

Home, Sweet Home: Dispatches from the Manchurian Candidate Factory: #14

Κύριε, ἐλέησον. (Lord, have mercy.)

My own opinion (borrowing from Richard Wolin) regarding the stuff I write: “Anecdotaly rich but analytically impoverished.”

Distribution: Book group, Adams Blvd./Cochran Ave. and Environs, Selected (wouldn't want to get me face bashed in) Tenants of my Apartment Complex, Relevant Organizations, Others.

Purpose: To Ridicule Few. To Amuse Many. To Inform All.

A reminder: because of frequent computer malfunctions, when I notice an egregious “printer's devil,” I'll **bold** it and add (sic). That'll bitch it.

Copyright notice: You're free to redistribute so long as all contents, including my name, remain intact. This is in the public domain. Bergendahl/Berg (as in Nuremberg)/*Bergie* Hawkins, Los Angeles, 11-28-22

“Having gotten mixed-up in writing, I have been punished for my impudence;
Refractory, I have offended my era's mentality.
The accumulated calumnies could very well get the better of my carcass;
As useless as it may be, my voice will nevertheless survive in these pages.

— Lu Xun's autograph/poem (1933). My translation from the French

“*Les autres, du moins, avaient honte de leur brigandage ; mais que faire avec celui-ci qui en est fier!*” (The others, at least, were ashamed of their depredations; but what's to be done with this one who's proud of them!)

— Julien Benda, quoting from a story by Tolstoy. My translation

“*On argumente mal l'honneur et la beauté d'une action par son utilité.*” (One can't well argue the honor and beauty of an act by referring to its usefulness.)

— Montaigne

“History: A conspiracy, not always among gentlemen, to defraud.” (I can now freely attest to that.)

— Ambrose Bierce (possibly paraphrased)

The Cat Walks (Backward, Natch!):

Withing days of my arrival at school, during the summer session for affirmative action students, a Bob Tajima was among the dozen or so Black and Hispanic students attending. Karen Maples was not. Yet both were regular admits. He: Japanese-American, she Black. That summer, I only saw him in the English classes, nowhere else. What was he doing there? Then, sometime in 1972 or 1973, I heard he was hit by a car while riding a bike on the sidewalk in Pasadena and died. Almost five decades later, at a beach in Santa Monica, I heard the word “Taj,” his nickname.

Lee Browne, of Calech, told me a story about a whore/social worker who once accosted him on a New York street. Later, after I dropped out, he also sent me to a Catholic school nearby to do a small tech job. The driver who took me there a couple of times was an underage girl, a student there. I asked her out, she refused.

In the 1980s, “Meets Cute”: with Subhash Sharma's girlfriend: 1) With her mother at a McDonald's in Santa Monica, they both ignored me 2) In Las Vegas with Subhash and me 3) At a Yoshinoya in Santa Monica, Ken Kobayakawa(?), software manager at Teledyne Controls, saw us and asked me: “is that your sister”?

In 1982, Reuven Levy suggested abruptly, out of the blue, that I find a rich woman, his words, to support me. Could this have been prompted by the four years I lived in the house of Lorraine Griffith, my landlady, in Pasadena?

At Terminal Data in 1982, my boss, Tom Liszczak fired me after three months, perhaps in too contrived a way? Months later, while manager at Xentel, the transsexual who had worked in the same room at Terminal Data came in for an interview, saying she had recently been fired by Liszczak. Terminal Data is where I met Reuven Levy. Later, while at Xentel, I even offered him a job.

Reminiscing about a friend, Oscar Alejandro Revey, who once told me a story about his father, a Hungarian-born philologist who, on emigrating to Buenos Aires, started a successful business. Successful, that is, until he was asked to manufacture a lampshade with the likeness of Juan and Eva Perón. To their great dismay, he callously refused. So inconsolable must they have been, so bitter their government's disappointment that Oscar's father eventually found himself “taking a trip 'cause he had to.” Orders for his business having somehow dried up though he was unable, by law, to adjust to straightened business circumstances by laying off workers. How like the workings of our very own Organs of State Security™. How very much alike. With the difference that here, one is explicitly encouraged to emigrate into the bargain. “*Para luchar en otros frentes?*” So much more streamlined a procedure, with nothing much left to chance.

After my first psychotic break, I was with Tom Ellsberg at a Norm's in Santa Monica (since demolished), with at least one person there harassing me verbally from a nearby table. I remember Tom say “It's just pressure.” A phrase repeated back to me by a customer at the Tehran Market a couple of months ago.

1995, in Florence. Irene and I are walking to the Boboli gardens near her apartment. A German accompanied by kids says, as they pass us, walking on the wrong side of the gravel path: “*Negerschwein!*” Irene then eyes me intently. If I remember, it was she who had proposed the visit.

In the last year of Colette's life, as she slowly succumbed to breast cancer, I witnessed three instances of intimidation, verbal but also physical. Now remembering another, quite off-putting, event I have related elsewhere in which she called attention to her niece's age and build, I think it possible this was meant for her own consumption more than mine. By further lowering her self-respect as a way to ensure there would be no deathbed confession.

An incident with peculiar undertones when, shortly after a visit to John Zhou's house, I visited his shop. At which time his business partner, also Chinese, behaved badly, making a kissing or whistling sound while calling my name. I ignored it and have not returned since. Other murky behavior by John's business partner noted at other times.

La Rubrique des Gueules Cassées (A Section on War-wounded):

For months, have had what seems like the beginning of a cold, but a cold which never gets under way, with a persistent nose drip. I've contacted my doctor at Kaiser. I'm also noticing a bit more of the usual clumsiness, i.e., knocking over my coffee grinder, bumping into things.

According to my pedometer, I walked over six thousand steps during my Saturday outing to Santa Monica while the walk back from my bank two days earlier took twelve thousand. Seven thousand daily steps are considered healthy.

About my mood, often the usual (when alone) goofyness, complete with the occasional jackass laugh (what can the neighbors be thinking). As though you couldn't tell from the stuff I write. I've also figured out what my problem is: I'm. Not. All. There. That is to say, I'm still here...

The Quotable Other, i.e., *L'Enfer, c'est les Autres* — Sartre (Hell is Other People):

Many years ago, a Dr. Tracy Millsap whose father I had visited for computer repair (the visit occasioning, in me at least, definite feelings of unease), during a short conversation, suggests I may suffer from Asperger's syndrome.

In a visit, Michael Reiner, son of a former customer, uses the phrase "Jewish lightning." Words I had once used (by myself). He was concerned about becoming homeless, we also spoke of his diabetes as I noticed he had trouble walking. I suggested he adopt my medical treatment. All in all, a confusing situation for me.

In our complex, I recently note frequent, mostly verbal, incidents with several neighbors, annoying but too routine to mention anymore. From now on, unless something particularly flagrant (or fragrant) happens, I won't write about the doings of the Peyton Place Players™ in the complex I call "our circus" anymore.

Over the last few years, various people have influenced me about the prospects for a resolution of this scandal and chances for a quick fix. Some seem to fuel an enthusiasm with phrases like: "Real soon, now," "Wait a little longer" or "You hit a home run," etc, etc, etc. Others, instead, ridicule my attempts at generating a scandal (if not necessarily justice). I overhear comments which I interpret as discouraging and/or confusing, things about me and my sister, Irene. In French I call this "*la douche Écossaise*" (the hot and cold shower) as I'm often left betwixt and between emotionally. As I imagine the attitudes, mindsets and practices which led to this impasse and crisis have been building since the end of WWII if not, indeed, since the beginning of the agricultural era (see Diamond or Scheidler), I expect we're in for a long wait either way. So: neither unwarranted optimism nor dark pessimism; the middle road instead. This I call my "Battle of Midway."

Sassenach and His Yankee Demyankee Tricks:

My main 1TB hard disk seems to have given up the ghost. Whether permanently or not, I don't know. I've decided to start fresh with a new disk, leaving the damaged one untouched. And since I struggled (unsuccessfully) for over a year to make both a full data backup and image, this could be a problem. A-and what of my carefully curated porn collection, you ask? Likely gone. All gone, I tell you! Never mind, my "*flucht nach vorn*" (escaping by going forward) proceeds apace.

(11-29-22) Was thinking how like some verbal tricks of the Organs of State Security™ were those of a classmates in high school who once, while I played a game of chess with another student; sat nearby and verbally harassed me throughout. Someone once said that life is only high school with money...

Now for a bit of arithmetic: (Technical Wizardry + Confidence Tricks) x the Ever-present Mystification = Sassenach's™ "Tricknology." There's a nice counter though, one only has to think of "*Ou est le 'Nihil Mirari' de Horace?*" — Stendhal (Remember Horace's admonition: "Be astonished by nothing")

Items, all using electronics, malfunctioning at random times. Sometimes in bizarre ways I've never before seen. Curious behavior beginning this year.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Eyeball warmer pad, goes on the blink (so to speak) at random times | 4. Lab power supply displays wrong values | 8. Semiconductor device tester, unless I'm crazy, something's very wrong here |
| 2. Induction stovetop | 5. Trusty DVM, made by Fluke no less | 9. Cell phone, computers |
| 3. Occasional odd fluctuations in 110VAC | 6. Yogurt maker | 10. MP3 music sometimes just not <i>right</i> |
| | 7. Miniature DC-DC lab power supply | |

Ah, that good old-fashioned American knowhow.

(12-10-22) Today, while setting up my "Democracy Wall" display at the Santa Monica library; as I unfolded a portable table, I noticed an extra small plastic foot insert of a different kind than the ones which came with the table. Loose in the cavity of the folded table, it had not been there the previous day when I setup the display in a practice run outside my bungalow.

Juegos de Manos, Juegos de Villanos:

Aside from the occasional "Meet Cute" with one or another of neighbor Tyson's Merry Band of Desperadoes™, I have nothing to report, thankfully.

Speed Bumps on the Road to Ragnarök:

L.R.'s (an acquaintance) free computer saga <insert demented cackle>:

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Earlier this year, I offer her a free PC. | 7. She cannot read print, too fine, she says. | 13. I buy more RAM to speed up slow PC. |
| 2. She asks for help finding cheap internet. | 8. She mails papers without required docs. | 14. In error, she gets a bill for tech visit. |
| 3. I fill out application for reduced rate. | 9. I make second application, accepted. | 15. DSL disconnect for non-payment. |
| 4. Bring it to her but she's not home. | 10. I find her apt. has no active phone line. | 16. Extra charge removed, reconnection fee. |
| 5. Mail paper from post office across street. | 11. ATT technician visits to fix problem | 17. Says I'm too slow. I say: puts PC at curb. |
| 6. A long delay before letter reaches her. | 12. PC working but she forgot password. | 18. On 11-29-22, I'm still dealing with bill. |

(12-2-22) Being well medicated today. First, the importunate visit by an AFJ worker regarding the pantry demolition "project" for which I still have no official, written notice of any kind from anyone (including the City). What kind of a place is this, anyhow? This man wanted entry, which request I refused as no written notice had been given. A stickler for the rules, I am. This *Aktion* followed hard on by a serenade featuring Brother *Cantinflas* and friends in a disjointed-sounding conversation outside his bungalow (I was working on my steps). Then, around 4PM, went to a customer in West LA on Santa Monica bus #7. I sat near a woman who, from past La Brea till nearly Avenue of the Stars, talked uninterruptedly on her phone. With one brief moment of silence during a phone "conversation" lasting up to twenty minutes. Throughout, I could not discern the faintest thread of a theme. Astonishing. On the same bus, also heard another passenger's surprisingly coherent fragment in an otherwise equally senseless conversation in which mention was made of someone "strutting about without a car."

(12-7-22) A Tempest in a Chamberpot™? Today, due to the, by now, legendary ~~elusiveness~~ otherworldliness of the "Brother from Another Planet™," (pace John Sayles) he made a mistake which could have been serious. Some background: 1) A customer, an eBay repeat buyer, orders more components, paying cash as he is buying in person. 2) My landlord schedules an inspection and, as I much prefer to avoid direct contact, I make plans to be away. 3) Having previously assembled my new cart for street displays of my book and "Democracy Wall," I need to do a test run on buses. The conjunction of these events plus my decisions leads me to the bank with cart in tow. Reaching it after taking two buses, on the return trip, I'm told the driver of the #212 simply has no room for my cart! My set response being to *never* argue (I've had over a year's worth of minor aggravation from drivers), I thank her and *immediately* begin walking the five miles home; not (yet) thinking of the stretch of La Brea where there is. No. Sidewalk. For. A. Mile. And a blind curve. And so, forced at times to walk on the road, next to the curb, with cars going by at high speed, it belatedly dawns on yr. Friend and Humble Narrator™ that this *might* not have been a good idea. In HSH #13, I said:

“(11-23-22) Even if tomorrow I were to be run over by a truck driven by, say, one of neighbor Tyson’s Merry Band of Desperadoes™, I’d still be coming out ahead when you consider what was originally in store for me. Ya gotta look at the bright side!”

Interesting coincidence. Paraphrasing Kipling: this has been no end of a lesson for me, it will do me no end of good. Therefore, this Saturday; Sunday, at the latest, I’m setting up shop, “Democracy Wall” and all, for the afternoon, in front of the Santa Monica **pubic** (sic) (public, I had written public. I swear it!) library, main branch, at 601 Santa Monica Blvd. The very spot where, you know, I was arrested on felony charges on 10-18-1988. That’ll bitch it. Or should I maybe heed Kevin’s (a former neighbor I ran into a few days ago) leading question and, in his words, lie low?

Why do I get the feeling that these Gentlemen of the *Securitate*™ share traits with both Madison Avenue and Al Capone?

(12-9-22) As I’m sitting outside, working on my Democracy Wall, a post office employee tries to deliver a package, helpfully mentioning it’s from Ukraine (say what?) and that it’s been opened. Later she corrects herself, saying it was from “U-something” (re- say what?). On rousing myself after several attempts by her to get my attention, I go to her truck to find a present from my sister, Irene, in Italy. Opened. I refuse to accept it. What’s more, the package lid just swung open. Whoever opened it didn’t bother to reseal it. This attitude is sometimes known as Mediterranean *je-m’en-foutisme* syndrome. *Landsmann*, whoever you are!

Benelux: A Kushi, it’s True, but a Nice One:

(11-23-22) Today, in the teeth of withering, sustained *Schräge Musik*, both during the outbound as well as the return leg of the mission, units of the F(I)SF/PPA (Free (lower) Slobovian Forces/Peasant People’s Army), ably led by a certain *Comandante Turnip Heldensohn der Heimat wiv’ Oak Leaf Cluster*, carried out a daring, daylight “*Pot Bouille*” *Aktion* deep in the ~~Metropol~~ Metropolis of Los Angeles (credit to Huxley for the name, pity I couldn’t think of it first). And, in spite of a brief, almost pro forma, appearance at a Venice Blvd. bus stop by SS (*Straßenschlampen*) formations, *ces deux pauvres, pauvres jeune filles* (those two poor, poor young girls); which formations our valiant forces repulsed, then scattered with hardly a thought; the operation was not without a certain measure of success. *Česky voják - dobrý voják! Slobovia Irredenta!*

Wink-wink, Nudge-nudge:

Is it common in the average, run-of-the-mill, police state for the government to take an interest in a teenager with nothing in his past to recommend him to the authorities’ attention? Or is this an instance of “*le mal Americain*” (the American illness)?

(12-1-22) Today, a red letter day in which I rode buses to pick up 3kWh’s (40lb) worth of batteries for my Democracy Wall and house solar. Near the end, I heard one of the drivers remind/exhort(?) passengers over the PA system to “not forget anything.” Quite the zealous fellow, wouldn’t you say?

I dimly remember someone in this **circuit** (sic) (circus, I had written circus) which some are pleased to call a housing complex, recently use a phrase of my mother’s: “*Finita la comédie*.” Aside from the (possible) casual heartlessness of it, mother having died in 2015, there is also an inaccuracy which so typifies this whole sorry business. Well informed certain parties are, yet somehow incapable of getting it *quite* right... For she was in the (occasional) habit of saying: “*Finita la comedia*” (Spanish not French). Which is about as close as mother ever got to cynicism...

Conclusions:

I must remind myself of this more often: what’s strange is not the atmosphere surrounding me nowadays. On the contrary, from my current perspective, this is a straightforward (if perhaps desperate) attempt at a cover up. It only *seems* strange due to the contrived situations I find myself in daily. The *really* strange is what came before; beginning, for me, with my meeting Robert Seidenstein in Germany at the age of sixteen. More and more, events present and past that once seemed innocuous, in light of what little I now know, take on a wholly different meaning; painting an increasingly sinister picture of this place (I don’t call it a country anymore). A stranger in a strange land, I’m feeling a bit claustrophobic right now.

The behavior of these Gentlemen of the Organs of State Security™ may have developed a momentum of its own: much as with a cancer, they may not have been able to put a brake on their activities.

(signed)

Le Navet (qui ne fera jamais plus la navette.) The turnip (who, though he once fell off the turnip truck, shall henceforth travel no more.)

P.S. To my sisters, Irene and Colette (the latter dead of breast cancer in 2018): May our wordless tears, both yours and mine, eventually prove invincible.



Elements of today’s “*Pot Bouille*” *Aktion*. The flier folder I’m never seen without, along with a lovely tea kettle I found at the curb.



My “Democracy Wall” display, a day before the Santa Monica library *Aktion*, near the spot of that unpleasant business with the authorities in 1988, 34 years ago.