

Old Manhattan Has Disappeared Before My Eyes

by Phyllis Chesler



I knew it was all over when they shut down the Horn and Hardart Automat, the restaurant where portions of food appeared in glass cages—but their liberation could be purchased with as little as five cents. Oh, those baked beans! And those tempting slices of pie! They took Chock Full o' Nuts away along with their nutty, dark raisin bread and cream cheese sandwiches. Schraffts, a genteel women-only preserve, which served elegant little sandwiches and dessert (and where I kept to myself and studied while in graduate school)—lost in the mists of memory. The Peacock Cafe, on West 4th St., where they started my cappuccino the moment I entered, and where I also sat, read, and wrote—now closed. The Copa is gone as is the Waldorf Astoria, with its gilded pagan facade and Art Deco magnificence, sold to the Chinese government. Always new restaurants keep popping up and then closing due to sky-high

rents. Increasingly, the Manhattan sky has been pierced by heartless, mirrored skyscrapers, so that the human frame is increasingly diminished; these towering temples of greed put us all in our lowly place.

Nearly sixty years ago, when I visited Europe for the first time, the buildings did not yet dwarf the human frame, one felt grounded, centered, and of consequence.