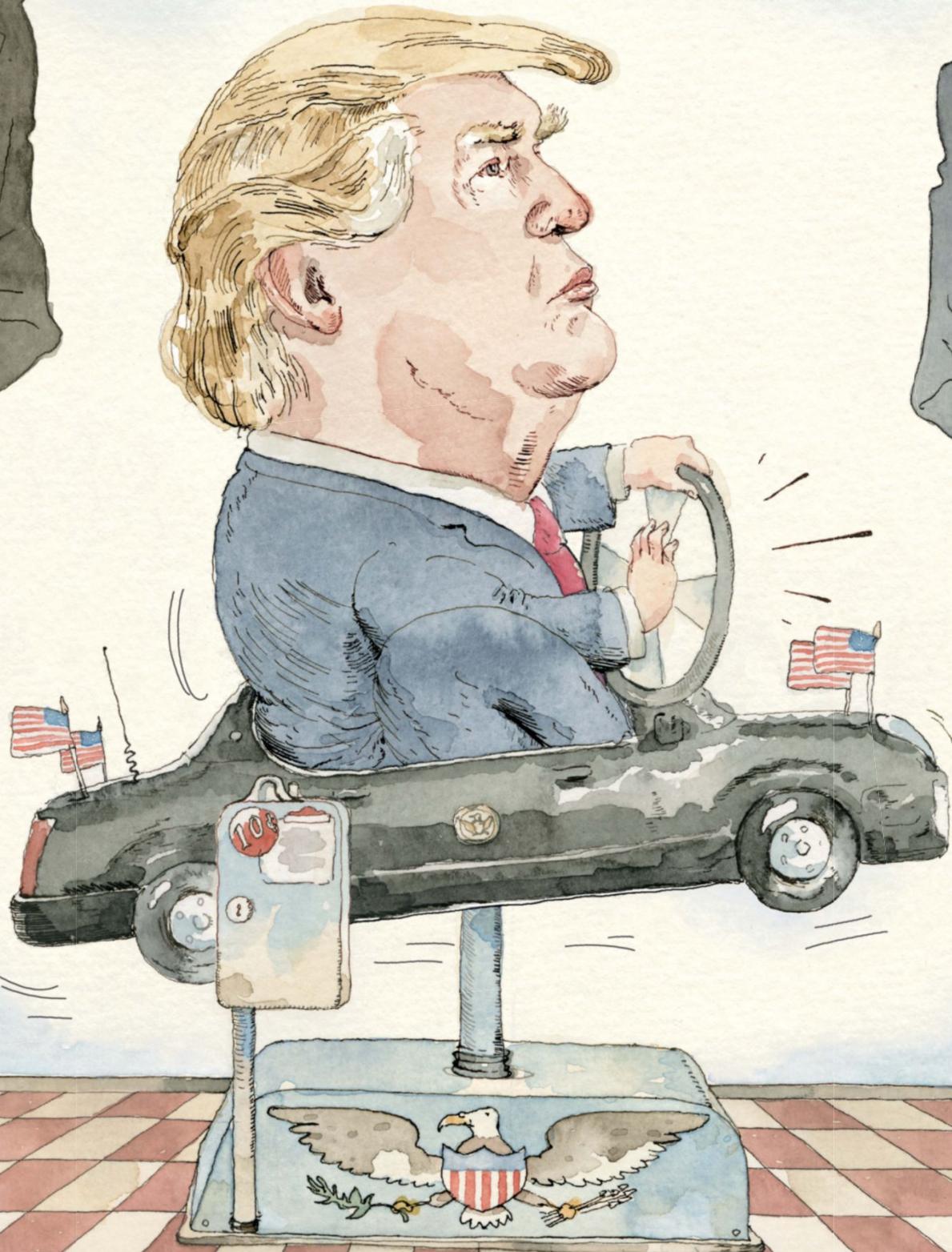


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JAN. 23, 2017

# THE NEW YORKER



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# THE NEW YORKER

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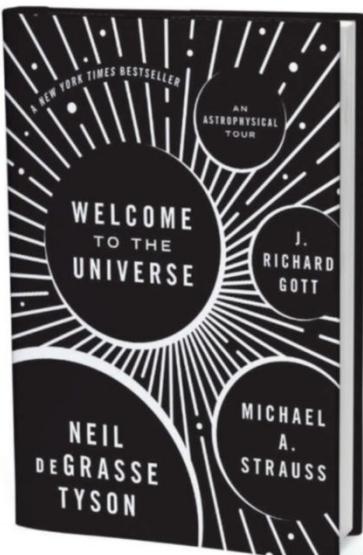
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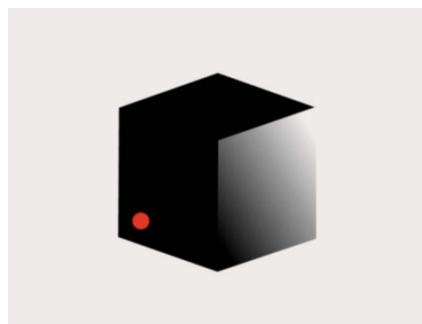
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### PHOTO BOOTH

Andrey Lomakin's portraits of Ukrainian civilians and their guns, with text by Joshua Yaffa.

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# THE MAIL

## THE DANGER OF TRUMPISM

Kelefa Sanneh on conservative intellectuals' man-crush on Trump is one of the odder pieces to appear in *The New Yorker* in some time ("Secret Admirers," January 9th). In addition to Sanneh's choice to devote so much space to the musings of an obscure blogger who lacks the courage to use his real name, there is the strangeness of the effort, on the part of the blogger and others, to place Trumpism in the context of a coherent intellectual world view that Trump himself clearly doesn't possess. The President-elect is the ultimate transactional politician: every position he takes is up for negotiation. Before the election, he claimed that the Electoral College was corrupt and untrustworthy; after his victory, he called it a pillar of democracy. The effort to project any consistent intellectual framework onto someone like Trump is a pointless endeavor. Perhaps Sanneh's next article can be on why humans feel impelled to impose order on chaos.

*Eliot Brenowitz*

*Professor of Psychology and Biology  
University of Washington  
Seattle, Wash.*

I was fascinated by Sanneh's exploration of Trumpism as an ideology that, even given the benefit of the doubt, lacks a rational center. Trumpism dismisses the purposefully divisive tactics of its avatar as collateral damage, the cost of bringing an apolitical savant to the table. The pseudonymous Decius, a proponent of the so-called movement, elicits chills. While verbal assaults on people of color, women, and immigrants by bullies who disdain logic are jarring, the intellectual rationalization of a politics of subjugation is terrifying. What kind of person could look at all of us who are boxed out of Trumpism's vision for this country, shrug, and calmly continue on? I am a single mother, a family structure that Trump and his supporters tend to, at best, dismiss or, at worst, revile. I sympathize with Decius's concern about revealing his identity—he's worried about

being doxxed and having his family harassed. Unfortunately, under Trump, it will take much more than a pseudonym to protect mine.

*Shauna McKenna  
San Diego, Calif.*

Why am I surprised that yet another post-election analysis totally ignores not merely the issue of gender but women in general? In discussing the so-called alt-right, Sanneh addresses racism, xenophobia, and Donald Trump's "unconventionality as a candidate," but he never mentions sexism, sexual harassment, or positions like defunding Planned Parenthood. If I met "Decius," I would ask him about the infamous "Access Hollywood" tape and about Trump's appalling lack of respect for women. These issues apparently don't concern Decius much, but shouldn't the questions at least be asked?

*Kathy Ewing  
Cleveland Heights, Ohio*

It struck me once again, on reading Sanneh's article, how meaningless the terms "cultural élite," "liberal élite," and "coastal élite" are. Here are all these members of the conservative intelligentsia, whose theories seem to undergird so much of our political reality, talking what sounds to me like eggheaded nonsense, while I, a poet and a freelance writer in New York City, am obsessing over whether my family will have health insurance in a year, and whether my young son, who is black, will be able to dodge Trump's white-nationalist gauntlet long enough to make it to adulthood, go to college, and get a good job somewhere his talents won't be wasted. Somehow, these concerns don't feel so élitist to me.

*Marcella Durand  
New York City*

*Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.*

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JANUARY 18 – 24, 2017

# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



Madame X, meet Ladies in Sequined Dresses and Sneakers. For “**The Museum Workout**,” which starts a four-week run on Jan. 19, Monica Bill Barnes and Anna Bass, Everywoman dancers of deadpan zaniness, guide tours of the Metropolitan Museum of Art before public hours, leading light stretching and group exercises as they go. Recorded commentary by the illustrator Maira Kalman, who planned the route, mixes with Motown and disco tunes. Might raised heart rates and squeaking soles heighten perception?

PHOTOGRAPH BY IOULEX

# CLASSICAL MUSIC

## OPERA

### Metropolitan Opera

With a new production by Bartlett Sher, the Met finally has a "Romeo et Juliette" that suits both Shakespeare's tragedy and Gounod's rhapsodic music. The curtain rises on a handsome Veronese piazza (designed by Michael Yeargan), where the chorus is bedecked in glinting jewelry and lavishly colored eighteenth-century-style finery. Vittorio Grigolo is a beautiful Roméo, his sweet tenor tremulous with longing, and Diana Damrau a lovely Juliette, her voice now fuller and 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. *Jan. 21 at 1.* • **Also playing:** Bartlett Sher's first production for the Met, a fleet-footed and sun-soaked "Il Barbiere di Siviglia," remains one of his best. Three full-voiced singers—Pretty Yende, Peter Mattei, and Javier Camarena—head up the cast as Rossini's lovable rascallions; Maurizio Benini conducts. (Dmitry Korchak replaces Camarena in the second and third performances.) *Jan. 18 and Jan. 24 at 7:30 and Jan. 21 at 8.* • A refined exponent of French style, the mezzo-soprano Sophie Koch 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. *Jan. 19 and Jan. 23 at 7:30.* • 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 2013 première. Stephen Costello, Željko Lučić, and Olga Peretyatko—all wonderfully effective in the lead roles—reprise their portrayals from previous seasons; Pier Giorgio Morandi. *Jan. 20 at 7:30.* (*Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.*)

### Bronx Opera: "Sir John in Love"

For its fiftieth-anniversary season, New York City's second-oldest continually running opera company presents two incarnations of one of Shakespeare's best-loved characters. Ralph Vaughan Williams's rarely heard opera has a lovely, lyrical, and mannerly quality, thanks to its use of English folk songs; it's based on the same story line as Verdi's "Falstaff," which follows in April. Michael Spierman conducts. *Jan. 21 at 7:30 and Jan. 22 at 2:30.* (*Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-772-4448.*)

## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

### 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, for all their sonic glory and emotional depth, lack Mahler's expressive range and technical élan. Forever Viennese, they might benefit from the lovingly antique, Old World sheen that the great Berlin orchestra, which Barenboim serves as conductor for life, should bring to them. The first performances, which take place this week, not only feature (in sequence) the first five of the

symphonies but also add attractive bonuses: several of Mozart's late piano concertos (with Barenboim, of course, conducting from the piano) and, with the Fifth Symphony, Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante in E-Flat Major for Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, and Horn. *Jan. 19-21 and Jan. 23-24 at 8.* (*For tickets, and complete program information, visit carnegiehall.org. Through Jan. 29.*)

### Kristian Bezuidenhout and Juilliard415

The superb forte pianist, resident in London but a regular visitor to New York, leads the school's period-performance ensemble in music that will suit the late-eighteenth-century sound world of this instrument. Mozart dominates with three works (including the Piano Concerto No. 12 in A Major and the serenade "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik"), but C. P. E. Bach, whose career hinged the Baroque and Classical periods, is also here, represented by his String Symphony in C Major, Wq. 182/3. *Jan. 23 at 7:30.* (*Alice Tully Hall. events.juilliard.edu.*)

### Alan Gilbert and the Juilliard Orchestra

Gilbert, a strong presence at Juilliard, conducts its flagship orchestra in the kind of iconoclastic concert that reflects his programming priorities at the Philharmonic. It begins with "Tout un Monde Lointain . . ." a cello concerto that the late Henri Dutilleux, one of Gilbert's favorite modern masters, wrote for Mstislav Rostropovich and the Orchestre de Paris (with an adventurous student soloist, Anne Richardson). It concludes with Shostakovich's Symphony No. 4 in C Minor, one of the most deeply idiosyncratic—and expressively intense—of the composer's major works. *Jan. 24 at 7:30.* (*David Geffen Hall. events.juilliard.edu.*)

## RECITALS

### Le Poisson Rouge

Two enticing concerts take place back to back at the downtown music club. Early in the evening, L.P.R.'s main space belongs to the charismatic pianist Adam Tandler, who joins members of the high-modernist JACK Quartet in "Serial Copland," a program of music for piano and strings (including the Piano Variations and the Piano Quartet) that's a world away from the composer's Americana ballets. Later on, an equally adventurous group of musicians (including the soprano Eliza Bagg, the electric guitarist Brendon Randall-Myers, and the cellist Ashley Bathgate) take the stage for the première of a song cycle (with texts by the singer-songwriter Ben Serecan) by the young Brooklyn composer Brooks Frederickson and for "Death Speaks," a masterly piece by David Lang that dips into the musical worlds of Schubert and indie rock. *Jan. 19 at 7 and 9:30.* (*158 Bleeker St. lpr.com.*)

### 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, which concludes with an orchestral concert on Jan. 27, begins with a chamber program on Friday that offers pieces by composers from Cuba (Alejandro García Caturla's "Primera Suite Cubana,"

from 1931), Argentina, Mexico, Bolivia, and Puerto Rico ("Concierto Virtual," a world-première work by the eminent Roberto Sierra, long based in the U.S.). *Jan. 20 at 7:30.* (*Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, Juilliard School. For tickets, and complete program information, see events.juilliard.edu.*)

### New York Polyphony

Columbia's Miller Theatre series presents Gotham's early-music vocal quartet, a group that strives to be a kind of all-male successor to Anonymous 4, whose ladies have stepped into the world of legend. Its talented gentlemen gather at midtown's Church of St. Mary the Virgin to perform a bedrock of the sacred repertory—Palestrina's "Missa Papae Marcelli"—as well as a new work by the British composer Ivan Moody. *Jan. 21 at 8.* (*145 W. 46th St. millertheatre.com.*)

### New York Philharmonic "Contact!" Series

The orchestra's essential new-music series, which was left for dead earlier this season, gets a new lease on life with concerts in winter and spring, at Williamsburg's National Sawdust. Members of the Philharmonic will perform works by the New York titan Elliott Carter (the Quintet for Piano and String Quartet) as well as pieces by several strong contemporary voices, including David Lang ("Sweet Air"), Zosha Di Castri, and Steven Mackey. *Jan. 23 at 7:30.* (*80 N. 6th St. nyphil.org.*)

### Music from Marlboro

Concerts given by alumni of the peerless chamber-music festival can offer some of New York's most dynamic performances. In this presentation, at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall, the musicians include the tenor Nicholas Phan, the violinist Carmit Zori, and the pianist Lydia Brown. The program combines works by Beethoven (selections from his "Irish Songs" as well as the String Quartet, Op. 59, No. 3), Haydn, and Vaughan Williams ("On Wenlock Edge," a tempestuous song cycle set to poetry by A. E. Housman). *Jan. 23 at 8.* (*212-247-7800.*)

### Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

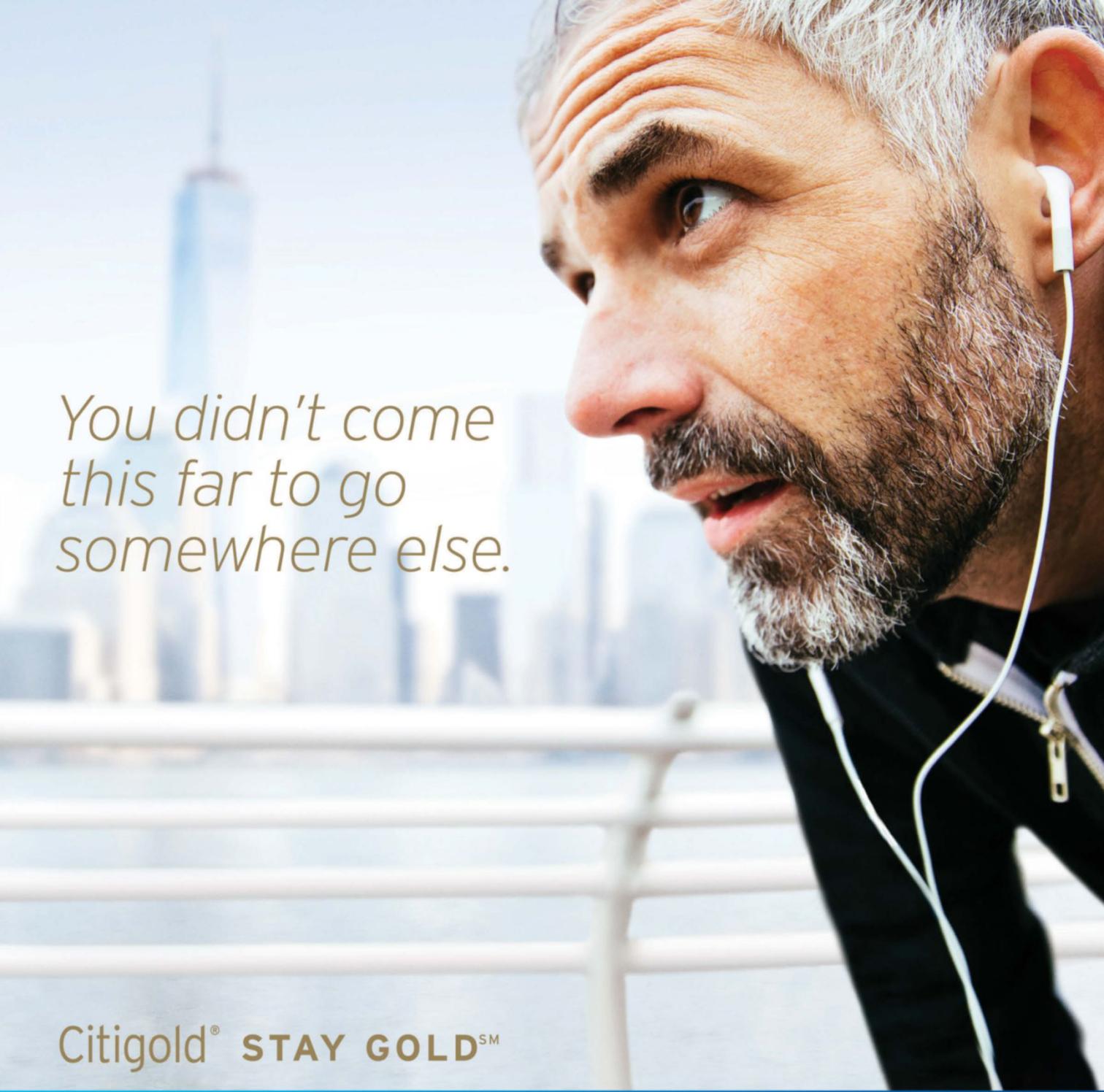
There may be no more gifted a clarinettist in New York than the Philharmonic's Anthony McGill, who joins the Society in a concert of works for the niche combination of clarinet, cello, and piano. It includes the genre's major work, by Brahms (the Trio in A Minor, Op. 114), as well as trios by Beethoven and the young American composer Joseph Hallman, whose piece "Short Stories" receives its New York première. Two formidable young virtuosos, the cellist Alisa Weilerstein and the pianist Inon Barnatan, complete the ensemble. *Jan. 24 at 7:30.* (*Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.*)

### Pacifica Quartet

The 92nd Street Y hosts the stylish and commanding string quartet, a cultural cynosure of Generation X. The fine clarinettist and composer Jörg Widmann joins them in Brahms's Clarinet Quintet, the climax of a program that also features works by Widmann and Haydn (the Quartet in G Major, Op. 76, No. 1). *Jan. 24 at 7:30.* (*Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.*)

### New York Festival of Song: "Pyotr the Great"

In this concert, a co-presentation with the New York Philharmonic's upcoming festival "Beloved Friend," NYFOS brings its inimitably ebullient style to a range of Russian songs by Tchaikovsky, in addition to selections by his colleagues Rubinstein, Arensky, and Taneyev. The outstanding Antonina Chehovska and Alexey Lavrov sing them; Steven Blier and Michael Barrett are at the piano. *Jan. 24 at 8.* (*Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330.*)



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# THE THEATRE



*La MaMa* celebrates the counterculture rock musical, which debuted in 1967, at the Public Theatre.

## Let the Sunshine In

*"Hair"* turns fifty.

WHEN “HAIR: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical” opened on Broadway, in 1968, it featured one of the best young casts ever to appear in an American musical. Diane Keaton, Melba Moore, and Ronnie Dyson were among the show’s stellar performers. The then twenty-two-year-old Keaton, in addition to having a little solo in “Black Boys,” was one of the few cast members who didn’t shed her clothes in the end. She didn’t see the point. Stories like this abound whenever the subject of “Hair” comes up. My own introduction to the musical was Miloš Forman’s 1979 movie version, with all those spectacular dances by Twyla Tharp, and that beautiful clown Annie Golden singing “Let the Sunshine In” into a cold winter sun.

What is it about this musical—which concerns a bunch of kids gathering in a park in New York’s East Village to welcome in the Age of Aquarius as one of their tribe goes off to war—that draws us to it, still? I think it has something to do with the co-lyricists James Rado and Gerome Ragni’s perfect melding of

story and antiwar sentiment with Galt MacDermot’s music, some of which might remind you of Sonic Youth’s controlled disarray.

It’s been fifty years since the spectacle was born, at the legendary producer Joseph Papp’s Public Theatre, in 1967. To commemorate that milestone, La MaMa, another venerable downtown institution, is hosting a one-night-only anniversary celebration on Jan. 21, as part of its Coffeehouse Chronicles series, featuring cast members from that production at the Public, and others, from its first Broadway incarnation and elsewhere. Actors including André De Shields and Keith Carradine—who starred in the original and have turned up in other “Hair” productions throughout the years—will be on hand to sing such unforgettable songs as “Aquarius” and “Where Do I Go?,” and Rado and MacDermot will share stories. (Ragni died in 1991.) It will give the actors a chance to celebrate Rado’s eighty-fifth birthday, and to contemplate the days and years it took for Rado and his collaborators to find their true, defiant voice in the uncertain time of yesterday’s youth.

—Hilton Als

### The Great American Drama

The New York Neo-Futurists present a new experimental show, created by Connor Sampson, in which the audience members are surveyed about what they want to see, and the cast members deliver. (*A.R.T./New York Theatres*, 502 W. 53rd St. 800-838-3006. In previews. Opens Jan. 22.)

### Jitney

Manhattan Theatre Club stages August Wilson’s drama about unlicensed cabdrivers in nineteen-seventies Pittsburgh, directed by Ruben Santiago-Hudson and featuring André Holland and John Douglas Thompson. (*Samuel J. Friedman*, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. In previews. Opens Jan. 19.)

### 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.)

### 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. Previews begin Jan. 24.)

### The Tempest

Phyllida Lloyd’s all-female Donmar Warehouse production comes to Brooklyn, featuring Dame Harriet Walter and set against the backdrop of a women’s prison. (*St. Ann’s Warehouse*, 45 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. Opens Jan. 18.)

### 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.)

## NOW PLAYING

### 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.)

# DANCE

## New York City Ballet

The season opens with five days of Balanchine, including his seldom seen one-act version of "Swan Lake" and the striking "La Sonnambula," in which an apparition in white glides across the stage, clutching a candle. (The trick is to make the tiny steps, called *bournées*, look like floating.) The Sunday matinée features the New York première of Justin Peck's "Scherzo Fantastique," created last summer for the company's Saratoga run. The music, by Stravinsky, is uncharacteristically lush, and Peck's response to it is dynamic and fleet. The piece will be performed as part of an all-Stravinsky program, along with Jerome Robbins's ballet about murderous females, "The Cage," and Balanchine's "Stravinsky Violin Concerto." • Jan. 17 at 7:30, Jan. 20 at 8, and Jan. 21 at 2 and 8: "La Sonnambula," "Prodigal Son," and "Firebird." • Jan. 18–19 at 7:30: "Allegro Brillante," "Swan Lake," and "The Four Temperaments." • Jan. 22 at 3 and Jan. 24 at 7:30: "Scènes de Ballet," "The Cage," "Eight Easy Pieces," "Scherzo Fantastique," and "Stravinsky Violin Concerto." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Through Feb. 26.)

## BODYTRAFFIC

The L.A.-based company returns to the Joyce with a triple bill that exemplifies its eclectic aesthetic. The most recognizable name on the program is Arthur Pita, a South African choreographer based in London, whose 2011 work "Metamorphosis"—yes, the one about the cockroach—came to New York a few years back. Pita's "Death Defying Dances" is composed of vignettes set to songs about ill-fated love affairs. Richard Siegal's "3 Preludes," on the other hand, is a lively quartet accompanied by Gershwin piano pieces. And from Anton Lachky the ensemble has commissioned "Private Games: Chapter One," a busy, intermittently grotesque work set in inky darkness. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 18–22.)

## Ruth Patir

On the eve of the Presidential Inauguration, Patir screens her film "Sleepers," in which dreams about Hillary Clinton, collected, in blog form, by Sheila Heti in 2008, mingle with images shot in St. Mark's Church in September, of back-rub circles and people dozing. On the day itself, Patir hosts readings and conversations; guests include the Moving Company, Lauren Bakst, and Effie Brown. (*Danspace Project, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St.* 866-811-4111. Jan. 19–20.)

## 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 that 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. 19–22. Through Feb. 12.)

## Isadora Duncan in the 21st Century / Fridays at Noon

The 92nd Street Y marks the dance innovator's hundred-and-fortieth birthday with performances of several solos she made famous, by dancers including the respected Duncan specialists Lori Belilove and Catherine Gallant. There is also a discussion, led by the scholar Andrea Mantell Seidel, of Duncan's politically motivated choreography and her influence on twentieth-century dance, which is hard to overstate. She introduced the idea that "serious" symphonic music need not be off-limits to dance, and that natural movement was as noble as anything in

the classical academic tradition. (*Lexington Ave. at 92nd St.* 212-415-5500. Jan. 20.)

## 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 on view during museum hours starting Jan. 17. (*Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St.* 212-708-9400. Jan. 24. Through Jan. 28.)

# NIGHT LIFE

## ROCK AND POP

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

### Cherry Glazerr

This dream-punk trio formed in 2011, its members coming from Los Angeles private schools and summer programs. For the group's upcoming album, "Apocalipstick," it sought out the storied producers Joe Chiccarelli and Carlos de la Garza—who have helped shape records by the Strokes, the White Stripes, M83, and Paramore—and recorded at the Sunset Sound Studio, in Hollywood. The result, a nimble, sunbaked rock record, never sounds overwrought or stale. Cherry Glazerr celebrates the new release this week on the Bowery. (*Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St.* 212-260-4700. Jan. 18.)

### Dashboard Confessional

Chris Carrabba has been engaged with emo since 1998, when he fronted the original lineup of the band Further Seems Forever. The Boca Raton songwriter fully crossed over in 2000, with the release of "Swiss Army Romance," the first record by Dashboard Confessional. Many of the band's most beloved songs are intimate acoustic numbers from that album, such as "Screaming Infidelities." But the group has since released five more studio albums, shedding some of its wistful emo-pop roots for a more mature, if sanitized, sound. Its live performances have always been summits for career-long diehards, and this three-night stand will likely be no different. (*Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl.* 212-777-6800. Jan. 21.)

### Heems

Himanshu Suri's long dance with the music industry has been as unconventional as the sardonic, confessional rhymes he's doled out since 2008. The Wesleyan alum was born in Queens to Hindi parents; he flirted with a career in finance before joining his friends Victor Vasquez and

Ashok Kondabolu to form the group Das Racist, a wisecracking hip-hop trio that carried the esoteric spirit of the Beastie Boys and De La Soul into the meta era. The group disbanded after one studio album, and Suri, known as Heems, set off on his own, starting a label, organizing politically in his native borough, and releasing witty rap tapes like "Nehru Jackets" and anxiety-riddled albums like "Eat, Pray, Thug." Now he splits duties in a new band, Swet Shop Boys, with the actor Riz Ahmed. Heems's loopy, hoarse flow, combined with a ceaseless barrage of cultural references and self-deprecation, make him an Everyman savant; he performs a solo set at this reopened market and show venue, supported by **Warm Brew** and **Akinyemi**. (*Brooklyn Bazaar, 150 Greenpoint Ave., Brooklyn.* 718-599-5800. Jan. 21.)

### A Music Benefit for Planned Parenthood and the A.C.L.U.

Since the election of Donald Trump, concerts whose proceeds go to supporting Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union have sprung up around the country. On the two days before the Inauguration, some of underground music's luminaries will come together for these causes at Brooklyn's Rough Trade and the Music Hall of Williamsburg. Performers include the kinetic folk musician **Sharon Van Etten**; **Daniel Rossen**, of the indie-pop groundbreakers Grizzly Bear; the brassy stylist **Beirut**; and Roberto Lange, who records haunting melodies under the moniker **Helado Negro**. (*Rough Trade N.Y.C.*, 64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn. [roughtradeny.com](http://roughtradeny.com). Jan. 19.)

### Lee Ranaldo

The winsome warbler Steve Gunn lives out of a suitcase for much of the year. His weathered yawping zips and dodges playfully in song; it's the voice of someone who has encountered many forks in the road. He joins Ranaldo, the guitarist and Sonic Youth veteran and another nomadic spirit. Ranaldo's reliable yearning, which neutralized Sonic Youth at its herky-jerkiest, is a steady force capable of taking listeners to unexpected new territory.

The two men co-headline this Brooklyn gig. (*Park Church Co-op, 129 Russell St., Brooklyn. Jan. 22.*)

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

### Ehud Asherie with Rebecca Kilgore

The Great American Songbook can unite keen interpreters of different generations. The pianist Asherie, an Israeli expatriate who has drawn attention in the past decade with his assured mainstream piano stylings, joins forces with the highly regarded West Coast-based singer Kilgore, whose recordings since the eighties include prized co-efforts with the eminent pianist and songwriter Dave Frishberg. Between the two of them, few valued standards will slip through the cracks. (*Mezzrow, 163 W. 10th St. mezzrow.com. Jan. 18.*)

### Jimmy Cobb

Cobb isn't the oldest classic drummer still performing (Roy Haynes, at ninety, has a few years on him), but the last surviving member of the band on Miles Davis's groundbreaking 1959 album, "Kind of Blue," is still going strong, at eighty-eight. Celebrating his longevity in style, Cobb gathers a multigenerational cluster of players, including the pianist **Larry Willis**, the bassist **John Webber**, and the saxophonist **Vincent Herring**, each well versed in hard bop—a genre that Cobb exemplifies with his judicious balance of elegance and aggressiveness. (*Smoke, 2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. 212-864-6662. Jan. 20-22.*)

### Jill Kargman

The comic mastermind behind the Bravo series "Odd Mom Out" and the essay collection "Sprinkle Glitter on My Grave" offers up the unholy alliance of hard rock and cabaret in her Carlyle début, "Stairway to Cabaret." The merciless ribbing of the denizens of the Upper East Side is Karman's bread and butter, so expect some deliciously uncomfortable moments amid the revelry. (*Café Carlyle, Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. 212-744-1600. Jan. 17-28.*)

### Branford Marsalis Quartet

**Kurt Elling** may not spring to mind when it comes to imagining a collaboration with the saxophonist Marsalis's quartet, but the results—as heard on last year's Grammy-nominated "Upward Spiral"—are a surprisingly effective fusion of exploratory post-bop and brainy lyricism. United by eclectic natures, Elling and the Marsalis unit (with the fine pianist **Joey Calderazzo**) train a collective eye to standards, bossa nova, original collaborations, and such offbeat material as Chris Whitley's "From One Island to Another." (*Rose Theatre, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Jan. 20-21.*)

### Tom Rainey

A go-to drummer for many present-day new-jazz visionaries, Rainey called in a few favors to stock his five-piece ensemble. Among the luminaries in this adventurous outfit are the trumpeter **Ralph Alessi**, the saxophonist **Ingrid Laubrock**, the pianist **Kris Davis**, and the bassist **Drew Gress**—a veritable supergroup of questing improvisers. Rainey's prodding and poking will provide both the glue and the impetus to smash the expected. (*Jazz Gallery, 1160 Broadway, at 27th St., Fifth fl. 646-494-3625. Jan. 20.*)

## MOVIES

### OPENING

**Split** M. Night Shyamalan directed this thriller, about efforts to thwart a kidnapper who has twenty-four personalities. Starring James McAvoy, Anya Taylor-Joy, and Betty Buckley. *Opening Jan. 20. (In wide release.)*

• **Staying Vertical** A drama, directed by Alain Guiraudie, about a filmmaker (Damien Bonnard) with writer's block who attempts to raise a child alone. *Opening Jan. 20. (In limited release.)*

### NOW PLAYING

#### The Ardennes

Robin Pront's début feature is a multi-speed affair. In a matter of minutes, we learn that Kenny (Kevin Janssens) and his brother Dave (Jeroen Perceval) were involved in a crime; that Kenny took the rap and went to prison; and that his girlfriend, Sylvie (Veerle Baetens), has since been seeing Dave. Even Cain didn't have that problem. Once Kenny is released, though, the movie loses muscle and momentum, as if brought low by Dave's inaction—he seems hobbled by the very idea of telling Kenny the truth. Then, with a change of setting, everything picks up again, as we are led into the forests of the title, and to a bout of bloodletting that verges on both the primeval and the surreal. Time and again, the movie strains for effect, favoring the tortuous over the plain. The brothers, embracing outside the jail, are reflected in the side-view mirror of a car. Janssens, likewise, fritters much of his character's force away in busy gestures—it might have proved more potent for being tamped down. Yet Pront does sustain the fatalistic mood; we believe, all too bleakly, that everything will turn out for the worst. In Flemish and French.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 1/16/17.) (In limited release.)*

#### 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 introducing him to powdered milkshakes.—A.L. (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 Monáe), 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.)*

#### 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 nar-

rative 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 compounds 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 rumitative priest.—A.L. (12/5/16) (*In limited release.*)

### **Julieta**

The latest film from Pedro Almodóvar is more temperate than what we grew accustomed to in his melodramatic prime, but it is just as sumptuous in its color scheme and no less audacious in shouldering a burden of plot beneath which other directors would sag. The source is an unlikely one: three stories by Alice Munro, which follow a single figure through motherhood and loss. *Julieta*—played in her youth by Adriana Ugarte and as an older woman by Emma Suárez—is a teacher of classical literature and myth. She has a child by a man whom she meets on a train (the scene is much lustier than it is on the page) and moves to be with him on the coast. But one sorrow after another intervenes, and it is only in maturity, after a chance encounter, that she starts to solve the puzzle of what feels like a broken life. Even then, the film is surprisingly open-ended; it leaves you wondering what mysterious path Almodóvar will take next. Fans will rejoice in the return of Rossy de Palma, one of his muses, although the role she plays here—a frizzy-haired Mrs. Danvers—may come as a shock. In Spanish.—A.L. (12/19 & 26/16) (*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

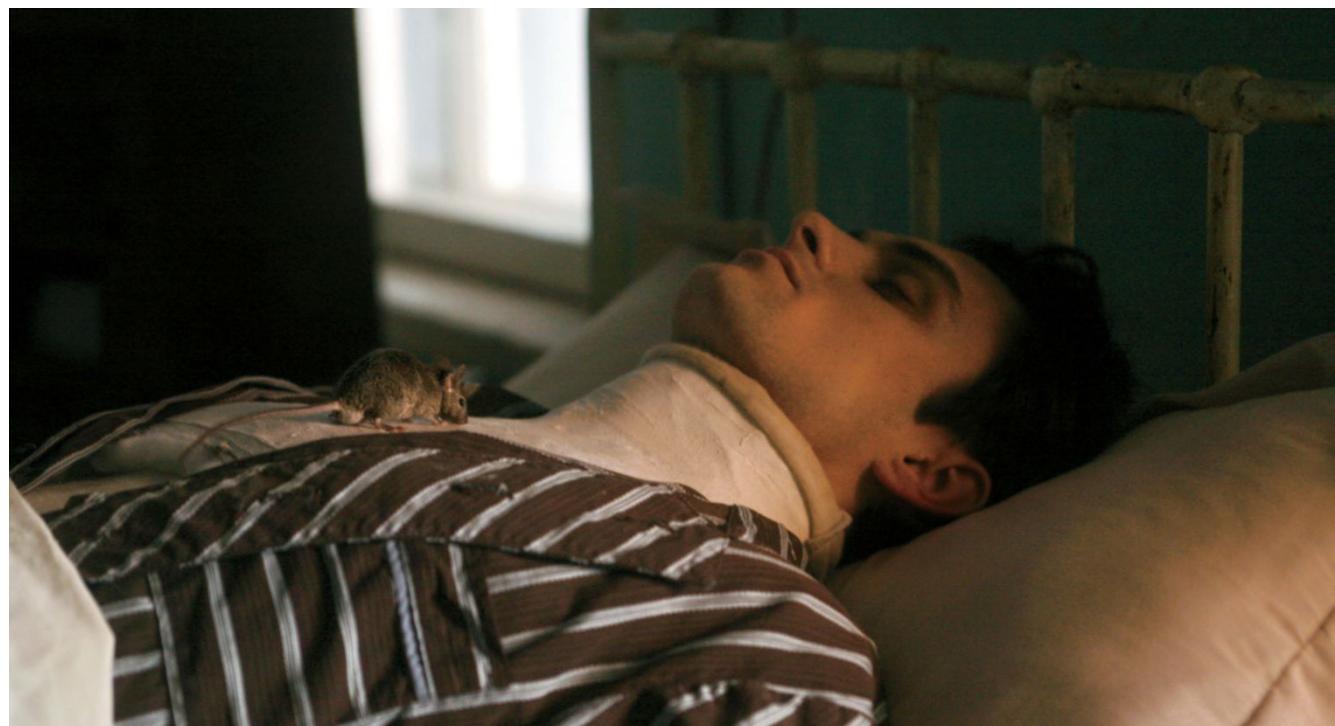
omits the best and the boldest behind-the-scenes machinations that Joe and his cohorts pull off, depicting instead the noisy but dull fireworks that result.—R.B. (*In wide release.*)

### **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, 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.*)

### **Modesty Blaise**

This psychedelically inventive 1966 spy spoof, adapted from a British comic strip and directed by Joseph Losey, suggests the cinematic fireworks of an auteurist 007. The title character, played by Monica Vitti—the star of Michelangelo Antonioni’s early-sixties masterworks—is an international secret agent who confounds powerful men with her charms and subjugates them with her intelligence. She’s summoned by the British government to hand a Middle East sheik a shipment of diamonds that’s sought by the arch-criminal Gabriel (Dirk Bogarde). Aided by her able sidekick, Wil-



“Scarred Hearts,” about a writer confronting disease, love, and Fascism in a Romanian sanitarium, screens Jan. 18–19 at Film Society of Lincoln Center.

lie Garvin (Terence Stamp), a working-class guy turned high-flying playboy, Modesty darts from Amsterdam (the site of some dazzlingly intricate aquatic plots) and London (in full sixties swing) to the posh island lair that Gabriel shares with the stylishly bloodthirsty Clara Fothergill (Rossella Falk). The vertiginous camera moves, the glitzy fashions, and the giddily miniaturized weaponry match the derisive tone of the cloak-and-dagger depravity, complete with a shocking execution and two blithe musical numbers. Losey captures with comedy the same chill of modernity beneath the Mediterranean sun that Antonioni captures with melodrama.—R.B. (*MOMA; Jan. 20.*)

### A Monster Calls

This narrowly didactic fantasy, directed by J. A. Bayona and based on a children's novel by Patrick Ness, is another maudlin entry in the dying-relative genre. It's the story of a bullied, solitary, and artistic twelve-year-old British boy named Conor O'Malley (Lewis MacDougall). He's haunted by a recurring nightmare, coping with the grave illness of his mother (Felicity Jones), and struggling with the authoritarian ways of his grandmother (Sigourney Weaver). One night, while sitting at his desk and drawing, he's visited by a monster without a name: a gigantic, gnarled yew tree with fire in its limbs and the imperious yet soothing bass voice of Liam Neeson. The monster will tell him three stories; in return, Conor must tell it one story, a true and deeply confessional one. In effect, the ambling tree is Conor's therapist, an orthodox Freudian who helps him to interpret the troubling mixed messages of his nightmare—and it's all about his mother. The mixed-media animations of the monster's mythological tales are eye-catching, but the movie is emptied out by its simplistic lessons: as Conor ultimately learns, only "yew" can help yourself.—R.B. (*In wide release.*)

### Paterson

The new Jim Jarmusch film stars Adam Driver as the title character; to call him the hero would be something of a stretch. He is a bus driver living in Paterson, New Jersey, with his wife, Laura (Golshifteh Farahani), and their dog, Marvin. In idle moments, during the evening or on his lunch hour, Paterson writes poems, not for publication but as if to gratify some private compulsion or demand. Not that they seem to cost him much in terms of emotional turmoil; we hear him recite them in a frictionless calm while the words appear patiently onscreen. (The verses are by Ron Padgett, although the presiding spirit is that of William Carlos Williams.) The movie follows Paterson's lead, guiding us through successive days and noting the minor differences between them. Regular scenes in a bar or on a bench are barely ruffled by incident, and the only gun that is pulled turns out to be a replica. Even as the film flirts with dullness, however, it starts to wield a hypnotizing charm, and Jarmusch has few peers nowadays in the art of the running—or, in his case, the gently strolling—gag.—A.L. (*1/2/17*) (*In limited release.*)

### Scarred Hearts

This fanatically detailed, intellectually furious drama, set in 1937, in a Romanian seaside sanatorium, catches a young Jewish writer in the jaws of disease and of Fascism. Based on the autobiographical writings of Max Blecher, it shows Emanuel (Lucian Teodor Rus), a handsome and accomplished poet, enduring treatment for Pott's disease—tuberculosis of the bone, which is rotting away his spine. The director, Radu Jude, unfolds the horrific treatment, involving long

needles, tight wraps, and a full-body cast, with an unflinching and fascinated specificity that contrasts with the teeming theatrical tableaux in which he films life in the lavish facility. The medical regimen provides a background for the slow-motion whirl of young intellectuals, politicians, and socialites who turn the hospital into a microcosm of European diseases of the soul. Nighttime parties for youths with prostheses, crutches, and braces devolve into sordid roars of patriotic, militaristic, and anti-Semitic chants. Sex is rampant and calamitously unsatisfying; literary ambitions and romantic dreams seep away along with physical ability. The unstinting exertions of the medical personnel and the patients' high-toned intelligence are as useless against disease as they are against Hitler and his local epigones. In Romanian.—R.B. (*Film Society of Lincoln Center; Jan. 18-19.*)

### 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 Garupe (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.*)

### The Son of Joseph

This arch, bold, and tender transposition of elements of the Nativity to the cramped secular life of a high-school student in current-day Paris is as much of an emotional wonder as a conceptual one. Vincent (Victor Ezenis), an only child, is something of a loner; he's being raised by his mother, Marie (Natacha Régnier), who refuses to tell him anything about the father he never knew. But Vincent does some snooping, finds out that his father is a big-time book publisher named Oscar (Mathieu Amalric), and insinuates himself into Oscar's splashy and decadent milieu, with tragicomic results. Meanwhile, Vincent encounters Oscar's ne'er-do-well brother, Joseph (Fabrizio Rongione), and discovers surprising affinities with him. The writer and director Eugène Green, an American émigré and a specialist in Baroque theatre, assigns the actors archaic diction and declamatory airs and stages an ecstatic scene of musical drama as an ideal fusion of style and substance. But the passionate heart of the action, Vincent's quest for emotional connection, involves his radical rejection of norms and proprieties and sparks the timeless fury of revolt; it's as thrilling as it is ingenious. In French.—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.*)

### Who's That Knocking at My Door?

Martin Scorsese's début feature has just the slightest bit of story line, but the movie is a fascinating portfolio piece: a black-and-white blueprint for "Mean Streets." Harvey Keitel plays one of Scorsese's Little Italy guys, a between-jobs bank teller who spends time going to the movies or carousing and roughhousing with fellow-idlers. When he strikes up a conversation with a pretty, educated woman (Zina Bethune) who's looking at *Paris Match*, it's as if he were contacting someone from another universe. Later, his Madonna-whore complex prevents him from connecting with her sexually or handling a secret from her past. Scorsese defines the character's conflicts too blatantly—he shoves religious statuary in your face—but the film is loaded with talent (Michael Wadleigh co-shot it, Thelma Schoonmaker edited), and the boys'-night-out sequences are peerless. The movie allows you to gauge the arc of Scorsese's career: mining Italian-American material here, refining it in "Mean Streets," and strip-mining it in "Good-Fellas."—Michael Sragow (*Museum of the Moving Image; Jan. 21-22.*)

# ART



A still from Arthur Jafa's lyric and searing installation at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, in Harlem.

## On Message

*A crucial ode to black America.*

OUR FORTY-FOURTH PRESIDENT, dignity incarnate, leaves office this week to make way for a reality-TV star. Whether you're looking for art to reflect a sense of outrage and despair or to deliver flashes of joy, Arthur Jafa's momentous video installation "Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death," at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, is required viewing. (It closes Jan. 28.)

Jafa's subject is bigger than politics—it's the matter of black life in the United States. A century of police brutality and political gains, of triumph, tragedy, and resilience has been distilled into seven lyric and searing minutes of rapid-fire clips culled from a passel of sources. A partial list: silent movies, documentary footage of marches and concerts, sports coverage, music videos, news stories, Hollywood blockbusters, police-dash-cam downloads, citizen journalism, the artist's home movies, and, of course, YouTube. (To viewers familiar with media art, the results may suggest a woke update of Bruce Conner's pioneering 1958 film collage, "A Movie.")

The piece opens with the hero-next-door Charles Ramsey, who rescued the Ohio kidnapping victim Amanda Berry,

in 2013, telling reporters, "I knew something was wrong when a little pretty white girl ran into a black man's arms. Dead giveaway." It ends with the singer James Brown collapsed on the stage, an image that becomes almost martyrlike in the wake of scene after scene of bodies violently felled.

Jafa has spoken of his desire to create a cinema that "replicates the power, beauty, and alienation of black music," and the length of his supercut was determined by Kanye West's song "Ultralight Beam," which plays behind the audiovisual patchwork like the beautiful backing of an intricate quilt.

At the age of fifty-six, Jafa is making his début at the gallery, but he has a distinguished career as a filmmaker, with credits ranging from a cinematographer for Stanley Kubrick's "Eyes Wide Shut" to the director of photography on Solange Knowles's video "Don't Touch My Hair." He may be best known as the cinematographer of "Daughters of the Dust," directed by Julie Dash. Like that movie (and like the paintings of Kerry James Marshall, now exultant at the Met Breuer), Jafa's "Love" disrupts the whitewashing of American culture with a black-centric view, one that is traumatic, ecstatic, and long overdue.

—Andrea K. Scott

### Studio Museum in Harlem

"Circa 1970"

The art world's intense nostalgia for the seventies continues with this exhibition of works from the museum's collection. While Jack Whitten and Jack Bowling rejected the notion that painting was dead and explored new possibilities for abstraction, other artists embraced poetic and historic motifs. Barbara Chase-Riboud's "Le Manteau," from 1973, is a six-foot-tall, freestanding cape made of bronze and hemp, stylistically indebted to Chinese embroidery and dedicated to Cleopatra. Most of the art here is American, but two African photographers reveal the power of images to craft identity. Malick Sidibe's portraits of Malian revellers vibrate with the joy of public celebration, while Samuel Fosso, in the privacy of his studio, shot himself in high-waisted bell-bottoms, reimagining "Saturday Night Fever" for the Central African Republic. *Through March 5.*

### GALLERIES—UPTOWN

#### Rebecca Morris

The L.A. abstractionist layers decorative references, loosely patterning her paintings with spray-painted grids or whimsical shapes. Morris's surfaces summon the world of craft: ceramics, faux finishes, summer-camp T-shirts. One commanding big square is reminiscent of a chunky pendant, with a raised, canvas-spanning, metallic-gold circle, excised with squiggles. It's curiously rendered, with a too-small brush and taped edges, over a beautiful batik-like surface of wavy white lines on a stained field of matte black. Another work is similarly dominated by a round form, a patchwork spiral of geometric shapes that evoke leopard print and dotted swiss. Morris seems to have an inexhaustible supply of tricks at her disposal, so it's to her credit that her work feels experimental rather than gimmicky. *Through Feb. 25.* (Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-752-2929.)

### GALLERIES—CHELSEA

#### Sergei Eisenstein

Best known as a pioneering Soviet filmmaker, Eisenstein also made thousands of drawings, a few hundred of which were so obscene that they remained private for decades. When he died, in 1948, Eisenstein's widow entrusted them to the cinematographer Andrei Moskin, whose heirs eventually sold them, in the late nineteen-nineties. Made all over the world and labelled in five languages, the dashing, if not quite distinguished, works, which have never before been exhibited in the U.S., include images of a naked dancer with tiny, Art Deco eyes and a *culo de acordeon*, and a bullfight interrupted by bestiality. Also on view is Eisenstein's unfinished film "*¡Que Viva México!*" *Through Feb. 11.* (Gray, 508 W. 26th St. 212-399-2636.)

#### Liz Glynn

Eight larger-than-life-size bronze sculptures are eerie mutations of Rodin. In a 2013 performance at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the young American artist made molds of the French Master's works. Then, working with a team of sculptors, she recombined the parts. In "Untitled (after Thinker)," the famous ruminator is missing a foot and holding an extra hand in his lap. "Untitled (after Balzac, with Burgher)" is the Frankenstein monster that its title suggests. Glynn is an assiduous and daring conceptualist with a

penchant for excavating the past. She pulls off this nervy tribute, echoing Rodin's own radical assemblage techniques (he famously reused and recombined his casts) and the hivelike spirit of his legendary atelier. *Through Feb. 11.* (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)

## GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

### Jan Dibbets

For this elegant exhibition, the stalwart Dutch conceptualist delves into his past, reworking negatives from the nineteen-seventies. Most depict the reflective hoods of automobiles, but that subject feels almost incidental. Dibbets isn't interested in cars; he's after the ways in which their surfaces result in pictures that can pass as abstract. Some of these works could be mistaken for Color Field paintings—only glints of light reveal their photographic origins. The show's best work, a grid of nine candy-colored versions of the same image, balances Pop panache and minimalist restraint. *Through Feb. 18.* (Freeman, 140 Grand St. 212-966-5154.)

### Anne Doran

Dada meets the Pictures Generation in the New York photo-conceptualist's sleek collages. A rotated image of cream-colored patio furniture abuts a tipped-over bottle of lime-green floor cleaner; a couple in a soft-core-porn shoot is bisected by office carpeting; Bic pens, crystal lampshades, and a military tank form an angular constellation. Except for the crucifix-shaped "Gloria," which includes a pixelated cat's face, these handsome, jarring works of appropriated photographs were conceived in the nineteen-eighties and -nineties but executed last year. Doran profits from the curious old-yet-new quality of her prescient, long-simmering works, whose acuity and dark humor transcend time and bend space. *Through Feb. 12.* (*Invisible Exports*, 89 Eldridge St. 212-226-5447.)

### Tamara Gonzales

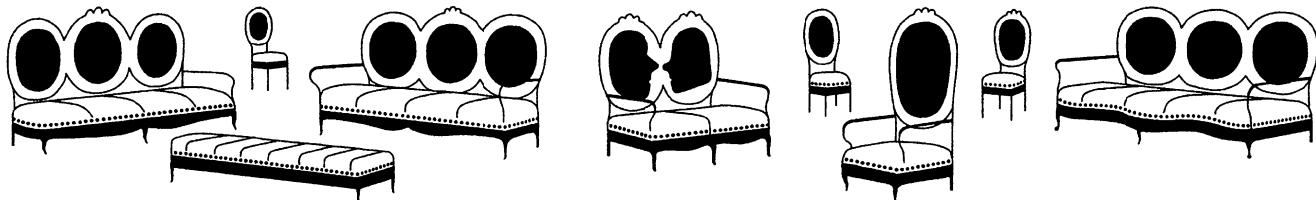
An eleven-foot-tall maraca, decorated with a cheerfully skeletal grimace of frosting-like acrylic paint, welcomes visitors to this exuberant show, which riffs on pre-Columbian motifs and was in-

spired by the artist's experiments with ayahuasca. A simple geometric figure (it alternately suggests Keith Haring's barking dog and an alligator baying at the moon) appears, in various poses, in three groups of works: brightly colored pencil drawings, large paintings made with acrylic and spray paint, for which Gonzales used lace as a stencil, and small tapestries woven and embroidered to order in Peru. Each series feels at once autonomous and buoyantly interconnected. *Through Feb. 12.* (*Von Nichtssagend*, 54 Ludlow St. 212-777-7756.)

### Jim Torok

In a show titled "The New Age of Uncertainty," the Brooklyn painter unites two disparate series: tiny, meticulous portraits of people he knows (his wife, a clerk at the local bodega) and larger, comic-like works, laden with text. Many of the latter are politically pointed; one is titled "It Should Have Been Bernie." The winningly primitive, almost hysterically expressive cartoons drift around the placid, hyperrealist faces like worries made visible. *Through Feb. 12.* (*Pierogi*, 155 Suffolk St. 718-599-2144.)

# ABOVE & BEYOND



### Software for Artists

This tech festival invites software coders and enthusiasts to a day of demonstrations and exhibitions that consider software's capacity for art. Demos include Fundroid, a robot that uses G.P.S., speed, and facial recognition to deliver pizza and beer, and Hope Floats, a console that automates calls to local government officials. (*Pioneer Works*, 159 Pioneer St., Brooklyn. [pioneerworks.org](http://pioneerworks.org). Jan. 22 at 10 A.M.)

## AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Collectors head back to **Sotheby's** this week for sales of American art and Americana. Capitalizing on the current enthusiasm for all things Alexander Hamilton, the house puts a collection of letters and documents, long held by a group of his descendants, up for sale on Jan. 18. The lots, some of which have been out of the public eye for more than two centuries, include a letter in Hamilton's hand, in which he lays out the treachery of Benedict Arnold; love notes; and even a lock of Hamilton's hair. This is followed by sales of American silver, furniture, and folk art—including a portrait of a rather bereft-looking boy in a white dress holding a cat—on Jan. 20. (*York Ave.* at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • **Christie's** kicks off the winter with a selection of Chinese export art (Jan. 18)—in other words, porcelain and enamel objects destined for the parlors of the European and American élite. The current offering includes Qianlong sconces, innumer-

able decorative bowls, and giant jars. Then, after a sale that features the furnishings of a stately Southern manse, Palmetto Hall (Jan. 19), the house devotes a day to outsider and folk art (Jan. 20), led by a large limestone lion carved by the African-American sculptor William Edmondson. (*20 Rockefeller Plaza*, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • As it does every year around this time, the **Winter Antiques Show** takes up residence at the Park Avenue Armory, with its upscale mix of antiquities, pre-Columbian sculptures, folk art, and Russian Imperial bric-a-brac (Jan. 20-29). (*Park Ave.* at 66th Street. [winterantiquesshow.com](http://winterantiquesshow.com).)

### Arsenal in Central Park

Park authorities and planners from across the country join members of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation in a discussion about the next generation of public spaces. Mitchell J. Silver, the city's Parks Commissioner, travels to a different borough each Sunday, where he photographs the area's parks, noting their usage and where there may be room for improvement. He will be joined by Kathryn Ott Lovell, from Philadelphia; Jayne Miller, from Minneapolis; and Jane Rudolph, from Arlington, Virginia. (830 Fifth Ave., Third fl. 212-360-1389. Jan. 18 at 6.)

## READINGS AND TALKS

### Rizzoli Bookstore

Between 2010 and 2015, the Swedish fashion photographer Per-Anders Pettersson attended forty fashion-week celebrations in more than sixteen countries across the African continent, including Botswana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Senegal, and the resulting photographs are collected in a new book, "*African Catwalk*." Pettersson documents bold yet meticulously controlled silhouettes that wind and burst at odd angles and utilize common prints and cuts in fresh ways. The book also includes several candids, like a group of models gazing into iPhone reflections, a table of insiders gabbing over emptied wine glasses, and a trio tucked in the back seat of a car in large hair rollers. (1133 Broadway. 212-759-2424. Jan. 18 at 6:30.)

### SVA Theatre

Designers continuously change the world, shaping the din of our daily lives with subtle iconographic cues. The School of Visual Arts offers the country's only master's degree in social innovation, asserting that politics, economics, and society can be realigned through design. Alumni of the program have tackled food waste in America, the gendered consumer behavior of the contraception industry, and the efficiency of medical facilities in India. "Design+Health," which marks the fifth anniversary of the program, examines how social design can affect health. A hundred and fifty practitioners from the visual-media world will participate in keynote discussions and demonstrations, and engage audience members on tools and tactics they can apply to their own work. (333 W. 23rd St. *measured.design*. Jan. 24 at 9 A.M.)

# FOOD & DRINK



## TABLES FOR TWO

### Sunday in Brooklyn

348 Wythe Ave., Brooklyn  
(347-222-6722)

JAIMIE YOUNG, THE former chef de cuisine at Atera, can do a lot more than eggs and pancakes, and his newest restaurant, Sunday in Brooklyn, a three-story enterprise in the former Isa space, on Wythe Avenue, is set up to display his versatility. There is an espresso bar, a to-go menu, a market area for homemade sauces and cured fish, a bar, an outdoor patio, and a dinner menu stocked with sustainably sourced fish roasted in a wood-fired oven. But what this place does best is clear and simple: the sticky, hedonistic brunch of your dreams.

From the outside, the building looks like an English town house—red brick, giant black-trimmed windows. Push through the heavy front door, and it's instantly L.A.—white stucco walls, palms, gray marble tables, geometric planters, and a host in a tiny-patterned button-up shirt. Settle in, and the cozy space reveals itself as a lumberjack's fantasy, complete with an unfinished beam ceiling and the cabin smell of a working fireplace. Sunlight drenches the room and unites the diverse styles. It feels good to be there.

A perfect meal starts with a warm pecan sticky bun and coffee served in gorgeous bone china. Move on to the egg-and-sausage sandwich. Like the hot sauce, the mustard, and the roast beef, the break-

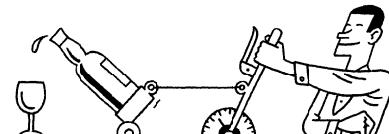
fast sausage is made in house, spiked with sage and maple syrup. "Tastes like camping," a bearded gentleman in buffalo check says. The sausage is blanketed in crispy shoestring potatoes, fluffy scrambled eggs, Cheddar, and spicy Gochujang aioli, and tucked into a sesame brioche bun that's been toasted and heavily buttered. The attraction to the sandwich is almost physical. Offset the richness with a bright, spicy Sunday, Bloody Sunday mezcal Bloody Mary, thick with fresh tomatoes and sambal.

At some point, someone near you will order the pancakes, and you will turn involuntarily to stare at the stack coated in hazelnut-praline-maple syrup and brown butter. Gesture to your waiter for an order of those. The sauce, the texture of butterscotch, slips down the sides like a slow-motion waterfall. It tastes like melted gelato. The pancakes, slightly undercooked, seem almost naughty.

The healthy options are comically punishing by comparison. Everything in the grain bowl—toasted barley, sautéed kale, cauliflower, and a pickled egg—is cold. The oatmeal is best eaten with a fork. The pastrami cod is disappointingly underspiced. Even this crowd—leather baseball caps with shearling trim, neoprene sweatshirts—seems happy to forgo their avocado toast for a day. Give in to your sloppiest self; you'll have a long enough walk to the subway to start making amends. (*Dishes \$3-\$23.*)

—Becky Cooper

## BAR TAB



### Tip Top Bar & Grill

432 Franklin Ave., Brooklyn (718-857-9744)

Barack Obama, judging by his approval rating, is a President with whom people might like to have a beer. His recent farewell party at the White House was an opportunity for some to do just that, but, if you didn't get an invitation, the next best thing might be Tip Top Bar & Grill, a low-ceilinged, vinyl-signed dive in the southwest elbow of Bed-Stuy. The walls are lovingly covered with images of the outgoing President: he's smiling on a clock next to a watermark of Martin Luther King, Jr.; speaking at a lectern with a "Change We Can Believe In" sign above him; and, slightly less convincing, alongside Michelle, in an advertisement for a "first couple farewell sculpture," a hand-painted porcelain number standing eleven inches tall. Tip Top's drinks are simple and generous—a beer-and-shot special is five dollars—and a good deal for anyone who's not a lurid teetotaler with billions of dollars of shady debt. "People here are going to be crying in a few days," a customer said on a recent evening. "People will be crying everywhere," someone replied. For the time being, though, spirits were high. After a few rounds, the menu for Aunt Sally's Kitchen (operated from a window in the back of the bar) becomes even more tempting—Sally serves delicious fish-and-chips whose appetizing scent floats intermittently through the air. An old-school jukebox, filled with songs by artists who'd likely refuse to perform at the upcoming Inauguration, played a string of pop and soul classics, and, at the end of the evening, people walked out of the warm and familiar room and into the cold and unwelcoming winter night.—Colin Stokes



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## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT PARTING WORDS

After eight years, few lines from Barack Obama's Presidential speeches stay in mind. For all his literary and oratorical gifts, he didn't coin the kinds of phrases that stick with repetition, as if his distaste for politics generally—the schmoozing, the fakery—extended to the fashioning of slogans. He rarely turned to figurative language, and he never stooped to "Read my lips," or even "Ask not what your country can do for you." His most memorable phrase, "Yes we can," spoke to the audacious odds of his own run for the Presidency, not a clear political vision. He sought to persuade by explaining and reasoning, not by simplifying or dramatizing—a form of respect that the citizenry didn't always deserve.

This aversion to rhetoric, like Obama's aloofness from Congress, is a personal virtue that hurt him politically. It's connected to his difficulty in sustaining public support for his program and his party. Even the President's hero, Abraham Lincoln, was a master of the poetic sound bite.

Obama's farewell address from Chicago last week was one of the very best speeches of his Presidency. He had one overriding message: that American democracy is threatened—by economic inequality, by racial division, and, above all, by the erosion of democratic habits and institutions. Its urgency gave the speech an unusual rhetorical punch: "If you're tired of arguing with strangers on the Internet, try talking with one of them in real life"; "If every economic issue is framed as a struggle between a hardworking white middle class and an undeserving minority, then workers of all shades are going to be left fighting for scraps while the wealthy withdraw further into their private enclaves"; "We sit back and blame the leaders we elect without examining our own role in electing them." Lines like these might not prove deathless, but because of their

bluntness, and because the times are desperate, they hit hard.

Politicians are always letting the public off the hook—it might be the most unforgivably dishonest thing they do. Obama was more candid than most, reminding Americans that the quality of our democracy depends on us—on our capacity to reason and to empathize, our attachment to facts, our willingness to get our hands dirty even when the political game seems sordid or futile. The key word of the speech was "citizen," which Obama called "the most important office in a democracy," one that he'll embrace in his post-Presidency. His exhortations and implications of blame were nonpartisan: conservatives might have heard their denial of science called out, while liberals might have been stung by the allusion to fair-weather activism. Whites and non-whites alike were urged to imagine inhabiting a different person's skin.

Perhaps there was a degree of self-blame, too. For all the achievements that Obama is able to claim—from bringing health insurance to twenty million Americans to building a framework for slowing climate change—he couldn't deliver a healthy democracy. He didn't have the political skill to advance his abiding vision of a United States of America. Maybe no leader could have, but Obama's opponents made sure of his failure.

Most Presidential farewell addresses are quickly forgotten. Hardly anyone knows that Bill Clinton and George W. Bush both gave one, as did Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. Those which endure are memorable for their warnings. When the new republic was still taking shape, in 1796, George Washington cautioned against domestic factionalism and foreign entanglements. At the height of the Cold War, in 1961, Dwight Eisenhower described a new "military-industrial complex" and a "scientific-technological élite" that were taking over public policy. Obama's warning in Chicago—owing



to its context, ten days before the Inauguration of President Donald Trump—felt even more dire. He quoted from Washington's address, but not its most obviously relevant passage, on the danger of partisan demagoguery: "It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foments occasionally riot and insurrection. It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which finds a facilitated access to the government itself through the channels of party passions."

If the President had quoted these words, he would have come close to naming the greatest threat to American democracy: his successor. Obama mentioned Trump only once, in passing. His aim was broader than one man, and his respect for the office kept the President from making it personal. (His chief speechwriter, Cody Keenan, said, "If there's one democratic norm that he can protect even as all others are shredded, it's the peaceful transfer of power.") Instead, the President-elect haunted the farewell address like a spirit too malevolent to be named.

The following day, Trump materialized in the flesh, in Trump Tower, for his first press conference in nearly six months. He was even looser and cockier than usual. He insulted media organizations by name. He reversed his avowed position on

Russian interference in the American election, as casually and as brazenly as he had once reversed himself on President Obama's citizenship. He relived the night of his victory, one more time. He revelled in his immunity from conflict-of-interest law. ("I didn't know about that until three months ago, but it's a nice thing to have.") He disparaged his Vice-President, who was in attendance, for not being rich enough to benefit from the same immunity. He congratulated himself for turning down a two-billion-dollar deal, which looked like a cartoonish bribe, from an Emirati businessman. He pretended to disentangle himself from the prospect of non-stop corruption during his Presidency. He told his sons to take care of the family business while he's away, or else.

All the while, a retinue of aides cheered and laughed like the nervous flunkies of a Mob capo. It was impossible not to feel that, for Trump, the Presidency means a supreme chance for payback, revenge for the humiliation that seems to be his constant fear.

This is the last week of the Obama Presidency. Historians will argue over its meaning and its merits. But, for democratic integrity, there's no argument, no contest. Obama's final speech wasn't just a warning—it will stand as an emblem of what we have been and perhaps can be.

—George Packer

## HERE TO THERE DEPT. TOP DOGS



WHEN THE OUTGOING President warned, in his farewell speech, of the ways in which inequality corrodes the social fabric, he probably wasn't referring to commercial airline travel. But, with its ever-expanding system of subclasses and legroom fees, is there any better symbol of our self-sorting tendencies?

Until recently, airborne animals were unaffected. While their owners squabbled over medallion status, they generally sat, crated, in the cargo hold—the last vestige of airline equality. All that changed this year, with the opening of the ARK at JFK, which calls itself "the world's first privately owned, 24/7 animal airport terminal." Situated "airside"—near the tarmac—it offers luxurious amenities, including climate-controlled stalls for horses and, for dogs, a bone-shaped splashing pool and a spa that gives "pawdicures." Fees for dogs start at around a hundred dollars. Horses can cost up to ten thousand.

Pet travel has always been rough. "You sit in baggage," John Cuticelli, the ARK's developer, said last week. "If you have to be there four hours before the flight, the animal has to be there *six* hours before." Customer service is nonexistent. "We see, in cargo, little cages that say, with tape, 'Fido eats at two o'clock, three o'clock, and five o'clock, and here's the food.'" The baggage guys ignore it. "They're not trained! They're baggage handlers!" Cuticelli was standing outside the ARK: a long gray building with tall windows, by Cargo Area D. A private-equity man with silver hair, he has a cockapoo named Tucker, but his passion is not animals so much as "deals that have very high barriers to entry." He won the contract to develop the ARK from the Port Authority in 2013.

Cuticelli hopes that when the ARK is fully operational, in March, it will serve five thousand horses a year, and seven to ten thousand dogs and cats. "And there are quite a number of birds that fly," he said.

Cuticelli's wife, Beth, the ARK's managing director, gave a visitor a tour. The first stop was the Pet Oasis, a facility not unlike the Delta Sky Club, with a sleek reception desk. "We're the lounge," Beth said. Dogs and cats can stop in for a few

hours "if you've got a short layover, or you're waiting for someone to pick you up." In back were rows of spacious gray kennels, accented with primary colors. She pointed out a veterinary-triage area, staffed with a technician; it had a bathtub and a blow-dryer for freshening up. "If they've been on a long flight, frequently they'll soil themselves," Beth said. There was a little yard "for relieving" and a kitchen stocked with Royal Canin.

"We don't have any cats in residence now," she said, passing the cat kennels.



But a fluffy collie sat perkily in kennel SKS-43. His name was Aidan, and he belonged to Joanne O'Connell, the facility's manager. She reported that the first guests at the Pet Oasis were a group of Korean puppies and a springer spaniel on his way from Atlanta to Bangor.

Back out front, John Cuticelli pushed open a barnlike door marked "Equine Arrivals." Inside were twenty-four elegant black steel stalls. He noted the fresh wood shavings on the floor, for weary horses to stretch out on. "It's just like going to a Ritz-Carlton," he said. "The bed's made. The horse enters, and here's the pillow, here's the little thing at the foot of the bed"—a rubber mat, for traction. Each stall comes with three flakes of Timothy hay and two water buckets. "Then it's an à-la-carte menu," Cuticelli added. Owners can request special hay, oats, and nutrients. He picked up a remote control, and the voice of Pavarotti filled the barn. Apparently, horses like opera.

The accommodations for birds seem less luxurious, probably because of the creatures' potential as carriers of disease. Cuticelli pointed out quarantine and biosecurity features and a room with a concrete feeding pool, where U.S.D.A. officials will examine water birds like flamingos. More exotic furry tourists, such as zoo animals, will remain in their travelling cages. Livestock will be directed to a special pen, which has a built-in "poo chute" to siphon off up to five thousand pounds of manure.

The swankiest part of the ARK isn't finished yet. For longer pet stays, a warehouse is being converted into a "resort" called Paradise 4 Paws. Cuticelli pointed out an area that will become doggie "suites": rooms with human-size beds, plasma screens for pets to FaceTime with their owners, art, and a "nightly tuck-in service." Cuticelli said, "You could say, I want my dog swimming twice a day, massaged once a day, running on the treadmill, let outside a number of times, and served a steak dinner."

Sadly, he said, the pampering ends when it's time to board the plane. "The truth is that once the animal's in the airplane there's absolutely nothing you can do for it. Because it's still in the cargo hold."

—Lizzie Widdicombe

## WHITE SMOKE DEPT. POPE IN A SOAP



"IF YOU DON'T mind smoke, you can sit here," Paolo Sorrentino said, indicating the seat beside him. "If you do"—he pointed to a distant couch. Sorrentino, the Italian writer-director of the new HBO series "The Young Pope," was ashing his Toscanello cigar out a window in the living room of his pied-à-terre, sixty-eight floors above Manhattan. A blueberry-scented candle flickered. Beneath his nest of graying hair and his Roman nose, Sorrentino's smile was melancholy. "I smoked cigarettes for twenty years, two box a day," he went on. "I love smoke, but seven years ago I change to cigars so I don't . . ." He sucked in.

"Inhale," suggested Sorrentino's translator, Michael Moore, a partly bald man with a worried face.

"Inhale, yes," Sorrentino said, pluming white smoke.

In the show, both Lenny Belardo, an American cardinal newly installed as Pope Pius XIII (Jude Law), and his surrogate mother, Sister Mary (Diane Keaton), smoke constantly. Sorrentino said that in his research he'd turned up rumors that Pope Benedict XVI, who stepped down in 2013, "used to smoke, but not in public. The people of the Church, they smoke, they swear, they do everything we do." In the show, both a rivalrous cardinal and the new Pope below "Fuck!" when vexed.

Sorrentino switched to Italian, and his remarks grew intricate and sonorous. As Moore studied his shorthand notes, then delivered a monotone précis, Sorrentino tapped ash on the traffic below. The filmmaker declared that he intended a fresh take on the Vatican: "There has never been an American Pope or recently a young Pope—forty-five, within the Church hierarchy, is relatively young." Isn't the Pontiff forty-seven? "Oh, Dio," Sorrentino said, before reverting to English. "I was forty-five when I started this!"

Pope Jude Law demands Cherry Coke Zero for breakfast. Is that an American thing? "I don't think so," Sorrentino said,

"but I thought it would be fun to put it in." The show has been sold in a hundred and ten countries. Did it help sales that Pope Jude Law is naked a lot? "Just once he's naked," Sorrentino said. Really? "Well," he allowed, "showing the Pope in pajamas, the Pope taking a shower—it jumps out at the viewer's eye, yes, but it's just part of the aesthetic of showing the hidden Vatican."

The Pontiff takes an interest in a Swiss guardsman's wife (Ludivine Sagnier), also often unclothed; soon enough, she guides the Papal palm to her breast. Sorrentino explained, "The fact that there are no records, in modern times, of clerics having sex inside the Vatican does not exclude the fact that there are plenty of rumors."

Despite the nudity, "The Young Pope" is essentially a Cecil B. De Mille-style costume drama. Pope Jude Law has fifteen outfits, a fresh alb and tippet for each aspect of his mercurial personality. Sorrentino shot in Rome, the U.S., and South Africa, and built a life-size Sistine Chapel. The frequent scenes of the Pope contemplating statuary were, he said, "dictated by our site inspection. The Vatican is always getting presents, and many of them are statues, so they stick them everywhere, behind every hedge—a kind of overdose of beauty."

Pope Jude Law's theology proves, jarriugly, to derive from the Inquisition. But the show's real twist is that he may not be a believer. "Because Catholic priests are celibate, they're in a loving relationship with God," Sorrentino explained. "So when they experience a midlife crisis, it regards their love for Him." Moore frowned at his notes, gave a small sigh of difficulty, and continued: "However, despite himself, there's an undercurrent—a burden of irony—where you feel this Pope was almost chosen by the Holy Spirit for this position."

O.K. But isn't Pope Jude Law kind of a sadistic twerp? Sorrentino shrugged. "I wasn't so worried about making him too repulsive," he said. "He will experience a sentimental evolution. And although in modern times it's difficult to find a Pope who has abused his power to such an extent, who has taken such pleasure in humiliating people, there is no lack of historical precedents."

Character, in this papacy, is subordinate to spectacle. Sorrentino said, "It was a huge test to see if I could produce

something as visually splendid as the Catholic Church has produced, the apparatus of majesty it has projected over the centuries." He added, "It would have been terrific to shoot in the real apartments, Raphael's loggia, the Papal—" Moore paused in his translation. "Casino?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Casina," Sorrentino said. In English, he clarified: "A small house. The Vatican can does not have a casino."

Perhaps in Season 2.

—Tad Friend

## CHICAGO POSTCARD FAREWELL



THE MOOD WAS anything but sombre. Eighteen thousand people left the cold and rain of a Chicago night and milled about inside the cavernous McCormick Place, waiting for Barack Obama. As a slide show of images from Obama's Presidency was projected on giant screens, a succession of pointedly chosen songs, from Foo Fighters' "My Hero" to Maxine Nightingale's "Right Back Where We Started From," played. Soon, Eddie Vedder and the Chicago Children's Choir would take the stage to perform "People Have the Power." And, like a Pearl Jam fan going to a show in 2016 wearing a concert T-shirt from 1991, attendees at President Obama's farewell were not shy about demonstrating just how far back they went.

Dee Fox wore a button from 2008, with a picture of Barack and Michelle under the words "Our Next President and First Lady." Above it, she had placed her oval "I Voted" sticker. She'd come from Texas, and had on an Obama T-shirt that said "CHANGE WE CAN BELIEVE IN" on the front and "I'M FIRED UP" on the back. Her nails were painted a metallic purple; her sneakers were glittery silver. Periodically, she stood on her chair to get a better look.

"I'm a retired schoolteacher," she said. "I've had health care all my life. I didn't vote for him because I needed any *gifts*." She worked phone banks in 2012 and 2016, for Obama and then for Hillary Clinton. "A lot of people vote against their own interests," she said, about this last election. "I read the Bible, and the word is very clear that you love your neighbor as yourself. And you're saying you want to take health care away from your neighbor? People vote like you buy a lottery ticket. You know when the Powerball hits four hundred million dollars? You know you're not going to win, but you take a chance."

Wylene Patterson, a medical technologist at Evanston Hospital, lived in Obama's district when he was a state senator. "I'd see him around Hyde Park," she said. "He impressed me. He had his views, but didn't always reveal his hand. He was cool."

Patterson sat with her coat on her lap. She didn't want to think about the 2016 election. "Coming up when I did, because I'm sixty-three, I have never, ever felt like I do now. On Election Night, I was in total denial. My mother died on the eighth, several years ago,

and on the eighth was this election. I said, 'You know, this day is jinxed.'"

Chris McDonald, an elegantly dressed retiree, worked phone banks for Obama in 2008 and 2012. "It was interesting to call places during his first run," she said. "I got hung up on a lot. I heard the N-word a lot. With one woman, I said, 'Well, Ma'am, I'm an N-word.' Click." She recalled, "I remember calling this one guy who had a farm. He said, 'Well, what's all the damned fuss about?' And I said, 'At least we can give this younger person a try.' And he said, 'Well, do you *know* him?' And I said, 'No, but I'll give him a try.' And so he told me all his concerns, and we talked about them, and I said, 'Let's just give this man a try.' 'Well,' he said, 'you're a nice gal, so I might just do that.'"

McDonald taught in Chicago public schools for thirty-two years, and saw Obama's return as a needed balm for the city. "I'm so sick of people saying negative things about Chicago," she said. But the prospect of reversing the progress of the past eight years rankled: "There's a reason Mitch McConnell and all them did that dirty shit. Because they're dirty people. People standing here have to get a hint, and not vote the same Congress and Senate back in. We can't let the same damned people do the same damned thing. If we always do what we always did, we'll always get what we always got."

Veronica Thigpen was with her thirteen-year-old daughter, August, who wore a sweatshirt that said "PEACE LOVE SKATE." (She's a synchronized skater.) They had been to Springfield in 2007, when Obama announced his candidacy for the Presidency. August was three. They were at the Democratic National Convention in 2008, and at the Inauguration in 2009. Obama is the only President August has known. Of her younger impressions of him, she said, "I thought he controlled everything. Like he was the king of the world or something."

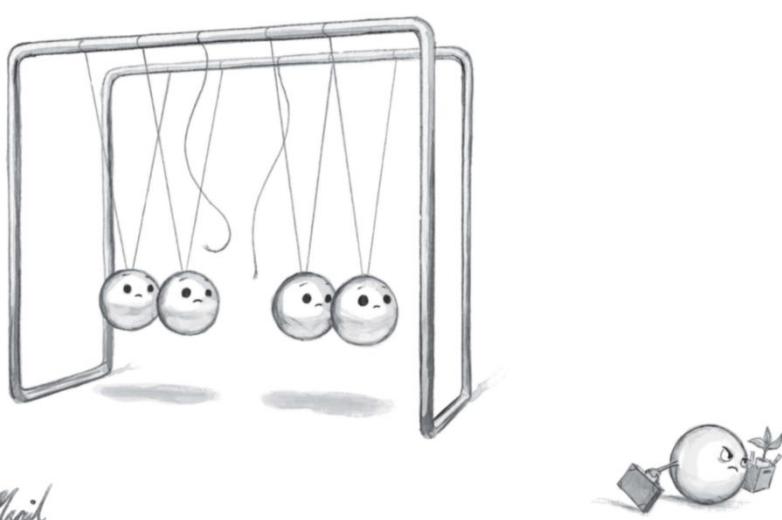
August is in the seventh grade at the Lab School, which the Obama girls attended before they moved to D.C. "I used to play with them," August said.

"She met them once," Thigpen clarified.

"I definitely feel like I know him," August said. "It's going to be really different to not say 'President Obama' anymore."

—Dave Eggers

W. McNeil



## THE FINANCIAL PAGE

### BIG-TICKET TRANSIT

**O**N NEW YEAR'S EVE, at a party to celebrate the opening of the long-awaited Second Avenue subway, Governor Andrew Cuomo said the project showed that government "can still do big things and great things." What he didn't say is that the project also shows that government can do really expensive things. The line, which so far consists of just three stations and two miles of track, is, at a cost of roughly \$1.7 billion per kilometre of track, the most expensive ever built. And it will keep that record as Phase 2 begins, at a projected cost of \$2.2 billion a kilometre.

Construction projects everywhere are subject to delays and cost overruns. Bent Flyvbjerg, a Danish economic geographer, has found that nine out of ten infrastructure mega-projects worldwide ran over budget and the same number finished behind schedule. But the U.S. is the world's spend-thrift. A 2015 study by David Schleicher, a professor at Yale Law School, and Tracy Gordon, a fellow at the Urban Institute, looked at a hundred and forty-four rail projects in forty-four countries. The four most expensive, and six of the top twelve, were American, the Second Avenue subway among them. In a study of transit construction costs worldwide, Alon Levy, a transit blogger, has found that they are often five to six times higher here than in other developed countries.

We used to do better. Hoover Dam was completed under budget, and two years ahead of schedule, and the Golden Gate Bridge, too, was finished early and cost \$1.3 million less than expected. So what's going wrong? It's complicated: one analysis of the problem cited thirty-nine possible causes. And factors that immediately come to mind, like higher land costs or labor costs, don't explain the difference between the U.S. and places like Japan or France. But some problems are clear. A plethora of regulatory hurdles and other veto points drag things out and increase costs. When New Jersey wanted to raise the roadway of the Bayonne Bridge, it took five years, and twenty thousand pages of paperwork, for the project to get under way. Obviously, environmental and workplace standards are important, but a recent paper by Philip Howard, the chairman of Common Good, suggests that a more streamlined regulatory process, like those found in many developed countries, could save hundreds of billions of dollars.

Then, too, because most infrastructure decisions in the U.S. are made at the state or local level, involving multiple governing bodies, projects must also satisfy a wide range of

constituencies. Political considerations are often as important as technical ones, and schemes that are initially well defined can end up like Swiss Army knives, fulfilling any number of functions. Long-suffering engineers call this "scope creep." Washington and Oregon, for instance, spent years collaborating on plans for a new bridge on I-5, spanning the Columbia River. What started as a simple proposal quickly morphed into a full highway expansion (including the rebuilding of five miles of interchanges), along with a light-rail extension. The cost rose to more than three billion dollars, after which the idea was abandoned.

A major cause of scope creep is the fact that infrastructure spending is at the mercy of political winds. Planners know that opportunities to build are limited, so when they do get a chance they tend to milk it for all it's worth. Politicians, meanwhile, like big, splashy projects that will win headlines and capture the public's attention. This is why we end up putting money into new projects while skimping on maintenance, even though the return on investment from simply keeping roads and bridges in good shape is usually higher.

Politicians are fond of a quote commonly attributed to Daniel Burnham, the father of Chicago's Exposition of 1893: "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood." It's an inspiring sentiment, but emblematic of what you might call the Edifice Complex, a habit, among politicians, of imagining that anything big and glitzy must therefore be worth doing. That's how Detroit ended up with a People Mover monorail that moves very few people, why San Jose is set to spend more than a hundred and fifty million dollars on a transit station intended as "the Grand Central Station of the West," and how

New York managed to spend four billion dollars on a PATH station designed by Santiago Calatrava. On the Second Avenue line, too, the stations, which account for most of the cost, are lavish structures with huge mezzanines. They're a pleasure to walk through, but more modest stations would have worked just as well.

Conservatives often reflexively dismiss infrastructure spending as a boondoggle, and liberals, perhaps in reaction, often reflexively defend it, no matter how wasteful. But the pool of dollars available for something like public transit is limited. The result of extravagant spending on subways and the like is that we end up with fewer of them than other cities. For the price of what New York spent on Calatrava's PATH station alone, Stockholm is building nineteen kilometres of subway track and a six-kilometre commuter-rail tunnel. Worse, cost overruns fuel public skepticism toward government, making it harder to invest the next time around. It's good for government to do big things, great things. But it's better if it can do them under budget.

—James Surowiecki



# MY FATHER'S CELLAR

*A lifetime of drinking.*

BY JOHN SEABROOK

MRS. HALL, my third-grade teacher at St. John's Day School, had given the class a homework assignment: draw a floor plan of your parents' house or apartment. Our house was big, but I did my best to include all the rooms on the first floor—kitchen, dining room, breakfast room, library, drawing room (a funny name for the room where the adults sometimes played cards), living room, two powder rooms, and bar.

I had to re-start a couple of times until I got a feel for the proportions. I liked the way the assignment made me

off the dining room which connected the front of the house with the back. Although small, the room produced maximum merriment per square foot. The bar was like a magic hat from which a magician pulls impossibly long scarves of colored silk. It sounded big—the violent rattle of the Martini shaker and the muted explosion of a champagne cork reverberated throughout the house. The liquor cabinet was a men's club of masculine archetypes: someone's ornery grandfather on the whiskey bottle; on the gin, a British Beefeater, dressed like

So I redid the whole plan, trying to draw the bar to scale, but it still came out larger than it actually was. "That's better, thank you, darling," my mother said, but I could tell she was worried about Mrs. Hall.

MOST OF MY FATHER's alcohol was secured in a cellar somewhere in the basement. Its location was a mystery to me, at first. Clearly, the wine and the champagne he served at dinner and at parties came from somewhere. There was no wine in the bar except for a few bottles of lesser whites in the fridge, for those sorry guests who preferred a glass of wine to a cocktail before dinner.

My father, John M. Seabrook (called Jack), was the scion and president of Seabrook Farms, a large frozen-food company that operated on more than fifty thousand acres in southern New Jersey—a kind of feudal empire that resembled, in his mind, at least, the ven-



think. I was momentarily outside the familiar rooms and the lives we lived there, looking in. Eventually, I managed to fit all the rooms into the square boundaries of my plan. I was proud of my work, and showed it to my mother.

"Oh dear," she said, and laughed.

"What's so funny?"

"It's just the size of the bar, darling." She laughed again—light but with a hint of tension. "It's so big. Mrs. Hall will think we're alcoholics!"

My bar, labelled "BAR" in big, blocky letters, was a large rectangle exactly in the middle of the plan, as big as the kitchen.

The bar was a narrow passageway

the real ones we had seen at the Tower of London, in a bright-red jacket and round black hat, holding a long spear. There were chrome-plated grippers and squeezers and shakers that my father washed and laid out on a dish towel before the guests arrived. There were the names of cocktails: Martinis, Daiquiris, Manhattans, Old-Fashioneds. My favorite, the Bullshot (it sounded like "bullshit")—Worcestershire sauce, beef broth, and vodka—was for the morning after, if someone had a hangover.

I dutifully erased the rectangle marked "BAR" and made it smaller, but now it was smudged, and more of a focal point than ever.

erable inherited estates of Great Britain. He had seen the wine cellars in some of those places, and he had set about building one for his own demesne, in Deep South Jersey. But by the time I was born, in the late fifties, the frozen-food empire was no longer his—C. F. Seabrook, the owner of the company, had sold the business to a wholesale grocery outfit from New York. Soon my father became the C.E.O. of a public company in Philadelphia. "Cee Eee Oh" was among the first sounds I recall hearing at the dinner table. It was like whale talk.

There was a key marked "W.C." that was kept in the drawer of a side table in the dining room. My father said that

W.C. stood for “water closet,” which was what they called the bathroom in England. But what bathroom door did the key fit? Most of the doors didn’t even have locks on them. My father often said that there was no reason anyone should lock doors in the house.

After some time, I realized that the bland, trust-me look on his face when he explained about W.C. meant that he was joking, and, moreover, that he wanted me to see that he was joking. He was going to show me his wine cellar. And one day he did.

“You can help me pick the wine for tonight,” he said one Saturday afternoon before a dinner party, when I was seven or eight. Thrilled, I followed him down the steep, curving steps that led to the basement. He was dressed in his casual weekend clothes: wide-wale corduroys the color of straw, a pale-yellow dress shirt, beautiful brown ankle boots with pink socks poking out of the tops. He moved carefully on the stairs, gripping the right-hand railing and lowering his foot slowly onto the next step, then stamping down with his heel to make sure it gripped before putting his weight on it. Years before, while riding alone one Sunday morning, he’d been thrown from his horse and landed on an irrigation pipe, cracking his pelvis. The horse had run back to the farm, and the men had gone out looking for my father, not finding him until several hours later, lying in a ditch. That was one of the few stories he told in which he was ever at a disadvantage. It wasn’t heard often.

At the bottom of the stairs was a low-ceilinged passageway that led to the basement’s outdoor entrance. Along one wall was some cabinetry for storing excess kitchenware and picnic stuff, and, next to that, a floor-to-ceiling plywood bookcase, painted white with green trim, holding books that had belonged to my older half sisters, Carol and Lianne—“Eloise,” “Black Beauty,” “The Happy Hollisters.”

He stopped in front of the bookcase.  
“See anything?”

I looked at the books. Among them was “The Boy Who Drew Cats,” a Japanese folktale about a rebellious artist-boy who defeats a goblin rat that lives in the temple and has killed many mighty warriors, simply by drawing pictures of cats on the walls and going to sleep. In

the morning, when he finds the terrible rat dead in the temple and can’t explain it, he notices that the cats’ mouths in the drawings are dripping with blood.

My father grasped the shelves and pulled to the right, and the whole bookcase slid noiselessly into a recessed pocket behind the cabinetry. Before us was a wide, arch-shaped wooden door, painted glossy gray, with a brass key plate. He fitted the W.C. key into it and pulled the door toward us just enough to catch the edge with his fingers, being careful not to pinch them against the edge of the now hidden bookcase.

The heavy door swung open, drawing the cool air of the cellar behind it. The viny scent of wine, cut with the stringent reek of strong alcohol, enveloped us. It was pitch black within, and, in the moment it took my father to find the light switch, I imagined a demon rat rushing past us and disappearing into some other part of the house.

Then the lights blazed up on a square room, about fifteen feet per side, filled from floor to ceiling with wine and liquor, resting in sturdy wooden bins stacked four high, stained dark brown and built around three sides of the room, along with a two-sided row of bins in the middle, forming two bays. It was like stepping into King Tut’s tomb.

**T**HE FIRST BAY held champagnes on the left and bottles of liquor and port on the right. There were exotic bottles such as Framboise, Calvados, and Poire Williams, and drinks I’d later come across in Hemingway—Campari, Armagnac, Pernod, marc—as well as liqueurs in garish colors, such as Chartreuse. I knew that “proof” meant percentage of alcohol by volume in the liquor: 100 proof was fifty per cent. Most potent of all was the 151-proof rum, which my father used to set alight crêpes Suzette on New Year’s Eve. There was a cache of those bottles down here.

Although my father told stories of epic drinking events from his youth, it was clear that they belonged to mistakes he had made in his first iteration as a husband and father, when he was in his twenties and thirties. All that remained of those days, apart from the stories, were these exotic bottles, their labels brittle and foxed.

In the next bay were the red and

white wines, all French—great châteaux such as Cheval Blanc, Latour, Margaux, and Palmer. American wines did not interest my father, because the British aristocrats he modelled his tastes on, and whom he wished to impress, were ignorant of Yank vineyards. His wine was the juice in the illusion that he was one of them.

The wines in the bins were sorted by château, with six or eight bottles of like vineyard and vintage occupying each bin. They lay on their sides to keep the corks moist, and you could not right them lest you disturb the sediment. Latour had a picture of an old tower with a lion on top of it. Cheval Blanc did not have a picture of a white horse, which seemed like an oversight. If a bottle was upright in front of the bin, it meant that that wine was ready to drink. The bottles of Burgundy, whether white or red, had gently sloping shoulders and expansive, deeply dimpled bottoms. The red Bordeaux wines, with their shrugged shoulders and skinnier butts, were called clarets, a word I knew from Dickens which made me picture a man with whiskers dining on mutton in a tavern.

Many of the red wines were older than I was. It pleased my father greatly that the year of my birth, 1959, and that of Bruce, my brother, 1961, were shaping up to be first-rate vintages, in both Burgundies and clarets. Later, after the wines had further matured and become famous vintages—wines that Gordon Gekko might have sent Bud Fox as thanks for an insider tip in “Wall Street”—they featured prominently in our early-adult milestones, homecomings, and victories. My father opened a lesser 1959 Bordeaux on my twelfth birthday and proposed a toast in which he compared me favorably to the wine. I would always be measured against my birth wine; the wines kept getting better. It’s hard to compete with “excellent and utterly irresistible,” as the 1959 Cheval Blanc was described in a recent review.

The bottom row of the reds contained the magnums—two bottles of wine in one. There were also a few double magnums, and one jeroboam: six bottles. My father said that there were much bigger bottles, including a Balthazar (sixteen bottles) and, the biggest of all, a Nebuchadnezzar—twenty bottles. No way! When we learned in Sunday school about



*"Excuse me, which do you think is better—this yoga studio, the one next door, the one upstairs, the one across the street, the one on the corner, or the one on the other corner?"*

• • •

how the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar cast the Hebrews Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fiery furnace, I pictured a giant bottle of wine, tipped forward aggressively, towering over those godly men.

Propped up against the small pyramids of bottles in each bin was a three-by-five-inch Rolodex card with the wines' vintage and terroir, the number of cases ordered, price per case (in francs as well as dollars), plus importer's commission, the wine merchant he had used (Sherry-Lehmann, on Madison Avenue), and the dates purchased and delivered, all transcribed in his oddly third-grade penmanship. This information was catalogued at a sort of standing desk that was built into the end of the central aisle, with cards, different-colored pencils and pens, and a pencil sharpener. A map of the wine-growing regions of France was tacked up above the desk. Another map showed the Saint-Émilion area. Behind the standing desk, along the fourth wall, were shelves that held baskets of single-shot bottles of gin, whiskey, and vodka—Lilliputian miniatures of the big bottles in the bar. These were for horse-drawn picnics.

In the back corner of the room was a narrow bricked-up archway. A few

years later, during the addition of a major new wing to the house, my father added a second secret cellar here, replacing the bricks with a faux-brick door; the key-hole was concealed behind a dustpan hanging from a peg. The door opened onto a long rectangular room with wooden crates stacked along the walls, leaving an aisle between them. These were the cases of wines for "laying down," still years away from drinking, the crates branded with the images of the labels inside.

Why the elaborate deception? We lived among farmers and hired hands who preferred a six-pack of Bud. A burglar was unlikely to be looking for a great wine to pair with fish. What was he so worried about?

MY FATHER WAS the dispenser of all alcohol in the house (and out of the house; he always carefully studied the wine list, even in a Greek coffee shop). He decided what wine his guests were drinking, and how many bottles of it. Although my mother eventually learned to drink a cocktail in the evening, so that her husband wouldn't have to drink alone, she was by nature abstemious. She had seen the damage caused by her older sister's "problem," as she referred to alcoholism in letters to their

mother. Wine interested her not at all, except to make coq au vin, one of her signature dishes. Once, she went to the wine cellar by herself for a bottle of red wine and chose a Cheval Blanc '55. "And she cooked with it!" my father would cry—the punch line of the story—as his dinner guests shook their heads and moaned "Ohh noo!" and my mother smiled gamely and played along as the simpleton housewife, which she most certainly was not. My mother was a beautiful, brainy woman from Spearfish, South Dakota, who by her early thirties had established herself in New York as the nationally known Elizabeth Toomey. She wrote a column for the United Press. She met my father while covering Grace Kelly's wedding to Rainier III, Prince of Monaco, in April, 1956. My father was a guest of the Kelly family. By October, my parents were married, and my mother's journalism career was over. Her new career was to be Mrs. John M. Seabrook, which she took very seriously.

After the coq-au-vin disaster, my father reserved two bins in the cellar for my mother, labelling two Rolodex cards, in red marker, "ETS Red" and "ETS White," and placing a few bottles of his most ordinary wine in each. Later, when I started coming home from college with friends and we would help ourselves to a bottle or two, we knew to avoid the ETS selections. ETS Red and ETS White became our shorthand for inferior wines everywhere.

An hour before dinner each evening, my father would go into the bar to open and decant the red wine he had brought up from the cellar. Using the corkscrew's collapsible knife with a curved edge, he sliced away the foil around the rim, exposing the cork, and embedded the point of the screw in the still-firm pith. With a few deft motions the cork was out. With older corks, infinite care had to be taken, but rarely did I ever see him break a cork in the bottle. When he did, it felt like a crisis.

Decanting was always done by candlelight, because only when the decanter was lit from below could the sediment be seen properly. My father explained this to me while he was decanting a bottle, his voice hushed with concentration as he poured the crimson liquid through the little glowing circle of candlelight and onto the broad glass lip of the

decanter, watching for the first dark bits of wine waste—the hated sediment—at which point he stopped. Sometimes, with an old bottle, a whole glass of wine was left, so thick was the crud.

White wine, of course, you didn't need to decant; the bottle sat in a clay sleeve that kept it cold. If the wine was a chilled Beaujolais, which was served on those fall days when the new vintage arrived, the bottle sat on the table, its shoulders streaming, in a pewter coaster inscribed with the words "A Dinner Without Wine Is Like a Day Without Sunshine." A smiling Provençal sun split the sentence in half. I spent meal-times listening to the adults talking, staring at that bit of alcoholic wisdom. It became my watchword.

After the wine was decanted and people were seated, my father would pour. Pouring wine properly, a practice later passed along to my brother and me, requires considerable skill. The right hand cradles the decanter below its waist and underneath, while the left hand grasps its throat with a white linen napkin. Approaching over the diner's right shoulder, the pourer's left forearm near the seated person's right ear, the left hand holds the lip of the decanter over the near wall of the wineglass (never touching it) while the right arm comes up to initiate the flow of wine. When the proper level in the glass is reached, which varies depending on the size of the glass, the wine, the number of people at the table (not counting my mother, who wouldn't have any), and those likely not to want a second glass (a calculation the pourer must make afresh on every occasion), the right wrist rotates laterally, decanter neck spinning in the curved fingers of the left hand, so that the wine drips are held by centrifugal force, keeping any drops from falling onto the white tablecloth, while the napkin in the left hand slides up to blot the lip. The slightest breakdown in muscular coordination results in spreading crimson stains of your ineptitude on the spotless tablecloth for all to see.

I DON'T REMEMBER MY first taste of wine. I know I feared it. The smell of beer was off-putting but tolerable; wine, while aromatic, smelled of real alcohol, and my body judiciously sensed poison, even as my brain scented fun. But I knew

on some level that I would learn to drink wine, and I was eager to get started. It was like learning to speak French, at which I would also fail miserably.

I was allowed a full glass of champagne when I turned thirteen, in January, 1972. I had a glass set at my place at the table, and, as a special honor, I got to try the 1959 Bollinger. Before this, I had been permitted to take small sips of champagne from my father's flute. The bubbles were nice, but the shocking dryness of the grape practically gagged me. The champagne bottle had the letters "EXTRA BRUT" printed on the label. *Brut*, my father explained, meant "dry" in French, and that was what I was tasting. But how could something wet be dry?

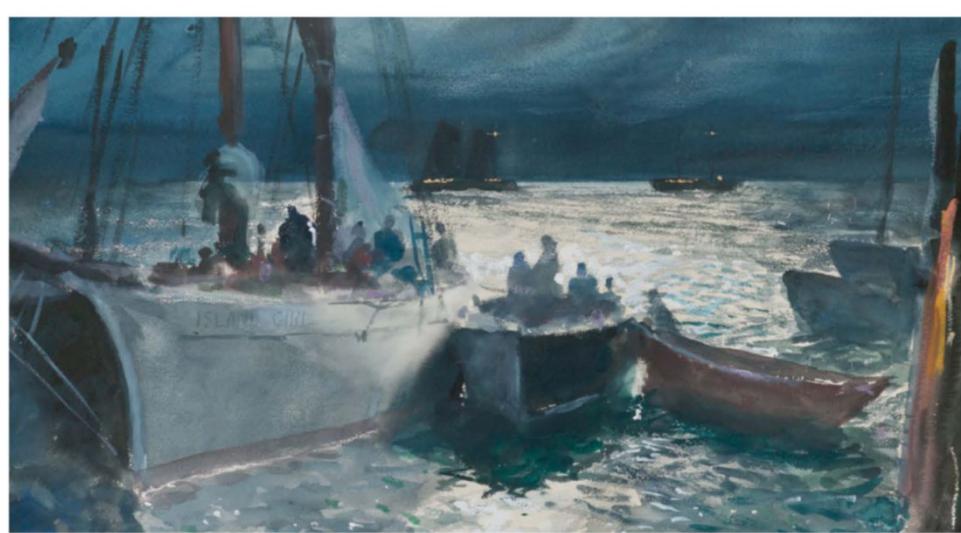
As he poured the wine into my glass, I heard the faint whistling of breath in his nostrils and caught a whiff of his aftershave. I kept perfectly still, not even daring to breathe, lest a micro-flutter cause him to pour me any less wine than he intended to.

And then a toast I can't remember,

except that it concluded, "1959 was a very good year."

I took a sip, then another. I felt something. What? Did anyone else feel it? I looked around. The adults were talking about what they always talked about—how the wine tasted (notes of peach, white pepper, and chocolate), where the grapes were grown, and how it had rained at the right time on the 1959 crop. They talked about everything but the most basic fact about the wine: the feeling it gave you. It felt as though my good spirits had emerged from a cave in my lower jaw where they usually hid away, like Puff the Magic Dragon breathing flaming 151-proof rum. It was a revelation, but no one at the table spoke a word about it, and I quickly learned to conceal the feeling. That was my first lesson.

I felt proud that I had been judged "grown up" enough to drink wine. And although my mother more than once questioned whether thirteen was too young, my father claimed that he had been drinking whiskey by twelve (probably not true), and, anyway, if I was grown



John Whorf (1903–1959) *Moonlight "Island Girl"* (detail)

#### Art and the distinguished older couple

The paintings were on their walls when their children graduated high school, and remained there at the birth of their first grandchild, and at each holiday, and birthday, and pizza night. They never wanted to sell them, and although each of their children's inheritance checks would be diminished by a few digits, their parents would always be remembered in the company of the paintings that had touched their souls.

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up enough to work in the fields weeding peppers and moving irrigation pipe in the hot South Jersey sun, as I did in the summer and on weekends and after school in the spring, I was grown up enough to drink wine.

Wine became a once-a-week thing, at Sunday “dinner,” which we had in the middle of the day, at 1 p.m., like British aristocrats. People in America watched the N.F.L. game on TV at that hour, which was what I wanted to do. But attendance at these family dinners was mandatory. We had our assigned places and we sat in them, year after year. Although the table was circular, my father’s place was clearly at the head, not only because it was aligned with his portrait, on the wall behind—a close-to-life-size, full-length study of him in a tailcoat, his top hat nearby—but also because on the side table under the portrait sat the platter holding the Sunday roast for him to carve.

My father liked to drink red Burgundy with beef and Yorkshire pudding, and claret with lamb and roast new potatoes. In early May, when it was soft-shell-crab season, he would open a Meursault—ten years old and perfect for drinking with shellfish, he’d say. In November, it was new Beaujolais with roast chicken. (With steak, he drank beer.)

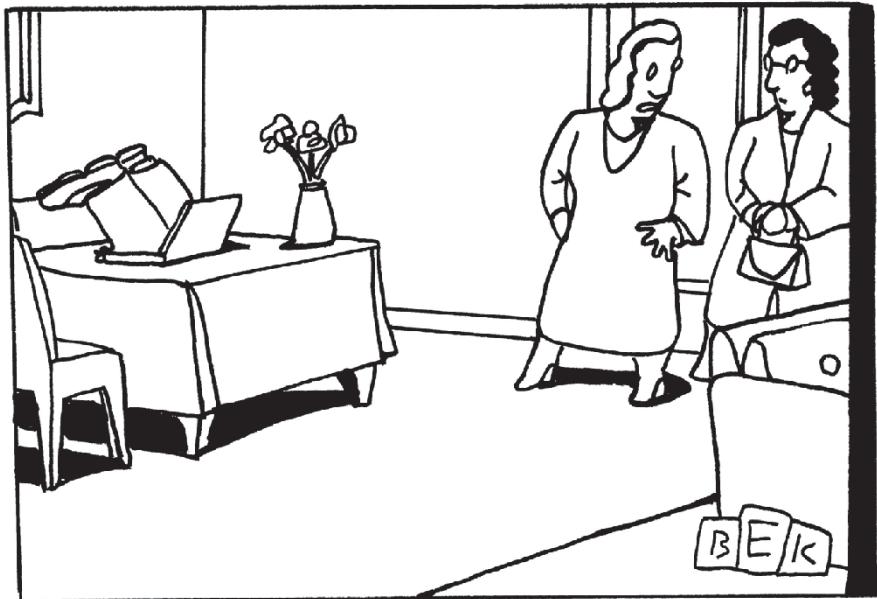
At first, he poured me no more than a quarter of a glass. Acting grown up was the way to get more—carrying on a con-

versation about one of the issues of the day, such as Vietnam, Nixon, whom my father supported (he scolded me for calling him “Tricky Dick”), or the election of ’72. Buoyed on a pink cloud of fizz, I sounded off on these themes, as well as holding forth on, say, an amusing incident that occurred in Mrs. Fenessy’s Latin class. The more I talked, the more my estimation increased in my father’s eyes, and the more wine he poured into my glass the next Sunday, firing my powers of conversation to still new heights.

**A**LL WENT WELL through the spring of 1973, until one Friday evening in June. The Devon Horse Show was going on, an annual ritual of the horsey set in the preppy parts of southeastern Pennsylvania, and there was a large tailgate picnic, with horses and horse vans, in a big open field with an eighteenth-century house nearby. Alcohol was everywhere. I had never seen people drink like that—drinking just to get loaded, the way I would one day.

An older boy I knew, whose father was one of my father’s friends, brought me a Budweiser and said we should chug one together. The first one was pretty hard to get down, but then I drank two more in quick succession, easily. Not long after that, my parents said it was time to go.

My father had recently bought my mother a maroon Jaguar XJ6. It smelled



*“I told him not to click on it.”*

like a new car, almost like a ripe melon—leather and a cleaner of some kind. It wasn't long after we set off along the twisty, hilly roads alongside the Brandywine Creek that the smell began to curdle the beer in my stomach. I lay back, my eyes open, hoping to ride the wave of nausea. I got the spins. Suddenly, my stomach flipped and I knew I was going to throw up. I fumbled for the window control, but I couldn't find it, discreetly hidden next to the ashtray, and I puked all that beer and whatever I'd had for dinner into the leather map holder on the side of the door.

My parents were shouting as I finally found the power-window switch and, too late, hung my head out the window, the night air cooling my blazing shame. The blurred lights became fixed as my father pulled over.

After they had done what could be done, we got back in the car and went to a gas station for paper towels and water, then drove home with all the windows open, in roaring silence. I went immediately to bed. The next morning, I was on the floor of the upstairs bathroom, leaning my pounding head over the bowl, suffering the first of many hangovers, when I heard my parents' voices coming from the breakfast room, which was directly below. My mother was talking about the incident, but I couldn't hear her words. My father's devastating judgment, however, was loud and clear:

"I guess Johnny is not as grown up as we thought he was."

**J**UST WHAT WAS my father up to, in introducing me to alcohol? He was passing along something he loved, and, moreover, something we could do together for the rest of his life (and did). He was always generous with his extensive knowledge of clothes, horsemanship, and alcohol. But he was unwilling or unable to engage in my preoccupations and fears. He didn't care about sports—except for riding, shaking a Martini was his only routine physical exercise. Nor did he like board games; he couldn't stand losing, my mother explained, so he didn't play. Many years later, when I was visiting my parents with my wife, Lisa, and our

son, Harry, my father agreed to a round of Celebrity, the after-dinner parlor game. Each player thinks of ten celebrities and puts their names into a hat, for a team of other players to act out. My father wrote his own name, including his middle initial, ten times, requiring the opposing team to enact him again and again. The idea that anyone could be more celebrated than he was

apparently did not compute.

Perhaps he was trying to educate a thirteen-year-old in the gentlemanly art of drinking? I would be going off to boarding school in the fall of 1972, exposed to new alcohol providers, and maybe he thought he needed to instruct me? Possibly, but I doubt it ever occurred to him

that his namesake, John, Jr., might have a weakness for alcohol. Alcohol was not about weakness in our family. It was about strength. I understood early on that what was important was not how much you drank but how well you held it.

It was as though the only way he could express his love as a father was to teach me to be just like him, starting by giving me his name. That's what it meant to be "grown up." My father didn't anticipate that when it came to alcohol I was not going to be like him. Our house sat atop a Fort Knox of alcohol, and, at least as far as I could tell, he never had one glass more than he should. But for me alcohol offered an escape from control, his and everyone else's. A glass of wine gave me a kind of confidence I didn't otherwise feel—the confidence to be me.

**I**GOT STARTED ON my drinking career with the mistaken notion that alcohol revealed the real, feeling me, when in fact it was the alcohol I was feeling. This flawed logic would take more than forty years to root out.

I did indeed meet a surplus of new alcohol providers in boarding school and college. Arriving in New York in the fall of 1983 as a twenty-four-year-old would-be writer, at first I drank vodka Martinis, which horrified my father; eventually I came to prefer what John Cheever describes in his Journals as the "galling" taste of gin. I'd switch from clear liquors to brown in the winter



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months, to ward off seasonal affective disorder. After cocktails, I always drank wine. I started out buying, by my father's standards, budget wine, planning to start a cellar of my own as soon as I had the space. Once, when I was twenty-seven, while reporting a piece for *GQ* about the young sommelier at "21," I won a case of Château Palmer for guessing the relative amounts of Cabernet and Merlot in one of the vineyard's blended wines. "An excellent foundation for a cellar!" my proud father declared. The wine was soon gone.

For a quarter of a century, I averaged a twenty-dollar bottle of wine almost every night, buying most of them individually at a nearby liquor store. I also bought cases of wine for parties and for weekend houses, and plowed through those, too—oceans of wine washing over us and our friends as the children played under the table. Even though I had been drinking three hundred and sixty-five days a year since I was twenty-four, it never occurred to me that I might be an alcoholic. I didn't think of myself as a particularly heavy drinker.

At the very Jag-defiling beginnings of my drinking career, it was clear that I could hold only a certain amount. That mark increased over time, but only up to a point: two highball or water glasses full of ice and either gin or bourbon, followed by up to a bottle and a half of wine. Any more and I'd get sick. My gut always had my back.

In 2009, when my family moved to a town house in Brooklyn, I had a cellar of my own, at last. I loved the vaulted basement, which was dry and high-ceilinged enough for me to stand in. Just after we moved in, I ordered a top-of-the-line redwood wine case, with room for a hundred and twenty-eight bottles, installed it under one of the vaults, and filled it with an exotic collection of vintages I had acquired from my brother-in-law's online wine business, which was going out of it. Night after night, I went down to my cellar and drank a bottle by myself, because Lisa was cutting back on drinking, and supposedly I was, too.

By 2000, my parents had started to relocate, from New Jersey to Aiken, South Carolina, for the climate, medical care, and horses. My father had much of his wine crated and packed into a

horse van, and driven more than six hundred miles south on I-95, and then west on I-20 to Aiken. There were no sliding bookcases in the Aiken cellar, but the climate control was superior.

After my mother died, in 2005, when she was eighty-three and he was eighty-eight, he entertained much less. He lost interest in drinking wine—he said he couldn't taste it anymore. Still, during my long stays in the Palmetto State, which I would take in rotation with my siblings Bruce and Carol, we went through the nightly ritual of discussing the upcoming meal and what wine (which he wouldn't touch) would go best with it. Perhaps a creamy 1996 Meursault, if we were having fish, or a firm La Tâche '90, with beef. Or, hell, why not open the biggest bottle you've got, Dad? (I was already loaded at this point, on two generous Maker's Marks.) No, no, he would shake his head vigorously and close his eyes in horror at the prospect.

Nightly, I would make my unsteady trip down the basement stairs to fetch yet another bottle of his wine. Standing among all the glorious bottles my father would never drink, I felt some of the beauty and grace that I had imbibed as a child begin to leak out of me. He was dying, and the rituals that went with the cocktails and the wine would die, too. My legacy was the leftover booze. I finally came to understand why my father had gone to such lengths to conceal his cellar. It wasn't to keep people out. It was to keep the alcohol in.

After I uncorked the bottle—decanting was pointless; what did I care?—I'd go through the motions of pouring him a glass; he'd refuse. So I just kept the bottle next to me and slopped it into my glass, sediment and all. To get through the after-dinner portion of the evening, which involved either Fox News or reruns of "Law & Order," I might require a large slug of Rémy Martin. After the home-health aide had got him into his wheelchair and taken him to bed, I would get angry and send e-smites to my siblings about treatment of the help. My brother wrote back, "Lay off the vitriol and the bourbon."

When my father died, at ninety-one, in early 2009, slipping away when none of us happened to be visiting, many hun-

dreds of bottles remained in his cellar. Fortunately, my brother arranged to have them auctioned. Had it been left up to me, I'd still be drinking them.

**B**ACK IN BROOKLYN, every night I went down the steep steps to my man cave in the basement and tanked up, before joining the family upstairs for a pretend-to-be-sober dinner that did not fool Lisa. She scoffed at me when I acted innocent of any drinking issues, and threatened an intervention. I agreed to try "moderate" drinking. When that didn't work, and when faced with the ultimate ultimatum from Lisa, I tried lying, and kept my drinking secret. In those dark moments of mendacity, I thought about the giant rat from "The Boy Who Drew Cats" that I had imagined escaping from my father's cellar on that first visit long ago.

Obviously, I had to stop drinking. If I stopped, I would feel like a man again when Lisa looked at me, rather than a rat. But stopping seemed like the hardest thing I could possibly do. Each time the subject came up, I'd agree to work toward stopping, but would hardly even pause, and sometimes would correct in alcohol's favor, as a reward for negotiating another extension of my license to drink.

Lisa found a therapist, and I submitted—at first reluctantly, then wholeheartedly—to the three of us untangling alcohol from my life. "You came by it honestly," the therapist, also named Lisa, said when we started, of my drinking. Part of the work involved going back, in my mind, to the wine cellar behind the bookcase and figuring out how I came to drinking. I felt that if I could just stay there, at the beginning, with all the bottles nestled in their bins, it would be O.K. Eventually, at the therapist's suggestion, I started writing about my father's cellar. Writing became a way of laying down wine as my heritage without actually having to drink it.

I took what I hope will be my last drink on what would have been my father's ninety-ninth birthday, April 16, 2016. Here's to you, Dad, I silently said, as I emptied my final bottle of twenty-dollar Oregon Pinot Noir from the corner liquor store into a water glass and glugged it down. It was no Cheval Blanc '59. ♦

## YOU NEVER REALLY KNOW

BY JESSE EISENBERG



**Y**OU NEVER REALLY know who people are. For example, just yesterday I was walking down the street when I saw a homeless man holding out a cup and begging for change. But when I got closer I realized that the man was not homeless, and that his cup was actually full of coffee! He was probably the kind of guy my fiancée would step right over without a second thought. Yup, you never really know who people are.

In my junior year of college, I accidentally began a conversation with a janitor, only to discover that he had been auditing classes for years, and was well versed in advanced philosophy! Yes, you never really know who people are until you meet them. When I met my fiancée, she was just getting out of prison for mail fraud, but she was so alluring that I overlooked her federal crime.

The world is topsy-turvy. The C.E.O. of a Fortune 500 company could turn out to be the greatest basketball player. A horse can run almost as fast as a leopard! People are so interesting! My mother, for example, is a nurse at a major hospital chain in New England. But I suspect that she's speaking to my fiancée behind my back. Yes, you never really know what's going on until you hire a lawyer. Unless that lawyer is John Rothstein.

There's the old adage "The shoemaker's son goes shoeless." It's true. My father ran Nike, and I work from home! You just never know.

People aren't always what they seem. John Rothstein, for example, seems like a great lawyer, until you realize that he's part of an evil cabal with my mother and my fiancée and, I'm beginning to suspect, my orthodontist.

Yup, the world has many different colors! Ochre, for example.

Everything is so unexpected. The tallest man in the world is from Turkey, and the shortest man in the world is dead. My orthodontist, Dr. Stu, told me that I needed to get my wisdom teeth removed, even though I could swear I had them removed as a teenager. People say the strangest things to other people!

For example, when I was coming out of the oral surgery, groggy and agreeable, my alleged lawyer, the vicious John Rothstein, was standing over my bed holding documents and asking me to sign them. I agreed, because of the effects of the anesthesia and because, when push comes to shove, people are all pretty good at heart.

Except John Rothstein. He's evil at heart. But no one in this crazy world is just *one thing*. For example, John Rothstein is also manipulative. You really never can tell!

They say that when God closes a door He opens a window. Well, I hope "He" wasn't anywhere near my condo. Because when the door to my condo closed I couldn't get back in, because my fiancée had changed the locks! Then, when I called my mother, because I needed a place to stay, she affected a funny Bulgarian accent and pretended she wasn't my mother and hung up the phone. Yes! People really are so complicated.

I once saw a swan and thought, All of the other ducks used to laugh and call you names.

I once saw my fiancée kissing Dr. Stu outside the public library, and I thought, That's odd. You never know who will be attracted to whom. A prince can become a pauper. A caterpillar can become a butterfly. Dr. Stu and my fiancée can be having an affair behind my back, and my mother, who recommended the depraved "lawyer" John Rothstein, can be orchestrating the entire thing—because sometimes, I've noticed, the most unsuspecting person can turn out to rule the world. Look at Mussolini. He spoke Italian and conversational Spanish.

My mother speaks Spanish. But only enough to haggle with her cleaning lady.

People really surprise you when you least expect it. If you expected them to surprise you, it would negate the whole premise! I was surprised, for example, when I discovered that the reason I kept setting off metal detectors was that Dr. Stu placed a tracking device in my gums during an unauthorized surgical procedure. My best friend, who is a pigeon, tells me that this tracking device has allowed the sinister cabal of my mother, my fiancée, my orthodontist, and the fiendish lawyer John Rothstein to avoid me while they carry out their orgy of sin.

Some things just don't change. I haven't changed in weeks. I sleep outside my former condo. The villainous John Rothstein lives there with my fiancée, and Dr. Stu is their babysitter. My mother is his nurse. I ask for change on the street. The cup I'm holding is a cup of coffee! My fiancée stepped over my body the other day! Dr. Stu dropped a nickel into my cup and I drank it anyway!

Yup, life's a journey. ♦

LETTER FROM EL SALVADOR

# CALLED AWAY

*A deportation crisis has fuelled an unlikely industry.*

BY JONATHAN BLITZER



**E**DDIE ANZORA WAS sitting in his cubicle at a call center in El Salvador one day a couple of years ago, making a hotel reservation for an impatient American customer, when he spotted someone he knew from a past life. The man, who was part of a group of new employees on a tour of the office, was tall, with a tattoo of a rose on the back of his neck. His loping stride caught Anzora's attention. Salvadorans didn't walk like that.

"Where you from?" Anzora asked, when the man reached his desk.

"Sunland Park," he replied. It was a neighborhood in Los Angeles, more than two thousand miles away, but Anzora knew it. A decade earlier, when the two

men belonged to rival street crews, they had got into a fistfight there. Now they were both deportees, sizing each other up in a country they barely knew.

Anzora, who is thirty-nine, is thick-armed and barrel-chested; his hair is trimmed to a fade. He was born in San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador, but he lived in California between the ages of two and twenty-nine, when he was deported for drug possession. "I got real American-culturized from the beginning," he told me recently.

By the time Anzora returned to El Salvador, in 2007, it had become one of the most dangerous countries in the world, gripped by an intractable gang

*One call center is called "homeland," for the deportees from the U.S. who staff it.*

war. On the plane, Anzora had been handcuffed, his legs shackled. Once he stepped outside, police officers inspected him to see if he had any tattoos that suggested gang ties. Anzora's Spanish was "all beat up," he said, a second language that he spoke with a Chicano accent. A cousin he knew from L.A., who had been deported a year earlier, picked him up from the San Salvador airport and let him stay in his apartment while he figured out what to do. Over dinner that night, Anzora's cousin told him about a company called Sykes, which ran one of the two largest call centers in San Salvador. Sykes, which is based in Florida, has call centers in twenty countries and employs about three thousand Salvadorans, who provide customer service and technical support to American businesses. In El Salvador, Sykes came to be known, in English, as "homeland," because so many of its employees were deportees from the United States.

Drawn by low operating costs, generous tax incentives, and proximity to the U.S., more than ten major call-center firms now operate in El Salvador, employing some twenty thousand people. Deportations from the U.S. have fuelled the industry by bringing an influx of English-speaking job-seekers. Anzora was one of twenty thousand Salvadorans deported in 2007. Since President Obama took office, in 2009, the U.S. has deported 2.7 million people, more than during any previous Administration. A hundred and fifty-two thousand of them are Salvadoran, and roughly twenty per cent have spent at least five years in the U.S. They generally speak fluent and idiomatic English—the most crucial requirement for call-center work. Their next most important quality is their desperation. Deportees are "very loyal," a recruiter for a call center told the news service McClatchy. "They know they won't get another shot." At one call center I visited, more than half the employees had been deported from the U.S. Recruiters show up at an isolated hangar of the San Salvador airport to intercept deportees as they get off small jets flown in by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

A month after Anzora arrived, he began working at Sykes. Instructors drilled him on the language of customer service: "sir" instead of "dude," "you're

welcome" instead of "it's cool." Anzora is charismatic and smooth-talking, a natural salesman, and he was soon assigned to take calls. He handled the account for Hotels.com, "upselling" customers on more expensive rooms. He also performed technical support for Kodak: when callers complained about their printers, he read from a list of basic troubleshooting techniques.

Cliques formed at Sykes based on where employees had lived before returning to El Salvador—the West Coast, Texas, the tri-state area. They listened to the American accents that others used while answering calls, and introduced themselves during breaks. "Everybody meets each other at a call center," Anzora said. In Spanish, the word for "deportee" is *deportado*, but the call-center employees preferred to call themselves *deportistas*—"athletes." The *deportistas*' lives revolved around the groups that formed in the office.

At Sykes, Anzora made close to a hundred and fifty dollars a week, which amounted to three times the Salvadoran minimum wage, and within two months he was able to move into an apartment of his own, around the corner from the office. But San Salvador remained a foreign city to him. "I'm the only one here," Anzora told me. He has the animated manner of a raconteur who has long been starved of listeners. "All my family is in the United States. There's nobody to reminisce with." He and the man from Sunland Park started attending church on Sundays. At work, calls from familiar area codes were almost therapeutic. "It felt good speaking to Americans, especially when these guys live close to where you used to hang out," he said. The feeling lasted only as long as the phone calls. Then, he said, "you're back in El Salvador."

**I**N 1981, AFTER a protracted political crisis, a leftist guerrilla army attacked El Salvador's military, setting off eleven years of fighting, in which seventy-five thousand people were killed. Fearing a Communist contagion in Latin America, the U.S. backed the military, despite its abysmal human-rights record, providing some six billion dollars in aid and sending advisers to help Salvadoran troops. But the U.S. support served mainly to prolong the war. About a quar-

ter of the country's population of five million fled to the U.S., where they sought asylum. All but two per cent of the applications were denied, so most people ended up staying illegally. Eventually, two million Salvadorans came to live in the U.S. The Salvadoran population in Los Angeles, the largest enclave, increased tenfold during the nineteen-eighties, to approximately three hundred thousand.

Anzora left El Salvador with his mother and younger brother just as the civil war began, and the family landed in Los Angeles. Like most Salvadoran immigrants there, they settled in South Central, an inner-city area that was controlled by the Bloods, a black street gang. At the time, black and Mexican gangs dominated the city, and they brutalized the Salvadorans who showed up in their neighborhoods.

Upstart Salvadoran gangs gradually began to appear, and attempted to take territory. When Anzora was nine years old, he was throwing a football with friends one day when a group of teenagers spilled out of a car and cocked their guns. A few seconds later, another car pulled up, and a bunch of boys emerged carrying baseball bats and long knives. In the first car was a group of Mexicans, dressed in oversized khaki pants and flannel shirts; in the second were Salvadorans who resembled goth rockers, with black T-shirts and long, unwashed hair. A gunshot scattered most of the fighters, but a few of them stayed behind to play football.

"Everybody was jumping into a gang," Anzora told me. "You go to school, and you're hanging out with your friends, and, next thing you know, one of your friends is throwing a gang sign." He ran with a more low-key group of Mexican, Salvadoran, and Asian hustlers, who were known as taggers, for their graffiti, and mostly avoided violence.

The Salvadoran gangs, which began in a spirit of self-defense, soon became as brutal as their adversaries. The two dominant Salvadoran gangs in L.A. were Barrio 18, named for the intersection of Eighteenth Street and Union Avenue, and Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, a portmanteau of Salvadoran slang meant to convey scrappiness and savagery. The black and Mexican gangs used bats to rough people up; MS-13 started using

machetes, and macabre stories of decapitations spread throughout the city. Soon, Barrio 18 and MS-13 began to feud, and the groups hunted each other down. Between 1989 and 1992, the height of the crack era, the number of gang-related deaths in L.A. rose by almost fifty per cent. California prisons filled up with Salvadoran gangsters, who weren't immediately deported, because the U.S. government was reluctant to send them back to a war zone.

**T**HE ANZORAS EVENTUALLY acquired green cards. Eddie's mother worked two jobs, as a cook and as a caterer, and the family moved from a house they shared with relatives to a small apartment in the San Fernando Valley. Anzora grew more rebellious as he got older. Once, he was caught spray-painting walls on Melrose Boulevard, and spent a night in jail. In 1992, when he was fifteen, his mother decided to send him and his brother to El Salvador for a year, to show them how easy they had it in America. They arrived in San Salvador just as the peace agreement that ended the civil war was signed, and lived with their mother's brother in Soyapango, on the eastern edge of the city. Anzora spent his afternoons tagging abandoned houses in the alleys where the leftist guerrillas had dug trenches. He looked and acted conspicuously foreign. "It was comedy," he said. "People used to make fun of me when I wore my baggy pants."

Within months, other Americans started arriving from Los Angeles. Now that the war was over, the imprisoned Salvadoran gang members were being deported. Most of them barely spoke Spanish, and Anzora fell in with them. "If you spoke English, you hung out," he told me. He remembers the year as a period of special clout for English speakers. "You could get any girl!" he said.

The privileged status of English stemmed from the novelty of the American-bred gangsters. At the time, Anzora said, the gangs in El Salvador were made up of "little fuckups, easy recruits for the new thing. The new thing had symbolism. It had music. It had clothing. It had money. These guys come here with the whole Mexican cholo"—thug—"look. You throw in a couple of movies, and it's just brainwashing. Then throw in a couple of songs from Cypress

Hill. Cypress Hill fucked everybody up over here."

Throughout the nineties, the U.S. continued deporting gang members to El Salvador. They allied with former soldiers and guerrillas who, with the economy cratered by a decade of fighting, couldn't find jobs and turned to street crime. The deportees had social cachet and a sense of organizational structure, and the war veterans had experience in kidnapping and torture. Eventually, the grudges between Barrio 18 and MS-13 were outsourced to El Salvador. Clones of the Los Angeles gangs popped up in and around the capital, with names like the Hollywood Crazies and the Fulton Loco Salvatruchas. "What the U.S. has tried to flush away has rather multiplied," the journalist Óscar Martínez writes in his recent book, "A History of Violence: Living and Dying in Central America." The American deportation policy turned local street gangs from L.A. into a multifaceted, international criminal network. MS-13 fanned out across Honduras and Guatemala, bringing with it a surge in crime and an increasing number of refugees displaced by the violence.

The Salvadoran government didn't have the resources to deal with the nascent gangs. It had only recently reconstituted the national police force, which had been disbanded at the end of the war, and its prisons were vastly under-equipped to handle an explosion of the inmate population. The U.S., meanwhile, was deporting people at such a rapid pace that often it didn't bother to send deportees' criminal records to the Salva-

doran authorities. An L.A. police detective told PBS, "It was like a petri dish that you put an Ebola virus in."

**I**n 1997, when Anzora was twenty, he was pulled over while driving in Los Angeles and arrested for possessing an ounce of marijuana and some meth, which he claimed wasn't his. It was his first criminal offense as an adult, and he was granted bail and released almost immediately. A few days later, he received a summons from an immigration court. When he responded, a judge told him that he would be deported.

Congress had just passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. One provision of the law turned petty crimes into grounds for deportation. Anzora's drug possession was now enough for him to be stripped of his green card and sent back to El Salvador.

Anzora, who was working at an animal hospital cleaning cages, put together enough money to have a lawyer represent him in his deportation proceedings. Every three months for the next four years, Anzora paid the lawyer four hundred dollars to file motions and postpone deadlines. One day, when he arrived for a hearing, a lawyer at the courthouse took him aside. "If you walk in there right now, they'll cuff you and put you on a plane," he said. He told Anzora to tear up his Social Security card. "From there, I went on the run," Anzora said.

For the next six years, he got rides to work and entered buildings through back

doors. One day, he told me, Immigration and Customs Enforcement raided the animal hospital. He escaped by dodging the agents in the parking lot and hiding in a nearby building until they gave up the chase.

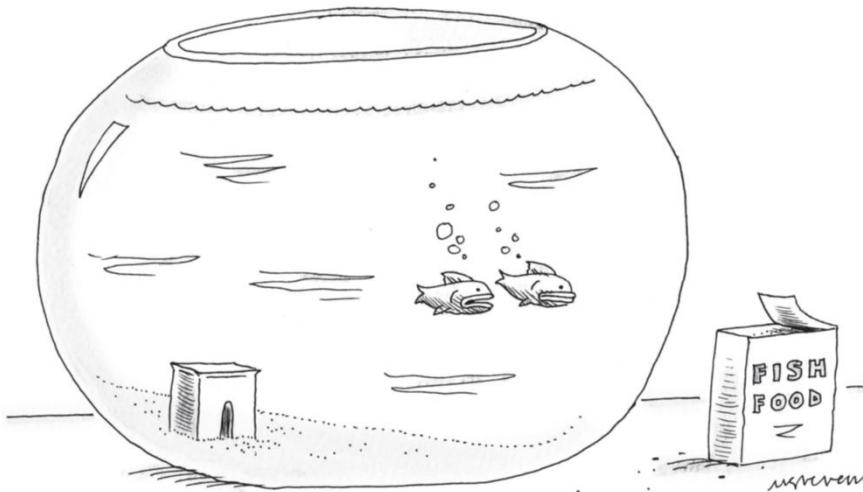
His arrest unleashed a new sense of urgency and ambition in him. Friends started calling him Fast Eddie. "Before, I was just a ghetto kid from around the way—just another kid from the hood, hanging out," he told me. Afterward, he said, "It was 'Do as much as you can, before you find yourself in El Salvador.'"

Anzora owned a house by then, having made the down payment with a credit card. He sold it, and, with the profit, he opened a small recording studio. Under someone else's name, he built a media-promotion business called Above Ground Entertainment. The rapper The Game used Anzora's studio, and 50 Cent once waited in the parking lot. ("That *cabrón* never did come inside," Anzora told me.)

The greater his success, the more he had to lose, and the thought of being deported haunted him constantly. He had a longtime girlfriend, and they wanted kids, but he was scared that he'd be separated from them. When the day finally came, in 2007, it was both an agony and a kind of relief. Unbeknownst to him, the brother of a business partner was involved with a Mexican gang that had killed a police officer. Anzora was caught in a dragnet that ICE had set up for someone else.

**W**HEN ANZORA RETURNED to El Salvador, he found that people still looked at him strangely when he talked. But this time he didn't feel appealingly exotic. "You speak English to somebody, and they say, 'Oh, you've been deported,'" he told me. Salvadorans now associated deportation with hard-core criminality. "The deportees are hugely stigmatized," Juan José Martínez, an anthropologist who studies the Salvadoran gangs, told me. "No one wants to hire gangsters—even though that's not what many of the deportees are."

Anzora had arrived in El Salvador wearing the clothes he had been arrested in: a pair of laceless Adidas sneakers, cargo shorts, and a tattered shirt. The next morning, before he left the apartment, his cousin made sure that he was



*"I wish they wouldn't just leave it there."*

dressed in a plain T-shirt and slim-fitting pants, so that he was not mistaken for an American gang member. "Someone coming from the States has that American hip-hop fashion," Anzora said. "Here they don't see it as hip-hop fashion. They see it as gang-member fashion."

The deportees in gangs wore baggy clothes and had tattoos on their arms, necks, and faces. These markers made them easy targets for the fiercely territorial Salvadoran gangs. Although some of the American and Salvadoran gangs shared the same names and allegiances, the Salvadorans were far more ruthless. "The gangsters strip deportees and torture them, looking for gang signs and tattoos," Martínez said. Any trace of Americanness—a barely perceptible gesture—was a potentially fatal liability. Anzora needed to be "low-pro," he told me, to call less attention to himself. He recalls looking in the mirror that first morning, staring at his spare new style, and thinking, This is my life? This is what I got to work with?

At the call center, each day brought a grim reminder of the situation. "Sykes used to put up a picture when somebody died. Everyone would feel bad," Anzora recalled. "But it started happening two times a week, three times a week, four times a week. And they stopped doing it. There were so many employees from Sykes getting killed that they didn't want to talk about it no more." (Sykes denies this.)

Every night, Anzora read newspapers and crime blogs, trying to figure out how the gangs operated. He asked around for tips and leads. How did they patrol their turf? What did they perceive as insults? How did they identify their enemies? When I visited Anzora last spring, we crossed streets at angles in order to skirt alleyways frequented by gangsters. He pointed out storefronts that seemed merely run-down but which, to him, showed signs of covert criminal enterprises.

One day, I drove to a dilapidated apartment building across the street from a strip mall to visit a forty-five-year-old call-center worker I'll call Tomás. He was deported from the U.S. in 2013, after being convicted of theft. Tomás was scared to leave his house to meet me. Unlike Anzora, he used to be a gangster, and has tattoos on his arms,

chest, and neck that mark him as such. He waited until I was in front of the building before he came outside to fetch me. He is unimposing—about five feet six, with a youthful face and a light beard. I tried to scan him with "Salvadoran eyes," as Anzora likes to say. His jeans were loose, bunching up at the tops of his Nike sneakers, and he wore a polo shirt that seemed a size too large.

When we reached his apartment, on the fourth floor, he said, "This is my little piece of America." The place was cramped and undecorated; in a tiny living room, the original "Ghostbusters," dubbed in Spanish, played on a television. Tomás's family moved to Los Angeles in the late seventies, when he was six, to escape the escalating violence that preceded the civil war. He grew up in South Central, and joined Barrio 18. "You try living there!" he said, justifying his decision.

"We were the first Hispanics. It was horrible." He renounced the gang when his children were born, and moved to Texas, where he opened an auto-repair shop. One day in 2013, it was raided by ICE, because Tomás had a criminal conviction from 1998, when he and a friend had been arrested in Oklahoma for riding in a stolen car. The public defender representing him encouraged him to plead guilty and serve a short sentence. He agreed, without realizing that his green card would be revoked. "In your mind, you grow up thinking you're from there," he said, referring to the U.S. "Then the shocker comes that you're not." He still considers himself an American. "Give me five years in prison. Give me ten years," he said. "But don't kick me out of my house!"

After Tomás was deported, he tried to return to his three children in the United States by crossing from Mexico. "Not even an animal abandons its kids," he said. He was caught, served two years in a federal prison, and was sent back to San Salvador in 2015.

Tomás's daily routine is, by necessity, simple: he goes to the call center for his shift, then he returns home. Otherwise, he rarely leaves, except to go to church. Once, during his commute, a group of police officers pulled their guns on him,

mistaking him for a gang member. "They were as scared as I was," he recalled. (One undercover police officer I spoke with told me that the gangs award points for killing cops.) Another time, while shopping for groceries, he was attacked by gangsters with guns, who tried to lift his shirt to inspect his tattoos. Tomás managed to break free. At the time, he assumed that his assailants belonged to

MS-13, but he later learned that they were connected to Barrio 18; both groups terrified him. Deportees are no longer seen as the founders of the gangs but as threats to the new order. Tomás has begun to burn off his tattoos, and uses a knife, when necessary, to cut the surrounding skin and blur the symbols. What was once a teardrop below one eye now looks like a bruise or a birthmark, and scars mottle his hands.

By one measure, Tomás is lucky: he has work. Deportees who are older, speak unsteady English, or don't have computer skills can't get call-center jobs. I spoke to a group of them who had formed a small coalition called Renaceres, or the Reborn, through which they petitioned the government for protection against discrimination. Other employers won't hire them because of their age, and banks decline to extend credit. "We came and tried to insert ourselves into life here, but how do we do it in a country that is in a state of total crisis?" Juan Toledo, one of the group's leaders, said. After fleeing El Salvador during the war, he lived in Iowa for twenty-eight years and was then deported. Within months of the group's founding, a member who had started a small garage was gunned down for refusing to pay a local thug who was extorting him.

AFTER ANZORA HAD worked at call centers for three years, he had saved up enough money to start a family. He married a Salvadoran named Mayra, who had a young daughter from a previous marriage. The following year, the couple had a son. Anzora's long hours at the call centers were beginning to wear on him, and, by 2015, he wanted a change. He noticed that the demand for English



speakers seemed to be outpacing the supply, and decided to start his own language school, English Cool, which will celebrate its second anniversary this spring. It is one of a handful that have cropped up to address the demands of call-center work. There's English4CallCenters, Got English?, Direct English, and English Coach. "English is coming back in style," Anzora told me. "People want to speak it, because it means you can get work." Deportees run and staff most of the schools, whose pitch is that of any other language school: study with a native speaker. "If you want to learn English, a deportee's a really good guy to learn from, because he actually dealt with people from Texas, from California," he said.

English Cool occupies part of a ramshackle town house, flanked by a cell-phone-repair shop and a garage. Anzora lives above the school with Mayra and their children, Angie and Christopher, who are fifteen and five. On the second floor are two classrooms, each outfitted with a whiteboard and a desktop computer linked to a TV. The bookshelves hold copies of "The Screenwriter's Bible," "Photoshop," and "Run Your Music Business," vestiges of Anzora's L.A. days.

Anzora's old moniker—Fast Eddie—still fits him. He records aspiring Salvadoran musicians, using his old equipment, which he arranged to have sent from California. A room at English Cool is appointed for the purpose. Strewn around the space are promotional materials for concerts he has organized. A few years ago, he started a clothing line, calling it ES 503, for El Salvador's telephone country code. Months later, gang members approached him at a bar and told him that the number was off limits: it had become a gang designation. (He abandoned the business.) Now he moonlights as a graphic designer and a wedding photographer.

At 10 a.m. one Monday, eight students arrived at English Cool for the intermediate-level class, and Anzora, who wore bluejeans and a black English Cool T-shirt, met them at the door of the classroom. Most of the students were between eighteen and twenty-five, and one man was in his late thirties. Some had low-paying or part-time jobs; others were still in school. The cost of Anzora's course—thirty-six dollars a

month—is designed to undercut the competition. (The average for the other schools is sixty dollars.) Still, only about half of the forty students currently enrolled can pay regularly. The rest are on generous installment plans.

"How were your weekends?" Anzora called out. "Pair off and tell your partner what you did." He darted around the classroom, making jokes and goading the more tentative students. For a speaking exercise, he posed a question to the group: "When was the last time you were robbed? And what did they take?"

Then he led the class in a call-and-response reading of Yelp reviews. Anzora went first. "I tried the Oreo Rice Krispy Toffee cookie and peanut-butter gluten-free cookie," he said. He paused so that his students could repeat after him, as if they were reciting some madcap catechism. "I had my plus-one go back to get more on my behalf," they intoned. A student interrupted with a question—what was a Rice Krispy?

Anzora learned his teaching methods at English4CallCenters, where he worked part time while at a call center. The school, which was founded in 2014, by Rodrigo Galdámez, a twenty-seven-year-old Salvadoran, has ten locations all over the country, plus two in Guatemala, and a thousand students each term. Galdámez had never been to the United States, so he hired a deportee named David Robles, from Texas, and together they prepared a teaching plan. Galdámez and Robles realized that the biggest impediment to Salvadorans who wished to work in call centers was attitudinal, not linguistic. The key to preparing them for conversations with demanding American callers was teaching them to be assured and solicitous.

Direct English, a high-end competitor to English Cool, has a mock call center, with fifteen computers and headsets, so that students can practice taking phone calls. When its owner, a genial man named Marvin Carias, who used to live in Southern California, showed me around, he led me to two big classrooms on the first floor, called the Staples Center and the World Trade Center.

One morning, I toured Convergys, a call center that occupies a giant glass building, ringed by palm trees, downtown. Across the street, in the middle

of a busy traffic roundabout, stood a sixty-foot-tall statue of Jesus Christ. Arrayed around it, like spokes, were little shopping areas, and in one of them, opposite a McDonald's, was English4CallCenters.

Convergys, which is based in Cincinnati, has a hundred and fifty locations, including eleven in Latin America. In El Salvador, it employs three thousand people, more than at any of its other Latin-American operations. Before hiring someone, Convergys conducts an extensive criminal background check. Many of the deportees I spoke to were wary of the place, and sought work at more permissive alternatives, like Sykes.

In the lobby, a group of young and visibly nervous Salvadorans furiously paged through booklets of grammar practice tests. The décor was meant to resemble the interior of a spaceship, Convergys's preferred symbol of corporate uplift. Control panels and astronauts were painted on the walls, next to Convergys's slogan, which was stamped everywhere: #CoolestJobEver. Televisions hung from wall units on the calling-room floor; Adam Driver smiled rakishly on one, and the Pistons and the Cavaliers played basketball on another. Workers took calls from customers of Dell, Dish, and A.T. & T.

"American culture is more or less the same as ours," my guide, a senior operations manager named Lidia Carias, told me. This is also the position of the Salvadoran government, which is trying to lure investors away from traditional call-center locations such as India and the Philippines. A memo from the director of the state-run foreign-investment office stresses the fact that Salvadorans have "a neutral accent in English and Spanish."

We climbed a flight of stairs to an identical-looking floor, where workers were talking to callers in Spanish. I bumped into one of Anzora's students, who grinned but slunk off, intimidated by my escort. Salvadorans who speak shakier English often earn less than their counterparts, but they still have a place at the call centers. American Latinos who prefer to use Spanish are a rapidly growing customer base.

Eventually, we arrived at a small space on the top floor, at the back of a parking garage. Amplifiers and speakers were

stacked on a makeshift bandstand, along with a drum set, microphones, and two electric guitars and a bass. Five twenty-somethings in dark jeans and T-shirts were milling around—the Convergys band! Its members take calls for much of the day, but they also play at job fairs and events throughout the city. Carias and I, the lone audience members, sat on a couch while the band performed a rock-and-roll rendition of the Amy Winehouse hit “Back to Black.”

**I**N 2015, THERE were more than sixty-six hundred homicides in El Salvador, which now has a population of six million; it was the highest rate in Latin America, and higher than the annual average during the civil war. More than half the killings have been attributed to MS-13, Barrio 18, and their offshoots, which have balkanized the country’s cities and provinces into gang-run enclaves. Last March, a group of gangsters who were chasing rivals just outside San Salvador came upon eight laborers putting up power lines. They tortured and killed them, just to show off. A former American gang member who now lives in San Salvador told me, “In the States, there’s rules, but right here the rules are out. There are just excuses to do violence.” The Salvadoran Congress recently passed a law that categorized the gangs as terrorist groups, which gave the police and the military license to fight back aggressively, compounding the bloodshed.

As a result, a fresh wave of migrants have headed for the U.S. Thousands of Salvadorans have sought asylum at American borders in recent years, including record numbers of unaccompanied children. When, at the start of 2016, the Department of Homeland Security launched a series of immigration raids, the government of El Salvador tweeted out legal advice for Salvadorans in the U.S., reminding them of the Fourth Amendment protection against illegal search and seizure. The move was billed as a show of solidarity, but it masked a sense of desperation.

Gang members have begun killing people who happen to live in neighborhoods controlled by rival groups, and so Anzora has stopped carrying his I.D. Last summer, two armed gangsters pulled him into an alleyway, demanding to see his I.D. and checking



*“Finally!”*

for tattoos. Without anything incriminating, he was able to persuade them to let him go. A lesser talker would have been killed for sport.

“Everyone here has to hustle to survive. Running around to make money, to escape the gangs,” he told me. “But I always had this feeling that when people die around here it’s almost like the country is telling them, ‘All right. You’re good. You can rest now.’” His view of this was almost mystical; he liked to remind me that, in Spanish, El Salvador means “the savior.” He was materially worse off than he had been in the U.S., but life in El Salvador left him no choice but to move ceaselessly forward. Though Anzora seemed genuinely happy, I occasionally spotted fissures in his optimism. He’d be laughing and riffing, and then, without seeming to realize it, slip into the third person when he talked about his life in L.A., as though he were telling me the story of something that had happened to someone else.

One Saturday, Anzora’s wife and kids were visiting her parents, who live in a gang-controlled neighborhood. Since Mayra grew up there, the gangsters allow her to move about freely. Anzora, though, was still seen as an interloper. “All it takes is for a jealous ex-boyfriend to say I was talking some shit,” he said. “No one fights here—they grab a pistol. In the States, you get into a little fight, and you’re cool. Over here, you gotta kill the guy.”

He decided to do some shopping

while he waited for his family to return, and we took a bus downtown to buy a gift for Christopher at a store that sold used toys and clothes. He paced around the shop, looking for a racetrack for Christopher’s toy cars. He found a used one in a crushed box that had been sloppily taped up, for ten dollars. “It’s a gamble—we’ll only know when we get home and open it if all the pieces are in there,” he said.

As we were leaving, another customer—middle-aged and bespectacled, with a considerable paunch—caught Anzora’s attention. The man was holding a pair of Nike Cortez sneakers in his hand. “That’s a gang shoe,” Anzora told me. He walked over to the man and said, “I’m not so sure you want those.” The man looked bewildered. I wondered if Anzora’s accent scared him. Then Anzora turned to the saleswoman, who caught his drift and smirked, trying her best to stay neutral. He asked her how much they were. “Twenty dollars,” she told him. “So that’s what your life is worth to you?” Anzora said to the man. He clapped him on the back, and we left.

Later that night, Anzora and Mayra called Christopher into one of the classrooms to open his gift. Anzora looked nervous. “We’ll see what’s in there,” he said, staring at the package. When Christopher tore the box open, the pieces spilled out in tidy plastic bags—the set was complete. Anzora beamed. “You see that, Papi,” he said to Christopher. “Now you got everything you need.” ♦

# TELL ME WHERE IT HURTS

*Our medical system rewards heroic intervention. When will we grasp the power of incremental care?*

BY ATUL GAWANDE

**B**y 2010, BILL HAYNES had spent almost four decades under attack from the inside of his skull. He was fifty-seven years old, and he suffered from severe migraines that felt as if a drill were working behind his eyes, across his forehead, and down the back of his head and neck. They left him nauseated, causing him to vomit every half hour for up to eighteen hours. He'd spend a day and a half in bed, and then another day stumbling through sentences. The pain would gradually subside, but often not entirely. And after a few days a new attack would begin.

Haynes (I've changed his name, at his request) had his first migraine at the age of nineteen. It came on suddenly, while he was driving. He pulled over, opened the door, and threw up in someone's yard. At first, the attacks were infrequent and lasted only a few hours. But by the time he was thirty, married, and working in construction management in London, where his family was from, they were coming weekly, usually on the weekends. A few years later, he began to get the attacks at work as well.

He saw all kinds of doctors—primary-care physicians, neurologists, psychiatrists—who told him what he already knew: he had chronic migraine headaches. And what little the doctors had to offer didn't do him much good. Headaches rank among the most common reasons for doctor visits worldwide. A small number are due to secondary causes, such as a brain tumor, cerebral aneurysm, head injury, or infection. Most are tension headaches—diffuse, muscle-related head pain with a tightening, non-pulsating quality—that generally respond to analgesics, sleep, neck exercises, and time. Migraines afflict about ten per cent of people with headaches, but a much larger percentage of those who see doctors, because migraines are difficult to control.

Migraines are typically characterized

by severe, disabling, recurrent attacks of pain confined to one side of the head, pulsating in quality and aggravated by routine physical activities. They can last for hours or days. Nausea and sensitivity to light or sound are common. They can be associated with an aura—visual distortions, sensory changes, or even speech and language disturbances that herald the onset of head pain.

Although the cause of migraines remains unknown, a number of treatments have been discovered that can either reduce their occurrence or alleviate them once they occur. Haynes tried them all. His wife also took him to a dentist who fitted him with a mouth guard. After seeing an advertisement, she got him an electrical device that he applied to his face for half an hour every day. She bought him hypnotism tapes, high-dosage vitamins, magnesium tablets, and herbal treatments. He tried everything enthusiastically, and occasionally a remedy would help for a brief period, but nothing made a lasting difference.

Finally, desperate for a change, he and his wife quit their jobs, rented out their house in London, and moved to a cottage in a rural village. The attacks eased for a few months. A local doctor who had migraines himself suggested that Haynes try the cocktail of medicines he used. That helped some, but the attacks continued. Haynes seesawed between good periods and bad. And without work he and his wife began to feel that they were vegetating.

On a trip to New York City, when he turned fifty, they decided they needed to make another big change. They sold everything and bought a bed-and-breakfast on Cape Cod. Their business thrived, but by the summer of 2010, when Haynes was in his late fifties, the headaches were, he said, "knocking me down like they never had before." Doctors had told him that migraines diminish with age, but his stubbornly refused to do so. "During

one of these attacks, I worked out that I'd spent two years in bed with a hot-water bottle around my head, and I began thinking about how to take my life," he said. He had a new internist, though, and she recommended that he go to a Boston clinic that was dedicated to the treatment of headaches. He was willing to give it a try. But he wasn't hopeful. How would a doctor there do anything different from all the others he'd seen?

That question interested me, too. I work at the hospital where the clinic is based. The John Graham Headache Center, as it's called, has long had a reputation for helping people with especially difficult cases. Founded in the nineteen-fifties, it now delivers more than eight thousand consultations a year at several locations across eastern Massachusetts. Two years ago, I asked Elizabeth Loder, who's in charge of the program, if I could join her at the clinic to see how she and her colleagues helped people whose problems had stumped so many others. I accompanied her for a day of patient visits, and that was when I met Haynes, who had been her patient for five years. I asked her whether he was the worst case she'd seen. He wasn't even the worst case she'd seen that week, she said. She estimated that sixty per cent of the clinic's patients suffer from daily, persistent headaches, and usually have for years.

In her examination room, with its white vinyl floor and sanitary-paper-covered examination table against the wall, the fluorescent overhead lights were turned off to avoid triggering migraines. The sole illumination came from a low-wattage table lamp and a desktop-computer screen. Sitting across from her first patient of the day, Loder, who is fifty-eight, was attentive and unhurried, dressed in plain black slacks and a freshly pressed white doctor's coat, her auburn hair tucked into a bun. She projected both professional confidence and maternal concern. She had told me how



*We devote vast resources to surgeons and the like, while starving the physicians whose steady, intimate care helps many more.*



*"You can eat the one marshmallow right now, or, if you wait fifteen minutes, I'll give you two marshmallows and swear you in as President of the United States."*

PAUL  
NORTH

she begins with new patients: "You ask them to tell the story of their headache and then you stay very quiet for a long time."

The patient was a reticent twenty-nine-year-old nurse who had come to see Loder about the chronic daily headaches she'd been having since she was twelve. Loder typed as the woman spoke, like a journalist taking notes. She did not interrupt or comment, except to say, "Tell me more," until the full story emerged. The nurse said that she enjoyed only three or four days a month without a throbbing headache. She'd tried a long list of medications, without success. The headaches had interfered with college, relationships, her job. She dreaded night shifts, since the headaches that came afterward were particularly awful.

Loder gave a sympathetic shake of her head, and that was enough to win the woman's confidence. The patient knew that she'd been heard by someone who understood the seriousness of her problem—a problem invisible to the naked eye, to blood tests, to biopsies,

and to scans, and often not even believed by co-workers, family members, or, indeed, doctors.

She reviewed the woman's records—all the medications she'd taken, all the tests she'd undergone—and did a brief examination. Then we came to the moment I'd been waiting for, the moment when I would see what made the clinic so effective. Would Loder diagnose a condition that had never been suspected? Would she suggest a treatment I'd never heard of? Would she have some special microvascular procedure she could perform that others couldn't?

The answer was no. This was, I later came to realize, the key fact about Loder's capabilities. But I didn't see it that day, and I was never going to see it in any single visit.

She started, disappointingly, by lowering expectations. For some ninety-five per cent of patients who see her, including this woman, the diagnosis is chronic migraines. And for chronic migraines, she explained, a complete cure was unlikely. Success meant that the headaches became less frequent and less intense,

and that the patients grew more confident in handling them. Even that progress would take time. There is rarely a single, immediate remedy, she said, whether it was a drug or a change in diet or an exercise regimen. Nonetheless, she wanted her patients to trust her. Things would take a while—months, sometimes longer. Success would be incremental.

She asked the woman to keep a headache diary using a form she gave her to rate the peak level and hours of headache each day. She explained that together they would make small changes in treatments and review the diary every few months. If a regimen produced a greater than fifty-per-cent reduction in the number and severity of the headaches, they'd call that a victory.

Haynes told me that Loder gave him the same speech when he first saw her, in 2010, and he decided to stick with her. He liked how methodical she was. He kept his headache diary faithfully. They began by formulating a "rescue plan" for managing his attacks. During an attack, he often vomited pills, so she gave him a supply of non-narcotic rectal suppositories for fast-acting pain relief and an injectable medicine if they didn't work. Neither was pleasant to take, but they helped. The peak level and duration of his attacks diminished slightly. She then tried changing the medications he used for prevention. When one medicine caused side effects he couldn't tolerate, she switched to another, but that one didn't produce any reduction in headaches. He saw her every three months, and they kept on measuring and adjusting.

The most exotic thing they tried was Botox—botulinum-toxin injections—which the F.D.A. had approved for chronic migraines in 2010. She thought he might benefit from injections along the muscles of his forehead. Haynes's insurer refused to cover the cost, however, and, at upwards of twelve hundred dollars a vial, the treatment was beyond what he could afford. So Loder took on the insurer, and after numerous calls and almost a year of delays Haynes won coverage.

After the first few rounds of injections—each treatment lasts three months and is intended to relax but not paralyze the muscles—Haynes noticed no dramatic change. He was on four medications for prevention, including the Botox, and had four escalating rescue

treatments that he could resort to whenever a bad headache began to mount. Three years had passed, and progress had been minimal, but Loder was hopeful.

"I am actually quite optimistic about his long-term outlook for improvement," she wrote in her notes that spring. "I detect slow but steady progress. In particular, the extremes of headache at the upper end have come down nicely and vomiting is much less of a problem. That, in my experience, is a clear sign of regression." Haynes wasn't so sure. But after another year or so of adjustments he, too, began to notice a difference. The interval between bad attacks had lengthened to a week. Later, it stretched to a month. Then even longer.

When I met Haynes, in 2015, he'd gone more than a year without a severe migraine. "I haven't had a dreadful attack since March 13, 2014," he said, triumphantly. It had taken four years of effort. But Loder's systematic incrementalism had done what nothing else had.

I later went to visit Haynes and his wife at their lovely nine-room inn on the Cape. He was tall and lanky, with a John Cleese mustache and the kind of wary astonishment I imagine that men released after years in prison have. At sixty-two, he was savoring experiences he feared he'd never get to have in his life.

"I'm a changed person," he said. "I've a bubbliness in my life now. I don't feel at threat. We can arrange dinner parties. I'm not the social cripple that I was. I'm not going to let anyone down anymore. I'm not going to let my wife down anymore. I was a terrible person to live with. That's gone from my life."

Migraines had ruled his life for more than four decades. For the first time, he could read a book all the way through. He could take jet flights without fear of what the air pressure might do to his head. His wife couldn't say enough about the difference.

"It's almost a miracle," she said. "It has been life-changing for me. It makes me so happy that he's not ill. I feel good about my future. We can look forward together."

Recently, I checked in again, and he hadn't had another headache. Haynes doesn't like to think about what would have happened if he hadn't found the

headache clinic. He wished he'd found it decades earlier. "Dr. Loder saved my life," he said.

**W**E HAVE A certain heroic expectation of how medicine works. Following the Second World War, penicillin and then a raft of other antibiotics cured the scourge of bacterial diseases that it had been thought only God could touch. New vaccines routed polio, diphtheria, rubella, and measles. Surgeons opened the heart, transplanted organs, and removed once inoperable tumors. Heart attacks could be stopped; cancers could be cured. A single generation experienced a transformation in the treatment of human illness as no generation had before. It was like discovering that water could put out fire. We built our health-care system, accordingly, to deploy firefighters. Doctors became saviors.

But the model wasn't quite right. If an illness is a fire, many of them require months or years to extinguish, or can be reduced only to a low-level smolder. The treatments may have side effects and complications that require yet more attention. Chronic illness has become commonplace, and we have been poorly prepared to deal with it. Much of what ails us requires a more patient kind of skill.

I was drawn to medicine by the aura of heroism—by the chance to charge in and solve a dangerous problem. I loved learning how to unravel diagnostic mysteries on the general-medicine ward, and how to deliver babies in the obstetrics unit, and how to stop heart attacks in the cardiology unit. I worked in a DNA virus lab for a time and considered going into infectious diseases. But it was the operating room that really drew me in.

I remember seeing a college student with infectious mononucleosis, caused by the very virus I was studying in the lab—the Epstein-Barr virus. The infection causes the spleen to enlarge, and in rare cases it grows so big that it spontaneously ruptures, producing major internal bleeding. This is what happened to the student. He arrived in our emergency department in hemorrhagic shock. His pulse was rapid and thready. The team could barely detect a blood pressure. We

rushed him to the operating room. By the time we got him on the table and under anesthesia, he was on the verge of cardiac arrest.

The resident opened the young man's belly in two moves: with a knife he made a swift, decisive slash down the middle, through the skin, from the rib cage to below his umbilicus, then with open-jawed scissors pushed upward through the linea alba—the tough fibrous tendon that runs between the abdominal muscles—as if it were wrapping paper. A pool of blood burst out of him. The resident thrust a gloved hand into the opening. The attending surgeon stood across from him, asking, in a weirdly calm, quiet voice, almost under his breath, "Have you got it?"

Pause.

"Now?"

Pause.

"You have thirty more seconds."

Suddenly, the resident had freed the spleen and lifted it to the surface. The organ was fleshy and heavy, like a sudden loaf of bread. A torrent of blood poured out of a fissure on its surface. The attending surgeon put a clamp across its tether of blood vessels. The bleeding stopped instantly. The patient was saved.

How can anyone not love that? I knew there was a place for prevention and maintenance and incremental progress against difficult problems. But this seemed like the real work of saving lives. Surgery was a definitive intervention at

a critical moment in a person's life, with a clear, calculable, frequently transformative outcome.

Fields like primary-care medicine seemed, by comparison, squishy and uncertain. How often could you really achieve victories by inveigling patients to take their medicines when less than

half really do; to lose weight when only a small fraction can keep it off; to quit smoking; to deal with their alcohol problem; to show up for their annual physical, which doesn't seem to make that much difference anyway? I wanted to know I was doing work that would matter. I decided to go into surgery.

Not long ago, I was talking to Asaf Bitton, a thirty-nine-year-old internist



I work with, about the contrast between his work and mine, and I made the mistake of saying that I had more opportunities to make a clear difference in people's lives. He was having none of it. Primary care, he countered, is the medical profession that has the greatest overall impact, including lower mortality and better health, not to mention lower medical costs. Asaf is a recognized expert on the delivery of primary health care around the world, and, over the next few days, he sent me evidence for his claims.

He showed me studies demonstrating that states with higher ratios of primary-care physicians have lower rates of general mortality, infant mortality, and mortality from specific conditions such as heart disease and stroke. Other studies found that people with a primary-care physician as their usual source of care had lower subsequent five-year mortality rates than others, regardless of their initial health. In the United Kingdom, where family physicians are paid to practice in deprived areas, a ten-per-cent increase in the primary-care supply was shown to improve people's health so much that you could add ten years to everyone's life and still not match the benefit. Another study examined health-care reforms in Spain that focussed on strengthening primary care in various regions—by, for instance, building more clinics, extending their hours, and paying for home visits. After ten years, mortality fell in the areas where the reforms were made, and it fell more in those areas which received the reforms earlier. Likewise, reforms in California that provided all Medicaid recipients with primary-care physicians resulted in lower hospitalization rates. By contrast, private Medicare plans that increased co-payments for primary-care visits—and thereby reduced such visits—saw increased hospitalization rates. Further, the more complex a person's medical needs are the greater the benefit of primary care.

I finally had to submit. Primary care, it seemed, does a lot of good for people—maybe even more good, in the long run, than I will as a surgeon. But I still wondered how. What, exactly, is the primary-care physician's skill? I visited Asaf's clinic to see.

The clinic is in the Boston neighborhood of Jamaica Plain, and it has three

## MOURNING WHAT WE THOUGHT WE WERE

We were born into an amazing experiment.

At least we thought we were. We knew there was no escaping human nature: my grandmother taught me that: my own pitiless nature taught me that: but we exist inside an order, I thought, of which history is the mere shadow—

\*

Every serious work of art about America has the same theme: *America*

*is a great Idea: the reality leaves something to be desired.*

Bakersfield. Marian Anderson, the first great black classical contralto, whom the Daughters of the American Revolution would not allow to sing in an unsegregated

Constitution Hall, who then was asked by Eleanor Roosevelt to sing at the Lincoln Memorial before thousands was refused a room at the Padre Hotel, Bakersfield.

My mother's disgust as she told me this. It confirmed her judgment about what she never could escape, where she lived out her life.

My grandmother's fury when, at the age of seven or eight, I had eaten at the home of a black friend.

full-time physicians, several part-timers, three physician assistants, three social workers, a nurse, a pharmacist, and a nutritionist. Together, they get some fourteen thousand patient visits a year in fifteen clinic rooms, which were going pretty much non-stop on the day I dropped by.

People came in with leg pains, arm pains, belly pains, joint pains, head pains, or just for a checkup. I met an eighty-eight-year-old man who had survived a cardiac arrest in a parking lot. I talked to a physician assistant who, in the previous few hours, had administered vaccinations, cleaned wax out of the ears of an elderly woman with hearing trouble, adjusted the medications of a man whose

home blood-pressure readings were far too high, and followed up on a patient with diabetes.

The clinic had a teeming variousness. It didn't matter if patients had psoriasis or psychosis, the clinic had to have something useful to offer them. At any given moment, someone there might be suturing a laceration, lancing an abscess, aspirating a gouty joint, biopsying a suspicious skin lesion, managing a bipolar-disorder crisis, assessing a geriatric patient who had taken a fall, placing an intrauterine contraceptive device, or stabilizing a patient who'd had an asthma attack. The clinic was licensed to dispense thirty-five medicines on the premises, including steroids and

The forced camps at the end of *The Grapes of Wrath*  
were outside

Bakersfield. When I was a kid, *Okie*  
was still a common  
term of casual derision and contempt.

\*

So it was up to us, born  
in Bakersfield, to carve a new history

of which history is the mere shadow—

\*

*To further the history of the spirit is our work:*

therefore thank you, Lord  
Whose Bounty Proceeds by Paradox,  
for showing us we have failed to change.

\*

Dark night, December 1st 2016.

White supremacists, once again in  
America, are acceptable, respectable. America!

Bakersfield was first swamp, then  
desert. We are sons of the desert  
who cultivate the top half-inch of soil.

—Frank Bidart

epinephrine, for an anaphylactic allergic reaction; a shot of ceftriaxone, for newly diagnosed gonorrhea; a dose of doxycycline, for acute Lyme disease; or a one-gram dose of azithromycin for chlamydia, so that someone can directly observe that the patient swallows it, reducing the danger that he or she will infect someone else.

"We do the things you really don't need specialists for," a physician assistant said. And I saw what a formidably comprehensive range that could be. Asaf—Israeli-born and Minnesota-raised, which means that he's both more talkative and happier than the average Bostonian—told me about one of his favorite maneuvers. Three or four times a year, a patient

comes in with disabling episodes of dizziness because of a condition called benign positional vertigo. It's caused by loose particles of calcified debris rattling around in the semicircular canal of the inner ear. Sometimes patients are barely able to stand. They are nauseated. They vomit. Just turning their head the wrong way, or rolling over in bed, can bring on a bout of dizziness. It's like the worst seasickness you can imagine.

"I have just the trick," he tells them.

First, to be sure he has the correct diagnosis, he does the Dix-Hallpike test. He has the patient sit on the examination table, turns his head forty-five degrees to one side with both hands, and then quickly lays him down flat

with his head hanging off the end of the table. If Asaf's diagnosis is right, the patient's eyes will shake for ten seconds or so, like dice in a cup.

To fix the problem, he performs what's known as the Epley maneuver. With the patient still lying with his head turned to one side and hanging off the table, Asaf rotates his head rapidly the other way until his ear is pointed toward the ceiling. He holds the patient's head still for thirty seconds. He then has him roll onto his side while turning his head downward. Thirty seconds later, he lifts the patient rapidly to a sitting position. If he's done everything right, the calcified particles are flung through the semicircular canal like marbles out a chute. In most cases, the patient feels better instantly.

"They walk out the door thinking you're a shaman," Asaf said, grinning. Everyone loves to be the hero. Asaf and his colleagues can deliver on-the-spot care for hundreds of conditions and guidance for thousands more. They run a medical general store. But, Asaf insisted, that's not really how primary-care clinicians save lives. After all, for any given situation specialists are likely to have more skill and experience, and more apt to follow the evidence of what works. Generalists have no advantage over specialists in any particular case. Yet, somehow, having a primary-care clinician as your main source of care is better for you.

Asaf tried to explain. "It's no one thing we do. It's all of it," he said. I found this unsatisfying. I pushed everyone I met at the clinic. How could seeing one of them for my—insert problem here—be better than going straight to a specialist? Invariably, the clinicians would circle around to the same conclusion.

"It's the relationship," they'd say. I began to understand only after I noticed that the doctors, the nurses, and the front-desk staff knew by name almost every patient who came through the door. Often, they had known the patient for years and would know him for years to come. In a single, isolated moment of care for, say, a man who came in with abdominal pain, Asaf looked like nothing special. But once I took in the fact that patient and doctor really knew each other—that the man had visited three months earlier, for back pain, and six months before

that, for a flu—I started to realize the significance of their familiarity.

For one thing, it made the man willing to seek medical attention for potentially serious symptoms far sooner, instead of putting it off until it was too late. There is solid evidence behind this. Studies have established that having a regular source of medical care, from a doctor who knows you, has a powerful effect on your willingness to seek care for severe symptoms. This alone appears to be a significant contributor to lower death rates.

Observing the care, I began to grasp how the commitment to seeing people over time leads primary-care clinicians to take an approach to problem-solving that is very different from that of doctors, like me, who provide mainly episodic care. One patient was a Spanish-speaking woman, younger-looking than her fifty-nine years, with a history of depression and migraines. She had developed an odd set of symptoms. For more than a month, she'd had facial swelling. Her face would puff up for a day, then go back to normal. Several days later, it would happen again. She pulled up pictures on her phone to show us: her face was swollen almost beyond recognition. There had been no pain, no itching, no rash. More recently, however, her hands and feet had started swelling as well, sometimes painfully. She had to stop wearing rings. Then the pain and numbness extended up her arms and into her chest, and that was what had prompted her to come in. She was having chest pain as she sat before us. "It feels like a cramp," she said. "My heart feels like it is coming out of my mouth. . . . The whole body feels like it's vibrating."

Doctors in other settings—say, an emergency room or an urgent-care clinic—would use a "rule out" strategy, running tests to rule out possible conditions, especially dangerous ones, as rapidly as possible. We would focus first on the chest pain—women often have less classic symptoms of a heart attack than men do—and order an EKG, a cardiac stress test, and the like to detect coronary-artery disease. Once that was ruled out, we might give her an antihistamine and watch her for a couple of hours to see if the symptoms went away. And, when that didn't work, we would send her home and

figure, Oh, well, it's probably nothing.

This was not, however, the way the woman's primary-care physician approached her condition. Dr. Katherine Rose was a young, freckle-faced physician two years out of training, with a precise and methodical air. "I'm not sure I know what's going on," she admitted to the woman.

The symptoms did not fit together in an obvious way. But, rather than proceed directly to an arsenal of tests, Rose took a different, more cautious, more



empirical approach, letting the answer emerge over time. It wasn't that she did no tests—she did an electrocardiogram, to make sure the woman really wasn't in the midst of a heart attack, and ordered a couple of basic blood tests. But she didn't expect that they'd show anything meaningful. (They didn't.) Instead, she asked the patient to take allergy medicine and to return to see her in two weeks. She'd monitor her over time to see how the symptoms evolved.

Rose told me, "I think the hardest transition from residency, where we are essentially trained in inpatient medicine, to my practice as a primary-care physician was feeling comfortable with waiting. As an outpatient doctor, you don't have constant data or the security of in-house surveillance. But most of the time people will get better on their own, without intervention or extensive workup. And, if they don't get better, then usually more clues to the diagnosis will emerge, and the steps will be clearer. For me, as a relatively new primary-care physician, the biggest struggle is trusting that patients will call if they are getting worse." And they do, she said, because they know her and they know the clinic. "Being able to tolerate the anxiety that accompanies taking care of people who are sick but not dangerously ill is not a skill I was expecting to need when I decided to become a doctor, but it is one of the ones I have worked hardest to develop."

The woman's symptoms disappeared after two weeks. A physician assistant figured out why: the patient had run out of naproxen, an analgesic medication she took for her migraine attacks, which in rare instances can produce soft-tissue swelling, through both allergic and non-allergic mechanisms. She would have to stay off all medications in that class. An urgent-care team wouldn't have figured this out. Now Rose contacted the Graham Headache Center to help identify an alternative medication for the woman's migraines.

Like the specialists at the Graham Center, the generalists at Jamaica Plain are incrementalists. They focus on the course of a person's health over time—even through a life. All understanding is provisional and subject to continual adjustment. For Rose, taking the long view meant thinking not just about her patient's bouts of facial swelling, or her headaches, or her depression, but about all of it—along with her living situation, her family history, her nutrition, her stress levels, and how they interrelated—and what that picture meant a doctor could do to improve her patient's long-term health and well-being throughout her life.

Success, therefore, is not about the episodic, momentary victories, though they do play a role. It is about the longer view of incremental steps that produce sustained progress. That, such clinicians argue, is what making a difference really looks like. In fact, it is what making a difference looks like in a range of endeavors.

**O**N FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1967, at 4:55 p.m., the Silver Bridge, which spanned the Ohio River, was funnelling the usual crawl of rush-hour traffic between Gallipolis, Ohio, and Point Pleasant, West Virginia, when a shotgun-like blast rang out. It was the sound of a critical link in the bridge's chain-suspension system giving way. In less than a minute, 1,750 feet of the 2,235-foot span collapsed, and seventy-five vehicles dropped into the river, eighty feet below. "The bridge just keeled over, starting slowly on the Ohio side then following like a deck of cards to the West Virginia side," a witness said. Forty-six people died; dozens more were injured.

The newly established National Transportation Safety Board conducted its first major disaster investigation and

reconstructed what had happened. Until then, state and federal government officials regarded such catastrophes as largely random and unavoidable. They focussed on building new bridges and highways, and employed mainly reactive strategies for problems with older ones. The investigation determined that corrosion of the four-decade-old bridge, combined with an obsolete design (it was built to handle Model T traffic, not cars and trucks several times heavier), had caused the critical fracture. Inspection could have caught the issue. But the Silver Bridge had had just one complete inspection since its opening, in 1928, and never with such concerns in mind. The collapse signalled the need for a new strategy. Although much of the United States' highway system was still relatively new, hundreds of bridges were more than forty years old and had been designed, like the Silver Bridge, for Model T traffic. Our system was entering middle age, and we didn't have a plan for it.

The federal government launched a standard inspection system and an inventory of public bridges—six hundred thousand in all. Almost half were found to be either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete, meaning that critical structural elements were either in “poor condition” or inadequate for current traffic loads. They were at a heightened risk of collapse. The good news was that investments in maintenance and improvement could extend the life of aging bridges by decades, and for a fraction of the cost of reconstruction.

Today, however, we still have almost a hundred and fifty thousand problem bridges. Sixty thousand have traffic restrictions because they aren’t safe for carrying full loads. Where have we gone wrong? The pattern is the same everywhere: despite knowing how much cheaper preservation is, we chronically raid funds intended for incremental maintenance and care, and use them to pay for new construction. It’s obvious why. Construction produces immediate and visible success; maintenance doesn’t. Does anyone reward politicians for a bridge that doesn’t crumble?

Even with serious traffic restrictions, one in a thousand structurally deficient bridges collapses each year. Four per cent of such collapses cause loss of life. Based on the lack of public response, structural

engineers have judged this to be “in a tolerable range.”

They also report that bridges are in better condition than many other parts of our aging infrastructure. The tendency to avoid spending on incremental maintenance and improvements has shortened the life span of our dams, levees, roads, sewers, and water systems. This situation isn’t peculiar to the United States. Governments everywhere tend to drastically undervalue incrementalism and overvalue heroism. “Typically, breakdowns—bridge washouts, overpass collapses, dam breaches—must occur before politicians and voters react to need,” one global infrastructure report observes. “Dislocation leads to rushed funding on an emergency basis with dramatically heightened costs.”

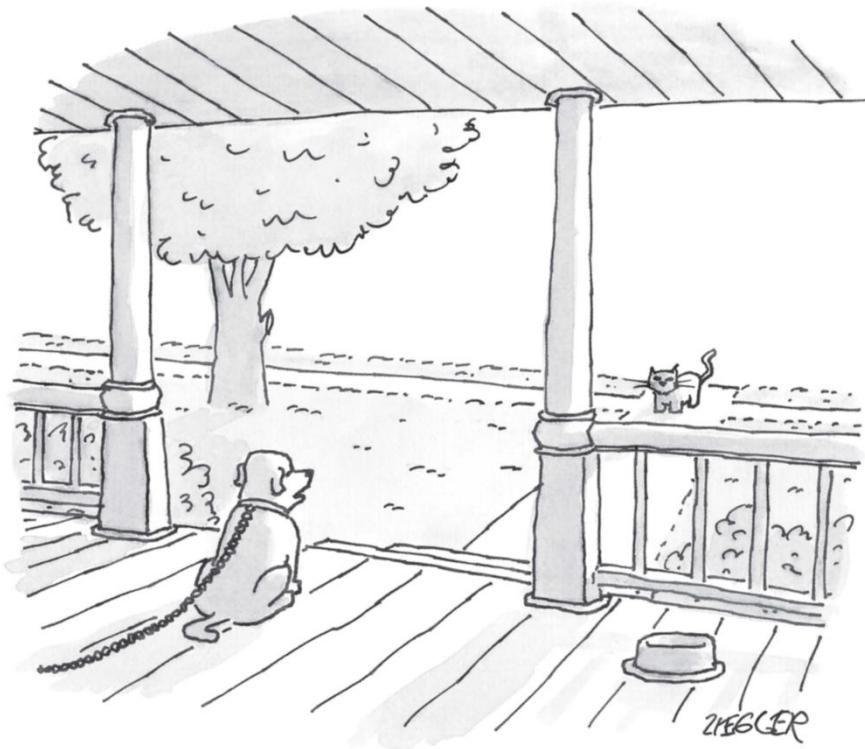
None of this is entirely irrational. The only visible part of investment in incremental care is the perennial costs. There is generally little certainty about how much spending will really be needed or how effective it will be. Rescue work delivers much more certainty. There is a beginning and an end to the effort. And you know what all the money and effort is (and is not) accomplishing. We don’t like to address problems until they are

well upon us and unavoidable, and we don’t trust solutions that promise benefits only down the road.

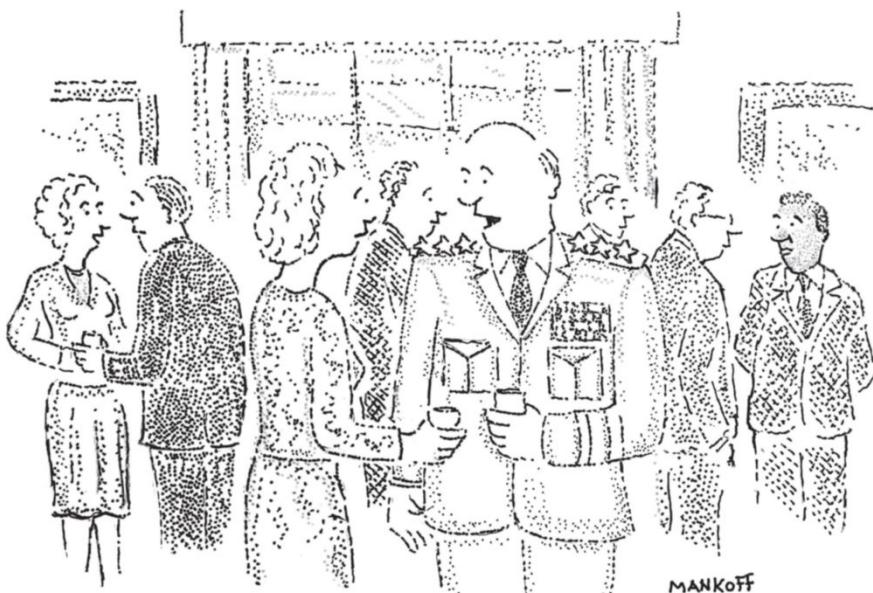
Incrementalists nonetheless want us to take a longer view. They want us to believe that they can recognize problems before they happen, and that, with steady, iterative effort over years, they can reduce, delay, or eliminate them. Yet incrementalists also want us to accept that they will never be able to fully anticipate or prevent all problems. This makes for a hard sell. The incrementalists’ contribution is more cryptic than the rescuers’, and yet also more ambitious. They are claiming, in essence, to be able to predict and shape the future. They want us to put our money on it.

For a long time, this would have seemed as foolish as giving your money to a palmist. What will happen to a bridge—or to your body—fifty years from now? We had no more than a vague idea. But the investigation of the 1967 Silver Bridge collapse marked an advance in our ability to shift from reacting to bridge catastrophes to anticipating and averting them.

Around the same time, something similar was happening in medicine. Scientists were discovering the long-term



*“Let me preface my remarks by saying that the chain is a lot longer than it looks.”*



*"Branch of the service? What makes you think  
I'm with any branch of the service?"*

health significance of high blood pressure, diabetes, and other conditions. We'd begun collecting the data, developing the computational capacity to decode the patterns, and discovering the treatments that could change them. Seemingly random events were becoming open to prediction and alteration. Our frame of medical consideration could widen to encompass our entire life spans.

There is a lot about the future that remains unpredictable. Nonetheless, the patterns are becoming more susceptible to empiricism—to a science of surveillance, analysis, and iterative correction. The incrementalists are overtaking the rescuers. But the transformation has itself been incremental. So we're only just starting to notice.

OUR ABILITY TO use information to understand and reshape the future is accelerating in multiple ways. We have at least four kinds of information that matter to your health and well-being over time: information about the state of your internal systems (from your imaging and lab-test results, your genome sequencing); the state of your living conditions (your housing, community, economic, and environmental circumstances); the state of the care you receive (what your practitioners have done and

how well they did it, what medications and other treatments they have provided); and the state of your behaviors (your patterns of sleep, exercise, stress, eating, sexual activity, adherence to treatments). The potential of this information is so enormous it is almost scary.

Instead of once-a-year checkups, in which people are like bridges undergoing annual inspection, we will increasingly be able to use smartphones and wearables to continuously monitor our heart rhythm, breathing, sleep, and activity, registering signs of illness as well as the effectiveness and the side effects of treatments. Engineers have proposed bathtub scanners that could track your internal organs for minute changes over time. We can decode our entire genome for less than the cost of an iPad and, increasingly, tune our care to the exact makeup we were born with.

Our health-care system is not designed for this future—or, indeed, for this present. We built it at a time when such capabilities were virtually nonexistent. When illness was experienced as a random catastrophe, and medical discoveries focused on rescue, insurance for unanticipated, episodic needs was what we needed. Hospitals and heroic interventions got the large investments; incrementalists were scanted.

After all, in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, they had little to offer that made a major difference in people's lives. But the more capacity we develop to monitor the body and the brain for signs of future breakdown and to correct course along the way—to deliver "precision medicine," as the lingo goes—the greater the difference health care can make in people's lives, as well as in reducing future costs.

This potential for incremental medicine to improve and save lives, however, is dramatically at odds with our system's allocation of rewards. According to a 2016 compensation survey, the five highest-paid specialties in American medicine are orthopedics, cardiology, dermatology, gastroenterology, and radiology. Practitioners in these fields have an average income of four hundred thousand dollars a year. All are interventionists: they make most of their income on defined, minutes- to hours-long procedures—replacing hips, excising basal-cell carcinomas, doing endoscopies, conducting and reading MRIs—and then move on. (One clear indicator: the starting income for cardiologists who perform invasive procedures is twice that of cardiologists who mainly provide preventive, longitudinal care.)

Here are the lowest-paid specialties: pediatrics, endocrinology, family medicine, H.I.V./infectious disease, allergy/immunology, internal medicine, psychiatry, and rheumatology. The average income for these practitioners is about two hundred thousand dollars a year. Almost certainly at the bottom, too, but not evaluated in the compensation survey: geriatricians, palliative-care physicians, and headache specialists. All are incrementalists—they produce value by improving people's lives over extended periods of time, typically months to years.

This hundred-per-cent difference in incomes actually understates the degree to which our policies and payment systems have given short shrift to incremental care. As an American surgeon, I have a battalion of people and millions of dollars of equipment on hand when I arrive in my operating room. Incrementalists are lucky if they can hire a nurse.

Already, we can see the cost of this misalignment. As rates of smoking fall, for instance, the biggest emerging killer

is uncontrolled hypertension, which can result in stroke, heart attack, and dementia, among other conditions. Thirty per cent of Americans have high blood pressure. Although most get medical attention, only half are adequately treated. Globally, it's even worse—a billion people have hypertension, and only fourteen per cent receive adequate treatment. Good treatment for hypertension is like bridge maintenance: it requires active monitoring and incremental fixes and adjustments over time but averts costly disasters. All the same, we routinely skimp on the follow-through. We'll deploy an army of experts and a mountain of resources to separate conjoined twins—but give Asaf Bitton enough to hire a medical aide or a computerized system to connect electronically with high-blood-pressure patients and help them live longer? Forget about it.

Recently, I called Bill Haynes's internist, Dr. Mita Gupta, the one who recognized that the John Graham Headache Center might be able help him. She had never intended to pursue a career in primary care, she said. She'd planned to go into gastroenterology—one of the highly paid specialties. But, before embarking on specialty training, she took a temporary position at a general medical clinic in order to start a family. "What it turned into really surprised me," she said. As she got to know and work with people over time, she saw the depth of the impact she could have on their lives. "Now it's been ten years, and I see the kids of patients of mine, I see people through crises, and I see some of them through to the end of their lives." Her main frustration: how little recognized her abilities are, whether by the insurers, who expect her to manage a patient with ten different health problems in a fifteen-minute visit, or by hospitals, which rarely call to notify her, let alone consult her, when a patient of hers is admitted. She could do so much more for her patients with a bit more time and better resources for tracking, planning, and communicating. Instead, she is constantly playing catch-up. "I don't know a primary-care physician who eats lunch," she said.

The difference between what's made available to me as a surgeon and what's made available to our internists or pediatricians or H.I.V. specialists is not

just shortsighted—it's immoral. More than a quarter of Americans and Europeans who die before the age of seventy-five would not have died so soon if they'd received appropriate medical care for their conditions, most of which were chronic. We routinely countenance inadequate care among the most vulnerable people in our communities—including children, the elderly, and the chronically ill.

I SEE THE STAKES in my own family. My son, Walker, was born with a heart condition, and in his first days rescue medicine was what he needed. A cardiology team deployed the arsenal that saved him: the drips that kept his circulation going, the surgery that closed the holes in his heart and gave him a new aortic arch. But incremental medicine is what he has needed ever since.

For twenty-one years, he has had the same cardiologist and nurse practitioner. They saw him through his first months, when weight gain, stimulation, and control of his blood pressure were essential. They saw him through his first decade, when all he turned out to need was someone to keep a cautious eye on how his heart did as he developed and took on sports. They saw him through his growth spurt, when the size of his aorta failed to keep up with his height, and guided us through the difficult choices about what operation he needed, when, and who should do it. Then they saw him through his thankfully smooth recovery.

When he began to struggle in middle school, a psychologist's evaluation identified deficits that, he warned us, meant that Walker would probably not have the cognitive capacity for college. But the cardiologist recognized that Walker's difficulties fit with new data showing that kids with his heart condition tend to have a particular pattern of neurological deficits in processing speed and other functions which could potentially be managed. In the ensuing years, she and his pediatrician helped bring in experts to work with him on his learning and coping skills, and school planning. He's now a junior in college, majoring in philosophy, and emerging as a writer and an artist. Rescue saved my son's life. But without incremental medicine he would never

have the long and full life that he could.

In the next few months, the worry is whether Walker and others like him will be able to have health-care coverage of any kind. His heart condition makes him, essentially, uninsurable. Until he's twenty-six, he can stay on our family policy. But after that? In the work he's done in his field, he's had the status of a freelancer. Without the Affordable Care Act's protections requiring all insurers to provide coverage to people regardless of their health history and at the same price as others their age, he'd be unable to find health insurance. Republican replacement plans threaten to weaken or drop these requirements, and leave no meaningful solution for people like him. And data indicate that twenty-seven per cent of adults under sixty-five are like him, with past health conditions that make them uninsurable without the protections.

The coming years will present us with a far larger concern, however. In this era of advancing information, it will become evident that, for everyone, life is a pre-existing condition waiting to happen. We will all turn out to have—like the Silver Bridge and the growing crack in its critical steel link—a lurking heart condition or a tumor or a depression or some rare disease that needs to be managed. This is a problem for our health-care system. It doesn't put great value on care that takes time to pay off. But this is also an opportunity. We have the chance to transform the course of our lives.

Doing so will mean discovering the heroism of the incremental. That means not only continuing our work to make sure everyone has health insurance but also accelerating efforts begun under health reform to restructure the way we deliver and pay for health care. Much can be debated about how: there are, for example, many ways to reward clinicians when they work together and devise new methods for improving lives and averting costs. But the basic decision has the stark urgency of right and wrong. We can give up an antiquated set of priorities and shift our focus from rescue medicine to lifelong incremental care. Or we can leave millions of people to suffer and die from conditions that, increasingly, can be predicted and managed. This isn't a bloodless policy choice; it's a medical emergency. ♦

# GOOD BEHAVIOR

*An unusual team of White House scientists works through the final days of the Administration.*

BY SARAH STILLMAN

A WEEK AFTER Donald Trump's election, a thirty-year-old cognitive scientist named Maya Shankar purchased a plane ticket to Flint, Michigan. Shankar held one of the more unorthodox jobs in the Obama White House, running the Social and Behavioral Sciences Team, also known as the President's "nudge unit." When she launched the team, in early 2014, it felt, Shankar recalls, "like a startup in my parents' basement"—no budget, no mandate, no bona-fide employees. Within two years, the small group of scientists had become a staff of dozens—including an agricultural economist, an industrial psychologist, and "human-centered designers"—working with more than twenty federal agencies on seventy projects, from fixing gaps in veterans' health care to relieving student debt. Usually, the initiatives had, at their core, one question: Could the growing body of knowledge about the quirks of the human brain be used to improve public policy?

For months, Shankar had been thinking about how to bring behavioral science to bear on the problems in Flint, where a crisis stemming from lead contamination of the drinking water had stretched on for almost two years. She wondered if lessons from the beleaguered city could inform the Administration's approach to the broader threat posed by lead across America—in pipes, in paint, in dust, and in soil. "Flint is not the only place poisoning kids," Shankar said.

In recent years, behavioral science has become a voguish field. In 2002, the Israeli psychologist Daniel Kahneman won a Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for his work with a colleague, Amos Tversky, exploring the peculiarities of human decision-making in the face of uncertainty. (Their collaboration is the subject of a popular new book by Michael Lewis, "The

Undoing Project: A Friendship That Changed Our Minds.") A basic premise of the discipline they'd helped to create was that people's cognition is bias-prone, and susceptible to the cognitive equivalent of optical illusions. As a result, small tweaks of presentation or circumstance could make a major difference: if a judge rendered a decision about granting parole just before a meal, the inmate's odds for a favorable outcome dipped to near zero; just after the judge ate, the chances rose to around sixty-five per cent. Grocers had learned that they could sell double the amount of soup if they placed a sign above their cans reading "LIMIT OF 12 PERSON."

But, for all the field's potential, its advances seemed mostly to have served the private sector. (And there they often veered toward sly consumer coercion.) A prominent exception was the "nudge," a notion advanced by the legal scholar Cass R. Sunstein, now at Harvard Law School, and the University of Chicago behavioral economist Richard Thaler, in their 2008 best-seller "Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness." They stressed the role of "choice architecture": the countless factors that coalesce around a given decision, often shaping outcomes in crucial, if barely visible, ways that could be rearranged. Sunstein and Thaler described the concept with public policy very much in mind. The subtle context in which we make choices, they theorized, could and should be stacked in favor of the social good. In the public sector, this meant gently nudging citizens toward certain choices, through techniques like automatic enrollment and reminder prompts, that take into account the fact that most of us, as Thaler told me, are "more like Homer Simpson than like Albert Einstein."

President Obama saw the appeal of the nudge. In 2009, he tapped Sun-

stein to head the most bureaucratic-sounding of bureaucracies, the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. During the next three years, Sunstein worked to bring behavioral insights into the government's approach to policy. But the reach of these ideas remained limited. The nudge's most appealing feature, its simplicity, was also among its constraints. Though the tweaks had vast potential implications, their small-bore design made it difficult to address the larger forces behind stubborn structural challenges. "We can't take on some big problems, like climate change, and solve them entirely with nudges," Thaler told me.

Shankar agreed, and, in her White House role, she wanted to test a wider range of tactics and delve deeper into problems. For the first two years, her team focussed mostly on programs that were narrowly defined, even though they could still affect thousands or millions of Americans: for instance, easing health-insurance enrollment, or helping veterans access education benefits. But Shankar was eager to see how her team might weigh in on more systemic, seemingly intractable problems associated with inequality, from homelessness to racial bias in policing. Flint seemed like a good place to find out. The city's water crisis was tied up in deeply entrenched, even multigenerational, issues: "its racial history, its socioeconomic circumstances, all of it," Shankar told me. Early last year, the team began gathering research relevant to Flint, drawing, in part, from public-health scholarship. In October, she and a colleague, an economist named Nate Higgins, visited the city for the first time, in conjunction with the Environmental Protection Agency, to ask residents about their evolving needs.

Then, on November 8th, Donald Trump was elected. For days, Shankar walked around shell-shocked. Her



*Maya Shankar, a cognitive scientist, hoped that she and her colleagues could help the residents of Flint.*



team, if it even continued to exist in the new Administration, would soon belong to one of the most anti-science President-elects in history, who has called climate change a “hoax,” spread unproven claims about vaccinations’ ties to autism, and mocked new brain-science-backed N.F.L. guidelines to prevent concussions, saying that football has grown “soft.”

**I**N 2010, THE United Kingdom became the first country to set up a government office devoted solely to making use of behavioral science. Backed by the new Conservative government, a hodgepodge crew of social scientists, psychologists, and data nerds, calling themselves the Behavioural Insights Team, tried to find opportunities for government savings and other improvements through simple tweaks. People were less tardy with their taxes, for instance, when they were shown

that most of their neighbors paid on time. Many of the British team’s projects aimed to use behavioral research for social uplift. In one, it conducted a randomized controlled trial to determine which of eight different prompts was most effective in soliciting participation in organ donation. (The winning message: “If you needed an organ transplant would you have one? If so please help others.”)

More recently, the team addressed British doctors’ overprescribing of antibiotics, contacting outliers who’d written prescriptions at the highest rates. The letter it sent did little more than note the recipient’s status on the far end of the statistical spectrum, but the prescription rates dropped by three per cent during the next six months. Some critics dismissed such accomplishments as overhyped fluff; others warned of a rising nanny state. Even the team’s guiding mantra—“Make It Easy, Attract-

tive, Social and Timely”—could be seen as nothing more than common sense.

Shankar got interested in the field as a teen-ager. The daughter of Indian immigrants, she once thought she’d become a classical violinist. (For several years, she was taught by Itzhak Perlman.) A hand injury derailed her musical aspirations, and, while recovering at home, in Connecticut, she happened upon a book by the psychologist Steven Pinker and became enamored of cognitive science. As a undergraduate at Yale, she conducted research on primates, travelling to a tropical island to study rhesus macaques, with the aim of mapping a feature of cognition known as “essentialism”: “Does a monkey know what makes a coconut a coconut, and an apple an apple?” (On the island, she learned to dodge monkey urine from the tree canopy overhead; the macaques carried a version of herpes B that could be lethal to humans.) Later, as a Rhodes Scholar and doctoral student at Oxford, she visited a famous flavor factory in Ohio, where she tested whether she could hijack the sensory perceptions of professional flavorists: giving them a lime-tinted beverage, say, that had the taste of tangerines.

After Shankar did her postdoctoral research, at Stanford’s Decision Neuroscience Lab, she began looking for a job. In the field of cognitive science, many of the opportunities for an aspiring researcher were of a particular type, geared toward helping to make big companies richer, or rich people thinner, or thin people more alluring on algorithm-based dating sites. Behavioral science’s bro-culture adaptations—the life hack, the quantified self—had proliferated. Shankar worried about her next steps. She didn’t want to spend her life in a suit, or in a lab, or on a remote island, dodging monkey excretions.

One day in 2012, she flew from California to a friend’s wedding in Connecticut. While there, she had tea with her college mentor, the Yale psychologist Laurie Santos. “I feel like the job I want doesn’t even exist,” Shankar told her. She added, sheepishly, “I guess I’ll go into consulting?”

Santos mentioned that she’d just returned from a conference, where she’d

heard about the Department of Agriculture's efforts to put behavioral science into practice to aid children from low-income families. Through a small nudge—a government initiative that automatically enrolled kids in free federal school-lunch programs, by simply cross-checking their eligibility for preexisting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits—hundreds of thousands of children were fed, without the shame and the bureaucratic hassle that kept parents from signing them up.

The idea that a minor government modification could decrease a child's hunger—and perhaps, in turn, improve his or her trajectory in school—stuck with Shankar. It was simple, even obvious, as the best behavioral insights often are. Later, she learned that the Department of Agriculture supported a whole slew of behavioral projects. One, conducted by Cornell University's Food and Brand Lab, found that if school cafeterias rebranded plain vegetables with catchy names—X-Ray Vision Carrots, say, or Power Punch Broccoli—consumption soared.

Shankar felt that she'd found her path. She reached out to Sunstein, who had returned to Harvard, and asked if he knew of any openings in government. He gave her the name of a contact at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. Shankar sent what seemed like a long-shot pitch to the deputy director, Tom Kalil, to join the office and find ways to weave behavioral insights into the heart of public policy. They met, and, to her surprise, Kalil hired her as a senior science adviser. Shankar was twenty-six.

She moved to Washington, D.C., in early 2013, leaving her bike and her books in California, "in case things didn't work out." Even before her new job began, she e-mailed Kalil with the outlines of a broader aspiration. "One of my more ambitious, longer-term goals," she wrote, "is to begin laying down the foundation for the creation of a U.S.-based behavioral insights team."

By the start of 2014, with guidance from some of the field's big names, Shankar had recruited her first five experts from academic institutions and nonprofits. They began working closely

with a growing list of agencies, including the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Agriculture, and the Treasury.

That year, the team sought to put together small collaborations that could garner quick results. It formed a partnership with the Department of Education and a nonprofit, uAspire, to find a way to lessen "summer melt." Typically, twenty to thirty per cent of students in urban districts who were accepted to college didn't matriculate, owing to last-minute burdens like financial-aid deadlines. The team helped devise a pilot program in which students were sent eight personalized text messages over the summer, prompting them to follow through. Matriculation rates increased by several percentage points. Shankar's group offered to help other agencies with similar tweaks, to facilitate microloans to farmers, or to reduce the overprescribing of antipsychotics and other drugs by Medicare providers.

Then, on September 15, 2015, President Obama gave the team the ultimate nudge: an unusual Executive Order, titled "Using Behavioral Science Insights to Better Serve the American People." It formalized the team as an official entity, and urged all federal agencies to "develop strategies for

applying behavioral science insights to programs and, where possible, rigorously test and evaluate the impact of these insights."

Four months later, the President declared a state of emergency in Flint. Shankar saw her chance to test the mandate's reach.

**L**EAD, SHANKAR'S TEAM quickly learned, represents a quintessential behavioral challenge. First, it tends to lurk quietly; in water, the potent neurotoxin is often invisible. After a state-appointed emergency manager switched the city's water source from Lake Huron and the Detroit River to the Flint River, in 2014, brownish liquid began flowing from many taps. The discoloration came from other contaminants, like iron. The lead contamination resulted from the corrosion of old pipes and plumbing fixtures, after the city failed to properly treat the water. *E. coli*, carcinogens, and bacteria causing Legionnaires' disease were also found in alarming quantities. The stark visuals had a strange behavioral upside, helping to provoke national outrage in a way that an invisible scourge rarely can.

In the bloodstream, lead disappears quickly, but bones can harbor the toxin



for decades. In children, lead exposure can impair basic brain development, causing impulsivity, anxiety, depression, and diminished I.Q. In the elderly, it can prompt memory loss, and pregnant women can suffer miscarriages and stillbirths. Mona Hanna-Attisha, a Flint-based pediatrician who'd helped expose the city's problem, told me, "There is no safe lead level, even for adults."

Shankar understood that Flint's water crisis went beyond the challenge of protecting locals from lasting bodily harm. It also meant repairing trust, or earning it anew, among residents who'd been told by government officials—often repeatedly, and emphatically—that Flint's water was safe to drink. As the city's lead issues evolved, the responsibility for obtaining safe drinking water had fallen in no small part on residents. Many neighborhoods were still waiting for their old lead pipes to be swapped out, and some people perceived inequities in the replacement process. (Only in mid-December did Congress agree to a hundred-and-seventy-million-dollar relief package to help speed up those repairs, and Flint's recovery as a whole.) In the meantime, residents would have to keep drinking bottled water, or else install special filters at home, which required vigilant maintenance.

Shankar's team had begun working

with the E.P.A. shortly after the President declared a state of emergency, helping to redesign the water-safety fact sheets that residents received. The purpose of Shankar's trip to Flint in October was to see how the team might take the partnership further. She and her colleague, Higgins, toured a water-processing plant and met with faith-based groups and Red Cross aides. And they visited an elderly man named Gerald as he tried to understand what E.P.A. workers were doing at his house testing his tap. (They'd come by many times before, he said, showing Shankar and her teammate a binder full of documents. But the communications from various agencies were often contradictory, he said, and many residents were left confused.)

Gerald's chief concern turned out to be his exorbitant bill. Flint has some of the highest water rates in the nation. As the situation unfolded, families were forced to pay outrageous amounts for water that was still unsafe to drink unfiltered. Shankar kept hearing about other concerns in the community: the threat of widespread evictions, tied in part to these large bills; children's malnutrition, which quickens the body's uptake of lead; undocumented immigrants who feared opening the door when E.P.A. officials came by with water-safety information. "It pretty quickly became

apparent that there was more at stake," Shankar told me.

On Shankar's return to Flint, in November, she wanted to introduce new behavioral tools to leaders in the city, and to engage with them on some of the more vexing challenges, like combatting the spread of misinformation. The team was still working toward its goal of coming up with science-backed interventions that could unfold over the next several years. She and a colleague, Will Tucker-Ray, planned to start at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, a Catholic congregation that Shankar had visited on her previous trip, and which served hundreds of Flint's Latino families. Disturbingly, a portion of the city's undocumented residents still hadn't even heard about the lead contamination. Advisories about the crisis often circulated only in English. Early on, bottled water and filters had been distributed by uniformed National Guardsmen, some of whom had demanded to see a driver's license from recipients; though the tactic stopped, the fear had not.

Shankar and Tucker-Ray arrived in Detroit on Saturday night. The next morning, at dawn, they drove to Flint. Tucker-Ray, who'd joined the Social and Behavioral Sciences Team at its inception, is also a managing director of ideas42, a nonprofit "behavioral-design lab" that applies research from the field to social issues, such as intimate-partner violence and income inequality. The pair got to Our Lady of Guadalupe just in time for the Spanish-language service. Incense swirled. Elderly ladies shook orange maracas, crooned, and swayed. Toddlers squealed in their parents' arms, and Shankar wondered whether lead might be present in their blood or bones.

Shankar and Tucker-Ray had stayed up late, working on their PowerPoint slides. The plans for the weekend were still a bit murky. "I'm eager to see how this goes," Shankar whispered.

**S**TANDING IN THE nave of the church, Shankar looked thoroughly Californian, in a stretchy bright-red runner's jacket and purple tennis shoes. (The nickname her team members had given her, Sneakers, reflected her



*"We're in luck—it's Father Time-and-a-Half."*

commitment to pragmatism in her fashion choices.) Tucker-Ray, in contrast, wore wool slacks and a narrow gray tie. Their host, Aurora Saucedo, was an active member of the church, as well as a co-founder of Latinos United for Flint, a group that started amid the water crisis. After Mass, she grabbed Shankar and Tucker-Ray and pulled them into a small church classroom. She wanted them to hear the worried voices of undocumented parishioners who'd just filed in for their weekly English lesson.

"What's going to happen with the water now that we have a new President?" one woman asked, later explaining that her hair had fallen out in clumps at the height of the water crisis. She couldn't afford to wash her hair with bottled Evian. "Do you think we'll still have the same help?"

A young man said, "I think the concern is that because we're a Hispanic community we're not going to have the same help." His parents had brought him to Michigan from Mexico, at the age of ten. More than a decade later, in 2012, he'd become a beneficiary of Obama's program for undocumented immigrants who had come to the country as children; it protected him from deportation, if only temporarily. Now, he said, besides the hazardous water, he feared immigration raids. "They already have all my information," he explained. "I don't have any criminal record.... I don't have any tickets, no drinking and driving." But he was concerned about his children, who, after they saw Trump on TV talking about mass deportations, asked him, "What's going to happen to us?"

We trudged across the parking lot to meet others in the church cafeteria. As Saucedo translated the taunts one parishioner had received ("I'm going to call the police and let everyone know you're illegal and they're going to throw your ass back to Mexico"), she began to tear up.

Saucedo had invited several church members to an informational meeting with Shankar and Tucker-Ray: a parish deacon, an immigration lawyer, and a local E.P.A. representative named Ramon Molina. Burly and affable, Molina held what Shankar called "trusted-messenger status." He'd taught social



*"Wheatgrass is highly effective at neutralizing joy."*

studies in Flint's public schools for more than thirty years, and many at Our Lady knew his face better than the mayor's. (His family had helped found the church, in the nineteen-fifties, after arriving from Mexico.) When the crisis hit, he was retired from teaching. But the E.P.A. had lured him back to work, hoping that his presence might help among Flint's Spanish speakers.

"Nothing we're about to say is a panacea," Shankar said to the group, who sat around a table in a classroom. She and Tucker-Ray passed out hard copies of their PowerPoint slides, before she launched into Tool No. 1: "implementation prompts." When trying to get people to sign up for flu shots, she explained, researchers discovered that return rates jumped when people wrote down when they would go to the doctor or the pharmacy, and how they would get there, in a pledge of sorts.

"Sometimes we just need a simple reminder to act on the things we want to act on," Shankar said. When it came to the water crisis, she suggested, the church could give every family a handout after services, asking them to note when, where, and how they planned to change their filters, and perhaps indi-

cating whether they wanted to receive reminders by text message.

Next, Shankar described concepts like "social norming"—using subtle forms of peer pressure to, for example, encourage hand-washing, which many residents had come to fear. She and Tucker-Ray eventually arrived at their main issue: trust-building. How could government regain the city's faith after such an unforgivable breach?

Blame tainted nearly every arm of government, from Michigan's Republican governor, Rick Snyder, and his Department of Environmental Quality, to the flat-footed E.P.A., to local elected leaders. So Shankar listed a set of tools for reversing at least some of the damage, including extreme "operational transparency" about remedial actions.

Shankar and Tucker-Ray suggested something along the lines of Domino's popular Pizza Tracker, which allowed customers to follow their pizza from the oven to their door, and worry less about whether, say, the pepperoni—or, in this case, the overdue lead-pipe replacements—had been forgotten.

The group seemed receptive, but there were murmurs of skepticism. Molina said his anger about the toxic water still felt raw, even now that he'd gone



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to work for the E.P.A. "As Joe Citizen, I was, like, 'I got screwed!'" he said. "My grandkids were drinking that water. Someone lied to me." Here, behavioral tweaks met their limits: if a government isn't worthy of trust, no savvy intervention can change that. And a nudge cannot fix a bankrupt policy; worse, it might help whitewash the problem.

Shankar and Tucker-Ray nodded sympathetically. The thornier issues would take time, money, and political will to fix. But, in the meantime, didn't it still make sense to debunk the misinformation that had been spread? Early on, some Flint officials had urged citizens to boil their water to get rid of bacteria—a recommendation that put residents at greater risk for lead poisoning, since boiling can concentrate the metal. How could Our Lady help reverse that misstep?

Myth-busting easily backfires, Shankar told the group. "It's much better to replace a lie or a mistruth with a memorable and incompatible truth," she added. Personal stories work well. So, too, the team's PowerPoint read, do "repetition, rhymes, songs."

When it was time to wrap up, Shankar returned to this idea, intrigued by what she'd learned on her previous trip

about Sauceda's efforts to use song and dance in her day job, as an addiction-prevention specialist. "We should just try to write a song around correct water use!" Shankar said. "I'd love to work with someone on your team to figure out what that looks like. I can't say I have any songwriting talents."

"Convince the mariachis to come over?" Molina said. Flint's mariachi band was playing that night at a local restaurant.

A catchy tune could clarify the details of the E.P.A. water-safety literature, Shankar pointed out. "Imagine you're in the kitchen," she said, "and you're a little confused, like, 'What did I read on the fact sheet?' But then you just recite the song in your head and you're, like, 'Oh, that's right!'" People laughed appreciatively.

"We will not accept anything less than a No. 1 iTunes hit," she joked.

The group soon left for the restaurant, where colorful parrots in cowboy hats hung from rafters. The mariachis—who turned out to be local college kids, some with bushy red beards and ruddy cheeks—played impressive renditions of Mexican classics like "Cielito Lindo." When the time came for the final song, Sauceda cried out, "Otra! Otra!"

"Lock the doors!" Molina cried, urging the band to keep playing.

As the musicians packed up, Sauceda brought the band's director over. "This is Maya. She's from the White House," Sauceda explained. "And she needs us to write a hit song about the water crisis—better than Taylor Swift, O.K.?"

**S**OCLICAL SCIENCE—or, more accurately, in some cases, pseudoscience—has a fraught history when it comes to communities of color. Eugenics; phrenology; the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male. It's easy to grasp why, especially in many disenfranchised neighborhoods, the sudden appearance of two cheerful behavioral scientists doling out help "for the good of the American people" (a phrase of which Shankar is fond) might be met with suspicion. Such wariness hovered over a morning meeting that Shankar and Tucker-Ray had on their second day, at the Genesee County health department.

The department's offices are next to a desolate parking lot. At around nine-thirty, a half-dozen community leaders—from a black church, a nearby community college, and elsewhere—filed into a conference room, taking their places around a long rectangular

table. Some seemed guarded, but all were eager for a White House ear. Kent Key, the director of the Office of Community Scholars and Partnerships at Michigan State University's College of Human Medicine, said, "What the narrative has been about Flint is that we were this little poor, docile black community that didn't have a voice, and needed someone to come and fix it for them." On the contrary, he stressed, locals had been fighting the switch in the water source long before it happened. "When a community does everything right by the book," he went on, "and your voice is still disregarded? To me, that speaks to a larger historical, systemic issue of the disregard for communities, particularly communities of color."

Key wore an ensemble of maroon slacks, maroon socks, a maroon turtleneck, and a maroon velour blazer, with a light-maroon scarf. Growing up in Flint, he said, his grandfather would take him fishing in the Flint River, where they'd catch buffalo fish, which he'd always toss back. "As an eight-year-old boy, I knew I couldn't eat anything that came out of the Flint River," he said. "As a child, it was in my mind that the water wasn't good." Many locals knew this, too, he explained. They'd repeatedly voiced their concern, on the steps of the capitol and at Governor Snyder's office, to no avail.

A church elder named Sarah Bailey soon chimed in. "It started with the decision that this community was inept and unable to govern itself," she said. In 2011, Governor Snyder invoked a controversial state law and placed Flint under emergency management. A few years later, the city's emergency manager switched Flint's water source, a move that was driven, Bailey said, by "the bottom line." (Two former state-appointed emergency managers have since faced criminal indictments, as have others involved in the water crisis.) She went on, "It took away our right to self-determination, self-governance, and democracy."

Later, Key shared a personal story about the son of a family friend who had begun acting out in school. The boy's mother had come to Key for help. When Key asked the boy what was

going on, he replied, "Well, they said I'm not going to be smart anyway."

"These kids are internalizing the messages about how the lead is affecting them," Key said. "If there is a direct correlation between lead exposure and the cognitive ability to handle stressful situations in a reasonable way, and we see more violent trends, can you imagine the pipeline of youth who are going to be going into the corrections system?"

When the meeting concluded, Shankar shook hands and exchanged business cards with the others. It wasn't immediately clear what had come out of the gathering. But, as she and Tucker-Ray left for their next appointment, Shankar began contemplating aloud the possibilities. She said to Tucker-Ray, "Did you see how my eyes widened when he said that thing about the kids giving up because they think they're going to be dumb?"

When she was at Stanford, Shankar had met Carol Dweck, a pioneer in the psychological study of motivation. Dweck's most central theory was simple: youth who were taught to regard their brains as a muscle, developed through hard work—a "growth mind-set"—fared far better than those who'd been taught that intelligence was a fixed trait, like eye color. In 2013, Shankar had co-hosted a conference on the subject at the White House. Now she wondered if she might be able to entice experts in the field to collaborate with schools, clinics, and childcare centers in Flint.

After a long day with Shankar and Tucker-Ray, I stopped by the home of a friend. I'd first met Greg Mansfield, who'd worked on the assembly line at a General Motors plant for nearly four decades, while reporting on another story, in 2014. We'd developed an odd relationship, mostly built around ribbing each other over politics. During last year's Presidential debates, we'd exchanged dozens of texts: "I hate to say it but she lies!!!!" he'd written on one occasion, followed by "He is kicking her ASS!!!!" Mansfield had taken the night off from his

usual 4 P.M.-to-1:30 A.M. shift to cook me spicy chili.

In the kitchen, Mansfield stood over a big silver pot and introduced his neighbor Jim Palmer, who made a living drilling wells for local residents. He had just returned from a deer-hunting expedition, and he sipped from a can of Budweiser. He asked why I'd come to Flint. "I'm following this behavioral-sciences team from the White House," I said. "They're trying to figure out how to use insights about real human behavior to do a better job with public policy—stuff like the water crisis here."

They looked at each other. "Oh, you mean like brainwashing?" Palmer asked.

"Well, I guess they'd probably call it more like applying research aimed to make policies better and cheaper and more effective." I searched for an example. "Like, instead of just telling veterans that they're eligible for certain benefits, they told them they'd *earned* those benefits, and suddenly lots more of them tried to enroll."

"Yeah," Palmer said. "Brainwashing."

Mansfield and Palmer were eager to talk politics. Michigan had helped swing the election in Trump's favor, a stark reversal from 2008 and 2012, when Obama won the state handily.

The Obama campaign had embraced behavioral science's possibilities, consulting with a group of leading academics and practitioners calling themselves the Consortium of Behavioral Scientists. The team

helped the campaign with get-out-the-vote techniques and advised Obama officials on how to quash false claims that the President was a Muslim. (Instead of saying, "No, Obama is not a Muslim"—which simply increased association by repetition—it was better to counter with "Actually, Obama is a Christian.")

In the 2016 election, Hillary Clinton's campaign seemed stuck in perpetual myth-busting mode. Even when James Comey, the director of the F.B.I., reaffirmed, two days before the election, that the candidate should not face criminal charges tied to her e-mails, the effect of the statement was exactly what Shankar had put forth at the Flint church: debunking a myth often



does little more than reinforce it. (“Within hours, a listener may not remember if it’s true or false,” Shankar had said. “It just feels recognizable.”)

The President-elect, it turned out, had a gift for the behavioral arts. He intuitively grasped “loss aversion” (our tendency to give more weight to the threat of losses than to potential gains), and perpetually maximized “nostalgia bias” (our tendency to remember the past as being better than it was). He made frequent subconscious appeals to “cultural tightness” (whereby groups that have experienced threats to their safety tend to desire strong rules and the punishment of deviance), and, perhaps most striking, his approach tapped into what psychologists call “cognitive fluency” (the more easily we can mentally process an idea, such as “Make America great again” or “Lock her up!,” the more we’re prone to retain it). Even his Twitter game was sticky: “Crooked Hillary!” “BUILD THE WALL.” (As Shankar said, repetition works.)

Shankar didn’t know whether her team would survive in the age of Trump. And, if it did, how would it be used?

As President, Trump may be attracted to the team’s knack for cost-

cutting. One of its early pilot studies, in 2015, found that the government could garner an extra \$1.59 million from private vendors in a three-month window just by tweaking a rebate form to encourage honesty. And the team had worked extensively on projects that served many people in Trump’s base of support, from veterans to small farmers to job-seekers.

But Shankar and her team’s desire to test more ambitious interventions—those exploring the intergenerational roots of poverty and inequality, and those inviting a broader range of voices to frame solutions to problems—will likely go unfulfilled. Many people on her team will remain in government, working for various agencies, where Shankar hopes that they will press on in using behavioral science. But the fate of the Executive Order laying out the team’s mission is uncertain. The group had just begun exploring ways to help bring about police reforms, and working to create new materials for post-prison reentry programs, drawing on input from formerly incarcerated individuals. They had ideas, too, for efforts to keep expanding access to school lunches, student-debt relief, and Obamacare.

In August, Cass Sunstein published

a book, “The Ethics of Influence: Government in the Age of Behavioral Science,” in which he reminded readers that choice architecture is value-neutral, ripe for democrats and demagogues. “There is no question that certain nudges, and certain kinds of choice architecture, can raise serious ethical problems,” he writes. “Hitler nudged; so did Stalin.”

Trump’s vision for behavioral science in the White House is anyone’s guess. Sunstein’s frequent collaborator, Richard Thaler, told me that he often signs their nudge book with the admonition “Nudge for good.” But he conceded that it is “meant as a plea, rather than an expectation.”

**A**s THEIR LAST day in Flint drew to a close, Shankar and Tucker-Ray hurried to a final meeting. They had arranged to talk with a disabled Gulf War veteran and community activist named Art Woodson, who didn’t think much of the federal government. At a local municipal building, where an enlarged photograph of corroded lead pipes adorned one wall, Woodson told Shankar about his worry that local kids would give up when lead’s symptoms surfaced, or even before. “What I see,” he said, “is hopelessness.”

Shankar peppered Woodson with questions: What kinds of things had he heard from kids who knew they’d been exposed to lead? How were parents and teachers explaining the risks to kids who had elevated lead levels? For more than an hour, they brainstormed, before Shankar and Tucker-Ray readied for their drive back to the airport.

As the pair collected their things, Woodson offered them a box of Flint fried chicken. “I’m a vegetarian,” Tucker-Ray said, apologetically. “So am I,” Shankar said.

“See, that’s what I’m talking about—y’all are D.C. people,” Woodson said. “I’ll eat a cow.”

As Woodson’s trust meter appeared to dip, he asked some final, pointed questions: When President Obama left office, people like Shankar and her team would have to leave, too, right? And then what?

Agencies on the ground in Flint



*“Perhaps a dirge would lift your spirits?”*

expected at least some of their work to continue. "Look, at this point, we're trying to run out the tape," Shankar said, of her own team. "I'm not willing to give up until the last day."

"Can you hurry up and push it out there?" Woodson said, of the team's findings in Flint. If their recommendations were already in progress, he said, Trump might prove less willing to "take something away from the kids."

Shankar promised that she'd sleep only a few hours a night until it was time for her to go.

Woodson nodded. Then he added, "Let me do a mental-health check on y'all—how are you feeling, actually, speaking from a personal perspective?"

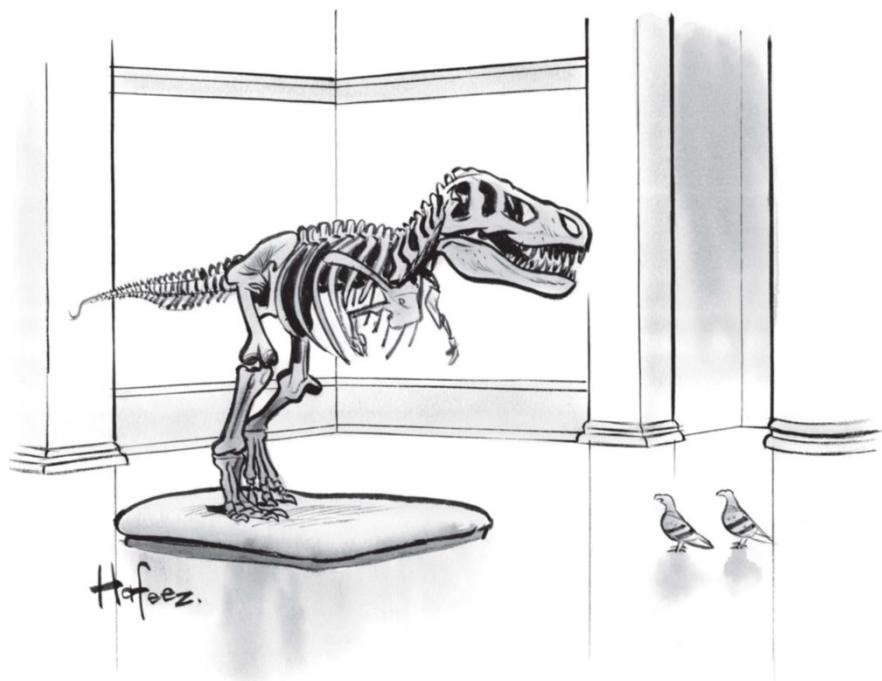
"As a person," Shankar said—she shot Tucker-Ray a look, then came uncorked—"I feel incredibly shitty, all the time, since the election."

Woodson hollered with delight. "Wow!" he whooped. "See, I trust you now! What you just said? I've got your back! Somebody mess with you, you make sure you call me." He continued, "You being you, that's how you win people's trust. . . . I'm telling you, if you want to get through to the people in the city of Flint, do what you just did and you will have them like—what's that dude, the pied piper with the flute?"

"But here's the thing, Art," Shankar explained. "We can't say that stuff as government—we can only say that stuff as individual people."

Woodson shook his head. "But you know what? That's the problem. That's why Donald Trump won, because he said things that the government normally doesn't say. He said it. By you saying what you just did, that's what people want. People want realness."

BEFORE THEIR FLIGHT, Shankar and Tucker-Ray debriefed in their hotel lobby. Shankar called Hanna-Attisha, the pediatrician who had sounded the alarm about the lead contamination, and who is now working hard to address its repercussions. The doctor stressed that the consequences would be measured not in years but in decades. "This isn't like a hurricane or a flood you can just clean up," she said. The only remedies,



*"Frankly, I don't see the resemblance."*

in fact, were resources that would be imperilled under Trump: stringent environmental accountability, as well as funding for maternal health care, childhood nutrition, early-childhood education, and other programs thought to mitigate lead's long-term effects.

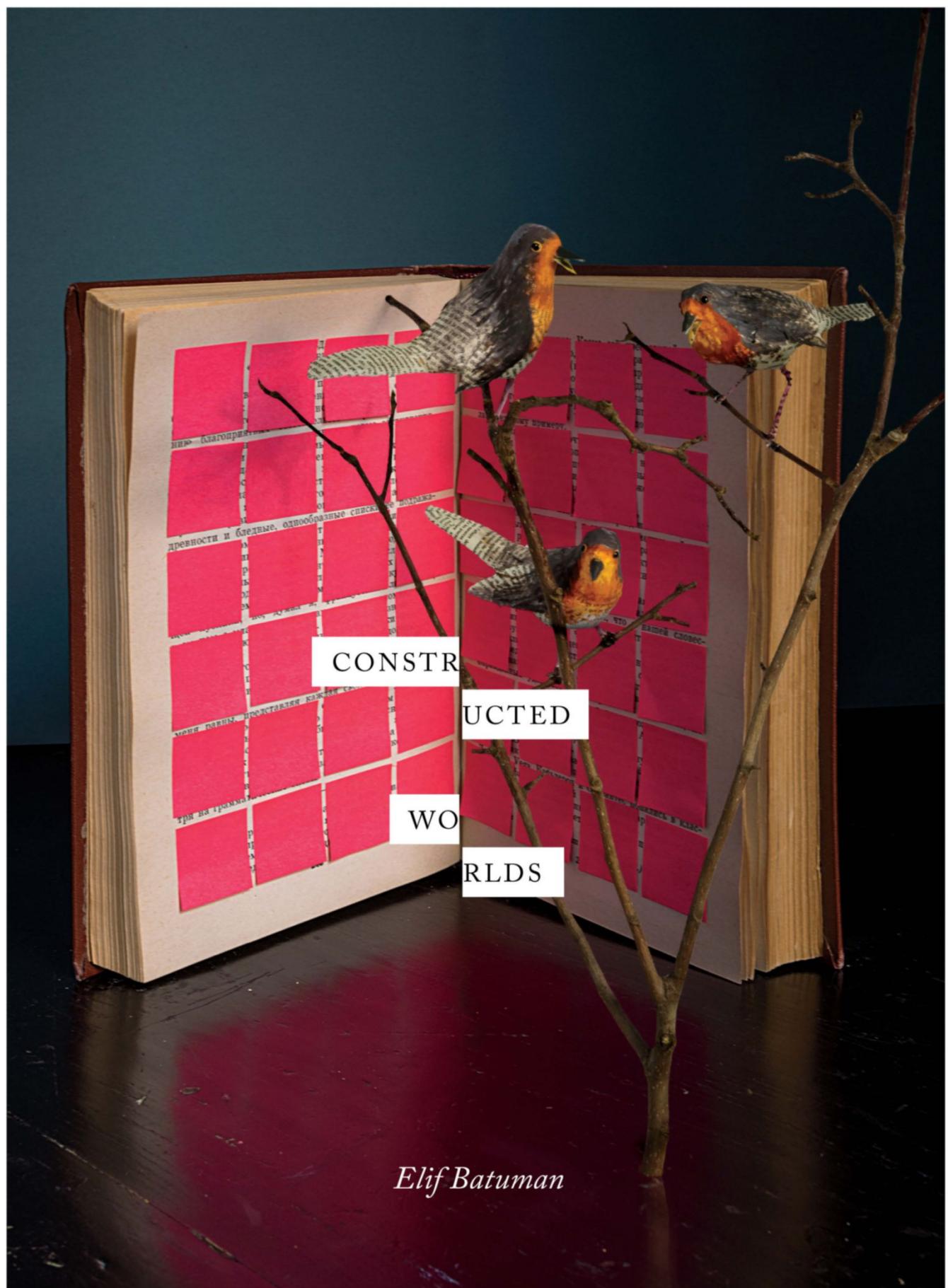
In the lobby bar, Fox News flashed announcements of Trump's Cabinet appointments. I asked Shankar what she would remember the most from the trip. "That interaction with Art," she said. "I'll never forget that." Then she wrapped her parka tightly around her and headed out into the cold.

The next day, Shankar reached out to a growth-mind-set expert with whom she'd planned the White House conference, back in 2013; soon, they had assembled a national working group to mine the psychological literature for ideas to share in Flint, and in other cities experiencing lead poisoning. Shankar called Kent Key, in Flint, and he mentioned his idea for a program to help the city's youth take a more proactive role in the water crisis. Perhaps the research could be applied there? These were the faintest beginnings of what Shankar had long imagined, a process that took behavioral interventions beyond

the nudge, and made bureaucracies capable of listening as much as prescribing.

The day after Christmas, Shankar went to her D.C. office to start packing up her belongings. She peeled birthday cards off the walls and pulled out the high heels she had kept beneath her desk, for days when she couldn't get away with purple sneakers. She had only just begun a harried job search, and she wasn't sure what she'd do next. But she hoped she could find a way to stay involved in Flint. She'd already received an invitation from the county health department to return for its annual conference in May, as the closing speaker, addressing the topic of "combatting distrust in the community."

Making good on her promise to Art Woodson, Shankar stayed in her office until she couldn't any longer. In early January, she took the last box of mementos home. Someone would come by soon to retrieve a piece of memorabilia known among White House staffers as a "jumbo": a giant framed photograph of Shankar and her team with President Obama in the Oval Office. It was the only item still hanging on the wall. ♦



*Elif Batuman*

**I**DIDN'T KNOW WHAT e-mail was until I got to college. I had heard of e-mail, and knew that in some sense I would "have" it. "You'll be so fancy," said my mother's sister, who had married a computer scientist, "sending your e-mails."

That summer, I heard e-mail mentioned with increasing frequency. "Things are changing so fast, Selin," my father said when I visited him that August. "Today at work I surfed the World Wide Web. One second, I was in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. One second later, I was in Anıtkabir." Anıtkabir, Atatürk's mausoleum, was located in Ankara, where my parents had gone to medical school. I had no idea what my father was talking about, but he lived in New Orleans and I knew there was no meaningful sense in which he had been "in" Ankara that day, so I didn't really pay attention.

On the first day of school, I stood in line behind a folding table and eventually received an e-mail address and a temporary password. I didn't understand how the e-mail address was an address, or what it was short for. "What do we do with this, hang ourselves?" I asked, holding up the Ethernet cable.

"You plug it into the wall," the girl sitting at the table said.

Insofar as I'd had any idea about it at all, I had imagined that e-mail would resemble faxing, and would involve a printer. But there was no printer. There was another world. You could access it from certain computers, which were scattered throughout the ordinary landscape and looked no different from regular computers. Always there, unchanged, in a configuration nobody else could see, was a glowing list of messages from all the people you knew, and from people you didn't know, all in the same font, like the universal handwriting of thought. Some messages were formally epistolary, employing "Dear" and "Sincerely"; others telegraphic, all in lowercase with no punctuation, as if they were being beamed straight from someone's brain. And each message contained the one that had come before, so that your own words came back to you—all the words you threw out, they came back. It was as if the story of your relations with others

were constantly being recorded and updated, and you could check it at any time.

**Y**OU HAD TO wait in a lot of lines and collect a lot of printed materials, mostly instructions: how to respond to sexual harassment, report an eating disorder, register for student loans. They showed you a video about a recent college graduate who broke his leg and defaulted on his student loans, proving that the budget he drew up was no good: a good budget makes provisions for debilitating injury. The bank was another real bonanza, as far as lines and printed materials were concerned. I got a free dictionary. The dictionary didn't include "ratatouille" or "Tasmanian devil."

On the staircase approaching my room, I could hear tuneless singing and the slap of plastic slippers. My new roommate, Hannah, was standing on a chair, taping a sign above her desk that read "Hannah Park's Desk" and chanting monotonously along with Blues Traveler on her Discman. When I came in, she turned in a pantomime of surprise, pitching to and fro, then jumped to the floor and took off her headphones.

"Have you considered mime as a career?" I asked.

"*Mime?* No, my dear, I'm afraid my parents sent me to Harvard to become a surgeon, not a mime." She blew her nose. "Hey—no one gave *me* a dictionary!"

"It doesn't have 'Tasmanian devil,'" I said.

She took the dictionary from my hands, riffling the pages. "It has plenty of words."

I told her she could have it. She put it on the shelf next to the dictionary she had been given in high school, for being the valedictorian. "They look good together," she said. I asked if her other dictionary had "Tasmanian devil." It didn't. "Isn't the Tasmanian devil a cartoon character?" she asked, looking suspicious. I showed her the page in my other dictionary that had not just "Tasmanian devil" but also "Tasmanian wolf," with a picture of the wolf glancing, a bit sadly, over its left shoulder.

Hannah stood very close to me and stared at the page. Then she looked right and left and whispered hotly in my ear, "That music has been playing all day long."

"What music?"

"Sh-h-h. Stand absolutely still."

We stood absolutely still. Faint romantic strings drifted from under the door of our other roommate, Angela.

"It's the soundtrack for 'The Last of the Mohicans,'" Hannah whispered. "She's been playing it all morning, since I got up. She's just been sitting in there with the door shut, playing the tape over and over again. I knocked and asked her to turn it down but you can still hear it. I had to listen to my Discman to drown her out."

"It's not that loud," I said.

"But it's just weird that she sits there like that."

Angela had got to our three-person, two-bedroom suite at seven the previous morning and had taken the single bedroom, leaving Hannah and me to share the one with bunk beds. When I arrived, in the evening, I found Hannah storming around, moving furniture, sneezing, and shouting about Angela. "I never even saw her!" Hannah yelled. She pointed wrathfully at Angela's desk. "These books? They're fake!" She seized what looked like a stack of four leather-bound volumes, one with "The Holy Bible" printed on the spine, shook it under my nose, and slammed it down again. It was a wooden box. "What's even in there? Her last testament?"

"Hannah, please be gentle with other people's belongings," a soft voice said, and I noticed two small Korean-looking people, evidently Hannah's parents, sitting in the window seat.

Angela came in. She had a sweet expression; she was black, and wore a Harvard windbreaker and a Harvard backpack. Hannah immediately confronted her about the single room.

"Hmm, yeah," Angela said. "It's just I got here really early and I had so many suitcases."

I said maybe we could each have the single room for a third of the year, with Angela going first. Hannah's father stood up and took out a camera. "First college roommates! That's an

important relationship!" he said. He took several pictures of Hannah and me but none of Angela.

HANNAH BOUGHT A refrigerator for the common room. She said that I could use it if I bought something for the room, too, like a poster. I asked what kind of poster she had in mind.

"Psychedelic," she said.

I didn't know what a psychedelic poster was, so she showed me her psychedelic notebook. Its cover had a fluorescent tie-dyed spiral, with purple lizards walking around the spiral and disappearing into the center.

"What if they don't have that?" I asked.

"Then a photograph of Albert Einstein," she said decisively, as if it were the obvious next choice.

"Albert Einstein?"

"Yeah, one of those black-and-white pictures. You know—Einstein."

The campus bookstore turned out to have a huge selection of Albert Einstein posters. There was Einstein at a blackboard, Einstein in a car, Einstein sticking out his tongue, Einstein smoking a pipe. I didn't totally understand why we had to have an image of Einstein on the wall. But it was better than buying my own refrigerator.

The poster I got was no worse than the other Einstein posters in any way that I could see, but Hannah seemed to dislike it. "Hmm," she said. "I think it'll look good there." She pointed to the space over my bookshelf.

"But then *you* can't see it."

"That's O.K. It goes best there."

From that day on, everyone who happened by our room—neighbors wanting to borrow stuff, residential computer staff, student-council candidates, all kinds of people to whom my small enthusiasms should have been a source of little or no concern—went out of their way to disabuse me of my great admiration for Albert Einstein. Einstein had invented the atomic bomb, mistreated dogs, neglected his children. "There were many greater geniuses than Einstein," a guy from down the hall, who had stopped by to borrow my copy of Dostoyevsky's "The Double," said. "Alfred Nobel hated mathematics and didn't give the Nobel Prize to any mathematicians. There were many who were more deserving."

"Oh." I handed him the book. "Well, see you around."

"Thanks," he said, glaring at the poster. "This is the man who beats his wife, forces her to solve his mathematical problems, and then denies her credit. And you put his picture on your wall."

"Listen, leave me out of this," I said. "It's not really my poster. It's a complicated situation."

He wasn't listening. "Einstein is synonymous with genius in this country, while many greater geniuses aren't famous at all. Why is this? I am asking you."

I sighed. "Maybe it's because he's really the best, and even jealous mud-slingers can't hide his star quality," I said. "Nietzsche would say that such a great genius is *entitled* to beat his wife."

That shut him up. After he left, I thought about taking down the poster. I wanted to be a courageous person, uncowed by other people's dumb opinions. But which was the dumb opinion, thinking Einstein was so great or thinking he was the worst?

HANNAH AND I both caught a terrible cold. We took turns buying cold medicine and knocked it back from the little plastic cup as if we were doing shots.

When it came time to choose classes, everyone said it was of utmost importance to apply to freshman seminars, because otherwise it could be years before you had a chance to work with senior faculty. I applied to three literature seminars and got called in for one interview. I reported to the top floor of a cold white building, where I shivered for twenty minutes on a leather sofa under a skylight, wondering if I was in the right place. Then a door opened and the professor called me in. He extended his hand—an enormous hand on an incredibly skinny, pale wrist.

"I don't think I should shake your hand," I said. "I have this cold." Then I had a violent fit of sneezing. The professor looked startled, but recovered quickly. "Gesundheit," he said urbanely. "I'm sorry you aren't feeling well. These first days of college can be rough on the immune system."

"So I'm learning," I said.

"Well, that's what it's all about," he said. "Learning! Ha-ha."

"Ha-ha," I said.

"Well, let's get down to business. From your application, you seem to be very creative. I enjoyed your creative application essay. My only concern is that this seminar is an academic class, not a creative class."

"Right," I said, nodding energetically and trying to determine whether any of the rectangles in my peripheral vision was a box of tissues. Unfortunately, they were all books. The professor was talking about the differences between creative and academic writing. I kept nodding. I was thinking about the structural equivalences between a tissue box and a book: both consisted of slips of white paper in a cardboard case. Yet—and this was ironic—there was very little functional equivalence, especially if the book wasn't yours.

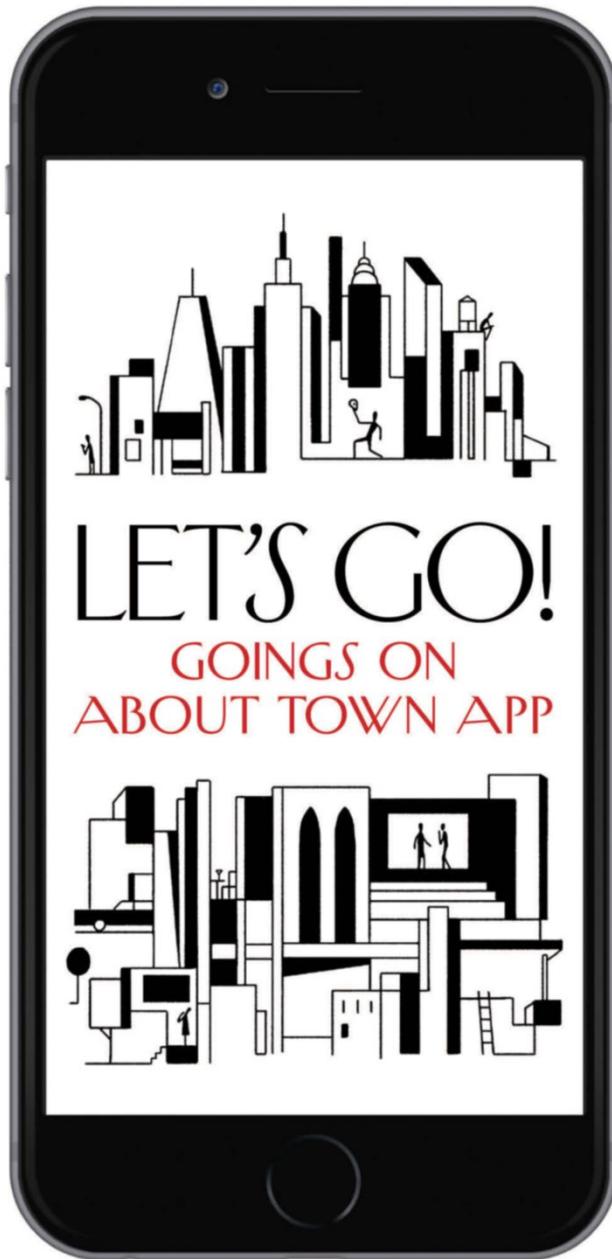
"Do you think," the professor was saying, "that you could spend two hours reading the same passage, the same sentence, even the same word? Do you think you might find it tedious or boring?"

Because my ability to spend hours staring at a single word had rarely been encouraged in the past, I pretended to have to think it over. "No," I said finally.

The professor nodded, frowning thoughtfully and narrowing his eyes. I understood with a sinking feeling that I was supposed to keep talking. "I like words," I elaborated. "They don't bore me at all." Then I sneezed five times.

I didn't get in. I got called to only one other interview, for Form in the Nonfiction Film, a seminar I had applied to because my mother had recently joined a screenwriting class and wanted to make a documentary about the lives of foreign medical graduates in America—people who hadn't passed the medical-board exams and ended up driving taxis or working in drugstores, and people, like my mother, who passed the boards and became research faculty at second-tier schools, where they kept getting scooped by people at Johns Hopkins and Harvard.

The film professor had an even worse cold than I did. It felt magical, like a gift. We met in a basement room full of flickering blue screens. I told him



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about my mother, and we both sneezed continually. That was the only freshman seminar I got into.

I APPLIED FOR AN art class called *Constructed Worlds*. I met the instructor, a visiting artist from New York, in a studio full of empty white tables, bringing my high-school art portfolio. The visiting artist squinted at my face.

"So how old are you, anyway?" he asked.

"Eighteen."

"Oh, for Christ's sake. This isn't a freshman class."

"Oh. Should I leave?"

"No, don't be ridiculous. Let's take a look at your work." He was still looking at me, not the portfolio. "Eighteen," he repeated, shaking his head. "When I was your age I was dropping acid and cutting high school. I was working summers in a fish factory in Secaucus. Secaucus, New Jersey." He looked at me disapprovingly, as though I were somehow behind schedule.

"Maybe that's what I'll be doing when I'm *your* age," I suggested.

"Yeah, right." He snorted and put on a pair of glasses. "Well, let's see what we've got here." He stared at the pictures in silence. I looked out the window at two squirrels running up a tree. One squirrel lost its grip and fell, crashing through the layers of foliage. This was something I had never seen before.

"Well, look," the visiting artist finally said. "Your composition in the drawings is . . . O.K. I can be honest with you, right? But these paintings seem to me . . . sort of little-girlish? Do you see what I'm saying?"

I looked at the pictures he had spread out on the table. It wasn't that I couldn't see what he meant. "The thing is," I said, "it wasn't so long ago that I was a little girl."

He laughed. "True enough, true enough. Well, I'll make my decision this weekend. You'll be hearing from me. Or maybe you won't."

On Sunday evening, the phone rang. It was the visiting artist. "Your essay was somewhat interesting," he said. "Most of the essays were actually in-

credibly . . . boring? So, in fact, I'll be happy to have you in my class."

"Oh," I said. "O.K."

"Is that a yes?"

"Sorry?"

"Are you accepting?"

"Can I think about it?"

"Can you think about it? I mean, not really. I have a lot of other applicants I can call," he said. "So are you in or are you out?"

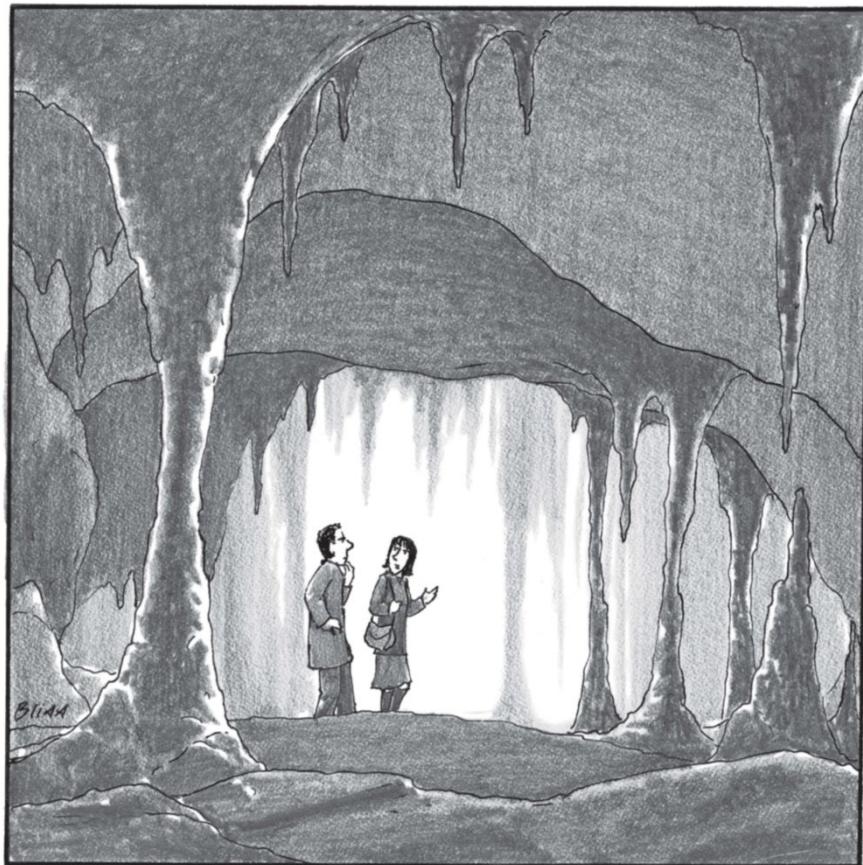
"I guess I'm in."

I WENT TO LINGUISTICS 101, to see what linguistics was about. It was about how language was a biological faculty, hardwired into the brain—*infinite, regenerative, never the same twice*. The highest law was "*the intuition of a native speaker*," a law you couldn't find in any grammar book or program into any computer. Maybe that was what I wanted to learn. Whenever my mother and I were talking about a book and I thought of something that she hadn't thought of, she would look at me and say admiringly, "*You really speak English.*"

The linguistics professor, a gentle phonetician, specialized in Turkic tribal dialects. Sometimes he would give examples from Turkish to show how different morphology could be in non-Indo-European languages, and then he would smile at me and say, "I know we have some Turkish speakers here." Once, in the hallway before class, he told me about his work on regional consonantal variations of the name for some kind of a fire pit that Turkic people dug somewhere.

I ENDED UP TAKING a literature class, too, about the city and the novel in nineteenth-century Russia, England, and France. The professor often talked about the inadequacy of published translations, reading us passages from novels in French and Russian to show how bad the translations were. I didn't understand anything he said in French or Russian, so I preferred the translations.

The worst part of the literature class came at the end, when the professor answered questions. No matter how dumb and obvious the questions were, he never seemed to understand them. "I'm not quite sure I see what you're asking," he would say. "If, however, what you mean to say is this other thing . . ." Then he



*"Why won't you just admit you forgot where you parked the car?"*

would talk about the other thing, which usually wasn't interesting, either. Often, one or more students would insist on trying to convey the original question, waving their arms and making other gestures, until the professor's face became a mask of annoyance and he suggested that, out of consideration for the rest of the class, the discussion be continued during his office hours. This breakdown of communication was very depressing to me.

**Y**OU WERE SUPPOSED to take only four classes, but when I found out that they didn't charge extra for five I signed up for Beginning Russian.

The teacher, Barbara, was a graduate student from East Germany—she specifically said “East Germany.” She said that in Russian her name would be Varvara. We all had to choose Russian names, too. Greg became Grisha, Katie became Katya. There were two foreign students whose names didn't change—Iván from Hungary and Svetlana from Yugoslavia. Svetlana asked if she could change her name to Zinaida, but Varvara said that Svetlana was already such a good Russian name. My name, on the other hand, though lovely, didn't end with an -a or a -ya, which would cause complications when we learned cases. Varvara said I could choose any Russian name I wanted. Suddenly I couldn't think of any. “Maybe I could be Zinaida,” I suggested.

Svetlana turned in her seat and stared into my face. “That is so unfair,” she told me. “You're a perfect Zinaida.”

It somehow seemed to me that Varvara didn't want anyone to be called Zinaida, and in the end my name was Sonya.

“Hey, Sonya, what a drag,” Svetlana said sympathetically in the elevator afterward. “I think you're much more like a Zinaida.”

“You guys were really torturing her with that Zinaida business,” said Iván, the Hungarian, who was unusually tall. We turned to look up at him. “I felt really bad,” he continued. “I thought that she was going to destroy herself. That it would be too much for her German sense of order.” Nobody said anything for the rest of the elevator ride.

Iván's comment about the “German sense of order” was my first introduction to this stereotype. It made me remember a joke I had never understood in

“Anna Karenina,” when Oblonsky says, of the German clockmaker, that he “has been wound up for life to wind up clocks.” Were Germans supposed to be particularly ordered and machinelike? Was it possible that Germans really *were* ordered and machinelike? Varvara was always early to class, and always dressed the same, in a white blouse and a narrow dark skirt. Her tote bag always contained the same three vocabulary items: a Stolichnaya bottle, a lemon, and a red rubber mouse, like the contents of some depressing refrigerator.

**C**ONSTRUCTED WORLDS MET on Thursdays, for one hour before lunch and three hours after. Before lunch, the visiting artist, Gary, gave a lecture with slides while pacing around the room and issuing decreasingly genial instructions to his T.A., a silent, gothic-looking person called Rebecca.

On the first day, we looked at pictures of genre scenes. In one painting, shirtless muscular men were planing a floor. In another, gleaners stooped over a yellow field. Then came a cartoonish drawing of a party full of grotesque men and women leering over cocktail glasses.

“How well do you know this party?” Gary exhaled, bouncing on the balls of his feet. “You look at it and think, I know that scene. I've been to that exact fucking cocktail party. And if you haven't yet, you will—I guarantee it, you'll find yourself there someday. Because you all want to succeed and that's the only way to do it. . . . Selin doesn't believe me, but she will someday.”

I jumped. The cocktail party was reproduced in miniature in Gary's eyeglasses. “Oh, no, I believe you,” I said.

Gary chuckled. “Well, I hope you do, because someday you're going to know that scene by heart. You're going to know what every last one of those people is saying and eating and thinking.” He said it like it was a curse. “Power, sex, sex as power. It's all right there.” He tapped the bilious face of a man who was holding a Martini glass in one hand and playing the piano with the other. I decided that Gary was wrong, that I was definitely not going to know that man. He would probably be dead by the time I even turned drinking age.

The next slide was an etching of a theatre from the perspective of the stage,

showing the unpainted backs of the scenery, the silhouettes of three actors, and, beyond the footlights, a big black space.

“Artifice,” Gary blurted, like someone having a seizure. “Frames. Who selects what we see?” He started talking about how museums, which we thought of as the gateway to art, were actually the main agents of hiding art from the public. Every museum owned ten, twenty, a hundred times as many paintings as were ever seen on display. The curator was like the superego, burying ninety-nine per cent of thoughts in the dark. The curator had the power to make or break the artist—to keep someone *sup*-pressed or *re*-pressed for a lifetime. As he spoke, Gary seemed to grow increasingly angry and agitated.

“You have Harvard I.D. cards. That I.D. card will open doors for you. Why don't you use it? Why don't you go to the Fogg Museum, the Museum of Comparative Zoology, the Glass Flowers gallery, and demand to see what they aren't showing you? They have to let you in, you know.”

“Let's do it!” one student, whose name either was or sounded like Ham, shouted.

“You want to? You really want to?” Gary said.

It was time to break for lunch. After we got back, we were going to go to the museums and demand to see the things they weren't showing us.

**I** WAS THE ONLY freshman in the class, so I went by myself to the freshman cafeteria. Portraits of old men hung on the dark panelled walls. The ceiling was so high you could barely see it, though with effort you could make out some pale specks, apparently pats of butter that had been flicked up there in the nineteen-twenties by some high-spirited undergraduates.

Exiting the lunch line with a falafel sandwich, I noticed Svetlana from Russia sitting near a window with an open spiral notebook.

“Sonya, hi!” she called. “I've been meaning to talk to you. You're taking linguistics, right?”

“How did you know?” I pulled out the chair across from her.

“I shopped the class last week. I saw you there. How is it?”

“It's O.K.,” I said. I told her about

the fire pits that the Turkic peoples dug, about how vowels changed over time and geography.

"That's *interesting*." She placed an almost voracious emphasis on the word "interesting." "I'm sure it's much more *interesting* than Psych 101, but you see it's inevitable, really, that I should take psychology, since my father is an analyst. A Jungian, a real big shot. He founded the only serious journal of psychoanalysis in Yugoslavia. Then two of his patients became opposition leaders and the Party started harassing my dad. To get the transcripts. Of course, they had it in for him, anyway."

"Did they get the transcripts?" I asked.

"Nope—there weren't any. My father has a photographic memory. He never writes anything down. I'm just the opposite, a real graphomaniac. It's pretty sad, really. I mean, look at all the notes I've taken, and it's only the second week of school." Svetlana flipped through her notebook, displaying many pages covered on both sides in tiny, curly handwriting. She picked up her fork and judiciously composed a forkful of salad.

"Soldiers searched our apartment," she said, "looking for the imaginary transcripts. They came in uniforms with guns at eleven at night and trashed the place—even my room and my sisters' and brother's rooms. They took all our toys out of the box and threw them on the floor. I had a new *doll*, and the *doll* broke."

"That's terrible," I said.

"I cried and cried. And my mother was so angry at my father." Svetlana sighed. "I can't believe this," she said. "This is the first real conversation we're having and already I'm burdening you with my emotional baggage. Enough—tell me about yourself. Are you going to major in linguistics?"

"I haven't decided yet. I might do art." I told her about Constructed Worlds—about how museums hid things from people, and how the class seemed to be planning some kind of heist.

"I would never have the nerve to take a class like that," she said. "I'm very traditional, academically—another legacy from my father. Basically, when I was five, he told me all the books to read, and

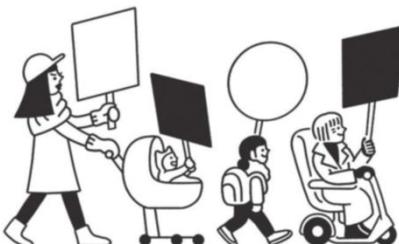
I've been reading them ever since. I have some bad news, by the way—we're not going to be in the same Russian class anymore. I had to transfer into another section, because of my psych lab."

"That's too bad."

"I know. But don't worry—I think we live in the same dorm. I'm pretty sure we'll end up seeing a lot of each other." I felt moved and flattered by how sure she sounded. I wrote her phone number on my hand, while she wrote mine in her daily planner. Already I was the impetuous one in our friendship—the one who cared less about tradition, who evaluated every situation from scratch, as if it had arisen for the first time—while Svetlana was the one who subscribed to rules and systems, who saw herself as the inheritor of centuries of human history and ways of doing things.

**I**N THE SECOND part of *Constructed Worlds*, we went to the Museum of Comparative Zoology, where we saw a brace of pheasants that had belonged to George Washington, a turtle collected by Thoreau, and "about a million ants," described as "E. O. Wilson's favorites." I was impressed that E. O. Wilson had been able to identify, in this world of seemingly infinite ants, his one million favorites.

After an hour of bugging the people at the front desk and standing around while they made phone calls,



we got someone to show us the back room, where they kept things that weren't on display. There was a New Zealand diorama—a plaster meadow littered with decrepit stuffed sheep, as well as an emu and a kiwi bird—that had become infested with moths. "We've mostly been disinfecting, and patching up with acrylic," a museum employee told us.

"Acrylic? Why don't you use wool?" Gary asked.

"Hmm. We tried wool first, but acrylic holds better."

"Do you see?" Gary demanded, turning to the class. "Do you see the artifice?"

"So this is what the curators are hiding from us," Ham remarked of a bison that had stuffing pouring out of its guts.

Gary laughed mirthlessly. "You think it's really any different at the Whitney or the Met? Let me tell you, kid, it's all blood and guts in the back room, in one form or another."

**F**OR THE NONFICTION-FILM seminar, we watched "Man of Aran," a silent movie from the nineteen-thirties, which had been filmed on an island off the coast of Ireland. First, a woman rocked a baby in a cradle. Next, the woman and a man dug in the ground with sticks. "The land upon which Man of Aran depends for his subsistence—potatoes—has not even soil!" the intertitle read. Finally, a man harpooned a basking shark, and then scraped something with a knife.

Never in my life had I seen such a boring movie. I chewed nine consecutive sticks of gum, to remind myself I was still alive. The boy in front of me fell asleep and started to snore. The professor didn't notice, because he himself had left after the first half hour. "I've already seen this film several times," he said.

In class, the professor told us that, by the time of the film's making, fifty years had passed since the people of Aran had harpooned anything. To capture the ancient practice on film, the director had imported a harpoon from the British Museum and instructed the islanders in its use. Knowing this, the professor asked, could we rightly classify the film as nonfiction? We had to debate this question for an hour. I couldn't believe it. *That* was the difference between fiction and nonfiction? That was something you were supposed to care about?

I was more concerned by the question of whether the professor was kind or not, whether he liked us. "It's so interesting how you think there is, or should be, a right or a wrong answer," he said to one student, in a gentle voice. At the end of class, another student said he had to miss next week's meeting to visit his brother in Prague.

## ON DISTANCE (QUONDAM/QUANTUM OVERDUE NOTICE)

There are clues.

At the dinner table, he refers to Julian of Norwich as "he"; I say, politely, "Isn't it 'she'?"

The next day I am in Washington, D.C., at the library, looking for "The Man in the Wooden Hat."

He's not on the shelf.

Having dismissed the "G"s I turn around; there are the "D"s: O.K.

I go home with Kathryn Davis. When I finish the novel a day later, I wish it were real. true. life.

I ask, as one does, when ravished: Where did you come from? Why didn't I know?

And here, again, is Julian of Norwich, here in this book. More than once.

Q. Who hadn't thought of Julian of Norwich in twenty years?  
(I estimate)

A. I (I estimate)

Given: A myriad of such delicate chimes,  
unlikely rhymes and synchronies  
To prove: How I am/the world is

Q.E.D. (not alone)

—Liz Waldner

"I guess I can't try to tape-record the class, can I?" the boy asked.

"That would be completely worthless," the professor said in a friendly tone. "Don't you think?"

**I**N LITERATURE CLASS, we started reading Balzac. Unlike Dickens, to whom he was sometimes compared, Balzac didn't care for or about children, and was essentially unhumorous. Children weren't important to him at all—they barely figured in his world. His attitude toward them was dismissive, even contemptuous, and, though he could certainly be witty, he wasn't what you would really call funny, not like Dickens was. As the professor spoke, I became aware of a slight sense of injury. It seemed to me that Balzac's attitude toward *me* would have been dismissive and contemptuous. It wasn't that

I was a child, exactly, but that I didn't really have a history as anything else. At the same time, it was exciting to think that there was a universe—"a *monde*," the professor kept calling it, annoyingly—that was completely other from everything I had been and done up to now.

**T**HE BOSTON T was totally different from the New York subway—the lines named after colors, the cars so clean and small, like toys. And yet it wasn't a toy; grown men used it, with serious expressions on their faces.

Svetlana and I took the T to Brookline to visit a Russian grocery store that rented out videos. The tracks ran down the middle of a two-way street lined by endlessly recurring churches, graveyards, hospitals, and schools: institutions of which Boston seemed to have an infinite

supply. Svetlana was telling me about a dream she'd had that she went to Taco Bell and had to eat a burrito made of human flesh.

"I knew my father would be angry if I ate it, but also that he secretly wanted me to," Svetlana shouted, to be heard over the train. "O.K., so the burrito is obviously a phallus, a *human* phallus—it's simultaneously taboo, like cannibalism, and yet it's something that has to enter your body. I guess I think my father has ambiguous feelings about my sexuality."

I nodded, glancing around the train car. A hundred-per-cent-impassive old woman with a shawl over her head was glaring at the floor.

"Sometimes I wonder about the man I'll eventually lose my virginity to," Svetlana continued. "I'm pretty sure it'll happen in college. I've had relationships that were intellectually erotic, but nothing ever happened physically. In a way, I feel like a sexual bomb waiting to explode. How about you? Are you planning to have sex in college?"

"I don't know," I said. "I never really thought about it."

"I have," Svetlana said. "I look at strangers' faces while I'm walking down the street and wonder, Is he the one? I wonder whether I've seen him yet, whether I've read his name printed on some list or directory. He must exist somewhere—he can't not have been born yet. So where is he? Where's this thing that's going to go inside my body? You never wonder that?"

I had often flipped through a calendar wondering on which of the three hundred and sixty-six days (counting February 29th) I would die, but it had never once occurred to me to wonder whether I had already met the first person I would have sex with.

We got off at Euclid Circle. There was no circle—just a concrete platform with a pay phone and a sign that read "Euclid Circle." I thought Euclid would have been mad. "That's so typical of your attitude," Svetlana said. "You always think everyone is angry. Try to have some perspective. It's more than two thousand years after his death, he's in Boston for the first time, they've named something after him—why should his first reaction be to get pissed off?"

Bells rang when we went into the

Russian store, and then the smell of salami and smoked fish hit us in the face like a curtain. Two clerks, one fat and one thin, stood behind a glass counter.

"Hello," Svetlana said in Russian.

"Hello," the clerks said, somehow making it sound ironic.

It was interesting to see so many Russian things: red and black caviar, stuffed cabbage, blini, piroshki, pickled mushrooms, pickled herrings, a muddy tank of carp that were alive, but perhaps only barely, and a barrel full of challenging-looking rectangular sweets, in wrappers printed with sentimental Cyrillic writing and pictures of squirrels. There was a whole aisle in the dry-goods section devoted to Turkish products: Koska halva, Tat pepper paste, Tamek rose-petal jam and canned grape leaves, and Eti biscuits. It turned out that Svetlana knew all these brands, because they had had them in Belgrade when she was growing up, and that the words for "eggplant," "bean," "chickpea," and "sour cherry" were the same in Serbo-Croatian as in Turkish. "It stands to reason," she said, "since the Turks occupied Serbia for four hundred years." I nodded as if I knew what she was talking about.

Svetlana bought half a kilogram of loose tea and asked in exaggeratedly correct Russian if it was true that the store lent out videotapes.

One of the clerks handed her a binder with a list of titles. Svetlana flipped through the plastic-encased pages way faster than I could follow and picked out a Soviet comedy about a car-insurance agent.

On the train back, Svetlana told me a long story about a Serbian movie director and his wife, who was an actress. A young French director came into the story somehow, and then died tragically, by falling off a barstool. "They say it might have been suicide," Svetlana said.

By the time we got back to campus, at ten, I felt wiped out and speechless. I opened my notebook. "He died by falling off a barstool," I wrote. "It might have been suicide."

S VETLANA TOOK PRIVATE French lessons from a grad student named Anouk. Every week, she wrote an essay about love, in French, and e-mailed it to Anouk, and they would meet at the

Café Gato Rojo to discuss it together. Svetlana often recounted her essay to me when we were running together. Svetlana had no difficulty talking and running at the same time; she seemed able to keep it up indefinitely.

"For today," she said, "I wrote about how you can make absolutely anybody fall in love with you if you really try."

"But that's just not true," I said.

"Why not?"

"How could I make a Zulu chief fall in love with me?"

"Well, of course, you would need geographic and linguistic *access*, Selin."

Svetlana had written about whether love was a game that you could get infinitely good at—whether it was a matter of playing your cards right—or whether it existed in some kind of current and you just had to tap into it. She thought it was a matter of playing your cards right.

It was a mystery to me how Svetlana generated so many opinions. Any piece of information seemed to produce an opinion on contact. Meanwhile, I went from class to class, read hundreds—thousands—of pages of the distilled ideas of the great thinkers of human history, and nothing happened. In high school, I had been full of opinions, but high school had been like prison, with constant opposition and obstacles. Once the obstacles were gone, meaning seemed to vanish, too.

**T**HE FINAL ASSIGNMENT for Constructed Worlds was to construct a world. I had decided to write and illustrate a story. Like all the stories I wrote at that time, it was based on an unusual atmosphere that had impressed me in real life. I had experienced the atmosphere I wanted to write about a few years earlier, when my mother and I were on vacation in Mexico. Something had gone wrong with the chartered bus, and instead of taking us to the airport it had left us in the pink-tiled courtyard of a strange hotel, where Albinoni's *Adagio* was playing on speakers, and something fell onto our arms, and we looked up and it was ashes. I was reading Camus's "The Plague"—that was my beach reading—and it seemed to me that we would al-

ways be there, in the pink courtyard, unable to leave.

I wanted to write a story that created just that mood—a pink hotel, Albinoni, ashes, and being unable to leave—in an exigent and dignified fashion. In real life, I had been in that courtyard for only three hours. I was an American teen-ager—the world's least interesting and dignified kind of person—brought there by my mother. It was the very definition of a non-event. In my story, the characters would be stuck there for a long time, for a real, legitimate reason—like a sickness. The hotel would be somewhere far away, like Japan. The hotel management would be sorry that Albinoni's *Adagio* was being endlessly piped into the halls and lobby, but it would be a deep-rooted technical problem and difficult to fix.

Although Constructed Worlds was listed in the catalogue as a studio-art class, Gary said that studio was a waste of class time. We would have to learn to make time for art, like real artists. We weren't allowed to use the school's art supplies. This, too, was like life.

I went to the art store to buy supplies. Everything was too expensive. I ended up at an office-supply store. I bought two reams of bright-pink computer paper, and used them to cover the walls, floor, and furniture of my new bedroom: a third of the year had passed, and it was my turn for the single room, where I could now take photographs that would look as if they had been taken in a pink hotel. Anyone who spent any amount of time in my room ended up slightly nauseated, because of all the rubber cement. Svetlana said she couldn't imagine how I lived like I did. "You realize *you* are now a sick person in a pink hotel," she said.

**O**VER WINTER VACATION, I went home to New Jersey. Everything was at once overwhelmingly the same and ever so slightly different. The Oliveri sisters' plaster donkey was still standing in the driveway under the willow tree, just a little smaller than it had been. There was basmati rice in the cabinet—a thing I had never seen there before.

My mother invited some colleagues to dinner.

She had planned the menu from "The New Basics Cookbook." I was supposed to make the dessert, a raspberry angel-food cake with raspberry amaretto sauce. I had never made an angel-food cake before, and got really excited when it started to rise, but then I opened the oven too soon and it fell down in the middle, like a collapsing civilization.

My mother's colleagues were cartoonishly awful. It was hard to believe they were oncologists—the idea that they were supposed to make sick people feel better was comical. "Fifteen years from now, the department will be nothing but beige faces," the department head, who was wearing a bow tie, declared.

I burst out laughing. "I can't believe you just said that," I said.

My mother brought out the cake, which was by then completely flat.

"I see you have a flat cake for us—is that on purpose?" one of the oncologists asked. My mother's boyfriend said it was a Fallen Angel cake. We ate it with the raspberry sauce. It was good, if you thought of it as a sort of pancake.

Later, my mother and I watched "The Sound of Music" on TV. Because of commercials, it took more than four hours. I was interested when the nuns sang about solving a problem like Maria. It seemed that "Maria" was actually a problem they had—that it was a code word for something.

**F**INAL EXAMS WERE after the vacation, instead of before. Anyone who was in a seminar or language class had to be back on campus for reading period, which started on January 2nd. My mother was full of outrage and pity that my vacation was so short, but I was mostly glad to go back.

The atmosphere on the train in early January was totally different than it had been in mid-December. In December, the train had been full of students: students slumped in a fetal position, or cross-legged on the floor, students with all their accessories—sleeping bags, guitars, graphing calculators, sandwiches that were ninety-nine-per-cent lettuce, the Viking "Portable Jung." In January, the passengers were sparser, older, more sober. I went to the café car, which smelled of coffee, of the striving toward consciousness. In one booth, a man in a



*"We've tried all the news channels—this guy is unbreakable."*

suit was eating a Danish. In another, three girls were studying.

"Hey, Selin!" one girl said, and I realized it was Svetlana. She said that she usually took the shuttle back, but Logan was snowed in. Apparently, the shuttle was an airplane. "Now I think I'll always take the train. It's so peaceful," she said.

Dusk was falling in Boston, which lay under eight inches of snow. We made a series of bad decisions, taking the T instead of a cab, then riding for several stops in the wrong direction—toward Braintree, instead of toward Alewife. Such names were unheard of in New Jersey, where everything was called Ridgefield, Glen Ridge, Ridgewood, or Woodbridge.

The campus felt deserted. Half the lights were out in the cafeteria, and there was only one line open, serving spaghetti and canned peaches. Angela was still home with her family, and Hannah was stuck in St. Louis because of the snow. She e-mailed me about it constantly, sometimes in verse. I wrote back some verses, too.

I tried to work in the dorm, but it was too quiet. Every time I looked up, Einstein seemed to be looking back at me in an expectant way, as if to say, *Now what?*

Eventually, I went to the library. I sat at a fifth-floor window overlooking the

Hong Kong Restaurant, an almost windowless structure that played a big role in Hannah's imagination. "Guess what it means if you order a 'red egg roll,'" she often said. A few doors down from the Hong Kong was a Baskin-Robbins, dark except for the glow from the freezers. I took out my computer—for the first time in my life, I had my own computer, an extra from my father's lab—and started to write about the people in the pink hotel.

Nothing good was happening in the pink hotel. The hotel was in Tokyo. A family was supposed to stay there for two nights. The father, a film director, was going to the countryside to shoot a nonfiction film about a nightingale farm. But the mother got sick, so she and the two daughters couldn't leave the hotel.

At two in the morning, the library closed and I walked home through the fresh snow. The clouds had cleared, revealing the stars. Light from even a nearby star was four years old by the time it reached your eyes. Where would I be in four years? I thought about it for a long time, but somehow I couldn't picture it. I couldn't picture any part of it at all. ♦

# THE CRITICS



ON TELEVISION

## TRAGEDY PLUS TIME

*How jokes won the election.*

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM

SINCE NOVEMBER 9TH, we've heard a lot of talk about unreality, and how what's normal bends when you're in a state of incipient autocracy. There's been a lot written about gaslighting (lies that make you feel crazy) and the rise of fake news (hoaxes that displace facts), and much analysis of Trump as a reality star (an authentic phony). But what killed me last year were the jokes, because I love jokes—dirty jokes, bad jokes, rude jokes, jokes that cut through bullshit and explode pomposity. Growing up a Jewish kid in the nineteen-seventies, in a house full of Holocaust books, giggling at Mel Brooks's "The Producers," I had the impression that jokes, like Woody Guthrie's guitar, were a machine that killed fascists. Comedy might be cruel or stupid, yet, in aggregate, it was the rebel's stance. Nazis were humorless. The fact that it was mostly men who got to tell the jokes didn't bother me. Jokes were a superior way to tell the truth—that meant freedom for everyone.

But by 2016 the wheel had spun hard the other way: now it was the neo-fascist strongman who held the microphone and an army of anonymous dirty-joke dispensers who helped put him in office. Online, jokes were powerful accelerants for lies—a tweet was the size of a one-liner, a "dank meme" carried farther than any op-ed, and the distinction between a Nazi and someone pretending to be a Nazi for "lulz" had become a blur. Ads looked like news and so did propaganda and so did actual comedy, on both the right and the left—and every combination of the four was labelled "satire." In a perverse twist, Trump may even have run for President as payback for a comedy routine: Obama's lacerating takedown of

him at the 2011 White House Correspondents' Dinner. By the campaign's final days, the race felt driven less by policy disputes than by an ugly war of disinformation, one played for laughs. How do you fight an enemy who's just kidding?

Obama's act—his public revenge for Trump's birtherism—was a sophisticated small-club act. It was dry and urbane, performed in the cerebral persona that made Obama a natural fit when he made visits to, say, Marc Maron's podcast or Seinfeld's "Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee." In contrast, Trump was a hot comic, a classic Howard Stern guest. He was the insult comic, the stadium act, the ratings-obsessed headliner who shouted down hecklers. His rallies boiled with rage and laughter, which were hard to tell apart. You didn't have to think that Trump himself was funny to see this effect: I found him repulsive, and yet I could hear those comedy rhythms everywhere, from the Rodney Dangerfield "I don't get no respect" routine to the gleeful insult-comic slams of Don Rickles (for "hockey puck," substitute "Pocahontas") to Andrew Dice Clay, whose lighten-up-it's-a-joke, it's-not-him-it's-a-persona brand of misogyny dominated the late nineteen-eighties. The eighties were Trump's era, where he still seemed to live. But he was also reminiscent of the older comics who once roamed the Catskills, those dark and angry men who provided a cathartic outlet for harsh ideas that both broke and reinforced taboos, about the war between men and women, especially. Trump was that hostile-jaunty guy in the big flappy suit, with the vaudeville hair, the pursed lips, and the glare. There's always been an audience for that guy.

Like that of any stadium comic,

Trump's brand was control. He was superficially loose, the wild man who might say anything, yet his off-the-cuff monologues were always being tweaked as he tested catchphrases ("Lock her up!"; "Build the wall!") for crowd response. On TV and on Twitter, his jokes let him say the unspeakable and get away with it. "I will tell you this, Russia, if you're listening—I hope you're able to find the thirty thousand e-mails that are missing," he told reporters in July, at the last press conference he gave before he was elected. Then he swept his fat palm back and forth, adding a kicker: "I think you will probably be rewarded *mightily* by our press."

It was a classically structured joke. There was a rumor at the time that Russia had hacked the D.N.C. At the same time, Hillary Clinton's e-mails from when she was Secretary of State—which were stored on a private server—were under scrutiny. Take two stories, then combine them: as any late-night writer knows, that's the go-to algorithm when you're on deadline. When asked about the remark, on Fox News, Trump said that he was being "sarcastic," which didn't make sense. His delivery was deadpan, maybe, but not precisely sarcastic.

But Trump went back and forth this way for months, a joker shrugging off prudes who didn't get it. He claimed that his imitation of the disabled reporter Serge Kovaleski was a slapstick take on the reporter "grovelling because he wrote a good story." ("Grovelling," like "sarcastic," felt like the wrong word.) He did it when he said that Megyn Kelly had "blood coming out of her wherever"—a joke, he insisted, and he actually meant her nose. "I like people who *weren't* captured," about John



*Television had stories that predicted Trump's rise—warped lenses that made it easier to understand what was happening.*

McCain: that had the shape of a joke, too.

The Big Lie is a propaganda technique: state false facts so outlandish that they must be true, because who would make up something so crazy? ("I watched in Jersey City, N.J., where thousands and thousands of people were cheering as that building was coming down.") But a joke can be another kind of Big Lie, shrunk to look like a toy. It's the thrill of hyperbole, of treating the extreme as normal, the shock (and the joy) of seeing the normal get violated, fast. "Buh-leeve me, buh-leeve me!" Trump said in his act, again and again. Lying about telling the truth is part of the joke. Saying "This really happened!" creates trust, even if what the audience trusts you to do is to keep on tricking them, like a magician reassuring you that while his other jokes are tricks, *this* one is magic.

It could be surprisingly hard to look at the phenomenon of Trump directly; the words bent, the meaning dissolved. You needed a filter. Television was Trump's natural medium. And television had stories that reflected Trump, or predicted his rise—warped lenses that made it easier to understand the change as it was happening.

No show has been more prescient about how far a joke can go than "South Park." Its co-creators, the nimble libertarian tricksters Trey Parker and Matt Stone, could sense a tide of darkness that liberal comedians like John Oliver and Samantha Bee could not, because "South Park" liked to ride that wave, too. For two decades, "South Park," an adult animated show about dirty-mouthed little boys at a Colorado school, had been the proud "anti-political-correctness" sitcom. Season 19, which came out in 2015, was a meta-meditation on P.C., and, by the season's end, one of the characters, Mr. Garrison, was running for President on a platform of "fucking immigrants to death." There was also a Canadian President who emerged as "this brash asshole who just spoke his mind," the show explained. "He didn't really offer any solutions—he just said outrageous things. We thought it was funny. Nobody really thought he'd ever be President. It was a joke! But we just let the joke go on for too long. He kept gain-

ing momentum, and by the time we were all ready to say, 'O.K., let's get serious now—who should really be President?' he was already being sworn into office."

Yet, as Season 20 opened, the show was doing precisely what a year earlier it had warned against: treating Garrison's Trump as an absurd, borderline-sympathetic joke figure, portraying him and Clinton as identical dangers, a choice between a "giant douche" and a "turd sandwich." Beneath that nihilism, however, "South Park" was onto something both profound and perverse. The fight between Trump and Clinton, it argued, could not be detached from the explosion of female comedy: it found its roots in everything from the female-cast "Ghostbusters" reboot to the anti-feminist GamerGate movement. Trump's call to Make America Great Again was a plea to go back in time, to when people knew how to take a joke. It was an election about who owned the mike.

In one plot, the father of one of South Park's little boys is a misogynist troll who gets recruited by a global anonymous online army; in another, the boys and girls at the school split into man-hating feminists and woman-hating "men's rights" activists. Meanwhile, an addictive snack called Member Berries—they whisper "Member? Member?"—fills the white men of the town with longing for the past, mingling "Star Wars" references with "Member when there weren't so many Mexicans?" Mr. Garrison, as "Trump," rides this wave of white male resentment

and toxic nostalgia. But the higher he rises the more disturbed he is by the chaos he's unleashed. Desperate to lose, he imagines that if he finally offends his followers they won't vote for him.

Halfway through the season, Mr. Garrison's Trump appeared as a standup comic. As the crowd chants "Douche!

"Douche! Douche!," he struts onstage with a microphone, as cocky as Dane Cook. "So I'm standing in line at the airport, waitin' in security because of all the freakin' Muslims," he begins, and then, when his fans hoot in joy, he tries for something nastier. "And the T.S.A. security people all look like black thugs from the inner city, and I'm thinking, Oh, good, *you're* gonna protect us?" When

racist jokes get only bigger laughs, he switches to gags about sticking his fingers into women's butts and their "clams." Finally, some white women walk out. "Where did I lose you, honey?" he taunts them from the stage. "You've been O.K. with the 'Fuck 'Em All to Death' and all the Mexican and Muslim shit, but fingers in the ass did it for you. Cool. Just wanted to see where your *line* was."

As prescient as "South Park" could be, it clearly counted on Clinton's winning: a dirty boy requires a finger-wagging mom. After Election Day, the writers quickly redid the show, and the resulting episode, "Oh, Jeez," exuded numbness and confusion. "We've learned that women can be anything, except for President," one character tells his wife and daughter. There were things "South Park" had always had trouble imagining: it was complex and dialectical on male anger and sadness, and able to gaze with empathy into the soul of a troll, but it couldn't create a funny girl or a mother who wasn't a nag. What it did get, however, was how dangerous it could be for voters to feel shamed and censored—and how quickly a liberating joke could corkscrew into a weapon.

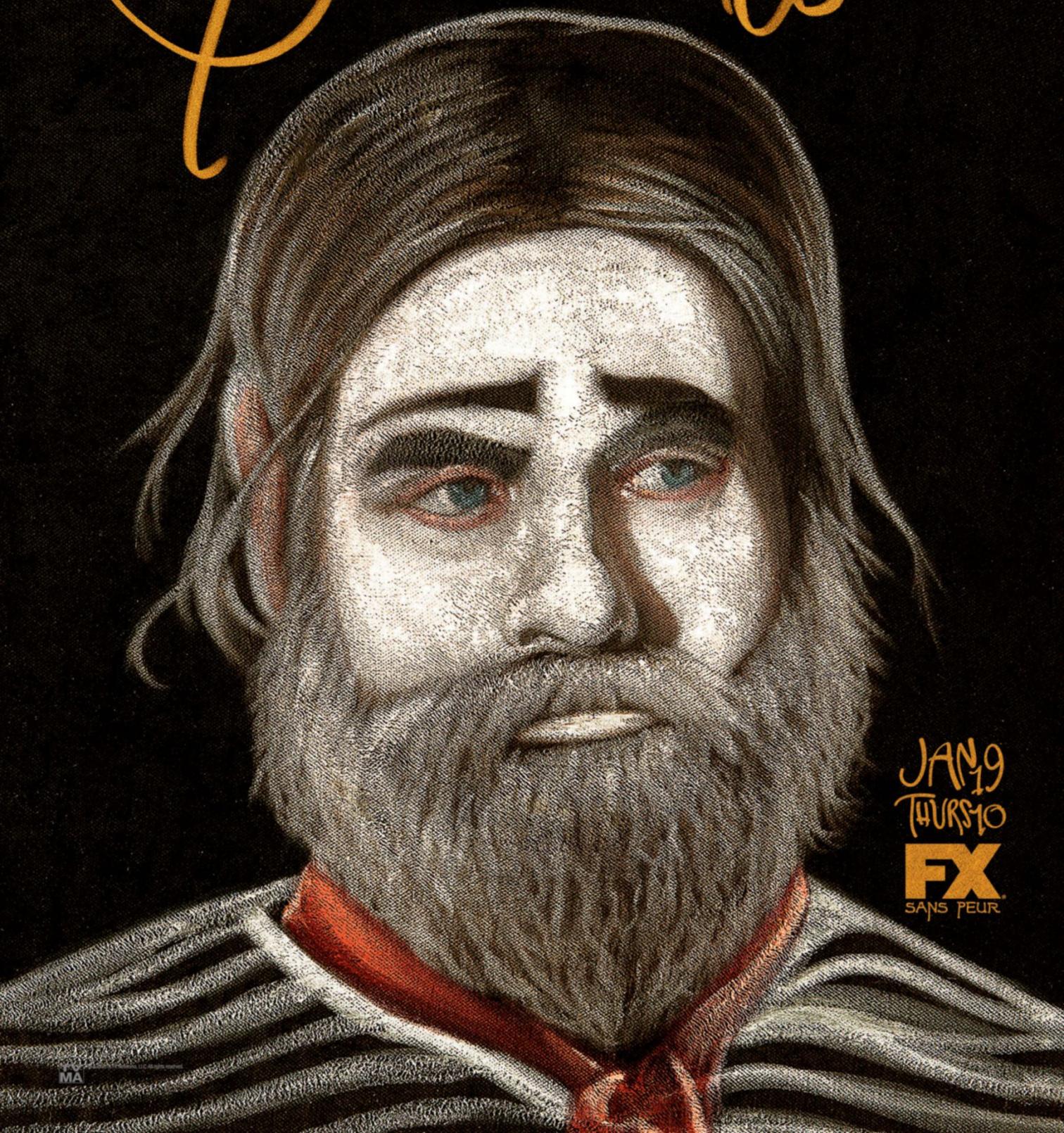
In November, shortly after the host of "The Apprentice" was elected President, the troubled starlet Tila Tequila—herself a former reality-TV star, one whose life had become a sad train wreck—blinked back onto the gossip radar. Now she was a neo-Nazi. On her Twitter account, she posted a selfie from the National Policy Institute conference, an "alt-right" gathering, where she posed, beaming a sweet grin, her arm in a Hitler salute. The caption was a misspelled "sieg heil." Her bio read "Literally Hitler!"

It was an image that felt impossible to decode, outside the sphere of ordinary politics. But Literal Hitler was an inside joke, destabilizing by design; as with any subcultural code, from camp to hip-hop, it was crafted to confuse outsiders. The phrase emerged on Tumblr to mock people who made hyperbolic comparisons to Hitler, often ones about Obama. Then it morphed, as jokes did so quickly last year, into a weapon that might be used to mock *any* comparisons to Hitler—even when a guy with a serious Hitler vibe ran for President, even when the people using the phrase were cavorting with Nazis. Literal Hitler was one of a thousand such memes,



Zach  
Galifianakis

# Baskets



JAN 9  
THURSDAY  
**FX**  
SANS PEUR



*"Wait a minute—this podcast is coming from inside the house!"*

flowing from anonymous Internet boards that were founded a decade ago, a free universe that was crude and funny and juvenile and anarchic by design, a teen-age-boy safe space. The original version of this model surfaced in Japan, on the “image-board” 2chan. Then, in 2003, a teenager named Christopher Poole launched 4chan—and when the crudest users got booted they migrated to 8chan, and eventually to Voat.co. For years, those places had mobbed and hacked their ideological enemies, often feminists, but they also competed for the filthiest, most outrageous bit, the champion being whatever might shock an unshockable audience. The only winning move was not to react.

In “An Establishment Conservative’s Guide to the Alt-Right,” two writers for Breitbart mapped out the alt-right movement as a patchwork of ideologies: there were “the Intellectuals,” “the Natural Conservatives,” men’s-rights types, earnest white supremacists and anti-Semites (whom the authors shrug off as a humorless minority), and then the many invisible others—the jokers, the virtual writers’ room, punching up one another’s gags. In Breitbart’s take, this was merely payback for the rigidity of identity politics. “If you spend 75 years building a pseudo-religion around anything—an ethnic group, a plaster saint, sexual chastity or the Flying Spaghetti Monster—don’t be surprised when clever 19-year-olds discover that insulting it is now the funniest fucking thing in the world,” the article states. “Because it is.”

Two thousand sixteen was the year that those inside jokes were released in the wild. Despite the breeziness of Breitbart’s description, there was in fact a global army of trolls, not unlike the ones shown on “South Park,” who were eagerly “shit-posting” on Trump’s behalf, their harassment an anonymous version of the “rat-fucking” that used to be the province of paid fixers. Like Trump’s statements, their quasi-comical memeing and name-calling was so destabilizing, flipping between serious and silly, that it warped the boundaries of discourse. “We memed a President into existence,” Chuck Johnson, a troll who had been banned from Twitter, bragged after the election. These days, he’s reportedly consulting on appointments at the White House.

Last September, Donald Trump, Jr., posted on Instagram an image of Trump’s inner circle which included a cartoon frog in a Trump wig. It was Pepe the Frog, a benign stoner-guy cartoon that had been repurposed by 4chan pranksters—they’d Photoshopped him into Nazi and Trump drag, to mess with liberals. Trump trolls put Pepe in their avatars. But then so did literal Nazis and actual white supremacists. Like many Jewish journalists, I was tweeted images in which my face was Photoshopped into a gas chamber—but perhaps those were from free-speech pranksters, eager to spark an overreaction? It had become a distinction without a difference. The joke protected the non-joke. At the event that Tila Tequila attended, the leader shouted

“Heil Trump!”—but then claimed, in the Trumpian manner, that he was speaking “in a spirit of irony.” Two weeks ago, the Russian Embassy tweeted out a smirking Pepe. The situation had begun to resemble an old story from the original fake-news site, the *Onion*: “*Ironic Porn Purchase Leads to Unironic Ejaculation.*”

HERE’S A SCENE in the final season of “Mad Men” in which Joan and Peggy, former secretaries, have risen high enough to be paired as a creative team. It’s 1970; the feminist movement has the pull to be threatening. (Earlier, it was a punch line: “We’ll have a civil-rights march for women,” Peggy’s left-wing boyfriend, Abe, said, laughing.) They sit at a conference table to meet their new bosses, three frat-boy suits from McCann Erickson. “Well, you’re not the landing party we expected,” one of them says.

The account is Topaz pantyhose, a competitor of the newly global L’Eggs. “So they’re worried that L’Eggs are going to spread all over the world?” one man says with a leer. “That wouldn’t bother me at all.” It’s a joke delivered past the women to the other men, who chuckle and make eye contact. Peggy and Joan smile politely. It goes on like that: the women’s pitches slam against a wall, because the men are one another’s true audience. “Would you be able to tell them what’s so special about your panties?” they ask Joan. She can be crude or elegant, she can ignore them, or she can be a “good sport.” But every path, she knows from experience, leads to humiliation.

Afterward, Joan and Peggy stand in the elevator, fuming. “I want to burn this place down,” Joan says. They have an argument—they fight about Peggy being homely and Joan hot, how each of them dresses and why. The argument has the same premise as the jokes: how men see you is all that matters. Knowing what’s wrong doesn’t mean you know how to escape it.

I thought of that scene the first time I saw the “Access Hollywood” tape, the one that was supposed to wreck Trump’s career, but which transformed, within days, on every side, into more fodder for jokes: a chance to say “pussy” out loud at work; the “Pussy Grabs Back” shirt I wore to the polls. In the tape, Billy Bush and Trump bond like the guys at McCann Erickson, but it’s when they step

out of the bus to see the actress Arianne Zucker that the real drama happens. Their voices change, go silky and sly, and suddenly you could see the problem so clearly: when you're the subject of the joke, you can't be in on it.

The political journalist Rebecca Traister described this phenomenon to me as "the finger trap." You are placed loosely within the joke, which is so playful, so light—why protest? It's only when you pull back—show that you're hurt, or get angry, or try to argue that the joke is a lie, or, worse, deny that the joke is funny—that the joke tightens. If you object, you're a censor. If you show pain, you're a weakling. It's a dynamic that goes back to the rude, rule-breaking Groucho Marx—destroyer of élites!—and Margaret Dumont, pop culture's primal pearl-clutcher.

When Hillary described half of Trump's followers as "deplorables," she wasn't wrong. But she'd walked right into the finger trap. Trump was the hot comic; Obama the cool one. Hillary had the skill to be hard-funny, too, when it was called for: she killed at the Al Smith charity dinner, in New York, while Trump bombed. It didn't matter, though, because that was not the role she fit in the popular imagination. Trump might be thin-skinned and easily offended, a grifter C.E.O. on a literal golden throne. But Hillary matched the look and the feel of Margaret Dumont: the rich bitch, Nurse Ratched, the buzzkill, the no-fun mom, the one who shut the joke down.

ON "THE WALDO MOMENT," an episode of the British show "Black Mirror," a miserable comic named Jamie is the voice behind Waldo, an animated blue bear, whose specialty is humiliating public figures. His act is scatological and wild, in the tradition of Ali G and Triumph the Insult Comic Dog, as well as the meaner correspondents on "The Daily Show." It's ambush comedy, taking the piss. But Jamie's bosses, hip nihilists with their eye on the bottom line, see greater potential for profit—online, an act like Waldo can go viral, jumping live from phone to phone.

As a gag, they run Waldo for Parliament, just as Colbert once started his own satirical super PAC. Jamie has no true politics—"I'm not dumb or clever enough to be political," he protests—but his crude attacks take off. He becomes a populist

sensation, like Trump: he's the joke that's impossible to fight. The politicians he's attacking are required to be serious, both the Tory stuffed shirt and the young female Labour upstart, who is dryly funny in private but can't risk showing it in public. A blue bear doesn't need to follow rules, however. Since Waldo attacks phonies—and is open about his own phoniness, including the fact that he's a team effort—viewers find him authentic. Even a brilliantly acerbic chat-show interrogator can't unseat him, because Jamie's got so much more bandwidth. He's allowed to curse, to be stupid, to be angry—the fight is fixed in his favor, because all the emotion belongs to him.

"The Waldo Moment" came out in 2013. By then, viewers had spent years getting their news delivered via comedy, and vice versa. Jon Stewart was two years from retirement; Colbert would soon jump to CBS. Newspapers, starved of print ads, had died years before—or been shoved into the attention economy, where entertainment mattered most. Online, all clicks were equal. Breitbart got traffic off quasi-comical headlines; the conspiracy theorist Alex Jones screamed on his livestream like Sam Kinison. It was no great leap for paranoid delusions, like Pizzagate, or deliberate hoaxes, like the one about the Pope endorsing Trump, to pass muster on Facebook, because the design made all news-like items feel fungible. On both the left and the right, the advertising imperative was stronger than the ethical one: you had to check the URL for an added ".co" to see if a story was real, and how many people bothered? If some readers thought your story was a joke and others thought it was outrageous, well, all the better. Satire was what got traffic on Saturday night.

Like "South Park," "Black Mirror" could see far, but not all the way to the end. Waldo, who has come in second in the election, gets acquired by sinister global-capitalist forces, which recognize that his Pepe-goofy image is the ideal mask for fascist power. As a militarized police force roasts homeless people from an alley, Waldo gleams from billboards, his message having pivoted to "Hope." When the episode came out, it was divisive: some viewers found it overly cynical in its portrait of the mob. Now it seems naïve: the creators did not imagine that Waldo might win—or that the person

controlling him might *want* to win. Like Mr. Garrison, like the shysters in "The Producers," Jamie tries desperately to escape the prank persona that he's created. But when he shrieks "Don't vote for me!" the audience only laughs; when he flees the van in which he's performing, his boss takes over the voice of Waldo. It's only when Jamie threatens to disrupt the show, attacking the screen on which Waldo appears, and the blue bear orders the crowd to beat him up, that people stop laughing.

WHEN VLADIMIR PUTIN was elected President, in 2000, one of his first acts was to kill "Kukly," a sketch puppet show that portrayed him as Little Tsches, a sinister baby who uses a "magic TV comb" to bewitch a city. Putin threatened to wreck the channel, NTV, unless it removed the puppet. NTV refused. Within months, it was under state control. According to *Newsweek*, "Putin jokes quickly vanished from Russia's television screens."

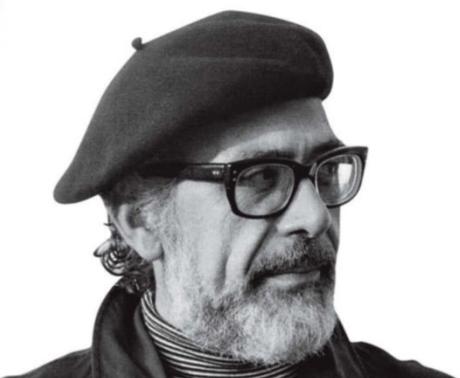
Soon after Trump was elected, he, too, began complaining about a sketch show: "Saturday Night Live," which portrayed him as a preening fool, Putin's puppet. His tweets lost the shape of jokes, unless you count "NOT!" as a kicker. He was no longer the blue bear. Instead, he was reportedly meeting with Rupert Murdoch about who should head the F.C.C. Soon, Trump would be able to shape deals like the A.T. & T. and Time Warner merger, to strike back at those who made fun of him or criticized him, which often amounted to the same thing. Fox would likely be Trump TV.

Last week, at his first press conference as President-elect, Trump made no jokes. He was fuming over the BuzzFeed dossier and all those lurid allegations worthy of "South Park," the pee jokes lighting up Twitter. Only when he reminisced about his rallies did he relax, recalling their size, the thrill of the call and response. He almost smiled. But when CNN's Jim Acosta tried to ask a question about Russia, Trump snapped back, furiously, "Fake news!"—and the incoming White House press secretary, Sean Spicer, told Acosta that if he tried that again he'd be thrown out. Now, it seems, is when Trump gets serious. A President pushes buttons in a different sense. As Putin once remarked to a child, "Russia's borders don't end anywhere"—before adding, "That's a joke." ♦

# VOYAGE TO THE INTERIOR

*A neglected South American master's existential classic.*

BY BENJAMIN KUNKEL



Narrators in Antonio Di Benedetto's novels are suspended in endless waiting.

**Z**AMA," A BRIEF, indelible novel by the Argentinean writer Antonio Di Benedetto, is a work of waiting—of enforced lassitude, excruciated anticipation, and final frustration. The story of a man holding out for deliverance from the backwater that turns out to be his destiny (if "destiny" isn't too dignified a word for where character and circumstance conspire to deposit us), it was written by a man likewise toiling in provincial obscurity and had itself to wait decades after its publication, in 1956, before it was recognized in the Spanish-speaking world as a classic. Only now, some sixty years later, and thirty after the death of its author, has the book appeared in English, in a sensitive translation by Esther Allen (New York Review Books). Yet to the late Juan José

Saer, the leading Argentinean novelist of recent decades, Di Benedetto's style was "undoubtedly the most original" in twentieth-century Argentina, and his work "one of the culminating instances of Spanish-language narrative in our century."

An ardent fan of Dostoyevsky, Di Benedetto is given to portraying states of extremity—of obsession, delusion, wild aggression—but without any nineteenth-century rhetorical overheating. He was a film buff and an occasional scriptwriter, and the narrators of his novels relate their descents into hell in the cool, efficient manner of film treatments. "Zama" is the testimony of one Don Diego de Zama, an administrator of the Spanish crown working in the seventeen-nineties in the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata—a vast ter-

ritory encompassing much of what is now Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay—and Zama begins his tale with something like an establishing shot: "I left the city and made my way downriver alone, to meet the ship I awaited without knowing when it would come." The focus tightens on an unabashedly symbolic image, as Zama looks at a "writhing patch of water":

A dead monkey, still whole, still undecomposed, drifted back and forth with a certain precision upon those ripples and eddies without exit. All his life the water at forest's edge had beckoned him to a journey, a journey he did not take until he was no longer a monkey but only a monkey's corpse. The water that bore him up tried to bear him away, but he was caught among the posts of the decrepit wharf and there he was, ready to go and not going. And there we were.

There we were: Ready to go and not going.

"Ready to go and not going" is the purgatorial condition throughout the novel. Zama, a former military hero renowned as a "pacifier of Indians," has been dispatched to Asunción, in the humid scrubland of what is now Paraguay. He hopes that he will soon be promoted to some better-paid and less far-flung post that might enable him to send for his wife, Marta, and their sons, whom he has left behind in Mendoza, in another corner of the Viceroyalty. Asunción, remote enough today, is immeasurably more so when Zama arrives by boat from Buenos-Aires (as it was then spelled), hundreds of miles away, and in its flat landscape of "barely perceptible hills" Don Diego's "temporary, stopgap appointment" will slide toward eternity. In the early nineteenth century, revolutions against Madrid broke up the Viceroyalty into independent republics, and part of the pathos of "Zama" is that the political entity that Don Diego serves will hardly outlast his abbreviated life.

The novel proceeds in short sections, like diary entries. "It was early. I had little to do," a typical report begins. As a counsellor to the provincial Gobernador, Zama receives occasional distinguished visitors, oversees the odd transfer of a prisoner, or contemplates a petition to requisition a work gang of enslaved Indians. Many tasks are morally dubious—finding a way not to prosecute a well-connected murderer—and others he performs with indifference bordering on incompetence. He is proud of his position as an officer of the crown, and as a white man

among native subjects of Indian or African descent. But his obsession with status betrays an insecurity; as a *criollo*—white but born in the Americas—he ranks below the Spanish-born élite of the colonial ruling class. Aloof even from his peers, he keeps his own (perfectly untrustworthy) counsel, and admires in himself the upright bearing that conceals an “impassioned disposition.” Early on, he tells (or, perhaps, warns) himself that he need only “keep diligently in mind my stability, my post and the duties attendant upon it” to “succeed in disengaging myself of it—of the post, that is.” The effortful diction suggests the exertions involved for this decorous man to contain “the havoc within me.”

Di Benedetto furnishes the colonial tedium with the scabbarded swords of Creole gentlemen and the patient embroidery of aristocratic young ladies. There are meals of *carne asada* and manioc soup; parleys over endless rounds of yerba maté; social scandals that erupt at horse races; deadly tropical fevers; and red dust, relentless sun, and clouds of mosquitoes. But this is not, or not only, a historical novel. “Zama” has been described as a work of existentialist fiction, and its protagonist, alone with a troubled mind, is as much an ambassador from the twentieth century as a Baroque-era bureaucrat. As with novels by Kafka, Camus, Sartre, and Beckett, the story’s preoccupation is the tension between human freedom and constraining circumstance. Zama, a man as impetuous as he is stuck, resembles other existentialist antiheroes as he swings between spellbound passivity and sudden lunges into action. But Don Diego never seems like a figure in an allegory, like K. in “The Castle”; or an ambulatory philosophical argument, like Roquentin in “Nausea.” “Zama” induces a rare feeling—to put it as naïvely as possible—of the main character’s *realness*. Don Diego is consistently surprised by his own behavior, but not as much as he would like. His abrupt acts and swerving meditations have an air of unplotted inevitability about them. He is a character more convincing than coherent, and more persuasive than intelligible.

It must be admitted that Zama is frequently loathsome. With too much time on his hands, he flings himself into tirades and physical assaults. Caught spying on a group of women bathing in a river, he is pursued by one of them and

turns on her: “Naked as she was, I took her by the throat, strangling her cry, and slapped her until my hands were dry of sweat, before sending her sprawling to the ground with a shove.” He is immediately ashamed, in a self-centered way—“Character! My character! Ha!” he snorts—only to be outraged when the woman’s husband later calls him a “filthy, gutless snoop.” Zama’s brittle vanity constantly sets him up for humiliations, producing a vein of black comedy that runs through the book. “It seemed excessive to persecute a man in such fashion,” he concedes after slashing the cheek of a hated colleague, the victim’s inferior rank insuring that he, not Zama, is banished as a result. Di Benedetto presents repellent attitudes and actions with anthropological neutrality and savors the irony that Zama’s inferiors must address him as *vuesa merced* (Your Mercy).

Don Diego errs through passivity as well as rashness. When he learns that the Gobernador has been given a position in the royal court, back in Spain, he is too glum about his own situation to show enthusiasm. Too late, he realizes that this was an opportunity to ingratiate himself with someone who could lobby for his transfer. Other ripe opportunities are fumbled. Much of the first part of the novel concerns Zama’s attempts to seduce the lonely wife of a rich and often absent landowner. After she complains of being besieged by men who desire her body, he disguises his lust as a grand passion. He dissembles too well, and ends up the object of her chaste infatuation; worse, he finds out that at least two other men are enjoying the physical intimacy he craved. “You are mine and I am yours, yours alone,” she tells him at their last meeting, on the eve of departing with her husband for Spain. “And I would have given what you’ve never asked of me, if only you had asked.” A bleak and ultimately horrific story, the novel is not least painful when it briefly becomes a romance. “It was the only visit that ended without protocol,” Zama recalls. “I walked to the front door alone.”

As if to underscore the ghastliness of inaction, both Zama and his almost-lover have experiences of watching, immobilized, as a large and likely poisonous spider crawls across a sleeping person’s face. The image suggests much of

Don Diego’s mood as the years move past. As he recounts, “It stepped down the forehead, edged along the nose and mouth, extending its legs onto the neck. This is when it bites, I said to myself. It did not bite.”

PART TWO OF “Zama” takes place four years later, in 1794, and prolepsis—the narrative technique of jumping forward in time—has seldom been used to crueler effect. Zama is still languishing in Asunción. Far from gaining a promotion and a raise, he has fallen into debt and sold his sword and rapier. Meanwhile, the memory of his family is fading: “The past was a small notebook, much scribbled-upon, that I had somehow mislaid.” He has set aside his matrimonial scruples long enough to have fathered a son with “an impecunious Spanish widow” whom he does not love. Zama neglects the boy entirely, but nurtures a hope that his son will grow up to be a hero, as he himself was in his soldiering days, and you sense that his sanity is slipping. Once another man marries Zama’s mistress and legally adopts his son, Zama’s intimate life comes to consist of tormentingly far-fetched sexual fantasies, plus an arrangement with an ill-favored older woman who gives him a few coins for his services, “her unwanted advances a joke played upon me by time.”

In the novel’s short, unsparing final section, set in 1799, Zama joins a military expedition to track down a notorious bandit. He hopes that “a daring feat of arms in the service of public order would place me in the monarch’s hand, to be set down in a position more to my liking”—and nothing in the book is funnier or sadder than this invincible desire for promotion, a goal by now as abstract as God’s grace. Captured by the bandit he was pursuing, Zama is tortured and condemned to death, but not before scrawling a last note home—“Marta, I haven’t gone under”—in his own blood, with an ostrich quill. He slips the message into a bottle and tosses it into the river, this hero of futility.

THE SO-CALLED Latin-American Boom of the nineteen-sixties and seventies, which made international celebrities of Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Di Benedetto’s

compatriot Julio Cortázar, passed him by. Even in Argentina, he was not well known during his lifetime. Argentinean literary culture is ruthlessly centered in Buenos Aires—"that bad habit, Buenos Aires," Jorge Luis Borges called the city—but Di Benedetto resisted the time-honored impulse of literary young men toward the capital. Instead, he lived in Mendoza, where he was born in 1922, a small city far inland, at the foot of the Andes. (It's Zama's home town.) He worked there for most of his life, as a journalist and editor.

"Zama" is the first of a loose trio of novels about waiting, now known as "The Trilogy of Expectation." (Esther Allen will soon translate the other two.) The trilogy displays one of Di Benedetto's most distinctive characteristics—his laconic prose. Writers of literary Spanish, from Gongora to the present, have often tended toward rhetorical extravagance and ornate grammar, but Di Benedetto the newspaperman favors sentences as clipped as telegrams, moving adeptly between lyrical, objective, colloquial, and philosophical registers. In the course of the three books, the language grows simpler and simpler, but avoids the tough-guy impression frequently associated with terseness. The effect is nearly the opposite: deprived of rhetorical shelter, Di Benedetto's narrators seem mercilessly exposed to the events they recount. The narrator of the second book in the trilogy, "El Silenciero" (1964), wonders if his fiancée knows she will be marrying *un hombre vulnerable*, a vulnerable man. Vulnerable to what? one might ask. The best answer is: everything. The third book ends like this, with an effect of existential nudity:

I have to get dressed, because I'm naked.  
Completely naked.  
We're born thus.

The title of "El Silenciero" is a neologism that isn't easy to translate but might be rendered as "The Silence-Maker" or "The Silentist." Much as Zama wants a promotion, the unnamed narrator of this novel wants quiet—that's all. Tormented by the sound of an idling bus outside the small apartment he shares with his mother, by the squall of a neighbor's radio, or by the noise of metal on metal in a machine shop down the block, he moves the household to a new address. Nothing changes except the sources of the din. "I consider man a maker of noises,"

the narrator declares. The omnipresent racket is obviously some kind of symbol, in the existential way: its significance may be that it has none. This calls to mind Kafka's pregnantly indecipherable novels, but Di Benedetto fills out his quasi-allegorical premise with so many dingy particulars that his narrator seems to experience his universal problem, in what may be the universal way, as a private shame and defeat. A special aversion to noise is patent, anyway, in Di Benedetto's prose: no waste sound.

The narrator of "The Suicides" (1969), also unnamed, is preoccupied with a darker kind of deliverance than his predecessors. On the brink of thirty-three, he is not so much debating whether to kill himself, as his father did at the same age, as waiting to find out whether he will do so. No doubt alert to the lugubrious potential of his material, Di Benedetto is more than usually matter-of-fact. Much of the novel amounts to a sort of dossier on the phenomenon of self-slaughter. The narrator, a reporter, and two of his newspaper colleagues share their research on suicide: social and psychological precipitants; variations in incidence by season and country; philosophical and religious arguments for and against; and so on. The blank tone, which seems to express numbness and dread, changes only when the narrator and a colleague named Marcela form a suicide pact. The dire agreement affects him almost as a betrothal might. Confusedly reawakened to the world by love for the woman with whom he has agreed to leave it, he is visited by a sensation of "beauty," as he calls it: "There it is, it exists, it circulates. It almost abounds. Svelte bodies, the young with their heads held high, a face, eyes, colors that descend from the air onto people, an adult forehead, a well-formed hand as it gestures." The moment expresses an intuition that seems to underwrite the entire trilogy: bliss is possible. Too frail, ordinarily, to be uttered, some anticipation of fulfillment sponsors these calamitous pursuits of happiness and curiously eloquent confessions.

PERHAPS DI BENEDETTO sensed that his refusal to pursue a career in Buenos Aires would thwart his ambitions. "Zama" handles the theme of geographical perdition with the offhand anguish

of familiarity. More remarkably, the novel's concluding scenes of torture anticipate an ordeal that began for Di Benedetto twenty years after his novel was published. In 1976, mere hours after a military coup toppled Argentina's government, soldiers arrested him for no apparent reason. He was not a leftist and may simply have committed the offense of journalism; another theory is that a well-placed rival for a woman's affections wanted him out of the way. As the junta set about kidnapping and killing (tens of thousands were "disappeared" in the seven years of the regime), Di Benedetto was imprisoned for eighteen months and sometimes tortured. On four occasions, he was—like the young Dostoyevsky, in 1849—subject to mock executions, taken out to be shot only to be "reprieved" at the last moment.

Di Benedetto was released in 1977, thanks to the intercession of the renowned Argentinean writer Ernesto Sábato and of the Nobel laureate Heinrich Böll, who wrote to the head of the military government. Di Benedetto immediately left the country and settled in Madrid, where he published a book of stories called "Absurdos"; prohibited by his jailers from writing fiction, he had composed them in letters to a friend, under the pretext that he was merely recounting his dreams. The book was no more successful than his other works. In 1984, the year after the dictatorship ended, he returned to Argentina and finally gave Buenos Aires a try. But he had just two years to live. The novelist Sergio Chejfec caught sight of him one day sitting alone in a pizzeria, and enthusiastically tried to engage him on the subject of his work. The older writer told him, "You're young. That's why you can believe my work is good. But that's not how it is. I am delivered up to nothingness."

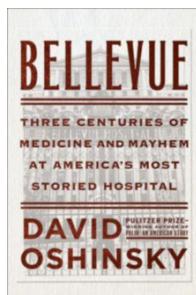
Only posthumously has this gloomy self-assessment been disproved. In 1997, the late Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño published a short story, "Sensini," in which the narrator befriends a writer named Sensini, recognizably Di Benedetto, who is the author of a cult classic about a bureaucrat in the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata. Now living in poverty in Spain, he supplements his

meagre income with prize money from municipal literary competitions. Though critics dismissed Sensini's novel as "Kafka in the colonies," Bolaño writes, "the book recruited a small group of devoted readers." Bolaño was one such fan of Di Benedetto's books, and the posthumous fame of Bolaño's hard-boiled, antipoetic fiction, so far from the surreal and sometimes whimsical tropics of magical realism, may have prepared a welcome for Di Benedetto.

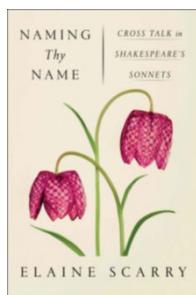
**A**LFRID KAZIN, IN "God and the American Writer," stressed an "American tradition of unavailing solitude," and quoted the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead: "Religion is what man does with his solitariness." The belated arrival of "Zama" in the United States raises an admittedly hyperbolic question: Can it be that the Great American Novel was written by an Argentinean? It's hard, anyway, to think of a superior novel about the bloody life of the frontier. Here is a white man whose whiteness fails to yield any providential good fortune, and a sojourner in the wilderness of himself confronting the cipher of the universe with religious dread. Americans—in the sense of the word that covers Alaska and Tierra del Fuego alike—live in a hemisphere that was conquered and settled by people who saw it as a place in which to realize their dreams. "Zama" is, among other things, a ringing statement of this hemispheric condition, in an unaccustomed key of defeat: "Here was I in the midst of a vast continent that was invisible to me though I felt it all around, a desolate paradise, far too immense for my legs," Zama tells us. "America existed for no one if not for me, but it existed only in my needs, my desires, and my fears."

The sense of matching immensities, inside and out, brings to mind Huck Finn lighting out for the territories or Augie March footloose in Mexico. But Don Diego de Zama isn't a young man exuberantly exploring liberty; he is a married bureaucrat in deepening middle age. As he tells his story, the boundless landscape takes on a look of confinement, and his New World conviction of a brighter tomorrow is ridiculed at each turn. ♦

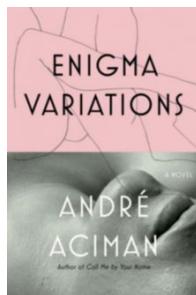
## BRIEFLY NOTED



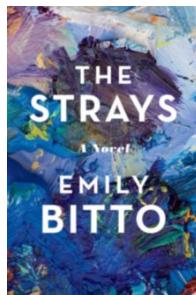
**Bellevue**, by David Oshinsky (Doubleday). This taut, masterly portrait of Bellevue Hospital operates much as that fabled institution has since its founding, in 1736: the entire history of New York seems to pass through. The hospital was on the front line of numerous battles that defined both the city and modern medicine: the waves of immigration in the nineteenth century; the fight against Tammany Hall for stricter public-health standards; the AIDS epidemic; the homeless crisis of the nineteen-eighties. Bellevue, often overwhelmed and underfunded, never failed to accept a challenge. But perhaps its biggest fight is one that continues today: navigating a health-care landscape in which commitment to public care isn't secure.



**Naming Thy Name**, by Elaine Scarry (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). This study of Shakespeare's sonnets suggests that the beautiful young man addressed in the first hundred and twenty-six of them may have been a poet named Henry Constable. Scarry unfolds intertextual references in the two men's works and notes that the letters of Constable's name are sometimes embedded in Shakespeare's lines (as in Sonnet 18: "So LONG as mEn CAn BReaTHe, or EYes caN see"). But she doesn't insist strenuously on her thesis: the book is less a work of scholarly debate-resolving than a tantalizing exercise in literary puzzle-making. The sonnets, likely written around 1600, weren't published until 1609—when Constable was in prison, and needed cheering up.



**Enigma Variations**, by André Aciman (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). The five exquisitely composed sections of this novel follow the protagonist, Paul, through the great loves of his life: a youthful infatuation with a cabinetmaker on a small Italian island, a disintegrating relationship with a woman he meets while playing tennis, an obsession with a man encountered at the same tennis courts, a passionate affair with a woman from university whom he sees every few years, and extramarital overtures to a much younger woman (he quit smoking the year she was born). The focus is not on Paul's fluctuating orientation but on his path to maturity. He learns that "heartache, like love, like low-grade fevers, like the longing to reach out and touch a hand across the table, is easy enough to live down."



**The Strays**, by Emily Bitto (Twelve). This début novel revolves around a sprawling, bohemian household in Melbourne during the nineteen-thirties. Three sisters live in semi-neglect with their elegant mother, a father who is a famous painter with a penchant for defecating in the garden, and a trio of up-and-coming artists who are his acolytes. The narrator, Lily, forms an intense friendship with one of the daughters, Eva, and, in middle age, recalls the unravelling of this quasi-commune. There's a sense of foreboding that never quite seems justified, even after we learn what happened, but the book is full of lush, mesmerizing detail and keen insight into the easy intimacy between young girls which disappears with adulthood.

# INDEPENDENCE DAY

*Run the Jewels finds a new purpose.*

BY HUA HSU



*El-P and Killer Mike's new album feels political, if only in its spirit of refusal.*

**R**UN THE JEWELS is made up of El-P and Killer Mike, two forty-one-year-old rappers who, until a few years ago, were largely unaware of each other's career. El-P was born and raised in a nice part of Brooklyn, at a time when New Yorkers could still argue that they were making the only hip-hop that mattered. In his late teens, he formed Company Flow, a rugged, bratty group that became part of a late-nineties underground held up by many as a modest, principled alternative to an increasingly showy mainstream. After Company Flow broke up, in the early two-thousands—one of their final shows was at a Ralph Nader rally—El-P went further underground, performing as a solo artist and founding Definitive Jux, an

independent label built in his own crass, wounded image.

Mike grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Atlanta, and attended Morehouse College, where he met Big Boi, from Outkast. Eventually, Mike dropped out, opting for a life of rapping and small-stakes drug dealing. In 2000, he débuted on Outkast's album "Stankonia," as a profane, blustery foil to the slick economy of Big Boi and Andre 3000. At the time, an association with Outkast was sufficient grounds for signing a major-label record deal, and three years later Mike released a solo album, "Monster." As Andre 3000 and Big Boi slowly abandoned Outkast, Mike became one of their most visible protégés.

El-P acknowledges the duo's odd-

couple sensibility on "A Report to the Shareholders / Kill Your Masters," one of the best songs on Run the Jewels' new album, "Run the Jewels 3": "Hey, not from the same part of town, but we both hear the same sound coming." By the end of the two-thousands, El-P and Mike were both adrift, slightly bitter, and consuming drugs at a worrying pace. Nearing their late thirties, they might have given up. Instead, in 2012, they began collaborating, and El-P ended up producing Killer Mike's "R.A.P. Music." The following year, they released the first Run the Jewels album, and then, in 2014, a second one.

Years removed from fame (or some approximation thereof), both men embraced the chance to rap as nobodies, creating songs that were outsized and fantastical. El-P makes beats that are chunky and abrasive, full of machine-age ennui. Their voices sound surprisingly good together—El-P's is dry and caustic, Mike's is saucy and gruff. Their collaboration is like an interracial buddy-cop movie from the eighties, in which they both get to be the one who deals with his authority issues by goofing around.

When El-P was in Company Flow, the group's records often bore an inscription: "Independent as Fuck." It was a badge of D.I.Y. pride, intended to distinguish them from their imagined foes, who treated hip-hop as a vocation rather than a calling. Today, when artists make their living not through recording but from merchandising, licensing, and touring, working outside a traditional label system demands an approach that is more playful and creative. The two men were brought together at the behest of a Cartoon Network executive, when they were both recording songs for the network. They débuted material from their second album on BuzzFeed. (They also released a remixed version of that album, consisting of beats made only from sampled cat sounds.) They've collaborated with rappers like Gangsta Boo and Trina, who are adored for their spitfire nastiness, but they've also opened for Jack White, whose relationship to hip-hop sometimes feels antagonistic. Most of their music is available for free online. In late December, they announced the surprise digital release of their new album with a YouTube video starring Fred Armisen and Carrie

Brownstein, of "Portlandia." A befuddled Mike steals the scene.

As a result, there's a perception that Run the Jewels makes rap music for people who might feel estranged by rap music. It's not quite "Hamilton." But there's something artisanal about it—the care and precision, the thoughtful, lockstep union between planet-tilting beats and thunderous boasts. There's no ambition to reinvent hip-hop, just a desire to hone the craft. (The group's name refers to a classic act, LL Cool J.) This unlikely partnership has changed El-P and Mike, simplified their motivations. "Run the Jewels 3" gives the impression of being the document of two grown men, raised under radically different circumstances, trying to make each other keel over in laughter—Mike is the "pervert with purpose that make you question your purpose," El-P is ill-mannered and loutish, the embodiment of a horny, rightward swipe on Tinder. "Me and Mike just think alike, we can't stop high-fiving," El-P raps on "Stay Gold." Their friendship feels like a model for finding kinship with unexpected people and discovering a common purpose.

THE DAY AFTER the election, Run the Jewels released "2100," a wobbly spaceship of a track that seemed like an instant response to Donald Trump's victory, though it was recorded well in advance. (The song appears on "Run the Jewels 3.") "You defeat the Devil when you hold on to hope," Mike raps, summoning a kind of optimism which suddenly felt unattainable to many of his fans.

On "Run the Jewels 3," there are riffs on riots and conspiracies, crooked cops and a rigged system. Mike ridicules the CNN anchor Don Lemon, and groused at "these All Lives Matter-ass white folk." "Sittin' next to a book and a gun/Ballot or bullet you better use one," he raps on "Down," the album's majestic opener. But the two don't despair. The album is dense and weighty, appreciative of the past that produced it, a redemption born out of what El-P calls "a pure absence of hope." "My, my, I could have died y'all/A couple times I took my eyes off the prize y'all," Mike remarks on "Down," with a sense of astonishment that he's survived long enough to discover his purpose.

Among those despondent about Trump's rise, some chose to see the moment as filled with the potential for insurgent art. After all, hadn't hard-core and hip-hop emerged in the wake of Ronald Reagan? But this lemonade-from-lemons confidence feels perverse—a retrospective assessment that risks ignoring the reality of the conditions that necessitated a song or an album. Now the focus is on survival, doing whatever is possible to stave off despondency.

Last month, the rapper Yasiin Bey, previously known as Mos Def, performed a series of farewell concerts. In the late nineties, Bey and El-P were label mates on Rawkus Records, which fancied itself a cornerstone of independent hip-hop, though one of its silent backers was the Fox media heir James Murdoch. Bey was among the most charismatic rappers of his time, and his albums were regarded as manifestos for progressive enlightenment. After a perplexing decade away, his return to the stage was seen as a chance to reclaim the possibility of another era. But the shows were rambling and messy, and "Dec 99th," an album he released with the artist and journalist Ferrari Shepard, feels sluggish and defeated. Bey was locked in a conundrum. We needed him to speak to us with the force and clarity of an irretrievable past.

We look to art for prophecy and new languages. But what happens when nobody knows what to say? Can art help make sense of this moment—of partisan Twitter armies, so-called "fake news," and the mainstreaming of conspiracy theories? Will earnestness and conviction continue to seem insufficient in the face of cynical trolling? On "Panther Like a Panther (Miracle Mix)," Mike reminds us that sometimes our wildest imagination has difficulty keeping pace with real life. He spent much of 2016 involved in politics, as one of Bernie Sanders's most visible advocates. He recalls sitting "with potential presidents" to talk about the war on drugs, and wonders, "Who thought the son of Denise would be the leader of people?"

Trump is barely mentioned on "Run the Jewels 3," except for a reference to the Devil's "bad toupee and spray tan." But it feels like a protest album, in the way that many things that sound a note of refusal feel political these days. ♦

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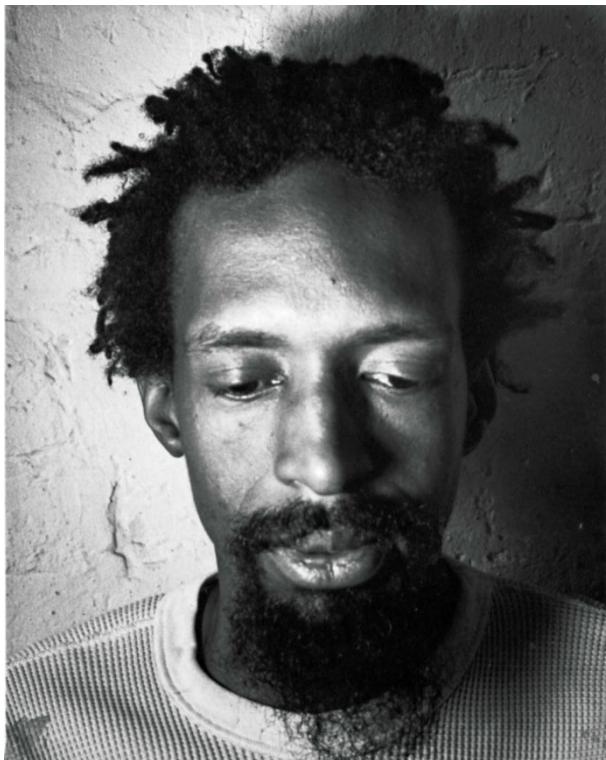
Maira Kalman, February 1, 1999

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# GUERRILLA MINIMALISM

*The wild and grand music of Julius Eastman.*

BY ALEX ROSS



**M**INIMALISM, THE LAST great scandal-making revolution in twentieth-century music, has become venerable. This season, Steve Reich and Philip Glass are being celebrated worldwide on the occasion of their eightieth birthdays. (Reich's was in October; Glass's is on January 31st.) Arvo Pärt, the auratic "mystic minimalist" from Estonia, received similar genuflections when he turned eighty, in 2015. Boxed sets have been issued, academic conferences organized, books published. Kyle Gann, Keith Potter, and Pwyll ap Siôn's "Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music," the most comprehensive treatment to date, covers everything from John Adams's "Harmonielehre" to the electronic drone pieces of Éliane Radigue.

With the canonization of minimalism has come a reconsideration of its

mythology. According to the familiar narrative, a group of composers led by Terry Riley, Reich, and Glass rejected modernist thorniness, opened themselves to pop and non-Western influences, and came home to simple chords and a steady pulse. The reality is more complicated. La Monte Young, whose String Trio of 1958 is widely held to be the starting point of minimalism, steered clear of tonality and maintained an avant-garde posture. A crucial rediscovery of recent years has been the work of Terry Jennings and Dennis Johnson, who joined Young in his early explorations of stripped-down textures. The pianist John Tilbury has made a luminous recording, for the Another Timbre label, of Jennings's early piano pieces, which are minimalist more in the Samuel Beckett sense—spare, cryptic, suggestive. For the Irritable Hedgehog label, R. Andrew

Lee has revived Johnson's vast 1959 work "November," in which crystalline sonorities gyrate for five hours.

The major revelation, though, has been the brazen and brilliant music of Julius Eastman, who was all but forgotten at century's end. Eastman found a degree of fame in the nineteen-seventies and early eighties, mainly as a singer: he performed the uproarious role of George III in Peter Maxwell Davies's "Eight Songs for a Mad King," in the company of Pierre Boulez, and toured with Meredith Monk. He achieved more limited notoriety for works that defiantly affirmed his identity as an African-American and as a gay man. (One was called "Nigger Faggot.") As the eighties went on, he slipped from view, his behavior increasingly erratic. When he died, in 1990, at the age of forty-nine, months passed before Gann broke the news, in the *Village Voice*.

These days, Eastman's name is everywhere. Renée Levine Packer and Mary Jane Leach have edited an anthology of essays about him, entitled "Gay Guerrilla." A recording of Eastman's 1974 piece "Femenine," on the Frozen Reeds label, has won praise from classical and pop critics alike. The London Contemporary Music Festival staged three days of Eastman concerts in December; Monday Evening Concerts, in Los Angeles, will present an Eastman program on January 23rd; and the Bowbird ensemble, in Philadelphia, is planning a festival for the spring. Identity politics has probably played a role in the Eastman renaissance: programming a black, gay composer quells questions about diversity. But it's the music that commands attention: wild, grand, delirious, demonic, an uncontrollable personality surging into sound.

**G**AY GUERRILLA" OPENS with an extended biographical essay, by Packer, that feels ready for adaptation as a harrowing indie film. Eastman grew up in Ithaca, New York, singing in boys' choirs and glee clubs. In his teen-age years, he showed talent as a pianist, and in 1959 he began studying at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute, one of the country's leading music schools. There his interests shifted from piano to composition. By the end of the sixties, he had joined the Creative Associates

*Eastman, all but forgotten at century's end, is now seen as a brazen pioneer.*

program at the State University of New York at Buffalo, which, under the direction of Lukas Foss, had become a center of avant-garde activity.

Eastman first made his name as a creator of conceptual scores in the vein of John Cage, his incantatory baritone often serving as a connecting thread. In the same period, he acquired a taste for provocation. Cage was miffed when, during a rendition of his "Song Books," in Buffalo, Eastman invited a young man onstage and undressed him. This was not the kind of happening that Cage had in mind. Works in what Eastman called his "Nigger Series" began appearing in the late seventies, causing immediate discomfort. He might have made more headway if his tactics had been less confrontational, but, as a colleague remarked, self-promotion was alien to him. His final years had the aspect of a deliberate martyrdom, accelerated by alcohol and drugs. He spent time in homeless shelters and in Tompkins Square Park. The composer David Borden has suggested that Eastman was "teaching himself humility on his own terms."

After Eastman's death, his manuscripts were scattered, and some vanished. Only after years of detective work, led by Leach, has a corpus of scores been assembled. A three-disk set on the New World label, "Unjust Malaise" (Borden's anagram of Eastman's name), gives a superb overview. As it happens, Paul Tai, who runs New World, once hired Eastman to work at the old downtown Tower Records.

Minimalism enabled Eastman's flowering, but, as Matthew Mendez writes, in "Gay Guerrilla," his approach to the genre was "hard to pin down:

arch, and not a little tongue in cheek." In 1973, Eastman wrote "Stay on It," which begins with a syncopated, relentlessly repeated riff and a falsetto cry of "Stay on it, stay on it." There's a hint of disco in the festive, propulsive sound. But more dissonant, unruly material intrudes, and several times the piece dissolves into beatless anarchy. (A good rendition can be found on the New World set; even better is a dynamic 1974 performance from Glasgow, available on Vimeo.) "Femenine" extends the mood of "Stay on It" to more than an hour's duration, losing wit and variety in the process.

Eastman perfected his multifarious minimalism in three works of the late seventies: "Crazy Nigger," "Evil Nigger," and "Gay Guerrilla." There's a precious recording of the composer impishly discussing these pieces: in a dry, professorial tone, he says that he chose the word "nigger" because it represents "a basicness, a fundamentalness, and eschews that thing which is superficial or—what can we say?—elegant." Each work is scored for multiple instruments of the same kind; Eastman usually presented them with a quartet of pianos. "Crazy Nigger" begins with a majestic rumbling of B-flats in the bass. We are thrown into a world that is as much Romantic as minimalist: the harmony thickens incrementally; quiet episodes are juxtaposed with thunderous fortissimos; pentatonic interludes add an angelic sweetness. There is a sense of worlds forming, of forces gathering.

Classic minimalist works tend to introduce change by way of horizontal shifts: Reich's "phasing" effect, in which instruments playing the same music slip

out of synch with one another; Glass's "additive" process, in which notes are added to a repeating pattern. Eastman's method, by contrast, is vertical. He keeps piling on elements, so that an initially consonant texture turns discordant and competing rhythmic patterns build to a blur. New ideas appear out of nowhere: "Evil Nigger" becomes fixated on a minor-key figure, in falling fourths, that resembles the opening motif of Mahler's First Symphony, and "Gay Guerrilla" hammers away at the Lutheran hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," beloved of Bach. Furthermore, players are given some freedom in realizing the score, their parts taking the form of structured improvisations. This exuberant chaos is far removed from the deadpan cool of Reich and Glass.

Throughout, Eastman upends the narrative of minimalist restoration—of the triumph of simplicity. Indeed, "Evil Nigger" runs the story in reverse, ending in spaced-out atonality. Surviving scores and recorded improvisations from his final decade revisit that zone frequently. (A tape of a volcanic 1980 piano-and-voice performance has surfaced; hopefully, it will be released.) Something about this music can't be fixed in place, and recordings are a pale echo of the live experience. In the closing minutes of "Crazy Nigger," additional pianists emerge from the audience and join the players onstage, to assist in the unfolding of a clangorous overtone series. The collapse of the wall between performers and onlookers feels like the start of an uprising. This is the point at which Eastman's music becomes absolutely, ferociously political. For a moment, it seems poised to bring the system down. ♦

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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 Mick Stevens, must be received by Sunday, January 22nd. The finalists in the January 9th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the February 6th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



"

"

### THE FINALISTS



*"Long time no sea."*  
Carlos Brooks, Los Angeles, Calif.

*All I'm saying is that the science isn't necessarily conclusive.*  
Adam Rothberg, Red Bank, N.J.

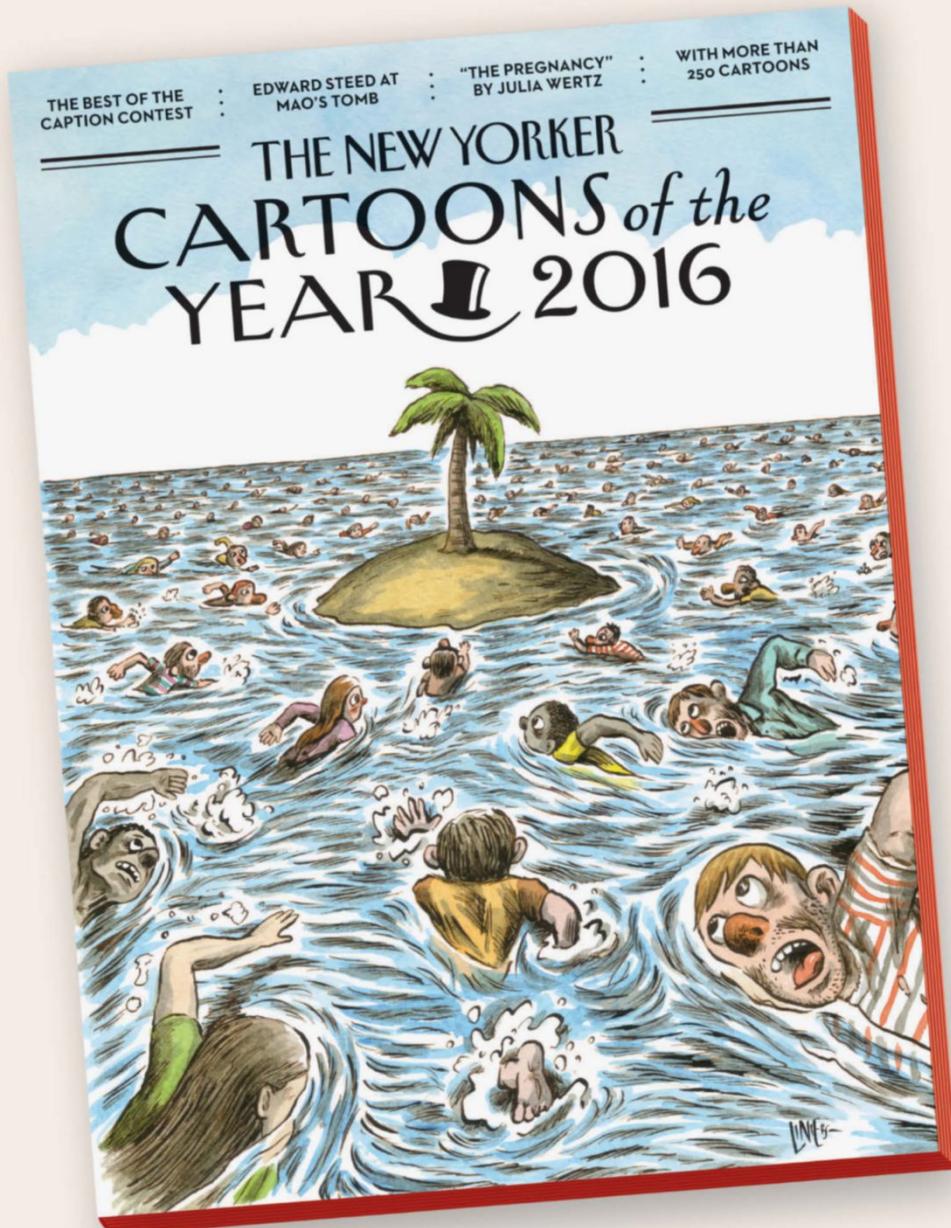
*Actually, we're in the same boat.*  
Stanley Pycior, Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*"Where do you see yourself five chairs from now?"*  
Paul Angiolillo, Watertown, Mass.

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