

# Strange Stranger Strangest

rising; difficult to understand or explain.  
visited, seen, or encountered; unfamiliar or

**Stranger**  
Noun

1. A person whom one does not know or  
whom one is not familiar.

embrace»

**Strange**  
adjective

1. unusual or surprising; difficult
2. not previously visited, seen, or  
alien.

erson whom one does not know or with  
one is not familiar.

embrace»

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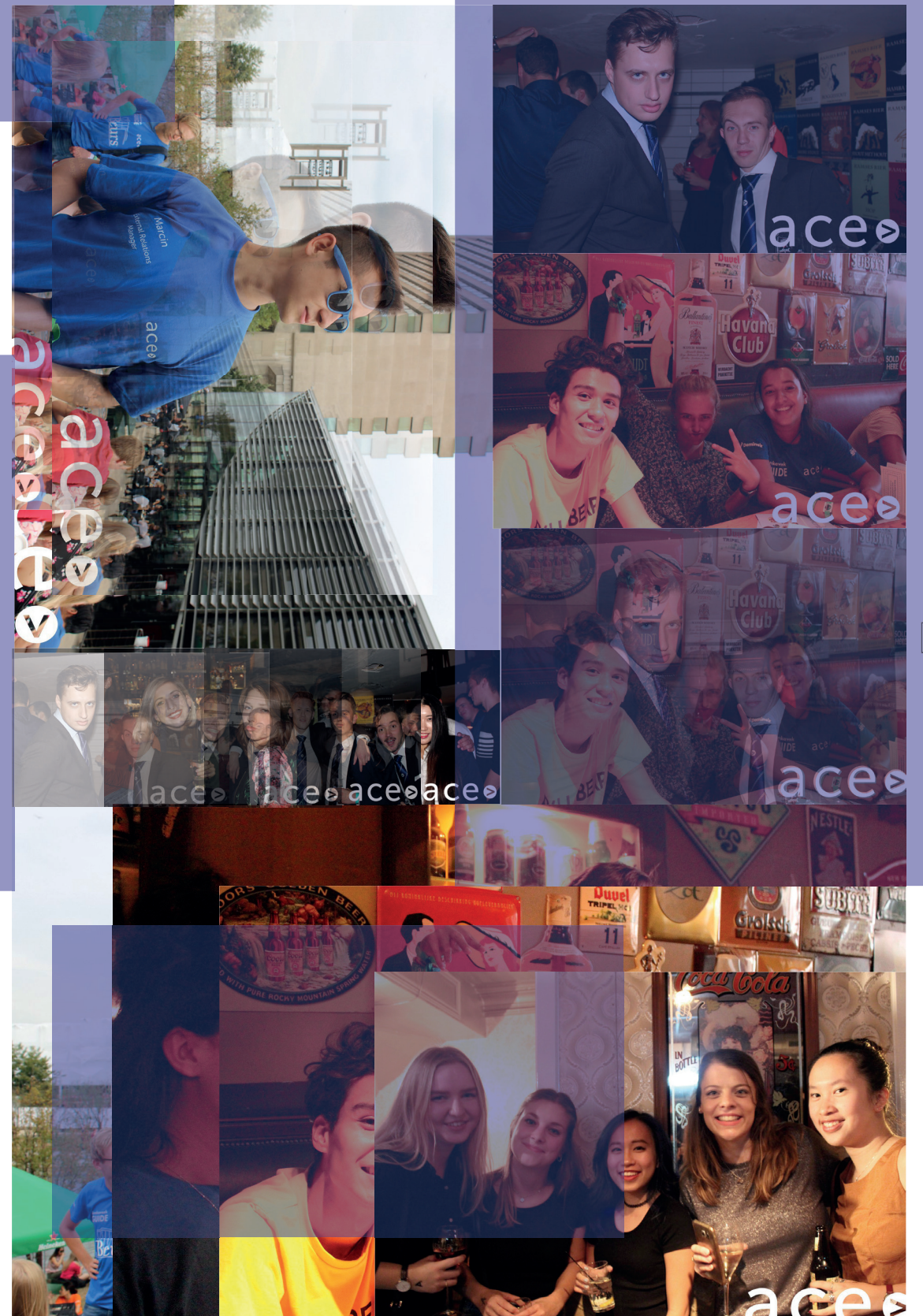
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# Editor in chief

Dear reader,

Welcome to the first issue of a new year! A new board has been seated, and with it comes a new team of talented writers for EmbrACE. I am honored to be writing this as the new Editor-in-Chief. And this year it is time for a new direction within EmbrACE. After all, it's a new dawn for the association, and with that comes a new day for EmbrACE as well.

The theme for this first issue is 'Stranger', which does fit well within this time of year. Darkness setting in earlier and earlier, non-stop cold days and within those dark days, a short period of light during the holiday season. Humanity has always coped with the never-ending cold and darkness by telling scary stories about the strangers lurking outside of the boundaries of the light. Children are told that something bad lurks in the dark, and even if we grow up, we carry this seed of fear within us. That which is unknown to us, scares us more than any realistic situation.

However, a stranger can also just be somebody you haven't had the pleasure of meeting yet. Once you have thrown yourself into an unknown situation, it might turn out that there was nothing scary about it anyway. That is also what the new EmbrACE writers and other committee members might feel; at the beginning of the year, you might have no idea what is going on or what is expected of you, but the further along you go, the easier it gets.

What might be reality to one person, might be surreality to another. By learning about life from different perspectives, you start fearing 'the other' less. That is also why I am so glad to be involved in



an international study association, where everybody comes from different walks of life. In all honesty, I am a bit of a homebody and I am incredibly scared of flying, so I like to hear stories of living abroad from others. One summer ago, I flew for the first time with Serbia with my best friends. On the way there, I had to chug back two shots of vodka to ease my anxiety. On the way back, we got into some turbulence and I cried the entire time. But this is also part of what this issue of EmbrACE is about: things that are unknown and things that are known but that scare you.

Of course, I am very happy with all the hard work from the EmbrACE editorial team, and the imagination and innovation of our new designer. Without their experiences, and their strangeness, this issue wouldn't have been in your hands right now. I hope that you'll open your heart, dear reader, and really let the unknown in and experience it fully.

Lots of love,

@ACE  
By Jing Wen

Hello, dear readers, I have good news for you – Embrace magazine is back! Following this very first issue of the new academic year, there will be three more well-designed magazines to be expected. Beyond doubt, there is a group of talented people behind the Embrace magazine. They were recruited during the first term by ACE. Besides them, the 37th Board, the Supervisory Board, and all the other eleven professional committees of ACE have been ready for the new year, too. So, I should say that the main theme of our International Faculty Association ACE during the past three months has been “team building” – building upon Greatness. As a part of this team, I cannot wait to tell you some stories about our team building.

The first big event for ACE was, of course, the Eurekaweeek. It was the debut of the 37th Board candidates. It was also a good opportunity to introduce ACE to new students. Through fun activities, and introduction sessions, we approached lots of first year students. After the Eurekaweeek, we got approximately 200 new members. This was the first success achieved by ACE this year. But we couldn't have achieved this without you – our members.

On **the 13th of September**, our first social drink happened at Café stalles. It was such a pleasant night when we met our old friends from ACE and saw lots of new faces. Served as a committee interest drink, the first social drink also facilitated our team-building.

At the **beginning of October**, all the 12 committees of ACE were completed. These committees will hold various kinds of events targeting at ESHCC students' particular interests throughout the year. The History Committee took the lead. They organized the “Movie and Pizza Night” on **the 24th of October** where we listened to a fun

speech given by Professor (?), watched a movie and ate delicious pizza together. We had so much fun at that night, however, it was just the beginning. ACE has got more fun events to offer, such as the Pub Crawl **on the 22nd of November**.

Besides, we are really happy to see that our committee members are from different countries doing various studies. Diversity, is apparently blooming within ACE. As an international faculty association, this is such a pleasant progress.

The first General Assembly and the Constitution Drink of the 37th Board completed the last segment of our team building. When we look back on things that we did to build up

the new team of ACE, we could see ups and downs. Learning from these ups and downs, we are determined to make ACE a more international and inclusive study association. Building upon Greatness – building upon the achievements of the previous 36 boards, we can see the hope of another “Greatness”.









# The stranger within modern football: Punk-football in Manchester

by Milan Weber



In 2017, I studied for four months at the Manchester Metropolitan University. What was the reason for me to study in England? Simply because I really love football. But don't worry, in this article, I won't bother you with the details of players and I will definitely not discuss football techniques or the latest Champions League results. Many people from outside England know the city where I studied because of Manchester United and Manchester City, therefore, I was really looking forward to seeing United and City play! These clubs are very big around the globe, but after a while, my attention focused to another football club, the stranger in town, and I will explain why.

The first game I attended while living in England was Manchester United against Hull City. I expected to experience the great atmosphere United was famous for around the world. Darkness overtook Old Trafford, the stadium of Manchester United, on the evening of this game. From a distance, I saw the floodlights burning. I couldn't wait to get inside that stadium to see the game. Finally, seeing Manchester United in action and I was there! The view from the upper tier was astonishing, but to my surprise, the atmosphere was disappointing. There were few people singing during the game, it was the away fans making all the noise. What happened to Manchester United and the atmosphere so many people talked about? I got this answer outside Old Trafford, a Manchester United fan explained to me.

For a long time, Manchester United was only attended by local supporters. People living around the stadium went to Old Trafford and together with the away fans, they were the only ones. Football tourism didn't exist for a long time. Families walked together to their beloved football club. Football and especially the working-class people were culturally intertwined. Even when you don't like football, if you live in Manchester for a while, you learn that football is very important when you want to learn something about the culture of this city. 'Are you a red or a blue?', is a very normal question: 'Do you support United or City?' Unfortunately, for many football fans in Manchester, especially the working class, football got commercialised. As a result, ticket prizes to enter the stadium increased massively. Clubs were able to do this because people from all over the world wanted to see Manchester United play inside the stadium. The demand to visit Old Trafford increased. Local fans created the great atmosphere Manchester United was famous for, but as a result of the high-ticket prices, they were not able to buy tickets for the game any longer. The club became a very successful one, but the fans paid the price for this success. After an American billionaire took over the club in 2005, the voice of the fans within the board of the club was definitely cut off and approximately 4.000 fans who claimed to carry the original soul of the club agreed with an alternative solution.

The Manchester United fan outside Old Trafford told me about FC United of Manchester. I was a little bit confused when I heard the name for the first time, FC United of Manchester? Sounds almost like Manchester United. That name was chosen deliberately. This alternative football club claimed to be the rightful continuation of Manchester United after 2005. Fans were sick of being seen as customers in the stadium

where they grew up. Too many things have changed within their club and people from this group no longer recognised themselves to the modern Manchester United that, in their eyes, exploited fans. On the one hand, I found it a little bit an exaggeration to create an alternative football club. On the other hand, I missed the real football fan identity at Old Trafford and was curious about FC United of Manchester. There was only one solution to find out about this club: going to a game!

FC United is a really warm club that welcomes everyone. That was my experience after I went to a game. I must admit, at first, I wasn't sure where I ended up that afternoon. You will not experience the greatness of Manchester United, for you will not encounter a big stadium when you arrive in the area of Broadhurst Park, the stadium of this club. The thing which is striking is that you do not have to buy any tickets in advance. Just go there and buy your entrance. The price was a fiver (five pound). That is really cheap when you compare it to other clubs in England. On the terraces, I saw banners with the text: 'Refugees welcome'. The low-ticket prices and the friendly, welcoming character of the club assured that already from the beginning in 2005, many people joined the club; either to play for a team or to become a fan. FC United started in the lowest league possible in England. It promoted several times in the years after 2005 and even reached the Conference North. That means that from that moment on, the club plays in a semi-national league.

Is there any danger that history will repeat itself and that FC United will become as popular as Manchester United, so that ticket prices will increase again as seen before at Manchester United? Already during the formation of FC United, precautions were made to avoid this. You can become a member of FC United, but it doesn't matter whether you donate 15 pound or 1.000 pound, you will have only one vote to vote for the board members. So, a rich person cannot become the owner of this club. Because of the easy accessibility to become an owner, approximately 2.000 people are owners of the club currently. To provide the club with extra protection against commercialisation, in the statutes of the club is added that it will remain a non-profit organisation. Punk-football is what this is called in Manchester.

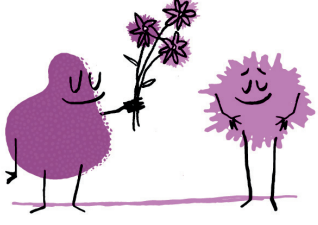
Within the world of modern football, FC United is a stranger. They are a protest movement against the commercialised football world that dominates the English football culture. In a wider context, we might argue that this club is more than just a protest football club. It is politically loaded. FC United carries a clear message against commercialisation. They show the world that commercialisation drove them into this position, but they didn't adjust to this model of exploitation. The people are proud of what they have built, although they still long for the good old days at Old Trafford. That message is embedded in their club song:

**This is our club, belongs to you and me. We're United, United FC. We may never go home, but we never feel down, now we've built our own ground, now we've built our own ground.**



# Acts of kindness: a two-way street

By Sara Haverkamp



Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you were in desperate need of some help? I sure did – many, many times. Getting lost somewhere, running out of cash: whether it is about something small or big, people need other people for assistance on a lot of occasions throughout their daily lives. You will probably recognise that whenever you encounter a problem, you would rather try to solve it yourself first, as you might not want to feel like a burden to anybody else. But when for some reason this does not work out, your next step would most likely be to contact a friend, a family member, or an acquaintance for that matter, as to increase your chances of receiving the help you need. What a lot of people do not realise, however, is that people you are unfamiliar with could also be of assistance to you. Try to go back in time and ask yourself: Have you ever been helped unexpectedly by a complete stranger? How did it make you feel?

November 13th may not be of specific significance to you now, but I would like to bring a change to that. This date recently passed and it was, World Kindness Day. This is a day that encourages random acts of kindness, and not just for the people you know: strangers you come across belong to this ‘target group’ as well. However, when I was talking about this topic with friends, I noticed that many people and specifically adolescents often feel reluctant performing such acts of kindness towards strangers; a person whom one does not know or with whom one is not familiar. During the brainstorm for this article, I was thinking about the term ‘stranger’ and what it implicitly means. I immediately happened to think about what the word means to me and why I had some rather negative connotations attached to it. I wondered about the cause of this and I realised that from a very young age, many children are taught ‘not to talk to or take things from strangers’ and as a girl, as stereotypical as it sounds, I have often been told not to walk or cycle home alone late at night as I risked encountering strangers with improper intentions.

But then I started thinking of all the good things people can do for each other and consequently what we can achieve together. I decided to break the topic to friends of mine and others at the campus of Erasmus University in to get a general picture about our generation’s thoughts on strangers. I asked them about positive experiences with strangers and acts of kindness. A few weeks ago, when I was travelling home from the campus with a friend of mine, she told me about her visit to Amsterdam the day before. Something unfortunate had happened to her when she was wal-

king in a busy street in the middle of hundreds of tourists: her bag had broken down, spilling all her belongings that she was carrying with her on the street. She started picking everything up as soon as she could, and astonishingly as she thought it was, she was quickly assisted by a handful of people who scattered around her on the ground to help her gather her stuff. She described feeling so fulfilled and contented afterwards of all the unexpected help that she had got, while she hadn’t even asked for it. Another story that I heard about was someone having a flat tire and when she was picked up, the bike did not fit into the car, so a passer-by offered to help and succeeded! Or when my friend went skiing, at some point she fell and lost one of her skis. They slid down the mountain, and as she had hurt herself, somebody else went down the slope and brought them back to her. Many of these stories I heard were endearing, and so thought my respondents. Someone even jokingly said to me that “his faith in humanity was restored”. We can only imagine about all the beautiful things that have happened and are still to develop between strangers across the globe!

In fact, the feelings resulting from the discussed encounters are essentially what many people experience when being aided by a stranger or strangers. However, it is not necessarily achieved when receiving (physical) help from strangers. For example, a few months ago when I was on my way to the second day of the EurekaWeek. I stayed at a friend’s house during the week and that Tuesday morning I was biking from her place to campus. I had only left shortly after an elderly man caught up to me and asked whether I had already started university again after the summer. We began a short conversation, but from a certain moment I was being submerged in a stream of helpful life lessons, as he told me how happy he was with the fact that nowadays more women attend university “than in his days”, that I should never become dependent on a man and that he had always told his children about this as well. Whereas at the beginning of the conversation I didn’t understand why he gave me ‘advice’ like that, I kept thinking back to it throughout the entire day because I thought it was funny and I had liked it so much. A great encounter with the famous typical Rotterdam spontaneity!

Think again about the question whether anything like this has ever happened to you before. Some of these stories may be more outstanding than others, but that does not mean that they are less meaningful. Right now, turn it all around. Have you ever

been in the position of the ‘stranger’? Have you ever been altruistic and unexpectedly put someone that you did not know first? I hope you did, and that you experienced the sense that you did something that actually matters. Or at least that you thought to yourself: “I’m really glad that I did that!” But why does all of this happen? According to The Huffington Post, we as humans are actually hard-wired for kindness, for Charles Darwin argued in his work ‘The Descent of Man’ that we are a social and caring species and that we are instinctively interested in others and have a natural sympathy for each other. Personally, I sometimes find this hard to believe or put into practice when looking at the current state of affairs at various places in the world, but I do trust that it’s really in the little things when it comes to treating others with kindness.

Therefore, the benefits of acts of kindness can be seen as a two-way street, since there are always performers and receivers of the acts. Once more, revisit the feeling you got whenever someone unfamiliar did something friendly for you. Keep in mind that you can be that stranger to someone else. It only takes one person to step out of the infinitely dynamic entity of a crowd and offer a helping hand and perhaps to even make someone else’s day. And since it has proven to make the performer of the actors feel good as well, everybody gains! So for now, my advice is to be kind to others (not just on that one day in November...) so that we can make this world a little bit better of a place and remember: what comes around, goes around.



# An Uncanny Stranger

By Max Peeters

Would you believe me if I told you the Einstein of storytelling changed the way our world functions today? What if I told you people don't always appear as they first seem? Contrary to what your assumptions might be, this is quite the case. Throughout the next few paragraphs I will be explaining to you how a storyteller with unintentional motive, helped create what we today have coined as one of the most powerful pieces of technology in our society. Modernist viewpoints invite the lonely minded to see with new eyes. This man who I am rambling on about is no exception. He is the wicked wind of the West; a genius in disguise. "Who is this man so unannounced to the world?" you may be wondering. Before I lift the veil off this stranger's face, and make my final reveal, I would like to first explain the marvelous invention this man came up with.

With wires sprouting up everywhere across the globe, the internet has engulfed our world and changed the course of human communication on an unprecedented scale. Many credit the US Army with this tea-spitting invention. The US Army was craving to harvest the internet for their defense sector. Just as the telephone replaced the telegraph, the US Army suspected the internet may be capable of replacing previous communication technologies. With a way to share information faster than any other nation's military, the US Army would be hands and feet ahead on any other nation.

Others credit Universities as the founders of the internet. These institutions created an interactive network amongst themselves to share and communicate their findings. You could perhaps stipulate that universities used a more practical application. Their intention was not for power, but rather to increase the world's knowledge. The ARPANET as it was called, evolved from a system in which universities each had their own network, to a tool which linked networks from each university; a network of networks if you will. Sound familiar?

Still, others look to individuals who 'came up' with the science of linking computers. These people include pioneering masters such as Bob Kahn and Vint Cerf. Don't get me wrong, these two individuals are geniuses in their own right. Mad scientists who abhor social norms and have delved into a realm of Da Vinci inspired thought which ponders just how much the human race is capable of. Though Kahn and Cerf in a literal sense did play key roles in creating this interactive web, one key figure is missing. A stranger to science, yet a chief in storytelling. This individual is the mastermind of this interactive network. A powerful Gandalf who is usually hidden quietly behind the scenes, but whom without, this quest would never have

been fulfilled. I'm talking about ideas. Ideas are the bedrock of shaping innovation. It is what has enabled early locomotives to voyage cross-country, and what has pioneered airplanes to soar over the skies. Before any physical innovation takes place, an idea must first flourish, and this was the case with the internet. Though Kahn and Cerf may be credited with the physical creation of the internet, the actual idea of creating an interactive web precedes these two scholars.

Best remembered as the owner of a duster mustache, accompanied with bushy eyebrows perched curiously on top of his forehead. Grey hair and a wrinkled face. An occasional cigar fitted loosely between his worn fingers. Mark Twain is by no means a mind you would accredit to the internet. Yet, Twain was a colonist when it came to discovering new ideas. A trailblazer of thoughts who could link concepts like no other. He was one of the first to have revolutionized this idea of linking computers. Though back in his day computers did not exist, Twain came up with the following proposition. What if we can link screens using telephone wires? Maybe then we can access the knowledge of the whole wide world. Twain called this invention the 'telectroscope'. Quite different from what we today have coined the internet right? Yet, this seemingly innocent, borderline science fiction idea would become the bedrock of what the internet would be modeled after. Here is an excerpt from the short story "From the 'London Times' in 1904" in which Twain describes over a hundred years ago a version of the internet that is eerily similar to our present internet:

"As soon as the Paris contract released the telectroscope, it was delivered to public use, and was soon connected with the telephonic systems of the whole world. The improved 'limitless-distance' telephone was presently introduced and the daily doings of the globe made visible to everybody, and audibly discussable too, by witnesses separated by any number of leagues."

Though this is only a short excerpt of Twain's complete description, it's astounding how over a hundred years ago a storyteller could so accurately predict what our present day google searches might be like. My case rests as follows: Though historians may credit the US Army, universities, or individuals with creating the physical internet, what truly is the bedrock of shaping innovation is ideas. Twain wrote this short story over half a century before the physical internet was created, without Twain's insights the internet may never have evolved into the powerful network it is today.

Though Twain's time here ended far before this network of networks ever took hold, he was a pioneer in shaping this invention. A founder, lost in the chronology of last week's bookkeeping. As for father time, as he stretched his arms wide with a mighty yawn, "sometimes the







We're all creators, every single one of us.

We create the basis for a somewhat happy life. We create families, societies, history. We create friendships, relationships, enemies. We create emotions, feelings, memories. We create a legacy, a pride, a name.

## We're all storytellers, every single one of us.

And we create stories to introduce ourselves to others. Through and through, brick by brick. We build it with every laughter that left us breathless, and every tear that fell down our eyes, every love that made us believe that we are timeless.

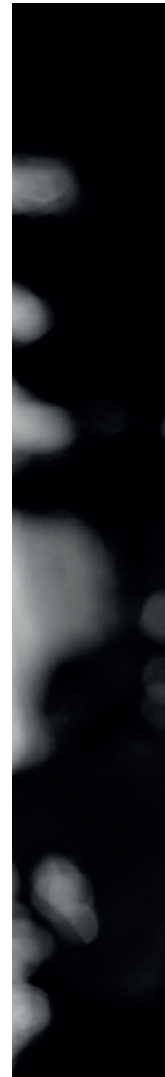
## We create illusions of ourselves.

We create ourselves to be a part of something bigger than us. We create to belong, whether it be a city, a clique, or a person. We carefully present it to our acquaintances. We let them in by lowering down our so-called walls. We let them see as much as we want them to see. We want to present ourselves in such a way, so that we can evoke emotions, admiration maybe, or pity.

We craft, line by line, memory by memory. Not every person deserves to hear the whole story. Not every person gets to hear the same lines. Every version packs another sequence, another breath, another tone, another self. Different enough to be unique, similar enough to keep integrity.

With every iteration, we feel this certain excitement, a feeling similar to the thrills actors feel before the curtains rise, or getting off a train you took to a place you have never been before. We feel because we get to learn our quirks, that we had oh so carefully curated, alongside with them, not just let others get to know us

Do not be deceived, though. Every single one is another part of the true-self, another angle to look within, one small part to what us and only as get to experience. It is not



necessarily a lie, what we curate. It is not made up from the things that did not happen. It is not a work of fiction that will be read throughout the years. But we modify the perception, we change the narrative, how it's told rather than what's told.

## We color it with the colors of imagination;

sometimes a cold periwinkle, sometimes a heart-warming dusty-rose, or maybe a burning red.

But human nature is curious, and it will get bored... eventually. It's built to believe that the grass is indeed greener on the other side and would do anything in its abilities to prove that it is right. So it will start craving change.

That's when we yearn with the idea of starting fresh, building a new life in somewhere where nobody knows our name. We urge to move. It is born purely out of boredom, out of monotonous lifestyle. We yearn to move, to change our surroundings when the life stops being the exhilarating adventure that we oh so crave. We want change when there's not much left to imagination, when we learn all the ways, when it's not exciting anymore. We grow estrange to the life we had spent so much time and effort to craft.

Hence we move. We move to wonder, wander, to recreate ourselves.

## "Fernweh",

Germans call it; the longing for the places you've never been to. Oh, so strong, so paralyzing... It will start affecting the mind so that it could implant itself deeper to the thoughts. The days wear a sepia filter. The

heart aches for every day not spent on-the-go. The mirror turns it face from you, the joys of life become tasteless. Dreams get grayer, the world gets bigger. This urge to go slows down the time so much that leaving becomes the only option.

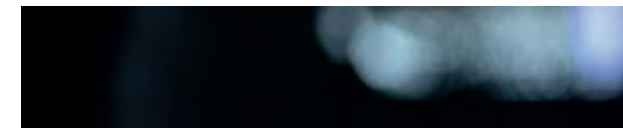
If one gets lucky enough to get a chance to run away, it will cherish every moment as they circle back to where they start. They will carefully start dreaming about the next destination, the people, and the life. They will dream about the habits they're going to adopt, the routines they'll eventually start to hate. Most of all, they will dream about the person they will become, the person they will curate next. And the wheel will keep on turning, and the seasons will follow one another, and the patterns will never change.

Pinterest is full of these quotes of who said it first. This particular one haunts mind whenever it is time to go again:

"You can recreate yourself as many times as there are cities in the world. I think it's for that reason we all love to travel."

Some say we travel to find ourselves, others say we travel to run away. But can you run away when there's no way to escape yourself? Can you distance yourself from who you truly are, no matter how many start-overs you get?

## Or can you find yourself when you desperately try to get lost?





# Stranger in the City

By Julian Beltan

I was once discussing a trip I made to Edinburgh a few years back with a friend who studied there but who I didn't know at the time. For us, it was amusing to realize that we could have been having a bite in the same café or attended the same exhibition, during the time we were sharing the same map. This leads me to think how many people in our future are completely irrelevant to us in our present. How someone who is now

Strangely, almost every aspect of our life is connected to a place, a building, an institution or a person that populates any urban jungle. These are also just another millimeter in the kilometers a city stretches. Only a fraction of the city is for us to call our own: this apartment, that school, this friend, that lover. They are just one of many apartments, schools, friends, lovers inhabiting the same set of coordinates. All of these things that we don't call our own are just unfamiliar, unacquainted to our minds. People are the co-existing in the same stretch of land. It is these people who we call strangers. Strangers to us, to our lives, to our minds.

When I think of Amsterdam, Milan or London many images come into my mind. Congested metros, busy sidewalks, sky-high buildings. Endless possibilities seem to be presented to us, one can do this or that and go here or there, it seems like we never have enough time to experience all the things the modern metropolis has to offer. Curiously, one thing keeps coming back into all those ideas I have of the city, that is: people. People, people, and more people. Every image of the city includes humans: men, women, tourists, neighbors. We live among a faceless mass of people, but we are also a part of it. It seems like this great collective is just infinite, and we are just another comma, in a never-ending book. Our presence seems almost insignificant when compared to the larger story of the modern city.

a friend was completely inconsequential to us once.

Think of a random street in any big city, how many windows are there? Too many to count.

Every single one of those windows frames someone's life, an alien life to the casual person passing by.

Almost like a painting, a window frames a life; a story. What lies behind that glass is full of emotion, symbols, meanings of the person encased by it. However these are all unknown to us, all hiding in plain sight in every street we cross. The protagonist of these undiscovered biographies can be anyone; a mother, a teacher, a soldier. We can sit next to them on a bus or train and we would never know that we cross their window every day on our way to work or school. Their existence is not yet particular to us. However, every one of those strangers is a possible friend, lover, colleague...

Is the city just an inventory of possible connections? An inventory of people to like or dislike, places to love or to hate?

Think of the dozens, thousands and even millions of people humans cross in the streets of various cities around the world. Facial features are undefined and blurry, one cannot seem to remember one face, not even one feature. They are formless in our heads. However, this changes whenever something makes one of those individual walkings in mass to stand out from the rest. The nothingness has become something, a tangible memory. Here the city acts as a meeting place. We walk and walk without noticing much until something or someone catches our attention. It is almost as if the unknown, the estranged, makes itself significant once we notice it for whatever reason that might be.

Contrary to a village or small town, where people know of each other and can even get to know most people their life touches, the city is an endless grouping of strangers that will most probably never get to know each other. So, when a stranger in the city leaves behind that title and takes another one in someone's life, it is a matter of chance. Of course, we are more likely to meet certain types of people depending on where we go, what we do and who we know. So chance brings us together and society unites us into friends, families, employees or whatever else we may become.

In this sense, a city is almost like a shattered glass, divided into countless uneven fragments. A university, a job or a house can be considered an uneven piece within it. So the strangers with whom we share these fragments are the most likely to come into our lives and transcend that mass of faceless figures with which we share the urban landscape.

Sadly, the connections we make come and go. We go through life meeting new people and forgetting others. Some people enter our horizons and leave the dark pit of strangers, while others we used to know to join the mass of the unknown.

Distance and time become our worst enemies when trying to make a friendship or relationship last as long as possible, making us reluctant for the known to become unknown. It might feel like kilometers and minutes can turn someone in our lives

into a complete and utter stranger. In turn, we also become strangers to them as well, becoming nothing more than a memory in their minds. That childhood friend you haven't talked to in 5 years might be a completely different person to what you know and those times in the park remain as only a vestige of what used to be. You might have nothing in common with them anymore and sadly, they have become just another stranger.

So,

the modern city is paradoxical in every sense.

It makes us significant and irrelevant at the same time. To others, we can be just a stranger or a friend. Curiously, life in the modern village is nothing more than a dual play between known and unknown, between foreign and familiar, between what we consider ours and what is not ours to claim. In the metropolis, we



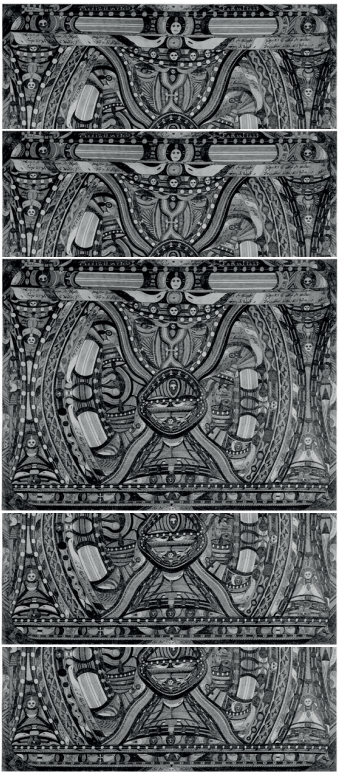
# Outsider art: who you are and who you will never be

By Cassandra Langenskold

Outsiders are strangers. We don't know them, and we probably never will. In some cases, we don't want to know them. But strangers are not only faceless people we pass on the street; they wait on the periphery of society behind our turned backs, neglected and disgraced as outsiders.

In 1972, Roger Cardinal coined the term to describe art brut, which translates to raw art. Outsider art is defined as art made by self-taught or naïve artists; they have no formal artistic training or education and are not in contact with the mainstream art world. Outsider artists do not follow the formal of art making such as perspective, meaning that their works are often incorrect in scale, have mismatching colours and do not contain the illusion of receding objects. In other words, their works are characterised by a child-like simplicity, which Cardinal labelled as "pure and authentic creative impulses". Perhaps the most famous outsider artist of the 20th century was Henri Rousseau, a French post-impressionist painter who created works in the Naïve or Primitive style. Rousseau was self-taught, only starting

## "outsider art"



his career in his late forties. He quickly became recognised for his lush colours and expressive imagery.

The artist duo Jean Dubuffet and André Breton formed a collective intended to track down art works by artists they deemed to be extremely individualistic and original. These gems of an artist should be both untrained and lack any sort of concept of an art institution or art other than their own. Dubuffet was of the mind that mainstream culture had already integrated all new developments in art, taking away their intrinsic power in the process. Art brut, or outsider art, was his antidote to this problem: only outsider art was capable of resisting the influence of mainstream culture and would therefore retain its originality and power.

Outsider art became a marvel, influencing artists such as the Surrealists, and gained a status of its own as an independent genre. While Dubuffet and Breton's original motive was to scout artists outside the gallery system, outsider art has now become legitimated and critically recognised in the art world. There are numerous published journals dedicated to the subject alone; there is a yearly Outsider Art Fair in New York which was founded in 1993; and there are even entire museums dedicated to exhibiting works by outsider and naïve artists.



romanticizes frenzied or uncontrollable artistic creation, portraying mentally ill artists as hidden geniuses with an innate and irrepressible artistic impulse. But when we categorize individuals as frenzied and hysterical due to their supposed mental instability, it paints a whole new picture; one of danger and volatility.

Individuals suffering from mental illness are put under lock and key by those more able, shunned from society and labelled as strangers. But their art is celebrated, oftentimes against their will or far from their control. Art history is no stranger to marginalization and alienation of those less able to make their voice heard; from the classification of non-Western art as primitive art to the neglect of women as legitimate artists, the art world is a serial boundary definer. Outsider artists, the mentally ill, or other individuals seemingly far-removed from the norm are yet another example of the art world's way of defining who you are and who you may never be.

Their art has become artistically celebrated, but the outsider artists themselves continue to be marginalized as a social group. Many outsider artists belong to the category of the mentally ill, and several such recognized artists were patients with chronic schizophrenia or residents of mental institutions: Nick Blinko, a British musician with schizoaffective disorder; Paul Goch, a dementia patient; Adolf Wölfl, a painter who spent his life inside the walls of Swiss psychiatric hospitals; or Pierre Vuitton, who suffered from morphine and alcohol addiction, who spent his life in nursing homes. These are all artists who have had their artistic contributions venerated yet remain on the outskirts of society.

It is no secret that many societies attach stigma and discriminatory attitudes towards mental health. Attaching psychiatric labels to individuals often leads to social exclusion and prejudice. Many people believe mental health problems to be dangerous, a risk to society, or unpredictable. Older methods of treatment for individuals experiencing mental health problems included barbaric techniques such as exorcisms or trepanation, whereby a doctor would use sharp stones to scrape and drill into the patient's head to allow evil spirits to escape.

The label "outsider artist" not only presupposes a detachment from the institutionalized manner of art creation, but it also suggests that such artists are deviants to the norm; they are strangers not only to the formal art world, but also to art beholders. Being labelled an outsider artist works to reinforce marginalization, ultimately limiting these artists from integrating with the art world and society. Public beliefs are continually reinforced, doing nothing to end the widespread social stigmatization of the mentally ill.

Another problem facing mentally ill outsider artists is that the communication between artist and audience is rarely direct; for several reasons, it is part of a larger and more complex process of communication, resulting in the artists experiencing a lack of control over their work and its symbolism. It can be said that outsider artists create from a need rather than a want, essentially limiting their agency. For Dubuffet, this represented an independence from any rational thought, allowing the artist to produce art without the burdens of convention. However, who asserts the right to project meanings and interpretation on art created from an unconscious will, when the artist themselves may not be fully in control? In a way, this



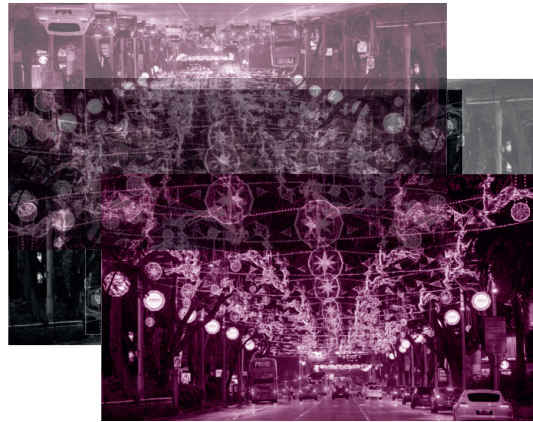
# Ho Ho Homesick

By Emma Dailey

To many, Christmas brings to mind the image of embroidered stockings above a crackling fireplace, a myriad of colorful presents piled under a pine tree, and sometimes, snowflakes swirling past the windows. It brings to mind the sound of carolers in costumes, Santa's sleigh bells, and the smells of eggnog and hot chocolate. It's a time for family, above all else and coming together around these traditions, which can make you feel at home, even as a French-American in Singapore, where my family has been living for twelve years now. Despite the tropical weather, a gaudy plastic Ikea Christmas tree would find its place in our living room every December, alongside advent calendars filled with melted chocolate. We even tried blasting the air-conditioning and sipping hot chocolate, but there was always something slightly off about forcing Christmas in the tropics, just like our neighbor decorating his papaya tree with garlands and balancing a plastic star at the top, or the high-budget Christmas lights decorating Orchard Road's rain trees as early as October.

So, like many, we soon quit trying to bring a Minnesota of Breton Christmas to the equator, and started new traditions, like dim sum at Din Tai Fung on Christmas Eve, or filling stockings with bobbles from Mustafa Center, Singapore's largest store in the heart of the 'Little India' cultural district. Last Christmas, however, was perhaps the most unconventional yet for me. On December 25th, 2017, what began as a family outing to the neighborhood Hawker center, an open-air food court where stalls sell local dishes, drawing from Indian, Malay, and Chinese cuisine, ended in us watching Hokkien opera and witnessing the final day of the Taoist festival worshipping the Goddess of Mercy, Guānyīn.

Walking home from the Hawker center, we drawn in by the unique sound of traditional Chinese opera, rapid clicking sounds of different sized percussion blocks, the trilling of



the 'Jing erhu' string instruments not unlike two-string violins played upright, and the occasional crash of an enormous gong, accompanying the three high-pitched, wavering voices, singing in the unique style of Chinese opera. We took a seat among the small crowd that had gathered, despite some light rain, around a temporary stage elevated a little over a meter off the ground. Elderly men and women sat on the red plastic chairs so typical of such public events, protected by their travel-sized umbrellas that no self-respecting Singaporean leaves the house without.

Framed by golden banners covered in neon green and orange pictograms, blue and red motifs, as well as garlands of Christmas lights, three actors occupied the space, looking positively regal in ornate, floor-length gown. Behind them, the backdrop depicted a plain bamboo hut, in stark contrast with the flamboyant character of everything else that was going on. Golden, bedazzled, and embroidered, their costumes reflected the already colorful light, giving the impression that their entire being gave off a warm glow in the rainy evening. Their thick makeup exacerbated the slightest expression into a mask like exaggeration, with their ghostly white skin and rose-colored cheeks bringing out their darkened eyebrows, arched into perfect semi-circles. Every twitch, every smile, every sigh, turning into a powerful grimace. The spectators sat entranced by the performance and the patter of raindrops, sitting in perfect silence until the end of the scene.

A scattered applause followed the final bow of the performers, and a woman sat beside us in the audience, turned around and began to excitedly explain what we were witnessing. This play was a staple of Hokkien Opera. The performers were from the 'Xing Xing Yong Hua Teochew Opera', the last group of its kind in Singapore, founded and still directed by Mr Qui Yufeng. Teochew and Hokkien are two Chinese languages originating from Minnan, a language spoken mostly in the Fujian province of China. While there are some similarities, the understanding of one does not infer the understanding of the other. Minnan dialects are commonly spoken among members of the Chinese diaspora and Singapore is no exception. Mandarin only replaced Hokkien as the most spoken Chinese language in Singapore after a government campaign in the 1980's, and Hokkien remains the second most-spoken Chinese language in Singapore, and Teochew is the third.

This particular group's performances of traditional opera are either in Hokkien or Teochew dialects, as opposed to the official language, meaning that the younger generations of Singaporeans, despite speaking Mandarin and usually either Hokkien or Teochew, are unable to fully understand the songs. Furthermore, there is a general loss of interest in the traditional arts, exacerbated by the fact that performances usually take place in remote industrial areas or in temples, places seldom frequented by younger generations of Singaporeans. Tonight, was no exception, there was not a person under fifty in sight besides my brother and me. As a result, this group is the last of its kind in Singapore, and the heart-wrenching wails were made more moving by the knowledge that we were witnessing a dying art.

This performance was sponsored by the Huan Shan Han Taoist temple based in Paya Ubi, an industrial park to the West of Singapore, where it has stood for just over thirty years. However, the temple had a permit to hold celebrations in an elaborate temporary installation in an open field in the more populated neighborhood of Hougang to the North. The diminutive opera tent stood beside the more massive temple installation, within which were three different areas. The largest was the prayer area, with shrines to various Taoist deities lining the walls. The second room off to the side was kept dark and lit only by green and black lights that made the decorated curtains

glow eerily. In the third room, bamboo stables were home to paper horses, their pages, and an army of paper soldiers. I wandered around these spaces looking confused, until a priest, wearing a black 'staff' t-shirt and jeans, offered to answer any questions I had.

He began by explaining that Taoism is a religion and philosophy that originated in China over 2000 years ago. It then remained the foremost religion in China until the Cultural Revolution. The religion centers around the 'Tao' which literally translates to "the way" but cannot be defined. Indeed, the goal of practicing religion is to reach your own, personal understanding of its significance to you as an individual through prayer, chanting scripture and meditation. Although there is no official main god, dozens of different deities are worshipped, such as the Monkey King, Sun Wukong, an immortal shapeshifter, or Mazu, the goddess of the sea. Each temple is dedicated to a specific deity. This particular one worshipped Quan Yin, "the one who perceives the sounds of the world" and goddess of mercy. The priest assured me that she was the main deity worshipped by Taoists in Singapore. The main altar had at its heart, a sculpture in her image, wearing a flowing dress, reminiscent of alcoves holding statues of the Virgin Mary. This figure, however, had a mane of long black hair, and multiple arms forming a halo around her. She was also surrounded by carvings of lotuses and peaches, painted in soft pastel tones. At her feet were red and gold bowls filled with sand and planted with fragrant incense sticks. Around the smoke floated over food offerings of Clementine's, rice and flour peaches as well as cups of tea and rice wine.

I was then brought to brought to the dark heart of this open-air temple installation. In stark contrast



Outside, (c) Marie Dailey



Phelya was lying on her bed facing the cave wall when she heard her roommate Lu getting up. She didn't know what time it was but there was barely any light, so it must have been very early. Phelya didn't move and just listened to Lu shuffling around before leaving the cavern. As soon as she did, Phelya sat up and peeked outside to see where she was going. She felt bad spying after her new friend like that, but ever since their conversation yesterday, she was not sure what Lu was going to tell their group leader, Allyn, about her.

It had only been two days or so since she mysteriously made it to the canyons from her burnt down hometown unscathed. Phelya's instinct was to trust Lu, but there were some mysterious things going on and secrets being kept from her. She had to make sure. The story Lu had told her about the virus that, many decades ago, gave people strange powers, changed their eye colour and eventually overwhelmed them, still gave her shivers. Everyone in the room yesterday had laughed it off when Phelya reacted the way she did about Rome's comment on her purple eyes. Her eyes had been brown all her life. Phelya knew she needed to find a way to see her own reflection. She also needed to hide the photo that showed her and her sister, because anyone that saw it would know she had told the truth.

When she thought of her sister, Phelya remembered the voice she had been hearing since she arrived here. It had been her sisters voice, the one that told her to trust Nordan – the young man that had shown her around the canyon and caught her when she

almost fell off the cliff; the one whose mother Phelya's new coat had belonged to. It was also the voice that mentioned the city of Wilderiver to her when Lu talked about it the day before. Lu had told her that this was the place many people had tried to go to since one of the fires had destroyed their hometown. But since there were no more trains running through the area and the weather was unforgiving at best, most people here did not dare tempt their fate even further by going. Phelya, however, felt a strong urge to embark on the journey nonetheless. She did not know why her sister's voice had told her the name of the city; she did not know if her sister really was the one talking to her, or if she was even still alive. But if her best bet at finding out was to go to Wilderiver, then there was nothing that would stop her.

Phelya watched as Lu turned a corner that lead to Allyn's cavern. This time, she found herself fighting the hurt that was forming in her chest. She knew that Lu had no reason to trust her after a day and a half, and so she felt foolish for having started to trust her. That's when she remembered the first thing her sister's voice had said to her. To trust Nordan. Only him and no one else. She frowned. What did that mean? It made her sad to think about it now, after having bonded with more than just Nordan. She wanted to make connections and feel like she belonged here. But she also knew that all the people around her were total strangers. She went back to her bed and grabbed the purple coat Nordan had given to her. For the

the postcard-sized pieces of rice paper, writing no more than three or four on each paper before brushing it off the table for the kids to collect. My guide explained to me that these papers were spells, given to them by the spirits possessing them, to help heal ailments or bring good fortune. These paper spells could be dissolved in water and drunk as a potion, alongside traditional Chinese medicine. "Sometimes, they cut their tongue with glass and drip some blood on it to increase the power" added my guide sheepishly. "People will contribute more to the temples that give the best predictions and the best medicine. This temple is actually free, people ask about their health. We have cancer patients that have been coming here for years and are still alive." As he finished his explanation, the mediums rose from their seats and limped out of the tent, encircled by their aides. One dragged a chain across the ground as he walked, while the other beat himself with a wooden stick. They walked to the middle of the open area and sat cross-legged, drink swigs from the green bottles and chain-smoking cigarettes. My guide nudged me, "See the black stripes on the cigarettes? That's opium". When I asked him how in the world they obtained opium in Singapore, he winked and said, "It's difficult". Worshipers circled the mediums and chanted scripture for almost an hour more. I felt light years away from the tall glass structures of Orchard Road, and the suited men of the Central Business District. I felt light years away from any semblance of Christmas. I felt like a complete and utter stranger, welcomed into this alien celebration by these kind and open individuals that truly wanted to share with us. And as I stood there, camera in one hand and notepad in the other, I came to the conclusion that when, like me, you are never truly home for Christmas, the stranger your situation, the more things feel in place



Outside, (c) Marie Dailey

with this peaceful scene of plenty, the second room I was shown, behind a heavy black curtain embroidered with gold and silver pictograms, was quite literally made to resemble the fifth level of Taoist hell, ruled over by King Chung Huang Ye, the horse general, Ma Jiang Jin, and the cow general, Niü Jian Jin. As opposed to the yellow fabric behind Quan Yin representing heaven, this room was made of black and green, with the three rulers of this hell depicted in the glow-in-the-dark paint that shone brightly under the black lights. At the foot of this tableau, two imposing wooden rocking-chairs stood in front of two writing desks. On each desk lay an ivory pipe, an unlabeled green bottle filled with a clear liquid, rice paper, and calligraphy brushes and ink. I stood to the side with my guide when two men entered the room, as what seemed to be their personal aids lifted the heavy velvet curtains for them.

The two men had long, tangled black hair and walked in a hunched manner. I was unable to see their faces. They each stood behind a chair and their aides immediately brought them their ceremonial robes, one black, one white, and draped them over their shoulders. Then, the robed men began chanting in unison, rocking back and forth in their chairs. Given the confused expression on my face, my guide thought it time to chime in with some explanations. These two men were professional mediums and had been for over thirty years. "Mediums are born with it, connection to the spirits, God teaches them when they are asleep. Some are not born with it but find a master to learn under, much longer process". This is dying out "the newer generation, actually, doesn't pray. In Taoism, there is a lot of procedure to follow, and I think nowadays, gen X and Y people don't like all of this. It's messy."

Tonight, they were attempting to summon the spirits of the 'two brothers' that live at this fifth level of hell. In white was the medium calling to "Da Ye Be" or "white brother", and in black "E Ye Be", "black brother". This first Hokkien dialect chant was a prayer to the Jade Emperor Huan Yin, followed by a general invitation to all spirits and deities to come to the temple and poses these two men. Wearing the brother's robes, said my guide, was only an encouragement for these spirits to come, but there was no way to tell which spirit would show if any chose to at all. The men would then go into a deep meditation. I witnessed as they did so, their head lulling forward and their bodies falling perfectly still. Worshipers in the tent continued their fervent chanting for what seemed to me like an eternity, raising both their pitch and volume until the unearthly sound swelled to a demonic crescendo. As the mediums began to move once again, several aids rushed to their sides, holding them down to their chairs as they starting kicking and screaming. "The brothers are here," said my guide, "I can tell by how they move. That is the priest's role here - to identify which spirit is here based on their speech and movements. It's clearly them".

I watched as their fit subsided and they settled in their chairs. The aides lit their pipes and poured them glasses of the rice alcohol. The mediums leaned forward once more, this time reaching for their paint brushes. They then began to fervently scribble characters onto



time being, she knew keeping the photograph with her sister and her by the beach with her was the safest option. She was not ready for someone to find it and start asking even more questions that she had no answers to.

“Anyone home?”

Phelya was standing outside Nordan’s cavern and waited. A few seconds later, he appeared in the entrance and looked at her with a slightly confused smile.

“You’re up early. What’s up?”

“Oh, um. I guess I still need to get used to this place before I can get a full night’s rest.” Phelya said with a hint of amusement in her voice. It felt carefree talking to Nordan, there was something different about him.

“Oh well, do you wanna come in?” Nordan asked.

“I was thinking we could give walking around another shot? And this time we’ll avoid the narrow ledges. Deal?”

“Deal. Let me just grab something.”

When Nordan returned, the two started walking down the long pathways, past countless caves that most people were still fast asleep in.

“So who do you share your place with? Or do you stay by yourself like Lu did?”

“Oh, no. I live with Isaac. Lu’s brother.”

Phelya nodded, “That’s nice – is that nice?”

Nordan chuckled, “Yeah, it’s nice.”

“So where are we going?”

“Hmm, I was thinking we could go up to the top and watch the sunrise?”

With furrowed brows, Phelya squinted up at Nordan.

“What do you mean, go to the top? I thought we made a deal!”

“Oh, trust me. I’m keeping the deal. Unless you worry being blown off into by the wind.”

Phelya stared, “Why would you be joking like that? Of course I’m scared of that?”

“Just walk with me, stranger.”

He smiled at her, grey eyes looking intent-ly into her own as they kept walking. In the morning dawn, Phelya could barely make out her surroundings, so she followed him closely.

The two walked up one last path before the wind picked up and they ended up on top of the canyons. Phelya took a look around and stopped when she faced east where the sky was turning orange as the Earth turned slowly to reveal the sun. A smile grew wide on her face as she took in the view. All she could see was vast, dry land that was slowly dipped in the beautiful colours of the morning. A view so much more peaceful and innocent than that of her smoking hometown to her back.

“Kind of makes you forget all the terrible things for a second, doesn’t it?” said Nordan warmly.

“It does. Is that why you brought me here?”

“Hm, partly. I do come here a lot to be alone for a while and just take in the sights, I thought you would appreciate that, too, after such a hectic few days. And I didn’t want anyone to hear us talking.” Nordan looked at Phelya briefly and then turned away.

“Hear us talking about what?”

When Nordan turned back around, he pulled something from his pocket. Phelya didn’t recognize it until it caught the reflection of the sun that slowly revealed itself. It was a broken piece of a mirror. She frowned. How could he have known?

“What-”

“Just take a look.” Nordan handed her the shard carefully. When their hands touched, they both gasped almost in perfect unison.

“Your hands are burning.” Phelya said in awe.

“Yours are freezing.” They both looked at each other for a second before Phelya focused back on the mirror. She took a breath before looking, hoping that Nordan wouldn’t notice her nervousness.

But when she faced her own reflection, she couldn’t conceal her shock. She did not recognize the person looking back at her. The piercing eyes that stared at her were out of this world and more alien to her than anything else about herself that she did not understand. I am not just a stranger to them. I am a stranger to myself...

With sad eyes, she looked up at Nordan. Phelya was surprised when she found understanding in his. Without saying anything, he reached for something in his jacket once more and pulled out, much to Phelya’s disbelief – a photograph.

When he handed it to her, she saw a young Nordan smiling brightly at the person behind the camera. He had barely changed since the photo was taken. Except for the fact that his eyes were not grey. They were a vibrant green.

“What does this mean?” Phelya managed to ask.

“I don’t know. All I know is that you’re the first person I’ve met that has been through the same thing. And I’m sure this has something to do with why you got away from the fire without so much as a scratch.”

All I remember is waking up in my garden. I remember everything I’ve ever known being burned to the ground... Actually, everything except me and the patch of garden surrounding me. Even my swing set was still there. And I remember a bird singing...? Nordan, what is going on?” Phelya stopped herself from rambling on and looked up at the young man standing in front of her.

“I think you and I might have a few more things in common than just our eyes.”





# Trained not to Smile

By Sonia Juillet

The metro is relatively packed at this time of day, with people squeezing into the last seats available. I eye the man sitting across from me as he looks out the window. There's nothing else to look at really, since we're in a tunnel. Though the black-haired man does seem fascinated by the darkness he sees. Perhaps it's his way of dissuading random people from talking to him. I realize I should probably stop staring, but my gaze remains fixed on him, no matter how much my mind is screaming at me to turn away. Maybe I'm jealous because he has space to spread out his legs since the seat next to him is the only empty one in the wagon. Finally another man, a blond man, dares attempt to come between him and the window that seems to captivate him so.

The change in the dark-haired man's countenance is immediate. Sitting up straight, his eyes light up in joyful animation, and he breaks into a grin. His unexpected and unadulterated happiness is contagious. I realize, as I notice others around him, struggling to repress small smiles from spreading across their faces. Eagerly, he gestures quickly, causing the blond man's eyes to widen in slight panic. Gently, he gestures something new and smiles hopefully at the dark-haired fellow. Not appearing in the slightest disappointed nor discouraged, the obviously more experienced man, signs more deliberately.

Suddenly, the taller blond man raises his arms and slowly moves his hands in an intricate and learned manner. Sign language, I determine, able to recognize it for what it is even with my limited knowledge.

Now, I can't help but observe the blond man as he in turn observes the other man. After what resembles an intense internal debate, the blond shifts in his seat and carefully touches the other's shoulder. Immediately, the silent man tenses, squares his shoulders as if in courage, and faces the man with an expression of absolute resignation.



The continued lack of reaction is shockingly rude. At last, apparently reaching the end of his rope, the man reaches out to grasp the man's shoulder. Then, with almost violent movements indicates the empty seat as he inquires after the place a third time. Appearing almost defeated the seated man nods to the spot, gesturing half-heartedly before turning his gaze from the window to his feet as he straightens up, providing enough room for the man to eventually take a seat. The blond man moves, frowning thoughtfully at dark-haired man.

"Excuse me, do you mind?" The man asks again, slight irritation filling his tone.

The man doesn't react, no blink, no flinch, no twitch. It's almost as if the other man hadn't spoken a word.

"Sorry, would you mind if I just slip in?" He asks, politely.

the atmosphere of happiness that has filled this coach, affecting everyone inside it, has waned, will this moment be pushed aside by their daily worries and concerns?

As corny as it may sound, I like to think that, if nothing else, even if they do fail to remember this brief period in time where a wagon full of random individuals shared a bit of pure happiness, at least their hearts will recall it. And maybe, if they're lucky, on a particularly dark day when all could be terrible, their hearts will chose to feel the optimism of this hour, unknowingly lifting their spirits.

## Any minute in one's life can leave its mark, sometimes even the most unpredictable ones.

I never expected to be so deeply affected by something that didn't even directly involve me, but I was, and even though it's been a few years since it happened, I still remember it clearly. I remember watching that one man's genuine delight and I remember the small smiles that transformed into grins on all the faces in the train wagon. And even thinking back on it now, I smile at the memory.



Still, his smile does not dim throughout his whole discussion, and the smiles on the faces of observers continue to spread and grow on each individual, even on those who looked the least likely to smile during this trip. Will this be their feel good moment of the week, where something completely random and unrelated to them occurred but somehow left its mark on them? Or perhaps they'll forget about it as soon as they step out of this wagon.... Once they leave and

Communicating with people is something I never really think about, if I'm lost or need to ask for something, I know that I can easily walk up to almost anyone and if they're in a good mood, they'll help me. But for this man, that could often be impossible, as few people know how to sign. Will this conversation with a complete and utter stranger be the highlight of his week? Are conversations with strangers a foreign concept for him and what must it be like?

## I wonder for a moment what it must be like to find such instantaneous joy for simply being able to converse with a stranger.

Obviously getting the hang of it, the blond man gains confidence and gradually, the duo communicate pleasantly with one another, neither one getting impatient with the other when one forgets how to sign a word or one fails to understand a sign. Both are smiling merrily, though the freely cheerful beam on the supposedly mute or deaf man's face is unbeatable and unlike any I've seen before.



# Please recognize me

By Berdan Kaplan

*"You're not going to make it in society. You're already such an emotional boy, and with this added, you are definitely not going to make it."*

## [ Out ]

"How could you...?"

"How could you do that to us; to your mother; to me? Why wait so long and keep all of that information from us? Why didn't you tell us before?"

"But why? Why tell your friends first and not discuss this with us? We are involved too, you know. A decision like that affects us as well; you can't just decide something like this on your own!"

"You're only 18 years old. Don't you need to give it some extra time? How can you make such a life choice at such a young age? You have to sort things out first, with us!"

"Are you even listening? The only thing I am trying to tell you is to give it – let's say – 3 to 5 more years. Just have another look at it, reconsider it, have some time to really think."

"Son, there are so many beautiful girls in the world. How do you not..."

"Your mother has been crying the whole week, you know. She has been sad the entire week. You don't want to see her like that, do you? And do you even realize where we are coming from... from what type of world? We are not used to this; we did not grow up with homosexuals everywhere on TV and in the streets."

"Again, you're not listening to what I am saying. You never listen to what I have to say. You're being too self-involved, and the only opinion you take into consideration is your own. I am saying that you need to give this more time, see how it goes and then, decide... and if you actually feel like that is who you are, then I guess there is no other way."

- It is more difficult if the people that are closest to you, are the most sensitive ones.

- You don't understand... it's not a decision. If I would have a choice, I would have made my life much easier but this is who I am, and there's no use of denying it.

- Listen to me. You are either born gay or you are not. **Don't try to trick me into believing something that's not even close to the truth.**

... no.

Are you kidding me?

- Why do you keep jumping from one point to another? Obviously, it is not my intention to make her cry. Why are you trying to give me this guilt feeling? It's not fair... and why do you keep implementing that this is such a 'bad' thing? Do you actually believe you can reverse this?

- It's not a choice, damn it! Why do I need to constantly repeat that for you?! I have not made a decision just because **there is no decision to make.** I am not going to take another 3 to 5 years to 'think this through. I have thought it through and again, it is not a decision. I have spent

years and months and weeks of my life crushing my brain over my sexual identity. I have accepted it. It is what it is. I am gay.

"Son... you're not listening... I'm telling y-"

- No! You're the one who isn't listening! You're the one who doesn't even want to understand me. I didn't do anything wrong, okay?! There is nothing wrong with me so, don't act like you can make me straight again, freaking hell. I am not being selfish here, you are! You think you can actually be involved in this so-called 'decision'? You're making me way too aggressive with all of that stupidity coming out of your mouth... come on!

"You're lashing out. I will not speak to you if you are going to treat me with this little respect and with this kind of arrogant and rude behavior."

- Where do you think this is coming from, dad? Can you connect the dots? I am obviously angry and have every right to be. I am the who is being treated like absolute sh-"

## [ fast forward: 3 months ]

*"... you're not going to make it in this society. You're already such an emotional boy, and with this added, you are definitely not going to make it."*

- How could you say something like that? The only thing that is important to me is that the people who are nearest, whom I love the most, are there for me to support me in the future. That's all I need to 'make it in this society'. Which society are you even referring to? The one back in your old home? Because that is definitely not the one we are living in – or at least, the one I am living in. "The world is harsh, my son. You don't know how much your ethnicity on its own is already going to affect your future and how the people in this society will judge you for it."

- Do you think I will be going to a job interview with 'Turkish homo' written on my forehead? I am good the way I am. My friends love me, and I've heard several times from the people around me that they appreciate my personality, and never ever would they imply the fact that I'm Turkish OR gay.

"How many of your friends did you tell?"

- ... that I'm gay?

"Hmm. Does everybody know here?"

- Why is that even relevant? I just live my life here. I don't introduce myself telling people I'm gay. It's just part of my identity, and here you are, literally trying to change me since the moment I came out to you. Get over it!

"... Ber-"

- I feel like you're not even answering me whenever I try to talk some sense into you. I thought things had slightly changed... and that you had enough time to reconsider and maybe even apologize for what you've said to me... **for not recognizing me.** "What have I said to you that is so awful?"



# Strangers On My Phone

By Saaqia Merali

The need for interaction is part of our species societal make up – we all need to make connections with other humans to function effectively as a society. How we do that has changed massively, and rapidly, especially over the past couple of decades. Digital communication has developed in leaps and bounds making everything, and everyone, much more easily accessible.

## The internet in itself has made the concept of a ‘stranger’ much more nuanced

– the way in which we interact digitally opens us up to a whole new world of possibilities; in people, in places, in ideas and in opportunities. It also opens us up to a world of negative possibilities.

Websites and applications that are based purely on enabling easy communication between people all over the world are thriving. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn aim to bring people together online through similar yet different interfaces, to connect. The platforms also facilitate a space for strangers to connect and get to know one another. While there are dangers and risks to this, the definition and idea of a stranger is changing with the times and meeting or interacting with unknown people online is

becoming more normal, and less scary.

Online communities, for broad and niche interests alike, are commonplace on social networks. Having a user profile on a social media platform like Facebook allows users to join groups and follow pages to find like-minded people and attend events related to their interests. One such group led to my interaction with kind strangers on my first day in Rotterdam – an occurrence that didn’t seem odd or bizarre considering I had just moved to a new city on that very day. I arrived at my student apartment to learn that the electricity and Wi-Fi contracts had been cancelled, and I had to renew them under my name. Feeling confident and excited to be in my new home, I called the helplines for both service providers, only to discover that the operator gave instructions in Dutch. Overwhelmed and unequipped, I turned to a WhatsApp group chat with over 200 members in it – all students who would be on my course as off the following week. Only minutes after explaining my plight, one student had offered to call Wi-Fi providers for me while another had offered to come over to my apartment to help with the electricity contracts. Two absolute strangers, our only commonality being that we were joining an undergraduate course together, came to my aid and I invited them into my home and life with open arms (literally, there were many hugs of gratitude). The kindness of strangers was something I was personally massively dependent on when I first moved to the Netherlands – the first country I had lived in where I didn’t speak the national language. When I came to this realisation, it made me question how differently and perhaps more openly we communicate from behind our screens, making judgements based on what we see of a person’s digital presence, and how willingly we ac-

cept this as preemptive insight into who they would be in real life.

Dating in particular has become a focus of many apps that encourage or at least accommodate strangers connecting online. In 2018, it is more commonplace to hear about ‘Tinder couples’ or even ‘Tinder weddings’, celebrating successful relationships that began on or because of the infamous platform, bolstering the notion that online dating is no longer taboo, or just plain weird to do.

There is a plethora of online apps that provide a platform for people to interact with strangers that may have similar interests. Most of the apps have a fairly similar set up,

where users usually provide photographs and a short ‘bio’ of themselves before being able to see other profiles.

There are several reasons why people may prefer online dating as their ideal way to meet new people. The first and most common reason most people have for using online dating apps is that there is comfort in ‘mutual interest’. If you’ve matched with someone, it means that they are interested in you, as you are in them. While this may be mostly physical attraction, based primarily on their carefully curated photographs, it can be a confidence boost to know that the person on the other side is already somewhat interested in

‘Catfishing’ is an unfortunately popular term,

you. It eliminates having to gauge the other person’s interest, and also if they are willing and available to date.

This initial attraction however, may be misleading. People on dating sites tend to portray the best, most appealing version of themselves. This can sometimes include enhanced photographs, or in some cases – photographs of someone entirely different.

referring to the act of luring someone into a relationship by adopting a fictional online persona. In extreme cases, a catfish would avoid meeting in person and continue to lead their victim on over online or digital communication. Other times, the term catfish is used to describe people who look quite different to their images on an online profile, as there is an excess of photo editing apps that allow users to correct any physical imperfections, they may think they have.

Another appealing feature of online dating is

the ability to portray oneself a certain way, while hiding behind a screen. Online dating apps offer their users a way to interact that is hugely different to conversing in real life. Aside from being able to show only their ‘best’ selves, users are afforded a time-lapse of sorts, between receiving messages and responding to them. In a real-life conversation, you wouldn’t necessarily have the option to think of the wittiest, cleverest response to impress your date.

Of course, this could mean that a person depicts a version of themselves online that is the furthest thing from their truest self and may be doing a disservice to themselves for when the online dating leads to a real-life meeting.

While online socialising apps offers a new experience to users in the real world, each person can find pros and cons to this rapidly growing (and changing) style of communication.



# On growing apart and losing a best friend

By Ming Nguyet Nguyen

We hear a lot of stories about romantic heart-breaks. Articles, songs, papers, videos, there's always something about the subject in any given format. We seem however to not acknowledge the heartache that comes with the end of a friendship.

As children, most of us had one best friend, and on top of that, we had regular friends. 'Best-friend' was this holy title, this special bond, that guarantee companionship during sleepovers, birthday parties, and any other children activity (it has been a while since I don't hang out with kids enough to know the details of their daily routine). This title defines partly what friendship is supposed to be, it gives both best friends a responsibility, something I was fine with, but growing up, struggled a with.

Fast forward to middle school, this was when my view on friendship, more specifically best-friendship changed. At this point, we have changed schools, met more people, some of us moved countries. The best-friend title started to make less sense. Why should I have to pick one friend, why is she/he more special?

I did, however, continue to use that term, I felt pressured, because I was given the best-friend title, and therefore felt obliged to also grant it back. Does that make sense? Is it comparable to saying 'I love you too' even though you honestly to say 'thank you?'. In all fairness, I loved my best friend, we were super compatible, laughed at the same dumb jokes, ate junk all day, and spent way too much time vegetating in front of a screen. It definitely wasn't an empty title, I simply didn't like the idea of it.

In High-school, I came to terms with myself, 'best-friend' was no longer a title, it was now a category, that could contain more than one person. It was also the first time I experienced growing apart from a close friend. It happened slowly. First, the texts became more and more sparse, the facetime less and less frequent (we were in different countries), then before we realized, our interests, taste, common likes, and overall priorities shifted. Being understanding and helpful towards each other was becoming harder, as we just did not get each other. This happened multiple times, and I bet it's happening right now, without me realizing it.

Nothing was wrong though, nothing really went wrong, it just happened. But then what do you do? Some are fine with just leaving the situation as is and then move on, I cannot. I like proper closure. So here are some of the things I did.

## Re-examine the relationship

Strong and long-lasting friendship is built on an even and solid foundation. Do you both have the same definition of friendship? What are you really looking for? What do you expect from the other person?

That's another thing I don't like about the title 'best-friend', it implies that all of the things you're looking for in a friend can be found in this one person. I personally find it selfish,

and unfair to expect that much from one person.

Like any other relationship, a friendship should be a mutual one, meaning that both parties contribute to it equally. If the balance is not there, if one puts in more effort, there are meant to be tensions.

For example, that one friend that only talks about themselves, without really listening to you. That one friend that cancels last-minute quite often. Or even that one friend that is so judgmental and bossy they fail to show support. Whatever it is, if it makes you feel uncomfortable being their friend, and brings out little to no joy, but require a lot of effort, then it's time to consider taking more radical actions.

It also happens that there's no drama, things just dull out (like in my case). What then? Don't feel guilty about admitting to yourself that it is what is, a past tense friendship. This could be that friend from camp, from work or from high-school, that you don't talk to anymore, but still pretend that you are BFFs.

## Be attentive and honest

Be honest with yourself, why are you still pretending that you're BFFs?

Some of us feel an obligation to do so. We remember what it felt like to be together, and forcefully try to make it happen again, despite the fact that the chemistry and fun are no longer there. In other words, nostalgia is playing you.

Feeling lonely could also contribute to the breaking of your already damaged friendship. Some people remain friends only because they are lonely. Yes, friends are there to help

you out in a difficult moment, but if their only function is to make you feel less lonely, then it might be better to meet other people with whom you genuinely enjoy being with. Hanging out only because due to loneliness is putting your needs first, and not appreciating the other person.

Admitting to yourself, and thinking about what is the best course of action is what helped me the most. In my case, I couldn't provide the same amount of endless and blind support that I used to. To put it bluntly, I did not want to be the best-friend anymore. I do however want to be a friend and keep in touch. So naturally, I told her that. It was a long night. An anxious and sleepless one, with me and her frantically typing our emotions away because I did not have enough data to video-call

## Move on

Growing apart is difficult but instead of focusing on the ugly, why not remember the good sh\*t. End things, don't linger, don't ruin the memories. You can also talk it out, say what you have in your heart to that friend, if they react nicely, good, if not you can tell yourself that you did try.

I hope my rambling was at least fun to read if not useful, until next time people.





# GO BACK TO WHERE YOU CAME FROM!

Returning home after living alone abroad

I am writing this article on my mom's birthday, and being 10 000 kilometers away, I will not be able to celebrate it with her. Being a foreign student in the Netherlands means that I often have to miss important events of my people back home. This has made me feel homesick. I miss my family, friends and food. However, I then remember the times I have returned to Peru. On the 25th of December, just as I landed, a presidential pardon was given to a former president convicted for human rights violations. The environment felt tense and the news were filled with protests. When I returned again in July, audio leaks from the supreme court revealed the sale of verdicts. After getting used to political stability in the Netherlands, I was frustrated, home was not exactly as I had envisioned. This led me to wonder how experiences abroad can change our perspective of home. I decided to interview students from outside of Europe, who only get to return home once or twice a year, as their exposure to home is as limited as mine.

The first person I interviewed was Anahi, she was born in Peru but lived the immediate six years preceding university in Nicaragua. The first time she moved she felt people in her new country were too laid back and that everything happened slowly. This frustration increased after living in the Netherlands.

**“People are straightforward and efficient in Rotterdam”.**

Moreover, public transport mostly works well, in Nicaragua her parents had to drive her whenever she wanted to leave the house. “In Managua, people without the ability to pay for a car have to walk up to 3 kilometers on the road, as there are few pavements, to be able to take the bus”. Back home she says that while she appreciated being cared for and her mother's cooking, she missed her independence, as in not being able to move without asking for a ride. Upon her return to Nicaragua for the summer holidays she says that everything was as she had imagined. But she now has more insight as to why the government crisis is taking place.

On the other side of the globe, Audrey returned to Indonesia after being in the Netherlands for 7 months. She noticed the introduction of “dumb traffic laws” where only cars ending on certain plaque numbers were allowed to circulate on given days. Just like Anahi, her parents would have to drive her because “back in Jakarta public transport sucks”. I asked her what she missed from the Netherlands when she was back home, and she said

**“I missed the fact that I was super independent...”**

when I am back home I am like with my family again, and it is not like I have a curfew or anything, but I feel like I have one”. When she is in Rotterdam she misses the “convenience of living in Indonesia”, the “comfort of knowing that there is someone for you all the time” and that everything is cheaper. Audrey told me that in Rotterdam she stopped reading Indonesian news, as she was not there she felt impotence. They have had an earthquake a few months ago, “and I couldn't do anything about it”. Now, “there is this disconnect” with home.

Meanwhile, Shavony did not return to her native Curacao for 2 years. I asked her how it was like, and she told me “It was the same but different...because I am a different person now”. “Back home the culture...you don't speak up and contradict people who are older than you, I never really agreed with it, but went along with it”, thanks to her time in Rotterdam she says “I speak up my mind, if someone is wrong I am going to tell them they are wrong.” When I asked Shavony what she misses from the Netherlands when she visits Curacao, she told me it was her freedom. Back home, she would have to run her activities by her parents. If she was hanging out with friends that her parents had not met, she would be in trouble. Now that she lives alone she says

**“I control my life”.**

When I asked her about the beach she says she “went a few times”, but mainly stayed in her house with the dogs.

Unsurprisingly, it seems that after a taste of independence and freedom we find it hard to return home, where our relationships had already been established. When we come to university, we tend to explore who we are and we have the space to do so. Audrey joined the eSports team, Anahi started learning Dutch, and Shavony is doing 2 minors. As we mature and become our own persons, re-adjusting to previous routines becomes more difficult. Our parents have to see this change, and when they do, we have to notice that they noticed. As Audrey put it, even though she did not have a curfew, she felt that she had one. However, it is also up to us to speak with them and make our return as comfortable as possible. My mom was still used to keeping my important articles for me. When I first came back, she took my Dutch house key and she forgot to return it to me. I noticed this when I landed in Schiphol.

Conversely, there are downsides to this independence which we appreciate not having to deal with when returning home. For example, having someone who will be there when we need them. Audrey spoke of her mom's cooking, and Anahi of medical emergencies. Home can be a vital source of support. Not only on concrete instances like cleaning, but emotionally too. I needed to see my family, hug them, keep up with their lives and share my experiences. Leaving was incredibly difficult but I am glad that I was able to start over so far away, and much like the people I interviewed, I feel a lot of personal growth. As Rotterdam feels increasingly homey to me, I like to remember my other home and those who make it so special as to motivate me to fly for over 12 hours to be back, even when home is not the same.



# Article 11 – Strangers on my

## Phone

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-and-woman-holding-heart-boards-1449059/>  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/cellphone-coffee-mug-computer-433313/>  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/blur-close-up-desk-electronic-433604/>  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/person-holding-cellphone-while-standing-on-train-station-1391404/>

Article 9 - blurred lines ...  
and reality - chapter 5:  
cover me

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/blue-abstract-painting-908294/>  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/artistic-backlit-beauty-breath-taking-267151/>  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/grand-canyon-under-blue-and-white-cloudy-sky-during-daylight-789609/>

Article 10 –  
Please  
Recognize  
Me

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/monochrome-photography-of-person-on-dark-room-1299417/>  
<https://unsplash.com/photos/wPbbsHdIEWI>

## Front & back

Picture by Designer

# Article 7 – Ho Ho Homesick

Photo credit: Marie Dailey

Maud Dik Milan Weber Sara Haverkamp Max Peeters

Doğa Billiger

Julian Beltran

Cassandra Langenskiold

Emma



José Luis

Minh Nguyet Nguyen

Saaiqa Merali

Berdan Kaplan

Mingzhu Lena Weiberlenn

Sonia Juillet

Louise Dailey





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