

Diary Transcription

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Here is a direct transcription from my diary—a few days from 1985.

I've reproduced the pages precisely as I found them, including line breaks. (To tell the truth: I've made a few cuts, and corrected the spelling of some Italian names.)

Each "text box" represents a separate diary page.

Beginning in 1976, when I was a college freshman, I've written virtually every day in a diary, always longhand. For most of these years, from 1976 to 2008, I've used National Brand blue-covered Chemistry Notebooks, lined. A few years ago, National Brand changed the color and texture of the covers. The original, nubbly, semi-corrugated grey-blue turned into a shiny purple-blue. I prefer the earlier style, but I've resigned myself to the new wave.

One day I hope to type up all my journals; that prospect of thorough transcription amuses and horrifies me.

Vicenza, September 2, 1985 – Mildly drunk – so that what I say & feel is unclear. Found a nice trattoria in the country above our monastery – ordered each a veal chop, which tasted of the fire & grill on which it was cooked. Saw Palladio’s Villa Rotunda, circle with square within facade. A lizard crawled into the unused well; only one side of the 4-side-symmetrical facade had intact a window, letting us peer into the perfect ballroom. We lay on the dirt. Steve commented that the villa looked best from its corners, & that the villa touched him. I’m not touched; but the Palladio buildings we’ve seen are precise. Their classicism reminds me of Alexander Pope. We walked down the Corso Palladio, saw palazzos. We had gelato near the Teatro Olimpico, which was closed

for rehearsals.

Our room looks like a convent
– a cross above the bureau (with
a crucified Christ) – and a girl in
prayer above our sodomite's night
table. The man with the black glove,
who haunted me in Venice, is here,
too – but now without the glove. He
was watching T.V. with two elderly
women when we returned from dinner.

Steve hid the wine bottle in his
sweater – we took home the remains.

It's "Mellini – Vino
Giovane di Castellina – Pozzi a'
Rosi." We always ask for local
wine.

We couldn't enter Villa
Foscari at Malcontenta – girl on
a bicycle rode out of the gate,
locked it, said it wasn't open.
Willow trees utterly obscure its
facade from view; the side facing

the stagnant canal reveals two
idiosyncratic staircases; I like
Palladio's staircases, Villa Rotunda's
strong deck of cards, centered.
We bought soap, soap dishes, &
toothpaste in Malcontenta, couldn't
find acqua fresca in the super-
markets – which reminds me that
our tirami su for desert
tonight was served frozen. We
had ravioli alla panna e
speck – bits of salt pork. The
panna (cream) here tastes strongly
of the origins of milk – is twice
delicious. We ate lunch in the
Piazza dei Signori, near the pink
loggia, the “man-and-boy” basilica.
(I said that the two orders of
the Palladian basilica reminded me
of a man and boy.) We ate
penne alla carciofi (the waitress
corrected my pronunciation of carciofi) –

tasted dangerously close to cafeteria
pasta casseroles. Everyone at the
surrounding tables spoke French;
old man beside us had a terrible
cleft palate, which the
nasal French language seemed
particularly to emphasize and to
be ill-suited for.

At breakfast in Venice the
chambermaid, when she gave us our
two pitchers – hot milk and hot coffee –
said “Grazie” for yesterday’s tip.
So we gave her a second tip.
We then took a walk to the St.
Marco Piazza, after changing \$150
each near the Rialto. We stood
facing San Marco’s domes – & I felt
like I at last could see the
central, largest dome – as if the
entire stay in Venice I’d been
unable to see it. I no longer
minded the cardboard shack covering

half of the facade. We didn't walk
down to the Ducal Palace. I
remember (already it's past)
understanding the asymmetry of the
tower, its row of button windows also,
echoingly, asymmetrical. Looked out
at the palazzi on the Grand
Canal as we took our final boat
ride to the Piazzale Roma to rent
our car: the water comes up to
the houses' very doors. The
presence of the water removes ordinary
circumstances & rules; we are in
a different time. (James Merrill
at dinner last night influences this.)
We can see the Villa Rotunda
from where we parked our white
Fiat. (Roosters around the Villa
Rotunda.) And we see a small
tidy vineyard from the Casa S.
Raffaele itself. Arcades
(ΠΠΠΠΠ) like in Bologna

form a pilgrim's path up to the
church atop our hill – we
tried to enter it, but services were
in progress. Chairs in the retreat
behind the wall; two women
alternate in manning the desk. They
seem sisters. Nuns everywhere
around. One of the sisters is
unresponsive – maybe hard of
hearing. She's one of those Italians
(the duller ones, like tonight's
waiter) who don't slow down their
Italian for us, even though it's plain
we're not comprehending.

Saw Villa Valmarana –
Tiepolo frescoes. A family seemed
to be half-heartedly living there –
old records, autobiography of Guy
de Rothschild, television, telephone –
maybe they come down from their
daytime upstairs quarters at night –
carefully grouped, embarrassed

furniture in the frescoed rooms.

9/3 – Day in the car – first to see
the human chessboard in Marostica
(it was covered by a market) –
then to Bassano del Grappa,
where we ate lunch on a piazza.
Then to Villa Barbaro in Maser –
we toured Veronese's frescoed
rooms – glass side doors, through
which we saw the present owners'
effects. Teatro Olimpico this
morning. American woman said
she was disappointed that the man
who is supposed to speak to demonstrate
the Teatro's acoustics was not there.

We saw a false-perspective city
behind the flat stage set. Two
towns – Castelfranco (Palladio
church, conservatory – cellists)
and Asolo, home of Eleanor
Duse, enunciator, attrice, interpreter

of Gabriele D'Annunzio's works.

Stole one of the Orfei posters which
covered Castelfranco. Conversed
with a woman in a bar in Asolo –
she was interested when we told
her we were from New York.

Dinner today at Scudo di Francia –
French-style manners & linen,
baccala which frightened me; bitter
creme caramel. I bit my tongue
in Bassano; we bought porcini &
a cream pitcher. Veneto is smoggy,
full of trucks & autostrade.

The villas are punctuated by
human statuary – like trees,
columns – they stand in the middle of
a large, owned space, & express
that ownership. A wall is
always dull – it must be frescoed
into something more airy &
inviting than a wall. So one
wall has a false, painted door,

a painted servant opening that door.

In the Villa at Maser, we must
wear padded slippers to protect the
floors – not particularly valuable or
beautiful floors, either. We contemplate
urinating outside a closed &
tree-concealed Villa Emo. We
see a Mondrian-like family tomb,
the Brion-Vega Cimitero. On the
way we almost hit a dog. My
hour's fear is that we will send
someone to the cemetery we're
trying to find. Many heavy
women on bicycles & motorbikes,
in dresses – a woman in virtually
see-through white in Bassano,
she gathers the material to
create crotch-concealing folds when
she bends over. The maid was
in our room before 9:30 this
morning; this evening before
dinner I saw the black-gloved

man strolling in the pebbled
driveway, smoking. His bad
hand was in his pocket.

9/4 – Roma – After traveling through
Umbria, through Florence (I
was heartbroken to see again the
Duomo), in the company of two
Sondra-Wheeler-like women –
one is mother, the other is a
travel agent with a dyed blonde
bouffant, who warns me against
becoming over-educated, as she is.
In Rome, we see the surprisingly
monumental Trevi Fountain, like
the Teatro Olimpico's stage set –
wild & calm sea. White statues –
but all of the city's white
monuments are soot-blackened.
We walk to the Campidoglio –
Michelangelo's austere Pythagorean
orders – look over to the ruins,

the illuminated corset of the
Colosseum – the Spanish steps,
which we climb – to see the
sun set over many domes, none
of them the Pantheon. I see
Saint Peter's dome. Men everywhere –
sexed profusion. The young men
outside parked cars in the
Piazza del Popolo are younger
than I am – I've become one of
those older men who form the
admiring fabric, justifying the
young sauntering against cars.
Two churches are identical in
the Piazza.

And we drove again to Venice –
today a kind of retrospective.
Boat service was suspended, so
we had to walk from Piazzale
Roma to the train station. We had
train trauma – all seats on
our train were reserved. But we

handled the trauma better than
our ugly American friends, who
spoke English only loudly & more
slowly when the conductor
clearly spoke no English. Dinner
tonight at a Tuscan restaurant,
Da Mario's – Mario, the
proprietor, has bushy eyebrows,
like Brezhnev. A woman in the
Rapido this afternoon looked like
Nancy Reagan. Impossible to
cross near the Vittorio Emanuele
monument to the Campidoglio –
unstoppered car flow. Changed
\$50 at Termini. Our room
at Pensione Forte is
“dear” – 164.000, but with bathroom.

Above all, men in Piazza
del Popolo, on the Spanish steps,
at the Trevi Fountain. I threw
in a 1.50 piece, but straight

on – and I notice that the
proper way to throw in coins is to
sit on the fountain's rim, facing
away from the water, & toss two
coins over one's shoulder – one for
love, one for luck. I take this
tourist's superstition seriously –
I want to return, before Sunday,
& throw again into the fountain,
this time correctly. I want to
return to Rome – I want my life
to be a life in which return to
Rome is part & parcel. Mournful as
I saw from afar the finger of
the San Marco Tower in Venice –
& the red roof of the Duomo in
Florence. I've returned to
Rome – microcosmically. Gelato at
Rosati's in Piazza del Popolo –
men-boys leaning against their
cars. We had wide Pappardelle
with wild hare sauce, & red

wine from a traditional Chianti
straw flask – pay for as much as
we drink. Saw the Triton Fountain:
four voracious mouths. Things
(monuments) in Rome always look
closer and more accessible than they
are in reality – we see the
Campidoglio from afar, but it
is not a matter of a few steps
to reach it. Same with St.
Peter's – we see it (as we saw
the obelisk of Piazza del Popolo)
from a distance – but it remains
a far object, as we consume
ourselves in the act of approach.

9/5 – Roma again – saw the Pantheon,
the Colosseum, the Baths of
Caracalla from afar, Saint Agnese's

church in Piazza Navona, Santa
Maria Maggiore. But above all the
sexism begins to wear me down – I’m
self-conscious in my gay clothing &
attitude in this city (this country)
where men touch each other freely but
aren’t gay. We go to Via della
Purificazione, near Via Sistina, to
check out “Easy Going,” the gay
disco. We walk past it, wait by
a nearby fountain until we gather
the courage to ask if there’s a
coperto. We ask – 12000 apiece.
We don’t enter. I feel women in
cars notice my brightly-striped,
feminine pants – are they mocking
me? Is “mockery” an
accurate assessment?
We find, near the Baths of
Caracalla (Piramide stop of the
Metropolitana) a ripped-up shred
of a gay porn magazine – black

cock up a white ass. Later, in the vicinity, we see another half page of gay porn – this time a blond teenager, holding his growing penis. Across from the baths, we sat at a bench near another bench, on which a heavy woman seemed to be knitting. A car pulls up – she takes the man (who gets out of the car) behind a sheet she’s pinned or hammered to the rock, to create a tent for her illegality. I see her hammering the tent to the rock, the man exiting, buckling his belt. Five minutes later, another man drives up. And yet the young man at the table behind Steve at tonight’s

restaurant looked like a kouros –
black hair, black eyebrows, perfect
nose, white teeth – but his
face didn't express
modulations. It was stern
& cool, like a machete, then
it smiled. I resent Rome's
churlishness. I was moved by Keats's
house, his death-bed room, the lock
of his hair, the life mask beside
the death mask. I didn't
notice the difference between the
two until Steve pointed out that

in one he is dead. The letter
from Keats, saying he is unwell;
Joseph Severn's portrait of a
dying Keats. We went to Keats's
grave – one whose name was writ
in water. And Shelley's. I felt
rested & restored after seeing
expatriate writers buried:
went to Caffè Greco, where
Keats used to dine. The
Spanish Steps mean more because
Keats died in the house beside
them. Saw fragment of
Keats's manuscript for Lamia –
I missed the feel of a
pen – the look of a manuscript page.

The word, “imagination.”

Masculine & arrogant Italian

men. Why do they frighten me?

Their very presence is a kind of

terrorism. We saw a fire under

a car today, near the Palazzo

Quirinale – the family running

away from the car. A marriage

took place at the Campidoglio –

a bride had her picture taken

by the Arch of Titus. I walked

through the ruined house of

the Vestal Virgins. The cruelty

of their celibacy has its contemporary

correlates in the demarcations and

penalties I feel in Rome’s

air: as if the nasty Natalie

Wood in Rebel without a Cause

(when she's still James Dean's
antagonist) was this town's
presiding divinity. Confessionals
in Santa Maria Maggiore are
multilingual, and in use. I see
a bored priest waiting for a
client, a priest gesticulating
definitively into an anonymous
woman's ear. There are a dozen
cats asleep in the Colosseum beyond
the fence which blocks off half of
it. Our restaurant (Archimedes)
smells of car exhaust – we eat
outside.

9/6 – Preferred 3 Caravaggios to the
Sistine Chapel – discovered only
late in the game that the panels
on Michelangelo's ceiling make more
sense if seen from the back of
the room – saw Michelangelo's

nude, pelting Last Judgment –
Raphael's rooms, including the
School of Athens – Apollo
Belvedere & the Laocoön – and
ate mozzarella & mortadella on a
panina near the Vatican – felt
nauseated at Castel Sant' Angelo –
hummed Tosca, throughout the
experience – Roman young men
put arms around each other –
girls lock arms – but it's a
deceptive language – dinner at
Arnoldo's near Campo dei Fiori – ate
inside, opposite a poster for a
Maria Callas tribute (1979) –
crepes, containing chocolate gelato –
went into a bookstore, Shakespeare
and Company – bought book of
Italian poems for my mother, asked
the owner of the store if she
knew the poet, & if the poet
was still living.

Coffee granita at Sant'

Eustache. At dinner, agnoletti
with creme & peas, vitello alla
mandorle, house vino bianco in a
white porcelain or ceramic
watering can – long circular
ramp in Castel Sant'Angelo –

The dome of St. Peter's, the
thick clear typographical
Roman lettering – the Bernini
altarpiece, so Hollywood –

Everyone in Rome, on its streets,
is very young – I tried on a pair
of red patent leather boat shoes
at a store called Al Capone's;
the salesman spoke English. I
gave him my American size.

I didn't tease my hair into curls
tonight – combed it straight
back, & fixed it with Tenax.

Here, at Pensione Forte, on
Via Margutta, in Rome, I smell

car fumes, & I feel that I am
aging – feel as if overnight I
have lost some bloom – is it my
subtly-receding hairline, a
lack of luster in my hair, my
dislike of these black glasses?
Rome makes me feel unattractive.
Sex is all over the streets but I
don't know where to find the
homosexuals.

9/8 – Last full day in Rome. We slept
accidentally until 11:00 – then waited
too long to change \$100 into lire at the
American Express Office at the Spanish
Steps. Today I strive to appreciate
Rome as if I were going to die
without seeing its green-blue fountain
waters again – because I am at the
Piazza Navona – the square in which
I am at home, square not a square,
but a rectangle. I'm before the

tremendous Fountain of the Four Rivers,
which Steve is sketching – can't
fit the impossibly high obelisk on
his paper. A boy urinating a
few feet behind us; we're before the
Church of S. Agnese. A horse
courses through the space between the
two walls of rock. The color of the
water is swimming pool turquoise –
is that the wonder of Italy – its
familiarity? Coffee granita at
Sant'Eustache was our
late breakfast. I just had a
bicchiere of acqua minerale at
Tre Scalini. Tomorrow I won't
be here. We saw the Tortoise Fountain,
Piazza Mattei – the four green youths;
we saw the Theater of Marcellus,
which grew into a palazzo; we saw
the Campidoglio again, and looked over
the Roman Forum. There are pieces of
column lying abandoned all over Rome.

The most astonishing fact about
the Pantheon, which we revisited
after breakfast, is the weight the
columns proclaim they're upholding:
they aren't cosmetic columns of the
Renaissance. Large circle open at the
top of the Pantheon: I saw clouds
moving past it – and gutters for
rainwater (ΔΔΔΔ) on the floor – small
beadwork pattern. Simple Parthenon-
like pediment, and the large letters,
MAGRIPPA. Water everywhere in
Rome – even pouring over coconuts
on streetstands. Ate lunch near the
Tempietto – which was closed – so
we peered through a gate at its
gazebo-like, thimble-like, carnival-
ticket-booth-like perfect roundness.
Saw a mentally or physically disabled
triptych sharing the field on which
we lunched – boy with just shorts,
couldn't hold his head up by himself,

father (?) in a wheelchair. Our
lunch was two ovoline of mozzarella,
which I made the mistake of
carrying sans plastic bag directly to
the cashier (cassa). We closed the
shutters at eight this morning at the
Pensione Forte. There was a white angel
in yesterday's "School of Athens."
NOBILITAVIT – the last word on
the obelisk above the Fountain of the
Four Rivers. The pretentious architects
conversing on the steps of the
Tempietto. Bathrooms closed before the
museum, yesterday at the Vatican.
The height of St. Peter's made me stretch
my eyeballs – the hugeness of the proportions
made itself felt in the
physical effort of my eyes stretching to
take it in. The Pantheon makes me
think of Emerson's "transparent eyeball,"
and a Titian "Deposition" in Venice
made me think of Coleridge's

reconciliation of opposites. I'm
thinking these days of
Christmas, and have bought each
of my family (except my father, who
won't be there for Christmas) a souvenir
of Italy – I lugged around all day a
calendar for Ian. I'm thinking of
Christmas because it's the furthest
gift-giving in the past: if I am a
corridor, then Christmas, the opening of
gifts, my mother's intention to give, the
silence of this instant of my appreciation
of her intention to give, is that
corridor's first room. And I'm
here in a later room – Rome – and this
all relates to my feeling of age,
wishing to put Oil of Olay on my
skin. I love Rome, but I
couldn't wear fish pants here.
On my next trip I want a small
typewriter. Also dreamt of Cliff
last night – Cliff arriving at an

apartment which wasn't quite mine.

There are birds on the fringes of
a Bernini statue – one on the pinkie,
one on the second finger. I wonder
if I will regret not having bought
soap for myself in Italy.

One hundred birds just flew to meet a
man feeding. Boys put arms around
girls here – they no longer do that in
America. The heterosexuality here is
juvenile and ostentatious. It makes
me wish to rebel & spend the
rest of my life in pantyhose.

Police car just drove in front of us
and blocked Steve's "veduta."

Statues, small ones, against sky, in
the Campidoglio – stone against sky
seems peculiarly Roman. I'm
older than many people in the Piazza
Navona.

I saw the sign, Via del Campidoglio,
in the white rectangle.

Italian men touch their crotches
in public. Italian men scratch
their groins elegantly, without shame.
// Probably my final entry in
Italy – just had my hugest
bowel movement in weeks –
purgation – and I drank less
vino bianco at dinner, Orso
Ottanta – we were given plates &
plates of antipasti the minute we
sat down – mussels, cauliflower,
beans, mushrooms, stuffed yellow
peppers – then had spaghetti
with clams & basil – but I
think they used parsley. To other
tables they brought fruit bowls,
grapes floating in water. In
America I want to serve grapes
in water after dinner.
Walked by the Spanish Steps –
Keats died there – not only did
he die young, but before his death

he experienced sickness. Visited
the Trevi fountain; we each threw
behind our right shoulders two
1.50 pieces, for luck, for love.
Two young men walked arm in
arm – mystery, power – I think
of “Leda and the Swan.” Where is the
knowledge? We’re all packed.
We have a bottle of acqua minerale
in the room. Tonight we won’t
shut the window – we’ll listen
all night to the Vespas, and in
the morning it will be the same
singing I heard this morning that
will wake me. We walked
through a menacing mall, passed
by Sant’Andrea della Valle –
I didn’t want to enter it again,
it would ruin the impression.