Magazine
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CONNECTION

FOREWORD

This edition, we wanted to explore connection in all of its forms: connections across the globe, across time, and, most of all, to one another. With articles ranging from the personal to the political, each work provides a unique insight into the factors unifying the UCL community at a time of fragmented connection.

We are, as always, immensely grateful to everybody who has contributed to the magazine, including our wonderful range of artists, designers, photographers, writers, interviewees, and section editors.

Enjoy!

Your EICs,
Emily & Vanessa

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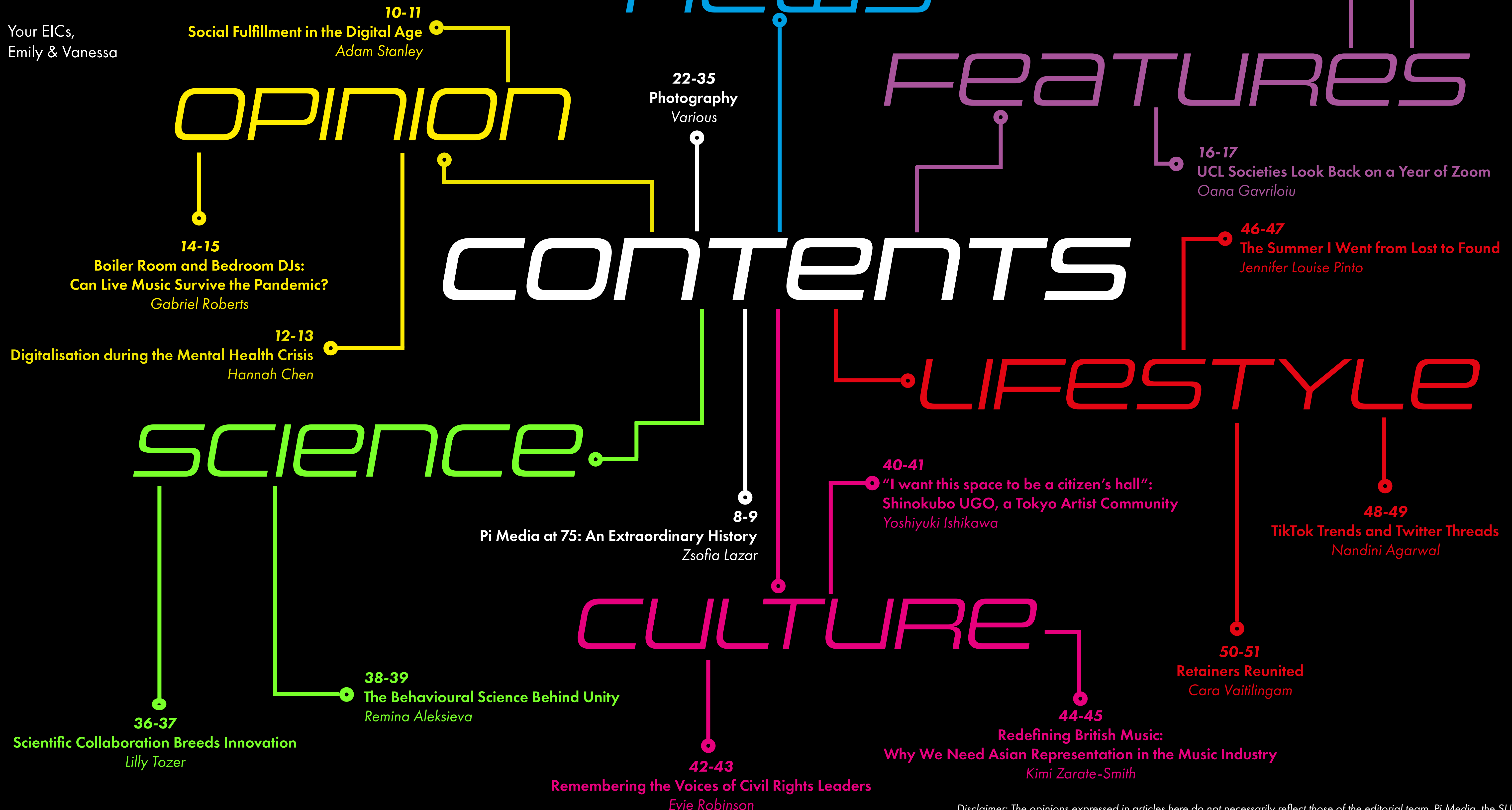

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Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in articles here do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial team, Pi Media, the SU or UCL.

UCL MEDICS ON THE COVID-19 FRONTLINE

Written by Jack Walters;
Photography by Johara Meyer and Interviewees

When Covid-19 first reached British shores in February 2020, there were growing concerns that the NHS would be overwhelmed. Soon after, with Covid cases skyrocketing, the government plunged the nation into its first lockdown and urged Britons to "Stay Home, Protect The NHS, Save Lives".

Since then, over 340 UCL medic students have enlisted their support and joined the NHS' 'call to action'. The Director of the UCL Medical School, Professor Deborah Gill, explained to UCL how some students spent up to 20 hours a week offering support to the NHS and stressed that this was on top of their student clinical placement hours. "We are enormously proud of their contribution to the healthcare community", Gill added.

Many medics have spent the last twelve months working at the Whittington Health NHS Trust in Islington, three-miles away from Gower Street. Professor Carly Fertleman, a consultant paediatrician at the trust and a UCL Medical School undergraduate lead, described UCL medics as having played "an invaluable part" in the NHS' response to Covid-19.

Other students, including Priya Gopaldas, have been working just a stone's throw away from UCL's Main Quad at University College London Hospital (UCLH). Priya explained that the Christmas-surge in Covid-cases prompted her "to get involved and give back to UCLH".

The fifth-year medic recalled for Pi Magazine her "daunting" first shift and explained how she followed nurses into the intensive care unit where more than 200 Covid-patients were waiting. "I was shocked at how ill patients were and found it incredibly difficult to process just how many people were dying." However, she pointed out "the psychological burden was greatly eased by the friendly doctors and nurses who would go beyond their job description to offer support."

Priya was quickly tasked with jobs she had no experience of before, such as taking arterial blood gas . Since then she has performed this procedure over 100 times and said, "I now feel like an expert!"

"The most complex part of the job was that, due to the ICU being understaffed, there was always something to do". This included making hourly-observations, drawing-up medication, and even turning patients over to ease their breathing.

But Priya also revealed that her work has taken a physical toll: "The long 12 hour shifts were the most challenging part. Despite working six nights in a row, my body didn't quite adjust to sleeping during the day. During that week I was averaging about five hours of sleep, but thankfully during the shift we were given a couple of hour-long breaks and we were able to sleep in the staff room".

The chief executive of the UCLH NHS foundation trust, Professor Marcel Levi, told the university that the "reliable, professional and resilient" work offered by the university's medic students was, "without question", both "essential and integral".

The Royal Free London in Hampstead has also recruited a number of UCL medics. Ashley Poole, who opted to stay in London during the first lockdown, has written for UCL about her ten weeks helping with communications in intensive care and anaesthetics at the Royal Free during the spring of 2020.

She then returned to ICU in December and was tasked to recruit fellow students. Ashley sent an email at 22:00 on December 23 inviting classmates to join an online training session the following morning. At 10:00 on Christmas Eve, 60 students joined the class. There are now 180 medical students at the Royal Free working in ICU, A&E, and on the Covid wards.

The medical director of the North London Hospice, Dr Samantha Edward, was also working at the Royal Free London. Edward praised the contribution made by UCL students and said, "I walked away struck by my personal experience".

PRIYA GOPOLDAS

ELIZA LASSMAN

"I was beyond proud to work alongside and meet these students whom I am often teaching in my own clinical setting", she added.

Now UCL students are even supporting the vaccine roll-out. Eliza Lassman, a fifth-year student, has been working at the capital's Covid-19 vaccine centres since December."I actually got the opportunity to help through my part-time job as a medical records summariser at a GP surgery. All the GP staff were given the option to help out – I jumped at the chance to be useful in whatever capacity was needed", Eliza recalled.

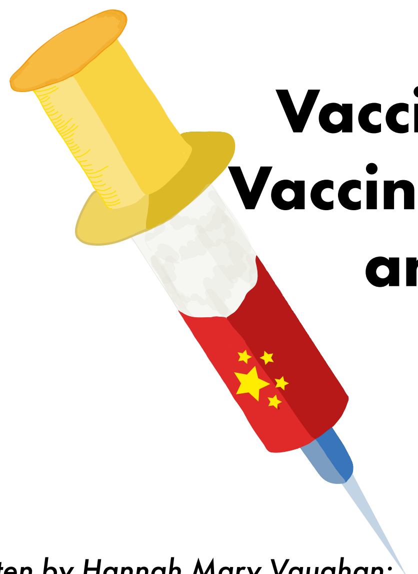
Initially, Eliza worked as a vaccine marshal, ushering people to where they needed to be and making sure people were socially distancing. Recently, after some "heavy online training", she undertook a new role as an administrator.

For many people, including one woman Eliza met "in floods of tears", the vaccine roll-out is a turning point in Britain's struggle against Covid-19: "I think it's mainly the relief or the hope."

The rapid vaccine roll-out has seen over 45% of the population receive their first Covid jab. This has already led to a drop in hospitalisations and deaths.

The break-neck speed at which Britain has been vaccinating so far also prompted Eliza to add, "I really do feel like I'm a part of history". She concluded: "Seeing the insurmountable effort that has gone into delivering these vaccines and how hard people have worked to come together and make this happen is so inspiring. It solidifies my belief that we will get through this."

"Nobody wins the race until everyone wins"



Vaccine Diplomacy, Vaccine Nationalism, and What Next?

Written by Hannah Mary Vaughan; Artwork by Valeria Fernandez

The name of the Russian vaccine, Sputnik V, may not be an accident, according to political analysts. It reminds us of the 1957 launch of the Russian satellite, Sputnik, which was to show Russia's strength and supremacy over the US during the Cold War.

The rhetoric of many countries concerning the development of a Covid-19 vaccine has taken on a similar tone of competition, rather than of global cooperation. For instance, the UK's Chair of the Vaccine Taskforce, Kate Bingham, stated that "the UK will go down in history as the country that led the world in one of the biggest scientific breakthroughs of our time." The race to develop a vaccine has since become a race of distribution. This is where the term 'vaccine diplomacy' comes in.

Vaccine diplomacy centres on "leveraging some of countries' inherent strengths in being able to produce vaccines ... for larger foreign policy ends," explains Harsh Pant, Professor of International Relations at KCL, in an interview with Pi Media. Thus, vaccine distribution takes on a political function. Pant points to the examples of China and India to illustrate this further, as these countries "seem more active on the global stage, than ... western countries."

India's vaccination program, launched on January 16 2021, is currently the biggest in the world, aiming to vaccinate its population of 1.6 billion. However, India also wants to position itself as "a country that is ... trying to help the rest of the world," says Pant. India is already known as the "pharmacy of the world", as it produces about half of the world's vaccines, especially for developing countries. Covid-19 vaccines will enable it to boost its reputation.

India produces both the UK's AstraZeneca (branded as Covishield) and local COVAXIN vaccines, and has already started exporting them to neighbouring countries, with Bangladesh and Nepal receiving them on a grant aid basis, as will the Maldives, Myanmar, and the Seychelles. India will also provide vaccines to South Africa, Morocco, Egypt, and Brazil. India's aim, besides bringing the pandemic to an end, is to be viewed as a "responsible global stakeholder," in a time when other countries are not.

China wants to use vaccine diplomacy for specific political gains, and to salvage its reputation amid global mistrust about the outbreak that originated there, according to Yanzhong Huang, Senior Fellow for Global Health at the Council on Foreign Relations.

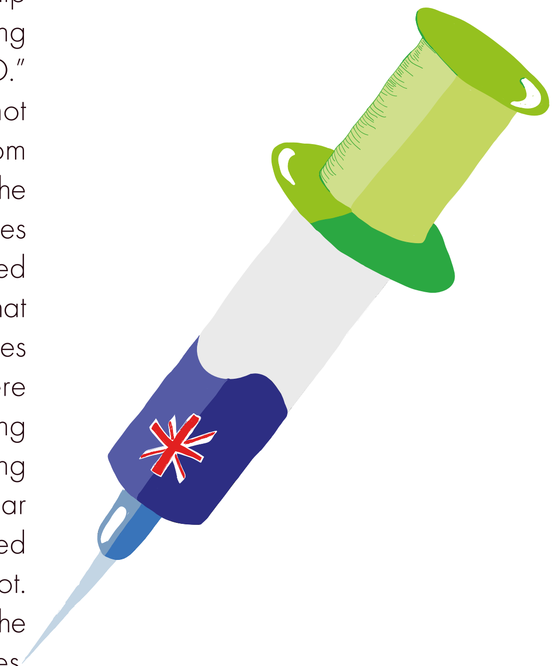
In an interview with Pi Media, Huang also speaks of China's soft power, used to become "more attractive in the developing world". According to Huang, this will help "China expand its international influence and facilitate the achievement of other foreign policy objectives," such as softening Southeast-Asian countries' stance in negotiations concerning territorial disputes by supplying them with vaccines.

However, Taiwan, for example, has refused Chinese vaccines, not only for political reasons, but also due to a concern with the lack of transparency regarding vaccine trial results and "the relatively low efficacy rate of the vaccines," explains Huang.

Currently, China is also concerned about Western countries "achieving herd immunity ahead of China, which would make China look bad," according to Huang. Another problem in their vaccine diplomacy is overpromising, as China might not be able to be as generous as it has pledged.

Western countries, on the other hand, have shown to be more "inward looking", focusing on their own policies, rather than fostering a global outlook. This approach can lead to vaccine nationalism, with policies prioritising their countries' access to vaccines, often concluding in the hoarding of vaccines.

In order to prevent this unequal distribution, COVAX was founded. COVAX aims to vaccinate 20-30 percent of all its member-states before moving on to vaccinating a bigger percentage of the population of individual countries. COVAX's 189 members include many wealthy economies, such as the UK and the EU. Yet the US was missing, having left the WHO altogether. Now, with the election of Joe Biden, Huang expects "it will play a leadership role in pushing for the reforming and strengthening of the WHO."



Joining COVAX has not prevented countries from prioritising their own needs. The EU's export checks on vaccines produced in the bloc incited criticism, as they suggested that the EU wanted to keep vaccines within its territory. The checks were the result of AstraZeneca cutting exports to the EU, but, according to the BBC, it remains unclear whether this was encouraged by the British government or not. Since then, the EU has granted the export of vaccines to 21 countries, including the UK, US, and Australia, as well as Ecuador or Oman.

The UK has ordered 407 million doses for a population of 66 million as of February 1, stating that any surplus vaccines could be distributed globally. Yet, according to the WHO, vaccinations need to occur simultaneously across the world in order to truly stop the pandemic, help the global economy, and prevent new mutations of the virus that would "undermine existing vaccines," according to Henry Li, Research Fellow at the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose. In an interview for Pi Magazine, Li stressed the lack of "global governance" and the need for a less fragmented approach to the fight "we are all losing."

High income countries form a mere 16 percent of the world's population, yet they own most of the world's vaccines. In today's global economy and increasingly connected world, can we afford to be selfish and not think globally? As the WHO has put it: "Nobody wins the race until everyone wins."

75 years of Pi: An Extraordinary History

Written by Zsofia Lazar; Photography by Daria Mosolova

Approximately 75 years ago, in 1946, a student magazine was established. It was christened after the then-provost, David Pye; no one could then have imagined that it would last three quarters of a century, and win numerous awards. This heralded the age of Pi.

Originally launched as purely a fortnightly news-sheet, Pi was written and published internally, a result of strong popular supply among UCL students and Union officials for a community project that would bind together the expanding campus. It served to provide news and entertainment for students, and journalistic experience for the editorial team. Richard Lubbock served as the founding editor; then a first-year medic, he modelled the first issues after the style of an American high school newspaper. Each issue was popular and cheaply available—although student politics was originally at the forefront of the paper, as a more diverse base of writers and journalists were recruited, new areas like sports, academic discourse and interviews with public figures also became regular sights.

This expansion only continued—in 2007, its former title of Pi Magazine was renamed Pi Media to take into account a foray into alternative media formats including Pi Online and PiTV, both of which have been hugely successful. Additionally, a sister publication to the Magazine, Pi Squared, was launched in 2006, but was discontinued in 2012 as a result of internal competition. Former contributors and successful names which Pi Media helped to launch include Jonathan Dimbley, British journalist and TV personality and Greg Wood, the Guardian's racing correspondent.

Over this three-quarters of a century, Pi as an organisation has achieved truly amazing heights as a student magazine—it has won

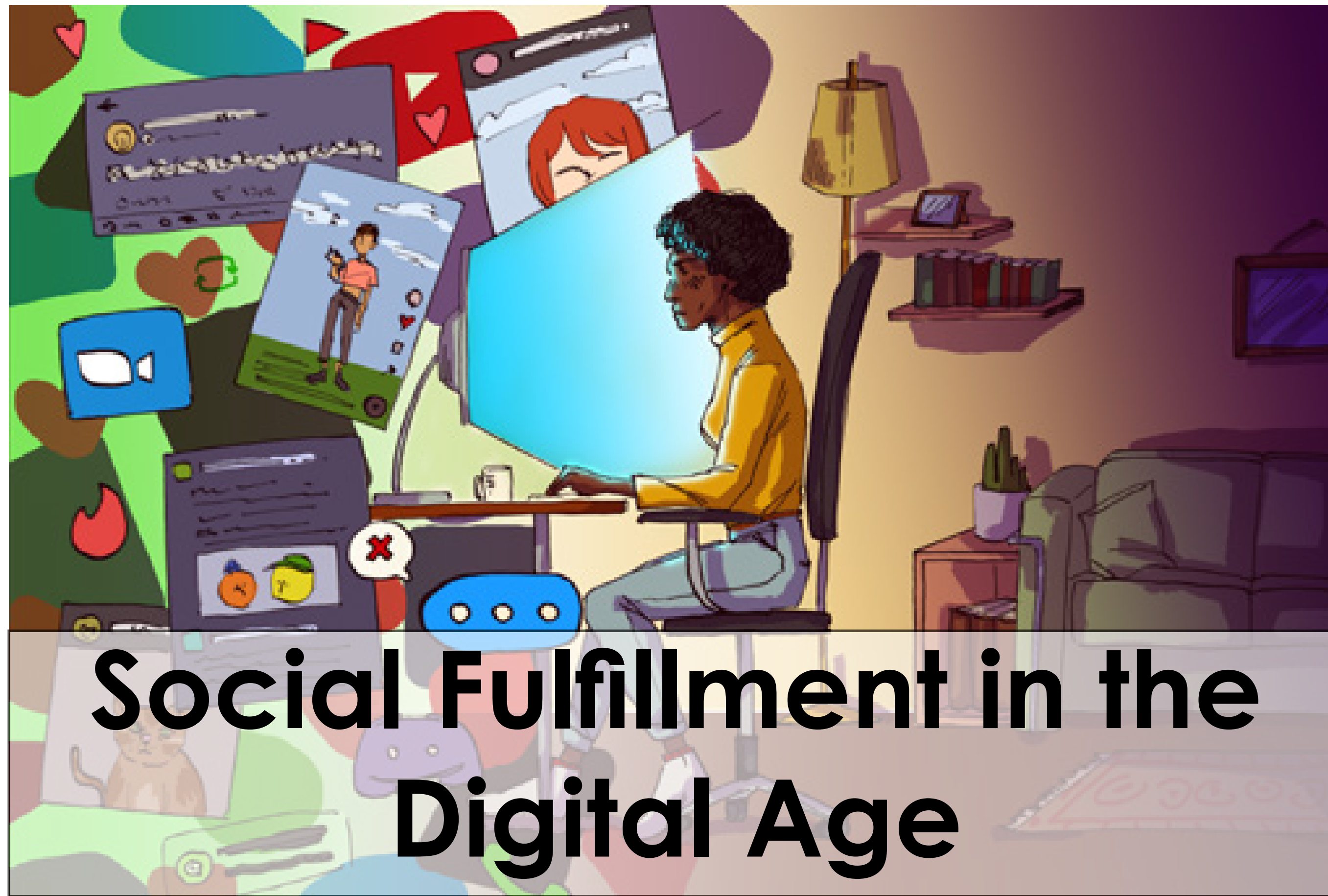
awards including the Best Student Publication in London at the Student Publication Awards only this year, the best publication at the UCL Student Union Art Awards on several occasions, and even Magazine of the Year at the The Guardian's Student Media Awards. It has also been the site of exclusive interviews with film stars like Elijah Wood, politicians like Dominic Raab and Nigel Farage, and activists like Desmond Tutu.

Pi's journalists have adhered to the highest standards of student journalism, exposing the truth even against adversity. In 2016, the President of Pi Media, Rebecca Pinnington, was threatened with disciplinary action after publishing an article revealing that the university would profit from student accommodation prices amidst a biting 'rent strike'. Pinnington faced potential expulsion or court action while in the fourth and final year of her degree, and still she told the truth. This affair attracted major media attention from individuals including the CEO of the Index on Censorship and Cut the Rent organisers. Pi continues to champion this integrity.

Pi's 2020/2021 President, Isobel Helme, has reiterated the privilege it is to be a part of Pi Media, and its continued dedication to producing insightful and award-winning content. "Sharing student stories and news is more important than ever, and despite the difficulties posed by this challenging year, all platforms rose to the occasion, exhibiting resilience, innovation and journalistic integrity across all content produced."

Pi Media's journey over these 75 years has been truly remarkable—from fortnightly news sheet to multimedia platform to award-winning publication—all the while maintaining its principles, integrity and dedication. It shows no signs of stopping.

OPINION



Social Fulfillment in the Digital Age

Written by Adam Stanley; Artwork by Flynn Klein

Living in not only the digital age, but also the most socially isolated era in centuries, it is only natural for Facebook mums, BuzzFeed millennials, and almost everyone else with an internet connection to supplement our lack of real-life social interactions with virtual ones. Whilst social media affords a simulation of light socialising from the comfort and (most importantly) safety of our own homes, we continue to become more isolated in the real world, and in many cases our use of social media starts to become more of a reliance than perhaps we would like to admit.

I am sure that many readers, being (by and large) a product of the internet age, have experienced some form of social media addiction at a time in their lives, whether it be to TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, or dating apps. This has been made even more likely by the three nation-wide lockdowns the UK has had in the space of a year. Many friendships would have faltered if it were not for our ability to reach out via the cyber-space, though the shift of the majority of our socialising from the real to virtual space may result in a serious personal unfulfillment with any interaction other than the virtual kind.

Our ability to socialise with hundreds of people at a time is only ever realistically possible through the use of social media, with almost anyone you have ever known being reachable by a few taps on a screen. As we become more accustomed to this type of social platter, being able to pick and choose who we communicate with and exactly how much we would like to communicate with them, the social rules and pitfalls of normal life seem more distant.

Upon re-introduction to a material social life, our inability to control and manipulate the social climate, as is possible on our phones, may render real interactions less stimulating than those we have become accustomed to in the virtual world. Luke, a second year comparative literature student at UCL, seems more excited than apprehensive at the return of normality in London, though accepts that a transition period is 'inevitable' and may be difficult for some. This sentiment is shared by many students, including Macrina, a second year Arts and Sciences student. She expressed some wariness of the effects a year of isolation may have on our everyday ability to function socially and believes that excessive social media use would only 'exacerbate' any pre-existing sense of alienation.

We are forced to accept and address the shortcomings of our personal relationships, rather than being able to block or just straight up ignore anyone we would like to in order to avoid the repercussions of our actions, as is possible in the virtual sphere. The personal issues we may face with flatmates, landlords or families then become harder to address as we become increasingly used to the possibilities of a virtual social world.

As a result, it may often seem easiest and most personally fulfilling to respond to challenging social situations by retreating into the cyber-space, a place with the potential for less social friction and more positive reinforcement. Even if you do not mind the lack of control, it is almost certain that real life has less going on than your combined social media—it is unlikely that you would receive tens of hyperbolically positive comments on how you look from people you barely know when entering post-pandemic a party, though a photo of you at the party posted to Instagram may provoke such a serotonin-inducing reaction.

On the basis of the harms constant social stimulation may cause, you may—wisely—try to restrict your involvement in the virtual social sphere, though as the world adjusts to socialising and working from home, disconnecting from it all may be next to impossible. From Zoom meetings to the online self-promotional work of creatives, our reliance upon the virtual world seems unavoidable, and disconnecting entirely would mean, for many, failing classes, fewer opportunities, and diminished job prospects.

How should we be expected to cope, then, with the modern synthesis of the virtual and real world, especially as the former continues to overtake the latter in what it offers? The answer depends on your living situation, a factor many are unable to have significant control over. If you are lucky enough to live with friends, you may be able to curb the need for supplementing your social life in cyberspace to some degree. Though even this can only go so far since, as students, we're at the very least required to join seminars through Zoom or Microsoft Teams. These are platforms which—like all social media—we have a certain amount of control over, whether it be turning off your camera on a bad hair day, manipulating your appearance by the use of favourable lighting, or simply not paying attention when you don't feel like it. These aspects of modern social life are clearly not sustainable as we (eventually) transgress back into the real-world of socialising. The transition is likely to cause resistance to the stark truths of socialising—that we may have to commute to UCL's campus for a 9 am and sit through a seminar or lecture looking like death, or that we may end up in Loop on a Wednesday night as an excuse for weekday drinking.

Despite all this, there remains an authenticity to the material world of socialising that is very clearly lacking in the virtual world. In this, though it may be initially less stimulating, I hope that the real world may be considered for what it is: an often dark and dreary place where each and every positive interaction counts for much more than it may in cyberspace. I, for one, cannot justifiably claim that a screensaver of UCL Portico shining in the summer sun compares to a real experience of it on a stark and cold November morning.

Digitalisation during the Mental Health Crisis

Written by Hannah Chen

The pressures of the pandemic, which exacerbated feelings of anxiety and loneliness, have increased strain on already overwhelmed university counselling services. During a time of calamity, startup wellbeing services arose with a potential solution to these problems.

There are two major product categories: mindfulness applications and online therapy. UCL's Student Support and Wellbeing team proposed mindfulness apps such as Calm, Headspace, and Sanvello during the November lockdown last year as extra support for students. Pi Magazine spoke to UCL Psychiatry PhD student Tayla McCloud, whose MSc dissertation paper analysed the effectiveness of an app for internet-based mental health treatment. She pointed out that directing students to lower-intensive intervention such as mindfulness apps first "is a sensible way to allocate resources". This is because they both reduce stress for less severe symptoms and provide temporary amelioration while students wait for scheduled meetings with university counsellors.

E-therapy apps, in contrast, are more contentious. Unlike traditional talk therapy, these apps offer a range of communication methods from live chat, to video, to phone calls. Their marketing strategies typically revolve around three guarantees: convenience, affordability, and qualified professionals. Despite their boom in popularity last year as a viable solution for those self-isolating, these apps have been criticised for failing to live up to their promise.

Convenience

After the user fills out a short form, they will receive a list of recommended therapists according to their needs. They then have 24/7 access to a private messaging room with their chosen therapist. The therapist is expected to respond regularly, depending on the company's policies. There are options to arrange weekly video or voice calls too. The large network of professionals helps users avoid the struggles of locating a therapist nearby, improving accessibility. The ability to evoke the psychological presence of a therapist any time over text gives the impression of greater interactivity.

However, research warns about the potential for miscommunication in text therapy. The elusive tone, lack of social cues, and impulse to banter are easily exacerbated by a virtual environment. The impact of disjointed communication is also under-researched. In 2019, an e-therapy app called Talkspace introduced a feature which sets a time limit for therapists to respond to messages, with a potential cut in pay for failure to perform. This risks exacerbating issues of over-dependency, with therapists expressing concerns over giving such leverage for customers 'with anxiety and boundary-issues'.

Affordability

According to the NHS, the cost of private therapy sessions for cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can range from £40 to £100 per session, with between 5 and 20 sessions needed. Comparing this pricing system with two of the biggest e-therapy apps, BetterHelp and Talkspace, both of which offer constant therapist access and cost around £60 to £90 per week, e-therapy does feel more affordable. But with apps, you are paying mainly for the convenience, with fewer guarantees over the quality of other critical aspects such as the therapist's professionalism.

Qualified professionals

'Inconsistent' is the most apt description for this category. Following criticism of YouTubers sponsored by mental health apps for profiting from 'fans struggling with depression', BetterHelp's business practices also came under intense scrutiny. Online forums like Reddit started threads discussing their trustworthiness. Recurring criticisms ranged from therapists providing generic replies which impeded quality relationship building (an important factor in therapy), or simply a lack of response. Many mental health apps use their Terms of Service to deflect criticism, specifying that their services are not intended to substitute actually seeing a mental health professional, and attempting to distinguish between the 'therapeutic conversation' they offer and traditional therapy. This vague phrasing does little to assure customers of their virtual therapy format's service quality. Clearly, the pursuit of expansion for a venture capital-backed startup can conflict with the ethics of professional therapy.

BetterHelp's founder Alan Matas argued in defence that failing to meet expectations is inevitable for 'a platform that has facilitated over 30 million counseling interactions'. This is the fundamental problem with the 'app-ification' of mental health. Corporate achievements overshadow the fact that they have access to the vulnerable depths of 30 million individual lives. The customers are not 'patients', and these online counselling interactions are not 'treatment'. Neglecting to consider the connotations of this model can lead to considerable disillusionment. Even if companies include disclaimers, think about the last time you actually read the Terms and Conditions of a product. And for those who are deeply distressed, poor transparency about the intended purpose of services is potentially destructive. McCloud reflects that "It is so tough to know what [online services] are legitimate, particularly when you are making a decision on something so important like your mental health [and have] so little information."

It is unfortunate that people have to be on guard when we want to seek help. The companies' indifference towards criticisms casts a new light on their advertised promises. The fear is that they may target digitally-savvy customers such as university students, thereby capitalising on widespread anxieties brought by the pandemic. As students search for a safe space to open up about their deepest struggles during a time of difficulty, the potential consequences of this new trend in therapy services are concerning. Nonetheless, the fundamental needs of startups to attend to customer feedback may provide opportunity for reform. McCloud hopes that with the momentum generated from media attention on mental health problems intensified by Covid-19, both existing and additional services can be expanded to offer accessible and effective mental health support to all. Personally, the hope is that more funding can be generated to objectively test the validity of therapy digitalisation, so as to scientifically assess the promises of wellbeing startups.

For university student-tailored resources regarding mental health, the UCL Support and Well-being team collated various online resources that help with general mental wellbeing to stress, anxiety and depression.

BOILER ROOM AND BEDROOM DJS:

CAN LIVE MUSIC SURVIVE THE PANDEMIC?

OPINION

Written by Gabriel Roberts; Photography from Interviewees

In 2010, when Blaise Bellville and two friends taped a webcam to the wall of a disused boiler room to livestream their DJ sets online, there was no way that they could have known that their idea would change the face of live music forever.

During its decade of existence, Boiler Room has clearly demonstrated the appetite for live-streamed music as the broadcasting platform has grown into a truly global phenomenon: from a couple of mates DJing in a backroom to the reported 10.6 million people who logged on to watch Carl Cox perform from Ibiza in 2013.

Fast forward to March 2020, and by the time Boris Johnson told clubs to close "as soon as they reasonably can" on March 20, Boiler Room had already set the trend. The platform had just announced three evenings of live music and archival DJ sets as the first events in its "Streaming from Isolation" series. Using only some simple software and the webcams now found on every device, musicians across the world could replicate the DIY blueprint that Boiler Room had developed and broadcast their performances straight from the safety of their living rooms directly into their audience's homes.

With clubs closed and events cancelled indefinitely, the future looked bleak, but tuning into a livestream on Instagram or Twitch TV became a way of alleviating the isolation of lockdown. It was a strange, but comforting feeling to see the viewer count tick upwards in the knowledge that you were sharing the same experience with hundreds and thousands of others around the world, each sitting at home listening to music only usually found in dark, hazy clubs. One study conducted by OnePoll and Harman found that 81.5% of US adults said that music had helped them to cope with self-isolation during the pandemic, while 64.2% said that watching live music online had made them feel connected to other people during lockdown.

Nevertheless, performing online has presented unique challenges for artists. For Christopher Commander, Head of Events at Rare FM and a UCL Electronic Music Society DJ, it was harder to create a connection online with his listeners, meaning that he needed to change how he curated his DJ sets: "playing music online is more challenging because you have to have a pretty consistent grasp of audience engagement... it's much easier to click off a stream than to leave a club."

"Using the mic to single out listeners, generally 'hyping' your set by using the mic here and there, and making sure your setup has clear audio and a good camera angle are ways in which one can still try and make that connection work."

For others, the range of logistical problems that streaming online entails has forced them to rethink live performances entirely. UCL Live Music Society guitarist Dhruv Kotecha explained that: "I've completely differentiated zoom gigs and regular gigs in [my] mind so I try not to compare them... I've treated the zoom shows as more of a studio-type experience."

While it's clear that musicians have shown incredible tenacity and resourceness during the last year, the UK government seems to have left the music industry to deal with the unprecedented challenge of the pandemic on its own.

As social distancing restrictions were loosened last summer, some venues experimented with different formats in order to operate safely in person. The Virgin Media Unity Arena opened in Newcastle as the UK's first purpose-built socially distanced venue, and Casa, a house and techno events organisation, also held a drive-in rave in Plymouth. These events used innovative formulas to maintain social distancing, such as raised viewing platforms which could accommodate up to 2,500 people, but eventually fell victim to the government's volatile tiered system of restrictions which left the future uncertain for many companies.

> "you have to have a pretty consistent grasp of audience engagement... it's much easier to click off a stream than to leave a club."

The government has pledged £1.9 billion in support as part of the Culture Recovery Fund, but this aid has been criticised as inconsistent and inaccessible. While Boiler Room was allocated a £800,000 grant, iconic London venues such as Printworks, Studio 338 and The Egg were all denied funding, leaving them in a precarious financial position.

For the thousands of freelance musicians, the transition to online live-streams has also left them out of pocket as music sales dried up in the last decade and performing live became their main source of income. As part of the 2021 budget, the Chancellor has now extended the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS) to help these freelancers and stagehands, but for many, these measures don't go far enough. Although the Musicians' Union has welcomed this announcement, it estimates that 38% of all musicians are currently ineligible for the government support scheme, of which only 15% will now receive financial aid under its extension.

The music industry has worked incredibly hard to survive thus far, but sheer perseverance alone isn't enough to support it. Although the innovative forms of live-streamed music have been a source of great comfort in this difficult time, for many, June 21 cannot come soon enough. I fear however that, given the government's erratic coronavirus policy and lackluster financial support, we may just find that there isn't much of the music industry left. The now infamous "Rethink. Reskill. Reboot." advert, which suggested that ballet dancers should retrain in cyber security, is emblematic of the attitude of the current government which refuses to adequately support artistic industries against this unprecedented challenge despite their immense cultural and economic value.

FEATURES

UCL SOCIETIES *look back on* A YEAR OF ZOOM

Written by Oana Gavriloiu

For this issue of the magazine, I spoke with the representatives of various UCL societies about the ways in which they have managed to adapt their activities to the many challenges of this year. With courses moving entirely online, every society was forced to reckon with how to organise meetings and events in a social-distanced scenario or, more often, remotely.

Societies rose to the occasion, devising diverse plans with the aim of offering their members a semblance of normalcy. From socially-distanced hikes to staging a play on Zoom, each club adopted a different approach. Some of them had the chance to hold a few in-person meetings in-between lockdowns, but even these were strikingly different from in pre-pandemic times.

Audrey, the Vice-President of the UCL Hiking Club, described the set of measures they had taken back in September when group hikes were permitted. The society had to ticket hikes through Eventbrite to impose a cap of 30 participants. Even then, it was important to keep to social distancing during their hikes. Members of the UCL Drama Society also had the chance to attend a few in-person workshops at the start of term one, but the socially-distanced environment did not prove to be conducive for theatre. Then came the lockdown, and everything had to be done remotely, even for sports-based societies. Every club had to find the best way to adapt, with most relying on their fully-fledged social media presences.

"All the emphasis was on social media—through Instagram, we were able to introduce different initiatives, such as 'Geocaching with UCL', asking our members to search for Geocaches around the world. We also posted videos teaching people how to take a bearing and some members filmed themselves hiking and encouraged others to go hiking too" explained Audrey. Lewis, the President of the Drama Society, talked about how social media and Zoom made their events more accessible, which meant that a lot more people showed up for their plays. Surprised by an unexpectedly large online audience for their shows and festivals, Pride Fest and Writing Fest, the Drama Society is pondering a way of live-streaming their plays in the future.

> **"You can't practice the essence of kendo online. You can't do any sparring, so you basically lose the fun part of it, which means that it's also more difficult to keep people in the club"**

Zoom was, of course, an indispensable part of the online experience. The Drama Society coordinated online workshops focused on acting and writing, whilst the UCL Kendo Club conducted its training sessions on there. Despite enabling members across the world to connect, both societies highlighted the limitations of an online medium. "You can't practice the essence of kendo online. You can't do any sparring, so you basically lose the fun part of it, which means that it's also more difficult to keep people in the club" explained Jan, the President of the Kendo Society. The move online was similarly challenging for the Drama Society: "Drama is especially difficult to translate in an online medium because it is so much about the connection between people."

Societies also held socials for members on Zoom, which proved to be a welcomed addition to the activity schedule of every society. UCL Kendo Club is even thinking of keeping them after things start going back to normal since they seem like a great idea, "especially during exam sessions when you don't have a lot of free time and just want to unwind a little bit". Audrey also pointed to the importance of having socials on Zoom as a way of getting to know the members of her society this year.

The pandemic also fostered more cooperation between societies. For example, UCL Film and TV Society organised monthly film screenings in collaboration with the UCL Nordic Society.

According to Diego, the Film and TV Society President, they also managed to set up a multipurpose server on which they post updates about meetings and stream movies.

At the moment, every society is waiting on guidelines from the government and the Students' Union on how to move forward. Some of them have events planned for the third term and beyond. The Drama Society is hoping to stage a few shows before the end of the academic year, when restrictions will potentially become more relaxed, in an effort to make up for the missed opportunities of this year. The Film and TV Society has plans to shoot three short films and to organise a partly online partly in-person film festival. As for the sports-based societies, they are likely to resume in-person activities in the next academic year depending on how many of their members would still be in London in term three.

> **"Drama is especially difficult to translate in an online medium because it is so much about the connection between people."**

Grappling with a once in a generation pandemic is taxing on every level; it would have been undoubtedly more convenient for societies to just halt their activities throughout the year entirely. And yet each worked to deliver a series of events that provided a sense of community to their members during one of the most difficult times to be a student.

WHY MY GRANDMOTHER DOESN'T TALK TO ME IN ENGLISH ANYMORE

Written by Anushka Ray; Photography from Author

My grandmother has been wearing saris since the day she got married. A rough equation would bring that to about sixty years of waking up at 5am to drape and weave the fabric over and under, sixty years of strict routine beginning as duty, evolving into tradition. For a long time, I defined my grandmother by this rigid, formidable practise, by the strength to commit regardless of her own exhaustion, believing my grandmother is unshakeable as a consequence of her past.

My grandmother's life story has always seemed too big for the rest of us. She became a matriarch at the age of 15, married off to an older man (and really, aren't all men older at that age?).

She would come to explain, "It was much easier for my father to house two children than three." Her husband then went on to become one of the most powerful men in their city, making her one of the most powerful women, attending opening events as special guests and countless tea parties around the neighbourhood. Her life is her magnum opus, brimming with the sacrifices writers love to dream up, so when 2020 generously gifted me with a five month long summer break confined inside my house, I called up my grandmother and asked if she would let me try writing her biography.

I am the fourth oldest and subsequently the fourth youngest grandchild, the dreaded middle child. I am not fluent in Bengali like my sister is, nor am I effortlessly adorable like my younger cousins are, and in order to prevent accidentally saying too much, I veer on the side of caution and try to say not much at all. Pairing these facts with my knowledge of my household and the rarity of abrupt, upfront vulnerability there, I expected the project to run somewhat journalistically—desperately trying to fish for information about my grandmother's marriage through lapses in conversation and language barriers.

It turns out my grandmother is a natural storyteller with that flair for accidental poetry which only non-native English speakers possess. My questions were quickly forgotten as she seamlessly transitioned from topic to topic, remembering things with a clarity I wish I had inherited. "My father was a doctor," she said, twenty seven minutes into the call, "and when patients got better, they would gift him a chicken. I kept one of these chickens, and had a room outside where I could check on him. One day, without telling me, they cut and cooked my chicken. When I found out, I cried and didn't eat the dinner they served. How could I? I had cared for him, I had given him food."

Our calls meandered through anecdotes like this, jumping from her affinity for catching squirrels to how she had hid in the kitchen when men visited the house because the daughter-in-law should not be seen without her husband present. When I questioned the oppressive nature of my grandmother's terrifying mother-in-law I was instantly shot down and told to remember the brunt of familial cultural pressure her mother-in-law had faced herself, and the durability of such expectations.

As our calls progressed, my grandmother began replacing hesitant English with rapid Bengali, forgetting—or choosing to forget—my abysmal grasp of the language. Bengali, with its innate melody and simple sounds, is intrinsically softer than English, and my grandmother works in tandem with the language she uses. When she speaks in English, her words are loud and for us, but when she speaks in Bengali, they're muted and for herself.

My greatest fear initially was exactly this: that I would be trapped in calls which I barely understood, struggling to keep up with verb tenses and tone shifts. But really, it was my grandmother's Bengali that I understood best.

About three-quarters into our first call, my grandmother began talking about her sister, switching between rough English and candor Bengali. "I think, in my sister's childhood, since she didn't have a mother because my mother died early, and then Father was also not there, she believed she didn't have anyone. I've told her I'm there, our brother is there, don't think that since there's no mother or father that you don't have anyone. If I hadn't married, if the three of us all stayed together, she would have thought otherwise. I think in the back of her mind she thinks 'if I don't have my husband, where will I go? Who will support me?' I really think she thinks like this." I had always focused on my grandmother's tactile, tangible losses: graduation, college, sleepovers, but had never considered the unexpected, gradual ones—sisterhood, familial trust, stability—the grievances that build over years.

My grandmother's life is not only what she has sacrificed from the day she got married. Its spectacularity is something else entirely; it is the clinginess of her children, childhood playdates with her siblings, her favourite afternoon snack, the advice her mother once gave her. She might have lost years of her youth, but she did not lose them all; she is as proud and sure of her childhood as she is of her children, well aware of her responsibilities as a daughter and her regrets as a mother. I had always been so myopic on the full length of my grandmother's life, convinced she has been moulded strictly by her marriage and its regulations. But she is not the strict, rigid routine of waking up at dawn to abide by tradition; she is the drapes of well-worn saris who know where to fall and where to caress from their years of practise, but still flow a little gently in the wind.

MYANMAR unravelled: COUP, CULTURE & CONNECTIONS IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Written by Ben Leo Hollis; Photography by the Author

On December 31 2018, I entered Myanmar across a border that had remained closed to international travellers for decades. Moving down into a small valley and over a disintegrating wooden bridge, I found a jovial Burmese border officer who quickly glanced at my visa, before I passed quietly into Myanmar's rolling green hills, neatly kept streets and tidy groups of wooden houses. Now, just over two years later, it looks like the country's quietly-growing connections with the wider international community look set to cease, as Aung San Suu Kyi and the rest of her democratically-elected government have been arrested and, just like that, the country has seen a swift return to its decades of military rule.

The military, headed by Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing, has instituted a one-year state of emergency, and claimed that November's elections, in which Suu Kyi, the country's leader since 2011, won a landslide victory over government-backed rivals, were riddled with "widespread fraud". However, independent electoral watchdogs have continued to support the election's integrity, with the EU's Election Observation Commission declaring that 95% of observers rated it either 'good' or 'very good'. Despite the military's ongoing claims and growing tensions, the coup went almost totally unpredicted by international analysts, and represents one of the most shocking geopolitical events so far this year.

I entered Myanmar as part of a year-long solo trip, cycling and camping from the UK to Australia. As such, I travelled the length of the country, from its tiny north-western border at Tamu, through the rolling fields and forests of the Magway province, to the temple-filled plains of Bagan and over the mountains to Lake Inle, Yangon and the East. Following independence from the British in 1948, the decades of military rule which followed the country's first coup in 1962 have left deep scars in Myanmar's history, with brutal suppression of pro-democracy protests including 1988's '8888 Uprising', which left thousands dead. However despite its tragically bloody past, the resounding image of the country to foreign visitors is one of pristine beauty, tranquility and tradition. An undeniable sense of peace rolls over you as you walk for the first time around the quiet streets of a Burmese village, with men wearing the traditional skirt-like longyi and the first tendrils of global corporations only occasionally visible.

I was continually welcomed in to stay by locals throughout my journey, though such invitations are forbidden by the government. After quickly exhausting my limited Burmese, my exchanges would involve an endless trading of grins as I explained photos of my travels using Google Translate, asking and answering questions about each other's families—many of whom I still exchange messages with, despite internet access regularly being blocked by the government in recent weeks.

Breakfast when welcomed to stay by a local family in Pakokku, Myanmar

Locals bathe in a river in the Magway region, Myanmar

> **"Despite the country's tragically bloody past, the resounding image of the country to foreign visitors is one of pristine beauty, tranquility and traditional culture."**

Sadly, not long after I visited, it looks like Myanmar's connections with the world could be beginning to return to decades of isolationism, in part reinforced by the sanctions imposed on Myanmar by western powers during its military rule. Tragically, Myanmar has been consumed by another period of bloodshed, as over 400 protesters have died at the hands of the police. Ultimately, not only does military governance restrict international connections, limit local freedom of speech, and potentially facilitate another barrage of human rights offences, it once again hampers Myanmar's steady path to development and democracy.

A farm worker near Inle wearing thanaka, a paste made from ground tree bark.

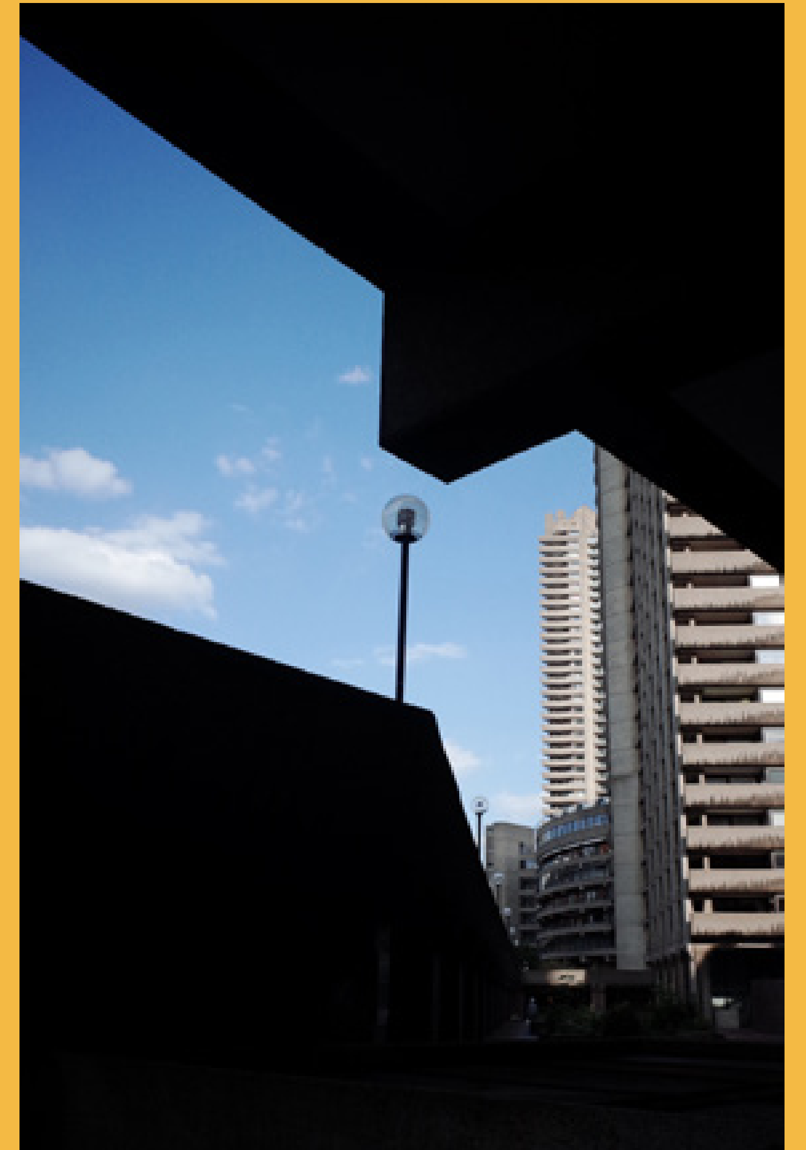
A pagoda overlooks the Irrawaddy River at Bagan, Myanmar

PHOTOGRAPHY

A farmer ploughs as an electricity line passes overhead near the town of Loikaw.

Ben Leo Hollis

PHOTOSOC x PI



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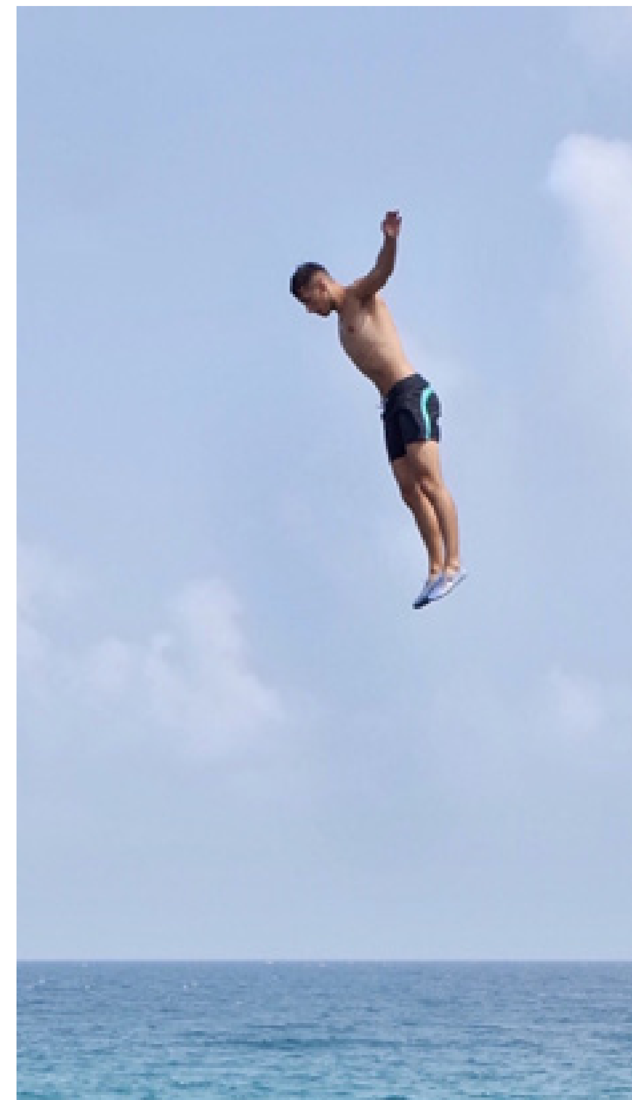

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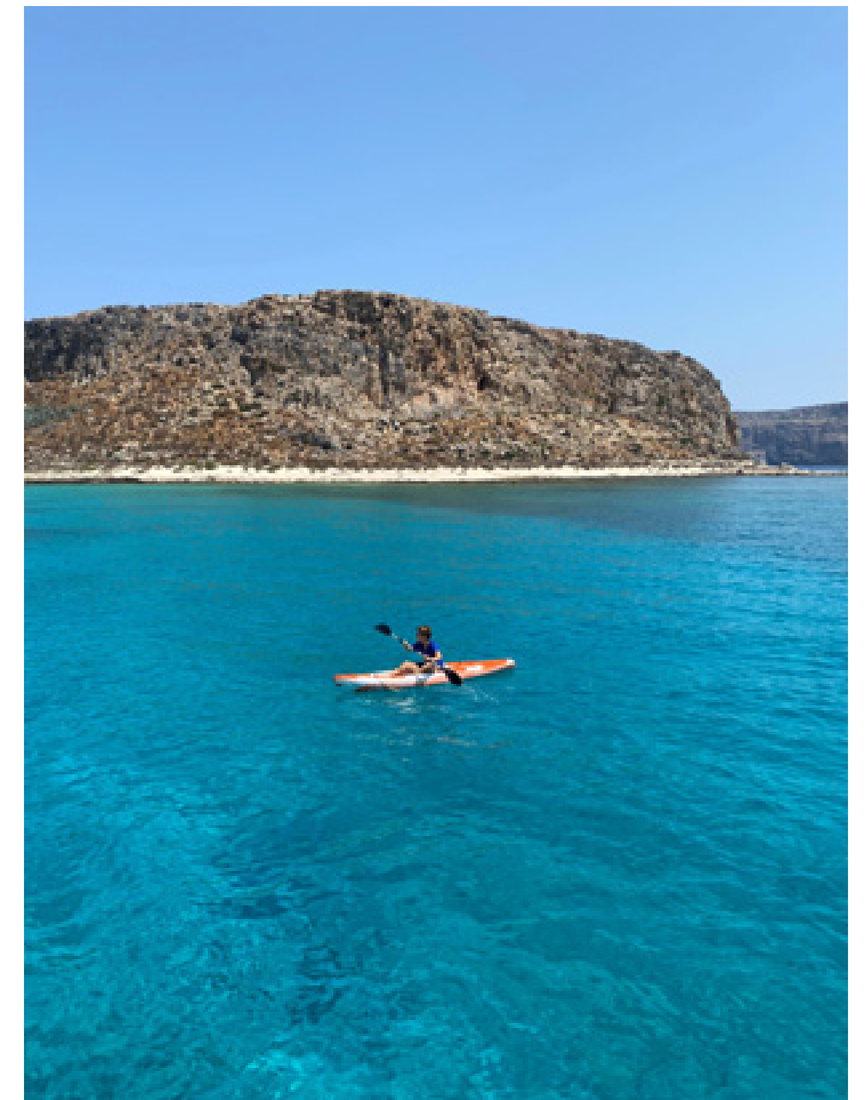

Eirini Mavrantonaki

Jesús Minchón

Eirini Mavrantonaki

PHOTOGRAPHY

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Johara Meyer

PHOTOGRAPHY

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Jesús Minchón

Johara Meyer

Facing page:
Above: **Johara Meyer**
Below: **Jesús Minchón**

Johara Meyer

Scientific collaboration breeds innovation

There are many ways that 2020 was 'unprecedented'. It's safe to say Covid-19 threw the scientific community into the spotlight as the whole world looked to them for guidance. Scientists answered this distress call by coming together with one formidable goal: to find a way out of this pandemic. Although 2020 was a rollercoaster of a year, scientists didn't let the turbulence get the better of them. They responded by making huge changes to the way that scientific research was produced, published and distributed. From academia to Big Pharma, there was an abundance of collaborations at both the national and international level, in order to ensure that the solution was found as soon as possible.

"Scientists answered this distress call by coming together with one formidable goal: to find a way out of this pandemic."

Science has always been a competitive, exclusive world of complicated jargon and big egos. But the pandemic has highlighted that collaboration and connectedness work in favour of scientific research and innovation. Will this signal a change in how science is done in the future?

It's safe to say that it wouldn't have been possible to make headway on fighting back against Covid-19 so quickly if it weren't for the global network of scientists working together in their research. There were Big Pharma companies working with government scientists, such as in the case of Moderna and NIH, without which Moderna would not have been able to produce a vaccine candidate so rapidly. Even Big Pharma companies came together to tackle this global issue: the heads of 10 top R&D companies have come together several times a week for meetings since the beginning of the pandemic.

Other major instances of international collaboration, like the Human Genome Project or the International Space Station, showcased the tremendous amount of research that can be accomplished in a fraction of the time. The International Space Station, for example, was the product of a programme involving fifteen nations, and ultimately led to significant advancements in space research for space researchers around the globe.

"With the world at a standstill, it was essential that scientists all over the world had access to the vital information about the virus as soon as possible"

One of the biggest changes in the science world due to the pandemic was how scientific research was published. With the world at a standstill, it was essential that scientists all over the world had access to the vital information about the virus as soon as possible - its mode of infection, how transmissible it is, the most vulnerable patient groups, and so on. This led to an explosion of open access papers being published online, allowing anyone to evaluate the latest findings and accelerate their own research projects.

The OECD's Science and Technology Innovation 2021 report highlights this change: the pandemic has laid down the foundations of effective and valuable models of open science. Since the beginning of the pandemic, over three quarters of scientific papers on Covid-19 were published with open access. Sticking to this practice would facilitate international collaboration, better allocation of research funding, and ultimately better equip us for future biological crises like Covid-19.

Open access is only one of eight main pillars of what is known as Open Science. There is also a need for other principles to be implemented in research, such as citizen science, research integrity, and FAIR data (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable). Yet, even the implementation of open access papers has allowed so much development in a fraction of the time it would usually take. Just look at vaccine development as an example - what usually takes 10 years took only 10 months. Seeing as it was such a key component of overcoming this pandemic, this will hopefully encourage more to adopt this ethos into their future work.

"If this has brought about the beginning of the end to the competitive, reclusive culture of science, it would most definitely be for the better. "

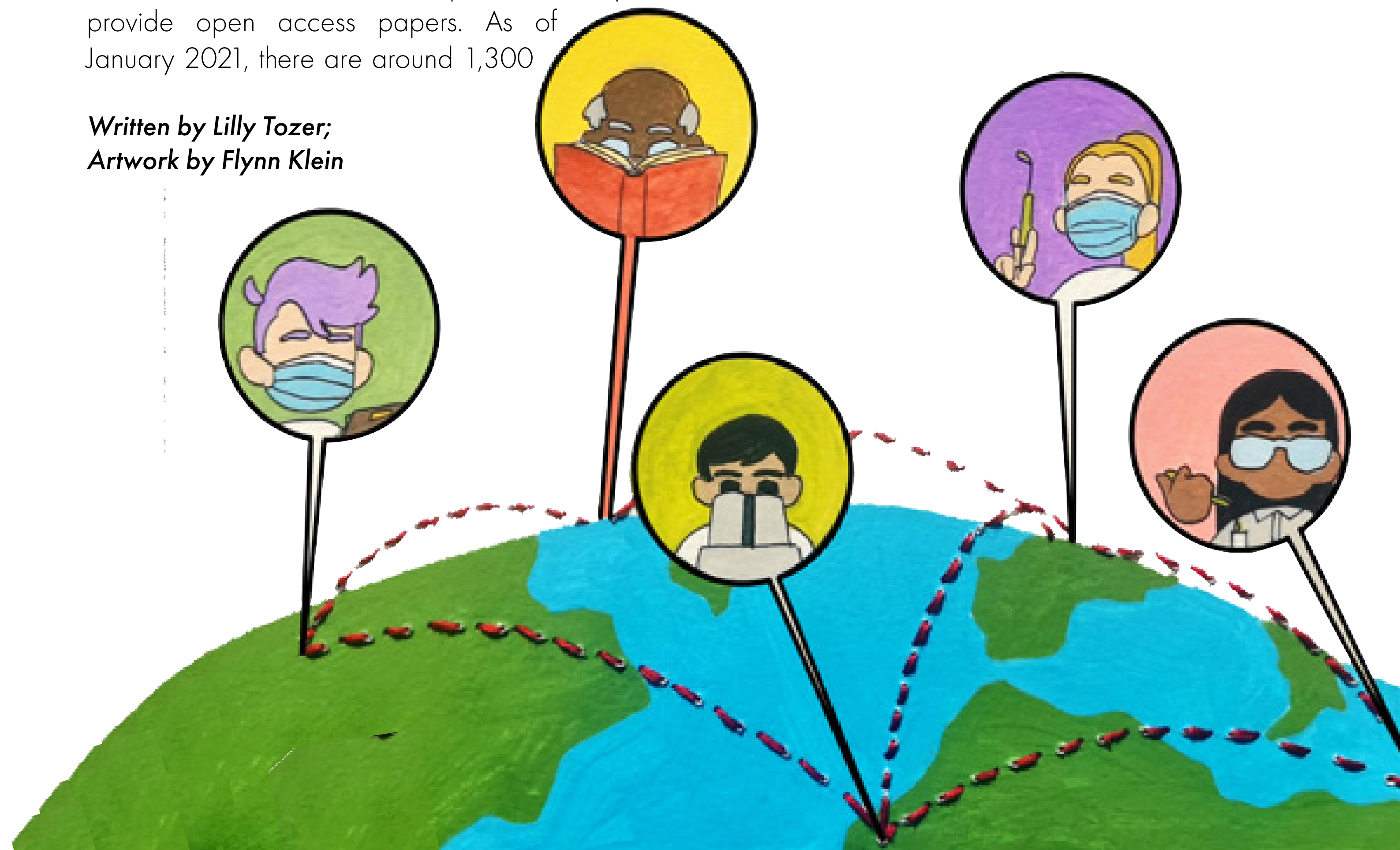
UCL has also been a part of this effort to promote Open Science - the university has a long term commitment to implement innovative principles to improve the way its research is conducted. This was applied to the challenges of Covid-19 through the 'UCL Covid-19 Research' platform set up to provide open access papers. As of January 2021, there are around 1,300 publications available with almost 26,000 views.

If this has brought about the beginning of the end to the competitive, reclusive culture of science, it would most definitely be for the better. It has been shown that competition promotes opacity, stifles creativity, and inhibits progress. If anything, the pandemic has made this clear. It's hard to know how researchers will proceed into the post-pandemic laboratories but it would be difficult to completely abandon this course towards Open Science.

"Let's hope that we learn the lessons of this catastrophic crisis and come out the other end better."

For science to stay productively collaborative, other institutions will also have to join the bandwagon. Politicians and scientists must work together to improve science policy and advice on public health concerns, as well as improve communications to the wider public. Without effective communication of science issues, wild conspiracies and misinformation have room to spread. Although the recent events have been extraordinary, there is evidently a long way to go. The potential to uproot the outdated ways of science into one that fosters and facilitates collaborative research is immense. Let's hope that we learn the lessons of this catastrophic crisis and come out the other end better.

Written by Lilly Tozer; Artwork by Flynn Klein



The Behavioural Science Behind Unity

Written by Remina Aleksieva; Photography by Johara Meyer

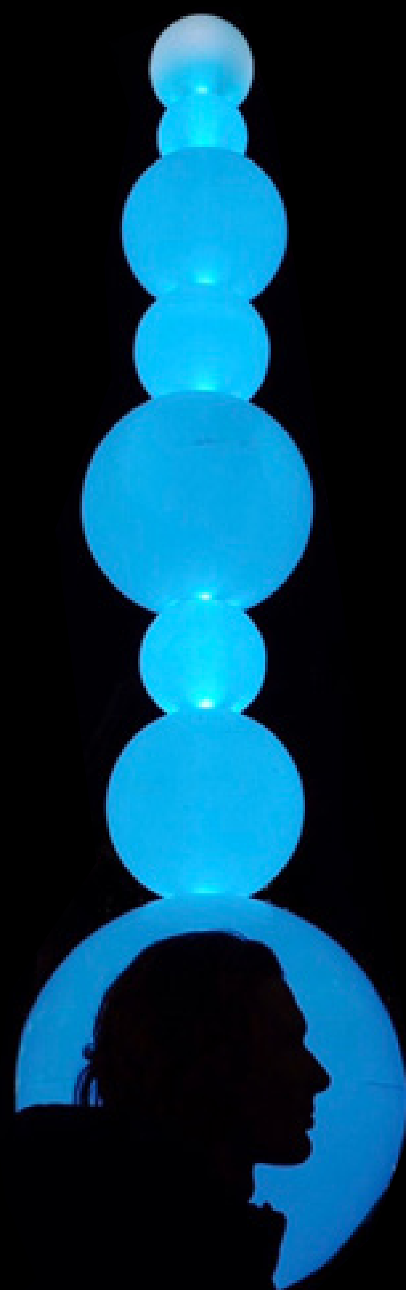
The Covid-19 pandemic has tested the world's ability to respond to crises on a global scale. While the pandemic pushed governments to impose lockdowns and travel restrictions virtually everywhere, the overall rise in CO_2 emissions has only been marginally reduced. However, the decline in atmospheric concentrations due to lockdowns show us that individual behaviours on a collective level can have an impact on our planet.

The pandemic's discourse has been illustrative of the inevitable biases in human thinking. Humans are susceptible to the "exponential growth fallacy", a well-known feature of human behaviour that describes our tendency to overlook exponential growth and wait too long before taking action. Even when measures against the spread of Covid-19 were taken, the pandemic has showcased the role of externalities on the pandemic's ramifications—when one person fails to self-isolate, the domino effect exponentially increases the risk of further spread. As the pandemic unfolded, this effect served as a metaphor of climate change inaction.

"Our willingness to take action ultimately depends on how psychologically and physically distant we perceive ourselves to be from its consequences."

Much like our response to the pandemic, battling climate change will require a combination of trade-offs. From an evolutionary perspective, we have a tendency to focus on immediate threats and benefits to ensure our survival. The phenomenon that behavioural scientists call "present bias" or "hyperbolic discounting", illustrates humans' inability to prioritise distant concerns over current ones. This is partly the reason why we struggle to grasp the abstract concept of climate change, particularly when its consequences are arriving slowly, albeit steadily. Our willingness to take action ultimately depends on how psychologically and physically distant we perceive ourselves to be from its consequences. Research from social psychology has shown that people are more likely to perceive global warming as a serious problem when they were asked about it on a particularly warm day. While this predisposition seemed to be effective in saving lives during a worldwide public health crisis, it isn't helpful to our current environmental challenges.

New hope has been sparked by the newly announced higher ambitions of the EU to become carbon neutral by 2050. A more rigorous climate agenda is indeed needed, and governments are already working multilaterally to set the tone through new legislation. Dr Tom Pegram, an Associate Professor in Global Governance at the UCL Department of Political Science, suggests that current climate strategies raise a paradox between the need for a top-down command approach and a bottom-up people centred entrepreneurialism. We need to raise public awareness of climate change in order to build social capital and political trust, at times of political polarisation. The environmental challenges of today present a common pool resource problem whereby individuals neglect the wellbeing of our planet in pursuit of personal gains.



In order to prevent this "tragedy of the commons", we must embrace our evolved penchant for cooperation and use it to improve our response to climate change.

The issue of collective action poses the question of whether the psychological concept of social learning could help us solve environmental inaction. According to ancient myths, humans did not invent fire-making, but rather learned it from divine figures like Prometheus and then spread their practice forward to the rest of the community. Ancient myth tellers prove to have grasped the fundamentals of "social learning"—the process by which people learn new behaviours, opinions and values from other individuals. Social learning is even more relevant in the era of increasing environmental challenges. But how can the dynamics of social learning be applied to mitigate climate change collectively as a society?

Combating climate change undoubtedly presents a collective risk. As such, it poses the social dilemma in which humans tend to search for a fine balance between their selfish interest and the common good. This is often referred to as a "prisoner's dilemma", an example used in game theory to assess individuals' choices as to whether to cooperate or not, where preserving the common good depends on individuals' investments and failure to invest enough harms all. If we were to suppose that this social dilemma is upon us, mitigating climate change would require investments in sustainable resources and personal sacrifices by ideally all members of society. Behavioural science argues that effective communication can increase consensus and trust between individuals and thus motivate them to sacrifice more for the collective benefit.

"To drive collective prosocial action, we must consider humans' unparalleled capacities for foresight, compassion and creativity."

However, it would be wrong to assume that humans would always act rationally in such dilemmas. In fact, the pandemic has demonstrated quite the opposite—that despite policymakers' assumptions, humans tend to rely on their emotional state. Susan Michie, Professor of Health Psychology at UCL and founder of the Centre for Behaviour Change, argues that our global response to climate change should highlight our interconnectedness as humans, not divide us. As social beings, it is imperative we learn how to cooperate in the long term. To drive collective prosocial action, we must consider humans' unparalleled capacities for foresight, compassion and creativity. Leveraging those experiences, along with effective communication, can instil social learning and direct the current trajectory from rapid deterioration toward sustainability.

The pandemic has upended our assumptions about climate change and presents a fruitful opportunity to stand back, observe and learn from our mistakes. It has highlighted the fundamental importance of understanding human behaviour. We now know that behaviours do change—if those in their possession are convinced of the threat. It is now the time to use this knowledge to fight climate change before it is too late.

UGO 新大久保

"I want this space to be a citizen's hall"

Shinokubo UGO, a Tokyo artist community incubated in the pandemic.

When I started living by myself in Tokyo in October, visiting art galleries became my new fascination. Covid-19 was not as serious back then, and I found pleasure in acquainting myself with the art scenes full of established and emerging artists. At one point, however, I stopped. It was a period during which I had to cope with the accumulating stress of online learning and a mental breakdown fuelled by loneliness. Artworks, far from the ideal of relational agents that bring people together, stood silent, indifferent to my existence. I asked myself what the point of visiting galleries was, when art did not speak to me and I could not afford to appreciate it. That was when I stepped onto a pink road that led to Shinokubo UGO.

UGO is an art space located in Shin-Okubo, a district where 40% of its population is said to be foreign nationals. "Originally, I wanted to have a space where people can just get together," says Dan Isomura during an interview with UGO artists-organisers. "It can be where people socialise without particular reason. Or an artists' studio, not only for us but also for those who urgently need a studio and non-artists alike." Isomura was contacted in 2019 by a landlord who wanted to turn his property into a cultural hub, and its transnational location resonated with Isomura's artistic interest. He invited a curator and artists to form the initial organisers and expected to open UGO in early 2020. Then Covid-19 hit.

"At that time," recounts Golden Love Yumbo, "[the number of] artists without access to their studios and art students who couldn't enter their campus increased, and quite a few of them we knew came to UGO. We stayed together for a while, helping out and cooking for each other." A sudden transformation from would-be-open art space to a refuge for artists in the pandemic was, nevertheless, not completely unexpected. According to Isomura, opening UGO's door to those in need was at the heart of the planning, even before Covid. "When Covid did hit us, people with urgent needs were made visible. I think our response was rather quick."

Rui Yamagata, who lost access to her campus atelier when preparing for her exhibition, was invited by Yumbo in April to UGO studio. "I didn't know 80% of people here", recalls Yamagata. "Jumping into a totally new environment and living every day with people you had absolutely no idea about - it rarely happens." Spontaneously meeting other practitioners breaks down the boundary of existing art institutions. "I don't go to university," says Karu Miyoshi, "but here I come across people who, in my artistic career, I would expect to meet. It's valuable to have such a connection already." He cheerfully describes his impression as "matchmaking".

UGO's vibrant atmosphere is captured best by the pink private road that stretches before the entrance. Unlike other art spaces, UGO's access to use this road for artistic activities such as Miyoshi's mural work shapes the dynamism of visitor interaction. "When events are hosted inside the building, somehow people don't come in but socialise on the road," explains Yumbo. Roads, by nature, present ambiguity in terms of their ownership and this road, likewise, is not simply a UGO's property. It is this "liminal area that cannot be reduced either to public or private" that for Yumbo represents the essence of UGO's ambience. This road hosted a flea market and open-air exhibition, reflecting experimentation with the types of gathering that are possible under the circumstances of Covid-19. Just a step away from the artistically-charged interior, getting out onto this road makes people "disarmed" and "permits certain discussions that cannot be held inside," says Isomura.

However, this road used to look like a "rubbish bin" before UGO's opening, and seeing strangers pissing and puking was an everyday occurrence. Painting the road and placing some artworks, both proposed by the landlord, effectively reduced such behaviour, but organisers are watchful not to turn their presence into a step toward gentrification. In the context of Tokyo's regeneration for the Olympics and an expansion of artist-related gentrification, UGO's establishment embodies a fundamental risk of enforcing it. Public art in gentrification "conspires to make people unaware of what's happening," warns Isomura, but "we need to consider what to embrace and what not to, and we should be able to say that we don't want to see people vomiting there." Communicating their intent is part of organisers' principle: they are planning a workshop with the local residents to discuss the issue of gentrification and what UGO can contribute to the neighbourhood.

"I asked myself what the point of visiting galleries was, when art did not speak to me and I could not afford to appreciate it. That was when I stepped onto a pink road that led to Shinokubo UGO."

During my first visit I was most struck by the organisers' openness to a stranger and their active facilitation continued to define my encounter with UGO. It is participation and communication that create UGO's unique sensibility to perform as a communal space beyond the artists' bubble. It provides an alternative to university-centred art careers for independent artists and aims to shelter racial and sexual minorities by hosting teach-outs by relevant artists. Future plans, such as a conversation with victims of sexual harassment in the art industry, point to UGO's community model of an intimate safe space which also reaches out to the wider public to raise awareness. "I want this space to be a citizen's hall, not a space for privileged artists and white cube galleries," hopes Yamagata. Their voyage to democratise art has just begun.

Written By Yoshiyuki Ishikawa;
Photography by Ujin Matsuo and Chika Takami

Remembering the voices of civil rights leaders

Despite the huge traction of the most recent wave of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, many have expressed concerns that society is once again diverting its focus from those who are most marginalised. This prompted me to return to some of my favourite essays by some of the most prominent and influential civil rights leaders in history. Unsurprisingly, I found their words to be as relevant as ever.

James Baldwin's *Dark Days* (1985) was the first race-related essay I read in sixth form. Focusing on the importance of education, Baldwin explores the sense of vulnerability one must admit to when embarking on an educational journey: 'the irreducible price of learning is realizing that you do not know'. Baldwin details his experiences of growing up in a world in which the values of his white counterparts reigned supreme. 'It is an extraordinary achievement to be trapped in the dungeon of color and to dare to shake down its walls and to step out of it, leaving the jailhouse keeper in the rubble': Baldwin's passionate and lyrical words about defying the constraints of a prejudicial society serve as an inspiring moment in the battle against racism. His work is a reminder of how far we have come, but mostly how far we still have to go.

It is important to acknowledge how race intersects with the fight for equality amongst genders. As I delved into the realm of literature that deals with these issues, I came to love the work of two incredible female civil rights activists, Angela Davis and Audre Lorde. In her seminal work *Race, Class and Gender* (1981), Angela Davis looks at race and race-relations with particular attention to gender and feminism; drawing connections between the legacy of slavery and the contemporary battle for all women against oppression in the 1980s. Davis considers the politics of race within the women's liberation movement: a movement largely run by and for white middle class women, often excluding Black women and other Women of Colour. As one of the first scholars to write an intersectional analysis of the relationship between race, class and gender, Davis paved the way for the comparative study of all three areas as intrinsically interrelated.

The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action, a short paper delivered as a lecture to Chicago's Modern Language Association in 1977, is a work by Audre Lorde that is engraved in my thoughts. Audre Lorde opens the essay by celebrating the notion of being alive, drawing on personal experiences of a recent health scare. Suddenly confronted with the very real nature of human mortality, Lorde describes regretting all the times in her life when she was silent, and vowed from that moment on to always speak out. She remembers all the women, of varying race, age and sexuality, that helped her through this period of life, and who joined her in the fight for freedom: 'we all shared a war against the tyrannies of silence'. Lorde's commitment to fighting silence resonates in the present day, in our ongoing duty to confront all forms of hatred, prejudice and discrimination, and to challenge ourselves to speak out, even when silence seems like the easy choice.

In recent months, there has been increasing momentum amongst students to decolonise and diversify the curriculum: a cause I feel particularly strongly about as an English Literature student. I spoke to fellow English students Nalisha and Miyin to hear their insights on the importance of diversifying the texts we read, both within and beyond the curriculum. Citing the work of Bernadine Evaristo and Sam Selvon as some of her favourite literature by Black writers detailing the problems of racism in England, and specifically London, Nalisha highlighted the significance of diversifying our reading as an ongoing commitment. She stressed that "decolonising the curriculum isn't just about getting a few texts by writers of colour on a reading list, it's about changing perceptions about what constitutes 'canon-worthy' texts—and re-evaluating where those assumptions came from". Nalisha's belief in the centrality of "giving the due space to marginalised writers who've been cast aside over centuries'' is one I feel we can all work to embrace in our reading. Speaking from experience, Miyin shared the educational and empathetic value of writing her article 'Words will set us free: Poetry in times of crisis' for last term's magazine, Defiance, which featured exclusively young BIPOC poets from UCL and London. Miyin emphasised her feelings on the importance of changing our approach to writers and authors of minority or marginalised backgrounds: "part of decolonising our minds is decolonising the ideas that feed it, and reading is one of the most powerful tools we have to understand the experiences, past and present, of people whose shoes we will never be able to walk in."

"Decolonising the curriculum isn't just about getting a few texts by writers of colour on a reading list, it's about changing perceptions about what constitutes 'canon-worthy' texts—and re-evaluating where those assumptions came from"

Reflecting on the thought-provoking and moving race-related texts I have read, I realise that there is still so much more for me to explore and learn. I am reminded of my ongoing duty to fight racism and be actively anti-racist in all aspects of my life: in my writing and research, as well as my day-to-day relationships, encounters, and conversations. 'What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say?': these powerful words of Audre Lorde serve as a reminder that there is always more we can say and do to advance the fight for equality.

Written by Evie Robinson;
Artwork by Valeria Fernandez

REDEFINING BRITISH MUSIC:

WHY WE NEED ASIAN REPRESENTATION IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

I grew up as one of the only Asian girls in a majority-white suburb of North London. Back then, representation was hard to find. I couldn't name a single Filipino or Asian celebrity on mainstream media channels. I was assigned a racial identity that I hadn't yet come to understand outside of white-lens portrayals of Asian characters, leaving me suspended between my two contrasting cultures, unable to fully grasp either side.

The lack of Asian figures in the creative industries makes it difficult to overwrite the "nerdy Asian" stereotype. The expectations Asian parents place on their children is a direct result of this absence. In a society where Asian artists are largely unseen, a career in the arts is unstable. Asian parents, and immigrant parents in general, fear that their children will face discrimination and financial insecurity, rightfully so, as the experience of first and second-generation immigrants is often one of survival.

To my mother's dismay, I was painfully creative. Music was something through which I could express myself, but I never thought that Asians could write pop songs, so I endured 14 years of classical piano instead. This turned expression into a discipline and I concluded that when you're Asian, playing music isn't for fun — it's for success.

But I still liked the Spice Girls. My love for non-classical music came as a total shock to a class of 8-year-olds. Playing Bach in assembly and then telling my white peers about "Wannabe" an hour later? The horror on their faces confirmed the mutual exclusivity of being Asian and engaging with Western pop culture.

Across the Atlantic, Asian representation is a slightly different story. My cousins in the US highlighted so many Asian-American identities that were already on the radio: Nicole Scherzinger, apl.de.ap (Black Eyed Peas), Bruno Mars — all of Filipinx descent. I downloaded their music on my iPod nano and grew a slightly out-of-hand obsession with the latter. But I had always wondered, why did I not know that they were Filipino? Diversity and representation is obviously lacking, so why don't they claim and integrate their racial identity into their art?

Minority representation is not achieved by just promoting a bunch of POC artists and getting them on the charts — it has to start with dismantling the music industry from the top down. It used to be that to break through as a POC artist, the artist would just flow with the current, make trendy music and not mention their heritage to avoid a narrowed-down audience. Yet the need for big-time record labels is dissipating and so is our idea of pop music. Artists don't need to send demos into agencies anymore. YouTube and TikTok are platforms no longer guided by the selection of label managers who work within a white-favouring framework.

Nowadays, collectives such as 88Rising use the digital music industry to foster a strong global community of listeners and carve out an Asian-American sound. There's a never-ending list of Asian-American artists: Olivia Rodrigo, H.E.R, Steve Lacy, Joji — all of whom have used social media as a promotional platform.

"Minority representation is not achieved by just promoting a bunch of POC artists and getting them on the charts — it has to start with dismantling the music industry from the top down."

The UK still has a long way to go, but the potential of homemade music means that progress is on the horizon. Dirty Hit, The 1975's independent label, is home to numerous artists defying societal expectations and subverting what it means to be an Asian musician.

Filipino-born, London-based artist, Bea Kristi, known as Beabadoobee, is a product of social media fame. Her musical career (apart from seven years of classical violin) began with soft-sounding bedroom pop. Her first song, "Coffee," went viral on TikTok. She proved that making music is accessible by producing the song in her childhood bedroom. "Fake It Flowers," her newest album, is a fresh take on modern day grunge inspired by 90s alt-rock and lo-fi artists - genres that have been historically disconnected from minority artists. Yet Kristi is no stranger to prejudice. In an interview with The New York Times, she remembered "being 14 and being embarrassed about my culture, wanting to be like all the other girls ... It was, 'You like things that are too white to be Asian, and you're too Asian to be white.'"

Beabadoobee created a digital community liberated from racial bias. The #beabadoobee tag on TikTok is filled with videos of teenagers donning her makeup or covering her songs. One could liken this to the wave of Avril Lavigne fans with stripes in their hair and religiously blacked out eyeliner, but this goes much deeper. Young people are inspired, celebrating not just a different style, but also the value of multiculturalism in an industry that desperately needs it.

Also signed to Dirty Hit, Rina Sawayama made headlines with her self-titled debut album. Nonetheless, she still faces microaggressions and normalised racism. She once revealed: "I found out one label exec jokingly called me Rina Wagamama." Sawayama considers herself British, having lived in the UK for 25 years with indefinite leave to remain. Yet without a British passport, Sawayama was ineligible for the Brit Awards and the Mercury Prize. In conversation with Vice, she called it "othering". Awarding institutions need disruption, as diversification cannot occur within unfair borders.

Only recently has the BPI changed the rules after the #SawayamaIsBritish campaign. Artists can be nominated without British citizenship: a monumental redefinition of British musicianship. Sawayama's representation of Asian talent has catalysed a long overdue recognition of diversity, clearing the path of institutional obstacles that have previously discouraged Asians and POC artists from connecting with the sphere of British music.

Written by Kimi Zarate-Smith;
Artwork by Keli Sheng

THE SUMMER I WENT FROM LOST TO FOUND

Written by Jennifer Louise Pinto; Photography from Interviewees

This summer, I felt lost and disoriented. The pandemic had left me purposeless, having abruptly ended my first year of university in March and been forced back to my adolescent life at home. What Can We Do? (WCWD), a social interest enterprise co-founded by a UCL alumnus, gave this sense of purpose back to me.

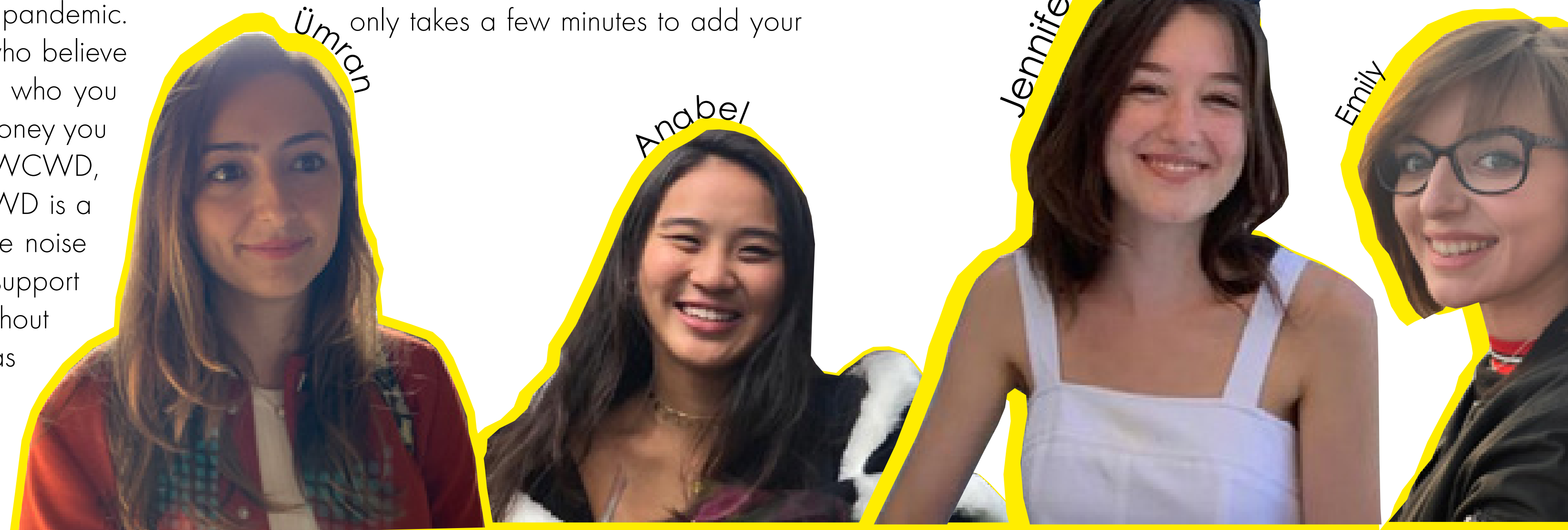
This summer, I was finally given a way to help—and safely, from my computer during the global pandemic. I became a content creator for WCWD who believe 'anyone can make a difference, no matter who you are, where you are, or how much time or money you have.' As Ümran and Emily, directors at WCWD, stated during my interview with them, WCWD is a "child of COVID, created to cut through the noise to inform people about the ways they can support the country through the pandemic without having to leave their sofa". WCWD was born out of "concern for our society and the world, and feeling disconnected and helpless following lockdown rules". The team quickly grew from 2 women to 5, and then to over 15, all eager to help: "our mission is to be the go-to place for people to find information and opportunities to take action. Our team is entirely made up of dedicated volunteers, expanding based on friends and connections made through university alumni groups."

As a UCL alumna, Ümran reached out to UCL Volunteering Services, through which 12 UCL volunteers contributed to the growth of WCWD. She describes being "really overjoyed at the amount of interest in online volunteering and the continued support that people want to provide to each other". Online volunteering enables one to defy national boundaries: to connect with and help others regardless of where one is in the world. As Ümran and Emily state, "without leaving our homes, we've been able to join global protests, attend talks of inspirational people across the world and be volunteers". Without the UCL Students' Union website, I wouldn't have found this incredible opportunity to help, create, and communicate with people all over the world—from China to France, from the UK to countless other places, we could all work together to bring some much-needed positivity and aid into the world.

I discovered small but impactful ways to help when I had previously thought myself helpless. Both directors describe WCWD as "here to guide you when you are unhappy with the state of the world and ask yourself 'what can we do?'". They add: "This kind of activism is here to stay, and change is possible. Anyone can be an activist, even with the smallest of actions". Fellow volunteer Anabel, who has recently graduated from her master's degree at UCL, describes the dynamic at WCWD as inspiring, especially "since most people were working full-time jobs alongside WCWD". One can inspire so many others via seemingly small actions. You can write a letter to the NHS or sign petitions on Change.org and Petition Parliament. It only takes a few minutes to add your signature or become a telephone befriender, but think of the effect you could have. Volunteering is flexible, engaging, and impactful.

> **"THIS KIND OF ACTIVISM IS HERE TO STAY, AND CHANGE IS POSSIBLE. ANYONE CAN BE AN ACTIVIST, EVEN WITH THE SMALLEST OF ACTIONS."**

Social media, though it has a lot of drawbacks, has also been able to connect, and to bring countless people together. It informs and incites others to act. I discovered how connection can actually take place online. Last Christmas was the moment this belief concretised itself in my mind as I received a gift from WCWD delivered to my hometown in the South of France. This was a Christmas garland in the shape of the WCWD symbol, accompanied by a note from Ümran and Emily thanking me for this summer. This is when I realised the true bonds that had been created this summer, when I went from lost and purposeless to found and connected. I realised how grateful I am for having met, even if this was through a computer, such kind and inspiring women in WCWD, which is only just getting started. For each of my articles, I collaborated with the volunteers, sharing ideas and resources. I was pleased to learn that Anabel felt the same way: "Working at WCWD was especially helpful during the pandemic because it gave me a chance to do something useful, and knowing that I was positively contributing to something is priceless!"



Volunteering helps others but also helps your inner self. Anabel explained: "I liked how researching and writing blogs for WCWD further educated me on important topics". By writing articles such as Spotlight on: Period Poverty, I learned that 49% of girls have missed a full day of school due to their period. Such blog posts raise awareness, inform, and offer ways to help. The media coach, Lindsay Williams, also delivered a media training and messaging workshop. This helped us not only with our communication skills, but also enabled us to connect as a team, which was an incredibly eye-opening experience.

This is also the case for studying in UCL. Even if online learning can be difficult and problematic, it has also taught us how to interact and communicate in innovative and unpreceded ways.This prior online experience has helped me in starting this academic year with a more positive and confident mindset in regards to virtually communicating and interacting with others. There are also many other online volunteering opportunities on the Students' Union website with guidance on how to get involved.

Online volunteering is perfectly summed up by Ümran and Emily: it is "about making people feel empowered, providing opportunities to help, and bringing people together at a time when making human connections is so difficult but evermore important". What Ümran and Emily are doing is truly inspiring and they are hopeful for the future of WCWD: "Once the current crisis subsides, we want to continue to empower people, to be activists, and to create a just future for all". I feel immensely grateful to have been a part of such an incredible team, working towards such a great cause. This summer, I went from lost to found.

UCL TikTok Trends

Written by Nandini Agarwal; Photography from Interviewees

If you said 'TiK ToK' in 2016 you were probably reminiscing about your school disco. In 2020, 'TikTok' was the most consistently popular Google search term, and this time it definitely wasn't for Kesha's 2009 hit. Short-format video sharing platforms had been gaining popularity for some years, but the unprecedented pandemic (2020 buzzwords, anyone?) led to an upsurge in their usage. Coronavirus became a launchpad for TikTok and other similar platforms to reach audiences they could not have captured before.

People had more and more time on their hands, and fewer media outlets which were putting out positive content. With the world shrouded in negativity and uncertainty (add to our list of most-used words last year), TikTok became a place where you could take a break and have a laugh or two. Whether you were 'bored in the house' or 'in the house bored', or imitating Cardi B saying 'Corrronavarus', content creators gave the world something to smile about (or cringe at, take your pick) together.

> ***"With the world shrouded in negativity, TikTok became a place where you could take a break and have a laugh or two."***

Of course, other social media platforms have been around and widely used since way before 2020. But putting audio and video together in short, catchy pieces of content made TikTok borderline addictive. Taking cues from Aristophanes, who first used humour in 466 BC to deal with war, TikTok turned to laughter to deal with stress, fear, and anxiety. While the news was filled with grim statistics, the platform was chockablock with comedic sketches poking fun at the seriousness of the pandemic, and catchy dances that definitely took the virus off your mind. Transforming something so scary into the subject of memes galore made it less daunting. Besides, being stuck at home with the same people you've lived with forever is reason enough to want to laugh at something meaningless.

> ***"Transforming something so scary into the subject of memes galore made it less daunting."***

In a time when we students felt extremely disconnected, not just from friends, but from the world in general, TikTok gave us a way to relate to each other. Of the 50 UCL students I surveyed, 78% use TikTok or other similar platforms and 60% of those starting using these apps between March and September 2020. All of them use these platforms first and foremost for entertainment, and secondarily to forward their interests and hobbies. Half of the surveyed students even claimed that they're on top of the current 'trends' that these platforms float around. University students were affected very strongly by the pandemic, and these social media applications' increasing popularity seems to have fostered a connection between them. UCL has its fair share of content creators on TikTok, and I spoke to some of them to get a sneak peek into the lives of students with a platform. Like a lot of students who began endlessly scrolling through TikTok when Covid hit, Dalia Wainwright (@daliawainx) also started her TikTok account during the first lockdown in March 2020. Dalia, a fourth-year UCL Pharmacy student, posts "tips on student life in London with the occasional political rant". Astha Kothari (@_a.k30), a first-year Mathematics with Economics student, began creating the wide range of content, with a bias towards Bollywood, that populates her account in October 2019, but decided to "dedicate more time" to it as the pandemic took offaround the same time. Ridthwan (@ridthemedic), a second-year Medicine student, started making fashion and skincare videos started only three weeks ago, but his reach is already through the roof, which he also credits to the pandemic.

> ***"In a time when we students felt extremely disconnected, not just from friends, but from the world in general, TikTok gave us a way to relate to each other. "***

I asked these creators how the pandemic affected their activity on TikTok. They all agreed that being locked up at home is what made them begin creating videos in the first place. Dalia said that she never had the time or the motivation to post regularly before, but the pandemic gave her reason to want to continue. Astha mentioned that her reach declined when TikTok was banned in India, but the pandemic made her audience more diverse and she shot up to a whopping 61.7K followers.

To creators, TikTok is not just an app they use to mindlessly entertain themselves. It is a commitment, but one that they enjoy. They all said that TikTok allows them to be creative (which Ridthwan says is a welcome change from his degree), and sit back and relax for a while. Dalia's 1.4 million views on a video disclosing 'boujee student life hacks', Astha's 1.1 million views on a video of her cutting snow, and Ridthwan's 65K views on a skincare video mean so much more than the numbers. They all agree to have found a community of like-minded people who helped them to stay connected through the pandemic. TikTok gave them the opportunity for social interaction when the whole world was isolated, and a chance to discover themselves and explore their interests.

> ***"They all found a community of like-minded people who helped them to stay connected through the pandemic"***

I maintain that TikTok has something for everyone. When everyone found themselves with too much free time, it didn't just provide a way to entertain yourself and scroll through hours of content. There were creators that gave people cooking skills comparable to MasterChef Australia (it's the best one, fight me). Some posted workout videos to motivate followers to exercise, while others sang or did art or read poetry. Platforms like TikTok have been extremely vital in helping both content creators and fans stay connected, not just to the real world, but also to themselves.

RETAINERS REUNITED

Written by Cara Vaitilingam;
Artwork by Keli Sheng

The day before WHO declared the outbreak of Covid-19 a pandemic, I flew home from my year abroad in Madrid. The situation in Spain was worse at that point: schools and universities were closing for two weeks and there were panicked rumours rumbling around the Erasmus groups that our time was about to end. I didn't buy it. This was just some flu strain that had gotten out of hand. It was scary and unprecedented, but was it going to alter my plans fundamentally? No chance.

I decided I would go home for a couple of weeks, sit this short interlude out, and then (I assumed) fly back and continue with my patatas-eating, museum-trawling, Spanish-practising life as if nothing had happened. I packed one piece of hand luggage. I left the rest behind: half-finished book on the bedside table, dirty socks in the laundry basket. Crucially, I left my retainers in their little blue box on my desk. I had my braces off years ago! I usually went a few weeks between each wear. Why would I need them for this fortnight's sojourn at home?

Of course, a fortnight came and went. By its end the UK was entering the first lockdown and returning to Spain before my Erasmus expired was looking less likely every day. I remember lots from those strange first weeks—the novelty of the Zoom quiz, the sunshine, the eerie quiet of my street punctuated by yowling sirens. Alongside the fear, uncertainty, and a feeling of privilege (mine was a relatively uneventful lockdown), I felt a jarring distance from pre-pandemic life. Conversations or experiences I'd had only weeks before felt alien to me. The life of hugging people and going to new places almost every day had disappeared so entirely, I wondered if it had ever existed. Like many of us, I was completely disconnected from my past life.

My unfortunate lack of retainers was a reminder of that life. As each week went by my teeth crept further from the even arc my 13-year-old self had suffered for. I became obsessed with my right lateral incisor (so much so that I Googled its technical name), running my tongue over it worriedly as we watched the daily Downing Street briefings to see if it had moved from the day before. Every time I was certain. It was twisting in place at a rate that had no precedent in the history of the orthodontic profession, probably because it sensed my retainers were lost and wanted to torture me, and I needed to start saving for Invisalign because I was going to look worse than Steve Buscemi by the time I could retrieve them.

Would I even see them again? What if we were in this lockdown forever? All the delightful pandemic-related anxieties many of us have come to know in the last year came to life for me in the plight of a single tooth. The retainers I had once resented for the pain they caused every time I remembered to wear them were now symbols of a joyful past life where I had straight teeth and could see my friends. I ached for them. They became a relic of "before". We were stuck in "after", and I could not get my old life back for love nor money.

This is the most tragic tale of the pandemic you've heard, I'm sure, so you'll be relieved to hear that I did get the retainers back. In August, a friend packed up my Madrid room and that little blue box arrived in a suitcase of clothes I barely recognised. Life was still pretty different, but I was reunited with a small piece of the old world, and it felt amazing. Actually, it felt excruciating. My right lateral incisor had twisted rather a lot after all. But I felt some of the jarring disconnect subside, and our reunion was joyful.

I've been reflecting on the retainers saga a lot recently. It makes me think about the small and big disconnects we've endured this year—the separations from each other, from our usual haunts and habits, from the people we think we were before the pandemic. I've made an effort to keep my connections with my previous life alive through video calls with friends and flicking through old photos, just as I used to run my tongue over my shifting teeth and imagine those familiar plastic moulds keeping them in place, but there is so much more we've been cut off from for four seasons. Detachment from our "before"—whatever that might have been—makes it feel like we are frozen in time and place, waiting for the severed branches of our lives to grow back.

The temporary absence of my retainers is utterly trivial in the big picture of a global pandemic and its associated traumas. Yet my reunion with them gives me hope for the rebuilding of connections with our past lives. We will get back to those people and those places. The aspects of my old life seem to inch closer every day as the sunshine thaws the brutal numbness of this winter. Like my long-lost retainers, the rituals of the old life might be a little painful to adjust to. But once we settle into them, it's going to feel so good.

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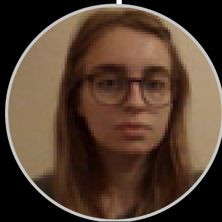
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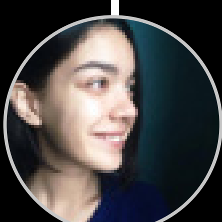
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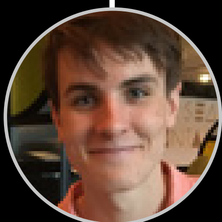
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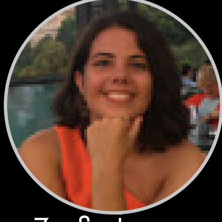
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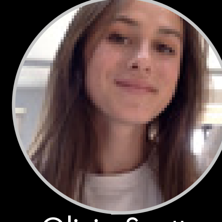
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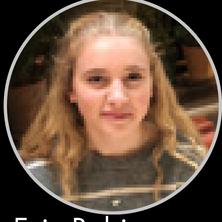
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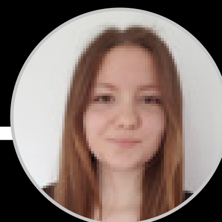
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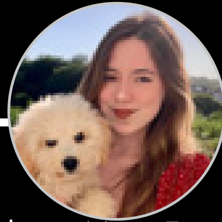
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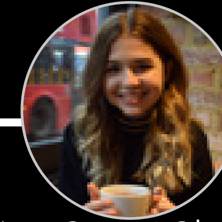
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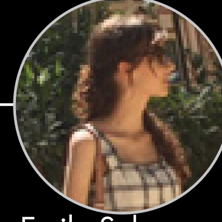
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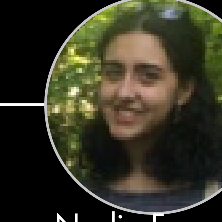
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