

Summer Knowledge

Manu Bazzano

Published in the November issue of the *Hermeneutic Circular*, pp 5-7

Gentrification started big time in New York *after* 9/11, Sarton said on Thursday, adding that the horror & frenzy & solidarity experienced first-hand on that day is what made him a New Yorker. It's a hot and breezy Sunday now in Wagner Park North and we are having a picnic. Through my cheap, wrap-around velvet-underground shades I see a splendid view of the Harbour. Over a slice of pizza, Sarton, organizer of this Person-centred World conference in NYC, says the unsayable: he tells me that gentrification started *before* 9/11. In fact, he adds, gentrification on a large scale may have been one of the things that exacerbated the hatreds and divisions culminating with the attack on the twin towers. Either way, it's clear that NYC is no longer what it was in the 1970s, when it was disdained by the rest of the US and left free to be its own undomesticated self. The urban policy of 'planned shrinkage' made sure of that: entire areas have been cleansed of the have-nots by curtailing essential services first so that ordinary folks would move out. Then the place would be revamped and repaved for the middle classes.

I had been surprised, hours before, as the ferry approached Ellis Island, where ships of migrants would come from Europe in search of a new life, by my warm tears. Echoes of distant cries and the realization that it was not all gilded happiness and joy: the tests they were subjected to, the chalk marks to identify an illness or illiteracy, same as it was in the place they were fleeing, interrogated by men in uniforms, their mental sanity tested and checked. There it stood, the Statue of Liberty,

whose home is the home of the Brave
By the statue of Bigotry...

sanitized echo of Aphrodite who, a travelling companion says, only had to look and one was enslaved, she who hovered somewhere between the impossible and the inevitable. Echo of Minerva too, of reason and Enlightenment, her steely equanimous gaze, her Presbyterian virginal gaze, her untouchable stony beauty. Hypertrophied reason generates monsters, the murky side of Enlightenment.

Give me your hungry, your poor, I'll piss on 'hem
That's what the Statue of Bigotry says.
Your poor huddled masses, let's club 'em to death

And get it over with and just dump 'em on the boulevard

On arrival the first day, the city loomed in the distance as I travelled through the black night and into the tunnel and in the midst of a midnight's traffic jam studded with yellow taxis and then, gazing up and up in Midtown at the impossibly high buildings, where do you think my window gives onto but Lexington.

Up to Lexington 125, feel sick and dirty, more dead than alive

And so after eight hours delay and plane journey amid German teenage students on vacation the exhaustion now makes me shudder here in the hotel between Lexington and 39th Street. No matter how cosy and full of creature comforts, few things in the world are more dismal than hotel rooms

After the applause had died down
And all the people drifted away.
She climbed down off the bar
and went out the door
to the hotel that she called home
it had greenish walls
a bathroom in the hall

During brief pauses next day at the all-day Journal Editors Meeting, glimpses of the Chrysler Building. The day ends and we agree to meet for dinner with others. I memorize the address and later walk over-confidently in that direction without a map and soon realize I am lost. And that I like it. The heat rises as I walk with the waning light picabooing between pedestrian crossings, each avenue stretching to infinity, the sky above and around an indulgence of ethereal light to an entirely human world, our human-made wings piercing like tender claws from our shoulder blades. Night slowly slides down as a myriad of street lights snub the firmament, and let me say it: *it is a mistake to see myriad reality as a holistic formation*

There are no stars in the New York sky; they are all on the ground.

Next morning early I stand aside inside Grand Central Station and gazing at the painted constellations on the ceiling, looking at the crowd sliding by hurried and hushed and smart I'm filled with joy at so much beauty – the mock sky and artful streaming of commuters, their forthright walk in the mouth of a river forever on the move, strange joy of a speck in the stream.

New York City I love you
Blink your eyes and I'll be gone
Just a little grain of sand

And what about the conference? For now I'm headed to Canal Street, Chinatown in the heat of the midday city sun, the words *Manhattan Bridge* a mirage at the zebra crossing, a destination, a destiny in the making, in the swelter of a thousand childhood summers in the Calabrian South.

Looking at the chemical sky
All purple blue and oranges
Some pigeons flying by
The traffic on Canal street is so noisy
It's a shock
And someone's shooting fireworks or a gun
On the next block

I follow the apparition and circle around the western contours of the bridge in vain, the noise of traffic now and voices and muffled despair at street corners positively Roman and Neapolitan

Ah, but remember that the city is a funny place
Something like a circus or a sewer

The Italian museum is closed for holiday, frozen to a day in 1977, a faded photo of Giorgio 'Long John' Chinaglia, striker with Lazio and later New York Cosmos, 'he lit up the Cosmos' between birth in Carrara, 1947 and inescapable death in Naples, Florida, 2012. His photo next to Pope Francis who can't do no wrong though he didn't receive the Dalai Lama for fear of upsetting the Chinese. Other faded photos adorn the window, unknown restaurateurs with 1970s sideburns and unfeasible haircuts. Outside the restaurant next door two men with trimmed white beards suck on a cigar and a large woman eats her very early lunch gesticulating managerially to the waiter in mute obeisance.

Here I am, I made it at last, walking on my coveted target, the Bridge, an infernal clatter of iron and metal on bouncy concrete, wobbly as hell, until desert-dizzy and dehydrated with pilgrim ambition I wobble as the bridge trembles under my feet. This city is too vast too much too beautiful, its ragged hellish heart now beautified and tenderized until I see her in the distance, is it real, is it her, the Statue?

Lightheaded and thirsty I gaze at the skyscrapers like any peasant from another era, a *terrone* like me who landed here by mistake and so I think of Delmore Schwartz who everyone called Delmore, born in Brooklyn to Jewish immigrants from Romania

I am the Brooklyn poet Delmore
Schwartz
Harms & the child I sing, two
parents' torts

Delmore, the Brooklyn Rimbaud, protagonist of Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift*, Delmore writer at twenty-one of the great short story *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* describing the generational divide between migrant parents and their half-assimilated, half-modernist progeny, writer of great poetry who never made it to the court of hideous snobs T.S. Eliot and Henry James. And who better than Delmore could write of the tenderfoot's disarticulation, the fury to clutch life by the collar, to speak, to speak and be heard? Don't I know it, dear readers, even among you decent upright person-centered people; *vox clamantis in deserto* and so forth.

We are Shakespearean, we are strangers.

Who better than Delmore, with the same retelling of birth, migration, new disappointment, damaged hopes, ordinary lives turned into the stone of history, Delmore who wanted to drape the world in radiance but didn't have enough material and died instead aged 52 in 1966 in a hotel room just off Times Square.

Keep thinking all the time, O New York boy!

The life of an exile is at all times contrapuntal, lived in precariousness and exhilaration, exhilarating because precarious, as described in the best existentialist texts before the logocentric takeover that turned it into another comfy raft.

'You look like a coal miner to me', the US policeman told me at the Border. I took it as a compliment. He was in a chatty mood and took his time despite the enormous queue behind me. 'I'm more left-wing than Bernie Sanders' he insists. He is informal, almost affectionate as he interrogates me. Learning that I'm a 'psychologist' he produces from his bag a book by one Michael Parenti. The affable and inquisitive, mostly one-way conversation goes on for a

while until he finally brands my passport, another livestock alien happy to access milk & honey and be dazed and confused by the bright lights.

The PC Conference is on different floors of the Graduate Center, right opposite the Empire State Building. I hear Margaret Warner say that therapists are anthropologists in a foreign country, learning a new language rather than scientists getting things straight. She did some pioneering work and proved that it is possible to work with highly distressed clients who are labelled as schizophrenics from a person-centred perspective. I daydream as to whether the therapist as anthropologist could be extended to therapist as *flaneur* and *flaneuse*, for nothing more reminds me of psyche's uncharted territory as a city, where meaningful encounters are love at last sight. I scribble this in a crowded London train a week later, and this could be anywhere, any city in the wide world, a man like yours truly seated with pen and paper, his doodles the only proof of having been here at all. He could be anywhere, his presumed presence vanishing in the act, yesterday a NYC's subway, today the travelling tearooms of a London Overground train, the clipped voices of quietly exultant Brexiters on a late summer day.

How nice it is to disappear
Float into a mist
With a young lady on your arm
Looking for a kiss

At the corner of Fifth Avenue and 34th Street I'm sitting on the pavement with John Wilson, deep in heartmind talk and suddenly we notice a tiny lively sparrow in the vast city. Uncle Lou's first solo album had a sparrow on its cover, a tiny sparrow just out of its egg, skyscrapers in the background.

It was very nice, oh honey it was paradise

Echoes of Alhambra and Alicante, a fated journey of separation in my youth without which dear reader I wouldn't be who I am and so forth. And tell me, btw, how *lost* can you get? Now as an older gent I get lost using a whole array of methodologies and epistemologies: 'the ruin of the subject' is how Georges Bataille called the existentialist project. And for Levinas, the latter was all about looking at the world in the *absence* of a subject – all exteriority, including *moi même*. Any excuse will do, for thou shall get burned either way. For instance, NYC: the city as the *id*, as a transcendental (not transcendent) river, entirely immanent and forever impossible, inevitable (plastic inevitable?). She only had to look and one was enslaved. *Or*, to put it grandly, the city provoking deep identification and transubstantiation

of the self: Joyce's Dublin, Reed's New York, Pasolini's Rome, Rodenbach's Bruges, Pamuk's Istanbul, Woolf's London, Bellow's Chicago. Who needs god when you can have a metropolis? Yet the sense of time persists and with it all those futile strategies reaching to an ever-present future, or the involuntary memory of a never buried past.

Watch out the world's behind you
There's always someone around you
Who will call
It's nothing at all

Asleep and innocent, Lexington – the bagel shop, the Chinese cafe, the hyper-trendy Japanese noodle bar, the convenience store. Then, of course, the conference: magnificent presentation by Claudio Rud on Spinoza. Claudio is a philosopher doctor poet from Buenos Aires. He spoke of *immanence*, the great conspicuous uninvited guest of the entire psychotherapy circus. We *are* relation from the start, and it is the relation that creates its own subject. Even 'presence', touted as a semi-numinous attribute of the divinely-attuned shrink, is a result of the in-between. Makes me think of the only prog-rock album worth listening to, King Crimson's *Islands*: "Islands join hands/'neath heaven's sea".

When I finally find a place to change some money, the affable guy at the counter misunderstands what I'm saying and says 'Welcome back!' I had babbled something in response to his question, saying 'Have been away from Italy for nearly thirty years' but he thought New York was a long-lost home I had just come back to. And he was right, and this nearly brings me to tears and makes me overlook the hefty sum of eighteen dollars commission I paid for my little transaction. Of course I'm back, here where bold granddad Santo came alone with his cardboard suitcase, Santo whose bones have gone lost from a remote cemetery in Aspromonte during refurbishment.

I am overjoyed and baffled that both my workshop (on Zen and therapy), and talk (on the actualizing tendency and feral philosophy) have been enthusiastically received. I've become too accustomed perhaps over the years to see myself at the margins, saying clever things that no one ever gets or gets offended by or gushes over incomprehensibly. Next day on the bench right next to Fifth Avenue's raging traffic, a heartfelt mind-to-mind conversation with Claudio, his smoky voice and knowing smile, both of us recognizing each other as twice heretics and in that sense only reluctantly deserving the epithet of 'philosophers'. We pay our muffled homage to Spinoza and Derrida amidst the wailing sirens and the car exhausts, both exiled from larger and then 'their own', smaller insular communities of exiles. Claudio

translates Rogers' 'formative' tendency (an evolutionary teleological surrogate of God's benevolent presence) as *transformative* tendency.

The city like the *id*: did you catch my earlier drift, dear reader? If that is too *impersonal* for you, if you think it's not relational enough, not Bolwbyan, Buberian, dialogical enough, then let me tell you of the city-deity in personalized form. On the last night before my forty winks I bid New York farewell

in the naked bed, in Plato's cave.

I imagined her as a beauty from Mittel-Europa who made it here from Lausanne, Turin, Krakow or God-knows where – her red dress falls on the bedroom floor high above streets that never sleep. In the dim hours I stumble awake grateful for my little death and brief disappearance and in the street I greet the drizzle on my cheeks with a peasant grin.

The World Person-centred and Experiential Psychotherapies Conference took place in New York City, 20-24 July 2016. Song lyrics and verses from poems are from Delmore Schwartz and his pupil at Syracuse University, Lou Reed. www.manubazzano.com