

1/24 Messenger the spacecraft, as distinct from the *Messenger* the barrel organ, sent back some socko photos of Mercury's craters and basins – the latter being concavities broader than 250 km. How this got started quien sabe, but the visible Mercurial impact zones are named for artists and writers. Matisse got his basin thirty-five odd years ago when it was photographed by Mariner 10. He keeps company with Vivaldi, Sholem Aleichem, Abu Nuwas, Bartók, Byron, Brunelleschi, Hayden, Heine, Basho, Imhotep, Zhao Mengfu, Murasaki, Judah Halevi, Surdas, Li Po, Petrarch, Martí, Sor Juana, Velázquez, Aandaal, Shelley, Saadi – the index is lengthy and includes a host of your A-list culture heroes.

Ah, to be able to say one's career has thus cratered! Keep your mundane prizes and phony honorifics. This one is the celestial real McCoy. Dare one hope there might be, one day, an asteroid bound for Mercury with your name on it?

Down, Vanity! (Most hideous of the nine dwarfs).

*Only when the last tree has died and the last river been poisoned and the last fish has been caught will we realize we cannot eat money.*

So ran the saying among certain Cree once upon a time.

In-effing-effible.

*No government fights fascism to destroy it. When the bourgeoisie sees that power is slipping out of its hands, it brings up fascism to hold onto their privileges.*

Detto Buenaventura Durruti.

Roger Bacon, who certainly deserves a Mercurial basin, held that three classes of substance were capable of magic: the herbal, the mineral, and the verbal. Given their leaves of fiber, their inks of copperas and soot, and their words, the book represented, for him, an amalgam of all three.

1/25 Salute Venus. Thrice. Gulls swooping far inland today.

More freedom on the margins.

Noo Yawk City, where people come from every silly walk of life.

“French Twist: Ben denies rate cut tied to SocGen meltdown.” This accompanied by a photo montage of a portrait of Ben Bernacke, double headed, and facing in two directions, his twin craniums joined respectively at the right and left ear. In the background at left, NYSE traders and a jaggy-looking financial chart of the Dow Jones average, and at the right by a shot of the Eiffel Tower and an inset photo of “rogue,” and now fugitive, Société Général trader, Jérôme Kerviel.

You got to love Murdock’s rag. It’s like a “jhizaborgeh” in a Greek coffee shop – the meat may be toxic, but it’s juicy to the max.



Curiouser and curiouser. Jérôme Kerviel, the 31-year old junior-level derivatives gumby the *Post* calls “the poster child for the... world financial crisis” managed to disappear more than \$7 billion of his bank’s assets faster than you could say koo koo kachoo, Jacques Robinson.

Société Générale’s president, Daniel Bouton, describes Kerviel as “a genius of fraud.” Yet Bouton’s mystified because no personal profit motive seems to have inspired the young fellow’s machinations. “Irrational,” says M. Bouton. “His motives are totally incomprehensible.”

Oui? C'est vrai? Totalement? Hmmm. However deeply buried Kerviel's motives may be – as *souterrain* perhaps as Bouton's head in the sand – one might profitably look to Baudrillard's *L'esprit du terrorism*, wherein it is posited that a wildly unbalanced and hegemonic system evolves its own rogue cells as part of an eminently adaptive organic process. The social results of that process may be unpalatable, but hey, there's your etiology in spades, hearts, diamonds and clubs. But of course this assumes one actually wants to know, and communicate to others, what might be going down.

*...They're lying low and they're makin' hay*

*They seem determined to go all the way...*

*...Tweedle-dee Dum and Tweedle-dee Dee...*

Kan ya makan in your distant youth, the French published a magazine – pretty raw stuff as you recall – called *L'actualité*. Comes around.

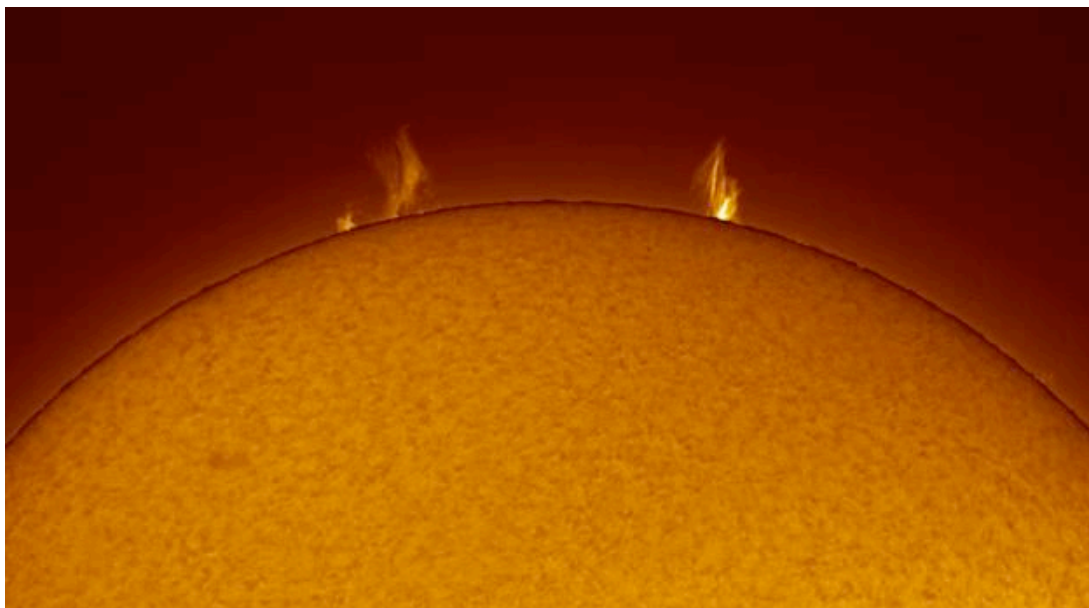
One more head and Bernacke becomes Cerberus, hound-guardian of Hades. Cerberus also being the name of a venture capital cabal that kan ya makan ate Chrysler. John W. Snow, Dubya's second Treasury Secretary, became chairman of Cerberus in late '06. Does the dog whisper work any more? If so, *play dead*.

No, you didn't really read this on the front page of the *Times*: "Egypt moved to restore its border with Gaza on Friday, but Palestinians used a bulldozer to knock down another portion of the wall to continue their shopping spree." *No, no se puede*. Check

with Katie. No, you're not hallucinating – it's the same copy on her computer too. Is *The Onion* is hacking into the *Times's* headlines and playing games? Or is unintended satire – as a manifestation of deep contradictions – speaking yet again, and more harshly than ever, its secret name?

When you read, again, the words “shopping spree” and try to square the image it evokes with what you know of Gaza and circumstances of the Gazans, your mind crashes, and defaults to a now-ancient cartoon image of Wilma and Betty, the *Flintstone* housewives, conspiring to spend the piles of neolithic chips their husbands Fred and Barney hadn't even earned yet. Then off they legged it, out the cave door in a cloud of dust, shouting their battle cry: *Chaaaarge... it!*

And then there's the image of the Egyptian police and military hapless in their brutality or vice versa, trying to push the Gazans back into Gaza – to recork the Jinny as it were back within his bottle. But that, mes amis, is a fairy tale.



Greg Piepol took this photo of the sun today from his backyard in Rockville, MD. These prominences, each more than four earth diameters high, extend out from old man Helios's western limb. Piepol calls his photo "The Two Towers."

While in Darktown, Bloomie maneuvers his budget board, tries to stay ahead of the deficit's looming wave. But the unfolding now in progress is a far bigger story than anyone can encompass. What to do but marvel at beauty of the black hole as you and your six billion plus surfing buddies hang ten along its rim?

A tale of two cities or just one really fucked up one? Por ejemplo, in the jungles of Lower Manhattan last night George Anderson, 47, a software CEO driving a piece of black Mercedes hardware, hit Florence Cioffi, 59, and kept going. Cioffi, a secretary with an insurance brokerage company was lucky enough some years back to be drinking a take-out coffee in Austin Tobin Plaza, rather than upstairs in the office where she worked when the plane hit Tower One a quarter mile above her. Intelligently, she took off running. But Anderson's Mercedes nailed her on Water Street, between Hanover and Old Slip on her way home to Gerritsen Beach, a white working-class enclave on the shore of southeastern Brooklyn – one of those neighborhoods where, if you're black, you need a police escort.

Returning to the scene, Anderson refused a breathalyzer test and was arrested. He abides in *Brookville*, just a bit farther east, and on Long Island's north shore where the annual income is percapita \$85 G's. The Anderson residence looks something like Tara, before the Yankee dogs arrived. If you're black and mistakenly wander over that line, you're less likely to be set upon by local youth with bats, than taken into custody

by the Suffolk County cops. Mais, on ne sais jamais.

Enterprise Engineering, Inc., Anderson's company, headquartered on lower Broadway near Wall, bills itself as an "E-commerce infrastructure and systems integration firm providing technology solutions for the financial services sector." The firm numbers Merrill Lynch, JP Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, Fidelity Investments, Wells Fargo, Putnam Investments, Lehman Brothers, UBS, Union Bank of California, MetLife and Visa among its clients.

At his trial, will Anderson's lawyers mount the first ever "The Global Economy Was Crashing" defense? Sure, why not?

Burns Night. You're not up to addressing a haggis, more like some soup and a rosbif sandwich, but wonder, as often as you may at *such a parcel of rogues in a nation*.

*Fareweel then, to what e'er we were.*

1/26 Eye freeze. Not exactly, but sure feels like it. So cold the wind bicycling west on 25th that your eyes water, and the tears snap to ice crystals before they crest the lower lids.

Prima emails from Benin sobre the enormous pollution in Cotonu:

"The only blue in the air is blue smoke – I have not see one sliver of azure sky since I arrived – just low-lying bleu horrendous, interrupted only by the greasy black smoke of a passing truck or car. If you thought every car manufacturer and every reasonable government enforced the ban on motors not retooled to reduce emissions, you are wrong. They just send those belching, toxicity-farting old motors down to the

third world, naked, unadorned. The worst day was when I was in the textile; the fumes and congestion were almost overwhelming. To see babies splayed against their mothers' backs like frogs, limp, inhaling the stuff: as I have wondered in a few emails, why don't they all drop off like, as Galeano once reported, the birds that fell from the sky on his friend in Mexico City?"

Then she follows up:

"Well, I was a bit relieved to find that the lack of blue (sky, that is) is not entirely due to pollution – at least if you look UP, not ahead into the bleu of butane et al – the lack is aussi because of the Harmattan."

Ah, Harmattan, one among earthgasm's family of amazing crazy-making winds. Harmattan's known to whack out folks and other beasts. Seasonally sucks Sahara into the Troposphere and tradewise across the Gulf of Guinea. Encountering monsoons, Harmattan whisks up tornadoes. And it's said, who knows how verily, that Harmattan brings sand all the way to South America. Diaspora of the minerals, *juste comme les gens, juste comme nous*. You bounce this notion back to Prima and she replies that, indeed, Kamau B., a Bajan by birth, along with many other Antilleans, believes that Harmattan makes hurricanes.





Harmattan haze surrounding Abjua National Mosque in Abuja, Nigeria

Who needs the wooly old 19th century French newspaper *COMIC-FINANCE: Journal Satirique Financier* when you have, tous les jours, la réalité?

Dit Jabès: *When there is nothing left, there will still be sand. There will still be the desert to conjugate the nothing.*

When Jabès lived in Paris, it was in a house in the Fifth, on a little street between Rue Mouffetard and Rue Monge: Rue de l'Épée de bois: Wooden sword street.

In the *Messenger*, you note the further extension of the gambit to blame the global market meltdown on one little fellow – the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back. Thus marshaled to the cause, a certain Barry L. Ritholtz, CEO of FusionIQ, a "New York-based investment research and money management firm," who proclaims "I have little doubt that Société Générale's unwinding of those positions absolutely pressured indexes worldwide."

Amidst their lively account of the attempted unwinding ("As panic swept European markets on Monday, word spread that a big hedge fund was in trouble and dumping stocks. Someone was selling, all right – Société Générale") – which in any case sounds more like trying to loop the thread back on the spool (c.f. the Qi Gong image of silk reeling), reporters Nelson D. Schwartz and Nicola Clark offer an almost lyrical image of calamity's genesis:

"From his desk... on the sixth floor of Société Générale's Alicante building in

the La Défense business district outside Paris, Mr. Kerviel, 31, took huge bullish positions on the Dow Jones Euro Stoxx 50 index and the German DAX..." – totaling some \$75 billionworth of anomalous, wildly aberrant bets.

Strange, eh, when the *Pest* and the *Messenger* are sucking, essentially, the same wind.

Mais, ooh-la-la, La Défense. There's the manifest content, and then there are other degrees of reading. La Défense, before it was La Défense, existed as a hill, a piece of strategic high ground which, over time, got strung into a necklace of perimeter fortifications. In 1871, La Défense served as one of the last redoubts of the Communards against the Prussian forces. Beneath whatever's built, lives a heroic, blood-sanctified mound.

The recasting of La Défense as an ultra-modern business complex – wherein thousands of less buggy versions of Jérôme gamble gazillions from within florescent-lit cubicles – came about during Mitterrand's Grand Projets initiatives of the '80s. The signature structure of the new complex, a carrera marble-faced office building and exhibition hall, takes the form of a vast, hollowed out cube known as La Grande Arche de La Défense. It constitutes the outermost point in a sightline, *l'axe historique*, that, when followed several miles southeastward and into Paris proper, traverses L'Arc de Triomphe, the Champs Elysée, the obelisk at Place de la Concorde, Les Tuilleries, L'Arc du Triomphe du Carrousel to finally arrive at the glass pyramid at the center of the Louvre's Cour Napoleon. Voilà.

Aux barricades? Non, non, mes enfants – aux pyramides!



The Grande Arche de La Défense from the top of the Arc de Triomphe.

And who will come to young Jérôme's defense? Peut-être M. L'Avocat de la terreur himself, Jacques Vergès?

*...Brains in the pot, they're beginning to boil*

*They're dripping with garlic and olive oil...*

In French, l'axe isn't an axe, it's une hache. To get those brains out of the skull then, forget l'axe and go for la hache. Historique or otherwise.

Kan ya makan, circa 2002, a joke circulated in France. To most Americans, yourself included, the name of the protagonist signified not at all:

*Interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy decides it is time to find out which of the French police forces is the most competent. He goes to three forests and releases a marked rabbit in each. Find me that rabbit, he orders.*

*The DST – the counterintelligence, counterterrorist police – plant wiretaps everywhere, They interview the trees and bribe the comeliest female rabbits. They then announce that the rabbit never existed.*

*The gendarmerie surges into the forest, burns it to the ground and hands Sarko a charred corpse – perhaps it was once a rabbit.*

*The policiers arrest every animal they can find. In the morning, they bring Sarko a battered, exhausted badger, who confesses, “I admit it. I’m a rabbit.”*

*Est-ce que ce monde est sérieux?*

*Si, si homme.*