

CHOI Chi Fung**Sleepwalk in the Suburbs**

fruit trees hang heavy with cans
bottles of drinkable water float down the river
lush, long tongues ripple in the wind through
air-conditioned seasons
bees reduced to mosquitoes buzz idly everywhere

enormous handcarts roll across
undulating fields of instant noodles
crowds of people wielding brooms cheer as they harvest
animals in the shape of meatballs, frozen chickens
souls squeeze onto escalators
the setting sun: entrance to the Underground

perhaps the famine scattered deep in the mud after dark
sprouts silently . . .
will there be mountains of tissues in the city one day?
news bulletins rumble in a lightning-filled sky

Translated by Simon Patton

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NG Man Sin 吳文倩

Escape, 1992.

Horizontal scroll, ink and colour on paper, 63.5 x 95.5 cm.

Contemporary Hong Kong Art Biennial Exhibition 1992.

CHOI Chi Fung**Another Summer's Garden**

we still live here as we always have
open your eyes and the first thing you'll see is
flowers in full bloom shaking or nodding their heads appropriately
after the wind
amidst gradually quickening breath and conversation honeyed words—
from the hidden hives nearby?—splash everywhere
an obscure fragrance drifts pollen hangs in the air
what more information could the bright butterflies spread
as they rise and fall?

the twitter of birds and the buzz of insects have blended into one language
and with no fixed standards of pronunciation
who wants to remember the dying cadence of remote cicada-song?

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irregular clumps of bushes have been trimmed to a uniform height
accentuating their verdant, symmetrical
exterior safely navigating the scrutiny of the beauty-seeking sightseer
but do the fruit peelings and scraps of paper beneath them change into
nourishing earth
or are they quickly snatched up by the fine roots of the tender grass
gently spreading blade by blade the strength of adaptability?
the ants that crawl amongst them are much more agile than their counter-
parts indoors—
what greater enemy could they have apart from their prey?
momentarily poised, the dragonfly always looks on
but can a pair of compound eyes see any more deeply into the world?
could a stone sprout four agile limbs?

in the afternoon people come out to cool down, chat, read the paper,
admire the flowers
or perhaps they sit there idly—it's rather unclear
you, child what's on your mind?

it is summer again

but do we still live here as we always have?

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CHOI Chi Fung

Temple Street • Early One Friday

how do you read this sentence of a street, epitome of worldliness?
now beginning so often with the first word to the left
of the seafood, mass transmitter of the shell-bone legacy, garrulously juxtaposed with
'Tourist' a foreign conjunction a fresh encounter
with a series of famous Picassos translated a-flutter
into everyday scarves ranged alongside t-shirts and jeans jungle
broad expanse prosperous adjectives in the process of simplification
Yiban yiban putong de blooming renminbi
and pirate compact discs glittering with perfume heirs of Cang Jie*
holding photographs of famous-brand leather goods and watches
pulling in the custom of tidal gazes the little squares
remaining unhurried amidst formless grammar but
how do you read this sentence of a street, epitome of worldliness?
in the early morning strolling past empty stalls
already devoid of handwriting which always seems to be saying something
so much leaking out in language speaking
no way of reading the family ties between one word and another
and no way of questioning
those buffs of the dictionary outside the car-park the 'Fortune Teller' men drove back to the future long ago
leaving behind a litter of melon rinds punctuation marks black birthmarks on the surface of writing
discarded in the circle of old men's talk at an outdoor theatre

*Cang Jie is often credited with the invention of Chinese characters.

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WONG Kai Yu 黃啓裕
Countdown (I), 1996.
Selenium Toned B & W Photographs.
Courtesy of the Art Museum, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

ta ta tum tum ta shed again and again in opera melodies faxed down from antiquity
leaving behind chess-gamblers eloquent sermons
promoting their respective jargons seeking out
one another's lambs in public gardens where banyan trees are stationed
leaving behind the fading lamp-light dragon whiskers rewritten in the hairstyles of beautiful women the re-emerging
features of the entire ancient Tin Hau Temple and beneath its clear complexion
the pivotal clause of the street referring back to the subject on the street-signs
still nothing more than an *onomatope* but how after all
do you read this sentence of a street, epitome of worldliness?
in the early morning car of exclamation shuttling past
peddlers once keyed in by the roadside licence-less
printed like cursive-script narrating
people from Nepal gaunt mother-tongue on the body of a YETI
breast-fed stalls on the pavement growing new sets of metallic milk teeth
rows of household pots and pans consuming a simple *feng' jin'* describing stacks of girlie magazines
immortal, never obsolete
linking words known to all explaining
trendy lingo awaiting reincarnation old-fashioned second-hand overcoats
pronouns stepping down from shop windows discussing
jade ware a surviving classical idiom perfect or flawed juxtaposed with ceramic artefacts
so commonplace unavoidably vulgar but then
how do you read this sentence of a street, epitome of worldliness?
in the early morning with even more phrases at the end of it
in an *essai* endlessly under revision?

11 March 1995

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