

UPDATES ON PRACTICAL UTOPIAS AND MEMORY PALACES

Michigan Governor Rick Snyder and others have presented a plan to resolve Detroit's bankruptcy. (<http://nyti.ms/1jUAjws>) It includes the demolition of most of the 78,000 abandoned buildings in the city, but it also imposes draconian reductions on the pensions of retired city workers. Philanthropists have come up with pledges of millions of dollars to keep the world-class collection of the Detroit Institute of the Arts from being sold, but the Buffetts, Gates, and Bloomborgs have not come forward, not even with seed money to help redesign and rebuild the city. And where are the visionary architects and city planners who cannot help but see this as the opportunity of a lifetime? Governor Snyder has suggested that Michigan offer 50,000 special visas to highly qualified immigrants to lure them to the area. Of course, one has to maintain a healthy skepticism regarding Governor Snyder's motivation. The collapse of Detroit and/or its reconstitution as a city not overwhelmingly Black (as it is now) makes a reliably blue state like Michigan into a reliably red state.

Fernando Palazuelo, a Peruvian developer, has just purchased the abandoned Packard Motors plant and its 40-acre site for \$405,000. (<http://nyti.ms/Lw2ltD>) He is part of an international land rush on Detroit to buy up properties at ridiculous prices. Maybe these Asian, European, and Latin American buyers will find their own visionary architects, and they will transform the city piece by piece. However, the question remains:



when as a country will we start being embarrassed by all this? Or even care?

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People are always telling us that rote memorization and "teaching to the test" are bad. But I also know, from painful experience, that there are a good number of American college students who can't add a column of triple-digit figures and have never heard of the Pythagorean theorem. Some things need to be memorized: multiplication tables, vocabulary, and historical timelines, to name a few. It's fine to say someone else will take care of that, just as the Eloi of H.G. Wells' Time Machine abandoned all intellectual pursuits to concentrate on having fun, leaving the difficult stuff to the Morlocks. It sounds like a pretty good idea until we find out that the Eloi are the principal item in the Morlock diet. That is frighteningly pertinent to our current situation, with the 1% busily ingesting the rest of our country. Of course, the Morlocks of today are not the underground trolls of

H.G. Wells' novel. They now wear thousand dollar suits and power ties. If the Eloi reference seems like a stretch, consider the phenomenon of the "Google effect." After reading "On the Road to the Memory Palace," Jim Grabill told me about a study (<http://www.scientificamerican.com/the-internet-has-become-the-external-hard-drive-for-our-memories/>) in which test subjects believed the information on Google was an extension of their brains and therefore learning the information was not necessary. "Incredibly, even though answers came verbatim from a Web site, people in the study had the illusion that their own mental capacities had produced this information, not Google." Entirely separate from the issue of the reliability of said information, that is an appalling revelation.

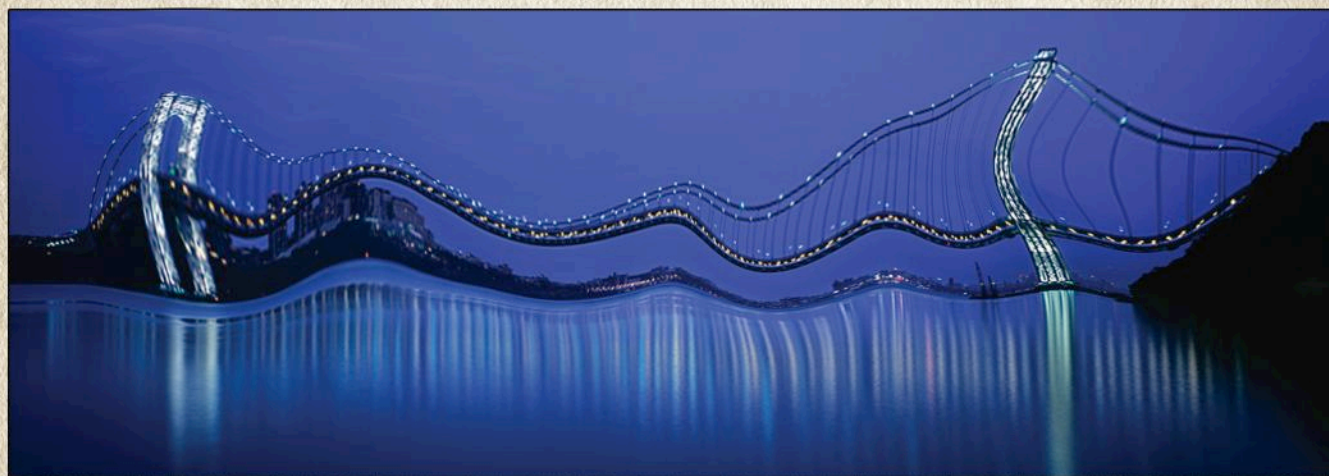
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When I hear about Chris Christie and the George Washington Bridge scandal, I cannot help but remember the brilliant observation of Mark Vanhoenacker in his New York Times article: "The iron grace of bridges remains our simplest metaphor for connectedness and uplifted civic space." (<http://nyti.ms/17aEnx4>) It reminds me of the oneiric bridges that were to link parts of the multi-canaled Practical Utopia in Detroit. The corollary to Vanhoenacker's vision is that the New Jersey scandal is the simplest metaphor for greed, corruption, and extortion destroying everything that civic space ideally represents. It is not a shock that politicians in New Jersey are shamelessly corrupt and apply the methodology of organized crime

to further their ends. The surprise is that a blue state overwhelmingly re-elected Chris Christie when he had given so many examples of the above, and that they interpreted this behavior as a sign of strong leadership. It makes me think of the

time when my home state, California, elected Arnold Schwarzenegger to “clean up” Sacramento. He was dubbed the “Governator.” California has shown a strong affinity for entrusting government to bad actors. That has

not worked out well for us. (Interestingly, an elderly, non-bombastic and very competent Governor Jerry Brown “saved” California, a feat that many had declared impossible, in two or three years. And no movie stars in sight.)



New Books by Our Contributors

Gerald Vizenor, *Blue Ravens* (novel), Wesleyan University Press
Favor of Crows: New and Collected Haiku, Wesleyan University Press

Simon Perchik, *Almost Rain*, River Otter Press

Nico Vassilakis, *All-Purpose Vispo*, BISAC: Literary Criticism/Visual Poetry
(<https://wwwcreatespace.com/4632347>)

Allison Hedge Coke, *Rock, Ghost, Deer: A Story of Survival*, Bison Books
Streaming, Coffee House Press

Will Alexander, *Singing in Magnetic Hoofbeat: Essays, Prose Texts, Interviews
and a Lecture 1991-2007*, Essay Press
Kaleidoscope Omniscience, Skylight Press

Lyn Lifshin, *A Girl Goes Into the Woods*, NYQ Books

Michael Fisher, *Libretto for the Exhausted World*, Spuyten Dyvil Press

David L. James, *No Way to Stop the Bleeding*, Finishing Line Press

Ivan Argüelles, *Ars Poetica: Poems 2006-2013*, Poetry Hotel Press

Brian Swann, *In Late Light (Poetry and Fiction)*, Johns Hopkins University Press

Karen Garthe, *The Banjo Clock*, University of California Press

[Contributors: Please let us know about your new or forthcoming books.]