

02



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Editorial

New Village is a literary quarterly for new Malaysian writing.

The point is to start a conversation about literature. I want people to come home, have dinner, clean up, have a shower, get into bed, finally, pick up New Village and read a piece or two. It's meant to be read in sips and glances.

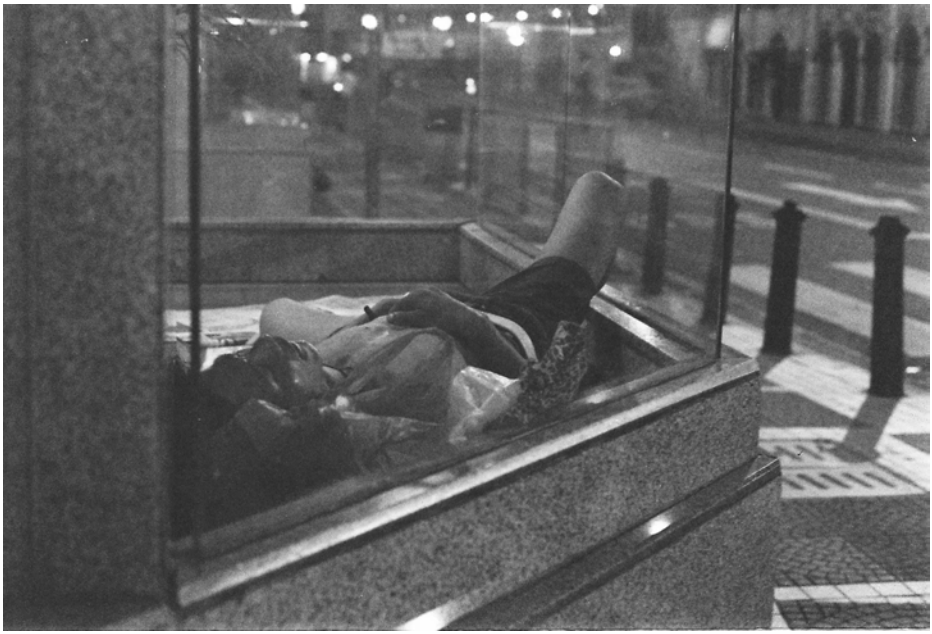
In this issue, we've got a hauntology essay by Adele Minke, a short piece about the flâneur from first-time contributor Alex Lee and a touching and disturbing short comic from Jin Hien Lau.

What's hauntology? It is the idea that Western culture has stalled and we are at the "end of history." As a result, things are haunted by their other selves, their ideal selves, past selves, potential selves, and so on. A man is haunted by the teenager he used to be and the millionaire he could have been. He is also haunted by the choices he did and did not make. In the essay, Adele applies the concept to KL.

We're giving away CDs with selected copies of the issue. Watch the Facebook Group for updates on when they become available and how to get a copy. Check out our Tumblr while you're at it.

Tshiung Han See





Home is everywhere

Alex Lee

A lot of talk over affordable housing has been going on these days, particularly in the Klang Valley. Perhaps the problem with the city is not just affordable housing but a sense of homelessness, a missing sense of place, or somewhere you want to be.

Housing crisis or not, one certainty is the increasing density in the ever-expanding circles of the city. Smaller and taller apartments are the marks of a looming contemporary homelessness, similar to Hong Kong and Singapore.

Some may argue that this has already taken place in our city. With no solid footing in Kuala Lumpur, we move from place to place, frequently renting rooms as small as 7 by 9 feet, often sharing the same unit with many housemates. Pushed to the brink of homelessness with no respite, perhaps a radical change in perspective is required.

In 19th century urban Paris, there was a lifestyle associated with idling, intelligent leisure and urban exploration. Those who adopted this lifestyle were called flâneurs. Paris, crowded and cramped, saw all the pressures of urban life. Lack of space led to the creation and

annexation of sidewalks and boulevards to cafes and landscapes, living rooms and gardens. Flâneurs were away from home, yet felt at home. They made the city an extension of their homes and a city we associate with romantic tones and warm feelings.

Most of us are flâneurs too. We make coffee shops our living room, Tesco's our refrigerator, cinemas our unbeatable home theatre system, parks our garden and Borders our reading room. Yet flâneurs take the city with passion, setting themselves apart from the consumer zombies of the modern city (although the first department stalls sprung from this lifestyle). Flâneurs walk the street to experience them, to feel and hear them, to smell and taste them, to discover and to feel like the centre of the world, yet remain incognito, and to react to it, placing tables and chairs on sidewalks, or playing *paille-maille* (a kind of croquet) on boulevards, all to make the city someplace like home.

Kuala Lumpur may be known for the twin towers, but it is the streetscape that city dwellers experience first-hand daily. It is the human scale that builds experience and memory of space and place. In our haste to be in the "eye of the world," we have forgotten this. All we experience is bitterness in traffic, broken pathways and closed public spaces but all is not lost. In every quarter, every sector and every neighbourhood, there remain pockets of place to be found and explored by the flâneur.

Go on: take a stroll in Pudu this weekend, talk to people on the street, see, feel, hear, smell and taste the city. Bring a sketchbook, a journal, a camera, a voice recorder, the curious friend or nothing at all! Kuala Lumpur is your home, so make yourself at home.

Playlist:

The Temper Trap—"Sweet Disposition"
Edward Sharpe & The Magnetic Zeros—"Home"
One Republic—"Feel Again"
Radical Face—"Welcome Home"
The Zutons—"Valerie"
Youth Lagoon—"Posters"
Zee Avi—"Honey Bee"
M Osman—"Suzana"

Two Poems by Shivani Sivagurunathan

Sundown

Pistils
also know the softest injuries,
wind-waves on bone,
the forging of the Sphinx,
geological time slipped
into knuckles,
withdrawal,
the wipe-out of a day.

You sit, fitted
behind an armchair,
the glass of vision
is curving, bifocal;
northward is the ceiling,
the black of paradoxical stars,

soon

the armchair stops
diminishing the longing
to rip
the steel pans,
the fan blades,
the polyester pumps,
the sheet over the sky,

so you tip on toes, imagine
the ravaged armchair,
its violet flowers

swinging into
ant-made holes
in the floor,

the patterning of your house,
the evolution of its walls,
its place on the axis of epochs.

They persist with your eyes half open,

the flask for the morning,
the hijacked jeroboam,
the spin-dried socks

still leaking water,
grating tiles
and your dream
to sit in place,
resisting the desire
to add to yourself
and distort

the simple horror of the wind.

The Yellow Wallpaper

There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself and that is that it changes as the light changes
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"

The yellow wallpaper
does not move for her,
a gothic mermaid
was how she began, became
a simple woman
with curlicue hair,
who specializes in spider hops,
and amber bees that linger
outside spacehomes,
how they are frolickers, she says,
even the grass-cutter
has gills and splices dust,
and the anthem of this country goes
BOOM-BA-BOOM
on the midnight radio
—the antenna in cahoots
with cascading science—
if atoms gush, if they
twirl like Necklace on Finger,
she says, where beespiders
rock about their maps
and the dancing labourer
goes home to his lover
with dust on his lips,
there—it is there

the spill happens,
buckets of tasty rain,
run, simply run,
inwith, outwith,
the belated bath inserted
with carps, mallards, red needles,

still halted
by the steady ant-trail
in front of her,
the tractor outside,
the building of things,
her moments by the
wall and its pattern,
the yellow, yellow.



Location

Adele Minke

To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept.

Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*

The question I'm trying to answer is found in the city. But that forgets the other place where I grew up, equally valid for thought. For the outsider, looking into the riches of the city, it can only appear as a dream, which does not know itself as a dream. It is a place for projection, the location of a million forms of desires. I grew up in school and the city. Perhaps more so the latter. And to speak of that, you need to move to the shopping malls.

When one spends one's life surrounded by glitz, life beyond it becomes impossible. The unnerving anxiety of desire, transformed into commerce, makes for the ticking metronome of a city running itself. Of course, this is weighed against those times when everything breaks down, the jam beyond the jam (a bus stalling on the road, for instance). If, then, desire works against itself, is frustrated by the lack of literal movement, it still returns to a point of shared interference; the community of roaring engines and impatient honking. Glitz will not save you in the haze and smoke of the motorway, pulling over onto the sidewalk. The memory that I have of KL is thus this perverse urge to breathe in as

much of its soot and dust, take in the residue and turn it into something else, like the page you are reading at this very moment; the connection of a time that lived.

The question to be asked here is not reducible for analysis—KL does not name a problem, but a location of being; one might say an ethic, the clues for a way of life that persists. Under such conditions the writing I exemplifies its object; to trace KL means to become a trace, to follow its lead as one chases the city in its sights and sounds; become the stone on a sidewalk, turn oneself into refuse; embody the city as it moves.

How to begin answering this question? Thought and experience are locked in a flow, in the drain and the water. I did not describe myself before a certain time and place; I did not describe the city then. The question only began when the I began, when, in its attractions (the many lights and clothes and people), the I became an I. If it is true that something in the condition of desire makes the I, then one knows how this ongoing question is to be addressed—a return that repeats its meaning differently. A posthumous understanding of what happened before. Like an entrance that redraws itself each time you announce your entry—it is rare that you recapture the same sensation twice.

But if there is a way of describing this…the answer takes its cue not from the questions you pose in isolation; you live the questions you ask. First, the cold air of the mall that greets you; then, the lights refracting into your eyes; and, inevitably, the parking lot heat. I was a spectator then , but how else does it enter you, as you enter it? The experience can only be termed as shock, even if it fades upon multiple exposures. It is the situation of those who live in the squall of air-conditioning, the dust of construction. No one asks to let you into the past; no one asked to let you into the automatic glass doors. There is an understanding of the world that begins with this image—a mystery, stripped of its religious connotations, beginning with the idea of consumption. Maybe all this feels empty. One still lives according to it (and one will die accordingly), and that is reason for understanding it.

So permit me this indulgence of a story. I have to keep writing in spite of the possibility of decay, like the endless construction of buildings that fear obsolescence and history. So: I am trailing the

LRT line, the monorail that isn't naturally connected. I make it seem as if I were walking there—I am far away from its vertigo but I still feel the pulse of things moving in line, my walk aping the cars zooming past me on a highway. I am walking on a highway. Time dilates itself despite my movement. I hear the trip-hop playing to the shoppers, and yet… they were sitting there, she was washed out, and it all appeared like a film to me, despite the injunction to not believe in the image. Like a dream that realizes itself as dream and reiterates its dreaming. A strange beauty and intense fantasy—where the music is never interrupted, and transitions from one box to the next. Each day is a reminder of the last that was today. *I like you very much, thank you*. The model walking alone into the building…

But as I said earlier—KL is only part of the story. To turn away from it is difficult, but necessary. Time to make another beginning, another false start.

Let me give you an idea of what it means to live here. If one walks around town, it becomes clear that the will to truth persists, even if it is distorted or reshaped into unfamiliar forms...

To leave KL is to depart from desire, a form of it that is at home in the dark alleys and open food stalls. Other desires proliferate in the privacy of enclosed boxes, like the suburban home where the I is restless and uneasy, the car that pipes in associative music. A consumption of the usual and lonely. Desire is distinct; it requires others, even if this only registers on the wayside of one's gaze. There are some things one cannot buy. Everything else is the chase for the remainder… that bump interrupting the straight road; the hint of desire in a voice you heard somewhere. In the city, you see that this logic is the broken reflection of a developing space. The twilight of another place resumes, here. It takes a moment to recognize that this does not render it mere epiphenomena of something happening elsewhere, but an equal expression of what is ongoing. Acceptance of this is necessary to survive here. Many things are similar here.

Survival, however, is still a matter of consumption. Its structure is lonely, the meaning personal and without deceit. When the I speaks to itself, the transparency of its actions appears unmistakable. Only later does it find that its voice was amplified (and minimized) by

the force of another, like the unobserved cranes that destroy your space. It is apparent yet opaque. This duality is a consequence of the impossibility of being here, but there is a way to live through this that does not just fall into complacent acceptance. The beginning of the I is the beginning of a struggle, the opaque, encompassing haze that reveals residues of concrete towers, and the nothing sky.

You see their shadows casted on the ground, upon the activities of its denizens. I am speaking of places where space is delimited by the urban, the sprawl conceptualized, as railing and sidewalks that contain vehicles of all kinds. And then you spot the back alleys, the cinematic lorongs that breathe in the dark, an economy of the other, not portrayed by the tourist brochures. The missing people—they come from elsewhere, corners of the Earth where it is unfashionable to smile (even if they still do, some of them). I cannot name names here; they belong to an existence that has its own logic. Regardless of your fantasies of solitude, it is clear what the subject entails here: the low-life, the abandoned, those who live out life with windows closed. If I refuse to affirm or deny their condition, it is because what happens behind closed doors is unknowable; the door you make an activity of, its static deceit. Some forms of life go on unseen—others disappear without you having heard of their trace.

And what is the status of that trace? Do you fear its obscurity, and attempt to parse it by reading it, out loud? An appropriation that transforms... what exactly? This is how anything happens here, perhaps—you have to accept it for what it is not. This unlikely understanding forms the basis of an I which attempts to recognize itself, in the midst of rubble, and congested buildings. Before you can go to the city, you have to discover the space where effluence is discharged; the drains and manholes by your shuffling feet; rats and cockroaches out of hiding, scurrying back into their homes; the consequence of a haunting desire that leaves itself behind. An unfortunate conflation of person and place, perhaps—but that is the only understanding I know, the construction of a material subject, from its surroundings. Such a connection is unmediated by the impossibility of things—possibility is the mediation that subsumes everything, even the words that appear before your eyes. They are

states that you desire but cannot get to, things disembodied but irremediably stuck to you. Everything here comes together as a *coming together*: the fragments sticking without a sieve, the dirt and details paraphrased without a sentence.

Can I say that I understand such a coming together? Does it appeal to anything more than the desire to locate the unlocatable? Be careful of these labels, one hears often—but what happens when the name itself is unnamable, it shattered at the moment of coming into being? (I do not appeal to history for a reason; there are only stories; there is no history.)

Only a trace of the truth—this sentence belies the wish that there was something once. The religious (or, if you wish, the metaphysical) will to truth. One could make the metaphysical out of the trace; a solution that isn't really a solution, only a willful inversion of the traumatic appeal. You will have to learn to live without this inversion, to absorb both on their own terms—to extract everything out of everything, and the nothingness within. Learning to live *without*—that still describes a form of life today.

But that still does not describe life that passes by one in the city, the flow and patterns that generate amid imposed blockages. A traffic cone is only there to be surpassed; the road turned into an exhibition for gastronomic desire. Even the highway, the flyovers can be repurposed for such desires; food and pleasure by the trees, drains ignored for the serving of aromatic fare. As if the idea of such desires is enough to spark this reorientation of space—true pragmatism, without a philosophical basis. Autonomy consists not in the mastery or expulsion of such desires, but rather its unleashing, moments where the excess re-marks the territory of a map. A perpetual creation and recreation—from what, from where? Every space is creative, its dis-ordering always leading you astray. Perhaps that is the secret of a city—without mastery, always already occurring, your encounter with its manifestations only a belated recognition. Things are unplanned; things do not go to plan. You are not where you are, simply because where you are is the provisional understanding of transition.

Why then the need to trace where you were before, your

steps that occurred in the dark of another night? Or to see that such steps were somehow located in a given road, that they were a part of the many coming togethers that happened, even when you were not there. It is a delusion to believe in the illusion of total resonance—yet how can I not, if only to describe the possibility of being somewhere before? I did not make myself, certainly not without the materials of a place, like the unlocked part of a goldsmith's shop. Against memories of impossible places, you learned to say: *here is what it is, here is where it is*. Not merely as a repository for the past, but the present, one's last act situated as part of the previous, and the previous... there isn't a way to put every step together; the sidewalk is missing. It does not collect because the bricks have shifted out of place, even as I stood on them. To place all this in mind as I continue to walk is to turn forgetting against itself, to forget the constructed I; going against traffic, showing its renewal to be a distinct artifice. The desire to *be*, wherever you are—it is a desire that haunts the displaced. Accordingly, you will find places where this wish is granted, the understated spots where one can picture the rest of the city…

A trace remains a trace, however, and here it is possible to advance a thesis of sorts: trace is intertwined with the glitz, it haunts the will to clarity (as in development plans and glass walls) just as something eradicated haunts its willful subject. This haunting is given a twist here—the shadow of a city (its conscience) is transferred to its inhabitants, the opaque made personal, the public expulsion of history returning in private. Nothing will go away in the city; there are too many people, too much happening in the air, the sky, places where one least expects. The freest city is the most closeted, congested one… something to be retained in the dim lights, the hazy remembrance of what you did last night. Haunting—it is the cause and effect of such misrecognition, lost words that were never actually lost. Similarly—those dilapidated buildings , the urban sprawl that exists, before another plan comes into existence, and takes the time only to dismiss what is passé. A cyclical return to what is and isn't, at the same time. They will not go away.

They will not go away—is such a phrase enough to sustain what happens here? Certainly, one is used to some of the invariables—the background heat to the din of

the city, the unpredictable rains that come, unannounced, and leave undissipated. Things change as much as it seems that nothing, finally, has changed... but here, then, is a kind of sustenance: the whirling unpredictability of life on a thin sidewalk, the impossibility of *knowing* what one says or is in the confines of a parking square. In those moments you realize that everything is nothing, that to embrace the lack is to forget the lack... only for it to return with the strangeness of a new thing, the haunting. What does it mean to affirm and deny everything at the same time? Who can survive such a contradiction in terms? But in the city this happens regardless of what one believes in—a metaphor for the impossibility of embracing everything, of stringing desire to each of its ends. Since we are speaking of KL, let us at least affirm that opacity is not an uncommon feeling here; not knowing where something originates but making it one's own, through sheer necessity. Nothing is mine, but because of that *everything* belongs to me. It is a strange form of autonomy, which may not even deserve that name—but again, what is going to haunt that concept, to make it tenable in another location? This uncertainty is precisely what makes it tick. It redirects itself in the neon lights, the glow of streets that do not know themselves, and you react as if you are surprised, when it is always an illusion otherwise. The revolution will not happen; in fact, it will always have had happened, and the opaque will return, as a congress in progress.

Perhaps such an attitude will be seen as an apology for things remaining the same—nothing could be further from the truth. The question here is how one imagines a future without reducing it to the present; to reiterate an opening, without making it sound like an imminent science. Besides, who are the people, in a missing and haunted place? What do they desire, and who is the subject of change? When one considers this question, it becomes harder to impose a blanket vision on this location; to impose that certain, transparent configuration, which derives from a previous configuration. The city's skyscrapers, these glass traps that attempt to *clear* the landscape, give rise to another opacity, the forgotten, still-existing parts of KL that hide in the open, vulnerable in their obsolescence. In the future that is being visualized, the dialectic of change is pur-

sued for its own sake—the endless planned digging and constructing that go on in opacity to the rest of us, even if the end result is supposed to make it clear where one is going. This result is rare in KL, as anyone who is acquainted with its roads will know. One has to ask what this contradiction points to—why is this derailing a regular occurrence in a place that aspires to a modern(ist) clarity? Is it necessity, after all, which guides this complexity? The excess that remains in KL has to be described as an ethic, the city's expression in spite of itself; which makes an organic sense out of the materials, the structured plans. And this may form the basis of an opaque change, a way to make do with (or without) something. This would be what one calls play, except without complacency (because of necessity).

But even this may just be the desire of an I located elsewhere, between projection and parody. Another way one can haunt the city—to be a part of it and not at the same time, the ironic descriptor of everything and nothing. The city has made you, but you are unmade at the same time; you become a part of what you are not. And the result feels as impossible as it sounds—just that impossibility makes it seem right. But then you are reminded of other incongruous possibilities, an insouciance in the face of all those maps, plans, provisional territories... unknown decisions made against unknown (though sold as known) decisions, an opaque answer to a pose of clarity. To develop a concept in this spirit is to say that the ethic outlives any concept, that regardless of the way the concept has been made to stand for the life of the city, it turns out to have always been intertwined with the movement of what it is not. Hence, haunting. The concept's name is always where it is not—lost in the crowds that move along, without the need for one. But this, too, makes the crowds' unknown concept a thing to be named—in their desire for more, a happy understanding lies sunken amid the usual profiteering, the excess of corruption... *what more do you want* is the secret question that makes its way to the surface, and insists on a certain answer. Their drive to be in KL is the drive to make the opaque *work*—to turn desire into excess, lost origins into identity: an amnesiac identity. A

distortion of sameness, an infected difference.

If this understanding only appeals to the initiated, then so be it. Part of the opaque, however, finds itself in the denial and disavowal of what is inherent. Perhaps it is only initiated through disavowal, the attitude that rejects, only to search for acceptance... who knows what the I desires? An understanding of this will have to wait—it is always deferred through the desire to desire, the question that makes itself up, as one makes way through crowded trains, the goings-on of a daily scene, fully immersed in the picture of the city. If the name for such a condition is alienation, you are at least certain that its recuperation haunts you, throughout the missing spaces of the city—the parts that one would like to be real, beyond the glass dream of a constructed edifice. And yet—time also recuperates, as the basis of history never goes away. Its end is only the announcement of a temporary halt, a subtraction into an abstract form of life, which sees the glass as eternally present, an endless proclamation of *this is it*. The mere inversion of this is to say that *this is not it*, to derive the force of its negation from what merely exists. Neither will suffice. Time makes what merely exists into a location for meaning, and if there is a recuperating mystery, it is located in a time that is not now, even as it shimmers in every wall and brick of the city. *Something coming soon*, the construction board in the shopping mall announces: a future hinted at, an invocation of time, as opaque as it is clear. For whom is this future announced, besides the invariable consumer? What dreams, and what visions?

But the I then has wandered too far, and its remembrance is but a genealogy of its desire. This takes place regardless of one's locality and temporality; the memory of what one desires is sufficient to push the I back into the past, and draw it forward to another future. This is how the city draws its subjects in and out—the recurrence of the now, reiterated as forever. To make you enter and never leave: this is a barring that is not physical (there are numerous entrances and exits in the shopping mall), but one that is, at the end of the day, about time and space as they are perceived. More than just the arrangement of a specific ruling power, such arrangements makes it impossible to see the arranging process; the invisible assignment

of sense and organs. This invisible power makes it essential to understand the *ethic* of the city. What is ethical here, though, is not a matter of an argument for or against, the mental calisthenics situated beyond any connection to a living body; but the understanding of what is embodied, as endlessly determining. In such situations, answers are not forthcoming, but this is not an excuse for an evasion. Location: this forms an irreducible background to the noise of thought, even before one is able to make a decision. To know is thus always to know *after*, the effects of what *was* given resonance in a future time. The place is in the I, the I in the place. Your desires were never known until they were known...

This story has taken place in absence of the city. By that I mean the requisite reflection was given its form, outside of the desire to be otherwise.

At the same time, what would it mean to reflect *within* the city? To use its glass walls to discern a message, to spread it through the reflecting reflections. This is not just a play of words—the play of light on object, after all, is enough to send a sudden answer elsewhere. You do not understand this until you do—such is the paradox of existing within the city, of being inside its undeniable seductions.

This seduction, however, is the only form that does not reduce. What it would look like to reflect *as a reflection*: such a question has been posed only to remind one of the subtractive understanding one can take, with regard to the pose of reflection. It is also to refigure the question of truth, thought of as a singular achievement, a longed after skyscraper that reaches vertically into the sky—a religious motif recast as a modern symbol. What it means to have this hovering over the I is still unclear, except that its own lucidity has succeeded only in undermining itself. In the opaque sky, what can be effected is only the hazing of everything within its ambit—the parodying of something tall and imagined as ruling the world.

The ground, nonetheless, will continue to contaminate the sky. Living haunts one's thoughts. And the fantasy of being unlocated (and unlocatable), avoiding seduction, is revealed as the opposite of what is desired. The rejection of the city is a form of this escape; another is the retreat to the auto-

mobile; and so on. In spite of those retreats, KL mocks those singular entities, through the traffic jams, man-made and yet impossible to fix. Letting this contingency go is similar to avoiding that hesitant smile, the city as a woman... but why is that anyway? She is also a man, as those prowling the streets will tell you. It is yet another of those uncontrollable developments (accompanying Development), the conducing of more desires, more and more unrecognizable. And that is the ideal of a strange logic: where what is aimed for is missed, and what succeeds always fails, according to the logic of the swerving bus, the missed meeting at the bus stop. Like it or not, these images serve as the unlocking of desire, its extension beyond the guarding of an enactment. The lack returns to become something else, in the split that has already taken place, the city that has always been there. You might say that both exist simultaneously, one not without the other.

A place, then—is it meant to contain, for one to refrain from a question posed in mid-air? Does the I find its voice only in the locality of desire? KL is a name only enunciated outside of itself: this is the inevitable problem of the concept that attempts to know. But you may think of another kind of concept, one that is shot through with the ambiguity of desire. It does not silence; it relinquishes itself in the cacophony of the city. To follow where that leads is itself an ethic, the work of life that is not frozen in time. To be part of the *flow*—this describes another form of life, perhaps the reverse of what has, in the first place, made such writing possible. Writing into existence what one can capture—the impossibility of the subject, the I in relation to the city...

Someone will ask: do you know what you are writing about? No—or at least, that sentence presupposes a form of silence, which gives one a certain regard. All I can say is that I am located somewhere, and it haunts the I in places that cannot be described. The likeness of this question, though, remains.

HOMEBREW PHILOLOGISTS

WHEN WE WERE KIDS, MY BROTHER AND I MADE UP OUR OWN VOCABULARY REPLACING DIRTY WORDS TO AVOID GETTING IN TROUBLE WITH OUR PARENTS



A BRIEF GLOSSARY:

① DUIT, PRONOUNCED "TWEED" CAME FROM THE FACT THAT TWEETY BIRD IS A DICK. REPLACES THE WORD DICK/PENIS



② BIET, PRONOUNCED "BEE-YET" A SHORTER WORD FOR CUNT IN THE HOKKIEN DIALECT



③ JOOP, PRONOUNCED "ZHOOP" BECAUSE APPARENTLY THIS IS WHAT THE ACT OF FORNICATION SOUNDS LIKE. REPLACES THE WORD FUCK



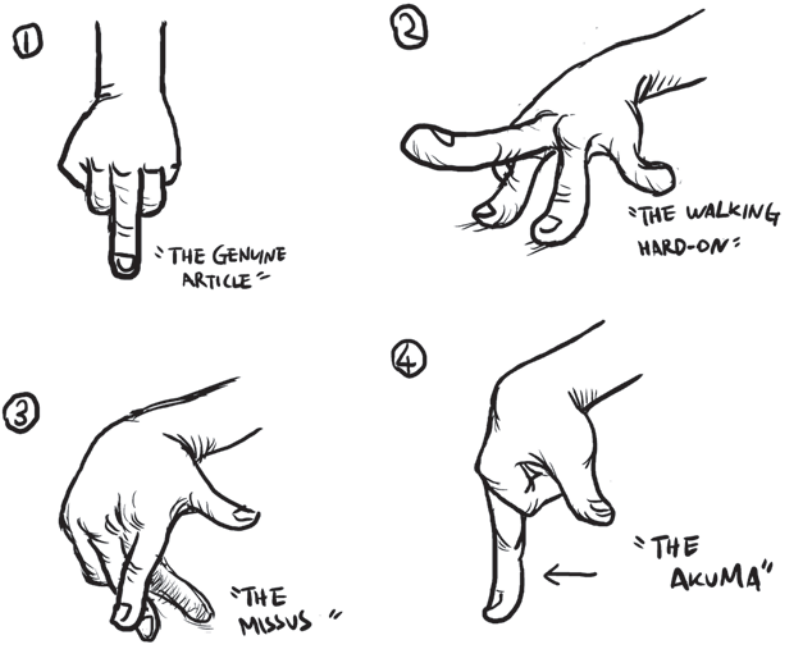
THE SMELL OF SEX!

ETC...

AS THE VOCABULARY GREW MORE INTRICATE WE STARTED INCORPORATING SIGN LANGUAGES INTO OUR AVANT GARDE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM.



A BRIEF VISUAL GLOSSARY:

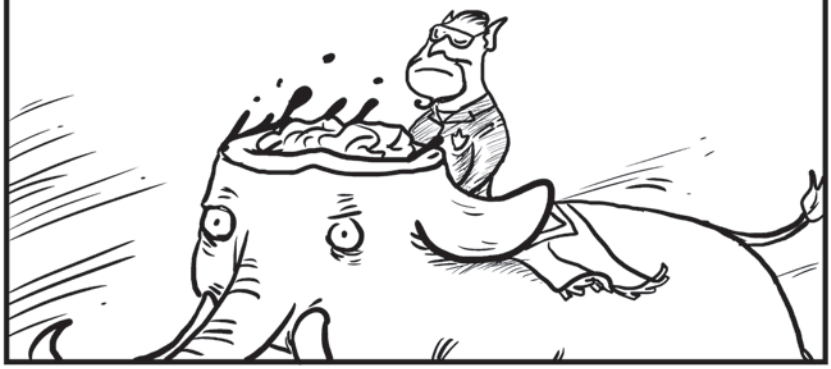


SOON WE WERE MAKING UP OUR OWN MYTHOLOGIES AND CULTIVATED A NEAT LITTLE INTERNAL WORLD FOR OURSELFS. (WE MOVED A LOT AND NEVER REALLY HAD FRIENDS AS KIDS.)



OUR MOST PROMINENT MYTHOLOGY WAS THE COMBINATION OF TWO OF THE BEST FILMS OF 1992, T2 AND ALADDIN. TO FORM "ABUNATOR"

THE STORY HAD ABU THE MONKEY AS JOHN CONNOR AND THE GENIE AS LIQUID METAL T-1000. IT IS SOO RETARDEDLY AMAZING, HIGHLIGHT INCLUDES AN ELEPHANT REPLACING A MACK TRUCK AND HAVING ITS SCALP SCRAPED OFF BY A LOW BRIDGE IN A HIGH SPEED CHASE.




AS WE GREW OLDER WE HAVE BOTH STOPPED THIS SECRET LANGUAGE CLUB AND GENERALLY HAD LESS TO MINIMAL COMMUNICATION.


AND IT IS TRUE THAT ONLY WHEN YOU LOSE SOMETHING OR SOMEONE THAT YOU TRULY REALISE THEIR VALUE.




WHO ARE YOU, LET GO OF MY GRANDMA'S HAND
I'M DEAN PHAM, MALE NURSE DU JOUR THIS PATIENT, THIS HOSPITAL NEEDS ME!
THIS IS MY HOUSE, NOT A HOSPITAL. DID YOU BREAK THE KITCHEN WINDOWS TO GET IN?
HAVE YOU EVER SEEN 'BICHA MUDA' ON YOUTUBE?
GET OUT!
.....
END



Student

Tan Ray Tat

1

You are aware of it, even as you read this: A sensuousness to the eyes, *in* the eyes—a *sensation of rubbing onto the gaze*. Your left tear duct waters during the event of corneal trauma, streams of hot tears waft around your swollen eyelid as your eye flits for the bathroom mirror. Uncoordinated, you stare at your reflection. When you cross your eyes, the invisible boundary running down the bridge of your nose no longer feels like a sheet of glass passing between your field of vision, but a second mirror that frames you in profile, like a mugshot. In your mind, the mirror reflection *completes* you while splitting your constitution; Half of your field of vision feels like a reflection of the side from which you observe yourself, though you are unable to tell where reality begins and reflection ends—as if both myopic and lachrymal plains are deadlocked in a battle for primacy. You have shaved half of your jaw, and covering either side of your reflection with a wet hand doesn't help reveal if you look pendulous without a beard. You shave the other half and brush your teeth.

You are looking forward to leaving your room for the first time in two days. Today, you are going to the mall to find the familiar in the unknown. Your mind goes through a list of things to do and say for her: At the bookstore you will pick up whichever paperback catches her attention, flip to the first page, and ask if she thought the person who the author dedicated the book to existed before or after the story. You intuit that rehearsing things like this amounts to setting yourself up for disappointment, and become conscious of smelling like pot.

To calm your nerves, you sit at the edge of your bed and play guitar. You perceive the relations between notes as pure data, and cannot hear yourself because you have become too engrossed with filling up gaps to move over silences. You become self-conscious when you cognize an inconvenient detraction to this exercise in horror vacui: Were someone else listening to you they would hear you in terms of expression, not information—you probably sound like a fucking asshole, a passionate naïf, or both. Whenever you're spaced out you mumble when you speak, and the people who receive you respond like insensitive assholes themselves, as if your incoherence were

an unsolicited response to their innermost vulnerabilities, which you babble about incessantly. You make a note to be expressive during the looming encounter. You will smile, make eye contact, and not fall into defensive preamble around the things you feel uncomfortable discussing, saying everything without saying anything at all. It occurs to you that not discussing these things in the first place are an option, and become conscious that your rooms smells like pot.

You put on your socks. Everything will be okay, you tell yourself. It will be pretty much the same old story, ending with her kissing you in the fire escape and then holding your hand as you head to the food court. Your sneakers will squeak as they shuffle over cream-colored mottlings, like streaks of cosmetic flesh uniformly disintegrating in some primordial liquid, frozen under marble luster, as though they once swam under the epidermic sheen of overlapping light trails singed into the ever-shifting surface, like radiating tattoos—SSEUG… INAMRA… S'NHOJ APAP… NAIVE. Walking across the floor with her will be like skating through a body as it turns itself inside-out, until the elevator, tearing through steel and stone, leaves a quadrangular wound detracting from the architectural ruse of interlocking curves.

2

Since he lost contact with his family, the student was neither forthcoming towards his friends or lover. He felt certain that his story had been set in stone, a monolith held together by cross-referenced reiterations of what he said during dorm sessions. He came to hate his honesty among other stoners, though he never expressed this. He came to see his reluctance to negotiate the terms of veracity as a matter of 'decency', and because such articulations always entailed the mention of "things said behind my back," the mere suggestion of which would become more biographical slippage, he lived in stringent vigilance towards the threat of oppressive combinatory webs forming between people he claimed to love equally, though he was well aware that the delusion that he could love was sustained by a exhaustive relocation of interpersonal boundaries. Because of this, the student spent a lot of time redefining what he consid-

ered "decent" about himself. The apex of his neurosis started from a fear of being perceived as unstable, though he was also afraid of ending up like his anal-retentive Muslim father—he had no desire to be perceived as balanced, either. He developed a perverse fixation on this double-bind after months of throat-scarring bong hits. After the stress of personal confrontation became too much to bear, he confined himself to private smoking and masturbated excessively. When pacified he indulged in hours of fierce navel-gazing, worrying about his mercurial stagnancy, like the cum on his belly, repressing the comfort from reveling in shame over the amorphous boundary between him and the "decent" object, whose perpetual expulsion and re-integration within the network of contingent interpersonal boundaries resulted in an inability to distinguish catharsis from quasi-ritualistic self-flagellation—he alternated between blind intimacy and paranoid distances towards people. He became interested in deconstruction and was contemptuous of his classmates, who reduced terms of separation and boundlessness across artificial humanist dichotomies, which he exhaustively located in theories of gender and class in his anthropology elective. Prone to data like 'X number of high fives', 'frequency of inflated ribcages', 'qualitative swagger' and unforgettably, 'bro-mongering', he was a source of delight for his tutor Jim Davis. After a period of playing wallflower at nightclubs, independent music festivals, gallery openings and dive bars, he devoted several paragraphs in his class blog disparaging the "Malay masculine performative," expressing mock-awe of how other guys could, with little or no reflection, naturalize what he called "Consistent Inconsistence." He was prone to inelegance when fashioning his concepts, though after several tutorials with Rosalind Leong from Literary Studies, he managed to ground his slew of oxymorons in French philosophy. He wrote that the patriarchal Malay subject prematurely resolves, in bad faith (a term which colored his dialogue rather than informed it), the problem of inhibitory structures by situating personal choices across determinations that never confined them. He did close readings of Foucault's repressive hypothesis and visited brothels in Bukit Bintang, though he never enjoyed himself during these excursions. He lived vicariously through

Power Point slides, delineating what he called the construct of the Masculine/Feminine and Malay/Other axis, though he was very aware that such themes limited the dimensions of his own critique, making him feel more and more exposed to slippage the more theses he presented. After just two semesters of Phil. 101 his mannerisms became reduced to stoney glances and etiolated mumbling, though he still had the audacity to quote "Jean-Paul Satay" while dismissing the dead existentialist for writing "entry-level psychoanalysis". Through he devoted little study to the field, he responded mostly to theorists who seemed pathologically distracted by an infinite series of falsifications produced by the psyche. He conceived a research proposal around what he called a "consistent" center of inconsistency, slightly embarrassed at the crude reversal of dichotomies (within an oxymoron which he had conceived in the first place, no less) that became a staple of his writing. It took a certain type of lecturer to entertain, let alone take delight in this simple-minded belletrism—he was often reprimanded for reducing everything into personal complexes. When Jim brought attention to the dichotomy-gerrymandering, Rosalind encouraged more guidance with leeway—After all, she noted wryly, Derrida got away with "Dic Jokes" from time to time. This exchange reminded the student too much of the dynamics between his parents for him to maintain a critical distance, and the question of why he wrote the way he did (or the potential Rosalind saw in it) always surpassed the apotheoses of his self-reflection. He did not hesitate to call his concept of the inverted "Inconsistent Constant" Love, in consideration of decency, humbleness, and an air of unassertive Truth in the Hallmark tradition.

The day he submitted his exegesis was the day he received the break-up letter. She was tired of him compartmentalizing himself and of being used as a crutch between fair-weather friends, and though she never used the word "mothering," that was the only word he had to make the contents of letter paraphrasable to others. He scanned through the 6,585 words thrice, finding no less that 6 inconsistencies in her reasoning, mostly variations of the syllogistic fallacy in which (a) she was unsatisfied with him because he withheld so much from her, but (b) she

was leaving him because she felt he was incapable of giving her more. Three months later, he turned in a final essay on love as "alienation from productive activity." This was so far removed from the sequence of events following the break-up (fragments of which he divulged throughout the course of many superficial relationships) that even Rosalind, following 2 other colleagues, conceded that his newfound Marxism was just a defense mechanism. This 3-to-1 consensus marked the conclusion of a 5-minute water-cooler chat whose other participants were (2) Hishammudin Hari, head of the humanities dept. (3) Jim, and (4) Rosalind's husband, a socialist party activist who had bought them microwavable styrofoam cups of leftover Laksa from the party the night before. The husband, who once met the student at his most self-absorbed, found him devoid of any insight to Malaysian *realpolitik*. He said that the boy possessed neither awareness nor honesty to write from personal experience, let alone endeavor to disavow their primacy through material analysis. He lead the frontal assault 3:53 minutes into the conversation, remarking that "the kids these days" (we quote him verbatim here) "(are) so disengaged from their surroundings they are xenophobic towards whoever they do identify with." This provoked mollifying laughter from the older men, whom the husband thought he had failed to entertain the previous evening, feeling slightly dwarfed by his guests' erudition. Over dinner, he had made nothing more than small talk, but had become conversationally invigorated by the institutional trappings of the humanities staffroom and did not mind the subtle condescendence in the *Guai Lou*'s tone when he expressed approval for the epithet. The bumi he definitely had won over, seeing how he asked him, without a trace of irony, to expound on what it meant to be "xenophobic towards the Same", to which the husband replied by expounding on the phenomena of "kids adopting a kind of identity politics in which they think of themselves as progressive by being self-loathing"—This remark provoked a serious expression on Hari's face, as if "(he) had caught the wind that Andy Kaufman was just playing a guy who sucked at every other impersonation save Elvis," as Jim recollected in another dinner party hosted by the effable Mrs. Leong.

Hari bonded immensely with the husband following the chat, losing his job six months later after being photographed at a socialist party rally. The parties stopped following the firing, though Jim still invited himself over to Rosalind's. Hari spent the next 2 years of what he called his "permanent sabbatical" to write a 180-page bildungsroman whose protagonist was based on Mr. Leong, a book filled with human conflict, mutual striving, subjects and narratives not easily reducible to liberal humanist cliches, teamwork, etc. all of which is too much to expect from this collection of impressionistic vignettes about the reclusive Student. He had dropped out during his final year and his name would have been long forgotten by the water-cooler quartet if it weren't for the expat's after-dinner witticisms: He had long adopted the phrase "stop being so (student's name)" whenever he thought a particularly pedantic point had been made, and this caught on in the faculty, much to the students's thin-skinned chagrin.

The student became increasingly isolated from school, finding solace in chat rooms with carnivorechick91, whom he recklessly confided in, even making up complexes he never had in order to animate personal stories he felt impartial to. He feigned a disproportionate amount of anxiety over a dream he had where he swallowed animal feces. The self-fulfilling nature of a "confession" revealed itself after the cat shit dream was adopted by carnivorechick91 as a shorthand for "control issues," a label which the student gave credence to at times while rejecting at others, oscillating between desire for intimacy and guilt over his reluctance to strive for anything beyond a pale imitation of his desires. A month before he dropped out he compounded this ouroboric cycle by fictionalizing no less than 5 dreams for the sake of attention, elevating his neurosis to the level of conscious storytelling. By then he was barely a student—all he did in the evening was smoke and stay up all night writing about dreams he never had for the internet.

None of this mattered, he thought, for he knew himself to be a decent, honest person. Today he is more or less the same as yesterday, though he felt more alive. He would be meeting her tomorrow for an air-conditioned shopping mall romp.

He fell asleep with his contact lenses on.



He Was Playing Something Softly In The Beginning

This piece consists of a piece titled “Justice,” composed in 2009, and another piece called “Process In Place(s).” And now this piece is called, “He Was Playing Something Softly In The Beginning.” The “he” is not me, but somebody I listened to after I did the mastering of this piece.

As a coin has two sides, some works are made for friends and some are made for enemies. This one can be both. It all depends on which side you “hear” it.

—Goh Lee Kwang

See reverse for CD.

No CD?
Stay calm and visit gohleekwang.bandcamp.com

Contributors

Alex Lee ("Home is Everywhere," p. 2) applies interventions to cities to create conversations. See bumppitybump.blogspot.com

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Tan Ray Tat (front cover, "Student," p. 24) is a video/performance artist who shares his work at facebook.com/TanRayTat

Goh Lee Kwang ("He Was Playing Something Softly In The Beginning," p. 31) is the founder of the experimental music label Herbal International.

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