

The AKTUA Times

An abstract illustration of a face in shades of blue and yellow. The face is composed of various brushstrokes and shapes. The eyes are yellow with black outlines, and the mouth is a dark blue, open shape. A yellow sunburst is on the left side of the face. A yellow scribble is on the right side of the face. The background is a light blue gradient.

A BOLD NEW FACE

Beginnings + Structure

We will be exploring the theme of beginnings: getting structure, cultivating growth and gaining perspective

***Interview with
Mrs Brenda
Mac'Oduol***

äktua



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The Editor



's Letter :

Beginnings and Structure

Dear Readers,

The Aktua Times has taken on a new face; you, the student body. The future analysts, technicians, developers, creators, and directors of the new world. I want this publication to represent the people—the humanity—behind the ‘cold and calculated’ discipline that not many people know very much about. With opportunities for contribution, I hope to create a document that reflects the rhythms of this particular student body and, perhaps, bring a better understanding of what it is that we are working towards becoming. The theme for this first issue is, appropriately, Beginnings and Structure. Two ideas that I think go very well in tow.

The beginning is quite an exciting space. There’s room for growth, room for change, and your imagination swirls with all of the palaces that you could build in the expanse of time that stretches out ahead of you like a blank canvas. A sheet of freshly fallen snow waiting for the first footsteps to trace a path lead by destiny, or the first snow angel to bless the landscape.

But all that empty space can also bring a sense of unease: "What if I make a mistake? What if the outcome ends up being terrible?" And, just like that, you find yourself stuck: hand halted mid-motion, you’ve seen disappointment before you can even touch the canvas.

Filling up space is easy, but filling up space the ‘right way’ can feel like splitting atoms for peace.

Structure is a concept that I think of as the backbone to any idea, the scaffolding around a building under construction. I find that having a skeletal outline of what it is you want to create, build or achieve brings you one step closer to actually seeing it, and there is no greater rush than seeing something you once imagined. But what happens when all of that structure starts to feel stifling?

This issue will explore what beginnings and structure look like in different contexts of our lives.

Kabelo Ntlaloe

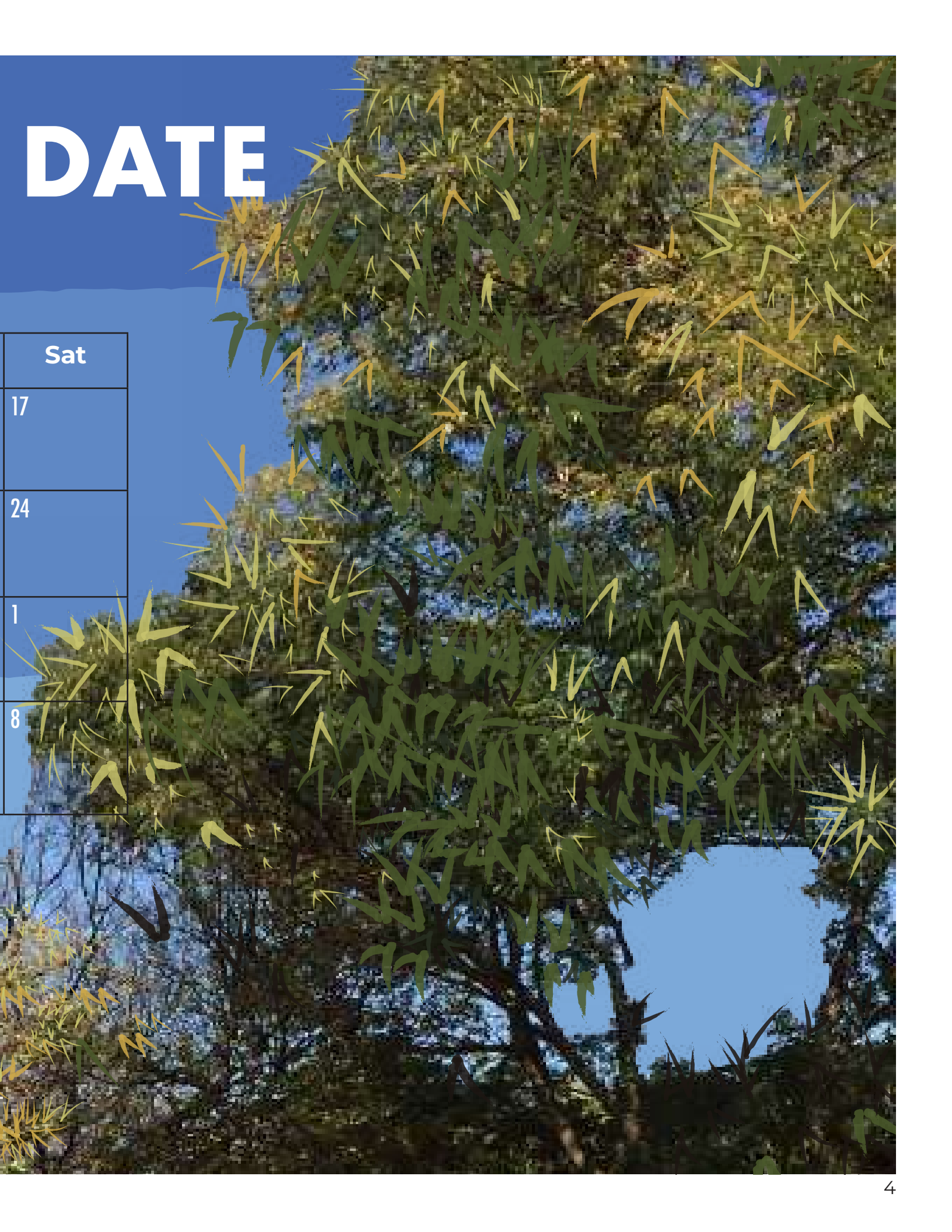




SAVE THE

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri
11	12	13	14	15 Lunch Hour Concerts	16
18	19	20	21	22 Lunch Hour Concerts	23
25	26	27	28	29 Lunch Hour Concerts	30
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AUGUST/ SEPTEMBER



DATE

Sat
17
24
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8

PROFILE:

ABULELA GAZI

On the 22nd of May 2019, Aktua hosted a career evening to give the student body an opportunity to interact with practising professionals in the financial industries as a last shot of motivation before the June midyear exams.

We were privileged to have a dynamic and charismatic speaker, Abulela Gazi, to recount his journey and give us a few insights into how he handled the pitfalls that often befall someone who has chosen to walk the path to becoming an Actuary; he cited routine as one of the structures he clung to in order to stay afloat.

Born in Mthatha, in the Eastern cape, Abulela spent the early years of his life in the small town before moving to Kokstad, another small town in Southern KwaZulu-Natal. This is where he matriculated in 2007. He then started his pursuit of the Actuarial profession at the University of Cape Town where he obtained his BSc in Actuarial Sciences in 2010; completing his BCom (Hons) Actuarial Sciences degree in the following year.

A self-professed loyal Old Mutual employee, his career path has been painted green since he started as an Actuarial Specialist in the Old Mutual FinRisC supporting the (take a breath) Corporate Segment with the Financial Soundness Valuations and Market Consistent Embedded Value results for old Mutual Corporate's pre-retirement products as well as preparing the annual Financial Services Board submissions.

In 2014 he summited the proverbial mountain and was admitted as a Fellow of the Actuarial Society of South Africa. Following qualification, Abulela became a strategy specialist in Old Mutual Corporate. Currently, Abulela is the head of Smoothed Bonus Funds at Old Mutual.

We hope those in attendance gleaned something from this intimate talk, and we hope to see more of you at the next one!

Written by Modiegi Sekoele
Edited by Kabelo Ntlaloe

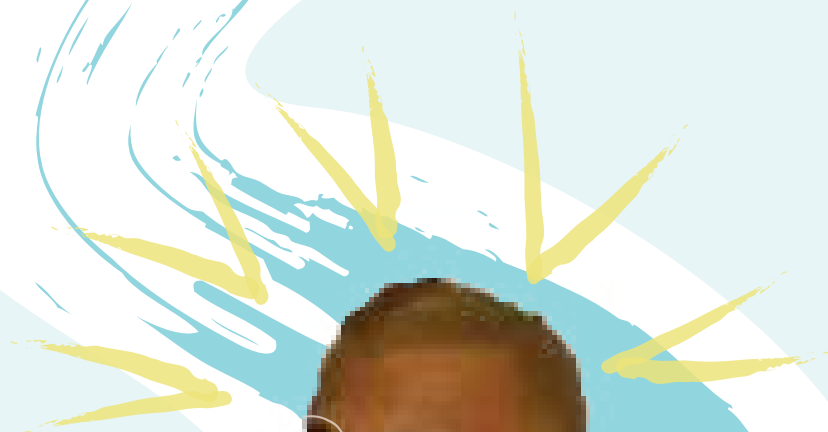
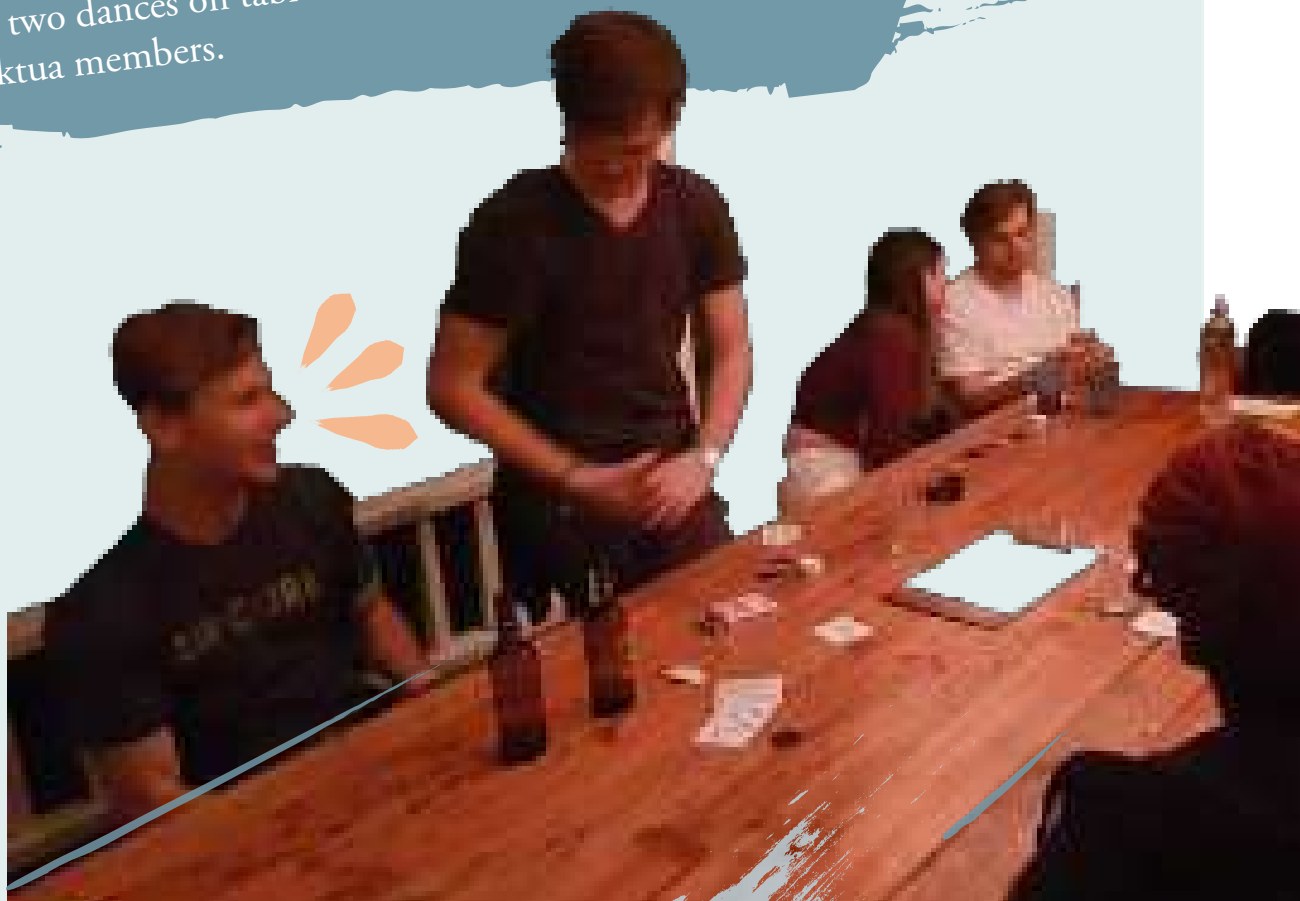


Photo courtesy of
Abulela Gazi

PUBCRAWL

When you are studying a degree that is as demanding as Actuarial and Financial Mathematics is, it is important to keep a network of people who understand the kinds of sacrifices that you have to make. This is arguably one of the most important structures to implement. With this in mind, on the 17th of April Aktua hosted a Pubcrawl to warm us all up for the year ahead; a chance to leave pretense at the door and venture into the evening with new and old faces alike. It proved to be a sprawling night of laughter, 30 seconds, good drinks, bad poker faces and one or two dances on tables. A fitting inauguration for the new Aktua members.





Photography by
Present Rikhotso
and the Aktua team



INTERVIEW

On the 5th of April 2019, a cold and rainy autumn day in some of our memories, I sat down to speak with lecturer and academic Mrs. Brenda Mac'Oduol.

For those who haven't visited her office, it is a moderately furnished room, with your standard L-shaped office desk, two identical maroon upholstered chairs tucked in neatly, as well as a filing cabinet complete with a multi-coloured miscellany of files.

But even behind all of that beraucracy there's a certain warmth that lingers in the room. It was this warmth that made this interview feel more like a conversation with your favourite aunt on a rainy morning at the kitchen table while the kettle brings some water to a rolling boil.

We spoke at lengths about where her beginnings are, what beginnings and structure mean to her, as well as how they've featured in her life over the years.

Born in Nairobi, Kenya, Brenda spent the early years of her life, and most of her schooling career, in the city. She then made the move to Cape Town, South Africa where she matriculated in 2007 before going on to pursue Actuarial and

BRENDA MA

Financial Mathematics the following year at the University of Pretoria. She then obtained her Honours (Cum Laude), as well as Masters (Cum Laude), degree in Mathematical Statistics.

"And [that's how] I ended up here. I started Actuarial [and Financial Mathematics] in 2008 and I've never left. And here I am, seated, almost finished with my PhD, hoping to be done soon. So, in terms of beginnings, those are my beginnings in a nutshell."

When it came time to discuss and dissect the concepts of beginnings and structure, she spoke tenderly and with so much care for how these integrate into the work that she does as a lecturer and person who finds themselves having to speak into someone else's life every other week.

W WITH:

AC'ODUOL



Photo courtesy of
Brenda Mac'Oduol

The following is a highlight reel of the conversation we had. It was quite difficult to try and condense an already vibrant and lucid exchange into a few supercut moments, but I hope reading this will be as edifying as it was for me to hear these words first-hand. A full transcription will be available upon request.

On the ways that structure has manifested in her life

Brenda: "I believe that we are connected energy-wise to the things around us, [and] the people around us, so if there are things that I desire to see or happen in that day then I should meditate on that, call that out, and put it into the space such that it does come back to me. And it's happened

a lot of times. Things like that, where if I don't start my day in that way, somehow everything else just doesn't come together. So, even when it comes to things like [my] diet, you know, I'm aware of the things that are out there, so structure for me means: what am I having in the morning? What time am I having it? What am I having in the evening? Am I exercising? What am I reading? What am I putting into me? Because structure means that there are things that I want to see in place, which means if I want to see certain things come to fruition in terms of the vision that I have for where I am going or what it is that I desire, then I have to feed myself, continuously, with things that empower me to see those things come together. So, that means I choose what I listen to, I choose what I watch I choose what I read, because I am very



intentional about keeping the space around me a certain way—”

Kabelo: “Nothing without intention. Do nothing without intention”

B: “Exactly! So, mental space [hygiene is important] because I [am] someone who internalises things a lot, I am an overthinker. So, for me, whenever something gets in [my head] I just marinate in it, and I keep chewing at it until it just becomes too much. That’s why I have to continuously feed myself the things that i know are going to put the structure that I want in place. There’s something that my husband has introduced me to: affirmations. [When we listen to affirmations in the morning] it’s basically you reconciling with yourself, because there are experiences you go through in life that distort the image you have of yourself. So those affirmations help you realise that whatever has happened is not taking away from who you are actually supposed to be, it’s just supposed to bring you back to that point. These affirmations help to restructure your mind in terms of how you see yourself, or the things that you envision for yourself. So, those are some of the things that we—I’m gonna say ‘we’ because I do it with [my husband]—have embarked on because I realise the importance of being intentional about what you’re placing in, and what you

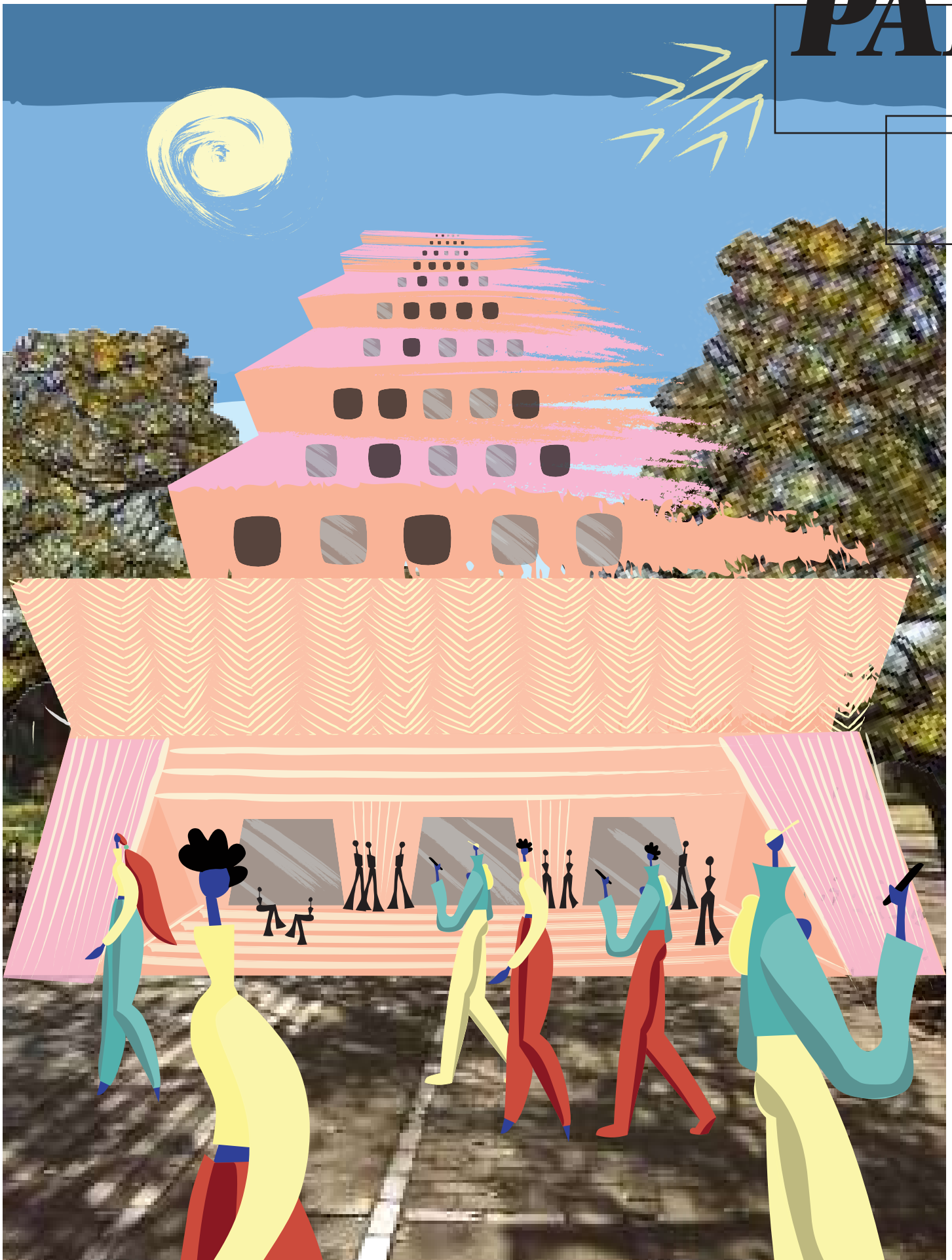
want to get out of, yourself. First as an individual, because those are the things that you are going to place in another person. Especially, let’s say, I’m encountering a student and they are going through the most—because we have students who come and they sit in my office and cry. There’s something they are looking for and if I have nothing to give,then—”

K: “You can’t pour from an empty cup”

B: “Exactly. And I realised that with this job, it’s not just about teaching, it’s more than that. I am their lecturer, I am their counsellor, I am their friend sometimes—it’s a lot of stuff. That’s why, for me, structure is important.”

Words of wisdom, in closing

B: “I think, in closing, my advice to, you know, the journey of a beginner would be: don’t be too hard on yourself, and allow yourself to grow in the environment that you have been placed in. and sometimes the environment will demand more of you than you are willing to put out, but that is only because it is an indication of the fact that there is something within you that needs to be broken out. So, allow yourself to go through the process of breaking, sometimes it’s necessary.”



ACES for the PEOPLE

Kabelo Ntlaloe

As someone who has always had an interest in architecture and the way that buildings and rooms can make people feel, I find myself observing the movement around campus and I marvel at how the landscape changes our behaviour.

Like in the valley between the Humanities Building and the Merensky Library, where a watering hole opens up on the banks of the foot-traffic streaming down Libri Ave; a communal smoke break, small talk, a shared lunch on the grass, people killing time. The benches lining the outside of the library become a giant open waiting room where *you* decide at what time your appointment is.

Seeing this phenomenon play itself out over and over in different iterations is what drew me to the idea of Social Infrastructure and the concept of public spaces serving as "palaces" for the people to come and improve the quality of their

lived experience.

Like how the library has facilities that allow for group discussions, leisurely reading, and even high-intensity focus interval studying. Or how it offers 24/7 protection from the elements of the harsher seasons — think of the wash of warmth that comes as you descend into the study centre, your cheeks flushed with the night; or the cool breeze that comes, seemingly out of nowhere, as you cross the threshold into high ceilings and white-noise from a central-cooling system on a sweltering day.

Not only this, but they — parks, libraries, universities — provide spaces for us to bump up against one another and confront what it means to share experiences and space.

It's features like these that make social infrastructure such an important part of any community's structure. A study by US Sociologist Eric Klinenberg has observed that neighbourhoods and regions with poor social infrastructure are at a higher risk of dysfunction: crime, vulnerability to natural disasters, and a generally poorer lived experience. Cracked sidewalks, abandoned buildings, and unmanaged open spaces are all signs of poor social infrastructure and typical to innercity landscapes. And, with the city lying across the train tracks as our restless neighbour, I can't help but ask how we as solution-designers can use our mathematical and statistical toolkits to rebuild a world with stronger social infrastructure; social infrastructure that's cohesive with the way we want to live?

Meet the TEAM :

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and 1st Year Rep

Bryan Smith
Chairperson

Members Absent

Ebrahim Ahmed
Vice-Head of Social

Aurelio Nicoletti
Head of Social

Clarence Chishaks
Head of Academics



On behalf of the Aktua committee I would like to thank all Aktua members for your support through attending events, purchasing merchandise, and interacting with our social media. We are trying our best to improve the role that we play in the greater university structure, to better our service to you and your connection with our community. Think of Aktua as your conch shell, pick it up and let your voice be amplified.

Megan Tolmay
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Chairperson and
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Kunj Desai
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LEND A HAND

are you a
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could use you!



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OR AN EYE