

PRICE \$8.99

THE

JAN. 9, 2017

# NEW YORKER



*jorge colombo*



# This cloud helps save time and lives.

With new diseases like Zika spreading faster than ever, no one medical professional can have all the answers. The Microsoft Cloud connects Partners In Health's 18,000 staff on a single platform so every patient receives the healthcare they deserve. Working together in real time is raising the standard of healthcare where it matters most.

This is the Microsoft Cloud.



# THE NEW YORKER

JANUARY 9, 2017

7 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

19 THE TALK OF THE TOWN

*Jelani Cobb on 1968 and 2016; teen cyberhackers solve a mystery; a British rocker gets a history lesson; New York City's luggers of junk clean house; James Surowiecki on corporate boycotts.*

THE POLITICAL SCENE

**Kelefa Sanneh** 24 Secret Admirers  
*A conservative underground embraces Trump.*

SHOUTS & MURMURS

**Jena Friedman** 31 A Recipe

PROFILES

**Tad Friend** 32 California Dreamin'  
*The director Mike Mills's nostalgia trips.*

A REPORTER AT LARGE

**Nicholas Schmidle** 38 Can Football Be Saved?  
*A high-school experiment to make football safer.*

OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

**Ian Frazier** 52 High-Rise Greens  
*The boom in indoor agriculture.*

FICTION

**Yiyun Li** 60 "On the Street Where You Live"

THE CRITICS

BOOKS

**Joan Acocella** 66 *Gregor Hens's "Nicotine."*  
69 Briefly Noted  
**Jerome Groopman** 70 *Charles Fernyhough's "The Voices Within."*

MUSICAL EVENTS

**Alex Ross** 74 *The super-virtuosity of Daniil Trifonov.*

POEMS

**Ellen Bass** 26 "After Long Illness"  
**John Kinsella** 58 "Milking the Tiger Snake"

COVER


**Jorge Colombo** "Waterways"

---

**DRAWINGS** Will McPhail, Kim Warp, Liam Francis Walsh, Joe Dator, David Sipress, Paul Noth, Jack Ziegler, Tom Chitty, Roz Chast, P. C. Vey, Tom Toro, Seth Fleishman, Drew Dernavich

**SPOTS** Greg Clarke





The future belongs to  
those who change it.

AMAZON ORIGINAL

# THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE

STREAM NEW SEASON NOW ON PRIME VIDEO

**amazon**  
Prime

## LIMITED-EDITION T-SHIRTS

Take a page out of Eustace Tilley's stylebook with exclusive shirts featuring our signature typeface.



Shop now at [modthread.com](http://modthread.com)  
Multiple styles available.

THE  
NEW YORKER

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Nicholas Schmidle** (*"Can Football Be Saved?"*, p. 38), a staff writer, is a Ferris Professor of Journalism at Princeton this spring.

**Tad Friend** (*"California Dreamin',"* p. 32) has been a staff writer since 1998.

**Jerome Groopman** (*Books*, p. 70), the Recanati Professor of Medicine at Harvard, has written several books, the most recent of which is *"Your Medical Mind: How to Decide What Is Right for You,"* with Dr. Pamela Hartzband.

**Jelani Cobb** (*Comment*, p. 19) teaches in the journalism program at Columbia University.

**Jena Friedman** (*Shouts & Murmurs*, p. 31) is a comedian and filmmaker. Her standup special, *"American Cunt,"* will be available on iTunes later this month.

**Kelefa Sanneh** (*"Secret Admirers,"* p. 24) is a staff writer.

**Ian Frazier** (*"High-Rise Greens,"* p. 52) recently published *"Hogs Wild: Selected Reporting Pieces,"* and is working on a book about the Bronx.

**James Surowiecki** (*The Financial Page*, p. 23), a staff writer since 2000, writes about business and economics.

**John Kinsella** (*Poem*, p. 58) is the author of, most recently, the poetry collection *"Firebreaks."*

**Alex Ross** (*Musical Events*, p. 74), a staff writer, is the author of *"The Rest Is Noise"* and *"Listen to This."*

**Yiyun Li** (*Fiction*, p. 60) is the author of several books. An essay collection, *"Dear Friend, from My Life I Write to You in Your Life,"* will be out next month.

**Joan Acocella** (*Books*, p. 66) has written for *The New Yorker* since 1992.

**Jorge Colombo** (*Cover*) is an illustrator, photographer, and graphic designer, and the author of *"New York: Finger Paintings by Jorge Colombo."*

NEWYORKER.COM

*Everything in the magazine, and more.*



### THE TRUMP TRANSITION

Steve Coll, Amy Davidson, Jane Mayer, and others analyze Donald Trump's Cabinet appointments.



### SCREENING ROOM

In our latest short film, *"If I Was God,"* a boy daydreams in science class as he dissects a frog.

**SUBSCRIBERS:** Get access to our magazine app for tablets and smartphones at the App Store, Amazon.com, or Google Play. (Access varies by location and device.)



---

## THE MAIL

### WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Hilton Als, in his review of the play “Sweet Charity,” takes the director Leigh Silverman to task for her seriousness of purpose (“Dear Heart,” December 5th). “The problem is that she’s too serious about theatre; she wants her shows to count—to have a moral purpose,” he writes. “Sometimes a play is just a play, and not all of her productions can bear the weight of her imperative.” Throughout the review, Als stops just short of telling Silverman, “Smile more!” Have we really not moved beyond this tired critique of women’s work and ambition? How can *The New Yorker* justify taking aim at a woman because she wants her work to “matter”? This unexamined cliché is disheartening, and diminishes both Als and your publication. “A play is just a play,” perhaps, but the truth is that plays matter. Words matter. Even—or, perhaps, especially—yours.

*Bess Wohl*  
New York City

---

### MEDIA UNDER TRUMP

In Amy Davidson’s Comment on Donald Trump’s transition team, she uses the term “alt-right” to describe the rhetoric of Trump’s chief strategist, Steve Bannon (December 5th). While I’m generally supportive of people’s efforts at self-appellation, it is the duty of everyone who objects to white-supremacist ideology to resist this group’s efforts at mainstreaming its positions. In practice, this means referring to those connected to it as the “so-called alt-right,” or else explicitly noting their ties to white-supremacist ideologies by calling them white supremacists or white nationalists.

*Elizabeth Armstrong*  
Ann Arbor, Mich.

Davidson, like many other journalists, quotes a Trump tweet. When

Trump was a candidate, the tweets were good for an eye roll, but, now that he has been elected, this one-way communication should be regarded for what it is: tweets between Trump and his followers. The role of the media is to hold politicians accountable, through accepted means: interviews and press conferences, even talk shows. Trump is able to avoid these platforms precisely because the media covers his tweets. If newspapers and magazines refused to do so, he would lose much of his ability to manipulate his coverage. Not much would be lost and, in my opinion, there would be a whole lot gained.

*Beth Cahn*  
Richmond, Calif.

---

### SEX AND PRIVACY

Margaret Talbot’s article on the lawyer Carrie Goldberg, a leader in the field of sexual privacy, reveals the complexities of adjudicating revenge-porn cases in the evolving world of online harassment (“Taking Trolls to Court,” December 5th). I so appreciated Talbot’s lionization of extraordinary attorneys like Goldberg, who have devoted an entire practice to this issue. While Talbot’s article focusses on victims of online humiliation, current laws offer protection to those who fear they may become victims. Even threatening to expose explicit photographs is, under existing harassment and extortion laws, often a crime. Individuals seeking orders of protection, or restraining orders, can ask the judge to include a provision that forbids the dissemination of private media to third parties.

*Clara Platter*  
New York City

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

# THE Beauty Queen OF Leenane

JAN 11—FEB 5



“...WILDLY  
FUNNY, DEEPLY  
AFFECTING AND  
GROTESQUELY  
MACABRE  
ALL AT THE  
SAME TIME.”

—THE TELEGRAPH (UK)

DRUID

By MARTIN MCDONAGH  
Directed by GARRY HYNES

BAM.org

718.636.4100  
TICKETS START AT \$25

Season Sponsor:

Bloomberg  
Philanthropies

Photo: Aisling O'Sullivan and Marie Mullin, by Matthew Thompson



Amy Poehler • Annie Dillard • Anohni • Michelle Williams • Hilton Als • Ben McGrath • Samantha Bee • Wiki • Aaron  
 Maria Bamford • Jack Handey • Siddhartha Mukherjee • Aziz Ansari • Rebecca Mead • Marc Maron • David Simon • Nate Silver • Samantha Bee • Wiki • Aaron  
 Larry David • Reggie Watts • Maria Bamford • Jack Handey • Siddhartha Mukherjee • Aziz Ansari • Rebecca Mead • Marc Maron • David Simon • Nate Silver • Samantha Bee • Wiki • Aaron  
 Amy Davidson • Ilana Glazer • Roz Chast • Emily Nussbaum • Cuba Gooding, Jr. • Junot Díaz • Jane Mayer • Evan Osnos • Laura Poitras • Rebecca Mead • Marc Maron • David Simon • Nate Silver • Samantha Bee • Wiki • Aaron  
 Amy Schumer • Jorge Ramos • Anita Sarkeesian • Roger Angell • Jelani Cobb • Gloria Steinem • Junot Díaz • Jane Mayer • Evan Osnos • Laura Poitras • Rebecca Mead • Marc Maron • David Simon • Nate Silver • Samantha Bee • Wiki • Aaron  
 Jonathan Safran Foer • Jill Lepore • William Finnegan • Jesse Eisenberg • Abbi Jacobson • Evan Osnos • Laura Poitras • Rebecca Mead • Marc Maron • David Simon • Nate Silver • Samantha Bee • Wiki • Aaron  
 Charlie Kaufman • Larry Wilmore • Lin-Manuel Miranda • Evan Osnos • Laura Poitras • Rebecca Mead • Marc Maron • David Simon • Nate Silver • Samantha Bee • Wiki • Aaron  
 Amy Schumer • Jorge Ramos • Anita Sarkeesian • Roger Angell • Jelani Cobb • Gloria Steinem • Junot Díaz • Jane Mayer • Evan Osnos • Laura Poitras • Rebecca Mead • Marc Maron • David Simon • Nate Silver • Samantha Bee • Wiki • Aaron  
 Amy Davidson • Ilana Glazer • Roz Chast • Emily Nussbaum • Cuba Gooding, Jr. • Junot Díaz • Jane Mayer • Evan Osnos • Laura Poitras • Rebecca Mead • Marc Maron • David Simon • Nate Silver • Samantha Bee • Wiki • Aaron  
 Amy Poehler • Annie Dillard • Anohni • Michelle Williams • Hilton Als • Ben McGrath • Samantha Bee • Wiki • Aaron



THE NEW YORKER  
**RADIO HOUR**

PODCAST

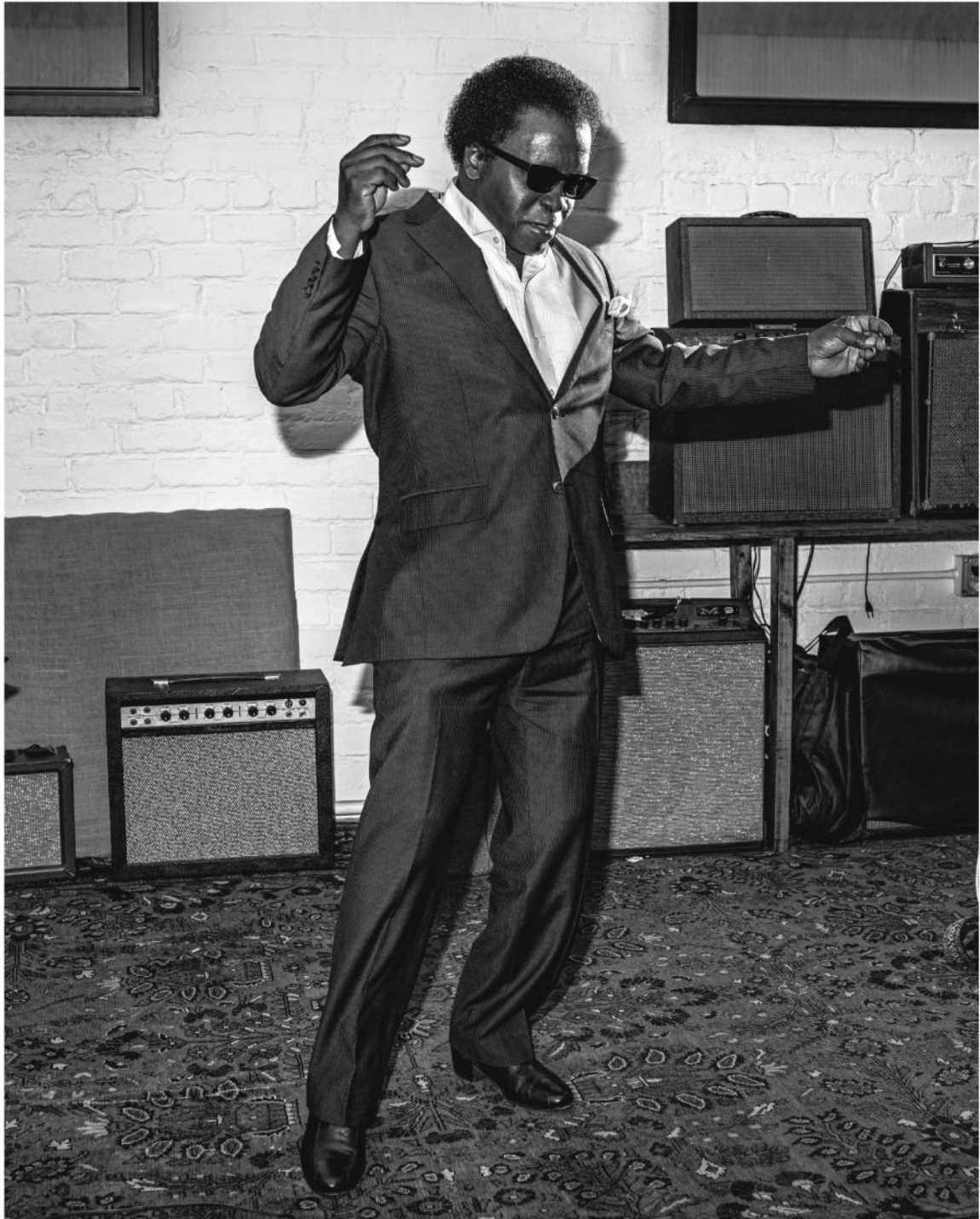
Spend an hour each week with your favorite writers and artists and their guests. The magazine's editor, **David Remnick**, hosts an original mix of profiles, storytelling, and provocative conversations, plus an occasional blast of comic genius.

Subscribe to the podcast on **iTunes** or **Google Play**, and listen anytime. (Or check your local public-radio broadcast schedule.)



JANUARY 4 - 10, 2017

# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



**Lee Fields** has earned the grit that coats his voice. With more than four decades of wear, his imperfectly preserved instrument might sound familiar to devotees of Stax and Chess. The North Carolina native, who plays Irving Plaza Jan. 7 with his band, the Expressions, is more revisionist than revivalist, performing as if the horns and Rhodes pianos of soul music had never given way to disco. His latest side, "Special Night," arrives via Big Crown Records, a budding Greenpoint soul label pressing seven-inch singles.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ADAM PAPE



---

# ART

---

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

### Metropolitan Museum

"Jerusalem, 1000-1400: Every People Under Heaven"

In this captivating show of some two hundred objects from the era of the Crusades, there are manuscripts, maps, paintings, sculptures, architectural fragments, reliquaries, ceramics, glass, fabrics, astrolabes, jewelry, weapons, and, especially, books—in nine alphabets and twelve languages. The works, from sixty lenders in more than a dozen countries, express the Jewish, Islamic, and Christian cultures of the time, the three great Abrahamic faiths sharing a city holy to them all, when they weren't bloodily contesting it. The installation is lovely: rooms in gray and blue are filled with a cumulative haze of spotlights, designed not for drama but for ease of attention; the show, though immense, won't exhaust you. The aesthetic appeal of the exhibits is continual and intense, but concentration on it can feel disrespectfully indulgent. Message, not medium, is the motive of even the most decorative work, in which visual pleasure serves to enhance belief and, perhaps, to give a foretaste of paradise. Partly, this is true of all properly regarded medieval art and design, from the time before Giotto and Duccio began insinuating personal style into painting. Most of the work in the show is not credited to a named artist. An exception is Sargis Pidzak, an Armenian who made superb illuminations for a Gospel book dated 1346. Another illustration, in a beautiful Italian Torah, of sacrificial rites in the courtyard of the Temple, is attributed to the place-holding "Master of the Barbo Missal." *Through Jan. 8.*

### Museum of Modern Art

"A Revolutionary Impulse: The Rise of the Russian Avant-Garde"

History is not a constant march forward—it can stand still for decades and then, as it did in Russia a hundred years ago, explode in a flash. This extensive showcase, featuring more than two hundred and sixty works, sets the formal experiments of early Soviet art—Lyubov Popova's geometric prints, Gustav Klutss's aggressive photcollages, the thick-slashed abstractions of Natalia Goncharova—within a framework of political upheaval. Formal innovation, it proposes, not only reflected rebellion but was intertwined with it. Kasimir Malevich is well represented, both by his Suprematist squares and by later, propaedeutic charts mapping the development of modernist style; the real star here, though, is his disciple El Lissitzky, whose geometric "Prouns" precede bold book covers, multiple-exposure photographs, and an audacious lithograph, made for the Committee to Combat Unemployment. Everything on view is from the museum's collection, and perhaps a full-dress exhibition would have integrated films more unexpected than "Man with a Movie Camera" and "Potemkin," two unimpeachable classics easily accessed on YouTube. But this sort of historically grounded, cross-media presentation is precisely how the museum should be

thinking as it prepares to expand its building with an eye toward a more muscular history of art. *Through March 12.*

### New Museum

"Cheng Ran: Diary of a Madman"

The young Chinese artist had never visited New York before filming the fifteen disjunctive, often jejune videos in his first U.S. museum show. On the largest screen, tourist-standard shots of Times Square are backed by a man half singing, half speaking Allen Ginsberg's "Howl"; other screens feature a couple having sex in the shower, a gentleman in Ray-Bans that reflect the Manhattan skyline, and a shucked oyster on a fire escape. Two films, one shot on the Williamsburg Bridge and the other on Staten Island Bay, feature Americans speaking halting Mandarin. If Cheng's images are undemanding, his seamless integration of life in two global superpowers has some more bite. *Through Jan. 15.*

---

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

### William Christenberry

A visual poet of the American South, Christenberry died in late November, three weeks after the opening of this understated knockout of a show, which pairs photographs of the same sites—ramshackle buildings and fecund landscapes in his native Alabama—in summer and winter. The attention that Christenberry paid to his subjects, which he often photographed years apart, bordered on the devotional. Here, his deceptively modest images are poignant monuments to the passage—and the ravages—of time. *Through Jan. 21. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)*

---

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

### Rita Ackermann

The Budapest-born, New York-based artist's recent series, "Stretcher Bar Paintings," reveals signs of support that are usually concealed. One messy red monochrome beckons with a montage of coquettish nudes, its surface subtly imprinted with the cruciform of its stretchers. In the series "Kline Rape," big, Ab Ex-y gestures struggle against Ackermann's long-term style of airy figuration. The outlined images of girls, which have been a hallmark of her work since the nineteen-nineties, rise to the top in "Kline Nurses," in which two neon-pink silhouettes, sporting bobs and fetishlike uniform caps, are fluidly limned over brash swaths of black. *Through Jan. 14. (Hauser & Wirth, 548 W. 22nd St. 212-977-7160.)*

### Jack Smith

Artaudian venom and derelict drag are soul mates in the radical oeuvre of the underground-cinema hero, best known for his experimental masterpiece from 1963, "Flaming Creatures." This small show shines a light on Smith's feverish output in other media, including vivid marker drawings on paper napkins, collaged flyers, and color photography. Posthumously pro-

duced prints of negatives dated 1952-62 feature dramatically made up queens in makeshift, layered costumes frolicking in a field of sunflowers; one wields a butterfly net. Two vitrines contain ephemera, including a handwritten announcement for screenings of Smith's scathing, prescient 1968 film, "No President," which incorporates found footage of the 1940 Republican nominee, Wendell Willkie, whose then unconventional political résumé included a stint as C.E.O. of a utilities company. This exhibition in a commercial gallery might well have infuriated the notoriously prickly, anticapitalist artist, but it's welcome fare in this bleak pre-inaugural season. *Through Jan. 14. (Marlborough, 545 W. 25th St. 212-463-8634.)*

### Masao Yamamoto

Avian photography is a tradition perched between science and art, but Yamamoto leans heavily in the latter direction with these sensitive, impressionistic prints. His small, transcendent pictures feature cranes in empty fields or doves soaring above petal-bedecked ponds. Swans get lost in the snow thanks to low-contrast exposure: birds and precipitation resolve into a vaporous beige. Some prints, including one of an owl looking away from the camera, Garbo-style, are mounted on *kakejiku*, the hanging scrolls usually reserved for ink paintings; others are subtly numinous, flecked with whispers of gold paint. *Through Jan. 28. (Richardson, 525 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)*

---

## GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

### Anna Glantz

These mannered paintings seem to have roots in high-school surrealism, vintage sci-fi book covers, and video-game worlds. "Retrovertigo" is a bizarre scene framed by imagery of crumbling bricks: a trumpet screws itself into the earth while a person hangs onto it for dear life. In "Mike Kelley Winter," the head of the legendary late artist floats in a pastel landscape interrupted by starbursts and a stick-figure dog. While certain motifs recur—notably stonework, animals, pumpkins, and goblets—each meticulous painting suggests its own uncanny narrative. The young artist's deft, if stilted, collision of illustrational styles is either admirably confident or perplexingly dogged, depending on your point of view. But the oneiric non sequiturs in her pictures linger in the mind's eye. *Through Jan. 15. (11R, 195 Chrystie St. 212-982-1930.)*

### Duane Linklater

The artist, who is Omaskéko Cree, from Moose Cree First Nation, in northern Ontario, has installed a disparate array of intriguing objects in an austere, layered, and quietly confrontational show titled "From Our Hands." Beaded mitts and slippers made of caribou hide and rabbit fur by Linklater's late grandmother, Ethel, and a buoyant clay animation piece by his twelve-year-old son, Tobias, join his own enigmatic sculptures. The gallery's south walls are stripped of their drywall, exposing a network of bright steel studs underneath. These industrial stripes are also the basis for the series "Untitled Problems," which combines gypsum, faux fur, and carpet in seemingly effortless ways; the artist renders each column wholly unique and oddly human. *Through Feb. 18. (80WSE, 80 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-5747.)*



## THE THEATRE



"Blueprint Specials" will be staged on the hangar deck of the *Intrepid*, with a cast of thirty-four.

## G.I. Jive

Rare Second World War musicals resurface, at "Under the Radar."

A FEW YEARS before writing "Guys and Dolls," which premiered in 1950, Frank Loesser put his sizable talents to work for Uncle Sam, when the U.S. Army hired him to collaborate on a series of musicals to be performed by and for the troops. Commissioned by the Special Services Division to boost morale, these "Blueprint Specials" came with a script, a score, and instructions for easy assemblage. ("The gags and situations are of the type to hit the GI funnybone. . . . The scenery can be knocked together in a jiffy from scrap materials found in even the loneliest outpost.") Loesser, who had been writing lyrics for Hollywood before the war, cut his teeth crafting songs for camp shows like "About Face" and "Hi, Yank!"; a 1951 *Billboard* profile proclaimed that "the army made a composer—a one-man songwriter—out of Frank Loesser."

Many of the scripts were lost to time, but the director Tom Ridgely, of the theatre troupe Waterwell, has unearthed four of them—all composed principally by Loesser between 1944 and 1945—and will mount them Jan. 6-11, on the hangar deck of the *Intrepid*. Ridgely spent months hunting down the scripts from various libraries and combining them into a full-length compilation. Much of the story will come from "P.F.C. Mary Brown,"

written in 1944 for the newly formed Women's Army Corps, in which the goddess Athena descends from Mt. Olympus to enlist as a private. The Broadway actors Laura Osnes and Will Swenson will lead a cast of thirty-four, consisting of both civilians and military performers, whom Ridgely found through veterans' groups by way of Army Entertainment, the modern-day equivalent of Special Services. They'll be joined by a fourteen-piece jazz orchestra and eleven dancers from the Limón Dance Company, who have reconstructed original Blueprint ballets by the choreographer José Limón.

"Blueprint Specials" is one of the more eye-catching entries in this year's "Under the Radar" festival (Jan. 4-15), the Public's showcase of experiments from here and abroad, which heats up the otherwise chilly theatre scene each January. "Club Diamond," by Nikki Appino and Saori Tsukada, also repurposes an old art form, in a darker story about the Second World War. The play begins in Tokyo in 1937, as a noted Benshi live-narrates a silent film, then skips ahead ten years, when the same man survives as a street performer under American occupation. For more modern war games, head to the Egyptian wing of the Brooklyn Museum, where the German collective Rimini Protokoll stages "Top Secret International (State 1)," an "algorithmic-based" immersive piece about global intelligence networks.

—Michael Schulman

## Jitney

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

## Made in China

The Wakka Wakka ensemble created this consumerism-minded puppet musical, in which a middle-aged American woman with a penchant for big-box stores falls in love with her Chinese neighbor. (*59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Previews begin Jan. 10.*)

## Orange Julius

Dustin Wills directs Basil Kreimendahl's play, about the transgender child of a Vietnam vet who is suffering from the effects of Agent Orange. (*Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-627-2556. Previews begin Jan. 10.*)

## The Present

Cate Blanchett and Richard Roxburgh star in the Sydney Theatre Company production of Andrew Upton's play, based on an early Chekhov work (known as "Platonov") and directed by John Crowley. (*Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. In previews. Opens Jan. 8.*)

## Yours Unfaithfully

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

## NOW PLAYING

## The Band's Visit

How do you make a musical comedy about boredom, drabness, and disappointment? This delightful new show, adapted from the 2007 (non-musical) film—about an Egyptian police band that travels to Israel to play a concert but ends up stranded for a night in the wrong town in the middle of nowhere—toys with that conundrum to hilarious and often hypnotic effect. Tony Shalhoub gets top billing for his unshowy performance as the band's repressed conductor, but the star is Katrina Lenk, as Dina, a world-weary local who shows him the sights, such as they are. David Yazbek's songs are charming, Tyler Micoleau's lighting is precisely evocative, and Scott Pask's rotating sets are ingenious. But it all works because David Cromer's direction is patient enough to allow the silence and space in which intimacy blooms. (*Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111. Through Jan. 8.*)

## COIL 2017

P.S. 122's annual festival returns, with works including Yehuda Duenyas's "CVRTAIN," which uses virtual reality to create a cheering audience of thousands; Nicola Gunn's "Piece for Person and Ghetto Blaster," about a woman's moral dilemma when she sees a stranger throwing stones at a duck; and Yara Travieso's "La Medea," which recasts the Euripides tragedy as a live TV tell-all. For the full program, visit [ps122.org](http://ps122.org). (*Vari-ous locations. 212-352-3101.*)

**Dear Evan Hansen**

This new musical (directed by Michael Greif, with music and lyrics by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul and a book by Steven Levenson) has a long stretch of brilliance, but it is ultimately undone by pop psychology. Evan (Ben Platt) is seventeen and in high school. Shyness causes his shoulders to hunch up, and he avoids eye contact with any interlocutor, even his mother, Heidi (Rachel Bay Jones). A classmate, Connor (Mike Faist), crosses a line, and, in the aftermath of his actions, the musical becomes a profound evocation of how the need to belong can be as ugly as the need to exclude. Platt's characterization is almost beyond belief, one of those supersonic performances that make you sit up in your chair. The holes in the formulaic second half don't so much diminish his performance as smudge it a little, like a beautiful charcoal drawing that's been handled too much. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/19 & 26/16.) (*Music Box*, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**God of Vengeance**

Were it not for Paula Vogel's new play "Indecent," which masterfully tells the backstory behind Sholem Asch's "God of Vengeance"—whose main claim to fame is a Broadway run halted for obscenity, in 1923—the earlier show would be forgotten by all but theatre historians. Now we can see what the fuss was about, thanks to New Yiddish Rep, which is presenting Asch's 1907 melodrama in its original language. As it turns out, the plot point that caught the vice squad's attention—a passionate lesbian kiss between the daughter of a brothel owner and one of her father's employees—takes up only a small part. What drives the story is the way men use tradition and religion to bolster their status and control women. Eleanor Reissa's production can be awkwardly earnest, and the acting is often tentative, yet the show is a fascinating curio. (*La Mama*, 74A E. 4th St. 800-838-3006.)

**Gorey: The Secret Lives of Edward Gorey**

The writer and illustrator Edward Gorey specialized in locating humor in peril and gloom; in his life, he could accurately be labelled a hoarder and a loner, yet his personality brimmed with inspirations and enthusiasms. The playwright and director Travis Russ has devised a brilliant solution for dramatizing this contradictory and solitary man: three actors, all of them excellent and in perfect tune with one another, play the artist simultaneously at three different ages, delivering a collective autobiographical monologue, sometimes delightedly affirming each other's accounts, sometimes gently contradicting them. Gorey may be the only character onstage (unless you count his overstuffed old house on Cape Cod, which is evoked in such loving detail that it deserves its own billing), but presenting his life in triplicate is like taking a familiar melody and assigning it an unexpected set of chords. (*Sheen Center*, 18 Bleecker St. 212-925-2812.)

**Othello**

David Oyelowo and Daniel Craig play the Moor and Iago, respectively, in Sam Gold's interesting version of Shakespeare's poem about possession, race, and jealousy, and it's those two stars, working without vanity, who do so much to increase our understanding of the language. Set in various contemporary Army barracks, the production closes the viewer into a world where male-ness is the dominant force, and where women are either put on a pedestal or considered ex-

pendable. Rachel Brosnahan is a very good Desdemona, and it's her strength and clarity that make Craig's Iago mad with jealousy. But it's a cold rage, which makes it that much more scary, while the complicated innocence of Oyelowo's Othello draws us in moment by moment without sacrificing the character's mighty power or his self-protective wit. (*New York Theatre Workshop*, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475.)

**ALSO NOTABLE**

**The Babylon Line** Mitzi E. Newhouse. • **A Bronx Tale** Longacre. • **Chris Gethard: Career**

**Suicide** Lynn Redgrave. *Through Jan. 8.* • **The Color Purple** Jacobs. *Through Jan. 8.* • **The Dead, 1904** American Irish Historical Society. *Through Jan. 7.* • **The Encounter** Golden. *Through Jan. 8.* • **Falsettos** Walter Kerr. *Through Jan. 8.* • **Finian's Rainbow** Irish Repertory. • **The Front Page** Broadhurst. • **Holiday Inn** Studio 54. • **In Transit** Circle in the Square. • **Les Liaisons Dangereuses** Booth. *Through Jan. 8.* • **Martin Luther on Trial** Pearl. • **Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812** Imperial. • **Oh, Hello** on Broadway Lyceum. • **Othello: The Remix** Westside. • **The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart** The Heath at the McKittrick Hotel. • **Sweet Charity** Pershing Square Signature Center. *Through Jan. 8.*

**DANCE****American Dance Platform**

Alicia B. Adams, the vice-president of international programming and dance at the Kennedy Center, has selected eight companies for this one-week festival, arranged in rotating double-bill programs. The most intriguing of them pairs the San Francisco-based group RAWdance's "Double Exposure," which was created by twelve choreographers (Ann Carlson and David Rousseve among them), with "Agua Furiosa," an Afro-Cuban riff on racism, drought, and "The Tempest" by Contra-Tiempo, from Los Angeles. And any visit by Ragamala Dance Company (in a split bill with Davalois Fearon Dance), an excellent Indian-American ensemble out of Minneapolis, is always welcome. (*Joyce Theatre*, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 4-8.)

**COIL 2017**

The dance selections of P.S. 122's multidisciplinary festival include "Basketball," the latest duet by Molly Lieber and Eleanor Smith, captivating performers whose attunement to each other can be engrossing. In "Meeting," the Australian choreographers Anthony Hamilton and Alisdair Macindoe move robotically while surrounded by sixty-four mechanical instruments: pairs of pencils and bells, triggered electronically. (*Various locations*. 212-352-3101. Jan. 4-10. *Through Jan. 22.*)

**Vicky Shick / "Another Spell"**

January has become the month of revivals. This week, Danspace revisits Vicky Schick's "Another Spell," a typically delicate and nuanced work from last year, which creates a quiet dreamscape filled with seven efficiently moving and vaguely mysterious women. As they go about their business—sometimes in intimate proximity, often alone—they seem to enact private stories and rituals: spinning in tight circles, shuffling on tiptoe, caressing, or simply basking in one another's company. (*Danspace Project*, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Jan. 5-7.)

**"American Realness"**

This annual festival of avant-garde performance, long based at Abrons Arts Center, now has a second home at Gibney Dance, where the festival's founder and director, Thomas Benjamin Snapp Pryor, has recently been put in charge of performance and residency programming. The schedule is as packed as ever: five world premières, six U.S.

premières, encore presentations, exhibitions, and discussions, and at least one party. The best bets are "Mercurial George," a volatile reckoning with identity by the Canadian choreographer Dana Michel; "Cage Shuffle," in which Paul Lazar recites randomly selected one-minute stories by John Cage while performing choreography by Annie-B Parson; and an evening of danced monologues by Meg Stuart, a noted American artist whose career has transpired mostly in Europe. (*Various locations*. 212-352-3101. Jan. 5-10. *Through Jan. 12.*)

**Contemporary Dance Showcase: Japan + East Asia**

This showcase offers a sampling of the newest of the new in the experimental performing-arts scene in Japan and the Far East. Most of these artists are unknown here, so the audience has no idea what to expect. The current edition includes a duet by Un Yamada, set to the 1923 Stravinsky ballet "Les Noces," a high-tech collaboration between the Canadian "audiovisual composer" Navid Navab and the dancer Akiko Kitamura, and works by choreographers from Korea and Taiwan. (*Japan Society*, 333 E. 47th St. 212-715-1258. Jan. 6-7.)

**"Stam-Pede"**

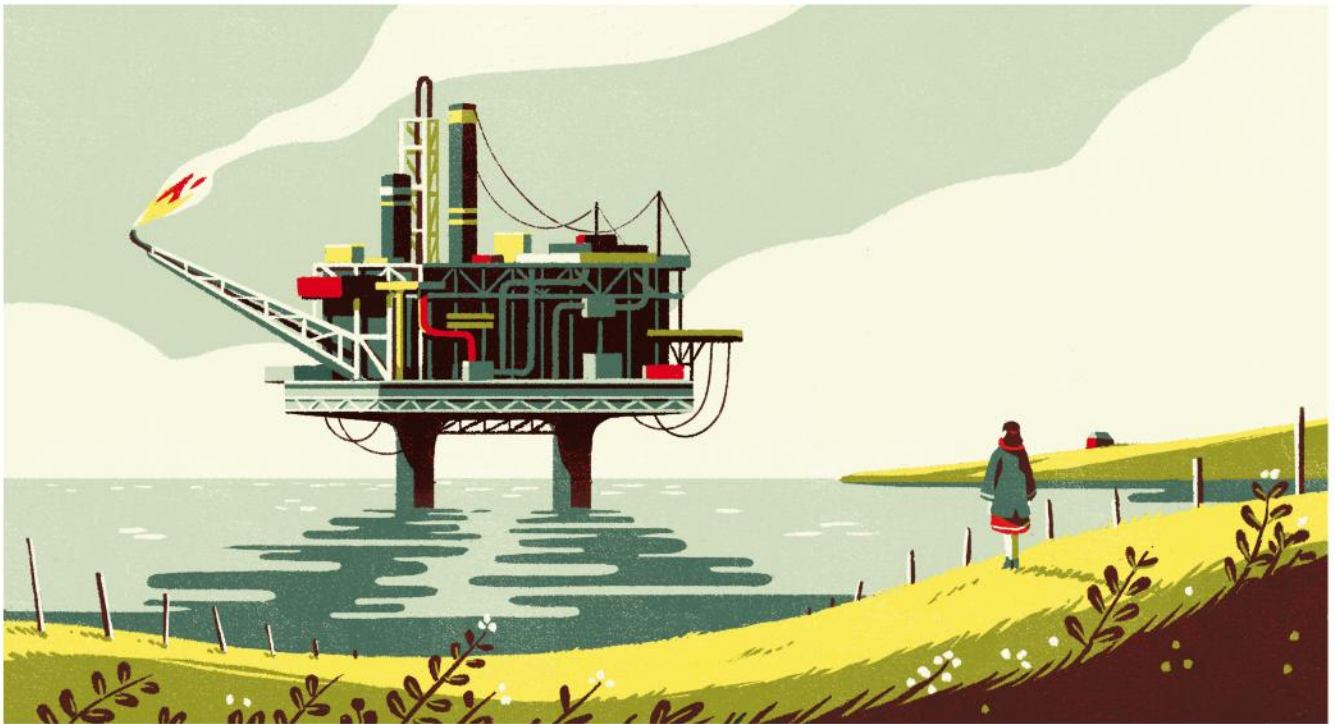
A broad definition of percussive dance is promoted in this annual showcase. This year's participating companies range from the Irish and modern of Darrah Carr Dance and the modern and tap of the Bang Group to the tap and quirkiness of Off Beat and its tall-enough-for-the-N.B.A. choreographer and star, Ryan P. Casey. (*Symphony Space*, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Jan. 8.)

**"Works & Process" / Pontus Lidberg**

The Swedish-born Lidberg is best known for his 2010 dance film, "Labyrinth Within," a collaboration with Wendy Whelan that he later developed into an immersive stage work. His style is poetic and meditative, with emphasis on the beauty and vulnerability of the human body. This winter, he will make his first work for New York City Ballet, with a score commissioned from the prominent composer David Lang ("The Little Match Girl Passion"). At the Guggenheim, Lidberg shows a few excerpts and talks about his approach with Whelan, who moderates. (*Fifth Ave.* at 89th St. 212-423-3575. Jan. 8-9.)



# CLASSICAL MUSIC



Kiera Duffy takes the leading role in “*Breaking the Waves*,” a new opera by Missy Mazzoli and Royce Vavrek, based on the Lars von Trier movie.

## In Extremis

*Women of indestructible spirit dominate this year’s Prototype Festival.*

SEVERAL DECADES AFTER Catherine Clément wrote “Opera, or the Undoing of Women,” a classic feminist critique, women still frequently come to grief on opera stages. The form can’t seem to dispense with what Clément describes as a punitive adoration of female singers: “They suffer, they cry, they die.” Yet modern tales of doomed heroines tend to reflect a more progressive, critical sensibility, particularly when female composers take the helm. Such revisionism could almost be the theme of this year’s Prototype Festival, which, in the past four years, has become essential to the evolution of American opera. On the bill are Missy Mazzoli’s “*Breaking the Waves*” (Jan. 6-9), about a Scottish wife who sacrifices herself to aid her maimed husband; David Lang’s “*Anatomy Theater*” (Jan. 7-14), which shows the dissection of an eighteenth-century English murderess; and Matt Marks’s “*Mata Hari*” (Jan. 5-14), about the seductive Dutch dancer who allegedly

spied as a double agent during the First World War.

“*Breaking the Waves*” had its première at Opera Philadelphia in September. The libretto, by Royce Vavrek, is based on Lars von Trier’s 1996 film, which, like other von Trier works, has drawn accusations of misogyny because of its brutal treatment of the principal female character. Bess, a member of a strict religious community on the Isle of Skye, marries an oil worker named Jan; when he suffers a paralyzing accident, he asks her to have sex with other men. Bess becomes convinced that by abasing herself to the point of death she will cure him. Her scheme succeeds, through a supernatural logic reminiscent of the redemptive self-sacrifices of various Wagner heroines. As with Wagner, we wonder whether Bess’s act confirms or transcends stereotypes of feminine devotion.

In Mazzoli’s opera, such issues quickly recede: we trust that the lead character is not undergoing degradation for the sake of male fantasy. The story is no less harrowing—it’s perhaps more so, given that Kiera Duffy, who sang the lead in Philadelphia and reprises it at Prototype, must act out

cruel scenes night after night, at times in the nude. Nonetheless, the desperate scenario of self-destruction and redemption seems to be a projection of Bess’s will to believe, her reshaping of the fabric of the world. Mazzoli’s score supports that dynamic by wedding strong lyric invention to an unsettled, insidiously dissonant chamber-orchestra texture that evokes the jagged beauty both of Skye and of Bess’s inner landscape. Benjamin Britten is a palpable influence, particularly in thrashing orchestral tempests and some melismatic, Peter Quint-like writing for tenor. Yet Mazzoli absorbs these and other elements into her own spare, propulsive voice.

Lang’s “*Anatomy Theater*,” which was first seen at L.A. Opera in June, offers some of the grisliest images ever shown in an opera house. But the composer handles the material with an eerie grace, creating space for another courageous solo turn. The mezzo-soprano Peabody Southwell also spends much of the evening naked, lying on a table and singing as examiners scour her body for signs of evil. They find none, and she goes on singing.

—Alex Ross



## OPERA

**Metropolitan Opera**

Bartlett Sher, a major director of the Met's Peter Gelb era, adds to his tally with a straightforward take on Gounod's lofty romantic "**Roméo et Juliette**," with Diana Damrau and Vittorio Grigolo (an electric combination when they were paired in Massenet's "Manon") as its ill-fated lovers; Gianandrea Noseda conducts. *Jan. 4 and Jan. 10 at 7:30 and Jan. 7 at 8.* • With its whimsical menagerie of puppets and liberal sprinkling of Masonic symbols, Julie Taymor's production of Mozart's "**The Magic Flute**" returns to the Met for a round of family-friendly performances. The abridged, English-language staging stars a talented young cast led by Christopher Maltman, Jessica Pratt, Ben Bliss, and Janai Brugger; Antony Walker. *Jan. 5 at 7:30. This is the final performance.* • The company's four-month-long test of the durability of Puccini's ever-green romance, "**La Bohème**," continues in the New Year. This time, the youthful cast is headed by Ailyn Pérez, Susanna Phillips, Michael Fabiano, and Alessio Arduini; Carlo Rizzi. *Jan. 6 at 7:30.* • The beloved tenor Plácido Domingo continues his vocal descent into baritone territory as the king of Babylon in Verdi's "**Nabucco**," bringing natural gravitas but little bite to the role. There are, however, superb performances from Liudmyla Monastyrska, Jamie Barton, Russell Thomas, and Dmitry Beloselskiy; James Levine emphasizes the score's beauty as well as its might, turning the famous "Va, pensiero" (sung with golden tone by the Met chorus) into the work's centerpiece. *Jan. 7 at 1. This is the final performance.* • Bartlett Sher's first production for the Met, a fleet-footed and sun-soaked "**Il Barbiere di Siviglia**," remains his best thus far. Three full-voiced singers—Pretty Yende, Peter Mattei, and Javier Camarena—head up the cast as Rossini's lovable rascallions; Maurizio Benini. *Jan. 9 at 7:30. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)*

**New York City Opera: "Candide"**

The resurgent company seems to be carving out a niche in the city's opera scene by offering contemporary works, but there is still room in the lineup for a backward glance. The Broadway legend Harold Prince—who first brought Bernstein's deft operetta to the company, in 1982—undertakes a new staging of the work, which stars an appropriate mix of opera and theatre talent, including Jay Armstrong Johnson, Meghan Picerno, Gregg Edelman, Keith Phares, and Jessica Tyler Wright; Charles Prince conducts. *Jan. 6 at 7:30, Jan. 7 at 2 and 8, and Jan. 8 at 4. (Rose Theatre, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)*

**"Prototype" Festival**

Though historians today cast doubt upon the purported criminality of Mata Hari, she was nonetheless executed in France for being a double agent during the First World War. In their world-première opera, "**Mata Hari**," the composer Matt Marks and the librettist Paul Peers deconstruct the nostalgic sounds of the Paris café (including accordion and banjo) as a way of delving into the story of the free-spirited dancer and courtesan who found herself at the center of a very dangerous game of espionage. Tina Mitchell and Jeffrey Gavett take the leading roles. *Jan. 5-7 at 7 and Jan. 8 at 2. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave.)* • Julian Wachner conducts the superb musicians of NOVUS NY and the Choir of Trinity Church Wall Street in the New York première of "**Breaking the Waves**," an opera by Missy Mazzoli and Royce Vavrek, which is based on the film by Lars von Trier. *Jan. 6-7 and Jan. 9 at 7:30. (Skirball Center, New York University, 566 LaGuardia Pl.)* • David Lang's hybrid

opera/musical-theatre piece "**Anatomy Theater**" stages the confession, execution, and public dissection of a convicted murderer in eighteenth-century England. The work's lurid libretto (co-written by Mark Dion) comes to life in haunting, darkly funny recitatives set against a post-minimalist accompaniment that thumps, groans, and heaves; Bob McGrath directs, and Christopher Rountree conducts. *Jan. 7-8 and Jan. 10 at 8. Through Jan. 14. (BRIC Arts, 647 Fulton St., Brooklyn.) (prototypefestival.org.)*

## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

**New York Philharmonic**

Except for a stiff introductory blast from Berlin—in the form of Kurt Weill's "Little Threepenny Music," for winds—Alan Gilbert's next round of concerts with the Philharmonic delves deeply into the musical heritage of Vienna. Emanuel Ax will be the distinguished soloist in the world première of the Piano Concerto by HK Gruber, a grand old man of Viennese composition whose music harbors an anarchic streak that Weill might well admire. Schubert's comparatively innocent Symphony No. 2 in B-Flat Major completes the program. *Jan. 5 at 7:30 and Jan. 6-7 at 8. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.)*

## RECITALS

**Time's Arrow Festival: George Crumb**

Crumb, long an American icon, has married the influences of Debussy and Bartók to the musi-

cal legacy of his Appalachian heritage. "American Songbook III: Unto These Hills" is one such treasure, which will be brought to life by the mezzo-soprano Elspeth Davis, the pianist Erika Dohi, and Sandbox Percussion in a concert that's part of Trinity Church's January festival of new and early music. *Jan. 4 at 5. (St. Paul's Chapel, 209 Broadway. No tickets required.)*

**Bargemusic Here and Now Festival**

The winter edition of this semiannual new-music jamboree is filled with works by several notable composer friends of the barge, including premières by David Del Tredici, Harold Meltzer ("Preludes"), Dalit Warshaw, David Taylor, and David Leisner ("Vapors"); the performers include Taylor (on trombone), Warshaw (on piano), the violinist Mark Peskanov, and the violist Mark Holloway. *Jan. 4-6 at 7:30. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. bargemusic.org.)*

**Bang on a Can: People's Commissioning Fund Concert**

With the organization entering its thirtieth year, the BOAC All-Stars offer their annual concert of crowdfunded commissions, which was going strong long before Kickstarter was a glimmer in anyone's eye. This iteration brings new works by Nico Muhly, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, and Felipe Waller, in addition to pieces by the masters Philip Glass, Michael Gordon, Julia Wolfe ("Believing"), and David Lang. *Jan. 9 at 7:30. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330.)*

## MOVIES

## NOW PLAYING

**Fences**

Chatting it up from the back of the garbage truck they operate for the city of Pittsburgh, Troy Maxson (Denzel Washington) and his best friend, Bono (Stephen McKinley Henderson), launch this adaptation of August Wilson's 1983 play with a free-flowing vibrancy that, unfortunately, doesn't last long. Under Washington's earnest but plain direction, scenes of loose-limbed riffing—such as a sharp-humored trio piece in the Maxson back yard for the two men and Rose (Viola Davis), Troy's steadfast wife—soar above the drama's conspicuous mechanisms and symbolism. Troy, a frustrated former baseball player from an era before the major leagues were integrated, tries to prevent his son Cory (Jovan Adepo) from seeking a football scholarship to college. Meanwhile, the embittered paterfamilias threatens his marriage by having an affair with a local woman. Much of the action takes place in the stagelike setting of the Maxson home and yard; despite the actors' precise and passionate performances, Washington neither elevates nor overcomes the artifice, except in his own mighty declamation of Troy's harrowing life story. With Mykelti Williamson, as Troy's brother, Gabriel, a grievously wounded veteran; and Russell Hornsby, as Troy's son Lyons, a musician who's struggling for success and his father's love.—Richard Brody (*In wide release.*)

**Hidden Figures**

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

**Julietta**

The latest film from Pedro Almodóvar is more temperate than what we grew accustomed to in his melodramatic prime, but it is just as sumptuous in its color scheme and no less audacious in

T

A

B

O

*Tom Hardy*

O

JAN 10  
TUES 10

**FX**  
FEARLESS



shouldering a burden of plot beneath which other directors would sag. The source is an unlikely one: three stories by Alice Munro, which follow a single figure through motherhood and loss. Julieta—played in her youth by Adriana Ugarte and as an older woman by Emma Suárez—is a teacher of classical literature and myth. She has a child by a man whom she meets on a train (the scene is much lustier than it is on the page) and moves to be with him on the coast. But one sorrow after another intervenes, and it is only in maturity, after a chance encounter, that she starts to solve the puzzle of what feels like a broken life. Even then, the film is surprisingly open-ended; it leaves you wondering what mysterious path Almodóvar will take next. Fans will rejoice in the return of Rossy de Palma, one of his muses, although the role she plays here—a frizzy-haired Mrs. Danvers—may come as a shock. In Spanish.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/19 & 26/16.) (In limited release.)

### La La Land

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

### Live by Night

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

### Neruda

Another new bio-pic, of sorts, from Pablo Larraín, whose "Jackie" is still in theatres. Once again, the angle of approach is oblique, avoiding the standard procedures of the genre, although in this instance there is an extra dash of playfulness and mischief. That certainly fits the subject, Pablo Neruda (Luis

Gnecco), whose poetry would later earn a Nobel Prize, but who begins the film, in 1948, as a member of the Chilean senate; as a Communist, he finds himself scorned by the recently elected President. The dismissal becomes a witch hunt, with Neruda—sly, grand, lecherous, and overweight—fleeing from one safe house to another, lovingly supported by his wife (Mercedes Morán) and harried by an irrepressible policeman (Gael García Bernal). Much of this story, including the journey over the Andes into Argentina, is a matter of record, but other parts, like the character of the cop, were brewed up for the sake of the movie. The result is both highly unreliable and enjoyably persuasive; we are lured into Larraín's imaginings, such as a final showdown in the snow, much as Neruda's devotees succumb to the declamations of his verse. In Spanish.—*A.L.* (1/2/17) (In limited release.)

### Passengers

This science-fiction drama has the substance and the tone of a "Twilight Zone" episode while offering a too-good-to-spoil and too-evil-to-believe plot twist that's the movie's *raison d'être*. Sometime in the future, a private company offers paying customers the chance to colonize a planet in distant space. The autopiloted flight takes a hundred and twenty years, during which time the five thousand-plus settlers and crew members are kept in suspended-animation pods that prevent them from aging. But after an unforeseen calamity only thirty years into the journey two travellers, Jim (Chris Pratt), a mechanical engineer, and Aurora (Jennifer Lawrence), a writer, are awakened too soon and face a lifetime as the only two functioning humans aboard the effectively empty spacecraft. (There's also a bartender named Arthur—played by Michael Sheen—but he's actually an android.) The director, Morten Tyldum, thrives on the peculiarities of the spaceship's amenities—the holographic greeters, the waitstaff robots with French accents, the implacable food dispensers, the swimming pool with a cosmic view—and the most engaging drama arises not from the pair's relationship but from the dangers of losing gravity. As for the big, crude, and ugly twist, it's just a prefabricated think piece. With Laurence Fishburne, as another human who must make the supreme sacrifice for the benefit of the movie's white heroes.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

### Paterson

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

### Silence

Martin Scorsese has never made a Western; his adaptation of Shusaku Endo's 1966 novel, set in the

seventeenth century, is the closest thing to it. Two Portuguese priests, Sebastião Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield) and Francisco Garrupe (Adam Driver), have heard rumors that their teacher and confessor, Father Cristóvão Ferreira (Liam Neeson), a missionary in Japan, has betrayed his Christian faith, and they travel to search for him. En route, they learn of the bloody persecution that Christians face in Japan, and when they're smuggled into the country they, too, face the authorities' wrath. Rodrigues is the protagonist of this picaresque epic of oppression and martyrdom, which Scorsese ingeniously infuses with tropes from classic movies, as in the mannerisms of a good-hearted but weak-willed Christian (Yosuke Kubozuka) and a brutal but refined official (Issey Ogata), whose intricate discussions of religion and culture with Rodrigues form the movie's intellectual backbone. Many of the priests' wanderings have the underlined tone of mere exposition; but as Rodrigues closes in on Ferreira the movie morphs into a spectacularly dramatic and bitterly ironic theatre of cruelty that both exalts and questions central Christian myths. It plays like Scorsese's own searing confession.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

### Summer

Éric Rohmer's 1986 drama, blending fiction and documentary with a graceful splendor, may be the finest example of his supple yet severe artistry. Delphine (Marie Rivière) is a stubborn Paris secretary whose instinctive negativity is put to the test when her vacation plans are spoiled two weeks before her planned departure. Rohmer turns her tentative visits to family and friends in search of new vacation options into an ethnographic study of French leisure habits—as well as an Impressionist celebration of the natural habitats and architectural glories around which they're organized. But the pleasures of new places and new friends clash with Delphine's inchoate longings and with her resistance to social conventions and, indeed, to decision-making. The film's original title, "Le Rayon Vert" ("The Green Ray"), is that of a novel by Jules Verne, which intrudes surprisingly on the action, and which, like the story's many striking coincidences, lends it a retrospective sense of destiny. As Rohmer rapturously proves through the adventures of his quietly rebellious protagonist, the negative of a negative is a positive. In French.—*R.B.* (Metrograph; Jan. 10.)

### 20th Century Women

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



## NIGHT LIFE

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



Ramble Jon Krohn, who produces and d.j.s as RJD2, mans the sound system at Brooklyn Bowl on Jan. 10.

## New Routes

*As young producers redefine fame, RJD2 remains heard and not seen.*

HIP-HOP PRODUCERS HAVE long had to conjure up a voice to build recognition: Dr. Dre and Kanye West learned to rap; Mike Will Made-It and Metro Boomin added sonic name tags to their beats. But in recent years amateurs have emerged at the fore via new channels. SoundCloud, the audio-hosting service, has provided young beatsmiths with a social network all their own, where they share mixes and build followings without the need for a rapper's endorsement, gaining micro-fame in the process. Policy updates suggest the company is smartly turning its attention toward this organic community: SoundCloud's founder and tech manager, Eric Wahlforss, recently explained to the German magazine *Groove* that the service would no longer terminate accounts for uploading copyrighted samples.

Ramble Jon Krohn, who produces and performs as RJD2, didn't enjoy such luxuries, but his hybrid positioning as a producer and a commercial artist made inroads others would unwittingly follow. After making a name for himself in Columbus, Ohio, cutting up records on turntables in local d.j. battles, he bought a sampler in 1997 and began imitating the sounds he heard churning from the coasts. Krohn offered catchy, achy loops

of melody ripped from fuzzy soul and jazz records, punctuated by kick and snare drums that swung with urgency; most vitally, he articulated a style without saying a word. Instead of pitching beats to established rappers, he signed to the independent label Definitive Jux and released an instrumental album of his own, then still a novel proposition in hip-hop. "Deadringer," which arrived in 2002, was at once a landmark record for the producer-as-artist and a gold mine for licensors: tracks including "Ghostwriter" and "Smoke & Mirrors" became inseparable from the countless television spots they scored, including ads for Acura, Saturn, Adidas, and Wells Fargo. Krohn's work became ubiquitous even as he remained unrecognizable to all but fanatic beat nerds—in 2007, when his instrumental "A Beautiful Mine" was tapped as the theme song for "Mad Men," millions heard his work without ever knowing his name.

Krohn loads hundreds of beats and thousands of samples into Brooklyn Bowl on Jan. 10, where he'll deconstruct and reassemble the collages found on his March album, "Dame Fortune." Throughout his sixth release, Krohn conducts a tangle of space funk and atmospheric, choral electronica, doing the work of the best producers even in loose moments—finding, and guiding, meaningful connections.

—Matthew Trammell

## Sam Amidon

This genial indie-folk singer, banjoist, and fiddler grew up in Vermont with expansive tastes that included an appreciation for Dock Boggs, Elvin Jones, and the drone violinist Tony Conrad. In 2010, Amidon moved to England with his wife, the singer-songwriter Beth Orton, where he has tuned in to the work of pioneering sixties British folk revivalists like the singer Anne Briggs and the song collector and singer Shirley Collins. Amidon, meanwhile, maintains his own commitment to heterodoxy, which has been marked by collaborations with gifted improvisers like the Americana-tinged jazz guitarist Bill Frisell and the multi-instrumentalist Shahzad Ismaily, his longtime cohort. For this show, part of the NYC Winter Jazzfest, Amidon takes his folk-improvisation hybrid one step further, inviting the free-jazz drummer Andrew Cyrille to open with a brief solo performance and asking a slew of guest improvisers, including Ismaily, the guitarist Marc Ribot, and the trombonist Curtis Fowlkes, to contribute embellishments to his affecting, gravelly songs. (*Le Poisson Rouge*, 158 Bleecker St. 212-505-3474. Jan. 9.)

## Blonde Redhead

Last year, the modish archival label Numero Group released "Masculin Féminin," a thirty-seven-track, four-LP boxed set of the "pre-Giuliani" recordings of this long-standing New York indie-rock act. Despite their recent canonization, Blonde Redhead have always seemed like outsiders—even in the eighties, their songs reflected a cosmopolitan view of downtown no-wave. (At that time, the group consisted of two Japanese women and a pair of Italian brothers.) The early music remains energetic and sharp, while hinting at the sophisticated art pop they would eventually perfect on their 2004 masterpiece, "Misery Is a Butterfly." This week, the group performs that album in full, backed by the sprawling American Contemporary Music Orchestra. (*Le Poisson Rouge*, 158 Bleecker St. 212-505-3474. Jan. 8.)

## Celebrating David Bowie

This tribute concert, billed as "A Very Special David Bowie Concert with Bowie People Playing Bowie Music Bowie Style," honors what would have been the late auteur's seventieth birthday. Bowie's closest friends have assembled the musicians with whom he collaborated most frequently to perform the music they wrote and recorded together across forty years and several tours. The event is part of a benefit tour, which includes stops in London, Los Angeles, Sydney, and Tokyo. For this New York date, the core ensemble includes Mike Garson, Adrian Belew, Angelo Moore, of Fishbone, and Bernard Fowler, of the Rolling Stones, among more than seventy musicians, all playing in support of local charities. (*Terminal 5*, 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Jan. 10.)

## PWR BTTM

Ben Hopkins and Liv Bruce, a guitarist-drummer duo, make knotty, snotty garage pop that's downright vital. Bruce, an affecting lyricist, gives their brimming theatre punk a lively humor and a dark edge: "We can do our makeup in the parking lot / We can get so famous that we both get shot / But right now I'm in the shower," he sings on "Dairy

Queen.” On their newest single, “Projection,” the Bard alums sober up, taking on the tortured purview of a protagonist who feels shunned by the world beyond his bedroom, and sees no option but “to stay inside.” Catch them for two nights at Joe’s Pub, performing in floral dresses and gobs of glitter; a sort of drag-in-drag gimmick made forgivable by their stone-serious talent. (*Joe’s Pub*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Jan. 7 and Jan. 12.)

### Thou

Perhaps it’s time to give doom metal a try. For those willing to overlook the genre’s stoner nihilism and satanic posturing (and, of course, the acrid odor of its most committed practitioners), it provides a clenched, cynical take on New Age. After a decade spent hammering it out in the underground-metal circuit, this slow-handed Baton Rougean sludge outfit has emerged as one of the style’s key ambassadors. Smearred, apocalyptic guitar riffs buoy Bryan Funck’s grim, screeching vocals, which invoke classic black-metal singers while sidestepping any hint of Dungeons and Dragons. His punishing songs are grounded in reality, and written in droning long form; for the right pair of ears, they can be downright meditative. (*Saint Vitus*, 1120 Manhattan Ave., Brooklyn. *saintvitusbar.com*. Jan. 6.)

### Title Fight

Title Fight is among the rare bands that make good on their efforts to sustain themselves within a tight-knit community, both personally and musically. They play a melodic offshoot of the suburban Pennsylvania hardcore sound, which has only got heavier and rangier in their fourteen years together, captivating their core fan base and intriguing curious onlookers. The band’s last release, “Hyperview,” from 2015, was its first on ANTI Records, cementing its expanding audience after a set at Coachella the prior year. This show is part of a short Northeastern tour of “intimate venues with limited capacity,” and features two quality openers: **Give**, which delivers an update of D.C. hardcore, and **Westpoint**, a relatively young band reimagining the grunge of their youth. (*Knockdown Center*, 52-19 Flushing Ave., Maspeth, Queens. 347-915-5615. Jan. 5.)

### Whitney

The guitarist Max Kakacek, formerly of the Smith Westens, and Julien Ehrlich, the onetime drummer for Unknown Mortal Orchestra, came together to form this soft-psychedelic outlet to satisfy more cerebral impulses. Honeyed timbres smooth out their back-road-folk influences in songs about heartache and home towns. Despite the slim lineup, Whitney composes ambitious arrangements that add in warm string and horn sections, pastel bridges, and swelling, shout-along choruses: “Golden Days” crams in guitar and brass solos, but Ehrlich’s soft-whine vocals keep the song delicate and compact. Whitney’s album “Light Upon the Lake” was released last June by the Indiana label Secretly Canadian, home to soul stirrers like Anohni and the War on Drugs. After hosting a string of ripping local shows last year, the group returns to the city for an evening of ambling AM-radio rock. (*Rough Trade NYC*, 64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn. *roughradenyc.com*. Jan. 5.)

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

### Regina Carter

Carter, an imaginative, conceptually minded violinist, pays tribute to a legendary singer, Ella

Fitzgerald—in what would have been her hundredth year—as well as to her own family roots, with the “Simply Ella” project. Fitzgerald’s voluminous repertoire, which touched on as many of the Great American Songbook standards as possible (with plenty of supplementary material filling in the gaps), will offer Carter more than enough touchstones with which to honor the great lady. (*Jazz Standard*, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Jan. 5-6.)

### Anat Cohen Tentet

Wielding her clarinet and saxophones in the service of traditional jazz, post-bop, Brazilian, and Middle Eastern musical strains, Anat Cohen is a present-day multicultural wonder. Her tentet, a consortium of strings, horns, percussion, and keyboards, will provide a sufficiently broad canvas for her far-flung tones. (*Jazz Standard*, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Jan. 7-8.)

### Fred Hersch Trio

This prime pianist’s instrumental touch only strengthens his acute composing and band-leading skills. See all three forces in play at this six-night stand, where Hersch expands his invaluable trio—with the bassist **John Hebert** and the drummer **Eric McPherson**—to include the

trumpeter **Mike Rodriguez** and the saxophonist **Dayna Stephens**. (*Village Vanguard*, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Jan. 3-8.)

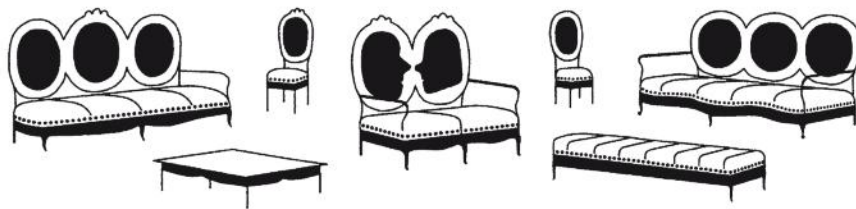
### New York City Winter Jazzfest

Anyone willing to dart through the cold from one jam-packed venue to the next at this now firmly established festival, currently celebrating its thirteenth iteration, will be rewarded with a firsthand account of jazz in the post-millennial era. The marathon programs on Jan. 6-7 include performances by **Jason Moran**, **Donny McCaslin**, **Mary Halvorson**, **Kneebody**, **Kris Davis**, and **Andrew Cyrille** (the festival’s artist-in-residence), and a swath of ECM Records artists, including **Bill Frisell** and **Ravi Coltrane**. (*Various locations*. *winterjazzfest.com*. Jan. 5-10.)

### Kendra Shank and Geoffrey Keezer

Shank, a vocalist of imaginative latitude, has found a duo soul mate in the veteran pianist Keezer, as demonstrated on the new recording “Half Moon.” Investigating worthy, under-the-radar material (including work by such jazz luminaries as Abbey Lincoln and Cedar Walton), Shank and Keezer find mutual inspiration in intuitive surprise. (*Mezzrow*, 163 W. 10th St. *mezzrow.com*. Jan. 9.)

## ABOVE & BEYOND



### Three Kings Day Parade

For many New Yorkers, the holiday season doesn’t end with the calendar year. El Día de los Reyes, which marks the adoration of Jesus by the Three Wise Men, gives children one last chance at gifts, on the twelfth day of Christmas. For the fortieth annual Three Kings Day Parade, in East Harlem, families are invited to join a morning procession through the neighborhood, starting on the corner of 106th Street at Lexington Avenue and ending at 115th Street at Park Avenue. Attractions include camels, colorful puppets, musical performances from local bands, and traditional Puerto Rican food. El Museo del Barrio, which hosts the parade, offers free admission throughout the day. (*El Museo del Barrio*, 1230 Fifth Ave. *elmuseo.org*. Dec. 6 at 11 A.M.)

## READINGS AND TALKS

### McNally Jackson

In the past half century, as media and publishing have advanced and transformed at breakneck speeds, so, too, has partisan propaganda. Indeed, government and literature’s relationship has only evolved, and sifting through past methods of shaping public opinion may sharpen

our understanding of real and fake news today. During the Cold War, the C.I.A. infamously coluded with literary magazines, making changes to works by Peter Matthiessen, George Plimpton, and Richard Wright, among others. In “Finks: How the CIA Tricked the World’s Best Writers,” Joel Whitney and Lisa Lucas examine the neutering of literary dissent in a bygone era, and consider its implications for our brave new world. (*52 Prince St.* 212-274-1160. Jan. 5 at 7.)

### 92nd Street Y

E. L. Doctorow, the Bronx-born novelist and playwright, twisted history to his whim in engrossing fictional narratives like “Ragtime” and “Billy Bathgate.” More than a year after his death, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Don DeLillo, and Jennifer Egan pay tribute to the writer in celebration of his posthumous “Collected Stories,” which arrives on Jan. 10. The volume contains fifteen stories written between the nineteen-sixties and the early twenty-first century, selected and revised by Doctorow himself, shortly before his death, including “Heist,” the short story that was expanded into his best-selling “City of God,” and “Liner Notes: The Songs of Billy Bathgate,” an amendment to his beloved crime epic. (*1395 Lexington Ave.* 212-415-5500. Jan. 9 at 7:30.)



# FOOD & DRINK



## TABLES FOR TWO

### Spice Symphony

Lexington Plaza, 182 Lexington Ave.  
(212-545-7742)

DEPENDING ON THE quality of your introduction to sesame-crusting tuna or similar sanitized novelties at trendier-than-thou enclaves, your opinion of Asian fusion may occupy some intersection of tortured and tacky. The coupling of Indian and Chinese, then, would seem like another superfluous mashup if it weren't for the fact that it was conceived not by overzealous food magnates but by Hakka immigrants living in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) more than a century ago, owing as much to homesickness as to a genuine affection for the sweetness and pungent heat of their adopted country.

The spirit of that diaspora cuisine lives at Spice Symphony, a compact, cacophonous canteen near Curry Hill. Headed by Walter D'Rozario, the former chef de cuisine of Junoon, who takes a "grandmotherly" approach to cooking, Spice Symphony celebrates the cultural mix-and-match spirit with the confidence of a cocksure matriarch who dares to inspire the palates of her children rather than placating their proclivities. Take the coriander soup, a mushroom-and-ginger broth thickened with earthy greens and topped with a generous spread of cilantro leaves: it's the sort

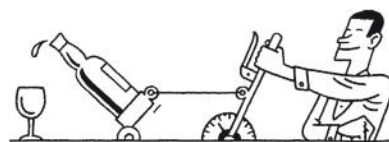
of memorable starter that either hooks you with its peppery kick or leaves your mouth tasting of soap. But not everything on the menu polarizes. The manchow soup, long a Chinese-Indian staple, is a soy-garlic stew, rich in scallions and chicken and heaped with crispy dry noodles, which seems designed to buttress diners against wintry weather.

At a fusion restaurant, it can sometimes pay to gamble on dishes that appear dubious. To the uninitiated, the Paneer Chili Dry, an unintuitive pairing of chili and cheese, may seem dangerously ill-advised, until you realize that strips of fried cottage cheese could not find a more winning foil than the sweet, hot tang of chili and ginger. On a recent Thursday evening, a table of overzealous patrons decided to order everything they found suspect, with varying degrees of success. The spinach chaat is perfect for anyone who is indifferent to the vegetable but enamored of the texture of waffle fries. The tandoori achari mushrooms, on the other hand, faltered, because the addition of yogurt, a spice mix, and an unidentifiable sauce conspired to create chaos.

Not everything pleased everyone, but the table began to resemble a Thanksgiving spread: there was way too much food, but that was to be expected. In a grandmother's kitchen, nobody gets to leave the table without a swollen belly and a parcel of leftovers. (*Entrées \$15–\$23.*)

—Jiayang Fan

## BAR TAB



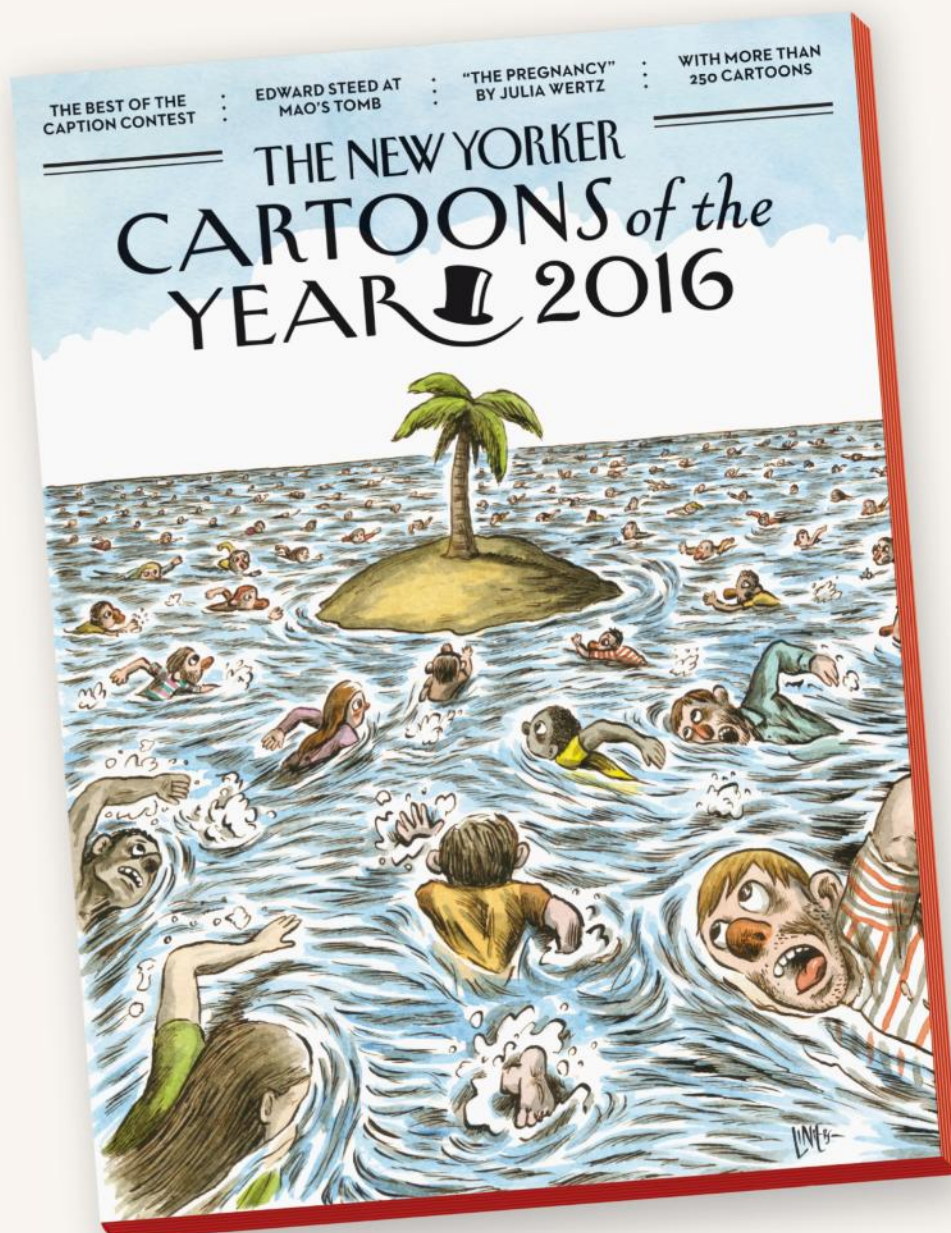
### Rabbit House

76 Forsyth St. (212-343-4200)

This exquisite wisp of a sake bar is tucked into a vibrant stretch of Forsyth Street, amidst Vietnamese restaurants, dumpling shops, and bubble-tea parlors. Its name is a play on a term popularized by Westerners to describe Japanese abodes—a memo circulated by the European Commission in 1979 described the Japanese as "workaholics living in rabbit hutches." But the bar's smallness works to its advantage, and the place has been created with intense care and an idiosyncratic sensibility: there are warm woods and twinkling Edison bulbs; the bases of the water glasses are tuliped so they spin on their sides precariously but never spill. On a recent Sunday night, Yoshiko Sakuma, the owner, chef, and sommelier, asked a patron who had just stepped in from the cold if she would mind if the bar forwent its overhead lights in favor of candles. Sakuma had had a long week. "I want to go drink at Shigure after I close," she said, throwing her head back in mock exasperation. One patron reminded her that the popular sake bar was closed on Sundays, and she groaned. Others suggested places she might visit instead, as they accompanied her in drinking the terrific house sake, which is available only during happy hour. Flights of sake are another good choice, if only because Sakuma walks drinkers through each selection, sharing gossip about the producers. At seven o'clock, a saxophonist and a double bassist came in to play a jazz set. They were so close to the bar that one patron, who was deep in conversation with a friend, apologized for interrupting their music. "No, no. Keep talking," the saxophonist said, smiling, then played on.—Wei Tichou



What's the best way  
to survive the holidays?



Humor, of course—it's a lifesaver. So grab hold of two hundred and fifty of our best single-panel cartoons from 2016, as well as delightful features from Edward Steed, Julia Wertz, Liana Finck, and Roz Chast, to keep you afloat.

**On newsstands now** or online at [newyorker.com/go/cartoons2016](http://newyorker.com/go/cartoons2016).

THE  
NEW YORKER



## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT

#### TAKING IT TO THE STREETS

ON DECEMBER 6TH, less than a month after the election, Vice-President Joe Biden, who was in New York to receive the Robert F. Kennedy Ripple of Hope Award, for his decades of public service, used the occasion to urge Americans not to despair. “I remind people, ‘68 was really a bad year,” he said, and “America didn’t break.” He added, “It’s as bad now, but I’m hopeful.” And bad it was. The man for whom Biden’s award was named was assassinated in 1968. So was Martin Luther King, Jr. Riots erupted in more than a hundred cities, and violence broke out at the Democratic National Convention, in Chicago. The year closed with the hairbreadth victory of a law-and-order Presidential nominee whose Southern strategy of racial politicking remade the electoral map. Whatever innocence had survived the tumult of the five years since the murder of John F. Kennedy was gone.

It was telling that Biden had to sift through nearly a half century of history to find a precedent for the current malaise among liberals and progressives, but the comparison was not entirely fitting. Throughout Richard Nixon’s Presidency, Democrats maintained majorities in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. The efforts of the antiwar movement to end American involvement in Vietnam had stalled, but Nixon’s first years in office saw the enactment of several progressive measures, including the Occupational Safety and Health Act and the Clean Air Act, as well as the formation of the Environmental Protection Agency. In 2016, the Republicans won the White House, maintained control of both chambers of Congress, and secured the ability to create a conservative Supreme Court majority that could last a generation or more. Donald Trump, a man with minimal restraint, has been awarded maximal power.

Last summer, the A.C.L.U. issued a report highlighting the ways in which Trump’s proposals on a number of issues would violate the Bill of Rights. After his victory, the A.C.L.U.’s home page featured an image of him with the caption “See You in Court.” In November, Trump tweeted that he would have won the popular vote but for millions of illegal ballots cast. This was not just a window into the conspiratorial and fantasist mind-set of the President-elect but a looming threat to voting rights. Ten days after the election, the N.A.A.C.P. Legal Defense Fund released a statement opposing the nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions, of Alabama, as Attorney General, based on his record of hostility to voting rights and on the fact that he’d once brought unsubstantiated charges of voter fraud against civil-rights activists. But, with a Republican majority that has mostly shown compliance with Trump, despite his contempt for the norms of democracy, the fear is that he will achieve much of what he wants. Even if he accomplishes only half, the landscape of American politics and policy will be radically altered. This prospect has recalled another phenomenon of the nineteen-sixties: the conviction that “democracy is in the streets.”

Movements are born in the moments when abstract principles become concrete concerns. MoveOn arose in response to what was perceived as the Republican congressional overreach that resulted in the impeachment of President Bill Clinton. The Occupy movement was a backlash to the financial crisis. The message of Black Lives Matter was inspired by the death of Trayvon Martin and the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri. Occupy’s version of anti-corporate populism helped to create the climate in which Senator Bernie Sanders’s insurgent campaign could not only exist but essentially shape the Democratic Party platform. Black Lives





Matter brought national attention to local instances of police brutality, prompting the Obama Administration to launch the Task Force on 21st Century Policing and helping defeat prosecutors in Chicago and Cleveland, who had sought reelection after initially failing to bring charges against police officers accused of using excessive force.

Last July, when the Army Corps of Engineers gave final approval for the completion of the Dakota Access Pipeline, members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, anxious that the pipeline would threaten their water supply, started an online petition and filed a lawsuit to halt construction. Thousands of activists, including members of Black Lives Matter, and two thousand military veterans went to Standing Rock, to protest on the Sioux's behalf; last month, they endured rubber bullets and water hoses fired in freezing temperatures. On December 4th, the Army Corps announced that it would look for an alternate route. But, since Rick Perry, Trump's choice for Energy Secretary, sits on the board of Energy Transfer Partners, the company building the pipeline (and in which Trump, until recently, owned stock), protesters are settling in for a long winter.

In that context, the waves of protests in Portland, Los Angeles, Oakland, New York, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., in the days after the election look less like spontaneous

outrage and more like a preview of what the next four years may hold. Unlike the specific protests that emerged during the Obama Administration, the post-election demonstrations have been directed at the general state of American democracy. Two hundred thousand women are expected to assemble in front of the Capitol, on January 21st, the day after the Inauguration, for the Women's March on Washington. Born of one woman's invitation to forty friends, the event is meant as a rejoinder to the fact that a candidate with a troubling history regarding women's rights—one who actually bragged about committing sexual assault—has made it to the White House.

The first Inauguration of George W. Bush, in 2001, saw mass protests driven by the sentiment that the election had been stolen. The protests that greet Trump will, in all probability, exceed them: some twenty other groups have also applied for march permits. Given his history with African-Americans, Muslims, Latinos, immigrants, unionized labor, environmentalists, and people with disabilities, it is not hard to imagine that there will be many more to come. The Congress is unlikely to check the new President, but democracy may thrive in the states, the courts, the next elections, and, lest the lessons of the sixties be forgotten, the streets.

—Jelani Cobb

## UP LIFE'S LADDER CYBERKIDS



SHORTLY AFTER ELECTION DAY, before the interference of Russian hackers became front-page news, a group of thirty-one high-school students gathered at N.Y.U.'s Tandon School of Engineering, in Brooklyn, for Cyber Security Awareness Week. Their mission: to solve a murder mystery involving a fictional Presidential race by analyzing digital "evidence" of security breaches. In the prompt given to the students, a candidate named Candice Deyte collapses and dies onstage at an event where she was to discuss important "cyber topics" with a famous hacker named Pat Rogers. Using a trail of clues that included Deyte's smartwatch, leaked e-mails, and Rogers's computer, teams of pubescent cyber-forensic investigators were tasked with determining the culprit. (The hacker did it.)

During a break, a trio of teammates from Dos Pueblos High School, in Goleta, California, decompressed.

"I think we were doing all right," Kenyon Prater, a restless senior, said.

"There's a large difference between the hacking competitions that we do for fun and actually setting up securities or trying to break into them to test them," Kenzie Togami, a senior with shaggy black hair, said.

Prater had persuaded Togami to join the hacking club their freshman year. "It's not like criminal hacking," Prater explained. "That said, *real-life* hacking is super cool." They discussed a hacking hero, George Hotz, who, in 2007, at the age of seventeen, became the first person to carrier-unlock an iPhone. He'd made a surprise appearance at C.S.A.W. three years earlier.

"Wait, I missed meeting Geohot?" Prater asked, using Hotz's online handle. A Stuyvesant senior named James Wang pointed out that Hotz also goes by Tom Cr00se.

"I don't know if I'd exactly call him a celebrity," Paul Grosen, a lanky blond sophomore on the Dos Pueblos team, said. "He's really smart. But morally . . ."

"He's definitely *infamous*," Prater said.

The Dos Pueblos kids didn't have much good to say about New York City, agreeing that there is too much construction. "It's like dodging bullets on the street!" Grosen said.

"I hate smoking," Togami added. "So many people smoke here."

The students stuck to the N.Y.U. building or to their hotel, next door. Wang and his Stuyvesant teammate, Nobel Gautam, milled around trying to spot name tags they recognized from online communities. (Not a single high-school girl took part in this year's competition.)

On a normal Saturday, Wang might be with his robotics team at a karaoke parlor in Queens, where he lives. But for the Dos Pueblos students C.S.A.W. presented a rare opportunity to socialize face-to-face. Back home, Grosen said, "we hang out online." He cited the "asymptotic increase in homework as break approaches."

"Another factor is college applications," Prater said. "When that's done, I definitely want to hang out."

In the lobby, government agencies like the D.H.S. and the N.S.A. had set up recruitment booths for the college-age competitors, and top-tier college scouts had pamphlets for the high schoolers. Togami, who plays the viola, said that he planned to go to Carnegie Mellon.

"You're going to jinx it, Kenzie!" Prater yelled. "*Apply* first."

Conversation turned to cybersecurity in the news. When someone mentioned Julian Assange, Grosen offered a thumbs-up and a grin.

“Wait, you actually *like* Julian Assange?” Prater asked.

“To a certain extent,” Grosen said, backpedalling. “I dislike his persona.”

“O.K., but he’s been accused of rape,” Prater argued. “I like Snowden more than Assange. Assange has this thing, like, everything is fair game. Snowden has more of a morality behind what he’s doing.”

What about the question of Russian hackers meddling in the election?

Togami was careful. “It’s not always possible to tell where something comes from, because people can use proxies and pretend they’re in another country,” he said. “You can kind of guess and speculate.” They all agreed that government security is bad in the U.S., in part because the smartest computer scientists take better-paying jobs in the private sector.

Grosen’s older brother John, who participated in C.S.A.W. competitions in high school, had returned as a freshman at M.I.T. He’d already cultivated a kind of jaded wisdom. “The stuff you hear about, like the D.N.C. e-mails, are just really, really trivial things,” he said. “Like, oh, they left the default user name and password open.”

“I don’t have any evidence myself, but if the agencies are saying the D.N.C. leak was orchestrated by the Russian government I’m inclined to believe them,” Prater said.

“As we all know, Putin loves Trump,” Paul Grosen said. He brought up the possibility of escalating security threats. “The Russians definitely have the capability, given how horrible our security is.”

“Worldwide, we’ve created this beautiful thing,” Prater said. “And then there are a lot of holes.”

—Carrie Battan

## THIS CHANGING WORLD LE TEMPS PERDU



WHATEVER ATTRACTIONS the 1975, a British rock band, holds for its many fans, a shared interest in the year 1975 is probably not among them. Certainly the events of that nadir of a year,

which include the fall of Saigon and the near bankruptcy of New York City, do not overly concern the band’s front man, Matty Healy, who was born in 1989 and grew up in Manchester, U.K.

Nevertheless, on a recent visit, Healy gamely agreed to walk the winter blocks around his East Village hotel in search of the 1975 that New Yorkers of a certain age remember. He soon found himself in a café, Physical Graffitea, at 96 St. Marks Place—the building that, together with No. 98, appeared on the cover of Led Zeppelin’s 1975 album, “Physical Graffiti.” Healy wore a long wool coat, a red sweater with white rose patterns on it, and different-colored socks. He is twenty-seven years old—a fatal age for some of his rock-star predecessors—but while vampire-pale and thin, Healy looked healthy. (“I’ve stopped doing drugs!” he declared, after pausing to read a plaque at 57 Great Jones, the Warhol-owned building where Jean-Michel Basquiat died, at twenty-seven, in 1988.)

What does concern Healy is the problem of how to be a rock star for “people who don’t buy that anymore.” Choosing a table in the corner, he explained how he goes about this delicate task. “For every rock-star move I make onstage, I do penance,” he said. He brought his palms together piously. “I will have these true moments of embracing the fucking situation I am in and being what people want me to be, but then immediately followed by feeling like a fraud, and that vulnerability being experienced and bought back into by the fans.” He sipped his English breakfast tea. “Because the only place that kind of ego is allowed nowadays is hip-hop. It is simply not allowed in people who are in a rock band.”

Healy’s rock-star problems are compounded by the fact that he grew up privileged and connected—“which is a challenge, especially for me, because my parents are famous in the U.K.” (His father, Tim Healy, is an actor, and his mother, Denise Welch, is a former host on the British equivalent of “The View.”) Record labels want “that kid from Sheffield with his T-shirt hanging off him,” he said. “So we’ve just had to be cleverer than that and speak to the broad middle class, whose search for identity is just as strong.”

Healy twisted a strand of his long dark hair, which was worn in an asparagus-going-to-seed style on top of his head. “My existential crisis is lived out a lot onstage,” he went on. “The other day in Orlando, I said, ‘I think I might believe in God.’ And then I left it for a couple of songs, and then I said, ‘No, I don’t actually really know.’”

The 1975’s name comes from a handwritten inscription that Healy found in a copy of “On the Road.” The book



The 1975

was given to him by the painter David Templeton, in Deià, the famous artists’ colony, where Healy’s mother and stepfather stayed when Healy was nineteen and impressionable. “You know what it’s like—I was swept away in the decadence of it,” he said, his long fingers fluttering around his face.

Graffitea didn’t have much of 1975 to offer, so the party headed west. Healy received several text messages from George Daniel, the 1975’s drummer and electro-sound-maker, with whom he writes the songs. “George is kicking off about the Grammys,” he noted. The nominations had come out that morning, and the 1975 was nominated for Best Boxed or Special Limited Edition Package, but not for its music. “I don’t want a Grammy for a fucking box,” Healy said, with a sardonic laugh.

He turned into the former CBGB, on Bowery, now a John Varvatos store. He had never been inside before. “This was CBGB—wow!” he said, skirting the menswear and the merch (including lots of boxed sets) to



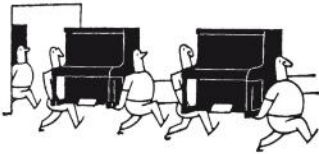
look at the photographs on the walls.

He peered at a shot of the Sex Pistols performing in 1976. Nothing about Johnny Rotten's aggressively careless posture conveyed penance, vulnerability, or any of the other things Healy has to worry about. He could just go about the business of being a rock star.

"Where's *our* CBGB?" Healy asked, shaking his head sadly. Gone with the rest of 1975.

—John Seabrook

## ONE MAN'S TRASH DEPT. OUT WITH THE OLD



THIS IS THE year you swear you are going to eat less saturated fat, learn Latin, enjoy life to the fullest, blah blah blah. Chances are you will do none of the above. But if your to-do list includes getting rid of your old stuff to make room for new stuff, help is on the way. One morning not long ago, Mike Cardona and Darryl Bradley, both thirty-three and dressed in black T-shirts, cargo pants, and baseball caps, showed up at a one-bedroom apartment near Sutton Place to pick up a sleep sofa, love seat, sideboard, and ottoman. The two men are employees of the Junkluggers, "the Robin Hood of

furniture removal," Zach Cohen, the twenty-nine-year-old owner of its New York City franchise, said the other day, in his Long Island City office. "We're passionate about donation." Cohen added that he was an accountant until he realized he wasn't passionate about taxes. Junkluggers, which aims to find new homes for all your unwanted junk (for a non-trivial fee of between two hundred and a thousand dollars, plus tax), was founded by Zach's brother, Josh, in 2004, after an elderly neighbor in Fairfield County, Connecticut, offered to pay him a hundred dollars to get rid of a couch. In those days, the Dodge Durango that Josh and Zach borrowed from their mother played a central role. Today, the company operates in ten states, takes in eight million dollars annually, and owns a fleet of gleaming chartreuse trucks.

Cardona and Bradley's first schlep of the day was an easy one: no stairs, no pianos (hard to give away), no dead cats (harder) or human skulls (a pair discovered by Luggers cleaning out the home of a deceased man one Halloween were bequeathed to the police). Two sisters were disposing of their old living-room furniture to make room for a new set being delivered that afternoon. Their father, supervising the goings and comings while his daughters were at work, said that he had called the Salvation Army for a pickup, but they'd detected a scratch on one of the sofa legs, and the

deal was off. "I told them, 'I'm giving it to you for nothing. You got to be kidding me!'"

"The Salvation Army has this attitude," Cardona said as he and Bradley maneuvered the sofa through the front door. "Except the one on Twenty-third Street, which is run by a very nice woman."

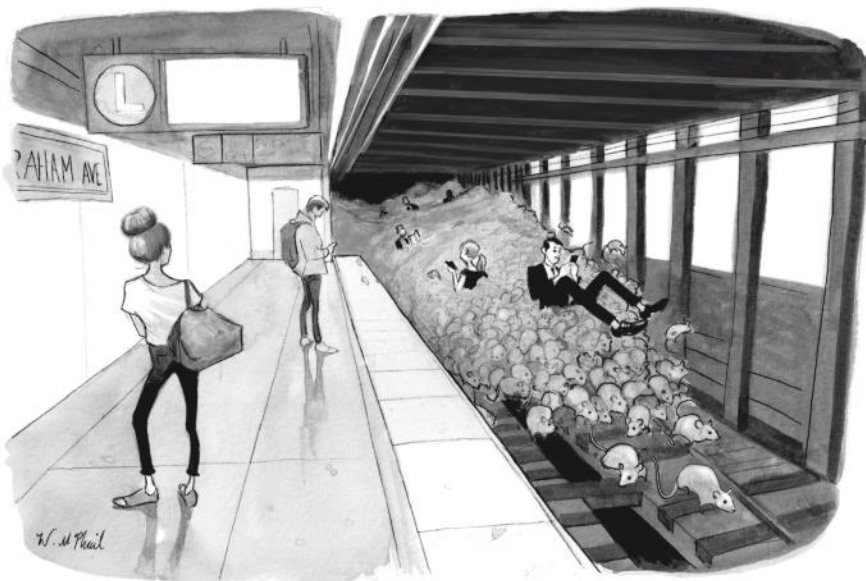
Later that day, Angela Kelly, the nice woman who manages the Twenty-third Street Salvation Army thrift shop, welcomed the gray Ultrasuede sleep sofa, overlooking the scratch but giving the mattress a once-over (many organizations will not accept mattresses for bedbug and ick reasons). "Y'all got to put those legs back on," she told Cardona and Bradley as they lifted the piece off the truck. "I don't have man help today." The sisters would be sent a tax-deductible receipt.

Have Cardona and Bradley ever brought home swag acquired on the job? "We aren't allowed to keep something unless the customer gives us permission," Cardona said, explaining that a Luggers must offer an item to three charities before dropping it off at headquarters. Cardona counts among his favorite freebies a table made from a tree trunk and a violin. Bradley once nabbed a frozen-smoothie-maker and a Pink Floyd boogie board. Last year, he was named Luggers of the Year, an award based partly on the number of donations secured. The honor comes with a Verizon tablet.

On the way to job No. 2—a pied-à-terre on the Upper West Side—Bradley recounted how, a few days earlier, he and a colleague had mistakenly taken a statue from a large apartment in midtown and donated it to a church. Fortunately, when the mixup was discovered, the piece had not yet been sold. "That statue had to be seventy-five pounds. It was awesome," he said. "Did you ever hear of Remington? 'The Bronco Buster'?"

Last collection of the day: a downtown penthouse loft where a few trees, some ceramic planters, and ten garbage bags of dirt needed to be removed from a rooftop patio. "Some people will look at this job as just hauling junk," Bradley said as he drove down Varick Street. "But we're so much more than that."

—Patricia Marx



"Due to a power loss, this train will be replaced by a wave of rats."

WE'RE ALWAYS HEARING about "firestorms of protest," but they seldom involve actual fire. In November, though, people who owned New Balance sneakers began setting them alight, posting videos of flaming footwear to social media, and calling for a boycott of the company. Like so much else these days, it's because of Trump. The night that he was elected, a New Balance spokesman told the *Wall Street Journal*, "With President-elect Trump, we feel things are going to move in the right direction." The spokesman was actually making a fairly limited point about trade policy. Trump has promised to scrap the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a deal secured by President Obama that would reduce trade barriers between many Pacific Rim countries. That suits New Balance, which still manufactures some of its shoes in the U.S., but good luck trying to communicate such subtleties in the current climate. New Balance suddenly found that its support for American workers—P.R. gold, you would have thought—had led it into contentious territory.

New Balance hasn't been the only corporate victim of a hyperpolarizing election season. After Pepsi's C.E.O., Indra Nooyi, said that company employees were "crying" after Trump's victory, conservatives called for a boycott. (The cause was aided by a viral fake-news story claiming that Nooyi had told Trump supporters to "take their business elsewhere.") A couple of weeks later, Kellogg's became the target of a conservative boycott, for yanking its advertising from Breitbart News.

There's a long history of corporate boycotts: the labor movement used them during strikes at the turn of the twentieth century, and they've been common since the nineteen-sixties. But, until now, boycotts have usually been staged in response to specific corporate practices. The United Farm Workers, in the mid-sixties, organized the famous grape boycott in order to get farmers to stop relying on underpaid, non-union workers. Greenpeace organized a boycott of Shell, in 1995, to stop the company from dumping an old oil platform at sea. And, in the nineties, Nike faced a boycott over its reliance on sweatshop labor.

By contrast, the Trump boycotts, from both the left and the right, have been driven by issues extraneous to the targets' core business practices. There are antecedents: a few years ago, L.G.B.T. activists went after Chick-fil-A after its president voiced his opposition to gay marriage. But there's something new about the speed and ferocity with

which people now respond to corporate statements or signals. You can see it as the next logical step in the evolution of what's sometimes called political consumerism. In the past few decades, we've grown accustomed to holding corporations responsible for their labor practices and environmental records. So it's not surprising that they are being called to account for their real or imagined political messages.

If we are indeed entering a Trump-fueled era of consumer activism, it's bad news for companies. Boycotts are not just futile griping; they often work. The U.F.W., Greenpeace, and anti-Nike boycotts were all successful. A study by Brayden King, a professor at (aptly) the Kellogg School of Management, found that, during high-profile boycotts between 1990 and 2005, a company's stock price fell, on average, every day that the boycott was in the news. King also found that more than a third of the boycotted companies ended up changing their behavior in response to the protest. Perhaps his most striking finding was that boycotts usually had only a small impact on sales. Bad publicity and worried stockholders were enough to bring a company to heel.

Thanks to social media, boycotts are easier to organize than ever. They used to face a classic collective-action problem: taking part makes sense only if everyone else is. Unlike a street protest, a boycott isn't inherently visible: you can't really watch someone not buying Frosted Flakes. Now you can see how many people have signed online pledges, and view videos of burning sneakers. All this helps project a feeling of momentum and critical mass, which in turn attracts more participants.

The obvious solution for corporations is to say nothing controversial. But in the Trump era a truly neutral position is hard to find. Pepsi's Nooyi has agreed to join Trump's so-called Strategic and Policy Forum, a group of C.E.O.s who will meet with him periodically. Does that mean Pepsi will go from being the target of conservative attacks to being the drink of choice for the alt-right? Kellogg's stopped advertising on Breitbart after being spotlighted by Sleeping Giants, a social-media campaign that is pushing brands to cut their ties to the site. But, in trying to avoid one consumer backlash, Kellogg's walked straight into another. Companies are used to facing pressure over where they advertise. But now they have to worry about where they don't advertise, too. Trump's victory has created a political realm in which tens of millions of people feel that if you're not with them you're against them. That's a curse for companies that aim at a mass market, America's traditional strength. It's hard to be all things to all people in an us-versus-them world.

—James Surowiecki

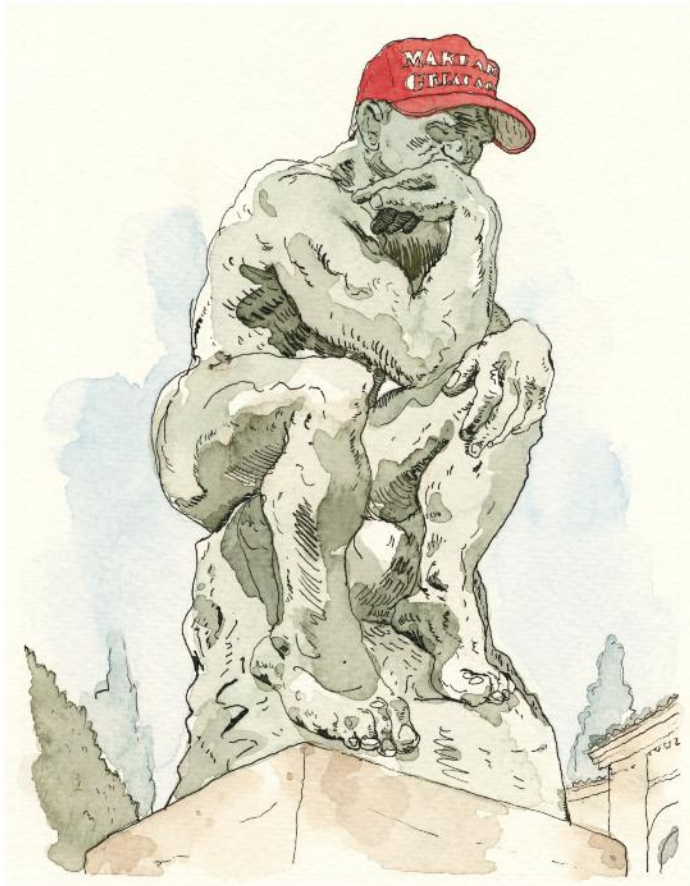




## SECRET ADMIRERS

*The conservative intellectuals smitten with Trump.*

BY KELEFA SANNEH



THE MOST COGENT argument for electing Donald Trump was made not by Trump, or by his campaign, but by a writer who, unlike Trump, betrayed no eagerness to attach his name to his creations. He called himself Publius Decius Mus, after the Roman consul known for sacrificing himself in battle, although the author used a pseudonym precisely because he hoped not to suffer any repercussions. In September, on the Web site of the *Claremont Review of Books*, Decius published “The Flight 93 Election,” which likened the country to a hijacked airplane, and argued that voting for Trump was like charging the cockpit: the consequences were possibly dire, but the consequences

of inaction were surely so. Decius sought to be clear-eyed about the candidate he was endorsing. “Only in a corrupt republic, in corrupt times, could a Trump rise,” he wrote. But he argued that this corruption was also evidence of a national crisis, one that could be addressed only by a politician untethered to political piety. The author hailed Trump for his willingness to defend American workers and America’s borders. “Trump,” he wrote, “alone among candidates for high office in this or in the last seven (at least) cycles, has stood up to say: I want to live. I want my party to live. I want my country to live.” By holding the line on unauthorized immigration and rethinking free trade,

Decius argued, Trump could help foster “solidarity among the working, lower-middle, and middle classes of all races and ethnicities.” Decius identified himself as a conservative, but he saved much of his criticism for “house-broken conservatives,” who warned of the perils of progressivism while doing nothing in particular to stop it. Electing Trump was a way to take a stand against both ambitious liberalism and insufficiently ambitious conservatism.

The essay was meant to provoke conservatives, and it succeeded. Ross Douthat, of the *Times*, responded that Decius had underestimated the likelihood that a Trump Presidency would damage both the country and the movement. On Twitter, Douthat wrote, “I’d rather risk defeat at my enemies’ hands than turn my own cause over to a incompetent tyrant.” The Web site of *National Review*, the eminent conservative magazine, published a series of critiques, including one by Jonah Goldberg, who called Decius’s central metaphor “grotesquely irresponsible.” No doubt Goldberg expected that, before long, he would be able to reminisce about that strange week, near the end of an endless campaign, when a blogger using a pen name was the most talked-about conservative columnist in America.

But for conservative intellectuals, as for so many others, November 8th did not mark a return to normalcy. A day and a half after Donald Trump was elected President, he flew from New York to Washington to meet with President Obama at the White House. Afterward, Obama expressed his hope, however faint, that Trump’s Presidency would be “successful.” In response, Trump expressed his belief, previously undisclosed, that Obama was “a very good man.” At the same time, about two miles east, in an auditorium at the headquarters of the Heritage Foundation, the well-connected conservative think tank, a handful of prominent conservatives gathered onstage to try to figure out their place in this new political order. Just about every seat in the auditorium was taken, one of them by Edwin Meese, Attorney General under President Reagan, who was in the front row, and whose phone was almost certainly the source of a pleasant symphonic

*A small group of thinkers argue that Trumpism could be more than a political slur.*

ringtone that briefly intruded upon the proceedings.

Jim DeMint, the former senator from South Carolina, is the president of the foundation, and he was jubilant. DeMint's current job, like his old one, requires a degree of ideological flexibility, and he had forged a close relationship with Trump. In March, Heritage published a list of eight worthy nominees for the Supreme Court; when Trump released his own list, in May, it included five judges from the Heritage slate. Addressing the audience, DeMint looked like a man who had won a long-shot bet. "What just happened, in this election, may have preserved our constitutional republic," he said.

Some of the people onstage weren't so sure. One of them was Goldberg, who had had an eventful year: his response to Decius was only one in a series of acerbic essays that had established him as a leading light of the #NeverTrump movement, a group of normally reliable partisans who said they could imagine voting for just about any Republican candidate—except one. This was in some sense a protest movement, albeit one led by a political élite. Its ranks included both *National Review* and its chief rival, *The Weekly Standard*, as well as most of the leading conservative newspaper columnists, countless scholars and policy wonks, and, quite possibly, the two Presidents Bush, both of whom declined to endorse Trump. Goldberg once called Trumpism "a radiation leak threatening to destroy the G.O.P." and compared the candidate to "a cat trained to piss in a human toilet." ("It's amazing! It's remarkable!" he wrote, mocking those impressed by Trump's occasional displays of political poise. "Yes, yes, it is: *for a cat*.") At the Heritage event, though, Goldberg tried to be magnanimous in defeat. "I am entirely open to giving Donald Trump the benefit of the doubt," he said. "The #NeverTrump thing is over—by definition."

Sitting next to him was John Yoo, who was a prominent Department of Justice official under President George W. Bush, and who had recently likened Trump to Mussolini. Glancing mischievously at Goldberg, Yoo said, "I don't know if it's over *for him*, though."

"That's true," Goldberg replied, chuckling. "Tell my wife I love her, if I suddenly disappear."

The speakers at Heritage that day differed in the degree of optimism they allowed themselves. All of them believed that Trump would likely nominate a suitably conservative judge to fill Antonin Scalia's seat on the Supreme Court. But when the host asked whether Trump might be "more sensitive and self-restrained" than Obama in the use of executive power, the room erupted in laughter. Yoo didn't dismiss the idea. He imagined Trump, on the first day of his term, repealing all of Obama's executive orders and agency regulations—an imperious way to make the Presidency less imperial. Goldberg, by contrast, insisted that, despite Trump's declarations of partisan fealty, he was at heart "a lifelong Democrat from New York who likes to cut deals." He argued that conservatives should make it their mission to keep President Trump in line—to insure that "he has to deal with us and get our approval on the important things."

But why should Trump now heed a political movement that was unable to stop him? In May, he told George Stephanopoulos, "Don't forget, this is called the Republican Party. It's not called the Conservative Party." During the campaign, Trump declared himself a convert to some conservative causes, like the pro-life movement, while unapologetically spurning others: he excoriated the "Republican Establishment," took a skeptical view of free trade and free markets, and shrugged at gay marriage and transgender bathroom guidelines. Trump's popularity was undimmed by these transgressions, which led Rush Limbaugh to suggest, in one memorable broadcast, that "the Republican conservative base is not monolithically conservative." If liberals were shocked, on Election Night, to realize that they were outnumbered (in the swing states, at least), then many leading conservatives must have been even more shocked to discover, throughout the year, that their movement was no longer theirs—if it ever had been. We have grown accustomed to hearing stories about the liberal bubble, but the real story of this year's election was about the conservative bubble: the results showed how sharply the priorities of the movement's

Take a break from the stresses of daily life. Hear the whistle of strong winds, the flapping of prayer flags, and the interplay of sound and silence from the highest mountains in the world.

**Sacred Spaces: Himalayan Wind & the Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room** Installation by Soundwalk Collective



# THE RUBIN

**SACRED SPACES:  
HIMALAYAN WIND**

NOW ON VIEW

THE RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART  
150 WEST 17TH STREET  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10011  
RUBINMUSEUM.ORG



Sacred Spaces: Himalayan Wind is made possible through the generous support of Christopher J. Fessner, The Hoch 2009 Ornamental Lead Trust, Raasia and Girish Reddy, and AudioTechnica. Additional support has been provided by Bob and Lois Baylis, Ashwini and Anita Gupta, Preethi Krishna and Ram Sundaram, William and Pamela Michaelcheck, Tulku Tsultrim Pelgyi, Manoj and Rita Singh, Venkat and Pratima Srinivasan, the Zakaria Family Foundation, and contributors to the 2015 and 2016 Exhibitions Funds.



leaders differed from those of their putative followers.

Now that Trump is the President-elect, plenty of prominent conservatives are hoping that he will govern as a reliably conservative Republican. Decius, the faceless blogger, is hoping instead that Trump's Presidency will mark the dawn of a new kind of conservative movement. He is one of a handful of pro-Trump intellectuals who have been laboring to establish an ideological foundation for the political tendency sometimes known as Trumpism. Politicians, as a rule, do not trouble themselves overmuch with the opinions of intellectuals, and Trump is unusually untroubled by debates about political philosophy. But these intellectuals—a group that includes anonymous bloggers and prominent academics—maintain that he does have a distinctive world view. In their argument, his unpredictable remarks and seemingly disparate proposals conceal a relatively coherent theory of governance, rooted in conservative political thought, which could provide an antidote to a Republican Party grown rigid and ineffective.

Charles Kesler, a political-science professor at Claremont McKenna and the editor of the *Claremont Review of Books*, calls Trump's election "a liberating moment for conservatism," an overdue repudiation of conservative élites and orthodoxy. The irony is that the modern conservative movement cohered, in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, as a rebellion against a Republican establishment that it considered out of touch. Now, according to a small but possibly prescient band of pro-Trump intellectuals, it is happening again. They suspect that Trump, despite his self-evident indiscipline, may prove to be a popular and consequential President, defying his critics—many of them conservative. They think that Trumpism exists, and that it could endure as something more substantive than a political slur.

IT WAS NOT impossible, during the campaign, to find prominent Trump supporters, even setting aside members of his immediate family. Populist-minded commentators like Ann Coulter, Michael Savage, and Laura Ingraham

## AFTER LONG ILLNESS

My wife calls. She left the eggs  
she'd gathered in a small tin pail

and would I bring them in  
so the dog doesn't eat them. Or maybe

he already has. They're by the shed  
where we're trying to trap the rat

or maybe by the greenhouse.  
I walk out in my robe and slippers, crushing

some mint which rewards me  
with its sharp identity. And there

is the pail by the coop.  
And there are two eggs, cold and whole

with a fleck of wood shaving stuck to one,  
as though a child had just begun

to decorate it, maybe making a horse  
with a tiny fetlock.

—Ellen Bass

were among the early adopters, mainly because Trump gave voice to their belief that unauthorized immigration was one of the country's biggest problems. But, among conservative pundits more broadly, skepticism of Trump was so widespread that it began to threaten the business model of cable-news networks. CNN dealt with this problem by hiring Jeffrey Lord, an obscure columnist and former Reagan aide who had met Trump in 2013 and been a supporter ever since. Lord was genial but unyielding in his defense of Trump, and he became one of the season's most unlikely new television stars: he is sixty-five and lives in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, where he takes care of his mother, who is ninety-seven; every weekday, CNN sends a car to drive him nearly two hundred miles to Manhattan, and back again. Lord still calls himself a Reagan conservative, but he says his belief in Trump's political instincts has been bolstered by a series of private conversations. He has come to regard Trump as "a serious guy," and he suspects that some of the #Never-

Trump crowd will come around. "In the day, some of the people who were conservatives didn't think much of Reagan, either," he says.

The differences, of course, are plentiful. Not only was Reagan a two-term governor of California; he also ran for President with considerable support from the conservative movement, which was emerging as the dominant intellectual force in American politics. His conservative coalition brought together free marketeers, military hawks, and Christian activists; it is partly thanks to him that those three groups came to be regarded as natural allies. Trump was not tied to any preëxisting political movement, or to any firm ideological commitments. Before launching his campaign, in June, 2015, he had been a Democrat (for most of his life), a potential Reform Party candidate (during a brief flirtation with Presidential politics, in 2000), and, starting in 2011, a kind of conservative gadfly, obsessed with the fallacious idea that Obama was not born in America. Throughout the

campaign, he seemed to get all of his information from the cable-news channels that spent so much of their time covering him, which created an eerie and sometimes unsettling feedback loop.

So it was something of a surprise when, this past February, an academically inclined online publication appeared, full of erudite arguments in favor of Trump. It was called the Journal of American Greatness, in tribute to Trump's pledge to "Make America Great Again," although its sensibility was more tweed jacket than red baseball cap. A charmingly bare-bones site, hosted at a lowly blogspot.com Web address, it evoked an earlier, nerdier version of the Internet, and its wry tone seemed calculated to contrast with the bombastic style of its chosen candidate. This was where Publius Decius Mus began his career, alongside a handful of other writers, most of whom adopted Latin pseudonyms. The hidden identities of Decius and the other Journal contributors may have made the essays more seductive, by making their authors seem like fugitives, desperate to stay one step ahead of the ideological authorities. Their facelessness also conveyed a faint sense of menace, as if these were the distant, Plato-quoting cousins of the balaclava-wearing hooligans who are a regular presence at nationalist marches throughout Europe.

The Journal eventually published a hundred and twenty-nine articles, the first of which acknowledged the perversity of the project:

It may seem absurd to speak of Trumpism when Trump himself does not speak of Trumpism. Indeed, Trump's surprising popularity is perhaps most surprising insofar as it appears to have been attained in the absence of anything approximating a Trumpian intellectual persuasion or conventionally partisan organization. Yet, Trump's unique charisma notwithstanding, it is simply impossible for a candidate to have motivated such a passionate following for so long by dint of sheer personality or media antics alone.

At times, the authors even sought to separate Trump from Trumpism, suggesting that the candidate was a powerful but inconstant champion of his namesake philosophy, which Decius summarized as "secure borders, economic nationalism, interests-based for-

eign policy." After Andrew Sullivan, the pioneering blogger, published a widely read *New York* story suggesting that Trump might be just the kind of tyrant against whom Plato once warned, Decius responded with an essay that was nearly as long and much more abstruse. He argued that Sullivan had misread Plato, and proposed, not very reassuringly, that in our current political climate an overdue recognition of "the people's sovereignty" might entail, for a time, "more control and less freedom in certain areas." Like virtually everything written in the Journal, this essay expressed seemingly sincere convictions in a faintly ironic tone, which was disorienting: we didn't really know who these people were, or how serious they were, even though the political movement they sought to explicate was anything but marginal. Then, in June, the Journal signed off and deleted its archives, declaring that it had been "an inside joke," which, in the course of a few months, attracted a large following, and "ceased to be a joke." In this last respect, the Journal had more than a little in common with the man who inspired it.

Evidently, Decius was not quite prepared to quit the debate. That may explain why, in September, he published "The Flight 93 Election." It may explain, too, why he agreed to meet, a few weeks after Trump's election, on the condition that his pseudonymity be maintained. He chose a private club in midtown, where he had been attending a lecture. (He hastened to point out that he was not a member himself.) Then he strolled over to a suitably anonymous location: the tatty food court in the basement of Grand Central Terminal, where he endeavored to fold his long legs beneath a small table. The man known as Decius was tall and fit, a youthful middle-aged professional dressed in a well-tailored gray suit and a pink shirt. He has worked in the finance world, but he talked about political philosophy with the enthusiasm of someone who would do it for fun, which is essentially what he does. Before he began to speak, he held out an iPhone showing a picture of his family: if he was unmasked, he said, his family would suffer, because he works for a company that might not

*Andante*  
TRAVELS

**JOURNEY INTO THE ANCIENT WORLD — OVER 120 TOURS WITH LEADING ARCHAEOLOGISTS**

*Exclusive access to the sites where history was made...*

POMPEII  
CRETE  
SICILY  
DORDOGNE  
& MANY MORE



- FROM AS LITTLE AS \$895  
EXPERT-LED | SMALL GROUPS  
SPECIAL ACCESS -

**TOLL-FREE 1-888-331-3476**

tours@andantetravels.com  
andantetravels.com

*We can arrange your international air - contact us for more details*

**McLean Gunderson**  
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL AFFILIATE

**BPD is a disorder, not a destiny.**

Treatment for women with BPD at U.S. News' Top Ranked Psychiatric Hospital

**855.707.0520** [mcleangunderson.org](http://mcleangunderson.org)

**Ohana Family Camp in Vermont**



[Ohanacamp.org](http://Ohanacamp.org) • (802) 333-3460



**THE CASHMERE WATCHCAP**

4 layers of 6ply cashmere at your ears.  
Warm and Soft like nothing else.

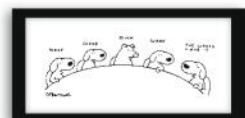
SCARVES, HATS, SOCKS, MITTENS, ETC.

HAND-BUILT 575.776.8287  
26 COLORS. USA.

109 East Palace Ave, Santa Fe, NM

[www.golightlycashmere.com](http://www.golightlycashmere.com)

ADVERTISEMENT



**newyorkerstore.com**



want to be connected to an apostle of Trumpism.

It is not necessarily absurd for Decius to suggest that he might suffer a fate like that which befell Brendan Eich, who resigned under pressure from Mozilla Corporation, the tech company he co-founded, after he was discovered to have donated to an anti-same-sex-marriage initiative. By obscuring his real name, Decius is also claiming a new kind of civil right, one often claimed by political activists in the era of social media: the right not to be doxed—that is, not to have one’s online activity linked to one’s offline identity.

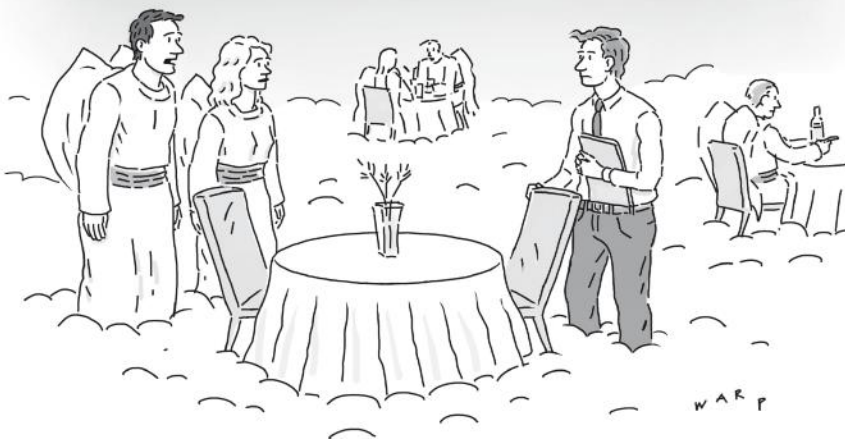
Decius is a longtime conservative, though a heterodox one. He had grown frustrated with the Republican Party’s devotion to laissez-faire economics (or, in his description, “the free market über alles”), which left Republican politicians ill-prepared to address rising inequality. “The conservative talking point on income inequality has always been, It’s the aggregate that matters—don’t worry, as long as everyone can afford food, clothing, and shelter,” he says. “I think that rising income inequality actually has a negative effect on social cohesion.” He rejects what he calls “punitive taxation”—like many conservatives, he suspects that Democrats’ com-

plaints about inequality are calculated to mask the Party’s true identity as the political home of the cosmopolitan élite. But he suggests that a government might justifiably hamper international trade, or subsidize an ailing industry, in order to sustain particular communities and particular jobs. A farm subsidy, a tariff, a targeted tax incentive, a restrictive approach to immigration: these may be defensible, he thought, not on narrowly economic grounds but as expressions of a country’s determination to preserve its own ways of life, and as evidence of the fundamental principle that the citizenry has the right to ignore economic experts, especially when their track records are dubious. (In this respect, Trumpism resembles the ideologically heterogeneous populist-nationalist movements that have lately been ascendant in Europe.) Most important, he thinks that conservatives should pay more attention to the shifting needs of the citizens whom government ought to serve, instead of assuming that Reagan’s solutions will always and everywhere be applicable. “In 1980, after a decade of stagnation, we needed an infusion of individualism,” he wrote. “In 2016, we are too fragmented and atomized—united for the most part only by being equally under the thumb of the administra-

tive state—and desperately need more unity.”

Decius takes perverse pride in having been late to come around to Trump; as a populist, he likes the fact that everyday American voters recognized Trump’s potential before he did. When Decius started paying serious attention, around January, he discerned the outlines of a simple and, in his view, eminently sensible political program: “less foreign intervention, less trade, and more immigration restrictions.” Decius cited, as one unlikely precursor, the 2004 Presidential campaign of Dick Gephardt, the Democratic congressman, who ran as a fierce opponent of NAFTA and other free-trade agreements. (During one debate, Gephardt argued, “We have jobs leaving South Carolina, North Carolina, Missouri—my home state—that originally went to Mexico; they’re now going from Mexico to China, because they can get the cheapest labor in the world in China.”) In his “Flight 93” essay, Decius called Trump “the most liberal Republican nominee since Thomas Dewey,” and he didn’t mean it as an insult. Trump argues that the government should do more to insure that workers have good jobs, speaks very little about religious imperatives, and excoriates the war in Iraq and wars of occupation in general. Decius says that he isn’t concerned about Trump’s seeming fondness for Russia; in his view, thoughtless provocations would be much more dangerous. In his telling, Trump is a political centrist who is misconstrued as an extremist.

There is a reason for that, of course. Trump has routinely said things that would, in previous elections, have been considered scandalous and disqualifying. His outlandish and often incompatible claims, along with his refusal to admit mistakes, make it impossible to determine which of his notions are likely to become policies, and can foster the sinister impression that, as President, Trump will be accountable to no one, not even himself. Decius says that he learned to accept what he calls Trump’s “unconventionality as a candidate,” and maintains that his support never wavered, even when Trump said things that he found indefensible. (The worst, Decius says, was Trump’s



*“Do you have anything with a view of God?”*

suggestion that Gonzalo Curiel, a federal judge presiding over a fraud case against him, had “an absolute conflict of interest,” because he was of Mexican descent. “I thought that was exactly the wrong thing to do,” Decius said.) But he also thinks that Trump’s occasional crudeness and more than occasional intemperance are inseparable from his “larger-than-life personality,” which was what allowed him to challenge conservative orthodoxy in the first place.

Trump’s disdain for what he calls political correctness, and often for common courtesy, made him seem uncompromising, even though a passion for dealmaking—that is, for finding advantageous ways to compromise—lies at the heart of his origin story. “Personality” and “media antics” might not have been sufficient to explain Trump’s success, but neither were they incidental to it. “Let’s say we get to define what Trumpism is, and hypothesize a perfect candidate who goes out with scripted speeches and policy papers and campaign staff,” Decius said. “Would he get the same traction as *this* guy? The answer, in my opinion, is no.”

OF COURSE, FOR the tens of millions of Americans who loathe and fear Trump, “this guy” does not appear to be merely an economic populist with a loose tongue. Throughout the campaign, he was accused of being the leader of a white backlash movement, waging war on minorities: he says that he wants to expel millions of unauthorized immigrants, and calls for a moratorium on Muslims entering the country. Since his election, many analyses of his political program have focussed on his ties to the alt-right, a nebulous and evolving constellation of dissidents who sharply disagree with many of the conservative movement’s widely accepted tenets—including, often, its avowed commitment to racial equality. This connection runs through Stephen Bannon, Trump’s chief strategist, an “economic nationalist” who was previously the executive chairman of Breitbart, a news site that aimed to be, Bannon once said, “the platform for the alt-right.” Earlier this year, Breitbart pub-

lished a taxonomy of the alt-right that included Richard Spencer, a self-described “identitarian” whose political dream is “a homeland for all white people.” At a recent conference in Washington, Spencer acted out the worst fears of many Trump critics when he cried, “Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail victory!” Later, Spencer told *Haaretz* that the election of Trump was “the first step for identity politics for white people in the United States.”

It is important to note that the link between Trump and someone like Spencer is tenuous and seemingly unidirectional. (When reporters from the *Times* asked Trump about the alt-right, in November, he said, “I disavow the group.”) But it is also true that partisan politics in America are stubbornly segregated: exit polls suggest that about eighty-seven per cent of Trump’s voters were white, which is roughly the same as the corresponding figure for his Republican predecessor, Mitt Romney. It is no surprise that many of Trump’s critics, and some of his supporters, heard his tributes to a bygone American greatness as a form of “identity politics,” designed to remind white people of all the power and prestige they had lost.

It is true, too, that Trumpism draws on a political tradition that has often been linked to white identity politics. One Journal author suggested that the true progenitor of Trumpism was Samuel Francis, a so-called paleoconservative who thought that America needed a President who would stand up to the “globalization of the American economy.” In Francis’s view, that candidate was Pat Buchanan, a former longtime White House aide who ran for President in 1992 and 1996 as a fiery populist Republican—and in 2000 as the Reform Party candidate, having staved off a brief challenge, in the primary, from Trump. Francis and Buchanan were united in their disdain for the Republican elite, which seemed to them too cozy with international business interests and too removed from the concerns of everyday Americans. Both also saw themselves as defenders of an American culture that was implicitly

white, or even explicitly so. Francis once wrote that he wanted to fight for “the survival of whites as a people and a civilization.” (The Journal article that cited Francis also made passing reference to his “undeniable lapses in judgment and decency.”) Buchanan, more circumspect, nevertheless linked his economic argument to an argument about the erosion of America’s cultural and racial identity. In a 1997 newspaper column, inspired by one of Bill Clinton’s paeans to multiculturalism, Buchanan asked, “When did we Americans vote for a revolution to overturn our ethnic and racial balances? When did we vote to rid America of her ‘dominant European culture?’” He supplied his own stern answer: “Never.”

Compared with forebears such as these, what is striking about Trump is how little he engages, at least explicitly, with questions of culture and identity. The “great” America that he talks about is an unsentimental place: not a tight-knit community defined by old-fashioned values but a big and shiny and rather nonjudgmental country where everyone has a good job, stays safe, and adores the President. Whether he was in a rural white town or an urban black church, Trump avoided moral exhortation, preferring to focus on the economic renewal that his Presidency would bring. Accepting the Republican nomination, in July, he bemoaned the number of shootings in Obama’s adopted home town of Chicago. But then, rather than adducing the usual list of social pathologies, he implied, preposterously, that the major source of crime in America was “illegal immigrants with criminal records,” who are “roaming free to threaten peaceful citizens.”

To Decius and his comrades, the language of citizenship is central to Trumpism, which encourages Americans to think of themselves as members of a wonderful club, besieged by gate-crashers. In Trump’s view, loyal American citizens can never fail, only be failed—either by their own leaders, who are (sadly) stupid, or by leaders of competitor countries like Mexico and China, who are (even more sadly) smart. Decius contrasts the Trumpist belief





in a “common citizenship,” entrusted with sovereignty, with the bipartisan tendency to leave consequential government decisions in the hands of agencies staffed by technocrats. When he speaks of “the administrative state,” he is drawing on a concept that has been elucidated at length by John Marini, a political scientist at the University of Nevada, Reno, whom a number of the Trumpists regard as an intellectual mentor. Marini is a member of an exotic tribe known as West Coast Straussians: a student of Harry Jaffa, who was a student of the opaque but influential political philosopher Leo Strauss, and who sought to draw out connections between the American republic and its classical antecedents. (The Latin pseudonyms used by *Journal* authors paid winking homage to this scholarship.) Another member of this tribe is Larry Arnn, the president of Hillsdale College, a stronghold of conservative thought, who sees in Trump a leader who, because of his willingness to violate political taboos, might be independent enough to check the progress of runaway regulations. “The government itself has become dangerous,” he says, “and I think Trump is likely to make that better.” What many of these Trumpists share is a disdain for what Charles Kesler calls “moralistic conservatives,” who are too concerned with propriety to see that our decaying political system needs a leader like Trump, and has therefore produced one.

**I**S TRUMP A TRUMPIST? So far, his announced appointments have given orthodox conservatives little cause for alarm, raising the possibility that Trump might be ideologically reliable after all. And, because he will be working in concert with a Republican House and Senate, his legislative record will necessarily be shaped by the Party’s congressional agenda, on topics ranging from abortion to Obamacare. Some Trumpists say that the biggest risk of a Trump Presidency is that he won’t be Trumpist enough.

But his Presidency, especially if it is successful, will inevitably change the shape of conservatism in the United States. The *Journal of American Greatness* was replaced, this past summer,

by a more conventional spinoff, *American Greatness*, published by a little-known polemicist named Chris Buskirk, who wants it to become “the leading voice of the next generation of American conservatism.” And the *Washington Post* recently reported that newspaper editorial pages are scrambling to find pro-Trump columnists; no doubt both demand and supply will increase in the next few years. In the meantime, Trump’s political triumph has caused a number of previously steadfast conservatives to rethink some of their lifelong positions, none more spectacularly than Stephen Moore, the free-market evangelist who serves as an economist at Heritage. Soon after Trump’s election, Moore told a group of Republican congressmen that the Reagan era was over, and that Trump had “converted the G.O.P. into a populist working-class party.” In a column for *Investor’s Business Daily*, he explained that the new Republican Party would be more willing to spend money on infrastructure and less willing to support trade deals. “I don’t approve of all these shifts,” he wrote, betraying his residual anti-Trumpism, “but they are what the voters voted for.”

It is also possible that Trump’s Presidency will be catastrophic, in ways that have a lot to do with the tendencies that Trumpists overlook: he could be ruined by corruption, or enmeshed in international scandal; he might spend his Presidency persecuting his enemies, or letting his deputies run amok. It is difficult to predict the outcome of any Presidency, but with Trump the worst-case scenarios seem particularly plausible, because he is so uninterested in the safeguards that might prevent them. His reliance on his own intuition is part of what Trumpists love about him, because it frees him from the tyranny of technocracy, but it also makes their job much more difficult. There is a profoundly asymmetrical relationship between Trump and the Trumpist intellectuals, who must formulate their doctrine without much assistance from its namesake; Trump’s political brand is based on his being the kind of guy who would never feel the need to explain himself to a bunch of scholars, no matter how supportive they were.

On a rainy afternoon last fall, as news of Trump’s Cabinet appointments began to trickle in, an English professor named Mark Bauerlein sat in a small apartment in Manhattan, sounding perplexed. “It could be twenty or thirty years before we really have the distance to see what is happening,” he said. Bauerlein was on leave from Emory University, in Atlanta, to attend to his other job, as senior editor of *First Things*, the ecumenical journal of religion and culture. Bauerlein is an admirer of Decius, and also a supporter of Trump, whose promise to control the border appealed to his sense of patriotism. “What it’s really about is planting an idea into Americans that this is our country,” he said. “This is our home! It’s going to have a boundary.” He also views the rise of Trump as a reaction to political correctness, which has, he maintains, made people feel that they can’t express themselves.

He said he understood that many people, including many students at Emory, had experienced Trump’s victory as a violation—an “extraordinary desecration” of the progressive temple. But he was also suspicious of his own urge to glory in that desecration. His hope, however far-fetched, was that Trump, by demolishing traditional Party ideologies, might somehow help people move beyond hardened partisan positions. Like a fair number of Trumpists, Bauerlein holds some beliefs that might have been expected to incline him toward #NeverTrump-ism, including an abhorrence of vulgarity. He once wrote a memorable essay about the indignity of overhearing curse words on an airplane; Trump has promised to “bomb the shit out of ISIS.” When Bauerlein was reminded of this, he merely sighed. All intellectuals who support politicians must make compromises, but Trump’s style makes those compromises harder to ignore. At times, Bauerlein sounded as if he were still figuring out what it meant to support President Trump—as if he were trying to stay optimistic while steeling himself for all sorts of disappointment. “There are some things in politics that you say, ‘This runs against what I believe.’” He lowered his voice. “You have to suck it up.” ♦

## A RECIPE

BY JENA FRIEDMAN



WITH THE INAUGURATION almost upon us, I thought I'd share an old family recipe, of Italian origin, passed down to my grandmother from her aunt in Germany. The ingredients have been tweaked to appeal to American tastes.

*Warning: This dish contains nuts.*

## INGREDIENTS:

- ¼ of all eligible voters (or less, depending on how many votes you can suppress)
- 1 charismatic leader with a wildly successful book, TV show, or film (and weird facial or head hair)
- 1 gaggle of Russian hackers
- 1 well-timed WikiLeaks
- 1 rogue F.B.I. director (or other high-level government official)
- A dollop of racism
- A spritz of anti-Semitism
- A sprinkle of idiocy (for a low-fat version, substitute applesauce for idiocy)
- The media

## PREPARATION:

1. Preheat the planet to record temperatures to accelerate climate change, and trigger a global refugee crisis. Put the refugee crisis aside and let it rise. It will come into play later.

2. Next, you'll need a melting pot, or the illusion of one. Mix a colorful figure (preferably orange) into a liberal but fractured democracy, where the left has been weakened by infighting and the right has been reduced by impotent leadership.

*Note: The figure may curdle the dish, unless he appears at first to be a joke, a clown, or a total idiot. Add the media here to help emulsify.*

3. Allow the mixture to congeal into a malignant orange mass, and let it stew in the pot for several months, heating the populace with racist rhetoric. Now that the refugee crisis has risen, knead it back into the mixture, along with any leftover xenophobia, bigotry, or fears of terrorism lying around in your cupboard.

*Note: This recipe calls specifically for Islamic terrorism. Even a small splash of domestic terrorism (often a by-product of toxic masculinity and lax gun laws)*

*will sour the mix, so store your terrorisms separately.*

4. As for misogyny, a little goes a long way. It's already everywhere, like salt or CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, so there's no need to overdo it. But, if you do have a taste for it, you can spice up the dish with a pinch of ass, a small handful of pussy, a smear of telling a candidate who has spent forty years in public service that she looks tired, or a scant cup of sexual-assault accusers paraded around as human shields on live TV. (Fun tip: Add insult to injury by not paying for their hair and makeup!)

*Note: If accusers start to bubble up in the pot, put a lid on it immediately by enlisting the F.B.I. director to do something moronic to deflect from snowballing sexual-assault allegations.*

5. At this point, everything may begin to boil over. Common sense would call for lowering the temperature, but that would obscure the full, rich (or ostensibly rich, but who really knows without tax returns) flavor. Instead, toss in some outside help to keep the concoction heated but contained, like a D.N.C. hack or another variety of Russian cyberterrorism (e.g., tampering with voter databases), as no one you are serving will seem to notice these extra ingredients.

*Note: To prevent progressives from sticking together, whisk some yolks into the mix. The kids will think it's béarnaise and eat it right up!*

6. Whip the ingredients into a pungent, gravy-like sludge. The early admixture of the media (including social media) will insure the perfect sludginess.

7. Once it seems edible, serve on Election Day. Be advised, however, that this recipe is not meant to appeal to all tastes; in fact, most Americans have never been exposed to this dish and probably won't be able to stomach it, but as long as they don't vote (or aren't able to, thanks to the repeal of key provisions of the Voting Rights Act), your dinner should be a hit!

*Yield: Serves 10-12, mostly Trumps but not Tiffany. ♦*



## CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

*Mike Mills's anti-Hollywood family films.*

BY TAD FRIEND



*Mills's childhood suffuses his work. "The five-year-old me never goes away," he says.*

OUTSIDE THE New York Film Festival, the writer-director Mike Mills kept freezing up on the red carpet. Which strobing camera to face? Which shouted question to answer? Seeing his perplexity, Annette Bening, who plays Mills's mother in his new film, fixed his lapels and gave him a brisk, man-up pat. He shuffled gamely after her. Upon clearing the gantlet, he cried, "Who invented *that*?"

Mills was there, on this Saturday night in October, to introduce his film "20th Century Women," the festival's centerpiece. Backstage, he gravely smoothed his lapels, now a matter of concern. At fifty, with graying whiskers and a broad, lonely face, he has the soulful air of a sepia-era frontiersman. He quivered when he heard that David Byrne was in the crowd: a Talking Heads song figures significantly in the film, and Mills's love of the band, when he was a teen-ager, made hard-core kids call him an "art fag." "Which is more pressure?" he wondered. "My therapist seeing the film tonight, or David Byrne?"

A former competitive skateboarder and punk artist, Mills made his name designing wryly impersonal T-shirts and album covers for Beastie Boys and Sonic Youth. But his films are nakedly personal. "Beginners" (2011) featured a character based on Mills—reticent, emotionally scarred—and one based on his father, an art historian who, after becoming a widower in his seventies, came out as gay, bloomed briefly, then died. In "20th Century Women," which opened on Christmas Day, Mills recasts his mother, Jan, as a Salem-smoking architectural draftsman named Dorothea. In the distant summer of 1979, she lives with her teen-age son, Jamie—another Mills stand-in—in a tumbledown pile in Santa Barbara. Flinty, funny, stylish, and manish, a blend of Amelia Earhart and Humphrey Bogart, Dorothea adores Jamie, but her Depression-era rigor precludes her saying so. As he gravitates to skateboarding and Iggy Pop, she enlists two much younger women to help teach him how to be a good man. To Dorothea's consternation, they instruct him

in feminism, menstruation, and the importance of the clitoris.

Mills's wife, Miranda July, a writer and filmmaker with the steely fragility of a Buster Keaton, once anatomized guys like Mills in a short story. "New Men are more in touch with their feelings than even women are," she wrote. "New Men want to have children, they long to give birth." Making a movie is as close as Mills can get. Greta Gerwig, who plays a punk photographer named Abbie in "20th Century Women," told me, "Mike runs a fluid, non-masculine set, where he'll cry behind the monitor." He cast Lucas Jade Zumann, a fourteen-year-old newcomer, as Jamie because, he said, "I don't like fifteen-year-old boys—their sexuality is too actualized." The film's only adult male is William, an earnest mechanic who makes his own shampoo.

Mills views himself as an outsider, a borderline recluse, but his sweet-natured, Eeyoreish manner disarms almost everyone. While his stance is one of self-deprecating bewilderment, he is also often genuinely bewildered. On his flight from Los Angeles, he'd been astonished that the four Wall Street guys around him were watching Fox News on their seatbacks as they yammered about a deal—astonished, that is, that business class was filled with businessmen. An uptalker ("Obviously, I did something wrong or it would be more popular?"), he watches you on the question mark, seeking a responsive nod. Yet, Annette Bening observed, "there's a part of Mike's being a beautiful person that's quite shrewd. He wins us over by being humble, so we help him with this thing he's making—and that part of him is very fierce and tenacious."

At the festival, Mills stood in the hallway as his film played, listening through a closed door. "Watching live with the audience is like being in a plane in turbulence," he said. "You're trying to fly it with your body, trying to keep it from crashing." He added, softly, "The five-year-old me never goes away. Why can't I sit through my movie on opening night? Because I think I fucking suck." Waves of laughter made him crack the door. Dorothea was writing Jamie absurd notes to excuse his serial tardiness at school: "He was involved in a small plane accident. Fortunately, he was not hurt."

Mills went outside in the drizzle to call July, just to hear her voice. He describes her as the true artist in their house—“She’s so much braver than I am”—because, unlike him, when her work goes badly she doesn’t threaten to quit and work in a dog-rescue shelter. Then he sneaked into the back of the theatre for the last twenty minutes. It was almost as terrible as he’d feared, until the standing ovation. In the greenroom afterward, Warren Beatty, who’s married to Bening, was giving everyone teary nods—*wasn’t that something?* “Mike is the real real thing,” he told me. He pulled Mills into a bear hug and murmured plaudits into his ear. “Warren cried, he hugged me—and he did ‘Reds’! I should just quit right now!” Mills said afterward. “He changed masculinity in the twentieth century. He filled being a movie star with doubt and befuddlement. His Clyde, in ‘Bonnie and Clyde,’ is *impotent?* And he produced the film? That’s so amazing.”

**H**OLLYWOOD FILMS generate emotion in predictable ways: by having a man voice long-unspoken admiration (“Good Will Hunting,” “Million Dollar Baby”), having a woman utter a deathbed avowal (“Love Story,” “Terms of Endearment”), or killing the dog (everything from “The Road Warrior” to “Marley & Me”). Mills’s characters long for that kind of intimate intensity, but their feelings remain undisclosed. In “Beginners,” the dying father looks past his yearning son to ask a hospice nurse to stiffen his hair with gel, which he’s never tried before.

Mills rejects the well-made Hollywood script, which bullies us into empathy for the main character by picking on him in the first act and giving him increasingly sizable obstacles to overcome—then rewards us with a gauzy scene of affirmation. He rejects even the customary reliance on an eventful plot. One of his art films, in 2009, needled Steven Spielberg by assembling title cards that tartly summarized the beginning of “E.T.” (“The creature squeals as it runs / The ship slowly closes its door.”)

His interest is in people and their trajectories; a maximalist, he wants to reveal the entirety of his characters’ lives and minds. In “20th Century Women,” the five main characters periodically nar-

rate their own and one another’s biographies. Their stories are accompanied by montages of period photos intended to create an air of credence. A believer in sympathetic magic, Mills gathers dog-eared objects and forgotten rituals to summon a world of mixtapes and Judy Blume and Three Mile Island and skateboarders who grab their boards *behind* their front leg. Julie (Elle Fanning), a seventeen-year-old who cuddles with Jamie—and sleeps with older, dumber boys—reads “The Road Less Travelled” and uses the language of self-help as a weapon. Bening wears Jan Mills’s jewelry, and we see the wooden rabbit that Jan carved after reading “Watership Down.” “Mike is obsessed by exploring the connection between the dramatic and the real,” the director Lance Hammer, a neighbor of Mills’s, said. “I think it comes from the need to believe he’s actually here, that he’s not having a dream, not floating away.”

Directing like a designer—re-creating the family scrapbook down to the last pilled sweater long gone to Goodwill—has its risks. Some critics find Mills’s work quirky or precious; some find it inert. The Boston *Globe* called “Beginners” “the passive work of a man nervous to touch the third rail of his parents’ discontent.” Yet his films lure you in with their precise, unemphatic presentation, their accrual of details—a heap of oily rags that could ignite at any time. Joachim Trier, the Norwegian director, said, “There’s a Todd Rundgren-ness to Mike’s work, a Steely Dan coolness, the melancholy low light of a late California afternoon in Laurel Canyon.”

Like his mother, Mills became a parent late in life, and his son, Hopper, spent time in the neonatal ward. In “20th Century Women,” this provided the germ of an opening-scene flashback. (Where most directors use flashbacks surgically, Mills revels in them; his films fall back as much as they spring forward.) In the NICU, Dorothea squeezes Jamie’s finger as she says, in voice-over, “I told him life was very big, and unknown,” and that “he’d fall in love, have his own children, have passions, have meaning, have his mom and dad.” Real-world images flash by, the compass points of Dorothea’s life: a couple doing the Charleston, an elephant, New York in the twenties, Louis

Armstrong, Humphrey Bogart, a huge night sky.

Jan Mills, a pilot who’d wanted to be in the Air Force, loved the aerial view. Mills has some photographs of her smiling at him as a toddler, but the smiles faded once he could talk back. “All my therapy was about my mother,” Mills told me. When he was a boy, they were like a couple, he said: she took him to museum openings as her date, and she was often beguiling. “But there were so many things I missed. You couldn’t be sad in her house. And anytime I reached out to her or asked a question that made her feel vulnerable, I got shut down.”

She died of cancer in 1999. Death always comes as a shock, but Mills does nothing to prepare us for Dorothea’s: halfway through the film, as she scrutinizes a punk drummer, she offhandedly tells us, “In 1999, I will die of cancer, from the smoking.” Yet Mills isn’t interested in provoking gasps of surprise. He wants to mine the gap between what we know and what the characters know. In lieu of a more traditionally rousing second-act climax, everyone watches Jimmy Carter’s “Crisis of Confidence” speech. Dorothea is thrilled by his candor, some of the others scoff, and Jamie silently registers the moment. Carter, punk, and the expansive cultural impulse that brought this random family together are about to be supplanted by the Reagan era. We know how fateful the occasion is. What’s moving is that they don’t.

**M**ILLS KNELT AT the foot of his bed in the Standard Hotel, on the Lower East Side, scrolling through photos on an iPad, exclaiming at a woman huffing glue and an owlsh boy who died young. The photographer Richard Verdi and his wife, Mindi, looked on. In the late seventies, Verdi chronicled the punk scene at CBGB with a Leica, capturing the jagged, fleeting defiance. Mills used five of Verdi’s images in “20th Century Women,” as Abbie recalls coming to New York and learning to be brave and sexual, and now he envisioned making a book about the film’s photos and photographers. Verdi, a silver-haired wedding photographer, murmured, “You can’t really explain what it was like to be five feet in front of the Ramones with their Marshall amps on ten.”

Mills experienced CBGB through his



sister Megan Ace, the inspiration for Abbie, who attended Parsons School of Design by day and the clubs by night. Mills followed her to New York in 1984, to study art at Cooper Union. “The first thing I saw,” Mills told the Verdis, pointing out the window to the school, a few blocks away, “was a homeless guy taking a leisurely shit on the front steps.” The view was now mostly condos.

Mills studied a series of photos of women, pausing on one he’d used: a woman wearing a necktie, her legs akimbo. “There’s a gritty, worldly insolence to them, and a sense of power,” he said.

“But a vulnerability, too,” Mindi noted. She pointed out another woman: “She was on heroin for twenty years.” Indicating the woman’s bruises, she said, “Getting beat up after CBGB was the ultimate—you’d made it with somebody who was of that frame of mind.” Mills winced. His detractors accuse him of excessive charm, but it may be more accurate to say that he edits brutality from his world view. When another photographer told Mills about one clubgoer’s violence and anti-Semitism, he replied, hopefully, “So she was just a troubled soul?”

In Mills’s family, you put the best face on things. Born in 1966, he was roughly a decade younger than his two sisters, a surprise consequence of what he terms his parents’ “recreational sex.” Megan Ace told me, “Mike was Baby Jesus, the boy who was supposed to save the family. Both my parents had such high regard for men, and they’d been disappointed by having two girls.” Ace continued, “But it turned out Mike was born in our balsamic phase—when the family, like balsamic vinegar that’s been in the fridge too long, had gotten funky.”

His teen-age rebellion was less defiant than exploratory. Though Mills haunted the mosh pits of L.A., his hair spiked up with beer, he told me, “I’d always keep an eye open for a way out. I was such a conformist, timid little boy.” His parents, with no sense of their designated role as oppressors, let his punk band practice in their house. He recalled, “Mom would say, ‘I thought “Just a Slut” was pretty good this time!”

In the nineties, Mills played bass in a band called Butter, which toured

America and Japan; he also designed its album covers. He became a mainstay of the D.I.Y. scene around the Alleged Gallery, on the Lower East Side, where Shepard Fairey and Ed Templeton, self-taught artists who prized feeling over technique, drank forty-ounce Budweisers and skateboarded out front. Like the Alleged artists Harmony Korine and Spike Jonze, who’d also become directors, Mills was a skateboarder at heart. Mike D, of Beastie Boys, for whom Mills designed two album covers, told me, “Kids like Mike who get bitten by the skate bug have a deep-down rage that they channel by saying, ‘I’m going to do a rail slide down the railing of this public building, and you can’t do anything about it!’ Skateboarding is great training wheels for expressing that feeling on a bigger canvas later.”

Mills was a versatile designer, turning out skateboards for Subliminal, scarves for Marc Jacobs, and graphics for Kim Gordon’s clothing company. He’d use corporate fonts, such as Helvetica, and welcoming colors, like Tokyo-taxi green, to make a child’s T-shirt that said “Child.” “It’s very ‘Sesame Street,’” Mills said. “I like a real ‘Anybody could have done it’ manufactured simplicity, the flat clunkiness showcasing the idea.” Aaron Rose, who owned the Alleged Gallery, told me, “You’d see five album covers by Mike in Tower Records’ window. Unlike a lot of his contemporaries, he never had ‘punk guilt,’ or fear of selling out.” When

Mills sprayed graffiti on the side of the Paramount lot—“Boring” and “Surrender”—he wore a business suit, and documented the endeavor with a photo essay.

The Verdis asked whether he had shot a scene at CBGB, and Mills said that he’d decided against it, “because it would be so *bad* compared to

the real thing.” His relationship with nostalgia is complex. Although he is curatorially respectful of vanished cultures, his films are often counterfactual—wistful imaginings of what might have been. What if everything was exactly the same but had worked out better? Mills keeps an Alva skateboard in the back of his Volvo station wagon, and when he can’t sleep he soothes himself by remember-

ing his runs—taken in the old style, fast and flowing, like a surfer—on bygone skate parks all over L.A.

**I**N THE NINETIES, when Mills watched Jim Jarmusch films—a few characters, a laconic camera—he’d think, I could do that. He began by shooting music videos. In 1998, his video for “All I Need,” by the French band Air, was a four-minute documentary about a young skateboarder couple with nothing but their palpable love for each other. It gave him a taste of “pulling off the magic trick of making people get a little teary-eyed.”

After moving to Los Angeles, in 1999, Mills co-founded a commercial-production company, called the Directors Bureau. He was already directing Gap ads—khakis-wearing dancers doing the mambo—and he’d shown that he could quickly summon a world and a vibe. Volkswagen and Nike wanted his pawky sensibility, up to a point. “I hired Mike for an Old Spice ad,” Sarah Shapiro, an ad-agency producer who went on to create the TV show “UNREAL,” said. “It was fascinating to watch him, with his odd palette and Jacques Tati references, trying to navigate these straight, corporate clients from Cincinnati.” (Mills told me, “My Tati references have the unintended benefit of scaring the clients. They’re afraid to say, ‘Who the fuck is Tati?’ on the conference call.”)

In 2000, he optioned Walter Kirn’s novel “Thumbsucker,” about an adolescent boy’s mutiny against his stifling family—a safe proxy for his own story. He wrote a script and raised four million dollars to make it, as an indie film starring Tilda Swinton and Vincent D’Onofrio. He began to hone a method: use real-world settings and hunt for moments that made his fictions feel like documentaries—the takes when an actor stumbled or momentarily forgot her line. He aspired to the simplicity of Yasujiro Ozu, the Japanese master, who placed his camera at only two levels: sitting height and standing height.

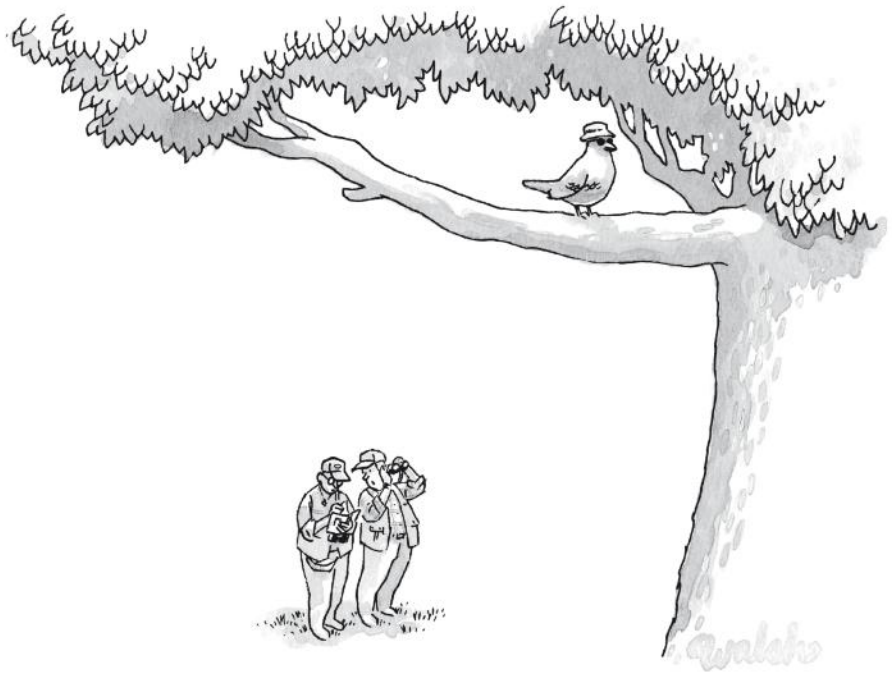
Yet “Thumbsucker,” released in 2005, is an apprentice work. During the editing, one of Mills’s producers sent him a note: “No more self-pity.” Mills was shocked that it was so evident. “‘Thumbsucker’ didn’t do what I hoped,” he said. “And the documentary I made next, about depressed Japanese”—“Does



Your Soul Have a Cold?,” in 2007—“which focussed on all the things I love and Hollywood can’t stand, like people eating, drinking, and sleeping, was a complete miss.”

He was at a creative loss. But he gradually realized that his father’s having come out and then died a few years later, in 2004, was not only a trial but also “a gift.” Mills recalled, “He had this monstrous gay adolescence where he started telling me *everything*, including which of my friends were cute and how sexy the UPS man’s legs were.” “Beginners” took six years to realize. It was an ambitious attempt to braid two stories, set in two periods: 1997 to 2002, when Oliver (Ewan McGregor) and his father, Hal (Christopher Plummer), belatedly get to know each other; and 2003, after Hal dies, when the grieving Oliver tries to establish a relationship with a French actress named Anna (Melanie Laurent). Mills believed that sorrow had made his work stronger and stranger. Yet when he pitched his script he downplayed its oddness: the history-of-the-gay-pride-flag interlude; the magazine photos from 1955 of people kissing that appear when Oliver imagines his parents’ early connection. Mills told me, “I’d say, ‘If you take out the history and the narrative bits, the rest of the movie totally holds together!’” *If it’s too much me, I can make it more you.* To get the film financed, he ended up throwing in his fee. When his producer remonstrated with him, he said, “My fear is not of not making money—it’s of not making this film.”

To establish a barbed intimacy between the pairs of actors, Mills assigned them tasks in rehearsal—the kind of emotional calisthenics he’d picked up in an acting class and from working with a story guru named Joan Scheckel. He had Laurent and McGregor, who’d just met, repeatedly break up with each other. And he had Plummer shop for a scarf with McGregor and supervise him as he made a bed. “Christopher wasn’t buying it,” Mills sheepishly recalled. “He told me, ‘You know, Michael, not every director needs to do this.’” Plummer says, “It was like being in school again, with the theatre exercises—he went much too far.” Mills politely insisted, and Plummer acknowledges, “I was better as a screen actor because of Mike Mills and



“Maybe it doesn’t want to be identified.”

his delicate way with psychology.” At eighty-two, he won his first Academy Award for the role.

WHEN MILLS MET Miranda July, at a noisy bar at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival, she was wearing a Mickey Mouse sweatshirt and leather pants. So it was a no-brainer. But July had a boyfriend, so she suggested to her friend Carrie Brownstein, the writer and Sleater-Kinney guitarist, that *she* date Mills. “I was sitting next to Mike at dinner,” Brownstein recalled, “and he pulled out a FedEx envelope. Amid all the hustling and dealmaking at Sundance, he’d had his assistant send him photos of his dogs, because he missed them so. So when Miranda later confessed that she had feelings for Mike, I said, ‘Obviously this is someone you should be with.’”

They came together back in Los Angeles, cinematically: an agreement over lunch to be just friends, sealed with a handshake; a surprise visit by July to drop off two wooden mice she’d found at an estate sale; a lingering kiss. When July saw the model of a house that Mills was building in the Sierras, she probed her finger into it and said, “That could be my room.” After she left, Mills took a photo of the glass of lemonade she’d

half finished and a stick that his dog Zoe had fetched for her. When he proposed, years later, he began by showing her a lemonade-and-stick tableau that he’d re-created. She had no idea what it represented.

Both of them had piercing blue eyes; both loved James Baldwin, Agnès Varda, and Velvet Underground. Both were seekers of buoyancy. As Brownstein said, “Mike is more mournful and Miranda more sinister, but neither lacks hopefulness.” But, where Mills situated a group of characters in semi-recent history, July poured her spiky personality into novels, films, interactive projects, and conceptual art—hard-to-categorize scenarios in which she’d dance entirely encased in a T-shirt, or speak in the scratchy voice of a cat with a wounded paw. “My punk scene was very unfeminist, and Miranda’s scene was slightly lesbian separatist,” Mills said. “I’m a Labrador and she’s a Border collie. Also, her film”—“Me and You and Everyone We Know”—“won handily at every competition our films were in together, and she was becoming hugely famous. It was a lot to date.”

Mills’s father had died four months before they met, and July worried that she’d get swamped by his overwhelming need: “Mike, at the beginning, was



like, 'Just lost family—must make new one.'" His desire for approval also made her uneasy. But she decided that he was, after all, an artist. "He may cast the pretty faces and get the biggest stars he can get, which to me is sort of ad-y—he can sell a feeling," she told me. "But I'm agog at how little he cares about storytelling conventions, like suspense and reveals. He's ultimately more experimental than I am."

Since their wedding, in 2009, they've lived together in Silver Lake, a hilly, fast-gentrifying area near downtown L.A. whose residents have included James Franco and the "Transparent" creator Jill Soloway. The couple work in separate offices nearby but share Mills's old house, a place where jacaranda roots poke through the driveway and Talking Heads albums are stacked beside a vintage turntable. Geographically, Mills positions the couple below Warren Beatty and Annette Bening—"They're in that top-of-Mulholland realm"—and to the east of the entertainment industry. Referring to a boulevard that bisects West Hollywood, Mills told me, "I only cross La Cienega if I need money or actors."

What connects Mills and July is the failure of connection. "Early on," July said, "we took this walk around the reservoir and talked about how we'd worked so hard all our adult lives, and maybe we could do something else." For her fortieth birthday, two years ago, she travelled to Mexico alone, because they couldn't find time to go together. "Making things

is what you do to comfort yourself if you feel an inborn loneliness that won't go away," she said. "So the reservoir idea utterly failed—other than that we got married and had a child."

MILLS STOOD ON Miramar Beach, in Santa Barbara, squinting worriedly as perfect waves rolled in. "This is not where I should have grown up," he said. "It felt so oppressive. As a freckled, burnable person, I couldn't go to the beach all day." When he was six, his mother began encouraging him to get out of the house, telling him to be home by supertime. With the beach proscribed, he'd follow dry creek beds—"the child highway"—through the neighborhood, exploring groves of live oak and fig, nasturtium hedges, mysterious culverts. As we drove around, Mills noted where he'd been hit by a car while running for the bus; where he'd drunkenly fallen out of a convertible and got a concussion; and where he'd got third-degree burns trying to stomp out wildfires.

As a high schooler, he often headed to Franceschi Park, where the local punks drank Mickey's malt liquor and took speed. He led me to a concrete underpass that spanned the San Ysidro creek bed, where he'd shot several hangout scenes in the film. The place was snugly feral, lacquered with graffiti, some of it added during shooting. "We painted in 'Cito Rats'—a gang back then—and the logo of Black Flag, to make it look right for the time," Mills said. "But a lot of

this is new. The kids have come back!"

He began trying to corral all this material into a film by jotting dozens of unrelated facts and ideas on file cards, from "gun control" (an obsession of his mother's, which didn't make it in) to "blow jobs always existed" (an obsession of his own, ditto). For two and a half years, he labored on a script. Mills "carries low, like a woman carrying a baby low," July told me, admiringly. "He holds a project inside him at a very low register for a long time." As he glued and whittled, he occasionally studied a reminder pinned to his bulletin board, which he'd written after listening outside the door during screenings of "Beginners": "Stronger, faster paced, more punch, no lulls, more graphic."

Finally, he asked July to read the script, which at that point also featured Jamie's divorced dad. Was it ready? Mills said that July "told me, 'It's hackneyed, it's making your movie about women really about a man'—she was brutal. I went, 'Aah, broken, a disaster,' and it got heated—but it turned out she was totally accurate. The audience doesn't need dads, is the sad truth."

Mills eventually wrote a dad-free script that felt faithful to his experience—except that Dorothea was warmer and more definitively heterosexual than Jan. "My mom was dark and had a level of undiagnosed depression and self-attack," Mills said. "But I couldn't put all that in." Annette Bening explained, "Female characters in film are judged harshly, so we have to love her. It's why film is the great near-art form—you want your movie to be seen."

On set, Mills is his best self: assured, curious, generous. He brought in Buddhist monks to bless the cast and crew, and a cellist to play during rehearsals. In the mornings, he and the actors would dance to each character's theme song, from "Why Can't I Touch It?" by the Buzzcocks (Jamie), to "As Time Goes By" (Dorothea). "It felt like he was interested in creating a happening, and the film occurred around that," Greta Gerwig said. But in the editing room the film once more refused to cohere—an occupational hazard when you jettison plot. Mills's stomach knotted up and he couldn't sleep. "As a dad and Miranda's husband," he said, "there was so much more at stake now in becoming a total failure."



*"These smug pilots have lost touch with regular passengers like us. Who thinks I should fly the plane?"*

To calm himself, he watched “Casablanca” over and over. Eventually, he realized that his film might work if he used his characters the way that Michael Curtiz had used Ilsa and Rick, linking his disparate story lines by cutting from Jamie’s face at the end of one scene to Dorothea’s at the start of the next. Mom loves boy but can’t express it; boy is disenchanted; mom and boy reconnect, if only briefly. He sent a file of that version to July. After calling her therapist for reassurance (she wasn’t in), July sat at her computer and pressed play. Afterward, she sent her husband a selfie that she describes as “someone who’d been crying for ninety minutes.” When Mills saw her “happily messed-up, cried-upon face,” he knew he was home.

Judd Apatow told me that he was “wrecked” by a scene, near the end of “20th Century Women,” when Jamie skateboards while holding on to Dorothea’s VW Bug. As Jamie swoops happily through the curves, he says in voice-over, “I thought that was just the beginning of a new relationship with her. Where she’d really tell me stuff. But maybe it was never really like that again. Maybe that was it.” Apatow said, “Mike’s films make me think of my late mother, and how I handled that relationship, and—how can I do better with the people around me?” He paused, choking up, and finally said, “Mike’s films make me proud to be a human being.”

Late in the film, Jamie dances with Dorothea, just as, late in “Beginners,” Oliver dances with Hal. “To have reconstituted my parents as movie stars, and to dance with them on film, is, psychologically, moving in the right direction,” Mills said. Much as July loves her husband’s work, she remains mystified by the gap between his actual childhood—“You could hug Mike for a long time, and it wouldn’t be enough”—and these glowing portraits. “It’s almost what you would do in some spiritual practice,” she said. “A devotion to an absence.”

“BEGINNERS” WAS A modest hit; “Thumbsucker” was not. But the budget for “20th Century Women” was seven million dollars—a number at which commercial responsibilities begin to accrue. Apatow observed that, as your budget rises, “there’s more pressure on your

movie to be funny—and, the funnier you make your movie in testing, the farther you get from life as it really is.”

Late one Friday afternoon, at his office, Mills said, “I’d guess if we made twelve to fifteen million in box-office I’m still in the game, and if I’m up in the twenties that would be huge.” He noted, though, that “every dollar you spend on a movie is a dollar further away from art and deeper into commerce.” He wanted to spend less on his films and make just enough to keep making them. After his father’s death, he quit ad work. “I decided, I’m helping capitalism look benign,” he said, “so I bailed from the Directors Bureau.” He laughed. “And then I missed directing, and I needed money. Now I try to do two ads a year, so I can earn the hundred and fifty thousand dollars I need to pay for my life. The politics of doing them remains unresolved.”

He was also worried about where the next film would come from. July told me that Mills recently had a dream in which someone told him, “You can just combine the first two movies and make a third about your mom *and* your dad!” He was exhilarated until he woke up. Was there a way to honor his memories yet be at least slightly commercial? Would a dash of dramatic conflict help? Mills gazed at Hopper, now four, as he ran off to explore, and said, “My shit is so sweet and earnest and trying so hard to be nice, and at times I just feel, like, Let’s do something nasty, Mike, with some evil people! Let’s fuck some shit up! I would love to be more florid, in a way that wasn’t annoying.” He laughed. “But therein I betray myself. Watching Hopper, so nice, giving his lunch money to other kids, I think I was a little like that. Poor *that person*, being raised by Humphrey Bogart: ‘Do we really have to drink and smoke? Can’t we just cuddle?’”

He drove with Hopper to pick up food for a party for his film crew. Expecting twenty guests, Mills got salads, eight bottles of wine, and two hefty wedges of cheese, then returned to the counter to ask, “If you were going to have a third cheese to make everyone happy?” At home, July took inventory, cried, “There’s no protein!”—the kind in cheese apparently didn’t count—and raced off to buy roast chicken. More amused than

chastened, Mills said, “It’s two captains with one boat.”

He and Hopper ambled into the back yard to sweep up fallen olive leaves. He was getting a stream of e-mails from the film’s distributor, A24, about “tastemaker” screenings, to position Annette Bening for a Best Actress nomination. July had told me that she’d reminded Mills “that the Oscars could be seen as a major artistic fail—that being beloved by the really homogeneous, conservative group that votes on them would be *bad*.” Mills said, “That’s where Miranda’s a savior. I felt dumb that I was falling for the competition.” But a moment later he added, “If we don’t get a nomination now, it is perceived as ‘You’re not worthy of seeing on Friday night.’”

People began to arrive, and the reminiscences flowed over soft Hawaiian music on the hi-fi. A few hours in, Mills chatted with Lindsey Jacobs, his on-set dresser—the person who wrangled the furniture and the props. He’d just told me how much he’d enjoyed working with her, and how eager he was to see her again.

Jacobs, a candid woman in her early thirties, had a slightly different take. “Mike is very appreciative but very particular,” she said. “There was a lot of freaking out. I had repeated nightmares where I was in bed and Mike was calling me to set.”

“I’m a designer, so I have to futz with what’s on my screen until it’s just right,” Mills said, apologetically.

“I eventually figured out what you wanted,” she said. “Natural, lived-in, but also really beautiful. Because that disappointed look—I couldn’t bear to see that!” Mills met this swift rebuttal of his nostalgia with a game smile.

Jacobs asked, “So, what is it going to be—another ten years before the next one?”

“Wow!” Mills said, taken aback. “My therapist told me, ‘No one keeps track of how much time it takes.’”

She shrugged: *Well, we do*. “Because you’ve got to have a lot more life first, right?” she went on.

“Yeah,” Mills said. He looked around in seeming astonishment at his family and friends and the bounty he’d provided, with such hopes, for a much larger audience. “Yeah, I gotta stew it down.” ♦



# CAN FOOTBALL BE SAVED?

*A high school is experimenting with technology to make the sport safer.*

BY NICHOLAS SCHMIDLE

ON OCTOBER 4, 1986, the University of Alabama hosted Notre Dame in a game of football. Notre Dame had won the previous four contests, but this time Alabama was favored. It had a stifling defense and a swift senior linebacker named Cornelius Bennett. Ray Perkins, Alabama's head coach, said of him, "I don't think there's a better player in America."

Early in the game, with the score tied, Bennett blitzed Notre Dame's quarterback, Steve Beuerlein. "I was like a speeding train, and Beuerlein just happened to be standing on the railroad track," Bennett told me recently. Football is essentially a spectacle of car crashes. In 2004, researchers at the University of North Carolina, examining data gathered from helmet-mounted sensors, discovered that many football collisions compare in intensity to a vehicle smashing into a wall at twenty-five miles per hour.

Bennett, who weighed two hundred and thirty-five pounds, drove his shoulder into Beuerlein's chest and heard what sounded like a balloon being punctured—"basically, the air going out of him." Beuerlein landed on his back. He stood up, wobbly and dazed. "I saw mouths moving, but I heard no voices," he later said. He had a concussion. After Bennett's "vicious, high-speed direct slam," as the *Times* put it, Alabama seized the momentum and won, 28–10.

Following college, Bennett was drafted into the National Football League. Between 1987 and 1995, he played for the Buffalo Bills, and appeared in four Super Bowls. During his pro career, he made more than a thousand tackles, playing through sprains, muscle tears, broken bones, and concussions. I asked him how many concussions he'd had. "In my medical file, there are probably six." The real number? "I couldn't even begin to tell you." Fifteen? "More." Twenty? "I played a

long time," he said. "Every week after a game, I got some sort of headache."

In 1996, he signed a thirteen-million-dollar contract with the Atlanta Falcons. He received weekly injections of Toradol, an anti-inflammatory drug. "It was magic—it made me feel like I was twenty-four again," Bennett said. He helped carry Atlanta to the Super Bowl—his fifth. (A more dubious distinction: his team lost in every one.) In 2000, at the age of thirty-five, Bennett retired and moved to Florida. He lived in a hotel in Miami's Bal Harbour area, worked on his golf handicap, and vacationed with his wife and friends in Europe and in the Napa Valley.

Several of Bennett's football peers were having a far tougher time. Darryl Talley, a former Bills teammate, suffered from severe depression. Mike Webster, a Hall of Fame center for the Pittsburgh Steelers, had become a homeless alcoholic; he died, of a heart attack, in 2002. Three years later, Terry Long, another former Steeler, committed suicide by drinking antifreeze. Andre Waters, a former Philadelphia Eagles safety, killed himself with a gunshot to the head.

A neuropathologist named Bennet Omalu autopsied Webster, Long, and Waters, and detected a pattern: each had a high concentration of an abnormal form of a protein, called tau, on his brain. Scientists associated tau buildup with Alzheimer's, but that disease ravaged the elderly. This was clearly a different pathology, and in a 2005 paper Omalu called it chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or C.T.E., which he categorized as a degenerative disease caused by the "long-term neurologic consequences of repetitive concussive and subconcussive blows to the brain."

The N.F.L. tried to discredit Omalu's findings. The league had set up a committee for traumatic-brain-injury research, led by a rheumatologist with a medical degree from the University of



*The varsity football team at St. Thomas Aquinas,*





*a high school in Fort Lauderdale, gathers around Rob Biasotti, one of the coaches. No other school has sent more players to the N.F.L.*



Guadalajara; the committee insisted that there was “no evidence of worsening injury or chronic cumulative effects of multiple mTBIs”—mild traumatic brain injuries—in N.F.L. players.” When Bernard Goldberg, of HBO’s “Real Sports,” asked a committee member if multiple head injuries could cause “any long-term problem,” the member replied, “In N.F.L. players? No.” At a congressional hearing, in 2009, Linda Sánchez, a Democratic representative from California, compared the league’s “blanket denial” about C.T.E. to the defenses once mounted by Big Tobacco.

Bennett, outraged by the league’s stance, joined the board of the N.F.L. players’ union. In 2010, he was elected to head the Board of Former Players, and he participated in heated discussions among league representatives, team owners, and players. “What the hell was a *rheumatologist* doing talking about head injuries?” he asked himself. Current and former players, he told me, harbored a “lack of trust” toward the league. In 2011, players launched a class-action lawsuit against the N.F.L., alleging that it had “ignored and concealed” evidence about the “risks of permanent brain damage,” and had “deceived players” into thinking that serial concussions did not pose “life-altering risks.” Bennett told Bloomberg News, “If the lack of information and negligence continues, you aren’t going to have moms let their little boys play football.”

His own son, Kivon, had just turned eleven, and was starting to play tackle football. Bennett was flattered (“I’d dreamed of having a son that followed in my footsteps”), but also anxious (“You never want to get *that* call”). Parenting is about providing children with opportunities while protecting them from harm, and few recreational activities put those impulses in opposition the way football does. Yet Bennett never considered trying to stop Kivon from playing. “This country is built on giving you a chance to pursue your dreams,” he said.

Kivon was big for his age, like his father had been, and performed well on his youth team. Bennett shared safety tips with Kivon: how to protect his head when tackling by hitting his opponent with his shoulder instead of his helmet;

how to improve his footwork. “I always tell him, ‘Positioning, positioning,’” Bennett said to me. “If he’s going full speed and he’s positioned, I feel as though that’s safe football.” Above all, he stressed to Kivon that he should let someone know if he thought he’d received a head injury.

Bennett wanted to give Kivon the best chance to excel. In 2015, when Kivon was a high-school junior, he transferred to St. Thomas Aquinas, a prestigious Catholic high school in Fort Lauderdale. Kivon, a strong student, enrolled in Advanced Placement classes. He had recently discovered “Macbeth,” he told me this fall. “I like the way the story lines didn’t add up at first but in the last few scenes it comes together,” he

said. He has a Twitter account, and in his bio he posts his G.P.A.—currently 3.7.

But Kivon went to St. Thomas primarily to play football. The school has produced more pro players than any other high school in the country. By the time Kivon enrolled, the St. Thomas Aquinas Raiders had won eight state championships and two national titles. Moreover, the school had embarked on a potentially radical experiment. The head football coach, Roger Harriott, had been instituting changes to make the game safer. He limited practices to ninety minutes, and got the school to acquire a pair of motorized human-size robots, wrapped in foam, which players could tackle, saving their teammates from unnecessary hits. Harriott hoped to put St. Thomas at the vanguard of football safety while remaining champions.

“Football is just a vehicle to make these kids better young men,” Harriott said. One day this fall, he told his team, “Ultimately, it’s for you to become a champion in life—a champion husband, a champion father, community leader, colleague.”

Such talk pleased Bennett. “My son is getting something from Roger that he’s going to take with him the rest of his life,” he said.

HARRIOTT BLEW AN air horn to signal the start of practice. It was late August. He had on a short-sleeved windbreaker and a sun hat with a wide brim. A stopwatch hung from a cord around

his neck, and he had tucked some crumpled notes into the waistband of his shorts. “The other guys are playing checkers,” he likes to say. “We’re playing chess.”

“Look me in the eyes!” he barked, as his players marched past him, single file. He starts each practice by shaking their hands and asking them about their day, or their parents, or their progress in recovering from an injury. “They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care,” he said.

Harriott’s father was born in Jamaica and came to the United States when Roger was an infant. Roger grew up in South Florida, and in the nineties he was a running back for St. Thomas. He won a scholarship to Boston University, and became a star there, then transferred to Villanova. He contemplated a career in the N.F.L., but he tore his anterior cruciate ligament in practice and never regained top form. After graduation, he went into coaching.

In March, 2015, he took the St. Thomas job. His predecessor had just won a state championship, but he had also been hard-nosed and profane. Intimidation was not Harriott’s style. He didn’t scream or grab players by the face mask to make a point. Students should play for the love of their teammates, he told them, not out of hatred for their opponents. He banned cursing and reprimanded coaches who broke the rule.

His tenure got off to a rough start. In the opening game, several first-string players sustained season-ending injuries. The quarterback missed a few games. A standout defensive end, an Ohio State-bound senior named Nick Bosa, suffered an A.C.L. tear. Sports reporters lowered their expectations for the team. Kivon, a third-stringer behind Bosa, urged his teammates to ignore the press. “My pops played in the N.F.L.,” he said at one point. “And one thing he always told me was ‘Don’t listen to these so-called experts. They’re just pencil pushers.’”

The Raiders went to the playoffs, but during one game Bosa’s backup was injured, and so Kivon was put in. As his father described it, he looked “like a deer in headlights.” Harriott pulled him off the field. Then, Kivon recalled, “I felt a switch come on.” He went back in and made multiple tackles.

The team advanced to the championship game, and Kivon sacked the rival



quarterback twice as St. Thomas won, 45–10, securing its ninth state title. His father watched, proudly, from the stands. “I had my day in the sun—it’s his time,” Cornelius said. This summer, Kivon accepted a scholarship offer from the University of Tennessee. In August, *USA Today* released its national pre-season rankings. St. Thomas sat atop the list.

**D**URING THE 2015 season, St. Thomas players, despite their many injuries, did not suffer a single concussion. Harriott and the school had made preventing head injuries a priority. The team bought Riddell SpeedFlex helmets, which came onto the market in 2014, and cost nearly four hundred dollars apiece. They have a polycarbonate shell, extensive padding, inflatable bladders, and a cutout on the crown that flexes upon impact, which, according to Kivon, “disperses all the pressure.” Last year, Virginia Tech’s Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science gave the helmet its highest safety rating.

At the start of the season, each St. Thomas player takes an exam known as Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing, or IMPACT. The exam is designed to establish a cognitive baseline; after a suspected concussion, a player is supposed to retake the test, allowing a medical professional to determine whether the athlete requires further assessment. But self-reporting of injuries is inherently unreliable, and no player wants to sit out for a ding. A 2014 study in the *Journal of Neurotrauma* found that, on average, players reported only one out of twenty-seven incidents in which they “saw stars,” became dizzy, and got a headache. Dwayne Owens, the athletic trainer at St. Thomas, said that he knew players who had intentionally botched their baseline tests. “Their parents might even tell them, ‘Don’t do your best,’” he said.

St. Thomas wanted to make the assessment of student concussions more objective, and this summer it agreed to participate in a research project with the University of Miami. Michael Hoffer, a professor of otolaryngology and neurological surgery, had developed goggles, equipped with two high-resolution cameras, that could detect the desynchronization of the wearer’s rapid eye move-

ments—a mark of a concussion. Hoffer was funded, in part, by the N.F.L., but the goggles would be useful to all types of athletes. According to a 2016 study published in *Pediatrics*, the number of school-aged soccer players seeking E.R. treatment for concussions has risen sixteen hundred per cent in the past twenty-five years. Owens told me that, in the past year at St. Thomas, he had identified concussions in two female soccer players, two volleyball players, and a baton twirler. St. Thomas now requires female soccer players to wear protective headbands.

Studies show that sports practice sessions are a “major source” of concussions. In 2015, nine St. Thomas football players suffered season-ending injuries in training. Harriott decided to ban tackling at practice, and he also introduced the robots, which were designed by four Dartmouth engineering students, in collaboration with Eugene (Buddy) Teevens, the college’s football coach. Teevens was worried about the future of the sport. Since 2009, the number of boys between the ages of six and seventeen who play football has fallen by nineteen per cent. In 2010, Teevens outlawed tackling during Dartmouth practices. He told me, “It’s real simple—the more you hit, the more you get hurt. And I’m in a unique position to add hits to someone, or take them away.” He went on, “If we

don’t change the way we coach the game, we won’t have a game to coach.”

Harriott and George F. Smith, St. Thomas’s athletic director, learned about the robots through an alumni parent, and asked for a demonstration. In the spring, two prototypes arrived by FedEx. The robots, called Mobile Virtual Players, or M.V.P.s, stand just under six feet tall, weigh a hundred and ninety pounds, and look like pillars of black foam. Some players laughed when they saw them, but they stopped when a coach squeezed the trigger on a remote controller and an M.V.P. took off, moving at about sixteen miles an hour. “It just *annihilated* one of our guys—ran him right over,” Smith recalled. Kivon Bennett told me, “Those things are no joke.” Smith ordered two, at a price of sixteen thousand dollars. (The prototypes were sent off to the Pittsburgh Steelers, who wanted to give them a try.) Smith said of the robots, “You’re taking one player who can get hurt out of the equation, but, more important, your helmet is not hitting another hard helmet—it’s hitting cushion. The helmet-on-helmet is the dangerous part.” St. Thomas can afford such experiments. The football program is huge—the varsity team alone has a hundred players—and its training facilities rival those of top colleges.

The robots arrived in late summer. Adam Bolaños, a science teacher and



JOEDATOR

“Make a note—their use of tools is both efficient and precise.”



an assistant coach, put them in an equipment room, among non-motorized pads of various shapes and sizes, and plugged them in. Two days later, the M.V.P.s were fully charged, and Bolaños and another assistant coach joysticked them onto the field. When an offensive lineman reached for the remote, Bolaños jerked it away and said, “Do you know how expensive these are?”

In one drill, a robot simulated a running back breaking into the open field. Ameer Riley, the defensive coordinator, watched a defensive back lunge ineffectually at the M.V.P. “We don’t tackle by diving!” he yelled. “You gotta drive through this guy.” Riley exhibited the proper form: lowering his shoulder, wrapping his arms around the dummy, then wrestling it to the ground. A minute later, the defensive back dragged the M.V.P. down. Riley exclaimed, “There you go!”

Riley wasn’t fully sold on the robots’ utility. “I’m a dinosaur kind of guy,” he said. “I like the old way. I feel a kind of sadness about the way the game has evolved.” Safety, he conceded, was “paramount,” but he feared that the robots might encourage bad habits. The guys, he said, were “launching themselves at the robots as if they were about to jump on a Slip ’N Slide, which is not an effective way to tackle.”

Dave Billitier, the assistant head coach, also observed the robot drill with a skeptical eye. “I just don’t think they simulate a kid tackling someone at speed,” he said. “The way the robots move is so static.” But something had to change in order to diminish the damage done in practice. “The kids are so much stronger and faster than they used to be.” After five minutes, the drill ended. The team, Billitier said, was “dying for some fresh meat.”

ONE AFTERNOON THIS summer, Harriott, while shaking hands at the start of practice, noticed a player near the back of the line putting his shoulder pads on, shimmying them over his head. The student, Trevon Grimes, had a temple-fade haircut so bushy on top that classmates compared his head to a broccoli floret. “You should’ve already been suited up, Grimes,” Harriott said.

Grimes was arguably the best high-school wide receiver in America. He

was tall and lean, with blazing speed and grippy hands. He referred to himself as a “light-skinned stallion,” and had altered his name on the back of his practice jersey so that it read “CRIME.” He was charismatic like Muhammad Ali, Harriott said.

“Sorry, Coach,” Grimes said. He had forgotten to take off his watch—a red Casio that he calls “my Rolex”—and he flung it against a fence. He was the only St. Thomas player who had chosen not to wear a Riddell SpeedFlex helmet.



*The robots, covered in black foam, are known as Mobile Virtual Players, or M.V.P.s.*

When Harriott informed Grimes that the Riddell was “scientifically safer” than the one he was wearing, a Schutt Air XP Pro, Grimes said, “I did my own medical research.” (In truth, Grimes simply found the Riddell too “big and bulky.” He told me that “all the college receivers and N.F.L. receivers” wear the Schutt, “because it’s lighter.” According to the Virginia Tech ratings, the Schutt helmet is the second safest.)

Harriott smiled. Grimes felt that Harriott, who has five children, treated him as much like a son as like a football player. As Grimes put it, “He lets us be ourselves.”

Grimes asked Harriott when he could get his game cleats. “I need to break them in, or my feet gonna be sore,” he said. Harriott told him that an expected shipment, from Nike, was late. (St.

Thomas has sponsorship contracts with Nike and Gatorade.)

The program’s resources and reputation attract players from across the country. Grimes grew up in Indianapolis, and started playing football at the age of seven. His mother, Leah, told me, “He was a foot taller than everybody else—bigger, faster, more aggressive. Parents used to pull their kids off the field and say, ‘Is that boy *really* eight?’”

In 1953, the American Association of Pediatrics recommended banning

children under twelve from playing football. (In 2013, the *Annals of Biomedical Engineering* published a study indicating that the head impacts sustained by players nine to twelve years old could be as severe as those sustained by college athletes.) But the sport continued gaining in popularity. Three years after the A.A.P.’s recommendation, an American Medical Association official declared that, although football was potentially “a killer and a maimer,” it offered “character-building advantages” for young children, and should not be banned.

After Grimes completed the fifth grade, Leah, a nurse, found a job at a hospital in Margate, Florida, so that Trevon could eventually attend St. Thomas. She worked twelve-hour shifts to save up for tuition, which costs more than twelve thousand dollars. Grimes

tested in before his freshman year. In 2014, as a sophomore, he made the varsity football team; during that championship season, he scored two touchdowns. In his junior year, he scored seven touchdowns, helping St. Thomas win the state title yet again. Leah, now a flight nurse at a children's hospital, kept a crazy schedule, but insisted on having one free day a week. "Friday nights are mine," she said. "When Trevon gets to the N.F.L., it will be Sundays."

By the end of his sophomore year, Grimes had received scholarship offers from nearly every top college program. "Laundry baskets" of letters arrived for him daily, Leah said. Privately, Grimes was intent on attending Ohio State. But he couldn't help doing a little preening: in March, at a Nike-sponsored camp in Fort Lauderdale, he told the press, "Whatever school makes me feel comfortable, that's one of the biggest aspects that will bump a school up."

ESPN invited Grimes to announce his college choice on-air, but he declined. In August, he posted on his Twitter account, @GrimeTime™, that he was headed for Ohio State. Urban Meyer, its head coach, had been in frequent contact with him. "I felt loved," Grimes told me.

Harriott knew that, if Grimes left Ohio State as hyped as he was going in, he had a chance to become an N.F.L. star. But athletic talent is fragile. Harriott had dreamed of the pros before tearing his A.C.L. (For most teen-agers, who tend not to think about long-term repercussions, a busted knee is far more worrying than a concussion. "If you take somebody's legs out, you instantly take away their livelihood," Cornelius Bennett said.)

Harriott stressed the importance of character development, and he didn't make exceptions for his star. Once, in practice, Grimes caught himself on the verge of swearing, and said "fudge" instead. Harriott pointed to the ground.

"Coach!" Grimes said. "I can't believe I gotta do pushups for 'fudge.'" But he complied.

Harriott blasted the air horn and the offense lined up for seven-on-seven drills. On one play, Jake Allen, the starting quarterback, threw the ball to Grimes, amid double coverage. Grimes plucked the ball out of the air. "That boy is like a magnet," an assistant coach marvelled. After

pulling down a pair of catches against St. Thomas's top cornerback, Grimes teased his defender: "I'm a machine! Sometimes I just need a little WD-40."

Harriott is a devout Christian, and he ends each practice with a sermon at midfield.

"How long you think he's gonna talk for today?" one player muttered. "Ten minutes?"

"Forty-five," another said.

"He be using them S.A.T. words, talking about Sophocles," a third joked.

"Improve my vocabulary, though," the second admitted.

In one post-practice speech, Harriott thanked God for "Your love, Your guidance, Your leadership, Your parenting, Your benevolent nature, Your competitive attitude." He said to his team, "Concern? Worry, fellas, that's the opposite of faith. That's sin. And sin separates you from performing to the best of your ability."

He also impressed on the students that they were just playing a game. "This is *fun*, fellas," he said. "When you get to the next level, you're going to miss this. When you leave here, it gets real."

**T**HERE ARE THREE former N.F.L. players on Harriott's staff. One of them is Glenn Holt, who was a wide receiver for the Cincinnati Bengals, tallying two touchdowns and four concussions in three years. "It's a different deal at that level," he said of the N.F.L. "Those guys work for the company. It's really big business."

The N.F.L. is not just a sports league; it is also one of the world's most powerful media companies. NBC, CBS, Fox, and ESPN pay billions of dollars a year for broadcast rights, giving the N.F.L. great leverage. (Ratings dipped before the elections this year, but they have rebounded.) In 2003, after ESPN launched a dramatic series, "Playmakers," about a pro football team with a player who beats his wife, and others who are implicated in a night-club shooting, the league commissioner at the time, Paul Tagliabue, expressed disapproval. The show was cancelled. John Eisendrath, its creator, accused Tagliabue and other N.F.L. executives of behaving like "bullies."

A decade later, ESPN again caved to league pressure, terminating a collaborative investigation with PBS's

"Frontline" about the concussion crisis. In 2015, Bill Simmons, at the time an ESPN contributor and the editor of Grantland, an online publication owned by ESPN, lost his job after questioning the "testicular fortitude" of Tagliabue's successor, Roger Goodell.

The 2015 hack of Sony Pictures e-mails exposed correspondence suggesting that the N.F.L. also influenced the making of the film "Concussion," starring Will Smith as Bennet Omalu, the neuropathologist. A Sony lawyer had written that "unflattering moments for the N.F.L." were edited out, removing "most of the bite." (The film's director, Peter Landesman, disputes this.)

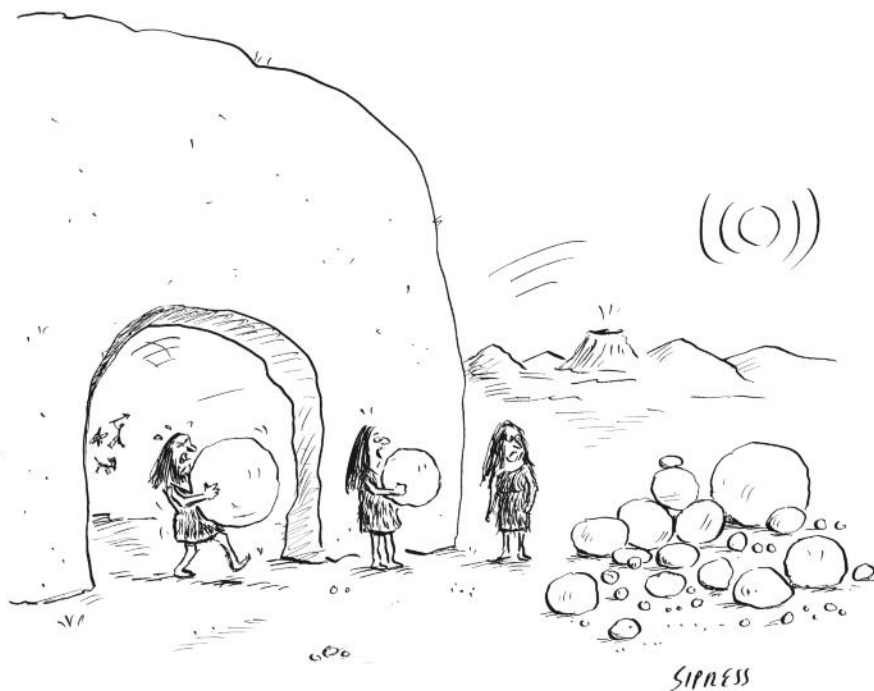
Whether or not the film was significantly edited, it haunted Garin Patrick, St. Thomas's defensive-line coach. Patrick played in the N.F.L. for three years, and suffered three concussions, which he described as getting his "bell rung." Last winter, he left a screening of "Concussion" feeling alarmed. The film, echoing the scientific consensus, puts forth the idea that repetitive subconcussive blows are thought to be the main cause of C.T.E. A one-off concussion likely represents a lesser threat. "That scared the shit out of me," Patrick said.

In April, 2016, he contacted a law firm that was representing former players suing the N.F.L. The league settled the case for nearly a billion dollars. Patrick was skeptical of the deal; in his view, it made it too difficult for individual players to receive medical compensation. Not long after the N.F.L. proposed the initial terms of the agreement, its own consulting firm concluded that twenty-eight per cent of former players would likely develop some form of dementia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, A.L.S., or C.T.E. Patrick, who suffers from short-term-memory loss, told me, "I think *I'm* one of the twenty-eight per cent."

Subsequent research has indicated that symptoms of C.T.E. may emerge as early as high school. At a congressional hearing in March, Ann McKee, a C.T.E. expert from Boston University, reported seeing tau-protein buildups "in ninety out of ninety-four N.F.L. players whose brains we've examined." She added, "We've found it in forty-five out of fifty-five college players, and twenty-six out of sixty-five high-school players."

I asked Patrick if, given these findings,





“We’re decluttering.”

he regretted having played football. “Would I do it again, knowing the stakes?” he said. “Absolutely. You could live into your nineties, or get hit by a car tomorrow. You gotta go from something.”

**I**N A CLASSROOM one afternoon in August, St. Thomas’s offensive linemen sat slumped at their desks, watching game film as preparation for a pre-season contest, later that week, against Dillard High School. “This is going to be a nut-kicking game,” Ryan Schneider, the offensive coordinator, told the players. “They’re not running complicated coverages. It’s just who’s the bigger, badder S.O.B. up front.” He advised, “Smash the hell out of them! And then let them know it’s coming again.”

On game day, St. Thomas amassed a thirty-five-point lead before halftime. Grimes caught a ball in tight coverage, brushed off two tacklers, and ran for a touchdown. Kivon Bennett made two sacks, and Asante Samuel, whose father was a cornerback in the N.F.L., returned an interception for a touchdown. The Raiders won, 51–0.

Later, Schneider, Harriott, and the team reviewed the game on video. Schneider praised Grimes for a downfield block, adding, “Next time, put him on

his butt and rub your balls in his face.” When Samuel’s interception appeared on the video, Harriott paused it to applaud the block that had opened up a path for Samuel: Lashawn Paulino-Bell, a two-hundred-and-forty-five-pound defensive lineman, had de-cleated an unsuspecting Dillard player. “It was, like, *boom!*” Paulino-Bell told me, reliving the play. “He was almost on a stretcher.” How did it feel? “It’s a rush,” he said. “It’s, like, Ahhh, that’s *live!*” He had no reservations about levelling the guy. “At the end of the day, you know what you signed up for.”

Harriott reminded Paulino-Bell and the others about a new rule: blocking uninvolved players was not allowed. Paulino-Bell’s hit was clean, Harriott said, but he noted that “those plays are over if you’re nowhere near the ball.” In recent years, the youth league Pop Warner, the National Federation of State High School Associations, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, and the N.F.L. have implemented rule changes aimed at reducing injuries, and introduced protocols for treating concussions. Helmet-to-helmet hits are forbidden across all leagues. The N.C.A.A. has banned gratuitously hitting the head or neck of an opposing player. The N.F.L.

has outlawed two-a-day practices, and helmet-first tackling, known as “spearing,” elicits an automatic fifteen-yard penalty. (At a rally in October, President-elect Donald Trump mocked the N.F.L.’s rule changes as “soft”: “Uh-oh, got a little ding on the head? No, no, you can’t play for the rest of the season!”)

According to today’s rules, Cornelius Bennett said, his sack of Steve Beuerlein would be grounds for ejection. He acknowledged that reforms were needed, but worried about hamstringing defenders. “I don’t want nobody crossing my space if I can’t lay the wood on him,” he said. “I tell my son, ‘It’s nice to be “nice-nasty” on the football field. I call it *nice-ty*. I would lay you out *and* smile and laugh about it at the same time.”

Ameer Riley, the defensive coordinator, expressed similar concerns about the safety rules. “I fear that they’re taking a big part of the game away,” he said. Now that so many kinds of hits were banned, he said, “the wide receiver don’t have that fear that he used to have of going over the middle.” Riley went on, “All those stats you see nowadays? There should be an asterisk next to those names, just like Barry Bonds”—the baseball player who holds the home-run record, but is accused of having used steroids. “They don’t play the same game as Jack Lambert”—the former Steelers middle linebacker. “If you were coming across the middle, Jack Lambert would annihilate you.” He added, “I’m all in for safety. I just worry about the integrity of the game, and it being a fantasy-football-run generation, where all the emphasis is on offense.”

In 2012, the N.F.L. began promoting a youth initiative, Heads Up Football, which teaches young players tackling and blocking techniques that are meant to “take the head out of the game.” Last year, the league cited a study that seemed to attribute a decline in youth concussions to Heads Up, but the *Times* subsequently obtained a copy of the study and discovered that the initiative “showed no demonstrable effect on concussions.”

A similar public conversation about safety in football occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. Back then, the sport was played almost exclusively at Ivy League schools. In 1884, Harvard tried to ban it for being “brutal, demoralizing to teams and spectators, and extremely dangerous.” The effort

was not successful, and dozens of players died from broken backs and snapped necks. Games increasingly resembled blood sport. In 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt invited representatives from Harvard, Yale, and Princeton to the White House, and they agreed on significant rule changes—including the forward pass—that were intended to make the game safer without sapping its vitality.

The death rate declined, but football did not lose its martial character. Sam Huff, a New York Giants linebacker in the nineteen-sixties, has described the game as “war without guns.” The special-teams coach at St. Thomas gives his units militaristic nicknames: SEAL team, Delta Six. Conor O’Neill, a former St. Thomas linebacker who played for four years at the University of Wisconsin, told me, “We’re the gladiators of the twenty-first century.” Last year, eight American high schoolers died from injuries sustained while playing football. The causes included a broken neck, a lacerated spleen, and blunt-force trauma to the head.

**I**N LATE AUGUST, on the day before classes resumed, Harriott instructed his team to comply with St. Thomas’s grooming standards. “You can’t have parts in your eyebrows,” he warned. He also reminded the boys to complete their summer reading assignments. “Don’t embarrass us,” he said.

That night, Grimes shaved off the inverted V that he had stencilled along his neckline. He ran up to Harriott before practice the next day. “Coach, I got a real emergency situation,” he said. “Why am I in pre-cal? Everyone else is in college algebra. I’m going to have an F! I’ve heard stories. It’s *hard*.” Harriott told him to stick with it. (He did, and as of December he had a B.)

St. Thomas’s first regular-season game was against Booker T. Washington, a public high school in a rough neighborhood of Miami. In 2009, one of its players was shot and killed at a party. Booker T. was the four-time returning state champ. (It competed in a different division than St. Thomas.)

Harriott and his coaching staff had recently scouted their opponent, observing them play against a team from Plantation, Florida. Booker T. won. At one point, Harriott was walking alongside

the stadium fence when a Booker T. player jogged over and taunted him: “You’re next.”

Back at St. Thomas, Harriott told his guys, “They think they’re tougher than you. They talk a lot. They’re backyard brawlers.” Booker T.’s head coach, Tim (Ice) Harris, was featured in a 2003 documentary, “Year of the Bull,” that focusses on another tough Miami high school. In it, Harris and other coaches are shown cursing at and hitting their players. “That was another era,” Harris told me. “Our kids needed a different kind of push to be able to understand and obey. As a coach and a father, I’m completely different from that now.”

Harris still ran tackling sessions at Booker T., he said, but only once a week, for thirty minutes. He said that he wanted to get the kids “to the game,” not “get them all banged up on the practice field.” Booker T. couldn’t afford Riddell SpeedFlex helmets, though Harris was trying to raise funds. And robots? “We *wish*,” he said. “We got to have a coach that holds the pads and runs with them.” He said that Booker T. embraced “the ‘Rocky’ concept.” When I attended a recent evening practice, at a public park near Booker T.—the school’s field has no lights—the de-



fensive coaches had wheeled out large plastic trash cans to simulate offensive linemen.

**T**HE WEEK OF the Booker T. game, the air was soupy, the sun devastatingly hot. By three-thirty, when practice started at St. Thomas, rubber pellets dusting the artificial turf were absorbing heat, pushing the field temperature well above a hundred degrees. One player threw up. “I don’t think it’s ever been this hot before,” Grimes said, bent over and sucking air.

Harriott used the weather as motivation. At the end of practice, before a hundred dripping faces, he demanded, “Would

you rather be shovelling snow?” He asked if anyone had heard what Booker T.’s coaches and players had been calling St. Thomas. “‘P’ cubed,” Harriott said. “Privileged. Private. Pussies.”

One afternoon, Grimes was running a curl route when he pivoted awkwardly, torquing his right knee. He headed to the sideline and adjusted a neoprene strap that he wore on the knee to alleviate the pain in his patellar tendon—a symptom of Osgood-Schlatter disease, an adolescent form of tendinitis. Grimes had been playing through nagging knee pain since the eighth grade. A coach asked him if he was O.K. “I’m good,” he said. “I just got to stretch it out. I told you, I’m a stallion, not a donkey.”

The day of the game, Harriott’s eyes looked feverish. Booker T. was ranked No. 6 by *USA Today*, and to win the national title St. Thomas would have to go undefeated. “Send a message,” Harriott told his players. “They play. We *love*. Fellas, it’s what’s expected of you. Live up to your standards and be grateful for the opportunity to prove your love, prove your worth.” His tone suddenly changed. “Right now is our state championship! Right now is our *national* championship! There is no tomorrow! It’s now! *I want their heads!*”

The game was held at a stadium in Miami-Dade County. Cumulonimbus clouds hung in the sky. An air siren heralded Booker T.’s entrance. As the players ran onto the field, they mimed firing machine guns. “I’m So Hood,” by DJ Khaled, blared over the speakers: “I ain’t gon’ play wit ‘em/I’d rather let the AK hit ‘em.”

The play-by-play announcer welcomed spectators to a matchup between “two nationally ranked high-school powerhouses.” Larry Little, a former Miami Dolphins guard and a Booker T. alum, and Michael Irvin, a former Dallas Cowboys wide receiver and a St. Thomas alum, met on the fifty-yard line and shook hands. After that, the good-will gestures ceased: a Booker T. defensive end facetiously blew kisses at St. Thomas players; a skirmish nearly broke out among the two schools’ coaches. Rob Biasotti, St. Thomas’s strength-and-conditioning coach, told me that he had never witnessed such a hostile pre-game atmosphere. “This is going to be a war,” he said.

On Booker T.’s first possession, the



quarterback scrambled, and he appeared to step out of bounds shy of the first-down marker. But the official spotted the ball favorably. Irvin said, loud enough for the linesman to hear, "That don't look like no first down to me."

Irvin graduated from St. Thomas in 1984. He went on to win a national championship with the University of Miami, and three Super Bowl rings with Dallas. In 2007, he was inducted into the Hall of Fame. St. Thomas was special to him. He still attended games, and bragged about the school on the NFL Network, where he is a color commentator.

His professional career was cut short by a spinal-cord injury. "I'm not saying I won't experience some negative effects from the game," he told me. But football critics, he said, failed to appreciate the sport's importance to low-income students. Irvin, who is one of seventeen children, asked, "Without the opportunity to play this game, where would they go? What would they do?" Harris, the Booker T. coach, told me that he regarded football as "one of the best dropout-prevention programs in the world."

In "The U," a 2009 ESPN documentary about the University of Miami in the late eighties, Melvin Bratton, one of Irvin's college teammates, described football as "basically a way out of the hood." Irvin agreed. Youth participation may be down in well-to-do communities, but the Upper East Side has never been a font of football talent. Wealthier Americans might ponder the future of football, Irvin said, but poor and middle-class kids were betting their future on football.

This socioeconomic disconnect is not unique to football: in 1965, after the second heavyweight fight between Muhammad Ali and Sonny Liston, the *Times* columnist Russell Baker addressed the growing abolitionist campaign against boxing, noting, "Fighters usually came from the hungry classes and were risking their brains for the titillation of the overfed." Irvin put it this way: "When we start talking about 'Will parents stop letting their kids play?', well, some parents will *have* that opportunity. But many will not. They will say, 'Son, this is your best chance.'" Even some of the St. Thomas players were growing up in dire circumstances: one

had been living in a motel, after his family lost their home; another student, whose guardian had been a drug addict, was in foster care.

On the next play, Booker T.'s quarterback, who last year suffered a concussion that left him foaming at the mouth, tossed an interception. St. Thomas, with Jake Allen at quarterback, took over, but Allen fumbled and Booker T. recovered. The score seesawed, and the first half ended with the Raiders in the lead, 17–14.

During halftime, Harriott urged calm: "Encourage one another. Don't hold your head and point fingers." He privately regretted having presented the contest as an existential struggle. St. Thomas was obviously the better team—and it was just a game, after all. "Get in the mind-set of enjoying yourselves," he told his players.

**S**T. THOMAS CAME out in the second half and played more mistake-filled football: dropping an easy interception opportunity, getting penalized for roughing the punter. The team's supporters, accustomed to blowouts, grew restless, noisily criticizing the coaches' play calls. Late in the third quarter, St. Thomas drove deep into Booker T. territory, but Allen threw two incomplete passes, and the Raiders settled for a field goal, making it 20–14.

The players lined up for the kickoff. Perhaps no part of football is more dangerous than the kickoff, when both sides barrel toward each other at full speed, like jousters. Ghastly collisions often occur. Pop Warner has eliminated kickoffs for children under eleven, but the kickoff will most likely endure elsewhere, because every once in a while a kick returner shoots the gap and runs all the way to the end zone. For fans, the thrill derives, in part, from the possibility of disaster. Other sports have moments of similar risk: the soccer star Lionel Messi dazzles most when dribbling through, and around, slide-tackling defenders.

As the football sailed through the air, Daniel Carter plunged down the field for St. Thomas, weaving around potential blockers. Booker T.'s returner caught the ball. Seconds later, Carter smashed into his legs, slamming him to the ground—a legal hit. St. Thomas's sideline erupted in whoops. "That's what I'm

*talking about!*" a coach yelled. Carter jumped up, his body surging with adrenaline; the returner did not. ("I thought he broke his leg," Harriott said later.) Booker T. trainers carried the player off the field. "Let's give him a hand and hope that he's not hurt," the announcer said. Carter told me that, for a moment, he felt "a little bit of guilt," adding, "But at the same time it's football."

In the fourth quarter, with St. Thomas down by a point, Grimes came alive. He caught a short pass, stiff-armed his defender, and ran for an additional twenty yards. The Raiders kicked a field goal and retook the lead, 23–21.

The air smelled like car tires. It started to rain, but the boys kept playing. Thunder boomed. Booker T. pushed up the field, and with two and a half minutes to go they scored, taking a four-point lead.

St. Thomas needed a touchdown, and Grimes desperately wanted the ball. He caught a pass near the sideline, but seemed to aggravate his knee injury, and hobbled off the field. He sat out for a play, then went back in and made another catch, advancing the ball deep into Booker T.'s end.

With twenty-three seconds left, St. Thomas had the ball on Booker T.'s twenty-five-yard line. Allen dropped back, swivelled right, and threw to Grimes, who, after catching the ball, cut inside and got by a potential tackler. Another one stood in his way. Grimes lowered his shoulder, plowed over the defender, and fell into the end zone. Ecstatic, he pulled off his helmet to celebrate.

But the head official insisted that Grimes's knees had touched the ground before the ball crossed the goal line. The ball was spotted at the one. On the next play, Allen lobbed a weak pass toward Grimes, which was intercepted.

St. Thomas had been defeated; for the first time in decades, the team had a losing record. Grimes was crying, as were others. Harriott tried to console them. "I appreciate the fact that you guys are heartbroken," he said. "It's going to make us better. Nobody died tonight."

**M**ORALE WAS TERRIBLE for days. Biasotti, the conditioning coach, called it "a disaster like I've never seen." He told me that he feared "a breakdown of civil order" if the team didn't bounce back strong.

An MRI scan of Grimes's knee revealed that he had a bruised patellar tendon. His doctor gave him a dose of oral steroids, and recommended two weeks off. High-school football was important, but being healthy for Ohio State was essential. In class, he acted out; injured athletes are notoriously cranky. "I ball up my emotions and let them out on the field," he said. "When I can't go out and release that energy, I don't know another way." (He later apologized to his teachers and teammates.)

At practice, Harriott urged the players not to let anger distract them. "We're not about that," he told me. Practicing with the M.V.P.s, he noted, helped keep the players' emotions in check, allowing them to "focus on strategy."

The next Friday, St. Thomas won, 42–6. A week later, the score was 49–0. Grimes returned for the homecoming game and caught a touchdown pass. The Raiders won, 42–0. His knee felt strong and the team looked confident.

A few days later, the Raiders flew to Las Vegas for a nationally televised game against the new No. 1 in the country, Bishop Gorman, a team that had not lost since 2013. The players and coaches checked into a resort nine miles southwest of the Strip. There were ten restaurants and a pool with a waterfall, but Harriott prohibited his team from enjoying any of it. This was not a pleasure trip. Nevertheless, Harriott's tone was more low-keyed than the one he'd adopted before the Booker T. game. He cut back on the motivational speeches. If his players weren't at practice, meals, or meetings, he wanted them resting, visualizing their assignments on the field.

Gorman had already beaten top-ranked teams from Texas, Hawaii, Florida, and California, and it had an electrifying quarterback, Tate Martell, who, like Grimes, was headed to Ohio State. In five games, Martell had thrown for thirteen touchdowns and run for six. The bookies made Gorman a sixteen-point favorite.

"They saying we *underdogs!*" Kivon Bennett said, indignantly. He and the others knew that, if they brought down Gorman, they had a chance of regaining the No. 1 spot in the *USA Today* rankings. Indeed, ESPN pre-



## STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND'S END CATALOG

PAUL  
NOTH

sented the matchup as if it were a prizefight. A commentator declared, "Tonight, two high-school heavyweights square off in the city where champions are crowned."

Gorman's stadium was filled to its capacity of five thousand. A row of rugged mountain peaks loomed to the west. Flavor Flav, whose son attended the school, showed up to watch. Harriott told his players, "Enjoy every second of this night."

Cornelius Bennett made the cross-country trip, as did Leah Grimes. She was wearing a St. Thomas jersey with "16"—her son's number—printed on the front and the back. Leah's mother had also flown in, from Seattle. Before the game, some of the players talked about why they were playing. Grimes stood up and said, "I'm doing it for my grandma. She has cancer. She made a long trip to come watch me play. First time she saw me play live." During warmups, Leah told me that the two weeks of rest had done wonders for her son. She hoped that his patellar problems were over. He was free of pain for the first time in years.

The game started at seven o'clock. Kivon Bennett looked across the field, and said to a fellow defensive lineman, "Let's show them some of that

South Florida shit." Before the kickoff, Harriott offered some final words: "Leave a mark forever on this field. The St. Thomas spirit should never leave here. They should *never, ever* want to see blue and gold again."

From the outset, St. Thomas played stifling defense, but on offense the team faltered. Jake Allen looked nervous and struggled to find his rhythm. He missed Grimes a few times, and then threw an interception. Grimes stormed off the field, and when a coach tried to calm him he snapped, "Everything is *not* O.K., Coach. Sometimes you got to say, 'It's not fine.' You got to say to Jake, 'Get your head out of your ass!'"

Nevertheless, the Raiders went into halftime behind by only 3–0. The deficit was "no big deal," Harriott assured his guys, but they'd win only if they played as a team. "God is going to test our resilience," he said, eying Grimes. Others were more direct. Schneider threatened to bench Grimes if he didn't stop fussing, and Michael Irvin, who had flown out for the game, said, "I don't want to hear this shit—y'all fighting each other on the sidelines. We fight *together!*" After that, several players looked prepared to run through a brick wall.

Early in the third quarter, St. Thomas



had the ball on its own forty-six-yard line, and went into a spread formation. Allen took the snap and pitched the ball to Michael Harley, a wide receiver. Gorman's defense pinched in around the line of scrimmage, assuming that Harley would tuck the ball and run. But Harley stopped, set his feet, and tossed an arcing pass toward the end zone. Grimes outran his defender, extended his arms, and pulled the ball in. Touchdown.

Grimes swaggered back to the bench. Irvin smacked him on the butt, exclaiming, "That's how big boys answer the call!" Fans hollered, "Grime Time!" The Raiders kicked the extra point, and went ahead, 7-3. On the next possession, they forced a fumble and recovered the ball. When the third quarter expired, Allen had led the offense to within inches of the goal line.

On the first play of the fourth quarter, Grimes ran a corner route, in double coverage, along the back of the end zone. He routinely outmuscled and outjumped opponents, but this time the ball was thrown short, and he didn't have a chance. As he and the two Gorman defenders fell trying to reach the ball, Gorman's safety intercepted it.

Grimes did not get up. When he hit the ground, he heard "a whole bunch of pops." He pounded his fist on the field,

in agony. Hurrying over, the team doctor saw that the injury was to Grimes's left knee—not the one with tendinitis. He and a coach carried Grimes to the bench. Grimes puffed his cheeks and his eyes looked panicked, as if he were contemplating, for the first time, a future that did not include professional stardom.

Leah ran down the bleachers and unfastened the clips on Grimes's shoulder pads. By the look on his face, she said later, "I knew it was something serious." A doctor packed his knee with ice and braced it with a cardboard splint. Grimes left the stadium on a stretcher, with a Gatorade towel covering his face. "I didn't want people to see me going out like that," he told me. An ambulance took him and Leah to a hospital for an X-ray.

Grimes refused pain medication, so that he could stay awake and follow the game on his phone. He watched Gorman score a touchdown and retake the lead, 10-7; then, with two seconds left, he cheered from the rear of the ambulance as St. Thomas kicked a field goal, tying it up. The game went into overtime. The Raiders scored a touchdown, then Gorman did the same. Double overtime. St. Thomas's defense prevented Gorman from scoring, and tried to win with a field goal, but the

kick was blocked. In triple overtime, St. Thomas scored again, but so did Gorman, and instead of settling for an extra point they went for a two-point conversion. Gorman made it, and won, 25-24.

Fans rushed the field. The St. Thomas players looked bewildered: they had been so close. A Gorman supporter patted a despondent St. Thomas player on the back, and said, "Outstanding athletes. Worked y'all's butts off. Keep it up." Gorman's coach, Kenny Sanchez, said, "We've played in some great games over the years, but that was probably the best."

Cornelius Bennett stood in the end zone, ruing St. Thomas's lost opportunity. "Shitty feeling to come out on this side of it," he said.

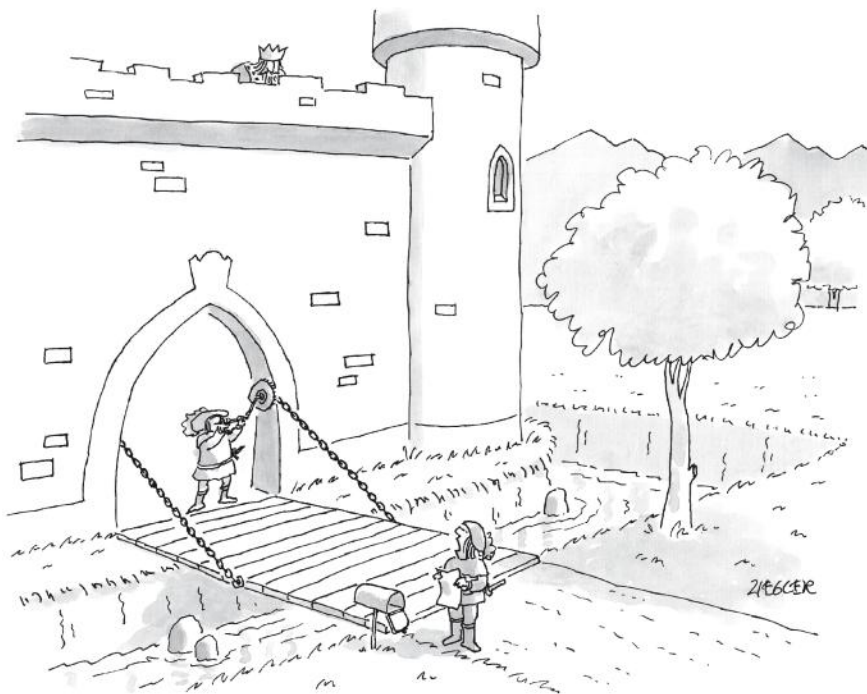
Harriott was a few feet away, addressing his team. He reminded the guys that their season was far from over. They still had a chance to win a third consecutive state title—something the team had never accomplished.

While the ESPN crew packed up their gear, little kids, basking in the bright lights, pretended that they were the stars. A group of twentysomethings crossed the parking lot, trying to find their car. "I think that's the best ten dollars I've ever spent," one said.

TWO DAYS LATER, Grimes had another MRI, which showed what he, his coaches, his family, and Ohio State feared the most: a torn A.C.L. His high-school career was over. He needed surgery and months of rehab if he was going to be ready for the start of the college season. "I will be back and stronger than ever," he promised on Twitter.

In November, Grimes visited Columbus; he toured the athletic facilities and the dormitories, sat in on meetings with the coaches and the players, and had his knee examined by the team doctor. He and Leah met with a guidance counsellor to discuss his plan to graduate in three years. "I want to be done with all my credits, just in case I declare early for the draft," he told me.

He insisted that his injury had not made him consider seriously a life without football. "If you're thinking of a Plan B, you're distracted from a



*"Good news, your majesty. We may already be a winner."*

Plan A,” he said. “I’m *going* to the N.F.L. There’s not a question about that. I’m just thinking about what I want to do after. I want to have a business or invent something. Like, you know those little plastic pieces that you put in the wall that keeps you from putting metal things into the thing? The guy who invented that is a billionaire!”

Ohio State played at home that weekend, against Nebraska. Grimes and his mother had front-row seats on the forty-yard line. In the second quarter, Nebraska’s quarterback, Tommy Armstrong, Jr., was tackled while scrambling. His head bounced off the turf and, for several minutes, he lay lifeless a few feet from where Grimes and his mother sat. Armstrong was strapped to a backboard and taken away. “My heart skipped a beat,” Leah said. “He could have turned his neck the wrong way and been paralyzed.” (Armstrong has since returned to play.) For the first time, Leah feared for her son’s safety. “I had to take a deep breath and refocus,” she said. “These are ginormous, mammoth men that are going to be tackling my son.”

**S**T. THOMAS CRUSHED their next four opponents: 42–8, 42–7, 49–0, 45–19. With Grimes out, other players stepped up. In one game, Kivon Bennett made six tackles, and his general performance, along with his classroom success and locker-room leadership, led Harriott to name him a team captain.

When the junior-varsity season ended, Harriott invited a few J.V. players to attend varsity practices. One day, during punt-formation drills, an eager J.V. call-up collided helmet-to-helmet with Kaleb McCarty, a junior. McCarty shook it off, but he had a terrible headache that night and couldn’t sleep. He woke up feeling dizzy, nauseated, and a little scared. “I knew something was wrong,” he said.

The next day, McCarty went to see Dwayne Owens, the athletic trainer. Owens told me that the researchers from Miami had completed a trial of the goggles that measured rapid eye movements, but had failed to provide St. Thomas with a pair to use. Owens, using a cell-phone flashlight and a series of balance tests, determined that McCarty had likely suffered a concus-

sion. His mother took him to the hospital, where he was given an MRI. “Doctors know so little about concussions,” McCarty told me. On the Internet, he had seen “all these tests that they do on N.F.L. players and, like, *all* of them showed something they find on their brains”—tau deposits—“that triggered them to commit suicide.”

McCarty was unsettled. “All of *this* can heal,” he said, running his hands over his body. If you sprain an ankle and try to run before it has healed, you can cause further damage, but pain usually dissuades you from pushing it. “What can tell your *brain* that it hurts?” McCarty said. “Nothing.”

McCarty did some research. He was troubled to learn about Tyler Varga, a Yale graduate who played in three games for the Indianapolis Colts before suffering a concussion that lasted four months; Varga eventually quit the sport. Other players were retiring early. Chris Borland was the kind of football player McCarty wanted to be: a linebacker who relished a dirty jersey and the roar of the crowd. In 2014, after graduating from the University of Wisconsin, Borland secured a multimillion-dollar contract to play for the San Francisco 49ers. His rookie season was sensational: he had two interceptions and a sack, and in one game he made eighteen tackles.

But, in the pre-season, Borland had sustained a concussion, and it made him wonder what would happen to his brain if he kept taking blows to the head. He discreetly read “League of Denial: The NFL, Concussions and the Battle for Truth,” by Mark Fainaru-Wada and Steve Fainaru, hiding the paperback inside a generic hardback. “I was reading about players who took their own lives, because they were demented and depressed from C.T.E., and then I was going to watch game film,” he told me. “It was fucked up.”

In March, 2015, Borland announced his retirement, saying, “I don’t want to have any neurological diseases, or die younger than I would otherwise.”

He went on TV and attended conferences on head trauma. Other professionals, like Varga, asked him for

advice. *ESPN The Magazine* called Borland “The Most Dangerous Man in Football.”

A few months ago, in Atlanta, Borland appeared on a panel about concussions and the N.F.L. He was asked how to make football safer. “I don’t know how you do it, if it’s even possible,” he said. Violence was central to the sport’s appeal. Incredibly, football seemed more popular the more people learned about the risks. “It’s like a religion in America,” Borland said. Another analogy might be climate change: we know that it is happening, and we know that it is harmful, but are we willing to sacrifice the convenience of air-conditioning and jet travel in order to combat the problem?

Changes could be made at the youth level, Borland told the audience: “No way a child should be allowed to play tackle football before high school.” In September, the parents of two former Pop Warner players who died, and subsequently were given a diagnosis of C.T.E., filed a class-action suit against the organization, contending that it had created a false impression of safety. The case raised several questions: What role should courts and lawmakers have in making football safer? Should we regulate activities that, if pursued for an extended period, might physically endanger the participants? When it comes to, say, shooting heroin, the answer is simple. But football, which can create tremendous financial and social opportunities for those who play it, cannot be categorized as purely harmful. The *Times* has described the class-action suit as “the next front in the legal battle over concussions.”

On the panel, Borland said, “We get into informed consent with college and pro players. There’s a huge reward if they want to take the risk, and if all the right information is made available. It’s a free country.” But, he added, “I think it’s wrong for children to hit their heads thousands of times.”

Kaleb McCarty told me that he once dreamed of going to the N.F.L., but now he just wanted to get into a good school. “Football is a vehicle for me to get an education,” he said. “I want to





try to go to Penn or Duke or Syracuse. There's no way I'll get into them *without* football."

**G**EORGE SMITH, St. Thomas's athletic director, was furious when he learned about McCarty's concussion. Since Harriott had revised the practice regimen, there had been no serious injuries outside of games—a marked improvement. Why, Smith asked, weren't the coaches using the robots more? Harriott told me that he considered the M.V.P.s "a great tool" and a "welcome innovation with regards to safety and injury prevention and concussion awareness." But they were glitchy—a "work in progress," as he put it. For one thing, the robots had hard plastic bases that tended to bruise shins, so the players didn't like tackling them. ("They *hurt*," Grimes said.) Ameer Riley, the defensive coordinator, said that, starting in the off-season, he hoped to incorporate the robots in more "realistic" practice scenarios.

Sometimes, Harriott said, "you have to go old-school and use *bodies*." He said of McCarty, "This was our first concussion all year," adding, "We're doing something right." A school that used practice robots was at the cutting edge of conscientious football, but Harriott wasn't about to deny the brutality. He said, "We haven't had any concussions in games—though we've *given* plenty."

McCarty expected to be out for three weeks while he completed a "return to play" concussion protocol, which meant missing St. Thomas's first playoff game, at home, against Palm Beach Lakes High School. Fortunately, the Raiders were the heavy favorite. McCarty attended the game in street clothes. When teammates asked him about the concussion, he told them that he had experienced blurred vision and skewed depth perception. One of them joked that it sounded like he'd been smoking weed.

Thirty minutes before the kickoff, the players lined up in the tunnel leading into the stadium. Grill smoke from the snack bar hung over the field. Michael Harley, a team captain, reminded them of the Bishop Gorman game: did they remember how awful it felt to lose? "Let's ball out tonight!" he said.

The Raiders started strong, with a rushing touchdown on their second play from scrimmage. By the end of the first quarter, they were ahead, 27–0. After eight more points, the Mercy Rule—a constantly running clock—would take effect.

At one point, Kivon Bennett hurt his knee. He limped off the field, but he didn't think the injury was serious. Ice, rest, rehab. "I'll be fine," he said. "Back in a week or two."

Trenell Troutman, a safety, scored two of the first-quarter touchdowns, running in a fumble recovery and returning an interception. "This is my first playoff game," he said, in a pre-game speech to his teammates. "I'm *hungry*." At one point, he hit a Palm Beach Lakes running back so hard that the player stumbled grotesquely around the field before collapsing. (He was assisted off the field.) After the play, a putrid smell on the St. Thomas sideline made one player say of Troutman, "I think he hit the shit out of that guy."

At halftime, the score was still 27–0. Harriott felt pleased with the performance of Troutman and a few others, but otherwise he was frustrated. "That's the first time I saw you guys get off to a great start and then take your foot off the gas," he said. He expected clinical, disciplined play. Instead, he saw senseless penalties and mental mistakes. Two coaches had been shouting at each other on the sidelines. St. Thomas would never win the state championship if it performed this way. "That was *pathetic*," he said. "First time I've ever been so embarrassed by you guys."

The team added to its total in the second half—a touchdown and a two-point conversion. After the game ended, with a score of 35–0, one of the opposing coaches called across the field, "You guys are one helluva football team."

Harriott's team clustered around him. "We've got a lot of work to do," he said. Their next opponent, Dwyer High School, was more formidable. "Heavenly Father, we didn't give our best effort tonight. We did not represent You well," he said, over the sound of the marching band. "We're thankful, Heavenly Father, for the opportunity to redeem ourselves, to make amends." He added, "And, as we pre-



Trevon Grimes, the team's star wide receiver,

pare to take out Dwyer, keep us safe."

St. Thomas trounced the team, 37–0. McCarty sat on the bench again, but he said that his head now felt fine. Concussions, he said, "are just part of the game," adding, "You just got to recover and learn from it. They are bound to happen, just part of the sport." The Raiders defeated their next two opponents





*is headed to Ohio State next year, but this fall he suffered a season-ending knee injury.*

by a total of seventy-eight points, and secured a berth in the state-championship game.

On December 9th, the Raiders travelled to Orlando, to face an undefeated team from Tampa. Grimes, no longer on crutches and already pressing eighty pounds with his bad leg, watched from the sidelines. Kivon Bennett was back

on the field, and so was McCarty. St. Thomas dominated from the start, getting so far ahead that the Mercy Rule went into effect. The final score was 45–6. McCarty was elated. He remained determined to get an excellent college education—“I wouldn’t go to ‘Bama just to play football”—but a pro career was back in his sights.

“The N.F.L. is still a goal,” he said.

A few days after the game, Harriott said that the victory was the “culmination of an extraordinary season.” He paused. “Whatever happened, we had each other—the players had authentic love for each other,” he said. “That’s the power of family, friendship, and brotherhood.” ♦



# HIGH-RISE GREENS

*Growing crops in the city, without soil or natural light.*

BY IAN FRAZIER

**N**O. 212 ROME STREET, in Newark, New Jersey, used to be the address of Grammer, Dempsey & Hudson, a steel-supply company. It was like a lumberyard for steel, which it bought in bulk from distant mills and distributed in smaller amounts, mostly to customers within a hundred-mile radius of Newark. It sold off its assets in 2008 and later shut down. In 2015, a new indoor-agriculture company called AeroFarms leased the property. It had the rusting corrugated-steel exterior torn down and a new building erected on the old frame. Then it filled nearly seventy thousand square feet of floor space with what is called a vertical farm. The building's ceiling allowed for grow tables to be stacked twelve layers tall, to a height of thirty-six feet, in rows eighty feet long. The vertical farm grows kale, bok choy, watercress, arugula, red-leaf lettuce, mizuna, and other baby salad greens.

Grammer, Dempsey & Hudson was founded in 1929. Its workers were members of the Teamsters Union, whose stance could be aggressive. Once, somebody fired shots into the company's office, but didn't hit anyone. Despite the union, the company and its employees got along amicably, and many of them worked there all their lives. Men moved steel plate and I-beams with cranes that ran on tracks in the floor. Trucks pulled up to the loading bays and loaded or unloaded, coming and going through the streets of Newark, past the scrap-metal yards and chemical plants and breweries. In an average year, Grammer, Dempsey & Hudson shipped about twenty thousand tons of steel. When the vertical farm is in full operation, as it expects to be soon, it hopes to ship, annually, more than a thousand tons of greens.

Ingrid Williams, AeroFarms' director of human resources, lives in Orange but knows Newark well. She has de-

grees in labor studies and sociology from Rutgers, and she visited many of the city's public-housing apartment buildings in her previous job as a social-services coordinator. She is a slim, widely smiling woman with shoulder-length dreads who dresses in Michelle Obama blues, blacks, and whites. For a while, she had her own show, "The Wow Mom Show," on local-access TV. Through it she met many people, including a woman who is a financial expert and helps local residents with their budgets. The two became friends, and last year when this woman was giving a speech at a Newark nonprofit Williams showed up to support her.

One of the other speakers that day was David Rosenberg, the C.E.O. and co-founder of AeroFarms. "A light went on in my head when I heard AeroFarms," Williams told me. "There's an AeroFarms mini-farm growing salad greens in the cafeteria of my daughter's school, Philip's Academy Charter School, on Central Avenue. I volunteer there all the time as part of parents' stewardship, and I know the kids love growing their own lettuce for the salad bar." After the speeches, she stayed to congratulate her friend and also introduced herself to Rosenberg. He asked her if she was looking for a job. She started as H.R. director at AeroFarms nine days later.

**T**HE MINI-FARM in the cafeteria at Philip's Academy is a significant piece of technology. In fact, it is a key to the story, and it figures in the larger picture of vertical farming worldwide and of indoor agriculture in general. If the current movement to grow more food locally, in urban settings, and by high-tech indoor methods follows the path that some predict for it, the mini-farm in the school cafeteria may one day have its own historical plaque.

The mini-farm's inventor, Ed Harwood, of Ithaca, New York, sold it to

the school in 2010. Harwood is a sixty-six-year-old man of medium stature who speaks with the kind of rural accent that sometimes drops the last letters of words. He has been an associate professor at Cornell's famous school of agriculture, and he began his career as an inventor by coming up with revolutionary improvements in the computer management of dairy cows, an animal he loves. His joyous enthusiasm for what he does has an almost messianic quality.

After spending part of his youth and young adulthood working on his uncle's dairy farm, he got degrees in microbiology, animal science, dairy science, and artificial intelligence, and applied his knowledge to the dairy industry. One of the first inventions he worked on was a method to determine when a cow is in estrus. Research showed that cows move around more when they're ready to breed. Harwood helped develop a cow ankle bracelet that transmitted data on how active the cow was each day; the farmer could then consult the data on his computer and know when it was time for the artificial inseminator. To check the accuracy of the bracelet, Harwood spent days walking around the pasture beside a cow with his hand on her back while he counted her steps. He enjoyed the companionship during this rather tedious exercise in ground-truthing and thinks the cow did, too.

He first became interested in growing crops indoors in the two-thousand-aughts. Around 2003, his notebooks and diaries began to converge on ideas about how he could raise crops without soil, sunlight, or large amounts of water. That last goal pointed toward aeroponic farming, which provides water and nutrients to plants by the spraying of a mist, like the freshening automatic sprays over the vegetables in a grocery's produce department. Aeroponic farming uses about seventy



*Vertical farming can allow former cropland to go back to nature and reverse the plundering of the earth.*



# THE AMENABLE SNOWMAN



*"There are scones in the oven, too, in case you're peckish."*

per cent less water than hydroponic farming, which grows plants in water; hydroponic farming uses seventy per cent less water than regular farming. If crops can be raised without soil and with a much reduced weight of water, you can move their beds more easily and stack them high.

Harwood solved the problem of the crop-growing medium by substituting cloth for soil. He tried every type of cloth he could think of—"They got to know me well at the Jo-Ann Fabric store in Ithaca," he said. Finally, he settled on an artificial fabric that he created himself out of fibres from recycled plastic water bottles, and he patented it. The fabric is a thin white fleece that holds the seeds as they germinate, then keeps the plants upright as they mature. The roots extend below the cloth, where they are avail-

able to the water-and-nutrients spray.

Devising a nozzle for the aeroponic sprayer proved a tougher problem. The knock on aeronics had always been that the nozzles clogged. How he solved this Harwood won't say. He has no patent for his new nozzle. "It's more of a stream than a spray," he said, "but we're keeping the design proprietary. I have no fear of anyone copying it. You could look at it all day and never figure out how it works."

He rented an empty canoe factory in Ithaca and set up a two-level grow tower a hundred feet long and five feet wide to employ his new discoveries, along with a light system that eventually consisted of L.E.D. lights modified to his needs. He had decided to grow commercial crops and chose baby salad greens. "My 'Aha' moment came when I was in the Wegmans supermarket in

Ithaca," he said. "My engineer, Travis Martin, and I looked at the greens for sale and saw that a pound of lettuce cost one dollar, while a pound of baby greens cost eight dollars. That was enough of a premium that we figured I could make my system profitable with baby greens, so I started a company I called Great-Veggies, and soon I was selling baby greens in several supermarkets in Ithaca."

When that didn't bring in enough money, he shut the company down. His financial situation, never robust, then took an upturn when an investor offered funding on the condition that he concentrate on selling the grow towers themselves, rather than the greens. Switching to that business model, Harwood formed a new company called Aero Farm Systems. He leased a number of his grow towers and sold a few. One of them went to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and he has no idea what happened to it. Another went to Philip's Academy, where it's the mini-farm in the cafeteria. The new company did not earn much, either, but he kept it going in a smaller part of the canoe factory.

**T**HE TERM "vertical farming" has not been around long. It refers to a method of growing crops, usually without soil or natural light, in beds stacked vertically inside a controlled-environment building. The credit for coining the term seems to belong to Dickson D. Despommier, Ph.D., a professor (now emeritus) of parasitology and environmental science at Columbia University Medical School and the author of "The Vertical Farm: Feeding the World in the 21st Century."

Hearing that Despommier would be addressing an audience of high-school science teachers at Columbia on a recent morning, I arranged to sit in. During the question period, one of the teachers asked a basic question that had also been puzzling me: What are the plants in a soil-free farm made of? Aren't plants mostly the soil that they grew in? Despommier explained that plants consist of water, mineral nutrients like potassium and magnesium taken from the soil (or, in the case of a vertical farm, from the nutrients added to the water their roots are sprayed with), and carbon, an element plants get from the CO<sub>2</sub> in the air and then

convert by photosynthesis into sucrose, which feeds the plant, and cellulose, which provides its structure.

In other words, plants create themselves partly out of thin air. Salad greens are about ninety per cent water. About half of the remaining ten per cent is carbon. If AeroFarms' vertical farm grows a thousand tons of greens a year, about fifty tons of that will be carbon taken from the air.

Despommier lives in Fort Lee, New Jersey, and not long after his lecture I visited him at his apartment, in a high-rise with a skyline view of New York. He is a cheerful, demonstrative man, seventy-six years old, with a short gray beard and a mobile face. The concept of vertical farming came from a class he taught in medical ecology, he said. "It was in 2000, and the students that year were bored with what I was teaching, so I asked them a question: 'What will the world be like in 2050?' and a followup, 'What would you *like* the world to be like in 2050?' They thought about this and decided that by 2050 the planet will be really crowded, with eight or nine billion people, and they wanted New York City to be able to feed its population entirely on crops grown within its own geographic limit.

"So they turned to the idea of rooftop gardening," he continued. "They measured every square foot of rooftop space in the city—I admired how they went to the map room of the public library on Forty-second Street and found aerial surveys and got their rulers out—and then they calculated what the city's population will be in 2050, and the amount of calories that many people will need, and what kind of crops can best provide those calories, and how much space will be necessary to grow those crops. Finally, they determined that by farming every square foot of rooftop space in the city you could provide enough calories to feed only about two per cent of the 2050 population of New York. They were terribly disappointed by this result."

At the time, Despommier's wife, Marlene, who is a hospital administrator, was working in midtown Manhattan. As the couple drove back and forth along the West Side Highway, Despommier considered the light-filled glass-and-steel structures, and that got him

thinking about the thousands of abandoned buildings throughout the city. He began to wonder why plants couldn't live on multiple levels, as human beings do. For his next year's class he carried over the previous year's project, and this time had the students calculate what kind of structure a multilevel urban farm would need and how many people you could feed that way.

Despommier taught the class for nine more years, always asking his students to build on what previous classes had done. He began using the term "vertical farming" in the second year. For methods of indoor agriculture, he referred to technology pioneered by NASA and to the work that a scientist named Richard Stoner did decades ago on how to grow crops in non-Earth environments. By the class's final year, Despommier and his students had determined that a complex of two hundred buildings, each twenty stories high and measuring eighty feet by fifty feet at its base, situated in some wide-open outlying spot—say, Floyd Bennett Field, the airport-turned-park on Jamaica Bay in Brooklyn—could grow enough vegetables and rice to feed everybody

who will be living in New York City in the year 2050. These vertical farms could also provide medicinal plants, and all the herbs and spices required for five different traditional cuisines.

The possibilities that opened up put stars in his eyes. Agricultural runoff is the main cause of pollution in the oceans; vertical farms produce no runoff. Outdoor farming consumes seventy per cent of the planet's freshwater; a vertical farm uses only a small amount of water compared with a regular farm. All over the world, croplands have been degraded or are disappearing. Vertical farming can allow former cropland to go back to nature and reverse the plundering of the earth. Despommier began to give talks and get noticed. He became the original vertical-farming proselytizer. Maybe the world's mood was somehow moving in that direction, because ideas that he suggested other people soon created in reality.

"When my book came out, in 2010, there were no functioning vertical farms that I was aware of," Despommier said. "By the time I published a revised edition, in 2011, vertical farms had been built in England, Holland, Japan, and





Korea. Two more were in the planning stages in the U.S. I gave a talk in Korea in 2009, and they invited me back two years later. Fifty reporters were waiting for me. My hosts led me to a new building, where they had 'Welcome Dr. Despommier' in neon lights. I saw that, and I cried! The ideas that I had described in my '09 talk they had used as the basis for building a prototype vertical farm, and here it was. When I'm lying in my coffin and they pull back the lid, the smile on my face will be from that day in Korea."

Today in the U.S., vertical farms of various designs and sizes exist in Seattle, Detroit, Houston, Brooklyn, Queens, and near Chicago, among other places. AeroFarms is one of the largest. Usually the main crop is baby salad greens, whose premium price, as Ed Harwood realized, makes the enterprise attractive. The willingness of a certain kind of customer to pay a lot for salad justifies the investment, and after the greens get the business up and running its technology will be adapted for other crops, eventually feeding the world or a major fraction of it. That is the vision.

**A**EROFARMS OCCUPIES THREE other buildings in Newark aside from the main vertical farm, on Rome Street. At 400 Ferry Street, it has a thirty-thousand-square-foot space whose most

recent previous use was as a paintball and laser-tag entertainment center called Inferno Limits. The graffiti-type spray-painted murals and stylized paintball splatters of that incarnation still cover the walls. AeroFarms' headquarters—sometimes referred to as its "world headquarters"—are in this building, some of which is taken up by a multiple-row, eight-level vertical farm that glows and hums. Technicians in white coats who wear white sanitary mobcaps on their heads walk around quietly. Some of these workers are young guys who also have mobcaps on their beards. The salad greens, when you put on coat and mobcap yourself and get close enough to peer into the trays, stand in orderly ranks by the thousands, whole vast armies of little watercresses, arugulas, and kales waiting to be harvested and sold. For more than a year, all the company's commercial greens came from this vertical farm.

Nobody in the building appears to have an actual office. Employees are distributed in more or less open spaces here and there. In a dim corner of the area with the vertical farm, where the fresh, florist-shop aroma of chlorophyll is strong, young graduates of prestigious colleges confab around laptop screens that show photos of currently germinating seeds and growing leaves. Folding tables burgeon with cables, clipboards,

and fast-food impedimenta. David Rosenberg, the C.E.O., who hired Ingrid Williams last year, is the boss. This distinction is hard to notice, because he looks more or less like anybody else.

I first met Rosenberg at an international conference on indoor agriculture held at a theatre in Manhattan. He wore dark jeans, a blue-and-white plaid shirt with the AeroFarms logo on the breast pocket, and running shoes. In past years, he used to fence competitively and win championships. He is forty-four, tall, and still fit, with close-shaved black hair and dark, soulful eyes. The quietness and patience with which he speaks can be disconcerting. He grew up in the Bronx, went to U.N.C. at Chapel Hill, and got an M.B.A. from Columbia in 2002. AeroFarms is not his first company. When his grandfather Michael Rhodes, a chemist, died, in 2002, a relative told Rosenberg about a molecule that his grandfather had created that could be used to make a weatherizing treatment for concrete. Rosenberg used his grandfather's invention to start a business called Hycrete, which he later sold, though not for a sum so great that he has chosen to fund AeroFarms himself. In recent years, his new start-up has raised more than fifty million dollars in investment, about twice as much as has any other vertical farm, or indoor farm of any kind, in the U.S.

After Hycrete, he wanted to create a for-profit company that would do good for the environment and for society. With his fellow business-school alumnus and fellow-fencer Marc Oshima, he set about researching the latest indoor agricultural technology. When they learned about the work of Ed Harwood, they immediately got in touch with him. "David and Marc called me, and they kept calling back and asking better and better questions," Harwood remembered. "They said they wanted their first farm and their world headquarters to be in Newark, and I told them, 'I've got a grow tower in a school cafeteria in Newark!' That's when I knew this was going to work out."

Rosenberg and Oshima had set up an indoor-agriculture company called Just Greens, which existed primarily in name. Harwood had the trademark on the name Aero Farm Systems. They proposed to him that the two companies



*"I've written my diagnosis on this piece of paper. I'm going to slide it over to you, and I want you to tell me if you're interested."*

merge and do business under the name of AeroFarms. Rosenberg would be the chief executive officer, Oshima the chief marketing officer, and Harwood the chief science officer. Like the original Aero Farms Systems, this company would base itself on Harwood's patented cloth for growing the plants and on his nozzle for watering and feeding them. It would build the vertical-farm systems but not sell them, grow baby greens commercially, and scale the operation up gigantically. This change in fortunes left Harwood thunderstruck. "I couldn't believe it," he said. "How many inventors have inventions sitting around, waiting for a break, and then something like this happens?"

**M**OST OF AMERICA'S baby greens are grown in irrigated fields in the Salinas Valley, in California. During the winter months, some production moves to similar fields in Arizona or goes even farther south, into Mexico. If you look at the shelves of baby greens in a store, you may find plastic clamshells holding five ounces of greens for \$3.99 (organicgirl, from Salinas), or for \$3.29 (Earthbound Farm, from near Salinas), or for \$2.99 (Fresh Attitude, from Quebec and Florida). Harwood's magic number of eight dollars a pound would be on the cheap side today. Four dollars for five ounces comes to about thirteen dollars a pound.

AeroFarms supplies greens to the dining rooms at the *Times*, Goldman Sachs, and several other corporate accounts in New York. At the moment, the greens can be purchased retail only at two ShopRite supermarkets, one on Springfield Avenue in Newark and the other on Broad Street in Bloomfield. The AeroFarms clamshell package (clear plastic, No. 1 recyclable) appears to be the same size as its competition's but it holds slightly less—4.5 ounces instead of five. It is priced at the highest end, at \$3.99. The company plans to have its greens on the shelves soon at Whole Foods stores and Kings, also in the local area. Greens that come from California ride in trucks for days. The driving time from AeroFarms' farm to the Newark ShopRite is about eleven minutes. The company's bigger plan is to put similar vertical farms in metro areas all over the country and eventu-



*"Tell the truth, Ezra. Does it look like he's being a more effective parent than me?"*

ally around the world, so that its distribution will always be local, thereby saving transportation costs and fuel and riding the enthusiasm for the locally grown.

At the Bloomfield ShopRite, I watched a woman pick up a clamshell of AeroFarms arugula, look at it, and put it back. Then she picked up a clamshell of Fresh Attitude arugula and dropped it in her cart. I asked her if she knew that AeroFarms was grown in Newark. She said, "I thought it was only distributed from Newark." I told her the arugula was indeed Newark-grown and explained about the vertical farm. She put the out-of-state arugula back, picked up the Newark arugula, and thanked me for telling her. I think AeroFarms does not play up Newark enough on the packaging. They should call their product Newark Greens.

The reason they don't is probably the obvious one—the negative ideas that salad buyers may have about Newark, its poverty and history of environmental disaster, including the presence

of Superfund toxic-waste sites contaminated by dioxins and pesticides. That's not the aura you want for a healthy-greens company. AeroFarms chose Newark because of its convenient location and the relative cheapness of its real estate. City and state development agencies encouraged the decision, and the company has hired about sixty blue-collar workers from Newark, some of them from a program for past offenders. At least geographically, the company so far is exclusively a Newark production.

But in another sense it could be anywhere. The technology it uses derives partly from systems designed to grow crops on the moon. The interior space is its own sealed-off world; nothing inside the vertical-farm buildings is uncontrolled. Countless algorithm-driven computer commands combine to induce the greens to grow, night and day, so that a crop can go from seed to shoot to harvest in eighteen days. Every known influence on the plant's well-being is measured, adjusted, remeasured. Tens of thousands of sensing



devices monitor what's going on. The ambient air is Newark's, but filtered, ventilated, heated, and cooled. Like all air today, it has an average CO<sub>2</sub> content of about four hundred parts per million (we exceeded the three-fifty-p.p.m. threshold a while ago), but an even higher content is better for the plants, so tanks of CO<sub>2</sub> enrich the concentration inside the building to a thousand p.p.m.

The L.E.D. grow lights are in plastic tubing above each level of the grow tower. Their radiance has been stripped of the heat-producing part of the spectrum, the most expensive part of it from an energy point of view. The plants don't need it, preferring cooler reds and blues. In row after row, the L.E.D.s shining these colors call to mind strings of Christmas lights. At different growth stages, the plants require light in different intensities, and algorithms controlling the L.E.D. arrays adjust for that.

In short, each plant grows at the pinnacle of a trembling heap of tightly focussed and hypersensitive data. The temperature, humidity, and CO<sub>2</sub> content of the air; the nutrient solution, pH, and electro-conductivity of the water; the plant growth rate, the shape and size and complexion of the leaves—all these factors and many others are tracked on a second-by-second basis. AeroFarms' micro-, macro-, and molecular biologists and other plant scientists overseeing the operation receive alerts on their phones if anything goes awry. A few even have phone apps through which they can adjust the functioning of the vertical farm remotely.

Though many of the hundred-plus employees seem to be diffused throughout the enterprise and most vividly present in cyberspace, everybody gathers sometimes in the headquarters building for a buffet-style lunch, at which Rosenberg makes a short speech. Talking quietly, he repeats a theme: "To succeed, we need to be the best at four things. We need to be the best at plant biology, the best at maintaining our plants' environment, the best at running our operational system, and the best at getting the farm to function well mechanically. We have to be the best total farmers. And to do all this we need the best data. If the data

## MILKING THE TIGER SNAKE

Fangs through a balloon, an orange balloon stretched over a jam-jar mouth scrubbed-up bush standard—fangs dripping what looks like semen, which is venom, one of the most deadly, down grooves and *splish splash* onto the lens of the distorting glass-bottom boat we look up into, head of tiger snake pressed flat with the bushman's thumb—his scungy hat that did Vietnam, a bandolier across his matted chest chocked with cartridges—pistoleer who takes out ferals with secretive patriotic agendas. And we kids watch him draw the head of the fierce snake, its black body striped yellow. "It will rear up like a cobra if cornered, and attack, attack!" he stresses as another couple of droplets form and plummet. And when we say, "Mum joked *leave them alone and they'll go home*," he retorts, "Typical bloody woman, first to moan if she's bit, first to want a taste of the anti-venom that comes of my rooting these black bastards out, milking them dry, down to the last drop." Tiger snake's eyes peer out crazily targeting the neck of the old coot with his dirty mouth, its nicotine garland. He from whom we learn, who shows us porno and tells us what's what. Or tiger snake out of the wetlands, whip-cracked by the whip of itself until its back is broke.

—John Kinsella

is not current and completely reliable, we will fail. We must always keep paying close attention to the data."

ED HARWOOD'S ORIGINAL prototype mini-farm, the one he sold to Philip's Academy in 2010, still produces crops six or seven times every school year. The invention sits in a corner of the cafeteria by the round lunch tables and the molded black plastic cafeteria chairs, an improbable-looking teaching tool. Examining it, you feel a mystified wonder, and perhaps a slight misgiving about the inventor's soundness of mind, remembering what happened to Wile E. Coyote. For concentrated ingenuity and handcrafted uniqueness, its closest simile, I think, is the Wright

brothers' first biplane, the Flyer, now on display in the National Air and Space Museum, in Washington. Like the Flyer, and like many other great inventions, Harwood's prototype is also an objet d'art.

Its dimensions are five feet wide by twelve feet long by six and a half feet high. Essentially, it consists of two horizontal trays of thick plastic, both about ten inches deep, one above the other, suspended in a strong but minimal framework of aluminum. Below the trays, at floor level, a plastic tank holds two hundred and fifty gallons of water. Frames like those used for window screens fit on top of the plastic trays. Each frame holds a rectangle of Harwood's grow cloth, about two and a

half feet by five feet in size. The cloth is attached to the frame by snaps. On small pipes running along the inside bottom of the tray, Harwood's special nozzles emit a constant, sputtering spray of water at a downward angle. The spray hits the bottom of the tray and bounces up, and some of it becomes the mist that nourishes the roots growing through the cloths. Eventually, most of the water drains down and returns to the tank to be reused.

Seeds speckle the white surface of the cloth. The L.E.D. lights above the trays shine on the seeds. They germinate, and soon the roots descend. Seedlings grow. In about three weeks, the plants are ready for harvesting. The trays are taken out and the leaves are cut off and given to the cafeteria staff, who put them in the salad bar. The cloths are scraped of residues, which are composted for the school's rooftop garden, and then the cloths go into the washing machine to be laundered for reseeded.

Throughout the mini-farm, PVC pipes and wires run here and there, connecting to clamps and switches. The pumps hum, the water gurgles, and the whole thing makes the sound of a courtyard fountain.

The teacher who keeps all this machinery in good order is Catkin Flowers. That is her real given name. A tall auburn-haired woman in her forties, she starts her science students working with the farm when they're in kindergarten. "We use the farm to teach chemistry, math, biology," she explained to me one morning between classes. "The students learn with it all the way through eighth grade. I think the farm is the reason our science scores are so competitive in the state. We get the kids involved in running the grow cycles and then solving the problems that inevitably come up. That's how kids really learn, not from sitting back and watching the grownups do everything."

"We're also teaching food literacy," put in Frank Mentasana, the director of EcoSpaces, the school's environmental-science program, who joined us. "Some of our kids have never seen vegetables growing. They may live in a part of the city that's a food desert, and their families get food at McDonald's or at bodegas. They may never have seen fresh greens in a store."

"Kids love to grow things," Flowers said. "It teaches them about nutrients, the minerals we put in the water, and why the water's pH affects how the plants absorb them, and about the light spectrum, and how photosynthesis works. The kids monitor the same kind of data as AeroFarms does, but less of it, of course."

"Ed Harwood is still a huge help," Mentasana said. "If we have a problem with the farm that we can't solve, Ed will make time to stop by and fix it."

"When we're ready to harvest, the kids can't wait to eat what they've grown," Flowers said. "They'll start eating the plants while they're harvesting, and we actually have to tell them to wait because these are for the salad bar. They want to find out how they taste. And they're excited when the plants they've grown become part of a meal for the whole school. Because of this farm, our school's consumption of leafy greens is probably not met by any other school in the country."

On another morning, I stayed for lunch. First, Mentasana took me, along with Marion Nestle (not Nestlé; she's no relation), the nutrition expert and N.Y.U. professor, on a tour of the school. A Clinton campaign e-mail released by WikiLeaks the day before had referred to harassment of Nestle by the beverage industry because of her book "Big Soda: Taking on the Soda Industry (and Winning)," and she was in a



great mood, proud to have been mentioned. Robert Wallauer, the school's young chef, introduced himself. He has worked for famous restaurants, but decided he could contribute more to the public good by running school kitchens. The entrée was a Chinese-style dish of pasta with chopped vegetables. I told him it was so delicious that if this were a restaurant I would come back and bring my friends.

Zara Hawkins, a fifth grader, stopped

by our table. Her mother is Ingrid Williams, the H.R. director at AeroFarms. Zara has a quiet manner, and she sometimes looks thoughtfully into the near distance as she talks. She noted the greens we'd just been served, supplied by AeroFarms. "We eat a lot of this salad at home," she said. "My mom brings the bags of lettuce from work. I didn't use to like it, but now I do. I have the baby kales in omelettes, with cheese. You can also put them in smoothies. They are O.K. In fact, they can be pretty good."

Wallauer got up and brought us back glasses of a kale-pineapple-and-yogurt smoothie whose color had the bright seaside green of a lime treat. "It takes a while for kids to start eating certain foods if they're not used to them," Wallauer said. "We made some of these smoothies yesterday, and we handed them out as dessert. One little girl took a sip and said it was pretty good. Then she took another and looked at me suspiciously and said, 'Did you put salad in this?'"

A FEW WEEKS BEFORE the vertical farm at 212 Rome Street was to harvest its first official crop, I walked through the building with David Rosenberg. After the usual handwashing, putting on of mobcaps and coats, and wiping our feet on mats for disinfecting, we stepped into the high-ceilinged room where the vertical farm was humming away. If Harwood's prototype at the school was the Wright brothers' first biplane, this immense scaled-up elaboration of it was a spaceship in drydock.

I thought of the tenderness of the greens this device produces—a natural simplicity elicited mainly from water and air by high-tech artifice of the most complicated and concentrated kind. It seemed a long way to go for salad. But if it works, as it indeed appears to, who knows what might come of it when we're nine billion humans on a baking, thirsting globe? Rosenberg and I stood looking at the vertical farm in silence. On his face was a mixture of pride and love; he might have been seven years old. "We are so far above everybody else in this technology," he said, after a minute or two. "It will take years for the rest of the world to catch up to where we already are now." ♦



ON

THE

STREET

WHERE

YOU

LIVE

YIYUN LI

**H**AD SHE BEEN born in a different era, Becky thought, and without the education to qualify as a governess, she might have become a wet nurse, offering nourishment in the most mindless form to an infant from a wealthy family. But the idea, explored in detail—what, who, when, where, why, how, those questions Becky had obediently followed in grade school without recognizing the terror of such scrutiny—was disturbing, not even a legitimate secret.

“You know, I hate museums.” The man next to Becky leaned over so that she alone could hear this confession. She nodded. To be a wet nurse one had to be a mother first. What was the point of wishing for that profession, then?

“It makes me angry,” the man said as he and Becky joined the others in clapping. The woman who was taking the podium was the director of this freshly remodelled San Francisco museum. “It makes me angry that I don’t own the art work. I’d hate to share with others. They’d never see what I see.”

He wore a bright-red necktie, which reminded Becky of SpongeBob SquarePants, but nothing about the man himself, who was tall and had to stoop a little to talk to her, resembled SpongeBob. It was terrible of her to seek connections that allowed her to feel closer to her son. Jude was six, and was being seen by two specialists four afternoons a week. He had no interest in making friends because he already had what he wanted: a SpongeBob pillow, and himself.

The man in the red tie said something, and Becky, not catching the words, nodded in confirmation. “So you like museums?” he said with disapproval, and then, forgivingly, “Most people do.”

Becky could see herself transcribing this conversation in her journal later that night. She would note that the man had reminded her of SpongeBob. Soon his face and his voice would fade from her memory; only the red tie and his words would remain. Becky had started to keep a journal when Jude’s condition was diagnosed. There was nothing private in it, just descriptions of strangers: a man brushing his teeth on a bench at a bus stop; a woman in Busy Mart calling a boy strapped in a stroller “a two-headed moron”; a handyman setting up beehives in the yard of the neighbor, who had given Becky a jar of honey when she

scratched her car while backing it into the garage.

Becky’s hope was that someday Jude would read her journal and recognize what he would miss if he didn’t pay attention to people. She tried to make those appearing in her journal interesting—interesting enough, but not too much. She did not want Jude to think the world was an exciting party and he was born to be left out, nor did she want him to be disappointed by its predictability and decide to stay in his cocoon.

Not entering Becky’s journal were family members and friends—the journal was not kept as a secret from Max, and even the most innocuous words about her husband or others close to her could be read the wrong way. She did not record anyone she met in the therapists’ waiting rooms, either. The parents there were confronted by their own anxieties in others’ faces, as if peering into mirrors. The children, too, were mirrors for one another, though they, inward-looking, did not seek solace from those caught in the same situation. And then there were people for whom the waiting rooms were only an extension of the world at large: a grandfather who insisted on talking with his wife on speakerphone for half an hour; the Guatemalan nanny who often stopped in the middle of her crossword puzzles and frowned at him, gesturing at his back with a thumb-to-ear, pinkie-to-mouth sign; the au pairs accompanying a skinny boy whose parents had never been seen at the therapists’—a Polish girl, followed by an Austrian who stayed for only a short time before being replaced by another girl from Poland. They’re going to Tahoe for Christmas, the one who had not lasted had told Becky; they said to me, Isn’t it nice you’ll have the whole house to yourself for a week? My mother said, Oh, no, you can’t spend your first Christmas in America all alone, that’s just too sad. Becky had thought about inviting the girl over for Christmas Eve. They hosted a dinner every year, joined by Max’s parents and siblings and their families. But it might have looked as though she were soliciting the girl’s help with Jude, taking advantage of her loneliness. Becky was good at uncovering nonexistent motivations in her actions.

She looked past the SpongeBob man at the nearest painting, a splash of colors that she found both familiar and exhaust-

ing. Seeing a painting in a museum and making an effort to understand it was enough of a responsibility. Owning it would be too much. Owning it would be like inheriting a tree, being accountable for its existence even after the person who planted it had vanished. Yet a tree you can cut down with a permit and a reliable crew. A piece of art is like a child: you can’t use your mediocre imagination to change anything about it. On the other hand, you can’t put a price tag on a child; you can’t put him up for auction. Perhaps the SpongeBob man was talking about one’s progeny. You can’t share with others who your child truly is (Jude who talked about semidemisemiquavers and semihemidemisemiquavers at breakfast as though they were floating in his cereal bowl), and you hate to see him through their eyes (Jude who had made himself a sign in kindergarten—“Im Not taLKING because I DON’t WaNTTO!”—and had been mute at school ever since).

The woman finished her speech, and people milled about with a purposefulness that felt amiss to Becky. Max’s boss, the chief of cardiology at the hospital and a longtime friend of the woman on the stage, had purchased two tables. Becky watched Max talk with a colleague, each taking turns laughing at the other’s joke. She raised her champagne flute to look at them through the bubbles, and their perfect social demeanor became less impressive. Perhaps that was how the world appeared to Jude, none of its inhabitants as engaging as a cluster of rising bubbles. But Jude might never find himself at an event like this. He might never drink champagne or taste caviar; he might never hold a woman’s hands in candlelight; he might never backpack through Peru or Scotland. Oh, the places he’ll not go, and the things he’ll miss in life!

But how do you know I’d miss them? asked Jude, who was not mute at home and was especially articulate when he was alone with Becky. She had been talking about soccer club and Little League and the birthday parties to which he was invited, because everyone was invited at that age. If you don’t miss them now, you may someday, she said. But how do you know? he said. These are the things people usually enjoy, she said, and you may feel sad if you miss them. I shan’t, he said. I find little amusement in them. I shan’t: no one around Jude spoke like that, but he kept



the Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary by his bedside. What amuses you? she asked. Dots and squiggly lines, he said. What? she said. You don't get it, he said, sighing. You can't see them.

ANOTHER MAN APPROACHED Becky. Even a banal conversation was a relief from a masterpiece staring back in silence, and she was ready to be saved. The man, wearing a plaid hat and a plaid jacket, appeared out of place among the dark suits and festive dresses. He asked Becky if she liked the painter, and she shook her head noncommittally. "What about you?"

"I can't say I like him. Too febrile for my taste."

Becky noticed his accent, the kind its owner would not hide, each word hanging on to the lips with a demure graciousness. Years ago, when Becky had been a work-study student in a research lab, she had overheard her manager tell a visiting foreign scholar that people in the Midwest did not have any accent. Mainstream American English, she said, which made Becky feel bland and transparent. Recently, while Becky was waiting for jury duty, a woman had told her that she was originally from Spain and was a linguistics professor but that at a summer party she had gone to with her sister and brother-in-law no one would talk to her: she had walked in with a nephew in her arms and a niece clutching her sleeve. They thought I was the nanny, the woman said. My sister, of course, my gorgeous sister with her handsome husband, she was in no hurry to correct the misunderstanding. The woman and her sister had entered Becky's journal that night.

"I wonder what would happen if someone splashed more colors onto that painting," Becky said when the man did not contribute a new question.

"I believe that's called vandalism, and it's against the law."

"I mean, if someone owned it. Would that still be illegal?"

The man looked at Becky. "Please allow me to say—and this is from my study of human motivations—there must be a reason you ask the question."

"What's the reason?"

"Might it be that you want to purchase the painting so you can do something to it?"

"It's not for sale."

"Things can always be arranged, wouldn't you agree?"

"But what would I want to do?"

"Might it be that you perceive imperfection in the painting and want to add your own touch? Or even destroy it?"

Jude could have been a suitable conversation partner for this man. Professo-rial and stilted, the neuropsychologist had said of Jude's speech. She was the second one they had consulted; the first had been unable to get Jude to speak. I concur, Becky had wanted to reply to the neuropsychologist, using Jude's phrase. Perhaps there was hope still. This man in front of her, after all, with his odd demeanor that might appear as affectation

to unsympathetic eyes, had been invited to the gala.

He asked her if she was an artist. No, she said. A patron of the arts? he said. Not at all, she said, and you? He took a pipe out of his pocket and said he had dallied in a few things here and there but nothing too special. Becky was about to point out that smoking was not allowed when he put the pipe back. "Dr. Watson," he said, "would disapprove."

Oh, Becky thought. Perhaps others would have recognized him right away from his outfit. "Is Dr. Watson here, too?" she said, feeling apologetic that he had been forced to drop the most obvious hint.

"He's tied up at the moment. Another engagement. Not as engaging as this one, I'm afraid."

"What kind of engagement?"

The man smiled. "As a matter of fact"—he lowered his voice—"they didn't have a budget for Dr. Watson."

"They what?"

"A good sidekick is still a sidekick, no?" the man said. He took the pipe out again and toyed with it. "But look around. There are a few other people like me out there."

Becky could not see anyone else who stood out.

"Naturally, they wouldn't want something as unimaginative as Vincent," the man said, caressing his ear. "Or, for that matter, Frida. But give it a try—you may be able to spot de Kooning or Joseph Cornell. Matisse is under the weather, so he may not look himself tonight.



Georgia O'Keeffe is here, but I'm afraid her beauty is too malleable to make a lasting impression."

"Who are you?"

"I believe you know the answer."

"What I mean is, who are you really? I don't believe you unless you point out someone. Show me O'Keeffe."

"I'm not supposed to do that. We leave our clients to form their own conclusion as to whether we do a good job or not."

"Then why didn't you follow the rules? And why are you here? You're not even an artist."

"Well, I'm their boss," the man said, and handed her a business card. "Ossie Gulliver. Here's my agency's information."

"OG Talent & Model," the card said. When Becky looked up, Ossie Gulliver was sidling up to another guest, to reveal his secret and perhaps to find the right person who would become a future client.

LATER THAT NIGHT, Becky wrote the man with the red tie into her journal but not the man in the Sherlock Holmes costume. Why? she asked herself, as though she were hiding an affair. She suspected that Ossie Gulliver was a made-up name. Still, a named man would claim more personal space than a man in a red tie. It could become an affair. Becky still had his business card, and with the pretense of hiring him for an event she could make a call. In movies, a romance could start that way, but even the most clichéd affair required a kind of talent she did not possess.

Becky was a good woman, and it required little talent to be good. Before she and Max moved to California, she had worked in a hospital in Sioux City as a float-pool nurse, a well-liked colleague. She was close to her three brothers, who still lived in Correctionville. Becky, the only one who had left, returned twice a year, for a family reunion in the first week of August and at Thanksgiving. She was friendly with her neighbors and the other mothers in the therapists' waiting rooms, and she stayed in touch with people, some of whom she had known since her time at the Country Kidds preschool. *Make new friends, but keep the old; one is silver, and the other gold.* Becky thought of herself as one of those folktale misers, never letting a person slip out of her life. Jude, spinning in the schoolyard during recess or rocking himself back and forth, was a

penniless pauper boy—he couldn't even inherit her silver and gold.

They couldn't live for him forever, Becky said sometimes, as though in despair, but the truth was that she felt soothed by the statement; exonerated, really. No parent could do that for a child, Max reminded her. He believed in science, intervention, and his will power as a father. He treated Jude not as the boy facing the social challenges spelled out in the neuropsychologist's report but as the man who would one day overcome all those hurdles. Max did not ask, as Becky did, what had gone wrong with her pregnancy; nor did he waste his energy, whenever there was a mass shooting, worrying that it would be linked to a young man on the autism spectrum. But how could he be so certain that they had not failed Jude by simply giving him a life? Max was the brave one, and bravery made questioning unnecessary.

Perhaps that was the talent Becky was missing: she wanted a comprehensible life, but she did not comprehend her life. She could not begin an affair because it required imagination. She could not understand Jude because her mind was too commonplace. *Who knows better'n I do what normal is?* Hazel, Harrison's mother in "Harrison Bergeron," asks. Becky had to Google to get the sentence right. She remembered Mr. Hagen, her English teacher, talking at length about that Vonnegut line in high school. Read it ten, twenty years from now, he had told the class. Becky was sketching Lance Elliot's back when Mr. Hagen said that. Lance was the tallest boy in her junior year, and she imagined that Harrison Bergeron would look like Lance. Becky wished she had been a ballerina.

Reading the sentence now, she had an odd feeling that the line should have belonged to her, and that Harrison's mother had plagiarized her. It was not fair that Jude would never become a child who played goalie for a soccer team or pulled pranks on his friends—but, no, that was the wrong way to think. What was not fair was that Jude had Becky, who was so normal, as his mother. A woman capable of having an affair with Ossie Gulliver would be a better choice, a mother who would rearrange the world for Jude. Becky would be better off being a wet nurse: providing was enough, understanding uncalled for.

Ossie Gulliver, a stranger she refused

to put in her journal, stayed on in her memory. People around her were like lights in a house: the more, the merrier; the more, the less space left unlit. Ossie Gulliver was a street lamp, a reminder that one house, however well lit, was the same as any other house, all of them living in the indifferent darkness.

**H**AVE YOU GUYS considered music lessons? a mother asked, and then recommended a musician who'd been working with her son. Another way to fail, Becky thought, while taking down the information.

Vivien, the musician, had been trained as a pianist and vocalist; she did not have any background working with special-needs children but had discovered her gift while teaching an autistic child—all this she explained to Becky on the phone, and the fact that she would be on tour at times and could not guarantee regular lessons year-round. Becky decided to visit Vivien by herself first. She needed all the evidence to show that they did what they could for Jude. People in the same boat, she noticed, often found more reasons to judge and to denounce.

Vivien lived on a street lined with one-story, boxy houses, battered pickup trucks, older-model cars, and several dogs that barked from behind metal fences. Becky was not familiar with this part of Oakland, and she felt that she should reproach herself for noticing these things. Roads in Correctionville were wider, houses larger, but people in her current neighborhood, a picturesque suburb overlook-

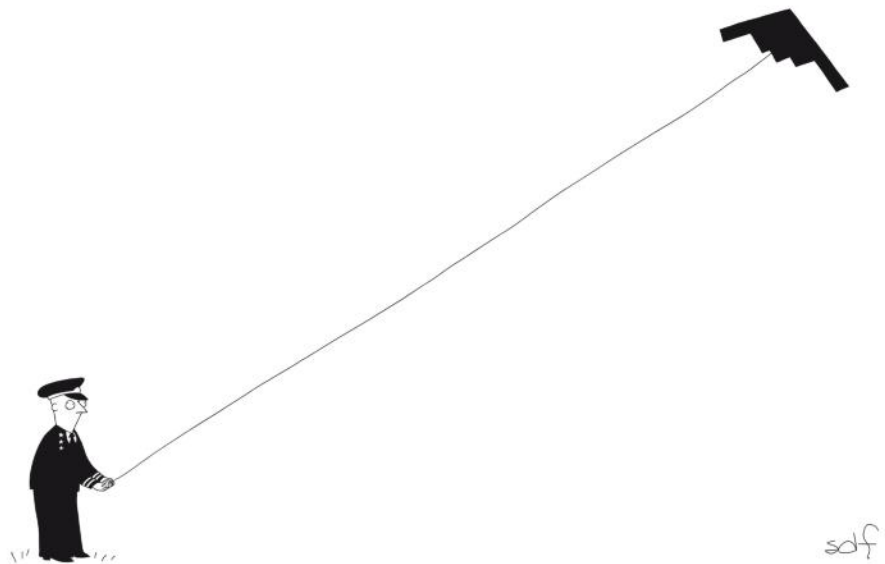
ing the Bay, would find Correctionville strange, too. What's in Iowa? people in California asked her every so often. What's on any street, in any town, in America?

An old woman opened the door before Becky rang the bell. She was Vivien's mother, she whispered, and said that the previous lesson was running a few minutes long. The living room was small, with two armchairs and a sofa around a coffee table. A picture window showed a patch of front yard large enough to accommodate a single agave plant. Another woman was sitting on the sofa, so Becky took an armchair. Vivien's mother picked up a basket of plums from the coffee table and said they were from her back yard. Becky was going to decline, but the old woman said that they were sweet, and she and Vivien had more than they could eat. The thought of letting the plums rot made Becky feel guilty. She chose a medium-sized one. Vivien's mother motioned for Becky to take more and fetched an old scarf, making a bundle of the plums.

The other mother, an Asian woman, didn't seem eager to talk at first, unlike most mothers in waiting rooms. She had a lunch pail of dollar bills next to her. Becky watched her fold the bills into intricate patterns. Money leis, she said when she noticed Becky watching, and explained that she sold them at graduations. Becky had never seen a money lei and did not know if this was a California tradition.

"Are you visiting Vivien for your son?" the woman asked. "How old is he?"

Becky said yes, and that Jude was six. "Potty-trained?" the woman asked,







“Not guilty?”

and when Becky said yes she felt shamed by the questioning.

“Lucky you,” the woman said. “William is seven. He was almost potty-trained last year, but something at school upset him—a kid or a teacher, who knows—and now he’s in diapers again. What do I do? I asked the doctor, and she said perhaps I should let him run bare-bottom in the house so he can feel it when he goes.”

“These things take time,” Becky said, comforting the woman automatically.

Vivien’s mother sat with an erect back in another armchair, her creased face showing little acknowledgment of the conversation. Becky could not tell if she was black or Native American or Latina—perhaps she was all three. There was no photograph in the living room that Becky could use to make out the family’s story. All she knew was that the old woman had raised a musician. Perhaps she would not question herself all the time about failing at motherhood.

Suddenly, piano music came from speakers, which Becky only then noticed. They were set in the corners of the living room. “Vivien lets the parents listen to the last five minutes,” the old woman explained, her eyes more lively now. After the opening bars, a boy’s voice came in,

loud and perfectly in tune, its articulation to be envied by any mother in the speech therapist’s office: *I have often walked down the street before. But the pavement always stayed beneath my feet before.*

“He has a heavenly voice, no?” the old woman said. William’s mother went on folding the dollar bills, her expression flat, as though she alone were deaf to her son’s singing.

“William sings so beautifully,” the old woman said. “This is my favorite time of the week.”

*And, oh, the towering feeling just to know somehow you are near. The overpowering feeling that any second you may suddenly appear. People stop and stare. They don’t bother me. For there’s nowhere else on earth that I would rather be.*

Had Becky been a sentimental woman she would have wept. But love songs were written to sugarcoat life’s plainness, to exaggerate the pain of living with or without love, and they were meant to be sung only by ordinary people. For Jude and William and children like them, love songs were another measure of their apartness from the world. How could William understand the dignity of his voice when his mother discussed his bodily functions freely with

strangers? A month earlier, Jude and his classmates had been asked to write about their fears. Becky wished that Jude had put down spiders or darkness or Teletubbies, like his classmates, but he had spelled out his fear neatly: “I still suffer from monophobia.” Monophobia—Becky had to look up the word—an abnormal fear of being alone. It was not fair that her son did not live with only some minor fears. Still, always, forever. That a person who expressed no interest in people could live with such a yearning for them; that a paramount fear of being alone could drive him away from the world. Becky could have empathized if this fear came from traumas, the kinds that she read about in magazines and saw on movie screens. But Jude had been born to a pair of dedicated parents. Neither Becky nor Max had any hidden history of unspeakable suffering; neither harbored darkness in their soul or inflicted pain on others.

William, finishing one song, moved on to the next: *Is this the little girl I carried? Is this the little boy at play? I don’t remember growing older . . . when did they?*

Becky felt furious—at Vivien, who used William’s voice to make something beautiful, when this beauty was of no use to the boy; at Vivien’s mother, for wiping away her tears because she, who must have suffered plenty, had the luxury of being moved by this unnatural beauty; and at herself, too, for being there, a witness to a crime, an accomplice, really. They had all made this moment into a memory for themselves without William’s permission; they gave meaning to something he would not attach meaning to. Of course, children like William and Jude were the loneliest people in the world. They had no one to rely on but the cocoon woven out of a wish to be unobtrusive, yet it was their parents’ job to rob them of that cocoon. Parents like Becky and Max visited therapists, discussed treatments, formed support groups, but they did this only because they could not understand. They, with their limited imaginations, wanted to change their children. Vandalism, Ossie Gulliver had said in front of the Jackson Pollock painting. Parents like them committed vandalism out of love and despair.

When William walked out of the

studio, his moon-shaped face expressionless, his mother put a newly made lei around his neck. Ta-da, she said, ready for college.

BECKY WAS IN a ruminative mood when she exited Vivien's house. She was about to get into her car when a man, who seemed to have come from nowhere, grabbed her purse. "Hey," she said, still half lost in her mood. "Hey!" she shouted, and the man started to run.

Becky ran after him, a stupid thing to do. She had been one of the top cross-country runners at her high school. She used to chant under her breath when she ran, *No halftimes, no time-outs; no halftimes, no time-outs*. The man turned the corner, his dark pants too loose for him to run efficiently. She did, too, looking up at the street names to make sure she remembered the way—Garden, Grande Vista, Highland. In no time she would overtake him, and she could sense the exhilaration she used to feel, making the final sprint toward the finish line. Becky had a mind that was neither too large nor too small for her body; how could she have given birth to a child fated to endure disproportions all his life?

The man stopped suddenly at the next corner. "Ma'am, stop chasing me," he said, panting a little. "I have a gun."

"Oh," Becky said. He was her height, with a round face that seemed to wear a perpetual smile—the kind of man who would crack an easy joke with anyone waiting in line at Trader Joe's. His courteousness reminded Becky of the nurse sent by A.I.G. to take her blood samples—both Max and Becky had purchased life insurance within six months of Jude's birth. The nurse had told Becky that he was a single father, and he left his baby girl at his neighbor's when he was working. Don't you worry about the needle, Ma'am, he had said, and Becky had thanked him, not revealing that she had been a nurse.

The man did not look menacing, yet she had to believe him. "O.K., O.K. But can you give me one thing? There's a notebook in that purse. Can you throw it to me? I promise that's the only thing I want back."

He put the Moleskine on the curb next to him and backed away. "Don't you move until I tell you to," he said.

Jude would never read the journal. The people in it, having caught Becky's

attention once, often made her think how curious other people were. It was silly to risk her life for the journal, anyone would say. No one would know that she was risking her life for this belief: *Who knows better'n I do what normal is?*

The thief was out of sight. Becky thought of calling Max and asking him to cancel the credit cards, and realized that the man had got away with her phone, too. That evening they would find out that he charged more than two thousand dollars, buying gift cards and a can of soda in a nearby drugstore. You were lucky he didn't hurt you, Max said. You were lucky he didn't take the car. But let's not go to this Vivien person for music lessons. It's not a safe neighborhood. There are other things we can do to help Jude.

But, whatever they did, they could never free Jude from his fear of being alone. This Max did not understand. There were other things that he did not understand. Would it even occur to him to question them? Max could have married June Landry, another float-pool nurse, who would be tending to their dinner now. Becky could have married Brandon Rogers, who had taken over the nursery in Correctionville from his father—both Becky's and Brandon's parents had thought that they would make a good couple. But Becky had not hesitated to say yes when Max proposed. They had dated long enough to think of themselves as being in love. She could be contentedly married to any reasonable man: that had been a comforting thought during their engagement. He could be happily married to any capable woman: that was a comforting thought in their marriage. For these comforts, Jude must have been given to her as a punishment. No, no, Becky told herself, shuddering violently. That wasn't true. Things that could not be scientifically explained could not be prevented, either.

BECKY NOTICED THE shaking of her hands as she drove away. Her purse was gone, along with Ossie Gulliver's card. An affair with Ossie Gulliver, like being a wet nurse, was only a fantasy of infidelity. Becky did not have the talent to betray anyone.

The next street she turned onto, an overpass above the freeway, was blocked by traffic. Many people had got out of their vehicles. Becky did, too. There

must have been an accident. She wanted to be among a crowd, to be a gawker, to be occupied by others' misfortunes. Perhaps what made most people different from Jude was their cowardice. They, too, suffered from a monophobia so unbearable that they needed to witness a street accident with strangers.

The freeway—all four eastbound lanes—was closed. On the next overpass, a similar crowd had gathered: a man was standing outside the railing, on the edge. Fire engines, ambulances, and police cars blinked below. A giant ladder had been set up, and two police officers were climbing it. People on both overpasses raised their cell phones. Good thing they caught him before he jumped, someone said. What if he jumped now? someone else asked. He can't, another person said. The cops cuffed him to the railing.

A moment of crisis, a moment of near-catastrophe. But when the man was subdued and moved into the ambulance the excitement quickly fizzled out. People dispersed. It was then that Becky noticed the man who had robbed her. He was whistling while taking pictures of the empty freeway, and when their eyes met he grinned and she could see the gap between his front teeth.

Becky returned to her car. It occurred to her that she could flag down a policeman, but she was exhausted, and saw little point in prolonging the day. The thief had made material gain, she had lost replaceable items, but what they had each gained or lost was nothing compared with a man's near-death. People would tell him that he had many reasons to live; they would not accept it if he said that he had many reasons for wanting to die. Anything that could go wrong—a marriage, a child, a medical treatment, a painting, an affair, a tree—started with hope. The only option was to blunder on through hoping. For that reason, Becky would keep telling Jude that it was good to make eye contact, to engage in conversation, to talk about his feelings, to make connections with the world. For that reason, too, she would refuse to accept Jude's argument if—when—one day he told her that none of these things would alleviate his monophobia, and that he did not have the talent to be anyone other than himself. ♦

---

NEWYORKER.COM

Yiyun Li on her story from this week's issue.



# THE CRITICS



BOOKS

## ASHES TO ASHES

*A life in cigarettes.*

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

THE GERMAN WRITER Gregor Hens smoked his first cigarette when he was five. His mother gave it to him. It was New Year's Eve, and the Hens family, like many Germans, were out in the snow setting up fireworks. But they couldn't light the fuses, because Gregor's two older brothers were fighting over the lighter. Frau Hens finally lost patience: "She pulled out a cigarette, lit it and held it out to me." Little Gregor took this wonderful thing and held it to the fuse of one of the rockets, which shot into the sky. Then he saw that the cigarette's ember had ceased to glow. "You have to take a drag on it, my mother said out of the half-darkness." He took a drag, the ember glowed again, and the child suffered a near-collapse from coughing and joy.

As Hens tells us in his memoir, "Nicotine" (Other; translated from the German by Jen Calleja), this experience eventually landed him with a decades-long addiction to nicotine. It also, he believes, gave him the beginnings of a personality: "I became myself for the first time." He means this literally. In his mind, the entire episode—the coughing fit, his mother's blue hat, his almost uncontainable pride in the fact that he, not his brothers, detonated the first rocket—comes together into a story, the first memory he has that is a story rather than just an image or a sensation. And, because he is a writer, he sees this birth of a story as the birth of his personality. How nice: to have the emergence of one's self marked by a rocket exploding!

In any case, it is by association with nicotine that Hens shows us what he wants us to know about his life. People will connect his book with Aldous Hux-

ley's "Doors of Perception," and I'm sure Hens had that volume in mind, but if "Nicotine" has a literary progenitor I would say that it is "In Search of Lost Time," in which Proust made the material of seven volumes bloom out of one French cookie dunked in a cup of tea. "Nicotine" is much shorter, only a hundred and fifty-seven pages, but Hens uses a similar alchemy to transform the things of his world—the family in which he grew up, in Cologne; his former home in Columbus, where he taught German literature at Ohio State; his apartment in Berlin, where he lives with his wife, and produces novels and translations—into whole relay stations of poetic force, humming and sparking and chugging.

THE MOTHER FIRST. Hens had to work on her for months to get permission to stay up for the New Year's Eve festivities. She insisted that he take a nap before the fireworks. He agreed, and from nine to eleven-thirty he lay in bed wide awake, rigid with excitement:

When my mother came to wake me I was already standing in the middle of the room putting my trousers on in the dark. She turned on the light, got me the checked shirt I'd been wearing during the day, went to the wardrobe smiling silently to herself and pulled out the thickest jumper [sweater] she could find. I stretched my arms up into the air, she pulled the jumper over my head, then stroked the hair from my forehead.

This is a tender scene—he allows himself to cherish the little boy as she did ("I stretched my arms up into the air")—but as the book progresses the mother turns out to be a mixed business. She had a cycling depression. When she was doing badly, she read romances, lots of

them, and smoked heavily. When she was better, she smoked less and read loftier literature: Musil, Mann, Joseph Roth. Gregor grieves for her, but this does not prevent him from letting us know, in small ways, the difficulties her illness created for her sons. She didn't really cook. Also, is it customary for German mothers to teach their five-year-old children to smoke? At the age of ten, Gregor was dispatched to a boarding school of truly Dickensian awfulness. (If you committed a misdeed, you had to *ask* for punishment. Then you were locked in a closet.) He says that he never knew why he was sent away from home, but his brothers were shipped off, too. It seems probable that the mother was getting worse. By the time Gregor was eighteen, she was dead. He never tells us what she died of, though there are hints that she committed suicide: "She succumbed to her own melancholy." From page to page, this beloved woman is glimpsed only partially. All around her there are silences, empty places, held breaths—an extraordinary act of literary finesse.

Hens recalls ruefully that she did not try to shield her sons from their brutal father. Once, when the oldest boy, Stefan—the troublemaker and, it seems, Gregor's favorite—did something bad, the entire family was imprisoned, for days, in the father's wrath: "We sat in silence in the dining nook spooning our soup with heads bent, profoundly frightened, avoiding eye contact. My mother gave not a word of defence for her eldest son, who cowered beside me crying with quivering legs, not trusting himself to wipe his fogged-up glasses, while my father talked himself into a rage for the hundredth time." What must it have



*In a memoir by the German writer Gregor Hens, smoking provides a vehicle for a story of domestic and national trauma.*



been like for Gregor, four years younger than Stefan, to see the older boy, whom he loved and respected, weeping so hard that his legs were shaking?

On another occasion, the family was headed home after a purgatorial vacation—Stefan had recently been caught smoking on the roof of his school—when the father pulled the car over to the side of the road and switched off the engine: “He swiveled round and screamed at my brother, who had dissolved into tears long before this: If I ever catch you smoking up there again I’ll bring you down from the roof with a pickaxe, I’ll ram a pickaxe into your arsehole and pull you down, I’ll rip you open and kill you.” The tirade went on for twenty minutes, Hens says. “Though it wasn’t directed at me, I have never endured such physical fear in my life.”

I believe him, but just as Frau Hens’s image is shaded, and thereby rescued from sentimentality, by suggestions of her shortcomings as a mother, so the father is spared a horror-movie monstrosity by what—you can’t believe it at first—are tinkling little notes of comedy. Herr Hens made his living as an inspector of damage from industrial explosions. Because of this, and because a blaze once broke out in his home office, he was very strict about fire safety. After the office fire, he bought a hundred and twenty Gloria-brand fire extinguishers to send out as Christmas gifts. He had to order that many in order to get a discount, but, as it turned out, he didn’t know a hundred and twenty people, so there were a lot of leftovers, and every room in the Hens house, even Gregor’s tiny bedroom, was outfitted with a bright-red fire extinguisher. (The boy used to lie in bed and gaze at it, longing to pull the silver pin.) After Stefan’s disgrace for smoking on the school roof, the brothers concluded that their father’s vehemence may have had less to do with school rules being broken than with fire safety.

Surely it also had to do with Herr Hens’s attitude toward smoking. He, too, had once been a smoker—indeed, a four-pack-a-day man—but he had decided that his habit had got out of control. That was the end of that. Overnight, without the help of books or pills or hypnotherapy, he had quit smoking. He loved to tell the story, “as proof of the enormous willpower of its heroic storyteller.

It’s true, he seemed to say, that most people don’t manage it, because it’s actually a perilous addiction. But I can do it. It’s damn hard, but if you have a strong will like mine it’s actually no problem at all. If you can’t do it with the power of your own will you are simply a weak person.”

All this is fun. It’s nice to see that bully ridiculed. But later Hens describes how his father, while wooing the woman who became his second wife, used to urge her two beautiful teen-age daughters to give up smoking: “It doesn’t suit you, my father would say. Women who smoke don’t make suitable Aryan wives and mothers, I added in my head.” Hens may have been traumatized by his father’s talk of enlarging Stefan’s asshole, but I think that almost all Germans, even those born some time after 1945 (Hens was born in 1965), still bear the mark of their country’s role in the Second World War. Hens, to judge from his book, truly hated his father. So do many people, but his story becomes captivating—laced with a saving irony—by being told through the medium of something as humble as tobacco.

EVERYTHING IS TOLD through that medium. Disgust is a parking-lot attendant who, in fetching Hens’s car, has filled it with “smoke particles . . . pumped out of his moist, mucus-filled lungs. Something that was deep within his body is now in mine.” (The sexual note makes this moment particularly unsettling.) Fear is a colony of red ants that, living in Hens’s front garden in Columbus, reminds him that his smoking habit, once broken, might return:

The entire parcel of land was infiltrated. A passer-by, throwing only a fleeting look over the place, would have been completely unaware of it. Maybe they would have delighted in seeing the freshly painted, light blue wooden façade, the glorious irises. But the moment I stuck a spade into it, the moment I pulled up just a single patch of weeds or disturbed a mossy slab with my foot, whole armies of combat-ready army ants gazed up at me; powerful, shimmering red specimens evidently waiting only for me. They streamed into the daylight in their thousands, the earth would appear to be in motion, and I’d be seized by vertigo.

Shimmering red specimens, streaming into the light: this is beautiful in an appalling way. Elsewhere, an episode that should have been frightening—Hens, on his bike, speeding down the road to

buy a pack of cigarettes, rams into a Toyota Land Cruiser and crashes onto its hood—turns into a comedy. An ambulance arrives, but, as it rushes to the hospital, it runs over an old lady, so it stops and picks her up, too. “Welcome aboard, I called out to her,” Hens writes. But, instead of returning his greeting, she screams abuse at him all the way to the hospital. Only there does he discover that his face is caked with blood and that there is a long, gaping laceration on his right temple. The story is funny—“I think even I sprang backwards when I saw myself in the bathroom mirror”—but its subject is the same deep-lying terror that is the main concern of most of the book.

Not all of it. In some scenes, Hens achieves a kind of middle tone, where, while still producing little horrors, he remains stoic, or reticent. In an early chapter, he and Stefan, grown men now, drive to the house of their great-aunt Anna, in Bremen. She has just died, and they are going to collect her keys. The house, of course, fills Gregor with memories. The peat in the garden reminds him of the time his aunt told him about a peat bog that lay just outside the town: “Out there, my young brain imagined, it was teeming with the eternally restless undead, ditch wardens, feral spirits and doppehgänger. Out there beyond the town the peat diggers uncover the skeletons of entire chain gangs, the tiny bodies of unwanted children, the corpses of abortions, bastards.”

The vast armchairs in Aunt Anna’s living room make him think of Deng Xiaoping. Why? We don’t know, but printed on the page where he tells us this there is a photograph of Deng, in a mammoth armchair, with antimacassars, such as Aunt Anna had, contentedly having a smoke. The book is full of these muddy little snapshots, showing things—a racing bike, a lighter, a Gloria fire extinguisher, Aunt Anna—that seem surprised that someone is bothering to photograph them. They call to mind W. G. Sebald’s novels, in which, with a similarly muffled emotion, photographs like these often document the lives of people who fled the Nazis.

Aunt Anna fled no Nazis, but much of her story, as Hens tells it, seems to be about love that wasn’t properly returned. She never married. She devoted herself to her job at the Brinkmann cigarette

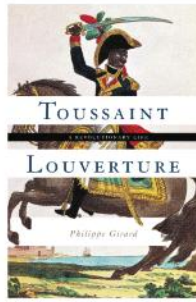
## BRIEFLY NOTED

factory. It was said that she was in love with the company's president, a married man whom she would visit at his lakeside property on her vacations. "They were the Romeo and Juliet of the German cigarette industry," Hens writes. And that may have had something to do with the fact that when Aunt Anna retired she was given, along with her pension, a hundred-year supply of the factory's product. Once a month, a courier from Brinkmann would arrive at her front door with two cartons of cigarettes. Now she was dead, but the stipend was to continue until 2071, so that, like the house, it passed to her great-nephews. As the chapter ends, Stefan pours shots of schnapps for himself and Gregor: "To Aunt Anna, Stefan says, raising his glass. To her love, I say." And Gregor lights up one of her cigarettes.

The book, too, ends with love and cigarettes. Gregor is eighteen. He is in love for the first time, with the beautiful Eliana. He has been to a party at her house, where, feeling outclassed by the other boys, he got terribly drunk and had to sleep over. In the morning, Eliana appears in his room in a gray robe and sits on the edge of the bed. He wants to pull her into the bed—he's sure that she is naked under the robe—but he has too horrible a taste in his mouth (beer, cigarettes) to dare to kiss her. She senses his discomfort, takes a cigarette out of his pack, lights it, and holds it to his lips. He doesn't remove his hands from under the covers. He just lies back:

It was quite possibly the most wonderful drag of my life. And then Eliana led the cigarette to her own full, slightly parted lips and took a deep, sensual drag. She bent over me and released the smoke, and the shimmering blue veil that caught the first autumnal sunshine sank over my face and caressed me. A kiss, better than a kiss . . . her lips, where my lips had been. Her breath and the smoke that we shared . . . I closed my eyes and sucked it in to the tips of my lungs. My first true love's kiss was smoke, nothing but smoke.

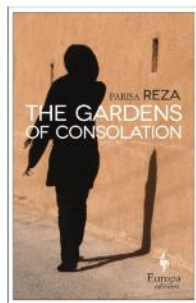
It is a strange combination, love and smoke, but there is a long streak of strangeness in German art—colors you didn't expect (Caspar David Friedrich, Max Beckmann), Venuses who aren't pretty (Cranach, Altdorfer)—which nevertheless feels like life. I don't know what Aunt Anna got in place of consummation, but Hens got this dark, lovely, funny book. ♦



**Toussaint Louverture**, by Philippe Girard (*Basic*). After leading a slave revolt in Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) in 1791—the only successful such revolt in history—Louverture became an anti-colonial icon. He emerges in this excellent biography as a man more complex than the myth of him would have it. His military and political stratagems coincided with a receptive mood in revolutionary France, which abolished slavery in 1794. In the restive period that followed, Louverture consolidated power, ultimately enforcing a labor code no less repressive than slavery. Girard writes thoughtfully about the various contradictions of Louverture's life, which ended in a prison cell in France. While there, he wrote a memoir addressed to Napoleon, expecting to be acknowledged by him as an equal.



**Am I Alone Here?**, by Peter Orner (*Catapult*). "Stories say what I can't," the author writes in this memoir in which short fiction becomes a form of vicarious living. Following the death of his father, Orner is left with a blank grief that he can quell only through reading. He proceeds, chapter by chapter, through what he's learned from authors from Chekhov to Welty. Kafka captures the struggle between "the craving for loneliness and a terror of it"; Herbert Morris gives the miracle of people in their "most intimate, unguarded moments"; Virginia Woolf retrieves "irretrievable time." The underlying force of the book is the desire to recover the "weight of what's vanished" and fiction's alchemical ability to do so.



**The Gardens of Consolation**, by Parisa Reza, translated from the French by Adriana Hunter (*Europa*). This confident debut begins some decades into the twentieth century, but its characters live on terms closer to the thirteenth. Talla, aged twelve, is walking with her husband from a small Iranian village toward a new life in the city. He is old enough to be afraid of bandits, she young enough to be afraid of ogres tucked among the dunes. We follow the couple through parenthood and three decades of alternating regimes. Occasionally, historical exposition—an account of Iran's burgeoning civil service, say—intrudes baldly. The novel is at its best when it evokes the family's comfort, despite the upheavals, in sensual, timeless pleasures: vats hot with rose petals and lamb, "the smell of jasmine and damp soil."



**The Revolutionaries Try Again**, by Mauro Javier Cardenas (*Coffee House*). Depicting the morass of contemporary Ecuadorean politics in high modernist style, this debut focusses on the efforts of two old friends—the President's chief of staff and an economist who has been living in San Francisco—to mount an insurgent political campaign. Cardenas hopscoches across time, shedding forms from section to section, and extending a single sentence over twenty pages. There's an infectious warmth in the recollections of the friends' school days, and the prose often draws blood: describing protests in San Francisco, a character says that "he had often seen American crowds waving their flags of self-importance and gorging themselves with organic cucumbers before returning to their placid homes."



# THE VOICES IN OUR HEADS

*Why do people talk to themselves?*

BY JEROME GROOPMAN



“TALKING TO YOUR yogurt again,” my wife, Pam, said. “And what does the yogurt say?”

She had caught me silently talking to myself as we ate breakfast. A conversation was playing in my mind, with a research colleague who questioned whether we had sufficient data to go ahead and publish. Did the experiments in the second graph need to be repeated? The results were already solid, I answered. But then, on reflection, I agreed that repetition could make the statistics more compelling.

I often have discussions with myself—tilting my head, raising my eyebrows, pursing my lips—and not only

about my work. I converse with friends and family members, tell myself jokes, replay dialogue from the past. I’ve never considered why I talk to myself, and I’ve never mentioned it to anyone, except Pam. She very rarely has inner conversations; the one instance is when she reminds herself to do something, like change her e-mail password. She deliberately translates the thought into an external command, saying out loud, “Remember, change your password today.”

Verbal rehearsal of material—the shopping list you recite as you walk the aisles of a supermarket—is part of our working memory system. But for some of us talking to ourselves goes much fur-

ther: it’s an essential part of the way we think. Others experience auditory hallucinations, verbal promptings from voices that are not theirs but those of loved ones, long-departed mentors, unidentified influencers, their conscience, or even God.

Charles Fernyhough, a British professor of psychology at Durham University, in England, studies such “inner speech.” At the start of “The Voices Within” (Basic), he also identifies himself as a voluble self-speaker, relating an incident where, in a crowded train on the London Underground, he suddenly became self-conscious at having just laughed out loud at a nonsensical sentence that was playing in his mind. He goes through life hearing a wide variety of voices: “My ‘voices’ often have accent and pitch; they are private and only audible to me, and yet they frequently sound like real people.”

Fernyhough has based his research on the hunch that talking to ourselves and hearing voices—phenomena that he sees as related—are not mere quirks, and that they have a deeper function. His book offers a chatty, somewhat inconclusive tour of the subject, making a case for the role of inner speech in memory, sports performance, religious revelation, psychotherapy, and literary fiction. He even coins a term, “dialogic thinking,” to describe his belief that thought itself may be considered “a voice, or voices, in the head.”

**D**ISCUSSING EXPERIMENTAL WORK on voice-hearing, Fernyhough describes a protocol devised by Russell Hurlburt, a psychologist at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. A subject wears an earpiece and a beeper sounds at random intervals. As soon as the person hears the beep, she jots notes about what was in her mind at that moment. People in a variety of studies have reported a range of perceptions: many have experienced “inner speech,” though Fernyhough doesn’t specify what proportion. For some, it was a full back-and-forth conversation, for others a more condensed script of short phrases or keywords. The results of another study suggest that, on average, about twenty to twenty-five per cent of the waking day is spent in self-talk. But some people never experienced inner speech at all.

*Hearing voices can be a sign of a malady, but for many it’s just part of thought.*

In his work at Durham, Fernyhough participated in an experiment in which he had an inner conversation with an old teacher of his while his brain was imaged by fMRI scanning. Naturally, the scan showed activity in parts of the left hemisphere associated with language. Among the other brain regions that were activated, however, were some associated with our interactions with other people. Fernyhough concludes that “dialogic inner speech must therefore involve some capacity to represent the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of the people with whom we share our world.” This raises the fascinating possibility that when we talk to ourselves a kind of split takes place, and we become in some sense multiple: it’s not a monologue but a real dialogue.

Early in Fernyhough’s career, his mentors told him that studying inner speech would be fruitless. Experimental psychology focusses on things that can be studied in laboratory situations and can yield clear, reproducible results. Our perceptions of what goes on in our heads are too subjective to quantify, and experimental psychologists tend to steer clear of the area.

Fernyhough’s protocols go some way toward working around this difficulty, though the results can’t be considered dispositive. Being prompted to enter into an inner dialogue in an fMRI machine is not the same as spontaneously debating with oneself at the kitchen table. And, given that subjects in the beeper protocol could express their experience only in words, it’s not surprising that many of them ascribed a linguistic quality to their thinking. Fernyhough acknowledges this; in a paper published last year in *Psychological Bulletin*, he wrote that the interview process may both “shape and change the experiences participants report.”

More fundamentally, neither experiment can do more than provide a rough phenomenology of inner speech—a sense of where we experience inner speech neurologically and how it may operate. The experiments don’t tell us what it *is*. This hard truth harks back to William James, who concluded that such “introspective analysis” was like “trying to turn up the gas quickly enough to see how the darkness looks.”

Nonetheless, Fernyhough has built up an interesting picture of inner speech and its functions. It certainly seems to be important in memory, and not merely the mnemonic recitation of lists, to which my wife and many others resort. I sometimes replay childhood conversations with my father, long deceased. I conjure his voice and respond to it, preserving his presence in my life. Inner speech may participate in reasoning about right and wrong by constructing point-counterpoint situations in our minds. Fernyhough writes that his most elaborate inner conversations occur when he is dealing with an ethical dilemma.

Inner speech could also serve as a safety mechanism. Negative emotions may be easier to cope with when channelled into words spoken to ourselves. In the case of people who hear alien voices, Fernyhough links the phenomenon to past trauma; people who live through horrific events often describe themselves “dissociating” during the episodes. “Splitting itself into separate parts is one of the most powerful of the mind’s defense mechanisms,” he writes. Given that his fMRI study suggested that some kind of split occurred during self-speech, the idea of a connection between these two mental processes doesn’t seem implausible. Indeed, a mainstream strategy in cognitive behavioral therapy involves purposefully articulating thoughts to oneself in order to diminish pernicious habits of mind. There is robust scientific evidence demonstrating the value of the method in coping with O.C.D., phobias, and other anxiety disorders.

Cognitive behavioral therapy also harnesses the effectiveness of verbalizing positive thoughts. Many athletes talk to themselves as a way of enhancing performance; Andy Murray yells at himself during tennis matches. The potential benefits of this have some experimental support. In 2008, Greek researchers randomly assigned tennis players to one of two groups. The first was trained in motivational and instructional self-talk (for instance, “Go,” “I can,” “Shoulder, low”). The second group got a tactical lecture on the use of particular shots. The group trained to use self-talk showed improved play and reported increased self-confidence

and decreased anxiety, whereas no significant improvements were seen in the other group.

SOMETIMES THE VOICES people hear are not their own, and instead are attributed to a celestial source. God’s voice figures prominently early in the Hebrew Bible. He speaks individually to Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, and Abraham. At Mt. Sinai, God’s voice, in midrash, was heard communally, but was so overwhelming that only the first letter, aleph, was sounded. But in later prophetic books the divine voice grows quieter. Elijah, on Mt. Horeb, is addressed by God (after a whirlwind, a fire, and an earthquake) in what the King James Bible called a “still small voice,” and which, in the original Hebrew (*kol demamah dakah*), is even more suggestive—literally, “the sound of a slender silence.” By the time we reach the Book of Esther, God’s voice is absent.

In Christianity, however, divine speech continues through the Gospels—the apostle Paul converts after hearing Jesus admonish him. Especially in evangelical traditions, it has persisted. Martin Luther King, Jr., recounted an experience of it in the early days of the bus boycott in Montgomery, in 1956. After receiving a threatening anonymous phone call, he went in despair into his kitchen and prayed. He became aware of “the quiet assurance of an inner voice” and “heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on.”

Fernyhough relates some arresting instances of conversations with God and other celestial powers that occurred during the Middle Ages. In fifteenth-century France, Joan of Arc testified to hearing angels and saints tell her to lead the French Army in rescuing her country from English domination. A more intimate example is that of the famous mystic Margery Kempe, a well-to-do Englishwoman with a husband and family, who, in the early fifteenth century, reported that Christ spoke to her from a short distance, in a “sweet and gentle” voice. In “The Book of Margery Kempe,” a narrative she dictated, which is often considered the first autobiography in English, she relates how a series of domestic crises, including an episode of what she describes as madness, led her to embark on a life of pilgrimage,



celibacy, and extreme fasting. The voice of Jesus gave her advice for negotiating a deal with her frustrated and worried husband. (She agreed to eat; he accepted her chastity.) Fernyhough writes imaginatively about the various registers of voice she hears. “One kind of sound she hears is like a pair of bellows blowing in her ear: it is the susurrus of the Holy Spirit. When He chooses, our Lord changes that sound into the voice of a dove, and then into a robin redbreast, tweeting merrily in her ear.”

Forty years ago, Julian Jaynes, a psychologist at Princeton, published a landmark book, “The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind,” in which he proposed a biological basis for the hearing of divine voices. He argued that several thousand years ago, at the time the Iliad was written, our brains were “bicameral,” composed of two distinct chambers. The left hemisphere contained language areas, just as it does now, but the right hemisphere contributed a unique function, recruiting language-making structures that “spoke” in times of stress. People perceived the utterances of the right hemisphere as being external to them and attributed them to gods. In the tumult of attacking Troy, Jaynes believed, Achilles would have heard speech from his right hemisphere and attributed it to voices from Mt. Olympus:

The characters of the Iliad do not sit down and think out what to do. They have no conscious minds such as we say we have, and certainly no introspections. When Agamemnon, king of men, robs Achilles of his mistress, it is a god that grabs Achilles by his yellow hair and warns him not to strike Agamemnon. It is a god who then rises out of the gray sea and consoles him in his tears of wrath on the beach by his black ships. . . . It is one god who makes Achilles promise not to go into battle, another who urges him to go, and another who then clothes him in a golden fire reaching up to heaven and screams through his throat across the bloodied trench at the Trojans, rousing in them ungovernable panic. In fact, the gods take the place of consciousness.

Jaynes believed that the development of nerve fibres connecting the two hemispheres gradually integrated brain function. Following a theory of Homeric authorship that assumed the Odyssey to have been composed at least a century after the Iliad, he pointed out that Odysseus, who is constantly reflecting and planning, manifests a self-consciousness of mind. The poem’s emphasis on Odys-

seus’ cunning starts to seem like the celebration of the emergence of a new kind of consciousness. For Jaynes, hearing the voice of God was a vestige of our past neuroanatomy.

JAYNES’S BOOK WAS hugely influential in its day, one of those rare specialist works whose ideas enter the culture at large. (Bicamerality is an important plot point in HBO’s “Westworld”: Dolores, an android played by Evan Rachel Wood, is led to understand that a voice she hears, which has urged her to kill other android “hosts” at the park, comes from her own head.) But Jaynes’s thesis does not stand up to what we now know about the development of our species. In evolutionary time, the few thousand years that separate us from Achilles are a blink of an eye, far too short to allow for such radical structural changes in the brain. Contemporary neurologists offer alternative explanations for hearing celestial speech. Some speculate that it represents temporal-lobe epilepsy, others schizophrenia; auditory hallucinations are common in both conditions. They are also a feature of degenerative neurological diseases. An elderly relative with Alzheimer’s recently told me that God talks to her. “Do you actually hear His voice?” I asked. She said that she does, and knows it is God because He said so.

Remarkably, Fernyhough is reluctant to call such voices hallucinations. He views the term as pejorative, and he is notably skeptical about the value of psychiatric diagnosis in voice-hearing cases:

It is no more meaningful to attempt to diagnose . . . English mystics (nor others, like Joan, from the tradition to which they belong) than it is to call Socrates a schizophrenic. . . . If Joan wasn’t schizophrenic, she had “idiopathic partial epilepsy with auditory features.” Margery’s compulsive weeping and roaring, combined with her voice-hearing, might also have been signs of temporal lobe epilepsy. The white spots that flew around her vision (and were interpreted by her as sightings of angels) could have been symptoms of migraine. . . . The medieval literary scholar Corinne Saunders points out that Margery’s experiences were strange then, in the early fifteenth century, and they seem even stranger now, when we are so distant from the interpretive framework in which Margery received them. That doesn’t make them signs of madness or neurological disease any more than similar experiences in the modern era should be automatically pathologized.

In his unwillingness to draw a clear line between normal perceptions and

delusions, Fernyhough follows ideas popularized by a range of groups that have emerged in the past three decades known as the Hearing Voices Movement. In 1987, a Dutch psychiatrist, Marius Romme, was treating a patient named Patsy Hage, who heard malignant voices. Romme’s initial diagnosis was that the voices were symptoms of a biomedical illness. But Hage insisted that her voice-hearing was a valid mode of thought. Not coincidentally, she was familiar with the work of Julian Jaynes. “I’m not a schizophrenic,” she told Romme. “I’m an ancient Greek!”

Romme came to sympathize with her point of view, and decided that it was vital to engage seriously with the actual content of what patients’ voices said. The pair started to publicize the condition, asking other voice-hearers to be in touch. The movement grew from there. It currently has networks in twenty-four countries, with more than a hundred and eighty groups in the United Kingdom alone, and its membership is growing in the United States. It holds meetings and conferences in which voice-hearers discuss their experiences, and it campaigns to increase public awareness of the phenomenon.

The movement’s followers reject the idea that hearing voices is a sign of mental illness. They want it to be seen as a normal variation in human nature. Their arguments are in part about who controls the interpretation of such experiences. Fernyhough quotes an advocate who says, “It is about power, and it’s about who’s got the expertise, and the authority.” The advocate characterizes cognitive behavioral therapy as “an expert doing something *to*” a patient, whereas the movement’s approach disrupts that hierarchy. “People with lived experience have a lot to say about it, know a lot about what it’s like to experience it, to live with it, to cope with it,” she says. “If we want to learn anything about extreme human experience, we have to listen to the people who experience it.”

Like other movements that seek to challenge the authority of psychiatry’s diagnostic categories, the Hearing Voices Movement is controversial. Critics point out that, while depathologizing voice-hearing may feel liberating for some, it entails a risk that people with serious mental illnesses will not receive appropriate care. Fernyhough does not spend

much time on these criticisms, though in a footnote he does concede the scant evidentiary basis of the movement's claims. He mentions a psychotherapist sympathetic to the Hearing Voices Movement who says that, in contrast to the ample experimental evidence for the efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy, "the organic nature of hearing voices groups" makes it hard to conduct randomized controlled trials.

FERNYHOUGH IS NOT only a psychologist; he also writes fiction, and in describing this work he emphasizes the role of hearing voices. "I never mistake these fictional characters for real people, but I do hear them speaking," he writes in "The Voices Within." "I have to get their voices right—transcribe them accurately—or they will not seem real to the people who are reading their stories." He notes that this kind of conjuring is widespread among novelists, and cites examples including Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, and Hilary Mantel.

Fernyhough and his colleagues have tried to quantify this phenomenon. Ninety-one writers attending the 2014 Edinburgh International Book Festival responded to a questionnaire; seventy per cent said that they heard characters speak. Several writers linked the speech of their characters to inner dialogues even when they are not actively writing. As for plot, some writers asserted that their characters "don't agree with me, sometimes demand that I change things in the story arc of whatever I'm writing."

The importance of voice-hearing to many writers might seem to validate the Hearing Voices Movement's approach. If the result is great literature, it would be perverse to judge hearing voices an aberration requiring treatment rather than a precious gift. It's not that simple, however. As Fernyhough writes, "Studies have shown a particularly high prevalence of psychiatric disorders (particularly mood disorders) in those of proven creativity." Even leaving aside the fact that most people with mood disorders are not creative geniuses, many writers find their creative talent psychologically troublesome, and even prize an idea of themselves as, in some sense, abnormal. The novelist Jeanette Winterson has heard voices that she says put

her "in the crazy category," and the idea has a long history: Plato's "mad poet," Aristotle's "melancholic genius," and John Dryden's dictum that "great wits are sure to madness near allied." But, in cases where talent is accompanied by real psychological disturbance, do the creative benefits really outweigh the costs to the individual?

ON A FRIGID night in January, 1977, while working as a young resident at Massachusetts General Hospital, I was paged to the emergency room. A patient had arrived by ambulance from McLean Hospital, a famous psychiatric institution in nearby Belmont. Sitting bolt upright, laboring to breathe, was the poet Robert Lowell. I introduced myself and performed a physical examination. Lowell was in congestive heart failure, his lungs filling with fluid. I administered diuretics and fitted an oxygen tube to his nostrils. Soon he was breathing comfortably. He seemed sullen and, to distract him from his predicament, I asked about a medallion that hung from a chain around his neck. "Achilles," he replied, with a fleeting smile.

I've no idea if Lowell knew of Jaynes's book, which had come out the year before, but Achilles was a figure of lifelong importance to him, one of many historical and mythical figures—Alexander the Great, Dante, T. S. Eliot, Christ—with whom he identified in moments of delusional grandiosity. In *Achilles*, Lowell seemed to find a heroic reflection of his own mental volatility. Achilles' defining attribute—it's the first word of the *Iliad*—is *mēnin*, usually translated as "wrath" or "rage." But in a forthcoming book, "Robert Lowell, Setting the River on Fire: A Study of Genius, Mania, and Character," the psychiatry professor Kay Redfield Jamison points out that Lowell's translation of the passage renders *mēnin* as "mania." As it happens, mania was Lowell's most enduring diagnosis in his many years as a psychiatric patient.

In her account of Lowell's hospitalization, Jamison cites my case notes and those of his cardiologist in the Phillips House, a wing of Mass General where wealthy Boston Brahmin patients were typically housed. Lowell wrote a poem

about his stay, "Phillips House Revisited," in which he overlays impressions of the medical crisis I had witnessed ("I cannot entirely get my breath, / as if I were muffled in snow") with memories of his grandfather, who had died in the same hospital, forty years earlier.

There was a long history of mental illness in Lowell's family. Jamison digs up the records of his great-great-grandmother, who was admitted to McLean in 1845, and who, doctors noted, was "afflicted with false hearing." Lowell, too, suffered from auditory hallucinations. Sometimes, before sleep, he would talk to the heroes from Hawthorne's "Greek Myths." During a hospitalization in 1954, he often chatted to Ezra Pound, who was a friend—but not actually there. Among his contemporaries, recognition of Lowell's mental instability was inextricably bound up with awe of his talent. The intertwining of madness and genius remains an essential part of his posthumous legend, and Lowell himself saw the two as related. Jamison quotes a report by one of his doctors:

Patient's strong emotional ties with his manic phase were very evident. Besides the feeling of well-being which was present at that time, patient felt that, "my senses were more keen than they had ever been before, and that's what a writer needs."

But Jamison also shows that Lowell sometimes saw his episodes of manic inspiration in a more coldly medical light. After a period of intense religious revelation, he wrote, "The *mystical* experiences and explosions turned out to be pathological." Splitting the difference, Jamison suggests that his mania and his imagination were welded into great art by the discipline he exerted between his manic episodes.

Lowell was discharged from Mass General on February 9th. Jamison quotes a note that one of my colleagues wrote to the doctors at McLean: "Thank you for referring Mr. Lowell to me. He proved to be just as interesting a person and a patient as you suggested he might be." Later that month, Lowell had recovered sufficiently to travel to New York and do a reading with Allen Ginsberg. He read "Phillips House Revisited." That September, he died. ♦





## SLEIGHT OF HAND

*The Russian pianist Daniil Trifonov, at Carnegie Hall and Disney Hall.*

BY ALEX ROSS



THE RUSSIAN PIANIST Daniil Trifonov creates a furor. The term is a familiar one in the annals of super-virtuosity. “PIANIST CREATES FUROR” was a headline in the *Times* when Vladimir Horowitz first played at Carnegie Hall, in 1928. Paderewski left furor in his wake, as did Sviatoslav Richter, the young Martha Argerich, and the young Evgeny Kissin. Americans usually don’t create a furor, at least on American soil. Russians are more prone to do so. It should be noted that a furor is not the same as a sensation. (Lang Lang creates a sensation.) Furor pianists exhibit intelligence as well as dexterity; they often make curious inter-

pretive choices that cause head-shaking at intermission. They give a hint of the unearthly, the diabolical. They tend to walk onstage hurriedly and bashfully, with little ceremony, and usher in bedlam from unseen regions.

Trifonov was born in Nizhny Novgorod in 1991, and now lives in New York. He achieved international fame in 2011, when he won first prize in the Tchaikovsky Competition. He made his professional Carnegie Hall debut later that year, performing Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto with Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra. That outing had more finesse than the average slam-bang run-through,

but it failed to prepare New York audiences for the impact of Trifonov’s first solo recitals, in 2013 and 2014. I caught the second, which included works by Stravinsky, Debussy, Ravel, and Schumann—the kind of serious-minded program that Radu Lupu or Mitsuko Uchida might offer. Not everything cohered, yet the playing had beauty and power to spare. A scurrying encore left even the most obscurantist pianophiles mystified. As it happened, it was the scherzo of a piano sonata that Trifonov had written.

What sets Trifonov apart is a pair of attributes that are seldom found in one pianist: monstrous technique and lustrous tone. The characteristic Trifonov effect is a rapid, glistening flurry of notes that hardly seems to involve the mechanical action of hammers and strings. It’s more like the immaterial swirl of veils in the dances of Loie Fuller. Such wizardry makes even Trifonov’s celebrated colleagues stop in wonder. In 2011, Argerich said of him, “What he does with his hands is technically incredible. It’s also his touch—he has tenderness and also the demonic element. I never heard anything like that.” The elemental thrill is to see him lunge from one extreme to another. When he does, “demonic” is not too strong a word.

So far, Trifonov has done best in the high-virtuoso territory of Liszt, Scriabin, and Rachmaninoff. His latest recording, on Deutsche Grammophon, is of Liszt’s Transcendental Études, Concert Études, and Paganini Études. The Transcendental Études contain some of the most taxing piano writing ever put on paper: jagged chords strewn all over the keyboard, everywhere-leaping arpeggiated figures, pages of double octaves. Trifonov dispatches all of it with stupefying effortlessness, in the process transforming this ostensibly bravura music into something elegant and rarefied, almost French. He suggests how much Debussy and Ravel owed to Liszt. This is not the final word on the Études: on the Myrios label you can find a recording by Kirill Gerstein, another major, younger Russian-born pianist, which has a stronger sense of musical architecture. Still, Trifonov’s entry will long be a benchmark.

*Trifonov has a rare combination of monstrous technique and lustrous tone.*

His explorations of Germanic repertory have yielded murkier results. Earlier this year, I watched him become nearly lost in Schubert's otherworldly Sonata in G, D. 894—not in the sense of forgetting where he was in the score but in the sense of letting go of the narrative line. He lavished such affection on each hovering chord and quiver of melody that the music was repeatedly in danger of gliding to a halt. Richter, through the force of his personality, could get away with such mystical prolongations of Schubert. Trifonov lacks, as yet, Richter's magisterial control.

At his most recent Carnegie appearance, on December 7th, Trifonov devoted the first half of the program to Schumann. Reaffirming his range, he first floated the fragile, translucent lines of "Kinderszenen" and then stormed through the dense, bristling Toccata. Both were deftly done. "Kreisleriana," which followed, was befuddling. The opening piece was hectic and clangorous; after that, torpor set in. The slow pieces were languid to the point of stasis. Phrases dissolved into a lovely mist of disconnected notes. The prayerful melody of the fourth piece shed its songlike character; even the longest-breathed singer would have had a hard time sustaining the line at this tempo. A minute here or there in Neverland would have been compelling, but fully half the work fell into that zone. The general impression was of a gorgeous miscellany.

After intermission, Trifonov turned to post-Romantic Russian repertory: five of Shostakovich's Preludes and Fugues, culminating in the colossal

D-minor pair; and Stravinsky's Three Movements from "Petrouchka." The Shostakovich was monumental, unsentimental, altogether formidable—worthy of comparison to Richter. The Stravinsky tended to skim the surface, but it blazed with energy and color. Trifonov even allowed himself a bit of showmanship: at the beginning of the second movement, in honor of the titular puppet, he let his right arm dangle limply for a moment. In all, though, this was the most wayward of the Trifonov recitals I've attended: the mannerisms obscured the mastery.

THREE DAYS EARLIER, at Disney Hall, in Los Angeles, I had encountered a different Trifonov—an artist both daring and disciplined, who ventured into remote territory and found his way back. With Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, he performed the Rachmaninoff Third Concerto, a work that always gives pleasure but seldom surprises. For most of the first movement, Trifonov played with unaffected brilliance; after initial tensions over tempo, he and Dudamel settled into a vibrant groove. The revelation occurred in the cadenza. Rachmaninoff's score gives a choice of two cadenzas: one is dazzling and scherzolike, while the other—marked "ossia," or "alternatively"—waxes grand and dark. The composer employed the first in his famous recording with the Philadelphia Orchestra, and most pianists have followed suit. A significant minority, however, favor the "ossia." Yefim Bronfman is in this camp; so is Trifonov.

The heart of the second cadenza is

an imperious elaboration of the suave, sauntering theme with which the concerto begins. Although it is marked "Allegro molto," it requires a Lisztian barrage of fortissimo chords in various registers. Trifonov could have knocked it off at high speed; instead, he took a deliberate, almost labored approach, slowing to a crawl in the turn to G minor. The sound was immense, seeming to ventriloquize the orchestra sitting silently by. There was a palpable sense of struggle—not technical but emotional, a battle of the heart. The passage assumed a tragic heft that changed the meaning of the concerto around it. Whether Trifonov had some reason to play it this way in the final weeks of 2016 I cannot say, but that minute of music hit me as strongly as anything I've heard this season.

Is it possible to offer criticism without complaint? When a performer is astounding on one occasion and exasperating on another, you want him to continue on his chosen path, however circuitous it may appear. Perhaps Trifonov's eccentricities will subside with time, or perhaps they will take on interpretive weight. His compositions are imitative—on YouTube, you can find his Piano Concerto in E-Flat Minor, which mashes together Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, Prokofiev, and a few others—but they give evidence of a restless, creative mind. He still has not touched much of the twentieth-century repertory; he will enrich it when he does. Once he settles into his maturity, he may have no equal. For now, furor follows him, because he has yet to commit the sin of routine. ♦

THE NEW YORKER IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF ADVANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS INC. COPYRIGHT ©2017 CONDÉ NAST. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

VOLUME XCII, NO. 44, January 9, 2017. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 13 & 20, June 5 & 12, July 10 & 17, August 7 & 14, and December 18 & 25) by Condé Nast, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Elizabeth Hughes, publisher, chief revenue officer; Risa Aronson, associate publisher advertising; James Guilfoyle, director of finance and business operations; Fabio Bertoni, general counsel. Condé Nast: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman emeritus; Robert A. Sauerberg, Jr., president & chief executive officer; David E. Geithner, chief financial officer; James M. Norton, chief business officer, president of revenue. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE NEW YORKER, P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684. FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, ADJUSTMENTS, OR BACK ISSUE INQUIRIES: Please write to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684, call (800) 825-2510, or e-mail [subscriptions@newyorker.com](mailto:subscriptions@newyorker.com). Please give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable, you are ever dissatisfied with your subscription, let us know. You will receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within four weeks after receipt of order. For advertising inquiries, please call Risa Aronson at (212) 286-4068. For submission guidelines, please refer to our Web site, [www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com). Address all editorial, business, and production correspondence to The New Yorker, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. For cover reprints, please call (800) 897-8666, or e-mail [covers@cartoonbank.com](mailto:covers@cartoonbank.com). For permissions and reprint requests, please call (212) 630-5656 or fax requests to (212) 630-5883. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. The New Yorker's name and logo, and the various titles and headings herein, are trademarks of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. Visit us online at [www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com). To subscribe to other Condé Nast magazines, visit [www.condenast.com](http://www.condenast.com). Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services that we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, please advise us at P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684 or call (800) 825-2510.

THE NEW YORKER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RETURN OR LOSS OF, OR FOR DAMAGE OR ANY OTHER INJURY TO, UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS, UNSOLICITED ART WORK (INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND TRANSPARENCIES), OR ANY OTHER UNSOLICITED MATERIALS. THOSE SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS, PHOTOGRAPHS, ART WORK, OR OTHER MATERIALS FOR CONSIDERATION SHOULD NOT SEND ORIGINALS, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED TO DO SO BY THE NEW YORKER IN WRITING.





## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

*Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Robert Leighton, must be received by Sunday, January 8th. The finalists in the December 19th & 26th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the January 23rd issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).*

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ..... ”

### THE FINALISTS

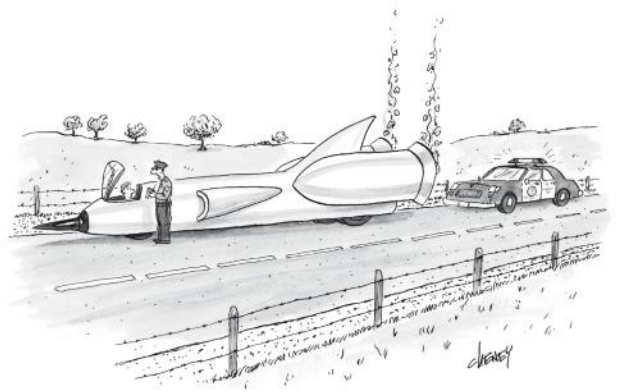


*“What makes you think you were not our first choice?”*  
Jim Johnson, New York City

*“You will have one more try when the music starts.”*  
Susan Adams, Chicago, Ill.

*“Where do you see yourself five chairs from now?”*  
Paul Angiolillo, Watertown, Mass.

### THE WINNING CAPTION

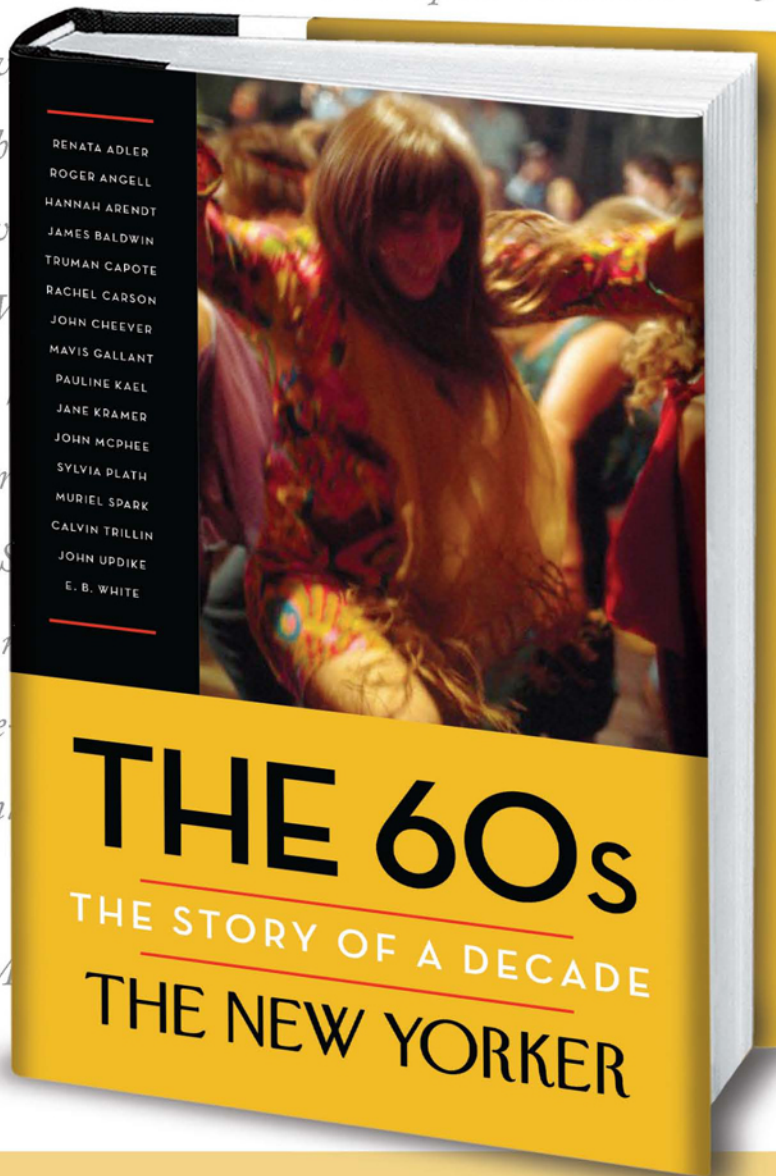


*“Sir, I just need you to take one small step out of the vehicle.”*  
Andrew Hawkins, Sudbury, Ont.

Advertisement

# HISTORY IN REAL TIME AS TOLD BY THE NEW YORKER

*U-2 spy plane • Bay of Pigs • Civil-Rights Movement • Summer of Love  
Martin Luther King, Jr. • Bob Dylan • Woodstock • Dwight MacDonaldd  
John Updike • Vietnam War • Free-Speech Movement • J.F.K. • E. B.  
White • Envo • Truman  
Capote • Job • Muriel Spark  
James Baldwin • The Beatles  
Apollo 11 • V • wiggy • Allen  
Ginsberg • & Garfunkel  
John Cheever • Pauline Kael  
1969 World S • Sylvia Plath  
Portnoy's Co • Cuban Missile  
Crisis • Free • Desegregation  
Environmen • Second-Wave  
Feminism • • Joan Baez  
Free-Love M • Rachel Carlson*



**WITH NEW PERSPECTIVES FROM**  
Malcolm Gladwell, Adam Gopnik, Jennifer Egan, Kelefa Sanneh, and many more.

A RANDOM  HOUSE HARDCOVER AND eBook



THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED WAS MADE FOR A CAR LESS ORDINARY.  
**THAT'S CONTINENTAL**



Explore more at [Lincoln.com](https://www.lincoln.com)



THE LINCOLN  
MOTOR COMPANY