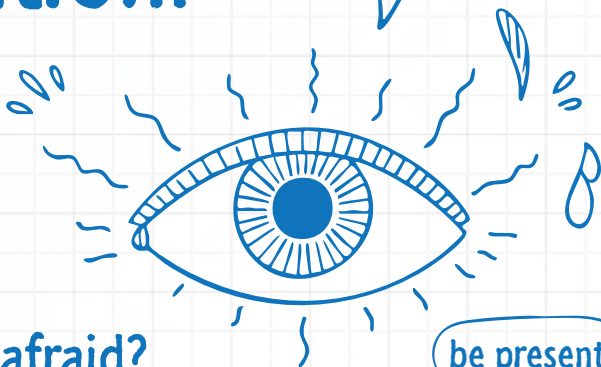


the WEIGHT of expectation.

pay
attention.



were you afraid?



be present.

interviews

observations

research

data

perfection

results

analysis

listen.

control?

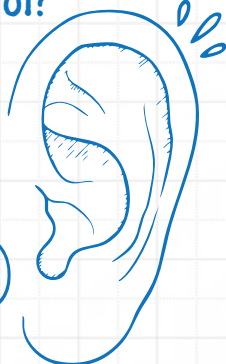
listen.

listen.

listen.

ambiguity?

fear?



let
the
shield
fall.



uncertainty
uncertainty
uncertainty

uncertainty
uncertainty



Letter 1 - The Weight of Expectation

Dear Tehreem,

I'm looking back at how you started this master's, and I see you hiding. You were hiding behind methods, interviews, and the idea of doing everything perfectly because you were terrified of getting it wrong. You thought that if you followed the "right" steps, if you asked the "right" questions, nothing would go off script, and nothing would expose your uncertainty.

But you can't hide when you are part of the space you are observing. Your presence is not neutral, no matter how much you wish it were. Every choice you make (how you speak, how you listen, what you decide to notice or ignore) changes what happens.

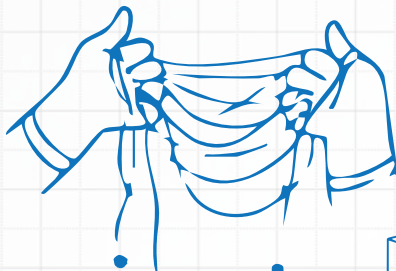
Looking at you from 5 months in, I want to remind you that it's okay to let go of the idea that you can control everything. Design isn't about being perfect or finding a single answer. It's about leaning into the ambiguity, noticing the invisible, and admitting that you don't have all the answers. You will fumble, you will question yourself, you will feel unsure and that is exactly where your journey begins.

Let the shield fall. Pay attention. Listen. Be present. You are here not just to apply methods, but to notice, to care, and to be changed by the people and the spaces around you.

Tehreem.

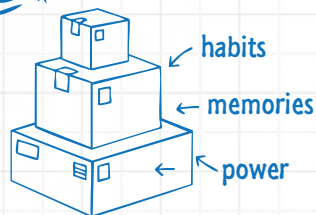


how do I bring balance?
can I bring balance?



Flemish?
English اردو

Am I an outsider?
I am an outsider.



Can you tell me
about....?

learning to SHARE space.



loud presence?

lean into
that tension.



a city is not a
blank canvas!

your tools are
not neutral.



time? schedule?
routine? meetings?



invitations



learn to
step softly

Letter 2 - Learning to Share Space

Dear Tehreem,

There was a moment in Genk project when you finally felt how loud your presence was, even when you were trying to be gentle. You were a South Asian woman, a designer (researcher), new to this city, not speaking Flemish, there for only a few weeks, walking into schools and streets and homes asking people to explain their lives to you. You were asking parents, teachers, and children about routines they had lived with for years, as if those routines were suddenly objects to be examined.

You began to feel how intervening it can be to ask questions at all. How every “Can you tell me about...?” carries the weight of who you are, where you come from, what you can and cannot understand. That is when the idea came to you: a city is not a blank canvas. It is already full. Of habits. Of memories. Of power. Of things that do not need you to make them meaningful.

You started to notice how trying to help could still become a way of taking over. You felt the discomfort of that. You wondered if what you were calling co-creation was sometimes just your own version of inclusion, shaped by your language, your timing, your assumptions.

This is where participatory design stopped being a theory and became a feeling in your body. You felt it when a question landed wrong. You learned that sharing space is not just about arriving with good intentions. It is about noticing what is already there and deciding how (softly) you can step. Your tools are not neutral. They are invitations. And not everyone has to accept them.

Tehreem.