

10/23 Where does this look come from *y ¿por qué, por qué?* It consists of a huge, often flabby, upper body surmounted by a wide, full-bearded face and shaved head. Tatts of course, the more the merrier. A pair of these fellows, truly Tweedledum and Tweedledee, share the cab of a truck that belches CO₂ into the already compromised atmosphere of 18th Street as you and Teddy sit outside Tarallucci's "working" on your espressos. Somewhere down the block the light changes and the truck moves on. As its tailgate vanishes eastward you read: Platinum Dismantling Co.

¿Por qué no?

Homeward up Fifth and across 21st. A sign nailed to the plywood crown of a scaffold advertises the business obscured by the jungle gym below:

PREY BAR

&

LOUNGE

IS OPEN

Carri-on.

On the one hand intention. On the other...

You follow a whimsical set of rusty orange footprints painted on the sidewalk along the north side of 21st Street. Where they began, you don't recall, but you became aware of them after crossing west on Seventh. An average-length stride, footfalls regularly placed until here, nearing the corner of Eighth, where the prints fall almost

side by side as though the walker was about to make a long jump. Ten or so yards on, a similar set of prints, then none. Whomever it was must have taken off...

Then: out of the blue

Love came rushing in

Out of the sky

Came the sun

Out of left field

Came a lucky day

Out of the blue

No more pain...

Roxy again.

The *Times* describes the fires sweeping Southern California as “a Hydra with at least 15 separate burns.”

With 800 National Guard troops diverted northward from the task of holding Mexico at bay, and equipment and firefighters brought in from Nevada and Arizona, “resources were stretched to the limit.” Not to mention journalistic prose, via which one learns that San Diego is “particularly haunted by wildfires.”

And it’s true, disaster brings out rhetorical bravura like no other condition can. Quoth Ron Roberts, chairman of the San Diego Board of Supervisors: “We have some of the highest temperatures, some of the driest landscape conditions, some of the most powerful winds; all of the ingredients for a perfect firestorm.”



The view from space, via NASA's Aqua satellite. (NYT)

While in New York – its own internal Dresden – the bonfires rage on.

And this pair of curious headlines:

“Many Red Flags Preceded a Recall of Hamburger.”

“Rice urges Turkey to show restraint.”

Chacun à son goût.

G’wan, I dare you. Try to walk down any Manhattan sidewalk for a whole block without passing under a scaffold.

Desiring a cab, one stands at the corner as if at the florist. Which hood bouquet is the prettiest?

A canary in the mind. When will it turn color and drop off its perch?

Enormous drought in the Southeast. Lake Lanier reveals its silty bed. Still, Coke bottles on, with Atlanta's reserve drinking water due to run out in three months, unless.

In response to the conflagrations out west, Gov. Schwarzenegger of Cally declares the wind "Enemy No. 1" and urges the populace to pray for its defeat. While folks are beseeching the Creator, why not add the reincarnation of Ray Charles to the list. Then, maybe then, there'll come a rainy night in Georgia.

On the left side of the front page, a million Californians flee the inferno. On the right, the market goes through the roof.

10/24 Now if, just if, you wanted to shock some folks, get their attention, take their eyes off the Prize, create some trauma – if you wanted to pose Bush and Schwarzenegger together in front of a wasteland, and along the way change the Cally constitution so its electoral votes were awarded proportionately and not tout court, and if the b(r)ush was dry, really dry, and the Santa Anas were a' blowin' hard, what exactly would you do?

Would you, as the Chinese warlords once did, rattle east and strike west?

And bounding ahead of the fire engine, the ever-faithful Dalmatian. Disaster politics in service of disaster capitalism. Dogsbody.

Towers to earth in the northeast. Inundation of the Lower Nine. Fire and wind

out west. Elemental. The destruction homes in on targets associated with chronologically successive centers of development and – just think of the place-names – particular ethnicities: Dutch-English, Afro-Français, Creolized Spanish underpinning polyglot migrant. *Sitting on the dock of the bay, watching the tide roll away where the bowers of flowers bloom in the sun and these pastures of plenty will always be free.* Or bust. Now the fable's complete: How the triangle got its tip.

And a link, a golden, bridgelike thread, subtle yet ineluctable, through the needle's eye, the gate between Sunshine State and Persia: original seat of faith – centuries before the Prophet's revelation or the murder of Ali – in the generative power of fire and sun, a land where it was, and is believed that Ahura Mazda emanated the seven sparks of all creation. Like so many heliotropes, we still, even now, turn to worship the source of light. And place our dead atop the Towers of Silence. In certainty that the vultures will come, and purify them that will be we, if not today then in some not-so-distant dawn. Hot stuff.

“A Giant Flying Fire Hose to Arrive,” says a headline in the *Times*, Oil Jar of Miracles and Wonders, Shaharazade to Self-proclaimed Sultans and Mother of All News. A click and you read how “San Diego's fire chief told reporters that a Martin Mars water bomber was expected to arrive this afternoon to help put out the blazes.” Ah, not a giant hose per se, but rather a plane that can unleash “7,200 gallons of water in a single drop, enough to drench three acres. Here's a clip of it in action.”

No matter, words alone are better. The gigantic four-propped thing skims over the surface of what looks to be a largish, pine-ringed lake, scooping water up into its belly. The camera follows the bomber's ascent, pans as it banks, comes in low over the

heads of the crowd on the shore, then over the lake – whooosh: release.

Not yet noon, but the Dow's off 170. Did the Martin Mars drench its fire?
Which way will the winds shift next?

And every instant, another headline speaks its secret name: "With Katrina Fresh, Bush Moves Briskly." Fresh Direct.

"California Fires Have Burned at Least 666 Square Miles."

Speed dial my man Nostradamus!

10/25 Up betimes and through a rainy Central Park to breakfast with Tom at Sabarsky, a Viennese café simulacrum nestled within Neue Gallery. On the way out, pass the admissions desk and check the damage for the exhibition upstairs. \$15 bucks a head – holy cow, wotta Klimpt joint! And as well-Ron a money-Laudering operation as ever you've seen.

As in the aftermath of the WTC and Katrina, the incredible shrinking stats.
Thus, verbatim from the Gray Lady:

"Widely-Cited Figure Deflates.

"On Tuesday, as the wildfires grew out of control and evacuation calls spread, a figure was reported across the Web. Here's one headline: 'New evacuees join nearly 1 million displaced by fires.'

"But the figure came from some fuzzy math that combined the total amount of evacuation calls placed to homes with information from a census taken 7 years ago. In an article today, The Los Angeles Times concludes that it 'appears to have been

substantially lower.’ Here’s why:

“Within hours, however, some of those evacuations were lifted. More San Diego residents were ordered to leave on Wednesday, but by then, unknown numbers of earlier evacuees already were back home.

“That pattern is one of several reasons why the widely publicized estimates of evacuation numbers are probably exaggerated.

“Another reason is that not everyone obeyed evacuation orders.

“The Times’s figure for total people evacuated, based on calls to county officials, stands at 505,600. Although far from a million, the actual number will certainly qualify as the ‘largest evacuation in California’s history,’ according to state officials.”

In the column adjoining this revelation, an ad shows a pretty blonde woman, say early thirties, clothed in a dark gray business suit. She’s reached out to grasp with both hands a thick black graph line that spikes and plunges in acute angles like a jagged snake, freefloating in the space between herself and the viewer. Whew, you’re glad she’s got it under control. “Get a Grip,” the headline exhorts, “On Volatile Energy Prices.”

10/25 Meanwhile, down in New York’s Lower 9th, Larry Silverstein and Brookfield Properties, with blessings from the Gov. in far-off Albany, offer Merrill Lynch a set of astronomical bribes if only they will continue to drink from the Ground Zero watering hole. But no, the great brokerage mastodon seems poised to fly north on the whirling winds of Steven Roth’s Vornado Realty Trust. Long forgotten now that Vornado came in second-highest bidder – at \$3.25 bil – for the still-vertical WTC seven months before September Morning.

In plan: down comes the Hotel Pennsylvania – *that's Pennsylvania Six Five Oh-Oh-Oh* – and up rears “a \$4 billion, 3 million-square-foot tower... home for 11,000 employees... [with] significantly more square footage than the Empire State Building.” Though the *Times* allows, “It might not be as tall.”

Well, one can't have everything. Vertically. Eighty thousand foot trading floors ought to be enough. Presuming one has ridden through the colder seasons of the subprime ice age, having written off \$10.7 billion last quarter, *tra la*.

The terms, the terms! A sixty-five year, billion dollar lease. Thus Vornado gets both an eastern anchor and massive collateral toward its intended swoop to conquer all points west, even unto and over the Hudson Railyards. Borne too on the Vornado whirlwind, to be plunked down on the not-Kansas railyards, another giant pachyderm in the real estate Directorate: The Durst Organization as in ashes to ashes, *durst to durst*, or No! I *durst* not think it so!

Thus would the Bloomie faction trump (if one may be permitted the word) the NY State development interests emmired in the always-sinking fortunes of the Veneto down south. A cloud, as it were, in Sheldon Silver's lining, a harbinger of ever soggy and more dispiriting returns to nature, whereas, on firmer midtown ground, one can imagine a kind of Shanghai-on-Hudson, extending east from the twenties to wherever north. And in a way it does become a zero sum game when a city has split its central business district in two. One leg always seems shorter than the other, everything limps. It would be better just to lose one and hop along on the survivor. Or put another way, one outsized porker's always trying to shoulder its frère away from the trough.

Amazing too that this is not happening at some remove, but only a few blocks from Penn South, your Socialist redoubt – a cluster high-rise castles from another age,

creatures of what some might call the Kennedy era. Camelot. Dreamlike now, Avalonian in the mists. Yet, for now, these red bricks minted in the sixties still stand one atop another. For how long? There's no retrofitting these buildings into "luxury" anything. By design, even beyond intention, they're proletarian to the core.

Still at earliest Merrill won't arrive until 2013, the year after the long count cycle runs out. By which time you'll be somewhere else, or noplacelse at all.

For the moment, which is all one has, Nowplace is where you're at.

Nota bene the Afghan proverb: *When two bulls fight, the leg of the calf is broken.*

10/26 The heart is the size of a fist. But what size is a fist?

Many mysteries, such as who, now that John Galt is presumably off the job, will take over deconstructing the Deutsche Bank building? News blackout, except for a terse paragraph from AP to the effect that the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation "hopes" to recommence unbuilding the twenty-six remaining stories in November, but the state agency refuses to estimate when the job will be done. The story of the fire, like a whale, breached the surface most spectacularly, but has now dived many fathoms deep.

Superbug Kills NYC Kid headlines the *Post*, reporting a seventh-grader's death from methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus. How is it that this ubiquitous bacterium, carried in the nostrils of approximately a tenth of the U.S. population, has proven so powerful a pathogen in some cases but doesn't appear to affect the vast

majority of folks at all? Information imbalance in spades. TMI about a host of obvious stuff, but for what you really want to know about, nada.

The most felicitous echo chamber in the New York subway system, and possibly anywhere, may be found in the Fifth Avenue subway station, south end of the downtown E and V platform at the foot of the escalator. It is there that a woman of substance, wearing sweatpants and a large overshirt, her head swathed in a purple do-rag sits on a milk carton, singing an aria. She accompanies herself with tinkling arpeggios played on the tiny electronic keyboard nestled in her lap. Doesn't matter that the song – Italian – is unknown to you. What carries it is her pure, lyric soprano. Comes the train. Before the doors close, a small interregnum of loveliness.

You get off the V at 34th Street and hear another high-pitched melody, just as unearthly. Particularly since you can't immediately locate the source given the acoustics of the station. Sounds like it comes from the opposite platform. Yes. Through a portal in the wall separating the tracks you glimpse an Asian man, seated, and bowing a stringed instrument held vertically between his legs. The tune's familiar but it takes you a few phrases to place it in this context: "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair)." Though you're already a couple of minutes late for acupuncture con Kelly, you make a fast detour across and down to get a closer look. There's a sheet of paper with four large Chinese characters taped to the front of the man's music stand. No entiendo. But the sign on his instrument case, opened at his feet, and in which you deposit a dollar reads: "Hi I'm Guang Da..."

A train drowns the music and you start bounding upstairs. When the song

reasserts itself, though fading fast with distance, it's morphed into "When a Man Loves a Woman."