



Issue 14
April 2025

Komaba Times
Connection

Komaba Times Issue 14 “Connection”

Welcoming our 14th spring as a publication, Komaba Times explores what it means to connect. Connection is a thread that weaves through our lives in myriad forms—some fleeting, others enduring, some tangible, others intangible. The ideas captured in the following pages illustrate the variety in the forms and strengths of connection. Whether in the pulsating commutes of Shibuya, the comradeship at the workplace, or the ties to culture and history, connection defies singular definition. Yet, in the shared pursuit of understanding it, we discover that these fragments—these moments of linkage—ultimately coalesce into a greater whole.

Connection, by its very nature, cannot exist in isolation. It necessitates an interplay—a relationship between points, between individuals, between ideas. And it is this very essence of connection that defines Komaba Times. From the inception of a single thought to the tangible pages in your hands, the publication is a result of connection. Over months of discussion, refinement, and creative expression devoted to the printing of this magazine, this issue has been shaped by a collective—a team connected by a shared passion for storytelling. Spanning across varied disciplines, degrees, and campuses within the University of Tokyo, our simple yet shared desire to express, to listen, and to be heard brought us together. Connection is what brought us to this endeavor, and connection is what we hope to extend beyond these pages.

In 2025, the world feels increasingly fragmented. We wake up to headlines that bear the weight of crisis, division, and uncertainty. In navigating the disorder in such times, connection becomes not just important but essential. It is in our shared narratives, in the act of listening and being listened to, that we find solace and strength. The stories within this issue serve as reminders that connection is not built on sameness; rather, it flourishes in diversity in the exchange of different voices and experiences. It is found in the willingness to reach across distances—geographical, ideological, emotional—and engage with one another’s own realities.

This issue of Komaba Times is our hands extended to the world, a promise that we are listening. It is an invitation to pause, to reflect, and to recognize the invisible yet undeniable threads that connect and sustain our lives. We hope that as you turn these pages, you, too, will feel that connection—that your stories matter, and your voices are heard.

Contents

House Hunting Hannah Payne	2
Shibuya Sea of Faces Shotaro Koizumi	4
Privileged Emotions Stanley Guevarra	6
The Visitor Zihan (Martin) Huang	9
Grab Another Drink! The Water Server Saga Continues Mahi Patki	13
Crowd Pleaser Kathryn Heathcote	16
Connections: On Human Connections and the rooted stems that guide them Owain Green	18
Reflecting on the value of “positive connections” in the workplace as a student job-hunting So Ando	22
The Life of Va Priya Mu	24
Connections: The Overall Picture Francis Darwin Eugenio	28
Interview with Fernando Suyog Garg	30
Cold Days, Tokyo, and “Tenali Rama” Suyog Garg	35
Epilogue: What Does Connection Mean for You? Komaba Times Team	38

FOREIGNERS AND DISCONNECT IN THE JAPANESE RENTAL MARKET

By Hannah Payne

This summer, I experienced house hunting in Japan for the first time. During this several month long endeavour I came to question the fairness of the Japanese rental market, especially for foreigners. In my first years in Japan, I had heard rumours about the challenges involved in finding an apartment as a foreigner. However, only after apartment hunting myself and experiencing first hand many rejections from landlords on the basis of my foreign nationality, did I really start believing that there is a problem of entrenched social discrimination in the Japanese rental market.

Of course, landlords have the right to choose who to rent their apartment to, and may look at factors like income, guarantors or occupation. However, I found that landlords and their real estate agents, before even looking at these factors, quickly reject foreigners. For example, at one estate agent which specialised in foreign customers, I enquired about several apartments that would suit my requirements. The estate agent proceeded to call each apartments' representatives. I could hear the conversations several times end with something along the lines of, "I see that you don't accept foreigners, understood, thank you for your time." It was disheartening that the category of 'foreigner' was preventing me from getting a fair attempt at applying for these apartments.

My experience is a common one among foreigners living in Japan. According to a 2016 survey conducted by the Ministry of Justice, almost 40% of foreigners responded that they had been refused housing due to their nationality. A common assumption is that landlords refuse foreigners who do not speak Japanese. On the contrary, of those who responded that they had been rejected from housing due to being a foreigner, 60% actually spoke at least business or academic levels of Japanese and only around 8% reported that they cannot converse in Japanese, showing the majority of foreigners who experienced these rejections are actually proficient in Japanese. Even more concerning was the finding that 23% of foreigners who have lived in Japan all their lives reported they were rejected from housing on the basis of nationality. This means that nearly 1 in 4 foreigners who have lived in Japan since birth have experienced discrimination in the housing market as a result of their nationality. These results paint a picture of across the board discrimination against foreign nationals in Japan, what we may call entrenched social discrimination.

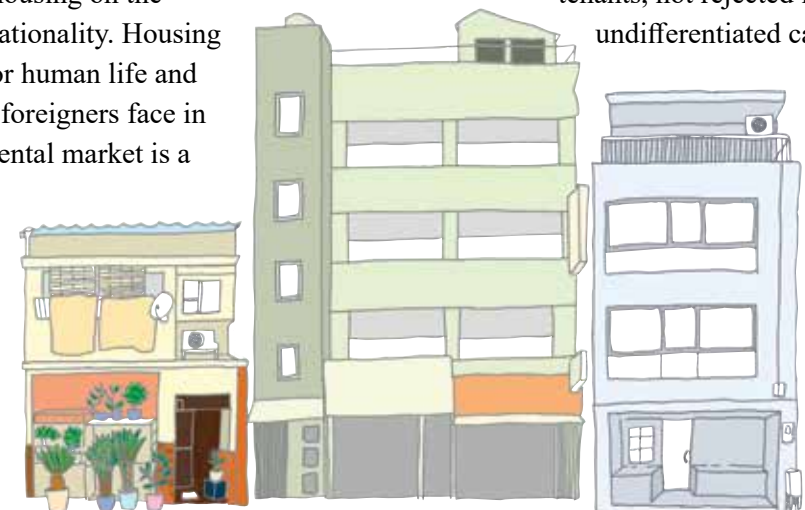
Although perceptions towards foreigners impact many landlords' choices to refuse foreigners, the specific nature of the housing market in Japan seems to exacerbate underlying social issues and stereotypes. The Japanese housing market is internationally unique in its strong protections

of tenants. Thanks to judicial interpretation, most leases in Japan allow tenants an interest in renting close to a life estate. Although owners of property can refuse to renew contracts if there is a "just cause", this right is very narrowly interpreted by Japanese courts. This means that homeowners are often very cautious in renting out homes to tenants because, in effect, tenants have the right to stay in units how long they like if they pay the rent. Thus, homeowners who are already risk averse often see foreign tenants as an extra risk and avoid renting to them.

Whilst the high risks landlords carry in renting out to tenants helps explain widespread discrimination against foreigners in the rental market, it does not excuse this discrimination. The Japanese constitution has a broad anti-discrimination clause. Article 14 of the constitution reads "All people are equal under law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status, or family origin". Furthermore, Japan is a signatory of the International Convention on All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Under these laws, one would think that widespread xenophobic discrimination would be prohibited in Japan. However, in reality, discrimination against foreigners is rampant. As stated before, 40% of foreigners are rejected from housing on the basis of their nationality. Housing is anecessity for human life and the limitations foreigners face in accessing the rental market is a

violation of principles of equality and fairness. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a new, clearly defined anti-discrimination law to protect foreigners from the current discrimination in the rental market.

My summer of house hunting eventually ended and I was able to find a comfortable home. However, my access to the housing market was restricted so much so that at times there was not a single apartment on the market fitting my requirements and allowing foreigners (although many were available to Japanese nationals). This experience illustrated that for a landlord, my connections to Japan like language proficiency, my status as a student and ability to generate income, were far less important than the generic categorisation of myself as a foreigner. That alone was often the first and only consideration made. Landlords blatantly refuse foreigners in their homes, and estate agents and their websites and services follow this openly. This practice must end. Foreigners should no longer be considered as fundamentally different from Japanese people, but as connected to and a part of Japanese society and thus deserving of fair treatment in the housing market. Foreigners applying to rent homes should, as with Japanese people, be considered on a case-by-case basis by landlords for their suitability as tenants, not rejected in the sweeping, undifferentiated category of 'foreign'.



Shibuya A Sea of Faces

by Shotaro Koizumi

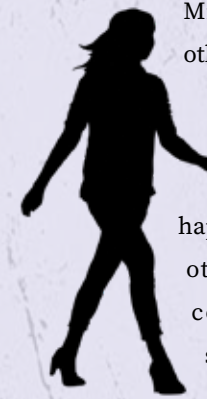
A commute through Shibuya is nothing but a blur.

As soon as the train comes to a grinding halt, the valves are loosened and streams of people pour out without pause. They all have the same aim - the escalators upstairs. Despite the complexity of this

labyrinth of a station, these violent streams never seem to lose their momentum. At last, they are spat out like steam out the surface exits. Amidst the chaos, I remain expressionless, my train of thought paused for the time being. Again and again, five times a week.

A thoughtless interlude between my beloved home and Komaba.

Yet, adjusting my focus, I see a different picture - a picture of faces, of other individuals. What role does 'the other' play in my worldview? How can I connect with them? It is to recognise that others aren't simply background objects in relation to I as the subject - they too are subjects in their own lives.

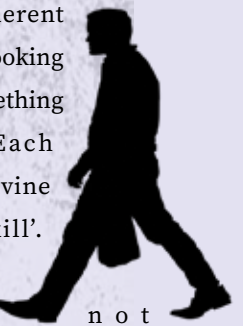


Michèle Tournier once suggested that others are a representation of a world of possibilities. Their facial expressions - joyful, angered, saddened, terrified - represent everything that can happen in the world. It is by looking at others' facial expressions that I can confirm that these emotions exist separately from me. It is by seeing a salaryman taking a turn into the Shibuya Stream skyscraper that I know it is not a 2-dimensional façade. A Shibuya world with depth that exists separately from me - that is what others provide.

Despite this, what if this connection of empathy is not real? When I first came to Shibuya, I felt a sense of disconnect due to my lack of confidence in Japanese - I could never start a conversation, for example. How can I empathise with others when I have no way of communicating with them? What if this sense of empathy is one-sided - what does my sense of 'connection' amount to if not mutual? In the extreme, what if every other person is a philosophical zombie - like non-player characters in a video game? Their subjectivity that I perceive would only be a simulation of one. There is no guarantee that I ultimately share anything with the millions of others that pass by in Shibuya every day.

It is then that I reference Levinas' face-to-face ethics. To Levinas, ethics was 'first-philosophy' - that is, it takes precedence over epistemological questions like the simulation one I raised above. According to


Levinas, humans have an inherent drive to care for others when looking at their faces, as if we owe something profound to each other. Each face, he says, contains the divine command 'thou shalt not kill'. This has a double meaning - to not kill literally, and to not annihilate them (to treat the person as if they don't exist). Levinas also points out that the face is exposed and vulnerable as if inviting violence. Yet, the fact that we do not resort to violence is because the inherent feeling of obligation is a universal ethic all humans share. Even before we start asking epistemological questions, this is the ethic we have to follow regardless of our whims. Perhaps it is indeed impossible to find connection within an overwhelming crowd. It is when we come face to face with another person that a real connection is established.



Today, it is becoming easier to avert our gaze from other people's faces. Self-checkout is on the rise in supermarkets and konbini, and any interaction with staff is minimal. However, if we took the time to look at each other more, if we did greet, thank and smile, we would recognise an inherent sense of responsibility to treat each other as humans. The knowledge that we can have this face-to-face connection regardless of each others' circumstance - even in this sea of strangers' faces - is indeed a comforting one.



Privileged Emotions



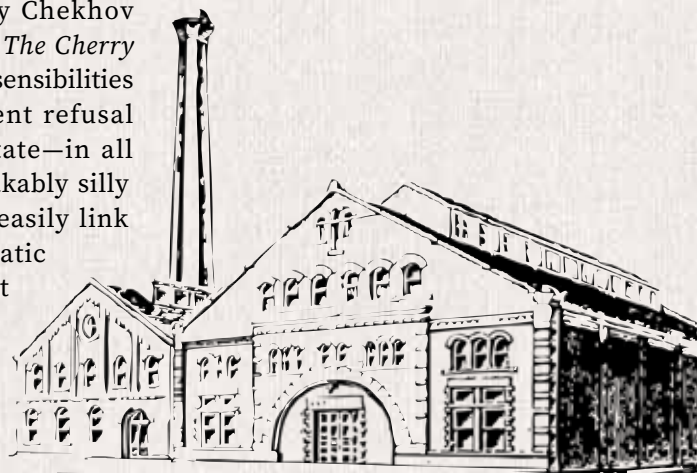
Stanley Guevarra

When *The Cherry Orchard* was first performed at the Moscow Art Theater in 1904, there was a dispute between its director, Konstantin Stanislavsky, and the writer, Anton Chekhov, on whether the play ought to be staged as a tragedy or a comedy. The drama revolves around the downfall of the aristocratic Ranevskaya family as their estate, including the titular cherry orchard, is set to be auctioned off to pay their debts. This unfortunate conclusion, however, could have been avoided had Lyubov Ranevskaya, the head of the family estate, agreed to a business plan that would pay off their debts—at the cost of axing the orchard.

“Chop it down?” Lyubov exclaims when the proposal is mentioned. “My dear, forgive me, but you understand nothing. If there’s one thing in the whole province that’s interesting, even remarkable, it’s our cherry orchard.”

Aside from vanity, Lyubov declines the business proposal because the estate is where her parents and grandparents had lived, and where her son had drowned. She would rather preserve this nostalgia to the last minute and disappear along with it rather than transform the cherry orchard into something else. Her feelings are convincing enough for Stanislavsky to direct the play as a tragedy, even though Chekhov had intended it otherwise. The tension between objective reality—impending poverty—and subjective reality—feelings of nostalgia—renders Lyubov a complex and multifaceted character that, in Stanislavsky’s view, ought to elicit more tears than laughter.

Still, there is a good reason why Chekhov insists on the comedic nature of *The Cherry Orchard*: it depicts the eccentric sensibilities of the rich. Lyubov’s persistent refusal to make a business of the estate—in all four acts of the play—is unmistakably silly and utterly idiosyncratic. Audiences can easily link her misery to her own obstinacy—a dramatic situation so removed from reality that it becomes laughable. But when such feelings are staged outside the theater, what do they look like in the real world?



Growing up, I had been reproached for entertaining emotions akin to something as ‘comedic’ as nostalgia. One summer during my pre-teen years, I blurted out, “I’m bored!” in a puerile, almost babyish manner in front of my father. Irritated, he did not hesitate to chide my childish tantrums, given the luxuries I enjoyed: a roof over my head and time to waste. When I started high school, I encountered classmates who seemed to have better lives: houses closer to our school, the freedom to visit malls without a watchful eye, and other such comparisons. I brought up these feelings of jealousy to my mother, who gently advised me to be grateful for what I had instead.

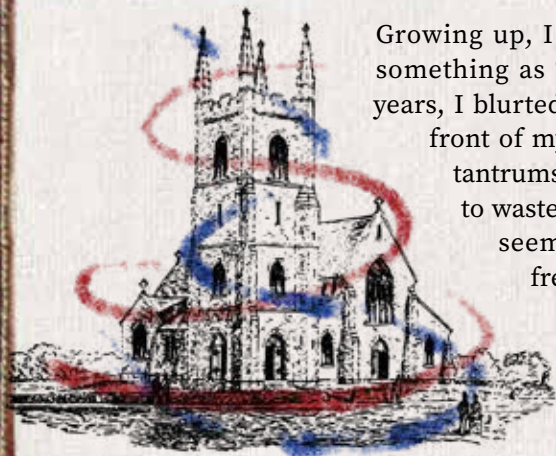
On the one hand, my feelings were merely juvenile concerns, and my parents had every reason to advise me against indulging them. Underlying their words was essentially a call to acknowledge my privilege as a child in a middle-class household. In the Philippines, where I am from, social class is conspicuously stratified, with people living on starkly distinct planes of inequality. Anyone who takes a quick stroll in Manila would see the homeless sleeping on flattened cardboard boxes or children in tattered rags selling *sampaguita* flowers. Access to basic necessities such as food and water is in no way guaranteed. Some are driven to crime out of desperation and hopelessness.

Privilege and its ignorance are brilliantly depicted in the Oscar-winning film *Parasite*. Known for its incisive social commentary on inequality, the film does not shy away from depicting the disturbing divide between the rich and the poor. In one particular scene, the mistress of a well-to-do household squeals in delight as she looks out from the backseat of her car, exclaiming, “Today the sky’s so blue, and no pollution! Thanks to all the rain yesterday!” The camera moves ever so slightly and captures the chauffeur in the frame, his face surly and bitter as he reflects on the flood that ravaged his home and forced his family to evacuate the previous day. It was caused by the same rain the mistress is grateful for.

This scene resonates deeply with Filipinos who brave disastrous typhoons at least once a year—many injured, some pronounced dead, and several whose homes are flooded to the roof—as opposed to the more privileged, who are secure in their storm-resistant houses and whose biggest problem might be a leak in the kitchen. For this reason, *Parasite* has been referenced to call out seemingly out-of-touch expressions of emotions on social media. When someone, for instance, announces joy at the relaxing sound of rain or the cool weather it brings, a barrage of hostile comments often follows.

Does this mean that emotions are less ‘natural’ than we might think they are? Scientific fields such as evolutionary psychology have studied emotions as universal facts of life stimulated by the same environmental causes. Charles Darwin, for example, traced emotional behaviors between animals and humans to support his theory of evolution. However, Darwin conducted his experiments in





Growing up, I had been reproached for entertaining emotions akin to something as ‘comedic’ as nostalgia. One summer during my pre-teen years, I blurted out, “I’m bored!” in a puerile, almost babyish manner in front of my father. Irritated, he did not hesitate to chide my childish tantrums, given the luxuries I enjoyed: a roof over my head and time to waste. When I started high school, I encountered classmates who seemed to have better lives: houses closer to our school, the freedom to visit malls without a watchful eye, and other such comparisons. I brought up these feelings of jealousy to my mother, who gently advised me to be grateful for what I had instead.

On the one hand, my feelings were merely juvenile concerns, and my parents had every reason to advise me against indulging them. Underlying their words was essentially a call to acknowledge my privilege as a child in a middle-class household. In the Philippines, where I am from, social class is conspicuously stratified, with people living on starkly distinct planes of inequality. Anyone who takes a quick stroll in Manila would see the homeless sleeping on flattened cardboard boxes or children in tattered rags selling *sampaguita* flowers. Access to basic necessities such as food and water is in no way guaranteed. Some are driven to crime out of desperation and hopelessness.

Privilege and its ignorance are brilliantly depicted in the Oscar-winning film *Parasite*. Known for its incisive social commentary on inequality, the film does not shy away from depicting the disturbing divide between the rich and the poor. In one particular scene, the mistress of a well-to-do household squeals in delight as she looks out from the backseat of her car, exclaiming, “Today the sky’s so blue, and no pollution! Thanks to all the rain yesterday!” The camera moves ever so slightly and captures the chauffeur in the frame, his face surly and bitter as he reflects on the flood that ravaged his home and forced his family to evacuate the previous day. It was caused by the same rain the mistress is grateful for.

This scene resonates deeply with Filipinos who brave disastrous typhoons at least once a year—many injured, some pronounced dead, and several whose homes are flooded to the roof—as opposed to the more privileged, who are secure in their storm-resistant houses and whose biggest problem might be a leak in the kitchen. For this reason, *Parasite* has been referenced to call out seemingly out-of-touch expressions of emotions on social media. When someone, for instance, announces joy at the relaxing sound of rain or the cool weather it brings, a barrage of hostile comments often follows.

Does this mean that emotions are less ‘natural’ than we might think they are? Scientific fields such as evolutionary psychology have studied emotions as universal facts of life stimulated by the same environmental causes. Charles Darwin, for example, traced emotional behaviors between animals and humans to support his theory of evolution. However, Darwin conducted his experiments in controlled conditions—isolated from the influence of language and culture. Capturing emotions in their spontaneous form would reveal that the context in which emotions are embedded plays a significant role in their formation, shedding light on emotions’ social and henceforth political nature.

Reflecting on the emotions felt when I was a child, I realize how different these might be for someone with fewer resources. My boredom is incomparable to that of night-shift workers whose exhaustion is etched into their faces after hours of monotonous labor. Jealousy among the less privileged is not a

the visitor

Author - Martin Huang

Tell me about connection. Humanity and the individual human unit as understood commonly is innately connected to everything. The categories formed by humans - sets like the idea of “HUMANITY” or “NATURE”—necessitate connection. Connection is also inherent to language. We know signs are connected to what they represent, and definitions are, by definition, connections with things. We often like to group these things into categories, or conflate them into one indefinite “thing”, referred to by a word. In other words, one is unable to comprehend the world and fit it into a view without connections.

The car is on fire, and there’s no driver at the wheel. The sewers are all muddied with a thousand lonely suicides, and a dark wind blows.

We see nature as beautiful, and humans are a part of nature. We see ourselves in the boundless beauty of the universe. To dust you will return. Life is contained here. Active and passive, an input-connection goes into one algorithm and it spits out an output connected to the input. This is a way in which things can work.

Here we see someone in front of a train station.

This someone has no face or any other identifying features.

This someone is the champion.

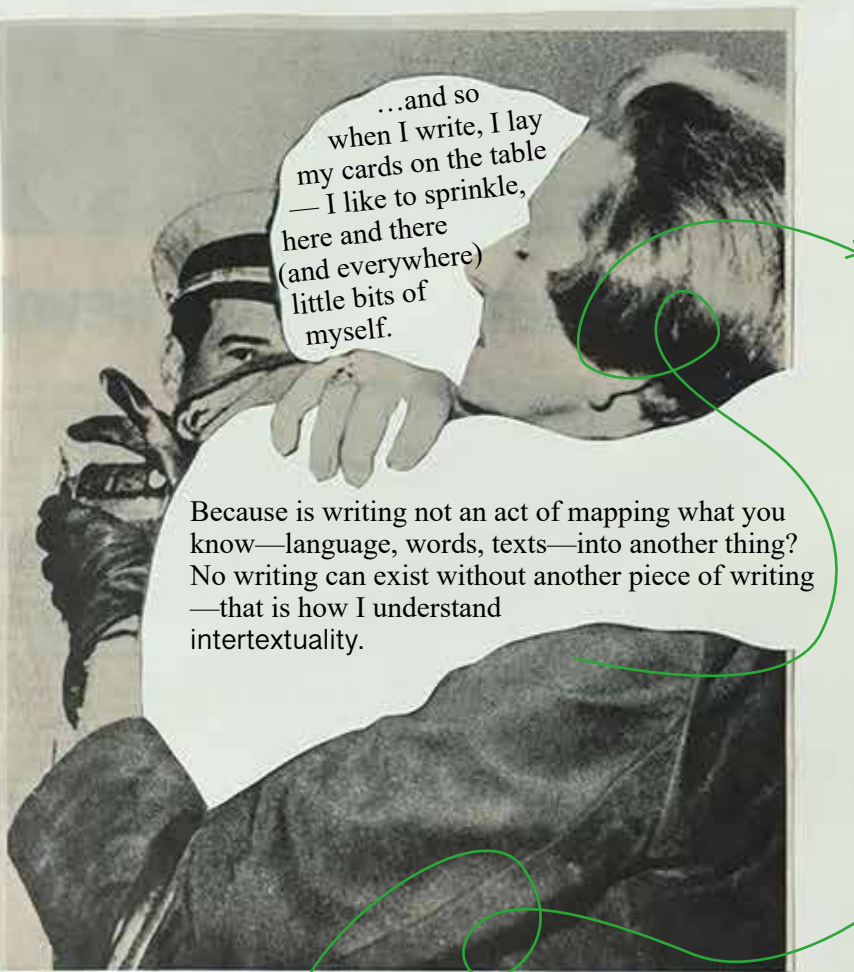
When this someone collapses to their knees in front of this train station, when they spontaneously cry and scream in great sorrow, what can we infer? So this person

is in front of this train station,

and tears fall from their unseeable and unidentifiable eyes

— PETALS ON A WET BLACK BOUGH.

Pictures - Pinterest
AUDREY.
Wojtek Orawiec
Frank Dresme
etsy
Cinthia Duim
E
shane



...and so
when I write, I lay
my cards on the table
— I like to sprinkle,
here and there
(and everywhere)
little bits of
myself.

Because is writing not an act of mapping what you know—language, words, texts—into another thing? No writing can exist without another piece of writing—that is how I understand intertextuality.

But sometimes, I think that maybe I go too far with these things, and the intertextuality, or the dialogue with other texts, the references, are too much, or they are merely facades. I am faking intertextuality here—I do not actually understand these references, these texts—they are merely reflections of a dilettante, measuring out one's life in Pinterest boards. But can the reader not make their own, more authentic, meaning out of this dilettante's screed? When I reference a song, a lyric...

So it is that a person is on their knees begging no one, a madman raving for nothing, screaming for nothing, sorrowful for nothing. Do you see them?

When we are children growing up in society we learn about connections between people. We are taught that this is the most beautiful form of connection. Love holds power. Society shows us that there are groups of people, cliques, friend groups. They are all connected. What happens, then, when someone does not exist within this framework?

A sample in a track, used as a break between the lyrics—the classic sample of Whodini's 1984 hit *Friends*.

Do you sometimes feel so nauseous, spurred on by nothing, spontaneous, so that you want to vomit on the spot, cry, roll on the floor, knowing yourself? Are you also a wretched creature brought upon here? Do you sometimes feel your feet move,

and an adrenaline-like sensation shoots to your head and brings in an energy and flow of loathing? Do you feel a disgust? Do you connect? Do you sometimes see a barren land surrounding you? Do you see that there is a man lying down in a grave somewhere with the same tattoos as you? Do you sense the walls and barriers and categories? Are you outside them, as you are outside territorial waters, or outside a bar at midnight clinging to humanity, beauty, nature, yourself, absolute nothing? Is there someone there?

David Foster Wallace said once that "THERE'S A LOT OF NARCISSISM IN SELF-HATRED". There is a passage from John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*: "DO YOU TAKE PRIDE IN YOUR HURT? DOES IT MAKE YOU SEEM LARGE AND TRAGIC? WELL, THINK ABOUT

IT. MAYBE YOU'RE PLAYING A PART ON A GREAT STAGE WITH ONLY YOURSELF AS AUDIENCE." Do I think this is true? Maybe. I am about as "covertly-narcissistic" as you can get. When it comes to performance to yourself I am maybe one of the best people to talk about it. And in this statement too is some sort of inherent narcissism—is it covert-narcissism to discuss your own covert-narcissism? In a way, I find that talking about this, making clear sense of my own self-hatred, eats its own tail. This is an Ouroboros of thinking. Am I performing to myself? Am I writing to myself? Probably. Will someone read this? Also highly likely. Will this be seen in terms of a vignette-essay-fiction-magazine-article? Yes, and no. Take these as only ramblings—that is the best way, and the way I intend.

Look at them, dancing and whirling, these daughters of darkness. These people all know, don't they?

I found this in the archives of a small student-run paper. I was looking through them—all the issues in a couple of shoddy old metal cabinets, shoved away in a corner. I don't even know why I was looking through them—some force, whatever it is, seemed to compel me, work through me, which led to me going to the building, asking for permission to get in, eventually getting in after about an hour's wait, and snooping around in these old cabinets.

One story, this one I want to tell you about, drew my eye—it concerns a young student no older than twenty-two. It goes like this: one day this student is seen in front of a station (not too far from where I found this story) kneeling down, forehead striking the ground. This young person was crying, screaming out unintelligibly. People moved past, but some glanced at them, or stood there and tried to talk to the student, who seemingly rejected the help. In about thirty minutes they stopped, stood up, and disappeared into the crowd. How interesting, I thought, that such a strange event occurred. I wonder who that person is, and where they are now. I read through the rest of the articles, and after a few hours decided to leave. I had by then gathered everything I needed for my own writing. The person at the gate had already left by then, and the sky had gotten dark. I sent a few other people some stories and articles I thought they would like to read.

The internet is modernity at its most liquid, and where the exact value of relationships is unclear. What the Internet brings is in terms of moving past the traditional concept of connection: the fact that we do not need to see people. From this, there is a destruction of the traditional economic and societal flows people used to take for granted—the units of the family, of the local community. Many people recognize that by making people come closer together, they become more distant. No longer do people, particularly young people, have to go out and seek connection. The internet breaks down the barrier of contact. Many people recognize that by making people come closer together, they are becoming more distant. But is this true? I see the Internet as having more of a curative function—the collapse of strong traditional units and ties I do not see as a moral bad. Instead, the proliferation of many weaker ties and the capacity to develop them through the Internet can be a form of self-expression, leading people to communities they never knew existed, and allowing for the creation of stronger connections over time. The communities that exist on the Internet can be hotels, but can easily become homes. I see it as a good thing, and a necessity, that these traditional connections are being attacked and toppled.

I decided to scan the story about the person at the station and send it to you—you may find it of some interest, given that you have discussed occurrences like these many times.

THIS ONE IS BROUGHT BY A MALEVOLENT WIND, SPINNING, TEENAGE LIGHTNING. LEGS ARE MOVING, ROCKING, THE LAMP MOVES BACK AND FORTH WHICH COMPELS HUMANITY TO SLEEP.

It's really weird to be writing something, looking at your phone in between sets at a show. It feels somewhat disrespectful, but to me there is a necessity to it.

What do you see in your dreams? Do you see what I see? Is there a murky ocean? Look! From the light-house comes a glare. It is green. The Hanged Man. Fear death by water. The bells are ringing, and it is time to go. We'll meet tomorrow.

To these people I am a tourist. Since my hair was still cut straight across my forehead, I have been a traveler in a foreign land. They pass over me like water. I find myself jumping from one place to another. Beware the friendly stranger. At least that is how I see it—I am not sure about them. There is always that small pang of sadness when I see that the ropes from me are breaking but their nylon is stronger than ever. At least that is how I see it. Am I a permanent fixture here, or am I just a wanderer? Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

Are you in a dark room illuminated only by a small lamp, mauve walls, the clock at a standstill. From the tom drum is rhythm. And you find yourself sitting on the ground below and behind the people. There is nothing but the lamp. You know it will extinguish itself one day. Do you also beneath this grouping of people want to vanish to the world? There is no one to see you, your incessant typing ignored. It is a warm blanket of other people, duvet of darkness, and it covers you. Come in under the shadow of this arpeggiated rock. The piano drops - I fear music.

Is this enough? I don't read much, I don't understand too much, but I am emulating, more so deriving. Maybe this emulation without understanding, a virgin excretion of energy, is my biggest sin.

CONNECTION ALLOWS FOR FORMS OF TRANSMISSION. In the modern era transmission came from talking to people, reading what they wrote, engaging with these connections in a push-and-pull of ideas. In terms of reading, I like to portray myself as an intellectual who has read much. It is in this way that I can connect myself to people, and through other interests. These nuggets I talk about, however, are those that I receive from online connections, words by famous people passed through the telephone-game sieve of social media. I have not read these things—*does it make me understand these things any less? If I do understand them, is the legitimacy of this understanding undermined by the source and transmission? Are what I have said all empty illegitimate references, then? I show my hand.*

You are what I am, an enemy. Like me you do not understand. Are you listening? Listen to me! One day when you are walking and see me you may ask me about it, and I will say that I have shown all my cards on the table. I have laid it out and you still do not understand. Like me you are a fool.

It tells your new friends:
I am a visitor here,
I am not permanent.

I knelt down in front of my lord you and a hand was placed on my shoulder. The strike of the clock-hand. The whale-bone temple, at that time, was so beautiful. I wish I could have gone there again. Now I am again traveling.

And these images before you—do they stick in your mind after months? There are happy and sad memories. Do they come to you and comfort you sometimes? The sound of running water wakes you up from your dream. Over here is *tabula rasa*. The green earth in the wind. Now you are not one with humanity but with the grass, the flowers. Let us go then, you and I, when the evening is spread out against the sky—this is the end of our journey. Thank you. I'll be here all night, as I've always been.

Edited by Stanley | Designed by Anna

Grab another drink!

The water server saga continues

by Mahi Patki

Since February 2023, over 34 water servers have been installed across UTokyo campuses—a milestone achieved through persistent student-led lobbying since 2021. The Water Server Project by UTokyo GXSN—the official student committee driving Green Transformation at UTokyo—is about more than just encouraging the use of reusable bottles; it also increases access to free drinking water, especially during the scorching summer months, and serves as proof that students have the power to create change.

While providing water refill marks a crucial step towards reducing plastic consumption, it alone is insufficient to drive a drastic impact in this regard. UTokyo GXSN continues to explore new strategies to nudge behavioral and structural changes within the university. Recent initiatives within the Water Server Project include redesigning

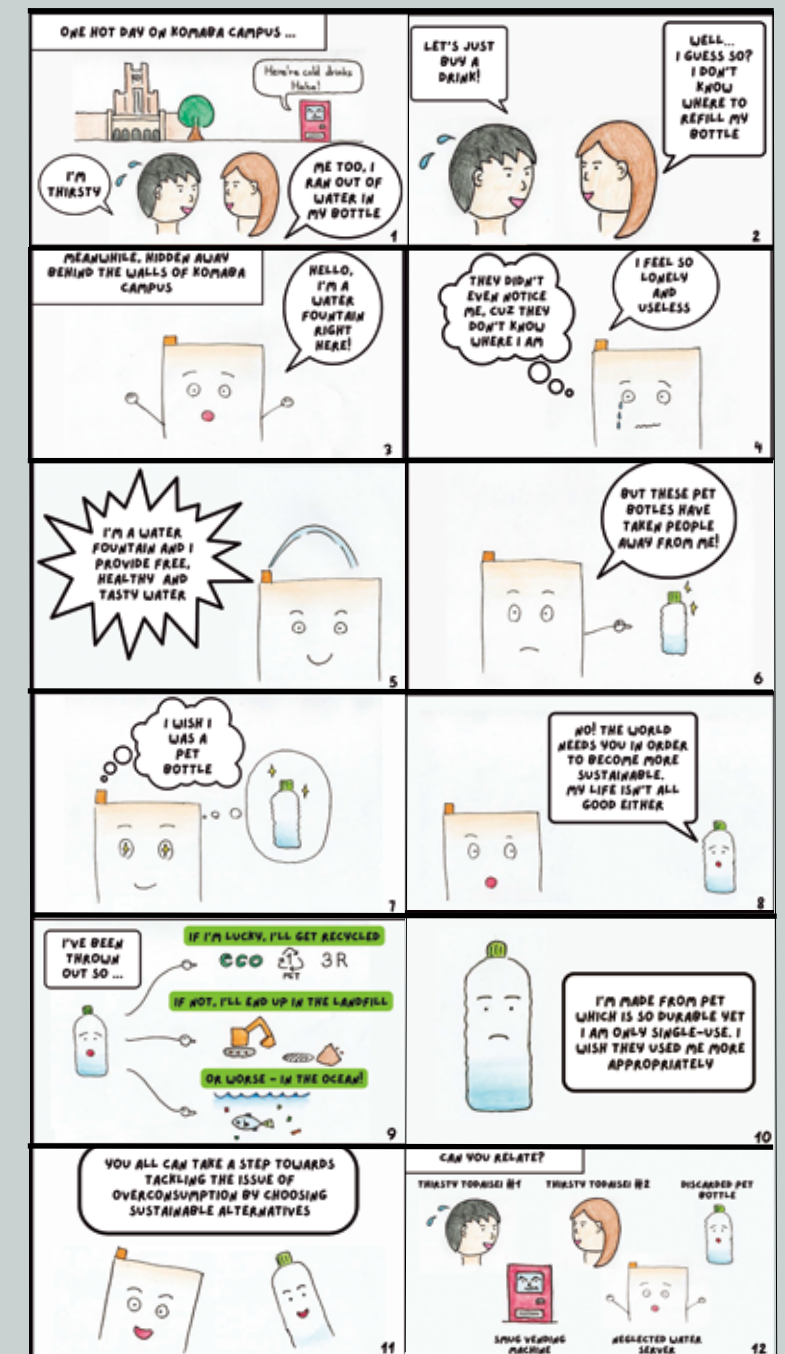
beverage sales and water server usage to gauge impact. This article provides a brief overview of these initiatives and their outcomes. To explore the project's journey in depth, check out relevant articles from

previous Komaba Times issues. Times issues.¹ For a glimpse of how we creatively defined the problem statement at the beginning of our project back in 2021, see the comic strip 'Plight of the water fountain'.

“UTokyo GXSN continues to explore new strategies to nudge behavioral and structural changes within the university”



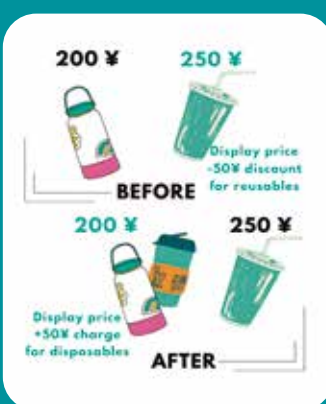
the display pricing strategy at Komorebi (on-campus café), connecting student changemakers through events, engaging in dialogue with beverage companies, and tracking campus



"Plight of the water fountain" a comic by:
© UTokyo Sustainable Network 2023 | Designers: Daiki Yamaguchi and Mahi Patki

To further cut down on single-use waste, we proposed several recommendations to *Komorebi*, a small on-campus café at Komaba that had switched to all-disposable packaging post-pandemic. While the café was unwilling to reintroduce the reusable coffee mugs they had used pre-pandemic, they started offering a 50-yen discount for customers bringing their own reusable containers. I proposed an idea to reframe this incentive, and with support from my team at UTokyo GXSN, we suggested a change in the pricing display. In-

Komorebi pricing strategy change



stead of highlighting a discount for reusables, we recommended displaying prices 50 yen lower by default, with an additional 50 yen charge for single-use cups, and the café adopted this change. Shortly after, beginning the 2024 Autumn semester, the café introduced a reusable cup and lid rental service from a third party. This service allows customers to take their drinks to-go and return the cup at their convenience—even on a different day! With this system, using a reusable container—either your own or a rented one—costs the same, while opting for disposables comes with an added charge. We call this initiative

“Change the FUTSU” (a play on the Japanese word futsū, meaning “normal”) to emphasize the need for shifting the norm from disposables to reusables. It leverages the idea that the pain of paying an extra 50 yen for disposables is more impactful than the joy of saving 50 yen from a discount—even though the actual prices remain unchanged (see example illustration).

The result? The percentage of customers using reusable cups increased from 7% in the 2023 Autumn semester to 41% in the 2024 Autumn semester—equivalent to saving around 4,900 single-use cups in just four months!² While this is undoubtedly a significant win, it’s still puzzling that 59% of customers choose to pay an extra 50 yen for a single-use plastic cup, despite the option to rent a reusable cup with a lid and return it at their convenience.

One day, I hope to decode the reasoning behind this! If you have any insights or ideas about this, or the Water Server Project as a whole, I’d love to hear from you.

Please share your thoughts by filling out our feedback form—it’s a great way



to help sharpen our focus and action.

<http://www.utokyo-gxsn.org/water-server>

As another part of our larger Water Server Project, we wanted to foster support systems for

university and high school students interested in running waste-related projects on their campuses. Facilitating knowledge transfer between student groups is essential to accelerate sustainable reforms at educational institutions. As such, UTokyo GXSN co-hosted the second kyo GXSN co-hosted the second Campus Changemakers Summit in collaboration with mymizu, an app and sustainability movement to encourage accessibility to free water refills globally. Held on October 12, 2024, the summit featured insightful morning keynotes on plastic mitigation initiatives, life cycle analysis, and microplastics, followed by an interactive Climate Fresk workshop in the afternoon, where participants untangled the causes and consequences of climate change and explored actionable solutions.

A few members of the water server team, including myself, had the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with a beverage company whose primary sales channel is vending machines (which I’ll spare you from naming, lest they get any free advertising). The conversation was polite despite our fundamental disagreement on the role of vending machines and PET bottles. It quickly became clear that the company wasn’t ready to embrace a truly sustainable approach in the beverage industry—one that goes beyond recycling, single-use packaging, and shifting responsibility onto consumers. Ultimately, the discussion left much to be desired. Still, I hope the ideas we shared got the company representative’s creative juices flowing and encouraged them to think more critically about the socio-environmental impacts and vast potential their business holds.

What has been the quantitative impact over the past years? Biweekly tracking of water consumption at 12 water servers on the Komaba I campus, monitored through installed water meters, shows that between March 28, 2023, and February 3, 2025, a total of around 371,000 L of water was refilled—equivalent to over 742,000 500 mL bottles.³ From the 2023 to 2024 academic year, refill volume has already surpassed the previous year by approximately 17%, with two months still remaining until the end of the 2024 academic year. Since we can only monitor 12 of the 34+ water servers on campus, the actual amount of refilled water is significantly higher.

For further context, during the academic year from April 2023 to March 2024, 171,000 liters of water were refilled at the 12 monitored locations—roughly equal to 342,000 500 mL bottles. In comparison, 249,000 packaged beverages of various types were sold at the Komaba Co-op store during the same period.⁴ This indicates that at minimum, more water is being refilled than packaged beverages consumed. However, despite the significant volume of refilled water, packaged beverage sales remain high.

372k
liters of
water refilled
by February
3rd 2025!



Where can we head from here? To make real progress, we need to go even further. For example, refill stations could be expanded to offer a wider variety of drinks—tea, coffee, protein powder, and more. Co-op bentos could be sold in durable reusable containers that are returned, washed, and reused the next day. Our school festivals, like Komabasai and Gogatsusai, are already meticulous at waste segregation, but what if we encouraged all participants to bring their own reusable cutlery, cups, and plates, with a rental service for those who forget?

We must continue to question the status quo (aka the FUTSU) and explore how we can operate a new paradigm where sustainability is effortlessly woven into every aspect of our lives.

I invite you to be a catalyst and take action for anything that you feel passionate about!

I am deeply grateful to the members of UTokyo GXSN, especially Ikuto Nakaya, Keina Hamaguchi, and Yuri Yanaiba for their dedicated work in monitoring water consumption, Jessica Peng for her insightful data analysis, and Daiki Yamaguchi, Eriko Yamada, and Leah Han for their creative illustrations, each contributing in countless other ways as well. I also extend heartfelt thanks to the leadership of the Co-op and the GX Promotion Subcommittee for their unwavering support and encouragement of student-led initiatives.

¹ Issue 10: Inertia ‘The Grand Water Fountain Conspiracy of Komaba Campus’; Issue 11: Reality ‘How to Fight the Climate Crisis in Your Everyday Life’; Issue 12: Emergence ‘Quenching our thirst for change: transforming Komaba Campus into an oasis’; Issue 13: Belonging ‘Grab a drink! The water server saga continues’.

² Data provided by Komaba Co-op Purchasing store.

³ Data can be accessed through our website: <https://www.utokyo-gxsn.org/water-server>

⁴ This excludes beverage sales from on-campus vending machines.

Crowd Pleaser

Kathryn Heathcote

Hands entwined, trembling,
Footsteps faltering on a tightrope.
Relentless light from glaring orbs,
Eyes sharpened by grating gazes—

“Don’t fall—we will watch you fall,”
Through five-second screens.
Down, down, into the abyss.
My forever friend grips
my
shoulder,
Whispering words that pierce:
“You are apart, not together.”

“Don’t choke—we will watch you choke.”
Up, up—fingers clench, then release the rope,
Leaving your throat exposed.
“What a happy hell this is,”
Another beaming bulb flickers,
To join the endless like show.



Connections

On Human Connections and the rooted stems that guide them

by Owain Green

It's wonderful, really, to look at how time flies. It's there in the trees, in the leaves and the fringes of seasons as the sun passes me down toward its slumber on the other side of the world. It's recollections of the past that first tie that loose-fitting knot into connection. My journey pushed forward by returning to the steps of its beginning.

My first genuine aspiration as a kid was to become a lawyer. I loved the sense of justice it had been granted in the various TV shows that soared in popularity from the mid-2000s to the 2010s. I was entranced by this idea of standing up to a system and proving a person innocent of a crime they didn't commit. That first big dream encountered reality and quickly faded into the specks of whimsical firelight of a kid who hadn't thoroughly thought of the journey toward success. I vividly remember the discussion with my teacher, who said things to me very succinctly.

'If you want to be a lawyer, you have to think of people as numbers on a spreadsheet.'

How should we think of our fellow humans? I ask this question not as a rhetorical one but as one that I genuinely believe links to this idea of connection. When I had that startlingly indisputable fact shown to me as a fourteen-year-old boy just starting to realise my place in the world, it was like being introduced to a reality I hadn't realised existed. Like the fantastical stories I'd buried myself within, but far darker and more existential. One in which people were just numbers on a spreadsheet, one in which the deaths of thousands were reclassified as expenses on another journey of self-righteous growth for the sake of profitable falacies. For me, this idea, no matter how much people told me it would be a success, was challenging to fit within. Because humans, to me, are far more than just numbers we can add and take away from, far more than a set of parts meant to serve whichever fantastical ideology of endeavouring profit exists to take their sense of self away from them. Perhaps I'll never be able to succeed that way, but then I would miss all that makes us unique, which didn't sound fun. It's small-minded, I know, and misses a large part of the grand schematic of the world around us, but then again, people are connected more than just through their value as products and resources.

It's through our artistic endeavours, personal exploits, and nonsensical thought tangents that we can find connections within ourselves and our community.

I bring a quote here that would remind any British school child of their boring GCSE education, but I'm desperately hoping it will somehow end up sounding intellectual to those who may have

missed it. J. B. Priestley's 'Inspector Calls', a modern morality play performed in 1946 in London, brings us to my second big dream, that second knot in the tie, and the movement toward a present where jostling with these two frames of mind, connected as they must be, comes to the forefront.

'We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.'

Let's stop for a minute and analyse what that all means. Priestley attempts to define his political beliefs using relatively straightforward logic. In society, people should look out for each other when they can because everyone has some connection to the other. Thus, we should all feel responsible for the health and happiness of those within our community. Communities have been a large part of human society ever since we decided that caves were cosier than the grass outside and kicked the bears out of their well-earned homes. Still, with a population of 9.73 million (The population of Tokyo, according to Google), it's impossible to see where that community begins and ends. If we were to take Priestley as factual, that would mean that I, a university student living off of (let's be honest here) not a lot of funds, would be responsible for every person I see who needed help, for every problem and hindrance that happened to the entire population around me. Thinking in this logic, it's almost easy to understand why we would ignore the connections between ourselves, why we would instead turn to numbers and spreadsheets as a way of removing ourselves from the interwoven threads of human existence that coalesce closest against the faces we see, the fierce loyalties that we create. Fundamentally, these two ways of looking at the world are separate. I look at those who promote it directly with disdain, but when I use their logic daily, I realise I do it all the same. All this knotting and tying and confusion rattles around in my brain until again a standstill of nothingness brings nothing but inaction, nothing but the focus on the following day ahead, the following personal ambition to achieve, all the while the creativity and beauty I espouse float gently away, drifting deeper into minuscule details laid out onto nothing more than a sheet of background paper thrown into the disarrayed office of life's administrative bleakness. It all seems too big, too small, too wide, too minuscule, that eventually, I force myself to stop, to breathe, to remember myself, and remember why I'm here, to remember that yes, two frames of thought can exist in conjunction, that connections can flare between the wrong and the right. Things are morally grey in our great big world, but that shouldn't stop us from trying to find the light within ourselves that forces the best. And so, in the realm of a tired student desperately trying to make sense of himself, we come to the third knot that exists when we close our eyes and drift. The one that shifts and turns when the rest of us grow weary, our minds set off for an adventure we'll forget soon after in the morning. The connection of imagination connects us all.

I imagine then that another set of eyes opens, another set of weary limbs move out of a bed slightly too small, in a room slightly too cold and set out toward the dreary daylight of the day. Footsteps are set alight by the sun that acts as a spotlight, giving all their due at the centre of the stage, each alone in



their monologuing, each singularly exuberant in their individuality. Yet I imagine them, an individual connected to me, eyes opening as mine close, heading out to their adventure, their pathway through the day. Perhaps they drag their heels slightly, whistle and smile at the people passing them by, or stay locked in the house to find the path that was asked. Yet still, they continue, finding themselves. Being asleep does not stop our minds from moving; we seek to see ourselves within the rifts and sparkles of flashing memories and chaotic lights. We find ourselves through the eyes of other people, through the experiences of different thoughts, and through messages of gratification wilfully given by those we hold close to our hearts. Humans cannot survive without sleep, just as we cannot survive without the help of other people. Connection, which can be defined in many ways, defines us as humans.

Is it not unintentionally human to seek to find a connection? To seek that friendly face with an outstretched arm and know everything will be okay? We see it in our religions, all demanding that others are lesser versions of themselves, eventually leading to the same promises of discovery and morality, each beautiful in their own right for the light they bring to those who believe. We see it in our customs and our songs, words from other languages reaching across borders to touch the hearts of those who live thousands of miles away, reaching across millennia to convey the songs and stories of people who have long since faded into the annals of the past. In our histories and family trees, we can trace ourselves, the outlines of our identity, the messages of our intent through the gaze of a thousand connected intentions. Am I connected? In the laughter I share with those around me. In the quiet moments, I breathe in the cool breeze and watch the trees shake and stir, their interconnected roots singing to each other as if they wish to stay connected to what they find there. I wonder to myself, have I seen the connection I was seeking? Have I found what I was looking for when I first boarded a flight and landed in a country where I had no real clue about living?

We return to the knotted quotes, the two dreams held in such high esteem, intermingling in our consciousness as individuals with spotlights, determinedly connected. Messily tangled so that the fluorescent vibrancy of humanity remains trapped by the incalculable odds of our bureaucracy. Untangling this knot seems almost impossible, but it is a task undauntedly connected to how we, as humans, see each other. So we continue drawing more knotted dreams into fervent reality, recklessly journeying to understand ourselves. Can we? Can we rectify this connected landscape of humanity with mere numbers? Can we take on the daunting task of accepting the sheer number of connections by helping all that appear in our lives? To think of people as numbers on a spreadsheet and as parts of the same body. Can both of these images exist at the same time? Perhaps they can, but these two metaphors are so far from one another that the only way they intermingle is in the mess of calculated flaws that often undermine our intent. So, with all the intelligence of a 21-year-old university student (which isn't much), I'd like to offer a slightly

different metaphor, one that attempts to bridge that gap between competitiveness and generosity so that the two can exist precariously balanced in perpetual incredulity.

We don't live alone. That much is true. We are all trees in a grove, sturdy and strong, unbalanced and weak. If we each decided to continue growing until we blotted out the sun, we would condemn all who grew around us to a life of perpetual darkness. We would grow so large and tall that there wouldn't be enough to support us all, and so instead, we have to work together, as trees are apt to do—growing interconnected avenues of roots to communicate, connect and reciprocate. Like trees, we talk to one another, discover one another, and find the connections between those we grow to understand and help each other succeed.

Four years, it is impossible, yet it's true. Four years have brought the roots within me, a growing tangle of weaves and webs that force me to recognise that I am connected and here. And I'll miss it. I'll miss it when I rip those connections away, when my roots slowly feed back into new pursuits, and when I bear fruit for my next journey, my next destination looming on the horizon. I'll miss the branches that grew me, the winding waters of knowledge and perseverance that sustained me.

The laughing, the crying, the struggles and joys, the pain and the beauty all coiled up and sprung. I'll miss it all. But at the same time, I know that when I do, when I transplant myself away from this beautifully expanded grove, I'll leave space behind for another to fill. I'll leave that gap in the darkness for someone else to develop, feeding off the knowledge and space I've provided until they're just as ready as me. Then, the whole process repeats itself. There's something beautiful about that.

Life is a series of connections; university is our biggest, when we take a moment to find something new about ourselves and discover if we belong, if we are who we say we are and if we can push ourselves forward. To be connected is to be human, to know when to leave those connections behind, to push on and find a way into life, to grow and thrive and to remember with fondness those years we spent growing.

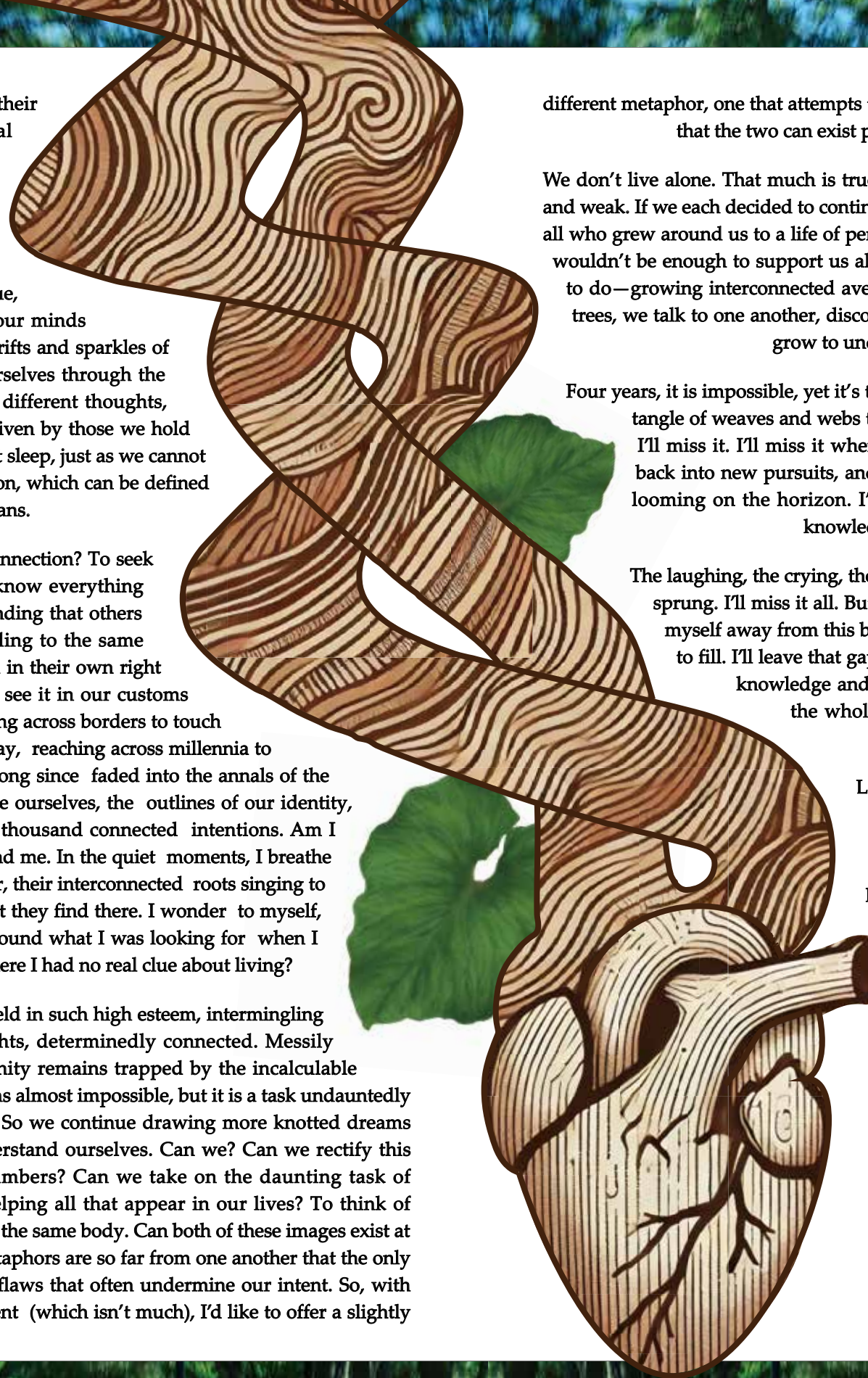
That is what makes each of us uniquely similar.

A tree in a forest of like-minded souls, each growing, competing and helping, but each finally leaving with something beautiful, something new, something that will last long past impact and forever engrain into the soil.

What else could I possibly think of other people if not this?

Owain Green

Edited by Mana | Designed by Sissi



Reflecting on the value of



POSITIVE CONNECTIONS



☐ IN THE WORKPLACE

☒ AS A STUDENT JOB-HUNTING

Written by So Ando

When you choose a company to join, what qualities will you prioritise?

Your position?

The salary?

Work-life balance?

Responsible investing?

The quality of the office?

We all know the importance of choosing a company that suits you and it's up to the individual to choose which values they cherish. You could work in consultancy or investment banking until midnight every day, and finally become super-rich. Or you may work in a manufacturing company and manage your work-life balance. However, as a student currently job-hunting, having talked with more than 100 workers in 2024, I found out that most of the workers do not mention a critical factor in the workplace - that of

"CONNECTION".

In Japan, "connection" in the context of recruiting has two main meanings. The first is important but also holds a negative connotation. It is a relationship utilized as leverage for employment, admission, or business transactions. The second means relationships with your family or friends outside the company. This is also important, but I would like to focus on the former. Hearing the word "connection", the term "コネ入社" comes to mind. コネ (ko-ne) is an abbreviation of the word connection, and 入社 (nyu-u-sha) means joining a company. I too held a negative image of "connection" in this sense, since the term evokes unfairness in the recruiting process. Moreover, I used to dislike getting close to people with motives like engaging in business transactions or being introduced to internships, since this process is so stressful. For example, I thought drinking parties (飲み会 (no-mi-ka-i) in Japanese) with co-workers would be a heavy burden for me.

In 2023, I was in Melbourne as an exchange student where I was surprised by its free and open culture. I used to live in Singapore from ages five to ten, but since I was so young then, this was my first time to be truly exposed to a foreign culture. Compared to Japan, I really loved the free vibe in Melbourne: not much peer pressure, so much greenery in the city, and you can do anything you want (perhaps also because I had the freedom to spend my time as I pleased, given my flexible schedule as an exchange student). Therefore, I had a poor image of Japanese working culture, especially the long working hours, the culture of drinking with seniors and the concrete jungle. However, recently I changed my mind.

When I started to talk with seniors via recruiting and numerous internships, I found three astonishing results. First, some of the senior's talks are interesting!

Isn't that a wonderful thing? I thought most of the drinking parties with seniors would be full of boasting by them (and I have to admit that some of them do so), but there are also many interesting stories and funny episodes to accompany them. Since senior's ages, hometowns and skills are so varied, talking with other workers broadened my mind. Whilst this expression might sound overly idealistic, I have found that it is genuinely true. Secondly, seniors are humans as well. It is common sense, but I used to separate Gen Z and others too much. I have to admit that a slight majority of the 飲み会 are somewhat boring, but we're all human, so it's only natural that we get along with some people more than others. You might even find you can get closer to a supervisor 10 or more years older than you through honest conversations. Let me call this "positive connection". Finally, I found that what matters is who you work with. Just imagine working from 8:00-18:00, five days a week. It is totally different from university life where you can take any classes with any friends you want. Having a good relationship with your co-workers is the most important thing for both your mental health and work performance. Moreover, it's great to have close friends in the workplace since Tokyo can easily make you feel lonely, especially after COVID-19.

In conclusion, I have come to cherish "positive connection" as the most important quality of a company. You do not have to be pessimistic about the relationships with your co-workers. Of course, there are negative aspects of Japanese relationship culture, but now I find value in the connections I make, and look forward to joining company events not for networking purposes, but to cultivate these positive relationships.

LET'S SEE HOW IT GOES IN 2026.



The Life of Vā

Priya Mu

You might have heard of the Japanese philosophical concept *Ma* (間) – meaning empty space – often indicating a negative space or gap representing the interval between objects or events. A few thousand miles away in the Pacific, in the island nation of Sāmoa, is another parallel concept that talks about these intervals. Possibly less popular outside the sphere of Polynesian enthusiasts, the Sāmoan concept of *Vā* is understood as a relational space – between people, environment, faith, etc. In other words, *Vā* is a continuum – a dimension that connects oneself with everything else.

I experienced *Vā* when I first went to Sāmoa during my 6th semester undergraduate architecture program. In Architecture, we have a course every semester called a design studio, a 4-credit course that feels like 40. The design studios are the sole reason

behind the inevitable sleeplessness, lack of social life, and other miseries that come with the degree. In these courses we are required to do projects, and we are usually given a brief which outlines the project's objectives and requirements. The brief for that semester was to propose a redesign of the old German courthouse in Apia, Sāmoa.

From the raising of the first Union Jack in 1914 to the killing of the Mau – the Sāmoan independence movement – leader Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III in 1929, the old German courthouse holds incredible history and is an important place for the people of Sāmoa. The studio was guided by Lama Tone, a New Zealand architect and educator with Sāmoan roots, who brings a Pacific lens to architecture—integrating Indigenous knowledge, local materials, and traditional-spatial relationships to create designs that

honor cultural heritage and harmonize with the surrounding environment. Lama had organized a week-long trip for the students to visit the courthouse and other important cultural sites, with his primary objective being to help us experience island life— to let us imbibe Indigenous values as much as we can.

There were 12 of us – 10 students, Lama and senior lecturer Bill McKay. We drove around the island, stayed at a *fale* – a traditional Sāmoan house, and tried *Fa'alifu Kalo* – a dish with Taro and coconut cream. We also tried *Kava* – a very strong, bitter tasting, and muddy looking root beer shared at special occasions. While we made sure to visit the site in question and other important cultural sites, including the villa and grave of R.L. Stevenson, most of our time was spent swimming in the ocean and swimming holes – natural pools by the ocean. In retrospect, there is so much to say about *Vā* in every experience we had, but the experiences that made me feel *Vā* the strongest were definitely the episodes of swimming.

The first swimming spot we visited was a cave pool called Piula – a small pool

with a partly covered cave enclosure. The water was a vibrant turquoise, lined with contrasting rocks all around, which enhanced its striking bluish-green hue—so clear that calling it 'crystal clear' would be an understatement. Everyone was thrilled and couldn't wait to jump in. I shared their enjoyment, but only emotionally – I didn't know how to swim. But my excitement got the better of me, and I thought, maybe if I jumped in, I would somehow know how to swim or at least keep myself afloat – you know, like how dogs just know. I jumped into the water. My hope that I would instinctively know how to stay afloat didn't go according to plan as I kept going down despite moving my hands and legs in every way I could to try to go up. My friends, who were on standby, rushed to pull me out and helped me reach the rocks at the edge.

Disappointed that I probably would fail natural selection, I stared into the water. I could see the bottom of the pool, as close as if I could touch it. I also wondered how the water tasted so fresh despite being right next to the ocean. Later I learned that this pool was a natural spring that originated from an



One of the many roadside pools with Bill and our mini-van making a cameo in the background!



The serene Piula Cave Pool

old lava tube. As my friends swam back and forth in the cave, playing with a volleyball one of them had brought from home, I tried to enjoy the ocean view, the wind, and whatever else the land had to offer me that day. I'm not sure if I looked melancholic, but my friend, who owned the volleyball, must have noticed me sitting by the rocks with my feet still in the water, my hands swirling aimlessly on the surface. He swam toward me and asked if I wanted to try using the volleyball as a flotation device to explore the cave. I hesitantly accepted the offer, not knowing if it would work, but to my salvation, it did. I felt so excited because I was convinced that the cave held a spectacular sight simply by virtue of its inaccessibility. And that feeling of joy did manifest in reality—despite the cave being really small and, in retrospect, not so spectacular. Over the trip, we went swimming in various other places, and I was able to enjoy the waters fully thanks to the volleyball. My friends named it Toby and compared me and Toby to Noland and Wilson the volleyball from *Cast Away*. I couldn't agree more, as me and Toby were inseparable throughout the trip.

It was on day 4 when we went to the most anticipated swimming spot of the trip – To Sua. It was like no other swimming spot we had visited. To Sua – literally meaning 'giant swimming hole' in Sāmoan – is an ocean trench located in a promontory overlooking the ocean. One cannot immediately see the trench, as it is located 30m (98 feet) below the ground. We had to get down using a ladder to a platform and then into the waters. You could jump off from the ladder or the platform on days of high tide. Some of my friends went in and assured me it was deep enough to take a dive, and it was. Having conquered the waters for the past 3 days, I decided to enter the pool in style and spring off from the platform. My friends (with Toby, of course) were on standby. I jumped in, and as I came up, one of them tossed Toby over. The water was salty, and I learned that the trench was connected to the ocean through a small submerged tunnel that unskilled swimmers were strictly advised to stay away from. One of my friends tried swimming through the tunnel to the other side. We were all waiting for him to come back up, but we were not worried, as he worked part-time as a life-

guard. When he finally came back, having taken his sweet time, he told us it was awesome but not easy to cross—even for him. It was clearly not my territory, so I tried to stay far away from the tunnel.

When looking at To Sua on Google Maps, one can see two openings to the sky because a section of land bridged over the middle, creating the illusion of division. This bridge formed a high, cave-like enclosure when looking up from the water below. The larger opening, closer to the ocean, had a submerged tunnel connecting to the ocean, while the smaller one was on the other side of the tunnel. I mostly stayed there, occasionally swimming back and forth between the two. Most of the time, floating on my back, I would look at the sky through the small opening, which would go out of view to show me the underside of the ground, with the rocks and their crevices, and then slow-

ly open up to the skies at the larger opening. The sky felt so far away in the middle of the Pacific, yet so close, as the clouds drifted in sync with the tides—just as I floated with their rhythm. I remembered Lama telling us about Vā on the first day of class and using the ocean as an example – how the oceans separated the islands but, at the same time, connected them. With the water cutting me off from gravity and the clouds floating parallel to me, I felt weightless—but I also felt deeply connected to the entirety of the Pacific, the entirety of the world. I felt both insignificant and immense, all at once. That one moment was not enough for me to fully comprehend the life of Vā, but it brought me closer to understanding that Indigenous life—the life of Vā—is one where a person feels intrinsically connected to the universe with the totality of their being.



The mesmerizing To Sua with the Pacific Ocean extending beyond



Connections: the overall picture

Darwin Eugenio

No human is an island
A saying many have heard
From childhood to one's later years
We want connection, so I've learned

Social animals we are
Forming packs, as nature desired
families, clubs, any event on the radar
To keep the sanity checked and balanced

Ancient communities grew and prospered
Some expanding, others decimated
Some explored new areas and wandered
meeting new people and saying hello

Sadly, competition is the brutal reality
Ideas and cultures diversify
Fear and ignorance push societal polarizations
Fueling conflicts, causing devastations

Modern globalization seen to connect people
technology helped in its facilitation,
but alas, natural instinct prevails
the clash of peoples and ideas wails

Western modernity a surging crown
The intolerant aspect causes some to drown
indigenous tolerance abused and beaten
disdain for the "different" becoming the norm

A thread of superiority opens and unwinds
the evolving mindset of a nation where it binds
Succeeding generations consider it tradition
unaware that it is a residue of colonial ambition

Globalization, a blessing and a snare
must be approached with utmost care
showing capability to destroy culture and economy
highlighted by the small virus of 2020

The internet expanded connections
but dangerous beliefs rode on this innovation
the truth reduced to relative perceptions
Can humans handle this flood of "information"?

Art and Connections: KT in conversation with **FERNANDO KAGUE**

Suyog Garg

Fernando Kague is a Brazilian performance artist of Japanese descent. He has been living and working in Tokyo for the past eight years. Fernando is currently curating a book about experiences of queer artists in Japan. Suyog from Komaba Times recently got in conversation with Fernando about the upcoming book among other topics. Below is an excerpt from the insightful interview.

The interview has been edited for clarity. Views represent Fernando's own opinions!

SG: Hi, nice to meet you. Can you tell us something about your work in Japan and introduce your performances?

A: Hi, yes, of course! Thank you for inviting me here.

In Japan, what I mostly do is part-time jobs. Primarily, I work as an art teacher, do modeling, and organize my own art events. Currently, I am also working on publishing an art book, as I mentioned earlier today. Additionally, I am developing an art project, and I occasionally work also as a bartender.

In Brazil, I first started with theatre and later went to film school. Because of that background, I began doing performance art here in Japan, hosting my own events

and sometimes participating in others' events, galleries, or similar platforms. My performances are a way to express myself on topics that I feel are important to discuss with people. Most of my work focuses on Japanese immigration and the Nikkei¹ movement. These topics are also closely tied to family; how people perceive and connect with family is a recurring theme I like to explore.

Do you know Marina Abramović? She is a well-known performance artist from Sweden. My belief—and at least speaking for myself—is that the body is the main tool we use to express what we want to communicate. Most of the time, I don't have a strict rehearsal process. Instead, I focus on researching and understanding



the feelings and themes I want to address. Once I've decided on the right elements, like music or objects (for example, a shell or another symbolic item), I use them to build my performance.

The length of my performances can vary depending on how I feel and the connection I am experiencing with the audience. Typically, though, I aim for something between 5 to 10 minutes. This is how I build and work within this art form.

Q: In what lens do you focus on Japanese immigration? By this, do you mean foreigners who come to Japan and live and work here?

A: The Japanese diaspora—let's put it that way—is one thing I've noticed. Another observation is that many foreigners are aware that Brazil has the largest Japanese community in the world outside of Japan, but they don't know much about the reasons behind it. That sparked my interest in sharing this, especially because I feel that Japan doesn't talk about it much. Japan often reflects on its history, but perhaps this part is either something they're not proud of or something they prefer to keep hidden.

I realized it was important to address these topics and raise awareness. My performances often encourage people to reflect on their families, and for me, they are also a way to connect with my ancestors—my grandparents who migrated to Brazil. Performing becomes a spiritual act, a way to honor the struggles and experiences of those who came before me. When preparing for a performance, I first research the emotions I want to evoke—whether about family or

immigration in general—and then I insert elements of the Japanese immigration movement to deepen these connections.

In one of my previous performances at a gallery in Harajuku, I used letters from my father, photographs of my parents' wedding, and some newspaper clippings. A suitcase served as the centrepiece of the performance, alongside a candle. I also handed out short letters to the audience. These letters were from Japanese immigrants to Brazil or Brazilian immigrants to Japan, sharing their feelings about family.

For example, one letter was from a mother who returned to Brazil after spending so much time in Japan that her son no longer recognized her as his mother; he referred to his grandmother as “mother” instead. Another letter was from a Japanese woman during World War II, who left her child in Japan and was unable to return to see her daughter for many years.

This is what I aim to do in my performances—connect the themes of family with the immigration movements between Japan and Brazil and highlight the personal and emotional struggles involved.

Q: Would you say that the reason behind your exhibitions is that you want to increase the awareness about people, for example, ethnically Japanese people living outside Japan among foreigners and in Japan?

A: Yeah, that's how I feel. But I also try to encourage the audience to reflect on their own families. One of my previous performance which took place during my event exhibition aimed to do just that.

Q: I've also realized that the word "sarau" seems to be a central idea to your works. Could you share more about the word?

A: Yeah. It's a Portuguese word. The word "sarau" originally means "afternoon," as these events often took place in the afternoon.

It started in Portugal, and when the royal family came to Brazil, they brought this tradition with them. Initially, these events were organized for royalty and featured music and poetry most of the time. Later on, during the 1960s and 1970s, artists began incorporating music, dance, poetry, and other forms of artistic expression into these gatherings.

I wanted to bring the concept of *Sarau* here, a space where artists wouldn't feel afraid to share their work, connect with each other, engage with an audience, and perhaps even network. *Sarau* would also be a welcoming place where artists could exhibit what they practice at home and receive feedback on it. That's why I decided to bring this tradition to Japan. It's been two years since I started, and I've already held several events.



The event takes place every year, roughly every 2 to 3 months. We don't have a fixed schedule—it depends on how my life is going at the time. So far, we've had 14 editions: one in Brazil, one in the Netherlands, and the rest here in Japan. The next one we're scheduling to have in March, but we don't have a fixed date yet! We also have an unrelated Open Mic event on April 12th, and I invite anyone who's interested to give a performance or read poetry in it.

Q: That's great. Thanks! I might myself be interested in the Open Mic event. You mentioned you moved here eight years ago. What's your perspective on living here for eight years as a foreigner? Or, since you have Japanese ancestry, maybe it feels a bit different being half-Japanese?

A: It's been great! I initially came to Japan due to family issues, planning to stay for two years max. But after that, I realized that Japan suits me in many ways. It's quite strange because it's not entirely black and white. Japan resonates with me deeply, yet I know it's a country that, in many ways, isn't designed for building relationships—personally and even professionally.

That contrast intrigues me. As a Brazilian, I love to hug, connect, and talk, which is why I create performances here. Since Japan makes building relationships challenging, it pushes me to engage, connect, and share, even briefly.

So it's been great because of that—because here, I have the chance to do something meaningful in a place where it's not the norm. It's also been very fulfilling to meet people from other countries with different backgrounds and perspectives on life. For example, even just talking to you is interesting; it feeds me in a way. In Brazil, people often share similar backgrounds, but in Tokyo, I meet individuals vastly different from me every day—the way they move, speak, or pause in conversation. These details feed me as an artist and human, offering new perspectives, like pieces of a larger puzzle.

Q: Yeah, in a way, I do relate with you. I heard that you also have an upcoming book about queer stories in Japan. Could you talk a bit more about it?

A: It all started with *Sarau*. I saw a lot of people coming to the event and exhibiting their work, but then I realized it was just a one-day opportunity for them to showcase their art; I thought we could do something more. As I mentioned before, I enjoy connecting and sharing with people, so I decided it should go beyond just one day. I wanted us to work together on something that would truly connect people. That's when I came up with the idea for the book. I invited some of the artists from *Sarau* whose work I admired to collaborate on this project.

Since I'm queer, I thought,

“Let's create something that involves experiences in Japan.”

But not focus on romance or love. While those elements exist, the book is more about the experience of being queer in relation to society, friends, family, and the city itself. It explores general feelings and challenges rather than romantic aspects. As I am half-Japanese, I try to reflect that identity in my work. Most models in the book will be Asian or mixed-heritage, with illustrations and photos featuring people from half-Japanese, half-Korean, and other backgrounds. Additionally, around 80% of the contributing writers and artists are of mixed heritage, adding an important layer to the project.

Another aspect is that one of the versions of the book will be in Portuguese and Japanese. The reason for this is that, as you know, Brazil has the largest Japanese community outside of Japan. We're creating the book in Portuguese and Japanese for that specific audience.

We're also making an English-Japanese version for readers abroad, such as those who might prefer to read in English but are also learning Japanese. It's a great way to engage with the Japanese language for both Japanese descendants in Brazil and for people learning Japanese as well.

The title is

“The Borders - The Artist Book”
curated and written
by Fernando Kague

It will be in collaboration with the artists from *Sarau*.

Q: That's nice to hear. What's the timeline of the book like? When is it going to be released? And would there be a piece about your own story in the book as well?

A: We're going to release the book in August with an opening exhibition. The exhibition will showcase extracts from the book, along with some illustrations and photos. I might also perform—possibly some performance art—to help people understand the concept a bit more clearly.





Q: I look forward to the book release and the exhibition! Before we conclude, is there anything you would want to change about the current situation? For example, regarding ethnically Japanese people who live here? I have met half-Indian and half-Japanese people who grew up in Tokyo. They have told me that they don't feel at home neither in India nor in Japan. It feels to them like they are stuck somewhere in-between, and they find it very difficult to mingle with either of the cultures. Have you observed something similar yourself? Or, is there something you'd want to change or raise awareness about?

A: Maybe it would be a bit cliché to say that there's no middle. Because, in reality, they have their own unique experience of living, even with just a small connection to both cultures. That makes them unique. For example, speaking for myself, I'm 100% Brazilian. I'm not Japanese, but I have Japanese

roots. I mix both cultures, and that makes me unique in the way I experience life in Brazil and here. My experiences at Japanese festivals, Japanese classes, and visiting my mother's side of the family with their traditional food have shaped me. All of that has given me a different perspective on life, work, and relationships compared to people who grow up with just one culture.

Both sides make you who you are. So, I'd say that you can embrace both opposing elements and use them to shape your own identity. Having these two different perspectives—they're so contrasting—makes you more flexible. It's like being a chameleon. You can adapt and take on whichever side you need, depending on the situation.

PERFORMANCE



The video performance art accessible via QR code is a compilation of two works in an experimental exercise by the artist. It explores identity and the shared experiences of those who, in some way, have faced cultural questions and navigated the complexities of cultural divergences throughout their journeys, reflected in their image as Nikkei.

It explores identity and the shared experiences of those who, in some way, have faced cultural questions and navigated the complexities of cultural divergences throughout their journeys, reflected in their image as Nikkei.



For more information, follow Sarau's Instagram account here

Cold Nights, Tokyo & Tenali Rama

By: Suyog Garg

After returning back from India earlier this year, the author got himself addicted to spending most nights watching a historical drama, "Tenali Rama". The show follows the story of Ramakrishnan, a famed minister and jester in the court of Raja Krishnadeva Raya in 14th century India. This write-up is a satirical memoir about the shock and grief the author felt when the actress playing one of the protagonists was suddenly replaced in Episode 269. The short memoir is originally written in a mix of Hindi, Urdu and Farsi and then translated into English.

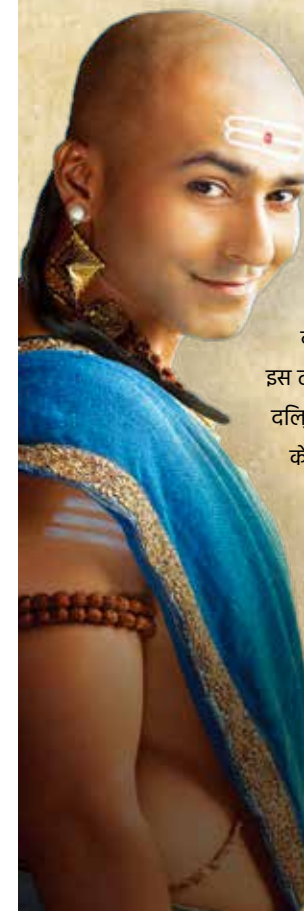
शरद राते, टोक्यो और "तेनाली रामा"

गौरतलब है की पछिले कुछ सफ़्ताहों से शीत लहर ने शहर को झँझोड़ के रख दिया है। घर के दरवाज़े से बाहर निकलते हैं की मानो रूह काँप सी जाती है। अब हुज़ूर इसमें आप गुमताखी किसकी मानेंगे, हमारी जो अपने देश के उस गर्म माहौल और मज़िज़ा दोनों की ही छोड़कर इधर दूर वदिश में आकर बस गए हैं, या फिर इस नषितुर वातावरण का जो की हमसे कोई आपसी रंजिश लिए मालूम पड़ता है। गलती किसी की भी हो, हम दोपहर से शाम तक का फ़ासला घर की गर्माहट और अपनी उस नर्म रज़ाई के भीतर रहने के परम सुख की आशा में किसी तरह व्यतीत कर भी लें, मगर जनाब खुदा-न-ख़्वास्ता किसी रोज़ हमें यूनिवर्सल में देर रात तक रुक जाना पड़े। फिर साइकल से घर लौटते वक़्त इन हाथों की उँगलियों का क्या हसर होता है, यह हमसे बहतर और कौन जान सकता है। हालाँकि हमारे पास अला दरज़े के दस्ताने भी हैं, जिनका इस्तेमाल करना हम बाख़ूबी जानते हैं।

बहरहाल, वाक़्या इनहीं शरद रातों में से किसी एक का हौ कोई खास महत्वपूर्ण बात नहीं हौ बस इतना है की हमार साथ धोखा हुआ हौ गहरा सघन धोखा, जिसस शायद ही हम फिर कभी उभर पाए। मगर आपको क्या? आप तो बस आग पेढ़िए।

पछिले माह की शुरुवात के दिनों की बात है। हम हाल ही में अपनी वार्षिक घरवापसी की यात्रा से जापान वापस लौटे थे। इस बार का आवास उधर पर लगभग एक महीने से भी ज़्यादा का हो गया था। हम भी क्या करते? लौट आने का तो मन ही नहीं कर रहा था। शीत ऋतु होने के बावजूत सूरज की धूप सेकते हुए बीत रहे दिनों का और पारिवारिक संबंधों की मधुर मठिस का ख़चाव इस बार कुछ अलग ही सा था। और फिर टोक्यो की शीत लहरों से किसी का लगाव भी क्या? खैर लौट तो हम आए ही, आख़िर ज़रूरी जो था! लेकिन इधर आते साथ ही ना जाने किस शुभ काल में हमारे सूक्ष्म से मस्तबिक में ख़याल आया की क्यों ना यूट्यूब पर "तेनाली रामा" नामक सोनी टीवी पर कुछ वर्षों पहले अत्याधिक प्रचलित हुआ धारावाहिक देखा जाए। अब इस ख़याल आने के उस क्षण को शुभ कहा जाए या फिर अत्यंत ही मनहूस, मालूम नहीं, सच तो यह ही रहेगा की जिस दिन से हमने उस शो को देखना चालू किया बस उसे देखते ही चले गए। दिनों क्या हफ़्तों तक का रोज़ शाम का सलिसला बस वही बन गया था।

इस तीव्र रुचिका करण केवल कहानी में दलिचस्पी ही नहीं थी, आख़िर तेनाली रामा के रोचक कसिसों से कौन ना-मुसद वाक़फ़ि नहीं है। दलिलगी हमको शायद उन कदिदरों से भी हो गई थी। गौर फ़रमाइये की अमूमन तेनाली रामा की कथाओं में केवल महाराज कृष्णदेवराय के दरबार और रामाकृष्णा के अपने बुद्धिकौशल द्वारा राज्य और प्रजा की वभिनि समस्याओं का हाल खोज निकालने का ज़किर ही अधिक मलिता है। इन कहानियों में रामाकृष्णा के अपने नज़ी जीवन और परिवार का समाकलन आम तौर पर उतना अधिक नहीं होता। अब इस शो की ख़ास बातें यही दो थी। एक तो यह की नर्मिताओं ने इन लोक कथाओं के वषिय में शोध करने और जतिना हो सकें उतनी नवीनतम कहानियों को शो के एपिसोडों के रूप में रूपांतरण करने में कोई कंजूसी ना की थी, जिससे की एक तो यह हुआ की कहानियों से पहले से परिचित लोगों की रुचिशो में बनी रही, और तो और नए दर्शक भी जुड़ते गए। "तेनाली रामा" की दूसरी ख़ासयित यह थी की रामाकृष्णा, उसकी पत्नी शारदा और माँ अम्मा से लेकर कपटी तथाचार्य और उसके शषिय धनी और मणतिक के कदिदरों का चयन बेहद कुशलता से किया गया था। नाट्य कर रहे ये सभी पात्र अपने अपने कदिदरों के ढांचे में यूँ ढल जाते जैसे मानो अपने ही किसी पछिले जन्म का जीवांत चित्रण कर रहे हों।



तो जनाब, जाहिर सी ही बात है की उस 14वीं शताब्दी की दुनिया में कदम रखते ही हम उसमे लुप्त होकर रह गए। बस शाम होने का इंतज़ार रहता और घर लौटते ही उस विजयनगर की अद्भुत नगरी में प्रवेश हो जाता। उधर टेबल के मॉनिटर पर अपने मृत्युदंड से बचने का कोई उपाय खोजता रामाकृष्णा, और इधर बिस्तर पर रज़ाई ओढ़कर पड़े हुए हम। कभी प्यास लगने पर रज़ाई छोड़कर बिस्तर से हम उठते थे, और उधर यूट्यूब पर शारदा अपने “उठा लो!” की गूँज कर देती, जैसे की उस ठंड में रज़ाई के अलग होते ही हमारे प्राण उठने की बात हो। वास्तव में कभी-कभी शारदा के उस प्रलाप का समय इतना सटीक बैठ जाता जैसे अतीत के काल की एक गूँज यहाँ सुनाई दे रही हो।

सब कुछ इसी प्रकार यँ ही अच्छा चल रहा था। धीरे-धीरे विजयनगर की दुनिया में विचरते हुए हम एपिसोड 268 तक पहुँच गए थे। रामा को अब दरबार में विशेष सलाहकार नियुक्त हुए भी काफ़ी समय गुज़र चुका था। हम अपनी दिनचर्या में सुख से दिन गुज़ार रहे थे। सारा विजयनगर भी खुश मालूम पड़ता था। शारदा अब गर्भवती थी और राज दरबार में उसकी गोदभराई का कार्यक्रम भी ठीक ही से हो गया था। अचानक ही शो ने नौ महीनों का टाइमस्किप लिया और रामा के पिता बनते ही, शो के उन नमकहराम निर्माताओं को किसी ने ना जाने क्या पाठ पढ़ाया की उन्होंने शारदा का पात्र निभा रही अभिनेत्री को ही बदल डाला। बस क्या था, हम तो जनाब आत्मघात पर उतर आए। वह नई शारदा का अभिनय हमको फूटी आखों से देखने का भी मन नहीं करता था। अब डूबता क्या नहीं करता? आख़िर में हमको दिल पर पत्थर रखकर “तेनाली रामा” से अपना नाता तोड़ना ही पड़ा।

इस हादसे के कारण हमें जो आघात पहुँचा है, उससे हम अभी तक ठीक तौर पर उभर नहीं पाए हैं। हाँ, माना की इतने बड़े स्तर के शो में इस प्रकार के परिवर्तन का जरूर ही कोई उचित करण रहा होगा, मगर दर्शकों से निष्ठा का भी तो प्रश्न बनता है। आख़िर दर्शकों के कोमल हिर्दयों से वे निर्लज्ज निर्देशक कैसे यँ खेल खेल सकते हैं? अंत में नुकसान भी तो उन्ही का हुआ। हमारा गया भी तो गया क्या? सुना है की हाल ही में इस धारावाहिक का एक नया संस्करण भी सामने आया है। इसमें कुछ बदलावों के साथ वही पुराने अभिनेताओं के होने की खबर है। मगर एक बार का जला, हर कदम फूँक-फूँक कर रखता है। क्या मालूम इस संस्करण का भी जनाज़ा वे लोग उसी प्रकार निकाल दें। अब हम तो बस इन्हीं उलझनों में फ़से, शर्द शामों को मस्त चाय की चुसकियाँ लेते हुए गुज़रते हैं। संभव है यह सिलसिला अभी कुछ और दिवसों के लिए ही सही लेकिन आगे भी बरकरार रहे।

English Translation

For the past few weeks, the cold wave has shaken the city to its core. The moment one steps outside, it feels as if one's very soul begins to shiver. Now, dear reader, whom would you hold responsible for this transgression? Is it my own folly for leaving behind the warmth and familiarity of my homeland to settle in this distant, frigid land? Or is it the merciless winter itself, which seems intent on holding a grudge against my choices?

Whosoever may be at fault, I somehow manage to endure the stretch from noon to evening in anticipation of the ultimate comfort—the warmth of home and the blissful embrace of my soft quilt. But, dear reader, heaven forbid I ever have to stay late at the university! Then, who but I would know the dire fate of my fingers as I pedal my way home through the freezing night? Mind you, I do own a pair of high-quality gloves, and I am quite adept at using them.

Nevertheless, this incident belongs to one of those particularly cold nights. Nothing especially significant, really. It's just that I was deceived—deeply, profoundly deceived! One from which I may never fully recover. But why should that concern you? You can just keep on reading.

This happened early last month. I had recently returned to Japan from my annual visit home. This time, my stay had stretched to over a month. But what could I do? I simply didn't feel like coming back. Despite it being winter, the days spent soaking in the sun and the warm embrace of familial bonds had an unusually strong pull this time. And then, what affection could one possibly have for Tokyo's freezing winds?

Yet, I did return! Because, in the end, duty beckoned. But as soon as I got back, some inexplicable moment of divine inspiration (or perhaps sheer misfortune) led me to the thought: “How about watching that immensely popular Sony TV serial from a few years ago: Tenali Rama?” Now, whether that moment should be called auspicious or utterly disastrous, I do not know. But the truth remains—once I started watching that show, I just couldn't stop. Not for mere days, but for weeks, my entire evening routine revolved around watching the show.

This obsession wasn't solely due to the show's storyline—after all, who isn't familiar with Tenali Rama's legendary wit? Perhaps I had grown attached to the very characters themselves. Typically, Tenali Rama's tales revolve around King Krishnadevaraya's court, where Rama's sharp intellect solves various dilemmas of the kingdom and its people. Rarely do these stories delve into Rama's personal life or family affairs. This show, on the other hand, had two unique elements.

Firstly, the creators had gone to great lengths in researching folklore and adapting as many new stories as possible. Their efforts ensured that even those familiar with Tenali Rama's legends remained intrigued while also inviting new viewers. Secondly, the casting was absolutely spot-on—from Rama himself to his wife Sharada, his mother Amma, the scheming Tathacharya, and his foolish disciples, Dhani and Mani. Every actor fit their role so seamlessly that it felt as if they were merely reenacting memories from a past life.

So, dear reader, it's only natural that once I stepped into the world of 14th-century Vijayanagar, I was utterly lost in it. I would impatiently wait for the evening, and the moment I got home, I would enter that enchanting world once more. On my monitor screen, Rama would be desperately finding a way to escape execution, while on my bed, buried under layers of warm quilts, I would watch with rapt attention. If ever I got thirsty and reluctantly left my cozy cocoon to fetch water, Sharada's piercing cry of “Utha lo!” (Lift it up!) from the screen would eerily echo in perfect timing, as if my very soul was being lifted a way from the warmth of my quilt. Sometimes, her words aligned so precisely with my actions that it felt like an echo from the past was whispering into the present.

Thus, everything was going well. Immersed in the world of Vijayanagar, I had made my way to episode 268. By now, Rama had long been appointed as a special royal advisor. Life was smooth, both for me and, seemingly, for the entire kingdom. Sharada was pregnant, and the royal court had successfully conducted her godh bhara (baby shower).

Suddenly, the show had a time skip of nine months, and just as Rama became a father, those treacherous showrunners, for some unknown reason, decided to replace the actress who played Sharada.

That was it.

My world shattered!

The new Sharada was unbearable to watch. Her voice lacked the warmth and authority of the original actress, and her expressions felt forced and unnatural. Gone was the charm that had made Sharada's character so endearing—what remained was a hollow imitation that disrupted, what had been for me, the very essence of the show. But what is a drowning man to do? With a heavy heart, I was forced to sever all ties with Tenali Rama.

The emotional damage I suffered from this betrayal still lingers. Granted, such a major production must have had some valid reasons for this change. But what about loyalty to the viewers? How could those shameless directors toy with our delicate hearts? And in the end, who was the real loser?

I hear a new season of the series has been released recently, supposedly featuring some of the original actors. But once burned, twice shy. What if these people ruin this season too?

Now, entangled in these dilemmas, I spend my cold evenings sipping warm tea, lost in thought. In a way the cold of the winter mirrors the chill of that betrayal, both leaving one longing for the warmth that no longer exists. Perhaps this routine will continue for a few more days, or perhaps much longer.

Image Courtesy: Sony SAB's Tenali Rama



Epilogue: What Does Connection Mean For You?

By: The Komaba Times
"Connection" Team

Connection elicits the idea of drawing associations between two different things or values: for example, often the color red is associated with danger or passion. It makes us recognize patterns and make informed decisions by linking past experiences and knowledge to new situations. Hence, when we see the red traffic light, it instantly induces us to stop, hinting at the danger of getting hit by oncoming vehicles. Thus, connection bridges the gap between different concepts.

- Aditi



Being human, being born in this time and era, where change and communication are taken for granted, might be one of the most exhilarating experiences that is available in the world. To connect, make mistakes and re-learn to reach others, make a call to the other side of the world and keep in touch with our loved ones among our modern privileges. We all have heard at some point that "everything is connected"; it is just one of the most magical things to see

how that statement has materialized even more in the past few years. Lucky us.

-Victoria

Connection is that insubstantial yet tangible thing that draws us to one another. You can't see it, but you can feel it. It's that "something" that makes us want to be in the other's presence.

- Mana

Connected, connected the trains and buses and bike lanes underground in the permafrost.

Connection is weak and strong. As units plugged into inputs and outputs, we are connected to each other like factory machines or like an HDMI cable that connects a laptop to a projector. Sometimes I just want to cut all of them off, but I know it'll be bad for me.

-Martin

To me, "connection" means being understood, and this happens through encounters with people and places. It's in the laughter shared with friends, the challenge of expressing myself in another language, and the joy of discovering a new perspective that reshapes my own. It is these connections that have made my life richer and meaningful. Being part of the Komaba Times team has allowed me to connect with talented contributors, designers, and editors while helping bring each piece to life. Playing even a small role in fostering these

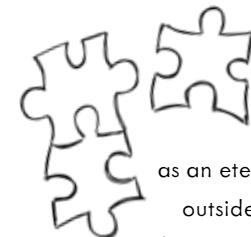
connections has been incredibly rewarding, and I am grateful for every moment of it.

- Risa



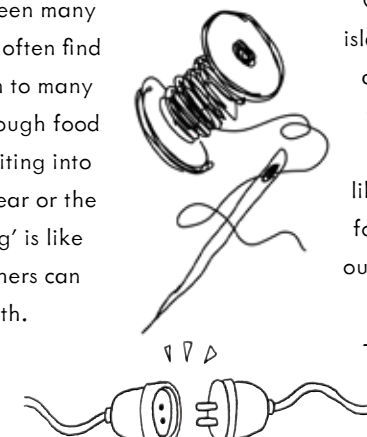
Connection can exist between many things, but I often find connection to many people through food and culture. Sharing the joy of biting into a pineapple tart on Lunar New Year or the fragrance of a good 'nasi kuning' is like sharing a part of myself that others can experience and connect with.

- Sherrene



Connection, to me, is both a challenge and a gift. Living a life as an eternal foreigner, I've often felt like an outsider—caught between cultures, never fully belonging. Yet, connection isn't about sameness; it's about understanding. It's found in shared laughter, kind gestures, and the quiet recognition of each other's stories. In this in-between space, I've learned that true connection transcends borders.

- Min



Connection is everywhere. We are like islands that seem separate from above but are firmly connected through the ocean floor. And this is why, whether we like it or not, we care for something beyond ourselves in one way or another.

- Stanley



"Connection" to me ignites an image of the connection between living things and objects on our Earth. How seemingly do entities on the planet connect to each other, from the vast ocean currents circulating under the sea, to the migrating birds and movement of people, to the digital networks of the internet.

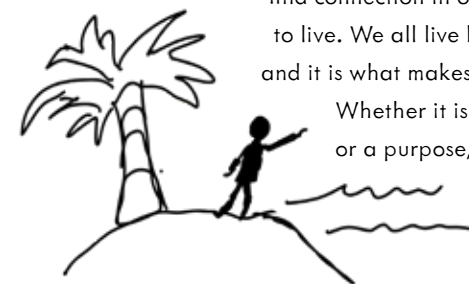
- Suyog



Connection means survival, as all mankind seeks to find connection in order to find a reason and a will to live. We all live because we have a connection, and it is what makes our human experience, human.

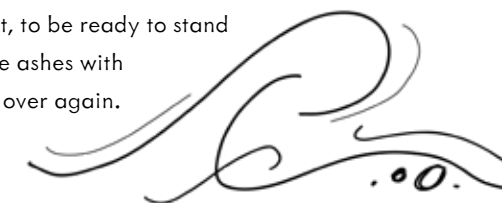
Whether it is to a person, a place, a concept, or a purpose, the forms of connections in this issue present the meaning to be alive with one another.

-Jihyun



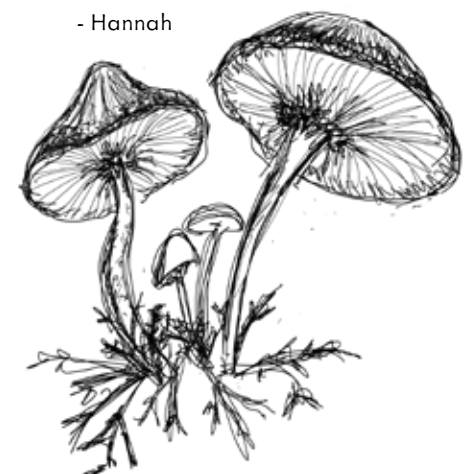
Across the vast sea, my hand still reaches out to you. Connection means to yearn, means to bleed, means to hope. A give and receive; a push and a pull. It is the surrendering of the soul for another -- sacrificing it all in the hope that one day you may be seen and heard, understood and cherished for all that you are. And if in the end, all is lost, to be ready to stand in the midst of the ashes with the resolve to do it all over again.

-Joanna



Connections may be shallow and fleeting or may be enriching and long lived. Some can be life changing, but such connections must only be a tiny proportion of the innumerable connections we make over a lifetime. When unpacked, "connection" is truly ambiguous.

- Hannah



Komaba Times Issue 14 “Connection” Team

Jihyun Lee, PEAK JEA B4, Komaba, *Editor-in-Chief*

Joanna Marie Ang, PEAK JEA B4, Komaba, *Head of Design, Marketing, Webmaster*

Stanley Guevarra, Area Studies, Komaba, *Head of Editing*

Priya Mu, ITASIA D2, Hongo, *Printing Liaison*

Hannah Payne, PEAK JEA B4, Komaba, *Editing*

Min Chung, PEAK ES B4, Komaba, *Editing*

Mana Sato, PEAK JEA B3, Komaba, *Editing*

Zihan (Martin) Huang, PEAK JEA B3, Komaba, *Editing*

Aditi Chauhan, PEAK JEA B2, Komaba, *Editing*

Victoria Hipatia Olivera Craig, Earth and Planetary Science M1, Hongo, *Design*

Sherrene Chua, PEAK ES B4, Komaba, *Design, Marketing*

Risa Kondo, PEAK ES B4, Komaba, *Design, Marketing*

Anna Cui, PEAK ES B3, Komaba, *Design*

Sissi Hu, PEAK JEA B3, Komaba, *Design*

Contributors

Hannah Payne, PEAK JEA B4, Komaba

Shotaro Koizumi, PEAK JEA B2, Komaba

Zihan (Martin) Huang, PEAK JEA B3, Komaba

Mahi Patki, GPEAK GPES M2, Komaba

Kathryn Heathcote, GPEAK GSP M1, Komaba

Owain Green, PEAK JEA B4, Komaba

So Ando, Asian Studies B4, Komaba

Priya Mu, ITASIA D2, Hongo

Darwin Eugenio, Agriculture D1, Hongo

Suyog Garg, Physics D2, Hongo

Faculty Advisor

Prof. Yuko Itatsu, Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies, Hongo

And a heartfelt thank you to **Asai-san** for their tireless dedication to Komaba Times’ print issues.

Thank you to everyone who worked on Connection!



KOMABA TIMES

3-8-1 Komaba, Meguro-ku,
Tokyo, 153-8902, JAPAN

Read and subscribe to our website for more
details on submissions and membership.

www.komabatimes.com

E-mail: thekomabatimes@gmail.com

Instagram/Facebook/X: @komabatimes

