

The Singaporean “auntie” is a cultural archetype that refers to a middle-aged (or older) woman whose many qualities include: (a) giving plenty of (unsolicited) advice, (b) showing concern about your state of full-belliedness (and feeding you regardless), and (c) anticipating five moves ahead of every theoretical situation and quantum state of existence, by drawing upon decades of knowledge hearing about people being conned, hacked or dying of flesh-eating bacteria from a bad batch of bok choy.

Someday, I’ll be one of those aunties who do back bends at the park connector. Or who slap their limbs with open palms to stimulate qi. Or dance Zumba to Canto-pop at the foot of my housing estate under an outdoor pavilion flanked by palm trees.

But that day is not today.

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In the mall adjacent to my office, I step into a parallel universe. Disco lights speckle the black walls with red and green dots that stretch into lines and become dots again. Speakers blast “Right Here Right Now” by Fatboy Slim, which makes me realize, right there and right then, how much I’ve not missed hearing it all these years. This is how I imagine a teenager would have curated a basement party in the late ’90s, and I almost expect us to suddenly slow dance or play spin the bottle.

This is no basement. There will be no slow dancing. I am in a boutique gym, where for the next hour, I shall bounce on a trampoline.