



## "heat it up baby"

Thursday night. I had forgotten all about it but now I can see the fire from two blocks away. The orange glow in the night sky condenses into one fiery focal point near the ground. From up closer three blazing pyramids rise high up into the air. Their sources are log-filled upright oil barrels with holes and slits in the lower sides. Bursts of sparks swirl above the nearby streetlight. A small crowd has gathered outside a small hut. People are chatting to each other. Two young men are going back and forth refuelling the blaze.

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Early this morning, a big truck with a crane drew up. The street reverberated with the engine. By noon the white kiosk with its glass front was stacked to the ceiling with dry logs. A notice posted in a small showcase invited attentive passers-by to participate in the transformation of energy into heat later that night. In the afternoon metallic waves of sound spread about the air. Hearing them I felt transported into a third-world township where metalworkers fashion car bodies out of scrap or beat crude copper plates into huge dishes with complicated patterns. Next to the kiosk a slight figure bent over what appeared to be a half barrel. From where I was standing I couldn't quite figure out what they were doing.

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The kiosk was recently transformed into a tiny art gallery. Every week someone new uses it as a showcase for their latest work. A breath of fresh art is blowing through our staid streets. Most Thursday nights the cars have to slow down to avoid hitting anyone on the outer edge of the crowd gathered to celebrate a new talent.

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Looking into the flames I am transported back to my childhood, to countless times when we stacked and lit dead branches and logs to cook potatoes or savoury sausages over the open fire in the middle of a harvested field.

The sparks rising into the night resemble fireflies swirling about in search of a mate.

I see homeless people in slums and big cities gathered round a similar fire in a similar oil barrel for a real need of warmth and company. The flames reach right back to the first human ever to stare into the light, realizing the warmth and usefulness of this gift. Hephaistos smiles down on us and Prometheus waves.

This clean street of a Bern neighbourhood suddenly feels akin to a Beijing street where vendors prepare their savoury meals over an open fire and hurried eaters barely take time to sit and gobble down the food.

I listen to the voice next to me: "It will soon be the 60th anniversary of V-Day." The three fiery barrels remind us of the sinister ovens of the holocaust, the fire of Hiroshima, all the fires of all the wars. We fall silent.

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The heat up close is unbearable. Even eight paces away from the barrels my face still feels hot. I stand mesmerized, watching the fresh, grey-brown logs turn black and red-hot before they burst into flame. The blue heart, its yellow tongue licks upwards. Always the same shape yet constantly shifting and changing. Most of the logs are pine. They spit and crackle, releasing sparks that rush into the black air above. Intermittent hissing, a constant rushing sound and a deep roar as of water coursing through a sluice. The bottoms of the barrels glow

orange with the heat and look as though they are about to buckle. Not likely, but the snow on the ground around them has melted. The meltwater has found its way to the nearest drainhole cutting a narrow channel into the five inches of frozen snow: a black snake runs through the dirty white along the pavement. Some of the onlookers have brought along sausages with them and long wooden sticks. Plans to roast the sausages are scuppered: the sticks are too short, the heat too intense. Most of the meat either burns to cinders or has to be eaten half-cooked. But people laugh off the minor culinary disaster. Cans of fruit juice and bottles of beer are handed round. No-one is cold. Faces are alight with smiles.

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Friday morning: All is quiet. Only a row of three black circular patches scars the ground outside the kiosk. A whiff of wood smoke hangs in the still air below the branches of the bare trees and in my thick coat.