

3/12 Forgive all debts.

Within fifteen years of the end of WWII, men had lost their hats and women the middle parts of their bathing suits. Went the fedora and with it the ceiling on debt. Came the abbreviated two-piece named for the fatefully irradiated atoll and million little 0's appeared and multiplied exponentially. Omphalo-neutrons gone critical en masse. Heads soared cloudward while myriad hoops orbited spiraling waists. South Pacific.

A true Keynesian moment.

Really the only thing left to do was consume more than we made and invent wars. There was, in fact, no form in which to stuff our wild contradictions short of rethinking everything – which most of the race were not inclined to do. Particularly when the surf was up. And then a little man with too much stubble too soon after a shave, “opened up” China and took the dollar off the gold standard. And the big gray bankers who’d moved his pawn piece eastward saw that their move was good.

By which time life had become a beach, which is something like a desert, both being made of shifting sand, and even a bonehead knows that a fedora will never stay when the ocean winds gust. Or the siroccos blow. With the result that, two generations on, the only song left to sing, in the absence of a silk route, a caravansary, or even a shimmering false oasis, is: *Wouldn't it be nice...* Or have been.

All systems conditional.

Challenger Houston, you are go at throttle up.

Roger. Out.

And never mind the O rings.

Whyo whyo whyo did we ever leave Ohio? Son of a gun gonna have big fun on the Bayou.

Goodbye normal genes...

And it seems to me you lived your life like a Ken doll in the wind...

Hey GI Joe, where you going with that gun in your hand? Or whatever that is in your pocket...

And Barbie, we hardly knew ya.

A tale of three dolls... inaction figures, really, who, no matter how many times you ask them can never tell you where the old gods went. They just don't know.

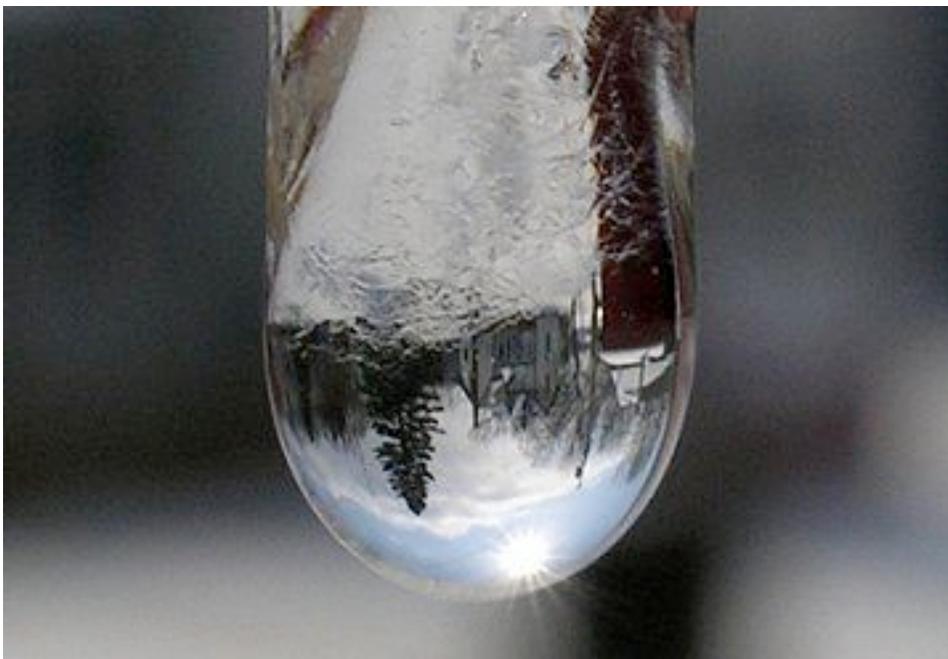
Back, back to the days when we were the Dead End Kids, or the Bowery Boys, and even earlier, Our Gang, aka Little Raskolnikovs.

Yesterday, the space shuttle Endeavour launched so brightly that according to

an observer in Cape Cod, a thousand miles from the Kennedy Center, it lit up the sky
“like an early sunrise.”



Photo: Martin



While a photographer from Minnesota, Lois Reinert, caught the effect of a water droplet at the tip of an icicle acting as a convex lens and inverting the world visible through it. But in an eyeblink...

You've got to pick up every stitch

The rabbit's running in the ditch...

Pero la última puntada la tome el diablo. Seguro.

Buried in yesterday's *Pest*, beneath the first of many likely avalanches of Spitzomania: "New-look Harlem Clears a Big Hurdle." Subhead: "Furor at Rezoning."

"Amid shouts of "Uncle Tom," and "sellout," the City Planning Commission yesterday approved a controversial rezoning plan for 125th Street that would create condos, more performing-arts space and a 21-story office tower with such tony tenants as Major League Baseball.

"The plan was approved 11-2 and now goes to the City Council.

"When the vote was over, opponents booed and Michael Henry Adams, and architectural historian and author of *Harlem Lost & Found*, began a diatribe against the commission's chairwoman, Amanda Burden.

"'You're a rich rich, rich, horrible person. You're destroying our communities. You're a rich, rich socialite. How dare you! You're destroying Harlem. You're getting rid of all the black people,' he screamed.

"He was ejected...."

Bien sur. The city planning commission is a duly constituted body and Michael Henry Adams has no standing, and therefore no right to obstruct the commission's process. Yet, everything he said was true, and everyone knows it.

Nor did Murdoch's mulch identify the commission members who voted for and against the plan, though it's easy to gather that at least some of the cries of "Uncle Tom!" were leveled at commissioner Kenneth J. Knuckles, a Howard University-trained attorney and long time flack for real estate interests who currently presides over a fiefdom known as the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, after having previously worked his magic on the South Bronx, during the period when it was easing into its upscale sobriquet SOBRO.

As for the planning commission as a whole, there isn't much good to say. The mayor appoints seven of 'em, the BP's one each and the Public Advocate one. Despite their "diversity," the commission's members are, as though by some extraordinary coincidence of politics and natural forces entailed to the city's infra-government of finance, insurance and real estate operators. And though their personal styles range from vicious to sentimental and misguided, the street they live on runs, by intent and design, one way.

When it comes to Harlem though, the commission does its dirty work with special zeal. Back at the end of November, they voted to allow Columbia University to continue it's metastasis of West Harlem by an eleven-to-one margin with one abstention.

So, however many people of any color may fall beneath the steamroller, go ahead:

Take up the rich folks' Burden, Amanda

The savage wars of peace –

Meanwhilst in Darktown, big subway ads everywhere underground
alternating versions en inglés y español:

¿No se siente

muy bien hoy?

—————

Feeling under the

weather today?

Big graphic of an umbrella with aspirin droplets falling ‘round it and sheltered
beneath it a box of tissues and a hot water bottle. Then the punchline:

Lo mejor es no subirse al tren.

Cuidese.

—————

Best thing to do is not get on the train.

Take care.

The ad’s body copy asserts that “You may feel worse on the train.” They damn
sure got that part right. Makes a body sick to even contemplate getting on the subway
sometimes. Still, it brings you back to a day, seven plus years ago, when you hopped
the A-train down from 125th Street having just had a some serious cut-and-cover oral
excavations performed by your then-dentist, Dr. J.J. Johnson.

What you wrote about the moment at the time was this:

Jaw still rubbery, but the rest of you feels like it could shatter on contact. Avoiding faces, you raise your eyes to the stream of advertisements above the windows and doors – “car cards” in transit ad parlance. Nestled amidst Dr. Zizmore’s rainbow hallucinations of flawless skin, and Trollman and Glazer’s promise to be “buen abogados y buen amigos,” an MTA public service message begs the million dollar question: WHAT IF YOU ARE THE SICK PASSENGER? Not a sick passenger, the sick passenger? The type below is too small to read, but the tag line at the bottom is clear enough. Is it possible that Michel Foucault never died but went underground, into MTA public relations?

IF YOU ARE NOT WELL, YOU WILL NOT BE LEFT ALONE.

But in the new advertising age, translucently masked by that *Cuidese* bullshit, lies the hidden message: *You’re on your own.*

3/13 Dear self. Take care of self and others.

Yes, the *Times* cropped the classic white bikini shot to a portrait, but her bod gets full play on the *Post*’s front page, and truly Ashley Alexander Dupré – Spitzer’s inamorata of many akas – qualifies bigtime as a tabloid-cover hottie. But it’s a whole different set of thermodynamics at work in the port of Basra. As it will be soon across the border in the Elamite Susa of old where, as legend has it, Esther abided and became a queen and Daniel died in Babylonian captivity. A city too, where Darius the Great built his sphinx-tiled palace. A site now held sacred by the Shi’a.

But back to Basra where the troops are heading: a strategic place, a launching pad for points east. Arab tribesmen destroyed an old Persian settlement there and set it

up fortified encampment in their fight against the Sassanians. The name Al-Basrah, in Arabic etymology, means “the over watching” or “the seeing everything.” The Persian word Bas-rāh or Bassorāh, however, signifies something along the lines of “where many ways come together.” A crossroads city, third largest in Iraq, inhabited by Shi’a, Sunni, Gnostics, old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all.

It was from here, in 639, that Abu Musa conquered a wide swath of eastern Persia. Much, much later, the Brits took it from the Turks and turned it into a modern port. In the next war, it served as a principal supply line for Allied support of Russia. A city with a long history of rebellion, down to the deepest level of language and belief. It’s said that, long ago, Basra maintained it’s own way of pronouncing Qur’an, and a key rhyme within sura 21.

In 1982, the Iranians tried to overwhelm Basra, but succeeded only in creating vast carnage in exchange for little territorial gain. Now, *pace* Yogi Berra, it’s déjà vu all over again: the year 639 redux, but with a different cast of characters. And it’s a world resource game being played, at least until that fuel’s exhausted and we come to terms with the pure, nihilistic forces driving to ever madder extremes the fury of our own worst selves.

The radio in the xerox shop is tuned to an all-news station squawking something about the new governor. They go to a break and the fulsome announcer intones: “News at the speed of lies.” At least that’s what you hear. But he must have said “light.” It seems to work both ways. Nicola, could you please explain this one?

Beneath the headline "'Gentle' Bomber," the *Post*, reports that "Investigators now believe... the Times Square bicycle bomber may have spent several hours in a local McDonalds... cooling his heels waiting for the area to be clear of people and traffic before peddling [sic] over to the military recruiting station and setting of an explosion." Though they label him an "anarchist," they allow that "the lack of bloodlust was the same in previous attacks on the Mexican and British consulates... that are believed to have been committed by the same bomber."

Carlylse Capital isn't. N'existe plus. *Give us a lever long enough and we'll launch ourselves into 0.*

"Severed fingers of five Western contractors were sent to the U.S. military in Iraq," quoth the *Messenger*, "giving the men's relatives hope that they are still alive, a brother of one of the missing men said.

"The men were abducted in two separate incidents that occurred... more than two years ago, a U.S. government official said Thursday in Washington....

"Patrick Reuben, a Minneapolis police officer whose twin brother, Paul Reuben, is among the missing, said late Wednesday the FBI told his family members that 'the fingers were confirmed to be those of the hostages.'...

"Four of the men [employed by the Kuwait-based company Crescent Security] were guards for a convoy ambushed [by men in Iraqi police uniforms] near the Kuwaiti border on Nov. 16, 2006. The fifth, Ronald J. Withrow, 40, of Lubbock, Texas, was a contractor working for JPI Worldwide and abducted on Jan. 5, 2007 near Basra...."

The report goes on to quote Francis Cote, father of one of the captured men:

“It’s possible they did sever (the fingers) to show proof of life. I’m sure somebody from our government was asking for proof of life and I guess proof of life was severing a finger versus delivering a video.”

OK, so some folks are just too backward to communicate via YouTube. Still, it adds a whole new layer of meaning to the trope “digital media.”