

SARA SJÖLIN'S *JETTES DINERSKOLE*

by Stanley Schtinter

*Ever hungry like a flame*

*I consume myself and glow.*

*Light grows all that I conceive,*

*Ashes everything I leave:*

*Flame I am assuredly!*

(Friedrich Nietzsche)

Jonathan Meades describes the British relationship to food as entirely visual. The fry-up, the Sunday roast. Dirty rainbow platters of gristle and batter and pomp that gloat at past scarcities and cock a snook at future ruin. Junichiro Tanizaki says that Japanese cuisine 'is to be looked at rather than eaten,' but saves us from the profanity of mentioning sushi in the same breath as a full English, continuing: 'it is to be meditated upon, a kind of silent music evoked by the combination of lacquerware and the light of a candle flickering in the dark.' I like the peasant fare of Portugal. Fish are sliced down the middle and tossed onto a grill, issued under harsh lights with a few spuds and a jug of olive oil if you-should-be-so-lucky. I can never decide whether it is humble or arrogant but suspect it is both, and therein lies its dignity and its enchantment. Visual food this is not.

The artist suggests I write about *Jettes Dinerskole* 'without knowing the process behind it.' The call evokes Dans le Noir, the highly-regarded London restaurant deprived of sight. It sounds like a gimmick until you learn that all of the staff are actually blind. (That we must *see* the caramel slop is one of endless indictments to make of the all-pervasive pornographic kultur *à présent*: the essence of caramel is most in its contemplation, and then in its aroma, and then in its taste.) Before she tightens the cloth I interpret (wrongly) a clue in the appalling head-fuck of the google-linked Smörgåstårta: a savoury cake that's consumed at funerals in Sweden. Now this, *this* is visual food. 'It is delicious,' she says. 'And very physical.' As I see it: slices of cucumber resemble soggy tombs cemented skyward by a surface bog of cream cheese, finished with dozens of factory-punished fallen pink shrimps. Goddess knows what hides inside. Bread, mayonnaise, *fillings*. 'Served cold and cut like dessert.' The horror, the horror.

*Jettes Dinerskole* seems to revolve around the making of two 'bad burger's'—purportedly inspired by an episode of *SpongeBob SquarePants* (born July 14 in 1986, SquarePants is a gifted cook who works at the Krusty Krab and lives in a pineapple with his pet snail Gary)—as part of a workshop run by Sara Sjölin at Fyns Laboratorie for Ung Kunst ("Young Art"), a night school for 15-30 year olds in Svendborg. These burgers resemble the Smörgåstårta violently deconstructed as a meal fit for the gluttonous End Times spectator in a lay-by piss-take put on by an apathetic arts graduate seemingly condemned to restaurant work *forever*. The burial cake before the fact. The future? You're in it. Is that the point? Sjölin is the haruspex of Etruscan lore (a person who foretold events by inspecting an animal's entrails); she is John Smith's *Girl Chewing Gum* collectivising the conjurer's trick, spitting it out into the flames of the original auto-

mous Mubi, *fire*—as the flesh of the wild boar twists and crisps o’erhead—inviting her gaggle of young players to lean closer, as she seems to whisper . . . *dance and laugh along life’s footpath, for the only authority is your own, the camera always lies, and it is . . . in one end and out the other*. Friedrich Nietzsche was probably right in his radical affirmation of life through ‘eternal return’: condemned to repeat forever each choice we make, every success as well as every suffering, but so was Russian mystic P. D. Ouspensky when he supposed there was a way to break the loop.

Nietzsche was visited in his last dream by Rudolf Steiner. The philosopher’s sister, Elisabeth, welcomed (and even employed) the clairvoyant for an understanding of her dying brother’s true, total vision. Whether pronouncements like ‘Nietzsche is not so much a philosopher as he is a collector of honey’ opened Elisabeth’s access is anyone’s guess, but Steiner’s reflections on his disobedience are vivid. ‘Nietzsche’s recalcitrance was instinctive and deep seated—he was not merely put off the way someone is who notices a logical flaw in an argumentation, but more the way a colour can pain the eye.’

Sjölin was raised in the small spiritual community of Ytterjärna, Sweden. She was schooled by the Waldorf method, an educational system conceived by Steiner in the wake of war. Children are encouraged to freely interpret the stories they are told — invariably spoken through the human voice — to create images from the stories, and grasp independently the importance of what those images mean. Waldorf intends to protect and accentuate the visionary state of childhood, rather than neuter it in preparation for a world of (restaurant) work. What bearing this has on Sara’s artistry, and in her approach to teaching, I wouldn’t suggest or try to define, but the seemingly free-form, communalised production of *Jettes Dinerskole* clearly offers antidote to the marketised monolith of prohibition, competition, fear and censorship that is the educational establishment in the English-language speaking world today. This monolith—or pail, to be properly cutting—is characterised by Goldsmiths University in London, once helping to produce the likes of Sarah Lucas (whose egg-breasts are referenced in this video), now forcing tutors to sign contracts that prevent them from meeting students in the pub, or the diner, or indeed anywhere off-campus. At New York University, students arrested for participation in the Gaza Solidarity Encampment are declared Persona Non Grata, a status that bars them from campus and all University-related activities. They are instructed to write ‘reflection papers’ demonstrating that they ‘have thought about all aspects of the issue,’ while actively refusing them the right to explain or justify their actions, as a punitive measure outsourced to a private company specialising in ‘behavioural intervention management.’

A school that denies the existence of the possible pie because of one bad apple deserves to fall and fall hard. And for a school that punishes students protesting genocide there is a special place reserved in hell. For Jette’s, under Sjölin, with its play and its wonder and its warmth and its humour, in the open orchard in the bright, bright light, with its bad, bad burgers . . . there is only the deserving to thrive, over and over, forever after. *Flames you are*, Sara seems to be saying to her artists of the night. And flame she is, assuredly.