

BEYOND THE *BUBBLE*

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APPEARANCE VS. REALITY



FROM THE EDITOR

Hello and welcome to the first edition of 'Beyond the Bubble' of this academic year!

From the manipulation of information from news outlets to images we see on social media becoming increasingly easier to edit, the phrase "don't judge a book by its cover" has never seemed more fitting. That's why we've decided to explore the theme of 'appearance versus reality' for this edition- trying our hands at peeling back the layers of misconception and revealing the truth ourselves. With the large influx of information coming our way every day, whether it be at school, online or simply in casual conversation, it can be easier to just accept things at face value- and you wouldn't be blamed for doing so. The idea of looking beyond what's first presented to you is more relevant than ever, especially when considering current affairs and events around the world, and we hope that by looking at the illusions of perfection crafted by social media and questioning the sincerity of companies that usually go without critique, we encourage you to look at things you come across every day with a slightly more critical eye and make your decisions while striving to hear all perspectives.

There's always something more than what meets the eye, and this publication is no exception. As always, I have to thank our lovely team, including Mrs Sahi, who have all worked very hard to get this edition to you.

I hope you enjoy reading!

Sanchali Greelan



Table of Contents:

ARTICLES

- 4 **Social Media - Aid or an Obstruct?**
- 5 **Celebrities: The Dichotomy of Fake vs. Reality**
- 7 **From Global Warming to Global Boiling, who is Responsible?**
- 8 **Barbie: A Unity in Pink Revealed**
- 10 **All that Glitters is not Gold**
- 12 **Beyond the Big Bang**

POETRY

- 14 **“Tick Tick Boom”**



Social Media: Aid or Obstruct?

by Tanisha Shah

Social media, one medium of communication out of the plethora of modes, has become the centre of life today with individuals like us being in constant orbit around it. A sudden glitch and we assume our lives are put off balance, drifting away into the unknown abyss: raising the question whether this profoundly impactful platform is leading to the betterment of mankind or the downfall of humanity as we know it.

Though the enhancement of individual expression is an undeniable benefit of social media due to its widespread global reach and the diversifying of the general public's outlook on different aspects, should it be able to pressure us to conform our unique opinions and identities? Is suppressing our individualism worth it for the pursuit of a couple extra likes and comments? Social validation will become detrimental to our population's attempt to progress further as this will only limit the variation of ideas. Just ticking the boxes, fitting ourselves into perfectly shaped cubicles like everyone else will certainly create an organised, well-oiled machine carrying out its sole function. But how useful will this machine be if a certain issue arises? With everyone confined to their boxes and incapable of thinking beyond their own bubble, the machine is going to be rendered useless



Whilst surveillance is done for national and personal security, suppression of individual privacy is another major concern. The constant monitoring can be considered as a form of spying as you're always under watch and always in check, on your toes, anxious as well as cautious. This along with data tracking limits our willingness to express 'supposed' controversial or unpopular viewpoints. Never knowing whether the next day something we posted harmlessly will haunt us and possibly reroute our lives dismisses our ability to debate or even consider unconventional thoughts. Forcing us into our boxes and bubbles yet again, social media limits the exposure to diverse perspectives even though it markets itself to do the opposite. Hence, all these individual bubbles are endlessly waiting to be popped, removing their filters, speaking their truths, and embracing the individualism inside.

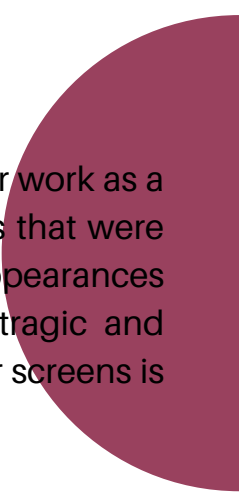
The fact that everyone has their own experiences with social media must be considered a major factor in determining whether social media is an aid to you or an obstruct. By learning and realising the positives and negatives of this platform in your life, you shall enable yourself to limit the effects of this addictive, influential source of information. Only then will you be able to make the change in your life the way you want it to be made.

Celebrities: The Dichotomy of Fake vs. Reality

by Mahum Qadeer

In an era dominated by social media and false portrayals of celebrity life, the tragic tales of Caroline Flack and Matthew Perry serve as reminders that what meets the eye is often a carefully curated illusion. Their stories not only shed light on the disparity between appearance and reality but also underline the pressing need to exercise caution when consuming content online. Two such examples are Caroline Flack and Matthew Perry.





Caroline Flack, known for her vibrant, joyful personality, inspired many through her work as a television presenter. However, behind the scenes, Flack battled personal demons that were often shielded from the public eye. The media's biased focus on her glamorous appearances overshadowed the challenges she faced in her personal life resulting in the tragic and shocking news of her suicide. It serves as a reminder that the image we see on our screens is not always an accurate representation of a person's reality.

Furthermore, Matthew Perry renowned for his role as Chandler Bing on the TV show "Friends," experienced a similar conflict between his public persona and his personal struggles. While Chandler's character brought joy to millions around the world, Perry faced his own battles with addiction and mental health. The media often overlooked these challenges, creating the illusion that celebrities live perfect lives. Perry's journey reminds us that even those who seem to have it all can face inner turmoil.

The contrasting narratives surrounding celebrities like Caroline Flack and Matthew Perry shed light on the impact of fake versus reality. The public's perception of these individuals is shaped by carefully curated images and stories presented by the media. However, it is essential to remember not everything we see or hear about on social media is true, and it is up to us to use our better judgment and think about whether or not what we see is an accurate depiction. By acknowledging the gap between the public image and reality, we can become a more empathetic and understanding society, working together to help those in need who do not often make it to the limelight.

Caroline Flack and Matthew Perry serve as poignant examples of the victims of biased media. Their stories remind us to look beyond the surface and recognize the complexities of their lives, and realise they were living, feeling humans just like me and you. It may be too late for them, but there are still multitudes of people right now falling victim to censored media, and it is up to us as a society to prevent these tragedies and realise who is in need of help.

From Global Warming to Global Boiling, who's Responsible?

by Miman Lama

"The era of global warming has ended. The era of global boiling has arrived." Antonio Guterres, as a secretary general from the UN, has confirmed July 2023 to be the hottest month within the last 120,000 years and that climate change has worsened to such an extent that the world is now in a state of global boiling. Ways of being increasingly environmentally aware has been integrated into most of our daily lives, and as working-class people, we can switch to renewable energy, either use public transport, walk, or cycle where possible, recycle, and change to energy efficient appliances. It is without a doubt these efforts have a positive effect on the environment, but with so much being done by us, it's questionable as to why results drastically show otherwise.

According to a report published by the British charity 'Oxfam', billionaires' investments produce an annual average of 3 million metric tons of carbon dioxide per person, which is a million times higher than the average 2.76 tons of carbon dioxide for those living in the bottom 90%. For as long the rich fail to accept responsibility and change their methods, it is those below them financially that must endure the consequences. We are indirectly upholding their tendency to lead lavish lifestyles by travelling large and short distances privately, owning expensive and multiple properties and vehicles, unnecessarily overconsuming and wasting goods, and exhausting a significantly higher amount of energy and emissions associated to their lifestyles than an average middle classed individual.

The rich are exploiting the remaining and limited 'carbon budget' by leading excessive lifestyles whilst keeping in mind the bare minimum as to not push the world past 1.5oC of increased warming by the end of the century. They "aren't making the space for the bottom 50% of the population to grow their emissions to the point where they're actually getting their needs met", says Emily Ghosh, a staff scientist at the Stockholm Environment Institute. All billionaires may not have the same impact as some may be taking sustainable initiatives, however it is solely people of their wealth who can contribute as massively to the environmental issues as they do.



Barbie: A Unity in Pink Revealed

by Sanchali Sreelan

It isn't often that we see women from all walks of life band together, but when we do the effect is outstanding- and it's relatively obvious what I'm referring to. Greta Gerwig's July 2023 film "Barbie" is easily one of the most highly anticipated of the year, inviting little girls, teenage girls, women and even some men into its vibrant fantasyland and pink bedazzled charm. And if you've been unfortunate enough to tune into to any of the critique surrounding it, you may find yourself subjected to the outcries of conservatives that the film is 'man-hating' vitriol and feminist propaganda. But I'll do you one better- the Barbie movie wasn't feminist enough.

I'm not denying it's impact. Culturally, I've never felt so united with my peers walking into a movie theatre decked out in pink. The team behind "Barbie" does an incredible job with its costuming and set design, encouraging and revitalising the female audience's interest in things that are stereotypically girly, hyperfeminine and things they can't engage in usually due to the fear of not being taken seriously. The buzz of Barbie is what I really loved about it- not so much it's message, but rather the camaraderie it inspired. That's not to say that the message wasn't true. In the film, there's a moment when one of the human characters, Gloria, stands up and makes a speech about what it truly means to be a woman. "You have to have money, but you can't ask for money because that's crass. You have to be a boss, but you can't be mean. You have to lead, but you can't squash other people's ideas" she says, and it's a sentiment that I agree with wholeheartedly. But the truth is that this isn't something new or unorthodox. Gloria simply puts into words what women have known and have been trying to express for years, and the fact that something that many women feel is just the truth is being penned as some kind of earth-shattering feminist rhetoric is honestly shocking. The truth is that most of "Barbie" 's message lacks nuance, and only scratches the surface of something that could have been truly subversive and actually fall into the "feminist propaganda" sector that conservatives are so appalled by.

“Barbie” ’s biggest achievement is also in some ways its biggest downfall- it has been made for an audience that is far too wide. The film attempts to curb any potential ‘what-ifs’ by trying to mention a whole plethora of issues just through one liners – perhaps due to the long-standing critique Mattel and, by extension, Barbie has faced because of the beauty standards the doll has been said to uphold- stretching itself far too thin and making it almost impossible for real points to be expanded upon. For example, I really enjoyed how the story of the Kens reflected how real-life women are treated- but at the end of the day, Ken is a man in a story about woman. The storyline places so much of the spotlight on Ken and his existential crises that it misses the opportunity to flesh out other characters, such as the humans. Gloria and Sasha, the human mother-daughter duo featured in “Barbie”, are also notably characters of colour. The movie could have leaned much further into the experiences of women of colour and the messages of intersectional feminism if it hadn’t spent so much time on conveying the cartoon-villain buffoonery of the Mattel bosses and Ken’s obsession with horses.

Perhaps the most ironic of all is the fact that because the film is quite literally funded by Mattel, the multi-million-dollar corporation behind the Barbie dolls conception, there’s quite a few issues that cannot be addressed. The company Mattel literally thrives on the exploitation of poor – you guessed it – women and an article by the Solidar foundation claims that during an inspection of two Mattel factories in Mexico, female workers were found to be sexually harassed by their colleagues. But of course, we choose to ignore this in favour of looking at the pretty pink clothes and the Instagrammable nature of the film, showcased through its admittedly impeccable marketing.

While I’ll be the first to admit that I enjoyed the film, I don’t think I’ll be alone in saying that it fell short of its grand feminist promises, instead delivering knowledge that anyone who’s existed as a woman long enough knows. The pretty pink paradise Gerwig and Robbie create is exactly that- but not much more.



All That Glitters is Not Gold

By Arthur Kepke- Wysocki

If it looks too good to be true, feels too good to be true and sounds too good to be true; then there is a high likelihood that it is too good to be true. What am I referring to? The biggest cover-up of modern times: the Temu Takeover.

Everywhere you look all you can see is an advert for the next Shein or Temu product, conveniently placed just a click away. Marketing strategies for both Shein and Temu mean that these Chinese fashion giants have become household names, by hiding in plain sight. Three years ago, Temu barely existed, but now it and its counterpart Shein dominate the market with every household product you can think of, at absurdly cheap prices.

At facilities claiming to be training centres, the Uyghur ethnic minority in the Xinjiang province are being raped, tortured and exploited. While the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) maintains the opinion that these 'centres' are an integral part of their "Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism"- which is actually a thinly veiled attempt to prevent Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims of the region from practicing and expressing their religion- the people being detained in these internment camps are being used for forced labour. The Ughyur Times suggests that there is an "extremely high risk that Temu's supply chains are contaminated with forced labor": which isn't surprising considering their business model. Temu operates on a business model that relies on the de minimis exemption to avoid paying import duties on international orders, hence driving down the cost for the consumer. However, this exemption also enables Temu to essentially ignore the USA's Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA), since they do not have to make as many checks on their imports. The only measure they take is ensuring that the terms and conditions of their sellers claim that no forced labour is used, which is easy to fabricate. There is no prohibition on Temu sellers delivering products originated in Xinjiang too, with some items even being listed as containing materials sourced from the region.



Image sourced by Minyoung

Shein is in a similar situation to Temu, also claiming that they do not use forced labour, though an investigation by Bloomberg suggests that their clothing uses Xinjiang cotton. Shein makes use of the de minimis exemptions as well, hence allowing them to get away with revealing very little information about their imports. Whilst it may seem that these companies are able to sell at such a low price simply due to the avoidance of import duties, upon simple investigation it is clear that there are connections between Shein, Temu and the exploitation of ethnic minorities in China. In fact, allegations by American lawmakers about the involvement of Shein and Temu in these practices have led to an investigation by the Select Committee on the CCP.

But if it is so easy to uncover the ties between Ughur mistreatment and these companies, why is business still booming? Successful censorship means that for most, this situation isn't visible and doesn't seem prevalent, instead some problem for a distant population with no ties to their daily lives. However, what many people don't see is the effectiveness of refusing to engage with Temu and Shein's persuasive marketing. After all, the company operates on 'supply-and-demand'; by effectively removing the demand by boycotting prevents funding for this injustice being generated. Boycotting also enables has also encouraged investigation into the policies of western companies such as Nike by the same Select Committee looking into the CCP.

SHEIN



Beyond the Big Bang

By Christopher Zander

"In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth" (Genesis 1:1): such was the common Western belief for hundreds of years, originating from thousands of years of religious history. Today, it seems the scientific community has united behind a new message – in the beginning, the Universe created itself.

The Big Bang Theory is a theory originating from the 1920's and 30's, generally taken as the "accepted" explanation for where the Universe comes from. The very simplest version suggests that the universe began as a singularity, a point almost infinitely small in space, which then rapidly expanded into the known universe. There is some further nuance within this, such as a variable rate of expansion causing a period known as "inflation".

Regardless, the theory of the Big Bang has been accepted; there are two primary pieces of evidence that we are taught in school. These are red-shifting and the Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation.

The Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation is a signal found everywhere throughout the universe, responsible for some of the TV static we see. The Big Bang would have been a remarkably energetic event; that energy should still be in the Universe, since energy cannot be destroyed. The CMBR is essentially this leftover energy, which we observe as a universal buzz of around 2 degrees Kelvin.¹

The second piece of evidence is slightly more complicated, relying (loosely) on a scientific principle called the Doppler Effect; this where we observe waves stretching or contracting based on relative motion to the source of the waves. One famous example of this effect is ambulance sirens, which we observe rising in pitch as they approach, followed by a more "stretched out" sound as the ambulance races away. A similar effect occurs on a galactic scale with light; if a light source is moving away from us, the light we see will be "stretched out", which means that it will be slightly redder – we call this effect "redshift".

Almost all of the galaxies we observe seem to have this redshift effect, with some small exceptions (such as the neighbouring Andromeda galaxy). The only realistic way for this to happen is if the Universe is expanding, so by extension, this suggests that the Universe was at some point much smaller than it is now.



These are, as mentioned, the two primary, strongest pieces of evidence for the occurrence of the Big Bang. There is, however, evidence against the Big Bang – much of it is fairly scientific. One particular thorn in astronomer's sides is the Hubble Constant – a value used to measure the rate of expansion of the Universe. Over the years, this not-quite constant has caused major headaches for astronomers. There are several ways to measure the Hubble Constant, from finding a relationship between distance and recession speed of galaxies, to using supernovae, even using the CMBR to find a value.² What astronomers have found is that these methods each find a slightly different value; an issue severe enough to be named "The Hubble Tension". Historically, the ranges of the values found would line up – note that a range of possible values in an experiment is found due to instrument and method imprecision – but as our technology has become increasingly precise, the ranges no longer overlap.² The rate of expansion of the Universe, so the Hubble Constant, lies close to the very heart of the Big Bang Theory, so a disparity here is a severe problem for the model.

Leaving the Hubble Constant aside, our current model suggests a certain order for which things happened – first time and space were created, then fundamental particles, and so on – and most of our historical data has lined up with the theory. Recently, however, the James Webb Telescope found very large galaxies far too early in time.³ This may sound like a small matter, but it's akin to having adult grandchildren whilst you yourself are a child – another severe issue.

If we analyse the situation carefully, we actually realise a fatal flaw with any scientific attempt to explain where the Universe comes from, related to conservation of energy.

Conservation of energy is one of the most central, foundational principles on which we have built science, dictating that something cannot come from nothing, and something cannot become nothing. This principle is fundamentally unbreakable, and the closest we can come to breaking it is equivalent to taking a small zero-interest loan and suggesting you have made money – very quickly, you will realise you haven't.

The flaw in a scientific approach is found in the form of a simple question: if something cannot come from nothing, where did the Universe come from? A singularity, but where did that come from?

As far as the question asked and the accepted theory of the Big Bang goes, there is no good answer – the only possible way to resolve the many flaws in the Big Bang is to radically reconsider the model, or even to completely abandon it and create a new story. Which path will ultimately be chosen is difficult to say; perhaps, after all these years, the only way forward will be a return to Genesis.



The School for Good Mothers: A Review

By Zara Khan

"The School for Good Mothers" by Jessamine Chan immerses readers in a dystopian exploration of motherhood and societal expectations. In this near-future world, Frida Liu becomes the central figure, enrolled in the mysterious School for Good Mothers after a seemingly minor parenting misstep. Chan skilfully weaves a tense narrative that examines the complex dynamics of morality, control, and the blurred lines between nurturing and overbearing.

The novel's dystopian backdrop, forces readers to confront uncomfortable truths about the social norms. Chan's writings invite reflection on the pressure placed on mothers and challenges conventional values of motherhood within a society where acceptance comes with a cost.

With thoroughly developed characters, including the compelling protagonist Frida, the story goes beyond its dystopian setting to serve as a thoughtful commentary on present-day issues. The book is an intriguing, haunting read, essential for those interested in the difficulties of morality in a complex and dystopian world.



Tick Tick Boom

by Tanisha Shah

Eyes that dimmer behind the flash
Cheeks that hollow after a click
Smiles that contract without backlash
Minds that constantly circulate

Tick Tick Crash

The camera never knows, you never know,
nor will I

I stand wearing my mask as my skin
holding tightly to my helmet of a skull
wandering aimlessly in my protective
bubble. Unaware and Unrecognised.

Tick Tick Pop

I succumb to the poison of the stinging
scorpions and the snakes slithering around.
Pushing me ever so closer to the bomb in
the centre of it all.

Tick Tick Boom

Fragments of me scatter like ashes after
Pompeii, waiting to solidify. Hoping in
despair of rejuvenation but we all know, I
can't reverse the ache and quake. And so I
smile.

Tick Tick Flash

The camera did what it must
so I shall as well. In ignorance and in
solitude. For no one would understand, no
one but me, no one at all.



Artwork by Shaan Kharaud