NEW VILLAGE

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It asks a question you do not know the answer to, until you enter. The mystery - it is found in your movement through it, the backdrop to so many uncertainties, inevitabilities.



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The poet Wong Phui Nam said the Malaysian poet is fucked. That is, the poet has to find his own voice, and the search alienates him from the Malaysian reader. The English language is a poor fit for Malaysian experience, Phui Nam says, no matter how deeply the poet explores it.

That's beautiful, yet bullshit. One of the roles of language is to express what is unspeakable and the volume of unspeakable things grows at the edges of language. Here, I'm thinking of how difficult it is to empathize with someone who speaks a different language than you. There have been efforts to fit English to the Malaysian experience, like Ee Tiang Hong's Engmalchin, but they have died out. And there are even bigger problems with this claim. Is there any culture English is suited for?

The constant striving to fit language to experience is the role of literature. Discussions, critical and public, foster literature. The government built up the National Laureates program and let their works go out of print decades later.

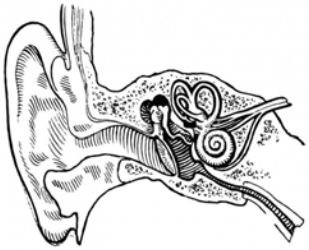
We have lost our appreciation of critical thinking. A piece of writing must be judged by the ideas it expresses, after all. I am accustomed to responding emotionally to the newspapers, but that response has given way to apathy. I suspect I am not the only one.

These are not problems, they are opportunities. We are a young country and we need to recover a love of critical thought and craftsmanship. If we never had it in the first place, let's take a shot at loving those things. This is why we started New Village.

- Tshiung Han See,
Editor

SAMY KANDIAH

Shivani Siva



After the sun—just a moment ago ridiculously orange and too titillating for Samy Kandiah who was walking the town twice as he did daily except for weekends—slipped into the Straits of Malacca and lay like a fallen coin at its base (or so he liked to think) came the most confused period of the days and nights. Sunless, he thought, *and* moonless. Black birds circled the tops of buildings, squawking and shrieking madly, sensing the end of something, a certain unverifiable death that happened every single day between seven-twenty-five and seven-thirty PM. Crepuscular knowledge was what he had failed to acquire even though he stopped in front of Ah Lang Hardware Store to wait and see if, once the sun exited and before the moon could start its shift, he'd get accosted by an old melody, coming from the hills or through some cave echo, and its tune would send him to sleep every night, and he'd dream about the truth and nothing else. It was time for that to hit him.

But Ah Lang Hardware Store brought no such luck. All he was left with when the hand on the clock tower crept towards a quarter to eight was the nervous urgency to get home before the Family sent out its youth to locate him, "Just in case," he could hear his wife shouting above the blender's rattle, "he's gone and jumped off a cliff." His death, usually by his own volition, was anticipated by the Family with the regularity of a norm and sometimes Samy Kandiah felt that the Family would benefit from a sense of accomplishment if he went and jumped off the cliff that was real only in his wife's sentences (which cliff? The one on the far end of the island? The one I'd

have to take a two-hour bus journey to get to? He'd wanted to ask) or hang himself from the mango tree that his daughter-in-law seemed to have a fetish for. Many times she'd predicted his death materializing on the highest branch of the mango tree in the garden of Shiva's Abode. And when she said this he'd be right there in front of her, sometimes even eating a fruit from the tree that would take his life. "If I do kill myself," he'd once said while the Family froze and widened their eyes, "I'll do it my own way, you hear? I'll do it theatrically or make it look like murder and you'll spend the next twenty years trying to figure it out." Of course he knew he shouldn't have said that. Then if he did finally vanish from their lives by some elaborate, gorgeous method, they'd know it was elaborate and gorgeous because he had fashioned it himself. They didn't have the patience or the skill to wonder how something complex became complex. It was enough for them to know that the complexity was created, that it was not a mysterious occurrence. So now he couldn't even kill himself. And again, the old melody, the magic, murmuring knowledge at twilight—one in the same or completely different, he didn't know—did not come.

He walked home, fighting off insects, a great group of them, he could sense, dancing above his head, giving him an active halo whose energy he wished could have been donated to his limbs. He exercised Monday to Friday but his joints still creaked and his back, stiff from toil-free years, sometimes made him regret his afternoon armchair-sittings when he was younger and needed a cup of basil tea and a stack of books to assure himself that he was living. It wasn't pure regret because he would not have become the man that he was and although people kept predicting his suicide—and he occasionally imagined it—he kind of liked his oldness, the fact that he ached in body and heart, and that the Family watched him with glazed eyes. There was no more room in the house for an armchair, just wooden and plastic chairs, many, many of them as though the armchair contained in its grandeur and comfort the ability to translate its qualities into quantities, sacrificing its value for the accommodation of a crowd.

He wished he'd only procreated once. But he'd been tricked and excited and too weak to resist the idea of living with his wife, one child between them to offer relief from each other. They had needed seven, apparently. And they still needed three of them—and the three's mates and offspring—to make life continue as before, when they woke up in the mornings, and it was enough not to worry about the beauty of enjoying an idle breakfast because a child was waking up in the next room, and it was perfectly normal and true to talk about milk powder brands and the most effective rice cooker. He'd spent years bringing life into life, a profound contribution that made him feel less profound when he thought about it, walking the town of Coal Island, seeking his old melody, his twilight knowledge.

When he got home he heard pans tumbling, oil popping and his wife ordering her daughters-in-law to dice green chillies with more passion. "You see this," she said

in her upbeat kitchen voice, "anyone will say a child has taken over the knife. Aiyoh, girls! Put your heart into it lah." He removed his slippers, about to step into the home that he had designed forty years ago when he used to close his eyes before sleep and a pageantry of images spiced his nights, urging his hands in the morning to draw a house fit for a teacher and his wife or, as he often thought, a scholar and his wife.

"Ma! How many plates have you put on the table?" his second daughter-in-law shouted.

Plates. He wondered if he cared for them, those circular items that had become a fixture in life on which nourishment sat and fingers played, soaking up curry, the gloop of ladies' fingers. He didn't really want to see another melamine plate with floral designs. Suddenly he hated plates, hated them with a rough, stormy-sea anger. Why in the world were plates dominating their lives? He wanted to run into the kitchen, take every diseased plate there was and break each one with his foot. Let the blood come. It was time for that to hit him.

But he stayed outside, looking at the mango tree, now purely dark and seemingly fruitless, and then he put his slippers back on and walked away from the front porch, off to the garden shed he had built twenty years ago when he had lied to the Family (then only half its current size) about his fascination with periwinkles and dragonfruits. "I'll grow them," he said, "somewhere in the corner of this garden but I'll need a shed to do that. For my tools." No periwinkles or dragonfruits ever appeared, even faintly, from the soil for they had not had plants to grow out of. The shed stayed, however, and housed his books. His wife never entered it, fearing the proliferation of cobwebs in "such a filthy low-class thing as a shed".



Samy sat on a rattan wicker chair and stared at the light bulb. He could still hear noises from the house. His son Kuhan had returned from work and was interesting the Family with two kilograms of mutton he had received as a present from his boss. Why was mutton such a fascination for them? He wanted to shout

back at them. "Eh you," he fancied himself saying, "the bloody sun at dusk is better, far better than a sickening piece of meat." He liked mutton, he knew that, but he wouldn't pray to it or allow it to make him happier than he had been before he had eaten it. Perhaps, he thought with a finality that shocked him, it was time to die.

It was not Death, for I stood up,
And all the Dead, lie down—
It was not Night, for all the Bells
Put out their Tongues for Noon.

He tried to remember more but he couldn't. It was only the beginning of the poem. He had *The Collected Works of Emily Dickinson* in the shed, on a shelf unknown to him and he could have gone to look for it, but he didn't want to. He had known the poem by heart before. It would return to him. Did he once try to recite it to his wife?

"Do you like poems?" Yes, he had asked her that before marriage.

She giggled and flipped her hair. She was the only Ceylonese girl he knew who had green eyes. She was also the only Ceylonese girl he knew who didn't need lipstick to project a red appetizing mouth. She didn't answer him. He should have known then. But it was wrong of him to think like that. In the early years, she had hidden birthday presents under the mattress for him, she'd cried during arguments, hugged him in the nights. Then something happened. No, no. Nothing actually happened. Everything was as it was from the beginning.

And yet, it tasted, like them all,
The Figures I have seen
Set orderly, for Burial,
Reminded me, of mine—

He should have recited it to her anyway. They would have had clarity then, when he was moustachioed and she had natural curls. Her arms had always been slim, lean, muscular flesh. How lucky he was that she had not grown fat, only thinner. And why did they have to procreate? It didn't matter that they did, now that he thought of it.

When everything that ticked—has stopped—
And Space stares all around—
Or Grisly frosts—first Autumn morns,
Repeal the Beating Ground—

The Beating Ground. Emily knew her stuff. Did the ground beat the feet or was the ground beating itself? Itself. It was less important to be beating something else. Nothing major could come out of it. He longed for twilight again. He'd wait in the shed till morning when the other twilight emerged. The pans were still tumbling but the oil had stopped popping. Dinner Is Served. But that was not what Samy wanted. In his thirties, he'd been called Mr. Samy Kennedy. Kennedys were handsome, oratorical, rhetorical...ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country. Well, he had taught schoolchildren for thirty years and they had still grown up dumb. One or two had become ministers of parliament. Did they bother to think about Emily alone in her room, thousands of poems beneath her bed? He had told them to imagine her and they had closed their eyes but what did they see? "Ma, more rice here lah!" a son shouted.

But most, like Chaos—Stopless—cool—
Without a Chance, or Spar—
Or even a Report of Land—
To justify—Despair.

That was how the poem ended. He knew he had left out some verses but he could not remember them. At least he had got the ending right. And now there was no more. Out of Emily's thousands, this was the one he had chosen for the night. Suddenly the thought of waiting in the shed till dawn bothered him. He wanted to get out, wherever, possibly back to Ah Lang Hardware Store but he had never had luck there. He opened the door of the shed and scanned the garden. It was quiet and dark and the Family was eating inside the house. He dashed across to the front gate, let himself out through the small opening and stood in front of the wall for a moment where no one in the house could see him. He leaned his head against the plaque of the house. It was cool on his skin. He touched it and turned around, facing it.

Shiva's Abode. No. 510.

He knew that number from somewhere else too, back in the day when he had touched something, perhaps a piece of paper. Yes, dung-brown paper smelling of dung. A brand new second-hand copy of *The Collected Works of Emily Dickinson*, stolen from the public library. Now, on this very day, after forty years, only now did he realize that his favourite poem of Emily's was numbered five hundred and ten in that edition. Did it really take that long to make simple connections? Was there even a meaning in such a link?

He started running and he ran till dawn and he heard the Azan and he heard the birds and he saw the royal blue of the sky and he felt a song perch itself on his ear going, "Despair...tra la la...Despair...tra la la" and he collapsed with joy.

UNTITLED

Adele Minke



You are walking, walking, walking. You are not really walking.

You are looking around, taking stock. The eyes have made it clear that they are watching. And maybe there are eyes at the back as well, watching every move. A stare. Not just any stare, but a scrutinizing one. Out of thin air - maybe your voice rings out. Maybe it doesn't. But you know there are voices. And sounds etc. If the point is to be loved then they will be clamouring about. If not then they would have left. The crisscrossing signals from a screenful of silence. Her shoes of brown concealing black.

It's in the eyes, damn it. Someone said from afar. It's in the cheeks as well, if you'd only notice, today. *I can't pretend not to stare. It's too hard to fake.* But, you know, faking it is the virtue of those eyes, and those steps that are about to be taken by you...

You know it's not really the same person entering – you just have to make sure that the view outside remains. Once in awhile, they change as you were keen on the inside, and you thought that they would continue, per se. Not exactly. The man lying on the station floor two days ago, that vagrant, is no longer there. And it's hard to understand why unless you ask. And why would you ask? Surprising, though hardly necessary, even if you feel like a dog most days. You are then transported away, into the pink interior of a train, from the claustrophobic exterior of dust and vehicles.

The person in front of you makes no sense. His eyes glance outwards, inwards,

at the distance. He sits and turns and talks to no one next to him. Ruefully he concludes that it is so, even as someone smiles at him in the opposite seat. So he holds his phone askance, glancing more at the screen, stroking his chin occasionally.

But he stood in public. It's not something one is inclined to do. What he needs is not what you may understand, but you are forced to try nonetheless. The taxis know this. They swoop to pick him up. In a day all this is happening, even as you speak to someone else:

Tauke I'm telling you
老板你不在家
Tiap-tiap hari pun sama
You sure or not, 靓仔?

It's kind of hard not to leave.

*

She might go out. It's not unexpected, her heels striking the floor of the train steadily, herself reflected in the multitude of mirrors surrounding her every step. Later she might return (and who knows, maybe to the same seat), but for now she is moving outwards, to the concrete platform, shoes clicking, and then the steel escalator, driving her down, landing her at the step of swirling dust, and the automobiles honking by the side of the road. Some at her, some not. Still what matters is not so much their honks (and noise) but the swearing and swerving, which inevitably takes place right in front of her eyes, as she decides to lift her feet enough to cross that gap from one concrete to the other. It takes some scurrying to make it over there. And she might remember, afterwards, that old Chinese song covering all those miles, to reach her finally:

夜上海, 夜上海
你是个不夜城 ...

Except, perhaps, by the time that happens it's a little late, the lights will turn on any moment, and she will find out that she isn't, in fact, in Shanghai. The army car rolls by nonchalantly as she continues down her daily walk, dodging cars and motorcycles which will not stop, the glint of the sun shining down onto not only her, but many others like her, with her. Still, the daily commerce intrudes, like that shadow who enters the train at the last moment, skulking its way to an occupied seat, and the stalls are rolled out, planted squarely where one would have walked. No matter. The point is to leave, after all. She must have thought of that for some time

because she doesn't mind. The gathering crowd doesn't mind her. And so on and so forth, the world around.

*

The man knows, though, that he must go home. After the taxi ride is only a short distance from the kind of quiet that you would have liked. It's his insistence on walking the rest of the way that keeps him alive, or so he thinks. The rest of the way, the pavement road, jutting stones...

The park, he had drunk there before. Once in awhile, alone. No more and no less than three bottles before the sky turned dark and he, a slight red. Not that someone would see. Leading on he would just stumble, a minor misstep here and there, onto the path, memorized route back, to his rented place. Cats as company, most of the time. Perhaps a stray dog on occasion. Just miss the turning, the car, and he will then be there.

He inhabits other spaces. It's a little sad to return home. The heart is where it is most anxious there. And so he haunts the train, the train station - places which are lighted by the multitude, in motion. You can never truly leave, as the entrances are filled by those who sit cross-legged, on an improvised bench. Some stare forward as if bored. Others note the ground on which their feet were placed. In all likelihood he had stepped over there, passed through the automatic doors at the same time as the others. He only wants to show that he, too, understands what it's like to walk. Still, it's not as if he has to do so; if he were delayed it would not matter much. There's always time...and the space has its uses, it's where he will sit, and continue.

*

So if she were to meet someone, by the place where everyone meets, she would be thinking. Or not. She would have had measured her heels, already considered – size, inch, comfort – and their clicks combine with the muffled shuffling of others, resonating on the second floor. Impossible to miss someone in the crowd, or at least her heels say so. It's one reason why the steps she takes are deliberately loud. All this assumes an audience, be it one or the many. She is a natural diva.

No, but – it's not just she who you must take note of. Everyone is walking with an audience today.

*

A gaggle of girls sweep by his stupor. Time for a smile? The laws dictate this. And maybe another flurry of hands on phone. But of course her eyes are curved

upwards. They remind him of people he once knew. There is no need to run because of this.

But there might be a need to stay, and, in the nighttime furore, where everything is revolving beyond oneself, it could be where she appears. Out of the light that had been flickering weakly, as if it was in a waiting state, endlessly. As if *he* was in the state of waiting. No stranger to this, him, but not here, not now.

And he is thinking, perhaps not like the others, that there was a need to run after all, to embark on that solitary, almost somnambulistic journey towards... something, perhaps, or nothing in particular. The street lamps comfort him, though, much more so than this seat, in the middle of a landscaped lawn. So it is with the remnants, the echoes of a vast imaginary - *what used to be here* - which he can't escape. Simultaneously caught and (not quite) freed.

The sounds remain the same to him. He is thinking of the sudden onrushing wave that, for him, is distinguishable wherever he goes. It marks an arrival, to some a departure.



*

The two men crushed in intimacy, whispering their unheard language through the compressed space of their being. They leave at the centre. Or what is central in the greater scheme of things.

The feet point in many directions. She had only just entered when the door shut hurriedly. Her face is worn from wear. But the heels are pointing upwards. The feet flip as though there was life in there. And the others leave by the droves.

It's the kind of night where he just might arrive. Low lights and the train's rattle. The seats ooze anticipation, of course. And the doors close just as he leaves the platform. Luckily for him, he isn't caught in between. He makes it there (this was unclear from before).

She shifts uncomfortably as the train hurtles on. One foot crossed above the other. But she is restlessly tapping the screen that separates her from the outside, glancing at the ceiling, floor, others in the train, unable to settle for a thing. Perhaps it's not the best night to be out, you note. She isn't the same now, not as she was yesterday, or three days ago. Calmer then? Certainly she wasn't as distracted.

He may just be thinking the same thing as she is, for one brief moment. It's not clear how many people share this. Nevertheless.

It's a little cliched, but...suppose he met her on the train. They are strangers to one another, of course. You could say the same for the stars outside. From this you would have concluded that each person is a wall to themselves, refusing to be scaled. Until they leave on their own accord, or an outsider enters through the circumstantial door, that is.

Still he doesn't think about all this, when he turns to glance at the window (the outside still attracting him), and his eyes brush her face, the facade on which you note is lowering. Maybe she says, *I don't live here, I'm just passing through,* which he isn't surprised to hear. *Taking the train somewhere,* he mumbles. She can't hear him, really, but she pretends she does. Only the train rumbles on, and the others stand in place, so you don't notice. He is hanging on to the strap that keeps his balance, she, the steel frame, and it appears that both of them are transfixed in a strange dance, which is frozen in your sight.

Hello? The next passenger mouths into her receiver. "是, 今晚不去了, 好迟了." You know they have to get off somewhere. The train doesn't run all night. It goes, and stops, and goes - but there is a point where it rests, even as the music (*Symphony no. 7, Eroica*) opens in someone else's phone.

Others have walked in by now. The woman with an umbrella; the spiky teenager driving his boots into the ground. But you, observer, are still caught in this story, which hangs by a small thread. Will something occur, if you look closely enough? Which details will you pick? Maybe it's the way his back has stiffened, his standing ramrod straight in the train, for no apparent reason. Or how her decorative flower, pinned neatly to the side of her head before, is now shaken by the faint rummaging of her hands. Or, maybe, it's the fact that the crowd has now somewhat obscured your view, and you think that you see a hand or two, crossed in between them.

*

"我就是不知道你要么。 你要么? 海阔天空? 你痴了啊, 你以为我是么?"

"我同你讲, 只有一个人知道我在讲么 – 对不起, 那个人不是你。我们就这里分手吧。"

He knows she isn't there. Someone waits in parallel with them, though it's unclear to him who that is. The air is cold, and it breezes past him, like the runners by the roadside, who pass by leaving imprints.

It has taken five stops for them to reach this juncture. Of course, no one has been counting (except for you, maybe?), but the sense is that of anticipation, fear, excitement – neatly contained, in a passenger train. The moment, as they say, is ripe for something to happen.

She is staring at the man before her, with an expression that betrays both surprise and disguise. He may or may not look at her, but says nothing, is silent. The words from before have now disappeared with the breeze, the entrance, the past. It's as if there was something in that moment, which they could have captured, but now feels oddly inappropriate, out of place. And the next few sentences determine everything – both from the man's perspective, and yours. Yet the train seems to go on, and he is still silent, unmoving.

He is trying to think, it seems, but that doesn't help either you or her. Why he was walking prior to the train, in the park, alone – all this seems particularly hazy to him now, the history of a subject, which has left his mind. Similarly, her afternoon shuffle, the music of the day, her forgettable evening. It would seem unfair, after all this, for them to meet one another, only to greet the night each in silence –

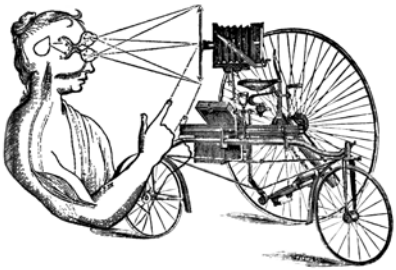
姑娘阿
你为什么还
是那么
的无情

In silence that will not last for more than a day, a night.

*

It's kind of hard to leave. But you will have to go. A false juxtaposition has thrown your observation off, just as the train has pulled itself into the last stop, made it impossible for you to stay.

You rise from your occupied seat. The lights are dimmed, both in and out of the train. It's a blur now in front of you, but you know your way out, don't you? Ticket stub in hand, you rush out of the shutting door, to placate the machine in place. Once done, the plastic guards let you through, and you reach an arch, where the steel covers have fallen in. They are now no more. Then, you find that you have disappeared.



I have, for the longest time, been fascinated by film stills. It has to do with an appreciation for the images themselves as well as the somewhat perverse idea of imparting stillness on a moving image.

Azzief Khaliq











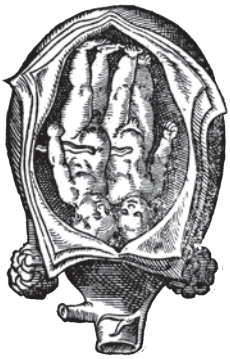




Ashes of Time Redux (Wong Kar-wai, 1994 / 2008)
In the Realm of the Senses (Nagisa Oshima, 1976)
Prenom: Carmen (Jean-Luc Godard, 1983)
Close-Up (Abbas Kiarostami, 1990)
A Fistful of Dollars (Sergio Leone, 1964)
I Don't Want to Sleep Alone (Tsai Ming-liang, 2006)
The Red and the White (Miklós Jancsó, 1967)

RETOLD

Catalina Rembuyan



We begin by imagining a place: a tropical jungle, lush and green. Imagine the trees of the forest, strong and tall, with branches stretching into so many directions that they seem to be entangled in the sky. On the branches are leaves, and so close are the leaves to each other that they seem to form a layer that blankets the Earth, but the sun has its ways. Piercing through the canopy like needles of gold, light hits the surface of a river and breaks into diamonds. There is a man wading in the middle of the river and his name is Dedaun.

His body is thin and dark, but on his back are white spots of a skin disease that form the pattern of a disfigured flower. He is old, but his muscles are strong, and where disease and worries did not mar his skin, it is still smooth.

Dedaun had fallen in love once. In those days people did not love before marriage and so the object of his desire was betrothed already and was quite beyond his reach. His beloved, whose name was Emas, was saddened by the way things were planned and would turn out, but she knew that she had to be sensible and be a good daughter. But I wonder if anyone who has argued their desires through reason did not once release themselves from its hard sensibleness to indulge, and when Emas began to vomit during the mornings there was very little doubt among the parents as to what had transpired. Emas's father had gone over to Dedaun's hut with a machete and amid cries of Amok! Amok! Amok! he had chased Dedaun out into the jungles. Emas cried for a week and after that, she too disappeared. The couple was never seen

in the village again.

There is a story that Emas was told when she was a very young girl: a man who had found his fortune traveling the world, upon returning home with his wealth and newfound bride, encounters his mother. He was struck by how shabby and poor in appearance she was: while he had been away he had increased in status and taste; and his mother remained in the same state as he had left her. If he had been alone he might have been able to adjust to the shock; now covered in wealth and armed with a wife, he was suddenly reminded of the nakedness of his past, and, ashamed of revealing that to his bride, he denied his mother.

Oh yes, her son was now wealthy, but she was not part of his wealth. And why would she be part of it? Immediately she saw herself as others saw her: a woman in tatters and rags, and while in the past she could find dignity in the shared company of her son — she could not see her shame if she shared it with others — now she saw that her son could offer no similar comfort; that he too was part of the world that mocked her and revealed her shame. Oh the shame! Oh the shame! To know that one is poor, to know that one is an object of mockery, to know that there is no dignity and worth beyond the approval of others, and to know that one's very own son — raised with tears and brought into the world with pain!—would no longer offer the solace of shared company; that he was now mocking her instead and sharing that delight with her enemies! She was so ashamed; she was entirely ashamed, and she realized that the son who stood with her enemies and was making fun of her attire, rank and poverty was no son of hers. Her son had died, died the day that he had left her, and the man who had returned was not her son but a stranger. O heartless child! she cried out; o heartless child, from whom did you feed if not from I, and from whom did you gain life if not from I? O child with heart of stone! Heart of stone! You are no child of mine!

As she spoke a storm began to rise around the son and his ship, and as lightning forked through the sky the bride cried out in fear. Turning to his mother he barely caught sight of her lips trembling with the words of the curse. When all things turned calm, he, his bride, and all the wealth of slaves, servants, animals and finery on his ship had turned to stone.

This is the version that Emas remembers and which she would tell her daughter as fable from then on. It is not the only version, although the details of the story are the same: a returning son full of wealth, a poor mother who greets him, the son is ashamed of his mother and begins to deny her, the wrathful mother who curses her son to stone. Neither the bride nor the storm is always present; and sometimes the mother is not alone (the son denies his father too). In one version the son is a member of a tribe of indigenous people and kidnapped, and he learns to be ashamed of the loincloth. In this version the tale itself becomes an unpunished Tanggang, denying its loincloth-covered past, frozen in its trappings of finery and

didacticism.

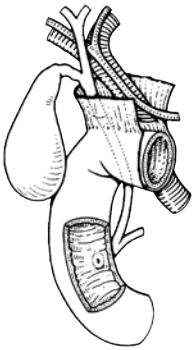
The lesson, regardless of the version, is always the same: do not be cruel to your parents; though you imagine they love selflessly, they have a sense of self too. Emas knows that shame is worse than death.

This is why she was not surprised when no one came to look for her even though she and Dedaun were not far from the village, nor was she surprised that, in the last weeks of her pregnancy, she dreamed of death and believed she would not survive. But when the child that she gave birth to was stillborn, she cursed and cursed herself; though she had given birth to a child out of wedlock and had been disowned by her parents, she could not make herself feel ashamed.



THE INGROWN

Tan Ray Tat



Does prosperity have to be so grotesque?

I should start with the boy, namo amitabha, who doesn't have anything to do with the business at hand, but in his layered countenance—a jubilant mask riddled with little crevasses betraying underlying deterioration, connect-the-dot jowls resonating to Chinese drums, adroit despite the blasé dignity xxpxex xxxxy xxxs xxxxxx[1]—I saw that he knew what I know now, on the tip of his tongue, like the tip of my pen, forever obscuring whatever gets through, whatever the condemned try in vain to dislodge, seeing as it's not their word, but this[2] that shall remain forever situated in the center of the construct we call the Truth[3].

How to keep myself from digressing, with the solemnity in which I write this, six days and two hundred kilometers away from the fact, when the boy drummed,

---

1 Illegible, in this case, due to moisture damage on the document.

2 The author tilts his wrist upwards, as if indicating the pen.

3 The paragraph reproduced here consists of words in red, written over a blue sentence, written over green. Placing the document over a light box reveals the blue layer:

> *"I cannot promise a straightforward account in my current predicament, as impervious as I am to Inspecxxr xxxxx's dxxplay of empathic manipulation – which I'm pretty sure has gone on video record, and, as far as I know, deviates from interrogation as well as multicast protocols prescribed by the PDM."*

The green layer is indecipherable.

his hand-eye coordinated regime of notes and rests solmizated in a register of guttural sounds and symptoms, marking the gradual birth of a monstrous slang in stop motion, again and again, as if emanating from the belly of the Choy Sun wading through the showroom? I watched the boy's arm muscles, his stiffening motions. Children covered their ears and in response he would bang harder amidst hasty mouthfuls of herbal chicken and Oolong tea, jaws and throats brimming with assurance of parental authority. Those who stayed to watch the presentation (never mind the Choy Sun's fancy sixth trimester, never mind the youthful vigor of the BHS Lion Dance Troupe, just show us some apartments already) took off their shoes before walking into the showroom. Aroma (Lime Extract), Propylene, Alcohol, Glycerin, Glycol, Zinc Rosinate, Dipropylene Glycol, Tocopherol: Bacteria-Be-Gone. Through my thermal vision mask[4] (which the Inspector has confiscated, along with the rest of my equipment[5]) I saw father's cloven footprints, mandala-like, interlocking with streams of BBG and Staphylococcus epidermis.

As solemnly as I write this, choking back tears for God-knows-what, unspoken, unwritten, unaffirmed, not even inscripted in gold on His red belly, the Boy punctuated every lull between intervals when his wrists hung flaccid. The boy who maneuvered the lion's head pushed his own out of the jaw, spewing mineral water nesting again among sweat droplets caught in bristles from his virgin mustache

(The author runs out of space and starts over behind the sheet of paper.)

Rising beyond the flotsam of herb and cake, Shareholder 22 (as indicated by the blue checkmark on the event manager's pad) saw himself, a little miniature person in a scale model of a gymnasium, poised jauntily despite fingerprints on the Perspex panel through which invitees could take a Glimpse at Pro(s)per(i)ty ™; Styrofoam kitchens, fiber optic balcony lights, indoor pools filled with gelatin plastic, and his Mini-Me, freshly painted, burning away calories amassed from herb and cake as the building vibrated to what he prided himself for being able to identify as a seven star movement. Everyone in the troupe dubbed the shareholder 'The Senior' except our Boy, who regarded him with sullen trepidation (he was the solemn type). Fortunately, the Senior never came close to the Boy to sense his, for he was one to take this supposed lapse in school spirit personally; his declared kinship to the BHS troupe even extended into macho fantasy, which became less-than-private when he shared a beer tower with his colleagues, the Event Manager and the Inebriated Fag-hag. Prior to the revelation, they had already endured a monologue about a recurring dream, where a white lion - the Ma Chiu - danced at the Shareholder's funeral. He

4 Item B05, pair of swim goggles.

5 White sling bag containing: 1 Lingerie catalogue, 1 phone charger, 2 jars of Brand's Chicken Essence. No identification.

even went to the length of listing the various people he saw in the dream, though he became elusive when pressed to explain their significance.

The Shareholder expressed desire that his funeral should proceed as noisily as possible, not unlike a Mexican death parade, with the sustained effect of percussion-enforced lugubriousness washing over ex-lovers (with matching income brackets) and former gym partners (without) - "What about fuck buddies you exercise with?" the IF shouted over the noise. The shareholder couldn't tell if she was humoring or deriding him by pointing out this false dichotomy within this conception of his "Inner Circle", a phrase the Event Manager found deliciously funny.

Accidentally, the Shareholder blurted: "Chinese men aren't my type."

Over the noise, the IF yelled for him to repeat himself. "Not my type," he repeated, attempting a smile. Despite his disingenuousness, this new subset among the potential bereaved became immediately incorporated into his active construction of an ideal wake, and due to a mind dulled by celebratory indolence - not to mention a lack of imagination on his part - he mentally assigned the IF's features onto the placeholder of the lover, gazing into an open casket, her/his fingertips gently brushing over his nipples, wet abdomens abandon bumping as hips interlocked, xxxx xexx xxx vxsxge xxcxxxx xxxgxxx xext xcxx xxloxxx xxxxix, and xxxx xx xxxxx xxx xxxx, such that the shareholder was no longer certain if this person - or ghost - signified a life of abeyance or an abeyance of life in itself, as the coherence of the lover's image depended on it being internally differentiated, the chin formed by introducing his nose and hers to a mutual disfigurement, reflected and duplicated across beads of condensation on the beer tower, asymmetrical cheekbones defined by the fag hag's lipstick and his mother's mouth canceling each other out, and so on and so forth until all that was left was a primordial impression, a pale skull irreducible to a bland gape, seemingly bemused at its own mediocrity. He could not help unconsciously projecting this on the other figurines trapped with him in the miniature gym.

The Shareholder suddenly felt very depressed.

After the Shareholder excused himself, his colleagues were compelled to discuss how different he looked and how much it aggravated them, as though his features (like how much his horn-rimmed spectacles emphasized the wideness of his face and the way his hairline hung haggardly from his scalp) had been deliberately calculated to manufacture the perceived rift compounded by his less-than-enthusiastic behavior that evening. "He's getting fat," said Irene Fathavista, "and when he talks rapidly it makes him appear more… animated. Like a cartoon character - Did you see the way he was looking at those boys? Embarrassing!"

"You mustn't encourage Bokson when he drinks and reminisces," the Event Manager said, "especially when he talks about his experience in public school. I take

it he wasn't in the popular clique - really, his frustrations are so thinly veiled it makes one too uncomfortable to sympathize..."

"Did you see how red his face got?" said Irene, eager to point out that Bokson drank the least among them.

The event manger burped, and lapped up his seventh glass. "Ahhh. I'm finally feeling buzzed. Bloated, too, but there's a warmness in my bowels and it feels good… cozy. If we could find a way to bottle up all this coziness and insulate the condo with it we'd make a fortune."

"That's disgusting, Henry," said Irene, observing yellow ripples in the dispenser graduate into little waves. "All that rattling! Which genius's idea was it to stack those glasses up like that?"

Henry started humming the first few bars of 'Good Vibrations', provoking a glare from Irene. "How many times," she said, "during committee meetings did I tell them that it was a stupid idea to set up the performance space in the showroom since the café is just next to it? For fuck's sake, some street lights have fallen over in the display!"

"Speaking of natural disasters," Henry had started reiterating a seismic retrofitting joke which he heard from an architect, before realizing that it would only serve to aggravate Irene by virtue of going over her head. "… my designer's finished the menu designs," was eventually what became of his rejoinder.

"Let's see it," snapped Irene.

"Oi, Triton!" yelled Henry, waving at the lanky American, whose posture could only be described as cowering, seated at a table which Irene noted was actually intended as an impromptu salad bar. He stood while wiping condensation off his glasses, never looking up as he did so. "Bring your laptop," reminded Henry.

As Triton approached his employers' table he pushed aside a serving cart, almost dropping his laptop in the process. Grunting, Irene snatched it out of the designer's hands, and he saw that she had webbed fingers. He looked at her carefully and saw red perforations across both her earlobes, a common indication of reconstructive surgery among Duyungs. While Triton wondered how he should behave in light of this, the colleagues sifted through Triton's file folders before finally finding the designs, which they scrutinized with gastric exasperation.

"What are you looking at," mumbled Triton.

"Your laptop," said Henry.

"My laptop. Of course. Stupid question. What else would ya be looking at, right?"

"I thought you were asking what we were looking at on your Laptop. It was a joke, Triton."

"I -"

"There's no accountant [sic] for taste, is there," commented Irene. "What's the

point of all those red brackets?"

"Those are units indicating the spiciness of each dish," said Henry.

"There's a measurement for spiciness?"

"It's not an exact science. The process is similar to homeopathy. They subject the chili to a process of serial dilution until it becomes palatable. The units represent the number of times they dilute it."

"That's interesting," said Irene, disinterested.

Triton, who had been waiting for an opportunity to redeem himself since his conversational faux pas, blurted: "People have different thresholds for taste perception, ranging from supertasters, who experience intensified flavors, and… and birds, the only animals who are immune to chili heat, as they are the only ones who eat without crushing the seeds, thus fulfilling the evolutionary -"

---- / - -// - -// - -// -/-// -/-// --/ --// --//[6]

"…O-M-E-G-A-T-H-R-E-E in place of H-A-L-F-B-O-I-L-E-D there, Triton. Paying customers have to know what they're paying for. Google a pull-quote from a nutritionist."

"I'm not getting any network here. Maybe if we moved to the showroom- "

"We'll do it later. Fix that image first. That girl has curry between her teeth."

"It's the only photo I have of her smiling."

"....."

"We could use the other shots."

"Ever hear of photoshop? How about directing the models in the first place?"

"I did. People just aren't as expressive here. It's pretty Midwestern, actually. I like it."

"You really have to speak up when you talk, dear. Articulate your words."

"T-they keep to themselves, especially in familial or social moments -"

"Triton, I can't make a word of what you're saying. Have you been drinking?"

"- couple a brewskis, no biggie…"

"Drinks are reserved for prospective buyers only. I'm going to have Henry formally reprimand you for... What's that smell?"

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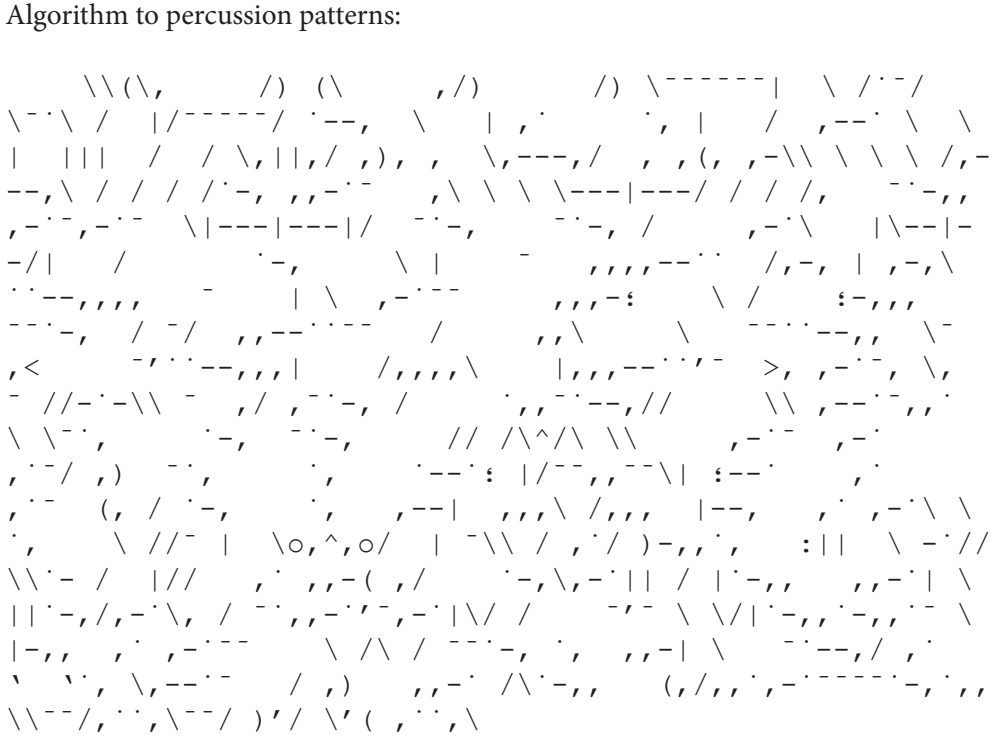
Feb 10, 1853 hrs. The built-in MLCD[8] display in my thermal vision goggles

6 Dash = Drums, Slash = Cymbals.

7 Mrtyormā amritam gamaya.

8 Micro Liquid Crystal Display

indicates the BWE[9] formation induced by the discreet introduction of the Pulse Algorithm to percussion patterns:



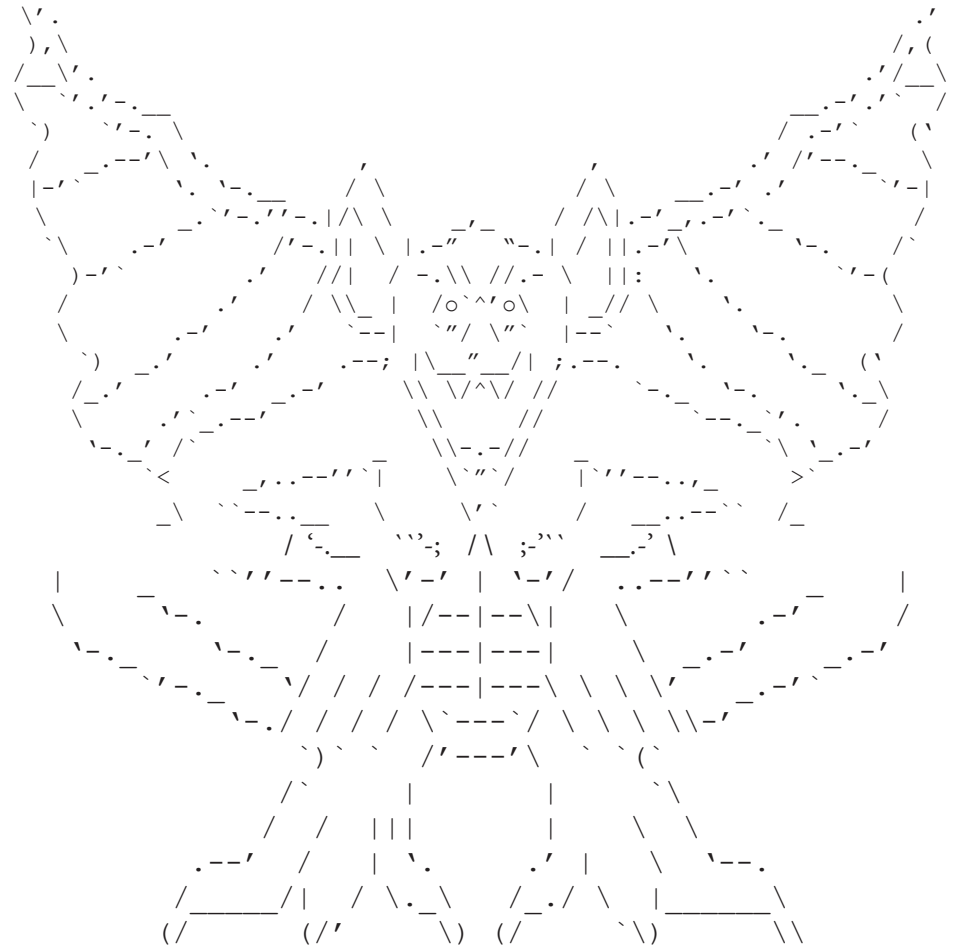
The room fills with acrid steam. The shame is unmistakable, even when refracted through watering eyes - this is every performer's worst nightmare: to die exposed. Feet scatter, as if an afterthought to the lull. A woman slips on a dancer's intestine and falls backwards into a puddle of shit and blood, in which she sits in dwarfed silence as her lover, ribs exposed, attempts to prop her up, all the while whispering that he loves her, he always has and he's sorry for everything apart from always. Beyond this spectacle, the evacuation proceeds impassively due to the radical improbability of what has just happened.

Like a black dream, the crowd's perceived magnitude of the situation appears to coagulate at the main entrance, towards which heads gravitate, bringing whatever happens to be attached to them while avoiding burning furniture and limbs as if following a pachinko trail in the floor plan, descending towards the drain. In the middle of the showroom, naked, eyes red from subconjunctival hemorrhaging, perched on top of a granite countertop like a gargoyle, Shareholder 22 gyrates his waist counterclockwise. He lifts both arms, lowers them, raises his left foot, and

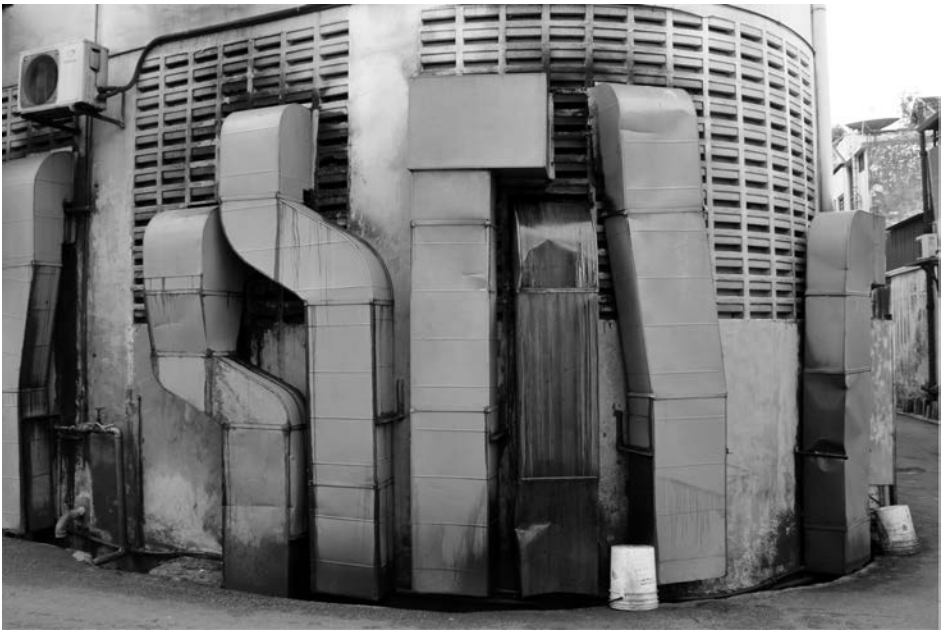
9 Brainwave Entrainment

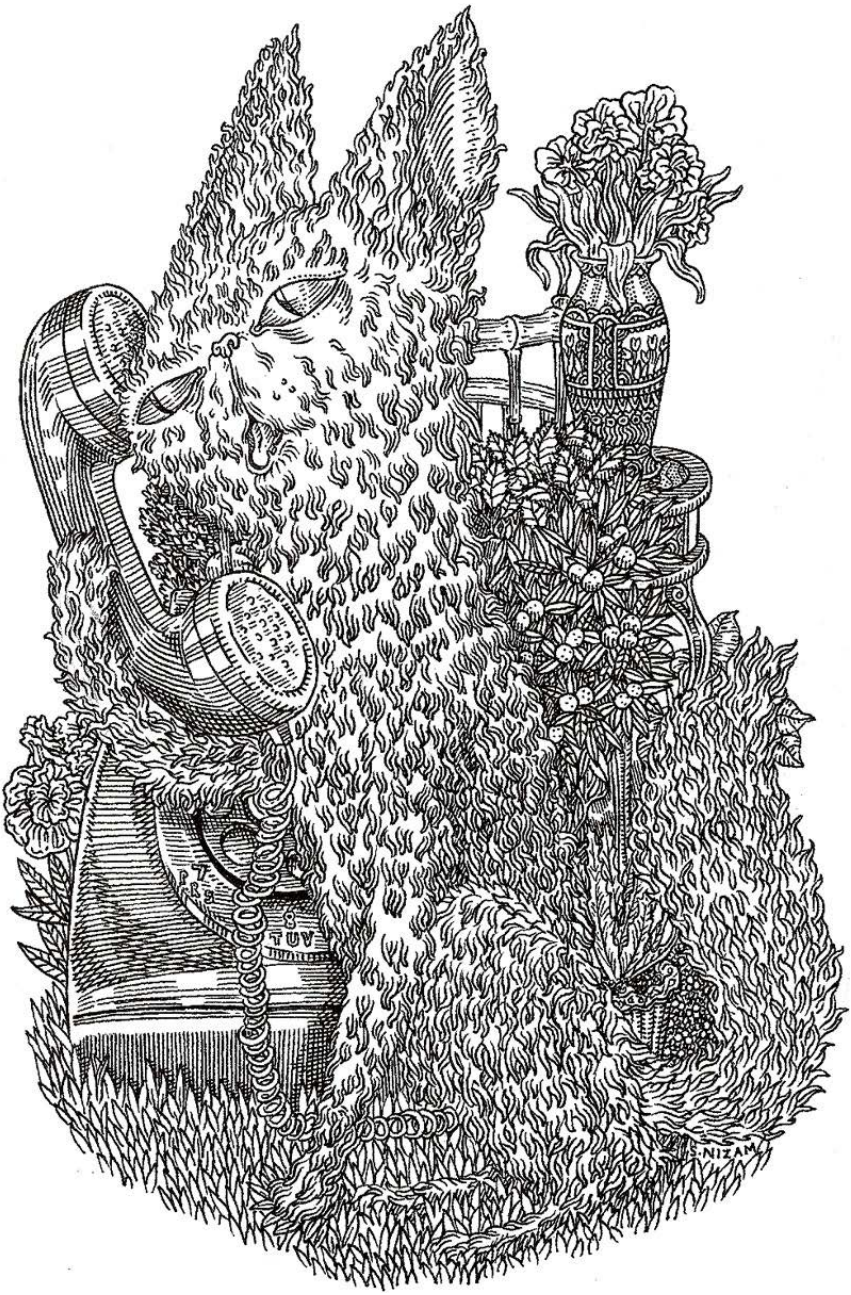
begins dancing.

I get a neurorhythmic readout, explaining this anomaly in what should have been a standard SHC[10]-inducement protocol:



10 Spontaneous Human Combustion





By Shahril Nizam

ADELE MINKE is a flaneur.

ANDREW T CRUM is a photographer and artist. His blog is http://momentsoftruth.wordpress.com/

AZZIEF KHALIQ, as Jerk Kerouac, is a noise artist. http://www.myspace.com/jerkkerouac

CATALINA REMBUYAN teaches English literature to teenagers.

FAIRUZ SULAIMAN is a video artist and organizer of the Digital Arts and Culture festival in Penang.

KUNING PENING is a founding member of the bands Think Tadpole Think, Tiga Segi Tiga, and most recently Tears of Alaska.

SHAHRIL NIZAM'S book of poems and illustrations,* If Only*, is available at Silverfish Books.

SHIVANI SIVA'S short story collection Wildlife on Coal Island is out August 2011.

TAN RAY TAT is the creator of Carbon Marrow comics. More info at http://www.carbonmarrow.blogspot.com

TENG QUAN ZHIN is an architect based in Kuala Lumpur.

* * *

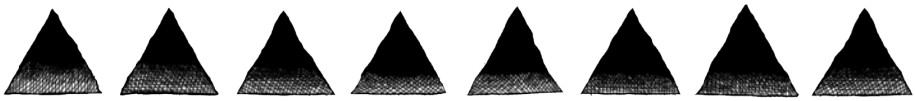
New Village is seeking new writing and photos. Entries must be well-written; every word must tell. Entries must also eschew political correctness and suggest the breadth of history.

We want to feed the spirit of critical inquiry. To borrow a line from Petronas, "we enter the white space left by the majors." The aim of New Village is to bring new voices to a wider audience, be it topical or highly personal. If your piece is at home in Malaysiakini or another media outlet, it's probably not suitable for us.

WORD LIMIT

Fiction, essays, reviews, interviews: 3000 words.
Photo essays: 10 photos, black and white only.
Poetry: 40 lines.

We'll take translated or reprinted works too.



Kuning Pening

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