

So I Went

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START ©

A while ago I sent a survey asking for stories of things that had happened to people in Hong Kong.

Some wrote back asking if I was looking for a particular theme, and I said, no; anything goes. Just tell me exactly where it happened because I want to go.

And so I went. I went and then took all their stories and put them into piles, tried to organise them in an order that made sense. Because you see, I had this idea that I would take all these stories that a lot of people wanted to share, and then somehow that I can't quite explain, there will be a thread, or something that they have in common...and then I could work with that.

I ended up standing in front of my table, surrounded by boxes, folders and piles of paper, and not really... *knowing* how to deal with them.

It was late in the afternoon, beginning of the summer. It had been a really hot day, so I had the air-con on. I was starting to get cold though. You know the thing is, we really do need air-con, because it can get *real* hot...yet I struggle to understand why some people love the feeling of walking into a shop or a mall and getting that wave of artificial cold air that... freezes you to the bone. It's just not like real air. Which is why, I like fans better. Fans are more realistic. Like this one here: it stands still, and then, if I turn it on, suddenly there's wind blowing all over the place. Let's just leave it off for a while, I can't keep these [the papers] together...The only difference of course is that fans, you can stop them whenever you want. Whereas Hong Kong's wind...

It's, it's like the Chinese say "shuo xia yu jiu xia yu". Which literally means, "you say it rains down and so it rains down". They use the phrase to show unpredictability of the weather. But the actual sentence structure can also be used in other contexts. For example, you can say "say forget, then forget." And it means you forget all of a sudden. It's interesting because of the *power* they give to the word say, as if words had some kind of supernatural strength that could summon rain.

I'm gonna tell you how it happened. I'm gonna tell you the story of what happened to their stories after they wrote them.

I was sitting down with the piles and piles of paper I had around me and it was like:

- 20%-25% their stories and city leftovers
- Some superficial gossip I couldn't help overhearing
- 10%-7% my past (because you can't avoid that when you're writing)
- Some stolen art and late night fear
- And... the rest just some empty space who's owner has no name.

I started by looking at them from different angles, like actual *physical* angles. I would stand up, just like this, looking for patterns... I then tried shuffling them, really quickly, without thinking, even with my eyes closed, hoping that somehow I would say: "make sense" and then, just like with rain, then they would make sense. But not even the Chinese spell was working... There must've been something wrong with my fengshui... So I did some research: there's this technique called "cut-ups" (creative right?)...I think Dadaist artists came up with it, and then William Burroughs used it for writing, and then David Bowie...you know he would cut out tiny pieces of paper and then pick one out at random from a bowl to write a song...and I told you this show was part stolen art so... what happens if I cut them If I mix them up, slide them next to each other and then...I could ask other people to read them... but...

How can I tear the stories apart like, like, noodles until they are so thin, so thin that you can tangle them together and they taste good? How far can I go until they start to lose all meaning? I mean, Burroughs did say that writing was the art of mixing words "heard, read, (and) overheard"...

Then I had an idea: I could make a list. I could make a list of all your stories... I'll put them over here, you gotta remember because they all look very similar, so you've got to remember those are *your* stories.

And then, and then all my stories, well, my stories go over here... and then... a third list of our stories together...and then it would get so confusing because how do you know which one's which and... so let's try something different. Oh... this might even be worse actually: a list of all the stories that have ever happened, and then all the stories that have never

happened but could have happened...and then all the stories that could've never happened but we wish they did... and then we would run out of paper. And it would be so overwhelming because, because when does something that is happening right now become a story...and it's an ever growing pile so what about the trees and the environment and ...

But... we've got some time, so at least we could try the listing... We could start a list with one, one, one old lady feeding pigeons... Or 1. Temple street is a fake road. No. That sounds like the title of one of those avant Gard over-the-top art pieces that no one really understands, but we all fake we do. ermm... this one!

1. They only broadcast news from another part of the world. Too factual...ermmm...I know!
2. A group of 7 graders crashing a shopping cart into McDonald's while shouting. That's better. More exciting at least.
3. A man who secretly loves found T-shirts with Mr. Happy prints. I was genuinely amused by this one. Is he Mr Happy exclusive? Or does he also like Mr Sad or Mr Angry prints? Or Mr this-is-just-my-resting-face prints? It's a good question. This was anonymous though, so I'll never ask him and we'll never know.
4. Shops that sell everything but what you need.
5. Empty chairs at the bus stop on the road. Have you seen them? It's the kinda thing that I've only ever seen in this city. I mean, nowhere else do people have so many extra chairs. Do people secretly bring them out during the night? or is there like a, like a special HK chair association and they have monthly surveys to identify bus stops in need of new chair donations? Just wondering..
6. A city that's full of beehives; buildings as high as needles shinning in the night and they make it harder and harder to breathe. -That's good. It sounds a bit more...like a motif. We can work with that. Keep your eyes open for that one.

You have to go far though. You have to go far to see them fully... sometimes you get there and all you can hear is the buzz of the city... it's almost like at a café were people are talking and in the back there's some sort of music, but you can't really tell what it is because it blends in with the gossip... the things they see or... hear. But never fully. Never fully.

These are just fragments... it shouldn't make any difference if I tear them, right? I mean, you could say

"they would lose order, their original structure"... but what good is order when you can't *make* something out of it? We better tear them apart, re-arrange them; these thin-strips of life ripped from other people... There I go again with disturbing imagery, but what else could be said? I don't like hedging my words. And...

We're getting to the part where... I honestly began to lose it.

I'm trying to talk to you but...

Words crumble in my mouth, they refuse to come out, they're stranded, lost between what I thought was important and what I can't forget. Between what they've written and what I need to say. They're, they're lost in the space between me and you (what 3, 4 metres?). I would throw them to you, my thoughts, if I could, like a, like a thought projectile. Maybe they would pierce you... But thought projectiles are still in the pipeline of things-to-be-invented so I've got no option. I've got to take these thoughts and soak them in mouldy language. A language that, that warps around them and that can turn truth into lies, lies into truth; spinning things around like a giant, invisible whirlwind..

So let's not. Let's not make a list.

Instead I'm just gonna say it. I'm gonna stand right here and tell you that all I've been trying to do is find a way to stay true to *their* stories, to this city, to *her* bloodshot eyes. I, I just want to find a way to tell you that... and I just can't find it.

So I might as well pour water over myself so that at least that feels a little bit more... unexpected. Like waking up from a nightmare, or being caught in the rain by surprise and for a split second everything else you were thinking about is washed away. And what's left is a...a... slice of undeniable truth because we *cannot* ignore the fact that a I am dripping wet.

So don't just sit there and stare at me like I'm crazy. c'mon. It's rude to stare.

Watch the ink [of the papers]. It's spreading. Soon I won't be able to read it. Or I will, but not completely. The ink keeps fading, bleeding unto my fingers and all that is left are ghosts of the liquid words.

At this point I changed tactics because clearly listing, reorganising piles and pouring water over myself was not working. So I tried making something. Something that could help me see the places after I had gone and visited them.

It's insane what you can do with bamboo. Have you not seen? The way they stagger them overnight and all of a sudden the whole building is hiding behind mesh and you can no longer see it.

Now, let's find a way to start. Ermmm. "The other day", "Once I was in", "Have I told you?" I like that start. It sounds like gossip. Not annoying gossip. No. More like late-at-night gossip. You know, the kind where you loose all filters and words just spill out like... black rain, rushing down those old buildings.

Have I told you about them? You know the ones with lines and lines of hanging clothes? You can actually see who's tiny apartment owns what line. Have you seen that? And then if you keep walking the old buildings are replaced by modern ones. On the same road it goes back and forth: new, old, new, old. They wrote about that too. You know, the one about the old house in Central. I haven't told you about that one. It's a good one to start with:

...Where is that tape?

(voicenote about abandoned house plays)

So I went. I went and walked all through Central, up the mid-levels escalator, turned right on Conduit Road, and when I got to #1 there was just a normal looking old building. No magnificent gardens or marble halls. No mud, no destruction, no ghosts, no stories. Just a parking lot and a house that had very little to say about Hong Kong's past.

I took a few pictures for reference and turned around. A few blocks down I came across a different building, this time empty, dark, and completely covered in weeds and flowers. I walked into the parking lot, then through the main door and up the stairs. I kept going up until I got to the roof, completely blinded by the fascination of intruding an abandoned place.

Then came the whistles. From one roof to the other two men had unleashed their secret code for intruders. I

ran as fast as I could, past the lady in the kitchen, through the door, past the vegetable stand on my right. I turned around for a split second, and closely behind there were three men chasing me with butcher knives. I finally got out of the market and into the first mall I could find... and

No, no no. Let me start again. Let me remember...

So I went. I went and walked all through Central, up the mid-levels escalator, turned right on Conduit Road, and when I got to #1 there was just a normal looking old building. An old building with nothing inside but the remaining of a landslide and to the left, a cow. A mammal taking a day trip to the city or something.

Stop. That's not it either. I'm mixing stories now. It was not a cow. It was just a pile of trash and a door. So I went in. Graffiti on the floor, a strange humid smell. The walls so thin it felt as if I could grab them like paper and they would just crumble.

To the left I could see the entrance to the basement and to my right a wider room. I went in and in the centre there was a basket covered in spotless fuchsia satin. Someone *must* live here, I thought. it looked too new, too well placed, too... I don't know. It just didn't fit.

I then heard the scream. It came from the basement. I had no time to think. My already knew where they were going. I stepped over a bunch of dead leaves...Or moths?... whatever. I can't say that all that is true.

Maybe I had tried too hard to highlight what I thought was important?, to separate truth from the lies... but then... but then the whole story turned neon! And it was harder to remember the place, the time...

It's always hard to tell the time in this city after dark. And there's no stars. I used to imagine they were stolen and turned into street signs, you know, wrapped in their neon lights...

I wish it was true. All of it. I mean, I wish something like that had happened. Something unexpected. Something where life is at stake. Where things are broken. Where the stories have been ripped apart and only what's important is left.

Maybe it *is* what happened. Not to me, but to someone else. Maybe you are sitting there, thinking, whoah,

that was me. And it could, it could be if I kept changing it. It could at some point be part of your memory. Your mind playing tricks on you, blurring the ink of the past. Making sure nothing but your body stays the same... and not even that. Forcing you to look for, to find, to go back...

Somewhere. In this city
somewhere. Sometime. In this City
Sometime In this. City
Find. Go on. Find
Find
Go on
Find
A man with the wrong shoes (reading of the texts?)
Find. Somewhere. Lost
Shoes with the wrong man
Go on
Should I still call?
Somewhere. Sometime
Do you remember?
Go. Go. Go.
Go. Go. Go. Find!
Something made out of nothing
Find
A story beyond repair
How can you forget?
Go on
Find
A man who loves found t-shirts
Find. Somewhere. Lost
A shirt who loves found men
Go on
Go on find out
Follow the map
Try to remember how it was
How it was how it was

We could go back but... No. Next section. Something less... something different. Something from my pile. I told you, you can't avoid it. So many of their stories but my past is there, its always there. I'm reading their stories and then in my head they connect to my stories You see how it's so complicated?

It's different from... no, its the same as with their stories, I mean the imagination ends up filling the blanks when you remember, its just that you've got more information of different types -not just text- so it's more convincing. Right? Ermmm... I don't know... I don't know if this one will sound more accurate just because I am saying that it is my memory or on the contrary

it'll be harder to reconstruct for the same reason... I don't know... Just watch it, ok?

I'll tell you how it was. It's getting late, I'm losing filter. I'll tell you exactly how it was.

We kissed real slow, slower than ripples. And I felt like I... was touching the stars. Except there's none in Hong Kong, we've established that. You know what I mean.

Wait, how would you like the memory? Your mind will recreate it one way or another, so why don't we pre-design it, huh? Let's make it so that everyone thinks (scratch that), so that I think what I did meant more, was more, felt like more.

What filter do you like more? Clarendon? Slumber? Or Nashville? Nashville's good, cheesy, but... Wait. Too much light, lets dim it a bit? Right. Ermmm... How about black/white? Never-mind. Too artsy. Better Nashville. Isn't that the name of a city? Do we need higher exposure? Aghh! I'll post it later.

This reminds me of the night when she told me all kept spinning and spinning. She also told me you miss me. Do you really? Remember when we got lost in the city? Or when we would hide on your roof and everything would look lighter, like layers and layers of light dots...

Remember the rain and the puddles, the cars? Remember the wind on your face, the leaves floating by?... Dammit I can't capture that! Or, or, the day that we made out against a parking lot wall and afterward my butt had two perfectly symmetrical black circles?

Would you say I loved you? Would it be a lie? How to remember that...

Don't tell me.

Don't tell me how to remember that night? How to remember the light, the rain, your eyes? And when your mind became blurry and you couldn't tell why, when you couldn't stay still and you escaped from the past?

How the hell do you capture that? It's no use... Conclusion? It's the same. My stories, their stories, your stories. Same problem.

I'm running out of time huh?...It's like a mix between having to tell you and not wanting to... aghhh!

TYPING

"When the lights are about to" [delete]

"There's dark" [delete]

Wait. We gotta go back. We gotta go back to the start because I can't tell you here. Forget everything, ok? Go back to me and some stacked up papers. Got it? Now. I was reading. Yes. I was looking through these and we were making a list. Right? Go back.

Go back...

This part has no jokes or unexpected occurrences.

I had read past the guy with only half his suit on while walking in Pacific place... a baby eating Doritos... a cow hysterically running around in circles with stolen underwear between its big cow teeth... I read past all of that and I couldn't stop staring at the word RAPE.

It was so distant. A single sentence in a survey written by a person I don't know. A person you don't know. But how can I ignore it.

There's a difference between what you want to hear and what needs to be said.

"I've moved past that", she says... "I've moved past that"

I imagine how she fights it, how she fights and tries to drive the memory away... but it bites deeper, no words, just ink spilling like blood over everything and everyone around her. Memories creeping like ghosts staining her mind, flooding the city with darkness and thunder so loud, so loud she can't even type it.

It's too much. She can no longer swallow it.

She thought she could hide it. But she forgot the fake lights. The ones in the heart of the city. The buzzing ones. The ones that flicker and hurt your eyes if you stare at them. She forgot you can't hide in this city. Not tonight. Not

TYPING

"When the lights are about to... hurt

She remembers the first time she realised

There's

Dark minds

*They
Hunt people
until all she can see is their shadows."*

So she let's go...

And then the the place where it happened, his face on her face, his power (imagine the power) fades into the noise of that city.

She then freezes her memory, right before the ultimate mistake, and imagines standing up for herself, saying to him – not today.

She didn't say all of that. Maybe she did. These are just my scribbles, just zeros and ones... but... I think truth is not stable, truth is like rain: it changes when we remember, it washes away.

And

I don't know who you are, where you are... you could be sitting out there, sinking into your seat, unsure about what you feel...I mean I know some of you... but... It must've taken courage to write it. Even if it was just one line. It must've been hard.

And she knew, she knew I was probably going to share it: I said so, in bold. So... is it truth that we're scared of? Or truth on the run? Truth in the mouth of others, *gossip* like poison...

I could've left her story in the back of my mind, focus on the anecdotes, the laughs, the cows. But... What am I playing at? A game of words that I've "heard, read, overheard" and... the right ones... those are hard to come by... they slip away like... rain, and I don't want to get soaked again!

So I've taken her story, filled in the blanks, tried to map it out so that at least we can't elude it. Her story is now part of the film rolling in your mind. At some point you'll start to remember it and so a new story will begin to breathe.

It's all down to your memory now: how light, how dark... I leave it up to you.

Remember I talked about the rain washing down thoughts and all that? That's exactly what happened next. That city, that sky, that person –they began to blend; and

their stories... they became *untangled* tales, mesh pulled down... pieces of truth on the ground.

Mere words, mere language. Unlit symbols that go back to the beginning of time and that without you and I to witness them mean nothing. Only flashes of light that you stared at for too long and when you close your eyes you can still see them. Then it all blurs away.

Well, it doesn't all blur away. I know I just said so, but, now that I think about it, they're not *mere* language or *just* tales. Tales are strong! They don't mean we forget the pain, erase the narrative. You know these things are still true. In real life or in our minds, but they all happened.

It's just we've already lived through them and, and moved onto new ones. New stories that inside hold bits and pieces -fragments- of those other older ones.

So we move on.

The show no more than a scaffold. When it ends you'll start to remember it. And new stories' will begin to breathe.

END

