

CHECKS&

BALANCES

Volume 26, Issue 3

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Fabian Rosielle

Chair of the 37th
Clio Board



Dear reader, Clio member,

A very warm welcome to the third and final edition of this year's Checks & Balances magazine. It's been a fantastic year so far, and we hope you've enjoyed it as much as we have.

With a slightly suspicious tan on their cheeks, 45 students find themselves needing to be dragged to their seminars in week two of Q4 once again. A slight scent of Arabic herbs still lingers in their rooms, with their Instagram feeds updated and the shouting of vendors in souks still ringing in their ears. Much can be said of the Faculty of Arts, but their 1.5 week gap around the beginning of each block allows the travel-hungry IR student to satisfy their hunger for at least a few more weeks. With the Travel to Marrakech and Casablanca just in the back of our minds, this edition's theme, 'Foundations', relates well to typical architectural Moroccan styles and techniques.

From afar these mosques and palaces make you dazzle as if struck by the Stendhal syndrome because of their pulchritude and grandiosity. However, these Sagrada Família-esque complex structures become much simpler upon closer inspection, with their arabesque tiles, marbles and pillars that were built on the geometrical rules of At-Tastir, or 'the art of straight lines'.

These rules of symmetry, much in line with this edition of the Checks & Balances Magazine, show you how simplicity can get lost within complexity. I hope that this will provide you with more inspiration and topics to feel passionate about! Finally, a final big thank you to the Editorial Staff of the Checks & Balances magazine for their outstanding hard work and dedication in the past year, leading to the creation of another beautiful new edition - you can be very proud.

Have fun reading and I wish you all a lovely summer break!

On behalf of the 37th Board of Clio and with much love,

Goodbye!

Fabian Rosielle

Chair of the 37th Clio Board

Sam Holm van Donk

Editor-in-Chief



Dear reader,

A keen eye may notice that our cover was made in the style of Piet Mondriaan's abstract compositions. An even keener eye may notice that it contains only the three primary colours, with the addition of sharp black lines. Red, yellow and blue are, of course, the foundations for any other colour, and Mondriaan's works thus present us a masterpiece of simplicity, returning to the most basic elements of colour and design. Interestingly- Mondriaan also inspired Dick Bruna's art style for Nijntje, or Miffy, and this perhaps lends credibility to the recognition that even just simple bold colours, bordered by thick black lines, can go a long, long way in global hearts and minds.

With this final edition of the academic year, we want to return to the basics. To take a look at the simplest elements that make up the foundation on which more complex structures and ideas can take root from. Our articles have been written with this idea in mind, and it's our hope that this can help you to take a moment to reflect on the underlying concepts to ideas that may at first glance seem intensely overwhelming.

Lastly, we want to thank you for sticking with us this year. We've had a blast writing, refining and layouting this year's Checks & Balances magazines, and it's our hope that you all have enjoyed the product we so carefully crafted. After 26 years of publication- first as Brutus, then Storio, and finally settling on Checks & Balances, this magazine has lived through many world-defining events. The millennium shift, 9/11, the 2008 financial crisis, and more recently; the rise and fall of covid-19 and the (re)election of Donald Trump. My own time with Checks comes to an end, but after seeing how this year went, I have no doubt that it'll be around for a long, long time to come, and I'm infinitely curious and excited for what the future holds for Checks, for CLIO, and for international relations as a whole.

So, thank you for picking up this magazine. It's been a pleasure, and from all of us here in the Editorial Staff...

Enjoy this third issue of Checks & Balances.

Sam Holm van Donk

Editor-in-Chief

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Beauty in Control

The Aesthetics of Authoritarian Rule

LEILA RIZKALLAH

Picture this: you walk into a city where every building is tall, white, and identical. The streets are spotless. Everyone's wearing similar types of clothing. No one talks too loud. No one dares to stand out. At first, it's kind of... satisfying? It feels clean, calm, and almost beautiful. Like you've stepped into a Pinterest board or a Wes Anderson film. But then, something starts to feel off and that dreamy vibe starts to feel disturbing. In totalitarian regimes, that picture-perfect aesthetic isn't just for show; it's a tactic.

Symmetry, order, and curated visuals are used to suppress difference, erase individuality, and make it crystal clear who holds the power.

Aesthetics (how things look) can be more than just decoration. In totalitarian regimes, beauty and order are often used as tools of psychological control. When cities, buildings, parades, and even media are perfectly organized and symmetrical, it sends a clear message that everything is under control, and that there is no space for difference. This idea was explored by Walter Benjamin, a German philosopher, who warned about the "aestheticization of politics." He meant that in some systems such as fascism, politics is made to look beautiful and powerful on purpose, to distract people from the lack of freedom underneath. The more impressive the visuals, the harder it becomes to question the system behind them. Visual perfection also makes any difference or disorder stand out. If everyone marches the same and buildings are all uniform, then someone walking out of line or expressing something unique becomes very visible, and therefore easy to punish. We see this in dystopian fiction too. In *The Hunger Games*, the Capitol's extravagant fashion with bright colors, extreme makeup, and futuristic architecture disguises oppression with spectacle, showing how the elite use aesthetics to distract from violence and inequality. Meanwhile, the poorer districts wear plain, colorless clothes and live in decaying environments, visually reinforcing their lack of power and individuality. In these systems, symmetry and order represent "purity" and "unity," while anything messy, colorful, or abstract is seen as dangerous. Art that's emotional, chaotic, or unpredictable is often seen as harmful and a threat be-

cause it encourages individual thinking which is the exact opposite of what a totalitarian regime wants.

In recent history, totalitarian regimes have frequently used architecture and urban planning as silent forms of propaganda; tools to control how people feel and behave in public space. In Nazi Germany, Albert Speer, Adolf Hitler's chief architect, designed enormous buildings strategically meant to intimidate and impress. These structures were so massive that they made ordinary people feel small, reinforcing the idea that the government was powerful and omnipresent. This style is known as monumentalism, a type of architecture that uses extreme size and symmetry to project strength. The same visual logic appeared in propaganda films like *Triumph of the Will*, directed by Leni Riefenstahl, a filmmaker who worked closely with the Nazi regime. Her films used carefully staged marches, camera angles, and perfectly synchronized crowds to create an image of national unity and complete control. Everything was symmetrical, clean, and orderly, designed to make chaos, individuality, and resistance feel out of place. Additionally, in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin, cities were filled with socialist realist architecture: buildings that looked strong, classical, and "heroic." As part of the Soviet government's plan to organize the country more efficiently, all cities were built following the same basic layout and were split into different districts. This wasn't just for convenience, it encouraged conformity by removing individuality from everyday life.

Today, North Korea is one of the clearest examples of how a government can use beauty and order as a way to control people. Under the rule of Kim Jong-un, everything from buildings to parades to TV shows follows a strict, polished style. The goal isn't just to make things look impressive but to make it clear that the government is powerful, and everyone must follow the same rules. One of the most famous examples is the Mass Games, also known as the Arirang Festival. This is a huge event where thousands of people, mostly children, perform dances and gymnastic routines in perfect sync. From above, their movements create giant pictures and patterns, like a living screen. It's beautiful to watch, but it's also carefully controlled. According to Kim Jong-il, the country's former leader, mass gymnastics help train children "to be fully developed commu-

nist people": someone who is strong, disciplined, and completely loyal to the group. In these events, every student must move in perfect sync, knowing that one small mistake can ruin the entire show. This teaches them to put the group above themselves and to follow orders exactly. These performances reflect a core North Korean belief called *ilsim-dangyeol*, which means *single-minded unity*: everyone thinking and acting as one, with no room for individuality.

Moreover, this relation between aesthetics and control is also reflected in many forms of recent media. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the totalitarian regime controls its citizens through visual design such as what people wear. For example, women are forced to wear specific colors based on their roles in society. The Handmaids, who are forced to have children for powerful families, wear red. The wives of the leaders wear blue, and household workers wear green. These color-coded uniforms erase personal identity and make it easy for the regime to label and control people just by how they look, like in many real authoritarian regimes. We also see these patterns in social media. On platforms like Instagram or TikTok, people often create "perfect" versions of their lives: clean rooms, matching outfits, color-coordinated feeds. This is called aesthetic curation, where everything is edited to look just right. While this may seem harmless, it creates pressure to look and live a certain way, pushing people toward sameness. Unlike in a dictatorship, this conformity is voluntary but it still raises the question: when does beauty become a way of controlling how we act, feel, or even see ourselves?

So, what do we make of all this? Beauty isn't always innocent. In fact, in the hands of power, it can become something sharp; something that doesn't just please the eye but disciplines it. Totalitarian regimes have long understood that aesthetics are a silent language. Order, symmetry, and visual perfection aren't just vibes, they're messages. And while it's easy to point fingers at past regimes, it's worth asking: where does this aesthetic obsession show up in our own lives? What systems are we participating in that reward uniformity and punish difference, not through laws or violence, but through visuals and pressure to appear perfect? Whether it's a parade in North Korea or a curated feed on Instagram, the connection between beauty and control is real and

maybe a little closer to home than we think. Who needs a secret surveillance system when you've got peer pressure, ring lights, and an algorithm that rewards beige minimalism?



Beauty isn't always innocent. In fact, in the hands of power, it can become something sharp; something that doesn't just please the eye but disciplines it.

The Road Ahead Is Written in Fiction

A story beyond the page

STEFAN SZEKELY NAGY

Science fiction is not just the art of speculation, but the very architecture of possibility. By imagining other worlds, authors give form to futures we have yet to live. As humanity examines the foundations of innovation, it becomes clear that an element of change in reality is science fiction itself. Where for generations, hard-science fiction has articulated possibilities closely related to real phenomena, often tested at a theoretical level. Jules Verne's 19th-century novels are cited as early examples of this phenomenon.

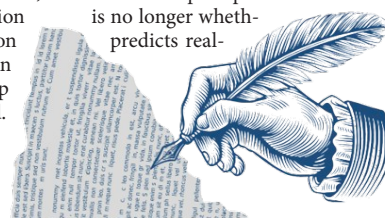
On the website, *Hands on Heritage*, it is said that Verne predicted entire infrastructures of modern life through research on the existing science, in his free time. Verne drew inspiration from scientific journals and his inventor friends. He blended curiosity with experience, grounding his fiction in emerging knowledge and technology. Through this process, Verne extended reality just far enough to provoke real-world experimentation and innovation. *The Nautilus*, a fictional electric submarine, appeared in Verne's fiction decades before modern submarines existed in a practical form, from such a real life experience. But Verne, as the father of science fiction, is only the first stone laid down in a long road of writers.

Isaac Asimov paved this road with more complex questions. He introduced a perspective on new technologies in the future, but also philosophical questions behind such technologies, such as: "How should technology and humanity interface?" Asimov didn't invent today's robots, but imagined human-machine relationships. In his Robot series, Asimov created three laws that shape how we think about AI ethics. His "Three Laws of Robotics" framed early ethical discussions about AI. Asimov's stories gave readers a mental model for what a world integrated with autonomous technology might be. These same mental models remain foundational in academic and design fields that deal with human-robot interaction to this day. Before researching, I doubted sci-fi shaped our future, yet now I'm convinced otherwise. This makes me wonder: what's the real difference between a scientific theory and a sci-fi concept? I find, today, science fiction is no longer just reactive or predictive, but instead a part of our own lives.

As seen by the *MIT Technology Review*, the genre is being used strategically through "science fiction prototyping." Institutions like DARPA, NASA, and MIT are leveraging speculative narratives to explore potential futures before committing to a direction. The influence of science fiction runs so deep, it begins to shape our

reality. Fictional interfaces from *Minority Report* informed actual UX/UI design, and Star Trek's shipboard computer laid groundwork for virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa. Within *The Expanse* TV series, there is a vision of the solar system governed not by a system of magic, but by orbital math and limited fuel. There's no magic gravity, just rotating ships using principles astrophysicists have theorised like the fusion engine. Without a warp drive allowing us to travel freely through the universe like the birds soaring smoothly through our skies, instead there is political tension over scarcity for resources in our solar system. This begs the question: is sci-fi a mirror of reality, a blueprint for it, or perhaps something in-between? Science fiction, then, becomes a kind of thought experiment on a grand scale, one where writers, filmmakers, and audiences collectively explore the possibilities that science and society might unlock. It allows us to confront both the wonders and the dangers of future technologies before they exist, embedding cautionary tales and aspirational dreams into our cultural consciousness. In doing so, it plants seeds of innovation, setting the stage for real-world scientists, engineers, and thinkers to turn fiction into fact. Rather than fitting one role, science fiction occupies a unique space: it both reflects our current hopes and fears and challenges us to reimagine what might be possible. By dramatizing future technologies and societal shifts, it acts as both a warning and an inspiration, sometimes predicting developments, and sometimes creating the desire and direction for the

To this end, I believe that science fiction does not exist to only entertain us in our free time, but actively pushes reality forward through speculation that engages both scientific thought and public imagination. It is an opportunity to test that which cannot be in the physical world. Imaginary worlds give us the freedom to believe, before we achieve in reality. As the technology that we use develops, so too do the stories we tell, and further, the challenges that we have yet to face. Science fiction and humanity's acceptance of it highlight an important interplay between what exists and what could. From Verne's electric submarine or the fusion-driven ships of *The Expanse*, these visions help shape our future. The question is no longer whether science fiction predicts reality, but how often reality ends up following its lead.



A for Effort, E for Execution

How Nutri-Score Failed to Grade Food Right

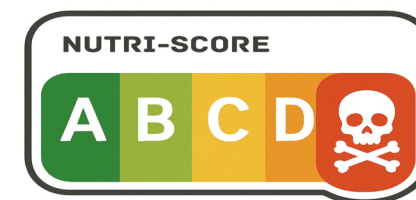
MIGLÉ GIRDAUSKAITĖ

Pop quiz: which option is healthier? Coca-Cola Zero or 100% pure orange juice? Frozen French fries or smoked salmon? Nesquik chocolate cereal or granola with nuts? Surprisingly, the healthier choices are the first ones listed in each pair. This counterintuitive ranking is based on Nutri-Score, a five color nutritional label, which classifies products from A to E (best to worst). While the main goal is to help consumers make informed dietary decisions by simplifying nutritional information, the system has sparked controversy by producing results that often contradict accepted beliefs, leaving many customers more confused about their food options than before.

By reducing complex nutritional profiles to a single letter, the system often distorts reality.

The original Nutri-Score model (now adopted by 6 EU states) was introduced by the French government, utilising the UK Food Standard Agency's concept "model WXYfm" for validating nutrient profiles. The system uses an algorithm to evaluate foods based on both negative components, such as saturated fat, sugar and salt, and positive ones, including vegetables, fruit, protein and fibre. Each nutrient is assigned a numerical value (ranging from 1 to 10 for negative elements, and 1 to 5 for positive ones). The algorithm then deducts positive points from negative ones, resulting in a final score that falls on the continuum between -15 and 40. The higher the number, the worse the product is. This score is then converted into a letter grade (for example, preferable value 'A' has a score < -1) and is placed on the packaging.

But as with any model that reduces complex data into a single score, Nutri-Score's algorithm isn't without its shortcomings. For one, this methodological approach only evaluates food based on 100 grams or milliliters, rather than on typical serving sizes. Thus, certain goods, like olive oil, which is usually consumed in drizzles or small quantities, receives a worse Nutri-Score than something like frozen lasagna, which may be eaten in larger portions and often contains poorer components. In addition, Nutri-Score gives twice the weight to the negative content category in the final score. So even a food like Greek yogurt (rich in positive contents, like protein) may score lower than a sugary fruit snack, simply because of its natural fat content (negative component). Lastly, the algorithm is not programmed to differentiate between naturally occurring sugars and



added ones. As a result, milk and fruit, containing natural sugars, lactose and fructose respectively, are scored the same as sodas, which contain sucrose and dextrose (additives). Even worse, Nutri-Score does not take into account sweeteners, therefore the previously mentioned Coca-Cola Zero, gets a B rating (aka pretty healthy). This algorithmic deficiency also allows food production companies to game regulatory rules and manipulate Nutri-Scores to the detriment of customers.

Flaws of the algorithm reveal a deeper problem with Nutri-Score: the oversimplification. Designed to offer an easy to read color and letter code as a foundation for elementary knowledge on dietary guidelines, the system aims to be accessible and comprehensible to all customers. Yet, misunderstanding ensues when frozen French fries receive a top tier 'A' rating. Such error stems from the metric's lack of transparency, failing to disclose how the scores are achieved. This is done, for example, by calculating categories of "as prepared" (after preparation) and "as sold" (before preparation) the same way. Take instant soup powder: when evaluated "as prepared" with water, it may receive a favorable 'B', due to its diluted sodium and fat content. Yet, if the same product were rated "as sold," in its concentrated powder form, it could drop to a 'D', exposing its high levels of salt and preservatives. This inconsistency can mislead consumers who prepare the product differently as suggested or who assume the rating reflects the product itself, not the serving context.

Ultimately, Nutri-Score does not work. By reducing complex nutritional profiles to a single letter, the system often distorts reality. In its effort to generalize, the label loses efficiency and ability to inform, undermining the very clarity it was designed to deliver. The question now is whether it can be replaced by a more productive alternative, such as the EU Reference Intake or Italian NutriInform Battery. If so, can any algorithm based system truly overcome the challenges inherent in simplifying nutrition?

From Advertising Strategy to Friend

Transcending the Ordinary Borders of Music

ROBYNE KERVER

Music can make us feel connected to one another in a way that rarely happens with anything else. I have never seen a bigger crowd of people cheering and laughing together at the same time except for at a concert. Music gives us meaning, and maybe even more than we'd like to admit. It has a way to tangle itself around every single aspect of our lives and turn it into a soundtrack that follows us along our path of life. Beautiful things never come without a sharp edge, however, which is the same case as with music. It can readily be compared to the moon. The moon is seen very brightly at night, illuminating the sky when the sun is absent. Though we know it's still there, the moon often seems to have disappeared during the day. Music can be just as clear as the moon at night, but also be hidden by the sun or by a cloud, although it is always there.

Music is there for us at the most emotional of events in our lives. Weddings, funerals and birthday parties all mark the pin-pointing of a new step made on this path, or the end of one.

Music becomes a companion that is there for you all along the way, almost seeming to watch and show comfort and support when you age, so you won't have to stand on your own

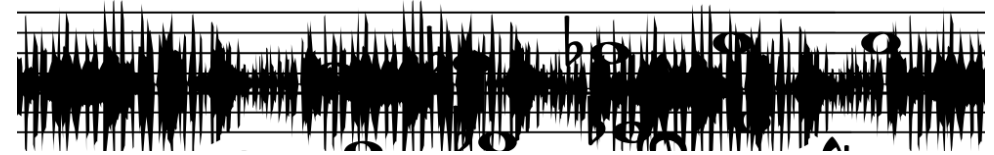
It puts a hand on our backs and confirms the passing of time. However, it is also a sign to forget, get your feet up and dance away. It has a contested binary that might be everything we need on such a night. The heavy emotional weight of realizing that time is floating away establishes the need for a distraction, a way to escape. Music, with its own stories and melodies, drag you away and become a token of safety, of the possibility of fleeing something that we all know exists, but we don't want to face day to day.

Lyrics can be a good example of how music unconsciously trickles into our heads, as the poems of music bring with it knowledge and experiences of relatable events, such as break-ups, feeling misunderstood or the fear of ending up at a dead-end job. It gets so easy

to not notice the experiences you gain from it, because it feels like some stories in songs are things that you've experienced yourself.

You could almost say that it's a form of emotional intelligence, as it gives you advice on how to best act in a situation, or tell you what hasn't worked for others. Music in movies can also be seen as acquiring some deepening element to the atmosphere that the movie aims to provide. In time, after countless movies, music becomes an algorithm, a pattern of emotions to the extent that they do not only reveal certain ambiances, but actively create them. These are the musical parts of life that don't get taken into consideration, but still have a huge impact on our lives. Music allows the creator to evoke strong emotions from the audience, having a very significant impact on the industry.

Though movies have greatly benefitted from the addition of music, it has simultaneously given rise to a threat to objectivity. Films can be altered to fit more adequately within one certain perspective without the viewer explicitly noticing due to this extension. When broadcasting a historical event, where two parties are in conflict, one side can be given more emotional, delicate music during a sad moment whereas more brutal and emotionless music can be heard when the other side is suffering.



This way, when it's done in the dark, filmmakers succeed in manipulating the audience, hence the reason as to why it is important for filmmakers to consider the impact they can make on the audience. Additionally, it is imperative that people don't just believe everything that is shown in a documentary, for emotions can easily be fabricated.

This manipulation can get political, too. Music is frequently used in political campaigns, as evident in the last US elections. Popular celebrities have increasingly gotten involved in US politics because they are such a valuable asset for winning over audiences, and thus imperative tools in political strategies. For instance, Taylor Swift has had a major influence on the outcome of the elections due to her popularity in 2024. Although there are no clear indications of her impact, the day after Taylor endorsed Kamala Harris, 405,999 users visited vote.org, whereas normally the number would average 30,000 a day.

Although there are no clear indications of her impact, the day after Taylor endorsed Kamala Harris, 405,999 users visited vote.org, whereas normally the number would average 30,000 a day. Swift is not the only one succeeding in getting political attention, Beyoncé has attended rallies of Kamala Harris to express her support.

The fact that musicians gain such popularity thanks to their music shows that they can gain a type of political power, which emphasises the influence of music in our global society

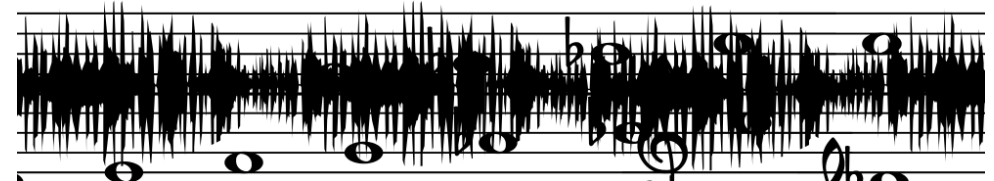
Another way of musical manipulation is the way that retailers adapt their music to effectively increase sales in their stores. The BBC has shown via an experiment



that taste altered according to output, which means that with wine, for example, "soft and mellow music" made the wine also taste more "soft and mellow".

This has to do with the increased use of background music, which changes the way audiences listen to music. Background music is not to be carefully listened to, but just to have on to increase the ambiance. What it does, however, is that it makes us less aware of the music played around us, facilitating ignorance towards the music that we hear. This makes it easier for consumers to be manipulated.

I think that we should not be scared of music turning into a dangerous weapon that will mean the end of our ways of living. Music mostly brings us joy, happiness, comfort and a sense of conviviality. Without it, there would not be as much color in the world as we have now. It stands by us in our best moments, and comforts us in our worst. It makes of life a movie with its own soundtrack, which we can decide ourselves. As long as we are aware that music can sometimes be misleading, it cannot do us too much harm.



Asymmetry of the Flesh

The Violence That Reveals the Architecture of Society

LEILA RIZKALLAH



Cannibalism provokes immediate disgust; an instinctive reaction that places it firmly outside the bounds of acceptable behavior. It's treated as the ultimate taboo, a symbol of total collapse, the point at which society is no longer recognizable. But beneath the shock lies something more compelling; cannibalism doesn't just violate rules, it reveals them. It exposes the delicate foundation of civilization, the systems of restraint, symmetry, and shared meaning that hold us together.

Rather than dismiss it as pure horror or sensationalism, what happens if we treat cannibalism as a lens? Through recent media like *Bones and All* and *Yellowjackets*, we see cannibalism reimagined not as mindless violence, but as a challenge to structure and order. These stories don't just show breakdowns, they ask us what civilization is made of, and what happens when desire, nature, or ritual push past its limits. The result is not just disturbing, it's revealing.

History reflects this unease as well. Accounts of cannibalism during wartime, such as the mass famine in Ukraine from 1930-1933, were recorded with horror. This was not only because of the violence, but because it showed a disintegration of the social fabric. Colonial descriptions of cannibalism in the Americas, Africa, and the Pacific were even more unsettling. These narratives were often exaggerated or invented to justify conquest. They portrayed non-European societies as "uncivilized," using cannibalism to suggest a total lack of moral order. By emphasizing this chaos, they reinforced a clear division between the "civilized" and the "savage," using it to promote and spread the European ideal of civilization.

At its core, society is built on agreements, explicit or implicit, that place the human condition above chaos and instinct. For example, the social contract means we give up certain freedoms in exchange for safety. Religious and moral rules make life feel sacred by setting boundaries, especially when it comes to the body. And things like architecture and symmetry help create order in our surroundings, showing a deep need to organize and protect human life. But cannibalism? It eats through all that (literally and metaphorically). It collapses the distinction between subject and object, between human and commodity. It inverts the sacred: the body, meant to be honored or buried, becomes dinner. This is why it keeps showing up in horror, in myth, in pop culture. Cannibalism isn't just about gore, it reveals how fragile the whole system is, how much of what we call morality is really just consensus and choreography.

Society likes structure; hierarchies, clocks, buildings. We build civilization vertically: higher, faster, better. But cannibalism happens horizontally. It's organic, chaotic, rooted in decay. In the series *Yellowjackets* (2021-), a high school girls' soccer team survives a plane crash and finds themselves stranded deep in the wilderness. As weeks turn into months, the facade of social order starts to crack. The social norms they once relied on begin to fade away, not because they've gone "wild," but because the environment around them simply doesn't care. The forest doesn't rely on structure or meaning; it responds only to hunger and instinct. Unlike civilization, which is built on ideas of justice, balance, and long-term survival, nature operates on a different kind of logic: things live, things die, and eventually, things are consumed. As the girls adjust, cannibalism doesn't come across as madness, but as a response to the harsh, indifferent logic of their environment. The structure of civilization slowly dissolves, replaced by the unsettling awareness that order was never nature's design, and that survival is all they have left.

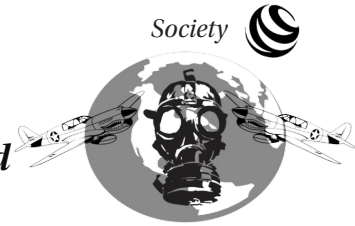
Cannibalism doesn't just violate rules, it reveals them.

In the end, cannibalism sticks with us not just because it's gruesome, but because it pulls back the curtain on everything we take for granted. It shows how thin the line really is between order and chaos, culture and instinct. Maybe that's why we can't stop telling stories about it; not to shock, but to ask what's really holding everything together.

End of the Beginning

War never ends the day victory is declared

ANNIKA KOCH



May 8th, 1945, is the day given by most history textbooks as the end of World War II. The date suggests the conflict's termination, but war never truly ends when the last bullet leaves the barrel and the last signature cements a treaty. War truly ends when those who committed atrocities fully acknowledge their actions and the nation no longer acts out of guilt. Although can this ever be achieved when the guilt of the Nazi's atrocities has been passed down through generations, exhibiting the phenomenon of generational guilt.

Generational guilt is when you feel responsible or ashamed for actions committed by your ancestors, ethnic group or motherland. Hence, it differs from guilt as it goes beyond causing another person pain or transgressing societal norms, and instead conceptualises individuals who tend to internalise a sense of culpability for historical wrongdoings they did not commit.

After WWII, Germany's society was confronted with a moral inheritance that echoes through today's politics and social attitude of the country. While the generation after the war grappled with rebuilding the country physically and economically, the new generations hope to detach their identity from history.

One way in which they've hoped to detach from the history is by examining it through a public debate on the problematic period, also referred to as "Vergangenheitsbewältigung". This debate was meant to solve gaps in information about the conflict. For example, historians traditionally focused on the ruse of Hitler, but never Japan's imperial ambitions. These ambitions are what sociologist Gi-Wook has stated have left a legacy in the Asian Pacific that continues to strain diplomatic relations today. Without addressing the past in its entirety, those who suffered may never receive proper compensation, and those who have offended may never proper-

ly acknowledge the devastation caused by their actions.

Often, the devastation one soldier causes or experiences, they can recover from. The Journal of Behavioural Medicine has found that 80% of people exposed to terrible experiences do in fact recover. Nonetheless, the journal doesn't discuss the effect the war has on the family of a soldier.

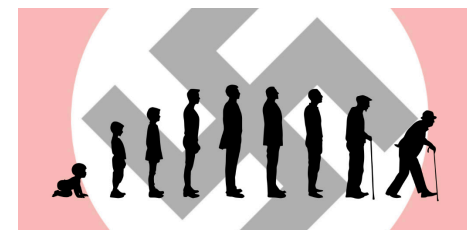
As the great grandchild of a Nazi soldier I believe it is fair to say that the guilt for the atrocities committed didn't end with the death of my great grandparents. It only began.

Even my earliest memory of my great-grandmother was a story about the war. Not one of those heroic ones where she helped hide a Jew from the police, but one about where she acted as a cheerleader for a parade to welcome Hitler to the nearest city. In her eyes, the best day of her life. For a 7-year-old it was simply a story. Moreover, I never met my great-grandfather, and yet all I know is that my great-grandmother kept his silver spoon on the table. It wasn't just any silver spoon. It was the only thing he came back with from Russia following captivity. Detained for "honourably" fighting for his country, according to her. Rightfully deterred from destroying another country with fascism, for me.

Though that's not what the 8-year-old thought. Little me was upset that she never got to meet him. But as I sat in the back of a British history classroom 2 years later, I understood for the first time that my ancestors were not simply compliant in the war; they were complicit.

That realisation has stayed with me ever since. I finally saw the reason why it is compulsory in Bavaria for high school students to visit a concentration camp. To reaffirm guilt in those who, like me, have ancestors who contributed to the suffering of thousands. Guilt, at the end of the day, will act as a deterrent for these kids to express any sort of antisemitism. Nonetheless, this guilt should not have to be felt by the younger German generations. Though with the rise of the AfD, it's necessary to emphasise that while the guilt should be left in the past, the memories should not. Absolve, don't forget. Germany deserves a future in which it has stopped letting the past control its current politics.

As the great grandchild of a Nazi soldier I believe it is fair to say that the guilt for the atrocities committed didn't end with the death of my great grandparents. It only began



Lives of the Forgotten

A Brief Explanation of the Conflict in the DRC

LORIS HAMIOU



In a world of never-ending conflicts, some are largely overlooked. Growing up, I saw some of those conflicts get a lot more international attention, whether in traditional media or in the classroom. Some might even say that those conflicts were taking up too much space in the public sphere, completely erasing some local or international stories considered less marketable.

By that, I do not mean to unnecessarily criticize the media or the school systems, although from my personal experience there is a lot to be done in this area, but rather to raise awareness about the value of human life.

In a utopian world, every conflict would resolve itself without the loss of any human lives. Unfortunately, it appears that we are a long way from reaching that place, as every day thousands of human lives are lost in bloody conflicts, completely forgotten by the international community.

The media are of course not fully responsible for those deaths, but I believe that by publishing relevant articles, they can help shape public opinion, and by extension the political agenda, and it is therefore a moral responsibility for them to not disregard any conflict, as insignificant as it may seem.

Though my voice may not reach far, it is essential to express my concern for the situation in Congo. It is estimated that over 3000 people died, and millions have had to flee since the beginning of 2025. One of the reasons for this lack of interest may be the absence of strategic interests for the European powers. I find it deeply troubling that so many lives are being lost in near total

indifference, simply due to a lack of investment in the country. This inevitably raises the question of the value of human life: should it only be worth saving when there are economic interests at stake? I don't believe so, and that is why I'd like to briefly walk you through the current situation and the latest developments.

The origins of this conflict take root from Congo's neighboring country: Rwanda. From April to June 1994, eight hundred thousand people are killed in events known as the Rwandan genocide. In June, the ethnic group in power, the Hutu, are defeated, and an estimated two million individuals linked to the genocide are forced to flee the country.

These individuals fled to the neighboring country, then known as Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), where they joined the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL). This was a coalition formed to overthrow the sitting president, Mobutu Sese Seko, and while the alliance achieved its main objective, it lasted only a year due to a fallout between the newly installed president, Laurent-Désiré Kabila, and the Rwandan military forces. The Rwandan troops eventually aligned themselves with Kabila's opponents and moved northward, seeking control over the country's vast natural resources.

The situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo is extremely complicated, it is estimated that about a 100 different groups are fighting inside of the country, among them the Rwandan Hutu mentioned above, but also other groups such as the Mars 23rd Movement (M23). The M23 was created in 2012 by a majority of Rwandan Tutsi fighting for the recognition of their rights. In that same year, the M23 took control of a region in the east of the country, North Kivu, along with its capital Goma. Tensions reached a peak, but negotiations continued, and by December, M23 forces withdrew from Goma. However in May 2013 fighting would resume, and a peacekeeping mission was deployed in the region, leading to the M23 officially halting its activities on November 5, 2013.

Despite the M23's defeat, conflict in the region never truly ceased, and evidence suggests the group never fully disbanded. In 2021, the M23 began its resurgence in the DRC. By 2024, it was estimated to control nearly half of North Kivu, and in January 2025, the group re-entered Goma 13 years after first seizing the city.

The situation in the Congo remains extremely tense,



marked by constant troop movements and severe consequences for the civilian population. The M23 stand accused of war crimes and serious human rights violations. According to a UN report, the group killed 131 civilians in a village in North Kivu in 2022. These executions were accompanied by mass rapes, the recruitment of children, and widespread destruction of property. While not officially designated as a terrorist organization, the M23 is widely recognized as a dangerous armed group responsible for grave abuses of human rights.

Finally, the Rwandan government is suspected of secretly funding the group, in addition to providing logistical and financial support. Satellite imagery included in UN reports clearly shows the presence of Rwandan troops on Congolese territory. Numerous eyewitness accounts have corroborated these findings, and ballistic analyses have confirmed that some of the weapons used by M23 fighters are indeed of Rwandan origin. To this day, Rwanda continues to deny any involvement whatsoever.

In this conflict, the first victim is the Congolese people

A total of 7 million people have been displaced, most

of whom live in makeshift camps where access to food and clean water is often extremely limited, and education is nearly non-existent. Hospitals in the region are overwhelmed and can no longer meet the needs of civilians. These dire conditions facilitate the spread of diseases such as cholera and malaria, compounding the crisis of famine and malnutrition.

International aid exists, but remains complicated. Access is restricted as armed groups block roads, and even when aid reaches its destination, it is often looted. Financial aid also exists, coming from countries like France and the United Kingdom; however, corruption and political conflicts of interest limit the effectiveness of the assistance. Finally, NGOs such as Doctors without Borders and Save the Children are active in the region, but their impact is also limited, as workers are often targeted by armed groups.

With this example of the situation in the DRC, I wanted to highlight the value of human life, regardless of the region of conflict. It is unacceptable that more substantial aid is not provided to local populations, who, like all human beings, deserve a living environment that meets their basic needs. I therefore call on the traditional media not to discriminate based on region or economic interests, but to, as I have tried to do, voice their concern about the situation. Moreover, politicians and educators must also take the initiative to address conflicts that are rarely discussed in schools.

Interview with Wongani Grace Taulo

Education = Foundations

VALENTINA TUERO FAJARDO



some of the barriers that prevent so many from reaching their potential, especially girls. My journey led me to work in education, first nationally and later globally, driven by the conviction that education is not only a fundamental right but a powerful tool for transforming lives. Working with UNICEF allowed me to turn that personal drive into global action.

What challenges did you face growing up that shaped your determination to work with an organization like UNICEF?

Wongani Grace Taulo is a seasoned education and gender equity expert with UNICEF, currently working as the Regional Education Adviser for Eastern and Southern Africa. Her work primarily focuses on ensuring inclusive, equitable, and resilient education systems, particularly for children affected by crises.

Can you share a bit about your background and what inspired you to pursue a career in global development and humanitarian work?

I was born and raised in Malawi, and that experience deeply shaped my worldview. Growing up in a context where many children lacked access to basic education, healthcare, or protection, I became aware of

Living in Malawi, I saw firsthand the impacts of poverty and gender inequality on access to education. Girls were often the first to drop out of school during times of crisis, and children with disabilities were invisible in many policy decisions. These early experiences shaped my determination to advocate for inclusive, equitable education systems—designed to leave no child behind. I knew I wanted to be in a position where I could help change the systems that had failed so many of my peers.

What drives you to continue working in this field, and how do you stay motivated during difficult times?

What drives me is the persistent inequal-



What drives me is the persistent inequality and the real, human consequences that come with it. Over 46 million school-aged children in Eastern and Southern Africa are out of school—many due to conflict, poverty, or climate change. It reinforces the urgency of our mission. I stay motivated by remembering that education can be life-saving. A school is more than a place to learn—it's a space for safety, nourishment, and hope. The resilience of children, especially girls who overcame incredible odds just to attend school, keeps me going.

What has been the most fulfilling aspect of your work with UNICEF so far?

One of the most fulfilling aspects has been contributing to the development of climate-resilient and gender-inclusive educa-

tion systems. Whether it's helping countries design education policies that prioritize girls' return to school post-COVID, or integrating climate change education into curricula, it's incredibly rewarding to know that our work influences not just today's outcomes, but future generations. Seeing governments take up these ideas and turn them into action is the most powerful validation of what we do.



Half the Truth, Twice the Assumption

What makes the Image of Twins so Inaccurate?

RUGILĖ GIRDAUSKAITĖ

Poet Henry Sambrooke Leigh once asked “I put this question, fruitlessly, To everyone I knew, What would you do, if you were me, To prove that you were you?” This question constantly haunts one community struggling to present themselves as individuals - twins. The idea of twins is a worn concept: just like old clothes, it has been reused and recycled in countless legends, books and films. Still, this notion continues to captivate societies, as twins are considered either a personification of symmetry; a balance between good and bad in life, or the opposite; them being unnatural species, breaking the laws of nature. Despite the never ending interest in twins, they have yet to be pictured accurately.

Viewed through historical and religious lenses, the portrayal of multiples (two more children born at same time) has been drawn various symbolic forms. In Roman mythology, one of the greatest of twins’ imagery can be Romulus and Remus as deas rival brothers, fatally struggling for power over a city to be known as Rome. Greek mythology, on the other hand, shifted the narrative from competitive brothers to polar opposite pairs. Apollo and Artemis embodied day and night, where Castor and Pollux (otherwise familiar just by one name Dioscuri) symbolized death and immortality. Similarly, in Eastern Asia, Taoists view fraternal twins as epitome of yin and yang - the duality of nature which suggests that balance between two forces (good and bad) is necessary for cosmic harmony. These tales show that a portrait of peaceful and loving siblings is unattainable. Instead, they are parted by fratricide or everlasting separation - highly improbable scenarios rooted in fiction. In spite of stories being myths, these legends set a foundation on how twins are

viewed today: competitive and opposite to each other. This symbolism is curiously universal. In the Baltic region of Europe, pagans believed in Ašvieniai (the divine horse twins of the Sun) that greatly resemble Dioscuri; and below the equator, the Yoruba community in Nigeria respected the religious custom of allowing one twin to starve if he is expected to be evil, thus polarizing siblings by good and bad characteristics.

Some of the touched-upon societies also viewed them as preternatural or cursed, as babies are expected to be born alone. Ironically, this perception is preternatural in itself, as the majority of animals on Earth are born in litters, clutches or groups. Therefore in mammalian terms, being born a singleton is relatively odd. Although these depictions are general and limiting, they set a precedent for certain traditions and attitudes towards twins across the world.

As culture progressed, the image of twins began to deteriorate. Before the 21st century, the topic of twins was mainly raised in folk tales or, later on, in circus shows. But in recent decades, pop culture has caught the virus of including twins into every media. The topics of those portrayals could be summarized in four categories: sexualization, depiction as a single entity, interchangeability and comic relief with a hint of freakishness. While the first category is,

fortunately, an uncommon one, it still appears in Bernardo Bertolucci’s “The Dreamers”, where fraternal twins Isabelle and Theo engage in a sexual relationship. Such a film plot is outrageous, as it normalizes this otherwise counter-intuitive affair, which blurs moral boundaries. Songs, such as Travis Scott’s “Topia Twins” or Doja Cat’s “Tia Tamera”, where twins are portrayed together in a

sexual tone are just a few examples of this normalization.

The remaining categories are more prevalent in our culture. A misconception that twins are made of two bodies, but one soul or heart can be seen in books, such as William Golding’s “Lord of the Flies”, or films, like “Memento” by Christopher Nolan. In the former work, twins Sam and Eric are pictured as so inseparable that other characters combined their names and addressed brothers as “Samneric”. To add, Sam and Eric were unusually attached, thus only speaking together at the same time. Twins do experience separation anxiety, as they have created a deep psychological bond through the shared tiny space in the mother’s womb. Nonetheless, Golding creates a false impression and reiterates the myth that siblings cannot spend time apart. Such an image can influence the general public, and especially twins, into believing that they are incomplete without the other half.

Another pervasive stereotype closely tied to twin identities is the notion of interchangeability and lack of individuality. There is a widespread assumption that twins are inherently identical. As a result, they must share not only physical traits but also dress, accessorize, behave, talk and even think alike. In reality, the majority (70%) of twins are fraternal (opposite to identical), and while they may share some personality traits from nurture and upbringing, their identities are shaped through unique personal experiences. Yet, mainstream media and fashion campaigns, such as “The Parent Trap”, “The Simpsons” and Alessandro Michele’s Spring/Summer 2023 Gucci Twinsburg Show, repeatedly misrepresent twin characters and models as flat, mirrored and personality-less. In these pictures, twin characters Annie and Hallie (whose rhyming names follow Hollywood’s silent rule of comedic twin tropes) are portrayed as so alike that they successfully deceive even their own parents into thinking they are different people. While twins themselves are aware of their differences, such portrayal of multiples confuses the audience. It rejects the reality of divergent twin personalities, and sometimes even breaks the physical barrier among twins, leading to persistent confusion.

Lastly, a manner which flattens twins into one-dimensional characters is illustrating them as a laughing matter. The very concept of multiples is absurd in itself: two exactly identical people born at the same time. Pop culture often leans to highlight this ridiculousness by assigning twins to secondary comedic roles, rather than offering them deeper, sincere primary parts. J.K. Rowling’s twins Fred and George Weasley and Lewis Carroll’s Tweedledee and Tweedledum exemplify this tendency. These characters suggest that twins are incapable of existing beyond the surface, but are only able to prank others, act naive or embody nonsense. By reducing twins to comic relief, pop culture weakens their image

as sensible and emotional beings. They reinforce this stereotype of multiples existing entirely for entertainment, abandoning the opportunity of framing them as complex individuals.

From ancient mythology to modern media, themes of cosmic duality, absurdity or comedy have been embodied by twins. This embodiment softens the true image of siblings to simple tropes, such as the double trouble or the funny duo, never as original or intelligent human beings. It is important to acknowledge that the mentioned portrayals are not necessarily right or wrong. Some twins, like any other siblings, do enjoy making jokes or wear matching outfits. The issue with creating a fixed attitude towards twins is forcing them into strict boundaries and raising high expectations on how they should truly behave. As long as society continues to recycle these expectations, twins will continue to feel ostracized from the rest of sibling pairs.





Defining the Dutch

Values & Symbolism in National Identity

ROBYNE KERVER & SAM HOLM VAN DONK

National identity is a notably tricky concept to get a feel for. Countless variations of objects, songs and sentiments, seemingly without significance, manage to shape the social cohesion of a nation. The Netherlands, known for windmills, tulips and weed, is not an exception. When looking at what defines such an identity, narratives often circle around two concepts: values and symbols. The Netherlands certainly represents and is embodied by both. Here, we are curious whether symbols are a better reflection of their national identity, or if underlying cultural values make Dutch people feel more connected with their country.



Individualism

The Dutch tend to value their individualism. This is seen in various contexts, such as the unlikeliness of getting approached by a stranger on the street. It is very rare to see a person not minding their own business on the bus, the train, or simply out in public. This value is also demonstrated in the way that people keep a certain distance from one another, even as friends. The ability to be on your own is both expected and respected, and no one is to take care of you but yourself. Help is allowed, of course, but no one can solve your problem for you. Unfortunately, there are topics that Dutchies would rather not talk about in public, often related to mental health or other medical inconveniences. This type of individualism could be seen as a flaw of society, as this silence may have negative effects. This ambiguous aspect of individualism seeps through the very essence of what constructs the Dutch identity.

Art



Dutch art can be seen as a symbolic reflection of this individualism. De Stijl is a notable art movement, founded by a group of painters and architects in 1917. It stands out for its minimal use of colour, preferring only primary colours, and sharp, distinct angles in its design. The movement is so unique that a certain culture of individualism- doing your own thing- is necessary for such zany ideas to see the light of day. Nijntje is directly inspired from these design principles (though with rounder lines and a slightly wider colour palette) and spawned a world of clones and inspirations- most notably Hello Kitty. Viewed through the lens of colour analysis, the colour orange is a tremendous hint towards a culture where one sets oneself apart. No other country uses orange as a national colour, as the dye tends to fade over time, and so the colour has become synonymous with Dutch royalty, Dutch football, and Dutch identity. In short- individualism as an underlying trait means nothing if not expressed, visualised and immortalised through works of design and colour.



Tolerance/Multiculturalism

Tolerance is a recurring theme in Dutch history. During the Golden Age, mostly religious refugees found their new home in the Netherlands. This was a rare situation in Europe during the 17th century, when Dutch citizens could enjoy freedom of conscience, and by extension religion, albeit silently. Some of this tolerance can still be seen today, as the Netherlands has built up a rich multicultural society where most people are accepted. However, there have emerged some anti-immigration policies and campaigns that go against this value. Geert Wilders and his party of freedom have especially turned this country into a significantly-less-tolerant one. This immigration backlash concerns itself, among other things, with the preservation of Dutch culture. This is then said to be disappearing due to the multicultural society. Despite the country having in some aspects become less tolerant, it is still visible in other areas, namely for their tolerance of soft drugs, particularly weed. Coffee shops are permitted to sell small amounts of weed to consumers, something that is rarely allowed in other countries. This is one of the reasons why the Netherlands is still considered a tolerant country.



Tools, not Values



This multiculturalism is no surprise given its merchant history. In the 17th century, the Netherlands was a naval superpower, allowing its coastal cities to develop into rich hubs of trade and cultural exchange. This is best shown through another vibrant symbol of Dutchness- the tulip. Originally from the near East and Central Asia, the tulip was introduced to Northern Europe when Dutch merchants brought them back from their trade routes with the Ottoman empire. They quickly became a sought-after commodity, arousing tulip-mania in upperclass Europeans at the time. They were later commonly portrayed in golden age paintings, and became strongly associated with the Netherlands. It should also be no surprise that the country has one of the highest English-speaking rates in the world. Language has always been merely a tool for trade and business, not a symbolic action with strong values attached. Therefore, multilingualism became a sought-after and appreciated skill for jobseekers in the merchant economy.



Practicality

Another aspect that the country is (in)famous for, is its practicality. The Dutch are very straightforward in expressing what they want from you, and what they don't want. They do not make things complicated with expressive language, because that would be inconvenient. Money is another element where this fact becomes clear. Dutch people are perceived to be very stingy, always alert to save money. That is why sales in the local Albert Heijn often sell out, and why their BONUS is so successful. The Dutch will go to extreme lengths to save money, and they do not like wasting time that they could otherwise spend enjoying the sun or drinking a cold beer.

Polders



The product of Dutch practicality is perhaps the most-well known symbol for the country: its many dykes, polders and canals, artificially shaping its water to literally carve a nation out of the sea. It is similarly reflected in clothing, featuring simplistic design that is foremost practical (and often bought on discount). The bike is likewise a strong symbol of Dutch values. As a vehicle, it is humble, cheap and practical- perfect for the narrow streets often lining the canals throughout the country.

Having placed such immense faith in waterworks, even letting it define an aspect of national identity, what does it mean when these systems fail? In 1953, an existential threat loomed over the southern provinces of the country, in what became known as the north sea flood. Known in Dutch as the traumatic watersnoodramp, this event was caused by a major storm hitting the sea defences of Zeeland on the night to February 1st. The dams and dykes would fail, following relentless pummeling by wind and sea. The results were devastating- thousands were killed, hundreds of thousands found themselves homeless in a single night, and 9% of Dutch farmland was underwater. Not only was this a destructive catastrophe, but an event that challenged what it meant to be Dutch. The country doubled down, and after coming together in solidarity to house these internal refugees, the government conceived the Delta works, beginning in 1960. An ambitious flood defence system of dams, sluices, locks, dykes, levees, and storm surge barriers, it was the most intensive water defense works in the world. Faced with destruction of this caliber, the Dutch nation was able to heal- not only materially, but heal its existentially threatened identity by doubling down on that which forces pride into the heart of every Dutchie. The unending fight against the sea. The fight that makes the Dutchman Dutch and unites a nation, from early land reclamation in the 14th century, to this day today.

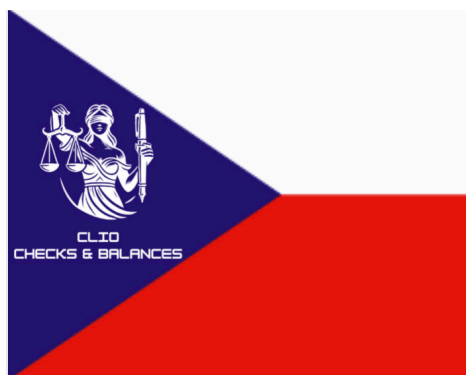




Behind a Name

Czechia's troubled naming

SAM HOLM VAN DONK



To the west of Germany, a small landlocked republic struggles to maintain a consistent naming policy. Česko, Česká Republika, Tschechien, Tschechische Republik, Czechoslovakia, (Kingdom of) Bohemia, Czechia and the Czech Republic have all been used to refer to this country by its inhabitants throughout history. This is understandably a cause for concern, especially when an acknowledgement of its 'real' name is lost. So why the bewildering array of choices?

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic officially recommends the name of *Czechia* for use in an international context. While the Czech name *Česko* gradually became used after the break-up of the former Czechoslovakia, foreign-language translations of this name often preferred describing it as the *Czech Republic*, perhaps to highlight the new political nature of the country. The Ministry does, however, note that the short name *Czechia* (and its translations to all languages) is just as correct as the formal name *Czech Republic*, but also that the short form should be used where the formal name is not required. It's all rather confusing, but the main message stands clear: *Czechia* is preferred by the *Czech* government.

Now the following question- why include the German names? Historically, a substantial number of German speakers called *Czechia* home. They began settling in Bohemian crown lands in the late 12th and 13th centuries, which was further encouraged under Austrian rule, when much of what is now modern-day *Czechia* was administered from Vienna. This would promote an influx of German settlers well into the 19th century. Later on, their presence (at around 25% of the country) was politicised as Sudeten Germans, ultimately

being used to justify a German annexation of Sudetenland under the Third Reich. Most were expelled from Czechoslovakia after the war, and today only 0.4% of Czech citizens declare German ethnicity.

We also touched on another name- Bohemia. This was the name of the corresponding territory since the 9th century founding of the Duchy of Bohemia. The land was known as the Lands of the Bohemian Crown for hundreds of years, before it was integrated into the Habsburg monarchy, and with the rise of Czech nationalism in the 19th century, became known as *Česko*.

In 1918, during the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy at the end of World War I, the independent republic of Czechoslovakia was created with Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk in the lead, incorporating the land of the Bohemian Crown. It achieved its name quite intuitively, being a portmanteau of *Czechia* and *Slovakia*. This name was rather ahistorical, and as we know, the state ultimately collapsed in 1922.

Czechia was not chosen by chance as the focus of this edition's country zoom. In February, the Editorial Staff had the chance to visit the country's capital altogether, resulting in a lovely extended weekend in the still-snowy cityscape. With this, we would all like to say thank you, and goodbye. Thanks for sticking with us, and we hope you've enjoyed the magazine as much as we have :)



Most of the committee is pictured here by the side of the famous Charles Bridge in Prague. Not shown are Robyne and Rugilë.

The Pursuit of Knowledge

The Dilemma of studying IR

IRSP COMMITTEE

We, IR students, are constantly confronted with our workload being centered on analyzing texts and ideas of authors in an attempt to produce our own. The pursuit of knowledge, and subsequent knowledge creation is considered academic virtues. But at times, an attempt at advancing academics might cause ethical friction. This is where the objective of knowledge creation, often abstract and distant, collides with the real world, almost resembling a Platonic doctrine, where the only aspect that matters is the attainment of truth. Begging the question, should knowledge pursuit prevail above ethical consideration? This was the dilemma we, IRSP, faced in our last trip to Sicily. A region in the southernmost part of Italy that is at the forefront of European immigration.

Once this destination for the trip was decided and the tickets were booked, I remember how we discussed the implications of the ongoing events in the Mediterranean. As IR students, we feel deeply intrigued and worried by the ongoing situation in Europe's southern regions when it comes to migration. The contentious issue of dealing with humans, ideals and moral values, and on the other hand practical limitations and a surge in populist anti-immigrant rhetoric, materializes in places like Sicily. This is where an often-abstracted phenomenon like the 'refugee crisis' vividly comes to life, in people, real people.

Informed by the Platonic notion of a pursuit of knowledge, the idea was coined to make an attempt at visiting an NGO and interviewing immigrants. Nonetheless, we started to recognise what was happening a day before the visit was planned. Some of our members began to express discomfort about the idea of visiting an immigration centre. We began to question whether it was appropriate for us to turn people's trauma into a learning experience. Conversations shifted from curiosity and academic interest to ethical doubts and personal unease. The moral dilemma grew heavier as we realised we might be crossing a line between awareness and intrusion. Who were we, as bachelor's and master's students, to come to their house and ask them potentially uncomfortable questions? Different arguments were put forward. On the one hand, there was the notion of collecting information on a controversial issue. The idea of using this information to promote the issue and aid the migrant community in advancing their case. On the other hand, we were reminded of the incredibly sensitive nature of the matter. From our privileged position, we would be forcing these people, who never



asked, to revisit the most traumatised moment of their lives. And for what, we could not promise them any of this new suffering would bring more than us being more aware of a reality we already partially imagined.

We began to question whether it was appropriate for us to turn people's trauma into a learning experience.

In the end, the contentious nature of our dilemma made us decide not to go. However to this day, I wonder whether the decision we took was the right one. There is no single best answer to the question. However, the thought that prevails in my head, is one of a missed chance.

Recognizing our positionality in our cozy university bubbles, where international misfortunes are superficially discussed and real life issues abstracted into policy equations, we might want to give more weight to the voices of those that experienced it, and as a result, include them in the conversation.



All Quiet on the Eastern Front

Trump's redefinition of NATO's Eastern Flank

SIBYLLE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Trump - a name not only repeated by the media countless times in recent months but also by world politicians. His return to the White House has triggered a reevaluation of key U.S. policy sectors, including its commitment to NATO's Eastern Flank. A commitment that appeared ironclad under Biden's administration in 2022, when Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine. Now, Eastern European allies are holding their breath as Trump decides whether to continue funding defence strategies in the region, or withdraw his support entirely.

Yet Europe should not panic. The region has become essential for American defence firms and a bulwark against Russian aggression. Therefore, while Trump enjoys the personal and political benefits of stationing troops in Eastern Europe, it must be acknowledged that this has led to the region's reliance on U.S. economic and military support. That support, however, may hinge less on alliance loyalty and more on strategic calculus and economic incentives.

Where do we stand now?

The U.S. military presence remains strong. According to the United States European Command (EUCOM), around 85,000 U.S. servicemen are stationed in European NATO countries, with approximately 20,000 in Eastern flank nations including Poland, Romania, and the Baltic States. Despite Trump's rhetoric questioning NATO's relevance, the actual posture reflects continuity or even escalation.

President Biden reaffirmed this commitment during the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, announcing the establishment of a permanent U.S. Army V Corps headquarters in Poland - the first permanent American base on NATO's Eastern Flank.

But those pledges were made under Biden. Now, with Trump back in power - a man who once claimed that NATO members wouldn't defend the U.S. if roles were reversed - uncertainty looms. Still, a full U.S. pull appears unlikely. Trump's critiques of NATO spend haven't erased the deeper network of U.S. deployment infrastructure, and bilateral agreements that form backbone of Eastern European defense.

Why the U.S. will stick around

First, the U.S. defense industry would lose a key revenue stream. In March 2025, Poland signed a nearly \$2 billion deal with the U.S. for Patriot missile support. In November 2024, Romania agreed to buy F-16 fighters and later approved a plan to purchase 48 F-35 aircraft. Meanwhile, Lithuania struck a deal with U.S. defense firm Northrop Grumman to produce medium-caliber ammunition domestically.

These deals show that the change in administration hasn't dampened military procurement. U.S. manufacturers gain reliable markets, and buyer states bolster their defensive capabilities.

Trump has also publicly confirmed that Article 5 of the NATO treaty still holds. Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski welcomed this in April, stating, "It is good that the new administration is discovering that allies are assets, not liabilities."

This slow optimism - especially from key allies like Poland - may stem from Trump's failed attempts at rapprochement with Putin. The lack of progress on ceasefires or Black Sea negotiations shows Putin's unwillingness to compromise, forcing Trump to reassess his strategy.

Now, Trump might have to abandon his appeasement stance and double down on deterrence, echoing his predecessor's posture. Reaffirming NATO's strength in the East could be a strategic move to regain credibility - and maybe even aim for that Nobel Peace Prize he's always coveted, already being nominated for the prize by his fellow congressman Darrel Issa.

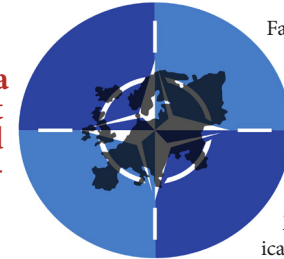


The new reality

As European leaders recover from initial fears of an American withdrawal, a new reality has emerged: not retreat, but quiet continuity. America's economic and strategic interests in the region have proven stronger than ideological shifts. Trump is guided not just by policy instincts but also by the reality that the Eastern Flank is vital to U.S. defense exports and leverage against Russia.

While Trump may cast this as American generosity, the real driver is Putin's obstinance. The lack of diplomatic breakthroughs has pushed Trump back into NATO's arms - albeit reluctantly.

What once seemed like a potential abandonment has now transformed into a grudging continuation of support.



Still, the support feels conditional. European leaders can rest for now, but how long they can count on U.S. backing remains unclear. Trump's skepticism toward NATO and tilt toward isolationism continues to cast a long shadow.

What if the U.S. pulls out?

The Trump administration has reignited debates about NATO's future. The colder, calculated diplomacy of previous decades has been replaced by erratic, confrontational messaging. The administration has warned to Russia in international forums and openly criticized Europe's defense investments - and even liberal values.

Hints of a troop withdrawal have returned. There are reports that the Pentagon is considering moving 10,000 troops out of Eastern Europe, stoking fears across NATO's front lines. Accurate predictions are hard to make, but two key scenarios appear plausible:

Scenario 1: A "Tit for Tat" Deal-Based Approach

In this case, the U.S. would favor bilateral defense agreements over multilateral NATO frameworks. It would reward or punish allies based on how well they meet U.S. demands, particularly on defense spending. For the U.S., this could mean encouraging European self-sufficiency without fully losing influence. For Europe, however, it risks undermining NATO cohesion and could set states against one another, weakening EU or NATO integration.

Scenario 2: Complete U.S. Withdrawal

Far riskier would be a total pullout. A quick or phased U.S. exit would leave Europe exposed, unable to fill the security vacuum in the short term. Russia could be emboldened to escalate further in Ukraine or test NATO resolve elsewhere. The U.S., meanwhile, would lose bases vital for operations in the Middle East and Africa, as well as significant defense contracts.

However, it would free up U.S. resources for the Pacific, aligning with Trump's strategic focus on countering China. For Trump's political base, it could be sold as a win: keeping his promise to disentangle the U.S. from Europe and shift to an isolationist policy.

What now?

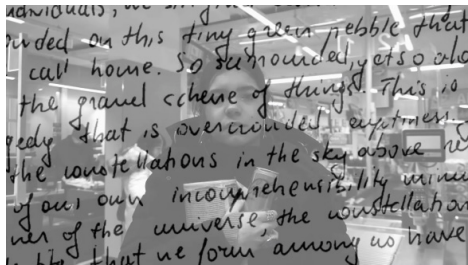
Whatever path the U.S. chooses, Europe no longer has the luxury of time. The transatlantic relationship is being reshaped before our eyes. While European states have made attempts to engage the Trump administration, no substantial agreements have been reached. Europe must now look inward - reassessing its own defense needs, capabilities, and strategic autonomy.

Maintaining open lines with Washington remains essential, but Europe also needs to prepare for a future where U.S. support might be reduced or conditional. Cooperation within Europe could offer the region a seat at the table - before the entire house begins to shake.

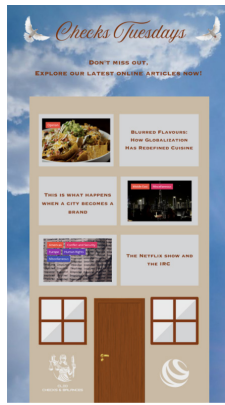
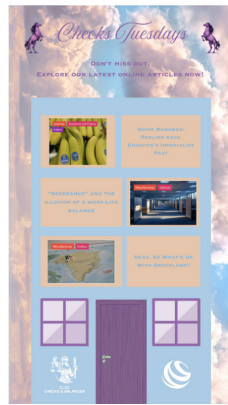


The Art of Checks

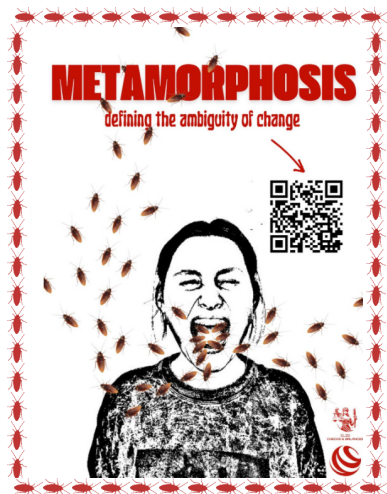
LEILA RIZKALLAH & MIGLĖ GIRDAUSKAITĖ



For our second edition “Overcrowding Emptiness” we produced a video focusing on themes prevalent throughout the articles, such as identity and purpose.



Our weekly instagram stories for Checks Tuesdays — featuring a building (because buildings have stories) with a new thematic background each week to spotlight our latest online articles in a visually engaging way.



Our poster and Instagram post for the first issue “Metamorphosis”, featuring daring cockroach motifs as symbols for transformation, counterbalancing the delicate butterfly on the front page.



Farewell to the 37th Clio Board!

What Personal Attributes were Fundamental for a Successful Board Year?

37TH CLIO BOARD

Charlotte:

The ability to work with 4 ½ guys: There's nothing quite like spending an entire year with 5 (basically 4 and ½ if I count their feminine traits collectively e.g. Sietse putting more effort into doing his hair than me, Owen always wanting compliments etc) guys. The resilience I have gained from footballs randomly being thrown around the Attic, huge amounts of bread laying in the cupboard and on all desks and the intense cockblocking that occurs when I go into any club with them, has been nothing short of a masterclass in patience, survival, and sheer willpower. But like all bad clouds, there is always a silver lining. The guys can tell you better than me (and I'm sure they will) there is an immense amount of sympathy that comes with being the only girl on the Board, much to their annoyance. This privilege has also allowed me to get my own bed(room) anywhere we travel to (unless we're talking about Owen, who demanded to have his own bed at AMW). While I have learned more about the brain (and weirdly enough body) of a boy, I don't think I would have had it any other way.

Sietse:

Social adaptability: I think the most important personal attribute for me was the ability to work with lots of different kinds of people and adapt myself to them. Especially as the Internal and having four committees, I found myself having chugging competitions with the Event Committee one day, and then discussing intersectional feminism with the Master Committee the next. From first years to alumni, you really see and work with a lot of different people.

I probably needed this attribute the most in the Board though. Seeing Charlotte getting a meltdown about every piece of plastic on the ground (whilst regularly “forgetting” to do half of her dishes) on the one hand, while also having to deal with Daniel using my desk as his personal cooking and storage station, took a lot out of me. And let's not forget about Owen pacing around the office and Nicolas breathing heavier than a woman in labour whilst I was trying to focus. Although it can sometimes be difficult working with so many different types of people, it is also exactly what made the Board year so much fun.

Fabian:

Time management: This year, I think I've (to put it into IR terms) reconceptualised what being busy actually feels like. Some days included staring at my ceiling after a caffeine-filled day where I've had to balance 10 meetings with a half hour break to eat something. However, some other days I found myself with seas of time to drink a beer in the middle of exam season. Managing a schedule so irregular makes me reflect back to my first year, where I recall just two events on the same day was enough to stress me out.

Mindfulness: No thank you, hippie-gurus that upon seeing this bs-term are eager to include me on a trip to their yoga retreat to India. I do however think that all the irregularity in my schedule, and endless number of fun moments, events and trips this past year have demonstrated that realising you're experiencing a special, stressful or fun time while you're in the moment is something to cherish.

Owen:

Asking for help: Throughout the board year I have learned that Murphy's Law is definitely true. Assume the worst, because that

will happen, and that's fineeee. Because you are not alone. You have five other idiots that are in the same shit as you. Stressing, sweating, swearing the same as you. No matter if it's asking Daniel if he can help sorting out receipts or asking Char to stop complaining that I need the computer monitor for once. They are (usually) always happy to help, and it will relieve so much stress.

Letting go: Everything that can go wrong probably will. The important thing about this is the ability to let it go once you can not do anything about it anymore. I will feel bad about it, but do not worry, there is plenty more stuff to stress about in the future. In the end it is just six idiots trying their best to make an amazing year for all the members.

Daniël:

A positive attitude: During a board year, you experience everything. From late night parties to early morning meetings. There are moments full of excitement and moments where you need to solve many problems. Even when things don't always go your way, it is about believing that you can do it. In this year I like to believe that we stayed positive in every situation. Whether it was the flat tire when going to Brussels or miscommunication with the staff at Pakhuis, it turned out to be all fine. Staying calm during the sometimes stressful situations helped me to solve all problems and enjoy the entire year.

Nicolas:

Adaptability: I think the most important attribute was being able to adapt to different situations. Especially on trips and at events there are moments when things don't go according to plan and require quick and decisive decisions. A big aspect of this is not being afraid to make the decision and take action. Like when we got a flat tyre on the way to Brussels, waiting for a new bus was going to take too long so it was time to figure out how to change a bus tyre

Resilience: Something that got me through the year was resilience, being able to stand on business. During the year it can get rough with consecutive weeks where you don't have a day to relax and decompress. Being able to push through adversity so that the association can keep going was a very important attribute that helped tremendously during the year.



About Us

In a time where human existence has become unimaginably complex, it is undoubtedly wise to reflect on the simpler, more basic roots from which such a world comes to be. One such foundation is joy. Joy is an unfiltered emotion woven into our very dna. It brings us connection from our relationships to one another, and is foundational to building a meaningful life.

Together, the Editorial Staff of 2024-2025 experienced joy a lot this year. We therefore want to take a moment to reflect on this year, and the joyful moments we've had together, by asking ourselves;

What is your favourite Checks memory this year?



CLIO
CHECKS & BALANCES

**Sam Holm
van Donk**

Editor-in-Chief



My favourite memory this year (among many) was our afternoon of grilling in Groningen. We grilled, chatted and laughed outside for hours on end, and in that moment I felt more connected to you all than ever, making it a moment I'll cherish forever, in a year I'll never forget.

**Stefan
Szekely Nagy**

Secretary



One of my favourite memories has to be from our trip to Prague. We were all joking around, asking if anyone had forgotten something. Annika suddenly realised she'd left her entire bag (with all her important things) on the plane. That moment pretty much set the tone for the rest of the trip, and sparked an endless string of jokes that still haven't really stopped.

Robyne Kerver

Layout Editor



My favorite memory of checks is the Christmas dinner, as most of us were there and we all just had a really good time. It was a really cosy evening with gluhwein, good food, and many laughs.

Leila Rizkallah

Public Relations



One of my favorite memories was from our trip to Prague. After a long, tiring day, we gathered around, watching Shrek 2 and eating takeout. It felt so familiar, like being with my siblings with everyone hysterically laughing. It was the kind of effortless comfort you don't notice until you look back on it.

**Miglė
Girdauskaitė**

Public Relations



I loved our Christmas potluck, which was truly heartwarming. We listened to Leila's playlist, watched Sam's favorite movie, and indulged in Stefan and Loris' home-cooked meals, all while sipping on glühwein. It honestly felt like a real family gathering, especially when the boys started a playful belt fight, just like real siblings do :)

**Rugilė
Girdauskaitė**

Contributing Writer



I'm lucky to share many memorable moments with Checks, despite being from Yearbook. One favorite was the running dinner, where chairs made a truly awful chocolate cake, but tipsy Nicolas couldn't stop eating it, so we had to hide the leftovers. This bittersweet dessert and night brought us a little closer.

Loris Hamiot

*Treasurer, Layout
Editor*



I made a lot of amazing memories during this year, although one stands out: when Nic (me) made us take the tram in the wrong direction after arriving in Prague. We started snowballing each other, leading to big human casualties

Annika Koch

Layout Editor



My second favourite memory (Loris stole my first) has to be our performance at the active members weekend, specifically watching Sam struggle to shave Loris' head and the rest of us dancing around them pretending we were part of some demon ritual. It was nothing short of organised chaos, just like our committee :)

**Valentina
Tuero Fajardo**

Reporter



My favourite memory of checks this year was 100% the trip to Prague. It was amazing to get to know each other really well and grow so close. Also special mention to AMW, just Sam going up to me at 8 am to give me an 80% alcohol shot of whatever it was, and of course Loris shaving his head.

**Nicolas
Larkin Damm**

Board Representative



My favourite memory of checks this year is the Checksmas trip to Prague. It was an amazing experience, visiting a city rich with history and a vibrant energy. It was great to see the committee grow closer and enjoy their time together.

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