

ON THE STREET

two men on mobiles
two yards from each other with backs turned
are they in conversation with each other
or is it a piece of street theatre ?

a bicycle and cart
with two tanks full of goldfish
two bowls of terrapins
food and a net to help you catch the one you want

A piece of contemporary art or a livelihood ?
an excavation with hard labour and spades
a medieval scene
could we make a piece of performance art or public art
this powerful echoing of truth ?

how do I decide what is art and what is real life ?
what part of my brain
filters information to help me understand
the soldiers boxer shorts hanging on a washing line
in the courtyard of the Ministry ?

TRANSLATION

every city has an area
where musical instrumenta are sold
Nanxinhua Jie in Beijing.
Took me a while to find it
Afetr many questions to my hosts
Taxi ride there with Lucy Wang Xiaodi
my translator for the morning.
We find everything I want
Pippa Zheng Erhu Quin
and the all of the gongs and cymbals you could dream of
at a tenth of the UK price NO SURPRISE !
I buy and leave
with a heavy bag.

12 DIARY POEMS WRITTEN IN BEIJING

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ALONE

no-one knows me
alone
could hide forever
in a multi story hotel room
with an easy internet portal
a staff of smiling faces and helpful translators

waiting now ... and wondering
why I am here.
just walked a block past
waiting taxis
constructions site(s) for the WORLD YOUTH GAMES
French patisserie
Korean, Japanese, Italian and Chinese restaurants
in the sun..
German bakery and Teryaki bar
in the sun..
shine.... bright
just walked the block
and then back into my multi story hotel room
and into this book to collect my thoughts

16MM FILM

an enthusiastic taxi ride
mid evening
to the Chaolong Cultural Centre
where new work - not my world of work - is being made.
before that
walking through an old factory district
full of contemporary art
studios
images - many still using the icon of Mao
a man
despite my reading
who is still thought of as a good man.
walking under big pipes that circumnavigate trees
with artists from
Yorkshire
Vienna
Berlin and Amsterdam
and then finally into a tree space lit by floodlights
meeting an improvising electronic musician
Hu Zi
friend to Leon who translates.
after that
the enthusiastic taxi driver
drops me in street darkness
at a corner where hundreds of men crouch
watching a 16 mm movie projected onto a high screen
old movie
intently watched
I didn't understand why it was happening
or
where the women were ?

AURAL TOURISM

growl of traffic
organised shout of children
laughter negotiating tickets and maps
100 no 60
100 no 60
90 no 60
90 no 60
70 no
70 no
60 - OK
2 for a 100 - OK
kites bought ... a bargain ?
as tai chi music glides by
click of feather balls hitting the ground
a reverberating stamp on a marble disc in the middle of the perfect
circle of the Circular Mount Altar
bullroar of a diabolo
whispers round the echo wall
recorded choral music seeping out so quiet from lampost lanterns
choir of elders singing their hearts out
massed group of singers and amplified harmonicas
singing Jingle Bells in Mandarin
finally a forestful of erhu duets from older men and women
remembering songs
like a magical group of chilled out crickets
on their Saturday off work

MENU WITH A DIFFERENCE

after an acrobatic show
that kept
topping
topping
topping
itself
to the LOTUS LEAF
a Buddhist restaurant where the menu read
Hot Tears fill the eyes glaze noodle
Vegetable dumpling
Concerned with benefiting heaven magical stone grass soup
In praise of going in happiness wild cherries yam claypot casserole
Curried forgiveness ball tofu
I shall absorb whatever comes my way
(yes that was a menu item)
Cold clear depths of the Heart brown sauce mountain bitter melon
Full stomach
chilled brain
back to my room and Lemn (in Vancouver)
says hello on email
and a whole load of messages
fly round the world !

LANGUAGE

here to meet people
and today
I met people
specifically Chinese.
the words I have learnt
don't help
conversation and
don't enable me to talk to taxi drivers
but many Chinese I meet
mainly the translators
speak English

CONFERENCE SPEAK

I learnt today that Chinese stories always have a positive ending
tragedy mitigated sometimes by
the good official
the upright official
sometimes by heaven and also by dreams.
I listened today to a man speaking in a soft Irish brogue
he said innovation and tradition (like yin and yan)
can't exist without each other.
I saw today
10,000 cars
36 kung fu dancers
many noodles
and an empty palace

UNDERWATER

in 8 lanes of a 50m pool
I lose the key to my locker
and have to RESWIM a length underwater to find it.
before that an American in the next lane gave me his cap
or the attendant would not have let me stay in.

with the body active I felt alive
now sitting in a chair
having people talk at me
(even with images)
I struggle to stay awake
Innovation and Creativity - the subject
should not be presented by speeches
should be danced, sung, eaten or swum.

trying to find the key to the afternoon
is harder than my lunchtime expedition

UNDERWATER

COMING TOGETHER

700 yuan a week for a Peking Opera performer
7000 yuan a day for a simultaneous translator
200 pounds a day for a UK musician
expenses for a Chinese volunteer
recycling in Morecambe
scavenging in Beijing.
knocking down houses
block by block
the debris
left
for
people to pick over for
wood
wire
concrete
dust everywhere
20 square miles of building site
roads empty because
no-one told
the taxi driver that they were finished - yesterday

arts and politics
the politics of art
what is obvious in one state
is not understood
in the other
what is conceived as important in one state
is not rated in the other.
no judgement
but what would a simultaneous translator
make of a drum beat
or an acrobatic leap
or a gesture

of
friendship.
CARD EXCHANGE

I read about it
I was told how to do it
I watched people make it happen
with two hands
a cardboard gift
that hopes to signify much much more
a hesitant first step

It's also about giving time
and attention
and respect for people and where they come from
travelling here
to Lucky Street
to the Yang Jin Ma Tibetan restaurant
with our British hosts
Celebrating Connections with Cardboard

FLASHBACK

I was here 31 years ago
except it was in Kathmandu
and it was a T shop with cakes, tea and hippies
not a bar with a Mongolian band
close to the drum and bell towers in old Beijing
a bar with beer, melon seeds and young foreigners
who are working here

what is the same ?
an atmosphere of being the few amongst the many
of idealism and passion
of exciting times
change

and adventure