

2HB

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KATHRINE SOWERBY



## Why I can't eat at Asia Style

SARAH TRIPP

I often feel emotional about food – delicate and callow and needy. It's a childish urgency to be nourished, a biological fact which fuelled a lot of the excitement and enjoyment of my early social interaction. I now recall even the quarrels over family meals as fortifying. It's true that my current course and moody relationship to the preparation and consumption of food has its provenance in the difficult pursuit of love. This relationship has reached an impasse.

I haven't eaten at Asia Style for a year. Today, in my lunch hour, I walked down St Georges Road and stopped outside the restaurant. I've been conscientiously avoiding this place for months and now I've found the courage to return, the door is locked.

For two years between the ages of 15 and 17 I was unable to hold a knife and fork in the presence of another person. This *phase* substituted an earlier *phase*, lasting only a few months, when I ate everything with a knife and fork: sandwiches, crisps, fruit and cake – seems strange now. I asked my brother if he remembered this cutlery fuss. He said that he didn't but he remembers that time I lied about who broke the lamp in the living room and he was unjustly punished.

She says the image she sees when she thinks of Hainan is Hainanese Chicken Rice, that's just what she thinks of. Her father was born in Hainan where lots of people work in the food industry – they either open a restaurant or a café. Everyone in her family works in the food industry. Her brothers are all chefs, she is the youngest, she has nine siblings and only two of them don't work in the food industry. She says that both the chefs who work here are called Cheung Gor, which means Brother Cheung. Brother is a sign of respect. When she was young and she was dating she tried to avoid chefs. She met her husband in Taiwan. He's a chef.

Circumnavigating Asia Style involved changing my route to work, changing my route to the pool club and declining invitations to dine there with friends. Cedric, who always wants to know why, asked, 'Why?' I told him that I don't like the food at Asia Style. A lie – I love the food at Asia Style. Cedric's silent and willowy suspicion finished with another probing, 'Why?' I said that I couldn't talk about it.

I was in the middle of a fraught conversation with one of my former students when I suddenly located the subtext of our friction. What we were really talking about was his covert desire for someone, not just anyone, but someone

he respected professionally and personally to ask him to exhibit his 'art work'. I said that nobody had ever asked me to exhibit my 'art work'. Ever. I must have been creaking with frustration because he spat back, 'It just shows how far you can get by being pushy.'

I knock on the locked door. In the back of Asia Style someone is cooking. He waves NO. I wave YES. He tries to shuffle out of sight. I knock again to signal that I have observed him trying to shuffle out of sight and I'm not going to give up. He reluctantly snaps off his rubber gloves. As he approaches the door I project an urgent smile, the one I employ when asking to use someone's toilet. You couldn't have dragged me kicking and screaming over this threshold twelve months ago. I squeeze my polite face through the tentative door gap and he squeezes back his broken English, 'Come back at five and a half.'

I've been approaching strangers as a function of art for a while. Being from out of town is an important perspective to hold onto. I've never totally let go of my own stranger status in Scotland and for this reason, and because I've always been naturally propelled towards the black void of awkward and stilted conversation, I enjoy talking to other strangers. Plus, the conversations I have with strangers often have an egalitarian quality to them – it's as if a sort of sympathetic consonance flourishes in the empty space between us, the hiatus created by an absence of familiarity with each other and with our immediate surroundings.

Conversation is a kind of commerce, and when we give speech we become part of what we speak, Lewis Hyde wrote that in his book 'The Gift'.

She says migration from China to Malaysia has always accompanied the trade between the countries. Her father left Hainan and settled in the fishing village of Endau in the province of Johor Bahru on the border between Malaysia and Singapore. She considers herself Malaysian Chinese. Someone else from Malaysia may not have the same Chinese influence as her but all Chinese are the same – we eat to socialise. For the past seven years there has been an increase in Malay coming to Glasgow but the immigration of Chinese has been steady since the 70's; Loon Fung on Sauchiehall Street was the first Chinese restaurant to open here in 1975, then in 1987 Dalian was twinned with Glasgow consolidating these economic relationships into a diplomatic kinship.

In the village where I was born there has been a Chinese take-away since 1973. It's always busy, there's always a queue but that's part of the event, part of being its attendee. The Chinese calendars, the calligraphic bilingual menus, the flavoured air, the tonal language, the ringing of hunger inside you are all absorbing and intensely distracting.

She says that people from all classes come and dine at Asia Style, rich people and ordinary people like us, and they are treated exactly the same way. She says the way they treat their customers has never changed, they are just as friendly as possible to everyone. Customers often have to queue to get a table but everyone is very polite about queuing, the customers like to adopt the Asia Style culture, the way we serve food and the way we operate. In Malaysia very often you will see a whole street that is almost like a food court, but you wouldn't stay there and chat all night, you would just come in, eat and go, this is the atmosphere of Asia Style. The food is like the street food you find in Malaysia and Hong Kong.

At five thirty I'm standing inside Asia Style. In the twelve months I spent zigzagging around Woodlands Road, West Princes Street, Great Western Road avoiding this I'd forgotten about the poise and charm of the Asia Style waitresses. I'm offered a table. I decline. They wonder what I want. We wonder together in an uncomfortable silence. I decide to request an interview. A raft of smiling faces carries me towards the owner. I speak one language and she speaks five. We quickly agree we can't understand each other. I need a translator.

The kinds of relationship nobody feels happy in are super-glued to the past. Inhibitions can also be symptoms, Sigmund Freud wrote that. Moulding a new relationship with Asia Style has now become a creative process I would confidently say I've committed to. I can't say it was planned; I just didn't want to go on avoiding Asia Style forever. It's true that I am now the subject of a bespoke project that began with the aim of desensitising the site of an unhappy personal drama. Cedric suggests that I fan the confessional impulses in my artistic practice.

It's Monday night and I still have a hangover from Sunday. I almost never drink and I almost never have to fight the emotional undertow of a hangover. If you drink a lot you probably have to do a lot of internal mediation and you must become adept at holding your own emotions at a distance, like the unfathomable moods of small children. I do not possess these skills. Mercifully, my translator is a charming man.

She says you don't have to worry there are no rules to eating at Asia Style. You can eat in any way you want. It's important to really enjoy the food. She says she finds it pleasing when customers come here almost daily, having a good relationship with the customers is very rewarding. Working long hours is worth it when the customers love the food and really appreciate it. It's particularly rewarding when the customer finishes the whole plate of food. She says she uses it as a guideline to show the standard of the food.

I watched the Danish film *Babette's Feast* not long after I'd moved to Glasgow. Paths across the city made by my friends and I were connecting up galleries, cafés and cinemas – we were finding our place and forgetting the towns and villages from which we'd escaped. At that moment, the film was like a honey trap for the small, wavering voice inside me calling me back home. The film details a meal prepared and consumed in a remote village on a stretch of desolate Jutland coastline. Its pious inhabitants live ascetic lives of solitary self-sufficiency into which Babette is invited. Babette's gastronomic feast slowly draws light from the cloudy faces of the villagers – faces rigid with self-sacrifice, abdication and lost love begin to yield colour and grace.

She says the most popular dishes are Malaysian Pancakes, the Salt and Pepper Crab and Sze Chuan Chicken. She likes Salt and Pepper Crab and Malaysian Pancakes because they remind her of home where it's easy to catch seafood. The popular dishes with the chefs are Prawn Noodles and Home Made Noodles. Very often when you go to a Chinese restaurant there are two types of menu, one written in English and one in Chinese. The English menu is just normal take-away food. What they've done here is basically mix the menu and take out all the English menu dishes. She believes the origins of Chinese cooking are iconoclastic. By mixing different things together you make new food. It's good to be curious, always.

Tiny, desiccated, fried fish float in a limpid soup with lettuce, mushroom, spring onions and etiolated balls of fish. In the bottom of the bowl is a tangled bed of hand made noodles with the resistant texture of fresh squid – it's like a warm aquarium of nutrients. Prawns simmer for hours to make the soup for the second dish. Threaded through this resonant liquid are noodles, fine green beans, slices of beef and egg. It's comforting and it rewards your hunger with a benevolent mood of fullness.

She's talking, explaining the dishes and even though I can't understand what she's saying she's still looking into my face and smiling. Her careful attention to smiling and showing her face openly to me is gently drawing a cincture of kindness around our table, around the sentient food, around me – tethering me to the visceral present of the meal, the conversation, the place.

She says, a good smile, that's all you need. I get a lump in my throat.

Nobody knows exactly what Aristotle meant by *Katharsis* because the second book of the 'Poetics' is lost. The word appears in the last book of the 'Politics' but here he says that he'll not labour its discussion because he had already defined it in the aforementioned volume, now missing. He says it's like the calming relief of listening to sacred music, or the release of fear, or a venting of

tension through art or drama. It's a lacuna which acknowledges that there are certain kinds of emotional transition that happen to some of us, sometimes, to different degrees, in everyday life when we're close to art or something or someone artfully shakes us and what falls away leaves us feeling freer.

She is being very modest. She says perhaps if you work as a chef in a restaurant you could claim your food is art, but she thinks her food is very homemade and traditional. She says in her culture all the important events are celebrated with food. Meals hold us together, eating is something that holds us together. It's true that my sensibility increases around food. She either has or hasn't noticed my mood changing as I eat. I tell her how I feel. I say that the food tastes wonderful – that the food makes me happy and that I feel inspired to write a love story set in her restaurant.

She says that she doesn't think Asia Style is a romantic place to eat. The atmosphere here is for chitchat and casual conversation. If you took a date out you wouldn't take them somewhere like Asia Style, not in Malaysia. The décor might seem unique to Western eyes but the setting is very homely for talking and chatting. She says she used to work at the Thai Fountain. She thinks that is a romantic place – she's seen two or three proposals of marriage made there.

Between adults disappointment is always worse than anger. That's what Cedric said while we looked at old photographs together. I'm trying hard to work out why this slightly melancholic aphorism was prompted by casual photos of our friends having fun. Don't have too many expectations, be an opportunist, improvise – I think that's what he was trying to say to me.

In a book titled, 'Intimacy', which takes the form of a dialogue between Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, a new kind of intimacy is proposed called, 'impersonal narcissism'. This intimacy is based on being valued by other people rather than on the acquisition of personal knowledge about them. So, *getting to know you* might be less interesting or exciting, and more inhibiting and coercive than intended. Instead, by entering a process of impersonal transformation – hosted by the wider world and ignited by a narcissistic love of other people's potential – we evolve in correspondence with the world rather than through opposition to it.

She says she would like to know why you want to write a love story set in Asia Style?

I want to repair something; I want to repair my relationship to this place that was broken by disappointment.

She says the Chinese rarely talk about romance; they are quite shy about it. Chinese culture has progressively become less and less romantic and more materialistic. We are a very conservative culture. We do not express ourselves that often. In many Chinese communities we have such long working hours that we rarely have time for romance. She says she is part of a strong family system where financial planning for the future education of your children is important and supporting them until they are able to support themselves is vital. Then the children look after their parents when they age, so there is a circular system that preoccupies us. This has always been the tradition. She says she's been brought up to think about traditional family values and planning for a future rather than romance.

In an essay on and not about Bas Jan Ader, Frances Stark takes time to attentively observe the way abandoning your identity can be a solution to the problem of disappointment, and the frustrating self-enslavement that ferments in the realisation that there's often no one to blame but yourself. But she notes that abandoning your identity means forgetting the past or at the very least being successfully distracted from it. If I keep knocking on doors I'll keep finding new kinds of intense distraction that will keep my mind off the past but that's all they'll do. Or, I could give the past a title, write it all down, then remove the confessional specifics and leave a democratic gap.

Self-employed. Employed by yourself – as a child I took great pride in the independence and self-sufficiency of that phrase which was used to describe my parents' vocational status. You can do things for yourself – that's the loose motto I improvised from their professional choices and Protestant work ethic.

She says Asia Style was her dream. It was her dream to have this restaurant and this location. Back in 2000 this was another Malaysian restaurant called Sui Kee. The minute she saw that restaurant her gut instinct told her she could be successful working here, she could work hard here and make something unique.

Due to the poetic nature of Asia Style's Chinese name – it's also a set phrase in Chinese – it's quite difficult to translate. The best interpretation the translator could come up with is one of the following: a local snack referring to the taste of Malaysia or an aroma. He hopes this translation vaguely captures the essence of the name.

The translator and I are full of talk and food. We're stuffed and philosophical. We feel suggestible. *Why not?* is our reply to any invitation. We say thank you many times in English and Cantonese.

She says the feeling of being full is happiness.

## 我為何不上風味小食吃飯

我常對食物充滿情感——脆弱的、稚氣的、有需求的。那是一種對滋養的稚氣迫切需求，也是為我早年的社交注入不少刺激和樂趣的生物學論據。現在回想起來，連家族聚餐的爭執都是有益的。我目前的路線和與 準備及享用食物的情緒化關係確實源自對愛的辛苦追求。而這種關係，已陷入僵局。

我已經一年沒上風味小食吃飯。今天，我在午餐時間走到聖佐治路，在餐館外停下來。過去幾個月，我一直刻意避開這個地方，現在我鼓起勇氣回來，門已上了鎖。

從十五到十七歲的兩年間，我無法在與他人同桌時用刀叉吃東西。這個時期取代了更早的，大約維持了數個月，一個我用刀叉吃所有的東西的時期：包括三文治、油炸馬鈴薯片、水果和蛋糕——現在才覺得怪。我問我的兄弟記不記得這餐具風波。他說不記得，可是他記得我在誰打破客廳檯燈這件事上撒了謊，害他蒙冤受罰。

她說，一想到海南島，她只聯想到海南雞飯。她的父親在海南島出生，許多海南人都從事飲食業——不是開餐館，就是開小吃店。她的家人也都從事這個行業。她的哥哥都是廚師，她是家中么女，九個兄弟姊妹中只有兩位不從事飲食業。她說，在這裡工作的兩位廚師都叫張哥，『哥』是一種尊稱。她年輕時儘量不交廚師男朋友。她在台灣認識她的丈夫。他是一位廚師。

為了刻意避開風味小食，我得改變上班的路線，去撞球室的路線，並拒絕朋友們在那兒聚餐的邀請。總想知道為甚麼的希德力問我「為甚麼？」我對他說我不喜歡那兒的食物。這是謊言——我愛風味小食的食物。希德力沉默，然後疑惑地繼續追問「為甚麼？」我說，我說不上來。

在和以前的學生的一次口角中，我忽然發現我們之間的摩擦所隱藏的意義。我們其實是在討論他秘密渴望有人；不是任何人，而是一位他在公在私都尊敬的人；開口邀請他展出他的『藝術作品』。我說沒有人曾邀請我展出我的『藝術作品』。從來都沒有。我應該是表現得非常不滿，因為他回敬我一句「這就是咄咄逼人的下場。」

我叩了叩那扇已上了鎖的門。在風味小食後邊，有人在煮東西。他示意『不』。我示意『是』。他試圖移動到我看不到的地方去。我又叩了叩門，表示我注意到他想移開但我不會放棄。他這才



不情願地拉掉橡皮手套。當他走過來時，我露出一個急迫的微笑，那種我想借用洗手間時所利用的微笑。一年前，無論如何強迫我，我也辦不到。我把殷勤的臉往門縫裡擠，他則擠出一句不流利的英語「五時半再回來。」

我因為藝術而主動接近陌生人已有好一陣子。『外地人』是個得抓牢的重要立場。我沒有完全捨棄我在蘇格蘭的外地人身份，也因為我總是很自然地被推入棘手和誇張的對話黑洞，我喜歡和陌生人交談。再加上與陌生人的對話常會有一種對等感——就像有一股和諧的共鳴回蕩在兩人之間那對彼此以及周圍環境的不熟悉而衍生的空間。對話是一種交流，當我們在演說的時候，我們成了演說的一部份，露易斯·海德在他的著作《禮物》中如此說道。

她說，人們隨著中國和馬來西亞之間的貿易而南下移民。她的父親離開海南，在位於馬來西亞和新加坡邊界的柔佛州一個叫安陶的漁村落腳。她覺得自己是馬來西亞華裔。其他馬來西亞人不一定受到和她一樣的傳統薰陶，但所有的華人都一樣——我們以吃來交際。過去七年來，有更多馬來人涌到格拉斯哥市，不過華裔移民人數自七十年代以來持續穩定。薩切赫爾街的龍鳳，是於一九七五年開張的第一家中餐館，接著大連在一九八七年與格拉斯哥市結為友好城市，以外交聯繫鞏固了經濟關係。

在我出生的村莊，自一九七三年便有了中餐外賣店。他們的生意總是很好，總是有人排隊；不過排隊是盛事的一部份，是參與的一部份。中國日歷、龍飛鳳舞的雙語菜單、漂著飯菜香的空氣、音調獨特的語言以及肚子餓的咕咕叫聲，全都那麼引人入勝，那麼叫人分心。

她說，所有階層的人士都上風味小食吃飯，有錢人和像我們一樣的普通人都受到同等待遇。她說，他們的待客之道從未改變，他們對任何人都一樣友善。客人常常得排隊，但大家都守秩序，也樂於接受風味小食的文化，包括我們的招待方式，我們的運作方式。在馬來西亞，你常會看到類似飲食坊的一整條街，可是你不會待在那兒聊一個晚上，你會進去吃了就走，這就是風味小食的風格。這裡的食物，就像馬來西亞和香港的街邊食物。

五時半，我站在風味小食裡。忙著在塢蘭士路、西王子街、大西方路繞道而行的十二個月中，我忘了風味小食女服務生們的姿態和魅力。她們請我入座。我拒絕了。她們納悶我有何目的。我們一起在尷尬的沉默中納悶。我決定要求採訪。一張張笑顏把我送到店主跟前。我會說一種語言，她會五種。我們很快地一致同意我們無法了解對方在說甚麼。我需要翻譯員。

那些大家都不開心的人際關係都被強力膠黏在過去。抑制可能是症狀，斯蒙德·弗洛伊德如此寫道。與風味小食塑造新關係，成了我自信會全心投入的一個創意過程。那不是有計畫的，我只是不想繼續避開風味小食到永遠。我現在是一個預示方案的主題，首先旨在消除我對一個場所的個人戲劇化敏感。希德力建議我在藝術工作上煽動告白的衝動。

那是一個星期一晚上，我仍然有著星期天的宿醉。我幾乎從來不喝酒，也幾乎從來不需要與宿醉的情緒低潮搏鬥。如果你喝得多，你大概得多反省冥想，而且你必須擅長與自己的情緒保持距離，如幼童那不可理解的情緒。這些本領我都沒有。所幸，我的翻譯員是一位迷人的男士。

她說，你不必擔心，上風味小食吃飯沒有規矩。你要怎麼吃，就怎麼吃。最重要的是好好地享用食物。她說，看到客人幾乎每天都來，會覺得很高興，與客人維持良好的關係很有滿足感。只要客人喜歡並欣賞這裡的食物，工作時間再長也值得。尤其當客人把盤子裡的食物都吃光，最有滿足感。她說，這是她測量食物水準的指標。

我搬來格拉斯哥市後不久，看了丹麥電影《芭比的盛宴》。我和友人走遍市裡的畫廊、咖啡廳和電影院——我們在找尋屬於自己的地方，要忘卻那些我們所逃離的市鎮和村莊。在那個時刻，那部電影宛如一個為我內心來自家鄉的猶豫之聲而設的甜蜜陷阱。那部電影敘述了一場在荒涼的日德蘭半島海岸一個偏僻鄉村所籌備及舉辦的盛宴。原本在那裡過著與世隔絕，自給自足的苦行生活的虔誠村民邀請芭比前往。芭比的美食饗宴讓村民佈滿陰霾的臉上展現曙光——因為自我犧牲、放棄和失去摯愛的僵硬臉龐上開始有了色彩和慈悲。

她說，最受客人歡迎的菜色是馬來西亞煎餅、椒鹽軟蟹和四川雞。她喜歡椒鹽軟蟹和馬來西亞煎餅，因為讓她想起能輕易捕捉到海鮮的家鄉。受廚師們歡迎的則是蝦麵和手工麵。當你到中餐館去，你常會看到兩種菜單，英文以及中文。英文菜單上的是一般的外賣食物。在這裡，他們把兩種菜單混在一起，然後去掉那些英文菜單上的食物。她相信中菜的根源是破除因襲。把不同的東西混合在一起，你就能做出新的食物。有好奇心，總是好事。

細小、脫水的炸魚漂浮在有萵苣、蘑菇、青蔥和純白魚丸的清湯裡。碗底鋪了一層糾纏著的，和新鮮烏賊一樣有咬勁的手工麵——就像一個熱騰騰、營養豐富的海底世界。第二道菜的湯，得用蝦燉上好幾小時。纏繞在湯裡的，是麵條、青豆、牛肉片和雞蛋。不但溫暖身心，而且以愛心來餵飽你的飢餓。



她娓娓為每一道食物解說，雖然我完全聽不懂，她還是微笑著注視我的臉。她細心殷勤地微笑，並讓我看清她的臉，漸漸令桌子周圍、食物周圍、我周圍，環繞著一份親切感——把我和眼前的這頓飯、這對話、這地方，拴在一起。

她說，你需要的，只是一個愉快的微笑。我的喉間彷彿塞了一塊鉛。

沒有人知道亞里斯多德所謂的『淨化』是甚麼意思，因為《詩學》的下冊已遺失。這個詞彙在《詩學》的最後一章中出現，但他說不會花篇幅討論，因為已在後續篇章為它下定義，可惜後續篇章已找不倒。他說那是宛如聆聽聖樂時的平靜解脫，或從恐懼中被釋放，或以藝術或戲劇來發洩緊張感。那是一個空白，確認了有些人，在有些時候，在不同程度上，當他們在日常生活中密切接觸藝術，或是被甚麼人或物的藝術性所震撼時，會經歷某種情緒轉變，然後在失去了一些甚麼之後，感到如釋重負。

她非常謙虛。她說，也許如果你是一家餐館的廚師，你可以自認你的食物是藝術，不過她覺得風味小食的食物是家庭式和傳統的。她說，在她的文化裡，重要的喜慶節日都以食物來慶祝。吃飯，把我們聯繫起來；是『吃』把我們聯繫起來。

只要有食物，我的確就會變得比較理智。不知道她有沒有注意到我在吃飯時的情緒變化。我告訴她我的感覺。我說，食物非常好吃——食物使我開心，我想寫一篇以她的餐館為背景的愛情故事。

她說，她不覺得風味小食是一個浪漫的用餐之處。這裡的氣氛適合輕鬆地聊天。在馬來西亞，如果你出去約會，你不會把對方帶去風味小食這樣的地方。這裡的裝潢也許在西方人眼中很別出心裁，但其實很普通，適合說說聊聊。她說，她曾在泰噴泉餐館打工。她覺得那才是一個浪漫的地方——她曾在那兒目睹兩三次求婚。

對大人來說，失望遠比憤怒來得糟。希德力在我們一起看舊照片時這麼說道。我努力試圖理解為甚麼朋友們開心玩樂的生活照會引來這句略帶憂鬱的格言。不要有太多期待，做一個投機者，隨興而為——我覺得這是他想告訴我的。

在一本題為《親密關係》，收集了李奧·伯撒尼和亞當·菲力普的對話的書中，建議了一種新的親密關係，叫做『非個人自戀』。這種親密關係建立在被其他人尊重，但不是親自去認識他們的基礎上。我想認識你也許沒那麼有趣刺激，而且也許更加抑制受迫。於是，我們反而進入一個非個人轉變程序——由更寬廣

的世界開始，被對他人潛能的自戀式的愛所點燃——我們通過與世界同步而非反抗，來進化。

她說，她想知道為甚麼你想寫一個以風味小食為背景的愛情故事？

我想彌補些甚麼；我想彌補和這個地方的關係。

她說，華人很少談論愛情，他們覺得害羞。中華文化越來越不浪漫，越來功利主義。我們是一個保守的文化。我們不常表達自己。在華人社區裡，我們的工作時間長得沒有時間談情說愛。她說，她屬於一個強大的家庭系統，強調為孩子的未來教育做財務規劃，以及扶養他們直到他們能獨立。然後孩子在父母年邁時照顧他們，大家都是循環系統的一份子。這是一直以來的傳統。她說，她從小被灌輸傳統家庭價值以及規劃未來的觀念，而非浪漫。

在一篇提到巴斯·簡·阿德爾，但不是以他舉例的文章裡，法蘭西斯·斯達克花時間細心觀察以放棄自己的身份來解決失望的煩惱，以及在覺悟你不能怨別人只能怨自己時發酵的沮喪自我縛束。不過她也發現放棄身份只是忘記過去，或成功地讓自己分心。如果我繼續叩門，我會繼續找到讓自己不去回想過去的，新的分心原因，如此而已。或者，我可以給過去一個標題，把它寫下來，然後將它遺失，留下一個民主空白。

自雇人士。受雇於自己——兒時，我以這個代表了獨立和自足，形容父母職業的詞彙為榮。你可以為自己做事——這是我被他們的職業選擇以及新教徒工作道德標準所啟發的非正式座右銘。

她說，風味小食是她的夢想。她一直夢想在這個地點開一家餐館。在二零零零年，這裡是一家叫瑞記得馬來西亞餐館。她第一次見到那餐館時，就有一個直覺，她會在這裡成功；她會在這裡埋頭苦幹，做出與眾不同的東西。

風味小食是個很有詩意的名字——也是中文固定詞句——因此相當難翻譯成英文。翻譯員所能想到的最佳翻譯是：一種馬來西亞的當地小吃，或是一種小吃的香味。他希望這樣的翻譯能至少捕捉這個名字的精神。

翻譯員和我說飽，也吃飽。我們覺得又撐，又富有哲理。我們完全軟化。對於任何邀請的回答會是為何不？我們以英語和粵語道了很多次謝。

她說，吃飽的感覺，就是幸福。



EWAN MORRISON

Tonight I leave New York, forever. I'm on Christopher street, the half litre of vodka decanted into my old jogging bottle and the plan is this - History day - I am history - I will stand beneath the triumphal arch on which Duchamp, in 1913, declared the Free Republic of Greenwich Village: I'll have a double in the bar on 11<sup>th</sup> where Dylan Thomas had his last. Another double in Café Wa on McDougal where Hendrix played and Ginsberg ranted, then walk reverently past the Stonewall memorial to 6<sup>th</sup> and Bleeker where the Weather Underground blew themselves to bits. Up to the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the Chelsea Hotel and Warhol and the Velvet Underground and Leonard Cohen's love song for Janis Joplin and have another double. On seventh and 32<sup>nd</sup> I'll have a shot in the transvestite bar in homage to Lou Reed then stroll up the banks of the Hudson where Trocchi drifted on his barge high on heroin, then up to 42<sup>nd</sup> and fifth to sit in the New York public library where Trotsky planned the Russian revolution and Henry Miller came to sleep. I'll have a final drink then for all the great lost minds in this city that has become more lonely than I can bear. I will let that last drink walk me to the blank wooden planks of the Chelsea piers and throw myself into open arms of the Hudson.

That was the plan but this is the problem. You have some really powerful idea for an ending and then the world throws something utterly banal at you and you lose the plot. I'm standing in the doorway of Cafe Wa and it's not that there's no trace of Hendrix or even that all I can see is trendy 30-somethings with iMacs. That's not what's making me mad. What is it even called? A whippet? It's blocking the doorway, snarling at me like it knows about the vodka. Like it knows I'm just this washed-up burned-out guy that just got fired and always wanted to be an artist or a rock star or a great poet or a great lover, or anything other than this. This forty year old who had no time for relationships who put off being creative till tomorrow. There is no tomorrow for me and the dog knows it.

So I'm out heading towards the Weather Underground place but c'mon - I try not to notice but the dogs are everywhere. This guy across the street, Nautilus pecs, Californian tan, cut-off denim shorts and a Bull-Mastif. This woman, face - fifty, legs - twenty - a Norwegian Elkhound. I know they say dogs look like their owners, and it's true everywhere I've been apart from here. Here people are mongrels and they aspire to being as pure as their thoroughbreds.

Up 10<sup>th</sup> just to get away. Trying to get back to the point, but then there's a guy with dreadlocks and a matted looking Bohemian Shepherd. And how do people working nine till nine in apartment blocks manage to keep dogs? Do they have carers? Yes, I've seen little Mexican men on fifth walking

eight different breeds at a time to make a buck. Schnauzers - Pugs - Arctic Huskys. I have to get off the street. I have to get drunk enough to see this through. Fuck the dogs. Skip the Duchamp and the beats, get to the Chelsea Hotel, soak up all that pain, all those drugs, do my dance to Sid and Nancy.

But it's blocks to go and all I see are Chow Chows and Dalmatians and Bernese Mountain dogs jogging beside their owners, and I'm becoming this theorist of dog signification. Each dog seems to know every other and they greet with explicit displays of physical intimacy, while their humans fumble with iPods, consider their appearance and calculate how much energy it would cost to communicate to the other human at the end of the leash. I'm staggering away from dogs and joggers and this drunken vision comes to me as I gaze up at the heights of midtown. It's a bit like The Matrix. The visible world is a lie, and the real world is too terrifying to face. At three in the morning in Times Square the thoroughbreds meet to discuss their covert plans for global domination. A right wing totalitarian hierarchy, based on breeding, secretly running the greatest economy on Earth. Alpha Males. Bitches. Kappa Beta Kappas. Oh and I have proof. Didn't I once witness a Weimaraner sticking its head out of a window, the sole passenger of a taxi heading uptown along Madison, smiling as its ears flapped in the wind?

The vodka is done and the light is failing and the joggers are thinning out and I'm all my plans are shot and I'm staggering towards my chosen pier. It is quiet there. No-one around. A mess of rubble. The hole in the fence where the junkies climb through. Focusing on my feet to get there. No doubts, no fear now. Two more blocks, five minutes and it will be done. A sound ahead. I look up.

The six long legs, the curves of the muscular thighs, balanced precariously on tiny, delicate feet. She walks as if barefoot, he walks as if in stilettos. Both look ahead, strong, directed, not distracted by sights or passing people, their noses lifted, perfectly poised as if focused on the same invisible point in the future. She is a model, six foot tall, size zero - he is a Great Dane.

Drunk or dreaming I don't know. I'm staring. Fifty yards away and they stop, just by my hole in the fence. He looks up at her as if asking and she nods. He lowers his gaze and squats. She does not look away, embarrassed, neither does she try to encourage him to quickly finish the humiliating task. It is me that feels the fool, hiding in the doorway of a warehouse, snatching glimpses.

His face as he squats. It is not the usual pain of passage, no, it is that of knowing that no matter how strong their love, what he must do now is the mark of what he really is. And her face, as she goes to her wrist-strap and pulls out the poo-bag from the cleverly designed bracelet, her face of infinite understanding and compassion as the colossal shit descends, and hits the sidewalk, as he raises up and lifts his eyes to her heavens as if to ask for forgiveness; it is her smile then as she inserts her hand into the bag and reaches

down for that hot, wet, brown mass, the delicate graceful smile she gives him as lingering as a kiss, as her fingers tighten round his mess and she lifts, deftly withdrawing her hand and feeling that good, warm, proud weight, and ties the bag. The look she gives, as they go on their way, her carrying his still-hot shit in her hand. That look that holds me transfixed. And I have never seen a dog so noble or a man as noble as that dog, or a woman more loving of weakness. They pass me and I am drunk, I know, staggering I know, following them. For three blocks I watch their hips swaying in perfect unison as they lead me away from the piers.

## *The stranger*

SARAH LOWNDES

The scene: It is almost seven o'clock on a Friday evening in London in mid-October. Dozens of people are still spilling out of the white tent of the art fair into the darkening cool of Regent's Park. Most are fashionable, some are rich: all are hungry, and somewhat fatigued from a day spent in the brightly lit and slightly unreal atmosphere of the fair. Across the road, a courtesy coach laid on for VIP guests is parked. The driver is waiting for the officious blonde intern with the clipboard to instruct him to drive off across town, to the opening of a Wallace Berman retrospective at the Camden Arts Centre. As the last passengers board, a man sitting behind me is making a phone call to what sounds like a male colleague, or possibly his gallerist.

'I was just in the Yoko Ono talk –'

[inaudible query, something along the lines of – 'Did you ask her something in the Q & A?']

'Yeah, I did actually and she gave me a nice answer.'

[Inaudible response, possibly a comment to the effect that it would be good to get hold of a recording of it]

'Yeah, I think it was recorded and it's going to be out on Resonance FM, so it should be easy to...'

[inaudible reply, perhaps checking that everything is in hand for that evening, and that he knows how to get to the place where he will be staying that night]

'I'm going up to Camden now on this bus. Yeah - I'll go by the overland to Dalston later.'

While the man has been on the phone, a woman with a heavy accent, either French or Spanish, has boarded the bus and now asks if the seat next to him is free. Silently he indicates that it is, but with a feeling of slight surprise – given the number of empty seats on the bus. The man concludes his phone conversation in a more self-conscious manner. Feeling that it might be bad manners to pass the journey in silence, he now turns to the woman and begins making polite conversation.

'Are you enjoying the fair so far?'

'Yes', she says with a girlish laugh.

'And you're here as an artist, or a curator or...?'

The woman gives him a slightly too lengthy rundown of her various art-related activities.

'So you run a space, a magazine and you're an artist, you must be very busy.'

Again the woman replies with a simpering 'Yes.'

'What kind of work do you make?'

'Photography'.

‘Photography, right’. There is a slight pause in which the artist tries and fails to think of anything to say about photography – it is clear that the medium is not his ‘bag’.

Moving on in search of something to talk about with this complete stranger that might interest him slightly more he asks, ‘And what is the journal?’

‘The journal does not exist any more, I am just looking after the archive now, and running the space –’

‘And is the space...?’

‘Yes, it is new. We are having exhibition programme and events.’

‘What kind of events?’ he asks, perking up, but adopting a slightly proprietorial tone – it is clear that live art is more up his street than photography.

‘Well, all kinds’, says the woman, somewhat bemused. ‘Is boring to just have exhibitions so we have talks, tea parties – *events!*’ she finishes emphatically as if exhausted by what strikes her as an unnecessary explanation.

‘Okay, I wasn’t sure what you meant by ‘events’ – it’s become a term that is used a lot in the art world and I wanted to qualify what you mean’, the artist replies in a reasonable tone.

His phone rings again.

‘Hi’ (it is obvious that it’s someone he is very intimate with, either his long-term girlfriend or wife).

[inaudible question]

‘Yeah, I’m just on the bus going up to Camden’.

[inaudible question: likely to be ‘who are you with?’]

The man replies with some hesitancy, as if wary of arousing suspicion, jealousy or irritation in his partner. ‘I’m with –’, he pauses, ‘a stranger, actually.’ He lets out a small, nervous laugh. ‘She just came and sat down next to me.’ (This last said as if to admonish himself from any wrongdoing).

[inaudible question, likely to be: ‘What is her name?’]

‘I don’t know actually – what is your name?’ he asks the woman.

‘Arelia.’

‘Arelia?’ he pronounces the strange name uncertainly.

‘I’m Bob’ he says, and then, something about the strangeness of the situation causes him to perceive the shortened version of his own name as being potentially misunderstood, being a verb as well as a proper noun. An image of apples bobbing in a bucket of water for Hallowe’en floats into his mind. ‘Bob as in Robert’, he adds, laughing again uncertainly at the oddness of introducing himself to this woman while on the phone to his partner. Returning to the conversation with his partner, he responds to a comment she has made concerning the mess he has left in their home (in a Northern city some three hours train ride away) in his haste to depart for London and the fair.

‘Yeah, I’m sorry I left in a bit of a panic and just left a big pile of clothes on the floor...’

[inaudible question, likely to be ‘what are you wearing?’]

‘I just put on my leather jacket.’

[inaudible question, probably concerning his plans for the evening.]

‘Yeah, I’m going up there later. I’m getting a bit nervous actually, it’s going to be packed.’

[Inaudible statement, likely to be ‘I love you’]

He replies, ‘Yeah, me too’ – the classic response when unwilling to say aloud in a public place ‘I love you’.

[inaudible statement – probably ‘I miss you’]

Having only left home a few hours earlier, he replies with a trace of irritation, at having this rare free time interrupted, ‘I miss you too’.

[the imagined reply, perhaps slightly frosty in tone: ‘I can tell you’re busy, give me a ring later *if you have time.*’]

He says (with some relief), ‘Okay, yeah, I’ll phone you later.’

Turning once more to his companion, he says, by way of explanation, ‘As you’ve probably gathered, that was my partner, we’ve got a young son and she was just putting him to bed (a slight pang enters his heart at the thought of his son in his pyjamas, fresh from the bath with his hair tousled and his face rosy, clutching his favourite story book, *How do dinosaurs go to bed?* But a second later, his thoughts turn back to the evening ahead in London, and he says brightly to the woman, ‘I’ve got a couple of nights off!’ Then, unable to resist a small boast, he says, ‘I’m going up to Dalston later to do a performance at this Fluxus film event.’

‘Oh’ says the woman, clearly about as interested in performance as the man is in photography.

Changing tack, the man says, ‘I went to the talk about [inaudible]. It made it all seem really important – sometimes I don’t know how important art is – so it’s good to feel that it is.’

‘The woman, who clearly suffers from no such misgivings about the importance of art, offers nothing in reply. Gallantly, the man asks, ‘What is your work about?’

‘Mostly I am taking photographs of funerals around the world, as an expression of individual and community.’ This is said in a slightly prim and self-important way, with the subtext ‘my work is far more worthy than your silly performances’.

The man is left gobsmacked by this response – thinking silently, her work sounds awful – and really out of date.

A silence descends for a few moments in which the artist thinks, God, I am so tired. His son had woken him up at 6am that morning, and his partner, extracting the last bit of co-parenting available before he fled to London, had

said, 'Can you get up with him please?' and then turned over in a way that suggested she was not asking, but telling. The man cannot draw up the strength to discuss the woman's terrible photographs of funerals – and thinks, a bit petulantly, I didn't ask her to come and sit next to me. He wishes he could be alone to mull over the events of the day and to think ahead to his performance that evening – to enjoy the strange tinselly feeling of nervous excitement that being in London at night brings. The coach has now stopped at some traffic lights in a leafy street in St. John's Wood.

'It's so dark', the woman says.

He, mistaking her comment for self-congratulation relating to the profundity of her own practice assents blandly, 'Yes, it must be.'

'No, I meant –', she gestures towards the night outside. 'It is quite scary, especially if you are a *stranger*', placing emphasis on the final word as if piqued at being described in this way to his partner.

'I'm sorry about that', he says, 'I didn't know how to describe you as you'd only just sat down beside me.'

'Ah –', says the woman, and then muses, 'What is the difference between foreign and stranger?'

'Well –', the artist says, with a spark of sudden interest, being a man who likes to pin down the specifics in life. 'They are similar words, but you use them in different contexts – you would talk about a foreign language for instance, but not a strange one.' He is conscious suddenly of the race issue, and how describing the woman as 'foreign' might even be worse than describing her as a stranger. Suddenly, and with blessed relief, he thinks of Albert Camus and offers, as if he had been complimenting the woman all along, 'Stranger sounds better in French...'

'Yes' the woman agrees, giggling again girlishly. Silence descends once more, broken by the arrival of the coach at the gallery. The man and woman disembark, the woman immediately encountering some friends approaching the gallery on foot. She embraces them warmly and begins talking to them in fast and excited French. The artist, who has been forgotten, walks towards the bright lights of the gallery and the slender flutes of champagne sitting fizzing on the counter inside, just waiting to be drunk.

## Nobody, at any time, should allow themselves to be lifted off their feet

KATHRINE SOWERBY

Felix opened one eye. The sun had moved round the tower block and the small red bedroom was drenched in light. He focussed on the objects scattered on the bedside table: a torch, cigarettes, an empty cup, and a broken telephone. The telephone belonged to his Dad, but his idea of mending something was to hit it as hard as he could. It had been early enough, when he came back from his job at the market, to climb back between the sheets. He'd dreamt his hat was on fire.

Flipping onto his back, Felix pushed the black curls out of his eyes and reached for his cigarettes. He leant over the edge of the bed feeling for his jeans and tried each pocket until he found a lighter. One hand behind his head, he smoked and tried to work backwards from the burning hat. It was something about blackbirds walking up the street. There were children slapping dogs and a girl on a ladder looking through a window. It was her. She'd dropped a box of matches and his hat had caught light. The curtain billowed like a sail in front of the open window. Outside an engine shut down and, next to him, the broken phone started ringing.

'Luc, is that you? I'll be right down.'

Felix splashed water on his face and pulled a clean white T-shirt from the drawer. In the kitchen he wrapped a parcel of fish cakes, a jar of honey and some biscuits. He checked his tangled reflection, patted his back pocket for his wallet, and ran down the five flights of stairs, baseball boots clicking on buckled metal with each step.

'You're a vision, Luc.'

He meant it. Luc wore faded black denim and his blonde hair was thick with dust. He leaned against a black car. At his feet, a flattened frog baked in the sun. They hugged.

'Where d'you get this?' Felix patted the dented bonnet. Flakes of dry mud fell to the ground exposing a patch of rust. Luc laughed and threw a crumpled bag of sugary crumbs into the road.

'Let's get out of here, Fee.'

Luc drove them out of town on a single-track road bumping in and out of potholes. They rolled their windows down and the wind buffeted through the car making conversation impossible. When the road widened a lorry overtook them. On its back planks of wood bounced and rattled, threatening to escape their fastenings. Their random clatterings made Felix and Luc laugh and kept them laughing until, seeing the long queue ahead, Luc pulled over.

'You sure it's okay to leave the car here?'

'Fee, my uncle wouldn't notice if we brought it back or not. Let's go.'



They jogged a little to join the line of people. In front of them was a girl their age in a patchwork, wraparound skirt combing her long hair while her friend read from a book of poetry:

*'butterflies flooded  
into the car  
their wings too soft  
to bruise.'*

A sign pinned to the fence read, 'NOBODY AT ANY TIME SHOULD ALLOW THEMSELVES TO BE LIFTED OFF THEIR FEET.' Felix turned to Luc and shrugged.

'I've no idea, Fee. Look, we're moving.' A gate had been opened and everyone jostled through. Luc and Felix held hands as if they were small boys again, and ran.

It was beginning to get dark when they reached the trees at the top of the hill. They leaned against a rock watching the crowd swell below them. Every few minutes they heard a voice through a loud speaker. They caught odd words that swung round telephone and power lines, scooping and snatching combinations, carried uphill on the breeze. Felix unwrapped his parcel of food.

'We need something to wash this down. D'you see any stalls down there?'

'Nothing. Just people. And fires.' Stars studded the darkening sky. They dipped the biscuits into the jar of honey. Luc pointed up, making a sweeping figure of eight with his finger.

'What noise d'you think stars make?'

'A kind of fizzing, I reckon, maybe a pop,' said Felix, mouth full. Luc jumped up and dusted down his hands on the back of his jeans. He turned and pulled Felix up.

'Come on, we might miss something.'

They walked down through a patch of forest. A quilt of fallen needles softened the ground underfoot. The trees were purple on the windward side, their trunks sloping downhill. Felix rubbed the soft down on a leaf as he brushed past then sniffed his hand. Nothing.

Coloured lights lit the way to rows of upturned crates. An envelope lay on the seat they chose. Felix picked it up and read, 'a gift of air'. The lights dimmed and, as their eyes adjusted to the darkness, they made out angles of scaffolding. There was a loud click. A crisp circle of light fell on the centre of the makeshift stage and, from behind a curtain, more than twenty but less than thirty people walked slowly into the spotlight. They formed a circle, held hands and, with a nod, they raised their arms. Pressing their palms against the palms of their neighbours, they widened the circle then, without making a sound, leaned forward slightly, bent their knees and pushed away from the ground. And just for a moment, there they were, suspended. Luc stood to clap. He wolf whistled. Felix held the envelope and looked around at the empty seats.

## Writers' biographies:

### SARAH LOWNDES

Sarah Lowndes is a lecturer, curator and writer based in Glasgow. Her book *Social Sculpture* (2004) documented the Glasgow art and music scene since the 70s, while her PhD analysed 1960s and 70s concrete performance in Southern California. Since 2002 Lowndes has been a lecturer in the Historical and Critical Studies Department at Glasgow School of Art. A regular contributor to art journals such as *Frieze*, the *Frieze Yearbook*, *Artforum*, *Art on Paper*, *Circa*, *MAP*, *Spike Art Quarterly* and *Untitled* and to catalogues for international institutions, she also curated the acoustic music project *Three Blows* (2008) and the forthcoming CCA group exhibition *Votive* (2009).

### EWAN MORRISON

Ewan Morrison is the author of three novels *Menage*, *Swung* and *Distance* (Jonathan Cape) and the collection of shorts stories *The Last Book You Read*. He is currently working on a new collection of stories entitled *Tales from the Mall*. He was the recipient of a Scottish Arts Council Writers Award in 2005 and was awarded Cove Park's six week literature residency in summer 2009.

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### KATHRINE SOWERBY

Kathrine Sowerby completed her MFA at the Glasgow School of Art in 2000 and is currently studying for an MLitt in Creative Writing at Glasgow University. She has exhibited her written work and been published in journals and anthologies. Kathrine lives in Glasgow with her partner and three children.

### SARAH TRIPP

Sarah Tripp was awarded the Scottish Arts Council's Visual Arts Residency at Cove Park in 2009. Other works by her include: *Why I disappeared* (Cove Park), *Let me show you some things* (CCA) *The labour you love* (Notre Dame Centre), *The Best Mistake* (Generator Projects), *The inside of an ambulance* (Fruitmarket Gallery), *Why work?* (Camden Arts Centre), *Testatika* (Cornerhouse), *Anti-prophet* (CCA) and *Education in Reverse*.

# Colophon

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