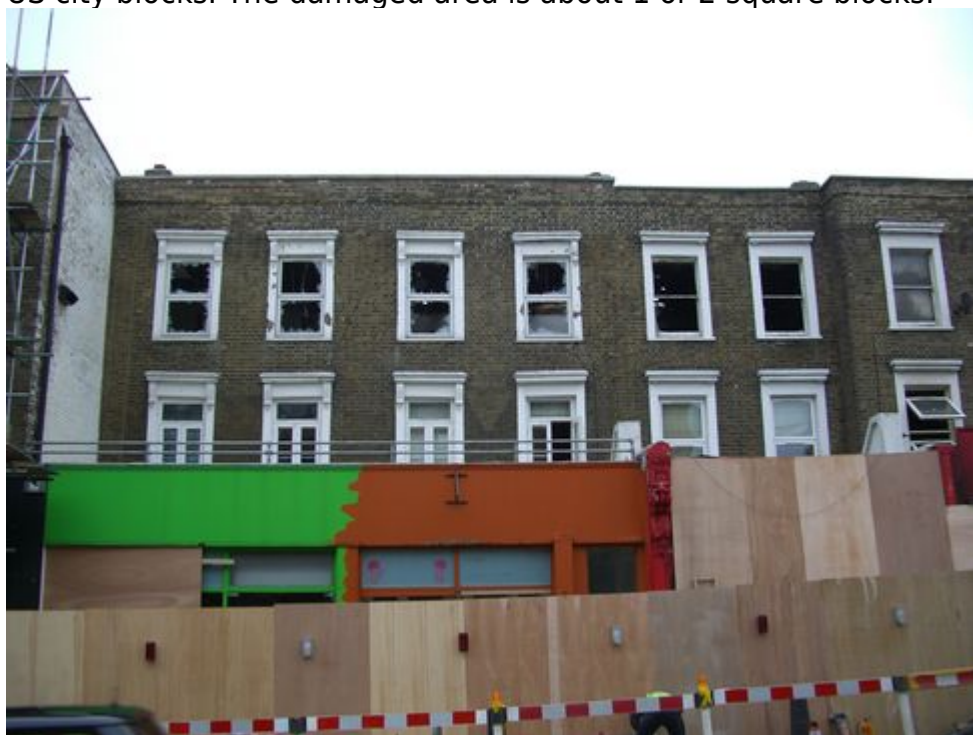


Okay, I am finally in sync with local time (6 hours ahead for those of you who are wondering) and I got up bright and early to cook myself a breakfast of bacon and eggs and a pot of coffee. The eggs were a mess, as I'm not used to the "hob" (cooktop) or the peculiar non-stick skillet, but I got the job done and ate well. Then it was off to Camden Town to take a look at how badly damaged it was in last weekend's fire. Today was the grand re-opening for those parts that survived.

Camden Town is off the northeast corner of Regent's Park, and my flat is near the southwest corner, so I entered the park, grabbed a latte to keep my hands warm, and stalked off across the park. It was *cold* this morning, probably about 2 or 3<sup>o</sup> C, or around 38<sup>o</sup> F. Brrr When I emerged from the park I found myself in a very different district than Marylebone. Camden Town is a depressed area, and it shows. It is very mod, and has that kind of feel you get in the Bohemian centers of many cities, such as Riverwest, in Milwaukee, or State Street, in Madison, or, well, the old Village in New York (before Giuliani/Bloomberg). I stopped into a "Fresh & Wild" which is the UK tradename for "Whole Foods". I just had to see how it was. It was odd to see this modern icon of big corporate meets green wedged into a dilapidated building in Camden Town. I bought some truffles and left (they have the *best* prices on organic truffles).

Here is what I found as I approached Camden Locks, which is the former locks, stables and yards where the open-air/indoor market sprawls over an area roughly equivalent to about 12 US city blocks. The damaged area is about 1 or 2 square blocks:





The fashion mongers seemed to have survived the best. There are a mix of vintage, resale and new fashions, with a really wonderful, whimsical style. I liked this set of styles:



Here is the shell of the Hawley Arms, a pub very popular with the stylish set, Lily Allen and Amy Winehouse among them. The place was a total loss inside, which is a shame as the owners had decorated with a number of pieces of original artwork, which went up in smoke. They swear to rebuild.



After poking through the open stalls, I headed out. Many vendors were still loading in

merchandise as I left. Some stalls are not secure enough to leave the product in them, others suffered too much smoke or water damage.

Next it was down to Leicester Square on the tube where I stood on line at the Tkts booth with a lovely couple from Toronto. I lucked out with another "single in stalls;" Row L again, to see Ring Round the Moon this evening. With fees and all it cost about \$40US. Not bad for a West End show. With my evening booked it was back to the Northern line for a ride down to Waterloo/South Bank. The Hayward Gallery has a pair of shows that caught my eye:

[Alexander Rodchenko](#) and [Laughing in a Foreign Language](#).

Upon my entry to the South Bank Arts compound, I saw this placard up on the wall and just had to take a shot:



I really enjoyed both exhibits. Laughing is an interesting examination of cultural differences in humour. Some of it put me off, such as a film which most struck me for the air of cultural superiority displayed by the filmmaker as he traipsed around through different cultures.

Some of what he did was funny, but much of it just seemed insensitive. There were many video pieces, which were interesting, but some were just too long (one was 59 minutes!). My favorite pieces were a series of scribbles on a wall at the landing of a stairway (can't recall the artist); "Born as a Box" by Shimabuku and "Wet Paint Handshakes, 24.01.08 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm" by Norwegian Rod Varra. The former is a simple taped up cardboard box which contains a CD player and speakers, from which we hear, spoken by the artist in English, "Hello, I'm a box. Just a box. Some people may think its a rough existence, but I rather like

it..." and on, a kind of existential riff. Rather good really.

Handshakes was wonderful, I'll try to do it justice here. What you see is a video monitor, a black tuxedo jacket the front of which is covered with white paint (and obvious hand prints) hangs on the wall above a pair of paint spattered black patent leather shoes. On the floor is butcher's paper, a pair of large wash basins full of milky white water, an empty paint pail, and many drip marks. On the video we see the artist, a stoic 55 year old man, wearing the tuxedo. He dips his hand into the paint and then reaches it out. A visitor to the exhibit opening tentatively shakes his hand, and then proceeds to a wash basin to clean the paint off their own. The artist never cleans the paint off his hand, so the paint just gets thicker and thicker on it. As the later guests shake his hand you can watch as their grip sinks their fingers deep into the layers of wet paint on the artist's hand.

No photos allowed. □

Back out on the South Bank, I took these shots of the Jubilee bridge and the trees and other geometric objects surrounding it.







Before we leave the South Bank, here is a bit of scrawl from a bench. I hope Ivy appreciated this bloke's apology:



The Jubilee bridge takes you to the Embankment and then spills out near Covent Garden. From there, with a stop for fish and chips (it being Friday, after all) brought me back to Trafalgar Square and the National Gallery. I didn't spend long there, just long enough to enjoy the wonderful collection of van Gogh, Cezannes, Pissaro, Seurat, etc. All my old impressionist pals. That's about as modern as they get. I think I'll find more to enjoy at Tate Modern, maybe next week.

On the way back home from Marylebone Station, came across this little sign:





Ta!