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JANUARY 30, 2017

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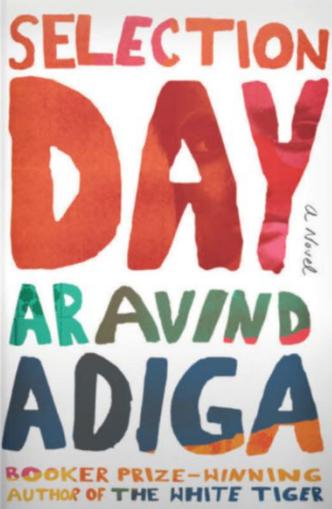
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Mary Jo Bang (*Poem*, p. 53) will publish the poetry collection "A Doll for Throwing" in August.

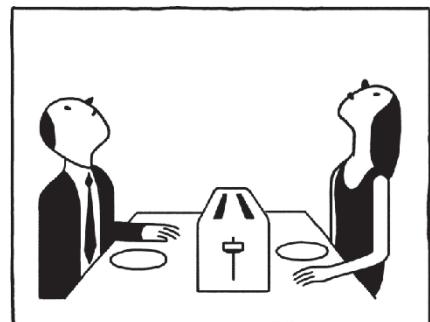
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THE MAIL

FINDING JUSTICE

I was inspired by Rachel Aviv's article on Albert Woodfox, one of the Angola 3, whose commitment to the principles of the Black Panther Party helped him endure four decades of solitary confinement, even after the Party itself had fallen apart ("Surviving Solitary," January 16th). But I disagree with the friend of one of his fellow-inmates, who said that this commitment to the Party was like that of Japanese fighter pilots who were still fighting thirty years after the war ended. For most African-Americans, the war is not close to over. It rankled me to read that the only way out of prison for Woodfox was through a plea bargain—admitting guilt where there was overwhelming evidence of innocence. This is one of many mechanisms by which black people end up with restrictions on their freedom as a result of institutionalized racism. Only with systematic and wholesale criminal-justice reform will black and brown people have equality in court. Woodfox's quote toward the end of the article says it all: "The more things remain the same, the more things remain the same."

*Marcia Brown
Hamburg, N.Y.*

SHOULD ZOOS KILL?

Ian Parker's article on the breeding policies of zoos touches on cultural differences between Europe and the U.S. regarding the value of animal life ("The Culling," January 16th). But it's worth noting that culling is practiced in both places, and not only in zoos. All responsible breeders of livestock, pets, and privately collected animals cull the non-viable or genetically unnecessary offspring of their animals. A failure to do so can disrupt the gene pool and result in animals that suffer from genetic disorders such as brachycephaly, in pugs; strabismus and clubfoot, in white tigers; and the so-called

stargazing gene, in corn snakes. Later in the article, Parker dismisses the conservation efforts of zoos as inconsequential given the rapid loss of habitats for animals in the wild. But zoos themselves do not have much control over habitat loss, and their breeding projects may help insure that there will be a supply of endangered animals to release if habitat-restoration groups are successful. Instead of demonizing zoos, we should recognize that they are full of experienced professionals and that their role in conservation efforts is indispensable.

*Kira Becker
Newton, Mass.*

HEARING VOICES

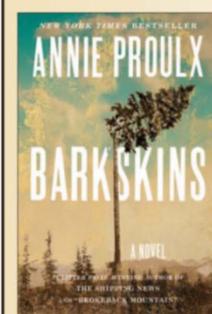
Jerome Groopman's article on the phenomenon of talking to oneself and hearing voices made me think that psychologists would benefit from a new term for the phenomenon, one without the negative connotations of "hallucination" ("Books," January 9th). I suggest borrowing a word from the field of music education: "audiation." It describes the experience of hearing and comprehending music with the mind's ear, much as we can picture and apprehend something in the mind's eye. The Gordon Institute for Musical Learning calls audiation "the musical equivalent of thinking in language." Indeed, the best musicians "hear" the sound they want to make before they make it. Audiation has positive associations with creativity and craftsmanship, associations that might appeal to many people who hear private voices, whether they are poets, mystical theologians, or psychologists themselves.

*Rebecca Bibb
Ann Arbor, Mich.*

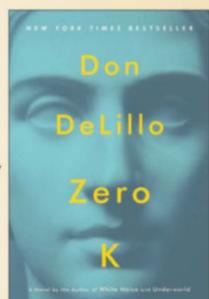
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THE MOST ACCLAIMED BOOKS OF THE YEAR

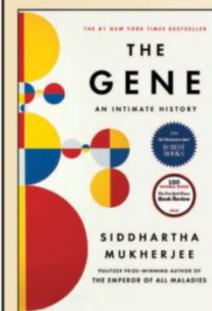
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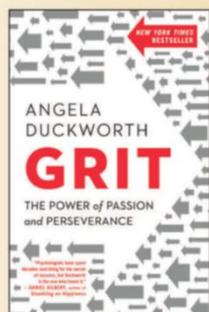
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



This hand-colored portrait of an unidentified woman was taken by an unknown photographer circa 1935. But to a contemporary eye, trained by social media, it may suggest hashtags from #ThrowbackThursday to #BlackLivesMatter. It's one of some hundred still and moving images, spanning a century and a half, in the International Center of Photography's exhibition "**Perpetual Revolution: The Image and Social Change**," which considers how advances in technology have politicized visual culture. Opens Jan. 27.

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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

Julie Byrne

Byrne has been engrossed in music since she left Buffalo, at the age of eighteen, with stops in Pittsburgh, Chicago, Seattle, and New Orleans. Not long after moving to New York, this country-folk songwriter found herself starved for open green spaces and the mental state that they abet. So she found a job as a park ranger, with Central Park providing an ample office for her day gig. The slow, sparse songs she wrote off the clock revel in meditativeness; she has a mature, weighty mid-range, employed to describe clouds that buzz by, double rainbows, and "natural blue" skies. Byrne marks the release of her sophomore album, "Not Even Happiness," with an intimate show—her minimalist guitar and understated tone beg for Rough Trade's rustic acoustics. (64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn. roughtradeny.com. Jan. 27.)

Machinedrum

Travis Stewart, the man behind the Machinedrum moniker, is a producer and beatmaker capable of swiftly moving through a dizzying array of genres, from juke to pop, while retaining intense focus. His greatest talent, though, is crafting music that's engulfing and communal, spurring connections with fellow-rumpshakers on the dance floor. Stewart, who also records with Praveen Sharma in the duo Sepalcure, recently moved from Berlin to Los Angeles. Judging from the ebullient sound of "Human Energy," his latest album, the newfound sunniness seems to have made an impression. On the album, bolstered by collaborations with the R. & B. singer Dawn Richard, he makes a strong case that something divine can be found through DJs and MPCs. At Webster Hall, Stewart will treat audiences to a live A/V performance-cum-dance party that will also feature the visual artists **Strangeloop & Timeboy**, as well as **Taso**, **DJ Spinn**, and **DJ Earl**, of the Teklife label, and the residents **Alex English**, **Hiyawatha**, and **DJ Dali**. (125 E. 11th St. 212-353-1600. Jan. 27.)

Giorgio Moroder

This Italian disco pioneer mapped four-on-the-floor patterns of kick and snare drums before many of today's working d.j.s were tall enough to reach decks. From his string of hits with Donna Summer during disco's fever pitch ("Last Dance," "Hot Stuff") to the soundtrack for the nineteen-eighties hedonist classic "Scarface," Moroder's catalogue was already enviable before his modern renaissance. The dance-music mascots Daft Punk tapped him for their 2013 comeback, "Random Access Memories," and the producers behind the controversial video-game series Grand Theft Auto asked him to score their sprawling, seedy digital world. Then there are his own releases, such as "Déjà Vu," from 2015, which continue to surprise old fans and intrigue new ones. Moroder brings five de-

cades of thump for a rare set of disco classics and forward-thinking electronic cuts. (*Flash Factory*, 229 W. 28th St. 212-929-9070. Jan. 27.)

Show Me the Body

This punk outfit has described itself as "three Jews from New York"—Queens, specifically—and the city recurs in the group's music and imagery. They've developed in public since 2014, when Julian Cashwan Pratt, Harlan Steed, and Noah Cohen-Corbett went from playing local parties to a no-frills tour with Ratking. They aren't the loudest or the fastest players, but they give their songs spacey reverb and a rap-friendly swing for an unfamiliar texture—last year's album, "Body War," trafficked in Anthony Kiedis and Death Grips in fairly equal measure. Coachella-bound fans can see them at this year's festival after all (an initial dustup led the band to deny the booking, despite their appearance on the lineup), but, if you're skipping the desert, you can catch them on Greenpoint's northern tip. (*Saint Vitus*, 1120 Manhattan Ave., Brooklyn. Jan. 27.)

Esperanza Spalding

"Emily's D+Evolution," Spalding's shift toward pop, was a 2016 gem, arguably overshadowed by flashier releases in a stuffed year. The jazz bassist, who wowed with her compositional skills long before this creative turn, felt compelled to try her hand at pop pageantry, and the results land somewhere in between. Take your pick of the album's surrealist art-rock songs: "Judas," "Rest in Pleasure," and "Elevate or Operate" are all inventive, engrossing tracks that pull off R. & B. and jazz in quick steps and then shoot for something more. After joining Solange Knowles and others in Washington, D.C., for a concert entitled "Peace Ball: Voices of Hope and Resistance," Spalding performs as part of "Virgin Whites," a staging of the Greek mythological story of Iphigenia. (*Pioneer Works*, 159 Pioneer St., Brooklyn. Jan. 27.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Butler, Bernstein, and the Hot 9

The stylistically omnivorous brass man Steven Bernstein has a soft spot for early jazz, so his fertile hookup with the New Orleans pianist and singer Henry Butler, a virtuosic performer who honors tradition while remaining unbound to it, always delivers big fun. The fruits of their collaboration—fortified by the spirited Hot 9 unit—were first heard on "Viper's Drag," from 2014, a recording that gave a joyous dusting-off to formative material from Jelly Roll Morton, Fats Waller, and others. (*Jazz Standard*, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Jan. 26-29.)

Mary Halvorson

This innovative guitarist works mainly in the eclectic corners of the jazz world, but she also holds a deep feeling for rock, rooted in a life-long appreciation of Hendrix, whose music first inspired her to take up the electric guitar, at the age of eleven, in suburban Boston. For

this show, after a yearlong hiatus, she revives her exquisite quartet, Reverse Blue, which features **Chris Speed** on tenor saxophone and clarinet, **Eivind Opsvik** on bass, and **Tomas Fujiwara** on drums. The group's eponymous 2014 début includes compositions from each member and stands out for its seamless integration of disparate elements—ruminative balladry, prog-tinged guitar solos, atonality—into a lyrical, abstract whole. (*The Owl Music Parlor*, 497 Rogers Ave., Brooklyn. 718-774-0042. Jan. 27.)

The Latin Side of Dizzy with Carlos Henriquez

To investigate Dizzy Gillespie's deep interest in Latin music is not exactly delving into unexplored territory, but it's always welcome and couldn't be more timely. Henriquez, the bassist with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, takes charge of his own hand-picked ensemble for a program that will touch upon such expected Afro-Cuban jazz masterpieces as "A Night in Tunisia" and "Manteca," as well as less familiar but equally propulsive Gillespiana fare. Stepping into Dizzy's shoes are the trumpeters **Terell Stafford** and **Mike Rodriguez**; the percussionist **Pedrito Martinez** will invoke the spirit of Dizzy's invaluable collaborator of the late forties, the influential, ill-fated Cuban conguero Chano Pozo. (*Appel Room, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St.* 212-721-6500. Jan. 27-28.)

Lee Konitz and Dan Tepfer

One of the defining individualists of modern jazz, the alto saxophonist Konitz has, throughout his seven-decade career, cemented persuasive relationships with distinguished pianists including Lennie Tristano, Hal Galper, and Martial Solal. Recently he's found another fellow-spirit in the pianist Tepfer, who shares the eighty-nine-year-old patriarch's obsession with cliché-free improvisation and without-a-net excursions. Konitz, who has also been singing, sans words, these days, may dust off his too rarely heard soprano saxophone, if we're lucky. (*Jazz Gallery*, 1160 Broadway, at 27th St., Fifth fl. 646-494-3625. Jan. 27-28.)

Mike Longo and Paul West

Dizzy Gillespie's ensembles of the fifties and sixties were a breeding ground for formidable players, including James Moody and Kenny Barron, as well as for less heralded but vital figures, like the pianist Longo and the bassist West, who unite here for a snug duet. The no-nonsense rapport of these bop-based stylists can be sampled on the 2007 recording "Float Like a Butterfly," dedicated to another Longo mentor, the pianist Oscar Peterson. (*Mezzrow*, 163 W. 10th St. mezzrow.com. Jan. 26.)

Brad Mehldau and Fleurine

Fleurine, a Dutch vocalist who sings in English, French, and Portuguese, and Mehldau, a primary pianist of his generation, share both a marriage and a leaning toward eclectic material that swerves away from the jazz mainstream. It takes brave spirits to attempt a rehauling of the Supertramp hit "The Logical Song," but that's just what these two did on the duet album "Close Enough for Love," which also found room for Hendrix's "Up From the Skies" and "Chanson De Delphine," from the Jacques Demy film "The Young Girls of Rochefort." Eclectic, indeed. (*Birdland*, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. Jan. 29.)

DANCE



"The Fairy's Kiss" has been attempted by many choreographers; Ratmansky discusses his latest version at the Guggenheim's "Works & Process."

Kiss and Tell

Alexei Ratmansky revisits an old favorite.

“THE FAIRY’S KISS,” based on a bone-chilling Hans Christian Andersen story and with a score combining the gifts of Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky, is something you would think that many choreographers would like to get their hands on, and many have. The first version, by Bronislava Nijinska, was made in 1928, for Ida Rubinstein’s company, in Paris. Rubinstein, not a great dancer but a great beauty, had lent her exotic presence to early productions of Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. By 1928, she was older, and stooped, and had had a bad face-lift. Still, she had the money to commission work from Europe’s best theatre artists, and so she got this piece from Stravinsky, who intended it as an allegory: the artist, in return for his gift—the “fairy’s kiss”—gave up his hope for happiness in life. Stravinsky crafted the score out of Tchaikovsky songs and piano pieces and dedicated it to his revered predecessor, who, it was said, had died in despair. The reception of “The Fairy’s Kiss” would

not have gladdened Tchaikovsky’s ghost. “It was like a drawing room in which someone has suddenly made a bad smell,” Diaghilev wrote. “Everyone pretended not to notice.” Diaghilev was not a disinterested witness. He felt that Stravinsky should be writing music for him, not for Rubinstein. But the reviewers agreed.

Later choreographers—George Balanchine, Frederick Ashton, Maurice Béjart, Kenneth MacMillan, John Neumeier, James Kudelka—took a turn with “The Fairy’s Kiss,” but many of them had trouble with it. One problem may have been Stravinsky’s scenario. With a fairy rescuing an abandoned baby and then, like Rumpelstiltskin, returning years later—first as a gypsy!—to claim what’s hers, the story could have seemed old-fashioned to audiences who had seen beach-party ballets. The musicologist Eric Walter White had another theory: that the Tchaikovsky salon pieces that Stravinsky chose were simply too fragile a scaffold to support so fraught a tale. Stravinsky had to ramp up the music—add thicker harmonies, chromatics—and, when he did, it gave off “the im-

pression of a trick.” Tellingly, Balanchine, the choreographer who probably struggled the longest with the ballet—he made his first version in 1937 and then revised it again and again—was not satisfied until he switched over to the shorter “divertimento” that Stravinsky made of the score, and dumped the fairy.

Soon Balanchine will have a rival for the most “Fairy’s Kiss”es. In the nineteen-nineties, Alexei Ratmansky, now the artist-in-residence at American Ballet Theatre, made a version for the Kiev Opera, and then one for the Maryinsky. But he found both a little boring, so now he is making a third attempt, for Miami City Ballet, to première in Miami on Feb. 10. He has put all the old stuff back in: fairies, gypsies, peasants, the baby. On Jan. 29 and 30, as part of the Guggenheim’s “Works & Process” series, he, together with his designer, Wendall K. Harrington, and M.C.B.’s artistic director, Lourdes Lopez, will discuss the new production with the dance historian Doug Fullington, and Miami dancers will perform parts of it.

—Joan Acocella



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New York City Ballet

This week, the company alternates between programs of Balanchine ballets—including his seldom-seen one-act précis of “Swan Lake”—and evenings of new works. There are three new pieces this season, two by Justin Peck, and one, “The Shimmering Asphalt,” by the Swedish-born Pontus Lidberg. Lidberg’s piece is an abstract and moody work for fifteen, set to a glistening, legato score by David Lang. • Jan. 25 and Jan. 31 at 7:30: “Allegro Brillante,” “Swan Lake,” and “The Four Temperaments.” • Jan. 26 at 7:30 and Jan. 28 at 8: “Fearful Symmetries,” “The Shimmering Asphalt,” and “The Times Are Racing.” • Jan. 27 at 8: “Scènes de Ballet,” “The Cage,” “Eight Easy Pieces,” “Scherzo Fantastique,” and “Stravinsky Violin Concerto.” • Jan. 28 at 2 and Jan. 29 at 3: “La Sonnambula,” “Prodigal Son,” and “Firebird.” (*David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Through Feb. 26.*)

Alexandra Bachzetsis

Beyond the allusive hints of Dada and Surrealism in its costumes, this Swiss-Greek choreographer’s “Massacre: Variations on a Theme” recalls the tradition of ballet mécanique. The music is provided by a player piano and two live pianists. The dancers are all human, but their behavior—repeating and passing around sequences of movement drawn from caged gorillas, the swivel-propelled grooving of Northern Soul dancing, and Trisha Brown, among other sources—suggests automation. The intended implication, though, is less about men becoming machines than about gender and sexuality being shaped by cultural conformity. An accompanying video installation, directed by Bachzetsis and Glen Fogel, is also on view. (*Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. 212-708-9400. Jan. 24-28.*)

Complexions Contemporary Ballet

The latest aesthetic justification advanced by the choreographer Dwight Rhoden for the senseless, slam-bang spectacles that he inflicts upon his always attractive and hyper-flexible dancers is that he is a collage artist. The first entry in his “Collage Series” is an electronica piece with a title that could serve for much of his work: “Gutter Glitter.” Also débütting is “Star Dust,” the first installment of a David Bowie tribute ballet. (*Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 24-29 and Jan. 31. Through Feb. 5.*)

Paulina Olowska

In “Slavic Goddesses—A Wreath of Ceremonies,” this gifted Polish painter looks back at the work of the Art Deco artist Zofia Stryjeńska. Olowska’s set and costumes borrow imagery from Stryjeńska’s painting series “Slavic Deities,” reactivating neglected ideas of paganism and femininity. Katy Pyle and members of her gender-bending company, Ballez, personify the goddesses in folk-dance solos set to an original score by Sergei Tcherepnin. (*The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Jan. 26-28.*)

Monica Bill Barnes & Company

“Bringing dance where it doesn’t belong” is Barnes’s characteristically tongue-in-cheek motto, and her latest project, “The Museum Workout,” certainly has chutzpah. She and her longtime dance partner, Anna Bass, lead tours of the Metropolitan Museum of Art which incorporate choreographed exercise. Their collaborator is the illustrator and frequent *New Yorker* contributor Maira Kalman, who designed the course and provides recorded commentary on a

soundtrack of Motown and disco. Is it all a joke about dance in museums, or does fitness really go with fine art? (*Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Jan. 26-29. Through Feb. 12.*)

“Blind: Strength in Vulnerability”

Tango is often seen—by practitioners and spectators alike—as a metaphor for life. Partnership, confessional, chess match, sexual courtship: the dance is a flexible fill-in for these and other dimensions of the human experience. Ana Padrón and Diego Blanco, the creators of this show, add yet another layer to the tango dynamic through the use of blindfolds: What does it mean to give oneself to a partner when one is dancing blind? The evening is set to original music by Pedro Giarrado, performed live. (*BAM Fisher, 321 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. tangoforall.org. Jan. 26-29.*)

Jan Martens

Relationships are hard work. That truism is the theme of “Sweat Baby Sweat,” a duet by this Flemish choreographer, and it’s related to the demands that his dogged aesthetic makes of an audience. Here, a man and a woman in unsexy underwear grapple for a long time, the intense connection between them at once masked and magnified by a slow shifting among cantilevered embraces, some sealed with an everlasting kiss. Through pop lyrics, Martens teasingly

acknowledges how the couple’s all-consuming insularity might inspire viewer boredom, but sticking with it yields emotionally complex rewards. (*Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. Jan. 27-28.*)

Trisha Brown Dance Company

“A Night of Philosophy & Ideas” is a free twelve-hour conglomeration of debates, lectures, screenings, readings, and performances. The early works of Trisha Brown, so clear in their embodied concepts, should fit right in. A multigenerational group of Brown company members (including Irène Hultman and Vicki Shick) performs such pieces as “Group Primary Accumulation” and “Spanish Dance” in various parts of the Brooklyn Public Library’s central branch throughout the night and early morning. (*10 Grand Army Plaza. 718-230-2100. Jan. 28-29.*)

“Works & Process” / “The Fairy’s Kiss”

A small contingent of dancers from Miami City Ballet comes to New York with excerpts from its new production of Stravinsky’s “The Fairy’s Kiss,” by the globe-trotting choreographer Alexei Ratmansky. Originally conceived in 1928, the ballet is a loose interpretation of the haunting Hans Christian Andersen tale “The Ice Maiden.” (*Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3575. Jan. 29-30.*)

MOVIES

OPENING

A Dog’s Purpose A comic drama, about a dog (voiced by Josh Gad) who is reincarnated in order to help several families. Directed by Lasse Hallström; starring Britt Robertson and Dennis Quaid. *Opening Jan. 27. (In wide release.)* • **Gold** Matthew McConaughey stars in this drama, as a mining executive who seeks gold in an Indonesian jungle. Directed by Stephen Gaghan; co-starring Edgar Ramírez and Bryce Dallas Howard. *Opening Jan. 27. (In wide release.)* • **The Salesman** Reviewed this week in *The Current Cinema*. *Opening Jan. 27. (In limited release.)*

NOW PLAYING

Fences

Chatting it up from the back of the garbage truck they operate for the city of Pittsburgh, Troy Maxson (Denzel Washington) and his best friend, Bono (Stephen McKinley Henderson), launch this adaptation of August Wilson’s 1983 play with a free-flowing vibrancy that, unfortunately, doesn’t last long. Under Washington’s earnest but plain direction, scenes of loose-limbed riffing—such as a sharp-humored trio piece in the Maxson back yard for the two men and Rose (Viola Davis), Troy’s steadfast wife—soar above the drama’s conspicuous mechanisms and symbolism. Troy, a frustrated former baseball player from an era before the major leagues were integrated, tries to prevent his son Cory (Jovan Adepo) from seeking a football scholarship to college. Meanwhile, the embittered paterfamilias threatens his marriage by having an affair with a local woman.

Much of the action takes place in the stagelike setting of the Maxson home and yard; despite the actors’ precise and passionate performances, Washington neither elevates nor overcomes the artifice, except in his own mighty declamation of Troy’s harrowing life story. With Mykelti Williamson, as Troy’s brother, Gabriel, a grievously wounded veteran; and Russell Hornsby, as Troy’s son Lyons, a musician who’s struggling for success and his father’s love.—*Richard Brody (In wide release.)*

The Founder

After “The Blind Side” (2009) and “Saving Mr. Banks” (2013), John Lee Hancock dishes up his most peculiar movie to date. Michael Keaton plays Ray Kroc, whom we first meet in 1954, in San Bernardino, where he has an epiphany while watching the burgers and fries being served, at top speed, by the McDonald brothers Mac (John Carroll Lynch) and Dick (Nick Offerman). Kroc suggests that they establish a franchise, which he will oversee; slowly and inexorably, he pulls control of the company out of their hands, and winds up with an empire. Keaton is at his most carnivorous, rendering Kroc, however disgraceful his dealings, impossible to dismiss, let alone to ignore, and the movie submits to his will. We get shots of people chewing their fast food in a state of bliss: perfect for the purposes of Ray, who compares a branch of McDonald’s to a church. The screenplay, by Robert D. Siegel, is peppered with bullet points and words of huckster’s wisdom, while the score, by Carter Burwell, abets the triumphalist timbre of the plot. With fine support from Laura Dern, as the hero’s lonesome wife, and from Linda Cardellini, as Joan Smith, who wins his heart by introduc-

ing him to powdered milkshakes.—*Anthony Lane*
(Reviewed in our issue of 1/16/17.) (In wide release.)

Hidden Figures

A crucial episode of the nineteen-sixties, centered on both the space race and the civil-rights struggle, comes to light in this energetic and impassioned drama. It's the story of three black women from Virginia who, soon after Sputnik shocked the world, are hired by NASA, where they do indispensable work in a segregated workplace. Mary Jackson (Janelle Monae), endowed with engineering talent, has been kept out of the profession by racial barriers; Dorothy Vaughan (Octavia Spencer) heads the office of "computers," or gifted mathematicians, but can't be promoted owing to her race; and the most gifted of calculators, Katherine Johnson (Taraji P. Henson), is recruited for the main NASA rocket-science center, where, as the only black employee, she endures relentless insults and indignities. Working from a nonfiction book by Margot Lee Shetterly, the director, Theodore Melfi (who co-wrote the script with Allison Schroeder), evokes the women's professional conflicts while filling in the vitality of their intimate lives; the film also highlights, in illuminating detail, the baked-in assumptions of everyday racism that, regardless of changes in law, ring infuriatingly true today. With Kevin Costner, as Katherine's principled boss; Mahershala Ali, as her suitor; and Glen Powell, as John Glenn, a hero in space and on the ground.—R.B. (In limited release.)

The Hired Hand

Peter Fonda's directorial début, from 1971, is a lyrical flight—ninety minutes of impassioned imagery about marital and fraternal loyalty, manhood, and (what's rarer for a Western) womanhood, too. It picks up a pair of decent, affable drifters (Fonda and Warren Oates), just when Fonda has sickened of the winding trail that was supposed to lead to California and has decided to go home to the wife and daughter he abandoned seven years before. After a horse thief kills their young third partner, Oates chooses to settle down for a spell, too. Oates never gave a subtler, warmer performance than as a man who unexpectedly takes to domesticity. Always robust and true, Verna Bloom, as Fonda's wife, conveys an extraordinary aura of sexual mortification. Fonda, touching as an actor, proves astonishing as a director, using a fluid, tactile style to conjure a life lived close to the elements and to sudden death. The way he stages violence ramifies shock into diverse stunned emotions: awe, grief, remorse, even a troubled satisfaction. And the cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond operates at the summit of his powers: the final shot of a barn has the quiet confidence of a classic still-life.—Michael Sragow (*Metrograph*; Jan. 30.)

Jackie

Natalie Portman plays Jacqueline Kennedy, and does so with such careful intensity that it will be hard for future actresses to take on the role afresh and make it theirs. No one, certainly, will capture the First Lady's voice with quite such breathy precision. Much of Pablo Larraín's film, scripted by Noah Oppenheim, is set after the death of John F. Kennedy (Caspar Phillipson), although we are led a sorry dance between the period of mourning, the day of the assassination, and some of the brighter times that went before—Jackie's televised tour of the White House, for example, in 1962. That narrative restlessness owes something to an interview that she gives, when newly widowed, to a visiting reporter (Billy Crudup), but more to the frailty of her grieving mind, and Larraín often com-

pounds the mood by trapping her, with no means of escape, in the center of the frame. Respectful viewers may find the results tendentious and even tactless; do we really need to see inside the Presidential limo after the shooting? Still, Portman gives the film her all, assisted by Peter Sarsgaard, as Robert Kennedy; John Carroll Lynch, as Lyndon B. Johnson; and John Hurt, as a ruminate priest.—A.L. (12/5/16) (In limited release.)

La La Land

Breezy, moody, and even celestial, Damien Chazelle's new film may be just the tonic we need. The setting is Los Angeles, with excursions to Paris and Boulder City, and the time is roughly now, though the movie, like its hero, hankers warmly after more melodious times. Sebastian (Ryan Gosling) is a jazz pianist who dreams of opening a club but, in the meantime, keeps himself afloat with undignified gigs—rolling out merry tunes, say, to entertain diners at Christmas. Enter Mia (Emma Stone), an actress who, like Kathy Selden in "Singin' in the Rain," is waiting for that big break. Haltingly, they fall in love; or, rather, they rise in love, with a waltz inside a planetarium that lifts them into the air. The color scheme is hot and startling, and the songs, with music by Justin Hurwitz and lyrics by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, ferry the action along. If the singing and the dancing lack the otherworldly rigor of an old M-G-M production, that is deliberate; these lovers are much too mortal for perfection. With John Legend, as a purveyor of jazz-funk, and J. K. Simmons (who commanded Chazelle's "Whiplash"), as a withering maître d'.—A.L. (12/12/16) (In wide release.)

Live by Night

Ben Affleck—as director, screenwriter, and star—revels in the juicy historical details of this Prohibition-era gangster drama (adapted from a novel by Dennis Lehane) but fails to bring it to life. He plays Joe Coughlin, a disillusioned First World War veteran and small-time Boston criminal who tries to keep apart from both the city's Irish gang, run by Albert White (Robert Glenister), and its Italian one, headed by Maso Pescatore (Remo Girone). But, after being brutally beaten for romancing Albert's mistress, Emma Gould (Sienna Miller), Joe goes to work for Maso in Tampa, taking over the rum racket and falling in love with a local crime lord, Graciella Suarez (Zoe Saldana), a dark-complexioned Cuban woman—and their affair provokes the wrath of the K.K.K. The drive for power, the craving for love, the hunger for revenge, and a rising sense of justice keep the gory and grandiose gangland action churning and furnish a hefty batch of plot twists and reversals of fortune. But Affleck's flat and flashy storytelling omits the best and the boldest behind-the-scenes machinations that Joe and his cohorts pull off, depicting instead the noisy but dull fireworks that result.—R.B. (In wide release.)

Manchester by the Sea

Kenneth Lonergan's new film is carefully constructed, compellingly acted, and often hard to watch. The hero—if you can apply the word to someone so defiantly unheroic—is a janitor, Lee Chandler (Casey Affleck), who is summoned from Boston up the coast of Massachusetts after the death of his brother Joe (Kyle Chandler). This is the definition of a winter's tale, and the ground is frozen too hard for the body to be buried. Piece by piece, in a succession of flashbacks, the shape of Lee's past becomes apparent; he was married to Randi (Michelle Williams), who still lives locally, and something terrible tore them apart. Joe,



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too, had an ex-wife, now an ex-drinker (Gretchen Mol), and their teen-age son, Patrick—the most resilient character in the movie, smartly played by Lucas Hedges—is alarmed to learn that Lee is to be his legal guardian. What comes as a surprise, amid a welter of sorrow, is the harsh comedy that colors much of the dialogue, and the near-farcical frequency with which things go wrong. Far-reaching tragedy adjoins simple human error: such is the territory that Lonergan so skillfully maps out.—A.L. (11/28/16) (*In wide release.*)

Minnie and Moskowitz

Weary of the aggression that he faces in New York, Seymour Moskowitz (Seymour Cassel), a pony-tailed, happy-go-lucky car parker and overgrown mama's boy, moves to California, where he learns that the aggression he faces is, in fact, his own. This romantic drama by John Cassavetes, from 1971, comes with a ready-made dose of fantasy—Seymour and Minnie Moore (Gena Rowlands), the single, middle-aged woman he rescues from a lout and loves at first sight, spend their free time at Bogart revivals. But, where Seymour sees a touch of Lauren Bacall in Minnie, she has few illusions about him. Brutality is everywhere—as many punches are thrown as in a boxing match, and far less fairly—and there's a special place in Hell for Minnie's married ex-lover (played by Cassavetes, Rowlands's real-life husband), yet, in this shambling tale of punch-drunk love, the rage is a part of romantic passion. The sculptural physicality of the images, a 3-D explosion without glasses, embodies that violence while preserving the antagonists' innocent grace; love smooths things out to a dreamy and reflective shine.—R.B. (*Metrograph*; Jan. 26.)

Patriots Day

Peter Berg's docudrama, about the 2013 bombing of the Boston Marathon and the hunt for its perpetrators, is vigorous, sentimental, and unreflective. It briskly establishes the identities and personalities of its protagonists, including police officers involved in the investigation, victims of the attack and its aftermath, and the Tsarnaev brothers. Much of the action is purely illustrative, keeping a narrative flow between several elaborate and dramatic police-procedural set pieces, starting with the takeover of the investigation by the F.B.I., under Special Agent Rick DesLauriers (Kevin Bacon). He establishes a command center, where a small army of information technologists, retrieving and analyzing videos from cell phones and surveillance cameras, display powers that are both dazzling and chilling. The explosive showdown that resulted in the capture and death of Tamerlan Tsarnaev (Themo Melikidze) turns a suburban street into a virtual war zone; the arrest of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (Alex Wolff) is astonishing in its depiction of militarized law enforcement. Mark Wahlberg is front and center throughout, as a passionate officer of abiding principle; the story ultimately pivots on the bravery of one endangered civilian (Jimmy O. Yang).—R.B. (*In wide release.*)

Silence

Martin Scorsese has never made a Western; this adaptation of Shusaku Endo's 1966 novel, set in the seventeenth century, is the closest thing to it. Two Portuguese priests, Sebastião Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield) and Francisco Garrupe (Adam Driver), have heard rumors that their teacher and confessor, Father Cristóvão Ferreira (Liam Neeson), a missionary in Japan, has betrayed his Christian faith, and they travel to search for him. En route, they learn of the bloody persecution that Christians face in Japan, and when they're smuggled into the country

they, too, face the authorities' wrath. Rodrigues is the protagonist of this picaresque epic of oppression and martyrdom, which Scorsese ingeniously infuses with tropes from classic movies, as in the mannerisms of a good-hearted but weak-willed Christian (Yosuke Kubozuka) and a brutal but refined official (Issey Ogata), whose intricate discussions of religion and culture with Rodrigues form the movie's intellectual backbone. Many of the priests' wanderings have the underlined tone of mere exposition; but as Rodrigues closes in on Ferreira the movie morphs into a spectacularly dramatic and bitterly ironic theatre of cruelty that both exalts and questions central Christian myths. It plays like Scorsese's own searing confession.—R.B. (*In limited release.*)

Toni Erdmann

Maren Ade's new film is a German comedy, two hours and forty minutes long, and much of it is set in Bucharest. These are unusual credentials, but the result has been received with rapture since it showed at Cannes. What it grapples with, after all, is matters of universal anxiety: the bonds, or lack of them, between parent and child, and the ways in which the modern world—in particular, the world of business—can compress the spirit. Sandra Hüller plays Ines, who works as a smoother of deals in the oil industry; her father is Winfried (Peter Simonischek), a shambling hulk who thinks that a set of false teeth is amusing, and who tracks her to Romania in a bid to disrupt her life and, perhaps, to alleviate its ills. His method involves assuming a new identity (hence the title) and invading the

space where his daughter makes her deals. We get, among other things, sexual humiliation involving petits fours, and a party that takes an unexpected turn. If the film has a fault, it lies with Ade's reliance on embarrassment as a weapon of attack. For a generation reared on "The Office," that may not be a problem. In German.—A.L. (*In limited release.*)

20th Century Women

In Santa Barbara in 1979, Dorothea Fields (Annette Bening) presides, with genial tolerance, over a mixed household. She is in her mid-fifties, with a teen-age son, Jamie (Lucas Jade Zumann), who is nurturing an interest in feminism, and a couple of lodgers—Abbie (Greta Gerwig), a russet-haired photographer with violent tastes in music, and the more serene William (Billy Crudup), whose talents range from meditation and effortless seduction to fixing the ceiling. Mike Mills's movie, like his earlier "Beginners" (2010), is a restless affair, skipping between characters (each of whom is given a potted biography) and conjuring the past in sequences of stills. Plenty of time is also devoted to the friendship, threatened by looming desire, between Jamie and Julie (Elle Fanning), who is older and wiser than he is, but no less confused; at one point, they take his mother's car—a VW Beetle, naturally—and elope. Amid all that, the movie belongs unarguably to Bening, and to her stirring portrayal of a woman whose ideals have taken a hit but have not collapsed, and who strives, in the doldrums of middle age, to defeat her own disappointment.—A.L. (12/19 & 26/16) (*In limited release.*)

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Evening at the Talk House

The New Group stages Wallace Shawn's play, in which a playwright and a group of actors reunite ten years after a flop. The cast features Shawn, Matthew Broderick, John Epperson, and Claudia Shear. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. *Previews begin Jan. 31.*)

Everybody

In Branden Jacobs-Jenkins's latest work, a modern spin on the fifteenth-century morality play "Everyman," the main character is chosen from the cast by lottery each night. Lila Neugebauer directs. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. *Previews begin Jan. 31.*)

Fade

Primary Stages presents Tanya Saracho's play, directed by Jerry Ruiz, about a Mexican writer at a Hollywood studio who befriends her office's Latino janitor. (*Cherry Lane*, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111. *In previews.*)

The Liar

Michael Kahn directs David Ives's adaptation of the Corneille farce, in which a seventeenth-century gentleman causes havoc by telling outrageous fibs. (*Classic Stage Company*, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111. *In previews. Opens Jan. 26.*)

Man from Nebraska

David Cromer directs a 2003 play by Tracy Letts ("August: Osage County"), about a Midwestern man (Reed Birney) who sets off on a quest to restore his sense of faith. (*Second Stage*, 305 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. *Previews begin Jan. 26.*)

Our Secrets

Béla Pintér and Company presents a new piece by the Hungarian director and playwright, about a community torn apart by surveillance and betrayal in Communist Budapest. (*Baryshnikov Arts Center*, 450 W. 37th St. 866-811-4111. Jan. 25-29.)

Ring Twice for Miranda

In Alan Hruska's dark comic fable, directed by Rick Lombardo, a chambermaid serving an all-powerful master flees with a butler into the rough outside world. (*City Center Stage II*, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. *In previews.*)

Yen

Lucas Hedges ("Manchester by the Sea") stars in Anna Jordan's play, directed by Trip Cullman for MCC, in which two under-parented kids meet a neighbor who takes an interest in their dog. (*Lucille Lortel*, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101. *In previews. Opens Jan. 31.*)

Yours Unfaithfully

The Mint stages a comedy by Miles Malleson, published in 1933 but never produced, about a depressed writer (Max von Essen) whose wife tries to reignite their marriage. Jonathan Bank directs. (*Beckett*, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. *In previews. Opens Jan. 26.*)

NOW PLAYING

The Front Page

This outstanding revival of Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's 1928 comedy has a surfeit of fantastic actors, who give the production everything they've got. Hildy Johnson (John Slattery) is a newspaperman who is trying to get out of the game, despite pressure from his boss, Walter Burns (Nathan Lane). Hildy is drawn back into journalism, against his better judgment, when a beleaguered worker named Earl Williams (John Magaro) escapes from prison on the eve of his execution. The director, Jack O'Brien, utilizes the best of what Broadway has to offer: a big stage, a solid budget, slick production values. The cast (including Sherie Rene Scott) is sizeable, and it takes a director of O'Brien's skill to keep all those hoops in the air without losing sight of the story, or of the internal lives of the characters. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/7/16.) (*Broadhurst*, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. Through Jan. 29.)

Jitney

The director Ruben Santiago-Hudson handles the large cast of August Wilson's 1982 drama with verve—an actor himself, he is sensitive to their needs—while he keeps the story moving. The central plot concerns Becker (John Douglas Thompson), the earnest owner of a gypsy-cab business in Pittsburgh. It's 1977, and the world is changing: the block Becker's business is on may be razed in the name of progress. Still, he and his drivers, all played by actors of great skill and humor, want to hold on to the past even as the past seeks to reject them. Particularly excellent are Michael Potts, as the emotionally tightfisted Turnbo, and the rising new star André Holland, who plays Youngblood. Holland brings to mind late black actors like Howard Rollins and Paul Winfield—performers who didn't play their race but added it to a character's complexities. (Harvey Blanks, as the numbers runner Shealy, adds lots of comic jolts.) There's a little too much blues music to mark the transitions, but that's a minor drag compared to the uniformly good work of Manhattan Theatre Club's ensemble. (*Samuel J. Friedman*, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

Made in China

This musical is almost certainly the first puppet show to open with a giant panda rapping a Donald Trump supercut and conclude with a midcoastal love duet. The loopy and cerebral company Wakka Wakka uses small objects to think big: previous works have taken on the creation of the universe and the financial collapse of Iceland. Here the focus is on fraught Sino-American relations, as exemplified by Mary, a gloomy divorcée, and Eddie, her lonely Chinese-immigrant neighbor. After Mary receives a plea from an imprisoned Chinese worker, a ravening toilet abducts her and Eddie, landing them in Beijing. Unsurprisingly, the critique of American consumerism and Chinese labor practices pales in comparison to the giddily surreal staging and kooky Bunraku-style puppetry. But when imaginative force summons humping dogs, stalking dragons, a high-kicking Mao, and a singing toilet plunger, who can complain? (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

Mope

Trevor (Eric T. Miller) is a, ahem, working stiff in the porn industry. A low-level performer—the “mope” of the title—he's seething with resentment. Women on set and off reject him, and his roommate, the genial Shawn (RJ Brown), is climbing the adult-entertainment ladder while Trevor makes extra cash as a night-club doorman. Paul

Cameron Hardy's play is most interesting for its tonal shifts, even if they're not always smooth. The show often flirts with sitcom tropes, especially in the scenes with Alice (Jennifer Tsay), a wide-eyed hedge-fund employee who discovers the sex industry's odd subculture. (Porn karaoke—it's a thing!) But the real subject here is the white American lumpenproletariat's disaffection, as Trevor, bored and angry, blames everybody but himself for his failures. We're likely to see more plays about these men in the coming years. (*Ensemble Studio Theatre*, 549 W. 52nd St. 866-811-4111.)

The Present

The writer Andrew Upton has adapted one of Chekhov's earliest pieces for the stage, known as “Platonov”—he started it when he was eighteen—and one wonders why, especially since Michael Frayn did such a masterful adaptation in 1984. Upton's version is set in the nineteen-nineties, in post-Communist Russia, where, after decades of repression, tempers flare easily, and even the most boring conversation, apparently, leads to sexy talk. All of this takes place at a birthday celebration for Anna (Cate Blanchett, doing her best), who's turning forty. When she was younger, Anna was the unhappy trophy wife of a powerful general. Now various elements of her life come together at the general's summer dacha. He's just one ghost in the spectacle, as is the love that the schoolteacher Mikhail Platonov (Richard Roxburgh, crying every chance he gets) felt, and apparently still feels, for Anna. It's sad to watch actors of this calibre try to swim in such a mess, and they're not helped by the director, John Crowley, who does nothing to parse the confusion, let alone to spare Susan Prior, as Platonov's wife, from the misogyny that hobbles her role. (*Ethel Barrymore*, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

The Tempest

Given its themes of imprisonment and liberty, this play makes an ideal conclusion to the director Phyllida Lloyd's acclaimed trilogy of all-female Shakespeare shows set in a women's prison. Harriet Walter conjures Prospero by way of a respected old lifer named Hannah Wake. She and her fellow-inmates seem to be imagining their lives into Shakespeare's scenes (the storm that opens the play is a cell-block riot, and shipwrecked characters arrive as new inmates), sometimes losing themselves in its fantasies, until harsh prison horns abruptly end their play-acting. The most painful interruption comes during Miranda and Ferdinand's betrothal masque, which takes the form of a dazzling consumerist reverie projected onto giant white balloons, and which Prospero literally punctures, forcing the women back to the hard reality of the cell block. (*St. Ann's Warehouse*, 45 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

ALSO NOTABLE

The Beauty Queen of Leenane BAM Harvey Theatre. (Reviewed in this issue.) • **A Bronx Tale** Longacre. • **Dear Evan Hansen** Music Box. • **Finian's Rainbow** Irish Repertory. Through Jan. 29. • **The Great American Drama** A.R.T./New York Theatres. • **In Transit** Circle in the Square. • **Martin Luther on Trial** Pearl. Through Jan. 29. • **Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812** Imperial. • **Orange Julius Rattlestick**. • **The Oregon Trail** McGinn/Cazale. • **The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart** The Heath at the McKittrick Hotel. • **Tell Hector I Miss Him** Atlantic Stage 2. • **Waitress** Brooks Atkinson.

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ART

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Louise Bourgeois

In a dimly lit space, eight small holograms cast a red glow. The diorama-like images—a little-known body of work produced by Bourgeois in 1998, at the invitation of a holographic studio—feature familiar motifs from the French artist's lexicon. Chairs, beds, and bell jars seem to float just in front of the frames, the ghostly 3-D effect rendering her oneiric assemblages more nightmarish than usual. A sculpture rests on the floor in the middle of the room: a dollsize bed and two pairs of disembodied feet, which are entwined like lovers'. It offsets the intimate scale of the other vignettes, while echoing the very Bourgeoisian psychosexual situation of one of them, in which the artist positions the viewer as a voyeur, crouching dangerously close to the action at the foot of the bed. *Through Feb. 11.* (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

Matt Johnson

Exacting reproductions of everyday objects aren't breaking news (the work of Robert Gober or Fischli & Weiss come to mind), but in this carefully orchestrated show the Los Angeles sculptor takes the technique on a challenging ride. A piece of white Styrofoam is rendered

with such virtuosity that it's impossible to believe it's not real; more obviously handmade touches, like the lettering on a crumpled cup from the fast-food chain El Pollo Loco, raise unsettling questions about production and value. What makes a wooden sculpture of a wooden shipping pallet any different from the original, except its location in a gallery? Johnson's work is so labor-intensive that one takes it as a labor of love. But there is an implied critique here, too, about the market's insatiable appetite, which runs the risk of treating art as a form of fast food. *Through Feb. 25.* (303 Gallery, 555 W. 21st St. 212-255-1121.)

"January Show"

An elegiac tone runs through this group show, with very good reason: after eighteen years, the discerning gallerists Margaret Murray and Janice Guy are closing their space. (Like the proprietors, the show also boasts a winning streak of mordant humor.) Works by current and former gallery artists include Leidy Churchman's "Nontheistic Dharma," a text painting explaining, elaborately, that nothing lasts forever, and an impressively elegant pencil drawing by Fiona Banner of a giant black period, known in some circles as a "full stop." The gallery's shows have favored conceptual art and photography, and the relentless passage of time is

an inherent theme of both mediums; it echoes here in Matthew Buckingham's "Celeritas," a chalkboard noting the fraction of a second it takes the room's fluorescent light to reach it, and in Moyra Davey's grid of color photographs, documenting Abraham Lincoln's majestically ravaged profile on a hundred different pennies. *Through Feb. 4.* (Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372.)

"We Need to Talk"

The gallery hosts an emergency family meeting of sorts, as most of the art world still reels from the Presidential election. While public participation is emphasized (visitors are invited to record their thoughts in sketchbooks, submit short videos for a looping program, and attend a series of Saturday symposiums), a spirited exhibition of cris de coeur and sophisticated agit-prop is also on view. Judith Bernstein offers a pointedly salacious, decidedly feminist take on our political moment with the ultra-bright 2016 canvas "All-American Spread Eagle." A painting by Sarah Morris takes a shot at the new POTUS with a single glossy word: "Liar." Glenn Ligon's new red-neon sculpture "Another Country (After Baldwin)" evokes the 1962 novel's blaze of rage and longing. The show, with its scrappy, ad-hoc energy and first-rate works, is an admirable, and, one hopes, generative, circling of the wagons. *Through Feb. 11.* (Petzel, 456 W. 18th St. 212-680-9467.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Katherine Bradford

Mysterious, ecstatic paintings of water and sky by an artist who divides her time between New York and Maine. "Storm at Sea" is a night view of swimmers, splotchy peach figures in a field of inky purple. Incoming weather is rendered as a tangle of scratches and lavender scumbling at the horizon, illuminated by lightning. At odds with her aquatic subject matter, Bradford works with dry paint, in thin or rubbed-out layers, to achieve the murky and luminous depths of her otherworldly vistas. In "Shell Seeker, Large Night," a lovely line of dusky planets skimming the top edge of the image suggests that a mystical universe may lurk at the edge of the known world. Born in 1942, the artist is hardly new on the scene, but she has only recently begun to get her due. If this forceful, intriguing show is any indication, there is much more to look forward to. *Through Feb. 11.* (Sperone Westwater, 257 Bowery, at Stanton St. 212-999-7337.)

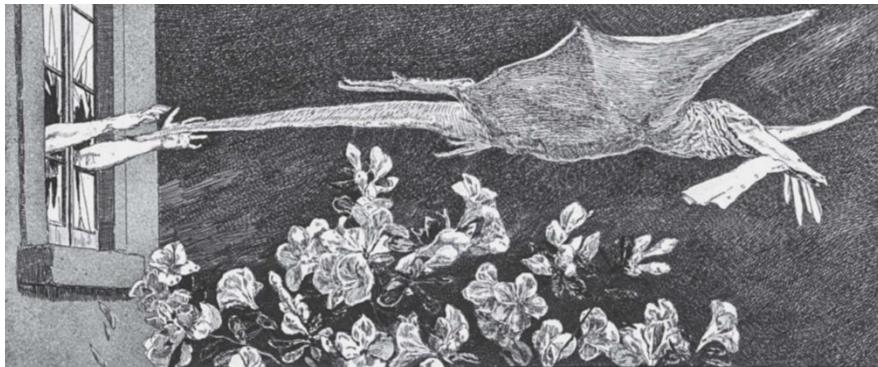
"AAA:Quien"

This two-person show of works by Erica Baum and Libby Rothfeld, who share an interest in palimpsests, is opaque but beguiling. Rothfeld is a young sculptor who combines objects and images—potatoes in laundry baskets, topped with ceramic crowns; a Velásquez reproduction partially obscured by a snapshot of a laundry room—with gravity and precision. (A washcloth nestled into a carved-out section of beige tilework in one work is especially poignant.) In Baum's beautiful closeup photographs of partially erased blackboards, made during her studies at Yale, in the nineteen-nineties, language plays hide-and-seek, as words arise from smudgy clouds of chalk. In one picture, the phrase "to depth" might serve as a motto for the whole show. *Through Feb. 5.* (Bureau, 178 Norfolk St. 212-227-2783.)



"LNAPRK" (1982), by Jean-Michel Basquiat, in "Fast Forward" at the Whitney. The show, which opens Jan. 27, revisits the resurgence of painting in downtown New York in the nineteen-eighties.

CLASSICAL MUSIC



The provocative art of Max Klinger was a surprising enthusiasm of the composer Johannes Brahms.

Hand in Glove

Leon Botstein explores Brahms's relationship to his artist friends.

AMID THE CULTURAL turmoil of late-nineteenth-century Europe—driven, most powerfully, by the revolutionary operas of Richard Wagner—Johannes Brahms continued to explore the early-nineteenth-century musical genres perfected by Beethoven: the symphony, the sonata, and the concerto, forms in which the composer used craftsmanship to transform pure emotion into musical structure. Brahms did keep up with the trends of his time, of course, if only to be familiar with the kinds of music he positioned his own works against. But his keen interest in the visual art of his day is less well known—an aspect of his creativity that Leon Botstein will explore with The Orchestra Now (TON) in their latest concert at the Metropolitan Museum, “Sight and Sound: Brahms, Menzel, and Klinger” (Jan. 29).

Late in his career, Brahms came to know the painters Adolph Menzel, whose work combined penetrating realism with proto-Impressionist brushwork, and Arnold Böcklin, who became renowned for such mysterious but classically grounded works as “Island of the Dead.” In Botstein’s view, Brahms shared with these artists a “creative if inspired historicism” and a “bittersweet, nostalgic ethos” that had parallels in the composer’s symphonic music. But Brahms’s friendship with Max Klinger, a younger man whose work he began to know in the eighteen-seventies,

is the most fascinating of all. As Jan Swafford notes in his biography of the composer, “in taking up Klinger,” whose work had “seized” him, Brahms “unknowingly made a connection to the future, to Modernism.” Klinger received early acclaim for “Paraphrase on the Finding of a Glove,” a series of etchings from 1881 that traces a man’s fetishistic obsession with a glove dropped by a young lady at a skating rink. Its most famous image, of the glove being carried off by a monstrous, vulture-like creature, is in the Met’s collection.

When Brahms travelled to Wiesbaden, on the Rhine, in 1883, to compose his Symphony No. 3 in F Major—which Botstein will conduct at the Met—his mind was full not of vultures or gloves but of memories of his late mentor Robert Schumann. Its opening bars (which quote Schumann’s “Rhenish” Symphony) are decisive but destabilizing: Major key, or minor? Two beats to the bar, or three? Its second movement contains passages of such harmonic complexity that they could have been written by Wagner, Brahms’s great rival, who died earlier that year, as could have the unexpectedly soft and lulling coda of the finale. Brahms’s classicism was deeply rooted. But his enthusiasm for Klinger, an artist whose work points aggressively to the innovations of the French Symbolists and the fascinations of Sigmund Freud, can give us a new perspective on the piece, the most enticingly subjective and psychologically complex of the composer’s four symphonies.

—Russell Platt

Metropolitan Opera

With a new production by Bartlett Sher, the Met finally has a “*Roméo et Juliette*” that suits both Shakespeare’s tragedy and Gounod’s rhapsodic music. The curtain rises on a handsome Veronese piazza, where the chorus is bedecked in glinting jewelry and lavishly colored eighteenth-century-style finery. Vittorio Grigolo brings boyish energy and a sweet tenor voice to the role of Roméo; Diana Damrau is a lovely Juliette, her voice now fuller (though less flexible) than in years past. The conductor, Gianandrea Noseda, sometimes gets swept up in Gounod’s seductive reveries, but he keeps the critical later acts taut with portent. (Amanda Woodbury replaces Damrau in the first performance.) *Jan. 25 at 7:30 and Jan. 28 at 8.* • The Met is going all-in on Michael Mayer’s flamboyant production of “*Rigoletto*,” which is set in a Las Vegas casino: the company has revived it almost every season since its première, in 2013. Stephen Costello, Željko Lučić, and Olga Peretyatko—all wonderfully effective in the lead roles—reprise their portrayals from previous seasons; Pier Giorgio Morandi conducts. *Jan. 26 and Jan. 30 at 7:30.* • The French mezzo-soprano Clémantine Margaine, making her Met début, takes on the fiery gypsy of Bizet’s “*Carmen*” in Richard Eyre’s tightly conceived production, which evokes the period of the Spanish Civil War with cinematic sweep. She leads a fine cast that also includes Marcelo Alvarez, Maria Agresta, and Kyle Ketelsen; Asher Fisch. (Derrick Inouye replaces Fisch in the first performance.) *Jan. 27 and Jan. 31 at 7:30.* • Bartlett Sher’s first production for the Met, a fleet-footed and sun-soaked “*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*,” remains one of his best. Three distinctive singers—Pretty Yende, Peter Mattei, and Dmitry Korchak—head up the cast as Rosini’s lovable rascallions; Maurizio Benini. *Jan. 28 at 1.* (*Metropolitan Opera House*. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

“Beloved Friend: Tchaikovsky and His World” is the brainchild of Semyon Bychkov, a distinguished conductor who has been devoted to the composer’s music for decades; in the next three weeks, he and the Philharmonic will roam through a selection of favorite works, with some surprises thrown in. The first program features a powerhouse soloist, Yefim Bronfman, who will be out front in a relative rarity, Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 2 in G Major, a piece followed by the confident Symphony No. 5 in E Minor and preceded by Glinka’s “Valse Fantasie.” *Jan. 26 at 7:30 and Jan. 27-28 at 8.* (*David Geffen Hall*. 212-875-5656.)

Daniel Barenboim and Staatskapelle Berlin: The Bruckner Symphonies

Barenboim, a man of both dazzling musicality and considerable intellect, leads Carnegie Hall’s first-ever traversal of the complete Bruckner symphonies in one season. He has a profound sympathy for these works, which need special care: for all their sonic glory and emotional depth, they lack Mahler’s expressive range and technical élan. This week brings the final performances, with the Symphonies Nos. 6-9 performed in sequence; each of them—except for the mighty, capacious Eighth—is paired with a Mozart concerto, for piano (with Barenboim conducting from the keyboard) or otherwise (the Sinfonia Concertante in E-Flat Major for Violin and Viola, which precedes the Seventh

Symphony). Jan. 25 and Jan. 27–28 at 8 and Jan. 29 at 2. (212-247-7800.)

Juilliard "Focus!" Festival

Every January, Joel Sachs and his New Juilliard Ensemble launch into an invaluable series of concerts that highlights a world of music, sometimes off the beaten path. "Our Southern Neighbors" covers a swath of music by Latin-American composers, mostly from the present day. The six-concert festival concludes with an orchestral program with the school's flagship ensemble, the Juilliard Orchestra, conducted by the able Carlos Miguel Prieto. It begins and ends with premières (by Reinaldo Moya and Gabriela Ortiz), but is anchored by music from two giants: Alberto Ginastera (the Harp Concerto, with Katherine Siochi) and Silvestre Revueltas (the volcanic "Sensemaya"). Jan. 27 at 7:30. (Alice Tully Hall. To reserve free tickets, which are required, visit events.juilliard.edu.)

Bruckner Orchestra Linz: "Celebrating Philip Glass's 80th Birthday"

Glass, long anchored in New York and beloved around the world, will be feted at Carnegie Hall by a trusted colleague, Dennis Russell Davies, who conducts his fine Austrian ensemble in works

that betray Glass's universal interests: the samba-inspired "Days and Nights in Rocinha," "Ifé: Three Yorùbá Songs" (the New York première, with the acclaimed West African vocalist Angélique Kidjo), and the Symphony No. 11 (in its world première). Jan. 31 at 7:30. (212-247-7800.)

RECITALS

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

In a concert stacked with two prominent piano quartets—by Brahms (the Quartet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 45) and Fauré (the Quartet No. 2 in G Minor)—the Society exhibits a selection of artists from its A-team: the pianist Alessio Bax, the violinist Ani Kavafian, the violist Yura Lee, and the cellist Paul Watkins. An amuse-bouche arrives first in the form of Brahms's fiery "Scherzo" from the collaborative "F-A-E Sonata" for violin and piano. Jan. 29 at 5. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)

Jean-Guihen Queyras

The esteemed French cellist, who has always been willing to range outside the comfort zone of most of his colleagues, offers a recital at Zankel Hall which includes not only repertory nuggets

by Schumann, Chopin, and Beethoven (the Sonata in A Major, Op. 69) but also a modern classic by Webern ("Three Little Pieces, Op. 11) and a world première by Yves Chauris ("D'Arbres, de Ténèbres, de Terre"). Alexander Melnikov is at the piano. Jan. 25 at 7:30. (212-247-7800.)

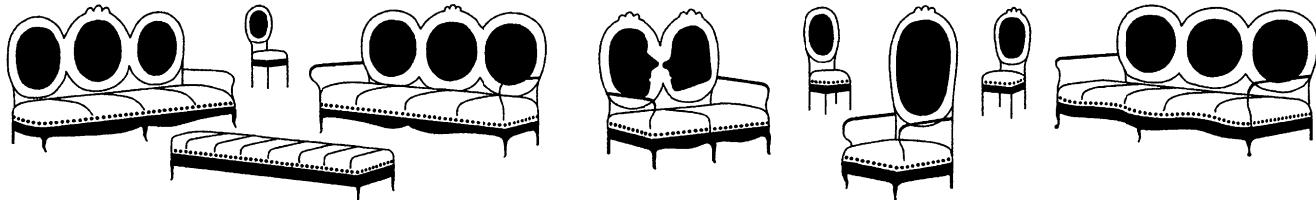
Yefim Bronfman and Members of the New York Philharmonic

As part of the Philharmonic's ongoing Tchaikovsky festival, "Beloved Friend," Bronfman joins the orchestra's concertmaster, Frank Huang, and other principal strings for a concert that features selections from the piano cycle "The Seasons" in addition to two tempestuous masterworks, the "Souvenir de Florence" for string sextet and the Piano Trio in A Minor. Jan. 29 at 3. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

Dmitry Masleev

The Russian pianist, the winner of the 2015 International Tchaikovsky Competition, makes his New York recital début at Carnegie Hall in a program that recalls those of a much earlier Russian phenom, Vladimir Horowitz: bushels of Scarlatti and Rachmaninoff, in addition to Liszt's "Totentanz" and sonatas by Prokofiev and Beethoven ("Les Adieux"). Jan. 30 at 8. (212-247-7800.)

ABOVE & BEYOND



Lunar New Year

There are several ways to celebrate the Chinese Lunar New Year, and most involve lavish displays of fireworks. Red and gold, the traditional shades of good luck, burst over the Hudson River and color the Empire State Building on Jan. 26; in Sara D. Roosevelt Park, on Jan. 28, more than six hundred thousand firecrackers will be set off to ward away evil spirits. The park will also host lion dances (distinct from the more famous dragon dance in its use of just two performers), decorations giveaways, craft venders, and food booths. Organizers suggest that the more dumplings attendees eat, the more money they'll earn that year, an easy enough proposition. The New York Philharmonic welcomes the Year of the Rooster with a concert and gala at Lincoln Center on Jan. 31. (Various locations. Jan. 26–31.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Neither as sexy as contemporary art nor as coveted as the works of the Impressionists, Old Masters nevertheless function as a kind of hedge in the overheated art market, more or less impervious to trends. A sale at Sotheby's on Jan. 25 includes a still-life depicting the interior of a humble *bodega*, or pub; the paint-

ing was recently rediscovered in France and has been (cautiously) attributed to Velázquez. Also on the block is a portrait of a sensual and round-faced blonde by the Italian Baroque painter Gentileschi. The sale is preceded by one of drawings, on the same day, and followed by one of slightly less pricy paintings and sculptures, on Jan. 26; works from the nineteenth century are added into the mix on Jan. 27. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • Christie's holds two days of Old Master sales, beginning with drawings on Jan. 24, including a depiction of a hunter and his dog, by Goya, and continuing with prints on Jan. 25. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • Swann offers a group of Art Nouveau posters from a private collection that includes a particularly large selection of affiches by Alphonse Mucha (Jan. 26). The Czech-born, Vienna-trained Mucha was best known for his alluring posters for perfumers, cigarette papers, and the 1900 Universal Exhibition in Paris. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

Hip-Hop and the Crack Generation" and "Sex: The Revolution," sets his sights on the rough days of early jazz and the drug-fuelled culture that followed it. "Bop Apocalypse: Jazz, Race, the Beats, and Drugs" aims to trace jazz's roots through its canonization as a classical American form, and to unearth the moment when drugs became inseparable from the country's popular culture. He follows the birth of jazz in New Orleans, its development as the original soundtrack for drop-offs and underworld underlings, and its eventual progeny, the Beat generation. The biographer John Tytell joins Torgoff at this book launch. (828 Broadway. 212-473-1452. Jan. 24 at 7.)

McNally Jackson

Elliot Ackerman, an author, journalist, and contributor to this magazine, reads from "Dark at the Crossing," which mines the tensions between Turkey and Syria for the backdrop of a modern love story. The former White House fellow and Marine served five tours in Iraq and Afghanistan before he began reporting on the Syrian conflict, in 2013, and his dense immersion allows for delicate perspectives on the fictional lives he conjures. Ackerman is joined by the literary journalist Lucas Wittman. (52 Prince St. 212-274-1160. Jan. 25 at 7.)

READINGS AND TALKS

Strand Bookstore

Martin Torgoff, the author and documentary producer behind "Planet Rock: The Story of

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

Fries with That?

Salvation Burger, 230 E. 51st St. (646-277-2900); Black Tap, 529 Broome St. (917-639-3089)

THE CITY'S OBSESSION with burgers had already reached peak LaFrieda when, a year ago, long after Daniel Boulud had upped the burger ante with foie gras and Shake Shack had gone public, April Bloomfield opened Salvation Burger. This was a natural move for the British nose-to-tail devotee, as Bloomfield has buttressed her gastropub mini-empire with two exemplary specimens: a hefty, salt-bombed Roquefort-covered beef gem, at the Spotted Pig, and, at the Breslin, a lamb burger that may be the juiciest in the city. In May, Salvation Burger closed after a damaging fire (no one was hurt); last month, the restaurant reopened, wood-fired burgers intact.

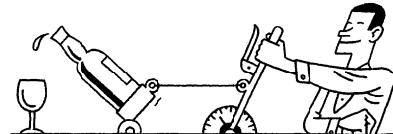
Bloomfield is not only a perfectionist, she's a purist. She recently débuted White Gold, an Upper West Side butcher counter and café, where whole steer and pigs are broken down, supplying the ground beef for her restaurants. (White Gold's chopped cheese sandwich, a pristine take on a quickie deli staple, is a thing of beauty.) Salvation Burger offers a parade of well-executed dishes, such as a comforting roasted marrow bone and an exemplary poutine, a mound of fries and cheese curds, soaked in a deeply savory

oxtail-dotted gravy ("Better than the one we had in Canada," one diner said). But how are the burgers? Bloomfield nails the details in both the Classic, with two smashed-thin patties dripping with house-made American cheese (a natural liquid Velveeta that should be bottled), and in the Salvation, which arrives gigantic, dense, and funky, topped with Taleggio and caramelized onions.

Meanwhile, Black Tap has been building an empire of another sort, based not on the strength of its burger, which is considerable, but on the Willy Wonka decadence of its milkshakes. Everything about the shakes is ridiculous: the store-bought taste of the frosting that adheres the candy to the glass; the dry, cloying brownies in the Brooklyn Blackout; the mounds of blue and pink spun sugar and the giant lollipops protruding from the Cotton Candy. But none of that matters. People wait in lines around the block not to have a culinary epiphany but to make a declaration, preferably on social media: Watch me! I'm having fun!! The burgers, on the other hand, are delicious. From day one, before the crazy crowds, before the expansion to the Village and midtown, there was an unusually excellent burger. Large, loosely packed, seared on the outside, soft pink inside, the Black Tap burger is still one of the best in the city. Get it to go, and skip the shake. (*Salvation Burger: burgers \$17-\$25; Black Tap: burgers \$14-\$19.*)

—Shauna Lyon

BAR TAB



The Creek and the Cave

10-93 Jackson Ave., Long Island City (718-706-8783)

New York has long been an epicenter of standup comedy; Woody Allen, Joan Rivers, and George Carlin got their starts here, and countless comic legends have followed. But in 2017, when a spot on a late-night show or a turn at the Comedy Cellar no longer holds the promise of success, the many little fish of the New York standup world swim toward the Creek and the Cave, a digitally savvy and sprawling comedy complex that sits at the lip of Queens. It includes a Mexican restaurant at street level, which has churro ice-cream sandwiches and an abundance of beers on tap; a bare-bones theatre accessed under a bright marquee; and a basement-level bar flanked by pinball machines, where comics rehearse their acts in lieu of conversation. On most Wednesdays, the "Legion of Skanks" show offers up good-natured filth; Cave Comedy Radio, a thriving podcast operation based in the building, churns out bawdy opinions on everything from celebrities to murder; occasionally, icons like Hannibal Buress and Chris Gethard show up for a set. On a recent visit, the gin-and-tonics were ice-cold and cheap, and aspiring comedians thronged the bar in advance of an early-evening open mike. One was scrawling in a notebook—"I think my brain needs a roommate," he wrote—while another moved his lips soundlessly. In a glassed-off room next to the bar, before an audience composed primarily of comics waiting their turn, a young man in a threadbare gray T-shirt had the stage. "I watch hockey," he said, "just because I know a guy from high school who's in the N.H.L., and I want to see him get hurt." On Thursdays, the wine is five dollars, but getting up to say your piece is always free.—Talia Lavin



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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

TRUMP TAKES THE OATH

A COUPLE OF HOURS before Barack Obama became a former President, he was walking along the White House colonnade. A reporter called out to him, "Any final words for the American people?" He had just two. "Thank you," he said, without breaking his stride. Donald and Melania Trump were expected for coffee, and he had run out of time. There were no more speeches to deliver, no more warnings that he could issue. In language, deed, and demeanor, Obama had done his part to make the transfer of power an orderly one. It might have been reasonable for him to hope that, at least for the next few hours, the progression of Inaugural rituals would provide some semblance of civic grace to what had been a notably unsettling time of transition in America. The causes included the talk of Russian hacking and the antic appointment to many of the most important Cabinet posts of dubious executives, men and women who are tragically unfit, from ideological extremists to unschooled plutocrats. There was the matter, too, of financial conflicts and nepotism, an autonomic reflex of aspiring authoritarians. At a pre-Inaugural black-tie dinner, Trump said to his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, "If you can't produce peace in the Middle East, nobody can."

When the Trumps arrived at the White House, Michelle Obama, wearing a dark-red dress, hugged Melania, in impeccable powder blue. Michelle, a practiced performer, smiled warmly. Still, then and later in the day, there were moments when her expression lost focus, as if she had finally exhausted her supply of forced cheer. The two women rode to the Capitol together; their husbands were in a separate car, as were the incoming and outgoing Vice-Presidents. Already seated on the Capitol steps were all of the living former Presidents and First Ladies except for George H.W. and Barbara Bush, who were too ill to travel. George W. Bush appeared to supply a stream of wisecracks. Jimmy Carter, who is ninety-two,

and his wife, Rosalynn, had arrived the day before, on a commercial flight, on which he shook the hand of every passenger. When Bill and Hillary Clinton gamely walked down the steps to join them, someone could be heard to say, "We're here for you." Hillary's presence was, by many measures, an act of civic courage.

Once everyone was in place, the ceremony moved quickly. Justice Clarence Thomas administered the oath of office to Vice-President Mike Pence. After an interlude of song from the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, John Roberts, the Chief Justice, swore in the new President, and got the words right—he hadn't in 2009, the first time he swore in Obama. Melania, who had been holding Abraham Lincoln's Bible and one given to her husband when he was a child, sat down to listen to him speak. As he began his oration, she lifted an umbrella. It had started to rain.

Trump's Inaugural Address was remarkable for its caustic bitterness, its metallic taste. He portrayed the United States as a forsaken nation—a landscape of "American carnage"—and himself as its sole redeemer. He opened by saying that the Obamas had been "magnificent," by which he meant that they had been magnificent to him. Then, having dispensed with this gesture of courtesy, he bore in, equating Obama with a deposed dictator. January 20, 2017, would be remembered, Trump said, as "the day the people became the rulers of this nation again." He embraced the ceremonial aspects of the day, the honor being paid to his person, while scorning the possibilities for comity and community that the occasion traditionally offers. Instead of affirming the continuity of democratic progress, he expressed his contempt for its non-Trumpian past.

In the new President's brief oration, those who had come before him—all of "Washington"—were guilty not simply of an inability to enact good policies but of corrupt bad will, even treachery: of



“refusing” to safeguard the border; of protecting only themselves, and forgetting the country’s citizens. “Their triumphs have not been your triumphs,” he said. Trumpism, by contrast, would bring riches and greatness. He spoke of the need for unity with Americans who live with “the crime and the gangs and the drugs,” terms that he has often used to describe minority communities but that in this case extended to those living among the “tombstones” of factories. And yet this was not a plea for fellowship. Again and again, there was the petulant ring of Trump’s demagogery—us versus them.

Above all, he asked his followers to turn their anxious gaze to foreigners, whom he portrayed as the thieves of their money and their dreams. “From this day forward, it’s going to be only America first,” he said. *“America first.”* Trump is, by now, well aware of the xenophobic history associated with that label. As a candidate, he seized on the darker moments of the American past to turn voters’ discontent into disdain, their doubts into conspiratorial suspicions. His speech was a warning of how deeply he might be willing to divide the country in order to deflect attention from his own policy failures, and how dangerous the resentments he blithely plays upon could be.

In 1988, Ronald Reagan, in his farewell address, noted

that he had often referred to John Winthrop’s image of America as “a shining city upon a hill,” adding, “But I don’t know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it.” He tried one more time, painting a picture of a “tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds.” And, Reagan said, “if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here.” Trump, like many before him, attempted to emulate Reagan’s rhetoric. America would “shine as an example,” he said. “We will shine for everyone to follow.” His version had neither the poetry nor the principle. Along with the rest of his address, it provided only disquieting answers to the question of what kind of city he saw.

After Trump’s speech, the mingling of the dignitaries resumed, with a more reserved air. The Obamas climbed into a helicopter, headed to Palm Springs. The Bidens got into a car, bound for Delaware. The crowd at the Capitol dispersed onto streets already populated by protesters. Donald Trump went to an office where, surrounded by congressional leaders and his family, he began signing executive orders.

—Amy Davidson

WHAT-IF DEPT. ROTH ON TRUMP



IN 2004, Philip Roth published *“The Plot Against America.”* The four main characters of the novel, which takes place between June, 1940, and October, 1942, are a family of American Jews, the Roths, of Newark—Bess, Herman, and their two sons, Philip and Sandy. They are ardent supporters of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, but, in Roth’s reimagining, Roosevelt loses his bid for a third term to a surprise Republican candidate—the aviator Charles Lindbergh—whose victory upends not only politics in America but life itself.

The historical Lindbergh was an isolationist who espoused a catchphrase that Donald Trump borrowed for his Presidential campaign, and for his Inaugural Address: *“America First.”* The fictional Lindbergh, like the actual Trump, expressed admiration for a murderous European dictator, and his election emboldened xenophobes. In Roth’s novel, a foreign power—Nazi Germany—meddles in an American election, leading to a theory that the President is being blackmailed.

In real life, U.S. intelligence agencies are investigating Trump’s ties to Vladimir Putin and the possibility that a dossier of secret information—*kompromat*—gives Russia leverage with his regime.

Roth wrote in the *Times Book Review* that *“The Plot Against America”* was not intended as a political roman à clef. Rather, he wanted to dramatize a series of what-ifs that never came to pass in America but were “somebody else’s reality”—i.e., that of the Jews of Europe. “All I do,” he wrote, “is to defatalize the past—if such a word exists—showing how it might have been different and might have happened here.”

Last week, Roth was asked, via e-mail, if it *has* happened here. He responded, “It is easier to comprehend the election of an imaginary President like Charles Lindbergh than an actual President like Donald Trump. Lindbergh, despite his Nazi sympathies and racist proclivities, was a great aviation hero who had displayed tremendous physical courage and aeronautical genius in crossing the Atlantic in 1927. He had character and he had substance and, along with Henry Ford, was, worldwide, the most famous American of his day. Trump is just a con artist. The relevant book about Trump’s American forebear is Herman Melville’s *‘The Confidence-Man,’* the darkly pes-

simistic, daringly inventive novel—Melville’s last—that could just as well have been called *‘The Art of the Scam.’* ”

American reality, the “American berserk,” Roth has noted, makes it harder to write fiction. Does Donald Trump outstrip the novelist’s imagination?

Roth replied, “It isn’t Trump as a character, a human type—the real-estate type, the callow and callous killer capitalist—that outstrips the imagination. It is Trump as President of the United States.

“I was born in 1933,” he continued, “the year that F.D.R. was inaugurated. He was President until I was twelve years old. I’ve been a Roosevelt Democrat ever since. I found much that was alarming



Philip Roth

about being a citizen during the tenures of Richard Nixon and George W. Bush. But, whatever I may have seen as their limitations of character or intellect, neither was anything like as humanly impoverished as Trump is: ignorant of government, of history, of science, of philosophy, of art, incapable of expressing or recognizing subtlety or nuance, destitute of all decency, and wielding a vocabulary of seventy-seven words that is better called Jerkish than English."

Roth retired from writing at seventy-seven, but, given Trump's threats to muzzle journalism that is critical of him, what role does he see for American writers of today?

"Unlike writers in Eastern Europe in the nineteen-seventies, American writers haven't had their driver's licenses confiscated and their children forbidden to matriculate in academic schools. Writers here don't live enslaved in a totalitarian police state, and it would be unwise to act as if we did, unless—or until—there is a genuine assault on our rights and the country is drowning in Trump's river of lies. In the meantime, I imagine writers will continue robustly to exploit the enormous American freedom that exists to write what they please, to speak out about the political situation, or to organize as they see fit."

Many passages in "The Plot Against America" echo feelings voiced today by vulnerable Americans—immigrants and minorities as alarmed by Trump's election as the Jews of Newark are frightened by Lindbergh's. The book also chronicles their impulse of denial. Lindbergh's election makes clear to the seven-year-old "Philip Roth" that "the unfolding of the unforeseen was everything. Turned wrong way around, the relentless unforeseen was what we schoolchildren studied as 'History,' a harmless history, where everything unexpected in its own time is chronicled on the page as inevitable. The terror of the unforeseen is what the science of history hides, turning a disaster into an epic."

Asked if this warning has come to pass, Roth e-mailed, "My novel wasn't written as a warning. I was just trying to imagine what it would have been like for a Jewish family like mine, in a Jewish community like Newark, had something even faintly like Nazi anti-Semitism befallen us in 1940, at the end of

the most pointedly anti-Semitic decade in world history. I wanted to imagine how we would have fared, which meant I had first to invent an ominous American government that threatened us. As for how Trump threatens us, I would say that, like the anxious and fear-ridden families in my book, what is most terrifying is that he makes any and everything possible, including, of course, the nuclear catastrophe."

—Judith Thurman

HEAD SHOTS BULL'S-EYE



No. 20 WEST TWENTIETH STREET looks like an ordinary office building, but go down to the basement and you'll hear an unusual sound—gunshots, frequent and close. On a recent evening, a group of around a dozen creative types—funky jewelry, high-minded tote bags—arrived at Westside Rifle & Pistol Range and nervously milled about as they waited to shoot at blown-up black-and-white photographs of themselves, in the name of art. The majority of them had never touched a gun before.

"We're virgins," Juliana Patiño, who works in advertising, said, gesturing toward her friend Josh Silberberg.

"I build for startups," Silberberg said. They giggled at a novelty target on the wall featuring a cartoon zombie holding a box of pizza.

Their portrait targets were made by the artist Bayeté Ross Smith, who had earlier photographed participants. Ross Smith is a self-described "visual anthropologist;" in the past, he has photographed gun owners and female boxers. At the range, wearing a black T-shirt emblazoned with a white boom box and the message "TURN THE HATE DOWN," he informed the creatives, "Today, we hope to raise the questions of who is a victim, who is a target, who is a threat, and how is that related to how we perceive violence." He added, "I'm always curious who people think should have guns. I'm black and American and I don't trust only the police and the military to have them. So who gets to have them?"

Ross Smith recalled how, in 2005, firing a handgun at a range in South San Francisco, he'd noticed something odd. "The targets were all, like, caricatures from a cops-and-robbers scenario," he said. "There were a lot of Arab dudes with rocket-grenade launchers, and even the white guys were supposed to look like gangbangers." The targets, he said, "didn't resemble who you'd actually shoot."

So he dug up studio portraits of himself and his friends, which he'd made for another series, and started firing at those. "The first few times I did it, I felt weird, like it was a bad omen or something," he said. "But it was fascinating how quickly they start to become simply targets and stop looking human."

The Westside event was produced by For Freedoms, "the first artist-run super PAC," which, this past election cycle, raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to fund "art to inspire deeper political engagement." One of For Freedoms' co-founders, the artist Eric Gottesman, ushered everyone into a classroom at the range for safety instruction.

"I'm starting to feel a little scared," Lizania Cruz, a designer and artist, confided. On a wall nearby was a bumper sticker that read "SAVE FREEDOM—STOP HILLARY."

The instructor, John Aaron, who had horned monsters tattooed on his neck and arms, began, "Anyone shot a gun before? Video games? Super Soakers? You're kind of halfway there."

The students practiced loading magazines into dummy rifles. Reading his audience, Aaron cautioned, "If you want to take a selfie, no sweat, but do realize you have a lethal weapon in your hand." He went on, "Now, you want to shoot at a target. You have your conventional bull's-eye, then you have your large human-form target." The latter, provided by the range, featured a blue man-shape, and, at the bottom, the words "Homeland Security."

"Can you shoot machine guns here?" Gottesman asked.

Aaron shook his head and said, "This is New York City!" But, he suggested, if you had five thousand dollars and the inclination, you might try Kentucky. "You can rent a helicopter with an electric Gatling gun and strafe cars. That, to me, is the pig's ass."

As protective earmuffs and glasses

circulated, Brian Boucher, an art writer, asked if people had heard the news about a fourteen-year-old who'd opened fire at a South Carolina elementary school.

"I use this word all the time—'shooting,'" a photographer from Padua named Francesca Magnani said. "It's so strange. In Italian, they are not the same word."

In a long cement room with seven shooting stations, a sign warned, "NO HEAD SHOTS REGULATION TARGETS ONLY," but the arty marksmen had been given permission to open fire on their own images.

The response was giddy. "I nailed this target!" Boucher said, after putting a bullet through his forehead.

The shooters traded targets. Ross Smith had brought extras, featuring images of himself (a recent self-portrait and a photo of him as a smiling boy). Wyatt Gallery, the executive director of For Freedoms, peppered the adult Ross Smith's face with bullets.

Afterward, Cruz exclaimed, "That wasn't as hard as I thought it would be!"

"Shooting a gun or shooting a person?" someone asked.

"It's a lot of fun—that's an important thing to understand," Ross Smith said. "People don't do this for no reason."

"I did my fifty bullets," Patiño, the ad woman, said, packing up. "I think if I shoot any more I'll start to like it."

—Emma Allen

ENCORE DEPT. NO CIGAR



DANIEL BARENBOIM, the matchless Argentine-Israeli pianist (his two Mozart-concerto cycles remain references), conductor, activist (the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, which he founded with the late Edward Said, bringing together Israeli and Palestinian musicians, is now in its seventeenth year), and general bon vivant (his taste for cigars led him to meet with a reporter at a cigar club opposite Carnegie Hall), came to town last week, for the sixtieth anniversary of his first appearance in New York City. Since he was only fourteen then, this dates him less than it might seem.

"Of course, I remember every moment of it," he said, sipping pineapple juice in the cigar club. He had politely declined a smoke after contemplating the club's menu, still lamentably short on Cubans. ("Itzhak Perlman," he said, "used to buy Cubans in Toronto and bring them to me in his *crutches*.)"

"Twelve I was, and Stokowski"—the conductor Leopold Stokowski—"auditioned me in Paris. He always put on a voice, speaking bad English on purpose: 'Would you like to play a concert Car-

negie Hall, New York?' And then he asked me what piece. I said, 'Beethoven, No. 3.' He said, 'Good. You will play Prokofiev, No. 1.' Goodbye." Barenboim laughed. "Carnegie Hall had then—still does—the aura of a temple of symphonic music. It's like La Scala, where some singers hate its acoustics. Actually, I've always thought that Carnegie Hall is absolutely wonderful for orchestra and not that good for piano; you cannot fill the hall with sound."

He went on, "But I loved playing in public—still do. I had a wonderful time! And I was very prepared. Difficult piece—I've never played it since. And I had, forgive me for the lack of modesty, some kind of success. So I played an encore—the Bach chorale 'Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring.' Stokowski was mad as hell. 'You don't play encores in my concerts!' And then he didn't talk to me for about twenty years."

In the sixty years since, Barenboim has returned to New York many times, but his program at Carnegie this month is unusual: he is conducting a full cycle of the Bruckner symphonies, and conducting and performing several of the late Mozart piano concerti. "I believe that composers always have one genre that is their intimate diary," he said. "Beethoven—it's not the symphonies! It's the piano sonatas and the string quartets. Mozart, for me, is the Da Ponte operas and the piano concerti, and there is a big link between those two, and I feel that every time I play them."

There seems something fateful about the coincidence of Trump's Inauguration and Barenboim's playing the often melancholic late Mozart and the famously apocalyptic Bruckner. "I'm not a politician," he said. "The East-Western is not an 'orchestra for peace.' It shows that if Palestinians and Israelis have equality of rights they have also equality of responsibilities, and this is why they can play so well together."

"But I have been thinking for a long time now about the fall of the Berlin Wall. The aftereffects were not all positive. I think the West committed many mistakes. Yes, the Communist system collapsed—it didn't work. Yes! But the triumphalism of the West was so shortsighted."

Describing his far-ranging musical travels, he said, "One day I might write



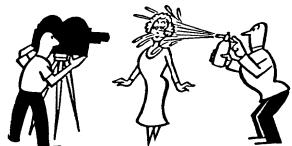
"I'm going to send you to someone who's more familiar with the law of the jungle."

a book about what I lived through between 1991 and 2006: four times a year, I would go from formerly Communist Germany and the Staatskapelle Berlin to Midwestern America—Chicago—and it was schizophrenic. I learned a lot. The attitude to culture, to knowledge, to education was actually far superior in the East than in the West. The musicians of the German orchestra understood democracy because they practiced it in their daily life, even under the Communist regime. They chose the musicians themselves; they appointed their conductor—they were far more independent than American orchestras. In Chicago, I had the feeling that everything that was achieved in America was achieved through legal means, not through human means. It was always the contract. Never human contact.”

After he completes the Bruckner cycle, Barenboim may turn to music previously left unplayed. “Someone asked me to play Rachmaninoff the other day. I thought, Really? But go listen to him play his music himself on YouTube. It’s nothing like what you expect. Really! Go listen to Rachmaninoff on YouTube!”

—Adam Gopnik

TRAGEDY PLUS TIME CRASH LANDING



PETE HOLMES IS a comedian whose work has taken many forms: a short-lived talk show on TBS, several standup specials, cartoons for this magazine, a podcast called “You Made It Weird.” “Some jokes want to be tweets,” he said recently. “Some jokes want to be funny paintings. Sometimes, on the podcast, there’ll be a funny premise, then nothing for a hundred minutes, and then a perfect callback, and you go, ‘Oh, that was a joke that wanted to be a two-hour conversation.’”

Holmes was in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, on the set of a joke that wanted to be an HBO series called “Crashing.” He is thirty-seven, tall and unchiselled, with an eager smile and a cascade of brown hair; he has referred to his look as “lesbian Val Kilmer.” After a take, he re-

moved a prop wedding ring. “One of the things I pushed for is that the character always wears his ring,” he said.

In 2014, on his TBS show, Holmes filmed a sketch in which he pitched ideas to Judd Apatow, that night’s guest. First, he suggested bad Pixar movies, such as “Beargician” and “The Ellusionist.” Then he turned serious: “There’s a man. He’s twenty-two. He gets married because he’s religious. Six years later, his wife cheats on him with a small Italian man. I get my heart broken, but I learn life lessons.”

“That doesn’t seem like a comedy,” Apatow responded. “That sounds tragic.”

“That’s my life,” Holmes said.

A few months later, Holmes fleshed out the idea, and he and Apatow sold it to HBO. Holmes, playing a fictional version of himself, catches his wife in flagrante delicto; he spends the rest of the season sleeping on friends’ couches, learning to do standup, losing his religion, and finding himself. In addition to starring in the show, which premieres on February 19th, Holmes co-wrote all eight episodes. “Sometimes I’ll hand in this little gem of a scene that conveys all the necessary information, with laughs in all the right places, and Judd will go, ‘That’s great that you wrote that. Now let’s try improvising and see what happens.’ And, of course, he’s right—that feels more alive. I wrote this line where someone asks Pete if he’s read the book ‘Codependent No More,’ and he says, ‘We were gonna read it together.’ I think that’s a nice joke. The script went through twelve drafts, and that joke was in all twelve. We never even ended up shooting it.”

On the soundstage in Greenpoint, Holmes was filming a scene in which Anthony King, an improviser from the Upright Citizens Brigade, played his pastor. King wore a white robe and sat behind a desk. “It’s summer—wouldn’t he take the robe off?” Oren Brimer, one of the show’s writers, asked.

“Let’s see it both ways,” Apatow said. The décor in the pastor’s office was neutral: a computer, a file cabinet. “Can we add a cross or an angel or anything that reads religious?” Apatow said. “He’s slipping into insurance salesman.”

They shot the scene as written, with the pastor trying to coax Pete back into the church’s orbit. “If you’re open, God has a way of working with that open-

ness,” King said. “It feels sleepy,” Apatow, watching from a monitor in another room, commented.

After a few takes, they broke for lunch. “Did we get it?” Holmes said, smiling. When he saw Apatow’s expression, his smile faded.

Apatow, Holmes, and the writers went out for lobster rolls and discussed how to make the scene brisker. Then Holmes returned to his dressing room and wrote a new draft. “Our writers are great, but most of them are Jewish, so with the



Pete Holmes

Christian stuff I usually take a crack at it myself,” he said.

Using the new script as a guide, King and Holmes reconceived the scene as a “prayer-off,” in which prayers became negs. “Heavenly Father, we ask that You forgive our brother Peter for forcing his wife into the arms of another man, or possibly two men,” King said, his head bowed.

“Father, help us not to heed gossip or slanderous speech,” Holmes said.

“Lord, we ask that You not allow the Devil to tempt Pete into Hell,” King said.

Holmes, speaking not as his character but as himself, said, “Go into detail on what would happen to me in Hell.”

King nodded, then started ad-libbing: “Lord, we know that as wolves tear the skin from Pete’s body, and as it grows back and then is ripped off again, he will have eternity to wonder whether he has made the right choices in life.”

“Oh, go flock yourself,” Holmes said, then burst into laughter.

“Cut!” Apatow said. “Much better.”

—Andrew Marantz

AUTUMN OF THE ATOM

How arguments about nuclear weapons shaped the climate-change debate.

BY JILL LEPORE



"Nuclear winter" skeptics created institutions that later challenged global warming.

A NUCLEAR WEAPON IS a certain thing—atomic or hydrogen, fission or fusion, bomb or missile, so many megatons—but nothing could be more uncertain than the consequences of using one. Nine nations have nuclear weapons; only the United States has ever used one, and that was in 1945. Our nuclear-weapons policy rests on a seven-decade-long history of events that have never happened: acts of aggression that were not committed, wars that were not waged, an apocalypse that has not come to pass. Strategists attribute the non-occurrence—the deterrence—of these events to the weapons themselves, to bombs on airplanes, missiles in silos, launchers on submarines. The power of deterrence, however, is a claim that cannot be proved. If, while a police car is parked in front of your house, your house is not robbed, you might suspect that a robbery would

have taken place had the police not been there, but you can't know that for sure. Nuclear-weapons policy is a body of speculation that relies on fearful acts of faith. Doctrinally, it has something in common with a belief in Hell.

This belief is about to be tested. The United States and its only nuclear rival have been reducing their arsenals since the end of the Cold War. In 1985, the United States and the Soviet Union held a combined stockpile of more than sixty thousand warheads; today, the U.S. and Russia have fewer than fifteen thousand between them. Dangers remain: a computer error, a malfunction in a silo, a rogue state, nuclear terrorism. In 2007, the former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and George P. Shultz, the former Defense Secretary William J. Perry, and the former senator Sam Nunn warned in an essay published in the *Wall Street Jour-*

nal that “the world is now on the precipice of a new and dangerous nuclear era . . . that will be more precarious, psychologically disorienting, and economically even more costly than was Cold War deterrence.” The time had come, they argued, for the eradication of nuclear weapons. Global Zero, an international nuclear-abolition organization, was formed the next year. In 2009, in a speech in Prague, Barack Obama pledged “America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.” That speech helped earn him the Nobel Peace Prize. The reality did not match the rhetoric. Congress exempted nuclear weapons from mandatory cuts in the military budget, and, in exchange for support for the New START treaty, which reduced deployed warheads by two-thirds, the President pledged eighty-five billion dollars to modernize the nation’s aging nuclear arsenal. “I think we can safely say the President’s Prague vision is dead,” the Alabama congressman Mike Rogers said in 2015, at a weapons conference sponsored by Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, and Northrop Grumman. “And I’ll leave it to the Nobel committee to ask for its prize back.”

The new President’s vision is unclear. “We have to be extremely vigilant and extremely careful when it comes to nuclear,” Donald Trump said during the campaign. But he also refused to rule out conducting a first strike, even on Europe (“Europe is a big place”); suggested that it might be a good thing for more countries to acquire nuclear weapons; and argued that it was pointless to manufacture weapons that could never be used, asking, “Then why are we making them?” In December, Vladimir Putin told military leaders in Moscow that he intended to bolster Russia’s nuclear arsenal. “Let it be an arms race,” Trump said in response. “We will outmatch them at every pass and outlast them all.”

Trump has often contradicted himself on the subject of nuclear weapons, but one of the more interesting things he’s said about them is that they are far more dangerous to the planet than global warming is. It’s a revealing comparison. The damage from a nuclear explosion does not respect national boundaries, and this adjustment in scale, from the national to the global, was the key argument put forward by advocates of

disarmament. That argument has been won: Trump's tweets aside, there is a bipartisan consensus in favor of significant arms reductions. Bipartisan agreement about the future of the planet falls apart not over the bomb but over the climate. Historically, though, they're inseparable: the weapons and the weather are twisted together, a wire across time, the long fuse to an ongoing debate about the credibility of science, the fate of the Earth, and the nature of uncertainty.

IN 1981, WHEN Jimmy Carter delivered his farewell address, part of it was written by Carl Sagan. The Senate had proved unwilling to ratify a treaty that had come out of a second round of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks; Carter wanted to take a moment to reckon with that loss, for the sake of the planet. He turned to Sagan, whose thirteen-part documentary, "Cosmos," first broadcast in 1980, was the most-watched PBS series ever. "Nuclear weapons are an expression of one side of our human character," Carter said, in words written by Sagan. "But there's another side. The same rocket technology that delivers nuclear warheads has also taken us peacefully into space. From that perspective, we see our Earth as it really is—a small and fragile and beautiful blue globe, the only home we have."

Sagan was an astronomer, but he'd begun his career working on a classified nuclear-weapons project. This was not unusual. Since the Second World War, the military has funded the preponderance of research in the field of physics, and, as historians have now established, a close second was its funding of the earth sciences. Although the environmental movement may not have started until the nineteen-sixties, the research that lies behind it began in the fifties, in the U.S. military. Indeed, the very term "environmental science" was coined in the fifties by military scientists; it was another decade before civilian scientists used the term.

Beginning on the day black rain fell on Hiroshima, nuclear weapons shaped environmental science. In 1949, the U.S. Weather Bureau launched Project Gabriel, a classified meteorological study of weapons and weather. The next year, the Department of Defense, in a study titled "The Effects of Atomic Weapons,"

coined the word "fallout." Researchers considered making the quantity, spread, and duration of fallout the standard measure of the force of a nuclear explosion, but found that approach to be too dependent on the weather. (Instead, they chose blast radius.) They measured and modelled the best weather conditions for explosions and the effects of those explosions on the natural world; they invented and refined tools to detect atmospheric weapons tests conducted by the Soviets; and they investigated the possibility of using nuclear weapons to alter the weather and even the climate of adversaries. Sagan, after finishing his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago, in 1960, worked on a secret military project code-named A119, which had begun in 1958, a year after Sputnik. Sagan was charged with calculating "the expansion of an exploding gas/dust cloud rarifying into the space around the Moon." The idea was to assess whether a mushroom cloud would be visible from Earth, and therefore able to serve as an illustration of the United States' military might.

Government-funded environmental scientists began noticing something curious: nuclear explosions deplete the ozone layer, which protects the Earth's atmosphere. This finding related to observations made by scientists who were not working for the military. In the wake of Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring," published in 1962, the U.S. government formed a number of advisory and oversight organizations, including the Environmental Pollution Panel of the President's Science Advisory Committee. The panel's 1965 report, "Restoring the Quality of Our Environment," included an appendix on "Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide," laying out, with much alarm, the consequences of "the invisible pollutant" for the planet as a whole. In 1968, S. Fred Singer, an atmospheric physicist who had worked on satellites and was now a Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior, organized a symposium on "Global Effects of Environmental Pollution." Four papers were presented at a panel on "Effects of Atmospheric Pollution on Climate."

Changing weapons policy opened new avenues of research. In 1963, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. signed the Limited Test Ban Treaty, an agreement to

stop testing nuclear weapons in the atmosphere. Using longitudinal data to study the ozone both before and after the test ban, the Berkeley chemist Harold Johnston found that stopping the testing had slowed the depletion. Research into the environmental consequences of nuclear explosions and of other kinds of pollution shared a planetary perspective, a vantage greatly enhanced by the space program; gradually, the meaning of the word "environment" changed from "habitat" to "planet." The first photograph of the whole Earth was taken in 1972, by the crew of Apollo 17. It became an icon of the environmental movement. It also shaped arguments about arms control.

Nuclear-weapons research was usually classified; other environmental research was not. During the nineteen-seventies, military-funded environmental scientists continued their top-secret research into the environmental effects of nuclear weapons. Given the test ban, these studies relied less on experiments on Earth than on computer models and on empirical findings involving dust on other planets, most notably Mars. Meanwhile, some environmental scientists pursued—and published—research on how chlorofluorocarbons, the exhaust from jet engines, and fossil-fuel consumption affected the ozone layer; this research demonstrated, crucially, that even tiny amounts of certain chemicals could catalyze dramatic changes, with planetary consequences. In 1974, the director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency asked the National Academy of Sciences to prepare a report on the effects of nuclear explosions on the ozone. That report, "Long-Term Worldwide Effects of Multiple Nuclear Weapons Detonations," married the logic of nuclear deterrence to the logic of environmental protection, or what might have been called pollution deterrence. Stephen Schneider, a climatologist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research, speculated that the fallout from a nuclear war might make the world colder by blocking sunlight, and that the diminished industrial production in a postwar world could change the climate, too.

Sagan had by this time become an advocate of nuclear disarmament, a cause that gained a great deal of momentum early in 1982, when *The New*

Yorker published a four-part series by Jonathan Schell called “The Fate of the Earth,” which did for nuclear weapons what Carson had done for chemical pollution: freaked everyone out. That fall, Representative Al Gore, the chair of the Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight of the House Committee on Science and Technology, convened hearings into “The Consequences of Nuclear War on the Global Environment.” The consequences of nuclear war on the environment, like its consequences on the balance of power, were difficult to prove; most data came from computer models, and from research on other planets. A battle began between those who were willing to place their faith in the speculations of military strategists and those who were willing to place their faith in the speculations of environmental scientists.

At the center of that battle was a plan to build a defensive missile shield: weapons that would orbit the planet. On March 23, 1983, President Ronald Reagan announced the Strategic Defense Initiative, in what came to be called his “Star Wars” speech: “I call upon the scientific community in our country, those who gave us nuclear weapons, to turn their great talents now to the cause of mankind and world peace: to give us the

means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.” To its many critics, S.D.I. undermined the nuclear paralysis that had set in with the idea of mutual assured destruction: neither the U.S. nor the U.S.S.R. would launch a missile, the theory went, since everyone would end up dead. But, if the U.S. could defend itself against a missile attack, M.A.D. no longer applied. The Union of Concerned Scientists prepared a hundred-and-six-page report opposing the project. Sagan, who had just had an emergency appendectomy and two full-body blood transfusions, dictated a letter of objection from his hospital bed.

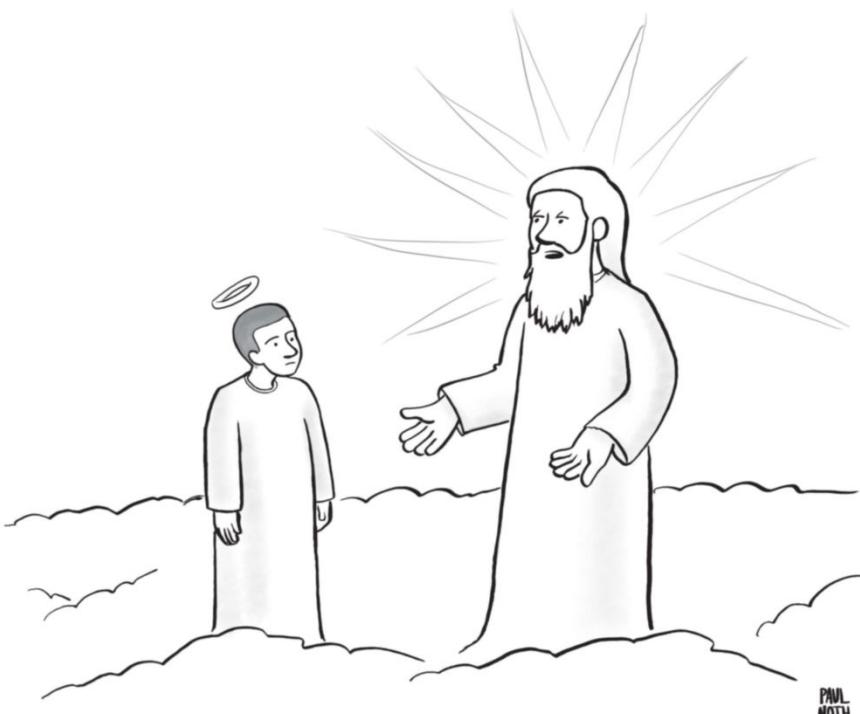
What Sagan did next is recounted in a new book by Paul Rubinson, “Redefining Science,” a history of science in a national-security state. The story of Sagan’s campaign against S.D.I., though little remembered, has been told before, in Lawrence Badash’s 2009 book, “A Nuclear Winter’s Tale”; in “Merchants of Doubt,” by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, in 2009; and, most richly, in a terrific 2011 journal article by Matthias Dorries. Sagan launched a campaign to warn the world about “nuclear winter”; the very term, as Dorries points out, brought together the weapons and the weather.

Sagan collaborated with four sci-

tists. James Pollack, his first graduate student, had written a dissertation, in 1965, on the greenhouse effect on Venus. Thomas Ackerman had attended Calvin College, a Christian school, as an undergraduate, earned a Ph.D. at the University of Washington, and then worked with Pollack at NASA. (Later, he declined an invitation to work on S.D.I., citing his moral objections as a Christian.) Richard Turco, an atmospheric scientist, was the co-author of a study called “Possible Ozone Depletions Following Nuclear Explosions,” which was published in *Nature* in 1975, the year that Owen Brian Toon, a graduate student at Cornell, submitted to Sagan a dissertation called “Climatic Change on Mars and Earth.” Sagan decided to use his celebrity to bring the research of these scientists to the broadest possible public audience, as fast as the scientific method allowed—or maybe faster.

“**T**O THE VILLAGE square we must carry the facts of atomic energy,” Albert Einstein said in 1946. “From there must come America’s voice.” Sagan, in his understanding of the role of science in a democracy, had Einstein behind him, but, more, he had John Dewey, along with a generation of Progressive engineers, New Deal reformers, and Manhattan Project-era atomic scientists. In 1946, the Federation of Atomic Scientists, which had been founded to advocate for international, civilian control of atomic energy, had established the National Committee on Atomic Information. Atomic scientists organized a speakers’ bureau: they spoke at Kiwanis clubs, at churches and synagogues, at schools and libraries. In Kansas alone, eight Atomic Age Conferences were held. The F.B.I. launched an investigation. In 1948, the head of the National Committee on Atomic Information, suspected of being a Communist, was fired. His entire staff resigned in protest, and the committee disbanded. The next year, the Soviet Union tested its first nuclear weapon. Public-spirited science yielded to the demands of a national-security state.

Sagan received his training in that world. But that world did not survive Vietnam, or the Love Canal disaster. This much Sagan understood. But what he could not have fully understood were two forces that had gained strength in



“Look, if I have to explain the meaning of existence, then it isn’t funny.”

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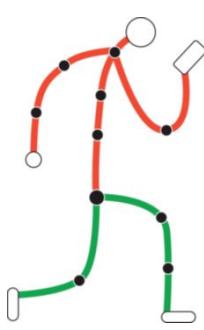
the nineteen-seventies, both of which were at odds with his neo-Deweyism: a postmodern critique of objectivity, fashionable among intellectuals, artists, and writers; and a conservative movement determined to expose the liberal bent of the academy and of the press. Sagan waded into these waters early in 1983, with a paper he prepared with Turco, Toon, Ackerman, and Pollack. The paper, known by its authorial acronym, TTAPS, used meteorological models derived from the study of volcanoes to calculate the effects on light and temperature of different kinds and numbers of nuclear explosions, factoring in the dust, smoke, and soot produced by the burning of cities; some of the data came from Mars. Moving beyond Schell, whose essays had predicted the end of humanity, TTAPS forecast a nuclear winter that might result in the end of all life on the planet.

Sagan circulated a draft to fifty scientists, then convened a conference at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in April, 1983, which was attended by twice as many. Meanwhile, he sent George F. Kennan a draft of an essay he'd written for *Foreign Affairs*. "I cannot tell you what a great thing I feel you have done," Kennan wrote in reply, thanking him for providing a "clear and irrefutable demonstration of the enormity of the danger presented by these vast nuclear arsenals." Next, Sagan and an assortment of colleagues submitted two papers to the peer-reviewed journal *Science* and planned another conference, to be held at a Sheraton in Washington, with five hundred participants, a hundred members of the press, and a live "Moscow Link." The day before the conference, Sagan published an article about nuclear winter in *Parade*. Using only the worst-case numbers, he admitted no room for doubt about what was, after all, a theory, presenting nuclear winter as the consensus of more than a hundred scientists from around the world.

Two charges were levelled at Sagan: that he shouldn't be writing for a Sunday newspaper supplement, and that he'd exaggerated the certainty of an untested theory. "In the scientific community you don't publish first results in *Parade* magazine," George Rathjens, of M.I.T., wrote.

(Unknown to Sagan's critics, the two *Science* papers had already been accepted for publication when the *Parade* article appeared.) In the *Wall Street Journal*, S. Fred Singer, at that time a fellow at the Heritage Foundation and later a consultant for the tobacco industry, argued that the theory relied too heavily on predictive models. The physicist and S.D.I. enthusiast Edward Teller wrote Sagan, privately, "My concern is that many uncertainties remain and that these uncertainties are sufficiently large as to cast doubt on whether the nuclear winter will actually occur." He added, "I can compliment you on being, indeed, an excellent propagandist—remembering that a propagandist is the better the less he appears to be one." In *Nature*, Teller attacked the theory ("A severe climatic change must be considered dubious rather than robust"), and offered this sermon: "Highly speculative theories of worldwide destruction—even the end of life on Earth—used as a call for a particular kind of political action serve neither the good reputation of science nor dispassionate political thought." That S.D.I. rested on highly speculative theories of worldwide destruction was not lost on Teller's many critics.

Sagan's grandiosity helped him gain a vast popular audience; it also hurt his cause. So did his partisanship: he declined an invitation to dine with the Reagans at the White House. His celebrity knew no bounds. The Pope asked him for an audience. Talking about war-



heads seemed like a fabulous way to be famous. "This morning, Trump has a new idea," Lois Romano wrote in a *Washington Post* profile of Donald Trump in November, 1984, the week after Reagan defeated Mondale. "He wants to talk about the threat of nuclear war. He wants to talk about how the United

States should negotiate with the Soviets. He wants to be the negotiator." He knew just how to do it. "It would take an hour-and-a-half to learn everything there is to learn about missiles," Trump told Romano. "I think I know most of it anyway."

Sagan was widely resented, and he made some poor decisions, but he was a serious scientist. Despite a number of

adjustments—Stephen Schneider ran his own numbers and determined that the likeliest consequence of nuclear war was something more like a nuclear autumn—the theory gained widespread scientific acceptance. Declassified documents demonstrate that Navy scientists, for instance, were persuaded by TTAPS. In May, 1984, William Cohen, a Republican senator from Maine, wrote to Reagan about the paper and suggested that the Administration conduct a study. The House Republicans Jim Leach and Newt Gingrich joined their Democratic colleagues Tim Wirth, Buddy Roemer, and Al Gore in proposing a budget amendment mandating a "comprehensive study of the atmospheric, climatic, environmental, and biological consequences of nuclear war and the implications that such consequences have for the nuclear weapons strategy and policy, the arms control policy, and the civil defense policy of the United States."

Hearings on nuclear winter were held that summer, before a House subcommittee that, Paul Rubinson says, "essentially put deterrence on trial." If a misfire or an accident would mean the end of all life on the planet, could there really be any strategic argument in favor of a nuclear stockpile? During another round of congressional hearings, Sagan said that he'd give a recent and inconclusive Department of Defense report on nuclear winter a D or "maybe a C-minus if I was in a friendly mood." Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle said that he'd give Sagan an F. "I didn't hear a word of science this morning," Perle declared. "I heard a shallow, demagogic, rambling policy pronouncement." William Buckley observed, "Carl Sagan gave a half-hour's performance so arrogant he might have been confused with, well, me."

In December, 1984, Reagan's National Security Council presented the President with a summary of a report on nuclear winter prepared by the National Academy of Sciences. While allowing that the model's quantitative risk assessment involved uncertainties, the report argued that the model's calculations suggested "temperature changes of a size that could have devastating consequences" and, with urgency, called on all available agencies and scientists to conduct

investigations to narrow the range of uncertainty. Nuclear winter could be debated, but it couldn't be dismissed.

NUCLEAR WINTER DID not end the Cold War, but it did weaken the logic of deterrence, and not merely by undermining the idea of a winnable nuclear war. Nuclear winter relied on computer models and projections; its predictions were uncertain. Deterrence relies on computer models and projections; its predictions are uncertain. At one point, Richard Perle said that he wished Sagan would go back to his laboratory and stop "playing political scientist." And that, inadvertently, got to the heart of the matter. However much Sagan might have overreached, his intellectual extravagance was nothing compared with the entirely hypothetical musings and game-theory models of the political scientists and strategists on the basis of whose speculations the United States government spent more than five trillion dollars between 1940 and 1996.

Reagan was himself persuaded by nuclear winter; a nuclear war, he said, "could just end up in no victory for anyone because we would wipe out the earth as we know it." In the U.S.S.R., nuclear winter energized dissidents. In 1985, when the Soviet physician Vladimir Brodsky was arrested, one of the charges was "transmitting a letter to the Soviet Academy of Sciences requesting greater publicity about the nuclear winter." Protesters in Moscow's Gagarin Square chanted, "Tell the truth about the nuclear-winter phenomenon to our people." Eduard Shevardnadze, the Soviet foreign minister, talked about nuclear winter in a speech at the U.N., and Mikhail Gorbachev alluded to it on another occasion. In 1985, the Federation of American Scientists presented Sagan with an award honoring him as the "Most Visible Member of the Scientific Community on the Planet Earth." In 1986, Turco won a MacArthur prize. After that year, the number of nuclear weapons in the world began to decline.

Since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, most nuclear-weapons talk has been about non-proliferation and coercion. Under the terms of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, signed in 1968, non-nuclear powers agreed to forgo nuclear weapons in ex-



"You were always my favorite to manipulate."

change for the assurance that they could develop nuclear energy, and for a promise from nuclear powers to pursue disarmament in good faith. Since then, no nuclear nation except South Africa has dismantled its arsenal, which is why non-nuclear states continue to press nuclear states to make good on the promise they made in 1968.

In a new book titled "Nuclear Politics: The Strategic Causes of Proliferation," the Yale political-science professors Alexandre Debs and Nuno P. Monteiro struggle with a very small data set. Of the eight nations other than the U.S. that have nuclear weapons, three (the U.K., France, and Israel) are American allies; two (India and Pakistan) are friendly; and three (China, North Korea, and Russia) are adversaries. Two of these countries (North Korea and Pakistan) acquired nuclear weapons since the eighties, which is very worrying, but both acquired them at great cost. (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then the Pakistani foreign-affairs minister, said his people could "eat grass"

if that's what it took.) The U.S. has stopped several states from developing nuclear weapons, either by threatening to abandon an alliance (in the cases of Taiwan and West Germany), or by threatening, indirectly, to use military force (Libya), or by using it, a perilous course (Iraq). Under what circumstances do states develop nuclear weapons? Debs and Monteiro argue that most states are too weak to do so; most weak states aren't interested; some weak states aren't especially threatened; and most weak states that are threatened are protected by stronger states. These findings question conventional wisdom, which has it that the bomb is a tool of weak states. "No doubt, the atomic bomb would enable a weak state to stand up to more powerful adversaries," they write. "So far, however, no weak unprotected state has ever managed to obtain it."

In "Nuclear Weapons and Coercive Diplomacy," just published, another pair of political scientists, Todd S. Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann, investigate

nuclear coercion, an idea that has all but replaced deterrence in some policy circles. Deterrence involves stopping your enemy from doing what you don't want; coercion involves getting your enemy to do what you want. The theory of deterrence rests on an analysis of the balance between two roughly equal superpowers. Those conditions no longer apply. Coercion is a theory for a single superpower: a new game, requiring a new game theory. Does it work? Not really. As Sechser and Fuhrmann demonstrate, nuclear powers have not generally been able to coerce other nuclear powers: in the sixties, the Soviets' nuclear superiority didn't help solve territorial disputes with China; and, more recently, the United States hasn't been able to coerce North Korea into abandoning its nuclear-weapons development. Nor have nuclear powers been able to alter the behavior of non-nuclear powers, the authors argue, and their list is long: "The shadow of America's nuclear arsenal did not convince Afghan leaders to hand over al Qaeda operatives after the group conducted terrorist attacks against American targets in 1998 or 2001. Great Britain could not coerce Argentine forces to withdraw from the Falkland Islands without a fight in 1982, despite deploying nuclear forces to the South Atlantic. The Soviet Union could not force Iran or Turkey to hand over disputed territory in the early 1950s, after Moscow acquired the bomb. China has similarly been unable to make relatively weak states—including Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam—abandon their claims to the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea."

These arguments are very interesting, but they are based on the shaky science of very small numbers. An *n*th case could unravel any of them. The most contested number in this debate is zero. In 2009, Thomas Schelling, an economist, national-security expert, and Cold War deterrence theorist, who had won a Nobel Prize for his game-theory analysis of conflict, issued a dire warning:

A "world without nuclear weapons" would be a world in which the United States, Russia, Israel, China, and half a dozen or a dozen other countries would have hair-trigger mobilization plans to rebuild nuclear weapons and mobilize or commandeer delivery systems, and would have prepared targets to preempt other nations' nuclear facilities, all in a high-alert status, with practice drills and secure emergency

communications. Every crisis would be a nuclear crisis, any war could become a nuclear war. The urge to preempt would dominate; whoever gets the first few weapons will coerce or preempt. It would be a nervous world.

Schelling's nervous world is the setting for "The Case for U.S. Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century," a careful and balanced study by Brad Roberts, the director of the Center for Global Security Research at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. Lamenting the hardened lines between advocates and abolitionists, Roberts calls for a fresh and broad-minded debate: "Whether nuclear weapons will continue to be effective in preventing limited wars among major powers is an open question." The case for deterrence began to fall apart in the nineteen-nineties and two-thousands, he argues, owing to a lack of leadership. This isn't entirely correct. Presidents in that period did fail to make the case for deterrence, but deterrence had already been dismantled by the spectre of nuclear winter.

The biggest consequence of the nuclear-winter debate, though, has had to do not with nuclear-weapons policy but with the environmental movement. In the short term, the idea of a nuclear winter defeated the idea of deterrence. In the long term, Sagan's haste and exuberance undermined environmental science. More important, the political campaign waged against nuclear winter—against science, and against the press—included erecting a set of structures, arguments, and institutions that have since been repurposed to challenge the science of global warming.

In 1984, in an effort to counter Sagan and to defend the Strategic Defense Initiative, the George C. Marshall Institute was founded by Robert Jastrow, a NASA physicist; Frederick Seitz, a former president of the National Academy of Sciences; and William Nierenberg, a past director of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography. Jastrow argued that "the Nuclear Winter scenario could not serve the needs of Soviet leaders better if it had been designed for that purpose." One of the Marshall Institute's first projects was to try to persuade PBS affiliates not to air a documentary critical of S.D.I.; citing the Fairness Doctrine, the institute argued that equal time ought to be given to its own report, in favor of

S.D.I. The report represented the views of three scientists—Jastrow, Seitz, and Nierenberg—while a statement expressing concerns about the science behind S.D.I. had been signed by sixty-five hundred scientists. Nevertheless, most PBS stations decided not to broadcast the documentary. With funding from the Marshall Institute, Seitz's cousin Russell Seitz, a physicist at Harvard's Center for International Affairs, published an essay in *The National Interest*, in the fall of 1986, dismissing the nuclear-winter paper as nothing but "a long series of conjectures" and declaring nuclear winter dead: "Cause of death: notorious lack of scientific integrity." In 1988, funded, in part, by ExxonMobil, the Marshall Institute turned its attention to the science behind global warming.

Another of Sagan's most vociferous critics, S. Fred Singer, had repeatedly challenged nuclear winter on the grounds of its uncertainty. "Sagan's scenario may well be correct," Singer wrote in 1983, "but the range of uncertainty is so great that the prediction is not particularly useful." A longtime consultant to ARCO, Exxon, Shell Oil, and Sun Oil, Singer is currently the director of the Science and Environmental Policy Project at the Heartland Institute, founded in 1984. Its position on global warming: "Most scientists do not believe human greenhouse gas emissions are a proven threat to the environment or to human well-being, despite a barrage of propaganda insisting otherwise coming from the environmental movement and echoed by its sycophants in the mainstream media."

The nuclear-winter debate has long since been forgotten, but you can still spy it behind every cloud and confusion. It holds a lesson or two. A public understanding of science is not well served by shackling science to a national-security state. The public may not naturally have much tolerance for uncertainty, but uncertainty is the best that many scientific arguments can produce. Critics of climate-change science who ground their argument on uncertainty have either got to apply that same standard of evidence to nuclear-weapons strategy or else find a better argument. Because, as Sagan once put it, theories that involve the end of the world are not amenable to experimental verification—at least, not more than once. ♦

TRANSLATING THE NOISES MY RADIATOR MAKES

BY COLIN STOKES

Click-ick-ick
“Hey, what’s up?”

Tck-tck-tck
“It’s me, the radiator.”

Fth-ath-ath-ath
“I’m good—just chilling. Not liter-

my repeated jokes about me being hot. As a radiator, I’ve got very little personal material to work with.”

P-p-p-p

“Just a quick reminder that you shouldn’t stack your books on my head. I find it disrespectful, and if you do it



ally, of course. I’m a heating device.”

Pfft-pfft-pfft
“Boy, it’s cold outside, right? You should stay in here and keep me company. I know, I’m a radiator, but I need warmth, too. No, don’t hug me—I mean I need *emotional* warmth. If you hug me, I’ll burn you like I did when you moved in your sleep and put your foot against me.”

Clack-ack-lack-a-clack
“Don’t complain about me burning you. You chose to put your bed next to me. You never asked if I might like some space. And don’t complain about

again I’ll have no choice but to dry them out and make their jackets fall apart in your hands when you’re reading them on the subway.”

Shh-shh-shh

“Don’t put your wet socks on my head, either. That’s gross.”

Tok-ok

“Please don’t wrap rope around me to make the apartment that you share with four roommates look like an *Architectural Digest* spread. Obviously, consensual bondage is great for those who are into it, but, sexually, I’m not that kind of radiator, and I won’t be

complicit in creating an unrealistic life-style fantasy.”

BANG

“Hey, are you awake? Sorry, just wanted to check.”

Clonpf

“You know, I can hear you complaining about me. It’s rude, and I don’t like it. If we’re going to make this living situation work, we’re both going to have to make compromises. I’ll see what I can do about not peaking in temperature around three in the morning, so you don’t wake up sweating profusely, and you can make sure to say hello to me when you get home.”

Rong-rang-a-ga-ga

“Don’t even think about trying to adjust me. I’m the exact temperature I want to be right now. You being overheated is just in your mind. Also, I’ll burn you if you try to touch my knob.”

Tick-ick-ick-tick

“Oh, wow, now you’re too cold? What happened to Mr. I Can’t Believe I’m Wearing a T-Shirt and Shorts in January?”

Ruff-ur-fu

“It’s not like I enjoy being stuck in the corner of your bedroom. Did you ever think that I might like to accompany you when you go to the outside?”

Ashh-shahh

“I’ve been in here since before the war! That’s what the real-estate broker told you, anyway. Imagine all the things I’ve seen and heated in that time.”

Lack-ck-a-lack

“Yeah, I mean, obviously everything I’ve seen has been in this room. It’s not like I was walking around on the streets in the sixties.”

Fka-ka-ka-a

“It’s fine to warm up your towel on me while you’re in the shower, but I don’t love seeing you run toward me naked to get it.”

Helloiamtheradiator

“The sound of an English phrase is just a coincidence. I can’t speak English. Only radiator.” ♦

THE TROLL OF INTERNET ART

Brad Troemel's attempt to disrupt the art world.

BY ADRIAN CHEN



Troemel finds the gallery system too slow, too insular, and too full of gatekeepers.

ON A RECENT afternoon, Brad Troemel showed me an image of a sculpture that seemed beyond belief: seven hundred monarch butterflies stacked on a levitating magnetic pedestal. Troemel had devised the sculpture six months before, and listed it, for twelve hundred dollars, in his online art store, Ultra Violet Production House. The work looked catalogue-slick, but it didn't actually exist; the image had been created in Photoshop. The buyer would receive the components to make the work, along with directions for assembling it and a certificate of authenticity. Then she would build it herself, gluing on the butterflies one at a time. Troemel had calculated that the butterflies would weigh about thirteen ounces, the heaviest load that the pedestal could

withstand. The sculpture would probably last for just an instant, like an element from the periodic table that can exist only briefly, before it crashed to the floor.

The sculpture was one of seventy-eight art works that Troemel and his collaborator, the artist Joshua Citarella, had conceived in the past six months and put up for sale in their store on Etsy, the online marketplace for handmade goods. Many were everyday objects with odd details that rendered them absurd: a couch was covered with hardcore-punk-band patches; a plank of wood atop two Apple computers functioned as a bench.

U.V. Production House was Troemel's latest attempt to use the Internet to make art outside the commercial-gallery system, which he finds too slow, too insu-

lar, too full of gatekeepers, and too dependent on the financially onerous and time-consuming practice of making art objects; it could benefit from an Amazon-style disruption. Troemel's project is simultaneously a jab at the rigid rules of the art world and an experiment in what art might look like if those rules didn't exist. "You can't make this with a straight face," Troemel said. "You'd have to be a real lunatic to do that."

Troemel is best known as the co-creator of the popular Tumblr blog the Jogging, an online art factory that, starting in 2009, produced thousands of strange images that blurred the distinction between art and meme. A closeup photograph of a MacBook submerged in a bathtub went viral, and remains a staple of gag Web sites. The most compelling products of Internet culture—the videos, catchphrases, and characters that surface in our social-media streams—get their power from radical shifts in context. A meme might begin as a running joke between friends or as an obscure message-board trope, and this intimacy clings to it even as it circulates among an ever-expanding audience. Troemel's work, at its best, gives the viewer the thrill of stumbling on an authentic viral gem.

The Jogging marked a shift in how artists approach the Internet. While practitioners of "Net art" in the nineteen-nineties and early aughts largely considered the Internet a virtual space, separate from the real world, by the early teens many artists regarded it as "something that pervaded existence in every way," Lauren Cornell, a curator at the New Museum, told me. They were responding to the Internet "not as a new medium but as a mass medium." Many of these artists—like Petra Cortright, Parker Ito, Artie Vierkant, and Amalia Ulman—had grown up with Napster and AOL and MySpace; now they hung out on Facebook and Tumblr. The Internet was both an obsession and an everyday reality. These artists made up a quasi-movement that came to be known, at first somewhat facetiously, as "post-Internet." (The term quickly fell out of fashion and is now mostly met with groans of embarrassment.) The Jogging's self-conscious embrace of the Web's vernacular, its shameless courting of attention, and its blurring of the real and the virtual were well suited to a post-Internet moment.

Troemel's art plays with a central paradox of the Internet: the technology that was supposed to liberate us from the dreary real world has inspired a whole new set of anxieties. For the growing number of artists who use the Internet to distribute their work, a key problem has become how to stand out amid a torrent of information—what the digital-art pioneer Cory Arcangel has termed “fourteen-year-old Finnish-kid syndrome,” in which any teen-ager with an iPhone can make something attention-grabbing. For Troemel, the solution is to embrace frantic creative production and the skillful use of social media. In an essay from 2014, Troemel coined the term “aesthlete” to describe the type of artist who can maintain relevance today. The aesthlete, he wrote, “produces a constant stream of work in social media to ride atop the wave in viewers’ newsfeeds, or else become the wave itself.” Troemel has some fifty-six thousand followers on Instagram, and he typically posts a photograph each day at 1 P.M., when he finds that user engagement is highest.

WHEN TROEMEL SHOWED me the butterfly sculpture, he was in the midst of a three-week arts residency, called Work in Progress, organized by the twenty-four-year-old British collector and curator Tiffany Zabludowicz. Zabludowicz’s father, a prominent collector, owns the office building in Times Square that housed the residency, where Troemel and I were talking. A press release that she handed me at the reception desk stated that the residency “questions the romantic and idealized notion of the artists’ studio.”

This suited Troemel, whose view of art could not be less romantic. He once described to me the “formula” for a gallery show: “You have a series of wall works that are meant to sell, and the stuff on the floor that’s meant to make things look difficult.”

A competitive wrestler in high school, Troemel, who is twenty-nine, has an intense, wide-eyed stare, and when he talks about his art he circles his arms energetically, as if he were literally cranking out ideas. He works out a lot and drinks N.O.-Xplode, a fitness supplement. “I think he is a jock deep down, and I think he wants to win at art,” the artist Nick DeMarco, a former contributor to the

Jogging, told me. When I asked Troemel why he liked his current dealer, Zach Feuer, a co-owner of Feuer/Mesler Gallery, in downtown Manhattan, he recalled that, when they met, Feuer told him, “I’m a capitalist. I want to make money from you and I want to make money for you.”

At eight o’clock on the morning that the residency began, before the other artists arrived, Troemel and Citarella claimed the corner office, which they left empty except for two desks shoved back-to-back, with iMacs on top of them, and a tattered suitcase that Troemel had used to carry the computers. The men planned to double the number of objects in the online store in three weeks.

Even for artists interested in the digital realm, selling physical work is usually the only way to make a living. Troemel’s gallery work is an eclectic mixture of assemblage, sculpture, and painting that comments on such contemporary phenomena as Bitcoin, the art market, and the sharing economy. One of his favorite strategies is to combine consumer goods that have symbolic value—coins, organic food, political posters, books of critical theory—to create an argument, which is usually opaque until one reads the lengthy artist statements that he writes for nearly all his shows.

Troemel tends to think of his gallery work in terms of posting on the Internet. “It wouldn’t make for a very interesting Instagram feed if for seven years I posted the same work every day,” he told me. Once, at an art fair, he curated a booth where he changed the work every hour, in an attempt to mimic the Internet’s content churn. A lot of his work disintegrates with the inevitability of a status update being pushed down a screen. For one show, he placed fresh fish he had bought in Chinatown along with flowers and metal coins representing the digital currency Litecoin onto a plastic board, vacuum-sealed them, and hung the bundle on the wall. This created an eerily beautiful bas-relief until, after a few days in the hot gallery, the fish rotted, filling the piece with gas and eventually exploding. Not all the entropy is intentional. During an opening last year, a drone piloted by Troemel spun out of control and became horribly entangled in a gallery-goer’s hair. At the same show, three sixteen-foot-tall stacks of oversized Jenga blocks crashed to the

floor during installation. Troemel replaced the blocks with a series of water-filled vases suspended at odd angles above the floor; on opening night, one tipped over and drenched a visitor. “Brad’s installs are always chaotic,” Lauren Marinaro, the director at Feuer/Mesler, said. “He comes in sure with all of his ideas, but he’s sometimes finalizing form.”

Troemel hoped that U.V. Production House would make creating physical work as risk-free as posting a photo to Instagram. No more tedious fabrication process or expensive studio rental: simply slap together a concept image, source the necessary materials on the Internet, and wait for the orders to roll in. When I visited the Work in Progress residency, he and Citarella had made thirty-two sales and about three thousand dollars in gross profit. The most expensive items, sold for five hundred dollars each, were two framed checks from a class-action settlement against the natural-products company Tom’s of Maine.

WHEN TROEMEL WAS thirteen years old, he discovered the file-sharing services Napster and KaZaA. He and his mother lived with her parents, in the Chicago suburb of Aurora. He estimates that he illegally downloaded as many as fifteen thousand songs at his grandparents’ house. File-sharing “gave me access to consuming so much culture, so many songs and bands, which are always lead-ins for other things,” he said. “I learned a lot.” But, in 2001, his grandfather was sued by the Recording Industry Association of America. The family settled for five thousand dollars. “It was just kind of sad and tense,” he said. “It didn’t ruin us. It was just a setback, and not enjoyed.”

His middle- and high-school years were dominated by wrestling, which his father, who lived nearby, encouraged. Troemel trained year-round and went to a tournament almost every week. He admired the meritocratic nature of the sport, where competitors are paired off by weight and age. “It’s like a really pure form of competition,” he said. He still follows wrestling closely: one afternoon, while we were at lunch, he pulled out his phone and watched video highlights of a recent high-school tournament while wolfing down a Cuban sandwich.

During his sophomore year of high school, Troemel took a photography

class. He liked how photography let him reframe the mundane details of his environment, in a way similar, he said, to how a skateboarder could turn a handrail into a productive obstacle. He received a scholarship to a pre-college program at the School of Visual Arts, in New York City, and when he returned to Illinois he started considering a career in art.

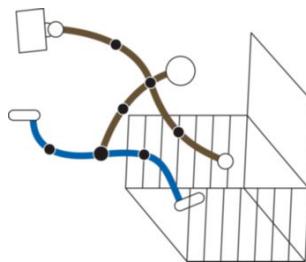
His work was inspired by the German husband-and-wife team Bernd and Hilla Becher, who photographed hundreds of industrial structures and arranged them in grids that they called "typologies." Troemel's subject was the landscape near his home. It was 2007, the height of the housing boom, and he went around taking pictures of various artifacts of suburban development. He did one series of concrete subdivision markers, arranging a hundred photographs into a Becher-like grid. The work looked impressive in a frame on his wall, but when he shared a photo of it on Facebook it was shrunk to the size of any other post, becoming lost in the ocean of content. "The labor-to-visibility ratio wasn't good," he said.

Troemel enrolled in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he became disillusioned by what he saw as the lack of seriousness among many of his classmates. He suggests that there is "some truth" to the stereotype that artists are layabouts. "The types of people who go to art school are often wealthy, and it's a vacation for some of them," he told me. Troemel was a contentious figure on campus. He dominated class discussions and was relentlessly critical of his fellow-students. "I recognize it was obnoxious and pretentious and narcissistic and generally probably unbearable to be around," he said.

Troemel gravitated toward artists whose work falls under the label of institutional critique, which takes as its subject the hidden workings of the art world itself. Institutional critique was born in the political climate of the late nineteen-sixties, when conceptual artists began to mischievously subvert the conventions of the museum and the gallery. For the French artist Daniel Buren's first solo show, an installation of his trademark vertical stripes, he blocked the entrance to the gallery. Marcel Broodthaers, the Belgian poet and artist, created a fictional museum that had gone bankrupt and

needed to sell off its collection. Troemel was struck particularly by the work of Andrea Fraser, whose performances confront the art-world élite. (For one piece, Fraser filmed herself having sex with a collector, who paid for the privilege.)

Today, Troemel is influenced by the critic Lucy Lippard, who in the nineteen-seventies argued that "dematerialized" conceptual art—tutorials, performances, light—might be able to escape commodification by the art market. He is



attracted to what Lippard and the critic John Chandler once called the "ultra-conceptual," where the idea behind a work is all that matters. Many of Troemel's favorite artists aren't even artists: when I asked him to list those he admires, he included the comedian Andy Kaufman, the BuzzFeed founder Jonah Peretti, and Ross Ulbricht, the founder of the online drug market the Silk Road.

As Troemel absorbed the lessons of institutional critique, he discovered the work of popular technology writers such as Clay Shirky and the former *Wired* editor Chris Anderson, who believed that the Internet was bringing about a democratic revolution in other cultural arenas. He read Anderson's book "The Long Tail," which argues that the infinite options proliferating on the Internet will lead to the success of niche products and businesses. Troemel saw the Internet as a way to circumvent the art world, by distributing art freely. He embraced a radical techno-libertarian ideology that he summed up in his undergraduate thesis, a twenty-page manifesto titled "Free Art."

"Free Art" reframes the history of modern art as a story of power-hungry critics and curators trying to contain the democratizing power of new technologies. But the Internet, Troemel explains ecstatically, has ushered in an era of art as pure information, uncontrollable by the market. "We have been given a chance to achieve great

things on our own without the market, galleries' or museums' corrupting effects," he writes. "The sacrifice Free Art asks is your own comfort and complacency; it is easier to continue to allow others to represent and distribute art, but wouldn't you rather do it yourself?"

AT ART SCHOOL, Troemel and a fellow-student, Lauren Christiansen, his girlfriend at the time, ran a gallery called Scott Projects out of their apartment. Scott Projects showed work by art students in Chicago, and its shows were well attended. When Troemel and Christiansen began showing artists from outside Chicago, however, attendance declined drastically. People had been coming out to support their friends. But Troemel noticed that traffic on the gallery's Web site had spiked—fans of the artists from outside Chicago were clicking on photos of their shows—and he began to think of the gallery as secondary to its blog.

Troemel and Christiansen's apartment filled up with leftover bits of material from Scott Projects' shows, so they began to use them to make what Troemel describes as "trash sculptures." They posted photos of the sculptures on a Tumblr blog that they named the Jogging, for the sustained pace that they sought. Like Troemel, Christiansen had been a star athlete in high school—she had turned down a track-and-field scholarship from Arizona State University—and they shared a competitive streak, which they funnelled into making their trash sculptures as quickly as possible. At first, Christiansen said, "it was just a fun and, frankly, intimate thing we were doing together."

The art was not much to look at. There was a pile of ice that was spray-painted gold and a litre bottle of Diet 7 UP Cherry that was balanced atop a pool cue. Troemel and Christiansen began to use Photoshop to enhance the photos of their sculptures with images and textures found on Google. Eventually, they began creating realistic-looking "sculptures" that were made up entirely of images found on the Web.

The Jogging was an inside joke that doubled as a form of institutional critique. Each work, no matter how tossed off or improvisational, was given a formal title. In addition to being a satirical jab at art-world pretension, this was, Troemel says,

a deliberate attempt to use the “social capital” of art museums to help the Jogging’s crappy images stand out among many thousands of crappy images on Tumblr. The Jogging’s sensibility would come to be defined by this irony; it seemed to be pointing out that the emperor had no clothes while sprinting by in an invisible Nike sweatshirt.

In 2010, Troemel and Christiansen moved to New York; he pursued a master’s degree in studio art at New York University while she opened a gallery in Chelsea. The Jogging, which had gained a small but dedicated audience, took a nearly two-year hiatus. At N.Y.U., Troemel began to slightly modify his anti-art-object stance. He became interested in the Silk Road, which used Bitcoin and identity-masking software like the Tor network to allow users to buy and sell illegal drugs. He ordered small amounts of designer psychedelics, amphetamines, and other drugs, using computers in an N.Y.U. lab so that he would remain anonymous. The lab had creaky wood floors, and he remembers feeling as if everyone were looking at him. It didn’t help his paranoia that he was liberally partaking of the drugs he bought. “I was getting pretty close to a nervous breakdown,” he said.

He was as fascinated by the Silk Road packages as by their contents, the ways in which the sellers balanced the need for anonymity with the desire to brand their wares. Troemel’s master’s thesis was a jumbled installation featuring shipping materials that he had received from Silk Road venders. There was a plastic baggie emblazoned with red dice, a fake I.D. slipped into a voter pamphlet for a local election in Pierce County, Washington, and a package of ketamine taped to the back of a Christmas card. On the floor were thousands of counterfeit pennies that he had ordered online from China, along with a hundred copies of a “bump key,” made at a nearby locksmith, that would theoretically allow anyone to break into the gallery. “I was, like, Well, I can make objects if they’re totally illegal,” he said.

TROEMEL IS INTERESTED in the artistic potential of a particular form of attention unique to social media: the rapid snowballing of clicks, likes, and shares known as virality. In 2012, the Jogging

relaunched, with virality as an explicit goal. Troemel had become fascinated by the anarchic message board 4chan, whose anonymous users are famous for posting pornography and explicit gore. They are a powerful force in Internet culture, and Troemel was impressed by the success of some of their stunts, such as when they vaulted the founder of 4chan, Christopher (moot) Poole, to the top of *Time’s* Person of the Year poll.

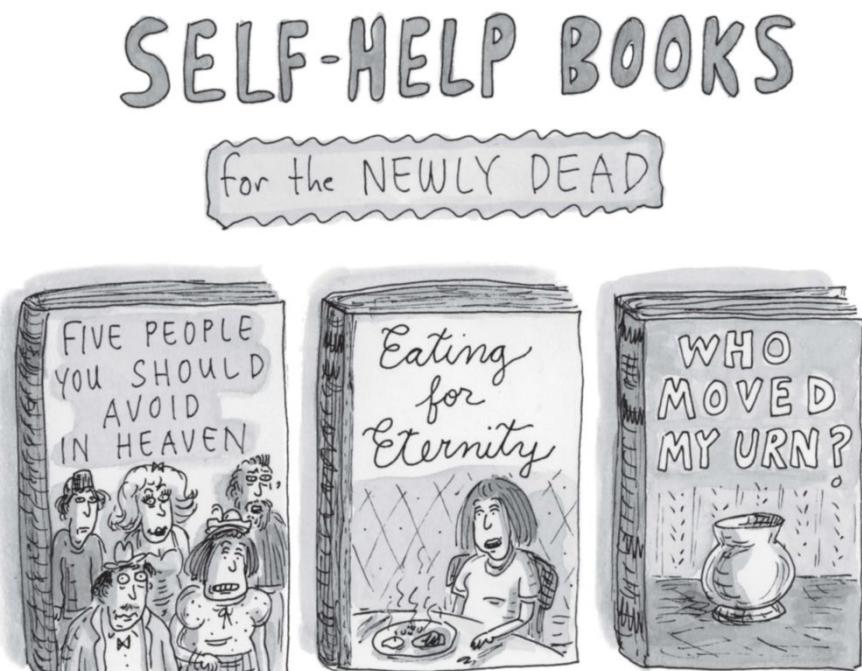
The Jogging’s embrace of institutional critique vanished after Troemel and Christiansen opened the site to submissions from outsiders and started to pay them according to the amount of attention their posts attracted. The Jogging had by then grown to be among the top one per cent of blogs on Tumblr, and attracted widespread coverage both inside and outside the art world.

The critic Paddy Johnson recalls visiting art schools at the time, and “there wasn’t a single art student I met who wasn’t reading that site.” The Jogging also had detractors. The critic Brian Droitcour published a takedown in *Art in America*, arguing that the Jogging’s appropriation of corporate branding strategies amounted to little more than a shallow exercise in careerism. “What appears to be art is basically business,” he wrote.

It was around this time that I discovered the Jogging, after it was shared by

one of the Tumblr blogs I followed. Each post was interesting on its own, but the steady rate at which new posts appeared, every few hours, each displaying a bizarre but consistent aesthetic, was the real mystery. Who was doing this, and why? Instead of names, posts were accompanied by abstract symbols that linked to the creator’s Web site. A lot of them linked to the portfolios of young artists, many still in grad school. At the time, I was an enthusiast of Internet culture, but I didn’t care at all about art. One of the main attractions of Internet culture is its transparency. A meme or a viral video can serve as a gateway to another world, since it can often be traced, through links, back to its source. I had imagined that contemporary art was the Internet’s opposite: hermetically sealed, rendered opaque by dense theories and twisted power structures. Yet here were young artists expending huge amounts of time and effort to make charmingly strange stuff on the Internet for free, and adopting the vernacular of social media so effectively that their work slipped into the consciousness of millions of people who had little interest in art.

The rapper Gucci Mane, to announce a mixtape, tweeted a Jogging image of his body merged with a waterfall. A photograph of a piece of bacon cooked in a hair straightener has become a staple of





"Do we need to do this in public?"

• • •

Web sites that catalogue online oddities. Troemel delighted in the way that these images infiltrated the mundane corners of the Web. To him, it proved that making art on social media, at the pace of social media, was a new way to achieve an old goal of conceptual art: producing art that does not just reflect society but is a part of it. In an essay about this phenomenon, titled "The Accidental Audience," he asks, "At what point do artists using social media stop making art for the idealized art world audience they want and start embracing the new audience they have?"

One common trait of works that Troemel likes is a provocative ambiguity that allows for "multiple vehement interpretations," he said. After the photo of the MacBook submerged in the bathtub was posted, some online commenters were suspicious that it was a stunt. Others commiserated with the owner, assuming that it was an accident. "It's just an exquisite little scene of theatre all in one image," Troemel said.

"Multiple vehement interpretations" could also describe the response to Troemel in the art world, where he is well known but divisive. "He just puts himself out there in this cocky way, and I think people either love or hate it, and ninety per cent of people hate it," the cu-

rator Lindsay Howard said. "He embodies the white male artist to such an extreme degree that he is just a perfect enemy."

"The definition of 'pretension' is somebody who elevates something that is not worthy of any kind of elevation," Paddy Johnson told me. "Brad does that quite a bit, but nothing he makes is straight-up dumb." Still, Troemel has been more successful at attracting attention than at winning critical laurels. His solo shows have never been reviewed by the *Times* or *Artforum*, and the critics who do notice them tend to give them mixed reviews. A common complaint is that his art seems designed to work better in a browser window than on a gallery wall. In Johnson's review for Artnet of Troemel's first solo show, at Zach Feuer, in 2014, which included a piece made of books by the radical publisher Semiotext(e) vacuum-sealed with Litecoins and organic dried beans from Whole Foods, she wrote that his frantic mixture of branding and art didn't translate to a physical gallery space, "where audiences demand—and deserve—a more thoughtful message."

AS THE JOGGING's reputation grew, its contributors were offered an increasing number of opportunities to collaborate with organizations such as the Museum of Contemporary Art in

Los Angeles and the magazine *Dis*. In 2013, they were invited to do a residency at the Still House Group, an artists' space in Red Hook, Brooklyn. The Jogging had grown to about a dozen official members, but this was the first time that most of them had worked together in person. They agreed that they wanted to make a site-specific installation that emphasized impermanence. Troemel thought that the pieces should start out looking extremely polished, as if they had been Photoshopped, before they decayed. Other members, who had been drawn to the Jogging for its critique of the art market, felt that this approach was overly commercial. "We were the ones who loved the shittiness of the Jogging," Nick DeMarco told me.

Troemel wouldn't budge. "Eventually, I just put my foot down," he said. DeMarco and an artist named Aaron Graham ended up leaving the group over the conflict. "It became very clear that Brad would not tolerate dissent and it was not a group," DeMarco told me. "Brad was the boss and we were his employees."

"He will not ever stand down to anybody," Christiansen said. "We would collaborate on ideas, we would do things together, but he was very much in charge of everything." Not long afterward, Christiansen and Troemel broke up. When I spoke to her, she told me that Troemel is a domineering narcissist who exploited her and the rest of the Jogging contributors for free labor to advance his own career. "To be honest, I want to be as distant as possible" from the Jogging, she told me. "It haunts me everywhere I go." (Troemel said that Christiansen's view was "clouded.")

The strife was not visible when I stopped by the Jogging show at the Still House on opening night. Troemel and Christiansen dashed around the brightly lit space putting finishing touches on the pieces as an art crowd of twentysomethings drank cans of Coors Light held in koozies made from baguettes. Neon hair extensions were frozen in a tall column of ice. Dead fish patterned with pink-and-red camouflage were tacked to the wall. My favorite piece was a white table coated in a hydrophobic substance on

which Troemel poured a bottle of green Gatorade and a bottle of yellow Gatorade. He removed a divider and the colors blurred together in the middle. The piece pulsed to the vibrations of people walking around it. The show stayed up for a week, as the fish rotted, the ice sculpture melted, and the Gatorade evaporated into a pool of sticky neon goop.

A FEW DAYS AFTER my first trip to the Work in Progress residency, I visited again. It was 9:40 A.M., and Troemel and Citarella were the only artists present. Other offices were cluttered with work—the French artist Cyril Duval had filled his with selections from an enormous collection of counterfeit Chinese goods—but the U.V. Production House headquarters was still empty.

Citarella was hunched over a drawing pad connected to his computer, using a stylus to put the final touches on the display image for their newest work. Citarella, who was a key contributor to the Jogging, has a cheerful, laid-back demeanor and seemed unperturbed by what he described to me as his dire financial situation. In 2012, at the height of the latest art-market boom, he had moved from freelance jobs retouching photos for galleries and Web sites to selling his own work—highly polished composite images that he describes as “post-lens photography”—for as much as fifteen thousand dollars. He spent the next two years making extravagant, largely unsellable art—for one piece, he built a gallery in a forest—and now the market had cooled. He had a show in London the weekend after the residency, and, he said, “If it doesn’t go well I’m going back on Sunday and looking for a job on Monday.”

Troemel was leaning against the wall behind him, examining the image. It showed a plastic tube, filled with Mason jars of preserved meats, hung diagonally on the wall. A woman’s disembodied hand held a jar at the bottom of the chute. The tube was marked with numbered notches, one for each day of the month; the idea was that the user would remove a jar of meat every day and eat it, and the rest of the jars would slide down a notch, marking time by

meat. The concept was inspired by D.I.Y. projects that Troemel had come across on Pinterest.

Though Troemel often draws on darker communities of the Internet—hackers, trolls, and drug marketplaces—he has recently become engrossed in the relatively wholesome scene on Pinterest, where décor and craft enthusiasts gather. (His most recent gallery show consisted of objects he had made following tutorials on Pinterest.) He is fascinated by the contrast between D.I.Y. projects whose aim is to make the world a better place through, for example, “upcycling” household trash into attractive planters, and those which are meant to help people survive in an apocalypse. “The connection between ethical consumerism and shit-hits-the-fan survivalism is where our interests are right now,” he said.

Troemel noticed something that seemed off, in the lower half of the image. “Is that can in the woman’s hand the same size as the ones in the chute?” he asked. A realistic image would help convince Etsy that this was actually an art work and not just two guys selling things that they had bought on Amazon. Since November, they had twice been temporarily banned for violating Etsy’s guidelines on reselling commercial goods. Citarella assured him that the image had the correct proportions.

Next, they had to settle on a price. Troemel estimated that the tube would cost about fifteen hundred dollars. He said, “I think maybe making it a three-to-four-thousand-dollar product will safely cover us”—he laughed—“in the unfortunate circumstance someone actually buys it.”

The calendar went up on Etsy. “Next year this time, people will be telling the date by whether they had venison or turkey,” Troemel said. He asked if he had told me about a product called NADA Spiders for Change, their best-selling item. He hadn’t, but I had read about it on the Internet. If you paid U.V. Production House a dollar, it would release six wolf spiders at the New Art Dealers Alliance art fair, which had taken place earlier in the month in Manhattan. If anyone found a spider and sent

in a photo of it, U.V. Production House would donate a hundred dollars to the Cancer Research Institute.

The spider stunt had caused some consternation for Lauren Marinaro, the director of Feuer/Mesler. She was on the selection committee for NADA, and when she arrived at the fair she was repeatedly asked whether the spiders were real. She said that she was ninety-nine-point-nine-per-cent sure they weren’t, but Troemel and Citarella wouldn’t tell her. “That was very annoying,” she said, with the exasperation of an older sister talking about her brother’s latest misbehavior. “There are repercussions to that, too, in the sense of, like, if the Board of Health thought that was real, they can shut them down.”

I had laughed when I saw a mention of the spiders by Paddy Johnson, on her blog Art F City, but I could see why someone invested in the fair would have deemed it, as she did, an “asshole-boy prank.” While Troemel’s work can embody the freewheeling creativity that is the best part of Internet culture, it often falls into the trap of the troll who mistakes a lack of accountability for freedom, provoking with obnoxious antics simply for the sake of generating a reaction, then laughing in your face when you fall for the joke.

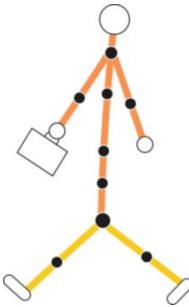
Troemel, predictably, had a more considered take on the NADA-spiders project. He explained that at art fairs

people are always walking around looking down at their phones and that, by making something that could spark discussion on social media, U.V. Production House could take part in the fair without actually being part of it. It would “create a palpable narrative that is more present in the media than some sort of abstract painting that you’d expect to see there,” he said.

I asked Citarella and Troemel if they had actually released any spiders. “None,” Citarella said. “Not any.” Troemel shot him a look.

“I mean, I wouldn’t say that,” Troemel said. “I don’t see a benefit of saying we didn’t do anything.”

Citarella gave him a look of exaggerated incredulity. “It’s . . . bioterrorism?” he said. They both laughed. ♦



STEVE HUFFMAN, the thirty-three-year-old co-founder and C.E.O. of Reddit, which is valued at six hundred million dollars, was nearsighted until November, 2015, when he arranged to have laser eye surgery. He underwent the procedure not for the sake of convenience or appearance but, rather, for a reason he doesn't usually talk much about: he hopes that it will improve his odds of surviving a disaster, whether natural or man-made. "If the world ends—and not even if the world ends, but if we have trouble—getting contacts or glasses is going to be a huge pain in the ass," he told me recently. "Without them, I'm fucked."

Huffman, who lives in San Francisco, has large blue eyes, thick, sandy hair, and an air of restless curiosity; at the University of Virginia, he was a competitive ballroom dancer, who hacked his roommate's Web site as a prank. He is less focussed on a specific threat—a quake on the San Andreas, a pandemic, a dirty bomb—than he is on the aftermath, "the temporary collapse of our government and structures," as he puts it. "I own a couple of motorcycles. I have a bunch of guns and ammo. Food. I figure that, with that, I can hole up in my house for some amount of time."

Survivalism, the practice of preparing for a crackup of civilization, tends to evoke a certain picture: the woodsman in the tinfoil hat, the hysterical with the hoard of beans, the religious doomsayer. But in recent years survivalism has expanded to more affluent quarters, taking root in Silicon Valley and New York City, among technology executives, hedge-fund managers, and others in their economic cohort.

Last spring, as the Presidential campaign exposed increasingly toxic divisions in America, Antonio García Martínez, a forty-year-old former Facebook product manager living in San Francisco, bought five wooded acres on an island in the Pacific Northwest and brought in generators, solar panels, and thousands of rounds of ammunition. "When society loses a healthy founding myth, it descends into chaos," he told me. The author of "Chaos Monkeys," an acerbic Silicon Valley memoir, García Martínez wanted a refuge that would be far from cities but not entirely isolated. "All these dudes think that one



An armed guard stands at the entrance of the Survival Condo Project, a former missile

A REPORTER AT LARGE

SURVIVAL OF THE RICHEST

*Why some of America's wealthiest people
are prepping for disaster.*

BY EVAN OSNOS



silo north of Wichita, Kansas, that has been converted into luxury apartments for people worried about the crackup of civilization.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAN WINTERS

guy alone could somehow withstand the roving mob,” he said. “No, you’re going to need to form a local militia. You just need so many things to actually ride out the apocalypse.” Once he started telling peers in the Bay Area about his “little island project,” they came “out of the woodwork” to describe their own preparations, he said. “I think people who are particularly attuned to the levers by which society actually works understand that we are skating on really thin cultural ice right now.”

In private Facebook groups, wealthy survivalists swap tips on gas masks, bunkers, and locations safe from the effects of climate change. One member, the head of an investment firm, told me, “I keep a helicopter gassed up all the time, and I have an underground bunker with an air-filtration system.” He said that his preparations probably put him at the “extreme” end among his peers. But he added, “A lot of my friends do the guns and the motorcycles and the gold coins. That’s not too rare anymore.”

Tim Chang, a forty-four-year-old managing director at Mayfield Fund, a venture-capital firm, told me, “There’s a bunch of us in the Valley. We meet up and have these financial-hacking dinners and talk about backup plans people are doing. It runs the gamut from a lot of people stocking up on Bitcoin and cryptocurrency, to figuring out how to get second passports if they need it, to having vacation homes in other countries that could be escape havens.” He said, “I’ll be candid: I’m stockpiling now on real estate to generate passive income but also to have havens to go to.” He and his wife, who is in technology, keep a set of bags packed for themselves and their four-year-old daughter. He told me, “I kind of have this terror scenario: ‘Oh, my God, if there is a civil war or a giant earthquake that cleaves off part of California, we want to be ready.’”

When Marvin Liao, a former Yahoo executive who is now a partner at 500 Startups, a venture-capital firm, considered his preparations, he decided that his caches of water and food were not enough. “What if someone comes and takes this?” he asked me. To protect his wife and daughter, he said, “I don’t have

guns, but I have a lot of other weaponry. I took classes in archery.”

For some, it’s just “brogrammer” entertainment, a kind of real-world sci-fi, with gear; for others, like Huffman, it’s been a concern for years. “Ever since I saw the movie ‘Deep Impact,’ ” he said. The film, released in 1998, depicts a comet striking the Atlantic, and a race to escape the tsunami. “Everybody’s trying to get out, and they’re stuck in traffic. That scene happened to be filmed near my high school. Every time I drove through that stretch of road, I would think, I need to own a motorcycle because everybody else is screwed.”

Huffman has been a frequent attendee at Burning Man, the annual, clothing-optional festival in the Nevada desert, where artists mingle with moguls. He fell in love with one of its core principles, “radical self-reliance,” which he takes to mean “happy to help others, but not wanting to require others.” (Among survivalists, or “preppers,” as some call themselves, FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, stands for “Foolishly Expecting Meaningful Aid.”) Huffman has calculated that, in the event of a disaster, he would seek out some form of community: “Being around other people is a good thing. I also have this somewhat egotistical view that I’m a pretty good leader. I will probably be in charge, or at least not a slave, when push comes to shove.”

Over the years, Huffman has become increasingly concerned about basic

American political stability and the risk of large-scale unrest. He said, “Some sort of institutional collapse, then you just lose shipping—that sort of stuff.” (Prepper blogs call such a scenario W.R.O.L., “without rule of law.”) Huffman has come to believe that contemporary life rests on a fragile consensus. “I think, to

some degree, we all collectively take it on faith that our country works, that our currency is valuable, the peaceful transfer of power—that all of these things that we hold dear work because we believe they work. While I do believe they’re quite resilient, and we’ve been through a lot, certainly we’re going to go through a lot more.”

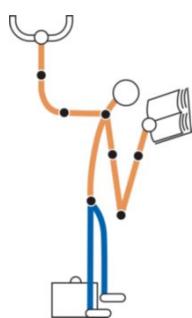
In building Reddit, a community of

thousands of discussion threads, into one of the most frequently visited sites in the world, Huffman has grown aware of the way that technology alters our relations with one another, for better and for worse. He has witnessed how social media can magnify public fear. “It’s easier for people to panic when they’re together,” he said, pointing out that “the Internet has made it easier for people to be together,” yet it also alerts people to emerging risks. Long before the financial crisis became front-page news, early signs appeared in user comments on Reddit. “People were starting to whisper about mortgages. They were worried about student debt. They were worried about debt in general. There was a lot of, ‘This is too good to be true. This doesn’t smell right.’ ” He added, “There’s probably some false positives in there as well, but, in general, I think we’re a pretty good gauge of public sentiment. When we’re talking about a faith-based collapse, you’re going to start to see the chips in the foundation on social media first.”

HOW DID A preoccupation with the apocalypse come to flourish in Silicon Valley, a place known, to the point of cliché, for unstinting confidence in its ability to change the world for the better?

Those impulses are not as contradictory as they seem. Technology rewards the ability to imagine wildly different futures, Roy Bahat, the head of Bloomberg Beta, a San Francisco-based venture-capital firm, told me. “When you do that, it’s pretty common that you take things ad infinitum, and that leads you to utopias and dystopias,” he said. It can inspire radical optimism—such as the cryonics movement, which calls for freezing bodies at death in the hope that science will one day revive them—or bleak scenarios. Tim Chang, the venture capitalist who keeps his bags packed, told me, “My current state of mind is oscillating between optimism and sheer terror.”

In recent years, survivalism has been edging deeper into mainstream culture. In 2012, National Geographic Channel launched “Doomsday Preppers,” a reality show featuring a series of Americans bracing for what they called S.H.T.F. (when the “shit hits the fan”). The première drew more than four million viewers, and, by the end of the



first season, it was the most popular show in the channel's history. A survey commissioned by National Geographic found that forty per cent of Americans believed that stocking up on supplies or building a bomb shelter was a wiser investment than a 401(k). Online, the prepper discussions run from folksy ("A Mom's Guide to Preparing for Civil Unrest") to grim ("How to Eat a Pine Tree to Survive").

The reëlection of Barack Obama was a boon for the prepping industry. Conservative devotees, who accused Obama of stoking racial tensions, restricting gun rights, and expanding the national debt, loaded up on the types of freeze-dried cottage cheese and beef stroganoff promoted by commentators like Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity. A network of "readiness" trade shows attracted conventioners with classes on suturing (practiced on a pig trotter) and photo opportunities with survivalist stars from the TV show "Naked and Afraid."

The fears were different in Silicon Valley. Around the same time that Huffman, on Reddit, was watching the advance of the financial crisis, Justin Kan heard the first inklings of survivalism among his peers. Kan co-founded Twitch, a gaming network that was later sold to Amazon for nearly a billion dollars. "Some of my friends were, like, 'The breakdown of society is imminent. We should stockpile food,'" he said. "I tried to. But then we got a couple of bags of rice and five cans of tomatoes. We would have been dead if there was actually a real problem." I asked Kan what his prepping friends had in common. "Lots of money and resources," he said. "What are the other things I can worry about and prepare for? It's like insurance."

Yishan Wong, an early Facebook employee, was the C.E.O. of Reddit from 2012 to 2014. He, too, had eye surgery for survival purposes, eliminating his dependence, as he put it, "on a nonsustainable external aid for perfect vision." In an e-mail, Wong told me, "Most people just assume improbable events don't happen, but technical people tend to view risk very mathematically." He continued, "The tech preppers do not necessarily think a collapse is likely. They consider it a remote event, but one with a very severe downside, so, given how much money they have, spending a frac-



"I released a lot of emotion with my drumming, but I still need to have a tantrum."

tion of their net worth to hedge against this . . . is a logical thing to do."

How many wealthy Americans are really making preparations for a catastrophe? It's hard to know exactly; a lot of people don't like to talk about it. ("Anonymity is priceless," one hedge-fund manager told me, declining an interview.) Sometimes the topic emerges in unexpected ways. Reid Hoffman, the co-founder of LinkedIn and a prominent investor, recalls telling a friend that he was thinking of visiting New Zealand. "Oh, are you going to get apocalypse insurance?" the friend asked. "I'm, like, Huh?" Hoffman told me. New Zealand, he discovered, is a favored refuge in the event of a cataclysm. Hoffman said, "Saying you're 'buying a house in New Zealand' is kind of a wink, wink, say no more. Once you've done the Masonic handshake, they'll be, like, 'Oh, you know, I have a broker who sells old ICBM silos, and they're nuclear-hardened, and they kind of look like they would be interesting to live in.'"

I asked Hoffman to estimate what share of fellow Silicon Valley billionaires have acquired some level of "apocalypse insurance," in the form of a hideaway in the U.S. or abroad. "I would guess fifty-plus per cent," he said, "but that's parallel with the decision to buy a vacation

home. Human motivation is complex, and I think people can say, 'I now have a safety blanket for this thing that scares me.'" The fears vary, but many worry that, as artificial intelligence takes away a growing share of jobs, there will be a backlash against Silicon Valley, America's second-highest concentration of wealth. (Southwestern Connecticut is first.) "I've heard this theme from a bunch of people," Hoffman said. "Is the country going to turn against the wealthy? Is it going to turn against technological innovation? Is it going to turn into civil disorder?"

The C.E.O. of another large tech company told me, "It's still not at the point where industry insiders would turn to each other with a straight face and ask what their plans are for some apocalyptic event." He went on, "But, having said that, I actually think it's logically rational and appropriately conservative." He noted the vulnerabilities exposed by the Russian cyberattack on the Democratic National Committee, and also by a large-scale hack on October 21st, which disrupted the Internet in North America and Western Europe. "Our food supply is dependent on G.P.S., logistics, and weather forecasting," he said, "and those systems are generally dependent on the Internet, and the Internet is dependent on D.N.S." —the

system that manages domain names. “Go risk factor by risk factor by risk factor,” acknowledging that there are many you don’t even know about, and you ask, ‘What’s the chance of this breaking in the next decade?’ Or invert it: ‘What’s the chance that nothing breaks in fifty years?’

One measure of survivalism’s spread is that some people are starting to speak out against it. Max Levchin, a founder of PayPal and of Affirm, a lending startup, told me, “It’s one of the few things about Silicon Valley that I actively dislike—the sense that we are superior giants who move the needle and, even if it’s our own failure, must be spared.”

To Levchin, prepping for survival is a moral miscalculation; he prefers to “shut down party conversations” on the topic. “I typically ask people, ‘So you’re worried about the pitchforks. How much money have you donated to your local homeless shelter?’ This connects the most, in my mind, to the realities of the income gap. All the other forms of fear that people bring up are artificial.” In his view, this is the time to invest in solutions, not escape. “At the moment, we’re actually at a relatively benign point of the economy. When the economy heads south, you will have a bunch of people that are in really bad shape. What do we expect then?”

ON THE OPPOSITE side of the country, similar awkward conversations have been unfolding in some financial circles. Robert H. Dugger worked as a lobbyist for the financial industry before he became a partner at the global hedge fund Tudor Investment Corporation, in 1993. After seventeen years, he retired to focus on philanthropy and his investments. “Anyone who’s in this community knows people who are worried that America is heading toward something like the Russian Revolution,” he told me recently.

To manage that fear, Dugger said, he has seen two very different responses. “People know the only real answer is, Fix the problem,” he said. “It’s a reason most of them give a lot of money to good causes.” At the same time, though, they invest in the mechanics of escape. He recalled a dinner in New York City after 9/11 and the bursting of the dot-com bubble: “A group of centi-millionaires

and a couple of billionaires were working through end-of-America scenarios and talking about what they’d do. Most said they’ll fire up their planes and take their families to Western ranches or homes in other countries.” One of the guests was skeptical, Dugger said. “He leaned forward and asked, ‘Are you taking your pilot’s family, too? And what about the maintenance guys? If revolutionaries are kicking in doors, how many of the people in your life will you have to take with you?’ The questioning continued. In the end, most agreed they couldn’t run.”

Elite anxiety cuts across political lines. Even financiers who supported Trump for President, hoping that he would cut taxes and regulations, have been unnerved at the ways his insurgent campaign seems to have hastened a collapse of respect for established institutions. Dugger said, “The media is under attack now. They wonder, Is the court system next? Do we go from ‘fake news’ to ‘fake evidence’? For people whose existence depends on enforceable contracts, this is life or death.”

Robert A. Johnson sees his peers’ talk of fleeing as the symptom of a deeper crisis. At fifty-nine, Johnson has tousled silver hair and a soft-spoken, avuncular composure. He earned degrees in electrical engineering and economics at M.I.T., got a Ph.D. in economics at Princeton, and worked on Capitol Hill, before entering finance. He became a managing director at the hedge fund Soros Fund Management. In 2009, after the onset of the financial crisis, he was named head of a think tank, the Institute for New Economic Thinking.

When I visited Johnson, not long ago, at his office on Park Avenue South, he described himself as an accidental student of civic anxiety. He grew up outside Detroit, in Grosse Pointe Park, the son of a doctor, and he watched his father’s generation experience the fracturing of Detroit. “What I’m seeing now in New York City is sort of like old music coming back,” he said. “These are friends of mine. I used to live in Belle Haven, in Greenwich, Connecticut. Louis Bacon, Paul Tudor Jones, and Ray Dalio”—hedge-fund managers—“were all within fifty yards of me. From my own career, I would just talk to people. More and more were saying, ‘You’ve got to have a

private plane. You have to assure that the pilot’s family will be taken care of, too. They have to be on the plane.”

By January, 2015, Johnson was sounding the alarm: the tensions produced by acute income inequality were becoming so pronounced that some of the world’s wealthiest people were taking steps to protect themselves. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Johnson told the audience, “I know hedge-fund managers all over the world who are buying airstrips and farms in places like New Zealand because they think they need a getaway.”

Johnson wishes that the wealthy would adopt a greater “spirit of stewardship,” an openness to policy change that could include, for instance, a more aggressive tax on inheritance. “Twenty-five hedge-fund managers make more money than all of the kindergarten teachers in America combined,” he said. “Being one of those twenty-five doesn’t feel good. I think they’ve developed a heightened sensitivity.” The gap is widening further. In December, the National Bureau of Economic Research published a new analysis, by the economists Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, and Gabriel Zucman, which found that half of American adults have been “completely shut off from economic growth since the 1970s.” Approximately a hundred and seventeen million people earn, on average, the same income that they did in 1980, while the typical income for the top one per cent has nearly tripled. That gap is comparable to the gap between average incomes in the U.S. and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the authors wrote.

Johnson said, “If we had a more equal distribution of income, and much more money and energy going into public school systems, parks and recreation, the arts, and health care, it could take an awful lot of sting out of society. We’ve largely dismantled those things.”

As public institutions deteriorate, elite anxiety has emerged as a gauge of our national predicament. “Why do people who are envied for being so powerful appear to be so afraid?” Johnson asked. “What does that really tell us about our system?” He added, “It’s a very odd thing. You’re basically seeing that the people who’ve been the best at reading the tea leaves—the ones with the most resources, because that’s

how they made their money—are now the ones most preparing to pull the rip cord and jump out of the plane.”

ON A COOL evening in early November, I rented a car in Wichita, Kansas, and drove north from the city through slanting sunlight, across the suburbs and out beyond the last shopping center, where the horizon settles into farmland. After a couple of hours, just before the town of Concordia, I headed west, down a dirt track flanked by corn and soybean fields,

tastrophe planning, which had languished after the Cold War. During the September 11th attacks, the Bush Administration activated a “continuity of government” plan, transporting selected federal workers by helicopter and bus to fortified locations, but, after years of disuse, computers and other equipment in the bunkers were out of date. Bush ordered a renewed focus on continuity plans, and FEMA launched annual government-wide exercises. (The most recent, Eagle Horizon, in 2015, simulated hurricanes, im-

and hydroponic vegetables under grow lamps, with renewable power, it could function indefinitely, Hall said. In a crisis, his SWAT-team-style trucks (“the Pit-Bull VX, armored up to fifty-calibre”) will pick up any owner within four hundred miles. Residents with private planes can land in Salina, about thirty miles away. In his view, the Army Corps did the hardest work by choosing the location. “They looked at height above sea level, the seismology of an area, how close it is to large population centers,” he said.

Hall, in his late fifties, is barrel-chested and talkative. He studied business and computers at the Florida Institute of Technology and went on to specialize in networks and data centers for Northrop Grumman, Harris Corporation, and other defense contractors. He now goes back and forth between the Kansas silo and a home in the Denver suburbs, where his wife, a paralegal, lives with their twelve-year-old son.

Hall led me through the garage, down a ramp, and into a lounge, with a stone fireplace, a dining area, and a kitchen to one side. It had the feel of a ski condo without windows: pool table, stainless-steel appliances, leather couches. To maximize space, Hall took ideas from cruise-ship design. We were accompanied by Mark Menosky, an engineer who manages day-to-day operations. While they fixed dinner—steak, baked potatoes, and salad—Hall said that the hardest part of the project was sustaining life underground. He studied how to avoid depression (add more lights), prevent cliques (rotate chores), and simulate life aboveground. The condo walls are fitted with L.E.D. “windows” that show a live video of the prairie above the silo. Owners can opt instead for pine forests or other vistas. One prospective resident from New York City wanted video of Central Park. “All four seasons, day and night,” Menosky said. “She wanted the sounds, the taxis and the honking horns.”

Some survivalists disparage Hall for creating an exclusive refuge for the wealthy and have threatened to seize his bunker in a crisis. Hall waved away this possibility when I raised it with him over dinner. “You can send all the bullets you want into this place.” If necessary, his guards would return fire, he said. “We’ve got a sniper post.”

Recently, I spoke on the phone with Tyler Allen, a real-estate developer in Lake Mary, Florida, who told me that he paid



The living room of an apartment at the Survival Condo Project.

winding through darkness until my lights settled on a large steel gate. A guard, dressed in camouflage, held a semiautomatic rifle.

He ushered me through, and, in the darkness, I could see the outline of a vast concrete dome, with a metal blast door partly ajar. I was greeted by Larry Hall, the C.E.O. of the Survival Condo Project, a fifteen-story luxury apartment complex built in an underground Atlas missile silo. The facility housed a nuclear warhead from 1961 to 1965, when it was decommissioned. At a site conceived for the Soviet nuclear threat, Hall has erected a defense against the fears of a new era. “It’s true relaxation for the ultra-wealthy,” he said. “They can come out here, they know there are armed guards outside. The kids can run around.”

Hall got the idea for the project about a decade ago, when he read that the federal government was reinvesting in ca-

provised nuclear devices, earthquakes, and cyberattacks.)

“I started saying, ‘Well, wait a minute, what does the government know that we don’t know?’” Hall said. In 2008, he paid three hundred thousand dollars for the silo and finished construction in December, 2012, at a cost of nearly twenty million dollars. He created twelve private apartments: full-floor units were advertised at three million dollars; a half-floor was half the price. He has sold every unit, except one for himself, he said.

Most preppers don’t actually have bunkers; hardened shelters are expensive and complicated to build. The original silo of Hall’s complex was built by the Army Corps of Engineers to withstand a nuclear strike. The interior can support a total of seventy-five people. It has enough food and fuel for five years off the grid; by raising tilapia in fish tanks,

three million dollars for one of Hall's condos. Allen said he worries that America faces a future of "social conflict" and government efforts to deceive the public. He suspects that the Ebola virus was allowed to enter the country in order to weaken the population. When I asked how friends usually respond to his ideas, he said, "The natural reaction that you get most of the time is for them to laugh, because it scares them." But, he added, "my credibility has gone through the roof. Ten years ago, this just seemed crazy that all this was going to happen: the social unrest and the cultural divide in the country, the race-baiting and the hate-mongering." I asked how he planned to get to Kansas from Florida in a crisis. "If a dirty bomb goes off in Miami, everybody's going to go in their house and congregate in bars, just glued to the TV. Well, you've got forty-eight hours to get the hell out of there."

Allen told me that, in his view, taking precautions is unfairly stigmatized. "They don't put tinfoil on your head if you're the President and you go to Camp David," he said. "But they do put tinfoil on your head if you have the means and you take steps to protect your family should a problem occur."

WHAT DO OUR dystopian urges emerge at certain moments and not others? Doomsday—as a prophecy, a literary genre, and a business opportunity—is never static; it evolves with our

anxieties. The earliest Puritan settlers saw in the awe-inspiring bounty of the American wilderness the prospect of both apocalypse and paradise. When, in May of 1780, sudden darkness settled on New England, farmers perceived it as a cataclysm heralding the return of Christ. (In fact, the darkness was caused by enormous wildfires in Ontario.) D. H. Lawrence diagnosed a specific strain of American dread. "Doom! Doom! Doom!" he wrote in 1923. "Something seems to whisper it in the very dark trees of America."

Historically, our fascination with the End has flourished at moments of political insecurity and rapid technological change. "In the late nineteenth century, there were all sorts of utopian novels, and each was coupled with a dystopian novel," Richard White, a historian at Stanford University, told me. Edward Bellamy's "Looking Backward," published in 1888, depicted a socialist paradise in the year 2000, and became a sensation, inspiring "Bellamy Clubs" around the country. Conversely, Jack London, in 1908, published "The Iron Heel," imagining an America under a fascist oligarchy in which "nine-tenths of one per cent" hold "seventy per cent of the total wealth."

At the time, Americans were marvelling at engineering advances—at attendees at the 1893 World's Fair, in Chicago, beheld new uses for electric

light—but were also protesting low wages, poor working conditions, and corporate greed. "It was very much like today," White said. "It was a sense that the political system had spun out of control, and was no longer able to deal with society. There was a huge inequity in wealth, a stirring of working classes. Life spans were getting shorter. There was a feeling that America's advance had stopped, and the whole thing was going to break."

Business titans grew uncomfortable. In 1889, Andrew Carnegie, who was on his way to being the richest man in the world, worth more than four billion in today's dollars, wrote, with concern, about class tensions; he criticized the emergence of "rigid castes" living in "mutual ignorance" and "mutual distrust." John D. Rockefeller, of Standard Oil, America's first actual billionaire, felt a Christian duty to give back. "The novelty of being able to purchase anything one wants soon passes," he wrote, in 1909, "because what people most seek cannot be bought with money." Carnegie went on to fight illiteracy by creating nearly three thousand public libraries. Rockefeller founded the University of Chicago. According to Joel Fleishman, the author of "The Foundation," a study of American philanthropy, both men dedicated themselves to "changing the systems that produced those ills in the first place."

During the Cold War, Armageddon became a matter for government policymakers. The Federal Civil Defense Administration, created by Harry Truman, issued crisp instructions for surviving a nuclear strike, including "Jump in any handy ditch or gutter" and "Never lose your head." In 1958, Dwight Eisenhower broke ground on Project Greek Island, a secret shelter, in the mountains of West Virginia, large enough for every member of Congress. Hidden beneath the Greenbrier Resort, in White Sulphur Springs, for more than thirty years, it maintained separate chambers-in-waiting for the House and the Senate. (Congress now plans to shelter at undisclosed locations.) There was also a secret plan to whisk away the Gettysburg Address, from the Library of Congress, and the Declaration of Independence, from the National Archives.



"I said, 'Crush your enemies, see them driven before you, and hear the lamentation of the women,' but the media took that totally out of context."

But in 1961 John F. Kennedy encouraged “every citizen” to help build fallout shelters, saying, in a televised address, “I know you would not want to do less.” In 1976, tapping into fear of inflation and the Arab oil embargo, a far-right publisher named Kurt Saxon launched *The Survivor*, an influential newsletter that celebrated forgotten pioneer skills. (Saxon claimed to have coined the term “survivalist.”) The growing literature on decline and self-protection included “How to Prosper During the Coming Bad Years,” a 1979 best-seller, which advised collecting gold in the form of South African Krugerrands. The “doom boom,” as it became known, expanded under Ronald Reagan. The sociologist Richard G. Mitchell, Jr., a professor emeritus at Oregon State University, who spent twelve years studying survivalism, said, “During the Reagan era, we heard, for the first time in my life, and I’m seventy-four years old, from the highest authorities in the land that government has failed you, the collective institutional ways of solving problems and understanding society are no good. People said, ‘O.K., it’s flawed. What do I do now?’”

The movement received another boost from the George W. Bush Administration’s mishandling of Hurricane Katrina. Neil Strauss, a former *Times* reporter, who chronicled his turn to prepping in his book “Emergency,” told me, “We see New Orleans, where our government knows a disaster is happening, and is powerless to save its own citizens.” Strauss got interested in survivalism a year after Katrina, when a tech entrepreneur who was taking flying lessons and hatching escape plans introduced him to a group of like-minded “billionaire and centi-millionaire preppers.” Strauss acquired citizenship in St. Kitts, put assets in foreign currencies, and trained to survive with “nothing but a knife and the clothes on my back.”

These days, when North Korea tests a bomb, Hall can expect an uptick of phone inquiries about space in the Survival Condo Project. But he points to a deeper source of demand. “Seventy per cent of the country doesn’t like the direction that things are going,” he said. After dinner, Hall and Menosky gave

me a tour. The complex is a tall cylinder that resembles a corncob. Some levels are dedicated to private apartments and others offer shared amenities: a seventy-five-foot-long pool, a rock-climbing wall, an Astro-Turf “pet park,” a classroom with a line of Mac desktops, a gym, a movie theatre, and a library. It felt compact but not claustrophobic. We visited an armory packed with guns and ammo in case of an attack by non-members, and then a bare-walled room with a toilet. “We can lock people up and give them an adult time-out,” he said. In general, the rules are set by a condo association, which can vote to amend them. During a crisis, a “life-or-death situation,” Hall said, each adult would be required to work for four hours a day, and would not be allowed to leave without permission. “There’s controlled access in and out, and it’s governed by the board,” he said.

The “medical wing” contains a hospital bed, a procedure table, and a dentist’s chair. Among the residents, Hall said, “we’ve got two doctors and a dentist.” One floor up, we visited the food-storage area, still unfinished. He hopes that, once it’s fully stocked, it will feel like a “miniature Whole Foods,” but for now it holds mostly cans of food.

We stopped in a condo. Nine-foot ceilings, Wolf range, gas fireplace. “This guy wanted to have a fireplace from his home state”—Connecticut—“so he shipped me the granite,” Hall said. Another owner, with a home in Bermuda, ordered the walls of his bunker-condo painted in island pastels—orange, green, yellow—but, in close quarters, he found it oppressive. His decorator had to come fix it.

That night, I slept in a guest room appointed with a wet bar and handsome wood cabinets, but no video windows. It was eerily silent, and felt like sleeping in a well-furnished submarine.

I emerged around eight the next morning to find Hall and Menosky in the common area, drinking coffee and watching a campaign-news brief on “Fox & Friends.” It was five days before the election, and Hall, who is a Republican, described himself as a cautious Trump supporter. “Of the two

running, I’m hoping that his business acumen will override some of his knee-jerk stuff.” Watching Trump and Clinton rallies on television, he was struck by how large and enthusiastic Trump’s crowds appeared. “I just don’t believe the polls,” he said.

He thinks that mainstream news organizations are biased, and he subscribes to theories that he knows some find implausible. He surmised that

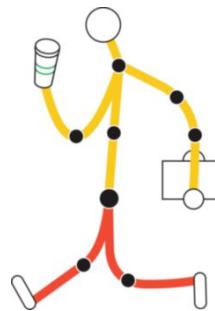
“there is a deliberate move by the people in Congress to dumb America down.” Why would Congress do that? I asked. “They don’t want people to be smart to see what’s going on in politics,” he said. He told me he had read a prediction that forty per cent of Congress will be arrested, because of a scheme involving the Panama Papers, the Catholic Church, and the Clinton Foundation. “They’ve been working on this investigation for twenty years,” he said.

I asked him if he really believed that. “At first, you hear this stuff and go, Yeah, right,” he said. But he wasn’t ruling it out.

Before I headed back to Wichita, we stopped at Hall’s latest project—a second underground complex, in a silo twenty-five miles away. As we pulled up, a crane loomed overhead, hoisting debris from deep below the surface. The complex will contain three times the living space of the original, in part because the garage will be moved to a separate structure. Among other additions, it will have a bowling alley and L.E.D. windows as large as French doors, to create a feeling of openness.

Hall said that he was working on private bunkers for clients in Idaho and Texas, and that two technology companies had asked him to design “a secure facility for their data center and a safe haven for their key personnel, if something were to happen.” To accommodate demand, he has paid for the possibility to buy four more silos.

IF A SILO in Kansas is not remote or private enough, there is another option. In the first seven days after Donald Trump’s election, 13,401 Americans registered with New Zealand’s immigration authorities, the first



official step toward seeking residency—more than seventeen times the usual rate. The New Zealand *Herald* reported the surge beneath the headline “TRUMP APOCALYPSE.”

In fact, the influx had begun well before Trump’s victory. In the first ten months of 2016, foreigners bought nearly fourteen hundred square miles of land in New Zealand, more than quadruple what they bought in the same period the previous year, according to the government. American buyers were second only to Australians. The U.S. government does not keep a tally of Americans who own second or third homes overseas. Much as Switzerland once drew Americans with the promise of secrecy, and Uruguay tempted them with private banks, New Zealand offers security and distance. In the past six years, nearly a thousand foreigners have acquired residency there under programs that mandate certain types of investment of at least a million dollars.

Jack Matthews, an American who is the chairman of MediaWorks, a large New Zealand broadcaster, told me, “I think, in the back of people’s minds, frankly, is that, if the world really goes to shit, New Zealand is a First World country, completely self-sufficient, if necessary—energy, water, food. Life would deteriorate, but it would not collapse.” As someone who views American politics from a distance, he said, “The difference between New Zealand and the U.S., to a large extent, is that people who disagree with each other can still talk to each other about it here. It’s a tiny little place, and there’s no anonymity. People have to actually have a degree of civility.”

Auckland is a thirteen-hour flight from San Francisco. I arrived in early December, the beginning of New Zealand’s summer: blue skies, mid-seventies, no humidity. Top to bottom, the island chain runs roughly the distance between Maine and Florida, with half the population of New York City. Sheep outnumber people seven to one. In global rankings, New Zealand is in the top ten for democracy, clean government, and security. (Its last encounter with terrorism was in 1985, when French spies bombed a Greenpeace ship.) In a recent World Bank report, New Zealand had sup-

planted Singapore as the best country in the world to do business.

The morning after I arrived, I was picked up at my hotel by Graham Wall, a cheerful real-estate agent who specializes in what his profession describes as high-net-worth individuals, “H.N.W.I.” Wall, whose clients include Peter Thiel, the billionaire venture capitalist, was surprised when Americans told him they were coming precisely because of the country’s remoteness. “Kiwis used to talk about the ‘tyranny of distance,’ ” Wall said, as we crossed town in his Mercedes convertible. “Now the tyranny of distance is our greatest asset.”

Before my trip, I had wondered if I was going to be spending more time in luxury bunkers. But Peter Campbell, the managing director of Triple Star Management, a New Zealand construction firm, told me that, by and large, once his American clients arrive, they decide that underground shelters are gratuitous. “It’s not like you need to build a bunker under your front lawn, because you’re several thousand miles away from the White House,” he said. Americans have other requests. “Definitely, helipads are a big one,” he said. “You can fly a private jet into Queenstown or a private jet into Wanaka, and then you can grab a helicopter and it can take you and land you at your property.” American clients have also sought strategic advice. “They’re asking, ‘Where in New Zealand is not going to be long-term affected by rising sea levels?’ ”

The growing foreign appetite for New Zealand property has generated a backlash. The Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa—the Maori name for New Zealand—opposes sales to foreigners. In particular, the attention of American survivalists has generated resentment. In a discussion about New Zealand on the Modern Survivalist, a prepper Web site, a commentator wrote, “Yanks, get this in your heads. Aotearoa NZ is not your little last resort safe haven.”

An American hedge-fund manager in his forties—tall, tanned, athletic—recently bought two houses in New Zealand and acquired local residency. He agreed to tell me about his thinking, if I would not publish his name. Brought up on the East Coast, he said, over coffee, that he expects America to face at least a decade of political turmoil, including

racial tension, polarization, and a rapidly aging population. “The country has turned into the New York area, the California area, and then everyone else is wildly different in the middle,” he said. He worries that the economy will suffer if Washington scrambles to fund Social Security and Medicare for people who need it. “Do you default on that obligation? Or do you print more money to give to them? What does that do to the value of the dollar? It’s not a next-year problem, but it’s not fifty years away, either.”

New Zealand’s reputation for attracting doomsayers is so well known in the hedge-fund manager’s circle that he prefers to differentiate himself from earlier arrivals. He said, “This is no longer about a handful of freaks worried about the world ending.” He laughed, and added, “Unless I’m one of those freaks.”

EVERY YEAR SINCE 1947, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, a magazine founded by members of the Manhattan Project, has gathered a group of Nobel laureates and other luminaries to update the Doomsday Clock, a symbolic gauge of our risk of wrecking civilization. In 1991, as the Cold War was ending, the scientists set the clock to its safest point ever—seventeen minutes to “midnight.”

Since then, the direction has been inauspicious. In January, 2016, after increasing military tensions between Russia and NATO, and the Earth’s warmest year on record, the *Bulletin* set the clock at three minutes to midnight, the same level it held at the height of the Cold War. In November, after Trump’s election, the panel convened once more to conduct its annual confidential discussion. If it chooses to move the clock forward by one minute, that will signal a level of alarm not witnessed since 1953, after America’s first test of the hydrogen bomb. (The result will be released January 26th.)

Fear of disaster is healthy if it spurs action to prevent it. But élite survivalism is not a step toward prevention; it is an act of withdrawal. Philanthropy in America is still three times as large, as a share of G.D.P., as philanthropy in the next closest country, the United Kingdom. But it is now accompanied by a gesture of surrender, a quiet disinvestment

by some of America's most successful and powerful people. Faced with evidence of frailty in the American project, in the institutions and norms from which they have benefitted, some are permitting themselves to imagine failure. It is a gilded despair.

As Huffman, of Reddit, observed, our technologies have made us more alert to risk, but have also made us more panicky; they facilitate the tribal temptation to cocoon, to seclude ourselves from opponents, and to fortify ourselves against our fears, instead of attacking the sources of them. Justin Kan, the technology investor who had made a halfhearted effort to stock up on food, recalled a recent phone call from a friend at a hedge fund. "He was telling me we should buy land in New Zealand as a backup. He's, like, 'What's the percentage chance that Trump is actually a fascist dictator? Maybe it's low, but the expected value of having an escape hatch is pretty high.'"

There are other ways to absorb the anxieties of our time. "If I had a billion dollars, I wouldn't buy a bunker," Elli Kaplan, the C.E.O. of the digital health startup Neurotrack, told me. "I would reinvest in civil society and civil innovation. My view is you figure out even smarter ways to make sure that something terrible doesn't happen." Kaplan, who worked in the White House under Bill Clinton, was appalled by Trump's victory, but said that it galvanized her in a different way: "Even in my deepest fear, I say, 'Our union is stronger than this.'"

That view is, in the end, an article of faith—a conviction that even degraded political institutions are the best instruments of common will, the tools for fashioning and sustaining our fragile consensus. Believing that is a choice.

I called a Silicon Valley sage, Stewart Brand, the author and entrepreneur whom Steve Jobs credited as an inspiration. In the sixties and seventies, Brand's "Whole Earth Catalog" attracted a cult following, with its mixture of hippie and techie advice. (The motto: "We are as gods and might as well get good at it.") Brand told me that he explored survivalism in the seventies, but not for long. "Generally, I find the idea that 'Oh, my God, the world's all going to fall apart' strange," he said.

At seventy-seven, living on a tugboat



"It's only until spring."

in Sausalito, Brand is less impressed by signs of fragility than by examples of resilience. In the past decade, the world survived, without violence, the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression; Ebola, without cataclysm; and, in Japan, a tsunami and nuclear meltdown, after which the country has persevered. He sees risks in escapism. As Americans withdraw into smaller circles of experience, we jeopardize the "larger circle of empathy," he said, the search for solutions to shared problems. "The easy question is, How do I protect me and mine? The more interesting question is, What if civilization actually manages continuity as well as it has managed it for the past few centuries? What do we do if it just keeps on chugging?"

After a few days in New Zealand, I could see why one might choose to avoid either question. Under a cerulean blue sky one morning in Auckland, I boarded a helicopter beside a thirty-eight-year-old American named Jim Rohrstaff. After college, in Michigan, Rohrstaff worked as a golf pro, and then in the marketing of luxury golf clubs and property. Upbeat and confident, with shining blue eyes, he moved to New Zealand two and a half years ago, with his wife and two children, to sell property to H.N.W.I. who want to get "far away

from all the issues of the world," he said.

Rohrstaff, who co-owns Legacy Partners, a boutique brokerage, wanted me to see Tara Iti, a new luxury-housing development and golf club that appeals mostly to Americans. The helicopter nosed north across the harbor and banked up the coast, across lush forests and fields beyond the city. From above, the sea was a sparkling expanse, scalloped by the wind.

The helicopter eased down onto a lawn beside a putting green. The new luxury community will have three thousand acres of dunes and forestland, and seven miles of coastline, for just a hundred and twenty-five homes. As we toured the site in a Land Rover, he emphasized the seclusion: "From the outside, you won't see anything. That's better for the public and better for us, for privacy."

As we neared the sea, Rohrstaff parked the Land Rover and climbed out. In his loafers, he marched over the dunes and led me down into the sand, until we reached a stretch of beach that extended to the horizon without a soul in sight.

Waves roared ashore. He spread his arms, turned, and laughed. "We think it's the place to be in the future," he said. For the first time in weeks—months, even—I wasn't thinking about Trump. Or much of anything. ♦

ALTERNATE ENDINGS

Movies that allow you to decide what happens next.

BY RAFFI KHATCHADOURIAN

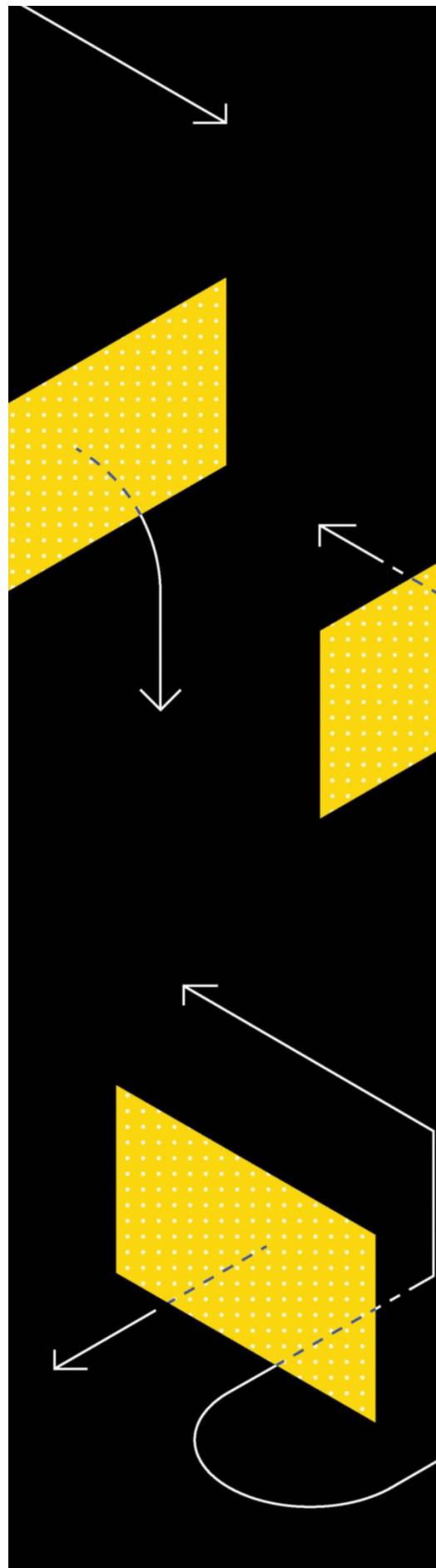
DANIEL KWAN and Daniel Scheinert, young directors who go by the joint film credit Daniels, are known for reality-warped miniatures—short films, music videos, commercials—that are eerie yet playful in mood. In their work, people jump into other people's bodies, Teddy bears dance to hard-core dubstep, rednecks shoot clothes from rifles onto fleeing nudists. Last year, their first feature-length project, “Swiss Army Man”—starring Daniel Radcliffe, who plays a flatulent talking corpse that befriends a castaway—premiered at Sundance, and left some viewers wondering if it was the strangest thing ever to be screened at the festival. The *Times*, deciding that the film was impossible to categorize, called it “weird and wonderful, disgusting and demented.”

Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that when the Daniels were notified by their production company, several years ago, that an Israeli indie pop star living in New York wanted to hire them to experiment with technology that could alter fundamental assumptions of moviemaking, they took the call.

The musician was Yoni Bloch, arguably the first Internet sensation on Israel’s music scene—a wispy, bespectacled songwriter from the Negev whose wry, angst-laden music went viral in the early aughts, leading to sold-out venues and a record deal. After breaking up with his girlfriend, in 2007, Bloch had hoped to win her back by thinking big. He made a melancholy concept album about their relationship, along with a companion film in the mode of “The Wall”—only to fall in love with the actress who played his ex. He had also thought up a more ambitious idea: an interactive song that listeners could shape as it played. But

by the time he got around to writing it his hurt feelings had given way to more indeterminate sentiments, and the idea grew to become an interactive music video. The result, “I Can’t Be Sad Anymore,” which he and his band released online in 2010, opens with Bloch at a party in a Tel Aviv apartment. Standing on a balcony, he puts on headphones, then wanders among his friends, singing about his readiness to escape melancholy. He passes the headphones to others; whoever wears them sings, too. Viewers decide, by clicking on onscreen prompts, how the headphones are passed—altering, in real time, the song’s vocals, orchestration, and emotional tone, while also following different micro-dramas. If you choose the drunk, the camera follows her as she races into the bathroom, to Bloch’s words “I want to drink less/but be more drunk.” Choose her friend instead, and the video leads to sports fans downing shots, with the lyrics “I want to work less/but for a greater cause.”

Bloch came to believe that there was commercial potential in the song’s underlying technology—software that he and his friends had developed during a few intense coding marathons. (Bloch had learned to write programs at an early age, starting on a Commodore 64.) He put his music career on hold, raised millions of dollars in venture capital, and moved to New York. Bloch called his software Treehouse and his company Interlude—the name hinting at a cultural gap between video games and movies which he sought to bridge. What he was selling was “a new medium,” he took to saying. Yet barely anyone knew of it. Treehouse was technology in need of an auteur, which is why Bloch reached out to the Daniels—encouraging them



“The defining art form of the twenty-first century has not been named yet,” one specialist in interactive media says, “but it is something like this.”

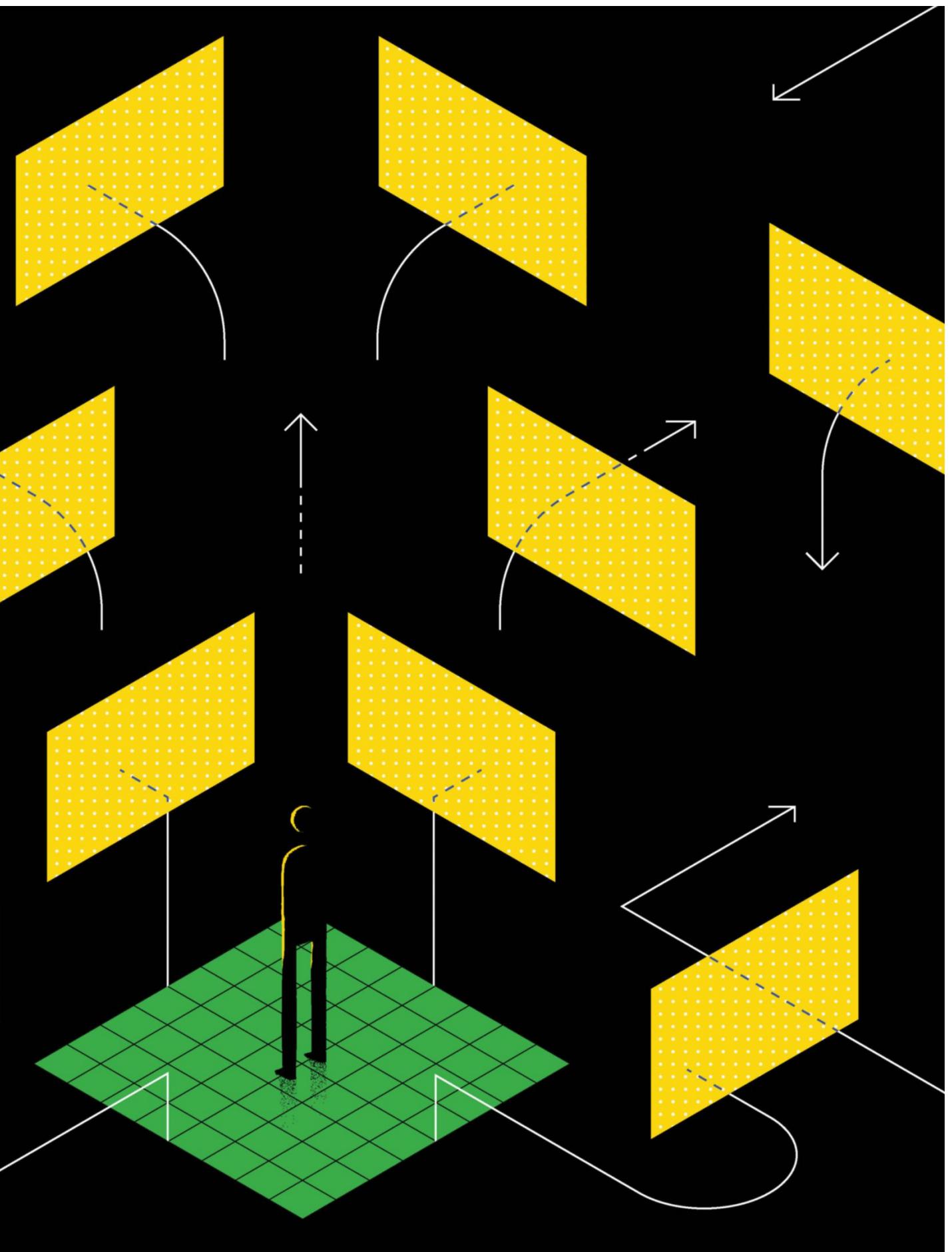
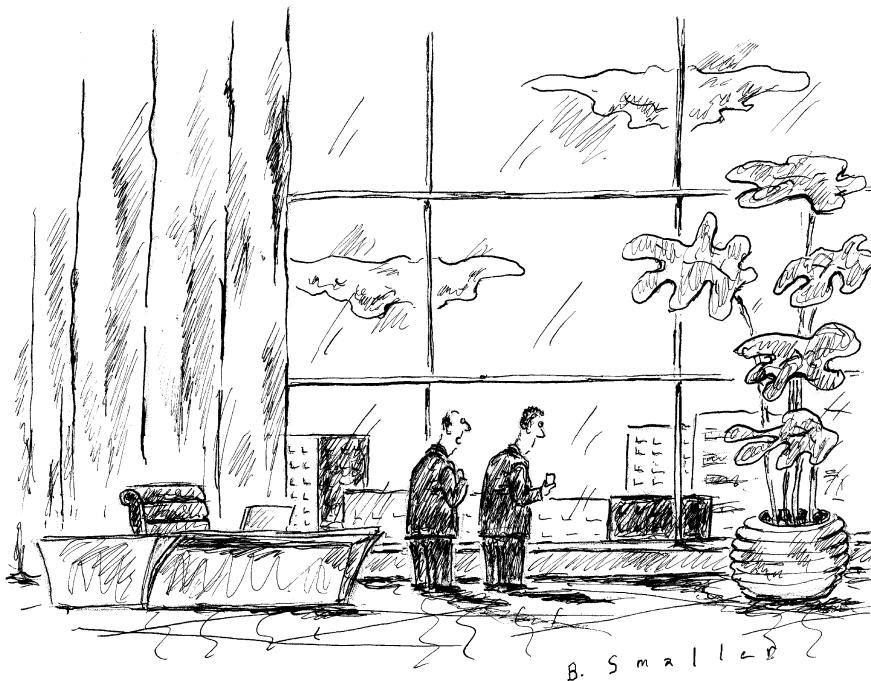


ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL SAVAGE



"Part of me is going to miss liberal democracy."

to use the software as they liked. "It was like handing off a new type of camera and saying, 'Now, use this and do something amazing,'" he recalled. "I don't want to tell you what to do."

BLOCH WAS OFFERING for film an idea that has long existed in literature. In 1941, Jorge Luis Borges wrote a story about a learned Chinese governor who retreated from civilization to write an enormous, mysterious novel called "The Garden of Forking Paths." In Borges's telling, the novel remained a riddle—chaotic, fragmentary, impenetrable—for more than a century, until a British Sinologist deciphered it: the book, he discovered, sought to explore every possible decision that its characters could make, every narrative bifurcation, every parallel time line. By chronicling all possible worlds, the author was striving to create a complete model of the universe as he understood it. Borges apparently recognized that a philosophical meditation on bifurcating narratives could make for more rewarding reading than the actual thing. "The Garden of Forking Paths," if it truly explored every possible story line, would have been a novel without any direction—a paradox, in that it would

hardly say more than a blank page.

Daniel Kwan told me that while he was in elementary school, in the nineteen-nineties, he often returned from the public library with stacks of Choose Your Own Adventure novels—slim volumes, written in the second person, that allow readers to decide at key moments how the story will proceed. ("If you jump down on the woolly mammoth, turn to page 29. If you continue on foot, turn to page 30.") The books were the kind of thing you could find in a child's backpack alongside Garbage Pail Kids cards and Matchbox cars. For a brief time, they could offer up a kind of Borgesian magic, but the writing was schlocky, the plot twists jarring, the endings inconsequential. As literature, the books never amounted to anything; the point was that they could be *played*. "Choose Your Own Adventure was great," Kwan told me. "But even as a kid I was, like, there is something very unsatisfying about these stories."

Early experiments in interactive film were likewise marred by shtick. In 1995, a company called Interfilm collaborated with Sony to produce "Mr. Payback," based on a script by Bob Gale, who had worked on the "Back to the

Future" trilogy. In the movie, a cyborg meted out punishment to baddies while the audience, voting with handheld controllers, chose the act of revenge. The film was released in forty-four theatres. Critics hated it. "The basic problem I had with the choices on the screen with 'Mr. Payback' is that they didn't have one called 'None of the above,'" Roger Ebert said, declaring the movie the worst of the year. "We don't want to interact with a movie. We want it to act on us. That's why we go, so we can lose ourselves in the experience."

Gene Siskel cut in: "Do it out in the lobby—play the video game. Don't try to mix the two of them together. It's not going to work!"

Siskel and Ebert might have been willfully severe. But they had identified a cognitive clash that—as the Daniels also suspected—any experiment with the form would have to navigate. Immersion in a narrative, far from being passive, requires energetic participation; while watching movies, viewers must continually process new details—keeping track of all that has happened and forecasting what might plausibly happen. Good stories, whether dramas or action films, tend to evoke emotional responses, including empathy and other forms of social cognition. Conversely, making choices in a video game often produces emotional withdrawal: players are either acquiring skills or using them reflexively to achieve discrete rewards. While narratives help us to make sense of the world, skills help us to act within it.

As the Daniels discussed Bloch's offer, they wondered if some of these problems were insurmountable, but the more they talked about them, the more they felt compelled to take on the project. "We tend to dive head first into things we initially want to reject," Kwan said. "Interactive filmmaking—it's like this weird thing where you are giving up control of a tight narrative, which is kind of the opposite of what most filmmakers want. Because the viewer can't commit to one thing, it can be a frustrating experience. And yet we as human beings are fascinated by stories that we can shape, because that's what life is like—life is a frustrating thing where we can't commit to anything. So

we were, like, O.K., what if we took a crack at it? No one was touching it. What would happen if we did?"

THE DANIELS LIVE half a mile from each other, in northern Los Angeles, and they often brainstorm in informal settings: driveway basketball court, back-yard swing set, couch, office. After making an experimental demo for Bloch, they signed on for a dramatic short film. "Let us know any ideas you have," Bloch told them. "We'll find money for any weird thing." By then, Interlude had developed a relationship with Xbox Entertainment Studios, a now defunct wing of Microsoft that was created to produce television content for the company's game console. (The show "Humans," among others, was first developed there.) Xbox signed on to co-produce.

While brainstorming, the Daniels mined their misgivings for artistic insight. "We'd be, like, This could suck if the audience was taken out of the story right when it was getting good—if they were asked to make a choice when they didn't want to. And then we would laugh and be, like, What if we intentionally did that?" Scheinert told me. "We started playing with a movie that ruins itself, even starts acknowledging that." Perhaps the clash between interactivity and narrative which Ebert had identified could be resolved by going meta—by making the discordance somehow essential to the story. The Daniels came up with an idea based on video-game-obsessed teen-agers who crash a high-school party. "We wanted to integrate video-game aesthetics and moments into the narrative—crazy flights of fancy that were almost abrasively interactive," Scheinert said. "Because the characters were obsessed with gaming, we would have permission to have buttons come up in an intrusive and motivated way."

For other ideas, the two directors looked to previous work by Bloch's company. Interlude had designed several simple games, music videos, and online ads for Subaru and J. Crew, among others, but the scope for interaction was limited. "It was, like, pick what color the girl's makeup is, or, like, pick the color of the car and watch the driver drive around," Scheinert recalled. One project that interested them was a music video for Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone." While

the song plays, viewers can flip among sixteen faux cable channels—sports, news, game shows, documentaries, dramas—but on each channel everyone onscreen is singing Dylan's lyrics. The video attracted a million views within twenty-four hours, with the average viewer watching it three times in a row. The Daniels liked the restrained structure of the interactivity: instead of forking narratives, the story—in this case, the song—remained fixed; viewers were able to alter only the context of what they heard.

With this principle in mind, the Daniels came up with an idea for a horror film: five strangers trapped in a bar visited by a supernatural entity. "Each has a different take on what it is, and you as a viewer are switching between perspectives," Kwan said. "One person thinks the whole thing is a prank, so he has a cynical view. One is religious and sees it as spiritual retribution. One sees it as her dead husband. The whole thing is a farcical misunderstanding of five characters who see five different things."

Their third idea was about a romantic breakup: a couple wrestling with the end of their relationship as reality begins to fragment—outer and inner worlds falling apart in unison. "We got excited about it looking like an M. C. Escher

painting," Scheinert said. "We were playing with it getting frighteningly surreal. Maybe there's, like, thousands of versions of your girlfriend, and one of them is on stilts, and one of them is a goth—"

"It was us making fun of the possible-worlds concept, almost—but that became overwhelming," Kwan said.

"And so we started to zero in on our theme," Scheinert said. "We realized, Oh, all the silliness is icing more than substance." The premise was that the viewer would be able to explore different versions of the breakup but not alter the dialogue or the outcome. "We thought there was something funny about not being able to change the story—about making an interactive film that is thematically about your *inability* to change things."

The Daniels submitted all three ideas—three radically different directions—for Bloch and his team to choose from. Then they waited.

INTERLUDE OPERATES FROM behind a metal security door on the sixth floor of a building off Union Square. The elevator opens into a tiny vestibule. On a yellow table is a wooden robot, alongside a stack of Which Way books—a copycat series in the style of Choose Your Own Adventure. A pane



"Your grass-fed beef—are the cows forced to eat the grass?"

of glass reveals a bright office space inside: a lounge, rows of workstations, people who mostly postdate 1980.

Yoni Bloch occupies a corner office. Thin, smiling, and confident, he maintains a just-rolled-out-of-bed look. In summer, he dresses in flip-flops, shorts, and a T-shirt. Usually, he is at his desk, before a bank of flat-screen monitors. An acoustic guitar and a synthesizer sit beside a sofa, and above the sofa hangs a large neo-expressionist painting by his sister, depicting a pair of fantastical hominids.

Bloch's world is built on intimate loyalties. He wrote his first hit song, in 1999, with his best friend in high school. He co-founded Interlude with two bandmates, Barak Feldman and Tal Zubalsky. Not long after I met him, he told me about the close bond that he had with his father, a physicist, who, starting at the age of nine, wrote in a diary every day: meticulous Hebrew script, filling page after page. After his father passed away, Bloch began reading the massive document and discovered a new perspective on conversations they had shared long before, experiences they had never spoken about. When he yearned to confer with his father about Interlude, he went looking for passages about the company; when his son was born, last year, he searched for what his father had written when *his* first child was born. Rather than read straight through, Bloch took to exploring the diary sporadically, out of time—as if probing a living memory.

Treehouse is an intuitive program for a nonintuitive, nonlinear form of storytelling, and Bloch is adept at demonstrating it. In his office, he called up a series of video clips featuring the model Dree Hemingway sitting at a table. Below the clips, in a digital workspace resembling graph paper, he built a flowchart to map the forking narrative—how her story might divide into strands that branch outward, or loop backward, or converge. At first, the flowchart looked like a “Y” turned on its side: a story with just one node. “When you start, it is always ‘To be, or not to be,’ ” he said. The choice here was whether Hemingway would serve herself coffee or tea. Bloch dragged and dropped video clips into the flowchart, then placed buttons for tea and coffee into the frame, and set the amount of time the system would allow

viewers to decide. In less than a minute, he was previewing a tiny film: over a soundtrack of music fit for a Philippe Starck lobby, Hemingway smiled and poured the beverage Bloch had selected. He then returned to the graph paper and added a blizzard of hypothetical options: “You can decide that here it will branch again, here it goes into a loop until it knows what to do, and here it becomes a switching node where five things can happen at the same time—and so on.”

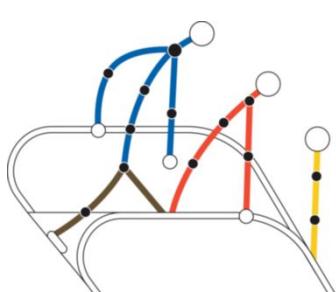
As Bloch was getting his company off the ground, a small race was under way among like-minded startups looking for financial backing. In Switzerland, a company called CtrlMovie had developed technology similar to Interlude's, and was seeking money for a feature-length thriller. (The film, “Late Shift,” had its American première last year, in New York.) Closer to home, there was Nitzan Ben-Shaul, a professor at Tel Aviv University, who, in 2008, had made an interactive film, “Turbulence,” using software that he had designed with students. Ben-Shaul, like the Daniels, felt some ambivalence about the form, even as he sought to develop it. “What I asked myself while making ‘Turbulence’ was: Why am I doing this?” he told me. “What is the added value of this, if I want to enhance the dramatic effect of regular movies?” The questions were difficult to answer. Some of his favorite films—“Rashomon,” for in-

stance—prodded viewers to consider a story's divergent possibilities without requiring interactivity. As a result, they maintained their coherence as works of art and, uncomplicated by the problems of audience participation, could be both emotionally direct and thought-provoking. “Rashomon’s” brilliance, Ben-Shaul understood, was not merely the result of its formal inventiveness. Its director, Akira Kurosawa, had imbued it with his ideas about human frailty, truth, deceit,

and the corrupting effects of self-esteem. Ben-Shaul feared that, as technology dissolved the boundaries of conventional narrative, it could also interfere with essential elements of good storytelling. What was suspense, for example, if not a deliberate attempt to withhold agency from audience members—people at the edge of their seats, screaming, “Don’t go in there!” enjoying their role as helpless observers? At the same time, why did the mechanisms of filmmaking have to remain static? Cautiously, he embraced the idea that interactivity could enable a newly pliant idea of cinematic narrative—one that is opposed to most popular movies, which are built on suspense, which make you want to get to the resolution, and focus you on one track, one ending.” Perhaps, he thought, such films could even have a liberating social effect: by compelling audiences to consider the multiplicity of options a character could explore, and by giving them a way to act upon those options, movies could foster a sense of open-mindedness and agency that might be carried into the real world. He began pitching his technology to investors.

Yoni Bloch and his bandmates, meanwhile, were lining up gigs in the Pacific Northwest to pay for a flight from Tel Aviv, to present Treehouse to Sequoia Capital, the investment firm. The trip had grown out of a chance meeting with Haim Sadger, an Israeli member of the firm, who had handed Bloch his business card after seeing a demo of “I Can't Be Sad Anymore” at a technology convention in Tel Aviv. Bloch, who hadn't heard of Sequoia and thought it sounded fly-by-night, filed the card away. But, once the significance of the interest was explained to him, he worked to get his band to the group's headquarters, in Menlo Park, California.

Bloch speaks with a soft lisp, and in a tone that betrays no urgency to monetize, but he is a skilled pitchman. Once, he gave a presentation to a Hollywood director who was recovering from a back injury and had to stand. “Even if you're standing and he's sitting, it feels the other way round,” the director recalled. “He owns the room.” Sadger told me that three minutes into his presentation Bloch had everyone's attention. Coming from the worlds of music videos and video games, rather than art films, Bloch



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and his band spoke earnestly, and with little hesitancy, about revolutionizing cinematic narratives. "They didn't see at the time the tremendous business potential that their creative idea and evolving technology had," Sadger said. The Sequoia investors recognized a business that could not only earn revenue by licensing the technology but also harvest data on viewer preferences and support new advertising models; they offered Bloch and his bandmates more than three million dollars. "They beat us in getting large investments," Ben-Shaul recalled. "Our investment fell through—and they took off."

By the time Bloch moved to New York, in 2011, and contacted the Daniels, Interlude had raised an additional fifteen million dollars in venture capital. Bloch told the directors that if there were creative options that Treehouse did not provide he could build them. The role of enabler comes naturally to him. (His best songs, a critic at *Haaretz* told me, were those he had written and produced for other people.) Bringing a music producer's sense of discrimination to video, Bloch told the Daniels that they should make the breakup story. "Right away, it was, like, Let's go with the hardest concept," he told me. "Love stories have been written billions of times, especially love tragedies. It's the oldest story in the book. Finding out how to make it different while using the audience is something you can't do easily."

POSSIBILIA" IS A TERM OF art in metaphysics, and it is also the title that the Daniels placed on the cover sheet of a six-page treatment for their breakup film—alongside mug shots of twenty-three uniformed schoolgirls, each with an orange on her shoulder. The schoolgirls don't signify anything, except, perhaps, that the remaining pages are going to get weird, and that a serious idea will be toyed with.

In the treatment, the Daniels sketched out a cinematic poem: a brief investigation of indecision and emotional entropy in a dissolving romance. The story starts with a couple, Rick and Polly, seated at a kitchen table. They begin to argue, and, as they do, reality begins to unravel. Soon, their breakup is unfolding across parallel worlds that divide and multiply: first into two, then four,



"When he reached the end of the pier, the rhetoric turned nasty."

eight, sixteen. The Daniels envisioned viewers using thumbnails to flip among the alternate realities onscreen.

Translating the treatment into a script posed a unique challenge: because the dialogue needed to be identical across the sixteen different performances, so that viewers could shift from one to another seamlessly, Rick's and Polly's lines had to be highly general. "Early on, we came up with all sorts of specific lines, and they kept falling by the wayside, because we couldn't come up with different ways to interpret them," Scheinert said. "It got vaguer the harder we worked on it, which is the opposite of good screenwriting." Kwan added, "Basically, we allowed the location, the performance, and the actions to give all the specificity."

At one moment of tension, as the film splinters into eight parallel worlds, Polly declares, "I need to do something drastic!" The script notes that her line will be delivered, variously, in the kitchen, in a laundry room, on the stairs, in a doorway, on the porch, in the front and back yards, and on the street—and that in each setting she will make good on her outburst differently: "slaps him and starts a fight / starts making out with him / flips the table / breaks something / gets

in a car and begins to drive away / etc." Like a simple melody harmonized with varied chords, the story would change emotional texture in each world. To keep track of all the permutations, the Daniels used a color-coded spreadsheet.

The Daniels cast Alex Karpovsky (of "Girls") and Zoe Jarman (of "The Mindy Project") as Rick and Polly, and then recorded the two actors improvising off the script. "We kind of fell in love with their mumbly, accidental, awkward moments," Scheinert said. But these "accidents," like the written dialogue, would also have to be carefully synchronized across the many possible versions of the story. The Daniels edited the improvisations into an audio clip and gave it to the actors to memorize. Even so, to keep the timing precise, the actors had to wear earpieces during shooting—listening to their original improvisation, to match their exact rhythm, while interpreting the lines differently. "At first, it was very disorienting," Karpovsky told me. "I had to keep the same pace, or the whole math at Interlude would fall apart: this section has to last 8.37 seconds, or whatever, so it seamlessly feeds into the next branch of our narrative."

The result, empathetic and precise,

could easily work as a gallery installation. The multiple worlds lend a sense of abstraction; the vagueness of the lines lends intimacy. As Scheinert told me, "It reminded me of bad relationships where you have a fight and you are, like, What am I saying? We are not fighting about anything." While working on "Possibilia," the Daniels decided to make the story end in the same place that it begins, dooming Rick and Polly to an eternal loop. Watching the film, toggling among the alternate worlds while the characters veer between argument and affection, one has the sense of being trapped in time with them. There is almost no narrative momentum, no drive to a definite conclusion, and yet the experience sustains interest because viewers are caught in the maelstrom of the couple's present.

As a child, reading Choose Your Own Adventure books, I often kept my fingers jammed in the pages, not wanting to miss a pathway that might be better than the one I had chosen. In "Possibilia" there is no such concern, since all the pathways lead to the same outcome. The ability to wander among the alternate worlds serves more as a framing device, a set of instructions on how to consider the film, than as a tool for exhaustive use. "Possibilia" is only six minutes long, but when a member of Interlude roughly calculated the number of different possible viewings, he arrived

at an unimaginably large figure: 3,618,502,788,666,131,106,986,593,281,521,497, 120,414,687,020,801,267,626,233,049, 500,247,285,301,248—more than the number of seconds since the Big Bang. It is unfeasible to watch every iteration, of course; knowing this is part of the experience. By the time I spoke with Karpovsky, I had watched "Possibilia" a dozen times. He gleefully recalled a moment of particular intensity—"I got to light my hand on fire!"—that I hadn't yet seen.

The film, in its structure, had no precedent, and one's response to it seemed to be at least partly a function of age and technological fluency. When a screening of the project was arranged for Xbox, the studio's head of programming, Nancy Tellem—a former director of network entertainment at CBS—was uncertain what to do. "I was sitting at a table with my team, and my natural response was to sit back and say, 'O.K., I want to see the story,'" she told me. "But then, all of a sudden, my team, which is half the age that I am, starts screaming, 'Click! Click! Click!'"

In 2014, a version of the film hit the festival circuit, but it quickly became impossible to see. Just after its débüt, Microsoft shuttered Xbox Entertainment Studios, to reassert a focus on video games—stranding all its dramatic projects without distribution. Last

August, Interlude decided to make "Possibilia" viewable online, and I stopped by to watch its producers prepare it for release. Alon Benari, an Israeli director who has collaborated with Bloch for years, was tweaking the film's primary tool: a row of buttons for switching among the parallel worlds. The system took a few seconds to respond to a viewer's choice. "A lot of people were clicking, then clicking again, because they didn't think anything happened," he told me. "At the moment that viewers interact, it needs to be clear that their input has been registered." He was working on a timer to inform a viewer that a decision to switch between worlds was about to be enacted. Two days before "Possibilia" went online, Benari reviewed the new system.

"Is it good?" Bloch asked him.

"Yeah," Benari said. "I was actually on the phone with Daniel, and he was happy." All that was left was the advertising. Interlude had secured a corporate partnership with Coke, and Benari was working on a "spark"—five seconds of footage of a woman sipping from a bottle, which would play before the film. Watching the ad, he said, "The visuals are a bit too clean, so with the audio we are going to do something a bit grungy." After listening to a rough cut, he walked me to the door. He was juggling several new projects. He had recently shown me a pilot for an interactive TV show, its mood reminiscent of "Girls." The interactivity was light; none of the forking pathways significantly affected the plot. Benari thought that there was value in the cosmetic choices—"You still feel a sense of agency"—but he was hoping for more. Wondering if the director was simply having trouble letting go, he said, "We like the storytelling, and the acting, but we feel he needs to amp up the use of interactivity."



"There are no seats left together, but maybe if you make pouty faces at me I can magically add more chairs to the airplane."

TRYING TO INVENT a new medium, it turns out, does not easily inspire focus. Early on, Interlude applied its technology to just about every form of visual communication: online education, ads, children's programming, games, music videos. But in the past year Bloch has steered the company toward dramatic entertainment. After Microsoft shut down Xbox Entertainment Studios, he invited Nancy

THE HEAD OF A DANCER

The days when you lean your head forward, then pull your head back, to see the sun is only a chrysanthemum, the eye is a white lake with a black boat moored at a particle pier that says what you want back isn't coming. The white speck says there is a light source that shines day and night far from a balcony on which an audience waits to see us open our doll eyes and close them again. I keep my face facing front to see every last thing that is coming. What is coming is this: a hat to be worn when taking a train, a compact in a pocket, a letter in a pocket, two hands, a waterfall pouring its contents into a well-worn shuddering mind. I'm as devoted to knowing as the dim fish swimming in an ever-widening circle. Today outraced the latest hour of midnight, my hat tells you that. That and that I strangely resemble you: eyes, nose, lips that refuse to open, knowing the face is glass and that glass can make or break you. The dog in the street pauses just as a car comes. Where does it stop? And now this, someone says. The precise line draws the bone that holds the cheek in place. The cheek waits to be kissed by air as it was once kissed by the dark-haired boy in the boathouse whose late-night lesson was that the distance between what had been described and what was now happening was immeasurable. The morning after, the black shoes on the shelf were married to a new all-encompassing idea: the dress is no longer the thing the future is founded on. You put it on. You take it off.

—*Mary Jo Bang*

Tellem to serve as Interlude's chief media officer and chairperson. Tellem, impressed by the way Interlude viewers tended to replay interactive content, accepted. "The fact that people go back and watch a video two other times—you never see it in linear television," she told me. "In fact, in any series that you might produce, the hope is that the normal TV viewer will watch a quarter of it." Interactive films might have seemed like a stunt in the nineties, but for an audience in the age of Netflix personalized content has become an expected norm; L.C.D. screens increasingly resemble mirrors, offering users opportunities to glimpse themselves in the content behind the tempered glass. Employees at Bloch's company envision a future where viewers gather around the water cooler to discuss the differences in what they watched, rather than to parse a shared dramatic experience. It is hard not to see in this vision, on some level, the prospect of entertainment as selfie.

Six months after Tellem was hired, Interlude secured a deal with M-G-M to reboot "WarGames," the nineteen-eighties hacker film, as an interactive television series. (M-G-M also made an eighteen-million-dollar investment.) Last April, CBS hired Interlude to reimagine "The Twilight Zone" in a similar way, and in June Sony Pictures made a multimillion-dollar "strategic investment." By August, Interlude was sitting on more than forty million dollars in capital—the money reflecting the growing industry-wide interest. (Steven Soderbergh recently completed filming for a secretive interactive project at HBO.) Business cards from other networks, left behind in Bloch's office like bread crumbs, suggested additional deals in the making; a whiteboard listing new projects included a pilot for the N.B.A. To signify the corporate transformation, Bloch told me, his company had quietly changed its name, to Eko.

"As of when?" I asked.

"As of four days ago," he said, smiling.

Even as the company was expanding, Bloch was striving to preserve a sense of scrappy authenticity. "We are a company run by a band," he insisted. "Everything sums up to money—I have learned this—but we still believe that if you make the work about the story it will be powerful." One of Eko's creative directors was overseeing a grass-roots strategy to attract talent, giving seminars at universities and conferences, encouraging people to use the software, which is available for free online. Hundreds of amateurs have submitted films. The best of them have been invited to make actual shows.

Of the marquee projects, "WarGames" is the furthest along in development, with shooting scheduled to begin this winter. When Bloch's team pitched M-G-M, they had in mind a project tied to the original film, which is about a teen-age hacker (Matthew Broderick) who breaks into a military server and runs a program called Global Thermonuclear War. He thinks the program is a game, but in fact it helps control the American nuclear arsenal, and soon he must reckon with the possibility that he has triggered a real nuclear war.

Sam Barlow, the Eko creative director overseeing the reboot, worked in video-game design before Bloch hired him. He told me, "The premise in the pitch was that there is a game, a literal game, that you are playing, and then—as with the original—it becomes apparent that there is a more nefarious purpose behind it. The idea was that you would be able to see the reaction to what you are doing as live-action video."

This proposal was soon set aside, however, out of fear that toggling between a game and filmed segments would be jarring. Instead, Barlow pulled together a new pitch. Hacking was still central, but it would be explored in the present-day context of groups like Anonymous, and in the murky post-Cold War geopolitical environment: terrorism, drone warfare, cyber attacks. The story centered on a young hacker and her friends and family. Viewers would be seated before a simulacrum of her computer, viewing the world as she does, through chat screens, Skype-like calls, live streams of cable news. On a laptop, Barlow loaded

a prototype: three actors chatting in separate video windows on a neutral background. With quick swipes, he moved one window to the foreground. The show's internal software, he said, would track the feeds that viewers watched, noting when they took an interest in personal relationships, for instance, or in political matters. The tracking system would also gauge their reactions to the protagonist, to see if they preferred that her actions have serious consequences (say, putting lives at risk) or prankish ones (defacing an official Web site).

"Suppose you have a significant story branch," Barlow said. "If that's linked to an explicit decision that the viewer must make, then it feels kind of mechanical and simple." In contrast, the show's system will be able to customize the story seamlessly, merely by observing what viewers decide to watch. This design acknowledged that key life choices are often not guided by explicit decisions but by how we direct our attention—as Iris Murdoch once noted, "At crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over." Before an impending story branch, for instance, the system would know if a particular viewer was interested in the protagonist's personal life, and her serious side, and could alter the story accordingly—perhaps by killing off a close relative and having her seek revenge.

Barlow was uncertain how much of the "WarGames" tracking mechanics he should reveal to the viewer. "The two-million-dollar question is: Do we need to show this?" he said. He believed that interactive films will increasingly resemble online ads: unobtrusively personalized media. "When ads first started tracking you, for the first few months you'd be, like, 'How did they know?' A couple of months later, you'd be, like, 'Of course they knew. I was Googling baby formula.' And now it's, like, 'I'm still getting spammed for vacation properties around Lake Placid, and I'm, like, Dude, we went. You should already know!'"

In many ways, the swiping system that Barlow had designed was a work-around for technological limitations that will soon fall away. Advances in

machine learning are rapidly improving voice recognition, natural-language processing, and emotion detection, and it's not hard to imagine that such technologies will one day be incorporated into movies. Brian Moriarty, a specialist in interactive media at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, told me, "Explicit interactivity is going to yield to implicit interactivity, where the movie is watching you, and viewing is customized to a degree that is hard to imagine. Suppose that the movie knows that you're a man, and a male walks in and you show signs of attraction. The plot could change to make him gay. Or imagine the possibilities for a Hitchcock-type director. If his film sees you're noticing a certain actor, instead of showing you more of him it shows you less, to increase tension."

Moriarty believes that as computer graphics improve, the faces of actors, or even political figures, could be subtly altered to echo the viewer's own features, to make them more sympathetic. Lifelike avatars could even replace actors entirely, at which point narratives could branch in nearly infinite directions. Directors would not so much build films around specific plots as conceive of generalized situations that computers would set into motion, depending on how viewers reacted. "What we are looking at here is a breakdown in what a story even means—in that a story is

defined as a particular sequence of causally related events, and there is only one true story, one version of what happened," Moriarty said. With the development of virtual reality and augmented reality—technology akin to *Pokémon Go*—there is no reason that a movie need be confined to a theatrical experience.

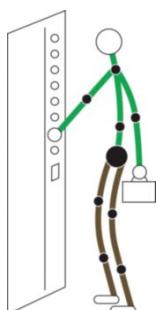
"The line between what is a movie and what is real is going to be difficult to pinpoint," he added. "The defining art form of the twenty-first century has not been named yet, but it is something like this."

IN MID-OCTOBER, BLOCH showed me a video that demonstrates the cinematic use of eye tracking—technology that is not yet commercially widespread but will likely soon be. The Daniels

had directed the demo, and they had imbued it with their usual playfulness. It opens on a couple in a café. Behind them, a woman in a sexy dress and a muscleman walk in; whichever extra catches your gaze enters the story. Throughout, an announcer strives to describe the tracking system, but the story he uses as a showcase keeps breaking down as the characters, using a magical photo album, flee him by escaping into their past. Viewers, abetting the couple, send them into their memories by glancing at the photos in their album. At key moments, the story is told from the point of view of the actor you watch the most. "People start out looking at both, and then focus on one—and it is not necessarily the one who talks," Bloch said. "When you look at her, she talks about him, then you care about him."

The future that the demo portended—entertainment shaped by deeply implicit interactivity—was one that the Daniels later told me they found exhilarating and disconcerting. "In some ways, as artists, we are supposed to be creating collective experiences," Kwan said. "This could get really messy if what we are actually doing is producing work that creates more isolated experiences." Alternatively, it is possible to imagine the same technology pulling audiences into highly similar story patterns—narratives dominated by violence and sex—as it registers the basest of human responses.

"On the upside, interactivity has the potential to push you to reflect on your biases," Scheinert said. Psychological experiments suggest that people who inhabit digital avatars of a race, gender, or age unlike their own can become more empathetic. "Done right, interactivity can shed light on what divides us," he added. "We find ourselves talking a lot about video games lately. Video games have blossomed into an art form that's become pretty cool. People are now making interactive stories that can move you, that can make you reflect on your own choices, because they make you make the kinds of choices that a hero really has to make. At the same time, it is really hard to make films with multiple endings, and I wonder what shortcuts will present themselves, what



patterns. Right now, we don't have many to fall back on."

On the morning that Bloch showed me the eye-tracking demo, the Eko offices were humming with anticipation. Two weeks earlier, the company had been divided into ten teams that competed, in a two-day hackathon, to produce mockups for new shows or games. The competition was a search for effective ways to tell stories in a new medium. The solution that the Daniels had worked out for "Possibilia"—a fixed narrative playing out across multiple worlds—might have sufficed for a short film, where abstract dialogue could be tolerated, but it was not scalable to feature-length projects. That morning, an Eko creative director told me that he was wrestling with the magnitude of the creative shift. "What does character development even mean if a viewer is modifying the character?" he said. If a film has five potential endings, does it constitute a single work of art, or is it an amalgam of five different works?

All the teams had completed their mini films, and Bloch, in his office, was ready to announce the winner. An employee knocked on his door. "Should I *yalla* everyone?" he asked—using the Arabic term for "Let's go."

"*Yalla* everyone," Bloch said.

In the office cafeteria, there was a long wooden table, beanbag chairs, a drum kit. People munched on popcorn. On a flat-screen monitor, the staff of Eko's Israeli satellite office, which does the technical work, had video-conferenced in. Bloch held a stack of envelopes, as if he were at the Oscars, and began to run through the submissions. Two groups had used voice recognition, making it possible to talk to their films. Others had toyed with "multiplayer" ideas. Sam Barlow's team had filmed a man in Hell trying to save his life in a game of poker. Viewers play the role of Luck, selecting the cards being dealt—not to win the game but to alter the drama among the players. Bloch said he had cited the film in a recent presentation as a possibility worth exploring. "The expected thing in that kind of story is that you would be the guy who comes to Hell," he said. "Playing Luck—



"No one designs for cat bodies."

something that is more godlike—is much more exciting."

The winner, Bloch announced, was "The Mole," in which the viewer plays a corporate spy. The team had written software that made it possible to manipulate objects in the film—pick them up and move them. Bloch thought the software had immediate commercial potential. Walking back to his office, he expressed his excitement about what it would mean to permanently alter a scene: to tamper with evidence in a crime drama, say, and know that the set would stay that way. "It makes the world's existence more coherent," he said.

Even as a number of Bloch's creative directors were working to make the interactivity more implicit, he did not think that explicit choices would fade away. Done well, he believed, they could deepen a viewer's sense of responsibility for a story's outcome; the

problem with them today was the naïveté of the execution, but eventually the requisite artistic sophistication would emerge. "Every time there is a new medium, there's an excessive use of it, and everyone wants to make it blunt," he told me. "When stereo was introduced—with the Beatles, for example—you could hear drums on the left, singing on the right, and it didn't make sense musically. But, as time went on, people started to use stereo in ways that enhanced the music." Bloch had started assembling a creative board—filmmakers, game designers, writers—to think about such questions. "We have to break out of the gimmicky use of interactivity, and make sure it is used to enhance a story. We are in the days of 'Put the drums on the left.' But we're moving to where we don't have to do that. People, in general, are ready for this." ♦



Quarantine

—
Alix Ohlin

BRIDGET LIVED IN Barcelona for a year. First she stayed with her college friends Maya and Andrew, who were trying to be poets, and then she sublet from a man named Marco, whom she'd met at a grocery store. She had a fling with a woman named Bernadette, who was from New Zealand and shared a flat with a Scot named Laurie, whom Bridget also slept with, and that was the end of things with Bernadette. Bridget smoked Fortuna cigarettes and wrote furiously in her journal about people she'd known and slept with, or wanted to sleep with, or had slept with and then been rejected by. She was twenty-three years old.

One night at Marco's apartment, she was awakened by loud knocking. Still semi-drunk from an evening with Maya and Andrew, she stumbled to the door and opened it to find three junkies standing there, asking for Marco. She knew they were junkies because Marco was a junkie—he'd told her this—and all his friends were junkies, too. They needed Marco's furniture, for reasons that were unclear, and they shoved her aside and began moving the kitchen table, the futon. For junkies, they were robust and rosy-cheeked, and she didn't put up much defense. Somehow this incident was all her fault. Marco kicked her out and she went to live in a cheap hotel, drinking anise in bed and staring at the peeling wallpaper. Later, Marco made her file a false police report saying that his laptop had been stolen. He said that it was the only way she could make up for her transgressions.

The person who rescued her from the cheap hotel was Angela, whom she'd met at the restaurant where they both waitressed. Angela was from Vancouver, and some dewy freshness that Bridget associated with the West Coast seemed to cling to her always, even when she was sleep-deprived or drunk. Angela had a German boyfriend with a face so feminine that he looked exquisite, like a porcelain doll. His name was Hans, or maybe Anders. He was always nice to Bridget, and when Angela brought her home he made up a bed for her in the corner of their tiny living room, a pile of blankets and pillows, as if she were a stray dog. Once, in the middle of the night, she woke to see him crouching in front of her, staring.

"What are you doing?"

"I wanted to make sure you were comfortable."

"I'm comfortable," she said, and he went back to bed with Angela.

ANGELA AND HER German boyfriend were little parents. They liked to make a fuss over people and put on elaborate dinner parties, and then they'd get drunk and spend the night bickering. It was tedious, and yet you had to indulge them, because you could see how much they enjoyed it, this performance of adulthood. Bridget stayed with them for two months, and would have felt guilty about mooching, if they hadn't so clearly wanted to gather around themselves a collection of misfits to take care of. In addition to Bridget, they often hosted an assortment of hard-drinking Germans from Hans/Anders's work, whatever it was, and Mei Ling, a Chinese-Canadian woman who had a cluster of gray whiskers on her otherwise smooth cheek, like a tuft of crabgrass thriving on a lawn. Mei Ling's reasons for being in Barcelona were unclear; whenever Bridget talked to her, she scowled and left the room. Angela said that she was very depressed.

Bridget would have stayed there indefinitely, but one morning Hans/Anders brought her coffee in her dog bed and said that they had to talk. "We're leaving," he said.

"For work?" As usual, she was hung over.

He shook his head and patted her shoulder. "Angela and I are getting married and moving to Canada. You can come visit us anytime."

"Does Angela know this?"

He laughed. "It was her idea," he said tenderly. "Everything is always her idea."

Bridget was stunned and a little irritated. She was used to a constant exchange of friends and lovers, and the idea that one of these relationships should be considered permanent struck her as inconsiderate. It went against the way they were all trying to live: stepping lightly on this earth, skirting the folly of human certainty. That night, she and Angela went out for drinks. They sat in an outdoor courtyard eating tiny meatballs and cockles in tomato sauce. Angela's blond braid nestled against her neck. She and Bridget had once show-

ered together, had swum naked together at a beach in Sitges. Angela's flesh was so pale that if you pressed a finger to her thigh the skin blushed dark pink, as if embarrassed by the touch. Now she was drinking cheap Rioja, her teeth turning purple. "I'm going to enroll in an education program and get certified to teach kindergarten," she was saying. "Hans will work with my father once his paperwork is settled. The business is very secure. Like my father always says, empires may rise and fall but people still need light bulbs."

In Bridget's stomach, the cockles swam restlessly in a river of wine. "You seem young to get married," she said.

Angela shook her head, and her braid flapped against her shoulder. "Oh, we won't get married for at least a year. We have to plan. Not to mention book the church. The flowers alone! You have no idea."

She was right about that. Bridget let her go—from the conversation, from their passing friendship, from the country of Spain. She found another place to stay and, when Angela hosted a last dinner party to say goodbye, Bridget said that she was sick and didn't go.

TO HER SURPRISE, she herself was back in Canada within six months. Marco stopped by the restaurant one day to tell her that her mother had been calling, and, when she called back, her mother didn't even scold her for being hard to reach. "I have some news," she said tightly. "Your father isn't feeling well."

Bridget held the receiver in her hot palm. She was on break, a stained white apron around her hips, her armpits still dripping from the afternoon rush, and a table of three men eyed her with the impersonal but aggressive sexual hostility she'd grown used to. She burst into tears, and the men rolled their eyes and turned to a better target. As if in one movement, she hung up the phone, untied the apron, collected her passport from Maya and Andrew's apartment, and went home.

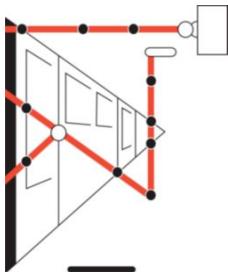
Her father lived for a year so dreary and relentlessly full of pain that she was forced to wish him dead. He had been a jokester, her father, spilling over with inappropriate remarks. Since she'd worn a bikini once at age ten, he had

called her Bardot, after Brigitte, whom she did not resemble in the slightest. He gave whoopee cushions as gifts. He did impressions so terrible that no one ever guessed who he was supposed to be. In the hospital, tethered to a tubular bouquet of chemotherapy drugs, he gritted his teeth and attempted to make light of the situation, but there was no light to be made. His body shrank; he was smaller every morning, as if repeatedly robbed of substance in the night. Bridget wanted only for his suffering to end, and, when it finally did, she sobbed so hard she felt as if her lungs were liquefying. Her mother was a husk, dried out by grief. She didn't want to stay in the house alone, so she sold it, bought a condo downtown, and took up choral singing. One day, she pressed her cool palm to Bridget's forehead and said gently, "What will you do now, dear?"

Bridget hadn't thought that far; she had conceived of herself as a source of support and nothing else. Now she saw that her mother needed her to go, and she felt abandoned. In the year of tending to her father she hadn't worked and had lost touch with most of her friends. Sitting in a café downtown, she wrote a letter to Angela, the kind of letter you write only to someone you haven't seen in a long time and perhaps never knew well, the kind of letter you probably shouldn't send at all. Angela replied within a week. "My heart is with you," she wrote, and Bridget's eyes swelled with tears.

Angela and her German had not got married after all; he had met a girl named Mavis and moved to Edmonton and "You know what? Good riddance!" Angela no longer wanted to be a teacher; she was training to be a masseuse instead. She invited Bridget to visit anytime. "We'll cook and have long talks just like we used to," she wrote, a revision of their history that Bridget found sweet.

SHE DIDN'T VISIT. She went to law school and made new friends and when she graduated she got a job in labor relations for a midsized corporation. She wore suits to work, with



kitten heels, and saw her mother every other weekend, whether her mother wanted her to or not. In the evenings, she still sometimes wrote in her journal, but the entries tended to turn into grocery lists, so she stopped. She was not unhappy. She liked being an adult, being good at her job, owning a car, painting the walls of her apartment on a Saturday afternoon. She didn't know why she'd ever resisted it.

When the invitation to Angela's wedding came, Bridget stared at the envelope for a few minutes before she remembered who Angela was. She sent her regrets and forgot about it until the phone rang at eleven o'clock one night and on the other end was Angela, weeping.

"I knew I must have offended you," she said. "I have to explain. We both know you should have been a bridesmaid, but Charles's family is enormous—I swear he has ten thousand cousins—and, you see, in their culture things are quite different. I wish—"

This went on for some time. Finally, Bridget said, "Angela, it's fine. I wasn't offended."

A pause, a sniffle. "So you'll come, then?" Angela said. Her voice was tinny, a child's, with a child's manipulation edging around the distress.

Bridget felt trapped. "Of course," she said.

She and Sam, her fiancé—he was also a lawyer—decided to treat it as a vacation. They hiked and swam and went zip-lining at Whistler before ending their trip in Vancouver. "How do you know her again?" Sam asked in the hotel, where she was steaming her dress, feeling nervous for reasons she couldn't define.

Bridget smoothed the dress with her hand, as if stroking her own lap. "I barely do," she said. "It'll probably be dull. Forgive me for what we're about to experience."

"Oh, I'll make you pay," Sam said, smiling, and kissed her.

The wedding, though, was not dull. Angela's husband turned out to be a Nigerian cardiac surgeon, and his large family was raucous and witty. Everybody had to meet everybody. Nobody

was allowed to skip the dancing. At one point Bridget found herself sitting with an elderly uncle, telling him a long story about her father, as he nodded and listened gravely, his wife meanwhile instructing Sam in a dance. Angela came up behind Bridget and put her hands on her shoulders, her cheek against Bridget's cheek. She was still blond and fresh-faced, but skinnier now, her dress a severe column of white, no frills or lace. Her hair was pulled back in a chignon. Grown up, she was all geometry.

"Thanks for being here, Bardot," she whispered in Bridget's ear. "It wouldn't have been the same without you." Bridget squeezed her hand, touched that she'd remembered this old nickname. And then Angela was swept away by a crowd that lifted her to the dance floor and demanded she perform. She danced gamely, but her hair was coming loose; she kept raising a hand to poke at the strands, and her smile tightened each time she felt the disarray.

BRIDGET AND SAM moved to Ottawa and had two children, Robert and Melinda—Bobby and Mellie. Their kids were joiners; they hated to be alone, and every weekend they wanted to see their friends at soccer, birthday parties, figure skating, hockey, dance recitals, sleepovers. This took up much of life. Bridget began to dream of travel: spas in Costa Rica, yoga retreats in Scandinavia.

"I think I'm burning out," she said to Sam, and he thought she meant on work, but she meant on everything. Sam was stable and good for her, absorbing whatever she threw at him, the tofu of husbands, but it didn't help. She considered an affair, but it seemed like too much work. Anyway, her days were full of meetings and car pools; there was no time for malfeasance. Instead, she spent more hours than she should have online, seeing whose life had turned out to be more dramatic than her own. That was how she found Angela, who maintained active accounts on Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram. Angela was still in Vancouver and, judging by her pictures, she had one child, an astonishingly beautiful boy who was a perfect combination of her and Charles—her eyes, his nose—as if they'd divided up

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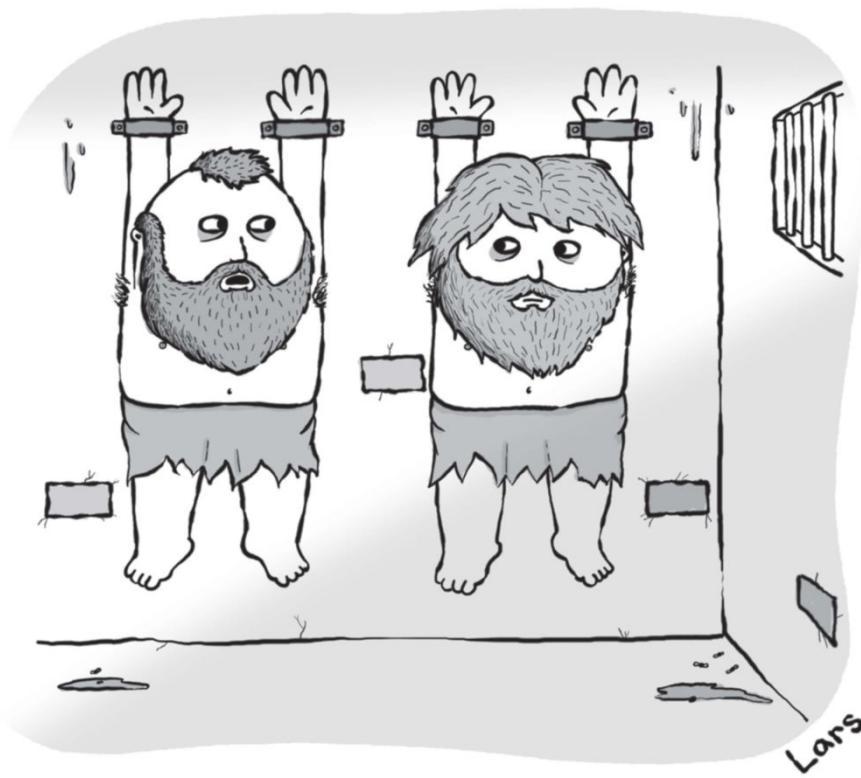
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“Personally, I prefer the old White House pressroom.”

the genes by legal agreement. Angela photographed him playing soccer and baking muffins; she pinned recipes for organic pancakes with hidden spinach and discussed the importance of fish-oil supplements. She redid her living room and posted the swatches; everything was off-white. She said that her favorite color was bone. Bridget clicked “Like.” Within a day, a message from Angela popped up in her in-box, frothing with six years’ worth of news. Much of it was already known to Bridget, from the Internet, but she pretended it wasn’t. As it happened, Angela was coming to Ottawa for a conference, and they made plans to get together. Bridget asked what kind of conference it was. “Medical,” Angela wrote.

On the day they were to meet, Bridget went straight from the office, in her pencil skirt and heels, to the bar at Angela’s hotel downtown. It was a modest hotel that catered to visiting bureaucrats. Angela was sitting in a booth, wearing jeans and a light cardigan. A bone-colored cardigan. Her hair was cut in a pleasant bob, and she was still blond. When she saw Bridget, she stood up and flung her arms

around her, pressing herself against Bridget’s chest. It was the way Bridget’s children had hugged her when they were little, holding nothing back, and Angela’s body felt like a child’s, thin and pliant and eager.

Bridget asked what kind of work she was doing at the conference, and Angela waved her hand shyly. “I’m not working these days,” she said. “The conference is for people who have my illness.” The illness was one that Bridget had never heard of. Angela described a set of diffuse symptoms—fatigue, muscle aches, cognitive impairment—that defied diagnosis. Doctors were perplexed. Much research still had to be done.

“What kind of cognitive impairment?” Bridget said.

“Oh,” Angela said, smiling. “I’m in a fog most of the time.”

She didn’t seem in a fog to Bridget. They sat drinking wine and discussing the annoying habits of their husbands and children, the dirty socks left on couches, dishes unscraped in the sink. Angela’s son had bought a frog at a pet store and tried to sleep with it in his

bed. Her husband was always at the hospital. He’d suggested that her symptoms were psychosomatic.

“Men always say that women are crazy,” Angela said vehemently, “but men have been in charge for most of history, and look how that’s turned out!”

Bridget laughed.

“*Bitches be crazy,*” Angela went on, shaking her head and making air quotes. Bridget didn’t know what, or whom, she was quoting.

Angela sighed. “I shouldn’t complain, though,” she said. “He keeps us in frogs and fresh sheets.”

Bridget laughed again. She was enjoying herself more than she’d expected to. They ordered another bottle of wine, which Angela chose because it was organic and sulfite-free. “I can’t taste the difference,” Bridget said.

“You’ll thank me tomorrow,” Angela said.

Around them, the hotel swelled with people sitting alone, stroking their phones with one hand while eating or drinking with the other. Even when the place was full, it was quiet. By ten o’clock, the bar was empty again and the street outside was dark. It was a government city, sedate in its schedules.

“I’m not sure I can drive,” Bridget said to Angela.

“Why don’t you come upstairs for a while first?”

She nodded.

The room was decorated in surprisingly offensive shades of mauve and green. Angela’s things were flung everywhere, her suitcase open on the closet floor, handouts from the day’s seminars scattered on the desk, wet towels dampening the carpet. Bridget lay down on the bed, and Angela sat next to her. It seemed lovely to be there, with her head on Angela’s lap.

“I’m sorry you’re sick,” she said, and Angela nodded, stroking her hair. Bridget turned then, and wrapped her arms around Angela’s waist. The two of them fell asleep that way, body to body, flushed cheek against warm leg, an embrace that was not about sex but not not about it, either, a hunger for touch that was somehow satisfied by this middle distance, this mutual understanding. Later, when Bridget thought about the night in the hotel, she would remember how Angela, down at the bar,

had said, with sudden sobriety, “Nobody takes care of me,” and then laughed, dismissing her self-pity with a toss of her pale hair.

THEY SWORE TO keep in better touch, but didn’t. Once Angela was back in Vancouver, her social-media accounts took a turn from organic cooking and home decorating to alternative health and New Age spirituality. She was doing chelation and oxygen therapy. She smudged her home with sage. Her thinking seemed dire. She was preoccupied with the tensions in the Middle East and believed that global conflict was imminent. She adopted two cats because she wanted her son to experience as much joy as possible before the world came to an end. But she and her son both turned out to be allergic, and “#catproblems” accompanied most of her posts.

Then came a year when Sam—always the steady one, the imperturbable base—almost died of heart trouble. For months, Bridget took care of him and their family, and, when he was better, their marriage was better, too; it had solidified under the stress, like a building settling on its foundation. During this time, Bridget rarely went online. She found it hurtful to see other people’s smiling, healthy families or, even worse, to hear about lives that seemed as fragile as her own; she didn’t need to be reminded that everyone’s happiness was in jeopardy.

When she checked back in, Angela was gone. All her accounts had disappeared. An e-mail sent to her in-box went unanswered. Bridget didn’t have her phone number and couldn’t find one listed. One evening, while the kids were in the basement watching a movie with their friends, she sat down and wrote a letter by hand, mailing it to the last address for Angela that she could find. “We’re all fine now. Just wondering what’s new. How are those pesky cats?”

As she had so many years earlier, Angela wrote back quickly. She no longer had the cats, she wrote, with a lack of explanation that was slightly ominous. She and Charles had got divorced, “on good terms more or less,” and she now lived in a little cottage outside the city. “A little cottage” sounded to Brid-

get like a euphemism for something, though she wasn’t sure what. Angela had decided that her symptoms were caused by an allergy to electricity, so she lived without it. She had a wood-stove and candles. She didn’t use computers and was reading a lot. “I feel a bit better every day,” she wrote, a statement that seemed to herald its own contradiction. Of her son she said little.

Bridget wrote back, wishing her well, and the correspondence seemed to die a natural death; there was no habitual rhythm in Bridget’s life for such letters. When, a year later, her cell phone lit up with a Vancouver area code, she assumed that it was Angela, but the voice that greeted her was low and commanding and male.

“This is Dr. Charles Adebayo. We met at my wedding,” he said.

“Yes, I remember,” Bridget said, confused. She was sitting in her car, listening to music, while Mellie fought her way through a soccer game in terrible blustery weather.

“My former wife is ill,” Charles said. There was a solemnity to his voice that was hard to reconcile with the laughing man of years ago. It was the voice of a man who’d had practice speaking about difficult topics and knew to provide them careful containment. “She would like for you to visit, and I would like so as well.”

“Is this the electricity thing?” Bridget asked. She looked out over the dismal soccer field, more mud than grass, where teen-age girls were flinging themselves around with abandon. Mellie was her aggressive child, a lover of tackles and hits; Bobby always played defense. They were both more wholesome, her children, than she’d had any right to expect.

On the phone, Charles sighed, a long, soft note. “We are not sure,” he said. “Angela continues to believe that she suffers from electromagnetic hypersensitivity. I believe she may have other significant health problems, but she refuses to see a doctor or be tested. We hope that you can persuade her to do so.”

“Me? Why?” Bridget said. She felt capable only of single syllables, beyond

which tens, hundreds of lengthier questions loomed.

“Because you are her best friend.”

On the field, Mellie went down hard, and Bridget involuntarily straightened in her seat, but a few seconds later her daughter bounced up again, laughing. She shook her ankle and high-stepped in a circle, as if she were doing the hokey pokey. And then everyone was running again. Bridget caught her breath, sometimes, when she saw how athletic her daughter was, how reckless her grace, how fully she possessed her youth.

The thing happening in the car—the phone call, the man’s voice, his bewildering request—did not seem real compared with Mellie’s loping stride as she deftly stole the ball and toyed with it, her skittering feet driving it toward the net and then past the goalie. Mellie clasped her hands above her head and glanced over at the car. Bridget honked the horn. *I saw.*

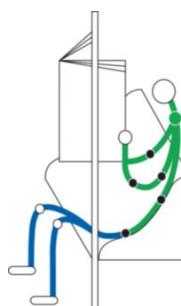
“Are you there?” Charles said. “The situation may be critical. We request that you come as soon as you are able.”

Bridget didn’t say, “I haven’t talked to Angela in years.” She didn’t say, “I would have thought she had closer friends.” She simply agreed to answer the summons.

HE LANDED IN a drizzle of rain that continued all the way from the airport to the hospital where Charles worked, obscuring the city behind a swish of windshield wipers. Traffic moved slowly, and she saw nothing but other cars and a horizonless sky.

Angela’s son was waiting at the hospital, too. He was all gangly legs in skinny jeans, his eyes half-hidden beneath bangs. Charles wore a purple shirt and yellow tie, strangely buoyant colors that contrasted sharply with the gravity of his expression. Over the shirt he wore a white coat. He gripped his son’s thin shoulder with a strength that was clearly both dominant and reassuring.

They drank coffee and talked about Angela. Charles mentioned Angela’s weight loss and her “ideation.” The son’s eyes were partly closed, as if he



were trying to fall asleep. At last Charles wrote down directions to the cottage—"you won't find it with a G.P.S."—and suggested that she arrive in the early morning, when Angela was most hospitable. He didn't explain what he meant by "hospitable." Then he asked his son whether he had any messages for his mother. The boy shook his head.

THE DRIVE TO Angela's cottage took Bridget through emerald hills made brilliant by the previous day's rain. The city fell away, then the suburbs, and then she passed through small towns with no posted names. The road Charles had instructed her to take dwindled from asphalt to gravel to mud, and she began to worry that her economy rental car wasn't up to the task. Her phone reception shrank to a single bar. Then the road ended. Charles had said, "You will have to park and walk." She stepped out into woods that smelled like fir and mushrooms, earthy and chilled, and hoped that the tiny clearing between two trees was the start of a trail. She crashed through it, the loudest thing around. Everything else was still, as if some kind of bad magic had blanketed the place. But, before she could get too worried, she saw Angela's cottage, a normal and well-maintained A-frame with geraniums planted in window boxes.

"It is best if you approach her gently," Charles had said.

Bridget didn't knock on the door. She stood in front of the house, allowing herself to be seen. How she knew to do this she couldn't have said. It was a calculation made on instinct. There was a flicker of movement at a window, and Bridget turned in a full circle, taking in the dense and quiet woods, the pine branches dripping, the surprisingly rapidly drifting clouds. Sam and the kids were visiting his parents this weekend; they had planned a cookout and a horror-movie marathon with the cousins. They would hardly think of her.

Behind her, the reluctant opening of a wooden door.

Angela stood silhouetted like a girl in a fairy tale. She was wearing jeans and a T-shirt and her blond hair was in a long braid, the way she used to wear it.

She was very thin. One hand rested on some kind of machine, from which tubing ran up her arms, under her nose, and around the top of her head. Her whole face twitched, either with tremors or with an attempt to smile; Bridget wasn't sure. "Do you know me?" she said.

Angela nodded. Her eyes were cloudy, marbled. "I shouldn't let you in," she said. "For your own good."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm in self-isolation. What I have may be contagious."

Bridget didn't ask what she had. "I don't care," she said. "I want to see you."

Angela turned and disappeared into the house. The open door was not an invitation. Bridget spent some moments staring at the darkness where her friend had been. After a while, a window above her opened and a sealed plastic package was thrown down to the ground. It was a medical kit, which, when she tore it open, turned out to contain a surgical mask, plastic gloves, and shoe covers. She put it all on obediently and waited until Angela came back to the door and nodded, satisfied.

Bridget followed Angela through a foyer and into a dim room; the far wall held large windows, but they were crowded with greenery that let in almost no light. As her eyes adjusted, she saw that the room was comfortable, with couches and armchairs and a woodstove in the corner. Angela settled into one of the chairs with the machine at her feet like a pet.

"Charles must have called you," she said. Her voice was raspy, asthmatic, and it made her tone hard to interpret.

"He did," Bridget said. She didn't want to talk about Charles, didn't want the freight of marital disagreement in the room. She leaned forward, putting her hands on her knees, and saw her friend recoil. "Tell me how you are," she said.

Angela stared past her. "There's a light," she said. "When I close my eyes at night, I see it and think it's waiting for me. Sometimes I think it's my father. You know he died."

"I didn't know that."

"I remember when your father died," Angela said. Her eyes grew sharper. "You changed so much. I didn't understand at the time, but I do now."

Even years later, the mention of her

father shifted a weight in Bridget's stomach, tilted her center of gravity. The sadness of his death was still a sinkhole that she could fall into and be swallowed by.

"My mother got married again," she told Angela. "To a dentist named Dennis. Dennis the dentist. She has these beautiful movie-star teeth now. Veneers, I guess they are? She seems happy. They have a time-share in Florida. So."

Angela bared her own teeth, which were not beautiful, small and brown, little emblems of decay. "Would you like some tea?" she said.

"Yes," Bridget said. "Let's have tea. You rest. I'll make it."

She had anticipated putting together a tray of biscuits or bread and jam, brewing a pot and serving it with sugar and milk. But there was no food in Angela's cottage. The cupboards held only bottles: capsules of bee pollen, vitamins, apple-cider vinegar. Next to a teapot on the counter was a bowl holding what looked like loose tea leaves; they smelled like mushrooms, like the forest outside. She boiled water on the woodstove, brought a tray into the living room with two cups. Angela's legs were now tucked beneath her. Her head lolled to the side at a violent angle, as if her neck could no longer support its weight. She was asleep.

Bridget left the tea. She took off the surgical mask, hiked to the car, and drove to the nearest store, where she bought some root vegetables and rice and fruit. Back at the cottage, Angela was still asleep in the chair, and Bridget arranged a blanket over her lap, tucking it in at the sides. Then she cooked the vegetables and strained them into a broth. She cooked the rice to a bland pudding. She mashed sweet potatoes into a purée. When Angela woke up, Bridget spooned the broth into her mouth, wiping away dribbles with a tea towel. Angela did not object; she parted her lips like a baby. Later, Bridget moved her to the couch. Bridget herself slept in Angela's bed upstairs, which was thin and narrow and hard. The next day, more broth, a little rice. She read aloud to Angela from the only material on hand, old copies of *Chatelaine* and the *Reader's Digest* which must have been left behind by some previous

"TINY"

Simon has taken his father, Peter,
to the town's museum on No Through Road
to see for himself the world's smallest dog.
Six inches at most from his mouse's nose
to the tip of his outstretched paintbrush tail,
"Tiny" was born to pedigree pointers
of true proportion the same year Lassell
discovered Triton—Neptune's largest moon—
and Britannia stole the Mountain of Light.
He was raised as a regular working hound
but at three years old chased a rat down a hole,
caught a fatal chill, and was later embalmed.
Under a glass dome, skewbald and well groomed,
he's tracking a scent through a diorama
of matchstick fence posts and pipe-cleaner trees;
a warped sky of roof beams and lightbulbs swims
in the bulged, unblinking eye of the case.
Simon says, "Do you think he's real? I think
he's real—look at the fine nap of his coat."
But Peter is elsewhere now, admiring
an Iron Age mattock, a chunk of quartz,
and a nineteenth-century fishing skiff,
actual size. For only twenty pence
the clockwork tin mine stutters into life.

—*Simon Armitage*

occupant; she couldn't imagine Angela buying them. She read recipes, "Laughter Is the Best Medicine" columns, stories about brave pets and remarkable women. It was hard to tell whether Angela was listening; she mostly lay back with her eyes closed, her fingers playing idly with the tubing of her machine.

Once evening fell, Bridget lit a fire in the stove and fed Angela again. When she was about to go upstairs, Angela grabbed her hand and said, "Please, no." So she took some pillows and cushions from the armchairs and made a bed for herself on the floor.

In the morning, Angela's eyes looked brighter. She disconnected herself from the machine long enough to take a short walk around the house. Afterward, they sat outside and drank Angela's terrible tea, which tasted like moss and feet. Angela had allowed Bridget to dispense with the mask, saying only, "I suppose you've been exposed. I just hope your immune system is stronger than mine."

"Does your son come here to visit

you?" Bridget asked her. She didn't mention that she had seen him in the city. Angela's eyes brimmed with tears, and she shook her head.

"I lost him," she said.

"But why?" Bridget said. After two nights at the cottage, her eyes and skin ached. She couldn't stop thinking about hamburgers and red wine. She wondered what Sam and the kids were eating, watching, what jokes they'd be making later that she wouldn't understand.

"Bridge," Angela said. It was a sunny, windy day and her fine hair was lifted in the breeze, floating up and away as if it wanted to escape her. "You must understand," she said. Her voice was patronizing, kind and sad, as if she were a parent explaining death to a child. "With what I have," she said, "I'm past the point of no return."

"Come home with me," Bridget said impulsively. "Stay at my house. We'll watch movies on the couch and eat junk food." She could sense Angela stiffen but kept going, unable to stop.

"We'll drink wine and stay up too late. You can meet my kids. You'll like them, Angela. They'll make you laugh."

They were holding hands now. Some geese flew overhead in a V-formation, and the trees swayed back and forth, as if they, too, were seeking touch. In one of Angela's magazines, Bridget had read an article about a scientist who had proved that trees could form a kind of friendship, twining their roots together. Sometimes one tree would curve its branches away from the other's, so that its friend got enough sun to survive. Angela said nothing, and the trees fell silent, too, as if to make sure that Bridget heard her refusal.

SHE DIDN'T SEE Angela again. She flew home to her family, leaving the cottage stocked with soups and stews, and fell gladly back into the mad routine of extracurricular activities and conference calls and neighborhood dinner parties. For a while she tried to stay in touch with Charles, but he never sounded pleased to hear from her; she understood that she had failed him. He finally removed Angela from the cottage by force, and she spent time in and out of hospitals. She didn't respond to Bridget's letters, and Charles said she refused to use a phone.

"How long do you think she can go on like this?" Bridget asked him the last time they spoke.

"I cannot hazard a guess," he said, and hung up.

Bridget stood in her kitchen, watching the wind twist maple leaves off a tree in the yard. The kids were upstairs in their rooms. Bobby was going away to college next year; Mellie the year after that. Sam was travelling more for work these days. Bridget would soon be stripped back to herself. Sometimes she thought of this aloneness as a luxury. Sometimes she was afraid of it. Sometimes she saw her life as a tender thing that was separate from herself, a tiny animal she had happened upon by chance one day and decided to raise. It was terrifying to think how small it was, how wild, how easily she could fit it in the palm of her hand. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Alix Ohlin on friendships and the casual but genuine intimacy of social media.

THE CRITICS



POP MUSIC

IN RETROSPECT

John Cale's reissued albums feature wild new inventions.

BY AMANDA PETRUSICH

FOR THE PAST several years, John Cale, the Welsh musician and co-founder of the Velvet Underground, has been selectively reissuing his back catalogue. Some of these efforts are straightforward: an old record is remastered, and given new packaging, an updated set of liner notes, and perhaps a new video. Others are wild reimaginings. This spring, Cale will be seventy-five. Lou Reed, his collaborator in the Velvet Underground, died in 2013, followed by other friends and peers: Leonard Cohen, David Bowie, the experimental composer Pauline Oliveros. It can feel, at times, as if Cale is tidying his legacy—dusting the house before company comes by.

Last month, Cale reissued “Fragments of a Rainy Season,” a live album recorded at various stops on a 1991 world tour. He was usually accompanied only by his own piano playing, and the set list included compositions from different eras in his discography, along with covers of lonesome songs like “Heartbreak Hotel.” For the reissue, Cale added eight new tracks: some alternative versions—including a second, more jarring “Heartbreak Hotel,” with distorted strings and other inconsonant noises—and some songs that didn’t make the original cut.

The album art features an exchange from “Macbeth”:

BANQUO: It will be rain tonight.
1ST MURDERER: Let it come down.

Cale is not interested in circumventing or prettifying anguish: let it come down. But he doesn’t revel in suffering, either; he figures out what hurting sounds like

and then articulates it. The result can be challenging and discordant, but this is still a deeply benevolent impulse—to recognize and free pain. “Fragments of a Rainy Season” opens with a song called “A Wedding Anniversary.” Cale sings lyrics by Dylan Thomas—another aching Welshman—over a tense piano melody. “Death strikes their house,” he intones, his voice cavernous and melancholy. “Too late in the wrong rain.”

Thomas imbibed and philandered without restraint, dying, in 1953, of pneumonia exacerbated by the several days he’d spent drinking whiskey at the White Horse Tavern, in the West Village. But he wrote often of the possibility of putting off death, or, at least, of defying it. His poem “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night,” published in 1951, ends, “Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

It is not hard to sense that same spirit in Cale. In the early nineties, Cale closed most of his sets with a cover of Leonard Cohen’s “Hallelujah,” which Cale first recorded in 1991, for a tribute album titled “I’m Your Fan: The Songs of Leonard Cohen,” and later included on “Fragments of a Rainy Season.” “Hallelujah,” which was released by Cohen in 1984, has been covered so relentlessly that it now feels like a shortcut for conjuring feelings of despondency. In 1991, though, the song was still an obscure track from “Various Positions,” a record that nobody was paying much attention to. Cohen’s take is cool and moody, sung in a staid, stately baritone. Cale’s version is sparse and undulating, and he sounds freshly gutted after every verse. It’s this iteration—which Jeff Buckley covered in 1994 and Rufus Wainwright sings on

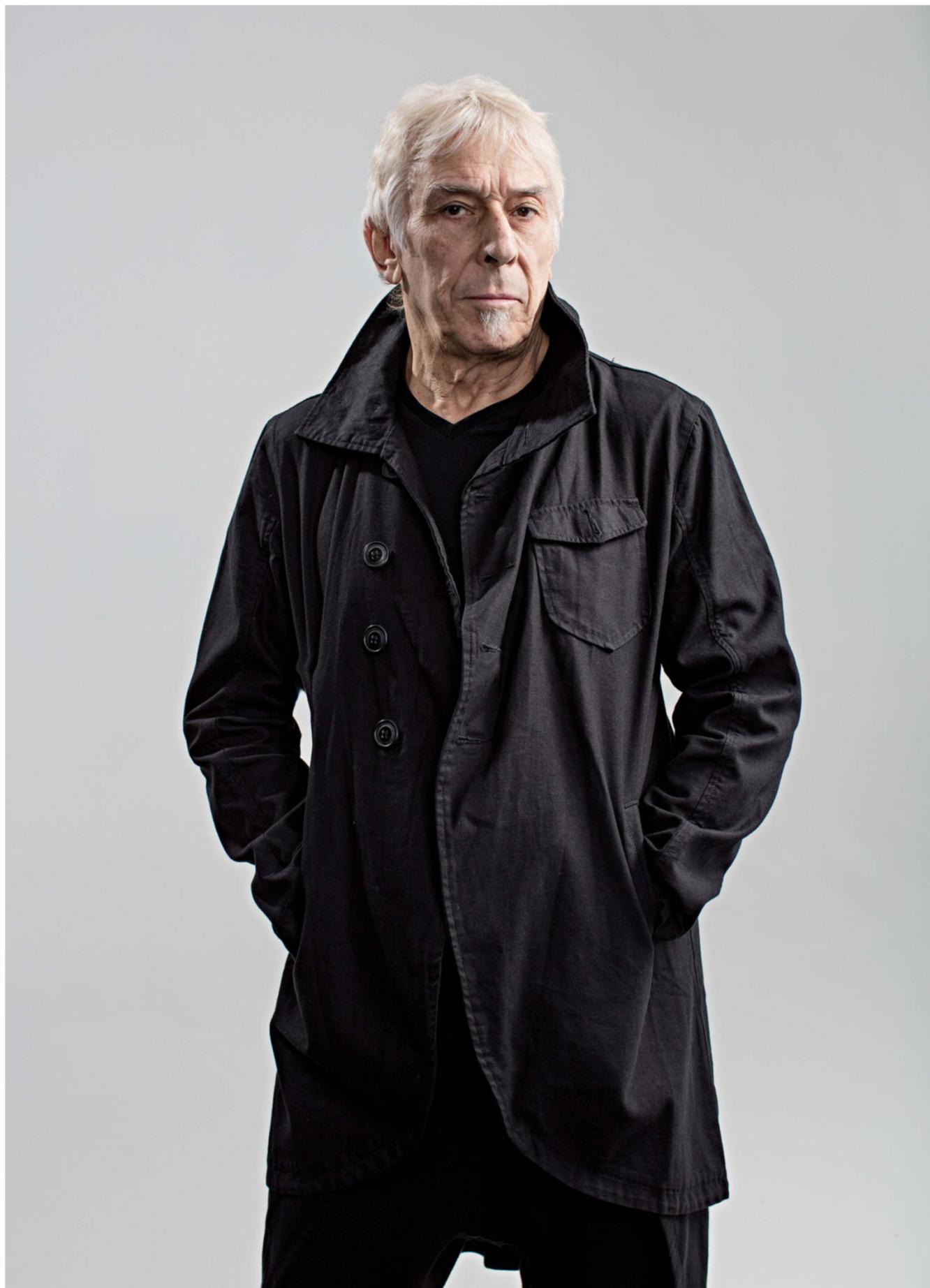
the soundtrack for the animated film “Shrek”—that most people recognize.

Cale also monkeyed with the lyrics. After he heard Cohen singing different words to the song during a show at the Beacon Theatre, he asked about alternative verses. Cohen reportedly faxed him fifteen pages of unused lines; from these, Cale pulled together new lyrics, which change the entire narrative trajectory of the song, making it bloodier, less celestial. It contains a heartbreakingly succinct account of how it feels to watch someone fall out of love with you:

There was a time you let me know
What’s really going on below
But now you never show it to me, do you?
I remember when I moved in you
And the holy dove was moving too
And every breath we drew was Hallelujah.

The fifth verse opens, “Maybe there’s a God above/but all I ever learned from love/was how to shoot at someone who outdrew you.” On this line, Cale resists the temptation to sing “you” as the more colloquial “ya,” which Cohen often did, and cheekily—to make it rhyme in a satisfying way with “hallelujah.” He seems to know that the lyric contains too tough a lesson to be made cute: how to be bested by someone you trusted but still land a blow on your way down. How to survive.

A week before Cohen died, in November, Cale released a video for his version of “Hallelujah.” It features Cale—sturdy and muscular, dressed in black, with heedless white hair and a goatee that makes him appear slightly devious—seated at a grand piano overrun with crickets and mealworms. A long string of pearls is wrapped around



Even as Cale looks back, ingenuity and brazenness still trump nearly every other motive in his work.

his left wrist. In one sequence, Cale is lying flat on the floor, and the worms are inching around his face. The evocation, of course, is of decomposition.

CALE WAS BORN in the spring of 1942 in Garnant, a small village in the Amman River Valley of Wales, a region rich in slow-burning anthracite coal. Mining began there in the eighteenth century; between 1860 and 1960, more than fourteen hundred workers died in the coalfields. Cale's father, William, was a miner, and his mother, Margaret Davies, was a schoolteacher. Margaret's mother insisted that John speak Welsh at home, making it impossible for him to effectively communicate with his father, who spoke only English, until he was seven, when he started school.

Cale's adolescence was bleak. He was hospitalized frequently for bronchitis. He later said that whatever syrupy opiate he was spooned led to hallucinations: "You'd end up sitting in your bedroom, looking at the wallpaper, and the flowers would change." Margaret became ill with breast cancer, which his maternal grandmother blamed on his birth. At twelve, Cale was molested by a church organist who had been giving him music lessons. "The way into the organ loft was narrow and, once in, you could not easily get out. If you were there with the organ tutor, it was even more cramped," he wrote in his autobiography. There is an undercurrent of dread in Cale's work which seems clearly born of his youth.

Cale exhibited an aptitude for composition on the viola and the piano, and left Wales to take music courses at the

University of London's Goldsmiths College. In 1963, following an invitation from the American composer Aaron Copland, he went to the United States to study at Tanglewood, the music center in the Berkshires, on full scholarship. Later that year, he moved to New York and took a job in a bookshop. At the time, downtown Manhattan was an incubator for experimental musicians, who incorporated into their pieces the dissonance and the atonality of city living. The minimalist composer La Monte Young worked from a vast, boxy loft on Church Street that eventually became his Dream House, the "sound and light environment" that he built with his partner, the visual artist Marian Zazeela. Yoko Ono offered up her home on Chambers Street as a performance space for young players. It suddenly seemed as if classical composition could be deinstitutionalized just by rerouting it geographically. John Cage, Terry Riley, Cornelius Cardew, John Zorn, Morton Feldman, Tony Conrad, Pauline Oliveros, Laurie Anderson, Steve Reich, Philip Glass, and others were inventing new ways to generate and organize sound. Their movement became known as Fluxus.

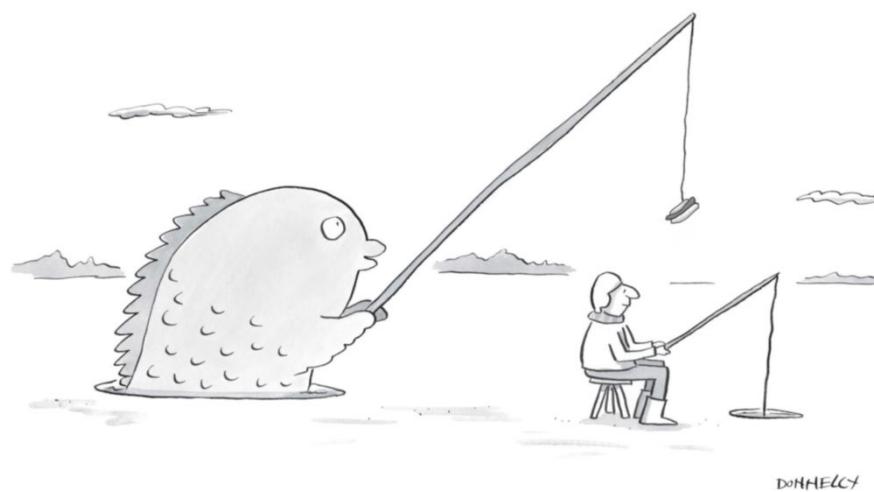
Cale quickly internalized its directives. Ingenuity and brazenness still trump nearly every other motive in his work. "It's what I must do each day: create music beyond the premise set before," he has said. By 1964, he was performing with Young's Theatre of Eternal Music, an ensemble interested in sensory inundation and programmatic harmonic sequences, usually dictated by Young. The work could be beau-

tiful, but it wasn't exactly user-friendly. In his notes on the project, Young explained his mission in mathematical terms, speaking of primes and denominators and intervals. The group's compositions had titles like "The Tortoise Recalling the Drone of the Holy Numbers as They Were Revealed in the Dreams of the Whirlwind and the Obsidian Gong, Illuminated by the Saw-mill, the Green Sawtooth Ocelot and the High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer."

Musically, the pieces combine an extended time structure, heavy, sustained sounds, and ungovernable melodic lines that often flit about unpredictably, like a mosquito stuck inside a car. Young described these movements as "the independent entries and exits of the tones." Sections of the compositions feel improvised, unmoored, and chaotic; something feral is happening over something staid. Elements of this approach, known as drone—and of Young's lawless spirit—stayed with Cale throughout his career.

In early 1965, at a party, Cale met Terry Phillips, an employee of Pickwick Records, a British label that released children's records until its founder, Cy Leslie, figured out that he could corral pickup musicians into writing and performing songs that resembled the hits of the day, and then sell those sound-alike 45s at a discount. Phillips asked Cale to join a Pickwick band called the Primitives, which was promoting "The Ostrich," a goofy, chaotic pop song written by Lou Reed, who was then a songwriter and session musician for Pickwick. Reed had a knack for sticky melodies, but he was interested in drone, too. He created a new guitar tuning for "The Ostrich"—a so-called trivial tuning, meaning that all the strings on his guitar were tuned to the same note. The results are intense and mesmeric.

The song wasn't a commercial hit, but, shortly after its release, Cale and Reed—with the guitarist Sterling Morrison and the drummer Angus MacLise—started a band called the Warlocks, later the Falling Spikes, and, finally, the Velvet Underground. Andy Warhol, who first saw the group play at a beatnik club called Café Bizarre, on West Third Street, became their first manager, along with the filmmaker Paul



Morrissey. In 1967, after MacLise was replaced by Maureen Tucker, the Velvet Underground partnered with the German singer and model Nico, an acolyte of Warhol's, and released "The Velvet Underground and Nico," the band's début album. The cover featured one of Warhol's banana paintings. (If you are lucky enough to find an early pressing, you can peel off the banana skin to reveal a pinkish fruit underneath.) Nico's wan alto is famously dispassionate, but Reed sounds anxious and weedy, singing about heroin, sex, and masochism. The record did not sell particularly well, but its influence was far-reaching. In 1982, in an interview with *Musician*, the electronic artist and producer Brian Eno suggested that everyone who had bought a copy of "The Velvet Underground and Nico" went on to start a band.

Cale made one more record as a member of the Velvet Underground: "White Light/White Heat," which was released at the beginning of 1968. It's a noisy, difficult record; Cale has since called it "consciously anti-beauty." In its seventeen-minute closing track, "Sister Ray," Reed tells a rambling and mostly incoherent story about a smack dealer trying to plan an orgy. The words "sucking on my ding-dong" are repeated. Reed and Cale noodle aggressively at each other through distortion pedals.

The two weren't getting along. The simplest explanation is that Cale's taste skewed more avant-garde. (The first record the band made without Cale, "The Velvet Underground," is easily its sweetest and most straightforward.) The split was acrimonious, and seemed to haunt both men for a long time. In 2014, a reporter for Channel 4 News in the United Kingdom asked Cale if he was over Reed's death. He paused. "Not really," he said. "I don't think that will happen."

After Cale left the Velvet Underground, he made sixteen studio albums as a solo performer and released at least ten live and collaborative albums. "Paris 1919," the best known of his solo records, from 1973, is wry, expansive, and playful, featuring an assortment of literary and historical allusions. Nobody was expecting Cale to make such a record, for which he had enlisted the U.C.L.A.

symphony orchestra and two members of the blues-rock band Little Feat (the guitarist Lowell George and the drummer Richie Hayward). The result is somehow both anomalous for Cale and characteristically inventive.

Cale has produced, arranged, and contributed to a number of records, including the Stooges' self-titled début, in 1969; Nick Drake's "Bryter Layter," in 1971; Brian Eno's "Another Green World," in 1975; Patti Smith's "Horses," the same year; and Manic Street Preachers' "Postcards from a Young Man," in 2010. His presence on these albums ranges from subtle to overt. Sometimes he is so close—either literally, as a player, or spiritually, as an influence—that the work feels as much his own as the songs he writes and performs. On the Stooges' "I Wanna Be Your Dog," Cale is the guy maniacally stabbing that one note on the piano for the whole three minutes. Take that away, I'd venture, and the entire song is instantly defanged and made limp. He is the person you want in the room when you are afraid that what you are doing is benign.

CALE HAS BEEN so consistently innovative, so focussed on ingenuity and instigation, that it's strange to watch him glance backward. Yet even his approach to retrospection feels groundbreaking. Last year, when he reissued "Music for a New Society," a bleak and largely improvised record from 1982, he also recorded new versions of all its songs. In a press release announcing the two albums—the updated collection was titled "M:FANS"—Cale spoke of the process as a kind of psychic exorcism. "It was time to decimate the despair from 1981 and breathe new energy, rewrite the story," he explained. Miraculously, he succeeded. Some songs, like "Chinese Envoy," once a spare, prickling dirge and now a boisterous electro-pop song, are almost unrecognizable in their present-day iterations. An album that felt colorless and desperate—Cale wrote of shame, death, "the crawling skin of God"—became contemplative, conciliatory. "I don't feel so bad, and always look forward with hope," Cale sings on "Taking Your Life in Your Hands." In the original, the line is hollow, if not scornful. On

"M:FANS," his delivery remains monotone, but he sounds nearly earnest.

Cale's relationship to his past reveals a contemporary mind-set. The idea of the album, as a form, has endured, stubbornly. It used to be a pleasurable and efficient delivery method: a dozen or so tracks collected onto one long-playing disk and sold to consumers at a discounted price. But after the Beach Boys' "Pet Sounds," from 1966, and the Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," from 1967, it became a kind of creative imperative, a way of eschewing the ephemerality of the single and establishing pop music as art. Then the technology changed; a preference for customization developed and became embedded in the culture. Younger artists look at the idea of the album sideways, kicking the tires, imagining a less prescribed, more multidimensional future for their high-concept work. Kanye West's newest project, "The Life of Pablo," has been revised untold times since its release (a snare drum might be quieted, or a lyric adjusted). It is not expected to exist in physical form—merely as a stream or a download—which would only impede its constant evolution. West has called the album "a living breathing changing creative expression."

Cale has always thought of art as fluid rather than static—he has rarely been satisfied by recapitulations of the status quo. Most of the songs on "Music for a New Society" are about misplaced faith and the strange rage that accompanies regret. "I wasn't in a very good place at the time and it was all about changes, about changing me, changing the people around me," he told *Uncut* last year. "Some of them I wished would go away, and I wanted to go away."

Here, then, was an opportunity to reclaim and reconfigure his despair. The idea feels deeply human. Who hasn't winced, looking back on a thing they made—or a place they lived, or a dress they wore, or a type of tea they drank—while enveloped in grief, and hoped for a way to neutralize that history without losing the thing itself? It is easy to be nostalgic about the past when we are yearning for a time before we knew certain disappointments. But it is just as easy to want to revisit dark days with the knowledge of fresh triumphs. Cale has invented a way to do that. ♦

FORK YOU

A life runs four ways in Paul Auster's "4 3 2 1."

BY LAURA MILLER



Auster's summarizing style of narration closes like a fist around the proceedings.

ACCORDING TO A currently popular line of philosophy, a self is merely the sum of all the stories we tell about a particular human body. It's an idea that resonates through the work of the writer Paul Auster, in whose fiction both selves and stories are precarious constructions, fascinating but unstable, more illusion than reality. In "4 3 2 1" (Holt), Auster's first novel in seven years and, at eight hundred and sixty-six pages, the longest by far of any book he has published, a single man's life unfolds along four narrative arcs, from birth to early adulthood. "Clearly you've read Borges by now," the faculty adviser remarks to one of these iterations of Archie Ferguson, a character who, like most of Auster's heroes, is fanatically book-

ish. "4 3 2 1" is indeed a doorstop of forking paths.

All four Archie Fergusons share the same origin story, one that has much in common with Auster's: a paternal grandfather who arrives in the United States with a Jewish name, which gets converted to something more Gentile-friendly on Ellis Island; a family history marred by murder; an emotionally remote, entrepreneurial father; a childhood in suburban New Jersey, a place that Archie, in all his incarnations, comes to detest. Archie's father, Stanley, at first adores his young bride, Rose, but as the novel's four plots diverge after Archie's birth, in 1947, the marriage survives in only one of them. Archie himself doesn't make it past Chapter 2 in one version of his story, killed when lightning

shears off a branch as the boy romps beneath the trees at summer camp.

Sudden death has been a preoccupation of Auster's since his own summer-camp days. At the age of fourteen, while hiking during a storm, he was part of a line of boys crawling under barbed wire when lightning struck the fence, killing the boy in front of him. Chance, understandably, became a recurring theme in his fiction, and in "4 3 2 1" it contributes to the four distinct paths of Archie's life. So, too, does character. In one story line, his father's furniture store burns down, his father collects the insurance for it, and life goes on relatively undisturbed. In another, Stanley's brother confesses that he's run up big gambling debts that can be paid off only if Stanley allows an arsonist to burn down the store. Stanley waits in the building to thwart this plan but falls asleep and dies in the fire. In yet another, Stanley's warehouse is burglarized, but he refuses to file an insurance claim, because he knows that an investigation will reveal that his *other* brother was behind the crime. In the fourth, Stanley ends up a rich man after ejecting both of his ne'er-do-well brothers from the business long before they can cause any serious trouble. As a result, one Archie—let's call him the Manhattan variation—grows up fatherless, and clings fiercely to his mother when the two move to the city. The Montclair variation grows up in straitened circumstances but with an intact family. The Maplewood Archie lives in bourgeois affluence as his father becomes obsessed with money and his parents become increasingly estranged.

AUSTER'S NOVELS TEND to fall into two categories, Paris and New York, a division of tone, style, and ambition rather than of setting—paradoxically, some of his most Parisian fiction takes place in New York City. He remains best known for the three short novels that make up "The New York Trilogy": exemplars of his Parisian mode, they were first published in the nineteen-eighties and are the foundation for a career far more celebrated in Europe than in his native land. Descended from Kafka by way of Camus and Beckett, these books are existential parables about the absurdity of the writer's life, calling attention to their own artificiality and grafted onto the apparatus of hard-boiled detective fiction. In "Ghosts," a

P.I. named Blue is hired to observe another man, named Black, through the window of a neighboring apartment. After more than a year of watching Black, Blue begins to suspect that it is he who has been the target all along:

He feels like a man who has been condemned to sit in a room and go on reading a book for the rest of his life. This is strange enough—to be only half alive at best, seeing the world only through words, living only through the lives of others. But if the book were an interesting one, perhaps it wouldn't be so bad. He could get caught up in the story, so to speak, and little by little begin to forget himself. But this book offers him nothing. There is no story, no plot, no action—nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book.

In his New York mode, Auster pays tribute to what Rose Ferguson thinks of as “dear, dirty, devouring New York, the capital of human faces, the horizontal Babel of human tongues.” The young characters in “4 3 2 1” worship the city as only Jersey kids can; it is a manic paradise, visible but just out of reach. In such novels as “The Brooklyn Follies” and “Sunset Park,” Auster’s evident intention is Dickensian. He packs the books with minor characters of assorted races and ages, and attempts to conjure up a jaunty urban cacophony.

That goal, however, is incompatible with Auster’s habitual style, which is a top-down, summarizing narration that closes like a fist around the proceedings. His novels are short on dramatic scenes and dialogue, and it’s not easy to celebrate a polyglot metropolis when you’re unaccustomed to letting characters speak for themselves. Whoever is telling the story—whoever is speaking, period—always sounds too much like Paul Auster. His prose, even when impassioned, has a bland, synthesized quality, and in his Parisian mode it has deliberately been boiled down to the bones; the ease with which this style can be translated contributes to his popularity overseas. In “4 3 2 1,” which is more of a New York novel despite the predictable metafictional twist at the end, his sentences come tumbling out in multiple clauses, mimicking the breathless rumination of his earnest, callow, fairly humorless and slightly stuffy protagonists:

The fundamental quest both before and after his new life began had always been a spiritual one, the dream of an enduring connection, a reciprocal love between compatible souls, souls endowed with bodies, of course, mercifully endowed with bodies, but the soul came first, would always come

first, and in spite of his flirtations with Carol, Jane, Nancy, Susan, Mimi, Linda, and Connie, he soon learned that none of these girls possessed the soul he was looking for, and one by one he had lost interest in them and allowed them to disappear from his heart.

Auster’s medium isn’t really sentences or paragraphs or scenes but narrative, events shoehorned into a sequence that endows them with significance: Blue has been hired to watch Black, therefore Black must be doing something worth watching. The narration in Auster’s novels typically dominates every other element in a ferocious and doomed assertion that the world the book describes is not ruled by happenstance. Maybe that’s what all storytelling is meant to do: reassure its audience that a legible causality shapes our world and our lives. The main character in the first novel of “The New York Trilogy,” “City of Glass,” seeking comfort after the death of his child, loves mystery novels because the world of such fictions is “seething with possibilities, with secrets and contradictions. Since everything seen or said, however trivial, can bear a connection to the story’s outcome, nothing must be overlooked. Everything becomes essence.” Plots, especially the solution-hungry plots of detective stories, give meaning to the flotsam and jetsam of lived experience.

One Archie Ferguson becomes a journalist, one a memoirist, one a novelist. One boy plasters his room with John F. Kennedy paraphernalia; another finds politics “the dullest, deadliest, dreariest subject he could think of.” All three of the adult Archies pine after a girl named Amy Schneiderman, but only one becomes her boyfriend. Were it not for that romance, however, this Archie wouldn’t have climbed into a car that crashes, thereby losing the thumb and index finger of his left hand. Without this disability, he would not have been exempt from the draft, a spectre hovering over all the Archies as they come of age in the nineteen-sixties. The dominion of chance becomes most explicit when, in 1969, the Selective Service System institutes a draft lottery to determine when eligible men will be compelled to serve: the Maplewood Archie thinks of it as “a blind draw of numbers” that “would tell you whether you were free or not free, whether you were going off to fight or staying home, whether you were going to prison or not

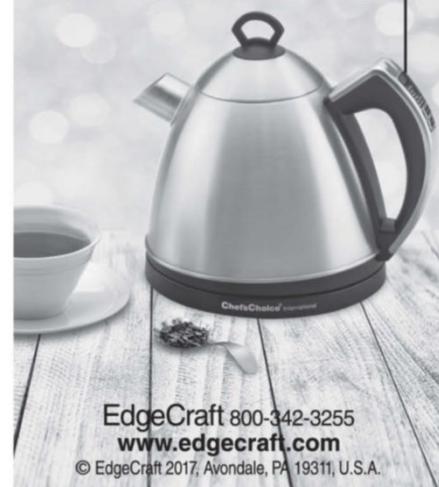
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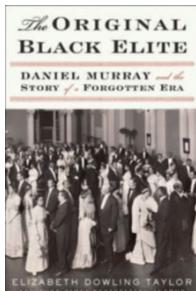


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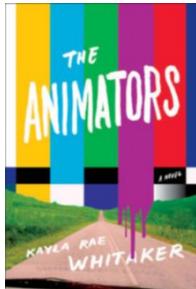
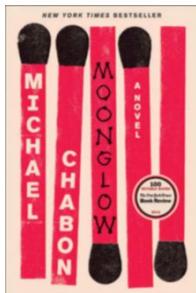
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THE
NEW YORKER

BRIEFLY NOTED



THE GENIUS OF
JUDAISM
BERNARD-HENRI
LÉVY



The Original Black Elite, by Elizabeth Dowling Taylor (*Amistad*). In the decades following the Civil War, a proud "colored aristocracy" emerged. This history focusses on two of its members—Daniel Murray, the son of a former slave, who, in 1897, became chief of periodicals at the Library of Congress, and his wife, Anna, a descendant of one of John Brown's raiders. Taylor documents the inaugural balls they organized, the properties they owned, and their political efforts on behalf of their race. Ultimately, affluence, respectability, and their light complexions couldn't save them from the humiliations of Jim Crow. By 1919, Murray had been demoted, his salary slashed, and he was forbidden to dine in the library's public cafeteria.

The Genius of Judaism, by Bernard-Henri Lévy, translated from the French by Steven B. Kennedy (Random House). The French philosopher and telegenic celebrity offers a meditation on the "inner work on Judaism," which he says has guided his adventures in revolutionary politics, in an eclectic treatise that includes a long examination of resurgent anti-Semitism. His arguments tend to be wayward; a defense of his support for intervention in Libya takes the form of an interpretation of the Book of Jonah. And there are moments of real contradiction, as when he calls the Holocaust a "crime without parallel" but then professes befuddlement at the phenomenon of "competitive victimhood." Still, Lévy writes with passion. When people stop reading Judaism's great texts, "to challenge and oppose them no more," he declares, "the genius dies."

Moonglow, by Michael Chabon (Harper). This novel narrates the life of the author's grandfather, as he lies dying, in 1989, of cancer. A powerful painkiller has brought "its soft hammer to bear on his habit of silence," so that stories of his exploits, failures, and secrets emerge in a non-chronological, occasionally cartoonish manner. The form allows Chabon to take on a range of modes and subjects—there's a bravura Second World War sequence, and an extended prison episode following his grandfather's attempt to kill his boss after losing his job to Alger Hiss. The most vivid element of the novel is the old man's relationship with his wife, a French war survivor haunted by terrifying visions.

The Animators, by Kayla Rae Whitaker (Random House). This tender, lively début traces the friendship and the artistic partnership of two young women. After meeting in college, Sharon and Mel spent a decade making (per their critics) "small, thoughtful cartoons and out-of-mainstream animation shorts for a thinking woman's audience." But their first full-length film, based on Mel's childhood in a Florida trailer park, wins a prestigious award. As their work gains recognition, Mel's hard-living ways strain her relationship with the quieter, anxious Sharon, until a medical emergency changes everything. The tension between private life and public art occasionally feels familiar, but Whitaker's nimbly created characters are as vibrant as the novel's title suggests.

going to prison, the whole shape of your future life to be sculpted by the hands of General Pure Dumb Luck.”

THE OPPOSITE OF luck is destiny, a predetermined fate dictated by genes or history or, if you’re going to be old-fashioned about it, God. The Manhattan Archie deliberately sabotages his grade-point average when he returns to school after his father’s death: “Within the narrow scope of misdeeds he was capable of, he understood that the only way to answer the question”—of God’s existence—“was to break his end of the bargain as often as he could, to defy the injunction to follow the holy commandments and then wait for God to do something bad to him, something nasty and personal that would serve as a clear sign of intended retribution.” Like any storyteller’s audience, he wants to be reassured that whatever happens, however bad it may be, it is linked to whatever happened before by narrative causality.

But all three adult Archies soon abandon the unreliable consolations of faith for more secular explanations. The Montclair Archie goes to Columbia (with several characters from earlier Auster novels listed as his classmates) and becomes a journalist. He is on hand to cover the 1968 student revolt but finds that “taking the journalist’s view of impartiality and objectivity was not unlike joining an order of monks and spending the rest of your life in a glass monastery—removed from the world of human affairs even as it continued to whirl around you on all sides.” The Maplewood Archie goes to Princeton, his writerly inclinations channelled into more esoteric literary work. (This story line features some amusing excerpts that read like undercooked Calvino pastiches.)

Instead of God, what directs the evolution of each Archie seems to be an irreducible kernel of identity. Whatever his circumstances, he was always meant to be a writer, and also to stand at the sidelines and observe while other people fight. This looks like a reversal of the approach Auster took in his earlier work, in which a character, simply by changing his name, can be transformed into another person; in which the self is provisional, a product of fiction. Still, it’s possible to detect a consistent thrum of anxiety running from those early works

through “4 3 2 1.” Auster likes to explicate his own texts, overtly stating his themes in the very books that embody them, but one rarely acknowledged influence is the legacy of the Second World War. The cynical, fatalistic hardboiled detective novel and film noir of the nineteen-forties and fifties—popular genres that Auster has often invoked—murmured of the suppressed memory of the war’s horrors, the trauma and doubt scrubbed out of American triumphalism. The narrative imposed on the Second World War was one of straightforward heroism, but Archie’s generation, like Auster’s, faced a more ambiguous challenge: their refusal to fight on moral grounds could also be construed as cowardice, and often was by the very men whom, as boys, they’d so admired for risking their lives to defeat Fascism. The antiwar protests of the nineteen-sixties were, among other things, an effort to replace one story—that the conflict in Vietnam was a necessary bulwark against Communism—with another: that the war was, as Archie puts it, “not just a political blunder but an act of criminal madness.”

And yet the longing for that less complicated, more satisfying story persists. Archie’s “sole ambition” is to “become the hero of his own life,” and both the Montclair and the Maplewood Archies have a burnished aura of Boy Scout rectitude that soon becomes tiresome. “If we have more money than we need,” the Maplewood Archie tells his mother when she announces that the family is moving to a bigger house, “then we should give it to someone who needs it more than we do.” The New Jersey Archies are a pair of Goody Two-Shoes, equipped with a full complement of twenty-first-century liberal attitudes about gender, race, and class, whose primary failing is a disposition to love the women in their lives too faithfully and too well. These Archies are so alike that it’s difficult to remember which one you’re reading about at a given moment without the aid of notes.

Not so the fatherless Manhattan Archie, whose experiments in divine provocation evolve into such louche activities as visiting prostitutes, shoplifting (to pay for the prostitutes), and a loveless affair with a young man who picks him up at an art-house theatre during a screening of “Children of Paradise.” Everything about the Manhattan Archie—his bisexuality,

the memoir he writes about how Laurel and Hardy comedies saved his life, the reading program he embarks on in Paris under the tutelage of a chicly enigmatic art historian—is vastly more interesting than the generic nineteen-sixties intellectualism of his suburban alter egos. By far the most affecting passage in “4 3 2 1” is a scene in which this version of Archie experiments, disastrously, with taking money for sex. It also helps that the Manhattan Archie has little curiosity about what he calls “current events,” thus sparing the reader the newsreel-like interludes of potted history that are constantly interjected into the two other story lines.

When the last Archie is left standing, he makes a resolution: “As for the Tet Offensive in South Vietnam, as for Lyndon Johnson’s abdication, as for the murder of Martin Luther King: Watch them as carefully as he could, take them in as deeply as he could, but other than that, nothing. He wasn’t going to fight on the barricades, but he would cheer for the ones who did.” Then he goes back to working on his novel. This isn’t, in fact, a material departure from his earlier style of political engagement, which mostly consists of reading the newspaper. It’s as if Auster had forgotten that he once drove a character mad by forcing him to watch a man sitting alone in a room writing a book.

Sprawling, repetitive, occasionally splendid, and just as often exasperating, “4 3 2 1” is never quite dull, but it comes too close to tedium too often; there is no good reason for this novel to be eight hundred and sixty-six pages long, or for every Archie’s love of baseball and movies and French poetry to be rhapsodized over, or for every major headline of the nineteen-fifties and sixties to come under review. The spooky, metaphysical economy of Auster’s fiction in its Parisian mode (“Oracle Night,” from 2003, is the best of his most recent books), with its arresting, uncertain, and dislocated narratives, offers more room to breathe, more space for the reader’s imagination to squeeze its way in, more spurs to wonder. It is this sort of book the surviving Archie seems to be writing at the end of “4 3 2 1,” when he observes that “as with all the other things he had written in the past three years, he was turning out roughly four pages for every page he kept.” That sounds like an excellent policy. ♦

A WOMAN'S VIEW

A Marisa Merz retrospective.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



THE MET BREUER is not yet a year old, but it has already distinguished itself as a site of beguiling and serious surprises: a huge survey of unfinished works by masters of Western art, a provocatively ingenious installation of Diane Arbus photographs, and a terrific retrospective (soon to close) of the African-American painter Kerry James Marshall. The latest is "Marisa Merz: The Sky Is a Great Space," the first major retrospective of the Italian artist in the United States. Merz is the least-known and, perhaps not incidentally, the only

female member of Arte Povera, a movement shepherded into existence, in 1967, by the art critic Germano Celant, as Italy's ambitious riposte to American Pop and minimalism. About a dozen artists participated, creating large, often sprawling abstract sculptures in humble materials—dirt, rocks, tree branches, used clothes, rope, burlap, industrial detritus—putatively to counter the sterility of consumer culture, but also, more practically, to master the capacious exhibition spaces that were becoming an international norm.

Merz's "Living Sculpture" (1966) and "Untitled" (1976), at the Met Breuer.

Marisa Merz was routinely identified as the wife and, since 2003, the widow of one of Arte Povera's leading figures, Mario Merz; for years her own work was exhibited sporadically and afforded only glancing consideration. But at the Met Breuer she emerges as the liveliest artist in a movement that was often marred by intellectual and poetic pretensions, and whose abstracted themes of nature and metaphysics rarely appealed to American sensibilities, and still don't very much. (Minimalism, which never took hold in Italy, had pretty well cauterized symbolic content for the art world here.) Merz is still at work, in her home town of Turin, at ninety. That's a late age for a débüt retrospective, but this show will be revelatory to many people, as it is to me. An occasion that might have seemed a revisionist historical footnote turns out to be more like the best saved for last.

It all started in her kitchen. The show opens with immense hanging sculptures of clustered ductlike forms in shiny aluminum sheeting, homemade with shears and staples. Cutout swaths loop and overlap, like snakeskin scales, to gorgeous, looming, somewhat sinister effect. The earliest piece dates from 1966, when Merz was spending most of her time at home, bringing up Beatrice, the daughter who was born to Marisa and Mario in 1960, the year they married. The pieces thronged the kitchen walls and extended into the living room and around the furniture, encasing the TV set. Beatrice, who is now the president of the Merz Foundation, which manages her father's estate and her mother's career, remembers being scared of the sculptures as a child. Here and there, the gleaming surfaces are faintly yellowed by cigarette smoke and the residue of cooking oil.

Merz has said that the series' English title, "Living Sculpture," paid homage to the Living Theatre, a New York troupe of Dionysian performers that was popular with young European artists. Soon after the first work's creation, it starred in "The Green Monster," an underground horror film made by some of Merz's friends, in which it was seen to digest writhing, naked actors. In 1967, it was briefly

installed in Turin's Piper Pluri Club, one of a number of related performance-and-party venues around the country that were frequented by the Italian counterculturati.

The show proceeds with other sculptural works, many of them made of hand-knitted copper wire or nylon filament. Some are prepossessingly large. An untitled installation from 1976, spanning an entire wall, comprises irregularly spaced wire squares the size of pot holders, stretched at their corners by brass-head nails. Some bare nails suggest squares that are missing or invisible. A floor piece, dated 1990–2003, is composed of a low steel trough, into which melted candle wax was poured; there, the wax hardened around the bases of nine tiny sculptures, in unfired clay, of indistinct figures and faces that are reminiscent of the sorts of prehistoric totem that archeologists, in despair, assign to "ceremonial use." Other works are small, including *scarpette* ("little shoes"): dainty slippers that Merz made from copper wire or nylon thread, for herself and for Beatrice. The child's nickname, Bea, is spelled out on a wall in clumps of nylon mesh, bristling with the knitting needles that were used to create them.

The show's title, "The Sky Is a Great Space," comes from a poem written by Merz. It relates to a conceptual caprice from 1970: a flight that she took in a small private plane, and documented, with a series of photographs, as a work of art. The mystique of the sky also figures in a 1975 photograph of Merz, taken from behind, as she sits in a chair, her *scarpetto*-shod feet propped against a wall. She looks out of a window onto a city (Rome) immersed in a black night pierced by a few scattered lights. It's a breathtaking picture, which presages Merz's gradual shift, starting in the nineteen-eighties, from sculptural installations to drawn and painted imagery. She has usually rendered faces, often of Renaissance-evocative Madonnas and angels, in a range of styles, from neo-Futurist tectonic to Edvard Munch-like Expressionist.

Merz's most striking pictorial technique involves layering combinations of graphite, wax, pastel, and paint that

is brushed or sprayed, or sometimes both, onto paper, metal, board, or unstretched canvas. Colors shared by different mediums make it hard, at times, to know which material you see. In one work, from 2004, gold paint sprayed onto copper engulfs a sketchy apparition of a woman playing a flute. Networks of copper wire attached to it might represent rays of light or waves of sound. A copper shelf at the bottom sanctifies the piece as an altar. Merz's mixed methods draw you into the process of the work, as if your gaze were helping to generate it. First impressions of insouciantly woozy execution disintegrate in registrations of texture and touch. The pictures are like factories turning out dreams.

Merz was born in 1926 in Turin, where her father worked at the Fiat plant. She may have studied dance. At some point in the nineteen-forties, she modelled for the neoclassical painter Felice Casorati. I have now conveyed all that is publicly known of Merz's life before 1960, which the concerted efforts of the Met Breuer show's curators—Ian Alteveer, of the Met, and Connie Butler, of the Hammer Museum, in Los Angeles, where the show will travel in June—have been unable to supplement. (Even Merz's maiden name is unknown: searches for a birth certificate yielded none.)

Surely Mario knew more, and others in their circle, now mostly deceased, must have, too. The lacuna bespeaks incuriosity about the wife of the great man, which Merz was at no pains to correct. Did she take some compensatory pleasure in being mysterious? At any rate, it served her as a mask. Meanwhile, she had a continual and direct hand in Mario's art; Alteveer told me that she was regularly consulted on the installation of his exhibitions. Their relationship was notoriously stormy but resilient—and they were a sight to see. He was a large man. She stands about five feet tall. (I'm reminded of the colossal Diego Rivera and the petite Frida Kahlo. There, too, the wife's art eventually came to rate as at least equal in quality to the husband's.)

Merz's work, no less than that of

her Arte Povera peers, advanced an avant-garde shibboleth of the era: proposing to close what Robert Rauschenberg had called "the gap" and which Germano Celant, with more starch, termed "the dichotomy" between art and life—as if art is ever meaningfully separate from life. The idea has always struck me as a fancy way of exalting a simple rejection of conventional display—frames, pedestals—and of working with found objects, defined spaces, and elements of performance. If there was a more political aspect to the Italians' works, it was ambiguous, assumed rather than expressed. The *povera* (im-poverished) element counted less as activism than as a sentimental gesture of virtue on the biennial circuit and in the deluxe galleries where their careers unfolded.

But the art/life conceit acquires special pith in Merz's case, beginning with her marginal standing in the Arte Povera group and the way that she navigated it: by making it the keynote of a personal, untrammeled originality. Both the ferocious "Living Sculpture" and the more ingratiating pictures and little sculptures that followed it made positive content out of being consigned to domesticity. Merz refuses to call herself or her art feminist, to the extent that she banished the word from the title of one of several fine essays in the Met Breuer show's catalogue. I'm reminded of some strong-willed women artists I knew, in the early years of the women's movement, who also resisted having their solitary struggles described in ideological terms. But Merz's very independence makes her an ideal avatar for feminist analysis. She pushed against limits in ways that revealed what and where the limits were, and she turned the friction to shrewd and stirring account. ♦

Block That Metaphor!

From the Albuquerque Journal.

The world was a better place before things got so out of whack that athletic departments were forced to mortgage their souls to keep the lights on.

Yet, the awarding of naming rights—in this case, by the University of New Mexico for the Pit to WisePies pizza restaurants—is the fedora on the head of the monster we've all created.

THE THEATRE

ALLIES

Ties that bind in Martin McDonagh's "The Beauty Queen of Leenane."

BY HILTON ALS



Mullen and O'Sullivan as a mother and daughter linked by mutual hatred.

I SO ADMIRE Martin McDonagh as a playwright that I'm more than a little sad that he's turned his creative attention to writing and directing films. I can't blame him; his audience will no doubt grow. It's my hope, though, that the people who like his movies (he won an Academy Award in 2006 for his short film "Six Shooter," and he has wrapped a new feature, starring Frances McDormand) will circle back to his plays and find what I found: one of the best theatrical minds we have on myth and its offshoot—everyday storytelling. McDonagh's dramatic world is defined by power and filled with cruelty and injustice; the bad guy takes center stage but doesn't always get called out. When he revels in his wrongdoing, he's so sly and funny that we forget to disapprove until it's too late—and then we feel doubly guilty for having enjoyed swimming in all that filth. Part of what makes Mc-

Donagh's plays so upsetting is that he's a proper moralist, with a severe heart and a weird acceptance of the worst.

That moral ambiguity marked "The Pillowman" (2003), a long and complex play that I have yet to get over. In the 2005 Broadway production, Billy Crudup—giving a performance that I haven't got over yet, either—played Katurian, a writer living in a police state, whose bloody tales closely resemble a series of terrible real-life crimes that are being committed against children. Does Katurian "inspire" the murders? Is the murderer so invested in Katurian's tales of lost, defenseless children who meet gruesome ends that he wants to act out what he sees on the page? And is using your imagination, perforce, an act of non-conformist wildness against the state? Monologues are difficult to deliver in today's theatre; most audiences prefer action

to reflection. But McDonagh didn't skimp on Katurian's speeches, and the lengthiness of the text only heightens the terror and the conflicted excitement we feel as we wait to hear what happens next.

"The Pillowman" was the culmination of a sense of promise that had been growing since the mid-nineties, when McDonagh's work was first staged in London. (He grew up in England, though his parents are from the west of Ireland, where he spent time as a youth.) But "promise" feels like a funny word in this context, since McDonagh's scripts were accomplished from the first, with their mixture of Irish colloquialisms and Menippean satire—and, in plays such as "The Beauty Queen of Leenane," from 1996 (now in a Druid revival, at BAM's Harvey Theatre), a nod to the incredible and incredibly funny novels of Flann O'Brien. McDonagh and O'Brien are literary kin in a sense, not father and son so much as brothers, with McDonagh as the younger sibling who goes further than his older brother ever imagined was possible, at least onstage. One thing McDonagh learned from O'Brien, I think, is that bizarre situations are more effective when the structure of a work is fairly conventional: you shouldn't undo the power of sensational content by sensationalizing the form as well.

In O'Brien's 1941 novel "The Poor Mouth," the narrator is a kind of dyspeptic David Copperfield who finds himself in a Gaeltacht memoir. Of his birth and its effect on his poor old Da, the narrator says:

I was born in the middle of the night in the end of the house. . . . My little bald skull so astounded him that he almost departed from this life the moment I entered it and, indeed, it was a misfortune and harmful thing for him that he did not, because after that night he never had anything but misery and was destroyed and rent by the world and bereft of his health as long as he lived.

Bald baby skulls, bad health, imminent doom: McDonagh, too, is interested in both physical and spiritual catastrophe. He opens his plays with O'Brien's simple "once upon a time" tone, before zeroing in on his characters and subverting the popular Seán O'Casey version of charming, hardscrabble Irishness by situating them not in an emotionally and politically fraught world but in an alternately repressed and explosive one.

The weather rarely helps. Rain showers

down on the cottage that Mag Folan (Marie Mullen) shares with her forty-year-old single daughter, Maureen (Aisling O'Sullivan), in "The Beauty Queen of Leenane." It's as dark outside as it is in the kitchen where the action is set. In that dingy domestic space, with its stone sink and blackened stove, there's a rocking chair, which is Mag's throne, in a way. Bundled up in woollens, she sits facing the audience, a TV in front of her. She's always waiting for the news to come on, but how can the screen compete with the ticker tape of complaint that spouts from her mouth and onto the floor and around Maureen's legs, binding daughter to mother? The two women spend their days tearing at those bonds, but they wouldn't know who they were without their mutual hatred and dependence. Back and forth McDonagh goes, with Mag whining about the lumps in her food and Maureen chafing bitterly against her mother's manipulations, but nothing changes. Until it does.

One day, the ladies' peevish neighbor Ray Dooley (Aaron Monaghan) arrives with an invitation for Maureen. There's going to be a dance—would she like to come? But Maureen isn't at home, and Mag, of course, doesn't pass on the message. She's not what you'd call a nourishing mother, though she is an expert nourisher of non-truths. Maureen learns of the dance anyway, and, while there, talks to Ray's brother Pato (Marty Rea). Pato is a handsome, agreeable man, a real person who knows his potential. He works construction in London (there are so few opportunities in Leenane), and even in his despair there is something like hope. Chatting sweetly after seeing Maureen home from the dance, he says:

I do ask meself, if there was good work in Leenane, would I stay in Leenane? I mean, there never will be good work, but hypothetically, I'm saying. . . . And when I'm over there in London and working in rain and it's more or less cattle I am, and the young fellas cursing over cards and drunk and sick, and the oul digs over there, all pee-stained mattresses and nothing to do but watch the clock. . . . When it's there I am, it's here I wish I was, of course. Who wouldn't? But when it's here I am . . . it isn't *there* I want to be, of course not. But I know it isn't here I want to be either. . . . In England they don't care if you live or die, and it's funny but that isn't altogether a bad thing.

The play opens up when Pato starts to talk about his experiences away from home, because the issues are writ larger:

this is a play about the colonized and the colonizers, and the ways in which a child can use hate to shape himself. In a sense, Mag is England and Maureen is Ireland: they can't live together, but they have barely lived apart. Maureen tells Pato about the months she spent working as a cleaner in England. She met a Trinidadian woman who did the same job, and wondered, just as the other woman wondered about her, Why would she leave such a beautiful place to live in England? For opportunity, of course, but what does opportunity mean in a country that tries to break its outsiders?

Pato's attention allows Maureen not to transform, exactly, but to reckon with her body in a different way, in that stultifying atmosphere. It's indelibly sweet to witness Maureen's anxiety about Pato: the fear that he may like her or reject her for liking him, the dance of vulnerability. Rea and O'Sullivan play it all so beautifully that you can't quite put your finger on why these scenes don't go deeper, until you realize that it's because of the energy behind the production: the director, Garry Hynes, a real talent, who also directed the 1998 staging (for which she won a Tony Award, the first woman to win in a directing category), hasn't found anything new to draw out here. She seems more interested in the story's high points—its surefire entertainments—than in the putrid plantings growing through that kitchen's cracks. The misplaced emphasis neuters Mullen's Mag. (Mullen played Maureen in the 1998 production, and also won a Tony.) It's as if Mullen were held back from exploring her character's rankness—and, without that rankness, O'Sullivan doesn't have enough to play against.

After making love for the first time, with Pato, Maureen, instead of staying in the moment and relishing the feeling of being touched, gloats. It's funny, but, by treating it as a gag, Hynes fails to explore the transference of power in the scene, or to show us how Pato and his masculinity are undone by the strength of Maureen and Mag's shared contempt. Rather, she distracts us from McDonagh's uneasiness, his sense of displacement—like him, Pato is an Anglo-Irish man who belongs to neither country. What we're left with is a measure of fun and wholesomeness, when the laughter should have had us choking back vomit. ♦

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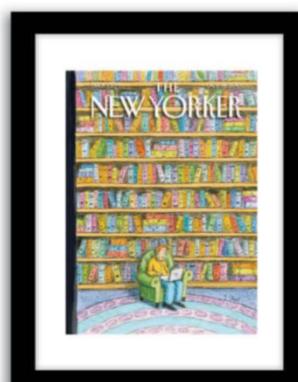
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DEPTH OF FEAR

"The Salesman" and "Split."

BY ANTHONY LANE



Taraneh Alidoosti and Shahab Hosseini in a film directed by Asghar Farhadi.

THE FIRST THING we see, in “*The Salesman*,” is a double bed. And the first words we get are not spoken but illuminated, in yellow and neon pink: “Hotel,” “Casino,” “Bowling.” None of them, let’s be honest, are what we expect in a movie from the Islamic Republic of Iran. But the sleight of hand is typical of the director, Asghar Farhadi, who has—in films like “About Elly” (2009), “A Separation” (2011), and “The Past” (2013)—shown himself to be a master of disorientation. What we are looking at is a stage set, built for a production of “Death of a Salesman,” in present-day Tehran. Arthur Miller would have approved. In a 1997 interview, he spoke about productions of the work in other countries, such as Sweden and China, and of the discrepancies that arose:

Some of the etiquette is different. People don’t address parents quite the way Americans do, and there is also a question of intimacy. Americans make a play at being very intimate very quickly, which seems disrespectful sometimes to people who aren’t used to instant emotional closeness.

These questions of intimacy and respect, and of how both can be violated,

beat at the heart of “*The Salesman*. ” The role of Willy Loman is taken by Emad Etesami (Shahab Hosseini), a part-time actor who also works as a teacher. By a pleasing symmetry, Willy’s wife, Linda, is played by Emad’s wife, Rana (Taraneh Alidoosti). Unlike the Lomans, however, the Etesamis have no children—no Happy or Biff to tighten the screws of disappointment. From what we observe, too, Emad seems pretty good at his day job; his pupils, boys in their teens, engage freely in classroom discussion. If, when he falls asleep in class one day, they grab the chance to take pictures of him with their cell phones, well, what high-school kid, anywhere in the world, could refuse such a gift?

The Etesamis’ problems start and end at home, a place that soon becomes untenable. A fracture appears in a bedroom wall of their apartment; windows crack without being touched, as if by hostile magic. Residents are told to leave the building, which is listing and shifting because of construction work next door. (“What a disaster, this town,” Emad says. “If we could only raze it all

and start again.” Sounds like a failed marriage.) Needing somewhere else in a hurry, Emad and Rana move into another apartment, recently vacated; the previous tenant has left a roomful of stuff. We never meet her, but, like the first Mrs. de Winter, in “Rebecca,” she hovers over the action. “A woman with lots of acquaintances,” we are told. “She lived a wild life,” a neighbor remarks. We get the point.

One of those acquaintances brings trouble. Rana, taking a shower, leaves the apartment door open for her husband, who is due home. As the gaze of the camera lingers on that door, ajar, we realize that someone else is coming. (Michael Haneke, the maker of “Funny Games” and “Hidden,” would surely commend such lingering.) By the time Emad arrives, there is blood in the stairwell, and Rana has been wounded in the head. Beyond those brute facts, though, everything blurs. She never caught sight of her attacker, nor did we. Was a sexual offense committed, too? Was there even an attack, or did she stumble and fall in fear?

What matters is what does *not* happen next. An American woman, taken to a hospital—as Rana is—to have her injury treated, would be asked about the circumstances, and law enforcement would be called. Not here. When Emad suggests going to the police, his wife demurs. “I don’t want to have to tell it in front of everybody,” she says, and her fellow-citizens agree that doing nothing is the smartest option. A neighbor tells her that, in regard to her assailant, “you’ll have to justify letting him in. There would be a trial and all kinds of stories.” So that’s it. The woman is the guilty party until proved innocent. Shame inflicts a secondary blow; reputations can be broken as easily as skulls. Western viewers, watching “*A Separation*,” which dealt with divorce and the care of an elderly parent, had to keep pace with an unfamiliar legal system as they went along, but the path taken by “*The Salesman*” is less public and more oblique. We don’t see a single cop, let alone a lawyer or a cleric, yet by their very absence we sense their clamp on society: a clever move by Farhadi, who shows nothing that could vex Iranian censors

but whose intent is nonetheless caustic and precise.

Little by little, Emad—bearded and reflective, the grain of his anxiety finely conveyed by Shahab Hosseini—turns into an amateur sleuth. He locates the intruder's pickup truck and tracks him down. When the culprit is revealed at last, he sidles inadvertently into view, and the figure that he cuts, to Emad's consternation, could not conform less to the image of a lecherous fiend. What follows, in the final half hour of the movie, is an astounding chamber piece, worthy of Strindberg, with the husband, the wife, and her aggressor stuck in a dance of doubt and death. With every shot, our sympathies flicker and tilt. We feel sorry for the shambling villain (asked about his work, he replies, "I sell clothes by the roadside in the evening"), and then, the next moment, abashed at our twinge of pity. Compare this lengthy scene with the no less agonized "Manchester by the Sea," and you hit a cultural gulf: what the American film presents as emotional turmoil comes across, in Farhadi's tale, as a piercing moral debate, its wording culled not from psychology but from older schools of thought. "Forgive me," the intruder says. "I was tempted."

Rana is ready to pardon him, but not Emad, who presses for revenge. Indeed, it is his response to Rana's ordeal, more than her own trauma, that dominates the plot, and the one flaw in this formidable work is that its attention rests so instinctively on Emad. "I'm not noticed," Willy complains, in a line from Miller that makes it into "The Salesman," but today's audience

may wonder if the play itself takes enough notice of Linda Loman, and the same applies to Rana. You fully believe that Emad loves her, yet you also catch his imperious tone toward her ("Stay there," "Don't interfere"), and you want to know: How about her secrets, or her scars? That urge is all the stronger because she is played by Taraneh Alidoosti, who took the title role in "About Elly," and who has one of those neat round faces that have held the screen since the infancy of cinema, shaded by different moods: a dash of the vamp, for Clara Bow; queenly wit, for Claudette Colbert; waspishness, for Myrna Loy; and a hint of whiskers, for Simone Simon, in "Cat People." Alidoosti, in turn, brings gravity and grief, and the stare that Rana directs at Emad, after his attempts at reprisal have gone awry, is so coruscating that you doubt their marriage can survive. Hence the unforgettable sequence in a dressing room, with the two of them being made up before going onstage. Each sits in front of a mirror, but, as framed by Farhadi, they seem to be inspecting each other face to face, without words or mercy. Why must the show go on?

BARRY WORKS IN fashion. Hedwig is a nine-year-old boy with a lisp. Patricia is brisk and correct, in a long skirt and heels. Kevin is as restful as a land mine. All are played, with unstinting relish and oomph, by James McAvoy, in "Split." In all, his character possesses twenty-three distinct personalities, which must come in handy at college reunions. By way of a bonus, he also turns up as the Beast, who has preternatural powers, limited social

skills, and a taste for human meat.

At the start of the film, this multi-valent fellow kidnaps three teen-age girls, played by Haley Lu Richardson, Jessica Sula, and Anya Taylor-Joy, who was the eldest daughter in "The Witch," and who must be wondering if anywhere is safe. They are imprisoned, menaced, kept in suspense about which of their captor's personae will show up next, and, over time, stripped down to their underwear. In short, we are watching an old-fashioned exploitation flick—part of a depleted and degrading genre that not even M. Night Shyamalan, the writer and director of "Split," can redeem.

Not that he doesn't make the effort. One girl has memories of being abused in childhood, but a backstory, however lurid, is no substitute for a character. Likewise, although we sit in on sessions between Barry and his shrink (Betty Buckley), the implication that personality disorders are doomed to issue in criminal madness hangs over the movie like a rank smell. As for the last-minute twist, a Shyamalan trademark, it will appeal solely to people who saw a particular Shyamalan film, years ago, in the days when he told sombre, grownup stories about guttering marriages and loss. So what's left? The answer is McAvoy, waltzing from one incarnation to another. I felt vaguely cheated that he has time for only a handful of the twenty-three, though I guess he can fill in the gaps when "Split" becomes a Broadway musical. A song for every personality! Bring it on. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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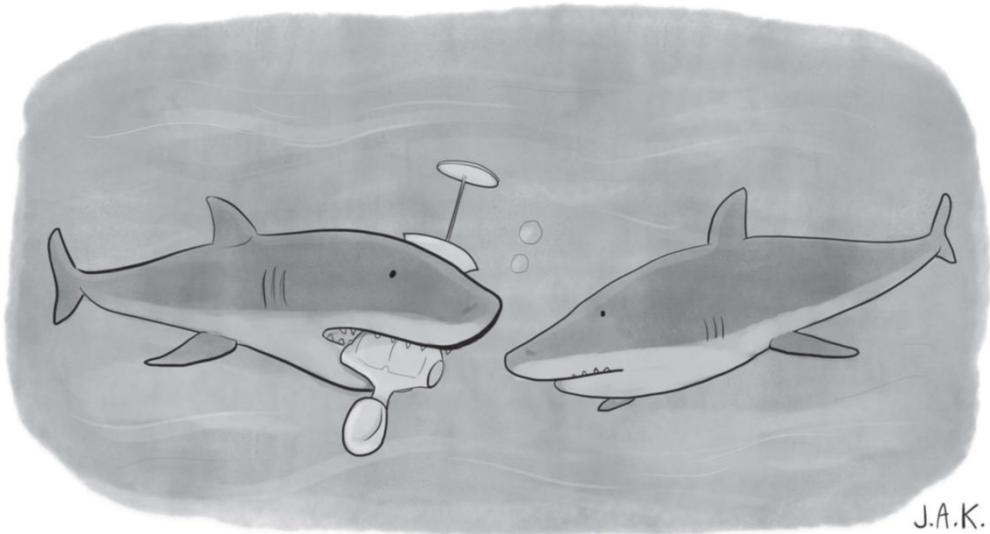
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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

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 Jason Adam Katzenstein, must be received by Sunday, January 29th. The finalists in the January 16th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the February 13th & 20th 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



J.A.K.

"

"

THE FINALISTS



"Maybe his second week will go better."
Audrey Orr, Naperville, Ill.

"I'd like to see other people."
Nick Gaudio, Austin, Texas

"The corrupt media will blow this way out of proportion."
David Neill, New York City

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Row v. Wave."
Laura Silver, Brooklyn, N.Y.

"BEAUTIFUL"

- Wayne S., Jacksonville, FL

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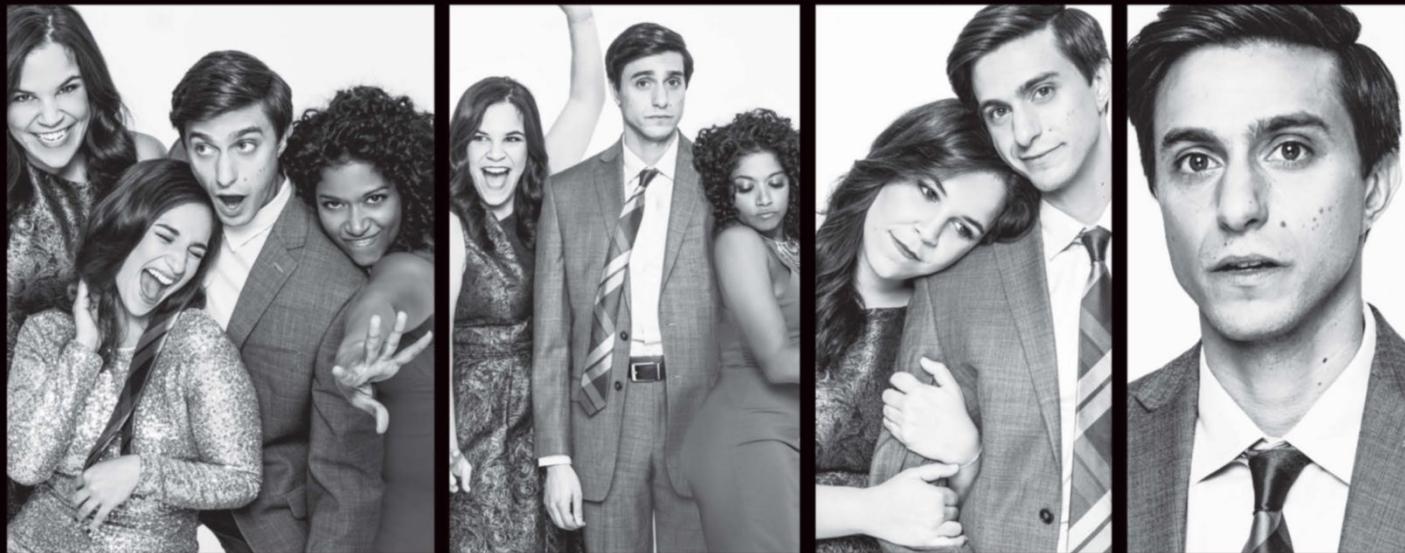


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