



Recipe

Life

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RIDGE
MAGAZINE



Editor's Note

University is a tumultuous period in our lives. In terms of age, we are considered adults. Yet it's hard not to feel lost and younger than ever when you're suddenly expected to know everything in life, and even worse—what you want to do with your life. Though many may try and follow the status quo, it does not guarantee success nor happiness. The truth is, whether it brings you great relief or further anxiety, there is no fixed way of approaching life and the way you live.

This issue, **Recipe of Life**, features articles that explore the different spectrums that make up life, encapsulating everything from work to self-identities and relationships. Here, our writers chose to interpret this theme in different ways. While some have taken a personal approach that delves into issues of dating and filial piety, others have chosen to consider social and cultural landscapes that influence and intertwine with our own lives. Whether it be an astrology reading of Singapore's future or a reflection of our obsessions with legacies and memories, there is an article for everyone in this issue that may help one reflect on how they wish to navigate their own lives.

Special thanks to my Deputy Editor-in-Chief Ong Sin Yee for being my rock through the magazine process; My Design Head Glennys Tai for conceptualizing and bringing this theme's vision to life; My Editors Caitlin Lim, Tan Wei Mei, and Gabrielle Ng for editing the articles; Timothy Loh for assisting in the printing of the magazine; and Joyce Lee for helping out in the exco. Finally, to all the writers and designers: this magazine would not have been possible without you; to all the marketers and website managers that bridged the content between writers and readers, thank you.

There is no fixed way to live. With this reminder, I hope you find comfort in knowing that at the end of the day, we are all just figuring out life one day at a time, hoping to create our own recipes of life.

Amber Tay Yi Xuan
Editor-in-Chief
NUSSU The Ridge



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We're All Like Other Girls (and Boys)

by Goh Jing Fei



Hard-boiled egg girl, clean girl, coconut girl... depending on the media you consume, these terms may either sound like they were produced by a random word generator or make perfect sense to you. These, in fact, are only a few of the countless aesthetics that have trended on TikTok, with their unorthodox names making each one seem more unique than the last.

While these TikTok aesthetics are new, the concept of them is certainly not. Prior to TikTok, the microblogging site Tumblr was one of the largest platforms where aesthetics thrived with users curating their blogs mainly with images that fit their aesthetic, such as the well-established grunge aesthetic. However, TikTok as a short-form video content platform, known for its algorithm that probably knows you better than yourself, has launched aesthetic after aesthetic into virality at an unmatched pace, giving rise to many unconventional ones.

At the top of the list is the more recent hard-boiled egg girl aesthetic which has garnered lots of attention and unsurprisingly, confusion. It's hard to tell what visuals could possibly make up the aesthetic from its name alone but according to Glamour UK on Instagram, it refers to "girls that love pink pastels and whites, glazed nails and broderie Anglaise" (the last item being a specific type of clothes pattern that features eyelets).

Though it is unclear whether the original TikTok video was just a joke since it included photos of actual hard-boiled eggs and a chicken taking a bath, the "hard-boiled egg girl" has ultimately cemented its place as a recognised aesthetic. While many TikTok and Twitter users felt that it was ridiculous, with some saying that these aesthetic trends have "gone too far", others claimed that they finally found their aesthetic—their signature style and vibe, that is.

The online discourse on aesthetics has evidently polarised people into two camps: those who see it as a means of self-discovery, and the more cynical crowd that thinks it's all hogwash.

To me, the ever-growing trend of aesthetics signals an increasing need among the younger generations to label ourselves, as well as a need to set ourselves apart from others. And of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with this. As the way we dress can express our personalities and identities, it makes sense for people to place importance on fashion and how they present themselves.

Furthermore, these aesthetics could serve as inspiration to those who are in the process of finding themselves, especially teenagers. By trying out different styles and seeing which they like the most, they can use it as a springboard to formulate their own personal style.

In the pursuit of forming one's distinctive identity, however, many of these aesthetics have ironically started to look similar to older ones, just repackaged with a new and often quirkier name. Take for instance the coconut girl aesthetic and the beach aesthetic—as their names suggest, both styles essentially revolve around clothes that girls wear to the beach, which do not allow for much variation. Yet, they are still categorised as separate aesthetics. When they become one and the same, how unique are they really? It would be hard to find a style you truly identify with when everyone ends up dressing in the same way whilst believing they are different.

What's also worrying is how inauthentic aesthetics have become in the way they are performed, with people coming to centre their entire identity on such labels. According to a random fashion blog I found in my research, you don't even need to go to the beach to have the beach aesthetic. It's about emulating the carefree vibes of a beach day, and content creators will spray salt in their hair to get a hairstyle that makes it seem like they actually went to the beach and frolicked about in the sea. Or as @attemptedsoc on TikTok mentioned, people will also rave about books associated with their aesthetic without having read a single word.



In my opinion, the rise of such performativity in upholding aesthetics on social media can be rather damaging. Some latch on to one specific style or personality and make it their entire life, and it doesn't matter to them whether the experiences they had were real or imagined. Our experiences are part of what makes us who we are, so fabricating them in order to fit an aesthetic would undoubtedly create a false sense of self.

And the development of a warped self-identity like this could lead to people not actually knowing themselves, their personality, and their likes and dislikes.

You may have also noticed how aesthetics are mostly gendered and focused on girls, compared to the two well-known aesthetics for guys, the softboy and the E-boy.

Although we may be inclined to think that it's because only girls care about such things, I find it reminiscent of the way the fashion industry boxes women into strict categories, as if they are the only ones who need to care about their physical appearance and how they behave.

More insidious is the clean girl aesthetic, which has faced widespread criticism for portraying conventionally attractive, thin white women as the pinnacle of beauty, and excluding people who do not fit this mould. Worse still, the aesthetic has been exposed as an imitation of how Black women and Latinas have styled themselves for decades.

And just like the fashion industry which is undeniably linked to all these aesthetics, the continuous trending of newer ones fuels consumerism.

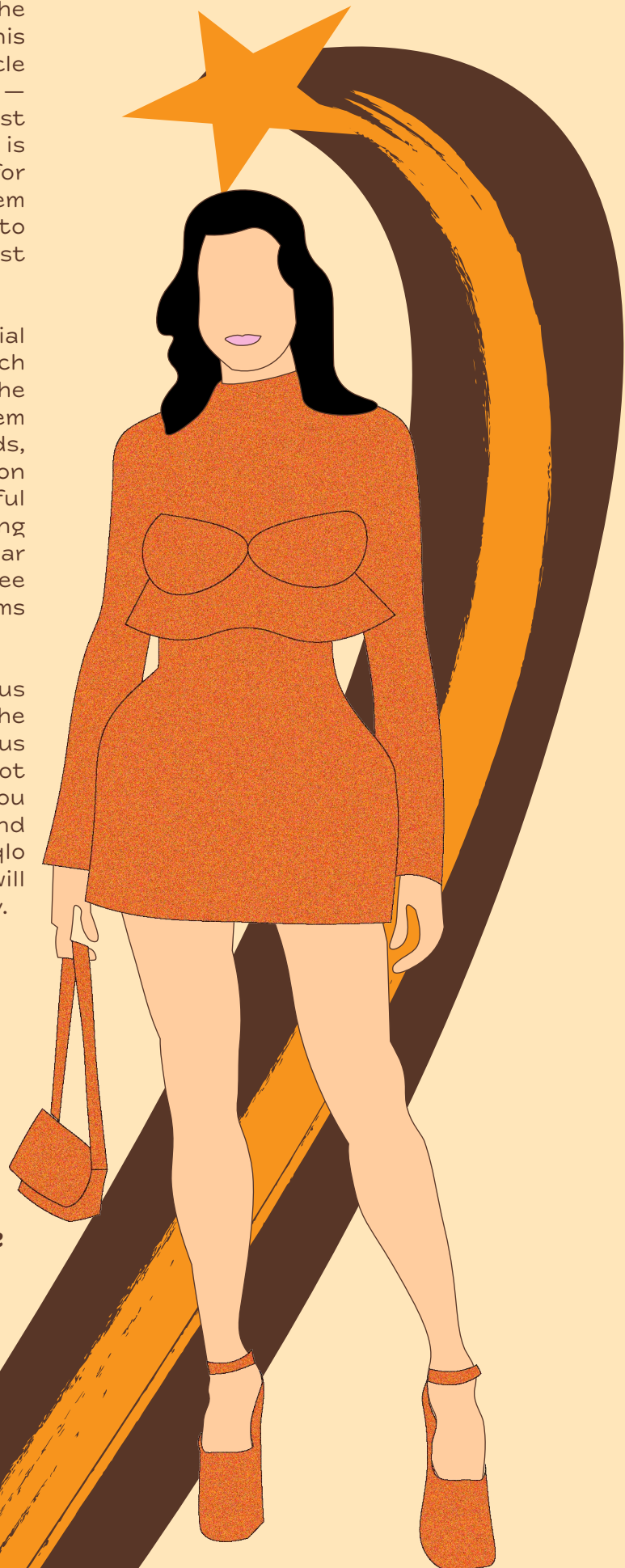
Magazines will tell you where to buy the must-haves for a certain aesthetic — and this has already happened with Seventeen’s article on how to achieve the clean girl aesthetic — with consumers eager to hop onto the latest trends and purchase new clothes. Not only is this a huge waste of money, especially for people who wear them once and throw them out, but this textile waste also contributes to the environmental problems related to fast fashion.

In spite of the above issues with how social media and aesthetics are consumed, such trends show no sign of stopping. Rather, the trend cycles of aesthetics on social media seem to be accelerating alongside fashion trends, which could exacerbate its impact on self-identity and feed into our wasteful consumerist culture. At the risk of sounding like a naggy grandparent, I urge you, dear reader, to be more critical of what you see online lest you fall for these capitalist scams and lose yourself.

That said, in Singapore’s context, many of us are afraid of standing out too much from the crowd. So if you think a more outrageous aesthetic like Barbiecore (think all things hot pink) could be the one for you, I encourage you to step out of your comfort zone and experiment with it, instead of wearing a Uniqlo shirt you may not even like. No one will remember what you wore in five years anyway.

At the end of the day, we’re all just trying to find our place in an increasingly complicated society. In this way, we are the same yet simultaneously different. Know that you don’t have to be an E-boy, a hard-boiled egg girl, or ‘that girl’ to be an interesting person.

You can just be you.





A Film Between Writing

By Austin Ong

The Moon Song, a song featured in “Her” (2013), begins with the line: “I’m lying on the moon.” Staring at these words, removed from their slow instrumentals, this line can feel like a friend’s admission of a difficult time. Using a single line, larger words like *lassitude* and *alienation* can seem more understandable: I am away, tired, a dim point amidst the black. While the magnitude of our emotions can seem colossal, we nonetheless feel them alone. The confessions and consolations come after. Behind this boundary of experience, we are given privacy to ourselves, but also separation from others. When our separation feels disappointing, and we alone seem to carry our emotions like the burden of new bones, I think the silver screen can be of help. Movies and television series entertain, create a shared experience amongst audiences, and engage you. For the words we cannot find, there are images.

Still, works of the silver screen are fundamentally entertainment. Through the gravity of a plot, and painstaking efforts in worldbuilding, entire worlds emerge from a black screen. They can be action-thrillers, dramas, fantasies, horror-flicks, or comedies; one is not considered superior or inferior by virtue of its genre. They can be indie-made or Hollywood blockbusters; one is not destined for fame or obscurity based on the budget alone. Films and television series can relieve you of your troubles, secure your attention for a while, so you may ready yourself to confront the problem after. Even then, there are works that delve deeper into the psychology of characters and address the difficulty of sincere communication.

1 Her (2013)

One of these movies is “Her” (2013), directed by Spike Jonze, and starring Joaquin Phoenix and Scarlett Johansson. It is a romance drama which features Phoenix’s character falling in love with an artificial intelligence assistant, voiced by Johansson.

While the film is set in the near future, the setting in which the movie takes place is refreshingly not apocalyptic. There may be technological advancements that are fiction to us now, but the city’s modernity is still recognisable. There is no sign of dystopia lurking in the skyline. The colours presented to the viewer are warm and pleasant, and in the evening, the city is aglow with overtime office lights in tall glass buildings.



Some may dismiss the film’s narrative as weird-guy-falls-in-love-with-future-Siri, but it is his relationship with an unexpected partner that explores human connection. Through their many conversations, the audience learns of the protagonist’s past relationship, the imposed emphasis of an unordinary one, and companionship. There is something so unguarded about the film, its scenes often featuring private conversations between characters, especially that of the protagonist disclosing his relationship to his best friend. Most profoundly, the film acknowledges that though we leave ourselves vulnerable in trying to find an emotional connection with the people around us, we should nevertheless, choose sincerity.

2 Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022)

Another notable film is “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (2022), directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert. The film is set in the United States, and tells the story of an Asian immigrant tasked with stopping a villain who not only seeks to destroy the multiverse, but also strangely takes the appearance of her daughter.

It is astounding what this film has accomplished, demonstrating a daring creativity that is incredibly motivating for anyone who seeks to create something themselves. Case in point: a scene of two rocks in the middle of the desert, their conversation written across the screen, to be read rather than heard. While other directors may reject such an absurd scene, the Daniels’ decision to commit to a soundless conversation demonstrates a rare loyalty to a pure creative vision, even if that means fully embracing the absurdity of a conversation between rocks.

Furthermore, the film smoothly conducts numerous tonal shifts in the plot, especially the shift from humorous absurdity to tear-jerking vulnerability. Despite the sci-fi-esque synopsis, the film funnels down to raw emotional moments between characters. When the dust settles, the film is at its core, a family drama focused on the difficulty of communication between family members, and the sacrifices an immigrant makes to uproot themselves from their home country.



3 Arcane (2021)

Arcane (2021) is an animated television series based on Riot Games' League of Legend characters and produced by the French animation studio Fortiche. Running for nine episodes, with each episode under an hour, *Arcane* is the story of two estranged sisters embroiled in growing tensions between the city of Piltover and its impoverished district of Zaun. (You do not have to play the game to appreciate this show.)

The most distinguished element of the show must be, at least personally, the creators' treatment of their characters. Each character has been written outstandingly well, their on-screen motivations, fears, and internal conflicts portrayed so viscerally and movingly, that any viewer could sympathise with them. For the entirety of the series, we watch each character get periodically interrogated by their past selves, their helplessness, ignorance, or subservience. Layered with a beautiful soundtrack, the mood within each scene is instantly recognisable but nuanced, conveying a pointed significance to each gesture or event. The motion and detail of each character is incredibly intricate as well, the series boasting a unique fusion of 2D animation techniques and 3D-modelled animation. Every element of the show serves the characterisation of its characters, as they continually wrestle with their own personal narratives, in a world where consequences undermine the best intentions.



End Credits

We are all familiar with the credits that roll after every show, especially in a cinema. This is our cue that the movie is over, and it is here that we know whether a show has thoroughly engaged its audience. What is always telling of a show's impact, however, is the audience's reluctance to leave. There might be a genuine curiosity towards the minds responsible for the film. There might be an instinctive certainty to settle into the moment and collect your thoughts. There might be a whiplash from having extended a rare length of empathy to a film's characters, and there is a small grief upon seeing the movie's end.

When I experience such moments, I feel like writing again. I would think, *I want to do for others what that medium has done for me*. While we will be the only ones who experience our own emotions completely, writing is a way to step out of this boundary. It prompts us to organise and externalise an inner world, whether of thoughts or feelings. Of course, there will be days when words are beyond grasp, when searching feels like scouring, and catharsis is replaced by frustration. But I know when I feel that frustration, I will watch a movie or a television series, and I will have the stamina to write again. For a short while, it is comforting to enjoy a film between writing.

Legacies & Memories

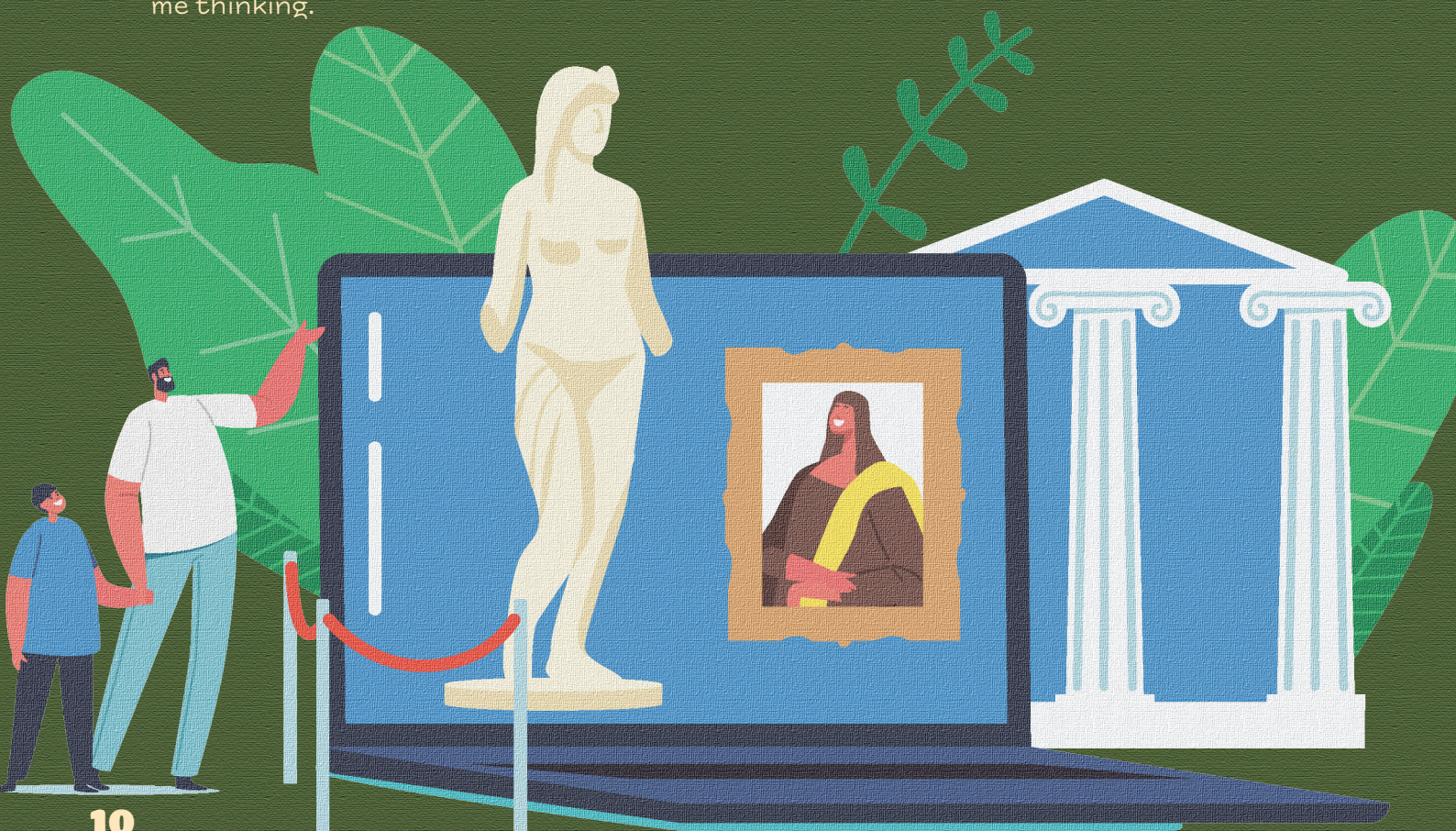
Living in the Past, Present and Future

By Lee Rui Kai

The yearning for immortality: what Hamilton, Instagram, Shakespeare and Pixar's Coco have in common.

Over winter break, my family and I went to visit my brother in London. We spent about a week there, with a lot of our time taken up in museums and musicals. There is an interestingly large amount of museums in London, given that they take up so much space, and are largely free to enter, and so quite unprofitable. This got me thinking.

Apart from storage spaces to keep the spoils of once rampant imperialism, why are there so many museums? And what's so intriguing about them that so many of them are filled with visitors?



This question remained at the back of my head until on the last night of our stay, when we watched the musical Hamilton at the West End. For those unfamiliar, the musical follows the life of Alexander Hamilton, one of the founding fathers of the US, and his life before, during and after the revolutionary war. A big theme in the musical is Hamilton's obsession with a legacy, in leaving behind something that stays long after his death, despite its adverse effects on his life and his loved ones.

Hamilton is clearly not the only one with a fascination for legacy, as is evident by the countless sculptures, legacies of ancient Greek culture and Renaissance sculptors, on display larger than life in museum halls, accompanied by writeups on the amazing achievements of the people of those times. Replicas of stone age tools and historical weapons and armours keep the past frozen in time in glass cabinets for our gaze.

Old paintings are continuously restored and upkeep for indefinite amounts of future admiration. Some time, a long time ago, somebody lived to create things to last long into the future. And today, we continuously hold on to these things, hold on to the past.

Founding nations, museums of relics, these are very big examples. However, this obsession with storing memories for the future to appreciate shows up just as well on much smaller scales. We all have that friend or family member that insists on taking pictures for every outing, sometimes for Instagram, and sometimes just for themselves, and it is not uncommon that I find myself forcing a smile for the fourth unsatisfactory picture because another person's eyes were closed or someone was only half in. I wonder if anyone is going to look back on this random lunch on a random day and care if everyone's eyes were open. And some do, which I recently realised when I discovered that some of my friends pass time by looking through their photo galleries again and again.

Although this is not something I personally enjoy doing, it certainly brings joy to some, and is definitely not something new brought about by social media. Photo albums have existed for years, and the stereotypical teen bedroom with polaroids pinned on cork boards was a fixture of early 2000s movies.

So this begs the question: why? In a world where it is not uncommon to hear the phrase "live in the present", why do so many seem to live very much with the purpose of recording or preserving lasting memories, and, on a larger scale, creating legacies, even more than appreciating the moment itself.

Since time immemorial, humans have romanticised the idea of permanence. In one of Shakespeare's most famous poems, Sonnet 18, he laments the ephemeral qualities of nature's beauties, celebrating the eternity his love gains by being immortalised in the poem. Even further back, ancient cultures like the Greeks and Romans worshipped gods, of whom immortality was a vital characteristic.

One probable reason for this romanticisation is the fear of death, and, as an extension, the 'final death' of being forgotten, as is illustrated in Pixar's *Coco*, an animated movie inspired by the Mexican Day of the Dead. In the movie, those in the Land of the Dead fade away when they are completely forgotten by the living. Upon learning of the inevitability of death, most children are terrified, and thus many parents try to shield them from the concept up until a certain age. It is perhaps to cope with this fear that humans have strived to be creators, and admirers, of things that last, things that escape death, and can bring us with them.

For some, this fear creeps into everyday life to an excessive amount, and we deem doing things that won't last or leave a mark as pointless. I find myself sometimes guilty of this, wondering why I put in effort to make new friends at an event who I know I won't reach out to again, or being upset that I could not find a suitable souvenir to remember a vacation with, in the process forgetting that my time spent with my loved ones was no less enjoyable or well spent without a souvenir.

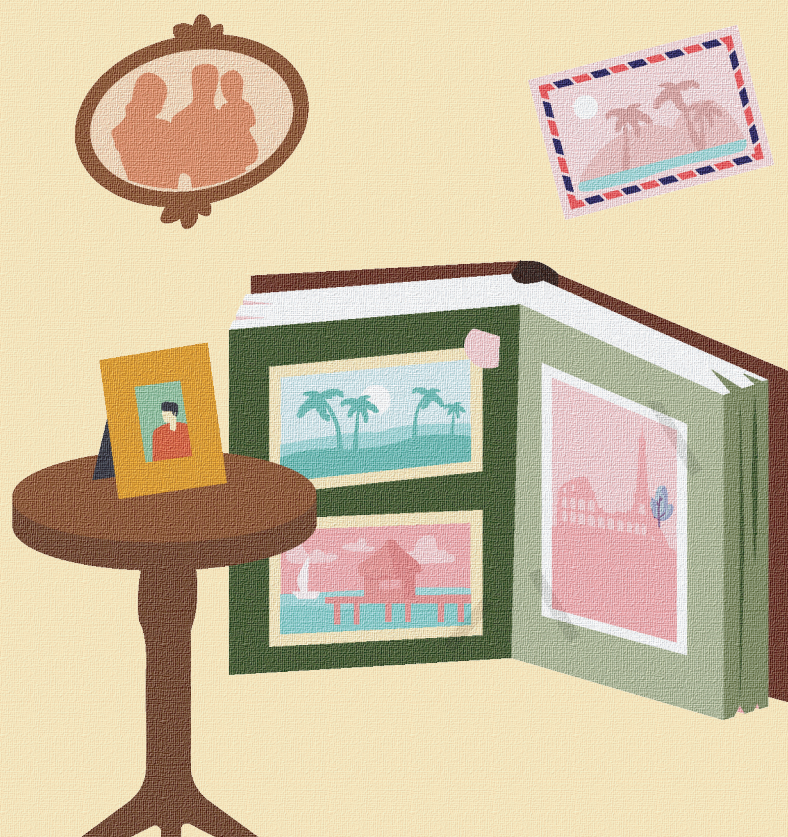
Of course, it is not unreasonable to want something to last. Many good things are better to have indefinitely, and planning for your future and making responsible choices based on their future consequences is certainly not living excessively for the future and not the present. And on the other hand, we cannot be too entrenched in the present, living a hedonistic life with no regard to where it might lead us.

So how do we find the right balance? Where do we draw the line between respecting and appreciating the past, and holding on to outdated, irrelevant beliefs and traditions that should be allowed to die? At which point does looking back at fond memories become an inability to move on with life? Where does planning for the future turn into excessive anxiety so much so that we cannot live in the present?

Perhaps the answer can be shown through a few simple questions. When you take a video of something amazing, do you think more 'Wow, that's beautiful', or 'Is this showing up well in my phone?' Is the rush of the experience more compelling, or the desire to capture it?

Of course, a few questions cannot tell with complete certainty whether you are living sufficiently in the present. There's no clear quantitative definition of what is 'sufficient', and different ways of living work for different people. Living to create a legacy can be a powerful motivator, and incredibly fulfilling for some, like Hamilton, while others may end up feeling empty, as if they've wasted their life rushing to create a memory they will not be around to enjoy. Some look back fondly on the experience of a beautiful sunset, while others wish they had captured it better to be able to look at it again. Some love ice sculpting, but many more prefer to work in stone.

Endless words can and have been said about this topic, which influences so many aspects of our lives, from the day to day Instagrammable meals, to our entire drive in life. This is just a reminder to take a moment to consciously reflect on how it is we have consciously or unconsciously chosen to live our lives, and how it has affected us, and whether we should change.





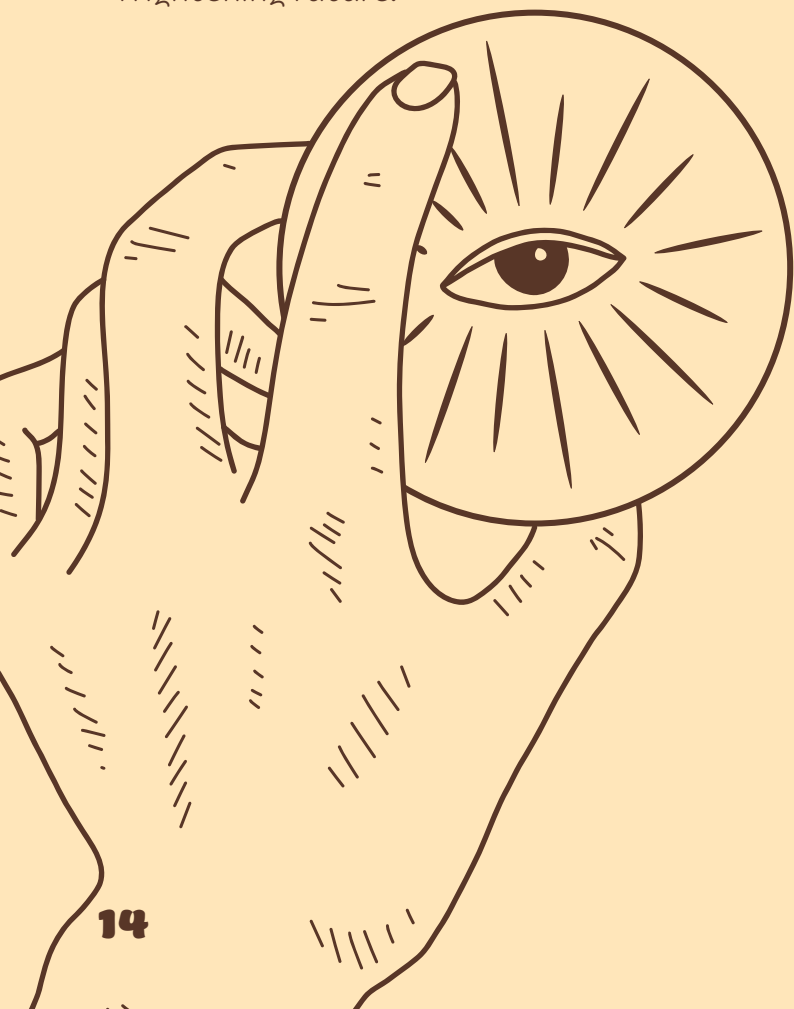
Astrology Reading

'Panic over rising sea levels, a collapsing economy, and a post-pandemic world has highlighted a constant of human nature— we crave certainty in uncertain times.'

By Hannah Lee

For centuries, humans have been searching for answers about the future that lies beyond human capacity. Divination—seeking knowledge of the future or unknown via the supernatural—is a practice that dates back to the great civilisations of the ancient world, and is still practiced in many cultures today. Over the last century, groundbreaking scientific and technological progress has made the future’s certainty seem graspable through hard data and statistics. But the pandemic has served as a painful reminder of the unpredictability of life, an abrupt interruption to what we imagined our future to be.

Using the supernatural to answer questions about the future is a practice that tends to resurge in the wake of instability. Tarot is one such form of divination that has recently regained popularity. Carrying a rich and multicultural history over the course of several centuries, tarot is the art of receiving messages regarding uncertainties through a deck of cards. The version of tarot that appears most commonly today can be traced back to the 1960s New Age movement—another point in history that, like today, was marked by anxieties over an uncertain world and a frightening future.

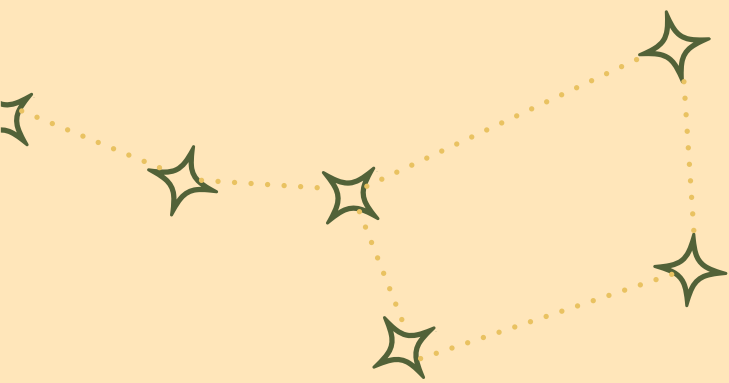


If these cards can truly give us some insight about the future, what do they say about the future of Singapore? We asked a tarot reader. In addition to reading tarot cards, the reader—who wishes to remain anonymous—also practices divination through Chinese numerology and charm casting. They began with the caveat that energies may change future outcomes but stated that core of the message usually holds true. They cautioned those receiving the messages against using readings as a rule book; most practitioners today believe tarot readings should be taken only as guidelines and as suggestions that may provide clarity.

The reading began with a general illustration of Singapore. According to the cards, the rest of the world mainly views Singapore as a land of opportunity, as well as a land of financial and commercial power. Its economic and commercial success, the tarot reader explained, is what draws people from all over the world to Singapore.

However, ‘leaving’ was a word that appeared prominently to the tarot reader when asked about Singapore’s youth. Frustrated over feeling unheard and unappreciated, many within the younger generation are contemplating leaving the country in the hopes of a more promising future. Ironically, the highly commercial nature of the country that draws foreigners appears to play a large role in why local youths feel the need to leave. The cards suggested that Singaporean youths feel that their freedom to express themselves creatively and emotionally is restricted to only being within a commercial capacity. This environment—where the youth struggle to find recognition beyond their commercial value—has also raised concerns over its impact on mental health. These sentiments were said to be especially prevalent amongst minority groups, who have to face yet another barrier of feeling overlooked.



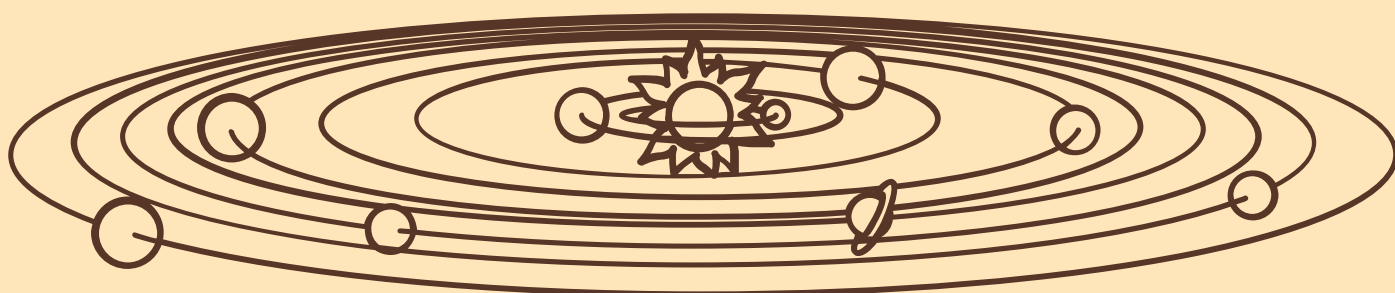


It is against this backdrop which the near future of Singapore is predicted to be set. According to the cards, the country is facing—and will continue to face—a period of struggle. Current anxieties and issues seem like they may persist. One such challenge is the growing socioeconomic gap between locals and foreign workers, which, as the cards have implied, will continue to grow larger. The reader explained how these tribulations of foreign workers will continue to be the backs on which the country's economic and financial successes are built. Locals will prosper and enjoy improved living standards; while those who come to Singapore in hopes of a better future will continue to struggle.

It seems such legislative and systematic inequalities will soon reach a tipping point. When asked what events the nation should anticipate, the cards revealed an unsettling and somewhat inevitable possibility—‘upheaval’. The reader claimed that the word made its presence clear. With some certainty, it suggests that there will soon be political and social unrest—Singapore may face protests or similar conflicts. It will be the climax of a crescendo of socio-political issues.

Despite the reading's initial apocalyptic predictions, the cards also appeared to suggest that this period of ‘upheaval’ will not be in vain. The final draw of cards illustrated an optimistic future Singapore that is hopeful, progressive, and most importantly, possible. Out of the times of conflict, an opportunity for a new start will arise. A specific progression that is predicted to happen is the development of old traditional ideas. For instance, the cards predicted that the mold of the ideal Singaporean traditional family (traditionally and currently, a heterosexual nuclear family) will grow more inclusive, and with that, progress in legislation and culture will be made. This push for progress, the tarot reader added, would result in guaranteed success. The nation will continue to prosper. More specifically, the local arts and entertainment industry is predicted to flourish, especially the subculture arts scene.

A dark cloud of hopelessness and fear may hang over our present. Even the cards affirm the plethora of persisting problems that make the future seem bleak and hopeless. But if the cards are right, we will live to see a Singapore that demonstrates the power of perseverance. Nevertheless, who truly knows if this will be the future of the nation? The reality—even for divination practitioners themselves—is that no one can really know. Though this may mean the anxieties of uncertainty remain, it goes to show that nothing is truly set in stone, and we still retain the power to write our own future.



Future of the 'It'

by Gabrielle Ng



Everyone knows the IT Girl. That's what makes her It.

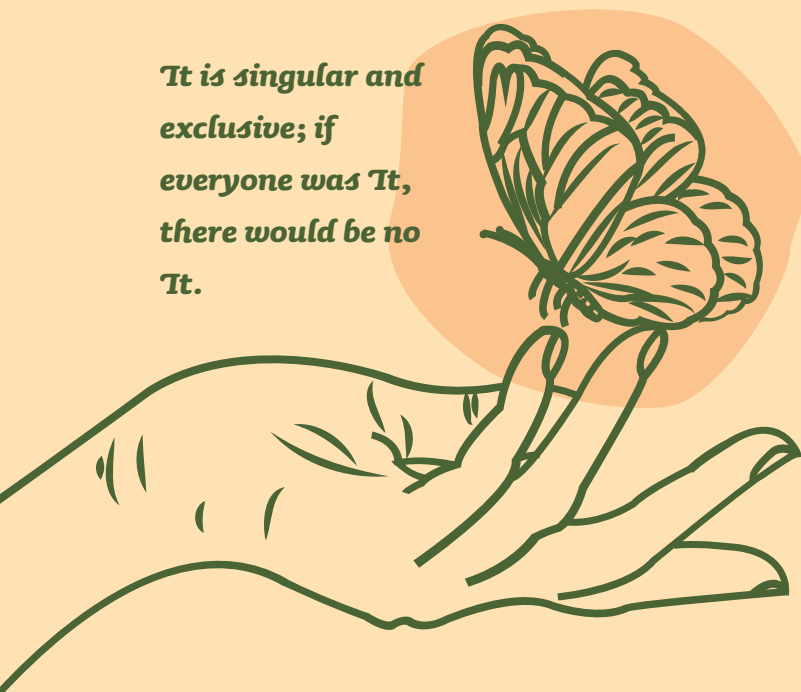
Everyone knows the It Girl. That's what makes her It. If you've spent more than ten minutes online in the past half a decade, you would know of at least one of her, even if you hadn't put a finger on who she was: Kate Moss, leader of the Tumblr waifs, Alexa Demie, siren of Euphoria fame who apparently never ages, or, most recently, Olivia Rodrigo, representative of the Gen Z pop-punk resurgence.

You know what they wear, what they eat, what music they listen to, which lucky partners they deign to reveal to the public eye. But you'll never know who exactly she is. Apart from her Amazon shopfront, fan-run Instagram pages documenting and sourcing her outfits, or Tiktok videos zooming in on the contents of her makeup drawer, that is.

It hasn't always been this way; mystique has traditionally hardly been accompanied by revelatory internet sleuthing.

But whether we've successfully peeked into the lives of these outstanding women or not, we have always held them up as a beacon of their time. Their elusiveness makes them ironically fixated upon by an inward-searching culture, figures of individualism that a contradictingly large flock of sheep attempts to emulate. How else would women in the 50s have understood feminine appeal if not for Marilyn Monroe? Who else could have shaken the 90s and cemented their lifelong residency in magazines and Pinterest boards like Naomi Campbell and Cindy Crawford? Regardless of her vulnerability to public criticism (given her nonconformity) and dismissal by many outside the fashion industry (as experienced by most subjects of feminine interest), the It Girl earns her titular badge through and only through her iconicism: she not just bridges but embodies the line between culture and counterculture, both reflects and alters her milieu, and most importantly, assures the rest of the world that she is It. There is no other like her and no other that can be It.

It is singular and exclusive; if everyone was It, there would be no It.



Which makes my point earlier strange.



How can the modern It Girl, now stripped bare before the all-knowing internet and its overeager citizens, maintain her allure of exclusivity?

Rather than a fantastical star held high in an impossible cosmic realm, she now seems more like a merchant dangling carrots on a stick, painting and offering a dream that's definitely attainable if you just do what she does: buy what she buys (she's mostly spotted in her fast fashion outfits of carefully shrouded origins and her Tiffany chain, but really, she loves this small business), eat what she eats (Bella Hadid's diet secret is her daily slice of pizza, did you know that?), and religiously abide by whatever she prescribes in general (drinking water solves everything). Her imitators and advocates on social media mirror this futile attempt to materialise something so immaterial, with videos and posts often outlining methodical steps to looking like a model off-duty or acting like an It Girl, all with differing pointers but, above all, the common, constant rhetoric of not trying so hard.

The paradox is clear: The It Girl is special, immaterial, aloof, nonchalant; her imitators are a flock of sheep, inseparable from material consumption, clamour for likes, and try much too hard to pin her down. It is her exact rejection of paparazzi hounds and popular trends and reticence from attention juxtaposed against her fascinating ability to get it anyway that makes her so appealing.

She is a fantasy of individualism in a culture of collective, a projection of our desire to get everything without trying in a lifelong hustle that tells us otherwise.

This oxymoron may seem obviously illogical and deeply contradictory in theory, but works in perfect tandem with the cogs of corporations who sponsor and supply such fantasies. By prescribing an all-too-effortful process of emulating an It Girl through social media and having it contradict what makes her so effortlessly cool in the first place, companies make sure one never reaches the endpoint of their pursuit. As a result, anyone who tries is left constantly reaching for this indomitable star, led on endlessly and deliberately by corporates who strategically, falsely, break down the star's appeal into consumable carrots to feed the common consumer's fantasy. Only, the more they feed, the hungrier they get.



To these emulators, the material—clothes, shoes, bags, cosmetics, anything that Revolve supplies and a plebeian neighbourhood mall doesn't—is the cake, and the immaterial, inimitable wearer is the cherry on top, one whose presence is far from crucial and whose absence can be easily distracted from by a sufficiently pretty cake. What they often fail to realise is that the wearer isn't just the cherry; she is the keystone to a sort of special cake where without its top floor, it simply just crumbles and settles into a bland, unappetising mess. Why did so many people want Lily Rose Depp's ballet flats, Alexa Chung's striped breton tees, and Jennie Kim's countless Chanel ensembles? There is hardly anything new or revolutionary about the pieces It Girls wear; it is their peculiar yet sweeping force that breathes life and allure into the pieces that merely decorate their body. So it follows that trying to bottle their essence into a price tag is futile, and purchasing pieces that are removed from the enigmatic persona they are associated with, mass-produced, and widely popular, inherently negates the unique appeal that made them so coveted in the first place. One full shopping cart does not an It Girl make.

To claim anyone can be It is a delusion. It is a delusion echoed by It influencers, by the corporates who sponsor them and offer material imitations of them, by popular culture itself which is blind to the fact that its reverence is its undoing. But excluding the lights, cameras and action, the basic principle that lies behind It isn't special, exclusive, or out of reach for regular humans at all. It is liberation—from spirals of mindless and futile consumption, from confining societal expectations, from lingering personal beliefs that hide and limit the ceaseless possibilities of who you can choose to be. And that is something anyone can achieve.

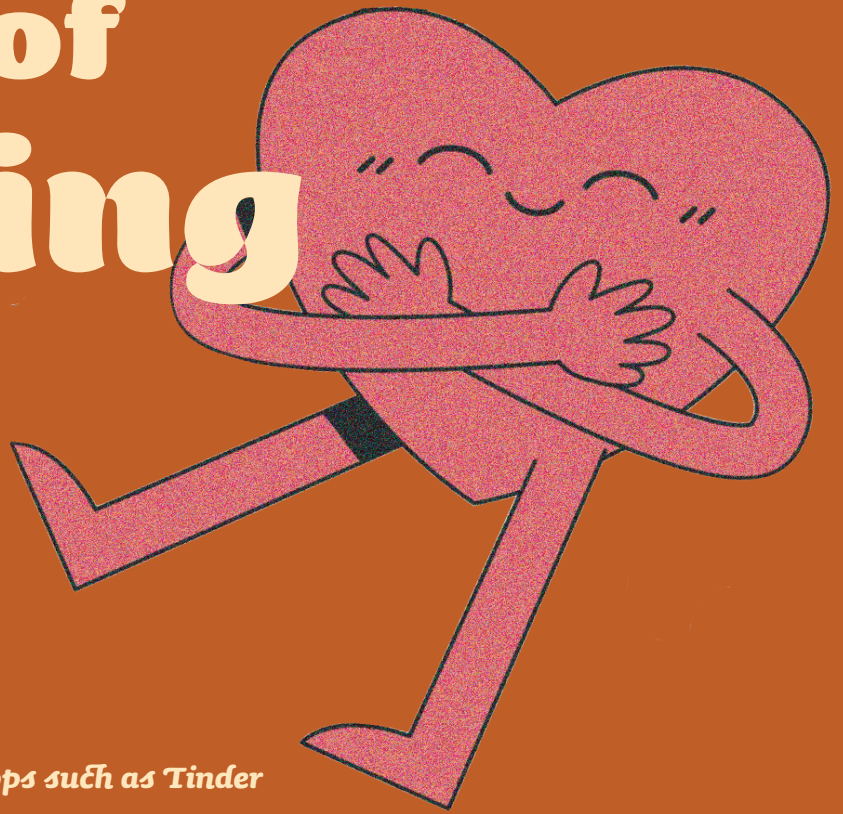
future of Finding Love

By Caitlin Tim

What comes to mind when you think of modern-age dating?

Do you think of online dating apps such as Tinder and CoffeeMeetsBagel?

Do you think about setting up a realistic profile to prevent catfishing others?



It seems as though the future of dating is indeed through online dating apps. In these apps, users typically have to set up a personal profile for potential matches to view. As a whole, profiles usually contain information revolving around age, height, hobbies and many others. Besides the aforementioned, many, too, include other information such as quirks and personality types.

However, an indisputable part of the personal profile would have to be pictures. As the saying goes: a picture speaks a thousand words—such pictures give a sensing of physical appearance, alongside other similar interests. In fact, pictures are arguably the make or break of one's profile. However, what if I told you that there's another way to find your match that is more heavily driven by similar interests and outlooks compared to physical appearance?

I hereby present to you Aphrodite Project—a project that was, in fact, launched by our fellow schoolmate!

“I’d suggest participants take things easy and keep expectations at a minimum. Beyond fixating on the idea of finding your best match through the project, why not have a change in perspective? The project serves as a nice alternative way to meet a new person by filling up a fun questionnaire. Nothing concrete needs to come out of it—and of course, there really isn’t an obligation for things to turn out well.”

What is Aphrodite Project?

Aphrodite Project acts as a platform to connect individuals. The project offers two options: looking for a friend and looking for a partner. Despite providing these options, it seems as though the majority of the student participants are utilising the project for the latter purpose.

Interested participants are required to fill up a questionnaire with a wide range of questions: from hobbies to dealbreakers, and even personal values in life. The last question, arguably the most important one, was about how many matches an individual would like to receive.

After filling in and submitting the questionnaire, the algorithm would take around one week to churn out the results and match(es) based on every individual’s responses in the questionnaire. An email would be sent to all participants once the results were ready. After which, everything from hereon would lie in each individual’s hands.

My Experience with Aphrodite Project

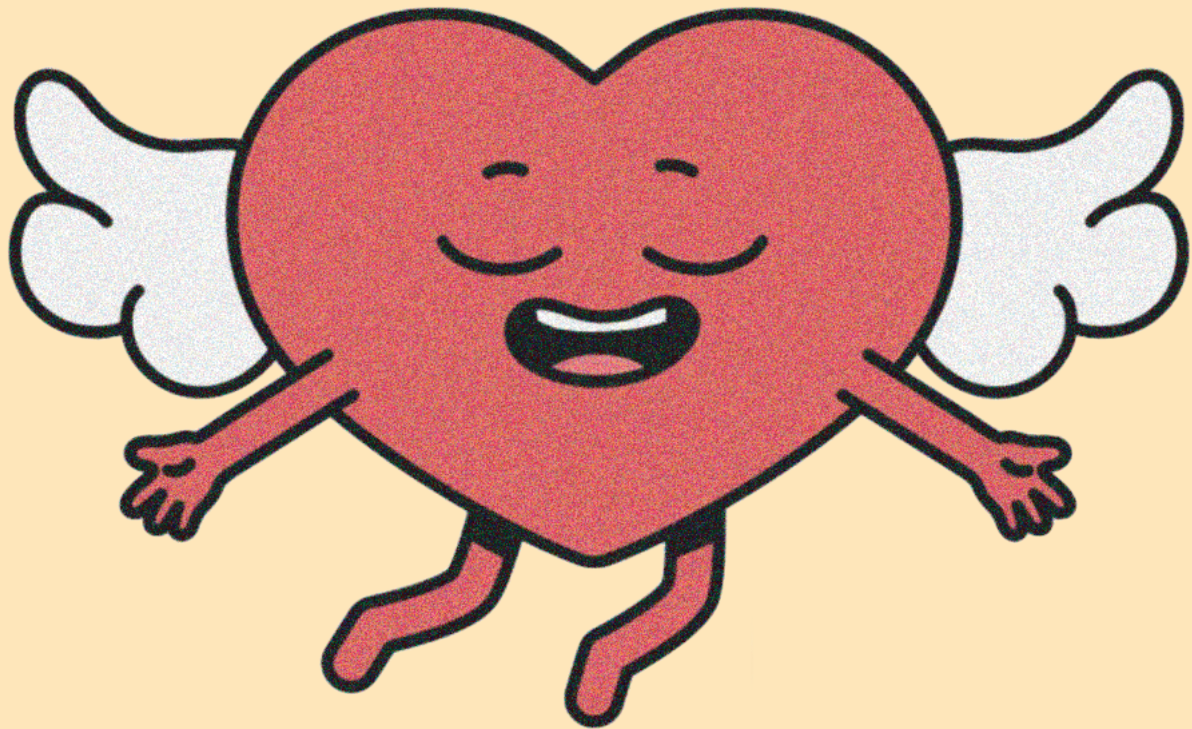
The concept of Aphrodite Project really intrigued me—I was curious to learn how the project taps into technology and psychology to generate the ‘ideal’ match for participants. This is especially so as the project claims to be built upon psychology and an economics Nobel Prize algorithm. As such, I decided to test it out for myself by signing up for it.

Quite frankly, I wasn’t expecting anything out of it and did not take it seriously at all. In fact, I went in with the mindset of exploring the questionnaire and taking things as it is along the way. Personally, I’d suggest participants take things easy and keep expectations at a minimum. Beyond fixating on the idea of finding your best match through the project, why not have a change in perspective? The project serves as a nice alternative way to meet a new person by filling up a fun questionnaire. Nothing concrete needs to come out of it—and of course, there really isn’t an obligation for things to turn out well.

With that being said, I must admit that the algorithm was kind to me. In the last question regarding the desired number of

matches, I selected the option to be matched with two individuals. And to my surprise, I actually got matched with two people! Given how there’s a significant amount of people who ended up not getting any matches at all, I’m certainly thankful for this outcome.

Following that, the accuracy of my match rankings absolutely blew my mind—my match ranks were 1.5 and 3.5. Such results were apparently hard to come by as most people had an average rank of around 20-50. Match rankings like these entail strong similarities. After briefly chatting with my matches, I was pleasantly surprised that I indeed had many things in common with both of my matches. Beyond just hobbies and interests (arguably, superficial similarities), our goals and personalities were also highly synonymous. Well, I guessed I really lucked it out in this run of the Aphrodite Project!



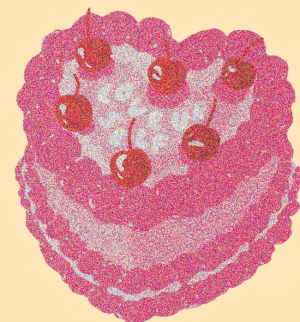
General Sensing regarding Aphrodite Project

While I got lucky in this run of the Aphrodite Project, the same can't be said for many othermost participants. A quick poll on the r/nus Reddit thread shows that a significant proportion of participants obtained suboptimal matches. Furthermore, a greater proportion of participants did not initiate conversations with their matches. Such outcomes have left many feeling frustrated and jaded: this is, yet again, an unsuccessful endeavour.

Personally, I believe that the lack of proactiveness could be accounted for by the timing of the project's results release period. Aphrodite Project took place during midterms season (around weeks 5-7), so it could be that many people were simply overwhelmed by impending deadlines and exams. The academic pressure might have caused many to neglect the outcome of the project. Consequently, this could have resulted in ghosting or lack of initiation. Truth be told, should my matches not reach out to me, I might not have initiated a conversation with them too simply because I was spread too thin during recess week. Hypothetically, if Aphrodite Project were to run at the start of the semester, I'd suppose that conversations and matches might be more successful. Well, at least for me, I would initiate conversations and meetups with my matches if it had been held during a less-than-hectic period.

Closing Thoughts

At the end of the day, Aphrodite Project is still a free project that has been made available to us. Think about it this way: there's nothing to lose by applying for it. But there's certainly a chance to gain a new connection—be it a platonic friend or a romantic partner. Hence, I don't think we should have unrealistic expectations about its outcome or grumble too much about it. My single friends, start over and never give up looking for your soul mate!



Virtue or Burden

The Relevance of Filial Piety in Singapore

Is filial piety still an esteemed value to uphold, or are its obligations just another stressor for a society already grappling with burnout and economic volatility?

By Wei Mei Tan



While filial piety has an important place in many Eastern and Western cultures, Singapore is one of the rare countries where the state actively enforces the value with the Maintenance of Parents Act (MPA), with an average of 30 cases filed each year since 2017. As stated in the Act, parents above 60 years old and unable to adequately provide for themselves may apply to receive a monthly allowance from their children. While the MPA takes into account the parents' culpability, such as whether they have "abused, abandoned, or neglected their child", it has drawn as much criticism as it has support.

Codifying filial piety within the law in this way begs the question — while filial piety has an undeniably important role in Singapore, exactly how important should it be? With the global shift away from rigid adherence to tradition, many, especially the younger generations, find themselves caught between expectations of piety from those who

raised them and modern values like individualism. Is filial piety still an esteemed value to uphold, or are its obligations just another stressor for a society already grappling with burnout and economic volatility? A bit of both, according to four university students who shared their thoughts on this contentious issue.

Having spent twelve years of her education under the Special Assistance Plan (SAP) — a programme with a strong focus on Chinese mother tongue and culture — Emily's views on filial piety are influenced by traditional Confucian values. The health science student believes that it is important for one to repay their parents in some way. Filial piety can be shown in any way, as long as both parent and child are satisfied with the arrangement. To Emily, that entails spending quality time with her parents and offering financial assistance. Though the duty of financial support is shared with her older siblings, it nonetheless remains heavy.





“I still put pressure on myself as I want to be able to share this burden equally”

Though J.Y., a FASS student, had a similar traditional Chinese upbringing, she eschews the obligatory undertones of filial piety. Piety, she believes, should be earned and not freely given. In a similar vein, the responsibility of financial maintenance should lie with the parents themselves and not with their adult children. Instead of shifting the financial burden onto their offspring through the MPA, J.Y. believes elderly parents should turn to the numerous avenues for aid offered by governments and charities. While she enjoys a close relationship with her parents and gladly proffers financial and emotional support, she hesitates to call it filial piety or — as Confucian doctrine frames it — “repayment” to her parents for raising her.

Familial duty is a constant and at times suffocating pressure in Ben’s life. As the only son of ailing, soon-to-be-retired parents, the imminent mantle of sole breadwinner is the most stressful yet galvanizing motivator for him to work hard to land a well-paying job. Besides financial support, caretaking is a major concern for final-year student Ben. He experienced caretaker burnout when his father suffered an accident that left him mentally and physically impaired. Without the means to afford a maid, and with other family members working more hours to cover the medical fees, Ben became his father’s main caretaker when he was still in high school. Between assisting his father with daily tasks like eating and hygiene, and conducting at-home rehabilitation, he burnt out within weeks. Ben confesses that he greatly resents the responsibility he has to shoulder and — despite his best efforts — also resents his parents for it. He feels trapped by the societal expectation of reciprocity.

“I treat people well when they treat me well,” J.Y. explains, “it’s not an obligation as we didn’t choose to be born. It’s just good to take care of your parents if they have treated you well.”

"My parents weren't abusive or neglectful, and they sacrificed much for me. I can't find a reason to not do the same, even if I don't want to. If I don't take care of them, who will?"

As a Singaporean who spent her schooling years in the US, Ruby is privy to the expectations of piety from her Chinese family, and the lack of it in the Western culture she grew up in. Though her parents have traditional views regarding familial responsibility and respect, they also understand that their children were raised in a vastly different cultural context, and instead wish for them to have the freedom to live their own life. That said, the Arts student shares similar sentiments on filial piety as her parents. Despite being removed from a cultural narrative that emphasises filial piety, she nonetheless feels an intrinsic duty to take good care of her parents. As her parents are financially self-sufficient, Ruby provides emotional support and visits them during school breaks to catch up with them — something she intends to continue with no matter where life takes her after university.

"We should take good care of our parents, but our lives shouldn't revolve around them," she said. "We also need the space to be our own person and live our own life."

With attitudes surrounding filial piety as diverse as Singapore's demographic, there seems to be no silver bullet in negotiating the tension between traditional family values and modern individualism. Perhaps deciding which precepts of filial piety to adopt and which to leave in the past is up to each family.

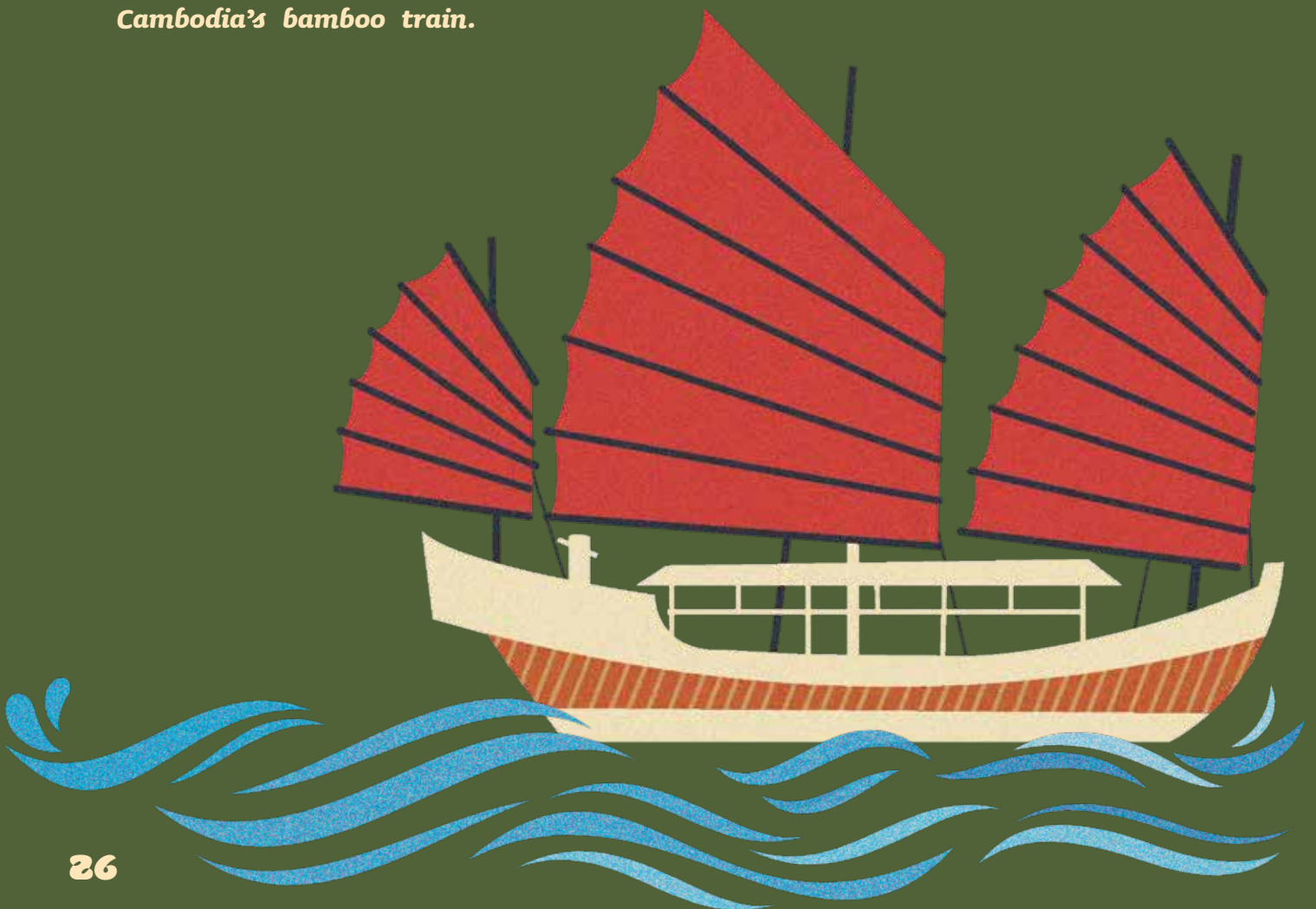


Beep beep!

The temporalities and modalities of transport

By Yuki Koh

*Transport can be effectively summed up as the **how** to get you to **where** you want to go. But not every country has the same level of transport availability and accessibility. Some ferry people around with culturally-specific transport modes, such as Hong Kong's junk boats and Cambodia's bamboo train.*



Viewed through that perspective, transportation is a lens into the differing sensories, temporalities, and modalities of traversing and existing in a country—much less, touring it. Think walking. It counts as transport, too. And whilst engaging ourselves as walkers, the pace slows us down so that we enjoy the sights and sounds of the country. The other day, I took a stroll along Marina Barrage’s open-air reservoirs, and found myself soaking in the sea air. With the cool winds caressing and carrying me away, I almost felt compelled to relax, introspect, and reflect on the day and how I felt. It encouraged me. In such turbulent times, something as simple as a walk tells me I am okay. Centred.



Going abroad, paring our transport down to minimalistic walking also permits us to look deeper into the nooks and crannies of loud, bustling markets, and hidden gems along the wall-to-wall panels of a vandal’s art.

Vehicular and motor transport can have different effects on the senses as well. Ramshackled, wooden-like structures that are barely cobbled together have a remarkable charm and wit to them. Cambodia’s Bamboo Trains are held together by second-hand wheels, wooden frames, and bamboo planks. They don’t even have an assigned place on the train tracks; depending on spur lines to get by. Bangkok’s and India’s tuk tuks are also some three-wheelers that expertly weave through the chaotic confines of the road traffic. If you search up the term ‘The Land of Motorbikes,’ it’ll bring you to the one and only Vietnam, where traffic operates on a 24/7 schedule.



I dub such transport as resistance transport — incoherent, loudhailer-like vehicles that bring you to where you need to be — not through official, linear modes of transport, but by being hostile to them. No real trains allowed. Don’t bother trying to follow the traffic lights either, because the civilians set their own rules.

I dub such transport as resistance transport—incoherent, loudhailer-like vehicles that bring you to where you need to be—not through official, linear modes of transport, but by being hostile to them. No real trains allowed. Don’t bother trying to follow the traffic lights either, because the civilians set their own rules. When you partake in such transport, you become a part of their civilian life—and effectively, set your own rules and pace. Seize back autonomy, I should say; seize back the freedom of movement. It’s liberating.

Don’t get me wrong—Singapore is great. Transport is widely accessible and extremely useful for us all. Yet as we look out our MRT windows and you see the same linear copies birthing upon another (as Alfian Sa’at said), and become habituated to the droning repetition of spatially-optimised flats and self-same underground tunnels, perhaps it may be time to look out to more chaotic waters. Let’s learn to break the rhythm with our transportation modalities and temporalities, be it when it comes to slowing down or going faster. Toodeloo!

The Kampung Spirit: *preserving the* Singaporean Past



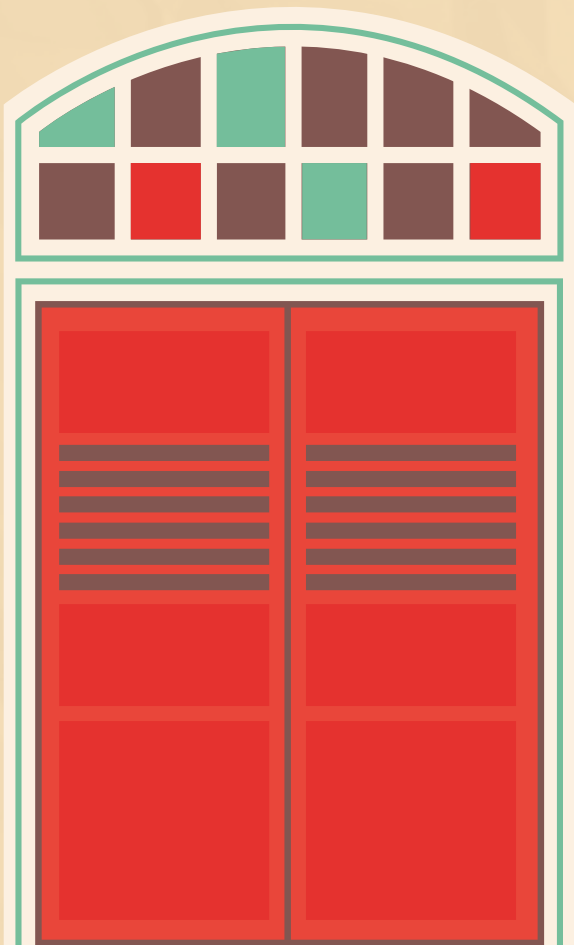
By *Amber Tay*

When we talk about Singapore culture, the ‘kampung spirit’ often comes to mind. The term refers to the personal bonds you have with the people around you, most likely due to the close proximity you have with one another. Derived from the Malay term for ‘village’, kampungs and the life within them were often described to be harmonious and community-centric. Neighbours would often know one another by name, and there was an unyielding trust that the village would come to your rescue when you needed help.

However, any traces of such past culture are basically non-existent in Singapore nowadays. Search Singapore on Google and the first images that appear are of Marina Bay Sands and the Merlion, both surrounded by soaring industrial skyscrapers.

The unfortunate truth is that Singapore’s tourism industry often centres around the shinier aspects of our country that often have travel bloggers scattering words such as ‘new,’ ‘futuristic’ and ‘state-of-the-art’ in their articles.

Though it is undeniable that such colourful, stylish attractions often serve as a backbone for the stream of tourists that flood into the country, there is also a foreboding fear that older, richer parts of our heritage can be compromised as a result. For instance, Kampung Gelam—a well-known tourist attraction with the word ‘kampung’ in its name—can be described less as a kampung of the past and more as an urban neighbourhood that preserves remnants of the colonial era to sustain the viewing experience of tourists or students, rather than lives of actual residents.



The Last Survivors

Only two kampung houses have survived among the many bulldozed: Kampung Lorong Buangkok and the villages on Pulau Ubin. Nevertheless, even now their future remains uncertain.

Located in Serangoon, Kampung Lorong Buangkok has narrowly avoided redevelopment and maintains its title as the last kampung on mainland Singapore. Purchased by a traditional medicine seller named Sng Teow Koon in 1956, the premise houses fewer than 30 families at the time of writing.

In Pulau Ubin, the populations residing in its villages continue to dwindle in size, with Today Online reporting a population decrease from 2,000 in 1957 to 38 in 2013. A place that first served as home to Orang Laut and indigenous Malay of Bugis and Javanese origins, Pulau Ubin has served inhabitants from numerous cultural backgrounds—whether it be the Chinese quarry workers in the 1880s or mainland residents fleeing Singapore during the Japanese invasion in 1942. Now, those that remain are often of the older generations, with younger residents moving to the mainland in pursuit of better opportunities or to be with family.

Soon, the communities that reside in both kampungs may no longer exist—and what is kampung spirit with no life in it?



The Kampung Spirit

Conversations about maintaining kampung culture in Singapore have been widely discussed over the past few years, with some arguing that what we yearn for is not the physical look of traditional Malay attap houses, but instead the values of community, kindness, and spirit that it represents.

“We should not regress to those days of poor sanitation, poor housing and poverty,” writes Josephine Chia in the 2018 CNA article titled ‘Commentary: Kampung spirit not a wish to revert to the past, but a longing for togetherness’. “But we can cherry-pick that gracious way of living, community concern and incorporate it into our modern lives.”

“Kampung spirit, Chia argues, is not an object of heritage but a form of values is an aspect of kampung culture that we can continue to maintain in modern Singapore society.”

Yet does this mean that physical aspects of our heritage should be allowed to deteriorate into mere fragments of our past?

Personally, I would argue otherwise. To dismiss physical heritage sites with the replacement of intangible values would be to diminish the importance of maintaining geographical spaces which proudly showcase aspects of our rich Singaporean history. Nevertheless, Chia’s argument does bring up an interesting aspect of at-risk heritages in Singapore. That is, the more intangible aspects consisting of dialects, food heritage, and cultural values are also slowly fading due to rapid industrialisation and globalisation.





Conclusion

Change is inevitable. So where do we go from here?

As Singapore struggles to fulfill the demands of its ever-growing urban population, the future of kampungs begins to look bleak. Yet perhaps instead of resisting change, solutions can be found where urbanisation can be welcomed without diminishing the essence of Singapore's heritage sites.

In 2020, in response to proposed urban redevelopment plans of the Kampung Lorong Buangkok area, a team of faculty from the Singapore Institute of Technology's Design and Specialised Businesses cluster worked together with students to brainstorm design solutions to preserve the heritage site. One such recommendation was “to integrate the kampung into Singapore's park-connector network, transforming KLB into a park, and with it the opportunity for greater traffic and awareness.

Joining non-governmental organisations specialising in the preservation of heritage sites can also serve as a platform to advocate and voice out one's own personal perspectives on how to solve the diminishment of at-risk heritages.

For instance, Singapore Heritage Society is an organisation that aims to be the “voice for heritage conservation in Singapore.” Here, they often reach out to the public through publications, talks, exhibitions, and guided walks to educate their audience on the need to preserve ‘the living presence of the past’.

In the same way where there is no one fixed recipe for creating food, our options for preserving the Singapore past are endless as well. Marinate on what's important to you; Season in a bit of advocacy during your free time; Perhaps even blend your peers' ideas together for a final project...

I don't have an answer when it comes to the preservation of kampungs. Yet perhaps it has brought me (and hopefully you, dear reader) some retrospection in what you see to be home.

Is it a place? Is it a culture? Or simply just the community?

Whatever it is, find it—You never know when it may leave all too soon.

From hobby to hustle: Chasing passion, finding meaning

by Daphne Yow



“Choose a job you love and you’ll never have to work a day in your life.”

Sounds familiar? You have probably heard this quote, or some variation of it, before. This centuries-old saying came from the Chinese philosopher Confucius, and was later echoed by American singer-songwriter Marc Anthony. At its core, it means if we do something that we are passionate about (aka our hobbies) for a living, we will enjoy it so much that we will not feel like it is work. And the fact that this logic has been passed down for hundreds of years shows there must be some truth to it, right?

I am an aspiring journalist. Writing has been a passion of mine since young, and I would pen fictional stories, lifestyle tidbits, and opinion pieces on issues I care about for fun. This interest made me look to journalism as my dream career path as I wanted to do a job in which I can both write and talk to people to learn about their stories. I loved having opportunities to write about any topic that piqued my interest for school publication clubs and for volunteer work during my free time. But when it came to actually being in the workforce, I realised that there is now that added aspect of needing to make my writing meet the expectations of many other parties—readers, editors, clients, and so on.

These higher stakes led me to unconsciously expect more from my writing, making it stressful at times. It's challenging to view writing as a pastime for relaxing now; I noticed that I would sometimes be tired out because it felt like I had to write well all the time and also could not always choose what I wanted to share. Whenever I try to write in my free time, I would constantly see it as being too informal and not good enough as I find it hard to get out of the tendency to see my writing through a professional lens. As I embark on my journalism journey, I realised, sadly, that I have now largely stopped writing for leisure—back when I could write freely just for myself without considering whether it was good enough for others.

Turning hobby into work

That was my personal experience chasing what I love for a livelihood, and you may have similar stories as well in whatever field you are in. I felt that it is a good thing if we can turn our hobbies into a career. This is because we could attain the best of both worlds: doing what we love and earning tangible rewards like money from it.

But the reality, according to Forbes writers Chrissy Scivicque and Kristi Hedges in their article, *Bad Career Advice: Do What You Love and You'll Never Work a Day*, sounds very different: "If you do what you love for a living, you'll probably end up loving it a little bit less." This begs the question: why can turning hobbies into work be 'not-as-good' as it seems?

Incidentally, something I recently learnt from a social psychology class—the overjustification effect—serves to explain precisely this phenomenon. When we are offered incentives to do tasks that we originally find intrinsically enjoyable, we tend to overjustify why we engage in the hobby, which in turn lowers our enjoyment. For instance, American professional basketball player Bill Russells, known as one of the greatest basketball players of all time, once said, "I remember that the game lost some of its magical qualities for me once I thought seriously about playing for a living."





Indeed, when I started writing for official reasons like work, the tangible rewards like salary and recognition overrode my enjoyment in becoming the reason why I write. Initially, I was intrinsically motivated to write simply because I enjoyed the feeling of solace and freedom of expression it gives me, but when those external incentives came into the picture, I started working towards those instead. Hence, incentivising me to write, which is already something I intrinsically enjoy, reduced my pleasure to write as I see it as work to be done, rather than something that I want to do simply because I enjoy it.

This commodification of passion means there is more at stake, and Scivique and Hedges put it very well: once you rely on something to put food on the table, it transforms into something different—from “that thing you do for fun” to “that thing you have to do for survival”.

With such bleak prospects, an important follow-up question would then be: is it not a good idea to pursue our hobbies for work?

Well, I’d say it depends.

Making passion come alive through meaning

Granted, monetising our hobbies will change the way we experience them, for better or for worse. However, looking to our hobbies to narrow down what we want to do in the future has its advantages. It could offer clues to what we are naturally interested in and good at. It is also easier to adapt to the job when you already have a solid foundation of the skills required, built up from your hobby. More importantly, doing something you like can at least alleviate the stresses of work more than if you did something else you like less, or even worse, hate.

Overall, my best bet is that we should not monetise all our hobbies; instead, keep some for relaxation during your free time. And for that one passion you may have decided to pursue full-time, it is all about finding the personal meaning it has for you.

To me, the question of whether we should turn our hobbies into a job is dwarfed by the question of what we find meaning in. Why do you do what you do? This is something I feel would be useful whether or not our job is something we like to do. We do not necessarily have to love what we do for a living (although that would be ideal), but if we can find personal fulfilment in it—be it for yourself, your family and friends, or even for the greater good—it will make life just a little easier to get by. And my verdict is that the happiness that comes from pursuing my hobby as a career far outweighs the drawbacks because of the personal meaning it has for me.



Despite having lost some of the magical qualities that writing used to hold for me, I still love the art of crafting meaningful stories for others. Journalism has given me the gift of getting to speak with people from all walks of life, learn lessons from them, and then translating those into stories to inspire others. Getting to do it professionally meant I could also get feedback from others on what to improve on, which is something I will not have gotten if I continued writing solely for leisure. Previously, I wrote just for myself. However, through getting to do it for a wider audience, I found meaning behind it, such as raising awareness of certain disadvantaged communities or urgent social issues. Granted, it is ultimately a job and there are deadlines and obligations to meet. It is inevitable that these might make the going get tough. In spite of such trying times, I like to remind myself why I am doing this—the immense fulfilment I get from seeing just one more reader understand a particular social issue and then take action to make things better.

Some may go on about how we should do what we love for a living, while others may tout the quote as a fool's dream. For me, it's all about knowing, and consistently reminding yourself of, your motivation behind what you do, which is also basically what will keep you going. Ultimately, it is a blessing to be able to chase your passion, and I hope you, my dear reader, will be able to find something that gives you meaning—in both work and life.



Future of *Singapore's* **Social** **Compact**

By Tessa Foo

What is the social compact and why is it important?

The social compact is a shared understanding of the ways in which we relate to one another in society. It involves the roles and responsibilities of various groups, including the government, communities and individuals.

Singapore's social compact is dynamic and has changed over time. From the 1960s to 1980s, nation-building was a priority and an emphasis was placed on self-reliance and individual responsibility. From the 1990s to 2000s, the “many helping hands” approach led to increased focus on collective responsibility and more support for certain segments of society. Now, with Singapore's emergence from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is timely to review our approach to social development and efforts to strengthen our social fabric.

The launch of the Forward Singapore movement in June 2022 highlighted a national impetus to refresh the social compact. Through co-creation of national initiatives, the Forward Singapore movement aims to enhance social capital and cultivate trust, allowing Singaporeans to progress together as a nation.

To me, Singapore's social compact can be likened to a popular dish enjoyed by all walks of life—nasi lemak! Read on to find out how each ingredient of nasi lemak corresponds to key challenges in the social compact.

Coconut milk rice: essential solidarity

Coconut milk rice is essential to the definition of nasi lemak—you can't call it nasi lemak without including this specially fragrant rice. With each grain of rice being analogous to an individual, our collective solidarity forms the foundation of the social compact.

As we deal with a number of social trends with long-term implications, be it a rapidly ageing population or mounting concern towards displacement, it has never been more important to remember our communal ties and shared commitments to one another. While we reflect on our aspirations for Singapore's future, we must also address our genuine anxieties.



Banana leaf: meritocracy

The use of a banana leaf in nasi lemak is said to originate from when the meal was brought directly to farmers working on fields. It's a historical practice that has continued to the present, much like meritocracy, a legacy of the late Mr. Lee Kuan Yew. Just like how the banana leaf holds everything together, meritocracy undergirds Singapore's approach to governance. In a meritocratic system, everyone has the opportunity to succeed through their merit (the product of hard work and talent), with the most qualified rising to the top. Meritocracy is practised in our education system, which aims to facilitate social mobility by providing equal opportunity through standardised tests.



However, in recent years, meritocracy has received criticism for unfairly privileging individuals from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Given that those who have succeeded by their merit seek to pass on their advantages to their children, the rich can provide more conducive home environments for their children to study or purchase quality tuition services. In contrast, individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds struggle to progress as they are structurally disadvantaged, thus increasing the risk of privilege being entrenched across generations.

Despite its drawbacks, meritocracy can be improved to become more open and compassionate so as to strengthen our social compact. One solution would be early intervention in the life of every child, particularly those from disadvantaged households, so that the circumstances of their birth do not limit their future outcomes. Another solution would be to expand our conception of merit beyond academic credentials. This would entail developing talents across diverse sectors, with opportunities for Singaporeans to advance at different stages of life. Most importantly, instead of judging individuals on the basis of income, we have to collectively recognise the worth of every worker and their contributions to society.

Sliced cucumber: health (fiscal, environmental, social)

Sliced cucumber is the healthiest ingredient in nasi lemak. As we refresh our social compact and appraise our responsibilities to one another, maintaining the health of our society—fiscal, environmental and social—is paramount.

Fiscal health

Singapore was ranked the freest economy in the world in the 2022 Index of Economic Freedom. However, if left unchecked, the mechanisms of the free market can exacerbate inequalities, creating a spatial fix of capital between the rich and the poor. Moreover, Singapore continues to remain open to foreign talent. Amidst the shifting demands of the global market, efforts to upskill Singaporean workers will ensure that they remain competitive against their foreign counterparts.

Environmental health

Individuals and companies have expressed greater commitment to sustainability to safeguard our shared future. In line with this, changes to our consumption patterns and daily activities must be made to ensure intergenerational equity of resources.

Social health

To make our social security nets more robust, the hike in goods and services tax (GST) from 7% to 8% has taken effect to fund the increasing social and healthcare needs of an ageing population. Healthcare and retirement adequacy will become increasingly crucial for seniors to live out their golden years with dignity.

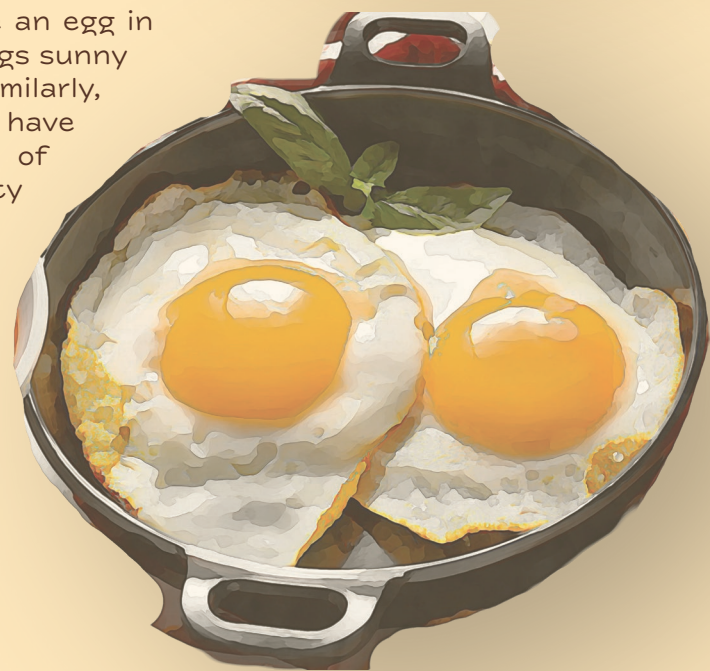
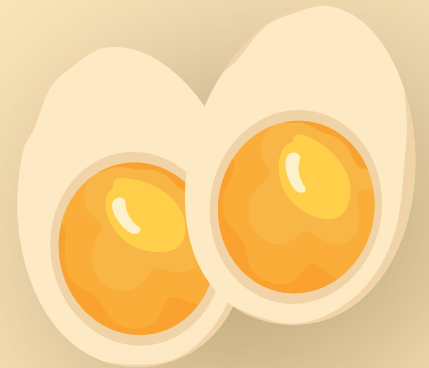
Egg: public housing

An egg is a ubiquitous ingredient enjoyed by many. You get an egg, you get an egg... nay, who doesn't want an egg to go with their nasi lemak? Likewise, national goods (such as public housing) that are widely available to Singaporeans should be kept that way—80% of Singaporeans live in Housing & Development Board (HDB) flats, with a 90% homeownership rate. However, with the rising cost of living, the challenge is to keep public housing affordable. Given that the COVID-19 pandemic set back construction projects, young home buyers have faced delays in getting their keys. Moreover, those who have looked to the resale market have been frustrated with record-high prices. In 2021, 261 flats changed hands for at least \$1 million each, with the most expensive flat selling for \$1.36 million. HDB flats are increasingly viewed as assets with a transactable value while doubling as homes, but the tension between these purposes has hampered the role of public housing in providing equity.

Furthermore, there are multiple ways to make an egg in nasi lemak. Some people prefer having their eggs sunny side-up, while others like them hard-boiled. Similarly, the different needs of groups in society have contributed to an intergenerational conflict of interest in the housing market. With property often constituting a significant proportion of a retiree's nest egg (pun intended), high housing prices benefit retirees looking to monetise their homes via rent or sale to enhance their retirement adequacy. On the other hand, boot-strapped youngsters looking to have their own place to gain independence and kick off the next stage of their lives yearn for more affordable housing. As housing costs continue to spiral upward, the dream of homeownership becomes more difficult for the next generation to achieve, which impacts their housing stability and opportunities for asset accumulation.

Tkan bilis: public consultations

To top it all off, we have ikan bilis, or fried anchovies! The perfect garnish to sprinkle onto your nasi lemak dish, with a delightful crunchy texture. In the social compact, public consultations, which are peppered throughout the year, function similarly by adding texture to our discussions of the social compact. These deliberations involve a plurality of voices, promoting civic participation and co-creation in policymaking.



As we chart our roadmap for the future of Singapore's social compact, the path ahead will be littered with challenges.

However, by adopting a broad-minded approach, we can negotiate difficult trade-offs to emerge stronger and more resilient.



Future of Food

By Nadya Low

With the increased attention and awareness for the need for a shift towards more eco-conscious and sustainable lifestyles, the food sector has inevitably been part of the discussion for the future of food

The production and consumption of meat seem to have come to the foreground, sometimes even demonised, as deep-seated believers push for social change in the form of diets that are purportedly better for the environment. We get served with statistics on how many gallons of water it takes to produce a pound of beef, pork or chicken (1800, 718 and 518 gallons per pound respectively), the carbon footprint (6.61, 1.72 and 1.26 pounds of carbon dioxide per serving of beef, pork and poultry respectively), pollution and emissions of the process of factory farming, the inhumane living conditions that livestock are subjected to, as well as the health benefits that come with rejecting such an overall detrimental lifestyle.

Undoubtedly, the resources associated with growing crops to feed livestock, as well as the greenhouse gases (mainly methane and carbon dioxide) produced by rearing animals contribute to the climate crisis. Beyond our carbon emission footprint, our water footprint includes both direct and virtual water use. Direct water use is probably what we're familiar with, having been told the importance of Singapore's Four National Taps and the ways to reduce water usage in the shower and brushing our teeth. Virtual water use, however, is much less simple to identify and reduce, and includes the water used to produce the food we eat, the clothes we wear, and other appliances, devices and products we buy.

Plant-based Diets & Veganism

It is for the sake of reducing harm to animals and the environment that veganism has become more than one of the many health diets to adopt, at least according to social media (alongside paleo, keto, gluten-free etc). Besides avoiding meat and animal-derived food products like dairy and honey, the lifestyle of veganism includes clothing and non-food items, obviously seen in the marketing of products like vegan leather and vegan-friendly cosmetics, toiletries and skincare products. The difference in the nuances between using the labels “vegan” and “vegetarian” seems to go beyond the strictness of the diet; both labels, especially “veganism”, are also a social alignment within a community.

“Unfortunately, companies use this loosely-defined term for non-food products, where it is unclear if “vegan” means non-animal-tested, cruelty-free, or only containing non-animal-derived plant-based ingredients as in the original food definition of the term.”

The Certified Vegan Logo by Vegan Action guarantees such criteria, but, as we know, certification processes create more administrative work and costs. Like other parts of the sustainability movement that centre on the consumption of alternative and more ‘green’ products, a vegan diet seems but a fad for the upper-middle class, only open for consideration for the niche group that can afford such a lifestyle. In addition, going vegan requires substantial knowledge regarding nutrition to avoid health risks, and not everyone has the resources to consider dietitians, nutritionists, or the price point of alternative sources of protein, calcium and iron to prevent health repercussions.

Additionally, not all veggies are equal. Fertilisers are often made from fossil fuels, and plants that require more water in turn require more energy for

water filtration, pumping and irrigation. Where the land is used for agriculture also makes a difference. The increased demand for specific plant products, such as quinoa—championed by the health food industry—could result in additional deforestation in order to grow more profitable crops.

Cruelty-free and environmentally friendly: The contradictions

As for animal products, while ethical farming aims to improve the production of meat for human health, the environment, and livestock, attempting to optimise so many variables just isn’t always possible. Ruminant animals like cows and goats have two stomachs, meaning that they ferment food in a specialised stomach prior to digestion, releasing methane in the process. Grass-fed cattle might sound like they make for better beef, but since grass-fed animals mature more slowly, they spend more time on earth, thus producing



more methane. Free-range chickens do get better health conditions from the increased physical activity, but they eat more as a result, relying on more feed which is ultimately worse for the environment.

In terms of land-use, ethical farming uses more land than traditional farming, and up to 99% more land than cultured lab-grown artificial meat. This land used to rear animals and cultivate crops used for livestock feed could instead be used for reforestation, where natural vegetation serves as carbon-storage reservoirs—through carbon sequestration—where carbon dioxide is removed from the atmosphere and stored as forest biomass. In line with more optimised land-use, could cultured and cultivated lab-grown meat and plant-based alternatives be better?

Food-tech: the solution towards more sustainable food?

Food is intrinsically linked to culture. Think about the food that nourishes your soul and it probably brings back memories of childhood or the nostalgia of youth, where the food played an important role beyond serving as physical sustenance. A friend of mine recently recounted how their Muslim father and grandmother learnt how to make fishballs from scratch after their mother converted to Islam after marrying and could no longer eat at her favourite fishball noodle stall. We form deep connections with food and it is through food that love is expressed especially in Asian culture: in both the preparation and consumption of our gastronomic heritage. A blanket ban on certain food products would thus definitely alter our relationship with food.

For this reason, switching meat-eaters to meat and dairy alternatives seems like the most straightforward solution, as technological advancements allow alternative protein to be produced more efficiently. This efficiency is measured in terms of reduced

greenhouse gas emissions compared to traditional meat. With the potential of R&D, products that mimic the taste and texture of meat are a great alternative that doesn't require changing tastes and preferences. Alternative proteins from cricket and microalgae to produce flour also have great potential to introduce unconventional protein sources in familiar bakery products.

However, due to the chemical-intensive and energy-intensive processes that go into alternative protein products such as Impossible, Beyond, Omni, TiNDLE, Quorn, the carbon dioxide emitted might be even larger than that of traditional protein products, unless renewable energy sources are used. The additional fats, salt and sugar that go into making processed foods also make any health benefits that come with plant-based diets questionable, compared to switching to whole foods like legumes and nuts that are natural and provide protein without the heavy processing.

Food security and local produce

Outside of food production, the carbon footprint of products is also influenced by logistics and transportation. Imported food would yield a larger carbon footprint simply because they are flown or shipped longer distances than local produce, especially those that are easily perishable and require more refrigerated storage. Air transport is nine times more carbon-intensive per tonne-kilometre than land transport, and about 50 times that of sea transport. Because only 9% of Singapore's fish is locally produced, its carbon footprint is considerably high. According to a study by Deloitte and A*STAR SIMTech, the consumption of fish accounted for the fourth highest total greenhouse gas emissions in Singapore out of 13 food items, just behind chicken, and ahead of beef.

In line with Singapore's 30-by-30 vision, with the aim of producing 30% of Singapore's nutritional needs by 2030, local produce such as from urban vertical farms like Sustenir, Kalera, Citiponics and Sky Greens has been contributing to the increased production of local veggies, while Eat Just's cell-cultured chicken is slated to be produced in a new Singapore facility in 2023.

Yet the solution isn't as straightforward as supporting local or eating locally produced food. Again, the carbon and water footprints of food depend on the energy sources used in their production, where food produced using renewable energy overseas could offset the environmental costs of its transport.

The Climate diet

Ultimately, it seems like there is no one-size-fits-all solution to food sustainability. Due to the multi-faceted nature of the food industry, from its cultivation, harvesting, processing, to transportation, there are many variables to consider before a single product's environmental impact can be determined. Amidst all of this, the climate diet seems the most promising compromise between social and environmental sustainability: developed by the EAT-Lancet Commission in 2018, it prioritises both health and environmental sustainability and suggests a “planetary health plate” that consists of half a plate of vegetables and fruits, and the other half primarily of whole grains, plant protein, unsaturated plant oils, and optionally animal protein. As such, instead of advocating for a fully plant-based diet, the climate diet promotes a ‘flexitarian’ diet that can include fish, meat and dairy foods, especially considering specific local and regional contexts.



Concluding thoughts on food sustainability

In conclusion, while there is no universal solution to the best route to achieving food sustainability, as consumers (and perhaps people venturing into the food industry in the future?), being aware of the various factors that contribute to the overall sustainability of our food will allow us to make well-informed food decisions. Ultimately, we as a society can only strive for improvement as opposed to perfection, with the understanding that the balance between ecological sustainability, cultural preservation, nutritional health and financial costs will be different between individuals.



Future of Fashion

by Caitlin Jee

What's the first thing you notice when meeting someone new? Is it their face, their hair, their clothes? Or maybe a mix of all of the above?

Until just a while ago, our clothes were the most noticeable thing people could judge us on since half our faces were always covered by masks. Within a few seconds of meeting, others could already form whole impressions of us based purely on our recipe of clothes and accessories. It's no wonder that some people would

want to adorn their best look, one that uniquely represents their personal style, when meeting new people. Many people place a heavy emphasis on what they consider to be their own fashion sense, and on strictly adhering to it. Given how important first impressions are, it's no surprise that our fashion sense is a big part of our identity.

Over the years, there have been so many fashion trends popping up, from goth to dark academia, and acubi to Y2K... Most of

these are trendy for a few years max, and then they're lost to fashion magazines of the past. What about you, reader? Do you stick to the style that you think fits you most? Have you considered trying out different styles before? Or, are clothes just too expensive and too short-lived to be worth buying anymore? Even so, caring about one's appearance and fashion is still a way to let others know about our beliefs and lifestyles, and to let the world know about ourselves without having to say a word.

For us, especially the younger generation, fashion is a way of self-expression; our clothes reflect our current mood and style. As we grow and meet more people, our sense of self changes, and so too does our fashion sense, which naturally leads to buying new clothes to experiment with different styles.

Then again, this lifestyle of people chasing the latest fashion trends can be heavy on the wallet, especially if the clothes we envision ourselves in are on the higher end of the market. Thus, not everyone can dress how they actually want. At the same time, we are constantly under pressure to regularly update our wardrobes to keep up with current trends in order to fit in. This has led to Gen Z being one of the top consumers of fast fashion. According to a report by market research firm Mintel, Gen Z, referring to those born between 1997 and 2010, buys more clothes than the older generations, with the average Gen Zer owning hundreds of dollars worth of outfits that are never worn at all.

In case you aren't familiar, fast fashion describes how the clothing industry will generate new clothes that imitate current trends at a low cost, bringing them to stores quickly and cheaply while demand for them is high. Synthetic fibres used in manufacturing these clothes have steered the fashion industry to prioritize profits and overconsumption, ignoring any adverse effects on the environment and human health. Despite fast fashion's poor quality, people turn a blind eye to overconsumption in favour of its inexpensive prices and a vast selection of styles. This leads to problems such as excessive greenhouse gas emissions due to the burning of discarded clothing, water pollution from untreated dye and chemical dumping, as well as waste management problems from the disposal of large amounts of unwanted clothing. Ultimately, money is what drives fast fashion and keeps its wheels turning.

While a sustainable alternative would be to buy more expensive clothing that can last longer and are ethically manufactured, most people can't afford to do that. With more important things like rent and food taking the bulk of their salaries, our first instinct would be to buy cheap clothes from fast fashion brands such as H&M when we need them. With major corporations prioritizing profits and with many people having no choice but to buy cheap yet unsustainable clothing, is there any hope of fashion moving from a culture of overconsumption to a more circular industry?

Well, with more research into biodegradable materials, this hope can most likely turn into reality.



In September 2022, at the finale of Coperni's fashion show, model Bella Hadid walked the runway in a spray-painted dress, with adjustments made such as cutting a slit in the dress and pulling down the sleeves for the off-shoulder look. This was made possible with Fabrican — a liquid fibre bound together with polymers, biopolymers, and greener solvents that evaporates when it comes into contact with surfaces. Using 3-D technology, Fabrican was sprayed and built on Bella Hadid's body. This spray-on material can be washed, reused, and dissolved for re-spraying when the garment reaches the end of its use, thus responding to the concerns regarding sustainability in the fashion industry.

This is a great example of how fashion and technology can work hand in hand to solve the issue of overconsumption. I believe this quote from the Coperni show notes summarises it best:

“Fashion designers need new materials and fabrics to create products to address evolving lifestyles and consumer demands. In the 21st century, we should make it the first time that science and design really march together in close step, illustrating in this way their interdependence.”



In fashion, this technology could be used to create clothing, or even repair damaged clothing as an alternative to mass clothes dumping. And that's not even touching on its possibilities in other sectors, such as healthcare and manufacturing. What else could more research in fashion technology lead to? Detachable 3D-printed clothes that fit our exact measurements? Zero-waste virtual garments? Temperature-changing smart fabrics? The good news is, all of these are currently being researched, so the future possibilities are endless.

Nevertheless, such options are not yet accessible to the general public. Fortunately, there are a few more sustainable and affordable options in Singapore that are available. One such option is thrifting. While Singapore is known for its branded fashion and designer clothes, it's no surprise that there has been a rise in thrifting here to combat the surge in clothing prices. There are numerous physical and online thrift stores available to shop at and sell to. If thrift stores aren't your thing, there are numerous eco-friendly and ethical fashion

brands in Singapore where we can shop for new clothes, if our wallets permit it. Other than that, online markets such as Carousell are always options for renting different types of clothes to try out, buy second-hand clothes, or sell clothes instead of throwing them away. Even exchanging clothes with friends would be a nice idea for a hangout session if you want to try out new styles. We don't always have to break the bank to try different styles or get new clothes—there are many options available if we want to update our fashion sense, and yet still be sustainable.

From where we stand, the future of fashion looks bleak and yet, optimistic. Heavy importance on profits drives businesses to manufacture clothing unethically with no regard for its effects on the environment and human health. Despite that, there are still innovative and sustainable options being discovered all the time. Regardless of your fashion sense, there is still a lot of freedom in choosing more sustainable and green options. After all, isn't fashion about having the freedom to choose what we want to wear?



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