

D. E. STEWARD

Junea

In Europe for a week from Tokyo, two days Paris, two days Naples,
leave from Rome

“How often do you think about it?”

“Every day, I think of it every day, I’m Japanese”

For many years here after Vesuvius exploded in AD 79 everyone must
have thought of it every day

Not as close as Table Mountain to Cape Town but as dominant

Cliff and caldera

Vesuvius closer than Fuji to Fukushima, to Tokyo, to Hiroshima,
Nagasaki, to Nanjing, to Auschwitz, to Bergen-Belsen, to Verdun, to
Wounded Knee, My Lai, Cambodia, to Kigali and the Virungas

Pangas slashing, Little Boy | Fat Man on their way down

Zyklon B and Kalashnikovs

“Life is indefinite”—2012 graffiti near the Naples airport repeated near
the Duomo

Immensely comfortable on the Duomo’s wide marble steps as if sprawled
there in the early 1600s listening to the deep richness of a dulciana
coming from the nave

Stability of space

Regretfully ignorant and so only haphazardly imagining, inferring,
what has gone on in this place

Temples before the Christian era back to the beginning of Naples and
before that the Duomo’s site was probably a Neolithic ceremonial site

The past wrapped with the present inexorably

In the terms of the ancients

Since what to them had passed was not in the past

D. E. STEWARD

They lived with multiple pasts as real to them as their present

The Lucanians, Ionians, and other Greeks, in what was to be Rome's and our Campania

Cumae, one of the many Ionian city-states, founded Neapolis around AD 600, the time of Sappho and Alkman

The images always there, a laughing 2012 woman's luxurious dark auburn hair open to her hips in the sun, its hint of Grecian curls, the sea nearby within its constant horizon

Via del Duomo in Naples stretching straight through the city down from the hills and Via Foria to the sea

Alkman's *Fish in the salt deep of the violet sea, / And long-winged birds*

Via dei Tribunali around the corner, the spine of Roman Neapolis

The three *decumani* of Roman Neapolis still the heart of the *Centro Storico*

Streets surveyor-straight like all Roman *viae*

Much of Via dei Tribunali still paved with the large, polygonal blocks of black basalt

The Romans called them *saxum quadratum*, the *summa crusta* crowned for drainage

There as Romans laid them and slick when wet

Basalt in Campania, stone of the region everywhere across the empire, and imagine carts, wagons, and chariots having bumpy transit

But their road maintenance was sound, the concrete filler gone now between the flush blocks that made Roman *viae* smooth

On Via dei Tribunali in the Baroque chapel of an orphanage, a flaring, dramatically topsy-turvy Caravaggio, his *Le sette opere di Misericordia* from 1607, three meters high

D. E. STEWARD

The angel's threatening gray wings the quintessence of severe Baroque Christianity

The seven acts of mercy, charity, and grace graphically instructive beyond doubt

It must have been a vicious, dagger-wielding world that Caravaggio implies

Guttering candles, doors kicked in, clerical dictates, arbitrary fate

The vividly baroque Naples of that huge painting endures

"SPOILT" graffiti in spring 2012 on Via del Duomo and other places around the city in that peculiarly British form

Transitory anarchism, right there next to the "SPOILT," the old anarchist encircled "A"

The anarchic always around in Italy, Spartacus up to Sacco-Vanzetti through to the Brigatti-Rossi and this century's garbage strikes, Nicola Sacco came to Massachusetts from behind Foggia in Naples' Apulian hinterland

As Boston once was to New York, Naples has been to Rome

Giambattista Vico, 1668–1744, perhaps the first modern historian, was a Napolitano

La scienza nuova

Vico's history of human societies and human institutions, not that of royalty and clerics

The common, inevitable rituals of marriage, burial, abstract belief

Specific experience not transcendent and repeating only in context

Like objects from the deep past, a hand ax, a Clovis point, a Jomon shard

In the regularity of the matter-of-fact, someone last handled it, chipped at or chucked it away, while sitting on a boulder or a log

D. E. STEWARD

Brushing away flies, favoring a sore toe, enjoying watching a fast-moving sky, they put it down and walked away

One object of an infinite number of objects handled, abandoned, and left to time

For the chipper, potter, or passerby in that instant in the past, handling it was a single concern or task in a normal day

And now and then such things formed by humans turn up to allow definitive archaeological insights into the deep history of that place, that particular past

As most things we handle are abandoned, pulped, burned, recycled, buried in landfills, like random objects that turned up in the ash rubble of Tower Two, down the line random objects of ours will turn up

A broken mug discarded, the farmer's fractured clevis or broken tractor part, a dead cell phone, a beer can, thrown out like the Paleolithic chipper, the North American flintman and the ancient Japanese potter discarded what they had in hand

And so will Vico's continuities be enhanced

It does not end

Great Naples goes on

Its bay with Vesuvius behind is a theater site of humankind

Whatever Fukushimas and ends of empires are ahead