get used to the spiral, realising we left our toys behind and put on BIG GIRL shoes. At this point, discovering therapy is a blessing in disguise. We learn how to love ourselves unconditionally in all shapes and sizes, while healing from generational trauma. But most importantly, we open our hearts to emotions that were hidden for too long because we were told they made us vulnerable and weak.



## "pain"

to let feelings flow inside  
is to feel pain unimaginable to human kind.  
one buries it within,  
one drowns it in drinks,  
but one can't always carry it beside.  
stay, hold,  
close your eyes,  
to open the body to ache  
experienced only by brave ones.  
because at the end of the tunnel,  
there's still light,  
in the lake of hope and love.



***"Each decision in our lives delivers us different results, bringing us closer to distinct endings. Not to say there are good or wrong choices, because ultimately there are only choices we do or do not regret making. Opportunities we could take, but for some reason we didn't."***

Twenties truly are magical and positively challenging, though, from what I have learnt, they also tend to be very blue. We have to say so many farewells in order to explore ourselves, to see what the world offers us. But what happens when we feel stuck in between? As in, stuck in a peaceful parking lot where you have waved goodbye to your childhood, found slight balance in a never-stopping, busy world. Yet, we don't know whether all we want is stability and consistency with a spice of occasional adventure or to reincarnate into our 18-year-old bodies to experience it all again. Mainly because we're scared of the so-often-referred-to-as-tedious but steady future.

## "gen z"

disconnected from the world,  
blankly staring into screens  
that provide us with no more than addiction.  
searching for validation of strangers  
who never met us,  
telling us to k\*ll ourselves,  
telling us we don't matter.

i wonder where all the kindness went,  
vanished from the earth  
banished from people's hearts.  
when did we become so selfish?  
so self-absorbed, so money-driven,  
attention-seeking, empty caskets.

i miss strangers's smiles,  
with no dishonest intentions,  
with no twisted impressions.  
just simple acts of affection.

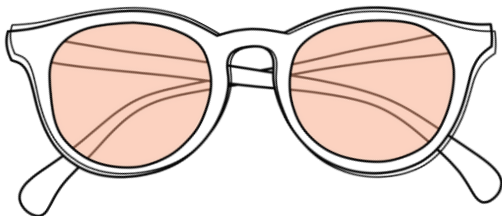
i hope there's more of us,  
dreamers of brighter days,  
waiting for humanity to rise up again.

Such a parking lot holds onto many "what ifs". Even though we could say: "let's live right now and here for the moment", it's okay for our hearts to yearn for answers and possible outcomes. A beautiful book by Matt Haig called *Midnight Library* captures the struggle of regrets, and THE "what ifs". Each decision in our lives delivers different results, bringing us closer to distinct endings. Not to say there are good or wrong choices, because ultimately there are only choices we do or do not regret making. Opportunities we could take, but for some reason we didn't.

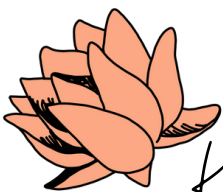
## "point"

what's the point,  
of having clothes we want,  
of travelling where we want,  
of going to schools we want.  
if ultimately the things we cry for,  
are right in front of us,  
waiting to be seen,  
past all the trivialities.  
to be enjoyed,  
to be loved  
and to breathe for.

What if we reached out to the person we truly liked?  
What if we booked the trip to Canada? What if we took  
the freelance job full of uncertainties? What if we  
shared our art with audiences?  
Well, we will never know until we try. The peaceful and  
stable lifestyle offers so much comfort. It's a warm  
blanket over our everyday life, until one day we realise  
we have missed on chances we dreamed of taking, yet  
felt too comfortable and scared to do so.



***"The peaceful and stable lifestyle offers so much comfort, a warm blanket over everyday life, until one day we realise we have missed on chances we dreamed of taking, yet felt too comfortable and scared to do so."***



*Kristina Cakova*

**Kristina is a Communication student who loves to travel, read and enjoys a good cup of coffee. In her writing, she focuses on self-growth, women empowerment and mental health struggle.**

## "regrets"

are the things we wish  
we did differently  
ours to regret?

are people we wish  
we ended up staying with  
people who actually exist?

or is it all  
a flower of fantasy  
deceiving our minds,  
that there's a better life,  
all seen  
with pink blinds.

in one I could have  
stayed with you,  
in the other  
wouldn't remember  
who you are.

but in this one  
at least I know  
I tried.



# The Bubbly Life

“I really liked living in my own little bubble” is a phrase most of us will have uttered at one point or another. We are all familiar with it and so far I’ve never met anyone that doesn’t enjoy the comfort of their own little bubble. This is where we feel safe, we know things work in it, we trust it, and we protect it because it protects us. Does that mean that life is like a bubble too? That depends on what you define as a bubble.

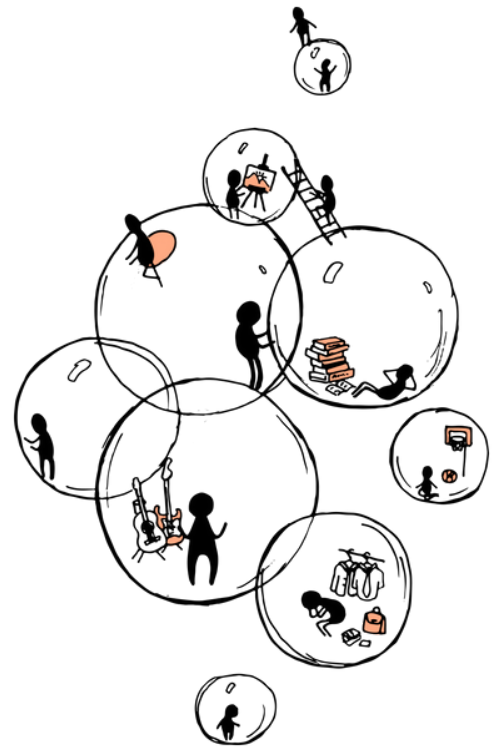
There is not one clear definition of what ‘living in a bubble’ means, but most share two similarities. Living in your own bubble shelters you from the outside world, and it limits you to be surrounded by people similar to you. At first, you might think “So, what’s the problem? Isn’t that convenient?” It is.

Growing up in a bubble leads you to believe that your way of doing things is the way to go. Think about people that have never left their state, town, or even village. Most of them are hardcore defenders of their ways and beliefs. They don’t know or have zero interest in the ways of others. As long as they stay within their bubble this is relatively harmless, but once they venture outside and are confronted with others’ ways and beliefs, this can lead to conflict. Especially when the other opposite party also views their ways and beliefs as the right way to go. It might be a generalization of course, but you get the point.

***"In all these bubbles I see people who are like me"***

Most of us have grown up in a bubble in one way or another and many may have experienced little to no contact with bubbles significantly different from their own. I’ll refer to the bubbles we are familiar with as “basis bubbles”. When thinking about the bubbles of your life family, cultural,

status, societal, religious, and economic bubbles might come to mind for example. This looks like quite a broad list at first, but when I looked at it for myself I noticed one key thing: in all these bubbles I see people who are like me. People that (to some extent) share my values, my point of view regarding what’s appropriate or not, and what one should achieve in life to be successful. It makes me comfortable, maybe a little too comfortable.



Because I don’t want to preach the old “life starts beyond the comfort zone” tale, I will reflect on my own experience and let you decide what to do with it. I grew up, as described above, in my variety of bubbles that were comfortable and filled with people similar to me. However, due to a series of events I began to feel like I didn’t fit the standard of some of my bubbles. As a result, I didn’t feel so welcome anymore in the bubbles I had called home my whole life. It



left me feeling a little heartbroken but mostly feeling excluded and alone. After a while, these feelings made way for a feeling of determination. I was determined to find other bubbles; bubbles that I would feel welcome to. And I did.



The first big step for me was to step away from everything I knew. I wanted to experience something completely different from what I was accustomed to. During my second gap year after high school, I had time to go on my first trip alone. I decided to do something that I'd always wanted to do but had always been too scared to do on my own: backpacking. Not to go find myself as the stereotype prescribes but rather I wanted to find others.

I planned for an 8-month-long backpacking trip and, a few weeks later, I was ready to go. My first stop was Cape Town, South Africa. I've wanted to visit South Africa for as long as I can remember. My name is South African (I'm not) but it always drew my attention. When I was a kid, my parents gifted me a book about two little South African girls -one of whom was called Nandi- and I loved it. It made me curious. I landed on January 26th, 2020 and it felt a little strange. Strangely familiar perhaps. I quickly found out that those who speak Afrikaans can understand my Dutch and vice versa. Many streets and towns had Dutch names and many people didn't even speak English to me. I was hoping to escape the familiar, not run into another familiar.



Days went by and I made friends in the hostel I was staying at. Really good friends even, but since they came from all over the world, they didn't grow up the way I did. They didn't fit my bubbles and I didn't fit theirs. And you know what? We got along tremendously well. We got to know our different bubbles, mixed them where we could, and accepted them where we couldn't. After about 6 weeks, we said goodbye as we all went our separate ways again. Some of them headed home, some to other countries and I travelled on to Thailand, ready to do it all again.

**"It is not necessarily resemblance that bonds people together. It's often accepting differences that attracts and excites"**

It didn't last very long, unfortunately. Covid-19 took over the world at a rapid pace and I was forced to go back home after only 7 weeks of traveling. However, I still keep the memories of those six weeks in Cape Town as one of the happiest times of my life. For the first time ever, I fit in, even though my new friends and I were nothing alike.

It took me months to realize that it is not necessarily a resemblance that bonds people together. It's often accepting differences that attract and excites, although it takes a bit more effort and determination. But, It gives you so much more in return: different perspectives, norms, values, cultures, and ways of life. It helped me realize that bubbles are not limitations, they are doorways to new beginnings.

*Nandi van Vliet*

**Nandi is a Dutchie and a third year ICM student. She loves to travel the world and meet those that make it beautiful. In her free time she likes spending time with friends while making finding the best coffees in town a sport. Her articles usually evolve around thoughts about the things you normally don't think about.**

# OLD IS THE NEW

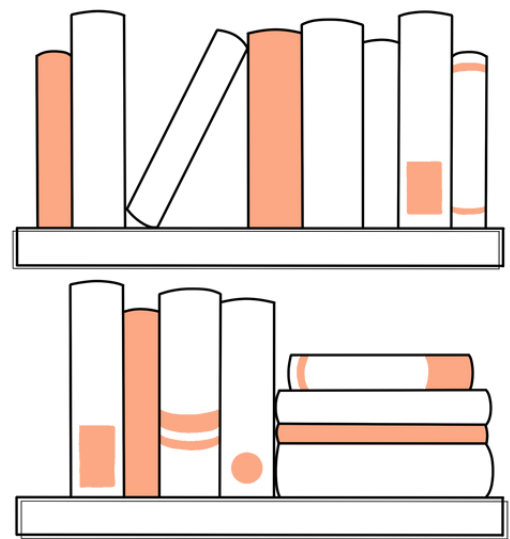
May this be an ode to all things old: architecture, lands, people, manners and habits, like talking to strangers in public. The Central Library in The Hague is one of my all time favorite places to do so. It carries -or used to, before its renovation- this old time charm that only manifests after something or someone has lived at least one lifetime.

There used to be this massive chandelier hanging from the ceiling on the ground floor of the cafeteria that looked like a tarantula spider and underneath it sat a group of knitting women. This group would gather there religiously every Sunday. Instead of visiting a church, these ladies would sit around a table sipping tea and discussing gossip. How magical you can sip on both, simultaneously. The scene looked as if the spider was about to devour them any time soon and the women were lulling it to harmlessness with the repetitive motion of looping fabric onto a metal hook turning it into a wearable piece.

***"May this be an ode to all things old. Architecture, lands, people, manners, habits - like talking to strangers in public."***

I would go there to focus on whatever I needed to get done, but I would always get easily distracted with all the life happening around me. There used to be an old lady reading her daily newspaper with a magnifying glass. Across from her, a large steaming espresso machine, resembling the Titanic.

A cup of coffee too can make one travel, either forward in time to a moment that isn't dreadful 6am or backwards, slowing time down to make the world revolve around the little plate underneath the coffee cup. I have always thought of it as a pretty but useless accessory. Now I know one's life must be filled with a bountiful of those eye candy pretty things that serve no purpose.



This year, they finished the renovations on the library. It looks different now. Ironically, the library has less books now and more computers. The only thing that remained is the regulars. The year is new but the good old things remain. A year too grows old. So I moved from the last year in Slovakia to the new year in the Netherlands.

With it, I moved into the new me with new resolutions looking for the old patterns in the new places. I started out this year wanting to take up running because I can

feel my spine curve as if to fit in a grave at 25 years old. Another resolution is to talk more to strangers in public rather than on dating apps. Where I'm from, which is a tiny village in rural Slovakia, there's so few people that everyone greets each other no matter the time of day.

There is a village shop that opens at most four times a week and I've come to believe that the shopkeeper only runs it to keep herself up to date with the village gossip. This is where the olds and regulars return to in my homeland instead of a library. Time in both moves at its own pace.



On my last visit to the Hague public library, I walked in slightly disappointed by the white walls and empty space aesthetic it has been given. Contrary to popular opinion, I like maximalist places. I like walls covered top to bottom with memories hoarded over time. It takes a lifetime to collect memories worth displaying on one's walls.

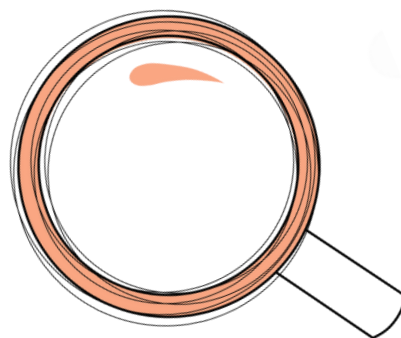
### ***"Time in libraries moves at its own pace"***

So I walked into the sterile cafeteria of the library, ordered a soda and sat down at a table with the intention to read the winning title of the annual French Choix Goncourt. Before I could even open to my bookmarked page, my eyes landed on a man a few tables away from me. I had noticed him on my previous visits but never properly observed him like I allowed myself to do this time.

This roughly 75-year-old man, slouching above a table with a pair of tweezers got my undivided attention. He was fully absorbed in his activity of pulling little colorful tiles from a template and carefully crafting an image on

a plate in front of him. He built a fortress around himself with three boxes filled with a collection of his previous work. I could spot a cat peeking out of one of the boxes and that alone charged me with enough courage to leave my table and walk to his.

He didn't pay much attention to me as he had a more pressing matter to focus on: the head of Vincent van Gogh. I took the liberty to join him at his desk, at which point he offered me a windmill postcard made of blue and white pixels. I followed his hands, which resembled the branches of a tree, as they picked brown tiles and laid them down intuitively to make Vincent's iconic hat.



"It's called pixel art. Here is my business card. I've been doing this as a hobby for 15 years." There were key chains, postcards of different format, magnets, I bet he could even make my portrait upon request.

It wasn't so much the art itself that left me in awe but his devotion to it. A 15-year-long hobby that might have started as a frustration, but turned into an effortless routine now and oh so beautiful. He confessed he comes to the library every day. I didn't ask, but I'm sure he orders the same drink and leaves at the same time every day too.

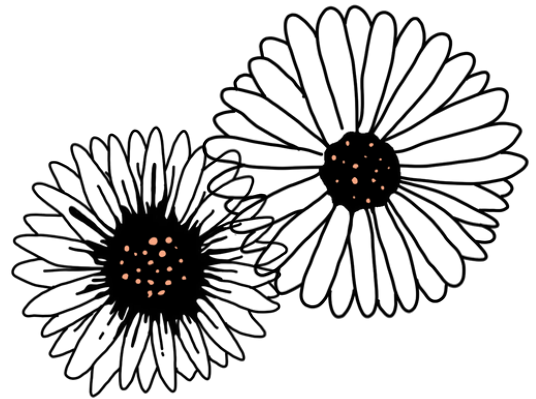
While I was browsing his treasure boxes, I thought of his life outside the library. He has an audience here, but is there anyone to watch him at home, to look at the pictures he crafted each day and listen to the stories he collected? I didn't ask; I might be better off not knowing.

## **"I made a new new year resolution – to fit in my grave old"**

I picked two keychains, one windmill postcard to send to my mother and one cat postcard to keep for myself –the one I had laid my eyes on before I ever learnt his name. All this for €9 paid directly to his bank account via Tikkie. “He’s not so old,” I thought, chuckling to myself. I stood up with hands full of treasures and walked back to my table my soul full of joy.

I find pleasure in the daily routine of these strangers. I feel familiar with them at this point. We all gather here religiously, the Sunday Women’s Knitting Club, the lady with the magnifying glass, the retired photographer saving on gas, the old man that uses tweezers as his art tool and me, swiping tables left and right with my gaze. No dating app could compare.

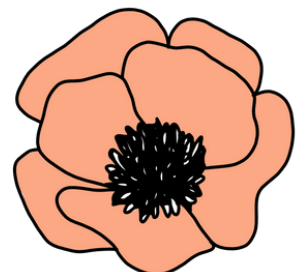
No matter the design of the library, I leave it feeling rejuvenated every time. As if an hour of time in between its walls had allowed me to collect a lifetime of stories. I feel as if I have lived a bunch and it’s mostly my spine that shows it. I made a new New Year’s resolution: I want to fit in my grave old. I want to fit in it having lived a fulfilling life. Ideally, one full of stories like this one.



*Veronika Puškašová*



**Veronika is a third year European studies student. She loves all things creative, cinema, cats, and clementines. Coincidences too.**



# the struggle with comparison

***This text is for anyone sometimes questioning their experience as a twenty-something year old***

So many of us struggle, particularly in our twenties, with finding our identity and voice. It's often tainted by others' expectations and the nagging feeling of comparison to our friends and peers at university.

***"Our twenties are particularly peculiar because people move in very different directions at a vastly different pace, making it difficult to even relate to your closest friends."***

I have noticed within my own group of friends, who all left their home countries to study in the Netherlands, that they struggle particularly with this, something I can deeply relate to. It seems that people who never left their home and, therefore did not have to start over, develop much quicker. I am now 24 years old and most of my friends back home are done with their studies and going into the work field. Many are in committed relationships, some thinking about or already moving in with their partners. They have well-established social circles that they rarely break out of.

When I speak to them on the phone, conversations about getting a puppy or where they want to go on vacation arise. Meanwhile, I am still living the student life, often struggling to pay my rent and occasionally relying on a parent, awkwardly asking if I can borrow some money.

Sometimes, it is difficult in these moments not to feel left behind. At other times I feel a sense of superiority in having a more vast or interesting experience, whilst they are already settling into adult life. There can be a feeling of distance or misunderstanding toward the people we grew up with, our closest friends, whilst "new" friends from university are easier to relate to.

Personally, I have sometimes felt a sense of shame about this, especially since these are people who have been in my life for over ten years, who have had my back and supported me through all the ups and downs of my adolescence.



**FOMO**



Contrary to these friends, there is also a growing number of twenty-something year olds who have extended their gap year or work and travel experience indefinitely. It seems that parental and societal pressures to immediately go into higher education with a focus on achieving a high paying job afterwards are being challenged. Within certain cultures, it has become acceptable to take some time to “find yourself” and figure out what you are passionate about before enrolling into a study programme or starting your career. Many young people seem to stray from the traditional path, making the experience of twenty-something-year-olds even more diverse and complex. Perhaps, we are one of the first generations in which people of the same age often cannot relate to one another. After all, the term “fear of missing out” (FOMO) arose and is now frequently used to describe the experience of Gen Z.



***"A comforting thought I like to remember, when questioning how I am spending my twenties, is that even with the heightened comparison through social media, the concept of “the grass is greener on the other side” is certainly not new. I wonder if perhaps it is simply a part of the human condition and that freeing oneself from comparison and expectations is simply an illusion, unachievable and certainly unattainable..."***

We are the first generation that has grown up with social media, constantly subjected to comparison and endless possibilities of how we could or should be spending our time. On the positive side, we enjoy many privileges and freedoms that prior generations did not have. However, this also means that there have never been more possibilities, opportunities and experiences to miss out on. It could be said that young people are spoiled by the abundance of options, and whilst this is a nice problem to have, it can be overwhelming.

*Sarah Sophie Richter*

**Sarah is a 2nd year student of the International Communications programme at THUAS. She grew up in Germany but likes to explore new cultures by moving around as much as possible. In her freetime she likes to explore different styles of art but her favourites are photography and surrealism.**



# one last deep breath



Dear you know who,

I am on the top of The Mountain in a small snowstorm. It is quiet... finally, it is quiet. The snow absorbs sound, which means that it brings silence into the world. Sometimes, I wish it would snow in my mind as well, or in my soul. I sit down on the cold white blanket. I am by myself here. My snowboard, still bound to my feet, is my only companion. The visibility is very low. I cannot see anything further than 5 metres away. Everything is white. It is like a veil covering my eyes and giving a touch of purity over everything that my sight can comprehend.

Should I be afraid? One could wonder how it would be possible to go down the slope without going off track. Still, what keeps me up here is the peace that I feel, not the fear. For the first time in a while, I feel like... like I can breathe. In this silence, my shallow breaths cannot be heard. But why are my breaths shallow? I am by myself here, hugged by snow. There is nothing to be afraid of this far away from everything. I can breathe in deeply and... breathe out without worry. It is a conscious action. I feel every movement that my body is doing during this exercise. Tears start forming and falling down my cheeks. I cannot stop them; I can only feel them. I am focused on my deep breathing. The cold air is filling my lungs and, in return, I give in return tears and warm breaths. I take off my ski mask and my helmet. Where my tears fall, the snow melts. I close my eyes.

My mind tends to form unclear images that make me nervous. They tend to come as a

wave to shatter me into pieces. But I am up here and they cannot touch me. I am focusing on my deep breaths. The darkness that I see with my eyes shut becomes softer. There is a new image that starts coming to life. I see a field full of green grass and colourful flowers. I am sitting against a tree with branches that are sometimes touching the ground and other times hugging me. I hear a laughter so clear and pure. I am not afraid or alone. There is a girl that rises from the tall grass.

She comes towards me. She wears short sleeves and some long green pants. She runs into my arms. She is so light and her laughter does not stop. She touches my face and, with her thumb, she wipes away the tears that keep falling. She has a certain light around her that I cannot place. She messes with my short hair and I do the same to hers. We are laughing together. I lay down in that meadow. She does not let go of her embrace. We just lay there without saying a word for I do not know how much time: I lost track of it. What is time anyway? Here there is no such concept.

At some point, we stand up. She takes my hand and starts running. I follow her, not because I have no other choice, but because I want to. We run and jump around, laughing. The flowers are catching us when we fall back on the ground. This smell of fresh air gives me peace.

The sky is clear. I have not looked at the sky in a while. When was the last time that I

looked up? That girl's tiny hand is still in mine. It is so soft. Sometimes she pulls my hand gently to make sure that I am still there. Her short blond hair is a mess, but she does not care. Her green eyes are admiring every detail of the view before us. I do the same. We are so much alike. We have the same smile, even if mine can be seen only behind the tears that never stopped falling.

She knows that I must go soon. She reaches into one of her pockets. She is searching for something. When she takes her hand out, she has that something in her small fist. She waits for me to give her my hand. She opens her fist, allowing me to see a ray of light in her palm. I take it and put it somewhere safe in my heart. I store it there for eternity, maybe in this way I will never forget about it ever again. I hug her tightly once more. She hugs me back and holds on to me, or I hold on to her, I do not know. I take one last deep breath. "I will never leave you again. We should come here more often. I promise I will never see the hat," I say before opening my eyes. I am back in the snowstorm. I am back in that silence.

This is the last time I will go down this mountain. I want to stretch this a little bit more, but time is just a concept invented by humans to bring value to their lives, to the minutes spent on doing a task, shared with someone or spent travelling. Humans like to quantify everything so they can have an asset that they can give in return for something else.

But my dear you know who, we do not have time. We do not own time. This concept started to eat us alive. We are asking everyone for a few seconds to be able to add to ours. We are trying to add to our "value" by asking for somebody else's time. It is like we are borrowing, but we will never be able to give it back. We start getting upset or hurt because we do not have or receive enough time in return. We continuously worry that we will run out if our inventory is not supplied by someone.

We even say "thank you for your time" like we took it and put it in our little box to store it for later.

If time is so precious, why when we share a memory, we never quantify how much time we spent on making it? We barely remember the concept of time when we tell a story. We do not even know what time is anymore because it does not matter. It matters that those actions happened. When we say "thank you for the memory", we store it in a little box in our hearts.



Think about the stars. When the sky is clear we can see so many. Astronomers define the stars' brightness in terms of apparent magnitude. The standard distance for that is 32.6 light-years. To be more specific, the light we see has already travelled several light-years. In other words, the light that is projected is an actual living memory. The star already lit a spot in the galaxy and we now see only parts of its past. When we stop and stare, do we think about time? Their time or ours? No.

**"When we look at the stars, we see how they looked years ago. It is possible that some of them do not even exist anymore. This is how insignificant and abstract time can be. There is no way to find out the present state of the stars. "**

Stars are special in their own way. Humans create shapes from their position or try to predict the future



There is an entire map of how they are placed or what constellation they form. But who decided that? We can form different images by ourselves by connecting some of them.

Even if we see the stars close to one another, in reality, they can be light-years away from each other. We are making up stories and giving them more power than they should have over us as we give in to the concept of time.

There is the Orion Nebula, from where the stars are born from clouds of gas and dust. We will never be able to see a star that was just born. I saw the nebula recently through a telescope. It was by mistake, to be honest. I just stood in line to watch something celestial through that big invention. I wanted to ask what I was going to see, but I preferred not to. I just wanted to feel closer to the sky. I saw the Nebula from which some stars are born. My thought was: maybe people are Nebulas for memories.



We create memories in the same way stars are born: we only see them after a while. No matter how far some memories are from one another, we tend to connect them because they make us who we are. For some, memories are the only reason to stay alive.

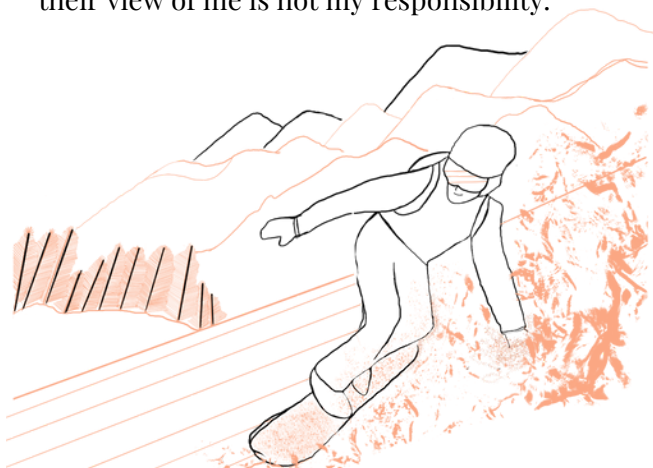
We both know where I am when I am giving you all these thoughts. I am on my last ride for a lot of things and I am only a few steps away from saying goodbye to a lifestyle that I followed my whole life. Yes, I am terrified. Yes, I have no idea what is going to happen. And yes, I am tired of all the questions. Maybe that is why I like to be here, on the top of the mountain. I am far away from everyone that is whispering in my ear, asking for information that I do not have

or from people that think that I am falling on my own. There is no pressure up in the mountain. The air is purer. I have the feeling that I want to stretch time a little bit more, but there is no point in doing that. I have my memories. Maybe I could have done more, maybe I missed a lot of opportunities, but I do not know that for sure. I am happy with my achievements. I found out that I am made from different pieces that might never come together to form a complete picture. I learned to keep them close to me and connect with them when I need them.

I met people that, at a certain moment, had little to no effect on me. But when I randomly passed by them later, they gave me the energy that I needed to go on. They recognized me and asked me with so much kindness how I am. I did not try to avoid the question like I sometimes do. I answered honestly with a shy smile, even if I was sad that day. They told me that they feel lucky to have seen me blossom. They were curious about how I will end up. In return, I was surprised they recognized me.

I am in a snowstorm in my life, just like I am right now on the top of this mountain. Nobody can guarantee that I will not go off track, not even me. Still, even if I do, that does not mean that I cannot find my way back to the slope or that I will not reach it at a certain point. Furthermore, we both know that I like a bit of adrenaline. I am prepared because I trust my body and my board. I must get lost sometimes in order to find a smoother path. I am not rushing anything either. I am just moving forward.

Some people will never see me for who I am. However, after showing them my true colours, their view of me is not my responsibility.



I am working on not caring anymore. Sometimes, even if the truth is exactly in front of them, I cannot force them to see it. I am not stuck.

I will never be stuck as long as I continue to believe in the light that I have inside me. The light that was given back to me by that little blond girl.



It is time for me to get up, my dear you know who. It is time for me to get up and have one last dance on this mountain with my board. I will lead and follow the melody of the snowstorm. I still cannot see anything around me, just the whiteness of the snow. The tears stopped falling a while ago. I am putting back my ski mask and my helmet. I am back on my feet. I take another deep breath and let myself slide downhill. My body knows exactly how to move without me thinking too much or at all. I leave my mark on the fresh snow. Maybe it will be covered soon or it might remain there, I will never know. I fall, but I am caught by a soft powder. I get up. I am alone but full of adrenaline. I am enjoying every second of this journey. My moves are fast and fluid. I know exactly what I am supposed to do. I have gathered the experience I need during all my previous journeys. My breathing is deep and constant. I feel the cold embracing me once again. I sense the last turn coming before reaching the intersection. The snowflakes kiss me goodbye one more time and I jump to answer. It was the perfect jump. I have enough speed and I pass by all the other people that are struggling to move past the flat portion. I reach the finish line. I take one last deep breath. I look back at the mountains again with a smile before going into the village.

It is snowing peacefully. I sit down and light a cigarette before dropping off my equipment. I still have one more moment to myself. I take a deep breath.

I am not sure if I am ready for what is coming next. I cannot see further than 5 metres ahead. However, as I did earlier, I will trust my instincts and what I learned so far. I have the people that I love and the light in my heart with me at every step. It is not a goodbye. It is moving forward to a different kind of adventure. I take another deep breath.


I do not know when the next time I will send you a letter will be, but I promise that I will not stop writing. Thank you for keeping my thoughts safe. Thank you for all the memories that we shared. I will have you in my heart always.

***"I take one last deep breath before the last words."***

With a smile accompanied by tears,

Someone that closes a book to start another one.



*Flavia-Ioana Tofan* 

**Flavia is trying to live her life to the fullest. She is passionate about everything that makes her want to break her comfort zone. She loves to crawl inside books and find new worlds to live in.**



# WORK IN PROGRESS

*Whilst I look at people passing by, heads full of swirling thoughts and days packed with tight schedules, I am slowly losing myself. My whole life I have been fighting for my future, dedicating day and night to it; sacrificing my time, and for what? I am no working bee, but still, that is what we all are. Am I the only one seeing this? Am I the only one scared to just exist without actually living? No one seems to care. It makes me wonder:*

I look out the corner at actual trade:  
The workers are fighting for lingering braids,  
The hair is now covered in dead-stinking grease  
While two rubber bands are still hanging at ease.

*Are we really free?*

A fly calmly lands on a swollen-red nose,  
It crawls up the eyelids: the day-lights expose  
How pale is the face and how low are the eyes,  
The ones that have shrunk, that have ruptured in size.

The factory's boiling, it's loaded with work:  
It's jammed, full of sweat; forces people to lurk.  
The time to clean up just keeps slipping away,  
The body is staying right here for display.

The C-belt is rattling, the wires – they squeak:  
It's wholly her fault, she was just being weak.  
It's not like this never occurred here before,  
There's always a line, there will always be more.

The sounds of quick steps have an instant effect,  
Someone is coming! No space for neglect!  
The bag gets ripped off, plastic touches the walls,  
They shove her by arms, she gets dragged through the halls.

The metal is stained, and the scrubbing will ache –  
The CEO board always mentions mistakes:  
No overtime pay, no insurance support,  
One more extra case and the gas will come short.



The hair! Oh, the hair, what a shame! What a loss!  
The money you get for such length... Golden cross!  
Decide now, and quicker, who gets it? Whose fault?  
Who's bringing the goods through the cooling down  
vault?

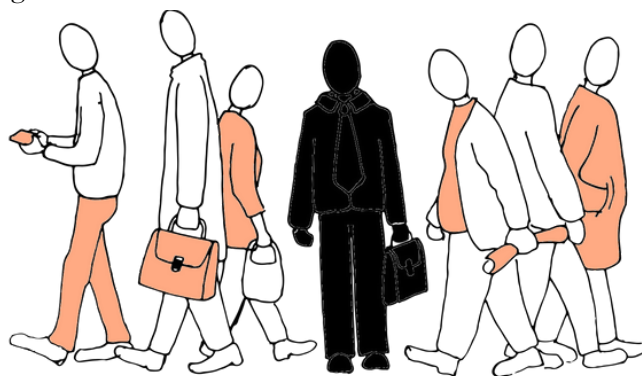
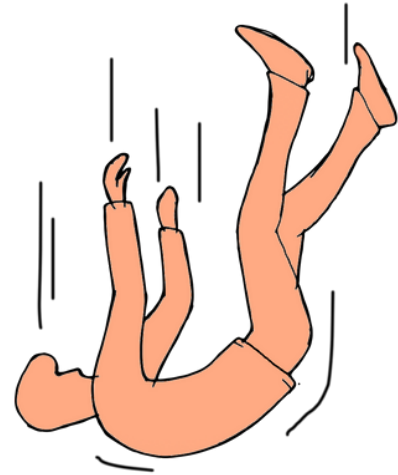
Her mother and sisters, they don't need to know.  
We'll tell them that all of us, all undergo  
The stripping, the shedding – the rules of the floor.  
You die while at work, you belong to the four:

The knife, for the cutting, for organs inside,  
The scissors, for locks that spread curly and wide,  
The chainsaw, for ivory bones and the skull,  
The axe, for the chopping, for skin that is dull.

The clatter of heels, and the air smells like stone.  
The beast stands there abruptly, strangely alone.  
Its head is half-masked, and its smile – silver teeth,  
It's staring, its eyes full of blood, switching heaths.

Now everyone parted. The honour is spread.  
It's down with the bowing of everyone's Head.  
The noise's standing still and the rattling is hushed.  
The corpse has been carried away. It's been gushed.

The tick of the hours is coming to life.  
The C-belt is running, there's no need for strife.  
The moment of quarrelling stays in the past...  
And suddenly there is a new screaming blast.



*Pana Khazina*

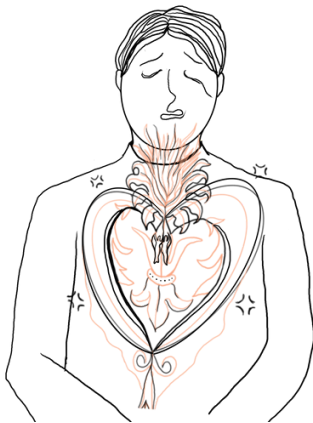


**Pana is a second-year ICM student at THUAS with a strong sense of justice and an undying desire to fight for human rights. She enjoys writing poetry and is a big animal lover. Despite being a full-time student, she still finds time to enjoy her hobbies and self-develop.**

# a glimpse into a mess of thoughts

I have never felt like this before. I opened my eyes and took a deep breath. Deep inside my stomach something was happening. It felt like an electric current that made me want to jump out of my chair and start running around. I expected it to last for only a moment, but as seconds passed, I realised this energy was still there, accumulating in my gut.

I could not stand up right then and there. I was in the middle of a class. I was not sure whether the feeling would escalate into an unbearable anxiety that would get me to bang my legs up and down in my seat. It could also just dissolve into nothing. Honestly, it could go anywhere from there, but it meant something big was going to happen; that much I knew.



Because my body was forced to stay still, my brain was left to wonder. It ran a deep analysis of every sensation on my skin, in my gut, in my chest. I felt every muscle as it bounced my leg up and down, my finger joints as they articulated their tips against my keyboard and the way my collar felt slightly too tight around my neck.

Parallel to that, my mind was going through every possible reason for the feelings I was having.

It may have been even worse than looking it up, because my mind leapt from panic attack to heart attack to imminent death in a matter of seconds. Still, there is no outrunning a tsunami once the water has started to grow against the shore, so I could do nothing but explore the feelings within my body and let them happen as they wished



**"There are some moments in life that we can tell will change our life forever. It can be anything: a hello, a goodbye, trying something new or realising something for the very first time. At this exact time, I could tell that something meaningful was going on in the back of my mind."**

I had been sad, burying myself in work and loneliness for a long time. Anything to escape the fact that I was terrified.

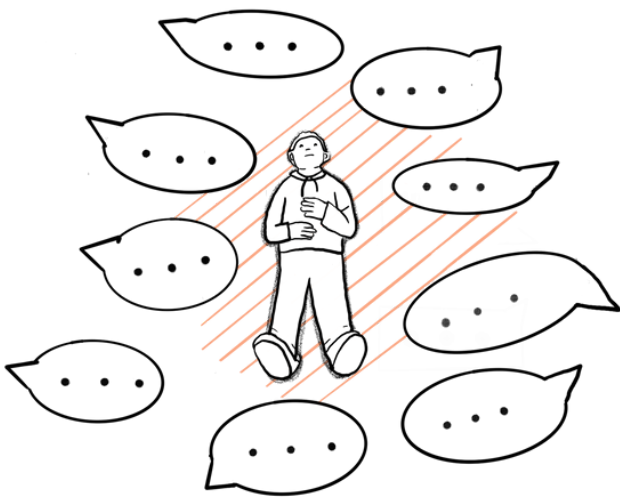
At the same time, I was running away from the reason for my fear. How had the nightmares got so bad that they kept me awake for days at a time? Why was my mind playing such nasty tricks on me at a time like this? Upon arriving on my exchange, I was told by everyone that this was going to be the best time of my life. No other point was going to even remotely come close to the experience of being on exchange. Then why did I feel so broken and empty? Was this the best I could ever feel?

Still, I stuck with it. I stayed on my exchange, went to the events, met the people I was expected to befriend and did everything I was supposed to do.

It was immensely draining and painful to have to look like a happy person at the prime of their life when my heart had been recently stomped on and there was nothing anyone could say or do that could make me feel whole again.

The sleepless nights started subsiding and my will to exist near others started becoming once again part of my daily life. Some days were harder than others, but as far as I was told, this is the way it is supposed to be.

Things were slowly starting to look up with the beginning of classes and the befriending of some extremely nice people that seemed willing to care about me when others would not



Then, the phone call that once again sent my heart to hell. Every word that I had been dreading for months was released and thrown in my face. How was I supposed to feel better after that moment? How was I ever going to be a full person when right there and then I felt like the slightest touch could have torn me to pieces?

Still, there was no running from reality. I arrived home, saw my flatmate and curved my lips in the happiest smile I could pull off. Did I want to watch a movie? No, the only thing I wanted was to bury myself in my bed like I had been doing for the past week, but I decided I was not going to let anything turn the best time of my life into hell.

So I watched a movie every single night, I went

out, treated myself, studied, worked and did everything that I was supposed to do as the carefree exchange person I was expected to be.

With the sunset in front of my window every night and some of the bubbliest people I have ever met around me, it was not difficult to accept that this is who I was supposed to be from then on.

The next few days were a combination of highs and lows that ended up leaving me dizzy from the complex emotions and the heart-breaking realisation that life as I knew it was over. You were out of the deal and I had to come to terms with it. At least I had got some closure. You had made the choice with me. It had not been me who single headedly had decided it

was looking at the sunset from up a hill the next time I saw your text. My new friend told me to ignore you, but I could not leave you when you needed help. So, I gave up what was best for me to help you once again. I let you into my life and I realised how much I had missed you, even if it had not even been three full days.

After that, life became a turmoil of feelings again. Over and over, I questioned my choice and wondered if I had been too harsh. You are, after all, going through a lot right now. Maybe I should have been more patient? But I did not have a lot of time to wonder: a few days later, you texted again and again.

I was watching the sunset with friends when I saw your message. It seems to be in the evenings that you realise that I am no longer there next to you. I looked at it and for the first time something happened. I could not put my finger on it, but there was this ongoing sensation deep in my gut. This restlessness that would not leave my body regardless of what I did.

It was insignificant enough to ignore for a few days, but suddenly, it intensified into this electricity that overtook my body in the middle

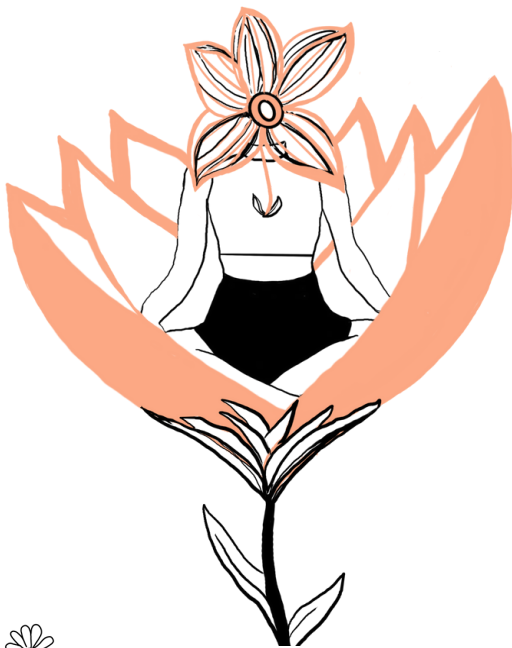
of a class and sent my mind into a wild hunt for answers. Would it have been better if I had just replied to you? Would the restless electricity have stopped burning inside my flesh then?

I had been sitting still trying to do damage control for what I believed to be the beginning of a strong panic attack when it hit me. Why had I assumed this energy was a bad thing? What if this is what freeing myself from you felt like? What if this is all the positive energy that I had not allowed myself to feel because I had been too busy pinning over you?

A smile curved my lips at this realisation. You might be the person I am destined to end up with or we might never speak again. I may end up looking back at my exchange as the best time of my life or I may hate the second I opted to leave my home. But the question is: who cares? None of that is a part of reality. I had been so busy partly living back home and partly in my exchange, partly being yours and partly hating your guts, partly missing everything and partly falling in love with this new city that I had not realised that I have already started growing here.

Plans are coming and going, my classes were a mess and then they got solved, I met the most amazing people and I got bored out of my mind, I danced at the beach and I sang at the top of my lungs. All of that in only two weeks of being here.

***"I do not believe in missing out and I do not believe in regret, and I love this way of living. It is freeing and it lets me grow and change without added pain."***

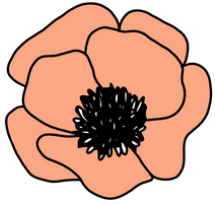


When I realised this, a question popped up in my mind. It felt like all the electricity got released into my bloodstream. As sudden as it had started, it vanished into the biggest smile I had had in a long time. With the feeling still overtaking my whole body, I grabbed a pen and scribbled on the edge of my notebook: "I'm not going to let any opportunities pass anymore. It's time to take a leap."

*Ju Laclau Massaglia*

**Ju is a second year Communication student with a big passion for books and writing. She is a work in progress that is continuously trying to be a verb instead of a noun.**





# CAN YOU RELATE

How often do you watch a TikTok video, read a tweet or scroll through Instagram and see someone or something that you can relate to? When we hear of or see new trends or topics, don't we usually look for a trusted voice or someone we think would be funny or insightful in a way we like? In 2023, most of the content we consume is specifically catered to us, it's tailor-made for each of us. Relatability refers both to scenarios that are appealing to most people or people themselves being relatable in how they do things. This applies to even the most mundane tasks, like getting ready for school or making their morning coffee.

This isn't an entirely new concept. It's been around for decades - for example, in the family-centred tv shows we watched, the teenage romance novels we read and obviously the adverts we saw. Back then, the content or entertainment was generally relatable. It didn't necessarily have to portray the exact life or scenario the target audience experienced, it just had to give people a sense of familiarity or even just understanding.

Nowadays, many of us expect to see content in which we can directly see ourselves. When we think of relatability we think of shared experiences, similar realities and a sense of being part of a community. Whether your corner of the internet is cooking, cleaning, fashion, painting or books, there is a community to be found and influencers who are at the helm of it.



As a black woman in her early 20s, being able to see someone who looks like me and has the same life experiences as me is very important. Life can sometimes be isolating and lonely, especially when you're far away from home. Seeing someone who is reassuring and comforting can make all the difference between feeling like you're the only one going through problems and knowing that you'll make it out to the other side of the issue. Sometimes, it's the smallest things that endear us to someone, maybe it's the way they dress or the music they like or even how cute their pet is! With all the stresses of the world, on most days we just want to watch something light-hearted and entertaining to take our minds off everything else. Whether it's a video on how to organise your closet, a thread on wholesome stories or a post on winter outfit inspiration, we want to be able to see ourselves in it.

***'When we think of relatability we think of shared experiences, similar realities and a sense of being part of a community.'***

I feel that in an attempt to connect with those like us, we have started isolating ourselves by expecting others to act a certain way, to act in a way that we can identify with. When you spend a lot of time engaging with someone's content, it's common to feel like you know them well or in some instances are friends with them. We can often feel like we have the same life especially if the content is about someone working in the same field as you, a university student in the same program as you or even just a random stranger who shows their daily routine. Change isn't something we always willingly welcome, especially when it comes to things that we've grown fond of or care for dearly. When an influencer or online



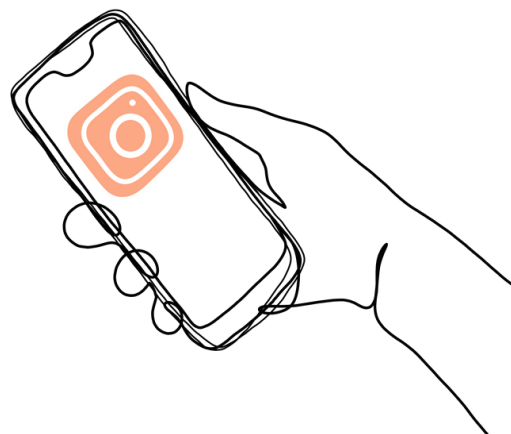
personality you follow suddenly changes how they do things or starts creating content that is different, it can sometimes be hard to reconcile that people change and things won't always stay the same. Over the past few months, I've had to ask myself if I would stop following someone or liking their content because they changed their content drastically. What if their content becomes too perfect and curated? One of the things many people look for is someone who is authentic and genuine. If someone feels or looks too perfect, it can be hard to relate to them because we aren't perfect and our lives aren't carefully put together at all times!

**'Seeing someone who is reassuring and comforting in how they speak or do things can make all the difference between feeling like you're the only one going through problems and knowing that you'll make it out to the other side of the issue.'**

When I think of relatability or look for relatable content, I mostly look for people who look like me, who have the same interests as me and who share my thoughts on certain topics. I think most people do. We often talk about people being stuck in a bubble or echo chamber and, whilst everyone should be open to new ideas and differing opinions, it can sometimes be a blessing to have a group of people who are supportive and give you a sense of belonging. When I look for or need some inspiring words about loving myself and feeling confident in my body, I look for someone who looks like me or someone I can identify with.

Representation is something we have heard over and over again, a concept that many people still feel is unnecessary or isn't worth getting upset over. However, feeling represented or seen in the media we consume is something everyone wants, consciously or unconsciously. Sometimes what makes a funny story funny or a cute outfit cute is whether we can envision ourselves in that same scenario or style.

When discussing social media, influencers and the impact they have on us, I think it is



important to remember that there are people behind our screens. Even the most wholesome content creators are still people like you and me. If we expect people to do things the exact same way we do things and expect them to live their lives exactly like we do, we lose the diversity and differences that make life -and social media- as interesting! How we interact with and internalise social media has become a big part of our lives, for better or for worse. Maybe I'm alone in this line of thinking or maybe you've thought of this too. All I can say is we should be careful about the expectations we put on others and the influence they have on us. We all experience different pressures in our lives to do things or think a certain way. When we put pressure on others to act in a way we ourselves can't live up to, it's bound to lead to disaster or, at the very least, disappointment; which is again something we can all relate to!

*Rumbidzai Mudzongo*



**Rumbi is a third year law student. She loves reading and writing but spends most of her time now watching movies and documentaries. She's trying to write and explore deeper more creative ideas.**



# WE MADE A PROMISE

**YOU ARE HERE.** That's good. Now we can start. Where are we going today, you might wander? Well, somewhere close enough to reality and not exactly far from the truth. I will leave it to you, my dear reader, to figure that out for yourself. Because the problem with fate is that only mortals are unfortunate enough to deal with it. I was there when I had to witness the complicated ways of fate.

Maybe the air was a bit too suffocating and the pub was a bit too dark, but I remember well the day when athis group of gentlemen were playing pool. They were meeting to play every week, in fact, and they were quite inseparable too. The oldest was wearing his signature red vest because everyone was calling him the Lion. Why? Better not to find out. Some say it's because of that scar he has on his lower lip and some say it's because of his temper during the match.

The Lion's brother has a similar reputation. He is known to have inherited the same temper; that's why he is called the Hyena. Along these predators there was also the Shark. Nothing can stand between the Shark and the break at the beginning of a game. He is known to always be the first shot and choose the solid balls.

And last but not least, their leader. Even though he doesn't seem like a very good player, he always has a last-minute trick to pull out his sleeve. There wasn't a move that the leader couldn't predict.

That night, a deal was set by one of the men that thought himself good enough to go up against the group. A lot of money was at stake and one thing was certain: neither of the parties wanted to lose.

The group already started to exchange looks after the Shark made the first move and sank two balls, leaving them in the lead.

"We should stop letting him open every time. It's getting boring," the Hyena said, elbowing his brother and laughing. Maybe that was another reason for his nickname.

His brother didn't react, he knew better than to underestimate their opponents from the start. Any decent player could get past that. As he predicted, the gentlemen on the other side soon regained the lead. Right when the Hyena was about to strike, the fire alarm started blasting through the whole building.

People started to panic. They jumped out of their seats and were led outside in a straight line. "The fire started upstairs from one of the candles.

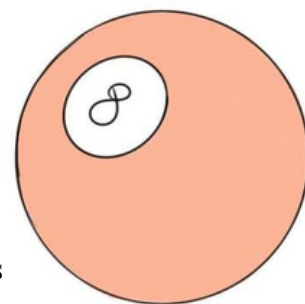
Don't worry ma'am," said the Shark compassionately to an older lady. Even though his kind gesture didn't have a kind purpose.

"If you show any more teeth, you'll scare them off," the Lion pointed out when he noticed the group of ladies that gathered outside.

"What do **YOU** know?" The Shark kept smiling "Where is Alex?"

"Still inside, I believe," Hyena answered, grinning from one corner of his mouth to another and patting his pockets making them all smirk.

Back inside the Leader was explaining to the angry gentlemen that he was going to offer them a rematch next week. What a shame indeed.



Back inside the Leader was explaining to the angry gentlemen that he was going to offer them a rematch next week. What a shame indeed.

“Thank you, Mr Montgomery. We’ll see each other next week.”

“Of course! And we’ll double the sum from our part,” Alex answered, reminding the gentlemen about the actual loss from that evening.

“We wouldn’t mind if you would actually lend us one of your players instead.”

“We’ll see.” Alex’s expression remained an amused smirk as he walked out.

Who would have thought they would enjoy the small victory? No one would question the Leader, not even the real owner of the pub.

Alex walked back into his office after everyone was finally out. There was no one else who could disturb his peace while he admired the little achievements he had been

carrying in his pocket, even though the only thing he could sell was the gold watch he snatched from a lady’s wrist. He could do better.

Leaning back in his chair he took a deep breath. Tonight had been a close call. The rest of the group didn’t need to know that a losing match could get them out of business. That’s why they needed to be careful.

Getting caught would have got them the same consequences if not worse.

Even though they had been doing this for years now, Alex had never stopped wondering when it would all come to an end.

He opened the drawer of his desk and, to his surprise, he found a letter. How could that be if he had just that morning been through his mail? He picked it up, nevertheless. No name, no address, no person of correspondence. Just a blank envelope. As he started reading, his expression turned into a frown.

*Dear Alex,*

*It’s been a while, I know. I just wanted to know if you are well.*

*We ended things quite suddenly and I couldn’t help but wonder during the past decade what the reason could have been. We were good friends.*

*I still remember how we used to play almost every week when we were little. You always let me win when we were pretending to be superheroes, even though we both knew I was the villain. Maybe I’ve always been the villain, so I am sorry. I am sorry that I let you down, that I judged you because we chose different paths. I wasn’t there for you when you needed me the most. I didn’t know how serious my mistake had been until you weren’t there anymore.*

*Maybe my apology now means nothing to you, but maybe there is still a part of the old Alex left in you somewhere. I hope there is, because otherwise I suppose I won’t be receiving any answer from you any time soon.*

*I want to make things right. Will you give me another chance?*

Alex threw the letter on his desk and ran his hand through his hair, frustrated. This must have been a joke; a really good one. However, no one appeared. He waited and waited, but nothing. It was only him in the room, the big ancient clock on the wall still ticking behind him.

Only a fool will answer to his past. Only a fool would reply to someone who broke his heart into pieces that he never managed to gather. His best friend chose to write to him after all this time. In ten years, they never exchanged a word

and now she had the audacity to send him this letter. Was he willing to give someone like that a second chance? Or maybe the only thing Alex needed was proper closure. That would certainly take the pain away, let him heal and go on with his life.

News flash: darling, he had a new life. Why would he ever try to reach that side of himself ever again? Why would he even bother? There was no “old Alex” anymore. It was only him with his good and his bad. That’s something his friend never understood.



**It was never about who was the villain. Every person has a dark side, it only matters who decides to stay when that comes to the surface.**

**The villain? The villain will always get what he wants and if it weren't for the happy ending, the hero would be long dead.** There is nothing that can stop a person who has a strong reason not to give up. Alex was an example of that. He had had nothing and now he had an empire. It was an empire that could crumble at any time, but that kept him alive. **What's life without a risk? What's fate without struggle?** Maybe that's why he received that letter now. Maybe fate had something planned for him? Alex got up from his desk. He paced around his room for another couple of minutes before picking the letter up again.

*I want to make things right. Will you give me another chance? I don't want to throw everything away. There isn't a day that passes without me thinking of you and of the promise that we made.*

*Meet me at the bell tower. Wednesday at 18:00.*

*-LOU*

It had been so long since Alex had said that name. Maybe longer than he wanted to admit. Still, Wednesday could be any Wednesday. Maybe Lou had sent him this letter a month ago and now it was too late to meet her. That day was Friday, if she meant the following Wednesday he still had a chance. Or maybe the mailman had brought the letter to the wrong address and Lou had intended it for her lover.

Did she have a lover? Or maybe they were more?

Wait a second...

Why was he asking himself such questions? He didn't care because there was no way in hell he was going. There was no way something would change his mind.

Suddenly someone knocked at the door, and he let himself sink back into his routine.

When Wednesday finally came around, Alex found himself headed to the bell tower. He said he wasn't going to go. It didn't matter, he was going to be late anyway. He had chosen to take the shortcut instead of the main road, however.

On the way there, he listed every reason why he should stop walking and head back to the pub. He counted every stone he stepped on and yet his feet were only taking him closer to the tower.

The moment he arrived, he knew it was a mistake, especially when he saw in the darkness the silhouette that was already waiting for him. The hood of a cape was covering her head, but the height and the size matched with Lou's. Not to mention the blond locks that showed the moment she turned around. His steps must have startled her.

Lou took her hood off and Alex let out the breath he didn't realise he was holding. She looked exactly the same, except she was 10 years older than the little girl he used to meet a long time ago. The yellow dot in her brown eyes was still there too. He could never forget how the sun embraced her honey eyes. It felt

like a treasure that only he got to see. What did she think of him? Was he the man she imagined he would become? Or maybe she wasn't recognizing the boy he used to be. He still had the same dark hair and untamed curls that were now slightly tamed under his hat.

There was a longer silence than Alex had expected. Why wasn't Lou saying anything? Why wasn't he saying anything? The words were struggling to come out, even though they were right there, on the tip of his tongue.

"Alex. It's been a while." He was just about to open his mouth when Lou spoke. "I thought you wouldn't come."

But he had. Was she disappointed?

"How are you?" Lou asked to break the silence that still lingered between them.

"Alex, please say something."

"What am I supposed to say? You were the one who left."

"I said I am sorry."

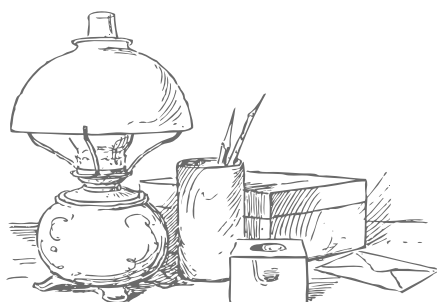
"Your apology means nothing to me."

"Then why did you come? Why bother?"

**"We made a promise didn't we?"...**

*Theodora-Maria Mrejeru*

**Theodora is a second year Law Student at THUAS. Besides writing academic papers she enjoys reading and photography. She is creative and ready to start a new journey.**





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