

# Some Kinds of Love

## *Travel Notes from Bucharest and Lviv*

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Published in the *Hermeneutic Circular*, October 2019 pp. 18-21

Maryia is explaining the law of probability. We're at the Dzyga Center, a cul-de-sac in Virmenska Street. A jazz combo is playing a shrewd, sprawling tune. My index finger keeps the tempo dreamily on a half-empty glass of red.

'Something is either probable or improbable – Maryia is saying – or *impossible*'. She doesn't stress the last word, but that's what I hear. And it's making me sad.

'Well – I say predictably – I'm only interested in the impossible'. I'm sounding like an undergrad. The band stops playing, and I can't take a cue.

'I read a book once – I insist – titled *The Impossible*.' 'Who is it by?' Yana asks diligently. 'Georges Bataille', I say, and after a pause: 'It's all black, with white letters'. Maryia, Valeria and Yana smile graciously.

As the band tunes up for another set, I know it's time to go. The waitress – a Madonna in a modernist Annunciation painting – steps out with the bill. Alone and far from home I step onto a street that echoes with the passing mirth of Sunday lovers and a ghastly rendition of *Satisfaction*. Mercifully, in the parallel street as the sky darkens with darting swallows, I am held ever so gently by the drone of a busker's *kobza*, the Ukrainian lute.

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Arthur Rimbaud is a young Romanian labourer heading back to Bucharest on this windy day in the merry month of May. I catch a glimpse of him in the non-priority queue at Luton airport.

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Pope Francis is in competition with me: our visits to Bucharest coincide. But Georgeta, Adelina, Dragos, Ozana and other colleagues of the Romanian Association for the Person-centred Approach who invited me to facilitate this weekend workshop cannot compete with the Vatican: 35 participants gathered in this large room while thousands in the streets outside are singing irrefutable tunes to the Lord on their genteel guitars.

From the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor window of my hotel room I marvel at the young policewoman's graceful half pirouette next to the Romanian and Vatican flags in the empty street outside the Ramada Majestic Hotel as she regulates the traffic for the Pontiff's visit.

Later that evening droves of nuns run in the heavy rain wearing disposable translucent rain coats like oversize condoms under mundane street lamps as teenagers at Glastonbury.

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Yana escorts me to the Angels Exhibition at the Borys Voznytsky National Art Gallery in Lviv. Among the paintings of angels we find Jacque Blanchard's *Time unveiling Truth*: it's all in there, the chief blunder of all philosophers-cum-psychologists, particularly of those who believe in the ontological peep show of *aletheia* revamped by pimp supreme Heidegger.

The zealous attendant scolds us for leaning too close to The Works. An enduring taboo is placed on desire by the work of art: *don't touch!* Yet the artist had a body, *was* a body. Then the artist's natural desire at the moment of conceiving her work gradually gave way to an aesthetic withdrawal that made the work possible in the first place: sublimation – never too far from repression.

That same work we are now eager to touch. We may forever push nature away with a pitchfork; she forever returns. This is not to say that art is only natural instinct and sensual longing, for then we'd be stuck with bare-chested Sunday dramas on the telly or the gastronomic aesthetic of Bayreuth, Glyndebourne and the Proms.

Yet the sensuous (*phenomenon*, 'that which appears to the senses') must remain in the picture. If it doesn't, we'll be forever cast adrift – as with normative existential therapy – on a senseless ocean of 'being':

The concept of being has attained a disastrous dominance in current aesthetics, demanding . . . that being itself speaks through the work of art. And what, then, does being say through the work? *Being simply keeps saying 'being' through the work* (Adorno).

When the sensuous (the dark, multiple, unknowable body and its fragile threshold with the concrete others and a concrete 'world') is pushed out of the picture, we'll be ensnared by the pieties and platitudes of universal relatedness, forever intoning homilies from the gilded letters of St. Buber.

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One early evening Sasha shows us the family home of Martin Buber in Lviv near his own home, a large balcony on the first floor with two statues, geraniums and other red flowers gleaming in the sweet summer air. I wonder what he'd make of contemporary practitioners who use his writings to paint sentimental icons of the therapeutic encounter.

So many times when marking case studies I run into descriptions of quasi-miraculous moments of deep relationality apparently caused by the high degree of openness and authenticity of the therapist. But the celebrated 'I-Thou' is for Buber accident – a rare occurrence that no training or technique can ever manufacture. All one can do is make room for the guest.

Moreover, as with deep relationality and universal relatedness, paeans to intersubjectivity in psychoanalysis (Jessica Benjamin) and politics (Jurgen Habermas) rest on the presumption that mutual recognition/acknowledgement in encounter is a given; it is assumed that destruction, rupture and negation can be kept at bay; that devastation can be endured and transcended. Assuming that this is ever possible, Judith Butler objects, would it still be within the realm of psyche, i.e. would it be meaningful and useful for an emancipatory, transformative psychology and politics?

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Another illustrious resident of Lviv was Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, who was born here when the town's name was Lemberg, capital of Galicia. During my talk I suggest to a wonderful and receptive audience of three hundred Ukrainian therapists and trainees that psychotherapy trainings would be more complete if they also featured readings such as *Venus in Furs*, the novel by Sacher-Masoch. For there are infinite aspects to human relating.

*Between thought and expression*

*Lies a lifetime*

*Situations arise*

*Because of the weather*

*And no kinds of love*

*Are better than others*

(The Velvet Underground, 'Some kinds of love')

It was probably wrong *and* crude of Austrian psychiatrist Kraft-Ebing to banalize and mythologize in his *Psychopathia Sexualis* Sacher-Masoch by coining the term 'masochism' and pointing at the writer as the 'poet of masochism [himself] afflicted with the anomaly'.

It will take another sixty years and the work of Gilles Deleuze to reframe *Venus in Furs* in terms of 'contractual relations' and 'contracted alliance', with an emphasis on 'persuasion' and 'education' all geared towards honouring mutual vows and promises by *signing a contract*. Does it sound familiar?

Two features in the writings of Sacher-Masoch (writer, utopian thinker, socialist, humanist and campaigner against anti-semitism) would make a welcome adjunct to the mawkish sentimentality of mainstream, attachment-driven relational therapy: (a) recognition of the contractual and highly ritualized nature of human encounters,

whether contract and ritual are explicit or implicit; (b) acknowledgement of the intensity of life (whose other name is *affect*) that rages all around the layers of language and the worthy exertions of cognition.

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On my last night in Bucharest we go to *Mogosoia*, the palace and garden ten miles outside Bucharest built by Constantin Brancoveanu, who was killed with his entire family by the Ottomans. We talk of Pasolini and Tarkovsky and of my favourite film of all times, *Solaris*, a film that must have been conceived by the ocean.

I wonder if Tarkovsky lived by the sea when he adapted *Solaris* for the screen. Out of the eternal waves the ghosts of the past emerge enfolded. Could the spectres of the future also emerge incarnate within that future that awaits us on the horizon? And if ghosts belong to the past, do spectres belong to the future?

*A spectre is haunting Europe ...*

Utopia, Rachel Menken tells Don Draper in *Mad Men*, Series 1, Episode 6, is both the good place and the place that cannot be. No place, no logo. *No Logos?* From Adelina we all learn about *Go*, the strategy board game she excels in. We talk and laugh and listen until the rain comes down in sheets drowning our voices. We seek shelter in the stone building, our voices and laughter and warm goodbyes echoing as we pass through nights and windy mornings through the merry and implacable change of seasons.

What is it about departures when the unexpected weight of past and future and current joys and aches presses on our chest? Later on Florentina says: 'The thunderstorm is welcome, for it means summer is around the corner.'

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Driving to the airport through Lviv's sleepy streets in the rainy summer dawn, I murmur a wordless goodbye to all animate inanimate things, to all the living and the dead who crossed this beautiful city's street. They are all asleep, my dear and accidental friends – he who so patiently and competently translated every word I said and who told me of Tarkovsky's first film, *Ivan's Childhood*; she with the striped red and white sailor top, the one who danced with me, her eyes the colour of the fading day.

Do people *fall* in love in the Ukrainian language? I ask. Or do they slip, slide, roll, soar, or else are blown apart and transfixed by the morning light through the departing clouds now traversed by swifts, the never-resting, sleeping-on-the-wing, bearers of unbearable hope and longing? Pity I can't hear the answer in the deafening noise.

I'm back at my table, sipping Lvivska, a venerable Vodka made in Lviv since 1782. Sasha proposes a toast to an unknown god, and we both know it is Dionysus Zagreus.

We sit in silence for a while, and my mind wonders: love is a *symptom*, from *syn* (together) and *piptein* (to fall). Falling together? Love and therapy as two instances of falling together? How else can a therapist get a sense of the client's 'worldview' without the latter's suffering and dismay rubbing on to her? Is this even thinkable when we're busy building walls against vicarious trauma? And: can I trust my own musings when tipsy on Ukrainian vodka?

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When we walk, we walk on the bones on the dead. When we dance, we dance on the bones of the dead. Millions were killed in 1932 and 1933 during the *Holodomor*, Stalin's Terror-Famine – his retaliation against those who sought independence from the Soviet Union. Ukraine suffered by far the heaviest losses.

As with the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide, the trauma persists through generations. It would take up to five generations, Jeanne Bernstein says during her talk, to begin metabolizing the unfathomable pain and loss. Those memories are inaccessible; they emerge in dreams and symptoms. Psychotherapy across orientations has failed to address, let alone tackle, these magnitudes of loss and displacement. A silent collective scream echoes still through the cobbled streets and the trendy cafes of this beautiful town.

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I think I had a method once. Get close to the flames, and when you're about to catch fire, withdraw, feel the intensity, the 'sensual appearance of an idea'. But my skin is charred, my wings are singed, and I don't know why I forswore music for inartistic psychology.

Alone in my hotel room on my last morning in Lviv, I am touched by Ian Penman's tribute to Prince, dying alone, in the middle of the night, two steps away from his studio at Paisley Park. How alongside his dazzling death-denying fantasy lived in him a thirst for the sublime. As an example of the sublime, Penman mentions Joni Mitchell's own orchestral rendition of *A Case of You*.

*You're in my blood like holy wine*

This strange, awe-inspiring song (both departure and longing) is my own private soundtrack on the way home.

*Contact Manu at [manubazzano@onetel.com](mailto:manubazzano@onetel.com). Manu will facilitate a one day workshop for the Society of Existential Analysis on Saturday 8 February 2020, titled Where It Was, Others Shall Be: Desire, Otherness, and the Alien Inside. For details of Manu's ongoing talks and workshops in the UK and abroad please visit [www.manubazzano.com](http://www.manubazzano.com).*