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THE

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# THE NEW YORKER



OBJECTS FOR LIFE







# THE NEW YORKER

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MARCH 20, 2017

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# CONTRIBUTORS

**Emma Allen** ("Mom-and-Pop Shop," p. 72), who will become *The New Yorker's* cartoon editor in May, has been a member of the magazine's editorial staff since 2012.

**Lorenzo Vitturi** (*Portfolio*, p. 62) is a photographer and sculptor based in London. His latest exhibitions were at the Photographers' Gallery, in London, and the Yossi Milo Gallery, in New York.

**D. T. Max** (*Portfolio*, p. 62) is the author of "Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace."

**Anthony Lane** (*The Current Cinema*, p. 100) has been a film critic for *The New Yorker* since 1993.

**Michelle Brittan Rosado** (*Poem*, p. 60), a Ph.D. candidate in literature and creative writing at the University of Southern California, is at work on her first poetry collection.

**Charles Bethea** (*The Talk of the Town*, p. 32) has been contributing to the magazine since 2008.

**F. Scott Fitzgerald** (*Fiction*, p. 80) was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1929. "The I.O.U." was written for *Harper's Bazaar* in 1920, but not published at that time. "I'd Die for You and Other Lost Stories," a collection of previously unpublished pieces drawn from archives and family papers, will come out in April.

**Rebecca Mead** ("Rise Up," p. 44) has been a staff writer since 1997. Her latest book is "My Life in Middlemarch."

**Adam Gopnik** (*Books*, p. 88) has been contributing to the magazine since 1986. His most recent book is "The Table Comes First."

**Sheelagh Kolhatkar** (*The Financial Page*, p. 34) became a staff writer in 2016. She is the author of "Black Edge," which was published in February.

**Nick Paumgarten** (*The Talk of the Town*, p. 30) has been writing for the magazine since 2000.

**Zoë Hitzig** (*Poem*, p. 84) is a graduate student at the University of Cambridge.

**Gary Shteyngart** ("Time Out," p. 36) is the author of the novels "Absurdistan" and "Super Sad True Love Story" and the memoir "Little Failure."

**Emily Nussbaum** (*On Television*, p. 98), the magazine's television critic, won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for criticism.

**Andrew Marantz** ("Trolling the Press Corps," p. 52) has contributed to the magazine since 2011.

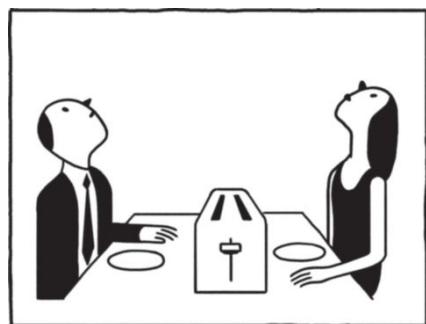
**Shannon Reed** (*Shouts & Murmurs*, p. 43) teaches at the University of Pittsburgh and contributes humor pieces to newyorker.com. She is writing a novel based on her experience teaching at a Brooklyn public high school.

**Tomer Hanuka** (*Cover*), in collaboration with the artist Asaf Hanuka and the writer Boaz Lavie, is an illustrator of the graphic novel "The Divine."

**Dan Chiasson** (*Books*, p. 94), who teaches at Wellesley, has contributed reviews to the magazine since 2007. "Bicentennial" is his latest book of poems.

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## ► LIVE STREAM

On March 20th, David Remnick discusses the Trump Presidency with artists, journalists, and politicians.

## ► VIDEO

The N.B.A. impersonator Brandon Armstrong imitates the playing styles of five basketball superstars.

## DAILY CARTOON

The cartoonist Pat Byrnes gives his take on the latest news and cultural events.

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BOTTEGA VENETA

# THE MAIL

## PUTIN, TRUMP, AND THE U.S.

David Remnick, Evan Osnos, and Joshua Yaffa's fascinating, and horrifying, article on Russian interference in the U.S. Presidential election was highly informative, but it seemed to avoid making a definitive statement about whether Russia's involvement had a direct impact on the election's outcome ("Active Measures," March 6th). Everybody—including *The New Yorker*—seems to be following Obama's lead in not doing or saying anything too concrete, for fear of seeming too "political." But surely the time to worry about appearing partisan has passed, now that we're in the hands of a President who encourages pollution, deregulation, and a profit-based educational system, and who exhibits a raw hatred of anyone who isn't white, male, straight, Christian, and native born. Despite all the knowledge and the evidence in this article, I finished it feeling discouraged, once again, about ever learning the truth.

Henry Strozier  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

The authors of this piece fail to acknowledge how far the United States' reputation as "champions of the liberal world order"—as a former adviser to Bill Clinton puts it in the piece—has fallen. The fact that America has become the target of a campaign similar to those which it regularly employs against other nations, such as tampering in an election, is a source of Schadenfreude for many people, even in the West. The way the authors gloss over American involvement in the 1996 rescue of Boris Yeltsin's Presidential campaign almost suggests a bit of a guilty conscience.

If the U.S. ever wants to rebuild its reputation as a leader in "the liberal world order," it will have to start adhering to the rules of that order. It is always dangerous when those in power deceive themselves into thinking that they are acting in the interest of others, or of abstract principles, when, in fact, they are serving only themselves.

Mark A. Wolfgram  
Ottawa, Ont.

This article aroused in me the same sense of dread and fear that I felt during the Cold War. The Kremlin's attack on the Presidential election, as it is described in the piece, is part genius and part juvenile, and it will have resounding implications for American democracy. Reading it helped me understand the political, cultural, and historical circumstances that led to the current power plays between Russia and the U.S.; it was particularly unnerving to realize how much diplomacy on both sides is now being dictated by ego and by pride. Celeste Wallander, President Obama's senior adviser on Russia, asked the most prescient question in the article: "Will Putin expose the failings of American democracy or will he inadvertently expose the strength of American democracy?" I am praying that it's the latter.

Maureen Bunney  
Mill Valley, Calif.

In "Active Measures," President Obama is portrayed as an innocent and well-intentioned bystander to perhaps the most serious attack on democracy in modern times. Galling as it is that Russian intervention is likely to have heavily contributed to the election of President Trump, Russia's cyber-aggression would also have been damaging to American democracy if Hillary Clinton had won. Obama's inaction is as incomprehensible as it is reprehensible, especially considering that the Obama Administration had several months to respond before the election, and that it was plain that Russian hacking was undermining the democratic process. It should be clear that telling Putin to "cut it out" and equivocating for political reasons when the integrity of the democracy was on the line was a completely inadequate response, and nothing short of a dereliction of duty. I respect Obama, and he should be credited for the good he has done, but he should also be blamed when blame is so obviously deserved.

John Orosa  
Stockholm, Sweden

## CALLING CONGRESS

I read with great interest Kathryn Schulz's article on calling one's congressional representatives ("Call and Response," March 6th). During the hearings to confirm Betsy DeVos, I called senators on the confirming committee to voice my opposition. Those whom I reached told me that, since I live in Michigan and not in their states, my opinion was not under their consideration. And yet several of those same senators accepted donations from DeVos and her family, most of whom also live in Michigan. If we are to continue the questionable practice of considering political expenditures "free speech," then we should be allowed to contribute only to congressional candidates campaigning in our home district. Likewise, senatorial candidates should be allowed to accept contributions only from residents of the state that they hope to represent. For those of us with meagre means, our only way of getting involved might be through an investment of time.

Richard Jaisle  
Traverse City, Mich.

In her piece, Schulz doesn't mention an unintended consequence of signing online petitions. Most of them, including those on the White House Web site, require supplying an e-mail address. When I signed one such petition asking that Trump release his tax returns, I was added to the Trump databases. I am now invited to watch his exciting speeches as they occur, asked to donate, and thanked for my continued support. Is everyone who has contacted the White House to protest considered a "supporter"? No wonder the numbers that Trump brags about are so inflated.

Leslie Higginbotham  
Portland, Ore.

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to [themail@newyorker.com](mailto: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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# GUCCI





MARCH 15 – 21, 2017

# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



What is American art? Every few years, a new answer to that impossible question arrives with the **Whitney Biennial**. The latest edition, which opens on March 17, was overseen by the perspicacious young curators Mia Locks and Christopher Y. Lew (pictured outdoors at the Whitney with Larry Bell's 2017 sculpture "Pacific Red II"). Their selection of works by sixty-three artists, whose roots are scattered from Milwaukee to San Juan to Tehran, conveys a national mood that encompasses empathy, action, rage, and reflection.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PARI DUKOVIC

# ART

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

### Museum of Modern Art

"Francis Picabia: Our Heads Are Round So Our Thoughts Can Change Direction"

The more serious you are about modern art, the more likely you are to be stupefied by this retrospective, elegantly curated by Anne Umland, of the merrily nihilistic Frenchman who strewed the first half of the twentieth century with the aesthetic equivalent of whoopee cushions. As a painter, a poet, a graphic artist, an editor, and a set designer, Picabia mastered, and mocked, canonical styles, with an emphasis on Dada—a movement in which he co-starred with his friend Marcel Duchamp, and which raised travesty to a beau ideal. Most of what's on view crackles with immediacy, popping free of its time to wink at the present, but not much of it truly pleases. Was Picabia an outlier of modernism? Or was modernism the background accompaniment for his one-man band? MOMA suggests the latter, notably in the section devoted to Cubist works. The writhing shapes in "Udnie (Young American Girl; Dance)," from 1913, spectacularized Cubism as a look—an engine of style—that shrugged off the residual figuration and the analytical rigor of Picasso and Braque. *Through March 19.*



Dress for success: in "Georgia O'Keeffe: Living Modern," at the Brooklyn Museum, paintings (such as "Blue II," from 1958, above) are on view alongside fashions from the artist's wardrobe and portraits capturing her singular style. *Through July 23.*

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

### Robert Mangold

Since 1965, when the earliest work in this concise four-decade survey was made, Mangold has been shaping canvas or Masonite, painting it in a single color, and testing its boundaries with pencil lines. In "Circle Painting #4," from 1973, the canvas is four feet in diameter, the color is a muted purple, and the pencil drawing is an inscribed square that doesn't quite fit—two corners overlap the painting's edges, setting up a strangely ethereal tension. Three large pieces from the nineties, in which separate panels of different colors are held together with black pencil ellipses, achieve a similarly serene imbalance. But in two tantalizing paintings from the previous decade Mangold does just the opposite, pairing narrow rectangular segments in taut, multicolored works that seem held together by sheer force of will. *Through March 25.* (Mnuchin, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020.)

### Anne Ryan

Twenty tiny masterpieces—arrangements of paper and fabric scraps—reaffirm Ryan as the premier collagist of Abstract Expressionism. She made hundreds of pieces between 1948 and her death, at the age of sixty-five, in 1954. Inspired at first by Kurt Schwitters, the collages quickly subsumed

principles of advanced New York painting. They appear frail but feel muscular. Whispy textures and colors create space by pushing and pulling at a scrupulous flatness. The rhythmic compositions generate effects of grand scale—turning big as you gaze at them, shrinking you into a miniature beholder of the sublime. *Through April 22.* (Davis & Langdale, 231 E. 60th St. 212-838-0333.)

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

### Roe Etheridge

The American photographer continues to take the measure of visual culture with a sharp but coolly neutral eye. Etheridge also shoots for commercial clients, and his outtakes here—models staring into space, a snowcapped mountain—translate the manipulative pleasures of advertising into something more honest. A low-res picture of a Jasper Johns flag painting manages to register the disembodying effect of digital photography without attaching critique, suggesting that Etheridge's equanimity is a conviction in its own right. But an image of "Sesame Street's" Cookie Monster grinning at a spread of chocolate-chip cookies expresses a knowingness that's just short of cynicism. *Through April 8.* (Kreps, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849.)

### Simone Fattal

In this beautiful show, a small forest of slender pedestals displays tchotchke-size stoneware sculptures, all from 2009, glazed sky blue, olive, white, or brown. The Syrian-born artist, now in her seventies, who was raised in Lebanon and settled in California in 1980, imprints her strange, barely figurative forms with dauby happy accidents. The pistachio-colored "Horse," with its roughly constructed Gumby-ish legs, small pointed face, and strange tail is both funny and talismanic. The simple, taupe "Dignitary" might be a bud vase, an obelisk, a sea worm, or a human being. Fattal tells us with her titles that some of these glossy patched-together objects are figures, and we can usually find their humanness—in their postures or in the deft suggestion of a feature or two. Each one is as expressive as a Rodin, maybe more so, despite small scale and whimsical hue. *Through April 8.* (Kaufmann Repetto, 535 W. 22nd St. 347-849-2471.)

### Pedro Reyes

Sculptures, mostly in volcanic stone, and mural-like installations of large drawings by the Mexican demiurge, who was trained in architecture and plainly deems no scale or theme too ambitious, are beyond impressive—they awe you. Reyes's style runs the gamut: from primitivist through neoclassical to futuristic, from tartly realist through surrealist to chastely abstract, from monumental to intimate, with each formulation specific in its erudite references, tinged with political conviction, and consummate in form. Although big, the show suggests a mere warmup for a refashioning of pretty much the whole world, retroactively and from now on. *Through April 15.* (Lisson, 504 W. 24th St. 212-505-6431.)

### Sue Williams

The Williams blend of charm and anger attains new intensities of sugar and spice in big paintings, which she made last year on a sojourn, from New York, in her native Chicago. Vigorously sketched in thin but color-saturated oils, with lots of bare canvas, are details of suburban houses, appliances, and human and animal anatomy, some paying homage to the styles of Chicago's halcyon Hairy Who. Abstract washes and patterns feel charged with



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meaning, as if stammering on verges of articulation. Yet again, as is her wont, Williams suggests someone who, bent on vengeance, can't help stumbling into beauty. *Through April 14.* (303 Gallery, 555 W. 21st St. 212-255-1121.)

## GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

### Sarah Charlesworth

The influential Pictures Generation photographer, who died in 2013, at the age of sixty-six, plumbed the depths of consumerist longing in her distilled, often sinister works. In this airy installation, the black lacquer, oval-framed, cibachrome prints in her series "Natural Magic" (1992-93) appear like dark thought bubbles. A magician's gloved hands produce fire; a woman in white heels, draped in blue silk, levitates; seven flames, in a vertical line, flicker above a Victorian candlestick. Each vignette floats, isolated against a slick sea of black, drawing a parallel between the illusionism of stage magic and the tricks of commercial photography. With their portal-like, sculptural presence and ghostly images, the chic works of this rarely exhibited suite seductively conjure the menacing undercurrent of both nineteenth-century occultism and contemporary mass-media enchantment. *Through May 6.* (Maccarone, 98 Morton St. 212-431-4977.)

### Justin Couillard

Inside a psychedelic living-room installation—complete with drawn shades, gently spacey prints on the walls, and a coffee table furnished with a novel by Philip K. Dick and a bong—is an enormous projection of Alien Afterlife, a video game that the artist, a self-taught coder, designed. It begins with a hospital deathbed scene and continues on in strange landscapes charged with uncertain threats and suggestive gibberish. It's as fun as it is disconcerting. A hilariously over-the-top coda is installed in the gallery's basement: two life-size sculptural aliens, talking to each other while sitting at facing desks, typing in a live chat room—you can join in at alienafterlife.com. *Through April 2.* (*Yours Mine & Ours*, 54 Eldridge St. 646-912-9970.)

### Dan Herschlein

The Stephen King of new art, born in 1989, Herschlein continues to rattle his viewers as a suave lyricist of dread. Sculptures include a fool-the-eye realist bathroom sink with the top of a head visible beneath the drain. Low reliefs uncomfortably situate figures with shrouded or missing heads. Works on paper depict squalid domestic interiors occupied by grotesque young men. In each case, tenderly tactile materials, such as wax and casein, enhance the creepy-crawliness, like an unfriendly whisper in a dark place where you thought you were alone. *Through April 9.* (JTT, 191 Chrystie St. 212-574-8152.)

### Leonhard Hurzlmeier

This German pictorial humorist makes his New York début with a show titled "All New Women"—crisp paintings on canvas or paper of generic females bicycling, doing yoga, protest marching, playing hockey, stealing jewels, or just cutely simpering. Composed of hard-edged and curvy geometric shapes in cheery colors, the works variously evoke advertising posters and graphic road signs, with echoes of Art Deco-era semi-abstraction. They all but audibly squeak with good-naturedness, so zealous to please that, in a New York way, you may suspect a cryptic catch. But good luck winking it out. *Through April 23.* (Uffner, 170 Suffolk St. 212-274-0064.)

## Johannes VanDerBeek

For the inaugural show at her sunny new gallery, Lauren Marinaro, the former director of the now defunct Feuer/Mesler gallery, presents an appropriately expansive and forward-looking body of work. The prolific VanDerBeek reanimates a familiar vocabulary of abstraction for the genre-defying, post-Internet age (in which a picture and an object might as well be one and the same) in colorful oil-stick drawings and sculptures, and wall-mounted panels made using a concrete substitute known as Structo-Lite. In "Orange Scream," short lines of red, white, yellow, and pink point in all directions, somehow jumping off the wall while fading into it. In "Greeter," six irregularly shaped panels on a metal armature suggest a paper cutout come to life. Seven "Anxious Portraits" hang on the wall like monumental cuneiform cartouches. *Through April 20.* (Marinaro, 319 Grand St. 212-989-7700.)

## GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

### Justin Amrhein and Colette Robbins

This duet between two young artists matches portentous Jungian mystery with frenetic Freudian avoidance. Works by Robbins that employ Rorschach-like blots feel rather literal, but her 3-D-printed polymer sculptures—narrow, complex towers in various shades of gray—suggest futuristic fetishes or the deformed bones of impossible animals. Amrhein's elaborately precise diagrams of sci-fi engineering projects suggest airtight systems of delusion. A white-on-black light box, almost thirteen feet long, depicts a vast machine with nearly three thousand individually labelled parts ranging from topical to absurd: "Trump shit extruder," "drone attack policy valve," "wimble bimble." *Through April 26.* (*Transmitter*, 1329 Willoughby Ave. 917-653-8236.)

## MOVIES

### OPENING

**Beauty and the Beast** Emma Watson stars in this adaptation of the fairy tale, about a young woman who falls in love with a monsterlike prince (Dan Stevens). Directed by Bill Condon. *Opening March 17.* (*In wide release.*) • **Frantz** Reviewed this week in *The Current Cinema.* *Opening March 15.* (*In limited release.*) • **Song to Song** Reviewed in *Now Playing.* *Opening March 17.* (*In limited release.*) • **T2 Trainspotting** Danny Boyle directed this sequel to his 1996 drama, based on novels by Irvine Welsh, about a group of heroin addicts in Edinburgh. Starring Ewan McGregor, Ewen Bremner, Robert Carlyle, and Jonny Lee Miller. *Opening March 17.* (*In limited release.*)

### NOW PLAYING

#### Actor Martinez

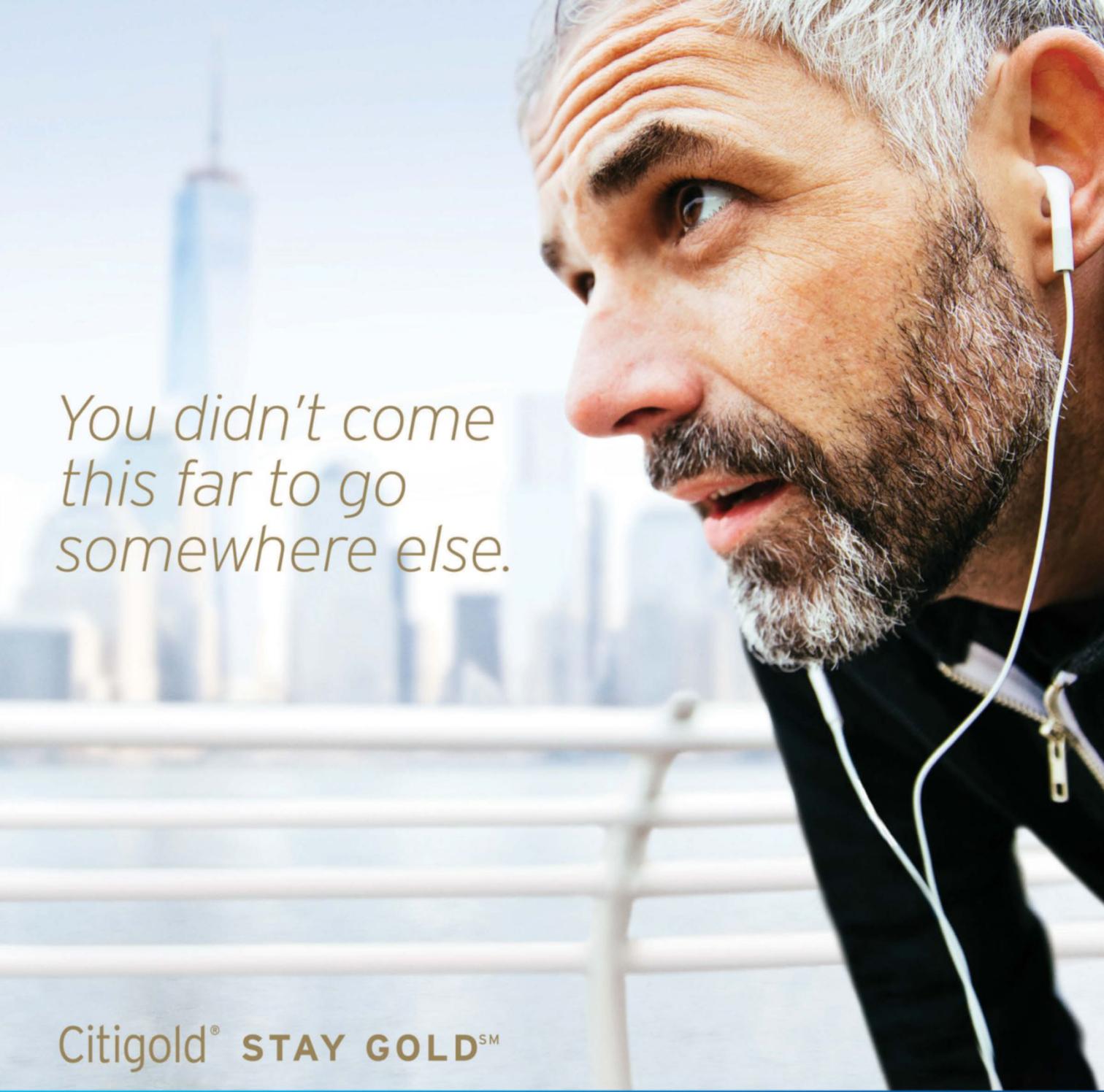
Nathan Silver and Mike Ott's film is a spinning prism of fiction and nonfiction that tosses off iridescent glints of melancholy whimsy. Arthur Martinez plays Arthur, a computer technician in Denver who dreams of making movies and connects with two filmmakers—Silver and Ott, playing themselves—in the hope that they'll make his dreams come true. They recruit Arthur to play a character based on himself, in an improvised drama based on his life. They film him at work, at home, and in discussion with themselves about the course that the film will take. But Silver and Ott find Arthur's life undramatic, and they spice up the action by hiring an actress, Lindsay Burdge (playing herself), to play Arthur's ex-girlfriend. Then they guide the action, instructing Lindsay to "press his buttons"; as they force Arthur to confront his problems on camera, they create problems for themselves, too. For all their self-deprecating irony and jack-in-the-box narrative gamesmanship, Silver and Ott—crafting a precise and exquisite visual style—turn Arthur's life and their involvement with it into quietly grand melodrama.—Richard Brody (*In limited release.*)

### Before I Fall

This adaptation of the novel by Lauren Oliver is a sort of adolescent "Groundhog Day," about a frivolous young woman who learns the meaning of life after experiencing death. Zoey Deutch plays Sam, one of a quartet of popular high-school girls who make life miserable for their nonconformist peers. Her best friend, the queen bee, Lindsay (Halston Sage), is driving the group home from a party when an accident occurs, killing Sam—who nonetheless awakens again, at home, in her bed, exactly as she did the previous day. Sam figures out that she's being forced to repeatedly relive the last day of her life, but enlightenment arises only after she learns that her cruelty has lasting effects on her victims. The setting is the Pacific Northwest, but the social context is utterly undefined, apart from its cozy prosperity. Each of the characters has an identifying trait or two, but none has any identity. There's little that the director, Ry Russo-Young, can do with the material's sentimental thinness, but she does something anyway, pushing the storytelling toward portraiture: lingering closeups on Deutch suggest mysteries that escape the confines of the drama.—R.B. (*In wide release.*)

### Daughters of the Dust

Julie Dash's boldly imaginative, ecstatically visionary drama, from 1991, is one of the best American independent films; she turns one family's experience of the Great Migration into a vast mythopoetic adventure. The action is set in 1902, as four generations of the Peazant family, Gullah people living on one of the Sea Islands, off the coast of Georgia, prepare to move to the North, where the bourgeois and devoutly Christian Viola (Cheryl Lynn Bruce) and her stylish and independent cousin Yellow Mary (Barbara-O) already live. From generation to generation, the islanders have maintained the traditions of their African-born ancestors, along with tormenting memories of slavery. The matriarch, Nana (Cora Lee Day), herself a freed slave, resists leaving her home and losing her link with the dead; the movie is narrated by the Unborn Child (Kay-Lynn Warren), whose future life bridges tradition



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and modernity. Dash plots family relationships with a novelistic intensity and observes the cultural interweave of Christianity, Islam, African and Native American religions, mysticism, and politics with luminous lyricism and hypnotic pageantry. The intimate action shimmers with mysteries and legends; a visiting photographer (Tommy Hicks), interviewing a Muslim community leader (Umar Abdurrahman), uncovers the unbearable grief and tragic heroism that these tales mask.—R.B. (*Museum of the Moving Image*; March 15.)

#### Get Out

A young white woman named Rose (Allison Williams) takes Chris (Daniel Kaluuya), her black boyfriend, to meet her parents for the first time. They live, in some style, in the country, and Chris, though an unruffled soul, feels a mild trepidation. But Rose's father (Bradley Whitford) and mother (Catherine Keener), liberal to a fault, offer a warm welcome; if anything, it is their African-American staff—Walter (Marcus Henderson) and Georgina (Betty Gabriel)—who make Chris feel more uneasy. A party for friends and family, the day after the couple's arrival, deepens his suspicion that something is awry, and the final third of the film bursts into open hostility and dread. The writer and director is Jordan Peele, making his feature-film debut, and the result feels inflammatory to an astounding degree. If the awkward social comedy of the early scenes winds up as a flat-out horror movie, that, we feel, is because Peele finds the state of race relations so horrific—irreparably so—that no other reaction will suffice. Kaluuya makes a likable hero, for whom we heartily root.—Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 3/6/17.) (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 which, regardless of changes in law, ring infuriatingly true today.—R.B. (*In limited release.*)

#### I Am Not Your Negro

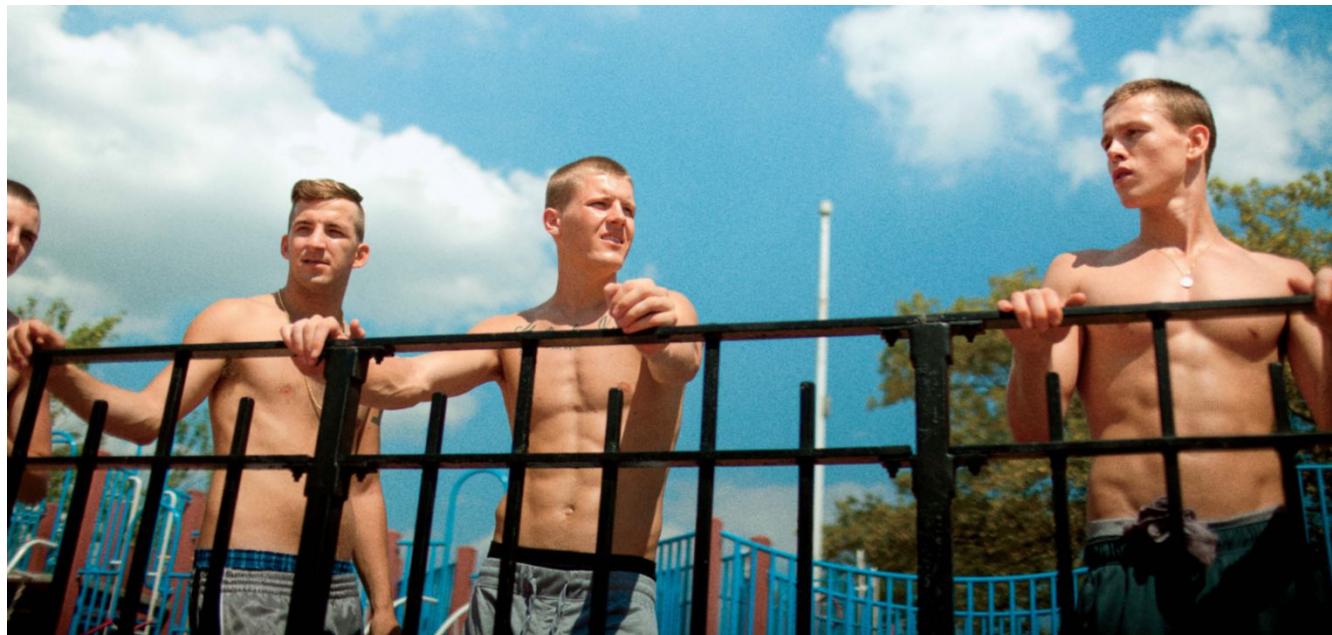
The entire voice-over narration (spoken by Samuel L. Jackson) of Raoul Peck's incisive documentary is derived from the writings of James Baldwin, whose unfinished memoir and study of the lives of three slain civil-rights leaders—Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr.—provides the movie's through line. Peck adds a generous selection of archival footage showing the heroes of Baldwin's project at work and detailing Baldwin's own intellectual activism at times of crisis. Moving from divisions within the civil-rights movement (including those separating Malcolm X from King) to its unities, Peck also spotlights Baldwin's analysis of the yet unbridged gap between the legal end of segregation and the practice of white supremacy. (Unredressed police killings of black Americans, as Peck shows, are a crucial and enduring result of that ideology.) The filmmaker cannily cites Baldwin's remarkable writings about movies to illustrate the author's overarching thesis, about the country's tragic failure of consciousness; Peck's references to current events reveal Baldwin's view of history and his prophetic visions to be painfully accurate.—R.B. (*In limited release.*)

#### John Wick: Chapter 2

As the title character, Keanu Reeves flings himself vigorously into the martial-arts gyrations and choreographed gunplay of this high-body-count thriller, but these maneuvers offer as slight a sense of physical presence as do C.G.I. contrivances. This sequel features him, once again, as a retired hit man forced back into action—this time, he's compelled to travel to Rome to kill a Mob queen (Claudia Gerini), whose brother (Riccardo Scamarcio) covets her position. Wick scampers through the catacombs beneath her villa while blasting heads to a pulp. He tumbles down staircases while battling her bodyguard (Common); the two soon continue their fight in New York. The director, Chad Stahelski, revels in a contract-killer underworld that's hidden in plain sight (Manhattan's buskers, homeless, and rumpled passersby are in on the worldwide conspiracy), and he gives its bureaucracy an anachronistically picturesque back office filled with paraphernalia seemingly left over from a Wes Anderson shoot. But the paranoid jolts are played mainly for giggles, and a vast set piece in a mirrored museum exhibit unleashes showers of stage blood but hardly a drop of emotion.—R.B. (*In wide release.*)

#### Kong: Skull Island

An unmapped and storm-girdled island, deep in the South Pacific, is too much to resist. Hence the expeditionary force that is dispatched there—set in motion by a scientist (John Goodman), guided by a British tracker (Tom Hiddleston), and caught on film by a dauntless photographer (Brie Larson). Military muscle is provided by a squad of American troops, newly released from the toils of the Vietnam War and commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Preston Packard (Samuel L. Jackson), who is already itching for another conflict. The fun starts—and it starts with admirable speed—when the island proves to be far from uninhabited. In residence is a U.S. pilot (John C. Reilly), who's been stranded there for almost thirty years and has never heard of the Cold War ("They take the summers off?"); a bunch of prehistoric nasties with a grievance; and



"Beach Rats," Eliza Hittman's drama about a Brooklyn teen-ager's exploration of his sexual identity, screens March 17-18 in "New Directors/New Films."

# A Love that Lasts

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a monkey the size of the Chrysler Building, whom we seem to have met somewhere before. The director of this heady nonsense is Jordan Vogt-Roberts, who sees no reason that "Apocalypse Now" should not be mashed up with monster flicks; the result, apart from a stale patch in the middle, is dished up with energy and verve.—A.L. (3/13/17) (*In wide release.*)

### The Lego Batman Movie

When does knowingness become just another shtick? That is the conundrum posed by Chris McKay's film, which clicks into place as a solid sequel to "The Lego Movie" (2014). This time, the action kicks off not with industrious good cheer but with a sly dig at the opening of every superhero saga—the black screen, the ominous score, and so forth. The hero in question is Batman (voiced again by Will Arnett), who hangs out in his lair with the courteous Alfred (Ralph Fiennes) but has no real friends; instead, he must make do with loyal enemies, such as the Joker (Zach Galifianakis), who promptly releases an entire plague of villains on a beleaguered Gotham. The filmmaker's plan is twofold: first, to cram the screen with pullulating detail, leaving us not just agog but aghast at all the gags that we missed as they flew by; and, second, against expectation, to steer the plot away from cynicism and toward a brand of domestic innocence—family values, no less. The whole thing might almost be a nod to the Lego ethic of yore. Michael Cera plays Robin, Mariah Carey plays a mayor, and Siri plays a computer. Of course she does.—A.L. (*In wide release.*)

### Logan

This is the ninth occasion on which Hugh Jackman has played Logan, otherwise known as Wolverine, and, in the absence of resurrection, it's hard to imagine a tenth. Grizzled and wry, he looks beaten down in the role, limping and drinking, and eking out his days as a limousine driver. As he dons a pair of reading glasses, or joins forces with his mentor, Charles Xavier (Patrick Stewart), who is ninety years old and bad-tempered, you glimpse a melancholy future, in which all the Marvel heroes start to wane; to be blessed with a superpower, after all, is no defense against the onslaught of time. Balancing out the old guys, in James Mangold's film, is the taciturn Laura (Dafne Keen), age eleven, whose knuckles, like those of Logan, are able to sprout lethal blades. The unlikely trio sets off from Texas to North Dakota, and the movie becomes a mixture of the rambling and the enraged; for some viewers, the scenes of violence, in which Laura and Logan fend off the assaults of a pursuing posse, will seem far more flailing and more unrelenting than they need to be. It's an exhausting trip.—A.L. (3/6/17) (*In wide release.*)

### Manhattan

Woody Allen's comic drama from 1979—which he directed, co-wrote (with Marshall Brickman), and stars in—is a work of delicious paradox. He depicts the bustling borough through the halcyon prism of his protagonist and alter ego, Isaac Davis, a prosperous TV writer who yearns to break free and write a novel. An anti-libertine romantic, the twice-divorced Isaac—indifferent or oblivious to proprieties and appearances—is dating a seventeen-year-old schoolgirl (Mariel Hemingway). He then casually dumps her for a self-absorbed intellectual (Diane Keaton) who had been the lover of his best friend (Michael

Murphy). The city leaps out with caricatural precision even as Allen constructs it piecemeal from his own urbane aesthetic—as in the exemplary scene in which Isaac dictates into a cassette recorder a surprisingly classical list of what makes "life worth living." Turning experience into art and vice versa, converting disappointment and frustration into existential crises, Allen offers nostalgic visions of New York that remain as strong as its reality. He wouldn't want to live in a city that would have him as its culture hero—and wouldn't want to live anywhere else.—R.B. (*Film Forum; through March 21.*)

### Moonlight

Miami heat and light weigh heavily on the furious lives and moods realized by the director Barry Jenkins. The grand yet finespun drama depicts three eras in the life of a young black man: as a bullied schoolboy called Little (Alex Hibbert), who is neglected by his crack-addicted mother (Naomie Harris) and sheltered and mentored by a drug dealer (Mahershala Ali) and his girlfriend (Janelle Monáe); as a teen-ager with his given name of Chiron (Ashton Sanders), whose friendship with a classmate named Kevin (Jharrel Jerome) veers toward romantic intimacy and leads to violence; and as a grown man nicknamed Black (Trevante Rhodes), who faces adult responsibilities with terse determination and reconnects with Kevin (André Holland). Adapting a play by Tarell Alvin McCraney, Jenkins burrows deep into his characters' pain-seared memories, creating ferociously restrained performances and confrontational yet tender images that seem wrenching from his very core. Even the title is no mere nature reference but an evocation of skin color; subtly alluding to wider societal conflicts, Jenkins looks closely at the hard intimacies of people whose identities are forged under relentless pressure.—R.B. (*In wide release.*)

### Raw

Julia Ducournau's movie tells the tale of Justine (Garance Marillier), who is joining her older sister Alexia (Ella Rumpf) at veterinary school. Justine arrives there as a hardworking student, a strict vegetarian, and a blushing timid soul; what we observe, in stages, is the process by which she turns into a lusty carnivore on the rampage. The trigger is the hazing ritual to which she and other novices must submit, which involves, among other delights, a shower of blood and the chomping of a raw rabbit kidney—sufficient to give Justine a craving for flesh of other kinds. She is not alone in her appetites, we learn, and Ducournau does not shy away from detailing the tasting menu that follows. Viewers with nervous stomachs should stay well clear, yet the film, however lurid, is memorable less for its capacity to disgust than for its portrayal of sisterly bonding, and for exploring the extent to which the characters—not merely the young ones, as a late revelation suggests—are both liberated and caged by bodily wants. In French.—A.L. (3/13/17) (*In limited release.*)

### Song to Song

In this romantic drama, set in and around the Austin music scene, Terrence Malick places the transcendental lyricism of his later films on sharply mapped emotional terrain. It's a story of love skewed by ambition. Rooney Mara plays Faye, a young musician who falls into a relationship with a record-company mogul (Michael Fassbender) who can boost her career. Then

she starts seeing another musician (Ryan Gosling), who also gets pulled into the impresario's orbit. The shifting triangle à la "Jules and Jim" is twisted by business conflicts and other players, including a waitress (Natalie Portman), a socialite (Cate Blanchett), and an artist (Bérénice Marlohe). Meanwhile, Patti Smith, playing herself, is the voice of conscience and steadfast purpose, in art and life alike. Without sacrificing any of the breathless ecstasy of his urgent, fluid, seemingly borderless images (shot by Emmanuel Lubezki), Malick girds them with a framework of bruising entanglements and bitter realizations, family history and stifled dreams. His sense of wonder at the joy of music and the power of love is also a mournful vision of paradise lost.—R.B. (*In limited release.*)

### A United Kingdom

A love story, but only just. In 1947, in London, and in defiance of the fog and the rain, a clerk named Ruth Williams (Rosamund Pike) meets Seretse Khama (David Oyelowo), who turns out to be the heir to a tribal throne in Bechuanaland. Without ado, they fall for each other and get married, to the indignant dismay of pretty much everyone, from the bride's father (Nicholas Lyndhurst) and the groom's royal uncle (Vusi Kunene) to a sizable wing of the British establishment. Things only get worse for the couple when they fly to his homeland, where Ruth finds herself disdained, for a while, by black and white women alike. Amma Asante's film, written by Guy Hibbert, has many themes piled on its plate, some of them far from digestible. We get large chunks of constitutional politics, plenty of stuff about Anglo-South African relations at the unsavory end of an empire, and a subplot about diamond mines. Oyelowo remains a commanding presence, especially in front of a crowd, but the movie affords him a fraction of the opportunity that "Selma" provided, and there are times when the romantic origins of the crisis all but vanish from sight.—A.L. (2/13 & 20/17) (*In limited release.*)

### Who's Crazy?

In Thomas White's ingenious and freewheeling comedy, from 1966, the wild theatrical happenings of New York's Living Theatre troupe burst into cinematic life in rural Belgium. The group's members play patients from a mental asylum. When a bus transporting them gets stuck on a country road, the inmates escape their captors and take over an empty farmhouse. There, the actors' grand improvisational antics mesh Mack Sennett-style slapstick and psychodrama, costume parties and hectic chases, music-making and kangaroo courts, fiery alchemical experiments and primal quests for water. When love creeps in, the doings turn mock-solem, as a mystical marriage—a threadbare rite of flung-together outfits and tinfoil décor—plays out like a discothèque exorcism. Using little dialogue, White creates a dense sonic collage that blends thrilling improvisations by the modern-jazz master Ornette Coleman and his trio with sound effects, vocal interjections, and other music (including a performance by Marianne Faithfull). With bold and canny camerawork that yields an uproarious parody of Ingmar Bergman's "The Seventh Seal," White dynamites the formalist restraint of art films and the bonds of narrative logic to unleash the primal ecstasy of the cinema. White's film is only now being released.—R.B. (*Film Society of Lincoln Center.*)



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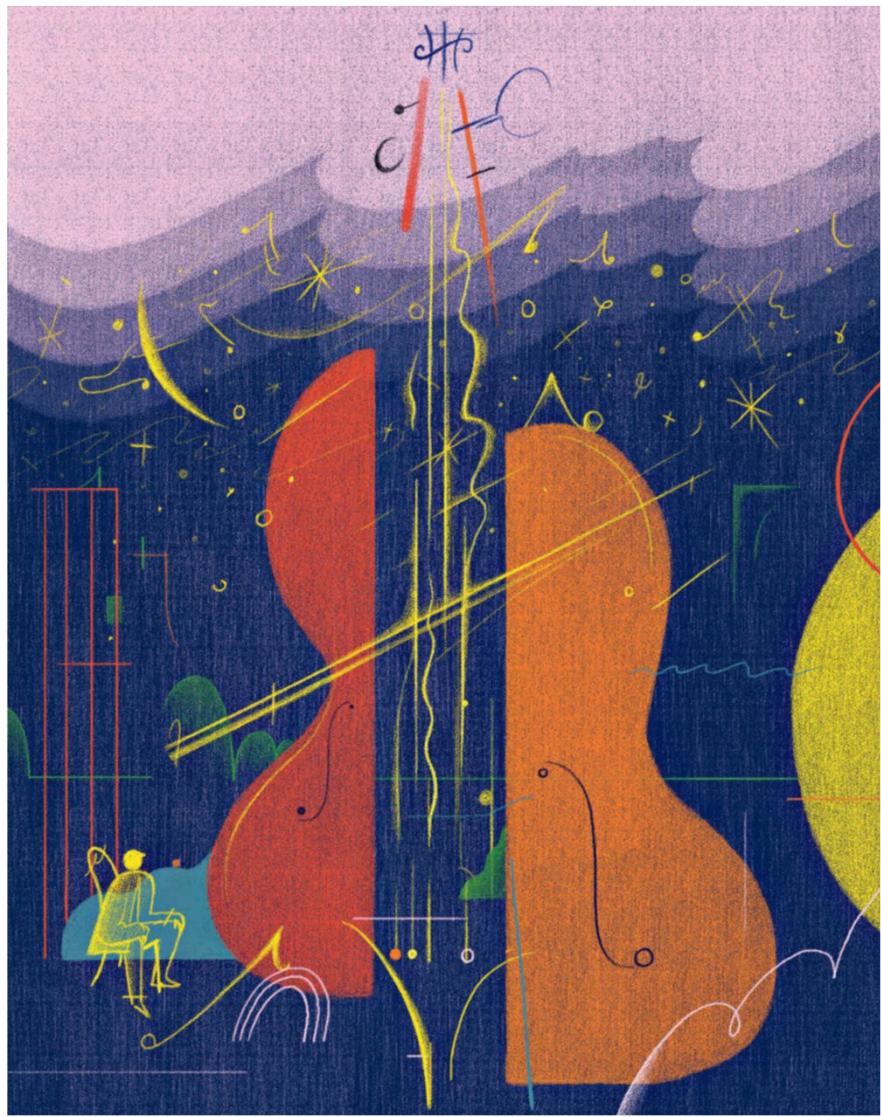
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# CLASSICAL MUSIC



The New York Philharmonic offers a new cello concerto by Esa-Pekka Salonen.

## L.A. Rhapsody

A globe-trotting composer-conductor writes a concerto for Yo-Yo Ma.

THE OTHER DAY, the composer and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen sat in a sparsely decorated office in West Los Angeles, eying the score of his new cello concerto, which Yo-Yo Ma, Alan Gilbert, and the New York Philharmonic will perform on March 15–18, at David Geffen Hall. The state of the world was weighing on him, and he wondered what a large-scale instrumental work could offer. “I suppose that to write a piece like this is, in itself, an optimistic

gesture,” he said. “To devote thousands of hours to such a thing, over two years—you have to hope that people out there can accept a certain degree of complexity. I’m always suspicious of things that see themselves as art. That has to be earned. But if you happen to sit down and create something that turns out to be art”—he laughed at his own circumlocution—“then that is some sort of statement.”

Salonen led the Los Angeles Philharmonic from 1992 to 2009, establishing it as America’s boldest, most modern-minded orchestra. After handing over the job to Gustavo Dudamel, he

left L.A., but a few years ago he moved back. “There is less ‘business’ here, at least for me,” said Salonen, who works regularly in London and New York. “I can work for long periods without the constant flurry of meetings that gives the illusion of activity but that doesn’t actually produce anything.” Few distractions present themselves at his studio, which is in a low-rise office building off Santa Monica Boulevard. Down the hall are a driving school, a doctor’s office, and other small businesses. You would never guess that one of the world’s leading musical figures was composing on the premises.

This is Salonen’s third mature concerto. Previously, he wrote a piano concerto for Yefim Bronfman and a violin concerto for Leila Josefowicz. “I’m doing things I haven’t done before,” he told me. “The opening is an attempt to show how consciousness crystallizes out of chaos. Out of a very thick twelve-tone structure”—he points to a dense spiderweb of figuration—the cello slowly emerges and starts to sing a proper melody. After that comes a section where other instruments are shadowing the solo part, like a comet’s tail.” Later in the concerto, electronics assist in creating that shadowing effect: the soloist’s playing is looped at a mixing desk.

The finale is inspired in part by Ma’s Silkroad Project, in which the cellist interacts with various world traditions. “I’ll have a group of congas and bongos, which will be Yo-Yo’s sidekick,” Salonen said. He compares another passage, in which upward and downward patterns grow more and more compressed, to a trash compactor. “A lot of dancelike gestures, too. In the coda, the cello keeps going up and up, all the way to the B-flat next to the highest note on the piano. Originally, I had it an octave lower, but Yo-Yo told me he could go even higher. A previously unknown note.” He closed the score and said, “I really want to hear it. It’s been in my head a long time.”

—Alex Ross

## CLASSICAL MUSIC

### OPERA

#### Metropolitan Opera

Much like his symphonies, Beethoven's only opera, "Fidelio," makes its points in dense and eloquent musical arguments. Fortunately, the Met's two leads, Adrienne Pieczonka and Klaus Florian Vogt, are Wagnerians known for carrying power as well as lyricism, and they head a cast that also includes Greer Grimsley and Falk Struckmann; Sebastian Weigle conducts. *March 16 and March 20 at 7:30.* • **Also playing:** The final performances of Bartlett Sher's fine new production of Gounod's "*Roméo et Juliette*" showcase a pair of outstanding singers, Pretty Yende and Stephen Costello, and a leading conductor of French repertoire, Emmanuel Villaume. *March 15 at 7:30 and March 18 at 1.* • A revival of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's grand production of "*Idomeneo*," which débuted in 1982, features two of the Met's first-rate Mozarteans, the conductor James Levine and the tenor Matthew Polenzani (in the title role), in addition to such estimable artists as Alice Coote and Elza van den Heever. *March 17 and 21 at 7:30.* • The immediate standing ovation—from a full house—that Sonya Yoncheva received at the end of the first night of "*La Traviata*" is a good indication of this revival's fundamental quality, even if Nicola Luisotti's conducting is several steps short of visionary. Radiating tenderness in the role of Violetta, Yoncheva shares a rock-solid vocal technique with her veteran Germont, Thomas Hampson; as Alfredo, Michael Fabiano offers singing of exciting intensity and dusky timbre, if not refinement. *March 18 at 8.* • One Sunday afternoon each season, the Met trains its spotlights on some of the best and brightest emerging singers in the country, at its **National Council Grand Finals Concert**. Typically, around nine vocalists compete for a handful of cash prizes; Renée Fleming hosts this year's concert, and a trio of past winners, Jamie Barton, Michael Fabiano, and Amber Wagner, will perform. *March 19 at 3.* (*Metropolitan Opera House*. 212-362-6000.)

#### LoftOpera: "Otello"

Verdi's interpretation of Shakespeare's tale of the Moor of Venice would be beyond this upstart company's range, but Rossini's lighter, bel-canto version should be a better fit. John de los Santos has set the opera in the time of Italy's postwar "economic miracle"; Sean Kelly conducts a cast headed by Bernard Holcomb and Cecilia Violetta López. *March 16, March 18, and March 20 at 8. Through March 27.* (*LightSpace Studios*, 1115 Flushing Ave., Brooklyn. [loftopera.com](http://loftopera.com).)

### ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

#### New York Philharmonic

Alan Gilbert's latest program with the Philharmonic is centered on a major star turn from Yo-Yo Ma—offering the New York première of Esa-Pekka Salonen's Cello Concerto. It also features classics, both modern and Romantic, by John Adams ("The Chairman Dances," in celebration of his seventieth-birthday year) and Berlioz ("Symphonie Fantastique"). *March 15-16 at 7:30 and March 17-18 at 8.* (*David Geffen Hall*. 212-875-5656.)

#### Les Arts Florissants

Marie Antoinette, a proficient amateur musician, played the harpsichord and the flute, but evidently favored the harp. For a program titled "Music for Marie Antoinette," the harpist Xavier de Maistre joins the magisterial conductor William Christie and his esteemed Baroque ensemble in manfully concertos by Jean-Baptiste Krumpholz and

Johann David Hermann, bookended by Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" and Haydn's Symphony No. 85 ("La Reine"). *March 15 at 7:30.* (*Alice Tully Hall*. 212-721-6500.)

#### Orpheus Chamber Orchestra

The excellent young cellist Alisa Weilerstein is featured in Schumann's Cello Concerto in A Minor, a work well suited to her probing intellect and passionate inclinations. The neatly balanced program also includes Mendelssohn's regal, buoyant Overture for Winds in C Major (Op. 24), Webern's iridescent Five Pieces (Op. 10), and Schubert's blithe Symphony No. 6 in C Major. *March 18 at 7.* (*Carnegie Hall*. 212-247-7800.)

### RECITALS

#### Elina Garanča

With her finely polished voice and glamorous stage presence, the Latvian mezzo-soprano does Romanticism three ways, in a concert on Carnegie Hall's main stage. The first half of the program is devoted to music by Brahms; it's followed by a set of favorites by Duparc ("Extase" and "Phidylé") and Rachmaninoff ("Lilacs" and the heart-piercing "Sing Not to Me, Beautiful Maiden"). Kevin Murphy plays piano. *March 19 at 2.* (212-247-7800.)

#### Sarah Connolly

The esteemed English mezzo-soprano opens a satisfying program at the Park Avenue Armory's Board of Officers Room with three distinct song cycles, each with its own color and atmosphere: Schumann's "Frauenliebe und -leben," Berlioz's "Les Nuits d'Été," and Poulenc's urbane "Banalités." The performances conclude with two English-language sets, selections from Copland's "Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson" and Richard Rodney Bennett's entertaining "A History of the Thé Dansant." Joseph Middleton accompanies her. *March 15 at 7:30 and March 17 at 8.* (*Park Ave. at 66th St.* 212-933-5812.)

#### Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center: "Debussy and Ravel"

Both of these French innovators composed extraordinary—and extraordinarily popular—string quartets and sonatas for violin and piano. In this concert, the Society offers all four favorites together: the two quartets are in the deft hands of the Escher String Quartet, and the two sonatas are interpreted by the violinist Nicolas Dautricourt and the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott. *March 19 at 5.* (*Alice Tully Hall*. 212-875-5788.)

#### Richard Goode

New York's leading eminence of the keyboard offers a jumbo-sized concert at Carnegie Hall this week, an evening devoted to music by Bach (the Partita No. 6 in E Minor and a selection of preludes and fugues from Book II of "The Well-Tempered Clavier") and Chopin (including a collection of nocturnes and mazurkas, and the Ballade No. 3 in A-Flat Major). *March 15 at 8.* (212-247-7800.)

#### Mahan Esfahani

This Iranian-American soloist, one of the most exciting exponents of the harpsichord in the world, puts together genuinely intriguing programs. His latest, at the 92nd Street Y, is a slate of works by masters from the Baroque and Renaissance periods (Bach, Bull, and Tomkins) and by more modern geniuses (including Kaija Saariaho and Steve Reich). *March 21 at 8:30.* (*Lexington Ave.* at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

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# DANCE



Carolyn Brown and Viola Farber, of Merce Cunningham Dance Company, perform "Summerspace," in 1958.

## Bird Song

*Paul Taylor makes room for an old Merce Cunningham work.*

AS MERCE CUNNINGHAM was trying, in the nineteen-fifties, to cleanse his dances of story and symbol—that is, more or less, to throw off the influence of Martha Graham, the most celebrated choreographer of the period—one of the main things beckoning him forward, apart from just mid-century modernism, was nature. He grew up in the small town of Centralia, Washington. He knew trees and birds and dirt roads, and he knew that however lovely nature

is it is not sweet, and it won't tell us what it means. Furthermore, it's huge. A bird that you can hear, maybe even see, in a hedge one minute is gone the next, and someone else is hearing it somewhere else.

A key piece that Cunningham made at this time was "Summerspace" (1958), in which six dancers fly through the air, not having much to do with one another. Their arms, with which they might have touched, or even just signalled to one another, are held close to their sides. It's as if Cunningham were saying that if he couldn't have wings he wasn't going to have arms. Robert Rauschenberg, his

art director at that time, gave him a Pointillist backdrop—all dots, applied by Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns with cans of Day-Glo spray paint and a stencil. The costumes bore the same design, with the dots sprayed on after the dancers got into their fleshings.

When "Summerspace" was first performed, at the American Dance Festival, in Connecticut, the audience didn't react much. "It all passed in front of them," Cunningham said, "but they didn't see it." That included the critics. P. W. Manchester, of *Dance News*, objected to having to see a dance "straggle all over the stage with no beginning, no middle, and no end"—which, as the Cunningham scholar Roger Copeland has pointed out, is sort of like complaining that nothing happens in "Waiting for Godot."

In time, however, "Summerspace" came to seem like one of Cunningham's most accessible works. Tellingly, it was one of the earliest of his pieces to be performed by other companies—and they were ballet companies, which generally don't like their presentations too cold. Actually, it was Cunningham who first decided that "Summerspace" might work well with ballet dancers, since it contained a lot of steps that they were used to (turns, extensions), and didn't feature the twisty Cunningham torso that they weren't used to. The first ballet company to take it on was New York City Ballet, in 1966, and according to Carolyn Brown, who had danced in the American Dance Festival première, most of the Cunningham dancers hated N.Y.C.B.'s version. I saw it some years later, and was thrilled by it.

Now that the Cunningham company has closed, so that there's no one around to perform the piece "right," we would do well to see "Summerspace" in whatever form we can. On March 19, March 21, March 23, and March 25, in the Paul Taylor American Modern Dance season, at the David H. Koch Theatre, it will be danced by guest artists from France's Lyon Opera Ballet.

—Joan Acocella

**Gauthier Dance**

The life of Vaslav Nijinsky—widely considered the greatest ballet dancer of the early twentieth century and an inventor of ballet modernism, equally famous for his descent into madness—is a terrible temptation for a choreographer. One of the latest to succumb is the German dance-maker Marco Goecke, whose “Nijinski” is performed by this skilled troupe, the resident dance company of Theaterhaus Stuttgart, in its Joyce début. The material leads Goecke into the usual lurid excesses and facile conflations of art and insanity, no less ridiculous in Goecke’s style of twitches and grunts. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 14-19.)

**“Live Ideas 2017: Mx’d Messages”**

On March 15, the choreographer Trajal Harrell—who has undertaken a multiyear exploration of the voguing scene in Harlem—performs a solo in which he channels a famous interpretation of the flamenco dance “Admiring La Argentina” by the Japanese Butoh master Kazuo Ohno. Afterward, Harrell will join in a conversation with Bill T. Jones and Justin Vivian Bond. On March 17, the festival hosts an evening of dances by performers from the Bay Area, including Brontez Purnell Dance Company’s “Chronic: A Dance About Marijuana.” (New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. March 14-19.)

**Paul Taylor American Modern Dance**

On March 19, in what may be a first, the company presents an evening of works by three titans of American modern dance: Taylor, Martha Graham, and Merce Cunningham. Both Taylor and Cunningham started their careers with Graham; it will be interesting to see their work side by side. (The Cunningham piece, “Summerspace,” will be performed by the Lyon Opera Ballet.) The season also includes two new dances by the eighty-six-year-old Taylor, his hundred and forty-fifth and hundred and forty-sixth, both produced in the last year. One of them, “The Open Door,” is set to Edward Elgar’s “Enigma Variations”; the excellent Michael Novak is the central figure. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. March 14-19 and March 21. Through March 26.)

**“Curlew River” / “Dido and Aeneas”**

Mark Morris’s doubleheader brings together two operas by British composers, Henry Purcell, from the seventeenth century, and Benjamin Britten, from the twentieth. Britten’s “Curlew River” is based on a Noh play about a grieving mother. The singers—all men in white—move in simple, clean patterns around the stage as they sing. In “Dido and Aeneas,” based on a passage from the “Aeneid,” Morris has put the singers in the pit, while the dancers of the Mark Morris Dance Group illustrate the action in rigorous, angular choreography onstage. The stately Laurel Lynch leads the cast. (BAM Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. March 15-19.)

**Emily Coates / “Incarnations”**

The former New York City Ballet and Twyla Tharp dancer is now a professor at Yale, where she teamed up with the particle physicist Sarah Demers for her latest venture, “Incarnations.” In the piece, part informal talk, part dance, De-

mers describes subtle concepts, while Coates sketches shapes with her arms and legs. References, ideas, and images ricochet: from evocations of Balanchine’s crystalline ballet “Apollo” to the principles laid down by Isaac Newton. (*Danspace Project, St. Mark’s Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. March 16-18.*)

**The Ashley Bouder Project**

At New York City Ballet, where Bouder has long been a standout principal dancer, male choreographers are still the overwhelming norm. But in her eponymous side project the high-spirited ballerina is doing her part to right that gender imbalance. She has commissioned a pas de deux for herself and her fellow N.Y.C.B. star Sara Mearns, by the excellent contemporary choreographer Liz Ger-

ring. The composer, Anna Webber, is also female, as is Miho Hazama, the composer of the score for a new four-movement ballet choreographed by Bouder and danced by N.Y.C.B. corps members. The seventeen-piece New York Jazzharmonic big band accompanies. (*Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. March 17-18.*)

**Harkness Dance Festival / Boomerang**

The aesthetic of this performance project, led by the fearless dancer Matty Davis and the choreographer Kora Radella, juxtaposes violent, no-holds-barred physicality with surges of hypersensitive vulnerability. “This Is a Forge,” a première, features text by the poet Jamaal May and live music by the avant-punk violin duo String Noise. (*92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 17-18.*)

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# THE THEATRE

## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

### Amélie

Phillipa Soo ("Hamilton") stars in a musical adaptation of the 2001 film, by Craig Lucas, Daniel Messé, and Nathan Tysen, about a young woman who spreads joy in Montmartre. (*Walter Kerr*, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

### 887

The stage auteur Robert Lepage performs a solo show, using technology to contemplate the nature of memory and his childhood home, in Quebec City. (*BAM Harvey Theatre*, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Opens March 16.)

### Gently Down the Stream

In Martin Sherman's new play, set at the beginning of the online-dating era, Harvey Fierstein plays a gay pianist living in London who meets a younger man. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. In previews.)

### Groundhog Day

Tim Minchin and Danny Rubin wrote this musical version of the 1993 Bill Murray comedy, about a misanthropic weatherman (Andy Karl) forced to repeat the same day over and over. Matthew Warchus directs. (*August Wil-*

*son*, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin March 16.)

### Hello, Dolly!

Bette Midler stars as the turn-of-the-century matchmaker Dolly Levi in the Jerry Herman musical from 1964, directed by Jerry Zaks and featuring David Hyde Pierce. (*Shubert*, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

### How to Transcend a Happy Marriage

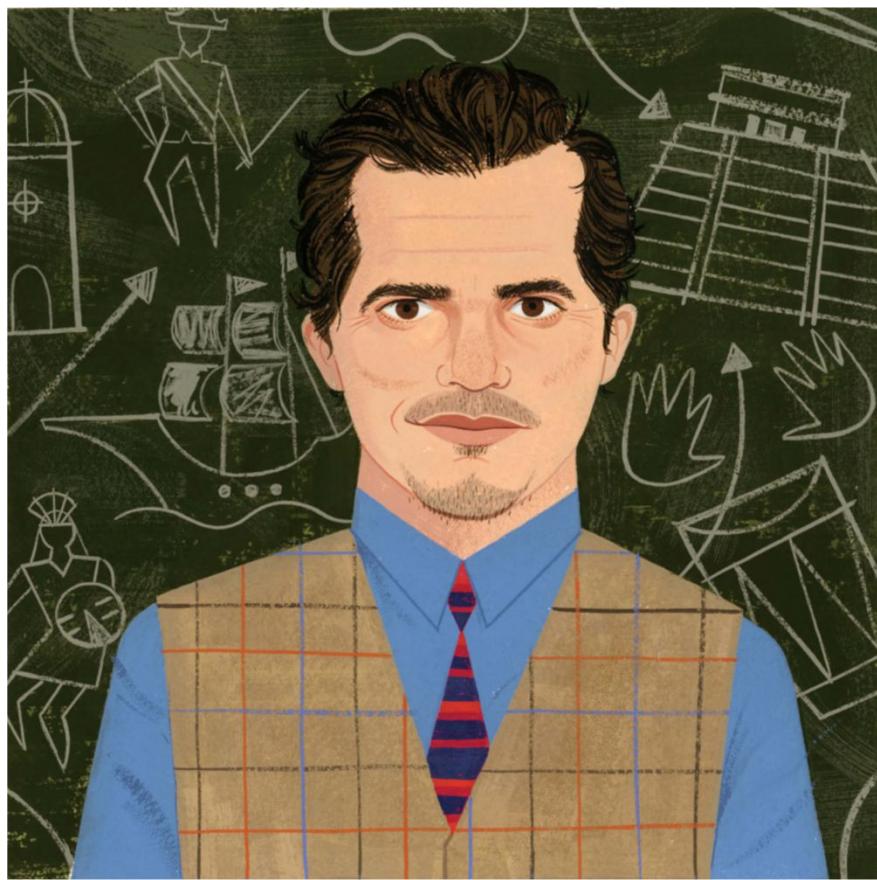
Lincoln Center Theatre stages Sarah Ruhl's play, featuring Lena Hall, Brian Hutchison, and Marisa Tomei, in which two married couples take an interest in a polyamorous woman. (*Mitzi E. Newhouse*, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. In previews. Opens March 20.)

### Joan of Arc: Into the Fire

David Byrne and Alex Timbers follow up their Imelda Marcos disco musical, "Here Lies Love," with this rock-concert retelling of the rise of Joan of Arc (Jo Lampert). (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Opens March 15.)

### Latin History for Morons

In his new comic monologue, John Leguizamo surveys history from the Aztec Empire through the Revolutionary War in an attempt to find a hero for his son's school project. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. In previews.)



*In his motormouthed solo shows, the comedian John Leguizamo has tackled everything from his Queens upbringing to the perils of fame. His latest, "Latin History for Morons," is now at the Public.*

### Miss Saigon

Cameron Mackintosh remounts the 1989 mega-musical, by Claude-Michel Schönberg, Alain Boublil, and Richard Maltby, Jr., an update of "Madame Butterfly" set during the Vietnam War. (*Broadway Theatre*, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

### 946: The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips

The Cornwall troupe Kneehigh stages an adaptation of Michael Morpurgo's book, in which a girl in a British seaside village meets a group of African-American soldiers preparing for the Normandy invasion. (*St. Ann's Warehouse*, 45 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. Previews begin March 16.)

### The Play That Goes Wrong

England's Mischief Theatre imports this backstage comedy, about a hapless drama society whose production of a nineteen-twenties murder mystery descends into chaos. (*Lyceum*, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

### Present Laughter

Kevin Kline plays a narcissistic actor having a midlife crisis, in Moritz von Stuelpnagel's revival of the 1939 Noel Coward comedy. (*St. James*, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

### The Price

Mark Ruffalo, Danny DeVito, Jessica Hecht, and Tony Shalhoub star in the Roundabout's revival of the 1968 Arthur Miller play, about a man who returns to his childhood home to sell off his parents' estate. (*American Airlines Theatre*, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. In previews. Opens March 16.)

### The Profane

Zayd Dohrn's play, directed by Kip Fagan, is about a liberal immigrant Manhattanite whose daughter falls in love with the son of a conservative Muslim family. (*Playwrights Horizons*, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Previews begin March 17.)

### Sweat

Lynn Nottage's drama, in which a group of factory workers in Reading, Pennsylvania, find themselves at odds amid layoffs and pickets, transfers from the Public under the direction of Kate Whoriskey. (*Studio 54*, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

### War Paint

Patti LuPone and Christine Ebersole play the rival cosmetics entrepreneurs Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden, in this new musical by Scott Frankel, Michael Korie, and Doug Wright. (*Nederlander*, 208 W. 41st St. 866-870-2717. In previews.)

## NOW PLAYING

### Bull in a China Shop

Bryna Turner does not have enough confidence in her characters. The giveaway? They swear constantly for no good reason, which is especially distracting given that the characters are Mary Woolley (Enid Graham), the long-time president of Mount Holyoke College, and Jeannette Marks (Ruibo Qian), an English professor and Woolley's partner of fifty-five years. Turner may be trying to show that these were feisty, opinionated women under

their petticoats (the action takes place between 1899 and 1939, tracing Woolley's thirty-seven years leading the college and ending shortly after she was forced into retirement), but the clunky language is a distraction, especially since Turner also relishes anachronistic references to, say, fan fiction. This LCT3 production attempts to cover much ground, personal and political: Woolley and Marks were passionate about women's education and about each other. Turner was partly inspired by her subjects' letters, but she doesn't capture their feverish romanticism. (*Claire Tow*, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

### C. S. Lewis Onstage: The Most Reluctant Convert

There's an ancient literary and theatrical tradition in which the hero struggles to resist the temptation of the Devil. In this production from Fellowship for Performing Arts, which has been concentrating on Lewis's works, life, and faith, we see the arc of a different kind of resistance. In the one-act, one-man play, drawn largely from the Narnia creator's letters and autobiography, Lewis's atheism, forged in an unhappy childhood and horrific experiences in the trenches of the First World War, is gradually broken down, not by divine inspiration but by fiercely considered intellectual reason. Written and performed by Max McLean and co-directed by him and Ken Denison, the show makes the stuffy Oxford don intriguing company. Unfortunately, the closer Lewis comes to his religious revelation, the less dramatic his own account becomes. (*Acorn*, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

### The Glass Menagerie

Tennessee Williams was thirty-four years old when his exquisite four-character study of family, memory, and love-as-chance premiered on Broadway. Based on his own mother, the redoubtable Amanda Wingfield (Sally Field) is a vivacious belle now living in a world circumscribed by the poverty of reality and by children she cannot understand. Together, Amanda and her son, Tom (Joe Mantello), look after her daughter, Laura, a painfully shy young woman made ill by pleurisy as a teenager. (She is played by Madison Ferris, an actor who uses a wheelchair.) The first problem in a production rife with problems—including pretentiousness, shallowness, and cruelty—is that Sam Gold directed it in name only, while wanting his name to be writ large. Mostly, the show imitates the style of the popular Belgian-born director Ivo van Hove, whose "radical" approach promotes the director as star. The actors tear through the script with little care for what is being said and how to say it. Field howls in the wind of that big stage, waiting to find a character that's there where Williams left her—on the page. Through no fault of her own, her Amanda is brittle, dry, an academic exercise in a "hip" production. (*Belasco*, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

### If I Forget

Family dramas are theatre's bread and butter, but when they are as expertly crafted as Steven Levenson's new play, at the Roundabout, you won't mind another helping of stage carbs. The siblings here are familiar archetypes, from the sanctimonious, underachieving youngest (Maria Dizzia) to the bossy, manicured oldest (Kate Walsh), with a passive-aggressive

academic stuck in the middle (Jeremy Shamos). A conflict about money induces *déjà vu* as well, but Levenson (who also wrote the excellent book for "Dear Evan Hansen") paints internecine dynamics with deft dialogue and a keen sense of observation: note, for instance, how the spouses uneasily try to remain neutral as the alliances among brother and sisters shift. Fuelling the tension is a painful argument about Jewish identity and Zionism in modern America, but the show finds humor—sometimes dark, always affectionate—in the characters' predicament. (*Laura Pels*, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

### The Object Lesson

Can you judge a life by its detritus? That's the cluttered question animating this astonishing solo play by Geoff Sobelle, an actor and occasional magician, whose work has been described as existential vaudeville. Part performance and part installation, the piece, directed by David Neumann, crams hundreds, maybe thousands, of cardboard boxes into the theatre. Each has a label ("Hot Wheels," "Faces to Forget," "Punctuation") and appropriate contents. Inappropriate contents, too: roots, tatty taxidermy. In a series of vignettes, Sobelle coaxes companionship, memory, and maybe even love from these massifs of stuff. If the last sequence is perhaps too on point, others, like a culinary demonstration and a misty reminiscence involving shared Chenin Blanc, are small marvels. Plus, there are a couple of phone conversations to rival the one Sobelle held in an earlier piece, "Elephant Room." This is work built on junk; treasure it. (*New York Theatre Workshop*, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475. Through March 19.)

### The Outer Space

Ethan Lipton wrote, narrates, and sings this story with songs, about a married couple who relocate to a dilapidated old spaceship that's orbiting Mercury. (Ben Stanton's lighting design eloquently establishes extraterrestrial scenes and moods in a cabaret setting.) The voyage is the wife's idea and passion, and after they lift off the husband comes down with "space sadness," which Lipton tells us is "sort of a combination of despair, mono, and a shitty attitude." Based on looks alone, you might guess that Lipton was a policy analyst at the Brookings Institution, and his singing voice is unremarkable. But he brings to this parable of marital compromise a distinctively droll sensibility, an inexhaustible supply of gentle good will, and a superb backing trio (sax, upright bass, and electric guitar), whose members co-composed the music and deliver celestial vocal harmonies. (*Joe's Pub*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

### Significant Other

Loneliness, heartache, and terror of permanent failure in love: given how incessantly these feelings have been plumbed on stage and screen, it's a wonder the playwright Joshua Harmon succeeds at making them so vividly painful in this comedy, about a young gay man standing on the sidelines as his three closest friends, all women, get married one by one. Gideon Glick is endlessly charming yet credibly hapless as Jordan Berman, who approaches a rare date with the grim apprehension of a convict awaiting sentencing for a capital crime; in his mind, the opposite of love is not its absence but death. It's all much more enjoyable than it sounds: Harmon ("Bad Jews") has a superb ear for dialogue, Glick is a fine physical comedian, and the supporting cast is delightful. But the story resonates because Trip Cullman's direction never shies from taking Jordan's crisis seriously. (*Booth*, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**The Skin of Our Teeth**

Thornton Wilder's Pulitzer Prize-winning saga, which follows the quarrelsome Antrobus family over the full expanse of human history, rarely sees a major production these days, possibly because it requires a cast of dozens, or possibly because it is quite intentionally a deranged mess. At Theatre for a New Audience, the director Arin Arbus attacks it with full conviction but struggles to overcome its contradictions: the show's politics feel both uncannily resonant and immovably anchored to 1942, when it was first performed. The production's four original songs, by César Alvarez, disrupt the show's flow even more than the script already calls for, and yet are among its best moments. The most arresting of these songs, "There's Only What I Know," is sung by the ferocious Kecia Lewis, whose performance as Mrs. Antrobus reigns, and who deserves a revue of her own. (*Polonsky Shakespeare Center*, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111. Through March 19.)

### Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street

In this Tooting Arts Club production of Stephen Sondheim's 1979 mid-career masterpiece, the director, Bill Buckhurst, has reinforced the show's depiction of English class distinctions by creating a pinched, claustrophobic, dimly lit environment. The stage is no more than a runway that surrounds, on all four sides, rows of benches and tables—a dining room in the pie shop of Mrs. Lovett (Siobhán McCarthy, an honest and first-rate artist). Visited by the murderous title character (Jeremy Secomb), she has an idea: is it possible that the world could be her (edible) oyster if she and Sweeney went into business together? Buckhurst treats the show as a storybook tale, full of sudden shocks of pain, visual surprise, and devilish laughter. Actors, rather than an outsized set or a thumping orchestra, make the show, and they open Sondheim's brilliant lyrics up to a new freshness. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/13/17.) (*Barrow Street Theatre*, 27 Barrow St. 212-352-3101.)

### ALSO NOTABLE

**All the Fine Boys** Pershing Square Signature Center. • **Come from Away** Schoenfeld. • **Dear Evan Hansen** Music Box. • **The Emperor Jones** Irish Repertory. • **Everybody** Pershing Square Signature Center. Through March 19. • **In Transit** Circle in the Square. • **Kid Victory** Vineyard. Through March 19. • **The Light Years** Playwrights Horizons. • **Linda** City Center Stage I. • **Man from Nebraska** Second Stage. • **The Moors** The Duke on 42nd Street. • **The Penitent** Atlantic Theatre Company. • **The Present** Ethel Barrymore. Through March 19. • **Sunday in the Park with George** Hudson. • **Sundown, Yellow Moon** McGinn/Cazale. • **Sunset Boulevard** Palace. • **The View UpStairs** Lynn Redgrave. • **Wakey, Wakey** Pershing Square Signature Center.

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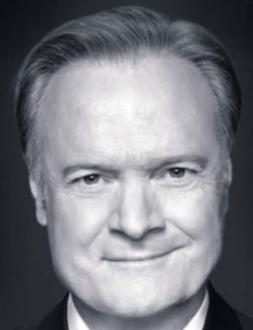
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## NIGHT LIFE



### As Is

*The techno d.j. Nina Kraviz stops off at Schimanski.*

NINA KRAVIZ IS a former dentist from Siberia who is now one of the most celebrated figures in the international techno scene: a d.j., a producer, and—when necessary—a music critic. Last year, after her three-hour set in Melbourne drew a mixed reaction, Kraviz posted a thorough analysis on Facebook, explaining precisely how she had used mischievous stylistic digressions and jarring tempo shifts to create a “wild, ravy mix” that confounded expectations. She reported that while the dance floor stayed full, a few patrons demanded refunds. “People wanted ‘techno’ and I offered none in their opinion,” she wrote. “In fact all I played was pretty much techno at least in my own definition but much of a broader spectrum.”

Kraviz grew up in Irkutsk; as a girl, in the nineteen-nineties, she stayed up late to listen to Europa Plus, a national radio network that broadcast an electronic-music show in the early hours of the morning. Paying close attention, Kraviz discovered producers like Armando and Steve Poindexter—pioneers of American music who were about as obscure at home as they were in Siberia. She moved to Moscow and

embarked upon an unusual double career, spending her days in dentistry college and her nights in the city’s clubs, soon gravitating toward a severe but open-minded form of techno, generally eschewing vocals and tunes so that dancers could lose themselves in the mutation of beats and textures. Eventually, her bookings grew regular enough to allow (or oblige) her to give up dentistry, and she joined the tribe of wandering d.j.s, making her living in the globalized economy of electronic dance music.

Nowadays, Kraviz’s influence extends beyond her own records and gigs: she is the proprietor of *трип* (“trip”), a techno record label, and she recently launched GALAXIID, an experimental offshoot. In December, she released “fabric 91,” her contribution to the prestigious series from Fabric, a London label and club; it is a beguiling seventy-six-minute mix that twists and turns and occasionally—startlingly—comes spinning to a stop. Kraviz will arrive in Brooklyn on March 18 to play Schimanski, a club that opened last Halloween in the northwestern corner of Williamsburg, in the space formerly occupied by Verboten. Refunds are unlikely to be offered, no matter what Kraviz plays.

—Kelefa Sanneh

**ROCK AND POP**

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

**Susana Baca**

David Byrne's lifelong quest for sounds that challenge convention led him to South America in 1995, when he compiled "The Soul of Black Peru," a collection of Afro-Peruvian originals and covers that explored the indigenous music born of colonial exchanges between African, Spanish, and Andean peoples. The album opened with Susana Baca's rendition of "Maria Lando," a sorrowful arrangement of Spanish guitar, cajón drum, and Baca's full, blues-leaning voice. Baca went on to become an international symbol of the Afro-Peruvian musical form, recording several albums and earning two Latin Grammys while researching and teaching ethnomusicology—"I'm telling old stories in new ways and new stories in old ways," she once said of her work and art. In 2011, she was appointed Peru's first black cabinet minister, and has committed herself equally to works of cultural preservation and political engagement in her native country and beyond. She performs at this Red Hook arts center in association with the World Music Institute. (*Pioneer Works*, 159 Pioneer St., Brooklyn. 718-596-3001. March 17.)

**Dreamcrusher**

Prolificness is a D.I.Y. badge of honor. From Lil B to Alex G, artists who go it alone are doubly respected for going at it a lot: self-releasing hundreds of songs and dozens of albums is an expression of obsessive inspiration and near-involuntary dedication. Luwayne Glass, a noise producer, has released at least twenty-six projects as Dreamcrusher, with material going back as far as 2006—lovers of avant-garde music may gorge to their limits. If the Wichita native's politics are only implied sonically—hard music for hard times—they drive his provocative visual art work and constellation of social-media platforms. On this night, he's offset best by **Logan Takahashi**, whose lean, gummy compositions go for the hips as much as the head. (*Silent Barn*, 603 Bushwick Ave., Brooklyn. 929-234-6060. March 16.)

**Flat White**

In a recent talk at Columbia University's architecture school, the multi-hyphenate designer Virgil Abloh described his d.j. career as having started as a joke. "Modern culture thrives off irony," he offered. "Humor is an entry point for humanity. It's essential in modern ideas in the creative space." The designer has executed subversive, punny projects in the realms of fashion (reselling Rugby flannels at a five-hundred-per-cent markup), product design (a transparent, textless cover for Kanye West's "Yeezus" album), and music: he has alternately described his d.j. crew, Been Trill, as an "art collective" and a "boy band." Observers remain split on the legitimacy of his ideas, but Abloh is best judged on his palpable passion for music—his d.j. sets may have started out as jokes, but they've grown into exciting tours through booming U.K. grime and stainless European techno. Now playing as Flat White, he co-headlines a marathon rave alongside **Black Coffee**, a South African producer and d.j. specializing in Afro-house music; the duo are supported by the Atlanta hip-hop producer **Sonny Digital** and the Philadelphia club d.j. **UNIQU3**. (*Knockdown Center*, 52-19 Flushing Ave., Maspeth, Queens. [knockdown.center](http://knockdown.center). March 18.)

**Japan Nite**

Earlier this month, before heading to South by Southwest, the annual music-and-technology conference held in Austin, Texas, where rising artists hope to gain a more influential audience than those at their home-town haunts, the singer-songwriter Felix Walorth decided it might be a good idea to read the fine print on his performance contract. He noticed a line pertaining to immigration; it seemed to imply that international performers who violated the terms of their agreement would be reported to U.S. immigration authorities. Swift backlash swept the festival as bands called for a boycott, and organizers scrambled to explain away the fairly common clause, which had existed in their documents for the past five years. Despite this year's controversy, international artists remain a core pillar of the festival; look no further than this annual SXSW showcase of the best emerging and obscure Japanese punk. Japan Nite was first staged in Austin in 1996, the initial stop on its annual tour across the United States. The lineup this year includes **CHAI**, an all-female quartet that makes slacker punk sound bubbly; **Srv.Vinci**, a rock showman staging his **Tokyo Chaotic!!!** project; and **Walkings**, whose damp blues melodies and raspy tone are only made more interesting by the lift of the band's native tongue. (*Knitting Factory*, 361 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn. 347-529-6696. March 19.)

**Martha Reeves & the Vandellas**

"Calling out around the world: are you ready for a brand new beat?" is a rallying cry so representative of pop that Bowie and Jagger couldn't resist the urge to repeat it. But it was Reeves who first delivered the call, in 1964, while fronting one of the most influential girl groups of all time. After rising through the ranks at Motown, from A. & R. secretary to backing vocalist for Marvin Gaye on cuts like "Pride and Joy," Reeves showed exactly why she inspired her label's tagline, "The Sound of Young America." At just twenty-two, the Alabama-born singer had a forceful yet patently adolescent tone that pierced through jangling arrangements of piano and horn: hear her scalding solo on "Heat Wave," one of the group's earliest hits, and spot the taut balance of church-pew catharsis and barroom swagger that has remained the standard for generations of divas. Now seventy-five, Reeves still performs and records with her two sisters, Lois and Delphine; her current tour includes a stop at this Times Square institution, where she will expose younger music lovers to her R. & B. anthems. (*B.B. King Blues Club & Grill*, 237 W. 42nd St. 212-997-4144. March 18.)

**Suzanne Vega**

If folk music invokes folklore, cultural artifacts and oddities that bounce between generations, there may be no folk text that better embodies those traits than "Tom's Diner." There's the song itself: a first-person, present-tense description of a Morningside Heights tableau, delivered like a dry anecdote to a friend, a theatrical chorus, or the most mundane police report in history. There's its tangled path to the spotlight: the song's writer, Suzanne Vega, recorded two versions, one with guitar and piano, and one a cappella. The latter was lapped up eight years after its conception, in 1982, by the British trip-hoppers DNA for a toxically catchy bass remix that far outpaced the original. The diner in question then became famous via "Seinfeld," and an audio engineer used Vega's vocals as a test subject for compression techniques that would even-

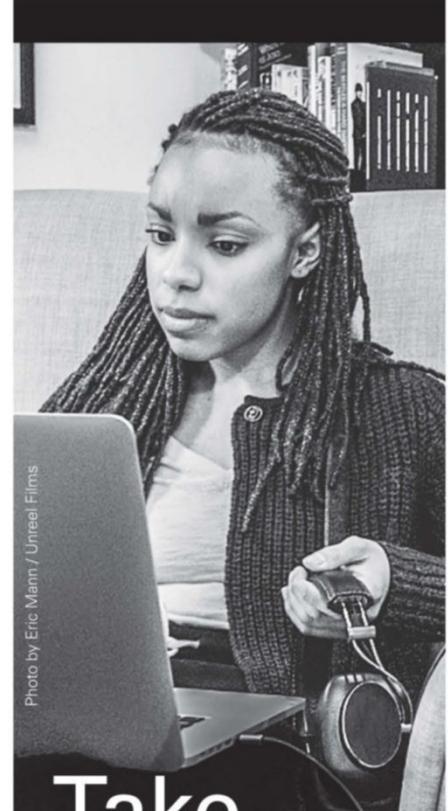


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tually result in the MP3. To this day, Vega, now fifty-seven, takes the too-odd-to-be-true tale in stride, and has remained a folk voice worth discussion for the formidability of her ideas. For this residency, she performs original music inspired by the equally complex novelist Carson McCullers; the songs are based on a play that Vega started back when she was a student at Barnard, a street or two away from Tom's Diner. (*Café Carlyle, Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. 212-744-1600. Through March 25.*)

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

### Claire Daly

The baritone saxophone is in good hands with Daly, who maneuvers the hulking horn with a dead-on balance of grit and finesse. Her new album, "2648 West Grand Boulevard," finds this valued player on her signature instrument as well as the flute, reinterpreting Motown classics with invention tempered by obvious respect and affection. (*Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595. March 21.*)

### "Free to Be: Jazz of the 60s & Beyond"

As diverse as the jazz scene is today, it doesn't have anything on the nineteen-sixties, when such influential icons as Sonny Rollins, Charles Mingus, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, and Dave Brubeck—each with a distinct aesthetic agenda—were making prime music. The Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra will salute these titans, and, in addition, present the saxophonist Walter Blanding's opus "The Happiness of Being." (*Rose Theatre, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. March 17-18.*)

(*Roulette, 509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. 917-267-0363. March 17.*)

### Michele Rosewoman

Cuba was on Rosewoman's mind long before relations began reblossoming with our spitting-distance neighbor. The pianist and composer's New York ensembles have been blending post-bop jazz and Afro-Cuban folk idioms since the early nineteen-eighties. This burly edition employs a four-piece contingent of horns and a well-stocked percussion team featuring three conga- and batá-drum players. (*Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595. March 19.*)

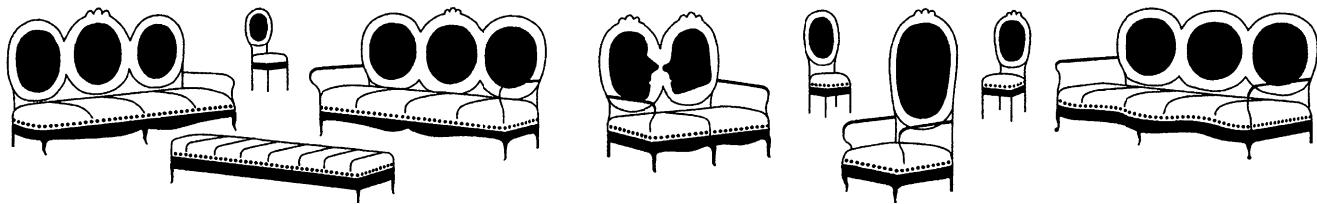
### Robin Holcomb

Attempt to define her music if you care to, but Holcomb has defied strict categorizations since her emergence on New York's downtown scene, more than thirty years ago. Now living in the Pacific Northwest, this fascinatingly eclectic pianist, composer, and singer has few qualms about mingling folk, jazz, chamber music, and points between and beyond in arresting original music. Her collaborators include Guy Klucevsek on accordion, Peggy Lee on cello, and Sara Schoenbeck on bassoon.

### The Tristano Project

The influence of the pianist, composer, and jazz conceptualist Lennie Tristano ebbed and flowed even before his death, in 1978, but his cool-jazz imaginings remain an object of fascination for inquisitive players. A quintet featuring the saxophonists **Greg Osby** and **Jaleel Shaw** and the pianist **Helen Sung** reexamines the still durable legacy of this hidden-in-plain-sight figure. (*Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. March 21.*)

# ABOVE & BEYOND



### Drone Film Festival

To accomplish the chilling last scene in the 1981 film "The Evil Dead," in which an unseen demon rises from the woodlands and snakes around trees before streaming through a cabin toward a final screaming victim, an operator mounted a camera on a bike and pedaled hard—a makeshift, pre-Go-Pro rig pulled together on a minuscule budget. The haunting visual effect—the viewer takes on the perspective of a ghostly figure bobbing and weaving through the air—is now a simple drone shot away, and enthusiasts have eagerly tested the limits of a free-range camera vantage that was once nearly impossible. At the third annual Drone Film Festival, directors showcase the best of their experiments: cameras zoom under vehicles and out of cavernous silos, stalk mile-high mountaintops, and trail surfers and snowboarders at never-before-attainable angles. The festival will also include a presentation on the current, ever-changing regulations governing the use of drones, along with drone races, exhibitions, and educational sessions on a first-come, first-served basis. (*Skirball Center for the Performing Arts, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-992-8484. March 18. Liberty Science Center, 222 Jersey City Blvd., Jersey City, N.J. 201-200-1000. March 19.*)

## AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Asia Week continues with three days (March 15-17) of Chinese art and furnishings at **Christie's**. The first morning is devoted to a private collec-

tion of tiny snuff bottles in every color and material, from jade and mother-of-pearl to painted glass; the afternoon session features works from the Fujita Museum, in Osaka, including a group of extremely valuable ancient ritual bronzes. Two more private collections, one from the Philippines (mainly of Chinese furniture) and the other American, go up the next day. (*20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.*) • **Sotheby's** presents a day (March 15) of Indian, Himalayan, and Southeast Asian art, mostly devotional sculptures, Tibetan tankas, and delicate miniatures. (One of the items is a seventeenth-century gilt-copper crown, inlaid with semiprecious stones, fit for a goddess.) Some pieces, like a bronze sculpture of Shiva embracing a graceful Uma—his first wife—come from the Cleveland Museum of Art. Classical paintings, including an album of twelve delicate ink drawings by the seventeenth-century Han painter Bada Shanren, are offered on the following day (March 16). (*York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.*) • **Bonhams** holds three auctions of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean art on March 15, the last of which is devoted to elegant Korean ceramics in all shapes and sizes. (*580 Madison Ave. 212-644-9001.*)

in the shaping of our life stories. He calls the biography a "vital handshake across time," and cherishes its ability to transpose information about our world, suggesting that, though facts and dates are absolutes, reality is a kaleidoscopic collection of occurrences, perceived by each person differently. His decades-long interest in the Romantic period, and in the biographical works of John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Thomas Lawrence, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Blake, informs this talk, in support of his most recent book, "This Long Pursuit." (*Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 92y.org. March 19 at 11 A.M.*)

### "The People Speak"

Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States" has become one of the most infamous texts of our time, read by millions and currently the subject of a potential ban by Arkansas lawmakers. The author and historian, who died in 2010, sought to recast America's story "from the perspective of the slaughtered and mutilated," as he told the *Times*, criticizing Columbus, Roosevelt, and Lincoln as lustful for blood and power, as opposed to heroic. The book sparked a film, the 2009 documentary "The People Speak," which Zinn narrated; at this live reading and performance, BAM and the Onassis Cultural Center gather actors, writers, and musicians to revive the stories of the marginalized Americans Zinn hoped to speak for. Performers include **Staceyann Chin, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Deva Mahal, Asif Mandvi, David Strathairn, Peter Sarsgaard**, and more. (*BAM Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. bam.org. March 21 at 7:30.*)

## READINGS AND TALKS

### 92nd Street Y

Richard Holmes, the British biographer, widens his scope to analyze the art of biography itself, and the role that the imperfection of human memory plays

# FOOD & DRINK



## TABLES FOR TWO

### Union Square Café

101 E. 19th St. (212-243-4020)

UNION SQUARE CAFÉ lives on. The fancy-casual flagship of Danny Meyer's empire, opened in 1985—which led the way for a hit parade of restaurants including Gramercy Tavern, the Modern, Blue Smoke, North End Grill, Untitled, Shake Shack, and, for a time, Eleven Madison Park—closed at the end of 2015, because of an untenable rent hike, with a promise to reopen within a year. Meyer is nothing if not trustworthy. In December, the U.S.C. revamp débuted in the old City Crab space, still close enough to the greenmarket to stock up on winter rutabagas and retain its farm-to-table ethos, an idea it pioneered.

The original restaurant, on Sixteenth Street, was vaguely Tuscan, vaguely new American, and extremely hospitable. These were the kind of people who learned your name, then remarked on your lovely brooch while giving you an extra-generous pour of Barolo. Carmen Quagliata, the executive chef since 2007, has a penchant for elevated comfort food that befits the restaurant's polished good vibes, and his cooking gets a grand showcase in the new multilevel space, spiffed up with dramatically lit booths, cozy nooks, and a gorgeous, towering front bar in the model of Gramercy Tavern.

The service is as humble and friendly

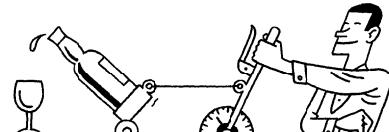
as ever. You've got to love a serving professional who cheerfully explains that "the Bitter Almond Negroni eschews gin" (for Cocchi Americano Rosa and an almond liqueur), as if it were entirely the Negroni's own excellent judgment call. One evening, the same server gushed earnestly about a pilgrimage that Chef had taken to meet a famous butcher in Italy, thus giving him the idea for the Sushi del Chianti al Modo di Panzano, a take on steak tartare: essentially, raw ground beef with some lemon and salt. Both the Negroni and the fluffy, clean beef are fine, but they don't improve on the original versions.

On a vast menu, Quagliata shines when he sticks to the basics: delicate fried calamari with little gifts of scallops and halibut, a thick, juicy burger with Beecher's cheddar, a silky hunk of on-the-bone roast pork with calypso beans, exemplary pastas. The picturesque lasagna Bolognese is stacked with delicate pasta sheets and a pungent ragù, but it doesn't quite work when it arrives lukewarm. The sleeper hit is the rich candele, sweet with carrots, charred scallions, Fresno chilies, pancetta, and yogurt, the perfectly al-dente scrolls pulling it all together.

Gratuity is included, and if you try to tip the coat-check girl she will flat-out refuse your money, with the sweetest smile you've seen in days. Actually, this is reason alone to come back again. (*Entrées \$27-\$46.*)

—Shauna Lyon

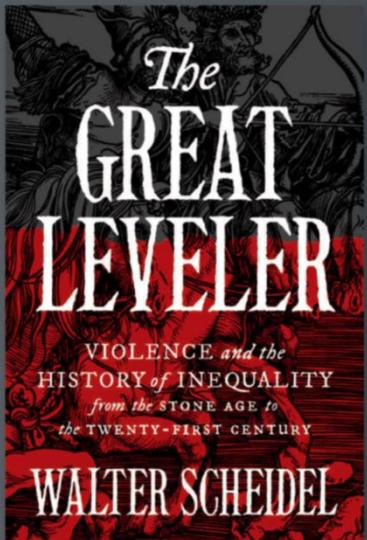
## BAR TAB



## KGB

85 E. 4th St. (212-505-3360)

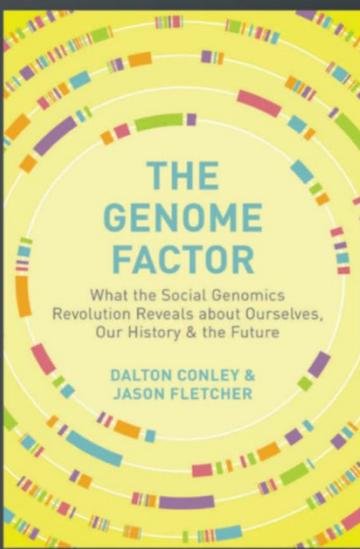
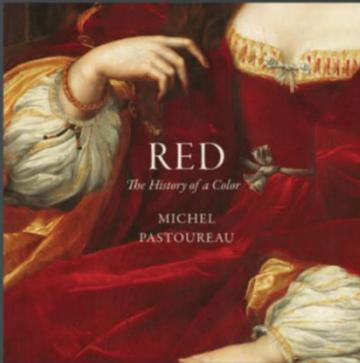
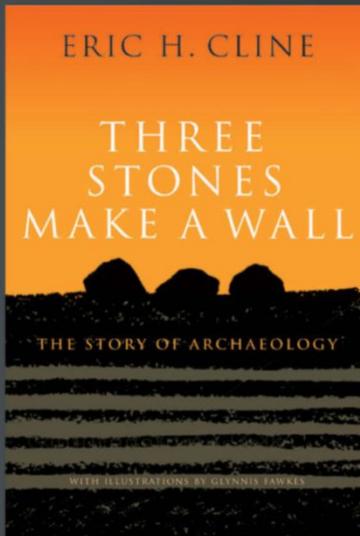
If you haven't yet made plans for where to celebrate the centennial of the 1917 Russian Revolution, consider KGB. During the Cold War, this second-floor barroom was the headquarters of Little Ukraine's own semi-secret Socialist club. "The F.B.I. used to watch the comings and goings from an apartment across the street," Dan Christian, the longtime bargeep, said on a recent evening, as patrons made their way in for the evening's literary event (there's one nearly every night). One of the readers, Liza Featherstone, an advice columnist for *The Nation*, arrived with her husband, the economics journalist Doug Henwood. They'd been coming here for seventeen years; it was "the site of our failed first date," Henwood said. At a nearby table sat a young woman in a knitted pink pussy hat. "I should have worn my penis hat," Henwood remarked, to no one in particular. The bar's Communist-red walls are festooned with posters of Soviet triumphs: victory over Nazi Germany, the first woman cosmonaut in space, Cheburashka (the U.S.S.R.'s answer to Mickey Mouse). KGB carries three varieties of Baltika, a decent proletarian beer brewed in St. Petersburg. The leftist power couple ordered Lagunitas I.P.A.s. "At no point would I have enjoyed living in the Soviet Union," Featherstone said. "The seventies were pretty comfortable," Henwood rejoined, pulling out his iPhone to share a 1978 photograph of General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev lounging in turquoise swimwear. Featherstone was summoned to the podium, where she delivered a meditation on the complexities at the intersection of B.D.S.M. and feminism. Forty-six hundred and sixty-three miles away, in Moscow, Vladimir Lenin rolled over in his mausoleum.—David Kortava



## CHANGING THE CONVERSATIONS THAT CHANGE THE WORLD

### The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge

ABRAHAM FLEXNER  
With a companion essay by ROBERT DIJKGRAAF



## THE GREAT LEVELER

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—Sarah Parcak, University of Alabama at Birmingham,  
winner of the 2016 TED Prize

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—Barbara A. MacAdam, *ARTnews*

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Abraham Flexner

With a companion essay by Robbert Dijkgraaf

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—Steven Pinker, Harvard University, author of *How the Mind Works*



## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT FIRST AS TRAGEDY

ONE EVENING IN 1970, a young Navy lieutenant found himself outside the White House Situation Room with a parcel of sensitive Pentagon documents, waiting for someone to sign for them. He sat down beside a man in late middle age, who wore a dark suit and an unsmiling expression. "There was nothing overbearing in his attentiveness," the officer recalled years later. "But his eyes were darting in a kind of gentlemanly surveillance."

The two men fell into conversation. The lieutenant mentioned that he had been taking graduate courses at George Washington University. The older man said that he had gone to law school at G.W. at night. Now he was at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, working under J. Edgar Hoover. He encouraged the young man to pursue only employment that interested him, and, shortly afterward, the officer applied for a job as a reporter at the *Washington Post*. He flunked the tryout and went to work instead for a suburban weekly. But he kept in touch with his friend, seeing him as a kind of career counsellor and, not without guile, as a potential source. Soon, the F.B.I. man confided in the reporter, telling him that he believed that the Nixon Administration was corrupt, paranoid, and trying to infringe on the independence of the Bureau.

In the summer of 1971, both men were promoted, one to the No. 3 job at the F.B.I., the other to the metropolitan staff of the *Post*. Within a year, their friendship became the most important reporter-source relationship in modern history. The reporter was Bob Woodward, who, with Carl Bernstein, led the coverage of the Watergate scandal and the fall of Richard Nixon. The F.B.I. man was Mark Felt, who, until he was in his nineties and revealed himself as Woodward's source, was known to the world only as Deep Throat.

Was Deep Throat part of an American Deep State? Some of Donald Trump's most ardent supporters (and, in a different, cautionary spirit, a few

people on the left) have taken to using "the Deep State" to describe a nexus of institutions—the intelligence agencies, the military, powerful financial interests, Silicon Valley, various federal bureaucracies—that, they believe, are conspiring to smear and stymie a President and bring him low.

"Deep State" comes from the Turkish *derin devlet*, a clandestine network, including military and intelligence officers, along with civilian allies, whose mission was to protect the secular order established, in 1923, by the father figure of post-Ottoman Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. It was behind at least four coups, and it surveilled and murdered reporters, dissidents, Communists, Kurds, and Islamists. The Deep State takes a similar form in Pakistan, with its powerful intelligence service, the I.S.I., and in Egypt, where the military establishment is tied to some of the largest business interests in the country.

One day earlier this month in Palm Beach, just after 6 A.M., the President went on a vengeful Twitter binge. Trump reads little but has declared himself "the Ernest Hemingway of a hundred and forty characters," and that morning he levelled what the *Times* rightly called "one of the most consequential accusations made by one president against another in American history." With no evidence, save the ravings of

the talk-radio host Mark Levin and an account, in Breitbart News, of Levin's charges of a "silent coup," Trump accused President Obama of tapping his "wires" at Trump Tower. He compared the unsubstantiated offense to "McCarthyism" and "Nixon/Watergate."

By now, Trump's tactics are familiar. Schooled by Roy Cohn, Joseph McCarthy's protégé, in the dark arts of rage, deflection, insult, and conspiracy-mongering, Trump ignited his political career with "birtherism," and he has kept close by his side Steve Bannon, formerly of Breitbart, who traffics in tinfoil-hat theories of race, immigration, and foreign affairs. Together, they have artfully hijacked the



notion of “fake news,” turning it around as a weapon of insult, diversion, division, and attack.

One does not have to be ignorant of the C.I.A.’s abuses—or of history, in general—to reject the idea of an American Deep State. Previous Presidents have felt resistance, or worse, from elements in the federal bureaucracies: Eisenhower warned of the “military-industrial complex”; L.B.J. felt pressure from the Pentagon; Obama’s Syria policy was rebuked by the State Department through its “dissent channel.” But to use the term as it is used in Turkey, Pakistan, or Egypt is to assume that all these institutions constitute part of a subterranean web of common and nefarious purpose. The reason that Trump is so eager to take a conspiratorial view of everything from the C.I.A. to CNN is that an astonishing array of individuals have spoken out or acted against him. Above all, he is infuriated that intelligence and investigative services have been looking into possible Russian connections to him, his advisers, his campaign, and his financial interests.

Bannon and Trump, according to the *Post*, refer to the Deep State only in private, but their surrogates feel no hesitation about doing so openly. “We are talking about the emergence of a Deep State led by Barack Obama, and that is something we should prevent,” Representative Steve King, of Iowa, said. “The person who understands this best is Steve Bannon, and I would think that he’s advocating to make some moves to fix it.”

Trump and Bannon would undoubtedly have called Deep Throat glaring evidence of an American Deep State. Felt was a Hoover loyalist; he oversaw the F.B.I.’s pursuit of radical groups like the Weather Underground and instituted illegal searches, known as “black-bag jobs.” Yet he was deeply offended that the President and his top aides ran what constituted a criminal operation out of the White House, and he risked everything to guide Woodward. The level of risk became clear in October, 1972, when Nixon’s aide H. R. Haldeman told him that Felt was the likely source. “Now, why the hell would he do that?” Nixon said. “Is he Catholic?” “Jewish,” Haldeman replied. “Christ, [they] put a Jew in there,” Nixon said. “That could explain it, too.” (It didn’t, quite. Felt was not Jewish.)

The problem in Washington is not a Deep State; the problem is a shallow man—an untruthful, vain, vindictive, alarmingly erratic President. In order to pass fair and proper judgment, the public deserves a full airing of everything from Trump’s tax returns and business entanglements to an accounting of whether he has been, in some way, compromised. Journalists can, and will, do a lot. But the courts, law enforcement, and Congress—without fear or favor—are responsible for such an investigation. Only if government officials take to heart their designation as “public servants” will justice prevail.

—David Remnick

## INK MR. BLITZED



NORMAN OHLER IS the author of the international best-seller “Blitzed: Drugs in the Third Reich,” which advances the case that large swaths of the German population, the Nazi Party, and the Wehrmacht used and abused an array of stimulants and narcotics. Chief among them was methamphetamine, in the form of a pill called Pervitin. According to Ohler’s reading of Hitler’s medical records, late in the war the Führer himself was hooked on a proto-speedball that consisted of cocaine and an opiate called Eukodal, administered by his private physician. The book, while delightfully nuts, in a “Gravity’s Rainbow” kind of way, has been praised for its meticulous research. A couple of critics have mistaken it for an apologia, a plea to cut the Nazis some slack, but Ohler said last week, “Nowhere do I say this. This would be a truly disgusting thing to assert.”

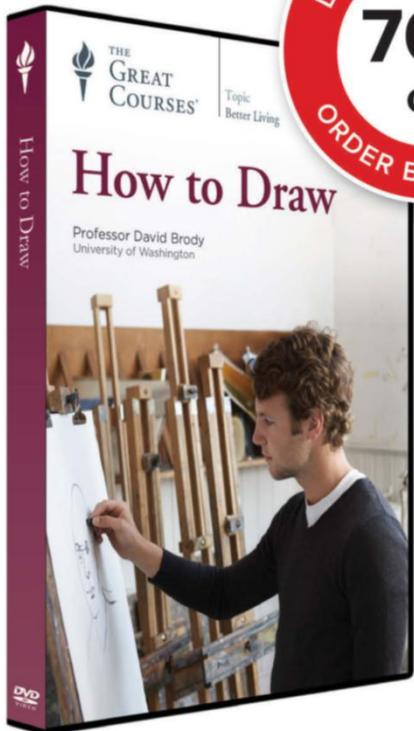
“Blitzed” has recently been translated into English, in such a way as to pre-

serve the rhymes from popular Weimar-era dope songs: “Euphoria awaits us / And though, as we suspect,/Our foes can’t wait to shoot us down,/ We snort and we inject!” Ohler arrived in the States last week, to spook its citizens with addled-Nazi lore while deflecting their attempts to get him to make analogies to Donald Trump. “The book fits the times,” he said. “People in Europe come to me and they ask, ‘What is Trump taking?’ They assume I can tell them the secret to his madness.”

Ohler spent his first morning in town walking around the East Village, where he lived for a couple of years during the nineties. Tall and, at forty-seven, very lean, he wore a gray turtleneck, skinny jeans, and an olive-green coat. He’s an unlikely historian. Prior to “Blitzed,” he published three novels, based on his experiences living in New York, Berlin, and Johannesburg. In a satchel, he carried the galley of his next book, a historical novel about Frederick the Great’s campaign to drain the Prussian swamps. “Frederick was anti-fishing,” Ohler said. “He wanted to make the potato the No. 1 food. Somehow, he managed to succeed.” Ohler speaks in a quizzical deadpan, so that it is often hard to tell, in the moment, to what extent he is pulling your leg.

Ohler was reared in Zweibrücken, the site of the U.S. military’s logistical headquarters in West Germany. His father was a judge; his mother taught art in a prison. “From the beginning, I was embedded in American culture,” Ohler said. As a high-school senior, in 1986, he was an exchange student at a school in Flint, Michigan. (He wound up in Michael Moore’s documentary “Roger & Me.”) Before coming to America, he and his fellow exchange students had been shown videos of the liberation of the death camps. “I really hated Germany after that,” he said. It was in Flint that Ohler first encountered illicit substances: “I was





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21. Value: Drawing Materials for Value
22. Value: Black and White and a Value Scale
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29. Color: How Artists Use Color
30. Color: Color Drawing Projects
31. The Figure: A Canon of Proportions
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approached by the drug people in school, so that I would be addicted and they could make money. They invited me to a weed party." He tried marijuana once but then demurred.

In Flint, his class took a trip to New York City, where at one point he found himself standing on the street next to LL Cool J. After college, he moved to New York, got a room in the apartment of a dancer he'd met, and began writing a detective novel with hypertext links. "It was the first Internet novel in world literature," he said.

By then, Ohler's view on drugs had evolved. A girlfriend persuaded him to drop acid, though, judging from the violent hallucinations, it was probably angel dust. "I have tried drugs, but I don't *use* them," he said. "New York itself was like a drug for me." In 1994, on the day that Kurt Cobain died, Ohler received a package from a friend in Berlin, containing a cassette of electronic music. This is the end of America, he thought, and before long he moved to Berlin. He spent some time in South Africa and in Ramallah. Ohler now lives in the Kreuzberg neighborhood of Berlin, right on the Spree. He has a boat that he uses to explore the canals and rivers of Germany and Poland. He said, "If you have a boat in Berlin, you really benefit from Frederick's fear of the swamps."

During his walk, Ohler found himself on Stuyvesant Street, in front of the building where he'd lived. He rang the bell and was buzzed up. A college student named Guillaume opened the door.

The dancer was out. Ohler asked to come in anyway, pointed out his old room, and spent a few moments at the kitchen table. He remembered the heaving of these walls, during his long-ago trip on whatever that was. "To this day, I don't know what happened in those hours," he said. "I realized there was more between earth and heaven than we are taught there is."

—Nick Paumgarten

## THE WAYWARD PRESS NEWSISH



**I**N JANUARY, 2013, Donald Trump's special counsel, Michael Cohen, sent a letter to the Onion. The satirical online newspaper, whose Latin motto is *Tu Stultus Es* ("You Are Dumb"), had just published a piece under Trump's byline, titled "When You're Feeling Low, Just Remember I'll Be Dead in About 15 or 20 Years." The attorney threatened legal action. "Let me begin," Cohen wrote, "by stating the obvious . . . that the commentary was not written by Mr. Trump. Secondly, the article is an absolutely disgusting piece that lacks any place in journalism; even in your Onion. I am hereby demanding that you immediately remove this disgraceful piece from your website and issue an apology to Mr. Trump." The Onion gleefully declined to comply.

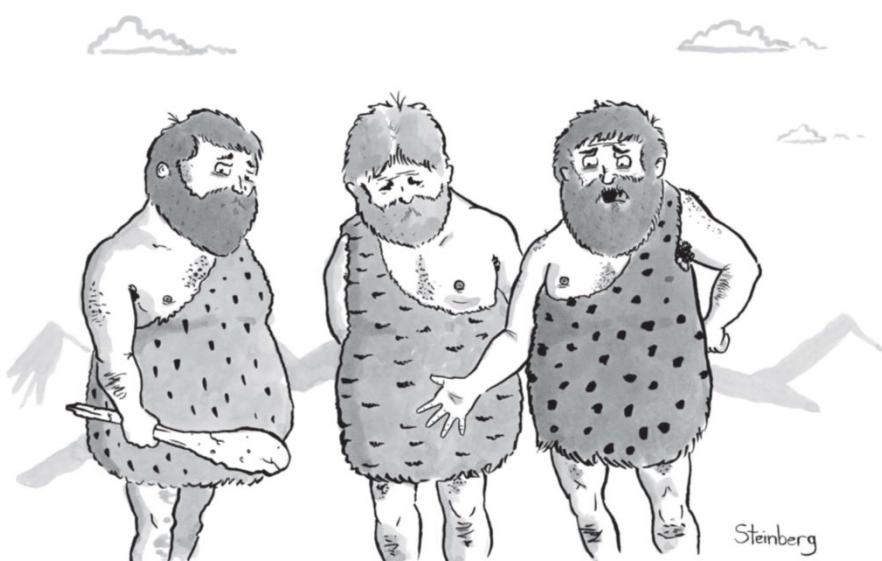
"We never apologized," Cole Bolton, the site's editor-in-chief, said recently at the Onion's offices, in Chicago. "The article's still up."

Trump has been a target of the Onion for around two decades. "We've always thought of him as a horrendous buffoon, an objectionable person," Bolton said. Still, the editor and his staff of sixteen mostly liberal writers and editors weren't thrilled by the prospect of having to cover, even satirically, a Trump Presidency. "I felt a comedic dread," Chad Nackers, the forty-three-year-old head writer, said. Nackers has satirized four Presidencies. His favorite was the Obama Administration, he said, "because Biden was a fucking blast." Like many news outlets, just before this past election the Onion prepared headlines for both possible outcomes.

"There were some really good Hillary-wins headlines," Ben Berkley, the managing editor, said, pulling up a never-published front page on his laptop. In a giant font: "DESPERATE WOMAN SETTLES FOR ASSHOLE NATION WITHOUT MUCH MONEY." Below that: "Now, Sisters, Destroy These Tools of Our Oppression!" Shrieks Victorious Hillary Clinton While Brandishing Fistful of Severed Penises." And beneath a headshot of a smug Trump: "TRUMP IMMEDIATELY CONCEDES ELECTION AFTER DISCOVERING OBJECT OF DESIRE IS 240 YEARS OLD."

On a recent Monday, Onion writers gathered in a conference room, whose walls were decorated with framed favorite front pages, to pitch headlines—"BLACK GUY ASKS NATION FOR CHANGE," read one from Obama's first Presidential campaign. This was a "timely meeting" (rather than an "evergreen meeting"), in which they'd riff on breaking news. A rule: "Stay away from low-hanging fruit," Berkley said. "We don't do 'The Angry Orange Wind Bag'-type stuff," Bolton added. "It's hard to go more extreme with Trump, the way we do with other public figures. So sometimes we go for the people around him."

Of the more than a hundred mostly Trump-related headlines submitted that day, only twenty-six received grunts of approval. These were gradually whittled down to five, including "RODENT CLEARLY MAKING ITS WAY THROUGH STEVE BANNON'S BODY THROUGHOUT NATIONAL



"Can someone please invent clothing that will cover both nipples?"

SECURITY MEETING," and "MAN AWAKENING FROM SEVEN-HOUR SLUMBER HORRIFIED BY MODERN WORLD." Others failed for a variety of reasons. "TRUMP UNVEILS MASSIVE BAILOUT PROGRAM FOR COMPANIES RUN INTO GROUND BY IDIOTIC SONS" was not Bolton's favorite Trump-sons joke. A writer in the corner waved away "DAMNING INTELLIGENCE REVEALS SEVERAL TRUMP AIDES CURRENTLY TRAPPED IN RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR'S NECK FLAPS." He said, "We just had a neck-flaps one."

A few minutes later, "CLOAKED FIGURE IN ADJACENT URINAL WARNS PAUL RYAN NOT TO GET COLD FEET OVER OBAMACARE REPEAL" spurred some ad-libbing.

"He's inside the urinal?"

"He's urinating onto him."

"It's an anthropomorphic urinal cake!"

Afterward, Bolton headed over to the graphics department, where a young woman read a headline aloud: "MAR-ALAGO CADDY INJURES SHOULDER TRYING TO CARRY HEAVY STACKS OF CLASSIFIED NATIONAL SECURITY BRIEFINGS AROUND GOLF COURSE." A researcher began Googling for golf photos.

"The caddy should be carrying binders and manila folders, along with Trump's golf bag," Bolton instructed. He paused. "I'd make this graphic a bigger priority today than the graphic for the nude sunbathing Pope Francis story."

Not every satirical subject reacts negatively to being in the Onion. Joe Biden's camp conveyed appreciation for his recurring character, "Diamond" Joe Biden (who washed his Trans Am in the White House driveway, shirtless). Bernie Sanders ("Clearly in Pocket of High-Rolling Teacher Who Donated \$300 to His Campaign") and Hillary Clinton both tweeted Onion stories about themselves.

"The Clinton one was an op-ed titled 'I Am Fun,'" Bolton said. "All she wrote with the retweet was 'Humorous,' which was great."

"None of the Republicans did anything like that," he went on. "It would be kind of funny if Trump tweeted something about us now. But he's the President of the United States, and we don't want him to be wasting his time in some Twitter flame war with a satirical news organization."

—Charles Bethea

## IN THE STREETS MOOD MUSIC



**O**N A RECENT, bitterly cold Saturday, the 3 Million Majority Marching Band was assembling on the steps of the main branch of the New York Public Library, under the gaze of Patience, the library's southernmost marble lion. Around the musicians demonstrators were preparing to march up Madison Avenue to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline. The marchers carried signs that said "Can't Drink Oil" and "Water Is Life." By 1:07 P.M., four band members had shown up. "Should we play?" Jared Engel, the band's leader and sousaphonist, asked. "Are you the boss?" Jim Fryer, a trombonist, said. "Or is this an anarchosocial commune or something?"

The 3 Million Majority Marching Band was started in February by Engel, a musician who usually plays the upright bass and the four-string banjo at jazz and bluegrass shows around town. Energized by the Women's March on Washington, he sent an e-mail to musical friends, calling for an ad-hoc band to show up at marches, rallies, and protests to provide people with "LIVE, morale-boosting music." He wrote, "Between my moderate tuba/sousaphone abilities and my extensive list of NYC musicians, I'm uniquely qualified to organize this band."

The band is open to anyone. So far, via word of mouth and Facebook, it has attracted thirty musicians, who have played at three marches—mostly New Orleans-style spirituals and protest songs. That day's Standing Rock march would be its third gig. "Down by the Riverside" is the first song. Key of F!" Engel cried.

When the song was over, a guitarist named Barry Komitor asked Tom Abbott, a clarinettist, about his plans for after the demonstration. "I'm gonna go eat some soup. And then I'm going to take off my overcoat and wear this tux," Abbott said, revealing the outfit underneath. "I'm playing a party for a rich person in SoHo."

Nancy Allen, a classically trained pianist, told a bandmate why she'd come

out with her melodica and maraca. "I really started paying attention eighteen months ago," she said. "I'm in it, man. I'm learning so much. I'm learning how to have dialogue. My husband said, 'I think I'm losing you a little bit.' And I said, 'You're going to have to put on your big-boy pants and deal with it.'"

By 2:07 P.M., the march was moving up Madison, toward Trump Tower. Around six hundred people crowded into one traffic lane, chanting, "Street by street, block by block, we stand with Standing Rock!" The band, near the back of the column, broke into a spirited rendition of "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho," played in D minor, as specified by Engel.

Darryl Williams Ferrera said that he hadn't been to a protest since the nineteen-sixties, when he marched against the Vietnam War and in support of the Black Panthers. He didn't recall the old marches having music, but he said that the mood was lighter in those days: "At least, back then the administration was listening to us."

At 2:57 P.M., the band rounded the corner of Fifty-fourth Street and turned onto Fifth Avenue. It had completed improvised renditions of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "Up Above My Head," interspersed with expert vamp-ing around the march's Standing Rock chant. It had also merged with another, more anarchic band, consisting of five drummers and a saxophonist. (Engel: "Should we join them? They're making some interesting noise.")

At Fifty-fifth Street, Trump Tower came into view, and the musicians and the marchers broke into "We Shall Overcome." In front of the building, they played "Jericho" (again in D minor), changing the lyrics at Engel's direction: "Donald Trump has got to go, and the walls came tumbling down!"

By 3:30 P.M., the assemblage had made it to Central Park. The marchers were continuing west to Columbus Circle, but the musicians were ready to call it quits. Spit had frozen in some instruments—"You see the ice?" Abbott said, pointing to frozen rivulets inside the bell of his clarinet. Plus, an organizer wearing a white bandanna had ordered them to stop playing, because the noise was scaring the carriage horses. A protester yelled, "Free the horses!"

—Bijan Stephen

## THE FINANCIAL PAGE

### MAR-A-LAGO RULES

**W**HEN IT COMES to America's technology industry, Donald Trump takes a dim view of foreign workers. "I will end forever the use of the H-1B as a cheap labor program"—it provides visas for technical and skilled employees—"and institute an absolute requirement to hire American workers for every visa and immigration program," he said in a statement a year ago. "No exceptions."

When it comes to the hospitality industry, though, Trump is much more, well, hospitable. His Administration recently made it harder to get H1-B visas, but he has expressed no objection to the visa category that hotels and resorts use—the H-2B—to attract low-cost, low-skilled seasonal labor. In fact, at Mar-a-Lago, his Palm Beach club, the visas are still in active use. Why the exception to the no-exception rule?

Since the election, Trump has been using Mar-a-Lago as a weekend retreat, a situation room, a source of personal enrichment (the private club just raised its membership fee to two hundred thousand dollars), and a backdrop for press conferences and photo ops. Based on the frequency of Trump's visits to the opulent club since he took office, Mar-a-Lago appears to be a place—unlike Washington—where he feels at home. It is also a business that, for the past decade, has taken advantage of the H-2B program (distinct from the H-2A program, which is for agricultural workers).

Hospitality businesses like Mar-a-Lago argue that they can't find Americans to fill seasonal jobs at the wages they advertise. Trump himself has said that "getting help in Palm Beach during the season is almost impossible." Sandra Black, an economics professor at the University of Texas at Austin, suggests a possible remedy: increase the pay. "The idea that there's a worker shortage means the firm isn't raising wages," she says.

The sixty-four foreign dishwashers, cooks, cleaners, and gardeners that Mar-a-Lago is expected to employ this year will be paid per hour roughly what they were paid last year. (The *Palm Beach Post* reported that the range is around ten to thirteen dollars an hour.) The foreign workers brought in to help staff the club tend to come from two countries, Haiti and Romania, according to someone who works at Mar-a-Lago as an employee of an outside contractor. Other clubs and resorts



nearby hire even more H-2B workers than Mar-a-Lago does. "It's very common in South Florida. He's not the only one," the person who works at Mar-a-Lago said. "But he is the President, and he has an example to set. Whatever they've said—'We cannot find these people just for six months out of the year'—baloney. If you're paying a decent wage, you'll find people to work."

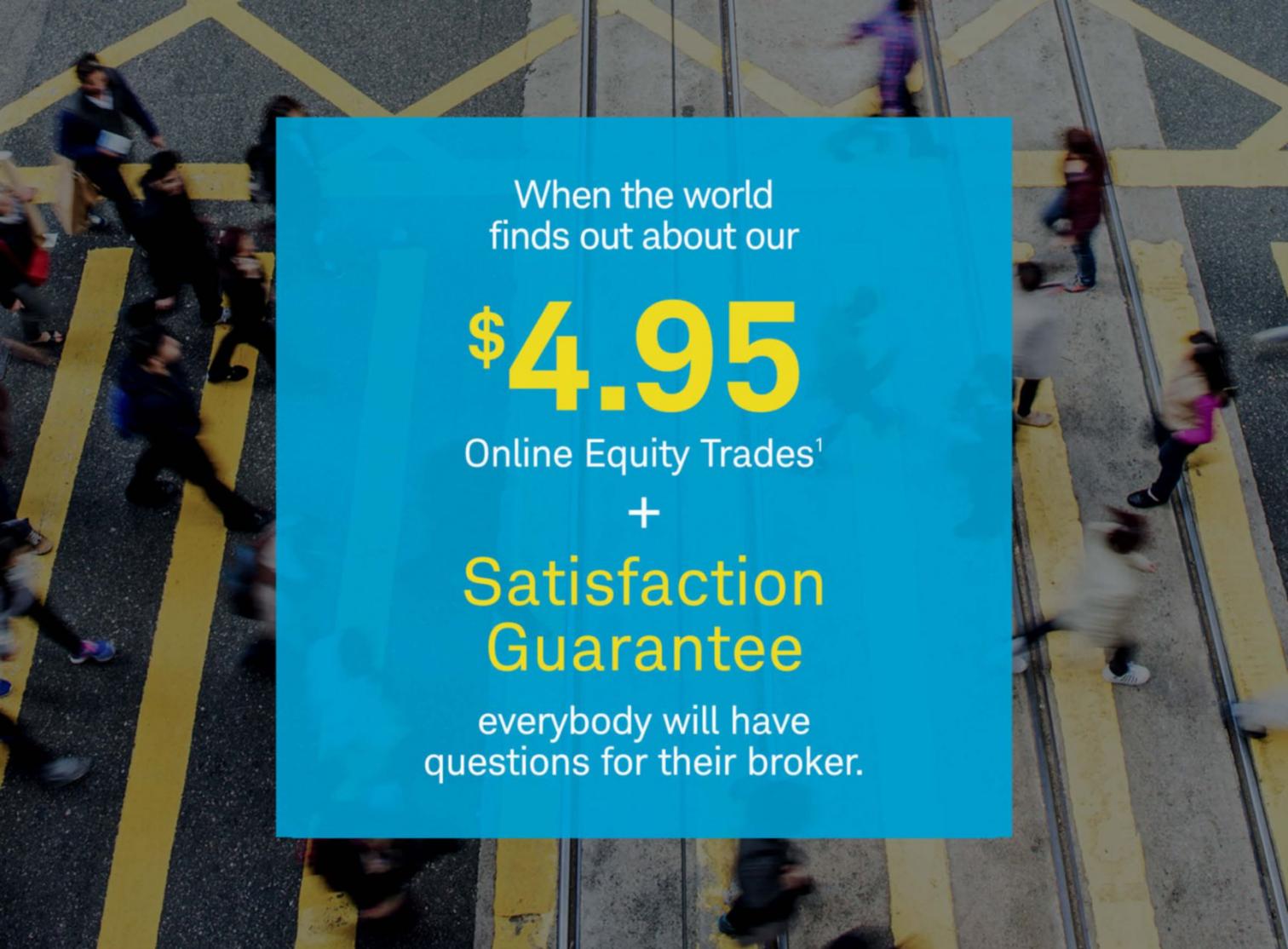
Even Jeff Sessions, the Attorney General, made a similar point. Sessions is a radical critic of immigration, so it's no surprise that he would object to foreign-worker programs, but at a Senate hearing about the H-2B program, held last June, he argued that employers should offer higher pay rather than bring in foreigners. "Most Americans would like a permanent job and not a short-term job," he said. "It seems to me that short-term jobs should pay more if they expect to get workers to work on a short-term basis."

If your mantra is "America First," there is actually a stronger case for the visas the tech industry uses than for the ones used by Mar-a-Lago. Giovanni Peri, an economist at the University of California, Davis, who studies labor and immigration, says that the H-1Bs can boost the employment prospects of Americans. In a 2014 report, Peri and his co-authors concluded that the tech industry in the U.S. would have recovered much more quickly after the recession had the government not pulled back drastically on H-1B visas in 2007 and 2008. The technology jobs offered to foreigners, they argued, would have created several hundred thousand jobs for American workers, including those without college degrees who perform support

roles in the tech industry. "Many people say that Japan has lost its edge in high tech because of its immigration policies," Peri said. "It's very hard to immigrate to Japan."

Tech companies, too, are mobile. If they can't hire the engineers and the programmers they need in Silicon Valley, they can move to Vancouver or Mumbai. "The cutting edge of innovation is usually in a place that is very diverse and open, and if this place loses its edge there is relocation," Peri said. There's no similar justification for maintaining the visa for the hospitality business. Some hotels would have trouble finding workers without a big wage bump, but the businesses themselves wouldn't move offshore; you can't substitute a room in Vancouver for a suite at Mar-a-Lago. So why would Trump target one visa program but not the other? The answer, as with so much else that Trump has done, is hard to discern from the slew of contradictory messages, but it seems that, when it comes to his own businesses, he's not eager to take a hit. And no one is making him.

—Sheelah Kolhatkar



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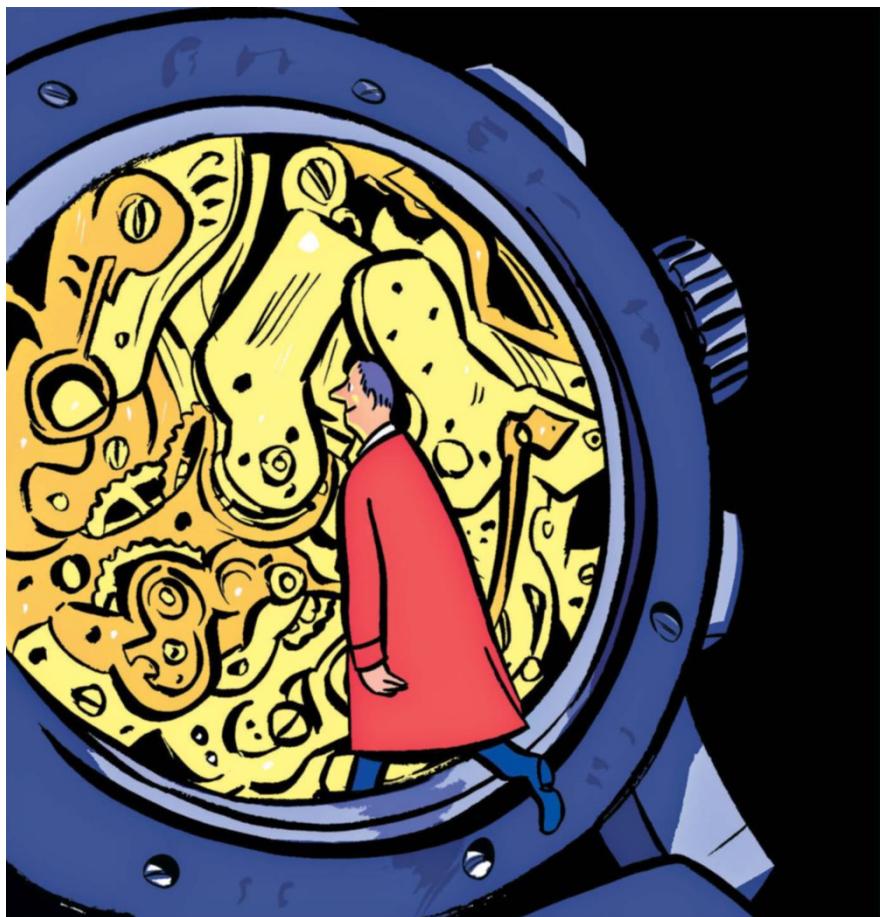
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PERSONAL HISTORY

## TIME OUT

*Confessions of a watch geek.*

BY GARY SHTEYNGART



*In October, my feelings of dread spiked, so I decided to buy a Rolex.*

AT THE START of 2016, I had a bad feeling. Time was not working right. Some weeks were as snappy as days, others were as elastic as months, and the months felt as if they were either bleeding into one another three at a time—Jabruarch—or segmenting into Gregorian-calendar city-states. Feb. Rue. Airy. Something was wrong with the world.

One day in February, I took a ride on the subway. This was a rare occurrence. Since turning forty, I'd started to suffer from a heightened sense of claustrophobia. A few years ago, I was stuck for an hour in an elevator with a man who weighed about three hundred and fifty pounds and his two grocery carts

crammed with bags of Tostitos and bottles of Canada Dry, an experience both frightening and lonely. The elevator had simply given up. What if a subway train also refused to move? I began walking seventy blocks at a time or splurging on taxis. But on this day I had taken the N train. Somewhere between Forty-ninth Street and Forty-second Street, a signal failed and we ground to a halt. For forty minutes, we stood still. An old man yelled at the conductor at full volume in English and Spanish. Time and space began to collapse around me. The orange seats began to march toward each other. I was no longer breathing with any regularity. *This is not going to end well. None of this will end well. We*

*will never leave here. We will always be underground. This, right here, is the rest of my life.* I walked over to the conductor's silver cabin. He was calmly explaining to the incensed passenger the scope of his duties as an M.T.A. employee. "Sir," I said to him, "I feel like I'm dying."

"City Hall, City Hall, we got a sick passenger," he said into the radio. "I repeat, a sick passenger. Can you send a rescue train?"

*A rescue train.* My whole life I have been waiting for one. Sensing the excitement of someone suffering more than they were, the other passengers moved to my end of the car to offer advice, crowding in on me and making me panic all the more. One man was particularly insistent. "I'm a retired firefighter," he said. "I've been doing this twenty years, folks. Seen it all. This man here is hyperventilating. That's what he's doing. Twenty years a firefighter, now retired."

"I'm going to take an Ativan now," I said, fishing a pill out of my breast pocket.

"Do not do that," the retired firefighter said. "It will only make you hyperventilate more. Trust me, I know what I'm doing."

A middle-aged woman approached me. "You have to imagine," she said to me, in a Polish accent, "that eventually the train will move. That eventually we will come out of the tunnel."

Shamed into not taking the Ativan by the retired firefighter, I looked down at my wrist. I was wearing a new watch, the first mechanical watch I had ever owned. A brief primer: Since the late nineteen-seventies, most watches have used a quartz movement, which is battery-powered and extremely accurate. Mechanical watches, by contrast, are powered either by hand-winding or, in the case of an automatic watch, by the motion of the wearer's wrist, which is converted into energy by means of a rotor. Mechanical watches are far less accurate than quartz watches, but often far more expensive, because their bearings are more intricate. All contemporary Rolex watches, for example, are mechanical. The difference between quartz and old-fashioned mechanical is that your child's Winnie the Pooh watch will likely keep better time than a seventy-six-thousand-dollar Vacheron Constan-

tin perpetual calendar in rose gold. A quick way to tell the two kinds apart is to look at the second hand. On a quartz watch, the second hand goose-steps along one tick at a time; on a mechanical watch, it glides imperfectly, but beautifully, around the dial and into the future.

Looking at the smooth, antiquated mechanical glide of my watch's second hand, I felt, if not calm, then ready for whatever happened next. As the conductor's radio flared on and off with promises from City Hall (my rescue train never came), as the passengers around me discussed my fate, I wondered: Can you hold your own world together while the greater world falls apart? The visible passing of time, second by second, seemed to provide a kind of escape route, even as my body remained within the metal shell of the stricken N train. *Three seconds, inhale. Three seconds, exhale.* The watch was a Junghans, from Germany, derived from a design by the Bauhaus-influenced Swiss architect, artist, and industrial designer Max Bill. I had bought it at the MOMA shop for what in my early, innocent watch days seemed like the astronomical price of a thousand dollars. Its no-frills, form-follows-function shape evoked civility in a time of chaos, a ticking intelligence in the face of a new inhumanity. The train slowly moved again. The Polish woman smiled at me. We shuddered into Times Square and I was, for a few moments in time, safe.

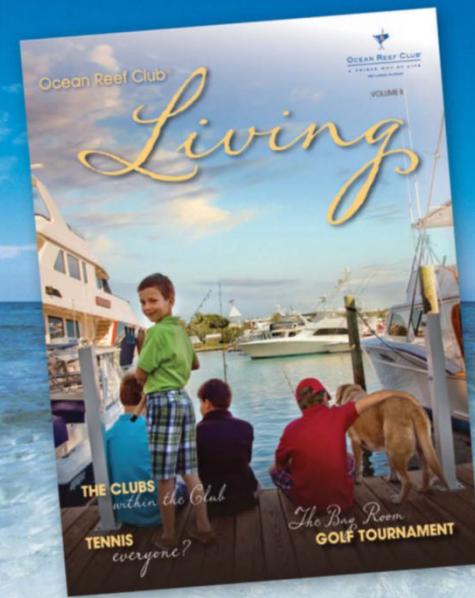
EVERY WATCH GEEK has an origin story. During childhood, my first best friend was a watch, a Casio H-108 12-Melody-Alarm. True to its name, the digital watch played twelve melodies, including "Santa Lucia," "Happy Birthday," "The Wedding March," "Jingle Bells" (played only in the bathroom of my Hebrew school, when no other Jewish boys were present), and even a song from my native Russia, "Kalinka" (roughly, "Red Little Berry"), which I listened to every hour on the hour to make myself feel less homesick and scared. I spoke English miserably, but the watch had its own language, a computerese series of squeaks issuing from a tiny Japanese speaker to form passable melodies. My parents had bought me the watch at a Stern's department store in Queens for \$39.99, a significant part of their net worth at the time,

and it was easily my favorite possession, until it caught the eye of a Hebrew-school bully. My grandmother marched into the principal's office and used the hundred or so English words at her disposal—"Bad boychik take watch!"—to lobby for its safe return.

Eventually, I made human friends, and my musical Casio disappeared for good. My relationship with watches from that point on coincided with the women in my life. In high school, my mother bought me a quartz Seiko, which pinched my budding wrist hair with its loose gold-plated bracelet, and was a bit out of place at my next stop, Oberlin, where comrades were not encouraged to have gold-plated things. After college, a girlfriend bought me a Diesel watch with the image of at least six continents on its dial, to indicate just how "worldly" I was, and a subsequent girlfriend had it repaired after we had broken up, a gesture of unusual kindness.

But by this time I thought of myself as a writer, and, for a writer, the money you make can be traded in for your creative independence, hence one is permanently building a rainy-day fund. I have always tried to keep on hand enough cash to cover at least two years of expenses in case the public stops being interested in my work, while plowing the rest into low-cost index funds. Thrift was comforting; material goods uninteresting, bordering on gauche.

And yet on April 12, 2016, I walked out of the Tourneau TimeMachine store, on Madison Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street, with a receipt for \$4,137.25 and a new Nomos Minimatic Champagner on my wrist, the sales clerks bidding me farewell with a cheerful cry of "Congratulations!" By the standards of luxury watches, the amount I spent was small indeed (an entry-level Rolex is about six thousand dollars), but by my own standards I had just thrown away a small chunk, roughly 4.3 writing days, of my independence. And yet I was happy. The watch was the most beautiful object I had ever seen. After my panic attack on the subway, the urge for another Bauhaus-inspired watch had become overwhelming, and I compared many brands. The winner was a relatively new watchmaker called Nomos, based



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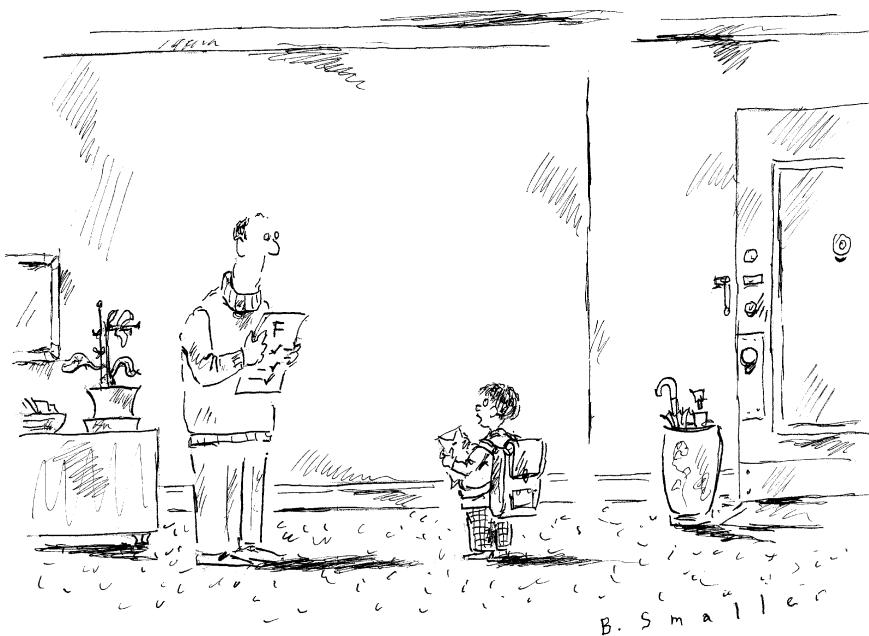
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*"You really have to stop fetishizing grades."*

B. Smaller

in the tiny Saxon town of Glashütte.

An early-spring sun glinted off my watch as I walked down Lexington Avenue. I took a photograph of the Minimatik on my wrist, as if at any moment I would be forced to give it back. There is an entire genre of watch aficionados who take photos of themselves wearing their timepieces in front of landmarks and post them on watch forums. Would I become one of them? I ducked into a Pakistani place to eat a quail, but was worried about splashing grease on the vegetable-tanned natural-leather strap. The dial was champagne-colored, with an unexpected circle of neon orange around the seconds' subdial. ("These are wild colors but in homeopathic doses," one of Nomos's marketing texts reads.) The Minimatik's lugs—the four parts that extend from the case and connect the watch to either a strap or a bracelet—were contoured and feminine, as was the gently domed sapphire crystal, a sharp rebuke to the dinner-plate aesthetic you see on so many watches meant for men. Nomos does not market its watches to either gender—their relatively small size is meant both for women and for men with nothing to prove. The hour markers were pearlized, and milled into the champagne dial to

pick up its brass hue. The watch seemed to absorb and reflect light in its own way, storing it under its arched sapphire, making it golden.

I took the watch off and turned it over. Some of the more interesting watches have an exhibition-case back, allowing you to see the inner workings. The Nomos calibre, assembled almost entirely from hundreds of minuscule parts made in Germany, is a riot of sunburst decoration, tempered blue screws, and a small constellation of rubies. A tiny golden balance wheel spins back and forth, regulating the time (think of a pendulum swinging on a grandfather clock, but at a tremendously fast clip), and this action, to many viewers, gives the watch the appearance of being alive. It is not uncommon for some watch enthusiasts to call this part of the watch its "heart," or even its "soul." The Nomos was not a quartz watch built by robots in a giant Asian factory. A German man or woman with real German problems had constructed this piece, blue screw by blue screw.

I was obsessed. And I had time to indulge my obsession. I believe that a novelist should write for no more than four hours a day, after which returns truly diminish; this, of course, leaves many hours for idle play and contem-

plation. Usually, such a schedule results in alcoholism, but sometimes a hobby comes along, especially in middle age. For us so-called W.I.S., or Watch Idiot Savants, all roads led to one Internet site: Hodinkee, the name being a slightly misspelled take on *hodinky*, the Czech word for "watch." Hours of my days were now spent refreshing the site, looking at elaborate timepieces surrounded by wrist hair and Brooks Brothers shirt cuffs, and learning an entirely new language and nomenclature. By this point, it was becoming clear that Donald Trump would be the Republican nominee. Hodinkee became a natural refuge, a place where I could watch videos of celebrity Watch Idiot Savants talking about their obsession in terms that made me feel less obsessive myself. The rapper Pras, of Fugees fame: "I think about my watches. Like when I get up in the morning."

**H**ODINKEE IS THE brainchild of Ben Clymer, a thirty-four-year-old watch impresario. In the outside world, no one really understood me, or the value of tempered blue screws. My sister-in-law pointed out, not incorrectly, that I might be suffering a mid-life crisis. But, in Watch World, you enter a room and everybody wants to discuss micro-rotors with you. As Cara Barrett, one of the few women writers on Hodinkee's staff, told me, "Micro-rotors are pretty damn adorable."

At Hodinkee's headquarters, which occupy a loft space in Nolita, every object is tasteful, much like the twenty-some mostly young people working there. In addition to publishing the most passionate watch journalism on the Web (and the most incensed readers' comments), the site sells its own watchbands and vintage watches. Hodinkee's statistics reflect the often rarefied world of watch collecting. The average visitor has an income of three hundred thousand dollars, owns five to seven watches, and buys two or three more a year at an average cost of seven thousand dollars each.

I spoke with Clymer at Hodinkee's offices. After I launched into a long soliloquy on a certain Zenith gold-filled chronograph, he said to me, "Wow, you're in deep." I took this as a huge compliment, but it was also a sign of how my life was unravelling. Hillary Clinton had

just collapsed at the 9/11 ceremony, FiveThirtyEight was showing the election tightening, and my shrink—also a watch nut—had just been telling me about the toll the election was taking on his patients. Yes, I was *in deep*, but weren't we all? A dear friend of mine who lives in Putin's Russia collects high-end shaving supplies. He once spent part of a visit to New York on the trail of some kind of badger-hair brush. I remembered all those old Soviet-era Russians humming math problems in their heads or playing twelve hours of competitive chess with themselves. In a society hopeless and cruel, the particular and the microscopic were the only things that could still prove reliable.

Clymer is preternaturally calm and sumptuously bearded, a self-described "old soul," who ticks as reliably as a chronometer granted the all-important Geneva Seal. The origin story of his watch obsession begins with a grandfather he called Papa, whose urbane New York tastes he admired as a kid growing up in snowy suburban Rochester, and whose gift to his grandson of an Omega Speedmaster "inspired me to do the whole thing." Clymer also started out with what has been called "the collecting gene." He wore a Volkswagen Beetle costume for his fifth birthday and collected old Bakelite rotary phones, which he bought at fifty cents apiece. His personal collection of watches is impressive—for example, a gold Patek Philippe with the Golden Rule inscribed on its dial, which Lyndon Johnson gave to his allies and underlings—and he has likely made a small fortune from buying and selling timepieces over the years, but he's also harnessed nostalgia in a way that feels real.

Hodinkee's influence is felt throughout the watch industry. Clymer has helped Jerry Seinfeld and Jay Z pick out their wrist wear (Jay Z wanted "the least rapper watch possible"). The shrinking size of some of the more intriguing watches for men can, arguably, be traced back to Hodinkee and its assault on what some in the watch world call "penis-extenders"—those overwrought testosterone timepieces pumped out by newer brands like Hublot, but also by old stalwarts like Patek and Rolex. If you want a watch that looks like a Russian oligarch just

curled up around your wrist and died, you might be interested in the latest model of Rolex's Sky-Dweller.

**A**S THE ELECTION approached, I started going to meetings of the Horological Society of New York. On the streets of Manhattan, I never have any idea which celebrity is which—they all seem to be Matt Damon—but at the Horological Society I could identify all my new heroes, many with full, Portlandian beards, across the vast hall of the library of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, in midtown, while they waited in line for their free coffee and Royal Dansk butter cookies. There was the nattily dressed Kiran Shekar—yes, *the* Kiran Shekar, noted collector, author, and proprietor of the independent watch purveyor Contrapante. I ran over to introduce myself and a few moments later he gave me his watch to hold, and a few weeks later he arranged for me to attend the secret RedBar, a meeting of the watch elect, at a bar in Koreatown. You need a regular to invite you to a meeting, and the idea that I could be welcomed into this exclusive world kept me from sleeping. I lay in bed practicing what I might say about "perlage," "three-quarter plates," and the rare lapis-lazuli dials on some seventies Rolex Datejusts.

At the gathering of the RedBar Crew, there was a Brooklyn watchmaker's apprentice from Australia, a woman from Latin America carefully taking pictures of a prized Rolex Daytona, a guy from Helsinki with his own brand of massive watches, and a young man with a hundred-and-fifty-dollar Citizen. No watch is rejected here, and there is no hierarchy. Just as at the Horological Society, the attendees skew young, a surprise considering youth's supposed slavishness to all things digital, and there are a growing number of women—RedBar's chief operating officer is the collector Kathleen McGivney. There was a boozy meat-market scene in the rest of the bar, which was filled with loud music and twentysomething Koreans on the make. But, in the section reserved for the W.I.S. crowd, we sipped whiskey as we stripped off our watches in our small brightly lit safe space. I threw my Nomos on a long covered table and an exuberantly bearded dude pawed at

it while I got my hands on a cheap but sturdy Seiko diver and an "honest" Omega Speedmaster. Swiss luxury watches may be made with the one percent in mind, but true aficionados know that the hegemony of the Swiss is over; some of the most interesting watches now come from German brands like Nomos and A. Lange and Japan's Grand Seiko. I missed out on the culmination of the evening, when all the watches were piled up for an Instagram photo with the hashtag #sexpile, but as I wandered into the autumn night my Nomos beat warmly against my wrist.

**I**N OCTOBER, MY feelings of dread spiked, and so I decided to buy a Rolex. Not a new one, of course, but something vintage—in this case, an Air-King from the seventies. I spotted one on the site of a dealer from Boston. It had a perfect "bluejean" dial and well-preserved hands, and a brown leather strap that I knew would contrast perfectly with the blue dial, as if my whole world were just cool and casual and everything was going to be O.K. After it arrived, I got in touch with Eric Wind, one of the top watch experts at Christie's, who told me that the dial was indeed rare and the hands "extraordinary." But, as I suspected, the case had been overpolished, because the lugs were too sharp and thin. ("Thick, beefy lugs" is a mantra for watch collectors; and most would prefer a scuffed "honest" case over something buffed and shiny.) Still, Wind valued the watch at about six hundred and fifty dollars more than I'd paid for it—my first potential profit as a Watch Idiot Savant.

I started looking at the Air-King's frantic second hand for hours, and listening to its serious ticking, which sounded like a surly boxer before the first round. When I was a kid, in the eighties, Rolex was shorthand for "yuppie." To console myself that I had not become one, I thought of all the rap lyrics featuring the brand. "Girl you look fine/like a wide-face Rolex, you just shine," Biggie Smalls rapped on "Fuck You Tonight." "They took my rings, they took my Rolex," Warren G commiserates with Nate Dogg on "Regulate." "I looked at the brotha, said 'Damn, what's next?'"

At a lecture that Jack Forster, Hodinkee's editor-in-chief, gave at the

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Horological Society, a photograph of a lonely Antarctic research station flashed on the projection screen. Speaking of its inhabitants, Forster said, "In Antarctica, there is no time except from the civilization that sent them there."

He went on to discuss the very subjectivity of time. "A month is not the same month from one month to the next. A year isn't." I looked into the reassuring deep blue of my old Rolex.

I'm familiar with the concept of leap years, of course, but Forster was saying that no one month, year, minute, hour is exactly, perfectly equivalent to any other. What hope do we have of regulating our lives, if time itself is an unsturdy, possibly political construct?

"There's something very mournful about watches," Forster told me, after the lecture. When I got home, I checked my Air-King and Nomos and Junghans against the atomic clock of time.gov. The Nomos had lost five seconds in the previous twenty-four hours, the Junghans close to ten, and the Rolex had gained fifteen. It took an average of three timepieces to tell the actual time. We were using watches to calculate our own demise, and we weren't even doing it accurately.

A few days later, over oysters and gluten-free Martinis, I pressed Forster on what I could do to end my expensive new hobby. He shrugged and swallowed a bivalve. Of collectors, he said, "There's some pocket of rot in the oak of their soul that can only be patched up by watches."

After Trump won, I went to Germany—specifically, to Glashütte, in the remote Müglitz Valley, in Saxony, between Dresden and Prague, where my Nomos Minimatik was born. The journey from Dresden by suburban train took me past churches and boxy G.D.R.-era dachas, a perfect Russian motif for a city that once hosted the budding K.G.B. spy Vladimir Putin. Glashütte, where German watchmakers began working in the nineteenth century, is now home to at least eight companies. The town, surrounded by the Ore Mountains, appears suddenly, its train platform hugged by buildings of cement,

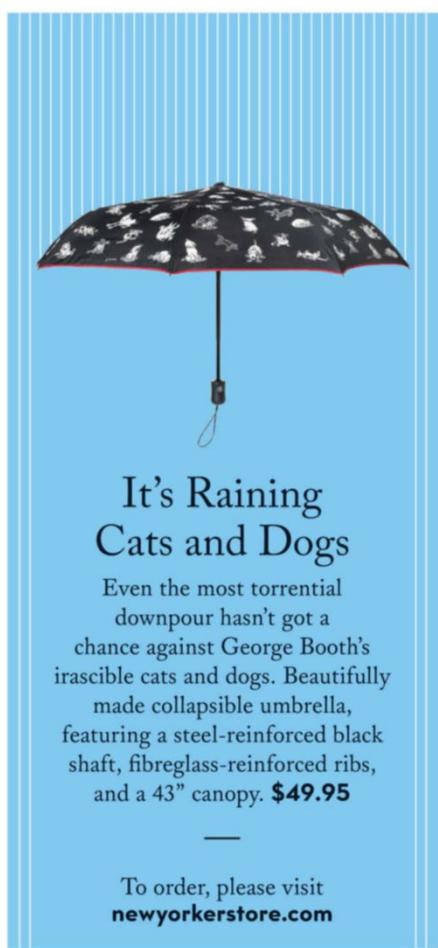
steel, and glass. Glashütte does not have so much as a proper restaurant, although every Tuesday a chicken man comes with a truck full of roasting birds, and pensioners dutifully line up as if the Berlin Wall had never fallen.

"Caring for machines is as essential as caring for yourself," an old East German poster proclaims in one of Nomos's workspaces. The company operates out of Glashütte's old train station, and also a well-kept building stuffed with the latest Vitra furniture, situated on a hill overlooking the town. (There is also a design bureau in Berlin, on the Landwehr Canal.) The watches are marketed not to the one per cent but to the creative classes. "If an editor's career is on the rise," a

German publishing friend said, "they'll get a Nomos."

"Too many Swiss watch companies have become M.B.A.'d and are run like Procter & Gamble," the watch collector Kiran Shekar had told me in New York. Nomos is the opposite of that. And there is a political element, too. Saxony has not been immune to the racist stirrings of the Alternative für Deutschland party, challenging Angela Merkel's ruling coalition. When an AfD march was planned for Glashütte, the company put up a sign reading, in German, "We tick internationally. No to right-wing propaganda. Yes to tolerance and cosmopolitanism, and to people who need our help now."

Visiting a watch manufactory is a soothing experience during chaotic times, and the painfully slow assembly of these beautiful objects may well fall under the heading of "God's work." At the Nomos workshop, a monastic silence prevailed as men and women (there are more of the latter than the former) sat at desks, wearing what looked like pink finger condoms and sifting through parts, some of them thinner than a human hair. The work is difficult and takes a toll. Because their hands need to be steady, watchmakers cannot drink profusely. According to Nadja Weisweiler, who works for the German retailer and watch manufacturer Wempe, they are encouraged to take up musical instruments or horseback



riding. I observed with special delight as a watchmaker inserted a balance wheel into a new watch, and it came to life for the first time.

At Nomos, the dignity of work is still celebrated, and the company provides an example of what a creative manufacturing workplace can look like at a time when making things is rarely the province of humans. Nomos's design bureau, in Berlin, is light-filled and cheery. The minimally bearded designers turn to everyday objects for inspiration. "We're recoding heritage with contemporary influences from Berlin," one of them told me. The neon orange that adds such cosmopolitan charm to my Minimatik, for example, came from the orange of warning signs seen in technical instruments and on the streets of the city. The avant-garde fonts for the numbers on the dial are stretched and opened up for better legibility. The intelligence of the design never proclaims the watch to be anything more than an instrument. "We know there are more important things than watches," Judith Borowski, the com-

pany's chief brand officer, said. "Like people suffering around the world."

Nomos is doing well. The company's sales increased by more than twenty per cent over the previous year, while the Swiss watch industry is suffering, in part because of the decline of several important markets, such as China and Russia, and, at a certain level, the preponderance of smart watches like Apple's. Because Nomos aims for a younger demographic, its C.E.O., Uwe Ahrendt, is optimistic. "The good thing about smart watches is that young people started caring about their wrists again," he told me in Glashütte. "They'll start off with a smart watch and then they'll switch to mechanical."

After visiting Nomos, I crossed the road to A. Lange & Söhne. Ferdinand Adolph Lange, the godfather of German watchmaking, founded the company in 1845, as part of a Saxon king's anti-poverty measures. The region was chiefly known for mining, but it was also famous for basket-weaving, and the dexterity required for that was used to make precise ticking things. After the

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Second World War, the Soviets nationalized the company and carted the best equipment off to Russia. Walter Lange, the great-grandson of Ferdinand, was about to be conscripted to work in an East German uranium mine, when he fled to the West. In 1990, after the Wall fell and when Lange was sixty-six years old, he returned to Glashütte and brought the company back to life. The new watches were soon beloved, especially by collectors who didn't care about Lange's pricing (entry-level Langes start at nearly fifteen thousand dollars, which some people consider a bargain).

In contrast to the freewheeling Nomos, Lange has an air of secrecy and tradition. To enter the inner sanctum, I had to surrender my phone and put on a lab coat. Lange's timepieces are beautiful in an eerie way that collapses the differences between centuries, speaking to a world interrupted and then, against all odds, resumed. The watchmakers use gold chatons with steel screws to hold down the rubies that act as a lubrication system for the watch. There is absolutely no need for gold chatons at this point—the technology has moved on—but Lange insists on using them.

Walter Lange died this year, at the age of ninety-two, and the success of his company can be seen as a form of revenge against the totalitarian Soviet interregnum. The results are almost perversely opulent. Parts of the mechanism are finished by hand but are never meant to be seen by the owner; only the watchmaker and subsequent watch repairers will see the work in full. When I look at the back of a Datograph, one of Lange's more complicated watches (it features a date as well as a chronograph, a kind of stopwatch), I see a small city of silver and gold gears and wheels, a miniature three-dimensional universe in which everyone is running to catch the next bus. If only our own daily exertions could be so purposeful and ornate. If only watches could do what they so slyly promise. To record. To keep track. To bring order.

AS THE INAUGURATION approached, I bought another watch. I knew I had to stop, but I had an excuse. I desperately needed a waterproof watch for swimming, my only form of exercise.

By my hopeless logic, the watch would make me healthier. I went to Wempe's emporium on Fifth Avenue, which is just a few doors down from Trump Tower, and feels like a meditation on the calmness of wood and the serenity of the color beige. It was early in the day, but already some gentlemen had stumbled in for their watch-fondling. "Tell me which watch you like and I'll tell you how long I have to work for it," one man was telling his five-year-old son. I was served an espresso and a Lindt chocolate by a young man who also presented me with a Tudor Heritage Black Bay 36, a glowing black-dial water-resistant watch bearing the famous "snowflake" hour hand of Tudor (a sister company of Rolex). I bought it, whereupon a small bottle of Veuve Clicquot was opened, and although the iconic snowflake hand was still two hours short of noon, I drank it down to the last. In total, I had now given up 10.1 days of artistic freedom to four watches in the course of less than a year.

Hodinkee invited me to a secret event at an undisclosed location. A black Lincoln MKT picked me up and half an hour later we arrived at a swish bar in midtown. Meanwhile, twenty-one of the world's most significant watch collectors were making similar, if longer, journeys, from as far away as London and Los Angeles. They had no idea what awaited them. At the bar, Ben Clymer unveiled the project that Hodinkee had been working on for more than a year. The company had taken a famous Vacheron Constantin watch known as the Cornes de Vache (its lugs are shaped like cow horns), swapped out the platinum or the rose gold for humble steel, switched the white or silvered dial for a slate-gray one, and changed the tachymeter scale on the rim of the dial, which measures distance or speed, for a pulsation scale, which helps measure the beating of the human heart.

Vacheron Constantin is a storied Swiss *maison* (Napoleon wore one of its watches). Amid the *aah-ing* of the audience, I ran over to be the first to feel metal against flesh. Collectors gathered around, taking snaps of the watch on my wrist. The atmosphere simmered with the strange happiness of our lit-

tle world, the feeling of being finally at the right place, if maybe not in the right time. The price of the watch was forty-five thousand dollars, and only thirty-six of them would be available for sale. Momentarily, I reviewed my finances. *What if . . .*

Shortly afterward, I met with a well-known collector and the editor of the watch site TimeZone who goes by the nom de plume William Massena, an ursine man with a strong Continental accent and even stronger horological opinions ("I used to get death threats!"). The timepieces in his collection were subtle yet striking. As Massena showed me the gorgeous faded-brown dial of a Rolex Submariner, akin to a model issued to members of the British Navy, I told him how I had got into watches at the start of 2016, when our nation was vulnerable but still whole. "Ah," he said, in a burst of European pragmatism, "but you are a little Russian émigré. You know if you need to you can put these watches in your pocket and sneak across the border to Canada past Buffalo. And you can survive."

A memory arrived unbidden. The year was 1978, and my family and I were at Pulkovo Airport, in Leningrad, about to become Soviet refugees in America. A stern customs officer took off my furry *shapka* and poked at the still warm lining, looking for diamonds my parents might have hidden there. A six-year-old is humiliated, but perhaps a lesson is learned. What if we had stashed away some diamonds and somehow got them through to freedom? In talking to collectors, I have heard the tale of a grandfather who was able to escape Occupied France because he gave a gold Omega to a stationmaster. Is this it, then? Is that what my obsession is about?

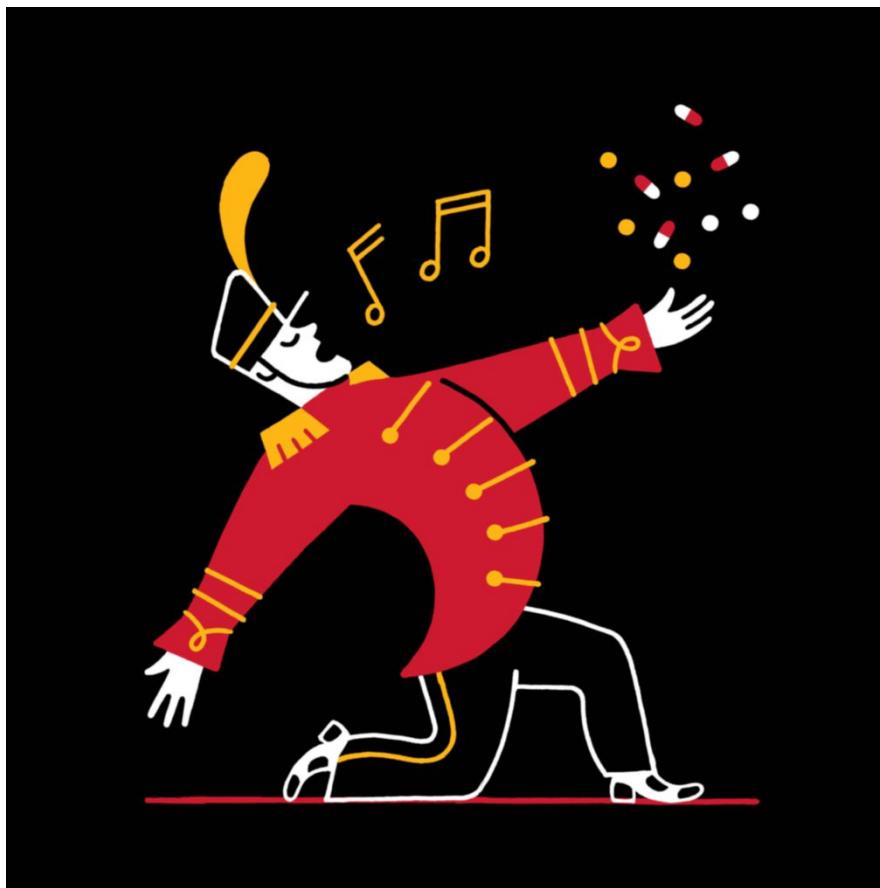
I will stop buying watches. But allow me one last purchase. It comes, via eBay, from San Luis Potosí, a city in north-central Mexico. It is a Casio H-108 12-Melody-Alarm, the kind I had lost to the Hebrew-school bully and my grandmother had reclaimed. The watch feels small, digital, innocent. It dutifully plays all the songs I remember. The word "HAPPY" appears in eighties letters as the birthday song plays. And, for a moment, I am. ♦



SHOUTS & MURMURS

## CLASSIC MUSICALS, UPDATED

BY SHANNON REED



### "PEOPLES AND OTHER PEOPLES"

(Formerly "Guys and Dolls")

In Times Square, two friends, Good Choices McGinley and Participation Trophy Masterson, try to raise enough money to keep their independent bookstore afloat. The show features such updated hits as "A Person Could Develop a Deeper Understanding That People with a Different Skin Color Are Not Otherwise Unlike Him or Her"; "Luck Be a Self-Actualized Person"; and, of course, the title number, "Peoples and Other Peoples," with its immortal line "You know a someone's only doing it for a someone else!"

### "ELIZA WITH A 'Z'!"

(Formerly "My Fair Lady")

In modern-day London, a feisty urban female youth turned doctoral

candidate teaches her rich male capitalist mentor about the depth and the variety of language and expression, causing him to abandon his snobbish ideas about what it means to be "well-spoken." You'll love hearing new takes on old favorites, including "I Could Have Analyzed Noam Chomsky All Night"; "Why Can't a Woman Be More Like Another Woman of Greater Achievement?"; and "In the Library Study Carrel Where You Work on Your Doctorate in Sociolinguistics."

### "THE ROMANY PEOPLE"

(Formerly "Gypsy")

Rose, a beloved celebrity baker, grooms her youngest daughter to take over her chain of gluten-free-cupcake shops. But, instead, the young woman

runs away to the Balkans to do field work on the DNA of her ancestors, the Romanies. Rose then bullies her older daughter into creating a line of rice-flour-based treats, for which Rose takes all the credit. Enraged, the young woman strikes out on her own, starting an artisanal full-fat-butter company, based on her mother's recipe. Distraught at having her secret stolen, Rose sings the showstopper "Rose's Churns!" Other memorable numbers include "Everything's Coming Up Butterfat" and "Let Me Explain Our Genetic Ancestry to You."

### "OKLAHOMA\$"

(Formerly "Oklahoma!")

In Oklahoma City, the state government faces a showdown, pitting fiscal conservatives against proponents of increasing funding for the arts. During a filibuster, a conservative representative, Laurey, falls in love with a curator from the local art museum, Curly, despite the disapproval of Jud, a sculptor who is also in love with Curly. The triangle resolves itself when Curly succeeds in convincing Laurey to vote in favor of arts funding, and Jud is forced to move to Kansas City because his grant application was approved there. Songs include "Oh, the Farmer and Cowmen Represent Trickle-Down Economics"; "People Will Say We're in Pork"; "Surrey with a Fringe Festival in the Jump Seat"; and "I'm Just a Girl Who Cain't Say 'Oeuvre.'"

### "THE MUSIC PERSON"

(Formerly "The Music Man")

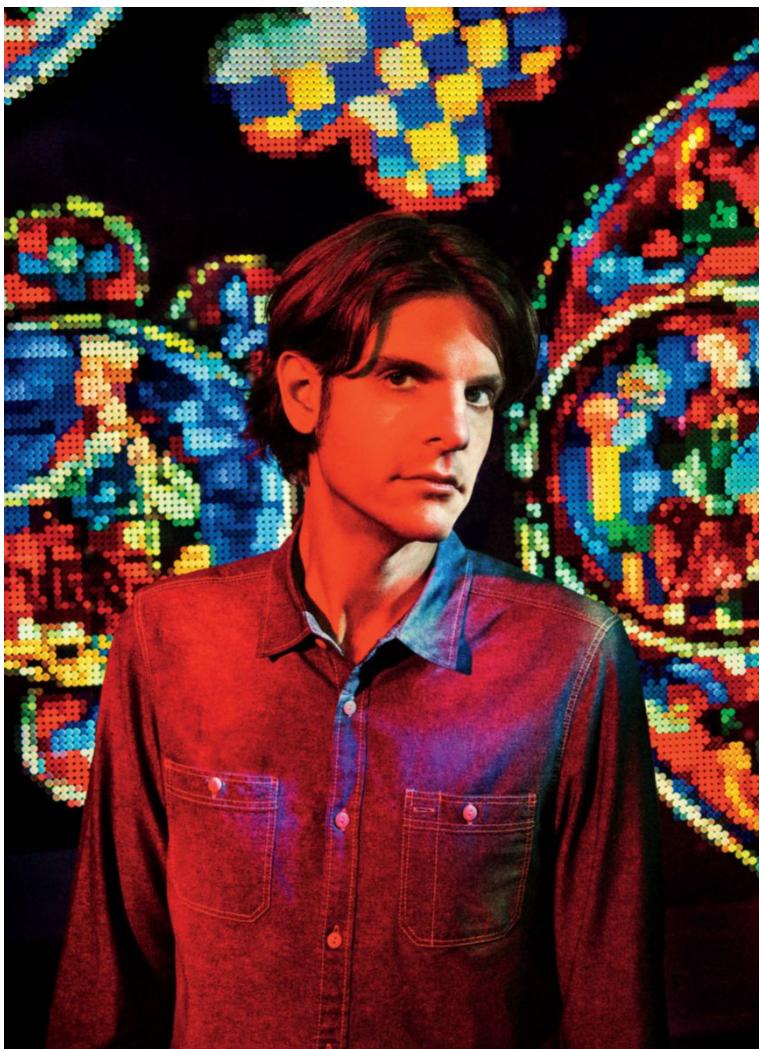
A person suffering from a variety of mental illnesses stumbles into the community of River City, Iowa, where he befriends and is cared for by the town librarian, who also gives piano lessons. The two fall in love, defeating the mentally ill person's demons with the power of music and online shopping. They eventually open a shelter for at-risk youth, where they teach literacy and the tuba. Your heart will soar as you listen to the updated score, which includes "Seventy-Six Beta-Blockers"; "O-Ho, the Amazon Package Is Arriving Via Next-Day Drone Service!"; and "Ya Got Trouble with a Capital 'T' and That Rhymes with 'B' and That Stands for Bipolar!" ♦

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

## RISE UP

Alex Timbers directs *“Joan of Arc,”* a musical call to arms for the Trump era.

BY REBECCA MEAD



FIVE ACTORS GATHERED in a room on Lafayette Street, in downtown Manhattan, to start rehearsing a new work for the Public Theatre, “*Joan of Arc: Into the Fire*.” Written by David Byrne, formerly of the Talking Heads, the show recast the enduring, improbable story of Joan—a teen-age girl in medieval France who experienced divine visions, led an army to defeat an occupying power, and was burned at the stake for heresy—as a rock musical that spoke to the current political moment.

It was early January, and, that morning, U.S. intelligence officials had arrived at Trump Tower to brief the President-elect, Donald Trump, on the findings of an investigation into the recent election, in which they had concluded that President Vladimir Putin, of Russia, had acted to insure the defeat of Hillary Clinton. Inauguration Day was looming, and the rehearsal room had a troubled mood that reflected more than the ordinary anxieties of creating a show.

The actors arranged four tables into

*Timbers specializes in offbeat revisionist fantasies about historical figures.*

a rectangle and sat down with Alex Timbers, the director of “*Joan of Arc*.” Timbers, who is thirty-eight, is tall and fine-featured. He wore a denim shirt and black jeans that hung off his lanky, slightly hunched frame. His hair is dark and thick, and he frequently runs a hand through it, like a Romantic poet on deadline.

Despite the air of disquiet, Timbers, who talks like a cool high-school teacher—lots of vocal fry, the repeated use of “awesome”—addressed the cast with rousing enthusiasm. He explained that, though the show had been in development for two years, it remained a work in progress. “I don’t think anything is sacred—we are going to be building this together,” Timbers said to the actors, all of whom were men except for Jo Lampert, a thirty-one-year-old newcomer, who was to play Joan.

Timbers presented a scale model of the stage design, which had been conceived by Chris Barreca. When built, the set would be black and austere, and filled with enormous L.E.D. screens. A staircase extended from wing to wing, and at center stage there was a vertiginous platform. The set was on a turntable, and as it revolved it represented everything from a cathedral to a prison tower. A six-piece rock band was to be installed, in cutout platforms, on the stairs. The music demonstrated Byrne’s facility in different genres, and included elements of pop, jazz, and reggae, though Timbers likened its predominant mood to the numinous Nordic rock of the band Sigur Rós.

Timbers planned to use few props onstage, but, in a corner of the rehearsal room, a cabinet contained items that could have been borrowed from the set of “Game of Thrones”: swords, goblets, a crown. Timbers invited the cast to play with the props as they attempted to straddle the fifteenth and the twenty-first centuries. “One of the keys to any successful musical is everyone telling the same story,” he said. “We are creating our own little world here, and while we are doing that we want to be sure that the things that excite us about it are the same things.”

To give the actors a sense of what excited him about the musical, Timbers turned to a text published in 1896: the preface of Mark Twain’s “Personal

*Recollections of Joan of Arc*,” a fictionalized retelling of her life. Timbers read aloud:

When we reflect that her century was the brutalest, the wickedest, the rottenest in history since the darkest ages, we are lost in wonder at the miracle of such a product from such a soil. She was truthful when lying was the common speech of men; she was honest when honesty became a lost virtue; she was a keeper of promises when the keeping of a promise was expected of no one; she gave her great mind to great thoughts and great purposes when other great minds wasted themselves upon pretty fancies or upon poor ambitions; she was modest, and fine, and delicate when to be loud and coarse might be said to be universal; she was full of pity when a merciless cruelty was the rule; she was steadfast when stability was unknown, and honorable in an age which had forgotten what honor was.

Lampert, who wears her dark hair in a spiky mullet, and has the long face and androgynous features of a Byzantine icon, stared ahead intently, her eyes brimming with tears. “Damn,” she whispered.

Timbers set the pages aside. “This is a show about faith and self-belief,” he said. “I think that, with the horrors of the context of today, and of 1425, it is really relevant.” He added, “Even the most unlikely individual can change the course of history through will and self-belief, and can make the impossible possible.”

A prolific director, Timbers has since his early twenties specialized in offbeat revisionist fantasies about historical figures. To make the past come alive, he presents it as a modern spectacle, with inventive use of light and video. The first significant work that he directed in New York, in 2003, was “President Harding Is a Rock Star.” Written by Kyle Jarrow, it focussed on Harding’s reputation as a corrupt adulterer, and promoted the theory that Harding died from eating poisoned crab procured by his spurned wife. The show concluded with a danse macabre between Harding and a giant crustacean.

Timbers was last at the Public in 2014, directing Byrne’s début musical, “Here Lies Love”—an exhilarating show, co-written with Fatboy Slim, that used disco music to tell the story of Imelda Marcos, the wife of the Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Timbers put the audience inside a simu-

lated night club and staged the action throughout the space, often on mobile platforms. The immersive drama enlisted members of the audience to help tell the story, by serving as mourners in a funeral march, for example, or as participants in a rally. The result was disconcerting: before theatregoers fully realized it, they were applauding the rise of a brutal kleptocrat.

Timbers’s début outing at the Public, in 2009, was “Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson,” a satirical musical about the first populist President. He wrote the script; Michael Friedman wrote the music and the lyrics. Six years before “Hamilton” recast the Founding Fathers as hip-hop strivers—and eight years before President Trump signalled his own historical allegiances by hanging a portrait of Jackson in the Oval Office—“Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson” reimagined Jackson as an emo rock star. (He was played, with brutish charisma, by Benjamin Walker.) For musical inspiration, Friedman listened to such overwrought bands as Dashboard Confessional; the play’s first song begins, “Why wouldn’t you ever go out with me in school?” Friedman told me that emo, which “is actually music that Alex listened to,” is “so emotional that it’s ridiculous, and so ridiculous that it’s emotionally affecting.” He went on, “I think this is the secret to Alex’s work—something becomes so ironic that it actually becomes true.”

The show was transferred to Broadway but closed after three months. It was only slightly ahead of its time: the opening number, “Populism, Yea, Yea,” featured angry citizens singing such lines as “Take a stand against the élite / They don’t care anything for us / And we will eat sweet democracy / And let them eat our dust.” With profane swagger, Jackson declared, “The American people deserve an alternative to croquet-playing cock-gobblers. I’m gonna fucking shit all over you guys with my brand of maverick egalitarian democracy.”

Oskar Eustis, the Public’s artistic director, said, “Alex recognized not just that populism was coming but the particular combination of ludicrous and dangerous that populism is. You can’t quite get a fix on the show—clearly it is critical, but it also understands and embraces what is attractive about that kind of populism.” The show’s satirical

tone had its detractors, however: Native American artists, and others, criticized it for insensitivity in its depiction of the genocidal Trail of Tears.

Eustis first encountered Timbers’s work in 2008, when Timbers wrote and directed an Off Off Broadway musical called “Dance Dance Revolution.” Loosely based on the Japanese video game of the same name, and set in a future in which dance has been outlawed, it had a cast of fifty-six; the theatre’s capacity was only ninety-nine people. “It was nuts, but there was a commitment to accessibility, and it was completely playful,” Eustis said. “Alex likes to take risks, but he does it in a way that is passionately concerned about the audience’s experience. He seduces them.”

Presenting “Joan of Arc” in the age of Trump gave Timbers’s task added urgency, Eustis said: “The question of resistance to oppression suddenly feels like it’s our daily bread. There is a need to say that legal authority and power are not the most important thing—that the most important thing is the power of conscience, of what we know is right, and that *that* is not just an internal matter. It is something that can lead a nation to rebel.”

ON JANUARY 15TH, in a large rehearsal space at the Public, Timbers and the cast began staging Joan’s defense of the city of Orléans. A scaffold had been set up to simulate the staircase set. He told his actors to imagine themselves as “British football fans” caught up in a “pub celebration—very aggressive, with something wild and dangerous about it.” David Byrne, in a bright-blue sweater, sat at a table, helping Timbers refine the storytelling.

In the fourteen-twenties, the English, having established control over the north of France, sought to capture Orléans and, from there, launch an assault on the southern half of the country, which was loyal to the French crown. With the help of their allies, the Burgundian French, the English forces lay siege to Orléans in 1428. Joan declared it her holy mission to defend the city, and the following year she led the loyalist French forces, known as the Armagnacs, to victory.

Timbers, a Yale graduate, is deeply steeped in history and politics—he

prefers nonfiction for his leisure reading—and he is well versed in dramatic theory. But he wears his learning lightly. Scott Brown, who co-wrote “Gutenberg! The Musical!,” which Timbers directed Off Broadway, in 2006, calls him “smart but not stuffy,” adding, “He is not a guy who is going to lead with his degree.”

When directing actors, Timbers often invokes pop culture to help them grasp the emotional resonance of a distant historical moment. At one point while guiding Kyle Selig, who was portraying the Dauphin of France as an amusingly callow figure, Timbers urged him to lean back on his gilded throne with his knees spread wide—an adolescent imagining himself as a gangster. “Yeah, you can go ‘Scarface,’” he said. He also worked with Sean Allan Krill, who was playing Bishop Cauchon. After Joan is captured by the English, Cauchon urges her to save her soul by declaring that she was lying about hearing messages from God; she initially capitulates, but then recants, which leads to her execution. Timbers observed to Krill that Cauchon’s horrified realization of the trial’s ramifications was his “Lance Ito moment.”

Timbers discussed how the Siege of Orléans should unfold onstage. He referred both to the patriotic oratory of Shakespeare’s “Henry V” and to the frenetic rhythms of battle in a *Nintendo* game. He placed Joan and her defenders downstage, and had the occupying force jeer at her loutishly from atop the scaffold staircase. The leader of the English forces, the Earl of Warwick, played by Terence Archie, sang with a sneer—“The whore! She speaks! The slut from the farm”—while his men fingered their swords and gestured crudely, singing, “These men? Your pimps! Who do you think you are?” Guided by the movement director, Steven Hoggett—who is best known for his work on “Black Watch,” a propulsive staging of the Iraq War—the English forces engaged the French in highly stylized combat.

During the battle, Joan is hit in the breast by an arrow—its flight through the air would be signalled by a whizzing sound cue. Jo Lampert practiced

crumpling in slow motion. She was carried offstage, apparently dead, her arms in a crucifixion pose. “She’s hit!” the English forces crowed. “We got her! She bleeds and she cries!” A few moments later, Joan miraculously reappeared atop the scaffold.

Timbers and Byrne had struggled with the characterization of Joan. “What makes her tricky as a musical-theatre protagonist is the way she is so driven,” Timbers said. Typically, protagonists

must overcome self-doubt, but Joan is galvanized from the start. The risk was that her story would feel static, but Timbers decided that Joan’s certainty could come off as thrillingly strange: “What makes her so exciting is that she is such a believer, and believes in herself and has faith in herself.”

In rehearsal, the part was being shaped to play to Lampert’s unusually flexible voice, which can shift from bluesy to pristine in an instant. The presentation of Joan would also capitalize on Lampert’s distinctive looks, which defy previous portrayals of Joan as a buxom warrior (the celebrated painting by Ingres) or as a gamine waif (Jean Seberg in Otto Preminger’s film “Saint Joan”). Lampert is five feet eight but weighs only a hundred and twenty-five pounds; she moves with a punkish slouch, as if her collar were perpetually turned up. Surrounded by ten tall, muscled men, she looked as if she had been plucked from a high-school track team and thrown into an N.F.L. game. Byrne’s music, which featured a number of ringing choral passages that would be amplified to fill the theatre with male voices, heightened the audience’s sense of Joan’s singularity, and of her vulnerability before the implacably masculine institutions of monarchy and Church.

Such gestures helped make Joan of Arc a more sympathetic figure for modern theatregoers, who might otherwise find her an alien presence. Steven Hoggett told me, “By today’s standards, she’d be a religious fundamentalist. She is strident and absolute, and death is beneath and away from her as she moves forward.” Joan of Arc was obsessed with taking her country back, and there have been many unsavory claimants to her

legacy—most recently, Marine Le Pen, the French right-wing nationalist leader. Lampert told me that she was determined not to present Joan simply “as a myth.” She said, “This was a real person in real circumstances, not someone written about just to provide us with hope through metaphor.”

But Lampert’s Joan is not an ordinary person: she is a rock star. Onstage, she asserts her dominance by straddling a microphone stand and, later, kicking one over. Byrne said, “There are certain gestures and movements, vocal things, that you can do onstage that are stirring to an audience. I, for the most part, try to avoid those things in performance—it seems manipulative—but in this case it is in service to the character. It gives me license to have her do those things I would never do myself.”

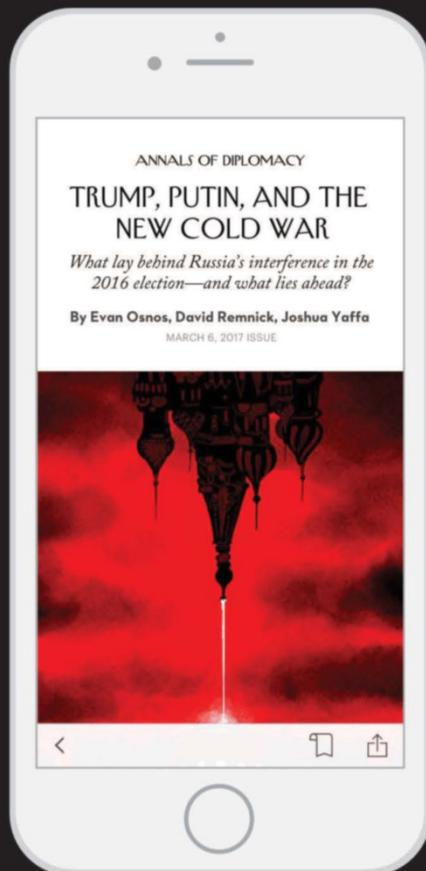
In “Joan of Arc,” Lampert goes through more costume changes than Lady Gaga at the Super Bowl: a leather motorcycle jacket, a skintight chain-mail shirt, a shiny armored jerkin. Timbers and Byrne decided that rock-concert motifs would convey Joan’s conviction and charisma in a way that made sense to contemporary audiences. Presenting Joan as a star, and the audience as her implicit fans, would also coax theatre-goers into believing in Joan’s rightness of purpose, at least while they sat in the darkened theatre.

Timbers is an aficionado of the rock-concert genre. “It is often where the cutting edge of design and staging is happening,” he told me. The set for “Rocky: The Musical,” which he directed on Broadway, in 2014, and which was also designed by Chris Barreca, employed a gantry structure that mimicked the set of Nine Inch Nails’s 2005 concert tour.

“Joan of Arc,” like “Here Lies Love,” is almost entirely sung, and, because pop-music lyrics are not particularly expository, the staging, the lighting, and the sound design must tell much of the story. In rehearsing the battle scene, Timbers directed the actors to train flashlights on the Earl of Warwick’s face when Joan appeared atop the scaffold, as if resurrected, to underline his fear and horror. The final staging has more than a touch of Grand Guignol: the audience first hears Joan’s avenging voice, apparently coming from nowhere. Then,



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aghast, the English spot her on an elevated platform at the rear of the stage, silhouetted against L.E.D. lights. Plucking an arrow from her armored breastplate and casting it down the stairs, Joan looks monumental and impregnable, somewhere between Nike of Samothrace and the Terminator.

**T**IMBERS IS NOT a director who is especially admired for the nuanced performances he elicits from actors. Nor is he celebrated for reinventing canonical works in innovative ways. Rather, he is best known for helping to generate new work that is unconventional in form and content; his shows often feel raw, improvisational, and energetic, even though this effect is achieved through highly controlled stagecraft. David Korins, the set designer for “Here Lies Love,” told me, “Some directors are great about helping writers, and being great with texts. Some are amazing with actors. Alex is an insightful thinker coupled with a modern-day P. T. Barnum. He has such a specific vision of what he wants his productions to *look* like—he sketches, and pulls research, and can talk intelligently about design.” Last year, Todd Haimes, the artistic director of the Roundabout Theatre Company, hired Timbers to direct an antic, steampunk revival of “The Robber Bridegroom,” a musical based on the Eudora Welty novella. Haimes said of Timbers, “I don’t know that he is necessarily the first choice for ‘Death of a Salesman’—I am sure he would do a beautiful job, but there are probably ten great directors who could direct that. There is probably only one great director who could direct ‘Bloody Bloody’ or ‘Here Lies Love.’”

Timbers’s breakthrough show, in 2003, was another cheeky revisionist biography: “A Very Merry Unauthorized Children’s Scientology Pageant,” which recounted the life of L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, as if it were a Nativity play. All the actors were between eight and twelve years old, and the set resembled a school gymnasium. When Timbers and his team received a letter from Scientology officials objecting to the production, they leaked

it to the *Times*. The paper subsequently gave the show an admiring review, describing it as “a cult-hit blueprint for a young generation that prefers its irony delivered with not a wink but a blank stare.”

Timbers often becomes involved in a show in its earliest conceptual stages: helping the writer of a musical come up with ideas, or imagining how to convert a film or a book into a stage production. For “Rocky: The Musical,” he devised a spectacular coup de théâtre: a full-sized boxing ring that slid out to extend over the first six rows of seats, displacing audience members onto the stage, where they became spectators to the show’s pugilistic climax.

His taste for new work was born partly of necessity. “People generally don’t get to direct, like, Chekhov or Tennessee Williams until they’re forty-five—there was some adage I heard that you have to have gray hair to direct,” he told me. “I was, like, ‘Wow, they don’t teach you *that* in college.’” But he is also temperamentally inclined to muck around with genre and form. In 2006, Timbers commissioned a friend of his from Yale, Elizabeth Meriwether—now the showrunner of “New Girl”—to write a play based on “Hedda Gabler.” The resulting show, “Heddatron,” featured robots as cast members. The machines, which were built by a feminist robotics collective, didn’t always work as intended, and Timbers incorporated their malfunctions into the production: sometimes a robot would run into a wall and stay there.



Michael Friedman, the “Bloody Bloody” composer, told me, “I remember arriving angry, because the concept seemed so stupid. Then I had a moment, near the beginning, where I had a revelation about ‘Hedda Gabler’ that was so pure and true, about how women are portrayed. I was, like, ‘Oh, I understand Ibsen now.’”

Timbers favors theatrical effects that do not hide their artificiality yet nonetheless have a powerful emotional impact. In 2012, he co-directed “Peter and the Starcatcher,” a play, by Rick Elice, that provided the backstory to “Peter Pan.” A ship’s rope was ingeniously transformed, through the actors’ manipula-

tions, into a porthole, a mirror, and the churning surface of the sea. Like “Bloody Bloody,” “Peter” began with a direct address to the audience. “I don’t think it’s a coincidence,” Timbers said. The idea was to “immediately kick down the footlights and say, ‘O.K., you’re here, you can see me—we’re all in this room together.’” (Timbers is directing a forthcoming Broadway adaptation of “Beetlejuice,” and he told me that he plans to embrace the mayhem-making potential of the title character, who “should be able to smash down the fourth wall and land in your lap, if necessary.”)

“Peter and the Starcatcher” transferred from a downtown theatre to Broadway, and ended up winning five Tony Awards. But Timbers has sometimes struggled on Broadway. “Rocky: The Musical” closed at a loss, after a six-month run. Last year, he was fired as the director of Disney’s “Frozen: The Musical,” which is being planned for Broadway. He was replaced by Michael Grandage, the veteran British director. Thomas Schumacher, the head of Disney Theatrical Productions, told me, diplomatically, “Alex is gigantically talented, but sometimes you get to a place where, creatively, you are not on the same page.”

Timbers isn’t at liberty to discuss “Frozen,” but he bristles at any implication that his success with avant-garde theatre might preclude his success in the mainstream. “I think it’s an easy narrative to say, ‘Oh, Alex does edgy, weird things and there isn’t always a place on Broadway for that stuff,’ ” he told me. “Off Off Broadway and Broadway have a lot more in common than people think. The greatest, most successful Broadway shows—be it ‘The Lion King’ or ‘Rent’—are all doing something formally experimental.”

**T**IMBERS’S EARLIEST influences were rock music, comedy, and movies. “I remember seeing this U2 concert when I was in high school,” he recalled. “They had this hanamichi”—a catwalk that extends into the audience—“and Bono and the Edge came out. The Edge had an acoustic guitar, and Bono sang ‘Starting at the Sun,’ and it was, like, ‘Wow.’ It was a huge gestalt shift.”

Theatre was of less interest. “I had seen theatre as this rarefied, élitist thing

that really didn't speak to much in my life," he said. Then, in 1993, he went to the Broadway production of "Tommy." He recalled, "It was in dialogue with popular culture—there were music-video visuals, there was cinematic staging, it was loud, and it felt brash and vital. It felt to me that it was important you were *there*—that the show couldn't have happened without the audience." Timbers, who was born in 1978, is too young to have seen the Talking Heads in concert. "But I have seen 'Stop Making Sense,' like, five times," he said. The film begins with Byrne walking onto a bare stage with a portable stereo. He plays a cassette tape, which turns out to contain the backing track to "Psycho Killer." Timbers said, "The theatrical engine of building the whole thing just from a person with a boom box—I have certainly thieved that many times in my own work."

Timbers grew up on the Upper East Side. His father was an investment manager; his mother worked in the legal department at Sotheby's. They divorced when Alex was in elementary school, and he lived with his mother, in the East Eighties. When he and two friends were in seventh grade, they created their own public-access TV sketch show, "The Shamu Review." Timbers recalled, "We would do restaurant reviews where we would have a sign that said 'Good Food?,' and we would go outside restaurants and hold it up and get reactions. We had a segment called 'Pyro Time,' when we would get a fish from Chinatown and a cork stick of dynamite, and blow it up, and play 'Carmina Burana' over it. It was irreverent and dumb, and kind of smart."

At the time, Timbers was a student at Buckley, a buttoned-up Manhattan private school for boys, but the school's focus on sports and competitiveness didn't suit him. He became friends with kids at other schools, and they more closely resembled the protagonists of Larry Clark's 1995 movie, "Kids," for which Timbers auditioned. Timbers said, "Growing up in New York, living alone with your mother, you grow up really quickly. You are out doing things at a younger age than anyone else is doing in the country. You fend for yourself and make your own friendship circles. You do drugs at an earlier age." (Timbers drew on his background when he helped



*"I appreciate the coffee, but have you had any luck getting a ladder?"*

• •

a tapeworm, which was played by a pipe cleaner. The kid ingests it, and it creates all this drama with his mom."

After ninth grade, Timbers chose to live with his father, his stepmother, and his two young half brothers, in the Chicago suburb of Lake Forest. He attended the local high school. "I had never gone to a co-ed school, and I had never had an experience out of the city, and I had never really had a conventional family life," he recalled. "Lake Forest was not the most diverse place in the world, but it was a very new experience to be in, like, a John Hughes suburb."

The school had its own television studio, and the students wrote, directed, and produced programming. "The first thing I made was when I got a tour of the local police department, and I made a music video to the Cypress Hill song 'Pigs,'" Timbers said. "It was in bad taste, but people couldn't believe the access I got." Timbers contributed to a student sketch-comedy show, and went on to run it. He recalled, "I did this whole emo thing, set to the Smashing Pumpkins, about a kid whose best friend is

Timbers threw himself into extracurricular activities, in part, because the family life he had sought in Illinois was upended by catastrophe: his half brothers suffered from a rare disease. His stepmother and his siblings spent Timbers's junior year pursuing medical treatments outside the state. Both boys died before reaching school age. "The tragedy and victories that one normally might have were amplified in my life," Timbers said. "That sort of duality became intertwined as I started to create work in high school. What came out of that was trying to find comedy in dark situations, and trying to find the subversive side of what might seem like sunny situations." Chekhov is among Timbers's favorite dramatists, for this very quality. "It's funny, funny, funny, and then it suddenly turns on a dime, and it's deeply sad," he said. "Those kinds of juxtapositions, to me, are really exciting."

Timbers entered Yale in 1997, and enrolled in the film program. But, as a fan of Tim Burton and David Lynch, he was dismayed by how theoretical the

classes were, and gravitated instead toward the theatre program. As a senior, he directed a memorably Brechtian production of “How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying.” Aaron Lemon-Strauss, one of Timbers’s contemporaries, was in the audience. “It was classic Alex Timbers—having fun, singing songs—but every once in a while there would be these super-subversive elements,” Lemon-Strauss recalled. “During one of the big dance numbers, the stage went black, and the light went on the audience, and the actors stopped and stared at the audience for laughing at women being objectified.”

In a class on experimental theatre, Timbers studied videos of productions by Richard Maxwell, Robert Wilson, and the Wooster Group. He and some classmates were inspired to create a dance work, called “Une Pièce de Mouvement Historique avec le Géométrie,” that told the history of mathematics through the lives of Copernicus, Thomas Jefferson, and Le Corbusier. “We wore sherbet-colored pants, and wifebeaters, and the music was all Steve Reich and Philip Glass,” Timbers recalled. The show lasted only twenty minutes, but audiences were told to arrive half an hour early, for a reading period: Timbers and his friends had created an elaborate study packet. “The show was like a Xerox of a Xerox—a confused parody of something we had never seen,” Timbers said. “But it was also a

way of trying out avant-garde tropes.”

After college, Timbers returned to New York. He and a friend from Yale, Jacob Grigolia-Rosenbaum, presented a production of “The Fever,” Wallace Shawn’s lacerating 1990 satire about liberal complacency, in the homes of friends and acquaintances. “We went and did it in every Upper East Side living room that we could get access to, and said, ‘Invite your friends,’ ” Timbers said. “Jacob performed this ninety-minute monologue about going to another country and seeing poverty. Meanwhile, people were sitting around drinking wine and eating cheese.”

In 2002, Timbers founded a downtown theatre company, Les Frères Corbusier, with Lemon-Strauss and Jenn Rogien, another Yale grad. The goal was to make absurd, experimental work, often with found material. Rogien, who is now a costume designer, said, “Alex had this unique approach—taking these somewhat dry and boring historically grounded figures and making something compelling and provocative out of them.”

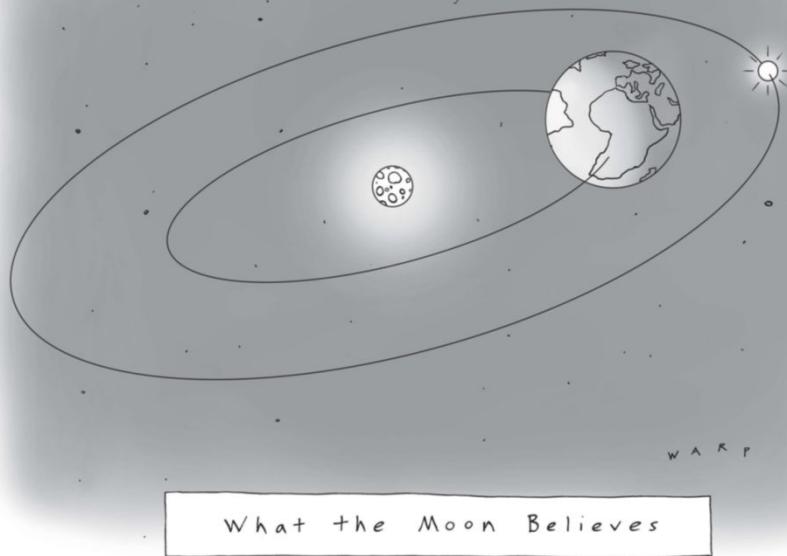
Timbers rented an apartment in the theatre district, next door to the Walter Kerr Theatre, which was showing “Proof”—an intelligent but staid play. “My apartment, meanwhile, was filled with all these fluorescent tubes and old TVs and weird disco balls—all the stuff we would use for downtown shows,” Timbers recalled. “I became the person

you called when you needed a fog machine.”

He still lives in the theatre district, though several years ago he moved into a sleek high-rise overlooking the Hudson River. The apartment is decorated with a designer’s eye for color—gray furnishings, orange accents—and with ironic postmodern touches. In the living room, there is a plaster bust of Caesar Augustus, painted to look as if it were made of aluminum; in the bedroom hang two oversized photographs of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, which were salvaged from an exhibition at the New-York Historical Society and repurposed for a Les Frères show. Timbers acknowledged that, during his dating years, they were an interesting talking point. He now lives with his girlfriend of five years, Rebekah Melocik, a musical-theatre lyricist who also teaches chess to children. Their commitment was sealed after she pulled an eight-month-long prank, pretending to stalk Timbers in the guise of an obsessed admirer. “I thought it was weirdly loving and thoughtful that someone would put so much time into screwing with your reality,” Timbers told me.

**I**N 2006, DAVID BYRNE attended “Hell House,” which Les Frères presented at St. Ann’s Warehouse. Timbers created an immersive house of horrors by following the instructions of a “scare them straight” kit, which evangelical churches use to frighten parishioners about the consequences of homosexuality and other “sins.” Byrne told me, “‘Hell House’ was found theatre—‘Let’s take something and represent it in a new context, and amp up the staging a bit, but not do anything else to it.’ To me, that was genius. You knew that Alex had a point of view, but for the most part he stayed out of it. It was left for you to go, ‘Oh, my God.’ ”

“I was very interested in the Brechtian idea of negative argument,” Timbers said. “So much theatre about politics is hagiography or a polemic.” He sought not just to lampoon historical figures, or to valorize them, but to create an uneasy sympathy. “Boozy,” another Les Frères show, featured Robert Moses as a messianic figure, and cast Jane Jacobs, the anti-development advocate, as the villain of the piece.



"The idea was that, by arguing the opposite of the truth, you unlock something, and see something in a new way," Timbers said. "The thing that made you feel that the piece worked was not a good review. It was when someone came back a month later and said, 'I read "The Power Broker" because of you.'"

"Joan of Arc" represents a significant shift in strategy for Timbers, because he plays Joan's heroism straight: her saintliness is never subverted. As rehearsals began, he told me, "I'm starting to get more skeptical of satire in musical theatre." He added that "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson," with its irreverent levity, now feels to him like a show conceived by a young man. "What I love about 'Joan of Arc' is that it's hugely hot-blooded and emotional," he said.

In early February, Timbers and his team began technical rehearsals at the Public's Newman Theatre, where "Joan of Arc" was to be performed. Timbers, in a baseball cap, shared extremely precise notes on sound and lighting, which he'd scribbled on a legal pad. Jacob Grigolia-Rosenbaum, Timbers's friend from Yale, told me about a night when he and Timbers went dancing in San Diego with the cast of a show: "There was this totally spectacular d.j. performance, that had this incredible lighting design—it was something Alex had never seen before. So while everyone was jamming to the music Alex turns on his phone and is recording the effect of the light. To see that pure delight in the visual mastery—to cease dancing, and to record the whole *light plot*—that reveals a lot about what gets him out of bed."

Inside the Newman Theatre, Timbers focussed on a scene in which Joan is inducted into a company of French soldiers through a series of gruelling physical exercises. Timbers stood in the auditorium adjusting the actors' positions—five inches to the side here, thirty degrees to the right there—to create the desired tableaux. With a week to go before previews began, major adjustments were still in order. Bright side lighting was casting the set in unattractive relief. "It looks like scenery we cobbled together—we either need to embrace that or clean it up and make it look monolithic," Timbers declared. The cos-

tumes were also being tinkered with: Timbers didn't like the Dauphin's cape, which was in blue crushed velvet. "It needs to be like the cape Macklemore wore at the MTV awards," he said, referring to a matador outfit that the rapper wore in 2013. "This is a little too Henry VIII."

Previews began less than a month after Inauguration Day, and during the following weeks Timbers began to allude more and more directly to the political drama unfolding outside the theatre's walls. As audience members filed in, they were confronted by a banner, hung across the stage, bearing the words that Mitch McConnell, the Senate Majority Leader, had recently used to stifle the dissent of Senator Elizabeth Warren: "She was warned; she was given an explanation; nevertheless, she persisted." At the start of the show, a video montage of protest imagery rolled back the years from 2017 to the fourteen-twenties: it began with photographs of the Women's March and ended with woodcuts representing the Siege of Orléans. Timbers imbued the opening moments of the show with a sense of gloom and defeat. Ten male actors, dressed in contemporary work clothes, delivered a chorus of hopelessness in the face of the Hundred Years' War and, by implication, of the Trump Administration.

Timbers had expected the show to be opening at the start of a Hillary Clinton Presidency. He had told me, "I thought the show would be hopeful, and now I'm hoping it stands chest-proud, as the wind blows against it." The violence exerted against Joan, and her grim struggle with political opponents, now has an added resonance. Twice in the show, Joan is grabbed by the pussy—she is examined to determine if she is a virgin, as happened in historical fact. This may be the first musical to incorporate into its stage directions the fondling of a medical speculum.

Although the show is Timbers's most sincere production, his gift for comedy does not go to waste. The institutional forces that conspire to destroy Joan are presented with gleeful mockery. The French nobles are effete and opportu-

nistic, and serve an unworthy monarch: at Timbers's request, the Dauphin's cape has been altered to include a hoodie with dangling white drawstrings. A phalanx of dancing clerics, in mitres and purple-and-gold tunics, suggest a papal conclave performing backup at a Prince concert. And Joan's moment of triumph—the crowning of the Dauphin in the cathedral at Rheims—is enacted with goofy exuberance. French courtiers twirl and toss flags like oversized cheerleaders, dancing in front of L.E.D.-generated stained-glass windows.

Such moments throw into relief the harrowing culmination of Joan's short life, and the violence of her end. In one preview that I saw, a camera installed on the lip of the stage filmed Lampert's face during the trial, and projected the image onto a screen behind her: drenched in harsh white light, Lampert looked both haggard and unbroken. The effect conjured up the jumbotron simulcast of a pop star in a stadium concert, or of a political figure at a convention. By framing Lampert's face in tight closeup, Timbers was also alluding to a cinematic Joan of Arc: Renée Jeanne Falconetti, the star of Carl Theodor Dreyer's 1928 silent film. The staging turned Joan into a populist leader, a sacrificial victim, and an icon of resistance: an urgently contemporary figure demanding an immediate response. Two weeks before opening night, Timbers sent me an e-mail: "More and more, it feels like the show is sitting in dialogue with 'tragedy of the intellect' plays, like Brecht's 'Galileo,' 'Coriolanus,' or Ibsen's 'Enemy of the People.' It is about an individual who knows what is right in a time when it would be easier to be silent."

At one point, Timbers told me, "I always want that kind of pact you make with the audience." With "Joan of Arc," he was determined to stir theatregoers, and he kept imagining himself as someone watching it for the first time. "What, when I leave the theatre, do I want to be *feeling*?" he asked me. "Do I want to take action? Is it 'I want to look up Joan on Wikipedia'? Or is it 'I want to start an organization?' That's the kind of stuff I am thinking about." ♦





THE POLITICAL SCENE

# TROLLING THE PRESS CORPS

*The Trump Administration disrupts the daily briefing.*

BY ANDREW MARANTZ

**I**N NORMAL TIMES, White House press briefings make for boring television. Robert Gibbs, Jay Carney, and Josh Earnest, the three generic-looking white guys who served as successive press secretaries under President Barack Obama, could walk unmolested through the streets of most American cities. Only on rare occasions was a clip from one of their briefings—for example, a testy exchange between Carney and Jonathan Karl, of ABC News, debating the logistics of Obamacare enrollment—remarkable enough to make headlines.

President Trump seems to have no tolerance for boring television. His press secretary, Sean Spicer, now a recurring character on “Saturday Night Live,” is often tongue-tied, enraged, or both. Spicer’s briefings, broadcast live on c-SPAN, are among the most highly rated programs on daytime TV, beating out “General Hospital” and “The Bold and the Beautiful.” On major networks, many hours are devoted to nightly exegeses of Spicer’s serial self-contradictions, and to Sunday-morning sermons about how he is imperilling the First Amendment. On YouTube, accounts with names such as Trump Mafia and Based Patriot repost Spicer’s briefings, and others post exultant compilations of the “spiciest” moments, overlaying his rebukes of reporters with images of flames and chili peppers.

The James S. Brady Press Briefing Room, in the West Wing, has seven rows of seven seats. The Associated Press, Reuters, and the biggest TV networks have reserved seats in the front row; blogs like Politico and Real Clear Politics are near the middle; BuzzFeed and the BBC are in the back. The seating chart is the purview of the White House Correspondents’ Association, an independent board of journalists who, with the sombre secrecy of a papal conclave, assess news organizations according to factors such as regularity of coverage

and centrality to the national discourse.

There are also correspondents who might be called floaters—those who have White House credentials but no assigned seat. Some floaters work for outlets that are too new to have been included in the most recent seating chart; others work for outlets that are marginal or disreputable. When press briefings are half empty, floaters can find vacant seats. In the early days of the Trump Administration, when each day’s briefing is oversubscribed, floaters pack the aisles, angling for a spot visible from the podium. The paradigmatic example of a floater is Raghbir Goyal, an amiable, somewhat absent-minded man in his sixties. Goyal claims to represent the *India Globe*, a newspaper that, as far as anyone can tell, is defunct. Nevertheless, he has attended briefings since the Carter Administration, and has asked so many questions about Indo-American relations that his name has become a verb. “To Goyal”: to seek out a reporter who is likely to provide a friendly question, or a moment of comic relief. All press secretaries get cornered, and all have, on occasion, Goyaled their way out. But no one Goyals like Spicer.

Until recently, the more established White House correspondents have regarded floaters as a harmless distraction—the equivalent of letting a batboy sit in the dugout. Now they are starting to see the floaters as an existential threat. “It’s becoming a form of court-packing,” one White House correspondent told me. Outlets that have become newly visible under the Trump Administration include One America News Network, which was founded in 2013 as a right-wing alternative to Fox News; LifeZette, a Web tabloid founded in 2015 by Laura Ingraham, the radio commentator and Trump ally; Townhall, a conservative blog started by the Heritage Foundation; the Daily Caller, co-founded in 2010 by Tucker Carlson, now a Fox News host; and the

enormously popular and openly pro-Trump Breitbart News Network. Most of the White House correspondents from these outlets are younger than thirty. “At best, they don’t know what they’re doing,” a radio correspondent told me. “At worst, you wonder whether someone is actually feeding them softball questions.” He added, “You can’t just have a parade of people asking, ‘When and how do you plan to make America great again?’”

For years, the first question of each press briefing has usually gone to the Associated Press, whose reporters sit in the middle of the front row. In Spicer’s first briefing, on January 21st, which lasted five and a half minutes, he uttered several verifiable falsehoods—“This was the largest audience to ever witness an Inauguration, period”—then left without taking any questions. For the first question of his second briefing, he called on the *New York Post*, whose reporter, sitting in the fifth row, was clearly surprised. He asked, “When will you commence the building of the border wall?” In Spicer’s third briefing, his first question went to a reporter from *Life-Zette*, who wondered why the Administration hadn’t taken a harder line on immigration. Many of Spicer’s early briefings were unusually short—about half an hour, with ten minutes of prepared remarks in the beginning. He often escapes from the podium without facing many tough questions from mainstream journalists. (This month, perhaps hoping to foreclose public scrutiny, or to starve “Saturday Night Live” of material, Spicer did his briefings off-camera for a week.)

Major Garrett, the chief White House correspondent for CBS News, sits in the front row. “Historically, the way the briefing room has been organized is, the closer you are, the farther you’ve come,” Garrett said. “And the person at the podium has tended to recognize that.” More



*The White House is calling on young correspondents from far-right Web sites, to the exclusion of established reporters.*



*"Well, it looks like someone had a nice vacation."*

experienced reporters, he said, "ask questions that are sharper, more informed. Not, 'What's your message today?' Not, 'Here's a paintbrush—would you paint us a pretty picture?'" If established reporters got fewer questions relative to the floaters, I asked, would this be good or bad for democracy? "We'll see," Garrett said. "We're engaged in a grand experiment."

A TV correspondent told me that calling on front-row reporters first isn't just about appealing to their egos: "It's also about maintaining a sense of predictability, a sense that eventually the substantive questions will be answered. Throwing that into chaos—'Maybe you'll get a question, if you shout loud enough, who knows?'—makes everyone desperate and competitive and makes us look like a bunch of braying jackals. Which I don't think is an accident."

About once a week, the walls behind the lectern are turned inside-out, revealing built-in screens from which reporters around the country can ask questions by video link. This is another Spicer innovation—the "Skype seats." Recent Skype questions were allotted to a Trump

supporter and newspaper owner in Kentucky, who asked about reducing coal-mining regulations, and to a talk-radio host named Lars Larson, who addressed the press secretary, an officer in the Navy Reserve, as "Commander Spicer," before asking whether the Administration would privatize federally protected parkland. During one of these sessions, Jared Rizzi, a White House correspondent for Sirius XM, tweeted, "Skypephant (n.) — super-friendly questioner used to burn up briefing time through the magic of early-aughts technology." "I certainly appreciate the purpose of bringing geographic diversity into the room," Rizzi told me. "I also appreciate ideological diversity. I don't appreciate diversity of journalistic practice."

A longtime Washington reporter from a mainstream network echoed that sentiment. "I don't mind them bringing in conservative voices that they feel have been underrepresented," he said. "Personally, I don't even mind them fucking with the front-row guys, the Jonathan Karls of the world. Those guys are a smug little cartel, and it's fun to watch them squirm, at least for a little while. But at

what point does it start to delegitimize the whole idea of what happens in that room? When does it cross the line into pure trolling?"

ONE SUNDAY AFTERNOON in February, Lucian Wintrich was in his studio apartment in the East Village, washing down a mouthful of vitamins with a lukewarm takeout latte. He was leaving for Washington, D.C., within the hour. "I'm a bit hungover, I'm sorry to report," he said. "Hardly the ideal way to make my grand D.C. entrance, but so be it." He sent a text to his boyfriend, lit a cigarette, and started to pack. His walls were covered with framed art, including a line drawing of a woman, gagged and strapped to an imaginary instrument of sexual torture, and photographs of several seminude young men wearing "Make America Great Again" hats, which were from Wintrich's "Twinks 4 Trump" series. "Good art should be transgressive," he said. "These days, it seems, the best way to be transgressive is simply to be a white, male, proudly pro-American conservative."

Wintrich, who is twenty-eight and has no professional training in journalism, was on his way to Washington to join the White House press corps. "I can only imagine what they're going to make of me," he said, smiling impishly and rolling his eyes. A few weeks earlier, at a pre-Inauguration party called the DeploraBall, I had spent a portion of the evening chatting with Wintrich, one of several far-right social-media stars in attendance. At one point, he excused himself to make an announcement from the stage: "We've had eight miserable years of people in the White House press corps—CNN, BuzzFeed, Huffington Post—writing articles" about President Obama, such as "The Best 80 Times That I Wanted to Jerk Off to Our President." "This bias would soon be rectified. "We've been in contact with people in the new Administration, and ... I'm going to be ... the youngest, gayest correspondent in the White House in history!" A cheer went up from the crowd as the announcement was made, followed by a chant: "Real news! Real news!"

Wintrich, a slim, good-looking brUNET, grew up in Pittsburgh. At eighteen, when he enrolled at Bard College, he was a standard-issue progressive.

By his junior year, he had become a Reaganite. "I was incredibly annoyed by the P.C. culture on campus, being told what not to say," he said. "Plus, I'll admit, I've always had a contrarian streak." He moved to New York, where he was a "creative" by day and a "party host" by night, both jobs that are not quite as glamorous as their euphemistic titles imply. A "creative" works at an advertising agency. (Wintrich claims that his former agency fired him for his political views, but that he can't elaborate because they settled out of court.) A "party host" is paid a few hundred dollars to show up at a club, invite a coterie of attractive friends, and spend an evening being conspicuously charming. "I had a good run, for a few years, as a darling of the artsy New York gay scene," Wintrich told me. "Then I came out as pro-Trump, and all those bitches turned against me."

Last summer, at a Gays for Trump party at the Republican National Convention, Wintrich met several of the country's most effective right-wing propagandists, including Jim Hoft, a fifty-six-year-old blogger who lives in St. Louis. Since 2004, Hoft has run the Gateway Pundit, whose posts are often picked up by the Drudge Report and distributed widely through Facebook. Recent Gateway Pundit headlines include "Feral Muslim Migrants Shout 'Allah Akbar', Attack Police in France" and "Breaking: Creepy New Video Released of Joe Biden Groping Little Girls." During the Presidential campaign, the Gateway Pundit received more than a million unique visitors a day, roughly on a par with *The Weekly Standard*.

Hoft and Wintrich became friends, and Wintrich began writing for the site. His beat there might be described, generously, as media criticism—or, less generously, as a series of broadsides in a dirty culture war, with emotional cogency emphasized over empirical coherence. After BuzzFeed ran a story accusing the Gateway Pundit, among other right-wing blogs, of using "alternative facts," Wintrich wrote a post headlined, misleadingly, "Buzzfeed Admits Liberal 'Fake News' No Longer Works—Points To Gateway Pundit as News of Future."

Wintrich was taking the bus to D.C. because, he explained, as a fiscal con-

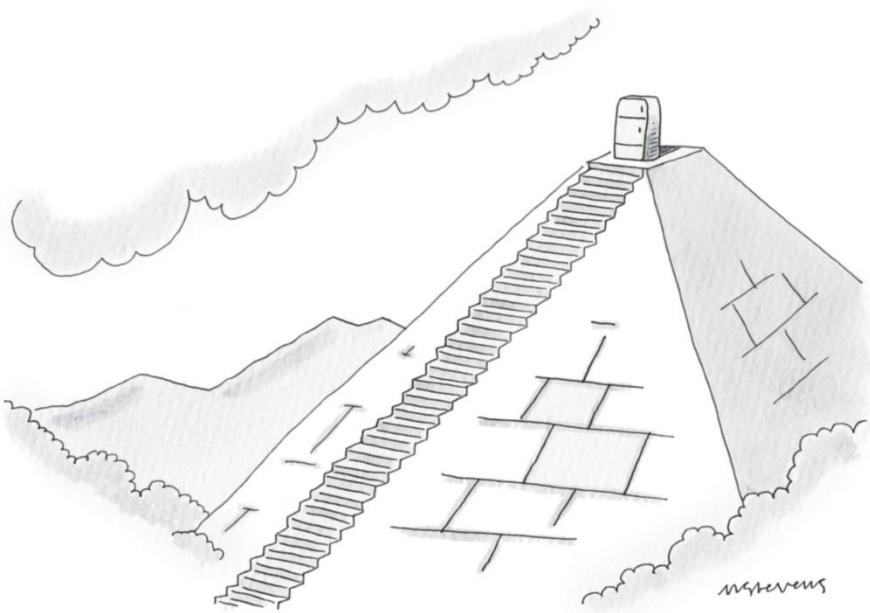
servative he couldn't bring himself to support Amtrak. He had packed an Yves Saint Laurent blazer, three Hermès ties, and a bottle of Dior Eau Sauvage. "I've got my first few outfits all lined up, and, I have to say, they're extremely cute," he said. On his phone, he reviewed a draft of a contract formalizing his employment with the Gateway Pundit. In a previous version of the contract, he said, "there was a sentence about 'Employee must maintain professional behavior at all times.' I called Jim and asked, 'Does this mean I shouldn't troll liberals anymore?' and he went, 'Oh, we'd better just take that line out.'

Wintrich intended to spend the bus ride catching up on recent news and drafting questions for his first press briefing. Instead, he opened his laptop, which is decorated with a Barry Goldwater sticker, and binge-watched several episodes of the animated sitcom "King of the Hill." He didn't seem to take the news-gathering aspect of his new job too seriously; more to the point, he didn't seem to consider taking the news seriously to be part of his job. "The main goal will be to draw attention to the ridiculous hypocrisy of the liberal mainstream media and to push back against them," he said. No one in the Trump Administration had coordinated this plan with him, he added; he saw it as his patriotic duty. The media, he said, "lambastes Trump no matter what he

does. Everyone knows Obama had a bigger crowd at his Inauguration. Literally, who gives a shit? It's just pretension and condescension, on the media's part, to make a big deal of it." Wintrich planned to move to D.C. as soon as he found an apartment. He relayed what a friend who also works in conservative media had recently told him: "You were brought in to troll the press corps, and you'd better troll hard." For a moment, Wintrich looked overwhelmed. Then he opened his eyes wide, took a deep breath, and shrugged. "Let's see what happens," he said.

**A**NDREW BREITBART, Stephen Bannon's collaborator in right-wing tabloid journalism and the founder of Breitbart News, often reiterated a maxim: "Politics is downstream from culture." When normal voters assess, say, a complex piece of legislation, they are unlikely to read the bill itself; more likely, they will base their opinions on how the bill is portrayed by their friends and Facebook friends, by celebrities, and in the media. In his 2011 memoir, Breitbart summed up his position, writing, "The left wins because it controls the narrative. The narrative is controlled by the media. . . . I am at war to gain back control of the American narrative."

After Breitbart's death, in 2012, Bannon became the general of that war, and



DIET PLAN OF THE GODS

neither time nor power has tempered his view. "It's going to get worse every day for the media," Bannon said last month, at CPAC, the annual conference of the American Conservative Union. "They're corporatist, globalist media that are adamantly opposed to an economic nationalist agenda like Donald Trump has.... If you think they're gonna give you your country back without a fight, you are sadly mistaken." According to the *Washington Post*, Bannon once included that paper, the *Times*, and NPR on a list of "enablers" of Islamist jihad. He now refers to the media, with monotonous insistence, as "the opposition party."

Trump also paints his relationship with the media as one of mutual antagonism, but it's actually closer to codependency. For decades, he has derided critical press coverage about him as deceitful or unfair, yet he eagerly consumed it, participated in it, and profited from it. "I read a lot," he recently told the journalist Michael D'Antonio, adding, "When I say I read a lot, I'm talking about current reading of the press and the media." During last year's Republican debates, when Trump stood onstage flanked by governors and senators, many pundits noted that he was one of the few Presidential candidates with no political experience.

But, if a Presidential campaign is viewed as a self-branding contest that plays out across TV, print, and social media, then Trump had a far more impressive track record than any of his opponents.

Trump's recent excoriations of the press—"The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!"—have been consistent with the rhetoric he used throughout his campaign. Last May, he held a press conference at Trump Tower, during which he repeatedly maligned the assembled reporters as "sleazy" and "dishonest."

"I think you've set a new bar today for being contentious with the press corps,

kind of calling us losers to our faces and all that," David Martosko, of the *Daily Mail*, said. "Is this what it's going to be like covering you if you're President?"

"Yeah, it is," Trump responded. Such clashes with the media, both in person and online, may have been motivated by Trump's feeling that he was being underestimated as a candidate. Yet he also seemed to be operating on several overlapping assumptions: that an arbitrary exercise of power would make him look strong; that he would benefit from setting up the mainstream media, one of



*Lucian Wintrich is one of the new White House correspondents.*

the most disliked institutions in the country, as a foil; that he could lie more effectively if he continued to assault the very notion of facticity; and, perhaps most important, that conflict boosts ratings.

Just a few weeks into the tenure of the first reality-star President, the drama in the White House is already at mid-season-cliffhanger levels. John Roberts, who covered the White House for CBS News, then went to CNN, and is now the White House correspondent for Fox News, told me, "I've seen tension before between the press and the Administration, but I've never seen such constant tension." Omarosa Manigault, a forty-three-year-old businesswoman, was once best known for her not-here-to-make-

friends persona on "The Celebrity Apprentice." ("Nobody likes you but me, Omarosa," Trump told her, in its first episode.) In a "Frontline" interview last June, Manigault predicted that, after the election, "every critic, every detractor, will have to bow down to President Trump." Last month, in the hallway outside Spicer's office, Manigault confronted April Ryan, the White House correspondent for the American Urban Radio Networks. According to Ryan, Manigault "got in my face," threatened her, and indicated that the Administration was keeping "dossiers" on journalists they distrusted, including Ryan. Manigault, asked by the *Washington Post* about the incident, responded with an e-mail that read, "My comment: Fake news!"

She was echoing her boss's favorite new meme. In his keynote address at CPAC, Trump said, "We are fighting the fake news. It's fake, phony, fake." He singled out CNN, "the Clinton News Network," before adding, "And I love the First Amendment. Nobody loves it better than me." Two and a half hours later, Spicer held an off-camera meeting in his office. Reporters from Breitbart and the *Washington Times* were invited; those from CNN, Politico, and the *New York Times* tried to enter the

room and were rebuffed, presumably in retaliation for their outlets' recent reporting on Trump's links to Russia. Last December, a Politico reporter asked Spicer whether, as press secretary, he would ban reporters from organizations he didn't like. "We have a respect for the press when it comes to the government, that that is something that you can't ban an entity from," Spicer said. "That's what makes a democracy a democracy versus a dictatorship."

Spicer's skepticism of the press goes back to 1993, when he was a senior at Connecticut College. An article in the student newspaper, about smoking policies on campus, accurately cited his work on student government but referred to

him as Sean Sphincter. “Maybe I am not all that familiar with the production of a ‘newspaper,’ but I am really not sure how this can be explained as unintentional,” Spicer wrote in a letter to the paper’s editors. “The First Amendment does uphold the right free speech [sic] and a free press, which I respect, however this situation goes beyond the bounds of free speech. . . . If the paper is indeed in the habit of using professional standards, maybe they should start to write and report like professionals.”

In past Administrations, the President has usually been too busy with matters of state to hang on his press secretary’s every word. This is one of the main reasons that press briefings exist. In the nineteenth century, most Presidents briefed reporters themselves, on an infrequent, ad-hoc basis. By the nineteen-twenties, doling out information had become a full-time job, and Herbert Hoover became the first President to hire a secretary whose responsibilities were solely press-related.

President Trump, by most accounts, is rarely too busy to watch TV, especially when he is the topic. “Look at his daily schedule, and you’ll notice how few events are held between 1 and 2 p.m.,” the radio correspondent told me. This is the hour during which Spicer almost always conducts his briefings. The correspondent continued, “I sometimes feel like I’m too busy to go to the briefings, and going to them is my job. The thought that the President of the United States might take the time to sit through an entire briefing, much less all of them, is, frankly, mind-boggling.” Another correspondent pointed out how often press aides deliver notes to Spicer while he’s at the lectern, and how obediently Spicer seems to respond to the notes’ directives, cutting a response short or abruptly ending a briefing. The reigning theory is that the notes are transcribed messages from the President, watching live from elsewhere in the building.

IN WASHINGTON, WINTRICH checked into the Hay-Adams Hotel, which is situated a block away from the White House and is a favorite place for D.C. insiders to see and be seen (although perhaps not quoted—the lower-level bar is called Off the Record). There he met up with his boss, Jim Hoft, who would

accompany him into the briefing room the next day, and with two filmmakers from Chicago, who planned to document their arrival. “I hate travelling, but I had to be here for this,” Hoft said. “The Gateway Pundit, this blog I started in my basement, made it all the way to the fucking White House. Are you kidding me? This is gonna be so epic!”

Hoft told me that, shortly after the election, he e-mailed “Trump’s people, and they encouraged us to apply” for press credentials. He didn’t specify which people, but he has known Bannon, now Trump’s top aide, for years, and Spicer tweeted a link to a Gateway Pundit story, about voter fraud, as far back as 2012. (The story turned out to be false.) From the hotel, Wintrich e-mailed Hope Hicks, Trump’s director of strategic communications, and got a response within three minutes. “She’s incredible,” Wintrich said. “And gorgeous, obviously. I hope I can convince her to be my friend.”

Over dinner at a nearby steakhouse, Hoft and Wintrich brainstormed about what they might ask the next day. “Just make sure it has ‘fake news’ in it, Lucian,” Hoft said, passing him a notepad. “Every question you ask with the words ‘fake news,’ you get a ten-dollar bonus. We’ll add that to your contract.”

Wintrich, sipping a Martini, jotted a few notes. “Sean! Over here, Sean!” he said, pretending to raise his hand. “In the past month alone, there have been at least twenty fake-news stories in the failing *New York Times*. Does fake news like this get in the way of the President’s ability to proceed on policy?”

Hoft cackled loudly enough to startle a woman at a nearby table. “That’s fucking hilarious,” he said. “Should we do something about ‘S.N.L.’ maybe?”

“A follow-up, Sean, if I may?” Wintrich said. “Do you think that the failing show ‘Saturday Night Live’ will be cancelled, or can it be made great again?”

“That’s hard-core,” Jeremy Segal, one of the filmmakers, said.

“Genius,” Hoft said. He finished his steak, ordered a slice of banana cream pie, and asked Wintrich whether he wanted another Martini. “Lucian, when we’re out together, I pay for everything. You know that, right?”

“That’s very kind of you,” Wintrich said.

Andrew Marcus, the other filmmaker,

said, “The big decision you have to make is how much of a troll you’re willing to be.”

“He’s *there* to troll,” Hoft said.

For a moment, Wintrich seemed to get cold feet. “Should we have a couple of backup questions that are specifically about policy?” he asked, tentatively.

“Policy schmololicy,” Hoft said.

The next morning, at the hotel, Wintrich’s hair was fashionably mussed, and he wore a navy suit and a tie printed with elephants in several pastel colors. Hoft, who is tall and blond, was in a black suit and a yellow Trump-brand tie. They had just learned that Spicer’s daily briefing had been cancelled. Instead, President Trump would host a joint press conference with Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada, who was at the White House for a state visit. “We’re scrapping the questions we worked on last night and finding ways to go after Trudeau instead,” Wintrich told me. “For instance, Trudeau apparently loved Castro. *Fawned* over him.”

Hoft, sitting at an antique wooden desk before an open laptop, read from the statement that Trudeau had delivered after Fidel Castro’s death: “‘The Cuban people had a deep and lasting affection for El Comandante.’ Is this a fucking joke?” Then, on his computer, he clicked on a headline: “Trump Claims America Should Never Have Given Canada Its Independence.” The post, on a site called the Burrard Street Journal, purported to quote a Trump tweet that included the hashtag #MakeCanadaAmericanAgain. “Is this real?” Hoft said. “I follow the news. I feel like I would have heard about this.” It seemed obvious that the Burrard Street Journal—whose logo is “BS Journal,” and whose other top headlines included “Alex Jones Selected to Host White House Correspondents’ Dinner”—was a news-satire site. But Hoft spent several minutes vacillating. He Googled “Make Canada American Again” and saw that no mainstream papers—the kind that he and the President had taken to calling “fake news”—had picked up the story. “It must be bullshit,” he said. “God, I hate bullshit sites.”

Outside the hotel, Wintrich lit a cigarette for the walk to the White House. As he and Hoft lined up at a Secret Service checkpoint, waiting to

be issued gray temporary passes, several correspondents wearing red "hard passes" were waved past the line. "Hard pass" is one of many press-corps shibboleths. "Pool," "spray," "gaggle," "lid": until you learn the definitions, they have the cumulative effect of making you feel as if you'd slipped into a "His Girl Friday" parody, with hardboiled journalists speaking in nonsense colloquialisms. A hard pass is a status symbol, allowing a White House staffer to gauge a reporter's seniority with one quick glance clavicle-ward. You can also take it home, whereas the temporary passes have to be dropped through a metal slot on the way out, an infantilizing gesture reminiscent of returning a school hall pass.

Few of Trump's press staffers had any previous experience, and the logistics were in disarray. "There's an adjustment period with any new Administration," a producer from a foreign news service told me, as we waited at the security checkpoint. "But with this one it can be hard to tell what's just incompetence and what's them intentionally messing with us."

EVEN ON DAYS when no televised briefing is scheduled, members of the press corps use the briefing room as a common space, chatting in the narrow hallways or working from one of the blue folding chairs. There's also an adjacent warren of tiny cubicles and audio-editing bays, and a kitchenette with a Keurig coffeemaker, a mini-fridge, and two vending machines that sell Rice Krispies Treats, Snyder's pretzels, and cans of Bumble Bee tuna. ("Who would be tempted by vending-machine tuna?" I heard someone ask.) The press secretary's office is upstairs, less than a hundred yards away. Reporters harangue him at all hours via e-mail or Twitter, and they sometimes congregate in the hallway outside his office. Inevitably, the close quarters lead to mutual resentment. In one particularly hostile press conference, in 1973, Richard Nixon was asked about his antagonistic relationship with reporters. "Don't get the impression that you arouse my anger,"



Nixon responded. "One can only be angry with those he respects."

One day during my time in the West Wing, a group of reporters were standing outside Spicer's office when Reince Priebus and Steve Bannon emerged. Some reporters tried to ask them about the Administration's alleged ties to Russia. Priebus walked

away without saying a word. As Bannon left, he smiled and said, "The opposition party, all lined up."

Hoft and Wintrich, after clearing security, walked past the North Lawn and entered the briefing room. Hoft sent a message to his niece: "This is your favorite uncle texting you from the White House!!!!," followed by a string of emoji hearts. Then he and Wintrich made their way to the podium, which was empty. They stood behind the lectern, with the official White House seal in the background, and posed for a photo, both wearing half grins and making "O.K." hand gestures. When they sat down again, Wintrich posted the photo on Facebook, captioning it with two emojis—an American flag and a frog. (In some corners of the Internet, the "O.K." gesture is associated with Pepe the Frog, a once-harmless cartoon that was co-opted by the alt-right.) About an hour later, Media Matters, a left-wing nonprofit devoted to "correcting conservative misinformation in the U.S. media," published the photo, along with a lengthy blog post about Wintrich headlined "A Dangerous Troll Is Now Reporting from the White House."

The story of the day was the scandal gathering around Michael Flynn, the national-security adviser. The *Washington Post* had reported four days earlier, and Flynn had admitted, that he might have had conversations with Russian officials. Some anonymous White House staffers were indicating that Flynn would soon be fired—"The knives are out," an official told CNN's Jim Acosta—while other staffers were saying the opposite. The President had not yet commented. In a few minutes, he would face the press corps on live TV. It was a scenario out of a journalism textbook: an opportunity to hold the

President's feet to the fire, to ask him what he intended to do about the Flynn situation.

Hoft and Wintrich, continuing to hone their questions about Castro, seemed oblivious of the mounting tension. Hoft chatted with a French correspondent, who asked which organization he was with. "A big Web site in the Midwest called the Gateway Pundit," he said. "Very, very large."

"Oh, you're from the Midwest—that's why you're so friendly," she said.

When the President hosts a visiting head of state for a bilateral press conference, the event is sometimes held in the East Room, the closest thing the White House has to a Versailles-style ballroom. The reporters were escorted into a white-marble hallway lined with oil portraits of recent Presidents and First Ladies. "Holy shit, Lucian, look at this," Hoft said, standing before Hillary Clinton's portrait. During the campaign, the Gateway Pundit's coverage of Clinton included the headlines "Dental Expert: Hillary Clinton Is Suffering From Serious Gum Infection and Immune Disorder" and "Breaking: Top Physician: Hillary Clinton Has Parkinson's Disease." Hoft and Wintrich posed in front of the portrait, making the "O.K." gesture.

In the East Room, unlike in the briefing room, the White House dictates the seating arrangement for the American press. On each gold-colored chair was a white piece of paper with the name of an outlet: the *Times* next to the Christian Broadcasting Network, the A.P. next to Breitbart. Hoft and Wintrich couldn't find any seats for the Gateway Pundit, so they sat in those reserved for the Qatari network Al Jazeera and RT, which is funded by the Russian government. "Everyone calls us Putin's puppets anyway, so we might as well embrace it," Hoft said.

The front row was reserved for TV correspondents—Kristen Welker, of NBC News, and five broad-shouldered men. They stood on wooden risers, just a few inches of air separating one from the other, and prepared for their TV appearances, or "hits." As the President's arrival drew near and the room got quiet, the correspondents faced their respective cameras, doing their best to ignore one another, and began to speak—first,

one at a time, then all at once, like an orchestra tuning up before a concert:

"... I would be surprised if he doesn't get some questions about..."

"... does the President still have confidence in his national-security adviser..."

"... apparently had discussions with the Russian ambassador..."

"... Flynn is in hot water..."

In press-corps argot, a bilateral press conference is a "two and two": the visiting head of state calls on two foreign reporters, and the President calls on two members of the White House press corps. Previous Presidents have usually called on the *Times*, major TV networks, or wire services such as the Associated Press and Reuters. In Trump's first two bilateral press conferences, he gave one question to Reuters and three questions to right-leaning outlets owned by Rupert Murdoch: Fox News, Fox Business, and the New York Post. "Let's see who he calls on today," one correspondent said. "*National Enquirer*, maybe? Whoever it is, they'd better fucking ask about Flynn."

After Trump and Trudeau made brief remarks, Trump's first question went to Scott Thuman, of the Sinclair Broadcast Group, which owns dozens of TV news affiliates across the country. According to Politico, Trump's

son-in-law, Jared Kushner, had struck a deal with Sinclair during the campaign: in exchange for increased access to Trump, Sinclair agreed to air footage of the candidate uninterrupted by commentary. (Sinclair denied this.) Thuman asked about the relationship between Trump and Trudeau, given their "philosophical differences."

Trump's second question went to Kaitlan Collins, a twenty-four-year-old reporter with the conservative Web site the Daily Caller. This was the press corps's last chance to ask about Flynn. Several reporters craned their necks to get a look at Collins. "President Trump," she began, "now that you've been in office and received intelligence briefings for nearly one month, what do you see as the most important national-security matters facing us?"

Many of the reporters were unable to mask their displeasure in person; on Twitter, the reactions were even stronger. After the press conference, Hunter Walker, of Yahoo News, tweeted, "Hearing reporters gripe about the lack of Flynn questions now: I'm just embarrassed for us." Collins and Walker engaged in a brief public spat, tweeting barbed remarks at each other from opposite ends of the White House. Later that day, one of Collins's colleagues at the Daily Caller compiled the comments

of Walker and other correspondents in a post headlined "7 Butthurt Reporters Who Should Be Deported."

Before Collins left the East Room, Julie Pace, of the Associated Press, approached her and asked, "Did someone tell you what to say?"

"I found that offensive," Collins told me later. "A girl from the press office did mention that I would get to ask a question, but of course she didn't tell me what it should be." Collins pointed out that, at Obama's first press conference, in 2009, he was asked, by a *Times* reporter, "What has surprised you the most about this office, enchanted you the most about serving in this office?"

"Look, I guess I could have phrased it differently, but I do stand by my question," she continued. "Regular people, two years from now, will not remember Michael Flynn's name. They will remember if we get into a war with North Korea, which is why I asked about national security."

Back at the Hay-Adams, Hoft was having a conversation, on speakerphone, with a Gateway Pundit blogger. Wintrich was too distracted to participate; he was curled up on the bed with his laptop, in a swoon of self-Googling. Since the Media Matters post had been published that afternoon, he had also been written about on Heat Street,



*"Because if we'd told you we were coming you would have said no."*

and had received offers to appear on “Tipping Point with Liz Wheeler” and “Full Frontal with Samantha Bee.” The *Times* published a piece about Wintrich—“White House Grants Press Credentials to a Pro-Trump Blog”—and, that night, Wintrich filed his rebuttal: “Carlos Slim’s Anti-Trump Blog, ‘The New York Times’, Attacks Gateway Pundit.”

After the phone call ended, Hoft and Wintrich took an elevator down to Off the Record. Hoft ran into an old friend, Sam Nunberg, a lawyer and former Trump adviser, who was spending much of that day at the bar, drinking with political reporters.

“Remember me?” Hoft said.

“Of course,” Nunberg said. “You’re part of the pro-Trump fake-news spectrum, somewhere between Breitbart and Drudge.” Hoft rolled his eyes, let out a loud laugh, and said, “Oh, fuck off, Sam.”

Hoft ordered a lemonade and took a phone call from Julia Hahn, who was once Bannon’s protégée at Breitbart News and now works with him in the White House. “Aw, that’s so sweet of you,” Hoft said. “Tell Steve I said hello, would you?” He hung up. “Just calling to say she’s a fan,” he said.

That night, Flynn resigned, resulting in a blizzard of banner headlines. Neither Hoft nor Wintrich noticed right away—Hoft was on a flight back to St. Louis, and Wintrich was engaged in a social-media battle with a progressive blogger. Before Hoft left for the airport, I told him that he should expect to hear from a member of *The New Yorker’s* fact-checking staff. “Oh yeah, just like at the Gateway Pundit,” Hoft said. “We’ve got a huge department of full-time fact-checkers.” He laughed so hard that he nearly spilled his lemonade.

THE DAY AFTER Kaitlan Collins and Hunter Walker’s Twitter feud, they sat near the back of the briefing room, making genial small talk. April Ryan arrived fashionably late, and people stood to let her get to her seat. Just before the briefing was to begin, a short nineteen-year-old named Kyle Mazza darted across the room, staking out a prime position in an aisle near the front. Mazza is a new-media Goyal, a floater among floaters. He is the sole employee of a network

## ODE TO THE DOUBLE “L”

*After Aracelis Girmay*

Twin shorelines  
at the end  
of my name, traffickers  
of white space,  
you could last on the tongue  
forever, lolling, longing,  
an endless drawing out  
of the little stream  
between you.  
Fill my life.  
I drink from the narrowest  
canal, flowing between  
two countries  
that, half of the time,  
claim me. Double “l,”  
bring me back  
to the in-between  
where my breath  
has always lived,  
without containment,

he calls U.N.F. News, or Universal News Forever (News), which owns no bandwidth on TV or radio.

Jim Acosta, near the podium, stood and delivered a hit. “I think the age-old question—‘What did the President know and when did he know it?’—that is going to be asked of White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer here,” he said. His comments seemed directed as much at the reporters in the room as at the CNN viewers at home. Sitting down in his front-row seat, he said loudly, “Should we get Sinclair and the Daily Caller to move up to the front? If they’re gonna go first anyway, it might make things easier.” Collins stared straight ahead, avoiding eye contact. A radio reporter, from his seat, spoke into a microphone about “the anger in this room.”

A sliding door opened, and Spicer approached the lectern. Apart from camera shutters, the room fell silent. “Happy Valentine’s Day,” he said. “I can sense the love in the room.”

His first question went to ABC’s Jonathan Karl, who asked, “Can you still say definitively that nobody on the Trump campaign, not even General Flynn, had any contact with the Russians before the election?”

“I don’t have any—there’s nothing that would conclude me that anything different has changed with respect to that time period,” Spicer said. He went on to insist that the journalists focus on the source of the leaks, not on their content. Later, when a Reuters reporter asked a tough question about Russia, Spicer answered tersely and then Goyaled, calling on a reporter from a libertarian blog via Skype.

The next day, the President held another two-and-two, this time with the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Trump’s two questions went to the Christian Broadcasting Network and to Townhall. On the way back to the briefing room, three cameramen stopped outside for a cigarette.

“Who’s gonna get the next question at one of these?” one of them said. “Cooking Light? Maybe Car and Driver?”

“At least the Israeli press got to ask tough questions,” another said. “I guess Israel’s still a democracy.”

Inside the briefing room, the lectern had been cordoned off with a velvet rope, and a sign warned against posing on the podium. Evidently, someone in the press office had noticed the Gateway Pundit’s photo. I took a picture of the sign and texted it to Wintrich and Hoft.

like two legs pointing toward the ocean, or these arms reaching into sky. From birth you have doubled my grief and my wonder, shown me forever the parallel which can never touch—the way I run alongside my love without entering his true mind. Rivulet of secrets, slim as a eucalyptus leaf, airplane runway of the heart. Double “l,” let my days always move in two directions. Build me a channel into which I can pour this voice.

—Michelle Brittan Rosado

“HAHAHAHAHAHA,” Wintrich texted back.

“Is that photoshopped?” Hoft responded. “Real?”

WINTRICH DID SOME apartment hunting, then took a bus back to New York. I had an extra day in D.C., so I decided to attend one last briefing. When I arrived at the briefing room, around 11 A.M., the reporters were in a frenzy.

“The President just said he was going to do a press conference.”

“He is? When?”

“In an hour, I think? He just said it, out of nowhere.”

“No Spicey?”

“What?”

“Does he know that ‘press conference’ means he has to take questions? Like, from multiple people?”

The reporters lined up outside the East Room. Kyle Mazza strolled by, carrying two cans of vending-machine tuna. Because this press conference had been scheduled with no advance notice, the seating in the East Room would be a free-for-all. As the reporters were led down the marble hallway, Mazza pushed through the pack and dove into a front-row seat.

Trump had never delivered a solo press conference as President. He had taken questions in the two-and-two format, but had not faced a sustained back-and-forth with the press corps. “Is he going to take questions, or just make us sit here like props?” a reporter sitting next to me said. “He has to take questions, right? Then again, if the purpose is to belittle us . . .”

Trump entered, made some introductory remarks, and then said, “Prepare yourselves. We’ll do some questions.” The correspondents sighed in relief and looked down, reviewing their notes. “Unless you have no questions—that’s always a possibility,” Trump added. It was a joke, but nobody laughed.

Within minutes, it became clear that Trump intended to deliver not so much a press conference as an anti-press conference. “I’m making this presentation directly to the American people, with the media present—which is an honor, to have you this morning—because many of our nation’s reporters and folks will not tell you the truth,” he said. The sentence contained one misstatement—it was actually afternoon—which was the first of dozens of misstatements, ranging from the trivial to the risible (“I never

get phone calls from the media”). He was asked several times whether his campaign had any links to Russian officials, and he denied the charge in various ways: “Russia is a ruse. I have nothing to do with Russia. Haven’t made a phone call to Russia in years. Don’t speak to people from Russia. Not that I wouldn’t, but I just have nobody to speak to. I spoke to Putin twice.”

As reporters asked questions, Trump rated their performances in real time (“Not a simple question, not a fair question”; “That was very professional and very good”), pitted them against each other (“Should I let him have a little bit more? What do you think, Peter?”), and, like a power-drunk Merlin, ordered them to stand or sit, speak or go silent. Reporters, apart from venting their frustration on Twitter, had no choice but to sit silently and take the abuse. Perhaps the most remarkable moment was an exchange between Trump and April Ryan: in a span of three minutes, Trump likened American cities to Hell twice, and asked Ryan, an African-American reporter, if the African-American members of Congress were “friends of yours.”

Near the end of the press conference, during a moment of crosstalk, Mazza spoke up and asked about Melania Trump. “She does a lot of great work for the country,” Mazza said. “Can you tell us a little bit about what First Lady Melania Trump does for the country?”

“Now *that’s* what I call a nice question,” Trump said, jabbing a finger in Mazza’s direction. “Who are you with?”

“U.N.F. News,” Mazza said.

“Good, I’m going to start watching,” Trump said.

I texted Wintrich to ask if he was watching the press conference. “so FUCKING GOOD,” he texted back. “Incredibly disappointed I wasn’t there for it.” It had been an opportunity to attack the mainstream media on the biggest possible stage, and he had missed it. When we talked about it later, Wintrich said that he still regretted missing the performance. But, even if he had been there, his skills as a troll might have been superfluous. After all, the man in control of the press conference was the world’s most gifted media troll, the President of the United States. ♦





PORTFOLIO

# FASHION'S ATTICS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LORENZO VITTURI

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**I**N ITALY, THE state is weak and the family is strong, so it's logical that, when it comes to preserving their histories, fashion houses—often second- or third-generation family operations—do it themselves. What to do with bolts of nineteen-fifties tweed so heavy that to wear it in a modern office would court heatstroke? Or fragile sandals made of straw, from the Fascist period, when leather was needed for soldiers' boots? *All'archivio!*

Each fashion house's archive is different. Many of Pucci's color-saturated fabrics hang in four elegant rooms in the historic Palazzo Pucci, in Florence, not far from the National Museum of the Bargello, which occupies the building where Pandolfo Pucci, a distant ancestor, was hanged, after he was caught plotting to murder Cosimo I de' Medici, in 1560. Also in Florence, Ferragamo stores its fifteen thousand old shoe models on the third floor of the Palazzo Spini Feroni, near the Ponte Vecchio, along with the awls and pincers of its founder, Salvatore Ferragamo. And Max Mara, aspiring almost to a breadth reminiscent of the Victoria and Albert Museum's, keeps its archive in a warehouse in Reggio Emilia. The collection includes more than three hundred and fifty thousand meticulously catalogued items, among them thousands of the house's trademark coats, some noteworthy ensembles of Audrey Hepburn and Carine Roitfeld, and issues of fashion magazines dating back to the nineteen-twenties.

The purpose of an archive is not just preservation but inspiration, a reminder that, while fashion moves ever forward, each house has a lineage. "It's a little bit like aristocratic families," Laudomia Pucci, who runs her family's archive (another part is housed at her country estate, outside Florence), says. "Either you are or you're not." Max

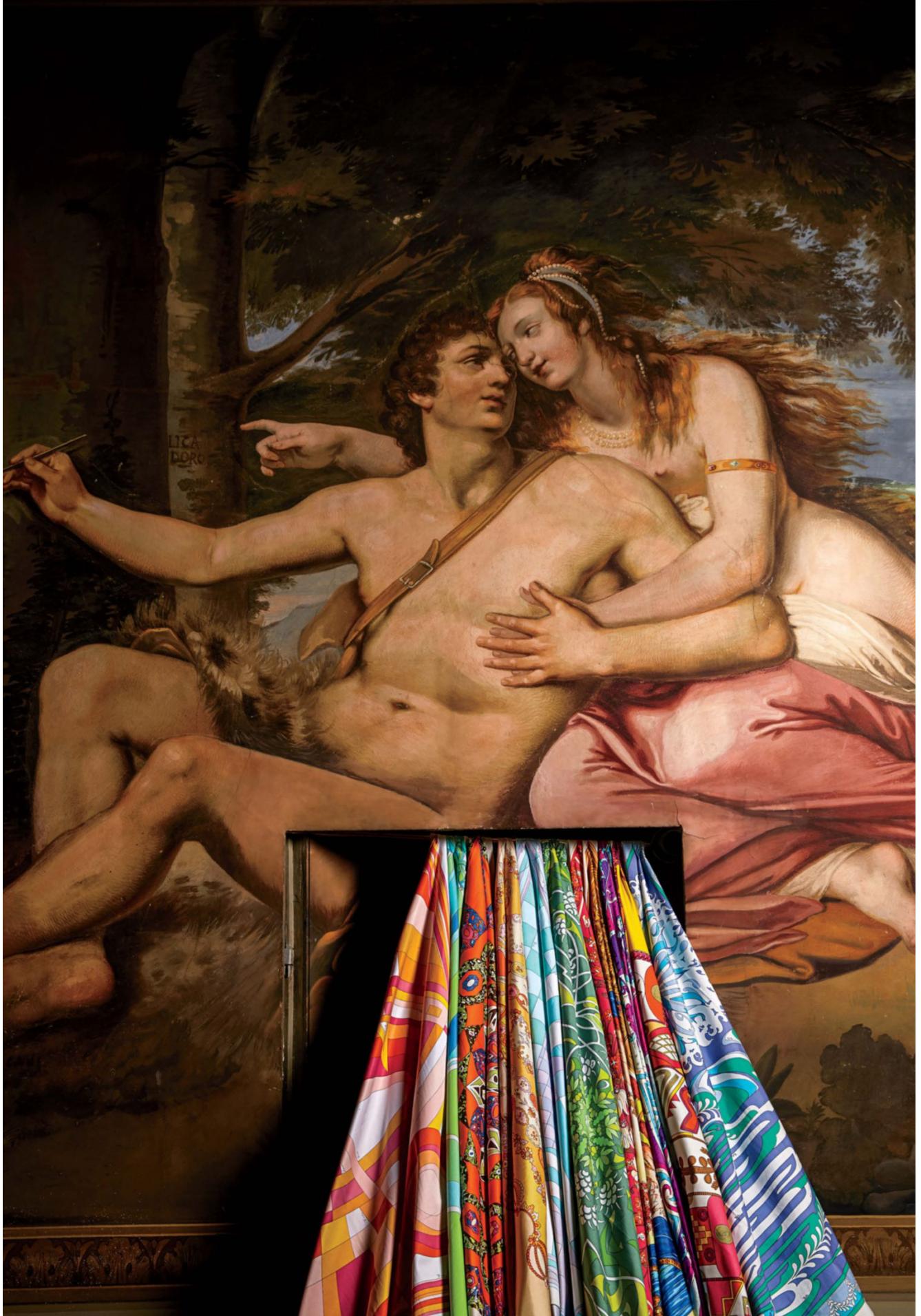
Mara's well-ordered archive projects a bustling competence, in keeping with the well-cut, practical elegance of its clothes. With Ferragamo, the message is craftsmanship and experimentation. Ferragamo's history is closely associated with the delicate leathers that Salvatore used—python, skate, toad, viper, seal, various types of lizard—and the company had to turn to experts at La Specola, part of Florence's natural-history museum, to figure out what it owned. Stefania Ricci, the house's archivist, told me, "Their specialists are trained in this almost eighteenth-century kind of research. They made the exact categorization of all the skins."

Pucci's preternaturally bright silk prints, laid out in blond-wood drawers, conjure a mod jet set. In the Palazzo Pucci, there is a little shrine of six terry-cloth robes from the nineteen-sixties under plastic capsules, a freeze-frame of Emilio Pucci's vision that a woman might come out of the water, dripping, onto the deck of her yacht, and put one on. Laudomia Pucci remembers how much Emilio, her father, enjoyed their effect at fashion shows. "After a few steps, the models would end up in just their bikinis, and it was very amusing," she recalled.

Designers at all the houses are regularly encouraged to make use of their archives: clothes speak to other clothes, boots to other boots. Describing a fabric or a color is never the same as holding a swatch of it in your hands. Laura Lusuardi, who oversees design at Max Mara, discourages her design staff from using the Pantone system or paper representations when choosing colors, and sends them to the archive instead. "A given red is not all reds," she said. "It's the shading that matters. So having these samples here, where a designer can begin his work, is crucial."

—D. T. Max

*Max Mara's classic camel-hair coats (previous spread) have never been out of production. Right: Pucci scarves from the sixties and seventies pour out of a doorway within a nineteenth-century fresco in the Palazzo Pucci, in Florence. "It's a happy brand," Laudomia Pucci, the family archivist, says.*





Above: Salvatore Ferragamo's nineteen-fifties leopard-seal skins. Right: A kidskin-cork-and-suède wedge sandal, made by Ferragamo for Judy Garland in 1938, atop a few of its colorful descendants.





*Circle skirts and capes hand-painted by Emilio Pucci in 1954, in the Palazzo Pucci. Laudomia Pucci says, "They are very*



ballerina—very unusual for my father.” He found his inspiration in Sicilian Moorish architecture and in the Palio, in Siena.



Above: Fabrics and wool fibres from the Max Mara archive, which staff designers are required to consult for color. Right: Shoe prototypes from the nineteen-fifties in Ferragamo's Sala della Vigilanza.





*To show its spring, 2017, line, Opening Ceremony collaborated with the choreographer Justin Peck on a ballet called “The Times Are Racing.”*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PARI DUKOVIC



ANNALS OF RETAIL

## MOM-AND-POP SHOP

*Who cares that Opening Ceremony's Humberto Leon and Carol Lim don't sew?*

BY EMMA ALLEN



**H**IGH-END FASHION TENDS to be the terrain of jaded, snobby insiders—the megalomaniacal couturier, the high-handed boutique clerk, the intern with a ten-thousand-dollar handbag. It's a type that finds its origin in many a high-school cafeteria: the mean girl (boys may also apply). For instance, when New York City fire marshals removed some chairs from the front row of a Zac Posen runway show several years ago, the ensuing scuffle provoked one guest to slap a publicist in the face, leading to a million-dollar lawsuit for "intentional infliction of emotional distress."

There are a few exceptions to the fashion-world mean-girl rule, among them Humberto Leon and Carol Lim—two mall rats from the Los Angeles suburbs, both the children of immigrants (Leon's mother is from China, and his father was Peruvian-Chinese; Lim's parents are from Korea). They met as undergraduates at the University of California, Berkeley. In 2002, in their mid-twenties, they founded a store called Opening Ceremony, on Howard Street, which was then a hard-to-find alley near New York's Chinatown and which has since been absorbed into SoHo. They sold clothes designed by friends, their own hoodie sweatshirts with an oversized diamond pattern (Leon's mother, Wendy, helped sew them), and apparel and tchotchkes that they lugged home from marathon shopping trips to Hong Kong.

Leon and Lim are huggers, and they love to host game nights and cook for people. One evening, Leon made me "Chinese lasagna" (secret ingredient: ketchup). "It's like a homey 'mom' meal," he said. The word "normal" comes up often in descriptions of them. Also "fun." When they started their business, they promised to fly their staff of ten to Jamaica if revenues hit a million dollars within three years; they made

it in two. Fifteen years out, they have a well-respected label, a hundred and eighty full-time employees, a vibrant Web site, a shop in West Hollywood, and four more in Japan. Eric Wilson, *InStyle*'s fashion-news director, has called Opening Ceremony "the most influential retailer of its decade." In 2011, Leon and Lim were also appointed creative directors of Kenzo, a Parisian brand owned by the luxury conglomerate Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE (LVMH). Last year, they received the Cooper Hewitt National Design Award for Fashion Design. "Which is sort of crazy, because we're not really designers," Leon said to me at the ceremony, in October.

Pre-Instagram, before being a social-media influencer was a job, they were outsiders who landed in New York and became its resident curators of hip, presenting an alternative to the previously definitive directives of glossy fashion magazines. Downtown artists, musicians, actors, skaters, and club kids gravitated to their store and partied with them after closing time; Michael Stipe was their first customer. They capitalized on that in-crowd: more than anything else, Leon and Lim are savvy collaborators, two people with specific tastes who lean on a network of talented friends whose devotion to them, and vice versa, borders on the familial.

The store's name is a reference to the Olympics, of which Leon and Lim are big fans. They were also inspired by the Games' itinerant nature. Each year, they've focussed on a different country—they travel there and eat, drink, shop, party, and import their favorite finds. They introduced New Yorkers to Havaianas flip-flops from Brazil in 2003; from the U.K., Topshop (2005); from Sweden, Cheap Monday and Acne jeans (2006); from Japan, SUNO (2008); from France, Carven (2010). They also helped launch

*which was performed at Lincoln Center.*



Leon and Lim trace their fashion roots back to pop music and the mall.

friends' labels, such as Alexander Wang, Rodarte, and Proenza Schouler.

In high school, Leon was crowned Homecoming King; Lim was voted Most Likely to Succeed. Now in their early forties, they've never stopped being the cool kids in the cafeteria—but the approachable ones, who slide their trays over to make room at their table, after the mean girls have scared you away.

ONE WINTER AFTERNOON, I stood by a fire pit in the back yard of Humberto Leon's Park Slope brownstone, watching Angela Dimayuga—the executive chef of Mission Chinese and a former roommate of Leon's partner, Patrick Wilson—stoke leaves and logs, which she was burning for their

ash. After combining the ash with tea, refined charcoal, clay, and lime, she planned to coat raw eggs with the mixture and bury them in big pots for three months—an ancient preparation for a dish called thousand-year-old eggs that she'd picked up from a Korean monk.

"They're basically just a snack," Dimayuga said. "We eat it with our moms."

"I called my mom and told her we were doing this," Leon reported. "She was, like, 'I'd better be there when the unveil party happens.' (As it turned out, raccoons found the eggs first.) Dimayuga and Leon's last back-yard party, which featured a sculpted ice table with sake rivers running through it, had grown from an eight-person dinner into a sixty-five-person affair sponsored by Sonos.

As Dimayuga poked at the ground with a shovel, Leon explained that when he was a kid his mother worked non-stop, as a seamstress and in two Chinese restaurants that she ran in Los Angeles with eight of her eleven siblings. She coached Leon over the phone on how to make dinner. "She'd be, like, throw in a little bit of this, squeeze a little bit of that, taste it," he said. "It was a good way to learn how to cook, just by instinct and trying it." He had on a camo Supreme sweater, Levi's, and Dr. Martens sandals ("they're only sold in Vietnam"). His white socks were encrusted with snow.

Inside, Mazzy and Emi, Leon and Wilson's three-year-old twin daughters, who speak Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese, and English, sat mesmerized by a Japanese TV show that's just a feed of kids playing with toys. Carol Lim entered, in a long black Kenzo skirt and a black top, and announced, "I just got my mom's kimchi recipe over the phone."

Wendy Leon lives fifteen minutes from Lim's parents, in Pasadena; the two mothers like to watch "Dancing with the Stars" together. Humberto and Carol lived in the same building on Thirteenth Street and Avenue A for eight years. "But there was, like, vomit on the street every day," Leon said. "It got too crazy." So they each began house hunting in Brooklyn, eventually settling five blocks apart.

While he chopped cabbage, Leon said that, when he was ten, his family moved from Highland Park, California, to Rosemead. "It was when my sisters"—four and five years older—"started to really get into music: the Go-Go's, Depeche Mode, New Order, Erasure, OMD." He studied the clothes on the record covers. "To fifth grade, I wore a trenchcoat and dress shoes. My feet were so small, I would buy women's shoes." At fourteen, he got what he considered a dream job, working part time at the Gap and earning \$3.35 an hour. When a La Boulangerie opened in the adjacent food court, he said, "It was, like, holy shit. Europe has landed."

Leon filled sippy cups with Perrier, put on a Belle and Sebastian album "for the kids," and went in search of Lim, who'd been summoned to the

basement by a wailing child (her daughters, Celia and Millie, are four and two). There, what Leon described as “a kid rager” was under way. Plastic toy food flew. Tiny instruments were twanged and banged. Gold balloons wilted against the ceiling. Often, at night, Leon and whatever friends have dropped by convert the space into “a karaoke *discoteca*”—Leon favors George Michael; Lim the Carpenters.

Amid the mayhem, Lim and a pregnant d.j. friend named Justine D. were discussing the Park Slope food co-op. Leon had just become a member. (He missed Raf Simons’s show during New York Fashion Week because he was on cash-register duty.)

“It’s like our new club,” Leon said. “We’re there every day.”

Lim said, “I was thinking of having Karma”—her nanny—“join.” In theory, Karma could work at the co-op a few hours a week, and buy discounted groceries for Lim.

“They say it’s a no-no, but I say it’s a yes-yes,” Leon said.

“But I would actually like to do it!” Lim said. “I would be into organizing the stock—cutting open the bags and shelving things.”

She reclined on a furry white beanbag and ministered to Celia, who requested frequent outfit changes (ladybug, fairy princess, Minnie Mouse).

Lim also traced her fashion roots back to music and the mall. “I was really into reggae, from the fifth grade,” she said. “I went to Bob Marley Day and I went to Sunsplash, and my mom didn’t know what these things were. She would drop me and my girlfriends off at these huge festivals where you can *imagine* all the things that went on.” Lim’s mother, Heidi, ran a jewelry store called Earring Corner. Lim’s father, Ted, a licensed pharmacist in Korea, worked in the States as a lab tech, and then in real estate.

Celia held out a bear costume.

“I think you’re too tall for this one,” Lim said, gently.

She continued, “I worked at the mall, at Bass shoes. Then I worked at the Body Shop. I was really into the causes the company was into.” Although she grew up in the Valley, Lim has a mellow surfer drawl, while Leon exhibits some Valley-girlish end-of-sentence

upspeak (“Kardashian-esque,” he once described it).

They both adored the advertisements of their teen years. Leon reminisced about a bouncy Gap TV ad starring Missy Elliott and Madonna. Lim said, “The Esprit ones felt both aspirational and relatable, because they did things with family, with memory, and with women of all different ages.” Opening Ceremony’s ad campaigns, featuring photos of downtown kids by Ryan McGinley, Roe Ethridge, and Collier Schorr, have a similar impact. Another retro favorite was Benetton’s magazine spreads shot by Oliviero Toscani—“I was really into multi-culti,” Lim said.

**I**N THE NINETIES, U.C. Berkeley became an unlikely incubator for the future of fashion. Leon (who majored in communications and art) and Lim (economics) overlapped there with Laura and Kate Mulleavy, the sisters behind Rodarte; Patrik Ervell, who became a menswear designer; Todd Selby, now a life-style blogger; and Sally Singer, who works as an editor at *Vogue*. Fashion design wasn’t offered as a major. “It was more, like, this is my tribe, that’s your tribe, based on how you dressed,” Laura Mulleavy told me.

“I like your Docs”—that’s how Humberto and I met,” Cynthia Leung, a Berkeley classmate who is now a fashion publicist, said. She introduced Leon to Lim during their sophomore year, and she accompanied them on epic shopping trips to the Salvation Army. “Carol would find one or two things, maybe a cashmere cardigan that was beaded and lined. And then Humberto and I would have these mammoth piles. Our main question was ‘Is this ugly? Is this *beautiful* ugly?’ That was a free fashion education.”

After graduation, Lim went into consulting and investment banking in San Francisco, while Leon designed store interiors for the Gap and Old Navy, and then was hired by Burberry, to run its visual merchandising. Lim followed him to New York. She recalled, “I tried to get my first job in fashion, and Ferragamo was, like, ‘You can start as an intern in the buying department,’ and I was, like, ‘Hell no.’” She ended up at Bally, in planning and merchandising. Their parents thought they were crazy

when, a few years later, Leon and Lim announced that they were opening a store. Each put in twenty thousand dollars, and they secured a forty-thousand-dollar small-business loan.

The original idea was for Leon to be in charge of creative and Lim to handle the finances, although they consult each other on most everything. Leon is the “black-belt shopper,” as Leung put it, who’s game for every after-the-after-party adventure. Lim, whose vibe is more den-motherish, is the “maybe” R.S.V.P. that turns into a “yes” at Leon’s coaxing.

Not long after the store opened, the artist Andrew Kuo answered an ad to sublet a studio in its basement, a former massage parlor that Leon and Lim leased along with the street-level space. He began hanging out in Opening Ceremony’s back room, where Leon and Lim whiled away slow days smoking, eating dumplings, and spying on shoppers through a peephole. “People just trying to start their thing would rent desk space in the back,” Kuo said. Lim would help them do their taxes. On dead afternoons, they’d all work on a zine called *So Bored*. It was filled with top-ten lists (one of Lim’s: 1. Tabasco sauce, 2. Humberto Leon, 3. Kisses, 4. Chinese massage . . . ).

The actress Chloë Sevigny, who has designed six fashion collections for Opening Ceremony, said, “I first remember being, like, Why is this fucking two-toned sweatshirt everywhere you look?” The signature diamond design—four triangles meeting at a point near the wearer’s sternum—evokes a semaphore flag. “I was quoted in a magazine saying if I ever did a clothing line I’d want to do it with someone like Opening Ceremony. Then Humberto called.” In the mid-aughts, she and the rest of the gang hung out at the same clubs: Lit (where Kuo d.j.’d) and Sway (with a weekly Smiths night, d.j.’d by Chloë’s brother Paul).

The Howard Street space has since evolved from a scrappy, exposed-plywood clubhouse—with Hello Kitty displays and shelves of art books—to a sleek boutique, spread over two adjacent buildings. A shopper will find everything from a tie-dyed T-shirt by Baja East (\$295) to a calf-leather Mansur Gavriel handbag (\$825) that would have

looked at home on Audrey Hepburn's arm. Opening Ceremony's own collections have expanded to include all manner of street-wear-influenced, often androgynous play clothes.

Lim said, "I worry that now a lot of people's first impressions of the store are 'I'm not cool enough,' that it's too 'fashion.' But when people spend time and strike up a conversation, they seem to get it—like, 'There is stuff for me.'"

Touches of quirkiness do remain, such as "Cooling Anger" and "Vitamin Sadness" facial masks (\$5) from Korea. And salespeople still call to mind that high-school friend your parents forbade you to see. What has definitely persisted is the store's strange power to make you believe you can pull off looks you certainly cannot—for instance, an MM6 Maison Margiela denim detachable-shorts romper (\$695). It's not hard to guess whose influence that is: Leon once almost persuaded me to get a Dorothy Hamill haircut.

Meanwhile, continuing to work with friends has proved not only fruitful and fun for Leon and Lim but a thrifty maneuver. "They have managed on a budget," Sevigny told me. "You help them out and they help you out—and you might not be getting paid."

The director Spike Jonze told me, "When I was writing 'Her,' Humberto and I were taking kung-fu classes, and every night, after we'd do the kung fu, we'd walk through Los Angeles. I'd tell him what I'd written that day, and he'd give me his feedback. He really is a stylist second and a storyteller first." When Jonze's movie version of "Where the Wild Things Are" came out, Opening Ceremony stocked "Where the Wild Things Are" outfits. An adult-man-size furry Max suit, complete with ears and a tail, sold out in the first hour. It cost six hundred and ten dollars.

In recent years, various prominent fashion duos have uncoupled—Pierpaolo Piccioli and Maria Grazia Chiuri, at Valentino; Marcus Wainwright and David Neville, of Rag & Bone—but few of Leon and Lim's friends can imagine such a fate for them. Ryan McGinley described their bond as "yin and yang"; Patrik Ervell invoked the left and right sides of a brain; Chloë Sevigny said that they brought to mind

Yves Saint Laurent and his business partner, Pierre Bergé. Apologizing for the grandiosity, Jonze likened them to Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe. "It's a very different world they live in, obviously, but the relationship has that kind of purity to it," he said.

**M**AYBE YOU'LL BUY this place and throw a big party and invite us!" Leon said to me, as he gestured around the picturesquely decrepit auditorium of an abandoned Catholic high school in Williamsburg. He stood by a sign that read, "La Familia Que Reza Unida Parmanece Unida" ("The Family That Prays Together Stays Together"). He confided, "We had to deal with a priest to get this place. Like, a really hardcore priest."

That afternoon, the British photographer Tom Johnson was shooting the look book for Opening Ceremony's spring, 2017, collection in the school. The line was influenced by a collaboration between Leon and the choreographer Justin Peck. (At twenty-nine, Peck has completed original ballets for some of the world's most prominent dance companies, prompting the *Vanity Fair* headline, "IS JUSTIN PECK MAKING BALLET COOL AGAIN?")

Peck was at work on a twenty-five-minute piece called "The Times Are Racing," with dancers costumed in Opening Ceremony clothes, tweaked for maximum danceability—a bright-yellow silk trenchcoat dress (\$650), a "Fairytale" reversible bomber (lavender and white, with Humpty Dumpty and Mother Goose patches, \$525), pinstriped overalls (a Dickies collaboration, \$275), and a capsule collection of sweatshirts, T-shirts, and tanks bearing the words "FIGHT," "ACT," "CHANGE," "DEFY," and "PROTEST" (\$65-\$95; proceeds going to the A.C.L.U.). Peck pitched the project to Leon as "Fred Astaire meets street dancing meets ballet." The première would serve as a substitute for a traditional runway show. "I love thinking about these true dialogues, and then the result is something you can buy," Leon said.

The seat of Johnson's pants was covered in dust from his writhing around on the floor with the camera. He prowled near two men—one wore knit pants and a backless top with flouncy

sleeves, the other a black trench. "Do you do ballet? Dance? Splits? Splits is good," Johnson said. The flounce-sleeved man did pirouettes. He was a dancer. The man in the coat, a model, tried to balance on one foot.

"You stand still," the stylist commanded.

Opening Ceremony often casts non-professional models, with a more diverse range of looks than in your average IMG binder. This time, Leon said, they model-hunted at Juilliard and on dance blogs. "Everything O.K.?" he asked the stylist.

"I kind of look from afar," Leon explained to me. "My M.O. is always, you hire people because of their skills. I want to see what they know. I don't want to see my version of what they know."

Lim was in a nearby classroom, gossiping with hair and makeup people. She told them, "I dated someone once who was insanely jealous of Humberto and who kept trying to convince me that he was straight."

"He thought that I was in love with Carol!" Leon said.

"Because Humberto would cut my bangs!"

Leon mimicked the guy: "Carol, men who like to touch women's hair, they are in *love* with them." They cracked up.

It was not a coincidence that Leon and Wilson and Lim and her husband, Matthew Killip, a British film editor, had children around the same time.

"Carol got pregnant and she's, like, 'You guys should get pregnant,'" Leon said. "So then I was, like, 'Patrick, should we do a surrogate?'"

Lim cut in: "I had looked up all the agencies. I was, like, 'Here's where you and Patrick are going.'"

Leon said, "And then we had twins, and Carol was, like, 'Oh, shit.'"

"So I decided I should just pop out another one."

**A**S THE BUSINESS grew, Leon and Lim began working with trained designers to develop the Opening Ceremony aesthetic. Simultaneously, they pursued collaborations with throwback giants like Pendleton, Levi's, Dr. Martens, Vans, Bass, Timberland, Coach, Esprit, and X-girl—"every little mall-rat brand

that we grew up with,” as Cynthia Leung put it. They did a capsule collection with the Muppets (hipster Kermit on a green sweater) and an Intel smart watch. Yoko Ono designed men’s pants for them—one with a handprint on the crotch and others with a sheer panel over the wearer’s behind.

The pair’s careful edits of other trendy collections made the shop feel as diverse as a department store like Barneys Co-Op (which carried the Opening Ceremony brand), with a similar price point. But while department stores over-invested in real estate, then scrambled to cope with the rise of online discount hunting, Leon and Lim were cautious about brick-and-mortar growth, expanding via e-commerce—something that similar boutiques, such as Fred Segal, in L.A., or Ikram, in Chicago, didn’t quite pull off. (It has helped that, for the past three years, Opening Ceremony has been backed by the private-equity firm Berkshire Partners, which has a minority stake in the company and a non-executive chairman on its board.)

In 2006, Leon and Lim launched a blog spotlighting their friends—cooking with David Chang or touring Chloë Sevigny’s closets—which further cemented the idea that their people were *the* people to know. Handily, many of those same people produced and appeared in their ads—a sort of proto-native-advertising approach that didn’t feel sleazy.

Leon told me, “We don’t shoot a normal ad campaign. We do a movie, and then we shoot a movie poster, and then the ads are the posters, and they feature clothing.” The pair’s latest Kenzo film was written and directed by Kahlil Joseph, who worked on Beyoncé’s “Lemonade.” The plot’s a head-scratcher, but at the première, in L.A., one bit of dialogue got laughs: “Turns out the only number I can really remember is my mom’s landline, so I ended up talking to my mom for, like, an hour.”

The duo’s appointment at Kenzo was initially met with some skepticism. For one thing, neither of them speaks French. For another, they are the only creative directors of an LVMH brand who are not designers by trade. But Kenzō Takada, the company’s founder,

was himself more of a retailer than a designer. He moved to Paris from Japan in his twenties and opened a store, called Jungle Jap, in 1970. It was decorated with Rousseau-style murals that he painted with his bohemian friends. Jerry Hall and Grace Jones were walking billboards for his kimonos, loose-legged trousers, and animal prints inspired by folk costumes. Leon said, “He was just buying fabrics from the market, and then people got obsessed with it.” Leon now oversees a team of sixteen Kenzo designers.

The brand that they took over was languishing; Leon and Lim immediately ripped down office walls and introduced sweatshirts (for upward of \$250) to their first Kenzo collection. Leon told me that company elders “were, like, ‘Oh, in France we call that a *promotional product*.’ And I was, like, ‘Well, growing up, that’s how I got excited about a brand.’” The sweatshirts, emblazoned with evil eyes and roaring tigers, were a hit.

Pierre-Yves Roussel, the chairman and C.E.O. of LVMH, said that he’d been drawn to Leon and Lim because they are such astute merchants. “They have that pragmatism that you find in the U.S.,” he said. “European designers tend to be a bit more snobbish when it comes to doing things that have a larger diffusion and are more accessible price-wise.” Before Leon and Lim were hired, seventy per cent of Kenzo’s customers were over fifty. After three seasons, seventy per cent were younger than thirty. The appointment was mutually beneficial. Sevigny told me, “I remember Humberto saying, ‘This is like the greatest business school slash fashion school you could ever go to.’”

**W**HEN I MET up with Leon and Lim, at Lincoln Center, for the first dress rehearsal of the Justin Peck ballet, they had just flown in from a week of Paris meetings and protesting Donald Trump by the Eiffel Tower. Nevertheless, they were peppy. In Paris, they’d shown Kenzo’s fall/winter, 2017, line. Leon said, “We wanted to see how we could bring up climate change in a collection, which isn’t super easy.” Lim laughed. Leon went on, “Then we discovered this thing called Arctic surfing.

It juxtaposed the idea of a summer sport in a winter atmosphere, so we used it to question, Where is this world going?” (The result: snow boots with sandal overlays, shin-length sweater-dresses for men, tropical prints.) They donated funds from a capsule collection to an organization called Earth Guardians, run by a sixteen-year-old self-described “indigenous climate activist” and “hip-hop artist,” who’d modelled in the campaign for a Kenzo-H&M collaboration. The show’s runway circled an exposed dressing-room area.

“People walked in and basically saw



*Sports cars (2013) and pratfalls on the runway (2015)—two of Opening Ceremony’s Fashion Week innovations.*

us doing hair and makeup," Leon said, as dancers assembled onstage.

He pointed to a ballerina and whispered, "Do you think the bun on top feels too 'ballet'?" and suggested I check out the view from the wings—"Sometimes dancers will run off the stage and just collapse," he said with relish.

It reminded me of something Cynthia Leung had told me: "Carol is unflappable and resilient, and Humberto is disarming and charming, and that's just carried them through." She added, "Once, Humberto was lying on a shantung-silk-covered royal-blue sofa that he had found at a Salvation Army. His father had just passed away; it was a really rough time. But I remember he said, 'I try to make everything look easy. It's important that the effort doesn't show.'"

The lights dimmed and a boisterous Dan Deacon song played. The dancers flung themselves around to the music. At the end, they all fell into a big heap.

On the stage, Leon, in an ochre velour Opening Ceremony polo and forest-green pants, consulted with the ballerina Tiler Peck (no relation to Justin) about her costume. "I feel like my butt was hanging out the whole time," she complained. She wore high-waisted black shorts and a mesh leotard.

"It doesn't look that way," Leon said, sympathetically, and asked, "But it feels that way?"

Lim, who had on a navy sweater, silky black pants, and black Timberlands, stood to one side as Leon negotiated. "The stamina that they have—even bending my neck like that I'd get whiplash!" she said, before excusing herself to finish Opening Ceremony's 2017 budgets. Across the stage, a ballerina in pink tights tweezed blisters on her feet.

"So what did we figure out about this?" Tiler Peck asked, gesturing toward her posterior.

A costumer told her, "We're going to make a nude thong."

Leon jumped in: "And then you're going to have butt glue! Is that cool?"

**A**S TRENDS IN luxury spending have moved from clothes and jewelry and cars to experiences (such as food and travel), it hasn't hurt that Leon and Lim throw a good party. To mark the 2008 Beijing Olympics, they held a seventy-two-hour blowout on Howard Street, complete with Scrabble tournaments and astrological readings. In 2010, when they launched an Opening Ceremony branch in Manhattan's Ace Hotel—in addition to clothes, it

stocks Marvis toothpaste and Haribo gummy candies—Solange Knowles performed. (Four years later, Leon created a custom Kenzo wedding dress for her.)

Leon and Lim's cheeky reinvention of Fashion Week norms began with their first Kenzo runway show, in 2011. Models put on mini shows throughout the company's headquarters; the actor Jason Schwartzman played drums. Other Kenzo presentations have featured a two-hundred-person chorus singing Janet Jackson's "Rhythm Nation," and an evening at a skate park in the Eighteenth Arrondissement.

For the inaugural Opening Ceremony show at New York Fashion Week, in 2013, Ferraris, Porsches, and Lamborghinis cruised onto the runway at Pier 25, on the West Side Highway, and disgorged models. The next year, an Opening Ceremony show held at the Metropolitan Opera House took the form of a play written by Jonah Hill and Spike Jonze (big reveal: the audience was seated onstage). In 2015, Leon and Lim orchestrated a sendup of fashion-world self-seriousness: dancers masquerading as models mock-tripped and tumbled down the runway, falling flat on their faces—a stunt choreographed by Justin Peck. (Earlier that week, the model Candice Swanepoel incited gasps and snickers when she wiped out during the Givenchy show.)

This past September, Opening Ceremony invited Fashion Week crowds to the Javits Center for an immigration-themed "Pageant of the People." Guests were greeted by male models holding the flags of their native countries and wearing riffs on the brand's classic varsity jacket decorated to represent different nations. Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein were the m.c.s, razzing the regular models ("this model gave birth to a baby this morning!") and quizzing the celebrities on the runway—including Whoopi Goldberg, Rashida Jones, and Ali Wong—on civics. Get-out-the-vote volunteers tried to register fashion editors and *It* Girls as they exited.

The New York public-art nonprofit Creative Time recently announced that it would be honoring Leon and Lim at its 2017 gala; the duo quickly commandedeer the party-planning. At a



*"Something terrible must have happened somewhere."*

brainstorming session with members of the organization, Leon said, "We've been to a lot of these things, and the takeaway is that they're boring and predictable." He continued, "In the end, we're all about selling," and suggested that everything connected with the event—"centerpieces, tablecloths, down to the tables and chairs, if possible"—be available for sale. Creative Time was enthusiastic: "I love the idea of being able to buy things at different price points," one staffer said, "like a napkin ring by Ai Weiwei!"

MANY PEOPLE who know Leon and Lim attribute their tireless drive and ferocious loyalty to their parents. "There's this tiger-mom-ishness about Humberto and Carol, a sort of children-of-immigrants energy," Andrew Kuo told me. Cynthia Leung explained, "Knowing Humberto's family, and Carol's, too, I'm sure they bickered all the time, but having moms like theirs, you have to work it out. It's very Asian-American—friends break up; family's not going to break up." She added, "When employees leave Opening Ceremony, Humberto and Carol can actually be, like, 'You betrayed us, this is the *family*, that's not O.K.'"

Leon described Pasadena to me, with its mansions and orange groves, as "probably the least cool, the least glamorous place, but actually *so cool*, because it's so weird." When I drove through, en route to Lim's parents' house, it looked like Westchester with palm trees.

In the Lims' living room, a hula hoop with rubber nubs on the inside leaned against a wall. "Apparently they're supposed to slim your waist," Carol said, rolling her eyes—a Korean-mom exercise fad. Heidi Lim pulled a tray of *galbi* (marinated short ribs) out of the oven. There were heaping dishes of *japchae* noodles, pumpkin porridge, and rice, as well as squash, cucumber, and cabbage kimchi, all prepared by Heidi. Carol cut my meat into bite-sized pieces with *galbi* scissors.

Over lunch, she mentioned that growing up she hadn't really identified as Asian-American (private Catholic school, Jewish friends, reggae obsession) until the L.A. riots following the beating of Rodney King and the killing of a black teen-age girl by a fifty-



*"How much should I pretend to care how they made their yams?"*

one-year-old Korean liquor-store owner. "I remember my heart was just trembling," Lim said. "I felt so much anger and sadness. But I also thought, That could be one of my mother's friends." She added, "It was one of the first times I remember Asian-Americans coalescing to have a voice."

The next evening, it was Wendy Leon's turn to show off her home cooking, this time for some fifty of Humberto and Carol's friends and co-workers. In her kitchen, Wendy and assorted relatives were preparing soy-sauce chicken, sweet-and-sour pork, fried squid, beef ribs, pork-belly buns, lobster wontons, and vegetable spring rolls. The sous-chefs wore Kenzo tiger sweatshirts in different colors.

"We always cook together," Wendy said. She has catered Opening Ceremony launch parties and meals for the Kenzo design team. She delegated in Chinese, then apologized: "Some of my family doesn't speak English—but nothing secret."

Taking a break, she showed me photos of Humberto, from nine-pound newborn—she went into labor in an L.A. garment factory and walked herself to the hospital, a dozen blocks away—to toned teen. His sister Rica joked that he got a six-pack from laughing and crying so hard.

In a snapshot from Berkeley, Leon's black hair was bleached blond. Wendy recalled, "He dyed his hair white but didn't want me to know—I was still very traditional." So, before a family friend's wedding, Leon sprayed on temporary dye; over the course of the night, he began to perspire. Wendy held up another photo. "Too hot! Dye dripping down his whole face! Oh, my God." ("Man, you're legendary," Kah-lil Joseph said, when he saw it.)

Leon showed up in a Yoko Ono hooded sweatshirt that said "DREAM." He was followed by Lim, with her daughters and her mother in tow; Spike Jonze, with a little dog; and Joseph, with his mother, his wife, and their toddler, Zora. Lim's daughter Celia trailed after Rica's daughter, a teen-ager named Coltrane. "She is totally in love," Lim said. "She won't eat until she sees what Coltrane's eating, and then that's her new favorite food."

As the hours passed and plates were filled and emptied, Wendy snapped pictures. A sleeping infant in a car seat had been stowed in the living room. Above him hung a Terence Koh print, with a message in blocky black text that also appears in white neon in Opening Ceremony's New York offices: "The Whole Family." ♦

# The I.O.U.



**T**HE ABOVE IS not my real name—the fellow it belongs to gave me his permission to sign it to this story. My real name I shall not divulge. I am a publisher. I accept long novels about young love written by old maids in South Dakota, detective stories concerning wealthy clubmen and female apaches with "wide dark eyes," essays about the menace of this and that and the color of the moon in Tahiti by college professors and other unemployed. I accept no novels by authors under fifteen years old. All the columnists and communists (I can never get these two words straight) abuse me because they say I want money. I do—I want it terribly. My wife needs it. My children use it all the time. If someone offered me all the money in New York I should not refuse it. I would rather bring out a book that had an advance sale of five hundred thousand copies than have discovered Samuel Butler, Theodore Dreiser, and James Branch Cabell in one year. So would you if you were a publisher.

Six months ago I contracted for a book that was undoubtedly a sure thing. It was by Harden, the psychic-research man—Dr. Harden. His first book—I published it in 1913—had taken hold like a Long Island sand crab and at that time psychic research had nowhere near the vogue it has at present. We advertised his new one as being a fifty-heart-power document. His nephew had been killed in the war and Dr. Harden had written with distinction and reticence an account of his psychic communion through various mediums with this nephew, Cosgrove Harden.

Dr. Harden was no intellectual upstart. He was a distinguished psychologist, Ph.D. Vienna, LL.D. Oxford, and late visiting professor at the University of Ohio. His book was neither callous nor credulous. There was a fundamental seriousness underlying his attitude. For example, he had mentioned in his book that a young man named Wilkins had come to his door claiming that the deceased had owed him three dollars and eighty cents. He had asked Dr. Harden to find out what the deceased wanted done about it. This Dr. Harden had steadfastly refused to do. He considered that such a request was comparable to praying to the saints about a lost umbrella.

For ninety days we prepared for publication. The first page of the book was set up in three alternative kinds of type and two drawings each were ordered from five sky-priced artists before the jacket par excellence was selected. The final proof was read by no less than seven expert proofreaders, lest the slightest tremble in the tail of a comma or the faintest cast in a capital "I" offend the fastidious eyes of the Great American Public.

Four weeks before the day set for publication, huge crates went out to a thousand points of the literate compass. To Chicago alone went twenty-seven thousand copies. To Galveston, Texas, went seven thousand. One hundred copies apiece were hurled with sighs into Bisbee, Arizona, Red Wing, Minnesota, and Atlanta, Georgia. The larger cities having been accounted for, stray lots of twenty and thirty and forty were dropped here and there across the continent as a sand artist fills in his nearly completed picture by fine driftings from his hand.

The actual number of books in the first printing was three hundred thousand.

Meanwhile, the advertising department was busy from nine to five six days of the week, italicizing, underlining, capitalizing, double-capitalizing; preparing slogans, headlines, personal articles, and interviews; selecting photographs showing Dr. Harden thinking, musing, and contemplating; choosing snapshots of him with a tennis racquet, with a golf stick, with a sister-in-law, with an ocean. Literary notes were prepared by the gross. Gift copies were piled in stacks, addressed to the critics of a thousand newspapers and weeklies.

The date set was April 15th. On the fourteenth, a breathless hush pervaded the offices and below in the retail department the clerks were glancing nervously at the vacant spaces where the stacks were to rest and at the empty front windows, where three expert window dressers were to work all evening arranging the book in squares and mounds and heaps and circles and hearts and stars and parallelograms.

On the morning of April 15th at five minutes to nine, Miss Jordan, the head stenographer, fainted from excitement into the arms of my junior partner. On the stroke of nine, an old gentleman with

Dundreary whiskers purchased the first copy of "The Aristocracy of the Spirit World."

The great book was out.

It was three weeks after this that I decided to run out to Joliet, Ohio, to see Dr. Harden. This was a case of Mohammed (or was it Moses?) and the mountain. He was of a shy and retiring disposition; it was necessary to encourage him, to congratulate him, to forestall the possible advances of rival publishers. I intended to make the necessary arrangements for securing his next book and with this in mind I took along several neatly worded contracts that would take all disagreeable business problems off his shoulders for the next five years.

We left New York at four o'clock. It is my custom when on a trip to put half a dozen copies of my principal book in my bag and lend them casually to the most intelligent-looking of my fellow-passengers in the hope that the book may thereby be brought to the attention of some new group of readers. Before we came to Trenton, a lady with a lorgnette in one of the staterooms was suspiciously turning the pages of hers, the young man who had the upper of my section was deeply engrossed in his, and a girl with reddish hair and peculiarly mellow eyes was playing tic-tac-toe in the back of a third.

For myself, I drowsed. The New Jersey scenery changed unostentatiously to Pennsylvania scenery. We passed many cows and a great number of woods and fields and every twenty minutes or so the same farmer would appear, sitting in his wagon beside the village station, chewing tobacco and gazing thoughtfully at the Pullman windows.

We must have passed this farmer ten or fifteen times when my nap was suddenly terminated by the realization that the young man who shared my section was moving his foot up and down like a bass drummer in an orchestra and uttering little cries and grunts. I was both startled and pleased for I could see that he was much moved, moved by the book he clutched tightly in his long white fingers—Dr. Harden's "Aristocracy of the Spirit World."

"Well," I remarked jovially, "you seem interested."

He looked up. In his thin face were the eyes that are seen in only two

sorts of men: those who are up on spiritualism and those who are down on spiritualism.

As he seemed still rather dazed I repeated my inquiry.

"Interested!" he cried. "Interested! My God!"

I looked at him carefully. Yes, he was plainly either a medium or else one of the sarcastic young men who write humorous stories about spiritualists for the popular magazines.

"A remarkable piece of—work," he said. "The—hero, so to speak, has evidently spent most of his time since his death dictating it to his uncle."

I agreed that he must have.

"Its value, of course," he remarked with a sigh, "depends entirely on the young man being where he says he is."

"Of course." I was puzzled. "The young man must be in—in Paradise and not in—in Purgatory."

"Yes," he agreed thoughtfully, "it would be embarrassing if he were in Purgatory—and more so if he were in a third place."

This was rather too much.

"There was nothing in the young

man's life which presupposed that he might be in—in—"

"Of course not. The region you refer to was not in my thoughts. I merely said it would be embarrassing if he were in Purgatory but even more embarrassing were he somewhere else."

"Where, sir?"

"In Yonkers, for instance."

At this I started.

"What?"

"In fact, if he were in Purgatory it would only be a slight error of his own—but if he were in Yonkers—"

"My dear sir," I broke out impatiently, "what possible connection is there between Yonkers and 'The Aristocracy of the Spirit World'?"

"None. I merely mentioned that if he were in Yonkers—"

"But he's not in Yonkers."

"No, he's not." He paused and sighed again. "In fact, he has lately crossed from Pennsylvania into Ohio."

This time I jumped—from sheer nervousness. I had not yet realized at what he was driving, but I felt that his remarks hinted at some significance.

"You mean," I demanded quickly, "that you feel his astral presence."

The young man drew himself up fiercely.

"There's been enough of that," he said, intensely. "It seems that for the last month I have been the sport of the credulous queens and Basil Kings of the entire United States. My name, sir, happens to be Cosgrove P. Harden. I am not dead; I have never been dead, and after reading that book I will never again feel it quite safe to die!"

THE GIRL ACROSS the aisle was so startled at my cry of grief and astonishment that she put down a tic instead of a tac.

I had an immediate vision of a long line of people stretching from Fortieth Street, where my publishing house stands, down to the Bowery—five hundred thousand people, each one hugging a copy of "The Aristocracy of the Spirit World," each one demanding the return of his or her two dollars and fifty cents. I considered quickly whether I could change all the names and shift the book from my nonfiction to my fiction. But it was too late even for this. Three hundred thousand copies were in the hands of the American public.

When I was sufficiently recovered, the young man gave me a history of his experiences since he had been reported dead: three months in a German prison; ten months in a hospital with brain fever; another month before he could remember his own name. Half an hour after his arrival in New York, he had met an old friend who had stared at him, choked, and then fainted dead away. When he revived, they went together to a drugstore to get a cocktail and in an hour Cosgrove Harden had heard the most astonishing story about himself that a man ever listened to.

He took a taxi to a bookstore. The book he sought was sold out. Immediately he had started on the train for Joliet, Ohio, and by a rare stroke of fortune the book had been put in his hands.

My first thought was that he was a blackmailer, but by comparing him with his photograph on page 226 of "The Aristocracy of the Spirit World" I saw that he was indubitably Cosgrove P. Harden.



"Who's a good, royal, and most sovereign doggie?"

He was thinner and older than in the picture, the mustache was gone, but it was the same man.

I sighed—profoundly and tragically.

"Just when it's selling better than a book of fiction."

"Fiction!" he responded angrily. "It is fiction!"

"In a sense—" I admitted.

"In a sense? It *is* fiction! It fulfills all the requirements of fiction: it is one long sweet lie. Would you call it fact?"

"No," I replied calmly. "I should call it nonfiction. Nonfiction is a form of literature that lies halfway between fiction and fact."

He opened the book at random and uttered a short poignant cry of distress that made the red-haired girl pause in what must have been at least the semifinals of her tic-tac-toe tournament.

"Look!" he wailed miserably. "Look! It says 'Monday.' Consider my existence on this 'further shore' on 'Monday.' I ask you! Look! I smell flowers. I spend the day smelling flowers. You see, don't you? On page 194, on the top of the page, I smell a rose—"

I lifted the book carefully to my nostrils.

"I don't notice anything," I said. "Possibly the ink—"

"Don't smell!" he cried. "Read! I smell a rose and it gives me two paragraphs of rapture about the instinctive nobility of man. One little smell! Then I devote another hour to daisies. God! I'll never be able to attend another college reunion."

He turned a few pages and then groaned again.

"Here I am with the children—dancing with them. I spend all day with them and we dance. We don't even do a decent shimmy. We do some aesthetic business. I can't dance. I hate children. But no sooner do I die than I become a cross between a nurse girl and a chorus man."

"Here, now," I ventured reproachfully, "that has been considered a very beautiful passage. See, it describes your clothes. You are dressed in—let's see—well, a sort of filmy garment. It streams out behind you—"

"—a sort of floating undergarment," he said morosely, "and I've got leaves all over my head."

I had to admit it—leaves were implied.

"Still," I suggested, "think how much worse it could have been. He could have made you really ridiculous if he'd had you answering questions about the number on your grandfather's watch or the three dollars and eighty cents you owed as a poker debt."

There was a pause.

"Funny egg, my uncle," he said thoughtfully. "I think he's a little mad."

"Not at all," I assured him. "I have dealt with authors all my life and he's quite the sanest one with whom we've ever dealt. He never tried to borrow money from us; he never asked us to fire our advertising department; and he's never assured us that all his friends were unable to get copies of his book in Boston, Massachusetts."

"Nevertheless I'm going to take his astral body for an awful beating."

"Is that all you're going to do?" I demanded anxiously. "You're not going to appear under your true name and spoil the sale of his book, are you?"

"What?"

"Surely you wouldn't do that. Think of the disappointment you'd cause. You'd make five hundred thousand people miserable."

"All women," he said morosely. "They like to be miserable. Think of my girl—the girl I was engaged to. How do you think she felt about my flowery course since I left her? Do you think she's been approving my dancing around with a lot of children all over—all over page 221. Undraped!"

I was in despair. I must know the worst at once.

"What—what *are* you going to do?"

"Do?" he exclaimed wildly. "Why, I'm going to have my uncle sent to the penitentiary, along with his publisher and his press agent and the whole crew, down to the merest printer's devil who carried the blasted type."

**W**HEN WE REACHED Joliet, Ohio, at nine o'clock the next morning, I had calmed him into a semblance of reason. His uncle was an old man, I told him, a misled man. He had been fooled himself, there was little doubt of it. His heart might be weak and the sight of his nephew coming suddenly up the path might finish him off.

It was, of course, in the back of my mind that we could make some sort

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of a compromise. If Cosgrove could be persuaded to keep out of the way for five years or so for a reasonable sum, all might still be well.

So when we left the little station we avoided the village and in a depressing silence traversed the half mile to Dr. Harden's house. When we were within a hundred yards, I stopped and turned to him.

"You wait here," I urged him. "I've got to prepare him for the shock. I'll be back in half an hour."

He demurred at first but finally sat down sullenly in the thick grass by the roadside. Drying my damp brow, I walked up the lane to the house.

The garden of Dr. Harden was full of sunshine and blossomed with Japanese magnolia trees dropping pink tears over the grass. I saw him immediately, sitting by an open window. The sun was pouring in, creeping in stealthily lengthening squares across his desk and the litter of papers that strewed it, then over the lap of Dr. Harden himself and up to his shaggy, white-topped face. Before him on his desk was an empty brown envelope and his lean fingers were moving busily over the sheaf of newspaper clippings he had just extracted.

I had come quite close, half hidden by the magnolias, and was about to address him when I saw a girl in a purple morning dress break, stooping, through the low-branched cluster of apple trees that made the north end of the garden and move across the grass toward the house. I drew back and watched her as she came directly up to the open window and spoke unabashed to the great Dr. Harden.

"I want to have a talk with you," she said abruptly.

Dr. Harden looked up and a section of the *Philadelphia Press* fluttered from his hand. I wondered if it was the clipping that called him "the new Saint John."

"About this stuff!" the girl continued.

She drew a book from under her arm. It was "The Aristocracy of the Spirit World." I recognized it by the red cover with the angels in the corners.

"About this stuff?" she repeated angrily, and then shied the book violently into a bush, where it skimmed down between two wild roses and

## OBJECTIVITY AS BLANKET

Nor the police, hyenas on hearing five confessions, four false and one too irresistible. Nor the mental-health elephant, tusked by the state. Nor the common-sense stork twisting at the prosecutor's feet. Nor the one the one juror, uneasy facing eleven pale sheep that bay all day all night for conviction. Nor the Governor, sir! Nor the common-sense stork, now in a knot. Nor the shots. Nor the clause, unbending. Nor the clause, bending. Nor, seeing his fitful approach, did one turn back to flip the window latch for the lifeform nearly breaking himself on glass. Nor the next Governor. Nor the state—carriage horses trotting ever steady blinders acute to the eye. Nor the widower how could he, puma in pull-focus. Nor the defense counsel, not for lack of it. Nor the stork, is she breathing? Is there such a thing as breathing here and does it mean—?

The polyester the royal blue the blanket on the bed of the mother of two.

—Zoë Hitzig

perched disconsolately among the roots.

"Why, Miss Thalia!"

"Why, Miss Thalia!" she mimicked. "Why, you old fool, you ought to be crocked off for writing this book."

"Crocked off?" Dr. Harden's voice expressed a faint hope that this might be some new honor. He was not left long in doubt.

"Crocked off!" she blazed forth. "You heard me! My gosh, can't you understand *English*? Haven't you ever been to a *prom*?"

"I was unaware," Dr. Harden replied coolly, "that college proms were held in the Bowery and I know no precedent for using an abbreviation of the noun 'crockery' as a transitive verb. As for the book—"

"It's the world's worst disgrace."

"If you will read these clippings—"

She put her elbows on the windowsill, moved as though she intended to hoist herself through, and then suddenly dropped her chin in her hands and looking at him level-eyed began to talk.

"You had a nephew," she said. "That was his hard luck. He was the best man that ever lived and the only man I ever loved or ever will love."

Dr. Harden nodded and made as though to speak but Thalia knocked her little fist on the windowsill and continued.

"He was brave and square and quiet. He died of wounds in a foreign town

and passed out of sight as Sergeant Harden, 105th Infantry. A quiet life and an honorable death. What have you done!" Her voice rose slightly until it shook and sent a sympathetic vibration over the window vines. "What have you done! You've made him a laughingstock! You've called him back to life as a fabulous creature who sends idiotic messages about flowers and birds and the number of fillings in George Washington's teeth. You've—"

Dr. Harden rose to his feet.

"Have you come here," he began shrilly, "to tell me what—"

"Shut up!" she cried. "I'm going to tell you what you've done, and you can't stop me with all the astral bodies this side of the Rocky Mountains."

Dr. Harden subsided into his chair.

"Go on," he said, with an effort at self-control. "Talk your shrewish head off."

She paused for a moment and turning her head looked into the garden. I could see that she was biting her lip and blinking to keep back the tears. Then she fixed her dark eyes on him again.

"You've taken him," she continued, "and used him as a piece of dough for your crooked medium, to make pie out of—pie for all the hysterical women who think you're a great man. Call you great? Without any respect for the dignity and reticence of death? You're a toothless, yellow old man without even the excuse of real grief for playing on

your own credulity and that of a lot of other fools. That's all—I'm through."

With that, she turned and as suddenly as she had come walked with her head erect down the path toward me. I waited until she had passed and gone some twenty yards out of sight of the window. Then I followed her along the soft grass and spoke to her.

"Miss Thalia."

She faced me, somewhat startled.

"Miss Thalia, I want to tell you that there's a surprise for you down the lane—somebody you haven't seen for many months."

Her face showed no understanding.

"I don't want to spoil anything," I continued, "but I don't want you to be frightened if in a few moments you get the surprise of your existence."

"What do you mean?" she asked quietly.

"Nothing," I said. "Just continue along the road and think of the nicest things in the world and all of a sudden something tremendous will happen."

With this, I bowed very low and stood smiling benevolently with my hat in my hand.

I saw her look at me wonderingly and then turn slowly and walk away. In a moment she was lost to view beyond the curve of the low stone wall under the magnolia trees.

IT WAS FOUR days—four sweltering anxious days—before I could bring enough order out of the chaos to arrange any sort of business conference. The first meeting between Cosgrove Harden and his uncle was the most tremendous nervous strain of my life. I sat for an hour on the slippery edge of a rickety chair, preparing to spring forward every time I saw young Cosgrove's muscles tighten under his coat sleeve. I would make an instinctive start and each time slip helplessly from the chair and land in a sitting position on the floor.

Dr. Harden finally terminated the interview by rising and going upstairs. I managed to pack young Harden off to his room by dint of threats and promises and wrung out of him a vow of twenty-four hours' silence.

I used all my available cash in bribing the two old servants. They must say nothing, I assured them. Mr. Cosgrove

Harden had just escaped from Sing Sing. I quaked as I said this but there were so many lies in the air that one more or less made little difference.

If it hadn't been for Miss Thalia I would have given up the first day and gone back to New York to await the crash. But she was in such a state of utter and beatific happiness that she was willing to agree to anything. I proposed to her that if she and Cosgrove were to marry and live in the West under an assumed name for ten years I would support them liberally. She jumped for joy. I seized the opportunity and with glowing colors painted a love bungalow in California, with mild weather all the year around and Cosgrove coming up the path to supper and romantic old missions nearby and Cosgrove coming up the path to supper and the Golden Gate in a June twilight and Cosgrove and so forth.

As I talked, she gave little cries of joy and was all for leaving immediately. It was she who persuaded Cosgrove on the fourth day to join us in conference in the living room. I left word with the maid that we were on no account to be disturbed and we sat down to thresh the whole thing out.

Our points of view were radically divergent.

Young Harden's was very similar to the Red Queen's. Someone had blundered and someone had to suffer for it right away. There had been enough fake dead men in this family and there was going to be a real one if someone didn't look out!

Dr. Harden's point of view was that it was all an awful mess and he didn't know what to do about it, God knew, and he wished he were dead.

Thalia's point of view was that she had looked up California in a guidebook and the climate was adorable and Cosgrove coming up the path to supper.

My point of view was that there was no knot so tight that there wasn't a way out of the labyrinth—and a lot more mixed metaphors that only got everybody more confused than they had been in the beginning.

Cosgrove Harden insisted that we get four copies of "The Aristocracy of the Spirit World" and talk it over. His uncle said that the sight of a book would

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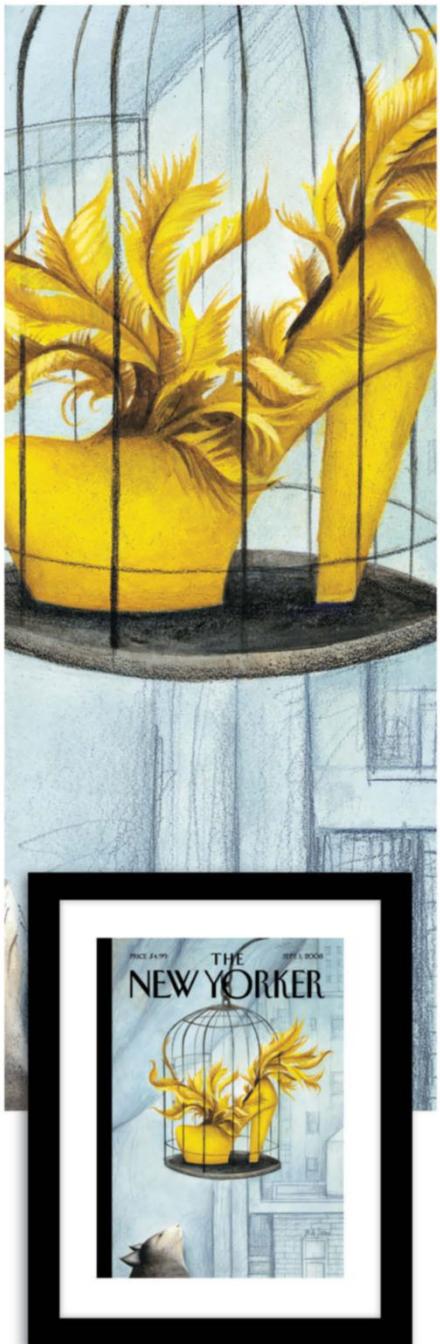
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make him sick to his stomach. Thalia's suggestion was that we should all go to California and settle the question out there.

I got four books and distributed them. Dr. Harden shut his eyes and groaned. Thalia opened hers to the last page and began drawing heavenly bungalows with a young wife standing in the doorway of each. Young Harden hunted furiously for page 226.

"Here we are!" he cried. "Just opposite the picture of 'Cosgrove Harden the day before he sailed, showing the small mole above his left eye' we see the following: 'This mole had always worried Cosgrove. He had a feeling that bodies should be perfect and that this was an imperfection that should in the natural order be washed away.' Hmm! I have no mole."

Dr. Harden agreed.

"Possibly it was an imperfection in the negative," he suggested.

"Great Scott! If the negative had failed to photograph my left leg you'd probably have me yearning all through the book for a left leg—and have it joined to me in Chapter 29."

"Look here!" I broke in. "Can't we reach some compromise? No one knows that you are in town. Can't we—"

Young Harden scowled at me fiercely.

"I haven't started yet. I haven't mentioned the alienation of Thalia's affections."

"Alienation!" Dr. Harden protested. "Why, I have paid her no attention. She detests me. She—"

Cosgrove laughed bitterly.

"You flatter yourself. Do you think I was jealous of your old gray whiskers? I'm talking about her affections being alienated by these descriptions of me."

Thalia bent forward earnestly.

"My affections never wavered, Cosgrove—never."

"Come, Thalia," Cosgrove said somewhat grumpily. "They must have been slightly alienated. How about page 223? Could you love a man who wore floating underwear? Who was—who was filmy?"

"I was grieved, Cosgrove. That is, I would have been grieved if I'd believed it, but I didn't."

"No alienation?" His tone expressed disappointment.

"None, Cosgrove."

"Well," Cosgrove said resentfully, "I'm ruined politically, anyway—I mean, if I decided to go into politics I can never be President. I'm not even a democratic ghost—I'm a spiritual snob."

Dr. Harden's face was sunk in his hands in an attitude of profound dejection.

I interrupted desperately, talking so loudly that Cosgrove was compelled to stop and listen.

"I will guarantee you ten thousand a year if you will go away for ten years!"

Thalia clapped her hands and Cosgrove seeing her out of the corner of his eye began for the first time to show a faint interest.

"How about after the ten years are up?"

"Oh," I said hopefully, "Dr. Harden may be—may be—"

"Speak up," the doctor said gloomily. "I may be dead. I sincerely trust so."

"—so you can come back under your own name," I continued callously. "Meanwhile we'll agree to publish no new edition of the book."

"Hmm. Suppose he's not dead in ten years?" Cosgrove demanded suspiciously.

"Oh, I'll die," the doctor reassured him quickly. "That needn't worry you."

"How do you know you'll die?"

"How does one know anyone will die? It's just human nature."

Cosgrove regarded him sourly.

"Humor is out of place in this discussion. If you'll make an honest agreement to die, with no mental reservations—"

The doctor nodded gloomily.

"I might as well. With the money I have left I'll starve to death in that time."

"That would be satisfactory. And when you do, for heaven's sake arrange to have yourself buried. Don't just lie around the house here dead and expect me to come back and do all the work."

At this the doctor seemed somewhat bitter, and then Thalia, who had been silent for some time, raised her head.

"Do you hear anything outside?" she asked curiously.

I had heard something—that is I had subconsciously perceived a murmur—a murmur growing and mingling with the sound of many footsteps.

"I do," I remarked. "Odd—"

There was a sudden interruption—the murmur outside swelled to the proportions of a chant, the door burst

open, and a wild-eyed servant rushed in.

"Dr. Harden! Dr. Harden!" she cried in terror. "There's a mob, maybe a million people, comin' along the road and up toward the house. They'll be on the porch in a—"

An increase in the noise showed that they already were. I sprang to my feet.

"Hide your nephew!" I shouted to Dr. Harden.

His beard trembling, his watery eyes wide, Dr. Harden grasped Cosgrove feebly by the elbow.

"What is it?" He faltered.

"I don't know. Get him upstairs to the attic right away—put leaves over him, stick him behind an heirloom!"

With that, I was gone, leaving the three of them in puzzled panic. Through the hall I rushed and out the front door onto the screen porch. I was none too soon.

The screen porch was full of men, young men in checked suits and slouch hats, old men in derbies and frayed cuffs, crowding and jostling, each one beckoning and calling to me above the crowd. Their one distinguishing mark was a pencil in the right hand and a notebook in the left—a notebook open—waiting, virginally yet ominously portentous.

Behind them on the lawn was a larger crowd—butchers and bakers in their aprons, fat women with folded arms, thin women holding up dirty children so that they might better see, shouting boys, barking dogs, horrible little girls who jumped up and down shouting and clapping their hands. Behind these, in a sort of outer ring, stood the old men of the village, toothless, musty-eyed, their mouths open, their gray beards tickling the tops of their canes. Over behind them, the setting sun, blood-red and horrible, played on three hundred twisting shoulders.

After the burst of noise that succeeded my appearance, a silence fell—a deep hush, pregnant with significance—and out of this hush came a dozen voices from the men with notebooks in front of me.

"Jenkins of the Toledo *Blade!*"

"Harlan of the Cincinnati *News!*"

"M'Gruder of the Dayton *Times!*"

"Cory of the Zanesville *Republican!*"

"Jordan of the Cleveland *Plain Dealer!*"

"Carmichael of the Columbus *News!*"

"Martin of the Lima *Herald!*"

"Ryan of the Akron *World!*"

It was weird, uncanny—like some map of Ohio gone mad, with the miles refusing to square and the towns jumping about from county to county. My brain quivered.

Then again the hush fell. I noticed a commotion in the middle of the crowd, a sort of wave or eddy floating down the center like a thin line of wind blowing through a wheat field.

"What do you want?" I cried hollowly.

Like one voice came the response from half a thousand throats.

"Where is Cosgrove Harden?"

It was out! The reporters swarmed about me, pleading, threatening, demanding.

"—kept it pretty close, didn't you—almost didn't leak out—pays to pay bills—won't he give an interview—send us the old faker—"

Then that strange eddy in the field of people suddenly reached the front and died out. A tall young man with yellow hair and stilt-like legs emerged dynamically from the crowd and dozens of willing hands propelled him forward toward me. Up to the porch he came—up the steps—

"Who are you?" I shouted.

"Name's Elbert Wilkins," he gasped. "I'm the fella that told."

He paused and his chest swelled. It was his great moment. He was the immortal messenger of the gods.

"I recognized him the day he came! You see—you see—" We all swayed forward eagerly. "I got his I.O.U. for three dollars and eighty cents he lost to me at draw poker, and *I want my money!*"

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—1920

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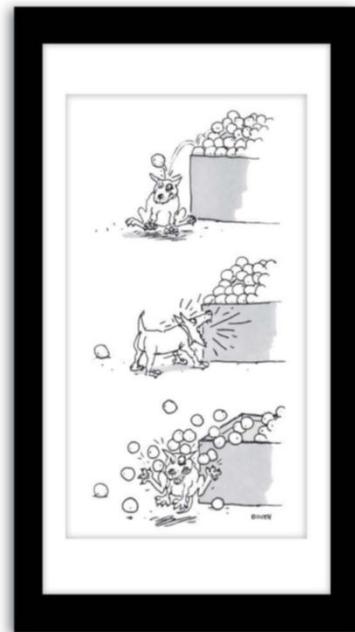
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# THE CRITICS



BOOKS

## THE ILLIBERAL IMAGINATION

*Are liberals on the wrong side of history?*

BY ADAM GOPNIK

OF ALL THE prejudices of pundits, presentism is the strongest. It is the assumption that what is happening now is going to keep on happening, without anything happening to stop it. If the West has broken down the Berlin Wall and McDonald's opens in St. Petersburg, then history is over and Thomas Friedman is content. If, by a margin so small that in a voice vote you would have no idea who won, Brexit happens; or if, by a trick of an antique electoral system designed to give country people more power than city people, a Donald Trump is elected, then pluralist constitutional democracy is finished. The liberal millennium was upon us as the year 2000 dawned; fifteen years later, the autocratic apocalypse is at hand. Thomas Friedman is concerned.

You would think that people who think for a living would pause and reflect that whatever is happening usually does stop happening, and something else happens in its place; a baby who is crying now will stop crying sooner or later. Exhaustion, or a change of mood, or a passing sound, or a bright light, *something*, always happens next. But for the parents the wait can feel the same as forever, and for many pundits, too, now is the only time worth knowing, for now is when the baby is crying and now is when they're selling your books.

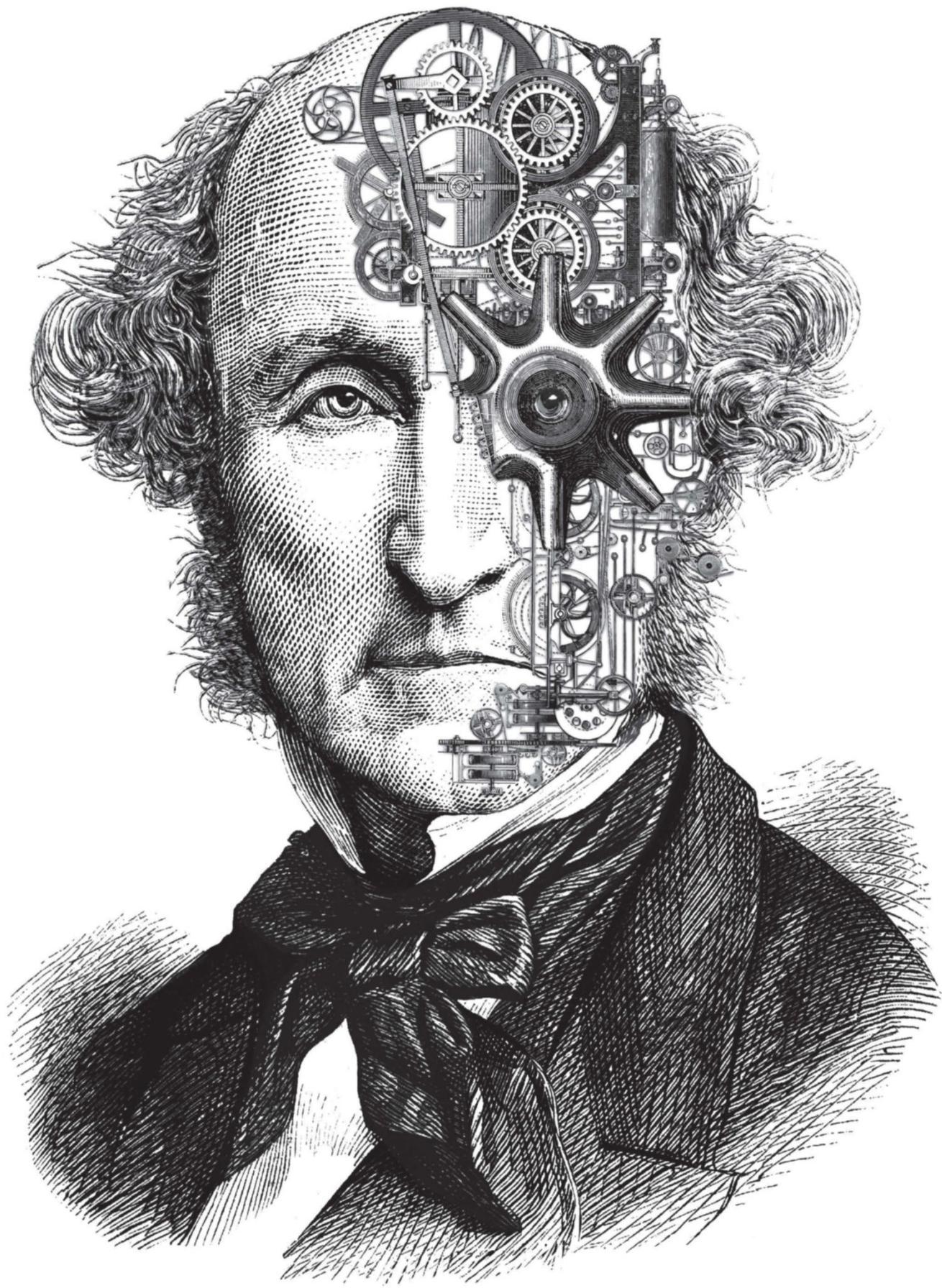
And so the death-of-liberalism tomes and eulogies are having their day, with the publishers who bet on apocalypse rubbing their hands with pleasure and the ones who gambled on more of the same weeping like, well, babies. Pankaj Mishra, in "Age of Anger" (Far-

rar, Straus & Giroux), focusses on the failures of what is sometimes called "neoliberalism"—i.e., free-market fundamentalism—and, more broadly, on the failure of liberal élites around the world to address the perpetual problem of identity, the truth that men and women want to be members of a clan or country with values and continuities that stretch beyond merely material opportunity. Joel Mokyr's "A Culture of Growth" (Princeton) is an attempt to answer the big question: Why did science and technology (and, with them, colonial power) spread west to east in the modern age, instead of another way around? His book, though drier than the more passionate polemics, nimbly suggests that the postmodern present is powered by the same engines as the early-modern past. In "Homo Deus" (HarperCollins), Yuval Noah Harari offers an elegy for the end of the liberal millennium, which he sees as giving way to post-humanism: the coming of artificial intelligence that may leave us contented and helpless, like the Eloi in H. G. Wells's "Time Machine." Certainly, the anti-liberals, or, in Harari's case, post-humanists, have much the better of the rhetorical energy and polemical brio. They slash and score. The case against the anti-liberals can be put only slowly and with empirical caution. The tortoise is not merely a slow runner but an ugly one. Still, he did win the race.

MISHRA, AN INDIAN-BORN journalist now resident in London, is dashing. Dashing in the positive sense, as one possessed by real brio, and dashing in the less positive sense, as one

racing through Western, and a great deal of Eastern, intellectual history of the past three centuries at a pace that leaves the reader panting—sometimes in admiration of his verve, sometimes in impatience at his impatience. Everything in modern history, his book suggests, has been inexorably leading up to the conditions of 2017. Since, if the book had been written a scant seven years ago—with Obama triumphant, Labour in power in Britain, and the euro having survived its shocks—the entire vector of the centuries would have seemed dramatically different, one wonders whether what Mishra traces through time might really be not a directional arrow but more like a surfboard, rising and falling on the quick-change waves of history.

Mishra's thesis is that our contemporary misery and revanchist nationalism can be traced to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's romantic reaction to Voltaire's Enlightenment—with the Enlightenment itself entirely to blame in letting high-minded disdain for actual human experience leave it open to a romantic reaction. In Mishra's view, Voltaire—whose long life stretched from 1694 to 1778—was the hyper-rationalist *philosophe* who brought hostility to religion out into the open in eighteenth-century France, and practiced a callow élitist progressivism that produced Rousseau's romantic search for old-fashioned community. Rousseau, who, though eighteen years younger, died in that same fateful year of 1778, was the father of the Romantic movement, of both the intimate nature-loving side and the more sinister political side, with its mystification



*The true élite of modern societies is composed of engineers, mechanics, and artisans—masters of reality, not big thinkers.*

of a “general will” that dictators could vibrate to, independent of mere elections. The back-and-forth of cold Utopianism and hot Volk-worship continues to this day. The Davos men are Voltaire’s children, a transnational and fatuously progressive élite; Trump and Brexit voters are Rousseau’s new peasant hordes, terrified of losing cultural continuity and clan comfort.

Piling blame on Voltaire as an apostle of top-down neoliberalism is familiar from John Ralston Saul’s 1992 “Voltaire’s Bastards,” and the idea of Rousseau, the Genevan autodidact, as the key figure in the romantic political reaction against modernity, even as the godfather of Nazism, was present in Bertrand Russell’s “A History of Western Philosophy,” back in the nineteen-forties. A fan of Voltaire will object that Mishra offers a comically partial picture of him, neglecting his brave championing of the fight against torture and religious persecution. Mishra’s Voltaire is a self-seeking capitalist entrepreneur, because, among other things, he established a watch factory at Ferney—as a refuge and asylum for persecuted Protestants. Casting Voltaire as the apostle of fatuous utopian progressivism, Mishra curiously fails to note that he also wrote what remains the most famous of all *attacks* on fatuous utopian progressivism, “Candide.”

The truth is that no thinker worth remembering has some monolithic “project” to undertake; all express a personality inevitably double, and full of the tensions and contradictions that touch any real life. Voltaire was greedy, entrepreneurial, self-advertising; he was also altruistic, courageous, and generous. He spread Enlightenment ideas to the farthest outposts of Europe—and he sold them out to the autocrats who lived there. A persistent oddity of intellectuals is that when they’re talking about someone they actually know they offer a mixed accounting of bad stuff and good stuff: he’ll drive you crazy with *this*, but he’s terrific in *that*. The moment someone becomes a feature of the past, however, he is reduced to a vector with a single transit and historical pur-

pose. If we treated our friends the way we treat our subjects, we wouldn’t have any. (Mishra himself is a voice against the neoliberal consensus who also writes a column for Bloomberg View. This does not make him a hypocrite. It makes him, like Voltaire, one more writer who works for a living.)

Mishra’s Rousseau, infatuated with a dream of ancient Spartan order and inflamed with resentment at the condescension of the Enlightenment élite, is more recognizable. But one wonders if an irascible Swiss pastoralist is really responsible for the temper of nineteenth-century anti-rationalism, which Mishra ably presents as it develops over the next two centuries, with a love of apocalyptic violence for its own sake. (Mishra rightly finds the obsession summed up in Bakunin’s phrase about destruction as a creative passion.) There are lots of romantic anti-rationalisms to play with; Rousseau’s was largely soft and sentimental in tone, rather than apocalyptic and violent. As Mark Twain saw, the pre-war American South grounded its “organic” medievalism in Walter Scott’s novels, without a trace of Rousseau infecting the brew.

Things get much more original and interesting when Mishra captures how the many currents of romantic nationalism are entangled in the contemporary world. This is the beating heart of the book, and it is both richly realized and wonderfully detailed. He demonstrates that “radical Islam” is an almost wholly modern “collage” of parts borrowed from Western romantic-reactionary thought; even Ayatollah Khomeini’s version was as much a product of Paris as of ancient Persia. (This may explain Michel Foucault’s enthusiasm for Khomeini and his revolution.)

The Indian material is particularly revealing. Mishra shows that, far from being some kind of restorative, backward-looking “tribalism,” the ideology that filled pre-independence India was a bizarre mixture of right-wing social Darwinism, muddled and mystical Theosophy, and left-wing Fabianism—not intrinsically “Eastern” but mod-

ern, eclectic, and fantastically merciful in its turnings. Savarkar, the chief ideologue of the extreme Hindu nationalism now once more in power in India (and a mentor of Gandhi’s assassin), relied on Western ideas absorbed during his student days in England, wedged in alongside Germanic and Wagnerian notions of glorious racial battles. He hated Muslims for their intrusion into a Hindu homeland, and adored them for their history of religious machismo.

For Mishra, elements in modernity that seem violently opposed, Zionism and Islamism, Hindu nationalism and Theosophical soppiness—not to mention Nazi militarism—share a common wellspring. Their apostles all believe in some kind of blood consciousness, some kind of shared pre-rational identity, and appeal to a population enraged at being reduced to the hamster wheel of meaningless work and material reward. Mishra brings this Walpurgisnacht of romanticized violence to a nihilistic climax with the happy meeting in a Supermax prison of Timothy McVeigh, perpetrator of the Oklahoma City bombing, and Ramzi Yousef, perpetrator of the World Trade Center bombing: the fanatic, child-murdering right-wing atheist finds “lots in common” with the equally murderous Islamic militant—one of those healing conversations we’re always being urged to pursue. (“I never have [known] anyone in my life who has so similar a personality to my own as his,” Yousef gushed of McVeigh.)

Mishra is too intelligent and humane to have any confusion about the end and outcome of these romantic reactions—one need be no fan of Shah or Tsar to see that the suffering of the people increased after the ruler’s overthrow by ideologues, religious or secular, enraptured by a dream of the renewed social whole. The twentieth century is a graveyard of such attempts, or, rather, is filled with graveyards of people crushed by such attempts. But Mishra does take most of his mordant pleasures in detailing the illusions on the liberal side. His insistence that the liberal state serves only a tiny élite seems belied by the general planetary truths of ever-increasing, if inequitably divided, prosperity. The same principle



of pluralism that applies to minds must also be applied to models. The state can be both inarguably more prosperous and plural and still insufficiently equal. Perhaps Tocqueville's most brilliant insight (and Mishra, to his credit, cites it) was that revolutions are produced by improved conditions and rising expectations, not by mass immigration. As Louis C.K. says, right now everything is amazing and nobody is happy. Each citizen carries on her person a computer more powerful than any available to a billionaire two decades ago, and many are using their devices to express their unbridled rage at the society that put them in our pockets.

**B**EHIND THIS RAGE is the history of European domination, which has produced an inequality favoring the North against the South, and the West against the East. In Samuel Johnson's eighteenth-century parable "Rasselas," a Persian prince asks a philosopher, Imlac, an essential question:

"By what means," said the prince, "are the Europeans thus powerful? or why, since they can so easily visit Asia and Africa for trade or conquest, cannot the Asiatics and Africans invade their coasts, plant colonies in their ports, and give laws to their natural princes? The same wind that carries them back would bring us thither."

"They are more powerful, Sir, than we," answered Imlac, "because they are wiser; knowledge will always predominate over ignorance, as man governs the other animals. But why their knowledge is more than ours, I know not what reason can be given."

That question underlies the other questions: we can't understand either the history of liberalism that produced modern life or the history of colonialism that produced Mishra's postmodern collage without first understanding why the wind blew only one way. Liberalism, on this view, is simply the hot air that blew the imperialists toward their loot.

Joel Mokyr is an economic historian at Northwestern, and "A Culture of Growth," though rather plainly written, is a fascinating attempt to answer that essential question. He reminds us that the skirmishing of philosophers and their ideas, the preoccupation of popular historians, is in many ways a sideshow—that the revolution that

gave Europe dominance was, above all, scientific, and that the scientific revolution was, above all, an artisanal revolution. Though the élite that gets sneered at, by Trumpites and neo-Marxists alike, is composed of philosophers and professors and journalists, the actual élite of modern societies is composed of engineers, mechanics, and artisans—masters of reality, not big thinkers.

Mokyr sees this as the purloined letter of history, the obvious point that people keep missing because it's obvious. More genuinely revolutionary than either Voltaire or Rousseau, he suggests, are such overlooked Renaissance texts as Tommaso Campanella's "The City of the Sun," a sort of proto-Masonic hymn to people who know how to do things. It posits a Utopia whose inhabitants "considered the noblest man to be the one that has mastered the most skills . . . like those of the blacksmith and mason." The real upheavals in minds, he argues, were always made in the margins. He notes that a disproportionate number of the men who made the scientific and industrial revolution in Britain didn't go to Oxford or Cambridge but got artisanal training out on the sides. (He could have included on this list Michael Faraday, the man who grasped the nature of electromagnetic induction, and who worked some of his early life as a valet.) What answers the prince's question was over in Dr. Johnson's own apartment, since Johnson was himself an eccentric given to chemistry experiments—"stinks," as snobbish Englishmen call them.

As in painting and drawing, manual dexterity counted for as much as deep thoughts—more, in truth, for everyone had the deep thoughts, and it took dexterity to make telescopes that really worked. Mokyr knows Asian history, and shows, in a truly humbling display of erudition, that in China the minds evolved but not the makers. The Chinese enlightenment happened, but it was strictly a thinker's enlightenment, where Mandarins never talked much to the manufacturers. In this account, Voltaire and Rousseau are mere vapor, rising from a steam engine as it races forward. It was the perpetual conversation between technicians and

thinkers that made the Enlightenment advance. TED talks are a licensed subject for satire, but in Mokyr's view TED talks are, in effect, what separate modernity from antiquity and the West from the East. Guys who think big thoughts talking to guys who make cool machines—that's where the leap happens.

**T**HE HISTORY THAT Mokyr details can be seen as a story of gradually decreased metaphysical illusion, with ineffable spirit being driven, by turns, out of the cosmos, the biological tree, and the human mind. In the final reduction, the idea of the "human" itself may vanish into algorithms and programs. The coolest machine of all thinks its big thoughts for itself.

This is the view of Yuval Noah Harari, a lecturer at the Hebrew University, in Jerusalem, and the author of "Sapiens," a bracingly unsentimental history of humankind, which was praised by everyone from Jared Diamond to President Obama. "Homo Deus" extends Harari's argument about man's fate far into the future. The first fifty or so pages go by smoothly, with a confident, convincing account of the transformations that have made the world less treacherous than ever before. He reprises, in rosy if not Pinkerian hues, the long peace and our advance toward an era of declining violence; we moved from an age where divine authority sponsored our institutions and values to a human-centered age of liberal individualism, where values were self-generated. Then he announces his bald thesis: that "once technology enables us to re-engineer human minds, *Homo sapiens* will disappear, human history will come to an end, and a completely new process will begin, which people like you and me cannot comprehend."

Now, any big book on big ideas will inevitably turn out to have lots of little flaws in argument and detail along the way. No one can master every finicky footnote. As readers, we blow past the details of subjects in which we are inexpert, and don't care if hominins get confused with hominids or the Jurassic with the Mesozoic. (The in-group readers do, and grouse all the way to the author's next big advance.) Yet, with

Harari's move from mostly prehistoric cultural history to modern cultural history, even the most complacent reader becomes uneasy encountering historical and empirical claims so coarse, bizarre, or tendentious.

A range of examples, from Elvis to Duchamp, summoned to illustrate Harari's points feel wrong in their details or wrong in their gist. Harari weirdly sees Duchamp, that cool arch-ironist, as an "Anything goes!" romantic, pouring his heart out in defiance of convention, rather than as the precise deadpan satirist he so obviously was. (Harari tends to a one-size-fits-all account of modernism, blowing past the truth that "styles" in the arts and humanities mark very specific political-poetic positions that real humanists spend lifetimes untangling and comparing.) When Harari deals with bigger events in modern cultural history, the micro-claims get even wackier and the macro-claims more frantic and arrogant. The light obtained by setting straw men on fire is not what we mean by illumination.

"Humanism," for instance, ordinarily signifies, first, the revival of classical learning in the Italian Renaissance—the earliest self-described humanists were simply fourteenth-century experts in Latin grammar—which came to place a new value on corporeal beauty, antique wisdom, and secular learning. These practices further evolved in the Enlightenment to

include an attempt to apply the methods of the experimental sciences to human problems, fighting superstition and cruelty by making life's choices more rational. Skepticism about religious dogma, confidence in scientific reasoning: this, in many different strains, is the humanism of Montaigne and Voltaire and Hume, the kind that John Stuart Mill defined for modernity.

By "humanism" Harari means, instead, the doctrine that only our feelings can tell us what to do—that "we ought to give as much freedom as possible to every individual to experience the world, follow his or her inner voice and express his or her inner truth." This sentiment is surely typical only of the Romantic rebellion *against* Enlightenment humanism, the reaction—which Mishra details at such length—of the figures, including Rousseau, who have been most sympathetic to religion and mysticism and the irrational. (Rousseau is almost the only eighteenth-century thinker who is quoted in Harari's book.) Enlightenment humanists tended to believe in absolute truths, of the kind produced by experimental science; they gave a fixed speed to light and asserted laws of gravity that were constant throughout the cosmos. If they doubted anything, it was the natural urgings of the heart, which they saw most often as cruel or destructive.

Harari's larger contention is that

our homocentric creed, devoted to human liberty and happiness, will be destroyed by the approaching post-humanist horizon. Free will and individualism are, he says, illusions. We must reconceive ourselves as mere meat machines running algorithms, soon to be overtaken by metal machines running better ones. By then, we will no longer be able to sustain our comforting creed of "autonomy," the belief, which he finds in Rousseau, that "I will find deep within myself a clear and single inner voice, which is my authentic self," and that "my authentic self is completely free." In reality, Harari maintains, we have merely a self-deluding, "narrating self," one that recites obviously tendentious stories, shaped by our evolutionary history to help us cope with life. We are—this is his most emphatic point—already machines of a kind, robots unaware of our own programming. Humanism will be replaced by Dataism; and if the humanist revolution made us masters the Dataist revolution will make us pets.

Yet the choice between "programmed" responses and "free" ones is surely false. We are made up of stories—and we make them up. Harari invokes women's memory of their experience of labor, whose pain they seem, in retrospect, to underplay, as an instance of our being fiendishly programmed by our evolutionary history, unaware. If women remembered the pain of childbirth, they would not have babies, or not twice. Well, in this man's experience, at least, women *don't* forget the pain of labor—they mention it, often—but they calculate the pain of giving birth against the joy of having a baby and, usually, decide it's a good bargain. And so they make a story composed of both truths. The narrating self doesn't replace sense with story; it makes a story that makes its own sense.

The algorithms of human existence are not like the predictable, repeatable algorithms of a computer, or people would not have a history, and Donald Trump would not be President. In order to erase humanity as a special category—different from animals, on the one hand, and robots, on the other—Harari points to the power of artificial intelligence, and the prospect that it

### TWENTY-YEAR-OLDS LOUDLY KNOWING THINGS



will learn to do everything we can do, but better. Now, that *might* happen, but it has been predicted for a long time and the arrival date keeps getting postponed. The A.I. that Harari fears and admires doesn't, on inspection, seem quite so smart. He mentions computer-generated haiku, as though they were on a par with those generated by Japanese poets. Even if such poems exist, they can seem plausible only because the computer is programmed to imitate stylistic tics that we have already been instructed to appreciate, something akin to the way the ocean can "create" a Brancusi—making smooth, oblong stones that our previous experience of art has helped us to see as beautiful—rather than to how artists make new styles, which involves breaking the algorithm, not following it.

Harari's conclusions in his earlier book, "Sapiens," are properly ambivalent, not to say ambiguous, and more fully aware of the traps of large-scale history. "It is sobering to realise how often our view of the past is distorted by events of the last few years," he writes. "Since it was written in 2014," he says, the book "takes a relatively buoyant approach to modern history." The intellectual modesty and appropriate uncertainty of this sentence seem an essential prerequisite to getting the big things right. Some might even call it humanism.

A READER CAN'T HELP noting that anti-liberal polemics, today as in the lurid polemical pasts that Mishra revisits, always have more force and gusto than liberalism's defenses have ever had. Best-sellers tend to have big pictures, secret histories, charismatic characters, guilty parties, plots discovered, occult secrets unlocked. Voltaire's done it! The Singularity is upon us! The World is flat! Since scientific liberalism of the kind Mokyr details believes that history doesn't have a pre-ordained plot, and that the individual case, not the enveloping essence, is the only quantum that history provides, it is hard for it to dramatize itself in quite this way. The middle way is not the way of melodrama. (That's why long novels are the classic liberal medium, and why the best one is called "Middlemarch.")

Beneath all the anti-liberal rhetoric is an unquestioned insistence: that the way in which our societies seem to have gone wrong is evidence of a fatal flaw somewhere in the systems we've inherited. This is so quickly agreed on and so widely accepted that it seems perverse to dispute it. But do causes and effects work quite so neatly, or do we search for a cause because the effect is upon us? We can make a false idol of causality. Looking at the rise of Trump, the fall of Europe, one sees a handful of contingencies that, arriving in a slightly different way, would have broken a very different pane.

Is this the age of anger? Mishra's title, and coinage, echoes W.H. Auden's "Age of Anxiety," the name for the post-A-bomb forties and fifties—which reappear comically in the new accounts as a heyday of middle-class buoyancy and social mobility. All times, save the most catastrophic, like all people, save the most depraved, are mixed. Ours seem more mixed than most. Any account of the new American atavism has to take into account that the same system that produced Trump had immediately before given us the eight forward-looking years of Obama, who remains a far more popular figure than his successor.

The alternative to Mishra's view might be that the dynamic of cosmopolitanism and nostalgic reaction is permanent and recursive. The divide that he sees seems far older than his two French anti-heroes. Karl Popper, in his book "The Open Society and Its Enemies," traced exactly the same cycle back to Plato's preference for regimented Sparta over freewheeling Athens (which is where Rousseau got the idea) and to a permanent cycle of history in which open societies, in their pluralism, create an anxiety that brings about a reaction toward a fixed organic state, which, then as now, serves both the interests of an oligarchy and those of a frightened, insecure population looking to arrest change.

We live, certainly, in societies that are in many ways inequitable, unfair, capriciously oppressive, occasionally murderous, frequently imperial—but,

by historical standards, much *less* so than any other societies known in the history of mankind. We may angrily debate the threat to transgender bathroom access, but no other society in our long, sad history has ever attempted to enshrine the civil rights of the gender nonconforming. The anger that Mishra details seems based not on any acute experience of inequality or in-



justice but on deep racial and ethnic and cultural panics that repeatedly rise and fall in human affairs, largely indifferent to the circumstances of the time in which they summit. We use the metaphor of waves that rise and fall in societies, perhaps forgetting that the actual waves of the ocean are purely opportunistic, small irregularities in water that, snagging a fortunate gust, rise and break like monsters, for no greater cause than their own accidental invention.

"Illiberalism" is the permanent fact of life. Moments of social peace and coexistence, however troubled and imperfect, are the brief miracle that needs explaining, and protecting. In this way, Mokyr's vision of a revolution made by hand retrieves the best side of the Enlightenment, and Voltaire as he really was. An easily overlooked aspect of Voltaire's thought was the priority it gave, especially in his later life, to practice. Watchmaking, vegetable growing, star charting: the great Enlightenment thinker turned decisively away from abstraction as he aged. The argument of "Candide" is neither that the world gets better nor that it's all for naught; it's that happiness is where you find it, and you find it first by making it yourself. The famous injunction to "cultivate our garden" means just that: make something happen, often with your hands. It remains, as it was meant to, a reproach to all ham-fisted intellects and deskbound brooders. Getting out to make good things happen beats sitting down and thinking big things up. The wind blows every which way in the world, and Voltaire's last word to the windblown remains the right one. There are a lot of babies yet to comfort, and gardens still to grow. ♦

# THE MANIA AND THE MUSE

*Did Robert Lowell's illness shape his work?*

BY DAN CHIASSON



*From his thirties on, Lowell suffered the relentless cycles of bipolar disorder.*

**I**N MAY OF 1936, Robert Lowell screwed up his courage and wrote a letter to one of his idols, Ezra Pound. Pound was living in Italy and toiling on his great poem “The Cantos,” while dallying with Fascism and Benito Mussolini. Lowell was a freshman at Harvard, still processing his experiences at boarding school and charity camp, and reporting from A-12 Wigglesworth Hall. Lowell proposed “to come to Italy and work under you and forge my way into reality.” All his life, he wrote, he had been “eccentric according to normal standards”:

I had violent passions for various pursuits usually taking the form of collecting: tools; names of birds; marbles; catching butterflies, snakes, turtles etc; buying books on Napoleon. None of this led anywhere, I was more interested in collecting large numbers than in developing them. I caught over thirty turtles and put them in a well where they died of insufficient feeding. I won more agates and marbles than anyone in school, and gradually amassed hundreds of soldiers; finally leaving them to clutter up unreachable shelves. I could identify scores of birds, at first on charts, later it led me into nature. Sometime overcome by the collecting mania I would steal things I wanted.

Pound, Lowell wrote, had re-created what he “imagined to be the blood of Homer” in “The Cantos.” (Parts of the poem had already been published.) Zeus and Achilles were “almost a religion” to him; how could the “insipid blackness of the Episcopalian Church”—the faith of fashionable Boston—compete with the “whoring of Zeus and the savagery of the heroes?” The ambitious young man enclosed some poems for Pound, to bolster, as it were, his application.

It is hard not to be charmed by Lowell’s hyperventilating report on his agates and turtles and toy soldiers, but the word “mania” suggests that he suspected the darker fortunes to come. From his thirties on, Lowell suffered the relentless cycles of bipolar disorder, the “irritable enthusiasm” that lurched him upward before landing him in despair. Its early stirrings are apparent in his letter to Pound: the sentences racing to match in number and variety the collections they describe, the grandiose gestures of self-deprecation, the hyperbolized confes-

sion of trifling sins. This is a nineteen-year-old boy writing to Ezra Pound about his worship of Zeus. “Mania” means here what it often means colloquially—the head’s name for the heart’s excesses—but it is striking nonetheless: already, Lowell saw writing both as a way to understand his compulsions and as a compulsion in its own right, a roundabout leading out of trouble and immediately back in.

The line between elevated spirits and mania, often recognized only after it has been crossed, is the subject of Kay Redfield Jamison’s groundbreaking book, “Robert Lowell, Setting the River on Fire: A Study of Genius, Mania, and Character.” The third term, the old-fashioned word “character,” is the surprise; here, it connotes the response to genius and mania’s shifting, sometimes inextricable turbulence. Of course, character can’t be clinically tested, but something kept Lowell going, and something kept him writing. Once you decide that character is definitive but difficult to define, even anecdotes about Lowell, long scattered in various sources, begin to talk to one another. The key impression is what Joyce Carol Oates called Lowell’s “ironic dignity.” Though he became a public person, he was never a public poet; he was, instead, a figure beheld in contemplation, working out the meanings of his thinking in plain view.

JAMISON’S BOOK ISN’T a biography. It is a case study of what a person with an extraordinary will, an unwavering sense of vocation, and a huge talent—as well as privilege and devoted friends—could and could not do about the fact that the defining feature of his gift was also the source of his suffering. Lowell’s “thinking,” naturally metaphorical even in its resting state, was catalyzed into poetry by extraordinary emotional responses to the abstract relations among symbols. When he was sick, Jamison suggests, the symbols changed places with reality. The implied “like” and “as,” which tie metaphor to the real world they transform, fell out of his mind. According to his friend Jonathan Raban, Lowell was “the most continuously metaphoric” person he’d ever met. In health, reporting on his periods of madness, he could be harrowing. As he put it in

"Skunk Hour," paraphrasing John Milton, "I myself am hell." But when he was manic, Raban notes, "the metaphors took over" and the hell was real. He became, in his mind, Christ, Hitler, Napoleon, Dante, Milton, Alexander, John the Baptist, and many others; he ransacked his house for ancient treasure. Once the delusions had settled back into metaphor, they were, Jamison suggests, "differently known and expressed."

Jamison has a difficult story to tell. Lowell's life did not follow a straight line: it coiled like razor wire through intervals of misery, each a discouraging echo of the last. It was a gruelling way to exist in time. Between 1949 and 1964, a period that covers his second marriage, to Elizabeth Hardwick; the birth of their daughter, Harriet; and the publication of two of the most important books in the history of American poetry, "Life Studies" and "For the Union Dead," Lowell was hospitalized twelve times, usually for periods of several months.

Jamison's book is the first to bring clinical expertise to Lowell's case; before it, the poet's cycles of illness and recovery have been judged in scolding moral terms, or, worse, viewed as a kind of lifelong-mishap GIF, with Lowell stuck in a permanent loop. When he was manic, Lowell smashed wineglasses and schemed to marry near-strangers. In recovery, his depressions were severe, his remorse profound, the work of repairing the relationships he'd damaged unrelenting. But the metaphors that came so quickly to hand could again be tamed and put to use. "Gracelessly," he wrote, "like a standing child trying to sit down, like a cat or a coon coming down a tree, I'm getting down my ladder to the moon. I am part of my family again."

**R**OBERT LOWELL WAS born a century ago, at his grandfather's baronial house on Beacon Hill's south slope, the unplanned and unwanted child of Charlotte Winslow Lowell and Robert Traill Spence Lowell III, a naval officer who later worked for Lever Brothers, the English soap manufacturer. His mother was judged, according to the standards of the time, to be ironhanded and manipulative; she viewed her husband, a meek man whose soul, Lowell wrote, "went

underground" in his forties, as feckless, dandyish, and abstract—a judgment Lowell shared, though he tempered it with pity. Together, these two horribly matched people created a troubled, physically powerful, emotionally frail, and altogether brilliant child, whose provocations shaped their lives. Various strategies to cope with Lowell's unruliness were adopted and discarded, but, eventually, his poetry was judged to be good enough to make acceptance worth whatever its costs. The family psychiatrist, Merrill Moore, informed the Lowells that their son was a genius: everybody would have to "adjust" to him as he was. This held true throughout his life.

Lowell, for his part, saw himself as split between "conscience" and "instinct," a "queer centaurish creature" whose self-insight often arrived long after the fact, as though delivered by Pony Express. Some of his best poems are pained audits of the damage he and those around him incurred as a result of his treating flesh-and-blood conflicts as clashes between allegorical opposites. In boarding school, at St. Mark's in Southborough, he was given a nickname that stuck—Cal, likely for Caligula, the squalid Roman emperor. His life began to take shape as a series of bold strokes and renunciations, chosen at least in part for their symbolic significance. Harvard was the family school (his uncle, A. Lawrence Lowell, had been its president), but, on the urging of Allen Tate, he decamped for Kenyon College, where he was taught by the poet John Crowe Ransom. Harvard was a metaphor, as was Pound, as was leaving Harvard to study at Kenyon; his parents were, too, and his weighing of their characters was often a matter of comparing the forces they embodied.

**L**OWELL'S EARLIEST POEMS give us local and domestic tableaux, electrified by allegory. Driven by his supercharged ambition, they are keyed up and tenacious, surrounded by what he called, later, a "Goliath's armor of brazen metric." Though "willed" into language, as Tate put it, their mannerist modernism feels like a distinctly personal invention. Picture Boston: the Longfellow Bridge (nicknamed "the Pepperpot"), sculls drifting by like water striders, the sun glinting on the river. Now compare

against Lowell's version, from his 1946 collection, "Lord Weary's Castle":

The wild ingrafted olive and the root  
Are withered, and a winter drifts to where  
The Pepperpot, ironic rainbow, spans  
Charles River and its scales of scorched-earth miles.  
I saw my city in the Scales, the pans  
Of judgment rising and descending.

Whatever these lines have to say about Boston, or doom, or the divine, their power comes from the feeling that a contemporary person has come under a Biblical spell in which, as Lowell put it, "simple experience is marked with pointers left here by providence." Lowell had, by this time, mastered the mode of mentors like Tate, brilliantly executing its allusive distance and baroque locutions ("scorched-earth" is the only hint of living idiom here). But he increasingly saw such poems as "prehistoric monsters dragged down" by their armor; they were, at best, "alive maybe." They had always acted as a cumbersome delivery system for personal revelation. As essential as style was to Lowell, no one style ever suited him for long.

Lowell published his first three books in the span of seven years; it was another eight before his next, "Life Studies," which secured his place as the first, best, and, until the death of Plath, most famous of the so-called confessional poets. The breakthrough came in 1954, after Lowell had spent three weeks in the locked ward of Payne Whitney Clinic in New York City. He and Hardwick had moved to a "half palazzo and half loft" apartment in Boston's Back Bay. In recovery, at the suggestion of his psychiatrist, Lowell began to write prose autobiography, in a style, discovered in Flaubert, marked by "images and ironic or amusing particulars." Particulars were not symbols; Lowell had found a way to write that did not require him to shunt every detail into cosmic significance. He had found a tone that implied pity, acceptance, and nostalgia, mild emotions that could be sustained across the arc of a narrative.

The tone could be followed, like a thread through a labyrinth, back to his childhood. In "91 Revere Street," a prose memoir, he gave his obsession with toy soldiers another look, recalling a friend, Roger Crosby, who had thousands of

"hand-painted solid lead soldiers made to order in Dijon, France." "Roger's father," Lowell writes, "had a still more artistic and adult collection," and was "the first grownup to talk" to him "not as a child but as an equal" when he noted how closely Lowell was following his "anecdotes on uniforms and the evolution of tactical surprise."

Prose allowed Lowell to move around in his recollections, to see his toy soldiers as a mark of difference from his mother and as a bond with his friend's father, who had treated him the way his own parents never had. In "Life Studies," he began to divide his sentences into lines, but the new poems retained the delight in narrative detail for its own sake—the names of schools and streets and friends and places to shop:

I was five and a half.  
My formal pearl gray shorts  
had been worn for three minutes.  
My perfection was the Olympian  
poise of my models in the imperishable  
autumn  
display windows  
of Rogers Peet's boys' store below the State  
House  
in Boston. Distorting drops of water  
pinpricked my face in the basin's mirror.  
I was a stuffed toucan  
with a bibulous, multicolored beak.

The metaphors here, located securely in the past, measure the gap between one's "distorting" reflection and one's self. Lowell's new assurance with metaphor was not only a stylistic triumph but a temporary psychic salve. The "armor" was off; he'd managed, in both life and work, to embrace private detail, private experience, and to express them without the abstraction of allegory. Lowell hated and rejected the "confessional" imprimatur, but the term was accurate in at least one regard: his poems were transactions between his closest-kept emotions—normally sealed up in shame—and language.

JAMISON'S BOOK IS a real contribution to the literary history of New England, whose damaged sages Lowell read as a way to understand his own peril. Lowell's New England was, as an honorary-degree citation from Yale put it, largely "a country of the mind." He detected in

the region's authors and leaders his own struggles to untangle the imagination from madness, and treated them as though they were his intimate friends, using the same tone to describe Napoleonic generals that he used to describe his grandfather's Scottish terrier. Cotton Mather was a "bookish" man with blood on his hands. Nathaniel Hawthorne was a fellow-student of the moods, and, like Lowell, a family man, alert to the household strains of his mysterious urges and swings. Ralph Waldo Emerson shared Lowell's sense of the inevitability of temperament: "the iron string," as Emerson put it, upon which the moods, like glass beads, were strung. And Henry Adams, who wrote within earshot of power his dyspeptic chronicle of failure and disappointment, suggested to Lowell how "his and our manic-depressive New England character" might be projected onto landscape and history, in the way that the region's extremes of bleakness and abundance were internalized as emotional poles.

If you collected everything Lowell wrote about New England writers, you would find an alternative record of the region, with instability of mood among its primary features. It was the case, too, in his own family. Ferris Greenslet, the Lowells' biographer, found frequent examples of "high-strung delicate men, prone to overwork and periods of nervous exhaustion." James Russell Lowell, the nineteenth-century poet who pre-

sided over what his great-grandnephew called Boston's "rank, upholstered, Olympian era," had inherited, he believed, his "dear mother's" madness, and many times contemplated suicide by revolver or strychnine. Percival Lowell, the astronomer who wrote several books on

Mars, at least once experienced a "complete breakdown of the machine." Closer to home, Charlotte Lowell, who occasionally wrote poetry, was treated for "semi-psychotic" states and spent a year following what she thought to be the daily habits of Napoleon—sleeping on an army cot and taking "cold plunges" every morning. There are cautionary examples in nearly every branch of Lowell's family tree of the risks associated with imaginative work, but also of its

payouts: Percival Lowell did help discover Pluto, after all. Lowell's fixation on his ancestry was, at least partly, a way of understanding how the family's "streak of the *malade imaginaire*," as Greenslet put it, ran through him. He knew that history and heredity were joined.

JAMISON'S STUDY TELLS us a lot about bipolar disorder, but it can't quite connect the dots to Lowell's work. Poetry doesn't coöperate much with clinical diagnosis. We can find, in any Lowell poem, symptoms that poetry shares with mania, but "clanging"—a mode of speech, common in psychosis, in which words are associated with their sounds—is present in almost every poem in the English language, and a poet who is not bipolar may use more of it than one who is. Rhyme is a form of clang association, yet its presence often indicates a level of calculation and aesthetic design that we do not associate with mental illness. A poem written, revised, and published is not a transcript of manic speech, no matter how off the rails it feels. Lowell wrote letters while manic; they are heartbreaking, but they are not art. Empathy at some point tends to check our deriving much aesthetic pleasure from works made as by-products of derangement.

But mood disorders occur with staggering frequency in creative people, and writers seem to suffer the most. A 1987 study at the University of Iowa found that eighty per cent of the writers studied exhibited the diagnostic signs of mood disorders, with fifty per cent fitting the criteria for bipolar disorder. A 2011 study of three hundred thousand individuals showed that "individuals with bipolar disorder were overrepresented in creative professions." Poets might be the most susceptible of all. They count on a certain amount of basic disorientation to do their work, which many report involves the temporary unshackling of the mind from ordinary semantic logic. There are various names for this willed receptivity to associations: flow, inspiration, the muse. These are not the names we assign to symptoms of mental illness.

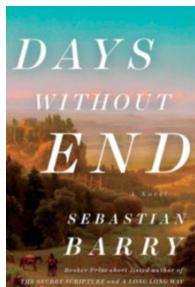
In his writing, though, Lowell drew upon the experience of feeling his mind speed up, his ideas accelerate, his sense of himself heighten and change, his sense of power and ethical behavior fracture, his memory and his reading switch places.



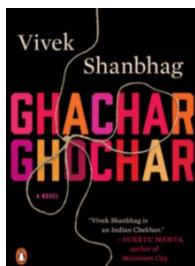
He knew, too, what it was like to reëmerge from these states, to reëncounter his friends and family, to apologize to his peers, to reconnect with his young daughter, and then, cruelly, to feel the entire process start to quicken and again take hold. This is the critical point about Lowell as a writer: he had been straitjacketed, he had been physically violent, he had been shaken to his fundament with regret, he had been wounded deeply by wounding others. To create a life, along with a body of work that reflected it, was to find and follow the thread inside the maze. What Jamison calls “character” might simply be, for Lowell, a zone in which writing was detached from danger. Autobiography, with its basically stable theory of causation, its firm checks upon reality and dream, its ordered sense of past, present, and future, was for him a necessary condition of continued survival.

Character might also be called, simply, luck. Lowell had writing, and he had friends, all of whom thought of him as the greatest writer they had met. But the key to his later years is the devotion of Hardwick, who met Lowell in Greenwich Village and, later, at Yaddo, the artists’ colony, where he was in the grips of his first manic break to result in hospitalization. Their lives were rarely settled and calm for more than a few months at a time over the course of thirty years. He left her, in the seventies, for Lady Caroline Blackwood, an heiress to the Guinness fortune, moved into a manor house in England, and had a child, Robert Sheridan Lowell. He quoted from Hardwick’s pained letters, without her consent, in poems about the agony of leaving her and the dangerous pleasures of his new life. And yet she was a figure of equanimity and patience. It helped that she was a writer of rival brilliance: she remarked of Lowell that he seemed to like women writers, a taste, she noticed, “not greatly shared” among literary men of the era. Without her, it is almost certain that Lowell would have died younger, written less while he was alive, done worse injury to more people, and made fewer friends. His inscription to Hardwick, in a copy of his last book, “Day by Day,” published just before his death, acknowledges her Orpheus-like courage: “For Lizzie, / Who snatched me out of chaos, / with all my love / in Castine Aug. 1977 / Cal.” ♦

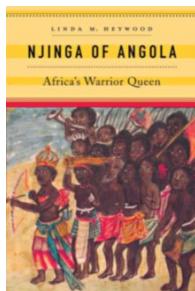
## BRIEFLY NOTED



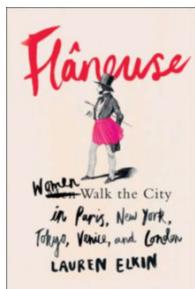
**Days Without End**, by Sebastian Barry (Viking). This prize-winning novel imagines nineteenth-century America through the eyes—and in the sparkling dialect—of an Irishman who emigrates during the Great Famine. Joining the Army, he is sent out West to slaughter Native Americans and fights on the Union side in the Civil War, nearly starving to death in a prison camp. Increasingly preferring to wear dresses, he has a romance with a man. By presenting these actions—whether cruel, noble, or tender—without judgment, Barry creates a sense of America as a huge canvas of juxtaposition and possibility, and of human life as something similar. “We have our store of days,” the protagonist says. “We spend them like forgetful drunkards.”



**Ghachar Ghochar**, by Vivek Shanbhag, translated from the Kannada by Srinath Perur (Penguin). This tragicomic novella is both a classic tale of wealth and moral ruin and a parable about capitalism and Indian society. In a Bangalore coffee shop, an anxious young man recounts his family’s travails. Once poor and happy, they became jealous, greedy, and indolent after his uncle made a fortune in spices: “Money had swept us up and flung us in the midst of a whirlwind.” Sunk in sloth, the narrator seeks redemption through marriage to a smart, industrious woman. Enter love, and dread. The novel is Shanbhag’s first to appear in English; the title is a child’s invented phrase for a tangle that cannot be undone.



**Njinga of Angola**, by Linda M. Heywood (Harvard). Maintaining independence in the face of colonial encroachment, the seventeenth-century African queen Njinga fascinated Europeans. For Sade, she was an exotic “other,” a figure of insatiable sexual appetite and unspeakable savagery. Hegel saw her divergence from gender norms as proof of his claim that Africa was “outside of history.” More recently, anti-colonialists have celebrated her as the mother of the modern Angolan nation. This fine biography attempts to reconcile her political acumen with the human sacrifices, infanticide, and slave trading by which she consolidated and projected power. Converting to Christianity, welcoming missionaries, and relinquishing more than forty male concubines for monogamy emerge as expedient moves. The experiences of Njinga’s subjects—enslaved, sacrificed, or dragooned into endless wars—remain sadly unrecoverable.



**Flâneuse**, by Lauren Elkin (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). Early in this meditative book, the author interrogates the assumption that the flâneur—the aimless city ambler, observing all and observed by none—is necessarily male. “We would love to be invisible the way a man is,” she writes. “But if we’re so conspicuous, why have we been written out of the history of cities?” Elkin combines her own circumambulations of New York, Paris, Tokyo, Venice, and London with accounts of women, such as Virginia Woolf and George Sand, who thrived on walking and recording these cities. Some pathways here are already well trodden, but Elkin brings rich insights into the places she visits, casting them in a new, distinctly feminine light.

ON TELEVISION

# ARCH NEMESES

*Bittersweet catfights on “Feud.”*

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



Susan Sarandon and Jessica Lange play Bette Davis and Joan Crawford.

WHY DID WHITE women vote for Trump? For one source of insight, try “Feud,” on FX, a barbed and bittersweet fable about female self-sabotage. The latest provocation from Ryan Murphy, “Feud” is a dramatization of the making of the 1962 camp-classic movie “What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?,” which starred Bette Davis and Joan Crawford. Beneath the zingers and the poolside muumuu, the show’s stark theme is how skillfully patriarchy screws with women’s heads—mostly by building a home in there.

A prolific auteur with an abiding interest in glamour and cruelty, Murphy is a thrillingly ambitious risk-taker, bending old genres into fresh forms; he’s also famously inconsistent, a Rumpelstiltskin

who can spin seemingly offensive concepts into gold—as in last year’s outstanding “The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story”—or fly off the rails, sometimes in the same show. “Feud” is his most recent franchise, and, like “American Horror Story” and “American Crime Story,” it’s designed to tell one narrative a season. (Next up: Charles and Diana.) Murphy deserves credit as a pioneer, having revived the anthology model and queered cable. But his other achievement is equally impressive: on FX, he’s nurtured older actresses underserved by Hollywood—among them Angela Bassett, Jessica Lange, and Kathy Bates—and given them grand and often gloriously strange roles. (Murphy couldn’t write a dull go-girl role model if one stabbed

him in the eye.) Last year, he launched Half, a foundation that pushes for diversity among directors; he’s committed to having half of his own directors be female, L.G.B.T., or people of color.

A woke Ryan Murphy is a tricky proposition: as anyone who watched late seasons of “Glee” knows, didactic camp can be a nightmare. “Feud” has its flaws—a jokey song cue here, blunt exposition there. But Murphy lets the contradictions sizzle: he knows that schlock can double as great art; that self-loathing can work both as a goad to ambition and as an emotional crippler. “Hollywood should be forced to look at what they’ve done to her,” Geraldine Page (Sarah Paulson) remarks of Joan Crawford late in the series, but not unkindly. Like all great horror, “Feud” loves its monsters. It’s also a lot of fun.

As Bette Davis and Joan Crawford, we get Susan Sarandon and Jessica Lange, casting that’s also sly meta-commentary. Two A-list movie stars, who were sex symbols in their youth, play two A-list movie stars, who were sex symbols in their youth, as they grasp for the kinds of roles—not dirty-talking grannies or fading beauties but star parts, with prize-winning potential—that Sarandon and Lange find in “Feud.” The price is that they must be willing to play their aging bodies for shock and for laughs, an act the world condescends to—at least, when women perform it—as “brave.”

This was precisely the bargain that Davis and Crawford struck as their careers waned. In 1961, when “Feud” begins, the actresses, legendary rivals from the nineteen-thirties through the fifties, were considered uncastable dinosaurs. Determined to make a comeback, Crawford builds her own vehicle. She finds a novel to adapt, a psychological thriller about two elderly sisters living in a Hollywood mansion who torment each other; she woos a director, Robert Aldrich (Alfred Molina); and she convinces her enemy, Bette Davis, to co-star. The women knew that their mutual hatred would be a lure. Even Jack Warner (a hilariously nasty Stanley Tucci, ranting behind a desk the size of a beach) buys in—although, naturally, his first question to Aldrich is that eternal query: “Would you fuck ‘em?” The show is at once blunt and compassionate about the

Realpolitik of this situation, in which any alliance was doomed. The press manipulates the women; so does the studio. They compulsively try to seduce every man in charge, because that's the customary path to control. As the columnist Hedda Hopper (Judy Davis, in a series of redoubtable hats) says with a shrug, midway through blackmailing Crawford into giving her a bitchy quote, "Well, men built the pedestal, darling—not me. There's only room for one goddess at a time!"

As in "What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?"—in which Bette Davis got the juicier part, as the delusional former vaudeville star, Jane—Sarandon initially seems to get the sweeter deal here. Popping her huge eyes and chain-smoking Lucky Strikes, she plays two equally fun Bette Davises: the saucy, pants-clad actress, a radical clown who smears crazy makeup all over her face, then struts out with her arms in the air like an M.M.A. champion; and the legendary villainess Baby Jane, an old lady who is also a cruel, spoiled little girl. Sarandon's apprehensive look, as Davis, when she watches the dailies of herself, as Baby Jane, is one of many mirror-within-mirrors moments. Davis knows that putting on gargoyle drag is an artist's choice, but it's a gamble, too. The joke might be on her.

For several years, on "American Horror Story," Murphy has reimagined Jessica Lange's doelike vulnerability as steely theatre. For the "Asylum" season, she wore a nun's habit and carried a switch; on "Freak Show," she sang "Life on Mars" as a Weimar German ringmaster/ampoule, blue glitter smeared from her lashes to her brows. Joan Crawford is equally larger than life, but hers is a tougher role—she's a big-shouldered beauty whose stiff intensity is hard to translate to a modern era. In "Feud," Lange is forever rubbing lemons on her elbows or doing jittery calisthenics, haughty with overcompensation. It's a performance that makes the viewer anxious, too, but that queasiness becomes its power. "Feud" is Crawford's tragedy, and, by the final episodes, when she's trashing her prospects in a mad quest to punish her co-star, Lange finds something wriggling and alive inside Crawford's hunger to be seen, her lipsticked rictus as amused as it is seductive. Spraying herself silver before attending the Academy Awards, she's a kamen-

kaze of femininity, determined to look her absolute best even as she flies straight into the Hollywood sign.

Amid the bitchiness, the saddest sequences aren't catfights but flickers of intimacy. Three episodes into "Feud," Davis and Crawford go out for drinks. It's a chess move: Davis hopes to soften the news that her daughter, B.D. ("Mad Men's Kiernan Shipka), has been cast in a minor role. But, perversely, they bond. Crawford describes her abject childhood; as Davis listens with shocked empathy, she gives a matter-of-fact description of how she lost her "cherry," at the age of eleven, to her beloved stepfather. Both women went to brutal boarding schools. "I loved it," Davis confesses. "It made me tough." They talk about their mothers. "I think maybe she was my only true female friend," Davis muses, and the two lock eyes. "You're lucky," Crawford responds, with a small smile. It's a line full of ambiguity. Is she saying that Davis was lucky to have had even one true female friend? Or that she's lucky she never had more?

THE SUCCESS OF "What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?" led to copycat films, dubbed "psycho-biddy" and sometimes "hagsploitation." There has long been a debate about vehicles like this, which provide actresses with work but are fuelled by the notion that their bodies are by definition a horror show. The critic Molly Haskell, in her biting collection "From Reverence to Rape" (1974), describes "What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?" as "society's final revenge on Davis" and Crawford's star image and on their power: the implication, by the exaggeration of their exaggerations, that they were never real, never women, but were some kind of joke, apart from women and a warning to them."

"Feud," like "Baby Jane," does occasionally veer into an eerie voyeuristic space, getting off on closeups of wrinkles while defending our right to stare. And yet choosing to be grotesque can be a form of liberation, too. Decades after Davis pulled on a doll's dress, grotesquerie has been key to modern female comedy, as self-assertion, not self-loathing. Sometimes that means letting one's face swell up, like Ilana on "Broad City," drooling from a seafood allergy, or puncturing an eardrum, like Hannah on "Girls." One of "30 Rock's"

most magnificent moments had Tina Fey embracing full repulsiveness: on the subway, she became a mentally ill hag, wearing a gray wig and a mole, and hissing, "I'm pregnant with a kitty cat!" like Baby Jane, Jr. Nothing scares people so much as a woman letting herself go; once you can scare them or make them laugh, you're in charge.

For older actresses, TV has been a godsend. On HBO's "Getting On," it was a transgressive jolt to see an elderly actress like June Squibb wrestle naked with an automatic door—in an all-biddy ensemble, no one has to play the hag. Netflix's "Grace and Frankie," starring Lily Tomlin and Jane Fonda, is a more old-fashioned sitcom, but it's also a welcome mirror for an audience long deprived of one. (Why are all these women white? In part, because playing "gross" is a riskier move for women of color—a subject for a different essay.)

One of my favorite small examples has been running on HBO, where Tracy Ullman is airing the latest iteration of a sketch show she's done since the nineteen-eighties. Ullman's forte is transformation: she uses all-concealing makeup to do cross-race, cross-gender drag. The only thing that's changed is Ullman's age—and I found myself startled to realize how many older women she now imitates. Growing up, I saw elderly British women on Monty Python all the time, but they were men in dowdy house-dresses, old bats who were funny precisely because they were interchangeable.

In contrast, Ullman does older women who are intensely specific: she's a vain Angela Merkel and a sociopathic Dame Judi Dench, who plays pranks in the guise of being a "national treasure." She's Maggie Smith filming amateur audition tapes for herself as James Bond; she's Germaine Greer ranting about her "gray minge." Ullman's body gives her permission: she can joke about sagging breasts one moment and be seductive the next. She also plays Kay Clark, a character she's done for four decades. A shy dork, put-upon but hopeful, Kay is the caretaker for her elderly mother. In other hands, she'd be one of Monty Python's grannies: a provincial biddy. In Ullman's, she's a heroine. You can laugh at her, but her meek capacity for joy, her decency in a world that can't see her, is a flag planted, as bright as lipstick. ♦

# THE LIVING DEAD

*"Personal Shopper" and "Frantz."*

BY ANTHONY LANE

**W**HAT FUN IT would have been to attend the meeting at which Olivier Assayas, the director of *"Personal Shopper,"* pitched his idea for the film. "That's right, she's a shopper, but she's also a medium, O.K.? She's waiting to hear from her dead brother. And then there's a nasty murder mystery. And lots of stuff with iPhones. So it's

try on any of the gorgeous objects—a temptation that Maureen, needless to say, cannot withstand. The movie's first intimate closeup is of her face, lost in forbidden rapture, as she puts on a pair of zippered and spike-heeled shoes. Later, she becomes aroused by the thrill of merely donning a midnight-blue creation, in rustling organza, complete with



Kristen Stewart confronts ghosts in a new movie directed by Olivier Assayas.

basically a fashion-boutique slash haunted-house slash slasher movie, set mostly in Paris and London. Except it all ends with a trip to Oman. Just because." The result is one of the weirder amalgams that has been offered to moviegoers since *"Surf Nazis Must Die,"* in 1987. And here's the weirdest thing of all about *"Personal Shopper"*: it works.

The shopper is Maureen (Kristen Stewart), although she doesn't look like a Maureen to me. She looks like a Chloe or a Kat. Her job is to buy or borrow dresses, leather pants, and essential fripperies for a celebrity named Kyra (Nora von Waldstätten), whose purpose in life, other than to be seen carrying two-thousand-dollar handbags, is never quite defined. She insists that Maureen not

the sort of under-harness that you might buckle onto a plow horse. Whatever turns you on.

If Assayas's goal were to unveil the worship of luxury, fair enough. He would hardly be the first director to be galvanized by a plethora of pretty things; there are moments in Josef von Sternberg's films with Marlene Dietrich when the battle for the limelight is waged between human beings and hats. In *"Personal Shopper,"* though, the clothes are clues. To wear someone else's outfit is like going undercover and slipping into another skin, and that is where the two halves of Maureen's existence merge. Blessed, or burdened, with psychic gifts, she reaches out helplessly to the world beyond—in particular, to her twin

brother, Lewis, who, not long ago, succumbed to a heart complaint from which she also suffers, and which could fell her at any time. A doctor warns her, "You just need to keep avoiding both intense physical efforts and extreme emotions." Which, let's be honest, is not the most helpful advice you can give to the heroine of a scary movie.

When Lewis was alive, he and his sister made a pact: "Whoever died first would send the other a sign," she says. Hence the sad heart of this movie—scenes in which Maureen drifts through the unlit mansion that he inhabited, near Paris. In one long take, the camera follows her with the smooth obedience of a valet, and watches as she opens the doors onto a terrace. (Assayas waits, very coolly, for the click of her lighter, then cuts.) The place is empty, and, in the hours of darkness, it creaks like a ship. Now and then, a tap runs of its own accord, but does that count as a contact? "I need more from you," she says out loud. "Give me the tiniest thing." What she gets is a series of gauzy granular blurs, shaping and reshaping themselves in the air around her; penned within them is the trace of a figure, whose mouth gapes wide in an ectoplasmic yawn. Could that be Lewis, or another unquiet soul? The emanations are unexplained, and viewers versed in *"Insidious,"* *"The Conjuring,"* and other recent horror films will sneer at the special effects and pronounce themselves woefully unspooked. You can't blame them, and yet, though I never jumped, I did believe in these ghosts—so sifted and so indistinct, like a dream from which you only just awoke.

The impression left by such passages in *"Personal Shopper"* is a Jamesian one. We are back in the "deep crepuscular spell" that is cast upon the hero of James's *"The Jolly Corner"* (1908) as he prowls the "great gaunt shell" of an untenanted house, aiming "to penetrate the dusk of distances and the darkness of corners, to resolve back into their innocence the treacheries of uncertain light." Like Maureen, he both seeks and dreads the apparition that awaits. What James could not foresee was how technology, more than a century on, would enrich rather than dispel the tug of the supernatural—how Maureen starts to exchange messages not in tenebrous

rooms, or on a Ouija board, but on her cell phone, in broad daylight, on a train. Her thumbs fly over the screen with the dexterity available only to the under-thirties, and her questions skitter across the ether: "Who is this?" "R u real?" "R u alive or dead?" Later, alone in her apartment, she is besieged by anonymous texts: "I am coming up," "I am on the landing." Hold your breath.

Here, as in the manic "Demonlover" (2002), Assayas is onto something—the uncontrollable means by which modern communications may be binding us together not as one friend to another but as extortioner to victim, predator to prey, or dead to quick. You have to reach back to "Poltergeist" (1982), to the image of a little girl sitting in front of a fuzzy TV and staring at the flashes of spectral visitation, to find something as provoking, and as creepily close to home, as the phone sequences in "Personal Shopper." They leave you with uneasy imaginings: Can one be hacked from beyond the grave? And just how malevolent can malware be?

When the movie had its première last year, at Cannes, it was greeted with a mixture of claps and boos. Anything that divisive has to be worth seeing. It's true that "Personal Shopper" is too vaporous at times, and there are dangling detours, as when Maureen researches a little-known painter or watches an old drama about a nineteenth-century séance on YouTube. Yet the over-all effect is as taut with tangible evidence as a detective story. The mirrored sequins on a Chanel dress cast reflections that flit across the walls like mischievous wraiths, and you may even detect a hint of "Harvey" (1950)—in which

Jimmy Stewart was best friends with an invisible rabbit—as the doors of a hotel elevator open and close to let through a nonexistent guest. It was at this point that I wondered if Maureen herself might have been deceased all along, but the theory doesn't hold up. For one thing, Kristen Stewart—who was in Assayas's previous movie, "Clouds of Sils Maria" (2014)—is such a material presence. She'll never be a lovable actress, but neither can she be ignored; she's so *on*, and so bereft of peace. She fidgets, twitches, snaps at her lines as if they were candies, and mops her hand over her face in the hope of wiping her cares away. In a movie plagued by the dead, she is the proof of life.

**T**HE NEW FILM from François Ozon, "Frantz," begins in 1919, in Germany, in the wake of the First World War. The main characters are still drowning in that wake, scarcely bothered as to whether or not they ever reach dry land. Hans Hoffmeister (Ernst Stötzner), a stern, white-bearded doctor, lives in the town of Quedlinburg with his wife, Magda (Marie Gruber), and Anna (Paula Beer), who was formerly engaged to Frantz (Anton von Lucke), their only child. He was killed in the war, not long before it ended; she has stayed on with them, as a kind of living memorial.

Indeed, their existence continues to circle around the vanished man. Anna lays flowers on his empty grave; the body was never returned from the battlefield. Soon the family is joined—and, to their discomfort, outgrieved—in their loss by Adrien Rivoire (Pierre Niney), a young Frenchman who claims to have known

Frantz in Paris, before the war. Hans, like other townspeople whose sons died at French hands, is initially hostile to this intrusive foreigner, but, little by little, Adrien is made welcome. The gentle Magda says that he reminds her of Frantz, "shy but stormy," and Anna, despite herself, is drawn toward the storm.

As Adrien, Pierre Niney is extraordinary to behold: pale, tapered, and flickering, like a candle made flesh. He took the title role in a 2014 biopic of Yves Saint Laurent, but his neurasthenic air is best suited to the dandyish dawn of the past century. At times, his intensity verges on overload, as does the dialogue ("This is like my son's heart," Hans says, producing Frantz's violin), and it is Beer's more phlegmatic presence that slowly assumes command. To begin with, the film, freely transposed from Ernst Lubitsch's "Broken Lullaby" (1932), bears all the signs of art-house decorum, complete with black-and-white photography and a mournful score. After a while, though, as the screen blooms briefly into color, we realize that Ozon, as befits the crafty creator of "In the House" (2012), is playing games with us. I was quite sure, for instance, that Adrien and Frantz would turn out to have been lovers. That trail is false, however, and even some of the flashbacks are not what they seem. This smooth-looking movie is taking moral risks. Deceit, it suggests, is not always a weapon, and white lies can be bandages and balms for wounded feelings, not least among the bereaved. As a priest says to Anna, in the confessional, "What would the truth bring? Only more pain." ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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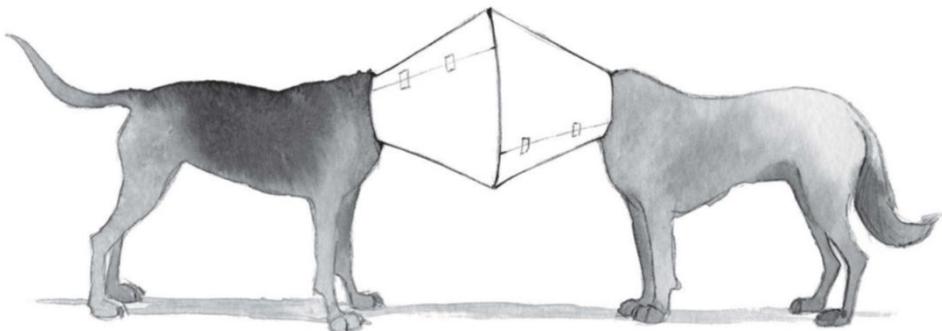
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## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Will McPhail, must be received by Sunday, March 19th. The finalists in the March 6th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 3rd 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



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### THE FINALISTS

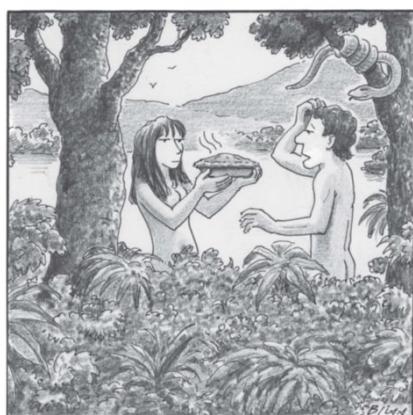


"I can't believe my eye!"  
Sean Harrigan, Atlanta, Ga.

"Let's just shoot the next one."  
Tim Hunt, Elkhart Lake, Wis.

"See? A real pirate would have cannonballed."  
Stephen Buys, Asheville, N.C.

### THE WINNING CAPTION



"I'll be damned."  
Judith Carter, Gloucester, Mass.

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