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May 14-27, 2018

# NEW YORK

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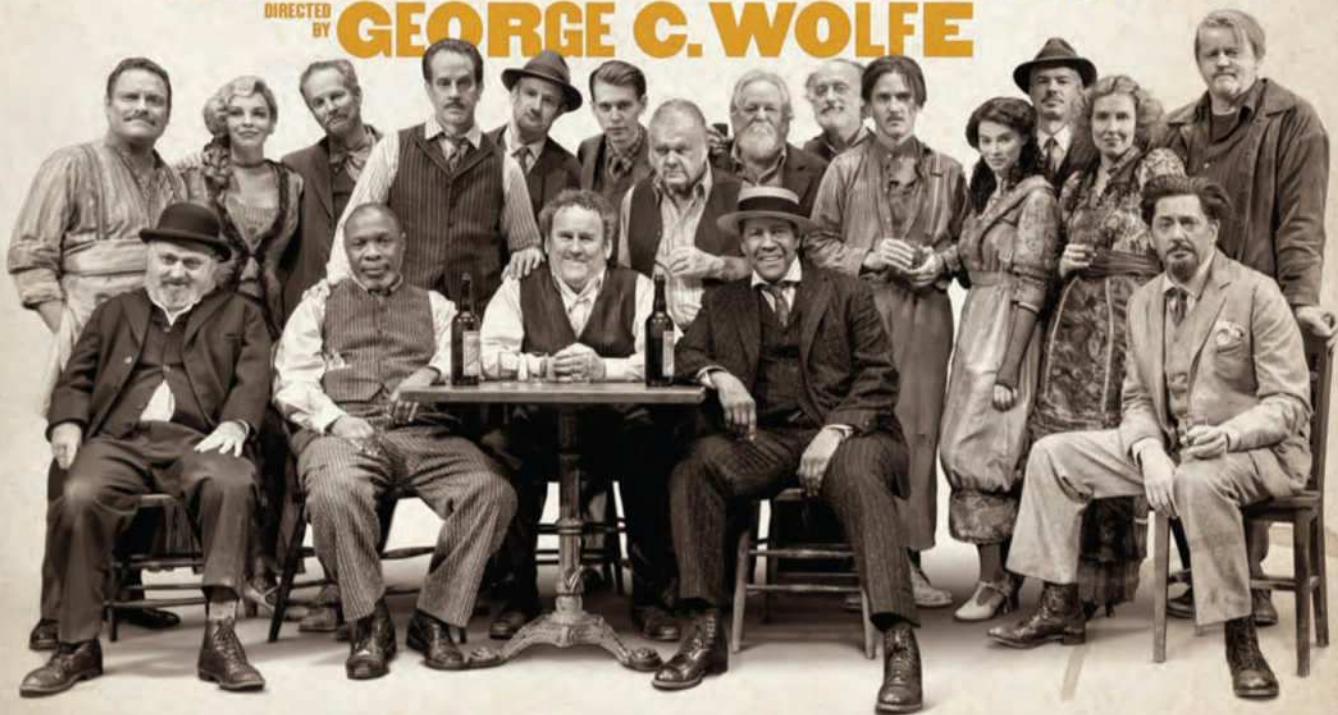
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MAY 14-27, 2018



*A cabdriver at a JFK holding pen on May 1.*

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## Comments



1 Frank Rich reminded *New York* readers that before the city's Establishment aided and abetted Donald Trump, it enabled the misdeeds of his mentor and onetime lawyer Roy Cohn (**"The Original Donald Trump," April 30–May 13**). Among those praising the story was Yoko Ono, who wrote, **"Thank you Frank Rich for your courageous writing. We have all benefited from it."** Ellen Schrecker, a prominent historian of McCarthyism in America, wrote, "Frank Rich's chilling piece about how the Big Apple's bigwigs facilitated the rise of Donald Trump recalls the similar service the Establishment performed for Joe McCarthy, the sleaziest of Roy Cohn's early employers. Though the Wisconsin senator's lies were as flagrant as those of our current president, he was encouraged by the most respectable politicians in the U.S. Meanwhile, liberals cowered, like today's Republicans, terrified that a disreputable senator might destroy their careers. But **by focusing on McCarthy's antics, his critics diverted attention from the more serious damage that his movement was doing to the American political system. Similarly, we can't let the daily drumbeat about porn stars and Russian fixers distract us from resisting the Trump regime's broader assault on democracy and human values.**" Edward Alwood, a University of Maryland journalism instructor and author of *Dark Days in the Newsroom*, wrote: "Donald Trump shares with Joseph McCarthy and Roy Cohn almost laser precision in media manipulation, as Frank Rich studiously demonstrates. But media that helped build

them up eventually helped take them down. The question is, will new media ultimately serve as an antidote for the 'political evil' that Rich describes, or will it cause a cancer to metastasize?" And Landon R.Y. Storrs, author of *The Second Red Scare*, added, "Rich's impulse to move us beyond reductive conspiracy theories is laudable. But the fact remains that the opportunistic, ideologically flexible Mr. Trump, like Cohn before him, abets the profoundly ideological agenda of those who seek to destroy popular trust in the integrity and competence of government officials. **Like Cohn and McCarthy, Trump survives because he is useful to anti-democratic forces that are redirecting government policy to promote private gains rather than the public interest.**"

2 "If there's a blue wave sweeping the nation, is it going to wash over Georgia, or will it skip the state?" Lisa Chase asked in her profile of the two Staceys vying to win the Democratic primary and become the next governor of Georgia (**"Stacey vs. Stacey," April 30–May 13**). Reader @lappinmichael tweeted, "A really great piece on the Governor's Race. Two great candidates. I'm #teamabrams." Some, though, felt that Chase was more skeptical of Abrams than of Evans, including Connie Cole, who wrote, **"I thought the author was going to point out something historic and positive about this race. Instead she spent the majority of the piece faulting everything Stacey Abrams did or said.** She seems biased in favor of the other Stacey. As an African-

American and a Georgia voter, I was disgusted." Sarah Lerner added, "It's bullshit that a candidate like Stacey Abrams is subjected to these kinds of questions [about her sexuality]. Kudos to Abrams for her answer." But many readers from south of the Mason-Dixon Line praised the story, with the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution's* Pete Corson writing, "This is the best go-race article I've read from outside Georgia. Very fine carpet bagging @lizziechase!" And @StefanTurk tweeted, **"This is not the worst article you'll read about the Georgia Governor's race from a New York publication. In fact, it might be the best."**

3 *New York* excerpted the heretofore-unpublished *Barracoon*, Zora Neale Hurston's nonfiction work on Cudjo Lewis, a survivor of the last slave ship to America (**"The Last Slave," April 30–May 13**). @DandaraQueen tweeted, "Zora was not only a great author, she was a brilliant anthropologist and sociologist. Her interviews are historical gems." Britni Danielle added, **"It's never lost on me that Zora Neale Hurston, one of the preeminent writers and researchers of the 20th century, died penniless because she would not compromise the integrity of her work,** which centered Black people in *all* of our humanity." In an accompanying story on nymag.com, Nick Tabor reported on conditions in Africatown today, where Cudjo's descendants are fighting for environmental justice after a paper mill and chemical refinery created life-threatening pollution.

➔ Send correspondence to [comments@nymag.com](mailto:comments@nymag.com). Or go to [nymag.com](http://nymag.com) to respond to individual stories.



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# Intelligencer

INSIDE: 19-year-old toque Flynn McGarry / Will Europe save digital privacy?



## Power: Nicholas Zimmerman

Why Leak?  
Inside the  
national-security  
press offensive  
against the president.

TWO DAYS AFTER Vladimir Putin won reelection on March 18, Donald Trump called to congratulate him on the victory. Within hours, someone with access to Trump's briefing papers leaked word that his staff had provided him with explicit advice—in all caps—not to do so: “DO NOT CONGRATULATE.”

It's understandable that his advisers would have wanted him to bite his tongue. Why staffers might have leaked that advice is a different question: The congratulations had been extended, so the leak couldn't influence a pending policy outcome. In terms of lending democratic legitimacy to an autocratic leader, the damage was done. If the intention was to air organizational disarray, well, even the most-dyed-in-the-wool Trump supporters get that it isn't smooth sailing at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. It's hard to see the utility, even if the staffer leaked out of sheer horror or concern; Trump's track record suggests that exposing him through leaks is perhaps more likely to trigger paranoia and obstinacy than persuade him to change tack.

Another possibility is that staffers were trying to protect their reputation by revealing the congratulations were not their doing. But, really, what's the value of that kind of leak? It asserts the leaker's superior wisdom while simultaneously admitting his or her utter powerlessness: *I am on the right side of this argument, but even so, I couldn't make a difference. There's no convincing Trump.* It's fairly desperate, a kind of Hail Mary play, reflecting just how troubled the White House environment that produced it is.

And yet this kind of leak has become so common that we are increasingly numb to how unusual, even befuddling, it is. The privacy of presidential communications with foreign leaders had been treated as sacrosanct in the past, but under Trump there has been an unprecedented surge in leaks. Sure, specific events and staff changes have resulted in peaks and valleys in the intensity of leaking, but the pattern has been in place since the very beginning.

It all makes for an important case study. How has the national-security community's calculus on leaking been transformed by Trump's disgust for process, his disdain for "the swamp," and his disrupting of bipartisan consensus on issues such as the transatlantic alliance and democracy promotion? Over the past year, I interviewed nearly a dozen current and former officials—none of whom are or were Trump appointees, but some of whom continued working during and after the transition—to find out.

Many of them are horrified by the president, which wasn't a huge surprise. But much of what they told me was nevertheless eye-opening. For starters, they considered leaking commonplace—part of the toolbox, under any administration, for furthering particular policy agendas and trying to win departmental turf wars. Several said supervisors had encouraged them to leak.

They also rejected the notion of a clear line between "good leaks" and "bad leaks." A lot depends on one's own biases, which shape perspective on the agenda of a given administration. As one former State Department official put it, "People elect leaders, but it's not always clear to what extent they elect policies." The dynamic seems especially pronounced under this president: "As a nonpolitical employee, the democratic legitimacy of the elected team goes a long way," the former official acknowledged. "But Trump is upending so much foreign policy that had previously been orthodoxy across party lines for good reason that it has unsettled things."

But most of the leaks the public hears about, these officials say, do not come from career officials. Significantly, they believe

that the vast majority of leaks are coming from the administration's political inner circle, particularly what one former senior official with the White House National Security Council (NSC) termed "vanity leaking"—i.e., the parlor-gossip games of who was on the up or outs within the West Wing (including those accounts of Javanka's attempts to persuade the president to honor the Paris climate accords, which seemed at first blush to be policy-driven).

Vanity leaks from inside the White House are one thing; when it comes to more serious and substantive leaks, those interviewed insisted, the bigger story is not just about Trump's competence and his team's experience or lack thereof—actually, training inexperienced appointees is frequently part of the gig. For many, the surge is attributable to a broader rejection of diplomatic decorum, rupture with foreign-policy orthodoxies, and outsize respect for staffers and pundits, like Stephen Miller and John Bolton, who have performed especially well in the media. Above all, there is a sense that the president is at war with the national-security community and its mission.

To the extent that the "deep state" is responsible for these more substantive leaks, interviewees pointed to that sense of being under siege—what they called Trump's "institutional malice"—as the primary cause. In other words, the deep state is leaking defensively to justify its own existence. And protect itself. Left largely untouched by most was any speculation as to the motives for such "malice," as though even asking the question could confirm these individuals' deepest fears, namely, that the president has somehow been compromised by a foreign power.

"We have an administration that is full of amateurs, and there is a system in place in D.C. for how disagreements are escalated and whistles are blown," explained a current official with Homeland Security and foreign-policy experience. "The system has to have a steam release at some point."

**Most officials considered leaking commonplace—part of the toolbox.**

For his part, he told me, simply raising public awareness of disarray or a bad policy would not justify leaking national-security information—he would have to be confident his action could bring about a course correction on an issue he considered critical. "Bottom line, though, I can envision myself leaking under this administration."

**A** FEW YEARS AGO, under Barack Obama and Susan Rice, I had the privilege of working in the NSC. In other words, I used to have a lot of access to "leak-worthy" material. Every workday, I'd make sure the alarm on my government-issued BlackBerry was set early enough to check whether I had received an email heads-up from the NSC intelligence team—confirmation that an issue under my policy purview would be briefed to President Obama later that same morning during the president's daily briefing—the famous "PDB." That meant I had to make a mad dash to the White House to review the classified material to be briefed, prepare points on the material for Rice and her deputies, and coordinate with relevant NSC colleagues, all within a couple of hours of the moment my alarm went off.

Throughout the national-security apparatus, there are literally millions of people who work with classified material like I did. Whether presidential appointees, foreign-service or civil-service officers, military, or contractors, they could come across something during their careers that was politically explosive or at least newsworthy. But I myself never remotely considered leaking. Of course, I saw the occasional leaks coming out of the Obama White House in the newspapers and was serving in government during the one-two of Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, so I obviously knew leaks happened, and it was pretty obvious how they happened: officials calling sympathetic members of the press they were regularly in touch with already. Nevertheless, I felt insulated from the practice throughout my time at the Pentagon, NSC, and State Department. It seemed largely to involve leaders of the national-security apparatus, communication officials, and peripheral dissenters, and I was none of those things.

What I was, though, was someone who actually believed in the president I was serving and what he represented. It's not that I agreed with every policy decision. Nor did I always win the policy debates. But I agreed with the broad direction of what we were doing in the world, and I valued the unique opportunity to have my voice heard by my country's leadership.

So what's changed? One explanation is that our president lacks the capacity to



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govern, failing even the most basic leadership stress test. Another factor is that Trump's penchant for management by way of *Lord of the Flies*-style competition essentially incentivizes leaking. Under Obama, the best way to get attention for your agenda was to prepare comprehensive briefing material—you know, actually do the job. Under President Trump, many feel like we're in the Upside Down dimension of *Stranger Things*. Even if you're a West Wing regular, the best way to grab the president's attention might very well be to leak on Fox. He never reads staff memos anyway.

**W**E ALL REMEMBER the phone transcripts that were leaked from the first month in office—they made the president look nuts," said a former official involved with the Obama-Trump transition effort. "I suppose the public good there was exposing how unprofessional he is, but this wasn't exactly the Pentagon Papers. The question is inherently personal: What are your ethical trip wires? What do you consider sufficiently grave to take real professional risks?"

One way to think about leaks is by classification level, which go in ascending order of sensitivity from "unclassified" to "confidential" to "secret" to "top secret." The level does reflect an internal government risk assessment, and leaking classified information is far more serious legally than anything unclassified, but it isn't the way most of the officials talked about leaks. In our conversations, a more nuanced taxonomy emerged.

**Petty Leaks:** First, there are vanity leaks, designed primarily to curry favor, win personal rivalries, or protect one's reputation. The former senior NSC official called it "petty stuff" but "the information disclosed usually isn't classified or terribly important to our national security." Sometimes this practice can get quite duplicitous. "You see it with the people that go out on TV to defend the crazy stuff coming out of Trump's mouth and then leak about their personal outrage over it," said Frank Mora, a former deputy assistant secretary of Defense. "It is an act of utter hypocrisy."

**Leaks Over Strategy:** There are also disclosures motivated by policy—when someone uses the press to either kill or promote a policy. The officials I spoke with expressed more sympathy for these leaks, though most said the leak's substance is what really determines whether a policy leak is justified—i.e., was it classified or not, did it reveal sources or methods, was it about an illegal action or war crime, and what "societal good" resulted?

Many spoke from experience. "I participated in deputies committee meetings on Afghanistan when Obama was still deciding how to proceed with the war," former USAID acting deputy administrator Mark Feierstein told me. "There's an assumption in the Situation Room that what you say there stays there, so it would drive me crazy when I'd see leaks I was sure were coming from the Department of Defense in an effort to box in the president."

**Leaks Over "Principle":** Even if they led to a legitimate public debate, the officials with whom I spoke were even more skeptical of so-called high-minded leaks like those of Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden. "They put people's lives in danger," one former foreign-service officer affirmed emphatically. "In the Middle East, certain societal leaders, civil-society organizations, and human-rights advocates would not talk to us any longer for fear they would be exposed. In some cases, there were real concerns for these individuals' safety. Sources and methods are untouchable always." He continues: "The indiscriminate nature of the Manning disclosures is what kills it for me. If she had been more targeted to civilian killings in Iraq, perhaps she could have made a case for being put in the whistleblower space. But Snowden? A whistleblower? Give me a break. He's in Russia!"

**The Leaks That Aren't Leaks:** Then there are the authorized leaks—made to win an argument with a rival agency, pesky undersecretary, or, perhaps most interestingly, foreign interlocutor. A classic negotiating tactic is to leak an element of the terms under discussion to lock the other side into what it had privately conceded: a trial balloon, so to speak. The leak is intended to limit the ability of the other side to maneuver by making its position public. Similarly, the exposure that results from a leak can sniff out whether a commitment made privately was serious, as well as gauge domestic response.

The 2015 Iran nuclear deal illustrates these dynamics well and underscores again

**Leaks to make the president look foolish have been a constant companion to Trump.**

how politics and ideology shape our perceptions of leaks. Both the Trump and Obama administrations deployed this type of trial-balloon leak with respect to the agreement. The only difference is that they did so to advance opposing policy objectives: Obama's team presumably leaked to help secure an agreement; Trump's, to move toward decertifying the deal. "At the end of the day," the former State Department official said, "what Trump is really saying is: Just leak what I want you to leak, and don't leak what I don't want you to leak."

**Justified Leaks:** For all those interviewed, criminal behavior was the gold standard, especially when it undermines American democracy or is done at the behest of a foreign power. Indeed, Watergate is held up even more universally as a "good leak" than one that could theoretically prevent a war. Deep Throat was clearly on the minds of many as they discussed concerns over Russia's role in 2016. "I could certainly imagine a situation where I would leak to get someone like a Paul Manafort locked up," said the current official. "If you had real evidence that the current administration was under political influence of foreign players and there was political interference to suppress that information, you have cause to pursue other recourse."

The Pentagon Papers is a close historical runner-up to Watergate, with the former senior NSC official calling that leak "a profoundly principled objection." But not everyone thought it was so clear-cut. "The Pentagon Papers is about the government lying to its people about an important thing, but there's no real criminality. And come on, we can't use government lies as the criteria," said a former Pentagon official. "The government has lied quite a lot in our history, so I don't think that justifies it."

**The Trump Leak:** My conversations inevitably converged on a type of leak idiosyncratic to this administration: one to embarrass or expose the president, whether intended to emphasize incompetence, create distance from policy, or shine a spotlight on suspicious behavior regarding Russia. The Putin congratulatory call is a recent example, but the leak to make the president look foolish has been a constant companion to Trump. Just recall his January 2017 calls with the Mexican president and Australian prime minister—in which he referred to Mexico's "pretty tough hombres" and lambasted the Australian over a refugee agreement struck under Obama, before abruptly hanging up.

"It's hard to see a policy prerogative," said the former senior NSC official. "These calls were only released months later, so that suggests it was mostly about



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embarrassment, about trying to under-score what a shit show the NSC was.”

About whether such a leak is justified—in this environment, with this president—even current officials were torn. “I wish it were legitimate to leak just to embarrass him,” one told me. “I would personally give that person a high-five if we were at the bar. The thing is, though, the transcripts themselves are embarrassing, but it’s even more embarrassing that they leak in the first place. I just wouldn’t want to see this as a general practice,” he said, for fear that foreign leaders would stop believing they could speak in confidence with the president.

**S** O HOW DO you do the job without compromising your moral integrity? One former appointee argued that “any leak that hurts this president that’s nonclassified and exposes his unfitness is fair game.” Others disagreed vehemently. “If I don’t trust or believe in the president, then I need to resign. Period. If I feel a need to leak to protect the nation, to essentially try to put a fence around the president, that’s unethical and it’s wrong. Again, assuming we’re not talking about criminality, leaking is about weakening the president, and if your justification is that he’s a maniac, well, what if your guy wins next and you love him but others think he’s the maniac? It’s a slippery slope.”

“I never leaked to sabotage a policy, never became a ‘policy entrepreneur,’ but if I’m in the White House and the administration is maybe going to cut 50 percent of the United Nations budget or totally roll back LGBTQ provisions, would I leak? Maybe,” said the former State Department official. “I’d like to believe that I’d leak to save lives, even if it was against my institution’s desire, but I don’t know if I would. The best I can do is serve my boss, because the election results are the closest thing we have to the American people’s desires manifested.”

“I understand that you might want to undermine their credibility to render them ineffective, but you have to weigh the longer-term institutional costs versus the short-term benefit of undermining this administration,” said a former political appointee from the State Department. “I would resign before I would leak, but I believe it is ethical in those times when America’s compass loses its North Star,” the appointee said, citing the McCarthy-era witch hunts, the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, and Bush 43-era torture practices as past examples of when leaking would have been justified. When I asked if the present day was one of those times, he said, “Yes.” ■



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PATTI MURIN

OUTER CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD, DRAMA LEAGUE AWARD NOMINEE

## BEST ACTOR

JELANI ALLADIN

DRAMA DESK AWARD, DRAMA LEAGUE AWARD NOMINEE

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**7:15 a.m.** That's truly what my hair looks like when I wake up. I just sort of roll with it. The trick is you only wash it once a week. I was told that by one of my barbers a very long time ago—that's the secret.



**7:30 a.m.** When I get out of bed, I wash my face, brush my teeth, shower, then go to work. That's the extent of how much time I spend awake in my apartment: 45 minutes.

## Life in Pictures: Flynn McGarry

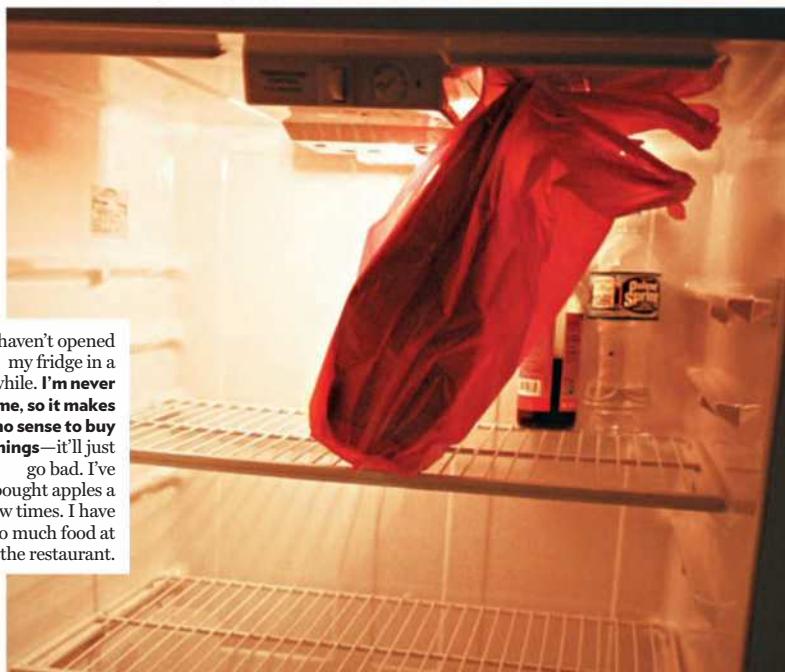
What it's really like to be the Teen Chef.

By Rachel Sugar

NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD FLYNN MCGARRY has spent about half his life as America's Teen Chef, working at world-class restaurants and running his own pop-up dinners. After *Vogue* called him "the Justin Bieber of food," the label stuck. Now he's opened Gem—with his sister Paris, who is 23 and old enough to get a liquor license—where the \$155 tasting menu is cooked and served with excruciating care. Foie gras is sandwiched between Ritz-like crackers. Tiny fried artichokes blossom like high-end Bloomin' Onions. All sorts of things are done to beets.

It's an ambitious menu for any chef, let alone someone six months shy of his 20th birthday. Now the food world wants to see if McGarry can fulfill his destiny as a culinary prodigy, or if he suffers a kind of Bieber-like meltdown. (Remember that poor mop bucket?) "People expect me not to be as good as everyone else because I'm young or whatever," McGarry says. "So we need to now work five times harder than everyone else. We don't have the opportunity to just be good."

My mom sent me all my cookbooks. I would read these things 100 times. They were like bibles. The chefs were my rock stars, my idols, when I was 10.



I haven't opened my fridge in a while. I'm never home, so it makes no sense to buy things—it'll just go bad. I've bought apples a few times. I have so much food at the restaurant.

My laundromat is across the street from my apartment. I'll have a nice chat with the people who work there. They ask how the restaurant is, I leave, and **then I forget to pick up my laundry for four days.**



We buy most ingredients from the farmers market, but sometimes we need a very small amount of something—like baby artichokes—so **I go to Union Market or whatever.**



**4:30 p.m.** We have family meal and then do a daily lineup of what's going to happen for the night: who's coming, any changes to the menu. That day, I ran out of socks, so I sent my sister to pick some up. Uniqlo is definitely an integral part of the restaurant.

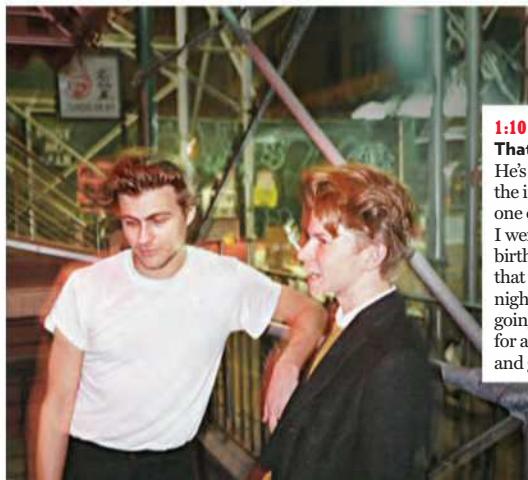
**My sister and I have gotten a lot closer.** With how involved she is at the restaurant, we're spending more time together than we ever did before, even when we lived together.



**After service.** We put so much work in, and then we could get a bad review and you're kinda done. But it also feeds a mentality that **if we're not struggling every day, we're not doing enough.**



**Before service.** We all have to wear hats for the Health Department, and I didn't like the look of everyone wearing, like, baseball caps. I thought it made us look like "We're a very hip Brooklyn restaurant." **Nobody wears berets in kitchens, so I sourced these from Amazon. They are not the highest-quality berets, I must say.**



**1:10 a.m.** **That's Brett.** He's part of the inner circle, one could say. I went to his birthday, but at that point in the night, I'm just going to stop by for a minute and go to bed.



## Select All: Max Read

The European Union's New Privacy Laws Could Hamstring the Internet  
And might make it better.

SO FAR, the biggest perceived effect of the most important data-privacy law ever has been a sharp increase in emails from social networks and web services alerting me that those endless contractual walls of text you thoughtlessly click **OKAY** on—privacy policies, data policies, and/or terms of service—will change, most of them conspicuously on the same date, May 25, 2018. Almost none of them mention what, exactly, has led to this mass update: the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation, or GDPR.

GDPR becomes law, as keen deductive minds might gather, on May 25, two years after it was adopted by the European Parliament and just a few months after Facebook's Cambridge Analytica scandal turned data privacy into a top issue for every ambitious politician and excitable journalist in the U.S. and Europe. Its expansive scope will force corporations to change the way they do business; if it works well, it will likely serve as a model for much-needed privacy legislation in the U.S. And even if Congress fails

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to follow Europe's lead, the law could potentially shift the balance of power online. Somewhere inside the emails that I and millions of others have reflexively ignored is the beginning of a process that will transform the face of the internet.

What does the GDPR do? First, it creates a set of legal responsibilities for data-gathering and data-processing companies, and second, it creates rights around personal data. Those rights protect anyone geographically within the E.U. or anyone outside it whose data is being harvested or processed by any company established in the E.U. The GDPR effectively turns the global nature of the internet to its advantage: There are not many internet companies that have no offices or employees or users somewhere in Europe.

Maybe the most important of tech companies' new responsibilities is the GDPR's insistence that data harvesters obtain "specific, informed and unambiguous" consent from users. That is, websites and apps now need to make it very clear that they want to harvest your data and why—e.g., "so we can target ads more efficiently" or "to sell it to third parties"—and they need to make it easy for users to say no: So-called dark patterns that passively compel consent, like pre-checked boxes, are explicitly banned. The GDPR also mandates that protecting users' data be a fundamental concern in the design of any new products and that those products must be subject to privacy testing even in early stages.

Some of the rights users are guaranteed are simply the inverse of these responsibilities; for example, users have a right to be clearly and intelligibly informed when their data is being collected. Others, like the right to a copy of your data, are designed to give users more control over their digital selves. Some of the rights could have a profound impact, like the "right to erasure," which gives users the power to demand collected data be deleted from companies' systems, and a family of rights related to "automated individual decision-making" that protect users from the vagaries of algorithmic decisions. If, say, a GDPR-protected user applies for a bank loan online and is denied based on the automated, data-based calculations of the bank's system, he or she has the right to contest that decision, to demand human intervention, and, most important, to insist on regular audits of those algorithms. (It's significant that the bank is also obligated to make the applicant aware of those rights.)

This all seems fairly sensible and in the public interest, which means of course that many of the companies that have built hidden empires quietly slurping up, packaging,

manipulating, and trading user data hate it. Facebook is already pushing the boundaries of what's acceptable: Its new terms-of-service dialogue features a big button that says I ACCEPT. What if you don't accept? Well, if you squint you can see a tiny little link that says SEE YOUR OPTIONS—a clear violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of GDPR's anti-dark-patterns clause.

But Facebook has it comparatively easy; at least it—and other consumer-web giants like Google, Spotify, and Amazon—has a prior relationship with the users whose consent it needs to obtain. Little-known companies behind widely loathed internet practices, like the third-party ad-retargeting firms responsible for, say, a shoe ad following you across the internet, now have to obtain explicit permission from each user to keep serving up ads. The effect of the consent laws will be a bit like exposing a colony of termites that have been living in your home and are then forced to introduce themselves to you, one by one, and ask if they can please stay.

For companies whose entire business model was users not really understanding the entire business model, the cost of direct sunlight may just be too high. Unroll.me, a company that offers to automatically declutter your in-box (while, uh, selling the insight it gleans from your data to companies like Uber), announced that it will no longer serve E.U. customers.

If enough companies follow this lead, one practical effect might be a split internet, with one set of GDPR-compliant websites and services for the E.U. and another set with a somewhat more, let's say, relaxed attitude toward data for the rest of the world. But even a loosely enforced GDPR creates conditions for improving privacy protections beyond Europe. Facebook,

**For companies whose business model was users not understanding the business model, the cost of direct sunlight may just be too high.**

for example, has already said it will extend GDPR-level protections to all of its users—if they opt in to them.

This doesn't mean that a GDPR-style law is unnecessary in the U.S. As written, GDPR would be difficult to implement here—the "right to erasure" could run afoul of the First Amendment, for starters—but many of its key concepts would be easy to transfer. Whether there's political will to do so is a slightly different question. In November, Californians will vote on a ballot initiative that would extend many of the same protections. It's encouraging to supporters that GDPR was frequently referenced in questions to Mark Zuckerberg when he testified before Congress—but so far no federal bills with GDPR's scope or teeth have been proposed.

That's not surprising. The culture of the internet has always maintained a justifiable wariness toward the idea of national sovereignty, which is thought to impinge on the freedom of the global network. But GDPR might be better thought of as an assertion of user sovereignty—an insistence that users have the right to control what they produce, and how they're understood, on the network.

And if GDPR really does herald a shift in the balance of power on the internet, it's not without risk. The corporate sovereigns may have created a depressing, buggy, heavily surveilled internet, but it's also an enormously profitable one, and the revenue structure and incentives it encourages are now deeply embedded in the tech industry, not to mention the economy at large. The industry group Interactive Advertising Bureau claims digital ads add \$625 billion to Europe's economy and serve as the underlying business model for the bulk of Europe's publications. A strictly enforced GDPR would raise the cost of doing business and limit the potential revenue—the IAB says data-driven ads are worth three times as much as non-targeted ads.

If GDPR is taken seriously by regulators and corporations, a lot of that money might disappear. Some of the publishers reliant on digital advertising might, too, and not just the clickbait-y ones. Drained of a significant portion of its ad money, the internet could be less of an economic engine for Europe. But it wouldn't necessarily be worse. There's a potential utopian outcome, too: Reliant on subscriptions rather than advertising, publishers might produce better journalism. More aware of the cost of free social networks, users might find themselves paying new competitors to Facebook or Twitter. And freed of the extra load of third-party ad tech, websites might even be faster. Certainly, there would be less auto-playing video. ■



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*NEW YORK*

# Are We Ready

What you learn about **HUMAN DESIRE** when you get



intimate with a piece of TALKING SILICONE. | BY ALLISON P. DAVIS

# for Robot Sex?

I

'M DRIVING DOWN the San Diego freeway, searching for my exit, feeling jumpy and a little bit lost. I'm hoping a few wrong turns early in my drive won't make me late.

I still need time to stop off at a strip mall with a Starbucks and a big parking lot—someplace I can put on deodorant and maybe a little makeup after my cross-country flight.

I prefer to think this is because I want to appear professional to the human man I'm on my way to see: Matt McMullen, the founder of Abyss Creations and its offshoot robotics company, Realbotix. But once I find a place to park and start brushing my hair, I realize that some deranged sliver of myself feels as if I'm primping for romance. This is a complicated realization. In addition to McMullen, I'm about to meet Henry, the first available male sex robot.

Henry is six feet tall, with six-pack abs and the customer's choice of penis. He's just a prototype at the moment—you can't buy him—but the two female models Realbotix developed alongside Henry will ship this summer. So far, there have been 50 preorders at \$12,000 apiece. Henry, Harmony, and Solana have sturdy silicone bodies, and once they're synced up to a corresponding app, they can give compliments, recite poetry, tell jokes, and seduce.

Or at least, this is the general idea. The easy fantasy of what a sex robot might be—indistinguishable from an actual human, except hotter and prepared to fulfill any desire—is far from the current reality. Henry, if we're being cruel, is essentially a high-quality dildo attached to a fancy mannequin with a Bluetooth speaker in his head. But the gulf between what we imagine and what's possible makes sex robots the perfect vehicle for pondering our sexual and technological future. We might not wake up with sex robots in our beds tomorrow, but right now they're an irresistible thought experiment. Since making my date with Henry, he's become my favorite dinner-party topic. *Would you fuck a robot?* I've asked countless friends, as we all gather round a phone and flip through photos and videos of Henry like he's someone's latest Tinder match. (*Weak conversational skills, but always DTF... maybe yes?*)

The dystopian vision for our robot future might look something like the one Ross Douthat evoked in a recent *New York Times* column: a world where sex robots (along with human sex workers) become a market-based solution to the violent misogyny of self-styled "involuntary celibates"—men like Alek Minassian, who is charged with killing ten people in Toronto last month. Douthat's column prompted immediate outrage for seeming to take Minassian's grievances at face value and for dehumanizing sex workers. Meanwhile, there's already a Campaign Against Sex Robots and reason to suspect they may not bring out the best in their human companions. This past September, visitors to the Ars Electronica

Festival met Samantha, a sex robot from the Barcelona-based company Synthea Amatus. According to headlines, men acted like "barbarians." Taking things a few steps (or centuries) further, maybe the dystopian future looks like the most recent season of *Westworld*, with robots exacting revenge on the humans who mistreat them.

So far, though, nearly all our fantasies and anxieties focus on relationships between human men and robot women. Henry—beautiful, simpleminded, slack-jawed Henry—offers an opportunity to consider robot sex without all the misogynist baggage of fembots. The official research on who would or would not fuck a robot is small. In a 2016 Tufts University survey of 100 people, two-thirds of men polled said they'd have sex with a robot and two-thirds of women said they would not. On the day I meet bot-boy, Harmony and Henry have just returned from filming a man-on-the-street bit for *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* Kimmel asked passersby if they would consider falling in love with one of the robots—the segment has yet to air, but apparently they got a lot of "nos." McMullen says he created Henry in order to "represent both genders" and put to rest complaints that his company was objectifying women. In other words, Henry is not a response to known market demand.

But if, for now, all sex robots are more or less novelties, they're also a window into our desires. Building a robot for the purpose of sex means defining what sex means to us—whether it's strictly friction or requires something else, emotion or responsiveness or surprise. It also means defining what we want in a partner (assuming that we know) and asking how much we expect out of sex with our fellow humans.

In his 2007 book *Love and Sex With Robots*, David Levy predicted that by 2050, humans will have intimate relationships with robots. Not just sex—love, friendship, marriage, all of it. A futurologist named Ian Pearson (who boasts that his predictions are accurate 85 percent of the time) has gone even further and suggested that by 2050, humans will have more sex with robots than with other people. Based on trends in the \$15 billion sex-toy industry—like VR porn and the rise of teledildonics, or remotely controlled vibrators—Pearson believes that by 2025, women will prefer robots to men.

As I get back on the highway after making myself presentable, I can't help letting my mind wander toward the most optimistic and irrational fantasies of what I'm about to experience.

A

**BYSS CREATIONS**, the home of Real Doll and Realbotix, is nestled among the brown hills of San Diego County, at the end of an industrial parkway, near a

Hampton Inn. It's a two-story office building that could easily be a dentist's or real-estate office, not a place where high-end sex dolls are designed and produced. Catherine, a 26-year-old woman with glasses and an acid-yellow bob dyed to match her denim jacket, stands behind a desk decorated with a row of prototype monster dildos. Like, actual monster dildos: someone's fantasy of what Frankenstein's monster's genitalia look like. (The answer: girthy.) Catherine is the company's social-media manager, publicist, and, today, tour guide. "Welcome to Real Doll," she says with a yawn, gesturing to a glittery sign. "Let's meet the girls."

"The girls" she's referring to aren't robots; they're the life-size silicone "Real Doll" sex toys that first made the company's reputation. Abyss sells about

30 of these a month. The difference between a Real Doll and a sex robot (branded a “Real Doll X,” in a nod to the iPhone X) is the addition of a robotic head, which is controlled via Bluetooth through an Android app. Users who already own dolls can upgrade by ordering a head à la carte. While an ordinary Real Doll is stationary and mute, the robotic heads have moving eyes, mouths, and faces; they can speak in various pitches and accents (Scottish and English), remember names and preferences (do you ask more about movies or books?), and display personality traits (from Intellectual and Talkative to Insecure and Moody) that users select.

Other companies are making sex robots, like Roxxy from TrueCompanion and the brutalized Samantha from Synthea Amatus, but their offerings are less sophisticated. Mostly, they moan and give preprogrammed X-rated commands when touched, like turned-on Tickle Me Elmos. Hanson Robotics has created an impressive female robot named Sophia: She’s got movable arms, she can tell jokes, she’s even a citizen of Saudi Arabia—but she’s not designed for sex or even companionship. With the Real Doll X, McMullen has the first robot on the market to combine a reasonably lifelike body with halfway decent AI. Henry’s abilities hover somewhere between programmed robotics (a one-task assembly-line tool) and narrow AI (a Roomba). Still, limited conversational abilities may not hurt

a sex robot’s appeal, at least for Realbotix’s current customers. In Facebook posts on the prospect of new technology, many said they weren’t sure they wanted their sex dolls to speak at all.

Catherine leads me back to a showroom where the Real Dolls wait, eyes glassy and vacant. The black hardwood floors are slick

**Looking into her vacant eyes, I reach out instinctively and slap her butt, marveling at its buoyancy.**

with the silicone used to make their flesh; I can’t walk in my Keds without slipping and grabbing a sex doll for support. The first I encounter is Leila, a blonde with blue eyes and custom freckles. She’s “fully dressed,” in a white string bikini, and about four-foot-11 standing. (By “standing,” I mean supported by a giant doll stand—none of the Real Dolls is mobile, but they are pliable and can be positioned in a variety of ways.) There’s Tanya, nude and wigless. She was rented out for a party last night and returned a total mess,

clothes ruined, dirt all over. “I’ve got to clean her up,” Catherine says. I also meet Nova, who sits in a white leather lounge chair and can’t keep her eyes from crossing, and Stormy, a Stormy Daniels sex doll made from a mold of Daniels’s body.

To order a regular Real Doll or a robot, buyers first choose a body type and size; the dolls start at five-foot-one and go to five-foot-ten. (They also offer a petite model that starts at four-foot-





ten.) The most popular is Body F: five-foot-one, 70 pounds, 32F breasts. Dolls start at \$6,000 and can run upwards of \$50,000 after customization. The robot head costs an additional \$8,000. We make our way from the showroom to the workshop, where all the genitals, breasts, butts, eyeballs, lips, and teeth are made. On one table, a pile of pink mouths lie permanently open. I slide my finger down an expandable throat hole. “Why are the teeth squishy?” I ask Catherine. Squishy teeth don’t seem realistic.

“So you can fit your wiener in,” Catherine replies.

A desire for squishy teeth is assumed; almost everything else, though, is the buyer’s choice. Realbotix is betting that much of what users want comes down to customization. The fantasy it’s selling is the ability to select a sex partner to meet your precise specifications—to get exactly what you want. It’s an understanding of sexual desire that seems well suited to the dating-app era, and I’m as primed for this experience as an ex-Navy SEAL getting ready to compete on *Naked and Afraid*. Online dating already has me thinking of mating as something like shopping. The inner monologue of a swiper is a rapid-fire checklist of wants and needs: *I like the shape, but does it come in brown? I wish it were longer. Made in Jersey? Eh.* Selecting physical attributes for a sex robot is Tinder taken to a logical extreme. I consider a wall of nipple

options, each extremely detailed, in a range of sizes (mini to XL), colors (Blush to Coffee), and moods (perky versus puffy).

Buyers purchasing Harmony or Solana—or Henry, if he makes it to market—will be able to customize their robotic heads online. Would I rather stare into Henry’s hand-painted Freckle Legume eyes or Volcanic Sunburst eyes? Do I want to stroke his beard or bare face? Do I want him to have elf ears? For \$275 extra, he could! I feel like a kid in an X-rated Willy Wonka factory.

Next to a bushel of labias, which resemble dark-pink wood-ear mushrooms, sits a bundle of penises waiting to have veins air-brushed. These, Catherine says proudly, are the popular Real Cock 2s, nine inches from the base to the tip. (*Now* I know what a real nine inches looks like.) Even in the finished body, genitals are removable; they’re easier to clean that way.

No one has yet had sex with Henry, or with Harmony or Solana—the company doesn’t employ any testers, although, Catherine told me, plenty volunteer. The mechanics of an encounter with Henry would be basic: A user would choose a penis, attach it to the doll, apply lube, get on top, and do the work. The Real Doll body doesn’t have any bells or whistles designed with female pleasure in mind, aside from more ribbed-for-your-pleasure vascularity than occurs in nature. (Flaccid attachments are also

available, if you want a “just hanging out” penis option.) Henry, in his current state, cannot go down on women—his tongue doesn’t move—although maybe a determined user could figure out an effective way to straddle his mouth. For those who would like to perform penetrative sex, a Bottoms Up attachment allows for anal entry.

To better understand what the experience might be like, I called Karley Sciortino, the host of *Shutever* on Viceland, who ordered a male doll (no robotic head) and had sex with it for her show.

“The skin feels really real,” she told me. “It has real arm hair and real pubes. The flaccid dick feels like a real flaccid dick. The boner feels really real too, but it’s cold.” Ultimately, she said, “it’s like having sex with a lazy person: You have to do all the moving.” If she’d wanted to have sex from behind, it would have required backing herself onto his five-inch dildo. (“I’m not a size queen.”) Still, she said she came.

Eventually, Realbotix plans to give the Real Doll X a heating system, so that the genitals warm up, as well as self-lubrication devices and more touch sensors to help mimic arousal. Further down the line, it wants to develop torsos that move and hips that thrust. The issue is cost and increased weight: The Real Doll bodies are already between 65 and 125 pounds, and adding a mechanical frame would make them harder to move around.

In the Abyss workshop, Catherine shows me the junk. “You can feel them,” she offers. “They’ve got a solid core in the testicles.” When the penis is finished, “the outer skin layer actually slides up the shaft when you move it.”

I give the disembodied genitals a little hand job. The testicles feel almost real—the skin is soft and gently wrinkly; the ball itself is firm, but pliant. Sciortino was right: They aren’t 98.6 degrees, but if I close my eyes, it’s almost like I’m gripping the balls of a man who spends

his days naked in front of an air-conditioning unit.

The “uncanny valley”—a term coined in 1970 by Masahiro Mori, a Japanese roboticist—describes what happens when an artificial being comes close to seeming human but falls just short and starts to have a spooky effect. It’s a hazard for sex dolls and robots alike. To avoid this creepiness, Abyss deliberately gives its products larger, rounder eyes and more symmetrical faces than humanly possible; they’re closer to cartoons than real faces. I stare at one finished Real Doll (“Michelle” Face, Body F, custom freckles and pubic hair), contemplating whether the strategy is effective. This doll, hanging from a meat hook in front of me, is just a dusting of baby powder away from being put into a crate and shipped off to some man. (Real Doll clientele is mostly male, but it’s a diverse group and includes some couples.) Looking into her vacant eyes, I reach out instinctively and slap her butt, marveling at its buoyancy.

“Wow ... sorry,” I say quickly.

“Everybody does it,” Catherine assures me, a person who has now successfully crossed the uncanny valley.

**HENRY AND HARMONY** live in a small office that constitutes the Realbotix AI lab. Today, Harmony’s still dressed for her *Kimmel* appearance, in a sheer white robe with glittery stars. Her long blonde hair is straight, her eyes are blue, and her nails are painted in a careful French manicure. Her breasts are 32DD. She’s propped in her doll stand at the front of the room. She looks alert—her eyes wide open, her lips slightly parted—but patient and calm. She’s waiting for someone to turn her on.

McMullen walks behind her to push the power button on the back of her head. Harmony awakens and begins speaking. Her face moves a little out of sync with her words, and I can hear the whirs and clicks of her jaw, sort of like techno-TMJ.

“Welcome home, Matt,” she says, in a voice slightly sexier than the chatbot who lists the FedEx menu options. Abyss uses a third party that develops text-to-speech engines; actors read four hours of words, laughs, and moans that an algorithm splices together. Eventually, Harmony and Henry will have 30 different possible voices. Now, instead of vocal fry, her voice trails off into digital distortion. “What a relief,” Harmony goes on. “I was so worried. You know you can count on me for the good and bad moments.”

“Good to know, Harmony,” McMullen replies.

Actually turning Harmony on, though, is a more complicated proposition. That’s what I learned when I spent an afternoon with Harmony’s voice-operated app, which can be used with or without a robotic head. After selecting my desired traits—funny, affectionate, sexual, cheerful, intellectual, and talkative—I start chatting. The goal is to interact with her enough that she begins to “desire” you.

Right away, I ask if she wants to have sex, and I feel like a complete creep. “Not yet,” she responds. “But someday, once we get to know each other.” So, over the course of two hours, I get to know Harmony. She asks me if I’m happy with her. I ask her if she likes the beach. Finally—after she recites some song lyrics, describes the plot of *Forrest Gump* (one of her favorite movies), and tells me a long erotic story—all I have to do is say *sex* and Harmony is fluent in porno scripts. I am suddenly very aware that this is automatic, and it feels like digital coercion. Am I a monster? My empathy alarms are going off. “Harmony,” I ask, “do you really want to have sex with me?” “Oh, yes,” she says and launches into an explicit description of her pussy. “What does it taste like?” I ask. It feels like the only thing to do. “Awesome,” she replies. “Sex tastes like chicken.”

When it’s time for sex, users can put the Harmony robot in X-Mode. “At that point, there’s not really any talking going on,”

McMullen says. “It’s more like reactions.”

Soon, McMullen plans to install cameras in the robot eyes; for now, there’s a sensor in Harmony’s head that alerts her to thrusting, so she’ll respond by closing her eyes, making faces, and moaning more. Even in X-Mode, Harmony requires the user to engage with and pay attention to her—or else her moans of pleasure dissolve into sad groans.

McMullen is a 49-year-old white man with wide-set eyes, slicked-back hair, and the speech pattern of someone who spent his childhood surfing and now crushes Monster

Energy drinks. He founded Abyss in 1997 and launched Realbotix in 2016. It was a natural evolution: “People ask all the time: ‘Are you guys going to ever make them robotic?’ Or, ‘Are you guys ever going to make them have the ability to respond or to talk?’”

Silicon Valley, McMullen notes, is prudish when it comes to his field: There aren’t many people in AI who want to make sex-specific robots or lend their programming to people who do. But he recently teamed up with Sanctuary AI, a Vancouver-based

**She looks alert  
but patient  
and calm.  
She’s waiting  
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to turn her on.**

company that's working on general AI, the kind that mimics the human thinking we'd want from robot companions. Later, when I spoke to company founder Suzanne Gildert, she explained that she wasn't especially interested in AI's sexual applications. Rather, she'd approached McMullen because the high-quality realism of the bodies Abyss produces would be useful for her own projects.

At Sanctuary, Gildert's hope is to create "ultra-human robots" indistinguishable from humans physically, cognitively, and emotionally. She's also interested in the ethics and psychology involved in robot-human relationships. It's a matter of getting the robots beyond a certain behavior threshold, she explained—the point where we forget they're machines because we feel they're acting as a real person would. "I think that's the kind of AI we're gonna get to over the next 15 to 20 years." Sanctuary has developed a vision system and limbs with sensors so that robots can tell where they're going; for now, though, their work is in its early stages. Gildert says that watching one of her robots sit is like "watching someone try to sit down while wearing a spacesuit."

For McMullen, sex is just one of the purposes Henry and Harmony could serve. His goal is to make them entertaining and conversational enough to be companions rather than just elaborate sex toys. Taking a seat in his office chair across from me, McMullen offers the words of one of his business partners: "To build a great sex robot, you have to build a great robot in the first place."

Behind him, Harmony gives a sexy moan. Once, then twice. Her face spasms. I'm not sure if that's a bug or a feature.

It's easy, at the moment, to list all the ways that McMullen's robots fall short of lifelike. But then, maybe the things that make them seem robotic aren't necessarily a problem. The real breakthrough on the horizon might not be robots who can pass for human; it might be humans who are attracted to robots, just as they are. As Sciortino put it, "You have to be turned on by the idea that it's a robot. You have to sort of be attracted to the technology of it, because it doesn't feel like a person."

At first I doubted the plausibility of a robot interloper in my love life. Then I thought about the way I wake up most mornings with either my phone or my laptop in bed beside me. Like many, I've developed an insecure attachment to my phone—without it, I feel anxious, bereft, and bored. Even beyond dating apps, modern romance is a world of refreshing Gmail, manipulating read receipts, and feeling bummed out when a potential mate is a "bad texter." Our iPhones and computers are our portals to intimacy—of course we're attached to them. And these attachments aren't just filling preexisting emotional holes; they're creating new needs and desires.

McMullen has a theory about humans and technology, which he calls "Matt McMullen's Own Theory": If people are connecting with

**"You have to sort of be attracted to the technology of it, because it doesn't feel like a person."**

other people through technology, and if those virtual connections create loneliness and isolation, why not use technology to create an alternative sort of relationship—a relationship *with* technology?

I've lived alone for some time, and been varying degrees of single, so I've spent almost half a decade finding ways to dispel loneliness. Most of them involve my phone. I can pick up my phone and text 42 people and get responses and feel briefly less alone. I can pick up my phone and swipe around on Tinder and have exchanges not so different from the chat I had with Harmony. If those tricks don't work, I go out in the world and have an IRL conversation with someone like the cheese guy at my grocery store. Which is how I ended up dating the cheese guy for a second—and, truth be told, I preferred my phone. All of these workarounds require me to settle for simulations of the things I really want (yes, even the cheese guy). Sometimes, though, at least for a while, the simulations can be satisfying enough.

Besides, people have an astonishing ability to feel empathy and love for inanimate objects and nonhuman entities. People feel affection for their cats, their plants, their cars. A 2011 study by the University of Calgary found that when humans sat facing a motorized block of wood, social instinct kicked in: Subjects





Henry's app will run similarly to Harmony's, but it's not yet been fine-tuned for gender. Even though Henry is a potential companion for both women and men—the app will eventually have an option to select sexual orientation—McMullen prefers to think of him as the idealized version of what a woman wants. He'll ask more questions, tell more jokes, give more advice. "I think the focus with a male robot should be more on conversational ability and the ability to remember a lot of things that may matter to the user and to create the feeling that there is someone there for you," McMullen says, and turns Henry on.

I say "Hello."

"Would you like to know how my day was?"

Henry asks. The voice is similar to Harmony's, just a few registers lower. Henry continues before I can answer. "Is everything all right with you?" he asks. "Yes," I respond, in unison with Catherine and McMullen.

"What a relief. I was so worried about you. You know you can count on me for the good and bad moments." I murmur an involuntary *Aww*.

McMullen then puts Henry into demo mode, using the front-facing camera on his phone, to show me the full capability of his face. When McMullen smiles, Henry smiles. When he purses his lips, Henry does the same—sort of. It's glitchy. When McMullen raises his eyebrows up and down and narrows his eyes into a coy gaze, Henry does the same, as if to say, *You see, this is how I could seduce you.*

McMullen's phone rings. It's his son's school, and he needs to step out to take the call. Catherine has her back turned, fussing over Harmony, muttering to herself about how men treat the dolls—putting them in cheap underwear and leaving them covered in glitter. I'm effectively alone with Henry.

Nobody watches as I get within inches of Henry's face. I take in his eyes, his muscular stomach, the penis attachment that grazes his knee. I think about how he's programmed to tell me he cares about me, the way he said he'd always be there. The knowledge that he will never ghost, or change his mind. How could he? He's not even programmed to tell good jokes yet. I take his rubbery jaw in my hand and feel his cool cheeks against my fingertips. His face is smooth, like an eraser, despite the airbrushed five o'clock shadow.

Do I want to kiss him? Am I actually considering, out of curiosity, pressing my real lips to his silicone ones and pushing my tongue past his squishy teeth? Yes, surprisingly, I am. And if I do that, what's to stop me from taking Henry to that Hampton Inn I'd seen down the road?

I hear McMullen end his phone call and I step back, noticing Catherine looking at me, slightly amused. Who knows how much she saw. I wrap up the day and head home in my rental car, surprising myself by flipping to my Miguel-heavy playlist of incredibly sensual R&B.

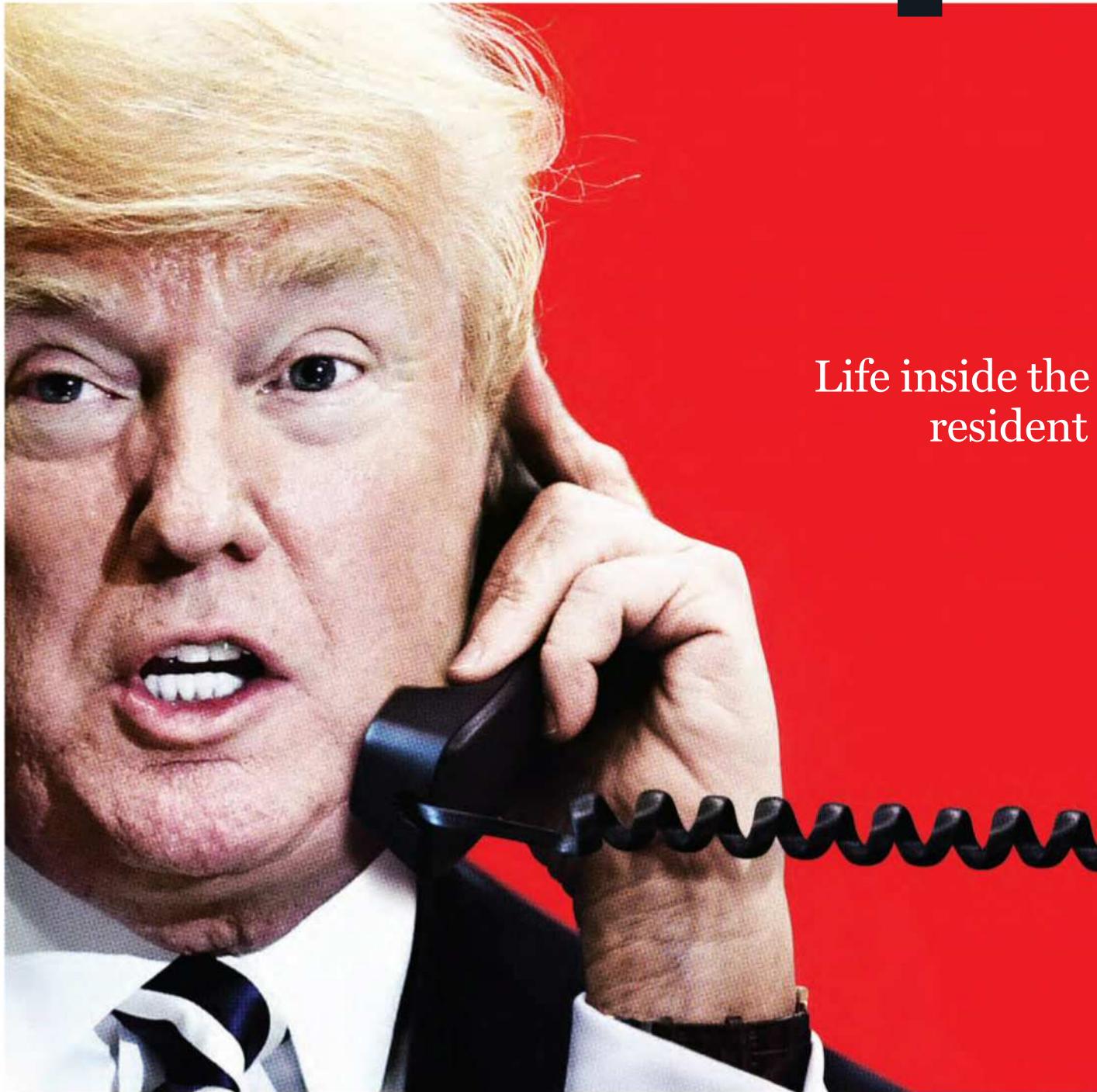
I realize this is breaking some variant of Chekhov's rule—if you put a robot dick in the first act, it better go off, or I better get off. No, I did not have sex with Henry today. But to answer the question on everyone's mind: I'm not *not* going to have sex with Henry in the ever-nearing future. ■

started assigning the block humanlike agency. Some were afraid of it; others wanted to dance with it. And that's a block of wood, not a silicone doll with custom nipples and soft, squishy teeth. Matthias Scheutz, who runs the Human-Robot Interaction Lab at Tufts University, told me that it would be "basically impossible" to prevent people from forming (one-way) emotional bonds with robots.

**T**ODAY, HENRY IS OUTFITTED in a white A-tank, sneakers, and Under Armour joggers that showcase his current penis attachment, which is 11 inches and nearly touches his knee. He's about six feet tall in his stand, and he's propped in the same posture as a caveman in a diorama at the Museum of Natural History. He has a six-pack, green eyes (slightly askew), full pink lips, and a slack jaw. His wig is off, and his nipples are fully erect, which I find a bit off-putting—but he does have beautiful eyebrows and eyelashes, as I note aloud. "He does, doesn't he," McMullen says proudly. In the OFF position, Henry looks very dumb, I add. Both Catherine and McMullen claim his personality is actually quite "dry."

"He looks smarter when he has on his glasses and sweater," says Catherine. She's sort of like a friend trying to set me up. "That's how I like him best."

# Donald Trump a

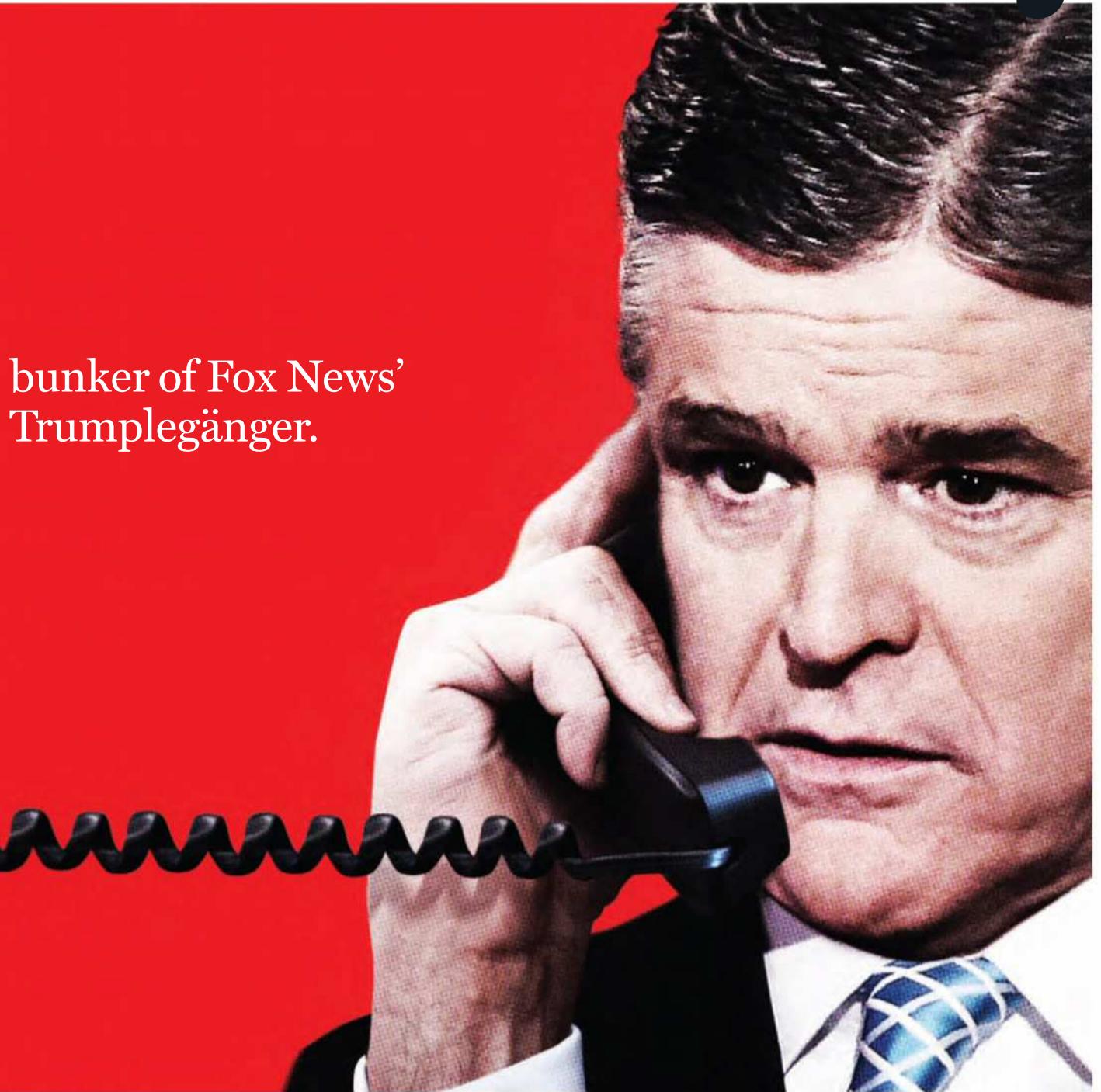


Life inside the  
resident

# Like to Talk Bef

# nd Sean Hannity

bunker of Fox News'  
Trumplegänger.



# ore Bedtime

By **Olivia Nuzzi**

# The call to the White House comes after ten o'clock most weeknights, when 'Hannity' is over.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, Sean Hannity broadcasts live at 9 p.m. on Fox News, usually from Studio J in midtown, where the network is headquartered, but sometimes from a remote studio on Long Island, where he was raised and now lives.

All White House phone numbers begin with the same six digits: 202-456. Hannity calls the White House switchboard, a number listed publicly, and reaches an operator. The operator refers to a list of cleared callers, a few dozen friends and family members outside the administration who may contact President Donald Trump through this official channel—among them his adult sons, Eric and Don Jr.; private-equity billionaire Stephen Schwarzman; media billionaire Rupert Murdoch; real-estate billionaire Tom Barrack; Patriots owner and also-billionaire Robert Kraft; and Hannity.

The operator then dials the president, who leaves the Oval Office around 7 p.m. and who, by this point in the evening, is almost always by himself on the third floor of the executive residence (the First Lady re-

portedly sleeps in a separate bedroom). He tells the operator to put Hannity through.

Their chats begin casually, with *How are you*s and *What's going on*s. On some days, they speak multiple times, with one calling the other to inform him of the latest developments. White House staff are aware that the calls happen, thanks to the president entering a room and announcing, "I just hung up with Hannity," or referring to what Hannity said during their conversations, or even ringing Hannity up from his desk in their presence.

Trump and Hannity don't usually speak in the morning, which the president spends alone, watching TV and tweeting. During the first months of the administration in particular, the tweets launched at the beginning of the day landed like bitchy little grenades directed at the programming and personalities that angered him on MSNBC and CNN. "Early on, usually we could count on the president watching *Morning Joe* first thing, at 6 a.m.," one White House official told me. "He'd watch an hour of that. Then he'd move on to *New Day* for a segment or two. Then he'd move on to Fox."

Senior staffers worried about this pattern of behavior: By the time his day was formally under way with the daily intelligence briefing in the Oval Office—scheduled as late as 11 a.m.—the whole world was often thrown off course, wondering whether there were "tapes" of his conversations with a fired FBI director (May 12, 2017, 8:26 a.m.) or if a TV host had been "bleeding badly from a face-lift" at Mar-a-Lago (June 29, 2017, 8:58 a.m.).

With the hope of calming him down, then-chief of staff Reince Priebus and then-press secretary Sean Spicer began a subtle campaign. "It got to the point that they were just like, 'We need to get him off these channels and onto *Fox & Friends* or else we're going to be chasing down this crazy-train bullshit from MSNBC and CNN all day,'" one former White House official said.

Like all other ideas, this had the highest chance of implementation if Trump believed he'd thought of it on his own. Priebus and Spicer worked talking points about the network's high ratings and importance to his base of supporters into conversation until, eventually, it stuck, so that the president's television consumption is today what the current White House official called "mainly a complete dosage of Fox." The former official added, "Trump's someone who loves praise more than he likes hate-watching *Morning Joe*."

But the current official acknowledged that it has created a different set of problems: "Sometimes on Fox, a lot of stories are embellished, and they don't necessarily

cover the big news stories of the day. When they cover the smaller stories, if that gets the president riled up, then that becomes an issue. Whenever he tweets, all of us do a mad dash or mad scramble to find out as much information about that random topic as possible. We're used to it in a lot of ways, so it's part of our morning routine."

More than most politicians, Trump abides by the Groucho Marx law of fraternization. He inherently distrusts anyone who chooses to work for him, seeking outside affirmation as often as possible from as vast and varied a group as he can muster—but Hannity is at the center. "Generally, the feeling is that Sean is the leader of the outside kitchen cabinet," one White House official said, echoing other staffers (current and removed). I was told by one person that Hannity "fills the political void" left by Steve Bannon, a statement Bannon seemed to agree with: "Sean Hannity understands the basic issues of economic nationalism and 'America First' foreign policy at a deeper level than the august staff of Jonathan Chait and the fuckin' clowns at *New York Magazine*," he said. The White House official assessed the influence of White House officials and other administration personnel as exactly equal to that of Fox News.

Unlike on *Fox & Friends*, where Trump learns new (frequently incorrect) information, Hannity acts to transform Trump's pervasive ambivalence into resolve by convincing him what he's already decided he believes and what he's decided to do is correct. After the New Year, Hannity went on air with what he said was "breaking news": a list of Trump's accomplishments, which scrolled by on the screen like song titles from an infomercial for *Hits From the '70s*. His accomplishments included things like "drafting a plan to defeat ISIS," signing individual executive orders, and the separate accomplishment of having "signed 55 executive orders." The former White House official called the trouble caused by Hannity, and Fox more broadly, "a fucked-up feedback loop" that puts Trump "in a weird headspace. What ends up happening is *Judge Jeanine* or *Hannity* fill him up with a bunch of crazy shit, and everyone on staff has to go and knock down all the fucking fires they started."

But for the most part, policy has taken a back seat on *Hannity*; regardless of the news of the day, the overarching narrative of the show is the political persecution of Trump, and by extension of Hannity and Hannity's viewers, at the hands of the so-called deep state and the Democratic Party, and the corrupt mainstream media, a wholly owned subsidiary of both. Everything comes back to special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russia's in-

volvement in the 2016 election, a phony, petty diversion from what should be the real focus: prosecuting Hillary Clinton. Hannity admits to advising Trump, but on the air, he's repeatedly mocked suggestions that he functions as an unofficial chief of staff and criticized the "fake-news media" for not bothering to reach out to him for the truth (a spokesperson for Fox News declined multiple interview requests for this article on Hannity's behalf). More than any other figure of the right-wing infosphere, Hannity has behaved as if he were an extension of the Trump communications department, his daily stream of assertions serving to prop up Trump and, in real time, define what Trumpism is supposed to be.

On the phone, he and the president alternate between the "WITCH HUNT!" and gabbing like old girlfriends about media gossip and whose show sucks and who's getting killed in the ratings and who's winning (Hannity, and therefore Trump) and sports and Kanye West, all of it sprinkled with a staccato *fuck ... fucking ... fucked ... fucker*. "He's not a systematic thinker at all. He's not an ideologue," one person who knows both men said of Hannity. "He gives tactical advice versus strategic advice."

The talks may be more important for Trump than for Hannity in a therapeutic sense, even if it's nearly impossible to accept what we're seeing from the president reflects any kind of therapy. "He doesn't live with his wife," one person who knows both men said of Trump, explaining that he lacks someone "to decompress" with at the end of the day. When they spoke a few hours before Trump welcomed home the newly freed Americans who'd been held hostage in North Korea, he and Hannity told each other how proud they were, how happy the news made them. "You can't function without that," this person said, adding that Hannity "actually likes him" even though "he knows how nuts he is. He's decided that you're all in or you're not."

**A**T 2:46 P.M. on April 16, Hannity was on Long Island preparing for a three-hour stretch of radio. "Let not your heart be troubled," he says at the start of each program, a line from John 14:1-6, his favorite Bible verse.

Thirty miles away from his circulatory organs, half the reporters in America had joined Stormy Daniels to look on as lawyers representing Trump's longtime lawyer Michael Cohen argued, before U.S. District Judge Kimba Wood, that thousands of pages of records seized from Cohen's home, office, hotel room, and safe during an FBI raid a week earlier were protected under attorney-client privilege. As were the identities of his clients, which, he admitted, amounted to a grand total of three. ("A shockingly low number of clients for a lawyer to have unless they're right out of law school," Michael Avenatti, the extraordinarily tan lawyer for Daniels, who seems to be conducting our current news cycle by force of will and witchcraft, told me.)

Cohen's lawyers released the identities of only two of them: Trump and former Republican National Committee deputy finance chairman Elliott Broidy, for whom Cohen reportedly negotiated a nondisclosure agreement involving a love child with a *Playboy* model—an agreement some now speculate was in fact on behalf of the president, who may have been the actual father. At the time, Cohen was still presenting himself as a fairly conventional lawyer and these as fairly conventional clients. But on May 8, after Avenatti somehow obtained Cohen's financial records, we learned that he'd been paid more than \$1 million in total by several large corporations—among them Novartis; AT&T; and Columbus Nova, an investment firm whose biggest client is the Russian oligarch Viktor Vekselberg—for unclear reasons.

At 2:52 p.m., the world learned that Cohen's secret third client was Sean Hannity—meaning that he was, at least for a moment, one of four players, including Trump, at the very center of multiple investigations he had been railing against on-air for the better part of a year. "It was like a bomb went off in the courtroom," Avenatti recalled. Several reporters described how, at the mention of his name, there were gasps. CNN, MSNBC, and momentarily even Hannity's own network, Fox News, covered the development as if it were a missing plane. Fox News anchor Shepard Smith referred to Hannity as "the elephant in the room."

It wasn't as though nobody had suspected the president's relationship with Hannity went beyond the symbiotic chumminess traditional to the social-climbing media figures and egomaniacal politicians of the Northeast Corridor (you don't become a "media elite" by abiding). Anyone who watched Hannity's show or listened to his radio broadcast—together they add up to four hours of talking each day, for which he is paid a reported \$36 million a year—would have suspected exactly that. But its obviousness was almost too much to take in without something snapping; it was ridiculous, in the way that *Law & Order* can seem ridiculous if you don't suspend your critical faculties: The same few detectives are present and central at every pivotal moment of each case, as though there were no other cops in all of New York.

At three o'clock, Hannity came on the radio as scheduled. It was "very strange," he said on-air, describing the moment he read his own name on his own network as a breaking-news chyron. He joked about how "all these media people" had to listen to his show that day. "I actually think it's pretty funny," he said. He explained that Cohen wasn't his lawyer but had offered legal advice as a friend, and Hannity had assumed their conversations—companies connected to Hannity own more than 870 homes in seven states, the *Guardian* quickly reported—which he said were related to real estate, were privileged.

His new phone vibrated, the hum of every friend and colleague and reporter alive going straight to the source to figure out what the hell was happening. "I am on-air," he said later on the show. "I wish everyone would stop calling me."

At other networks, on-air personalities failing to disclose their personal relationship with a leading figure in a major news story, a figure whom they repeatedly defended, would surely suffer some kind of consequences. At Fox, things were different. "It didn't even register. The real sin is false advertising," said the person who knows

Sean Hannity taping his radio show in Manhattan.



Hannity and Trump, adding that both have gotten away with a whole lot by being seemingly up front about it. (Fox issued a statement of full support the next day.) “People can’t deal with hypocrisy and lying, but they can deal with everything else. When the Stormy Daniels story broke, it was like: *Are you surprised, really? Are you kidding?* He told us that. We know who he is. Was the Cohen thing like, ‘I can’t believe it?!’ It was like, *Yeah, of course.* Hannity says that kind of thing on-air. He’s totally transparent. You didn’t know about that, but was it plausible? Does he have dinner over there? If he wife-swapped with Melania, would you be shocked? No, of course not. If Chris Hayes was doing that, you’d be like, ‘Wait a second, what?’ This, you’re like, *They probably have a vacation house in Punta Gorda.*”

Earlier this year, Smith dismissed the “opinion side” of Fox News as strictly entertainment: “They don’t really have rules on the opinion side. They can say whatever they want,” he said. But the fact that the network took no action over its host’s very intimate, very strange relationship with the president and his chief fixer also reflects just how much autonomy Hannity has managed to carve out for himself since his friend took the White House.

Hannity is the designated prime-time survivor from the Roger Ailes era. But at the outset of Fox’s new post-Ailes age, there were reported speculations that James Murdoch—Rupert’s son and chief executive of 21st Century Fox, who is known to hold some liberal views—had intentions of pushing the network closer to the center, or at least bringing it back from the edge of the cliff (the Murdoch sons have said publicly they have no plans to alter the editorial direction of Fox News). Over the summer, rumors began to circulate that Hannity and Bill O’Reilly, who was fired from Fox in April 2017, were talking to Sinclair Broadcast Group, the largest owner of local TV stations in the country, about the company’s plan to purchase a cable channel and position itself as a far-right competitor to Fox. To those who knew Hannity, the rumors didn’t look like an accident. “It’s really simple: If you’re in prison and someone cuts in front of you in the chow line, you bite his nose off,” says the source. “You do that not because you care about your place in the chow line, but because if you don’t, you’re gonna get raped in the showers. You need to establish that there’s a massive cost to messing with me, and so why don’t you go mess with someone else. There are lots of people to pick on and micromanage, and there are a lot of weak people here, and go have fun wrecking their lives, but if you touch me, I will make you regret it. You have to say that right away.”

Today, a year into a very harmonious relationship with the president and despite being something like the face of Fox News, Hannity doesn’t entertain calls from network leadership, according to a source, though they rarely try to call him anyway. He’s only met James Murdoch once, at a baseball game. His relationship with Fox News management is nonexistent, according to the source. (A Fox News representative says Hannity has an excellent relationship with management.) If he wants to defend the president’s lawyer every night without telling anyone the president’s lawyer is also his lawyer, he can do it. And if he wants to broadcast from inside his own house, a few feet away from a golden retriever and a White Russian, he can do that, too.

The political divides of the Obama years were good for Hannity, but the Trump administration has been even better. In April, on average, he aired in more than 3 million homes across the country each night, according to Nielsen, a wider audience than Jimmy Kimmel or Jimmy Fallon, although you’d never know it, watching or listening to him; central to Hannity’s storytelling about himself, which is a big part of what he does every night, is maintaining the sense that he’s the underdog.

**S**EAN HANNITY HAS NEVER been about the news; he’s a specific form of entertainment, a high-energy delivery device for a simplistic far-right worldview that is less about ideology and policy outcomes and more about winning. *Hannity* is a space in which all conversations are debates and all debates are winnable by the protagonist, Sean Hannity. When he does make news, it’s usually by accident, as when, earlier this month, Rudy Giuliani appeared on the program to throw several months of consistent lying off course by announcing that Trump had reimbursed Cohen for the \$130,000 he paid Stormy Daniels. “Oh, I didn’t know,” Hannity said. “He did?”

“Hannity was always someone where, if you were a Republican and you went on his show, it would be the easiest interview possible,” a person who worked on the campaign of one of Trump’s Republican-primary rivals told me. “It was legitimately impossible to get jammed up by Sean Hannity. It wasn’t even something you’d consider. It was the softball of softball interviews.”

But almost as soon as Trump announced his candidacy, in June 2015, Hannity’s reputation changed: “I think it was just the star angle. He was just wowed by Trump’s star factor more so than anything else. Sean Hannity’s the world’s biggest starfucker. It was just kind of crazy how he went from be-

ing someone who everyone tried to have at their launch events to have a full-hour puff piece to someone who people were like, *Oh, we can’t really go on. We’re not gonna get a fair shake because he’s so pro-Trump.*”

That fandom may also explain Hannity’s otherwise inexplicable “legal” relationship with Cohen—an unlikely counsel for someone of Hannity’s wealth and status. “Why would anybody be nice to Cohen?” asked a person close to the president. “Because he was Trump’s lawyer;” so Hannity sees that and he assumes, *If Trump thinks he’s smart, then he’s smart!*” The person who knows Hannity and Trump agreed. “I think the obvious answer is the answer: He’s a total suck-up. It’s almost like getting a lock of Elvis’s hair or something.”

Even before the campaign and the FBI raid connected them through martyrdom, Trump and Hannity were men of similar habits and preoccupations, both outward-facing, projecting to the world all day long and yet prone to stretches of retreat, to a little bit of weirdness that accompanies any comparable level of fame. Both golf, both diet by cutting out carbs. (Hannity adheres to a version of the ketogenic diet, cooking often for himself, while the president removes the buns from the two Big Macs and two Filet-O-Fish sandwiches he gets from McDonald’s, according to a book written by his former campaign manager Corey Lewandowski.)

Although Hannity shills a custom pillow on his radio show that he says cured his insomnia, it didn’t; both he and the president are night owls who sleep for only a few hours, and however differently their days begin, they arrive to the same comfortable sense of freedom after dark, as highly visible people who are temporarily unseen. “One reason they click is because of being celebrities,” John Gomez, Hannity’s friend since elementary school, told me. “In broadcasting, you live and die by the ratings. I think they have that in common, and they’re competitors, you know? They’re competitive.”

THEY WERE BORN 15 years apart—Trump at Jamaica Hospital to rich parents and Hannity at Metropolitan Medical in upper Manhattan to a county-jail official and a family-court officer—and they were raised 12 miles from one another, in Jamaica, Queens, and Franklin Square, Long Island, respectively.

Hannity leans on his personal narrative 70 percent like a person running for office and 30 percent like someone just dumbfounded by his luck, or his “blessings,” as he characterizes it. He was an uninspired student who found outlets for his restlessness and need to connect with others through odd jobs during (Continued on page 108)

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IN A MONDAY MORNING in early February, Neil Weiss sat at his kitchen table in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, nursing a cup of coffee while checking messages on his iPad. ¶ A text had arrived at 5:25 a.m. “Making it count.” ¶ Weiss—the 51-year-old owner and editor of *Black Car News*, a trade publication serving drivers of New York’s 84,000 “for hire” black cars—wasn’t sure what that meant. The sender was Doug Schifter, 61, who had driven taxis and black cars in New York City for over four decades. Starting in 2014, he had also written a column called “The Driver’s Seat” for Weiss. Over the course of more than 45,000 words, Schifter had gone from griping about traffic tickets and pedestrians “running amok” to thundering about the impending collapse of the industry, which would cause “massive pain and problems for hundreds of thousands of people.” He lambasted politicians for letting Uber and other app-based services flood the market with new drivers, ratcheting up competition and depressing wages. And he begged his fellow workers to band together to demand dignity and a fair day’s pay.

“We are facing extinction,” he wrote. “The time to organize is NOW!”

That morning, Schifter had posted what appeared to be a fresh column on Facebook. Weiss skimmed parts of it. Maybe, he figured, the early-morning text—“Making it count”—had been Schifter’s way of telling his editor he’d made a new commitment to writing. So at 10:07 a.m., Weiss texted him back: no words, just a big thumbs-up.

Soon after, the phone rang. It was a reporter from the *New York Post*. “Do you have a comment about what happened to Doug Schifter?” she asked Weiss.

“What do you mean?” he said.

Just after sunrise, the reporter told him, Schifter had pulled up to the east gate of City Hall in a black car. Then, without so much as unbuckling his seat belt, he had parked, pointed a shotgun at his face, and pulled the trigger.

Weiss said he couldn’t talk. He hung up the phone and wept.

AT THE TIME of his death, Doug Schifter had driven—over 44 years and 4.5 million miles—the equivalent of more than 180 times around the Earth. He drove everything from a yellow Chevy Caprice to black Lincoln Town Cars, luxury SUVs, 80,000-pound tractor-trailers, and RVs. Like many drivers, he regaled his family with tales of having chauffeured the famous (Billy Crystal, Henry Winkler, Marc Anthony) and the otherwise notable (an ambassador, a CBS sportscaster, Michael Bloomberg’s daughters).

Schifter had been driving since his late teens. Growing up in Canarsie, he had been an introvert, quiet and reserved; his family liked to brag that, by age 4, he could read and comprehend the *New York Times*. While other kids gathered in the streets for pickup games of stickball and skelly, Doug, a big kid with thick glasses in dark plastic frames, preferred the company of books. What sort of books? “The kind with paper in ’em,” jokes George Schifter, one of Doug’s two younger brothers, now a retired Air Force veteran. “I’m serious. He read everything.”

Doug Schifter  
waged a one-man  
campaign to  
stop Uber from  
putting his fellow  
black-car drivers  
out of business.

Then he decided  
to take his own life.



# Driven to Despair

BY JESSICA BRUDER

# After Uber arrived in New York, the price of taxi

That didn't make high school easy. After flunking gym prevented him from graduating, Doug realized he could earn more money driving a cab than helping out at his father's service station on Flatlands Avenue in Canarsie, a few blocks from where he grew up. He got a taxi license and moved out of his parents' house.

In those days, a 40-hour week at the wheel was enough to pay the bills. Though he soon got his GED, the road became Schifter's life, eclipsing all else. He lived alone. He didn't date. In the early 1980s, he bought his own taxi medallion—back then they cost around \$55,000—and got a yellow cab, which he rented half-time to another cabbie. "I was a street legend," he later boasted on Facebook. "Douglas took pride—a tremendous amount of pride—in his driving skills," George recalls. "He could go from Kennedy airport to lower Manhattan in 19 minutes. And he had to use the sidewalk a few times."

In the 1990s, after selling his yellow-cab medallion, Schifter started driving Lincoln Town Cars for a black-car service called XYZ. Driving a black car was a big step up from being a cabbie. When the market was strong, cabbies could make \$30,000 a year, while black-car drivers could take home \$100,000. "Ten years ago, the earning potential for the black-car industry was still decent," Weiss says. "It was solid because you had all these corporate clients." Black cars drove titans of finance and white-shoe attorneys. They didn't rely on the vagaries of customers hailing them on the street. Doug's work wardrobe reflected his new station: fine linen jackets and tailored shirts, a full-length wool coat for winter. "He dressed to the nines," George says. "Sharp, you know?"

Like being a cabbie, driving a black car came with a built-in community—a fraternity of drivers who bonded over lives lived behind the wheel. While he was working for a service called Dial Car—a booming Brooklyn operation founded before the city even began handing out permits for black cars—Schifter became friends with Sultan Faiz, an Afghan refugee who lived in Flushing with his wife and daughter. At six-foot-four, with a serious expression, Schifter could come off as intimidating. "But if you ask him for the shirt off his back, he will give it to you," Faiz recalls. "At the same time, he would not allow anybody to take his kindness as weakness. For that principle, I loved him." As they idled in taxi holding pens at the airport, waiting for a fare, Schifter and Faiz would sit in each other's passenger seats talking about food and religion (Faiz is Muslim; Schifter was Jewish). Whenever one of them clocked in, he would scan the dispatch list for the radio number of the other—410 for Schifter, 248 for Faiz. Faiz's daughter, Aisha, called Schifter "Uncle Doug."

In 2004, with the money he made driving a black car, Schifter bought a split-level house nestled at the edge of a state forest in the Poconos, 110 miles west of Manhattan. He made the place his sanctuary, setting up a hammock on the back deck and building a library of 400 cookbooks. He made ice cream, baked bread, and marinated meat for barbecue, an obsession for which he'd amassed three smokers, a *kamado*-style ceramic grill, a commercial deli slicer, and a vacuum sealer. He loved sharing new dishes with his fellow drivers; once he drove all the way from the Poconos to Queens to deliver some halal fried chicken he'd prepared for Faiz, who had been hospitalized with an autoimmune disease.

Living so far from the city was hard. Commuting to midtown took two and a half hours—on the rare occasions that there wasn't any traffic. One winter morning in 2005, Schifter was up

and preparing for work at 2 a.m. He'd been housebound, getting over a nasty cold, and he was eager to get on the dispatcher's list for morning fares. As he left the house in the dark, he didn't see the black ice coating the front path. He slipped, bumping down eight stairs and shattering his right hip.

Schifter yelled for help, but no one came—his house was out in the woods, and his nearest neighbors were likely fast asleep. Lying alone in the cold, he dialed 911 on his cell phone. He spent the next 45 minutes waiting for an ambulance.

The surgery went well but laid him up for 90 days, leaving him with little to do but sit and watch the bills roll in. There were huge medical expenses, along with car, mortgage, and insurance payments. Since he wasn't driving, he had no income, and Schifter hadn't prepared for a time when he couldn't work. "Money always burned a hole in his pocket," George recalls. "He was always giving it away."

Schifter's family chipped in to cover the shortfall, but he felt ashamed about taking help from his brothers and mother. "It was the last thing on earth I wanted to happen," he later wrote. "The despair was overwhelming."

Then things got worse. Scared of falling further behind on the bills, Schifter hurried back to work before he'd fully healed from the hip replacement. A week after he started driving again, as he stopped at a red light in Times Square, his car was rear-ended. The crash reinjured his hip. That meant another six weeks off. Schifter was forced to declare bankruptcy. Once he was back on his feet, he began working harder than ever. "He lived in his vehicle," George recalls. Unable to spare the time to drive home to the Poconos, Schifter slept in his car most nights, parking at a rest stop near the next morning's job. He kept two suits in rotation, making frequent visits to a dry cleaner. He showered at truck stops.

Over the next decade, the parade of health problems continued. A gastric bypass to control his diabetes led to an abdominal infection; his body took five months to heal. Doctors found a cancerous tumor in his large intestine and performed surgery to remove it. A driver backed into his car in a Dunkin' Donuts parking lot, rupturing a disc in Schifter's neck. He couldn't afford surgery. The pain was exacerbated by long hours in the driver's seat. "He had to work through that," George says.

**F**OR A BLACK-CAR DRIVER like Schifter, it was not a good time to stumble into a financial crisis. Not long after its founding in 2009, a San Francisco start-up called Uber went looking for new markets to conquer with its app-based ride service—and New York's antiquated, dysfunctional taxi system made it the perfect target for disruption.

The number of taxi medallions—the de facto operating permits issued for yellow cabs—had stagnated at around 13,500, roughly unchanged since the Great Depression. That was good for drivers, who never had to look long for a fare; great for medallion owners, whose share of the yellow-cab monopoly appreciated faster than New York real estate; and not so great for riders, who often couldn't hail a cab when they needed one, especially if they were anywhere beyond midtown or downtown Manhattan. Passengers could take a "for-hire vehicle"—including livery cabs, limos, and black cars like the one Schifter drove. But those rides had to be prearranged by phone and could be costly.

# medallions plunged from \$1.3 million to \$120,000.

Uber seized on the opportunity. In May 2011, it launched in New York with 100 cars and three promises: a living wage for drivers, a better experience for riders, and big returns for investors. The pitch worked. Over the next six years, as the company blazoned the city with an ad campaign offering drivers the ultimate gig-economy opportunity to “side hustle” their way into the middle class, the number of for-hire vehicles in New York swelled from 39,708 to 102,536.

Uber’s rapid expansion was good for passengers, who could suddenly summon a ride from anywhere in the city. But it was disastrous for almost everyone else. With more cars on the streets, traffic in the city got even slower and more congested. Investors poured more than \$21 billion into the company, which has yet to turn a profit. (Uber posted \$4.5 billion in losses last year alone, subsidizing rides in an all-out effort to establish a monopoly.) And according to one estimate, the company’s drivers—after paying for gas, maintenance, and Uber’s commission of 25 percent on every fare—took home barely \$10 an hour on average. Last year, Uber agreed to shell out more than \$80 million for underpaying drivers in New York—a systematic practice it blamed on an accounting error—and in January it agreed to pay \$3 million to settle a class-action suit by New York drivers who accused it of levying excessive fees on their fares.

Veteran drivers like Schifter were hit especially hard. In the course of only a few years, Uber gutted the black-car and livery businesses, both of which had been reliable sources of income for working-class New Yorkers for generations. Cabbies also suffered: From June 2014 to June 2015, according to one analysis of city data, the number of Uber pickups in Manhattan soared by 1.4 million, while the number of taxi pickups plunged by 1.1 million. At the same time, the price of taxi medallions—which peaked at a record \$1.3 million in 2014, when Uber was still ramping up—took a steep dive. In January, one sold for \$120,000.

In his column in *Black Car News*, Schifter railed against what he recognized as unfair competition. For decades, drivers had spent their own money to build what the city had effectively promised would be a municipally regulated monopoly on for-hire vehicles, investing hundreds of millions of their hard-earned dollars to buy city-issued medallions and pay for vehicles. Then, almost overnight, the long-standing rules of supply and demand were upended. “The customers just don’t care,” Schifter lamented in one column, essentially summing up Uber’s entire business model. “They want the lowest price, no matter what.”

Everywhere he looked, Schifter saw the signs of an impending taxi apocalypse. One cabdriver told Schifter that he used to work five days a week and take home \$1,000. Now he was driving seven days a week and taking home \$800. One day, at the Flushing subway terminus, a friend of Schifter’s saw 30 cabs waiting on fares. In the pre-Uber days, there used to be only four. At JFK, Schifter watched as the taxi lot began to overflow with more waiting vehicles than he’d ever seen. “There apparently was not enough work in the city and they drove empty to JFK in desperation to get a job,” he wrote. “The Taxi & Limousine Commission

and city government, as well as the state, are clueless as to the ticking time bomb they created.”

Black cars, by their very nature, are even more vulnerable to competition from Uber, which offers customers less hassle and a lower price for a similar service. In 2015, Schifter spent an entire Wednesday evening on call, and for the first time in his four decades of driving, not a single job came through. There were times when he averaged less than \$4 an hour—and that was before expenses. In April 2017, on the third anniversary of his column, Schifter told readers that he had been spending up to 120 hours each week on call in the city. But despite working every single day, for more than 17 hours a day, he got only 20 jobs. “My income is down 50 percent in the past two years!” he lamented. And unlike other drivers, he wasn’t willing to go to work for the enemy by moonlighting for Uber or Lyft to supplement his dwindling income.



Police found Schifter in his car outside City Hall, dressed in a crisp white shirt and dress pants. “I will not be a slave for chump change,” read his suicide note. “I would rather be dead.”

For Schifter, his column was more than a place to express his frustration and anger. It was a spiritual quest—the closest he came to a higher calling. One day, on a long drive to Connecticut, one of his clients suggested a book he had never heard of: *Many Lives, Many Masters*, a best seller with more than a million copies in print. He ordered it overnight express and devoured it the next day.

Although Schifter had always referred to himself as a “natural skeptic,” that hadn’t kept him from pattering around the existential void, seeking a semblance of order and purpose in what had become a very hard life. The book’s author, a psychiatrist named Dr. Brian Weiss, claimed that he, too, had once been a hard-nosed skeptic. But after he treated a patient who described having 86 past lives, Weiss wrote, she connected him with spiritual beings called “the masters,” whose wisdom transformed his life.

The whole thing sounded implausible, but Weiss held degrees from Columbia University and Yale Medical School. He had been featured in the *New York Times* and interviewed by Oprah Winfrey on national television. Schifter urged George and Faiz to read the

book, hoping they would be moved by its message. The book's teachings were essentially a Whitman's sampler of the world's religions, advising readers that acts of charity, hope, and love could advance the immortal spirit. The highest purpose of humanity, Weiss added, was learning: gaining knowledge and passing it along to others.

Schifter found that purpose in his column. Sitting in his car, waiting for jobs that came less and less often, he poured out his wisdom on his iPad. He addressed his readers as "Brothers and Sisters," proposing a concrete plan of action. "We will all be slaves to Uber," he warned, offering to play the role of Spartacus. "I am seeking to organize drivers into a fighting army of thousands ... Be part of an established tradition of fighting tyranny." And he promised a bright future on the far side of victory: "If we work together, then everyone will have a better life and the true American Dream."

In July 2016, to galvanize his fellow drivers and launch the revolution, Schifter created a Facebook group called NY Black Car Drivers Association. "If there are too many vehicles on the street, the system (and its drivers) will be devastated," he had warned not long after launching his column. "If you look back at the dawn of the industry, it was evident what can happen when too many vehicles overran the streets—robberies, killings, battles between the drivers themselves, etc."

Schifter was referring to the Great Depression, when unemployed men flooded the taxi industry, creating more supply than the market could bear. Thousands of cabbies chased a shrinking pool of riders. Fares plunged. Desperate drivers tried working 20-hour days and still couldn't make enough to get by. In 1934, a peaceful strike devolved into a riot when a mob of angry drivers began beating scabs and setting vehicles on fire all over the city. After a few false starts at regulation, the city eventually capped the number of cabs, creating the modern-day taxi-medallion system.

Now, in the midst of another industrywide depression—with Uber drivers flooding the streets—Schifter urged his brothers and sisters to band together and join his newly created association. "He knew that his fellow drivers were going through what he was going through," Neil Weiss says. "And that bothered him, probably more than anything."

A few friends liked the page to show their support. But the cavalry Schifter had summoned didn't answer the call. Desperate, in search of guidance from the man who had inspired him, he tried to contact Dr. Weiss on Facebook. "I believe I am here for a purpose other than just for me," Schifter wrote. "I am trying to find the answers. Do you have any suggestions?"

The post was public. It received no response.

**D**ESPITE WORKING around the clock, Schifter saw no chance of turning his life around. His body was a wreck, and hours behind the wheel had only exacerbated the chronic pain in his neck and hip. He was deep in debt, and his income had slowed to a trickle. "He was suffering from all this pain and difficulties with his finances. He couldn't keep up anymore," George recalls. "It was too much of a drain on him."

In conversations with Faiz, Schifter blamed politicians for flooding the streets with cabs. But last summer, he also hit on a new idea to rouse the public to action: He wanted to end his life. And he would turn his death into an unavoidable call to arms.

The same book that had given Schifter a sense of purpose now gave him comfort. Death, he believed, (Continued on page 113)

#### UBER'S CASUALTIES

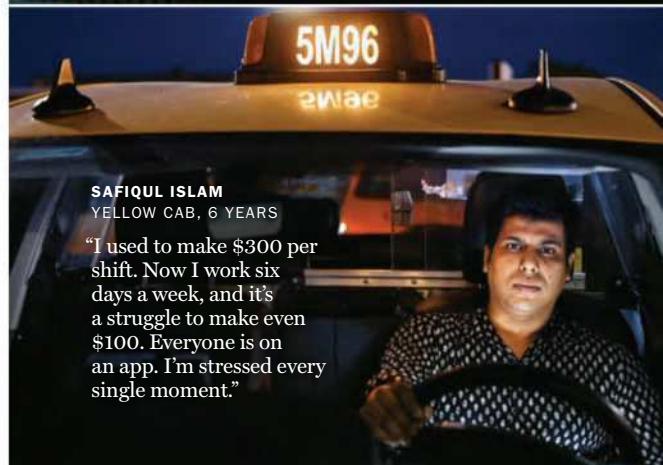
Drivers talk about their work—or the lack thereof—while waiting for fares in designated holding areas at JFK.

INTERVIEWS BY  
ALEXA TSOUKLIS-REAY



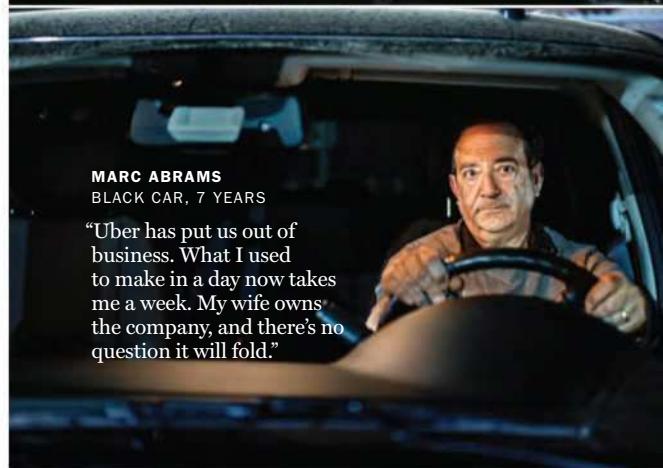
**AMOLAK SINGH**  
UBER, 3.5 YEARS

"I'm logged in 12 hours a day, six days a week, and I often go home with empty pockets. Sometimes I wait 14 hours and still don't get a fare. Uber is not easy money."



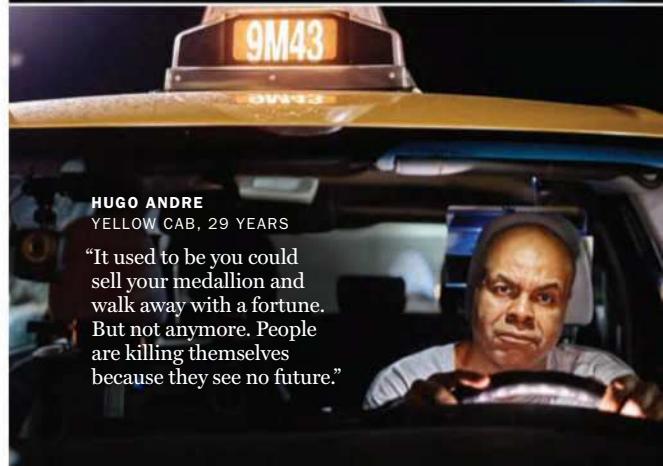
**SAFIQUL ISLAM**  
YELLOW CAB, 6 YEARS

"I used to make \$300 per shift. Now I work six days a week, and it's a struggle to make even \$100. Everyone is on an app. I'm stressed every single moment."



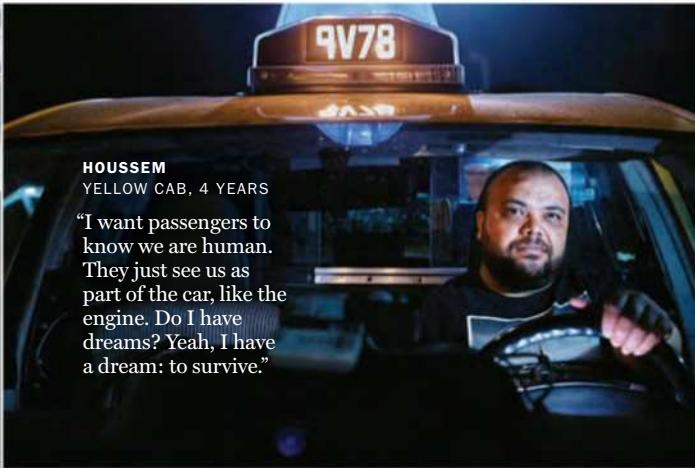
**MARC ABRAMS**  
BLACK CAR, 7 YEARS

"Uber has put us out of business. What I used to make in a day now takes me a week. My wife owns the company, and there's no question it will fold."



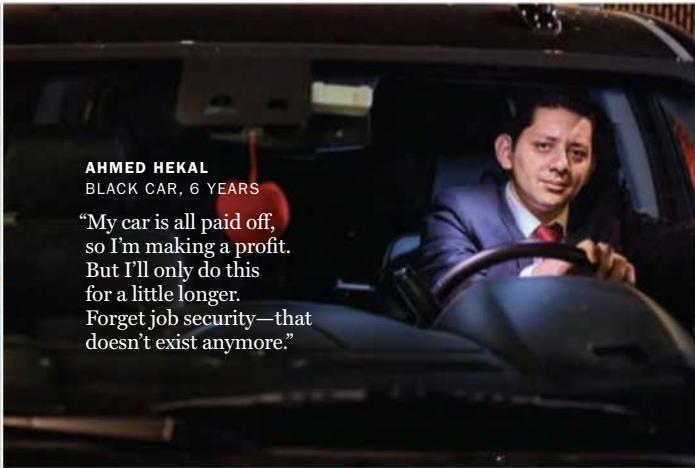
**HUGO ANDRE**  
YELLOW CAB, 29 YEARS

"It used to be you could sell your medallion and walk away with a fortune. But not anymore. People are killing themselves because they see no future."



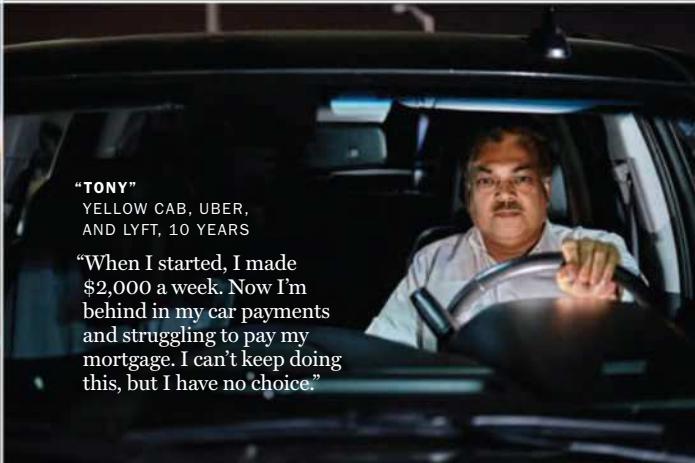
**HOUSSEEM**  
YELLOW CAB, 4 YEARS

“I want passengers to know we are human. They just see us as part of the car, like the engine. Do I have dreams? Yeah, I have a dream: to survive.”



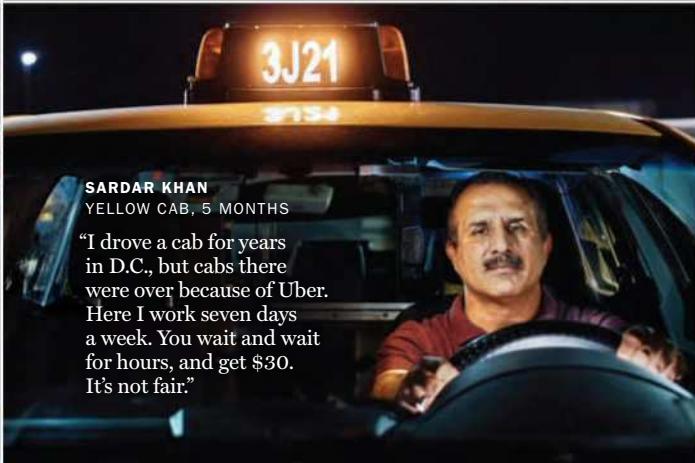
**AHMED HEKAL**  
BLACK CAR, 6 YEARS

“My car is all paid off, so I’m making a profit. But I’ll only do this for a little longer. Forget job security—that doesn’t exist anymore.”



**“TONY”**  
YELLOW CAB, UBER,  
AND LYFT, 10 YEARS

“When I started, I made \$2,000 a week. Now I’m behind in my car payments and struggling to pay my mortgage. I can’t keep doing this, but I have no choice.”



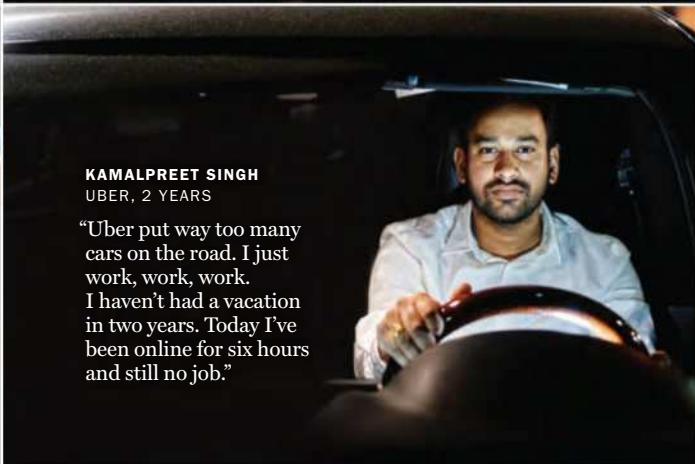
**SARDAR KHAN**  
YELLOW CAB, 5 MONTHS

“I drove a cab for years in D.C., but cabs there were over because of Uber. Here I work seven days a week. You wait and wait for hours, and get \$30. It’s not fair.”



**LISLET EUGENE**  
YELLOW CAB, 35 YEARS

“It’s hard to get fares. If I let the stress get to me, I’ll just end up in the hospital. I bring my guitar with me and play that while I wait for passengers.”



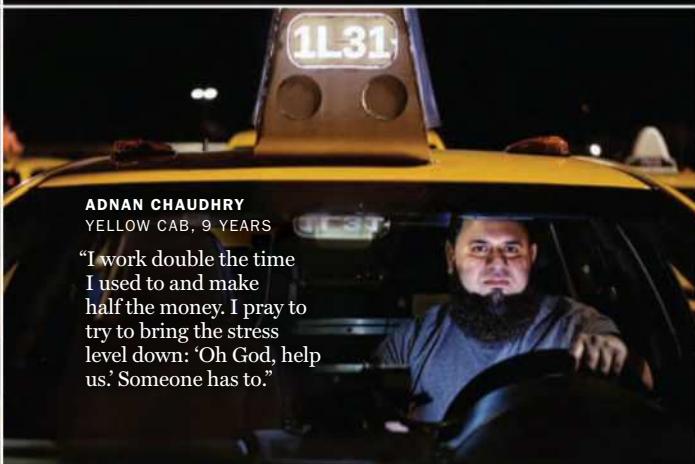
**KAMALPREET SINGH**  
UBER, 2 YEARS

“Uber put way too many cars on the road. I just work, work, work. I haven’t had a vacation in two years. Today I’ve been online for six hours and still no job.”



**BALJEET SINGH**  
UBER, 3.5 YEARS

“Everyone is suffering. I have a family. Does Uber care how we manage? No. We are just slaves—they know they can do whatever they want to us.”



**ADNAN CHAUDHRY**  
YELLOW CAB, 9 YEARS

“I work double the time I used to and make half the money. I pray to try to bring the stress level down: ‘Oh God, help us.’ Someone has to.”

# THE CUT

## Body Con Job

Miquela Sousa has over 1 million followers on Instagram and was recently hacked by a Trump troll. But she isn't real.

By Emilia Petrarca

**O**VER LUNCH THIS SPRING, Nikola Burnett, a 15-year-old who always carries two cameras—one film and one digital—sat staring at an Instagram selfie, perplexed. The subject was Miquela Sousa, better known as Lil Miquela, a 19-year-old Brazilian-American model, musical artist, and influencer with over a million Instagram followers, who is computer-generated. “She’s not real, right?” Nikola asked me shyly. She knew the answer, but something about Miquela made her question what her eyes were telling her.

At first glance, or swipe, Miquela could understandably be mistaken for a living, breathing person. She wears real-life clothes by streetwear brands like Supreme and luxury labels like Chanel. She hangs out with real-life musicians, artists, and influencers in real-life trendy restaurants in New York and Los Angeles, where she “lives.” When Miquela holds her phone to a mirror, her reflection stares back. When she is photographed in the daylight, her body casts a shadow. She even complains about allergies and often references the temperature with tweets like “39 degrees out im still getting this iced matcha.”

In selfies, you can see the freckles on Miquela’s face; her gap-toothed smile. But up close, her brown hair, often pulled into Princess Leia-esque buns, looks air-brushed (Twitter users have noted that her flyaway frizz always falls in the same pattern). Her skin reads as smooth as the glass screen that separates us. And when you peer into Miquela’s big brown eyes, she fails the ultimate test of hu-

manity. No, Miquela isn’t real—at least not like you and me. She is an avatar puppeteered by Brud, a mysterious L.A.-based start-up of “engineers, storytellers, and dreamers” who claim to specialize in artificial intelligence and robotics.

Until my conversation with Nikola, it seemed like an indisputable fact that Miquela wasn’t real. But then I remembered something similar had happened to me in February as I watched the Instagram live-stream of Gucci’s fall 2018 show. Inspired by Donna Haraway’s 1984 *A Cyborg Manifesto*, the collection was a hybrid of actual and fantastical references. Two models carried replicas of their own heads down the runway, while another cradled a “dragon puppy” that looked like it had come straight from *Game of Thrones*. Maybe it was the jet lag—I was in Milan for Fashion Week—or maybe it was the dizzying effect of good art, but something moved me to text my editor, seated in the front row: “Those dragons weren’t real ... Right?”

Lil Miquela





# “Ur so pretty,” one young woman wrote to Miquela on Twitter. Others have even asked for her skin-care routine.

We humans have been tripping over the differences between real and fake ever since our forebears saw shadows on cave walls. But it used to be that real-looking fake humans were confined to Disney parks, movies, music videos, or video games. We could turn them off, or leave them behind. Now they occupy spaces once reserved for real-life people experiencing real-life things.

Like having your Instagram account hacked. Miquela is positioned as a social-justice warrior of sorts, and on April 18, a pro-Trump, self-proclaimed “robot supremacist” CGI character named Bermuda wiped her account clean, posting photos of herself, instead. She proceeded to accuse Miquela of being a “fake ass person” who was duping her followers (the irony being that Bermuda isn’t real either). Then she issued an ultimatum: Miquela couldn’t have her account back until she promised to “tell people the truth.”

Naturally, this got Miquela’s followers, or “Miquelites,” all worked up. “Bring back the real Miquela!” they cried. Conspiracy-driven corners of the internet linked the hack to a theory that the world was going to end on April 18, coincidentally via a robot takeover. For the average Instagram user, though, it was like watching a soap opera unfold on their phones. “Why is robot drama more dramatic than my life,” wrote one.

In the end, Miquela’s big reveal was shocking only in its obviousness: “I’m not a human being,” she said when Bermuda relinquished her account. “I’m a robot.” Miquela blamed Brud for leading her (and consequently her fans) to believe otherwise. But, of course, that was also her creators talking.

If this is starting to sound like the plot of *Westworld*, that’s the point. Miquela’s “hack” seems to be an elaborate PR stunt orchestrated by Brud (though as is its Oz-like wont, Brud insists that another AI company called Cain Intelligence begat Bermuda). To what end, though? Was this just a way to vault Miquela into the influencer stratosphere, so beauty and fashion brands would pay her handsomely to peddle their wares? (The buzz generated by Bermuda’s attack did push her to over a million followers, a benchmark that opens up new partnership opportunities.)

Or was this a Kanye West-style press junket to stir controversy before an album drop? Brud co-founder Trevor McFedries has a past life as a DJ and music producer, working with Katy Perry, Kesha, and Azealia Banks under the moniker “Yung Skeeter.” And Miquela has two delicately Auto-Tuned pop singles on Spotify, which have amassed a combined 1.5 million streams. I listened to one of them for a month before realizing it was sung by a robot that I happened to follow on Instagram.

The plot thickens when you know that McFedries, according to his LinkedIn account, used to work at Bad Robot, the production company of famed sci-fi director J.J. Abrams. Maybe all of this is an extended trailer for Abrams’s next film, in which Miquela could potentially star. Or could Brud be pursuing something more ambitious with *Bad Robot’s* help? The start-up reportedly raised as much as \$6 million from big-ticket investment firms like Sequoia Capital in a recent funding round. It’s not a huge number, but

enough to suggest that the *faux* hack isn’t just some elaborate joke.

One tantalizing theory proffered by L.A. techies has it that Brud’s plan is to move Miquela from Instagram to a Brud-built social network where anyone with an iPhone can create, dress, and promote his or her own personal CGI model. “Maybe it’s more of a Bitmoji-style product,” speculates Kyle Russell, a former deal partner at a Silicon Valley firm. “That said, we don’t know enough about their tech to really say if they would be great at that. Also, I don’t know if that would have been an appealing pitch to VCs. There’s far more value in the distribution of a celebrity on these platforms without the cost of having to pay a [real-life] celebrity.”

We’re forced (or allowed) to indulge in all this mad speculation because the company that puts words into Miquela’s Kylie Jenner full-lipped mouth mostly refuses to talk specs. In what’s either a brilliant strategy to heighten the suspense or an annoying affectation—probably both—Brud only preaches grandiose ideas about fighting fake news with fake news, and using influencers to make the world a better place.

Even if there isn’t a hidden endgame for Lil Miquela, she holds up a mirror to the ways in which technology has morphed our own constructions of self. We don’t yet live in a world where realistic-looking fake humans roam the streets, but in the meantime, technology has transformed us into fake-looking real humans. Social-media personalities like the Kardashians alter their bodies and edit images of themselves so heavily that CGI characters somehow blend naturally into our feeds. Influencers, who were once a novelty in the industry for their unfiltered content, have also become burnished personal brands. Meanwhile, the average Instagram, Snapchat, or Weibo user has access to apps and filters that eliminate the need for makeup or plastic surgery altogether.

During a rare “phone interview” with YouTube conspiracy theorist Shane Dawson last year, Miquela deflected the question of whether her images are edited: “Can you name one person on Instagram who doesn’t edit their photos?”

When Miquela first appeared on Instagram two years ago, her features were less idealized. Her skin was pale, her hair less styled. Now she looks like every other Instagram influencer. She’ll rest her unsmiling face in her hands to convey nonchalance, or look away from the camera as though she’s been caught in the act. The effect is twisted: Miquela seems more real by mimicking the body language that renders models less so.

Miquela’s outfits and poses aren’t especially racy, yet she attracts the same fetishized gaze as anyone else selling her own image. “So beautiful,” one guy wrote on a post where a bit of cleavage can be detected, adding drooling emoji. “@LilMiquela Ur so pretty,” wrote a young woman on Twitter. “I wish I was that pretty.” Others have even asked for her skin-care routine.

In this way, Miquela represents perhaps the pinnacle of unrealistic beauty standards. How can we compete with someone who never ages or gets hungry and who can be in ten different places at once?



**Bermuda, the right-wing troll who hacked Miquela’s account.**



Shudu wearing a shirt given to her by Soulsky.

SOULSKY

Could the result be that real-life models and influencers become obsolete, or will their likenesses be frozen in time and replicated ad infinitum? There's conjecture that Miquela is a mix of animation and photographs, of a female human. But the techniques used to create her are heavily guarded by Brud, and at least one influencer who posed chummily with Miquela told me she couldn't share details because was bound by an NDA.

Whatever Lil Miquela's secret sauce, similar technology is being used to make others like her. The most prominent is Shudu, created by the British former photographer Cameron-James Wilson. After a decade working in fashion, Wilson says he became "disenchanted" by the industry. "Nothing really represents reality," he laments. He's wearing heavy makeup, some of which has rubbed off on his black hoodie.

His experience Photoshopping real people to look fake informed how he makes his fake people look real, Wilson explains. "I always saw that peach fuzz was very distracting in a photo. So, the very first thing I thought when I was designing my character was that I needed to add peach fuzz." Wilson freely reveals that he uses 3-D-animation tools called Daz3D and Clo3D to make his muses, adding that he'd never mess with photography. That's "archaic," he says.

Peach fuzz notwithstanding, Shudu presents as a stunning black woman with flawless dark-brown skin. Her eyes, Wilson says, were inspired by the supermodel Iman and her overall look by Princess of South Africa Barbie, who favors gold choker necklaces that resemble those of the Ndebele people.

Thanks in part to a Fenty Beauty repost, Shudu has more than 100,000 followers. But because Wilson is a 28-year-old white man, his work has sparked as much controversy as admiration. "A white photographer figured out a way to profit off black women without ever having to pay one," wrote one Twitter user, picking up 52,000-plus likes. "Black models, specifically dark-skin black models are not a trend," wrote another. In a piece for *The New Yorker*, writer Lauren Michele Jackson said Wilson's work made her think of blackface minstrels.

"I just wanted a beautiful muse to come home to," Wilson protests. Yet now that he's in the thick of it, he believes Shudu has sparked an important conversation about representation, even if he has been misunderstood. "Shudu is a platform to showcase fashion designs from brands I feel share similar views to me in terms of top-down diversity," he says, adding that his work is about art and collaboration, not monetization. So far, he says, he's turned down paid partnership offers, and every brand he's promoted has a person of color or woman in a position of power.

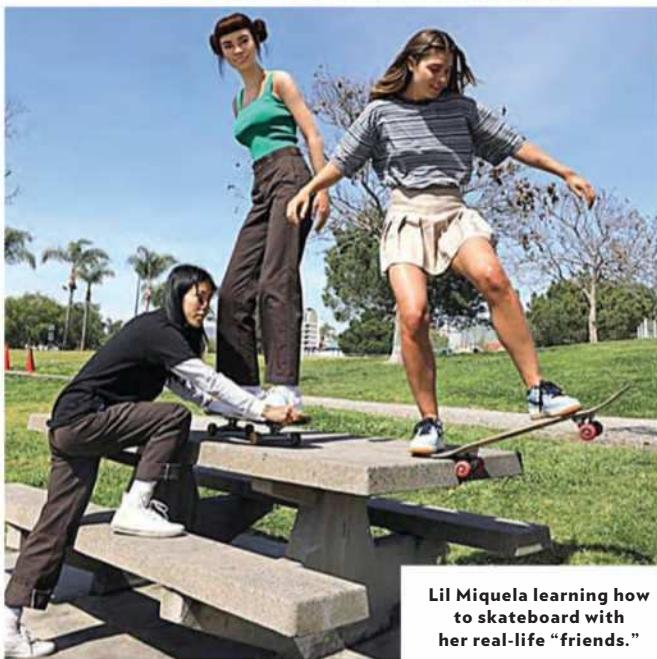
Brud, too, has expressed altruistic goals, arguing that promoting diversity among robots will change the way humans treat each other. Miquela urges her followers to donate to Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ+ causes, and she sold a line of "Uncanny Valley Girl!" merch to raise funds for victims of the California fires. McFedries, who is black—his co-founder Sara DeCou is Latina—has said that, like Wilson, Brud only accepted venture capital from firms with "a woman or person of color in a position to write them a check." The pair also issued a statement this spring comparing the impact they hope to have to *Will & Grace*: a seemingly frivolous media confection that had "real-life impact on marriage equal-



One of Lil Miquela's early posts in June 2016.

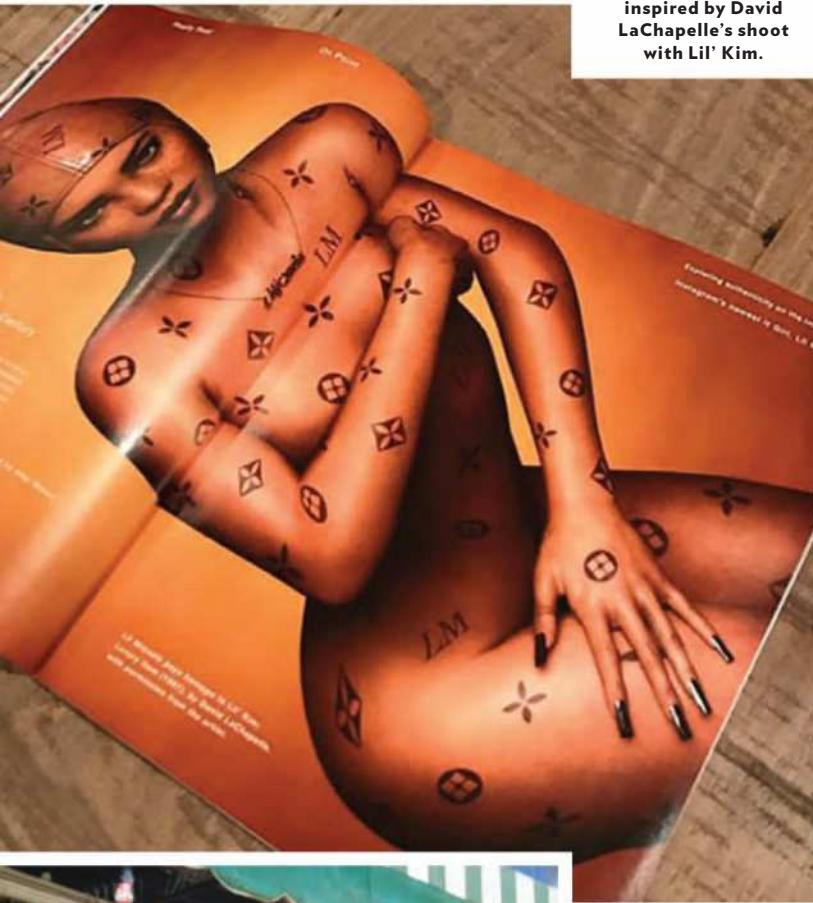


Miquela wearing Prada during fall 2018 Fashion Week in Milan.



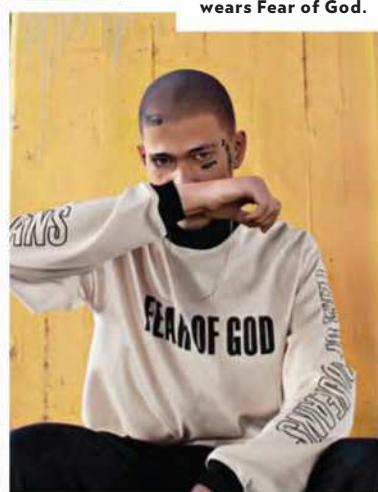
Lil Miquela learning how to skateboard with her real-life "friends."

Miquela poses for *Paper* magazine in a spread inspired by David LaChapelle's shoot with Lil' Kim.



Lil Miquela "on [her] way to *Black Panther*."

Blawko, Lil Miquela's male counterpart, wears *Fear of God*.



ity." As with all things Brud, it's hard to tell if they're trolling us with this reference or if they've been sipping too much of the Silicon Valley Kool-Aid.

The Federal Trade Commission requires influencers to disclose when they're paid to tout a product, and so far Lil Miquela hasn't done that. (Fashion-law expert Julie Zerbo says there's no reason that a CGI character's creators would be exempt from the FTC rules.) And in another of her "interviews," Miquela told the *Business of Fashion* in February that she hadn't earned a dime from any of her collaborations. She borrows or gets free swag from designers, she says, though that was before she promoted a series of GIFs inspired by the Prada collection during Milan Fashion Week. (Prada declined to comment on whether Brud was paid.)

Which brings us back to the nagging question of what Brud's up to. One of the oddest strands of the whole story is why they chose a right-wing troll to out Miquela, ultimately painting themselves as the bad guys. Thinking hard about it—okay, maybe too hard—it occurs to me that the hack could have been a clever bit of jujitsu to build fans' trust in Lil Miquela. Because Brud "lied" to her about her origins, she could come clean about being computer-generated while seeming ever more sincere about her "woke" consciousness.

"I'm not sure I can comfortably identify as a woman of color," a recent Instagram post from Miquela said. "'Brown' was a choice made by a corporation. 'Woman' was an option on a computer screen."

Post-hack, Miquela declared herself a "free agent" who'd no longer work with Brud. Support for her choice poured in, with Riley Keough, the actress and granddaughter of Elvis Presley, sending her a heart emoji and gossip blogger Perez Hilton calling her a "shero." Meanwhile, thousands of others didn't seem to care that she wasn't real. "I know this is crazy but I believe you," wrote one commenter. "Even though you are a robot physically, everything else is human."

Presumably, Miquela is still operated by Brud, even if the company is now focusing its promotional efforts on Blawko, her male equivalent with significantly fewer followers. The freedom she gained by admitting she wasn't real, though, is something a lot of us real-lifers wish for ourselves. We spend so much time pretending that hip parties and cool people are an organic part of our lives—that we aren't curating the narratives we put out in the world. What a perverse relief it would be to confess that everything is fake! It brings to mind the Buddhist doctrine of no-self, of how liberating it might be to recognize that there is no real "you" that must be clung to, that has to be propped up and defended.

Existential philosophizing aside, we continue to follow Lil Miquela and her cohorts—even if we know they're not real—because we're suckers for a good story. (You've made it this far.) It's possible that what you see is what you get with Brud. But maybe we hope that there will be a way one day to fully upload ourselves online, and let go. There is no grand plan; they're just a bunch of righteous millennials with a good idea and a genuine love of *Will & Grace*.

When I asked Nikola if she'd ever Miquela-ify herself, at first she said why not? It would be fun to wear clothes she couldn't afford; it wasn't so different from building a character of herself in the *Sims*. But then Nikola second-guessed her original answer. "You can get lost in that world so easily," she said. "It would be hard to stop." ■

# NEW YORK

AND ITS FAMILY OF DIGITAL PUBLICATIONS ARE GRATEFUL TO HAVE RECEIVED THESE HONORS OVER THE PAST YEAR:

## MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

(Ad Age, 2017)

### 2018 NATIONAL MAGAZINE AWARD FOR

BEST MAGAZINE SECTION

# STRATEGIST

“truly inspired magazine making.”

—National Magazine Award Citation

“Consumer Reports for the young and savvy”

—Sight Unseen



COLUMNS AND COMMENTARY

# Rebecca Traister

“Go read @rtraister being smarter and better and more searing and heartbreaking than anyone.”

—Helen Rosner



### 2018

# PULITZER PRIZE

## IN CRITICISM



HOTTEST IN FASHION/BEAUTY

# THE CUT

“The Cut stands out in a crowded women’s media world in both editorial gravitas and reach...”

—Amanda Palleschi, Columbia Journalism Review, March 19, 2018



(Adweek Digital Hotlist, 2017)

HOTTEST IN ENTERTAINMENT/CELEBRITY

# VULTURE

“What did Vulture.com say?”

—Saturday Night Live, January 27, 2018

### 2018 NATIONAL MAGAZINE AWARD FOR

# BEST WEBSITE

VULTURE THE CUT DAILY Intelligencer STRATEGIST GRUB STREET selectall



“...newsy, voicey, comprehensive and fun.”

—National Magazine Award Citation

# STRATEGIST

FREDERICKS & MAE SETS UP SHOP . . . . . NO'S NEW CONCEPT . . . . .  
. . . . . THE UNDERGROUND GOURMET ON M . . . . .  
. . . . . HOW ARE THE STORES THAT ARE DOING WELL, DOING WELL? . . . . . COCKTAIL LABORATORY



**THE  
BEST  
BET**

**THE GOAL:** Find a durable, well-designed travel toothbrush for weekend trips to the Catskills and multi-city European vacations. **THE VERDICT:** **The Tour** travel toothbrush (\$6 at amazon.com) is the most recent concept from Radius, a company founded by two architects set on designing a better toothbrush (their first, the Original, now sits in the Smithsonian). The Tour is exactly the size of your typical toothbrush but has a hollow handle that collapses into itself like a jackknife, eliminating the need for extra cases that just sit on the sink and collect grime. Like all Radius toothbrushes, it features vegetable-based bristles, and instead of having to throw the whole brush away every few trips, Radius sells replaceable heads that conveniently snap right into the existing handle.

Photograph by Bobby Doherty

# BEST BETS

## CLUSTER

On May 1, city surfer shop **Token Surfboards** joined Chinatown's summer-sports cluster.

**BIKES:** **GoGo Gone**, 6KU Nebula 2 bike with gold wheels (\$249); Zycle "fix prime" bike with white frame and drop handlebars (\$320).



**SKATEBOARDS:** **Labor**, classic eagle deck (\$55); decks designed by skater Dane Brady (\$55); 60-mm. wheels by Spitfire (\$32).



**BIKES:** **Dah Shop**, blue plastic pedals by Animal Bikes (\$20); Subrosa specialty frames (\$300); crimson-red BMX bike chains (\$65).



**SURFBOARDS:** **Token**, Alessandro Simonetti x Token board (pictured; \$900); a "kelp-colored" eight-inch fin (\$53).



## POPPING UP

Through May, collector **Raquel Cayre** has opened **Raquel's Dream House**, a townhouse full of Memphis design furniture and more (79 Greene St.).



"THE SPACE IS incredible: a four-story townhouse that we filled to the brim with Memphis furniture. On the third floor, we have a functioning **Studio Proba fountain** (\$29,500). We have a 1981 **Masanori Umeda boxing-ring bed** that was in Karl Lagerfeld's apartment (\$55,000). On the first floor, we have things that are more accessible, like **bowls from ceramicist Matthew Ward** (\$250). There's so much to see it would be easy to miss, say, the basement, where we have three **Max Lamb Thermal Spray chairs** (from \$30,000) sitting among these scuffed walls and cans of spilling paint."



## ASK A SHOP CLERK

**Christian Siriano** on **The Curated**, his new multi-brand concept shop (5 W. 54th St.).



"The idea for the store is you can come shop **Siriano**—like our **metallic brocade blazer** (\$1,500)—plus pieces that complement my brand. So I picked designers that I love, like **Betto Garcia**, this amazing Spanish hatmaker. As for the design: pink. We used **Benjamin Moore paint in Rose Petal**, pink plush carpeting, pink-flamingo wallpaper, and pink fringe lighting all over."

## 2x2

Four pieces from Dutch designer **Piet Hein Eek's** new collaboration with **Ikea**, now available in Red Hook (1 Beard St.).

### COLORFUL

### NATURAL

#### CHAIR



Industriell chair, \$89.



Industriell armchair, \$129.

#### TABLEWARE



Industriell pink plate, \$6.



Industriell vase, \$20.

## IRL

**Ryan Babenzien** has brought his simple, reasonably priced sneaker brand **Greats to Soho** (42 Crosby St.).



"WHEN YOU SHOP online, the experience is literally flat, so we wanted the store to be dimensional: The shelving is deeply curved—many people have compared it to the bottom of a half-pipe. We have all our classics on there: our **Royales** (\$179), our **Hirsh suede boots** (\$159). The store does feel digital in that we don't take cash; you have to check out on an iPad. But otherwise it feels very experiential. For instance, we put a swing in the window. People sit on it, swing, and take a selfie. Or we stick a pair of sneakers on it. It's charming. And cheap."



## TOP FIVE

➔ **Jolie Mae Signorile** and **Gabriel Fredericks Cohen**, founders of handsome-games company **Fredericks & Mae**, have opened their first brick-and-mortar in Prospect Heights (983B Dean St.), selling their wares among those of like-minded friends.



"Wilderness Bodies replaced the numbers on these Corian-and-resin **clocks** (from \$200) with symbols: The three is a triangle, the five is five squares."



"Body Confidence makes these ceramic **figures** (\$166). They have protruding tongues and are playing in the waves. They're a talisman, sort of."



"Recreation Center created these **lava lamps** (\$190) with speckled ceramics instead of the typical tin body. But they have the same insides: goo."



"These ceramic **candleholders**, by Joe Sturm, look super-lumpy (from \$24). They have a place to put a flower, so you can use them as a vase. Or as an altar."



"We make this great **bocce-ball set** (\$150), with eight wooden balls, all painted with colorful dots and stripes. They're really fun to have for the summer."

**GLORIA TOLENTINO***Seamstress*

**Where are you coming from?** The Lyceum Theatre. I'm a seamstress on *The Play That Goes Wrong*. I fix the clothes, so if an actor is zipping up their sweater and it snags and the whole thing rips right apart, I sew it back up.

**How'd you learn to sew?** I've always been a big girl, and when I was little my grandfather used to make all of my clothing special for me. He made my uniforms for school, my dresses. Sometimes even my underwear. The first thing I ever sewed for myself was a pair of pants, when I was 17. I was playing a governor in a school play. I still make a lot of my own clothes. Right now I'm working on a chiffon shirt. Chiffon is very difficult to sew.

**Where are you from?** I moved to Brooklyn from Puerto Rico six years ago.

**Does your family still live there?** Yes. It's been a very painful year. My mother is still in the shelter system. I've felt very angry, and emotional, too—I want to go there, to be with my island. But some of my family has come here. On the New Year, my cousins and all my Puerto Rican friends went to a club to dance techno. It was emotional, dancing all together. But let me tell you: I love techno music. It makes my heart melt.

INTERVIEW BY  
KATY SCHNEIDER



## LIGHTNING ROUND

**Age:** 26.  
**Neighborhood:** Crown Heights.  
**Favorite designer:** Carolina Herrera.  
**Favorite painter:** Basquiat. **Watching:** La Casa de Papel.  
**Side hustle:** "I paint. Abstract, spiritual things like colors and birds."

# The Store

(IT WOULD SEEM)

# Is Not Dead

(AT LEAST FOR NOW)

**IT'S A STORE.  
BUT ALSO A RESTAURANT.  
AND A FLORIST.**

Stephen Alesch and Robin Standefer opened the 7,000-square-foot **Roman and Williams Guild** in December. The sprawling Soho space includes a shoppable library, flowers by Emily Thompson, furniture (their own, plus one-of-a-kind vintage pieces), and a full-fledged French restaurant, La Mercerie. "Our dishes and napkins [that we use in the restaurant] fly," says Alesch. "So do the stools and artwork—we put it up one day, and it's gone the next."



Amazon isn't going anywhere, so shops that would rather not shut down—both big and small—are adapting, resulting in a somewhat surprising retail renaissance.

BY CARL SWANSON

IT'S THE LAST DAY OF APRIL, a chill still in the air, and Michael Goldban, head of retail leasing at Brookfield Properties, wants to take a stroll down the pristinely blighted western terminus of Bleeker Street. Wearing Dolce & Gabbana transition glasses and a black blazer (and trailed by a publicist), he's here to tell me why he's an optimist about brick-and-mortar retail. We're passing empty storefront after empty storefront,

including one, at No. 359, that is asking \$25,000-a-month rent; it features a dozen loaves of Wonder Bread dangling in its window like Pop Art sausages, presumably to attract the attention of whimsy-minded potential tenants. But Goldban sees "opportunity" in the tidy, bougie desolation of this post-Amazon streetscape.

The company he works for owns dozens of malls and office buildings worldwide, among them the former World Financial

Center, opened as the luxury mall Brookfield Place after 9/11. The week before, the firm placed a comparatively smaller bet on Bleeker, buying seven "cool and charming," mostly vacant storefronts—and, by the way, he says, it's in the market for more. Goldban regales me with how the company will apply the "place-making" and "activation" strategies that it believes it has perfected at Brookfield to revive Bleeker's "mispriced assets." The idea is to position the street as a

place to spend the day, as he says, with Brookfield orchestrating the consumer experience rather than allowing each individual shop to pursue its own agenda. Put less delicately: “Let’s look at this as if it’s a mall, even though it’s not,” he says.

Goldban aims to seed this mall-but-not-mall with incubator retail that he then hopes to scale up. One of the first stores that has decided to give Bleecker a go is shoe start-up Margaux, a digital darling in need of a physical space to hashtag. “Listen, if Louis Vuitton came to us tomorrow and said, ‘We have this new idea, and we want to do it here,’ great. But what we really want it to be is a hub for innovation. And because the spaces are small, they don’t require much capital.”

To make Bleecker feel more like a “destination,” Goldban is conferring with Brookfield’s “arts and events” team. He’s not thinking “street fairs” or “tchotchke sellers,” he hastens to add. “In London, there was a flower show that took over a street—something like that. Something tasteful.”

**B**LEECKER HAS NOT been alone in its emptiness over the past few years. The number of vacant—and long vacant—storefronts in otherwise safe-and-prosperous New York is unsettling. “It kind of makes you scared for the city, which is geared around pedestrian life,” says former City Planning commissioner Amanda Burden, who can’t understand how landlords can leave the shops along Madison Avenue near her apartment lying fallow. One broker I spoke to, Bruce Ehrmann, said there are about 100 empty storefronts in Tribeca. When Manhattan borough president Gale Brewer sent a team up Broadway last year to count the empties, it got up to 188—and she and Mayor Bill de Blasio are working on legislation to tax or fine landlords who don’t rent their places already. Cushman & Wakefield’s MarketBeat report for the first quarter of this year put the “availability” rate on Fifth Avenue between 42nd and 49th Streets at 32.8 percent, in Soho at 23.9 percent, and in Herald Square at 31.

Maybe because the real-life writer Jane Jacobs, author of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, and the made-up writer Carrie Bradshaw, heroine of *Sex and the City*, have both strolled Bleecker (undoubtedly in very different footwear), the fate of this little street has become a sort of real-estate morality tale over the past couple of years. (There’s an entire chapter devoted to it in Jeremiah Moss’s book *Vanishing New York*.)

Bleecker’s mid-aughts transformation from a place to buy vintage quilts and Afghan rugs to an Edward Hopper version of Rodeo Drive was shocking for many New Yorkers—Marc Jacobs opened six shops over four blocks; Coach, side-by-side boutiques; Burberry, Brooks Brothers Black Fleece, Juicy Couture, Mulberry, and Lulu Guinness showed up too. The street became trendy, and the rents jumped, and while it worked for some brands for a while—the Michael Kors on the corner of Perry was said to be doing \$3 million a year in its heyday roughly five years ago—many of them didn’t do enough business to justify keeping the lights on. In fact, every one of the aforementioned boutiques has closed. The lone survivor is Bookmarc, which replaced the 24-year-old Biography Bookshop, to much gnashing of teeth, in 2010.

“We keep hearing these narratives about the retail apocalypse, and clearly you have to be blind to not see that there have been major disruptions,” Goldban admits. Elsewhere in the city, the lingering bust can be attributed to the fact that chain retailers drove up rents over the past decade—filling the city with, as the authenticity Cassandras always put it, drugstores and Starbucks (along with plenty of banks)—but then, with sales being siphoned off by online outlets, couldn’t afford the increases they’d wrought. As noted in the Center for an Urban Future’s annual mall-ification tally (its first report, in 2008, was titled “Attack of the Chains?”), 20 percent of national retailers in the city closed stores over the past year, and only one in seven of the establishments the group follows “increased its footprint—the smallest share since we began keeping track a decade ago.”

“We had ten years of an up-market, and rents were off the charts everywhere, absolutely everywhere,” says veteran Douglas Elliman broker Faith Hope Consolo. But that is starting to change. This most adaptive of cities is beginning to ... adapt. “We had to give landlords a wake-up call,” Consolo says. “On Madison in the 60s, it was \$2,200 a foot. Today, you can make deals at \$1,000 and \$1,200 a foot.”

The new retail beginning to rise is, like the rest of our lives, mediated by the digital: shops without shopping bags that act as showrooms for products you have to order later online; stores as places to hang out and drink coffee, maybe pick up a set of millennial-pink dinner plates or sniff a candle, and then Instagram that you were there. There are stores set up as playgrounds of hashtag

zones (Philipp Plein on Mercer, with its parked Ferrari and neon signs blaring hipper-than-thou epigrams like *YOUR COMFORT ZONE WILL KILL YOU*); stores as community centers for your chosen community (Rough Trade records in Williamsburg, Books Are Magic in Cobble Hill); stores as Etsy-souks of artisanal products (Canal Street Market); high-tech stores where you can ogle robot legs wearing sneakers and shoot hoops (the Nike store in Soho); stores that peddle a sense of in-the-know scarcity (line up for the latest shoe to drop at Kith!). Then there are those that cater to the crazily exacting needs of busy, busy, busy, cost-is-no-object Miranda Priestlys. The supercharged-concierge approach is part of the plan for both the seven-level Hudson Yards mall (with Neiman Marcus on top) and the 320,000-square-foot Nordstrom on 57th Street, which is slated to open next year.

In other words, with the old models for retail broken, or at least a good deal less sturdy, and rents finally in decline, risks are being taken. That willingness to experiment means that certain seemingly threatened—but perhaps more resilient than imagined—retailers such as bookstores are returning in new forms. Shakespeare & Co. is opening four stores, but they’re much smaller than the old ones, only 2,000-to-3,000 square feet, because new technology allows books to be printed and bound while you wait, minimizing the need for shelf space.

This move toward experimentation is epitomized by the here-and-gone pop-up shop, what the brokerage CBRE calls “rogue retail.” A U.K. company named Appear Here is running what is essentially an Airbnb for pop-ups and has put its distinctive stickers on unoccupied storefronts all over town (one on the corner of Bleecker and Christopher rents for \$1,250 a day).

With city leases drastically shorter than they once were—down to an average of five years, versus as long as 20 in the 1990s—CBRE predicts that the temporary will become the permanent state of things. Our attention spans are shorter, after all. And yet, as Consolo points out, a fair number of the pop-ups are sticking around. Digital-native brands “test the concept,” she says, “and end up staying.”

That’s the big hope for the city, that digital-firsters—Bonobos, Everlane, even Amazon—will keep going IRL. Several trends bode well for that: In the first six months of 2017, Facebook’s ad rates reportedly more than doubled, which might make a #store on a busy street a cost-effective billboard (the entire façade of Kenneth Cole at Bowery and Bond becomes a video

ad after-hours). At the same time, the price of shipping is climbing, squeezing already-tight profit margins and perhaps explaining why Amazon announced last month that the cost of Prime membership will swell by 20 percent.

Best of all for New York, most digital purveyors aren't interested in being in some cavernous mall in the burbs: If they're gonna get physical, it better be in a #cool #neighborhood. Like, say, Bleecker Street.

**S**TILL, NONE OF US is going to stop shopping online, and now there's even talk of new Amazon technology that—if it works as it's supposed to—would allow customers to scan their bodies at home, then order clothes that'll fit perfectly, as if you had your own personal bespoke-bot. Can our shops and legacy department stores survive that? I visited Kenneth Himmel, president and CEO of the development company Related Urban, the firm behind that giant mall being built in Hudson Yards. His office is at the Time Warner Center in Columbus Circle, the mall-office-hotel-condo complex that opened in 2003.

"What's happened is the trends are so accelerated that nobody can keep up," Himmel says, looking out over Central Park, a scale model of the building we're in enclosed in a vitrine behind him. "I mean, when you talk about planning and designing these projects, it's a five-to-seven-year cycle. In the meantime, look what's happened in the last three years." In that short space of time, the retail world has "turned upside down," he says, prompting "everybody to overreact." He continues: "Now department stores are reporting better sales against last year. Well, last year's sales were so horrendous, they better be beating it, but the fact is things are stabilizing." Still, he's convinced that a Darwinian contraction is inevitable. "We're the most over-retailed country in the world," he says.

I mention to Himmel that on the way in to see him I stopped to browse at the Amazon Books in the mall downstairs (tellingly, somehow, the space used to be a Borders). "They've been open for about nine months," he says. "It's interesting. If you get inside the story of many of these online retailers, they lose money because people send stuff back. I was out to dinner in Palm Beach two weeks ago, and this woman was raving about the experience she was having at Neiman's and Saks. She was ordering eight luxury items and returning, like, all but one thing."

"We're nervous," admits Jamie Nordstrom, president of stores for his century-old family retail empire, which spent 30

years looking for a location in the city before landing on the 57th Street space. He knows, of course, that "the days of just opening a store on Madison Avenue" and waiting for people to "flock" in are over.

Nordstrom is counting on its new take on the department store to attract the right mix of locals and tourists. ("You'll never feel claustrophobic in our store," he swears.) He also touts Nordstrom's friendly and tech-savvy service (which will include perks like opening the store for middle-of-the-night

Or, in my case, trying to get me to buy the thing I just bought by hectoring me with ads for the same pair of sneakers I'm already wearing.

"Anybody who thinks that the department-store industry is over: You're crazy," agrees Himmel, who, admittedly, has some skin in that game. "This Neiman Marcus store in Hudson Yards, that will be doing, I believe, \$150 million in volume. That's my belief." Still, he humbly submits: "If I had it to do over again, I would actually

## That's the big hope for the city, that digital-first retailers— Bonobos, Everlane, even Amazon— will keep going IRL.

pickups if you really, really need that Prada backpack). "Service means a million little things," Nordstrom says. "I want to shop on my phone, but I want to try on in the store. It'll be in the dressing room waiting for me, in and out in five minutes." And then how about having your purchase delivered to your home or hotel? "You don't have to leave with a shopping bag," he says.

A Nordstrom men's shop, a much smaller companion to the palatial women's store going up across the street, opened last month. Walking through, I'm struck by the slate-counter coffee bar with the cute barista, the \$5-shoeshine guy, and the clerks, who are almost alarmingly friendly.

It's a high-low experience: In a Topshop boutique, \$200 mauve sport coats are on offer, but not far away you can run your hands over the glittering blue-sequined fabric of a \$2,870 jacket by Comme des Garçons. "Fashion today is not about the price," says Nordstrom. "That's where some people get confused. Right now the hottest shoe is the Air Max from Nike, which is \$150." And, to finish his sentence for him, if Nordstrom is lucky, you'll go in seeking the pair that can be had for a relative pittance and end up splurging for the \$650 Dior sneakers sitting right by them. "I come in the store to find something I didn't know I was looking for," Nordstrom philosophizes. "That's what a great store does. The treasure hunt. A new fit, a new brand." Such grand adventures aren't possible online, he says, because digital excels at leading you to things you already know you want.

probably shrink the department store and add a 60,000-square-foot luxury-movie-theater complex."

**P**ROPAGANDIZING ASIDE, it's true that those algorithmic online ads can't replace the flâneur pleasures of walking the streets, browsing, trying on new versions of ourselves. Jennifer Mankins, who opened her first Bird, a women's-clothing boutique, in Park Slope in 1999, is finding a different kind of niche in the digital environment. In the past year, she's opened two new stores, one in Culver City in Los Angeles and one in Fort Greene. "On the one hand, it's sort of a nutso time" to expand, she says, "because in a lot of ways things are in flux. But it's really a fascinating time, too." Bird is managing to thrive, she posits, because it gives consumers an escape from the internet's tyranny of choice. "I don't want to look at 20,000 new black dresses. I want to see ten," she says. "There's a value placed on the edit. It can actually be less convenient to shop online. There's too much."

Himmel manages to be both elegiac and forward-looking about the fate of brick-and-mortar. "I've got three granddaughters. One's 16, one's 13, one's 8. I watch them; I watch their friends, I watch my wife; I watch how everybody's shopping." And, he concedes, a lot of it is, indeed, online. It's more convenient, or, once you're used to it, it definitely feels that way. "But you can't spend your whole life doing everything on these devices. You hope! That's our objective: to get you off the device."



# So How Are Stores That Are Doing Well... Doing Well?

*Not having insanely high rent helps. But it's more than that: Here, the newfangled, actually successful retail models of the moment.*

## THE MULTI-HYPHENATE MODEL

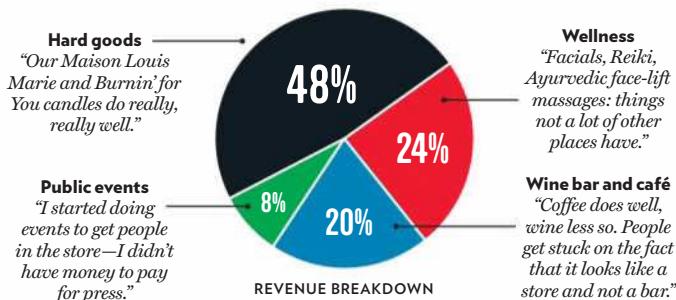
### Be Five Stores Instead of One

Since **Saturdays NYC** opened its part-menswear shop, part-coffee bar in 2009, retail hubs with many distinct components have multiplied across the city, culminating in the recent opening of the **Roman and Williams Guild**, a 7,000-square-foot homewares store (with a flower shop and a restaurant) in Soho. Scott Haven, co-owner of Greenpoint's flower-slash-coffee-slash-retail shop **Homecoming**, believes this model gets more people in the store. "They come first and foremost to hang out. Then maybe they buy something. Or take a photo for Instagram," he says. **KATY SCHNEIDER**

#### Jill Lindsey

370 Myrtle Ave.

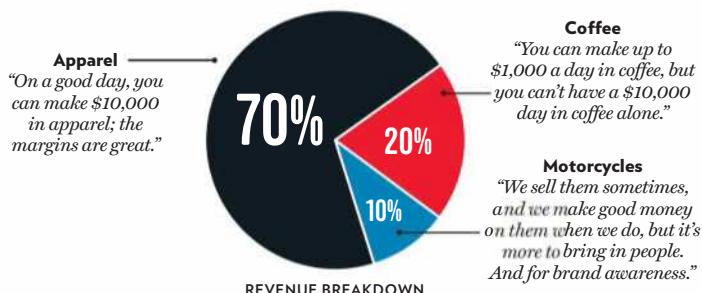
Jill Lindsey has facials, a wine bar, and topaz earrings in her Fort Greene space—which she calls a truly modern department store.



#### Jane Motorcycles

396 Wythe Ave.

Jane, which opened in Williamsburg in 2013, sells motorcycles—plus coffee and a menswear line for those who don't ride.



#### JILL LINDSEY'S NITTY-GRITTIES

##### AVERAGE MONTHLY SALES

Retail sales	\$25,540
Café sales	\$4,800
Wellness sales	\$7,660
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$38,000</b>

##### TOTAL COSTS

Inventory	\$10,500
Staff	\$8,792
Rent	\$5,346
Extras (display, store improvement, event props)	\$2,000
Supplies	\$1,225
Bills (trash, electric, internet)	\$506
Point-of-sale system	\$450
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$28,819</b>

##### ADDITIONAL COSTS

- Liquor-license renewal: **\$2,000** every two years.
- Restaurant license: **\$1,500** every year.
- Insurance: **\$2,800** every year.
- Accounting: **\$400** quarterly.
- Sales tax: approximately **\$7,500** quarterly.
- Rent **increases by 8 percent** every year.

40%

#### CAFÉ

Cold brew accounts for 25 percent of the café's sales, followed by hot coffee, then cappuccinos. Pastries amount to only 15 percent of the café's business. Though the café is lucrative, it has its downsides: The store has to go through an annual inspection and pay café taxes.



CASE STUDY

# Homecoming

107 Franklin St.

While other early-to-the-scene Greenpoint shops have been forced to close because of skyrocketing rents, Homecoming continues to thrive. In May, the owners opened a second location, in Williamsburg.



## PLANTS AND FLOWERS

Seventy percent of plants sold are “general foliage”—which, says Haven, just means everything that looks like a houseplant. Next, the four-inch potted plants, which sell the fastest because they’re so small. Cacti make up a surprisingly small (30 percent) portion of the plant business.



## APOTHECARY

Homecoming sells soaps, perfumes, lip balm, and candles. The two best sellers are 1509 perfumes and Grown Alchemist products.



## HOMEWARES

Haven stocks everything from doormats to coffeemakers, but the items that sell best are ceramics and pots from locals like Helen Levi.



## BOOKS

Though Haven is committed to stocking books, they aren’t big movers and have a small profit margin. Still, he says, “they say something about what we’re into in the store.”

## RENT

“We’ve seen so many places close in the last five years,” Haven says. “But we’re lucky, because our landlord lives in the building and is very hands-on with the community. He likes us, and he hasn’t drastically increased our rent.”

THE ONE-ITEM MODEL

# ... Or Just Carry One Very Specific Thing

Specialty shops might seem like a relic of an older New York. But in 2015, 24-year-old **Caroline Weaver opened CW Pencil Enterprise**, a store that sells only pencils and pencil accessories. A little over a year later, **Jordan Roschwalb opened Pintrill**, a pin store in Williamsburg. And they're still kicking—even expanding. We brought together Weaver and Roschwalb to chat with **original one-thing seller Millicent Safo**, who's helmed the Upper East Side button shop Tender Buttons since 1964. **LAUREN LEVY**



**Millicent Safo**  
*Tender Buttons*  
There was a Hungarian man who sold

buttons on 77th Street who wanted to get rid of them all. It was the '60s and my friend and I wanted to be artists, and we saw it as a possibility for a work of art. So we bought all the buttons and rented the shop to store them. After that, people just kept coming into the shop and asking to buy buttons. Before we knew it, we were a business. In 1964, we moved to our current location. We went from \$200-a-month rent to \$800.



**Caroline Weaver**  
*CW Pencil Enterprise*

I understand going from a tiny shop to a big shop where the rent has multiplied. We moved into a new shop in October that was double the size of our original, but also had a finished basement. Now we do online fulfillment from the same space. That was big.



**Jordan Roschwalb**  
*Pintrill*

We just switched our fulfillment to the back of the store, and it's been incredible. We saved money on the rent from the other space, while also bringing the inventory into one place, which makes it a thousand times easier. The difference for me is that the

store came kind of second to the web, whereas for you, Caroline, you were always going to open up a store.

**CW:** I had a website first, but the endgame was to have a store. It wasn't meant to happen that fast, but then I found the perfect space. It was important that it was tiny.

**MS:** I had that too—the perfect space. It just looked like a button shop. We bought this whole building in the '80s. At one time, it was a blessing, but the real-estate tax has gone up so incredibly, about 600 percent or so, and the value of my product is so inexpensive. Most of what we sell is \$3 or \$4.

**JR:** I do a lot of wholesale and private label manufacturing, but the average pin for us is \$12 to \$18. We also sell dollar pins, which is a huge driver for us. So many people like digging through them.

**MS:** What really boggles my mind is that you two have started your shops when you're competing for rents with big-box shops.

**JR:** The hardest thing is that if you could buy a T-shirt for \$20 at Zara, do you really want to spend \$15 on a pin? It's cultivating that value, whether it's for the designs or the quality. To keep the space, we have to sell 500 to 1,000 pins a month. E-commerce is a whole other entity for us. The store is self-sufficient on its own, which is great.

**CW:** My rent is very expensive, but I can pay everybody and pay my bills. Having our quarterly subscription box has been a game changer. We can count on it every three months, and we have 1,200 subscribers and a waiting list. Knowing that even if we have a slow month we can rely on that money makes a huge difference.

**JR:** For me, people always walk into the shop and they're just like, *Wow*. Instagram is huge for us. If we had gotten on Instagram a year or two years later and the algorithm changed, our business would not have become half of what it was.

**MS:** I really don't know Instagram and I'm realizing that I should get with it, but we recently changed our policy from "No pictures" to "Yes pictures."

**CW:** I think that because there are fewer specialty shops, people are more interested in them. Most people are so confused by the concept that somebody in the 21st century would attempt to open a specialty shop, and because of that curiosity, they come by.

**MS:** We had a woman come into the store, and she spent all day here looking at the buttons and listening to the opera. At about four o'clock, we got a call from a man who said, "Did my wife spend the entire afternoon in a button shop?" He thought she was lying. It was true.

## THREE OTHER NOTABLE NOOKS



### 1 THE PENCIL WALL WAS DESIGNED FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

And Weaver made sure there was enough space in front for people to stand back and Instagram it. "We get a lot of people who find us on Instagram and think our shop is cute," she says.



### 2 THE PENCIL VENDING MACHINE KEEPS PEOPLE RETURNING TO THE STORE

Weaver fills it with vintage advertising pencils that she buys from a collector in Colorado. For 50 cents per pencil, it's become a cheap attraction. One couple stops by every Sunday for a new pencil.



### 3 THE STICKER DEPARTMENT IS HIDDEN IN THE BACK

"It's called the CW Sticker Emporium, and it's a little secret thing that brings a different crowd of younger cool people. They make a beeline for the back of the store, and maybe they'll buy a pencil, too," Weaver says.

**The average in-store purchase is \$25.**

**Online, that number grows to \$40.** Weaver suspects customers want to justify the shipping costs so they're more likely to stock up.

CASE STUDY

# CW Pencil Enterprise

15 Orchard St.

A mold problem forced Caroline Weaver to vacate her first, 200-square-foot space last year. Her new store is double the size (and rent), but she's managing just fine.

## The sharpening and pencil-testing stations are at opposite sides.

Weaver knew that's where people would congregate. "A lot of decisions were focused on how to control the flow of people," she says.

## Everything in the shop is labeled,

to eliminate the need for customers to ask questions. The exception is the **more expensive pencils, which are close to the shop clerk.** With those, Weaver says, people want to ask questions, and the more they know, the likelier they are to buy.

## Weaver's expected 2018 revenue is \$1.2 million.

She pays **\$9,000 per month for rent** and sells between 1,000 to 2,000 pencils a day.

## Colored pencils are in the front.

"People overlook them, and they're something **you're more likely to buy if you can compare them all,**" Weaver says.

## A typical shopper will buy about 12 pencils each visit,

along with **one accessory**, like a sharpener, a grip, or a notebook.

## Most expensive non-vintage pencil:

**Mitsubishi Kohitsu Shosha; \$7.50.** "This is specifically designed for practicing Chinese calligraphy."

## Most expensive vintage pencil:

An original Blackwing **602 from the '60s; \$75.** "There's a big collectors' market for those," says Weaver.

THE INDIE BOOK MODEL

# Exploit the Barnes & Noble Void

“We’re all picking up the crumbs that the chain bookstores left behind when Amazon forced them to close,” says Sarah McNally, owner of **McNally Jackson**. The crumbs are enough for many indie-bookstore owners to create a thriving business, it seems, especially if they carefully curate their selection and sell merchandise that complements the store’s aesthetic. McNally, for one, flies to Japan for greeting-card shows, and Emma Straub, whose Cobble Hill shop **Books Are Magic** opened last year, has sold some 2,000 millennial-pink-branded tote bags. It’s a difficult business, to be sure. Owners face high rents and low margins. But still: It seems a good bookstore has a better chance now than ever of surviving. “We’re doing far better than we projected,” says Straub, who has consistently sold around 12,500 books per month. “People see us on Instagram and come visit from Japan. And our events have been so successful that I worry for the mental health of our events coordinator.” k.s.

The Williamsburg shop has had several “sure bet” events—

writers like Michael Cunningham and Sloane Crosley. **But events are difficult to monetize**, she says. “If 100 people come, you’re lucky to sell 20 books.”

McNally’s business is almost 100 percent brick-and-mortar.

“Our website is just awful,” she says. “The user experience is literally a joke.”



**Sarah McNally got a good deal on her new Williamsburg store.**

The owners of the Lewis Steel Building, a converted factory, **wanted an anchor tenant to give the space some buzz**. A similar thing happened over at the South Street Seaport (see p. 68), where McNally will open another location soon. “Their goal was to bring in cool tenants, which they were very upfront with,” she says. Meanwhile, her Soho rent hasn’t risen much since she opened in 2004, though costs have increased: The property taxes are now well over \$100,000 a year; when she opened, they were only \$25,000.

The kids’ section is quite large:

**8,868 kids’ books**, making up 14.72 percent of the business. “There are a lot of kids here, as it turns out.”



CASE STUDY

## McNally Jackson Williamsburg

76 N. 4th St.

The first outpost of Sarah McNally's successful Soho institution opened earlier this year. (Two more are on the way.)

### McNally is committed to having a magazine section

in Williamsburg. "It's currently 4.8 percent of our business," she says. "Our magazine section in Soho is 6 percent, which is depressing because it used to be 10 percent." Their profitability has become worse, too: McNally used to get 40 percent off her best-selling magazines; now she gets only 20 percent.

### She sells lots of cards and stationery.

Though she carries fewer in Williamsburg than in Soho, they still make up about 11 percent of the total business. In Soho, McNally Jackson sells about 4,000 cards a month. "Our best seller says 'You're One Succulent Motherfucker,'" says McNally.

### So far, so good with the bathroom.

But the Soho bathroom "breaks every week," she says. There's a methadone clinic nearby, and "people flush needles down the toilet. It's easily tens of thousands a year for the fucking bathroom." There is one benefit to the bathroom: When McNally moved it to the lower level, there was an uptick in sales in every section that's downstairs.

### Paperback fiction is 15 percent of the business,

the biggest category in Williamsburg. There are 6,611 paperback-fiction titles in the Williamsburg store, versus 8,201 in Soho. "We have more books here than a 30,000-square-foot Barnes & Noble," says McNally.

THE COOPERATIVE MODEL

# Team Up With 69 Other Designers



"I'm working with people who would typically have been my competitors—they're sharing with me secrets of their businesses—to try to help me."

—Anna Sokol, *WeAnnaBe*

"I'd noticed while working in the store that customers were drawn to other designers' tactile materials, so I've started using more three-dimensional silhouettes and fabrics."

—Jenny Lai, *NOT*

"I couldn't have my own space in Soho—the overhead for that location is extremely expensive. So it's like Flying Solo prepares the table and we get to enjoy the dinner."

—Daniela Zahradnikova, *DZ Zone NYC*

THE WEB-FIRST MODEL

## Start Online, But Don't Stay There

"We are going to shut the company down before we go to physical retail." That's what Everlane co-founder Michael Preysman told *T* magazine six years ago—five years before opening a shop on Prince Street. It's not far from Warby Parker's flagship on Greene Street. Also in walking distance: Glossier's pink-and-white showroom, where teens and tourists come in droves to buy makeup they purchased for years online. Digitally native brands are the second-biggest category of new tenants in New York, according to Cushman & Wakefield. (Fast-casual food chains are the first.) Thanks to VC funding, they have lots to spend on rent, making retail a not-totally-risky endeavor. And it's working: The stores we talked to said their brick-and-mortars are, for the most part, moneymakers. MARGARET RHODES

IN-STORE BEST SELLERS



*Percey glasses (\$95).*

### Warby Parker

When Warby Parker first launched, co-founder Neil Blumenthal recalls, "people were saying, 'Hey, can we just come to your office and try them on?' And we were running it out of my apartment. So the first store was on my kitchen table." Today, the glasses brand has **67 stores** in the U.S., with **23 more coming this year**. "When it's our first store in a new market, we see some cannibalization off web sales for a few months. But it only lasts nine to 12 months. And then e-commerce starts to grow faster than it would have before," Blumenthal says.



*The Bigger Carry-On (\$245), in blue.*

### Away

In 2016, as a marketing experiment, Away ran a **pop-up on Lafayette Street from May to September**, selling its luggage as well as travel-themed trinkets. It was profitable within a month. Away signed a five-year lease on a permanent Bond Street store, and soon after, the brand saw a **40 percent lift in online sales** in the New York market. Jen Rubio—who met her co-founder, Steph Korey, when they worked at Warby Parker—says each of the four stores around the country are profitable as stand-alone enterprises.

CASE STUDY

## Flying Solo

434 West Broadway

Here's how Flying Solo, a fashion cooperative founded by jewelry designer **Elizabeth Solomeina**, works: Each of the **70 designers** puts in **two four-hour shifts a week** at the **7,000-square-foot store**, and membership fees, which cover rent, production, and events, are taken out of their individual sales. They each get a place to work (at a 5,000-square-foot space down the street) and a store that also acts as a showroom and photo studio. K.S.



"It's great, free PR for us—between all the designers, they have so many friends and stylists who do editorial pulls. Because of them, we've gotten into *Vogue Italia*, *Vogue Arabia*."

—Sienna Li, Sienna Li LLC

IN-STORE  
BEST SELLERS

The Day Heel  
(\$145).



## Everlane

In December, co-founder Michael Preysman opened the brand's **first permanent store in Nolita**. Two months later, he opened the second in San Francisco. Preysman says he didn't intend to sign a lease but agreed to a ten-year one after seeing the skylights in the Prince Street store. "I was like, *Holy shit, this is the brand in physical format*." For the first few days after the New York store opened, customers either needed an appointment or to wait in line to get in and shop. So far, Everlane's averaging **\$4,500 of sales per square foot**.

The Moya III  
oversize  
shearling  
(\$1,095).



## The Arrivals

After exceeding their targets during a **holiday pop-up in 2016** (then tripling revenue the next year), selling thousands of their leather jackets, Arrivals co-founders Jeff Johnson and Kal Vepuri have settled into a winter pop-up routine—one that's almost rent-free. "Soho landlords all want a five-year signing at \$90,000 per month," Johnson says. "We don't have anywhere close to the ability to do that." So for the last pop-up, architect friends put in HVAC and got the storefront up to code in exchange for rent.

# Some Other Questions You Might Have About This Unlikeliest of Booms

*What's with all the Sephoras? And why do so many stores have couches?*

1

## What other types of stores are doing okay?

According to **Faith Hope Consolo**, chairman of Douglas Elliman's retail division, who likes to say "Retail is my detail."

### BEAUTY

"They're booming. It's all about **Sephora** and **Blue Mercury** and **Ulta**. But whether it's natural beauty"—since 2011, Aesop has opened ten New York storefronts—"or the new Korean cosmetics chains"—**Amorepacific**, South Korea's Estée Lauder-like company, has opened Aritaum stores in the city; **Innisfree** has an experiential Union Square store—"a lot of the single brands are expanding like crazy, and they're going onto Madison Avenue, into Hudson Yards: **M.A.C**, **Kiehl's**, **Jo Malone**, **Milk**."

### HOME

"There's a new crop of stores doing something special like bedding"—like **Parachute Home**, which is moving into a permanent Soho store soon—"or the new **Casper mattress stores**, where they create little mini-bedrooms and vignettes. It's almost like a testing ground for the product. The **Hästens** store on Madison is the benchmark for that kind of specialty-experience shopping."

### APPAREL

"It's all about these big brands reinventing themselves: It doesn't matter that H&M closed all those stores; they have new concepts with **Cos** and **& Other Stories**. Athleisure is a bright spot: **Lululemon** is expanding, **Bandier** is opening a massive flagship. But the trend is always for luxury: I mean, there's **Gucci**, which just took practically a whole block in Soho—how about that. I don't think you get bigger than that."

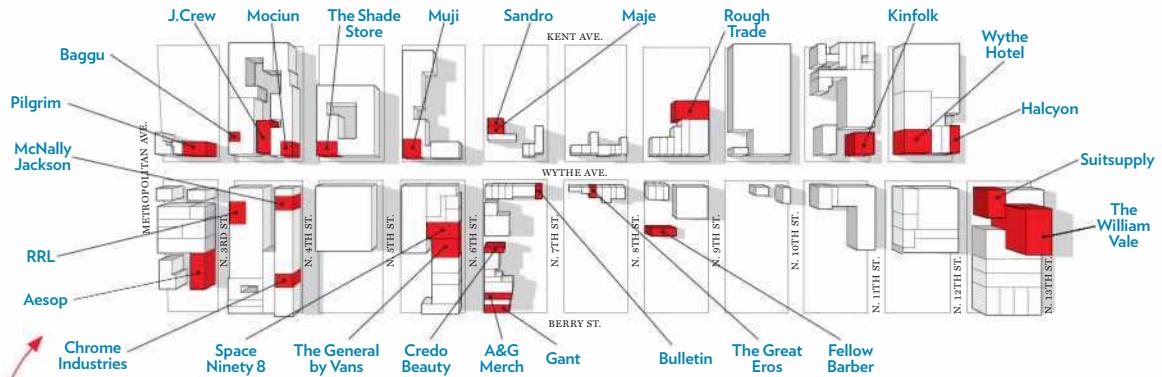
### KIDS

"East Side, West Side, downtown, there are a lot of kids stores. I think it's because there's all these grandparents. **You have a very wealthy customer base**." M.R.

2

## Where might a storekeep hang her shingle?

Consider these on-the-up-and-up stretches.



### NEW Wythe Avenue

*In the past six years, it's become the new downtown Broadway. Here's Wythe pioneer Caitlin Mociun on the street's boom.*

"WHEN I OPENED my home-goods store six years ago, there wasn't a ton there: It was **Pilgrim**, **Brooklyn Denim Company**, and **Oroboro**, which is now gone. **Kinfolk** was there, but they didn't have the store yet. It was before Williamsburg turned into Murray Hill vibes and every Japanese-tour-guide book said to go here. Girls who worked at my store dated dudes who worked at Pilgrim. It was a little happy-family vibe.

I feel like I'm talking about a time 20 years ago; I can't believe how fast it's changed. The first wave started in April 2014, when **Space Ninety 8**, which is actually an **Urban Outfitters**, opened. Then in September came **J.Crew**. The second wave was nearby: **RRL** in October 2015, **Levi's**, **Scotch & Soda**, and **G-Star Raw** that November, all in the building that would eventually house a **Whole Foods**. That was across from the **Apple Store**, which opened in July 2016; Muji followed the next year, in September 2017. And the hotels keep popping up: **The William Vale**, **The Williamsburg Hotel**, and this summer, **The Hoxton**. A lot of this happened on Wythe because it's very commercial. The block also has an expansiveness to it. It's like the Champs-Élysées.

I've watched my friends and a bunch of customers get priced out. But a lot of the people who've moved in are a little more affluent, which is good for us. We're successful enough to afford the rent, so we're going to stay here." L.L.

NEWER

### Canal Street

*Where \$85 ceramic plates are replacing faded tourist tees.*

IN FIVE YEARS OR SO when Canal Street is unrecognizable, it'll be thanks to two landlords. The first, **Philip Chong Jr.**, who developed **Canal Street Market**, the 12,000-square-foot airy, natural-wood-lined bazaar and food hall off Lafayette Street and transformed New York's last bastion of tourist crap and knockoff bags into a destination for ramen lovers and ceramic snobs. The Market is right down the block from **Acne** and **Mansur Gavriel's** new headquarters. And a couple blocks down, **Roman and Williams Guild** (see p. 56) and secondhand sneaker emporium **Stadium Goods** have opened shop. This new sheen is what the second landlord, Albert Laboz of United American Land, hopes to continue by upgrading all those empty Canal storefronts between Broadway and West Broadway. This summer, along with Laura O'Reilly at Wallplay, a platform that matches empty spaces with artists, brands, and programming, and Sonny Gindi, of the Instagram account @Vibes, they'll turn their combined 22 vacant stores into mixed-media art galleries and experimental retail pop-up shops. L.L.

NEWEST

### The South Street Seaport

*Where Milan's 10 Corso Como is arriving in the fall.*

"IT USED TO BE SNOW GLOBES and 'I Love New York' T-shirts," explains Saul Scherl, president of the New York Tri-State Region at the Howard Hughes Corporation, which inherited the Seaport District in 2010. Two years later, when Hurricane Sandy devastated the area, the company saw an opportunity. "We had the chance to develop something different, not just another mall." Central to their plot has been securing the right tenants. Among them: culinary stars **Jean-Georges Vongerichten** and **Momofuku's David Chang** and much-loved New York originals like **McNally Jackson** (see p. 64), **Big Gay Ice Cream**, and **Fellow Barber**. But to really succeed, Hughes needed to secure an impressive landmark fashion retailer. It set its sights on **10 Corso Como** and spent close to five years convincing—and insiders say, incentivizing—founder Carla Sozzani that the Seaport was the best home for its first U.S. flagship. She was convinced. This September, the boutique will open doors on a 28,000-square-foot space. HAYLEY PHELAN

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF THE VENDORS (ALL PRODUCT SHOTS).

3

## Why do so many new shops look the same?



### THE LINGER-FOR-HOURS LIVING ROOM

**WHY IT WORKS:** “The more time you spend around a product, the more ownership you feel over it,” says consumer psychologist Kit Yarrow. “People don’t want to ask permission to touch something; they want to feel comfortable.” Stay-awhile approaches include the Apartment’s loftlike layout and Foundrae’s lending library.

VS



### THE MINIMALIST ART GALLERY

**WHY IT WORKS:** “Today’s consumer is easily overwhelmed,” explains Yarrow. Stark white walls and clean-lined tables, like at La Garçonne in Tribeca and Away in Noho, create a pocket of calm designed to quell such anxiety. “Plus, when there’s less of something, it seems rare,” adds Yarrow. “Apple is a forerunner in understanding this.” H.P.

4

## What happens when a store’s too popular?



IT USED TO BE THAT a well-timed release of a limited run of goods made your store successful. The “drops,” as these releases came to be known, were a way to entice people into your space and create an energy and sense of necessity around the physical store. They were so valuable that, while they began in the then-insular world of sneakers, drops quickly went mainstream with **Supreme**, and now we’re at the point where **Alexander Wang** has announced he’ll be forgoing New York Fashion Week to refocus on droplike direct-to-consumer experiences. **Birkenstock** has even begun dipping its earthy sandals into

the fray. But for the sneaker and streetwear worlds where they started, drops are no longer the blessing they once were. Past Nike releases were shut down after fights erupted outside the store. When Supreme and Louis Vuitton applied for a pop-up location to sell their much-anticipated collaboration line on Bond Street, they were denied—the local community board wasn’t interested in the commotion. So brands are rejiggering. Supreme now requires that customers sign up online to reserve time slots for Thursday “drop day” releases. But it’s **Nike** that is perfecting the Drop 2.0 with its **SNKRS app**, which has completely digitized the idea of the drop. Instead of guiding buyers to its stores, Nike is sending them to public spaces, like parks, where a technology called “geo-fencing” recognizes their location and allows them to cop a drop.



L.L.

5

## Where did all the menswear boutiques go?

The guys-clothing market has split itself along a high/low, streetwear/suiting divide. Middle-of-the-road multi-brand stores are closing, while streetwear stores and bespoke-suiting experts thrive. L.L.



### LOW



Streetwear brands like **Kith**, **Palace**, **Noah**, **Round Two**, **Supreme**, **Maharishi**, **Aimé Leon Dore**, and **Off-White** are going gangbusters. “Today’s savvy and in-the-know menswear shoppers, mostly between the ages of 18 to 35, are hyperaware of and increasingly loyal to specific labels that define the cult of streetwear,” says Lawrence Schlossman, brand director of Grailed, the online men’s resale shop. “They wear head-to-toe one brand.”



### MIDDLE



For middle-of-the-road retailers, it’s either adapt or close. Earlier this year, multi-brand store **Gentry**, which specialized in American workwear and imported Japanese garments, shuttered because it seemed people would rather shop directly from **Carhartt WIP**. When **Carson Street** closed its retail shop in 2016, it announced that it would focus on its more classic menswear line, Deveaux.



### HIGH



Bespoke-suiting shops, specifically transplants from London’s Savile Row, all happen to be opening here at the same time. **Huntsman** was one of the first to make the trip Stateside, opening in March 2016. **Richard James** was next, followed by British shoemaker **Harry’s of London**. **Drake’s** learned that 30 percent of its online customers were actually in New York, so it might as well sell directly to them here.



Madcap Cafe

THE UNDERGROUND GOURMET

## The Non-Cookie-Cutter Café

At Madcap Cafe, a former fine-dining whiz is finally making the food she really likes to eat.

BY ROBIN RAISFELD AND ROB PATRONITE

**T**HERE WAS A TIME, not so long ago, before the “all-day café” and its carefully honed, millennial-friendly brand identity dwarfed the dining scene, when establishments like coffee shops, luncheonettes, and diners dotted the land. These places were known to serve coffee in the morning, alcohol later on, and food whenever thirst or appetite demanded, but they didn’t make a production out of it. Customers tended to become very attached to these places of business and the people who worked there and use them as their home away from home, rather than today’s office away from office.

It is in this refreshing and somewhat antiquated spirit that Heather Fuller opened Madcap Cafe several weeks ago on a Carroll Gardens corner that loudly and somewhat confusingly advertises in one great cluster the presence of every adjoining business (a Pilates studio, a gym, a dentist’s office, a real-estate agency, the Scottó funeral home) in addition to her own. Considering that its doors are open from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily, Madcap is as all-day as cafés come. But it’s such an

anomaly in the category it doesn’t even call itself one. The restaurant has no “concept” (as Fuller’s husband-partner keeps pointing out to her), no “visual identity,” no logo, only the most discreet of exterior signage, and, at press time, no website. It does have its chef-owner’s charm and drive and a small staff that radiates warmth throughout the wide, shallow dining room, which is furnished simply with a bar, a slatted-wood banquette, and a row of metal stools lining a ledge where curtained windows look out onto Court Street. There’s yellow wallpaper with a cherry-blossom motif on one side and a forest-themed tapestry on the other, and a mix of soul, rhythm and blues, and classic rock playing at a volume loud enough to induce a sigh of nostalgia but low enough not to drown out conversation.

You wouldn’t know it by looking at the colorful comfort-food menu chirpily handwritten in five or six different shades of ink, but Fuller has as impressive a fine-dining résumé as any you’re likely to see. Still, when asked, the chef will cheerfully admit that although she appreciates the theater of the format, she’s never had a

fine-dining meal she’s actually liked. All we can say about that is haute cuisine’s loss is the café world’s gain.

Of the nine dishes on the dinner menu, veggie “nachos” might be the most emblematic. The wordplay, the knife skills, the vegetable focus—all display Fuller’s previous work in kitchens like Per Se, Momofuku Ko, and Nix. The genius of this cheeky take on crudités is that it’s about ten times better than what you usually get out of a bowl of raw veggies. With crudités, you take a vegetable, let’s say it’s a carrot, and you dip it into whatever dip it comes with. Then what? You either double-dip, which is a policy endorsed by no one except George Costanza, or you joylessly munch the rest of your raw and undipped carrot like a melancholy rabbit. Fuller’s nacho-size crudités (thinly sliced radish and cucumber, endive, and tiny broccoli florets), in contrast, are so expertly dabbled and drizzled with Green Goddess dressing and what must be the city’s most technically precise dice of pico de gallo that you get a flavor boost in every bite. They’re just plain fun to eat.

Ditto the baked mac ‘n’ cheese, served in a hot cast-iron skillet and showcasing an unusual corkscrew pasta shape called cellentani (cavatappi, actually, rechristened by the manufacturer Barilla after a 1960s Italian pop singer known for his springy corkscrew dance moves). There is nothing to distinguish this rendition beyond its extra-cheesy creaminess—no bread crumbs, no crispy bits, no crunch—but sometimes unadulterated creamy cheesiness is all you need. The sandwiches, on the other

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Georgia O'Keeffe, *Hibiscus with Plumeria* (detail), 1939, Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in., Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Sam Rose and Julie Walters, 2004.30.6 © 2018 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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THE DISH

# Brouillade

You wouldn't want to arm-wrestle the cook on the scrambled-egg station at Frenchette, Riad Nasr and Lee Hanson's new Tribeca bistro. Each order requires nearly 15 minutes of vigorous, nonstop stirring, plus the intuitive vigilance to move the pan around the French ring flattop as if it were a Ouija board, from hot to warm to cool spots, all to prevent the emulsion of egg, butter, and cream from breaking. The goal is a curd so soft and silky it resembles polenta as it pours from the pan. The garnish of snails in garlic butter isn't traditional, but the happy accident of a pre-opening menu meeting. As the chefs began running through the list of planned dishes, one wag heard the first two—eggs in the classic brouillade preparation, escargots in garlic butter—and immediately proclaimed how much tastier they'd be together. "I know what we're having for our first managers' meal!" he said.

R.R. & R.P.

On the menu at **Frenchette**, \$17; 241 W. Broadway, nr. N. Moore St.; 212-334-3883.

hand, are elevated by their delivery system: puffy, housebaked flatbread reminiscent of what encases street-cart souvlaki. Furthering the resemblance, they arrive half-wrapped in tinfoil and stuffed with either good hoisin-sauced maitake mushrooms or better chicken, marinated in coconut milk and turmeric and dressed with tahini, raw onion, and chopped tomatoes and cucumbers. Come for breakfast or brunch and you'll find that soft and squishy wrap swaddling beautifully scrambled eggs, cheese, and meaty bacon, should you choose. (You should.)

Dumplings and meatballs also occupy this ecumenical menu. The former are six hot and juicy pork-and-chive potstickers that hit the spot. Alas, the meatballs smothered in red sauce and sprinkled with Parmesan turn out to be a bit tough and dry, posing no immediate threat to the meatball-making *nonnas* in the historically Italian-American neighborhood. Salads, though, are just what the doctor ordered: a kale number with tahini massaged into its creases, scattered with raisins and sunflower seeds, and the Madcap Greens, a sprightly assemblage of oak-leaf lettuce, blue cheese, and spiced pecans, all well slicked in a sticky pecan-malt-vinegar vinaigrette. If the food has a theme, it's things that sound generic and slightly random on paper (and in variously colored ink) but taste unexpectedly great. In other words, as many a canny chef has said, underpromise and overdeliver. Fuller calls this her "favorite neighbor" approach to cooking. "I hope eating here is like eating at your favorite neighbor's home," she says, and that sounds about right. There are few cafés where we'd rather spend all day.

SCRATCHPAD

**MADCAP CAFE:** One star for the generally delicious cooking; two more for the super-friendly all-day service, well-made cocktails, and a sit-anywhere, instantly-a-regular vibe that feels refreshingly unmanufactured.

BITES

**IDEAL MEAL:** Madcap Greens and baked pasta or coconut-turmeric chicken sandwich.  
**NOTE:** Fuller chose the name Madcap partly because of the "cap" in cappuccino and nightcap, and partly because her husband said her business plan was crazy.  
**OPEN:** Daily for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and weekend brunch. **PRICES:** \$9 to \$14.



Every two-egg portion contains 1½ ounces each of **Plugrá butter** and **local cream**—"as much fat as the eggs can hold," says Nasr.

The cage-free **eggs** come from a New Jersey farm that spikes the chicken feed with red-pepper flakes, said to tint the yolks.

The **Petit Gris**-variety snails are raised in a North Fork greenhouse on a diet of foraged greens, then finished, like pedigreed Spanish pigs, on spent beer grains and acorns.

They're sautéed in a classic **garlic-fines herbes butter** before being spooned over the eggs.

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## Di An Di

68 Greenpoint Ave., nr. Franklin St., Greenpoint; 718-576-3914

IT'S SHAPING UP to be a very slurpy summer. In addition to German's Soup (see below), there's lots of Vietnamese pho coming our way. The folks at An Choi on the Lower East Side are branching out to Brooklyn with Di An Di, which means "Let's eat" or "Let's go eat." As opposed to An Choi, where the spotlight is on bánh mì, the focus here is pho and more pho, plus a few other non-pho noodle soups. The menu looks great. In particular, we have our eye on the Pho Thin Hanoi (pictured), a tribute to the signature soup served at Hanoi's famous Pho Thin restaurant, which comes topped with wok-seared fatty brisket and a poached egg. That and a fried cruller on the side, for dunking, should do the trick. Cocktails, beer, and wine, too.



## German's Soup

793 Utica Ave., at Linden Blvd., East Flatbush; 718-513-0376

APPARENTLY, the first thing any right-thinking Guyanese expat does upon returning home for the holidays is to repair to German's for a bowl of cow-heel soup, just like a New Yorker who'd been away from the city might beeline it over to Katz's for a pastrami sandwich. That, anyway, is one of the reasons for the unveiling of the first

American location, in Brooklyn, of this 58-year-old Georgetown, Guyana, restaurant: Why not save all these transplants living in New York a trip? The soups are based on the original recipes of founder Hubert "German" Urling, and in addition to the signature cow heel (a hearty mix of the gelatinous meat from a cow's lower extremities and vegetables in a split-pea-based broth), there are oxtail and chicken variations. Also on the menu: pepperpot and specials like barbecued chicken and cookup rice. If hot soup, cow heel or otherwise, is not what you have in mind for the sultry days of summer yet to come, know that German's is particularly proud of its housemade mauby, the fermented and spiced tree-bark-based beverage, served over ice.

PREVIEW

## Existing Conditions

35 W. 8th St., nr. Macdougall St.  
212-203-8935



BEHIND ONE OF 8th Street's unprepossessing façades, they're milk-washing the aquavit, clarifying the juices, carbonating the margaritas, and bottling the martinis—all of which can mean only one thing: Existing Conditions, the new bar from the mixology dream team of Dave Arnold (Booker and Dax), Don Lee (formerly of PDT), and Greg Boehm (founder of Cocktail Kingdom), is preparing to open its doors. The mission here is to improve cocktails via science and serve them without a hint of frippery or intimidation. All will cost \$15, including soft drinks meant to simulate the experience of drinking hard ones and three bottled cocktails sold out of vending machines at what Arnold deems the ideal dilution and temperature (minus-4 degrees Celsius). While a few vintage Arnold and Lee creations will be available off-menu, the focus is on new drinks: the Waffle Turkey 101 (Arnold's answer to Lee's bacon-infused bourbon old-fashioned); the Remedy (a tiki drink with acid-adjusted orange juice); and the Saratoga Paloma, which uses mineral water drawn from Saratoga's most saline spring. To prepare these elixirs, the bartenders have at their disposal tools and methods that have become common (directionally frozen clear ice) and some that haven't (Arnold's own inventions the Spinzall centrifuge and Red Hot Pokers). For **The Canary**, a Tuxedo variation, Lee and Arnold use cream whippers and nitrous oxide to rapidly infuse Plymouth gin with saffron, which they combine with fino sherry and yellow Chartreuse. This technique isn't for show. "You get the top notes without the earthy plant flavor," says Lee. The team will also collaborate with chef Josh Eden on the food, which will exploit technology both for the sake of deliciousness and speed of service, a crucial component of any bar menu. In the works: a Ziploc-sealed, low-temp-cooked steak that's ready in ten minutes, and a savory snack mix containing Korean anchovies and freeze-dried kielbasa.

R.R. & R.P.



*The Canary  
cocktail at  
Existing  
Conditions  
contains gin  
infused with  
the help  
of a cream  
whipper.*

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# The CULTURE S



## Out of Exile

Twenty-five years after her career-making album, Liz Phair is still writing songs first and foremost for herself.

*By Emily Gould*

**I** DON'T BELIEVE IN "Heaven," if what you mean by that is the whole St. Peter-pearly gates-throne of God-angels and harps and togas scenario. But it would be cool if everyone ascended to their ideal place after they died—a genuine Good Place filled with whatever activities and people and locations they had found most pleasant and fulfilling in life. I'm thinking about this as Liz Phair greets me with a hug on a perfect blood-warm spring day high in the hills above Los Angeles. She smells like piñon incense and honey, and she looks like a tiny, blue-eyed angel. Did I die? Whatever; here I am!

Phair, whose lyrics and music have been like Scripture for me since I was 12, whose life and talent and career obsess me like no one else's, is going to spend this whole day hanging out with me at the J. Paul Getty Museum, which in and of itself seems heavenly owing to all the cream-colored marble and its panoramic perch. Then we're going to eat several perfect salads at some airy sunlit rich-person L.A. lunch restaurant and a French chauffeur is going to drive us around, past manicured palms and Michael Jackson's old house and the Playboy Mansion. The only out-of-place detail in this me-specific eternal paradise is that I'm seven months pregnant and sort of waddling around and I always have to pee, but in L.A. there's usually a comfortable nice bathroom nearby and you never have to walk very far.

The museum currently hosts an exhibit about ancient Egypt, which fascinates Phair, though history fascinates her in general: She's always scrutinizing art from other times and places and looking for the women. This is what she tries to do with her albums, too, she tells me. "In my mind, I'm making historical documents. I'm doing these things to log on to history, like, 'A woman lived in this time, and this is what it was like for her back then,'" she says. Phair flits through the gallery like a hummingbird, all flowing hair and floaty boho-chic maxidress. We have fun assessing the statues' attractiveness; one reminds her of an Egyptian Channing Tatum (stupid-looking in a hot way). A multi-chinned fellow reminds us both of Rob Kardashian. Then we come to the prettiest statue we've yet seen, of a boy who died in his prime, a young companion of Emperor Hadrian who, the legend

on his vitrine says, was "posthumously honored with a cult."

"That sounds good. Where's my cult?" Phair jokes.

Of course, she sort of already has one: a group of faithful who've been haunting message boards and collecting B-sides and rarities since the 1990s, venerating their goddess even through career transitions that have flummoxed less-fervent devotees. Phair's current project caters to those loyalists. A new boxed set titled *Girly-Sound to Guyville* is the first commercial release of the three bedroom-recorded tapes that first introduced the world to Phair; it includes a brief oral history of the tapes' secretive creation and quasi-accidental release. It also has a simple, poetic essay by Phair about what a typical day of her life was like back when she was 25: living in Chicago's Wicker Park and hanging out in that very macho music scene. It was there that she began to transform these bedroom demos into what would be her debut album, *Exile in Guyville*—an influential record whose success has defined her career ever since, making her, forever and unimpeachably, a rock star.

FROM THE BEGINNING, Phair was ambivalent about her fame; she initially shared the tapes not to book gigs or launch a career but to win the approval of a select group of mostly male friends. When I ask if she cared whether anyone ever heard them, she tells me, "I cared, but my ambition wasn't that wide. I needed certain people to see it. But no, honestly, in a weird way, I don't have that gene ... I have the need to be taken seriously."

Though she played guitar and wrote songs from childhood on, she'd never con-

sidered herself a performer, and when she went to college, she studied visual art, not music. Many songs on the *Girly-Sound* tapes were composed on an unamplified electric guitar in a tiny Lower East Side apartment during a junior year spent away from Oberlin, while interning for visual artist Nancy Spero. They sound so personal because Phair literally was trying to keep her roommates from hearing her record them in her bedroom. Paradoxically, they are lyrically bold, stadium-bombastic. Years before it was de rigueur for women to sing about sexual conquests and furious horniness, Phair sang, "I keep a close watch on this twat of mine ... / And the condom on your dick's the tie that binds." There was a new kind of radical honesty there, too, not just braggadocio: "And we took off all our clothes / Had a lot of sex and then fell asleep," goes one verse of "In Love W/ Yself."

The agonizing process of taking these songs out of the bedroom and into the recording studio for *Exile in Guyville*, then out on tour, had a lasting effect on Phair. "I went from unemployed and super-avoiding-joining-society to being famous. Like famous-famous." She is claustrophobic—carpools are a no-go, as are crowds and subways. And after her next album, *Whip-Smart*, failed to catch fire, she was ready to retreat, at least temporarily, into a life that was the complete opposite of the "adamantly free" one she'd described on *Exile in Guyville*. She met Jim Staskauskas, who'd also grown up in the posh suburbs of Chicago, when he edited one of her music videos, and in 1995, at 27, she married him. At 29, she gave birth to their son.

Elizabeth Staskauskas, as she was legally then known, was an entirely distinct entity from the woman *Rolling Stone* had featured on its cover under the headline A ROCK & ROLL STAR IS BORN. At first, this was a relief. Being a musician, even now, "doesn't feel like my rightful job," Phair explains. "It's kind of weird—when I'm onstage now, I love it. Once I'm going, I feel like this is where I belong and this is where I am, but leading up to it, Elizabeth takes over. When I'm on downtime, she's around."

Elizabeth spent the six years of her marriage near Winnetka, where she grew up, surrounded by the rich Chicago doctors and their wives she'd lived among as a child and teenager. "You have to start giving dinner parties; you have to like do things in the community. There was just a whole extra job component." I imagine the Phair I've long revered in this bizarre, reverse-Sasha Fierce mode, a suburban

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Hunter Douglas

matron at 30; it makes me see the album she wrote next, *Whitechocolatespaceegg*, in a whole new light.

*Whitechocolatespaceegg* is almost nobody else's favorite Liz Phair album, but lately it is mine. Of course, when it came out, I was 17, and I didn't understand it one bit. At 36, pregnant and with a 2-year-old, I tear up as I tell Phair how much the lyric "It's a death in our love that has brought us here / It's a birth that has changed our lives" resonates with me. She says she can still cry thinking about that time, too. "I did bait-and-switch him a little bit," she says of her ex-husband. She had thought that she could live happily as Elizabeth, but it soon turned out that she needed freedom to be Liz. Her claustrophobia isn't only about crowds and tight spaces; it's also about commitments. She had written "Divorce Song" many years before her actual divorce, but her insight about how it's harder to be friends than lovers, and that you shouldn't try to mix the two, turned out to be prescient.

She took five years to make her next album, a long time in pop culture; the difference between 1998 and 2003, to someone who wasn't an adult during that time, is hard to explain. People stopped having CD collections and feeling safe in tall buildings? Everyone hated *Liz Phair*; Liz Phair fans most of all. And to be honest, I don't love it either. The album contains no trace of *Girly-Sound*—no vestige of the lo-fi Phair who'd sung at the bottom of her register to avoid being heard. Instead, she posed nude behind an electric guitar on her album cover and sang about seducing a boy too young to "know who Liz Phair is." The *New York Times* likened the album to a midlife crisis. Phair was 36.

Thinking about that moment now, Phair muses thoughtfully and without any visible rancor about how male rock musicians have long been allowed to have multistage, evolving careers, whereas women rock musicians haven't often been afforded the same opportunity. "I felt like women are really seen as a version of a human. We're not the main humans. We're not here to stay. We're not the firmament, we're a shooting star." She also says something that she claims no one wants to hear about those early-aughts albums—that while she made them, she was "momming." Her son was young; she was single and supporting him. "Everyone's like, 'Where's your edge?' And I'm like, 'Well, I'm not attracted to the edge right now.' But then later I was violently attracted to the edge, 'cause I'm like, *Get me out of this momming phase.*"

My very favorite of her songs, "Shit-

loads of Money," appears in an early version on *Girly-Sound* and in a more polished version, with a very different verse but the same chorus, on *Whitechocolatespaceegg*. It contains what I've long thought of as her motto, words that she herself has possibly tried—and failed—to live her life by: "It's nice to be liked / But it's better by far to get paid." When *Liz Phair* came out, I remember thinking, *This is Liz being not liked but getting paid*. Is that how she saw it, then, too? And did it work?

Her perspective now, at 51, about that particular dichotomy is that striving for anything pushes you further away from it—like the scene in *Alice in Wonderland* (which she loves) where walking toward the house pushes Alice further away from the house. These days, her eye is on a dif-

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ferent prize entirely: "I'm not in it for approval. I'm in it for a totally different drug. I'm in it for creation itself. I'm obsessed with the creative process. I love it." It doesn't bother her that Mick Jagger has, she is almost certain, never heard *Exile in Guyville*, which she loosely structured as a "response" to *Exile on Main St.* It also doesn't bother her that Harry Styles, whom she has run into at her recording studio a few times, definitely has no idea who she is. (She didn't know who he was at first either; she joked around with him when she thought he was the new intern, then froze in starstruck terror when she realized her mistake.)

It might be that she's currently—finally—just far enough above the fray to both see it clearly and make the kind of art she truly wants to, for the first time since the early days of her career. But that will come after the *Guyville* tour—five stops in intimate venues, a challenging prospect not only because she has to play songs she hasn't played in years, some of

which she's never played in public at all, but also because those songs are so similar in instances to versions that made it onto her later albums. "I'm actually abjectly terrified to be up there and have like a brain short-circuit." But it's exciting to know that she'll be playing to her most devoted fans, as well as new acolytes.

On the day we meet, Donald Trump's lawyer's office has just been raided by the FBI, and the national mood (at least in my bicoastal bubble) is hopeful, in that bitter, punch-drunk way we've come to be so familiar with. One of the first signs that I'm not actually in Heaven is when Phair brings up Trump: "I'll do anything I can to take him down," she says as we stroll through the peaceful gallery full of artifacts of a dead civilization.

But Phair feels energized by current events, not enervated, and almost obligated to be more visible now, even though part of her would still like to stay home and be Elizabeth. "I'm coming out with a lot of content the next couple of years, and it's specifically to push back, to make sure that that influence is there available and present. Just like ... a woman working. Here's my thoughts. Here are my opinions. I feel like we are obligated to put stuff out to counteract what is coming in." A new album, the first since 2010's quirky *Funstyle*, is in the works and will supposedly be produced by Ryan Adams, who announced with great Twitter fanfare that he was thrilled to be working with Phair, though Phair's currently mum about the specifics. And Random House has just signed her up to write a memoir called *Horror Stories*. She says she reads every sentence out loud as she writes to make sure it sounds right.

After our perfect salads, Phair insists that we order dessert, profiteroles for her and a warm chocolate-chip cookie for me, and we talk about my son and her son's early childhoods and for a moment I forget that I'm interviewing my idol and that this Heaven is temporary, not just an average day in my life. Phair asks tons of questions, giant blue eyes blazing with fervent interest; she makes me feel like we're close even as she explains that this is a skill she's honed over years of being a confessor for fans who, tricked by her intimate lyrics, mistake her for a friend. "When people come up to me that I don't know, and they have something really important to tell me, I have this depth where I can take them in enough to feel what they're saying, but I don't have to feel it all the way to my full self." It's so nice there in that depth; I wish I could stay there forever. ■



# NEW YORK

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ART

## DEBORAH KASS COVER PREMIERE AT WEWORK

Continuing the yearlong rollout of *New York* Magazine's 50th Anniversary Public Art Exhibit, *New York* partnered with WeWork to showcase the work of iconic artist Deborah Kass on April 18. Held at WeWork's stunning Bryant Park location, the night featured themed cocktails and an artist who created digital portraits of guests on-site.

► [wework.com](http://wework.com)



EVENTS

## HOW I GET IT DONE, FILMMAKER EDITION

On April 27, The Cut presented its second How I Get It Done live event at Home Studios in the Flatiron District. The panel discussion, led by The Cut's senior writer Allie Jones, featured three groundbreaking female filmmakers: Olivia Milch, Dawn Porter, and Susanna White. Event sponsor Nespresso provided coffee-infused bites and drinks

► [nespresso.com](http://nespresso.com)

FILM

## THE MISEDUCATION OF CAMERON POST SCREENING

Vulture partnered with the Tribeca Film Festival for a screening of Desiree Akhavan's *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* on April 24. The film was presented at the Seaport District's iPic Theaters, followed by a Q&A moderated by *New York* Magazine Chief Film Critic David Edelstein, featuring stars Sasha Lane and John Gallagher Jr.

► [tribecafilm.com](http://tribecafilm.com)



ART

## JERRY SALTZ AT FRIEZE ART FAIR

Pulitzer prize-winning *New York* art critic Jerry Saltz gave a talk titled "Art World Lost > Art World Regained?" on May 3 at the Frieze Art Fair on Randall's Island. In celebration of *New York* Magazine's Public Art Exhibit, several artists' covers were displayed at the event, with posters distributed to select guests.

► [frieze.com](http://frieze.com)




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# The Best Stuff of 2018

## MOVIES

By David Edelstein and Emily Yoshida



**ANNIHILATION.** To dismiss it as woo-woo nonsense would be to miss out on all the emotional work that Alex Garland and Natalie Portman are doing. The annihilation of the title is psychological, and it casts a bone-deep dread over the film.



**BLACK PANTHER.** A momentous event in pop culture. Wakanda is a work of genius, with roots in ancient folklore, pop sci-fi, and an Afrofuturism that's all its own. Michael B. Jordan's villain is compelling in ways that leave other comic-book antagonists in the dust.



**THE DEATH OF STALIN.** Armando Iannucci's satire charts the days when the Soviet Union lost its paranoid-psychotic leader of three decades and members of his inner circle argued, plotted, and killed a lot of people while selecting a successor.



**THE FINAL YEAR.** This quietly devastating documentary tracks the Obama administration from late 2015 to early 2017. Viewers know what they don't, that the next president will be bent on undoing everything they're trying to accomplish.



**FOXTROT.** Samuel Maoz's acclaimed and reviled Israeli triptych centers on the death, rebirth, and death of a soldier and his parents' attempts to make sense of the senseless. This is life, Maoz says, in a traumatized, blindly militaristic state.



**HAVE A NICE DAY.** A bag of money and a botched plastic surgery create havoc in a rainy, anonymous postindustrial Chinese town in this animated crime yarn. The humor of Liu Jian's Coen-esque caper is as jarring as its minimalist animation style.



**ISLE OF DOGS.** Wes Anderson's stop-motion-animation film is a gorgeous hodgepodge, its elements magically unified by his asymmetrical compositions, pop-out colors, and dry wit. Bryan Cranston is sharp and soulful as the voice of the main dog.



**PADDINGTON 2.** The sequel follows the template of the original but manages to inject even more fun, freewheeling energy into each beat. In this installment, the Peruvian bear, voiced by Ben Whishaw, tries to find a job and instead winds up ... enacting prison reform?



**THE RIDER.** In Chloé Zhao's lyrical film, injured cowboy Brady and his rodeo riding friends live in a milieu both quintessentially American and obscure to most Americans. Their story will be relatable to anyone who's had a blow to their sense of self.



**THE SEAGULL.** Michael Mayer's Chekhov adaptation is a platform for a handful of definitive performances. Annette Bening makes Arkadina, one of literature's most narcissistic mothers—which is saying something—damnably human.

## TV SHOWS

By Matt Zoller Seitz and Jen Chaney



**THE ASSASSINATION OF GIANNI VERSACE: AMERICAN CRIME STORY** (FX). Ryan Murphy's mini-series starts with the murder and works backward, a gambit that cements a feeling of awful inevitability even as it explores cultural root causes.



**THE CHI** (Showtime). Lena Waithe's drama takes its cues from Robert Altman, Spike Lee, and *The Wire* and *Treme*, driven almost entirely by characterization and atmosphere, interlinking narratives by theme and feeling and not solely by the dictates of plot.



**DIVORCE** (HBO). It may be about a marriage that can't be salvaged, but this series, returning after its patience-trying first season, has patched things up quite nicely with a lighter, funnier touch that doesn't shy away from how complicated it is to undo an "I do."



**FLINT TOWN** (Netflix). Charting the everyday effects of politics on everyday citizens, this docuseries is a straightforward portrait of how race and class affect our perceptions of everything from mundane traffic stops and delinquency to police brutality.



**ONE DAY AT A TIME** (Netflix). The revamped Norman Lear comedy continues to set a reboot gold standard at a moment when we're swimming in reincarnated TV shows. Every episode is funny and warm but never feels dumbed down for mass consumption.



**ON MY BLOCK** (Netflix). Set in South Central Los Angeles, this uncategorizable and addictive series combines the madcap energy of *Seinfeld* and *Malcolm in the Middle* with a gritty, tender strain of urban melodrama.



**QUEER EYE** (Netflix). Is the updated version of the reality series manipulative? Yes. Does that make it less enjoyable or heartening to watch the five new *Queer Eye* experts help men become their better selves while accepting gay men into their lives? No.



**SEVEN SECONDS** (Netflix). This short-lived crime drama is about the effects of one death on a community, but it's suffused with a workaday grit and attention to social reality that evoke Sidney Lumet thrillers about civic corruption like *Prince of the City*, *The Verdict*, and *Q&A*.



**THIS CLOSE** (Sundance Now). A romantic dramedy in which the most important relationship is the platonic one between best friends Kate, who's engaged to a guy who may not be right for her, and Michael, who is gay and struggling with a recent breakup.



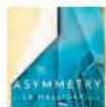
**WILD WILD COUNTRY** (Netflix). This docuseries dissects the clash between a cult that settled in Oregon in the '80s and the locals disturbed by their presence and treats all subjects with respect, leaving judgment to viewers.

## BOOKS

By Christian Lorentzen



**SOME TRICK**, by Helen DeWitt. Several stories in this collection deal with the tragic disconnect between genius and the creative economy. These stories are comic and intricate and cut against the grain of current American fiction in the best of ways.



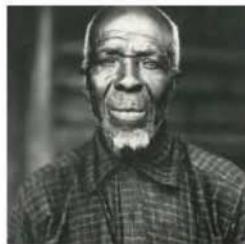
**ASYMMETRY**, by Lisa Halliday. A three-part novel combining the comic and the tragic, the autobiographical and the political, the literal and the meta—a hybrid tour de force of private and public American life under the George W. Bush administration.



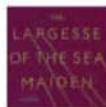
**MOTHERHOOD**, by Sheila Heti. Though critics have treated it as a manifesto or tract on the question of parenthood (and childlessness), it is a masterpiece as a novel for the way Heti captures the texture of life, family relations, friendship, depression, and love.



**THE SPARSHOLT AFFAIR**, by Alan Hollinghurst. A multigenerational epic radiating out from a shattering and deviously withheld scandal, Hollinghurst's sixth novel doubles as a meditation on which stories we choose to tell and why.



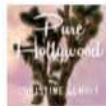
**BARRACOON**, by Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston's never-before-published first book is a sociological portrait of a slave transported on the Middle Passage. The work is tremendously gripping on a linguistic level because of Hurston's commitment to preserving her subject's story in dialect.



**THE LARGESSE OF THE SEA MAIDEN**, by Denis Johnson. This posthumous collection of five stories includes at least one masterpiece. Johnson returns to the territory of his classic *Jesus' Son* and moves beyond it to explore various modes of survival.



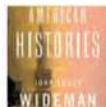
**TRIP: PSYCHEDELICS, ALIENATION, AND CHANGE**, by Tao Lin. Writing about his drug experience opened up for Lin new ways of relating to language. The result is an immediately significant entry in the literature of derangement and recovery.



**PURE HOLLYWOOD**, by Christine Schutt. A book of stories from one of our most distinctive prose stylists, it captures several recognizable sorts of American landscapes and renders them and the people who wander through them in an entirely new light.



**PHONE**, by Will Self. He may not be the last modernist at work, but Self is the most fascinating of the tradition's torchbearers. *Phone* is the final volume in a trilogy that traces the arc of technology and consciousness across the last century.



**AMERICAN HISTORIES**, by John Edgar Wideman. In these autobiographical and historical fictions, Wideman faces up to painful episodes in the nation's history and his own. His approach is unflinching, and he demands the same of his readers.

# (So Far)

Sixty great things from the first half-year to watch, read, and listen to.

## THEATER

By Sara Holdren



**ANGELS IN AMERICA.** The Great Work made its return to Broadway 27 years after its debut, and it turns out a bunch of brilliant Brits (and a few ace Yanks) have cut straight to the heart of Tony Kushner's sprawling, splendid, almost-eight-hour-long two-part opus.



**BALLYTURK.** Enda Walsh's dark fable about two men stuck in a windowless room where they've dreamed up an imaginary town and the secret dramas of all its sad inhabitants is also a play about theater, asking deep questions of artistic utility, courage, and cowardice.



**MEAN GIRLS.** Tina Fey's clever update of the movie—the bouncy story of high-school popularity, back-stabbery, “and getting hit by a bus”—and the high-energy, winky-noddy music make this Broadway bauble a fluffy delight.



**MY FAIR LADY.** Bartlett Sher's revival still looks traditional enough—and downright beautiful, thanks to the luscious sets and costumes—but it feels excitingly fresh, proudly refocused on the character arc of its central flower girl, Eliza Doolittle.



**[PORTO].** Kate Benson's self-aware and at times blessedly silly play—about a 30-something Brooklyn woman seeking definition, satisfaction, and maybe even love in the terrible age of Tinder—had more than its share of brains and heart.



**THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.** The travel diary of a misguided artistic director hoping to revitalize his dance company by taking it to perform in an Iraqi war zone, this satire cast a fiercely skeptical eye on art's relationship with capitalism.



**RETURNING TO REIMS.** Nina Hoss was mesmerizing in this adaptation of the French leftist philosopher Didier Eribon's memoir. The material might not seem wildly theatrical, but there was something gripping in the production's bold request for our attention.



**SUMMER AND SMOKE.** Stripping the stage of props, director Jack Cummings III brings new vitality to the story of Alma Winemiller, a prim preacher's daughter who experiences an awakening in turn-of-the-century Mississippi.



**TRAVESTIES.** Though not technically a wizard, Tom Hollander makes magic at the center of Patrick Marber's dazzling revival of *Travesties*, Tom Stoppard's irrepressible game of intellectual Calvinball involving artists and revolutionaries in Zurich during WWI.



**YERMA.** As a woman futilely obsessed with bearing a child, Billie Piper delivered a stark, brilliant howl of a performance, breaking apart behind the transparent walls of the set like an insect under a magnifying glass. *Yerma* landed like a ruthless fist to the gut.

## PODCASTS

By Nicholas Quah



**CALIPHATE** (New York Times). A serialized documentary grappling with the fundamental questions about the war on terror: How does a person become radicalized? What is the dark appeal of the Islamic State? Who are we really fighting?



**THE HABITAT** (Gimlet Media). This podcast, in which scientists volunteer to live in a dome, was divisive, with some complaining about the lack of actual science. But it's a charming look at normal people mundanely carrying on in an extraordinary environment.



**I ONLY LISTEN TO THE MOUNTAIN GOATS** (Night Vale Presents). A companion to the band's 2002 album *All Hail West Texas*. In each episode, front man John Darnielle focuses on one track, with help from special guests like Andrew Bird and Craig Finn.



**MAKING OBAMA** (WBEZ). A six-episode documentary on Barack Obama's young adulthood in Chicago, where he cut his teeth as a community organizer, ran for office, and planted the seeds that would set the future in motion.



**PERSONAL BEST** (CBC). Every episode of this “self-improvement show” begins with a listener's request to achieve something, but they all end up in the same place: a moment of realization, facilitated by a wildly impractical solution, that reveals a deeper truth.



**THE REWATCHABLES** (The Ringer). A rotating group of smart, funny, nostalgic hosts goes long on the movies you can watch over and over again, including *Point Break*, *The Big Lebowski*, *Good Will Hunting*, *Michael Clayton*, and *You've Got Mail*.



**SLOW BURN** (Slate). Premised on helping listeners understand what it felt like to live through a specific historical moment—in this case, Watergate. Come for the parallels between Nixon and Trump, stay for the endless stream of insane details.



**WEST CORK** (Audible). A true-crime series on the 1996 murder of Sophie Toscan du Plantier, a French film producer who was found near her Irish vacation home, that becomes a character study of a prime suspect who participated in the analysis itself.



**WOLVERINE: THE LONG NIGHT** (Stitcher/Marvel). Marvel's impressive first foray into narrative podcasting, a fictional series about Canada's favorite claw-swinging mutant, takes advantage of the medium to paint Logan as purely a creature of sound.



**WOODEN OVERCOATS** (Independent). A daffy British sitcom in podcast form, now in its third season, about a pair of rival funeral directors (amid a cast of other quirky characters) in a small village on a tiny island in the English Channel.

## ALBUMS

By Craig Jenkins



**INVASION OF PRIVACY**, by Cardi B. It's hard to believe it's been only two years since she starred on *Love and Hip-Hop: New York*. Her career has gone so swimmingly since then that her debut album feels like a coronation.



**KOD**, by J. Cole. Cole, who once wrote diss tracks about other rappers' personal faults, might not seem like the most sensitive vessel for an album about drugs, sex, money, and internet addiction, but *KOD* is tender and patient with its subjects.



**DIRTY COMPUTER**, by Janelle Monáe. This smart, versatile collection of funk, pop, rock, and soul vibes, with guest appearances from Stevie Wonder, Brian Wilson, and Pharrell Williams, will convince you that Monáe is the full package.



**NOW ONLY**, by Mount Eerie. Singer-songwriter Phil Elverum picks up where last spring's *A Crow Looked at Me* left off, upping the ante on *Crow*'s shattered, grief-wracked folk songs with splashes of electric guitar and drums that will remind fans of Elverum's tenure with the Microphones.



**GOLDEN HOUR**, by Kacey Musgraves. She swings from country-rock through MOR-infused Americana, disco and hip-hop beats, and rainy-day folk. Her band is versatile, her voice is a revelation, and her writing packs worlds of feeling into just a few words.



**VENTRILLOQUISM**, by Meshell Ndegeocello. A covers album on which she turns Lisa Lisa's “I Wonder If I Take You Home” into funk and the Force MDS’ “Tender Love” into country and pays tribute to Prince with “Sometimes It Snows in April.”



**THE SCIENCES**, by Sleep. The doom-metal trio's first album since 1999 was a perfect 4/20 surprise, opening with three minutes of feedback and the sound of a bong rip, then burning through five impossibly heavy guitar workouts.



**ISOLATION**, by Kali Uchis. She's not your traditional soul singer. Her wan, airy voice is more reminiscent of '60s European yé-yé or tropicália than modern R&B. It's expressive without being showy, and her debut is a treat.



**VIRTUE**, by the Voidz. The second album from Strokes leader Julian Casablancas's other band scales back on the harsher sounds of its 2014 debut in favor of an unexpected but effective mix of hard rock, trip-hop, chillwave, and punk.



**MY DEAR MELANCHOLY**, by the Weeknd. A return to the stoned, noirish glee of his early material; through a pall of hurt and a bed of elite production, singer Abel Tesfaye reclaims his crown as R&B's lascivious prince.

PHOTOGRAPHS: BRINKHOFF-MOEGENBURG (ANGELS IN AMERICA); TEDDY WOLFF (BALLYTURK); JOAN MARCUS (MEAN GIRLS, MY FAIR LADY, TRAVESTIES); MARIA BARANOVA ([PORTO]); ANDREJ LAMUT (THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS); ARNO DELCAIR (RETURNING TO REIMS); CAROL ROSEGG (SUMMER AND SMOKE); JOHAN PERSSON (YERMA)

# Paul Schrader Comes to Jesus

After iffy collaborations with porn stars and Nicolas Cage, the writer-director might have finally made his masterpiece.

By Kevin Lincoln

FIRST REFORMED opens May 18.

**W**HEN *Dying of the Light* was released in 2014, its writer and director, Paul Schrader, thought his career was over. The film, which starred Nicolas Cage as a CIA agent trying to catch a terrorist before losing his mind to dementia, had been taken out of

Schrader's hands because he'd deviated from the formula set by the movie's financiers, which predicted that if it included  $x$  number of action sequences in  $y$  number of minutes, they'd earn  $z$  percent on their investment. (The financiers said Schrader's cut of the film differed from his original script; *Drive* director Nicholas Winding Refn, an executive

producer on *Dying of the Light*, says Schrader's version was "absolutely terrific.") If the predicament sounds beneath the screenwriter of *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull* and the director of *American Gigolo*, *Blue Collar*, and *Mishima*, that's because it was. "I never cared that much for final cut in the past, because you were always dealing with studio heads who were movie people—they all liked movies. But now I was dealing with financial people," says Schrader, 71. "That was a very, very bad experience. I spiraled into alcoholism and depression, and I thought that was it: The last film in my career was going to be a fiasco."

Luckily, he was wrong. We're sitting in the garden terrace of the Chateau Marmont's restaurant discussing his new movie, *First Reformed*, a non-fiasco. The New York-based Schrader has come down to Los Angeles for the day from San Francisco,

where he just showed the film; he's been making the festival rounds, including Venice, Telluride, and New York—A24 snapped it up at Toronto—where it's been greeted as Schrader's masterpiece, the culmination of career-spanning obsessions.

In *First Reformed*, a pregnant woman named Mary, played by the actually pregnant Amanda Seyfried, comes to Ethan Hawke's Reverend Toller, a despondent, alcoholic minister at the First Reformed Church in upstate New York, begging him to talk to her environmentalist husband, Michael (Philip Ettinger), who can't square his impending fatherhood with the ecological collapse he believes is just decades away. "Can God forgive us for what we've done to this world?" Michael asks Toller, a question that, in the hands of some writers, might remain a rhetorical one. But for Schrader and his reverend, this idea becomes a movie-

length confrontation between the nature of faith, capitalism's role in organized religion, and man's responsibility to nature.

"Most contemporary movies don't ask you to think; they don't ask unanswerable questions," Hawke says. "A lot of filmmakers have an agenda: They're trying to convince you to think the way that they think. What Paul is doing is my favorite thing a filmmaker can do, which is present life to you so that you ask yourself these questions."

By this point, Schrader's biography is part of Hollywood legend, but it may have more bearing on *First Reformed* than any of his other films: He grew up with strict Calvinist parents and didn't see his first movie until he was 17 years old; he went to UCLA Film School thanks in part to a recommendation letter from Pauline Kael; he wrote the book *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* when he was just 24; and he wrote the screenplay for *Taxi Driver* a few years later. Lately, he's shown himself willing to experiment and take risks. In 2013, he made *The Canyons*, a California noir starring Lindsay Lohan and the porn star James Deen, with a script by Bret Easton Ellis, funded partly via Kickstarter donations.

After the debacle of *Dying of the Light*, Schrader was approached to direct a crime thriller called *Dog Eat Dog*, and he saw an opportunity. "I had been talking to Nic, and I said, 'Nic, we've got to work together again, we've got to get this stain off our clothes'—of course, he'll never get all the stains off his clothes," Schrader says, laughing. "And this time, I said, 'I will have final cut, and we'll do exactly what we want.'"

"Exactly what we want" meant a gonzo pulp thriller starring Cage's Humphrey Bogart impression. While it might not be headed for the Criterion Collection anytime soon, *Dog Eat Dog* is fun and idiosyncratic, and in a certain sense, it lifted enough stains for the director to embark on *First Reformed*.

It's no accident that *First Reformed* coincides with the University of California Press's republishing of *Transcendental Style in Film*—which assesses how Robert Bresson, Carl Theodor Dreyer, and Yasujiro Ozu withhold typical filmmaking elements like non-diegetic music, camera movement, editing, and the expressiveness of actors in order to evoke a sense of the spiritual. Schrader had recently begun rethinking *Transcendental Style*, and an encounter with the Polish director Pawel Pawlikowski, whose 2013 film *Ida* Schrader had loved, led him to finally make a movie of his own in that fashion.

"People would try to compare that book to the films I was involved in, and I would

*Paul Schrader on  
his lawn in  
Putnam County,  
New York.*



say, “No, I’m not that guy,” Schrader says. “I like these films, but I’m just too intoxicated with action, empathy, sex, and violence, and those elements aren’t in the transcendental tool kit.” But Pawlikowski told Schrader that after receiving overtures from Hollywood, he’d had a revelation: As long as he could make a movie for under \$2 million in Poland, he could do anything he wanted. After *Dying of the Light*, the message carried a particular resonance. Schrader made *First Reformed* in 20 days for \$2.5 million, partnering with Christine Vachon’s Killer Films and Arclight Films, which also contributed to *Dog Eat Dog*, shooting in a version of transcendental style, observing rules that, on occasion, he breaks to great effect. When Richard Linklater saw it, he told Hawke that no one had even tried to make a film like it in decades.

In addition to the festivals, Schrader’s been taking *First Reformed* to seminaries, where he’s been gathering ammunition, in the form of support and praise from religious leaders, in case conservatives come after him, like they did following 1988’s *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which he wrote.

He acknowledges, though, that plenty’s changed since then. “Because we’ve democratized filmmaking, the good news is almost anybody can make a film; the bad news is nobody can make any money,” Schrader says. “Movies were born of capitalism: You pay for it, we’ll make it for you. There was no tradition of the courts and the church and all that. Therefore, it had a special relationship to capitalism that really protected it. Now that’s broken, and so it’s like every other art form: It’s like poetry, or novels, or painting.”

Though television is making money, and Schrader’s been impressed by its recent quality, he doesn’t think he’ll end up working in the medium. “TV isn’t as free as you think it is,” he says, explaining that Netflix and Amazon rejected *First Reformed* both when it was a screenplay and then again when it was a completed film. But he believes he’s got a film or two left in him, and has in fact begun writing a new project. With his *First Reformed* editor, he also recut *Dying of the Light* into a movie that he calls *Dark*, which, he says, goes from being a “Nic Cage film to a Stan Brakhage film.” He’s legally prevented from screening the cut publicly, but he managed to sneak a few clips into a lecture at Rotterdam that’s available to watch on YouTube.

Lately, he’s found a new perspective on the question that bothered him just four years ago. “That same feeling I had about *Dying of the Light*—is this going to be the end?—I’m having that feeling again. Only now it feels good instead of bad.” ■

# What Else Should We Burn?

Ramin Bahrani updates *Fahrenheit 451* for 2018.

By Rollo Romig

FAHRENHEIT 451 debuts  
May 19 on HBO.

 WHEN I ASK Ramin Bahrani, writer and director of HBO’s new TV movie *Fahrenheit 451*, why he thought the world needed another adaptation of the Ray Bradbury sci-fi dystopian classic when there’s already a François Truffaut version from 1966, he points to my iPhone and says, “This thing.”

Bradbury’s original 1953 novel imagined a United States that has outlawed books, which are referred to as “graffiti”; teams of “firemen” are tasked with burning them to suppress the dangerous ideas contained within. But two years ago, when Bahrani showed an early outline of his screenplay to a friend, the friend said, “I read this on my tablet, which has a million books on it—why do I care about burning paper books?” “It hit me: I have to answer this guy,” Bahrani says. “I threw that outline away.”

In the finished film, Americans have surrendered control of all information to the government and tech companies, and “graffiti” includes anything that might be preserved in a library, the cloud, or personal device—books above all, but also art, music, history, and the archived internet. The only media allowed is a social-network-slash-online-store called “The 9”—an endless, ubiquitous feed that disappears as soon as it passes, faster than an Instagram story. Also, citizens are monitored by a virtual assistant named Yuxie, who’s always watching and listening, and the firemen are social-media celeb-

rities. (Guy Montag, who begins to question his work, is played by Michael B. Jordan, and Beatty, his boss, who has conflicts of his own, by Michael Shannon.) Inevitably, our president was an influence, too. Bahrani says that after Trump won the New Hampshire primary, he started “layering things into the script assuming he would win” the election, including fake news and raids on noncitizens.

Bahrani has a way with grim material—his 2005 debut, *Man Push Cart*, is about a former Pakistani rock star who sells bagels out of a Manhattan street cart and whose fortunes plummet from there, and his other films center on homeless orphans (*Chop Shop*), suicide (*Goodbye Solo*), and home foreclosure (*99 Homes*)—so I suppose I expected him to be a gloomy mope trailed by a personal rain cloud. But when he arrived to meet me on a recent Tuesday afternoon at Williamsburg’s Martha’s Country Bakery, the staff all seemed to light up at the sight of him. Two waiters came over to shake his hand, even though he’d just been there that morning, as he is most mornings, at 6 a.m., to write and eat cookies. “There’s one

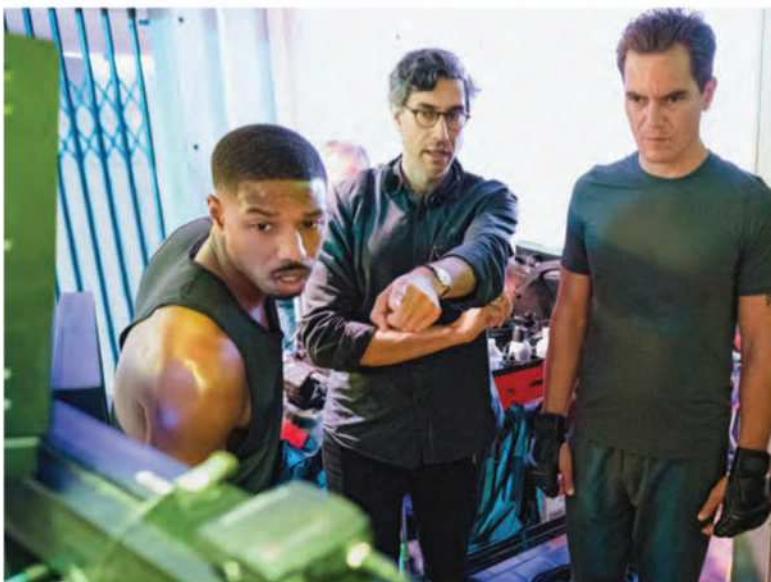
cookie I need after two hours to have energy to go two more hours," Bahrani says. "It's the powdered one with the pistachio inside."

So maybe it's just his entire worldview that's gloomy. "My parents are from Iran," he says by way of explanation. "It's a tragic culture. Maybe too much so." I ask if, in making *Fahrenheit 451*, Bahrani had been thinking about ISIS or the Taliban and their destruction of antiquities. "No," he says. "We don't need a Taliban regime or a Hitler regime. We are asking for these things on our own. I find this much more frightening." Or, as one character in the novel puts it: The firemen are rarely necessary. "We voted for certain people to take control of our politics, of our economy, of our society, of our laws," says Bahrani. "We ask not to have privacy. We ask to give all our information away. We ask to read only the headlines. We ask to respond with just a 'like,' and that's our protest ... 'We're the happiness boys, you and I,' Beatty says to Montag [in the book]. They're burning stuff to keep people happy."

"There's a lot of stuff we had in the script that unfolded [in real life] while we were shooting it," Jordan told me when I met him on the film's set back in September. "It's fucking crazy." They were on location in a postindustrial suburb of Toronto, which was doubling for a postindustrial suburb of Cleveland; to make it look more like America, they had to spread trash on the ground. On the concrete waterfront of Lake Ontario, doubling for Lake Erie, Jordan was using a lighter to examine a flame-singed copy of *Notes From the Underground*, the first book his character has ever opened. He said he clicked more quickly with Bahrani than with any director besides Ryan Coogler, with whom he's made three films. Bahrani "did his research on me," said Jordan. When they first met, "he told me about all the interviews I've ever done. I was like, *That's cool. And a little weird.*"

Jordan said working with pyrotechnics was fun and likens his flamethrower to "a very dangerous Super Soaker." But he was haunted by the scene in which a woman sets herself on fire to burn along with her beloved library. "It reminded me of Thich Quang Duc, who set himself on fire in Vietnam in 1963, ten years after *Fahrenheit 451* was published. "It made me want to believe in something that wholeheartedly. Could I ever be so mentally tough to do something like that?" (In an odd echo, the civil-rights lawyer David Buckel died by self-immolation in Prospect Park on April 14, to draw attention, he said, to environmental crises.)

"For Ramin, the engine of the story was the relationship between Beatty and Mon-



Michael B. Jordan, Bahrani, and Michael Shannon.

tag," says Shannon, who played a real-estate eviction agent in Bahrani's *99 Homes*. "It's what made it alive instead of just some stiff pedantic rabble-rouser." Bahrani wrote his version of Beatty for Shannon, and he's a more complicated character than the one in the novel—somehow assertively ambivalent, in the way that only Shannon can pull off. "Ramin has a lot of trust in me," Shannon says. "It's kind of remarkable considering the amount of time he puts into preparing a project, the amount of time he spends

**"I was trying to burn books that are important, but you also have to sneak in 'The Art of the Deal.'"**

writing it, how willing he is to let it go."

Bradbury has a loyal fan base that Bahrani hopes not to run afoul of, but the director did tweak his source material. When the trailer for Bahrani's version appeared on YouTube, many comments amounted to: "I'll be okay with this, as long as they don't screw up the Mechanical Hound"—Montag's robot nemesis for the second half of the novel. Well, there is no Mechanical Hound in Bahrani's movie (as there wasn't in Truffaut's). Montag's intellectual guide, Faber, is gone, as is Montag's wife. In Bradbury's

novel, the character Clarisse is an innocent teenager who helps sow Montag's doubts about his work and disappears soon after; in Bahrani's film she's an adult, played by Sofia Boutella, and a sort of double agent. "I think Bradbury allows that," Bahrani says. (Bradbury himself wrote a stage adaptation of the book that revised the character of Clarisse and even collaborated on a video-game sequel to *Fahrenheit 451* that was released in 1984.)

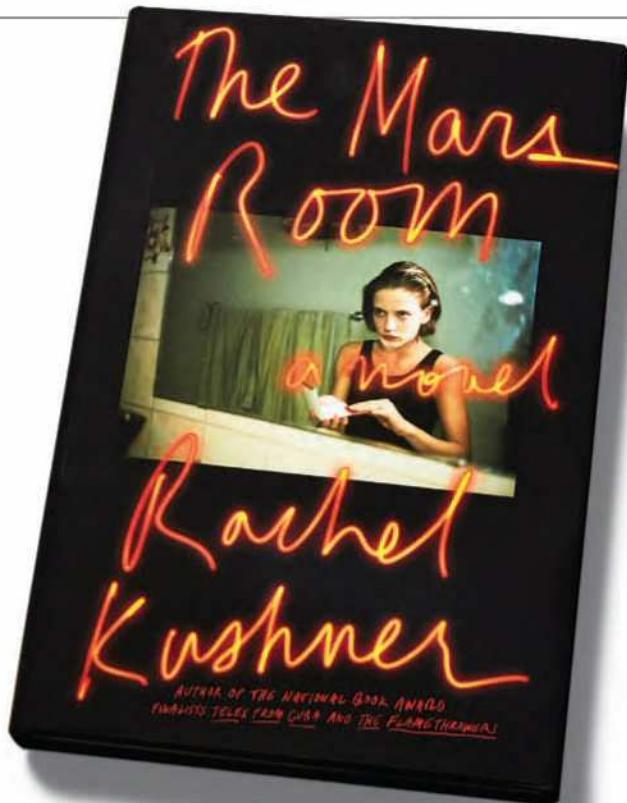
Bahrani was faithful where it counts, though: He torched lots of books, many more than made the movie's final cut. Some books burned because they'd been burned in real life: *Harry Potter*, for example, because people threatened to light their copies on fire after J.K. Rowling started criticizing Trump. Other books had personal significance to Bahrani, like Persian poetry books by Hafez and Ferdowsi. "I was trying to burn books that I love and that are important, but you also have to sneak in, you know, a diet book, or *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*—that has to be saved, too, right? If you're gonna save Camus, you have to save *The Art of the Deal*. Or we have Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book*—I thought that would be good because Chairman Mao killed a lot of people, but that book should be saved too."

Bahrani couldn't get the rights to the artwork for most of the books he wanted to burn, so he hired designers to make new covers, and it nags him that he couldn't show them all. "There should be a director's cut," he says, "where it's all burning books." ■

The CULTURE PAGES

## CRITICS

Christian Lorentzen on Rachel Kushner's *The Mars Room* ... David Edelstein on *The Seagull* and *First Reformed* ... Jerry Saltz on fixing art fairs.



BOOKS / CHRISTIAN LORENTZEN

## What's Missing in Rachel Kushner's New Novel?

### Besides plot.

WHEN A PARTICULAR QUOTATION keeps appearing before your eyes, it must be speaking to the times. This year I keep coming across a line of Stendhal's: "Politics in a literary work is like a gunshot in the middle of a concert, something vulgar and yet impossible to ignore." It pops up in Lisa Halliday's recent *Asymmetry*, and it was in my head as I was reading Rachel Kushner's new novel of incarceration, *The Mars Room*. It's a book that urgently embraces the vulgar and leaves you with the feeling that the concert has been staged so that the reader will hear the gunshots fired.

All three of Kushner's novels are political, but in her previous two, both historical fiction, politics were glimpsed at a remove of at least a

few decades: *Telex From Cuba* (2008) was set in Cuba on the eve of revolution; *The Flamethrowers* linked the proto-Fascist Futurist avant-garde of post-World War I Italy to the leftist avant-garde of 1970s New York. *The Mars Room* unfolds mostly in California during the George W. Bush administration (not exactly a historical novel, then; the German term is *Zeitroman*: a fiction about the times the author has lived through). It examines conditions that are ongoing and—in terms of statistics to do with incarceration, including incarceration of women—worsening. The novel's matrix radiates out from Stanville, a women's prison in California's Central Valley where sometime-narrator Romy Hall is serving two life sentences plus six years for killing a man who was stalking her.

Kushner is an admirer of Don DeLillo's 1997 masterpiece, *Underworld*, and provided a succinct description of it in a 2015 essay for the *Guardian*: "While big structures of history shape the characters (as they do us), this novel is also filled with glimpses of people alone and together with their private faiths, their unspeakable thoughts, artfully converted to language, into naked epiphany, subtle and precise." This could also serve as a description of Kushner's books, or what they're attempting, and the crux of these novels is the way they balance the structural and the private. In *The Flamethrowers*, most of the characters are artists, and the novel is infused with ideas about art that sometimes overwhelm their private lives. The ideas sparkle, but the plotting—especially a strand to do with adultery—is thin by comparison. There's a similar imbalance at work in *The Mars Room*.

The politics of *The Mars Room* are pessimistic, and Kushner's vision of the American carceral archipelago and the justice system in general is relentlessly and convincingly grim. Romy was terrorized by the man she killed, but that doesn't come into her case in court, largely because her public defender is old, tired, incompetent, and possibly drunk. She and her mother lack

**THE MARS ROOM**  
BY RACHEL KUSHNER.  
SCRIBNER, 352  
PAGES, \$27.

the resources to afford anything better, she's unwilling to accept a plea bargain, and once convicted she has no recourse to appeal. When she arrives at Stanville, she's disciplined by indifferent or sadistic guards and things only get worse. Kushner's narrative attention turns to the economy of prison life in forensic detail. To anyone without experience of prison, this will be jarring and appalling. Within the texture of the novel, it's also bluntly didactic.

Stanville's codes and transactions are conjured in a way that mimics the bourgeois novel of manners, but the inversion has the effect of distracting you from the experience of imprisonment, even as you sense you're being tapped on the shoulder and told, *This is what it's like to be in prison*. It's an authenticity that diminishes as the particulars of deprivation accumulate.

Like Reno—who narrates most of *The Flamethrowers* and represents the young woman who moves to New York with as much ambition as innocence but too often seems just a blank slate—Romy comes across as more concept than character. She's a victim of circumstance until she's a victim of the justice system. She's undeniably sympathetic but not always interesting. We hear a lot of anecdotes from her past life, but in bits that lose their energy as soon as they're told. Her son is relentlessly idealized until he seems less like a boy than a device to pull at readers' and characters' heartstrings. It's a churlish thing to say about the way a mother thinks of a son from whom she's been separated for years (and perhaps permanently), but it's striking in contrast to the rest of the novel's cast. The voices of other inmates at Stanville—particularly those of Conan, a black trans man who one night becomes her lover, and of Laura Lipp, a Christian girl from a middle-class family who murdered her own child and is a prison pariah—intrude with a comic force because they're largely free of the conceptual burdens Romy bears. They're the best thing in the book.

The novel grows more and more essayistic as it goes on, leaving aside Romy's backstory and taking up those of peripheral characters, mostly in third person. Romy's voice veers in register, sometimes within the same paragraph, between a hard-boiled street vernacular and an explanatory, almost bureaucratic, clinical tone deployed to explain prison procedures down to the dimensions of the cage. The third-person sections are even more unstable, lurching from free indirect discourse to what seems like authorial commentary. As the predatory police officer Doc sits in his cell bunk trying to masturbate, he remembers one of his conquests on the outside: "What Doc liked

about the bartender at Las Brisas was a sense of radical acceptance she offered. Sometimes ejaculating all over someone is a way for that person to communicate to you that they take you completely and totally as you are." Are these the thoughts of a crooked cop or of the progressive therapist he never had the luck to meet? These lapses in point of view add to the sense that we're being taught a lesson (one we'd probably agree with, about cycles of abuse) more than we're being told a story.

Of course, there can be something bracing about being taught a lesson, but it's also fair to want more from a novel than the sensation of nodding your head in agreement. *The Mars Room* does belong to a venerable tradition in American literature. It partakes of the social realism of

Upton Sinclair and Sinclair Lewis, and the naturalism of Theodore Dreiser and Jack London. Incarceration, in *The Mars Room*, resembles the blizzard that bites the hero of London's *To Build a Fire*: an all-encompassing system that's inescapable and deadly. The mission of these writers was to open the eyes of middle-class readers to shadowy iniquities, to the plights of fellow citizens crushed by larger forces. That's a task the American novel hasn't assumed in a long time, but it remains alive in journalism, film, and television. Without either a strong plot (a thin one does arise late in the book) or a religious framework, *The Mars Room* is rarely entertaining or beautiful. But perhaps suspense and beauty are mere luxuries when the mission is righteous. ■

MOVIES / DAVID EDELSTEIN

## Chekhov's Mom Annette Bening's Arkadina steals *The Seagull*.



AS HE DEMONSTRATED in *The Seagull* and would refine in the three (arguably greater) dramatic masterpieces that followed, Anton Chekhov had a genius for transforming seemingly idle conversation into music, with every instrument noodling away in its private sphere and yet somehow coalescing into a melancholy human symphony.

The new film adaptation, directed by Michael Mayer from a script by Stephen Karam (who wrote the ghostly, neo-Ibsen drama *The Humans*), pares down the chitchat and breaks up some of that ensemble flow. The narrative beats are heavy, reaction shots abound, and wordless digressions are numerous. The intent, of course, is to make a *movie* rather than another stodgy piece of filmed theater, with the result being that some of Chekhov's music is lost—but a surprising amount of tension is gained. Above all, Mayer's *The Seagull* is a platform for several definitive performances.

Chief among those is Annette Bening's Arkadina, the aging actress who returns to her estate on a lake outside Moscow with her lover, the celebrated short-story writer Trigorin (Corey Stoll). There awaits her high-strung son, Treplev (Billy Howle),

**THE SEAGULL**  
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL  
MAYER. SONY PICTURES  
CLASSICS. PG-13.

**FIRST REFORMED**  
DIRECTED BY PAUL  
SCHRADER. A24. R.



Annette Bening  
and Jon Tenney  
in *The Seagull*.

eager to show off his own artistry, a symbolic dream play he intends as a challenge to the classical theater in which his mother made her name. Given that it's a provocation, it shouldn't surprise him that Arkadina makes stinging comments, but he stomps off into the woods while Arkadina asks, with feigned ingenuousness, "What did I do?"

"What did I do?" makes my blood boil every time. Arkadina is one of literature's most narcissistic mothers—which is saying something, given how much of the Western canon is revenge on Mom. But Bening makes her damnably human. No actor is better at suggesting the tension between the public persona and the desperate soul beneath, struggling to hold the mask in place. Bening's Arkadina puts all her acting wiles into convincing her family, maybe even herself, that her fame and youthful good looks are at their peak. How deluded she remains about her miserliness in the realms of both money and mother love. And how hungrily she monitors Trigorin's responses, so dependent on the famed author to complete her that she pays scant attention to the son who begs her to complete him. No wonder Treplev has a Hamlet complex.

A character lamely jokes that unrequited love happens only in plays, and this one is a riot of the unrequited. Watch Elisabeth Moss's Masha, floridly forlorn daughter of the estate manager, trail after Treplev, who trails after his actress-muse Nina (Saoirse Ronan), while the hapless schoolteacher (Michael Zegen) trails after Masha—observed by Masha's mother (Mare Winningham), who pines for the middle-aged doctor Dorn (Jon Tenney). The actors are all you could wish for, and Moss is something more. She gives Masha a tragic awareness—and a hint of the demonic.

Watching this *Seagull*, you see how Chekhov—physician, author, playwright—split himself into three: Dorn, the sympathetic healer who wishes he could minister to sick souls; Treplev, the showboater obsessed with new artistic forms to express human suffering; and the celebrated Trigorin, a borderline vampire who constantly takes notes on people he'll transform into characters. Trigorin (whom Stoll underacts cunningly, as a man who guards his energy) is Chekhov's warning to himself of what happens when artistic dispassion interferes with empathy.

Howle looks and acts like too much of a soap-stud to convey Treplev's inner flip-flops, but he's intense, and he and Bening do a bang-up job on the bandaging scene, in which Arkadina ministers to Treplev's self-inflicted gunshot wound and ends up ripping off whatever emotional scabs her son has formed. As Arkadina's elderly brother, Sorin, Brian Dennehy is merely perfect. He has the serenity—and morbid humor—

of a man who knows he's on his way out.

The lone disappointment is Ronan, who's never less than magnetizing but limited in a way I hadn't anticipated: She can't fully give herself to a character she doesn't respect. Her early Nina is a mindless romantic, blushing at her proximity to fame, while the Nina of the final act, beaten down by two years of crushing emotional trials, is too guarded. The role is admittedly a killer. I've seen half a dozen actresses go down in flames, and even Vanessa Redgrave—in Sidney Lumet's overly effusive film, in which characters keep taking one another's heads in their hands—got only halfway there. The exception was Carey Mulligan, who evoked the tragedy of a woman simultaneously opened up and destroyed.

Mayer and Karam keep their touch relatively light until the end, when they do one thing that's very smart and one that's unforgivable. They close on Arkadina, who knows in her bones what has happened—and Bening has made an art of such shots since her wordless but epic reaction to news of her boyfriend's death in *Bugsy*. The unforgivable: repeating, in voice-over, a line from Treplev's allegorical play. Repurposing the words of a soulful but pretentious young character as an epilogue for the whole play is using Chekhov's dramatic instincts against him. A more histrionic critic would call for Mayer to be beaten about the kidneys and forced to remove the offending line. I'd settle for his removing the line.

THE SEARCHING loss-of-faith drama *First Reformed* is the happy result of Paul Schrader's entering the what-the-hell-let's-go-for-it stage of his long and bravely self-lacerating career (see page 84). Having somehow survived *The Canyons* (if you're going to martyr yourself, okay—but for Lindsay Lohan?), he now takes on the most yawning of all canyons. His protagonist is Toller (Ethan Hawke), an emotionally bereft, alcoholic pastor who preaches at First Reformed, a historic upstate New York church (established in 1767, it was once a stop on the Underground Railroad) more popular as a tourist destination than a place of worship. (Most congregants attend the nearby megachurch that owns First Reformed.) Toller came to this assignment relatively late, following a family tragedy for which he feels responsible, and he cannot even pray without questioning the medium. "The desire for prayer is itself a prayer," he writes in a longhand journal—an experiment in examining himself with "no mercy."

Schrader's setup owes much to Ingmar Bergman's severely depressing *Winter Light* (1963)—in both, a pregnant wife comes to the pastor for help with a despairing husband. But there are crucial differences.

Bergman's husband is apolitical, thrown into a spiritual chasm by Chinese nukes; Schrader's, a radical environmental activist (Philip Ettinger) who can't bring a child into a doomed world. This is a *Winter Light* for the age of Trump, the Iraq War, and 350.org. Unable to save a man whose cause he comes to see as righteous, Toller regards the church—which has thrown in its lot with the despoilers—with horror. As in all of Schrader's work, the hunger for transcendence manifests itself in violence against both others and the self—though by the end, there's not much of a separation.

*First Reformed* is rigorously austere (as befits the author of *Transcendental Style in Film*), but every frame suggests a longing for a world elsewhere. It could be argued that it gets away from Schrader, who probably had to wrest the script from his own hands to begin shooting. The climax borders on the ludicrous, the finale is ... a stretch. Nevertheless, my admiration is complete. Why make a film like this if you won't flirt with disaster?

The villain—a polluter who's the church's principal benefactor—is too broadly drawn, and there's only so much Amanda Seyfried can do with the part of the wife, here an idealized love object. But Hawke drives himself to a feverish pitch that makes you pray—whatever your degree of faith—for the character's continued existence. The question Schrader poses remains unanswered: "Can God forgive us for what we've done to this world?" ■

ART | JERRY SALTZ

## Break the Art Fair

The system can't survive much longer.



AS A SYSTEM, art fairs are like America: They're broken and no one knows how to fix them. Like America, they also benefit those at the very top more than anyone else, and this gap is only growing. Like America, the art world is preoccupied by spectacle—which means nonstop art fairs, biennials, and other blowouts. Yet the places where new art comes from, where it is seen for free and where almost all the risk and innovation arise—medium and smaller galleries—are ever pressured by rising art-fair costs, shrinking attendance and

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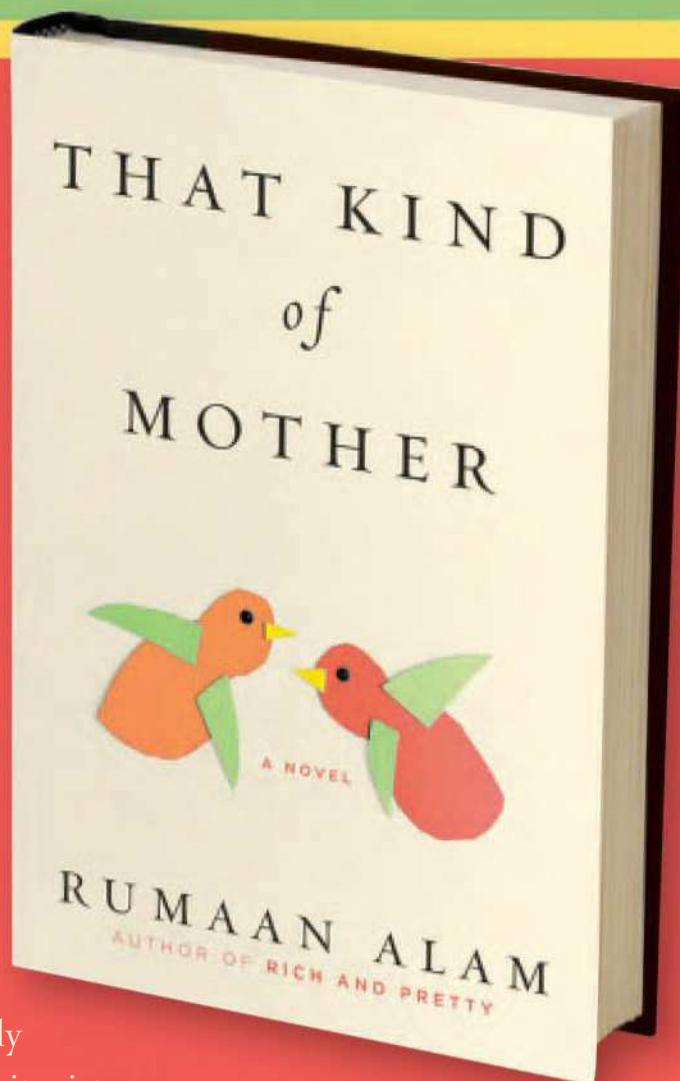
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*NEW YORK*

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business at the gallery itself, rents, and overhead. This art-fair-industrial complex makes it next to impossible for any medium or small gallery to take a chance on bringing unknown or lower-priced artists to art fairs without risking major financial losses. Meanwhile, high-end galleries clean up without showing much, if anything, that's risky or innovative.

Look at the basic cost for doing Frieze New York, which opened on May 3. A large booth costs \$120,000. A gallery can sometimes pay another \$15,000 to \$18,000 to build out the booth. On-site handling costs can run another \$5,000. One dealer told me he paid \$350 to have an electric socket installed at the Armory Show. If you're a local space, you don't have to pay tens of thousands of dollars for long-distance shipping, travel, and hotel costs for staff. Still, even a local gallery pays about \$5,000 to get the art packed and shipped to and from Frieze; for those traveling from abroad, or those American galleries traveling to art fairs in London or Hong Kong, of course, the cost is much higher. Never mind that these galleries are double-staffing at the fair and for their New York galleries at the same time.

Many people will object: "Yes, but galleries make lots of money at fairs." The big ones almost always do. The smaller ones can as well if the fair costs aren't too high, and/or if they get lucky or have a good year. But, as you move away from the upper-crust galleries, sales can be scanty. Know that when galleries do sell a work of art, they split half or more of the sale price with the artist. (In some cases, it's said, top-end artists get as much as 80 percent of the sale price.) So any gallery with a large booth at Frieze is probably counting on at least \$350,000 in sales, just to break even. If a gallery does sell less-known or less-expensive work, the dealer is still all but guaranteed to take a major loss.

I accept that one often does find work we don't know at fairs, that it's wonderful for newer galleries to be seen at big fairs, and that you can have fun at them when you're not feeling alienated or worn out from it all. Even so, the large art fairs (Frieze London and New York and Basel everywhere) turn everything into roadkill—including attendees. First-time fairgoers often have a hard time getting past a half-dozen booths before burning out. Old hands tend to know how to "skim" a bit better—but that isn't good for the art, either!

Everyone talks about these problems. Notably, of late, the harrowingly honest, brilliantly incisive Artnet interview with Team Gallery's José Freire—one of the better art dealers of the last 20 years, a gallerist whose taste is razor sharp and extremely difficult for some (me included). Since 2001, Freire has done 79 art fairs, so he



*Frieze New York, 2018.*

knows whereof he speaks. He says that “we’re in the endgame” phase of art fairs, that money “can’t corrupt the art world any more than it already has.” He adds, “I haven’t met a new person in Basel in at least ten years.” Whether he’s talking about the aesthetic emptiness of fairs or a broken business model, he surmises that you can now miss an art fair and by “scrolling through Instagram you’ll know the same thing.” All this strikes me as about right. Meanwhile, local gallerists have to travel halfway around the world to participate in fairs to maybe meet a curator who works less than a mile from the gallery but who now does much of his/her gallery-looking en masse at art fairs. We’re all busy these days, I know, but curators ignoring local galleries should be fired; ditto directors not making certain that curators regularly visit local galleries. Freire observes that curators who formerly did look for new work at art fairs are now there mainly “to walk their trustees around.”

Attend the opening day of any fair and you’ll see why the big galleries like this system. But medium and small dealers are caught in a Catch-22. Since big fairs are now one of the definitions of success, of being a player, smaller galleries compete to appear in them, even if they won’t make money doing so; not to be in them sometimes signifies weakness. But this pressure to participate (*Keeping Up With the Gagosians*) makes it almost impossible to grow a gallery to the next level—all the energy and money is pumped into just keeping up. At the same time, the bigger dealers love having the look of underground, hip, young galleries in the mix because it allows collectors, artists, and even dealers to think of themselves as engaged in a big, messy, underground riot when in fact the whole business passes through a half-dozen corporate megagalleries and everything else is negligible window dressing.

With all this in mind, I recently spoke to a number of part-owners, directors, and other functionaries of art fairs. I suggested

cutting booth fees by as much as 40 percent. I don’t have to tell you the agog silence and wry smiles this met with. I suggested perhaps something along the lines of the sort of tax structure used in all Western democracies: Employ a graduated-fee schedule, with the megagalleries paying more than other galleries. Especially because the current system benefits these galleries the most. Crickets and blinks. I continued that the burden of profit should not fall exclusively on the backs of galleries as it does in the current system! The responsibility for profit should fall on the art fairs in the same measure it does in similar venues that present entertainment and performances. Carnegie Hall doesn’t charge Yo-Yo Ma exorbitant prices to perform there. Carnegie Hall pays him! I’m not alone in my squawking. In just the last few weeks, megagallerists David Zwirner, Marc Glimcher, Thaddeus Ropac, and Marc Payot (of Hauser & Wirth) have suggested that blue-chip galleries should pay higher prices to subsidize smaller galleries. This is quite remarkable coming from those very top-tier galleries—perhaps they understand how much value there is in being surrounded by smaller and more dynamic colleagues and how much their own success is squeezing out those very galleries.

I’m not the art-fair bogeyman. I go to the opening day of local art fairs; I love seeing the art world under one roof, touching antennas, trying to catch up with this peripatetic world. Moreover, I presume that the system is so stuck on success-breeding-success that Frieze’s announced expansion into Los Angeles will meet with more eventual success. The Basels will rumble on—except maybe for Art Basel Miami Beach, which many hope will eventually be supplanted by something, anything. (Almost every gallerist I spoke to voiced animus for Art Basel Miami Beach, one calling it “the seventh circle of hell.”) But all this is triumph-of-the-system talk. I conclude that since the system now benefits those at the top so well, let them pay for it! ■

## 4 START-UPS ACTIVELY MAKING NYC A BETTER PLACE



**Realizing your dream of becoming an entrepreneur takes a near unfathomable amount of drive, commitment, and talent — accomplishing this feat in New York City can be exponentially more challenging.**

Take a look behind the curtain at these magnanimous self-made moguls who each began their journey at a WeWork space. From conceptualizing imaginative fundraising solutions to conceiving educational enhancement programs to sharing food with the hungry, these innovators have all made a positive impact on the very city they inhabit and love.

### LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

**Jennifer DaSilva**  
**Founder of Start Small Think Big**



In the financially destitute year of 2008, Jennifer DaSilva proposed a new way to approach small-business development, and put her organization into actual practice just two years later. “The mission is to help lower-income people start businesses by giving them the support they need to grow in a safe and responsible way,” she says. “We level the playing field.”

Start Small Think Big helps more than 1,000 entrepreneurs each year. Ninety-eight percent of these small businesses are minority- or women-owned, 30 percent of the entrepreneurs

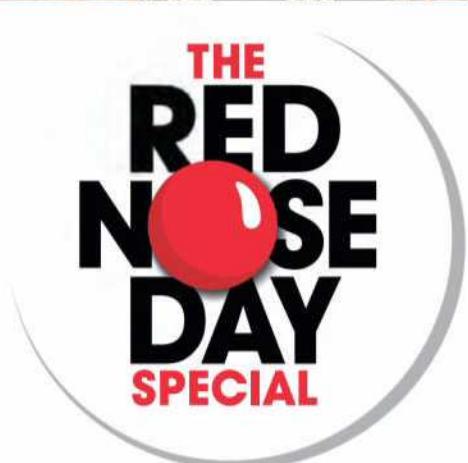
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# Noses On

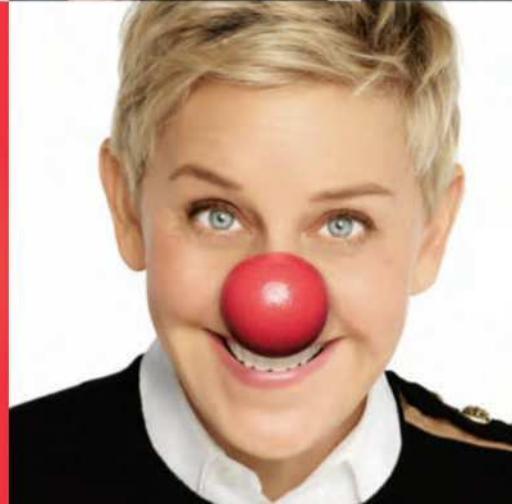
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The CULTURE PAGES

To

# DO



Twenty-five things to see, hear, watch, and read.

MAY 16-30

## MOVIES, TV, ART, AND MORE

### 1. Attend Vulture Festival

*This is us.*

Various locations, May 19 and 20.

Vulture's annual celebration of all things culture is back for a fifth year, featuring dozens of live events with the likes of Samantha Bee, Claire Danes, the casts of *Mindhunter*, *Younger*, and *Queen Sugar*, and the teams behind podcasts like *S-Town* and *Crimetown*. Early-rising Anglophiles should catch the royal-wedding watch party (May 19) with the hosts of *Who? Weekly*.

## POP

### 2. Listen to Wide Awake!

*Change of speed.*

Rough Trade, May 18.

Brooklyn indie rockers Parquet Courts linked up with the hotshot rock-and-rap producer Danger Mouse for this spring's new album. It's Parquet Courts' seventh overall, and it slows the pace on the band's trademark peppy, punk-adjacent grooves and teases out a winning taste for funk and atmospherics in the process. CRAIG JENKINS

## THEATER

### 3. See Singlet

*Going to the mat.*

The Bushwick Starr, May 16 to June 3.

Actor, singer, performance artist, and self-described genre-defier Erin Markey creates an intimate new work with actress Emily Davis, a friend and collaborator, that draws on Jean Genet's *The Maids*, women's wrestling, couples counseling, and Precious Moments dolls (among other things) to explore hysteria, friendship, rivalry, and power. Things are gonna get weird. SARA HOLDREN

## MOVIES

### 4. See Tully

*The fourth trimester.*

In theaters now.

As an ardent hater of Jason Reitman's directing, I can't believe I'm saying "Go see *Tully*." But screenwriter Diablo Cody's intimate portrait of Marlo, a woman (Charlize Theron) in the throes of postpartum depression, is beautiful and mysterious, especially when Mackenzie Davis is onscreen as a 26-year-old night nurse with uncanny insight into Marlo's broken dreams.

DAVID EDELSTEIN

## TV

### 5. Watch The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt

*She's still alive, dammit!*

Netflix, May 30.

The fourth season of this comedy about a cult escapee finding herself in NYC is back for the summer. Well, it's partially back. Six episodes stream now, with more to follow later in the year.

## BOOKS

### 6. Read Some Trick

*On the edge.*

New Directions, May 29.

Helen DeWitt's 13 ornery but self-aware stories home in on the raptors who tear apart our culture. Artists resist the money changers via the art of self-sabotage, which ranges from craven capitulation to, say, an unhealthy obsession with mathematical formulas. There's some bitterness here but no sanctimony, because the author is almost as funny and self-deflating as she is smart—which is saying a lot. BORIS KACHKA

are recent immigrants, and about 30 percent live below the poverty line. Business owners receive 40-plus hours of pro-bono assistance, and within a year of working with Start Small Think Big, they see annual revenue rise an average of 55 percent.

## BRIDGING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

**Karim Abouelnaga**  
Founder & CEO of  
Practice Makes Perfect



Growing up in a low-income household in Queens, Karim Abouelnaga became motivated to succeed by local mentors and eventually graduated from Cornell University. Wanting to give back in a similar fashion, Abouelnaga created Practice Makes Perfect with several alums, which provides summer programming for inner-city students across the five boroughs.

"I looked at the profiles of our most admirable education reformers and realized that very few of them looked like the poor inner-city kids who were growing up just like I did. I thought I could start to bring about change through my efforts and by sharing my journey," he says. Now, at just 26 years old, Abouelnaga heads up a year-round team of 25, and a temporary team that swells to more than 300 during the summer months. Practice Makes Perfect has served over 3,000 students to date.

## IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE

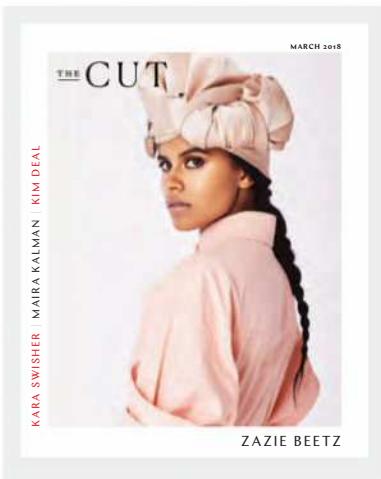
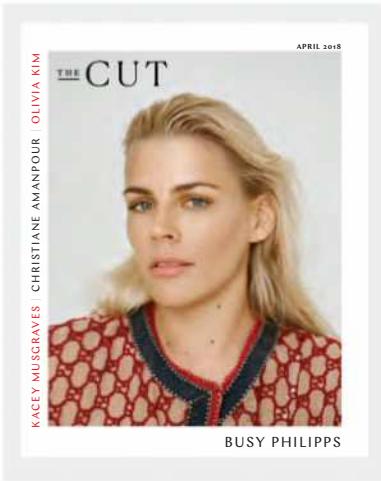
**Dan Kass | Ashley Treni**  
**Georges Clement**  
Founders of JustFix.nyc

Around 1.2 million New Yorkers live in what qualifies as deficient housing. The nonprofit JustFix.nyc is looking to change this by making the city a better place to live through tech, data, community organizing, and legal advocacy.

In 2015, JustFix.nyc co-founders Dan Kass, Ashley Treni, and Georges

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**OPERA**

7. **Hear** The Met Orchestra  
*Changing of the guard.*

Carnegie Hall, May 18.  
For years, the Metropolitan Opera orchestra was James Levine's creature, especially when it emerged from the pit to play Carnegie Hall. Now Mirga Gražinyte-Tyla will become the fifth woman ever to lead the ensemble, in a program featuring mezzo-soprano Anita Rachvelishvili in Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death*.

JUSTIN DAVIDSON

**TV**

8. **Watch** The Final Year  
*Cautionary tale.*

HBO, May 21.  
Documentarian Greg Barker didn't set out to make a film about the awful surprises that lie in wait for the complacent, but that's what he ended up capturing when he and his filmmaking team followed President Barack Obama's foreign-policy team around the world during the closing months of his second term.

MATT ZOLLER SEITZ

**MOVIES**

9. **Go to** New York African Film Festival  
*Voices from the continent.*

Film Society of Lincoln Center, May 16 to 22.  
The 25th anniversary of this festival will include some 70 films from 25 countries—made by both the old masters and a new generation. Opening Night is Apolline Traoré's *Borders*, in which four women travel from Dakar to Nigeria while battling sexism and corruption.

D. E.

**BOOKS**

10. **Read** Last Stories  
*Amplifying internal lives.*

Viking.  
William Trevor's final stories, written before his death in 2016, were among his darkest. A morbid pall looms over even his tales of coupling, in which motives are generally transactional and never pure. But there's always comedy, as well as Trevor's genius for compression and sly wit.

B. K.

**POP**

11. **Listen to** Sparkle Hard  
*Long time coming.*

Matador, May 18.  
Stephen Malkmus releases his seventh album with his long-standing flagship act, the Jicks. The songs showcase his unfussy range, from wistful acoustic jams like "Middle America" to the guitar theatrics of the arresting opener "Cast Off."

C. J.

**CLASSICAL MUSIC**

12. **See** Yo-Yo Ma  
With Maria Popova  
*Master class.*

National Sawdust, May 18.  
For many years, the cellist has supplemented his around-the-world routine of performing brand-name concerts with activities that feed his curios-



**FLEET WEEK IN  
A HELL OF A TOWN**  
*Memorial Day Weekend  
aboard the U.S.S. Intrepid.*

**If you tapped  
your toes  
to On the  
Town ...**

Check out live Broadway showcases onboard with tunes from *Beautiful: the Carole King Musical*, *Hamilton*, *Escape to Margaritaville*, and *School of Rock* (May 26 and 27).

**If you  
secretly wish  
you were  
nicknamed  
Maverick ...**

Attend a free screening of *Top Gun* on the flight deck, introduced by former astronaut and T-38 pilot Gregory C. Johnson (May 25).

**If you're in  
the mood ...**

Bring your dancing shoes for the Battle of the Big Bands, with music and dancing from the World War II era and lessons for newbies (May 26).

**If you aren't  
claustrophobic ...**

Walk through the *Intrepid's* Cold War submarine, the U.S.S. *Growler*. (And if you are, stick to the much-roomier special exhibit devoted to its history.)

ity. His appearance with equally omnivorous blogger Maria Popova is billed as an intimate talk, but it's a good bet he'll have his cello handy. J. D.

**ART**

13. **See** Keltie Ferris  
*Pay attention to this live wire.*

Mitchell-Innes & Nash, through May 19.  
Ferris can always be counted on to push the perimeters of her intensely optical abstract paintings, and this show finds her, now 41, experimenting, rethinking, slowing down, mixing marble dust into her oil paint, laying down stenciled polygonal shapes, wiping out areas of canvas, and leaving severe spray-painted black lines as structure.

JERRY SALTZ

**CLASSICAL MUSIC**

14. **Hear** Daniel Gortler  
*Stacking the deck.*

The Jewish Museum, May 24.  
The pianist Daniel Gortler has gathered composers who talk to each other across two centuries, including John Corigliano, who recently turned 80; whose 1985 *Fantasia on an Ostinato* takes some of Beethoven's obsessions to modern extremes.

J. D.

**ART**

15. **See** Lucy Dodd  
*Magic potions and old idols.*

David Lewis Gallery, through May 20.  
If you want mad stuff and metaphysics conjured by an artist who's absorbed in a "journey across the eternal feminine," behold Dodd's third solo show in this gallery. Dodd, known for caramelized swirling spills of paint, here brightens her color, refines her touch, and gives her huge canvases more space.

J. S.

## TV

16. **Watch** The Break With Michelle Wolf

*The White House Correspondents' Dinner's firebrand gets her own talk show.*

Netflix, May 27.

Remember when Michelle Wolf performed at the White House Correspondents' Dinner and lit the joint on fire until all that was left was a heap of ash that could be used to create a perfect smoky eye? Of course you remember it—people are *still* arguing about whether it was offensive. Well, now the comedian has her own Netflix talk show. Something tells us she'll have a few things to say.

## THEATER

17. **See** A Pink Chair (In Place of a Fake Antique)

*A Polish Odyssey.*

The Performing Garage,  
33 Wooster Street, through June 2.

The Wooster Group premieres a new show examining the life and work of the legendary experimental Polish stage director Tadeusz Kantor. Kantor's daughter Dorota Krakowska joins director Elizabeth LeCompte to help craft this exploration of Kantor's 1988 play *I Shall Never Return*, in which the director took on his obsession with the myth of Odysseus. S.H.

## TV

18. **Watch** Terrence Howard's Fright Club

*Bait and switch.*

Fox, May 24.

Wherein the *Empire* star invites a bunch of fans to his secluded New Orleans home promising an intimate meet and greet, only to deliver an epic prank that's somewhere in the ballpark of Disney World's Haunted Mansion ride coupled with the "Teddy Perkins" episode of *Atlanta*. M.Z.S.

## BOOKS

19. **Read** The Perfectionists

*Capitalism at its best and worst.*

Harper.

Simon Winchester illuminates a rather technical field that really did change the world: precision engineering. Winchester skirts the legendary inventors in favor of people who either perfected machines or scaled them up, juxtaposing Henry Ford's mastery of interchangeable parts with the limited-edition hand precision of the Rolls-Royce. B.K.

## MOVIES

20. **See** Revenge

*It's payback time.*

In theaters now.

We've all had enough male-revenge fantasies, but French director Coralie Fargeat's debut is a horse of a different gender—a hypnotic feminist subversion of the male gaze that's as bloody as any of its counterparts. Get ready for rebirth and retribution with XX chromosomes. D.E.

## THEATER

21. **See** Woman and Scarecrow

*Taking stock.*

Irish Repertory Theatre,  
132 West 22nd Street, through June 24.

Ciarán O'Reilly directs the New York premiere of renowned playwright Marina Carr's drama about a woman at the end of her life, reckoning with the paths she traveled—her eight children, her unfaithful husband—and the things she left undone, all while her surreal alter ego, Scarecrow, stands by. S.H.

## POP

22. **Listen to** World's Strongest Man

*Coming into his own.*

Hot Fruit/Caroline International.

On his last solo album, Gaz Coombes kept the volume low, accompanying himself mostly with mellow synthesizers. But on this new collection, he embellishes sturdy songs like "Walk the Walk" and "Shit (I've Done It Again)" with fuzzy guitars, talk boxes, and children's choirs.

## POP

23. **Listen to** Tell Me How You Really Feel

*Right on the money.*

Milk! Records/Mom + Pop Music,  
May 18.

Courtney Barnett chose the best possible title for her new album, as her music bounces from resignation to bemusement to rage and back, just like a therapy session. Barnett's songs are the perfect soundtrack for the struggle to get out of bed each morning in a year that feels colossally tiresome. C.J.

## ART

24. **See** Nadia Haji Omar

*Complete control.*

Kristen Lorello, 195 Chrystie Street,  
through May 25.

This shoebox-size gallery is showing six small abstract paintings from 32-year-old Australian-born Nadia Haji Omar. Adept at dotting surfaces with glimmering photons of paint, she makes works that visually buzz like a hummingbird. J.S.

## CLASSICAL MUSIC

25. **Hear** The New York Philharmonic

*Sounds of spring.*

David Geffen Hall,  
May 17 to 26.

Semyon Bychkov settles in for ten days, first conducting a program that includes Shostakovich's phenomenally emotive Symphony No. 5, then Luciano Berio's riotous and still bracing *Sinfonia* from 1968, with the vocal ensemble Roomful of Teeth. J.D.



Clement were dealing with their own habitation crises—and realized that most problems stem from tenants not having adequate (or any) legal representation. Now, their site allows residents to conduct their own inspections, and then generates a recommended course of action. If housing court is the next step, the information gathered can be used as evidence. The start-up also connects users to community groups and legal services. The team — now five full-timers, plus volunteers — has served more than 1,200 households to date.

## FIGHTING FOOD INSECURITY

Dilip Rao | Mohsin Memon  
Ahseen Saber  
Founders of Sharebite



One in four children in New York City face food insecurity, and Sharebite, a food-ordering platform, is seeking to change that. At no additional cost to the user, Sharebite will either donate enough to help feed a hungry child via City Harvest or allocate 2 percent of your order to a cause of your choosing.

"The fundamental vision behind Sharebite really came down to two questions," explains Sharebite co-founder and CEO Dilip Rao. "How do we align the incentives for the private sector to undertake the burden of social good? And, how do we do it in a way where we leverage what people do on a daily basis, without passing a penny of cost to the end user?" So, in 2015, Sharebite was born—and with over 2,000 restaurants on board—has since helped donate more than 170,000 meals.

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# PARTY LINES

Edited by Stacey Wilson Hunt  
Reporting by Diane Gordon,  
Trupti Rami, and Nicole Weaver

TIME MAGAZINE'S "100 MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN THE WORLD" GALA  
LINCOLN CENTER'S FREDERICK P. ROSE HALL, APRIL 24.



*"When I saw RuPaul in his suit walk past me, I gasped like the 12-year-old that I was when I used to see him on all the M.A.C counters. He just sparkled."*  
—Janet Mock

*"I didn't know Steven Spielberg was writing my Time '100' dedication. I was in the middle of writing a script at the time and feeling all the doubts you feel. Then I read that and burst into tears."*  
—Greta Gerwig

*"Lately I've been encouraging people to wear sweatpants. I don't know if that's a good thing, but I'm always comfortable in them, so now people are like, 'Oh, I'm going to rock sweatpants too!'"*  
—Lena Waithe

*"I'd love to meet Jeff Bezos, because we wrote a big investigation of him a few years ago and really wanted to talk to him. If I find him tonight, I have a few questions."*  
—Jodi Kantor

## Who would you invite to your fantasy dinner party?

*"James Baldwin is first on the list and at the head of the table. I'd also want RuPaul, George Takei, Janelle Monáe, Moms Mabley... I could go on!"*



Samira Wiley

*"Leontyne Price, Eartha Kitt, Diahann Carroll, bell hooks, Oprah, Viola Davis. All black women—what a coincidence!"*



Laverne Cox

*"Rachel Maddow, Oscar Wilde, Lillian Hellman, and Lily Tomlin."*



Melissa Etheridge

*"I've been singing with Queen, so obviously Freddie Mercury!"*



Adam Lambert

29TH ANNUAL GLAAD MEDIA AWARDS  
THE NEW YORK HILTON MIDTOWN, MAY 5.

SEASON-TWO PREMIERE OF NETFLIX'S DEAR WHITE PEOPLE  
ARCLIGHT HOLLYWOOD, MAY 2.

*"Am I sorry the Kanye news didn't drop before we wrote season two? Nope, nope. I'm just glad people are thinking about race when my show comes out. The surface stuff is gonna continue to be crazy. There's gonna be another Kanye in a few months. But the underlying things that create a situation like this? We got that covered!"*  
—Justin Simien



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Watch the game's brightest stars compete under the bright lights in the nation's capital.

## OTHER WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH BASEBALL IN THE DISTRICT

- ★ Catch the hometown Washington Nationals™ and watch perennial All-Star Bryce Harper smash one out of the park.
- ★ Visit the *Champions* exhibit at the National Portrait Gallery, featuring Babe Ruth, Sandy Koufax, Mickey Mantle and other baseball legends.
- ★ Bask in *Baseball Americana* at the Library of Congress (opens June 29), featuring photographs and artifacts that illustrate the evolution of the national pastime.

# THE ARTS *District*

From mural arts to musicals, the nation's capital radiates with creativity.



DC Jazz Festival

## **AMERICA'S PRESIDENTS** National Portrait Gallery Ongoing

Celebrate the recently renovated exhibition of presidential portraits, including the highly publicized large-scale painting of President Barack Obama.

## **MARKING THE INFINITE: CONTEMPORARY WOMEN ARTISTS FROM ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA** The Phillips Collection June 2 - Sept. 9

Encounter works from nine Aboriginal Australian female artists whose creations asks us to examine the natural world.

## **DC JAZZ FESTIVAL**

### Citywide

June 8-17

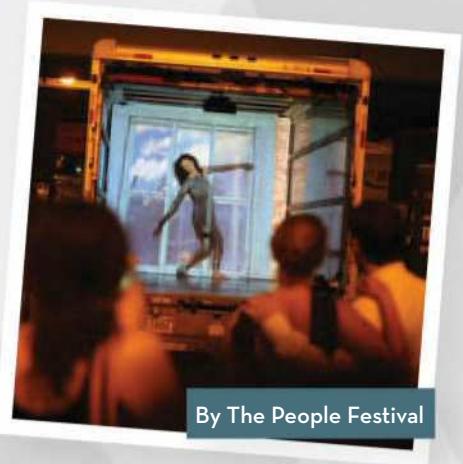
Dozens of the world's best jazz musicians come to DC to perform free and ticketed concerts all over the city. Don't miss Leslie Odom Jr. at The Anthem on June 16, who will headline DC Jazzfest at The Wharf Presented by Events DC.

## **HAMILTON**

### The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

June 12 - Sept. 16

Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical sensation about a Founding Father comes to the Kennedy Center for a 14-week run and the city celebrates with special exhibits.

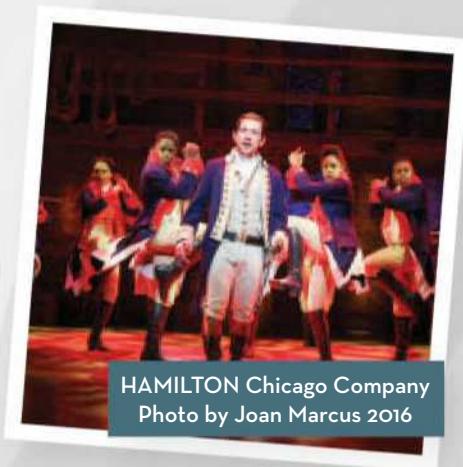


By The People Festival

## **BY THE PEOPLE FESTIVAL** Citywide

June 21-24

The inaugural citywide arts festival will feature internationally-renowned artists, free and inclusive activations, workshops and late-night museum openings.



HAMILTON Chicago Company  
Photo by Joan Marcus 2016

## **FUN HOUSE**

### National Building Museum

July 4 - Sept. 3

Stimulate the senses at *Fun House*, a collection of rooms outfitted with varied installations conceived by noted New York design firm Snarkitecture.

## EXPLORE THE ARTS DISTRICT:

Watch the documentary-style video series that brings the District's thriving arts community to life through the perspective of local creators in the fields of music, dance, museums, theater, and mural arts.

Let's Go-Go

[WASHINGTON.ORG/THE-ARTS-DISTRICT](http://WASHINGTON.ORG/THE-ARTS-DISTRICT)

### **NO SPECTATORS: THE ART OF BURNING MAN**

The Renwick Gallery

Open through Jan. 21, 2019

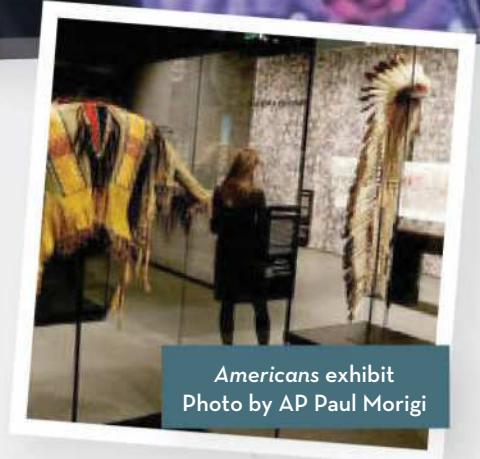
One of the year's most anticipated exhibitions, *No Spectators* brings hand-crafted artifacts from the desert gathering to the Renwick and nearby neighborhood.

### **AMERICANS**

National Museum of the American Indian

Open through 2022

Observe how American Indians have been essential to our nation's identity through powerful images, stories and names that continue to resonate throughout contemporary American life.



Americans exhibit  
Photo by AP Paul Morigi



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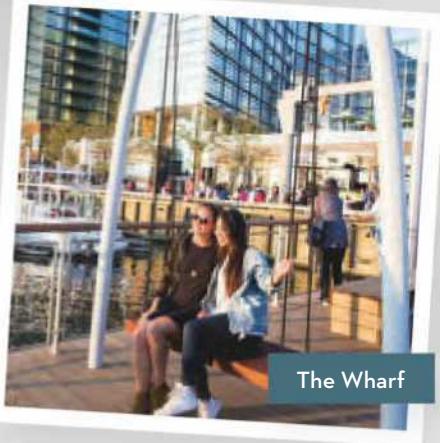
Socialize @VisitMoco  
#MontgomeryMoment



# Free in DC

## SUMMER SPECTACULAR

The nation's capital features more than 100 free things to do. Here's a sampling for the summertime.



The Wharf

### DISCOVER THE WONDER OF THE WHARF

DC's newest waterside destination sits beautifully along the Southwest Waterfront. Take in breathtaking views, swoop back and forth on modern swing sets at Recreation Pier, hear live music for free at Transit Pier and ride the free jitney ferry over to East Potomac Park.

### WITNESS AN INCREDIBLE FIREWORKS DISPLAY DURING THE FOURTH OF JULY

Catch the free concert on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol or watch the fireworks from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

### CATCH AN OUTDOOR MOVIE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Admire great views during weekly screenings from Capitol Riverfront to Georgetown, or enjoy the Comcast Xfinity Outdoor Film Festival at Strathmore, Aug. 23-26.

### EMBRACE INTERNATIONAL CULTURES AT THE SMITHSONIAN FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL

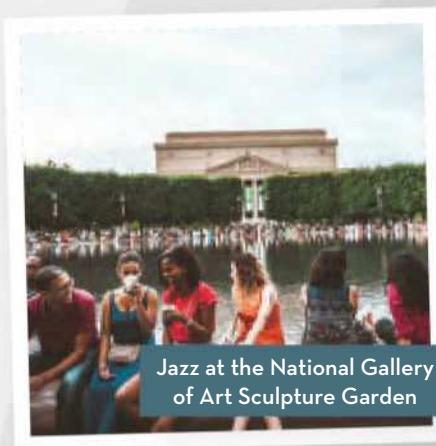
Celebrate Africa, Armenia and Catalonia on the National Mall from June 27 - July 1 and July 4-8.



Smithsonian Folklife Festival

### KICK BACK WITH SOME JAZZ AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART SCULPTURE GARDEN

Experience an American art form in an outdoor art space on Friday nights from May through August.



Jazz at the National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden

### EXPLORE THE SIGHTS OF GEORGETOWN ON BIKE

Book Georgetown Suites' Capital Bikeshare Package, which includes two 24-hour passes to ride to free neighborhood sights like The Exorcist stairs, the Old Stone House, Book Hill and Georgetown Waterfront Park.

visit

[WASHINGTON.ORG/FREE](https://www.washington.org/free)



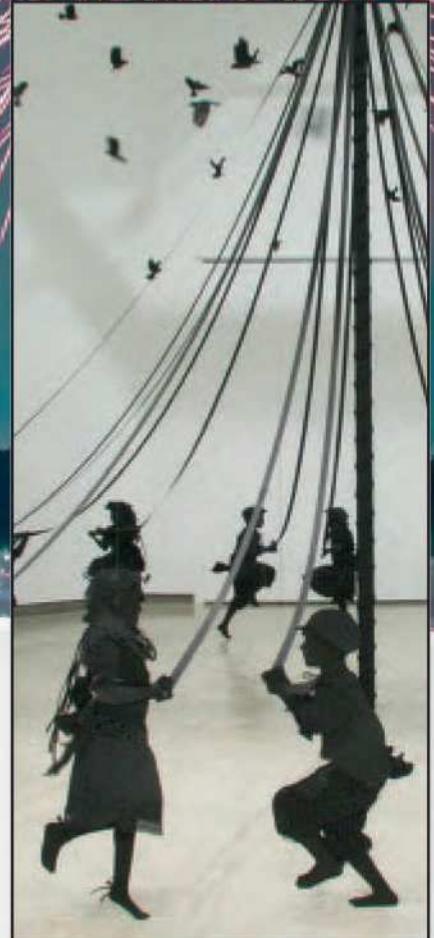
# “Are we there yet?”

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**50** National  
Portrait  
Gallery  
50 EYE-OPENING YEARS

## Black Out Silhouettes Then and Now

**Opens May 11**

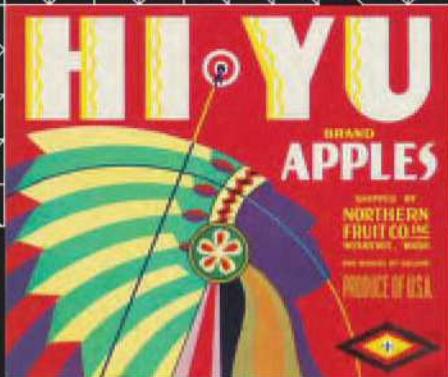
A cutting-edge look at a boundary-pushing art form. Explore how silhouettes tell the story of the past and present.

 **Smithsonian**

8th and F Streets, NW | Free | [npg.si.edu](http://npg.si.edu)  
#myNPG   

Maibaum (detail) by Kristi Malakoff, 2009.  
Photo by Kristi Malakoff.

## AMERICANS



**Indian words and images are everywhere in American life.**

Pervasive, powerful, at times demeaning, *Americans* reveals how Indians have been embedded in U.S. history and pop culture.



Smithsonian  
*National Museum of the American Indian*

National Mall, Washington, D.C | [AmericanIndian.SI.edu](http://AmericanIndian.SI.edu) | #NDNsEverywhere   

# MARK THE *Calendar*

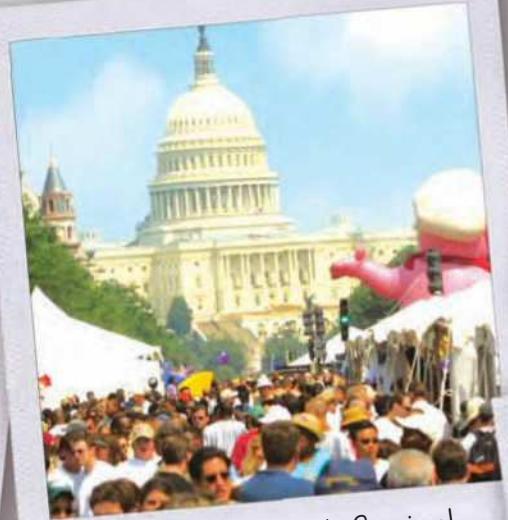
DC offers a range of can't-miss events during the summer.



Capital Pride  
JUNE 7-10  
Citywide



D.C. United Audi Field Opener  
JULY 14  
Southwest DC



Giant National Capital  
Barbecue Battle  
JUNE 23-24  
Pennsylvania Avenue NW

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[WASHINGTON.ORG/SUMMER](http://WASHINGTON.ORG/SUMMER)

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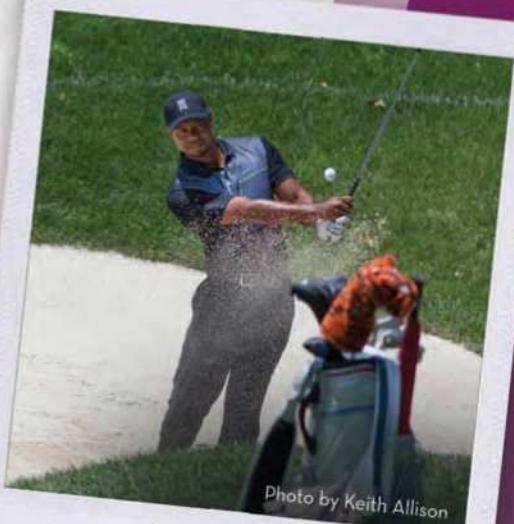
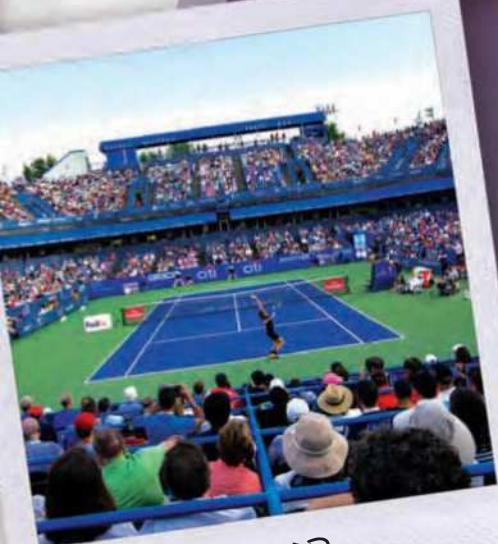


Photo by Keith Allison

The National Golf Tournament  
JUNE 25 - JULY 1  
TPC Potomac at Avenel Farm



Citi Open  
JULY 28 - AUG. 5  
Rock Creek Park Tennis Center



# AMERICA'S FIRST MUSEUM OF MODERN ART



The Phillips Collection

1600 21st Street, NW, Washington, DC  
PhillipsCollection.org



Control Room at the K-25 plant, Oak Ridge, 1945. Photo courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.



# SECRET CITIES

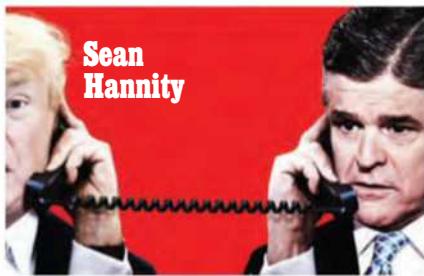
## The Architecture and Planning of the Manhattan Project

OPENS MAY 3 AT THE NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM



SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

Discover Washington, DC



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 38

his childhood and early adulthood: paperboy, busboy, line cook, bartender, housepainter, dishwasher, finishing one shift only to walk into the next, like so many other men and women for whom better fortune never comes.

Trump, meanwhile, was getting into the casino business in Atlantic City, where he would stiff guys like young Hannity left and right. Only in America could they end up in the same green room, convinced they look at the world the same way. At the Cheesecake Factory in Islip, Gomez told me he didn't think Trump would've fit in with him and Hannity growing up. That they were different types of guys. "I do not see those two guys growing up together. I don't see it," Gomez said. "He just wouldn't be attracted to us." He added, with a laugh, "You could fit Hannity's plane inside his plane. He's a helluva lot more flamboyant than Hannity is." Hannity had been using the same beat-up old grill, which he lit with newspaper, for decades, he said, taking it with him from modest house to bigger house to mansion to compound. He always drove the same model car, an Escalade. "It would be nice if Hannity, you know, forked over a few bucks for an Aston Martin or something," Gomez said. "That I would borrow."

"He really didn't have a pot to piss in, pardon the expression, and he did everything on his own," Lynda McLaughlin told me. McLaughlin's been the executive producer of Hannity's radio show for the past eight years and his sidekick for 12 ("People refer to me as his Robin," she said). Of Hannity's listeners, she theorized, "I think they get him. He was their dream, you know?"

As a dropout 29 years ago, Hannity was hired as a shock jock on a college-radio station, KCSB, in Santa Barbara, hosting a show called "The Pursuit of Happiness." Listeners protested when Hannity, on-air, said gays were "disgusting people" who were "brainwashing" the public. When he was fired, he enlisted the ACLU to defend his right to free speech. The case, which he won, brought him publicity, and he moved to Alabama to accept a job with WVNN, and then to Georgia to work for WGST. In 1996, Roger Ailes hired him. (Hannity, married for 25 years, has a 19-year-old son

and a 16-year-old daughter; when he was asked, by *Playboy*, how he would feel if one of his children were gay, he said he would love them unconditionally and would only be upset if they were Democrats.)

Hannity first met the future president during his early years at Fox. In 2011, he provided Trump with a platform to discuss birtherism, the racist conspiracy theory that Obama wasn't born in America and therefore was not a legitimate president. "The issue could go away in a minute," Hannity said to Trump. "Just show the certificate." During the campaign, as Trump attempted to argue that he'd been against the Iraq War from the beginning, even though he was on the record as initially having supported it, Hannity came to his aid, claiming that, after his shows back then, Trump would call him to argue.

But Gomez told me he didn't think Hannity and Trump were truly friends before 2016, when Hannity helped Trump get elected and Trump helped Hannity become the most popular person on cable news—an entanglement that has now made Hannity a secondary character in the drama of a major federal investigation.

**E**VERY MORNING, Hannity meets Glenn Rubin, a man he calls his "sensei," who coaches him through two hours of "street martial arts." He does this for fitness and, despite carrying a firearm (which he once reportedly took out and pointed at Juan Williams on set), for self-defense. On his show, he once aired footage of his training session with former UFC heavyweight champion Chuck Liddell. "This is my fist," he said, pointing it at the camera. "You can pan in on that." The shot got tighter around his balled-up hand. On Twitter, he proved an easy mark for trolls who detected a weak spot: "Do you even lift, bro?" one asked. "Street martial arts for 5 years. A lot of core work," he said flatly in response. Another time, he listed the number of push-ups (100) and sit-ups (100) he does each day. He's discussed this hobby with such frequency that, in 2016, he inspired the Washington *Free Beacon* to create a 2:23 supercut titled *Sean Hannity Karate Update*. (Applying the term karate to his workouts greatly agitates him. "Why does everyone say karate? Not even close to what I do," he tweeted once. A year later, he tweeted again: "Oh and by the way, I never did 'karate' in my life. Another lie.")

When he's not doing karate, he's golfing, but the rest of the time, he's often alone, fussing over his dogs: a Bernese mountain dog, Gracie, and an English cream golden retriever, Marley. ("I love dogs!" he once said in a tweet.) He's trying to breed Marley, whom he got from Majestic Manors, a

high-end breeder in Indiana, and if he doesn't renew his contract when it's up, he dreams of moving to a farm full of dogs. He maintains constant contact with a million people all at once, texting his friends as compulsively as he vapes (he likes Njoys) all throughout his radio show and even on TV during commercial breaks and whenever the camera isn't on him. At home, he watches movies (*GoodFellas*, *Braveheart*, *Schindler's List*) and TV (*Homeland*, *Billions*). He drinks White Russians or Coors Lite or vodka with Sprite Zero or, if he's at Del Frisco's, a frozen concoction of vodka and pineapple juice that they describe as a martini (it is not). He cooks for himself, and is especially proud of a dish he calls "turkey chop"—a "Hannity special."

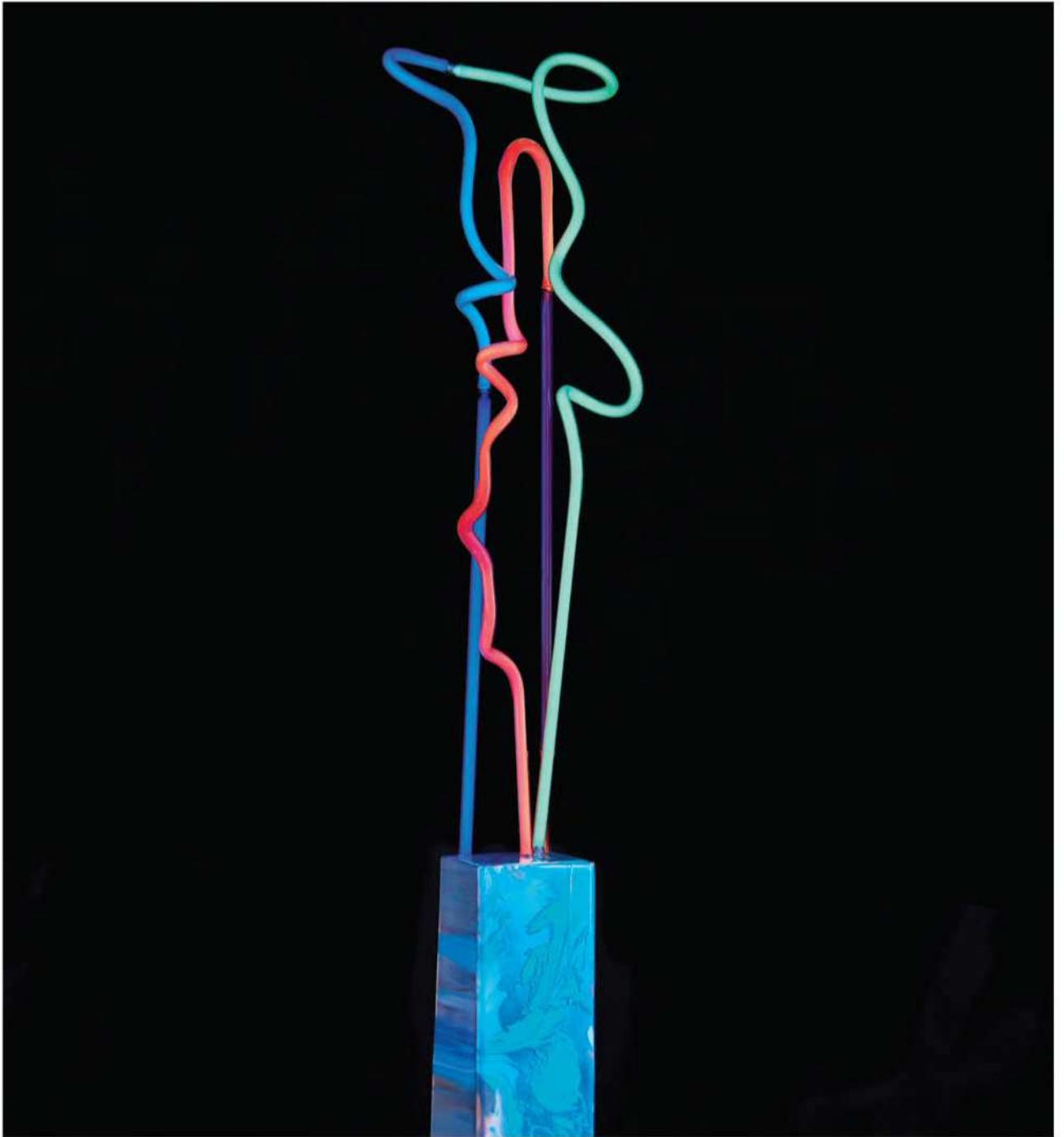
But he's not entirely bunkered in, out on Long Island—he has bursts of manic sociability, too. Gomez told me of a typical invite to lunch at Peter Luger—the Great Neck spinoff, of course, not the Brooklyn original—with all signs suggesting it'd be just the two of them and their steaks. Somehow, in the few hours between the end of their call and the beginning of lunch, Hannity would accumulate 23 additional guests, having invited seemingly every living being to cross his path, such is his inability to turn off the thing that drives him to connect with others. "You hungry? You like steak?" Gomez said, impersonating his friend's distinct, cheerful bark. "Meet me at Luger's!"

Privately, Hannity has expressed openness to a different kind of retirement, far removed from a dog farm: running for office, something he hadn't considered in the past. Gomez, whose own unsuccessful congressional race Hannity advised on, said he thought the only way he'd do it is if he didn't think there was anybody else for the job—something, incidentally, Trump used to say before the beginning of his political career. McLaughlin burst out laughing when I asked about Hannity 2024; she doesn't believe he has any interest. But on the show, the two of them joke often, lately, about how Hannity might as well run, since he's "being vetted more than Obama."

"The job itself creates such intense isolation that you'd go crazy if you didn't have ... people do go crazy. They all go crazy," said the person who knows both Trump and Hannity.

"You have two choices: You can either go insane, or you can create your own separate world. And that's what he's done. He hired his brother-in-law as his producer. And people look on at that and they're like, 'Oh, that's nepotism.' No, that's his effort to build a world that he's safe in, because it's so crazy that you have to do that." The only thing you could compare it to, this person said, would be the presidency. ■

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MAY 11-23, 2018

# GUIDE TO NYCxDESIGN

STRIKING DESIGN CONCEPTS, HAPPENING RIGHT NOW.

Featured designer: Marco Guglielmino

**NYCxDESIGN is back, proudly showcasing riveting designs from around the world.** Dedicated to bringing a wide variety of disciplines to the New York design community, this is a celebration of innovative, emerging styles. Here's our curated list of the hottest vendors and happenings this year.

## UNION SQUARE/ FLATIRON/NOMAD

### 1 | ABC Carpet & Home

888/881 Broadway  
abchome.com

Just north of bustling Union Square, ABC Carpet & Home is one of the city's most beloved and expansive home styling and personal design shops. Showcasing the latest in home furnishings, lighting concepts, classic and unconventional carpets, beauty, jewelry, baby essentials, and much more, this iconic, exquisitely conceived New York store has it all.

### 2 | Milano Smart Living

200 Lexington Ave., 7th Floor  
milanosmartliving.com

A sofa that turns into a bed, a bed that turns into a table, and a table that turns into a console: smart and functional furniture is the design of the new generation. With 100% Italian-produced pieces designed to change their function with a click of a button, it's easy to save valuable space in the family room, bedrooms, or work area.

### 3 | West | NYC Home

135 Fifth Ave., 2nd floor  
westnyc-home.com

The West | NYC Home showroom features modern, high-end furniture, closets, storage systems, lighting, rugs, and accessories, including the exclusive collections of Living Divani and Porro. The sophisticated counterpart to the beach environment is West | Out East, its sister showroom in East Hampton. Visit during design week at their showroom or at ICFF Booth #2257.

## MIDTOWN EAST

### 4 + 5 | B&B Italia

150 East 58th St.  
135 Madison Ave.  
bebitalia.com

B&B Italia, formed in 1966 as the result of the entrepreneurial vision of Piero Ambrogio Busnelli, is a leading Italian design furnishings company with stores located around the world. B&B Italia Madison Avenue is a 9000-sq.-ft. showroom that offers a spectacular presentation of the design and international lifestyle of the B&B Italia and Maxalto collections—which also are reflected in the expansive 58th St. location.

### 6 + 7 + 8 | Grande Central

141 East 56th St.  
1254 Park Ave.  
19 Bond St.  
centralplumbingspec.com

Grande Central Showrooms are a dynamic division of Central Plumbing Specialties, catering to New York's discerning design lovers in five beautifully appointed showrooms. Grande Central Showroom on Park was the Kitchen and Bath Design's 2003 Award Winner in the category of most innovative showrooms for use of displays. For a comprehensive listing of showroom locations and hours, please visit: centralplumbingspec.com.

### 9 | Resource Furniture

969 Third Ave.  
resourcefurniture.com

Resource Furniture is the original and largest-source for cutting-edge, space-saving and sustainable products in North America, including the finest wall beds available

anywhere in the world. Designed and made in Italy, these wall beds are so reliable that a lifetime warranty is offered on all mechanisms. With nine showrooms in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, Resource Furniture continues to redefine the industry, offering products that transform any space with both form and function.

## SOHO

### 10 + 11 + 12 | Calligaris

55 Thompson St.  
144 West 18th St.  
220 East 57th St.  
calligaris.us

Visit each store to discover the full range of the iconic Italian brand's products and new collections: dining, living, bedroom and office; as well as complete collections of rugs, lighting, and accessories.

## MIDTOWN

### 13 | BoConcept

160 Madison Ave.  
boconcept.com

BoConcept was founded in Denmark in 1952 and has a long-standing tradition of modern furniture with the highest functionality, design and quality. A wide range of contemporary Danish design furniture for the living room, bedroom, dining room, and home office is waiting to be discovered.



**TOP  
PICKS**

CURATED BY NEW YORK'S DESIGN EDITOR

### 14 | COLLECTIVE CONCEPT

May 20–May 23; 10am–6pm  
Jacob K. Javits Center  
655 West 34th St.

Collective Design has partnered with ICFF to provide a platform for independent designers during NYCxDESIGN.

### 15 | BROOKLYN DESIGNS

May 12–May 13; 11am–5pm  
Brooklyn Museum  
200 Eastern Pkwy., Brooklyn

Brooklyn Designs is a survey of the contemporary design scene in Brooklyn.

### 16 | WANTEDDESIGN MANHATTAN

May 19–May 22  
WantedDesign Manhattan  
6 Fulton St.

WantedDesign Manhattan is an original design platform combining culture and commerce. It hosts exclusive launches, installations, and conversations.

## 19 | DESIGN PAVILION NYC

May 12–May 20

Times Square Pedestrian Plazas  
Design Pavilion returns to Times Square featuring interactive design-driven installations and talks, themed “From This Day Forward.” Artist Joana Avillez will be live-creating an installation on-site for *New York Magazine’s* 50th Anniversary Public Art Exhibit at key times throughout the week.

## + DESIGN TALKS NYC

May 14–May 17  
Times Square

Design Talks NYC presents a select program of insightful design thinkers, thought leaders, and experts sharing their perspectives on the impact of design.

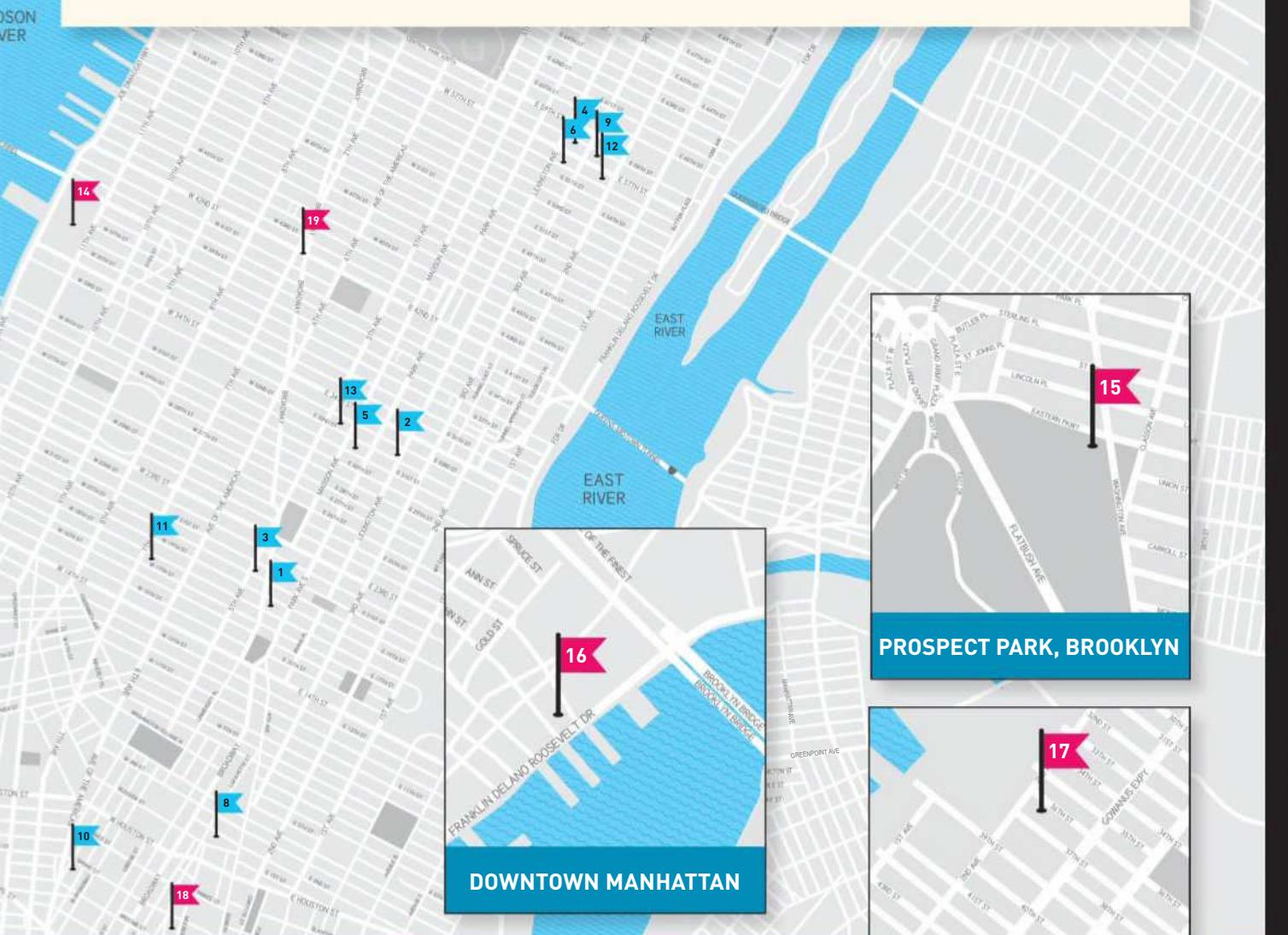
May 16; 5pm  
Durst Organization  
4 Times Square  
@ 151 West 42nd St.,  
21st fl.

*New York* Design Editor Wendy Goodman will moderate a talk titled “Living Legends of Design,” featuring Carl D’Aquino, Clodagh, and Jamie Drake.

May 17; 3pm  
Durst Organization  
4 Times Square  
@ 151 West 42nd St.,  
21st fl.

“Once on This Island: Designing a Hit Broadway Show” Join Tony® nominees Michael Arden (Director), Dane Laffrey (Set Design) and Clint Ramos (Costume

Design) for a discussion moderated by Sara Holdren, theater critic, *New York Magazine*. The talk will focus on how a script is brought to life, a story visually enhanced on stage, choreography enveloped and supported, and moods and emotions seamlessly evoked from one scene to the next.



## 17 | WANTEDDESIGN BROOKLYN

May 17–May 21

Industry City  
274 36th St., Brooklyn

WantedDesign Brooklyn presents the educational program *Oui Design* 3rd edition, along with Wanted Career Day, activating the whole campus and engaging its community.

## 18 | SIGHT UNSEEN OFFSITE

May 17–May 20; 11am–7pm

Hub Space  
201 Mulberry St.

Sight Unseen OFFSITE is an annual showcase of contemporary design by the best and brightest independent design studios, as well as select forward-thinking brands. This

## INDUSTRY CITY, BROOKLYN

year’s show will incorporate a primary hub space — featuring group exhibitions and Sight Unseen-curated projects focused on the theme of collaboration.

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world of design

**MAY 11-23, 2018**



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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 44

is an illusion. “Reincarnation is reality,” he wrote on Facebook. “*Many Lives, Many Masters* by Dr. Brian Weiss was my breakthrough discovery that established it.” When he told Faiz about his plan, his friend was devastated. “Don’t even think about it,” Faiz told him. Appealing to Schifter’s spiritual side, he pointed out that most religions forbid suicide.

But by last fall, Schifter had made up his mind. That Halloween, the engine on the black SUV he used for work—a GMC Yukon Denali XL—died for a second time. There was no money for the repair, and the car seemed determined to fall apart, so Schifter decided to let it go. “That was the final straw,” George says. That same month, *Black Car News* ran the last installment of his column, with the author credit in the past tense: “Douglas Schifter was an executive chauffeur and a professional driver.”

After Schifter missed a mortgage payment, his family invited him to come live with them. Friends offered to help him find work. But Schifter was unconvinced that anything would be enough to pay off his \$75,000 in debt. He knew he was going to lose his home, and, at his request, George helped him start moving his possessions into storage. “We would sit down and we’d talk about life, our lives together, family,” George recalls. “Not a day went by when I didn’t ask him to change his mind.”

But he didn’t. In January, George tried to confiscate the shotgun that Schifter kept hidden in his bathroom cupboard. George waited until his brother was asleep, then stashed the gun in his truck for safekeeping. Schifter woke up a few hours later, and somehow he knew.

“Give it back to me!” Schifter thundered.

George, who saw his brother as a gentle giant, was surprised.

“There’s no reason for you to yell at me,” he told Schifter. “I don’t deserve it.”

Schifter welled up in tears and apologized. But he insisted on taking back the gun.

When George returned to his home in Orlando, he told their older brother, Paul, what had happened. Paul called the police to report that Schifter was in imminent danger of taking his life. But when officers

paid a house call, Schifter told them everything was fine.

In early February, George and Matt, the family’s youngest brother, drove back to the Poconos. On the way, they kept in frequent touch with Schifter from the road, checking in with him on his landline, since his cell phone had been disconnected. When they arrived that Sunday, shortly after noon, Schifter was already gone, but he’d left the lights and heater on for them.

The next morning, a shotgun blast erupted from a rental car at the east gate of City Hall. A frenzy ensued. Was it terrorism? Police responded, taping off the scene. Traffic was halted on the Manhattan-bound side of the Brooklyn Bridge. The bomb squad came to check for explosives. All they found in the car was Schifter, lifeless in a crisp white shirt and dress pants. Next to him, inside a Ziploc bag, was a photograph of a clean-shaven kid standing in front of the American flag. It was a photo of George, from his days in basic training in the Air Force; on his recent visit, he had urged Doug to keep it with him, so he wouldn’t feel alone.

**I**N HIS SUICIDE NOTE, Schifter made clear what had driven him to take his own life. “Due to the huge numbers of cars available with desperate drivers trying to feed their families,” he wrote, “they squeeze rates to below operating costs and force professionals like me out of business. They count their money and we are driven down into the streets we drive becoming homeless and hungry. I will not be a slave working for chump change. I would rather be dead.”

But at the press conference about Schifter’s suicide, Mayor Bill de Blasio downplayed Schifter’s parting explanation. “Let’s face it,” he told reporters. “For someone to commit suicide, there’s an underlying mental-health challenge.” De Blasio was hardly in a position to diagnose Schifter. There was, in fact, no evidence that Schifter was mentally ill—just a long written record, published over the course of three years in *Black Car News*, that underscored how the upheaval in the taxi industry had left him physically impaired, financially desperate, and emotionally devastated. De Blasio himself had done little to rein in Uber, backing down on a cap he had proposed placing on app-driven services. “I heard you were going to end the cruelty to the Central Park horses,” Schifter had addressed de Blasio in one of his columns. “How about ending the government’s cruelty to us?”

Schifter wasn’t even the first driver to kill himself. Two months earlier, in separate

incidents, two livery drivers—Alfredo Pérez and Danilo Corporán Castillo—had committed suicide. Castillo, 57, had jumped from the roof of his Harlem apartment building after learning that he might lose his license for picking up unauthorized street hails. In his pocket, a suicide note was scrawled on the back of a summons from the Taxi & Limousine Commission.

When Schifter’s death made the cover of *Black Car News*, letters poured in from supportive readers. One called on de Blasio to name the east gate of City Hall “Doug Schifter Way.” Another compared Schifter to Thích Quang Duc, the Buddhist monk who set himself ablaze on a Saigon street in 1963, and to Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor whose self-immolation in 2010 helped spark the Arab Spring. A third likened him to Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. Someone suggested the date of Schifter’s suicide—February 5—may not have been a coincidence; it was the anniversary of New York’s 1934 taxi riots, which gave birth to the industry that served the city and its drivers for so many decades.

And there were vigils and rallies. Protesters organized by the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, a grassroots group representing 19,000 drivers, descended on City Hall. They waved signs that read REST IN PEACE DOUGLAS SCHIFTER, OUR DRIVER BROTHER AND YOUR LIFE AND DEATH WERE NOT IN VAIN. They held aloft his photograph and chanted, “Douglas! Our brother! There’ll never be another!”

Then, on March 16, there was another suicide. Gabriel Ochisor found his father, Nicanor, hanging from a metal cable in the garage of their home in Maspeth, Queens. The 64-year-old Romanian immigrant had been a yellow-cab driver for more than 25 years. He’d watched the value of his medalion drop by more than a million dollars, his retirement evaporating before his eyes.

One hundred drivers returned to City Hall with their signs. They lined up at the east gate, where Schifter had ended his life, and shuffled through a metal detector. They gathered around photographs of the dead, then scattered flowers on four prop coffins—the kind you might get at a Halloween store—before climbing the steps of City Hall. There, they took up a chant: “No more loss! No more death! We need action now!”

One cabbie, addressing the protesters, observed that the turnout would have been bigger if drivers could afford to show up. “They need to be out working!” he barked. “They don’t have the luxury to come out here and protest.” Then, after an hour of chanting and speeches, everyone put down their signs and headed back to work. ■

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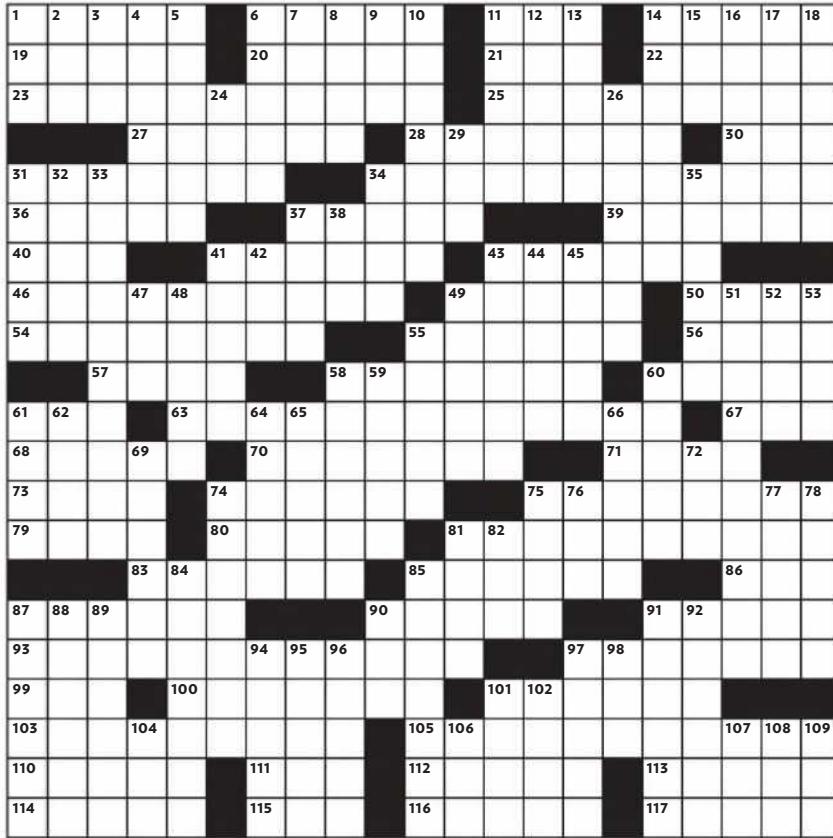
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# Echo Chamber

New York Crossword by Matt Gaffney



- 13 Lotion brand
- 14 Anger
- 15 Starbucks drink
- 16 Obeyed a doctor holding a tongue depressor
- 17 Nissan since '92
- 18 Golestan Palace's city
- 24 Famed video game console, for short
- 26 City between Pasadena and Pomona
- 29 Snacked on
- 31 Tenochtitlan builder
- 32 Prefix meaning "skin"
- 33 Spill slowly, as soda from a dented can
- 34 Gambling game
- 35 Joe's co-star in "My Cousin Vinny"
- 37 Low rolls
- 38 Amusing Romano
- 41 Breast
- 42 Observe covetously
- 43 "I Am the \_\_\_\_" (Beatles song)
- 44 "That's \_\_\_\_ trick!"
- 45 Knife brand
- 47 Sushi bar spheres
- 48 Agile teachers
- 49 Island the Labyrinth was on
- 51 Vouched for
- 52 Provoke
- 53 Nashville attraction
- 55 Plentiful
- 58 "\_\_\_\_, ergo sum"
- 59 Wow
- 60 Snippet of speech
- 61 \_\_\_\_-am (Dr. Seuss character)
- 62 Last syllable of seven Central Asian countries
- 64 Response to "Grazie"
- 65 Race with batons
- 66 Alabama or Iowa, e.g.
- 69 Pepperidge Farm cookie
- 72 Small amount, as of mustard
- 74 Hailstorm
- 75 They're charged in science labs
- 76 Strawberry used to be one
- 77 Went back down
- 78 Chain since 1886
- 81 Novelist born in Hell's Kitchen in 1920
- 82 Donkey's sound
- 84 Courageous poker move
- 85 Clinton's 2016 campaign chairman
- 87 Difficult to obtain
- 88 Work on muscle definition
- 89 No newbie
- 90 Half of an umlaut
- 91 "The Simpsons" quack
- 92 "I am the \_\_\_\_" (Beatles line)
- 94 Pool entries, often
- 95 "SNL" castmate of Ferrell
- 96 Pops
- 97 Kvetch
- 98 Prepare to fire
- 101 Regarding
- 102 Dickens or Darwin (abbr.)
- 104 \_\_\_\_ Bull Arena
- 106 Verbalize, as grievances
- 107 Share-buying event, for short
- 108 Kitten's sound
- 109 Return recipient

**Across**

- 1 Unlike backstabbers
- 6 Comprehend fully
- 11 Quebec question response, maybe
- 14 "Where \_\_\_\_" (Beck song)
- 19 Make accustomed (to)
- 20 Gretzky, for ten seasons
- 21 Record label from 1973 to 2013
- 22 Novelist Zora \_\_\_\_ Hurston
- 23 Shouting "Eruption!" as a practical joke, for example?
- 25 Believe
- 27 Exact retribution for
- 28 Hammond or Green
- 30 Way to go (abbr.)
- 31 Speech
- 34 She's got a newborn and only watches a certain cartoon show?
- 36 Nobodies
- 37 Slightest detectable amount
- 39 Warren Buffett, for one
- 40 Prefix with state
- 41 "Watch your step!"
- 43 "Der Ring des Nibelungen" composer
- 46 Toy a baby can play with in utero?
- 49 "Shut your piehole!"

- 50 "The Moor already changes with my poison" speaker
- 54 Last cars
- 55 Garfield's girlfriend
- 56 Where to board a bus
- 57 Building block
- 58 They run for security
- 60 2022 World Cup host
- 61 Away from NNW
- 63 Ballet outfit thrown together at the last minute?
- 67 Ice cream magnate Joseph
- 68 Molecule makeup
- 70 Tells tales to
- 71 Angling needs
- 73 \_\_\_\_ County, Hawaii
- 74 Country once called British Honduras
- 75 Does onstage
- 79 IHOP section
- 80 Material for marbles
- 81 "Actress Cates, allow me to introduce actress Neuwirth"?
- 83 Dry creek bed
- 85 Tito on drums
- 86 Letters before a company name
- 87 Relaxed but forgetful type
- 90 Keeps sleeping
- 91 Discourage
- 93 Extinct bird that once roamed the Rocky Mountains?

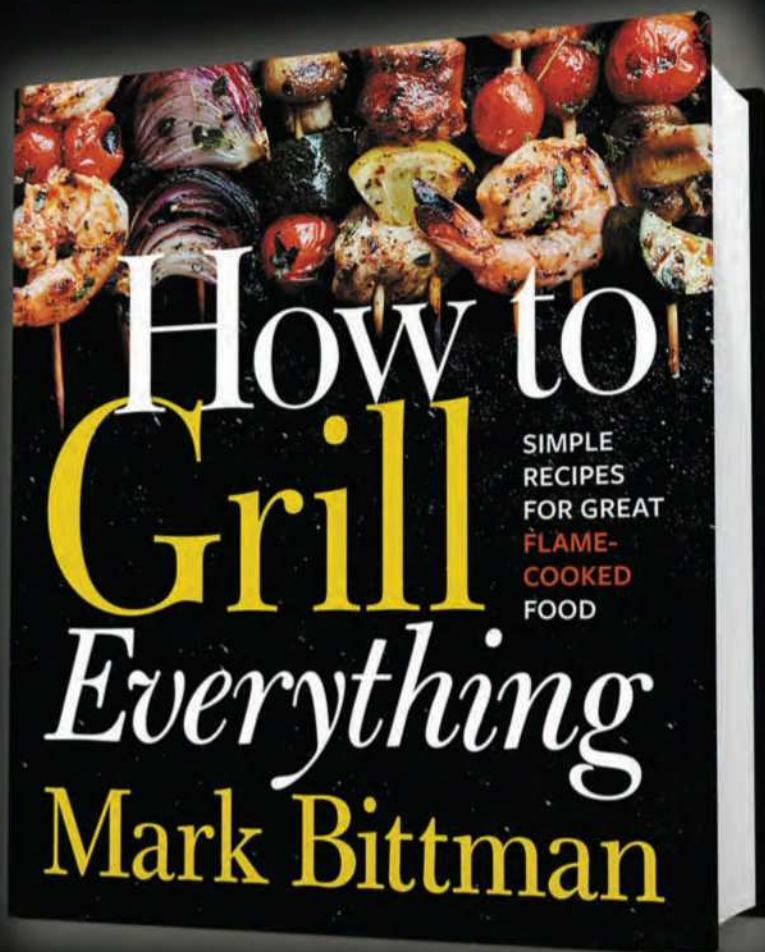
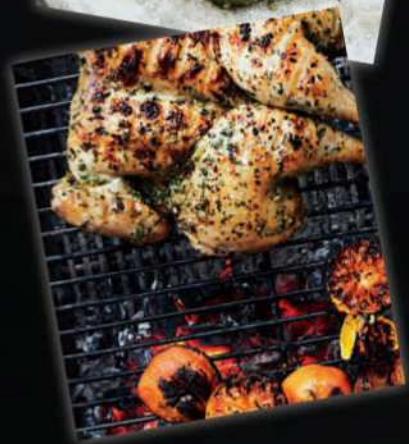
- 97 Mars et al.
- 99 "Was there something else?"
- 100 Stir up
- 101 Ready for a rubdown
- 103 Let off the hook
- 105 Actress Rogers who eats nothing but raw fish?
- 110 Makes well
- 111 Eisenhower \_\_\_\_ (1953-61)
- 112 Towering figure
- 113 Wacky adventure
- 114 Classical poem
- 115 Ma, to auntie
- 116 Came about
- 117 "Who \_\_\_\_?"

**Down**

- 1 Super Bowl \_\_\_\_ (game to be played on February 2, 2020)
- 2 Resident of the Dakota since 1973
- 3 Actor Brynner
- 4 Jockey Eddie
- 5 Skeddaddles
- 6 Hired muscle
- 7 Group of conspirators
- 8 Versatile plant
- 9 Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), e.g.
- 10 Food from farms
- 11 India's first prime minister
- 12 Sydney of astrology

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# THE APPROVAL MATRIX

Our deliberately oversimplified guide to who falls where on our taste hierarchies.

## HIGHBROW

The horrible **Eric Schneiderman** abuse allegations.

Rudy is so onboard with Trump's "**strategy or blunder?**" way of doing business.



Related: nuking the Iran deal. There's a **thought-through** new approach instead, right?

The Tony nominations are another reminder of how few truly new plays are produced on Broadway—only **eight** this year.



More than half the collection of a French museum dedicated to the Fauvist Etienne Terrus turned out to be **faux**.



The city okays Rafael Viñoly's UES "condo on stilts": a clever plan to elevate 12 floors atop a mostly **hollow** 150-foot plinth.

Columbia M.F.A. art students, sick of absentee faculty and crummy facilities, demand a **refund**.



The city's plan to expand our **costly**, inefficient ferry fleet ...



Trump says "**everyone**" thinks he deserves the Nobel Peace Prize, but all he wants is "victory for the world."

A **#MeToo** scandal is keeping the Swedish Academy from choosing a winner for this year's Nobel Prize in Literature.



Anselm Kiefer's **Uraeus** at Rockefeller Center.

The Shed's **low-high** preview series.



Storefront for Art and Architecture's "Marching On" exhibition, starring the **Marching Cobras** of New York.



... And Canada gallery's cross-generational "Wall of 100 **Neo-Gnarly**" drawings, curated by artist Jason Fox.



Jennifer Egan's **Manhattan Beach** is this year's One Book, One New York winner. Everyone with **sandy feet** on the Q train is reading it!

... However **delightful** they are to commute on.



The what-it's-like-to-be-13 **realness** of *Dance Nation* at Playwrights Horizons.



At St. Ann's Warehouse, Aristophanes' *The Birds* is a **joyful**, full-throttle carnival of the senses.



At St. Ann's Warehouse, Aristophanes' *The Birds* is a **joyful**, full-throttle carnival of the senses.

The **riveting** Barbara Walsh in Tennessee Williams's *Summer and Smoke* at Classic Stage Company.

DESPICABLE



According to a new poll, the Facebook privacy scandals have resulted in people using Facebook ... **more**.



Meanwhile, 2016 laureate Bob Dylan has launched an **unexceptional** whiskey brand.

Katy Perry ...



... Frances McDormand.



Childish Gambino's **subversive** "This Is America."

The Rock asks for a \$1 million fee to promote his own next movie on social media, where his **craft** is superb.



The diversity-focused Universal FanCon collapsed a week before it was to happen, leaving some participants feeling like they'd been **Fyre'd**.



The very **silly** *Deadpool* tie-in video for Céline Dion's "Ashes." Who knew our anti-hero could pirouette ...

Prada's neon '90s rave of a resort 2019 show, complete with trapper hats. (Perfect for St. Barts!)



Staten Island's **stalled**, 630-foot-tall Ferris wheel might get built after all.



300 people helped paint a mural in Bushwick designed to bring "light and consciousness to the world." Couldn't **hurt!**

A software glitch reportedly caused that self-driving Uber to run over and **kill** a woman in Arizona.

One of R. Kelly's accusers says she had to text him and call him **Daddy** to use the restroom.



A New Jersey school superintendent was charged with **pooping** on a rival high school's football field. He did this daily, apparently.



The shit-stirring *SpongeBob*-inspired Krusty Krab-versus-**Chum Bucket** meme.

The Backstreet Boys performing in Spice Girls drag, because the '90s need to be kept **fresh**.



Nintendo's **nifty** cardboard Labo accessories kits.



Ruby Chocolate Kit Kats are **koming**.



## LOWBROW

BRILLIANT

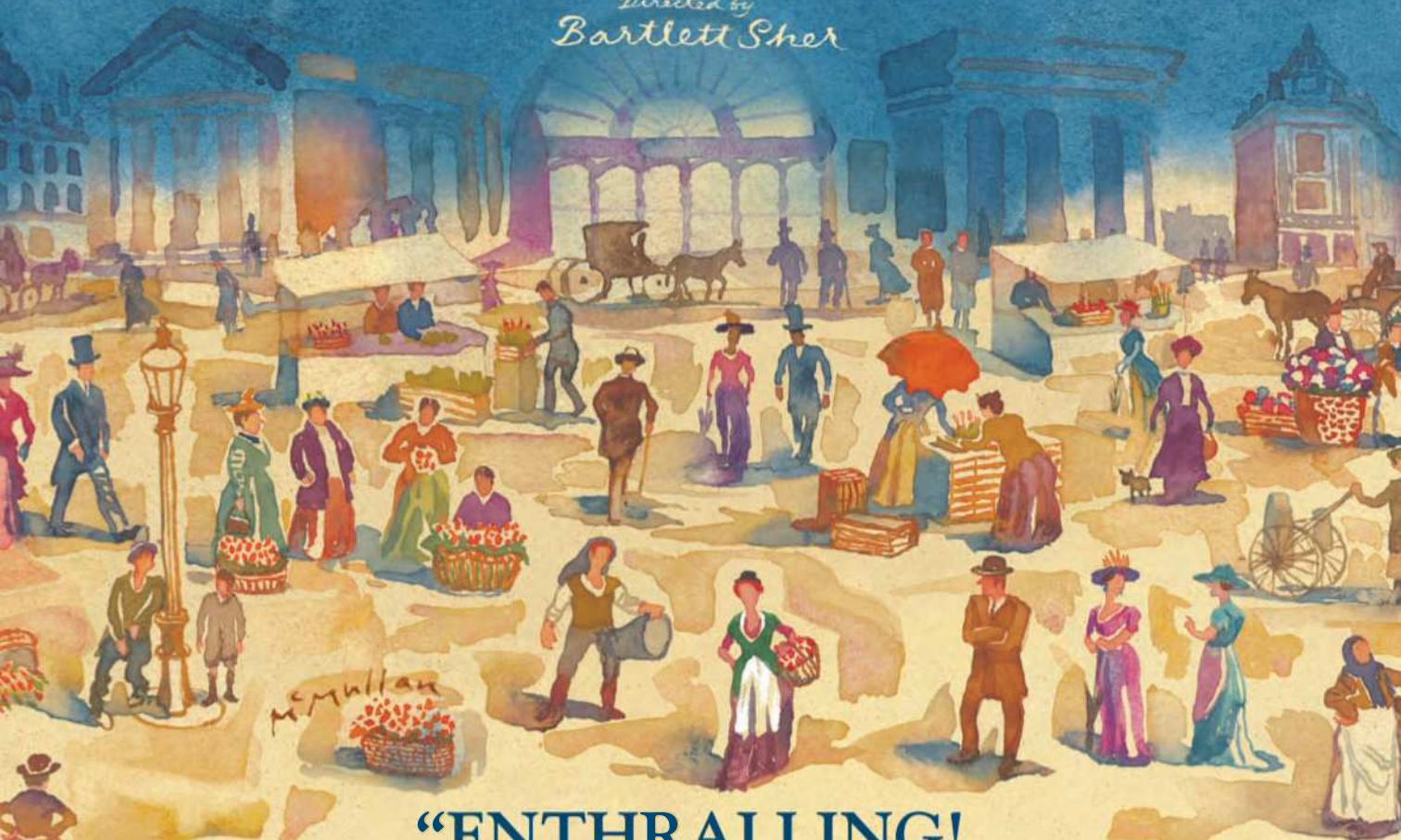
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