

12/8 The day traditionally associated with the birth of the Buddha.

Wonderful-awful logo the *Wicked Messenger* uses for its seemingly endless “Choking on Growth” pieces self-touted as “*A series of articles and multimedia* [multimedia as a noun!] *examining the human toll, global impact and political challenge of China’s epic pollution crisis.*”

So what’s the idea? Is the *Times*, as defacto mouthpiece for the American body politic, attempting to rhetorically pressure China to rein in its economy? Is the idea to speak as a wiser, more-experienced industrial society chiding our too-brash junior sibling on his reckless behavior? Or is this simply a projection of the west’s negative wish-fulfillment? Go figure. Anyways, the “Choking on Growth” logo is minute when set against the size of the page, but it’s eye-catchingly placed, like a heraldic crest carved into a picture frame, at the top center of every China story’s lead photo.

The symbol, when decoded, shows itself to be a masterpiece of concise visual narrative. It consists of a stylized Chinese flag, positioned as if it were a curtain parting to reveal the silhouette of a factory – complete with classic sawtooth angled rooftop skylights – the kind of icon of heavy industry one finds on resource maps in old-style atlases. Smoke billows from the factory’s tall chimney and drifts across the red flag, half obscuring the constellation of yellow stars the flag’s upper left corner.

Despite, or perhaps because you worked for so many years as a graphic designer, you still find it amazing that so minute and apparently simple a visual element can act powerfully on the imagination. One need not read a word, to get the picture.

That said, each accompanying story’s headline is subtly crafted to echo and

amplify the associations set in motion by the logo, for example: “Trucks Power China’s Economy, at a Suffocating Cost.” The pictures too are invariably beautiful in a weird way. They makes the point grossly, but include extraordinary nuances that unfurl, lotus-like, on closer examination.



Reuters

And True to Barthes’ formulation, the captions ice the signifying cake, driving a multiplex message relentlessly forward in the reader’s mind: “Spewing soot while waiting for fuel, trucks often spend hours idling in fuel lines, like these in Wuhan, sometimes for as little as five gallons of diesel, because of shortages and rationing.”

Another pic receives this benediction: “Every night, columns of hulking freight trucks invade China’s big cities with exhaust so thick it dims headlights.”

You’d show it here, but it’s strange how the little logo, unlike photos or text, will not permit itself to be cut and pasted from the *Times* webpage into a document.

Wondrous too how such a beautifully-crafted, highly focused and sophisticated

propaganda ensemble attends our own crumbling system. The esthetics of dysfunction, flapping home to roost.

Pangaea.

Is it possible? That the bridge between avian flu and humans isn't another species at all. It's the media, stupid.

Bizarro sky this morning. All whitish haze and mackerel stripes. Don't pay it any mind.

Some folks never do understand, that at deepest heart, trickster is true.

In speaking of a Swedish Muslim named Mehdi who was arrested in Pakistan, imprisoned in Guantánamo, and ultimately released, the documentary film director Erik Gandini comments: "We were really hoping to find someone from the inside of Guantánamo who was just good looking and typecasted; a well-spoken and smiling person. That is typical of the media expectation. But you cannot expect that from a prisoner from Guantánamo. These people are marginalized from the very beginning. Mehdi was not even interested in the idea of a Geneva Convention. He was just interested in what God's role was."

So much distress and heartbreak in your extended family. So many folks who won't take your hand you've extended because they're too busy digging their graves.

Blame it on the Totentanz with its magic spell...

The dance of love?

*Seems like every time you turn around*

*Somebody else just hit the ground...*

*Everyone is broken...*

Oy, the whole mishpocha.

A recent international edition of *Time* contained an article that amounted to a death certificate for, and post-mortem of, French Culture as whole. In response, Bernard-Henri Lévy published a piece in *The Guardian*, dealing with the projective nature of the attack. Curiously, or not so, neither the original *Time* text, nor BHL's riposte were published in the U.S.

BHL concluded his counter-argument thus:

"I would like to end on the final overriding impression of this bizarre text, which the more I think about it, seems less and less a survey of France and more and more a savage reflection of the state of American culture itself. Because what really strikes one is the nervousness of the tone. It is this desire to prove too much which inevitably, as Nietzsche said, exhausts truth. It is the whiff of anxiety and, perhaps, of anguish, which emerges from this article. As if it contains an ultimate message, but a secret one, and in code.

"Come on! Let's get to the point! My feeling is that this article would not

speaking of the decline of French culture if it did not also speak of the fate of all dominant cultures, which at one time or another are condemned to watch their dominance decline. This article speaks truly of America and of what will happen to it on that day when the increasing power of Spanish, Chinese, or perhaps other Asian languages ensure that Anglo-American will no longer be the language of the formula and of universal translation. France as metaphor for America. Anti-French hostility as a displaced form of panic which dare not speak its name. Classic.”

*Oui, il a raison, mais...* What BHL’s at times tremendously incisive mind appears to possess no slot for is the idea that English isn’t what’s threatened here. English survived the political dominance of England and stands be around long after the U.S. of A. is gone. The bastard survives. The lucky bastard.

What’s going, going, and may one day soon *disparaître*, is the greenback – once referred to as the Almighty Dollar, a term attributed to Washington Irving and culminating lately as Ahmadinejad’s “worthless piece of paper.” Whereas English as a vehicle for exchanging ideas, however perverse or diluted, maintains an enormous practical value that has yet to peak.

But a currency, well, a currency is only worth what the market and folks’ faith in it will bear. Myth don’t pay the rent. Or put another way, the wire’s just a wire without the juice. But no one need be shocked. Just physics, bro. Basic stuff.

Look there, on the other side of the note from George Washington. Back of the seal. The pyramid crumbles. God has favored our undertaking. Da new order has begun, yo. Revelation.

Let's unmake a deal. Come on down!

Stone soup. Flavored with a soupçon of nail.

It is critically important that we reserve to ourselves, even in the midst of speech and though we may never in our lives invoke it, the right to remain silent.

12/9 Festival of light and dark.

Flickering.

Fatal attraction to one's own image.

Personal magmatism.

The precipitating angel.

The eagle has branded.

Tentacle rape.

Humble yourself, the bell done rung.

*The whole world doped on words.* Sez Erik Gandini.

Just say NAO: National Applications Office, which is national in one sense and exquisitely privatized in another. A new governmental agency up charged with taking in and coordinating intelligence largely supplied by corporate eyes and ears: Boeing, BAE Systems, L-3 Communications and Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC).

Don't believe it? Just say NGA: National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. Lord knows what these iProds really do besides come up with astonishingly expensive applications and deadly absurd acronyms no irony can leaven. Par example, among many, is GOSHAWK (Geospatial Operations for a Secure Homeland – Awareness, Workflow, Knowledge), thunk up by the lambent minds at BAE, the UK-based and third-largest military contractor this side of Uranus. The GOSHAWK, er, tool, purports to help law enforcement agencies at every level prepare for, and respond to “natural disasters and terrorist and criminal incidents,” by providing them with data and technical support capabilities that can, according to the pitch, “turn geospatial information into the knowledge needed for quick decisions.” Thus a GOSHAWK op might acquire data from satellites, aircraft and sensors on the ground, and integrate it, neatly sorted into “differentiated levels of classification” for use by analysts with varying levels of security clearance.

Oy! Iz a vay iz mir! Vill dey find Judge Crater? How about Little Jimmy? Look, there goes Etan Patz! So vere's Valdo?

GOSHAWK, SHMOSHAWK – abi gezint!

Screw another bulb into the old menorah and let the dreidel spin.

You-ooh-ooh-ooh zen'd me, honey you-ooh-ooh-ooh zen'd me...

12/10 How is it possible to constitute a robust and integrated self in the ARO (three letter acronym for Absence of a Reliable Other)?

Je ne regresse rien.

A big, bluff-looking retriever takes a dump in the exact center of the sidewalk on the corner near the café. If he'd hired a surveyor, he couldn't have done a more accurate job. His biped is there to pick up most of what his best friend dropped. But jeeze, even the Chelsea dogs got real estate fever: location, location, location.

It's like being on acid these days. One has only to verbalize something and lo, it appears. If the conversation on the corner in front of Le G. turns to the old woolen short pants one used to have to wear as a lad, the kind that chapped the back of the knees in inclement weather such the elements have contrived for today, then within an instant a pretty young woman appears at the opposite corner wearing what look at this distance to be a pair of herringbone culottes and a kind of frock coat, her ensemble completed by a fetching newsboy-like cap. You're tripping: you can see the backs of her knees, the inch or so between pant hem and boot top with exquisite precision and very close up despite the range of a dozen yards. The skin's indented as the backs of knees should be, and colored pink from the damp chill, but not chapped at all.

No plan, so they say, survives contact with the enemy.

Gales of laughter. Typhoons of...

Nine will get you eleven that...

Gambling, gambling. Spin, dreidel!

If you imagine yourself pure as the driven snow, you're snowblind.

Speak jerboa!

*Times* headlines and pics to go with 'em. Juxtapositions.

"Flying Humans, Hoping to Land With No Chute."



Axel Koester for The New York Times, left; Perry Trowbridge/AFP

Jeb Corliss, left, wearing his wing suit. Right, skydivers with wing suits flying over the Florida Keys before releasing their parachutes.

Opinion »



*Times* Op-Ed: Help Me Spy on Al Qaeda

And some images need no illustration:

“UBS Gets Capital Injection After \$10 Billion Write-Down.”

Is that capital as in punishment? Injection as in lethal? How do you strap a bank to a gurney? What’s its favorite last meal? How many bankers does it take to walk a last mile? Do the injectors keep executioner’s hours?

“Inheriting a Disorder: Do you see any behaviors in your children that explain something about you?” Or, put another way when you click the link: “Your Child’s Disorder May Be Yours Too.” The story begins: “By age 2 it was clear that the boy had a sensibility all his own...”

“As Orthodox Population Grows, So Do Tensions.”

“Rule on Shots Forces Some Students Off Maine Campuses.”

“The Nation: A Hail of Bullets, A Heap of Uncertainty.”

“Compass Can’t Cure What Ails Box Office.”

“Rubles Are a Girl’s Best Friend.”

“Town House Living: The Untold Story.”

Books: “No Longer the City of ‘Bonfire’ in Flames.”

“Is the Entrée Heading for Extinction?”

“The 53 Places to Go in 2008.”

“Forecasters Eye Storm Near Puerto Rico.”

“Ice Storm Results in Blackouts, Death.”

A swath of the U.S., from the southern Plains to the Northeast, laminated under a sheet of ice. Oklahoma, where the wind comes whistling down the plain:

“This is a big one, we’ve got a massive situation here and it’s probably going

to be a week to 10 days before we get power on to everybody,' says Ed Bettinger, speaking for the OK utility company. 'It looks like a war zone.'...

"The sound of branches snapping under the weight of ice echoed through Oklahoma City neighborhoods.

"'You can hear them falling everywhere,' Lonnie Compton said Monday as he shoveled ice off his driveway.'"

And clusters of cars piling into one another on highways, like there's no tomorrow. Like it's a carnival ride.

Objects, objects everywhere, and not a subject to be found.

While up there, looking serene as can be, Holmes and its partners do their ineffable and fantastically material dance. Come in Milan Gucic, can you hear me? *Yes, I can hear you just fine.* What does Holmes look like from Serbia, Milan? Our audience is dying to know. Is it fading? *Fading?* *Can this comet just go away?* *No! It's so expanded now that I couldn't frame it in a medium sized refractor. Lights from Belgrade's two and a half million people are nothing compare to this comet –*

I'm sorry, Milan, what was that? I'm afraid you're breaking up...

Elsewhere in it's article on UBS, the *Messenger* calls its capital injection "a financial life-line from the cash-rich East." The nominally Swiss bank sells a ten percent stake to the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation and "an unidentified Middle East investor." Bin Laden kin? ¿Por qué no? Gotta grease da wheels o' commerce.

Thus, “UBS’s mammoth write-down comes on top of a \$3.7 billion charge in October, making it by far the biggest casualty of the American home-mortgage crisis among banks outside the United States.

“The emergence of white knights [Ghengis K. and Saladin?] from Asia and the Middle East underscores the growing financial might of these countries, much of it built on oil money and channeled into vast ‘sovereign wealth funds.’

“‘It’s a measure of how the geopolitical and financial landscape has changed,’ said David Williams, the head of banking research in London at the investment bank Fox-Pitt Kelton Cochran Caronia Waller. ‘Only a year ago,’ he noted, ‘this was considered one of the most financially sound institutions in the world.’”

“Mammoth write down.” Guess the interglacial period is over. Faster than predicted. Changes the landscape for sure. Remember those images of the ice sheets rising way above the Empire State’s spire? Just for comparison’s sake – not like that actually happened or anything. And those white knights, their chests emblazoned with red crosses, even in black and white, galloping across the frozen lake in *Alexander Nevsky*? Score by Prokofiev. Montage-o-rama. Visual dialectics: thesis, antithesis, synthesis, voila, new thesis and so the snowball rolls. Don’t got to be no Eisenstein to see that.

Ring dem bellz.

Which raises the question: who will be on the list of the *Times*’s Neediest Cases this year?

Battle on Ice. Holiday on Ice. Soul on Ice. Sold!

Ice 'n' Stein.

Lake Peipus, Chud, or Peipussee, depending on whether you are speaking Estonian, Russian or German, is a damn big un: Ten thousand plus square miles with an average depth of twenty-one feet. Forty five feet deep where the Teutons fell in. Thirty rivers and streams flow into this inland sea and the Narva drains it. But large as it is, Peipus was deeper and wider during the last ice age. But no one really knows how much more so. No Google Earth back then. Who can tell what's in a glacier's dreams, coming and going?

A comet's nucleus, so the story goes, ranges from half a km to fifty km, más o menos. They are composed of rock, dust, water, ice and a variety of frozen gasses: carbon monox and diox, methane and ammonia. Though comets contain a variety of organic compounds as well, in the scientific mind, the ice have it. Hence the nickname "dirty snowball" favored by many astronomers. And those nomers are really experts in nomenklatur. But of course, by extending the axiom accorded the crystalline flake, no two dirty snowballs are absolutely alike. So each and every dirty snowball is unique... a celestial glacier all its own.

Welcome Holmes.

Dirty snowball effect, in effect.

Banging up against the inside and outside limits of self.

Storm-caused blackouts in parts of Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa and Illinois.

100,000 without electricity in the show-me state.

In dark of which, consider referendum to change MO motto to the snow-me state.

These are the kinds of ice storms in which, historically, a troublesome presidential candidate's plane goes down. No troublesome candidates this time around though.

*He gives his harness bells a shake*

*To ask if there is some mistake...*

New York: because it contains elements of every city. Is there a city, present or past, not represented here in some form? Johnny Cash sings *I've been everywhere*. You love that song, perhaps because you were *born* everywhere.

Or nowhere: oscillating between the poles of a concrete city and an immanent one To Come, a celestial Jerusalem. Perhaps that's part of why you thrive in Athenian New York, but gag in the Roman one.

The City To Come is not built in a day. It's less than that, an eyeblink, a nanosecond, a New York minute. It doesn't even have to erase what's there. The City To Come can coat its antecedent translucently, turn its debacles into miracles. It simply has to turn a corner, walk around behind itself, meet itself appearing from all six and eight directions at once.

Got sick somehow. Exhausted. Feels like frozen blood.