

2/10 Late afternoon. A series of snow cells rip northeastward across the city. Not so much snowstorms as tempests hurling snow. You encounter the first one on the Upper East Side, walking the two blocks downtown from T. and M.'s housewarming party to catch the crosstown heading west. Almost immediately, the fabric of your coat front becomes invisible, as though you've been sprayed with fire extinguisher foam.

Home in under half an hour, thanks to a fast-running bus and fortuitous subway connection. Emerging from underground at 25th Street, the stairwell frames a blue sky alive with white cumulus stampeding by. The uptown cell, it seems, passed this way too, and not long ago. Fat drops of water, nearly globular, balance on the hedge leaves. The walkway's wet and strewn with bits of blown down tree branch.

Elevator twenty stories up. In the time it takes to hang up your coats, incredible transformation. Outside the living room window, unheralded by any visible preliminaries, a vast sweep of whitish-gray, driven nearly horizontally. But look more closely and you see innumerable snow devils – an apparent chaos of micro storms within the larger cell. There goes a black plastic bag that at first you register as a bird, so bizarrely avian its trajectory – heading up and away from the main thrust of the wind. Now it loops and swoops downward. Hah! There's an actual bird, hard to tell what kind, seemingly disoriented, trying to figure out which way the air is actually moving. Perhaps the substance itself doesn't know.

Two of these events, one after the other within forty minutes, separated by an interregnum of relative calm. And now a blindingly bright pre-sunset and cascades of multiform clouds sweep by at various altitudes as though arrayed upon several planes which move independently – a vast, transparent armillary sphere.

There's a fractal, almost pixilated quality to the clouds' edges, less like tufts of

cotton pulled apart than a digitized image rent asunder. Looking south, the buildings of the Lower Manhattan massif seems almost randomly shadowed and illumed. But more: a sense that the light itself is bending to strike certain structures and avoid others. You know this can't be true, the cause must be the intermittent cloudcover, yet the effect's uncanny. So many lately – these disturbed and perturbing skies.

Not to be outdone, the surrounding waters join the festival of décalage. Matte gray the surface of the bay directly south. And over toward the west your flashing little sliver of the Hudson flows: ice blue.

Earlier, toward the end of the gathering on the Upper East, Eric B. handed you a copy of *The Battery Park City Broadsheet*, which he'd picked downtown. With the action lessening outside, you unfold and scan. One headline grabs your eye:

LMDC and New Contractor Resume Work at 130 Liberty

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Time and Cost Expected to Double

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Company That Blew Up Sands and Stardust Casinos

Will Now Take Apart Deutsche Bank Tower

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New Contractor's "Culture of Safety" Touted

The gist is thus: The blaze last August has delayed the building's deconstruction by approximately a year. Meanwhile, the costs which Bovis Lend Lease,

the company in charge of the overall demolition, originally estimated at \$75 million just grow'd to \$150 million plus. And...

“One of the principal changes implemented [since the fire] has been the hiring of a new subcontractor, LVI Environmental Services, Inc., to complete the project. Known for its expertise in imploding large buildings, including several Las Vegas casinos, LVI had been one of the finalists for the original contract in 2005, but it withdrew its bid after another company on the short list received anonymous threats warning it not to take on 130 Liberty. This paved the way for the hiring of the John Galt Corporation, which was removed from the project... after the August fire, and which has subsequently been alleged to have ties to a company believed by some investigators to have been linked to organized crime.

“LVI prides itself on its “culture of safety,” having logged nearly 200,000 hours of abatement work at the Pentagon since September, 2001 without incident. Last month, however, one worker was killed and several injured during LVI’s decontamination and demolition of a power plant in San Francisco.

The strategy for taking 130 Liberty apart has also changed. Instead of simultaneously decontaminating and demolishing the remaining 26 stories – the procedure until the August fire – LVI will (pending approval of this project from [unspecified] regulators) remove all the toxins from the building before resuming deconstruction....

“I think what we’re seeing here is a real change in terms of transparency,” said CB1 [Community Board 1] chair Julie Menin...” Yatta, as they say, yatta.

Presumably the fire system which so catastrophically failed during the conflagration has been repaired. But why, oh why, is Bovis still handling the job? This

alone is beyond astonishing. What factors account for the more-than doubled costs, and who will pay them? Nowhere too, either in this article or the public discourse overall, will one find the admission that it is, in fact, not possible to take down such a toxic structure safely. Someone, somewhere, and perhaps a host of someones in numerous somewheres, will end up breathing in a great deal of extremely vile particulate crap, the whereabouts of which is subject to the vicissitudes of the elements and beyond the control of any human engineering system, however efficient or well-meaning. What becomes of the contaminated material they do manage unbuild and haul away? Who gets that prize?

And how will those harmed – along with those whose health has already been compromised – be monitored and cared for? Are they due any sort of compensation? If so, by whom?

Moreover, is it possible, under present circumstances, for any social system – even a micro-system like the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation – to operate with genuine transparency? Isn't it more a case of what must, at a particular moment, made clear to whom within a generalized default state of opacity? For economic and power relations to be sustained in anything like their current form, must they not, by necessity, operate beyond the sphere of public oversight? Otherwise, wouldn't the public exercise its will?

Or would we? Perhaps we like it better in the dark, having dwelt in caves and forests for far longer than we have in fenced-off fields and cities?

Strange too how the microscopic content of seemingly transparent air may appear, in time, as a shadow upon a respirating lung.

Still, Laozi said something on the order of

*Muddy water,*

*Let stand*

*Becomes clear.*

Which may prove true. Even here in darkest Darktown. Aka Opa-city.

Gwen's feeling fluish, body aches. Make her some pomegranate tea. But to you it seems like a hot chocolate kind of night. Out of milk. So you zip down to Kyung's. Pay. Refuse a bag, just loop your index finger through the plastic jug's handle and carry it that way, which causes your thumb to graze the top of the lid. Slick. What's this? A little disk of ice has formed there, a sixteenth of an inch thick, maybe a bit more. Frozen refrigerator condensation? Who knows? Waiting at the corner for the light to change, you flick the ice disk off like a tiddlywink. Your eye doesn't follow it down, but you hear a sound like the ring of a dropped quarter. So much so that you stop and look to see where it fell. Pick it up. Place it on the lid. Flick it off again. It hits the pavement and, with a barely audible click, breaks in two. Get moving, poppy, you got the light in your favor and it's chilly outside.

2/11 Breathtaking cold.

The Dow attempts to run up a little bull on the strength of having spun itself a fable about Hasbro toys' strong '07s fourth quarter. What are folks investing in now, Uncle Drosselmeyer futures? But wait. AIG, the company that "Hank" built, the world's largest insurer and number six worldwide, one of the thirty blue chips that make up the Dow, and presumptive owner of many a North American port facility,

announces that it isn't sure quite how much of a bath it took on credit derivatives whose value is based on now-crashed mortgages. *Uuh, give us a minute to figure it out,* they say. To which investors react with appropriate, if belated, skepticism.

Meanwhile, Yahoo, lush as Europa, spunkily rebuffs Zeus Gates's \$45 billion bullish advance. *We're worth more than that,* they shrill. *What do you think we are, some cheap floozy?*

Color them whatever, a chip's a chip for all that.

A week ago NASA transmitted the Beatles "Across the Universe" toward Polaris, 431 light years away, from the Deep Space Network transmitting station near Madrid – the purported intention being a triple celebration: the 40th anniversary of the song, the 45th anniversary of DSN and the 50th anniversary of the agency. Beatles "historian" Martin Lewis encouraged fans to participate in "Across the Universe Day" by playing the track as it was being, well, beamed up.

Next day, in fact only a few hours later, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, TM guru to multitudes, including the fab four, up and died, aged somewhere in his mi-90s. His last words, according to some, being "Jai guru deva om..." which roughly translates from Sanskrit as "Hail the divine guru om." This chant he'd taught the Beatles, and Lennon used it as a bridge lyric into the chorus "Nothing's gonna change my world..."

Freaky deaky daddyo. Particularly considering the mythologies connected with the North Star among black American slaves, but also the belief whose origins you don't know, that Polaris is the human soul's first stop after it departs earth.

Meanwhile, it's possible that the Lennon lyric is a Lady Mondegreen, a mishearing of "A Cross-eyed Universe." Does it sound as "Across the CUNYverse" to

those in the city's university system? Are word gamers hearing: "Acrostic universe"? Certainly Apple the computer company must be hammering Apple the record company to have the words officially changed to "Across iTuneiverse." If they're not, what's wrong with 'em? Or as Beethoven urged: "Think outside the Bachs."

Too weird take two. A pair of articles on the subject of Persia dominate the center of the *Messenger's* front page separated by the thinnest of rules, the optical equivalent of a translucent veil.

On the left the hard news. "On Revolution's Anniversary, a Split in Iran" headlines a picture of Ahmadinejad behind a podium, pumping a fist in the air, lunging forward in a pose that presumes an exhortation to assassinate the Great Satan, beneath which the caption describes him as addressing "a crowd of tens of thousands in Tehran on the 29th anniversary of the victory of Iran's Islamic revolution."

Immediately to the right, a volta face.

"Travel: The Other Iran: In the old Persian capital, Esfahan, an American finds a mostly friendly welcome." This illustrated by a photo of a merchant in the Grand Bazaar pouring a copious quantity of a gorgeously red spice from one gigantic brazen bowl into another. And of course, if you click on "slideshow," up comes a visual whirl of Oriental delights.

*Images of broken light which dance before me like a million eyes,*

*That call me on and on across the universe.*

*Thoughts meander like a restless wind inside a letter box, they*

*Tumble blindly as they make their way across the universe...*

Chanted Lennon, kan ya makan. And Bryan Ferry sang of

*Chameleon colour*

*All phases of moon*

*The shifting of planets*

*And leopard spots too*

*As destiny wills it*

*So seasons will change*

*Just like you.*

It is told that once, in his travels, Zhuangzi saw a skull lying by the side of the road, and lamented, out loud, "What a pity!" Whereupon the skull retorted, "How do you know it's bad to be dead?"

2/12 The Obama "hope" bubble seems a collective reaction to the economic deflation and the widespread sense of fear and depletion it induces.

Purely anecdotal, but among your friends and acquaintances who plaster themselves with his buttons and stickers, Obama registers more as a religious figure than a political one. There's a pharmaceutically tinged quality to these devotees – their manner of speech shifts toward the breathless. Altered states. Of the sort and intensity you haven't witnessed since the ascent of JFK. The politics of nitrous oxide.

The earth is held up by a giant magnetic turtle.



So much of how we feel the world to be hinges on what we experience as inside or outside.

Note to self: In your spare time, found the Do Nothing Party.

On the *Messenger's* left column a stack of three headlines:

"G.M. Reports Quarterly Loss of \$722 Million: Saying a slowing market had caused the swing to a loss, G.M. also announced a buyout offer to union employees to cut costs."

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"Buffet Offers to Reinsure Municipal Bonds: The offer, made to 3 troubled bond guarantors, would do little to alleviate the problems the companies are facing with more complex securities."

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"Mortgage Crisis Spreads Past Subprime Loans: Even borrowers with strong credit are feeling the pinch as home values fall."

While over on the right hand column, the Dow runs up a two hundred point bull. Paradoxical respiration.

A grand display of prominences, a kosmik prom as it were – flares dancing all around the solar limb.



Gil Esquerdo, 2/11/08

At T. and M.'s the other day, A. asked how many installments of *BW* you planned on sending out and you replied that you had no idea, that it was just ongoing and when it stopped it stopped. "Ah," he said. "It's like a scroll, then. Like *On the Road*."

"Yes," you said. "But maybe more horizontal, like a Chinese painting." Odd how it took you until just now, two days later, for his image, in all its intuitive astuteness – implying a constant unwinding and a simultaneous, reciprocal winding – to really click.

Bored witness. Bought witness. Vay ist mir!



In Noordholland yesterday, Jan Hemmer caught a glitter path in action: setting sun rays on a field of horizontal spider threads.

On the Charai Qamber, a plain on the outskirts of Kabul, a genuine humanitarian crisis plays out. There, under the harshest conditions imaginable – extreme cold and lack of food, a confluence of refugees: Laborers deported from Iran, families forced out of Pakistan many months ago by camp closings, farmers from the south whose villages have become unlivable due to fighting. Earwitnesses describe the

sounds, by night, of flapping plastic sheets and children coughing.

In remoter parts of the land, as snow began to fall in January, blocked roads and temperatures more frigid than the norm – early mornings in the minus twenties. The official estimate is five hundred plus people dead from cold along with a quarter million cows and sheep. And who can count the fingers and toes claimed by frostbite?

Snow in Chelsea. Sticking to the sidewalks, rooves and greensward. As usual, plenty of traffic up Eighth and across 23rd. But the snowfall blankets the streetsounds below. Unlike yesterday, no howling winds. Ah, there's a honk – one cab at another. Unconvincingly urgent, but audible. And another, even less inspired. A few beats of quiet, then a fanfare, albeit muted. So. What you're watching isn't a silent movie after all. A gull, no two, gliding way inland.

Sound of an airplane, reminiscent in its timbre of a slowed-down incoming shell. Somewhere to the east. Can't see it. Barely visible the Empire State.

Don't look, just listen. Roar of accelerating truck. Bleat of siren, staccato, yet half-hearted. You've been avoiding this moment and now the dust bunnies go gusting like tumbleweeds across their parquet prairie given the slightest breeze. Clumps of catfur insinuate themselves into the knap of the rug. Too late in the day to finish before nightfall. Still, you'll fill this room and all the others in turn with the sound of Electrolux. Up an' at 'em. Embrace the suck. Time is now.

Notes toward your stump speech:

*Some of my opponents promise that they will do a great many things forcefully. Others commit themselves to doing only a few things, and in moderation. But all of them promise that,*

*in some way, they will act. Here then is the difference between myself and all the other candidates: I alone can make the pledge that if you, the people, entrust me with the highest office in the land, I will do NOTHING AT ALL...*

Yes, and it is within the space of the roar of the vacuum, in the midst of running the carpet cleaner over the Kilim, that you finally hear the obvious: how his name, shouted at rallies, with its three open vowels – one for each syllable – sounds like a religious invocation, a plea for recognition, salvation even, addressed by a supplicant to a greater power – a worshipper’s prayer for rescue from a terrible plight. But the similarity is unmistakable – this not-too-distant phonic variation on O, Al-lah.

As always when such a flash strikes you, a reactionary inner voice shrills *You must be barmy!* Well, yeah. But there it is, forensic-like. You didn’t make these sounds up, just ID’d the connection between them. As no doubt millions of others have, consciously or no. But isn’t that how we work, our deep-down river of sub-thought ever flinging their currents against the pillars that uphold the tender bridge of rationalism?

How many Muslims, Shi’a and Sunni, ranging from fanatical to nearly secular have been obliterated in our name since October 7, 2001, when Operation Infinite Justice opened up its (anything but Salaam) bomb bays? And today, hundreds of thousands of Americans ritually utter a sound separated by way fewer than six degrees from that which invokes the presence of the Compassionate and the Merciful. Is this the weirdest form of blowback ever? But then, is it not often the way of blowback to manifest in forms so seemingly unrelated to received history that, to the vast majority of its victims, it makes no sense at all?

Hopefully, hopefully, the math you just did is not a subtotal that will be combined with other factors to produce an algorithm for assassination. But again, however unconsciously, this near phononym is going to scare some people shitless. And in your experience, terrified people go for their guns. And blast the roses.

Hopefully, Hopefully. Kan ya makan, in the love of the sound of things, the O-Al-lah of the Caliphate stuck on the tongue of the Reconquesteros to transform, Mudéjarically, over time, into Ojalá – “let’s hope” – so that, five hundred years later, in the great unending Diaspora of people and their tongues the Dominican trouvère Juan-Luis Guerra could chant of a new Cockaigne:

*Ojalá que llueva café en el campo.*

If only it would rain coffee on the fields.

*Que caiga un aguacero de yuca y té.*

And a shower of yucca and tea.

*Del cielo una jarina de queso blanco*

From the sky, a sprinkling of white cheese

*y al sur una montaña de berro y miel.*

And in the south, a mountain of watercress and honey.

*Oh oh oh oh oh,*

*Ojalá que llueva café...*

Oh, and as of this evening, he’s carried off Old Virginny by twenty percentage points plus. Not to mention Maryland and DC. All quiet along the Potomac, where the

*Washington Post* reports in a front page article that “Anonymous law enforcement and military officials revealed that F.B.I. interrogators provided Al Qaeda suspects with ‘food whenever they were hungry as well as Starbucks coffee at the U.S. prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.’”

*Next. Hey Agent Carmody, what can I get you today?*

*Hey Chuck, I’ll have my usual, and so will Sheikh Mohammed.*

*OK, coming right up – one Tazo® Chai Iced Tea Latte and one Skinny Cinnamon Dolce Latte®. Both venti, right.*

*Right, great. And the Sheikh wants a branola cranberry muffin. Aw hell, throw an apple branola in there for me too.*

*Sure, no hay problema.*

*Thanks dude.*

*Hey, have a great day.*

2/13 You catch up with him at the corner of 24th and Eighth waiting for the light to change, or a break in the oncoming cars, whichever comes first. Rangy fellow, black, close-cropped beard, early thirties if you had to guess. He’s particularly noticeable because he’s sans umbrella and outer garments, but his blue oxford shirt is only rain spattered on the shoulders, so he hasn’t come far. He cups his hand round his cigarette to protect it from the downpour which has been falling in near Biblical quantities since the snow stopped late last night.

You’re walking fast so you briefly overtake him and catch a glimpse of the CVS drugstore nametag clipped to his shirt pocket. Ah, he works across the street. One of the managers? ¿Quien sabe? But aha, he’s heading for Abdul’s coffee cart on the

corner. Why didn't he wait under the store's awning and cross diagonally when the lights were changing? He'd have stayed a whole lot drier. Again, go figure. No line waiting for Abdul, lucky for Mr. Blue Shirt. Abdul spots you passing. Quick exchange of salutations. Then he leans forward to hear his customer, of whose words you catch only these: "I'll take a *large* coffee this morning – six sugars..."

Quiet along the Potomac, peut-être, but drums along the Rio Grande foshizzle. Scuttlebutt of questionable provenance, but it makes sense that Felipe Calderón – el presidente de Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, and political leader of the world's putatively twelfth largest economy – met recently with David Rockefeller, who, in the absence of JP Morgan, could credibly claim to be the ultimate gringo banker. The agenda? Moves toward a common currency, the Amero or some such. *Novus ordo* whatever. It's all very Uncle Miltie (Friedman, that is). Very ShocDoc, this global credit pancake (GCP). Disaster Capitalism (DisCap) at its finest. Waterboard economics. Money talks, but what does it say? And how reliable is information thus obtained? Does it matter? Dangerous Opportunity, as "crisis" supposedly translates from Chinese – or as on dit aujourd'hui, DangOp. And of course all ops involve a certain degree of dang. *Grab a lamb in passing*: an ancient tactic that serves well in the present moment, as does the PrezPrime spectacle: *Stage a false show of sight and sound*.

These men, particularly the relatively gray ones like David, truly are High Priests of the Dark Side. But damn, they play an awesome game.

Amero. Just doesn't trip off the tongue like Euro does. Hell, why not call the new scrip the Ammo and get it over with? *At this hour, the Ammo is up against yen and*



*down slightly against the yuan.* Praise the Lord and pass the Ubique. From Large-Cap on down to Micro-Cap, they're all DisCap now.

When all systems fail, the only fallback is the *Amo*, invaluable currency of luv.

2/14 All bescaffolded the façade of the never-much-loved building fronting the Seminary between 24th and 25th on Ninth. Active demo phase. Casement windows open at crazy angles, random-like. Still, the structure, as you pass, seems to be breathing a sigh of relief to at last have its demolition underway.

*There's nothing you can do that can't be done.*

*Nothing you can sing that can't be sung.*

*Nothing you can say but you can learn how to play the game.*

*It's easy.*

*Nothing you can make that can't be made.*

*No one you can save that can't be saved.*

*Nothing you can do but you can learn how to be you in time.*

*It's easy.*

Et bon St. Valentin.

Now the Dow's down a hundred seventy-odd 'cause the FedChief sees a rebound coming, sort of, but, uh, maybe not right away. Poor market – don't know

whether to shit or go blind.

The headline runs “Stocks Fall Following Bernanke Comments,” and the *Messenger* explicates: “Though the Fed chairman’s comments suggested the Fed is still open to further interest rate reductions, the tone was, as expected, somber. Bernanke said the housing and credit crises have weighed on the economy, curbing hiring, and that as a result, consumers will probably keep paring their spending. Consumer spending is a pillar of economic growth.”

And I guess it, uh, gee, just now, um, maybe, it, um looks like, uh, the only pillar left standing.

Having nothing to do with Wisdom and her seven pillar’d house. Which as ever floats free, yet is anchored in the real. Unlike the Proverbial house where Folly presides, and beckons passersby with the same call as Wisdom does, “Whomever is a Fool, let him turn in here!” – though to an altogether different effect.

For when the Fool draws close, Folly whispers: “Stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.” But Folly’s Fool does not know that the dead lie all about, and that Folly’s guests abide, even while still living, in the depths of Sheol.

Says the Fool, believing it to be true: “I made money...”. And then he puffs himself up and leans against the pillar.

And again, the *Messenger* speaks:

WASHINGTON – The Pentagon plans to shoot down a disabled 5,000-

pound spy satellite before it enters the atmosphere in early March, a senior Pentagon official said Thursday.

The official said the operation was expected to be carried out from a Navy cruiser that would fire a missile specially fitted for the mission. Other details on the timing and location of the operation were not available, pending a Thursday afternoon briefing at the Defense Department.

It was not immediately known if the operation was prompted by fears that the satellite's debris would pose a danger if the satellite were allowed to tumble back into the atmosphere on its own; by reasons of secrecy, or by some combination of factors.

Many satellites have fallen harmlessly out of orbit during the space age, in part because they often break apart and the pieces generally burn upon re-entry. And when pieces do survive re-entry, they have usually landed in remote areas or in an ocean, simply because the Earth's surface has more remote regions and seas than it does heavily populated areas.

The operation, which was first reported on Thursday by The Associated Press, involves the Department of Homeland Security, the State Department and other agencies in addition to the Defense Department. It has ramifications that are diplomatic as well as military, in part because the United States criticized China last year when Beijing used a defunct weather satellite as a target in a test of an antisatellite system.

The United States has shot down at least one satellite before, in September 1985, as a test of an antisatellite system under development.

The impending demise of the American spy satellite, which has been a

problem for months, has been of some concern to rocket experts, who have speculated that the object may contain hydrazine fuel, which is typically used for rocket maneuvers in space and would be hazardous to anyone who came into contact with it on the ground, should any of the substance not be consumed by the fierce heat of re-entry.

“Appropriate government agencies are monitoring the situation,” Gordon Johndroe, a spokesman for the National Security Council, said in a statement in late January.

Specialists who follow spy satellite operations have speculated that the problem satellite is an experimental imagery device built by Lockheed Martin and launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California aboard a Delta II rocket. Shortly after it reached orbit, ground controllers lost the ability to control it and were unable to regain communication.

“Not necessarily dead, but deaf,” as Jonathan McDowell, an astronomer at the Harvard-Smithsonian center for Astrophysics, put it in late January.

John E. Pike, the director of Globalsecurity.org in Alexandria, Va., said in January that assuming the satellite in question was indeed a spy satellite, it would probably not contain any nuclear fuel, but that it could contain toxins, including beryllium, often used as a rigid frame for optical components.

*[bong bong bong]*

*Satellite of love*

*[bong bong bong]*

*Satellite of...*

Yes, five thousand pounds seems around the right weight for a small-bus-sized satellite. USA 193. D'ya suppose it's painted yellow? And will the lights be flashing?

Tell us O Wise Ones, what other substances may we soon see "consumed by the fierce heat of re-entry"?

And didn't my Lord deliver Daniel?

Or – in this version of the continually revised, nonstandard edition – is it Daniel who delivers Daniel?

Up and out there somewhere, Pentagon or Fed-ward, lie the hallowed precincts of the Powers that Be. While crouching furtively on the windswept streets of Chelsea, the Bowsers that Pee.

Trip down to the Tweed Courthouse to lend your body to the rally against school budget cuts. Walk east toward along Chambers. Taped to the windows of a liquor store near Church, pink hand-drawn signs of hearts pierced by arrows and written below: *Buy something!*

Of course one doesn't really shoot *down* an object in space, any more than the

sun rises or sets. Rather one blasts its fragments in all directions. So if a Navy missile actually succeeds in scoring a direct hit on satellite USA 193, several hundred, possibly several thousand pieces of space junk will be strewn into orbit round the earth, joining the more than twelve thousand officially detectable hunks of crap already there. Some of this debris came from spacecraft and materials various countries and consortia sent up and abandoned. Other refuse is due to unplanned structural failures, or, as with the Chinese last year, a deliberate use of anti-satellite weaponry.

One way or another though, and in whatever form, thanks to gravity, it all comes home.

But you won't rest easy till NASA's in the cold cold ground.