

Student

VOICES



AMAZON

A worker's torture chamber

ON LIFE & DEATH

A poignant reflection of a pandemic experience

HOW TO BRIDGE THE GAB BETWEEN EMPLOYEES & EMPLOYERS

OUR TEAM

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EDITOR'S NOTE



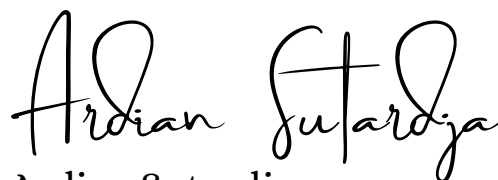
My name is Ardian and I am the Chief Editor of Student Voices at Ascend Now. When I first heard of the opening, I was enthralled at an opportunity to take on my own independent project that involved

the skill I'm so passionate about: writing. Working as a journalist has always been my lifelong dream, so for Ascend Now to offer me a chance to start from- idea to inception - my own magazine was practically a dream come true. Importantly, Student Voices was not created for me, it was developed with one core idea: to display the incredible talent of students.

In the process of developing this magazine, I learnt many things. Indeed I learnt about the difficulties and logistics of creating a magazine, but more importantly, I was simply overwhelmed at the sheer skill that young people have, and I am more determined than ever to showcase that to the world. Truly, this is a magazine built to display the varied acumen that students possess. After looking at countless submissions, the skill that students have in making words almost fluidly dance on the page, in creating artwork so static yet so inspiring, and writing articles that shed light on entirely different avenues is practically unparalleled.

As a sneak peek, this first edition alone contains a piece that may finally bring the spotlight back to the Palestinian stage, an article that may help you win the Ascend Now Bullpen, and some stunning photos of beautiful landscapes. Recognition is key here, and we want students to be recognized and awarded for their talent. So please, share our magazine with your family, send it to your friends, because this first edition is our most important, and a fantastic display of the talent of students everywhere.

Without further ado, it is my great honor to present to you the debut edition of Student Voices.



Ardian Sutardja

Chief Executive Editor at Student Voices



SURVIVING THE PANDEMIC



Disorganized piles of paper clutter my stuffy room, hiding the windows and occasional beams of light streaming through it. The little glimmers of light gradually fade from a welcoming yellow to a dull monochrome. Days fly by as I stare blankly into the endless bleak sky beyond the windows. Clenching my longing heart, I patiently await the day where the loneliness filling the deepest darkest rooms of my mind clears up to reveal a majestic array of colors.

In a time of uncertainty, especially as an adolescent who is still trying to find herself, it's easy to allow negative thoughts to consume us. The prevalence of this unhealthy mental

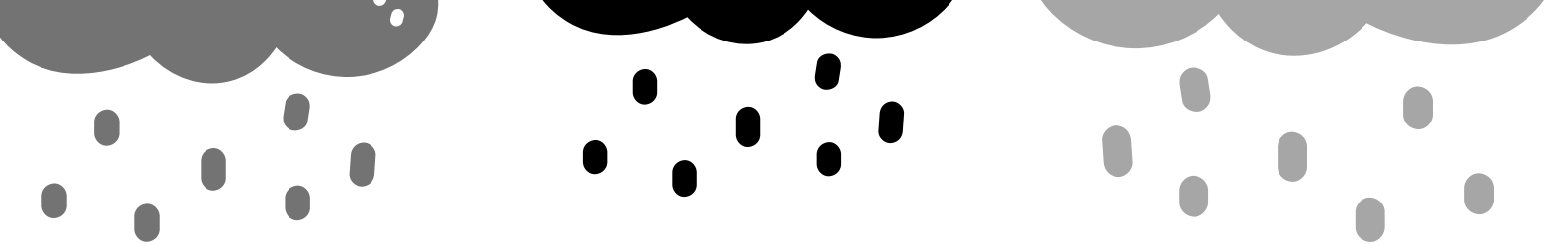
state often makes it seem as if the real virus is not the physical embodiment of the Coronavirus but instead the train of negative thoughts that slowly spread to all corners of our mind, leaving no room void. With the closure of educational institutions, many adolescents like myself, have been stripped of our daily routine and social interactions. What used to serve as a means to destress was suddenly absent, creating a gap unable to be fully mended.

Being an adolescent, I can safely say that the pandemic had a profound impact on all aspects of my life, especially my mental health. Simply the increase in workload has put a large



"A GAP UNABLE TO BE FULLY MENDED"





weight on my shoulders, but coupled with the lack of physical activity and social interactions, everyday feels like an internal battle. At the start, it seemed like everything was just sunshine and rainbows as I was able to attend classes from the comfort of my own home and work on tasks at my own pace, but, the longer it went on, the more I realized that the stress of having to do everything on my own and being unable to share this stress with fellow classmates effectively was beginning to take a toll on my mental health.

Many days I would stay glued to my chair as the hours slipped by, occasionally walking to the kitchen perhaps to grab a snack. I was working longer and longer hours but nothing was getting done; it was as if I stagnated. Simple enjoyable tasks suddenly became such a time-consuming load that could not be completed with perfection regardless of the time and effort I put in, creating an added stress. Frustration accumulated alongside my stress and anxiety, generating feelings of physical and mental exhaustion.

It is during these times where everything began turning pitch black; a monochromatic jail cell held me prisoner. Despite my many

attempts to break free, the chains binding me would not loosen their grip. However, unbeknownst to me, watching from a distance was my family, friends and community. Their support and guidance became the final missing piece allowing me to escape such a dark and lonely place. While the pandemic might have inhibited me from ever returning to my normal routine, I know that I am in a much better place and that with time, the colors that once disappeared will return brighter than ever.

The uncertainty that has come about as a result of the pandemic has resulted in the compromise of many adolescents' mental health, which often comes unnoticed. Mental health is just as prevalent and important as physical health. It is not only a real issue but also nothing to be ashamed of, especially as an adolescent going through what can be said to be the most unpredictable and difficult times. As such, it is important to reach out to someone you're comfortable talking with and share your stress instead of bottling it all up. Perhaps then, you'll see that the endless pile of papers wasn't such a bad thing after all. ■



ABOUT CLAIRE

Meticulous in her work habits, Claire is dedicated to bringing awareness of mental health and well-being. The enthusiasm she exudes is positively inspiring to her community.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO REACH OUT

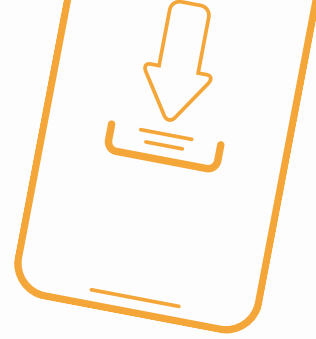
Samaritans
of Singapore
1800-221-4444

National
Care Hotline
1800-202-6868

TOUCHline
(Counselling)
1800 377 2252



FINDME



by Armaan Bhansali

A National Emergency.

A Great Talent Recession.

An Unprecedented Labor Market.

News agencies have used many names to describe the current labor shortage impacting businesses and governments, and hampering supply chains worldwide. In the US, more and more shops have stuck “Help Wanted” signs on their stained storefront windows, and more and more workers have handed in their two weeks notice to the reluctant hands of their employers.

This issue is especially important for me as personally, I have seen businesses collapse due to the simple fact that they don't have the necessary employees to keep themselves afloat. On the other hand, I have seen families go through financial and mental turmoil because of the pay cuts the virus brought, as well as many adults being unable to find jobs and sustain themselves. I kept hearing stories of workers taking pay cuts to support struggling businesses, and this was all the more prevalent in the service industry as output production took a hit with a lack of physical workers.

Consequently, workers were bringing insufficient funds home, while struggling with time to commit to a second job, changing their jobs at such short notice. It became apparent to me that both sides were hurting – the employers and the employees. This labor and job shortage even affected my family, with my

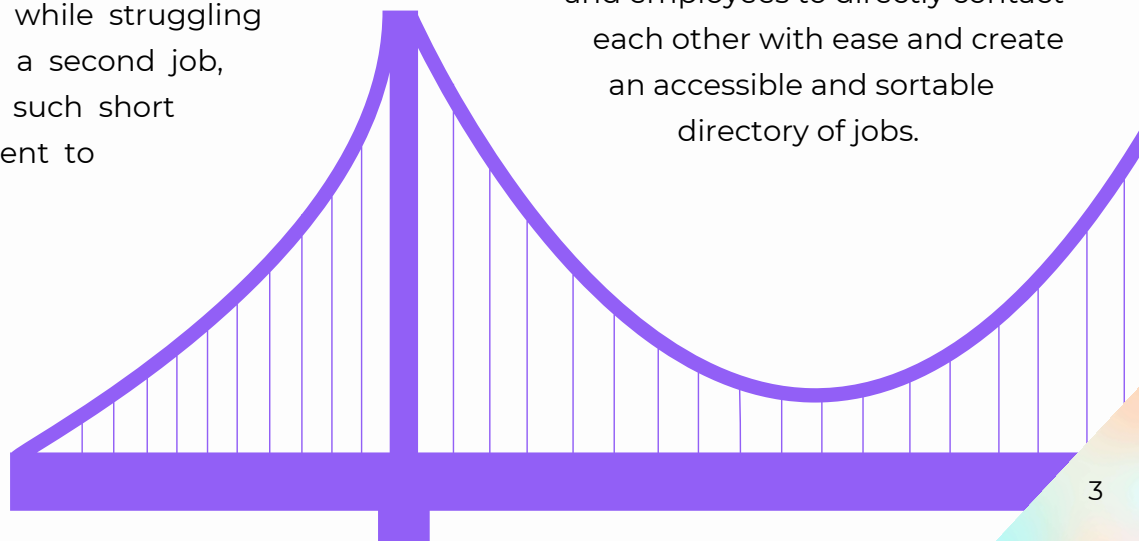
older sister and her friends struggling to find jobs while in university.

Eventually, I could not stand by as this problem grew larger. I simply needed to do something to try and help people in these situations.

This was the inspiration behind this project, to bridge this gap. People rendered unemployed due to COVID-19 may have a hard time finding a job, but I resolved to make it easier for them to get back on their feet, to make it easier for those needing an extra source of income, for those needing daily assistance and for companies requiring short-term staffing.

With over 11.3M jobs in the US going unfulfilled just last month, it is undeniable that the world is facing a crisis in the making. Indeed, a solution must be found. One that connects needs that complement wants, one that will end the virus' cycle of unemployment, one that will finally bridge the gap between employers and employees. What sort of platform could possibly achieve such a monumental task?

I present **FindMe**, an app which aims at least in part to engage with and solve today's labor shortage. FindMe's key goals are to allow potential employers and employees to directly contact each other with ease and create an accessible and sortable directory of jobs.



To consolidate the ideas I had and to establish the app's functions, I took the extra step of consulting a true professional in the field. I turned to Mehdi Moutahir, a professor at Northeastern University, arguably one of the most prestigious universities in the world. His vast knowledge of business and practical application of business ideas enabled me to contextualize the app and design it for the real-world market. He gave me incredible insights on how to make FindMe unique and stand out more. This has helped me make the app into what I believe is the best job-finding app there is.

COVID-19 has changed our perspective. People want to work from home, are looking for a transitional job to get back on their feet, and are not willing to commit to long contracts

As previously mentioned, FindMe is an app that links employees and employers. One key feature of the app is a jobs page with both jobs listings and the salary per hour clearly listed right there. Each prospective employer lists their contact information so that they can be contacted directly. Furthermore, there is an employee portal where prospective employers can browse through profiles and contact likely candidates directly. The power of this app is the simple interface and the easy steps towards contacting employees and employers, which allows for both sides to be satisfied.

This year has been a clear reminder to all of us that job security leads to healthier minds, healthier families, healthier communities, healthier economies and a healthier world. FindMe not only has the potential to help individuals, but also small companies – the ones most susceptible to financial downturns. I firmly believe that FindMe can be the bridging mechanism that will fill a great lacuna globally.

FindMe is more than just an idea, it will be a functional platform to bridge employees and employers alike. It is a platform that has the potential to take the world and the market by storm, bringing job security to those who need it. If marketed and presented correctly, this can truly change our world.



I have put a tremendous amount of work into FindMe and I am really excited for what it brings to the table for a lot of people. Seeing the opportunities that it already presents has given me great hope that it will be tremendously meaningful. I sincerely hope that in these horrific times the FindMe project can continue to make a difference to the lives of our users. ■



ABOUT ARMAAN

Armaan Bhansali is a 17 years old student who enjoys playing basketball and cricket in his free time. He is currently doing the IB course in school.

Personal Diaries

by Cameron Scherbakov

The buzz of the telephone brought me back from my reverie and I realized it was my grandmother on the phone. It was not surprising because it's now a habit of receiving her calls and having little conversations with her almost every day of the week. It was her familiar voice, something that I grew up listening to full of love and warmth. One of the things that I love most about my grandmother and look forward to is how she regularly checks in on me by calling me.. Her endearing voice often takes me back to my childhood, bringing memories of the wonderful moments I shared with her.

I particularly enjoy my visits to her house with my family every weekend for lunch, where we would gather together to eat spaghetti with my grandfather's special tomato sauce. A simple meal, but what makes it so special are the conversations that go around the table.

A defining feature of my grandmother's house, one that reminds me of my childhood, is the very familiar smell of her house that I grew up with. There is a calm and tranquility that pervades the house and the warmth and love resonating through the very walls of the house. The cherry tree is something around which

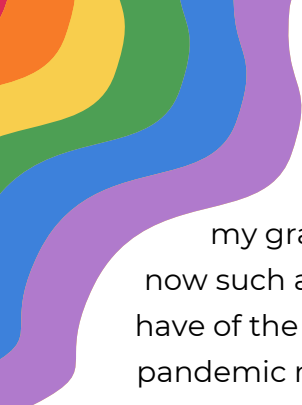
my childhood memories are woven, for I can vividly recall the moments I spent cherry-picking at her place.

I have never-ever observed her speaking much about her past. What little I know is that she used to be the captain of her basketball team back when she was living in Iran, that probably explains her agility at her age, she is seventy four. **What a towering personality my grandma is!** She is not very tall in the literal sense yet very imposing in her own way.

Navroz is a festival we look forward to as a family to spend time with her and the Eidi (a gift) I get from her is an expression of her love and blessings for us and hence the most cherished part of the festival.

Going back in time, I remember when I was much younger, I had asked if I could take a mirror from her house. It was an oval shaped ornate piece with etched borders; though there was nothing significant about it, the thought of having it in my room gave me the comfort of being closer to her. To this day I have it in my room where I can see it at all times, not to forget the beautiful memories it holds for me.

"It was the familiar voice.....full of love and warmth"



The current pandemic has thrown life out of gear for everyone and I only get to visit my grandmother on special occasions now such as birthdays. But the memories I have of the times spent with her before the pandemic make me hope that things shall return to normal soon.

Grandparents are indeed a blessing and a great source of love, comfort and solace. We

must not hold back any opportunity to express our gratitude to them for being such wonderful people and adding color to our lives and childhood.

This piece is from my personal diary, and is a tribute to the person who has had a profound impact on me - my madar (grandmom)!!!

Love,

Cameron



ABOUT CAMERON

Cameron Scherbakov is an IB student born in Geneva Switzerland who enjoys studying computer science and paleontology. These subjects interest him as one is to do with the future and the other is heavily linked to the past.



A Flight of Fantasy

by Doruk Okur

The only thing I could hear was the wind whooshing the shards of grass against each other. The aged man led me into the balloon's basket...



As I wandered listlessly, I was taken by surprise as I set my eyes on a hot air balloon. I could feel hundreds of blades of grass sweeping against the sole of my shoe. In the far distance, a small plump figure next to the hot air balloon caught my attention. The silhouette of his back hunch visible from the light being blocked from the empty horizon of the sunset. The sun rays barely crawling through his thick and messy beard blocking his neck from light making it very light-toned and pale.

As I got closer, I could see each and every small strand of his arm hair making tiny shadows resembling a crowd of people standing in an open area. Once I was at a meter's distance from the old man I could see every little detail on his wrinkled face. The pores formed due to countless sunburns and his depressed green eyes covered by his saggy eyelids. I could feel the silence lingering in the air, only making my visual system even more attentive and observant. The seeds of stray dandelions coursing around, only visible for milliseconds as they were camouflaged by the clear orange

sky. The only thing I could hear was the wind whooshing the shards of grass against each other. The aged man led me into the balloon's basket.

" As the man started to feed in the fire's heat into the balloon I could feel the heat molecules emanating from the fire crawl and stroke all around my delicate skin.

I clambered into the basket and when I set foot I could feel the bottom of the basket being influenced by gravity to curve downwards in a concave way. I was already getting second thoughts about doing this balloon trip but there was no going back. As the man started to feed in the fire's heat into the balloon I could feel the heat molecules emanating from the fire crawl and stroke all around my delicate skin.

As we rose upwards the heat particles got left behind but there was still a residual feeling around my body. The basket took off and I could feel the threads of wicker gradually



giving away. As we ascended, I could feel the air around me getting looser and more scarce. I looked at the man to see how he reacted but expectedly, he didn't seem to mind as this was his livelihood.

"At the edge of this border rested the glistening, dark orange sun painting everywhere."

In the opposite direction, you could perceive the wild, raging ocean filled with large deadly waves considered a menace and a deadly threat to billions of people. Mother nature's biggest weapon, the waves occupying the

space in front of my eyes, sometimes as serene as a bird gliding through the empty sky and sometimes as frightening as an avalanche rolling down the side of a mountain. Right ahead of me lay the most marvellous and captivating sight ever. The flat tranquil range of grass, extending beyond a human's eyesight and towards the horizon. At the edge of this border rested the glistening, dark orange sun painting everywhere its rays reached with an orange tint. After 10 more minutes of staying on this extreme altitude, the sun disappeared from sight and only its orange beams of light trailed around leaving the place in a twilight that was beyond description. ■



ABOUT DORUK

Doruk is a passionate learner interested in app development besides academics. His diligence and conscientious attitude sets him apart from his peers. Keen on enhancing his skills, Doruk welcomes any opportunity that comes his way.



FOLKLORE

A NEW ERA

by Janelle Tan

Taylor Alison Swift was born on 13 December 1989, making her a sagittarius. Over her career, Taylor Swift has become a renowned singer-songwriter, best known for her hit songs:

Shake It Off, Cardigan, Blank Space...

She has released nine albums (Evermore, Folklore, Lover...) and two re-recorded albums: Red (Taylor's Version) and Fearless (Taylor's Version).

Folklore was released on July 24 2020, this makes it her eighth studio album. The album was created in isolation due to the covid pandemic. Due to this, Taylor recorded the album at home while being joined virtually by her producers, Jack Antonoff and Aaron Dessner.

To swifties, this period of time would be known as the Folklore era.

Unlike most of her albums, Folklore was not filled with upbeat songs about heartbreak such as her previous albums which is what she is known for: songs about heartbreak, which led her to have a reputation in the media as a 'serial dater'. Folklore is unique as it does not follow Taylor's usual style of mainly upbeat pop productions, singing songs about love.

'I don't want to think of anything else now that I've thought of you' -daylight.

Instead, Folklore consists of mellow ballads partnered with neo-classical instruments. The album falls under the genres of indie folk, alternative rock, and electroacoustic styles.

FOLKLORE

A NEW ERA

Instead of being influenced by her love for her partner at the time, the album was influenced by loneliness during her time quarantining. Unlike her previous albums of exploring teenage romance, she explores not just romance, but mature themes of escapism, empathy, romanticism and nostalgia, singing lyrics such as:

'so I got wasted like all my potential'
- *This is me trying.*

Unlike previous songs with lyrics that did not need much interpretation, the songs on this album follow a theme of metaphorical words with deeper meanings. To understand what Taylor sings, you have to think about the lyrics. Throughout the album, Taylor does this through a set of characters, fictional narratives, and story arcs, painting a romantic story with a deep meaning underneath through three songs on the album, creating a trilogy about young love through *'Cardigan'*, *'August'* and *'Betty'*.

This shows Taylor's evolution throughout the years and shows her growth of being able to reflect not only on romance, but also on other aspects of her life. The album explores mature themes such as the fear of abandonment

'you're not my homeland anymore, so what am I defending now?'- *exile ft Bon Iver.*



Taylor also explores themes of childhood trauma, alcoholism, self doubt...

'i've never been a natural, all I do is try, try, try'
- *Mirrorball.*

Overall, Folklore is an exceptional album. It is one of, if not the best album of her discography simply because she is able to explore themes of not just romance but mature themes that fifteen- year old Taylor Swift was unable to. Folklore shows not only Taylor's maturity level but is able to connect with her audience on a deeper level instead of just heartbreak.

Folklore cuts deep, relating to surface deep level but instead a deeper, more meaningful one. The album is not remembered for the upbeat, catchy songs but instead for its ability to connect with the audience through not only heartbreak but through experiences. Unlike the lover era, the 1989 era, the fearless era... Folklore's era is different. Folklore brings is a new sound of Taylor's music.

It is an era that shows Taylor's growth.

Folklore has multiple layers, her lyrics are received by her fans at not only a surface deep level but instead a deeper, more meaningful one. Folklore cuts deep, relating to surface deep level but instead a deeper, more meaningful one. Folklore shows Taylor's growth since her debut album in 2006.

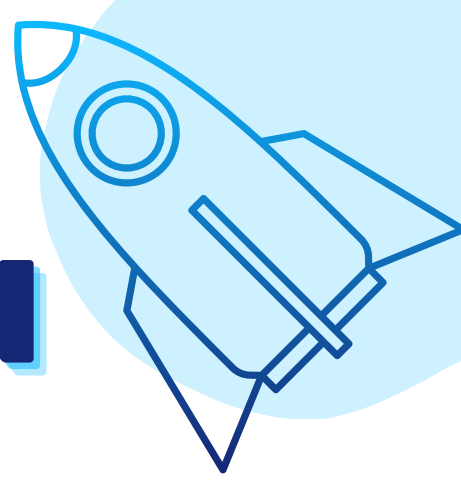
Folklore is a new era. ■



ABOUT JANELLE

Janelle is fond of pets... she is passionate about taking on new roles be it an entrepreneur or a writer. The understanding and insightful comments she provides sometimes belie her age.

TIPS FOR THE BULLPEN



The 3 Keys to Success

by Ardian Sutardja

As you may know, Ascend Now often hosts a Bullpen, a high stakes, high reward “Shark Tank” like competition, where students pitch their business ideas to a selection of highly successful investors, industry professionals and other well experienced panelists.

The reward? A \$1000 seed fund to help students start up their business and of course, major bragging rights.

The competition has proven incredibly popular among Ascend Now students, with the 2021 Summer Bullpen receiving 152 applicants and over 1216 minutes of competition time. Thus, the Bullpen is indeed highly competitive, with only 6 finalists and 1 winner.

For me, the Bullpen is an incredible event. It's an opportunity to put yourself to the test, to challenge your critical thinking and planning, to brave your fear of public speaking and pitch your idea to the judges that await you.

Going through the competition myself I thought it was a truly enriching experience, that left me forever satisfied I decided to take the leap, and join the competition. Thus, as a former 3rd place finalist, I have talked with a Women's Bullpen winner and came up with the 3 Keys to Success that are often overlooked aspects of a Bullpen presentation competitors need to succeed. Each of these will help you guys advance to the top, dive into the Shark Tank, and come out a successful businessman.

Key #1 Passion

When you enter the Bullpen, you can't dive into the tank with a half baked, uninspired idea you're not even passionate about. The basis of all good bullpen pitches is founded in passion. For me, choosing such an idea was perhaps the hardest part of the development process, and my conversation with this bullpen winner in writing this article reminded me of one thing, that our ideas were inspired.

They weren't copied from the web, or generated solely to win the competition, they were inspired from intimate personal experiences that have stuck with us ever since. For me, it was seeing friends struggle during the peak of the pandemic that inspired her. It was these intimate personal experiences that made me passionate about my product, and it was thus passion that drove me to do my best in the competition. This is by far the most important thing in the bullpen: to have an idea you're truly passionate about. After all, to make your idea appeal to the judges, it has to appeal to you first.

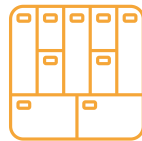
Key #2 Primary Research



Nothing sells a business idea more than having customers sell it for you. Primary research, the research you conduct directly with customers and other important stakeholders, is important to back up the effectiveness and potential sales of your product. We suggest going beyond simply

asking friends and family, and instead experimenting with potential customers and businesses, and perhaps hosting online surveys to get a good sense of what people think of your business model. You could even take it one step further and offer a test version of your product to consumers, collecting data like customer retention and satisfaction. This research will make your product seem more feasible and realistic, and provide important statistics that will solidify a good placement in the bullpen.

Key #3 Business Model



A business model is one of the most important yet one of the hardest parts of the equation. There are so many variables at play in creating a good business model, and the ones that are detailed and seem feasible are the ones that place highly in the bullpen. I, with the help of my partner, prioritized our business model of

dropshipping, explaining what it is, how it works, and why it can be so successful. If you're offering a service or an app, it is important to take into consideration possibilities like a freemium model, incentives for customers, how revenue is earned, and any charitable work the business may engage in. Be detailed! Don't skip out on seemingly unimportant factors like cost structures and anticipated expenses, because you want every edge over your competitors. Showing the judges why your product can be so profitable via a well thought out business model is ultimately key to success.

**NOW GO ON
AND UNLOCK
THE BULLPEN!**



ON LIFE AND DEATH

by Rayden Ignacio

The Ancient Egyptians believed that a cat has nine lives; the sun god Atum-Ra was said to have given birth to eight other gods, and the myth persisted ever since. Their ancestors, children, and bloodline were to be cherished - burials were performed with worldly belongings. They believed that life on Earth was so important that material accomplishments could transcend to the afterlife. Today, we imitate similar values through how we choose to compensate death, but the jewels and gems that used to accompany the dead were now a weighing scale to how important we are. Unlike any material form, however, life has no price.

When the pandemic announced its two-week stay, we rejoiced with the prospect of not knowing the disappearance of endless chatter and decisions of our own accord. Likewise, to human instinct, we acted to help one another; all over the world, funds were started to help victims and the families of victims of the outbreak. Yet, human beings are molded by atavistic instincts to survive, which oftentimes come at the expense of other people.

Was a lawyer's family more important than a teacher's family? Is a banker 'worth' more to society than a consultant?

Throughout our entire lives, we are placed under the unfair assessment of our lives, and that the value of our life is contingent upon the labor that we can provide to society.

Throughout the pandemic, we have been hearing similar variations of the phrase: 'we are all on the same boat'; taking recent catastrophe into mind, it proves that we are all on the same sea, but not on the same boat - some are not privileged enough to afford a boat at all, many have water letting into their ships, while a lucky few have made their way to shore.

I was twelve years old when the pandemic first disrupted the world; for many children my age, it would also be their last. While I was able to study online in the comfort of my own home, my heart aches for the children who are unable to continue their everyday lives due to their lack of resources. My heart aches for the children who are living in conditions unsuitable for human life, whose future is being wiped out day by day as the pandemic ravages their country.





Human civilization was founded on the backs of the poor, and it is life's greatest irony that the ones who work the hardest are often the least able in society. How can one cherish their life on Earth when nothing that they do seems to make a difference? The answer to that is actually quite simple: pain is not everlasting. Pain comes and goes, but the scars that we bear are proof of our survival.

Although pain acts as a candidate for actions that may dampen the meaning of life, it is often human action that gives it a distinct meaning. It is this human action that continuously cherishes the mundane in this world of chaos. It is this human action that keeps humanity sane in this insane world.

A cat has nine lives, which allows it to live its life to the fullest without the thought of death behind them. If we could all live as if we have eight other lives ahead, wouldn't life be a lot more wonderful? ■



ABOUT RAYDEN

Rayden is 14 years old. He is founder of Filtro, a business that focuses on selling hand painted face masks to raise funds for people who cannot afford sanitation kits.

AMAZON: A WORKERS HELL

by Ardian Sutardja

The day was December 10. As an incredibly destructive series of tornadoes tore through towns and cities in 6 US states, workers at a nearby Amazon warehouse remained trapped inside. Not by debris or by stay-in-place orders, but by Amazon's very own management, who had not only forced employees to continue working through the storm, but told them to shelter inside the warehouse's bathrooms and prohibited them from leaving. These workers were now captive to Amazon's oppression, their survival willfully put on the line because managers prioritized productivity and work over the lives of their own employees.

Just over 20 minutes after receiving a warning, a tornado struck the warehouse with over a hundred workers inside. Within seconds, massive sections of the roof collapsed while the walls violently caved in, reducing the building to a mangled pile of metal, concrete and plastic with the motionless bodies of 6 Amazon workers buried underneath.

"Amazon won't let me leave until after the storm" wrote one of the workers to his girlfriend. It was indeed the last text he would ever send.

Subjected and oppressed until Amazon's profit fueled tyranny, these six workers died

because of the company's greed, for they lost their lives due to a pattern of utter disregard and disrespect for their workers that has emerged across Amazon workplaces worldwide. Now more than ever, it has become incredibly clear that behind its fulfillment centres, inside its delivery vehicles and even written inside its code, Amazon is nothing more than a horrifically exploitative, greedy and dangerous force that ought to be abolished, collectivised or torn apart.

There are hundreds of issues with Amazon's practises and business model that each deserve their own time in the spotlight. Censorship of certain products, massive climate emissions, price discrimination, foreign forced labor and violations of its own users' privacy are just a few common criticisms of the massive company. However today let us focus on arguably it's most malevolent practice: Amazon's treatment of its workers.

While Jeff Bezos snatches the title of one of the world's richest men and flies to the edge of space on a multimillion-dollar rocket ship, Amazon's workers pay a brutal price. At the company's core is nearly 800,000 employees subjugated to Amazon's inhumane, almost torturous idea



of employment. The company's entire global infrastructure and skyrocketing profits are perhaps only possible because of the exploitation of the workers who operate it.

While Amazon may advertise a supportive and safe workplace, the truth is that in the company, employees are regularly treated inhumanely and in direct violation of their civil rights. While employed by Amazon, workers were subjugated to long nine hour shifts that when combined with gruelling, strenuous because of the exploitation of the workers who operate it.

While Amazon may advertise a supportive and safe workplace, the truth is that in the company, employees are regularly treated inhumanely and in direct violation of their civil rights. While employed by Amazon, workers were subjugated to long nine-hour shifts that when combined with gruelling, strenuous work, often took a horrific physical toll on workers. This has been evidenced by workers



in Amazon warehouses worldwide. In particular, it was discovered that there were 600 ambulance calls to UK Amazon warehouses in just 3 years. Further investigations unshredded a variety of unsafe working conditions and ignorance of employees' medical conditions that all contributed to creating a hazardous work environment. One request revealed that

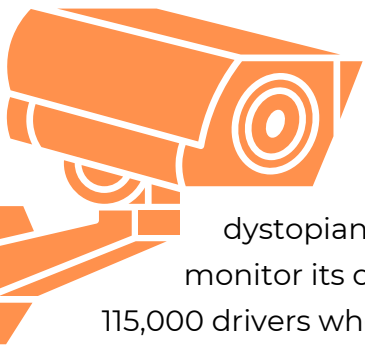
workers had been injured by electric shocks, fallen unconscious and even suffered major trauma. Reports by workers tell of heat conditions in Amazon's centers reaching as high as 46C, with Amazon negligent to provide proper protection or the necessary equipment to prevent heat strokes and other dangerous conditions. Together with the company's strenuous workloads in the heat, ambulances had to be regularly posted outside Amazon work places just to take away passed out workers.

As evidenced, subject to hazardous working conditions and extreme heat, and alongside other factors such as insufficient worker protections and steep quotas, Amazon's workforce are commonly injured and sometimes killed by the company's employment.

More than 24,000 serious injuries in 2020 alone, with injury rates double that of the industry range

According to the Strategic Organising Centre, Amazon workers sustained more than 24,000 serious injuries in 2020 alone, with injury rates double that of the industry average. At warehouses around the sprawling NYC, injury rates at Amazon warehouses triple the national average. Besides heat strokes and physical trauma, Amazon's working conditions also take a horrific mental toll on workers. Mental breakdowns were described as a regular occurrence under Amazon's

employment as well as emergency calls for employees driven to suicide in their time being exploited under Amazon's reign. One former Amazon warehouse employee, Seth King, who has since gone public with the reports of Amazon's horrid treatment of its workers, described Amazon's "grueling, depressing" work as causing him immense mental harm. A ban on talking to other people, a lack of windows and 10 hours standing shifts without even sitting down helped give King the sense that management regularly "work people to death".



In its drive to maximize productivity and profit, Amazon has also crafted an overtly intrusive, almost dystopian surveillance system to monitor its own workers. For Amazon's

115,000 drivers who the company relies on to make deliveries, multi-part cameras have been installed to see where drivers look, how they drive and even if they yawn, with a live feed of each driver available to managers. Each camera is unable to be turned off as long as the ignition is on, and are always recording as if to eliminate any driver privacy. Proponents of the system claim it has increased driver safety, but Amazon drivers have already debunked these claims, since Amazon's strenuous quotas can only be met by violating the driving practices recommended by the surveillance system. Similarly, Amazon's warehouse workers' every action is also monitored by management. Insider reported in 2019 that an automated system tracking a worker's "time off task" can result in their termination without the involvement of a single human manager.

With profits soaring by 220 percent during the pandemic, Amazon as a company has benefited greatly from the onset of the virus, but for its workers, a different story must be told.

Amazon has long publicly proclaimed its COVID response, pointing out its widespread testing as a key example of a good and effective response. What it seems to hide from the public is that employees of no medical background were assigned to run and operate these very testing centres, creating not only an unprofessional but alarmingly dangerous environment. Cases among workers would frequently arise while management was said to have hid the deaths of workers from the rest of the employees. In fact, without unions to back them up, Amazon workers are unable to stop working without pay, and have been forced to work despite a very real and widespread virus risk. October 2020, 20,000 Amazon employees had contracted COVID-19, but the number today remains hidden from the public. Similarly, the number of Amazon workers who have died from the virus, known to be at least eight, is also conveniently unknown for the company. Compared to its Chinese competitors like Alibaba and JD.com, both of which have registered zero worker deaths from the virus, Amazon's response is carelessly dangerous.

With the above evidence in mind, it's no surprise why Amazon workers have filed lawsuits against the company, and are attempting to unionize even in the face of the company's disgusting union-busting efforts. I believe it is long past time to assist them in their fight. If you truly care about the well-being and safety of these workers, if you have any moral concern about what conditions workers endure every single day, or if you even want





to work in a constructive, supportive environment, we must end Amazon's tyranny. We must demand better.

Do not normalize this treatment, do not turn a blind eye to Amazon, for its influence is far too vast. Your power as a consumer lies in your dollar, for if Amazon does not listen to its workers, it will only listen to one thing: profit.

With the above evidence in mind, it's no surprise why Amazon workers have filed lawsuits against the company, and are attempting to unionize even in the face of the company's disgusting union-busting efforts. I believe it is long past time to assist them in their fight. If you truly care about the well-being and safety of these workers, if you have any moral concern about what conditions workers endure every single day, or if you even want to work in a constructive, supportive environment, we must end Amazon's tyranny. We must demand better. ■



ABOUT ARDIAN

Ardian is confident and strongly believes in what he says. He is a leader in the making, an inspiration to students his age. Ardian has varied interests and is able to maintain a balance between his academics and other initiatives he is a part of.

ISRAEL'S GENOCIDE

by Ardian Sutardja

It would be foolish to deny the fact that violence between Israeli and Palestinian forces is a complex, layered issue with decades of history wrapped up in politics, bureaucracy and great conflict. However, when one can see through mainstream media lies and look past the biased reporting common in covering this issue, it becomes clear that this is not a war or a battle, it's a massacre.

Today's mainstream media have often failed to shine light on the facts regarding the situation there. In the US especially, Zionist figures and organizations have massive

influence over both politicians and the media. Inhumane and cruel acts of violence committed against Palestinians are often censored or toned down in mainstream reports.

You might notice that throughout mainstream media, any form of violence from Israeli forces is always described with neutral terms such as "clashes" and "violence between the two sides", with the article often accompanied with an explanation from Israeli forces only. One recent example of this is the beating and brutalization of Palestinian people at the funeral procession of journalist



Shireen Abu Akleh by Israeli forces. Even when covering such a horrific event, large broadcasters such as the BBC chose to title their articles “Violence at Funeral”, often casting blame on both sides. In reality, Israeli police attacked without provocation, nonetheless choosing to attack those mourning the death of a beloved figure, with them struggling to hold her casket while the batons of Israeli police came down upon them.

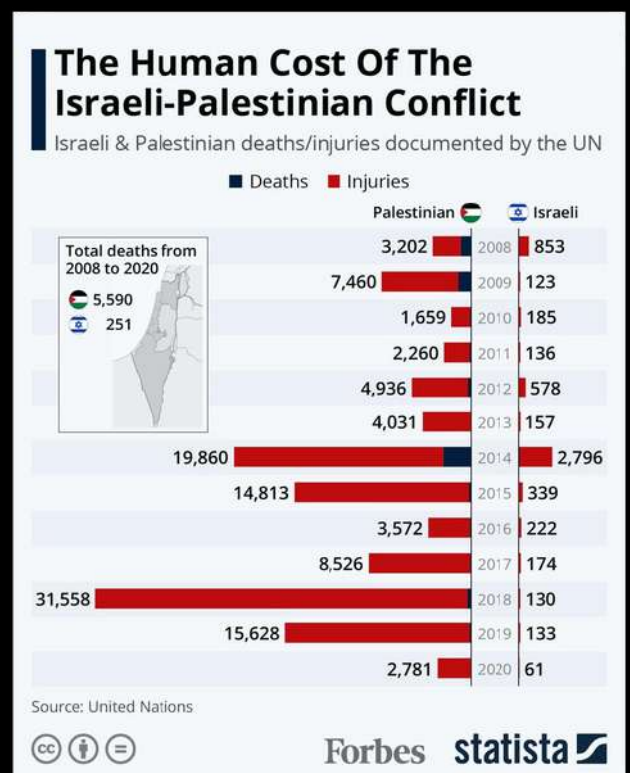
Of course, there was her death itself and the coverage it received. Not only was Shireen Abu Akleh shot and killed by Israeli forces (something Israel has conceded), she was shown to be wearing a brightly painted press helmet and jacket when she was murdered. This latest killing reflects a disturbing pattern of Israeli killings of journalists, such as the killings of reporters Ahmed Abu Hussein and Muath Amarneh in 2018, and the bombing of Al Jazeera and Associated Press offices in 2021.

Especially in the Gaza Strip, air strikes by Israeli warplanes regularly hit civilian targets, murdering innocent adults and children with absolutely no connection to any terrorism of any kind. The prebaked notion generated by the news today suggests that both sides have suffered heavy losses, that perhaps equal amounts of casualties have been suffered in both Israel and Palestine. The reality simply could not be more different.

As is so evidently clear, this conflict between Palestine and Israel shares more in similarity to a genocide or a massacre rather than

a typical war. In a nutshell, Palestinian casualties simply dwarf Israeli ones. In 2018, a year of extreme violence and countless war crimes on Israel’s part, Palestinian injuries were 242 times more numerous than Israeli ones. In an 11 day period between 2021 June and July, Israeli precision guided air strikes killed 256 Palestinians, including 66 children. 72,000 Gazans were made homeless in the same period, driven out by military forces and Israeli violence. In 2022, Israel killed five times as many Palestinians in 2022 then during the same period in 2021.

When it comes to Israel’s military, there’s no question about it: the Israeli military is a brutal, violent force with no regard for civilian casualties and a tendency to kill innocent Palestinians. From stabbing people to leave



them to bleed to death, or “mistakenly” firing shells into Palestinian farmers then covering the incident up, Israel’s military has a routine of Palestinian killings that seems either intentional or caused by incredible negligence. From the air via drone and aircraft attack and on the ground via shootings and illegal executions, Palestinians face constant threat from their Israeli oppressors.

To make matters worse, it is not just Palestinians that have been callously murdered by the IDF, it is also the humanitarian organizations stepping in to provide aid that come under fire. In its 55 year occupation, numerous charities have been shelled, bombarded and shut down by Israeli forces. Most notably, a Red Crescent office in Gaza was shelled by Israeli occupation forces, killing two of its occupants. It's thus no surprise Israeli politicians have given their military “full freedom to defeat terrorism”, a policy now paving the way for the unjustified murder and abuse of civilians at checkpoints and throughout villages and towns.

While Israel continues to deny any wrongdoing and claim it has only targeted military areas, the simple facts show the opposite. In Gaza Israeli air strikes have struck hospitals multiple times. One doctor described the scene at al-Shifa Hospital as “catastrophic”, himself feeling “haunted” by the sight of mangled bodies, and the helpless screams of children injured in the strikes.

With over two thousand children killed in just 20 years by Israeli forces, it is clear these are horrific, unjustifiable murders that count as human



rights violations. Organizations such as Human Rights Watch, as well as the UN have said that these “amount to war crimes”, and are thus illegal under international law.

Palestinians also face forceful, violent evictions by Israeli military forces who often arrest and brutalize them, while displacing them from their homes and bulldozing them straight after. The house’s former occupants are often then unfairly tried, incarcerated even as minors, or indefinitely detained. These horrific actions of course remain legal under Israeli law, which allows Jewish families to reclaim property, while preventing Palestinians from doing so. Entire Palestinian localities have been erased in favor of Israeli ones, with new and expensive real estate popping up all over the border on the ashes of the Palestinian families buried underneath.

"THE ISRAELI MILITARY IS A BRUTAL, VIOLENT FORCE WITH NO REGARD FOR CIVILIAN CASUALTIES"

Meanwhile, even during prayer, Palestinians struggle to escape Israeli violence. Israeli forces raided the Al Aqsa Mosque without reason with an apparent desire to escalate tensions, purposefully attacking elders and other worshippers, as well as firing tear gas and stun grenades inside.

Israel also exercises control over the Gaza Strip and the movement of its citizens, and enforces an extensive buffer zone that renders much needed land unavailable to Palestinians. Within the strip, Israel has fomented shortages of clean water, healthcare and electricity, creating widespread poverty. Because of this and little sign of any improvement, the UN predicted Gaza would be unlivable by 2020 with its horrific conditions and complete lack of basic necessities.

Further compounding this issue is an Israeli blockade with border closures and barriers to exit at sea and by air, and which infringes on free export and import. This blockade has disrupted and blocked the supply of food, fuel

and medicine, while doing little to accomplish its stated goal of harming the militant group Hamas. Such a blockade, alongside other human rights violations, has been referred to the International Criminal Court for investigation, despite attempts by Israel to refuse entry to the organization's investigators.

Israel and its military oversee one of the most brutal and inhumane occupations in humanity's history. It is without question that Israel's intention was never self defense -- it is the systematic and purposeful killing and displacement of Palestinian citizens, and creating poverty stricken conditions for them to live in. Combine widespread civilian casualties, targeting of civilian and media buildings, a hardline economic blockade as well as violent displacement of Palestinians, and the big picture becomes abundantly clear...

**THIS IS
NOT A
WAR,
IT'S A
MASSACRE.**



▶ Palestinian worshippers running from Israeli tear gas at the Al Aqsa Mosque (AP News) ◀




From Object, to Subject: How 'Cléo from 5 to 7' Subverts the Male Gaze

by Solaia Suherman

Visiting the slightly suspicious arthouse cinema on Beach Road has become my way of escape — from the weight of schoolwork, and social circles, and self-imposed stress. Despite having made it a habitual affair, I will not forget the day I, rather impulsively, sat down to watch Agnès Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7*.

Sunk into a seat, ensconced in the familiar darkness, surrounded by perfect strangers, the images moved before me — after learning that she has contracted cancer, *Cléo*, weighed with a foreboding, strides down a staircase, her steps in



"It frustrated me that she was happy to play into what society demanded to be seen of her as a woman — to feel the need to connote a certain to-be-looked-at-ness."

sync with the melody of the music. It was a special moment in which the physical world melted away for me, invoking a melancholic yet beautiful trance: the film and me, me and *Cléo*. As she reaches the bottom of the staircase, she meets her own gaze in a mirror, and, to herself, utters: Hold on, pretty butterfly. Ugliness is a kind of death. As long as I'm

beautiful, I'm more alive than others. With a newfound confidence, she roams the city with a certain awareness and pride — a pride that abides by the knowledge that she is being gazed at for her beauty.

At that moment, an overwhelming wave of inexplicable sadness washed upon me. I questioned why she would go as far as to think that ugliness was a kind of death when actual, tangible death was knocking at her door. Moreover, it frustrated me that she was happy to play into what society demanded to be seen of her as a woman — to feel the need to connote a certain to-be-looked-at-ness. But, more memorably, it provoked in me a chain of thoughts that had only recently landed on John Berger's iconic quote, in which he states that 'men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.' *Cléo de 5 à 7*, or, in English, *Cléo from 5 to 7*, toys with the notion that a woman's core purpose in cinema, thus wider society, is to be, merely, an ornamental object to be gazed at — passively watching others looking, rather than actively doing the looking.

Cléo's Metamorphosis

The film moves in real-time. From 5 to 7PM, *Cléo* undergoes a profound internal transformation, hence the title. It is a film about time — transporting the viewer back to a time in which

films took their time to unfold (much like the layers of an onion). In fact, no big action takes place through its length, as a result, coming across as slow to the modern mind. But, this slowness, if you will, wields power. We are walking with Cléo, in the literal sense, as she wanders the streets of Paris, and also metaphorically, as she navigates what it is to let go of self absorption. We feel her subjective perspective on time ebb and flow, lending us an incredibly intimate, personal vantage-point on this character, and much more importantly, emphasises the concept of the gaze (the film is 90 minutes long, as opposed to 2 hours long in real-time, suggesting the subjectivity of time). Varda's



"The vision of the late and great Agnès Varda deeply resonates with me."

technique in the art of filmmaking is playful, yet intentional — whipping the camera from one character to the next, holding the lens on seemingly insignificant paraphernalia and on the time-ravaged faces of people, decorating the screen with detail, using joyful jump-cuts and energetic zoom-ins... she knows when to move and when to pause, inviting us, the audience, to look, to study, to consider, to question, to realise, and to look again.



On a superficial level, this is a story of a beautiful, yet self-absorbed singer as she grapples with the premonition of death, leading her to wander, almost aimlessly, from place to place. It is a search

for meaning that forces her to change her perspective on the world. In the first half of the film, mirrors adorn the screen — an overwhelming reminder of Cléo's vanity. So often, we, the audience, look at her world through these mirrors, as if some sort of a portal into her soul. Faced with an unprecedented fear, she holds onto her self image for security. Perhaps, she leans her confidence on this beauty of hers — of embodying an object of femininity as a means of vitality. Somehow, the people around her are also invested in her beauty. But, she is merely a spectacle in the eyes of (male) passerbys — an object meant to be gazed at. It could be said that beauty is the very thing that defines and obliterates Cléo.

In her walk to nowhere, she decides to stop by a friend who works as a nude model for a group of artists. When Cléo asks her how she has the courage to do so, her friend muses that 'they are looking at more than just me — a shape, an idea.'

Soon after, she drops her hand mirror from the top of a staircase, shattering as it hits the ground, its fragmented pieces reflecting broken parts of her complexion. It is no coincidence that it is the last mirror we see in the film. Perhaps, this is a symbolic death of Cléo's hold on beauty. Indeed, subjectivity is the golden string that runs through the film. The nuanced shift of the subjective camera's attention from her face, to the world around her face suggests that she sees the city actively. We are no longer looking at the city funneling its eyes at her. We are now looking outward, presented with opportunity, possibility, liberation, and a certain sporadicity.

Suddenly, she doesn't see herself through the lens of feminine beauty. Suddenly, she sees herself as a person, not a doll. Suddenly, her place in the world is all the more clear. Suddenly, nobody is looking. It is fully Cléo's world, in which she is looking. She has made peace with her body's impermanence. She is fully in control.

Varda's Gaze

When faced with the near impossible question of one film that has changed my life, amongst many others, Cléo from 5 to 7 springs to mind almost immediately. The vision of the late and great Agnès Varda deeply resonates with me. Varda happens to be one of my favourite directors (Cléo from 5 to 7 was her second feature film). As one of the most influential film directors of the French New Wave movement, or Nouvelle Vague, her life and oeuvre has immeasurably influenced the medium of filmmaking, and, most notably, has paved the way for female directors in a very much male-dominated industry. Cléo from 5 to 7, serves as the entrée to her masterful body of work.

But it is the way that she handles the concept of the gaze that excites me. Throughout the history of cinema, films have been portrayed through the lens of men, in other words, under the influence of the male gaze. The male gaze was a term first coined by Laura Mulvey in her revolutionary essay, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.' As a film theorist, she argued that most mainstream movies depicted women as a passive object as a means to visually satisfy the active, heterosexual male figure.

Whilst Varda's fellow (male) directors, such as Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut, brought life to a number of 'independent' female characters, there still remains a sense of passivity, fantasy, and lack of authenticity in their embodiments. They give the impression of characters made by men, for men, instead of whole human beings.

Agnès Varda's work doesn't buy into the male gaze, rather, abides by the female gaze. She did something not many people had the bravery to do. By situating specific women in specific places, she lets her characters live as individuals in a patriarchal world, in which the very definitions of femininity are in upheaval. She lets them provoke, challenge, question, and breathe. Suddenly, there was a new voice in the face of cinema — that of women.

In Cléo from 5 to 7, Agnès Varda takes the idea of the male gaze and subverts it. The story begins with Cléo bound by the structures of society, performing for the gaze of men. But then, Varda undermines its power by lending her the possibility of being the one looking. This subversion is a powerful act that not only deeply inspires me, but further proves Varda's pure genius in the art of visual storytelling.

Cléo, from 5 to 7, moved from being an object of desire, to a desiring subject — from the one being looked at, to the one looking; and, from a bearer of meaning, to a maker of meaning. The scales of power have been balanced. Finally, she is in control. ■



ABOUT SOLAIA

Solaia is an artist, filmmaker, poet, and essayist. She runs a blog called *Iris Archive* together with her friend Shayna Tjiputra. Given that her father is an art collector, she has always been exposed to the world of art since a very young age. She finds solace in tucking into a corner to research, write, or read (specifically Alain de Botton, depending on the day). She loves cinema and believes this medium will always have a special place in her heart!



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