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Help Create Order; Beggars Opera; Communication

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It is against the law
to beg in the subway.
Help us create order.
Don't give money to lawbreakers.

I heard these lines the other day
while riding the downtown no. 6 train.
They reminded me
of an announcement
I used to hear
some twenty years ago
during the Koch era.

The point then
was about the same,
that homeless people should go away
and leave decent middle-class people alone
to read their newspapers
and contemplate
the course of history
while the stock market
melts
along with the polar icecaps.

After Koch
there was Dinkins
then there was Giuliani
and now there's Bloomberg.  
Mayors come and go  
but some things don't change.

Homeless people  
are here to stay,  
so you'd better get used to them.

Their stories aren't bad  
as theater,  
if you think about them  
as tragedy  
that grips us all.

Soliciting  
in the subway  
is against the law,  
don't give to beggars!

The NYC  
subway system  
belongs to  
paying customers  
who work for a living  
and don't  
make up  
stories  
of phony  
tragedies  
trying to get  
paying customers  
to give up  
their hard-earned cash  
to beggars.

Remember  
That the NYC subway  
belongs to those

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Dave has been living in the streets for five years. He begs every day to get money for a bite to eat.

He has a crutch that he uses just like in The Three Penny Opera that he's never heard of. They didn't assign Brecht in Dave's high school.

The other day on the F train, Dave was telling the story of his accident and how he just got out of the emergency room of Beth Israel Hospital, when a blind man offered to give Dave a dollar.

Dave said, "No man, that's ok!" and quickly made his way out the door and back into the next subway car, as the train moved on.

I LIKE IT

He claimed to be a Vietnam vet. He was raving.

I thought that the cop who patrols this area of Penn Station
would tell him
he’d have to leave.

I've seen him hanging out here
before,
talking too loudly,
but not
out of control.

He walked
up to me
and said
loud and clear,
"How long have you
had that beard?"

I told him,
"About forty years."

He smiled and said,
"It's Cool!
I like it."

∙∙∙∙

She sat in her wheelchair
on West 32nd Street
where she begged every day
starting at about 4 p.m.

“You know,
“SSI’s
not enough
to get by!”

She could hear the blind man
coming towards her:
the tap, tap, tapping of his Cane.

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She always said “hello!”
to him
just before he reached her
chair,
so he’d know to swerve
around her
and make his way
across 7th Avenue
into Penn Station.

They both knew
that she was not
really
saying “hello,”
that it was
just her way
of letting him know
it was time
to swerve
a couple of steps
to the left.

George Snedeker is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the
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