

CHECKS & BALANCES

Old World Swallowtail
(*Papilio Machaon*)

Volume 26, Issue 1

Like other holometabolous insects,
they undergo *complete metamorphosis*



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Metamorphosis
*Defining the Ambiguity
of Change*

**Fabian
Rosie**
Chair of Clio Board



**Sam Holm
van Donk**
Editor-in-Chief



Dear reader,

I am very excited to welcome you to the first edition of the Checks & Balances magazine this academic year. It feels as though the new year has only just started, but the Editorial Staff has already managed to produce a brand-new edition with many interesting topics to discuss. The ambiguity of change immediately makes me think of two songs. In 'Changes', a young David Bowie realises that the world around him is rapidly changing, impermanence, and that it's better to face these changes, although he does so with some hesitation (his stutter in ch-ch-ch-changes). The second, 'A change is gonna come', by Sam Cooke, was written and recorded just ten months before his death. Cooke notes that he thinks he has successfully accommodated to the world around him, and although it may not be in his life or the next, he knows a change for the better will come.

Perhaps the oxymoron in this edition's title highlights what makes change so beautiful, yet so difficult to understand. How can one define ambiguity? How can one predict and be okay with change? For me, books, films and songs such as these help me accept the necessity of metamorphosis in changing times, while maintaining hope for positivity.

I recognise a lot of these elements in my work with the Association. Threats of budget cuts, the Slow Study Fine and anti-internationalisation laws are threatening our way of being, and Clio will have to learn to adapt. Our future may seem grim in a lot of aspects, but drawing lessons from Cooke and Bowie will make Clio come out of this change in the best way possible, with good hope for the future.

I hope that this edition of the Checks & Balances will show you new insights into the world around us. Lastly, I want to thank the Editorial Staff for their hard work and dedication, which were essential to publishing this edition. Enjoy reading!

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

Fabian Rosielle
Chair of Clio Board

Dear reader,

In his introduction to The Great Gatsby, professor Matthew J. Brucoli makes the following statement;

"A popular classroom fallacy holds that classics are universal and timeless... but it is subject to metamorphosis"

Perhaps then, such classics find their strength in being able to mirror contemporary desires, fears and anxieties? Their messages are not universal, nor are they absolute, but should be read as archetypes that can be found relatable and actual in spite of society's rapid transformation. They are not universally timeless, despite what some may claim, but draw their lasting power exactly because they tread ambiguity so adeptly, leaving them open for interpretations that transcend the societal context which birthed them.

This is the idea we wish to encapsulate with this first edition of Checks & Balances. Far from being uniquely applicable to literature, Brucoli's statement reflects a vision that metamorphosis is constant and unrelenting, and that strokes of genius are not defined by their ability to defy it, but by being dynamic when faced with the murkiness of change. We are therefore not attempting to 'define' the specifics of change. Far from it. We simply wish to draw attention to metamorphosis, in all its forms. This means facing both the elegant and the grotesque, and all that lie between them. The butterfly emerges triumphantly from its cocoon just as Kafka's characters find themselves inexplicably transformed into monstrous beings.

The world is changing, and as IR students, we begin to find ourselves with the knowledge to understand and interpret what is happening around us. These are our 'classics'. They are not timeless, nor are they universal. Yet we hold onto them, allowing them to guide our own interpretation of our realities. Let this magazine inspire you to face head-on the realities of metamorphosis, and enjoy the reading.

Sam Holm van Donk
Editor-in-Chief



IN THIS ISSUE

03 A View on Symbolism

CLIO's Blue Heart

04 Perceptions of Metamorphosis

Historical Faces of the Term

05 Interview with Mihnea Rares Hantiu

Othering: Structural Violence in Society

07 Will TikTok Change Politics?

How TikTok Tightens its Grip on Youth

09 Mirror, Mirror

The Dark Reflection of Society in The Substance

11 5 Grams of Weed in 5G Speed

The Involving Interplay Between Digital Technology and Drug Accessibility

13 Interview with Giulia Tariello

Instagram, IR and the UN: The Best of Both Worlds

15 Data Deception

How Statistics Leads to a Misconception of Reality

16 Resurgence of Regional Identities

Why Could it be Seen as a Problem?

17 Rising Right

Europe's Populist Shift and the Struggle of Unity

19 Political Pulse

The Coups d'Etat of the Sahel - Who Influences Who?

21 Lost in Translation

Are You Funnier in Your Native Tongue?

22 Lawmakers Breaking the Law: An Alarming Threat to Human Life

A Look Into Afghanistan's Humanitarian Crisis

23 The Alchemy of the Soul

A Path to Ethical Evolution

24 An Open Letter From Carrer

Top Tips to Bridge University and the Real World

25 About Us

Introducing the Editorial Staff 2024-2025



A View on Symbology

CLIO's Blue Heart

SAM HOLM VAN DONK

Found in instagram bios, whatsapp statuses and even usernames, the blue heart emoji has become something of a marker of identity among CLIO members. It is used in conversations when a full heart might feel too intimate, due to its common understanding as a CLIO symbol. This highlights what the sender and receiver have in common, and gives a tangible, visual connection to one another. But it is not the only symbol that the study association has used over the years, and its usage is but one instance of a long history of symbology. Neither is CLIO unique in having symbols and traditions that tie the community together; political leaders have since the dawn of social organisation utilised symbols, colours, rituals and traditions to foster an increased sense of social belonging, and thus loyalty to this group.

The most prominent CLIO symbol is undoubtedly our logo. Designed in the late 2000s, the logo evokes the international spirit of the association, while adhering to solid and simplistic design principles. Some believe that the letters 'CLIO' are subtly embedded in the globe's curves, though this remains speculative... Interestingly, CLIO's old logo contained many of the design elements included in the contemporary logo, though in an earlier, less developed manner. The current logo's colours reflect the ones adopted by the association, being simply navy blue and white (in contrast to the old one's blue and yellow). These colours can be said to reflect ideas of professionalism, authority and trust, all crucial aspects of diplomacy, and international relations in general.

As a powerful symbol of belonging, the logo is featured on many tangible aspects of the association, such as the flag, the jacket pins and most pieces of committee clothing. All these items serve an interesting purpose-



by being surrounded with aspects of what are essentially nationalist symbols (albeit in a less formalised manner), we socialise ourselves into the association, letting it become a part of who we are. We wear the association's clothes, and adorn our own suits with the pin to represent the cultivated pride that being part of this community gives us.

When we talk with other CLIO members, the topic of conversation often drifts to our hopes of what active members weekends will be like, the achievements of our own committees and of course the latest in community gossip. Such everyday rituals further strengthen our social relation to the community that the association fosters, all while placing itself at its core, developing a sense of loyalty towards what may seem like pretty arbitrary symbols to an outsider.

Again, this type of community-building is not unique to CLIO, or to study associations in general. Every state does this to some extent, with national symbols intended to unite people, often differing in background, by creating visual and verbal representations of values, goals, culture and history to foster patriotism and loyalty. Subnational groups too, both ethnic or historical minority groups, as well as sexual orientations, and really any other social groupings imaginable (each use symbolism to foster group loyalty!). Shared symbolisms can be incredibly rewarding and fun to be a part of. The emphasis, of course, lies in CLIO's positive attributes- accessibility to new students, and openness to anyone willing to join! My suggestion? Embrace your spot in the CLIO community, and above all else- enjoy this first issue of Checks & Balances' 26th volume.

Perceptions of Metamorphosis

Historical Faces of the Term

LORIS HAMIOT

Metamorphosis is a term that first appeared in ancient Greek, consisting of two parts: meta ("after") and morph ("form"), together literally meaning "transformation". But how has this term been used throughout history? And what are we saying when using this word today? From mythology to science going through literature, let's take a brief journey through the centuries.



Metamorphosis as a divine punishment

In Greek mythology, metamorphosis is used as a punishment, but for what crimes and by whom is this punishment given?

One of the most well known illustrations of metamorphosis is the story of Medusa, a beautiful young woman assaulted by Poseidon in the temple of the goddess Athena. Wishing to take revenge, the goddess transforms the young woman into a horrible snake-haired gorgon with the malediction of petrifying anyone who looked at her. Another example that rises from Greek mythology is the myth of Narcissus. This myth gave rise to a word that we still use today, but very few people know why it is used in this context. By now you've probably grasped it; this word is narcissistic. Just like Medusa, Narcissus was very attractive. However, this young man had a particular disdain for anyone who fell in love with him. Unfortunately for him, a nymph named Echo fell madly in love with him and, in typical Narcis-

sus fashion, he rejected her. As punishment for his arrogance in spurning the Nymph, the gods condemned Narcissus to fall in love with his own reflection seen in the water. Unable to detach himself, he eventually died, and a flower, now called Narcissus, grew in his place. In the modern era, people are called Narcissists when they are obsessed with themselves, just as Narcissus was.

In ancient Greece, metamorphosis was seen as a punishment given by the gods to remind humans who defied them that they remained merely mortal.

Metamorphosis in science

Metamorphosis in a scientific context is one we are fairly familiar with. It always refers to a change of form, except that in its context, this change is natural, and allows the animals undergoing it to evolve in order to survive in different environments. This transformation process doesn't happen all at once, as can be seen with the larva that forms the butterfly. A butterfly doesn't grow wings overnight. Instead, it undergoes a process that can last from 4 weeks to several months before reaching its final form: the adult butterfly. During this transformation, the butterfly passes through an intermediary state called the pupal stage, during which it undergoes a complete transformation and grows wings and antennae. This sense of scientific metamorphosis is therefore a relatively recent concept, first appearing in the 17th century in the work of a Dutch naturalist named Jan Swammerdam, who through the use of a microscope, was able to fully observe the butterfly's transformation.

Metamorphosis in literature

Whether it's due to its mythological or scientific origins, metamorphosis is a term that is very commonly found in literature, be it in Ovid's Metamorphoses, a book in which the titular Ovid transcribes all the examples of metamorphoses as punishments, or in more contemporary books such as Franz Kafka's entitled The metamorphosis published in 1915, in which the main character undergoes a sudden transformation when he wakes up as an insect. Whether in one example or the other, metamorphosis is not seen as something positive, but rather as a punishment or a burden that must be carried by its victims.

To conclude, metamorphosis is a very specific term, which will always be linked to transformation, although it is used in very distinct contexts. After reading this article, you will hopefully be able to use it properly!



Interview with Mihnea Rares Hanțiu

Othering: Structural Violence in Society

RUBEN ARDELEAN



Rareș is a PhD candidate at UNATC Bucharest who specialises in documentary filmmaking. In 2013, he co-founded Citizenit, a cultural NGO in his hometown of Arad.

It's called othering – a process by which a group or individual is marginalised and defined as different. Rooted in the idea that, to define one's identity, one must first set oneself apart, othering often leads to social hierarchies and justifies exclusion or discrimination.

For Mihnea Rareș Hanțiu, a Romanian filmmaker and producer whose work blends fiction and documentary, cinema offers a unique lens through which to explore these divisions. We invited him to reflect on how othering operates in contemporary society, its echoes in Mathieu Kassovitz's "La Haine", and whether this age-old process is inherent to the human condition – or something we can perhaps transcend.

"Without structural change and empathy, the 'fall' continues"

Let me begin this interview with a fundamental question: what makes a film political, Rareș?

Well, it's like asking what makes a steak delicious or a

soup good. The recipe involves ingredients, preparation methods, and timing, all aimed at developing flavour, texture, and tenderness to create the perfect final product. If you ignore these aspects, you just end up with a piece of cooked meat, not a proper steak. Similarly, our discussion about films relates to these same ingredients and processes.

I believe everything is political—art is political. Films that intentionally include or exclude certain perspectives, identities, or experiences can be political through what they choose to show or omit. Even seemingly apolitical films carry political weight through their subtext. What makes a film great, however, is a cohesive, well-crafted language across its text, subtext, and supertext.

We live in a world where even basic human needs like shelter, food, and clothing become political decisions. What you eat, wear, and where you live often means supporting one system or entity over another.

How do you perceive the effects of the 'other' in contemporary times?

The concept of "othering" translates into Romanian as "alterizare" because Romanians often draw from Latin etymology, such as alter ego. It could also be described as the "marginalization of the Other." This process describes how a group or individual is perceived as different, inferior, or "foreign" compared to a dominant group. It can manifest culturally, socially, politically, or psychologically, often justifying exclusion or discrimination.

I believe this concept has, in some form, underpinned the development of cultures and civilizations. It's like in marketing, where real competition pushes innovation and improvement. Without differentiation or competition, better technologies wouldn't emerge, and evolution would stagnate. Similarly, throughout history, these distinctions have driven thought and practices that ultimately propelled our evolution as entities on this planet.

In film—and art in general—there's no story without tension or intrinsic conflict. These distinctions between characters, with their social, mental, or political disparities, create a problem to solve and provide a narrative structure. This tension often forms the "first point of no return" in classical storytelling.



Films like *La Haine* wield a double-edged sword: they can awaken some from apathy while pushing others toward fanatical rebellion.

The three characters in *La Haine* seek revenge, justice, recognition, respect, and the release of their anger—all fundamental human drives. The film reflects a fragmented society where othering and marginalization lead to alienation, violence, and despair. While Vinz, Said, and Hubert are united in their suffering, their lack of common direction and constant oppression condemn their story to tragedy.

The film's moral is a call to awareness: without structural change and empathy, the "fall" continues.

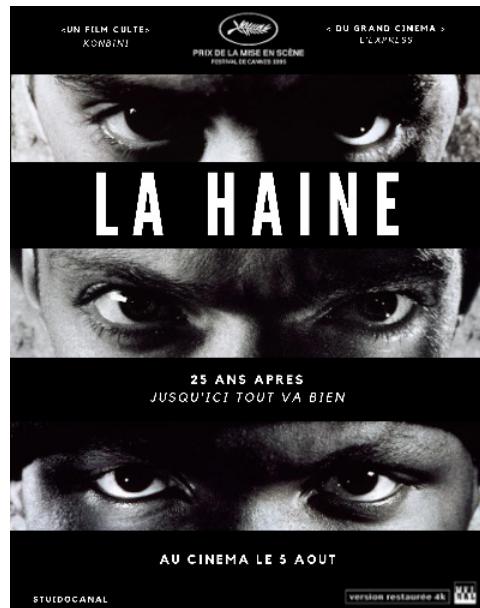
Is the practice of 'othering' inherent to the human condition?

I touched on this earlier. „Othering,“ as a natural part of the human condition, has been debated by great philosophers. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger suggests that our relationship with the Other is inevitable, as our existence (Dasein) is always „in the world“ and in relation to others. Othering emerges when we see ourselves in opposition to others, as „us“ versus „them.“

Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic explains that othering is essential for self-consciousness but also a source of perpetual conflict. The Other is necessary for defining the Self.

Some argue, however, that othering is not inherent but a product of power structures, culture, and history, perpetuated by societal norms.

Kassovitz's film brings these concepts into focus, but without critical thinking and coherent analysis, we risk becoming voyeurs—watching cool images of gangsters in a way reminiscent of Hollywood films from the '30s about the fight between good and evil. The final question remains: who is „good,“ and who is „evil.“



*In *La Haine* (1995), the three main characters – Vincent (a white Frenchman), Hubert (from an African background) and Said (of Moroccan descent) are marginalized young men from the impoverished suburbs of Paris. What makes it possible for three guys, with different cultural and religious heritages, to unite? What did they unite for?*

Matthieu Kassovitz's film is a perfect fit for discussing "othering" or "marginalization." It's a cult classic from the '90s, where three young men are united by their shared condition as marginalized individuals in a deeply fragmented French society.

Despite their differing ethnic and cultural backgrounds, they share the experience of social exclusion, structural violence, and lack of opportunities in the urban periphery (banlieue). This reflects more than just the characters—it's a lens for us to examine ourselves through the film.

Cinema, with a capital C, has the power to change mentalities, and I wonder if this film succeeded in doing so, nearly three decades later. Has life improved for marginalized communities in France or Europe? It's hard to say.

The danger with films like this is that they can become cult hits for their form rather than their substance. Have they brought societal change, or have they fetishized marginalized lives, making them seem "cool" while missing the point of addressing real social issues?



Will TikTok Change Politics?

How TikTok tightens its grip on Youth

ROBYNE KERVER

How do we know that what we read is true? And should we know that information is true, is this information the only truth, or part of a bigger concept that is hidden from us? There are tons of different ways that we obtain our information in the world. We gather information to broaden our knowledge and increase our understanding of the world around us, on different platforms. One example of this is TikTok, which has increasingly become the dominant form of social media amongst the youth nowadays. TikTok has also become a mechanism for political parties to exert their influence and change political views. This has for example been done by the Dutch party Forum of Democracy, posting minecraft videos and funny stories with a political background. One of the problems this creates is that it gets increasingly difficult for the consumer to see these deliberate efforts to change our point of view, and it can even come close to manipulation, if the intent is not indicated clearly. How exactly do political influence groups and parties affect our lives through TikTok?

Studies have found that videos are more effective than traditional media at capturing the attention of young people. It also helps that short-term videos are more effective in capturing the attention of the youth than most modes of communication. Another important factor is the algorithm that TikTok uses to keep users engaged with the content they are receiving. The app uses an algorithm that is different from other social media platforms, yet also very successful. Users get to see topics that they are interested in, which makes it easier to only receive one-sided content. One problem about using TikTok as a political platform, however, is the fact that TikTok is everything but a serious form of social media, often very personal and expressive, and infused with popular culture references. This makes the social media platform an easy way for misinformation to spread and for polarization to grow. This blend of the personal and the impersonal, the formal and the informal and the objective and the subjective makes it almost impossible to get a grasp on the intentions of the videos that we watch.

There are several ways that TikTok gains information about a user's interests and takes this to form an individualized algorithm. According to the Harvard Political Review, TikTok captures users' in-app activity and creates a customized stream of content that follows the users' previous interactions. It observes the activity of the users and creates a stream of videos that are all interesting to them, which can make the content coherent

to the political views of the person, creating a sphere of one-sided information. TikTok's algorithm can eventually even lead to polarization and radicalisation, as people get dragged into a political echochamber where only one part of the political spectrum can be heard.



Being merely confronted with one side of the story can have serious consequences, such as misinterpreting the popularity of the information: if someone only sees one part of the story, that person can easily take this information as the truth or perceive the content as the most popular content, when this is not (always) the case. Consumers that have strong political perspectives often stimulate the algorithm to present homogeneous news. This can lead to severe disproportionalities in political views, and with that, the creation of false images about political issues. This way, a confirmation bias comes to life. The different ways that media can be shared is also concerning when looking at the platform. As people increasingly favor watching news that is entertaining or short-term, media will shape itself in the consumers' interest, which causes old forms of media to become to gradually be replaced by more attractive media that might be way more shallow and devoid of context due to the decreased attention span among the younger generation.

Looking at the recent EU elections that were held in

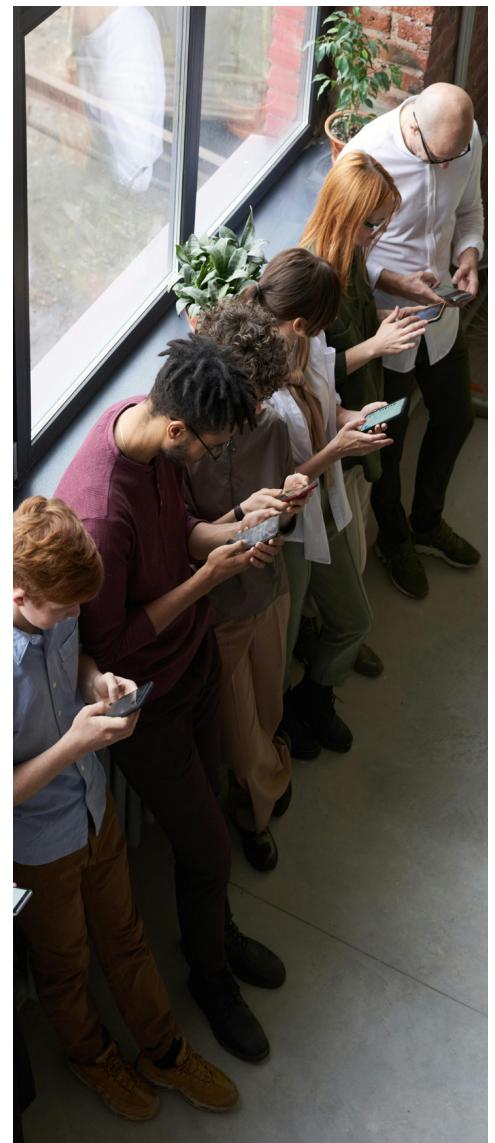
2024, far-right movements increasingly used TikTok as a tool to win electoral votes. The youth finds a big part of their news on social media, which makes it easy for misinformation to extend itself and influence, in this case, political views. This was of big importance during the EU elections, since there were countries in which the youth was allowed to vote and therefore politically exert influence in these elections: in Germany, Malta, Austria and Belgium, the required age for voting is 16, and for Greece it is 17, which means that there is a bigger part of the youth that is legally permitted to vote. According to POLITICO, polls prove that support for the right and the far-right among young people is growing. Further research indicated that from Italy to Germany, many members of far-right parties of the European Parliament engage far more with TikTok users than those from traditional parties. Social media offers a direct way for dialogue between voters that do not typically receive news from legal media outlets. Also, social media platforms provide a place where controversial topics can be discussed. TikTok has become a sphere of influence for alternative sides of information that are not always as reliable as we think and would like them to be. On the other side, it can criticise current news platforms in ways to stimulate them to do better and to leave no groups out of the narrative.

This creates popular political narratives that might be right, are often wrong, and at worst dangerous

Something also worth mentioning, is that some types of misinformation are not spread deliberately: it might be intended to be sarcastic or insincere. Of course, TikTok is intended as a very informal and unserious platform, which can obviously lead to misunderstandings about intentions and opinions, and therefore also lead to political and social turmoil about what people have or haven't claimed. Additionally, the arrival of AI has not made the social battleground any easier to oversee. Fake AI-generated videos roam the internet, showing decision-makers claiming things they would never say, and spreading misinformation. This then creates popular political narratives that might be right, are often wrong, and at worst dangerous. AI makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish between truth and falsehood, limiting the users' ability to make politically informed choices.

We might have entered a new age of politics, where a large share of the population can be influenced by popular or narrow content that only shows a specific aspect of the political landscape, leading to a rise in polarization among different groups and the spread of misin-

formation. It has become harder to filter out truthful information from our lives, especially in social media platforms such as TikTok, where fake news flourishes. How can we keep autonomous in a world where we don't know who influences us, with what underlined objectives? TikTok might be used for other purposes than merely recreational fun. It remains important that we keep track of what is true, and sound out the misleading noises that can echo through the four corners of your phone screen.





Mirror, Mirror

The Dark Reflection of Society in The Substance

LEILA RIZKALLAH

When we look in the mirror, are we truly seeing ourselves, or the ideals society has taught us to chase? *The Substance* holds up a haunting mirror, forcing us to face how beauty standards shape our identities. This film lays bare that society's obsession with perfection goes far beyond looks; it runs deep, affecting how we see ourselves and what we think we're worth.

In the story, the infamous Elizabeth Sparkle (played by Demi Moore) is fired from her aerobics show because she is deemed to have become too old and unattractive. In her desperation, she turns to *"The Substance,"* a mysterious drug that creates a younger, prettier version of herself, named Sue. Through Elizabeth's story, the film explores ageism in Hollywood, our obsession with perfection, and of course, beauty.

A critique on society's obsession with youth

In *The Substance*, Elizabeth's self-destruction is a tragic embodiment of a societal obsession with youth and beauty, instilled by the belief that a woman's worth is tied to her appearance.

The film, marketed and viewed as horror, is actually a heartbreakingly accurate portrayal of the internal struggles faced by so many women and girls, forced to equate their value with how young and beautiful they look

Ageism's grip on society grows tighter each day. Younger people are now worrying about wrinkles and lines, a burden that once only haunted older generations. Today's children and teenagers are bombarded with new skincare regimens and anti-aging trends: gua sha tools, sleeping on their backs to prevent asymmetry, and anti-aging straws to avoid wrinkles. The constant influx of these "solutions" online reinforces the message that ageing is a flaw that needs to be fixed, despite it being a natural process embedded in our human nature. It's essential to remember that ageing is a privilege, not a



failure; reaching another year should bring pride, not guilt. However, society has conditioned women to feel they've failed when signs of age start to appear.

A woman approaching thirty is labelled "old," while a forty-year-old man is still in his prime. A woman's value is measured by her fertility and appearance, so once she's no longer able to bear children, she has no worth in society. We see this bias play out in storybooks and movies, where ageing women are villains—like those in Snow White and Rapunzel, depicted as bitter, alone and incapable of being loved.

These images seep into young girls' minds, teaching them that ageing is something to fear and resist, rather than embrace. Even someone like Demi Moore, who remains stunning at 61, is still judged because she's 61. Society doesn't care if she's beautiful; we care that she's ageing, and that's enough to judge her.

It's also important to remember that society's notion of "anti-aging" rarely prioritises health. Instead of promoting wellness and longevity, it encourages risky habits such as smoking to curb appetite, urging women to trade their health to stay thin.

Society has marketed confidence as something achievable through cosmetic procedures, promoting the idea that it's "empowering" to spend thousands for validation and compliments. But at its core, this message is built on a universal fear—that without beauty, we are unworthy of love. *The Substance* makes painfully clear that this obsession with youth isn't vanity; it's the result of a culture that teaches women they lose value with each passing year, pushing them to hold on to a version of themselves that will naturally and inevitably change overtime.

The tragedy lies in this: the very faces women are pressured to change are reflections of the people who loved and came before them. The nose they are taught to shrink and the eyes they are told to alter, all carry the stories of their families. There's something deeply sad about growing into your mother's face, only to try to erase it in the name of "beauty".

Beauty standards and the idea of "perfection"

"I'll be happy when my skin is clear. Or maybe when I lose five pounds. Perhaps if I get a different nose or if my lips were just a bit fuller..." But when does it stop? When will it finally be enough? How much more do we need to change before we can feel perfect?

The Substance paints a dark picture of society's obsession with being perfect.

Everywhere we look, we're being targeted

I open my phone, and it's flooded with messages telling me what I need to change, how I need to look better. Nine-year-olds are buying anti-aging creams instead of dolls, and people are lying on their medical records to get prescriptions for Ozempic (a medication for diabetes) all in an effort to lose weight they don't even have. Women's insecurities have become a business, exploited to make a profit, get views, and fuel an endless cycle of self-doubt.

This film is a harsh satire about beauty standards and the lengths women will go to conform to them, destroying themselves in the process. Coralie Fargeat, the director, shared in an interview how Elizabeth is only truly at peace at the end of the movie when she is just reduced to a face and has no body at all. This highlights the crushing weight that women feel every day chasing after the perfect version of themselves and how just one moment of not worrying about their body and appearance is considered a relief.

Elizabeth's obsession with beauty is pushed to its breaking point. She's willing to give up days of her life just to look young and beautiful.

Though it sounds extreme, the idea mirrors real life: every day, women go to risky lengths to chase society's version of "perfect."

They have dangerous surgeries, take weight-loss medications they don't know anything about, and even trade the ability to have children for the perfect body—all to fit an impossible version they will never achieve.

The film highlights the cruel irony of trying to be "perfect" only to end up worse off. When Elizabeth takes the substance, the audience watches a grotesque scene where her back painfully splits open in order to birth the new version of herself. This is an example of the irreversible damage women do to themselves, such as botched plastic surgeries, because they are so blinded by the idea of perfection. *The Substance* is a chilling mirror to the extremes people go to in the name of beauty.

I think this film is a breath of fresh air against today's endless cycle of new beauty routines, the rise of drugs like Ozempic for weight loss, and the increasing push for Botox to turn back time. This film is a very intense watching experience and uses body horror and gore to effectively elicit a strong reaction from the spectator and force them to open their eyes to the world around them. *The Substance* comes across as a cautionary tale, almost like it's trying to shake some sense into every young woman watching, telling her that she's already enough just as she is. It makes us question the idea that "beauty is pain" and look at the harmful lengths people go to for the sake of beauty. In the end, *The Substance* reminds us that true beauty isn't about changing who we are to fit society's impossible standards; it's about recognizing the worth in who we already are.



5 Grams of Weed in 5G Speed

The Evolving Interplay Between Digital Technology and Drug Accessibility

MIGLĖ GIRDĀUSKAITĖ



What may appear as a combination of emojis to a regular Internet viewer, substance abusers know that this is a code for the possible type of narcotics - marijuana, hash, prescription drugs or cocaine - that a dealer could advertise digitally for sale. Symbols can be utilized to obtain illegal substances, as the enciphered messages appear harmless and can discreetly facilitate transactions, without appearing overtly suspicious to the public, especially to law enforcement. Herein lies the problem: the advancement of cyberspace produced a previously unfamiliar market for a faster and more effective way to traffic drugs, with a far reduced risk of being caught (in comparison to physical drug dealing affairs). This ease of access to narcotics online raises a pressing question: how did the digital space become a tool for users' pursuit of substances, a kind of virtual "chasing the dragon"?

Although the use of drugs has been a documented phenomenon since ancestral times, large- scale trafficking of illicit materials is relatively new and dates back to the 19th century. During this period, European Colonial powers started growing opium in its Asian territories and smuggling it into China for trade of luxuriously goods. This inflow of opium led to an escalation in addiction, instigating the Opium Wars and regulations on drug importation. Following bans, drug trade shifted towards the West in the 20th century. The Cold War aided this shift and narcotics became a geopolitical device, causing American soldiers to depend on heroin. Affected by the economically and socially destructive pest, the USA waged a "war on drugs". Yet this business managed to adapt to new obstacles and gained its (thus far) most powerful form reaching a global scale: industry controlled by drug lords, such as Pablo Escobar, Toto Riina, Khun Sa and Félix Gallardo. However, edging the digital era, there was a shift in the way major drug cartels conducted their transactions, and the crime itself gained distinctly new shapes: "drug dealers in white coats" (doctors and pharmacists), and notably activity thriving on the darknet.

The darknet is characterized by its exceptionally encrypted and hardly accessible infrastructure, allowing the users to surf anonymously and obtain publicly unavailable information. This system operates through specialized links and the Tor Browser, which secures the user's data and identity. While the darknet provides

some positives, such as granting access to censored content and ensuring freedom of speech and press, it also has been exploited by malicious users who have utilized cyberspace for illegal drug trade. Prominent marketplaces that emerged on the darknet include Hydra Market, Evolution, Empire, Darkode, Cannazon, Dream, Silk Road, AlphaBay and Agora. Among these, the Silk Road (named after the original historical trade route between Europe and Asia) was considered to be the first and leading one, beginning as a channel for protected and unidentified transactions via blockchain technology, which were funded by cryptocurrency Bitcoin. By 2013, an estimated 70% of the 14 000 products sold on Silk Road were drugs. However its demise was marked in 2013 when the US government seized and shut down the Silk Road, sentencing its founder Ross Ulbricht to life in prison. Another significant marketplace, Dream, became the most enduring and visited network. Nevertheless, as with Silk Road, it was shut down in 2019. The last notable forum was Alphabay, being the largest website mentioned thus far. In its short active period, it was linked to 250 000 listings for illegal drugs, which was 17.8 times more listings than in Silk Road (14 000). Despite its milestones, Alphabay ceased operations in 2017, marking the end of one of the darknet's murkiest illegal marketplaces. The aforementioned forums had a significant impact on the drug trafficking commerce, as its anonymity and encryption enabled transactions on a global scale with limited risks, due to the darknet's secretiveness. However by 2022, the number of active darknet marketplaces and the associated drug sales had decreased substantially, leaving only a couple (from over a 100) still operating.

The darknet forums and their cryptocurrency payments granted drug dealers and substance abusers a platform for trade with minimal legal repercussions. However, navigating with this method of selling/obtaining narcotics proved to be too complex for casual users. To buy or sell, the customers or merchants had to commit time and effort to the marketplaces to even be able to understand surfing deeper on the web. The experience was far from user- friendly, leading to the emergence of mobile apps and messaging services. Through this approach, all users need to do is download an app to begin trading or purchasing. Apps like Telegram, Whatsapp or Viber also offer secure encryption, making transactions not only safer but significantly faster and more efficient due to their streamlined design and functionality. Additionally, the services



Shop by Category

Drugs 8,104
Cannabis 2,063
Dissociatives 193
Ecstasy 681
Opioids 594
Other 435
Precursors 39
Prescription 1,666
Psychedelics 974
Stimulants 1,039
Apparel 265
Art 118
Books 869
Collectibles 2
Computer equipment 40
Custom Orders 85
Digital goods 548
Drug paraphernalia 291
Electronics 79
Erotica 515
Fireworks 2
Food 8
Forgeries 75
Hardware 24
Herbs & Supplements 6
Home & Garden 11

messages 0 | orders 0 | account \$0.00

Search



have an ever bigger reach, as creators use them as a marketing tool for selling their products. Regardless of the messaging service construction, the accessibility of drugs is limited by certain indicators, which have now become increasingly evident. One prominent signal is the combination of names (terms that specifically identify the drugs sold, like 'mushrooms', 'weed' or 'pills'), profile photos and description. These descriptions often include verbs related to the consumption methods (for instance 'smoking', or 'tripping'), the effects of the substances, or the various delivery methods utilized.

Narcotics dealers have progressively turned to social media platforms like Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, and Discord, much like they use the messaging services. However, the major platforms employ content filtering algorithms for illegal materials, including drug trade. Nonetheless, traffickers have beaten these systems through the use of emojis. Although certain sequences of these symbols are recognizable as codes for drug dealing, law enforcement and platform creators cannot bar the usage of them, as that would remove a considerable load of innocently typed emojis. Dealers also circumvent the system through the use of "Algo-speak", which is the application of specific vocabulary to avoid the algorithmic filters and getting caught. Such language is also highly adaptable, thus users can invent new terms daily and escape legal consequences.

The language adaptability factor and easement of drug accessibility on social media platforms poses significant dangers, as it effectively reaches young audiences. The simple communication mechanism on these apps increases the likelihood that young people will be exposed to harmful substances, putting them at greater risk for abuse and overdose.

Although it may appear that drug trade has been made more accessible through the development of the Internet, statistics have shown that among young people, the use of substances has declined. The 2019 Covid-19 pandemic may have affected this trend, as it limited the availability of drugs and disrupted international drug supply chains, through the imposed trade and travel restrictions. Additionally, the trafficking of narcotics could have been lowered by the social media creators' initiative to take up proactive steps and manage their platforms more effectively: Snap, Meta and Google financed a campaign through which users were provided with more information on the risks of substance abuse; Snapchat has implemented a search control feature that restricts drug- related content and instead provides educational information. These collective efforts may have contributed to the reduced accessibility and appeal of drugs among youth.



Interview with Giulia Tariello

Instagram, IR, and UN: Best of Both Worlds

VALENTINA TUERO FAJARDO

Giulia Tariello is an Italian EU Youth Delegate to the United Nations where she focuses on coordinating the activities of the UN Youth Delegates from European and non-European countries. She also advocates for the work of the United Nations through social media, targeting young people specifically. Giulia studied a bachelor's degree in Political Sciences at the University of Roma Tre in 2021, with a masters in International Relations at the University of Milan La Statale, from which she graduated in October 2023. Tariello has been passionate about foreign languages and cultures since middle school, pursuing this in high school ultimately leading her to follow up on this passion through university.

How did you end up being an EU Youth delegate at the UN?

During my mandate as the Italian Youth Delegate I met the first and former EU Youth Delegates to the UN and they told me when the new call for selecting a new EU YD opened. To become the EU YD you had to candidate yourself through your national youth council. They nominated me, and I went through the selection process with the EU Delegation to the UN and the responsible people in Brussels. Then I did the interview and they selected me! The mandate was initially meant to last for one year (2023-2024) but it was prolonged until September 2025. Believe me when I say that I thought my last trip to New York would have been during the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and then during the United Nations Economic and Social Council Youth Forum in 2024... but here I am again ahah.

Why is it important for you to give voice to Italian youth?

I remember the 17-year-old Giulia who was in high school and had to decide which university course to attend. A choice that can define your future and your future career. I was lucky enough to know what I wanted to do from a very early age, however, I know that this is not so common for young people and sometimes youth may feel lost when deciding which university to attend. I wish I had someone who could tell me what was the best path for me, which experiences to accept, and which direction was best to take for me. But I had no one. No relatives or friends in the field, not even someone I knew who could help me. That's why I feel the need to be that person for the countless 17-year-old boys and girls who need guidance and want to better



understand the functioning of the international system. But it's not just that.

I have the privilege of representing the youth in the United Nations and I want to be as representative as possible. When I was the Italian UN Youth Delegate I travelled across Italy to meet young people and know what their inputs were. Now that I am the EU Youth Delegate I cannot travel across Europe and that's why I also use social media to reach out to many people and learn from them what are the different inputs, needs, and concerns that I should represent in an international forum.

How do you combine your work and also social media?

I honestly don't know, it's quite hard to cope with my mandate, my normal job, social media and also balancing my private life. Sometimes all of these different worlds combine and I get inspired to create a reel or part of my duties as an United Nations Youth Delegate is also gathering input from youth and social media is the best tool for it. I am an overthinker when it comes to my job but I am the opposite for content creation. So I think that in a way I have found a balance also in terms of time but I am still learning to enjoy the best of both worlds.

What is the hardest part of your career?

I believe it's not having a "career." As feeling lost in this field is very easy, and the expectations others have of you contribute to making you feel that way. I suffer a lot from imposter syndrome, which makes me think every day that I am not "good enough" to fill this role, especially when you send thousands of unanswered applications. But among my followers, everyone sees me as an example, and I am glad about that, but we should never idealise someone we don't know. What we see on social media is never 100 percent reality. For example, my work with the EU delegation to the UNs is voluntary, so it is not categorised as a "job," and the hardest part is realising that the path is long but I know that slowly, I will get exactly where I want to be.

I also want to add that because of my role I travel a lot, and although it is among the reasons I chose this path, it is hard to know that for a certain period you cannot be home with your loved ones. Among other fears, my FOMO is the most powerful ahha

Do you see the results of your work?

Of course, from different points of view. Both from my work at the United Nations with several UN Youth Delegates and my advocacy work on social media. When we collaborate at the UN or at the EU Level, and we see that our input is included in official reports, recommendations or drafts, it is a big result. When it comes to my advocacy work, every time I meet someone who follows me on Instagram and tells me that I was selected for their dream job is a big accomplishment for me! I remember in September during the Action Days of the Summit of the Future some young people thanked me for sharing the funding opportunity that allowed them to be there and attend the Summit.

Any advice for anyone that wants to work at the UN?

I'd say "Take that step, but keep in mind not to rush". Sometimes either we are too afraid of taking the step, moving forward and sending that application, or in general taking a risk, or we want everything fast and as soon as possible. But this is not how the world of international organisations works.

There is no time to be afraid of a negative response or failure to break through in this world

You have to take a deep breath and try because only then can you say you failed.



On the other hand, one must understand that it is an extremely competitive world. You compete with the whole world, not just with people of your own nationality, and because of this we will sometimes get so many closed doors and need to increase our experiences both academically and professionally before we can get ahead. Do not be afraid of the process and believe in yourself and your potential.

What do you want to do next?

Of course, I will continue my advocacy on social media, hoping to broaden my community more and more. My goal is to have an advisory role at UNESCO, whose mission aligns most closely with my aspirations and goals, wanting to help ensure safe and equitable access to education on a global scale. Already being part of the UNESCO Global Youth Community and the "quality education and lifelong learning" team is a big step.

We will certainly see what the future holds...for now it has always surprised me positively!

Data Deception

How statistics lead to a misconception of reality

ANNIKA KOCH

We trust numbers to give us clarity and an explanation that words do not. In science, data supplies us with evidence to prove our hypothesis is correct. In humanities, dates provide us with timelines that give us a contextual understanding of an event. Yet, in society, those exact numbers often mislead us. We see the numbers and in our head, a picture is drawn. However, what happens when we can no longer imagine the sheer amount the number is implying? But, far more significant, how do those numbers shape how we act and think?

While the statistics don't lie as such, they don't tell us the whole truth

Back in 2020, the Black Lives Matter protests shed light on the ongoing police brutality facing the African-American community. In addition to raising awareness, the protests initiated a discourse surrounding the systematic racism that continues to exist in today's America. In this system, the race of someone determines their criminal tendency. Not because one race is inherently more violent, but because the system focuses on finding the minority "guilty", to prove the "superiority" of the majority. Back in 2019, about 14% of the American population identified as Black while the FBI reported 51.3% of adults arrested for murder were Black or African American. How can it be possible that such a small demographic can contribute to crime this much? One explanation for this is that fact "black" neighbourhoods are more predisposed to be policed. With an increased number of policemen present, an increased amount of crimes can be spotted and logged. A study completed in 23 major U.S. cities found that officers spend considerably more time in neighbourhoods with a larger African American demographic. While some may argue this is due to a system of segregation that shows more crimes are committed by African Americans, one also has to see the clear disparity. Hence, while the statistics don't lie as such, they don't tell us the whole truth. They don't show us the fact that according to the U.S. Federal Reserve, the average net worth of a Black-led household is \$44,900, and the one of a white household is \$285,000. Nor do the statistics acknowledge the focus the system has on this demographic because of their race.

Nevertheless, data does not simply withhold the context in which it is sampled, it misleads our judgement.

The most significant case of this is in conflicts. Reports often state that civilian casualties rose by 50% this year in the X region. Despite 50% being a significant increase, when analysed it may not be as dramatic. Say that region had 200 casualties last year and this year it was 300, but 3 years ago it was 4 million. Thus the reports focus on a 50% increase in a year, even though on a large scale the casualties have decreased. Similarly, statistics of historic events that transcended territorial boundaries cannot adequately represent the truth. Once a conflict has a spillover effect and authoritarian regimes come into play, it is increasingly difficult to judge whether data on casualties is correct and not biased. For instance, even now the casualties of World War I are recorded with a range from 15 to 22 million. That is 7 million individuals that the world cannot be sure died due to the circumstances of conflict. That number alone we cannot imagine. Another reason why data often misguides our judgment. Once we can no longer depict the number referred to, we tend to struggle to understand the gravity of the situation. A lack of social understanding often leads to the repetition of the mistakes that cause such atrocities and a disincentive to aiding those in need.

In conclusion, data deception is more than the wrong numbers on a report. It is the numerical presentation that shapes our perceptions of how our society functions. The same numbers that leave us with the impression that we can decide between right and wrong, are the numbers that encourage subconscious predatory narratives and bias. Therefore, let us acknowledge the data for what it is. Digits that decide the outcome of people's lives.



Resurgence of Regional Identities

Why could it be seen as a problem?

LORIS HAMIOT

France is a country made up of 18 regions, consisting of 12 in mainland France and 5 overseas. This number has varied over the course of history, for example in 2016, where the number of regions in mainland France fell from 22 to 12 in order to increase the efficiency of their administrations. However, this measure further destroys the regional identity of certain regions such as Brittany and the Basque Country. A regional identity within France today is like a mirage. This was very much a feature of the country in the days of the monarchy, when each region had its own ruler and vassals. However, since the French Revolution of 1789, and the establishment of a central government based in Paris, this identity has been jeopardized. The use of the French language on a national scale has been the main cause of the gradual disappearance of regional languages, and has been lost all the more since the use of regional languages in schools was banned for more than 130 years after the French Revolution. In the past, it's been estimated that between 10 and 15 regional languages were spoken in France, the best known being Basque and Breton, but also including Alsatian, Corsican and Occitan were also spoken. It's also important not to overlook Creole languages, which have over 2.5 million speakers in the French overseas regions, however, this section will concentrate on the use of regional languages in metropolitan France.

A regional identity within France is today like a mirage

Faced with this gradual decline, associations such as Bretagne Culture diversité have been key players in the renewal of cultural movements designed to promote regional cultures. In addition, bilingual schools have been opened to teach regional languages to younger children. In fact, this language, with less than 200,000 speakers, is facing a steady decline in the number of young speakers and it is estimated that almost 80% of Breton speakers are aged 60 or over. The aim is therefore to revive the number of young people who can speak it, in order to maintain its use moving forward. However in 2022, only 3% of students are enrolled in schools that teach Breton alongside French. What's more, town councils and other regional institutions are often not in favour of introducing these schools, as they run the risk of French being overtaken by another language. Currently, a Diwan school (a school teaching Breton) has been raising criticism as it teaches all courses exclusively in Breton, with French still taught, but as a secondary



language on the same level as English. Yet it must be noted that the use of the French language is an important pillar of the country, as it connects all these regions together and is part of a common identity. This centralization of the French government is also intended to prevent any separatist movements within the country. One doesn't have to look far to find a country where the use of regional languages as a factor of identity has been a political issue. In fact, Spain is known for facing a number of independence movements, notably in Catalonia, where strong demonstrations have been calling for independence from the Spanish state. In France, similar movements exist, yet in a different manner, as there is little popular support for them.

These events lead us to wonder about the extent to which we should promote such regional identities, which on the one hand are important as part of our history, but over the long term can lead to problems of national unity, and contestation over the central authority of the national government.



Rising right

Europe's Populist Shift and the Struggle for Unity

STEFAN SZEKELY NAGY

For years, the EU has struggled with a profound shift in its political landscape. Populist parties that have existed in the periphery of Europe for a long time, have made significant gains and are now steadily moving to the center stage across various EU countries. This transformation in the EU reflects deep-rooted internal changes within the member states, driven by economic, social, and cultural issues that have slowly crepted on the population since the start of the pandemic in 2020. In my opinion the growing influence of populist parties should serve as a serious waking up call for the European Union and its citizens. Raising critical questions if Europe will manage to adapt to these concerns maintaining its unity amidst polarization or if history might repeat itself. The main question we should ask ourselves is if this could return Europe to its fragmented and chaotic state before the World Wars, with rising resentment among nations as the present system pushes the continent closer and closer to the brink of another conflict.

The rise of far-right support in Europe is no coincidence. In the face of ongoing economic and social pressures, many voters in the member countries feel let down by the current leading political parties. As a result, high inflation, soaring living costs, and fears of economic instability have pushed citizens to seek alternatives. For instance, the financial toll of military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine has been heavily scrutinized in member states, with voters questioning whether the support is worth the negative impacts on their own lives. In addition to economic concerns, cultural and demographic anxieties have also become significant factors in shaping public opinion. Among these, immigration has emerged as one of the most contentious and politically charged issues, further fueling dissatisfaction with traditional political parties which, rather than taking action against this issue, appear to support the arrival of more immigrants in their countries, aligning with what is perceived in the modern world as being just and democratic. In nations like the Netherlands or Belgium where housing shortages and high living costs already stress citizens, a fear is rising that an ongoing flux of migrants might wors-

en these problems. One which is deep-rooted in the thought that newcomers might claim jobs or housing which are already limited for the citizens, and pose a safety risk due to their own traumatic experiences in the war-torn regions of the world or the unclear background they possess. While such concerns hold some validity, I believe blaming immigration oversimplifies the existing problem and risks fostering division within the population, which in return might lead to more violence between the new formed camps as both of them would be fighting for their right they are entitled to, leading to even more instability.

Therefore, I would suggest that policymakers address these problems comprehensively by offering solutions that unite the people instead of dividing them, as it is seen nowadays with the populist parties. These parties have skillfully tapped into these grievances. For example in Austria. The Freedom Party of Austria (FPO) has gained widespread support securing a recent victory with their strong message "Austria First" promising job protection, immigration control, and

reduced EU interference. Although this discourse has resonated with the voters who feel neglected by the current leadership in their country it raises questions about its future feasibility. This is because many sectors in the country depend on migrant labour provided by the immigrants that enter the country every year, such as agriculture, tourism and even healthcare. Consequently, restricting immigration could lead to workforce shortages, driving costs even higher for the consumer and creating gaps in the essential services. As seen with Brexit in the UK, isolationist policies can harm the economy and prompt regret among voters. Rather than benefiting the country, this decision worsened the economy, leading people to reconsider their choice and call for rejoining the EU.

As these political parties gain influence, they are not only reshaping domestic policies to suit their own needs but also affecting the external relations and decision-making abilities of the EU, marking the beginning of an era of uncertainty for the Union's future. In the latest European Parliament elections, far-right parties have made important gains, shaking up the political

landscape. While pro-European and centrist parties still hold the majority, right-wing groups are now the third-largest body, led by Patriots for Europe (PFE). From France to Austria and Romania, right-wing extremist parties are not only winning seats but are also actively shaping the debates and policies in ways that Europe has not seen since WW2. Their influence, while not enough, is still slowing down the EU's agenda, creating challenges to the direction that the Union will be tackling in the future. The FPO for instance has been pushing for stricter national regulations, leading Austria's stance to shift and enter into conflict with the EU's goals. If these issues escalate Austria's relationship with the EU could become strained. Similarly, in Romania, populist parties like the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) and SOS have gained traction by promising voters better housing, job security, and debt relief which comes as a helping hand to those which have gone unheard for years. However, from my perspective, these promises risk being just illusions, offering short-term hope at the expense of long-term stability. Promises that will come back and hurt its citizens as it has been seen throughout history, as the political class does not care about anyone or anything besides their own interests. In addition in Romania, I believe that the National Court of Justice erred excluding the SOS party from the presidential elections since it opened the gate for pro Russians to take over the country. The frustration of citizens who wanted to vote for SOS led them to rally behind the independent candidate Călin Georgescu, a pro-Russian, fascist figure, ultimately helping him secure a victory in the first round of elections. His success raises concerns about the ability of centrist parties to uphold the democratic values.

Moreover, their success underscores the EU's failure to adequately address the dissatisfaction of its citizens. This fragmentation undermines the EU's ability to act as a cohesive block on global challenges. For example, security policy, which requires unified coordination, becomes increasingly difficult to address when individual member states prioritize national interests over collective solutions. Instead of creating campaigns to explain the status quo, I believe that the democratic and progressivist parties in member states need now more than ever to change their political campaigns, by opening their ears to the citizens, showing them through actions not only words that their cries have been heard. When it comes to the EU I think it must find a way to reconcile the rising competing demands between countries from the west and east. By fostering a deeper connection and demonstrating the tangible benefits of unity that can be offered for the people that are part of the Union. The European Union stands at a pivotal moment in its history. The next few years will determine whether it can navigate these challenges effectively. In my opinion, ignoring these problems would be a serious mistake. The EU must recognize that populism is not the cause but a symptom of deeper issues such as economic inequality, cultural anxieties, and mistrust in institutions. Addressing these root causes is essential to preserving the Union's integrity. Populist parties may offer an outlet for frustration, but their solutions often oversimplify complex issues, leaving citizens vulnerable to disillusionment. Will the EU be able to adapt and meet the demands of its citizens? Or will Europe's political shifts drive the Union toward a more divided, uncertain future, closer to the state the continent was before the Second World War?





Lost in Translation

Are You Funnier in Your Native Tongue?

ANNIKA KOCH

A grasp of the native language is considered an integral part of immersing yourself in a culture. As though a country's culture can only be expressed in its richest and most authentic form by the native tongue. Have you ever considered the same is true for yourself? Only those who speak your mother tongue will possess a true depiction of who you are as a person. Therefore, it should be possible to declare that our personality depends on language and interchangeably affects how we come across to others. And yet, could it really be true that we're "funnier" in our mother tongue?

From a psychological viewpoint, language and personality are connected in that our words act as a sort of filter in terms of bridging our brains with our hearts. When our brain listens to a linguistic statement it perceives, interprets, and maybe even memorises it. As we then process the statement we often associate certain emotions that are sparked by the connotation of specific words. For instance, when we hear the word "blue" we think of the colour which often has a connotation of tranquillity. Nonetheless, in English, the saying "feeling blue" is equivalent to feeling down. However in Russian, "голубой" means light blue and has a rather neutral connotation. In Chinese, blue is the colour of immortality. Thus, you can see that different languages challenge us to interpret the meaning of a statement differently. Now can the same be said not simply about specific words, but your whole personality?

We often see our personality alter once we have traveled abroad as though the concept incorporates more than our genes.

Our personality can be shaped by our daily interactions and by the language we speak.

For example, the University of Connecticut studied Americans of Mexican descent who grew up bilingual. They concluded that when describing themselves in Spanish, the responses tended to focus on family values, while in English, responses emphasized personal success. The researchers attributed this to the implications of the American culture which ever since the idea of the "American Dream" encourages individualism. Hence, when we switch between languages we emphasize different cultures and therefore, values with our words. Accordingly, when we master a new language, we adopt the cultural mindset that goes with it and the sense of humour linked to it.



Although our humour changes depending on the language we speak, it doesn't necessarily mean we are funnier. We may be more confident in our mother tongue as we speak without difficulty. Thus, the delivery of a joke could be flawless and without awkward pauses, immediately awaiting a response from the listeners. Alternatively, a language such as Italian correlates with strong hand gestures. When these gestures are mirrored by the listeners it engages them, prompting you to come across as "funnier" because a larger body of individuals is giving you a reaction.

Alternatively, it may not be the body language or confidence that causes you to feel as though you are "funnier", but the fact that there are no direct translations of some jokes or words in other languages. Say you're Japanese and want to replicate the joke "貧乏ってどうやって読むの? (Binbou tte dou yatte yomu no?) 読めない。貧乏だから (Yomenai. Binbou dakara.)". It is close to impossible as the direct translation would be "How do you read the kanji for 'poverty'? I can't read it. I'm too poor." The humour here is that the Japanese word "binbou" (貧乏) means poverty. Hence, the joke relies on the irony of someone being too "poor" to read the word for poverty itself. Therefore, if we do not have the same words or sentence structure in a language we cannot use the same humor in the same situations.

However, that proves that you're not funnier in your mother tongue. You may be more confident and have a wider vocabulary. However, it is only because your audience shares the cultural values and understands the ironic connotations of the words you chose, that you're perceived as funny. For this reason, language does not shape our personality or change it, it simply brings out different aspects of us, based on our experiences and listeners.



Lawmakers Breaking the Law: an Alarming Threat to Human Rights

A Look into Modern Afghanistan's Humanitarian Crisis

MIGLÉ GIRDĀUSKAITĖ

“We are erased. Today human rights in Afghanistan do not exist. Women of Afghanistan do not exist for the Taliban”. Human rights activist Mahbooba Seraj made this statement following the Taliban's accession of control in 2021 and the subsequent adoption of the stringent “Vice and Virtue” laws. By 2023, the Women Peace and Security Index (WPS) evaluated Afghanistan to have the lowest possible scoring with regards to women's inclusion, justice and security. These circumstances correspond to the ceaseless power struggle between various religions, cultures and local communities, through which a ping- pong effect of advancement and decline in human rights has been induced. The current situation exhibits signs of total reversion of progress made in the last 20 years.

Following their resurgence to power, the Taliban enforced an interim government and reconstituted the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan”. To mitigate potential challenges from representatives of the “Islamic Republic of Afghanistan” (the former democratic republic) the leader has imposed a strict and highly exclusive office, primarily composed of southern Pashtun Taliban members.

The distrust for opposition coming from within is also reflected on the global scale, as currently, Afghanistan's international relations remain tense, with most nations refraining from constitutive de facto recognition of the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan”. However, certain neighboring countries have shown support for the regime, such as China, for instance, which has begun trade through its future “Belt & Road Initiative”, and has organized diplomatic commitment by officially accepting an ambassador. Additionally, negotiations are underway to renew the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Gas Pipeline, though India has opted for limited involvement to avoid any association with possible terrorist activity. Meanwhile, countless states and international organizations, including the UN and EU, have imposed restrictive measures of arms export, asset freezes and travel regulations. These strict sanctions, however, indirectly aid the deterioration of human rights in Afghanistan, as it decreases the available options for the Afghan nationals to leave the state. In response, the international community urges increased funding for gender equality, access to education and international representation within the country.

As a consequence of ongoing restrictions, Afghanistan is facing a severe humanitarian crisis. International

isolation and the lack of foreign support immobilized the economy, damaging essential systems. Apart from international conflicts and internal struggles, Afghanistan simultaneously experienced the effects of climate change: three consecutive years of drought followed by an earthquake, resulting in 2023 the state becoming the most food-insecure country, with increased malnutrition levels, widespread hunger and approximately 23 million Afghans deprived of humanitarian assistance.

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan has also intensified due to Taliban's domestic legislative decisions, (abolition of the Afghan independent Human Rights Commission and the non-compliance of human rights mechanisms). Beyond disobedience of pre-emirate laws, the Taliban adopted additional bans on women's rights, severely limiting their participation in public life. Women are now largely barred from the ability to work in the public sector, owning businesses or even appearing in the open without a male presence. These actions have made the crisis worse, increasing gender-based discrimination and pushing Afghan society further away from international human rights standards.

The Taliban's stringent restrictions, in conjunction with imprisonment, torture and unlawful attacks and killings constitute a severe violation of human rights. The Taliban's actions are short of remorse and they have demonstrated an overall unwillingness to discontinue such policies. Despite this, the lack of rigorous international investigation is notable, and thus permits further atrocities. In turn, the Human Rights Council is pressed to ratify an Accountability Mechanism to address and prevent these violations. Thus, Afghanistan is today a nation in turmoil, facing numerous critical issues from its unconventional regime.





The Alchemy of the Soul

A Path to Ethical Evolution

ADIAN VAN DEN OUDEN

“The soul becomes dyed with the colour of its thoughts.” – Marcus Aurelius, Meditations

In the ancient idea of karma, there lies hidden a dynamic not unlike the process of metamorphosis—a force that reshapes us, changing our inner landscape based on the actions we take and the values we hold. Traditionally seen as a cosmic balancing act, Karma has roots in mysticism and spiritual lore. But peel back these layers, and we find a profound, psychological transformation that ties Karma to our conscience. It is a metamorphosis not of the physical form but of the psyche, where our actions and choices gradually shape the essence of who we are.

At the core of each of us is the conscience—a quiet but powerful compass that evolves and guides us through self-awareness, introspection, and the impact of our moral choices. This compass is shaped by cultural influences, personal experiences, and innate moral instincts. When our actions align with these inner values, we feel the expansion of integrity and satisfaction, nourishing our sense of self. When we stray, however, feelings of guilt and remorse take root, creating a subtle yet profound transformation. Over time, this metamorphosis, influenced by our choices, reflects the true meaning of Karma—an internal cycle of cause and effect that sculpts the moral architecture of our minds.

Consider the process of good Karma as the chrysalis stage, where our positive actions foster inner peace and psychological growth. As we make choices aligned with compassion and integrity, we experience an inner flowering—a transformation of confidence, mental resilience, and social harmony. Through this self-renewal, our psyche sheds limiting layers and blossoms into a state of alignment, resembling a metamorphosis that manifests as positive energy in our external lives.

On the other hand, bad Karma operates as a cocoon of conflict, where unethical actions lead to internal discord and external challenges. When we act against our own moral compass, negative emotions like guilt and anxiety coil within, slowly eroding our self-worth. This inner turbulence disrupts our peace, our relationships, and our mental well-being, placing us in a state of emotional suspension until we address and reconcile our actions. The suffering often linked with bad Karma, then, is the experience of stagnation and the yearning for transformation.



In viewing Karma as an inner metamorphosis, we reclaim a sense of personal responsibility, realizing we are the artisans of our own moral and psychological evolution. By nurturing self-awareness and making ethical choices, we empower ourselves to direct our growth consciously. In this perspective, Karma is not an external force but an internal process of unfolding, an organic journey of transformation that brings us closer to our most authentic and compassionate selves.

Seeing Karma as a transformative process within the conscience reveals the intricate connections between our actions, moral values, and psychological growth. It embodies the timeless wisdom that ethical living is not only spiritually fulfilling but also an essential step in self-realization. This interpretation bridges spiritual and psychological wisdom, inviting us to see how our moral actions catalyse an inner metamorphosis that expands both our inner world and our experience of external reality.

In embracing Karma as a transformation of the soul, we acknowledge its essence within ourselves—a force for growth and evolution that guides us toward integrity, compassion, and inner peace. By listening to the voice of our conscience, we embark on a journey that not only enriches our own lives but also sends out a transformative ripple that impacts the world around us. Karma, then, is not a mystical force but a deeply personal journey of moral and psychological metamorphosis.



An Open Letter from Career

Top Tips to Bridge University and the Real World

CAREER COMMITTEE

Dear reader,

As the Career Committee, and fellow students, we know like no other that the metamorphosis to the professional that looms on the horizon can be a daunting one. At times it can feel like there is pressure on you to perform, to succeed, and to get the best out of every possibility. So, to help you navigate the seemingly immense challenge that lies ahead of you, the Career Committee presents a few must-know tips to help you on your way to professionalism:

Develop Your Own Brand

Spend some time honing your web persona. Make a professional email address, tidy up any social media profiles, and update your LinkedIn page. Moreover, think of how you want to showcase your abilities and experiences to employers and coworkers.

Keep your learning mindset

By now, you are probably accustomed to learning new things as a student, and this should not change once you graduate. Being receptive to new information is actually essential in a work environment. Take on difficult projects, look for mentors, and accept criticism as a chance to improve.

Develop Your Soft Skills

In any workplace, effective communication, time management, and problem-solving abilities are essential. Develop your capacity to communicate ideas clearly, engage in active listening, and practice swiftly adjusting to changes. In a competitive employment market, these abilities will help you stand out.

Recognize Workplace Culture

College and the workplace may have different dynamics. Take note of how individuals dress, communicate, and use their time. You can integrate more quickly if you are responsive and proactive in adjusting to the workplace culture.

Establish Specific Goals

Career planning begins right now. Determine your long-term and short-term objectives, then list the necessary steps to achieve them. The sense of direction you create for yourself can help you navigate.

However, besides technicalities, we should not be afraid of admitting that the transition from student to an active member of the workforce could sometimes ignite an uneasy feeling, as the transition is often sprinkled with uncertainty, intense levels of competition and an ever-looming sense of societal pressure for alumni to perform. Failure is generally overemphasized as inadmissible, which in turn might cause anxiety or even determine alumni to develop dislike for their once embraced domain. Mental health plays a big role in today's society, and it is often overlooked by more pressing, fungible concerns like securing a workplace without weighing the downsides of hurrying such a decision. Oftentimes, after finishing studies, people neglect considering leisure and self-content in favour of advancing the career ladder by any means possible.

Yet, instead of perceiving your future job as a label of your never-ending professional ambitions and a source of status, alumni should prioritize juggling professional expectations with mindful decisions that have in their centre the well-being of, and satisfaction with, themselves. At the end of the day, what you prepare throughout your whole university life, your best and most cheerful years, should represent a coronation of both your ambitions as well as your character as a person, one with a healthy mental status and desires that reach beyond what a contract or some figures might entail.





About Us

Checks & Balances is the official magazine of the Student Association CLIO, the biggest association of any faculty of Arts in the Netherlands. We are completely student-run, and cover a wide array of topics, including politics, technology, environment, security, economics and society with a global scope. We strive to provide our readers with insights on topics that are overlooked or lack more varied perspectives. This is the first edition of the 2024-2025 academic year, our 26th year of publication. The Checks & Balances Editorial Staff hopes that you enjoy reading this magazine as much as we've enjoyed writing it for you! Fun fact: Despite having 10 members, this committee contains 12 nationalities from 3 different continents!



Sam Holm van Donk
Editor-in-Chief



Hi there, I'm Sam, this year's Editor-in-Chief. I'm both Danish and Dutch, and am passionate about international relations, history and just obscure facts in general. Outside of school/committee work, I enjoy board games, horror movies and having a good time with friends.

Stefan Szekely Nagy
Secretary



Hello, I'm Stefan, this year's Secretary. I am from Romania and in my final year of International Relations and International Organization studies. I have a keen interest in astronomy and history. In my free time, I enjoy playing games, reading, and cooking meals for my friends.

Loris Hamiot

Treasurer, Lay-out Editor



Hi! I'm Loris. I'm from France and I'll be the treasurer/ lay-outter this year. I'm very interested in International Relations but more generally with anything remotely related to politics. In my free time I like to play tennis, read and listen to 70's and 80's rock music

Annika Koch

Lay-out Editor

Hey! I'm Annika, originally from Germany but grew up in Mexico and the UK. I'm a first year IRIO and love history. Besides uni, you'll probably never see me without my headphones listening to music, rice or talking about football.

Robyne Kerver

Lay-out Editor



Hi! I'm Robyne and this year I get to do the lay-outing for the upcoming issues of Checks with my fellow lay-out editors! I'm half Swedish, half Dutch, but I was born in the Netherlands. In my free time I love making music and reading. My interest in IRIO lies in the politics and history part of it.

Leila Rizkallah

Public Relations



Hi, I'm Leila and I am in charge of PR this year! I'm from Egypt and I study International Relations. Outside of university, I love watching as many movies as I can and I enjoy walking and reading at the park.

Ruben Ardelean

Reporter



Hi, I'm Ruben, a reporter this year! I am studying IRIO and I love watching films and reading books! I also like spending my time swimming and running. I'm a huge fan of graffiti culture and house music.

Miglè Girdauskaitė
Public Relations



Hi, I'm Miglè and I'm going to be responsible for PR this year. Unlike most of the committee, I'm studying International and European Law. In my free time, I love watching movies and listening to their soundtracks.

Nicolas Damm Larkin
Board Representative



I'm Nicolas, I am this year's Commissioner of PR & Publications of the Clio Board. I work on all promotional material and strategies for the events and services that Clio offers. I also aid and guide the PR's of each committee in fulfilling their tasks. I am the Board Rep here at Checks & Balances, Photo & Multimedia and the Yearbook Committee.

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December 2024

Printing

Drukwerkdeal.nl

Circulation

150 Copies

