

10/11 Shiva for Millie at her apartment on West 71st Street. Forty years she'd lived there. End of an era. You knew her first as aunt Gladdy's best friend – they'd known one another since grad school at Clark back in the days when psych was jung und annafreud. Many years later, L., the younger of Millie's two daughters became your first serious girlfriend. Later still, after Gladdy died, Millie and your mother Bea grew much closer, and after Bea died, you and Millie formed an unlikely bond, based in part on familiarity over time and also on a kind of multi-leveled affinity that spanned your disparate generations. More recently, you gained a sense of Millie as a steadfast well-wisher her own right – beyond her role as a messenger of Gladys and Bea's posthumous blessings upon your household. But since she prided herself on possessing a rigorously scientific mind, Millie would likely have found that formulation absurdly new age. Nor put much credence in your notion that she was a time traveler.

This afternoon, an assembly of Millie's daughters, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, friends and relations of many stripes, confabulate together in the living room defined for them all by the absence of a presence no longer sitting in her accustomed chair. In the way of such things the mingled voices rise and dip and amidst a ready supply of food and drink, reach a kind of crescendo. *Bing-bong*. A loud electronic chime from the speaker on the bookshelf. But it's not the doorbell, rather an alarm Linda set up so that Millie, as her voice grew weaker, could summon her caregiver. Millie had worn the button on her wrist, until it one of the EMTs who took her to the hospital placed it on the table next to her bed. And now it's gone off. No, there's no one in the bedroom.

Ask the angels who they're calling

Go ask the angels if they're calling to thee

Ask the angels, while they're falling

Who that person could possibly be...

Sang the troubadour Patti Smith kan ya makan.

10/12 Ah them DARPA bums. What pranks will the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency blue-sky dream up next? Whatever these may be they'll be bought with billions in federal warbucks earmarked for Urban Ops (UO) – military strategies and the weapons to go with them, specifically developed for the war against cities.

While on the R&D front, the eggheads at the RAND Corporation have been busy authoring such future (though presently classified) classics as *"People Make the City": Joint Urban Operations Observations and Insights from Afghanistan and Iraq* and *A Tale of Three Cities: Analyzing Joint Urban Operations with a Focus on Fallujah, Al Amara, and Mosul*.

Whereby we revisit Dickens revised with a vengeance: It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, an age when an Organic Micro Air Vehicle in the shape of a fruitfly could ID the presence of bad actors and call down nanobot ballistics to vaporize the street where you live.

Perhaps this particular species of madness will visit Jakarta, Mogadishu, Karachi, Mumbai, Lagos, Beirut or Bay Ridge or some or all of them. Anyplace that houses large numbers of dissatisfied, potentially obstreperous people will find itself locked in the Urban Ops crosshairs. Or as Duane Schattle, a retired Marine lieutenant

colonel, now director of Joint Urban Operations Office at U.S. Joint Forces Command, succinctly puts it: "The cities are the problem."

For his part, Wayne Michael Hall, a retired Army brigadier general and the senior intelligence advisor in Schattle's outfit predicts that "We will be fighting in urban terrain for the next hundred years."

What's special about one hundred? Is it the mythic quality of the figure itself? A nostalgic reference to a simpler, more clear-cut hundred years' war? Or is that how long they expect it will take them to win? But win against whom and what? Or is the idea that by then, what we call cities today will have become *so* twenty-first century?

"Everything worth fighting for is in the urban environment," says James Lasswell, a retired colonel and head of the Office of Science and Technology at the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory. He sounds just like an old-school guerrilla. Which side is he on?

A distant moment which occurs right now.

Est-ce que ce monde est sérieux?

Si, si hombre.

Asks and affirms Francis Cabrel, taking the bull's eye view in *La corrida*.

10/13 Something, many things actually, that are extraordinary, magnificent even, about the number 7.

Up to the Lincoln Center area to see Barbet Schroder's new movie on Jacques Vergès, *Terror's Advocate*. On the subway platforms and plastered to a passing bus you're struck by a new ad campaign for the Marine Corps. WE DON'T ACCEPT APPLICATIONS, it reads, ONLY COMMITMENTS. The poster boy is framed close up, but we can see his cap and the collar of his dress blues. His features make him look sort of like a white guy, but the skin glistens, as though its been misted with honey-colored oil. Cosmetically creolized. And the sheen serves to distract the eye from his expression – part aggression, part despair.

Here's what the incandescent planning minds at Bloomie's DOT did to Ninth Avenue in the name of adding a bike lane: with only the best of stated intentions they abstracted a street straight out of Copenhagen and plunked it down – superimposed it – over one of Chelsea's already bolluxed-up traffic conduits.

Prior to its coming, the *Times* ran an enthusiastic front page story on the bike lane, replete with a futurized photo which showed cyclists tooling along the left side of the street, as is the case on Eighth Avenue and all the other bike-laned thoroughfare. But the article asserted that the lane would run down the west side of the street. So either the text was in error, or else the plan entailed moving all the buildings on the west side to the east and vice versa, while simultaneously changing the direction of traffic from south to north – a veritable Moses-esque undertaking. But since no new condos were depicted in the mock-up, it seemed more likely that whomever fact-checked the piece just hadn't put their boots on the ground.

This modest editorial confusion was as nothing compared to the experience of the built thing itself, to which no description can really do justice. Still one must

attempt it, a thing far less daunting than trying to cross Ninth Avenue. In order to traverse the thoroughfare now, say east to west, one first crosses a stretch of roadway presumably dedicated to bicycles. Then comes a meridian, with raised pedestrian islands at the intersection of the cross streets. Midblock, between the islands, the meridian is demarcated by white zebra lines on the macadam and a row of phosphorescent stanchions that look quite Alphaville by night. In the center of the striped zone stands the gray Golem-like Muni-Meter that issues permit tickets for cars parked across the meridian from the bike lane. Next come three roaring lanes of traffic funneled down from four lanes north of 23rd, the drivers invariably disconcerted by the sudden merge. Finally, the parking lane set against the curb on the west side of the street.

The result: an astonishing level of confusion for all parties, cyclist, motorists and pedestrians alike. In the week since the bike lane opened, you have attempted to ride in it once only to be pursued by a car, its driver either confused or homicidal. The most generous interpretation of his actions is that he thought himself to be in a “local” vehicular lane, purposely set apart from traffic and intended for cars in search of a parking space. One block later, a delivery man, pedaling uptown, barreled toward you. Narrow miss there. Biking along a regular street one contends with the infamous “door zone,” but there’s a sense of having more space to maneuver whereas in this corridor one feels hemmed in. Since this adventure, you’ve taken to riding on the sidewalk – it’s much safer for all concerned.

You’ve observed too that as traffic crosses 23rd Street heading south, it doesn’t slow up for the merge to three lanes, but rather accelerates as a kind of paradoxical reaction to the increased density – better get ahead while you can! Compounding this

madness, the Department of Trauma has stenciled a profusion of utterly cryptic white arrows on the road surface, often accompanied by the word ONLY in giant block letters, that keep prompting drivers to do something – but what? All in all, there's a plethora of visual stimulation, hence conditions that have become exponentially more dangerous. If, unconsciously, the idea was to get folks to avoid crossing Ninth Avenue on foot, it worked. Even the nimblest and most street smart young folks you talk to at the café find the new arrangement daunting.

Staggering to imagine what this boondoggle cost to build. And it's not quite done. It appears that the coffers sunk into the pedestrian islands are meant to contain plantings of some sort. And where, in all this chaos, are the vehicles of the gardeners going to park? Or perhaps these pits are not intended as planters at all, but rather graves, pre-dug in anticipation of fatalities to come. Now *that's* planning with a vengeance.

10/14 *All 7 and we'll watch them fall*

They stand in the way of love

And we will smoke them all

With our intellect and our savoir faire...

Sang Prince in the year of '92.

A century ago, Ward McAllister asserted that the city had four hundred citizens worthy of speaking of or to. William Sidney Porter, aka O. Henry, had all four million New Yorkers in mind. And you, for whom are you writing if not the 7 billion

who'll inhabit this orb in 2012 when the current cycle of the Maya long-count ends, *supuestamente*, and the falling of a certain 7 turns 11?

And Venus also rises.

10/15 Not all time travelers have journeyed through the same spheres.

Pedaling west toward Ninth just before 8 a.m. They're stringing the sky over the Hudson like a harp. Evenly spaced, the parallel contrails also resemble a musical staff. Between two of the strands, a chopper hovers – vile, insect-like, up to no good – resembling nothing so much as a misshapen whole note nailed buzzing to a sky-blue score.

“Road block” redefined for the cyberspace age. It means the monopolization of a given website's rentable space by a single advertiser for a given period, generally a day.

“C'mon amigo,” said George Bush to Oscar Arias, friendly-like. “Hey, everyone else is on board. Just say yes 'cause you gotta take the deal the way it lays. It's a good 'un too. Oh, and just in case you don't understand what I'm sayin', see all that stuff you export to us with hardly no tariffs, uh, well, I wouldn't like to see what'll happen if you don't come to the barbecue...”

Mark Langdale, U.S. Ambassador to Costa Rica says he asked the President to make this statement, or words to that effect, “just so the facts are on the table.”

Whilst just a few degrees north of the equator a million and a half referendum ballots cast last week are being counted, one by one. But the fix is in and the official tally will likely confirm the estimate: 51.6 per cent to 48.4 – a margin of 50,000.

On the front page of the *Tico Times* a shot of the victory party at “yes” headquarters. A flamboyantly silky green-clad clown whips up the crowd. Behind him, a trio of fetching young women gyrate their hair and toss bejeaned hips, hallelujah hands waving high. Their cropped white teeshirts bear the TLC logo printed large in red and blue, throbbing above the symbolic region of their hearts.

Light, sweet crude skips past the \$85 mark. One euro will get you a buck forty-two. Certain UAW local leaders, waking up and smelling the catfood, balk at endorsing a new contract with Chrysler that leaves a big loophole for plant closures while transferring the pension burden to the union. But they’ll have to jump eventually. Lookit who holds the reins. And check out the size of them spurs.

On the left hand side of the *Times* online’s front page, a waxing apocalypse:

“Citigroup Profit Fell by 57% in Third Quarter: The setback for the global banking giant, which sent the stock market into a sharp decline, was the latest fallout from the subprime mortgage crisis...”

“Stocks Retreat Amid Bad Debt Worries.”

“Banks Create a Fund to Protect Credit Market...”

From which the eye flees screaming toward the bright illustrations to the right:

“TRAVEL: High Tea, India Style: A trip to the plantations of Darjeeling is a teetotaler’s delight.”

“Sheikdoms With Less Glitter Can Still Sparkle.”

Who knew? Must be Emirate Awareness Week. Hmm. There’s seven of ‘em written up, each more wonderful than the other. Al Fujayrah, for example, located on the Gulf of Oman side of the cluster “presents a relaxed, idyllic alternative to the hustle-and-bustle of the Persian Gulf coast.” Less “conservative” than Sharjah, but not quite as party-down as Ajman, Al Fujayrah takes the middle line and the jewel in its crown is the sleek, 218-room Meridien al-Aqah Beach Resort, whose “clientele varies, making for interesting people-watching: from local women covered from head to toe and relaxing under poolside parasols to thong-clad pasty Russians sipping cocktails while a Filipino house band plays ‘A Whiter Shade of Pale.’”

And then, of course, for a dose of kultcha, it’ll soon be just a short hop over to the, er, “Louvre.”

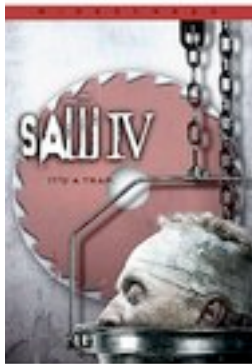
Light and crude make a certain sort of sense. But sweet? Does anyone drink the stuff – under parasols or otherwise?

10/16 Post-Ba Gua, on your way to meet Teddy's for coffee, you walk east along 23rd Street, past Home Depot, where a display in one of the coffered windows catches your eye – a diorama in miniature of HD’s planned, or fantasized, participation in the Thanksgiving Parade. On the sidelines, behind a police barricade, a mixed assemblage of spectators, including kids and toddlers, the adults about the height of Barbie and Ken. Then there are the balloon handlers, seven similarly-sized manikins, all wearing the company’s trademark orange aprons. And what helium-filled symbol are they guiding down the street? Not Garfield, nor Snoopy, nor Sponge Bob, nor any other

beloved icon of popular culture, but rather a gigantic, circular saw, fitted out with a jagged-toothed crosscut blade – about the right scale for an inflatable Paul Bunyan should he happen along and want to trade in his axe for something more suburban. In actuality, now that you think about it, the saw baloon in the window is about “life” sized. So that would make you about Paul’s height in the diorama’s world.

Thus is the imagination harnessed to the domestication of terror. In this case, terror made small, stylized into a balloon one could pop in a carnival game of darts. What prize would you win if you were able to pop them all?

Still, there are too many, whatever your skill. And in ten days, coming to a theater near you:



Eye of the navel of the world, what do you see?

John Bunyan meets Paul Bunyan at the edge of an abyss called Progress.

And a crime to every purpose under heaven. Turn turn turn...

Herodotus tells of an Egyptian certain king, Psammetichus, who, seeking to know what would befall him, “sent to the oracle of Leto in the city of Buto,” which, of all the oracles, is “the least given to lying.”

Try on a persona: the barbarian-critic Visigothsky.

As in a waking nightmare, you keep seeing, in your mind’s eye, the oil-sheened face of the young Marine.

New dance craze with an implosive beat: *Collapso*.

Vanity: the only economy the city’s got left.

We’re dogs, we New Yorkers, waiting on the Big One. If unleashed, we might go for that other dogs’ throat, or rush over to smell one another’s privates. But we’re tethered, internally, so all we can do is bark. While the caravan moves on.

Hey, hey, getcha crude oil futchas! Buy ‘em now for Novemba delivery at \$88.20! The *Times* owns as the price de jour fast approaches the record set in the early (oily) eighties, when the OPEC crunch and the Iranian revolution combined to push oil prices up what would be about \$100 today. “This week’s surge,” they say “is being fueled [!] by the threat of a Turkish military incursion in northern Iraq.” Sometimes ya gotta surge. Wildcat. Roll out the barrel and they’ll have you over it before you can say

God is Great! Or Mammon Rules! Or Mama! Or words to that defect.

“The housing decline is still unfolding, and I view it as the most significant current risk to our economy,” said the Treasury Secretary at Georgetown today.

What a lovely phrase, that first clause, conjuring as it does the image of a little origami house, it's creases opening out until its form becomes unrecognizable and one is left with a blank sheet once again.