

Ivan Cheng **Renaissance**

Interior. The apartment is filled with street sculpture, hard industrial edges that M had carried up the staircase. An industrial meat slicer weighs on reclaimed countertops. A balcony view to a courtyard fountain filled with coins. The apartment is filled with infrastructural medals M has won to echo the voluptuousness of the city; a measure to alter or lose a sense of privacy.

L babbles like stumbling, as though believing in his speech as a form of subsistence for the apartment, and for M, who watches his mouth. L's body is arranged tentatively, almost daring to compete with its sound. M easily pours a carafe of decanted Dornfelder into tumblers. L's neuroses are intermediary for any transition. M stares as though he can undry liquid paper, a time turning back. Camouflage has a fluid constitution. Wrangling a cigarette from a jacket breast pocket, L lights a heavy zippo. M flips through a book and opens it.

L I love to smoke indoors. In these times, it feels illegal almost every place I go. Smoking is still so exciting in how low key transgressive it is, particularly since it is taxed, and then it's decreed that the boxes are guarded by the bodies of retail workers so it cannot be easily shoplifted. Vapor and ash from burning paper, it is one of the closest things to the money of the cash register; it is infected and sick, just like gum and choco.

M Here is a photo of a building designed for street view - on perspective.

L I know that one. (stressing pronunciation) *Palazzo del Diamanti*. A façade of over 8000 pink and white marble ashlar configured in bossage to appear as diamonds, little pyramids studding the surface and glinting in the sun. While I busked, I was invited to Ferrara and I saw it there, I wasn't playing there, not my territory, but, well, quite strange to be surrounded by something so pristine, to know that you're there for a city itself. The streets are beautified and sanitised to temporarily heave with a schedule of invited street musicians and pedestrians cluster and pause. It was soon after Amy Winehouse died, the city rife with covers, back to black, italian vibrato.

M The buskers festival in Ferrara is another nail in the coffin of unregulated public space. Private sponsors fuel a government endorsed exercise in rephrasing the city as a 'temple of free music'; a temple for busking, operating on axes of thoughtless imitation, genre diffusions, and desperation for perceived authentic originality. Accessibility and visibility for profit.

This fountain burbles wet and shameful from the courtyard, like a kombucha stain, a vessel impregnated with coins; currency as adjacent to wishes. L realises then that M looks down on it, M strolls past regularly.

L Your apartment is filled with street sculpture

M I wouldn't call it sculpture

L I mean - just let me be equal to these other things you've dragged into your room? I won't plead crust punk-ish arguments for my pride in piecemeal, unregulated income. I know I'm an idiot to forget that physical and online space is held by corporations and the banner I wave simply confirms pervasion of approved content. I could change the way I feel about playing music on the street - don't know how yet - my haunting bleating of recognisable hits to win cash and coins in my case.

M Could you forget how to be on the street? An alternative is institutional approval. Bigger chunks of change, radiant sustained visibility. You could try being online more.

L wants to tell M about everything he likes about the space they're in, like a list could make him visible.

L I love everything I can remember about public space. Do you know what I mean when I speak of the broken tether to source material when I play toward crowds that move past? I hold no one, not for long, I work in and out of a meritocracy, I am a conduit for everything I can bear to regurgitate. And the regulars - those in the repeated vicinity as I pump at the same material - they don't choose to be near me. I force myself into 'textuality'. My fandom appears, a hazy abstraction expelled from my body and converted into a currency unit, seems like a fedora worn in a dining room. I am the smut fantasy of fanverse, the distortion. So the internet feels vestigial?

M (chuckles, drags a sip from tumbler)

L steps into M's bedroom, which has long curtains on small windows and is just about the size of the bed. It smells musty, bits of grit in the sheets, dirt and sand. He tugs at the belt loops of M's baby blue jeans, wilfully believing that this rare foray into fucking someone moves him into relatability. M's underwear is stupid blue, the type of teal you'd only buy if you were a mother shopping for a cosmopolitan son.

L mouths and hums on M's soft dick, totally out of practice but feeling intimate, so careless. Hardened eventually, M flips L and tongues at L's asshole for a while with the confidence of an artist working with jesmonite, alabaster crumble and gesso, their semantic differences and pale confidences. L senses this security and wants it. M smells his ass, but L smells focus and self belief. His mouth falls into a continual "O", even though L is barely into rimming, having designated his own ass as a numb site of repression.

M What do you like? What do you want?

L (laughs, long pause, giggle, pause, laughs) I want to look at myself with desire, to be like a stepfather to my own life. Outside but able to prove myself. Given unconditional access with heavy expectation.

M becomes aware that their intercourse might be perceived as more symbolic than he expected. His supple wine nose fades with thought, and suddenly a clamp down. The fragrance of lube wafts like incense. It wracks the biceps in particular, the bit near the armpit, unnerving, shingle burn down neck and torso. M functions. He tangles L in his elbows and spreads L's thighs with a furred knee. What L wants is that M doesn't ignore him, ever again,

L I've thought a lot lately about transitions in performance.

M rubs his chin against L, slipping fingers against and into different holes. He pushes his cock against L's sphincter but it clamps, and L flops over to intently slurp against frenulum of M's cock, pulling back the foreskin and pinching at the tributary veins alongside the stubby girth. L's tongue laps at the pisshole, teasing it open, metallic, and M starts to ejaculate freely in languid ropes. L retains this in his mouth and on his nose, cheeks and brows, smudging it back across M's neck and lips in embittered kisses. Face to face, L jostles and jerks his hand, a bucking vice on M's shaft. A highlighted text can seep through the sloppy lace of white correction fluid. M's gaze drifts towards dozing, but one hand brushes L's nipples and the other roughly clasps to stroke L's elbow and forearm as he twists at his own member.

L Do you ever walk past unlit churches? The church is left unseen in its physical presence. I do not play there at night, I seek light, I walk past, I mean, I said. Religion as its own spectacle, but not for tourists. Or not illuminated for its details to become an architectural landmark. Or - what I see is that the church is an empty building, designed to be vacant and transient like a street, while a graveyard attached fills with bodies. The church like my phone is a morgue of images, messages. Don't you also think the language we speak and write is something we inherited? It's the language of the recent dead? The dead far outnumber the living, but seizing control isn't a passive thing in this time.

M pushes his lips against L's ear and trails a tongue over baby soft clavicle. He mops their mess with his bundled underwear, retrieved from the corner of the bed. L swallows M's ring finger and breathes around it.

L Thank you for tonight.

Renaissance transforms an excerpt from ***Ferrara Deux (faits divers)*** - a collection of performance texts by Ivan Cheng presented as an illustrated murder mystery novel.

Ivan Cheng focuses within his practice on the proposition of a 'bad reading', and has presented text adjacent performances internationally. He also works widely as a performer, musician, and dramaturg, and initiates project space bologna.cc in Amsterdam.