

February 7

Though hundreds of thousands had done their very best to disfigure the small piece of land on which they were crowded together, by paving the ground with stones, uprooting every vestige of vegetation, cutting down the trees, turning away birds and beasts, and filling the air with the smoke of naphtha and coal, still spring was spring, even in the town.

The sun shone warm, the air was balmy; everywhere, where it had not been scraped away, the grass revived and sprang up between the paving-stones as well as on the narrow strips of lawn on the boulevards. The birches, the poplars, and the wild cherry unfolded their gummy and fragrant leaves, the limes expanded their opening buds; crows, sparrows, and pigeons, filled with the joy of spring, were getting their nests ready; the flies buzzed happily along the walls, warmed by the sunshine. All were glad, the plants, the birds, the insects, and the children. But men, grown-up men and women, did not leave off cheating

and tormenting themselves and one another. It was not this spring morning that people thought sacred and worthy of consideration, not the beauty of God's world, given as a source of joy to all creatures, a beauty which inclines the heart to peace, to harmony and to love, but only their own devices for enslaving one another....

Which is how – the caveat being a dubious translation – Tolstoy opened his last novel, *Resurrection*.

Shortly after his country's financial collapse last November, the Icelandic writer Haukar Már Helgason put it this way in the *London Review of Books*: "There is an enormous sense of relief. After a claustrophobic decade, anger and resentment are possible again. It's official: capitalism is monstrous. Try talking about the benefits of free markets and you will be treated like someone promoting the benefits of rape. Honest resentment opens a space for the hope that one day language might regain some of its critical capacity, that it could even begin to describe social realities again."



Bush fires in Australia, northeast of Melbourne, consume vast quantities of

eucalyptus forest – the oil-rich trees become highly combustible in times of drought. The death toll so far, well over one hundred. Immediately preceding the fires, the highest temperatures in 150 years of official record-keeping: 117°.

While, to the north in Queensland folks paddle boats past their sunken homes while crocodiles watch from the rooftops. The rains began in December, and haven't let up since.

February 9



David Gray/Reuters

Fire Engulfs Beijing Hotel Complex

BEIJING — A fierce fire engulfed a major new building in Beijing that houses a luxury hotel and cultural center on Monday, the last day of celebrations for the lunar new year when the city was ablaze with fireworks.

The building was designed by the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas and is part of China Central Television's new headquarters, an angular wonder of modernist architecture that sits astride the city and was built to coincide with the Beijing Olympics

last year.

The fire was burning from the ground floor to the top floor, the flames reflecting in the glass facade of the main CCTV tower next to the hotel and cultural center. The 241-room Mandarin Oriental hotel in the building was due to open this year. Flames were spotted around 9:30 p.m. and within 20 minutes the fire had spread throughout the building.

Crowds of onlookers watched the fire, as the police tried to move the spectators away. People watching noted that the timing of the fire — coming at the end of the spring festival — was inauspicious. The main CCTV tower appeared to be untouched by the fire.

“Debris is falling and flames are coming out in all directions,” Edie Marshall, a Beijing resident, told Reuters.

The hotel’s Web site said the hotel occupies a prime position in Beijing’s central business district.

Sayeth the *Times*.



Yohanes Budayanto

Mandarin Oriental Hotel center left, CCTV tower center right. Unusually blue sky.



Photo: Ben

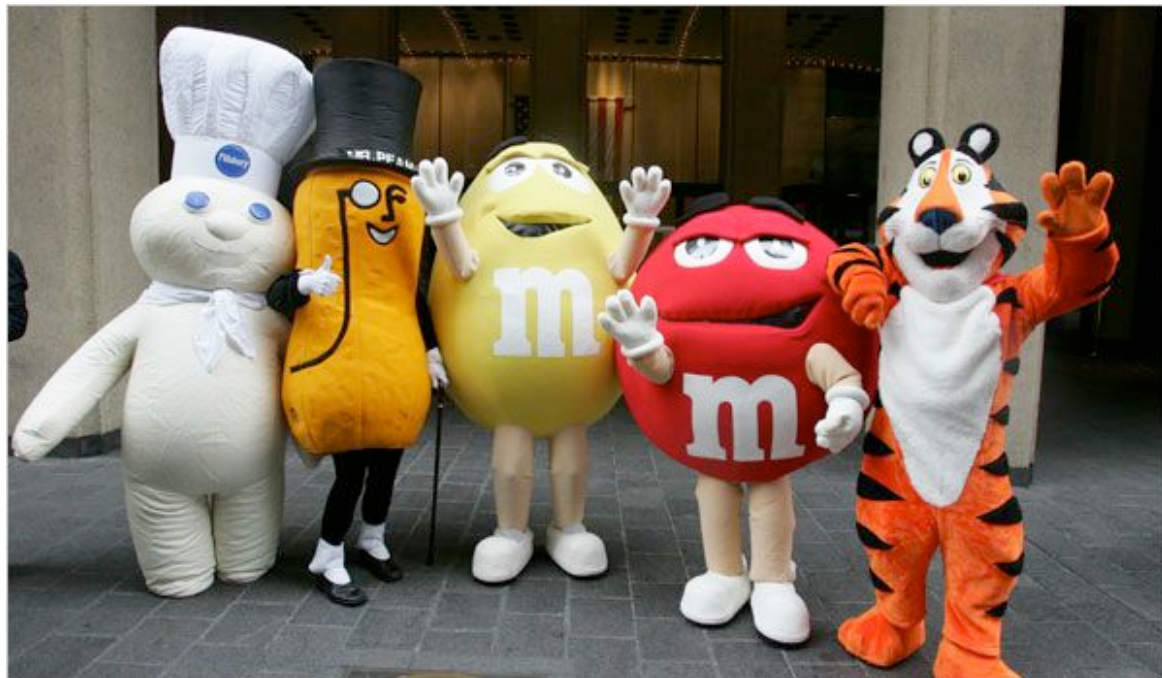
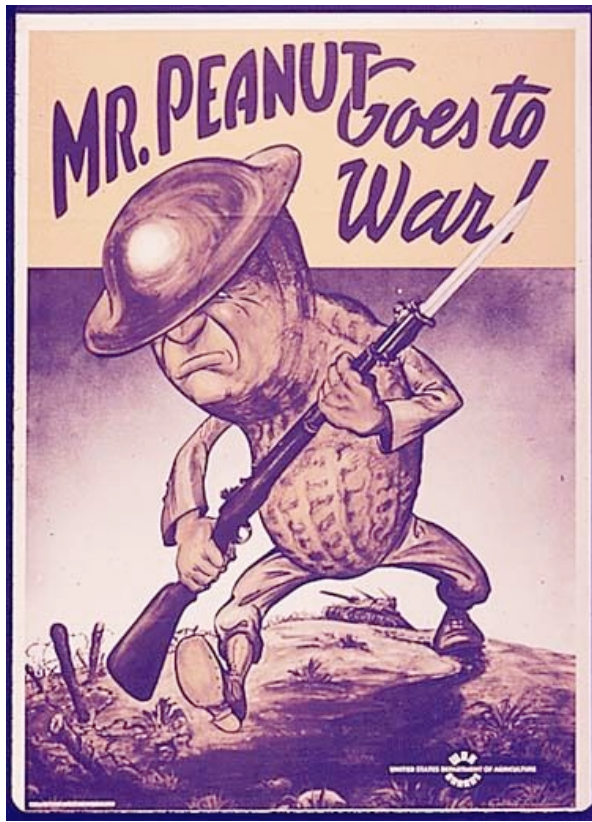
Not long past, the CCTV tower and Mandarin Oriental Hotel on the rise. Blue sky again.

Delirious Beijing, Rem. Delirious.

Peanut Case Shows Holes in Safety Net

Conditions at the Peanut Corporation of America were just one element in the outbreak of salmonella [that, so far has killed 8 and sickened 19-odd thousand].

The article carries on at length. But what more can one say?



Don Hogan Charles/The New York Times

With his mates in happier times.

Sometimes you feel like a nut. Sometimes you don't.

What's the use of worrying?

It never was worth while, so...

Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag,

And smile, smile, smile.



Andy Wong/Associated Press

In the mid-evening, at the time the blaze began, the Mandarin Oriental was filled with (mostly foreign) workers, laboring round the clock to finish its construction. Fireworks on the roof went awry, and...

[Arson Suspected in Australian Fires That Have Killed 131](#)

And Amazon.com hypes hard for the latest iteration of its "electronic book reader" named, of all things, Kindle.

February 10



Skoy vay! Weird enough for ya?

“The fact is that anything that emphasizes an effect is parasitic upon it, puts a strain on it, and inhibits it. [Laotze:] “Whoever stands on tiptoe is not steady, and whoever takes huge strides cannot walk properly.” As the saying goes, if you overdo it, not only are your efforts in vain, but you undermine even the possibility of an effect. Too much turns to too little, for excess not only acts as dead weight, not only threatens to reverse or exhaust the effect, but furthermore impedes what might have happened – one might say even what was just waiting to happen. The effect is quite simply prevented from *resulting*. A double price is then paid: internally, that obstruction; meanwhile, externally it causes the effect to be “detested.” For, instead of passing unnoticed, the excessiveness of the effect draws attention to it, provokes resentment, and attracts resistance, causing it to be rejected.”

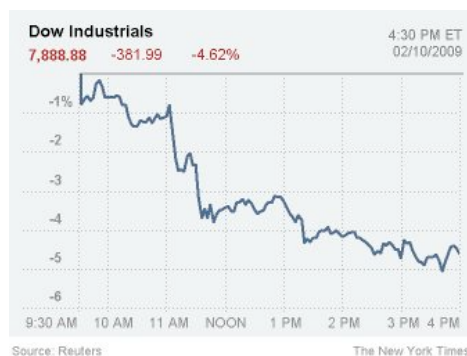
Says Jullien in *A Treatise on Efficacy*, p. 107. Doubtless he was, at the time he wrote it, not thinking about the WTC: the missing excess in the cityscapes above.

Whilst Timothy Geithner, Treasury Secretary, purportedly aiming to “restore faith,” opens his mouth, and immediately too much continues its slide into too little:

Stocks Slide As New Bailout Disappoints

The plunge begins with his, er, “unveiling” of the, ah, “plan” at 11 a.m. –382 at the ding.

Commenting on the \$838 billion “stimulus plan,” Jean-Pascal Beaupre of Quebec’s *La Presse* notes: “One may wonder whether President Barack Obama will recognize any of its measures when it’s adopted in its final form. The mountain is on the way to giving birth to a mouse.”





Fuzheado

Who needs sprinklers when you've got killer feng shui?



Ruth Fremson/The New York Times

Work? Hell no – you can't make me!