

5/13 The Metropolitan Transit Authority's Hudson Yards deal with Tishman Speyer derails, uncouples, and vanishes into the chasm of city-never-to-be-built as the chosen developer makes tracks for the hills. Why? What loco motives drive these gravy trains, only to wreck them? Eventually some sort of semi-coherent explanation will emerge. For now, only speculation on the non-availability of the credit such a vast undertaking would require, and a terse press release from the MTA (when are they going to exchange that middle initial to R for Realestate?), which reads in part: "Despite the best efforts of both sides, a final agreement could not be reached. The MTA has now re-entered discussions with other interested developers and remains committed to timely development of these unique and valuable parcels of land on Manhattan's Far West Side."

Unique, certainly. How valuable? Time will tell.

Let's fake a deal!

5/14 Walking toward Grand Central on this high spring morning. So much movement in search of sustenance. Nomad's land.

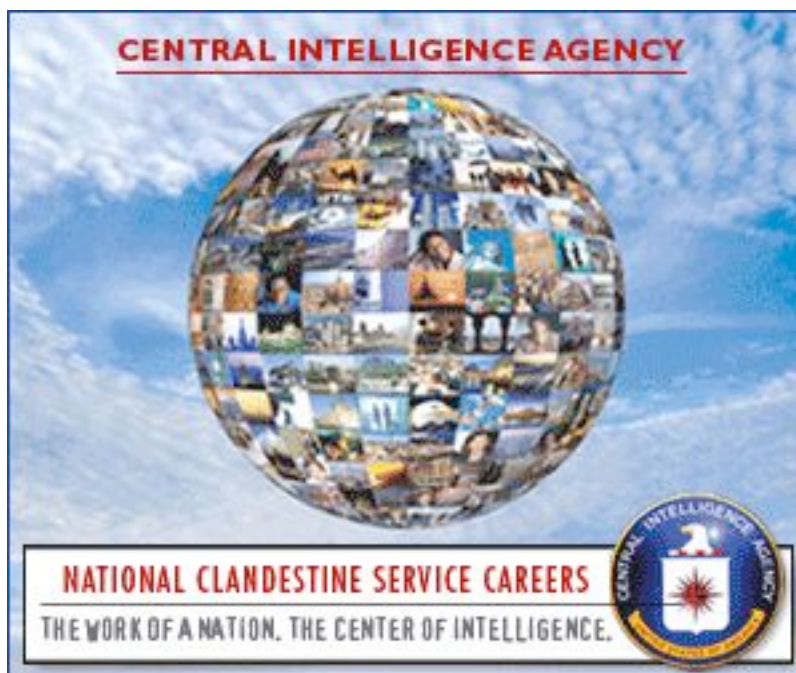
Immense tragedy plays out in China.

Constant change. And transformation.

Up in F.'s woods near the Bronx River, a stone's throw from the old Lorillard snuff mill, a pair of yellowgreen finches flying oak to oak. Sweetgum trees. Pokeweed.

Beech. Solomon's seal, both true and false. Young hemlocks that look healthy until you turn over a branch and see the white patches where the woolly adelgids have laid their eggs and on the underside of the needles too.

In one spot, among the fallen leaves, near the fruits of the exhausted-looking trout lilies, numerous tiny Chinese-red spiders, or ticks. Jack in the pulpit. Mayapple, many flowering. The "apples" come late in summer. Polygonum. Sassafras. Across almost the whole of the pond's surface, wolffia, the smallest flowering plant, looking for all the world like a skein of green polenta. Equisetales, pre-leaf-as-we-know-it, pre-seed. Ancient plants that send off spores.



Front page in the *Messenger*, just below the S&P 500, Dow and Nasdaq closing prices.

Shimon Peres and George Bush sit side by side in what the *Messenger* describes

as “a lush garden of olive trees” at the Israeli president’s residence in Jerusalem. Says W: “What happened here can happen anywhere.” Ghastly to contemplate, but yes, it’s possible. And from the criminal who presided over Katrina and the fall blossoming of disaster capitalism, beneath the apparent empathy lurks a dead-on threat.

5/15 The bottom story of the Seminary building does not go quietly. Twin steamshovels patrol the central rubble mound, busting up reinforced slabs with their great metal knuckles, while around the perimeter, a variety of smaller machines hammer away at whatever holdout elements remain upright. Through a gap in the hoarding you see a hardhatted fellow, squat as a Nibelung. He wears, belted to his waist, a box from which protrude twin joysticks that he manipulates with considerable finesse. Move a few paces to the side and it becomes clear that he’s not playing Grand Theft Auto, rather remote controlling a strange device. The thing’s got wheels, but these are elevated for the moment as it hops, nearly prances about on four extendable, vulcanized rubber-shod legs. At the end of an articulate neck, the creature’s head takes the form of a pneumatic chisel which beats like a woodpecker’s bill against a soon-perforated cinderblock wall. There’s writing on its flank:

ROBO BREAKING COMPANY INC.

(914) 939-0086

Back to the café and just reseated when a boom ripples the glass window behind you. Out to peer through the little holes in the plywood on Ninth Avenue to discover that a large section has been brought down amidst effusions of dust. One of the steamshovels is busy whanging the slabs into slabettes. One piece of what must

have been a floor-ceiling resists the steamshovel's ministrations and at length the scoop lifts it high from underneath and drops it from a great height. No dice. So the shovel reverts to fist and begins to pound away again. It's a question of getting the drop just right. Ah, there it's split in two. Clear going now.

One thing's different since your day. None of the kids heading toward school, either to PS 11 where Gwen used to go, or to the Catholic school on 10th Avenue seem remotely interested in viewing the mechanics of destruction. They don't even appear to aurally register the cacophony emanating from behind the plywood curtain. It's as if they live in another city altogether, one in which a city blocksworth of cataclysmic action rates not at all.

A couple of days ago T. emailed you:

A thought struck me about Born Witness: that, in fact, in prose, you are doing exactly what poets do with a body of work, which is to work out a metaphysic, both tactile and intellectual, for dealing with the world. And there's a line of Thoreau's about poets needing to monitor their own inner meteorology, which is also a generative aspect of Born. With the actual meteorology, which I happen to enjoy. And last but not least, as I watched you snap off shots of the missing seminary addition, vanished, along with all its ugliness, I was reminded of Baudelaire's line (I think) about the city changing faster than the heart does.

To which you replied:

Thanks for reminding me of the Baudelaire line from Le Cygne – one of several poems he dedicated to Victor Hugo. I went to look it up and discovered this, to me, huge – and howling – décalage in most of the English translations including my venerable New Directions version.

The couplet reads:

Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville
Change plus vite, hélas! que le coeur d'un mortel)...

"Mortel" literally means "mortal" but connotes in certain uses, the human being with an implied awareness of our ephemerality. It wouldn't work to simply say "Changes more quickly, alas!, than the mortal heart." Though that might come closer to B.'s intent. It certainly conveys more richness than "human" or "man." The sense of the line gets lost altogether without the imputation of actual mortality to the human heart recording the city's change. Amazingly the majority of translators simply jettison the word's primary degree of meaning and imagine that "human" somehow carries the freight – and this in a line from a poet who's nickname could be Mr. Mortality.

I'm going to have to start translating Baudelaire myself though I don't speak a lick of French really – I can't do worse than these translators who absolutely undermine the essence of his work.

The Dow celebrates a rapid succession of horrific disasters, including an explosion at a Nigerian oil pipeline that caused over a hundred fatalities – this and the absolute tanking of U.S. industrial output – by moving most immodestly to the brink of 13,000.

Les Liaisons Kangareuse.

5/16 The Dow seems to balk at the brink. Would the liminal 13 constitute irrational

exuberance? But crude be bold and we're talking \$130 as a none-too-distant threshold.

And the Saudis, faced with the physical presence of GWB for the second time in four months just say "no" to his putative urging to pump harder. But was Bush really there to talk oil or to try to make a deal, as he likely will to Mubarak, for taking out of the Qods Force base in Fajr. But who knows? Maybe the idea – and no doubt the Israelis would happily collaborate – is to go for an even bigger bite of the Iranian-Syrian enchilada. Time, and blood, will tell. No matter what, it's hard to imagine any good coming out of these sociopathic megadoses of threat and demonization of other.

Tweedle-dee Dum and Tweedle-dee Dee...

They seem determined to go all the way...

And again, Hellfire missiles shot from a drone rain down on Damadola, Pakistan, just over the Afghan border. Out of the blue. At least eighteen dead in an eyeblink – ah, but robots have no true eyes, nor need to refresh them with tears.

Once, back in the '80s, you wrote a song, dutifully performed in clubs throughout the East Village and beyond by your then-band, Salon Bon Ton. Don't remember the lyrics, only the chorus:

Someone's going to have to pay the bills

For all of these long distance kills...

5/17 "Chinese Flee Flood Threat From Quake."



Jason Lee/Reuters

“Thousands of earthquake survivors fled camps and villages on Saturday after warnings that several lakes and rivers were getting dangerously close to overflowing.”

5/18 State of Israel: 60th anniversary of its founding. Jew-wish fulfillment. *Land without people for a people without land.* Be careful what Jew-wish for.

5/19 Full flower moon. Time to plant corn. And in the meantime, design an SUV that runs on leftover tortillas.

5/20 A warm, rainy, November day.

They were right, those idealists of a former time. The International Worker *will*

be the Human Race. Whose masters will be cyborgs.

5/21 An entire culture in v-fib.

Can a deck chair be used as a flotation device?

The Dow, having tested, with one demure toe, the waters above 13,000 finds them entirely too hot, at least for the nonce, and retreats some 400 points in two days to find that the chaise longues have yet again been rearranged as the band strikes up "Nearer My God to Thee."

Whilst oil bats its eyes at \$134 and continues to seek its own level.

Once the dollar was massif. Now it's speedbump.

First there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is...

Alles verdampft.

5/22 When the ego collapses, the id and superego rush violently together and commingle, or at any rate grind together. Thus, in the person of Bush, the ultimate id release, preemptive strike and super, even uberego structure of Homeland Security, extraordinary renditions and the tyranny of the state which now only exists to order the murder of others as prelude to its own suicide. Bush sends thunderbolts hurtling like

Zeus, but walks like an eight-year-old.

When Americans, polled on question, overwhelmingly affirmed that they wanted “change” – which they identified with Obama – were they actually signaling a wish to construct or recast an ego that can effectively mediate the extremes, create or restore a reality principle in politics and by extension in themselves?

Clearly Hillary is, as they say in Liverpool, daft as a brush. McCain too. Are Americans, at least in considerable numbers, tired of living in exile from the possibility of an integrated self? Is Obama, who psychologically represents integration even as he biologically constitutes it, tapping in to a wish, perhaps even an adaptive impulse among many people to harmonize their split, yet ineffectively differentiated infantile and authoritarian aspects? Does he offer the identificatory possibility of creating a mediating structure that will allow the whole of the self to engage its manifold energies?

With what available objects does a schizoid culture construct a workable ego? Particularly given the abusive father and degraded, nearly obliterated mother.

Whether Obama is or is not personally sane hardly matters. Maybe he’s just as nuts as the other two but keeps it better wrapped. What’s interesting is that Americans, by the millions, are projecting their own desire to become harmonized, integrated personalities onto him. This, far more than the content of his speech, signifies a shift in the political discourse. What Obama is saying, not literally, but via the tone of his presence distills to this: “It is possible to cohere an integrated self out of diverse, even conflictual materials. See, I have done it. And if I have, then you can. The discontinuities within the self need not be crippling, nor treated as a source of shame. Nor, by extension, need the difference of others automatically trigger your fear and

hatred.”

Is there a part of our collective mind, however depleted, however late in the game, that strives, or at least yearns toward sanity?

Early evening and Bernard Cousin, aged 25, a medical student working part time as a publicist, sits with his friend and officemate Bernard Fritsch, aka Killian, having a drink at café la Chope on the place de Contrescarpe, near enough to much of the rioting that has raged on the Left Bank in the previous two weeks. There will be more violence tonight.

Cousin takes out a red felt-tip pen and writes *Il y a de l'herbe sous le pavés* – there is grass beneath the paving stones – on a sheet of white paper. Killian shakes his head. Doesn't like the grass image. It's too “naturiste” for his taste, plus it carries the unintended connotation of pot smoking. He suggests “the beach” – *la plage*.

Next morning, Cousin rearranges the words and added a comma in blue ballpoint. *Pour le rythme, le “swing.”*

SOUS LES PAVÉS, LA PLAGE.

It's sprayed hundreds of times, on hundreds of walls, sometimes by Cousin and Killian, sometimes by others. Once upon a time, forty years ago.