CHECKS & BALANCES

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REBIRTH

The Process of Coming To Be

Lune Gros

Chair of Clio

Dear reader,

A warm welcome to this new edition of the Checks & Balances magazine. The second semester has begun and that means that we are halfway through the academic year. Nevertheless, until the summer holiday arrives, many of you will find yourselves stuck in the lecture halls, seminar rooms, and libraries. It's a period that can seem quite overwhelming and demotivating, especially when the weather slowly begins to get better. At times, I reminisce about the days of lockdown when you could just grab your laptop, head outside, and attend classes online. But even studying in the sun eventually lost its appeal. Students started skipping classes, faced exam failures, and took breaks from studying altogether. There came a point where sleeping in and daily hot-girl walks were not a satisfying day program anymore, and everyone desired to be back within the university walls.

The opening of facilities in the city felt like the start of a new era. Of enlightenment; like dark times had finally passed. It is crazy to imagine how quickly we moved on: Before realising, we weekly partied in the Poele and met up again for committee nights with big groups. The city of Groningen snapped back to life; This was a true process of "coming to be" of a new student life, a Renaissance within our ordinary lives. Being stuck in the Harmonie Building suddenly seems not that bad, but rather a blessing.

This edition of the Checks & Balances will show you many cases of rebirth in our surroundings. I hope that this will provide you with many new insights and topics to feel passionate about. Finally, I want to thank the Editorial Staff of the Checks & Balances magazine for all their efforts in creating this beautiful new edition. Have fun reading!

On behalf of the 36th Board of Clio and with much love,

Lune Gros
Chair of the Clio Board

Anna Aragoncillo

Editor-in-Chief

Dear reader,

Today, I saw a red poppy blooming in the park behind my house. Five centimetres under the ground, perhaps two weeks ago, a tiny spore found its home. Yesterday, a drop fell on one of its only two leaves. Scorching summer heat dried up this small flower, wet autumn flooded her roots, cold winter froze the ground under her, and it's now, when the tender spring allows her to bloom. Albeit only a small flower, she's alive and resilient. I see a mirage of a poppy in every wild landscape rustled by the wind, in every horse that runs free, in every squirrel that swiftly sprints through trees. For me, poppies are a sign of the cycle of life, they're a symbol that there is always light after the tunnel, that there will be a tomorrow, and, mostly, that we are alive.

As the spring sun glows over dewy wisps of grass, I have the honour of presenting you our second edition:

Rebirth
The Process of Coming to Be

We want to encapsulate the idea that everything in this life is a process, that we, as beings, came from dirt and to dirt we shall return. Life is more than existing, and our existence is more than our present. It is our past that bore us and made us into what we are. We are a collection of all the flowers we have seen, the laughs we have shared, the bruises we have earned from falling off our bikes and the roads that have led us here. Let us embrace making mistakes and learning from them, let us rejoice in the process of coming to be, and not just being.

On behalf of the Editorial Staff of 2023-2024, let this magazine be your own poppy flower to remind you of the radiance of the primaveral sun,

Anna Aragoncillo Barceló
Editor-in-Chief

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Carpe Diem

What Makes Us Human?

ROCIO MARTEL MEDRANO

Laughing until you can't breathe
Wanting hundreds of different lives at once
Fearing the future
Perpetually waiting for friday or summer
Thinking about the universe
That first bite of food
Wasting time
Holding hands
Jumping in excitement
Snoozing your alarm
Constantly learning, and unlearning
Watercolours
Feeling fine and then breaking into tears
Refusing to elaborate
DANCING
A friend peeling an orange for you
Watching your favourite show, or a sunset
Showing someone a thing you care about
Paying close attention to their reaction
Wondering about death
Nostalgia

If you ask me about humanity, this has to be the answer. It must be. There have been theories, of course, made by the old and wise philosophers, and no doubt those are more rational than whatever I just rambled about. Certainly more thought out. But at the end of the day, aren't all those things what we are truly here for? Aren't the small things in life what really make life worth living? Think about everyone and anyone that you have ever known. Think about your mom, and your dad, and your third grade maths teacher that terrified you and that one kid you befriended on the playground and forgot about.

We are all people, experiencing the world for the first and only time.

But, if for whatever reason, any of us, or even you, got the incredible chance of suffering an untimely death and being reborn, what do you think you would do? Would you put on a suit and go to work for a third of your day, every day from now until forever? Who said we should? Would you buy a shirt, and then throw it away and buy another one because the colour wasn't really flattering to your season? Pollute the earth, scroll, and scroll, and scroll, in an endless cycle of vice? Would you want to be a billionaire? Judge people? Care about gender? Punish yourself? Would you?

I would call my mom. I would go outside, even when the sun isn't shining, but especially when it is. I would hold my friends so tight and ask that one cute person for coffee, with no shame. Bother my cat. I would bake. I would sometimes be alone, but hopefully not lonely. Listen to the music that makes me happiest, no matter what it is. Love whomever I want. Hate whomever I please. Listen to the birds in the morning, and relish in the sound of the sea. Try out new things, even if I was afraid of them. Never ever let my sister go. Be the Dancing Queen. Lie down next to my dog, and listen to him breathe. Maybe I would do some gardening, connect with the earth, and most likely I would fail, and fail again and then some more. Thankfully, no one would actually care.

And aren't you glad you don't need to be reborn to enjoy, and cry, and laugh and scream and live? I don't know if we have a soul, but we can never get our time back, and we are certainly not being given a mystical opportunity. We don't need to be reborn, not at all, not even a little bit. We just need to reconsider what it truly means to be human.

Farewell, Welfare

Reconsidering our Definition of Welfare

CASPAR LEMMENS

Bhutan, a captivating mountainous land brimming with beautiful scenery and well-preserved cultural heritage. The Bhutanese, who live according to principles such as harmony with nature and a strong sense of community, are nevertheless considered one of the poorest people in the world. That is, if you look at the most common measurement of wealth: the GDP. Bhutan's GDP per capita is 158th in the world and its overall GDP ranks 178th. The government of Bhutan, however, does not seem to be too bothered by this. Does that mean the Bhutanese government does not care about the wellbeing of its citizens? Quite the contrary: they just have a very different definition of wealth.

Bhutan measures its wealth not in terms of GDP, but according to their very own Gross National Happiness index, or GNH for short. The Bhutanese method focuses on psychological well-being, health, time use and balance, education, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standard. While there has been a fair share of criticism against Bhutan's GNH, it serves as a prime example of a trend reconsidering the definition of wealth.

An important moment in the "philosophy of happiness" was the release of the book "Limits to Growth" by the Club of Rome in 1972. While the book was primarily about the scarcity of resources, it also touched upon the reassessing of our definition of wealth. The book and "happiness-movements" thereafter have challenged the prevalent assumption that more economic wealth equals more happiness. They argue that under the influence of predominantly neoliberal economic policy making, Western societies have become individualistic and lack sufficient attention to non-economic needs. The relentless pursuit of more production, more gain and more money has left us disconnected from what really makes our lives meaningful. It is therefore no wonder that surveys find that youth in developed countries often feel like their life lacks meaning or feel lonely, which can contribute to severe phenomena like depression or suicide. Besides impacts on individuals, it affects our surroundings, as more and more of the earth's surface has to submit to our "holy pursuit" of economic gain. The environmental consequences are evident.

However, many governments are reluctant to commit to prioritising happiness over wealth, precisely out of economic motives. GDP still often wins over GNH, for example mass tourism in Venice rendering the city nearly impossible to live in. However, voices favouring a broader focus than merely economy have been growing ever since 1972. In 2011, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution, by the name of "Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development", where it proclaimed happiness to be a fundamental human goal. Furthermore, since 2012, the 20th of March has become International Happiness Day.

Of course, it would be unwise to propose to degrade economic production to the point where a state becomes impoverished, but there still is a lot of room for initiatives that value happiness over money. For starters, the way of measuring wealth can be changed to include less tangible needs. Community projects can be subsidised, nature better preserved and working times optimised. Furthermore, the question does not even have to be a dilemma. The increased happiness and fulfilment might even prove beneficial for business, with studies overwhelmingly showing higher productivity among workers who consider themselves happier. The Bhutanese, in the meantime, enjoy their preserved homeland, communities and culture. Although their GDP is over 7000 times lower than their Northern neighbours in China, their feeling of fulfilment is way up. In a world threatened by scarcity, and where younger generations often feel disconnected from the world, we might want to reconsider what really is important to us.

Go Global or Stay Local

The Role of Local Markets in Community and Global Prosperity

EMMA ANDREAE

Shopping in the 21st Century is an interesting experience. Tomatoes come from Spain, avocados from Mexico and oranges from Egypt. They travel millions of kilometres in refrigerated containers, battling storms, droughts and even transport strikes, just to get to us. The consumers. They are exposed against high contrast thin paper sheets, highlighting the bright colours of the produce, which seems to have an almost unnatural glow, perhaps due to the wax used to make apples shiny and appetising. The concerns that plague consumers range from the pesticides used, the handling, or the environmental impact of the transport and distribution of such goods. However, in a sea of capitalist transnational corporations, local community hubs are fighting to emerge as pivotal forces guiding us towards a more sustainable future.

2021 saw about 1.95 billion metric tons of cargo being shipped around the world equating to, roughly, 1.3 billion cars. Our phones, clothes, and even our medicine come from all around the world, which is everything except sustainable. In some localities, such as Western Montana (US), local markets stand as champions of sustainability. Vendors proudly showcase products sourced from nearby farms, reducing the carbon footprint associated with transportation. The emphasis on fresh, seasonal produce aligns with eco-conscious consumer values, making local markets not just shopping destinations but hubs of sustainable living.

The decision to shop locally presents a spectrum of advantages and challenges. On the positive side, local businesses often provide personalised service, unique offerings, and a sense of community connection. By supporting local enterprises, consumers contribute to a cycle of economic resilience, creating jobs and bolstering the local economy. These clear advantages also consequently go alongside with higher prices and, in most cases, also limited product variety, although these drawbacks are outweighed by the broader benefits of nurturing vibrant local economies.

From a local standpoint, the support for smaller markets goes beyond mere transactions, as it is an investment in the community's vitality. Initiatives like "Green Saturdays,"strive to promote eco-friendly products, exemplifying the transformative potential of intentional local support. Yet, its impact extends globally. The rise of ethical consumerism is creating a ripple effect, influencing global supply chains. By choosing locally sourced products, consumers worldwide contribute to a more sustainable and resilient global economy.

The significance of local markets lies not only in their existence but also in their accessibility. In urban planning and community development, ensuring the availability of local markets becomes a cornerstone for fostering sustainable living. Markets serve as community gathering spaces, reducing the need for long-distance travel and reinforcing the social fabric.

While multinational corporations dominate headlines, it is the collective impact of local businesses that forms the backbone of many economies. The multiplier effect of locally spent financial resources stimulates economic growth, and the decentralisation of economic power enhances community resilience. Local markets are not just contributors to GDP; they are engines of prosperity that can weather economic uncertainties.

The resurgence of local markets is more than a trend, it is a movement reshaping the narrative of commerce. From the smallest villages in deserted plateaus to multicultural and bustling global metropolises, the intentional act of supporting local markets becomes a shared commitment to sustainability, community well-being, and economic resilience. The availability of local markets is not just a convenience; it's a vital component in the quest for a more sustainable and interconnected future.

Paint It Green!

Uncovering the Hipocrisy of Modern Corporatism

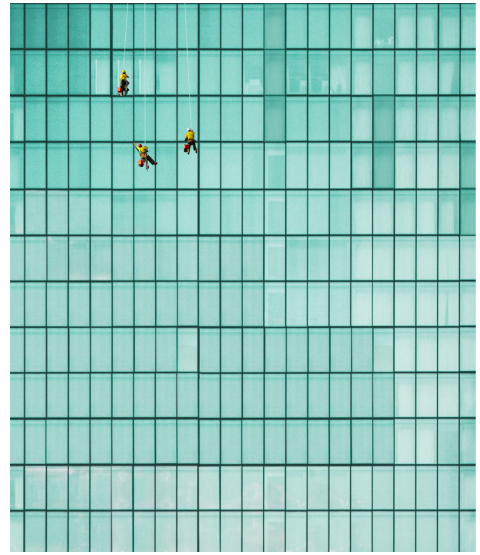
ROCÍO MARTEL MEDRANO

It's 2019, and you approach McDonalds for a convenient albeit unsatisfactory quick meal. As you receive your drink you notice your straw is no longer plastic, and whilst you sip on the new soggy paper one, you think that it is a touch uncomfortable. Immediately, you regret this thought and reflect on all the turtles that these recyclable and eco-friendly straws are saving. You open your phone to look up concrete data and, oh! As it turns out, they are not recyclable at all. You have just fallen victim to greenwashing.

The term greenwashing was first coined by an environmentalist journalist in 1986 who realised that the "save the towel" movement promoted by hotels, asking guests to reuse their towels in order to save the environment, really did not do much more than save these colossal and wealthy companies even more money on laundry. This phenomenon can come in many different forms, but it essentially boils down to a corporation misleading their consumers by marketing their products or strategies as more eco-friendly than they truly are. This behaviour has become increasingly profitable for companies since, as environmental awareness amongst consumers rises, up to 66% of individuals are willing to spend more money on products that are marketed as green.

Although this breach of trust is not new, it has been more studied in recent years, as the public demands and has more access to the hard evidence provided by companies thanks to the internet and stronger environmental standards. The science is clear: if humanity wishes to keep living on this planet, greenhouse gas emissiones must be down to net zero by 2050. The fashion industry is one of the great offenders in this matter, responsible for 2% to 8% of global carbon emissions according to the UN. They are, coincidentally enough, also one of the industries with more cases of unlawful greenwashing. Reports have found that 60% of sustainability claimes are unsubstantiated in this regard, with brands such as H&M, Uniqlo and Zara being mentioned quite frequently. Other companies recently involved in such scandals have been Ikea, CocaCola or Ryanair.

Some economics ardently defend this strategy, claiming that businesses have a right to seek revenue. However, this isn't arguable—it is not just another marketing



ploy, and should not be taken lightly as such. It is necessary that we, and most importantly they, recognise how immoral it is to profit off people's honourable desires to help save the planet. It's an unethical violation of corporate social responsibility to cheat the limited small-scale environmental methods that regular individuals have access to, in order to gain more money and subsequently further degrade the world. Additionally, it poses serious challenges to effectively battling the current climate crisis, promoting fake solutions, and delaying truthful and concrete action.

The planet cannot accommodate further greenwashing.

The European Union is taking steps to ban greenwashing in Member States territories, but the current reality is that the responsibility falls upon private parties to identify, and steer clear of these lies, as businesses do not care enough to stop them. Why would they care about the planet that they live on? When possible and if you do wish to avoid them, pay close attention to the transparency and accountability of the firm producing a certain product and learn more about greenwashing tactics, such as looking out for empty "green claims" with no backing evidence to sustain them.

Constructing the World that Surrounds Us

Exploring the Future of Architecture: The Thin Line Between the Aesthetic Value of Architecture and Its Intentional Utility

ANNA ARAGONCILLO BARCELO AND FABIA MIELCAREK

As humanity rapidly edges the limit of the Earth's resource capabilities, it is quite an obvious thought to reconsider the pillars of human needs. Food, energy and shelter. We are aware of how to safely and sustainably pursue food and energy, but shelter is still quite contested. Architecture throughout the ages has evolved in a constant and innovative manner, from antique mesopotamian terraces to gothic pointed arches, and even brutalist geometric concrete forms, it's quite clear that human eyes have been witnesses to an ever-changing variety of styles. However, there is a predicament that remains unanswered. Should we, as a constructing society, pursue architectural works that prioritise beauty, or should we seek to satiate our building needs with visually unpleasing but practical constructions?

Anna

I think that although beauty is in the eye of the beholder, there are some common grounds for what aesthetic characteristics in architecture are. Personally, I'm a firm defender of pretty buildings. As climate change increases, we spend more and more time in buildings, as a consequence of the polarisation of weather, which means that we will, eventually, spend the entirety of our days inside. We need to revitalise our environment by creating buildings that not only serve their purpose, but also satisfy the aesthetic crave in our brains. Pleasantly looking buildings are not just a luxury, they are a necessity. Humans look for beauty and proportions in all the tiny aspects of life, from the shell of the smallest snail in the back of our gardens to the tempestuous hurricanes' ratio. So, why shouldn't we look for them in our workplace? Or our living room? Why should we not look for them in the world that surrounds us?

Fabia

A beautifully designed building, aesthetically pleasing for the eye when walking through a new city sounds appealing to me too, however from my point of view they accompany many pitfalls as well. Living in them often comes with high renting prices. Since a majority of the population cannot afford these renting prices, the question goes beyond a debate about architecture, and ventures into a debate about exclusion and privilege. Who are we giving a higher living standard by building beautiful buildings for them to live in and who is missing out to their advantage? Building livable architecture, which might be less pleasing for the eye, means incorporating people with fewer resources into the city centre, thus integrating them. This opens up the possibility of decreasing the gap between rich and poor, because poorer families would get the same geological opportunities as wealthier ones. With more affordable architecture in the city one would go against the effect of poorer people moving to the suburbs and therefore living separate from the wealthier population.

Anna

That's quite a fair point, as a societal system in which only the rich are capable of affording a pleasing living is undoubtedly flawed. However, then the issue stops being one of the types of architecture that we should pursue, and starts being one of the imbalances of the power structures that lay the foundation of the way our social order is constructed. Recent trends have highlighted and brought focus to the polarisation of the financial capabilities and, I agree with you, it is up to us to bridge those differences so as to not condemn certain collectives to a life-long deprivation of their needs and wants. All aspects of life should strive to build those bridges, and architecture should not be an exception to that norm. Just because the facade of a building possesses aesthetically pleasing characteristics, does not mean that it will have to be expensive. There are thousands of possible combinations to produce high quality

architectural works from recycled materials, resulting in smaller costs and allowing existing architecture in local communities to be repurposed.

Fabia

Even though the use of recycled materials would create pretty buildings in an increasingly sustainable way, it does not mean full sustainability. We also have to take into account all of the other essentials in the process of planning and building. You need to pay for the blueprints when planning to build. It is not just the building materials themselves, but all of the materials one needs for the planning process and furthermore the aspect of time and manpower spent, which could also be spent in other areas. In the capitalist system we live in, the prioritisation of profit often outweighs the practicability and sustainability of buildings. The competitive market drives that even further and creates a nature of quick and cost-efficient solutions often promoting something as being sustainable, while leaving out unsustainable aspects of for example the production or construction process, like the blueprints.

Anna

I would agree with you that the blueprint costs are quite big ones, but that is the fair work of architects. Intellectual property needs to be respected, as it is the result of years of experience and knowledge. Additionally, all buildings, all facades, all bridges, all pillars need a blueprint. Even the simplest squared cement house will need a blueprint, a mathematically calculated plane where all measures, resistance and conductibility of materials that could and should be used are written down as to ensure its safety. Not every aspect needs to be about the integral structure of buildings, as we can also use certain cognitive dissonances and neural responses to achieve aesthetic effects that, as some would say, tickle the right part of our brains. Neuroaesthetics uses patterns, textures and colours to provide a constant display of human ingenuity while still serving as a brain exercise, allowing us to stand up against a sedentary and complacent mind.

Fabia

Notwithstanding that the concept of neuroaesthetics sounds fascinating, it probably also comes with its own costs. This money could be invested into other important areas such as education, health care and climate resilience planning and improve the living standard of Individuals within these realms. Instead of building new buildings, one could work with the many already existing and contribute to the environmental stewardship. The perception of what is considered beautiful architecture changed over history and will go through many changes in the future. It is not sustainable to build a new building to tear it off and build a new prettier one in the next generation again. Especially now with the pressing issue of climate change and growing frequency of increasingly severe weather events the appearance should be of secondary importance. Secure, reliable and practical buildings are essential, able to withstand the extreme weather conditions.

Beautiful architecture creates a pretty living space and every building can be a piece of art. However it also brings along high renting prices and the construction and planning process takes up more time, energy and costs than for practical buildings. All in all, we conclude that there should be a balance, a thin line, between both gorgeous architecture and practical living spaces. Especially with climate change developing and the next extreme weather event waiting around the corner we need strong buildings, fulfilling their purpose. We will not be able to find this balance though, unless we realise that beauty is not everything when designing our environment.

What is the Dutchie?

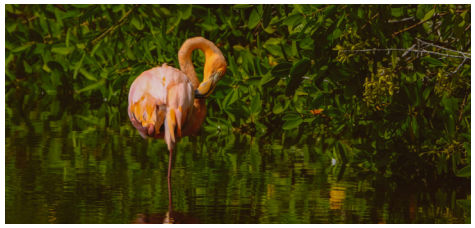
Dutch-Caribbean Minorities and their Relation to Dutch Nationhood

SAM HOLM VAN DONK

While watching the opening commercials at a movie theatre in Groningen, I was presented with a travel advertisement for the Caribbean island of Curaçao. It naturally came as something of a shock to me when, during this commercial, a local of the island was portrayed as an outrageously laughable character, based solely on his culture. His Dutch dialect was portrayed as simple, derogatorily presented as crude and inappropriate, just as his character was presented as an embodiment of "tropical island vacation", complete with Hawaii shirt, flip flops and a flower necklace. With subsequent observations, it becomes clear that the Caribbean Dutch minorities are frequently portrayed as simple, foreign and comedic in advertisements and entertainment, a suggestion supported by evidence of stereotyping towards university students with a Caribbean background.

As commonly known, the Kingdom of the Netherlands currently comprises of the Netherlands proper, containing 12 mainland provinces and 3 "special municipalities" in the Caribbean; Bonaire, Sint Eustatius & Saba, as well the constituent countries of the kingdom in the Caribbean: Aruba, Curaçao & Sint Maarten. These altogether officially make up the Kingdom, with every country holding the same legal status within this framework.

In every territory and country in the Kingdom, Dutch is an official language, often alongside Papiamento. Papiamento is a creole language that is based on Portuguese and Spanish with significant influences from Dutch, and is widely spoken throughout the southern Caribbean. The majority of these islands' populations are considered mixed-race, often being descended from Dutch settlers, African slaves, native populations and various other European peoples. All, of course, are legal citizens of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and share the exact same passport as mainland Dutch citizens. This fact is continuously articulated by Dutch politicians, who stress an inclusive model of citizenship that emphasises legal equality for all. However, Dutch citizens in overseas territories were frequently excluded from societal ideas of Dutch nationhood, their cultural aspects like religion, language and culture ultimately not considered a match with the Dutch nation.



In an ideal world, all peoples of the constituent countries would make up a collective, multicultural Dutch nation, as desired by inclusionist politicians. However, Caribbean Dutchmen are often treated as somewhat foreign; a completely separate people, yet one that shares peculiar similarities, such as language and passports. This results in a strange construction of the Caribbean Netherlander in the mainland as different, yet similar; exotic, yet familiar. The borders of genuine "Dutchness" have then been drawn; and they most certainly do not include a catholic, mixed-race, Papiamento speaking Caribbean inhabitant. I believe that this results in a strange duality, where stereotyping is permitted, being regarded by the mainland as friendly banter among neighbours in the same Kingdom, yet often comes across as unacceptably derogatory and demeaning. This is not only in entertainment; within primarily Dutch study programs, Caribbean Netherlanders are often treated as foreigners, despite knowledge on both parts that they are all in fact citizens of the same Kingdom. Even in official censuses, Caribbean peoples are not included as native Dutch persons, highlighting the ultimate failure of the state in creating an inclusive model of nationhood.

Some countries have successfully established unitary nationhood across many ethnicities. In Indonesia, a strong national unity campaign by the first President Sukarno resulted in a strong sense of nationhood, even where no bond between the peoples had ever previously been present. Yet, it seems that the Netherlands of today is unable to reconcile its multiple cultural identities into a single shared sense of nationhood, as Caribbean Netherlanders find themselves consistently placed in a state of limbo; not quite considered Dutchmen, yet not quite a foreign group altogether. In this sense, Caribbean identities present a challenge to the traditional conception of the Dutch community. Today, this idea is in dire need of a redefinition, one that brings justice to all the various peoples that share Dutch citizenship.

Why History Belongs to the People

Vindicating Memory Politics and its Legacy of Absences

BRIANA STEFANA AGRICI

Throughout our shared historical narrative, memory has played an important part in shaping our understanding of humanity and our interactions with systems of authority and anarchy; in many ways, we exist as long as someone remembers us. More than a social performance, both individual and collective memory have always been creators of identity and mediators of experiences. While some claim that the time of colonial "glory" and power has long been forgotten, in reality, the systemic denial of its socio-political and military implications erases the human dimension of history. Deconstructing and reconstructing identities entails a long process of unified self-reflection, which should conclude with the acknowledgement that memory is both political and personal.

Neo-colonialism in Europe emerged as an effort to deterritorialise colonial history, once the political intent to keep colonialism as a matter of national interest faded. While the colonial state mirrored the attributes of the metropol tan state (with the colonial administration becoming a state-like entity shaped by its vocation of domination), the heritage of neo-colonialism is more deceptive, refraining from converting suffering into a weapon of the masses. The social legacy of neo-colonialism is a legacy of absences: the absence of written memory, the absence of impartial history and ultimately the absence of remorse.

Politics of memory defy the status of former colonialist states, as it forces them to revise their past. In the case of France in the Algerian War, the politics of concealment became a powerful weapon of discourse framing, as it made use of two tools: official language and a broad amnesty. Thus, a violent war (noting the repression efforts of the French troops on the 8th of May 1945 that resulted in a death toll of 45.000 Algerians), that since has been referred to as a massacre has been officially framed for a long time as an internal "operation" which required "measures to maintain order". The politics of amnesty closed the doors on any potential judicial aftermath, as it awarded general amnesty on any war-crime. The memory of the coloniser is the memory of dehumanisation, which translates itself into the current social and political hierarchies — national identity is constructed on a foundational historical narrative that transcends generations and provides continuity for the political community. While the social consciousness has begun cultivating a memory of identity shaped around the minority, most post-colonial powers are still stranded in an age of commemoration of their own "great men" narrative.

A symptom of this attitude is how the inherent violence and brutality of colonialism seem to become second after the "historical trauma" experienced by the coloniser upon losing territory (as in the case of the UK, where losing Hong Kong meant more for national pride than the people experiencing the aftermaths of colonialism). Thus, accountability is slowly neglected from the political and social narrative – the coloniser transforms the right to grief into a weapon of concealment, controlling the manner in which memories are diffused. Taking responsibility for the crimes committed in post-colonial territories implies acknowledging how the lack of such accountability further enables neo-colonialism and continuously denies peoples the power to justly rewrite their own history. The persistence of memory politics also emerges in the context of informal political relations as an imperative tool of resistance – recollections of war have been preserved and diffused in communities creating a collective memory of the past. However, the structural aspects of neo-colonialism become apparent when the two narratives contend, especially when one possesses normative influence rooted in the subjugation of the body and the instrumentalization of memory.

Rewriting history is a laborious and harsh process that can be possible only by surpassing the conventions of scientific history and embracing the intersectional nature of historical experience. Without denying the obvious primary role of states in shaping the past, history should not belong to the victors, but to the people — history is first lived, then recounted.

From Crisis and Embargo to a Peaceful Thaw, and Back Again

The Fleeting Rebirth of US–Cuban Relations

MATEI CIOCAN

It may feel strange to think that just six decades ago our world came the closest to total nuclear annihilation due to the conflicting and endlessly complicated prospects of the Cold War. And yet, at the centre point of this cardinal even in recent human history, there was one island off the coast of Florida that underwent exponential shifts in its foreign relations and allegiances: Cuba.

The narrative of Cuban–American relations is one of the most ambiguous yet fascinating stories in the Western Hemisphere. It has witnessed periods of collaboration and mutual enrichment as well as times of occupation and ideological rivalry that further grew apart and scared the fragile relations of the two nations.

The 19th century found Cuba under the suzerainty of the Spanish Colonial Empire. During this time, multiple US presidents saw the island as a "great addition" to the rapidly emerging United States. After Cuban independence from Spain in 1890, the US effectively implemented a neo-colonialist precocious system, controlling most of the revenue in the Cuban economy and intervening militarily multiple times during the interwar period.

This era of subjugation effectively led to the Cuban Revolution of 1959, which saw the rise of communist rule in Cuba, under the rule of Fidel Castro, a profound Marxist who challenged American liberal hegemony by aligning with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. After the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, tensions peaked by the Cuban Missile Crisis, which essentially meant deployment of Soviet nuclear warheads on the island just 90 miles away from mainland United States, a serious security hazard for American domestic affairs. Although the crisis deescalated due to collaboration between American and Soviet negotiations, Cuba remained trapped in a long lasting embargo and political isolation.

After decades of slow negotiations, the Cuban Thaw of 2015 saw the normalisation of US–Cuba diplomatic relations and the beginning of a new stage between the two nations. The Obama Administration struck a number of policies: for instance, organising the reopening of the American embassy in Havana as a symbolic moment, lifting travel bans to Cuba, suspending the ever-lasting economic embargo that was holding up development and removing the island nation from the list of "State sponsor of terrorism", which had been significantly detrimental aspect for the credibility of the Cuban regime on the international stage. Furthermore, Barack Obama's visit to Havana in 2016 validated the diplomatic efforts of the two governments and set the stage for a more efficient and collaborative future for the cooperation of the Caribbean region.

However, as proven many times in history, the change in political circumstances and political colour of the governments in power resulted in a fundamental shift of perspective for the evolution of Cuban–American foreign relations. On June 16, 2017, President Donald Trump issued a presidential memorandum reversing some aspects of the Obama administration's actions regarding U.S. relations with Cuba, and characterising them as "terrible and misguided". Among the changes was also the reinstitution of the travel ban, which had the potential to once again separate mixed families with Cuban–American heritage, who had only been able to reunite for a short period of time. The trend of revising Democratic policies by the Republican Administration intensified even further as the issue of Guantanamo Bay Naval Base on the territory of Cuba arose. Trump swore to never abandon the US base, as it was seen as a valuable instrument to monitor the actions of the Cuban Administration.

In the midst of this troublesome history, one might wonder what the prospects could be for the foreseeable future. It is evident that the peaceful rebirth of bilateral relations was a short lived glimpse of hope to restore good collaboration between Havana and Washington, but now there is no point in denying that the failure of the Thaw has led to the resurgence of ideological differences. Moreover, it should be in the USA's interest to seek improvement amongst relations, as it would regain an important ally in the region. Nonetheless, considering the ever complicating international stage, the USA should perhaps reconsider their position on this, asking themselves if a Cuban enemy is really preferred over a Cuban partner. However, it is imperative to note that the majority of mediatic discussions gravitate around the sphere of interest of the United States.

While this is a rather evident outcome, taking into account the sheer power of America compared to Cuba's, we as IR students should not neglect the position and interests of the Cuban people, which for the better part of this conflict have been suffering the most.

In that regard, reaching equal footings in bilateral negotiations and reconciling the colonial past are equally important aspects for a prosperous future between the two nations.

Yet progress has once again taken a slow path, with the Biden Administration beginning to repeal some (but definitely not enough) of the restrictions imposed by the Republican Administration between 2016 and 2020. A key aspect for American reluctance is still leaning on the civil rights violations that occur in Cuba, with protesters that militate against the communist regime still being brutally repressed and imprisoned to this day. However, the continuance of restrictions are doing nothing but affecting the daily lives of Cuban citizens, who are suffering the most from the economic deprivations that result from the frozen relation.

Alas, while one might say that the rebirth of US–Cuban relations was fleeting, there is still hope to reinvigorate efforts to save bilateral collaboration between the two.

What the Obama Administration achieved in the mid 2010's was in its own one of the most spectacular attainments of American diplomacy in over three decades, as it marked the first normalisation of relations between a democratic and an authoritarian regime after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

And while the future is without a doubt a foggy one, paved with uncertainties and challenges, one thing remains clear: a peaceful collaboration between America and Cuba would substantially increase stability in the Caribbean region and foster positive economic developments for both nations, just as it was envisioned by the words of Fidel Castro at the beginning of the conflict: "I seriously hope that Cuba and the United States can eventually respect and negotiate our differences. I believe that there are no areas of contention between us that cannot be discussed and settled within a climate of mutual understanding. But first, of course, it is necessary to discuss our differences. I now believe that this hostility between Cuba and the United States is both unnatural and unnecessary–and it can be eliminated."

Finland and Sweden's Bid for NATO

A New Foreign Policy–and a Fulfilment of Destiny?

SAM HOLM VAN DONK

It shook the world when, in February of 2022, war broke out on the European continent. Few states, though, felt the pressure more than Finland, whose 1,340 kilometre border with Russia has been a historical source of worry and debate. What posed a particular problem for this Nordic nation was its non-membership of the international military alliance NATO, as well as fears that the active Russian minority within its borders could pose a security risk, as it did in Ukraine. Many Finns echoed a similar sentiment: "could we be next?". Three months later, Finland, along with its Western neighbour Sweden, formally applied to join the alliance.

But why were they not already a member of NATO? Most of its European counterparts were already members, so it seems remarkable that they would go against the trend in this way. Much can be said about this, but in brief, it seems that for both nations formal neutrality makes up a particular national value. Sweden, for example, retained its neutrality for both of the World Wars, as well as the Cold War. Finland similarly faced the cold war with a dual approach: maintaining formal neutrality, yet also cooperating militarily with the United States, trading intelligence information covertly for decades. Furthermore, a large part of Finnish trade was dominated by the Soviet Union, and both nations benefited greatly from trade with both the capitalist and communist worlds. Ultimately, both nations have a history of neutrality, as well as a pragmatic approach to trade, that would dominate their foreign policy throughout the 20th century, and their recent joining of the alliance could be seen as a major break of their foreign policy.

Many Finns, however, were not overly surprised with this course of action. They argued that although the war in Ukraine was the spark to solidify their military ties to the West, it was simply the culmination of a longer, more gradual drift away from Russian influence. Sweden and Finland have both been official partners of NATO since 1994, and in this sense have already contributed greatly to the alliance. Some social experts agree with this sentiment, also claiming that Finnish society has already mentally prepared for the full integration into the alliance since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This is also reflected in Finland's unique relationship with Sweden, which meant that any Swedish application to NATO should be followed by a Finnish one. Both nations are members of the Nordic council and the EU, and naturally have a long history of fellow neutrality. Additionally, Finland hosts a large number of Swedish speakers, just as northern Sweden contains a sizable Finnish minority. In short; if the Swedes go West, the Finns will follow. And just like that, national sentiment was confirmed when a Swedish application to NATO was almost instantaneously followed by a Finnish one.

What will change, however, is that the Nordic nations will now have direct security guarantees under NATO's article 5; regarding the attack on one nation as the attack on them all. It can therefore be argued that this acceptance into NATO was therefore only a formalistation of a more extensive process that has taken decades to culminate into their full acceptance into the West. Or, others may say, this final rejection of neutralism represents the total rebirth of their foreign policy.

BookTok: A Real Page-Turner

A 21st-Century Literary Phenomenon

EMMA ANDREAE

In the vast realm of social media, where fleeting trends come and go with the swipe of a finger, a heartwarming phenomenon has emerged in the last years: BookTok. Albeit often dominated by short attention spans and visual content, the rise of reading on TikTok is rewriting the script, inspiring a newfound appreciation for literature in the digital age. The rise of BookTok, a virtual dance club within a platform otherwise dominated by dance challenges, lip-syncing, and viral pranks, is, little by little, challenging the assumption that social media is solely a breeding ground for superficial trends.

Nevertheless, this new genre of content does not signify a departure from its fast-paced and almost disposable nature, as these characteristics still prevail. The platform's short and condensed videos are tailor-made for capturing attention in a fast-paced environment, bringing users to get creative in their promotion modes, from emulating certain dialogues to acting out particular scenes to garner interest. Of course, the normative book reviews still exist and are used, but they have acquired a more engaged and concise nature. The result is a captivating fusion of visual storytelling and literary appreciation, transforming reading from a solitary activity into a shared experience.

One of the driving forces behind the BookTok phenomenon is the democratisation, if we can call it like that, of literary influence. While book recommendations have traditionally come from publishers or established critics, TikTok has shifted this dynamic by allowing everyday readers to become influential tastemakers. A simple 60-second video can catapult a hidden gem into the literary spotlight, making overnight sensations out of previously overlooked books. However, while this phenomenon provides readers with their own megaphone onto the editorial world, it also creates much more static noise, making it harder to critically focus on what is actually being said. BookTok's audience showcases great variety; from contemporary fiction to classic literature remakes, each book can find its audience, but not every book gets to really be on stage. It is especially hard for intersectional authors and book reviewers to be given the microphone on social media.

Precisely because of this, the rise of BookTok has sparked conversations around representation and inclusivity in literature. Books that explore diverse perspectives, cultures, and identities are gaining traction, but the core issue goes deeper than that. In some kind of sense, we are only able to see the pretty intersectional books, those that only stand slightly against institutional discrimination. The rest of them, those books that are not pretty, the ones considered the ugly truth, the ones, for example, written by colonised people about their colonisers, don't get to be on stage. Although there have been several attempts to stand up against the silencing of suffering voices, there is a lack of a unionised movement.

The rise of BookTok is more than just a trend; it's a testament of our journey and our future through the enduring power of storytelling in the digital age. Books in social media have always been a thing, virtual places like GoodReads or MySpace have discussed books before the rise of BookTok. TikTok has only redefined how we consume content by revitalising the reading culture by making literature accessible, relatable, and shareable.

What's Juliet without Romeo?

A Manifesto Against Liberal Feminism

BRIANA STEFANA AGRICI

Stop operating from your masculine energy now and allow yourself to only be perceived in terms of stereotypes! Concealed behind claims of female empowerment, social media has witnessed a resurgence of conventional gender norms. Endorsed as a self-discovery tool and a way of "reconnecting with yourself", concepts such as feminine energy become remodelled liberal values, deploying women of agency over their own actions and feelings—women are emotional, they feel so do not bother thinking; follow not lead, create not decide. Ambushed from all sides with standards of what you ought to be, succumbing to this external pressure creates a new dilemma—now what?

Values around the dual energy of femininity and masculinity originate as spiritual practices, first borrowed from Hinduism, Buddhism and other Indigenous beliefs. However, a wider spread on the Internet followed a decontextualisation in the pursuit of mass appeal, making them better fitted to the social landscape of gender practices in the Western world. A substantial critique of this new tendency is the encouragement of young women to change themselves to comply with ideas of traditional femininity as rooted in the male-gaze (do not be loud, be less independent, no one likes a controlling woman). Yet, why should anyone decide what a woman is? Writing about gender performativity, Judith Butler emphasises that a key element in performativity is not just the act itself, but its repetition; gender "is real only to the extent that it is performed". In this sense, nobody possesses a gender before they start doing gendered acts, building upon what their identity is expected to operate like.

Nonetheless, gender norms and their connection to liberal feminism partake in a long history of colonialism and anti-intersectionality, eventually coming to be accepted as an integral element fueling the neo-liberal system. Hence, liberal feminism or white feminism came to be recognised as a "capitalist bargain", since it systemically ignores issues of intersectionality, making central the gender experiences of (usually) straight, upper-middle class, white women. While the libertarian feminist idea of emancipation has to some extent been achieved in the West, it is failing to liberate most women from the yoke of capitalism and patriarchy. This "empty" feminism lingers as it further reinforces "improved" gender norms by continuously re-conceptualising the world in terms of feminine and masculine, without recognising how they distort real social practices. Liberal feminism is not empty feminism at its origin, but its emptiness is given by the inability to overcome systemic weaknesses). Individualism sets an imminent trap: the illusion of instant gratification under earning capital is only demoted when stepping outside of its "feminine" confinement and realising that while change might be permitted, it is not encouraged. Conflictingly, a woman is free as long as her freedom is controlled by the power of capital and violence. "It seems a woman must already be equal before she can complain of inequality" (Catharine MacKinnon).

The legacy of radical feminism in the form of "the personal is political" has the potential to create a new framework for understanding gender norms and dynamics. A flexible understanding of gender implies an intrinsic understanding of identity and why "women and men are made, not born" (Simone de Beauvoir). On a theoretical level, even the idea of gender equality might be flawed in its mainstream understanding, as this equality implies a relational connection with another subject—equality between men and women, where the former becomes the normalised standard. But ultimately, my equality shall look differently from yours.

The goal of the "empowered women" stems from the Western-dominated illusion of the woman who can climb the ladder of the social structure and enjoy the same opportunities as the men around her, by using the rule of law and other civil conventions. Yet, the myth of the "man-made woman" and the "corporate girlboss" becomes obsolete considering the increasing number of women who are deprived of basic rights such as bodily autonomy and security. In a system where the currency of liberty is power, the only way empowerment can be (re)claimed (was it ever claimed in the first place?) is by either hoping to ignore the relational aspect of power and structure that sustains power differentials or by recognising that liberation is not possible without dismantling economic and social dominions.

Ever since its creation, the liberal subject has been masculine. Theorising about reform is foreseeing how the system can be corrected; the liberal feminist narrative pushes forward ideas of gaining autonomy and self-determination by essentially appealing to the patriarchy. Adding women into existing frameworks means taking for granted the fundamental assumptions of said public constructions, which are mostly historically and politically defined by their "man-ness", such as gender (a woman is not a man) or rationality.

The capitalist system operates to its advantage the historical and social omission of women from the very beginning by permitting structures such as the patriarchy to evolve. Power is gender-related, constituting identities and dividing resource access. When conceptualised in this manner, empowerment threatens the status quo as one is empowered at the expense of the other. "When men lose power, they feel they lose rights" (Catharine MacKinnon). The liberal approach of equating gaining more access to power with empowerment is flawed from multiple perspectives; firstly because having access to some sources of power does not ensure the ability to exercise it in relation to other actors, and secondly because gendering norms and institutions de facto constrain the decisional autonomy of the woman.

Under these conditions, liberal feminism has created the tendency to measure women's empowerment by their access to certain forms of power (labour and more open entry to political life) instead of analysing the wider social landscape and how power sources reinforce social relations. The radical critique of power access as a defining feature of feminism concerns how this reinforcement can do nothing else than further perpetuate cycles of gender discrimination, emphasising that by opening the current system built on the oppression of women to women there will be no changes gained, but a prevailing adherence to the status quo. Integrating marginalised groups in a political, social and economic sphere that benefits from their identity will further strengthen the power relations, by rebranding them under a new sense of imposed gratitude. To think that women of colour or trans women can verily claim a position of power in the current system fails to acknowledge how liberalism tends to accommodate human rights only by providing the bare minimum of social and economic change.

The evolution and history of feminism as a movement and its internalisation in the mainstream framework is representative of how capitalism "feeds" as a system. While movements such as feminism, environmentalism, and post-colonialism are necessary and act as instruments of empowerment for silenced communities, they more often than not end up being absorbed.

Capitalism embraces its critiques and it does not punish them as other political systems as long as it manages to make a profit out of counter-culture movements. However, this illusion of choice also exists inside a feminist paradox—while (some) women are allowed to critique and openly talk about their experiences, no change occurs without mass solidarity in society, which is systemically discouraged by a culture of alienation and isolation.

One Casts Out Devils by Misnaming Them

The Primaveral Nature of Language, or Why We Should Care About What We Say

ANNA ARAGONCILLO BARCELÓ

It is not in the axe that cuts through neck, or the cyanide that penetrates stomachal walls that a devil finds itself face to face with death. It is the language that stabs and tears such an entity. What is it exactly in that concatenation of syllables that proves fatal? Is it the rhetoric of it? The sound of strong consonants against flowy vocals? Or might it be the wrongness of being termed as something that he is not? The rage and discomfort that comes with being called erroneously?

Well, it's none of those. It is the intersubjective meaning that is attached to the concept of oneself and the other. Not truly about opposing to the other but about opposing to the connotations of the conceptualization that a third entity might exert onto oneself.

Language plays a crucial role in our construction of what reality is–what pushes us to wonder, is language objective? Not our interpretation of it, but the words themselves? While some might argue that it is, on a deeper level, language has a bidirectional and convoluted relation to discourse and is not, in fact, objective. Discursive practices are incapable of being objective, as the meaning is socially constructed on the basis of an intersubjective meaning. In an evermore world of political (over)correctness, one might wonder, how does a term come to become offensive? And, in such a case, can it ever become undone?

In order to understand this predicament, we need to look at discourse as an all-encompassing fluid concept, rather than as one-dimensional. We must focus not only on the words themselves, but on the contexts in which they first emerge and then are used, as well as the structure and agency that accompanies them. Terms such as queer, black or slut were born as derogatory terms from a desire to segregate, subordinate and silence entire communities on the basis of their identity. However, these conceptualizations underwent several sociolinguistic transformations that made it possible for these terms to get partially rid of their original meaning, depriving them from their pejorative nature and providing them with another meaning. A meaning that, rather than deepening the segregation, managed to create a voice in unison; one that, rather than reinforcing the subordinative relational power, motivated the emergence of a collective force; one that, rather than muting and shushing outlying voices, gave them the stage and script for them to speak up.

Not all terms are (re)created equal, and, similar to a deciduous oak tree, language goes through different phases. It can be born from arid ground, but it is dependent on its environment to shape it, nurture it and, eventually, bring it to bloom. Terms can be reclaimed by the community, mostly for the community, although this is not always the case. Sometimes, terms are normalised and integrated into standard modes of language by depriving them of negative connotations. In other occasions, sociolinguistics do not manage to achieve that, as the weight of the discriminatory historical power relations are much too recent and much too heavy.

We cannot change the past, in the same way that we cannot foresee the future. What we can do, however, is scrutinise, dissect and digest the world that surrounds us. It is in the critical thirst for knowledge that we will find the axe we are looking for; awareness. Awareness of oneself, our environment, the past and present underlying power structures and our contribution to humanity's pyramid. The devil has, is, and will keep on being slayed by the perlocutionary forces of the own communities. By reclaiming these terms, we give a renewed intersubjective meaning to the world that surrounds us.

The Commodification of Self-Care

And How Looking After Ourselves is Supposed to look like, according to Capitalism

ESTHER LÁINEZ CARBALLO

"Monthly new lingerie as part of your self-care routine", I read as I scroll through Instagram. Rolling my eyes, I tap to see the next story. It says the pimples on my face are caused by my pillowcase, so I need to buy another one: it costs like 50 euros, but it's for the sake of my poor skin. I take a deep breath. The next story is a very muscular man asking me if I am ready to invest in my health (I must go to the gym at 5 AM). My eye starts twitching now.

Taking care of our mental and physical health, working on self-love and making time for ourselves is certainly not a silly matter, and there is nothing inherently wrong with it: in fact, amidst a society obsessed with achievement and productivity, these habits become rather necessary if we want to live a healthy and prosperous life. The exhaustive rhythm of our world has led, in the last decades, to a concerning rise of stress, depression, and anxiety, so it makes perfect sense that the idea of "taking care of yourself" became so popular and prominent across culture and media. But as I see these ads in Instagram, I cannot help but wonder what is really self-care and what is just more consumerism, as it seems to me that the line between the two may have become too thin. What was once a nice reminder to look after ourselves in order to be healthier, has now become a new opportunity for companies to get even richer—at our expense.

Take as an example gym culture. Gyms are often advertised as a place where you can improve not only your looks, but also your health. But to what extent does this actually happen–and at what cost? While the decade of the 2000s brought forward a wave of eating disorders especially for women (mostly anorexia nervosa and bulimia), somewhen in the 2010s the problem seemed to shift, and we moved on from extremely skinny girls who could not eat more than 200 calories a day to overly-muscular men who cannot eat less than 4000. This is not to say that the pressure posed by beauty standards is not on women anymore, but rather, that instead of decreasing they are now a threat to yet another sector of the population. One only needs to see "the hot guy" in a 90s movie and compare it to "the hot guy" in a more recent one: his biceps are four times his head. Several actors have spoken up about this issue, like Zac Efron, who claimed that being so muscular was extremely detrimental to both his physical and mental health, causing him insomnia and depression, and making him unable of even walking up a few set of stairs without getting tired because of how much energy required to move his body.

Another example is the skin-care industry. It does not matter how many studies and dermatologists assert that one does not need more than two or three basic products to take normal care of their skin: influencers and companies keep insisting that we need an eight-step routine (at least). And while ten-year-old girls invade the aisles of Sephora and ask for retinol as a Christmas gift, and boys and men spend so much time, energy, and money getting to achieve the perfect body through exhaustive work-outs and crazy meals and supplements, who is really benefiting from all of this? I'll let you in on a clue: it is not the consumers.

"We Were Girls Together"

The Value of Shared Girlhood amidst a World that Wanted Us Against Each Other

ESTHER LÁINEZ CARBALLO

Somewhen in the spring of 2022, the picture of a plaque, found in a bench of Central Park, stirred chaos among the internet as girls and women of all ages came across it. The plaque read: "For my lifelong best friend, Judy, from Janice. We were girls together."

Words cannot convey the reasons why the quote "We were girls together" struck a chord in so many women. But they may be the same reasons that led so many of us to collectively dress in pink the next summer to watch Barbie together, stare at the screen holding our breaths when we listened to Billie Eilish's "What was I made for", and shake our heads with disappointment months later while hearing that "joke" in the Golden Globes: "Barbie is based on a plastic doll with big boobies". They also may be the same reasons why you will never find yourself without a pad or a tampon in a public toilet for women, or crying because of a guy without another girl offering you a tissue and helping you fix your mascara. The same reasons behind Let me know when you're home safe and Do you want to borrow some of my clothes?

While representations of girlhood in media and culture have certainly evolved, ten years ago they were plagued with girls "who were not like the other girls", because being a girl was just… bad. Enjoying make-up or clothes was vain, wearing pink was embarrassing, and having guy friends was the best option because girls were "too much drama". The pick-me culture shamed girls for choosing anything associated with traditional femininity, fostered competitiveness and slut-shaming that only reinforced internalised misogyny, and lacked any sense of sorority or community. But we have come a long way since then. It seems like we all have been girls together lately, whether it was while enjoying the Barbie movie, the Eras Tour, the Coquette trend, or celebrating Galentine's Day with our girl-friends. The importance of this lies not in the events themselves, but in how they have allowed us to connect, to laugh and cry and sing together. To exchange friendship bracelets and wear matching outfits; to share with each other a part of our souls, something that makes us girls and that no one has yet figured out what it is, exactly.

But if you ask me, I believe it is us. I believe we girls make each other. The friends we had when we were younger and who we do not talk to anymore, even though we still remember many of our inside jokes, the made-up name they gave to their crush, or their birthdays (how could we not, when we marked it in our school agendas so many times, decorating the date with hearts and happy faces and colours?). I think it is the fact that we still use the mascara our friend recommended us years ago, or that we still keep the letters we wrote to each other, the pictures, the memories of running home because we were already past our curfew; the fact that we still remember how they laughed, or how safe we felt by their side. The fact that the friends we have now are being part of this process too, a process that is also shaping who we are through the silent understanding of friendship. The bond tying us girls is a thing of unexplainable and precious beauty that shapes who we are as we go through life, and the fact that this bond is now being valued and appreciated should be a motive and a celebration to all of us who are lucky enough to be girls together.

DNA or DIY?

The Possibilities and Dangers of Genetic Technology

FABIA MIELCAREK

Would you like to have blue or green eyes? Or how about blond and curly hair? What if you could select the green eyes you wanted your whole life or the blond hair you admired your best friend for, for your children? Would you grab the opportunity and design your own human being? No, I'm not here to present to you the new science fiction movie that just came out, but the possibilities of actual science of the future.

Scientific research is conducted all over the world, exploring more about the potentialities of genetic technology. This is how scientists found out it would be possible to modify the genes of a baby to choose specific characteristics. Genetic technology accompanies great possibilities and opens up paths to create and save lives. Couples with genetic diseases in their bloodline can have a healthy baby, or even the possibility of having a child in the first place due to procedures like in-vitro fertilisation. Life can be produced outside the woman's body, which makes a screening achievable before the healthy embryo can be transferred into the body in order to create a new family.

Scientists can also save lives by creating more organ matches via the creation of a similar genetic profile. This would mean that the number of people dying every day while waiting for a transplant (which according to information from the United Network for Organ Sharing, lies at about 20 people per day) would decrease enormously. Other advances may include the increasing general resistance within the human gene pool, which may lead to a reduction in the incidence of cancer patients and therefore safe lives; or the fact that by cloning animals like the rhesus monkey, with a similar physiology to humans, scientists can ameliorate medical research.

However, these possibilities also pose questions of morality and threats to the well-being of the patients. A slight mistake in the modification process could drastically decrease the health of a baby and also increase the risk of diseases like cancer. And the question arises if it is rightful to create the life of an animal for the purpose of experimenting with it. Moreover, in a world where achieving an idealised version of physical perfection is within reach, questions arise about the potential consequences for diversity and human interaction. Would we all look the same in the end according to society's current beauty standards? And extending the discussion to more than beauty standards, this would also be a matter of racism, ableism, and a more apparent manifestation of eugenics.

The gap between rich and poor people and countries in the world would potentially increase even further and discrimination and othering would extend onto another, more primal level. We have already seen atrocious examples of othering and violence based on inherent traits in the past. This could exacerbate significantly given the potential for altering traits. People that are rich and powerful enough to create the perfect human beings for a perfect society would therefore gain even more power, excluding others based on race and other "undesirable" traits. Worst case scenario: would we find ourselves in a society controlled by an engineered elite? In a world where insecurities and psychological problems keep increasing, we do not need further means to exclude and judge others.

So far, the use of genetic technology is strictly regulated by countries: for example, through the regulation framework "Human fertilisation and embryology authority" in the United Kingdom, or the prohibition of the selection of embryos for non-medical purposes in Germany and Canada. While the possibilities remain near to endless, it is probably good that this technology is, for now, reserved for medical purposes. Instead of trying to find out how to create the perfect child, we should instead start off by shifting our mindset. We would not be so special and unique anymore if we all looked the same. We need to start off by realising that it is the differences, and often what we would consider our flaws, that make us unique.

Interview with Silvia von Pistor

Can Facilitating Access to Cannabis Benefit some People, while Endangering Others?

FABIA MIELCAREK

Silvia von Pistor works for the German medical cannabis company Canify and is responsible for research and development in the GXP area, which means all quality and regulatory lab divisions and their people, results and projects. She offered us an insightful perspective into both the effect and regulations regarding this medicine and the advantages and disadvantages of marijuana legalisation.

What exactly can you treat with Cannabis?

We don't have a lot of statistically sound facts to answer that question, but we do know that many patients that are treated with it have shown very positive responses especially when it comes to pain, both chronic and neuropathic. That is remarkable because it is something that hardly any pain medicine can cover. It furthermore helps with appetite, which is especially helpful for cancer patients going through chemotherapy. Additionally, some spasmolytic diseases and Parkinson disease that medicinal cannabis can have a positive effect on.

Why is there not a lot of data?

I do tend to think that the way it is used in most of the countries and because of the history of it being an abusive drug there are many people that have experiences, but that was never driven by a real statistical protocol or study. When we talk about flowers, the harvested part of the cannabis plant, it is really hard to standardise them, which would be the basis to collect meaningful data. You would need to have the exact same flower and the same way of applying the dose. The second aspect is the indications themselves. If you want to study pain for example you get a very subjective outcome. To have a meaningful result you need thousands of patients. And so far there has not been a pharmaceutical company which has taken the step to invest at this point.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of the legalisation of Cannabis?

In recreational use, it is better for people when it is produced in a controlled environment. They would have access to better quality and I would hope that the production for recreational use would also get controlled regularly. You would be sure that it is not grown with dubious or even harmful pesticides or fertilisers. The safety and quality of the product will improve. I also think that it will be easier to educate people about it once it is legal. Hopefully, the more acceptable the use is, the more you talk about it and use it responsibly.

However, I am not sure whether the current law is designed well enough, in terms of the amount and accessibility of and to the product. To grow and cultivate Cannabis, you need the people with knowledge as well as the square metres. When you look at Canada and their legalisation, one of the biggest issues was that they did not have enough product available for the users on the day after the legalisation. So the black market did not really shrink because people were interested and wanted to have access, but the amount of product was underestimated and therefore limited. I am a bit worried about similar effects. If Germany takes an individual decision, it could only be on a national level. When we are talking about the product gap, which will be there, it cannot be filled with flowers from other countries. The international trade will not allow that, so it has to come from within the borders.

In essence, there are still quite a few questions. I think that the intention to legalise is fair and Cannabis has been a well known substance for thousands of years. So it is the right decision to go this way and legalise marijuana, but by means of processes and conditions to support it, I am not sure whether that is completely thought through yet.

Diary of Matthias Haass

What does the Revival of the European Defence Initiative Mean for Us?

CASPAR LEMMENS

Matthias Haass is a German Journalist. He has experience as correspondent in the field of Diplomacy and European Affairs, and now works for the German newspaper Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine. Although he now primarily works as a journalist, he finished a bachelor's degree in Peace and Conflict Studies, after which he became a journalist.

There have recently been calls by NATO officials and representatives of government to prepare our European societies for war, what should we expect of this?

I believe that the calls for preparing ourselves, especially among government or NATO officials, signal a radical change in mindset among policymakers. While there have always been calls in favour for strengthening European Defence, the scale of discussion and the role of the public figures show that the favouring side is more dominant. Of course, in the light of the Ukraine War, this was to be expected. However, I believe this does not mean everyone should expect to be wearing body armour and kevlar helmets by next year. Firstly, the upscaling of defence industries, especially within the cooperation framework of the EU, takes time. More importantly however, it is not needed to mobilise an entire continent to achieve an acceptable level of defensive capabilities.

What is fundamentally different between a war prepared society and our current societies?

This is where it gets interesting. If you assume that a country with a large defence industry, and therefore a high production capacity, is the same as a society that is prepared for war, you would be wrong. France, for one, has a large defence industry and is a large exporter of arms, but I don't believe we could consider it a war prepared society. The difference is mentality among the people, and I think that is precisely what the remarks of NATO officials are aimed at. To justify taking measures regarding defence, there has to be a certain feeling of urgency in a society. Also purely psychological, the change in mentality impacts the way a society handles conflict. Recent studies have shown that in most European countries, the willingness to fight for one's country is at around 20-30 percent. If European countries really want to improve their defence, this has to change.

Why have we been so hesitant and passive in the last decades?

First of all, for the longest time we have been using American protection to our advantage. There simply was no urgency to adjust our societies to a scenario of war, because there would always be the Americans looking over us. This has changed now the USA has become more hesitant to provide for European defence in Ukraine. Secondly, it is simply costly. In terms of money, it will cost taxpayers' money to facilitate these investments. Moreover, it costs a society in terms of time and psychology. We would have to be willing to accept that war is a possibility, and that young people would have to serve years of their lives in the army. Lastly, the European mindset has been dominated by pacifism, on a continental scale. After effectively causing and enduring two world wars, Europeans did not even want to consider war or prepare for it anymore.

Should we fear this means we are preparing for an actual war?

My guess is as good as any, because this is simply unpredictable. However, I personally would not be too afraid. Preparing European societies for a possible war does exactly what it says; prepare. In case it would be needed, we would be better prepared. In the meantime, what matters is that things do not escalate to such an extent by diplomatic means. Moreover, a well prepared society can promote peace, as it will not be regarded as easy prey. As long as society is prepared for defending, we should not be fearful. When societies are prepared for attacking, that is where problems arise.

The Problem with the West

Removing Obstacles for Productive Discourse

PAUL JOHANN LINDHORST

"Does the world still need the West?" asked Al-Jazeera's Patrick Gathara in 2020. In the context of the ongoing conflict in the Near and Middle East, the term "the West" gets unconsciously thrown around like no other. But the term blurs reality and so harms the chances for peace and human flourishing in the Middle East. The discussion needs a return of precise language and terms.

> In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, "the West" is used to describe the often-coherent pro-Israeli stances by European nations and the USA, as well as its allies. But this blurs reality, as it fails to recognize historical and political complexities essential to reasons, but they significantly differ from the Anglo-American ones. Both countries are inextricably linked to "The West", but so are Spain and Ireland who have recently and understanding who does what and why. The USA has shown historical, bi-partisan support for Israel, as did the UK. Germany has also shown support after the Second World War, having anchored Israel's right to exist in its constitution. This has obvious and less obvious historically shown very different stances, recently expressing harsh criticism towards Israel. Using "the West" in discourse can hide the diverse positions of typically "Western" countries, thus not helping the productive discussion.

So, if "the West" as a concept is often unclear and analytically inutile, why would someone use the word?

"The West" can be a shell word meaning "Imperialism", "Capitalism", and "Islamophobia". All of these concepts stand in historic connection to many "Western" countries and are rightful criticisms of its failure to act up to the self-proclaimed values of freedom and democracy. Nevertheless, if not followed by an explanation of the implied notions, a critical mind might wonder why authors use "the West" instead of saying what they really mean–and rightly so.

Of course, not every unreflected use of the term is mal-intended, but one must strive to avoid such simplifications, as they can undermine one's own precision and credibility–especially in a serious discussion with human lives at stake that should be in nobody's interest.

"The West" also serves as the imaginary entity vis-à-vis actors identify and legitimise themselves with. In different national discourses the government positions itself, "the West" can be consciously used to obscure what the government is speaking for and against. The rejection of "Western values" by one government might be viewed sympathisingly by an Iraqi citizen, who has suffered immensely under those operating in his country claiming to protect said values like Human rights. But framing Human Rights as "Western", or synonymously "imperially imposed", means governments can legitimise rejecting them, and act accordingly. This relativist framing is also a function of the concept of "the West" in political discourse – with resulting, cruel consequences. Thus, I advocate for each one of us to think about the words we are hearing, to be as precise as possible in what we say and write and, however hard it might be in the time of TikTok and Instagram Reels, and to call out demagogues wherever they use potential boogiemen like "the West" to create incitement and prevent constructive discourse.

In conclusion, we might be able to answer the question posed in the beginning. "The West" can be used as a political tool either to rally the "Western" self behind the flag and defend what it perceives must be defended or to outrage the "Western" other in order to support whatever policy is framed to be in opposition to the hypocritic and imperial "West" however harmful or corrupt that policy is. Thus, the world might not need "the West" but it needs a rebirth of peace, self-determination, precise language and those who are ready to fight for it – that is what the relentlessly continuing wars in the Middle East and Ukraine show.

That Looks Familar ...

Are These Paintings Really How They Seem?

CLIO YEARBOOK COMMITTEE 2023-2024

Our Memory can trick us sometimes. Do we really remember something the way it was? Or do we actually paint the picture way different than it originally was? When we bring past things to the present, we tend to project them in a different light. Well, we took the liberty to take this to the maximum capacity. Do you recognise the paintings we recreated?

With love,

Clio Yearbook Committee '23-24

About Us: What Song Makes You Feel Reborn?

Jumping onto the theme of our second edition, we wanted to really explore where the term *rebirth* was born, so here´s a little sociolinguistic lesson for you! The term *rebirth,* in its English form, is composed by the lexeme *birth,* which comes from the Old Norse *byror* (meaning offspring) and was later derived by the Germanic suffix *-th* to reference *process,* thus coming to mean *the process of bringing an offspring to existence,* which, posteriorly, was derived with the latin prefix *re-,* signifying *back, again, anew,* thus forming *rebirth; a repeated birth into temporal existance.* If you follow this code, you will find songs that we have listened to while working on the magazine, and hope to evoke the same question in you: What song makes you feel reborn?

The C&B Editorial Staff of 2023-2024 hopes you enjoy our second edition!

Study Association Cleo
Checks & Balances
2023 - 2024

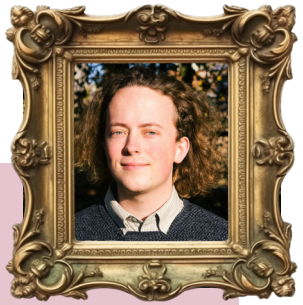
Anna Aragoncillo Barceló

Editor-in-Chief

Labour by Paloma Paris. It makes me mad, pisses me off, and triggers the most intrinsic rage instincts in me, and it is in that rage that I find comfort. Feeling such raw emotions makes me feel reborn, and gives me the strength to stand up for what I care for, like a phoenix that emerges from her ashes.

Sam Holm van Donk

Secretary



One way trigger, by the Strokes.

Why? I'm not so sure myself, but it's fast and catchy, with upbeat lyrics and a mesmerising riff. It gives me energy when I need it (oftentimes in the mornings) and makes my day just that little bit better.

Judith de Bruijn

Board Representative

Beautiful Things by Benson Boone. Honestly, there is not really a reason, and it might be another song in a few months. But this song recently came out, and already before it was haunting me (and probably the rest of the internet) online. The chores just makes you feel free and energised, allowing you to let loose.

Matei Ciocan

Treasurer & Layout Editor

You've just finished your exams, you quickly get into your car with your best mates, head straight to the seaside doing 180 on the motorway passing everyone around you, 30 degrees in the air and the sun is shining upon you. For me, this is feeling reborn, and the speakers loudly play *Amazing* by INNA.

Rocío Martel Medrano

Layout Editor

Sometimes, to feel reborn you need to be loud, unapologetically so, let it all out and then breathe back in. *Would've, Could've, Should've* by Taylor Swift helps, because who wouldn't think that belting out at the top of your lungs *Give me back my girlhood, it was mine first!* is cathartic and therapeutic in the girliest of ways?

Esther Láinez Carballo

Layout Editor

For me, *This Land* by Hans Zimmer, that famous Lion King song, certainly alters my brain chemistry. It's always a reminder of who I am, the path I have walked so far, and how much more life still has to offer. It always helps me rediscover my inner strength when I need it the most (even though it might make me shed a tear or two in the process).

Briana Stefana Agrici

Public Relations

If you know me, I've probably mentioned Alexandra Savior (might've called her my personal Jesus). In a room with plastered posters on the walls where someone forgot to stub out a cigarette the muffled sound of Mirage seals the fracture of distraction. To be reborn is to cling to a rescue boat hoping you'll one day find the shore again.

Emma Andreae

Public Relations

Amsterdam by Nothing but Thieves.

It's one of the first songs I've heard from my now favourite band and it has a special place in my heart. It's not their best song, but every time I hear it, it feels like I'm hearing it again for the first time.

Caspar Lemmens

Reporter

The beauty of a dying icon, singing as if in his prime. The tempo and music style shifts are just brilliant. Everything of a rebirth can be found: the tension and prophetical lyrics of the intro/end or the relaxation followed by fiery passion in the middle. *Innuendo* by Queen is a spiritual trip, and rebirth, every time.

Fabia Mielcarek

Reporter

The feeling of warm sunlight on the skin. The feeling of wind rustling through your hair, on your bike. The feeling of laughter bubbling up in your body around friends. All of this gives me a feeling of being reborn. I think a song that fits those feelings would be: *Shooting Stars and Fairy Tales* by Mrs. Greenbird.

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