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Hot Dog, Hong Kong

by Adrian Wong

I happened upon a hotdog on the evening of February 28th, while walking through Tai Hang with a friend¹. It laid on the sidewalk, flattened but otherwise unaffected –as if some cartoon penguin had, moments before, rolled over it with her Zamboni on its maiden voyage. We knelt near it to get a better look, and moved on after mutually acknowledging that it was in fact a hotdog. We'd only taken a few steps when a car peeled out from an adjacent alleyway and came screeching to a halt. The driver emerged from the nondescript vehicle (an olive-toned Honda Accord, possibly a Toyota Corolla); lifted the hotdog gingerly from its resting place, using only his thumb and index finger; and proceeded to place it into the trunk of his car. He subsequently drove away, and left us dumbstruck, puzzling over what we had just witnessed.

Having lived and worked in Hong Kong for the bulk of the last half-decade, I have been consistently inspired by the fragmentary narratives that abound in this city. My interests have run the gamut from secret cabals of revolutionaries in Kowloon at the turn of the century, to the invocation of ghosts from beyond the gates of hell and their banishment via exorcism by Taoist holymen, to the collection of historically inaccurate recollections (i.e. verified falsehoods) by the residents of neighborhoods slated for redevelopment –which returns us to the mystery of the hotdog collector, whom I have affectionately dubbed *Frank*, who strikes at the heart of the present investigation.

Trapped in an infinite loop the bifurcated narratives leading up to Frank's actions on that fateful evening multiply and bloom ad infinitum each more complex and implausible than (yet as possible as) the last:

Scenario 1. Frank, while rushing to a meeting, loses his grip on his hotdog and fails to dispose of it properly. Later that day, he recalls the event and is wracked with guilt. He returns to the scene and discovers it right where he left it. (*But why remove the hotdog from the scene?*)

Scenario 2. Frank and his girlfriend, Francine, in a moment of emotional frisson are unable to control their mutual disdain. She slaps the smirk off of his face. He slaps the hotdog from her hand –and stomps on it with his size 47 Sperry Top-Sider (*known for its untextured sole*). Frank pauses on his way home to retrieve the lifeless carcass of his relationship. (*But why was the hotdog so well preserved?*)

Scenario 3. A hotdog pressed between two dictionaries, on a 13th floor balcony, heats in the afternoon sun. Oils released from the warming meat permeates, via osmosis, its intestinal casing, the surrounding bread, and the bindings of the books that sandwich it. Dislodged from its position, the flattened sheet of meat and bread falls to the ground below and catches the eye of a passerby (*our friend, Frank*), headed to his car. The impression of that image builds and by the time he reaches his car, he's convinced that it's a sign from above. The hotdog is quickly retained for future contemplation.

Ultimately, we may never know Frank's true intentions. We may never know how that hot dog came to be flattened just so. But through that not knowing, Frank and the frank both are disentangled from the constraints of static truth. Frank can simultaneously be a clumsy moralist, a spurned lover, an aesthete... In a city renewed, reclaimed, redeveloped, and rebuilt almost beyond recognition, History is untethered from empirical facts. Nearly all of Hong Kong's early films have been lost to humidity or water damage; locally produced television programs were almost exclusively shot live and broadcast directly into homes with no recording media in-between; countless numbers of the city's most revered landmarks have been sacrificed in the name of progress; and much of the archive that remains, systematically redacted in the name of saving face. Built upon the shared experience of her residents, Hong Kong's history is a constructed one, guided by her irrepressible spirit. The city's past expands into a rich and palpable phantasy fueled by an infinite regress of Franks and franks, strewn backwards and forwards through our collective consciousness.

¹ filmmaker, Ezra Emerson