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The Creative State of Mind

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Acknowledgements

Dear Marta from 2017,

Oh dear. There are so many things I wish I could tell you. Your life will change drastically, and not exactly in the way you had expected or wished for yourself. You worked so hard to get where you are now. You exhausted your body, abandoned your passions, and spent too many sleepless nights. Everything to prove that you deserve to live in *the perfect West*, to obtain a *world-class education*, to fulfil your biggest dream of becoming a *University Professor*, and to reach the ultimate goal of *life safety and prosperity*.

Unfortunately, this infinite race will not end after moving for your PhD to the Netherlands. Although you achieved the impossible and got the job without a research master's, now you are obsessed with proving that your Eastern European origin doesn't make you any worse. On top of that constant discomfort you feel inside, you soon discover that finding comfort outside is not easy either. Your hopes shatter every time you arrive at the freezing office, seek a fancy winter tea and receive a sad piece of ginger floating in boiling water, and find a forest that turns out to be a park with trees planted every 20000 mm with a surgeon's precision. Things that you hung on to before – watching blue skies and green meadows from your living room, in a warm refuge from engines, shouts, and crowds, a space to breathe and to rest – are all gone. Arranging the smallest things that used to save you so much pain (a dishwasher is truly a lifesaver for your itchy eczema hands!) turns out more difficult than getting a PhD job. The idea you were raised with – that you can get anything as long as you can pay for it – is run over by a big ugly tractor. You are not able to get basic things arranged, no matter how much you would offer to pay.

But you are strong and resourceful. You are intelligent, you have your parents' financial support, a loving partner, and super close, caring friends. So you will not give up easily. You treasure your wonderful and caring fellow first-year PhDs, cry in their arms,

curse the cold office, and pee yourself from laughter while eating delicious food and drinking wine. They teach you how to cook without wasting too much of your precious research time, show you the possibilities of make-up, and confront those who refuse you the basic bits of comfort. You make regular calls to keep up with your dearest old friends. You keep looking for traces of nature every time and everywhere. You are always kind and polite, caring and supportive, desperately hoping that you will get at least some of it back. You are lucky to work with the best supervisors: brilliant researchers who are at the same time kind, playful, open-minded, and ready to support you in your pursuit of achievement. You monitor how you spend every hour and make sure that none of your time is wasted. You work your ass off and publish two academic papers in your first year, to improve the chances that you'll be able to make a living as a researcher. But achievement will never satisfy the endless black hole of feeling not good enough.

When life starts looking good again, you will begin losing. After half a year of “challenging your beliefs” that makes you feel even more insecure, your therapist ends your treatment, because apparently, you are doing well enough. You wake up on a Saturday morning and watch in horror how municipality workers butcher big, wonderful trees on your street. You mourn the green oasis that shielded you from the neighbours' windows. You mourn the sun permeating through the leaves, shadows no longer dancing on your bedroom wall. Then, you receive a letter announcing big renovation works on your street, under your very windows. You brace yourself for the scheduled two months of your biggest fear – loud noise – never imagining that they will take nine months, that you will be stuck inside, with nowhere to go, digging machines drilling into your very heart while you struggle to think logically about intricate study designs. You start with a new, more compassionate therapist. The noise will continue and the water pumps will roar 24/7 while you lose your office and contact with office mates when corona hits. Your partner tries to protect you from chaos but

Acknowledgements

he struggles too. You escape from the noise to a forest but find yourself next to a pack of kids going back and forth on loud motocross motorbikes, who purposefully ride next to you when they see you outraged and panicked. You feel worse and worse, and escape to a vacation park. Cars speed next to your cabin. Still, you look for comfort among cute little goats and you go for long hikes in national parks. You come back home and the engines roar until 10 pm and sometimes even during the night. You feel there is no place left for you. Your therapist goes on parental leave and the substitute therapist is passive and non-responsive. You lose all your hope and text your PhD buddies in desperation. A Polish friend recognizes the danger and insists you escape to Poland ASAP. A small spark of hope. Together with your partner, you drive for 12 hours and settle back into an apartment in which you spent your teenage years.

The taste of Polish bread and local strawberries. Rolling hills and turquoise lakes surrounded by thick woods. A vista above the pine trees, a short walk from your place. Traces of beavers at a nearby stream, reminding you of the Withywindle from the Lord of the Rings. A hammock on the balcony. Pink sunsets, white sands, and the murmur of the sea. The sounds of Rachmaninow's preludes coming out of your own fingers. Roaming the beech forest next to your high school once more with your best high school friend. Hiking the vast woods with your bestie from studying psychology. Poland feeds you generously, without limitations and without "dit is not possible". You soak in it eagerly. You slowly start working again on your PhD. You resign from the annoying therapist. They don't have another English-speaking therapists, and they don't make an effort to look for therapists in other cities. You have to wait for six months for your therapist to come back from the leave. Soon, it is time to go back to back to *the West*.

Back in the Netherlands, you keep working on your opus magnum, the biggest project in your life and the biggest hope for a mind-blowingly good publication, the theory-

developing meta-analysis. Anxiety about your contract ending soon kicks in, and the vision of being jobless and vulnerable haunts you. Your therapist's parental leave is prolonged, and when she finally comes back, she is fired. You begin looking for a new therapist, but the waiting lines are crazy, English-speaking therapists nowhere to be found, and no one cares that you were left without help in the middle of the crisis. You manage to skip the waiting line and follow your therapist to a new company. But then the horror repeats, and the digging machines arrive under your windows again. You need peace and quiet but it is nowhere to be found. Rescue comes unexpectedly from your new friends and their kitty. You can work from their beautiful place. Still, you have no safe place of your own. You feel worse and worse, and you escape to Poland again. You stay even longer, then come back, and after a month, the digging machines come back with yet another renovation. I realize how ridiculous this sounds and that you will not believe me until you see it with your own eyes! This time you cannot escape to Poland because your partner needs to work from the office. You desperately look for another place to rent, but you are either rejected from viewings, or you find apartments next to noisy streets. You are not sure how long you will survive with the threat of noise looming above you every day. When you start losing all your hope, you finally find a quiet row house in the countryside, with dirty old walls and doors, but with floors, a little garden, and surrounding meadows. You apply for it and wait. When the noise becomes unbearable again, your new human and furry friends save you again. The couple leaves for holidays and needs someone to take care of their sweetest, most cuddly pussy. You stay at their place and finally, sign the contract with the owner of the row house. You frantically pack, armoured with your headphones, move out and go through a crash course in painting, sanding, and repairing. After a month, you receive surprising news: your therapy will not be continued. The reason? You were in crisis again when the roadworks happened for the third time. Apparently, you receive treatment in the Netherlands when you are a bit ill but not TOO

Acknowledgements

ill. And so it begins again, the search for the new GP in the countryside and the new therapist. One GP tells you that you should go back to Poland if you cannot find treatment here. In the end, things finally settle. You find a Polish therapist who is always on your side; you face the biggest trauma in your life and reconnect with the Lejsi part of yourself; you develop a strong bond with a fellow PhD living next door; you spend countless hours cuddling the cutest pussy who forces herself into your house; you start a new job and then you stop it; you fight through finishing your PhD with your fuck-it-all type of humour; you learn how to say “fuck it” to everything and everyone (even to your supervisors); and you dare to develop your own business with artistic photography of nature.

Dear Marta from 2017 and beyond: I am the most grateful in the world that you have never given up on yourself. I am endlessly proud of this badass independent woman that you have become.

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Another project back, and my Diamond Grant supervisor, Alina Kolańczyk. The truth is that my PhD already started during master thesis seminars with Alina, where I wrote up a grant proposal for conducting five empirical studies, using an eye-tracker. *At least I tried*, that's what I thought after clicking "submit". Six months later, I got the funding. Alina, thank you for shaping the fundamentals of my research identity, for introducing me to the magical world of cognition and motivation, for the exhaustive course on the psychology of creativity (I use my notes up to this day!), for drawing strong and weak activation spikes that made me obsessed with spreading activation theory of creativity (see my blog on "Associations and Hedgehogs"!), for sparking my curiosity about the intricacies of goal-related cognition, without which I would have never been able to write a Need for Closure paper AND a theoretical paper on priming, for the delicious shots at ESCOP 2017 in Potsdam, and for all the discussions and opportunities you gave me so generously. Here, I would also like to thank all supervisors and collaborators from my student times at SWPS University in Sopot, who played a huge role in shaping my research identity: Radek Sterczyński (I hope the influence of your creativity training on my writing and general life approach is very obvious hahaha), Tomasz Maruszewski (false memories study), Ewelina Smoktunowicz (my first empirical study supervisor), the memory of Marlena Kossakowska (research on forgiveness), Michał Parzuchowski (meaning violation studies), and all the members of Journal Club in Sopot.

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Before corona hit, I spent most of my time working on the PhD from the third floor of HRM & OB department, where I met fantastic people. Gerben, thank you for sharing the office, for brainstorming ideas, and for your chill approach to life. Maxim, thanks for the passionate discussions on motivation and cognition, for your help with student supervision, and for being my go-to person for psychological theories. Frederik, thank you for being my buddy and for introducing me to the spicy details of the department haha. Wout, thank you for being my corona office mate and for our fascinating expedition to the graveyard. Bart, thanks for your help on different topics and for spreading your amazing golden retriever energy in the department. Onne, thanks for letting me warm up your Creative Problem Solving course with creative games. Edwina, thanks for our buddy chats and walks, for making me aware of intersectionality, and for your enjoyable podcast on Spotify. Jacoba, Sanne, Tim, and Laetita, thanks for your tips on teaching. Yingjie, thanks for being my supervisor in my first year. Here, I would also like to thank Kristian Peters, for your empathy and kindness.

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