



Edition V. *Growth and Power*

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Editors' Note

This edition celebrates a milestone in the Ambroisie team's journey that we have always dreamed of reaching. We are ONE year old! We began working together in the Autumn of 2021, and haven't stopped since. Through ups and downs, our committee, our writers and editors have experienced so much growth!

Growth is progress, it's process, it's stepping stones, it's redirection and challenge. It's also joy, beauty and grateful moments of building something worthwhile, together.

Power is a more complicated term. Its connotation being intrinsically complex, we want our writers to explore, (re)define and create pieces through which we can comprehend the many facets of this word. We also wanted to inspire our community to find power within themselves and in what they do, to explore the empowerment that stems from growth.

We would like to sincerely thank the Ambroisie family for this year of growth. We are both people who believe in the power of the light, and we very much hope to spread it through the Journal, for you, dear readers, writers, editors, dear team. We couldn't be here without you, and we wouldn't want to. Onward and upward, sending you much love in the new year.

Yours truly,

Emma and Dodo

Special thanks to our patrons on Patreon for their support: Alexandru, Callie, Edina and Miri.



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**Amalia Pascual del
Riquelme Verdejo**

*edited by
Laurine Heerma*

The Emperor's New Clothes : The legitimation of the Hapsburg dynasty through the use of clothing

The Emperor's New Clothes : The legitimation of the Hapsburg dynasty through the use of clothing

During each moment in history, the human necessity of covering, identifying and expressing oneself has been approached differently. One of the tools that the new Hapsburg dynasty used when Charles V inherited the crown in 1520, creating their image of power, which simultaneously reinforced and legitimised the new monarchy: their clothing. The Hapsburgs hereby distinguished themselves from all other European monarchies, creating a new aesthetic that reflected very particular values, which was also appreciated in the rest of artistic disciplines.

The Renaissance, with its exaltation of individualism and love for magnificence, granted dress a privileged status. During the Middle Ages, despite certain peculiarities of some regions, a common clothing existed within the higher levels of European societies. Consequently, it was not until the fifteenth century that a process of diversification was initiated that culminated a hundred years later. Parallel to this phenomenon, the reverse took place. The fashion created in one country crossed its borders, and therefore the influences in this field were continuous. Within these coordinates, some influences were more dominant than others, and the sixteenth century saw the Spanish Golden Age, and with that, their way of dressing was imposed in every European court. Nevertheless, in spite of being the most relevant within the European panorama, the Spaniard's dress was indeed influenced by other foreign fashions. It is imperative to take into account that said influences were mostly present in the masculine dress, considering that the female dress had a more national character. In fact, two of the Spanish garments that had the most impact in the international scene are the farthingale (*verdugado*) and chopine (*chopin*).

Additionally, the rise of the portrait entailed a display of power and sophistication that placed humans as the core of the universe in a society dominated by social hierarchies and lineage. The democratisation of the portrait, in its origins exclusive to the most privileged, ended up encompassing the whole scope of the social spectrum, creating the imperative need for those in power to create new iconographies that

quenched their yearning of differentiation.

According to Dr Patricia Fumerton, the faces in the miniatures by Nicholas Hilliard are in fact the background, made to support the variable encompass representation of hair, jewels and other objects. The heads could be painted far more rapidly than the meticulous job that pearls, frills and diverse clothes. The more time spent, the bigger the relevance. Clothing brings a specification that people cannot give, and its importance is proven by the way that portraits were put into inventories during the Renaissance. In fact, the name of the model, often misspelt, is a common method of categorising, and clothing of itself is one as well. For instance instead of saying Isabelle, the name would be spelled Isobel, but the dress would be described accurately. If the character and psychology of a person can be shown exclusively through their fashions, why bother with the complex decorations of portraits? In the majority of cases, the identity is clearer in objects than in people, which have a symbolic and iconographic charge.

With the ascension of Charles V to the throne, but most specifically with his arrival to the Iberian Peninsula, the Flemish and French influences on the Spanish way of dressing became more apparent, as shown by the ordinances of Seville's guild of tailors when demanding that the aspiring candidate to the apprentice position knew how to cut *una saya francesa y un jubón a la francesa de manga ancha*¹. If the French fashions, open at the front with a big collar, were seen as an international garment used by European elites, the Spanish national style was increasingly reaffirmed and was implemented in foreign courts. In spite of the Italian triumph of the Renaissance, its influence on Spanish garments came deferred through the Netherlands, and soon short hair, especially accompanied by a small cap, and for men, leg-of-mutton sleeves along with open necklines, came into fashion.

After the Middle Ages, a nationalist sentiment started to consolidate among different European territories. Rather quickly the universal aspect of the Gothic style was pushed aside in favour of an individualism brought on by the Renaissance. The Spanish dress during the period of Charles V was indeed the result of this nationalism in conjunction with the continuous influx of foreign fashions, especially pronounced throughout the fifteenth century. Christianity may be interpreted as a common denominator. Fashion can adhere in varying degrees to climatic conditions, however, it is always going to answer to aesthetic values that also translate into particular morals. The conscience of a national fashion was already present during the beginning of the sixteenth century in the Hapsburg court. When Charles V entered the Iberian Peninsula in 1517, he was a foreigner, not only because of his education and tongue, but also his way of dressing. In 1520, the Bishop of Badajoz defended the new Emperor by saying *"en la cual determinación está y estará mientras viviere, e así aprendió vuestra lengua e vestió vuestro hábito, tomando vuestros gentiles ejercicios de caballería"*².

With regards to the Spanish government, the national aspect was more accentuated, possibly explained by the isolation of women and their lack of liberty in dressing. It is expressed through the little details, in the use of certain garments with very peculiar characters. Since the beginning of the Middle Ages, the variety

of coats and capes had been the biggest originality of the Spanish suit due to its replacement in the rest of Europe, as it is precisely the first Spanish garment that Charles V wore upon his arrival. Other elements to mention due to their transcendence are the aforementioned *verdugado* and *chopines*, the *transado* or ribbon-bound braids and a type of coif called *de papos*.

The Spanish *verdugado* [Figure 1], from which “farthingale” derives, was a hoop skirt originally stiffened with esparto grass; later designs in the temperate climate zone were stiffened with osiers (willow withies), rope, or, from about 1580, whalebone. The name *verdugado* comes from the Spanish *verdugo* (“green wood”, or the more modern meaning of “executioner”). In the court dress, it was a type of undergarment that gave a flared shape to the skirts. It appeared in Castille in around 1470, and at the end of the fifteenth century, it was imported to the Italian Peninsula. Consequently, with the reign of Francis I, it travelled to France, and by the second half of the sixteenth century, it was adopted by ladies across Europe.

When it comes to footwear, the chopines [Figure 2] are made of extremely thick cork soles. They were already in use in mediaeval times in the Iberian Peninsula due to their islamic legacy. Further on, during the 16th century they travel to Venice, becoming characteristic of this city, and soon some parts of Europe follow suit. Their morphology made them a complicated shoe to wear, becoming a recurrent element in popular theatre as the women who wore them would fall in the arms of the knight. The *transado* [Figure 3] were a type of ribbon-bound braids that appeared at the end of the 14th century and remained in fashion until the middle of the 16th century, imitated in Flanders, France and Italy.

During the first third of the sixteenth century, the human figure flattens and widens itself, with the dominance of horizontal lines, the silhouette consequence of a reaction against the Gothic taste, based on angular shapes and slenderness. Fashion loses liberty and variety, characteristic of the previous movement, and becomes increasingly uniform. The headpieces become smaller and the garments tend to imprison the neck and tighten around the arms and torso.

The ideal of flattened shapes is exchanged for one that tends to create triangular silhouettes. This new ideal of beauty, pleased by full and robust shapes opposite of Gothic fragility, translates into the fashion of a silhouette with wide hips. During the 1520s, the Spanish dress became more experimental and eye-catching due to the foreign influences; however it still favoured the contrast between the upper bust and waist. After 1530, the court dress was created, inspired by the motivation of hiding the female body. The trunk was elongated artificially, the waist was not marked in its natural place instead of using a type of corset that made the torso be rigid and flat; the body of the petticoat is joined to the skirt forming a pronounced peak. The only thing to value of the feminine form under those rigid shapes and smooth surfaces, was the narrowness of the waist. The woman appeared as something inaccessible, enclosed in a rich case.

The necklines widen progressively, as in 1526 there are examples of rounded ones that exposed the shoulder nine, covered by the upper part of a thin chemise or a

transparent gorget. The latter being one of the most relevant novelties of the 1530s, especially the ones that covered the whole neck, that in the next decade would start being finished off by ruffles. This new fashion announcer is the end of liberty that women enjoyed from the fifteenth century to show off the skin of her necks and even their bust. The dresses now are completely closed with high necklines and collars to keep the head straight [Figure 5]. This characteristic of Spanish fashion would soon be imitated by the rest of Europe.

The surprising diffusion of the Spanish dress in Europe in the fifteenth century was a direct consequence obtained by the prestige of the Americas, thereby establishing Spain as a key location in the traffic of precious metals, a sort of luxury during the Renaissance. The most distinct characteristic of the Spanish dress was its temperance, its austere elegance. In spite of its delicacy, the textiles are contained within a dark chromatic scheme. Even the buffoons at the Escorial didn't wear garish colours. The fashion of black travels to Italy and France, and soon to the rest of Europe. The Spanish dress stylises the lines of the body, and the feminine realm's main transformation was the abandonment of flexibility to the benefit of straight shapes. The stiffness is a formal aspect that agrees with the values and Spanish pride, as owners of half of the world. It gave whoever chose to take part in it, a sense of monumentality. Through solid fragments of brocade, one could obtain volumes that juxtapose in an angular way, a volumetry that brings a sobriety and a severity. The hefty jewellery talks more about power than sensibility.

Even though luxury and ostentation were permitted, the Spanish dress implied the embodiment of the new Catholic values that the Hapsburg court showed at the core of their politics. Furthermore, not only did they use clothing as a unifying element of the territory, playing with timid nationalisms, and creating a common identity, but also empowered whoever chose to adhere to these fashions. Another aspect to take into consideration is the political and social implications brought by the type of costume and the origin of the textiles.

One of the direct consequences, which is often overlooked, of the relevance of clothing is the creation of a new jurisdiction. The generalised economic wellness implied a new clientele with more expensive taste, as demonstrated by Ann Rosalind Jones y Peter Stallybrass³, when looking at the registry of the Office of Wardrobes. In the Iberian peninsula, the nobles were forced to express in their garments their privileged category. In that century, the uncontrollable wish for luxury resulted in excessive spending that worried the government who tried to impose laws to contain opulence. In 1515, Joan I of Castile forbade her vassals, even if they were dukes, to wear brocade and restricted the use of silk to certain garments and ornaments.

Although history of fashion is increasingly getting more attention, it's a field that should be held in higher regard. The Renaissance conception of which the importance of portrait lays upon the face and therefore in the psychological study of the subject is not completely true, taking into account the multitude of material elements employed in the construction of an image, person, or alter ego. As it was something that the monarchs kept in mind, they would employ a never

ending range of tangible and luxury elements with a very distinct iconography to differentiate one another from the rest of the world. Within the Habsburg court, this new dynasty used and created new garments to legitimise their power and unify their territory that went on beyond their borders. They were the owners and masters of the world, and through ostentatious yet modest clothing, ensured their recognition and dominance.

Figures



Figure 1. *Herod's banquet* (detail), Pedro García de Benabarre, circa 1445-1485, tempera, sutco reliefs and gold leaf on wood. Image courtesy of Museu Nacional d'art de Catalunya.



Figure 2. *Chopines*, circa 1550-1650. Image courtesy of the MET



Figure 3. *Eneas Silvio, bishop of Sienna, presents Eleanor of Portugal to Emperor Frederick III (detail), Piccolomini, c. 1502–1507, fresco at the Piccolomini Library. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*



Figure 4. *Catherine of Austria, wife of king John III of Portugal (detail), Anthonis Mor, 1552–1553, oil on panel. Image courtesy of ©Museo Nacional del Prado .*



Figure 5. *The Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia*, Juan Pantoja de la Cruz, 1598 - 1599, oil on canvas. Image courtesy of ©Museo Nacional del Prado .

Footnotes

¹A french kirtle and a french doublet with wide sleeves.

²In whose determination is and will be while he lives, that is how he learnt your language and dressed in your attire, taking your gentile exercises of chivalry.

³(2000, pp. 21-22)

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MONTANER Y SIMON.

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Anastasiia
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edited by
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Growth and Power: The history of auction houses

To begin with, I would like to explain in simple terms what trade is, in order to discuss the history of auction houses in the context of art business and the commercial world as a whole. It is pretty easy to see the parallels between modern-day understandings of sales in a business, as any trade has two fundamental aspects: buying and selling. Furthermore, trade can be identified as a voluntary exchange of services and/or physical belongings. Due to the fact that the art business is part of the commercial world and is often run not only by local auction houses, but even by large corporations, such as Sotheby's, Christie's and Cambi Auction House, it is also based on the grounds of general sales.

The way the general public sees how modern sales function, we can be thankful for trade, as this phenomenon was already created back in ancient times¹. If we analyse the development of trade, we can see that it has been present since the existence of humankind. A very well-known example of trading in ancient times is the exchange of belongings such as clothing, food, and different types of grains, as at the time any form of money we use today had not been invented yet. The most privileged class, such as nobility, aristocracy and royalty, from what we nowadays call the modern EU states, had always had access to their treasuries and did need to be part of the trade themselves. Given their financial capabilities, they had an opportunity to buy the pieces, which were considered outstandingly unique and rare at the time, such being jewellery, furniture, paintings, any forms of visual arts and decorative elements for their private houses. Contrastingly, the general public and anyone of a lower social background didn't have any access to them at all, as these belongings were kept as private property pieces only. Without a doubt, this tendency has clearly changed throughout the course of history and the general public has gained an opportunity to observe them. One of the first most vivid examples in history, when we become witnesses of this shift, can already be considered the period of the Middle Ages. The most famous family of an aristocratic background who decided to make their properties and decorative elements visible to the greater public were the Medici. Not only were they the most outstanding philanthropists, but by using modern-day business terms, they could even be considered to a certain extent to have been art investors of their time: their properties and art pieces were not used for their own benefit only, but were made accessible to people from any social background for free, which was a

huge rarity for the fifteenth century when Lorenzo il Magnifico himself was in power.

Even though the traditions of access to the arts have changed with time, the definition of valuable belongings, in material, historical and sentimental aspects, has remained the same, and nowadays, the general public has access to them, but not only in museums. There are separate institutions in the art world which allow one not only to see, but to acquire something of great quality, with an unspeakable history behind it. In the majority of cases, these pieces are irreproducible and can be kept not only for personal pleasure, but even as a form of investment. Such institutions are auction houses and adverse to ancient times, when trade was the field carried out by the lower social class groups only (what I have briefly mentioned above), nowadays, it has become a luxurious business run by the upper class, amongst whom the most influential figures are art business owners and/or collectors. In this article, I intend to present the history of auction houses, to show their development and to explain why these institutions are the representation of strength in the art business.

The history of auction houses' dates back to 1674, when the first one was established in Stockholm by Baron Claes Rålamb². Interestingly, in the United Kingdom, the first auction house was created only 195 years later, and "by the end of the eighteenth century, auctions of artworks and chattels often took place in taverns and coffeehouses"³. As it has been since 500 BC⁴, when according to the historians of ancient history and religious studies, the first ever mention of the process of an auction appeared in Babylon. Nonetheless, the legal definition of the auction itself always remains the same, no matter what period of history we are to look at. In the legislative context, the auction's main purpose is "a public sale of the property to the highest bidder" and to "obtain the best financial returns for the owner of the property and to allow free and fair competition among bidders"⁵.

Having established what the process of the auction itself is, and how the auction houses were born, I would like to give some particular attention to the most famous and well-established auction houses worldwide, known as Sotheby's and Christie's. The former is one of the most renowned in the world, as it was created back in 1744 by Sir Samuel Baker⁶, and it still holds not only such a monumental reputation behind its name due to the historical events, but remains a pioneer among the giants in the world of art business. Along with Christie's, Sotheby's occupies up to 90% of the market for auction sales of antiques and art objects⁷. Captivatingly, Sotheby's was initially a members' club, where only the aristocracy had an opportunity to be hired. Nowadays, the headquarters of Sotheby's is no longer based in London, but is in New York, as it was opened there in 1955. After 1955, the opening of branches of this auction house around the world followed in such cities as Paris, Los Angeles, Zurich, Toronto, Melbourne, Munich, Edinburgh, Johannesburg, Houston and Florence. The aforementioned auction house Christie's is a real leader in the modern art-business, including visual arts, antique furniture, jewellery and other forms of luxurious arts. This is proven by the fact that its total revenue in 2017 alone amounted to \$6.6 billion⁸, which undeniably surpassed Sotheby's revenue in that given year. However, it cannot be emphasized enough that being the main competitor to Sotheby's, the latter auction house still has managed to outperform the figures given above in 2021, by reaching the

peak of the annual turnover with the number of \$7.3 billion⁹. Thus, this clearly proves that these role models of auction houses have not only managed to keep up their reputation in terms of historical value, but also to demonstrate the clear development of their work throughout the centuries, up to modern-day society's demands.

But to understand these auction houses' full evolution, we also need to look at how their progress was forged geographically. As it has been mentioned before, the first auction house was established in Stockholm, followed by the opening of two other ones elsewhere in Sweden. Here we can all become witnesses of the fact that the first expansion of the art business institutions happened from this Scandinavian country towards the UK. When one is to follow and to judge the history and development of auction houses through Sotheby's exclusively, one can also tell that the following country to adopt this manner of luxury trading was the US. Moreover, amongst the numerous countries where the branches were open, it is very easy to find that Italy stands out a lot, due to the amount of affiliate auction houses that were opened there, and it is vital to pay attention to the development of these institutions in this particular state.

Modern-day Italy is often seen by both the customers of the art business and the art dealers themselves, as one of the countries that represents the beauty of art best, due to the fact that the Italian Peninsula is the motherland of many blue chip artists¹⁰ of all the different styles and historical periods: from Leonardo da Vinci to Lucio Fontana. Taking this into consideration, even though Italy has managed to adapt to this quite innovative approach to selling art, as it was for the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, it is surprising to see that the first originally Italian auction house was only opened in 1998¹¹. Cambi Auction House was indeed founded in the twentieth century in Genoa, however, it is highly important to underline that Cambi, according to their own record, is confirmed to be "the first auction house [in Italy] with a turnover of over 35 million euros"¹². Nowadays, Cambi presents three different fields, such as luxury, modern and ancient, despite initially specialising in only the latter. As is stated by Cambi themselves, "over the years, alongside the consolidation of Ancient Art proposals, great attention has been given to the Modern Art and Design, Oriental Art, Jewelry, Watches, Wines departments' development"¹³. Likewise, it is crucial to understand that this is the auction house which became "the point of reference in the country for the art and collecting market"¹⁴. I would like to bring your attention to the fact that Cambi Auction House has also developed from a single, so-called "local" auction house in Genova back in 1998 to a successful art-business establishment with offices in Rome, Turin, Venice, as well as with its headquarters opened in the financial capital of Italy, in Milan¹⁵. These factors only highlight once again the incredible progress Cambi has made in the context of its personal development as a separate business structure and the adaptation of an Italian historical establishment that very vividly represents its motherland on the level of international trade.

In concluding this article, I would like to re-emphasize the fact that auction houses are themselves highly representative of power and strength for various reasons. It is difficult not to ignore the clear impact that auction houses have had on global economics since their establishment, due to constant development and expansion. This can be judged from the figures of both income and sales that have a proven

record in Sotheby's, Christie's and Cambi. Moreover, it is clear that apart from the importance that auction houses bring from a financial aspect, they also act as historical landmarks. Auction houses also represent how this kind of business has progressed from simple trading and non-professionally organised auctions into a well-established form of corporate business as a whole. Auction houses such as Christie's, Sotheby's and Cambi can paradoxically be seen as antiquities in the world of art business themselves: they have managed to preserve their countries' traditions in art business (in terms of areas of art that they represent, as well as based on the cultures of their countries of origin). Likewise, they embody their own manner of carrying business as separate institutions, being in constant competition with each other and therefore also developing art business as a whole, which is very rare for a modern, corporative world. Thus, it can be concluded that auction houses constitute the representation of strength and power not only of the countries where they have originated from, but likewise the field of this business as a whole.

Footnotes

¹ According to the article of Square "The History of the Trade and Barter System" the first time one comes across such concept as the bartering system is dated back in 6000BC

² "The Brief History of Auctions" by Lacy Scott & Knight, Iskauctioncentre.co.uk

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "The Law of Auctions" by Law Offices of Stimmel, Stimmel & Roeser

⁶ "The History of Sotheby's Auction House", Sothebys.com

⁷ "Russian and Ukrainian Artists of The World Scale At The Auction Christie's in London", Usaartnews.com

⁸ "Christie's sales in 2017 total £5.1 billion/\$ 6.6 billion", Christies.com

⁹ "Historic \$7.3 billion turnover for the auction house", Hausvoneden.com

¹⁰ The ones who have a confirmed, long-lasting history of being sold in auction houses at a great value

¹¹ History, Cambi, Cambiaste.com

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.





Sabrina
Harverson

edited by
Maija Utriainen

Fungi: Friend of Foe?

There was a certain type of growth occurring in a top floor attic classroom in a South London primary school. A white mug with old coffee sat on our teacher's dark wooden desk at the front of the classroom, amid chaotic towers of books and paperwork. Inconspicuous and seemingly insignificant, it had been sitting there for at least a week. My teacher had decided it would be "exciting" to see what grew from the stale beverage. As 10 year old students, we were equally enthusiastic about this ad hoc experiment. My teacher was unorthodox in his teaching methods, but what better way to learn? Science in action. The best way to learn. We were intrigued as the surface of the cold coffee began to slowly acquire unique islands of fluffy white mould. A week and a half later, a single white mushroom emerged from one of the mouldy islands in the coffee. We were all proud of our mushroom, it was like having a house plant before that was cool. A small yet perfect specimen. One morning however (two weeks into our experiment) we discovered the cleaner had tidied our teacher's messy desk (no easy feat) and thrown the contents of the coffee mug away. A brief minute of silence ensued for our collective loss. We were disappointed that we had not been able to grow a multitude of mushrooms, but at least we had grown and witnessed the flourishing of one. We were not too disheartened and it was the topic of conversation for quite some time. And there was *always* next time, we all excitedly thought.

Today, a move such as growing fungus in the classroom would probably get a teacher suspended or trigger some sort of investigation for causing a health hazard that has the potential to harm students under a teacher's care. Mould is intriguing and is wonderful, but it can also be a household nightmare, and even deadly. Recently, a two year old from Rochdale died after "chronic exposure" of extensive black mould in the social housing in which the boy lived (Brown and Booth, 2022). Some would be shocked by the capability of mould to cause death and this is a tragic example of what happens if black mould is left to fester.

But is black mould so deadly, that we should all be inspecting our homes with a fine toothed comb? Mould loves damp places

and 12% of English buildings are considered seriously damp (Kuhn and Ghannoum, 2003). In fact, mould in houses is a very common nuisance. Its favourite place in the home are damp ones such as window sills, bathrooms and basically anywhere you have condensation. Black moulds that are most commonly found in the home are often *Cladosporium* or *Alternaria* fungi (Sample, 2022). Another black mould, *Stachybotrys chartarum*, even releases toxins that are harmful to humans which can cause symptoms such as wheezing, a cough or lightheadedness. Those most at risk are babies, young children, people with respiratory conditions and weakened immune systems. Mould in social housing or with housing associations is another issue entirely. It is beyond the scope of the discussion here, as often, there are several complex factors for negligence of the properties and cause of mould growth. There has however been a lot of recent media coverage over the dangers of black mould. Whilst I do not suggest you ignore large swathes or collections of the stuff visibly growing on your bathroom ceiling or on your window. In private housing, people basically need to use their common sense and address damp patches, ventilate areas in their home, and you're less likely to have mould or the dreaded black mould. You really just have to be sensible.

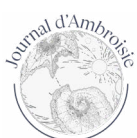
Fungi are not all bad though. Their growth and existence can be vital. It has an integral role within medicine which is ever growing. There lies an interesting paradox when thinking about fungi. Fungi has this wonderful way of being both potentially harmful and on the other end of the spectrum, life saving. Fungi are vital pharmaceutically, when we consider certain life saving drugs. Cyclosporine for example, is an immunosuppressant drug that enables transplants to be possible by preventing rejection of the donated organ (Sheldrake, 2020, p. 10) This drug is widely manufactured by the submerged fermentation of aerobic fungi known as *Trichoderma polysporum*. It is not just with immunosuppressants where fungi have been a game changer for medicine. There are antiviral drugs and anti-cancer drugs to name a few. But have you ever thought if fungus could help us psychologically?

Psilocybin is a compound that has received a lot of attention for its results surrounding depression and addiction. It is produced by more than 200 species of fungi, and is the active element in psychedelic mushrooms (Sheldrake, 2020). Once injected into the body, the synthetic version of psilocybin can trigger a plethora of "psycho-spiritual effects". Psilocybin in the body is converted to its psychoactive metabolite, the chemical psilocin. Psilocin stimulates the receptors in the brain that are usually stimulated by serotonin, the neurotransmitter. Psilocin essentially intervenes in the paths of electrical signals in our body and is known to be able to change the structure of neurons (Sheldrake, 2020, p. 122). The study "Beckley/Imperial Psychedelic Research Program" demystified how psilocybin changes patterns of neuronal activity (Beckley, 2022). They gave participants a dose of psilocybin and monitored brain activity. The brain scans carried out revealed that rather than increasing brain activity (which is what they were expecting), psilocybin instead reduced activity in certain areas of the

brain. The brain activity that was reduced is what is known as the default mode network (DMN). Our DMN is usually active while one is self-reflecting, letting one's mind wander or thinking about past or future plans. Studies showed that participants who felt the greatest "loss of a sense of self" had the bigger reductions in activity in regard to their DMN (Sheldrake, 2022). What does this all mean for people with severe and unseemingly untreatable psychological problems?

It is patients who reported positive therapeutic experiences with psilocybin that is important. The use of psilocybin in clinical trials has shown to lift severe levels of depression and anxiety in patients. The results have been considered close to miraculous for treating a range of psychiatric issues (Sheldrake, 2020, p. 119). Two studies running in tandem for example at New York University and John Hopkins University in 2016 prescribed psilocybin as well as psychotherapy for participants with depression, anxiety and "existential stress" after being given a terminal cancer diagnosis. According to the results of the study, after one dose of psilocybin, 80% of participants considered there was reduction with their reported psychological symptoms and this was the case with some patients up to 6 months later (Sheldrake, 2020). In general, there were improved levels of quality of life and people feeling more interconnected. The thing that was considered mindblowing for one of the senior researchers on the study (Roland Griffiths) who had carried out the interviews at the end of the study, was that over 70% of participants considered taking this dose of psilocybin as one of the top 5 meaningful moments in their lives (Griffiths, 2016). *Are these people leading incredibly boring lives?* Griffiths asked himself the same question, and it turns out the experience of taking psilocybin was compared to situations such as people giving birth to children or death of parents. Thus, this study was seen as groundbreaking in modern medicine for its positive psychiatric intervention with psilocybin (Griffiths, 2016). It was not a one off either. Several other studies with psilocybin have reported dramatic changes in people and can induce a "mystical" experience within people. Moreover, people in these studies have said they have felt a better connection with the world and a greater appreciation for the natural world (Sheldrake, 2016, p. 120). On reflection, researchers argue that it seems that psilocybin enables people to be more open to experiences, and enables them to be more flexible or pliable in their thinking, which is often needed if someone is in the throes of addiction or depression and is stuck with a rigid way of thinking (Sheldrake, 2020, p.124).

Psilocybin, however, cannot be relied on as a long term solution for treating depression and anxiety. Some participants in these studies did not have a positive experience with psilocybin. Although some people found taking psilocybin "liberating", others found the experience terrifying. In the John Hopkins study, 25% of participants experienced terror. A participant called Mark described his experience as "six hours of terror", even though taking psilocybin also helped him for fleeting periods of time. Therefore, a "bad trip" is not mythical, and can reportedly happen in quite a bad way (Hari, 2019, p.289). What is the solution to such a dilemma? Johann Hari discusses



how psilocybin essentially dismantles the ego, leaving one vulnerable. You wouldn't leave someone without their ego to wander the streets, because our ego protects us. However, our ego is problematic when it grows too big, and people find it difficult to make connections. Dismantling it should not be done trivially. Indeed, researchers argue the point of taking psilocybin is to help people to build healthy relationships with their ego (Hari, 2019). If we return to Mark, the positive experiences he did have with psilocybin, he mirrored the emotional effects as closely as possible with meditation. This enabled him to feel a sense of "connection" that he had felt before but without psilocybin. As a result of this, social anxiety that he struggled with did not plague his life constantly (Hari, p. 290). In order to reap the benefits of psilocybin, it is therefore not for long term use. Essentially, being psilocybin in the long term is never a good idea because of the way it can leave one vulnerable in terms of dismantling their ego. Having said that, no study has investigated the long term effect of psilocybin, or the enduring effects are not really known (Barrett, Doss and Griffiths, 2020). Essentially, it seems researchers are being cautious as more research needs to be done. It can however, as research has shown, help individuals grow out of rigid thinking patterns, but they then have to be replaced in the long run by something else (like meditation) that can mirror such positive experiences.

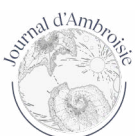
Returning to my childhood connection with fungi, our teacher did grow more islands of mould in his coffee mug. It was more probably due to his messy nature, than a desire to see if we could grow another mushroom. The islands were superbly unique and it revealed to me as a 10 year old just how entangled fungi are in our lives, and how exciting fungi can be. Fungi can be a danger, but grown and utilised in a certain way, it can be an immense aid for humanity. The world of fungi can take many forms and it really can be a surprise what form that fungi will grow into or take. The uses of it may not yet be known in our world, but they are just waiting to be discovered.

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Sarah Hussain

*edited by
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The dark arts of seduction: A classical waltz with the devil

Step one: always wear red

Rise and fall, rhythmic fluidity, and a close-hold intimacy are all principles of the classical Waltz. It is a romantic dance that forces a partnership towards idealism and passion, under the influence of melodic triple-metre songs and liberating courtships. Two bodies sway in a net of tied movements, displaying acknowledgment and pledging undying submission to the music that drives them to their bittersweet joy and demise.

In clandestine fantasies, perhaps you are already waltzing with a face you adore. Perhaps, on the third measure, you have become trapped in a loop and your dance is now but a wilted rose, smelling like inescapable doom. Regardless, the truth is that not all of us get to pick our partner. Sometimes, in the depths of night, we fall like Alice down the rabbit hole of an unrelentless, sinful romance. This romance bears the dampness of a melancholic rainfall, the yearning of the 52 Hertz whale, but a masochistic ache to play the music past midnight, until feet start to bleed and madness ensues.

It is thrilling at first. Like a venus flytrap, to devour and dominate in ways that satiate our partners' cravings for volatility. We wear red to invite the devil to the waltz, then black to mourn its death when the dance comes to a halt, to play mind games with our partner. Each masquerade mask, each sheet of resin filter creates a push-pull dynamic whereby we can possess pleasures of being both the marionette doll and the puppeteer at once. Don't get me wrong, the dance doesn't end there. As an astrophysical singularity, the dance is set in stationary motion to be picked up exactly where it was left last; the hands once again touch in an exciting rush of adrenaline and fleeting joy.

Step two: follow the leader

Mirror your partner's movements; when they put their left foot forward, you put your right foot back. After all, imitative behaviour is one of many social ramifications of attraction (Farmer et al.,

2018). When the dancer in the dark teaches the box-step, we can only let our bodies loose, like a shipwreck, sinking into an intoxicating reverence for the master that, in the moment, governs our senses and intelligence. It is all too glamorous, but there is a phantom flair of enticement in each motion – a maddening mystery.

Sadly, even after ten songs, it may seem like we know the dance or the masked master, but, like a snowflake, any conviction of self-belief and affirmations melt into the palm of our hands. The leader does not lead to teach, he engineers self-destruction by seizing motion. Sometimes, we figure this out on the first dance, sometimes, on the last, but by that time, it is already too late and everything has become a habitual mess. We begin to miss the masked dancer when the sun is shining and when the routine in the dark commences, a guilt-filled conscience moves with its master, gaunt, and utterly lost.

Step three: bow and courtesy

This is the end; this is the beginning of the end. When the music and the delicate sequences stop. The dancers should then pay one another respect and gesture gratitude for the honour of dance. “But, Sarah, the dance is a damnation to hell and the dancer, the devil.” Yes, but people do not scrutinise the game, for it is the player who participates, both willingly or unwillingly. No one sees the struggle behind closed curtains and even if they do, the dance is so intricate that we begin to mould ourselves into the tune that keeps the tempo. To the world outside my personal ballroom, I am both the leader and the follower. *I do this to myself – I choose destruction. I am both the naive victim and the devil who tempts. I wear the red shoes and I am the executioner.* I cannot ask for help or scream, because we all have our own dances in which we are locked, and the waltzing does not stop until I have become one or the other.

But come closer, I’ll let you in on a secret: with every step, there is a dangerous vulnerability. Occasionally, the dancers will rise and fall, and they will expose themselves under the moonlight. This is when everyone becomes naked – all of the lines, broken and unbroken, lay bare and seep through cracks. In these moments, one sees the devil for who he truly is: a shadow of man’s ego. When we overtly crave peace and harmony, the shadow seeks pleasure in wreaking havoc to the balance of our mental worlds. Powers are put to play and a subconscious battle of who is stronger rips at the seams of the perfect sutures that keeps every human together.

For these fragmented moments, we must thank the dance and the dancer; the introduction and constant growth of knowledge of all the good and the ugly is a repression of confrontations we deem ourselves unbrave to face. One can easily forget that the descent into the underworld is just as possible as the ascent from the underworld, because the creatures that lurk under our

beds must have come from somewhere, right?

The End

Ah, but there we go again...yearning for another dance. Though, this time, the devil will not extend his invitation, he never did in the first place. Instead, he waits for you like children on Christmas day, with new gimmicks and tales to share. He is smart, but so are you, because he fell for you the moment he laid his eyes on you. You gave the devil a pulse - mortalised him and fooled him into believing he could overtake you. He hides in the shadows for a reason: you haven't yet given him permission to usurp your throne. You still wear the crown: he can lead the dance, but you still sing the tunes.

So, you've flipped a hidden switch. Bedevil the devil, I say!

Congratulations! You have now reached the end of the tutorial and are ready to make your debut in the wallowing world of the waltz. Torrents of musical absorption and hollow affiliations, ritualistic imitation and consuming silence, and the venomous power game pulls at your heels. It is your dance to give and yours to remould; a waltz made of clay, spinning on a wheel *you* turn. A "kinesthetic" (McKechnie, 2002) expression of your abstract thoughts, both good and evil. The waltz is classically you: reckless, yet timeless.

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Sherry Ahmed

edited by
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The astronomical hamartia: the wisdom of immortality

Predestination

From the garden of Eden to modern crafts, humanity has battled through time; persistent, yet insatiable for triumph. *Where there is a will, there is a way, I say; though everything is just written in the stars, is it not?* Quite literally too, seeing as how each constellation has its own story to tell. Example: the eighth largest in the cosmic hemisphere, Draco (the Dragon) is said to have been Ladon, guardian of the golden apples in the garden of Hesperides. Initially a matrimonial offering to the Empress of the Olympian Gods, Hera, she scattered his image into the skies, a portrait of commemoration upon his death by Hercules (Alexander, 2021). It is indeed worth noting that, in this tale, two divine deities are the ones with authority; Hercules, a demi-god, was the one with control over Ladon's end, and Hera, over the remnants of his aftermath, demonstrating that death is not something we can control.

At first, it may appear as though the deity had limited influence on Ladon's death, since Hera (Queen of the Gods) hadn't interfered in Hercules' conquest – it can be said that Ladon was but a pawn in the fulfilment of Hercules' eleventh labour, which required for him to slay the Dragon and take the guarded apples. As a demi-god (and the son of Zeus, himself), it was most probable that Hercules (Bowden et al., 2005) was predestined to finish this conquest, leaving Ladon as a puppet in the tasks of a superior being.

Irrespective of the different times and civilisations that have lived before us, alleged religious history illustrates mankind as experiments, where the divine intervene. A viable explanation for this could be the consequence of man deliberately being created imperfectly. Currently, the world's leading faith belongs to Christianity; an Abrahamic, monotheistic religion, alongside Islam and Judaism. Christianity depicts the story of the father of mankind to be one of great ambition and materialism. Eve, seduced by the shrewd serpent, shared the fruit with Adam, forcing awareness of their nudity. This invoked emotions of shame and humility to both, reinforcing the separation between humanity and the creator.

Dissecting the implications of acquiring the knowledge of their state, it is disputable whether the psychological connotations implied were to remind man of his susceptibilities, two of which were: malleability and narcissism. For generations to come, the daughters of Eve would be cursed with childbirth and obedience to their husbands, while the sons of Adam were reprimanded with hard labour in exchange for vegetation and mortality for mankind.

For dust we are, and to dust we shall return. (Genesis 3.19).

Quintessence

Although our demise is inevitable, it is nonetheless irrefutable that we struggle with this realism and consciously approach the end with an optimistic, if not idealistic narrative. Regardless of our individual perspective of the last day, the question of our purpose plagues us.

If, in death, I shall find reason, then why do I exist?

Gifted with curiosity, we work to bridge the gap between the absence of tangible data proving the existence of the omnipotent. Among us are those who believe in a higher power; through conviction, we gain a share of an eternal, heavenly afterlife; a step closer to him. And then there are those who question; perhaps through rejection, we gain victory over him. There is simply too little left answered.

I am a Pisces, a fish out of water, searching for a way back home.

The original sin illustrates man as an opportunist, hunting for ways to bridge the gap between the 'creator' and the 'creation'. Abrahamic, monotheistic faiths explicitly forbid practices that nurture dependence on a deity other than the one "true God". Alternatively, polytheistic faiths such as Wicca embrace such rituals as part of revering nature, which increases our energy flow. Examples incorporate rites that permit practitioners to either attract or repel physical and psychological transformation since everything has a 'soul'. The lunar cycle is among the many offerings of nature employed to perform 'magic'. Rituals linked to the moon are known as 'moon magic'. By charging objects (such as water) from the moon's magical currents, Wiccans can then boost their momentum through these fluxes to achieve quantifiable value on material gains/losses through spiritual connections.

It can be said that the "soul" acts as a gateway between the immortal divine and mortal man. As part of our "punishment" for the original sin, our flesh will decay upon death, leaving the soul vulnerable for judgement. The concept of the spirit can be associated with our desire for immortality (potentially as a coping mechanism) for it is the "soul" that remains after death.

Perception

During the 4th and 5th centuries in ancient Greece, Protagoras (Sholarin et al., 2015), a relativist, known for “man, the measure of all things” hypothesised that perception cannot be measured in a feasible straight or curved line. He theorised that each one person holds a unique perception of the world, denoting the ultimate truth was unattainable due to each mind perceiving the world inversely.

How do we quantify the truth in one’s perception when the whole truth itself is inaccessible?

A democracy does not determine the ‘truth’, but rather, the concept of what is. This becomes the truth, hence an illusion society has decreed to be fact. Each individual’s observations are as essential as the other for the world to exist in “harmony”. Ideally, we ought to be able to both fear death, while recognising our restrictions in evading it, which would assist in providing a “healthy” balance to how we perceive death as a civilisation.

This dichotomy within mankind can also be explored utilising scales. If we allocate the notion of radical control to one end of the scale and the opposite equivalent of extreme subservience to the other end, it may become easier to appreciate the narrow-minded views of man. Instead of acknowledging our perception of life as a ladder, we subconsciously picture survival through a monochromatic lens; anything but power repeatedly indicates obedience, signifying “weakness” in a world where we survive through adaptation. If we become powerless, we become undesirable, hence isolated from the world. We associate solitude with decay and the horrors of death because we enter and leave this world alone.

Similarly, the extreme opposite, control, can encourage psychological lonesomeness due to the lack of “equality” between us and all entities around us. As the top of the food chain, we may succumb to the narcissistic tendencies demonstrated by our ancestors in the original sin (verifying we occasionally overestimate ourselves), which perceptibly lead to our disgrace.

It is debatable whether this contradiction can be used to explain why we crave perpetuity; although we are palpably mortal, we crave an immortal “soul” to balance our existence and this in turn delivers solidity. Alternatively, perhaps it is not a balance in stability we yearn for, but in its place, the permanency we obtain through absolute control, which if supplied to man, could yield annihilation. As social animals, humans rely on each other to demonstrate the extent of power we have. Regardless of whether we have control, we feel self-conscious; with influence, we fear duplicity and the loss of such authority and without power, we fear for our own survival.

Conclusion

Instead of observing our end as just that, we build narratives and religious

convictions to alleviate our disappointments over the unknown; of what we have no control over – death. Perhaps it is the idea of disappearing without glory or fulfilment; if we die fighting for a “greater good”, our compensation shall be a share of the amenities we associate with the omnipotent. Without any long-term benefits to carry over onto the “next life”, we would need to accept that we live a meaningless life, which also diminishes the value of everything we struggle to attain.

Moreover, we wilfully recognise the premeditated patterns of the universe, when deciphering our position in God’s play – with our origins and death being one of our most debated topics. It is possible that tales, such as the original sin exist for us to learn from, an attempt to prevent us from replicating the same mistakes as our ancestors (deceiving ourselves into believing that we can overcome the creator). Still, we utilise resources provided by the omniscient in an attempt to overcome death, all while being aware that we cannot. Moreover, it is feasible that we were designed to subconsciously compete against anything we consider to be superior; which might be the only way to frequently humble us; by reminding us of the differences between us and “God”.

I am my own demise.

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Shraddha Gulati

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Undiminished

I remember reading in school when I was young: “Matter takes space”, a concept that forms a fundamental for the way our world is built, how matter behaves and exists. But on a human and personal level, the concept of taking up space became clear to me only recently, when I was growing out of my older versions, and stepping into a fuller me.

Just like other people, I grew older trying to fit into the world, hiding parts of myself, seeking approval and validation from the world, and diminishing my real self. My growth began when I realised that I wanted things to be different, that there is no way this is what life must be about.

The following passages come from personal experience, and at times, I point out special moments when one realises they are growing out of something, into something better, instances to look out for when we are “growing.”

I realised that growing older doesn’t necessarily mean growing up. To grow up, I needed to face everything I had buried away, and in many aspects, that meant surrendering, and being the real version of me, undiminishing myself, showing parts of myself that were locked away in my memories.

Growing out of our parents’ shadows

It is commonly believed that we tend to carry unfinished dreams, burdens or memories from our ancestors, and often develop similar patterns of choice or living as our immediate ancestors, the closest being our parents.

A part of our parents always lives in us. Many times we see it as similar patterns of life, circumstances, often bad-luck in many cases, or similar taste in food or clothing. In fact, many even tend to repeat similar patterns of choice when it comes to choosing a life-partner. Growth begins when as an adult, we begin to realise that we will always have that part of our ancestors living within us, and we allow it to do its part, be aware of our tendencies, but still make more informed and independent decisions.

When we as adults look at our ancestors, including our parents, with no judgement, we can finally begin to understand that our life is not about them, or their unfinished desires or burdens. Yes, we do have

a tendency to act similarly to them, or even end up in similar circumstances, but growth is about understanding the importance of what we are here to do in this moment, without trying to be someone we aren't. We deserve to make our own choices, and even mistakes, because in this moment, right now, the power to choose and act is ours. We can repeat everything that has happened, or live a life like that of our ancestors, or we can realise that this is our time, we can choose differently, and we can break the pattern.

When we realise the privilege to be here, we see the importance of making our own way in the world, succeeding or failing in our own ways. Thus, growth happens. We finally see that this story is ours, and it reflects in the light we see our parents in. When growth happens, we begin to relate to our parents as people, who may have made their own unique mistakes; we realise that we don't have to fix them, we only have to understand them.

Outgrowing friends

When we start to evolve, it reflects in almost every aspect of our life, especially in our friendships, because unlike other relations we form in our lives, friendships are usually the most forgiving and most volatile, with minimum promises and burdens. We outgrow friends in every phase of our life, from schools to higher education, and most of all, we lose friendships to time.

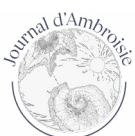
But another way in which I have seen people lose friends is when they are evolving, and in my opinion, that's indeed for the best. I used to have many friends when I was a child in school, but when I began to realise that those were nothing but my attempts to seek validation from people, I realised maybe I need to step back. From the twenty people I used to call my friends about three years back, I am left with probably two or three, and the most surprising part is that these are the people I never expected to remain friends with, but today, I share some unique bonds with them.

Growth happens when we realise what kind of bonds we have made, and when we are ready and willing to lose them in the name of our wellbeing.

When I realised that I wanted healthier friendships, many people decided to suddenly stop calling me, or meeting me, but I was okay with that. I knew that they wanted to be friends with the version of me that I had already discarded, so what remained was a happier version of me, more content with what life brought my way, less anxious to make friends or seek validation, and more at peace. Growth usually feels like hell, but ends with peace, and somewhere between making many attempts to meet or call people that I called friends, and staying home on a weekend night in my own company, watching Harry Potter in bed, I think I grew up.

Growth and love

The way we love and desire to be loved says a lot about us, and the way we see ourselves. I have always been a hopeless romantic, believing in fairytales, and looking for that intense love that is capable of huge passion. Blame it on



the stories we end up reading and believing, or the movies and the fictional characters that steal our hearts, but love has many types; growth happens when we choose the form of love that sustains us, rather than the ones that destroy us. Throughout life, we are expected to fight for love, beg for it, so we end up accepting any form of it.

“We accept the love we think we deserve”

Stephen Chbosky, author of *The perks of being a Wallflower*.

After reading multiple self-help books, and re-reading *Eat Pray Love* multiple times, I believe I started to realise the kind of love I had, and also the kind of love that I still craved. Depending on one’s journey in self-growth, we cross paths with many types of potential partners, and even soul-mates. But growth begins to manifest when we see what we have, realise what we want, and be willing to give up on ideas and opinions on love we have grown up believing, if they are not in alignment with our highest good.

Today you may decide to break up, give up, stay single or try to explore different forms of partnerships that may fulfil your soul’s deepest desires of receiving love, or even end up having a pet to take care of. Anything that helps heal the broken, bruised and chaffed heart is eventually a step towards receiving love, but **growth happens when we understand that there is no love out there that can fulfil us the way we ought to, no love can replace the love we give ourselves.** It happens when we begin to feel whole in our own company, doing what we love, enjoying ourselves, going out on a date with ourselves, smiling at ourselves in the mirror, and maybe bursting into a song or a random dance at home. When it comes to love and partnerships, I believe the power is already within us, we only have to be willing to share it with people who respect us, not chase it or a version of it in others.

Growing into me

Healing my relationship with myself has been one of the most important things I have done in my life. Today, I understand myself better; I know what makes me happy, what makes me sad, and I know the difference between what I like and what is good for me, be it people, career paths, or even food. Everyone faces challenging times in their life, when we are forced to change our ways, and grow out of a comfortable phase. Growth begins by challenging our ideas, thoughts, and patterns we fall for. Small choices, from eating healthy, or making time for self-care, or breaking free from toxic relationships are stepping stones to a truer version of us. Self-growth, and the way we relate with ourselves is probably the most challenging, because it requires us to burn our old self down and build a new and honest version of ourselves, more open, more vulnerable. It requires us to undiminish ourselves, to offer our real selves to the world, but in spite of being difficult, this process is the most rewarding. It allows our heart and mind to align, it brings us peace, it compels us to see our beauty.

After taking time to work on the relationship I share with myself, I can see myself in a clear light, listen to my heart’s feeble desires, use my mind efficiently, and make space for my dreams, new people, new relationships.



The world hasn't changed, but I have. I have fallen in love with my character, childish whims, my love for ice-cream, my curly hair, and my freckles.

"I have travelled through madness to find me"

Danny Alexander

Undiminished

Growth is never easy, it comes with pain and heartbreak, but it is essential.

The whole process of growth is about understanding oneself better, stepping into an evolved version, then preparing oneself to share it with the world.

This begins with understanding what parts of us are we hiding, and why. The process of growth is about showing our real self to the world, along with the parts we hid, it is about undiminishing ourselves, because no one else can be us, right now, here in this world. There is a "you" and a "me" shaped hole in the Universe, and our true power lies in filling it.



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Maija Utriainen

Defining sustainable finance: did anyone ask the Global South?

When I first encountered the term ‘sustainable finance’ in a random job description in my last year of university, my first reaction was to sigh. Yet *another* use of the word ‘sustainable’ in front of a less conventional concept to make it seem more sexy? The worst thing was – it was working. Despite my fatigue with seeing the word ‘sustainable’ used in too many poster ads on the street and on random brands of yogurt in the grocery store, I had fallen straight in, and the words had piqued my interest. Importantly, at the time, my concern was not with the power of the ‘sustainability’ discourse in terms of greenwashing, but simply with the word’s overuse, having ultimately produced a lack of meaning.

In the years that have since passed, it has become clear to me that sustainable finance as an industry has come to stay. Indeed, major and local banks alike have sustainable finance divisions, and investing in exchange-traded funds (ETFs) with a sustainability lens has been popularized. A scholarly interest has also appeared, with research institutes and master’s degrees on sustainable finance being established across academia. Even the international development sector is getting involved through sections such as the UN Environment Program’s Finance Initiative, the UN Development Program’s Sustainable Finance Hub, or the UN International Network of Financial Centers for Sustainability.

But this blooming of sustainable finance across sectors and geographies, of course, does not come without complications. There are plenty of illustrative examples of how ‘sustainable’ finance has greenwashed, pinkwashed, or impact-washed. These are processes that entail using deceptive marketing and communication to disseminate a public image of a company or fund as contributing to environmental, social, or impact purposes – when, in reality, said company or fund has far from contributed to such goals. For instance, a prominent investigative report of November 2022 estimated that half of European climate investment funds still include fossil fuels and aviation in their portfolios (Smit, 2022). This is evidence of a clear double standard being present within the sustainable finance industry. Despite such

gloomy realities, one must admit that sustainable finance has still succeeded in transferring immense capital flows towards much needed world issues such as climate adaptation projects, renewable energy, the circular economy, biodiversity, and the SDGs at large – areas of investment that until just a decade ago in most markets were niche rather than mainstream.

In fact, specifically green financial products have caught the attention of markets in the Global North, with a few cities consistently appearing within the top 15 of the *Global Green Finance Index*: London, Amsterdam, New York, San Francisco, Paris, and the Scandinavian capitals of Copenhagen, Oslo, and Stockholm (Wardle, Mills and Mainelli, 2022). I would note these cities for their entrepreneurial, ‘forward-thinking’ identities and recent startup culture (Korneti, 2021) and go even further than their green finance titles in naming them *hubs of sustainable finance*. I conceptualize these hubs as embodying both financial assets, regulation, and policy. They consist of investors, financial institutions, asset and wealth managers, politicians, regulators, and lobbyists to name just a few. In being the largest markets for sustainable finance assets in the world, this handful of hubs are the ones drafting and governing the discourse on ‘sustainability’ in the global economy.

While debates on impact-washing are, rightly so, taking place across all of the above-mentioned locations in the Global North, there is one central notion that seems to escape the debate: whatever we decide to define as ‘sustainable’ in the Global North is likely to somehow affect the countries whose markets for sustainable finance have yet to grow. Europe, and especially its sustainable finance hubs, has a crucial role to play in addressing this question and ensuring that the Global South is not just considered but *involved and heard* in current debates on definitions of ‘sustainability’.

As someone born and raised in one of the world’s sustainable finance hubs, Copenhagen, I feel all the more conscious of Scandinavia’s responsibility in crafting the current sustainable finance discourse. After all, we have weaved pictures of our nations in recent years that on the world stage make us appear as an almost irresistible utopia. In this way, we appear tolerant, transparent, and equalitarian to most outsiders. This is not to say that such characteristics are not applicable – everything is relative, and I would argue they still make up the fabric and values of Scandinavian societies – but reality, of course, is always more nuanced than what seems. It is common that we market ourselves as progressive and inclusive by pointing to history: for example, that Denmark was the first country to abolish the slave trade, or the first to legalize same-sex marriage. That, however, far takes away from the fact that we were still an imperial power committed to slavery for centuries, and that the LGBTQ+ community in Denmark historically has and still does face discrimination today.

Admitting to these nuances in our own narrative instead of painting a ‘first

mover' identity is important if we are to address the issue as of now: the soft power Scandinavian countries hold in conceptualizing the sustainable finance industry of the future. We make up less than 0.3% of the world population but sit on soft power in terms of our global image as sustainability leaders and hard power in the size of the market for green financial products within each of our countries. This is why we face a big responsibility in the conversations on sustainability we are currently taking leadership in, and why we must do our utmost in diagnosing and reevaluating any discourses and policies on sustainable finance that could possibly (re)produce inequalities in the Global South in the future.

Of course, disempowerment and structural inequalities ingrained within the global economic system is nothing new. In recent decades in history, it presents itself most clearly in the way the system dismantled and then reformed itself in the face of decolonization. Wealthy individuals from colonizer states would pull their financial assets out of a colony in the very moment of independence and then store it in what was considered 'safe' havens such as Switzerland – only to reinvest it in the now decolonized state a couple of decades later in the form of foreign direct investment (FDI) or store it in new tax havens such as the Bahamas (Ogle, 2020). This pattern not only shows obvious hypocrisies in European ideas of who is considered a 'safe' capital haven and who is considered 'worthy' of investment, but it illustrates how Europe contributed to financial instability in newly independent states. This, simultaneously, was happening at a time when European capital was needed most as a form of unconditional reparation and building of new, strong, and independent national economies in the Global South. These actions of removing capital before reinvesting it were all symptoms of a larger issue: that whenever Global South countries have since sought independence, they have had to rationalize and build their national economies by way of Euro-American economic logics (Hickel, 2021). Such ideas were hegemonic in their construction of the global capitalist system, and so newly independent countries were left with few choices available to the development of their own economies that were not heavily influenced by Euro-American ideas of what an 'economy' is.

How does this then translate to the issue of defining the 'sustainability' in sustainable finance? In short, it all fits into a perfect jigsaw puzzle of Euro-American norm diffusion and the power it has in shaping policy agendas outside of its own dominion. Norm diffusion in itself can be explained as one country's decision-making being dependent not solely on international and national factors, but also on decisions made in other countries. Furthermore, it has been argued that its 'typical mechanism is conditionality: in order to access certain resources, national governments must comply with given policy requirements' (Gilardi, 2012). If this 'conditionality' sounds familiar, it is because it is a common critique of finance disbursement from institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund towards the Global South, and the European Union towards the post-Soviet bloc. Therefore, in many ways, there are signs that norm diffusion of policies come with conditions that may or may not perpetuate or worsen existing

inequalities.

Simultaneously to the above processes, the 'sustainability' of sustainable finance is being defined by regulation across the world, most notably in the recent – yet long overdue – EU Taxonomy on Sustainable Activities. This taxonomy sets out to facilitate more green investment while hindering greenwashing and includes meticulous indicators for reporting measures. Whether positively or negatively, the regulation's definition of a 'sustainable' economic activity is certain to transform the entire sustainable finance ecosystem.

It is exactly due to the concept of norm diffusion and in knowing the historical ability of EU regulation in creating similar ripple-effects across its outer borders (as was the case with its GDPR policy, now present across the world due to global supply chains) that I am now growing increasingly worried. After all, the European Union fosters the interests of its own members before it considers external stakeholders – and I believe the same thing might be said for the top sustainable finance hubs in Europe trying to influence such regulation. Why, in the end, would they feel naturally inclined to think of the 'other' before the 'familiar' of their own backyard? They are concerned with regulating their own market before anyone else's, and for this reason, I doubt that the economies of the Global South take the number one spot on their list of concerns.

I should underline that attempts such as the European Union's to regulate an already complex market, on as tricky an issue as greenwashing, is already a feat on its own and should most definitely be applauded. I also still do believe that sustainable finance hubs such as the ones in Scandinavia are doing their best to influence such policies in a positive way. However, it does not kill the thought in the back of mind that, somehow, the Global South has been excluded from or disregarded in important conversations – and that their economies and livelihoods stand to lose due to the future norm diffusion of sustainable finance definitions.

Why is it, for example, that most conversations surrounding the sustainability of finance grounded in the Global North mostly focus on the environment? I take issue with the immediate jump of the EU to construct a definition of an environmentally sustainable activity while a social taxonomy was abandoned for a later point in time. In fact, BNP Paribas has found that as many as half of investors focus their investment strategy less on social factors than they do the more well-known components such as the environment (Saul, 2022).

The definition of 'sustainability' as according to the UN's Brundtland report of 1987 equally weighs the environmental, economic, and social components, and it is therefore an issue that the social component so often is considered a box-ticking exercise, while the environmental and economic components take the main stage. As a matter of fact, the overt focus on the environment

is so painstakingly clear that I find myself thinking that the most part of the industry is equating sustainability entirely with environmental sustainability.

I believe Global North countries consider themselves as faring 'better' than Global South countries on many social indicators. While this is generally accepted to be true, – to return to my previous argument on the nuanced realities of Scandinavian countries – it does not mean that we can downplay our own issues and ignore the social component of our sustainability definitions. Who knows? I personally believe that including the Global South in more of our sustainability conversations would make us aware of our own shortcomings, and allow for more nuanced discussions on both inequality and environmental action within our own countries and economies.

All of the above is to say that the Global South can provide essential insights to current 'sustainability' definitions within sustainable finance. Whether sustainable finance hubs are currently including and voicing the concerns of the Global South is difficult to say, and so with this piece, I have simply sought to demonstrate that they most rightly deserve a place at the table. Operating within the limits of the global capitalist system and knowing our history of disempowerment and economic disenfranchisement of Global South countries, being inclusive in our conceptualization of 'sustainable' finance is the very least that we can do.

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Alex Bee

*edited by
Editors in Chief*

David and the Dragon: Hard power and Soft Landings

What, where, or why is Taiwan?¹ Polls suggest that just a decade ago, most in the West would struggle to answer any of those questions. Yet in the last few years awareness of the dwarfed island next to China has become inescapable. You might know little about the island itself, but it's practically impossible *not* to know that Beijing² isn't fond of its independence.

Admittedly, this is partly a result of rising tensions across the strait³, but tensions across the strait are nothing new. Partly it's a result of global hyper-politicisation, but this is not the first moment of crescendo in the history of popular political awareness.

More than either of those things however, Taiwan has hit its main character arc as adept self-dramatist. Resource-starved and population-scarce, matching its neighbour blow-for-blow in any economic or military matchup is functionally impossible. In the battle for hearts and minds though, troop numbers and naval tonnage matter far less than volume of positive coverage and narrative weight.

In pursuit of your heart and mind, both heirs to China have chased "soft power" since the civil war propelled Mao's Communists to the imperial palace and sent Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists packing to the provincial backwater of Taiwan in 1949.

"Soft power" as such originally sprang from the halls of American academia in the early 1990s, and its students weren't ashamed of wearing the stars and stripes of their homeland. It was conceived as a hyper-Harvard social science, destined to optimise the projection of American cultural and ideological prestige across the globe, especially following the nation's myriad identity crises in the post Cold War era. In its traditional formulation, soft power is merely surrogate for hard power - a force by which one state might exert its will on another in classical hegemonic interplay.

And yet, removed thousands of years and miles from the Ivy League, classical Chinese political thought is awash with the tropes

of cultural force and invisible influence. Confucian thinkers elevated ritual above all, advising kings to act as paragon for emulation. A virtuous ruler would create widespread harmony; an unruly king would see his land fall into chaos and ruin. What is such a formulation if not 'normative leadership'? Confucians beat out their 'Legalist' adversaries during the Han dynasty foreign policy debates by arguing that barbarians swirling around the imperial peripheries might be dealt with not at the point of a sword, but with cultural strangulation. Extend the arms of Chinese majesty to the uncouth nomad, so they believed, and he shall submit to your will without even raising a compound bow in protest. Values and wealth, they believed, had the power to transform hostile peoples as if by magic.

It is little wonder, then, that notional soft power had taken deep root in Chinese-speaking policy circles long before Joseph Nye articulated his Atlantic-normative notion in 1990.

As early as the 1950s, *soft power* was the only viable pillar of PRC foreign policy - despite Mao's famed belief that 'political power grows from the barrel of a gun'. Facing extreme isolation following the Korean war - even from its Communist allies in Moscow - China articulated a platform of postcolonial politics and solidarity with the developing world. A summit of African and Asian states in 1955 produced the Bandung Line and Beijing's 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' - most of which it claims to uphold today.

As the decades presaged economic reform and China's long-dormant growth engines belched out double digit GDP growth year on year, the courting of foreign ears changed course. In the 2000s, CCP President Hu Jintao told the Seventeenth Party Congress to focus on growing China's *ruan shili* (the accepted Mandarin translation of Nye's term) - a resource which had already been growing passively alongside productive capacity. Across the developing world, the Chinese economic miracle was exerting an inexorable draw. Beijing had barely touched political liberalisation, but productivity growth was galloping ahead of any democratic contemporary. For an authoritarian regime stuck in the early stages of economic development, China was fast becoming the model de *rigueur*.

Soon this admiration spread beyond just developing states in Asia and Africa to the policy circles of the former anti-Communist bloc. Germany opened its doors to Chinese investment; David Cameron hailed a 'golden era' in Anglo-China relations; US foreign direct investment doubled year-on-year between 2000 and 2008.

This kind of arms-open intercourse does not occur at gunpoint. China's present and potential economic strength was winning over a cynical, money-hungry audience of investors and politicians who saw nothing but a growth market of unprecedented proportions. The money was flowing and fortunes

were being made.

And when 2008 struck, it left the collective West in the crushing vice of a financial-cum-identity crisis. If Bretton Woods II turned out to also be a mirage, what was left of Fukuyama's famous prophecy that the West had won? As the collapse of the Western banking sector tore at the fraying edges of neoliberal orthodoxy, China's authoritarian, interventionist capitalism only grew more appealing as it sliced through the meltdown more or less unscathed.

With the "red star over China" shining brighter than ever, Taiwan's [white sun](#) was on the wane.

Stretching all the way back to the republican era in China proper, "Free China" had been Washington's closest ally in Asia. Sun Yat-sen, undisputed father of the Chinese republican movement, regarded the 'United States as the champion of liberalism and self-determination of nations.' He believed that attaining its aid would require a new normative (soft) power - formulated in terms of a lost 'ancient Chinese morality' that his new democratic republic would recover.

He founded the Department of Propaganda in 1920 to help publicise China's republican reforms and disseminate news of the revolution to anyone who might be listening. Its inheritors, Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) party, went on to reconstitute the department as the core of Taiwan's communication apparatus. In 1951, it began publishing the English-language *Free China Review*, an ill-read publication drowning in a soup of its own soft power aspirations. The regime's attempt to present White Terror Taiwan as home to familiar ideals of 'democracy, Christianity, anti-communism and pro-Americanism' would ring true perhaps only for the most zealous McCarthy adherent.

When Chiang Kai-shek died in 1975, his son Chiang Ching-kuo inherited the rule of Taiwan by an implicit rule of primogeniture. By then, the island was in its third decade of "white terror" and rapidly losing currency with key allies. Before long, Nixon's state visit to China would begin the great Sino-American rapprochement, casting Taiwan into the dark and out of the UN.

So the ailing republic needed new sources of soft power - and fast. Whispers of democratisation, long on the lips of freedom fighters and activists, now made their way around the halls of power. Revealingly, Chiang announced his intention to end martial law through an interview with *The Washington Post*. Democratisation was a slow process - Chiang died in 1988 and the first truly contested presidential election did not take place until 1996 - but slowly the island took to its newfound freedoms. Pointedly anti-communist in the 50s and 60s, Taiwan became pointedly anti-authoritarian from the 90s onwards. The island's power matrix is entirely defensive - and waving goodbye to the repressive excesses of Chiang Kai-shek's free-in-name-only-China was the best way of rallying support in Washington.

At least, that was the plan. But against an ascendant China, even heartfelt commitment to human rights norms, progressive social policies and consistent democratic consolidation were not enough to stem the rising red tide. Shocker. In the new millennium, Taiwan was struggling. Its first opposition-party president, Chen Shui-bian, was widely disliked in Washington for his stridently anti-China stance. He was seen as a meddler, and too big for his own small-island boots. His successor Ma Ying-jeou fared better, but because he leaned into repairing relations with China rather than on his nation's democratic merits.

Then the dragon changed course. Xi Jinping took power in 2015 and by 2018 his rivals were either preternaturally quiet in their complimentary pleasure palaces or rotting in jail cells. By 2020, the border province of Xinjiang was filled with internment camps and the unmistakable whiff of genocide⁴. Umbrellas were snapped in Hong Kong; voices were silenced.

Suddenly China was once again the big bad boogeyman that Western powers had conveniently forgotten it always was. As a self-promoting democracy on China's doorstep, Taiwan rapidly became a darling amongst hawkish policy circles in Washington. Here was a state of no little wealth, weighty public presence and genuine democracy - a state not prone to the kind of repressive outburst always causing PR disasters for other non-European American allies. It was a perfect cause célèbre.

Trump began the process of disengaging with China, but it was enthusiastically picked up by the Biden administration. The ageing president is the first in a very long time (though not the first in his long lifetime) to verbally commit to defending Taiwan. It is thanks in no small part to the haloed vision of a freedom-loving, demon-hating democratic angel projected by Taipei that this kind of supportive groundswell now exists across the world. Public support for Taiwan is so great that a small majority of Americans now believe their military should intervene if violent conflict were to break out across the strait. At the same time, global goodwill towards China has reached an all-time [nadir](#).

Such a PR disaster could only be self-inflicted. China has dashed its "ancient morality" on the rocks of Xi's unbridled authoritarianism (and growing personality cult). Taiwan has taken the "progressive morality" of enlightenment liberalism and weaponised it in the name of self defence. There is no media organisation on the planet able to resist the pull of the Taiwan strait and it is to Taipei's credit that their island regularly features implicitly as the rebels in a thrilling battle with the empire. Everybody likes an underdog - especially an underdog with open democracy and human rights protections. The tale may be as old as time, but the consequences could define our future. Nothing is "soft" about the Taiwan-China rivalry, but the nations' stories and their tellings carry enormous power.

Footnotes

¹ Officially the Republic of China (ROC) since the heirs of the October Revolution retreated there upon losing their civil conflict with Mao's Communists in 1951.

² People's Republic of China, or what is commonly thought of as just "China". The PRC.

³ The Taiwan-China relationship is often portmanteau'd as 'cross-strait relations' in reference to the narrow strip of ocean which, like many other narrow strips of ocean, has served as the critical defence of sovereignty for Taiwan over the last seventy years.

⁴ Cultural or otherwise. The semantics are argued [here](#) and [here](#), etc.



Anja Radonjic

edited by
Elizabeth Rose

A letter to Her, with love

My darling,

Hello, stranger. I know, it's been a long time since I've reached out and talked to you. You make yourself known with the occasional pain from a stiff neck and back, or eyes twitching from tiredness. "Move, move, move, idiot," I imagine you'd say, sensing that work and the minutiae of the day come before you, my dear Body. Sorry. You must be tired of my apologies, especially when I plead with you to end the agony of the sore throat and a blocked nose you had forewarned me of the very next day. Through the next night, your myriad of cells and antibodies would nurse me, restore me back to health, a network so complex and beyond my comprehension, and you- their supreme coordinator, their grand conductor. The next day, already feeling better, I'd congratulate myself and forget about yesterday's lethargy and supplication to your wiser ways ever happened. I know slowing down won't happen, and another series of sleepless nights comes, but I feel invincible - because I rely on you to get me through all ups and downs. I blindly take for granted that every morning I wake up, I will get on with my day, that a flu will pass, that I can push myself to unhealthy limits. I count on you to fix any ailment, every single time. Besides my mother's love, I count on yours unconditionally.

Before writing this letter, I did not realise we have been together for 8,505 days. In this life, you will be my longest companion. In the thousands of days to come, you will carry me to all the places I want to see, and do a whole lot for the communities we came from. I will need your strength for that. As I mature, so will you. Our skin will lose its elasticity, and pores will darken...but I do not truly understand what it means to age, not just yet. I will have to be more gentle with you, when you stop working the overnight magic, and things take longer to fix themselves. I will utter a sincere thank you as you finally tire, with love, and appreciation, after thousands and thousands of days spent together. How odd. A human body, taken as an ordinary, a substitutable unit by our educational, health, and political institutions. All I can think of are the mini-universes contained within each and every one of the billions of bodies on Earth today, where soul and body constantly dance, battle and

embrace – from first breath until the last.

We had our rough times, my darling. Adolescence was hard for me – and for you too I imagine. I must have been at times an unpleasant and impatient tenant in your evolving walls. You acted as a shield between my own authenticity and the unforgiving world out there. I was so impatient to see what you'd become. I wanted to be anyone else, and like an actress on a stage, remain in another's shoes well-after the last of the audience left. Sometimes I'd look at my cats and dogs as they chase after one another or carelessly nap – would have I been better off as an animal? It took me a while, the restlessness and the desire to change had nothing to do with you, darling Body. Nothing to do with how you were extending, becoming taller, growing hair, morphing and simply, evolving. The problem lies in people's 'advertent' and inadvertent attempts to police each other's bodies, to make them conform to a single, uniform standard which they themselves probably despise. Body trends and body ideals, a shifting set of rules and purchases – that can easily slip underneath you, leaving you in a state of constant chase and dissatisfaction. I wonder if people are aware of the power invested in a body, or even if societal institutions are aware of it. Is this why they want to bend and diminish self-respect and self-love? What would happen if I hone the power already within me and you, dear Body? What will happen if my love for you becomes unshakeable?

There is a great absurdity in today's world, where I am so much exposed and well acquainted with the bodies of nameless, and sometimes faceless models and actors, and yet I still barely understand my own. The other day, I let my fingers run through my hair and across the face with great attention, like a sculptor would examine their creation. Across the temple, down the sharp-edged nose. My shoulders scattered with spots, little constellations. I held myself in an embrace, each arm locked around the elbow. I used to dislike the hair on my arms, and felt shame for them. Now I find them comforting, calming. I associate my strength and independence with them. I would not know how to tell a story without them (many spilled drinks will attest to my unwavering gesticulation). Then, I lowered my hands to my belly. As I skate the fingers cyclically around the belly button, I can't help but smile. It's a whole landscape to discover, all that I put you through, Body. Birthmarks I never noticed before, stretch marks that weave across like a bifurcated river. It's a strange sensation, to rediscover you, it brings me happiness, and deep sorrow. I feel guilt for diverting my look from you, from not holding you enough, from not loving you enough. But look at all of this. The skin, the muscles, and tissues, and bones.. You are an artefact of my life, Body. I am so sorry for wasted time. I will honour you for thousands of days we still have to share.

Lastly, I want to say that I know the journey ahead won't be easy. On bad days, I sense the shame and doubt rising like a tide, hoping to break in again.



I have a lot to learn, and even more to unlearn. One thing is for sure though, Body, I will strive to work in unison, soul and mind inextricably linked through each nerve, with you. Together we will work on caring for both mental and physical health, because I, we, am, are not invincible, and the mind cannot exist outside of its own boundaries. I will work on becoming a bit more gentle with myself, with You. I still don't have the right words for how living in today's times affects how I relate to myself, where each simple movement is microscopically examined, sexualised, or commodified and served right on the screen. The hurt I felt from friends, and those who were never really friends, and the words they called me as teenagers are still etched in my mind. I do not want to forget them, the words, because a lot of power comes from transforming and trying to overcome the hurt. Growing up in a small town, I know the policing of the body, the quickness of being sized-up and my worth determined based on a seconds-long glance. But I am not equipped to, nor would I ever do justice in telling the stories of the violence against the bodies of women, queer, trans, and non-binary folk. Nor to the experience of people living with disabilities, or to the experience of different races. I cannot tell the stories of many lives that were lost to the broken systems that teach us your own body is not enough or is deemed unacceptable to whatever ideal applies to the social and cultural context. It is a tragedy. The decades, centuries even, that societies have spent on bending and breaking people's exploration of themselves, people's acceptance of themselves; to diminish the fundamental aspects of human existence - knowing self-worth and self-love. So my darling, I will work on loving you, and respecting you, through better or worse. I can only hope each and every one of us finds exactly what they need, in their own inner-universe.

With all my love and gratitude,
A.



Daniel Bremeer

*edited by
Elizabeth Rose*

What the Midwestern states flipping Republican in 2016 tell us about the history and future of the political left

In the 2016 United States presidential elections, Donald Trump managed to win by flipping five Midwestern states – Iowa, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania – from Democratic to Republican. There are of course factors unique to that specific year, as well as differences between the states, but the 2016 elections can be seen as a symptom of a longer trend, one which consists of all five states becoming more right wing (Levitz 2022). The history of these five states, each characterized by struggling economies and a majority white working class population, tells us the story of multiple intertwined socio-economic and political processes applicable to most of the Western world. Like many of my fellow left-leaning members of Gen Z, I feel a sense of urgency, a feeling that we don't have much time left to address the multiple interwoven crises of the world caused by decades of right wing ideological hegemony in government and the economy. The resulting need to figure out how to acquire political power for the left, combined with my fascination with politics and society, have led me to write this article. I feel that to address the many challenges of the 21st century, from climate change to growing wealth and income inequality, we need a strong left that can win elections. And to win, we first need to understand why we have been losing – the story of which is inseparable from the changes that our countries have undergone in the past five decades, illustrated here through the example of the American Midwest. I have chosen this specific example because, as I'll show later, the electoral changes in these states are a direct consequence of their socio-economic transformation, which itself is extremely similar to what is happening throughout the Global North.

To understand why the five above mentioned states flipped from Obama to Trump, we need to know why they leaned Democratic before, and for that, we have to go back to 1945. Driven by a desire to rebuild from the war, prevent another disastrous economic depression, compete with the Soviet Union, and provide enough social stability and security to its citizens to avoid any backslide

into authoritarianism, countries in the free world entered a new era in terms of socio-economic structure. With power in the hands of left of center governments and with pressure from trade unions, the model of the Keynesian welfare state was adopted in most of the West – named after the economist John Maynard Keynes and characterized by anti-cyclical government intervention in the economy, a strong and organized labor movement, full employment, social welfare and capital controls (Schwartz 2009: 183, 189-192). To put it simply, the Keynesian era was a compromise between capital (those owning the factories) and labor (those working in the factories), who agreed to share productivity gains equally among themselves. If we think of the economy as a pie, back then it was a continuously growing one, with its ever larger slices evenly divided among the two groups in society. During this era, the American economy expanded significantly, with its leading sector being car manufacturing, which provided millions of high paying union jobs to residents of states such as Michigan (Schwartz 2009: 178). Here I want to emphasize that while this period does represent a highly prosperous and secure time for working and poor people across the West, it wasn't like that for everyone, with disenfranchisement and segregation of black people being the norm in the US South. The Keynesian era shouldn't be idolized without reservation by the left today, even if the underlying idea of sharing productivity gains is something we should aspire to achieve. Going back to our story, and more specifically electoral politics, the party system stabilized across all of the West with unionized factory workers voting for centre-left social democrats (Democratic party in the USA), while business owners, professionals and intellectuals voted for centre-right conservatives or Christian democrats (Republican party in the USA) (Hague et al. 2019: 271, 288). Today, the correlation between income and party preference in the USA has reversed among white people (this process doesn't apply to black Americans, due to the Republican party being openly racist towards them). The loss of the original association is referred to as class dealignment, while the rise of a new type of connection between educational level and party preference, a significant contributor to this reversal, is called 'educational polarization' (Ghetin et al. 2022: 1). Now let's consider the, in my opinion, quite fascinating story of why these two processes have come about and what it means for us today.

In the 1970s, the 'pie' stopped growing, which made sharing it between capital and labor demographics more difficult, so the post-war Keynesian consensus came crashing down. Amidst an oil crisis, high inflation, high unemployment and stagnating growth, leaders decided to try something new. The neoliberal era, characterized by a reduction in social security, privatization, liberalization and free movement of capital and most trade was ushered in (Hague et al. 2019: 346). The seemingly necessary changes to get the pie growing again meant that any new growth would primarily go to capital, with whatever trickled down going to labor. For our story, this meant that in the new open market American cars couldn't compete with Japanese

and German ones, (Schwartz 2009: 282) nor could American steel or garments compete with Chinese produced ones. This led to the outsourcing of production, to make a wide range of products more cheaply in China and the Global South, resulting in domestic deindustrialization, meaning a loss of manufacturing capacity and jobs here in the West. Organized labor went from striking for higher wages to striking to keep their jobs in the first place. Societies structured around a strong unionized industrial working class changed to societies consisting of unorganized and often precarious service workers – bartenders, clerks, salespeople – and a rising class of educated professionals (Van Hooren 2017: 80–81). The neoliberal revolution, therefore, destroyed the organized basis of left of center parties, and undermined beyond discussion left of center economics. Since the Democratic party no longer advocated for an economic system which favors the working class, and no longer had the institutions of a strong labor movement behind it, it could no longer count on the votes of working class people. But there's more.

The Keynesian era lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty, securing for them the conditions for a decent life. As one can learn in any introduction to psychology, Maslow's hierarchy of needs posits that if someone's basic needs are met, they start prioritizing higher level needs, such as self expression. Wide-scale surveys by 20th century social scientists show a huge distinction between the values of pre-war and post-war generations. Baby boomers, having their material needs met, prioritize postmaterial values more (Van der Meer 2017: 118). As this baby boomer generation came of age, postmaterial values became more salient in politics – which was already moving away from economic debate, due to the triumph of neoliberalism. For example, during an election campaign, focus on issues such as wages decreased while focus on issues such as freedom of speech, gender equality and environmentalism increased. Furthermore, the number of college educated citizens increased extremely quickly in the latter half of the 20th century in the USA, from around 4% of the population in 1950 to around 33% today. To be clear, this is pretty unambiguously a good thing – a more educated society not only is more productive and prosperous, but has a larger number of critical thinkers and people holding democratic and liberal values. Furthermore, highly educated people are significantly more culturally progressive than those without degrees (Levitz 2022). This growing progressive class, which notably has no economic incentive to help those who are worse off, naturally took to the Democratic party, becoming both its voters and its politicians – speeding up desertion of the party by the more socially conservative working class and making Democrats the party of the highly educated. And if no party represents the interests of the working class, but at least the Republicans align with white working people culturally, then it is no wonder why the five states at hand – Iowa, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania – flipped Republican in 2016.

It can feel tempting to assume all hope is lost for those of us on the political left. But this isn't true, and I can think of at least three reasons why. First, as I briefly mentioned before, class dealignment in the USA only applies to white communities. When you look at the entire society, lower income people–

who are disproportionately ethnic minorities – still vote for the Democrats (Levitz 2022). Similarly, while Northern English white former industrial towns may desert to the Conservative party, Indian or Nigerian immigrants and their children won't, because right wing parties are still too explicitly racist for this to be in their political interests. With growing immigrant populations in the West resulting in multicultural and diverse communities across our countries, and an ever increasing share of the population being highly educated, the left still has a path to hope and to victory in most countries – as Biden's success has shown.

Secondly, political debate is centered on whatever we, as a society, explicitly show we prioritize. Alternative conceptions of how our economy could, and perhaps more importantly, *should* function, can be brought into the mainstream with enough time and effort. Indeed, with the current height of inflation, and the looming global recession, the salience of economic issues is sure to surpass those of cultural ones. And while this is far from ideal, it may yet force economic alternatives currently considered inconceivable, to soon become inevitable.

And finally, as the effects of climate change are felt ever more acutely by an ever growing number of people, the next inexorably recurring crisis will give us a chance to demand alternatives to the economic system, which is rapidly destroying the ability of Earth to sustain human life. The slow but sure realization of millions that our economy is harmful ecologically, might just lead to the realization that it is harmful socially, too. The climate crisis presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Restructuring our socio-economic system is our only way to ensure the survival of human civilization as we know it, and the way we go about doing that is up for debate – so let us fight to build a fairer, more just system based on sharing prosperity among everyone.

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I'm pro-choice, but what choices do I have?

With the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, to say that in recent months the door to debate over abortion was once again opened would not be accurate. As far as I'm concerned, it was never closed, the issue has always been up for debate – the right to abortion has never been fully secured. Though many Western countries passed this right all the way back in the 1970s, thanks to the restless activism and information campaigns of concerned parties, to this day, many continue to question its legitimacy, calling for its renewed prohibition.

While debates on the issue go on and on and on between pro-choice, pro-life activists, and politicians, the fact of the matter is that hundreds of thousands of girls and women become – and I dare to use the word – *victims* of an unwanted pregnancy. On the one hand, if they live in a country or state where the right to abortion does not exist, and they do not have the means or the possibility to get the procedure somewhere else, they are forced to bear all the consequences of unwanted pregnancy, often at the costs of their status, physical, mental health and wellbeing. In sum, at the expense of their own lives. On the other hand, women and girls who have the right to abortion supposedly have a choice and, therefore, the power to decide how to deal with their unwanted pregnancies. The assumption is that with the right to abortion, unwanted pregnancies should not cost women their lives. However, I argue that this is a myopic assumption that does not consider the plethoric amount of struggles women still have to go through, despite having the right to abort.

In other words, while the right to abortion is fundamental, it should not and cannot be considered an end to itself, but rather, a starting point. The issues of unplanned and unwanted pregnancies are profoundly nuanced and deserve to be fully and accurately explored. In recent years, the topic of abortion has often been talked about through the American discourse, which has thoroughly politicised it, completely ostracising the profoundly personal nature of this issue. In this article, taking a very personal stance, I aim to explore some of the nuances of both abortion and unwanted pregnancy. I argue that even when you are fortunate

enough to have the right to abortion, it can still feel like you have no power over your situation, body, and life.

Though I cannot speak for every woman and girl, I know that for many of us, getting pregnant when we did not plan or want it, is one of the most terrifying things that could happen to us. To avoid that fear, many people decide to take on contraceptive methods, which are, without a doubt, the most efficient ways to prevent pregnancy besides abstinence or celibacy. However, not only are they not accessible to everyone, but they also are not 100% effective, and unplanned pregnancies can still happen. Not to mention that in some instances, people can be pressured not to use contraceptive methods by their partners or their community or religion. Besides, contraceptives like condoms can also be removed without the knowledge or consent of the partner.

So when an “accident” does happen, and a woman or girl becomes pregnant, what choice and power do they actually have?

According to Article 1 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR), “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (The United Nations, 1948). Yet, failure to create social systems in which women can have abortions or continue pregnancies as they choose, free of judgement, religious persecution, social impact or career implications, means failure to ensure the equal dignity or right to security for women globally.

The moment a pregnancy test shows two lines instead of one, it can feel like all your power and agency over your own body and life are quickly vanishing for two main reasons. The first and most obvious one is the biological component. While the act of getting pregnant is by no means a solitary one, as a woman or womb-having person, we have been assigned the role of bearing children, putting, therefore, all physical consequences on us, whether we like it or not. On this matter, we have little to no choice or power, despite all technological developments. The second reason is a wider, societal one. While it is not as “unchangeable” as the biological one, it still pushes women and girls to comply with accepted norms. As soon as a pregnancy test turns positive, depending on your social environment, the decision can often feel like it’s already been taken for you.

For instance, I am a young woman, still a student, I don’t have a full-time job with a steady income, and I still rely on my parents for most of my financial needs. If everything goes as planned, I will at the soonest, only be able to become fully financially independent in a year or two. Still, my salary will probably be just enough to cover a bedroom in a shared flat and my moderate living expenses. While I’m currently in a committed relationship

with my boyfriend, we are far from ready to settle down. As such, according to my social circle and my environment, if I were to become pregnant, the sensible thing to do would be to have an abortion unless I want to “ruin my life” and that of my “boyfriend”.

Alternatively, if one day, let’s say in ten years, I’ll have a great job, a high-enough income and will have settled down with someone and become pregnant, the common assumption would be that I carry on the pregnancy and have the baby. It would only be “logical” for me to do so.

As such, it very much appears that whatever the situation might be, schemes and plans on what it is that you *should* do when becoming pregnant have already been decided through societal norms in your environment. So, I’m asking myself, what kind of power *do* I have? If I try to go against these norms, while it is possible, it will most certainly come at a cost. But what happens if I try to follow these norms?

Lets hypothesise: I’m a young woman living in Italy, my native country, and I need to get an abortion. In Italy, the right to abortion was passed in 1978 and is supposedly available for all women, and the state fully covers the procedure. However, what struggles will I encounter? First, I’m lucky enough to be over 18; otherwise, I would need consent from both parents to get the abortion. Second, I need to find a doctor or hospital that does these kinds of procedures. In Italy, only 60% of hospitals offer access to abortions due to a dangerously high number of “conscientious objectors”. In some regions, no hospital provides such procedures (Laiga.194). Depending on the time of the year, the clinics or hospitals that do the procedure might either be closed or completely overbooked. Third, while the procedure is free, I still need to cover the costs for the post-procedure meds and possibly psychological support pre or post-procedure. Finally, and the most worrying aspect of all, is that I know I will be judged. Everyone will have something to say about whether it’d be my social circle, my doctors, my nurses or, more generally, society. In Rome, in 2012, “the garden of angels,” or in other words, the cemetery of foetuses, was inaugurated (Ama, 2012). This is a cemetery where hundreds of foetuses resulting from abortions were buried with a white cross bearing the name and surname of the women who aborted them. All this would often happen without the women’s knowledge or consent. Only in 2022, after years of legal battles, activism, and investigations, “there will no longer be the mother’s first and last name but only an alphanumeric code”(La Svolta, 2022). More controls and regulations will also be carried out to ensure that the burying of the foetuses does not happen without the women’s consent. This whole affair goes a long way to show how strong societal judgement can be, even in a country where the law supposedly protects the right to abort.

On the other hand, let’s say that in this case, I decide to carry through with the pregnancy and keep the baby. What would that imply for me? Here are just a handful of struggles that I’d have to take on in the same exact society which makes abortion so difficult to access and possibly so traumatising to have. First, I would have to rely on my parents for all the financial aspects of raising a child, hoping they would support me. This would make me entirely

dependent on them in all areas of my life, so my decisions would probably need to comply with their wishes, as I need them to provide for my future baby and me.

Second, I would probably need to quit my studies or put them on hold, as universities offer few resources to accommodate young mothers. Third, it would be almost impossible due to widespread discrimination against young mothers to secure a job, leaving me with little to no other option but to depend on my parents. Fourth, if I want to put my child in a kindergarten, I would have to put them on a waiting list for months, if not years, which means that I'd have to rely on a huge network of friends and family, making me even more dependent on them. On top of that, with the current economic crisis and meagre employment rates worldwide, finding a job while having no experience and being a young mother, is extremely difficult. Finally, much as in the above-stated situation, I would still face extremely harsh judgement if I still decided to take on all those challenges. People, friends and family will most certainly judge my "choice" to keep the baby and become a mother so young. I would be judged for how I decided to ruin my life, possibly my partner's and my future baby's. By some, I would be judged for having had a child out of wedlock, but if I do get married, I would be judged for marrying so young. If I relied on my parents for financial help, I would be judged. If I did get a job, I'd be judged for "neglecting" my baby. And the list goes on and on again.

In sum, the same society and state which make it so difficult for me to get an abortion are the same as the ones that make it so difficult for me to carry to term the pregnancy. So in this climate, what choices do I have, and what is my power? Is having the right to abortion enough when facing an unplanned/unwanted pregnancy?

Pregnancies, whether planned or not, wanted or not, are extremely nuanced and personal experiences. They need to be approached with better legal frameworks, reforms and support, and with more respect, and less judgement. In recent months, some countries such as Spain have made efforts to ensure better sexual and reproductive health and the voluntary interruption of pregnancy. For that, they have adopted a more holistic approach that focuses on removing some of the existing obstacles to abortion while offering more support to women and girls who would like to have one. For instance, they have removed the need for parental consent for girls between 16 and 17. However, they did not just stop there; they have also focused on ensuring better sexual education and access to contraception for female contraception, while pushing for more developments in male contraception, working on promoting to "encourage men's co-responsibility". They have also pledged to improve pregnancy and childbirth conditions by offering a "new pre-birth leave from the 39th week of gestation, compatible with subsequent maternity leave, and good obstetric and gynaecological practices" (La Moncloa, 2022). Finally, they have also

tackled reproductive violence such as “reproductive exploitation, forced abortion and pregnancy, forced sterilisation and forced contraception” by recognising them as “forms of violence against women” in compliance with the Istanbul Convention (Istanbul Convention Action against violence against women and domestic violence, 2011)

While all these reforms should set an example of how to tackle the theme of pregnancy with greater nuance than any pro-life, pro-choice binary debate allows, they must be paired with a change at the societal level in terms of norms and judgement. When our conception of norms is so narrow and binary as to be inadvertently prescriptive, how can we call what we have a *choice*? A true choice would be powerful, and the power to choose free of judgement, eminently empowering. By challenging our own, our friends and families and society’s judgements and assumptions on the choice to abort or carry a pregnancy, and significantly - *when* we are expected to make each choice - we take the first steps towards this empowerment.

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Zsófi Lazar

*edited by
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Trajectory of Power – the Rise and Fall of Elon Musk

In this world, everyone knows that money means power – and who could understand that better than Elon Musk, now the richest man in the world? The growth of Tesla and SpaceX as brands associated with visionary thinking and the future has been astronomical. However, Musk as a figure has been highly polarising, and his rise to prominence as CEO of these companies, and now Twitter, shows how closely personal power and branding can be associated with business success, as well as the downfall of his enterprise.

Affluence and innovation were two guiding forces of Musk's background that realised his potential as an entrepreneur. The Musk family, descendants of wealthy landowners in South Africa, were known for their entrepreneurial endeavours and property development. Elon's father, Errol Musk, was especially prolific as an electromechanical engineer, pilot, sailor, and consultant, owning and developing properties and locations such as emerald mines. His mother, Maye Musk, in contrast, was a dietician and model. The native wealth of the father may not have guaranteed the son his future, but still helped to shape the lifestyle and expectations of Elon to live up to such lofty results. This familial influence led Elon to design a video game at just twelve years old, leaving for Canada when he was seventeen and initially studying at Queens University, Ontario. Stanford came next – though he dropped out after two days in California to set up an online business directory Zip2 with his younger brother Kimbal in 1995, providing travel guides to newspapers like the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune. The pair sold the firm in 1999 for \$307 million, with Musk himself receiving \$22 million from the deal (H. Sandercock, "Elon Musk"). Next, Musk went into online banking, launching an early version of PayPal with Max Levchin and controversial businessman Peter Thiel, who is known for his staunch stance against 'political correctness' and assertions that Silicon Valley has become a 'one-party state' in its left-leaning policies. This focus on innovation and business from a young age, specifically on opportunities that were financially successful, highlighted Elon Musk's shrewdness and strategy, which only grew as he got older.

The idea of a tech genius, someone to save the world from its sins, is compelling. This can be seen in the popular character of Tony Stark in the Marvel films, a genius who initially designs weapons but eventually becomes a global force for good through his technology, and whose qualities many have compared to Musk's intellectual and visionary prowess. SpaceX and Tesla certainly pushed change that was seen as revolutionary by many, firstly in the theme of space travel, and secondly in the electric car industry. As a result, many have idealised Elon Musk as such a figure, which has led to his profound influence and overarching personal brand.

Indeed, SpaceX was additionally a testament to the personal management style that Musk is famous for cultivating. Starting in early 2002, Musk has had a reputation for this harsh and demanding approach, and has recently fired nine SpaceX employees due to a letter they wrote calling on SpaceX to condemn the "harmful Twitter behaviour" of Musk. However, Jon Edwards, the vice president leading the meeting, had characterised the letter as an extremist act, stating that "SpaceX is Elon and Elon is SpaceX". This, albeit it being an extremely harmful method of establishing dominance within the company, highlights the undisputed influence that Elon Musk had over making SpaceX a success. His personal label and micromanagement style has led to notable growth and efficiency, though arguably controversial and problematic policies to do with overworking and a lack of empathy.

For this same reason, the Tesla revolution was even more successful – both to do with the innovation of Tesla, as well as Musk's figure behind the company. This was sold as one of first successful independent automakers, and a pioneer in the electric car market. Tesla was the first to use lithium-ion batteries of the sort found in laptop computers, to finally develop their own innovative battery packs. This new approach gave the Roadster unprecedented range and power, allowing it to go from zero to sixty miles per hour in 3.9 seconds and cover 245 miles on a single charge. This combination made it highly appealing. Indeed, the vision was unique – Musk was selling sleek, stylish cars with zero engine emissions that wouldn't just appeal to nerds and the ecologically minded, but those seeking a sleek, modern vision of luxury. Style and renewability were an uncommon pairing that reinvented the designing, building and selling of cars. Moreover, Musk built up its own supply chain, enabling the company to custom-build its own electric engines, battery packs and self-driving technology, even its own glass. The exclusivity promoted by the brand is exacerbated by its lack of advertising or use of a dealer network for online customers. These factors, alongside the global vision of a transition to clean energy, proved successful for the business strategy of Tesla. In 2016, Musk opened a "Gigafactory" making battery packs with Japanese-owned Panasonic in Nevada, resulting in Tesla's own solar power arm, SolarCity, which has become a key part of Tesla Energy. These advancements by Musk made renewability a desirable and viable business – an unlikely outcome that was greatly influenced by Tesla's business strategies

and the idea of Musk behind it as a genius inventor.

However, Musk cuts a controversial figure; some would argue that his handling of the issues of misinformation, specifically on social media and after his acquisition of Twitter, has not been satisfactory. For example, the billionaire has recently scrapped Twitter's COVID-19 misinformation guidelines. This policy, taking action against those breaching its COVID, previously suspended over 11,000 accounts for misinformation about the disease as of September 2022. (R. Schraer, "Twitter Ends Covid Misinformation Policy"). This took the form of a 'five-strike system' monitoring content that could lead to a "significant risk of harm", with repeat offenders being suspended for a period of time from hours to indefinitely. Though the majority of Twitter's policies with regards to misinformation remain in place, the end of this policy means that some asserting information with a lack of evidence, such as Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, have been able to return to the website. Ms Greene was suspended on the first of January 2022 due to her false claims around the "extremely high number of coronavirus vaccine deaths" in the United States. (BBC, "Marjorie Taylor Greene") Moreover, Musk's mass layoffs at the company and his lack of experience with organisational change are indicative of an imperfect understanding of how social media companies such as Twitter operated – an area where his personal brand and visionary status could not help him. This inevitable downfall came with Musk selling at least \$3.95 million worth of Tesla stock 'to save' Twitter, which some estimate is going to buy back some of Twitter's billions in debt, or some of the company's shares. However, this is only contributing to uncertainty on the part of Tesla's shareholders, who are concerned about the sixty-one percent drop in the company's stock price from late 2021. Leo KoGuan, one of Tesla's biggest individual investors, has asserted on Twitter that Tesla "needs and deserves to have a working full-time CEO". (M. de la Merced; P. Eavis. "Elon Musk Sells Another Big Chunk of Tesla Stock.")

Therefore to some, Elon Musk is a visionary – efficient, innovative and determined. To others, he is entitled and brutal – a rich man experimenting to stave off boredom. His intrigue stems from the fact that both interpretations ring true. Though his strict management policies with both Tesla and SpaceX and his recurring personal brand have led to his prolific rise to fame, Musk's damaging failure with Twitter showcases a lack of awareness and empathy that speaks volumes about his character. Must one be ruthless to thrive? The story of Elon Musk, though it is one that praises innovation and technological skill, certainly seems to say so. The dangers of such ruthlessness and relentlessness, however, lurk close behind; though Musk may have climbed very far, as we have begun to see with Twitter, he has just as far to fall.

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Draco, Causes We Care About Journal



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edited by
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Queerbaiting Has Lost the Plot; The Very Real Remifications of Proving Who the “True” Queers Are

In this age where social media dictates how we perceive each other’s intentions and inherent worth – we come across what I will explain to be a negative byproduct of respectability politics and the aching fight for queer liberation.

The recent fixation on queerbaiting and the pattern of forcing people to demonstrate that they identify a certain way rests upon biphobic principles which reinforce reductive interpretations of sexuality. As Ed Farley has written, the term “queerbaiting” itself is not the problem, so much as the way it has been improperly appropriated toward issues it does not concern (Farley, 2022). Farley explains that the phrase “queerbaiting” was intended to refer specifically to fictional characters in film and television. However, social media has led us down an obscure path where fans expect real life actors to bare all when it comes to their identities, regardless of where they are in their stage of individual understanding.

There is a community split that most bisexual people encounter – an anecdotal feeling of “not being gay enough for the gays” or “straight enough for the straights”. Many experience this as internalized homophobia, informed by stereotypical renditions of what it means to be in the LGBTQ+ community. Specifically, these issues come from the misconception that bisexuality is merely a combination of both gay and straight identities. This misconception informs many popular culture criticisms that fixate on the concept of queerbaiting which was brought into social consciousness around 2010. Specifically, with reference to well-liked pop singers and television series characters (Honderich, 2019).

Originally a critique of the insidious consequences of rainbow capitalism, queerbaiting drew into focus the corporate desire to profit off of the illusion of supporting gay rights. Professor Julia Humberg’s primary criticisms hinge on the commodification of

queer identities as a corporate marketing tool. One that is often utilized without any intention of creating tangible change for the same communities it seeks to financially gain from (Honderich, 2019).

Rainbow washing occurs when corporations deceptively suggest that a performance, or television series will include LGBTQ+ representation, subsequently misleading queer fans to invest time and money in their product on this basis. These tactics are designed to give the illusion of being pro-gay rights (Honderich, 2019). We can see this with Disney introducing queer-coded characters while simultaneously funneling money toward overtly anti-gay legislation like the Florida 'Don't Say Gay' bill (STITCH, 2022).

Though it is necessary to be critical of corporations and their intentions when including queer representation - it is also important to recognize that the actors cast are not intrinsically related to the characters portrayed. Placing this kind of pressure on individuals completely misses the point, specifically as queerness is meant to be discursive and fluid in nature. This is not to ignore the issues that can arise when straight performers are selected to represent mannerisms stereotypically aligned with queerness. Primarily as one could argue that such roles would be better suited to actual queer people who exist in these identities daily (McDermott, 2021). However, this does not give onlookers the authority to demand that performers out themselves to maintain credibility amongst their fanbase. Indeed, as supporters of this community - we must be critical of ourselves and the way queerbaiting can reinforce covert forms of homophobic sentiment.

Queerbaiting combined with notions of "cancel-culture" has created a feedback loop of people *REQUIRING* those in the spotlight to prove their queerness. Farley speaks about this phenomenon in the case of Kit Connor, who was forced out of the closet by fans seeking to prove he was *not* in fact bisexual when the character he plays is (Farley, 2022). We saw similar pushback with Harry Styles when he was criticized for his gender-nonconforming fashion choices (STITCH, 2022). These notions of queer elitism have come to impact real people and coerce many out of the closet in a way that is counter-productive, bi-phobic, and ultimately wrong.

Looking at this from a queer theory perspective, the desire to file people into neatly labeled folders comes from a historically monosexual representation model. Kenji Yoshino wrote about this in 2000, when he first coined the term "biphobia". Bisexuality and the nuanced spaces in between "gay" and "straight" are in many ways a direct contradiction of much of the work completed to avoid the "anxiety of identity interrogation" (Yoshino, 2000). Bisexuality, or rather the lack of hard lined definitions of identity, "threatens immutable sexuality standards", as "it precludes both straights and gays from 'proving' their identities" (Yoshino, 362, 2000). He further discusses that without a clear understanding of what makes people inherently gay or

straight, monosexual identities ultimately cannot be proven to exist (Yoshino, 362, 2000).

The fixation on monosexual identities has presented opportunities for political mobility specifically to do with the gay liberation movement. There is a specific kind of justification in homosexual communities for “biphobic response” due to the concern that “sexual ambiguity or fluidity might undermine the basic argument that homosexuality is biological” (Griffin, 247, 2009). Therefore, it has been the fuel with which structural biphobia has taken root and remained rampant amongst both LGBTQ+ community members and straight people alike.

The notion that people cannot experiment with their style, music, art, romantic affiliations, or otherwise – lest they be considered a “queer-baiter”, is the opposite of what queer theory has worked to establish. Queer discourse is built upon the notion of being undefinable, hard to interpret, and entirely up to the individual. The fixation of forcing people to behave in the way that other queer community members expect them to, is using the same homophobic standards of identity and expression that structural homophobia pits against the LGBTQ+ community.

Sexual exceptionalism, as Ratna Kapur puts it, “continues to operate in ways that include some queer subjects”, that is, “those who conform or assimilate [...] while it simultaneously casts out non-compliant sexual, gender, and racial others” (Kapur, 136, 2018). Following this narrative, notions of queerbaiting often come from a specific interpretation of the word “queer” in and of itself, one that Kapur expresses as “aligned with a set of (white) secular norms [...] where practices such as gay marriage serve as a marker for the distinction” between those on the right side of progress and not (Kapur, 136, 2018). Many of the negative implications for bisexual people in particular can be traced back to the false narratives of the AIDS epidemic that established stereotypes about bisexual men as promiscuous and therefore, the ones attributed with “bringing HIV/ AIDS into the heterosexual community” (Griffin, 246, 2009).

Bringing the case of Kit Connor back into focus, he was forced to come out because he was seen with a woman. Fans were so wrapped up in proving who the liars are that they have completely riddled the nuance of bisexuality, a meaningless endeavor. Therefore, in this case, he was perceived as straight. Commonly this becomes an issue when dealing with bisexual people dating those of the opposite sex and constantly being forced to prove in other ways how they are *still* queer despite their outwardly *appearing* heterosexual pairing.

This erasure becomes systemic as social media is a powerful filter of what we perceive as “truth”. Regardless of an assumptions’ validity, people often risk losing their careers if they don’t come out. This narrative omits the danger in coming out as if we don’t live in an homophobic world that does not always reward those for being openly themselves (Farley, 2022).

There cannot be any variation in expression or romantic connection when the all-consuming hammer of social media depicts the *right way to be queer* as it swiftly slams down on difference. This standard of identity does not allow any kind of variation in the process of coming to understand oneself in time. If you come out one way, you're expected to hold onto that identity as if it's life or death. Even if one doesn't relate to it, is arbitrarily forced to come out too soon, or into an identity that wasn't theirs in the first place.

Bringing this home - these larger issues impacting celebrities trickle down into our shared queer spaces. The standards we place on larger scale influencers inevitably come to dictate the way we treat people in our smaller, more interpersonal relationships. These unrealistic standards come to impact people in our day to day lives in a way that is hugely powerful and destructive. Regarding queer nightlife in London - many have faced rejection at the door of gay bars for merely "not looking gay enough". External-community standards of queerness & subsequent stereotypes become internally violent and isolating when attempting to define what a "proper queer" should look, act, and think like.

This brings issues of the difficulty in fixating on monosexual identities back into focus, as Yoshino has argued. Adding to this conversation, Griffin expresses, "herein lies the difficulty with a minority identity development model that requires a single endpoint as different from the majority" (Griffin, 250, 2009). Due to the confines of queerbaiting on a larger scale, we see the ways in which this same destructive discourse seeps into our closer-knit community spaces where bisexual people are expected to cut ties with any heterosexual tendencies of their identities, while exaggerating the homosexual parts (*ibid.*). Therefore, further establishing the idea that sexuality is a choice and representation is owed to the community more than it is to oneself.

Queerbaiting has lost its plot. What was originally meant to critique larger scale corporations and their fixation on the direction of the rainbow dollar - has now become a benchmark with which to determine punishment of those who do not act in accordance with the standards of queerness they've had thrust upon them. This standard of identity is reductive and as a result we are losing the opportunity to grow into our truest selves at our own pace.

Queer theory seeks to determine the infallible value of difference and nuance in the way people are able to express themselves over time, on their own terms. At the end of the day there is no right or wrong way to express one's sexuality. That is, as long as it is not being used to shame, blame or isolate others for having a different variation of that same label.

I'll leave us with a quote from Christian Klesse;

**Some theorists consider multiplicity, fluidity and non-coherence to be the sources of bisexuality's unique queer potential for undoing the dominant gender and sexuality categories of Western binary thought.
(Klesse, 115, 2021)**

Instead of fixating on what "true" queerness looks like, we should be opening ourselves up to interpretations of identity that focus on the power of difference. Simultaneously we must reconfigure the critical lens that queerbaiting seeks to establish back onto corporations. This is how we can aim to protect the process of growing and coming out on what should be the terms of each individual.

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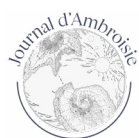
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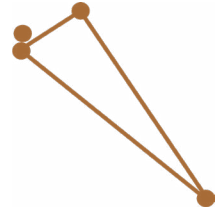


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Triangulum, Interview Section



interviewed by
Journal d'Ambroisie
Editors in Chief

“I realised that I had to adjust and rethink entirely what I believed about success” – An Interview with Fedor Holz

As 2022 was coming to an end, our Editors in Chief found themselves reunited in a Budapest cafe after months of working together remotely. In only a few moments, on the other end of the zoom call they would be joined by professional poker player Fedor Holz to talk about poker and entrepreneurship, and his ideas on growth, power and the importance of community.

Fedor Holz is a German professional poker player with live tournament winnings of over thirty-two million dollars. He is also an avid entrepreneur with various initiatives, from *Primed Mind* to *Poker Code*. Speaking to him was a mind opening experience. At just twenty-nine years old, Fedor's expertise and wisdom is palpable, and his confident mindset, as well as his humbleness, admirable.

Journal d'Ambroisie: Your success has been forged over the last decade or so in the spotlight. What is that like, and what were some of its biggest ups and downs?



Fedor Holz: That's a pretty big question. My success in poker has been very different over the years. At times, it was very hard to grasp, overwhelming. Afterwards, it becomes more rewarding with a lot of very valuable experiences. My most successful year in poker was 2016, and that was very intense, very exhausting, demanding and exciting all at once. And so very overwhelming. The years following, I would say the learnings and experience and



the fruits of it settled in and it became something that I'm overall very grateful for. In terms of the ups and downs, especially within my career, because in poker you're really on your own, there is no rulebook, no specific path that you follow. Essentially, it's very high velocity, there are lots of ups and downs, and I am generally also a person that is dynamic, I like energy and things happening.

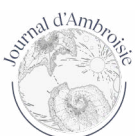
JA *In this edition of the Journal, we explore the concepts of growth and power. How do you relate to those terms, both professionally and personally?*

FH Growth for me is kind of an all encompassing thing that is my life, and that I really enjoy; it isn't something I consciously set out to do, and truth be told, I feel I have accomplished more growth when I didn't try to focus on it. Rather, I just let go, and don't try to go into a particular direction with specific goals. What I do is try to remove barriers, try to reduce friction and bring myself into a high level of energy. In terms of power, I kind of see both sides of the coin: the first term that I think of in association with power is resourcefulness. I believe it's great to have people surrounding you who are resourceful, to be able to solve problems, to accomplish things, to help and support, and to make each other stronger. On another level, I also see a certain level of exploitation or dominance, where it's about having more force over things to try to change the outcome. This is something I actively try to distance and remove myself from, and actively call it out.

JA *In your interviews, and visibly throughout your career in general, you always talk about community and its significance to you. Could you talk about the importance of a community and how it fits into your vision of the future?*

FH I talk about community in a very particular way. Out of my experiences, collaborating with other people has proven to be the most effective way to accomplish things. In hindsight, gathering those people around and creating a well-functioning interaction and group dynamic was probably one of the biggest reasons we have been moving so fast and why we have been so successful.

JA *That's very interesting, because generally speaking, when someone mentions poker, everyone thinks of it as a rather lonely activity, but this is a beautiful way of redefining it, and building this mindset into other projects you launched as well. Is your experience of growing through communities in poker something that inspired you to launch your other initiatives?*



FH I would say yes. It's not so much that I picked the theme and set out to specifically work with it, it's more that I found things I was excited about. There are certain topics that excite me and people who do cool things and are passionate about what they do, that also makes me passionate, and then you just begin doing things that eventually always have to do with other people. For me, the first step is to look for other people who have achieved or want to achieve something similar to my own visions.

JA *In many of your interviews, you put great emphasis on passion and emotional connectedness. How have these approaches shaped your professional life? Where do you think it makes a difference that you approach things from a place of passion against, for instance, rationality?*

FH It's actually very interesting when this process happens, when I talk about something and someone writes about me talking about it and then I hear someone else repeating that. Whenever I hear these repeated phrases, I believe they fall kind of flat. So when I talk about passion, I don't necessarily talk about it from a perspective of "everyone should be doing whatever they want to do", but more about how to actually apply passion in reality. It's entirely clear for me that people produce better outcomes when they do things with a higher level of intention, which produces a higher quality of life and that's something I think is worthwhile to put effort into. Nonetheless, there are a lot of visible situations where people are not able to do that, because they need a roof over their head and want to be able to feed their family. At this point, it's really more about trying to find solutions to improve the general situation. So it's worth pursuing on an individual level, because the long term reward is very high and for me, it's really more of a long term equation than anything else.



[Image 2] © Poker Red

JA *Connected to this, would you say that your other projects outside of poker, specifically your mindfulness app Primed Mind, stem from this mindset? And is this the message you want to pass down to people starting their own projects and careers?*

FH When you say it like this, it sounds much grander than the initial idea, which was very simple. It was more that this particular mindfulness exercise has helped me a lot, I used it a lot and after doing a few tests with my friends who were athletes, they really loved it as well. So after that we thought: why not build an app and make it available for more people and make it mostly free? That's the entire thought process behind the app – because this is valuable, we wanted to make it accessible to more people. And in the process, I learned a lot about entrepreneurship and how to build a business and how to develop an app.

JA *So does this mean you also regularly practice mindfulness yourself? Is that something that plays an important role in your life?*

FH I guess it depends on what you understand when you say mindfulness. I'm not a very spiritual person, I am not a disciplined practitioner of mindfulness, but I would say that I love thinking about things and reflecting on them. So out of that, a lot of me questioning myself and finding something where I think: there is a way that feels more natural or authentic, and then stepping into it and doing that at a very high pace. This is more my mindfulness practice that leads me to being more open to new ideas and people. And whatever happens, I think the level of me taking myself too seriously is reducing, and my openness towards other perspectives is increasing.

JA *Do you think that it makes a difference that it seems like everything you create and do comes from this authentic place? Does that authenticity come across for people when they use the products you are creating?*

FH I think to a degree, yes, but that's really for other people to answer. But I would say for myself, if I just tried to think about how I did something and how I felt it connected with others, then I would say **I don't care that much about what people think; that's how I made the best experiences, when I just do my thing, and if people are curious and ask me something and it brings about something new, then that's great.**

JA *Assuming the amount of interactions you've had over the last ten years, is there one that you would say was the most valuable one? Maybe someone who was a mentor to you?*

FH I don't think it was necessarily the conversations whereby wisdom was delivered to me, it was more the experience itself that shook me, that enabled me to step out of something that wasn't very good for me. I wasn't necessarily connected to one person during those times, but there were multiple moments that were emotionally very challenging for me. One of these big moments was definitely when I stopped playing poker. I was very exhausted, I was drained and didn't enjoy poker anymore. And that was a really important moment because I was very successful. This combination was an important experience for me to realise that whatever I believed about success didn't seem to be my experience. Then **I realised that I had to adjust and rethink entirely what I believed about success or about achieving something.**

In terms of mentors, I started working in a trading company in Chicago which was a very cool experience for me, because on the one hand, I was really excited about exploring a new topic, and on the other, that was my first look into a company and what it's like to work with a CEO, with owners and 200 employees, a structure and set out goals. From that I realised that there are certain things that are amazing and certain things that are highly limiting for me in the entrepreneurial world, and that's something I have never experienced before. Before, it was just me and my rules and whatever I wanted to do.

Recently, I would say Covid19 was one of the biggest bearers of change for me, because when I started getting more into entrepreneurship and building businesses, I didn't have many ideas about how I want to live my life or build a business. That time for me felt really unproductive, because instead of lots of meetings, I had one scheduled in two weeks, and that was very frustrating. I got very bored and I procrastinated, and then three to four weeks later I had the most productive week of my life, which showed me how I had worked significantly better having that level of freedom and room for creativity. So really, Corona was my mentor.



[Image 3] © WSOP

JA *That is also something that our audience can resonate with most certainly. And with regards to this, what inspired you to share your knowledge of poker with a new generation of players and to launch your training program?*

FH You really make everything I do sound so great. With *Pokercode*, it was a very simple process. Many people have asked me for coachings and I've done countless of them throughout my career, and I always thought there must be a way to do this better. At this point, I was getting hundreds of messages and I thought it would be nice to record videos. At the time, I also met a very strong poker player, and he said he would create the curriculum. We went on to create a video course that we sold online, and it worked out really well. Shortly after I realized this is very unsatisfactory. I thought people were going to watch it, but I soon realised it was only 15 % of those who watched my regular videos that actually watched my video course I sold online. At that point, I had to ask myself: so many people are asking for *it*, but what are they actually asking for? That's when I embarked on a journey of exploration, asking myself questions like: why are people fans of someone? What do they actually care about? Why are they passionate about the game? That's when we understood, a lot of people who are passionate about poker don't actually want to get better at it, they just enjoy playing the game, like the mental challenge of it. They enjoy the psychological and emotional element of it, but once they reach the threshold of going more professional, they can lose that interest. **Essentially, there is this idea in society that if you do something, you have to achieve a certain level, you need constant progress.** So we created a cool training ground that people are intrigued by, where they can just have fun for the love of the game. Especially in Central Europe, poker is often perceived as this game where people gamble their life savings away. I would honestly say that the big majority of people that I know play poker, play in a very reasonable way. I would also add to this that it's beneficial, similarly to chess, for their mental and emotional development, which is what I want to focus on at *Pokercode*.

JA *Like you said there is often this negative image of poker in people's minds; what is your definition of poker then? What is it about and what does it mean to you?*

FH I think it's actually very easy to grasp. If you were open minded and spent like thirty minutes with it, read some stuff, watched some videos, that you would get a pretty good idea. You wouldn't get an understanding of the actual life of poker players and how it works with poker pros, but in terms of complexity, it's very similar to chess, which I also play. There are a wide variety of games that are being played; you can do cash games, or tournaments, with a variety of buy-ins, and I have played mostly tournaments in my career.

FH You got me! It's interesting, because in terms of what I perceive to be possible for growth, I'm maybe a 2 out of 10, but to other people, I'm maybe an 8.5 out of 10. You also asked me what is valuable about knowing when other people are inauthentic. It is basically the whole basis of my business decisions.



[Image 4] © PokerPhotoArhives

JA *We talked a lot about power, but alongside it, money is also very much at the centre of poker. As someone who “deals with” money all day, what is your perception of it?*

FH For poker players, money is very transactional, because it's also how you measure your result. We also spend a lot of time with the concept of money, which I think is normal when you go about risking money every day. But in this way, you also take it less seriously, which is quite different from non-poker players. Money is money and an apartment is an apartment. Very often, money is being mistaken for the thing that you pay for and I think that is unhealthy, creating a fake dependency that for example, you're only able to eat food by slaving away in something you don't necessarily want to do. So I believe it is important to separate money from like food, a place to live in, because money is essentially a layer of information that can be exchanged and that we can distribute. On the other hand, when you're emotionally more connected to it, money plays a bigger role in your life. Maybe the more money you've made, the more you've played and the more mature you are, the healthier your connection to money is.

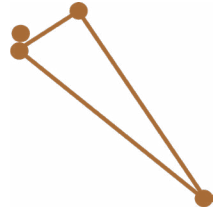
JA *What advice would you tell to our audience and our community of young pioneering voices who are looking to make a difference in the world?*

FH Think smaller. One of the big fallacies I stepped into multiple times was to feel pressure to think big. What happened right now, is I became significantly more practical, because the things I care about are in their essence, not that grand. There was a project that I planned here in Vienna, and there was a business case behind it to do multiple locations, to have it spread across continents. But what I actually cared about were the people and bringing them together. **My advice is: take the smallest step, then the next and then you can figure out whatever comes after.** Break things down into smaller steps, focus on them, it will make you move significantly faster. Like even now when I do something in business, things truly really change after a few years. I was not in that mindset and I didn't used to think like that. Now, after all these years, I have more experiences, I have skills that are more advanced and I can estimate more outcomes. I don't think you're going to build something super relevant at the age of 20. You're going to do something small, get really excited about it and then maybe it'll tumble down, or take a detour, and then you do the next thing and at some point after five, six, nine, ten years, you look at the repertoire of things you have done and you begin scheming in bigger ways.

JA *That is certainly something to think about for us as well in the coming years and how to approach our projects. Speaking of next year, what are you looking forward to the most?*

FH My birthday. I have a ritual where every year, I bring the people who are closest to me together and for a few days of the year, we're all in one place. I'm turning 30 this year, so I have something very special planned and I can hopefully get everyone together for 4-5 days. This is normally the most fun week of my year. I'm looking forward to it immensely.

Triangulum, Interview Section



interviewed by
Journal d'Ambroisie
Editors in Chief

“We must search for our causes with the same enthusiasm with which we look for love” – An Interview with Henrietta Kovács, Director of Autistic Art

As 2022 was coming to an end, our Editors in Chief found themselves reunited in a Budapest cafe after months of working together remotely. In only a few moments, on the other end of the zoom call they would be joined by the Director of the non-profit organisation Autistic Art, Henrietta Kovács, to discuss ideas on growth, power and the importance of community.

Henrietta Kovacs is the Director of *Autistic Art*, a non-profit organisation based in Hungary that aims to help people with autism live a better life. They provide financial, as well as other types of aid, like organising an art program for the youth who live in autistic housing facilities. Talking to Heni was a treat; her faith in a better world, her relentless fighting spirit and kindness is a reminder for us all, that we can indeed build a better world.

Journal d’Ambroisie: What inspired you personally to work in the NGO sector in general, and specifically with people on the autism spectrum, in Hungary?



Image 1. Henrietta Kovács

Henrietta Kovács: Well, first of all, I don’t have a personal connection. When you choose to work for an NGO in Hungary, in many cases, you are personally connected to the cause it represents and that’s what inspires your decision to join; for example, your child is born with a disability. At least this was the case, I think, 15–20 years ago. Today, I would say, people are much more open to working for these organisations. For



me, I'm raising three neurotypical children. When my third child was born, I felt this need to volunteer for social-charitable causes, since I suddenly had a lot of free time, and as I was a Hungarian and English teacher, I felt I had something to give, to help out with my English language knowledge, translating websites, pamphlets, something like this. And this is how I started working for the *Down Egyesület* (Down Association), who are helping children with Down-syndrome with early-stage development programmes, as well as through the foundation of a house, a sort of integrated playhouse. This especially pulled me in, since the whole point of the playhouse was to allow neurotypical children to meet and play with kids with Down-syndrome, to approach them differently and get to know them, understand them better. I think this was a genius idea, because as adults, we see the world in a stricter way, with a narrow scope, and for us it's much harder to accept divergence. In this sense, we have a lot to learn from children. When I was conducting my research to see what kind of world exactly I'm stepping into, I got to sit in on a class in a school where this integration between children was central. They have classes of 16-18 students, 15-16 neurotypicals and a few who are "different". They can be kids with Down-syndrome, or wheelchair users, or children on the autism spectrum. And in this class, I got to observe something that I consider genius, happen: the teacher prepared the kids, she said "we are going to have an exciting drawing class today, what you need to do is, you need to remove your shoes and your socks because we are going to create with our feet!" And this was super exciting for all the children. All the students were really into it, and as they prepared to paint with their toes, the new classmate arrived and he did the same thing as everyone else. He created a beautiful piece and all the classmates were in awe of how talented he was. And when the students went home that day, what they told their parents about school is that they had a new classmate who paints really well with his feet, instead of saying: our new classmate doesn't have hands. This experience totally charmed me. Years later, a similar thing happened to me, to further illustrate how much we have to learn from children. I was already at *Autistic Art* by this point, and I was on the tram with my youngest son. He was sitting on my lap, and we were staring out of the window – as one does – when I saw a guy with his dog that had three legs. And I automatically thought with pity: "oh, poor dog, how can it walk around with only three legs?" But my son had a totally different reaction, he said: "mum, look, how great this dog is, he can run on three legs!" These are the thoughts we should bring to the forefront of society, we shouldn't pity others, as I believe marginalised people had enough of our pity. Rather we should help them actively. For me, this is the strong and appealing societal attitude, and this is what drove me personally to join an NGO.

Later, joining *Autistic Art* was quite accidental actually. In 2016 I was representing the Down Association at a training course for people

working in the sector, and I met Viktória Bella there, the then managing director of Autistic Art. It was a long course, it lasted three or four months, and Viktória and I sat next to each other and chatted multiple times. During one of these chats, she told me what their Foundation was doing. I heard about them and their work before – people in the sector are usually aware of each other – and I told her that I thought what they were doing was amazing, but that there’s a need for more fundraising. And this was the magical sentence, after which she lured me in to join them. It was a big dilemma for me, whether I should leave Down Association to join *Autistic Art*, since it’s hard for me to make such decisions, when it gives me pain to say goodbye. But I felt like this is where my road was leading me. And this is how I ended up at *Autistic Art*.

JA *Stemming from this, you said that it isn’t pity that people need, but rather understanding, and social understanding. What are the things that you have seen in society over the years, what are the attitudes and societal attitudes towards people on the autistic spectrum, and how do they directly affect the work of Autistic Art?*

HK Actually, I think that the mechanism and the behavior that can be experienced in society in terms of being charitable is getting better, but it is still not ideal. So we are still very far from an ideal space, and it may sound silly, but I think it should be mandatory to give back. Of course, it does matter how you ask. So it is clear that everyone has a lot of problems, and despite it, let’s say so for me and for you, we still choose to do something about it. So today, I am really saying that charity should be compulsory to be taught even in primary school. But we need to give it a much sexier name than charity (“jótékonykodás”), because in Hungary, this is precisely where people will think the opposite of charity. So when you say charity in Hungarian, it has such a beautiful sound, but maybe a nicer word should be invented, or rather, the problem is that it’s already imbued with certain connotations. And the problem is that Hungarians are so prejudiced, and when the word charity is mentioned, then they think, well, it’s not certain that it will reach its goal. So we’re still struggling with that here, you know? So how much will they really get? You just collected a hundred units, but how much of that goes to the cause? Then you have to explain that you can’t give the hundred units, because then we, as an organisation, wouldn’t be able to function. Volunteering essentially cannot mean that you don’t get paid for it. I think volunteering works well periodically or short-term, but asking someone for their time continuously, long-term, even for several hours a day, without giving them something in return, will not work, that’s for sure. I’ve experienced it myself.

Hungarian society is years behind a culture where charity is really self-evident, and I must say that Hungarian society is really moving at a very

slow pace. I think I told you when we were out at a wine festival, and you tell a Hungarian about your cause, and their reaction is: leave me alone, I have enough trouble. Whereas for the tourists, it was self-evident to come and support us. And this is also where we see our task this year. We communicated this very strongly: we are supporting 11 residential homes, where independent autistic people who are unable to lead a “normal” life live, and this is obviously the main mission, but in addition, you should educate society, and encourage them. Many people are healthy and don’t have affected children, which is something to be happy about, regardless, you have to be responsible in the society you live in, otherwise it won’t be a livable society. Because then we will only continue to say that we support autistic people, they are not valuable, and we’ll continue to pity them, but this is not the right attitude. We have to ask ourselves: how can they join this society? What are their good skills? In fact, their thinking is so broad, it is amazing what we could learn from them. Their life-affirmation is so strong, their positive attitude towards certain things is so motivating, and if we don’t want to hear that, then we remain stupid. And then what happens? Then again, I believe if we only deal with our own problems, we will continue to have problems, whereas if we start dealing with someone else’s, then we have a task for our life. Or we want to return this so that everyone has a social cause. They used to say and ask, well, if you communicate this way, is it okay that some people won’t be donating to *Autistic Art*, but to another cause? Yes, it’s okay, because there is a mission that you join and care about, but at the same time, if you are the flag bearer of this, sooner or later, you will be discussed anyway. Essentially, I’m an optimist, but I’m not satisfied, so a lot needs to be changed. And I think one more thought should be brought in, that if you can sow this seed, it should be regular. Because a one-off donation is not enough. I write my homework regularly, don’t I? I regularly cook for my children at home, you regularly produce articles, you are looking for what to do next. In my opinion, charity should also be like this.

JA *And related to this, do you see a generational difference in this attitude, that perhaps the younger generation is more inclined to have a cause to which it regularly contributes, or that the differences are not generational, but rather geographical?*

HK I think it’s geographical. I can really see that our children who grow up with this are much more sensitive. Basically I think they’ve already received a pack for the road that they’ll take out somewhere and use, and then I’m sure they’ll give it back. I think it also has to do with emotional intelligence, and this attitude can be learned, right? Please tell me it can be learned.

JA Yes!

HK Good. Because I see that if we address influencers in this way, they can help us, because we need their help and what is going on in social media right now is really amazing. If you have a good voice by your side, then it really has a measurable result, because then purchases appear in, say, webshops, which was experienced before around Christmas. However, if that person is not so emotionally intelligent, then of course he says that he is involved, but he is not doing it well, or with insufficient dedication, or perhaps with insufficient credibility. Also, what is perhaps still a little lacking in young people, precisely because of their age, is that they are extremely enthusiastic, but they are enthusiastic about so many things that they can't choose. And then it can be very well observed within the older generation, either middle-aged or older, where there are already children, and where this kind of support comes about consciously, so that this is not a one-time tick, but, let's say, it has been here for a long time. So, if there is this awareness and there is this extreme sensitivity, then it can be observed that even their children can be included in our mission. But it's not easy to attract new people from different generational strata, social age, and social age groups, it's a lot of work. Unfortunately, I can turn back to the fact that either people are very superficial and do not delve into a story, or they are still skeptical, so the result of a long work is that they finally sit down to an auction, let's say, and then participate and actively take part in it. So, I think the point is that you convey your social cause with enthusiasm and credibility. My husband was involved in another social cause, and the two of us used to get sad a lot of the time, because if we created some kind of event - a fundraising event for example - our circle of friends would turn their heads away. But then we won't give up on it, because your world will really be the way you make it, and then you can't do it any other way than to start looking at your network in your narrow circle, to somehow attract them. It really is tasteful sales and marketing. You should never attack your potential partner, create another problem, but show how they will be more if they support the cause. And isn't it very interesting, when the conversation ends like: thank you, it's great that you came and told me, and it's so good that I can support you.

JA *Maybe it can also be difficult in today's world, because young people may also find it difficult to choose a cause and stick to it, unlike perhaps older generations, since everything feels so accessible and there are so many charitable causes out there that could be supported. So I think for many young people a big question of how to choose and how to say: "I now stand behind this cause and not this one" is particularly challenging.*

HK There is no good answer to this. It's just like choosing a partner. There are many beautiful girls, and there are many beautiful boys. Many are beautiful, smart, talented. And we obviously want that person to be by our side for a long time, but is there a guarantee for that? So, when they don't have it, we look for it, and in the meantime we get disappointed, we have to stand back, they leave us, we cry, we laugh. On some level, this is the same as choosing a cause you care about. So, when you pick one, you like the case for something, either because they enthusiastically told you about it, or because you see that your classmate from university is involved. Suddenly he wears an *Autistic Art* t-shirt, or writes in an *Autistic Art* notebook, or he is autistic. And I think that nowadays, if we still try to sell it a bunch of times, then charity should be sexy, right? You have to let people understand that when you give, you also receive.



Image 2. Special People.

JA *And when do you realise that you've chosen well?*

HK You don't. And if in the end, you break up, because it didn't work out, then you go on and look for another love after that, don't you? Because for all I know, if the manager of the organisation didn't answer your letter right away, then don't be disappointed, because they're also human, they're doing their job and they can also make mistakes. And maybe it's not your calling to go to a residential home and see how autistic people live there. Even if it's not your cause, don't give up, find a new partner with whom you can move forward, because there is no such thing as not having a cause that is yours. I consider that impossible.

JA *You said that you have to give regularly. I don't know how typical this is for you, that the Christmas period is busier, that the campaigns go really well in December, people donate a lot then, and afterwards not so much.*

HK If you were to say Heni, answer very briefly, almost in one word, then I would say that this is how it is regularly, yes. But it's your job to change it. So, it is really much more noticeable that the traffic on our webshop is extremely strong at this time. This year, to have numbers, if you want to hear them, we sold nearly HUF 12 million in December. By the way, in the other 11 months of the year, this sum is around 4-5 million, which is obviously a task for us to change, and which requires serious brand building, and products that are constantly exciting and sexy, and that people want to buy. And you should do the same with the different donation options, when you won't get anything in return, because here you're going to say, well, I'll buy this notebook here and not at the stationery store, or you set up a monthly deduction of HUF 1,000. To have people donate on a regular basis, it's very difficult, and you have to build very exciting campaigns in order for people to feel that this was a really brilliant idea, and for them to go to their charity concert or to their cookie sale. So your brain has to be constantly spinning for you to put together something very exciting. And now, for example, we have such an installation on Nyugati square, a big letter A, if you ever have time, go and have a look. It's an installation that is encouraging people to help. Do you think people go there? No, they don't. Maybe the way it should be done is to put an enthusiastic young volunteer, who subtly pulls people in, so you can touch your smart watch there and can already support with HUF 1000. But people simply pass it by, and if you don't lasso them, it's very, very difficult. And we had illusions about this, we thought we'd get hundreds of thousands of forints, but the fact is, it doesn't work that well, and it shocked me. In addition, it also had press coverage, so it's very difficult. Of course, there are exceptions, we should emphasize that our charity auction is not in December, but in October, and HUF 70 million was collected this year, which is huge. But with this, you are not addressing new people, but the old ones, or the very old ones, or those whom you have recently drawn in, called and enticed and invited to your side. So all in all, it's hard work. Last year, we did something where we said we'd build a bridge between autistic people and non-autistic people, and that there should be frequent crossings on this bridge. And we didn't expect autistic people to come over to our world, on the contrary, let us enter theirs, because it doesn't work any other way. And we said that a bridge usually has four pillars, right? So then we did four online auctions, because we were still after Covid, and at that time, participation and charity in the online space worked relatively well. Then we did a wine auction, and then a 1 percent campaign, where you can give 1 percent of your taxes to a specific cause. But again, so many people leave it to their accountants, and they will either type it in and enter the tax number, or not. So, again, you shouldn't leave this to someone else, you should figure it out yourself,

HK and it doesn't cost you anything. And then in the third quarter, we did a charity contemporary book auction. Everyone looked at us strangely, because they thought: why would you auction off contemporary books? For our wine auction, our partner was a wine company, which brought in very special wines, requesting them from collectors, or offering some that are rare and very expensive. We also found a partner for the book auction, Libri, who we asked to help us bring writers and poets together, and we asked them to write personalised messages to the buyer: that they are good people, thank you very much for supporting the *Autistic Art* Foundation with this book. And it went so well that it got lots of attention. Even Forbes came to take pictures and interviewed us. Again, the financial results did not turn out to be strong, but this is how you build the brand. And then the third and fourth pillars came after that, which I can't even separate anymore: we had a big charity auction that raised HUF 40 million, and then the fourth was actually the Christmas shopping at the end of the year. It was an awful lot of work, so we said that we should not do it again this year, because it was a lot of hard work and the financial results were not that great, so let's focus on the one big auction, and then invite everything and everyone there, and try our best.

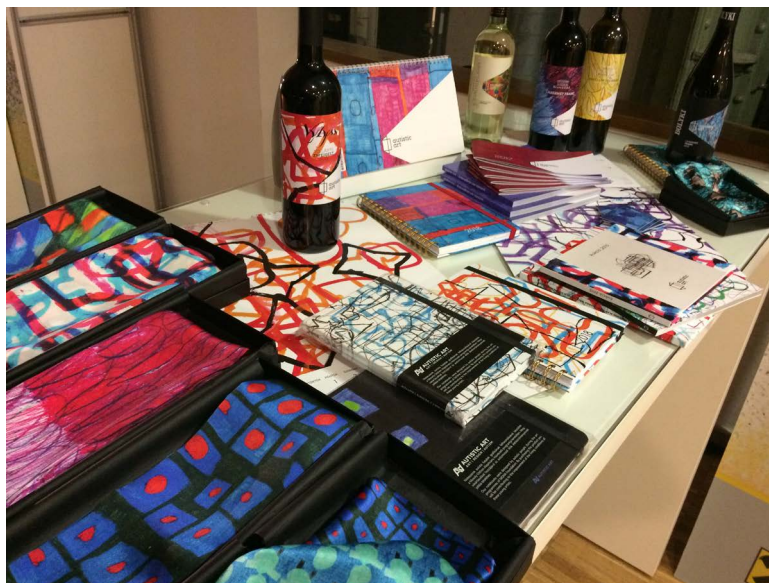


Image 3. Exhibition.

JA *The topic of this next issue is Growth and Power. We wanted to ask you, how do you see civil organizations and charities? Is there anything, the power, to really bring about significant social changes in a positive direction? I guess there is, because otherwise we wouldn't be doing this job so devotedly.*

HK Yes, I think so, there definitely is. If we look at the letters that we receive, when we transfer the subsidy amount to these 11 homes, which usually tends to be concentrated towards the end of the year, then we

can provide them with support, and here it is also very important to tell you, that we cannot transfer 70 million to them, because there is a big cost to organize such a program, there is a staff working on it, but last year we transferred HUF 35 million to them, which again is like dividing it by eleven, so it can't be such a large amount, but they are incredibly happy about it, and we receive very nice letters from them. They are those who call us angels, as we always arrive at the best possible time and literally save them. So if we look at it this way, this work does have power.

Then it also has power in the sense that, as I said before, the people whom you can address in this way and become your supporters, they will really thank you for drawing attention to the fact that it is also possible to think and behave in this way in society. I am sure that it would be more powerful if organisations with similar initiatives were more united, so it would have even more power, and maybe at how we could - to put it mildly - put pressure on the decision-makers not to vote about such a civil law as the one that is being voted on now in Hungary, where it is abnormal that the individual concerned, who lives in a disadvantaged situation and has been put in a disadvantaged situation through no fault of his own, should take care of himself.



Image 4. Drawing Activity.

Indeed, it is a very strange way of thinking, and it is frustrating that in the 21st century, such a law can be born. So, when I sit down at the end of the year as the managing director of *Autistic Art*, as I sat down and talked with everyone from the team not long ago, I could say that personally, what each of them added to our work, as a graphic designer, as a social media person, or as a colleague responsible for corporate relations, it was really great. We transferred HUF 35 million to these homes, but in the end, I am still not satisfied. I am not satisfied, because you understand that HUF 70 million should be transferred to them, so that they feel safer. And it wasn't up to my colleagues, so I told them too, but maybe we should do this with even more energy and with

HK even more strength, because quite simply, their situation will never be easier. In fact, the amount of money they receive from the state has not changed for 15 years, and it won't increase anytime soon. And yet, the price of bread and milk are constantly increasing. Quite simply put, we have to do more, even more skillfully, with even more power and efficiency, and I'm scratching my head as to how we can achieve that. To be honest, there is nothing left but to find even more people who will be regular supporters, because there is no fairy tale. You do so and so events that are picked up by the press, because they are often picked up by the press, and for us, December was really about the fact that you gave interviews to everyone, and you are saying yes because it reaches people. At the end of the day, our job is to keep these 11 homes safe, and it doesn't go that way without sacrifices. And the people will hear about the fact that there are initiatives here that are really filling the gap, that these homes are needed, and the problem is that not 11 homes are needed, but in reality, 111 are needed. So that's how we do have strength and power. By the way, there are definitely those who do it better. So I look up to *Hösök Tere* for example, because they do it very well. Their task is to dismantle this kind of indifference that exists in society. And in this case, mindset is key and it's important to change your thinking. Anyone can be indifferent, but not everyone is affected by autism. And then it is also such a difficult, difficult subject. We are also used to saying that we cannot compete with those organisations that deal with sick children or puppies, because your child could be sick at any time. And you can adopt a puppy any time, and then right from the start it's good for you, because there's a cute dog there, and then it's your responsibility and duty to take care of it. In this way, people can relate to them more easily, so they can feel it better, the cuteness comes first. But the world of autism is a very difficult one. I was with my family just now at Christmas, and we were talking about this. Living with a severely autistic child requires an incredible amount of energy and effort from the family and everyone in the family. And this is very difficult, because they certainly don't celebrate Christmas like an average family, for if the boy or girl in question is not in the mood, they won't gather by the tree, or they won't unwrap the presents, and so everything soon loses its harmonious, fragrant, colorful charm. And autism is like that. So this is such a really, really hard path for the affected families, and that's why we have to help them.

JA *The way this comes across is that for you, the fate of these autistic people is primarily your responsibility. How do you see that? Because in our eyes, it would be the state's or the country's responsibility first and foremost, to take care of its autistic citizens, not an NGO's.*

HK Yes, you feel correctly about this, because Autistic Art is almost an umbrella organisation that currently has 11 children, 11 associations or foundations, that were created independently of Autistic Art. These residential homes were not created by us, nor are we running them, but they were created by people who were implicated, ten mothers whose lives were affected and had reached the level of – as far as I know – 40-45 years old, while their severely autistic children turned 16-18 years old, and they simply saw that there was no place for their child in Hungarian society at the time. So, after the age of 16, compulsory schooling ends, and after that, there is no humane institution for them. You have to see that in civilly maintained residential homes – and not the state and church ones, because those exist too – they do not have the professional background that is available in the homes that we support. The point is that a lot of attention must be paid to these young people so that no problems happen to them, they do not turn against themselves or others, because their nervous system is not stimulated well enough, or their energy is not properly harnessed and used, then they can cause harm to themselves.

The people who work in the social sector, with autistic people for instance, do not get a good enough provision, so they will leave after a while, since the state does not take many good and humane steps for them to have a correct work environment. This is our task, so that these 11 homes can remain in existence. At the moment, their lives are really difficult with this whole energy crisis and with the fact that they don't get as much state support as I think they should. So this, specifically, the financial support that we gave them, it may very well be that it will be used to pay the electricity bills. This is partially why it's not possible to communicate this in a painful way, because then everyone has a problem, and then they turn away from you, so we try to show this on some level with the tool of beauty, with art, because the drawings that come to us from these homes are brilliant. We are sitting where we started this conversation with the idea that they can indeed create value. So, some works really come to us with, I don't know, a message, a world of colors, a world of shapes that touches us. And that's why we are all receptive and open to beauty, if not to art, to some extent, and that's why this face can often speak for us so well.

JA *So there is a special value that has been added to the campaigns through art, then.*

HK Yes, exactly. And then what happens is that you let autism into your world, which can send messages and communicate so brilliantly. Really, I think that if such a work enters your home, say, in the form of a painting or in the form of a print, it is really to make it available in this way. If such a work enters your apartment, sooner or later a conversation about it will start. In the same way, if a wine bottle with an *Autistic Art* label is put on the table, it is a door towards a certain kind of conversation and the possibility to shift mindsets. This is exactly the point, to start dialogues about autism far away from our own context.

But the point is not that everyone should be a scientist in the field of autism and be able to talk about it to the extreme, but that we pass this pattern on to others, and that's really what art is for, it can facilitate connections. Another element I don't think we've talked about yet, is that if you donate, you should be proud of it. It's something that is missing, that someone gives, but doesn't want to show it to the world afterwards. Why? Put it out there, let it be appreciated, be proud. I do believe this should be done better. But then again, it's like having a painting. We have some supporters who come to the auction by presenting the current catalog to their employees, and then the employees vote on which autistic work the executive will buy at the auction.



Image 5. Kristóf Réti amongst his drawings.

JA *Our audience is mainly our generation - young people - and I would like to ask what advice you could possibly give to them and to us for the next year: how to be smart in 2023?*

HK A lot can definitely be done with the energy you young people have. In the first instance, for example, as you created this initiative, the Journal, you can really be proud of that. And if you take this interview with us, *Autistic Art*, and you push it to as many places as possible, I think it is already a big help. But I believe that today's young people must work on shifting their indifference, so that it disappears, and they must search for social causes with the same enthusiasm they look for love. So that we shouldn't, quite simply, we *really* shouldn't exist without looking for a cause that we can stand up for. For example, we were invited by Corvinus University to speak about autism and they invited students, whose role was to imagine how they would introduce *Autistic Art* to the international market. And these students were so enthusiastic, and this is exactly what needs to be turned into action.

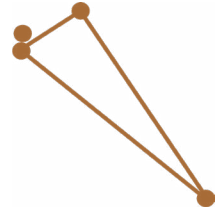
You truly have so many possibilities in your hands, and so much knowledge, so it's very important to turn these into actual physical deeds.

JA *This is a very good motto for everyone, to transform our passion and enthusiasm into action. Thank you for this conversation, it was very inspiring.*

HK Thank you for the invitation. I hope your readers and community will find a cause they will stand up for this year.

JA *A love cause.*

HK Yes, let us fall in love.



Alitza Nichole Cardona

*edited by
Miriam Zeglache*

Without words and without plans: letting go.

To experience the pleasure of allowing yourself to feel desired and discover the other person's sweat while getting lost in their eyes, shouldn't come at the price of losing yourself in a fabric of doubts. Verbs are embodied in a state of being as if the result of its interaction with the other produces a tide of emotions that clash with the insecurities that come with the uncertain. To communicate in a way that does not generate conflict with our desires and aspirations is no easy feat. Stepping away after stating oneself sometimes is a task from faith. For this narrative, I am talking about an exploration with another that took place in just one night, maybe two. Do not mistake this essay with its romantic opening because what I wish to convey is a message about approaching circumstances, knowing how to let go. The world of immediacy may lack intimacy, and for some reason, we may fall victim to its indifference masked, maybe, as trauma, stress, doubts or simply a lack of proper communication. In this human world of calculated reasons that insist on ignoring the power that comes with feeling, I am just going to talk to you about him and the others, and how I put into a message what I couldn't convey into words: written, texted, emailed or "snapped".

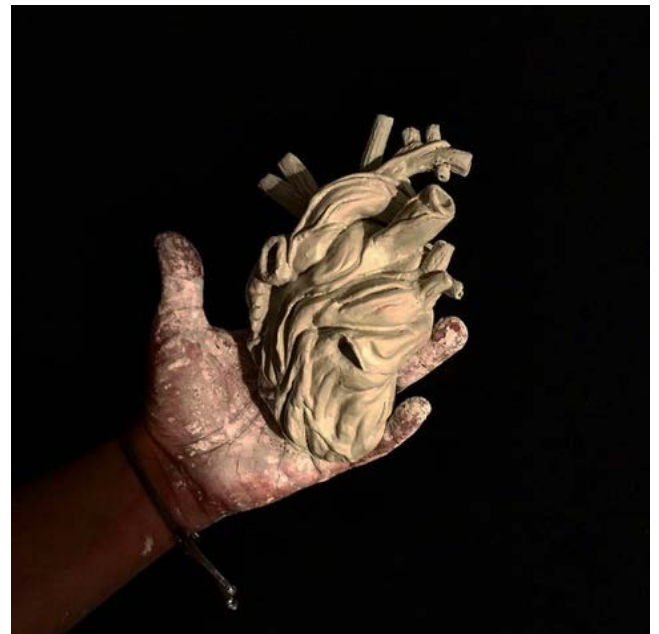
I know that after having him, in the next few days that followed, that sublime intimate moment constituted a veiled reality of unattachment, where one can feel themselves grasping every inch of a constructed personality designed specifically for this moment and the next. I believe the creation of a chameleonic personality suited to manage expectations has become appropriate to politely divert external aspirations. Our personhood is constantly vulnerable to its potential management, and control is becoming of power. To compromise our potential in this current social landscape is a risk we may feel too deeply. From a woman's point of view, we may create personalities to sustain the infinite awareness of value amidst the sea of others and a social contract we simply didn't ask for. I am talking about this social contract where we have to prove our productive worth to attain the simple luxury of compassion masked, in many cases, as romantic love. Are we sacrificing too much when we expose some part of ourselves to feel an instant of compassionate safety, in a world where our presentation card expresses the aesthetics of ego and its morality? Even if you are just one "fish" amongst, now, eight billion, the price of fleeting intimacy just builds up when the intention of sustaining something worth building from is also weaved in a timeframe where your productive willingness intends to survive indifference. It is said a woman's womb is four to six inches. Imagine if we could merge these inherent female spaces and count

the number of scapes or — expansive — possibilities where millions nurture potential realities. After thinking about all this, at the end of a night of “exploration”, even if I had loved him for just that moment, the engineering of the potential realities of my womb and my desires for compassion, he just picked up and called it a night.

Too many sensations resembling the realities of compassion have been called a night, and these infinite reproductive potentialities keep being reconstructed by a string of faith and walls of hopes. The energy of false illusions can be counted as lost to realities that come with learning processes related to the generation of a present. Illusions can be an investment, a necessary misstep. Because of these moments within the process of our present, we then learn how to recycle experience. We continue to learn the ways crises become seeds of opportunities. Power dresses as confidence when you walk the lands marked by sudden shifts, unforgivable abruptions, and valleys of inconsistencies. To know where to step, how to walk and to look when you are meant to see, requires the precise consistency of distrust even when gazing at the most remarkable beauty of hope disguised as flesh carried by two legs of diversion.

Writing as drawing presents you with the perspective of processes. The landscapes that form when you draw a line, or paint a horizon, generate rhythm, resembling a tone where silence turns that landscape of possibilities into a mirror reflecting a roofless ceiling – if you haven’t decided to limit yourself. Maybe, how our lives are shaped depends on a subjective knowledge we inherit and then whose overwhelming impositions we try to justify with the illusion of repetition, tradition, and objectiveness. Forgetting the unknown is a resource of creation that blurs the inherent and forever relevant role of imagination. As differences create spaces of possibilities of a reality you never counted on, hopes don’t need to dress as anything, but reveal themselves in their true form. You.

Intimate explorations require awareness. As we communicate intent, passion will reveal the human necessity of connection. To collaborate romantically is a decision where the ego shouldn’t intervene.



*A love note
By: Alitza Cardona*

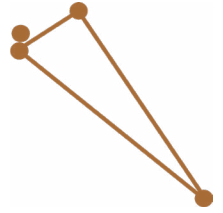
Relationships are extensions of the crossroads your soul encounters and the moment it needs to evaluate and embody whatever life requires from you.

Sometime during my youth, I ended a co-dependent relationship that coincided with the death of two persons I loved dearly. Grief is an exploration of the unfulfilled spaces your soul longed to share with a beloved subject. I had made every mistake and took every wrong decision in that relationship. I was left without words to apologise. I considered myself the “bad person” of the relationship; he was good and had left with my dog. Always without making plans I submerged myself in work, forgetting my time has its “stakeholders”. These people also fed from a collectively-made fabric of stories, perspectives, and angles that in some ways constructed my fourth wall. One questions the existence of homogeneous processes. As observation enables us to link suggested spaces of thought through contradictions, one could identify relations or relationships that evidently become one in many bridges that constitute the performance of reality. Art gives you that, a real preformistic space, shaded with horizons and discourses of limits. However, at the end of this show is when only you get to know what you are, while in any other moments you get to aspire where and how to be in an interwoven and ever-emergent process of everything. At that moment, the pain of that relationship and the failure of my investment in another person’s story filled my heart with guilt. Having to heal the polarisation of my morality, I understood good or bad to translate to the other’s understanding of morality as well as their perspectives. The lens that evaluates the conditions of my life will never be specifically mine even if an awareness of what is mine is what only matters. I understood everything too fast as I became aware of the sense it made to quickly start another story to voraciously learn. Time is not wasted if passion subjects me to keep learning, aware I am destined to keep creating mistakes that conform to the foundations of my power. Another crossroads taught me to love myself. And since then, I have gotten lost in many other illusions. It is not that I am proud of the traces of pain I have left within ignorance of my half though steps, but I am proud of being able to grasp the unknown in order that it serves me before the conditions of my present drown me in responsibilities that will serve others.

I sent every expectation of others for me to hell. This resulted from the moment I decided that analysing the mirrors of my realities and the counsel of my fourth wall wasn’t enough to nurture what this performance of a type of personhood gets to make of my life. Without words I let go of that relationship in 2017. I knew writing a letter wouldn’t be enough, so I measured my chest in the hopes of comprehending the physical reality of my heart. I moulded it with clay as anatomically accurate as I could and left it on his doorstep. The form of what I created was a way of apologising, conveying some sense of my intentions to heal the circumstance of us but in any other manner that could make my recipient feel my intentions through association. Finally, letting go of any regard of what he could make of it, I just collected the rest of myself and carried on. Sure enough at this point, after all these words, I expect you to understand that everything will never be enough when another is not open to receive, and your uniqueness is a



consistent condition of individual power. Your condition is repeated within the collective body, arguably with the tangibility that the material suffices, but certainly with a tone that optimises the symphony of orchestrated strategies that produce emotion and meaning. Within my condition I decided to be justice, faith, and compassion, even if it's destined to get lost in translations. At this point, surrendering is the inevitable shade of power's light.



Anja Radonjić

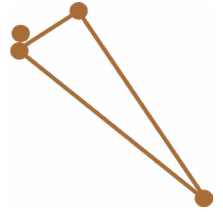
Constructs

My palm traces nook and cranny,
touch alone resurfacing old memories.
Can there be loving a place with no purpose? Perhaps
between the wallpaper and the bricks, the peel and blood;
without a flickering light, exactly here – the walls confine me.

A prodigal daughter returns. It was easier to spurn
the love only freely given. My dreams concerned
marble steps, mahogany doors; a pool, and checkered kitchen floors;

now the place creaks beneath me. What used to be home
is unknown labyrinth; blinds bear dust
coating and pipes shriek glimmering rust. And darkness shelters
forgotten past. There is no point in weeping in
a house worn down, about to combust.

Lyra, Creative Writing & Poetry



George Tomsett

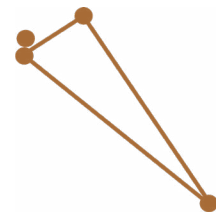
Cycle

The moon won't say he loves you.
Like a father, its blank face will listen hard
to your midnight misery and say nothing.

It followed your car on the way home from summer camps.
Like a father you would plead with it
take me anywhere else.
Like a God it never answered.
Sumptuous silence,

watching you tear yourself to shreds
beneath those ever-arriving, ever-diminishing slithers.
Turning to it still, like a sunflower trapped
in a sunless nightmare, not because you want to,
but because you have to.
At night, you too can be reduced
to the child you once were, motherless,
building tiny cities with tiny plastic pieces
that, with a snap, would come apart.

Your own little planet. Fostered with a smile.
Room tidied. Tides changing. You knew nothing
of waning light.



Namal Siddiqui

Trying

I am trying to write but I keep erasing words, dissatisfied with the way I tell the story after all this time. I hate that the story begins with the banal, the timeworn — that anguished word trying.

I am trying to find my bearings.

I am trying to hold myself again.

I am trying to avoid relapse.

Relapse is an unusual word to write in a verse. It is so mechanical, so terrible, so unexpected because you believe you're fine, you are riding the turf of life.

I am trying not to make the same mistakes.

I am trying not to fall for the same traps.

I am trying not to be so vehemently bitter again.

Vehemently. So poisonous a word. So relentless. I am trying to be relentless. I am trying not to lose (it) and I am trying not to let go. I am trying to make sense out of life as a human turned metamorph.

I am trying to unfold maybe like a petal.

I am trying God knows if a God exists.

I am trying to be the bud that becomes the flower.





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