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.