

Apropos

Marie Antoinette was but nine when Rousseau wrote in *Les Confessions* of a great princess whom, upon hearing that the peasants had no bread, declared *Let them eat cake*, but the French must have had their reasons for pinning so pithy a one-liner tail on her donkey, that is to say, her ass. Does it matter if she never said it in the courts of Versailles? Here in Asian modernity within the air-conditioned comforts of a Japanese mall on Orchard Road we perform post-colonial teatime, queue in snaking lines for hours for delicate pastries once native to Paris, as an old lady in Bukit Ho Swee pools together her pennies from selling tissue at the hawker centre to note stoically that she is four dollars short of the purchase of a twenty kilo packet of rice. One Ladurée macaron costs four dollars, and there is, in fact, one so named for that profligate Austrian queen of France, in lieu of the Sofia Coppola movie. Its topnotes, rose and anise. The rice, when the old lady gets it, will last her two months. Meal pairings, soy sauce and eggs scrambled with preserved sweet radish bits. For now her stoicism will feed her for five days, maybe a week. The macaron melts in your mouth. The world is a click away. With the democratization of the airline industry and the globalization of cosmopolitan déjà vu, everything is a plane ride away and nowhere is nearly far enough. We can't be sure about what Maslow would say to Butler's conjecture that *Possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread*, but what we are left with is the certainty that most of us here are privileged enough to contemplate concentric circles rather than the hierarchy of a triangle when we think about our needs. When I was just a little girl I asked a boy as bourgeois as me as we sipped fair-trade coffee from Ethiopia if he could believe in the word *revolution* prima facie and he said a revolution is three hundred and sixty degrees but if you really wanted to change things isn't it one hundred and eighty? He lifted up the ceramic saucer to show me with his hands. You wouldn't go into the palm reader's with me because you said our fate was in God's hands not hers. Ten years into the rat race and you finally look down for the first time to realise you have been running on the spot. The soles of your shoes, nothing to show for: worn through but squeaky clean, and I am no longer there to kiss your knees. Before you cast that stone, assuming the worst and hoping against hope that it maims me without even the token courtesy of knowing where I am, remember that Kierkegaard, pious in his own way as he was, acknowledged: *At least a dirty conscience makes for an interesting life*. If I had Dalí's way with clocks I would try to reach you, but I can't paint to save a life, much less change your mind. It's too late now, the best you can do in this regard, in disregard, is cosmetic. Gold plate your hamster wheel as you turn tricks within and wait for the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau to come get you. Queue for more European sweetbreads, baked in neutral Swiss factories and shipped to Hong Kong, London, Tokyo, Dubai. Put your name on the waiting list for limited edition Hermès bags. All the possibility in the world, right here in our city. From third world to first in fifty fucking years, yessiree! Truly, you are spoilt for choice: as long as you close an eye to the fine print that all your possibilities are strictly consumerist. Let us hold hands and worship at the altar of Adam Smith. In Tianducheng in Zhejiang, China they are building a city that is a replica of Paris, including a scaled replica of the Eiffel Tower. If you take a picture in front of the fake Eiffel Tower in Tianducheng and you angle it right, it will look just like the real thing. If it is true on both counts that money can buy you anything and that love goes home to Paris in the winter, can the latter be paid via the former to make a swanky detour in China when they are done building the city up? I think you think that life is a show and I used to think that love is a showstopper. Can I tell you that it used to pain me so bad that all you ever wanted was a picture? Zizek says *The real is that which stands outside the symbolic pact and which threatens the subject within the symbolic pact with psychosis*. Baby, the truth is life happened and you were a tourist.