

## Intellectual Property

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The day the trucks began arriving  
with the materials for my Big Idea,  
it's not that I wasn't delighted,  
rare as it is to behold your very own  
Big Idea beginning to take shape  
in your back yard—  
& it's not that I wasn't grateful  
for that segment on "All Things Considered,"  
for the honorary doctorate from Stanford,  
& for the offers from think tanks  
both progressive & neocon—  
but all the same,  
I couldn't help feeling uneasy;  
I couldn't stop wondering  
where everything was coming from:  
the bricks, the stones, the mortar,  
the patio, the entertainment systems, the linoleum,  
the polished oak banisters, the cupolas, the flying buttresses,  
the peacocks, the gargoyles, the moat,  
the sheet lightning, ball lightning, forked lightning,  
the sunken grottos, the rainforest, the cascades,  
the mezzo-sopranos, the Visigoths, & the parking garage.

After dusk,  
when the workers had disappeared  
into their tent city  
to guzzle beer & slap down aces,  
I'd sneak onto the work site,  
drift through the roped-off areas  
as if haunting my own creation,  
& that's when I began to notice

the scuff marks on the linoleum  
& the featherless patches in the gargoyles' wings—  
why, even the sheet lightning  
was fraying at the seams,  
& the mezzo-sopranos couldn't conceal  
that tell-tale middle-aged vibrato.  
The tires on the workers' trucks  
were worn down nearly to the metal,  
the bumpers obscured by rust.  
So later that season,  
when my Big Idea had been publicly refuted  
& the components had been carted away,  
I understood that nothing had happened  
for which I could take credit—  
not even the conflagration that consumed  
the evidence of all that construction,  
nor the smaller, fiercer fires that followed,  
still blazing up spontaneously here & there,  
years after they'd first  
been extinguished.