



ISSUE 57

CAMPUS

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ARTWORK BY CRUDDY



CRUDDY

STUDY IN THE UK:

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Other than banks, you can find additional businesses that will lend you money for education such as NTUC (National Trades Union Congress) and TCC (The Credit Co-operative). These differ from banks and other financial institutions because of the personal assistance provided.



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ISSUE 57 | DEC '18 CONTENTS

Check our website
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02: Cult or Generational Trend?

Urban yoga and activewear

03: 6 Degrees of K-Pop Session

What type of fan are you?



05: Cult Brands

Selling a religious experience

06: Creepy Cults

Not for the faint of heart

17: A New World Order

The populist cult

08: Street Cred

The cult of streetwear

18: Frenzied Fans

Music acts with cult following

09: Cult Figures

Collectible vinyl toys

19: 4 Films to

...bring out the cult movie fan

10: The Cult of Giving

Has giving become a mindless cult?

20: 7 Cult Rituals

that pushed limits of normal

11: Harry Potter and the Order of the Fans

The irresistible appeal of the fantasy fandom

13: Bark or Bite

A look into Tarantino's cult films

16: Hollywood's Secret Cults

Celebrities in Cults

REGULAR STUFF:

04: Cheat Sheet:

What makes a cult

12: The List:

Top 5 Air Jordans

14: Out & About

21: Stress Relief



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CULT OR A GENERATIONAL TREND?

BY CHERYL TAN

The global phenomenon of Urban Yoga and Activewear



The term "cult" usually refers to a social group defined by its beliefs (be it religious, spiritual or philosophical), or its common interest in a particular personality, object, or goal. With the boom of the activewear industry, a certain age-old discipline has also risen to fame across the globe: Yoga, a traditional practice originating from India that has become the poster child for health and wellness, promoting a stronger sense of mental clarity, physical fitness, flexibility, and strength.

THE CULT OF ACTIVWEAR

Lululemon. The wildly popular activewear brand that has gained a huge following globally since opening its first store in Vancouver back in 2000. An activewear giant that has created a brand that promotes a lifestyle built around embracing positive mantras, practising self-care, and creating a community of fashion-conscious urban yogis.

Let's face it. One way or another, we have all been a participant in this phenomenon. Whether we have worn an over-priced contour-pleasing pair of tights, attended a free in-store or outdoor yoga class, or passed a stranger on the street carrying the company's reusable shopping bag with inspiring slogans like "Do one thing everyday that scares you".

In the midst of pursuing the aesthetic lifestyle of an urban yogi (with \$98 butt-hugging tights, a matching crop top and an overpriced padded yoga mat), have we lost the intention behind the traditional practice of yoga? Have we allowed activewear apparel giants succeed in feeding society's hunger for narcissism instead of digging deeper and asking ourselves what genuine values yoga embodies?

Are we practising yoga for asceticism and self discovery? Or is yoga an afterthought and a justified excuse for purchasing pricey workout apparel; a case of enclotted cognition – donning expensive activewear to look and feel the part of an urban yogi dedicated to the discipline.

MINDFULNESS FOR THE MASSES?

These successful apparel giants may have cashed in on the health and wellness boom and they may not necessarily promote the true ascetic principles of traditional yoga, but they should certainly be credited for opening up the practice of yoga to thousands of people around the world and introducing the concept of "mindfulness" and "being present" to a fast-paced society that is surely crying for a socially acceptable outlet to pause and reflect on life.

REDEFINING YOGA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

At this point, maybe we need to pause and re-think our motivations for practising yoga. The fundamental philosophy of yoga encourages being non-judgmental and compassionate to others and ourselves. Yoga is not about perfection or performing a beautiful pose to show other people on Instagram. It's not a competition of flexibility, nor is it about comparing yourself to the person next to you in yoga class.

Rather, this traditional discipline is about becoming attuned to our individual self, in body and mind, to practise mindfulness (2018 word of the year!) and making room for exactly where we are, while letting go of judgement. The more we do yoga, the more we can recognise that even our own states can change day to day, moment to moment.

When we strip down the facade of successful activewear companies such as Lululemon or Aloyoga, it is more than just that \$129 pair of sculpting tights you are purchasing. We are buying into a lifestyle, into a community of people from all walks of life that are attracted to yoga for various intentions; whether for the superficial image of just looking good in a form-fitting pair of tights while doing a "downward dog" pose, or genuinely seeking to practise "mindfulness".



6 DEGREES OF KPOP-SESSION

BY LYDIA TAN

Kpop fans: you either hate 'em...or you're one of them. As someone who has fallen deep down the Kpop rabbit hole for several years now, I've seen my fair share of crazy Kpop fans and trust me, Kpop fans can get to a whole other level of crazy. So here are the six levels of extreme Kpop fan tropes that you will inevitably encounter when you join the fandom.

1 the fomo fan

This is the tamest out of the whole spectrum of extreme Kpop fan types. These are the fans who will make time to attend every single opportunity to meet their idols up close; they're the ones you'll see at the airport or at every concert/fan meeting event. They are also the fans who will spend their money on all the merchandise their faves put out – some even have dedicated Kpop "shrines" in their rooms for their precious growing collection of albums, lightsticks, posters etc.

2 the "love is blind" fan

This next level are the fans who are so infatuated with their idols and view them as literally perfect in their eyes. When an idol gets involved in a "scandal" or gets flak for something he/she did or said, you will see these fans all up in the comments defending their idols with a list of reasons why it wasn't their fault. It doesn't matter if the idol brought the controversy upon themselves due to their own recklessness; to these fans, their idols are flawless angels that can do no wrong, thus they feel it is their moral duty as fans to defend and protect them.



3 the landmine fan

One note of caution: You never want to mess with these fans. If you so much as disagree with anything about their idols, you'll immediately be labelled as a hater. Criticise a certain group's song or don't fancy a member's looks? Hater status confirmed. Be prepared for an onslaught of mean comments coming your way. These fans sometimes can be an extension of the "love is blind" fan – their delusional, perfect ideal of their idols can result in them shutting down anyone else who thinks otherwise.

4 the thirsty AF fan

This is where things get borderline creepy. These are the fans who can get quite TMI in expressing how much they love their idols. I'm going to spare you the details but just scroll the comments section of any Kpop-related video and you'll see what I mean. These are usually the fangirls who see their idols as more than just oppas, they are their husbands, boyfriends, or even sons.

Every fandom is not without its own crazy extreme fans but hey, that's what makes them unique! Sure, these fans might not have such a good reputation and might do some questionable things but they add to the drama and excitement of belonging in a fandom. In fact, most of us Kpop fans are actually nice, logical people who stay within the boundaries of being a fan. So come be a part of us, we don't bite...

5 the koreaboo

Ever heard of the term "weeaboo"? A koreaboo is the Korean equivalent, it refers to non-Korean people who try too hard to be Korean, to the point that they truly believe they are Korean and end up forsaking their own culture. This usually results in people making a cringey fool of themselves trying to portray what they think Koreans are like, based on what they think they know from Kpop/Korean entertainment or stereotypical tropes portrayed in the media.

6 the sasaeng

This is the epitome of obsessed Kpop fans, so much that I don't think they deserve the title of "fan" anymore. The term "sasaeng" comes from the Korean word for "private life" and they describe people who go to crazy extents to get their idols' attention. These include harassing or stalking idols, breaking into their dorms to steal their belongings, almost poisoning them and even sending them letters written in their own menstrual blood. Well, if they really want to be remembered by their idols, they sure will be remembered – just not in a positive way.



Mention the word 'cult', and most of us would either immediately think of famously weird cult groups, or cult collectible items. Both are correct, since they both have a loyal following who worship the 'brand', and would spend money and time on them. So how do we distinguish a cult from, say, a religion or a product? Much like hipsters, you can spot one by how mad they get when you call them hipsters. Cults don't call themselves cults - they call themselves churches, or clubs, or your friends, because no one logically joins a cult on purpose. To help you on your way, here are some hallmarks of classic cults.

Cheat Sheet

#57 What makes a cult?

THEIR RECRUITMENT TACTIC

Some groups use stress and personality tests to garner recruits, targeting people who are suffering (ie. those who have issues with relationships, career, etc) or are at their low point in life. Some groups tailor their pitch to present their cult as being an exact fit for a newbie's insecurities: cult sneaker brands make you feel like you're part of an exclusive group so you don't feel isolated. Even smart people can be swayed - for instance, Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo's members included wealthy businessmen and otaku (nerds) in the science and tech sector.



THEIR IDEOLOGY

Groups can become dangerous cults when they are deceptive, dangerous, and oppose the basic rules of society. Cults often teach an ideology that they are the only ones who know the 'truth' and that those against their teachings are 'evil' (or clueless).

In short, they brainwash their members. Scientologists, for instance, teach their members that human bodies contain evil aliens that are the cause of all physical and mental illness. Loyal fans of cult brands like Apple will swear by it, since they are only familiar with their operating system.

THEIR SECRET CODED LANGUAGE

Many cults use secret languages or code words to further isolate their members from society. Or the other way round. In the Red Pill cult - a group of hopeless men who simply want to bed women - members use secret terms like LMR (Last Minute Resistance) to describe a woman who rejected a sexual advance. Of course, fans of cult fandoms like Star Wars also have their own terminologies, like 'Use the Force'.



THEIR MEMBERSHIP FEES

While cults often rely on donations, many have a business model that provides a product or service for a fee to cement their staying power or recruit more members. Many cults make their members pay a percentage of their earnings, while some make members pay for 'classes', or implement monthly fees, or force their members to donate all their possessions. Some megachurches border on being a cult, but unlike cults, churches get tax breaks.

Some cults make a ton of money - for instance, Rancho Rajneesh (the cult featured in Netflix's 'Wild Wild Country') made US\$130 million, enough for its leader to buy Rolls Royces and private jets. Cult brands also make a ton of cash - Nike's Jordan Brand pushed Michael Jordan's net worth to US\$1.65 billion.



THEIR EXIT POLICY

Inevitably, some members catch on that they're part of a crazy cult and they want to get out. But it's not as easy as exiting the front door.

Many cults block their members from quitting - either because they don't want their extortion secrets leaked, or because they don't want to lose their monthly revenue - by imposing high exit costs or inducing fears of failure and isolation. Some crazier cults will also harass any ex-members who leave, especially if they publicly badmouth the organisation. In some cases, members had to physically jailbreak out of a compound. Luckily for members of cult collectibles like Bearbricks, the exit strategy is to simply not buy new toys.

CULT BRANDS:

BY ESHWARAN

Selling a religious experience

A// LACROIX

We have all heard our favourite American Youtubers and influencers mention this brand over and over again: LaCroix. It's an American sparkling drink - basically soda water with a hint of fruity flavour. While it's sought after today by social influencers, it wasn't always that popular.

It debuted in 1981, and they intentionally stuck to a youthful and vibrant design, hoping to steer away from the premier image of high-end brands like Perrier. It finally gained some traction in 2010, when the general public got more a bit more health conscious. With its fruity flavours and no sugar, there has been an unquenchable demand for it ever since.

The brand has stolen a huge amount of market share from other carbonated drinks, all while creating a huge youth trend. They did so by positioning themselves where it mattered most - being readily available at youth hotspots and getting online personalities to speak about their products. It's no wonder they gained a cult following.



B// APPLE

With large doors and high ceilings, one might say that an Apple store is a temple to the Apple experience. The wide-open spaces create a sense of grandeur and majesty; you can't help but feel like it's the beginning of an enlightenment.

Combined with reliable Apple geniuses and simple yet advanced products, it's no wonder so many people have joined the Apple cult. Apple helps you decide what you need, what to get, and delivers it in the most comfortable manner, leaving you with a peace of mind that you made the right choice.

Apple product announcements are a proper occasion; you are sent a mysterious invite, and then you gather in a large hall. One by one, products are rolled out to you, each meant to cater to your every need. These events are so large scale and so immersive, it creates a sense of awe.

Each Apple product seems to be built and programmed to work like magic. No technical jargon, no flashy numbers - just a pure, unfiltered experience.



Some brands have loyal fans who defy norms and conventions. Fans so loyal, they stake out overnight for the latest release, or only consume products that come from their beloved brands - because to them, nothing else compares. With a combination of hype-worthy products and social media marketing, these brands have created a following that is the envy of their competitors.

C// IKEA

When we think of home furnishing, the first name that pops to mind is IKEA. Though their products have funny names and are troublesome to assemble, IKEA is one of the biggest names in the business, with a cult following to back it up. The fact the IKEA handbook distributes more copies than the bible should be a good sign of their cult status.

IKEs are strategically placed and managed to ensure you fall in love with the brand. First, their outlets are isolated, so you don't simply go there on a whim. Secondly, their outlets are mazes filled with piles of cute products which forces you to take things slow. The piles of products actually sell, and create a high demand when people rush to get them.

Plus, the smell of food is pumped into the kitchen sets. This makes you imagine all the food you could make in that kitchen, making you more likely to purchase the products.

Above all, their products are DIY. When completed, they provide us a sense of achievement and appreciation. This drives us to come back and buy more, since we associate IKEA with those positive feelings.

No wonder IKEA is never empty, even on weekdays.



CULT OF PRODUCT AND EXPERIENCE

Consumers are picky and have high expectations, and the fact these brands have gained a following that can be labeled as cult-like speaks to the delivery of their products and the shopping experience. It's these unforgettable experience and products that will make consumers come back for more.

CREEPY CULTS

Not For The Faint Of Heart

Cults – The word alone sends shivers down our spines as we picture figures draped in robes, marching around a raging fire, eerily chanting in unison as they engage in a human sacrifice ritual to honour some strange god.

By definition, cults are a religion or religious sect that is considered unorthodox, spurious, or extremist, with its body of adherents living in an unconventional manner.

Over the decades, cults have baffled (and frightened) society with their unorthodox practices. Typical features of cult-like behaviour include excessive control of its members, a serious case of groupthink, submission, and even absurd gender roles that may lead to sexual exploitation.

Here are five cults whose extreme practices have led to some dramatic, and even tragic consequences.

HEAVEN'S GATE

Led by Marshall Herff Applewhite and Bonnie Nettles, the Heaven's Gate cult operated on a bizarre philosophy, based on Christian beliefs combined with UFO themes.

Applewhite believed that 2,000 years ago, Earth was visited by extra-terrestrial beings from the "Kingdom of Heaven". These extra-terrestrial beings allegedly commanded the mind of Jesus Christ. During the 1970s, Applewhite believed that the extra-terrestrial beings had returned to earth and that one of them was residing within his body.

Applewhite managed to convince his members that the only way to reach the "Kingdom of Heaven", also known as "The Next Level", was to leave their bodies. He believed that a spacecraft would take them to "The Next Level", and the only way to leave their bodies would be through suicide.

This led to an unfortunate incidence of mass suicide in March of 1997 when 39 members, who lived together, were found dead in their California mansion. The members were all dressed in black shirts, sweat pants and brand-new Nike Shoes. They all had one five-dollar bill and three quarters in their pockets.

SIMILAR ALIEN CULTS: Raelians believe that life on Earth was created by aliens called the Elohim, while Scientology preaches that an intergalactic dictator (Xenu) sent a bunch of aliens to earth to cause spiritual harm.

WORLD MISSION SOCIETY CHURCH OF GOD

Much controversy still surrounds the World Mission Society Church Of God (WMSCOG) – whether or not the organisation should be considered a cult remains debatable. However, some ex-followers have claimed that the church subjects its followers to mind control, and that church leaders allegedly controlled personal aspects of their lives, such as romantic relationships.

Established in Korea in 1964 by its founder Ahn-Sahn-Hong, the WMSCOG believes in "God The Father" and "God The Mother", and does not recognise Christmas or Easter. In the past few years, the WMSCOG has since expanded internationally, reaching over 7,000 people in 175 countries.

A PEOPLE magazine interview of 6 former WMSCOG members revealed that the church had attempted to isolate members from their family, and employed the use of brainwashing techniques. Members were encouraged to donate at least 10-15% of their income to the WMSCOG, and some ex-members claimed that they were encouraged to drop out of college, resign from their jobs and limit the time spent with families to recruit new members for the organisation.

SIMILAR CHRISTIAN CULTS: Korea-based Unification Church (aka Moonies) operated very similar to WMSCOG.

MATAMOROS HUMAN SACRIFICE CULT

Matamoros, a northeastern state in Mexico city, experienced a horrific shock with the gruesome news about a gruesome cult and its heinous murders in 1989.

It all began when pre-med student Mark Kilroy went missing during a spring break vacation. Weeks later, his remains were discovered in a remote ranch in the outskirts of Matamoros. His brain was found boiled in a cauldron filled with blood and other human bones.

This was when the Matamoros Human Sacrifice Cult came to light. Run by Adolfo Constanzo, known by cult members as El Padrino (The Godfather), the cult would often beat, shoot, or slash their victims, before viciously mutilating their bodies in a human sacrifice ritual. When Kilroy was found, about fifteen other mutilated corpses were discovered around the ranch.

Constanzo, who was said to be involved with drug smugglers outside Mexico, believed that these rituals would help protect them against the law. According to Serafin Hernandez, a member of the cult, such practices would make them "impermeable to bullets and untouchable by police." To escape being convicted by the law, Constanzo ordered his underling to kill him in 1990.

SIMILAR SACRIFICIAL CULTS: The Incas, Mayans, and Aztecs were famous for their human sacrifices – most of them children.

KU KLUX KLAN

Possibly one of the most well-known cults in history, the KKK is a cult that many are familiar with. Helmed by racist beliefs, the KKK is a white supremacist cult formed in 1866. When it was first established, the KKK would terrorise African-Americans who were newly freed from slavery. Some of their victims were even murdered.

In the 1920s, the KKK was said to be involved in several criminal conspiracies. However, the group managed to gain some form of political influence, electing sympathetic candidates to state offices. The group had gained a strong following in the Southern States such as Alabama, Louisiana and Texas.

Fast forward to present day, and the KKK is still an active organisation in the United States, with a membership ranging between 5,000-8,000 people. KKK rallies are still held frequently, and up to 2013, the KKK even hosted its own YouTube show titled The Andrew Show, a programme designed for children.

SIMILAR RACIST CULTS: Neo Nazis and white supremacist groups have similar agendas to the KKK, and are gaining more exposure in the Trump era.

CHILDREN OF GOD

Out of all the other cults mentioned above, the Children Of God cult probably adheres to the most perverse ideology. Founder David Berg established the cult in early 1969. Cult members, both adults and children, lived together in communal housing called "homes", with its occupants referred to as "families." At one point, COG had 130 communities around the world.

Basically, the COG was a cult of hippies engaging in sexual intercourse with children... while claiming to operate on Christian beliefs. Berg was so rooted in his philosophy, he allegedly engaged in sexual intercourse with his biological daughter. Members were encouraged to engage in sexual activities with children as young as 10 years old; sexual intercourse within biological families was not unusual. Parents were reassured that by allowing kids to explore sex, they were "raising children the natural way."

In addition, adultery was also encouraged. One of the cult's unorthodox recruitment practices included the concept of "flirty fishing", which involved female members having sex with men in an attempt to convert them.

SIMILAR SEX CULTS: The Rajneesh Movement was famous for its promotion of free sex (minus the minors).



BAPE

Established in 1993, Japanese streetwear label BAPE (A Bathing Ape) products include men's, women's and children's apparel, as well as accessories and lifestyle items. The label has expanded beyond Japan and now has stores in big cities like London, Hong Kong, France and New York City. Perhaps most known for their full-zip shark hoodies, the Japanese label recently launched a 13-piece capsule collection in collaboration with football club Paris Saint Germain (PSG). The recent collaboration, which celebrates the opening of BAPE's new store in the Le Marais district, pays tribute to France through its adaptation of a blue, red and white color palette. A small Eiffel Tower makes its guest appearance on the left breast of the co-branded BAPE shark hoodie.



OFF-WHITE

Founded just 6 years ago, the label Off-White was established by Virgil Abloh. The DJ, graphic designer, architect and creative director previously owned Pyrex Vision, before starting to work on the iconic fashion label we know today as Off-White.

Inspired by structural forms and his desire to re-visualize streetwear, Abloh conceptualised Off-White's logo by using a familiar element we often see in daily life: black and white striped lines. Abloh's logo proved to be a success when T-shirts bearing the black and white lines sold out quickly — proving the designer's ability to create an association to the brand that resonated with fashion enthusiasts.



[BY NATALIE KWAN]

STREET CRED

The cult of streetwear

Cop or drop? Streetwear is a fashion trend that has been consistently thriving and it seems that this trend is here to stay. Every time an iconic streetwear favourite like Supreme has a web drop, it's often quickly snapped up within seconds. Streetwear aficionados are willing to spend hundreds and thousands of dollars on apparel, and pieces from popular brands are highly coveted, fetching some insane prices on the resell market.

We talk about some iconic streetwear brands that you've probably heard of at least once.

Hopefully after reading this, you'll have something to talk about with the hypebeasts and hypebaes in school.



SUPREME

The name Supreme is almost synonymous with the word streetwear. Established in 1994, Supreme's first store was located in Manhattan, New York City. The core of the brand was deeply rooted skate culture, and prided itself for its hype quality. Today, a simple T-shirt with the Supreme boxed logo printed on it can fetch up to US\$950 on eBay.

Perhaps you remember the Louis Vuitton and Supreme collaboration in early 2017, which shook up the streetwear scene and soon came to be recognised as one of the hype-est collaborations in history. Personally, the Louis Vuitton X Supreme Red Epi Keepall Bandouliere Duffle Bag struck me as the most iconic item in the collection back then. It now fetches up to US\$14,775 at online resellers.

Recently, Supreme teamed up with The North Face to release their Expedition collection — a series of jackets, fleeces and pants. Released on November 29, 2018 in Brooklyn, L.A. London and Paris, the Supreme x The North Face Fall 2018 collection sold out almost instantly and is now only available through resellers.



PALACE

Palace started out as a skate brand, and is recognised today by its distinctive triangle logo designed by London illustrator Fergus Purcell. The brand is relatively young, having only been established in the late 2000s, but has opened stores in big cities like London and New York City since then.

Palace drops also tend to sell out rather quickly, and if trying to 'cop' the merchandise online does not work, Palace fans who reside in reasonable proximity to the store can join the line and hope to land their hands on the coveted items they were hoping for.

The skate/streetwear brand recently collaborated with preppy American label Polo Ralph Lauren, releasing an iconic collection of menswear items including tops, trousers, outerwear and accessories, plus a classic Polo Oxford button-down shirt featuring the logos of both brands.

You don't often imagine grown men plonking down hundreds of dollars on toys, especially when most of these buyers don't even open the boxes. However, many of these toys are considered pieces of art, and on online auction sites, the price appreciation — which normally takes years for traditional art — can occur overnight.

You may recognise names like KAWS or Bearbricks, or have seen vinyl toys that sport skulls and innards, or parody pop culture icons like Snoopy and Mickey Mouse. They are also inextricably linked to hype-worthy streetwear brands like Supreme, BAPE, and Nike, or even Uniqlo.

Typically issued in limited edition (usually a few hundred), the toys are meant for display, not play. But where did these come from, and what is the hype?



CULT FIGURES

The Designer Toy

Released in 2001, the BE@RBRICK series — by Japan's Medicom Toy — resembles a bear-headed Lego figurine. At 7cm high, it comes in sizes like 50% and 1000%.

Some of the most valuable BE@RBRICKs are their 1000% sizes, made in collaboration with brands like Billionaire Boys Club, Nike, and Chanel. An October 2018 collab with READYMADE x BAPE retailed for US\$2,700, and on eBay it was US\$13,000, while the 2009 a pure stainless steel collab with Japan's The Black Sense Market retailed at over US\$43,000!



The iconic KAWS Companion (created by American artist Brian Donnelly), which resembles a clown-like Mickey Mouse, debuted in 1999 with 500 pieces. Originally designed for Bounty Hunter and sold for under US\$200, today it easily sells for over US\$2,500.

Since then, prices continue to skyrocket. For example, KAWS' Companion Boba Fett retailed at US\$200, but is now valued at US\$10,650. A Medicom x KAWS collab piece which retailed at US\$3,000 recently sold at auction for over US\$25,000!

Limiting supplies creates the hype; when New York's MoMA (Museum of Modern Art) announced that they had limited supplies of the US\$200 KAWS Companion, buyers crashed their website.

BY YIN LOON



The origin story

Collectible vinyl toys came about in the mid-1990s Japan when streetwear brand Bounty Hunter sold limited-edition toys along with their urban clothing line. A few years later, Hong Kong artist Michael Lau sparked a cult toy phenomenon with his Gardeners line which featured handmade streetwear at a time when hip-hop culture was the hype.

Thanks to the low-cost production and easy customisation, vinyl toys soon inspired a new generation of designers to conceive of their own vinyl icons.

Today, most collectible toys are made by names like Medicom Toys, Kidrobot, Funko, as well as homegrown labels like Mighty Jaxx and Flabslab. In addition to collaborating with artists, brands like Funko and Kidrobot also release collectible collabs with pop culture icons like Street Fighter, Rick and Morty, or Hello Kitty.

For beginner toy collectors, there are blind boxes from brands like Kidrobot, Mighty Jaxx, and Medicom that retail at just S\$10-\$20. But serious collectors head for big ticket items.

Vinyl toys can be bought online via retailers like Kidrobot, Flabslab or Mighty Jaxx — but don't be surprised if popular items sell out fast, only to be listed on resell or auction sites like eBay or StockX.

Other designers and producers

Other artists are also making their mark in the toy world, including Sebastian Burdon (aka Whatshisname), Jason Freeny, Ron English and Takashi Murakami.

Burdon is probably most known for his balloon dog figures (aka POPEk), while Freeny is known for his dissected figures of pop icons like Mario Bros and Mickey Mouse. English is a prolific artist whose toys feature his signature skull grin, while Murakami's brightly coloured artworks influence his vinyl toy line called Mr. Dob.

Often retailing between US\$100-\$500 (depending on rarity), their toys tend to sell out almost instantaneously and resell for over US\$1,000. They have not only collaborated with brands like Nike, Billionaire Boys Club and BAPE, but also with fellow artists.

Whether it's for the hype, the artistry, or simply the resale value, collectors often follow upcoming releases in order to snag the next drop. These collectible figurines have captured the essence of zeitgeists past and present, thanks to their associations to mainstream fashion and entertainment labels. Like streetwear labels, they continue to ride the hype wave.

THE CULT OF GIVING

HAS CHARITY BECOME A MINDLESS CULT?

DO WE GIVE FOR OTHERS, OR FOR OURSELVES?

These children have been portrayed in such a way by volunteers that they have been denied individuality and have become photo props to help project a certain self-image, a plot device in a structured narrative.

Talking about their experiences, people often don't mention the beneficiaries or their individual struggles, but rather, they talk about themselves making a change and what a humbling and tough experience it was for them. One often sees inspiring pictures of friends building schools and teaching children, rather than pictures of individual beneficiaries.

In this manner, giving has become centred on the giver rather than the beneficiary, thus the motivation behind giving has to be questioned, as lurking behind this constructed façade is an empty hypocrisy.

Ultimately, people don't give to make others feel better by responding to their material lack, but to make themselves feel better by feeding their own psychological need.

HOW DO WE JUSTIFY GIVING? WHO NEEDS IT?

People tend to romanticise giving by considering themselves to be generous, and the beneficiaries to be pitiful. They are helpless, we help. They receive, we give. Behind this lies condescending attitudes of assumed power hierarchies used to justify giving, predicated on assumptions that some people and places are inherently inferior and in need just because they are different, and don't align with our preconceived notions of development or happiness.

While many people genuinely do require aid, one should never become complacent in assuming that everyone needs help simply because you deem them as such.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE GIVE MINDLESSLY?

Cautionary tales warn against failing to contemplate: who *needs* help, is giving *justified*, and is it *effective*?

For example, American missionary John Chau was killed during a self-initiated mission trip to North Sentinel Island by the indigenous islanders in his attempts to approach them. Armed with gifts, food, toys, and his Bible, Chau acted on his own will to 'better' their lives and offer help in the form of evangelism, not realising that his actions were shrouded with the insidious shadow of colonisation, or at least Western cultural imperialism.

Despite clear hostility and resistance from the Sentinelese, Chau repeatedly attempted to force his help onto them, believing it was best for them. Rather, giving becomes an imposition of one's own ideals.

Also, Chau approached despite knowing that his contact with the Sentinelese would likely wipe out their population, since isolated societies like theirs lack immunity to pathogens carried in modern man. In such a context, 'giving' becomes thoughtless, imposing, and selfish rather than generous.

Picture this: it's that time of the year, you open Instagram and you're bombarded with a barrage of posts by friends who've gone for Overseas Community Involvement Programmes (OCIPs) - their beaming faces posited front and centre, a Messiah figure, framed by the many interchangeable faces of barefoot, skinny children in tattered clothes.

This blind giving never considered that the Sentinelese could actually be content with their way of life/religion/social system, and didn't want an ignorant foreigner's ideals imposed onto them.

In another example of blind giving, take a look at Habitat for Humanity. What most people don't know is that "Habitat homeowners" have to buy their own houses, pay their own mortgages, and perform "sweat equity", i.e. demonstrate their active participation by helping build their own homes. Since beneficiaries are putting in both the work and the money, this begs the question... where are the efforts and monies of volunteers and donors really going to?



WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN GIVING AID?

Don't get me wrong, I am hugely passionate about social work and I feel it's something everyone should do, but what has to be established first is proper **research, knowledge and respect**. Conducting thorough research such as how the organisation is run, how the donations flow to the beneficiaries (whether as cash or other kinds of aid), helps one give thoughtfully and donate carefully! After all, who can forget the scandalous case of embezzlement back in 2005 which shot NKF to notoriety and shook public confidence?

When giving, **don't forcefully impose, be ignorant, condescending, or hypocritical**. Never blindly assume that others unequivocally require and want our aid.

National Kidney Foundation

Habitat for Humanity

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE FANS

The irresistible appeal of the fantasy cult fandom

What better time to talk about the massive cult following of the Harry Potter franchise than now, with Potterheads packing the cinemas to catch the long-awaited release of *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*? (Guilty, I'm one of those fanatics who squealed throughout.)

Though author J.K. Rowling originally intended the books to be marketed to tweens, the fanbase has become a real motley crew - read and adored by all ages, all genders, all cultures, and from all over.

But how did Harry Potter reach its cult status? Professor Michael Drout, an expert on fantasy literature, states: "Harry Potter is a social phenomenon because the generation grew up reading the books together."



Pottermania Stats

As of 2018, having sold more than **500 million copies** worldwide, the series is the best-selling in history. It's been translated into **over 80 languages**, and the last four books have set consecutive records as the fastest-selling books in history. J.K. Rowling is the **world's first billionaire author**, and was named the **"Most Influential Woman in Britain"** in October 2010.

Potterheads - what is it about Harry Potter that they love?

The immersive, fantastical Wondrous World universe is entirely built by the imaginative mind of Rowling. Even though the first book was published in 1997, the universe is still expanding. This universe includes (but is not limited to):

- Seven Harry Potter books
- The eight-part film series starring Daniel Radcliffe
- A play (*Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*)
- Travelling exhibitions (which visited Singapore in 2012)
- A digital platform (Pottermore)
- A series of spin-off films (*Fantastic Beasts*)
- In-universe books (*Quidditch Through the Ages*, *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*)
- Theme parks and attractions (*The Wizarding World of Harry Potter* at Universal Studios)



WHAT CRAZY THINGS DO THEY DO?

While all cult fandoms are considerably frenzied, Potterheads are markedly more mild than other fans such as those of Kpop, boybands, or even football. They are the docile cousins in a family of aggressive, banner-waving, light stick-wielding, costume-donning, car-chasing, fan chanting fanatics. However, that's not to say Potterheads don't have their fair share of crazy.

Besides reacting at lightning-fast speed when it comes to supporting new releases, fans have also been known to swarm landmarks that have played a part in inspiring Rowling. I have personally visited the Lello Bookshop in Porto, which inspired the grand Hogwarts library, as well as The Elephant House café in Scotland, where Rowling sat writing her early novels while overlooking the Edinburgh Castle, which is said to have inspired Hogwarts itself. Both have evolved into tourist attractions, and fans have to queue up and even pay entry fees to take a look inside!



When I visited London earlier this year, I rushed to the famous Platform 9¾ at King's Cross train station to see the famous wall - a portal for young witches and wizards to board the magical Hogwarts Express. What I wasn't prepared for was just how long the queues were, for both the merchandise shop and to take pictures with the famous trolley. With a few hundred fans there that day, the queues snaked around the station, and I never got my picture running through the wall for the Hogwarts Express.

Whilst there, I also tried to catch *The Cursed Child* at the Palace Theatre, but tickets were sold out for weeks, even though the play premiered in 2016. The undying fervour of the legions of fans never ceases to amaze me. All over the world, hordes of fans flock to The Wizarding World of Harry Potter - Universal Studios' themed attraction. Decked out in tell-tale Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin robes (which are really pricey), fans pay very hefty prices just to see the beloved Diagon Alley and the hallowed halls of Hogwarts, and of course to get a taste of Butterbeer!



While Potterheads aren't the most fanatical extremists, they do spend massive amounts of time and money to be part of the universe which is still growing. Fans took to Twitter and social media to rave about *Fantastic Beasts 2*, even before its release. Fans are even willing to dole out US\$240 to get memorabilia like Hedwig's cage to feel like a part of its world.

Twenty years on, fans are still obsessed about the cult of the boy wizard, and it seems like the Harry Potter universe will have life in the real world for a very long time.

THE LIST

BY FAZLI RAHMAT

TOP 5 AIR JORDANS OF THIS ERA

5. AIR JORDAN 4 RETRO OG 'CEMENT' 2016

This was one of the original four colourways that was released in 1989. Complete with never-before-seen 'wings' that act as lace locks, this retro features the 'Nike Air' branding on the heel, just like the 1989 OG models. The shoe appeared in Spike Lee's film *Do The Right Thing*, transcending the game of basketball to make an impact in pop culture.

Released in 2016. Retailled at US\$235, resells at an average of US\$450.



4. AIR JORDAN 11 RETRO 'WIN LIKE' 82'

Michael Jordan's habit of lofting game-winning shots started when the 19-year old nailed a slam dunk to put North Carolina's own Tar Heels up for good during the 1982 NCAA Championship game. The Air Jordan 11 Retro 'Win Like' 82' celebrates the beginning of MJ's victorious matches, featuring the UNC team colours on a traditional Air Jordan 11 build.

Released in 2017. Retailled at US\$220, resells at an average of US\$300.



3. AIR JORDAN 3 RETRO 'HALL OF FAME'

This was once exclusively auctioned in 2006 to support Hurricane Katrina relief efforts and made a comeback this year to honour MJ's humanitarian efforts. This was the first sneaker to sport the famed Jumpman logo, and the Jordan brand might not today without it. The origins of the Jumpman logo and the elephant print remain a mystery; according to Nike, the latter was designed at the behest of MJ himself.

Released in May 2018. Retailled at US\$190, resells at an average of US\$230.



2. AIR JORDAN 11 RETRO 'SPACE JAM 2016'

The Air Jordan 11 Retro 'Space Jam' 2016 commemorates the 20th Anniversary of the movie *Space Jam*. It was worn by Michael Jordan himself as a Player Exclusive in both the movie and the 1995 NBA Playoffs. The 2016 retro was Nike's largest and the most successful shoe launch ever. The sneaker was the first to swap the traditional #23 to MJ's comeback #45 on the heel - the first for an Air Jordan 11 release.

Released in 2016. Retailled at US\$220, resells at an average of US\$330.



1. AIR JORDAN 1 RETRO HIGH OG 'BRED TOE'

When you say "Air Jordan", this is the first that comes to mind. It all started with Michael Jordan, who was fined US\$5,000 per game for wearing a pair of red-and-black shoes which violated NBA's uniform rule. That was how the "Banned" colourway came about - aka 'Bred' or Black and Red. This retro 'Bred Toe' features a Chicago Bull-inspired colourway that combines the elements of the 'Bred' and 'Black Toe' editions of the Air Jordan 1, remaining faithful to its OG 1985 roots.

Released in Feb 2018. Retailled at US\$160, resells at an average of US\$440.



WHY ARE AIR JORDANS EXPENSIVE?

Nike wanted to keep the Jordan icons coveted and special, by keeping the production limited. With a high demand, it drives up the market price - that's when you'll see people start to resell their Jordans. But a true sneaker collector will do whatever it takes to own a pair of Jordans; it's hard to imagine the popularity of Air Jordans fading anytime soon.

First released back in 1985, Air Jordans have become a sensation in the sneaker community, and continue to be must-haves for sneaker collectors. Previously a running shoe company, Nike's reputation was elevated when the legend himself, Michael Jordan signed on with Nike to create his own shoe line. Despite being under the Nike label, Air Jordans' tremendous success makes it stand out as a brand of its own. But which Air Jordan is actually the greatest of all time? Here's the top 5:

BY JAN FOO

BARK OR BITE

A DEEPER LOOK INTO TARANTINO'S CULT FILMS



Usually filmed on a budget and released to little excitement, cult movies eventually evolve into an accepted and revered narrative among audiences, even long after their theatrical debut. Their rise to cult status impinges on certain factors like a hardcore fan following, punchy dialogue, and memorable characters.

Quentin Tarantino's 1992 *Reservoir Dogs* is a nonlinear narrative about a gang of miscreants taking part in a diamond heist orchestrated by mob boss Joe Cabot. Its flashback narrative structuring answers before questions is cleverly delivered, elevating it to an iconic status among other nonlinear films to date.

The film draws cult status with its hard-hitting style, with the rabble-rousing Mr Pink, hot-headed Mr White, psychotic Mr Blonde, and Nice Guy Eddie at the heart of all this. Their interperate raging with guns unsheathed and pointed at each other occurs regularly throughout

the film. The amalgam of violence and profanity set the movie's tone in its quest to uncover the rat behind the botched diamond heist.

Reservoir Dogs also draws strong reference to pop culture, evident in the dialogue from the coffeehouse scene with Madonna's lyrics to *Like a Virgin* scrutinised, and the sadistic ear-cutting scene featuring Mr Blonde behind the knife cavorting to Stealers Wheel's *Stuck In The Middle With You*. K-Billy's *Super Sounds of the Seventies Weekend*, a fictional weekend themed playlist, served as the movie's soundtrack.

Quentin Tarantino followed-up his debut film with the release of his postmodern masterpiece *Pulp Fiction* in 1994. It was the most successful independent movie of its time, making over US\$200 million on the back of an US\$8 million budget. Known for its casting, iconic style, and whimsical dialogue, *Pulp Fiction* went on to achieve critical acclaim, bagging

numerous film awards and going on to become widely claimed as the greatest film ever made - even up to this day.

Pulp Fiction is a film telling three overlapping stories in non-sequential fashion with all three stories interconnected to one another. The film's controversial theme involving drugs, violence, excessive use of profanities, and homosexual rape combined perfectly, bringing together an unconventional but appealing narrative that still sits very well with movie buffs today.

John Travolta's declining career found its resurgence in arguably the most iconic dance scene in movie history - the Twist Contest. Starring previously in blockbuster films like *Grease* and *Saturday Night Fever* in the 70s, Travolta defined the disco era through his dancing, and his explosive return to the dance floor with Uma Thurman could not be any more iconic.

Much like *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*'s quirky dialogue provided audiences with memorable lines which ranged from Samuel L. Jackson's divine intervention epiphany to his comical but near-death confrontation with Honey Bunny.

Although comical, parts of the film's dialogue was introspective, especially with Jackson's character who develops into an almost puritanical person, and eventually moralises the story with redemption.

Blood, guns, profane language, quirky dialogue, and pop culture references are some hallmarks established in Tarantino's first two films, and both have since gone on to claim cult status among fans and movie-lovers alike.



OUT AND ABOUT

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PRODUCTIONS



26 Jan 2019 | 6pm
SOTA Concert Hall
Tickets: \$450 - \$470

I was not ready da

From modest beginnings in Chennai, Aravind SA's wit and self-deprecatory humour have conspired to make him a popular stand-up comedian not just in the South, but across the country. It was always on the cards, we suppose, given that his very first standup comedy video in 2013 went viral, resulting in a whole culture of people embracing the catchline, "I was not ready da".



9 Feb 2019 | 8pm
SOTA Concert Hall
Tickets: \$35 - \$470

Kanan Gill - Live in Singapore 2019

One of India's most popular comedians, Kanan Gill, will be making his anticipated return to Singapore. Gill's latest special, 'Teetar' is a personal, observational and deeply stupid follow up to 2017's Keep It Real. In this hilarious one hour show he juggles ideas from Julius Caesar's death to marching to bands and his building societies. This show also explains what "teetar" means.

MOVIES

Mary Poppins Returns
(December 25)

Cast: Emily Blunt, Ben Whishaw, Meryl Streep

Set in 1930s London, which is the time period of the original novels by P. L. Travers, the story follows Michael (Ben Whishaw) and Jane Banks (Emily Mortimer), who are now grown up. Michael is living with his three children (Pixie Davies, Nathanael Saleh, and Joel Dawson) and housekeeper Ellen (Julie Walters), in the house on Cherry Tree Lane. After Michael has a personal loss, Mary Poppins (Emily Blunt) comes back into the lives of the Banks family. She is joined by a street lamplighter named Jack (Lin-Manuel Miranda), and an eccentric cousin named Topsy (Meryl Streep).



How To Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World
(January 31)

Cast: Jay Baruchel, Cate Blanchett, Gerard Butler

What began as an unlikely friendship between an adolescent Viking and a fearsome Night Fury dragon has become an epic adventure. But when the sudden appearance of a female Light Fury coincides with the darkest threat their village has ever faced, Hiccup and Toothless must leave the only home they've known and journey to a hidden world thought only to exist in myth.



Clarke Quay Block Party Countdown

When: 31 Dec, 9pm-12.30am
Where: Clarke Quay Fountain Square
Fee: Free

Clarke Quay's annual New Year's Eve Countdown features a line-up of bands, DJs and MCs. This year's theme PLAY will see specially constructed 3D play block structures designed to bring a fun and imaginative playground element to the party. There's a pedal-powered LED wall that will light up the harder you pedal, converting cycling power into illuminating patterns and lights. Roaming, dancing, green "toy soldiers" and The Unicorn Parade (3m-tall unicorn mascots) will interact with party-goers; providing many instagram-worthy photo moments.



Marina Bay Singapore Countdown 2019

When: 26-31 Dec 2018
Where: The Promontory
Fee: Free; fireworks \$38-\$148

This year's Marina Bay Countdown will feature an hour-long fireworks with 3D surround sound, and performance acts by Taiko drummers, dancers, and fire performers at The Float (from 11pm, tickets \$38-\$148). There are plenty of other free attractions, such as a light projection show on The Fullerton Hotel (28-31 Dec), as well as the Merlion and the ArtScience Museum (29-31 Dec). There will also be a Food Truck Fest at the Marina Bay Sands Event Plaza (28-31 Dec) and the Marina Bay Carnival (22 Dec-24 Mar 2019).

COUNTDOWN PARTIES

Siloso Beach Party 2018/19

When: 31 Dec, 6pm-8am
Where: Siloso Beach
Fee: \$58-\$108
(incl. entrance + drink)

Siloso Beach Party is Singapore's only beach countdown party. It returns for its 12th edition, featuring adrenaline-pumping music, spectacular fireworks and endless thrills. Partygoers can also look forward to a medley of Asia's finest DJs and a special headliner to soundtrack the festivities. There's a 10% off Early Bird and Advance Standard Ticket for tertiary students by using the code SBPSCHOOLS.



Royal Albatross: New Year's Eve Countdown Cruise 2018

When: 31 Dec, 9.30pm-1am
Where: Historic Ship Harbour Resorts World Sentosa
Fee: \$295 (for Countdown Cruise)

Usher in 2019 with a romantic new year's eve countdown party, dancing the night away aboard Super Yacht Royal Albatross. The Countdown Cruise sets off at 9.30pm for a 2.5-hour cruise following the coastline to the city, before turning south and cruising through the scenic Southern Islands. Guests will be treated to an action-packed night of music, champagne, desserts galore and fireworks at Mount Faber until 1am.

GIGS



19 Jan 2019 | 7pm
National Stadium
Tickets: 5
\$88 - \$348 (sold out)

BTS World Tour "Love Yourself"

Backed by the most passionate fans, BTS' rise to meteoric levels of popularity are nothing short of phenomenal and they have set record after record during their climb to the top. Taking another step closer towards world domination, BTS WORLD TOUR 'LOVE YOURSELF' will be the band's biggest tour to date, while successfully selling out all their shows in North America, UK and Europe before making their way back to Asia.

8 Jan 2019 | 8pm
The Coliseum, Hard Rock Hotel
Tickets: \$148 - \$228

SLASH feat. Myles Kennedy and the Conspirators

SLASH, iconic Gun N' Roses guitarist and songwriter, has garnered a GRAMMY Award, and was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. This concert supports the release of the band's third album, Living the Dream, which debuted to rave reviews from fans and critics.



19 Jan 2019 | 8PM
The Pavilion @ Far East Square
Tickets: \$108 - \$208

Taking Back Sunday Live in Singapore

Global rock superstars, Taking Back Sunday, will be performing music from their upcoming album, Twenty, which is a celebration not only of those career-defining moments, but of the landmark albums that chronicle their story and looks back at some of the highlights from this unlikely group of musical misfits.



Hollywood's Secret Cults

BY NINA GAN

If you've watched Netflix's "Wild Wild Country," you'll know that cults do exist on a massive scale and that even sane, educated people would be persuaded to be part of them. So it isn't difficult to imagine that some famous people in entertainment are either part of cults, or were raised in one.

Hollywood stars that belong(ed) to cults

Everybody knows that getting celebrity endorsements does wonders for a brand – the same goes for cults. The Church of Scientology has had a celebrity recruitment programme in place since 1955, and today operates special Celebrity Centres in places like LA and Paris. Scientology preaches that it's OK to be wealthy and famous, so it's no surprise that it has a long roster of big names – the most famous of which include Tom Cruise, Danny Masterson, and John Travolta.

But there are other cults that take on various permutations, along with a number of Hollywood stars.

Church of Scientology

Children of God

Rainbow commune

Did you know that Joaquin Phoenix grew up in California-based hippie group – and secret child prostitution ring – Children of God until he was four? Fellow actress Rose McGowan, and musicians Christopher Owens and Susan Justice were also child members of the group. Many ex-members grew up with damaged relationships with their parents thanks to the cult's strange practices.

Other Hollywood stars grew up in various smaller communes. Wynona Ryder's family grew up in California's 300-acre Rainbow commune for three years without electricity with seven other families, and Glenn Close's family was part of the Moral Re-Armament (MRA) cult, an extreme conservative group which centered around four absolutes: honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love.

Unlike other actors whose families belonged to cults, Michelle Pfeiffer accidentally joined one when she was 20. Her group believed in breatharianism – the ability to live without food or water, believing that sunlight will provide all the necessary nourishment. Members had to pay to basically starve.

Cults for women, by... a man

Of course, before celebrities become famous, they have to start somewhere. And during this time of vulnerability, it's no surprise that some of them (mainly women) join dubious cults – many of which purport to be self-help groups.

NXIVM (pronounced NEX-ee-um) began as a group for female mentorship, and attracted a number of newbie actresses for their workshops on eliminating psychological and emotional barriers. However, it was soon launched into notoriety after reports of disciples being branded (by hot iron) in secret ceremonies. Then it was found that its young female recruits were being exploited both sexually and for their labour.

As the main recruiter of vulnerable young women, actress Allison Mack (she was 'Chloe' in *Smallville* and NXIVM's second-in-command) was recently charged with sex trafficking and forced labour conspiracy, along with NXIVM's founder, Keith Raniere. She also reportedly married Battlestar Galactica actress Nicki Clyne at the behest of Raniere.



Another women-centric cult called Superstar Machine started out in New York as a self-help group; it only accepted female members, and attracted a lot of young, vulnerable actresses. Its leader was a man named... International Scherick. Women had to pay a membership fee to join – new members paid around US\$200 a month, and higher-level members could pay upwards of US\$1,000 a month – which basically entitled them to regular meetings where they were subjected to insults and emotional manipulation from Scherick.

This is because the basis for this cult is 'serving the masculine'. Many members had relationship issues, so apparently Scherick 'trained' them to hold onto men. However, unlike many other cults, Scherick advocated for monogamy on the women's part, maintaining that "women have sex to get a relationship, while men have sex to have more sex."

The fact that both these women-centric cults are run by men could be the reason that both Raniere and Scherick are described as super narcissistic, according to ex-members.

A NEW WORLD ORDER

Why is it a hot topic now?

Populism is inextricably linked to globalisation as billions of people have moved around the world and evoked immigration backlash within countries. Right-wing slogans like "Make America Great Again" and Poland's refusal to accept more refugees last year are symbolic of the desire to reassert one's own unique national identity in an increasingly globalised world. Meanwhile, left-wing populists are rallying against growing inequality in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. For example,



movements like Occupy were a direct reaction to the (perceived) excessive deregulation of America's banking industry, leaving millions of working-class people homeless, and creating a political backlash

on both the left and right among the newly-minted "working poor".

Furthermore, populists have aggressively used fake news as a way to gain traction for their agenda by throwing shade on the truthfulness of mainstream media. In a telling statement last year, Facebook publicly acknowledged for the first time that illicit third parties used its platform to manipulate public opinion during the presidential elections in the US and France.

POPULISM: WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Thanks to globalisation, many countries are witnessing an ideological shift towards populism, which in many cases has now become a political cult. While there is no fixed definition for populism, it broadly refers to the idea that society is separated into two groups pitted against one another – the hardworking, virtuous masses versus the greedy elite. Populist political rhetoric is frequently characterised by claims of representing the unified "will of the people" and a desire to overthrow the current political establishment. Unlike mainstream political discussions revolving around liberalism, for instance, populism is a vague ideology appealing to people positioned on the fringes of political spectrum from left to right.

Most right-wing populists belonging to the older generation, for example, criticising (in their view), unrestrained globalisation and immigration for threatening domestic jobs and social harmony. While left-wing populists also share an anti-globalisation view – they are more forward-looking, demanding socialist-leaning policies and greater income equality. Even though populism is not new, what is new is the dramatic rise in populist leaders across the world, from Donald Trump's nationalist zeal to Brexit campaigner Nigel Farage's disillusionment with Europe's tolerance for multiculturalism.

POPULIST FACES OF TODAY

Today's tumultuous political landscape has thus generated a new breed of bold populist leaders who, by dramatically romanticising civic pride, have transformed populism into a cult.



One of the best examples is in the recent, shocking election victory in Brazil has taken an unprecedented turn towards the political right after decades of leftist policies. Jair Bolsonaro's populist triumph in the first round of the presidential election this October is symptomatic of the peoples' frustration with a corrupt government and persistent economic hardship. A worsening recession has taken a toll on the economy, which contracted by more than 8% in 2015 and 2016, and uprooted millions from Brazil's rising middle class back into poverty.

Elsewhere, populist campaigns in Italy by the anti-establishment parties Five Star and the League have captured votes by taking a tough stance against the issue of immigration (both legal and illegal) which has come to dominate the political landscape. More than half a million migrants have made the perilous journey across the Mediterranean and landed on Italian shores in the past four years.

The rise of Philippines' president Rodrigo Duterte is testament to populism's sweeping charm in emerging market democracies, where immigration does not take centre stage. Instead, strongmen in these countries provide hope for the aspirational middle classes over the inability of state institutions to provide public services. However, even populist politicians in democracies may resort to extreme measures incompatible with democratic principles: Duterte's ruthless policy on drugs has, according to human rights defenders, killed over 12,000 people, many of whom were not given due trial in court.

THE FUTURE OF POPULISM

Since Singapore makes it compulsory for citizens to vote for elections, it can admittedly be difficult for us to appreciate how voter apathy in recent years helped give birth to the rise of populist movements. But it can have dramatic consequences for national policies, as was the case for Brexit, with pro-Brexit backers winning 51.9% of votes.

According to a study, only 64% of registered voters aged 18-24 went to polls, while 90% of over-65s voted. Studies suggest just over 70% of voters from the former age group voted Remain, while just under 30% opted to vote Leave. Voter apathy amongst millennials

thus clearly affected the Brexit outcome, and the tables could have turned had more millennials taken matters into their hands. Disgruntled young Britons now face an uncertain future as they can no longer travel, study, and work freely across the continent.

As countries constantly shift their political allegiances under the forces of globalisation, populist movements have the ability to empower the masses and fundamentally reshape traditional notions of democracy.

By Yin Loon

Frenzied Fans

Music Acts with a Cult Following

Music has the power to shape our collective minds, and some bands or musicians have undoubtedly changed people's lives on a grand scale. These acts don't merely attract a fanbase, they attract a cult following that shadow them like their devoted flock of sheep. These fans are often the first in line to enter a concert venue and first to purchase any merchandise or concert tickets.

For them, there's nothing they won't do for their beloved bands – some even go as far as getting tattoos as a show of permanent devotion. Whether you're a hip-hop lover or an EDM head-bopper, here are some musical acts today that come with their own entourage of worshipping fans. Are you one of them?



{ X Japan }

Formed in 1982 by drummer Yoshiki and lead vocalist Toshi, X Japan was the pioneer of *visual kei* (aka glam metal) in Japan. Hailed as the country's biggest rock group, the band has sold over 30 million records to date. The angst in their songs almost seems to be a reflection of drummer Yoshiki's own pain – it physically hurts when he plays the drum and piano, and he sometimes collapses on stage from lack of oxygen. He's also got a deformed neck bone from too much head banging.

They took a hiatus in 1997, when the internet was born (and Toshi, inexplicably, then joined a cult). The band reunited in 2007, and only released their first album in years in 2016 – in time for the soundtrack to 'We Are X', a documentary about the band.



{ Deadmau5 }

The devotion of fans of deadmau5 (or Joel Zimmerman) is cult-like: they follow every show, have tattoos of his logo, and post thousands of gushing comments on social media. These Mausketeers also like to sport his unique headgear – a Maus helmet – which appear in different shapes, colours, and sizes; some even have LED blinking eyes.

Deadmau5 has DJ'd at the VMAs and headed top tier music festivals; he doesn't sing, but he operates a bank of computers from the stage. He's popular with tweens as well as the hard-partying 20-somethings, as his character seems made for the gadget-obsessed, app-downloading consumer. His fame has grown exponentially over the 6 years since his first recording, counting over 8 million Facebook fans to date.

{ Wu-Tang Clan }

Wu-Tang Clan's audacious debut, *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)* rocked the hip-hop world in 1993 with its grimy beats, cinematic conception and raucous MC'ing – and they're still livin' large today. With nine members in the group (almost all equally talented), they've released too many albums to count. A few members have also appeared on film and TV.

What raises them to cult status are their fans – or Wu-Disciples – who will buy just about anything they release. Led by money-making genius RZA, they've not only produced albums, but also apparel, video games, comic books, and books like *The Way of the Wu*. Their resurgence to hype can be attributed to *Once Upon a Time in Shaolin*, a single-copy double album that sold in 2015 to Martin Shkreli (that pharma bro) for US\$2 million.

{ Phish }

You may or may not have heard of this psychedelic act that's kept the 1960s-style jam-band grooves alive for generations. While they may not be as famous as the Grateful Dead, Phish's annual New Year Eve shows at Madison Square Garden sell out every single year – most of them in under 10 minutes.

It's the Phans that are responsible for their cult status – they attend every live concert, each featuring a spectacular light show, carnival acts, and even glow stick wars. Chances are you've never heard a Phish song, since their cult status was borne from their live performances. There are no rules to a Phish show; their lyrics can be nonsense, fraught with puns, or burst with tributes to hippie love and peace. Once in a while, the drummer will come out front to blow into a vacuum cleaner.



By Bhawna Sharma

4 FILMS TO BRING OUT THE CULT MOVIE FAN IN YOU



Star Wars, *Pulp Fiction*, and *The Shawshank Redemption* are just a few of the myriad films that smashed box office records to become global pop culture sensations. Till this day, *Star Wars* continues to be screened around the world and fans have monetised on its legacy through festivals, merchandise, and conventions. Its success is testament to the power of fans, who through their habitualised fan practices, have made *Star Wars* an iconic cult classic. But when you think about 'cult', chances are you're probably imagining off-beat,

obscure films that only gradually snowball into full-fledged watching rituals, and rightly so. What makes cult films stand out from mainstream commercial successes is their non conformist (in some cases, even downright trashy) approach towards film-making. These films are low-budget, low-brow, and don't always perform well at the box-office. It's only years later that fans revisit them and start to appreciate their peculiarities by untangling hidden messages. Here are four films to get you started on your journey of cult classics:



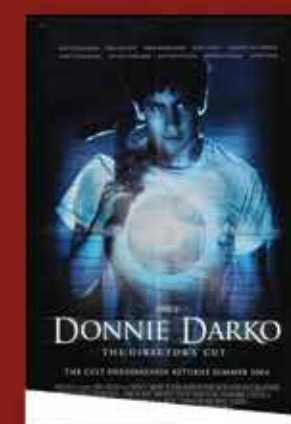
THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW (1975)

This science-fiction horror features the bizarre: A transvestite scientist from the planet Transsexual, Frankenstein's monster, a hunky body-builder, and plenty of weird aliens. A year after its release, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* changed the future of cult culture forever, and became a shining beacon of hope for disillusioned millennials and more importantly, underdogs in society struggling with their sexuality in the midst of a punk revolution. Pushing the boundaries of taboo, the film didn't hesitate to explore gender fluidity, drag, and polygamy. In fact, there's never been a moment in the last forty years when *The Rocky Horror Show* hasn't been playing in a cinema somewhere in the world.

HEATHERS (1988)

Peer-pressure, suicide, fat-shaming, and self-harm are all common issues surrounding high-school life today. But that wasn't the case when *Heathers* first hit cinemas in 1988, completely subverting the archetypal, feel-good coming-of-age films like *Pretty In Pink* and *The Breakfast Club*.

Featuring scrunchies, knee-high socks, and shoulder-padded blazers, *Heathers* narrates the adventures of 17 year-old Veronica and her encounters with the rebellious JD who is plotting a high-school murder spree. Sprinkled with dark comedy and crude jokes about bulimia, this box-office-flop-turned-teenage-cult classic grapples with an array of youth issues that are even more prevalent in today's internet era.

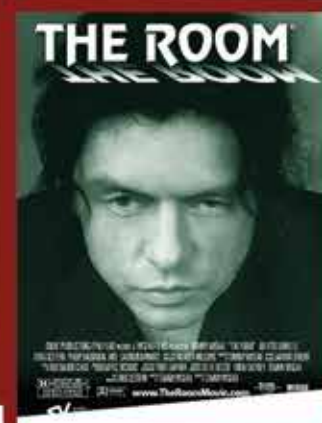


DONNIE DARKO (2001)

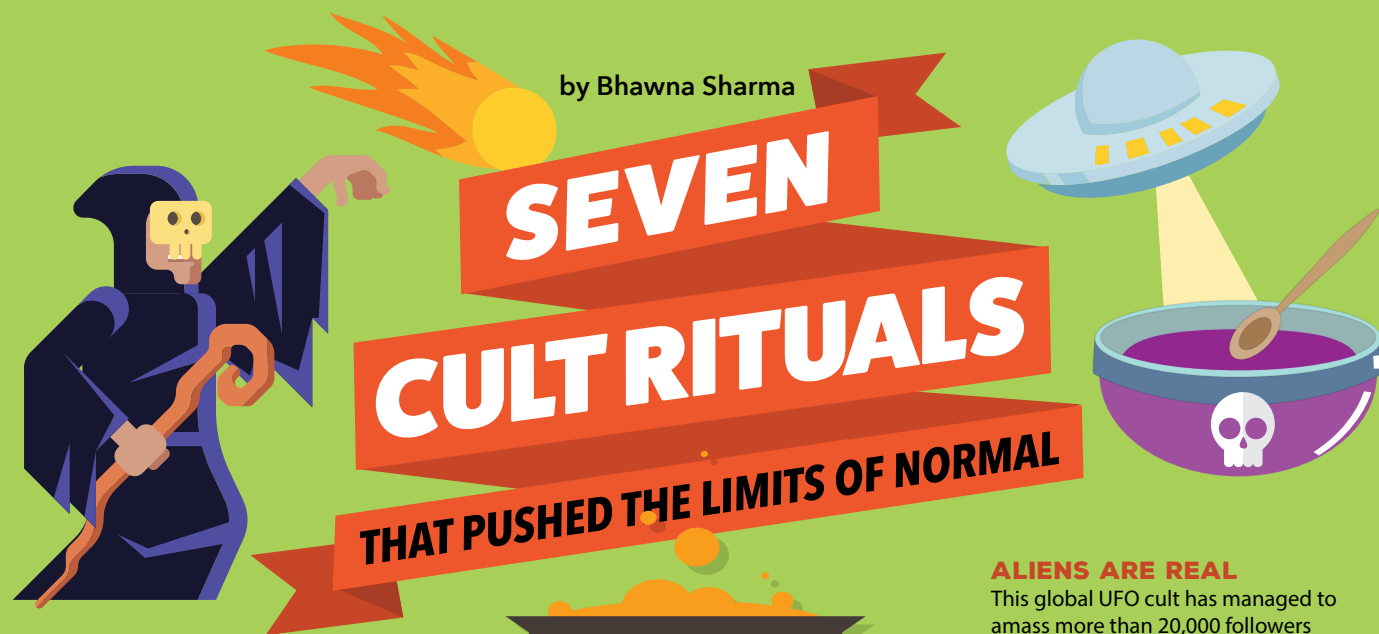
For a film that cost US\$4.5m to make but only made a modest US\$500,000, it's remarkable how *Donnie Darko* came to be hailed as an indie cult classic. We're talking about a high-schooler imagining six-foot rabbits, time travel, and arson attacks. The film has generated a multitude of fan websites filled with philosophical theories about time travel, web-based academic literature on the iconography of Frank The Rabbit, and complete undergraduate modules exploring the specific genre, narrative, and ideologies in it. Most of all, it speaks to teenagers about the painful process of growing up, and what it means to be a grown 'man' and a grown 'woman' in a cruel world.

THE ROOM (2003)

Ever heard of a film that was so bad it became famous? If you haven't, then you should check out *The Room*. Dubbed as Hollywood's worst film (or as some say, *The Citizen Kane* of bad movies), *The Room* rose to cult status five years after its debut. The film itself is an utter hodgepodge, suffering from an extremely convoluted plot and terrible dialogues. But that's exactly what made it into a cult – fans found amusement in its abominable storytelling, and ritualised every screening by throwing spoons, cracking derogatory jokes, and tossing around footballs in the cinema. Like most cult classics, *The Room* ultimately deconstructed principles of good film-making, focusing on the love triangle between a wealthy banker, his disenchanted wife, and his best friend through cringe-worthy camera shots and poor acting.



The growing commercialisation of films has meant that most movies are now marketed to make profits. But the beauty about films is that once audiences watch them, they never really go away. In other words, there's always going to be an inter-generational group of cultists who revive long-lost films otherwise destined to fade away into oblivion. Who knows, perhaps the next *Rocky Horror Picture Show* is just waiting around the corner.



by Bhawna Sharma

SEVEN CULT RITUALS THAT PUSHED THE LIMITS OF NORMAL

DEATH BY FRESH-AID

In what is considered the greatest tragedy of American civilian life until the 9/11 terror attacks, members of the Jonestown cult committed mass suicide by drinking cyanide-laced Fresh-Aid at the word of their charismatic leader Jim Jones. Jones was an ardent believer of revolutionary suicide rituals known as "White Nights", and eventually declared a state of emergency after facing increasing pressure from the outside world.

SNAKES ARE SAFE

While mainstream Christian churches do not use snakes, the Appalachian Mountains of North America happen to nest some of the last serpent-handling churches. Following a rather literal explanation from a biblical passage in the Gospel of Mark, these religious cults have special services in which people actually handle venomous snakes. If bitten, worshippers do not seek treatment, believing that God will save them. Kentucky Pastor Jamie Coots made headlines last year when he was bitten for the ninth and final time, and died after refusing treatment.

THE RICH MAN'S CULT

Yes, we're talking about high-profile celebrities like Tom Cruise and John Travolta. Scientology preaches true enlightenment and freedom for all, and has attracted more and more celebrities over the years. From alleged levitational powers to strange 'silent births' rituals, many question their practices. Its core ritual constitutes forced confessions called "auditing", in which members are pushed to reveal incriminating secrets to the church which can then be used against them.

Cult rituals conjure all sorts of disturbing images in my mind: flesh-eating aliens, cannibalism, baby sacrifices, mass suicides, you name it. And chances are most of them do actually exist. Cult rituals are performed by a group of people practising strange beliefs and rituals in rather extreme ways. Here are 7 cult rituals which will leave you questioning the meaning of weird:

HUMANS EATING HUMANS

The Aghoris are one of the most well-known cannibalistic cults in India. They believe that nature is free for all, and frequently consume human flesh from fresh corpses in the Ganges, drink from human skulls, eat live animals, and isolate themselves on mountaintops away from material delusions.

A CULT THAT TOOK OVER A WHOLE TOWN

The Rajneesh movement was founded by mystic Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (1931–1990). Led by its iron-lady Ma Anand Sheela, the cult is famous for carrying out the largest bio-attack terror in American history, contaminating ten salad bars with salmonella in an attempt to suppress voters. In addition, its rituals frequently involved sex-crazed group dances, forced sterilisation programs, and primal scream meditation techniques, all of which sparked disapproval from residents in Oregon.

ALIENS ARE REAL

This global UFO cult has managed to amass more than 20,000 followers around the world, from Canada to Japan. Like a science-fiction novel, members of Raelism believe that the human race was created by aliens, and their trademark baptism ritual is characterised by a priest putting their hand on the forehead of the person wishing to be baptised in order to transfer their "genetic information" to extraterrestrials. Earlier this March, the cult started negotiations for building an extraterritorial embassy in Vienna to welcome back their alien creators.

SATANIC CULT RITUALS

You can't possibly talk about cult rituals without mentioning Satanists from the 1980s, who've become synonymous with satanic ritual abuse. The cult, which was commonly associated with notions of goth and heavy metal, upheld typical Satanic rites including child sex abuse, paedophilia, animal sacrifices, and cannibalism. Even though the hysteria of the 1990s has subsided, some people continue to practise Satanism today. In 2015, Bronwyn Grammar was set alight in a satanic sacrifice where the attackers believed they would gain power, wealth and fame.

While it's easy for outsiders to judge the rather perverted and twisted practices of cult ritualists, there's a reason to their enduring beliefs. As CalTech psychologist Jon-Patrik Pedersen notes, people are often drawn to cults in a quest to find human belonging and emotional support from a community. A total surrender to belief may thus blind cult followers to the damaging consequences their rituals may have. After all, even highly-educated professionals in the Rajneesh community, including doctors and lawyers, failed to recognise the disturbing practices around them.

STRESS RELIEF

Cults are synonymous with a loyal following – something that any brand or egocentric person would probably want. But anyone can start a cult, and all you need is something that people want and can relate to! If you're thinking of starting your own cult, then you'll probably need to prepare some necessary items in your toolkit – so if you're twiddling your thumbs and don't know what items to get, we're here to get you started...

Instructions:

Cut out all the individual items

You can use them as part of your ritual (you can make something up) or use them as a tool to gather your disciples

Do-It-Yourself

CULT Starter Kit

CULT MEMBERSHIP CARD

Welcome to the cult!
You're now a member of the cult devoted to

Member since

A skull is always handy to give that 'authenticity'

Always have a candle around in case of blackouts or eclipses

Have a guide book in case you get into an argument over your rules

Prepare a large cauldron which can be useful for sacrifices

Useful tool in the kitchen when preparing a mass lunch (or a sacrificial goat)

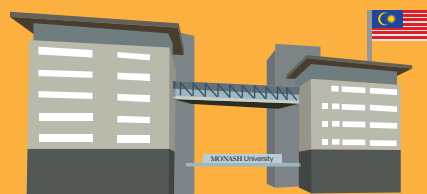
You'll need a staff to look the part of a leader

10

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