

REVISED 2/26/2013

TERRA INCOGNITA (2011-2013) NEW YORK TO LJUBLJANA

“The stars, as if knowing that no one could see them now, frolicked in the black sky, now flaring up, now going out, now quivering, they busily whispered among themselves about something joyful but mysterious.”

– Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*

BELLS OF ST. JAMES

Not rewarded
But *fore-given*,
We awaken
From our dreams,
To a watery peal
Of bells, an echoing
Within.
From The Highest
Places
In Thought
And Mind
Comes this
Clamor
Of bells –
Vision(s) *of*
The Pantocrator.
This divine
Spell (*moves*)
Lifts all
Other spells;
This fugue
Of light
Redeems (*spells*)
Old and new
Days and
Nights.

GK (02/10/13)



I. NEW YORK

New York in 2011 was a truly frightening place. (It was easy to fear madness and see oneself floating face down in the East River.) The post-2008 economic meltdown was in full swing despite tepid signs and optimistic forecasts that a recovery was underway. One could find newly minted homeless people in Central

Park on any given day. They arrived with suitcases, wandered around or parked themselves on a park bench and generally disappeared at dusk. Where they went is anyone's guess. But you could find the same lost souls staring into time and space on the side streets of the Upper East Side in the evening, staring that is with downcast eyes, averting the oblique gaze of frightened passersby.

Image (above) – Central Park, New York, New York, USA, 2011

It is a terrifying prospect when the mannequins in the windows of high-end shops on Madison Avenue seem to have more humanity than the well-to-do people on the streets, who in turn begin to resemble robots or demons. It is an overt warning to seek escape. The stare of the mannequins is not unlike that of the homeless. Yet it was not long after this strange mid-2011 hiatus that the dark flowers of Occupy Wall Street appeared in the canyons of Lower Manhattan, defying all expectations that they would be immediately routed by the police (the renowned NYPD), though they were summarily evicted under cover of darkness one eventful early morning in late autumn. OWS seemed to embody a momentary crystallization of outrage – while the outrage generally went underground again and the economic machinery of the Capital of capital churned on (and on and on). Street theater in New York takes many forms. Yet if one wishes to divine the soul of the place, it is better to visit the homeless in Central Park (Central Park's origins including a squatter settlement circa 1860).

II. MELBOURNE

Escaping, then, to Australia, it is not surprising to find that the superficial veneer of relative prosperity covers serious disparities of a similar order – a global order after all. Australia, slowly being strip mined by primarily foreign or multinational consortiums, including the Chinese government, enjoys a fairly serious high-consumerist lifestyle at the expense of almost everything else. Melbourne thrives in the CBD while the outskirts and the suburbs, which roll in every direction, slowly moulder. Yet Melbourne is not Sydney, even if it increasingly enjoys the raucous nightlife of its northern nemesis. It is strangely beautiful, then, that the Aboriginals laugh at the increasingly frequent mood swings in Australian weather, noting that bush fires have been around forever, and that they used to set them intentionally; but also noting that coastal inundation hardly matters to them because they “remember” the times when the low-lying lands now sprouting new housing developments along the coast were underwater anyway. While they are laughing, the Australian government and insurance companies are panicking. The strange



beauty of Melbourne is its “old world” character, the opposite of Sydney. In Fitzroy, a trendy district on the east side of Melbourne, one can be approached by Aboriginal street people and asked for money. Once you give them any, they throw it away and amble off, asking for more. (Melbourne is said to be Australia’s New York, whereas Sydney is said to be Australia’s Los Angeles).

Image (above) – Southern Cross, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, 2012

Yet the Australia that is drowning in its own marginal success is also the Australia that is awash with a new wave of unwanted immigrants – both the boat people who drift over from Indonesia and the legal immigrants that perversely remind Australians of their own repressed history. Australians were and are all “boat people” – but pity anyone who might try to remind them of

this. Better to set sail for else-where – but also better to acknowledge that almost anywhere else is more or less the same today.

III. HONG KONG

Hong Kong is the great stopover, after Singapore, for flights out of Australia. It breaks the long haul to Europe, whereas Singapore breaks the long haul to North America. (There is a little known route from New Zealand to South America, drifting south first to Antarctica to catch the high northerly winds.) As respite en route else-where, Hong Kong is a study in true



diversity and true prosperity, albeit in the shadow yet of the Mainland and watched closely by Beijing for any signs of apostasy regarding full integration in 2030. At the handover by the British, it is said that planeloads of gold went West, landing in Vancouver, Canada, primarily. Such are capital flows today – as such are the movements of privilege and power.

Image (above) – Hong Kong International Airport, Chek Lap Kok, Hong Kong, China, 2012

IV. LONDON

London is becoming one gigantic shopping mall. In the run up to the 2012 Summer Olympics, the city built high-end shopping facilities in association with transport hubs and Olympic venues that oddly resembled the Duty Free corridors one must pass through now in all airports to exit customs. One is force marched through such places today, not unlike the blockbuster art exhibitions that end with a gift shop. The economic regime running London is unique, because the City within the city runs everything, and the City within the city, which is the Financial Services Industry, is essentially a money-laundering venture for global capital. The excessive real estate values in London are a proper sign of this specialization, as is the price of just about anything in New York a proper sign of Manhattan's reliance on Wall Street, with complaints



from New York's billionaire mayor always already forthcoming if and when anyone dares criticize this dependence. (It is curious to note that as Bloomberg's illegally acquired third term as mayor of New York expires, he is heading to London to establish a new beachhead for his global operation, Bloomberg L.P.) The occupation of St. Paul's in London, in alliance with OWS, was telling. The Church of England was forced to admit complicity with Power in permitting the demonstrators to be evicted. As the Church Fathers noisily lambasted (via bombastic homiletics) the financialization of Life itself, it then more or less

dismissed Canon Chancellor Giles Fraser (even though he said he resigned) for siding with the demonstrators. To paraphrase, the Canon Chancellor said, ominously, "I half expect to see Christ amongst them."

Image (above) – Westfield Mall, Shepherd's Bush, London, England, 2012

V. PARIS

Paris will always be one of the loveliest places on Earth, even when it has become one gigantic *banlieue* – it has a certain *éminence grise* (double entendre intended). It is hard to fathom how one could ever ruin Paris, other than perhaps to sell it lock, stock, and barrel to Capital. There will always be new French revolutions. The last French Revolution was named Chris Marker. We might find most of these past revolutions at Cimetière Montmartre or Père Lachaise today. Marker, for example, was buried with the communards at Père Lachaise, since his un-timely passing at the age of 91 in July of 2012. He lived on rue Courat, in Paris, in the vicinity of the last stand for the Paris Commune. Yet he lived in the communards' shadow in terms of his films and polemics. Marker knew how to remember (reflect) ...

Yet one must eventually escape Paris as well (as both Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jean Cocteau knew). Where is the proverbial else-where after Paris? It could be most anywhere that is nominally down at the heels. For obscurity pays dividends that Capital will never understand nor find a way to exploit. The necessity of escape is relative to what activities are at hand – whereas escape also sometimes involves a forced march, under the sign of a terrifying aversion to the status quo, as Charles Baudelaire certainly knew ...

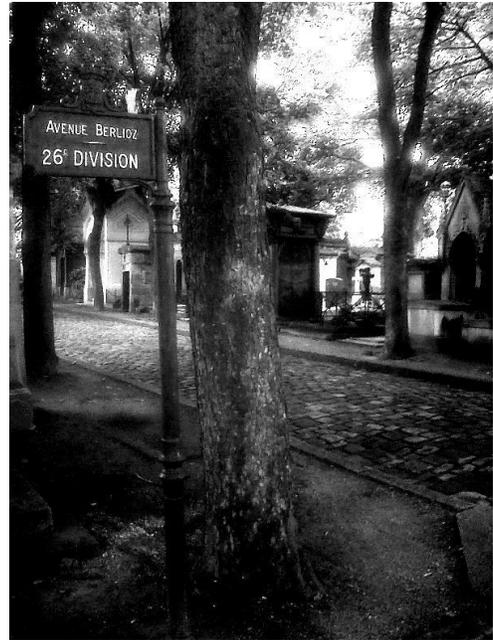
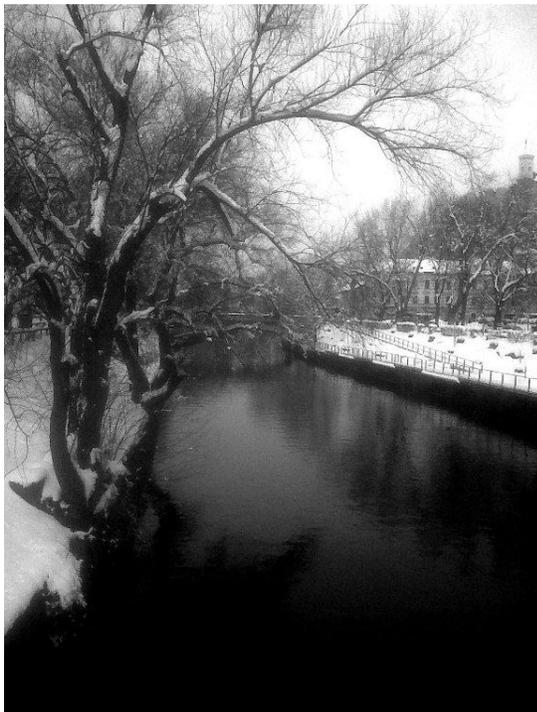


Image (right) – Cimetière de Montmartre, Paris, France, 2012

VI. LJUBLJANA



Ljubljana, Slovenia, is an ancient land – Istria. Arriving across the mountains, by land or by air, places the place firmly in *terra incognita*. Its “Hapsburgian” aura is less strenuous or pronounced than Trieste (James Joyce’s preferred redoubt). And Trieste is demonstrably up market by comparison. The semi-divine beauty of Ljubljana, however, is in its cultivation of the perennial philosophy of the outsider. Under snow, under Communism, under Capitalism, Slovenia survives by reflection (by remembering). This reflection is what has been mostly exterminated by Capital in New York, Melbourne, Hong Kong, London, and – provisionally – Paris. This reflection is a type of mnemonics (a memory system) that indexes an immemorial other time. Yet what is remembered never occurred. What is remembered is the Future. How did Slovenia become a land of philosophers?

Image (above) – Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2013

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