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An Almost Ideal City

TenBerke Architects, NYC

June 17 – August 14, 2026

Press release

And now, finally, tell me about Manet's bouquets...

I was born some time ago in America to American parents, so to me everything in Europe has always seemed old. For a long time my internal categories of European architecture were simply- stuff that didn't get blown up during WWII vs. stuff that was built after WWII. It wasn't until I saw *Menilmontant* that I became visually aware of the difference between old European things and even older European things. In that case, between Napoleonic Parisian things and Medieval Parisian things.

You know how if you travel a meaningful distance in any direction you might find, on observation, that all of the details are just a little bit different? The street signs, the bricks, the stones that make the street, the grass, the stones in the grass, even the earth- everything is just *so-* and different than it is at home.

I read something once, I think, called "*On Visiting Kafka's Grave*", a personal essay by Helene Cixous...

It was nearly two decades ago, but the gist, as I remember it, is that our Hero goes to Prague to visit the grave of Franz Kafka, but once at the cemetery, finds herself unable to locate it. And from there things get sort of psychedelic. It becomes unclear whether she visited the cemetery or even Prague to begin with. But I recall that she claims Kafka's headstone is blindingly white.

Years later in Athens, I visited the Acropolis on a suffocating summer afternoon, and found that with the marriage of such a cruelly uncompromising sun and a complete absence of shade, I couldn't really see anything at all. The marble, even in its advanced age, was reflecting light, screamingly, here, there and everywhere, and all at once. A meaningful direct address of any object here would be unlikely.

In that moment I thought of the Cixous. I smiled to myself at the absurdity of traveling such a great distance to regard these objects and finally, in the anticipated moment of physical proximity, of actualization, being neutered by the very environment that I had forced myself into. I mean who goes to Greece in August.

The thing is, I have never been able to find that Cixous essay on Kafka and his grave. I am certain that I read it, but I guess I may have made the whole thing up. And it's not like I'm obsessed with the Frankfurt School or anything. I'm really not.

Do you live in a city and have a dog? One thing you might notice if you take three idle walks around the block every day is how fascinated your dog is in the creases of their built environment. Dogs really like the edge where the sidewalk ends and the buildings begin. Ground Zero for the urban x-y axis is of great interest to dogs. At least it was to my dog.

If a dog were to make art I wonder if that art might be a collection of photographs or drawings of favorite stones along their well trodden path. Marking time sort of like Sisyphus, if Sisyphus found beauty in the comfort of knowing exactly what he had to do and where he had to be, all the time, and if that permitted him to appreciate details he might have otherwise ignored.

Maybe one day you'll be strolling down a street in Cologne or some place else and you'll find yourself caught on some arbitrary architectural detail, snagged, just for a second. You might think,

That looks just like one of Viola's pictures

And padding down that same street in the opposite direction might be some stoned tourist, and maybe he sees that same little nuance, is derailed by it just like you are, and maybe he is even thinking something that approximates what you're thinking, at precisely the same time.

And hey, maybe that stoned tourist is me.

Luca Dellaverson, may 2026