

STARANO

SPRING 2021



THE
FACE
OF
RAGU
WANN

PRIYA
RAGU ON
LYRICISM +
LEMON RICE

EDITORS NOTE

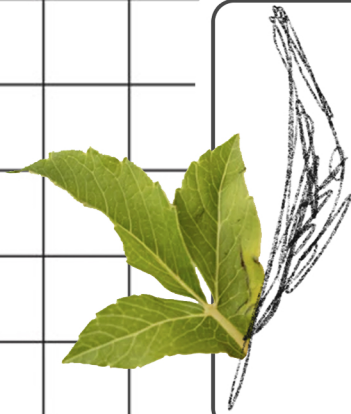
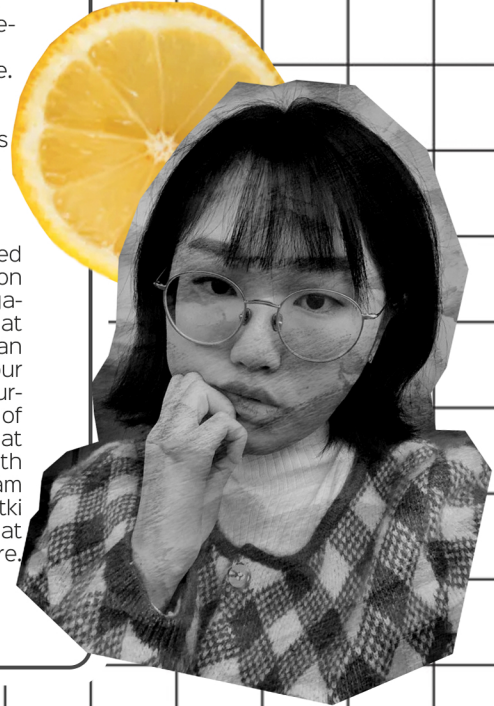


Dear readers,

When I first came to KCL I was excited but also nervous especially when I visited the freshers fair. I knew I wanted to do something related to journalism but back then second and third years seemed so intimidating that I was initially afraid of putting myself out there. Strand was one of those societies that was inclusive and interactive. They accepted me with a warm heart and let me write about things I have always wanted to write about. Initially a group of less than 10 people, the year I came was when we received more than 100 members. My dedication to the society led me to become deputy editor and then editor-in-chief.

Strand has provided me with amazing opportunities - I visited London Fashion week multiple times, interviewed British Asian Icon Rina Sawayama and won journalism awards on behalf of the magazine. The thing that makes me proud about the magazine is that we have succeeded in becoming more and more inclusive. From an annual female empowerment issue to highlighting people of colour within the arts, Strand Magazine is a shed of light within the journalism field which may seem daunting for females and those of colour. I am sad to say that this is my last issue within such a great society. I thank Sammy, Corissa, and Isabel for trusting me with higher positions within the editorial team, the current editorial team for being absolute stars and of course the next editor-in-chief Ketki who I stan with all my heart. <3 Thank you for making my 3 years at KCL so great and I wish you all the best with Strand in the future.

Love, Halim



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EDITORS



1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11

FOOD & DRINK

"The Face of 'Raguwavy': Priya Ragu on Lyricism and Lemon Rice" by Anoushka Chakrapani

MUSIC

"Bastille on Bringing Back 'Arts and Culture' - In Conversation with Will Farquarson" by Emma Short

ESSAY

"Goodbye Topshop: A Sentimental Reflection over Teenage Trend Nostalgia" by Ellie Muir

ESSAY

"Bridging the Gap Between Performative Activism and Ethics" by Callum Liveras-Dionsyiou

FILM & TV

"A Roadmap of Lockdown Film & TV" by Juliette Howard and Andriani Scordellis

ART

"An Interview with Alya Hatta" by Ketki Mahabaleshwarkar

SEX & RELATIONSHIPS

"Peripheral People Power" by Malina Aniol

PHOTOGRAPHY

"Distanced Diaries: Freshers 2020" by Ana Oancea

LONDON & BEYOND

"New London" by Shreya Sharma

DANCE

"Making the City - Transnational Dance Artists: In conversation with Sharon Mercado" by Stephanie Burrell

LITERATURE

"Absence / Silence / Space" by Godelieve de Bree



MENTAL



THE FACE OF RAGU NAVY

PRIYA RAGU
ON LYRICISM
AND LEMON
RICE

Growing up, the South Indian dish of lemon rice found its biggest hater in me. Maybe it stems from me opening my lunchbox at school to the same yellow rice, the repetition of it conditioning me to dislike the dish. But having eaten it more recently, I give it a bit more credit (although not a lot). My family's recipe is a mix of mustard seeds, lemon juice, split black gram, chillies and curry leaves with a pinch of turmeric powder for the bright yellow colour mixed into day-old rice. Priya's was quite different.



Signed to Warner Music, the Tamil-Swiss artist, Priya Ragu, is on her way to bend your ideas of R&B music. South Asian rap and specifically Sri Lankan artists are often compared to M.I.A, and Priya has had her fair share of interviews that do the same. But to me this feels limiting to the unique sound that Priya creates, or as she calls it 'Raguwavy'. Influenced by music in Tamil cinema and contemporary hip hop, she and her brother combine the two complex worlds by creating catchy lyrics to go with bouncy beats. Her newest track 'Chicken Lemon Rice', courtesy of my Spotify Discover Weekly playlist, -caught my attention immediately. It wasn't just the fresh sound that combined Tamil talas with rap, but the verse and the title of the track that intrigued me. I asked Priya about mixing chicken curry with lemon rice, something I never thought about doing, and as it turns out, distaste for lemon rice isn't uncommon.

Q: Could you tell me about the lyric chicken lemon rice?

Priya: 'Yeah, it just came like instantly when we listened to the beat. It just rhymed very well. You know, chicken lemon rice. I don't know where that actually came from, that idea. It just popped up. We grew up eating lemon rice a lot at home and I didn't like it, you know?'

Personally, the bitter mustard seeds and lemon were too overwhelming for a 10-year old's palette and I wasn't alone in believing that. 'I don't like the sour flavour of it. But then when I cooked it, of course, it was very tasty. I feel like it depends on which rice you're making it with. My mom does it with the red rice, the healthy rice. So, it's really not that amazing, so she doesn't do it a lot, but she did it back in the days.'

The song is one of the releases from her latest album which will be released this year. Championing diversity and love, she and her brother Japhna Gold whipped it up quite quickly.

'It's really about celebrating life, celebrating heritages and owning them, you know. The song was written really quickly. I mean Japhna, he sent me the beat. And I knew right away how the melody should go. And also the verses. My brother, he's a rapper so it's really easy to write with him together. We released it this February and we've received a lot of love since then. It's really cool to see how the song is touching many souls you know out there'.

But doing music full-time is fairly recent for Priya. She worked at her 9-to-5 up until 2017, while burning the midnight oil to produce new tracks. After quitting her job, she travelled to New York to further develop her music, collaborating with her brother Japhna and rapper Oddisee. Her tracks 'Lighthouse' and 'Good Love 2.0' made her a sought-after artist with 20 international labels wanting to sign her.

The visually stunning music video for 'Chicken Lemon Rice', released with Warner Music, was shot in an abandoned hotel in London. Combining cultural motifs in her outfit and surrounding set, the song celebrates her Sri Lankan Tamil roots.

Growing up, Priya visited Wembley often to meet her family and cousins. From being the only brown kid at school to seeing people like her in London, the Tamil shops and restaurants allowed her to connect with her identity and feel a sense of home.

The same saree that her mother would force her to buy for weddings is a garment she has embraced and made her own. Paired with sneakers and a cheetah print turtleneck, she makes saree the new streetwear on her track's artwork. The slicked back and braided hair, a common and important element of South Indian culture, is featured in the video as well.

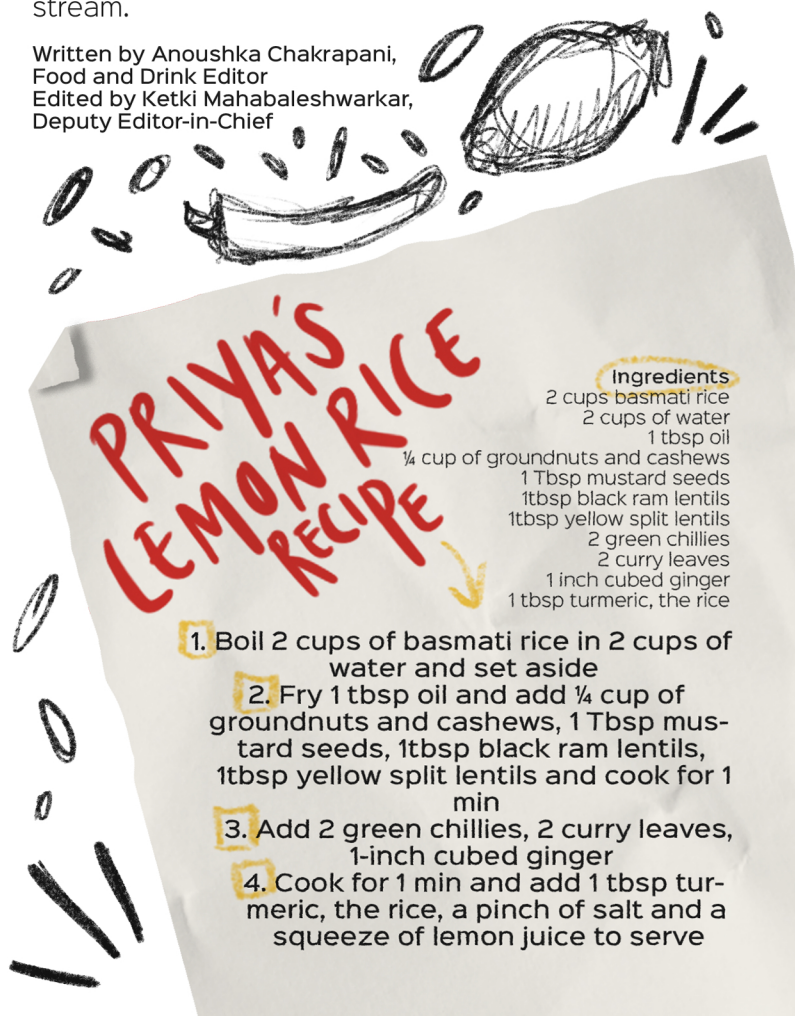
Were there any spots that you visited, or you would recommend for a good takeaway?

'I mean, when we are in London, we definitely visit Dishoom. And then there's this other Sri Lankan restaurant called Hoppers. Actually, I don't have any great spots like, I still need some time to discover them.'

Living with her parents in lockdown has meant a lot of good Tamil cuisine is on the table. Her mother who happens to be vegetarian, cooks the best seafood curries; 'she does a crab curry that's always the highlight of the day. I'm amazed at how Tamil people don't use any tools. To break the crabs, you know they use their fingers. It's some talent, you know.'

When I asked her about any food motifs popping up on her upcoming releases she responded; 'I will keep that as a surprise actually'. Here's hoping that Priya makes the incredibly delicious world of South Indian fast-food of vadas and dosas mainstream.

Written by Anoushka Chakrapani,
Food and Drink Editor
Edited by Ketki Mahabaleshwarkar,
Deputy Editor-in-Chief



Ingredients

2 cups basmati rice
2 cups of water
1 tbsp oil
¼ cup of groundnuts and cashews
1 Tbsp mustard seeds
1tbsp black ram lentils
1tbsp yellow split lentils
2 green chillies
2 curry leaves
1 inch cubed ginger
1 tbsp turmeric, the rice

1. Boil 2 cups of basmati rice in 2 cups of water and set aside
2. Fry 1 tbsp oil and add ¼ cup of groundnuts and cashews, 1 Tbsp mustard seeds, 1tbsp black ram lentils, 1tbsp yellow split lentils and cook for 1 min
3. Add 2 green chillies, 2 curry leaves, 1-inch cubed ginger
4. Cook for 1 min and add 1 tbsp turmeric, the rice, a pinch of salt and a squeeze of lemon juice to serve

BASTILLE ON BE BACK 'ARTS AND CULTURE

In Conversation with
Will Farquarson



ReOrchestrated

ReOrchestrated, a documentary by Bastille, is available to stream now on Amazon Prime Video.

Interview by Emma Short, Music Editor

When Bastille released their third studio album 'Doom Days', they were criss-crossing the globe, playing shows and staying up all night relentlessly. "It's a lifestyle choice," Will Farquarson, their guitarist and bassist, told me. Skip forward eighteen months and now he spends his evenings watching *Gardener's World*. For a band as world-renowned as Bastille, the pandemic has put their hectic lives on standby. Has there been peace in the eye of the storm? Or do they miss playing sold-out shows to crowds of screaming fans? Will shared his experience of lockdown, the damage it's causing to the cultural sector, and how Bastille has held onto their creative spark.

As a band, Bastille must have faced unique challenges in continuing connectivity and collaboration whilst working remotely. How have you overcome these challenges?

Will: It's a miracle of modern technology. We were taking a year off from touring anyway, so we didn't have any live shows, but other bands have started doing live-streamed shows. It's crazy to think that we live in a world where being in a band and touring is even semi-possible without ever having to physically meet up. That's also slightly disconcerting, because maybe we're losing something. The real concern is whether the temporary measures to protect our health will become normalised, so that we lose social contact. That is vital, I think, to human wellbeing.

Is touring something that you miss?

Oh absolutely! We've basically been on tour without more than a couple of months off since 2012. In the beginning, it was actually quite nice to have some time off, because our lives have been so hectic. That lasted about three months and now I'm jumping at the bit to get going again. I've definitely had enough R&R. I think what it's done is reconfirm how much we all love to play. Because our lives have been a blur for ten years, with touring the world and staying up all night, we took that for granted. And now my fiancée and I have been watching *Gardener's World*. That's a very different lifestyle and not really one I'm comfortable with... I can't wait to play for fans again, reconnect with people and play music.

Bastille has been raising awareness about the events sector, its importance to our economy, and its value in life more generally. Could you tell me more about that?

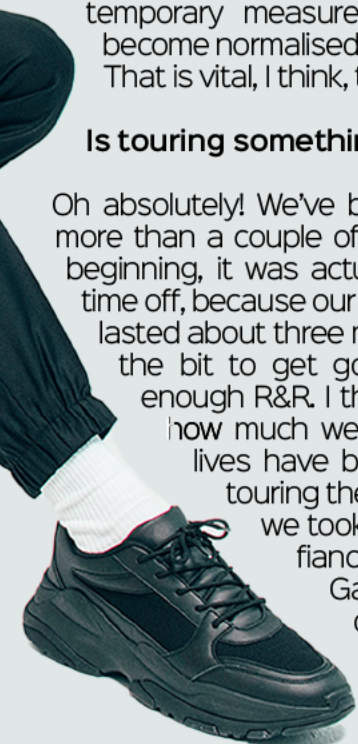
It's incredibly worrying. My concern is not so much for more established artists like us – we can afford a hiatus of one or two years without it being devastating. It's all the people working in the industry, our crew, sound engineers, guitar techs and tour managers, people whose industry has been destroyed and who aren't fortunate enough to have a buffer. It's also heartbreaking to see that those small, local theatres have packed it in because the future is so bleak. There's a danger of losing something very valuable. If you start to lose your art scene, be it theatre, be it music... that's fundamentally important to our culture. In the early stages of any crisis, there's a lot of focus on people's health and the economy, but it can sometimes be overlooked that art and culture are important in themselves, not necessarily in relation to health or money.

Given all of this uncertainty, how are you planning for the future?

In terms of releasing music and the creative side of things, that's one area where we're not too uncertain. Having been in a band for ten years, we're used to having every second of every day mapped out six months in advance, and now no one knows what's going to happen! We had a meeting with our manager the other night and there are a few plans floating around, possible release strategies and touring, but it's all dependent on what happens over the next six months or year. It's a really unique experience for everyone across the world. That's one of the elements that makes this so stressful and difficult; not being sure of the future.

Has this uncertainty and the other challenges you've faced as a band had an impact on your creativity?

The way we work is quite interesting. Dan usually writes the songs alone, but we've had different ways of working on each of our albums. On the first album (*Bad Blood*), we all had jobs and we'd meet after work for rehearsals, which was one way of doing it. We recorded the second album (*Wild World*) on tour. For the last album (*Doom Days*), we took some time out and all got together in the studio in London. And with this EP (*Goosebumps*), we've been emailing ideas to each other, coming up with things at home and scheduling in socially distanced time in the studio. That's been different, but then every time we've made an album has been different. It's a bit of a blessing that we've always worked with Dan as the principal songwriter, as it means the songs are always coming. He just won't stop writing them! So it's been challenging logistically, but I don't think it's been challenging creatively.



“GOODBYE TOPSHOP:

Some of the Nostalgic Trends of the 2010's”

“|

“I'll meet you outside Topshop” is no more. Whether it was the skin-tight disco pants, the ‘GEEK’ tee, or the infamous joni jeans and cropped black pleather jacket combo - Topshop has catered to my fashion needs for almost half of my life. After Phillip Green's Arcadia empire collapsed into administration last year, ASOS has recently taken over as the new owner of Topshop, meaning over 500 stores have closed whilst the fate of the UK highstreet remains ever more precarious.

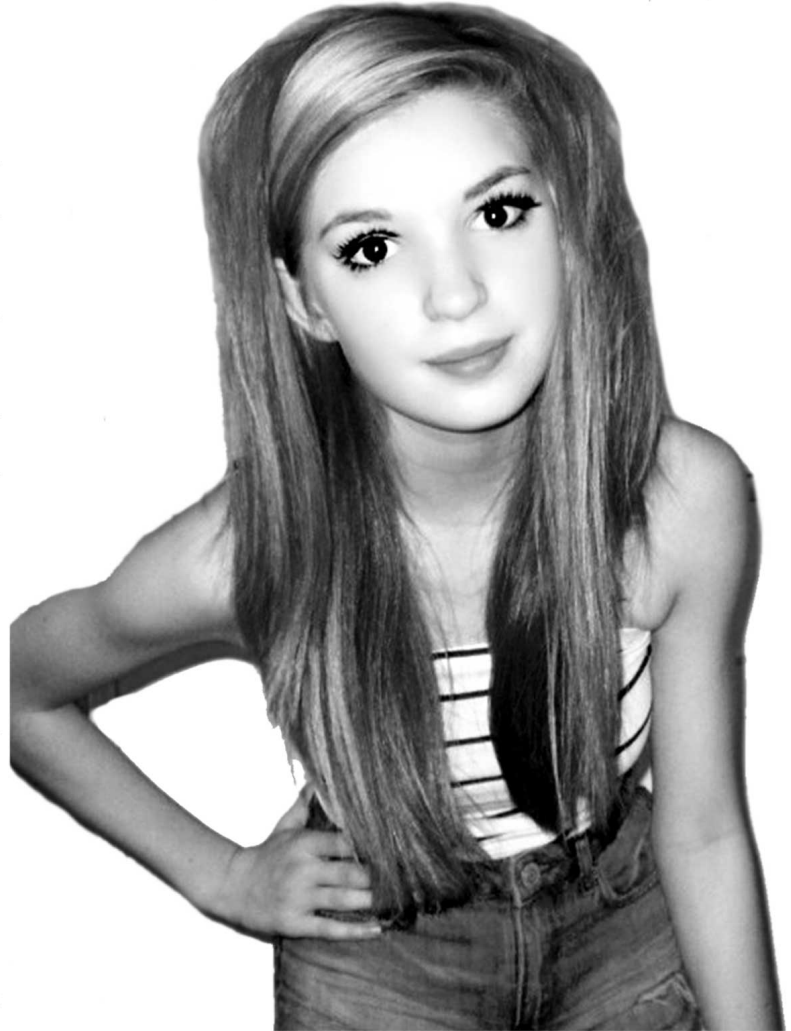
It's a bittersweet breakup. Now knowing it's a company which is deeply unsustainable, exploits factory workers, and has a billionaire retail magnate and alleged bully boss - I'm glad to see its demise. Although, the same can't be said for the thousands of Topshop retail employees who found out they were being made redundant via a Tweet in early February.

But as my seemingly shallow and materialistic mindset attaches emotive memories onto physical shops, (rest in peace Woolworths and Dorothy Perkins), the loss of Topshop from the UK high street is sentimental for many of us whose teenage years were dictated by the trend forecasters at Topshop.

Like a time capsule of memories and trends which has been digitised, that exhilarating feeling of walking into your local Topshop can't be replaced.

The sentiment I attached to this shop, from such a young age, is arguably worrying. Why do specific shops signify such importance to us? Is this a testament to my shameful consumerist tendencies? Or, do I just feel extremely old, now that my favourite teenhood shop has disappeared?

I think it's a combination of factors; the way almost all UK highstreets are designed the same unifies a collective experience among teenagers nationally who hang around the town centre after school and on the weekends. Or perhaps, it's because my generation were the guinea pigs of Facebook and Instagram, where showing off our outfits became second-nature to our online presence as we were sucked into the clutches of commercialism. Nevertheless, Topshop was imprinted in the fabric of my social life from a young age, in similar ways to which the corner shop near secondary school birthed a host of nostalgic memories.



*“I'll meet you
outside
Topshop”*

Possibly the hardest goodbye is to the Oxford Street flagship store, known better as ‘big Topshop’. Nothing is more nostalgic than floating into the store bright-eyed and bushy-tailed on a Saturday afternoon, chin held high and eyes smouldered because (rumour has it), that's where all the model scouts were waiting to pounce on fresh talent. I really thought I had it in the bag.

On arrival, a happy-go-lucky DJ is spinning the decks by the entrance, with a boyband of boyfriends and dads lined up on the sofas to your right. Armed with a chunky compact digital camera to capture the cute outfits and memorable moments, my friends and I were on a mission. This 90,000 square foot store was the terrain which we were about to conquer - the landmark of Oxford street - filled with goodies from overpriced cakes to an extensive sock selection.

My introduction to Topshop started in the ‘petite’ section: the training bra of Topshop, if you will. Still being somewhat adolescent and unable to fit into adult clothes, my mum compromised with my eagerness to wear adult fashion by letting me in through this unique entry point. A trip to Topshop was the top-tier treat and if I was lucky, I sometimes even left the store feeling accomplished having secured the ultimate clout weapon: a £5 crop-top. The next port of call was returning home with my new purchase, setting up my compact camera on timer, getting the shot and finishing the image off with a high-class and beautifully executed Picnik edit (insert eyelashes and airbrush 100X), before debuting this work of art on my Facebook timeline. Like for like!

Here, I would like to pay homage to the

Eight Topshop trends which defined my adolescent years in the 2010s:

1

The Aztec legging

2013 captured in a legging. The Aztec legging is arguably on par with the yin and yang legging and the peace sign legging. Paired with a graphic top such as the 'GEEK' tee or the 'NYPD' sweater, these leggings upgraded the hole-filled H&M black legging into highway fashion luxe. These head turners oozed confidence, it's just a shame everyone else had them too.

3

The (frilly) socks

Socks were so mundane to me before Topshop came into my world. Nothing screamed chic like having a white polyester frill poking out of your school shoe in the summer. Honorary mention to the designers behind the Topshop socks, the grey sparkly mesh socks were the coolest yet most uncomfortable socks I've ever owned - they felt like a scouring pad.

5

The crop-top dynasty

This section of the store was where the magic really happened, so many choices, combos and colourways. My ears pricked up every time I heard Topshop had brought out a new shade of their ribbed crop top. It was a scramble to get the perfect shade of baby blue. Paired with a mid-rise Jamie jean or ultra high-waist Joni jean was the equivalent of today's 'off duty model' aesthetic.

8

The Joni Jean empire

Last but certainly not least: the JJ. The perfect silhouette for a generation of girls first realising the benefits of a high-waisted jean. There was something special about the placement of the back pockets which just spoke to me. A mid-wash blue was a personal favourite, and a white jean paired with a statement black wedge heel made for the perfect house party look.

2

The 2 for 3 deal on knickers

Briefs with slogans like 'LOSER!' on the back, a Disney themed party accompanied by a cheeky lacey number, became the elite present for a friend's birthday come Year 9. Coupled with a Lush bath bomb and a birthstone necklace from Topshop Freedom jewellery made for the perfect DIY gift set. Admittedly, purchasing my first G-string with a pink polka dot design was an anxiety-ridden yet memorable moment. Hiding it scrunched in the back of my drawer for a year, until I had enough courage to try it on however, was much more stressful.



4

The fur trimmed denim jacket and green parka

These jackets gained ascendancy with boys and girls. These two ground-breaking pieces of outerwear made a bad school uniform look even worse. I simply cannot look at a faded green parka ever again.

7

The Peplum top

A peplum paired with disco pants couldn't go wrong. We hadn't seen anything like it before: a top which changed the silhouette of your outfit? I'll have 3 more please!

6

The denim hot pant

These shorts became the most versatile wardrobe item when the first person discovered the art of wearing tights underneath shorts. This foolproof technique reassured mums across the country that our decency was still intact, as the shorts just kept on getting shorter but the tights remained opaque - a crafty and clever strategy.

Farewell Topshop, old friend
Written by: Ellie Muir

Bridging the Gap Between Performative Activism and Ethics

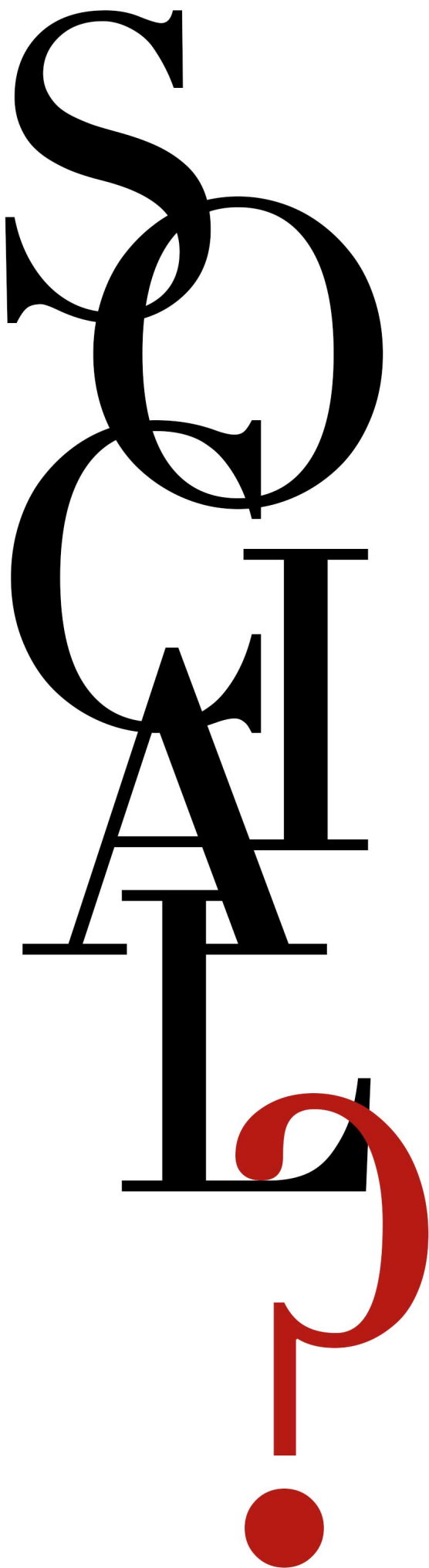
In the age of Instagram infographics, Twitter threads, and general online activism, I'm sure everyone can recognise a brand of politics loosely called 'performative activism.' But what exactly is performative activism? It generally refers to the participation in forms of political advocacy and activity that serve to increase one's social capital, as opposed to genuine action and support for a cause. This brand of politics can be characterised as (frankly) detached from reality, self-interested, and often inconsistent, which can lead it to sometimes stray from our personal ethics.

There is a lot to be said about political approaches that begin and end with hashtags. Perhaps the worst example was #BlackoutTuesday, which intended to raise awareness relating to issues of racial injustice, police violence and criminal justice reform. However, instead of raising awareness, posts relaying further abuses of power by police during protests, information about protest locations and times, and educational material were drowned out by a sea of black screens. Moments of mass support for a cause need substance. In place of substantive claims for change, the #BlackoutTuesday 'movement' enabled people to appear angry and frustrated as a means of acquiring social capital.

Social media posts can be effective in spreading information relating to activism, so long as the information is correct. For example, social media posts concerning the death of Breonna Taylor at the hands of the police were powerful insofar as they garnered increased support for police reform. They were also often rife with misinformation- one such false claim was that Breonna Taylor died while she was asleep. The tendency to lie or not fact-check activist posts discredits the brutality of her killing, making activism which is based on spreading

This tendency toward lying in order to sensationalise stories is indicative of performative activism; sensationalising one's social media posts increases the likelihood of its spread, but the sharing of one's post also aids in boosting one's social capital. More followers, more likes, and more comments about how one is 'fighting the good fight' all results in an egotistical approach to activism, concerned not with the ethics of spreading truth and fighting for justice, but with boosting one's own position in the world.

ETHICS?



“I’d argue that the performative activist ultimately partakes in a kind of political hedonism”

Another issue pertaining to our culture of performative activism is the degree to which it is currently both rewarding and un-challenging to be an ‘activist’. It is easy to post, for example, an infographic about animal abuse and have all of your friends tell you how much they agree that dogs shouldn’t be tortured, neglected, or killed. This degree of empathy seems to stem from imagining that their own pet (or that something equally as cute) should not be subjected to something so awful. However, the degree to which popular culture deems animal abuse abhorrent but is largely averse to vegan (and even vegetarian) lifestyles is the logical conclusion of a politics based on increasing one’s social capital. I’d argue that the performative activist ultimately partakes in a kind of political hedonism. Implicit in every action is the drive toward pleasure, and thus a reluctance toward ethical self-reflection.

Confirmation bias dictates that people search for views that agree with their own. Thus, the performative activists’ need to maximise favourability with followers (and potential followers) incapacitates truly subversive views. Inconsistency and contradiction are permissible within the rubric of this kind of politics, due to its lack of an appeal to underlying principles other than personal pleasure. If lying makes one happy, one ought to lie. If eating animals makes one happy, one ought to eat animals. Pleasure as a driving force for ethical action – which seems to be implicit in the performative activist – is in desperate need of reassessment.

Thus, if we are willing to re-evaluate our ethical positions, perhaps a more interesting question is the extent to which always ‘living one’s principles’ is a feasible possibility. I myself am vegetarian and hope to convert to a vegan lifestyle soon. Even though I enjoy eating animal products, I deem supporting the animal product industry, responsible for the mistreatment and deaths of animals, immoral. However, to what extent should I change my actions in order to stick to my principles? Peter Singer argues that we ought to donate to causes that are preventable through cash injections, to the point in which we are not giving up something of equal moral weight. For example, instead of buying a new phone for £800, we ought to donate that £800 to fight preventable diseases, as the pleasure gained from purchasing a new iPhone is not as important as potentially saving multiple lives. To link this back to online activism, any individual having the means to create political change and believing in politics, but not doing so, is breaching their ethics. Advocacy for a position without action is not only hypocritical, but useless.

It is imperative that we, as individuals, try to figure out what we find immoral, and actively take steps to act in accordance with that. Try to be consistent with your views. If you deem one thing (un)ethical, contemplate how that relates to other areas of your life, i.e. do the ends always justify the means, or is it ever always immoral to do X. If performative activism is appearing to care about an issue for self-gain, then real, ethical activism is attempting to enact positive change through action, regardless of whether it better your own life.

A ROADMAP OF LOCKDOWN FILM & TV

by Juliette Howard and Andriani Scordellis

Tiger King (dir. Eric Goode and Rebecca Chaiklin)

Released on Netflix a little over a week after the announcement of the first lockdown in March 2020, *Tiger King* marked the first true obsession the British (and global) population succumbed to in isolation. The gun wielding, eccentric owner of a big cat zoo in Oklahoma and his soft-spoken, flower crown-sporting rival proved to be as entertaining as they were bizarre, kick starting a culture of jokes, memes, and amazement at the thought that any of it was actually real. It was the perfect dose of peculiar to even out the otherwise bland way of life lockdown had enforced.



Normal People (dir. Lenny Abrahamson and Hettie Macdonald)

BBC Three's most streamed show ever, *Normal People* took over screens in April 2020. Star of lockdown television, it follows tricky relationships, the power of intimacy, and the universal feeling of students trying to navigate through life. One of the most memorable pandemic moments to come out of the show is the hype surrounding a chain that one of the protagonists, Connell, wears. It immediately became a cultural phenomenon, with an Instagram account that has amassed over 175k followers, magazines such as *Tatler* and *Vulture* dedicating articles to it, and ASOS stating that chain sales have gone up by 130 percent since *Normal People's* release. Clearly, pandemic television has us all attempting to recreate our fashion sense for those all-too-important zoom calls.



Bridgerton (created by Chris Van Dusen)

Dubbed "Jane Austen with lots of sex", Netflix's *Bridgerton* was watched by more than 82 million accounts in its first month, making it the streaming service's biggest series ever. The "horny historical romance" (*Entertainment Weekly*) follows the Bridgerton family as they navigate their way through Regency-era English society. There's a surprise pregnancy, a dramatic duel over the honour of protagonist Daphne, a deathbed vow, all occurring within the first few episodes, iconically narrated by Dame Julie Andrews. The show's insane popularity, no doubt helped by the pandemic, continued to grow through social media platforms; creators on TikTok have taken *Bridgerton's* much loved orchestral renditions of Taylor Swift, Celeste and Ariana Grande to create their own Regency-era inspired romances, or just cut together hot edits of the adored Duke. From buying corsets and ball gowns, to creating a trend based on what your *Bridgerton* name would be, the show has certainly solidified its place in the 2020 pandemic television shows that will be remembered.

The Queen's Gambit (dir. Scott Frank)

Released shortly before the second lockdown at the end of 2020, The Queen's Gambit became in just four weeks the most watched scripted miniseries on Netflix to date, depicting a prodigy chess player's journey to the world championships. Much like its protagonist Beth Harmon's ambitious personality, viewers devoured the series with a similar determination, both inspired and captivated by Anya Taylor-Joy's brilliant performance, the stunning decor, and the surprisingly entertaining game of chess. The pandemic had already seen a rise in interest in the game according to The Washington Post, but The Queen's Gambit sparked a mania, with purchases of chess sets and demand for lessons rising noticeably.

Tenet (dir. Christopher Nolan)

Delayed multiple times due to the pandemic, Tenet was the first Hollywood "tent-pole" to be released in cinemas after the first lockdown. Grossing over 360 million dollars, Christopher Nolan's most recent directorial endeavour developed the status of 'cinematic experience', but divided cinema goers, some viewing it as a confusing flop, others praising it for its ambition and complexity. Either way, the movie both bewildered and amused audiences, sparking over the summer intricate fan theories and Kenneth Branagh accent memes alike.

WandaVision (created by Jac Schaeffer)

Marvel's WandaVision, released by Disney+ gained the status of the world's most popular TV show, across all platforms, less than four weeks after its January debut. At a time when we are using TV and film as escapism more than ever, WandaVision has been incredibly well timed. The protagonist, Wanda Maximoff, has made television her life in order to escape the grief of losing her love. However, she doesn't just binge TV, but forces an entire town to enact tributes to different sitcom eras. In each new episode, she quite literally lives inside TV. Many articles have popped up since last March, documenting our viewing and bingeing habits, with one unsurprising trend finding that viewers have been returning to their favourite nostalgic shows, including 90s movies and vintage shows to escape the chaos around us, just like Wanda in the MCU. WandaVision creates a shared meta experience for its viewers and gets as close to a collective viewing experience as we can currently get.

Malcolm & Marie (dir. Sam Levinson)

Filmed in secret, controversial Malcolm & Marie, directed by Sam Levinson, was the first film to be entirely written, produced and shot during the pandemic. Set over the course of one, heated night, the story follows film director Malcolm (John David Washington) and his girlfriend Marie (Zendaya) who after a film premiere in which the former forgot to thank the latter, are forced to confront painful revelations about their relationship. Jealousy, screaming, a tirade about the failure of film critics all combine in this fast-paced chamber play, but the film was met with heavy criticism, many characterising it as a screaming fest without any real depth. Mike Crowley (You'll Probably Agree), however, called it a "decent quarantine capsule", therefore granting it a place on our road map to lockdown television and film.



When we imagine our post-pandemic world, what social, political, and economic landscape do we see? Visions of crowded streets, bustling bars, and thrumming nightlife; a synesthesia of grit, glamour, and nostalgia that will inevitably arise out of a year spent in lockdown. It is the common intention to return to life in 20s with the same vigour that was immortalised by the great writers and artists a century before. Where creativity leads, the world surely follows, and so I wondered who (and what medium) would be at the forefront of the roaring decade to come.

Meet Alya Hatta - 21, an artist and creative visionary in London. She uses the medium of paint, canvas, video, audio design, and 3D software to create her colourful visual landscapes and population simulations. In last summer's Dazed x New Gen Gap campaign, Alya's work was shortlisted out of hundreds of entries; joining a cohort of six visual artists who were then commissioned to create a unique series of work which reinterpreted GAP products. The campaign called for artists to respond to this question brief: "How is *your* world changing post-2020?", and Alya's response was bold, innovative, and refreshingly self-satirical. "Whatever it is", a surrealist dance animation, is a sensory concoction of colour, robotic dance moves, and cubic clothing - so, basically, most of our Instagram feeds right now. Humour aside, Alya's response *is* intended to be deeply critical of our increased dependence on the internet. She told Dazed that in the video, the Covid-compliant group of 5 figures dancing, "perform to elicit a satirical and false sense of unity and positivity that is heavy in today's online and offline atmosphere."

We must then question, not only what our landscape will *look* like, but what kind of agents we will be in inhabiting it. What will be our communal personality? Will there be a homogenisation of art, visual imagery, and social-culture? —admittedly a destination we are slowly seeing social media creep towards day by day. I asked Alya these questions, as we connected last December to talk about her journey as a multi-medium artist, creative, and art student. We spoke about identity, comparison culture in the art community, and how our new digital world is making art more accessible.


Tell me about the start of your journey as an artist – how did you get started? What medium did you use?

Alya: I started very young, when my mum used to send me to art classes. So I was born in Malaysia, but I grew up in Saudi Arabia, Dubai, London, Indonesia — all over the place! I *properly* started doing art in Malaysia due to the nature of my GCSE and A-Level art course where we started off with realism, painting, oil-painting, and then it kind of grew from there! When I came here to England, I had no real concept of what conceptual or fine art was. I was so used to following a particular formula that I learnt in school, and when I did my foundation year. It was very difficult for me to adjust to that kind of painting.

A NEW ARTISTIC LANDSCAPE

In Conversation with Alya Hatta

By Ketki Mahabaleshwarkar



How did your university environment and childhood encourage your creativity?

Actually, what held me back in my foundation year was the environment — it wasn't really stimulating and there was barely any diversity. I guess there's two ways to look at it, because it was positive in the sense that I had time to focus on figuring out who I was as a person. I felt so different due to the cultural and racial differences— but that actually influenced me positively because I started looking at my background and my identity in relation to living in England, coming from an ex-colony in Malaysia. I really got to delve into that, and now being in an environment that has people who openly explore racial politics and identity questions has encouraged me in my own identity journey.

The basis of my work is trying to find out my own practise alongside my own identity. [We started talking about how we both felt too “white” for our respective cultures, yet too “foreign” for British culture.] Maybe the ‘solution’ to that is accepting that I’m an individual that has no borders, but at the same time, I have conflict with that because I understand it is a very privileged position to be in, having experienced so many different countries and cultures.

What is your favourite part of exhibitions, and having your work presented in galleries? Because I know you have done international exhibitions, starting off at 17!

It's interesting, because growing up I was a super ‘straight-As’ kid, so I developed a complex where nothing is ever good enough, or I don't feel, like, proud of myself when I *do* achieve these things. I'm always happy in the moment when I get to share my art, but then in my head I'm like, “okay what's the next thing?; how can I do better?” Being self-critical affects me in good ways *and* bad ways: I'm always pushing myself but I don't really stop and take time to think about what I've accomplished.

I wanted to say congratulations for being one of 6 finalists of the ‘Dazed x Gap New Gen Gap’ initiative! What was that experience like?

Thank you! It was very intense! They sent this email saying that I was the finalist and I didn't even realise that they had already posted about me on their Instagram. I had 2 weeks to produce a final product. Sometimes, with so much stuff going on, it is difficult to feel like the artist is in control. Right now, I'm focused on making the best work that I can in my final year, and these competitions and recognitions are like little boosts of motivation when they do come about.

You choreographed a series of dancers, set amongst a surrealist backdrop of the cosmos and almost psychedelic scenes, for an animated short film: *Whatever it is*. Could you tell me more about the process of imagining and then creating the film?

Because it was the pandemic, I was responding directly to the environment around me, and how I felt during isolation. I guess I wanted to make the project very ‘people-based’. It was weird making the work for a set brief because I don't usually work with another person in mind or to satisfy a specification. It's strange because I feel like what I made was a product — and I've never really thought of my art in that way. But yeah, I wanted to take the GAP clothing and imagine it in a way that was different; I wanted to take liberties with the styling — not just slap a Gap hoodie on something. I really related it to how I was feeling in the pandemic. Admittedly, there was a kind of pressure to make someone happy. I found myself thinking “oh is this edgy enough?; is it cool enough for Dazed?”

My favourite thing about the film is how you satirise the false sense of community we feel in the pandemic, through these popularised Tik-Tok dances and challenges. It almost reminds us of how isolating the whole lockdown experience really was. Do you think there was, and still is, a false sense of positivity and unity?

I'm not that up-to-date with British politics, but just seeing Boris Johnson slap on the ‘rule of 6’ , other catchy slogans, and put a rainbow on the NHS, whilst not actually making the key workers' lives any better, lead me to think of it. I still think there is a sense of false ‘positivity’ and unity, but it's getting better in different ways. After coming back to the studio and seeing some of my friends, I feel like my world has definitely gotten smaller. I basically go back and forth between my home and the studio. But I guess my world has also expanded, because I now have deeper, richer, and closer relationships with the people around me.


Let's talk digital – how do you think technology and mass-digitisation has affected the creative community?

I can only speak on my behalf, but it has definitely opened up so many possibilities, just by going from painting to moving image — there's something about movement and seeing things come to life that painting just can't easily do. Also, in terms of online shows, it's amazing for accessibility, and challenging the notion of ‘who gets to view art?’ Gallery spaces can be daunting and unapproachable, so I think digitising exhibitions has been helpful!

Once you have a laptop, you don't have to spend money repeatedly buying materials. I know the softwares I use; they're all free! Anyone can use it. Digital spaces have also made it easier for artists to share their work with other people, and there's a joy that comes from that!

Do you think social media, like Instagram, is integral in the life of a modern artist?

People mainly contact me through Instagram. So if it didn't exist, a lot of things wouldn't have happened for me. I treat my Instagram 90% like an artist's portfolio, and so, I actually think it's really important for visibility.



Saying that, I also understand that it can be a really toxic place and it opens people up to face so much comparison. You find yourself thinking, “oh this person’s making work, should I also be making work?” I would say: take everything with a pinch of salt. It’s a good tool for visibility, finding other artists and people with similar artists. But I do remind myself to have a disconnect from it because Instagram is not representative of real life...at all. It’s all curated so people can show only what they want to show.

Has your artistic work changed in the past seven months?

My work has gotten richer in what it is about, because like I said, I had the time to do some self-reflection about my identity and where I am in the world, where I want to be. I forced myself to use new digital mediums because I didn’t have access to my usual materials. I now use my time to focus on what I want to do. I think I became a lot more connected to myself over lockdown, and of course, that’s going to translate into the art and make it more meaningful.

I know you share a lot of your 3D and video editing work on Instagram, to produce these larger-than-life landscape illustrations and visuals. Do you have a favourite recent piece?

I really love landscape pieces and population simulation. I recently started making my own music as well! I’m slowly starting to become the artist that I envisioned myself to be, and that’s making me happy! I’m creating my own space and aesthetic. I want my art to be *yummy* lol.

People say “art imitates life” – is this conveyed in your work?

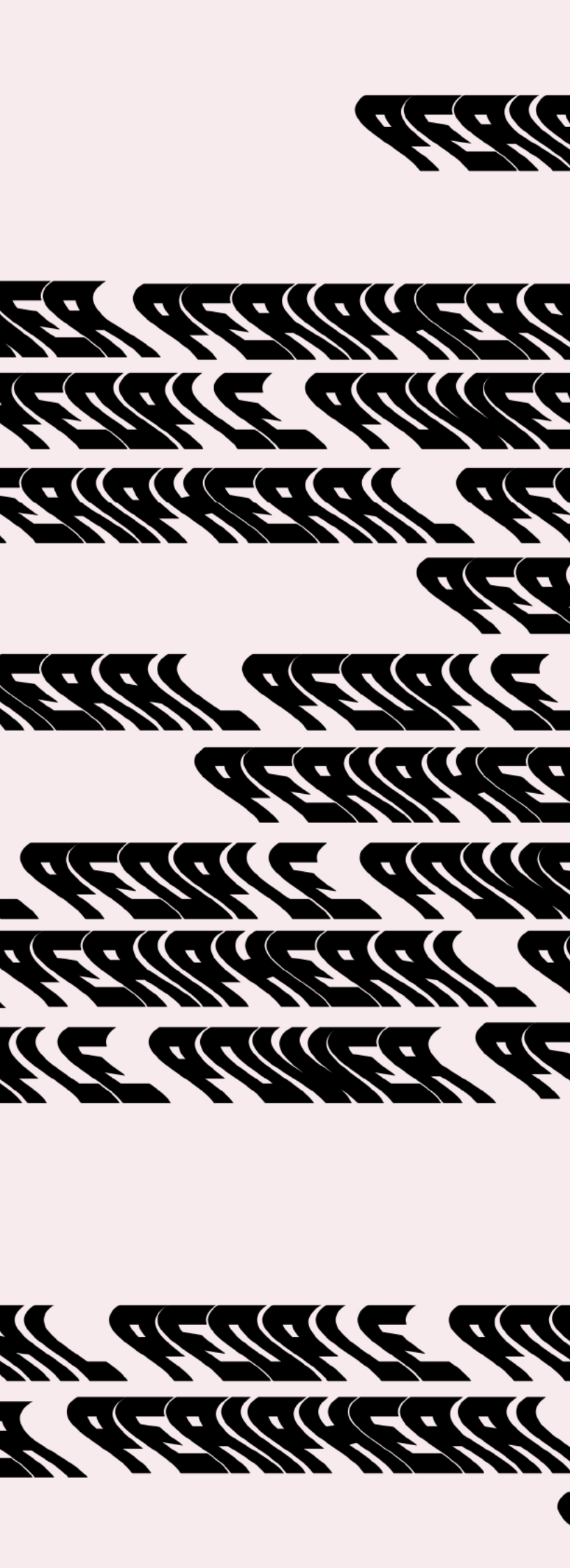
I’m always trying to put myself into the artwork. There’s no separating it. If I have a bad day, and I come into the studio, even the happiest, colourful painting is going to change. My confusion with my identity and stuff creates a disconnect sometimes, so everything I create in the form of art is trying to bridge that gap. I want to be able to put my name on the artwork and say, *this is me*.

You can find Alya’s art on www.hatta.studio and [@alyahatta](https://www.instagram.com/alyahatta) on Instagram.

Image Credits
‘Hieronymus Bosch but it’s the year
3000 and he’s an Asian Woman (me)’
(2020)
Simulation Still by Alya Hatta



"The simulation expresses an attempt for the construction of identity through a Southeast Asian lens, drawing on both cultural and religious influences and internal turmoils experienced as a result of the diaspora I've lived through."



The last few weeks before leaving London last March due to the pandemic, I decided to walk to campus. It took me roughly an hour every morning. I explored tiny, picturesque alleyways and saw the big commercial streets usually full of life and the hectic rushing masses as empty as I had never seen them before. Usually I put my headphones on, listening to forgotten voice messages, talking to my parents, or tuning in on a podcast – there was this constant cloud of productivity shielding me from other people.

One day I passed by a homeless man sitting on a boutique's windowsill and shyly smiled at him, but I did not stop, being in a rush to get to my seminar. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw his crooked smile and that he started talking to me. I walked towards him and offered him money, but he slightly shook his head, continued to smile and started to tell me his story. We stayed there together for a couple of minutes, talking, listening, smiling. People were rushing by, oblivious of our unexpected bond, people just as I had been one of them before. Nothing movie-like happened afterwards. We did not become friends for life, I do not know what he does now, where he is. And yet, in this second, our interaction mattered to both of us.

This is not an essay about interacting with homeless people (even though this topic also deserves more attention). It is an essay on the importance of strangers and acquaintances in our lives. I could have chosen another story: the time I stood in line with friend at Guy's bar and the law student before us was pouring out his heart about how difficult his degree was, the time I sat on a bus and started playing with a toddler who was punching a balloon in my direction, or simply the times walking from lecture to another with people who had not yet and might never become close friends, but nevertheless were part of my daily life making me feel like I belonged.

We all have these stories, sometimes they are not even stories, they are just normalities and yet, we often do not register their importance before they are gone – at least that has been the case for me. When I arrived at home, I was glad to be reunited with my family and later some of my school friends. But the longer the semi-isolation with my exclusively “chosen one's” lasted, the more a feeling of discontent started to creep up which could not be explained by boredom, loneliness or anything else but the fact that all of the sudden sparks of magic I had experienced when sharing kindness with an acquaintance or a stranger, had suddenly vanished. My favourite moment, the surprised and shy smile when greeting someone whom you do not know, was hidden under a mask.

While the importance of close friendships has long been postulated by psychologists and has arrived as a recurring topic in magazines, self-help blogs or books, the power of our weak ties and encounters with strangers has not yet become prominent in research or society in general. This is somewhat surprising as the results of the few existing studies show remarkable results of these casual interactions for our well-being – both mentally and physically, creativity or even job opportunities.

Testing the lung function of 4000 people at the start of their study and four years later, three researchers from the Pennsylvania State University and the Carnegie Mellon university found that the more social roles a person enacted – including both strong tie relations such as friendships or partnerships and weak tie relations such as classmates or yoga partners those to which we have no strong emotional bond – led to a reduction of the age-related decrease in the lung functioning when controlling for other factors. Surprisingly, the weak tie relations – our acquaintances or daily chitchat partners – have just as big an effect as our relationship with our closest friends by encouraging us to lead a healthy lifestyle.

The peripheral people in our lives can be a superpower. Interactions with them, even really short ones, can make our day. Gillian Sandstrom, a researcher from the University of Essex, has conducted a multitude of studies on our interactions with acquaintances, strangers, and our fear of being rejected by them. In 2014, she conducted a study called Social Interactions and Well-Being: The Surprising Power of Weak Ties in which she found that “Students who typically interact with more classmates are happier and experience greater feelings of belonging”, a result she found to be transferable to other demographics.

Other studies, Sandstrom conducted, show that if we treat complete strangers as we would treat our acquaintances rather than being “effective” – non-talkative and rushing things – there is evidence that we are happier following the interaction. She thus encourages people to not only endorse their weak ties but also engage with strangers by sharing her stories of doing this with the hashtag #Talking2Strangers.

With lockdown came an upsurge of statements on the importance of touching, but maybe we have overlooked another just as important source of well-being; the casual, nearly neglectable encounters we have on a daily basis. Our awareness of our weak ties might be low, but they are a crucial path to our happiness. During the isolating pandemic, it has been this path that has been taken away from us nearly completely, leaving us only with the possibility to endorse some online actions: Zoom book clubs or choir meetings or a WhatsApp message to a classmate we sometimes talked to. But when we go for the walk that still is allowed, think of giving them a smile, wave to them or simply wish them an amazing day.

However, we should be hesitant in only pointing at the pandemic as the source of all our problems. The weakening of our weak ties and our interactions with strangers might be a symptom of a much longer enduring pandemic of a society driven by productivity. Replace the mask that is now preventing you from giving the cashier a smile, with your headphones, your hectic race to work or school which are preventing you from allowing for the unexpected moment of kindness. The patterns of productivity and efficiency are far deeper ingrained in our societies today than the new social distancing restrictions temporarily preventing us from the surprise encounters. It needs a re-thinking of our daily habits that we are taught to perform, to be as productive, as successful as Steve Jobs or Jeff Bezos, to ensure that a Covid-free future is also a future of peripheral people power.

Peripheral People Power
by Malina Aniol

Instagram's made-to-order brands: the beginning of the end of fast fashion



by: Bo Nguyen

MaisonCléo

mère et fille

JULIE cotton blouse x1

Details

Fabric - 1,30 m x 10,00	13,00
Time of production - 2,5 hours	37,50
Paypal fees	3,99
Hosting website per item sold	0,30
Country tax	6,50
Marketing fees (shooting,...)	8,00
One scrunchie	5,00
MC net margin	35,71
Packaging with recycled postcard	0,00
Custom with your measurements	0,00
All our love	0,00
Fight against fast fashion actions	0,00

Total €110,00

by Paypal - 6/11/2020



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For me, as I assume for most of us, the COVID-19 lockdown has been a life-changing event, mainly because I was bound to spend more time than ever both inside my home and with myself. And what is a better way to spend that time than to dive into the bottomless pit of content on social media? It wasn't long until I discovered the slow-fashion movement on Instagram. Before I realized it, I had read countless articles and posts on the real costs of our clothing and I began to wonder who was paying the actual price of my three-pound top if I wasn't.

From the day I received my first salary at sixteen until now, I have been a devoted ASOS customer, checking their 'New In' page every day for fresh drops like it was my Twitter feed. Having been a self-confessed online shopaholic for years, it was especially hard for me to admit that I, too, am a culprit in the large-scale societal and environmental damage the fast fashion industry is responsible for. It was a real obsession that even caused me to purchase their Next-Day-Delivery plan last year because I was ordering and returning so many clothes. So, of course, it took me a long time to accept that this wasn't sustainable—neither for the earth nor for myself. I started asking myself many questions:

What if it isn't normal that my shirt costs less than my coffee? How can I preach about feminism when I don't stand up to the exploitation of mainly female garment workers all over the world?



I wasn't putting my money where my mouth was, so I had no choice but to find alternatives. I started looking for solutions where I initially had found the problem: Instagram. This is where I stumbled upon made-to-order labels. Approaching a—to me—completely unknown sphere of fashion, I was filled with scepticism but also great curiosity. Days' worth of scrolling and following was spent on researching. What I found changed the way I approached fashion profoundly. Made-to-order is a concept that follows the zero-waste approach of only supplying where there is demand. The product is only made once it is ordered. Not only does this allow for customization in size and design but also a kind of transparency I never had thought was possible. Because the production chain is so short for small made-to-order businesses, it is really easy to ask about how much work and time is needed to make your clothing and how much it costs. My first purchase was the 'Julie' blouse—110 Euros (100£). Spending 100£ on a blouse was unbelievable to me, but once I saw where the money went, I found it even harder to believe how a blouse could be produced for 5£.

In the world of fast fashion, it is often forgotten that the clothes we wear were designed and made by real people and not machines. Do you know who designed your H&M dress? Where do we draw the line for creative property? By supporting handmade-to-order brands you are not only supporting small businesses, but you are also making sure that an artist—the designer—can keep making art. Instagram allows these designers to directly communicate with their customers to find out what fits, colours and styles they would like to see. This kind of designer-customer communication allows their collections to be more dynamic and responsive to trends than large-scale producers could ever be.

For anyone who wears anything beyond straight sizes (everything that counts as 'plus-size') buying clothes can be a nightmare. Even though there are more labels nowadays who cater to plus-size, the lack of choice is still striking compared to straight-size fashion. Made-to-order fashion could be a feasible solution to this issue as the concept of sizes can be completely dropped when clothing is made to each individual's measurements.

Could made-to-order brands be paving a new path in fashion? Yes. Could they be the future of fashion? No, or at least not exclusively. Made-to-order fashion is not made for everyone. It is made with people in mind who have the funds to invest in their clothes, for people who are looking to wear them for years or who can simply afford to splurge on something that is tailored to them. However, it is not made for people who don't have the funds or who depend on fast fashion being fast and cheap. Made-to-order fashion isn't for everyone just yet and it isn't the all-in-one solution against fast fashion either. Overthrowing the fast fashion industry is impossible when we are not doing it for all bodies and with society's most vulnerable groups in mind. But for those who can afford it, it could be the first step into a more sustainable and inclusive future of fashion. Better fitting clothes while dismantling weight stigma and fatphobia at the same time? Supporting fellow artists while being a part of the long-overdue rebirth of the fashion industry? Sounds like a hell of a deal to me.



Lastly, here are some made-to-order labels I personally support and recommend checking out, IG handle included:

Olivia Rose The Label
(@oliviarosethelabel): FIRST IMAGE
(and image credit, by Marta Ferenc
@martsferenc for Olivia Rose The Label

Elexiay (@elexiay): IMAGE
ABOVE, image by Elexiay

Chalsie Joan (@chalsiejoan):
IMAGE TO THE RIGHT, image
by Marie Jedig @mariejedig for
Chalsie Joan

IMAGE PAGE 2, ORDER FORM
and myself wearing the
'Julie' blouse
by **Maison Cléo**



DEAR DIARY,

FRESHERS HASN'T BEEN WHAT I EXPECTED. WHAT WITH THIS GLOBAL PANDEMIC SITUATION PUTTING A SPIN ON THINGS.

BUT I DID HAVE A PRETTY GOOD TIME, SO NO NEED TO FAKE MISERY. EVEN THE SOCIALLY DISTANCED FRESHERS EVENTS, HAD A BRIGHT SIDE. (IT WAS DEFINITELY SINGING MAMA MIA AT THE TOP OF MY LUNGS

AND WHILE REAL LIFE MIGHT FEEL LIKE ITS HAPPENING BEHIND GLASS AT THE MOMENT, THE MOMENTS YOU EXPERIENCED BEFORE GLASS AREN'T ANY LESS SPECIAL.

AND WHILE MEETING POTENTIAL FRIENDS DIDN'T OCCUR IN CLUB BATHROOMS ~~AT~~ DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVEN'T MADE SOME PRETTY COOL FRIENDS. MIGHT EVEN HAVE BEEN EASIER THIS WAY.

SO REALLY, FRESHERS 2020 HAS BEEN PRETTY COOL.

WITH LOVE ALWAYS,
ANA

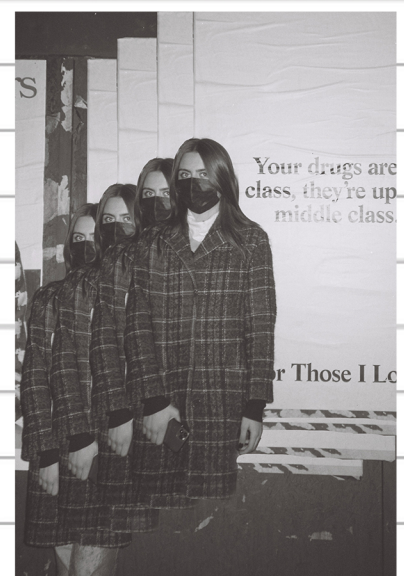


PHOTOS BY
ANA OANCEA

DISTANCED DIARIES: FRESHERS 2020



Freshers 2020



NEW LONDON

By Shreya Sharma, London and Beyond Editor.
Edited by Ketki Mahabaleshwarkar, Deputy Editor-in-Chief.



Before the pandemic hit, I had made extravagant plans to fly out to Japan to celebrate my 21st birthday. Of course, instead of venturing into the late-night streets of Tokyo, I stayed in London and spent it with some of my closest friends and family. By 9pm we were urgently ushered out of the restaurant and for the next 10 minutes we were only able to wander aimlessly in the dark streets hoping we might stumble upon something that was open. This sense of unfamiliarity in a city where I spent most of days made me consider that even without traveling anywhere new, I would have to acclimatize to a **'new London'**.

As someone who isn't a natural homebody but was forced to stay home, I had plenty of time to consider what lockdown would look like beyond London. Since we aren't traveling anywhere now, our city can take some creative inspiration from cities all over the world. I won't be as expectant as to call post Covid-19 London, 'London 2.0' just yet, but after reading about the creative solutions of people celebrating life in lockdown all over the world, I'm feeling more optimistic about what can be done.

With every conversation starting and ending with 'when we get back to the old days' we forget to actually realise what some of the newer days might look like. The notorious sweaty tube journeys, for instance, are something I don't miss. Now I can't even imagine being trampled on, shoved, and squeezed onto the tiny carriage. If I were designing 'London 2.0', maybe the city would finally embody some of the clean, air conditioned and efficient subway systems like in Japan. Continuing to vicariously live out my plans to travel to East Asia, I also wouldn't be opposed to eating my next meal with a stuffed Panda. After Japan, Thailand was next on my list and in Bangkok, restaurants placed a stuffed panda next to customers to enforce social



distancing while allowing people to still eat with their friends and family.

But if you aren't into pandas, there are always restaurants where you can sit next to a balloon pig. While we are still taking tips from creative East Asian approaches, I would also particularly love to see little kids wearing fairy wings in class. In Taiyuan, China, young children wore these wings to help them pract

“WITH EVERY CONVERSATION STARTING AND ENDING WITH ‘*WHEN WE GET BACK TO THE OLD DAYS*’ WE FORGET TO ACTUALLY REALISE WHAT SOME OF THE NEWER DAYS MIGHT ✨ LOOK LIKE.”

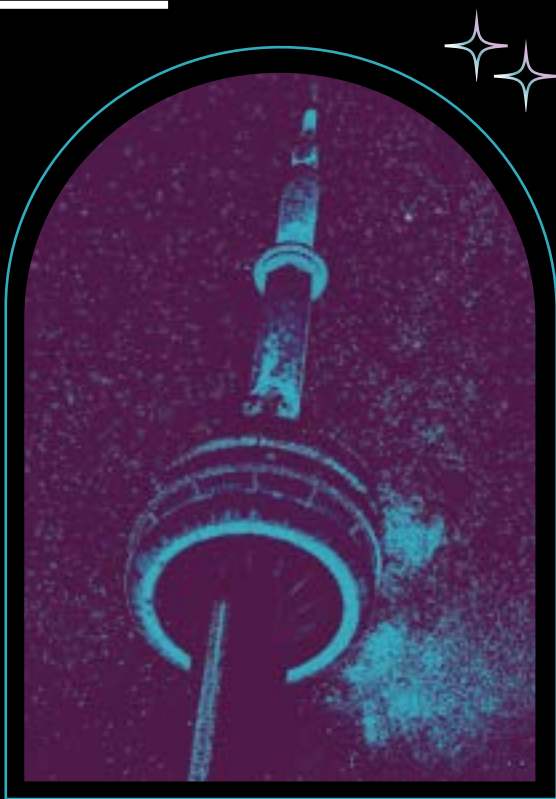
-tice social distancing while making it seem less daunting and pressurising. Granted, this is for children, and even though we are all working from home, in my image of a post-Covid globally constructed London,

children's fairy wings are a strike of creative genius!



If we travel out of East Asia and head straight to New York, maybe the pace of my ‘new London’ will slow down even more, like it did in Domino Park. In the East River in Brooklyn, there were white circles painted in rows on the grass, allowing people to safely see friends and embrace being social again. In fact, in Queen Square, hearts were sprayed onto the grass to encourage social distancing in Bristol as part of a new scheme called ‘Bristol Together’; proving that maybe our city doesn’t have to look halfway across the world to promote post Covid initiatives.

If the East Coast approach isn’t something you can picture in London, our city can certainly take some tips from San Francisco. It’s no secret that homelessness is one of the largest issues and is especially prominent in central London. While many of us struggle to get motivated in the winter and fear to brave the harsh winds for our



daily walks, many of the most vulnerable are left even more alone and in great danger. San Francisco, however, created the first temporary tent camps for homeless people. The local authorities created a socially distanced sleeping area with toilets, hand-washing stations, and even security. Homelessness in the U.K. is nothing new and this initiative is not going to be a long term solution, but the new London I have conjured up would certainly benefit from starting to re-think about homelessness and take a leaf out of San Francisco's book.

Toronto has definitely taken the lead with creative approaches to exercise and wellbeing that we need to see in London immediately! Toronto introduced BubbleYoga, with people taking part in yoga classes in plastic domes.

It was the perfect combination of having your own work-out space while feeling like you're in a class and following an instructor. With each bubble having audio connected directly into the dome, students can bring their own equipment but still feel like part of the group. Come summer time, I would want to see St James Park re-designed to host some Bubble workout classes.

But, if we aren't in a position to go and mingle with real people, we can always take a lesson from Sydney. If we were to head over to the Five Dock Dining Restaurant to pick up a take-away, we would be greeted by cardboard cutouts of people filling up empty seats at the table. Even though the cut-outs were just pictures of people looking down at their phone, the restaurant played tapes of people talking in the background to create a social ambience.

Essentially, as one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world, I would want my version of the new London to be inspired by other countries' creativity. Even though I didn't spend my birthday in Japan or even try a BubbleYoga class, reading about some of the international, artistic, and creative approaches to mundane realities was surprisingly uplifting. While 'London and Beyond' has been much more *London* than 'Beyond' this year, if we incorporate more creative global approaches to our city, I wouldn't mind having to spend another birthday at home.

MAKING THE CITY

Photo taken by Elisa Juri - "Selva 2020"

TRANSNATIONAL DANCE ARTISTS

IN CONVERSATION WITH SHARON MERCADO

By Stephanie Burrell, Dance Editor

Edited by Ketki Mahabaleshwarkar,
Deputy Editor-in-Chief

Capital cities have always been citadels of artistic exchange, network-building, and movement of people. Fast forward to contemporary society, these processes happen at an exhilaratingly expeditious rate. The city is a departure point for conversations, which are ubiquitous in academia and the arts, around global citizenship, transnational operations, and the multiplicity of identity and experience. This phenomena of global interaction is especially pertinent to arts and culture; it brings about inter-cultural understanding and sensitivity, inspiration and also cooperation where resources and money can be shared.

The ubiquity of cultural institutions such as the German Goethe Institut; one here in London as well as panoply of others spanning all the continents, shows that state and private patronage want to facilitate these worldly interconnections and artistic sharing. Such institutions serve as hubs for archiving plural societies, the dissemination of cultural ideas and art, and a guide for individuals to curate and make their own bespoke city experience. While these cultural consuls delineate a map of global citizenship beyond nation-state borders, it's crucial to also examine the individual actors forging their very own international artistic connections. Disrupting the notion of a fixed identity

and living status being exclusive to one country, space, or set of borders. These grass-root innovators fortify international communities and share their nuanced cultural experiences, adding more texture to the metropolis.

An ideal example is dance artist *Sharon Mercado*, born and raised in La Paz, Bolivia, and currently training, teaching, and performing in Berlin. She began her dance training in La Paz, at the age of six, starting with ballet and soon followed by contemporary as well as traditional and popular dances. Now, she is finishing her B.A in programme dance, context, and choreography at the HZT (Inter-Centre University for Dance Berlin). She performed in projects in Bolivia with collectives such as the Wayruru Project, Border Project, and projects in Germany, in which she has collaborated with choreographers and visual artists such as Maque Pereyra and Paola Bascon. The places in which her work has been shown is already extending beyond the borders of Bolivia and Germany, with her choreography having been performed in Coimbra, Lima, and New York. Sharon herself says that her choreographic practice is an autobiographical exercise and therefore, contains traces of her experiences and home cultural practices. Her contemporary dance expression is carving out a traceable network throughout the globe.

The specific hybrid practice is '*Technocumbia*' a community dance practice which Sharon is the creator and practitioner of. A corporeal embodiment of the collision of cultures, migration, and a nod to the urban and rural communities in Bolivia, in which she finds home. It is also a movement practice

that encourages deeper research into the evolution of the variety of Cumbia music sub-genres present throughout Latin America. In summer 2020, she began giving donation-based 'Technocumbia' classes in outdoor public spaces throughout Berlin, again, symbolically sketching out her autographic movement onto Berlin's topography.

This dance practice, whose first class was taught in La Paz in December 2019, is a testament to ideas about transnational interactions between nations, cultures, artists, and people. Paraphrasing Sharon's words, 'Technocumbia' is a practice that combines the movement steps synonymous with European styles of techno music with the movement associated with Latin Cumbia sounds. She is inspired by the forces of resistance and desire for change that these two music styles have their roots in, and wants to embody this through her dance practice. The class is a group practice that trains the body to follow the people around you and heighten your senses to tune into the group rhythm and repetitive actions. Autochthonous communities in Bolivia are a source of inspiration; stamping dance practices such as 'Zapateo' and others found in Quecha and Aymara communities of South America (communities which Sharon belongs to) are fundamental components for her choreographic process. The body, in her 'Technocumbia' class context, is also an archive of urban Bolivian pop culture from the 90s.

'Sábados Populares' was a tv show that documented dance battles between gangs and people from the military service, Sharon unifies all these expressions of the people into her joy-inducing and accessible practice.

Particularly important during a year of separation and distance, Sharon's domestically travelling dance class is an invitation to experience popular Latin culture on the streets of Berlin. Sharon expresses how enjoyable it was to see the Berlin public transfixed by people outwardly displaying joy, *a radical act during such testing times*. The reception at her dance institution was



also positive and feedback from peers encouraged her to teach outside the parameters of the university. Her innovative spirit was also commended and supported by the student dance Biennale in Hamburg in 2020 and she was rewarded a residency with Juanqui Arevalo in Coimbra, Portugal. Her work has reached new audiences through digital mediums. Fans, collaborators, and members of the Latin diaspora in Berlin and beyond, shared her class via social networks. Berlin's international community and art devotees also browsed her online collection of distinctly Bolivian contributions to the Berlin art landscape.

Sharon's journey between La Paz and Berlin is one of transformation. Through this odyssey she has become an agent of identity and cultural exploration; one who is in conversation with trans-continental urban happenings. Her work is defiant against reactionary ideas of closed borders and reduction in diversity. She questions pejorative notions of the immigrant, both in the Americas and Europe. One being negative perceptions of Bolivian economic migrants in Argentina, despite sharing Andean terrain and similar musical expressions. Sharon also understands the hardships and precarity an immigrant in Europe can face.

Sharon and her 'Technocumbia' class puts marginalised cultural contributions at the forefront. Ensuring that voices on the Bolivian periphery are shared globally, her unique dance style chronicles her life as an immigrant in Berlin and boldly accents the ever-changing cosmopolitan Europe, within and beyond institutional limits, carried out with her own perseverance and desire to tell her stories.

ABSENCE/
ABSENCE/

SILENCE/
SILENCE/

SPACE
SPACE

By Godelieve de Bree, Art Editor

Edited by Ketki Mahabaleshwarkar, Deputy Editor-in-Chief

Recently, I read a poem called 'saguaro: trans forms' by tanner menard (it's freely accessible on 'hungermtn.org' – I highly recommend) and I have spent the last few weeks thinking about it. It concerns queer, trans, and indigenous experience and from the title itself,

we see menard experimenting with the deconstruction of language and form to discuss these issues.

It's exquisite. Playing with structure in a thoughtful and engaging way, the poem uses its form to reflect its content perfectly, asking for us to interpret how each of its facets are meant to be read. Speaking of the climate crisis they write: 'it is/ right now right now right/ for indigenous people/ to/ lead/ the fight'; the repetition represents the urgency while the form shifts the emphasis on each individual term, rhyming and punning on 'right' while questioning morality. When reading it, the definitive feature which jumped out to me was white space: using absence it carves out a form that extends out saguaro-like shapes from a central body. The poem looks like it is dripping, degenerating, while still signifying a recognisable shape.

While we tend to think of this kind of formal experimentation as something contemporary, it is so deeply established in language, and more specifically, the art form of poetry. The intersection of visual and linguistic can be traced all the way back to hieroglyphics, but in England, we can see this idea of 'concrete poetry' in the work of the 16th century poet George Herbert. By manipulating white space and line breaks, he constructed poems such as 'The Altar' and 'Easter Wings' which look like their namesake. Despite this broad history of formal experimentation, it was modernism and postmodernism which, in the aftermath of the world wars, deconstructed traditional forms and normalised fragmentation which is definitive of the poetry as we see it today.

It's been on my mind because, despite my absolute commitment to it, I'm a strong believer that language is deeply inadequate and that the only way we can use it constructively is by experimenting with it to try and tease out new and more effective meanings from it. Equally, however, I believe that in order to make language most effective we have to get well acquainted with its opposite: silence. In his essay, 'Functional White: Crafting Space & Silence', Orlando White writes "text sometimes acts as a polarizing filter that darkens the paper and dims the brightness of the page" and this means it is on us to 'to write and un-write and interpret and reinterpret the page through space by making language and silence collaborate.' I reference this because it so deeply highlights the ideas of opposites which I'm concerned with, and how opposites can give themselves to one another through their mutual but contradicting definitions.

The visual is inextricable from poetry. Before we even read such condensed literature like poetry, we are scanning it, approaching it as a kind of image on the page. It has features such as line breaks and white space which signal to us that this is poetry we're about to read. So, how does white space operate? It has two main functions: silence and pause. How these are threaded into the body of the poem influence not only pace but sentiment. While it isn't as easily defined as this, it is more accessible to think of these operating as two aligning functions. That of the space within, and the space that floats around which language carves itself into.

With both of these then, we see a range of techniques used to inject silence into a poem. These include: lines of single words, enjambment, lines with gaping holes in the middle, lines which are gaping holes of silence and many more. For those that read and write poetry I urge you to spend time with these silences, exaggerate them – just as language is a building block for writing, so is its opposite. These spaces intended to be full of nothingness can mean so much: anxiety, hesitation, the difficulty of expression, etc. Meditating on the exact function of these silences can be such a nourishing experience for both processes of reading and writing.

The work of Layli Long Soldier (I recommend looking up Obligations 2), for example, physicalises white space, using it in some of her poems to represent land; text thus becomes a colonising force. This in turn becomes a representation of the violence which white, homogenous American culture has, and continues to, inflict on Native American people. This poem exemplifies effective use of white space. Nine lines long and laid out in the shape of a diamond, it uses silence and repetition to confront the difficulties of uttering the violent history of the US: 'to understand to find to unbraided to accept to question/ the grief the grief the grief the grief'. The gaps between phrases sew this 'inability to articulate' into the very fabric of the poem; silence speaking just as its words do.

Writing is a process of constantly balancing out 'presence' versus 'absence' – whether it be with the information we are conveying or the form we are using to do so. What I'm really trying to explore, though, extends past the experience of writing and rests in the world as we live in it today, where Covid has impacted everything in our lives: relationships, work ethic, and mental health, where everything seems to be defined by absences.

These absences, while painful and persistent, can be illuminating. They can teach us about the difficulties of the human experience while also making us that much more grateful that when presence eventually returns, we will be that much more aware of its meaning.

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