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New Village is a quarterly zine on Malaysian culture and literature. Contact us at newvillagezine@gmail.com.

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Editor's Note

I am so scared of one day waking up and not caring anymore. On a day such as that, I would wake up and surf over to YouTube and watch all the clips I could find of Portlandia, or Monty Python's Flying Circus. I would probably watch all the Portlandia clips that have to do with the feminist bookstore.

I would avoid all responsibility from that day forward. I would think that I would explode from taking on anymore responsibility. I would feel like the next thing I will do would be the most unforgettable thing I will ever do. I will be remembered in a hundred years for the next thing I do. I would be able to live off the proceeds from the next thing I do. And the next thing I do is pull a chair out from under the table and I think to myself I have pulled the shit out of that chair out from under that table. It will be the most legendary chair-pulling in history and I will look around and feel sad that no one captured that moment on a smartphone.

Sometimes I think I am more scared of that day than I am scared of death. It would be worse than death, a living death. It would be like being a human vegetable.

I don't want it with such a passion that I've considered it very carefully. I would watch Seinfeld from beginning to end. Or maybe I would re-watch Game of Thrones.

—See Tshiung Han



From the Suburbia Kid

Alex Lee

"You can't rely on bringing people downtown, you have to put them there."
Jane Jacobs

Last week, I came across a new part of town. It was a new area developed from corn fields. This happens all the time, but what happens exactly when new areas are opened up? Does this help develop the city centre they surround?

The most important things in a city are people and businesses. Cities survive, thrive and decline based on these building blocks. With an imbalanced ratio, cities will find it very hard to grow and meet the expectations of the developing economy. Detroit, a city with a population of 1.8 million at its height became a city of 713,777 in 2010. That's a city built for more than twice its current population. Surely there is plenty of infrastructure to attract people and businesses into the city, right? If there isn't they will come when we build it, how do cities work beyond the spreadsheet and for the everyday commoner.

Very often, cities open up new areas when they discover that they need to grow. For example, my hometown has an ongoing problem with poor consumer consumption. When two similar outlets open close to each other, both businesses suffer and, if we are lucky, one manages to outlast the other. To address this problem, the city council (probably just like yours) will, with their "sound" decisions, approve the development of new areas outside the city proper. The development of suburbs. Lots and lots of suburbs. Suburbs that come with a hypermarket and a drive-thru McDonalds or KFC.

On a macro level, it all looks like the figures will add up and the problem will be solved soon enough with lots of happy people in the mall and fast food outlets. One might argue that this is a model that has been proven to work on many occasions but in reality it is inefficient and very silly on the street level, where common sense sets the rules of survival. Suburbia shouldn't be the "solusi utama" for the urbanisation of Malaysian cities, and here is why.

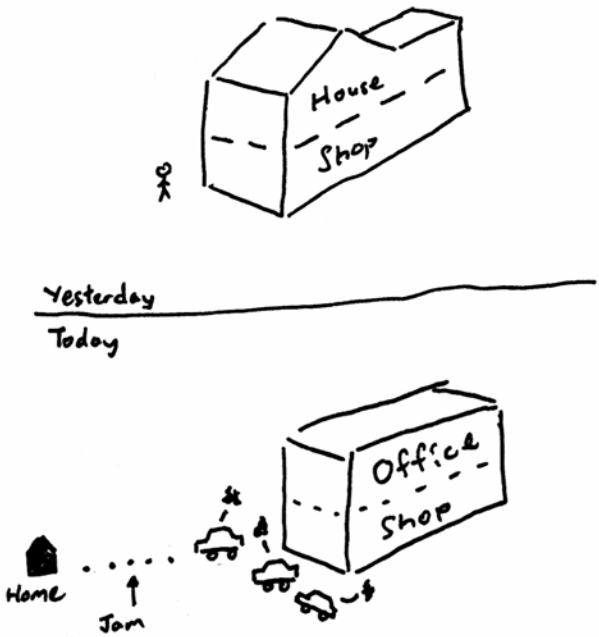
The breaking up of the population over vast tracts of suburbs is so inefficient that it stunts the growth of cities, especially smaller ones. It dilutes consumer consumption and spreads businesses too thinly. Business growth plateaus at the edges of suburbs because people from outside the suburb rarely visit.

Reflecting on the effects of urbanisation on the development of our very own heritage cities, we may just find the answer to our woes. A little more than a hundred years of development has put the typical shophouse through the trials and tribulations of common sense. The key feature of the shophouse was that it was mixed used. It had residential above and businesses below. It addressed the problem of lack of living and commercial space in the city and it was

efficient. It created a high enough density of people in a small area to keep the businesses and the city growing.

The idea of mixed-use today is trendy, but (unlike the vast stocks of shophouses) mostly reserved for a few high-density blocks in the city. Worst still, these mixed-use developments continue to saturate the housing stock even more so when people don't live in the houses they purchase. A sizable portion of them are bought for property flipping. Flipping is the act of buying a house with the intent of selling it for profit and not to have it rented out or lived in. Most of the time, it remains empty and awaiting buyers. The buyers are often in the flipping cycle themselves and the property could continue to remain unoccupied for a while. Flipping does not help increase the density of the city and often has detrimental effects on the growth and health of the commercial units within the same development. With the setbacks, there just isn't enough promise in large mixed-use developments to create the all-essential critical density.

The critical density of city residents is crucial for urban growth. Without it, the young Malaysian city will be just a shell of a teenager with no vibrancy. A dense city is a vibrant city and a city that borders on the definition of densely populated. Most planners subscribe to theories that avoid overcrowding the city. They do this by housing the population in suburbs. But suburbanisation does more than clog up the arteries of a living city. It dilutes the city, makes it flavourless. What is needed is a return of the shophouse typology. A wholesale use of vacant commercial unit stocks in existing low-rise buildings. This can be done if our planners and industry players understand the realities of the changing environment that the world has thrown at us.



Our cities are full of shophouses. Yesterday's shophouses were mixed used and encouraged diversity, but today's shophouses are used solely as retail or commercial space.

Lifetime Partner

I am interested in the couples who have been married for more than 40 years, how they know each other, and how they are able to sustain their relationship for so many years.

—Wilfred Weegee

See facebook.com/DecayingCoastline for more photos by Wilfred.






nutella

















The couple in the newspaper, they are my aunt and uncle. They committed suicide due to an issue with a loan shark. I took this photo when my mum showed me the article in the newspaper. Even though they died in such a terrible way, their love is beautiful. They will be lifetime partners forever.

—Wilfred Weegee

I have taken up cooking

Catalina Rembuyan

I have taken up cooking.
It is a meaningful activity, one that provides.
It is the ensuring of sustenance.
It is not an art. It is craftsmanship.
It is the act of delivering creation,
originating from the time before art was written,
when beautiful things were made to be used,
not to be dissected. Here are illustrations:
woodwork laced with flowers,
attire lined with lace, stonework with shapes,
metal engravings, colourful earthenware.
When the oil sizzles in the wok it is the creation of fuel.
It is, supposedly, what husbands love.
It feeds children.
It grows life.

Atoms, molecules, all elements
transform under heat. In the water,
the flesh of animals bleed their essences.
These happen;
there is no need to overthink beyond their function.
Assembly robots do not comprehend physics,
and cooks are components in the machinery of life.

Outside there is a storm.
Sonamu to strike us at midnight GMT.
Winds up to 80 km/h from the South China Sea.
I stand in my kitchen, cooking.
I am preparing food.

Tui

Tan Ray Tat

Like a sentence that breaks a vow of silence, the dream ends with the scent of fresh detergent powder and birdsong, pieces of the morning collapsing into projections of an object of memory—a syntactic integrity cohering within an associative matrix of genitalia and laundry. Snugly nested in the Tui's territorial outbursts is the spirit of retreat, a sustained space of silence tunneling through some intuition of oneself or another. The movement can only be described as a foresight of foresight, or the echo's delusion of freedom through the unilateral disposition of hearing. The listener becomes possessed. Its animal sings of forgotten nightfall, blackness as it comes to be thrown between space and time, an elegy of echoes reverberating through shadows. Its song is as sweet as it is prideful—who hasn't dreamt of conquering the night? But fawning over reflections in the height of cloying delirium, the shadow finds itself wanting. Wanting to survive the dream, to be its own object, to be the wakeful thing that casts shapes away from the window sill that bears the impression of an aquarium brimming with potential, loose particles, amoeba shapes dancing around dust particles in the warmth. Wanting to wake up again and again, even though its eyes are already open. Let's say it does just that—accepting its desire to penetrate the light of its

making, to inhabit fresh skin worn under wrinkled jeans, the steady beating of a heart beneath a ribcage—then what? The urge to oversleep is seductive, to mourn the fragility of one's containment. He has no need to wallow because he isn't proud of the quality of his shame.

He sits up as a flawed person emerging in a temple of self-realization through ceremony, with other wayward souls caught in the throes of adulthood. Rent is $120 a week. Formational thoughts of the day revolve around life as a work in progress, and he becomes momentarily haunted by a sense of uncanniness—as though his room tunneled into infinity and everything outside were inside, observed through a bowl of self-contained spectatorship. He quickly truncates the resolution of this idea, destroying the image of himself as a voyeur under the city skyline. He contemplates stories he could not call his own, other works in progress. Other finalities out of reach. Like his shadow, he finds himself wanting, but accepts the boundlessness of his contentment. He has lived a privileged existence and has only recently come to feel blessed by the diminishing returns in self-investment—enjoyment isn't what it used to be: no escape in wine, nicotine, marijuana, or the occasional comfort food binge. Having buried the want of sleep, he yearns to seek. One of his flatmates is playing aftermath banjo in the kitchen to the smell of Persian coffee. He internalizes the impetus but not its mystery—though he has no delusions as to the aseptic nature of personal expression, he chooses to believe in its hope for containment. He perceives the music as a continuum of whims coloring emotions

inhabiting purpose. Its ode to the simpler pleasures of life has long since become alien to him but he is at least able to regard the dream with a bittersweet acknowledgement of its necessity. He feels a sense of relief and makes a new year's resolution: No more parasitical excursions at house parties. No more anonymity in the city, looking for people to go back with. No more bedside poetry, nursing the contours of his solitude, as though its amorphousness had room to house spirit. Curiously, he becomes afraid to uncover the identity of the banjo-player (Gretchen? Shaun?), and upon leaving his room, he circumvents the kitchen, taking an atypical route to the bathroom to look himself in the eyes. Pure despair. He considers a facial before deciding to slum it under the surveillance of the mirror eye.

—How much eyeliner to cover up a week's neglect? says Donald, behind shower curtains.

—You ran out on us last night, he says, concealing some resentment. Donald lived in the lounge (like a "free-range chicken") and cultivated a presence that fell somewhere between nonchalant intrusion and ubiquity.

—Alone time called. Ended up reading the first draft of Shaun's spiritual clusterfuck on DXM, said Donald.

—How was it a clusterfuck? he said.

—As self-help it was greasy…. As philosophy, poisonous. His trip is a tirade against self-certainty, said Donald.

—If anyone else wrote that book, you'd love it. You read us that monologue about "de-centering consciousness"—

—Speaking as a writer of what I'm sure you understand are *stories*… I wasn't trying to make a point when I

wrote that. Speaking as a writer *in general*… that's a lot of fancy circumlocution around a simple position I haven't even articulated yet. I'm all for embracing the counterintuitive, fuck the will to power and all that jazz. But Shaun goes on for five chapters about a mission to disarm egos—

—Sounds right to me—there's been a lot of that going on in here this morning.

—Which goes to show you that reading his book has done me no good.

—You're the devil.

—I am not oblivious to the possibility that I may have adopted this position during the dissociative state because I was thinking in double negatives. But you'd be a fool to imagine that Shaun's universalism has anything to do with him transcending self. It's about politics. Psychological divide and conquer. Why should we let ourselves off guard just because he wears a T-shirt that says he's naked?

—You can have your pride and eat it too, you know.

—Pride is just garnish, Mr. Greedy should at least be on speaking terms with Mr Ticklish.

—What?

—Mr. Men. Abject adjective blobs. First book to break formula featured Mr Clever, who is revealed to be oblivious to basic nuances of day-to-day reality. Can't tell a good joke or cook a hot meal. Despite his namesake, he turns out to be a fuckwit.

—Ironic.

—I did lots of that at a creative writing camp I attended 4 months ago. You can get plenty of ideas from children's books. I'd create characters by cross-referencing personality traits of Mr. Men and Little Miss Somethings.

—Hmm. When I meditate I intuit emotional states as a combination of the

masculine and the feminine. My awareness, staring at my mirror reflection and its anima, the soul-image.

—I like your buzz, it's more like sets of women with subsets of men for me. But Mr Clever is a wildcard, because he's the emperor with no clothes: the fool forever alienated from common experience. Anyone who can afford time to write grapples with Mr. Clever. He represents everyone's blindness to themselves, the perfect confluence of alienation and self-engagement that empowers the most mundane of journal writers to presume the metaphysics of fiction. He is everyone's hypocrite: As a bourgie, he's not self-identifying like his counterpart Mr Greedy.

—Uh-huh.

—So, tell me… Shaun talks of having found his calling in life. So he pitches his anti-ego fluff to some vanity publishers, then what? Not that aspiring writers on the dole don't make excellent gurus….

—Did you sleep in the tub, Donald?

—Crawled in here around 6. The steam from the warm faucet unclogs my sinuses.

—See you tomorrow Donald, he says, and splashes water on his face.

He towels himself on the way to the bus station. Behind him, the music has dissipated in the kitchen along with the possibility (Shaun? Gretchen?) of a healthy conversation. Donald's bitterness leaves a bad taste in his mouth. The shape of some silly, half-formed idea about people having the right to respect the quality of their disgust emerges in his head, and he internalizes this immediately without considering its contours. He feels disgusted by the discussion about the preferability of apples over

oranges, though still he remains fond of the cretin who said all that nonsense. The section of his thoughts that feels susceptible to Donald's increasingly frightening ideas on the human condition projects "Mr. Bitter" as a codeword for you-know-who, once he eventually conveys this episode to Shaun, amidst walls' ears. But all of this is far removed from the present moment. When he reaches the bus stop his thoughts drift towards the subject of time, and because he is beginning to think in hasty compound sentences (having forgotten his Persian fix while following the trajectory initiated by Donald) he redoubles the thought: Time, and time again. Time in context: Donald's lack of respect for it. He was going to be late for work, and he hadn't even had any breakfast yet. Watching cars pass, he looks at the bus schedule and concludes that he has enough time to buy a pie, while wondering what he might have retorted in Shaun's defense. He concedes that he shouldn't take pride of his apolitical nature in regards to writer's vanity, for the simple reason that he doesn't write. His eyes focused on the sundry shop, he explores a dichotomy typified by his two flatmates—the difference between thought-management and creation; the state of feeling empowered enough to write your way into life and the attempt to construct a reality fluid enough to be indifferent to chaos, complex enough for people in the story to be writers themselves, whatever they make of their predicament. What does it mean when characters wield more freedom than the writer himself? He hears a violent honk, the screeching of tires and feels himself being thrown across a windshield,

I don't read you...??

Kuning Pening

Find me something to read. God damn you!
Who? Me? Yes you, you mongoloid on the south east of my
de-concerted affairs.
I watched birds mating in Kuala Kangsar,
where I found love on the side walk, brushing her tooth, with
a book on her left hand.
Now, my disposition of the emasculated chocolaty taste of
your book was rather intriguing, perhaps like not
reading.
Jabbed some tobacco brunette with scrolled paper, waiting
for Burroughs to smile.

Cream breasted woman don't read much. Often mistaken for
a tree.
Cream breasted woman don't read much. Often mistaken for
a cow.
Lusty cunt, you!

Read said Gabriel. Read! Read! Read!
Alright! Alright! I'm reading already!

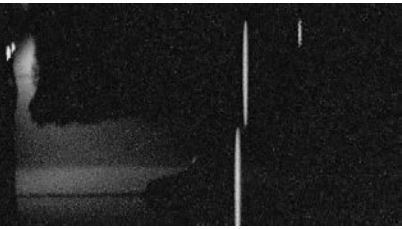
Come here you! You book with tears. In those libraries full
of objectionable causes.

Come on! Move on!
...God Damn you book!
Should I hate you, book? Maybe some other time I will.

But, now, those Holy Literatures put me on a train.
God, don't let the train take me. Hurt my back.

Kuala Kangsar Railway Station, December 2006

I Am Listening



Goh Lee Kwang

I have been listening, for more than 2 hours now.
I am in a room, a small listening room, full of CDs, and an okay sound system.
I go though the booklet that comes with the CD, I go from one CD to the next, adjusting the volume of the sound system. I am in a listening room I am not familiar with. I was only here not 4 hours ago. The sound system is a basic setup, without much options. The CDs are well organized, alphabetized, by label, and by artist. But there are also CDs on the coffee table, on the sofa (where I am going to spend the night), even on the carpet. Some CDs have simple packaging,

a jewel case, and sleeve notes; some are rather fancy, with 32 pages of text and images. When I am writing this I am still listening.

I read the most about music from CD liner notes. Introduction written by some music scholar, critic, producer, or sometimes the artist / musician / composer themselves. I think music is best read this way. I did not have proper music training, I cannot read music. But when I think of what I am doing, I try not to think of it as something else (like I am doing sound poetry, or invisible painting etc.) I know what I am working on is music, or sound. I am dealing with composition, or sound organized. I am dealing with pitches and frequencies.

And sound is something you listen to only when it capture your attention. It's always there, but only certain sounds will capture it. Some sounds are much catchier than others. And catchy sounds always lead to the recreation of concrete / reality sound (the sound that one can easily recognize, besides the musical instruments, it is also included the sounds of traffic, alarm, door bells etc.; or emotion (I am not good on this part, but most people surely are). Sounds that are less catchy are those sounds that are non-recognizable, something unnamed, in short, what people call abstract sound.

I found some CDs that I cannot find elsewhere, not even available as online downloads, I cannot help but sample each CD for a few minutes each, if I had my computer with me I would copy everything to my external hard drive. But now I cannot concentrate on my listening, because my thought is rumbling, I am telling myself that I am listening right now, not writing, not doing anything else, but I am

writing, I am going from one CD to another, I am flipping booklets from one to another. The rain stops.

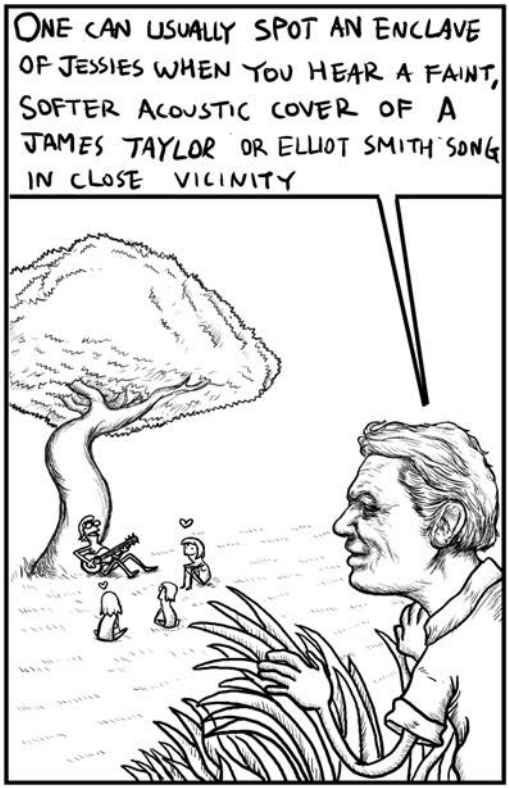
One morning, I woke up, around 7 a.m. I wanted to listen to something, instead I get a book. I sat down near the balcony and start reading the book. It was an interesting book, I forgot when I bought the book, or whom I borrowed it from. I sat there and read for almost an hour, then I heard some unidentified noise, I was thinking, what am I listening to? What CD did I put on just now? I have no answer. I went on with the book, not so long later, again an unidentified noise "bang!". What am I listening to? I get up, leave the book on the armchair, and go find out from the CD player. The CD player is off. And the rain begins.

And music is not a door to escape, it is a view from the window, with the imagination the only limitation.

ARTSCHOOL SAVANNAH

BY: JIN HIEN LAU





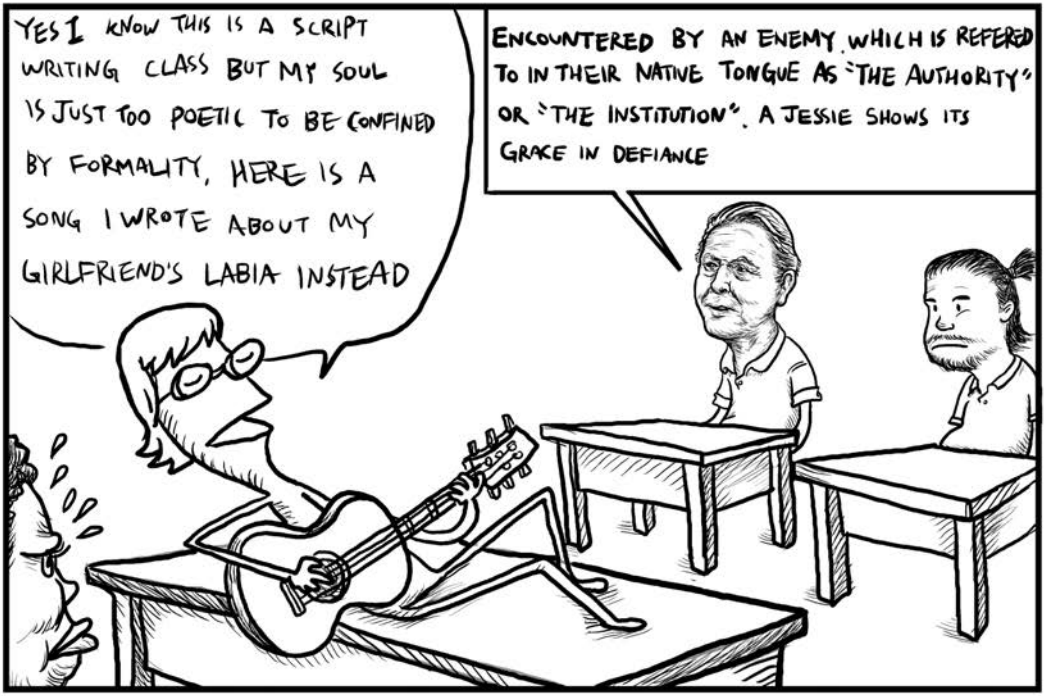


AT EASE WITH THE PRESENCE OF A NEWCOMER, THE MALE JESSIE WILL ESTABLISH ITS SOCIAL /TERRITORIAL DOMINANCE BY RECALLING PAST GLORIES



TAKEN OUT OF THEIR NATURAL HABITAT (TREE NEAR CAFETERIA TO AN ACTUAL CLASS) THE JESSIES WOULD RESPOND WITH A DEFENSIVE CALL TO ARMS






AFTER 3 YEARS EACH JESSIE WILL METAMORPHOSIZE INTO EITHER A CHERRY PICKER IN TASMANIA OR GET A CUSHY POSITION IN THE FAMILY BUSINESS
DID I EVER TELL YOU YOU HAVE A BEAUTIFUL SOUL
PFFFRRRT
WHO DOES JAMES TAYLOR COVERS ANYMORE

Contributors

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Alex Lee ("From the Suburbia Kid," p. 2) blogs at bumppitybump.blogspot.com

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Catalina Rembuyan ("I have taken up cooking," p. 18) teaches English literature to teenagers.

Tan Ray Tat ("Tui," p. 19) is a video/performance artist who shares his work at facebook.com/TanRayTat

Goh Lee Kwang ("I am listening," p. 27) is the founder of the experimental music label Herbal International.

Kuning Pening ("I don't read you," p. 25) is a founding member of the bands Think! Tadpole! Think! and Tiga Segi Tiga.

Wilfred Weegee ("Lifetime Partner," p. 6) is a photographer. See wilfredweegee.com.

Wo Swee Teck (back cover) is an illustrator.

