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'The Spaces In Between', *The greyworld Issue*

It was in the early stages of his problematic relationship with Pegeen that the Venice report was commissioned. Working with playwright and poet Alan Ansen (the inspiration behind characters Rollo Greb in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and AJ in William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*), he followed him around the weird city of canals, photographing their findings and character changes. He also came up with the notion of dyeing the waters of Venice lagoon a brighter colour, both in order to trace the journey of the water and to observe people's reaction to the spectacle. Whilst this did not happen there and then, I learned that an activist dyed the waters bright green in 1968 as part of a protest against capitalism and that, in 2007, extreme right sympathiser Graziano Cecchini dyed the waters of Rome's Trevi fountain blood-red. But just as the transformation of the Lagoon's waters was not to happen, neither was the report to be published. It was completed but Rumney then delayed it, troubled by the usual psychic rollercoasters of his existence, his difficult relationship with Pegeen and the birth of their only son Sandro. Angered by the two day delay, Debord was to expel Rumney from the Situationists International.

And what of the London Psychogeographical Committee? Apparently, Rumney said that its members had been "on strike" since 1957 but it was to rise again from the flames in 1989, once disputes had been settled! At the Venice Biennale in 1995, artist Luther Blisset was mounted "Ralph Rumney's Revenge", covering the city with bi-directional arrows and encouraging the drunks from the taverns and Biennale parties to follow them in any way they pleased.

Before his death in March 2002, Rumney brought psychogeographers from around the world to his new home town of Manosque in Haute Provence for a whole month of drinking and debate. Until the end,

when cancer took him at the age of 67, he remained passionate in his beliefs, fiery, oppositional ... forever on the edge.

He told Alan Woods, "I think the trick, as far as possible, is to be sort of anonymous within this society. You know, to sort of vanish."

Perhaps it does not matter how much psycho-geographical research Rumney left behind, or even conducted. Whirling through the epicentres of the avant-garde, traipsing the art routes of Europe and coming into contact with the leading revolutionary spirits of the times, writers, poets, artists, dealers and assorted geniuses, and crazies – he was a sort of one-man, psycho-geographical band, a true English eccentric. And, in my books, that's something to be cherished.

Matthew Thomas

Venice without gondolas

I visited Venice for the first time recently. Although I teach architectural history, I tried not to let my professional training shape my interpretation of the city. I wanted to be as open as possible and to use my eyes and my heart to take in what I saw. Of course, I could not forget what I knew. So I found myself overlaying the myths of Venice that were formed from literature, art and cinema with my travel experiences. I started writing a short essay on Venice, in the genre of personal travel writing. But prose was stifling my subject. In the middle of writing, I found myself changing gears and going for a poem. Venice is an untameable beast. The poem came closer to reflecting that.

For my mother, Julia Bastéa, in memoriam:

Quiet water everywhere
Moss on stones
Eaten away, maps of time.
Banners and flags
Masks and pleated silk
Brocade shawls
Ghosts that don't let you get by.

Marco Polo looks up from his prison cell window
Remembers his days of glory in China
And wonders if the Venice he treasured
Wasn't but a jail of immovable bars
And maybe memory itself is, too, a jail
Of gilded bars, deep walls
Echoes of the dead, of the tortured
Bridge of sighs.

Mass at San Marco's, Sunday morning
We dress properly
God forbid we might pass for tourists, and not worshippers
No one is fooled, least of all we.

Inside San Marco's, during Mass
I felt, for the first time,
In a faint, fleeting manner,
The glory that was Byzantium.
A reflection of Constantinople and Hagia Sophia
Maybe the only reflection still in existence
And maybe here I found Justinian's church
In Venice
Still alive, among foreigners,
As was Constantinople, once and ever,
Gilded capital, among foreigners.

And maybe the ghosts
Of the palazzo where we stayed
Were not frightening ghosts
But rather frightened themselves,

Waiting for food and libations
From the tourists, who respect the serenity of the dead.

Old glories attract us
As if we are all children of Venice,
As if we all want to die there
Like Thomas Mann's protagonist
The city's observer, of a century ago,
Recording the fall of the Empire.

Maybe Shakespeare was right
In marrying the city with commerce
Did we come across the Merchant of Venice again?
I found him in a store
Near the Piazza San Marco
He sold me a pair of earrings
"antique glass" he said, in English.
He was probably Jewish—one of the last Venetians,
He countered my haggling by speaking modern Greek,
He learned it one summer, he said,
Taking classes in Venice, along with his son.

Venice once brought goods from East to West
Now the East and the West come to Venice
To sell the ghosts of the past.
Masks of distant carnivals, Murano glass
Handmade paper for correspondence
Dipping fountain pens with glass handles
Leather goods, stamps, fabric bags, stamped with
ancient patterns.

I bought a fabric bag in Venice
A place for small ghosts to hide.
Suddenly, once they're freed from their city's walls,
They unfurl ferociously
Like clouds of angry genies
Taking over the sky, the earth,
Our minds,
Our souls.



Words and photography by Eleni Bastéa

Eleni teaches at the University of New Mexico, USA. A faculty research grant (RAC) from her university helped to make the trip to Venice possible. Currently, she is preparing an art exhibit with images and text about Venice. www.elenibastea.com

