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THE NEW YORKER

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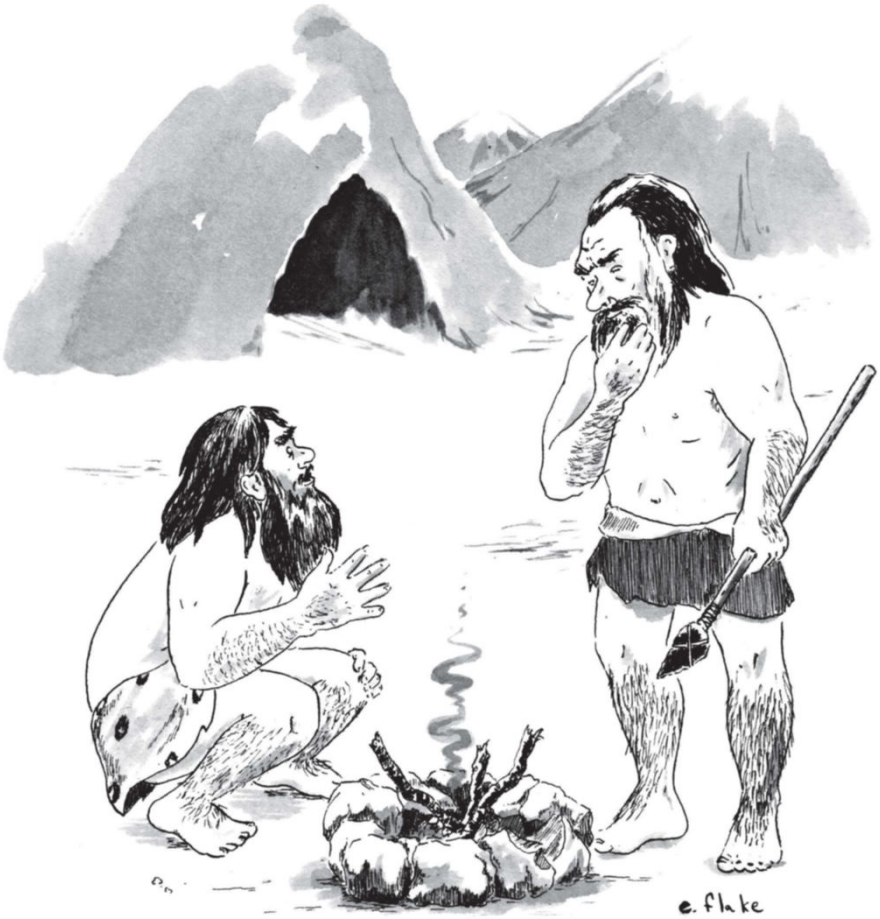
DRAWINGS *Emily Flake, Jeremy Nguyen, Amy Kurzweil, P. C. Vey, Harry Bliss, Edward Steed, Roz Chast, Trevor Spaulding, Benjamin Schwartz, Christopher Weyant, Liana Finck, Paul Noth, Will McPhail, John O'Brien, Tom Chitty, Robert Leighton* SPOTS *Sébastien Plassard*



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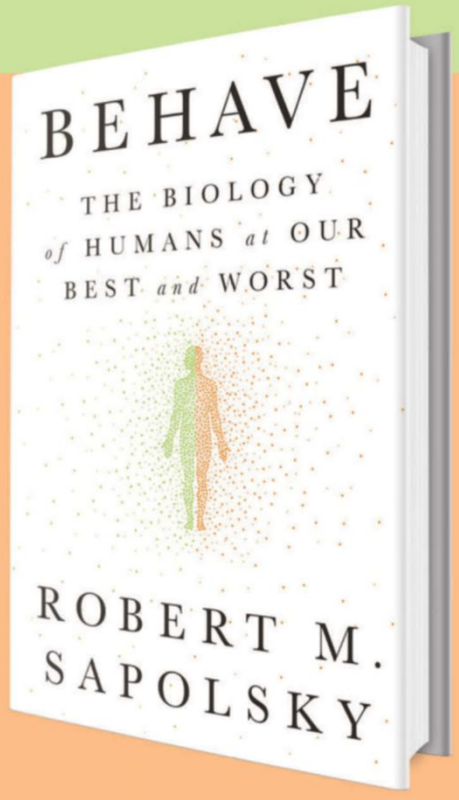

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PHOTO BOOTH

Carolyn Kormann writes about Bryan Thomas's photographs of a changing Florida coastline.

PODCAST

On this week's episode, Etgar Keret reads "Fly Already," his short story from the issue.

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LEFT: PHOTOGRAPH BY BRYAN THOMAS

THE MAIL

LEADING THE REVIEW

Though my memory may be imperfect after half a century, it is highly unlikely that Norman Podhoretz, the author of "Making It," a critique of New York intellectuals, was asked to become a co-editor of *The New York Review of Books*, as my late wife, Barbara Epstein, has recounted and as Louis Menand reports in his essay on Podhoretz (Books, May 1st). When Barbara and I, along with Elizabeth Hardwick and her husband, Robert Lowell, envisioned the *Review* at dinner, in the early nineteen-sixties, we decided immediately that Bob Silvers—and only Bob—could edit it. That evening, we called Bob, who immediately grasped what we were planning and accepted the job. (Bob died a few weeks ago.) I became estranged from Podhoretz some years later, after he threatened to end our friendship if the *Review* did not celebrate his book. I told him that the *Review* leaves such judgments entirely to the reviewer. In the case of "Making It," the reviewer, like most others, found the book foolish.
Jason Epstein
New York City

CHRISTIAN EXILES

I am a gay, married Episcopal priest, so I was particularly interested to read Joshua Rothman's Profile of Rod Dreher, the religious writer, whose recent book, "The Benedict Option," entreats Christians to exile themselves from modern life and retreat into religious communities ("The Seeker," May 1st). Much of what Dreher writes about resonates with me, from his dislocation, his restlessness, and his yearning to belong to his critique of both right-wing and left-wing Christianity, with their vapidities and identity politics. But I take issue with the gender binary that Dreher seems to adhere to, and the fear associated with it. It is possible to experience the truth of God—and to withdraw from the world into a small, religious community—without subscribing to essentialist notions of gender, sexuality, or identity. It is sad to me that Dreher is unable to see the liberative aspects of gospel identity along with the "ordering" aspects that he so admires.
Mark Genszler
St. Francis Episcopal Church
North Bellmore, N.Y.

TRUMP'S FIRST HUNDRED DAYS

I share many of David Remnick's opinions about Donald Trump and his so-called policies, but not the dread expressed in his recent Talk of the Town piece (Comment, May 1st). The article attempts to convince the reader that President Trump poses a threat to America's democracy. It warns that we may be witnessing the nation's demise, and notes that, to date, many democracies have failed. The United States was never as liberal as Remnick seems to imply, nor are democracies from different eras quite as comparable as he suggests. Our democracy remains a work in progress. We should embrace vigilance rather than debilitating anxiety about the future.
Jeffrey J. Cymrot
Newton, Mass.

Remnick spends nearly all his extended Comment talking about the Bad Guy, Donald Trump. But, if there is to be a liberal, democratic future, Remnick, the media, and the Democratic Party need to start promoting true progressives, such as Bernie Sanders, who are not beholden to corporations, rather than Democrats like Elizabeth Warren, who has been moving toward the center for the past two years. They must also realize that, as unhappy as many people are with Trump, some citizens—even on the left—are relieved that the candidate whom they consider the greater of two evils was not elected.
Alan Cohen
Eugene, Ore.

•

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

The Bronx Zoo is one of many institutions under the aegis of the Wildlife Conservation Society, which protects ecosystems around the world. New to the zoo are eight Indian gharials—critically endangered reptiles of the crocodilian order, indigenous to the Chambal River, in India—identifiable by their needle-nose snouts. They can be found basking in the JungleWorld exhibit, along with white-cheeked gibbons, painted storks, and Indian fruit bats. The gharials eat mainly fish, and not humans, perhaps only because their mouths aren't wide enough.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP MONTGOMERY

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera
A crew of topnotch singers brings a wealth of dramatic specificity to the current revival of **"Don Giovanni."** Mariusz Kwiecien's leathery-voiced Don is a dandy with an alpha male's desire to dominate those around him, but that doesn't stop Erwin Schrott from stealing the show as a best-in-class Leporello marked by a bone-dry wit and a thundering bass-baritone. The entire cast—including Angela Meade, Matthew Polenzani, Marina Rebeka, and Isabel Leonard—copes admirably with Plácido Domingo's sluggish conducting and keeps the musical values high. *May 11 at 7:30.* • **Also playing:** Franco Alfano's **"Cyrano de Bergerac"** is a fluent example of Italian opera after Puccini, but it really owes its contemporary renewal to a few star tenors who have been unable to resist the chance to play the immortal title character. Roberto Alagna headlines the current revival, opposite Jennifer Rowley and Atalla Ayan; Marco Armiliato. *May 10 at 7:30 and May 13 at 8:30.* • Opening night of the Met's revival of Wagner's **"Der Fliegende Holländer"** was the occasion for a well-deserved round of toasts: to the veteran German baritone Michael Volle (in the title role), whose voice may have lost a little richness over the years but not a bit of authority or style; to the American dramatic soprano Amber Wagner, who offered a star-making performance (as Senta) that, with its dark intensity of coloring, could stand comparison to Astrid Varnay; and to the conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin, the company's music director designate, whose solo curtain call brought forth a cascade of roses, thrown by a grateful orchestra. *May 12 at 7:30.* • Robert Carsen's unmissable new production of **"Der Rosenkavalier"** brilliantly updates Strauss and Hofmannsthal's eighteenth-century setting to the turbulent, militarized pre-First World War Vienna of Schnitzler, Klimt, and Musil—even if some of his gestures (such as setting Act III in a brothel) go too far. Renée Fleming is a poignant Marschallin, Elīna Garanča a thrilling and highly original Octavian, and Günther Groissböck a surprisingly dashing and youthful Ochs. Also with fine performances from Erin Morley, Matthew Polenzani, and Markus Brück; Sebastian Weigle. *May 13 at 12:30. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000. These are the final performances of the season.)*

On Site Opera: "The Secret Gardener"
Before the exquisite madcappery of "Le Nozze di Figaro," an eighteen-year-old Mozart set loose a different cast of characters on a picturesque estate for a day of mistaken identity and jealous reversals. On Site Opera takes great care in selecting the locales for its shows, and this production is no different, with Eric Einhorn staging the opera buffa in the Westside Community Garden, accompanied by a wind octet and double bass. *May 11-13 at 7. (123 W. 89th St. osopera.org.)*

Operamisson: "Behind the Mind: The Complete Cabaret Songs"
The cabaret literature is populated with a long line of eccentric characters, and some of the most memorable ones can be found in William Bolcom's jaunty collection, including the shady "Black Max," the flamboyant "George," and the irresistible charmer known only as "Amor." The countertenor Jordan Rutter performs all twenty-four songs in the seventy-five-seat Cabaret Theatre at the Duplex, with Operamission's director, Jennifer Peterson, at the piano. *May 16 at 9:30. (61 Christopher St. at Seventh Ave. purplepass.com/operamission.)*

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic
The Philharmonic continues its deep and unexpected dive into live cinema accompaniment. First comes a screening of Blake Edwards's **"Breakfast at Tiffany's"** (with its splendid score by Henry Mancini), which serves as the orchestra's spring gala. Then it's on to a short run of Steven Spielberg's **"E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial,"** one of the high notes in the professional love affair between Spielberg and his favorite composer, the venerable John Williams. Joshua Gersen (the orchestra's assistant conductor) and David Newman conduct, respectively. *May 11 at 7:30; May 12 at 7 and May 13 at 1 and 7. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.)*

BAM: "Silent Voices"
Hilton Als, a critic for this magazine, and the poet Claudia Rankine are among the writers contributing original texts for this concert by the beloved Brooklyn Youth Chorus, a program that highlights social injustice and marks the ensemble's twenty-fifth anniversary. The commissioned composers include Nico Muhly, Kamala Sankaram, Paul Miller (DJ Spooky), and Caroline Shaw. *May 12-13 at 7:30. (Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. bam.org.)*

American Symphony Orchestra: "The Apostles"
The conductor Leon Botstein has been a prominent champion of Edward Elgar, and, in 2007, demonstrated his affinity for the English composer's regal œuvre throughout a memorable Bard Music Festival. Here, the festival's chorus, plus six vocal soloists, joins the orchestra in "The Apostles," a ravishing 1903 oratorio in which Elgar set texts from the Bible and the Apocrypha. *May 12 at 8. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)*

RECITALS

NYFOS Next
The soprano Lauren Worsham became an alt-classical star in 2012, with her incendiary performance in David T. Little's opera "Dog Days." Not exactly a slouch in music theatre, either, the Tony-nominated Worsham and her husband, the Obie-winning musician Kyle Jarrow, like to get into trouble with their band, Sky-Pony, which enticingly mixes indie rock, burlesque, and performance art. New York Festival of Song, hopelessly smitten, gives them the last of its season's contemporary-music events, which will take place in the stylish and judgment-free Williamsburg venue National Sawdust. *May 10 at 7. (80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org.)*

Symphony Space: John Luther Adams Residency
Living in Alaska for more than twenty-five years provided the composer John Luther Adams with ample inspiration for a singularly expansive, contemplative body of work. He now spends much of his time in New York City, and his Symphony Space residency includes a recital by the sterling pianist Lisa Moore at the intimate Thalia Theatre. It also sprawls beyond the venue, with the esteemed chorus the Crossing performing "Canticles of the Holy Wind" at St. Michael's Church, while Alarm Will Sound disperses throughout Morningside Park to play "Ten Thousand Birds." *May 11 at 7, May 12 at 7:30, and May 14 at 3. (Broadway at 95th St. symphonyspace.org.)*

Chiara String Quartet
The Chiara, a favorite ensemble at the Met Museum, returns to offer a concert of two substantial works: the Clarinet Quintet by Brahms (with Todd Palmer) and the String Quartet No. 6 ("Canticle") by the respected American composer Pierre Jalbert, in its New York première. *May 11 at 7. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949.)*

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center
Charm and rusticity abound in an intimate recital by two outstanding young musicians, the violinist Alexander Sitkovetsky and the pianist Wu Qian. Their program includes sonatas for violin and piano by Schumann (in D Minor, Op. 121) and Grieg (No. 3 in C Minor), in addition to Falla's "Suite Populaire Espagnole" and Schnittke's "Suite in the Old Style." *May 11 at 7:30. (Rose Studio, Rose Bldg., Lincoln Center. 212-875-5788.)*

Alexandra Gardner
Many contemporary composers are interested in combining acoustic instruments with digital sounds, but few achieve the particular alchemy of craft, whimsy, and sensual appeal that the Baltimore-based composer Gardner consistently produces. Appearing as part of the "Musical Ecologies" series at the Old Stone House, in Brooklyn, she presents works for unaccompanied shakuhachi and for alto flute, amplified violin, and cello, each paired with electronics. *May 11 at 8. (336 3rd St. 718-768-3195.)*

Bargemusic
A highlight of the weekend at the floating chamber-music series is a recital by the admired pianist Yael Weiss, who interleaves three Beethoven sonatas (including No. 24, "À Thérèse") with more recent works inspired by classic American popular forms, by Paul Chiara ("Rag 109") and Paul Schoenfield ("Boogie 54"). *May 12 at 8. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. For tickets and full schedule, see bargemusic.org.)*

Five Boroughs Music Festival: Quicksilver
The enterprising, citywide festival's next concert features a group—led by the superb violinists Robert Mealy and Julie Andrijeski—that's become a firm presence in New York's early-music scene. Here, the ensemble ranges somewhat beyond the usual precincts of Renaissance and Baroque creativity to explore work by composers from Poland (Mielczewski), Austria (Fux and Schmelzer), Sweden, and Belgium. A performance in Queens, on May 12, precedes the Brooklyn engagement. *May 13 at 7:30. (Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, 85 S. Oxford St., Brooklyn. 5bmf.org.)*

Carolyn Sampson
The British soprano, whose clarity of voice shines through a broad repertory, offers a Mother's Day recital at Alice Tully Hall in which a floral theme connects songs by several composers from across the centuries. The selection includes works by Purcell ("Sweeter Than Roses"), Schumann, Britten, Schubert, Strauss ("Mädchenblumen"), and Poulenc ("Fleurs"). *May 14 at 5. (212-721-6500.)*

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ART

Shiba Inus and an undead celebrity roam an Earthlike planet in a far-off future, in a still from Ian Cheng's digital simulations, "Emissaries."

IMAGE COURTESY THE ARTIST

Never-Ending Story

Landscape and consciousness evolve over eons in an exhibition at MOMA PS1.

WHAT IF A work of art was so smart that it could free itself from the artist who made it? The digital whiz Ian Cheng takes a deep dive down that wormhole with "Emissaries," a trio of color projections, now unfolding in three rooms at MOMA PS1, which he describes as "video games that play themselves." These simulations are set millennia apart in the same landscape, which evolves from volcano to lake to atoll. (Politically minded viewers might grok a cautionary climate-change tale.) The characters start out shamanic and end up sci-fi. They include, by time line, a prophetic owl and the plucky daughter of a village elder (a prehistoric Arya Stark), a pack of Shiba Inus and an undead celebrity (a skeleton with sunglasses intact), and a meerkat-like race of futurist ranchers. Activity unfolds in real time according to rules programmed by Cheng and his collaborators, but, as in life, rules do not control outcome.

The thirty-three-year-old artist, who studied cognitive science at Berkeley and worked at the visual-effects company Industrial Light & Magic before earning his M.F.A., at Columbia, is fond of a quote by Philip K. Dick: "Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away." The same might be said of Cheng's alternate realities. Even when the museum is closed, "Emissaries" continues, thanks to a live stream on the Web site twitch.tv, which plays twenty-four hours a day. During a recent visit to the exhibition, I never encountered the owl—whose existence I learned of in a handsome, diagram-laden brochure that Cheng designed—but the dogs were busy dodging laptops, furniture, and a Brancusi sculpture, which floated by as they swam in the lake. The meerkat-ish tribe, whom Cheng has dubbed "Oomen," just huddled forlornly on barren terrain.

They reminded me of the abandoned family on David Bowie's home planet in Nicolas Roeg's 1976 movie "The Man Who Fell to Earth." The association isn't entirely random, given Cheng's canny use of cinematic techniques, from omniscient aerial views to extreme closeups. But this isn't a movie, and expectations of conventional narrative should be checked at the door. Cheng has said, "I hate that art is given the burden of having to be meaningful. I think this is a misunderstanding. Maybe the real purpose of art is to wrestle with the relationship between meaning and meaninglessness and how they transform each other."

Cheng's project is impressive, even profound, but it is not without precedent. Chance operations have been central to art since the mid-twentieth century. Matthew Ritchie has been visualizing character-driven cosmologies for more than twenty years; Paul Chan's postapocalyptic video cycle "The 7 ~~Lights~~" is another touchstone. And the compassion of Cheng's transhumanist vision aligns him with a cohort of other young artists working in New York, staying awake as they dream of the future.

—*Andrea K. Scott*

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MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum
"Adrián Villar Rojas: The Theater of Disappearance"
In this whimsically apocalyptic rooftop installation, the Argentinean artist arranges foam-urethane replicas, based on 3-D scans of more than a hundred pieces from the museum's collection and scans of live models, in sixteen black-and-white tableaux. Figures from across cultures and history kiss, gesture at one another, and vamp around several long white tables set as if for a Mad Hatter banquet—"Alice in Wonderland" meets "Night at the Museum." In one piece, an early-twentieth-century tomb effigy from Kentucky is adorned with a staff from West Africa's Dogon people and an ancient Chinese vase. In another, a child in a seventeenth-century Japanese helmet shaped like a conch shell sleeps peacefully atop an enormous fragment of an Egyptian queen's head. *Through Oct. 29.*

Guggenheim Museum
"Anicka Yi: Life Is Cheap"
The New York artist—the winner of the museum's 2016 Hugo Boss Prize—works provocatively across mediums, but has distinguished herself as a Conceptualist of scent. For this exhibition, she teamed up with molecular biologists and forensic chemists. At the entrance, we're confronted with an olfactory mystery: metal gates at either end of the short corridor suggest a holding pen, and insecticide spray cans on the floor emit a custom fragrance acidly titled Immigrant Caucus. It's a subtle, sociopolitical concoction—something slightly bitter, maybe resinous, that you might not usually notice—made of compounds derived from, we're told, carpenter ants and Asian-American women. There's a menacing allure to the installation, which you may suspect is working on you subconsciously. After all, Yi makes no secret of her interest in exploiting advanced scientific methods to manipulate sensory perception. (It's also the theme of her stunning 3-D video "The Flavor Genome," currently on view in the Whitney Biennial.) Two strange, complementary dioramas, like luxury-department-store window displays, occupy the dim gallery. "Lifestyle Wars" is a dark, glittering, L.E.D.-lit cybernetic-themed environment populated by industrious ants; "Force Majeure" is a glowing Cronenbergian scene of paintings made using bacteria. On the walls, white tiles are stained with growing colonies, and flesh-like silicone sheets decorated with living splotches are draped on tripods. With "Life Is Cheap," the ever-inventive Yi again taps into the anxious undercurrents that haunt our fondest technological fantasies. *Through July 5.*

Brooklyn Museum
"We Wanted a Revolution:
Black Radical Women, 1965-85"
In this superlative survey, familiar names mingle with those that deserve much more recognition. The several dozen black women artists whose work is featured did not conform to one style, but they did share urgent concerns, often addressing issues of bias and exclusion in their art—and in their art-world organizing. Senga Nengudi used her remarkable, corporeal abstract sculptures, made from stuffed panty hose, as elements of her performance art, captured in haunting photographs, which are contextualized by correspondence detailing her affiliation with Just Above Midtown Gallery (JAM), a crucial New York institution of the black avant-garde, instrumental to the careers of a number of the included artists. Lorraine O'Grady is one of them: her sardonic "Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Costume," a pageant gown made of countless white gloves, which she wore to exhibition openings in her iconic guerrilla performances of 1980-83, is wonderful to encounter. Painting is well represented by dense, textured color-field marvels by Howardena Pindell, from the seventies, which are placed in quiet dialogue with Virginia Jaramillo's gorgeously bright, hard-edge abstractions, from the same decade. A strikingly slapdash self-portrait by Emma Amos, from 1966, centers the artist's intense, direct gaze. Not surprisingly, there is a great deal of powerful photography on view, from Coreen Smith's spontaneous portraits of Harlemites in the seventies to Lorna Simpson and Carrie Mae Weems's poignant pairings of image and text, from the eighties. But it's the ephemera here—the raw documentation and spirited newsletters—that becomes the exhibition's fascinating glue, showing these women not as anomalous achievers but as part of a formidable movement. *Through Sept. 17.*

American Folk Art Museum
"Carlo Zinelli"
Born in 1916, the self-taught Italian artist was drafted by Mussolini to fight in the Spanish Civil War but sent home after only two months, suffering from shell shock. He was committed to a psychiatric hospital in Verona in 1949, and lived there until his suicide, in 1974, producing hundreds of colorful gouaches, distinctive for their obsessive repetition and figural silhouettes filled with bubbles or holes. The earliest piece in this exhibition depicts a city teeming with giant birds, naked humans, and arching roads, with almost no empty space. Later, Zinelli introduced adroit changes of scale, in complex, graphic compositions that balance keen design instincts with the mysterious depths of great art. In one work, from 1960, a man with green legs twice as long as the rest of his body is surrounded by cutaway houses, oversized leopards, and scores of small figures in brown, black, and dark green. A remarkable red-and-yellow piece from 1963 includes a female silhouette lying amid a phalanx of smaller figures, suggesting a portrait of the collective unconscious. *Through Aug. 20.*

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Walead Beshty
The London-born, L.A.-based artist seems to be aiming for radical transparency regarding both the art-making process and its industrialized context. Deconstructed computer scanners are impaled on poles, and wall-mounted flat-screen TVs have been sliced in half or cored like apples. Also on view are big color photograms and copper etchings of the artist's handprints and medical prescriptions. Some of the pieces, particularly the destroyed electronics, risk fetishizing Beshty's ability to transmute other people's work into profit (he's a very successful artist). More compelling is a series of five-foot-tall, L-shaped copper monoliths, which were deliberately installed without gloves, so that their mirror-bright surfaces would accrue evidence of their circulation through the art system in the form of dark fingerprints—a portrait of behind-the-scenes labor that verges on the sublime. *Through June 17. (Petzel, 456 W. 18th St. 212-680-9467.)*

Justin Matherly
Last year, the New York-based sculptor exhibited cast-gypsum figures of Asclepius, the Roman god of healing, his son Telesphoros, and his daughter Hygeia, at Zurich's Galerie Eva Presenhuber. Somewhat blocky but full of earnestly eccentric personality, they rested on hollow pedestals cast in concrete from cardboard shipping boxes and supported with walkers. Matherly's ingenious idea for a semi-reprise at his New York gallery was to make new sculptures with the same molds, which he had broken off the original casts. Now the once dignified Asclepius, clutching his staff, is split down the middle, and a figure of Telesphoros, a symbol of recovery, is pierced with holes and missing an ankle. These degradations, rather surprisingly, serve to make the figures—survivors, all—that much more powerful. *Through May 20. (Cooper, 521 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)*

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Céline Condorelli
For the final show at this experimental space, the design guru Prem Krishnamurthy tapped the London-based artist Céline Condorelli, whose art reflects the gallery's ethos: art meets graphic design in aestheticized self-reflection. A 1930 gouache by Herbert Bayer, titled "Extended Field of Vision," which depicts an eye surveying a range of flat planes, is displayed in a large hole cut into a wall—one of several such interventions—in between an abstract screen print on acrylic by Condorelli and a large plant, which, per the accompanying checklist, is promised to Krishnamurthy's archive. (Although he is giving up his physical space, he will continue to work with artists.) In "It's All True," a four-color lithograph, five years' worth of displays in the gallery's window are seen superimposed. Like many of the preceding exhibitions, this one is irresistibly complex and colorful, if a little hard to decipher. *Through May 21. (P!, 334 Broome St. 212-334-5200.)*

Amy Douglas
The British artist deploys her specialized trade—the restoration of antique Staffordshire ceramics—to devilish effect in this wonderful show of small sculptures. Salvaging broken nineteenth-century figurines, she seamlessly reconfigures shards of shepherds, maidens, saints, and a menagerie of animals. Douglas's vignettes are witty, perverse, and sometimes macabre, as in "I Lost My Head," which shows a princely, decapitated figure juggling an assortment of heads, including those of a child and a tabby cat. Another standout features a woman looking to the heavens, as four rosy-cheeked men peer out from a horizontal slice in her white frock. Douglas often underscores the sneaky political content of her ingenious bricolage with sarcastic titles. "I Will Be Phenomenal to the Women" pokes fun at the forty-fifth U.S. President, showing him as a dandyish aristocrat with a lemon-yellow comb-over and a golden apple stuffed in his mouth. *Through May 21. (Hanley, 327 Broome St. 646-918-6824.)*

Richard Tinkler
Whenever the artist sells one of the hundreds of drawings—dense geometric webs of mostly straight lines in colored pen or pencil—that he stores in albums in his studio, he produces a duplicate to take its place. This may sound obsessive, but paging through the album included in this enticing show of small paintings elicits a mood of tranquillity, and the seven untitled oils, each of which Tinkler made in a single sitting, are even more serene. In one, thick lines scraped into a rose-pink background form repeating panels of prismatic stars. In another, large diamonds of orange, red, and blue-black have the securely corralled improvisational beauty of a textile. *Through May 28. (56 Henry, 56 Henry St. 646-858-0800.)*

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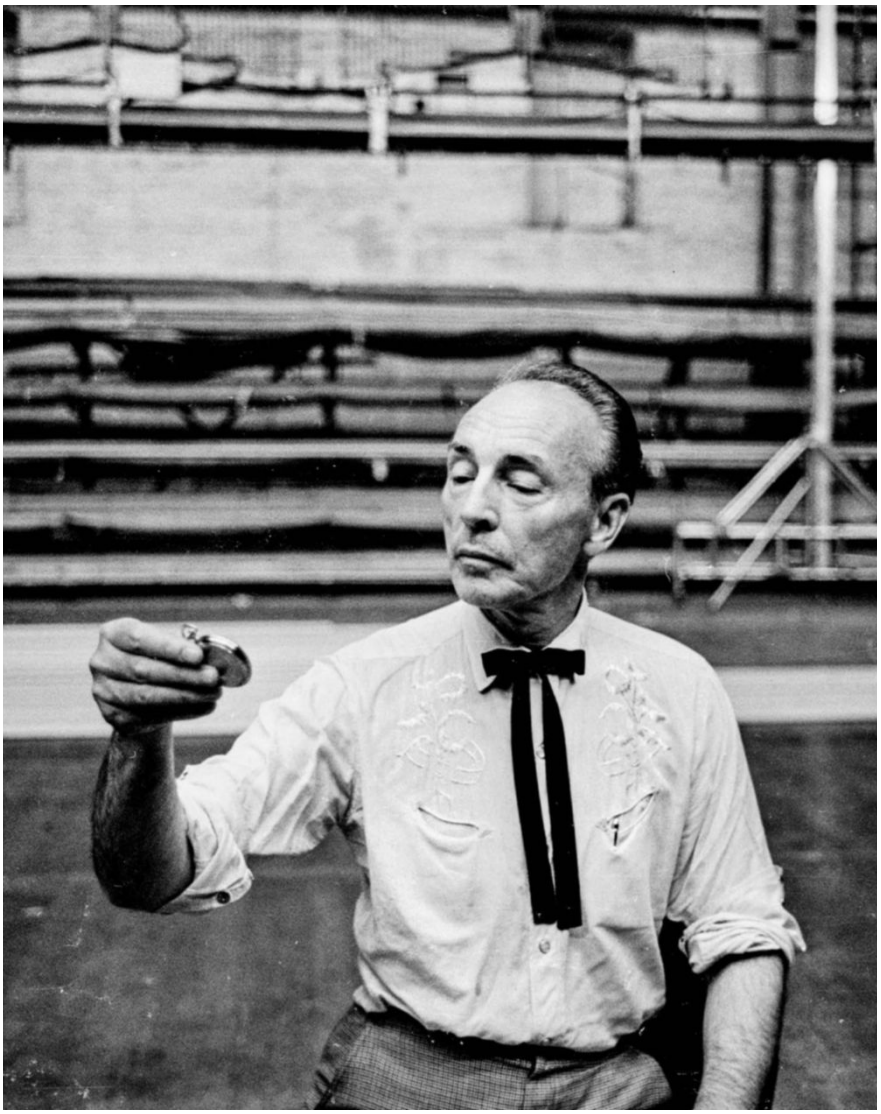
DANCE



A video project attempts to record the choreography of George Balanchine as he himself taught it.

ROWNTREE/EXPRESS/GETTY

Lost and Found

Patricia McBride rehearses young dancers in "Rubies."

PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS telling us, wistfully, that dance is evanescent, here this minute, gone the next, and therefore that it's like life. This is not true. Balanchine went on staging his "Prodigal Son" for fifty years. Every time a dancer came through his door looking as though he would make a good Prodigal (Jerome Robbins, Edward Villella, Mikhail Baryshnikov), Balanchine would pull that ballet out of the cupboard and put it on again.

But what if the ballet's creator is dead? It's hard to remount a ballet from a single filmed performance, because that's just that dancer's idea of what it should look like, which she may have got secondhand or tenth-hand. Furthermore, the film can show only how she did it on one night, when perhaps she was in a bad mood or dancing on a sore toe.

The solution would be to make the choreographer immortal, so that he would always be there to coach the ballet accurately. And that, in a way, is the goal of the George Balanchine Foundation Video Archives, which Nancy Reynolds, a former New York City Ballet dancer, founded, in 1994, and even provided some of the startup money for. "The idea just came to me," she said. "What would we give to have seen Mozart coaching Don Giovanni?" So, twice or three times a year, for the past twenty-odd years, one of Balanchine's veteran dancers has come into a studio under Reynolds's direction, taken a skinny little dancer, usually from New York City Ballet, by the hand, and, in front of a battery of video cameras, demonstrated how Balanchine taught her to dance one of his ballets. If, at any moment, the younger dancer says, "Oh, that's not the way we do it now," and shows her something different, the master dancer may perhaps say, "Oh, how nice," or not, but it is her job to point up the disagreement, so that people watching this tape in the future will know what the original was. (The recordings—there are now more than fifty—are available at the New York Public Library's Jerome Robbins Dance Division and at research libraries around the world.)

Last month, I went to a studio at the School of American Ballet to watch Patricia McBride, who danced for Balanchine from 1959 to 1989, coach Lauren Lovette and Daniel Ulbricht, both from City Ballet, in the famous pas de deux from "Rubies," now a half century old. The music, by Stravinsky, is complicated, and so is the mood. The ballet is fun and jazzy, but, according to McBride, the original female lead, Balanchine said he wanted "angry legs." When I asked her whether, in coaching, she was ever tempted to repair changes made since she stopped performing the ballet, she answered that she did so only when the new steps seemed to be going against the music. Music: that was the theme of the taping session, as it was of Balanchine's career.

It was very moving to watch McBride work. This diminutive woman, with a forehead full of bangs, seemed like an angel with a fiery sword, standing at the gates. Nothing dates faster than yesterday's "street" ballet. McBride in "Rubies" was always cool and sexy, but also tidy and cheerful and exact. And now this normalcy of hers, this lack of vulgarity—documented by the Balanchine Archive tapes—will stand forever as protection of a vulnerable ballet.

—*Joan Acocella*

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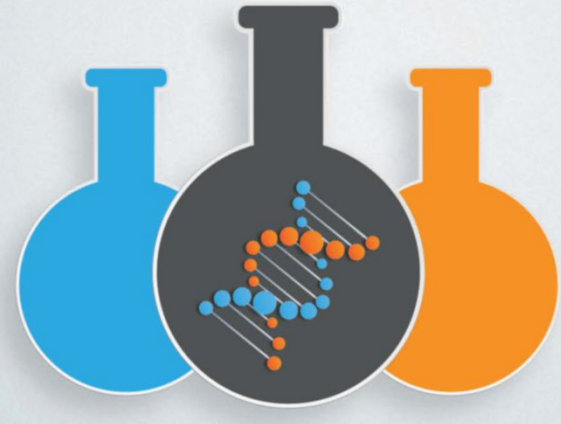

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American Ballet Theatre
Ballet season begins in earnest as the city's two major companies, A.B.T. and New York City Ballet, face off at Lincoln Center. As usual, A.B.T.'s spring offerings at the Met are dominated by big, full-evening ballets ("Giselle," "Le Corsaire"), the kind adored by old-fashioned balletomanes. But there are some novelties as well, in particular Alexei Ratmansky's new take on Richard Strauss's 1924 ballet "Schlagobers"—here translated as "Whipped Cream." It's a fantasy ballet with a whisper-thin plot involving a boy with a passion for sweets who finds himself dreaming of dancing parfaits and cream puffs—a perfect excuse for a suite of imaginative, often tongue-in-cheek dances for a vast array of daffy characters, all set within a dreamlike world created by the pop surrealist Mark Ryden. Other season highlights include Diana Vishneva's farewell, in the tearjerker "Onegin" (June 23)—and Alessandra Ferri's return to the role the same week—as well as a week of one-act Tchaikovsky ballets, including George Balanchine's "Mozartiana." • May 15-16 at 7:30: "Don Quixote." *(Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-477-3030. Through July 8.)*

New York City Ballet
Since creating his first ballet for the company, in 2012, Justin Peck has been hard at work, producing new pieces for his colleagues at a pace of two a year. On May 12, the troupe unveils its fourteenth Peck opus, "The Decalogue," a dectet set to a piano score by the Brooklyn-based songwriter Sufjan Stevens. The two have collaborated before, with success. Also this week, on a program that includes Alexei Ratmansky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," the company presents Christopher Wheeldon's "Carousel (A Dance)," from 2002, which includes a pas de deux with dark, sensual undertones. • May 10 at 7:30 and May 13 at 2: "Carousel (A Dance)," "The Blue of Distance," "The Infernal Machine," "Pictures at an Exhibition," and "Year of the Rabbit." • May 11 at 7:30 and May 13 at 8: "Ash," "Funérailles," "Common Ground," "Oltremare," and "Rodeo: Four Dance Episodes." • May 12 at 8 and May 14 at 3: "Slice to Sharp," "Chiaroscuro," "Stabat Mater," and "The Decalogue." • May 16 at 7:30: "Red Angels," "Varied Trio (in Four)," "Polaris," "Herman Schmerman Pas de Deux," and "Concerto DSCH." *(David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Through May 28.)*

Richmond Ballet
On its visits to New York, the State Ballet of Virginia likes to show off the variety of works that it regularly commissions. This program of New York premières includes Ma Cong's "Lift the Fallen," a sentimental swirl about overcoming grief, and "Polaris," a cosmic-themed trip by the contemporary choreographer Katarzyna Skarpetowska. The title of Val Caniparoli's "Swipe" refers to its sideways motion, its borrowings from African dance, and the way the composer Gabriel Prokofiev remixes music by his grandfather Sergei. *(Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 9-14.)*

Battery Dance Company
In recent years, this stalwart troupe has distinguished itself with international collaborations. This season, the company's forty-first, includes "Echoes of Erbil," a solo by Hussein Smko, who is from the Kurdish region of Iraq. "On Foot," an ensemble piece about refugees by the group's artistic director, Jonathan Hollander, features Smko and also live participation by the Syrian visual artist Kevork Mourad and the Syrian musician Kinan Azmeh. *(Schimmel Center, Pace University, 3 Spruce St. 212-346-1715. May 10-11.)*

Hilary Easton + Co.
In many New York buildings, a radiator is a noisemaker, disturbing the peace with clanking and hissing. But Hilary Easton's latest piece, titled "Radiator," is a hushed meditation on the quiet power of dance. The low-key prowess of the dancers Michael Ingle, Alexandra Albrecht, and Jessica Weiss combines with Easton's compositional expertise. *(Gibney Dance: Agnes Varis Performing Arts Center, 280 Broadway. 646-837-6809. May 11-13.)*

Koma Otake
For more than forty years, Eiko and Koma were a celebrated husband-and-wife duo, the king and queen of coupled slow motion. Then, in 2014, Eiko started doing solos; Danspace Project presented three astonishing weeks of them last year. Now Koma gets his turn. "The Ghost Festival" is part art installation, with twenty-four portraits of the dead, made of sticky-rice paste and hair, arranged around St. Mark's Church and in a mobile trailer outside. Koma's solo performance honors those spirits, incorporating traditional music and dance from rural Japanese festivals into his own painstaking practice. *(St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. May 11-13.)*

Rocha Dance Theatre
Jenny Rocha is as much a costume designer as she is a choreographer, and the outfits she's created for her hour-long dance work "Battledress" are wild. Hoopskirts like armor, frilly materials made knife-sharp, curlers or a heeled pump worn as a protuberant helmet: this is female attire that makes a statement, at once protective and aggressive. *(Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. 866-811-4111. May 12-13.)*

François Chaignaud and Cecilia Bengolea
In recent years, Dia:Beacon has presented the work of such dance eminences as Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, and Steve Paxton. Now this less established and less exalted Paris-based duo gets the museum's imprimatur. Their 2004 piece "Sylphides" is an intriguing art project that involves vacuum-sealing dancers in body bags. "Dub Love," from 2014, shallowly mixes ballet pointe work with moves from club and street dance. The accompanying reggae-and-dub d.j. set should get the former factory thumping. *(3 Beekman St., Beacon, N.Y. 845-440-0100. May 12-14. Through May 21.)*

MOVIES

OPENING

King Arthur: Legend of the Sword Guy Ritchie directed this version of the medieval tale, starring Charlie Hunnam, Astrid Bergès-Frisbey, Djimon Hounsou, and Jude Law. *Opening May 12. (In wide release.)* • **Paris Can Wait** Eleanor Coppola directed this comedy, about the wife of a director whose business partner joins her on a day trip. Starring Diane Lane and Arnaud Viard. *Opening May 12. (In limited release.)* • **Snatched** A comedy, directed by Jonathan Levine, about a mother (Goldie Hawn) and daughter (Amy Schumer) who take a jungle vacation together. *Opening May 12. (In wide release.)* • **Stefan Zweig: Farewell to Europe** A historical drama, about the Austrian Jewish writer's exile in the nineteen-thirties and forties. Directed by Maria Schrader; starring Josef Hader, Barbara Sukowa, and Aenne Schwarz. *Opening May 12. (In limited release.)*

NOW PLAYING

Casting JonBenet
This narrowly reflexive documentary reduces its participants to reality-TV entertainers. The filmmaker, Kitty Green, goes to Boulder, Colorado, and auditions, on camera, local residents for a dramatization of the unsolved killing of JonBenét Ramsey (which occurred there in 1996) and its aftermath. She shows only brief performances from her script by the aspiring actors, and instead interviews them at length about the case and their interest in it, eliciting speculations and reminiscences in addition to deep and traumatic personal stories, which they divulge in the hope of being cast. Meanwhile, Green stays above the fray and out of the question; her motives and interests, as well as her presence in the locale and her presentation of the project to its participants, are rigorously kept out of the film. (Also, she doesn't speak with any nonwhite Boulder residents.) Green's editing squeezes the actors' outpourings into sound bites; the snippets of dramatizations that she films are insubstantial, undeveloped, disengaged. Every aspect of the movie is trivialized—the experiment with documentary form, the participants' experiences, and the case itself.—*Richard Brody (Netflix.)*

Chasing Trane: The John Coltrane Documentary
A dully conventional film about a brilliantly unconventional musician. The director, John Scheinfeld, starts the account in the mid-fifties, when Coltrane first came to prominence, as the saxophonist in the Miles Davis Quintet, from which he was fired for his drug and alcohol habits. Quitting cold turkey, Coltrane found fresh inspiration in the company of Davis and Thelonious Monk before forming his own band, reaching new heights of popularity and then repudiating it in the interest of deeper and wilder musical ideas. The sketch of Coltrane's early days emphasizes the influences of his two grandfathers, who were ministers, and the film draws a through-line regarding his spiritual quest. It features many performances by Coltrane (including some fine if familiar film clips) but buries them under graphics and voice-overs; the movie's one enduring contribution is interviews with some of Coltrane's musician friends, including

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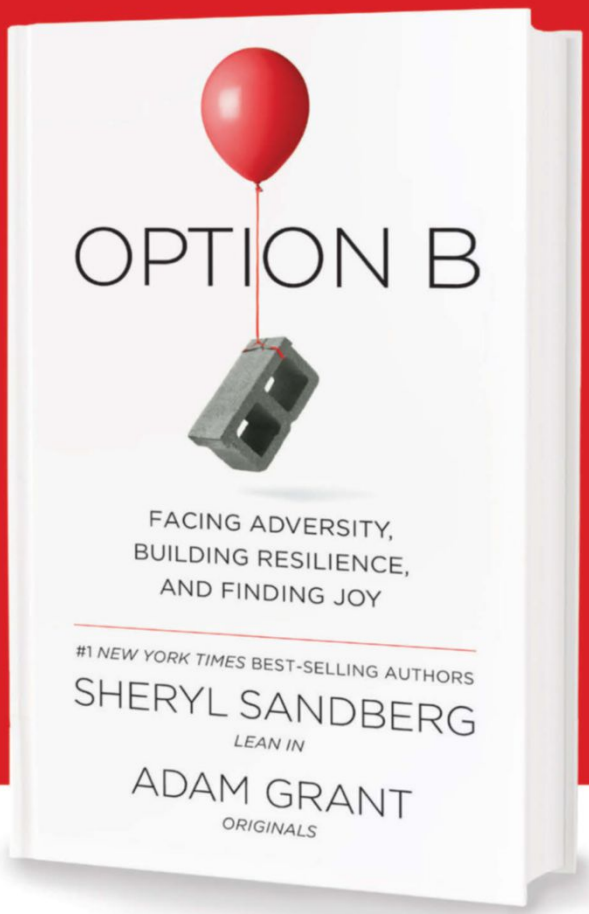

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OptionB

KNOPF

Jimmy Heath, Reggie Workman, Wayne Shorter, and Benny Golson, but these discussions are edited to snippets. Meanwhile, the film offers almost no musical context; Scheinfeld seems more interested in Coltrane's story arc than in his art.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

Close-Up
Abbas Kiarostami's intricately reflexive 1990 drama tells the true story of an unemployed Tehran movie buff who passes himself off as the internationally acclaimed filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Invited into the home of a credulous couple, the impostor announces his plan to make a film starring their adult son. The father, growing skeptical, invites a journalist to visit, who, in turn, brings the police. After reading a report about this case, Kiarostami filmed a reënactment with each participant (himself included) playing his own role, and he gained permission to film the impostor's trial. The ironic politics of Kiarostami's audacious method blend the intellectual impulse of documentary observation and the emotional need for self-dramatization—the free play of imagination and the free range of vision, both of which, in the course of the action, are crushed from the high stool of a courtroom's clerical overlord. In Kiarostami's furiously clear view, religious dogma suppresses the eye's observations through the dictate of the word; his calmly unwavering images, with their wry humor and generous sympathy, have the force of a steadfast resistance. In Farsi.—*R.B. (Anthology Film Archives; May 12 and May 14.)*

Colossal
The director Nacho Vigalondo's new movie is partly a blandly schematic drama of self-discovery and partly a thinly sketched sci-fi monster thriller—yet his mashup of these genres is ingenious and, at times, deliciously realized. Anne Hathaway stars as Gloria, a hard-drinking and unemployed New York blogger whose boyfriend (Dan Stevens) throws her out of his apartment. She retreats to her late parents' empty house in her rustic home town, bumps into a childhood friend (Jason Sudeikis), gets a part-time job in the bar he owns, and tries to take stock of her life. Then she and the world are gripped by the sudden appearance of a gigantic monster that wreaks havoc in Seoul for a few minutes each day. The connection between Gloria's story and the monster's is too good to spoil; suffice it to say that its metaphorical power brings a furiously clarifying and progressive insight to Gloria's troubles and aptly portrays them as the quasi-universal woes of humanity at large. The trope takes a lot of setting up, but it's worth it—and Hathaway's self-transformative, forceful performance brings Vigalondo's strong idea to life.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

The Fate of the Furious
The latest and loudest addition to the franchise that will not die. Most of the regulars return, including Letty (Michelle Rodriguez), Roman (Tyrese Gibson), and Hobbs (Dwayne Johnson), who grapples once more with the problem of finding a vehicle large enough to fit him. He also has to lay aside his enmity of Deckard (Jason Statham) for the sake of a higher purpose: the taking down of Dom (Vin Diesel), who has turned against his erstwhile pals. Such is Diesel's dramatic range that the difference between the good Dom and the bad Dom is almost too subtle to be seen by the naked eye. Behind the chaos lurks the figure of Cipher (Charlize Theron), who combines the roles of hacker and seductress, and whose party trick—the hot spot of the story—involves taking command of multiple vehicles, by remote control, in New York, and making them race around the streets like packs of dogs. The rest of the film, directed by F. Gary Gray, is threatened by both silliness and exhaustion; cracking crime at the wheel, you sense, is not a theme on which variations can be spun forever. With Helen Mirren, who doesn't even get to drive.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 4/24/17.) (In wide release.)*

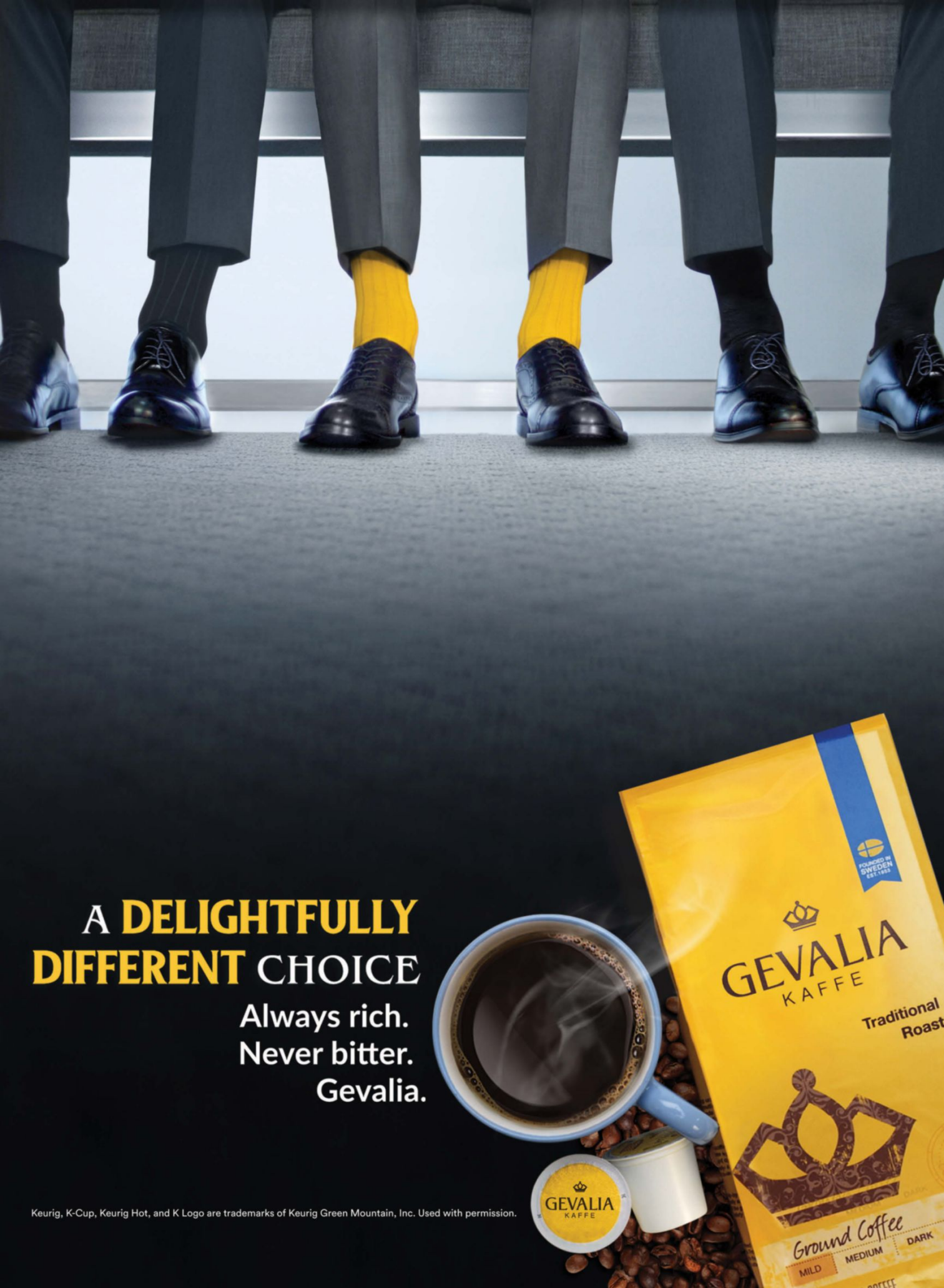
Gohatto
The last film by Nagisa Oshima, from 1999, is a spare and cruel drama about sex and violence within the ranks of the samurai. It's set in Kyoto, in 1865, where the Shinsen militia—a government unit organized to suppress dissent ruthlessly—enlists two new swordsmen, the suave young Kano (Ryuhei Matsuda), who's only eighteen, and Tashiro (Tadanobu Asano), who falls madly in love with him. Soon, Kano—a quiet, stone-cold killer with little worldly experience but a steely attitude—sets men's hearts aflame throughout the unit, sparking deadly rivalries among his cohorts and rattling his commanders, notably the cunning and tautly controlled Toshi (Takeshi Kitano). Oshima is unsparing in his depiction of the militia's bloody exploits (Kano's first assignment is a beheading, shown in horrific detail) and in his revelation of Kano's motive for joining up—the desire to kill with impunity. His restrained, elegant images capture life on the edge of death; the warriors' sparring and training, their rigid discipline and furious bloodlust, come off as the ultimate aphrodisiacs. In Japanese.—*R.B. (Quad Cinema; May 12-13.)*

David Bowie co-stars in the Second World War drama "Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence" (1983), alongside the composer Ryuichi Sakamoto, who also wrote the score. It screens May 12-13 at the Quad Cinema.

ALAMY

Leon Morin, Priest
Jean-Pierre Melville's 1961 drama, spanning the Second World War and the postwar years, is centered on a young widow, Barny (Emmanuelle Riva), who lives in a small French town. Barny is a Communist; her late husband was Jewish, and, under the Occupation, she struggles to spare their two young children from being deported to a concentration camp. Melville's depiction of wartime France is peerless: he shows the brazenness of collaborators, the casual anti-Semitism, and the arrests and disappearances with a harrowing simplicity. But the film's main drama concerns Barny's relationship with the handsome, brave, vigorous, and intellectual priest of the title (Jean-Paul Belmondo), who seduces women's souls—and Barny's above all. Melville presents their relationship without irony; to make it the heart of his film, he cut out an hour of footage about the Occupation. (This version restores eleven minutes of it.) Melville films the religious dialectics with remarkable but dispassionate skill, and he uses the story of Barny and Morin to skew the postwar political context—to reinforce the role of Catholics in the newly founded Fifth Republic and suppress that of Communists. In French, English, and German.—*R.B. (Film Forum; May 12-18.)*

The Lost City of Z
The new James Gray film has a scope, both in time and in geographical reach, that he has never attempted before—an anxious wrestle with the epic form. The movie, based in part on the book of the same name by David Grann, of *The New Yorker,* stars Charlie Hunnam as Percy Fawcett, a British soldier who journeyed repeatedly up the Amazon in the first quarter of the twentieth century. His goal, which came to consume his life and to cut it short, was to locate the remains of a forgotten civilization in the jungle. So implacable a quest could be taken as foolish or futile, but Gray prefers to frame it in terms of heroic striving. Whether Hunnam is the right actor to assume such a burden is open to question, and the whole movie, though shot with Gray's defining elegance and his taste for deep shadows, is often a dour affair. Still, there are welcome touches of levity and mystery, supplied by Sienna Miller, in the role of Fawcett's long-suffering wife, and by Robert Pattinson, overgrown with facial hair, as his equally loyal sidekick. With Tom Holland, as the explorer's eldest son, who vanished in the company of his father.—*A.L. (4/17/17) (In wide release.)*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The Lovers
This bittersweet romance thrusts its fertile and clever dramatic framework into the foreground and leaves it undeveloped. Mary and Michael (Debra Winger and Tracy Letts) are long-married and long-frustrated suburban cubicle jockeys, and both are having affairs. Mary is seeing Robert (Aidan Gillen), a writer; Michael is seeing Lucy (Melora Walters), a dancer; and each is waiting for the right moment to tell the other that the marriage is over. But the impending visit of their son, Joel (Tyler Ross), a college student, puts a crimp in their plans; while waiting to separate, Mary and Michael suddenly rekindle their relationship—in effect, cheating on their lovers with each other. Winger is commanding in action and in repose, and Letts invests his role with gruff energy, but they and the other actors exert themselves in a void—none of the characters have any substance beyond their function in the story. The writer and director, Azazel Jacobs, offers a few visual grace notes that resonate beyond the plotlines, but his script is devoid of imagination. With Jessica Sula, as Joel's girlfriend, Erin, whose quandaries go utterly unaddressed.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

A Quiet Passion
Terence Davies, who has previously adapted the work of Edith Wharton, in "The House of Mirth," and Terence Rattigan, in "The Deep Blue Sea," now turns his attention to Emily Dickinson. The arc of the film is a long one, marked by regular readings of her poems; we meet the author first as a defiant schoolgirl, played by Emma Bell, and trace her through the years of her maturity, her gradual seclusion in the Amherst family home, and the shuddering awfulness of her death, in 1886. Cynthia Nixon takes the role of the adult Dickinson, and does so without ingratiation, willing to make her difficult or, when occasion demands, unlikable; Dickinson's manners, always forthright, grow more barbed as her ailments worsen. There is strong support from Keith Carradine and Joanna Bacon, as her parents; Jodhi May, as her sorrowful sister-in-law; and Catherine Bailey, as a flirtatious friend, although the social badinage seems forced in comparison with the quieter scenes around the hearth. Most striking of all is the presence of Jennifer Ehle, whose compassionate calm, as the poet's sister, does much to lighten the movie's dark distress.—*A.L. (4/24/17) (In limited release.)*

Risk
Laura Poitras made this documentary about Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, in the course of six years, on the basis of her extraordinary access to him and his associates. She follows Assange through a wide range of circumstances and activities, starting earlier in the decade, when, via WikiLeaks, he disseminated classified information received from Chelsea Manning (then known as Bradley Manning), a U.S. Army soldier, and called attention to abuses by American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. She depicts Assange's efforts to contest the Swedish government's investigation of him for accusations of sexual assault, and even films him during his clandestine escape from a London hotel to the Ecuadorian Embassy, where he has been granted asylum to avoid deportation to Sweden. She also discusses allegations of collusion between WikiLeaks and Russia to aid in the election of Donald Trump. Along the way, Poitras, in voice-over, expresses her own growing distrust of Assange, and says that the distrust is mutual, but she never makes clear any mutual expectations that may have underlain her access to him from the outset. Embedded within the portrait of Assange is Poitras's own refracted self-portrait, in which she hints at her naïveté regarding Assange's motives—a naïveté that was already in plain view in "Citizenfour," from 2014, her film about Edward Snowden, clips of which turn up as a fascinating subplot in this new film.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

Stalker
In the Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky's science-fiction drama from 1979, the near-future is a cold and mucky ruin, both physically and emotionally. A man whose strange status as a "stalker" allows him to enter the Zone—a sealed-off area of menace and promise—defies his distraught wife to lead two voyagers there, the cynical Writer and the rationalist Professor. Their perilous trip, however, resembles nothing so much as an escape through the Soviet Union's industrial wastelands and highly militarized border regions to an isolated glade of psychedelia that stands in for the ostensibly utopian West. Tarkovsky realizes the allegorical tale with an overwhelming density of visual detail; the riot and clash of textures—black-and-white and color, agonized contrasts of light and murk, shimmery reflections on pools of water, and abrading striations of grass and stone—form a frenzied vocabulary and lend the film the torrential inner force of Dostoyevskian rhetoric. One subterranean dialogue sequence, in which the three travellers wrangle over metaphysical fantasies and long-stifled grudges, could be borrowed directly from a grand existential novel. In Russian.—*R.B. (Film Society of Lincoln Center; May 10-11.)*

Suture
The writer-producer-directors Scott McGehee and David Siegel come off as virtuoso deadpan wiseacres in this engaging, cutting-edge neo-noir, from 1993. The plot involves patricide and amnesia, but what makes the movie fascinating is their casting of Dennis Haysbert, a solidly built black man, as Clay Arlington, a character who is constantly said to look exactly like his half brother, Vincent Towers—played by Michael Harris, who's svelte and white. When Vincent rigs an explosion that results in Clay's taking on his identity, the casting becomes an avant-garde ploy with punch. It pivots on questions of what constitutes identity—the internal stuff of life or the external components of race, wealth, and status. The graphic vitality of Greg Gardiner's black-and-white cinematography and the straight-faced wit of the gifted ensemble (including Sab Shimono, Mel Harris, David Graf, and Fran Ryan) make it pleasurable for audiences to suspend their disbelief.—*Michael Sragow (Metrograph; May 13.)*

A Woman's Life
This adaptation of Maupassant's 1883 novel about a woman's fall from aristocratic ease to careworn dependency starts deceptively well. Jeanne le Perthuis des Vauds (Judith Chemla) returns from convent school to her family's estate and enjoys domestic amusements and the splendors of nature. She revels in the warm wisdom of her parents, even as the director, Stéphane Brizé, seems to revel in the delicate diction of the actors who play them (Yolande Moreau and Jean-Pierre Darroussin). Then the drama kicks in, and the movie goes off the rails. Jeanne marries a local man named Julien (Swann Arlaud); he promptly impregnates her servant (Nina Meurisse) and has an affair with a neighbor (Clotilde Hesme), whose husband (Alain Beigel) kills him. Jeanne and Julien's son, Paul, grows into a ne'er-do-well whose debts reduce Jeanne to destitution. The tale of worldly affliction and spiritual redemption is, unfortunately, merely illustrated; Brizé pays more attention to the tasteful costumes and the alluring settings than to the drama or the images. The performances are muted as well, as if to link formality and misery, but the view of the milieu's hypocrisy and constraint is bland and passionless. In French.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?
Robert Aldrich's 1962 melodrama about two ruined sisters joined in torment and degradation is also the stylistic clash of the two actresses who play them, Joan Crawford and Bette Davis. The story starts in the nineteen-tens, when Jane Hudson was a child vaudeville star. In the nineteen-thirties, she was overshadowed by her older sister, Blanche, a movie star; then Blanche was crippled by an accident for which Jane was held responsible. Now, three decades later, Blanche (Crawford), a paraplegic, is totally dependent on Jane (Davis), an embittered, alcoholic fantasist. Blanche is still famous; Jane, who is completely forgotten, is planning an absurd comeback—and, gripped by envy, inflicts ever-crueller tortures on Blanche, who struggles desperately to save herself from them. The famously grotesque impasto of Jane's makeup (Davis's own invention) matches her roaring theatrical flamboyance; Blanche, plain-spoken and sculpturally stark, is reduced to muddled deceptions in order to elude Jane's clutches. With his biliously ironic images, Aldrich stares ruefully at the women's ugly battles and sees Hollywood's own sickness reflected in them. With Maidie Norman, as the housemaid Elvira, who tries to help Blanche get free.—*R.B. (Film Forum; May 10.)*

Win It All
The ambient violence in Joe Swanberg's previous feature, "Digging for Fire," bursts into the foreground in this casually swinging yet terrifyingly tense drama of a compulsive gambler on the edge. Jake Johnson (who co-wrote the film with Swanberg) stars as Eddie Garrett, a part-time Wrigley Field parking attendant and full-time poker player who's constantly in debt. When a rough-hewn friend prepares for a term in prison, he gives Eddie a duffel bag to hide. Eddie finds cash in it, and, despite the best efforts of his Gamblers Anonymous sponsor (Keegan-Michael Key), yields to temptation. Eddie turns to his easygoing but tough-loving brother, Ron (Joe Lo Truglio), who runs a landscaping business, for help; besides saving his own neck, Eddie also wants to save his new relationship with Eva (the charismatic Aislinn Derbez), a nurse whose intentions are serious. With a teeming cast of vibrantly unglamorous Chicago characters who hold Eddie in a tight social web, Swanberg—aided greatly by Johnson's vigorous performance—makes the gambler's panic-stricken silence all the more agonizing, balancing the warm veneer of intimate normalcy with the inner chill of secrets and lies.—*R.B. (Netflix.)*

9 Tony Award® Nominations

BEST MUSICAL

BEST ACTOR
BEN PLATT

BEST FEATURED ACTRESS
RACHEL BAY JONES

BEST FEATURED ACTOR
MIKE FAIST

BEST SCORE
BENJ PASEK AND JUSTIN PAUL

BEST BOOK
STEVEN LEVENSON

BEST ORCHESTRATIONS
ALEX LACAMOIRE

BEST LIGHTING DESIGN
JAPHY WEIDEMAN

BEST DIRECTOR
MICHAEL GREIF

DEAR EVAN HANSEN

ATLANTIC

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

All the President's Men?
The Public and London's National Theatre stage a one-night-only reading of transcripts from the confirmation hearings for President Trump's Cabinet, edited and directed by Nicolas Kent. The cast includes Ellen Burstyn (as Elizabeth Warren), Aasif Mandvi (Scott Pruitt), and Ron Rifkin (Bernie Sanders). *(Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-840-2824. May 11.)*

Arlington
The Irish playwright Enda Walsh wrote and directs this Orwellian tale of a man monitoring a young woman in the waiting room of a tower. *(St. Ann's Warehouse, 45 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. Opens May 10.)*

Can You Forgive Her?
In Gina Gionfriddo's play, directed by Peter DuBois, Amber Tamblyn plays a woman afflicted by financial and romantic problems who finds refuge with an engaged couple on Halloween. *(Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. In previews.)*

The Cost of Living
Martyna Majok's play, directed by Jo Bonney for Manhattan Theatre Club, tells the parallel stories of an unemployed truck driver who reunites with his ex-wife and a doctoral student who hires a caregiver. *(City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Previews begin May 16.)*

Derren Brown: Secret
Brown, an Olivier-winning British performer known for his feats of mind-reading and audience manipulation, presents an evening of "psychological illusion." *(Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111. In previews. Opens May 16.)*

The Golden Apple
Encores! presents Jerome Moross and John Latouche's 1954 musical, a retelling of the Iliad and the Odyssey as a whimsical American fable, complete with pie contests and hot-air balloons. *(City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. May 10-14.)*

The Government Inspector
Red Bull Theatre stages the Gogol satire, directed by Jesse Berger and featuring Michael Urie, in which an undercover inspector comes to a provincial town to investigate local corruption. *(The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Previews begin May 16.)*

The Lucky One
The Mint revives A. A. Milne's 1922 play, directed by Jesse Marchese, about two brothers whose enmity erupts when one of them lands in legal trouble. *(Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)*

Seeing You
The immersive-theatre producer Randy Weiner and the choreographer Ryan Heffington (known for Sia's "Chandelier" video) created this site-specific piece, which transforms a former meat market into nineteen-forties Hoboken. *(450 W. 14th St. 866-811-4111. In previews.)*

Seven Spots on the Sun
In Martín Zimmerman's play, directed by Weyni Mengesha, a reclusive doctor in a town ravaged by civil war and plague discovers that he has a miraculous healing touch. *(Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-627-2556. Opens May 10.)*

Sojourners & Her Portmanteau
Ed Sylvanus Iskandar directs two installments of Mfoniso Udofia's nine-part saga, which charts the ups and downs of a Nigerian matriarch. *(New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475. In previews. Opens May 16.)*

Venus
Suzan-Lori Parks's play, directed by Lear deBessonet, is inspired by the life of Saartjie Baartman, a South African woman who became a nineteenth-century sideshow attraction because of her large posterior. *(Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. In previews. Opens May 15.)*

The Whirligig
The New Group presents Hamish Linklater's play, directed by Scott Elliott and featuring Zosia Mamet, Dolly Wells, and Norbert Leo Butz, in which divorced parents care for their ailing adult daughter as figures from her past reëmerge. *(Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. In previews.)*

NOW PLAYING

Come from Away
Canadian hospitality doesn't seem like grist for drama, but this gem of a musical, by Irene Sankoff and David Hein, makes kindness sing and soar. On 9/11, thousands of airline passengers were rerouted to the tiny Newfoundland town of Gander, population nine thousand. The Ganderites opened their doors—and fetched sandwiches, underwear, and kosher meals—while the "plane people," trapped in a five-day limbo, reckoned with a changed world. A splendid twelve-person cast plays dozens of characters, but Sankoff and Hein deftly spotlight a few, including an American Airlines pilot (Jenn Colella) trying to maintain control of her charges and an Egyptian chef (Caesar Samayoa) coping with the first glimmers of post-9/11 Islamophobia. Christopher Ashley's production doesn't dwell on inspirational messaging, instead letting the story, along with some fine fiddle playing, put the wind in its sails. *(Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)*

A Doll's House, Part 2
Lucas Hnath's invigorating ninety-minute work, directed by Sam Gold, is an irresponsible act—a kind of naughty imposition on a classic, investing Ibsen's signature play with the humor that the nineteenth-century artist lacked. When Nora Helmer, Ibsen's protagonist, shut the door on her husband, her children, and her bourgeois life, it was left to the audience to wonder what would become of her. Here she is again, after so many years—fifteen, to be exact. Since leaving her husband, Torvald (Chris Cooper), Nora (Laurie Metcalf) has discovered her own voice and become a popular feminist writer under a pseudonym. (Condola Rashad, as Emmy, the daughter Nora left behind, is perfect in every way.) The ideas keep coming, fast and delicious. Although Hnath's Nora is free, she, like most of us, is still bound to the thing that we can leave behind but never fully divest ourselves of: family. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/8/17.) *(Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)*

Groundhog Day
Harold Ramis's 1993 film had it all: an inspired performance by Bill Murray, a sweet romance, and a premise that was both a vehicle for endless comedic variation and a spiritual brainteaser, akin to a Buddhist parable. After all, aren't we all repeating the same day over and over again, trying to find meaning in the banal? Credit this fine musical adaptation for not simply inserting songs into a ready-made formula but teasing out new ideas. The Australian musical satirist Tim Minchin wrote the catchy and cerebral score, his follow-up to "Matilda," with Danny Rubin, the original screenwriter, updating the script. As Phil Connors, the weatherman stuck in a time loop on February 2nd, Andy Karl doesn't re-create Murray's misanthropic euphoria—who could?—but gives the character his own sardonic stamp. And the director, Matthew Warchus, infuses the tale with clever theatrical flourishes, like a vertical car chase. *(August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 877-250-2929.)*

Happy Days
Samuel Beckett wrote this play later in his career; it was first performed in 1961. Winnie, based on certain aspects of his voluble mother, is a busybody who wonders about religion, the way things look, and the way the universe turns, without knowing much about herself. In the first act, she's buried up to her waist in earth; in the second, up to her neck. As performed by the terrific Dianne Wiest, Winnie has a beautiful voice, light and questioning. But what she has in beauty of expression she lacks in gravitas. Wiest doesn't have a mean bone in her body, and Winnie has plenty of mean bones—and muscles, too. She converses with her husband, the nearly silent Willie (Jarlath Conroy), and at one point they talk about castration. We should feel, then, what we don't feel enough of in James Bundy's production: menace. *(Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111.)*

Hello, Dolly!
In Jerry Zaks's fairly standard production of the 1964 musical, by Jerry Herman and Michael Stewart, Horace Vandergelder (David Hyde Pierce) is a sour, money-grubbing merchant from Yonkers. His two young assistants, Cornelius Hackl (Gavin Creel) and Barnaby Tucker (Taylor Trensch), head into New York City, where they fall for two women: Irene Molloy (Kate Baldwin), a hatmaker on whom Vandergelder has set his sights, and her assistant, Minnie Fay (Beanie Feldstein). But the plot turns on Dolly Levi, the matchmaker, and the show offers ample opportunity for whoever plays the part to showcase her ability to convey pathos and defiance, grief and comedy. And who better than Bette Midler to give us all that? The role isn't necessarily tailor-made for her—she's infinitely more complicated and funny—but she has remade the character in her own image: as a scrappy trickster with needs and vulnerabilities. (5/1/17) *(Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)*

PEOPLE WHO CODE ARE SERIOUS.
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PARDON ME FOR NOT WORSHIPING
THE GOSPEL OF GENERALIZATION.
I COLOR INSIDE THE LINES AND
INNOVATE OUTSIDE THEM.
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BY DREAMERS OR DOERS.
IT WILL BE LED BY PEOPLE
LIKE ME, WHO CAN DO BOTH.

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THE NEW SCHOOL

Solange Knowles presents "An Ode To," a performance piece riffing on her latest album, "A Seat at the Table," at the Guggenheim on May 18, as part of the Red Bull Music Academy Festival.

In & of Itself
Newly imported from Los Angeles, this solo performance by the world-class sleight-of-hand artist Derek DelGaudio is not merely a magic show with theatrical trappings but a thoughtful piece of theatre that makes inspired use of DelGaudio's skills, conjuring a haunting essay on secrets and identity. The level of difficulty at which he executes conventional magician's fare—card tricks, a disappearance, a ship in a bottle—is plenty diverting on its own. What makes these devices linger in the mind is how he uses them to build an ephemeral illusion of intimacy with his audience. If it doesn't all necessarily cohere, it's only in the way a poem might choose not to resolve—to leave ample room for wonder. Frank Oz directs, and Mark Mothersbaugh composed the wistful, carrousel-style music. *(Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E. 800-745-3000.)*

Indecent
Paula Vogel's revelatory play—her belated Broadway début—begins in Warsaw in 1906 and ends in Connecticut a half century later, but it's as intimate and immediate as a whispered secret. It tells the story of another play, Sholem Asch's Yiddish drama "God of Vengeance," which toured the theatres of Europe before coming to Broadway, in 1923, and causing a scandal, in part because of a passionate lesbian kiss. The cast was tried for obscenity, and Asch chose to distance himself from the work—all before Nazism overtook the play, its people, and the world it came from. Directed with poetry and polish by Rebecca Taichman, Vogel's play thrums with music, desire, and fear, and it's shrewd about the ways in which America isn't free, and about how art does and doesn't transcend the perilous winds of history. *(Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)*

The Little Foxes
Long dismissed as ripe melodrama, Lillian Hellman's 1939 play, about a Southern family rotten with greed and rancor, has a Greek tragedy's implacability and the taut plotting of film noir. Daniel Sullivan's production, for Manhattan Theatre Club, is traditional in every respect but one: Cynthia Nixon and Laura Linney take turns playing the imperious, steel-willed Regina Giddens—one of modern theatre's greatest creations—and the vulnerable, alcoholic Birdie Hubbard. While both stars play Birdie along the same lines, each brings very different shadings to Regina. Linney portrays the villainy with gleeful relish, while Nixon makes us fully understand how Regina's anger has been fuelled by decades of frustration. It's worth seeing the show twice if you can. Hellman's incisive storytelling, her razor-etched insights into women's limited options in a patriarchal society, are largely good enough to withstand the scrutiny. *(Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)*

Mourning Becomes Electra
Eugene O'Neill's sorcerous inspection of the Civil War's haunted aftermath, an update of Aeschylus' "Oresteia," finds Expressionistic life in this new production, from Target Margin. Much of the power of the five-hour-long affair is owed to the grandness of O'Neill's scope and the demand it makes on the audience's endurance. By the time the curtain falls, we feel a wrenching exhaustion that echoes the attrition of the doomed Mannon family. To this epic effect (and perhaps because of the vast canvas it offers), the director David Herskovits adds an ongoing—and often comic—commentary on theatrical conventions and history, as the actors flit among naturalistic, melodramatic, and cartoonish readings of their lines. Whole sections whiz by with a tossed-off, modern kind of cool. By slow, erotic degrees, Herskovits draws us close—then, via a funky approach to staging, closer still—into the drama of family. *(Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-598-0400.)*

Oslo
J. T. Rogers's play, which has upgraded to the big stage at Lincoln Center, introduces us to the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of the Middle East peace process: a married Norwegian couple who orchestrated the secret talks between Israelis and Palestinians which led to the 1993 Oslo Accords. Played by the exceptional Jennifer Ehle and Jefferson Mays, Mona Juul and Terje Rød-Larsen are tight-lipped diplomatic professionals, as cautiously neutral as their all-gray wardrobes suggest. (Bartlett Sher's staging is Scandinavian in its clarity.) Plying their guests with herring and waffles, they oversee colorful characters from both sides, who bond tentatively and tell jokes while haggling over Gaza. At nearly three hours, the play provides a journalistic service without having much to say, ultimately, about the conflict itself, aside from a "We Are the World" coda that shows how close we were, once, to peace. *(Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)*

Pacific Overtures
The best thing about this strange and ultimately lifeless production is Stephen Sondheim's amazing—and amazingly complex—lyrics and music. First produced in 1976, the piece recounts the story of Western forces infiltrating and influencing a closed-off nineteenth-century Japan, told from the Japanese point of view. (George Takei plays the Reciter, the musical's narrator.) There are layers of political and aesthetic understanding and misunderstanding here that add something to the conversation about Asia, imperialism, and colonialism, but, as staged by John Doyle—who has given us fascinating versions of other Sondheim shows, including his Broadway revivals of "Sweeney Todd" and "Company"—the production feels abbreviated and misconstrued. Still, there are wonderful performers in the cast, including Karl Josef Co (he's a new matinée idol) and Ann Harada, who has great comic timing. *(Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111.)*

The Roundabout
J. B. Priestley's play, basically forgotten since its première, in 1932, is receiving its American début, as part of the "Brits Off Broadway" series. The script takes the form of a classic roundelay, but instead of romantic shenanigans the comic intrigue turns on social, financial, and political concerns. The only overtly sexual agenda is pursued by Comrade Staggles (Steven Blakeley), a brandy-loving Bolshevik who has accompanied Pamela Kettlewell (Emily Laing) to the country estate owned by her father, Lord Kettlewell (Brian Protheroe). Hugh Ross directs a cast of eleven accomplished farceurs, notably Richenda Carey, as a Depression-hit member of the gentry, and Hugh Sachs, as a family friend whose every line pierces the hypocrisy around him, including his own. "You're always jumping to conclusions," Lord Kettlewell tells him. "I know I am," he says, "but it's the only exercise I get." *(59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)*

Six Degrees of Separation
The playwright John Guare has written at least three masterpieces, and this is one, a brilliant investigation into the lies we tell ourselves—and our children—without admitting how much we need to believe them to get through. A wealthy Manhattan couple, Ouisa (Allison Janney, tall and nimble) and Flan (John Benjamin Hickey), live to succeed while forgetting how to love. When Paul (Corey Hawkins) enters their home, saying he's the son of Sidney Poitier, the couple begin to feel things they haven't felt for years, like the excitement that comes with letting difference into their lives. While the director, Trip Cullman, manages the relatively large cast with clarity and power, nothing feels inspired except for Hawkins's performance and Peter Mark Kendall's, as Rick, one of Paul's lovers and victims. Both characters want to believe in the power of love, but are undone, in different ways, by romance: Rick's with a man he cannot know, and Paul's with himself, the person he dreams of being but can never realize. *(Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)*

Sweat
Lynn Nottage's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama, newly transferred to Broadway from the Public Theatre, opens at top intensity in a parole office in Reading, Pennsylvania, in 2008, as two young men, one black, one white, attempt to confront the mess they've made of their lives. But this is really the story of their mothers (embodied with rich authenticity by Michelle Wilson and Johanna Day), who have spent their adult lives working

ILLUSTRATION BY INÈS LONGEVIAL

the assembly line of a steel-tubing factory, and whose friendship crumbles the day in 2000 when the plant locks the workers out. By the end, everything is fully explained—perhaps too fully explained, depending on your taste. But Nottage isn't interested in hinting at what went wrong; she wants to make it known. It's a play that listens deeply to the confounding plight of blue-collar workers in the world's richest country, and which, in a just world, would shake their bosses to the core. *(Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.)*

ALSO NOTABLE

Amélie Walter Kerr. • **Anastasia** Broadhurst. • **The Antipodes** Pershing Square Signature Center. • **Bandstand** Jacobs. • **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** Lunt-Fontanne. • **The Emperor Jones** Irish Repertory. • **Ernest Shackleton Loves Me** Tony Kiser. • **Gently Down the Stream** Public. • **The Glass Menagerie** Belasco. • **Miss Saigon** Broadway Theatre. • **The Play That Goes Wrong** Lyceum. • **Present Laughter** St. James. • **The Price** American Airlines Theatre. *Through May 14*. • **Samara** A.R.T./New York Theatres. *Through May 14*. • **Sunset Boulevard** Palace. • **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street** Barrow Street Theatre. • **3/Fifths** 3LD Art & Technology Center. • **Twelfth Night** Public. *Through May 14*. • **Vanity Fair** Pearl. • **The View UpStairs** Lynn Redgrave. • **War Paint** Nederlander.

NIGHT LIFE

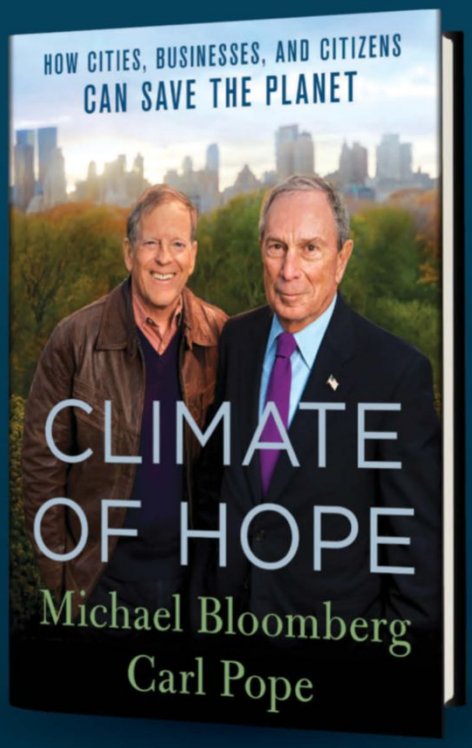
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

The Music of Patrick Adams
Each year, the Red Bull Music Academy, an amorphous organization responsible for various music-themed events and a twenty-four-hour online radio station, hosts a sprawling festival of talks, concerts, and parties throughout the city, diving deep into pockets of popular and underground music and living up to its scholastic title. This year, the series presents a concert celebrating the work of the musician and record producer Patrick Adams, whose credit appears on influential releases from the disco, soul, and hip-hop eras. The Harlem native cut his teeth working at the Apollo, where he once watched a young Michael Jackson soundcheck, and went on to produce records for acts as varied as Black Ivory and Rakim. He plays with a stacked band, including the soul icons Leroy Burgess and Donna McGhee, at this comprehensive tribute to his catalogue. *(Alhambra Ballroom, 2116 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd., 6th floor. nyc.redbullmusicacademy.com. May 11.)*

DJ Harvey
Harvey Bassett came of age in England in the late nineteen-seventies, amid pivotal developments in the city's music and politics. Punk and disco germinated alongside oil shocks, bloody culture wars, and seismic shifts in government. Inspired by rapid change, Bassett sought out a new route; on a trip to New York City, he encountered hip-hop, then just blossoming. Soon, he was spending up to eight hours a night behind decks in London, Cambridge, and Bristol, playing everything from the Pop Group to the Fat Boys. Now infamous for his marathon sets, he takes the reins at Output this week, playing from open to close. *(74 Wythe Ave., Brooklyn. outputclub.com. May 12.)*

Perfume Genius
Mike Hadreas, who performs otherworldly art-rock as Perfume Genius, has built a career



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—Leonardo DiCaprio

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St. Martin's Press

Patrick Adams, a prolific crafter of disco, soul, and hip-hop, is honored in Harlem this week.

sifting through traumas from his teens, when he received death threats for being openly gay, and from his twenties, when he struggled with substance abuse. Now, with the release of his fourth album, "No Shape," he's gingerly moving on, focussing on the little things required to exist in the face of adversity. His deeply personal music is intensely therapeutic for the marginalized and the oppressed, and he's found a fitting tour partner in **Serpentwithfeet,** a stunning avant-gospel project by Josiah Wise, who spent his adolescence burying his difference as a queer boy in a strict religious household in Baltimore. Both artists are crushing and glorious, and the tour's New York stop is an excellent opportunity to check out Brooklyn Steel, a new venue housed in a former steel factory in East Williamsburg. *(319 Frost St. May 16.)*

Omar Souleyman
Souleyman's approach to the Arabic wedding music known as *dabke* features sampled beats melded with pleasingly overdriven melodic passages drawn partly from Kurdish, Iraqi, and Syrian sources (all expertly played, on keyboard, by his longtime accompanist Rizan Sa'id). A former brick mason with a gruff, commanding voice, the singer, who began his career in 1994, is a star in the Middle East, and has released more than five hundred recordings, almost entirely on cassette; a new full-length album, "To Syria, with Love," is due out in June. There were murmurs that Trump's travel ban might keep him out of the U.S., but Souleyman's gig at this Greenwich Village institution will proceed as planned. *(Le Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleecker St. 212-505-3474. May 11.)*

Colin Stetson
The alto saxophone has played a significant role in the development of the classical, jazz, avant-garde, salsa, and punk-rock genres. But the Michigan-born, Montreal-based saxophone innovator Stetson is proof that the instrument's most thrilling possibilities are still being uncovered. In his years of touring with the likes of Tom Waits and Bon Iver, and as a solo performer, Stetson has been honing a technique known as circular breathing, in which woodwind players inhale through their nose and use their cheeks as bellows, allowing them to sustain a tone for a very long period of time. Stetson's skill, which results in a visceral experience for the listener, is evident on a set of conceptual albums (the "New History Warfare" trilogy) and on a stunning 2015 release, "Sorrow," with the violinist Sarah Neufeld. On his recent album, "All This I Do for Glory," Stetson ruminates on the ideas of ambition and intent. *(Baby's All Right, 146 Broadway, Brooklyn. 718-599-5800. May 12.)*

Tokyo x Brooklyn Festival
In 2013, Shinzō Abe, the Prime Minister of Japan, pledged nearly a billion dollars to the so-called Cool Japan cultural-funding initiative, in part to compete with South Korea's vast pop-cultural impact. Brooklyn may not have similar financial initiatives, but its influx of artists and musicians over the past decade has certainly reshaped its global identity. This weekend marks the inaugural edition of this new pop-culture festival, meant to build bonds between the buzzing creative communities of artists, chefs, innovators, and craftspeople in Tokyo and Brooklyn. The main draw is an eclectic music program, featuring **Miyavi** and the **Taiko Masala Thunder Drummers,** from Tokyo, and **Blonde Redhead, Anamanaguchi,** and **Miho Hatori,** based in Brooklyn. *(Brooklyn Expo Center, 72 Noble St., Brooklyn. May 13-14.)*

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

The Bad Plus
The Bad Plus is dead, long live the Bad Plus. The pianist Ethan Iverson, a contributing composer for this epochal ensemble, is leaving the band, to be replaced, at the beginning of next year, with Orrin Evans, another formidable, forward-thinking keyboardist. The original unit will be saying its final goodbyes in December, at the Village Vanguard, but a chance to hear the group in its definitive, genre-twirling configuration is not to be squandered. *(Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. May 9-14.)*

Eric Comstock and Sean Smith
Balance lies at the heart of the most effective jazz-leaning cabaret acts. Insuring the right amount of overt charm, reverence for the past, instrumental bravura, and in-the-moment connection with an audience is an art carefully perfected with experience. The pianist and singer Comstock has the goods, and, in tandem with the superb bassist Smith, he will offer expert musicianship and joie de vivre in equal measure. *(Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. May 13.)*

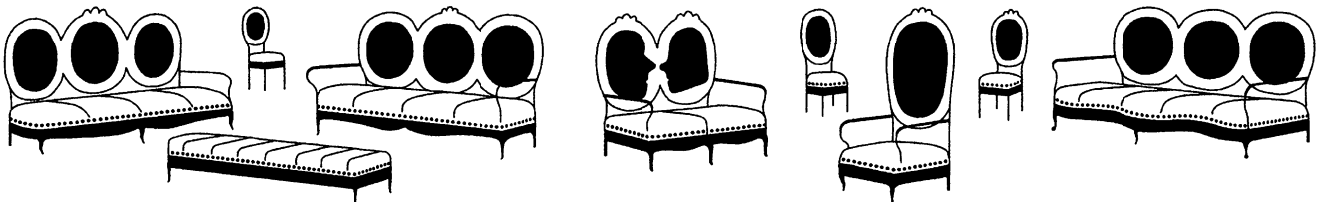
Leslie Pintchik
Pintchik sits comfortably among the many under-heralded, imaginative keyboardists who are keeping things interesting without grabbing attention. A crafty, lyrically minded improviser and a compelling composer, she has the added advantage of a seasoned trio that includes the bassist **Scott Hardy** and the drummer **Michael Sarin.** *(Jazz at Kitano, 66 Park Ave., at 38th St. 212-885-7119. May 11.)*

Chita Rivera
Witnessing the charisma, stagecraft, and durable glamour of a theatrical legend in a hallowed night spot is an experience to be savored. Rivera, a venerable Broadway potentate, will undoubtedly take possession of the house that Bobby Short built, relinquishing her command only when she deigns to do so. *(Café Carlyle, Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. 212-744-1600. May 9-20.)*

Chucho Valdés Quartet 75th Birthday Celebration
A powerhouse virtuoso, the Cuban pianist Valdés remains a force of nature, both lushly romantic and bitingly percussive in his sweeping improvisations. Celebrating his seventy-fifth birthday at the helm of a galvanic quartet, Valdés will demonstrate an undiminished ability to fuse Afro-Caribbean rhythms and Stateside hard bop with joyous abandon. *(Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. May 9-14.)*

ILLUSTRATION BY MARK TODD; OPPOSITE: ILLUSTRATION BY PABLO AMARGO

ABOVE & BEYOND



Drones: Is the Sky the Limit?
There are few more fitting locations for the first major exhibition on pilotless aircraft than the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum, housed in an aircraft carrier that towers over Twelfth Avenue. This show combines artifacts, models, rare footage, and grand installations to connect the technological developments of the First World War to the varied and increasingly immersive spectrum of drone capabilities today. Guests will have a chance to handle drone hardware; see the world's first "flying dress," Volantis, on display; and learn how drone technology has affected the fields of policing, firefighting, photography, performance, and more. *(Pier 86, Twelfth Ave. at 46th St. intrepidmuseum.org. Opens May 10.)*

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The season of blockbuster art sales is upon us. Which auction house will reign supreme? Both of the big houses start off with auctions of Impressionist and modern art. **Christie's** goes first, with an evening sale (May 15) led by a painting of Dora Maar by Picasso ("Femme Assise, Robe Bleue"), with a provenance worthy of a Spielberg opus: the painting was confiscated from the painter's dealer, Paul Rosenberg, by the Nazis, only to be "liberated" from a German train by the Resistance. The sale also includes a resting ovoid head by Brancusi, "La Muse Endormie," rendered in patinated bronze and gold leaf. Works on paper follow the next day. *(20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)* • A bust by Alberto Giacometti of his younger brother, Diego, and an aqueous landscape by Monet ("Vétheuil") lead **Sotheby's** May 16 evening sale of Impressionists and moderns. Lovers of the fin de siècle will be enticed by a portrait, by Gustav Klimt, of a pale woman engulfed in fiery reds ("Dame Im Fauteil"), created during the dawn of the Viennese Secession, in 1898. The sale follows one of African and Oceanic art, on May 15, that includes a Chokwe female figure from Angola, its taut, rounded shapes carved out of glistening wood. *(York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)* • **Bonhams'** sale of postwar and contemporary art (May 16) offers works by Wayne Thiebaud (one of his scrumptious-looking dessert paintings, "Camellia Cake"), Lichtenstein, and Frankenthaler ("Summer Angel"). *(580 Madison Ave. 212-644-9001.)*

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FOOD & DRINK

TABLES FOR TWO

Monroe

49 Monroe St. (347-361-8054)

"TWENTY YEARS AGO, Brooklyn was the Wild West. Now if you want grimy you come here," a bar-side patron explained. He was talking about Monroe, the latest offering in the area, south of Manhattan's East Broadway stop on the F train, known as Two Bridges. The neighborhood is still relatively ungentrified, despite the recent intrusion of beautiful-people eateries like Dimes, Mr. Fong's, and Kiki's. Kiki's may be the sexiest restaurant in the city—not glamorous by any means, but sexy in a bare-mattress-on-the-loft-floor kind of way, where the simple Greek food is cheap, the wine carafes are inexpensive enough to order too many, and the people are so stunning that you think you and your date, by extension, must be, too. Monroe, a month-old restaurant from the same family as Kiki's, continues that tradition: the wine is just as reasonable and the portions just as large and beside the point. The crowd is a little older and a little more local, and the wait, for now, unlike Kiki's hours-long one, is relatively nonexistent.

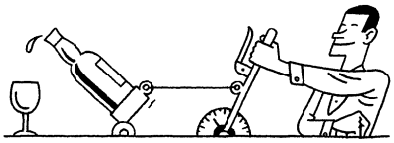
Monroe is dark and romantic, stuffed with enough greenery to look like a lost city tucked in the Amazon. The waitstaff, like the place, is not fussy. Angelique, a bartender, looks like Jennifer Garner on a grocery errand. The food is indiscriminately southern European (pasta carbonara, chorizo, frisée-lardons salad), and the quality is about the same as a cafeteria's: recognizable, edible, filling. Stick to the staff's recommendations: the burrata, the steak tartare, the cacio e pepe, the eggplant parmesan. The tartare is so light and tender that it tastes only like the olive oil and spring onions used to season it. The burrata—a generous blob—is served over a bed of pesto with halved cherry tomatoes. But even the good dishes have a texture problem—everything is so soft that a regular was overheard ordering her pasta "undercooked." Al dente, it was still gummable.

Other items are riskier. The escargots are disturbingly fat. The paella, which comes topped with a decadent tower of seafood, is like a soupy risotto. The salad Niçoise is surprisingly professional—the tuna perfectly seasoned and seared—until you land on a piece of fish that didn't survive its freezing very well and feels slimy on the tongue.

Share dessert. There's passable chocolate mousse or fridge-cold crème brûlée, which, more often than not, is comped, as if in apology. Then head around the corner to 169 Bar in a spell of abandon. Remember when you were young enough for tequila shots and P.B.R. on a Monday night? No? Thanks to Monroe's—the alchemy of low lights and wine, legs intertwined like the plants above you—you'll be inspired to pretend. *(Entrées $11-$29.)*

—Becky Cooper

BAR TAB



Pine Box Rock Shop
12 Grattan St., Brooklyn (718-366-6311)

At most decent vegan establishments, the exclusion of meat and dairy from the menu is not conspicuous, and the politics of animal liberation take a back seat to the culinary experience. Not so at the Pine Box Rock Shop, perhaps the most aggressively herbivorous bar in the five boroughs. At its most recent strictly plant-based monthly pop-up market, a bakester wore a black hoodie bearing a directive to "arm the animals" and an illustration of a panda toting an M249 machine gun. But try one of her seven-dollar cruelty-free marshmallow-filled fudge brownies, and any reservations you may have about arming pandas swiftly disappear. Situated in a former casket factory, on an artsy stretch of East Williamsburg, the industrial-woodsy barroom draws a diverse crowd of twenty- and thirtysomethings. At the pop-up, the collective wardrobe included a beret, a hijab, man leggings, protective headphones (on an infant), camo, and tie-dye. Some people studied a drink menu that carefully avoided any beers or spirits made with animal by-products like gelatin and cochineal extract, a coloring agent made from crushed insects. Others grazed on the proffered risotto burgers, coconut bacon, and artisanal faux cheese. A vat of raw chaga-mushroom "mylk" was produced—"It's medicinal," a vender with knuckle tattoos explained—and quickly depleted. Proceeds from an organic hot sauce went to an animal sanctuary in New Jersey, where about two hundred pigs, goats, ducks, turkeys, chickens, rabbits, and peahens live out their natural lives. The bar's mission to facilitate principled eating and drinking is eclipsed only by its commitment to irony. There is one arcade game in the place, and it's Big Buck Hunter.—*David Kortava*

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SEEING CANCER IN A New Light

Dr. Michelle Bradbury stands in the operating room alongside a surgeon during a cancer operation. She guides a tiny camera that emits laser light across a patient's lymph node. Bradbury, Director of Intraoperative Imaging at Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK), shines it on cancer cells exposed to imaging nanoparticles, called C dots, marking them in neon with a special contrast medium. On a nearby computer screen, malignant cells glow highlighter-green, allowing the surgeon to easily identify and carefully remove them.

Nanotechnology is the science of manipulating materials on an extremely small scale, based on the nanometer (one billionth of a meter). C dots are the first-of-its kind nanotechnology-based silica particle to be used in U.S. operating rooms to "see" cancer. "You can go within a few millimeters of the tissue, and image areas of anatomy that you could never reach by any other method," Bradbury explains.

Bradbury is Co-Director of the MSK-Cornell Center for Translation of Cancer Nanomedicines, one of only six cancer nanotechnology centers in the country funded by the National Institutes of Health. She developed C dots in collaboration with her colleague at Cornell, Ulrich Wiesner, in an effort to do what cancer surgeons only dream of: find and remove every last cancer cell during surgery before they spread to other areas of the body.

C dots also serve as carriers of anticancer drugs for targeted cancer treatment and visual confirmation of successful drug delivery.

Thanks to exciting innovations like this, cancer care is shifting from traditional therapeutic approaches – like chemotherapy, surgery, and radiation – towards the development of more targeted, molecular-level approaches, including nanotechnology. Previously seen as science fiction, the approach is gaining traction as advances mount – many of them originating in the MSK-Cornell Center and in MSK's Center for Molecular Imaging and Nanotechnology (CMINT).

> "If cancer markers could be measured using a device like a smart watch, it could detect the cancer at the earliest possible moment and beam that information directly to the doctor."
>
> DR. DANIEL HELLER

Two floors down from Bradbury's office is Dr. Daniel Heller, an MSK chemist who, like Bradbury, is part of CMINT. He is developing nanotechnologies to specifically tackle the problems of cancer recurrence and metastasis.

Heller's team devised a prototype sensor that uses a tiny implant to detect molecules known as biomarkers that are made by cancer cells. The sensor monitors cancer activity and can be read by shining light on the skin using a wearable fitness tracker-like device.

"If cancer markers could be measured using a device like a smart watch, it could detect the cancer at the earliest possible moment and beam that information directly to the doctor," Heller says. Such information would be especially useful in patients who have known risk factors, have recently had a tumor removed, or are in active treatment. Earlier detection can mean a much improved prognosis.

Heller's lab is also creating nanoparticles to carry cancer drugs directly to metastatic tumors. These tiny particles are loaded with anticancer drugs and are targeted to the blood vessels that feed tumors. These smart, nano-sized medicines will hunt and kill metastatic tumors much better than current drugs, and with fewer side effects.

Nanotechnology is changing cancer detection and treatment. The future is here, it's tiny, and with the help of innovators at MSK, it's rapidly moving into the mainstream of patient care.

Discover the future of cancer care. Learn more at **mskcc.org/nanotechnology**

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
PAY DAYS

A YEAR AGO, during the Democratic Presidential-primary debate in Flint, Michigan, Senator Bernie Sanders was railing against "the crooks on Wall Street" when he turned to his opponent, Hillary Clinton, and said, "One of us has a super PAC. One of us has raised fifteen million dollars from Wall Street for that super PAC. One of us has given speeches on Wall Street for hundreds of thousands of dollars." Clinton had a ready response: "If you were going to be in some way distrusted or dismissed about whether you can take on Wall Street if you ever took money, President Obama took more money from Wall Street in the 2008 campaign than anybody ever had!" Obama had still stood up to Wall Street, she said, and so would she. But there was a problem with that argument: although Barack Obama's two campaigns had raised about twenty-five million dollars from Wall Street, he had not personally received large fees from the industry. Meanwhile, since 2001, Hillary and Bill Clinton's paid speeches had earned them a hundred and fifty-three million dollars.

Obama may yet catch up. Last week, it was reported that, having returned from sailing around Tahiti with friends, he would embark on the working stage of his post-Presidency by giving a speech for which the financial-services firm Cantor Fitzgerald would pay him four hundred thousand dollars. During his time in the White House, Obama made his share of mistakes, but he worked hard. While enduring insults about his family and his citizenship, he won landmark progressive victories—including the expansion of health-care access to millions of Americans—all without a hint of sordidness or scandal, and then he campaigned tirelessly for Clinton. He deserves a comfortable retirement. But isn't that what the joint book deal that he and Michelle Obama recently signed, for a reported sixty-five million dollars, is supposed to provide? For that matter, what should a post-Presidency provide? A reason that Obama has been criticized for the Cantor Fitzgerald fee may be not that he would take the money but that he would do so before his identity outside the White House has been solidly defined. Now almost the first thing that the public is learning about this next stage in his life is the one thing they think they already know about politicians: they are financially beholden to corporate interests.

Obama will not run for office again. And, unless the Obamas have learned nothing from the Clintons' experience, his decision to accept the speaking fee should finally put to rest any notions that Michelle might run. Still, one hopes, and Obama has said, that he is not done with public life. Last month, in Chicago, he talked about wanting to inspire young people to feel good about politics as a profession. He might consider how the financial decisions he makes in the next few years could compromise that goal, and others. He is committed to working with Eric Holder, the former Attorney General, in the battle over congressional redistricting, which will require fund-raising for state campaigns.

Obama has also begun accepting money from donors like John Doerr, the venture capitalist, and Reid Hoffman, of LinkedIn, for the Obama Presidential Center. The design for the twenty-one-acre library-and-museum complex, on the South Side of Chicago, was revealed last week, at an event near the site. Obama announced that he and Michelle would donate two million dollars to a youth-jobs program, and emphasized that, while other Presidential libraries had involved retrospective "ego-tripping," his would look forward. According to the *Times*, the fund-raising target is eight hundred million dollars, to cover construction costs and the initial endowment. The modern imperative for a former President to collect cash for a monument to himself as soon as he leaves office allows little respite from

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

the culture of political financing. The minute you stop being pharaoh, you have to start building a pyramid.

Until quite recently, it was considered perfectly proper for a former President to trade his conversation and his companionship for a check. Jimmy Carter, who eschewed personal enrichment in favor of quietly effecting humanitarian advances around the world, was viewed as an outlier. Yet, if the tradition was ever a healthy one for our democracy, voters no longer seem to see it that way. Russian hackers may have been a factor in Hillary Clinton's defeat, but so were a number of Americans who believed that the Clintons had sold their independence. The Democratic super PAC Priorities USA recently commissioned a study of voters in Wisconsin and Michigan who had chosen Obama in 2012 and Donald Trump in 2016, and found that thirty per cent had voted not *for* Trump but *against* Clinton. Many also distrusted the Democrats' economic allegiances. The G.O.P., meanwhile, was short on elder statesmen who had enough credibility with its populist wing to halt the lurch toward a demagogue who said that all politicians were crooks, and that he knew it because he had bribed them himself.

Obama may feel that he's had enough of this kind of headache, but the fact is that his party still needs him. If he could just hand over the reins to successors with national reputations and, crucially, the ability to articulate what the Democratic Party stands for, it would be fine for him to focus on his own projects until the next time he's called on to give a Convention speech. The Democratic field, however, is in a state of unproductive entropy, in part because the Party has not resolved the divisions and the contradictions that drew younger voters, in particular, to Sanders. The list of potential standard-bearers includes everyone from Joe Biden and Elizabeth Warren, who will be in their seventies in 2020, to traditional machine politicians, like Andrew Cuomo and Terry McAuliffe, and younger senators, such as Amy Klobuchar, Kamala Harris, and Chris Murphy, who as yet lack the constituencies and the institutional support that they will need in order to succeed on the national level. But, if any of them are standing on a primary-debate stage in 2020, they are going to have to offer better answers than the ones Clinton gave in Flint.

Her campaign was full of confidence after that debate, but Sanders, in an upset, won the Michigan primary, and Clinton went on to lose the state, narrowly, to Trump. Many observers wondered why the candidate hadn't done more polling, or deployed a better field operation, or, at least, made better use of a surrogate who would have been a great asset there: President Barack Obama. Maybe next time.

—*Amy Davidson*

SIDE BY SIDE

WHALES AND DINOSAURS

As a child, Stephen Sondheim lived a few blocks from the American Museum of Natural History, but he hadn't been back in a while, so on a recent rainy night, in search of the PEN America Literary Gala and his friend Meryl Streep, he found himself disoriented. Streep was going to give him an award for Literary Service on behalf of the organization, which advocates for persecuted writers. He came to the diorama of Peter Stuyvesant in Dutch Manhattan. "If you get rid of the Indians, it looks like Barbra Streisand's compound!" he said. It put him in mind of a Rodgers and Hart line about Peter Minuit buying Manhattan Island: "For twenty-six dollars and a bottle of booze." He mused on a rhyme he loved. "Yip Harburg rhymed 'everybody' with 'ladeedadee,'" he said. "It's really terrific."

Out of the gloaming, Streep appeared.

He: "Hi there!"

She: "Hi-i-i there!"

Streep had on a white shirt over black-and-white striped pantaloons. "It's my springtime outfit," she said.

"It's your harlequin outfit!"

Sondheim asked Streep if she was a regular at PEN events. "I came because I love you," she said.

Where to next? The summer-stock theatricality of finding each other dissipated as the pair walked along the museum's Stygian passageways. Attendees in black tie were beginning to stream in. Sondheim told a joke whose punch line was "I don't care. It's still kreplach."

Stephen Sondheim and Meryl Streep

He added, "That's a profound joke."

A PEN guest approached Streep and asked her to pose for a photo holding a sign urging Russia to free the Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov. "I don't have social media," she responded. But PEN does, so she complied. (The picture ended up in the *KyivPost*.) Then, after wandering past the giant clam and the embalmed squids, they found the Milstein Hall of Ocean Life. "I remember this as a sort of atrium," Sondheim said. Someone took a picture of him, puckish grin on grizzled face, leaning on the railing, with Streep tilting her head toward him, sorority-girl-like, the blue fibreglass whale hovering in the background. Sondheim had been playing around with whale metaphors earlier. "Whales and dinosaurs? It's almost too easy."

Once seated, they set out to tell the story of their friendship.

Sondheim: "Let her do it. Then I'll correct it."

Streep: "I didn't have to bring my husband, because there you are!"

Sondheim (triumphant): "Now you have a portrait of Meryl's marriage. It's called 'The Bickersons.'"

They first met more than forty years ago, when Streep had a bit part in Sondheim's adaptation of Aristophanes' "The Frogs," at Yale, a production that was

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staged half in and half out of a pool. ("Chorine Chokes on Chlorine" was her suggested headline.) "I don't think he even noticed me," Streep said. "He was a god."

Sondheim (demurring): "Oh, I'd only written a few shows. 'West Side Story,' 'Gypsy,' and 'Forum.'"

"*Just* 'West Side Story,' 'Gypsy,' and 'Forum'?"

"And 'Anyone Can Whistle.' They stripped my epaulets after that, as they say."

True collaboration waited until 2013, and the movie version of "Into the Woods," in which Streep played the witch. He wrote a special song for her and she asked him to sign the sheet music. "Don't fuck it up!" he wrote on it. Both agreed that she didn't, but the song was cut.

In the meantime, their friendship grew through one of Sondheim's favorite mediums, games. Natasha Richardson and Liam Neeson hosted holiday parties that included charades, in which Streep participated. Mia Farrow brought Sondheim to one.

"I play a different kind of charades than Meryl does," he said. "I play running charades, in which there are two teams in relay. She likes to play the kind of charades where her team makes up all the things and our team acts them out and they giggle at what assholes we are as we're doing it."

Streep replied, "His version is too complicated to do when you're drunk."

The room filled. The awards were given. Talk turned to children (hers) and art (his). They have hopes for a new collaboration, but, for now, they wish they saw each other more. They have houses near one another in Connecticut, but they're busy: He's working on a Buñuel adaptation. She's preparing to play Katharine Graham in Steven Spielberg's version of "The Pentagon Papers." But that isn't the *real* reason.

"We plan—" Sondheim began.

"—and then he cancels," Streep said.

"Or you do! And there's a third person, and that's Christine Baranski, who does a lot of cancelling." This they agreed on: Baranski was the problem.

—*D. T. Max*

DEPT. OF HOOPLA
ALT DANCE-OFF

There is a woman in Washington, D.C., who, during the week, works at a law firm. Some weekends, she d.j.s at weddings or corporate events, as DJ Applause. Recently, she took a Saturday-night gig, at a downtown cigar bar. "I was told that it would be a group of journalists having an eighties-themed party," she said. She was not told that the party would be called the Real News Correspondents' dinner—not the White House Correspondents' Association dinner, and not Samantha Bee's "Not the White House Correspondents' Dinner," but a smaller event, held as a form of right-wing counterprogramming. "Our weapons now are the pen, our weapons are keystrokes on our iPads and our iPhones and our laptop computers," Rose Tennent, a conservative radio host and one of the event's organizers, said from a lectern. "We must use those effectively to restore liberty to this great country."

Jim Hoft, another organizer and the editor of the pro-Trump Web tabloid the Gateway Pundit, spoke next. "Those people who are meeting across town, at the White House Correspondents' dinner—those people are not the ones who are telling the truth," he said. The crowd booed, and someone shouted, "*Very* fake news!" "They're running these crazy conspiracies on Russia," Hoft continued. "But what's wonderful is, the public is starting to not listen to them." There were about a hundred people in attendance, including Michael Flynn, Jr., who was smoking a cigar and wearing a "Golden Girls" T-shirt. TVs were tuned to a Fox News special about Donald Trump's first hundred days; while Hoft spoke, photographs of Michael Flynn, Sr., the former national-security adviser, who is under investigation by the Pentagon, flashed on the screen.

The first speaker was Lucian Wintrich, from the Gateway Pundit. He introduced Gavin McInnes, a talk-show host and a self-proclaimed "Western chauvinist," who took the microphone from Wintrich and kissed him on the mouth. "You can't get AIDS from kissing, right?" McInnes said. He wore a studded denim vest, and his face was smeared with dirt. "This is how I dressed in the eighties," he said. "I was an anarchist punk, and I think in many ways I still am." He argued that the G.O.P. was the party of freedom. "*You* became the Nazis, Democrats," he said. "You became the Fascists." He concluded with what he called "a poem that I just came up with right now." The poem was a chant: "U.S.A.! U.S.A.!"

During the speeches, the d.j. stepped outside for some air. Three of the attendees—two young men wearing "Make America Great Again" hats, and a blond middle-aged woman—asked whether she was a Trump supporter. "I try to remain neutral," she said. Wrong answer. "They started in on me, asking me all kinds of aggressive questions," the d.j. said later. "I stayed quiet. I was the only black person there, and I didn't want it to become a thing. I just kept thinking,

THE PRODIGAL SON RETURNS TO DO HIS LAUNDRY

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INVENTING FOR LIFE

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Shit, just play the music and get out."

She went back to her turntables. "We have a surprise for you," Hoft told the audience. "We have a Thrilla in . . . wherever we're at." It was a dance-off between McInnes and James O'Keefe, a self-described "guerrilla journalist," whom Andrew Breitbart once referred to as "a cross between Morley Safer and Sacha Baron Cohen." McInnes went first, dancing to "Let's Go Crazy," by Prince. He shimmied his hips, lifted his shirt to expose his chest, and ended by doing the Worm. Then O'Keefe, in a fedora, performed Michael Jackson's choreography to "Billie Jean," including a passable moonwalk. As measured by crowd applause, O'Keefe was the clear winner. "Fuck that guy," McInnes said. "He just memorized a bunch of moves. I was dancing from the heart." Hoft returned to the microphone. "That's it for our program tonight," he said. "We have some food in the other room. . . . Thank you so much, and God bless America." It was 8:53 P.M.

The audience dispersed, and the d.j. spun to a near-empty dance floor. After a while, the blond woman from outside approached and requested "Girl You Know It's True," by Milli Vanilli. "I already played that, actually," the d.j. said. In response, the woman called her "a little bitch" and stormed off.

The event ended at eleven. "I was in my car and gone by 11:24," the d.j. said. "I have never packed up that fast." She votes, but otherwise she tries to ignore politics. "My main takeaway was to do more homework next time," she said.

—*Andrew Marantz*

FORM OVER FUNCTION DEPT.
BONG SHOW

When David Bienenstock says, "I've been smoking weed professionally for fifteen years," he is referring to his two stints as an editor at *High Times* and the intervening years as a frequent contributor to *Vice*, where, among other things, he co-produced the pot-cooking show "Bong Appétit" and once wrote a rebuttal to the *Times*, entitled "Maureen Dowd Freaked Out on Weed Chocolate Because She's Stupid." (Bienenstock's wife was the "Edibles Editor" at *High Times*. They both left the magazine recently.) Bienenstock is also the author of the 2016 book "How to Smoke Pot (Properly)," which is less a primer than a plea—less how than why. He considers himself to be an advocacy journalist, a member, in a way, of an abolitionist press. "Cannabis was my gateway to social justice and to the idea of the government as an oppressive, illegitimate force," he said the other day. Still, there is useful advice here and there in the book, such as a three-step plan for combatting "amotivational syndrome," also known as "couch lock":

> Step 1: Decide what you're going to do *after* you get stoned *before* you get stoned.
> Step 2: Get stoned.
> Step 3: Do whatever you decided on in Step 1.

Bienenstock came to town from Los Angeles last month, to guest-curate an exhibit, at apexart, in Tribeca, called "Outlaw Glass"—a showcase of glass pipes and bongs, handmade by master lampworkers for the purpose of smoking marijuana in various forms. Technically, this is known as artistic hard glass. There were four large vitrines, each about the size of a coffin and populated by an array of flamboyant, filigreed apparatuses, lurid plumbing in many colors and forms—dragons, skulls, krakens—which one might find either fetching or hideous, depending upon one's taste for velvet heavy-metal posters and airbrushed landscapes on vans. No question, the craftsmanship was humbling. Delicate leaves and lace, tubes within tubes, ghouls embedded inside chambers like ships in bottles. One object widely admired by the other lampworkers was a pea-green monster truck with big black tires and flames exuding from six tailpipes—every inch of it glass. *Mais oui: Ceci, c'est une pipe.* Bienenstock, who is forty-one and was reared in Rahway (he first smoked pot behind the bowling alley), invited his mother to the opening. She told him, "I can remember throwing out one of your contraptions, but it wasn't nearly as elaborate or beautiful as one of these things."

"Some of these guys probably started out selling weed," Bienenstock said, a couple of days later. A few weeks earlier, the gallery had held a "flame-off," based loosely on "Chopped," the cooking show, at Brooklyn Glass, a glass studio in Gowanus. Fifteen local contestants were each given the same materials, the same equipment, and four hours to create a pot pipe. Their finished work was on display at the back of the gallery; the winner had been selected by Bienenstock. "It seemed like something I'd want to display in my house," he said. "It doesn't look like a pipe, at first glance."

The lampworkers in the show had pseudonyms like Elbo, Banjo, Kinda, and Snic. The so-called godfather of glass is Bob Snodgrass, a seventy-one-year-old hippie who lives in Eugene, Oregon. His work filled an entire vitrine. He started out in the late seventies, selling his implements at county fairs and Kiwanis Clubs, and then, beginning in the late eighties, became a parking-lot fixture on tour with the Grateful Dead. Bienenstock said, "Deadheads knew that if you bought a Snoddy it would pay for itself, because everyone wanted to put their good weed in it." Snodgrass's innovations are legion. He conceived of the so-called sidecar design—wherein the bowl is affixed to the side of the pipe, rather than the top—while he and his wife were spending the night in a friend's waterbed. Every time they put the pipe down, it tipped over. But if you had the bowl as an outrigger—eureka!

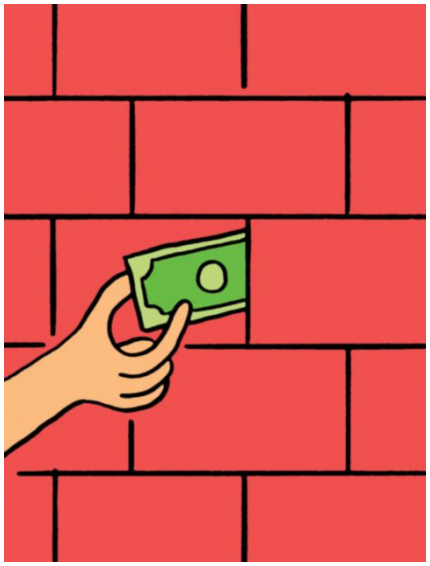
Though none of the works at the gallery were for sale, the finer ones can go for six figures. The collectors, Bienenstock said, "are a self-selecting group of people who have money and love weed." Included in this category, apparently, are growers looking to park their unbankable cash. Bienenstock calls it a "legally gray art form." In 2003, at a time when the Department of Homeland Security had declared that the risk of a terrorist attack in the U.S. was orange in magnitude, the Justice Department devoted personnel to a sting that it called Operation Pipe Dreams. Dozens of people were arrested for selling paraphernalia. (You may recall the subsequent prison sentence of the comedian Tommy Chong.) Though there didn't seem much of a chance that anyone would raid the exhibit in Tribeca, the gallery included this statement in the brochure: "apexart does not endorse or advocate the use of illegal substances." But Bienenstock does.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

STICKLER STATUS

GRAND CAYMAN, the largest of the Cayman Islands, is distinguished by a crescent-shaped, white-sand beach lined with four- and five-star hotels, dive shops, and stores selling luxury goods at a price point you might expect in the Zurich airport. Two of the most popular activities are swimming with stingrays and operating offshore tax havens. It is also a favored destination for corporate retreats, and for four days this April more than five hundred financial compliance officers converged on the Ritz-Carlton in Grand Cayman. Between sets of tennis, rounds of golf, and seminars on operational due diligence and cash-management efficiencies, it became clear that some of them were a little nervous about their futures.



Compliance officers are supposed to keep banks, hedge funds, and other companies out of trouble. Doing so sometimes means telling powerful money-makers that they have to follow rules, which might mean that they make less money. This is not always an easy task. For every insider-trading arrest, fake-account scandal, Bank Secrecy Act fine, or money-laundering investigation, there is a compliance department that failed in its job. In the movies, compliance officers are usually the meek ones wearing glasses, hidden in windowless rooms at the end of long hallways.

Compliance officers live in fear of missing something. "There are no great days, like, 'Oh, my God, we just found that one of our portfolio managers was doing something wrong and we told it to the C.I.O. and we're going to get him kicked out of here,'" Thomas Sporkin, a securities lawyer who represents compliance officers, said. "There's no victory there." When Mark Schein, a former Bronx prosecutor and enforcement lawyer for the New York Stock Exchange, became the chief compliance officer of the hedge fund York Capital Management, in 2005, he had golf shirts made. "On one side, it says 'Your Capital Management Compliance Department,'" he said. "On the other side, it says 'We Take the Fun Out of Funds.'"

Despite compliance's reputation as a buzzkill profession, its status rose during the Obama Administration. Regulations implemented after the financial crisis created a need for internal watchdogs, as did the concern raised by prosecutions of banks and hedge funds for mortgage fraud, currency-market rigging, and insider trading. In 2014, the *Wall Street Journal* went so far as to describe compliance as a potential "dream career." But President Donald Trump, with his disregard for business-ethics standards, both in and out of office, is creating a new atmosphere.

During cocktail hour by Camana Bay, holding plates of crab claws and sushi, conference-goers exchanged anecdotes about how traders at their firms were starting to ask whether the old, strict rules still applied. The compliance officers seemed to be channelling a concern about what leadership theorists call "tone at the top." Michael Useem, a professor of management at Wharton, said that words alone don't change rules, "but when repeated, promoted, articulated, in a whole variety of communication channels, it does affect the tone in the middle." He went on, "The tone at the top right now coming from Washington may be sending a corrosive message on compliance, ethical behavior, and so on. I think it probably is, but we are going to have to wait and see." (Useem did not attend the Grand Cayman conference, which is called GAIM Ops; I was there as a speaker.)

Trump's tone has been aggressive. In early February, he signed an executive order directing the Treasury Secretary to revisit Obama-era banking rules, and he has repeatedly complained about the burden of excessive regulation. ("Dodd-Frank is a disaster," he declared, in January, referring to the financial-reform legislation that was passed after the 2008 crisis. "We're going to be doing a big number on Dodd-Frank.") His Administration has been hostile toward the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which was set up to protect consumers from the skullduggery of financial institutions, and, in March, he fired Preet Bharara, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, who became famous for bringing insider-trading prosecutions.

For the most part, Wall Street has been pleased by these signals. But Andrew Kandel, the chief compliance officer and co-general counsel at Cerberus Capital Management, a private-equity firm, said that regulation helps promote ethical behavior. He and Schein have given seminars at the Grand Cayman conference for seven years. "I try to scare people all the time by talking about the regulatory environment and how difficult it is, that the S.E.C. could examine us, or the C.F.T.C.," he said, referring to the Commodities Futures Trading Commission. It's one way to "remind people of how important it is to be compliant."

There are other ways as well, such as setting an example. "Making a lot of money any way you can is something that Trump brags about and advocates. And that creates a general climate. And you really need your people to be intimidated," Schein told me. "When you have an atmosphere where people feel they can do whatever they want to make money, and regulation is going to be going away, it just makes our job a lot harder."

—*Sheelah Kolhatkar*

TIM LAHAN

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE SCIENCES

SIGHT UNSEEN

Seeing with your tongue and other surprises of sensory-substitution technology.

BY NICOLA TWILLEY

According to one scientist, "You don't see with the eyes. You see with the brain."

THE CLIMBERS AT Earth Treks gym, in Golden, Colorado, were warming up: stretching, strapping themselves into harnesses, and chalking their hands as they prepared to scale walls stippled with multicolored plastic holds. Seated off to one side, with a slim gray plastic band wrapped around his brow, Erik Weihenmayer was warming up, too—by reading flash cards. "I see an 'E' at the end," he said, sweeping his head over the top card, from side to side and up and down. "It's definitely popping—is it 'please'?" he asked me. It was. Weihenmayer moved triumphantly on to the next card.

Erik Weihenmayer is the only blind person to have climbed Mt. Everest. He was born with juvenile retinoschisis, an inherited condition that caused his retinas to disintegrate completely by his freshman year of high school. Unable to play the ball games at which his father and his brothers excelled, he took to climbing after being introduced to it at a summer camp for the blind. He learned to pat the rock face with his hands or tap it with an ice axe to find his next hold, following the sound of a small bell worn by a guide, who also described the terrain ahead. With this technique, he has summited the tallest peaks on all seven continents.

A decade ago, Weihenmayer began using the BrainPort, a device that enables him to "see" the rock face using his tongue. The BrainPort consists of two parts: the band on his brow supports a tiny video camera; connected to this by a cable is a postage-stamp-size white plastic lollipop, which he holds in his mouth. The camera feed is reduced in resolution to a grid of four hundred gray-scale pixels, transmitted to his tongue via a corresponding grid of four hundred tiny electrodes on the lollipop. Dark pixels provide a strong shock; lighter pixels merely tingle. The resulting vision is a sensation that Weihenmayer describes as "pictures being painted with tiny bubbles."

Reading the cards before his climb helped Weihenmayer calibrate the intensity of the electrical stimulation and make sure that the camera was pointing where he thought it was pointing. When he was done, he tied himself into his harness and set off up Mad Dog, a difficult route marked by small blue plastic holds set far apart on the wall. Without the BrainPort, Weihenmayer's climbing style is inelegant but astonishingly fast—a spidery scramble with arms and feet sweeping like windshield wipers across the wall in front of him in order to feel out the next hold. With the device on his tongue, he is much slower, but more deliberate. After each move, he leans away from the wall, surveys the cliff face, and then carefully reaches his hand out into mid-air, where it hovers for a split second before lunging toward a hold several feet away. "You have to do the hand thing, because it's hard to know where, exactly, things are in space," Weihenmayer explained, as I prepared to tackle Cry Baby, a much simpler route. "Once my hand blocks the hold, I know I'm in front of it, and then I just kind of go in there."

Weihenmayer told me that he wouldn't take the BrainPort up Everest—relying on fallible electronics in such extreme conditions would be foolhardy. But he has used it on challenging outdoor climbs in Utah and around Colorado, and he loves the way that it restores his lost hand-eye coördination. "I can see the hold, I reach up, and I'm, like, 'Pow!'" he said. "It's in space, and I just grabbed it in space. It sounds so simple when you have eyes, but that's a really cool feeling."

The BrainPort, which uses the sense of touch as a substitute for sight, is one of a growing number of so-called

ILLUSTRATION BY CHAD HAGEN

sensory-substitution devices. Another, the vOICe, turns visual information into sound. Others translate auditory information into tactile sensation for the deaf or use sounds to supply missing haptic information for burn victims and leprosy patients. While these devices were designed with the goal of restoring lost sensation, in the past decade they have begun to revise our understanding of brain organization and development. The idea that underlies sensory substitution is a radical one: that the brain is capable of processing perceptual information in much the same way, no matter which organ delivers it. As the BrainPort's inventor, the neuroscientist Paul Bach-y-Rita, put it, "You don't see with the eyes. You see with the brain."

Bach-y-Rita, who died in 2006, is known as "the father of sensory substitution," although, as he liked to point out, both Braille and white canes are essentially sensory-substitution systems, replacing information that is typically visual—words on a page, objects at a distance—with tactile sensation. He even argued that writing ought to be considered the original precursor, because it enabled the previously auditory experience of the spoken word to be presented visually.

Bach-y-Rita began his medical career in visual rehabilitation, gaining a reputation as a specialist in the neurophysiology of eye muscles. In 1959, his father, Pedro Bach-y-Rita, a Catalan poet who had immigrated to the Bronx and taught at City College, suffered a catastrophic stroke. Doctors said that he would never speak or walk again, but Paul's brother, then a medical student, designed a gruelling rehabilitation regimen: Pedro had to crawl around on kneepads until he could walk, and to practice scooping up coins until he had learned to feed himself. After a year, Pedro went back to work as a teacher and, after two, he was able to live independently. When he eventually died—in 1965, of a heart attack—he was hiking up a mountain in Colombia. And yet, as his autopsy revealed, his brain was still severely damaged; the areas responsible for motion and involuntary muscle movements had been all but destroyed. "How could he have recovered so much?" Bach-y-Rita marvelled. "If he could recover, why didn't others recover?"

Bach-y-Rita had already begun tinkering with devices that substituted tactile sensation for vision, but, encouraged by this personal evidence of the brain's ability to adapt to loss, he completed his first prototype in 1969. It was built from castoffs—a discarded dentist's chair, an old TV camera—and weighed four hundred pounds. A blind person could sit in the chair and scan the scene by using hand cranks to move the camera. The analog video stream was fed into an enormous computer, which converted it into four hundred gray-scale dots. These points of information were then transferred not to four hundred electrodes, as in the BrainPort, but to a grid of vibrating, Teflon-tipped pins mounted on the back of the chair. The pins vibrated intensely for dark pixels and stayed still for light ones, enabling users to feel the picture pulsing on their backs. After just a few hours' practice, Bach-y-Rita's first six volunteers, all blind from birth, could distinguish between straight lines and curved ones, identify a telephone and a coffee mug, and even recognize a picture of the supermodel Twiggy.

Bach-y-Rita published his results in *Nature*, in 1969. During the following decade, he continued to refine the system, testing his blind subjects with more and more complex tasks while trying to shrink the enormous contraption into something more manageable. The bulk of cameras and computers at the time wasn't the only challenge. He also ran up against a tactile constraint known as "two-point discrimination"—our ability to tell that two things touching the skin are indeed discrete objects, rather than a single large one. The skin's spatial resolution varies widely; on the back, the stimuli had to be quite far apart, and Bach-y-Rita spent years looking for a better spot. Some of the most point-sensitive areas are on the hand, but if blind users had their hands stuck in a device they wouldn't be able to manipulate the objects they were newly capable of seeing. Bach-y-Rita's colleagues scoffed when he settled on the tongue, pointing out the difficulty of making the device work in a wet environment. But the tongue's moisture makes it an excellent transmitter of electrical energy, and it is as sensitive to two-point discrimination as a fingertip.

In 1998, Bach-y-Rita founded a company, Wicab, to commercialize his invention. It is based in a small office park in the suburbs of Madison, Wisconsin, and shares an anonymous, two-story glass building and a plant-filled atrium with a family dentist. A couple of dozen employees sit at cubicles or in a small workshop where each of the devices is still built by hand. When I visited, Tricia Grant, Wicab's director of clinical research, led me through the first steps of a ten-hour training program that she's developed to help new users get accustomed to the device.

Grant spread a black cloth on a conference-room table—it's easier for beginners to start in a high-contrast environment—and blindfolded me. She put the band holding the camera over my ears and gave me the plastic lollipop to put into my mouth. As I wiggled my fingers in front of my face, she explained how to increase the intensity of the electrical pulses on my tongue until I was able to feel them. (Smokers and the elderly typically require more stimulation than younger users.) Suddenly, there was a slightly sour fizzing on my tongue, and we were ready to begin.

Grant told me that she was putting a plastic banana and a ball on the table. "This is how we always start," she said. "See if you can tell which is on the left and which is on the right." Lips clamped shut around the BrainPort cable, I swept my head slowly from side to side, as if I were stroking the table with my brow, emitting a startled "Mmm," as I bumped into each effervescent object. Although I couldn't explain exactly how I knew, after scanning back and forth for a few seconds I was pretty sure that the ball was on the left and the banana was on the right, and I reached out to double-check. "You grabbed that ball like you saw it!" Grant said.

Half an hour later, I had successfully navigated an obstacle course of office chairs, and identified the letter "O," written on the whiteboard. (A capital "L" proved a little trickier—I guessed "E" instead.) "What else can I see?" I asked Grant. Just then, our lunch arrived. She warned me to avoid hot peppers and

pickles, in order to spare my overstimulated tongue. I barely heard her, slumped in my chair and suddenly aware of how hard I had been concentrating for the past forty-five minutes. Stripped of sight, I'd had to squeeze every drop of information I could about the world around me from a plastic square tingling like Pop Rocks on my tongue.

We completed only the first part of Grant's course, but she told me that, after ten hours, I would have been able to use the BrainPort to safely move around my home. Achieving mastery takes much longer. "We recommend practicing for at least twenty minutes a day," she said. "It's like learning a foreign language."

Wicab has been making the BrainPort for the better part of two decades, and the device received F.D.A. approval as a vision aid in 2015. No more than two hundred have shipped, however, and in the blind community it remains little more than a curiosity. Eric Bridges, the executive director of the American Council of the Blind, told me that he hadn't heard of it or of the various alternative devices, like the vOICe. He said wearily that he is constantly approached by people claiming to have invented the next big blindness aid, but that few of these ideas ever make it to commercial production. Although 1.3 million Americans are blind, with another 8.7 million qualifying as visually impaired, they still constitute a niche market. "And guess what?" Bridges added. "The blind and visually impaired community has a really low labor-participation rate. We're not exactly flush with cash." Although users of the vOICe need purchase only a smartphone and a pair of cheap augmented-reality glasses—the software is free—the BrainPort is currently priced at ten thousand dollars. (Wicab is lobbying to have the device qualify for reimbursement under Medicaid.)

But cost is not the only obstacle. Learning how to use a sensory-substitution device is hard work. "I almost think of it as giving you an opportunity to see what sensory perception must have been like when you were an infant," Michael Proulx, an experimental psychologist who studies sensory substitution, told me. "We can't remember the first year of life and how confusing all that visual information would have been." Learning to see using the vOICe or the BrainPort is, he said, "starting you back at square one again, and you have to build up an expertise and an understanding over time." Not surprisingly, many blind people, for whom getting from A to B in a sighted world already poses a significant daily challenge, don't feel that it's worth the investment of time, money, and energy to become proficient users of a device that, at its best, offers limited results. The BrainPort's images are, after all, gray-scale and low-resolution, and its auditory competitor, the vOICe, operates with a built-in time delay, so it can't even help you cross the street.

In the late nineteen-fifties, in a windowless basement at Johns Hopkins, the neurophysiologists David Hubel and Torsten Wiesel began a series of experiments that eventually won them a Nobel Prize, for their contribution to our understanding of the visual cortex. Some of their most important work took place in the early sixties, when they investigated the development of visual processing. They sutured closed a single eye of an eight-day-old kitten and unstitched it three months later. Although the kitten now had two undamaged eyes, it remained blind in the eye that had been visually deprived. Examining the kitten's visual cortex, Hubel and Wiesel found that the open eye had taken over the neurons of the one that was closed, leaving the kitten forever unable to process information from a second eye.

This finding became a central piece of evidence for the so-called "critical periods" doctrine of brain development. The theory holds that, if sensory input is lacking during a crucial phase, the brain will fail to develop normally, remaining unable to process that kind of information even if sensory input is later restored. According to this theory, Paul Bach-y-Rita's sensory-substitution device should not have worked for adults who had spent their entire lives blind, because their brains would never have developed the ability to interpret visual information.

More recently, however, other neuroscientists have found clues indicating that the adult brain does retain some ability to adapt—a quality known as plasticity. In 2002, scientists installed a tiny glass window in the skulls of adult mice and trimmed every other whisker; they were able to watch as the spatial-processing center in the mouse brains reconfigured itself to compensate for the sensory damage. (Mice rely on their whiskers to orient themselves.) As the concept of adult neuroplasticity encroached on the dogma of critical periods, a new generation of neuroscientists seized on sensory-substitution devices as a valuable tool with which to probe human brain development and organization.

In 2007, the Israeli neurobiologist Ella Striem-Amit embarked on doctoral research investigating whether people who are born blind could ever learn to perceive visual information in the way that sighted people do. She joined the lab of Amir Amedi, a neurologist at Hebrew University, in Jerusalem, and they set about training a small group of congenitally blind subjects to use the vOICe. The vOICe translates a camera feed into electronically produced notes according to reasonably simple principles: brightness is mapped to volume, and elevation to pitch. The camera scans a hundred and eighty degrees and delivers a new snapshot every second, and the sound is heard in stereo, enabling you to tell which side an object is on. A staircase whose first step is on your left and which has a sunlit window at the top would, for example, sound like a musical scale, rising in volume as it ascends in pitch.

Striem-Amit discovered that teaching people to see using the vOICe required more than simply helping them master the technology. "Congenitally blind people don't know how vision works," she explained. "They don't know principles of occlusion"—that one object can block another—"or that things appear larger when they're closer." Yet, after seventy hours of training, her subjects were able to grasp these concepts and to identify shapes, objects, and even faces. In a video of one experiment, a blind woman, shown a picture of a man spreading his arms and legs in the shape of a star, stands up and mimicks his position. In another, a man using a similar device to identify a plaid shirt says, "It sounds a bit checkered."

More remarkable were the results of fMRI brain mapping of blind subjects. Although the initial processing of the vOICe's soundscapes occurred in the auditory cortex, subsequent tasks, such as identifying objects, occurred in the same

regions of the brain as in sighted people. Striem-Amit and Amedi believe that the results directly contradict the critical-periods theory of brain development. "What we are claiming is that a lot of these brain regions didn't depend on visual experience to begin with," Striem-Amit explained. Instead, they argue, the correct wiring is laid down in the brain regardless of whether it is ever used.

Amedi, a former jazz saxophonist, has recently developed a device called EyeMusic, which replaces the soulless electronic bleeping of the vOICe with instrumental timbres that add color to the auditory translation of visual information: strings are shades of yellow, brass is blue, and so on. After training nine congenitally blind subjects on the device for thirty hours, he showed them the shapes I, V, and X in three different colors, while mapping their brains. When asked to discriminate among the shapes as letters, the participants showed the greatest activation in the area of the brain associated with reading; when the participants were asked to identify the shapes as Roman numerals, their brains lit up in a region associated with numbers and quantity; and, when the participants sorted the shapes by color, Amedi and his colleagues saw activity in the color centers of the brain, as well as in the auditory cortex.

"If you open a neuroscience textbook right now, it would still talk about the visual cortex, the auditory cortex, and so on," Amedi said. "I would argue that that labelling is wrong." After all, if congenitally blind people are able to listen to and then accurately identify the red apple in a basket of Granny Smiths using the same area of the brain as sighted people, why should that area be considered visual? Instead, Striem-Amit and Amedi have begun to argue that the brain is organized along task-specific lines—and that the visual cortex seems to be linked to vision only because most of us use sight in order to gather the type of information that it processes. "This is not just a semantic thing," Amedi said. "By looking at the brain this way, we can better understand what each area is really doing, and how it's doing it."

"This is still controversial," Striem-Amit acknowledged. "There's a lot more to be done." Another neuroscientist, David Eagleman, compares the current state of neuroscientific knowledge to the field of genetics before Crick and Watson discovered the structure of DNA. "Neuroscience is so young that we hardly know the first thing about the brain," he told me. Nonetheless, he leans toward a point of view potentially even more radical than that of Striem-Amit and Amedi—that the adult brain may be flexible enough to encompass entirely novel senses.

Eagleman, too, has developed a sensory-substitution device, called the VEST (Versatile Extra-Sensory Transducer), which will become available in 2018. It is a waistcoat with thirty-two embedded vibratory motors, connected to a smartphone app that translates sound frequencies into tactile stimuli. It is designed for deaf people, who, Eagleman claims, should, with adequate training, be able to understand not just basic environmental sounds but also speech. "It's simple," he said. "We're just putting the cochlea on the torso."

But Eagleman's ambitions do not stop at sensory substitution: his larger goal is sensory augmentation. He expects that VEST users may, depending on the data transmitted through their skin, be able to "feel" electromagnetic fields, stock-market data, or even space weather. "It may be the case that we can add one or two or three or more senses and the brain has no problem," he said. Amedi likewise imagines that sensory augmentation could enable us to "see" bodies through walls using the infrared spectrum or to "hear" the location of family members using G.P.S. tracking technology. "The community of people that work in sensory substitution is very small, and ninety-nine per cent of them, including me, used to be very focussed on restoration, rehabilitation, and basic science," Amedi told me. "Now, even just in the last year, the pendulum has swung in the direction of creating superabilities."

THE SCIENCE OF sensory substitution has also begun to attract the attention of philosophers and experimental psychologists, who hope that it will shed light on the nature of perceptual experience. What is seeing, after all, if your tongue can do it? Is a person who perceives visual information via the auditory system experiencing sight, sound, or an unprecedented hybrid of the two? The philosopher Fiona McPherson told me that the field is divided on these questions, in part because there is no agreement on what a sense actually is. Some argue that vision is defined by the organ that absorbs the information: anything that does not enter through the eye is not vision, and thus Erik Weihenmayer is feeling, rather than seeing, the rock wall in front of him. Striem-Amit, on the other hand, is one of many neuroscientists who favor a definition of vision that is determined by the source of the stimulus: vision is any processing of information that comes from reflected

rays of light. By this measure, Weihenmayer is seeing, period. "For the past twenty years, there was a supremacy of neuroscience," the French experimental psychologist Malika Auvray told me, meaning that activation in the visual cortex was sufficient proof that an experience was visual. "But people have defined the visual brain area as the location in the brain where you get activation in response to visual stimuli, so there's a certain circularity there."

The final criterion typically invoked in these debates is the lived experience of the sense—what philosophers call the "qualia." This distinction has an intuitive logic: most people feel certain that they would never confuse the sensation of seeing something with that of touching or hearing it. But the experiences that sensory-substitution users report are varied. Some blind people say that if they look at an apple using the BrainPort, or vOICe, or EyeMusic, it feels like seeing: the knowledge that an apple is sitting on the table in front of them appears in their brain as a mental image. Indeed, some vOICe users are so strongly conditioned by its sound that they experience involuntary visual images: one reported seeing a light-gray arc in the sky every time a police car passed with its siren blaring. Others, however, define the experience in more cognitive terms: they decode the electrical stimuli they are feeling, or the sounds they are hearing, in order to arrive at the understanding that an apple is present.

Malika Auvray and Amir Amedi have individually conducted experiments designed to explore the causes of this variation. They found differences between people who were born blind and those who lost their sight as adults, and between those who had only just begun to use a given device and those who were fully accustomed to it. Auvray has shown that a single vOICe user may have a range of experiences, depending on the task at hand: the process of identifying an object often feels auditory, while that of figuring out where it is feels visual. Amedi speculates that much of this variation hinges on the vividness of an individual's mental imagery, which, even among sighted people, is known to vary enormously: if asked to picture an apple, some people (including Amedi) can barely conjure up outlines, whereas others immediately envision a photorealistic image. Eagleman, meanwhile, believes that further experiments may show that the subjective qualities of our sensory experiences are really produced by the structure of the incoming data itself. In other words, the brain of someone feeling electromagnetic-field fluctuations through vibrations in his VEST will somehow recognize that this data stream contains patterns that aren't related to touch and that, instead, qualify as something entirely new.

I spoke to Jens Naumann, a German-born Canadian who had lost the sight in each eye in two separate accidents by the age of twenty. He uses the vOICe, and when I asked whether it felt like vision to him he pointed out that even normal sight is the gateway to a range of experiences. "One is just functional," he said. "And that's where a sensory-substitution device means I can see things like the edge of the pavement or the entrance to a building. But another is beauty." The vOICe can never successfully translate the visual experience of looking at his wife's face or watching the sun set over the snow-covered mountains outside Banff. But, he added, "vinyl siding makes a very nice sound, actually, like music almost. So there's a beauty in that."

After we finished climbing, Weihenmayer and I went out for lunch—a curry at a local Nepali restaurant, in defiance of Tricia Grant's recommendation to avoid spicy foods after using the device. He told me that he had never seen the world particularly well even before he became totally blind. "With the BrainPort, it's similar to what I used to be able to see like," he said. "Shapes, shades of light and dark—where things basically were, but not anything super-vivid, you know?"

Skyler Williams, Weihenmayer's climbing partner, had joined us, and guided him along the buffet line, spooning chicken tikka masala and sag aloo onto his plate. Weihenmayer used a cane, "shorelining" against the edges of the room to get back to his seat. As we ate, he told me about his experience climbing with the BrainPort in the pinnacle-studded landscape near Moab, Utah. As he inched his way up Castleton Tower, the sun was directly behind him, and the shadows were confusing. "I kept reaching out and trying to touch this thing, and it was just rock," he said. "Whenever I moved my head, it moved, too, and I eventually realized I was looking at myself. My head, my arms—and they were so defined it was crazy. I hadn't seen myself since I was a dorky, pimply fourteen-year-old."

"That's so much of what the BrainPort is," Weihenmayer explained. "You're just reaching out like a kid again, and you're, like, What the hell is that?" The experience shifts between decoding and seeing, between frustration and awe, frequently within the same instant. Later during that climb, as he neared the summit, the sun had gone behind the tower. "The lighting was perfect," Weihenmayer said. "At that point, I wasn't even thinking about my tongue. I'm just thinking about the picture in my brain."

Weihenmayer doesn't use the BrainPort exclusively for climbing. When he's travelling, it enables him to find light switches and remote controls without patting down entire hotel rooms. At home, he wanders around with it, "just kind of looking at things," he said, or hangs out with his kids—kicking a soccer ball, or playing rock, paper, scissors. On a phone, he showed me a short movie of him using the BrainPort to play tic-tac-toe with his daughter, Emma. Weihenmayer carefully felt out the thick, marker-drawn edges of each square before drawing his "O"s, while his daughter confidently filled in her "X"s. After drawing her third "X" in a row, Emma jumped up and down shouting, "I won! I won again!"

"Wait, I thought I had a circle on the top left, the middle left, and the bottom left," Weihenmayer said, scanning the sheet. "You stinker!"

"Oh," Emma said, caught cheating. "Maybe we both won?"

"When you go blind, you get kicked out of the club," Weihenmayer told me. Using the BrainPort, he said, makes him feel like part of the gang again. He can see what his family is doing, without anyone needing to tell him. And he can never forget seeing his son smile for the first time. "I could see his lips sort of shimmering, moving," Weihenmayer said. "And then I could see his mouth just kind of go 'Brrrrp' and take over his whole face. And that was cool, because I'd totally forgotten that smiles do that." ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

GOODBYE, MY FUNDING

BY IAN FRAZIER

JOANA AVILLEZ

I WAS WALKING DOWN the street one afternoon, when I suddenly lost funding. At first, I couldn't identify what the strange feeling was—a sort of lightness in the right rear pocket, where I kept my wallet, and a chest-tightening deficiency of balance, and a sensation as if all the rubber bands around my bankroll had been cut. Afterward, I learned that adult-onset funding loss often presents in this fashion, but at the time I had no idea what was happening, and I was concerned.

Loss of funding (L.O.F.) afflicts more than ninety-two per cent of the population. It can strike at any moment, often with little warning. Researchers have recently unlocked some of the biophysical secrets of this scourge. Apparently, when funding loss occurs, a flow of electronic transfers is interrupted, causing a lack of distribution to fund-sensitive receptor cells in the brain. Within ninety seconds, these cells begin to suffer stresses; in another three minutes, the cerebral cortex goes totally dead. If you do not get to a high-wealth prospect or a ranking office bureaucrat in time, the damage can be irreversible. Many people who lose funding are never the same. Others are sometimes able to return to normal lives.

The invisible force we now know as funding was discovered in the early twentieth century by railway workers digging a tunnel in France. One of the workmen's shovels struck something huge and ineffable, and there it was. Scientists then required decades to isolate it, describe it, and give it the name it has today, which is based on the English word for money. Even now, many of us may not realize that money and funding share a common ancestry. Were it not for funding, there would be no life on Earth, or no life as we know it. Recently, some scientists who had been funded to study single-cell life-forms in volcanic cracks in the Earth's crust at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean discovered that these bacteria themselves depend on funding. Tracing their wider circulation throughout the planet's systems, the scientists found that certain ocean-vent bacteria make regular appearances in northwestern Canada, presumably to solicit Robert Smith. Afterward, the stay-at-home worker bacteria "reimburse" their travelling reps with mitochondrial donations when they return to the ocean bottom. Thus, the whole global ecosphere is connected by an intricate web of funding.

For me, loss of funding has been especially painful, because not only am I accustomed to being funded, I also fund. In fact, many recipients have told me that no funder funds like I fund. I have even been called the Fundin' Fool. To have to disappoint those people seeking funding has been heartbreaking. I take their applications, so carefully prepared by well-funded grant-writing specialists, and tear the pages into tiny pieces before the would-be fundees' eyes. Then I watch them exhibit the same symptoms that came over me—death, basically, but the kind of death that keeps you looking outwardly the same while you're all rotted inside.

Fortunately, help is on the way. If you feel that you have been defunded, there's a number you can call. Also, exciting new possibilities may exist in space. Today, a NASA satellite is travelling the outermost reaches of our galaxy in search of additional funding. Excitement ran high last year, when funds were observed on a flyby over Mars, but they turned out to be only Martian rocks. It is still highly probable that funding exists on one of the trillions of objects out there in space. Promising schemes have been proposed to extract funding from cosmic rays using a technology that traps the rays in a matrix of informal, low-key private luncheons. However, such ideas still remain at the event-planning stage.

I know it's too late for me. My own beloved funding will never come back. If your funding up and leaves the way mine did, nothing you can say or do will change its mind. For a while, hoping against all reason, I held on to some of the toiletries that my funding had left in the bathroom. Finally, that got too sad, so I gave them to an organization that provides personal-care items to lesser fundings that do not have them. What still tears me apart is thinking of my funding with someone else. In March, I caught a glimpse of my funding in midtown, getting into a black S.U.V. with a bearded man. My funding saw me, too—I could tell by the wistfulness of its expression, and its faint, fiscally poignant smile. My former funding is one classy amount of funding, I'll say that. And let's not be coy. It's some of the top funding available anywhere, by which I mean in the neighborhood of thirty-seven G's. Goodbye, my funding. May you always be happy. May your new love never forget what a treasure he has. You still possess my never-to-be-funded-again heart. ♦

PROFILES

TRACK RECORD

Richard Russell's XL Recordings is an empire built on the art of listening.

BY MATTHEW TRAMMELL

Russell says that XL has a roster of musicians with "uncompromising vision."

RICHARD RUSSELL, the head of XL Recordings, walked into a small recording studio in West London and found a woman named Caroline Simionescu-Marin sitting, cross-legged, atop a rack of audio equipment. Russell is known for signing distinctive and driven young artists, from M.I.A. to Vampire Weekend to Adele, and on this drizzly August morning he had come to hear some music that Simionescu-Marin wanted to play for him. They traded gossip about Zayn Malik's departure from One Direction while a studio manager served egg sandwiches, and a sound engineer cued up track files on a large console.

Simionescu-Marin, an energetic twenty-two-year-old, was dressed in a black sweatsuit. A radio host and a concert promoter, she had spent much of 2016 recording budding rappers around London. XL executives were planning to release a compilation of the material, and, struck by her entrepreneurial spirit, they had offered her an artists-and-repertoire job, which involves scouting for new talent. When Russell first met her, he recalled to me, they "talked about the idea that you don't want to sit around in music waiting for permission—waiting for someone to give you the right excuse." He was eager to hear the results of her foraging. She had titled the compilation "New Gen," after her radio show.

Russell, a forty-five-year-old with a slight frame and boyish features, was dressed in an olive long-sleeved shirt, thick violet socks, and the kind of yarn bracelets that a sensitive high schooler might wear. As he slipped off a pair of tan Nikes and swivelled in his chair, Simionescu-Marin informed him that she'd already played "New Gen" for others at XL. Some of them had suggested shortening it. Subtly, she asked Russell for permission to reject the advice. "I don't want to just pick the ten best songs," she said. Such editing, she continued, would trivialize months of work. She was determined to capture the sounds of a diverse movement.

"Everyone at the label is quite used to 'Cut it down, cut it down—short, short, short,'" Russell said, after a moment's consideration. He spoke with a chirpy, welcoming intensity. "You can sprawl a bit," he said. "Especially at the start of something."

Russell grew up in a northern suburb of London, and did some sprawling himself. As a teen-ager, he spent weekends combing through record shops, launching pirate radio stations, and promoting his own parties—"putting on clubs," as he called it. He collected imports of rap records from New York, and followed the "mongrel British hybrid" sounds of garage, jungle, and drum 'n' bass, seeing firsthand that local music scenes could have a global reach.

In the studio, "New Gen" began playing, and it was filled with such sonic collisions: knotted slang from various Caribbean enclaves around London had been infused with the slow-rolling drums and sinuous bass of Atlanta hip-hop. Whenever Russell heard something that he liked, he nodded thoughtfully. But as the tracks played he began offering criticisms veiled as encouragement: "The drums are pretty wrong—in a good way"; "It takes some balls to do that."

He was most impressed by the album's pop instincts. "My Ways," a twinkling cut by a South London rapper named AJ Tracey and a singer called J. Warner, sounded innocently commercial, recalling American R. & B. of the early aughts, which is still esteemed in London night clubs. Tracey's lyrics were filled with quippy turns of phrase. "Now I'm doing Plan A with the music," he

ILLUSTRATION BY CRAIG & KARL

rapped. "I used to rave up in Plan B"—the name of a now shuttered club in South London.

"Lyrics are such a fundamental part of my listening," Russell told me later. "This is what you get from being a teen-age rap fan. There's other types of music people grab upon where you don't really need to listen to the lyrics. But if your musical teen-age education is Rakim you can't not be listening to the words."

Russell took control of XL, which started as a niche dance label, in 1994, and he remains its top executive. But he no longer maintains daily oversight of the company, and has begun devoting himself almost entirely to producing music of his own. When I visited London, he spent most of the week working on his début album. Russell didn't consider this a radical shift: he'd always seen himself as a creative person who had sidestepped into an executive role, letting artistic intuition drive corporate decisions. He is proud that XL has a different ethos than the "Big Three" American labels—Universal, Sony, and Warner—which often shape musical careers with the market foremost in mind. Major-label executives, Russell likes to say, are devoted to shareholders, not listeners. As I observed him taking in "New Gen," it was hard to tell whether he was listening as a boss or as a fan.

"That's quite a bit of work you've got there," he said, as the last track faded away, indicating both that he liked the album and that the album did feel long. Simionescu-Marin, sensing his point, proposed recording comical skits, which are often used to break up the continuous flow of beats on a rap album.

Russell asked her if anyone had recorded video footage during her studio sessions.

"We've got loads," she said.

"You might already have skits there," Russell said. He suggested that she listen to all the candid footage of her expeditions—"meaning, look away from the screen"—in the hope of finding snatches of dialogue to insert between tracks. "People are just so bloody funny," he continued. "Unless you're trying to be funny. Then it's *not* funny. When you try to write dialogue, you get lots of clichés, don't you? But, when you ride the Tube, every line you overhear people say, it all sounds original. People are naturally original."

Just as major movie studios tend to finance only films with strong projected box-office returns, major record labels prefer to avoid risk, especially in an era when digital streaming has slashed profit margins. Executives mine social-media data to identify the next viral sensation, or pair unknown acts with established producers and songwriters to manufacture hits. Independent labels, conversely, operate almost entirely on risk. They sign smaller acts in genres for which commercial expectations are modest, and rely on the occasional breakout success to keep the operation afloat. On a major label, fledgling artists may feel constrained by the demands of a multinational corporation—or neglected, as executives cater to dozens of high-profile acts. On an indie label, artists enjoy more creative freedom, but they can feel limited by smaller budgets, which don't allow for the marketing that attracts large audiences. This creates a maddening dichotomy: sign to a powerful label without taste and sacrifice artistry, or sign to a tasteful label without power and sacrifice reach.

XL, Russell told me, was a "hybrid." He explained, "As an artist, what you want is a record label with the musical integrity and the aesthetics of those small indies, but with the drive and ambition of those big labels. They were not typically found in one place. You were getting one thing or the other. But, for the type of artist who was going to be the *best* type of artist, you didn't really want to compromise on either one of those things."

Russell allows such artists to develop with minimal interference. XL has unusual patience. This year, it has been shepherding a series of spare, eerie releases from a Venezuelan electronic producer named Arca, who has worked closely with Björk and Kanye West. In February, Pitchfork heralded one Arca track, "Piel," as "shockingly new," observing that its romantic melody "dissolves into a puddle of oozing beats and jumbled clanks." Arca's sales have been small, but he has begun to build a devoted following, and other producers have echoed his sound. XL's discoveries often slip into the mainstream without having hit singles: Vampire Weekend has never had a track in the Billboard Top 100, but the band has sold nearly two million albums. Adele, who signed with XL at the age of eighteen, is the label's sole megastar. Her most recent album, "25," sold twenty million units, an almost unfathomable number in the era of digital streaming. Russell has prospered along with his artists: in 2015, the London *Times* estimated that his stake in XL was worth more than a hundred million dollars.

Part of the label's allure is how comfortably a pair like Arca and Adele can share space on its roster. For an aspiring musician, signing with XL confers legitimacy. Jonathan Dickins, who manages Adele and the guitar antihero King Krule, called a deal with the label "the Holy Grail." Zane Lowe, a host of Beats 1, Apple's radio station, described XL to me as "the most consistently tasteful label," and he praised Russell's unmatched "ability to work with strong artists of strong opinions." In 2008, Thom Yorke, of Radiohead, released his first solo album through XL, telling Pitchfork that he had partnered with the label because it was "very mellow" and had "no corporate ethic." Radiohead now distributes its music through XL as well. Last fall, Frank Ocean chose XL to release the vinyl and CD versions of his lush, idiosyncratic new album, "Blonde." Ocean's previous label, Def Jam, had reportedly been perplexed by his music, and had focussed on such superstars as Justin Bieber.

Russell rejects the notion that record labels should be engineering highly consumable songs; instead, XL aims to identify highly consumable artists who have "uncompromising vision." In this sense, XL operates more like an art gallery than like a record label, banking on a musician's long-term potential rather than on immediate returns. After signing the indie-pop minimalists the xx, Russell explained to his staff, "People have tried things with their sound to flesh it out, but all they need is someone to *record* it." He tapped Rodaidh McDonald, a young producer, to build and manage a new in-house studio where the band could work free of constraints. Jamie xx, one of the band's

members, recalled in an e-mail, "The first time we rehearsed in there, it was literally just a garage, but just through the wall was the XL office, buzzing away and always playing great music, so it was an inspiring place even then. Gradually, it was soundproofed, and Richard put his mixing desk in there; you could see the office through a window that was put in. It was still pretty bare bones, but that was perfect for us."

The label is defiantly choosy, passing on many performers with strong music, large followings, well-connected management, and success at other companies. Caius Pawson, an A. & R. executive who has worked at XL for ten years, admitted, with a laugh, that he'd delivered only two acts to the label so far: the xx and the British singer FKA Twigs, who takes a grisly electronic approach to R. & B. (He has also worked closely with Frank Ocean.) "And I think I've got a pretty good track record!" Pawson said.

Russell prioritizes artists whose music is fundamentally original but also has "threads" of connection with past musicians he admires. This prevents XL from becoming too random in its adventurousness. Ben Beardsworth, the company's managing director, shares this mission, but he told me that he also aims "to deliver commercial success." The two men complement each other: whereas Russell devotes himself to aesthetics, Beardsworth has the financial pragmatism that enables the label to take risks.

In 2014, XL offered a contract to Powell, a British producer whose hard-edged electronic music is not aimed at mainstream audiences. (When staffers listened to his vinyl pressings, they couldn't tell if the jagged scratching noises they kept hearing were intentional or the result of manufacturing errors.) Powell told me that he was initially apprehensive about having to keep up with the likes of Radiohead. He recalls telling Beardsworth, "I hope you're not expecting me to sell millions of records here. I don't want to be judged on things that are beyond my control, because I only know how to make the music that I make, and there's a limit to where that can go." Beardsworth responded, "We only need to worry about making a *cultural* impact. In my experience, once we've done that the financial side tends to work itself out."

In 2006, Russell stopped in at Cherry Jam, a small West London club, to see a teen-ager named Adele Adkins perform. He'd heard a few self-recorded demos that she'd posted on her MySpace page. She performed an acoustic set, and he recalls getting "such a feeling of confidence from her, and *about* her." Russell introduced himself, and she asked him what he thought of her performance. He told her, "I don't think you could do a bad show, because it's just gonna be you." She joined the label shortly afterward.

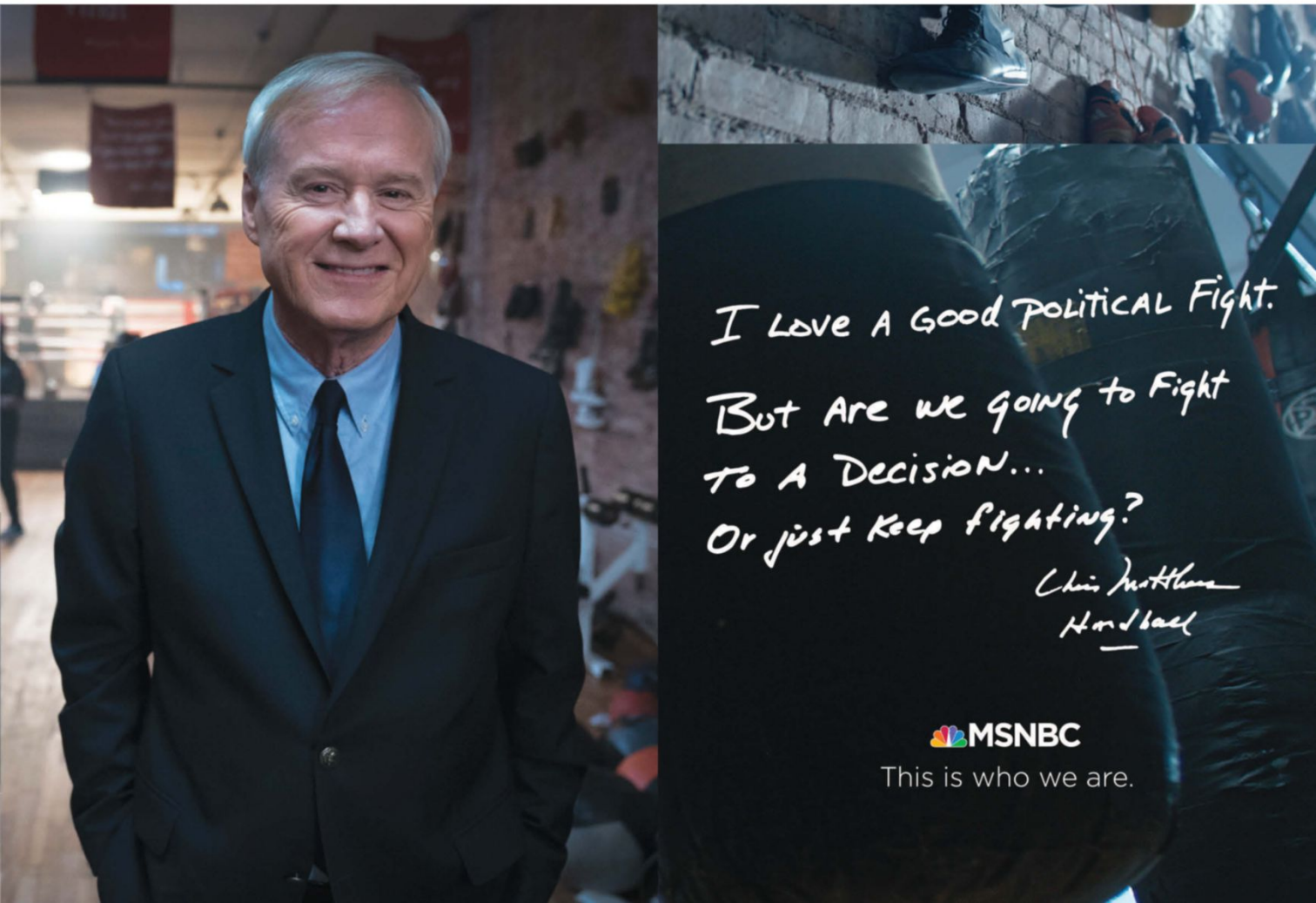
By 2010, Adele was a star, and working on her second album, "21." She drafted several upbeat pop demos, but

felt uninspired by them. After she went through a breakup, she started from scratch, reconceiving the album as something far darker and more personal. "My decision was potentially dangerous territory, in terms of budget and inner-circle expectation," she said, in an e-mail. "I nervously went to see Richard, and he truly treated me like an artist. There was zero record-exec bullshit or hidden agendas, other than that he trusted me to make the right decision for myself." She added, "He builds the vessel, but we are the captains."

Major labels increasingly drop artists after one flop, but record deals at XL, Beardsworth said, allow an artist to continue releasing material even "if it's not sticking commercially straightaway." He called XL deals "sensible," adding, "An economic equilibrium needs to be maintained, or else everything'd start running off the rails." The gigantic success of Adele has surely helped bankroll many of the label's vanguard projects, but Russell and Beardsworth, perhaps out of pride, insist that other factors have been more critical to their profit margins: among them, maintaining a markedly low number of signings and releases per year. Russell said, "Normally, in business, there's this growth thing. This growth bullshit. Not everything is meant to grow! 'Gotta be bigger, gotta be bigger, gotta be bigger.' But there aren't any shareholders at XL, so there's no one there to say that. And it's, like, *why* should it grow? It shouldn't grow. It should be this size."

In conversation, Russell dodges cliché in real time, pulling back from overstatements and providing counterarguments to his own arguments. He told me that he didn't agree with villainous portrayals of major labels—"it's too simplistic"—but added that he couldn't imagine joining one, either. "That wouldn't have worked for me," he said. "And it wouldn't have worked for them." When I asked him what, exactly, made an XL artist, his answer was both romantic and evasive. "I used to think everyone loved and understood music, and had this deep feeling and deep passion for it," he said. "And then I realized, All right, not everyone has that. Some people just like the thing they hear on the radio. They're not listening to the words, they're just into it, and that's fine. But when you *have* that deep feeling for it, that's a gift." Most people, he suggested, eventually lose the impulse to discover new music, "because of what's going on in their life." He went on, "I suppose that doesn't matter—you can listen to old shit. And that's O.K. as well. People get a lot from that. But they're missing something. Because, whatever it is they're into, that thread's right there, in something being made now."

Russell's own music is being released under the name Everything Is Recorded, and it sews some of his favorite sonic threads into new songs. Instead of singing himself, he has recruited guest performers to contribute vocals. Not long



ago, he had a session with Sampha, a quiet soul singer who had just released his first solo album with XL. Russell mentioned that Sampha's voice reminded him of Curtis Mayfield's. "I haven't listened to too much Curtis Mayfield," Sampha admitted, but Russell insisted that the two vocalists shared more than a fine falsetto. "Curtis Mayfield, from what I understand, was quite a gentle soul, in an era where a lot of soul artists were quite macho," he said. He played for Sampha "The Makings of You," a Mayfield track from 1970, and they discussed a lyric in which Mayfield struggles to find the language to express affection: "These words I've tried to recite/They are close, but not quite." For one of the new songs, "Close but Not Quite," Russell bent Sampha's wispy harmonizing around a sample of Mayfield's line. The resulting song became a meditation both on Sampha's timidity—he was originally an intern at XL, and it had taken years for him to declare himself a performer—and on Russell's belated assertion of his artistic voice. With the track, Russell had created another hybrid: a seventies-soul melody paired with modern percussion and angular rhythms. Recently, he decided to make the song the title track of his first EP.

"To do a record label well is so similar to being an artist," Russell told me. "You have to be bloody-minded, and you have to be awkward. You have to be, like, 'I'm doing it like *this*.' It doesn't matter what everyone's saying it should be like. Every artist you've ever loved has done that."

XL's offices are in Notting Hill, in a mews a block and a half away from the colorful street markets of Portobello Road. The property is a barnlike structure, and its exterior is painted with images from XL albums: the swirling black waves that appear on the cover of Thom Yorke's solo record "The Eraser"; the oil-slicked "X" from the cover of the xx's "Coexist." Inside, the walls are covered with album art, flyers, and photographs, including a signed publicity shot from M.I.A.'s 2009 Grammy appearance, in which she performed while nine months pregnant. Plaques commemorating gold and platinum records—often found in corner offices at major labels—hang in the bathroom.

The first time I visited, a stream of soft-thump hip-hop and jittery electronic beats emanated from the house speakers. Many of the desks were empty, the Macs on top of them asleep: employees were still shaking off five days at the mammoth Glastonbury Festival, in Somerset. A publicist was discussing Liss, a four-piece band of skinny musicians from Denmark, who'd recently released some plucky soul-pop on XL. Liss had become a sensation in its homeland, but had barely registered in the U.S., despite a tour and good press: a headline in *i-D* had described Liss as "the boy band for people who don't like boy bands." The publicist wondered aloud whether to discourage or own the classification. What constituted a boy band today, anyway? The group's members performed for screaming girls in Copenhagen, but they also played their own instruments. "Whatever," she concluded. "Boy bands are cool."

XL has twenty-six full-time employees, almost none of whom have previously worked at a record company. Instead, they are former d.j.s or journalists, promoters from the night-life circuit, and visual designers just out of college. The label often holds company-wide meetings in which any staffer can make a case for a potential signee, playing tracks and presenting a vision for an artist's career. McDonald, the recording-studio manager, told me that the feedback process is "sometimes quite painful, but it's very important." He added, "Sometimes it's, like, 'Damn, I thought that was a great song!' But then, O.K., six people didn't. And I trust their opinions, so maybe we'll press Pause on that one."

Pawson, the executive who helped discover FKA Twigs, started out hosting illegal warehouse parties in East London. When he joined XL, in 2006, at the age of twenty, he had excellent musical taste, but he quickly learned to soften his club-sharpened manner. "I was always joking around—I thought part of my role was to always make everyone laugh and be energetic," he told me. "An artist, like, referenced Picasso, and I was, like, 'Ha! You think you're fucking *Picasso*?' I was thinking that he was one of the boys, and that he would laugh. And he was just, like, face-dead. I realized that you're working with all these people's ambitions, and hopes, and their art, and the art relates back to who they are, in essence, as people."

Phil Lee, a creative director, was asked early in his tenure to design visual packaging for M.I.A. She lived near the office, and regularly popped in with self-designed imagery that was jagged, pixelated, and irregularly cropped. He began preparing the files for production, following conventions that he'd learned in design school. "I spent hours and hours tidying this thing up, printed it all out, and I was, like, 'Yeah, it's ready, come on in,' and she goes, 'What have you done? No, no, no, no, no—*that* is the aesthetic.'" In an e-mail, M.I.A. told me that Russell's presence had empowered her to give such mandates. "He supported the way I worked," she said. "Things didn't have to be perfect." She loved the fact that he often pressed her scrappy song drafts to vinyl without proper mixing. "It was about energy and excitement," she noted. "I'd grown up on some early stuff he put out or made, and so I knew as a teen-ager that what mattered was the urgency of creating a new sound and what that made you feel. Not craftsmanship."

Russell guides his staff with a soft touch. He stops by people's desks and asks them which projects are on their docket. If they have a question, he'll make a stray reference or offer a hint—"Did you read Moby's book, by the way? Really good snapshot of New York at that time"—and then wander off. Many staffers told me that they learned the most by watching Russell interact with artists, and that they were daunted by the scope of his cultural knowledge. Since he emptied his office and began recording, the XL staff has approached day-to-day operations like house sitters consulting the directions left on the kitchen island. Along a large white wall on the building's main floor, Russell has printed instructions, in vinyl lettering, about how to listen to music:

There is a proper procedure for taking advantage of any investment.

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Russell began listening in this ceremonial way as a child. He grew up in the predominantly Jewish London suburb of Edgware, and playing music at high volume was never a problem: there was a highway on one side of his house and a deaf neighbor, Mrs. Margolis, on the other. His mother, Rosalind, recently told him, "We weren't very supportive of what you wanted to do. Except you got to make so much more noise than any of your friends, 'cause we knew there was no one to bother about." Rosalind was a teacher, and his father, Stanley, was an insurance salesman. They were, Russell told me, immigrants with roots in Eastern Europe, and they ran a "conventional religious household." Russell was the younger of their two children, and they hoped that he would get a "proper job," becoming a doctor or a lawyer. "I thought I was growing up in such a bad place and boring place, and dealt such a bad card," he recalls. But Edgware was the last stop on the Tube, and he could easily ride into Soho to shop at Groove Records, a discerning store on Greek Street. "If you lived further out, you were screwed," he told me.

In 1984, Russell started high school in London, and his classes quickly became ancillary to his musical explorations. After attending the Notting Hill Carnival, an annual Caribbean street festival, he formed a d.j. crew named Housequake, after the Prince song. By the age of fifteen, he was getting booked in clubs, playing hip-hop and soul records. Around this time, a fascination with electronic dance music began to take hold across the city. The pulsing innovations known as techno and acid house had started with middle-class black teen-agers in Detroit and Chicago, but they found an audience in the U.K., where kids who had grown up under Margaret Thatcher were searching for subversion. Warehouse and open-field parties known as raves sprouted throughout West London, and the music blended elements of European techno, Caribbean dancehall, and American hip-hop. For the first time since the punk era, British youth had a sound of their own, and a new class of bohemians hardly ever saw daylight. Many raves were fuelled by Ecstasy, but Russell experienced them without drugs. His wife, Esta Blechman, was also a regular at the raves, but they didn't meet until years later, when she was the head of news and programming at MTV in the U.K. She recalled, "He would be telling stories of raves that we probably were both at, and I'd be, like, 'What, you were *sober*?' He was busy! For him, it was kind of work."

In 1989, Russell produced a rave track of his own, and he took a demo tape to City Beat, one of many small London labels that released twelve-inch singles for d.j.s to play and fanatics to collect. An A. & R. person there, Nick Halkes, thought that the track sounded unpolished, but the two struck up a friendship. "Rich was making himself useful, bringing information and ideas through," Halkes recalls. He and his boss, Tim Palmer, had recently launched an offshoot label that focussed on underground rave singles; Halkes chose the name XL, because it was "powerful and potent and big." They began paying Russell fifty pounds a week to plug their releases to d.j.s. The work began to mimic that of an A. & R. executive. Rave labels didn't give artists money to record; instead, they searched for self-released singles from bedroom producers and financed the records' wider release. To do the scouting job well, you had to be at the raves, listening and dancing, and have a tactical sense of what d.j.s would want to play.

In 1992, Russell and Halkes, emboldened by their immersion in the scene, produced a song together, "The Bouncer." Over wobbly bass and convulsive drums, a sampled voice taunts, "Your name's not down, you're not coming in. Not tonight." The track made it to British radio and became a minor hit. Russell wasn't sure what to do next, however. He had no clear identity as an artist. But he realized that he had an ability to spot potential in others, and he threw himself back into scouting for the label.

In the mid-nineties, XL had its first major commercial success, with the Prodigy, a band that adapted the rave sound for the arena-rock stage. Liam Howlett, the group's brash front man, provided a

"I hope you're digging a hole big enough for everybody."

template for the kind of success XL wanted to replicate. Howlett refused to appear on "Top of the Pops," the most-watched music program on British television, because he considered it "wack." In an interview with *Spin*, Howlett proclaimed, "We're not Oasis. We don't want everyone to like us."

During this period, Halkes quit XL to join a major label, and Palmer retired from the music scene. In 1994, XL was unceremoniously left in Russell's hands. Three years later, the Prodigy's third album, "The Fat of the Land," became the first electronic album to reach No. 1 in the U.S. Russell had succeeded on his own terms, but felt pressure to sustain the momentum. "It happens to a lot of labels—you get that one big act," he told me. "It often destroys independents." He feels that XL became a "real" label when he renewed the Prodigy's contract, which had expired after the release of "The Fat of the Land." To meet the group's financial demands, the former record nerd found himself at a bank, taking out a loan.

At the same time, Russell was formulating a different vision of how to grow XL intelligently. He noticed that whenever he visited American labels he was handed stacks of promo CDs from dozens of new artists whom they were developing; some of the records never even came out. XL, he decided, would release only five or six albums a year. His idols in the music industry—George Martin, Berry Gordy, Chris Blackwell—had all run in-house studios where music was created from scratch. Russell decided that XL would have its own studio, with a full-time staff. (A label without a recording studio, Russell likes to say, is just a marketing company.) In order to stay focussed on artists, he delegated contractual negotiations, business management, and accounting to Beggars Group, an independent British music distributor, and split the ownership of XL with the head of Beggars, Martin Mills.

Most important, Russell decided to move beyond the label's rave roots, and commit to working with exceptional artists across genres. He leaned toward "strong characters" who, like Liam Howlett, both courted and mocked the mainstream. XL artists have turned down ad campaigns, flipped off Super Bowl cameras, alluded to incest, rapped about rape, and drawn the ire of censors across the globe. Occasionally, Russell's embrace of provocateurs has backfired. In 2009, he signed the house-rap firebrand Azealia Banks, but they clashed over her demos and she left the label without releasing a song. Russell stressed to me that when he speaks of "uncompromising" talent he is "not talking about dysfunctionality." He went on, "I'm talking about someone who is *intensely* functional. When you have that vision, you're unlikely to waste time, because you're ruling everything out before it's even a discussion."

The moment Adele became famous, she began receiving countless offers for festival performances. Until last year, she declined them all, leaving millions of pounds on the table. Russell never questioned her choices. "He said that Adele was the punk-rock Barbra Streisand," Jonathan Dickins, the singer's manager, told me. "And he said that *before* she put a record out."

THE COPPER HOUSE, Russell's personal recording studio, is a five-minute walk from the XL offices, behind a bamboo gate that opens onto a sunken courtyard. One sunny afternoon, Russell welcomed me into the large living room of the studio, which he built in 2014. Pinned on a wall were black-and-white candid photographs of people who'd come to collaborate

with him on the Everything Is Recorded project. Images of Brian Eno, Mark Ronson, and Peter Gabriel were alongside those of XL stars, such as Sampha.

Up a narrow set of stairs was Russell's recording space, which has dark woodwork, wall-to-wall carpeting, a microphone stand, and mounds of blinking equipment arranged at its edges. Russell noted proudly that he owned an original Maestro Rhythm King MRK-2, the first drum machine deployed on a commercial album. Sly and the Family Stone had used one in the late sixties, he told me, "as a 'fuck you' to their drummer."

Russell was in the mixing phase of his project, tweaking the prominence of various layers of sound. He played me two parts. One was a twenty-minute-long "movement"—a writhing composition of dubbed bass and tinny blips that forced rave drums under jazz chords. It was the product of hours of recorded free play by several session players and producers, followed by weeks of editing and arranging by Russell, to give it shape. The second part was a collection of hip-hop and R. & B. songs, created by various combinations of collaborators. The material struck me as a grand synthesis of XL's stylistic history: the eighties hip-hop that is dear to Russell's heart, the racing rave breaks that gave him industry footing.

We ate fish and beans from a local market as the tracks played, and I studied a chart that Russell had made, which mapped out the components of what I'd heard: collaborators, time stamps, samples. The final track list remained undecided. Russell has said of the record, "We made a huge mess, then set about tidying it all up."

Russell told me, "I started off making records, but as the label took off I backed off of that. I think the reason was 'I'm building this thing.' I needed to be doing *that*. But I also think I was intent on building a team of people. Part of the reason for that was that, at the earliest opportunity, I was going to start making records again. I wasn't sure how, and I always knew that was going to be tricky, because you can't just leap from one of these worlds to the next."

In 2010, Russell produced "I'm New Here," the final album by the poet and singer Gil Scott-Heron. He paired Scott-Heron's vocals with terse bass notes and a seventies blues tone, a combination that harked back to Russell's hit, "The Bouncer." Russell began splitting time between label duties in London and recording in New York, and considers it a transformative period. Scott-Heron, he said, was "a barometer of truth." The process helped Russell shake off his fears about music-making; soon afterward, he

produced albums by the soul singer Bobby Womack and the Blur front man Damon Albarn. A personal sound—heavy bass, spartan arrangements, rave drums, soul chords—began to take shape. Working with Scott-Heron taught him other useful lessons. In 2011, Scott-Heron, who had struggled with a cocaine addiction, died. Russell found out the next morning, and began keeping a journal. He still regularly writes in it before bed, which, he says, "is an incredibly effective way of clearing the mind."

On my second visit to the Copper House, Russell greeted me by saying, "I want to start you off today with a bit of reading." He handed me a laptop with an open document, then headed upstairs to the studio. It was a journal entry that described how, on June 9, 2013, he'd lost the ability to move, after developing a rare autoimmune disorder, Guillain-Barré syndrome, and two related conditions. He found himself in a hospital bed at University College London, paralyzed and in excruciating pain. He had lost most of the fat surrounding the nerves in his feet and shins, and even the slightest touch was agonizing. In the journal, he recounted this period, occasionally with dark humor: "When I mentioned to the doctor that I wasn't sleeping or for that matter going to the toilet, he said, 'Hospitals are like that, full of people not sleeping or shitting.' God bless the National Health Service."

He was in intensive care for ten days before doctors figured out what was wrong with him, then spent the next two months in bed. To pass the time, he and Esta watched "Breaking Bad" (she found it boring) and "Game of Thrones" (it put him to sleep). Only a few employees were told of the severity of Russell's condition, but a procession of artists visited his bedside. "Adele was very sweet," Esta said. "She came in and cried a lot and then laughed and said it was gonna be fine. Damon Albarn came in and brought lamb stew—it was lovely."

When Russell's condition improved, through medication and physical therapy, he decided that he had run out of excuses not to put his own music first. Every day, between breakfast and dinner with Esta and their three sons, he retired to the studio. It was its own form of therapy. Today, he wears thick socks to diminish occasional foot pain, but he has otherwise had a full recovery.

Everything Is Recorded is signed to XL, and Russell hopes to be handled like the label's other artists. He shares management with Adele, and during my visit he was considering options for album art and promotional imagery. Kahlil Joseph, who directed Beyoncé's "Lemonade" video, had begun working on a visual treatment. It was a challenge, Russell realized, to fashion a public image for himself after spending two decades standing outside the frame. One could read unease in his decision to make a solo album with so many guest artists. But his sound is indelibly tied to the ways in which he has nurtured the voices of others, even as he cultivates his own. Russell's vision, it seems, is about the power of collaboration.

Now that Russell has instilled XL with a governing aesthetic, he said, the label's future lies in the hands of his staff. That said, he'd like to see XL's records get more obscure, and its signings even more lean. "I suppose from the outside it's, like, 'Well, what are they going to do—what do they do after Adele?'" he said. "Twelve-inch singles. Electronic music. Shit that's banging. That's what we do. And then? Then stuff happens."

As we left the Copper House, I mentioned in passing that I couldn't imagine many label heads making a record, as Russell had. He retorted, "Well, Kanye West does, and *he's* a label head." (West has an imprint at Universal.) This led us to the kind of spiralling conversation about pop history that he still loves to have. At one point, he compared Paul McCartney and John Lennon to Jay Z and Beyoncé: "When you get two alphas, if it works, the shit just goes mad."

Russell went on to suggest that Jay Z hadn't received "enough credit" for his transformation into a mogul. The rapper, I said, was an odd figure for a champion of underground, non-commercial sounds to defend. If Russell told Jay Z that record labels don't have to grow, Jay Z would probably laugh Russell out of the room.

He smiled in agreement. "He'd be, like, 'You're crazy!' Well, one of the reasons XL doesn't have to grow is that it's already quite big." ♦

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DEPT. OF LABOR

THE GIG IS UP

Many liberals have embraced the sharing economy. But can they survive it?

BY NATHAN HELLER

Not long ago, I moved apartments, and beneath the weight of work and lethargy a number of small, nagging tasks remained undone. Some art work had to be hung from wall moldings, using wire. In the bedroom, a round mirror needed mounting beside the door. Just about anything that called for careful measuring or stud-hammering I had failed to get around to—which was why my office walls were bare, no pots yet dangled from the dangly-pot thing in the kitchen, and my bedside shelf was still a doorstop. There are surely reasons that some of us resist being wholly settled, but when the ballast of incompletion grew too much for me I logged on to TaskRabbit to finish what I had failed to start.

On its Web site, I described the tasks I needed done, and clicked ahead. A list of fourteen TaskRabbits appeared, each with a description of skills and a photograph. Many of them wore ties. I examined one called Seth F., who had done almost a thousand tasks. He wore no tie, but he had a ninety-nine-percent approval rating. "I'm a smart guy with tools. What more can you want?" he'd written in his profile. He was listed as an Elite Tasker, and charged fifty-five dollars an hour. I booked him for a Wednesday afternoon.

TaskRabbit, which was founded in 2008, is one of several companies that, in the past few years, have collectively helped create a novel form of business. The model goes by many names—the sharing economy; the gig economy; the on-demand, peer, or platform economy—but the companies share certain premises. They typically have ratings-based marketplaces and in-app payment systems. They give workers the chance to earn money on their own schedules, rather than through professional accession. And they find toeholds in sclerotic industries. Beyond TaskRabbit, service platforms include Thumbtack, for professional projects; Postmates, for delivery; Handy, for housework; Dogvacay, for pets; and countless others. Home-sharing services, such as Airbnb and its upmarket cousin onefinestay, supplant hotels and agencies. Ride-hailing apps—Uber, Lyft, Juno—replace taxis. Some on-demand workers are part-timers seeking survival work, akin to the comedian who waits tables on the side. For growing numbers, though, gigging is not only a living but a life. Many observers see it as something more: the future of American work.

Seth F.—the "F" stood for Flicker—showed up at my apartment that Wednesday bearing a big backpack full of tools. He was in his mid-forties, with a broad mouth, brown hair, and ears that stuck out like a terrier's beneath a charcoal stocking cap. I poured him coffee and showed him around.

"I have molding hooks and wire," I said, gesturing with unfelt confidence at some coils of translucent cord. "I was thinking they could maybe hang . . ." It struck me that I lacked a vocabulary to address even the basics of the job; I swirled my hands around the middle of the wall, as if blindfolded and turned loose in a strange room.

Seth F. seemed to gather that he was dealing with a fool. He offered a decision tree pruned to its stump. "Do you want them at eye level?" he asked.

"Eye level sounds *great*," I said.

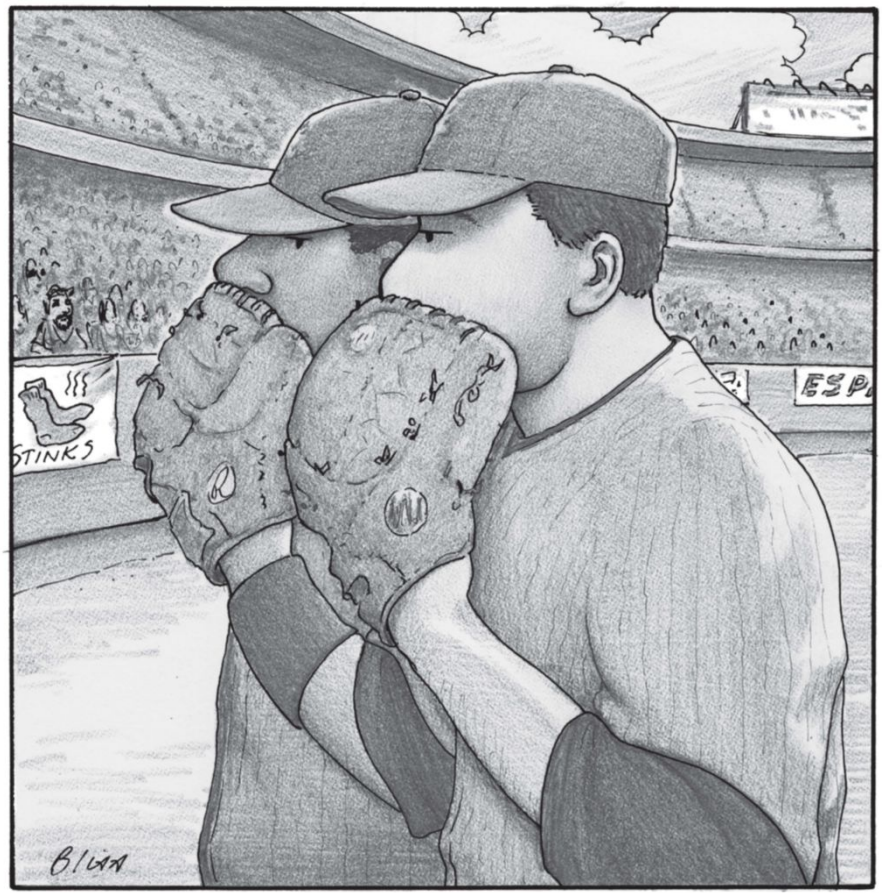
Seth F. had worked for TaskRabbit for three years, he told me as he climbed onto my kitchen stool—"like twenty-one years in normal job time." In college, he had sold a screenplay to Columbia Pictures, and the film, though never made, launched his career. He wrote movies for nine years, and was well paid and sought after, but none of his credited work made it to the big screen, so he took a job as a senior editor at *Genre*, a now defunct gay magazine, where he covered the entertainment industry. He liked magazine work, but was not a true believer. "I'm one of those people, I think, who has to change jobs frequently," he told me. He got a master's degree in education, and taught fourth grade at Spence and at Brooklyn Friends. Fourteen years in, a health condition flared up, leaving his calendar checkered with days when it was hard to work. He'd aways found peculiar joy in putting together IKEA furniture, so he hired himself out as an assembly wiz: easy labor that paid the bills while he got better. He landed on TaskRabbit.

"There are so many clients, I rarely get bored," he told me. He was feeding cord through the molding hooks to level my pictures. At first, he said, hourly rates at TaskRabbit were set through bidding, but taskers now set their own rates, with the company claiming thirty per cent. A constellation of data points—how quickly he answers messages, how many jobs he declines—affect his ranking when users search the site. He took as many jobs as he could, generating about eighty paid hours each month. "The hardest part is not knowing what your next paycheck is from," he told me.

Seth F. worked quickly. Within an hour, he had hung six frames from the molding over my couches. Sometimes, he confessed, his jobs seem silly: he was once booked to screw in a light bulb. Other work is harder, and strange. Seth F. has been hired to assemble five jigsaw puzzles for a movie set, to write articles for a newspaper in Alaska, and to compose a best-man speech to be delivered by the brother of the groom, whom he had never met. ("The whole thing was about, 'In the future, we're going to get to know each other better,'" he explained.) Casper, the mattress company, booked him to put sheets on beds; Oscar,

"Sharing" boosters herald the virtues of autonomy and flexibility; skeptics warn about the rise of a new precariat.

ILLUSTRATION BY JANNE IIVONEN



"Well, there's your problem right there—you need to sauté the onions in white wine before adding the ginger."

• •

the health-insurance startup, had him decorate its offices for Christmas.

As we talked, his tone warmed. I realized that he probably visited strangers several times a day, meting out bits of himself, then moving on, often forever, and I considered what an odd path through professional experience that must be. He told me that he approached the work with gratitude but little hope.

"These are jobs that don't lead to anything," he said, without looking up from his work. "It doesn't feel"—he weighed the word—"*sustainable* to me."

THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE is both a seat of national identity and a site of chronic upheaval and shame. The industry that drove America's rise in the nineteenth century was often inhumane. The twentieth-century corrective—a corporate workplace of rules, hierarchies, collective bargaining, triplicate forms—brought its own unfairnesses. Gigging reflects the endlessly personalizable values of our own era, but its social effects, untried by time, remain uncertain.

Support for the new work model has come together swiftly, though, in surprising quarters. On the second day of the most recent Democratic National Convention, in July, members of a four-person panel suggested that gigging life was not only sustainable but the embodiment of today's progressive values. "It's all about democratizing capitalism," Chris Lehane, a strategist in the Clinton Administration and now Airbnb's head of global policy and public affairs, said during the proceedings, in Philadelphia. David Plouffe, who had managed Barack Obama's 2008 campaign before he joined Uber, explained, "Politically, you're seeing a large contingent of the Obama coalition demanding the sharing economy." Instead of being pawns in the games of industry, the panelists thought, working Americans could thrive by hiring out skills as they wanted, and putting money in the pockets of peers who had done the same. The power to control one's working life would return, grassroots style, to the people.

The basis for such confidence was largely demographic. Though statistics about gigging work are few, and general at best, a Pew study last year found that seventy-two per cent of American adults had used one of eleven sharing or on-demand services, and that a third of people under forty-five had used four or more. "To 'speak millennial,' you ought to be talking about the sharing economy, because it is core and central to their economic future," Lehane declared, and many of his political kin have agreed. No other commercial field has lately drawn as deeply from the Democratic brain trust. Yet what does democratized capitalism actually promise a politically unsettled generation? Who are its beneficiaries? At a moment when the nation's electoral future seems tied to the fate of its jobs, much more than next month's paycheck depends on the answers.

ONE THURSDAY EVENING in February, Caitlin Connors texted me and said to meet her at a bar in Williamsburg called Donna. The place was large and crowded; I found her in the middle of a big group, in a corner bathed in light the color of Darjeeling. Connors is small and outgoing, with a brown Jackie O. bob that looks windswept even indoors. She had come to New York five years earlier, from Colorado, "to learn about the Internet," she said, and she worked in marketing awhile. Agency life had not been her thing—"a lot of crazy bitches"—so she started her own branding firm, the Fox Theory, which does marketing for entrepreneurs, artists, authors, and a sleight-of-hand magician. She led me to the bar to sit. She wore a black floral blouse and skinny navy pants. "I think we're just coming into the next wave of human civilization," she told me, and drained her cocktail with a straw. "Humans can operate on a person-to-person basis, sharing ideas and sharing business without intermediaries."

When Connors first came to New York, she lived with several roommates in a huge, run-down place in Chelsea she dubbed the Fox Den. When her

sister came to stay with her, they moved to a newer building, the Fox Den 2.0, and that was where she discovered Airbnb. She started to rent out an extra room, and the income made them "less pinched." When she moved again, with another roommate (she has had thirty-six roommates in total), they searched for an optimally Airbnb-able place. They ended up in Williamsburg, a neighborhood that seemed "trendy" to tourists. The Fox Den 3.0, as the new digs were christened, was a three-bedroom duplex by the Bedford Avenue subway station. It had sleek new appliances and a lovely yard; through an ingenious configuration of beds and couches, it could sleep up to twelve people.

Connors tried to rent it out one week a month. Some swapping was often required. If she and her roommate were in town during a rental, they decamped to make room for the guests. Sometimes they used an acquaintance's pad in Manhattan, also on Airbnb. Sometimes Connors stayed at the home of an old friend. "It's the time we have to hang out and chill and *catch up*," she said. "He loves it. I love it." The financial upsides were considerable. By Airbnb-ing out their apartment one week a month, Connors and her roommate could clear their four-thousand-dollar rent. Sometimes they were gone for longer. One golden month, Airbnb-ing brought in five figures. "That's more than most people, smart people, make in their job," Connors observed.

For Connors, though, the real benefit of Airbnb was that it allowed her to travel, which she still loves to do. She spent part of November in Mexico, and part of December in Jordan. She saw the Fox Den as a tool for living a worldly life without committing to a worldly career. ("Otherwise, you'd have to be another level of rich to make this work.") She spent all of January in Cuba, which gave her a new business concept.

"In Cuba—random little town—half the town wanted me to start their Airbnb accounts for them," she said. Connors found a population that desperately needed help with the marketing of personal brands. Now she got out her iPhone and started swiping rapidly through photos, many of which centered on azure shorelines and shirtless men. "Cuba is preserved like a time capsule," she said. She stopped at a street scene. "Everyone drives old cars." She swiped. "These are their farms. They plow their fields with oxen." On her next trip, she planned to help Cuban artists market themselves as American millennials do: "I want to help the Cubans learn to make money off of their art."

A friend of hers, Prescott Perez-Fox, passed by us, on his way out. Connors snagged him. "I don't know what you do anymore!" she said.

Perez-Fox fished some business cards from his pocket. "I'm a graphic designer and brand strategist, and I also run a podcast, and a podcast meet-up. You should come to our meet-up," he said, handing her a card. The card said, "NEW YORK CITY PODCAST MEETUP." "That's the group," he said. "My show is on the back side." The back of the card said, "THE BUSY CREATOR PODCAST." "It's about workflow and creative productivity and culture and habits for creative pros."

"Why have I not been"—Connors blinked hard—"learning from you more often?"

"Girl, get after it!" Perez-Fox exclaimed. In addition to hosting his own podcast, he had been a guest on nine other podcasts, including "Freelance Transformation" and "Life in the Woods: Hope for Independent Creatives." "I'm finishing a project tomorrow," he told her. "Then I'll be more free."

Connors said that she was in New York at least through next week, probably, and then she was going back to Cuba. "Want to come down?" she asked.

"Ah," Perez-Fox said. "A *little* bit hasty."

One of the best things about Cuba, Connors explained when Perez-Fox had darted out into the night, was that she greeted each day there without anxiety. "Not waking up stressed every day, doing something super-rewarding, and having time to write and make art and all that stuff—that's what I want," she told me. Soon after we went our separate ways, she left town, to fly south.

In 1970, Charles A. Reich, a law professor who'd experienced a counter-cultural conversion after hanging with young people out West, published "The Greening of America," a cotton-candy cone that wound together wispy revelations from the sixties. Casting an eye across modern history, he traced a turn from a world view that he called Consciousness I (the outlook of local farmers, self-directed workers, and small-business people, reaching a crisis in the exploitations of the Gilded Age) to what he called Consciousness II (the outlook of a society of systems, hierarchies, corporations, and gray flannel suits). He thought that Consciousness II was giving way to Consciousness III, the outlook of a rising generation whose virtues included direct action, community power, and self-definition. "For most Americans, work is mindless, exhausting, boring, servile, and hateful, something to be endured while 'life' is confined to 'time off,'" Reich wrote. "Consciousness III people simply do not imagine a career along the old vertical lines." His accessible theory of the baffling sixties carried the imprimatur of William Shawn's *New Yorker*, which published an excerpt of the book that stretched over nearly seventy pages. "The Greening of America" spent months on the *Times* best-seller list.

Exponents of the futuristic tech economy frequently adopt this fifty-year-old perspective. Like Reich, they eschew the hedgehog grind of the forty-hour week; they seek a freer way to work. This productivity-minded spirit of defiance holds appeal for many children of the Consciousness III generation: the so-called millennials.

"People are now, more than ever before, aware of the careers that they're not pursuing," says Kathryn Minshew, the C.E.O. of the Muse, a job-search and career-advice site, and a co-author of "The New Rules of Work." Minshew co-founded the Muse in her mid-twenties, after working at the consulting firm McKinsey and yearning for a job that felt more distinctive. She didn't know what that was, and her peers seemed similarly stuck. Jennifer Fonstad, a venture capitalist whose firm, Aspect Ventures, backed Minshew's company, told me that "the future of work" is now a promising investment field.

Many dreamy young people, like Caitlin Connors, see unrealized opportunity wherever they go. Some, in their careers, end up as what might be called hedgers. These are programmers also known as d.j.s, sculptors who excel as corporate

consultants; they are Instagram-backed fashion mavens, with a TV pilot on the middle burner. They are doing it for the money, and the love, and, like the overladen students they probably once were, because they are accustomed to a counterpoint of self. The hedged career is a kind of gigging career—custom-assembled, financially diffuse, defiant of organizational constraint—and its modishness is why part-time Lyft driving or weekend TaskRabbit-ing has found easy cultural acceptance. But hedging is a luxury, available to those who have too many appealing options in life. It gestures toward the awkward question of whom, in the long run, the revolution-minded spirit of the nineteen-sixties really let off the leash.

As Caitlin Connors's apartment became more popular, she faced unforeseen challenges. Cleaning had to be done rapidly, in between stays. Questions from guests required prompt responses, even when she was abroad, and had no Internet access. When Airbnb logistics started to approach "a full-time job," she hired a management company, called Happy Host, to handle bookings, cleanings, and related chores. Happy Host normally charges twenty-five per cent of earnings, but Connors found the cost worthwhile. "I'm, like, They do everything for you?" she said. "Sign me the fuck up!"

One day, I went to visit Happy Host's founder, Blake Hinckley, at his loft apartment on Broadway, a block from the Strand bookstore. The elevator opened into the living room, which was sparsely but stylishly furnished with caramel-colored leather couches and bright, extroverted art work. Hinckley, who is twenty-nine, had a blond cascade of hair, round glasses, and a short, raffish beard. He had studied English and economics at Middlebury College, and worked for the Boston Consulting Group, doing efficiency assessments for big companies. While travelling three hundred days a year, he was also renting an apartment, in Boston. He did the math and found that, if he'd put the place on Airbnb, he could have made tens of thousands of dollars. Around that time, consulting in New York, he met his girlfriend. "The idea of being staffed in Cleveland and doing another 'delayering'—B.C.G.'s polite euphemism for layoffs—just seemed catastrophic," he said. Love, freedom, and a dream of fleeing corporate America won out.

Hinckley and three roommates have Airbnb-ed their apartment ("Glam Greenwich Village 4BR Loft"). As part of its service, Happy Host arranges professional photography, and the loft, a former hat factory with Eamesian kitchen stools and a fig tree by the window, stood ready for an appraising gaze. In addition to taking photos, Happy Host writes text for Airbnb listings, screens reservation requests, coördinates check-ins, greets guests, answers e-mails, and supplies soaps, towels, and wine. Hinckley's people remain on call for emergencies, which can arise under improbable conditions. The company once had a client who, in the space-saving fashion of New Yorkers, used the drawer under her oven as a storage area for documents and mail. She nearly lost the kitchen to a fire when a Bavarian guest attempted to bake.

The afternoon was waning, and the "unrivaled natural light" in the apartment's "West facing windows" had turned tawny. Twin arrays of seven large, gonglike bells, each mounted on a facing wall, shot off a *pong*. "The gamelatron!" Hinckley explained. "My roommate was at sea, and saw a gamelatron, and had a religious experience."

Hinckley told me that creative, affluent professionals are the company's typical customers. "Startup founders, consultants, people in private equity have been really drawn to this, because they're so busy, they don't have time to respond to a guest inquiry within the hour, or the inclination to wake up at one in the morning because the guest has had a couple of cocktails and is having trouble opening the door," he said. "Also, intellectually, the concept of pricing really resonates." If a property is constantly booked, its prices are too low; frequent fallow periods mean the rate is high. Long stays are favored, because cleaning and coördinating make turnovers costly. Happy Host sets future rates using a proprietary algorithm.

When deciding whether to work with a host, Hinckley assesses the apartment's appearance (enlisting a designer if necessary), amenities, and location. Opening a laptop, he asked for my Zip Code and entered it into AirDNA, a third-party subscription database that gathers Airbnb market information nationwide.

"Forty-seven rentals in your neighborhood," he said, peering at the laptop screen. "Seventy-one per cent are occupied at any time. Your median person is making 31K there on a 22.8K two-bedroom cost." He frowned: weak margin. "The neighborhoods we like are the ones that are really high on this trend line." He clicked to a new data set. "SoHo, Greenwich Village. There, you have people making over fifty-five thousand dollars on their apartment, if it's a full-time rental." He looked at me and opened up his eyes wide. "Which is wild."

In promotional material, Airbnb refers to itself as "an economic lifeline for the middle class." A company-sponsored analysis released in December overlaid maps of Airbnb listings and traditional hotels on maps of neighborhoods where a majority of residents were ethnic minorities. In seven cities, including New York, the percentage of Airbnb listings that fall in minority neighborhoods exceeds the percentage of hotel rooms that do. (Another study, of user photos in seventy-two majority-black neighborhoods, suggested that most Airbnb hosts there were white, complicating the picture.) Seniors were found to earn, on average, nearly six thousand dollars a year from Airbnb listings. "Ultimately, what we're doing is driving wealth down to the people," Chris Lehane, the strategist at Airbnb, says.

It is, of course, driving wealth down unevenly. A study conducted by the New York attorney general in 2014 found that nearly half of all money made by Airbnb hosts in the state was coming from three Manhattan neighborhoods: the Village-SoHo corridor, the Lower East Side, and Chelsea. It is undeniably good to be earning fifty-five hundred dollars a year by Airbnb-ing your home in deep Queens—so good, it may not bother you to learn

that your banker cousin earns ten times that from his swank West Village pad, or that he hires Happy Host to make his lucrative Airbnb property even more lucrative. But now imagine that the guy who lives two doors down from you gets ideas. His finances aren't as tight as yours, and he decides to reinvest part of his Airbnb income in new furniture and a greeting service. His ratings go up. Perhaps he nudges up his prices in response, or maybe he keeps them low, to get a high volume of patronage. Now your listing is no longer competitive in your neighborhood. How long before the market leaves you behind?

I put a version of this question to Lehane on the phone one morning. In the White House, he was known as a "master of disaster" for his strategic crisis management. As Al Gore's press secretary, in 2000, he led the double-black-diamond effort of making the Vice-President seem loose and easygoing on the campaign trail. He told me that even an arms race to the top of the market would benefit overlooked neighborhoods. "It has a ripple effect on the local economy," he explained.

A competitive Airbnb host who hires a cleaner and a decorator in Queens creates work for locals. Guests—some of whom, Lehane insisted, *prefer* to be in remote neighborhoods—might patronize businesses in the area. "What we do represents a different model of capitalism," he told me. After hanging up, he sent a six-hundred-word e-mail of elaboration, and another after that.

He pointed out that, traditionally, affluent people have accrued further wealth passively—from real estate, investments, inheritances, and the like. Those with less charmed lives have had to resort to work in exchange for money. Airbnb makes passive earning available to anyone with a spare room.

In a competitive market, though, advantaged people still end up leveraging their advantages: that is why Happy Host exists. Today, every major Airbnb city (among them London, Paris, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and New Orleans) has multiple Happy Host equivalents to help meet rising market expectations. A two-year-old New York competitor, MetroButler, has twenty-two contractors and two cleaners, and last year bought the clientele of another competitor, Proprly. MetroButler's co-founder Brandon McKenzie had been using Airbnb to pay down law-school debts when he realized that short-term rentals could support an entire service industry. "We're sort of in the business of pick-axes during the Gold Rush," he said.

Others harbor similar ambitions. "Our goal is to become a mega-behemoth," said Amiad Soto, who, with his twin brother, co-founded Guesty, a Tel Aviv-based company that helps hosts manage bookings (or arranges for a remote operator to do so under their names). Guesty has seventy-five employees, and Soto spends much of his time hiring more. For physical work, most such companies rely on other apps—Handy, Postmates—or hire part-time workers themselves. Sharing is not only challenging an existing model; it is generating its own labor force.

One drizzly spring afternoon, I met a MetroButler worker named Bobby Allan while he prepared an apartment for guests. Allan is a conservatory-trained actor and singer in his mid-twenties. He came to MetroButler last summer, from a gig at Proprly; he also works as a cater-waiter and as a hype man at children's parties. At MetroButler, he is a part-time contractor, without benefits, but he doesn't mind: gig work makes it possible to take time off for more exciting endeavors (for instance, an appearance in Syfy's "The Internet Ruined My Life"). MetroButler pays him fifty dollars for each two-hour cleaning—sixty if he greets the guests,

too. "You meet so many crazy people," he told me. The place he was cleaning, a small garden apartment with a child's room at the back, was a regular for him. He had put fresh company linens on the queen-size bed, and had left hotel-size shampoo and conditioner bottles, with the MetroButler logo, on the nightstand. He discovered that the bulb in the desk lamp had burned out, so he made a note to buy a replacement.

In the child's room, Allan dressed the twin bed in crisp white sheets, pulled the duvet cover over the duvet with impressive speed, and rolled a bath towel and a hand towel into little logs, to be arranged in the center of the bed. His first tax return as an independent worker had been a shock, he said. But the work had been instructive in many other ways, too. He consulted his phone. Every task was annotated on a photo of the space in an app that let MetroButler watch his progress in real time; he checked off each detail and took a photo of the room when he was done. He hummed the finale to "The Firebird" while he swept the floor.

Normally, every efficiency has a winner and a loser. A service like Uber benefits the rider, who's saving on the taxi fare she might otherwise pay, but makes drivers' earnings less stable. Airbnb has made travel more affordable for people who wince at the bill of a decent hotel, yet it also means that tourism spending doesn't make its way directly to the usual armies of full-time employees: housekeepers, bellhops, cooks.

To advocates such as Lehane, that labor-market swap is good. Instead of scrubbing bathrooms at the Hilton, you can earn directly, how and when you want. Such thinking, though, presumes that gigging people and the old working and service classes are the same, and this does not appear to be the case. A few years ago, Juliet B. Schor, a sociology professor at Boston College, interviewed forty-three mostly young people who were earning money from Airbnb, Turo (like Airbnb for car rentals), and TaskRabbit. She found that they were disproportionately white-collar and highly educated, like Seth F. A second, expanded study showed that those who relied on gigging to make a living were less satisfied than those who had other jobs and benefits and gigged for pocket money: another sign that the system was not helping those who most needed the work.

Instead of simply driving wealth down, it seemed, the gigging model was helping divert traditional service-worker earnings into more privileged pockets—causing what Schor calls a "crowding out" of people dependent on such work. That distillation-coil effect, drawing wealth slowly upward, is largely invisible. On the ground, the atmosphere grows so steamy with transaction that it often seems to rain much needed cash.

"Airbnb enabled me to go back to school and become a full-time student and work as a part-time photographer."

"Airbnb is necessary while my cousin is out of town to work."

"I am here as an individual, not representing some radical, self-serving organization. I am speaking to *my own experience*."

The streets near New York's City Hall were ear-stinging and windy on the morning of a big Airbnb hearing, but attendees clogged the doorway, and the air inside was thick with sour human concern. A new law had made it illegal for many New Yorkers to advertise short-term rentals. The law ostensibly targeted unregulated hoteliers, who snatch up multiple apartments and Airbnb them year-round, but it served the broader interests of major hotel trade groups, such as the American Hotel and Lodging Association and the Hotel and Motel Trades Council, which lobbied against Airbnb. At the hearing, hosts protested the rule's breadth: why not limit each member's listings, rather than banning them all?

Christian Klossner, the executive director of the Mayor's Office of Special Enforcement, sat behind a desk microphone, wearing a patient expression as speakers gave testimony. Suzette Sundae, a musician wearing a fifties-style swing dress and a white cardigan over her tattoos, said that she ran a vintage-clothing store in Park Slope. When the store's traffic fell off, she had Airbnb-ed her home. "It saved me from having to declare bankruptcy, and it allowed me to close my store without owing a dime," she said. An East New York resident named Heather-Sky McField recalled having to travel to Baltimore each week to care for her mother, who had breast cancer. She had been unable to evict her tenants, who'd stopped paying rent. "Had it not been for Airbnb, I would have been foreclosed by now," she told Klossner.

Given such testimony, it was easy to see how the sharing economy became a liberal beacon—and easy to see the attendant paradoxes. A century ago, liberalism was a systems-building

TIME, IN WHALES

Our legs of yellow skin next to one another,
calves spread, I think of beached whales, the arcs of their bellies,
clean and gleaming. A whale would lie in the shape
of something cold, the body sipping on itself
like a drain. Gravity sucks a whole whale onto sand.
You study Korean, whispering, *Murorŭda*, *murorŭda*,
meaning, literally, *Water rises*, but really meaning *to improve* or
to rise in sap, in springtime trees. Come spring, it will be your
birthday.
We will have seaweed soup, supply our blood with oxygen.
Do you know that Koreans do that, because, hundreds of years past,
they saw whales eating seaweed after giving birth?
You cross your legs, their hair black and coarse like my father's
and my grandfather's across the ocean. And do you know that
whales have hair?
Perhaps a sign of their past, when they walked the earth?
Summer of years past: your father across the same ocean to
bring you
to America, where you would grow up speaking a language
different from mine. Do you know that whales, too, detect where

one another comes from
through song? That music I hear is yours and ours. *Murorŭda*.
Murorŭda. Water rises. Whales die in this year's hot winter.
Your father has told you of the summer, the dank heat.
Your foster mother ran after you, you already asleep in your father's arms,
wailing your name. You will not be called by that name the next day
and years will pass by. But when you're ten you will write
about that story
and spell "wail" as the animal, whose breath is a distance,
spouting steam,
the great animal that becomes crushed by air and sprayed with words
Man's Fault. And yes, so perhaps the world will end in
water, taking with it
all loving things. And yes, in grace. Only song, only
buoyancy. You rise now
whispering, *Murollida, murollida*. Meaning, literally, *to raise water*,
but really meaning *to bring water to a boil*.

—*Emily Jungmin Yoon*

philosophy. Its revelation was that society, left alone, tended toward entropy and extremes, not because people were inherently awful but because they thought locally. You wanted a decent life for your family and the families that you knew. You did not—could not—make every personal choice with an eye to the fates of people in some unknown factory. But, even if individuals couldn't deal with the big picture, early-twentieth-century liberals saw, a larger entity such as government could. This way of thinking brought us the New Deal and "Ask not what your country can do for you." Its ultimate rejection brought us customized life paths, heroic entrepreneurship, and maybe even Instagram performance. We are now back to the politics of the particular.

For gigging companies, that shift means a constant struggle against a legacy of systemic control, with legal squabbles like the one in New York. Regulation is government's usual tool for blunting adverse consequences, but most sharing platforms gain their competitive edge by skirting its requirements. Uber and Lyft avoid taxi rules that fix rates and cap the supply on the road. Handy saves on overtime and benefits by categorizing workers as contractors. Some gigging advocates suggest that this less regulated environment is fair, because traditional industry gets advantages elsewhere. (President Trump, it has been pointed out, could not have built his company without hundreds of millions of dollars in tax subsidies.)

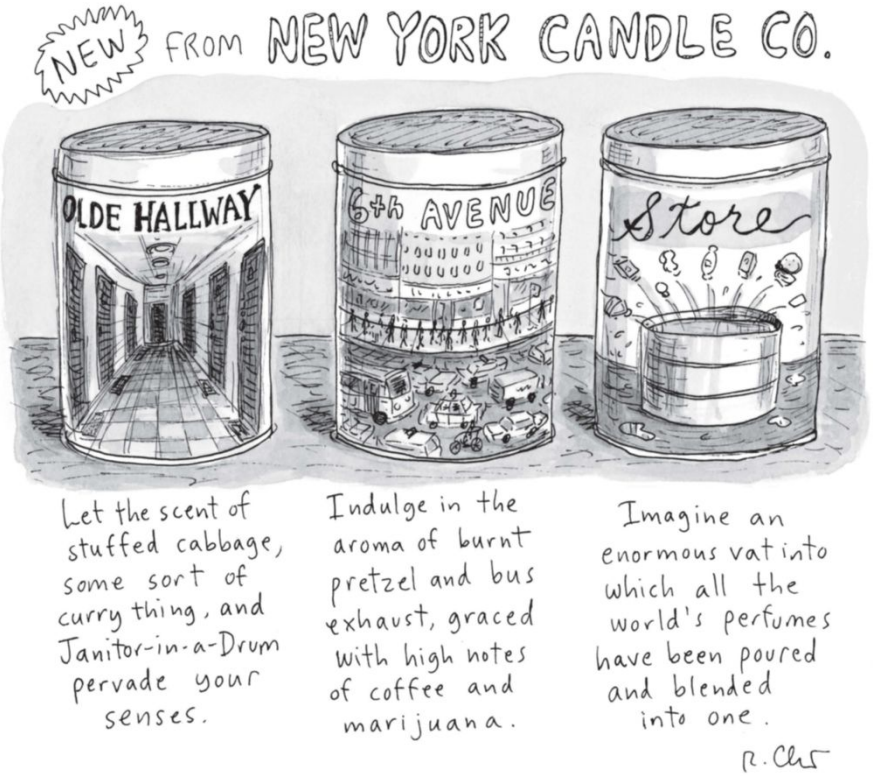
Still, since their inception, and increasingly during the past year, gigging companies have become the targets of a journalistic genre that used to be called muckraking: admirable and assiduous investigative work that digs up hypocrisies, deceptions, and malpractices in an effort to cast doubt on a broader project. Some companies, such as Uber, seem to invite this kind of attention with layered wrongdoing and years of secrecy. But they also invite it by their high-minded positioning. Like traditional companies, gigging companies maintain regiments of highly paid lawyers and lobbyists. What sets them apart is a second lobbying effort, turned toward the public.

"We're borrowing very heavily from traditional community-organizing models, and looking at the grass roots in each city," Emily Castor, Lyft's leader in the campaign against regulatory constraint, told me a while back, when we spoke in the company's San Francisco headquarters. "Who are the leaders? Who are people who distinguish themselves as passionate, who want to get more involved? We have a team that includes field organizers who are responsible for different parts of the country."

If Uber has come to be known as the Wicked Witch of the West, dark-logoed, ubiquitous, and dragging a flaming broom of opportunism, Lyft has sought to be the Glinda, upbeat, pink, and conciliatory, and its organizing outreach has been key to this reputation. Castor's work was not accosting government but assembling users, building a network of ordinary people who wanted Lyft in their lives.

"They'll have dinners and other opportunities for people to learn more about what policy activities are happening in their area," she said. This often means turning out for community-style lobbying—like the hosts at the Airbnb hearing in New York. "We get to know who has a powerful voice that would be helpful if shared with elected officials," she explained.

Castor is a friendly woman with tidy blond hair who also started out in Democratic politics. After college, she worked in Washington as a legislative aide for the California representative Susan Davis. In 2008, before returning to school to get a degree in public administration, she worked on an unsuccessful congressional campaign. She moved to San Francisco, and in 2011 worked as a municipal finance consultant. It was an exciting time to be in the Bay Area. In the wake of economic collapse, young people with big ideas and an understanding of mobile technology were thinking about how work could be made cheaper, lighter, and more accessible. Castor started renting out her car on Getaround, an early sharing-economy company, and then tried Zimride, Airbnb—any service she could get her hands on. Their premise of sharing moved her. "It was like falling in love," she told me. "You ask yourself, Is this love? Is this love? And, when you find the thing that's right, you don't have to ask." Early in 2012, she started an event series, Collaborative Chats, devoted to the sharing economy. When Lyft launched, in June, 2012, the founders hired her to be the company's first "community manager." She found that she could draw on her political training. "Collective identity is one of those aspects that, in the theory of social movements,



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is so important," she told me. "You're not just 'taking rides.'"

A key architect of that organizing strategy is Marshall Ganz. From the sixties through the early eighties, he worked under Cesar Chavez, leading the organizing efforts of the United Farm Workers. Now, at the Harvard Kennedy School, he teaches what he calls "a story of self, a story of us, a story of now": the collective-identity movement-building method that Castor invoked. In July, 2007, he led a boot camp to train Obama's first battalion of organizers for Iowa and South Carolina's primary contests. He told me that he found the sharing companies' use of grassroots methods "problematic."

"There's a difference between exchange, which is what markets are all about, and discernment of common purpose, which is what politics is about," he said. Ganz told me that he had been distraught after Obama's victory in 2008 when the Democratic National Committee seemed to abandon the President's grassroots network. What he had hoped would be a movement had been cast aside as an electoral tool that had served its purpose.

Castor, who is nearly four decades younger than Ganz, had a different heroic ideal for social change. "When I worked on the Hill," she recalled, "my chief of staff used to say, 'A political campaign is a startup that is designed to go out of business.'"

Questions have emerged lately about the future of institutional liberalism. A Washington *Post* /ABC News poll last month found that two-thirds of Americans believe the Democratic Party is "out of touch," more than think the same of the Republican Party or the current President. The gig economy has helped show how a shared political methodology—and a shared language of virtue—can stand in for a unified program; contemporary liberalism sometimes seems a backpack of tools distributed among people who, beyond their current stance of opposition, lack an agreed-upon blueprint. Unsurprisingly, the commonweal projects that used to be the pride of progressivism are unravelling. Leaders have quietly let them go. At one point, I asked Chris Lehane why he had thrown his support behind the sharing model instead of working on traditional policy solutions. He told me that, during the recession, he had suffered a crisis of faith. "The social safety net wasn't providing the support that it had been," he said. "I do think we're in a time period when liberal democracy is sick."

In "The Great Risk Shift: The New Economic Insecurity and the Decline of the American Dream" (2006), Jacob Hacker, a political-science professor at Yale, described a decades-long off-loading of risk from insurance-type structures—governments, corporations—to individuals. Economic insecurity has risen in the course of the past generation, even as American wealth climbed. Hacker attributed this shift to what he called "the personal-responsibility crusade," which grew out of a post-sixties fixation on moral hazard: the idea that you do riskier things if you're insulated from the consequences. The conservative version of the crusade is a commonplace: the poor should try harder next time. But, although Hacker doesn't note it explicitly, there's a liberal version, too, having to do with doffing corporate structures, eschewing inhibiting social norms, and refusing a career in plastics. Reich called it Consciousness III.

The slow passage from love beads to Lyft through the performative assertion of self may be the least claimed legacy of the baby-boomer revolution—certainly, it's the least celebrated. Yet the place we find ourselves today is not unique. In "Drift and Mastery," a young Walter Lippmann, one of the founders of modern progressivism, described the strange circumstances of public discussion in 1914, a similar time. "The little business men cried: We're the natural men, so let us alone," he wrote. "And the public cried: We're the most natural of all, so please do stop interfering with us. Muckraking gave an utterance to the small business men and to the larger public, who dominated reform politics. What did they do? They tried by all the machinery and power they could muster to restore a business world in which each man could again be left to his own will—a world that needed no coöperative intelligence." Coming off a period of liberalization and free enterprise, Lippmann's America struggled with growing inequality, a frantic news cycle, a rising awareness of structural injustice, and a cacophonous global society—in other words, with an intensifying sense of fragmentation. His idea, the big idea of progressivism, was that national self-government was a coöperative project of putting the pieces together. "The

battle for us, in short, does not lie against crusted prejudice," he wrote, "but against the chaos of a new freedom."

Revolution or disruption is easy. Spreading long-term social benefit is hard. If one accepts Lehane's premise that the safety net is tattered and that gigging platforms are necessary to keep people in cash, the model's social erosions have to be curbed. How can the gig economy be made sustainable at last?

During the final days of the Obama Administration, I went to see Tom Perez, at that time the Secretary of Labor and now—after a candidacy fraught with inner-party conflict—the chair of the Democratic National Committee. Perez, tieless in a white shirt, greeted me from a couch. Beyond the stresses of leaving the Cabinet, he had just experienced a bad nosebleed and looked drained.

"If you're looking for the five-point blueprint, I don't have it," he said, when I asked about his vision for the gigging labor market. Last year, he pushed the Census Bureau to reinstate the Contingent Worker Supplement to gather data. (The government currently has no information on a gigging sphere as such.) He believed that any long-term labor model should include input from workers, but wasn't sure what that should look like. "Voice can take a lot of forms," Perez said. "I'm a big fan of collective bargaining and the labor movement, but I recognize that there are other ways."

Perez champions what he calls "conscious capitalism"—free-market liberalism, with an eye to workers' rights—and he insisted to me that profit-seeking and benefits-giving are not at odds. "Shareholders are best served when all stakeholders are well served!" he explained. The mind-set was mainstream during the nineteen-nineties, and still runs strong in the tech community, with its doing-well-by-doing-good ethos. One popular idea is that app markets regulate themselves with online ratings by and of everyone involved in a transaction.

The record here is mixed. Some earners complain about the way rating systems favor the judgment of customers (Seth F. told me that it is hard to challenge a poor rating) and can be leveraged for haggling purposes. (Some Airbnb customers, Blake Hinckley, of Happy Host, said, use trivial problems to seek a refund.) And reputation governance can't pick up patterns of unjust exclusion. Research on Airbnb found that identical profiles given different ethnic names were treated differently by hosts, and that pricing on equivalent apartments ran lower for black hosts than for everybody else. (A couple of weeks ago, Airbnb agreed to let a regulatory body, in California, test for discrimination; the company itself has instituted an aggressive program to try to curb such behavior.) Still, you cannot regulate somebody's house or car the way you regulate a hotel or a taxi.

"Someone who's hosting on Airbnb might say, 'Well, this is my space. I only want a certain kind of guest in my spare bedroom,'" Arun Sundararajan, an N.Y.U. business professor, says. Is that unreasonably discriminatory? In a new book, "The Sharing Economy," he proposes a halfway measure like Airbnb's: self-regulation in collaboration with government. Many elected politicians like a long-leash approach, too. In November, 2014, after an Uber employee described tracking a journalist's movements, Senator Al Franken sent a list of privacy-policy queries to Uber's C.E.O.; last fall, Franken pressed Uber and Lyft about apparent race-based discrepancies in wait times. "What I'm trying to do is help customers understand what these companies are doing, and encourage these companies to put in place voluntary measures," Franken told me soon after dispatching the first letter. Some companies have taken preëmptive measures. Laura Copeland, the head of community at Lyft, describes having created an "advisory council" of seven drivers to make sure that the people on the street have a voice in the company.

Other assessments suggest that employees, too, should get their houses in order. "To succeed in the Gig Economy, we need to create a financially flexible life of lower fixed costs, higher savings, and much less debt," Diane Mulcahy, a senior analyst at the Kauffman Foundation and a lecturer at Babson College, writes in her book "The Gig Economy," which is part economic argument and part how-to guide. Ideally, gig workers should plan not to retire. (Beyond Airbnb hosting, Mulcahy sees prospects for aging millennials in app-based dog-sitting.) If they must retire, they should prepare. Mulcahy suggests bingeing on benefits when they come. Fill your dance card with doctors while you're on employee insurance. Go wild with 401(k) matching—it will come in handy.

This ketchup-packet-hoarding approach sounds sensible, given the current lack of systemic support. Yet, as Mulcahy acknowledges, it's a survival mechanism, not a solution. Turning to deeper reform, she argues for eliminating the current distinction between

"Mom! You're embarrassing me!"

employees (people who receive a W-2 tax form and benefits such as insurance and sick days) and contract workers (who get a 1099-MISC and no benefits). It's a "kink" in the labor market, she says, and it invites abuse by efficiency-seeking companies.

Calls for structural change have grown loud lately, in part because the problem goes far beyond gigging apps. The precariat is everywhere. Companies such as Nissan have begun manning factories with temps; even the U.S. Postal Service has turned to them. Academic jobs are increasingly filled with relatively cheap, short-term teaching appointments. Historically, there is usually an uptick in 1099 work during tough economic times, and then W-2s resurge as jobs are added in recovery. But W-2 jobs did not resurge as usual during our recovery from the last recession; instead, the growth has happened in the 1099 column. That shift raises problems because the United States' benefits structure has traditionally been attached to the corporation rather than to the state: the expectation was that every employed person would have a W-2 job.

"We should design the labor-market regulations around a more flexible model," Jacob Hacker told me. He favors some form of worker participation, and, like Mulcahy, advocates creating a single category of employment. "I think if you work for someone else, you're an employee," he said. "Employees get certain protections. Benefits must be separate from work."

In a much cited article in *Democracy*, from 2015, Nick Hanauer, a venture capitalist, and David Rolf, a union president, proposed that workplace benefits be prorated (someone who works a twenty-hour week gets half of the full-time benefits) and portable (insurance or unused vacation days would carry from one job to the next, because employers would pay into a worker's lifelong benefits account). Other people regard the gig economy as a case for universal basic income: a plan to give every citizen a modest flat annuity from the government, as a replacement for all current welfare and unemployment programs. Alternatively, there's the proposal made by the economists Seth D. Harris and Alan B. Krueger: the creation of an "independent worker" status that awards some of the structural benefits of W-2 employment (including collective bargaining, discrimination protection, tax withholding, insurance pools) but not others (overtime and the minimum wage).

I put these possibilities to Tom Perez. He told me that he didn't like the idea of eliminating work categories, or of adding a new one, as Harris and Krueger suggest: you'd lose many of the hard-won benefits included with W-2 employment, he said, either in the compromise to a single category or because current W-2 companies would find ways to slide into the new classification. He wanted to move slowly, to take time. "The heart and soul of the twentieth-century social compact that emerged after the Great Depression was forty years in the making," he said. "How do we build the twenty-first-century social compact?"

Perez's new perch, at the D.N.C., has given him a broader platform, and a couple of hours after the House passed the American Health Care Act last week, he championed the old safety net in forceful language. "Scapegoating worker protections is often a lazy cop-out for some who want to change the rules to benefit themselves at the expense of working people," he told me. "We shouldn't have to choose between innovation and the most basic employee protections; it's a false dichotomy." The entanglement of the sharing economy and Democratic politics has continued—Perez's press secretary at the Department of Labor now works for Airbnb—but his approach had circumspection. "Any changes you make to policies or regulations have to be very careful and take all potential ripple effects into account and keep the best interest of the worker in mind."

His own effort to do that led him one day to New York, where he stopped by a company called Hello Alfred. "I just wanted to introduce us a little bit, explaining why we're here," Marcela Sapone, the company's C.E.O. and cofounder, said. "I think the best way to do that is to show you what we do. I heard that you like Coke heavy"—that is, the opposite of Coca-Cola light—"so we went ahead . . ." She handed him a miniature bottle.

"The perfect size!" Perez exclaimed. He looked delighted and confused.

"O Romeo, Romeo. Lurking outside my balcony is super creepy, Romeo."

"At Alfred," Sapone went on, "we think that help should be built into your life." Sapone and her co-founder, Jess Beck, had met at Harvard Business School after leaving McKinsey. "We were thinking about how we were going to balance a career, building a family, building a social life in the community—you'd have to be a superhero. So we asked for some help to become that superhero," Sapone said.

Unlike TaskRabbit, Hello Alfred is based on recurring service. When customers download the app and sign up, they're assigned a single tasker, called a home manager, who comes once or twice a week, on a schedule. Alfred taskers often have keys and let themselves in; the idea is that, like traditional home help, they get to know their clients' preferences and quirks. "It's sort of a weird relationship you build with this person," Leah Silver, a client who is an elementary-school teacher on the Upper West Side, told me. "They know so much about you."

The reason for Perez's visit was an unusual feature of Hello Alfred's model: although the taskers can work part time, on a schedule they determine, all are full W-2 employees. Perez considered the company to be a model—creative, well-intentioned, and kind toward its employees—and praised it between pulls on his Coke heavy. "I appreciate that you're understanding the high road is the smart road," he said. "This is not an act of charity! This is an act of enlightened self-interest."

He would have been more correct to call it self-interest tamed. Sapone told me later that it's expensive to carry a staff of W-2 workers on a gigging schedule. The tax burden is greater for Hello Alfred than it would be on a 1099 model, the hourly rate is high, and the required human-resources infrastructure drives up the cost. Attrition is low, but W-2 companies are also vulnerable to various employee lawsuits from which 1099 employers are insulated.

For now, however, companies such as Hello Alfred, going above and beyond market demands out of principle, may be the gig economy's best hope. And, occasionally, the principles travel. Blake Hinckley has already moved the most senior three of his six Happy Host staff cleaners onto W-2 status. The reason, he told me, is Sapone: they knew each other in Boston, and she convinced him that any honorable company owed its workers employment benefits.

"Maybe you should worry less about kryptonite and more about office doughnuts."

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One afternoon, I accompanied a Hello Alfred tasker named Phillip Pineno as he went to service apartments in Kips Bay. A placid guy with tiny silver hoops in his ears and a hipster's dusky beard, Pineno does tasking four days a week and, like Bobby Allan, works in his remaining time as an actor. In the lobby of a building facing Bellevue South Park, he gathered packages and ascended to a client's apartment—one of eleven he'd visit that day. A bag of Trader Joe's Veggie & Flaxseed Tortilla Chips went in a cupboard. A box of cereal was tucked into position on the counter. Pineno used to be a caterer, doing events at Lincoln Center and the Museum of Natural History. The work was fine, he said, but unpredictable, different from Hello Alfred. "You get to feel more like a human," he told me. He could take time every week to work toward his dream without gambling his future on it. He had found some sense of workplace comfort—of being valued and known.

For many gig workers, as for Seth F., that dream remains elusive. When Seth F. had finished hanging art work in my living room, I led him to the dining room. He took a small electric drill and some screws out of his backpack, and started driving them into the plaster. We were hanging a small print of a Sol LeWitt drawing, squares in squares in squares. He extracted a laser level, and projected it across the wall. "This is my favorite tool," he told me, with a moving tenderness. He rarely met other taskers, he said; there were no colleagues in his life with whom he could share experiences and struggles. The flexibility was great, if you had something to be flexible for.

"The gig economy is such a lonely economy," he told me. He left his drill behind after he finished the work, but I was out when he returned the next day to get it. I never saw him again. ♦

ANNALS OF LAW

A RIGHTEOUS CASE

Zainab Ahmad's mission to show that criminal prosecution is the best counterterrorism strategy.

BY WILLIAM FINNEGAN

ZAINAB AHMAD had a small disaster in Saudi Arabia. "I always borrowed an abaya from the legat in Riyadh," she said. An abaya is the full-length robe that is required dress for women and girls in Saudi Arabia. "Legat" is short for the legal-attaché office, the F.B.I. presence in an American Embassy. Ahmad is an Assistant United States Attorney with the Eastern District of New York. "A button came undone during a meeting, and suddenly it was like something out of 'Showgirls.'" Ahmad laughed. The Saudis were unamused. "After that, I went and bought my own abaya on Atlantic Ave."

We were sitting in a diner on Cadman Plaza, across from the Brooklyn federal courthouse. Ahmad, who is thirty-seven, was looking litigation-ready, in a well-cut dark suit and a cream blouse. "That's Judge Glasser," she whispered, motioning with her eyes toward another table. "He did the Gotti trial."

The Eastern District of New York has long been known for its work against organized crime. Since the September 11th attacks, E.D.N.Y. has also become an aggressive prosecutor of terrorism, securing more convictions than any other U.S. Attorney's office. Ahmad's specialty is counterterrorism, her subspecialty "extraterritorial" cases, which means that she spends a great deal of time overseas, negotiating with foreign officials, interviewing witnesses, often in prison, and combing the ground for evidence in terror-related crimes against Americans. She spends time in American prisons as well, typically with convicted jihadists. A former supervisor of Ahmad's told me that she has probably logged more hours talking to "legitimate Al Qaeda members, hardened terrorist killers," than any other prosecutor in America.

"They're treasure troves of information about the networks, once they decide to coöperate," Ahmad told me. "Some of them didn't expect to be here, to face any consequences. Their plan was suicide. Now they're very vulnerable. Everybody's human. You pull the levers." The main lever that prosecutors have with coöperators is a reduced sentence. For naïve young men, disenchanted with jihad and looking at forty years to life, that can be a powerful incentive to talk. Ahmad may ask them to testify in court. She has prosecuted thirteen people for terrorism since 2009, and has not lost a case.

That week, in the courthouse across the street, she had finished a hearing in the case of a Malian man accused of murdering an American diplomat in Niger. In December, 2000, William Bultemeier, a military attaché, was gunned down in a midnight carjacking outside a restaurant in the capital. The accused was Alhassane Ould Mohamed, also known as Cheibani, who was famed around the Sahel as a smuggler. He was arrested, and the case seemed strong. Bultemeier's vehicle, a Toyota Land Cruiser that belonged to the Embassy, was recovered in Timbuktu, and Cheibani's fingerprints and DNA were found inside. A security guard at an Air Afrique office testified to seeing him commit the shooting.

In 2002, though, Cheibani escaped from jail, and reportedly went to work for Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. A.Q.I.M. finances its campaigns by smuggling and by kidnapping Westerners, and Cheibani was said to have participated in the kidnapping of two Canadian diplomats in 2008. After a subsequent attack on a Saudi convoy in Niger left four dead, he was caught, tried, and sentenced to twenty years. Then he escaped again, in a mass breakout mounted by Boko Haram.

In 2012, Ahmad got the Bultemeier investigation, by then a very cold case, reassigned to E.D.N.Y. The next year, with Cheibani "in the wind," as Ahmad put it, she obtained an indictment, and soon afterward the French Army caught him in an Al Qaeda column in northern Mali.

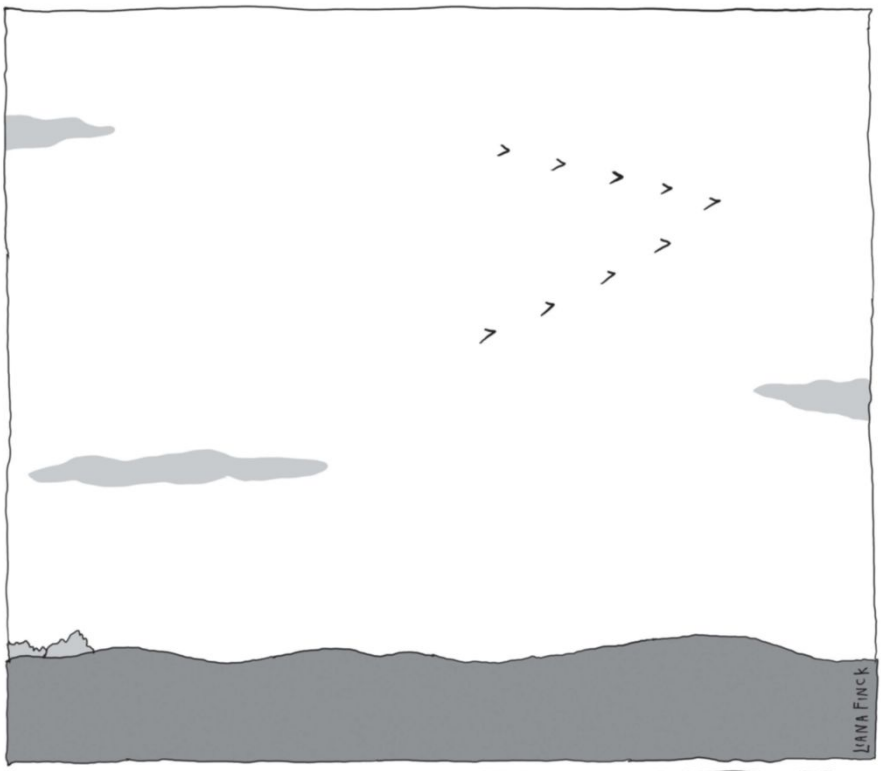
In Brooklyn, Cheibani's lawyers, public federal defenders, had requested a suppression hearing, hoping to quash some of the prosecution's evidence on constitutional grounds. Such hearings are a chance for the defense to get a preview of the government's case. The preview that Cheibani and his lawyers got was discouraging. "They know Zainab's reputation," a federal prosecutor who has worked with Ahmad said. "They know their chances are not good."

Ahmad had made numerous trips to West Africa, chasing leads, collecting evidence, interviewing potential witnesses. For the hearing, she brought in seventeen witnesses from Niger and Mali, few of whom were prepared for a New York winter. "Half of them had only sandals," Ahmad said. "We were all frantically scraping up coats, hats, shoes. We came this close to putting a woman on the stand in a yellow hat *with a pom-pom*." At the hearing, in the marble and mahogany grandeur of a Brooklyn federal courtroom, Cheibani was presumably astonished to see seventeen Africans ready to testify against him. On March 24, 2016, he pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit murder, and was subsequently given a sentence of twenty-five years. "He's not an ideological jihadist," Ahmad said. "He's in it for the money. But a lot of people are in it for the money, and his knowledge of the Sahel has been very valuable to A.Q.I.M."

Knowledge is everything in counterterrorism. "Coöperators are the unsung heroes of this business," Ahmad said. One of her former supervisors at E.D.N.Y., David Bitkower, told me, "You coöperate some kid from Minneapolis in 2009, and a couple of years later he's going to help you prosecute an Al Shabaab commander, who is going to help you pursue defendants farther

Ahmad has probably spent more hours with Al Qaeda members and other terrorists than any other American prosecutor.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PARI DUKOVIC



GEESE FLYING SOUTH TO VISIT YOUR GRANDPARENTS

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up the chain." Ahmad considers all her time with ex-jihadists well spent. "They always know more than they think they know," she told me. "Everything they remember helps fill in the picture."

Trials are relatively easy, in Ahmad's view: "There's a neutral arbiter—a judge, a jury. You make your best argument, and they decide." Getting an extraterritorial terrorism case charged, on the other hand, requires establishing facts to the satisfaction of an American grand jury about events that occurred, often years ago, in faraway places. For Ahmad's cases, those places have included Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Algeria, Syria, Nigeria, Niger, Kenya, Somalia, Trinidad, Guyana, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

But the hardest part of bringing a terrorism suspect onto American soil, she says, has usually been convincing the U.S. government that it's safe. Special approval must be obtained both from Main Justice—as government lawyers call Justice Department headquarters, in Washington, D.C.—and from the National Security Council, in the White House. The political opposition to such transfers has been entrenched for years on Capitol Hill, and has only intensified since the attempt to put Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, on trial in Manhattan federal court. That effort failed, in 2010, in the face of objections from Congress and local officials.

In the Senate, the drive to oppose and defund civilian trials for accused terrorists has long been led by the Republicans Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, Chuck Grassley of Iowa, and Jeff Sessions of Alabama. "This is no way to fight a war," the three senators and a group of their colleagues wrote, in a 2015 letter to Eric Holder, then the Attorney General. The letter referred, specifically, to several extraditions that Ahmad was involved in. The senators and their allies strongly prefer that foreign terrorists who target Americans be detained in the military prison at Guantánamo Bay and, when possible, tried by a military tribunal. In 2009, Sessions, who is now the Attorney General, added an amendment to a military spending bill titled "No Miranda Warnings for Al Qaeda Terrorists."

Ahmad and her colleagues have been working meanwhile to develop, with considerable quiet success, a criminal-justice alternative to Guantánamo. It's a high-wire act. The public has unique expectations of law enforcement with respect to terrorism. "When there's a bank robbery, we try to solve the crime," Ahmad said. "But nobody thinks our job is to stamp out bank robbery. Terrorism is different. People expect us to prevent it." Many terror cases are difficult to make, with the strongest evidence often classified or inadmissible. "And we can't afford to lose," Ahmad told me. "We can't get anything wrong. If we lost a major extraterritorial case, there might never be another chance."

Ahmad had a multifaceted upbringing. She grew up in suburban Nassau County, Long Island, with her father and stepmother and two younger brothers, and she also lived part time with her mother, in Manhattan. Her parents had divorced, amicably, when she was an infant, and, as Zainab grew, according to her father, Naeem, "she would play Mom off against Dad, but always for one thing—to buy more books." Her parents were part of the Pakistani diaspora, and Zainab spent summers in Pakistan and England. Visits to Pakistan were an adventure—she had dashing, rowdy cousins—but England was often a shock. "You could feel the discrimination," she told me. "My cousins, no matter how successful or well educated, were never going to be accepted as British. People would ask me where I was from. I'd say I was American. Then they'd say, 'Yes, but where are you *really* from?' I was always so glad to get home."

"We felt comfortable here," Naeem told me, when I visited him and his wife, Nasrin, at their home, in East Meadow. "I felt comfortable with my neighbors, and never told my children to avoid kids because they're Christian, Jewish—none of that." (Most of Zainab's friends as a child were Jewish.) Naeem, a retired engineer, is an active member of a local mosque, and has taught Sunday school since the nineteen-eighties. "I am a very religious man," he said. "But not a religiosity man. I don't care what other people do."

Naeem and his first wife, Jamile, left Pakistan for Canada in the nineteen-seventies—for economic reasons, he said. But his engineering degree, from the University of Peshawar, was not recognized in Canada, so he found work investigating insurance claims. In 1977, the couple moved to New York, where Zainab was born three years later. Naeem managed a restaurant in midtown and later helped run a construction firm. His boss, who eventually became his partner, was a Hindu from India. "We're both from the Punjab," Naeem said. "But if there was a war between India and Pakistan we didn't bring it home. We were the same, except he went to temple and I went to mosque."

Zainab's parents describe her as a cheerful, precocious child. "She never walked, she always skipped," Jamile, who now lives in Pakistan, told me. "Her sixth-grade teacher praised her respectfulness, and that meant a lot to me. A lot. It's difficult to raise a respectful child in the U.S." When Zainab was eight or nine, she and Naeem read the entire Quran together, which took about a year. She didn't understand a word, she said. Later, as an undergraduate at Cornell, majoring in health policy, she studied Arabic. "We talked every night," Naeem said. "She would give me the gist of the Arabic. I would send her back to class with new ideas and questions." Even as a lawyer, he said, "she sometimes uses me as a bounce-off for ideas—to see what I say."

Naeem served lunch and tea. A few days earlier—this was last spring—there had been a Trump campaign rally in Bethpage, a couple of miles to the east. "You could hear the roaring from here," Naeem said. "Everything but the '*Build the wall!*'s." Like his daughter, Naeem has a quick tongue and a ready laugh.

Nasrin, a tall, smiling woman in her fifties, is the town clerk of Hempstead, which has a population of eight hundred thousand. She is the first elected official of South Asian extraction in New York State. While we talked, white guys in pickups parked in the driveway and came to the front door, where they conferred with Nasrin over sheaves of documents—constituent service on a rainy Saturday afternoon. The American Dream lives on Long Island.

And yet I remembered Zainab saying, "If I were fifteen now, growing up where I did—I don't know. Everything's changed." She meant the level of mistrust that Muslims in America face. "When I was a kid, even though I had a funny name, and didn't look like everyone else, it honestly took me a very long time to realize that. There was nothing that made me feel different. Substitute teachers would come, and start to take attendance, and hesitate, because my name was at the top of the class list, Ahmad. They'd say, 'I know I'm going to pronounce this wrong.' And the whole class would be, like, '*Zainab.* Duh.'

"Every year, in elementary school, we'd have American Heritage Day. Everybody would say where their family was from. Germany. Poland. I remember, in second grade, saying, 'My family's from Pakistan.' The teacher pulled down a map, and I didn't know where Pakistan was, even though I'd been there. I was totally embarrassed. But then I was relieved because the teacher didn't know, either." Ahmad laughed. "I'd kind of like to go back to a time in America when teachers didn't know where Pakistan is."

Jamile told me, "When Zainab was little, she wanted to be a receptionist. She loved answering the phone. Then she wanted to be a nurse. I mentioned lawyer, because my dad was a lawyer, but I wasn't serious." Ahmad herself is vague about how law happened. She had planned to be a hospital administrator, but things went sideways after the September 11th attacks, and she ended up at Columbia Law School, on a full scholarship. One judge she clerked for, Reena Raggi, of the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, recalls her strong academic background in finance and economics. "She excelled in a variety of areas," Raggi told me. "Her ability to analogize. Her aptitude for solving problems. She has a deep critical mind. Zainab doesn't come across as a hard-boiled, aggressive prosecutor. She's reserved—that's her upbringing. She would have been successful in any field. But, I must admit, I didn't see *this* coming."

Naeem once got a call from his daughter while she was clerking for U.S. District Judge Jack B. Weinstein. It was 2006, at the end of a major Mafia trial. "Zainab was crying," he said. "The defendant had been convicted. She said, 'I couldn't take it when he took off his watch and his necklace and gave them to his family.' She had got to know these people. So I said, 'Which side would you rather be on, the government or the defense? You're not after the person, you're after the truth.'"

When Ahmad joined the Eastern District, in 2008, she first worked on Brooklyn and Staten Island gang cases, but soon found herself drafted into a terrorism investigation that centered on a plot to blow up fuel tanks and pipelines at John F. Kennedy International Airport. The plotters, one of them a former baggage handler, were a motley quartet from Guyana and Trinidad, and the case led to both Iran and Al Qaeda. "You start following a disgruntled baggage handler, a guy who's mouthing off in Queens," Ahmad said. "But he has the potential to connect with serious networks—and this guy did it." Russell Defreitas, the baggage handler, made trips to Guyana, looking to contact a senior Al Qaeda leader. When his search failed, he settled instead for Abdul Kadir, a chemical engineer and former member of Guyana's parliament, who had transferred his allegiance to Islamist extremists in Iran. The investigators moved carefully, placing an informant with Defreitas, but not, at first, asking him to gather evidence with a tape recorder. "We weren't sure about Guyana law, or the Guyanese, and you don't want to blow your informant," Ahmad said. "We're not the intelligence community. We're law enforcement. We have to declare we're there. You have to figure out who you can trust. Eventually, we worked it out, and we got him recorded."

Marshall Miller, the lead prosecutor on the case, was struck by how Ahmad took to the work. "Zainab was really good in Guyana with local law enforcement," he told me. "She made them feel respected. Ninety per cent of prosecutors, that doesn't come naturally to them. They want to get shit done. But the best prosecutors are born diplomats, particularly in this field. You

need to be able to relate to people from all over the world."

Miller's team discovered links between Kadir and Mohsen Rabbani, an Iranian diplomat believed to be the mastermind of the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires. Kadir, they determined, was planning to engage the Iranian military and special forces in his plot. When he tried to fly to Iran, they abruptly halted the investigation and had the plotters arrested. "We had to take it down," Ahmad said. "If this were all happening in the U.S., you could afford to let it go and roll up more people. They didn't have explosives yet. But if he goes to Iran he goes totally dark. He already had the J.F.K. plans. We couldn't let him get away."

At the trial of Kadir and Defreitas, in 2010, Miller assigned Ahmad to make the closing argument. She knew the case thoroughly, and had shown poise and fluency in court. In the summation, she gave a bracing description of the plotters' intent: "Their goal was to destroy the economy of the United States. They knew that accomplishing that goal would take lives, and they didn't care. In their view, the innocent lives lost would be mere collateral damage."

Defreitas had testified that his tape-recorded plans to cause devastation were just empty talk. "Ladies and gentlemen, that is ridiculous," Ahmad said. "It's not like you find your kid brother borrowed your car and crashed it and you yell, 'I'm going to kill you!' Everybody realizes you are not actually going to kill your brother. You're just blowing off steam in the heat of the moment. That is not what we're dealing with here. . . . Russell Defreitas is doing everything he can to make his nightmare a reality." The jury deliberated for five days. Then they convicted Defreitas and Kadir on multiple counts of conspiracy to commit acts of terrorism. Both men were sentenced to life in prison.

There are ninety-three U.S. Attorney's offices. Of these, fewer than half a dozen are in a position to pursue extraterritorial cases. Terrorism is only one area of transnational crime, but it is easily the most high-profile. In recent years, E.D.N.Y. has in some ways overtaken its traditional rival, the Southern District, which is based in Manhattan. "Competition with S.D.N.Y. makes you kind of entrepreneurial," Marshall Miller told me. "We're like the scrappy little brother. Immediately after 9/11, we had, I think, zero terrorism cases. The goal was to change the program. You gotta go out there and make friends with all the agents and legats. S.D.N.Y. was haughty. They let you know they're the best. We tried to be the guy you wanted to go out for a drink with. Friendly." Experienced agents noted the hustle. Tara Bloesch, an F.B.I. special agent, who has completed several tours in Pakistan and is now based in Philadelphia, told me, "If there's a way to legally establish venue, the E.D.N.Y. will do it. Maybe it's just the airport that returning fighters land in—anything."

When the F.B.I. has a promising investigation, it becomes like a client shopping for a lawyer. Which U.S. Attorney's office would be most effective on this case? As Ahmad began travelling in the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, and began winning significant convictions, her stock at the F.B.I. rose. Judge Margo Brodie, of the Eastern District, who was formerly the deputy chief of the Criminal Division at E.D.N.Y., told me, "Agents were bringing their cases to the office, *begging* to have her take them. It never dawned on her that the reason she had so much work was that she's so good."

Bloesch worked closely with Ahmad on a gruelling 2015 trial, providing information about events in Pakistan. "I've never seen anybody work that many hours," she said. "Everybody else kind of falls in line. We worked Saturdays, Sundays." Celia Cohen, one of Ahmad's co-counsels on that case, lives in New Jersey and has two young children, but she moved into Ahmad's apartment in Manhattan for three weeks during the trial. "We hardly slept," Cohen told me. "It was like college. We just discussed the case till we crashed and woke up with new ideas."

Building an extraterritorial terrorism case typically requires permission from foreign governments to conduct investigations in their domains, and then assistance in apprehending suspects and transferring them to American custody. This process can involve a great many sign-offs—delicate, overlapping negotiations prone to being buffeted by political and bureaucratic winds.

When Ahmad revived the case of William Bultemeier's murder, in West Africa, David Bitkower, her supervisor, had doubts. "That region is not a five-star destination at the best of times, and this was not the best of times," he said. "Al Qaeda had just taken over the northern part of Mali. Zainab was bound and determined, though. It was a righteous case." In Niger, she interviewed police officers who had dealt with Cheibani, and the owner of a garage where he had left his truck on the night of the murder. She found another eyewitness, a one-legged beggar called Toto, who was still working outside La Cloche, the restaurant where Bultemeier had eaten his last meal. The original eyewitness, the security guard, had long vanished and was presumed dead. Ahmad found him, too. "He was petrified," she said, but ultimately agreed to testify. For that, Ahmad gave credit to her case agent, John Ross, a former New York City police officer: "Ross has incredible people skills."

Ahmad and Ross went next to Algeria, looking for a woman who had been engaged to a Cheibani associate. Her house in Niger had been searched in the initial investigation. "Maybe we can put Cheibani in Niger," Ahmad said. "That would be huge. Because we've only put him in the truck." The woman and her daughter were a prostitute team, now living in the southern Algerian city of Adrar. "We got a lot of pushback from the Embassy on that trip," Ahmad said. "I felt strongly that we should go, and not ask for the witnesses to come to Algiers. We're the supplicants here." The daughter turned out to be helpful, and Ahmad put her on the list of witnesses to be flown to Brooklyn. "But the interview process was so cumbersome there, so formal. We had to take an Algerian judge with us to her house. The defense attorneys don't have to do that."

But, in the view of Joshua Dratel, a New York attorney who has represented a number of high-profile terrorism defendants, it's the government that actually enjoys an advantage in evidence-gathering. "Foreign governments won't coöperate with us," he said. "Foreign witnesses even won't coöperate with us. They're afraid that we're really U.S. agents, or that they'll get in trouble if they talk to us."

Ahmad, who really is a U.S. agent, says that she also struggles to cultivate foreign witnesses. "We can't just go knock on doors in Niger. Defense attorneys can. I need permission from the Embassy, the State Department, the Niger government. We're a government engaged in sovereign relations with a foreign government, and in deference to them."

Ahmad pursued the Cheibani case because, she said, it seemed both important and feasible. "It's all triage," she said. "It's not like we're going around West Africa trying to charge everybody who supports A.Q.I.M. or Boko Haram. This was the murder of an American diplomat. I remember an official in Niger saying, 'I really hope my country will do what you're doing if something happens to me.'"

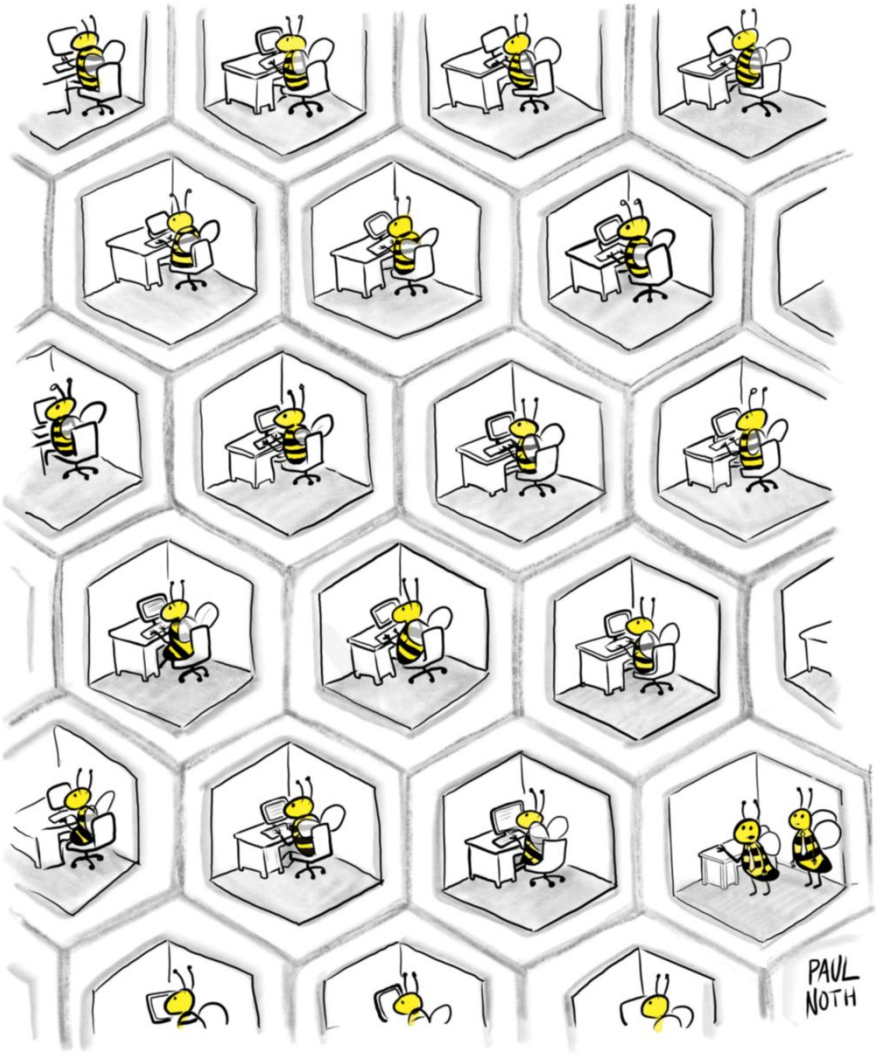
Cheibani's home town of Gau was out of reach; it lay in the part of northern Mali that was being held by Al Qaeda and its affiliates. "The A.Q.I.M. flag was flying over Gau," Ahmad said. But the Gau policemen who had originally arrested Cheibani had fled south, and she found them outside the capital, Bamako. They told her that Cheibani had spoken freely about his crime, and that they had found parts of Bultemeier's vehicle—a bumper, a luggage rack—in a search of his house. She felt ready to charge.

Ahmad arranged for the policemen to come to Brooklyn and appear before a federal grand jury, and in June, 2013, the jury returned a sealed indictment. A few months later, when the French Army reported capturing Cheibani, Ahmad was uncertain that it was really him. The Sahara is a big place. But, she said, "We had his biometrics, from his Bamako arrest. Turned out it *was* him." The French handed Cheibani to the Malians. As Ahmad worked toward an extradition, her diplomatic skills were at full stretch. Cheibani's criminal networks were formidable, and any of the governments involved—France, Mali, and Niger—could have halted the process at any time. Finally, she told me, the Malians said, "Yes, come and get him." Ahmad exhaled, shaking her head. F.B.I. agents retrieved Cheibani. "They Mirandized him on the plane," she said. "I first saw him at his arraignment. He looked much older than his photos, like he'd led a hard life. It was one of the most moving moments I've felt doing this work."

I HAD HEARD FROM several people that Ahmad has a great rapport with juries. When I asked her about it, she seemed embarrassed. We were back at the Cadman Plaza diner—which, I'd learned, Brooklyn prosecutors call the Perp Diner. "I don't know," she said. "Maybe it's because I feel comfortable with them. The mosque I went to as a kid was in Queens, and it drew people from all over Brooklyn, Long Island, the Bronx—cabdrivers, truck drivers, regular working-class people. My parents' friends came from their mosque. When I look at these Brooklyn juries, I see the people I grew up around."

Ahmad lives downtown, in an apartment that looks out on East Fourteenth Street. Her mother, Jamile, visits every summer. She's an elegant woman, who had worked as a computer programmer at an insurance company in midtown for many years. She loves New York, and steps lightly through the swelter of an East Village sidewalk. "In Pakistan, we grow up street-smart," she said. "In America, the children are so naïve. Zainab is naïve. Zainab would be shocked if I ever told a lie. '*What*?' In Pakistan, kids would never be fazed. But I think that's important—to irk your child. So I'm here."

Ahmad was briefly married, to a lawyer from Jordan, but is now divorced. Though she lives alone, and travels constantly, she manages a busy, even glittering social life. "Zainab has a wider range of people she's close to than the rest of us do," a friend of hers, a freelance writer, told me. "She'll throw a party at her place, and it's cops, actors, journalists, filmmakers, doctors,



"Of course, the actual honey is all made overseas."

businesspeople, Pakistani lawyers, academics. She doesn't cook, but there's always a ton of food. She's the sort of person everybody wants to make food *for*. I first met her at a rooftop barbecue in the Village. It was dark, but it was like she was sunny—I can't think of a better word for it. You see that light, and you want to get near it."

After hours, Ahmad likes to sing karaoke at a joint on Avenue A. "She always sings lighthearted, feisty-girl songs," her friend said. "I thought Taylor Swift was just trendy and beneath notice until I heard Zainab sing 'Blank Space' there with her cop friend Ed." On cross-examination, Ahmad admitted that her signature karaoke tune is "Manic Monday," as interpreted by the Bangles. Her youngest brother likes country music, so they belt out Luke Bryan's "That's My Kind of Night" on drives out to see the folks on Long Island. On road trips with her best friend from college, Shally Madan, who lives in California, Madonna, Rihanna, and the "Bend It Like Beckham" soundtrack see heavy rotation.

Ahmad seems barely to share her intensity (or much else) about her work with her nonwork friends. "She's so offhand about it," the freelance writer said. "She doesn't let her work hang over her like a pall. Last year, she had just finished some very tricky case. Then we went out and sang karaoke."

There is, of course, much about her work that Ahmad can't discuss with anyone lacking the relevant security clearance. When I asked her, at the Perp Diner, about how an American prosecutor "coöperates" a jihadist, she drummed her fingers, shook her head, and finally came up empty. "Everybody I've flipped is still under seal."

On certain mornings, when she's in town, her workday starts with a walk across town to Chelsea, where the New York Joint Terrorism Task Force has its headquarters. One floor of the building is a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility, a secure area that blocks surveillance. Ahmad leaves her phone outside. Inside, she can speak freely about cases by teleconference with intelligence operatives, diplomats, and military officers with top-secret clearance all over the world.

In combatting terrorism, Ahmad says, there is no conflict between the military and the civilian criminal-justice system. She works closely with the Pentagon, and defers to the military where it has jurisdiction. In one case, she was pursuing an Iraqi-Canadian charged in the murder of five American soldiers, killed by suicide bombers whom he had helped travel from Tunisia to join Al Qaeda in Iraq. The man was living in Edmonton, and Canada, like most countries, will not consider an extradition request from the U.S. military as long as Guantánamo remains open. To persuade the Canadians, she had to gather evidence in Iraq, which was then unstable enough that Ahmad and an F.B.I. colleague had to take cover from daily rocket attacks. As Ahmad investigated, she was transported in military helicopters. In Mosul, she stayed on a U.S. military base, and soldiers brought witnesses to the perimeter for interviews. "I think military investigators often see us as finishers," she told me. "They may have a lot of evidence on somebody. We've got the machinery, and the credibility, to charge and try that person." After four years, she persuaded Canada to extradite the man.

Some of the indictments that Ahmad has obtained remain sealed, usually because the suspect is still at large, and I suspect—Ahmad says she disagrees—that this can produce conflicts of interest, if, say, the Pentagon and the C.I.A. are trying to kill the same individuals

THE SOUL'S SOUNDTRACK

When they call him Old School
he clears his throat, squares
his shoulders, & looks straight
into their lit eyes, saying,
"I was born by the damn river
& I've been running ever since."
An echo of Sam Cooke hangs
in bruised air, & for a minute

the silence of fate reigns over
day & night, a tilt of the earth
body & soul caught in a sway
going back to reed & goatskin,
back to trade winds locked
inside an "Amazing Grace"
that will never again sound
the same after Charleston,

South Carolina, & yes, words
follow the river through pine
& oak, muscadine & redbud,
& the extinct Lord God bird
found in an inventory of green
shadows longing for the scent
of woe & beatitude, taking root
in the mossy air of some bayou.

Now Old School can't stop
going from a sad yes to gold,
into a season's bloomy creed,
& soon he only hears Martha
& the Vandellas, their dancing
in the streets, through a before
& after. Mississippi John Hurt,
Ma Rainey, Sleepy John Estes,

Son House, Skip James, Joe
Turner, & Sweet Emma,
& he goes till what he feels
wears out his work boots
along the sidewalks, his life
a fist of coins in a coat pocket
to give to the recent homeless
up & down these city blocks.

He knows "We Shall Overcome"
& anthems of the flower children
which came after Sister Rosetta,
Big Mama Thornton, & Bo Diddley.
Now the years add up to a sharp
pain in his left side on Broadway,
but the Five Blind Boys of Alabama
call down an evening mist to soothe.

He believes to harmonize is
to reach, to ascend, to query
ego & hold a note till there's
only a quiver of blue feathers
at dawn, & a voice goes out
to return as a litany of mock
orange & sweat, as we are sewn
into what we came crying out of,

& when Old School declares,
"You can't doo-wop a cappella
& let your tongue touch an evil
while fingering a slothful doubt
beside the Church of Coltrane,"
he has traversed the lion's den
as Eric Dolphy plays a fluted
solo of birds in the pepper trees.

—*Yusef Komunyakaa*

she is trying to haul into court. This seems to have been the case with Mohanad Mahmoud al-Farekh, a Texan who became a high-ranking Al Qaeda leader. The Justice Department wanted to prosecute him, but the Pentagon and the C.I.A. reportedly wanted to put him on a kill list, arguing that he could not be captured. As it turned out, Farekh was captured by Pakistani forces in 2014 and handed over to the U.S., where Ahmad charged him, under seal, the following year. He now awaits trial in Brooklyn.

For Ahmad, the more complex collaboration is with U.S. intelligence agencies. Spies and prosecutors investigating terrorists are often after the same information, but spooks cannot, for obvious reasons, be called as witnesses. "We discovered, as terrorism cases ramped up, that we needed to put in a second informant," Marshall Miller told me. "We had to have one who could testify in court." If Ahmad uses evidence gathered by intelligence agencies in a public trial, she risks revealing sources and classified data. Prosecutors are obliged to ask permission to use this evidence, and, as with extraditions, these are not negotiations that can be conducted by e-mail. "You have to go there, whether it's to Langley or Nigeria, and meet with people, explain what you want, gain their trust," she said.

Any exculpatory evidence must be disclosed to the defense, though attorneys need security clearances to see classified information. "They're usually disappointed," Ahmad said. "They want to know where the real Super Secret Squirrel stuff is. But there is no real Super Secret Squirrel stuff. We wish."

Joshua Dratel, the New York attorney, says that, in counterterrorism cases, the government's control of information gives it another advantage. "By making juries anonymous, we're telling jurors that the defendant is really dangerous," he said. "I've had the government put an anonymous *expert* on the stand. The standard of probable cause for surveillance is diluted in national-security cases. They don't even need a warrant for overseas wiretaps. In the past decade, we see much less classified information, and we have to get a lot of it through the judge, who knows nothing about the case."

"We were a bit desperate before Zainab showed up here," Mark Smith, the head of covert policing for the Greater Manchester Police, said. British intelligence had caught wind of an Al Qaeda operation in 2008. About a dozen men from Pakistan had entered the country on student visas, registered for classes, and immediately quit school. Surveillance showed them to be scouting a range of public venues, eventually concentrating on the Arndale Centre, a large shopping mall in Manchester that, in 1996, was the target of an I.R.A. truck bomb that devastated much of the city's retail district. Abid Naseer, a graduate student from Peshawar, with a B.A. in English literature, began to regularly e-mail an Al Qaeda handler in Pakistan. He wrote that he was planning to get married soon, but in his daily rounds there was no sign of a fiancée, or of marriage preparations. This was a code that the Brits had seen before. The wedding day would be the attack day.

"We devoted all of our counterterrorism resources to this surveillance," Smith, who was then leading the region's terror-investigation force, told me. "We had twenty-five, twenty-six teams trying to watch nine guys. What if one of these guys goes off the radar? The risk was high. When we saw the attack-dates e-mail, we had to strike."

Law enforcement pounced too soon, though. From the intercepted e-mails,

and from quantities of flour and oil found in Naseer's flat—Al Qaeda teaches operatives how to build bombs starting with flour and oil—the authorities inferred that the group had planned to make bombs with chemical detonators and an organic charge, similar to those used by the bombers who struck three Tube trains and a London bus in 2005, killing fifty-two. But no bomb-making chemicals were found, and the British press grew increasingly dubious. The government, hoping to make the whole thing go away (the exchange-student business in Britain is large and lucrative, Smith pointed out), decided to deport the suspects rather than prosecute. The detectives on the case were horrified when they heard the news, at the prosecutor's office. "I couldn't accept it," Smith told me. "They nearly called security to remove us."

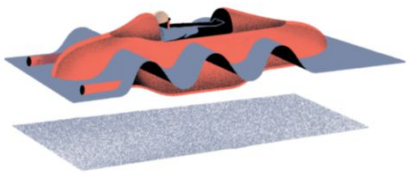
Naseer fought his deportation, arguing that a return to Pakistan would be unacceptably dangerous, and he won the right to stay. But by then the Americans had become interested in his case, particularly after British intelligence alerted the F.B.I. that the e-mail account that Naseer had been reporting to—the Al Qaeda handler in Pakistan, e-mailing as sana_pakhtana@yahoo.com—had started receiving e-mails again, this time from a jihadist in the United States who was asking for bomb-making instructions. "I nearly crashed the car when I heard that," Smith told me. Ahmad said, "It was really bad op sec"—operational security—"on Al Qaeda's part, to use the same Yahoo address. I mean, come on." The U.S. plotters were arrested. Ahmad headed to Manchester.

"When Zainab walked in the room, we said, 'Crikey, she looks awfully young. Is this a junior sent here to fact-find?'" Smith said. "Within a few minutes, though, it was, like, 'Whoa, she knows what she's doing.' There was no comparison with U.K. prosecutors. Zainab stayed four days with us on that first visit, and left us a big list of evidence she wanted, and exactly how she wanted it packaged up."

Ahmad's goal was to demonstrate that Naseer's plot was part of an international conspiracy, allegedly organized by Al Qaeda in Pakistan, to bomb targets in the United Kingdom, Denmark, and the United States. The would-be U.S. bombers were three young men who had been classmates at Flushing High School, in Queens, and then, in 2008, travelled together to Pakistan to join the Taliban. They ended up instead with Al Qaeda, from whom they received military training and, ultimately, orders to return home and carry out suicide bombings. They were of more use to the cause, they were told, using their local knowledge to attack New York City than they were in Muslim lands. After considering Grand Central Terminal, Times Square, and other landmarks, they settled on bombing subway trains at rush hour. By now, the authorities were monitoring their phones, however, and reading their e-mails to Al Qaeda, which used much of the same code that Naseer had used, including an upcoming "wedding."

One of the U.S. plotters, Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan-American, was working as an airport-shuttle driver in Denver. Following instructions that he had e-mailed to himself from Pakistan, he bought hydrogen peroxide and acetone from local beauty-supply outlets, rented a hotel suite in nearby Aurora, and used the kitchen to cook up triacetone triperoxide, a detonator explosive similar to that used in the London attacks. He tested the mixture in the hotel parking lot. It exploded, as he had hoped. Zazi packed the detonator explosives in a rental car and drove to New York.

As he crossed the George Washington Bridge, police stopped him, at the



request of the F.B.I., but they failed to find the jar of explosives in the car. Zazi was spooked. Then his rental car got towed in Queens, with his computer, containing all the bomb-making instructions and incriminating e-mails, inside. Zazi flushed the explosives down a toilet and flew back to Colorado, where he was arrested almost immediately. His accomplices were detained a few months later, and, in 2010, Zazi pleaded guilty to multiple terrorism violations; one accomplice, Zarein Ahmedzay, also pleaded guilty. Zazi and Ahmedzay are still awaiting sentencing, as their coöperation with law enforcement continues to be useful. (The third member of their plot, Adis Medunjanin, a Bosnian-American, pleaded not guilty. He was convicted, in 2012, in Brooklyn federal court, and sentenced to life in prison.)

Abid Naseer fought extradition from the U.K. but lost, arriving in Brooklyn in early 2013. Ahmad, preparing to try him, debriefed Zazi and Ahmedzay at length. They had been in Peshawar in November, 2008, when Naseer was also there. The same Al Qaeda "external-operations" team that tasked Zazi and his friends with a martyrdom operation had commanded Naseer. Ahmad planned to call Zazi and Ahmedzay as witnesses. They could fill in the picture of Al Qaeda's training operation in Pakistan from the inside.

The Naseer trial started in February, 2015. David Bitkower, who was Ahmad's supervisor during the first phase, told me that it was a tough case. "It was largely circumstantial," he said. "There was no smoking gun. It was all in the argument. You can easily lose." But Ahmad had gathered significant new evidence. Computer forensics had deepened the analysis of Internet and phone records. Ahmad tied the plots, furthermore, to Al Qaeda's top leadership, through documents seized in Osama bin Laden's hideout in Abbottabad, Pakistan, which had not been seen publicly before. In a letter to bin Laden, written in early 2009, Saleh al-Somali, Al Qaeda's external-operations chief, reported, "We had sent a number of brothers to Britain, Russia, and Europe on condition that their work will be completed and ready before the end of the year." When Mark Smith, the Manchester detective, heard those words, he said, "We knew immediately they were talking about our guys."

Naseer represented himself, and did a credible job, though Judge Raymond J. Dearie warned him not to waste time arguing to the jury that the United States lacked jurisdiction in his case. By Act of Congress, the U.S. has broad jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute terrorism offenses anywhere in the world. Foreign investigations require

the permission of the national authorities, of course, but in this case Ahmad and her team had received extensive support from the British. She called Manchester police officers and MI5 agents as witnesses, and they gladly appeared, wearing "light disguise"—wigs, fake beards, makeup—because they were still working undercover. Security for the trial was heavy. Naseer was not allowed to rise from the defense table except when summoned by the Judge; Ahmad and her colleagues were bound by the same rule, lest the jury infer that the defendant was considered unusually dangerous by the court.

"He was a soldier," Ahmad said later, of Naseer. "Totally controlled, ice-cold, well trained. He tried to be charming to witnesses, even smiled at the jury."

Naseer, who is powerfully built, had a bushy beard, and eyes that, at least in photographs, did not look capable of effectively supporting a smile. While acting as his own advocate, he spoke about himself in the third person. There was no "I," only "Naseer."

It was a bizarre case, turning largely on the meaning of a handful of e-mails between Naseer and the handler, who was code-named Sohaib. Naseer contended that the e-mails were innocent banter with a stranger whom he had met in an Internet chat room. He was looking for a wife, discussing his prospects. The prosecution contended that the e-mails were in code, and Ahmad subjected them to a probing read. In e-mails, Naseer and Sohaib agreed that a car would be useful for married life; that meant the plan called for a car bomb, Ahmad said. Sixty-one photographs of a chain store called Next and its surroundings had been saved to a draft e-mail file, which was available to his co-conspirators. This, she said, was where the bomb would be detonated. The photos suggested a second strike: panicked shoppers would stampede into the blast paths of backpack bombs set deeper in the Arndale Centre, which sees seventy thousand people on a busy day.

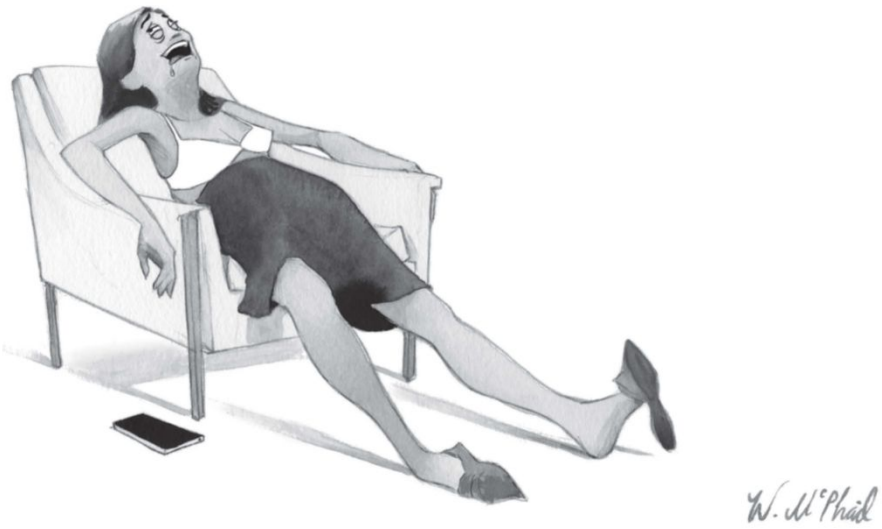
Naseer's e-mails to Sohaib described a meandering courtship. He wrote that he met Huma, the first object of his affections, at a bus stop, and that he found her "very weak and difficult to convince." She worked in a cosmetics shop. According to Ahmad, "Huma" stood for hydrogen peroxide, a bomb ingredient found in beauty products (the cosmetics shop) in a diluted, or weak, form. Extracting it in sufficiently concentrated form is a challenge—it's "difficult to convince." Nadia, another woman of interest, was more like it. "Nadia is crystal clear girl, and it won't take long to relate with her," Naseer wrote to Sohaib. "Nadia" was nitrate, Ahmad explained. Ammonium nitrate, a high-order explosive found in some artificial fertilizers, is a white crystal solid in its pure form. (Timothy McVeigh used a fertilizer bomb to kill a hundred and sixty-eight people and injure more than five hundred in Oklahoma City, in 1995.) The ammonium-nitrate detonator that Naseer settled on could be quickly assembled. "These are stilted descriptions of women, but they're pretty good descriptions of bombs," Ahmad told the jury.

Ahmad teased out the absurdity of Naseer's romances. Huma, he wrote, seemed unwell. She had lost weight. This was two days after she first gave him the cold shoulder at the bus stop. "How much weight can somebody possibly lose in two days?" Ahmad asked. "On top of that, it's December in northern England. Huma is not going to be standing at a bus stop in a bikini where you can count her ribs."

Using a precise breakdown of Naseer's browsing history and phone records, Ahmad showed that, on a trip to Pakistan, ostensibly to visit his sick mother, he contacted two of his co-conspirators in Britain, men whom he claimed he barely knew. He then "went dark" for two weeks, during which, Ahmad suggested, he visited the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the rugged hinterlands along the Afghanistan border where Al Qaeda has its training camps. Ahmad brought Najibullah Zazi to the witness stand to describe for the jury his own training in the camps, where he learned how to handle an AK-47 and how to build bombs. One design—the kind "the guys in London used" in 2005—was wired through the pockets of a specially made shirt. Another, which he preferred, was to be carried in a backpack and wrapped in ball bearings for, as he put it, "the casualty purpose."

Ahmad never mentioned her own familiarity with Pakistan—that her father had gone to university, for instance, in Naseer's home town, Peshawar. But she

HIGH ON CANCELLED PLANS

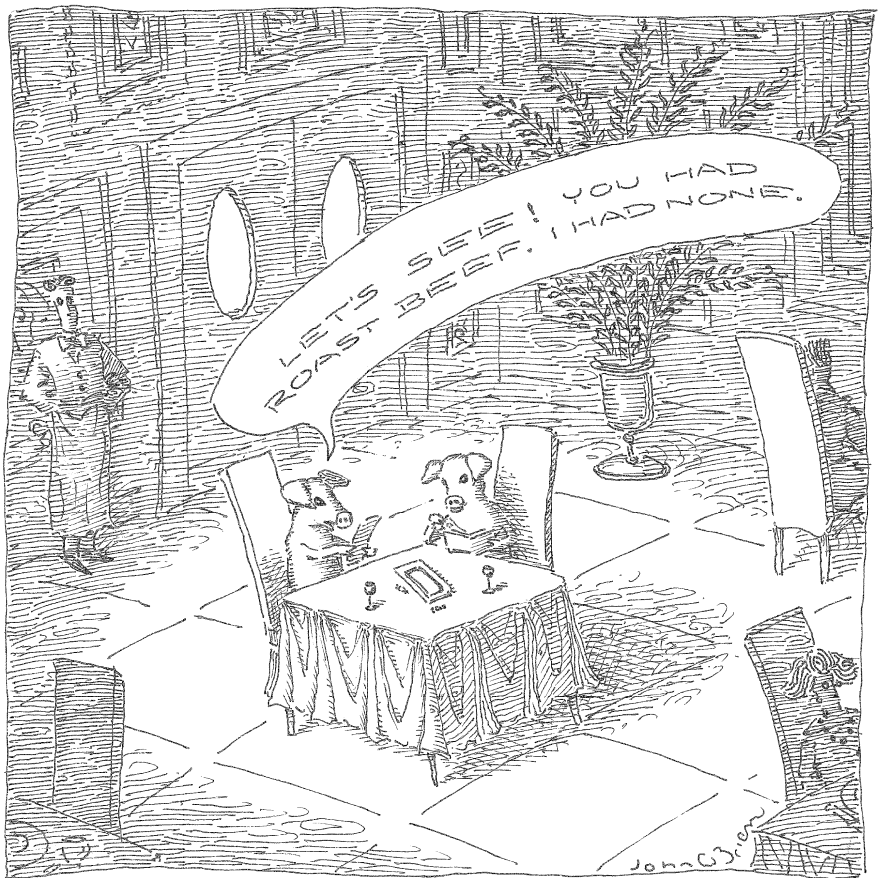


spoke with authority about how Peshawar had been changed by the American invasion of Afghanistan, and of how many Pashtuns—the region's dominant ethnic group, to which Naseer belongs—had felt humiliated by the occupation, inspiring some young men to join Al Qaeda to seek revenge. Mark Smith, the Manchester detective, who watched the trial, said, "Just the way she pronounced the names of the towns in Pakistan, you knew she wasn't guessing."

Naseer returned to England, still on a student visa. He never went to school. Instead, he spent much of his time online, Instant Messaging and visiting Muslim dating sites. But he never e-mailed his Al Qaeda handler from his personal e-mail address, or even from his own computer. For that, he went to an Internet café, where he habitually used the same public computer, and took care to use his operational accounts only to e-mail his handler. "This is Al Qaeda tradecraft," Ahmad said.

Naseer's last e-mail to Sohaib, sent on April 3, 2009, announced that he would soon be married. "I met with Nadia family and we both parties have agreed to conduct the Nikkah after the 15th and before the 20th of this month . . . you should be ready between those dates." A *nikkah* is a wedding ceremony. According to Ahmad's minute-by-minute reconstruction of the day, this e-mail was drafted, loaded on a thumb drive, and carried to the Internet café. At his usual terminal, Naseer began listening, on his phone, to a *nasheed*—a religious or spiritual chant. Ahmad played the *nasheed* for the jury, and then read a translation from the Arabic: "We are marching towards them. With turbans that will become their burial garments. They spilled their blood generously and with love. Looking forward to death in large numbers." Naseer copied the document from the thumb drive into an e-mail and pressed Send. The attack was on, and Al Qaeda knew enough about its timing and location to prepare to take credit.

Naseer claimed that he didn't realize Sohaib was a terrorist. But, while Zazi was on the stand, Ahmad used his testimony to establish that Naseer's pen pal was the same handler, with the same Yahoo address, who had directed the Zazi team's efforts to bomb New York subway trains.



In her closing remarks, Ahmad told the jury that Naseer's demeanor alone during his testimony showed that he knew Sohaib and also knew that Sohaib was Al Qaeda: "Ask yourself, did anything he said or did, did any look that glanced over his face, suggest any shock or horror or surprise at the fact that his random Internet buddy Sohaib, who he thought was just a fun guy to exaggerate his love life to, was actually a member of Al Qaeda? Did anything he said or did suggest that he hadn't known that all along? No, I suggest to you that it did not. He didn't express any shock, any regret, any upsetness, any holy-crapness at the fact that he had just found out in this courtroom that he had been e-mailing Al Qaeda."

Ahmad's summation was three and a half hours long. She remembers looking at her notes only once. James McGovern, who was the chief of the Eastern District's Criminal Division until last year, told me, "It was the summation of a lifetime." Ahmad had called former Al Qaeda operatives; British secret agents; experts in explosives, computer forensics, Arabic, Pashto, and Al Qaeda's structure; the F.B.I. agent who secured the bin Laden documents; even a Norwegian detective who could link, through shared e-mail accounts, the Manchester plot with a plot to bomb a Copenhagen newspaper office. Ahmad's ability to connect with the jury was critical. "You want to project: I am the most reasonable person in the room," McGovern said. "Zainab *excels* at that. Jurors believe that they would see eye to eye with her about things. People want to say, 'That really impressive person, I want to be in agreement with that person.'" Ahmad's proposition about Naseer was simple, in the end: "This man wanted to drive a car bomb into a crowded shopping center and watch people die." After one day of deliberation, the jury agreed. Naseer was convicted on all counts and, in November, 2015, he was sentenced to forty years.

Last spring, Loretta Lynch, as Attorney General, asked Ahmad to come work at Main Justice. Ahmad took a leave from E.D.N.Y. and moved to Washington, where her brief included transnational organized crime and international affairs. She travelled

frequently—not to dusty towns in the Sahara or prisons in Saudi Arabia but to foreign capitals. She briefed senators, represented the Justice Department at the White House, and led a delegation to Trinidad to address the outsized flow of fighters joining ISIS from there. Supervising about seventy prosecutors, she oversaw critical investigative, charging, and litigation decisions.

Soon after Sessions replaced Lynch, he demanded the immediate resignations of all U.S. Attorneys who remained from the Obama years. Since U.S. Attorneys are the only political appointees in their offices, the work of most career prosecutors went on. But Ahmad, watching the transition from up close, saw a wholesale reorientation of Justice Department priorities. Under Sessions, the themes would be immigration enforcement, a revived federal war on drugs, and the abandonment of initiatives to reduce civil-rights abuses in American police departments. Certainly, extraterritorial terrorism prosecutions would be a nonstarter.

Sessions has repeatedly expressed his desire to see accused terrorists dealt with by military commissions rather than "try them in a normal criminal court." President Trump has repeatedly declared his enthusiasm for expanding the military prison at Guantánamo, which has not received a new inmate in nine years and presently holds only forty-one prisoners. "We're gonna load it up with some bad dudes, believe me," Trump told a campaign rally last year. In February, a draft executive order directing the Pentagon to send captured ISIS fighters to Guantánamo was leaked to the *Times.*

It is not yet clear how all these new inmates will be captured. But it is clear that the military commissions at Guantánamo have failed miserably. Since the September 11th attacks, federal criminal courts have convicted more than six hundred people on charges related to international terrorism. The Guantánamo commissions have convicted eight, with three of those convictions vacated or overturned on appeal, and one partially overturned. More prisoners have died in the camp than have been convicted there.

Many successful terrorism prosecutions in recent years, moreover, have followed extraditions that would not have occurred if Guantánamo and its military commissions had remained an option. Abid Naseer and dozens of other convicted terrorists now serving U.S. prison sentences would instead be free—still on the battlefield, as it is said—because our main counterterrorism partners, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands, refuse to provide evidence or to coöperate with extradition requests unless a suspect is to be tried in a criminal court.

But the Trump Administration seems less interested, so far, in parrying threats than in demonizing Muslims, particularly immigrants and refugees. Besides everything else, this is a strategic mistake. As Ahmad says, "America is the most successful country in the world at integrating immigrants, and that helps keep us safe. Immigrant communities in Europe are much more ghettoized, much less warmly accepted. We do have a problem with people trying to join ISIS, but the number of people going from Belgium *dwarfs* the number going from here, even in absolute terms, let alone relative to our populations."

The "threat stream" emanating from Islamist extremism has not abated. Al Qaeda branches continue to wreak havoc in the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, West Africa, and Syria. Boko Haram's depredations ravage much of West Africa, Al Shabaab thrives in the Horn of Africa, and the Taliban is steadily regaining ground in Afghanistan. But, at the moment, none of these movements expend much energy on staging attacks in the West. The Islamic State is another story. Its online appeals to sympathizers in the Dar Al-Kufr—the territory of disbelief—continue to find vulnerable, disturbed individuals prepared to act. "It's so hard to combat, especially with the rise of encrypted communications," Ahmad said. "We can take down networks, but only if there *are* networks."

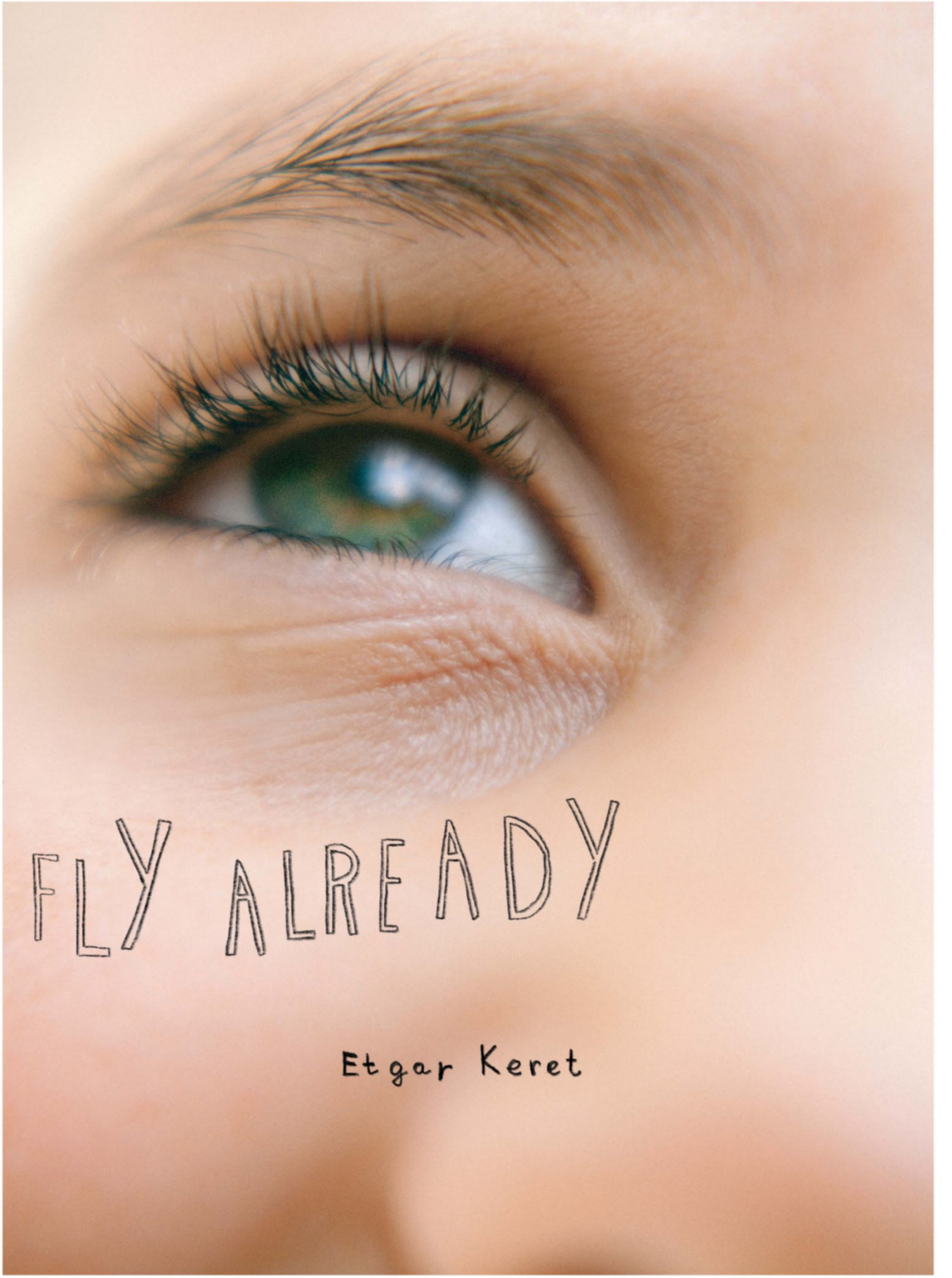
Ahmad returned to E.D.N.Y. in April. She and her colleagues remain deep in debate over what to do with jihadists returning from the battlefields of Syria and Iraq. "When should we prosecute? Material support for ISIS is a crime, but can we make good cases? Can these guys be rehabilitated? How useful is their intel? If they're not in custody, what level of surveillance?"

The success of U.S. federal prosecutors in rolling up terrorist networks is not widely appreciated. The leadership of core Al Qaeda has, by all accounts, been decimated. Drone strikes have been important to that progress, but their success, and the fact that civilian casualties have not been even more extensive, is entirely due to good intelligence, most of it provided by informants. Ahmad thinks that popular culture tends to misunderstand the process, and the limited utility of drone strikes. "'Zero Dark Thirty' got a crucial point wrong," she told me. "It wasn't stopping *torture* that stopped intel. It was stopping *interrogation.* It was going to droning, to killing. You get no intel from corpses."

Currently, Ahmad has two terrorism defendants in custody awaiting trial. One is the Iraqi-Canadian whom the Canadians took four years to transfer to the U.S. The other is Mohanad Mahmoud al-Farekh, the Texan who was captured in Pakistan while a debate raged in Washington over targeting him with a drone strike. (This list does not include, of course, suspects whose indictments are under seal, some of whom may already be in custody and coöperating.) Ahmad told me that she may hand over these two defendants to another prosecutor. She wouldn't do so if they were difficult cases to make—that would be bad form—but the evidence in both is very strong.

A federal prosecutor who has worked with Ahmad, and who declined to be named, acknowledged the risk of extending the protections of the U.S. legal system to accused jihadists. "If you bring a member of Al Qaeda here from Mali or Nigeria and that person is acquitted, they'll probably file an asylum claim or a Convention Against Torture claim, saying Al Qaeda or the government back home is going to hurt them. And, the next thing you know, you're standing next to that person in Starbucks."

Ahmad pondered that image for a long minute. Finally, she said, "I think we're safer even *if* the guy ends up next to you at Starbucks. I'll take that as a cost of doing business when we're putting incredibly dangerous people in jail from more successful cases. Also, if he's done time here and then is released and stays, he'll be under surveillance. But that has not happened. Not once." ♦



FLY ALREADY

Etgar Keret

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTON PERLAKI

P.T. SEES HIM first. We're on our way to the park to play ball when he suddenly says, "Daddy, look!" His head is tilted back and he's squinting hard to see something far above me, and before I can even begin to imagine an alien spaceship or a piano about to fall on our heads my gut tells me that something really bad is happening. But, when I turn to see what P.T. is looking at, all I notice is an ugly, four-story building covered in plaster and dotted with air-conditioners, as if it had some kind of skin disease. The sun is hanging directly above it, blinding me, and as I'm trying to get a better angle I hear P.T. say, "He wants to fly." Now I can see a guy in a white button-down shirt standing on the roof railing looking down at me, and, behind me, P.T. whispers, "Is he a superhero?"

Instead of answering him, I shout at the guy, "Don't do it!"

The guy just stares at me.

I shout again, "Don't do it, please! Whatever took you up there must seem like something you'll never get over, but, believe me, you will! If you jump now, you'll leave this world with that dead-end feeling. That'll be your last memory of life. Not family, not love, only defeat. If you stay, I swear to you by everything I hold dear that your pain will start to fade and, in a few years, the only thing left of it will be a weird story you tell people over a beer. A story about how you once wanted to jump off a roof and some guy standing below shouted at you . . ."

"What?" the guy on the roof yells back at me, pointing at his ear. He probably can't hear me because of the noise coming from the road. Or maybe it isn't the noise, because I heard his "What?" perfectly well. Maybe he's just hard of hearing.

P.T., who's hugging my thighs without being able to completely encircle them, as if I were some kind of giant baobab tree, yells at the guy, "Do you have super powers?"

But the guy points at his ear again, as if he were deaf, and shouts, "I'm sick of it! Enough! How much can I take?"

P.T. shouts back at him, as if they were having the most ordinary conversation in the world, "Come on, fly already!"

And I'm starting to feel that stress, the stress that comes with knowing that it's all on you.

I have it a lot at work. With the family, too. Like what happened back then, on the way to Lake Kinneret, when I tried to brake and the tires locked. The car started to skid along the road and I said to myself, "Either you fix this or it's all over." Driving to the Kinneret, I didn't fix it, and Liat, who was the only one not buckled in, died, and I was left alone with the kids. P.T. was two and barely knew how to speak, but Amit never stopped asking me, "When is Mommy coming back? When is Mommy coming back?"—and I'm talking about *after* the funeral. He was eight then, an age when you're supposed to understand what it means to die, but he kept asking. Even without the constant, annoying questions, I knew that everything was my fault and I wanted to end it all, just like the guy on the roof. But here I am today, walking without crutches, living with Simona, being a good dad.

I want to tell the guy on the roof all this. I want to tell him that I know exactly how he feels and that, if he doesn't flatten himself like a pizza on the sidewalk, it'll pass. I know what I'm talking about, because no one on this blue planet is as miserable as I was. He just has to get down from there and give himself a week. A month. Even a year, if necessary. But how can you say all that to a half-deaf guy who's four stories above you?

Meanwhile, P.T. pulls on my hand and says, "He's not going to fly today, Daddy. Let's go to the park before it gets dark."

But I stay where I am and shout as loudly as I can, "People die like flies all the time, even without killing themselves. Don't do it! Please don't do it!"

The guy on the roof nods—it looks like he heard something this time—and shouts at me, "How did you know? How did you know she died?"

Someone always dies, I want to yell back. Always. If not her, then someone else. But that won't get him down from there, so instead I say, "There's a kid here," and point at P.T. "He doesn't need to see this!"

P.T. yells, "Yes, I do! Yes, I do! Come on and fly already, before it gets dark!" It's December, and it really does get dark early.

If the guy jumps, that'll be on my conscience, too. Irena, the psychologist at the clinic, will give me that after-you-I'm-going-home look of hers and say, "You're not responsible for everyone. You have to get that into your head." And I'll nod, because I know that the session will end in two minutes and she has to pick her daughter up from day care, but it won't change anything, because I'll have to carry that half-deaf guy on my back, along with Liat and Amit's glass eye.

"Wait there for me!" I scream. "I'm coming up to talk to you!"

"I can't go on without her. I can't!" he shouts back.

"Wait a minute," I yell, and I say to P.T., "Come on, sweetie, let's go up to the roof."

P.T. gives an adorable shake of his head, the way he always does right before he sticks the knife in, and says, "If he flies, we can see better from here."

"He won't fly," I say. "Not today. Let's go up there just for a minute. Daddy has to tell the man something."

But P.T. persists, "So yell from here." His arm slips out of my grasp and he throws himself down on the ground, as he likes to do with Simona and me at the mall.

"Let's race to the roof," I say. "If we get there without stopping, P.T. and Daddy get ice cream as a prize."

"Ice cream now!" P.T. wails, rolling around on the sidewalk. "Ice cream now!"

I have no time for this crap. I pick him up. He squirms and screams, but I ignore him and start running toward the door to the building.

"What happened to the kid?" I hear the guy shout from the roof. I don't answer. Maybe his curiosity will keep him from jumping long enough for me to get up to the roof.

P.T. IS HEAVY. It's hard to climb all those stairs when you're holding a five-and-a-half-year-old kid in your arms, especially one who doesn't want to go up the stairs. By the third floor, I'm completely out of breath. A fat redheaded woman who must have heard P.T.'s screams opens her door a crack and asks who I'm looking for, but I ignore her and keep climbing. Even

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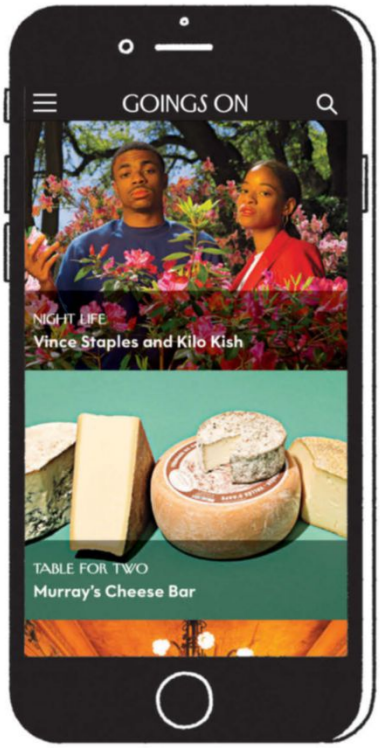

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if I wanted to say something to her, I don't have enough air in my lungs.

"No one lives upstairs," she calls after me. "It's just the roof."

When she says "roof," her shrill voice breaks, and P.T. yells back at her in a tear-filled tone, "Ice cream now! Now!"

I don't have a free hand to push open the peeling door that should lead outside—my arms are full of P.T., who doesn't stop flailing—so I kick it as hard as I can. The roof is empty. The guy who was on the railing a minute ago isn't there anymore. He didn't wait for us. Didn't wait to see why the kid was screaming.

"He flew," P.T. sobs. "He flew and because of you we didn't see anything!"

I start walking toward the railing. Maybe he changed his mind and went back inside, I try to tell myself. But I don't believe it. I know he's down there, his body sprawled at an unnatural angle on the sidewalk. I know it, and I have a kid in my arms who absolutely should not see that, because it would traumatize him for the rest of his life, and he's already been through enough. But my legs take me toward the edge of the roof. It's like scratching a wound, like ordering another shot of Chivas when you know you've had too much to drink, like driving a car when you know you're tired, so tired.

Now that we're almost at the railing, we start to feel the height. P.T. stops crying, and I can hear both of us panting and an ambulance siren in the distance. It seems to be asking me, "Why? Why do you need to see it? You think it'll change anything? Make anyone feel better?"

Suddenly, the redhead's high-pitched voice commands me from behind: "Put him down!" I turn around, not really understanding what she wants.

"Put me down!" P.T. shouts, too. It always gets him going when a stranger butts in.

"He's just a kid," the redhead is saying, but her voice is suddenly soft. She's on the verge of tears. The sound of the siren is getting closer, and the redhead starts walking toward me. "I know you're suffering," she says. "I know that everything is so hard. I know, believe me." There's so much pain in her voice that even P.T. stops flailing and stares at her, mesmerized. "Look at me," she whispers. "Fat, alone. I had a child once, too. You know what it is to lose a child? Do you have any idea what you're about to do?" Still in my arms, P.T. hugs me tight. "Look at what a sweet child he is," she says, already beside us, her thick hand stroking P.T.'s hair.

"There was a man here," P.T. says, fixing his huge green eyes—Liat's eyes—on her. "There was a man here, but now he flew away. And, because of Daddy, we didn't get to see him."

The siren stops right below us and I take another step toward the railing, but the redhead's sweaty hand grabs my arm. "Don't do it," she says. "Please, don't do it."

P.T. HAS A scoop of vanilla in a plastic cup. I order pistachio and chocolate chip in a cone. The redhead asks for a chocolate milkshake. All the tables in the ice-cream parlor are filthy, so I clean one for us. P.T. insists on tasting the milkshake and she lets him. She's called Liat, too. It's a common name. She doesn't know about my Liat, about the accident. She doesn't know anything about us. And I don't know anything about her. Except that she lost a kid.

When we left the building, medics were putting the guy's body into the ambulance. Luckily, it was covered with a white sheet. One less image of a corpse in my mind.

The ice cream is too sweet for me, but P.T. and the redhead look happy. With his cup in one hand, he reaches out for her milkshake with the other. I don't know why he always does that. After all, he's still eating his own ice cream—why does he need more? I open my mouth to say something to him, but the redhead signals that it's O.K. and gives him her almost empty cup. Her child is dead, my wife is dead, the guy on the roof is dead.

"He's so cute," she whispers, as P.T. strains to suck up the last drop of milkshake in the paper cup. He really is cute. ♦

(Translated, from the Hebrew, by Sondra Silverston.)

NEWYORKER.COM
Etgar Keret on the necessity of humor in the face of tragedy.

A CRITIC AT LARGE

WE COULD ALL HAVE BEEN CANADIANS

Rethinking the American Revolution.

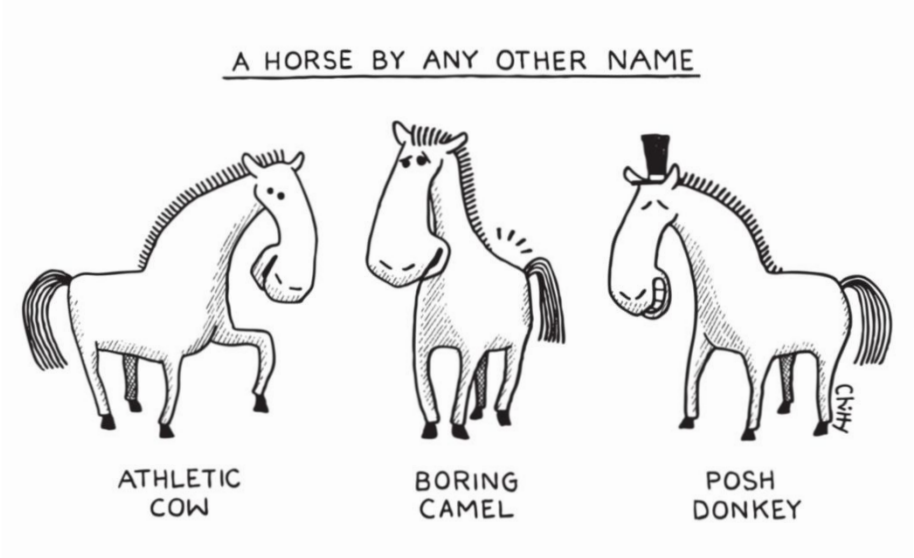
BY ADAM GOPNIK

And what if it was a mistake from the start? The Declaration of Independence, the American Revolution, the creation of the United States of America—what if all this was a terrible idea, and what if the injustices and madness of American life since then have occurred not in spite of the virtues of the Founding Fathers but because of them? The Revolution, this argument might run, was a needless and brutal bit of slaveholders' panic mixed with Enlightenment argle-bargle, producing a country that was always marked for violence and disruption and demagogy. Look north to Canada, or south to Australia, and you will see different possibilities of peaceful evolution away from Britain, toward sane and whole, more equitable and less sanguinary countries. No revolution, and slavery might have ended, as it did elsewhere in the British Empire, more peacefully and sooner. No "peculiar institution," no hideous Civil War and appalling aftermath. Instead, an orderly development of the interior—less violent, and less inclined to celebrate the desperado over the peaceful peasant. We could have ended with a social-democratic commonwealth that stretched from north to south, a near-continent-wide Canada.

The thought is taboo, the Revolution being still sacred in its self-directed propaganda. One can grasp the scale and strangeness of this sanctity only by leaving America for a country with a different attitude toward its past and its founding. As it happened, my own childhood was neatly divided between what I learned to call "the States" and Canada. In my Philadelphia grade school, we paraded with flags, singing

The Revolution is the last bulwark of national myth, but in sanctifying it we forget that it was more horrific than heroic.

ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN STAUFFER



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"The Marines' Hymn" and "Here Comes the Flag!" ("Fathers shall bless it / Children caress it / All shall maintain it / No one shall stain it.") We were taught that the brave Americans hid behind trees to fight the redcoats—though why this made them brave was left unexplained. In Canada, ninth grade disclosed a history of uneasy compromise duality, and the constant search for temporary nonviolent solutions to intractable divides. The world wars, in which Canadians had played a large part, passed by mostly in solemn sadness. (That the Canadians had marched beyond their beach on D Day with aplomb while the Americans struggled on Omaha was never boasted about.) Patriotic pageantry arose only from actual accomplishments: when Team Canada won its eight-game series against the Russians, in 1972, the entire nation sang "O Canada"—but they sang it as a hockey anthem as much as a nationalist hymn.

Over the years, we have seen how hard it is to detach Americans from even the obviously fallacious parts of that elementary-school saga—the absurd rendering of Reconstruction, with its Northern carpetbaggers and local scalawags descending on a defenseless South, was still taught in the sixties. It was only in recent decades that schools cautiously began to relay the truth of the eighteen-seventies—of gradual and shameful Northern acquiescence in the terrorist imposition of apartheid on a post-slavery population.

The Revolution remains the last bulwark of national myth. Academics write on the growth of the Founding Father biographical genre in our time; the rule for any new writer should be that if you want a Pulitzer and a best-seller you must find a Founding Father and fetishize him. While no longer reverential, these accounts are always heroic in the core sense of showing us men, and now, occasionally, women, who transcend their flaws with spirit (though these flaws may include little things like holding other human beings as property, dividing their families, and selling off their children). The phenomenon of "Hamilton," the hip-hop musical that is, contrary to one's expectations, wholly faithful to a heroic view of American independence, reinforces the sanctity of the American Revolution in American life.

Academic histories of the Revolution, though, have been peeping over the parapets, joining scholarly scruples to contemporary polemic. One new take insists that we misunderstand the Revolution if we make what was an intramural and fratricidal battle of ideas in the English-speaking Empire look like a modern colonial rebellion. Another insists that the Revolution was a piece of great-power politics, fought in unimaginably brutal terms, and no more connected to ideas or principles than any other piece of great-power politics: America was essentially a Third World country that became the battlefield for two First World powers. Stirred into the larger pot of recent revisionism, these arguments leave us with a big question: was it really worth it, and are we better off for its having happened? In plain American, is Donald Trump a bug or a feature of the American heritage?

Justin du Rivage's "Revolution Against Empire" (Yale) re-situates the Revolution not as a colonial rebellion against the mother country but as one episode in a much larger political quarrel that swept the British Empire in the second half of the eighteenth century. Basically, du Rivage thinks that the American Revolution wasn't American. The quarrels that took place in New York and Philadelphia went on with equal ferocity, and on much the same terms, in India and England, and though they got settled by force of arms and minds differently in each place, it was the same struggle everywhere. "Radicalism flourished in Boston, Bristol, and Bengal, while fears of disorder and licentiousness provoked rural elites in both the Hudson Valley and the English shires," du Rivage writes. "As radical Whigs gained strength in North America, the political culture of the British Empire became increasingly Janus-faced."

On one side were what he calls "authoritarian reformers"; on the other, those radical Whigs. (Both were seeking to sway or supplant the "establishment Whigs.") This isn't the familiarly rendered divide between Tories and Whigs; the authoritarian reformers were less fusty country squires attached to old English institutions than an élite executive class of intellectuals and aristocrats committed to the Empire and to the reform of institutions that were seen as preventing the Empire from being maximally efficient. It was a group of men who, in spirit and psychology, were not entirely unlike the "reformers" in Communist China, open to change for the purpose of reinforcing their own power in an intact hierarchy. The authoritarian reformers were "not a political party per se," du Rivage writes. "They were, rather, an ideological vanguard, a loosely organized group of politicians, publicists,

and theorists." (Significantly, no famous names cling to the group; career politicians and businessmen like William Murray, Matthew Decker, and Viscount Bolingbroke were their mostly interchangeable leaders.) They wanted a strong monarch surrounded by a circle of aristocratic advisers; very limited democracy; reform in the Army and Navy; and a tax-heavy system of mercantile trade—all of it intended to make the Empire as profitable as it needed to be.

Extended taxation within the Empire was central to their agenda. They sincerely believed in "taxation without representation," because they saw citizenship not in terms of sovereignty and equality but in terms of tribute received and protection offered. Pay up, and the British Navy will keep the Frenchmen, pirates, and aboriginals away. Samuel Johnson, who was hired by the authoritarian reformers to write the 1775 pamphlet "Taxation No Tyranny," captured the argument best: the men who settled America had chosen to leave a place where they had the vote but little property in order to live in a place where they had no vote but much property. With lucid authoritarian logic, Johnson explained that even though the American citizen might not have a vote on how he was taxed, "he still is governed by his own consent; because he has consented to throw his atom of interest into the general mass of the community."

The radical Whigs, though they, too, were implanted within establishment circles—grouped around William Pitt and the pro-American Marquess of Rockingham, with the devilish John Wilkes representing their most radical popular presence—were sympathetic to Enlightenment ideas, out of both principle and self-protection, as analgesics to mollify "the mob." They represented, albeit episodically, the first stirrings of a party of the merchant class. They thought that colonists should be seen as potential consumers. Alexander Hamilton, back in New York, was a model radical Whig—trusting in bank credit and national debt as a prod toward prosperity, while the authoritarian reformers were convinced, as their successors are to this day, that debt was toxic (in part because they feared that it created chaos; in part because easy credit undermined hierarchy).

The radical Whigs were for democratization, the authoritarian reformers firmly against it. The radical Whigs were for responsible authority, the authoritarian reformers for firm authority. And so on. This quarrel, du Rivage argues, swept across the Empire and, as much as it divided colony from home country, it united proponents of either view transnationally. Those we think of as "loyalists" in the American context were simply authoritarian reformers who lost their war; those we think of as "patriots" were simply radical Whigs who won.

Some of the force of du Rivage's account of the Revolution lies in his dogged insistence that the great political quarrel of the time really was a quarrel of principles. His book, he tells us in the introduction, is ultimately about "how ideas and politics shape social and economic experience." This is a more radically Whiggish proposition than it sounds. For a long time, under the influence of the formidable Lewis Namier, the historian of Britain's eighteenth-century Parliament, the pervasive ideas in the political life of the period were held to depend on clans and clan relations, not systems of thought. Even Edmund Burke, we were told, was no more drawn to Rockingham by ideology than Tom Hagen was drawn to the Corleone family because he shared Vito's views on urban governance.

Though there is obviously truth in this approach, then and now, du Rivage deprecates it as much as it has ever been deprecated. (His evidence for the power and specificity of this battle of ideas includes a number of political cartoons, drawn by the participants: it is astonishing how often the political figures of the time, from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Revere, communicated in comic images.) Throughout, he makes a convincing case for the view that people quarrelled not about clans but about concepts. In fact, participants in the quarrels could cross clan lines: the radical Pitt's brother-in-law, George Grenville, himself a Prime Minister, was the leader of the authoritarian reformers in Parliament.

This account cuts against the American specificity of the Revolution—the sense that it was a rebellion against a king and a distant country. No one at the time, du Rivage suggests, saw what was happening as pitting a distinct "American" nation against an alien British one. Participants largely saw the conflict in terms of two parties fighting for dominance in the English-speaking world. The scandalous high-water mark of du Rivage's iconography occurs in January of 1775, when Pitt (now ennobled as the Earl of Chatham) brought Franklin, then living in London, into the House of Lords to witness his speech on behalf of the American radicals, in effect sealing the unity of the single party across the ocean. This scene—though nowhere captured in the familiar imagery of Franklin flying his kite and inventing bifocals—was, in its day, as significant as that of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The transnational nature of the Revolution, du Rivage shows, has been blanked out. The promise of transatlantic unity in a move toward modernity was very real. Had the radical Whigs secured their power in Britain, our Revolution might well have taken on a look and feel far more like those of the later Canadian and Australian dissolutions from the Brits: a political break toward "home rule" but without any of the elaborate paraphernalia of patriotism attached to it. We would probably still have had some piece of the British flag upon our own, and Betsy Ross would have sewn in vain.

Du Rivage's book began as a Yale Ph.D. thesis, and has not lost all traces of its origins. He has the passion for his labels that any inventor has for his own mousetraps: scarcely a page in his book goes by without at least one of the terms "radical Whigs" and "authoritarian reformers" appearing on it. He

is so taken with his explanatory scheme that he asserts it even when the lines between the camps were a little blurrier than the neat Ping-Pong division suggests. Although his sympathies are with the radical Whigs, he sees that many of the authoritarians' claims were not false. As Alan Taylor made clear last year in his mind-opening "American Revolutions" (Norton), the victory of the rebels immediately led to the loss of the protection of the British Navy, leaving American merchant ships defenseless against the pirates of the Barbary Coast, a situation that produced a lot of imprisoned American sailors and, eventually, the Marines hitting the shores of Tripoli, inspiring the song we sang in that second-grade class in Philadelphia. The imperial protection racket really did protect; its withdrawal meant that we had to put together an enforcement squad of our own, which we did, and are still paying for.

Holger Hoock, in his new book, "Scars of Independence" (Crown), has a somewhat simpler point to make. The Revolution, he shows, was far more brutal than our usual memory of it allows. (Mel Gibson's Revolutionary War movie, "The Patriot," made this point, as his "The Passion of the Christ" did of Roman crucifixion; say what you will about his politics, Gibson is good at reminding us of the core violence in our favorite myths. Crosses and muskets really *are* lethal weapons.) Page after page, the reader blanches while reading of massacres and counter-massacres, of floggings and rapes, of socket bayonets plunged into pitiful patriots and of competitive hangings and murders. The effect is made all the more hallucinatory by the fact that these horrors took place not in Poland or Algeria but in what are now, in effect, rest stops along I-95, in Connecticut and New Jersey, in a time we still think of as all three-cornered hats and the clip-clop of Hollywood equipages on cobblestoned streets.

Hoock is almost too delighted with his discoveries; like the fat boy in "Pickwick," he wants to make your flesh creep. Certainly, no reader will ever be able to imagine the Revolution again as the pop-gun pageantry that those Philadelphia school talks instilled in us kids. He details tortures inflicted on both sides—the phrase "tarred and feathered" persists as something vaguely folkloric but is revealed as unimaginably cruel. The prison ships in which captured soldiers were placed were themselves sites of horror: thousands of American captives were left to languish, starve, and often die, in British sloops kept just offshore. The reader grimaces at Hoock's description of a British bayonet massacre, a kind of mini My Lai, of helpless patriots in rural New Jersey:

> The British started to bayonet their defenseless victims, crushing bones and leaving gashing wounds in the men's stomachs, chests, backs, and limbs. Withdrawing the blade, as much as plunging it in, tore muscles, arteries, and organs. When the British moved out, Julian King had sixteen wounds, including eleven in his breast, side, and belly; George Willis had sustained between nine and twelve wounds, some in his back. At first, it seemed that Thomas Talley would escape this wave of the bloody assault; he was taken prisoner. British soldiers had moved him outside and stripped him of his breeches, when his captors received orders to kill him, too. They took Talley inside the barn and lethally jabbed him half a dozen times.

A seventeen-year-old British soldier, arriving on the scene, recalled that "the shrieks and screams of the hapless victims whom our savage fellow soldiers were butchering, were sufficient to have melted into compassion the heart of a Turk or a Tartar"—as pointed a comparison in lethal indifference to human suffering as an eighteenth-century British mind could make.

The narrow lesson here is that war is war, and that the moment the dogs of war are unleashed—anywhere, for any purpose—atrocity follows. In an epilogue, Hoock makes the wise point that, given what wars of national liberation are actually like, Americans should perhaps be disabused of our enthusiasm for nation-building and democracy exportation. Yet what specific point about our political legacy does Hoock want to make? Even just wars are appalling; knowing how high the casualty rate was on Omaha Beach and in the Normandy campaign after D Day does not reduce our sense that the Second World War was a necessary conflict. The horrors of the Civil War were still more horrific than those of the Revolution, and yet few are sorry that it was fought; in any case, that war has never been subject to the same amnesia, in part because, given the presence of photography and wire-service telegraphy, it was hard to hide those horrors in neat packets of patriotism.

Hoock's book does raise another, unexpected question: why is it that, until now, the Civil War cast such a long, bitter shadow, while the Revolution was mostly reimagined as a tale of glory? One reason, too easily overlooked, is that, while many of those who made the Civil War were killed during it, including the Union Commander-in-Chief, *none* of the makers of the Revolution died fighting in it. The Founding Fathers had rolled the dice and put their heads on the line, but theirs was the experience of eluding the bullet, and, as Churchill said, there is nothing so exhilarating as being shot at without result. Of how many revolutions can it be said that nearly all its makers died in their beds? In the American Revolution, the people who suffered most were not the people who benefitted most, and the lucky ones wrote most of the story. Like everything in history, amnesia has its own causality.

Du Rivage's and Hoock's accounts are mostly about white guys quarrelling with other white guys, and then about white guys being unimaginably cruel to one another, stopping only to rape their enemy's wives and daughters. What of the rest? Here again, both new histories illuminate the role of the African-American slave population, and of the fight of the indigenous population to find room for its own existence. As Taylor showed, what we called the "Indian" population—in Canada, the preferred name now is First Nations—struggled to find space, and land, between the Americans and the Canadians, and mostly lost (though they lost on the British side of the border with less violence than on this side, the British being less hungrily murderous than the Americans).

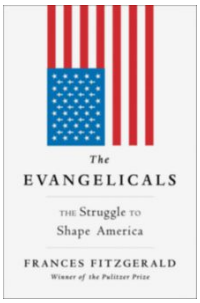
The experience of the African abductees in the war was more tragic. Thousands of slaves ran to the British

lines, with the encouragement of the British Army, and though the Brits mainly valued the slaves as an irritant to their masters, they did give them shelter and, sometimes, arms. At Yorktown, thousands of escaped slaves recruited as soldiers fought within the British lines; when the Americans compelled the British to surrender, many of the slaves were returned to their miserable bondage—including slaves owned by Washington and Jefferson. "Jefferson retrieved five or six of his slaves; Washington recovered two young black women but not a dozen other slaves who managed to slip away," Hoock recounts.

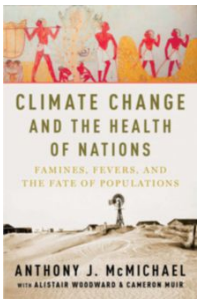
Had the British won, we might now be taught about a fight between brave British emancipators and indigenous slaveholders, with the black slaves who defected to the British-loyalist side seen as self-emancipators, as the blacks who defected to the Union Army are now, and with Washington's and Jefferson's rhetoric of liberty shown the same disdain we have for the not-very-different libertarian and individualist rhetoric of their heirs in the Confederacy. We would perhaps wonder, far more than we are now allowed to, how radical Whigs like Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Paine ever allowed themselves to betray their own Enlightenment principles by making the tragic error of entering into a compact with slaveholders.

That historical account would be as self-serving and tendentious, in its own way, as our current glorious one. Against the skeptical view of the achievement of the American Revolution, one can easily posit a view more radical than even the ideology of radical Whigs quite suggests. Three decades ago, Gordon Wood, in "The Radicalism of the American Revolution," asked us to see the Revolution in the broadest historical scale, and to realize that, whatever its failings and brutalities and hypocrisies, it represented a decisive break with doctrines of inherited power and monarchical rule, and a move toward democracy that had scarcely been so dramatically accomplished since very ancient times. Jonathan Israel's forthcoming book "The Expanding Blaze" promises to make a similar case: that the revolution was the

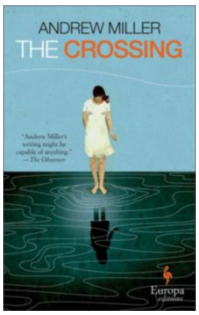
BRIEFLY NOTED



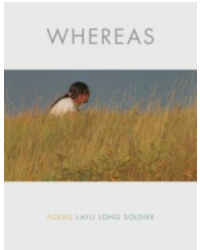
The Evangelicals, *by Frances FitzGerald (Simon & Schuster)*. This incisive history of white evangelical movements in America argues that their influence has been more pervasive and diverse than generally realized. Contending that media coverage typically focusses on TV preachers and a loyal born-again constituency dictating its socially conservative agenda to Republican politicians, FitzGerald shows that debate within evangelical denominations over slavery was part of the national schism that led to the Civil War, and that the counterculture movements of the nineteen-sixties echoed the populist, anti-intellectual tenor of evangelist discourse. The book concludes in the present, with eighty-one per cent of Evangelicals having voted for Donald Trump, despite his many unchristian qualities.



Climate Change and the Health of Nations, *by Anthony J. McMichael (Oxford)*. Examining the ways in which climate change has long disrupted human societies, this sober, forceful history anticipates the potential cataclysms to come, in a world that, because of man-made emissions, is warming at an unprecedented rate. Examples ranging from the time of early man to that of the Romans, the Mayans, and the Anasazi demonstrate that even minor fluctuations in temperature have resulted in "food shortages, famines, infectious disease outbreaks, weather disasters, and conflicts over resources that foment social disorder and topple regimes." McMichael laments that, although our society is the first to have the tools with which to fashion a response, it lacks the will to do so.



The Crossing, *by Andrew Miller (Europa)*. Set in England, this family drama opens out into an adventure story with existential overtones. Tim and Maud fall in love at a university boat club, marry, and have a daughter. But they are pulled apart, first by Tim's upper-crust family, who disapprove of Maud's upbringing and individualism, and then by a family tragedy. Maud, awakened to her fascination with the uncharted, makes for the open sea, and her hazardous solo voyage on the Atlantic is the book's centerpiece, evoked by Miller with rich and detailed specificity. Maud emerges as a memorable figure, a misunderstood woman who has yet to discover her own brilliance and tenacity.



Whereas, *by Layli Long Soldier (Graywolf)*. These poems, by a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation, juxtapose tribal and personal history to address the U.S. government's violence against Native Americans—including the execution, in 1862, of thirty-eight Dakota men, who revolted as starvation ravaged their people. Using elliptical prose, blank spaces, crossed-out text, and Lakota words, Long Soldier articulates both her identity and her literary undertaking: "In this dual citizenship, I must work, I must eat, I must art." A central sequence repeats the "Whereas" of congressional documents to critique the Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans. Passed in 2009, it was never publicly read and was unobtrusively "folded into a larger, unrelated piece of legislation called the 2010 Defense Appropriations Act."

great radical act of its day, responsible, directly and indirectly, for the onset of the modern age. Abolitionism rose from the promise of the Revolution more than the Revolution sustained slavery.

Indeed, that abolitionism burned brighter in Britain than in the independent States, as historians have argued, had at least something to do with America's triumph: Britain could demonstrate that it was better, more honorable, than its former colonies at a time when such a demonstration was urgently sought. Then, too, the separation of the Southern plantation owners from the West Indian ones weakened a formidable lobbying force within the Empire. Still, if history is not always written by the winners, it shapes itself to the slope of events: had the episode arrived at a different outcome, as it easily might have, the American rebellion could well have come to be seen as the French Revolution often is, if on a far smaller scale—a folly of Enlightenment utopianism unleashing senseless violence.

In confrontations between empire and rebels, though, our hearts are always with the rebels. We take it for granted that rebels are good and empires bad; our favorite mass entertainment depends entirely on the felt familiarity of this simple division. But there is a case to be made that empires can be something other than evil. People mocked the beginning of the "Star Wars" cycle, turning as it did on a trade dispute, but trade disputes are real, and begin wars, and whom would you really rather have running the government when a trade treaty has to be negotiated on a galactic scale: Senator Palpatine or Han Solo?

The authoritarian reformers—the empire, in other words—have something to be said for them; and what is to be said for them is, well, Canada. Our northern neighbor's relative lack of violence, its peaceful continuity, its ability to allow double and triple identities and to build a country successfully out of two languages and radically different national pasts: all these Canadian virtues are, counterintuitively, far more the legacy of those eighteenth-century authoritarian reformers than of the radical Whigs. This is literally the case; the United Empire Loyalists, as they were called, the "Tories" who fled from the States, did much to make Canada. More than that, Canada is the model liberal country because it did not have an American-style revolution, accepting instead the reformers' values of a strong centralized, if symbolic, monarchy (the Queen is still there, aging, on the Canadian twenty-dollar bill); a largely faceless political class; a cautiously parliamentary tradition; a professionalized and noncharismatic military; a governing élite—an establishment.

The Canadian experience was not free of sin—as the indefensible treatment of the First Nations demonstrates—and was, as well, not free of the "colonial cringe" that bedevils so many countries overattached to the motherland. (London and Paris, in this view, meant too much for too long to too many ambitious Canadians.) Still, there is something to be said, however small, for government by an efficient elected élite devoted to compromise. The logic of Whig radicalism, in whatever form it takes, always allows charismatic figures undue play; there's a reason that the big Whigs remain known today while the authoritarian reformers mostly sink into specialists' memories of committees and cabinets.

The first modern charismatic politician, John Wilkes, was among the greatest Whig heroes of the American radicals. Nor is it entirely accidental that he would give his name to the charismatic actor who killed Lincoln. The red thread of theatrical violence, violence as show and spectacle and self-definition, links the violence of our revolution with the violence implicit in all cults of great men. Those who say "Thus always to tyrants!" can say it only when they shoot somebody. A government based on enthusiasm, rather than on executive expertise, needs many things to be enthusiastic about. Whig radicalism produces charismatic politics—popular politics in a positive sense, and then in a negative one, too. This is the Achilles' heel of radical Whiggism, and we know that it is its Achilles' heel because one day it produces an Achilles, and the next a heel.

If there's a brighter light unifying Britain and America at the time of the Revolution, perhaps it lies neither with the frightened authoritarians nor with the too easily inflamed radicals but with the new doctrines of compassion that could run between them. Hoock tells the story of Captain Asgill, who, as late as 1782, was sentenced by Washington to be hanged in retaliation for an unpunished loyalist atrocity. (A group of British prisoners were forced to draw lots—or, rather, had lots drawn for them by a small American boy—and poor Asgill was the loser.)

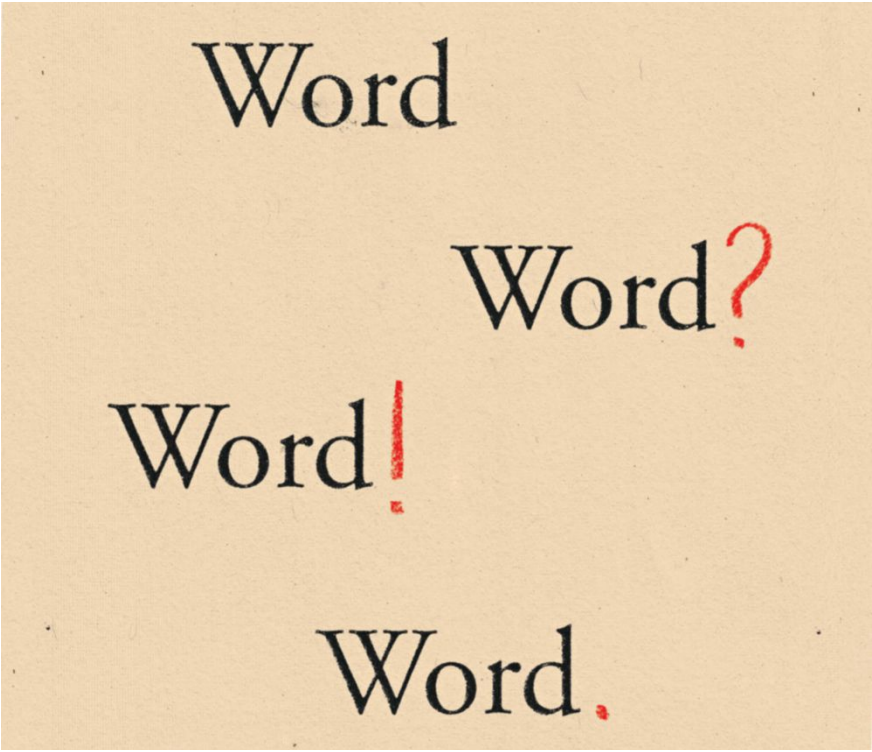
His mother, back home in London, wrote to the Count of Vergennes, the foreign minister of France, America's ally and Britain's adversary: "My son (an only Son) and dear as he is brave, amiable as deserving to be so . . . is now confined in America, an object of retaliation! Shall an innocent suffer for the guilty? Represent to yourself, Sir, the situation of a family under these circumstances; surrounded as I am by Objects of distress; distracted with fear & grief; no words can express my feelings or paint the scene." Hoock sneers a little at the letter (as "drenched in the language of sentimentalism"). But it worked. Vergennes forwarded it to Washington, and it became a cause célèbre in the new nation, exactly because of its call to a reciprocal humanity of suffering. "What must be the feelings of the many hundreds of . . . tender American mothers"—reading that letter—"whose sons in the early bloom of youth have perished in that sink of misery, the prison ship at New York?" one gazette writer wondered. Eventually, the affair produced a five-act play by Jean-Louis Le Barbier, dramatizing Washington torn between mercy and justice, and Hoock tells us that, although Washington couldn't read French, "the retired general and lifelong theater enthusiast thanked the author personally for his dramatic efforts." Nations could escape the mutual cycle of massacre and reprisal through the new "sentimental" cult of sympathy. This third late-eighteenth-century ideology, still with us sporadically, seems saner than either authoritarian beliefs (however reforming) or Whiggish ones (however radical). "The Patriot" is an instructive movie; "Saving Captain Asgill" might be an inspiring one. ♦

BOOKS

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND

John McWhorter makes his case for Black English.

BY VINSON CUNNINGHAM



Black English, McWhorter argues, has become an American lingua franca.

One of my favorite sounds in the world is the voice of the late comedian Bernie Mac. I often think of an early performance of his, on the nineties standup showcase "Def Comedy Jam." The routine, slightly less than six minutes long, is songlike in structure—after each cluster of two or three jokes, Mac yells "Kick it!" and a snippet of cheesy, drum-heavy hip-hop plays. Between these punctuations, he affects poses that would fit as comfortably within a twelve-bar blues as they do on the dimly lit Def Jam stage: sexual bravado, profane delight, sly self-deprecation, dismay and gathering confusion at a rapidly changing world. "I ain't come here for no foolishness," he says toward the beginning of the set, his double negative signalling playfulness and threat in equal measure. "You don't understand," he says again and again, sometimes stretching "understand" into four or five syllables. Then, with swift, hilarious anger, like Jackie Gleason's: "I ain't scared of you motherfuckers." The "r" in "scared" is barely audible, and the subsequent profanity is a fluid, tossed-off "muhfuckas."

Bernie Mac is, in other words—and this is the source of my love—an expert speaker of Black English, which is the subject of the recent book "Talking Back, Talking Black" (Bellevue), by the linguist, writer, and Columbia professor John McWhorter. In the book, McWhorter offers an explanation, a defense, and, most heartening, a celebration of the dialect that has become, he argues, an American lingua franca.

McWhorter's début as a public intellectual came twenty years ago, when a fracas erupted over a proposal to use Black English—then often called Ebonics—as a teaching tool in public schools in Oakland, California. The idea was roundly ridiculed. Ebonics, people said, was simply a collection of "slang and bad grammar"—not nearly enough to make a language. The TV talking head Tucker Carlson, in a typically nasty flourish, called Black English "a language where nobody knows how to conjugate the verbs," McWhorter recalls. The pungent reaction baffled linguists, who had long appreciated—and begun to seriously study—the "languageness" of Black English and other informal speech variants, such as Jamaican Patois, Swiss German, and Haitian Creole. McWhorter, who is black, was then teaching at nearby U.C. Berkeley, and he had a long-standing scholarly interest in black speech. He became—by dint of his race and his physical proximity to the uproar—the most prominent authority on the validity of Black English as language.

Since then, McWhorter has built a career outside the academy as a quirky populist, committed to defending linguistic novelties often derided as erroneous or as harbingers of slackening standards. He sees in such innovations evidence of the only constant in language: its endless mutability, and its corresponding ability to surprise. He hosts Slate's popular linguistics podcast, "Lexicon Valley," and, in another recent book, "Words on the Move" (Henry Holt), writes acceptingly of such trends as "uptalk" (the tendency to end declarative sentences with the upward lilt of the voice that usually accompanies a question) and the peppering of "like" throughout the speech of younger Americans. McWhorter brooks no condescension toward the Valley Girl. "Americans," he laments in "Talking Back, Talking Black," "have trouble comprehending that *any* vernacular way of speaking is legitimate language."

"Talking Back, Talking Black," then, is a kind of apologia. In five short essays, McWhorter demonstrates the "legitimacy" of Black English by uncovering its complexity and sophistication, as well as the still unfolding journey that has led to its creation. He also gently chides his fellow-linguists for their inability to present convincing arguments in favor of vernacular language. They have been mistaken, he believes, in emphasizing "systematicity"—the fact that a language's particularities are "not just random, but based on rules." An oft-cited instance of systematicity in Black English is the lastingly useful "habitual 'be,'" whereby,

ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVER MUNDAY

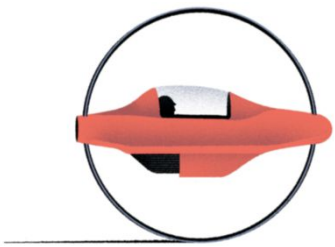
Carlson's quip notwithstanding, the formulation "She be passin' by" contains much more than an unconjugated verb. That naked "be," McWhorter explains, "is very specific; it means that something happens on a regular basis, rather than something going on right now." He adds, "No black person would say 'She be passin' by right now,' because that isn't what *be* in that sentence is supposed to mean. Rather, it would be 'She be passin' by every Tuesday when I'm about to leave.'" A mistake to untrained ears, the habitual "be" is, "of all things, grammar."

However logical, examples like these have failed to garner respect, because to most Americans grammar does not inhere in linguistic rule-following generally but in a set of specific rules that they have been taught to obey. McWhorter offers a couple of typical directives: "Don't say *less* books, say *fewer* books," and "Say Billy and *I* went to the store, not Billy and *me* went to the store." This narrow notion of grammar has amounted to a peculiar snobbery: the more obscure and seemingly complex the grammatical rule, the more we tend to assert its importance and to esteem those who have managed to master it. "People respect complexity," McWhorter writes. His smirking and somewhat subversive accommodation to this Pharisaism is to emphasize the ways in which Black English is *more* complex than Standard English.

One of these ways—the truest, I should add, to my own experience of the language—is the use of the word "up" in conjunction with a location. Hip-hop fans might recognize this construction from the chorus of the rapper DMX's hit song "Party Up (Up in Here)": "Y'all gon' make me lose my mind / Up in here, up in here / Y'all gon' make me go all out / Up in here, up in here," etc. McWhorter, playing the tone poet's patient exegete, scours several instances of the usage, settling on the idea that in this context "up" conveys the intimacy of the setting it qualifies. The sentence "We was sittin' up at Tony's," according to McWhorter, "means that Tony is a friend of yours." This is an artful and convincing reading, and McWhorter carries it out in an impishly forensic manner, proving his thesis that, in some respects, Black English has "more going on" than Standard English. The latter lacks such a succinct "intimacy marker" as Black English's "up," and someone who studied Black English as a foreign language would have a hard time figuring out when, and how, to deploy it.

The passage on "up" is characteristic of McWhorter's strengths as a writer. In the years that he has spent popularizing ideas hatched in the halls of the academy, he has honed a friendly prose style. Some of the sentences in "Talking Back" seem designed to enact its author's loose, democratic approach to English, and to language more broadly: sentence-ending prepositions sit happily together with uses of the singular "they." This intelligent breeziness is the source of the book's considerable charm. It also helps McWhorter slide past the aspects of Black English that cannot be so cheerily explained.

McWhorter's easygoing recounting of the Ebonics affair, with its emphasis on his ecumenical approach to language, elides the way in which the episode served as an opportunity to broadcast his somewhat stonier views on black American life. McWhorter opposed the Oakland proposal—a fact that he scarcely makes clear in "Talking Back, Talking Black." He told the story more fully in "Losing the Race," a best-selling jeremiad published in 2000, which argued that the familiar litany of black American troubles—low academic achievement, the absence of upward mobility, and so on—were due more to cultural deficiencies like anti-intellectualism and a "cult of victimology" than to institutionalized racism. The support that some black leaders expressed for the Oakland proposal was, in McWhorter's view, evidence of their misguided sense that "the main issue" was "not evaluating an educational policy but defending black America from racist abuse." Black English is perfectly legitimate as language, but its use in schools wouldn't help black students, he wrote in 1997, because, among other problems, "inner city backgrounds do not prepare many children to be receptive to education in school."



McWhorter's stance in "Losing the Race" won him fame as a commentator on race and society, and got him classified alongside an increasingly—but, in retrospect, fleetingly—visible cadre of black conservatives, including the economist Thomas Sowell and the writer Shelby Steele, with whom he frequently agreed on such matters. McWhorter, though, was an otherwise conventional, if slightly old-fashioned, liberal Democrat; he'd arrived at sociology's doorstep with a bouquet of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's ideas just as they were beginning to wilt. He didn't deny the persistence of racism—he still inveighs against mass incarceration and the drug war—but insisted on the reality of post-sixties progress, and implored his fellow black Americans to reach out and grab their country's newly extended hand. This thinking has slipped further out of fashion in recent years, as smartphones around the country have delivered the bad old news about blacks and the police. McWhorter's response to the radicalism of the younger generation, notably embodied by the Black Lives Matter movement, has been an exasperated resignation. He writes about race less regularly these days, and, when he does, it is often to dismiss the new mood as a kind of cult, long on shibboleths and pieties but woefully short on methods for bettering the lives of black Americans. (A 2015 article that McWhorter wrote for the Daily Beast was titled "Antiracism, Our Flawed New Religion.")

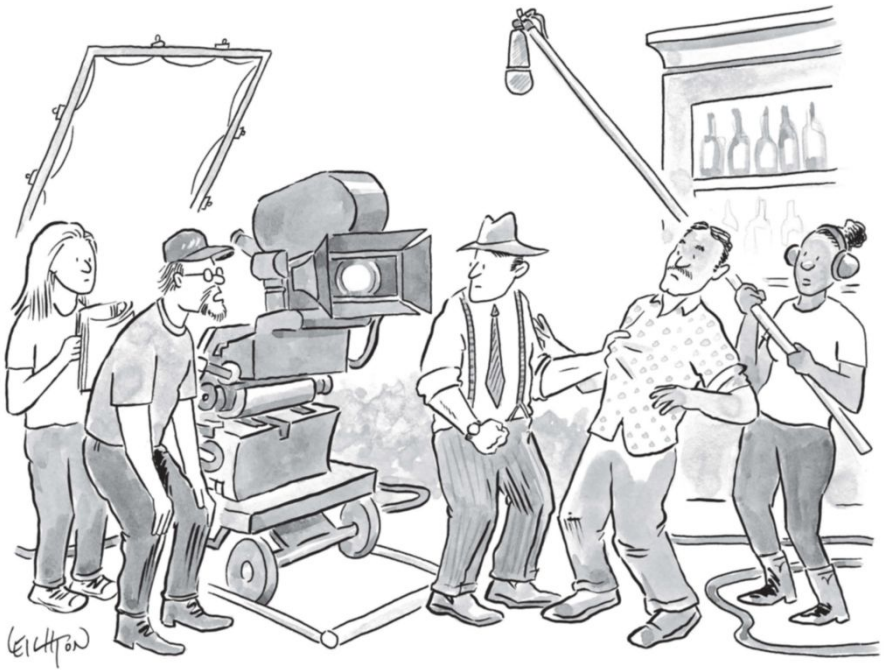
Early in "Talking Back, Talking Black," McWhorter brings up the legacy of racism, only to reject it as an adequate explanation for—or tool in arguing against—the derision levelled at Black English over the years. "Surely racism plays a part in how Black English is heard," he concedes in the book's first chapter, before claiming that "the speech of Appalachian whites is condemned to an even greater degree." He offers this latter assertion—doubtful, by my admittedly anecdotal lights—without a hint of evidence. He is unimpressed by, and wary of, the "sociopolitically charged argument" that "to criticize a dialect is to criticize its speakers." McWhorter fears that its chief result is to make people—white

people—"clam up." Better, with evangelistic hopes like McWhorter's, to root around for the language's exceptional qualities: "up" and all the rest.

The most energetic but also the most frustrating section of "Talking Back" is a short treatise on the word "nigga." McWhorter takes the customary care in distinguishing the word from its uglier, older cousin, "nigger," but he pushes the distinction further than most: for McWhorter, these are not simply two separate English words, let alone two pronunciations of the same word; they are, rather, words that belong to two different dialects. "*Nigger* is Standard English and *nigga* is Black English," he writes, matter-of-factly. "*Nigga* means 'You're one of us.' *Nigger* doesn't."

This interpretation helps to explain the odd power that "nigga" wields over blacks and whites alike when said aloud. Richard Pryor's use of it in his standup act in the seventies was radical not simply because street lingo had made its way onto the stage: Pryor had swung open the door between alternate cultural dimensions. Blacks suddenly felt at home—"up in the comedy club," somebody might have said—and whites relished the brief peek into a room they rarely saw. Something similar happened, and keeps on happening, with hip-hop, many of whose practitioners use the N-word as a kind of challenge to white enthusiasts. It's become a familiar joke: when the music's loud, and emotions are high, who dares recite, in full, the lyric that eventually alights on "nigga"?

That "nigga" is not only one of our most controversial words but also one of our funniest is revealing, and worth puzzling over. McWhorter doesn't allow himself the pleasure. The word's power—and therefore its coherence, its licitness as language—is impossible to understand without a glance at the history of race-rooted subjugation in America. The emergence of Black English is owed in part to straightforwardly linguistic factors: McWhorter convincingly cites the phenomenon of recently enslaved adults straining to learn a new language, plus a syncretistic importation of vocal gestures picked up along the trail of forced migration. But it also developed as a covert, often defiant response to the surveillance state of slavery. Grammatical nuance, new vocabulary, subtleties of tone—these were verbal expressions of racism's mind-splitting crucible, what W. E. B. Du Bois called "double consciousness." As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has written, black vernacular is a literary development as well as a linguistic one. "The black tradition"—from ring shouts to Ralph Ellison—"is double-voiced," Gates writes, in the introduction to his seminal study, "The Signifying Monkey," echoing Du Bois. The humor associated with black language play—with jokers like Pryor and Bernie Mac—directly descends from this multivocal tradition, and from the trouble that made it necessary.



"You're beating him senseless, but what you really want is his approval."

• •

This polarity—between a tragic sense of the world and the ability to make of it a kind of punch line—might help to unshroud, if only slightly, an enigma at the heart of McWhorter's book. In a chapter on what it means to "sound black," he is able to isolate several aspects of the "blaccent," as he calls it—a tendency, for example, to clip certain vowel sounds and luxuriate in others. But he concedes, in the end, that elements of black speech remain mysterious. All of its facets come together in a manner that can seem inexpressible, a point he illustrates with an essentially artistic analogy: once, watching a group of young black girls execute a dance routine, he noticed something off—inarticulable, but *off*—in the moves of the one girl who had grown up mostly around white people. Something beyond rhythm; something like style.

Whatever this quality may be, it operates as well on Sunday morning as it does on Saturday night. Consider the voice of Martin Luther King, Jr. His rich, swooping Baptist cadences, almost musical in tone, have become part of the American soundscape. His rhetoric was a breakthrough by way of synthesis. He had an unmistakably black sound, a sound that had been forged over centuries in the privacy of segregated worship, but he fitted it, often, over flawless Standard English syntax that straddled in its rhythms the Constitution and the Bible. He sometimes sounded like an Otis Redding cover of Abe Lincoln or the text of a Psalm.

Think of the concluding passages of his most famous speeches: "I Have a Dream," "I've Been to the Mountaintop." Forget the words. King's shudders and vibratos, half-shouts and glottal stops have become a synecdoche for the ongoing struggle for American freedom. They remind us: black talk has—at high cost, to often beautiful effect—become a moral language, too. ♦

BOOKS

FIRST LIGHT

Début poetry from Mai Der Vang and Airea D. Matthews.

BY DAN CHIASSON

THE HMONG-AMERICAN POET Mai Der Vang's début volume, "Afterland" (Graywolf), reminds us what a distinctive instrument the human imagination is, no matter what tune it plays. There is a story in this book, and an important one: Vang's family fled Laos at the close of the Laotian "secret war," when the C.I.A. armed the Hmong people to fight against the occupying North Vietnamese. Laos fell, the C.I.A. pulled up stakes, and many Hmong families, after languishing in refugee camps in Thailand and elsewhere, were resettled in places like Fresno, California, where Vang lives today. Vang is among the first generation of Hmong-Americans born here and writing in English. She has no firsthand memory of the trauma that shaped her. These ironies, not a little bitter, sponsor her work.

Vang writes strikingly, often chillingly visual poems, their images projected one at a time, like slides in a lecture, or perhaps in a trial. A woman is dragged "bleeding / by her long black hair," her child's "head in the rice / pounder, shell-crumbled." The poems can feel like environments rather than narratives: they develop according to our wary movement through them, simultaneously registering both our outward point of view and our inner commentary. Here are the opening stanzas of "Water Grave," about a river crossing:

> We cross under
> the midnight shield
> and learn that bullets
>
> can curse the air.
> A symposium
> of endangered stars
>
> evicts itself to
> the water. Another
> convoy leaves the kiln.

The line breaks here represent the fear of what we'll encounter next along the poem's low-lying, cramped horizontal axis, with bullets "cursing" the air overhead and stars reflected on the water below. Inside, where the mind makes comparisons and analogies, the dissociation inheres in malfunctioning metaphors: what is a "symposium / of endangered stars" and how would it evict itself? The illogic evokes, on the page, the damaged conditions for thinking which burden these "creatures of the Mekong," their "heads bobbing" like "ghosts without bodies" in a "river yard / of amputated hearts."

Vang's poems are sometimes woven with Hmong phrases, which, to the reader who lacks the language, give the impression of chatter arriving by a remote, staticky broadcast. "Light from a Burning Citadel" counterpoints its eerie, ancestral first-person voice with a part-Hmong chorus:

> Now I am a Siamese rosewood on fire.
> I am a skin of sagging curtain.
> I am a bone of bullet hole.
> I am locked in the ash oven of a forest.
>
> *Peb yog and we will be.*

A note tells us that *peb yog* means "we are." The English syntax seems to approximate Hmong phrasing: its metamorphosis from another language, like the brutal self-transformations it expresses, is costly, ultimate, but also definitive.

"Afterland" works its wonders with an intentionally rationed vocabulary, its counters combined and recombined in poem after poem: stars, water, hair, bones, fire. To invest this elemental grammar with such feeling is to play a game, mastered by poets from Du Fu to Louise Glück, that reminds us that the contents of the world are finite, and

In "Afterland," Vang deploys a rationed vocabulary to wondrous effect.

ILLUSTRATION BY CHARLIE GENTLE

that the imagination obtains, often, only in combination. The style creates an atmosphere of impending marvels, and many of Vang's poems perform, in words, the transformations that they describe:

In the dove tree
Corrals of your hair,

A scaffold ascends
The perfumed winter

Where frost has hewn
You into azalea.

"Azalea" is a beautiful word in any context, but in this stark verbal landscape it stands out like the garish shrub it denotes, here reduced to its bare winter interest.

The restraint of these poems in part reflects Hmong languages' resistance to script; many appear to have existed for centuries without any written record. The most common script among Hmong speakers today was invented in the nineteen-fifties, by Christian missionaries. It uses the Roman alphabet, but clumsily, and with many critical effects of sound lost on the page. Around the same time, a farmer named Shong Lue Yang was said to have been taught a script, the Pahawh Hmong, by messengers from God. He attracted many followers before he was killed, a suspected insurgent, in 1971. Here are the crucial middle stanzas from a poem I believe will be read and taught widely, "Mother of People Without Script":

Paj is not *pam* is not *pab*.
Blossom is not blanket is not help.

Ntug is not *ntuj* is not *ntub*.
Edge is not sky is not wet.

On sheet of bamboo
with indigo branch.

To *txiav* is not the *txias*.
To scissor is not the cold.

When Vang reads the Hmong words aloud (you can hear her do so on the Poetry Foundation's Web site), they sound, to me, nearly identical; and yet when you see them the distinctions are clear. Every poem is different, by a little or by a lot, when it is read aloud. Here that gap, and all the clashes of culture and power it embodies, is in fact the subject of the poem, which adopts the rote tone of a language primer.

"Afterland" is, I think, two books. The one I have been describing, holding itself to its own stringent vision of verbal beauty, is among the most satisfying débuts by an American poet in some time. The book inside this book, much shorter, is replete with poignant snapshots of immigrant life; in these poems, Vang is looser, her language less monitored, the tension allayed by humor and wisdom. I like these poems slightly less. In "Matriarch," a grandmother watches Sylvester Stallone on TV and thinks of "a man omitted," likely a casualty of war:

She points at the television as if she could translate
Rocky, make sense of Rambo. She is camphor blouse,

Grandmother, keeper of jars for flamed cuppings.

This kind of parallelism—a current or slightly outré tic of M.F.A. workshops—always puts more weight on the second verb, and "makes sense of" is too weak to stand up to the pressure. A poetry that has elsewhere excavated its language from the communal unconscious has a hard time adopting the mode of personal anecdote. We miss the concentration, the narrowing and zooming attention to language, and, weirdly, the white space of her finest poems. A lot of silence goes into such work, if you listen carefully for it.

Airea D. Matthews is this year's winner of the Yale Younger Poets Prize, judged by Carl Phillips. Her work is formalist, but she doesn't write often in the forms we associate with poetry. Fugues, text messages to the dead, imagined outtakes from Wittgenstein, tart mini-operas, fairy tales: Matthews is virtuosic, frantic, and darkly, very darkly, funny. "Simulacra" (Yale), her first collection, doesn't feel like an anthology of distractions or novelties. When a fine poet moves through such a variety of forms, she becomes, with every new obstacle, more herself, more aligned against accident. "We need change of objects," Emerson wrote. With prowess of this magnitude, relaxing the ingenuity would mean ruin.

Of the book's several lares and penates (Baudrillard, Barthes, and others make memorable cameos), the most important is Anne Sexton, the American confessional poet, who died, a suicide, in 1974. Hers is a story often understood to be about corrosive and largely self-inflicted domestic ennui. Matthews first plants this theme in a prose poem, part David Lynch and part Brothers Grimm, "The Mine Owner's Wife." A man comes home, opens his mouth, and a canary flies out; soon he slices his tongue open and bleeds into his wife's goblet. "And, this, every single night" is Matthews's deadpan punch line.

A series of poems imagines text exchanges between Sexton and a variety of correspondents, in a range of bizarre settings. They read like Virgilian eclogues in the age of autocorrect. All the disorientations of texting remain in place: we can't be certain who's saying what, and messages sometimes arrive jumbled, rushed, and in the wrong order. Here are the final three messages in a poem about suburban anomie, "Quiet Desperation Texts Sexton on Independence Day":

FRI., AUG. 2, 6:41 AM
(2/2) around the block.
Fewer asses not tweaked,
twerked or fatted, yet
all that holds back a soul?
Chalkcage withering under
wrinkled corsets

FRI., AUG. 2, 6:39 AM
Every here
same cawing crows,
same ruined perches.

FRI., AUG. 2, 6:38 AM
(1/2) Same old hoes in fresh loam
and the bald cockold who drags
his tucked wife's fat dog
while he jogs

The two columns form a harmonized lament between women that exposes, even as it patches over, differences in time, place, privilege, and race. The out-of-order texting suggests the ways that poets disobey temporal rules, treating their long-dead predecessors as collaborators. Matthews is reimagining poetry's ancient function to connect the living to the dead, to engage with the past as an active, boisterous presence. "It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not," Whitman wrote. Poets, after all, have always known how to trick death with irresistible texts. ♦

THE ART WORLD

THE ROARING STETTIES

A Florine Stettheimer retrospective.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Doyenne of liberty: Stettheimer's "A Model (Nude Self-Portrait)," from 1915.

COURTESY ESTATE OF ETTIE STETTHEIMER AND COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

THIS IS A good time to take Florine Stettheimer seriously. The occasion is a retrospective of the New York artist, poet, designer, and Jazz Age saloniste, at the Jewish Museum, titled "Florine Stettheimer: Painting Poetry." The impetus is an itch to rethink old orders of merit in art history. It's not that Stettheimer, who died in 1944, at the age of seventy-three, needs rediscovering. She is securely esteemed—or adored, more like it—for her ebulliently faux-naïve paintings of party scenes and of her famous friends, and for her four satirical allegories of Manhattan, which she called "Cathedrals": symbol-packed phantasmagorias of Fifth Avenue, Broadway, Wall Street, and Art, at the Metropolitan Museum.

She painted in blazing primary colors, plus white and some accenting black, with the odd insinuating purple. Even her blues smolder. Greens are less frequent; zealously urbane, Stettheimer wasn't much for nature, except, surreally, for the glories of the outsized cut flowers that barge in on her indoor scenes. She painted grass yellow. She seemed an eccentric outlier to American modernism, and appreciations of her often run to the camp—it was likely in that spirit that Andy Warhol called her his favorite artist. But what happens if, clearing our minds and looking afresh, we recast the leading men she pictured, notably Marcel Duchamp, in supporting roles? What's the drama when Stettheimer stars?

Born in 1871, in Rochester, New York, Stettheimer was the fourth of five children of a banker, who ran out on the family when she was still a child, although they remained well off financially. The two oldest offspring married. Florine and her sisters Carrie and Ettie—"the Stetties," as they were known—never did. They lived with their mother, Rosetta, first on the Upper West Side and, later, near Carnegie Hall. Florine also maintained large and lavishly decorated rooms on Bryant Park, as a studio and salon. Carrie spent more than twenty years fashioning a doll-house mansion, now in the Museum of the City of New York, which contains miniature works by artist friends. (Duchamp contributed a bitsy "Nude Descending a Staircase.") Ettie, the most effervescent of the sisters, wrote novels of female independence and romantic disillusionment, under the bemusing pseudonym Henrie Waste. In Florine's 1923 portrait of her, she appears as a flapper goddess on a chaise adrift in a starry sky, next to a combined Mosaic burning bush and Christmas tree. That ecumenical gesture is characteristic of the Stetties' cosmopolitan fervor, which extended to an active interest in the Harlem Renaissance, through their friend the critic, photographer, and patron Carl Van Vechten. Shut out of New York high society, on account of their being Jewish, the sisters made the most of their ostracism by becoming doyennes of liberty.

Stettheimer's passion for art started early. Having attended the Art Students League—figure studies in the show affirm her skills—she sojourned for several years with her sisters and her mother in Europe, studying art in Germany, attending lectures by Henri Bergson in Paris, and immersing herself in museums. The women returned to New York at the outbreak of the First World War. To say that Stettheimer was, at that point, sophisticated is like calling water wet. She had a Symbolist bent, with affinities for Gauguin, Bonnard, Ensor, and Klimt, and inflections of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. In 1912, thrilled by "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune," in Paris, she composed a sort of fan-fiction ballet, "Orphée of the Quat-z-Arts," in which a girl, separated from her father during a festive procession of art students, finds herself at a bacchanal with gods, goddesses, and Apache dancers. She dances with Orpheus until Mars intrudes. The conception might have worked, based on her terrific designs for it, which are included in the retrospective, but the show was never produced.

Further evidence that Stettheimer could have been a major theatre designer is provided by the sets and

costumes that she made, using cellophane, feathers, and sequins, for Gertrude Stein's buoyantly befuddling opera, "Four Saints in Three Acts." The production caused a sensation on Broadway, in 1934, with music by Virgil Thomson, choreography by Frederic Ashton, and an all-African-American cast. It seems clear that Stettheimer might also have succeeded at some of the other careers then open to women: couture, perhaps. But, after a solo exhibition at the Knoedler Gallery, in 1916, brought no sales and only tepid reviews, she swore off any public career, despite pleadings from friends such as Georgia O'Keeffe, who wrote to her, "I wish you would become ordinary like the rest of us and show your paintings this year!" She did contribute something every now and then to group shows, but the audience for her work was otherwise by invitation only.

In 1915, Stettheimer painted perhaps history's first full-length nude self-portrait by a woman, revealing herself to be a true redhead. The pose is taken from "Olympia," by Manet, who had borrowed it from Titian's "Venus of Urbino," but Stettheimer's left hand, instead of resting on her pudendum, brandishes a bouquet of flowers. Appearing contentedly amused, she is short-haired, long-waisted, long-legged, and small-breasted: a period knockout, at the age of forty-four. No details of her love life are reported, though she liked men, if gingerly. (Ettie cut many pages out of Florine's diaries after her death—but, blessedly, she defied her command to destroy the works that remained in her studio.) In one of her deft poems, "Occasionally," she writes of a type who "Rushed in / Got singed / Got scared / Rushed out." Armored "Against wear / And tears," the speaker dismisses "The Always-to-be-Stranger," whereupon "I turn on my light / And become myself." Van Vechten described her as a "completely self-centered and dedicated person." He wrote, "She did not inspire love, or affection, or even warm friendship, but she did elicit interest, respect, admiration, and enthusiasm."

Stettheimer peopled her pictures with willowy figures—women in slinky gowns and men in close-fitting suits. They have individualized faces but might almost be clones beneath the cloth—they're not so much gender-bending as gender-averaged. She made Van Vechten, who was gay but married twice, appear both epicene and heroic in a painting of him in his apartment, amid symbols of his myriad vocations. She rendered the leading art critic Henry McBride as the judge of a tennis match. To finish a portrait of a sun-loving friend who was vacationing on Nantucket, she sent a card daubed with seven shades of tan, for him to select the one that pertained at the moment.

But Duchamp brings out more complex feelings in her work, whether she shows him helping to serve lobster at a picnic; operating a crank-and-spring gizmo, to conjure an apparition of his female alter ego, Rrose Sélavy; or appearing as a disembodied, mystic face, in the manner of Christ on Veronica's Veil. Like Stettheimer, Duchamp came from a well-to-do family, and shunned a standard career in favor of a lifelong vocation of entertaining himself. They were soul mates of a sort, you can tell. Two years after her death, he collaborated with McBride on a retrospective of her work at the Museum of Modern Art.

Rich kids seldom become committed artists, though the Dada generation featured another, Francis Picabia, who also attended Stettheimer's salon. She overcame what the card sharp played by Charles Coburn, in Preston Sturges's "The Lady Eve," diagnoses as the tragedy of the rich—"They don't need anything"—by making it her subject. Life as a serving of whipped cream on top of whipped cream functions as a master theme of her visions of determinedly languid and deluxe but also intense conviviality. In one way, this jibed with the glamour of the Gatsby-esque twenties in New York. But in another, hugely consequential way, it focussed the consolidation of a world-changing avant-garde.

In her paintings, as in her homes, Stettheimer gathered the best and the quirkiest spirits and energies—the collective genius—of her epoch, gave them a whirl, and sent them spinning into the future. See the show. Become her latest interesting guest. ♦

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MUSICAL EVENTS

CATACLYSM

Chaya Czernowin's new opera, "Infinite Now," in Ghent.

BY ALEX ROSS

Czernowin often associates her scores with natural phenomena—water, wind, snow.

"THE DAYS STAND like angels in blue and gold, incomprehensible, above the ring of annihilation." Those words, from Erich Maria Remarque's great war novel of 1929, "All Quiet on the Western Front," are at the heart of "Infinite Now," a harrowing and darkly majestic opera by the Israeli-born composer Chaya Czernowin. The work had its première last month, at the Flemish Opera, in Ghent, not far from some of the bloodiest battlefields of the First World War. Czernowin's score includes eruptions of orchestral, vocal, and electronic pandemonium that evoke with unnerving immediacy the chaos of battle and its aftermath. She has achieved, however, something more than a sombre memorial to death and destruction—a crowded genre in modern opera. Episodes of unearthly beauty hint at Remarque's angelic presence, which seems to arise whenever man-made horror collides with nature.

Czernowin was born in Haifa in 1957, a child of Polish Holocaust survivors. She has lived variously in Germany, Japan, and Austria, and since 2009 she has been based at Harvard, where she has taught some of the most vibrant composers of the rising generation. Her work is rooted in the radical musical languages that surfaced after the Second World War: the frenzied gestures of Iannis Xenakis, the visceral timbres of Helmut Lachenmann, the elemental textures of Giacinto Scelsi, and the hyper-dense polyphony of Brian Ferneyhough, who was one of Czernowin's teachers. Her signal achievement has been to give an organic logic to the explosive aesthetics of the avant-garde. She often associates her scores with natural phenomena—water, wind, snow, crystal structures, vegetative growth—and the resultant music feels like the outcome of irreversible physical processes. Her 2010 orchestral piece "The Quiet," recently recorded on the Wergo label, is typical. It begins in near-silence, with faint bass-drum rolls, a tremor of gong, fingernail scratches on drumskins, and breathy noises from the strings. Emanating from a large orchestra, such sounds create a sense of depopulated vastness. In the final few minutes, a quadruple-forte avalanche of brass and percussion is unleashed—a musical equivalent of the butterfly effect, in which slight changes trigger cataclysms.

Such momentous shifts occur throughout "Infinite Now," which unfolds in a continuous two-and-a-half-hour span, the aural equivalent of an almost limitless landscape. Its plot consists of two seemingly unrelated stories that become interwoven. One strand is based on Luk Perceval's multilingual theatre piece "Front," which had its première in Hamburg, in 2014, in commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of the start of the First World War. That text incorporates excerpts from "All Quiet on the Western Front" and from another war novel, Henri Barbusse's "Under Fire," alongside soldiers' letters and eyewitness testimonies, in English, Flemish, French, and German. The other strand is "Homecoming," a cryptic tale by the contemporary Chinese writer Can Xue, in which a woman returns to a house she has known since childhood and finds it strangely transformed; the present owner insists that it is now poised at the edge of an abyss, and when the woman tries to leave she encounters inexplicable obstacles. The common thread is entrapment: the soldiers cannot escape the trenches, the woman cannot escape the house.

When the Flemish Opera approached Czernowin about making an opera of "Front," she initially resisted, feeling that she had spent enough time in the realm of war. Her first theatrical work, the 2000 opera "Pnima," is an oblique study in the incommunicability of trauma: an elderly Holocaust survivor tries to convey his experience to his grandson, who struggles to grasp what he hears—the opera has

PHOTOGRAPH BY IRINA ROZOVSKY

no words, only vocalizations—but who is overwhelmed nonetheless. Czernowin, who had been seeking a way to bring "Homecoming" to the stage, hit upon the notion of combining the story with "Front," realizing that she could amplify the resonance of both. In a commentary on "Infinite Now," she writes that the texts embody, from male and female perspectives alike, "an existential state of nakedness where the ordinary sense of control and reason is stripped away."

"Infinite Now" is divided into six acts, each of which begins with a recording of metal gates clanging shut. (Czernowin and her collaborator, Carlo Laurenzi, from IRCAM, the Paris center for sonic research, took the sound from YouTube videos about prison life.) Then a complex electronic fabric kicks in: we hear, at one time or another, voices talking; a woman reading "Homecoming" in Mandarin; crowds and demonstrations; industrial hums and drones; train sounds; the flutter of bird wings; cracking ice; wind and water; news broadcasts; bits of popular song; and high-pitched sine tones. From this enveloping texture, voices and instruments emerge, sometimes assertively and sometimes almost imperceptibly. Two trios of singers deliver passages from "Front" and "Homecoming." Six speaking actors flesh out the wartime characters, of whom the most striking are Paul Bäumer, Remarque's doomed protagonist, and Nurse Elisabeth, who is based on Ellen La Motte, the author of a brutal memoir of nursing on the Western Front. When a deserter tries to kill himself, Elisabeth bitterly observes, "We must try to save his life, help him recover until he is well enough to be stood up against a wall and shot."

Those lacerating words occur in the fourth act, in which the two halves of "Infinite Now" begin to merge. Up to this point, a characteristic Czernowin mood of tense expectancy has prevailed, with stretches of rustling and whispering interrupted by spasms of orchestral fury. The tone shifts, though, when the protagonist of "Homecoming" tries and fails to leave the house. In an extravagant, register-leaping aria for contralto voice—delivered spectacularly in Ghent by Noa Frenkel, a regular Czernowin collaborator—the woman sings of crawling outside the gate, in search of familiar grasslands, and encountering "something hard and moving" under her feet. Pieces of Paul Bäumer's narrative are juxtaposed with that nightmare scenario, with the nurse's tale following soon afterward. The musical textures then thin out, as if the proximity of horror had brought clarity. At times, the harmonies brush against traditional tonality: a D-minor triad on a guitar here, an E-flat-major triad in the voices there.

In the fifth act, the cataclysm arrives. Wind howls on the soundtrack. The strings bow so hard that pitch disappears. Vocalists let out strangulated cries. Huge cluster chords accumulate. It all builds to a sonic hurricane—one of the most awesome storms in musical history. A wrenching scene from Remarque ensues, in which Bäumer watches an enemy soldier die. "Comrade, I did not want to kill you," he says. "Forgive me." In the final act, the action seems to slide into the present, as voices are altered to sound as though they were coming from radios or speakerphones. ("As in Skype with problems," the score notes.) The entire rampaging force of Czernowin's orchestra is funnelled into isolated tones—at one point, a three-minute brass drone on G. In the closing section, industrial noises give way to natural ones: cicadas, steps in dry leaves, wind in trees, rushing water. The last words belong to Can Xue's heroine: "In the darkness I put on my clothes."

The forces in Ghent, under the baton of Titus Engel, made a heroic effort with a score that imposes unrelenting demands on its performers. Terry Wey delivered haunting countertenor lines, and four expert Czernowin collaborators—the guitarists Nico Couck and Yaron Deutsch and the cellists Séverine Ballon and Christina Meissner—were featured in solo instrumental parts. Perceval directed the production, in austere fashion; the sets were minimal and abstract, with actors and singers inching about the stage in the Robert Wilson fashion. Although the severity befitted the subject, I wondered whether Perceval might have done more to differentiate the opera's two worlds, so that the audience could better register the epiphany of their becoming one. Then again, an atmosphere of engulfing mystery, of the uncanny, is integral to the power of Czernowin's conception. "Infinite Now" captures the terror, and the wonder, of discovering that the world you thought you knew has forever changed. ♦

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

WE ARE FAMILY

"Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2" and "Chuck."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Chris Pratt and Zoe Saldana return to the galaxy in James Gunn's new movie.

NEAR THE END of "Guardians of the Galaxy" (2014), the hero, Peter Quill (Chris Pratt), distracted the villain, who had evil designs upon all of creation, by dancing at him. This was a moment to be thankful for. At last, you felt, someone at Marvel was starting to heed the wise words of Vladimir Nabokov: "The difference between the comic side of things, and their cosmic side, depends upon one sibilant." For the makers of superhero films, it's not enough to toss in a few sprinkles of light relief. The true challenge is to remind your audience that the very idea of saving the world—or an infinity of worlds, or whatever—is in itself a joke, and that its puffy grandeur is begging to be popped. Let's face the maniac and dance.

Quill now returns, in "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2," with his cluster of companions intact. Gamora (Zoe Saldana) is unsentimental, unafraid, and green, as if a Spartan warrior had been blended with an avocado. She and Quill have a thing going, except that they don't, not really. Then, there is Drax (Dave Bautista), with pecs of iron and no irony; Baby Groot (voiced by Vin Diesel), who used to be an indestructible tree until he was destroyed, leaving nothing but a twig; and Rocket (voiced by Bradley Cooper), a raccoon-like pest who—no offense—should long since have been turned into a hat.

The initial task of the team, who can be hired to clean up any intergalactic mess, is to slay a slobbering beast on behalf of the Sovereign, a refulgent race whose clothes, complexions, hardware, and soft furnishings are deeply infused with gold. Imagine dwelling full time in the elevators at Trump Tower, and you'll have some grasp of an average Sovereign day. As the Guardians depart, job done, Rocket steals some batteries, and his casual theft, believe it or not, is the root of the plot. Not that we should complain. Half of the most enjoyable tales ever told on film have sprung from near-nothings. "Easy Living" (1937) depended on a fur coat being thrown from a penthouse roof and landing on the head of Jean Arthur, who was sitting on the top deck of a bus.

"Easy Living," however, was written by Preston Sturges and directed by Mitchell Leisen, both of whom knew how to keep a mood aloft, and how much fun could be had from Fifth Avenue alone, whereas poor James Gunn, who wrote and directed "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2," has the whole of space to play with, or to get stranded in. The Guardians crash-land in an alien forest, followed shortly by another craft, which resembles a hard-boiled egg. From this steps a figure of authority, played with magisterial hairiness by Kurt Russell, who utters a line, to Quill, that is pretty much designed to sink the soul: "My name is Ego, and I'm your dad."

And so the curse of the backstory strikes again. Anything Darth Vader can do, Ego can do better. Any old fool in a cape can run a Death Star, but Ego has built his own planet, apparently after consulting the covers of Yes albums. Yet a world is not enough. "I wanted more. I desired meaning," Ego admits. It is at this point that the movie, which has been motoring along nicely, fuelled by silliness and pep, begins to splutter. Gunn decides to treat the quest for meaning seriously—a lethal move that not only leads to the noisy palaver of the climax but also undermines Chris Pratt, who likes to hold these movies at arm's length, as it were, and to probe them for pomposity. The Quill of the first film, if informed that his long-lost dad was named Ego, would have smirked like a ten-year-old and asked to meet Uncle Id.

Media historians to come, gazing at the franchises that kicked off this century, will be struck by the desperation with which most of them—the Avengers, the Guardians, and the road-bound mortals in the "Fast and the Furious" series—ram home the theme of the family, or, at least, of the ersatz clan that is made up of fellow-combatants. Could this be how pop culture responds to the dissolution of old domestic norms? In Gunn's new film, almost everyone joins the party. Quill and Ego agonize over the missing years of their relationship; Gamora keeps fighting her cyborg sister,

ILLUSTRATION BY DIEGO PATIÑO

Nebula (Karen Gillan, who is genuinely freaky to behold), so brazenly that you come to dread their eventual reconciliation; Drax refers with unembarrassed Oedipal glee to his parents having sex; and even Yondu (Michael Rooker), a blue-skinned mercenary with a magic Mohawk, starts yakking on about his dissatisfying past. (To be fair, he does get a splendid sequence near the end, descending slowly to the core of a volatile planet, to be greeted with the words "You look like Mary Poppins!" to which Yondu replies, "Is he cool?") We are reassured, in the credits, that the Guardians will return. Let's hope that Vol. 3 recaptures the fizz of the original, instead of slumping into the most expensive group-therapy session in the universe. Stop looking over your shoulders, guys. Get back to the future.

Given the vast musical resources available to Hollywood, how come the choice of songs, in major films, is often so conservative and so cramped? Imagine harassed producers rooting around in their desk drawers and pulling out a double CD, in a cracked case, entitled "Hits of the '70s." That would explain why "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2," needing something for Baby Groot to groove to, opts for "Mr. Blue Sky," previously heard in "Paul Blart: Mall Cop." Later, in case we've forgotten that the film is about fathers and sons, we get "Father and Son," by Cat Stevens. Not to be outdone, Philippe Falardeau's new movie, "Chuck," which is squarely set in the seventies, shows one ugly car being driven to "You Sexy Thing," and another being driven to "You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet," with the passengers stuttering along in unison to the "B-b-b-baby" bit.

Liev Schreiber plays a real-life boxer, Chuck Wepner, famed for going fifteen rounds with Muhammad Ali, in 1975. Or, to be accurate, almost fifteen; the fight was stopped with less than twenty seconds to go, not that that made any difference to Wepner's raucous supporters, especially in Bayonne, New Jersey. The movie shows him living there with his wife, Phyliss (Elisabeth Moss), and their daughter, Kimberly (Melo Ludwig), delivering liquor and trusting that his coach, Al Braverman (Ron Perlman), will get him the occasional bout.

If "Chuck" grows bloody, that's because Wepner, who could take any punishment and seldom hit the canvas, was known for leaking gore; he was sometimes, to his chagrin, called the Bleeder, which was the original title of the film. Yet the only gruesome sight here is Ron Perlman eating a sandwich, and the action in the ring—including the match with Ali, whom Braverman refers to as Mahatma, and an early encounter with Terry Hinke, known as the Stormin' Mormon—totals less than ten minutes. In truth, this isn't a boxing movie at all. It's a movie about the kinds of existence in which boxing, or the swagger of boxing movies, can feel like a big deal.

Look at Chuck, for instance, cuddling up to Phyliss, as they watch Anthony Quinn in "Requiem for a Heavyweight" (1962) and recite the lines from memory. That film began as a television drama, starring Jack Palance. (There was also a version, now lost, on British TV, with a pre-007 Sean Connery.) And whom does Quinn battle at the beginning of "Requiem"? Cassius Clay, as he then was, whose punches we see—or barely see—flying toward the lens. Later comes "Rocky," which, in Wepner's proud eyes, is based on his own defiant experience with Ali. When that film wins the Oscar for Best Picture, Wepner says, "We won." He introduces himself to Stallone (played by Morgan Spector) in a restaurant, and even, with Stallone's encouragement, auditions for a small role in "Rocky 2," only to flame out, stoked on cocaine.

Movies coiled up in other movies have a habit of becoming either costive or cute, but somehow Falardeau avoids the traps. This is partly a matter of texture—Chuck wears a thick plaid coat that could double as a picnic blanket—and partly because the performances feel no less lived-in. The cast could knock the Guardians of the Galaxy on their backsides, any night of the week. Schreiber moves with bearish stolidity, even when boxing, and nothing is more poignantly delayed than Chuck's realization that most of his wounds were self-inflicted. Moss is sharper on the uptake; watch her console Chuck on the eve of the Ali fight, drawing him to her breast but rolling her eyes to the heavens. She knows how this will end. As her successor, a redhead named Linda, Naomi Watts is in tough and unkiddable form, and her verdict on the Bleeder is at once harsh, precise, and touched with affectionate hope. "There's more to you than meets the eye, Chuck Wepner," she says, adding, "Not much, just enough." ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Drew Dernavich, must be received by Sunday, May 14th. The finalists in the May 1st contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the May 29th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

" "

THE FINALISTS

"And where was the outrage over Alan's standing desk?"
Hannah Roberts, Los Angeles, Calif.

"Like I'm the first person who's tried sleeping their way to the top."
Glen Donaldson, Brisbane, Australia

"Don't just stand there. Tuck me in."
Nick Gaudio, Austin, Texas

THE WINNING CAPTION

"Your insurance company got back to us."
Laurie Blayney, Louisville, Ky.

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