

Date: November 12th, 2021.

Location: Grand Café De Willem, Wijnhaven 61, 3011 WJ Rotterdam.

Time: 12:40PM.

I got to the canteen of the Willem de Koning Academy at 12:40PM. First thing I noticed was how busy it was. I had to sit at a table where there already was a person sitting. Kind of awkward, but I need the power outlet.

Next was the noise. The music is loud. Too loud. Even with my headphones on, I still only hear the music and murmurs from the people around me. I hate it. I've been at home for the last 3 to 4 weeks in quarantine. This is too busy, too much stimulation. I feel like I'm going to panic. It's my own fault for coming here at lunch time. I'm sitting in the back left corner. Behind me there's a window and concrete pillar. The table is cold. I hope I don't run into anyone I know. I'd hate that. But I feel like luck won't be on my side today. I'm playing my own music and trying to drown out any noise from the canteen. It's too overwhelming. There's a girl looking at me. Or out of the window behind me. I don't know but I feel watched. I've put on Christmas music. Maybe that will help.

It doesn't. The music here is so loud that it sounds like a bad mashup of Justin Timberlake's 'Mirrors' and Mariah Carey's 'All I want for Christmas'.

It reminds me of those clothing stores that play music too loud. They're uninviting and get on my nerves easily.

Just like the canteen does at the moment.

I've been here for 15 minutes now. The stranger I sat with has gotten up and a new stranger has taken their place. The new stranger is eating a panini and is looking at the back of my laptop. I think they're looking at my case, which has 'Starry Night' from Van Gogh on it. They continue eating their panini. I think if anyone here knew what I was typing I would be cast as a new stalker for the Netflix series 'You'. Oh well. Back to looking around.

The lamps look like clouds. They're orange. Why are they orange? Out of love for The Netherlands? Or just aesthetic reasons?

I think lunch break is almost at its end because people are getting up around me. It's still busy. Someone is speaking loudly. I can hear it over the music, but I can't hear exactly what they're saying. I think the music has switched to Avril Lavigne now. Who is in charge of the music?

It's busiest at the register at the moment. Lots of people seem to want coffee. I hate coffee.



There're flowers on the table I'm sitting at. Now that I've seen them. I notice them on all the tables. They look like they're going to die soon. The edges of the red petals are already brown and black. Maybe they didn't get enough fresh water.

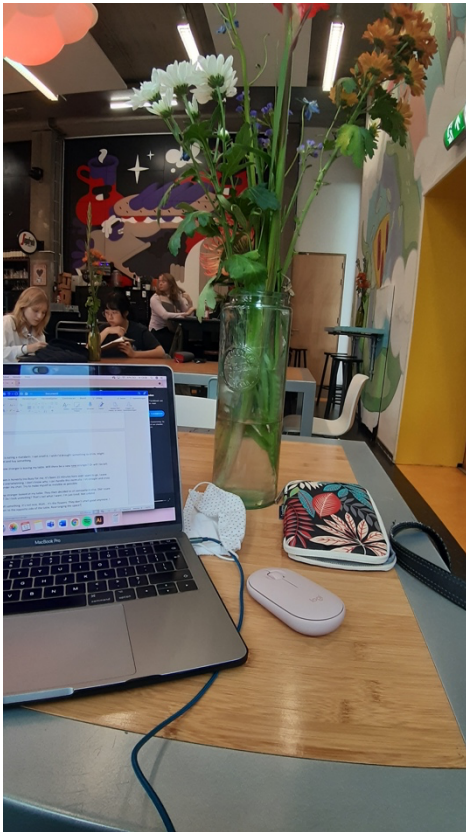
Someone is eating a mandarin. I can smell it. I wish I'd brought something to drink. Might need to go and buy something.
Oh. The new stranger is leaving my table. Will there be a new new stranger? Or will I be left alone?

The canteen is honestly too busy for me. It's been 25 minutes here and I want to go. Leave. It's all too overwhelming. I don't know why. I can handle this normally. I sit straight and cross my legs under my chair. Try to make myself as invisible as possible. I think it's because of how much I've gotten used to being by myself, so this busy environment is a step outside my safe little box that I've been in for the past few weeks.

A new new stranger looked at my table. They then decided to sit somewhere else. Did I scare them off? Do I look uninviting? That's not what I want. I'm just tired. Not unkind.

Oh, I smell something. It's not nice. Wait... It's the flowers. They don't smell good anymore. I move them to the opposite side of the table. Rearranging the space? The smell lingers.





I count 19 people here. When I entered, it was 31. So quite some people left. I've heard people speak Dutch, English and other languages I'm not familiar with. Someone just said 'oh, nice'. It doesn't sound like they think it's nice at all. Didn't sound like they meant it. But that's the thing. You never know when people mean something or not.

A newer new stranger has decided to sit with me. They unloaded their bag and it looks like they had fun at the Albert Heijn. Food, yoghurt and a drink.



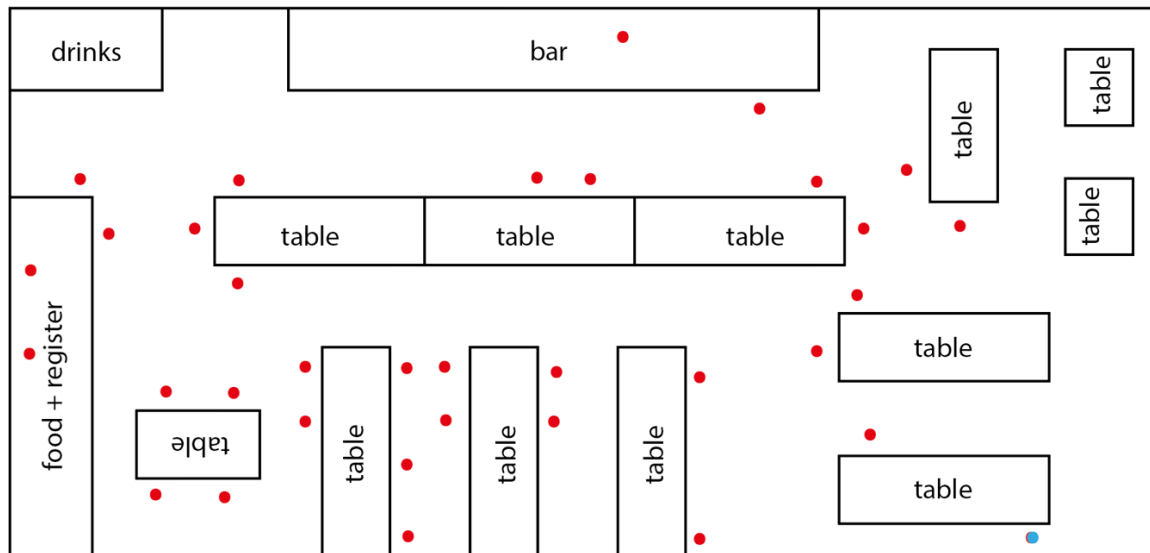
I didn't notice the stranger at first, so they scared me when they dropped their key on the table. Made me jump a bit. But they're busy with their phone, so they don't pay me any mind. That's good.⁴

I've been here for 40 minutes now. I'm getting used to the music. Or they turned it down. No, I think I'm just getting used to it.

I'm worried that my observational skills are lacking. I'm trying my best, but I seem to be processing things so slow. Like everything is happening around me without me being part of the space.

Everyone is being so social. Is it just me that gets so nervous with so many people around me? And with so many people here, how can I still feel like I'm the odd one out? It's art school. We're all odd. But yet, in big spaces like this, I always feel like I don't belong.

I recorded audios so you can hear how loud the music is. Here's where I'm sitting:



The red dots are strangers. The blue dot is me.

I've been here for an hour. It's enough and I decide to leave.

I'm writing this after my whole canteen experience. For me, the sitting in the canteen was uncomfortable. The research method itself was fine, but I also found it difficult to observe. I didn't want to look at one spot for too long or stare at one person because I didn't want them to feel watched.

So I think it's a combination of feeling uncomfortable in the canteen and not wanting to make others uncomfortable with my observing, which made me want to observe as discretely as I could.