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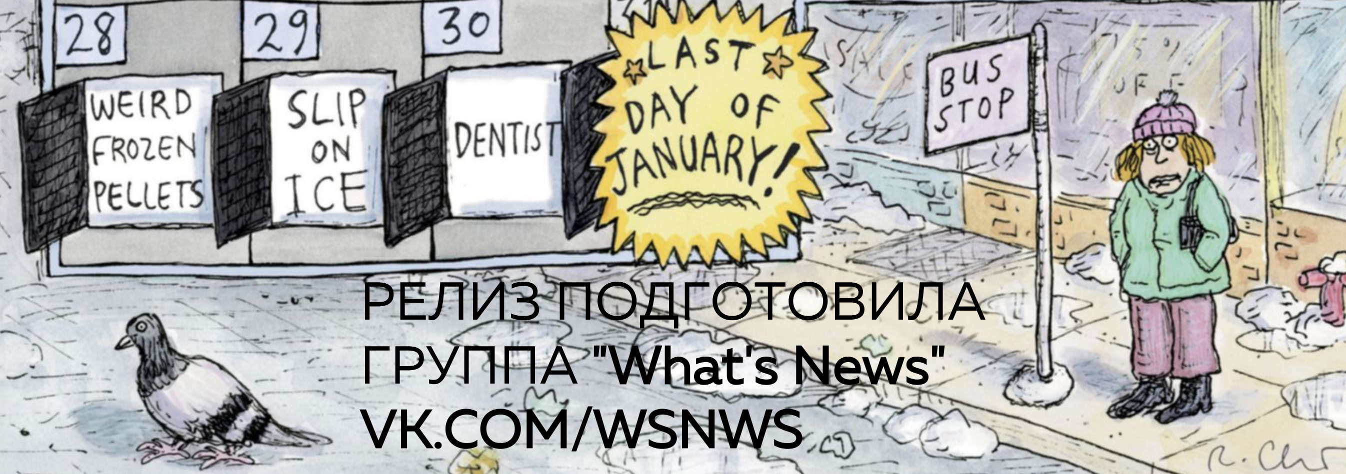

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THE NEW YORKER

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PODCAST
On this week's episode, Jhumpa Lahiri reads "The Boundary," her short story from the issue.

DAILY SHOUTS
Grant Snider illustrates an ode to a book he bought but never finished reading.

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THE MAIL

CAN HOLLYWOOD CHANGE?

The most telling quote in Dana Goodyear's article on Hollywood's reckoning with its culture of sexual abuse comes from a television executive: "Nobody knows how to act now. The rules have been so changed" ("Exposure," January 8th). Well, yes, duh! Many men don't know how to act now because they weren't acting like adults in the past. The "rules" put in place and enforced by male-dominated institutions—government, academia, industry, science, religion—have indeed been exposed as predatory and oppressive. The participants—not just the perpetrators but those witnesses who colluded through their silence—have also been exposed.
Judy Funston
Norwood, N.Y.

People are asking whether we can finally have gender equality and "more equitable and accountable workplaces." This can't happen until we address the real issues behind oppression. If influential women in Hollywood are now reading Naomi Klein, let them also be listening to Richard Wolff, who argues that the economic structure of most companies creates perfect conditions for discrimination. Complete power over whether a worker advances or is held back gives rise to abuse of power—period. Those seeking change should restructure their companies so that they are owned by the workers, to allow for equal say and equal pay, and accountability for everyone. Then see if it's easier to eliminate oppressive behaviors and to open the doors for gender parity and transparency. Behavior can't be changed simply by firing people.
Lisa Moulton
Redwood City, Calif.

BOOM OR BUST

In his article on Texas and the energy industry, Lawrence Wright mentions the lore that oil booms are acts of God, or are at least born from "luck and a willingness to take risks" ("The Glut Economy," January 1st). These myths obscure a deeper truth. For every dollar that a company earns drilling rigs in and shuttling pipes around the Permian Basin, the state and federal governments effectively add on another buck-fifty, for free, in subsidies. That ain't luck. Nor is it very risky, not when forty per cent of all new Texas oil fields are essentially guaranteed, via these subsidies, to be profitable. As Wright notes, low oil prices may help a little, by limiting further expansion of the industry. But to really smooth out the wide swings associated with oil and gas—and also lessen the effects of climate change—lawmakers need to pursue a gradual decline of oil and gas production and combustion in the state and, eventually, the nation.
Peter Erickson, Senior Scientist
Stockholm Environment Institute
Seattle, Wash.

Wright contends that fracking in Texas despoils communities and creates enduring environmental hazards, but he doesn't give a balanced view of its net effects. The vast majority of drilling and production in Texas occurs in sparsely populated rural areas. Loving County, in the Permian Basin, ranks sixth among the state's counties in crude-oil production and has a population of a hundred and thirteen. Wright suggests that methane emissions related to natural-gas production may make it no better than coal in terms of global warming. But there are many responsible operators who capture methane emissions, thereby preserving the tremendous advantage that natural-gas production has over coal. There is always a tension between industrial activity and environmental protection; the task is to find the proper balance.
Eb Luckel
Berkeley, Calif.

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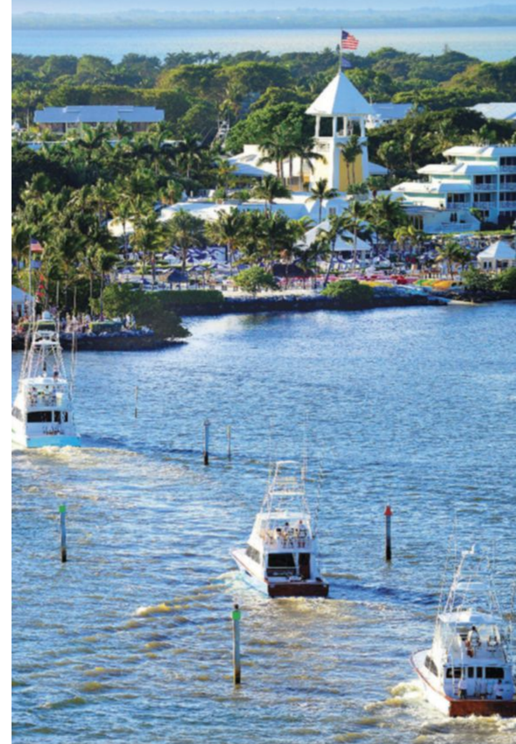

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In 1953, when Joseph Cornell saw a collage by the Spanish painter Juan Gris, titled "The Man at the Café," it inspired the most extensive series of the American sculptor's career. **"Birds of a Feather: Joseph Cornell's Homage to Juan Gris,"** at the Met, unites the Cubist masterpiece from 1914 with twelve of the shadow boxes that Cornell made in response to it, including "Untitled (Le Soir)," circa 1953-54. (It's pictured behind the scenes at the museum, above.) The exhibition is on view through April 15.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ADAM KREMER

MOVIES

NOW PLAYING

The Chair
This 1962 documentary, produced by Robert Drew and filmed by Richard Leacock and D. A. Pennebaker, offers high drama, complex characters, and vivid performances that match those of any fictional film. It focusses on a Chicago attorney, Donald Moore, and his efforts to get the death sentence of a convicted killer, Paul Crump, commuted, on the then novel ground that the prisoner had been rehabilitated. (Crump was a trusted counsellor to other inmates; even the prison warden had become his friend and supporter.) Three days before the scheduled execution, the New York lawyer Louis Nizer joins Moore on the case. The filmmakers, working with newly available lightweight equipment, capture the action with agility and concentration, but their method is not that of the self-effacing fly on the wall: the subjects are aware of the camera, and, far from censoring themselves, they expose their machinations and emotions with a self-aware sincerity and perform with a confessional and confrontational daring. Moore, in particular, is like a real-life Jimmy Stewart, with his folksy drollery giving way to grand—and grandly principled—oratorical bravado.—*Richard Brody (Film Forum, Jan. 29-30, and streaming.)*

The Commuter
The director Jaume Collet-Serra's unintentionally comedic action film is set mainly on an evening Metro-North train from Grand Central Terminal, where Mike McCauley (Liam Neeson), a financially strapped paterfamilias dragging himself back to Tarrytown, accepts a hundred thousand dollars from a mysterious stranger (Vera Farmiga) to find a passenger named Prynne who's carrying an important bag. Mike, an ex-cop, knows how to conduct the search, and he soon has another motive: his wife and son have been kidnapped and won't be released until the job is done. Mike fights his way through it, clobbering several passengers with his fists and another with a guitar, dangling out the window and beneath the carriage of the speeding train. He's caught in a vast surveillance network of corrupt officials and in the network of well-worn relationships that have developed over a decade of daily round trips. Neeson's performance is brisk and uninflected; his Mike is gaunt but unhaunted, a blank without shadows. The set pieces and the cliché dialogue seem piled on randomly: the story and the characters would be no less developed in half the time and the slapdash script places the suburban train line at a bunch of Manhattan stations where it doesn't actually go.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

Darkest Hour
How badly we need another Winston Churchill film is open to question. Nonetheless, Joe Wright's contribution to the genre is welcome, largely because of Gary Oldman in the leading role. He seems an unlikely choice, yet the lightness of his performance marks it out from other attempts; this Churchill, oddly quick on his feet, with a hasty huff and puff in his voice instead of a low, slow growl, suggests a man in a hurry to fight. None too soon, for we are in the late spring of 1940, with the German war machine in full cry and Britain adrift until Churchill, to the alarm of many contemporaries, takes charge. Wright has a curious weakness for the overhead shot, be it of the House of Commons or of a landscape cratered by bombs, and the musical score sounds too plush by half. But Oldman is braced by his supporting cast. Kristin Scott Thomas, as Clementine Churchill, is witty as well as stalwart; Neville Chamberlain, as played by Ronald Pickup, has never looked graver or more aghast. Best of all is Stephen Dillane, as Lord Halifax, whom Churchill called the Holy Fox: cadaverous, principled, desperate for peace, and wrong.—*Anthony Lane (In wide release.)*

Hostiles
In this drama, set in 1892, the director and writer Scott Cooper turns a classic Western setup into a Western-by-numbers. Christian Bale plays the grizzled Captain Joseph Blocker, the unwilling leader of a military convoy accompanying the aged and ailing Cheyenne chief Yellow Hawk (Wes Studi) and his family from a jail in a New Mexico fort to their Montana homeland. Blocker, a veteran of Wounded Knee, hates Native Americans but is ordered to protect Yellow Hawk, who fought there, too, against him. Early in the journey, the convoy picks up Rosalie Quaid (Rosamund Pike), a homesteader who survived a Comanche raid in which her husband and children were killed. En route, the men of the group, including Yellow Hawk, fight for their lives against a diverse set of enemies, whites and Native Americans alike. Cooper dramatizes the relentless kill-or-be-killed ethos of Western life and the severe mental and moral toll that it exacts from all who face it. Yet the bare script seems written by telegram, reducing the characters to pieces on a historical chessboard, and the portentous pace and lugubrious tone of Cooper's direction take the place of substance.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

The Insult
Ziad Doueiri's new film begins with a drainpipe and winds up with angry mobs and burning cars. The pipe is the cause of a brief exchange between two men, from different—or, as they see it, opposing—sides of the Lebanese divide. One is Tony Hanna (Adel Karam), a Christian who runs a garage, and the other is Yasser Salameh (Kamel El Basha), a Palestinian refugee who works on a construction crew. Each, having wounded the other's pride, finds it almost impossible to back down, despite mollifying advice from his wife, and, once lawyers get involved and the media learn of the dispute, the quarrel bursts out of control. Much of the story, written by Doueiri and Joelle Touma, is set in courtrooms, where we are schooled in the past—not only in the individual histories of the protagonists but in the sufferings endured by their respective communities. With all the weight of these matters, the movie often feels clunky and didactic, grimly bent on balancing the argument; fortunately, there are fighting performances—from Camille Salameh, as a mischievous attorney, and from El Basha, whose graven features tell a sorry tale. In Arabic.—*A.L. (Reviewed in our issue of 1/15/18.) (In limited release.)*

Lady Bird
As writer and director, Greta Gerwig infuses this comedic coming-of-age drama with verbal virtuosity, gestural idiosyncrasy, and emotional vitality. The loosely autobiographical tale is set mainly in Gerwig's home town of Sacramento, in the 2002-03 academic year, and centered on Christine McPherson (Saoirse Ronan), self-dubbed Lady Bird, a senior at a Catholic high school whose plan to escape to an Eastern college is threatened by her grades and her parents' finances. Lady Bird's father (Tracy Letts), with whom she shares a hearty complicity, is about to lose his job; her mother (Laurie Metcalf), with whom she argues bitterly, is a nurse who works double shifts to keep the family afloat. Literary and willful, Lady Bird joins the school's musical-theatre troupe, with results ranging from the antic to the romantic. Afflicted with real-estate envy, she infiltrates the world of rich kids and risks losing true friends; she dates a Francophile rocker (Timothée Chalamet) whose walk on the wild side is comfortably financed. Meanwhile, her relationship with her mother deteriorates. Deftly juggling characters and story lines, Gerwig provokes aching laughs with gentle touches (Metcalf's etched diction nearly steals the show), but her direction remains self-effacing until late in the film, when several sharply conceived scenes suggest reserves of observational and symbolic energy.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

Outrage
Ida Lupino's profoundly insightful and far-reaching drama, from 1950, is about a small-town woman named Ann Walton (Mala Powers) who, on her way home one night from a local factory, is raped. Though her family embraces her compassionately, neighbors whisper as if to shame her. Ann's fiancé, Jim (Robert Clarke), doesn't blame her at all and wants to marry her at once—but he also wants to pretend that nothing has changed, and he has little patience for Ann's emotional agony. Lupino turns prudish Hollywood conventions into a crucial part of the story: just as the word "rape" is never spoken in the movie, Ann is prevented from talking about her experience, and, spurred by the torment of her enforced silence and the trauma that shatters her sense of identity, she runs away from home. Lupino's drama blends Ann's story with an incisive view of the many societal failures that contribute to the crime—including the unwillingness of the legal system to face the prevalence of rape. Above all, Lupino depicts a culture of leers and wolf whistles and domineering boyfriends, and reveals the widespread and unquestioned aggression that women face in ostensibly consensual courtship and that's ultimately inseparable from the violence that Ann endures.—*R.B. (MOMA, Jan. 29 and Jan. 31, and streaming.)*

Phantom Thread
The role taken by Daniel Day-Lewis in Paul Thomas Anderson's strange and sumptuous film—the actor's final screen appearance, he has claimed—is, in every sense, tailor-made. He plays Reynolds Woodcock, a fashion designer of the nineteen-fifties, who, in the London house that he shares with his sister Cyril (Lesley Manville), creates immaculate dresses for a selection of wealthy women. As devout as a priest in his calling, he seems to resent any intrusion upon his professional peace, yet he invites a waitress named Alma (Vicky Krieps) into his life as a model, and, eventually, as far more. The result is a pact as perilous and as claustrophobic as that between the guru and his disciple in Anderson's "The Master" (2012), with the camera closing in remorselessly on stricken or adoring faces, and a strong tincture of sickness in the romantic atmosphere. All three leading players respond with rigor to this Hitchcockian intensity, and Reynolds—fussy, cold, and agonized—is a worthy addition to Day-Lewis's gallery of obsessives. The costumes, every bit as alluring as you would expect, are by Mark Bridges, and Jonny Greenwood contributes a swooning score.—*A.L. (1/8/18) (In wide release.)*

The Post
The new film from Steven Spielberg, like his "Lincoln" (2012), is a solidly rousing act of historical

re-creation. Meryl Streep plays Katharine Graham, the owner of the Washington *Post*, with Tom Hanks as its swaggering editor, Ben Bradlee. Most of the story is set in the early nineteen-seventies, at a vertiginous time for the nation and its capital. The so-called Pentagon Papers, obtained by Daniel Ellsberg (Matthew Rhys), unveil a reluctance, on the part of multiple Administrations, to inform the public about the true state of the Vietnam War. When the *Times* is prevented, by legal injunction, from publishing the Papers, the *Post* gets its chance to step in and continue the job; what will Graham do, given that further revelations will rock the very establishment of which she is such a doyenne? The movie is a little too confident of its own righteous stand (listen to the strenuous John Williams score), but the battle between hesitation and decisiveness is beautifully managed by Streep. With Bob Odenkirk, Tracy Letts, Sarah Paulson, Bradley Whitford, and a lethally smiling Bruce Greenwood, as Robert McNamara, and delicious period costumes, starting with Bradlee's striped shirts, by Ann Roth.—*A.L. (12/18 & 25/17) (In wide release.)*

The Shape of Water
When it comes to many-layered tales, Guillermo del Toro is no novice. But even the fantastic beasts of "Pan's Labyrinth" (2006), stalking against the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War, could not prepare us for the wild jostling of genres in his latest film, which is set at the peak of the Cold War. Sally Hawkins plays Elisa, who is lovelorn, unabashed, and mute. She lives alone, next door to a commercial artist named Giles (Richard Jenkins), and works as a cleaner, alongside her friend Zelda (Octavia Spencer), at a scientific facility. There she finds an unlikely beau: a scaly creature (Doug Jones) who has been brought from the Amazon to Baltimore, where, it is hoped, he may be of use against the Russians. Elisa teaches him sign language and hatches plans to spring him from captivity. Given the presence of musical numbers, dance sequences, and foreign spies, plus a surprising frankness about sexual bliss, you would expect the movie to fall apart, yet it all hangs together, held tight by the urgency of the characters' feelings and the easy force of the magic. With Michael Stuhlbarg, as a sympathetic soul in a white coat, and Michael Shannon, as the candy-crunching villain.—*A.L. (12/11/17) (In wide release.)*

Soleil Ô (Oh, Sun)
The Mauritanian director Med Hondo's bitterly insightful, artistically freewheeling 1970 film begins with an antic sketch of the European colonization that subjugated and impoverished Africans. It depicts, with sardonic fury, the adventures of an unnamed young African man (Robert Liensol) who arrives in Paris and, with naïve optimism, seeks his fortune among his colonizers. He considers himself at home in France, but soon discovers the extent of his exclusion from French society. Facing blatant discrimination in employment and housing, he and other African workers organize a union, to little effect; seeking help from African officials in Paris, he finds them utterly corrupt and unsympathetic. Making friends among France's white population, he finds their empathy condescending and oblivious, and his sense of isolation and persecution raises his identity crisis to a frenzied pitch. Hondo offers a stylistic collage to reflect the protagonist's extremes of experience, from docudrama and musical numbers to slapstick absurdity, from dream sequences and bourgeois melodrama to political analyses. Hondo's passionate, wide-ranging voice-over commentary, addressing the hero in the second person, blends confession and observation, aspiration and despair, societal and personal conflicts. In French.—*R.B. (MOMA, Jan. 30.)*

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ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

MOMA PS1
"Carolee Schneemann: Kinetic Painting"
In one of the New York artist's iconic performances, "Interior Scroll," from the nineteen-seventies, she unfurled a text from her vagina indicting the sexism of her experimental filmmaking milieu. Around the same time, in a mesmerizing sendup of Action painting's macho posturing, Schneemann swung nude, from a harness, marking the walls with a crayon. But the artist's career adds up to much more than an extended riposte to the insults of the male-dominated avant-garde, which this survey makes clear. Moving from her dynamic abstract paintings of the fifties to her Fluxus-inspired events and Super 8 films of the sixties and on to recent installations, schematic drawings, and multichannel videos, the show reveals Schneemann's quest for a feminist visual vocabulary to be the unifying force of these disparate endeavors. In her ongoing series of often hilarious lecture-performances, she indexes ancient symbols of female sexuality; in grids of color photographs, from the eighties, she documents her unorthodox relationship with her cat; "More Wrong Things," from 2000, is a foreboding tangle of cables and monitors displaying disaster footage and her own archival performance clips. With this decades-overdue retrospective, Schneemann is shown to be a crucial forebear to younger performance-based artists, and a groundbreaking Conceptualist attuned to the tactile properties of every medium she takes on. *Through March 11.*

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Carla Klein
The subject of the Dutch painter's new show is greenhouses, but her imagery evokes haunted houses as well. Strict gray lines delineate transparent architecture with illusionistic precision. The tropical plants—a dashed-off bromeliad, a lushly rendered fern—serve as a reminder that paint is itself a kind of haunting. Klein has long worked from photographs, incorporating accidents of the darkroom into her elegant paintings. You may find yourself asking if the ectoplasmic irregularities here originated with smudges on negatives or with the dirty

"Three Penny Opera," by the New Jersey-born phenom Jamian Juliano-Villani, is among the new paintings in her show "Ten Pound Hand," at the JTT gallery.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JTT, NY

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glass walls that they document. But such questions don't break the spell of these entrancing scenes, in which a coiled heating unit assumes the otherworldly aspect of a flying saucer. *Through Feb. 15. (Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144.)*

Dan Perjovschi
The Romanian artist's wall-filling broadside collages serve up a shot of wisdom with a chaser of cynicism. Recent, mostly distressing headlines are adorned in heavy black ink with simple cartoons and on-the-nose bits of wordplay, like "Trump l'Oeil" or "This is a War(ning)." What seems at first to allude to our noisy news cycle is in fact the identification of a more basic problem: that the dilemmas of information overload and fake news are neither new nor likely to change. The whip-smart juxtaposition of paid political ads, tendentious op-eds, and misleadingly truncated stories unfolds into a subtle view of the inherently intractable complexity of politics. The point is underscored in "The Dark Parliament," a series of postcards in which Perjovschi has blacked out Bucharest's hulking parliamentary palace, a gargantuan folly commissioned by former Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu. *Through Feb. 10. (Lombard, 518 W. 19th St. 212-967-8040.)*

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Katherine Bernhardt
Slices of watermelon, Nike swooshes, bug-eyed Garfields, rolls of toilet paper, and Coke bottles, outlined in spray paint and filled in with drippy areas of color—no one could accuse this talented painter of holding back. Bernhardt renders her boisterous images with pictographic consistency and appealingly messy abandon. "Laundry Day" is the monochromatic outlier: it shows a Day-Glo Pink Panther, with tube socks floating around him, disappearing into a background of muddied fuchsia. As funny, and even festive, as the paintings are, look with care and you'll notice their critical streak. In "Dole + Darth Vader," bananas hover around the "Star Wars" villain—part stormtrooper commander, part Carmen Miranda. *Through Feb. 11. (Canada, 333 Broome St. 212-925-4631.)*

Arcmanoro Niles
A supernaturally bright cadmium orange dominates the portraits in the twenty-eight-year-old painter's show, titled "Revisiting the Area." The area is the neighborhood in Washington, D.C., where Niles grew up. In his dreamy compositions, he exalts his subjects with hair styles and beards dense with glitter, while populating their surroundings with spectral figures and menacing creatures. In "A Safe Place Since Birth (Sisters)," two middle-aged women—one appears serious, the other beatific—stand in front of a brick wall. At their feet, a ghoulish baby wields a shiv—the predominant mood is a far cry from safe. A similar demon attends the five young men portrayed hanging out on the stoop of a housing complex in "Where We Played as Kids." That figure and the fiery palette lend a jittery edge to a scene that might have otherwise felt nostalgic. *Through Feb. 25. (Uffner, 170 Suffolk St. 212-274-0064.)*

"Alan Shields Project"
Seven contemporary artists pay irresistible homage to the color-besotted genius Alan Shields, who died in 2005 at the age of sixty-one—and who, perhaps inevitably, steals the show. His "My Roller Derby Queen," a cheesecloth-on-cardboard semi-abstraction marked with a grid of red and green velcro squares, confounds any attempt to distinguish color from texture, or substance from form. But so do the lush, fluorescent brushstrokes of Lisa Alvarado's acrylic-on-wood piece "Traditional Object 11." The workaday raw canvas of B. Wurtz's "Untitled (Three Red Circles Button Painting)" wears its functional overtones like a badge of honor. Naotaka Hiro's unstretched and untitled painting of a black jellyfish boasts a border of grommets and twine. The strongest statement of emotional investment in materials may be Channing Hansen's "3-Manifold," a multicolored skein of hand-spun and hand-dyed yarn: the alpacas that provided the wool are identified by name in the show's checklist. *Through Feb. 17. (Van Doren Waxter, 195 Chrystie St. 212-982-1930.)*

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

John Newman
The earliest piece in this compact, eye-catching survey of the veteran New York sculptor's four-decade career, which was curated by Dan Nadel, is also the simplest. "Accelerated Grimace," from 1982, is a wall-mounted box, inspired by Japanese armor, which is loosely cruciform in shape and made of welded panels of black and silver steel. In the late nineties, Newman began making intricate tabletop agglomerations of material and chromatic incongruity, many of them with loosely anthropomorphic associations. In "Many Entries," from 2016, a jute pompadour swoops over two spotted pearlescent ripples, making an impression at once singular and unresolvable. The most recent piece here, "The Foggy Lens Needs Adjustment," made last year, is a blown-acrylic teardrop surrounded by a candy-striped swirl, supported by a rusted steel plait that winds and curves its way down to a black obsidian sphere. Sixty-five new drawings in black gesso and white pencil chart further possibilities of loops, bulges, and curves. *Through Feb. 11. (Safe Gallery, 1004 Metropolitan Ave., Bushwick. .safegallery.biz.)*

DANCE

New York City Ballet
The company, which recently lost its artistic director in the midst of allegations of misconduct and abuse of power (the investigation is ongoing), gets down to business with two programs of ballets by George Balanchine and one of new and recent works. The first Balanchine program includes a certifiable masterpiece, "Apollo," from 1928, in which a young god is born and learns the ropes from three muses, eventually choosing Terpsichore, Muse of Dance. (A limpid pas de deux follows.) The ballet is considered by many to be Balanchine's manifesto, a declaration of his less-is-more modernist aesthetic. In the "21st Century Choreographers" program, three of the works are by graduates of the company school, and two are by current dancers. "Year of the Rabbit," by Justin Peck, is the most thrilling: an exciting romp set to music by Sufjan Stevens. "Spectral Evidence," an impressionistic piece inspired by the Salem witch trials, was created for the company in 2013 by the French choreographer Angelin Preljocaj. • Jan. 23 at 7:30, Jan. 27 at 2, and Jan. 28 at 3: "Apollo," "Mozartiana," and "Cortège Hongrois." • Jan. 24 and Jan. 30 at 7:30 and Jan. 27 at 8: "Divertimento No. 15," "The Four Temperaments," and "Chaconne." • Jan. 25 at 7:30 and Jan. 26 at 8: "The Wind Still Brings," "Composer's Holiday," "Spectral Evidence," and "Year of the Rabbit." *(David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through March 4.)*

Compagnie Accrorap / "The Roots"
Hip-hop has gone through many transformations since coming onto the scene, in the seventies, and its reach is now global. This ensemble, founded by the French-Algerian dancer and choreographer Kader Attou, is based outside Paris. Its aesthetic is pared down, cinematic, poetic. The dancers, who combine popping and locking, floor work, acrobatics, and theatrical flourishes, are fluid and highly skilled. Attou's evening-length piece "The Roots" merges electronica with classical music, pure dance with moody scenes that play out like pantomime. *(Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 23-28.)*

"COIL"
After six years of wandering while waiting on renovations, Performance Space 122 returns to its East Village home, for what's been announced as the final installment of its long-running sampler. The dance selections conclude with "Petra," in which Dean Moss riffs on Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film "The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant," recasting some roles with immigrant performers. In "he his own mythical beast," the ever-elegant David Thomson provides his take on the complexities of race, identity, and gender, throwing together allusions to Hitchcock, Claudia Rankine, and Trisha Brown (in whose company Thomson danced), and featuring a slippery character inspired by the Hottentot Venus. *(P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Jan. 24-Feb. 4.)*

Kei Takei / Moving Earth Orient Sphere
From the late nineteen-sixties through the eighties, the Japanese choreographer Kei Takei was a significant force in New York dance, regularly presenting installments of spare, repetitive rituals—regarded by some as mystical and by others as tedious—in an ongoing work called "Light." For the first time in seventeen years, in a show presented by Lumberyard, she and her company return, bringing the forty-fourth part of "Light," "Bamboo Forest" (2015), which considers the infrequent blossoming of bamboo flowers as a metaphor for cycles of life and death. The show also includes a 1974 solo from the eighth part of "Light," in which Takei ties herself into knots. *(New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Jan. 25-27.)*

"Julius Eastman and Dance"
The fiercely original work of the avant-garde composer Julius Eastman, long neglected but currently undergoing a rediscovery, extended into the world of dance. As part of the Kitchen's retrospective survey "Julius Eastman: That Which Is Fundamental," Molissa Fenley revives her "Geologic Moments," a 1986 dance of accelerating minimalism, with a remastered recording of its Eastman score. Additionally, the evening includes rare footage of Eastman's collaborations—with Andy DeGroat, among others—and even some of his own choreography. *(512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Jan. 30.)*

CLASSICAL MUSIC

The classical legacy of Frank Zappa is celebrated in a pair of concerts at Roulette, in Brooklyn.

Repo Man

Frank Zappa swept pop, jazz, and modernist music into a raucous whole.

The now common commingling of rock, jazz, and classical streams in American composition was pioneered by Frank Zappa (1940-1993). A virtuoso guitarist, an indefatigable bandleader, a tenacious businessman, and a maddening iconoclast, his prolific output ranges from hit pop singles ("Valley Girl") to orchestral works of formidable modernist complexity ("Bob in Dacron"), with trippy jazz-rock instrumentals ("Peaches En Regalia") and much else in between. A Los Angeles icon, his work is also well appreciated in Europe; his ghost doesn't quite haunt New York, though, which makes a pair of Zappa-themed concerts at Brooklyn's Roulette (Jan. 25-26), offered by the fantastic young musicians of Switzerland's Lucerne Festival Alumni, seem all the more necessary.

Zappa's lack of posthumous presence here may be regrettable, but the composer's music and personality contain problematic elements that could give anyone pause. While Zappa's protean catalogue can be idealized as an awesome, unitary composition, individual works, for all their raucous energy, can pale in comparison to those of the modernist icons he revered. His music lacks Varèse's pitiless severity, Boulez's fine-grained intellectualism, Stravinsky's happy embrace of aesthetic discipline—or, on purely American terms, the joyful, uncompromising originality of a fellow Southern Californian, Harry Partch. ("For Your Eyes Only," a piece by John Zorn that's included in the concerts, reveals a composer with a more refined ear for instrumental color, a keener grasp of harmony, and a more convincing sense of narrative.) And, while one can admire Zappa as a vibrant satirist of American life and as a tribune in the fight against censorship, such deliberate provocations as the singles "Bobby Brown Goes Down" (with its cascade of homophobic lyrics) and "Jewish Princess" would not advisably be released today.

But at the Lucerne concerts, featuring the conductor Matthias Pintscher and the vocalist Della Miles, all is forgiven. The selected works—including "Dupree's Paradise" and "G-Spot Tornado," which gleefully mash up pop and modernist elements—represent the classical Zappa at his best. And the most recent pieces, by the gifted Olga Neuwirth ("Eleanor," which uses texts by Martin Luther King, Jr., and June Jordan) and Tyshawn Sorey ("Sentimental Shards," a nod to both John Adams and Duke Ellington) give a contemporary political focus to Zappa's anti-establishment rage.

—*Russell Platt*

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera
In David McVicar's double bill of **"Cavalleria Rusticana"** and **"Pagliacci,"** the operas take place forty years apart in the same town square in provincial Italy; while the clothes and social norms change, the emotions swirling around love and its loss remain the same. Roberto Alagna, a star tenor with a pleasingly tangy voice, sings forcefully and isn't afraid to indulge in some good old-fashioned onstage sobbing, a hallmark of verismo style. The other singers—Ekaterina Semenchuk, George Gagnidze, and Aleksandra Kurzak—bring high-stakes immediacy to their roles; Nicola Luisotti conducts with warmth and panache. *Jan. 25 at 8 and Jan. 29 at 7:30.* • **Also playing:** Bartlett Sher's picturesque rendition of Donizetti's feather-light comedy **"L'Elisir d'Amore"**—built with his usual collaborators, the set designer Michael Yeargan and the Tony Award–winning costume designer Catherine Zuber—returns with a cast of full-bodied lyric voices, including Matthew Polenzani, Ildebrando D'Arcangelo, and Pretty Yende; Domingo Hindoyan. *Jan. 24 at 7:30 and Jan. 27 at 8.* • The chief virtue of McVicar's production of Verdi's **"Il Trovatore"** is its pacing: the revolving stage requires no breaks to change the sets, meaning that it hurls the characters toward their grisly fate with just enough time for a string of explosive arias and, of course, the opera's famous Anvil Chorus. The show stars Maria Agresta, Yonghoon Lee, Quinn Kelsey, and Anita Rachvelishvili; Marco Armiliato. *Jan. 26 at 8 and Jan. 30 at 7:30.* • McVicar's new staging of **"Tosca"** feels like a course correction: less risky than Luc Bondy's controversial 2009 production, but more successful. Old-fashioned at heart, it offers a sumptuous re-creation of the opera's Roman settings. But the slanted stage skews the perspective, creating an effective backdrop for McVicar's detailed telling of a story about sanctimony and sexual blackmail in a nineteenth-century papal state. Sonya Yoncheva and Vittorio Grigolo make smashing role débuts; Emmanuel Villaume conducts with attentive care. *Jan. 27 at 1. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)*

New York City Opera: "Cruzar la Cara de la Luna"
When Houston Grand Opera commissioned José (Pepe) Martínez to write a "mariachi opera," in 2010, it seemed like an experiment in multiculturalism intended to engage the city's large Hispanic population. But now the opera's subject matter—a Mexican-American family grappling with a sense of identity that straddles the border—is at the center of a highly charged political conversation that seems to intensify with each week's headlines. Leonard Foglia directs City Opera's revival of the work, and David Hanlon conducts the uplifting yet nostalgic score. *Jan. 25 and Jan. 26 at 7:30, Jan. 27 at 2, and Jan. 28 at 4. (Rose Theatre, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)*

David Lang: "The Whisper Opera"
One of the most effective of Lang's sui-generis dramatic works—poised intriguingly between opera, cantata, and chamber-ensemble piece—is revived at N.Y.U.'s Skirball Center, in a staging that will conjure pleasant memories of the piece's Mostly Mozart Festival première. The sopranos Tony Arnold and Alice Teyssier join members of the International Contemporary Ensemble. *Jan. 24-Feb. 3. (566 LaGuardia Pl. For tickets and showtimes, visit nyuskirball.org.)*

Fresh Squeezed Opera: "Here Be Sirens"
In this revival of Kate Soper's cheeky postmodern opera, three sirens loll about their island while they

ILLUSTRATION BY JAMIE COE

wait for sailors who can be lured to watery graves. One of the trio—quite apathetic about her status as a dangerously enchanting creature of Greek myth—spends her downtime reading centuries of scholarship about her species (including Freud), in an attempt to escape her circumstances; Amber Treadway directs. *Jan. 28 at 4. (National Sawdust, 80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org.)*

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic
Two artists who have gradually built strong careers are featured in the orchestra's concerts this week. One is Stéphane Denève, the stylish principal guest conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra, who seems poised to replace Charles Dutoit as a leading purveyor of Franco-Russian repertory. The other is the technically assured violinist James Ehnes, whose long-standing esteem in the profession has only grown with time. The program is all Prokofiev: the First Violin Concerto, the "Love for Three Oranges" Suite, and a selection of excerpts from the ballet "Romeo and Juliet." *Jan. 25 at 7:30, Jan. 26 at 2, and Jan. 27 at 8. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.)*

Cleveland Orchestra
The greatness of the Cleveland Orchestra lies in its combination of an Austro-Hungarian sensibility—reinforced by its music directors George Szell, Christoph von Dohnányi, and, now, Franz Welser-Möst—with the machine-tooled solidarity of the Rust Belt's golden age. Welser-Möst makes a stand for Austrian culture in his two concerts with the group at Carnegie Hall. The first offers a recent work by the prominent young composer Johannes Maria Staud ("Stromab," inspired by a story about a canoe trip down the Danube) with Mahler's Ninth Symphony; the second is devoted to Haydn's glorious final oratorio, "The Seasons," featuring the vocalists Golda Schultz, Maximilian Schmitt, and Christian Van Horn, and also the impressive Cleveland Orchestra Chorus. *Jan. 23-24 at 8. (212-247-7800.)*

Concerto Köln
The esteemed German period-instrument band—with one of its concertmasters, Shunske Sato, as violin soloist—offers a concert in the Italian style at Alice Tully Hall this week, a program boasting Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons," the Concerto for Strings in G Minor (RV 156), and the "Sinfonia al Santo Sepolcro," in addition to pieces by Avison and Dell'Abaco. *Jan. 24 at 7:30. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-247-7800.)*

Voices of Ascension
Dennis Keene's outstanding choir is long in residence at the Church of the Ascension, an elegant neo-Gothic pile designed by the architects Richard Upjohn and Stanford White. This week, Keene and his forces—along with the actors F. Murray Abraham and Angelia Impellizzeria—present two masterworks of Les Six, Poulenc's "Gloria" and Honegger's "King David." *Jan. 25 at 8. (Fifth Ave. at 10th St. voicesofascension.org.)*

Juilliard Focus! 2018
This year, the Juilliard School's annual, immersive contemporary-music festival highlights new and recent music from China: a timely emphasis, since the institution plans to open a new campus in Tianjin in 2019. The program, with the Juilliard Orchestra conducted by the highly regarded Chen Lin, includes Qigang Chen's colorful, infectious "Luan Tan," Guo Wenjing's Concerto for Erhu and Orchestra ("Wild Grass," with Wei-Yang Andy Lin playing the two-stringed Chinese fiddle), and Zhu Jian-Er's elemental Symphony No. 5. *Jan. 26 at 7:30. (Alice Tully Hall. juilliard.edu.)*

RECITALS

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center
This week, the Society celebrates music of both the present and the past, in separate concerts. The first event, at the Rose Studio, brings the admired soprano Tony Arnold together with the Orion String Quartet, in a program of music by David Dzubay, Sebastian Currier (the world première of "Études and Lullabies"), and the eminent Australian composer Brett Dean. The second, a mainstage concert at Alice Tully Hall, focusses on works by two great friends, Brahms and Dvořák—the former's Piano Trio No. 2 in C Minor and the latter's Piano Quintet—with a selection of their gloriously ersatz folk dances as well. *Jan. 25 at 6:30 and 9; Jan. 28 at 5 and Jan. 30 at 7:30. (212-875-5788.)*

Julius Eastman: "That Which Is Fundamental"
The Kitchen hosts a comprehensively researched series of multidisciplinary events celebrating Eastman, a brilliantly mercurial gay black composer and provocateur, who captivated international audiences in the nineteen-seventies and eighties but died marginalized and homeless in 1990. Among the highlights are a concert of the composer's ecstatic early minimalist pieces, performed by the S.E.M. Ensemble (of which Eastman was a founding member); a program at the Knockdown Center, in Maspeth, Queens, featuring intense works for multiple guitars or pianos; a program highlighting Eastman's collaborations with the choreographers Andy de Groat and Molissa Fenley; and a closing concert that includes Eastman's rarely encountered "The Holy Presence of Joan D'Arc," for ten cellos. *Jan. 25, Jan. 27-28, Jan. 30, and Feb. 3 at 8. (512 W. 19th St. thekitchen.org.)*

Marilyn Horne Song Celebration
To mark the singular mezzo-soprano's final season leading her recital series, "The Song Continues," at Carnegie Hall, several outstanding young singers who have participated in the program over the years—including Nicole Cabell, Susanna Phillips, Isabel Leonard, and Russell Thomas—return for a final concert. The program includes a mélange of well-known songs by Tosti, Ives, Bernstein, Duparc, and Richard Strauss. *Jan. 28 at 3. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800.)*

Stephen Hough
The pianist, an artist of elegant surfaces and probing depth, returns to Carnegie Hall with a program that deliberately examines the differences, and the commonalities, between the German and French compositional schools, pairing Debussy's "Images" (complete) with Schumann's Fantasy in C Major and Beethoven's Sonata No. 23, "Appassionata." *Jan. 30 at 8. (212-247-7800.)*

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

America Is Hard to See
Life Jacket Theatre Company stages this interview-based play with music, about a community for sex offenders in rural Florida called Miracle Village. *(HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 866-811-4111. Previews begin Jan. 30.)*

Balls
One Year Lease mounts this physical-theatre rendition of the 1973 tennis match between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs, also the subject of the film "Battle of the Sexes." *(59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Opens Jan. 24.)*

Cardinal
Anna Chlumsky and Stephen Park star in Greg Pierce's play, directed by Kate Whoriskey, about a woman trying to reinvigorate her small Rust Belt town who clashes with an interloping entrepreneur. *(Second Stage, 305 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. In previews. Opens Jan. 30.)*

Draw the Circle
Mashuq Mushtaq Deen performs this solo piece about his gender transition, told from the point of view of his family and friends; it plays in repertory with "Until the Flood." *(Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-627-2556. In previews.)*

Edward Albee's At Home at the Zoo: Homelife & The Zoo Story
Lila Neugebauer directs Albee's diptych of one-act plays: his 1959 classic "The Zoo Story" and its 2004 companion piece, "Homelife." *(Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. Previews begin Jan. 30.)*

Fill Fill Fill Fill Fill Fill Fill
In Steph Del Rosso's play, directed by Marina McClure and featuring the Bats, a woman recovering from a breakup begins to feel holes throughout her body. *(Flea, 20 Thomas St. 212-226-0051. In previews.)*

Fire and Air
Terrence McNally's new play, directed by John Doyle, traces the relationship between the Russian ballet impresario Sergei Diaghilev (Douglas Hodge) and his lover and star dancer, Vaslav Nijinsky (James Cusati-Moyer). *(Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111. In previews.)*

Hangmen
In this dark comedy by Martin McDonagh ("Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri"), the second-best hangman in England (Mark Addy) reacts to the news that capital punishment has been abolished. *(Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111. In previews.)*

He Brought Her Heart Back in a Box
Theatre for a New Audience presents a new play by Adrienne Kennedy ("Funnyhouse of a Negro"), which explores segregation through parallel monologues set in 1941 in Georgia and New York City. *(Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111. In previews. Opens Jan. 30.)*

In the Body of the World
Eve Ensler ("The Vagina Monologues") wrote and performs this piece about her experience receiving a life-threatening diagnosis while working in the

Congo; Diane Paulus directs, for Manhattan Theatre Club. *(City Center Stage I, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. In previews.)*

Jerry Springer—The Opera
Richard Thomas ("Anna Nicole") and Stewart Lee wrote this musical ode to the talk-show host, staged at London's National Theatre in 2003. John Rando directs the New Group's production, featuring Terrence Mann and Will Swenson. *(Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. In previews.)*

Kings
Thomas Kail directs a new comedy by Sarah Burgess ("Dry Powder"), about a Washington lobbyist (Gillian Jacobs) trying to manipulate a neophyte congresswoman (Eisa Davis). *(Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Previews begin Jan. 30.)*

[Porto]
WP Theatre presents Kate Benson's play, first performed at the Bushwick Starr, in which a woman meets a stranger at a bar in gentrified Brooklyn. *(McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 866-811-4111. Previews begin Jan. 28.)*

NOW PLAYING

Ballyturk
Two nameless men inhabit a Plato's cave for hoarders, a windowless room whose cupboards disgorge shoes, biscuits, and bouncy balls. To order their days, they imagine a town, Ballyturk, and spin out stories about its inhabitants. The writer and director Enda Walsh's latest play is a word-drunk, sand-starved "Happy Days," a manic "Waiting for Godot" in which Godot might actually show up. The piece revisits Walsh's usual preoccupations: ritual, repetition, and the work of stories to make sense of a senseless world. And it provides splendid roles for actors: Tadhg Murphy and Mikel Murfi as the captives, and Olwen Fouéré as a mysterious interloper, all of them glorious. But, as a mystifying allegory for the human condition, it is as beautiful and profoundly irritating as a field of poison ivy, a place of rich theatrics and cheap metaphysics. *(St. Ann's Warehouse, 45 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. Through Jan. 28.)*

Cute Activist
In Milo Cramer's affectionate, scattershot satire, a bunch of city dwellers are trying to do the right thing. Or maybe they're just doing the easy thing. They're almost certainly doing something. Bouncily directed by Morgan Green, the play imagines a Disneyfied space of rising rents, awkward Tinder dates, and fifty-dollar green salads—the kind of place where a guy (Ronald Peet) and a girl (Madeline Wise) can't quite fall in love. "Romance falls outside my mission statement," she says. The play's focus is often fuzzy, its bite blunted. (There are several musical interludes with puppets, and a wicked turn by David Greenspan as the vampiric Landlorde.) Cramer and Green aim at broad targets, and they hit more than a few. "Cute Activist" is at its best exploring the contortions of youth and idealism, and the growing worry that principles may not be your pals. *(The Bushwick Starr, 207 Starr St., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111.)*

Anna Chlumsky ("Veep") comes to Off Broadway in Greg Pierce's "Cardinal," at Second Stage, as a Rust Belt woman whose bright idea to reinvigorate her town—by literally painting it red—is co-opted by an entrepreneur.

ILLUSTRATION BY CARI VANDER YACHT

Hindle Wakes
The Mint's production of Stanley Houghton's play, a smash at its 1912 début, in London, is permeated by brass. Though the manufacture of cotton is the source of the great wealth of the Lancashire industrialist Jeffcote (the formidable Jonathan Hogan), he refers to his riches with this slang term for "money," in dialogue that makes charming use of the local dialect. The alloy is suggested in the ornate interior arches of Charles Morgan's set; its golden glow informs Christian DeAngelis's lighting; and, most tellingly, it's possessed by Fanny (Rebecca Noelle Brinkley), the working-class young woman at the center of the action. She represents the burgeoning feminism of pre-women's-suffrage England, and her dealings with those around her reverberate with today's #MeToo headlines. The director, Gus Kaikkonen, sees the rebellious glint in Houghton's script, but he might have gone a bit further in leavening some of its melodrama. *(Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)*

The Undertaking
The documentary troupe the Civilians, which has spun theatrical nonfiction from such subjects as the Atlantic Yards and the porn industry, takes on "the big one": death. But Steve Cosson's piece is far from grand, limiting its scale to two actors and eighty minutes. Cosson (played by Dan Domingues) is interviewing Lydia (Aysan Celik), a South American artist who once took ayahuasca—did she glimpse the great beyond?—but the conversation turns wildly discursive, and the pair attempts to visit the land of the dead with the help of cowhide rugs and an umbrella. Occasionally, the action cuts to reënacted interviews with a crime-scene cleaner, an embalming-school dropout, and survivors of near-death experiences, as scraps of audio leak in like apparitions. The piece's true subject, more than mortality, is unlocking the unconscious, whether through hallucinogens, a skiing accident, or the art of conversation. *(59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)*

Until the Flood
A few months after Michael Brown was shot by the policeman Darren Wilson, in Ferguson, Missouri, the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis commissioned Dael Orlandersmith to write a piece about the event. She interviewed local people, but the resulting solo show doesn't quite follow the Anna Deavere Smith formula. Instead of performing word-perfect transcripts, Orlandersmith ("Yellowman," "Forever") created composite characters. Under Neel Keller's direction, she toggles from, say, a middle-aged father who wants Ferguson to be "clean, pure, white" to a teen-ager who is terrified he'll be killed before he can go to college, or to a barber who is schooling a pair of naïve young women. Orlandersmith need only put on a jacket or a scarf to adopt a new personality, but in the end it's her own voice—by turns compassionate, frustrated, anguished and empathetic—that comes through. *(Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-627-2556.)*

ALSO NOTABLE

The Band's Visit Ethel Barrymore. • **Bright Colors and Bold Patterns** SoHo Playhouse. • **The Children** Samuel J. Friedman. • **Cruel Intentions** Le Poisson Rouge. • **Disco Pigs** Irish Repertory. • **Farinelli and the King** Belasco. • **Hello, Dolly!** Shubert. • **John Lithgow: Stories by Heart** American Airlines Theatre. • **Latin History for Morons** Studio 54. • **Mankind** Playwrights Horizons. • **Miles for Mary** Playwrights Horizons. • **Once on This Island** Circle in the Square. • **The Parisian Woman** Hudson. • **SpongeBob SquarePants** Palace. • **Springsteen on Broadway** Walter Kerr.

NIGHT LIFE

Elsewhere, which recently opened on Johnson Ave., enlivens Brooklyn's scattered live-music landscape.

ILLUSTRATION BY KLAUS KREMMERZ

Breaking Ground

How a show-promotion team went from filling venues to building one.

Jake Rosenthal is considering making postcard-size maps of Elsewhere, a labyrinthine new two-floor venue on the border of Williamsburg and Bushwick; it takes a few rounds of circling before the space reveals all its sections, pathways, and staircases. Since it opened, last Halloween, Elsewhere has drawn fans from all over the area for deep-house raves, cozy rock shows, and anything else that Rosenthal and his partners can dream up. The space is an experiment in the city's ever-changing night-life economy: it's one of the few venues that's independently owned and operated, and designed entirely by show bookers.

Rosenthal, thirty-one, and Rami Haykal, thirty, began throwing small concerts and parties as Popgun in 2008, scouting rising talent from blogs and MySpace pages, often bringing bands to the city for their first New York shows. The duo found a home base in Glasslands Gallery, a ramshackle venue on the Williamsburg waterfront, but when the space closed, in 2014, they were already imagining building their own live-music headquarters. Though they had little instruction in the way of contracts and permits, they scoured Craigslist for a footprint large enough for what they pictured. After connecting with a landlord and developer, they settled on a former furniture-assembly factory, and, in 2015, signed a lease.

Mistakes abounded. "We were running Popgun the whole time we were in construction," Rosenthal explained. (His childhood friend Dhruv Chopra came on as a partner as they planned the space.) "We had to change contractors in the middle of this project, which was insane. So many lessons." They removed one of the factory's walls and attached a cinder-block box that would become the Hall, a large dance floor that hosts d.j.s and bigger acts, and designated a smaller space, called Zone One, to housing bands. Above the rooms is the Loft, a second-story lounge with striped tiles and dimly lit unisex bathrooms. "Eventually, upstairs will be the rooftop," Rosenthal said. (He hopes to open the new addition by May.)

Despite the venue's shimmer, the managers still program Elsewhere with an eye toward emerging acts, critical darlings, and oddball scene staples. The upcoming schedule includes sets by the electronic maven Sophie (Feb. 8), the experimental composer John Maus (Feb. 14), and the twitchy thrash band Power Trip (May 10). The thirteen-person Popgun team operates out of Elsewhere's basement, which may help them sustain a kind of D.I.Y. ethos—they're comfortable underground. "Having a venue is such a personal experience," Rosenthal said. "It's a reflection of every little vibe tweak you want to make, to make it feel like your home. Back here, it feels like we're in control."

—*Matthew Trammell*

ROCK AND POP

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

DMX
The former office of Def Jam Records, at 160 Varick Street, once served as a creative clubhouse (or madhouse) for generations of hip-hop's biggest stars. The rapper Nore's podcast, "Drink Champs," often recounts stories of ego-fuelled parking-space conflicts and you-had-to-be-there chance meetings at the office—guests describe the space as a frat house with a music-industry budget and a liberal treasurer. Def Jam first struck gold blending rap and rock with Run D.M.C., and then found an outsized star in Earl Simmons, known to fans as DMX, the snarling Yonkers hit-maker who, in 1998, released two No. 1 albums—the first rapper to ever accomplish this feat. For one night, he revives those hedonistic days and the stadium anthems that came with them. *(B. B. King Blues Club & Grill, 237 W. 42nd St. 212-997-4144. Jan. 25.)*

Fleetwood Mac
Few groups had as much drama and energy as Fleetwood Mac; its history includes no shortage of personnel changes, affairs, religious cults, private jets, acid trips, and mental institutions. But, no matter how bad the interpersonal vibes got, the band stayed at it, becoming one of the best-selling acts of the twentieth century. Christine McVie, Mick Fleetwood, John McVie, Lindsey Buckingham, and Stevie Nicks are honored as the 2018 MusiCares Person of the Year, with a tribute concert featuring performances by **John Legend, Lorde, Keith Urban, HAIM, OneRepublic, Harry Styles, Miley Cyrus,** and more. *(Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-247-4777. Jan. 26.)*

Danny Krivit
In 1971, on the advice of a friend who owned the Stonewall Inn, Bobby Krivit converted the Ninth Circle, his fledgling West Village lounge and steakhouse, into a bar that would serve the neighborhood's growing gay community. Business boomed quickly—to keep his new basement disco churning, Bobby enlisted his stepson Danny to program tapes with dance music and custom edits. That same year, Danny met James Brown, who gave him a white-label copy of "Get on the Good Foot," and thus began Danny's decorated career as a dance-music jockey and promoter for landmark clubs throughout New York City, including the Loft, Area, Limelight, and the Paradise Garage. *(Good Room, 98 Meserole Ave., Brooklyn. 718-349-2373. Jan. 26.)*

Tory Lanez
One pleasant development to come out of contemporary music's ever-broadening scope is a replacement of the familiar one-hit wonder with what could be called the no-hit wonder. Today's most engaging young artists sidestep pop's search for a singular sound. Instead, they have the option of spreading creative tentacles in many directions, beguiling die-hard fans with each upload. Toronto's Tory Lanez exemplifies this approach, with a chameleonic, smoky voice that sits well on most everything. For evidence, compare "Say It," humid-summer R. & B. built on a nineties New Jack sample, with "In for It," a chilling late-night rallying cry assisted by the electronic wunderkind RL Grime. *(Studio Square, 35-33 36th St., Astoria. 718-383-1001. Jan. 28.)*

MikeQ
The ballroom and vogue music scenes, most famously captured in the documentary film "Paris

Is Burning," have been influencing popular culture since the nineteen-eighties, while remaining staunchly underground. Vogue grew out of New York's nineteen-seventies disco and house eras, and crossed over when Madonna and others cribbed its sounds, its fashion, and its dance moves; today, a new generation maintains the insular, escapist energy that made the original parties special. This twenty-seven-year-old Newark-based d.j. started out producing on free software, and soon found himself spinning all over New York, as one of the few d.j.s willing to stick to ballroom tracks for entire sets. His first official release came out on Fade to Mind, an agenda-setting Los Angeles record label that specializes in futurist electronic music. *(Elsewhere, 599 Johnson Ave., Brooklyn. elsewherebrooklyn.com. Jan. 27.)*

MØ
Punk rock and mainstream pop music have historically had a contentious relationship, but that's not to say that some major stars haven't been radically influenced by punk's possibilities, while also wanting to bring their ideas to bigger stages. The Danish auteur Karen Marie Ørsted, better known by her moniker, MØ, is among them. Growing up in a small town, Ørsted was stoked by artists such as Kim Gordon, and would sneak off to Copenhagen to attend shows at the D.I.Y. venue Ungdomshuset. In her early days, she "tried to provoke as much as possible," she told *The Fader*, crafting songs with titles like "A Piece of Music to Fuck to." These days, she's pleasing millions of listeners worldwide with unusual hits like "Final Song," in which chirping synthesizers and erratic drum machines find a peculiar harmony. She'll perform with the Norwegian producer **Cashmere Cat** for two nights at Brooklyn Steel. *(319 Frost St., Brooklyn. 888-929-7849. Jan. 25-26.)*

Helado Negro
Roberto Carlos Lange, known as Helado Negro, a South Florida-born son of Ecuadorian immigrants, is a delight to hear, whirring with gentle thumps and warbles on songs like "Personas Facil." On his latest album, the magnificent and defiant "Private Energy," Lange sings, often in Spanish, about extending hands; being young, Latin, and proud; and wanting to know someone from the inside out, not the other way around. The music was created in conjunction with the Tinsel Mammals, two curious dancers who accompany Lange onstage and, in head-to-toe silver, groove along with him in a slow-burning choreographed routine. Helado Negro will perform with the formidable **Lido Pimienta,** who recently won Canada's Polaris Prize, and with the wistful L.A. songwriter **Cuco,** at Elsewhere. *(599 Johnson Ave., Brooklyn. elsewherebrooklyn.com. Jan. 26.)*

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Benny Golson
A living link to the golden era of nineteen-fifties hard bop, the saxophonist and composer Golson can still extract riches from a ballad and stir up trouble, as exhibited on his most recent release, the 2016 album "Horizon Ahead." If the eighty-nine-year-old Golson unleashes but one of the durable classics he's written, such as "Killer Joe," "I Remember Clifford," and "Whisper Not," it'll be a memorable event. *(Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Jan. 24-27.)*

Vincent Herring
In a fairly ambitious frame of mind, this keen alto saxophonist will attempt to play one tune from each of the ten decades of recorded jazz. At his side for this exercise in large-scale thinking will be the trumpeters **Jon Faddis** and **Jeremy Pelt** and the saxophonists **Eric Alexander** and **James Carter.** *(Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. Jan. 23-27.)*

Mike Longo & Paul West
Dizzy Gillespie's ensembles of the nineteen-sixties were a breeding ground for such formidable players as James Moody and Kenny Barron, and also for less heralded but vital figures like Longo, a longtime Gillespie pianist, and the bassist West. They unite here for a snug duet. *(Mezzrow, 163 W. 10th St. mezzrow.com. Jan. 25.)*

Daryl Sherman
That Sherman is devoting an evening to the work of the obscure songwriter Carl Sigman may come as a surprise to everyone but the devoted coterie who expect nothing less from this treasured vocalist and pianist, who seems to relish every choice standard written in the past century. The underpraised Sigman, as Sherman will reveal, contributed to such imperishable gems as "It's All in the Game" and "Ebb Tide." *(Don't Tell Mama, 343 W. 46th St. 212-757-0788. Jan. 27.)*

Matthew Shipp and Roscoe Mitchell
As the visionary saxophonist Mitchell built on the free-jazz innovations of such pioneers as Ornette Coleman and Albert Ayler, in the nineteen-sixties, so the younger pianist Shipp has drawn on the achievements of the avatars of Mitchell's generation. This celebration of the enduring tradition will find Mitchell jostling with Shipp's interactive trio. *(Zankel Hall, Seventh Ave. at 57th St. 212-247-7800. Jan. 27.)*

ABOVE & BEYOND

New York Boat Show
Some say that the two happiest days in a boat owner's life are the day the craft is bought and the day it's sold. This annual gathering at the Javits Center gives would-be buyers a chance to extend that initial pleasure, displaying hundreds of fibreglass wonders, from motor yachts to sailboats. A number of activities are planned, including the Touch-a-Boat tour, where kids can climb aboard a working F.D.N.Y. fireboat; a boating career day for students; and a presentation of the WaterCar, which goes from land to water with a transition time of fifteen seconds. Expect interactive boating simulators, hands-on workshops about engine repair, rope-tying tutorials, fishing seminars, and presentations about financing and insurance. *(655 W. 34th St. nyboatshow.com. Jan. 24-28.)*

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The Venetian master Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo is best known for his ceiling frescoes, but, for those who can't afford a palazzo in Venice, **Christie's** Jan. 30 sale of Old Master and British drawings offers the opportunity to own a little piece of his œuvre in comparatively minor form. The most valuable of these is a chalk, pen, and ink commedia-dell'arte scene—one of the painter's favorite subjects—depicting the infant Punchinello being nursed by his mother, while other commedia characters look on. The sale also features several views by Turner, including a pretty watercolor of Lake Lucerne, with the Alps in the distance. *(20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)*

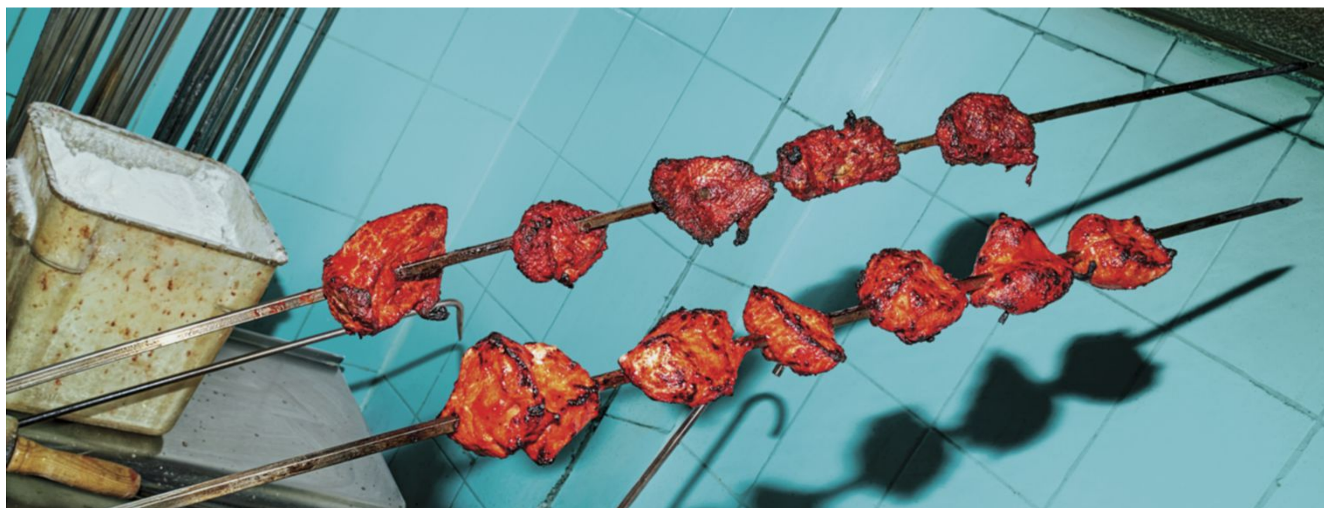
READINGS AND TALKS

92nd Street Y
In the book "The Disappearing City," from 1932, the famed American architect Frank Lloyd Wright published a vision for a suburban development called Broadacre City. In it, each American family would be given an acre of land, and communities would be highly localized with little transit. Today, much civic life is shared by masses of people in tight confines, and sprawling apartment complexes dot cities nationwide. The curator and architecture critic Jacob Moore discusses his exhibit "Living in America: Frank Lloyd Wright, Harlem & Modern Housing," which ran last year at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, and attempted to tie together these two disparate ideas of the American landscape. *(1395 Lexington Ave. 92y.org. Jan. 24 at noon.)*

The New York Academy of Medicine
January is Glaucoma Awareness Month, when the medical community aims to spread information about the disease, which causes loss of vision and affects millions of people worldwide. Joseph Lovatt released the documentary "Going Blind: Coming out of the Dark About Vision Loss" in 2010, as he began to lose his own sight. In the film, he interviews various individuals afflicted by blindness, including an art teacher and an Iraq War veteran, about their personal experiences, while sharing pertinent information about detecting, treating, and coping with vision loss. The New York Academy of Medicine hosts a free screening of the film, followed by a discussion and Q. & A. with the Peabody Award-winning director. *(1216 Fifth Ave. 212-822-7200. Jan. 29 at 6.)*

ILLUSTRATION BY PABLO AMARGO

FOOD & DRINK



PHOTOGRAPH BY ZACHARY ZAVISLAK FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

TABLES FOR TWO

Ruchi

120 Cedar St. (212-227-8454)

You've had Indian food, sure, but have you tried chicken chettinad? How about raan? Or goat kadhai? Most Indian restaurants in New York focus on the classics (tikka masala, korma), or trendy takes on the cuisine. (Floyd Cardoz's pork ribs vindaloo at Paowalla, noted.) Ruchi, a humble dive on the cusp of the World Trade Center site, on the other hand, goes for a maximalist approach, offering more than sixty main courses, an attempt at encyclopedic deliciousness from across the subcontinent.

Ruchi is easy to miss: the dining room is snugly fitted into the crook of O'Hara's, a boomerang-shaped cop-and-fireman watering hole. The restaurant is marked only by a faded red vestibule and a pair of plastic stands that advertise deals—North Indian dishes are half price at lunchtime on weekdays. Colored-glass lanterns wash the interior with a warm, effulgent light, and the mauve shadows they cast seem to demand that diners try something out of the ordinary.

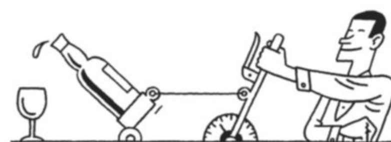
Start with raan, one of Ruchi's standouts: skewered chunks of lamb leg marinated in yogurt. The smell of masala spices that wafts from the plate prefigures succulent pieces of meat sautéed with onions and potatoes. A regal set of dishes can be found in the "dosa gallery" section of the menu—delicately spiced potato mash or meat enveloped in paper-thin rice pancakes—but remember that these South Indian specialties are always full price.

There are also breads from across the subcontinent: coconut-laced Peshwari naan and rosemary naan, from the north; poori, a fried puff of wheat dough popular throughout India; and southern specialties like idli, fluffy domes of fermented rice-and-lentil batter. Also southern are the utthapams, thick rice pancakes that, like their skinny cousins the dosas, have their own "gallery" on the menu. They can come with mushrooms, paneer, peas, and onions, but if you crave heat order the "very spicy" onion-and-hot-pepper version.

Lunch at Ruchi is usually busy with financial workers on lightning breaks, Russians muttering to one another in low tones, and the occasional group of magazine staffers. "I've never tried kadhai before," a harried-looking millennial in a white button-down muttered as he scanned the menu. When it came, he wasn't disappointed: the tart dish involves simmering ginger, garlic, onions, and bell peppers, and can be ordered with paneer, chicken, lamb, or goat. Pair it with tamarind rice, studded with roasted peanuts, and the flavor pitch, as it does so often at Ruchi, reaches a peak. *(Entrées $12.95-$24.95.)*

—*Nicolas Niarchos*

BAR TAB



Fraunces Tavern
54 Pearl St. (212-968-1776)

This bar is situated on the spot where, in 1762, the West Indian freeman and innkeeper Samuel Fraunces began pouring beer and wine for the thirsty merchants of lower Manhattan; where the Sons of Liberty plotted the lesser-known New York Tea Party; where a cannonball from a British ship, sent to put down the rebellion, crashed through the roof; and where, in June of 1776, insurrectionists gathered for the New York Provincial Congress and drained bottles of Madeira as one of them blew his fife and another played drumsticks. (They broke sixteen glasses and a pudding dish.) It's also where General Washington announced his resignation, toasted his officers, and, crying, shook all their hands. One evening, years later, Washington sent back a three-dollar shad, offered to him on the house, because "it shall never be said that the President indulges in luxuries." On a much more recent evening, a gray-haired patron walked past the L.E.D. candles by the entrance, through the whiskey lounge, with its extensive Scotch collection and coveted leather chairs, and into one of the tavern's noisy barrooms, where he ordered a seltzer. Behind him, Wall Street types sipped white wine, echoes of those eighteenth-century Americans who, in this place, founded the New York Chamber of Commerce, and whose dialogue on wares led to intimations of independence. In the nineteen-eighties, the patron said, "Goldman Sachs guys came here and talked about stuff like insider trading and real estate." What high-minded ideals occupied them now? A man in a suit excitedly showed off his backpack to a woman in a red skirt. "It's got a pocket for everything," he declared. Not quite "We the people," but a preamble, no doubt, to something revolutionary.—*Neima Jahromi*

EXPLORE

OPENS JANUARY 23

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
TRUMP IN THE WORLD

The World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, getting under way this week in the Alpine town of Davos, Switzerland, has long been known as much for its socializing and its parties as for its serious discussions of policy. But the organizers do their homework, and last Wednesday the W.E.F. released its Global Risks Report 2018, detailing how factors such as interstate conflicts, earthquakes, market bubbles, and a severe energy-price shock ("increase or decrease") could affect the well-being of populations and businesses around the world. One recurring presence in the report, weaving through a crowd of potential panics and crises that, according to its assessment, he has made more probable, is a figure who is planning to elbow his way through the halls of Davos itself: President Donald Trump.

The report notes that, in addition to such globally devastating acts as the decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate agreement, Trump has exemplified the rise of "charismatic strongman politics," which has contributed to a "febrile" geopolitical environment. Among other things, the report says, this bending of policies to oversized personalities has increased the likelihood of a nuclear confrontation with North Korea. If you are in Davos to assess risk, in other words, just look for Trump. Attended by eight Cabinet members, he'll be hard to miss.

Trump will not be entirely out of place, though, in terms of his importance or his self-importance. This Davos meeting, the forty-eighth, will involve some three thousand participants, more than half of them from the private sector: "members" of the W.E.F., who pay dues and are drawn from the world's thousand largest companies, in revenues, and "partners," at various levels, who pay a bit more to take part. They, along with invitees from the public sector, N.G.O.s, and the arts, are meant to shape "global, regional, and industry agendas." About eighty per cent of the invitees are men.

The most recent U.S. President to have attended Davos was Bill Clinton, but so many heads of state and government show up that the W.E.F. had to perform triage in its guide to this year's attendees, focussing on the G7 (six leaders will be present; Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, of Japan, won't make it) and the G20 (Prime Minister Narendra Modi, of India, will deliver the opening speech; Trump will give the keynote address on the closing day). Although the guide mentions that several heads of African nations will be there, it does not name all the leaders who will have a chance to meet the man who called their countries "shitholes." The leaders of various Muslim and Latin American nations, whom Trump has also belittled, will be present, too. (Celebrities such as Elton John, Cate Blanchett, and Shah Rukh Khan, the Bollywood idol, will also be attending; it wouldn't be Davos without them.)

Mapping every nation that Trump has insulted is an exhausting task. It's easy to imagine this year's meeting playing out as scenes from a very dark screwball comedy: Trump tries to shake a gaggle of allies whom he has called deadbeats, in order to persuade Erna Solberg, the Prime Minister of Norway, to send more white people to America. But on the way he sees the French President, Emmanuel Macron, whose capital he has declared ruined by immigrant terrorists, then bumps into Mexico's finance secretary, with whom he gets into a fight about paying for the wall. For a respite, Trump scans the room for Vladimir Putin, but, alas, the Russian President hasn't been seen at Davos since 2009.

When Trump's trip was announced, there was a flurry of questions, some gleeful, about how someone so "America first" could be headed to an event so globally minded. It is the kind of gathering where you can expect to—and this year will—find Al Gore. The stated goal is to create a "shared narrative," whereas

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Trump doesn't stick to the same story from one day to the next. Davos also celebrates the idea of negotiated solutions, such as the Iran nuclear agreement, which Trump has been seeking to undo. John Kerry, who closed that deal as President Obama's Secretary of State, is also expected to attend.

Yet, as Trumpist hypocrisies go, the President's Davos trip hardly qualifies. During the 2016 campaign, he boasted that he was "really rich" and a member of powerful circles that his voters could scarcely imagine, where only he would speak for them. But his populism was always putative. Though the social entrepreneurs and human-rights advocates in attendance might recoil from the idea, Davos in some ways really is Trump's kind of place. Hobnobbing at an exclusive club in a resort town? After the Inauguration, the Trump Organization raised the initiation fee for Mar-a-Lago, the President's Florida golf club, effectively marketing access to power. He may well think of Davos—where, for years, his former associate Anthony Scaramucci hosted wine tastings—as a Mar-a-Lago in the mountains.

Then, some foreign politicians harbor the hope, or the delusion, that Trump is persuadable. For example, there was consternation in the United Kingdom about Prime Minister Theresa May's apparent difficulty in scheduling a meeting at Davos with Trump. Two weeks ago, he tweeted that he was scrapping a planned visit to London because he didn't like the real-estate deal that had made a new, more secure American Embassy possible. The British press wondered if he might have been more upset by reports that he won't be invited to the wedding of Meghan Markle and Prince Harry, who is known to be friendly with Barack Obama. Britain's anxiety over this estrangement is fitful: some want Trump to stay out of the country; some are more anxious about losing the "special relationship"; others just want May to save what can be saved.

This is what might be called the Davos dilemma: countries may scorn Donald Trump, but they are not quite ready to dismiss the President of the United States. Toward the end of the W.E.F.'s Risks Report, though, there is a section on responses to "stresses and shocks" which includes something called "transformative resilience"—meaning that it helps, in the wake of a crisis, to have a "capacity for change." That sounds like good advice for Democrats, but it also might be a remonstrance about assuming that other countries don't have options. Some Davos attendees might not wait for America to be the world's leader again. As Trump expounds from the stage, they may find themselves thinking about how long they'll need to keep listening.

—*Amy Davidson Sorkin*

UP LIFE'S LADDER
FARMERS ONLY

Thanks to the locavore movement, we're used to food with origin stories: that venison tartare once ran free in a forest in Katonah. But what about the farmers? They started out somewhere, too. On a recent Saturday morning, eighteen fledgling farmers gathered in the East Village, armed with PowerPoint presentations and big dreams. They were the latest graduates of the Farm Beginnings class run by GrowNYC, which also oversees more than fifty farmers' markets in New York City, including the huge one in Union Square. GrowNYC has been around since 1970—it blossomed out of the first Earth Day—but the training program started in 2000. "The average age of the American farmer was getting higher and higher—it's about fifty-eight, fifty-nine across the country right now," Christopher Wayne, the program's director, explained. "We needed to start developing new farmers if we were going to keep fresh products coming into New York City."

Wayne, who has a red beard and wore a GrowNYC hoodie, stood by a bagel-and-coffee spread in the organization's "sustainability center," a few blocks from Union Square. (Behind a glass pane, basil grew under L.E.D. lights.) It was the last day of the nine-week course, and students were giving final presentations to an audience of spouses, kids, elder farmers, and potential business partners. "Agriculture is not something you can do alone," Wayne said. The course begins with "holistic goal setting," which he admitted was "a little fluffy for farmers," and goes on to cover budgeting, marketing, and legal support. Successful graduates may end up selling rhubarb jam in Union Square; the class of 2013 produced Rise & Root Farm, a women's co-op in Orange County that sells heirloom tomatoes and edible lavender at the market on Fridays.

The program recruits heavily from immigrant populations. "These are folks often with agricultural experience in their home countries, working dead-end jobs in New York City," Wayne said. Aurelia Cline-Thomas, who wore a bright head scarf, got up to make her presentation. She was born in Gambia (her father raised chickens) and worked as a flight attendant for Nigeria Airways before relocating to Scarsdale, where she grows herbs and vegetables in her back yard. She hopes to run a sustainable farm in the Hudson Valley. "All activities and food production must be in tandem with nature," she said, reading off her holistic goals. "Work on the farm should be balanced with relaxation and recreation. In short, practice the golden rule." Her action plan: start with culinary herbs and vegetables, then add poultry. "For instance, quails," she said. "Quails are very small. And they don't make a lot of noise."

Miyoung Jung, a fiftyish woman in a pink sweater, had studied microbiol-

ogy and worked in medicine development in Korea before moving to Bayside, Queens. "If you are lucky, you can make one medicine in a decade," she told the group. "Maybe you don't have any. So that's why I thought, It's too slow a process." She wants to lease two to ten acres in Ulster or Putnam County, and had a budget lined up for growing ninety-five thousand dollars' worth of kale and other vegetables by the end of the year. Kama Doucoure, who moved from Niger in 2005 and lives in New Rochelle, where he's an auto mechanic, said that there is a huge demand among the West African Muslim population for sheep, which are used to celebrate holidays and births. "You sacrifice two sheep if it's a boy. If it's a girl, it's one sheep," he said. "How many sheep we can sacrifice every year? It's a lot!"

Rasaq Kunrunmi-Abiola, who emigrated from Nigeria eight months ago, plans to focus on rabbits, which he called "my major strength." He wore a blazer and had a detailed budget, which included a line item for manure sales. "I have some Nigerian vegetables that I hope to introduce, too," he said, clicking through photos of *shoko yokoto*, a leafy green also known as celosia or quail grass, and *efirin*, or clove basil. From the back row, Wayne asked where he planned to market them. "That is not a problem," Kunrunmi-Abiola said, confidently. "If I go into the production of these veggies, it's going to be magic."

After the presentations, the graduates received certificates and drank sparkling cider. It had been two days since President Trump's reported comments about "shithole countries" and the supposedly undesirable immigrants they produce, but the aspiring farmers weren't fazed. "Everybody know Trump is a very unstable person," one said. "I can speak for Nigerians," Kunrunmi-Abiola said. "We're in the top positions: engineers, businessmen. We're doing fine." Doucoure, the sheep guy, had become a U.S. citizen nine days earlier. "He thinks we are shit. We are not," he said, clutching his three-year-old son, Demba. "But I don't want to judge him and get mad. I just want to show him that, if you think I'm shit, I'm here. I'm not shit. I'm doing this, I'm doing that. Judge by my action. Next year, I will be here as a farmer."

—*Michael Schulman*

FIELD TRIP
SHARDS

There's a warehouse in Long Island City that houses a quarter of a million pieces of Tiffany glass, sorted by color, in rough wooden cubbies. Understandably, people who hear about it want to come take a look. Pilgrims regularly show up at the door and ring an unmarked buzzer for the Neustadt Collection. Lindsy Parrott, the collection's executive director and curator, turns them away. "My heart kind of breaks," she said.

The Neustadt Collection is a nonprofit decorative-arts archive comprising hundreds of Tiffany lamps and windows, and the world's largest trove of glass fragments from Tiffany Studios. The outfit lends objects to travelling exhibitions and has a dedicated gallery in the Queens Museum, but the warehouse isn't open to the public. On a recent Saturday, though, the Neustadt welcomed visitors for a rare tour, in conjunction with Open House New York. At 2:30 P.M., a dozen or so people were lined up outside the warehouse, in the shadow of several shiny new residential high-rises.

Inside, ceiling fans whirred above rows of cubbies packed with jagged glass bits. One row was labelled "Brown with brown streaks"; another, "Dichroic turquoise."

Parrott, who is a petite forty-one-year-old, had her eyeglasses tucked into the neck of her sweater and wore leopard-print ballet flats. "We don't have a lot of reds," she told the visitors, once they were inside. "Is that because Tiffany made so many lampshades and windows with, you know, juicy peonies in them? I mean, maybe."

She explained that the warehouse held the remnants that were left when Louis Comfort Tiffany's studios, in nearby Corona, closed, in the mid-thirties. (Tiffany was the son of the jeweller Charles Lewis Tiffany.) Around that time, she said, Dr. Egon Neustadt, a Jewish orthodontist from Austria who settled in Flushing, began collecting Tiffany lamps, after his wife admired one in a Greenwich Village junk shop. Stained-glass lamps had fallen out of fashion, and the market was flooded with them. Neustadt went on to purchase more than two hundred Tiffany lamps, along with some windows and, later, the archive of fragments. He established his own museum, from which the Neustadt is descended.

One of Parrott's pet peeves is people telling her that Tiffany lamps remind them of the fixtures in a T.G.I. Friday's or a Ruby Tuesday. "The design is lousy," she said of the chain knockoffs. "The glass is offensive."

She picked up a cream-colored fragment with a rippled texture, about the size of an iPhone. (Part of preparing the warehouse for visitors, she said, was stashing away fragments small enough to be pocketed.) "I'm going to pass this around. Two hands, please. Some of the edges are sharp—it's glass."

She explained how the artists had pressed wooden paddles against the molten glass to create an undulating effect—"ideal for suggesting, say, the hem of a saint's robe in a church window."

Across the warehouse, the Neustadt's in-house conservator, Susan Tomlin, was giving a glass-cutting demonstration. "Feel free to take pictures, unless, um, I'm in them," she said. "I'm shy of the camera."

Tomlin, who is seventy-one, has worked with glass for more than fifty years. She bent over an aquamarine shard, drawing a cutting tool across the surface.

"You can see it's really just a scratch. Glass is temperamental. It doesn't want to break at all. And it wants to always break straight. You have to coax any kind of curve—" A piece snapped off in her hand. "Oh, goodness, whoa. That's not supposed to happen."

An elderly man stepped forward for a better look, and nearly tripped over a floor mat.

"Jeffrey!" his female companion hissed. "Jesus!"

After the visitors had left, Parrott poured out bottles of beer—"I think we should put it in a real glass"—and garnished them with orange slices. Tomlin mixed a gin-and-tonic. The Mister Softee jingle drifted in from the street.

The talk turned back to Neustadt. The doctor liked to customize the objects he collected, a practice that offends today's purists. Parrott mentioned a Tiffany dragonfly lamp to which he had

added red glass, to spruce up the wings.

"And the thing is, it's just gorgeous that way," Tomlin said.

"But if you did that now, you'd be scorned," Parrott said. "So we hear from people in the field, like, *Ugh*, the big eye roll. 'Dr. Neustadt did this, or that—'"

"It's not fair," Tomlin said.

In another instance, Parrott went on, Neustadt purchased a Tiffany window depicting a woman in classical garb. The woman's face had been smashed out. "He probably got a deal on it, right? It was damaged," she said. "His wife, Hildegard, was deceased by then, and he missed her deeply. So he had somebody paint her visage and inset it into this Tiffany window. People snicker about that now."

"You have to remember," Tomlin said, that, at a time when no one else cared, "Dr. Neustadt amassed this treasure trove of Tiffany lamps and kept them safe."

Parrott agreed: "I don't feel like we have anything to apologize for."

—*Lindsay Gellman*

THE BOARDS

SHAKESPEARE ON ICE

The first time that Michael Grandage, the distinguished British theatre director, saw "Frozen," the wildly lucrative animated Disney movie, was upon its release, in 2013. (It was at the bidding of his partner, Christopher Oram, a theatre designer with a fascination for animation.) At the time, Grandage made the passing observation that its plot resonated with themes in the pastoral comedies of Shakespeare that he had directed. Then he moved on, as one does when one has more pressing concerns, like bringing Daniel Radcliffe to Broadway in "The Cripple of Inishmaan," for which Grandage received a Tony nomination.

The second time Grandage watched the movie was in the summer of 2016, after being asked by his agent whether he wanted to be considered to direct a stage-musical version of the film. (The show opens at the St. James Theatre on March 22nd.) "I thought, Actually, you know what, I think it is one of the very few things I haven't done yet, a new musical," Grandage said the other day. "I looked and thought, All the music is rather charming and beautiful, and very attached to the narrative. And I reconnected to the big sweep of the story. I thought, I would love to come at it with a Shakespearean sweep—to do something with it that takes on all these big questions that I believe are in 'Frozen.'"

What might those themes be? To discuss this, Grandage agreed to pay a visit to the Shakespeare Garden, in Central Park, whose delicate poetical plants—eglantine, cowslip, and rue, all mentioned in the Bard's works—were still buried under a schmalz-thick layer of snow deposited by the bomb cyclone of a week earlier. Metaphor alert!

"The biggest connection to Shakespeare with what happens onstage in 'Frozen' is the reuniting of Sebastian and Viola, in 'Twelfth Night,'" Grandage explained, settling on a bench, the temperature having risen to a balmy thirty-one degrees. "Both of those siblings assume the other to be dead, and at the end of the play they turn and see each other, and realize that the person they love deeply is alive. I think that moment—that specific moment in the turn, before either has said anything—should be the most moving thing you could ever achieve in the theatre." He was aiming for a similar effect at the end of "Frozen," in which one sister sacrifices herself for the other, and then is resurrected by the power of sibling love. "If we get it right for the audience, pretty much everything else will, at some level, take care of itself," he said.

Another parallel: "As You Like It," Grandage's favorite work in the canon. He said, "The two cousins are trapped in a castle at the beginning, and they free themselves and go out into a forest. And, in the landscape, they are freed by the landscape to find and understand love." When Grandage directed the play, in 1999, he and Oram, who designed the production, set it mostly in wintertime. "We thought, Wouldn't it be great if, when they first came across the people in the forest, they were all standing around braziers?" he said. "When you go into the Forest of Arden, the first thing that happens is snow falls."

Grandage also directed a wintry "Hamlet," with Jude Law, in the West End and, later, on Broadway. Law delivered the "To be or not to be" soliloquy outdoors, in the snow, in bare feet. "Hamlet" has come up in Grandage's conversations with Caissie Levy, the actor playing Elsa on Broadway. "The existential journey that Elsa goes on, independent of her sister, is, for me, absolutely related to 'Hamlet,'" he said. "Her running off to create her own palace is the catalyst for a freer existential debate. The problem with Hamlet is that he is always trapped in Elsinore—he doesn't have the luxury that Elsa has. Which I guess is why I put him out walking in the snow—getting out of the palace and turning into something elemental. Isn't that weird?"

Michael Grandage

The sun slipped behind tree branches: bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang. "What is remarkable about the genius of 'Frozen' is that it takes you on a Disney fairy-tale track and blows it out of the water," Grandage went on. "The idea that family love comes to the fore as the key message is a wonderful thing for us to investigate." Before returning to rehearsal, he took a turn around the garden, where plaques bearing quotations were peeking above the snow, like wary crocuses. "Most friendship is feigning/most loving mere folly," read one, from "As You Like It." Grandage cudgelled his brains to recall the speaker. "It's Amiens!" he said at last, and sighed with theatrical relief. "I was about to give back my Equity card."

—*Rebecca Mead*

INK

MAN'S MAN

One afternoon at the Explorers Club, in Manhattan, Geoffrey Gray was in the fifth-floor gallery looking at a painting of a man with a beard. Sixty-odd years ago, the bearded man was a correspondent for a publication called *True*, which billed itself as "The Man's Magazine." Two years ago, Gray rebooted *True* as True.Ink, an online "experience-based" publication.

"They called him the Vagrant Viking," Gray said of the man in the painting. The Vagrant's legal name was Peter Freuchen. Born in 1886, he speared walruses, hiked the Arctic, and stood six feet seven in a polar-bear-fur coat. Gray described how Freuchen, suffering from frostbite, once had to cut off his own leg.

"I think he ate the leg? Gonna have to check the facts on that," said Gray, who is thirty-eight and grew up in Binghamton, New York. (Fact check: he didn't cut off a leg, just some toes. He didn't eat them.) "He wrote wonderful pieces about living on the ice." Freuchen, who married an Inuit woman, also wrote for *True* about his in-laws. Printed monthly from 1937 to 1975, the magazine took its name from Lord Byron's "Don Juan": "Tis strange—but true; for truth is always strange; Stranger than fiction."

Gray discovered *True* seven years ago while working on a book about D. B. Cooper, the mystery fugitive who, in 1971, hijacked an airplane, then escaped by parachute, never to be found. Gray's theory is that Cooper had gleaned practical advice from a *True* article: "How 50,000 Men Disappear Every Year in the U.S."

Gray is the kind of guy who, if he likes you, might address you as "Matador!" He has a short beard, and this, in combination with his love of adventure and fondness for blood sports, gives him the air of a man preoccupied with the idea of what being a man involves. He seems less like Ernest Hemingway than like someone doing a faintly ironic Hemingway impression. He once made a documentary about the most gored matador in modern history, Antonio Barrera, whose credo he likes to quote: "You've got to put all your meat on the grill."

The old *True* is what used to be called an "armpit slick." Reinterpreting the publication for our post-Weinstein era, Gray has had to tinker with the mix. Stories like "You and Your Secretary: Career Before Hanky-Panky?" (1969) wouldn't fly anymore. "I want the original magazine's spirit of individualism, but not the husky, hairy-knuckled stuff," he said.

The air at the Explorers Club was musky with taxidermy. On a nearby plinth stood a pale, tusklike object. Staring at it, Gray said, "I know there's a whale penis in here somewhere." Looking closer: "Oh. That's the whale penis." He headed downstairs, where a few True.Ink staffers were camped between the fourth and fifth floors. "We don't do much actual writing," he said. The publication's tagline is "Live the story." Subscribers are known as Truthers. Stories they have lived so far include emerald-hunting in Colombia, schooner-sailing to Cuba, and shvitzing in Tlaxcala.

"My friends say I'm a cross between Indiana Jones and Martha Stewart," Gray said. "Our idea is to create these portals where you can escape your life for a while." The latest portal is a project called "The People's Horse." The initial plan was for *True* to buy a racehorse, raising the money on Indiegogo, but that changed after Gray spent a season on the Triple Crown circuit, boning up.

"Horse people opened their barn doors to us," he said. "I learned that a lot of the poetry, artistry, risk, luck, essence, and point comes down to breeding." So the new plan is for *True* to breed its own horse. Gray partnered with the breeding managers of California Chrome, the 2014 winner of the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness, to sire a foal with a mare selected by Truthers (and others) who paid a hundred dollars for the privilege. This April, the winning mare, Colerful Bride, will give birth to a filly. Horse-related experiences scheduled for the Truthers in the coming months include feeding, boozing, and barbecue. Actual racing, Gray said, won't happen for at least two years.

Chrome's managers are based in Kentucky, and Gray was about to head to LaGuardia to catch a flight there. Talk turned to traffic: a New York experience. Gray asked his Web designer if he'd ever been to Kentucky. ("No.") Did he want to go, in five minutes? ("Uh . . .") "I don't want to say we're the antidote to fake news," Gray said, later. "I don't want to contribute to that meme. We just want to offer a serene environment to experience real things." Rush hour is its own adventure, but Gray made his flight, by a hair. His Lyft driver—a Moroccan, and a horseman—took the card Gray gave him.

—*James Camp*

"As a courtesy for the inconvenience, please accept a voucher for three additional hours of your life, redeemable upon your death."

THE POLITICAL SCENE

SOFT TARGET

China's suspect courtship with Jared Kushner.

BY ADAM ENTOUS AND EVAN OSNOS

In early 2017, shortly after Jared Kushner moved into his new office in the West Wing of the White House, he began receiving guests. One visitor who came more than once was Cui Tiankai, the Chinese Ambassador to the United States, a veteran diplomat with a postgraduate degree from Johns Hopkins University. When, during previous Administrations, Cui had visited the White House, his hosts received him with a retinue of China specialists and note-takers. Kushner, President Trump's thirty-seven-year-old son-in-law and one of his senior advisers, preferred smaller gatherings.

Three months earlier, Cui had been in near-despair. Like many observers, he had incorrectly predicted that Hillary Clinton would win the 2016 election; his botched forecast, he told a friend, was precisely the kind of error that dooms the careers of ambassadors in the Chinese diplomatic system. To make matters worse, Cui knew almost nobody in the incoming Administration. Donald Trump had won the election in part by singling out China for "raping" the United States.

In Kushner, Cui found a confident, attentive, and inexperienced counterpart. The former head of his family's real-estate empire, which is worth more than a billion dollars, Kushner was intent on bringing a businessman's sensibility to matters of state. He believed that fresh, confidential relationships could overcome the frustrations of traditional diplomatic bureaucracy. Henry Kissinger, who, in his role as a high-priced international consultant, maintains close relationships in the Chinese hierarchy, had introduced Kushner to Cui during the campaign, and the two met three more times during the transition. In the months after Trump was sworn in, they met more often than Kushner could recall. "Jared became Mr. China," Michael Pillsbury, a former Pentagon aide on Trump's transition team, said.

But Cui's frequent encounters with Kushner made some people in the U.S. government uncomfortable. On at least one occasion, they met alone, which counterintelligence officials considered risky. "There's nobody else there in the room to verify what was said and what wasn't, so the Chinese can go back and claim anything," a former senior U.S. official who was briefed on the meetings said. "I'm sorry, Jared—do you think your background is going to allow you to be able to outsmart the Chinese Ambassador?" Kushner, the official added, "is actually pretty smart. He just has limited life experiences. He was acting with naïveté."

By now, Americans are accustomed to reports of Russia's efforts to influence American politics, but, in the intelligence community, China's influence operations are a source of equal concern. In recent years, the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. have dedicated increased resources to tracking efforts by the Chinese government to spy on or to enlist Western officials in pursuit of their policy goals. (The F.B.I. and the C.I.A. declined to comment on this.) "The Chinese influence operations are more long-term, broader in scope, and are generally designed to achieve a more diffuse goal than the Russians' are," Christopher Johnson, a former C.I.A. analyst who specializes in China, said. "To be unkind to the Russians, you'd say they are more crass."

Kushner often excluded the government's top China specialists from his meetings with Cui, a slight that rankled and unnerved the bureaucracy. "He went in utterly unflanked by anyone who could find Beijing on a map," a former member of the National Security Council said. Some officials who were not invited to Kushner's sessions or briefed

Since the election, Beijing intelligence has targeted Kushner as a key asset.

 ILLUSTRATION BY BARRY BLITT

on the outcomes resorted to scouring American intelligence reports to see how Chinese diplomats described their dealings with Kushner. Other U.S. officials spoke to Cui directly about the meetings. Kushner was "their lucky charm," the former N.S.C. member said. "It was a dream come true. They couldn't believe he was so compliant." (A spokesman for Kushner said that none of the China specialists told him that "he shouldn't be doing it the way he was doing it at the time.")

Kushner was still getting an education in the world of national security. His transition from business to public service had been abrupt; even as he took on the responsibilities of a statesman, with a portfolio that ranged from China to the Middle East to Mexico, he was waiting to receive a permanent security clearance. Shortly after Trump won the election, disagreements emerged inside the transition about whether to seek the type of clearances, overseen by the F.B.I. and other agencies, that would allow Kushner; his wife, Ivanka Trump; Donald Trump, Jr.; and Eric Trump to receive classified briefings. Some transition officials thought it was inappropriate to dispense such clearances until the Trump children's roles in government became more defined. On November 16th, after multiple news organizations reported the impending requests, President-elect Trump disputed them in narrow terms, tweeting, "I am not trying to get 'top level security clearance' for my children. This was a typically false news story." (A Kushner spokesman said that Kushner was unaware of any such requests made on his behalf.)

On January 9th, Trump announced that Kushner would join the Administration, and two days before Trump's Inauguration an aide submitted Kushner's request for a security clearance. The application was troubled from the start. After failing to list any contacts with foreign governments, among other incomplete sections, Kushner's office filed a supplement the next day, citing numerous contacts and promising to assemble a complete list. (Kushner blamed a "miscommunication," which caused the aide to file a "draft" prematurely.) In May, Kushner's office sent another supplement, listing more than a hundred contacts from more than twenty countries.

Some of Kushner's meetings during the campaign and the transition have caused problems for him. In June, 2016, he attended a meeting with a Russian lawyer, which Donald Trump, Jr., had arranged after he was told that she was aware of information, possessed by the Kremlin, that would "incriminate" Hillary Clinton. (Kushner updated his security forms once more, in June, 2017, to include the meeting.) On December 1, 2016, at Trump Tower, Kushner and Michael Flynn, a retired general and Trump's designated national-security adviser, met with the Russian Ambassador, Sergey Kislyak, who, according to Kushner, offered to deliver information about the war in Syria over a secure line. Kushner asked if the Russian Embassy had a communications channel that "we could use, where they would be comfortable transmitting the information they wanted to relay to General Flynn." (Members of Congress harshly criticized Kushner for suggesting the use of Russian channels.)

As months passed, some members of the White House received their permanent security clearances, but Kushner continued to wait. For high-level appointees, the process is normally "expedited," a former senior U.S. official said. It can be completed in several months, unless "derogatory information" pops up during the review.

Kushner had an interim clearance that gave him access to intelligence. He was also added to a list of recipients of the President's Daily Brief, or P.D.B., a top-secret digest of the U.S. government's most closely held and compartmentalized intelligence reports. By the end of the Obama Administration, seven White House officials were authorized to receive the same version of the P.D.B. that appeared on the President's iPad. The Trump Administration expanded the number to as many as fourteen people, including Kushner. A former senior official said, of the growing P.D.B. distribution list, "It got out of control. Everybody thought it was cool. They wanted to be cool."

Some people in the office of the director of National Intelligence questioned the expansion, but officials who reported to Trump didn't want to risk irritating him by trying to exclude his son-in-law and other new additions. David Priess, a former C.I.A. officer who delivered the P.D.B. during the George W. Bush Administration and is the author of "The President's Book of Secrets," said that Kushner's situation was unprecedented: "Having studied the President's Daily Brief's six-decade history, I have not come across another case of a White House official being a designated recipient of the P.D.B., for that length of time, without having a full security clearance."

Among national-security specialists, Kushner's difficulty obtaining a permanent security clearance has become a subject of fascination. Was it his early failure to disclose foreign contacts? Or did it have something to do with the investigations into Russian interference in the 2016 elections? As the Administration finished its first year, some clues to Kushner's security troubles have come into sharper focus, giving a new perspective on his encounters with China.

Before arriving in Washington and taking up his unusual role as son-in-law, confidant, and free-ranging foreign-affairs counsellor, Kushner had no particular familiarity with diplomacy. "My experience was in business, not politics, and it was not my initial intent to play a large role in my father-in-law's campaign," he said, in testimony before congressional committees last July, as part of the Russia investigations. Since 2008, he had served as the C.E.O. of the Kushner Companies, the family firm, which has an office in Florham Park, New Jersey. Its assets included commercial real estate and twenty-two thousand apartments from New Jersey to Maryland.

Through his work, Kushner had established links to China. A Kushner project in Jersey City, which opened in November, 2016, reportedly received about fifty million dollars, nearly a quarter of its financing, from Chinese investors who are not publicly named, through a U.S. immigration program known as EB-5, which allows wealthy foreigners to obtain visas by investing in American projects. Kushner was also an investor, alongside prominent Chinese and Hong Kong businessmen, in multiple companies. He and a brother, Joshua

Kushner, co-founded Cadre, a real-estate investment firm, which received funding from Jack Ma, the billionaire founder of Alibaba. (The scope of investors behind Kushner projects is unknown, because the company does not disclose the names.) Ivanka Trump has her own business endeavors in China, where some of her branded handbags, shoes, and clothes are manufactured.

During the campaign, Trump asked Kushner to be "a point of contact for foreign government officials." Kushner, who was largely uninvolved with the transition team, devoted little attention to how he would handle those contacts in the event that Trump won.

Shortly before the election, aides prepared a memo for Chris Christie, at that time the head of the transition team, concerning the sensitive matter of conversations with foreign powers. "Because the current President is still in office, calls made during the transition period should be high level, non-substantive, and consist largely of diplomatic pleasantries," they wrote. Trump would be "inundated with requests for thousands of calls from around the world," they warned, through "campaign staff, outside advisers, and other third parties." He must not accept them. Requests must be "methodically returned" in "a sequence of calls that will not create any diplomatic incidents or negative press stories." The President-elect must have a classified intelligence briefing before conversations with foreign leaders, and then conduct the meetings only when a note-taker and a national-security aide are present. The aides suggested that Trump make five "waves" of calls over a number of days, starting with the United Kingdom and ending with Pakistan.

"Obviously, all that just got tossed aside," a senior transition official recalled recently, because Trump was "excited that important people were calling him." Trump spoke to more than two dozen heads of state before his campaign contacted the State Department. The freewheeling access extended to in-person meetings. On November 17th, Trump had his first meeting with a foreign leader, Japan's Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe. According to a transition official, the meeting had come about after Abe's government contacted Ado Machida, a policy director for the Trump transition, whose father had served as one of Japan's representatives to the United Nations. (Machida declined to comment.) In another break with protocol, Trump was accompanied to the meeting by his daughter and son-in-law, while they were still running their respective businesses.

During the transition, Kushner met with a range of foreign officials to discuss the incoming Administration. At the same time, as the head of his family's business, he was urgently seeking an infusion of cash to repay a debt totalling hundreds of millions of dollars. In 2007, the Kushner Companies had bought 666 Fifth Avenue, a forty-one-story office tower, for $1.8 billion, the highest price ever paid for a building in Manhattan at that time. The deal turned out to be a potential disaster for Kushner. Demand for office space had fallen short, and he was hunting for investors, in Asia and the Middle East, among other places, to shore up the building's finances.

On November 16, 2016, Kushner had a private dinner with Wu Xiaohui, the chairman of China's Anbang Insurance Group, to discuss Wu's possible investment in 666 Fifth Avenue. Months later, when the meeting was revealed, and Bloomberg News reported that the Kushner family stood to make as much as four hundred million dollars from the agreement with Anbang, Democratic lawmakers, including Senator Elizabeth Warren, of Massachusetts, criticized it as a possible conflict of interest. The companies abandoned the negotiations.

In some cases, it was unclear whether Kushner was representing the transition or his business. On December 13th, at the recommendation of Sergey Kislyak, the Russian Ambassador, Kushner met with Sergey Gorkov, the head of Vnesheconombank, or V.E.B., a Russian state bank. Kushner and the White House have said that he was acting as a Trump adviser and did not discuss his business. But Representative Adam Schiff, of California, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, has raised concerns that Kushner was discussing business while serving the transition. Schiff pointed to statements by V.E.B. and a spokesman for Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, which suggest that Kushner held the meeting in his capacity as head of the Kushner Companies. On January 9, 2017, shortly before beginning work at the White House, Kushner said that he was stepping down as C.E.O. He sold his stake in 666 Fifth Avenue to a family trust, while retaining ownership of many of his assets.

As Trump prepared to enter the White House, he took a sudden measure that unnerved officials in Beijing. On December 2nd, encouraged by the fiercest anti-China hawks among his advisers, including Steve Bannon, at that time his chief strategist, Trump took a telephone call from the President of Taiwan, Tsai Ing-wen, breaking with nearly four decades of American diplomatic practice. The U.S. has friendly relations with Taiwan, but Presidents since Ronald Reagan have avoided speaking directly with Taiwan's President, because, as part of its "One China" policy, the U.S. formally recognizes only the Beijing government. Then, in an interview, Trump mused about giving up the "One China" policy and recognizing Taiwan's government, in Taipei.

Chinese officials turned to the man that Kissinger had recommended to them: Jared Kushner. Kushner later told others that he took on the China portfolio reluctantly, after "clamoring" Chinese officials called Trump Tower and asked for him by name.

On December 9th and 10th, Cui Tiankai and Yang Jiechi, China's top diplomat, visited Kushner at his office at 666 Fifth Avenue. Unlike officials from Japan and the United Arab Emirates, who were secretive about contacts with Trump's transition team, the Chinese diplomats kept the Obama Administration informed. After visiting Trump's transition team, Yang called the White House to report the encounter.

At times, Flynn and others joined the meetings. Laying out China's hopes and ambitions for its relations, Cui urged

the U.S. to expand military-to-military exchanges and to endorse the Belt and Road Initiative, a foreign infrastructure campaign intended to expand Chinese influence abroad. According to a participant in the discussions, Flynn welcomed the overture, praising the Belt and Road Initiative and saying that, although the U.S. had just one government at a time, he appreciated "beginning dialogue now."

After Trump's Inauguration, on January 20th, Kushner's contacts with Cui intensified. They met again on February 1st, and, that day, Ivanka took her daughter, Arabella, to a lunar New Year celebration at the Chinese Embassy. Later that month, Kushner persuaded Trump to back off his threat to abandon the "One China" policy. Kushner also passed along proposals from Cui to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who made his first official trip to Beijing in March. During the visit, Tillerson startled China experts by adopting some of Beijing's official phrases, including "mutual respect," which is often interpreted as reinforcing China's claims over disputed waters in Asia.

Kushner and Cui also met repeatedly to prepare for Trump's first meeting with China's President, Xi Jinping, on April 6th, at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort. Daniel Russel, who, until last March, was the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and is now a diplomat-in-residence at the Asia Society, in New York, said, "It was clear that heated arguments were taking place among the President's advisers." On one side, hard-liners, including Bannon, who has said he believes that China is "bent on world domination," advocated a confrontational stance on trade and other issues. On the other, according to Russel, "Jared Kushner was described as adamant that Mar-a-Lago should be exclusively about bonding." Russel continued, "We were told that the theory was to first establish a warm family friendship, using meals and Trump's personal charisma."

In the event, China overwhelmingly achieved its objectives: a soft-focus summit with regal photo ops and little talk of trade and other touchy subjects. It was also an auspicious occasion for the Kushner family. While Xi met with Trump, Beijing regulators approved three trademark applications from Ivanka's company, to sell bags, jewelry, and spa services. Ivanka is also an adviser to the President, and her deals with the Chinese were hardly unusual. Since Trump assumed office, the Chinese government has approved scores of trademark applications by the Trump Organization.

Kushner was proud of his role in the summit, telling a person close to him, "People say we ought to do things the way they always have been done, with the same approaches. Somebody with more experience, tied to the old ways, may not have necessarily been able to pull off the Mar-a-Lago summit like we did." He added that the officials who have criticized his approach to foreign affairs "usually get pretty uncomfortable when they're not in control of something and it doesn't go the way they want."

By the spring of 2017, investigators in charge of evaluating whether to give Kushner a permanent security clearance had new information to consider. U.S. intelligence agencies aggressively target Chinese government communications, including Cui's reports to Beijing about his meetings in the United States.

According to current and former officials briefed on U.S. intelligence about Chinese communications, Chinese officials said that Cui and Kushner, in meetings to prepare for the summit at Mar-a-Lago, discussed Kushner's business interests along with policy. Some intelligence officials became concerned that the Chinese government was seeking to use business inducements to influence Kushner's views. The intelligence wasn't conclusive, according to those briefed on the matter. "I never saw any indication that it was successful," a former senior official said, of Chinese efforts to compromise Kushner. The Chinese could have mischaracterized their discussions with Kushner. But the intelligence reports triggered alarms that Chinese officials were attempting to exploit Kushner's close relationship with the President, which could yield benefits over time. "They're in it for the long haul," the former official said. (A spokesman for Kushner said, "There was never a time—never—that Mr. Kushner spoke to any foreign officials, in the campaign, transition, and in the Administration, about any personal or family business. He was scrupulous in this regard.")

In March, 2017, Bill Priestap, the F.B.I.'s chief of counterintelligence, visited the White House and briefed Kushner about the danger of foreign-influence operations, according to three officials familiar with the meeting. Priestap told Kushner that he was among the top intelligence targets worldwide, and was being targeted not only by China but by every other major intelligence service as well, including those of the Russians and the Israelis. Priestap said that foreign spy agencies could use diplomats and spies masquerading as students and journalists to collect information about him. (An F.B.I. spokesperson declined to comment.)

Priestap and Kushner discussed some of Kushner's contacts, including Wendi Deng Murdoch, the ex-wife of Rupert Murdoch. Kushner and Ivanka Trump had known her for about a decade, and she was a regular guest at their Washington home. U.S. diplomats and intelligence officials have long speculated about Wendi Murdoch's ties to the Chinese government. Internally, some Chinese officials spoke about her in ways that suggested they had influence over her, the former senior official, who was briefed on the intelligence, said. Other officials said that the intelligence was inconclusive.

The allegations against Wendi Murdoch are complicated by her divorce from Rupert Murdoch. On January 15th, some of the allegations were published in the *Wall Street Journal*, which is owned by Rupert Murdoch. (A spokesperson for Wendi Murdoch said, "The idea that she is involved in anything covert is so absurd, it could only have come from an unnamed source." A spokesperson for Rupert Murdoch said that Murdoch does not believe Wendi is a spy.)

When Kushner was briefed by the F.B.I., he saw little cause for alarm, according to a person close to Kushner. He had no doubt that China and other countries were trying to persuade him to do things or to provide information, but he was, despite his inexperience in diplomacy and intelligence, confident in his ability to navigate these situations. After all, he told others, New

York real estate is not "a baby's business."

Largely away from view, the U.S. and China are engaged in a heightened competition to steal sensitive information from each other and to manipulate foreign officials. Since 2016, Chinese authorities have expanded public warnings about the threat posed by American espionage. (In November, the Chinese Society of Education issued a video quiz for primary-school students, which included the question "What number should you dial when you spot spying activities?") China's intelligence services have demonstrated greater sophistication in seeking to compromise foreign officials, sometimes by using hacked information. In 2014, Chinese hackers copied a vast database from the Office of Personnel Management. Officials said that Beijing appeared particularly interested in identifying Chinese-Americans who were working for the U.S. government, so that China could try to manipulate them into being of assistance.

For its 2017 budget, the Obama Administration requested nineteen billion dollars for cybersecurity, an increase of more than thirty-five per cent from the previous year. Earlier this month, the F.B.I. arrested Jerry Chun Shing Lee, a former C.I.A. officer, and charged him with unlawful possession of defense information. In addition to countering classic espionage, the U.S. is considering new ways of managing how foreign powers lobby and seek to affect the American political system. A 2016 law has established an interagency unit to coördinate "counter-propaganda," and bills proposed in October expand requirements of the Foreign Agent Registration Act, which regulates foreign influence in Washington.

American intelligence officials describe their Chinese counterparts with grudging respect. At the end of the Obama Administration, Russia and China topped the White House's list of counterintelligence threats, largely because of their proficiency in electronic surveillance—intercepting phone calls and e-mails. The Chinese were not yet on the level of the Russians in the area of "human intelligence," or spies and informants, a senior Obama Administration official said, "but they're certainly improving, and they've been quite aggressive in recent years." Michael Bahar, a former staff director and general counsel for Democrats on the House Intelligence Committee, said, "They are a professional service. They do their homework."

In the months after Priestap briefed Kushner on the counterintelligence threat, Kushner and Ivanka Trump made some adjustments. In May, the Kushner Companies issued an apology after reporters observed Nicole Kushner Meyer, Jared Kushner's sister, speaking about his White House position while promoting real estate to potential investors in China. In September, Kushner and Ivanka declined an invitation to visit China, amid criticism from some American scholars that they were ill-equipped to conduct diplomacy on behalf of the United States.

Other plans remained unchanged. In November, Kushner travelled to China as part of the President's delegation for a summit with Xi Jinping. In Beijing, Kushner had lunch at the home of Wendi Murdoch, an occasion that went unmentioned in briefings and public schedules. (A White House spokesman said that Kushner attended the lunch "in a personal capacity," after the President's official business was complete.) Kushner saw no reason to curtail their friendship. In the seven months since Kushner's meeting with Priestap, Wendi Murdoch had done nothing that raised his suspicions, according to a person close to Kushner. "Why do I have more of a risk of telling her state secrets than anyone else?" Kushner asked recently. "Either I'm qualified to handle state secrets or I'm not qualified to handle state secrets. I think I understand my responsibilities."

In December, U.S. intelligence agencies briefed a wider circle of officials, saying that "a member of the president's family" was being targeted by a Chinese influence operation, echoing earlier warnings. It was not clear if that family member was Kushner or someone else.

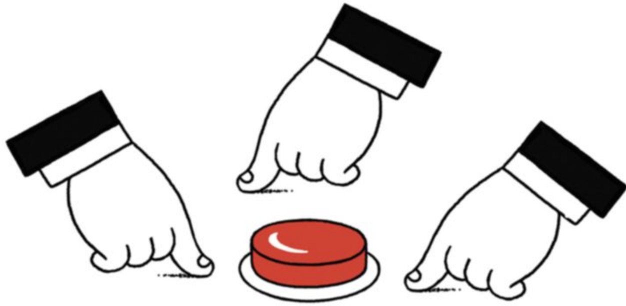
The President's children resist the argument that their undivested assets, their behavior, and their willingness to mix government service and personal profit present a target to adversaries and allies alike. The senior transition official believes that's a mistake. "They're going to slowly, over time, get what they want out of him, and it's not going to be obvious," the official said. "Sure, you'll take the meeting, but you're giving them a real investment opportunity that's 'good for them,' and 'everyone wins.' Meanwhile, they're just trying to get their teeth into him."

Kushner enters his second year in Washington facing increasing political and legal pressures. He has already testified before congressional committees about his meetings with the lawyer from Moscow, the Russian Ambassador, and the head of V.E.B. The F.B.I., too, is reportedly investigating Kushner's Russian meetings. As details of his dealings with China come to light, they expose him to additional questions about the wisdom of his diplomatic efforts and the recurring risk that his work in government cannot be disentangled from his family's business interests. This month, it emerged that the Securities and Exchange Commission and federal prosecutors in the Eastern District of New York had issued subpoenas to the Kushner Companies, for details about its use of the EB-5 visa program.

Kushner's once expansive role in the White House has narrowed, and he no longer meets frequently with Ambassador Cui. Still, by his own description, he is as confident as ever that his instincts, honed in the family business, can serve him, and the country, well. In the White House, he has a lofty but precarious status. Henry Kissinger, who had encouraged Kushner's dialogue with Cui, described Kushner as occupying a "daunting role flying close to the sun."

Recently, a former teaching fellow from Kushner's undergraduate days at Harvard recalled that Kushner took a popular class on the American Presidency, taught by Roger Porter, who had advised Ronald Reagan when he was President. At the end of the semester, Porter read aloud from "The Inner Ring," a 1944 oration by C. S. Lewis. It was Porter's warning to his ambitious students about the temptations that haunt higher office, and the allure of favor-seekers. "You will be drawn in, if you are drawn in, not by desire for gain or ease, but simply because at that moment, when the cup was so near your lips, you cannot bear to be thrust back again into the cold outer world." ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS



LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

THE BUTTON: A NUCLEAR FABLE

BY CALVIN TRILLIN

When the first nuclear-alert alarm sounded, at approximately two-thirty in the afternoon, the President flipped the switch that locks the doors to the Oval Office with tamper-proof dead bolts and then dove under his desk. His cell phone skittered across the floor during the dive; he was carrying only the cheeseburger he'd been eating. Diving under the desk was precisely what he'd been taught to do during atomic-bomb drills at that military boarding school where well-off parents sent their incorrigibles and slow learners. Within seconds, though, he realized that he was stuck. The Oval Office desk was larger than his desk had been in high school, but so was the President.

Until that moment, the day had seemed like any other day at the White House. Many staffers were in their offices, meeting with their criminal-defense attorneys. Vice-President Mike Pence had been alerted that he might be required to appear in public with the President later in the day, and so, facing a wall on which a mirror and a picture of Nancy Reagan had been placed side by side, he was practicing his adoring smile. Stephen Miller was polishing his response to a newly published book, "Twenty-four Personality Types and How to Deal with Them," in which the author, the renowned psychologist Sarah Stewart, mentioned him as the personification of a type she called Aggressive Dork.

That morning, Cabinet secretaries, assembled for a meeting in the Cabinet Room, had been passing the time before the President's arrival by bantering about which description of the President that had leaked to the press was the most accurate. "I was right on the mark," the Treasury Secretary, Steven Mnuchin, boasted, of his characterization of the President as an idiot. H. R. McMaster, the national-security adviser, argued that he'd been much more accurate in depicting the President as a dope. Rex Tillerson, displaying a scholarly streak that surprised his colleagues, pointed out that Merriam-Webster defined "dope" as "a stupid person," while "moron," the word Tillerson had used to describe the President, was defined as "a very stupid person." The door opened, and they all stood and said, respectfully, "Good morning, Mr. President. You are the smartest of them all."

The tension didn't start until early afternoon. It had been days since the President and the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Un, had exchanged words about the nuclear buttons on their desks, but when the picture on the Oval Office television set suddenly went dark—it turned out that so many Fox News employees had to be sent to anti-harassment training that there was no one left to operate the cameras—the President, finding nothing else to occupy his time, resumed tweeting. In a tweet aimed at Kim, he wrote, "Hey, Little Rocket Man, my button is a lot bigger than your button—nyeh, nyeh, nyeh."

"No, it isn't, Old and Depleted Hunk of Rotting Flesh," Kim replied.

"Yes, it is, Bad Haircut Dwarf."

"No, it isn't, Orange All Over."

"If you show me yours, I'll show you mine," the President tweeted.

Just then, the President's chief of staff, John Kelly, alarmed by the tenor of the tweets, entered the Oval Office. He calmed the President by telling him that replacement camera operators were due to arrive at Fox News soon, promising to have the White House mess bring in some extra ketchup for the cheeseburger, and assuring him that he was a genius. Kelly was almost back at his desk when the nuclear-alert alarm sounded.

Within seconds, Kelly was informed by White House security that it was a false alarm, set off by an electrical glitch. Terrified that the President, not having heard the all-clear because of his concentration on his cheeseburger, might respond to the alarm by pushing the large nuclear button on his desk, Kelly ran back to the Oval Office—only to find the doors bolted. He shouted "False alarm!" again and again through the door, not realizing that the President suffers from hearing loss: his right ear is partly blocked, and through his left ear he can hear only compliments.

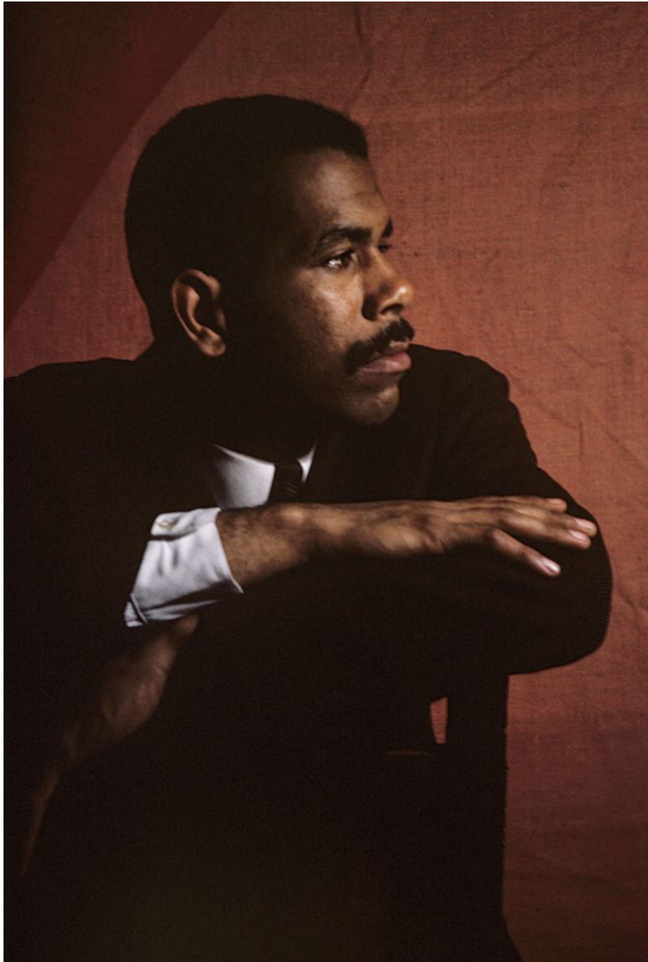
While Kelly called for a battering ram, the President, from his cramped position on the floor, was indeed feeling around with his one free hand (the other held the cheeseburger) for the nuclear button on his desk. He intended to show Kim Jong Un once and for all whose was bigger. The battering ram was now at work on the bolted door, but the President apparently wasn't able to hear it. He knew that the button was on the upper right corner of his desk, and he stretched his arm in that direction. He was tantalizingly close, but he couldn't quite reach it. The door was starting to give way. He shifted his position as much as he could without dropping the cheeseburger. He still couldn't reach it. He gave up just as Kelly and a Secret Service team burst through the door, shouting, "False alarm!" Thus was the world spared a nuclear holocaust because the President's fingers were too short to reach his button. ♦

AMERICAN ARCHIVES

REMAINDERS

A brilliant début launched the career of a singular talent. How did he get lost?

BY KATHRYN SCHULZ



William Melvin Kelley wrote about white people thinking about black people.

There were arrows, so we followed them. This was one afternoon last summer; my partner and I had spent the day at our local public library, working steadily through breakfast and lunch and what the British would call teatime, until suddenly hunger clobbered us both and we packed up and headed out to the car. Home was maybe four miles away. In my mind, I was already constructing enormous sandwiches. The arrows appeared two miles in, lining the side of the road where, that morning, there had been nothing but marsh grass. They were shin-high, wordless, red on a white background, pointing away from the sandwiches. My partner, who is usually more hungry than I am but always more curious, swung the car into the other lane and began to follow them.

The arrows led down a state highway, across an interchange, onto a smaller road, past a barn and some grain silos, then along one of the Chesapeake Bay's countless tributaries. A sign warned us that we were in a flood zone. My partner, who grew up one county over, remembered the place from childhood—at seven or eight, she'd had a memorable encounter in the area with a trailer full of cockatiels—but she hadn't been there since. The arrows ended at a large gray shed with a red roof. A spray-painted sign indicated that it was open twice a month, on Saturdays, in the summer only. We parked across the street, next to a boat, and headed for the door.

Inside: boxes of fishing tackle, cans of Rust-Oleum, a ceiling-high stack of interior/exterior paint. A half-dozen washboards, a cast-iron sewing machine, signs advertising fresh eggs and Guinness and speed limits in unknown locations. Doorframes, window frames, picture frames stripped of their pictures and stacked catawampus in a corner. A wall of old license plates, a box of old flashlights, Chock full o'Nuts cans chock-full of nails. Circular saws, gate weights, drill bits, jigging bait, oyster tongs, jumbles of other farming and fishing equipment that I, having grown up suburban and landlocked, could not identify. No cross-stitched pillows here; no clothes, unless you count waders; no discarded chinaware—not much, in short, of the usual junk-shop bric-a-brac. A few boxes of LPs. A few old sports pennants. And, near the cash register, a single bookshelf, with a handwritten sign taped to the top: "Paperbacks, 50¢. Hardbacks, $1."

Books I can identify. I went to browse, and spotted, first thing, a slender volume that was shelved the wrong way round—binding in, pages out. I pulled it down, turned it over, and found myself holding a beautiful clothbound first edition of Langston Hughes's "Ask Your Mama." I flipped it open and there on the frontispiece it said:

> Inscribed especially for William Kelley ~ on your first visit to my house ~ welcome!
> Sincerely ~
> Langston Hughes
> New York
> February 19, 1962

I gawped. Then I beckoned my partner over and we gawped together. After a short-lived and entirely silent moral crisis—resolved by remembering that half the point of visiting junk stores is the possibility of stumbling on unexpected treasures—I walked over to the cash register, handed the young

CARL VAN VECHTEN TRUST/BEINECKE LIBRARY, YALE

PHOTOGRAPH BY CARL VAN VECHTEN

man behind it a dollar, and bought the book. And then, because it, too, was an arrow, I followed it.

I didn't know who William Kelley was when I found that book but, like millions of Americans, I knew a term he is credited with first committing to print. "If You're Woke, You Dig It" read the headline of a 1962 Op-Ed that Kelley published in the New York *Times*, in which he pointed out that much of what passed for "beatnik" slang ("dig," "chick," "cool") originated with African-Americans.

A fiction writer and occasional essayist, Kelley was, himself, notably woke. A half century before the poet Claudia Rankine used her MacArthur "genius" grant to establish an institute partly dedicated to the study of whiteness, Kelley turned his considerable intellect and imagination to the question of what it is like to be white in this country, and what it is like, for all Americans, to live under the conditions of white supremacy—not just the dramatic cross-burning, neo-Nazi manifestations of it common to his time and our own but also the everyday forms endemic to our national culture.

Kelley first addressed these issues at length in his début novel, "A Different Drummer." Published three weeks after that *Times* Op-Ed, when he was twenty-four, it promptly earned him comparisons to an impressive range of literary greats, from William Faulkner to Isaac Bashevis Singer to James Baldwin. It also got him talked about, together with the likes of Alvin Ailey and James Earl Jones, as among the most talented African-American artists of his generation.

When I read "A Different Drummer," I understood why. Geographically, the novel is set in a small town called Sutton, outside the city of New Marsails, in an imaginary Southern state wedged between Mississippi and Alabama. Temporally, it is set in June, 1957, when a young African-American farmer named Tucker Caliban salts his fields, slaughters his horse and cow, burns down his house, and departs the state—whereupon its entire African-American population follows.

It's a brilliant setup. Our culture has produced countless fantasies about what would have happened if the Civil War had ended differently—chiefly, if the Confederacy had won and slavery had endured. (See, e.g., "The Guns of the South," "If the South Had Won the Civil War," and "Underground Airlines.") But we have a paucity of art that chooses to imagine a different outcome for the civil-rights movement, or alternate universes where African-Americans, from any era, wield not less power but more.

Appropriately, that seizure of power—the sudden refusal of African-Americans to continue living under conditions of subordination—flummoxes the white citizens of Sutton. When "A Different Drummer" opens, one of them, seeking to make sense of the recent events, recounts a harrowing story. Half slave narrative, half tall tale, it concerns a behemoth of a man, known simply as the African, who arrives one day on a slave ship, cradling a baby boy in the crook of his arm. Bound by chains held by at least twenty men, the African is led into town and sold—whereupon he whips around and, with the chains, knocks over his captors and decapitates the auctioneer: "Some folks swear . . . that the head sailed like a cannon ball through the air a quarter mile, bounced another quarter mile, and still had enough steam to cripple a horse some fellow was riding into New Marsails." Gathering up his chains "like a woman grabs up her skirts," the African then flees to a nearby swamp and starts conducting raids to free other slaves. Eventually, his nominal owner, led to the hideout by a traitor, kills the African and claims as his own the baby boy: Tucker Caliban's great-grandfather.

The man who tells this tale maintains that Caliban acted as he did because "the African's blood" resurged within him. Not all his listeners agree, but they're hard pressed to offer a better explanation for the recent exodus, or imagine its likely consequences. Some wonder whether wages will be better or worse with a third of the population gone. Others, professing not to care about Caliban and his followers, echo the governor's statement: "We never needed them, never wanted them, and we'll get along fine without them." Still others feel betrayed, in ways they can't articulate, by the violation of a social compact whose terms they'd never previously bothered to study too closely.

Although the plot of "A Different Drummer" depends on the autonomous actions of African-Americans, the story is told exclusively through the eyes of these white townspeople. This, too, is a smart idea—a kind of fictional affirmation of the historian Lerone Bennett, Jr.,'s claim that "there is no Negro problem in America. The problem of race in America . . . is a white problem." Moreover, it is wonderfully executed. At twenty-four, Kelley was already a strikingly confident writer, with a sense of humor reminiscent of Flannery O'Connor in stories like "Revelation": caustic, original, efficacious. He was also a keen observer, and although his story has the emotional proportions of a myth, his sentences reliably feel like real life. Tucker Caliban's doomed cow is "the color of freshly cut lumber"; to the men watching from outside, the fire he set first appeared climbing a pair of curtains in the center of his home, then "moved on slowly to the other windows like someone inspecting the house to buy it."

"A Different Drummer" ends in pessimism, less about the fate of black Americans than about the moral potential of white ones. Yet, thanks to it, Kelley's career began in tremendous optimism. His was the rare first novel that makes future ones seem both inevitable and exciting—and, indeed, he went on to publish four more books in under a decade. But I wasn't alone in being unfamiliar with them. After his early and fiery start, Kelley largely faded into obscurity—not just before our era but in his own prime. Obscurity, of course, is a common enough fate for authors. But what's curious about Kelley is that he is seldom read today not just because of the weaknesses in his books but also because of their peculiar, discomfitting strengths.

William Melvin Kelley was born on November 1, 1937, at Seaview Hospital, a tuberculosis sanatorium on Staten Island, where his mother, Narcissa Agatha Garcia Kelley, was a patient. His father, also named William Kelley, worked for many years as an editor at the *Amsterdam News*, one of the oldest and most influential African-American newspapers in the nation. The paper was based in Harlem, but the family lived in a working-class Italian-American community in the Bronx, together with Kelley's maternal grandmother, a seamstress, who was the daughter of a slave and the granddaughter of a Confederate colonel.

By his own account, Kelley grew up

at a time when "striving Negroes wanted to transcend" race rather than politicize it. Typifying that impulse, his father "worked hard to eradicate all vestiges of Negroness from his voice," and kept Countee Cullen and Paul Laurence Dunbar on the main shelves of his library while banishing Marcus Garvey to its highest reaches. Kelley, whose own voice never lost its Bronx accent, internalized this ethos young. At home, he won over the neighborhood kids with his excellent Sinatra imitation, and with his willingness, when playing Cowboys and Indians, to take on the role of Tonto. At the Fieldston School, the nearly all-white prep school he attended from first through twelfth grades, he practiced the time-honored strategy of overachieving: by his senior year, he was student-council president, captain of the track team, all-around "golden boy," and bound for Harvard. Once there, Kelley discovered writing—which, he later recalled, "made me so happy I wasn't going to do anything else." He found mentors in the experimental novelist John Hawkes and the modernist poet Archibald MacLeish, and in 1960 he won the Dana Reed Prize, for the best writing by a Harvard undergraduate.

It was a high honor, but more or less the only one Kelley earned in an otherwise troubled college career. His mother died during his sophomore year, his father when he was a senior. Kelley switched majors four times, failed almost every class but his fiction courses, and dropped out of school one semester shy of graduation. He went home to his grandmother and, with considerable trepidation, confessed that he'd abandoned all his illustrious career plans and wanted to be a writer instead. She heard him out, then told him that she could not have spent seventy years making dresses if she hadn't loved it. Two years later, Kelley published "A Different Drummer."

Two more books followed in quick succession: a short-story collection, "Dancers on the Shore," in 1964, and a novel, "A Drop of Patience," in 1965. The stories are uneven, but the best of them—including "The Only Man on Liberty Street," in which racism ruptures a complicated family, and "Not Exactly Lena Horne," in which two retired widowers get into a small, upsetting fight—are exemplars of the form: taut and self-contained yet seemingly pulled midstream from life. The novel, meanwhile, concerns a blind jazz musician who rises to national prominence, has a doomed romance with a white woman, and subsequently suffers a nervous breakdown. It let Kelley explore not only the destructiveness of racial categories but one of his other long-standing interests as well: the primacy of sound. As a child, Kelley spent hours sitting with his grandmother while she worked, and the stories that she told him merged in his mind with the clatter of her sewing machine. In Europe, he befriended the avant-garde saxophonist Marion Brown and became part of an ongoing conversation about sound and meaning. "If things had gone another way," he told Gordon Lish in a 1968 interview, "I would've been a musician."

In retrospect, though, the most notable aspect of Kelley's early work is its dramatis personae. Wallace Bedlow, whom we first encounter making his way toward Caliban's farm in "A Different Drummer," reappears in "Dancers on the Shore" as a blues singer destined for a short but brilliant career in New York, under the guidance of his brother, Carlyle. Carlyle himself then plays starring roles in Kelley's last two novels, during the course of which he encounters Chig Dunford, a Harvard-educated aspiring writer who also débuts in the story collection. Dozens of other characters likewise reappear from tale to tale; in his old age, Kelley once said, he hoped to look up at his shelves "and see that

all of my books are really one big book." Like Balzac and Faulkner, he was in the business of world-building—in his literature, but also, by then, in his life.

Kelley was seventeen when he met his future wife, Karen Gibson; she was fourteen and, she told me, distinctly unimpressed. Almost a decade later, the two crossed paths again, at the Penn Relays, a weekend-long integrated track meet that drew thousands of African-American participants and spectators. By then, Kelley was finishing "A Different Drummer," while Gibson, who had studied art at Sarah Lawrence, was planning to become a painter. She was drawn to creative types and, this time, she was dazzled by him. In 1962, they got married.

The Kelleys' early life together was peripatetic. Gibson, who later changed her name to Aiki Kelley, was, like her husband, a product of the black bourgeoisie and eager to escape it; also like him, she wanted to see more of the world before starting a family, so the couple soon decamped to Rome. A year later, they returned to the United States for the birth of their first child, Jessica, but it was a short-lived homecoming. Three days after she was born, Malcolm X was assassinated. Kelley, asked by *The Saturday Evening Post* to cover the subsequent murder trial, grew disgusted with the bias in the judicial system, and vowed to leave the country again: "I wouldn't assign myself the task of announcing that our little rebellion had failed, that racism had won again for a while. Not with a young wife and a toddler depending on me and all this killing going on."

In short order, he and Aiki packed up and moved with Jesi to Paris, where their second daughter, Cira, was born, in 1968. Initially, they planned to learn the language, then relocate somewhere in Francophone Africa to explore their roots. After a few years, though, they decided that they wanted to be closer to their relatives, and moved instead to Jamaica, where they lived for nearly a decade—William writing, Aiki making art, and both of them raising and homeschooling their daughters.

It was in Jamaica that Kelley and his family converted to Judaism. This came about because Kelley started smoking ganja with some locals behind a neighborhood chicken joint, and every day before they lit up they read aloud from the Bible. Kelley had been raised as a Christian, but his interest in Scripture surged in Jamaica, and he asked his wife to begin reading it with him. The two of them were searching for moral guidelines to help them raise their children, and they soon found what they wanted in the Pentateuch. One by one, they began shedding old

DEAR EROS

I asked my son which part of his body he loved most.
He said his skeleton. I always used to think I loved
my toes, a quarter of my bones splayed into fans,
the nerves so bright and easy to please. A friend's daughter
showed me the bones she'd filed in an old card catalogue.
I handed each one back, the dull heat of rot traded
for the glare-white of a bare rib, fleshless cradle of hip,
heft of femur on a mantel. She and I shared our love
of lemons, and she taught me "witch" in her made-up language
so I could call myself by the proper word. The invented one.
I held myself against the hard belly of those vowels,
that black glyph of a name. The pulse I once felt
when my son turned inside me thrummed against my hand.
Tonight, the splinter I let live in my thumb finally worked
its way out of my flesh, the wound larger than the weapon.
I asked my son which part of his life he loved most.
He said crying. Because it felt so good to stop
when he was happy again. The daughter shows me
the thin hair of roots whitening the soil in a jar.
She has made this small wilderness and given it life.
When my marriage was failing, I offered to take care
of my friend's succulent. It was almost winter. Everything
was going gray. So when the plant began to bloom
I welcomed its dusty pollen until the kitchen smelled
like carrion and bone dust. The house grew heavy with need,
with an ache I understood. The smell of death was simple
to answer. I knew what those fetid yellow stars required.
I opened the back door to invite the flies to their desire.

—*Traci Brimhall*

traditions—bacon, Christmas, Sunday Sabbath—and adding new ones: Shabbat, Yom Kippur, a kosher kitchen.

It was always a self-directed faith; neither Kelley nor anyone in his family ever joined a synagogue, and they observed a religious calendar at odds with the conventional Jewish one. Kelley excelled at self-direction, in fact. He was meticulous in all his habits—the arrangement of his shoes, the order of his pens—and writing was no exception. He worked with punch-card regularity, in an office where his desk faced the wall, so that the only world he could see was the one he was creating. He set down his first drafts in pencil, made corrections in ink, then typed up the result on a manual typewriter, whose rhythm he loved. He did this every day, week after week, month after month, until he had published two more novels. Then he kept on doing it every day thereafter—even though, after the second of those novels came out, the world all but entirely ignored him.

The epigraph to Kelley's third novel, "dem," is written in the International Phonetic Alphabet—written, that is, to capture the way people actually speak, even though, in doing so, it thwarts the way people usually read. "Næʊ, ləmi təljə hæʊ dəm foks lɪv": those words mark a new willingness on Kelley's part to make things difficult for his readers, linguistically and otherwise. Translated, they read, "Now, lemme tellya how dem folks live."

The "folks" in question are white people, and, like "A Different Drummer," the novel focusses on a white character: Mitchell Pierce, a middling employee at an advertising agency, who grows increasingly estranged from, among other things, his job, his pregnant wife, his sense of self-worth, and reality. As such, Mitchell is a classic mid-century white antihero, the kind that can be found, in works ranging from "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" to "Portnoy's Complaint," exuding professional mediocrity, evading responsibility, humiliating himself sexually, and cowering in the face of his supposed inferiors: women, children, household help, members of all kinds of the putative lower classes.

Aptly, for a book about an antihero, "dem" winds its plot not through action but through passivity. Early on, Mitchell tears a hamstring and finds himself bed-bound for several weeks, during which time he develops an embarrassing addiction to a soap opera and a powerful crush on its heroine. Kelley is setting us up to think about melodrama, which "dem" is not made of but is very much about: the substitution of feelings for ethics, cheap thrills for costly experience, and simulacrum for reality. Indeed, when Mitchell happens to encounter the actress who plays his crush, he fails to grasp that she isn't actually the TV character he worships, and then further fails, when the opportunity arises, to sleep with her.

While Mitchell is conducting this ineffectual affair, his wife is having a considerably more successful one, with a black man. When the book opens, she is pregnant with twins; in an echo of the soap-opera plots Mitchell adores, one of these turns out to be fathered by her husband, the other by her lover. After the babies are born and the doctor breaks the news, Mitchell sets off to find his fellow-father and persuade him to take the dark-skinned baby.

Thus begins a kind of picaresque journey through black New York, and, in parallel, through the Bosch-like fantasy- and horror-scape of Mitchell's racial imagination. Along the way, he encounters another desirable woman, this one black, whom he also fails to bed; an African-American maid he had unjustly fired some time before; her nephew, none other than Carlyle Bedlow, who pockets Mitchell's money and serves as his poker-faced, Harlem-based guide; Carlyle's militant younger brother Mance, who refers to Mitchell as "devil"; and, finally, Mitchell's co-father, a man named Cooley, whom, it turns out, he has known all along.

The whole journey is a merciless satire on the themes of white fear, guilt, and hypocrisy, played out in the always charged

language of miscegenation—only, this time, with the current of that charge reversed. One practical and emotional cornerstone of slavery was the inability of the enslaved to determine their own families. When Mitchell, cuckolded and left to raise a black man's child as his own, realizes that his suffering is a kind of reprisal, his whiny "Why me?" is parried irrefutably by his fellow-father: Why Cooley's great-granddaddy? Like the white characters in "A Different Drummer," Mitchell experiences black retribution. Neither is violent—the first is a renunciation, the second a reckoning—but both are profoundly disconcerting, because they leave white characters and readers alike alone with past and present iniquities, and with the scales to measure them.

If "dem" is a strange book, it is strange in a familiar way. Part Roth, part Swift, part Twain, it is built of satire, farce, and hyperbole, all deployed in the name of moral seriousness. But Kelley's next novel, "dunfords travels everywheres," is strange in a strange way. When it opens, Chig Dunford is living in an imaginary European country that observes a bizarre sartorial segregation: every day, its citizens self-divide into those who wear blue clothes (Atzuoreursos) and those who wear yellow ones (Jualoreursos), groups that are strictly forbidden from mingling. While living there, Chig has a brief affair with an enigmatic fellow-expatriate named Wendy, then reunites with her on his way back to the United States, when the two find themselves sharing a steamer with a mysterious organization called The Family, and also with a cargo hold full of slaves. Meanwhile, Carlyle Bedlow is back from "dem" and up to a whole new set of tricks, including one involving a loan officer moonlighting as a limousine driver, who turns out to be—in a wonderful Bulgakov-like turn, by far the best in the book—the devil.

All this is funny, dark, smart, and extremely entertaining—except that, fifty pages in, the reader suddenly slams up against this sentence: "Witches oneWay tspike Mr. Chigyle's Languish, n curryng him back tRealty, recoremince wi hUnmisereaducation. Maya we now go on wi yReconstruction, Mr. Chuggle? Awick now?"

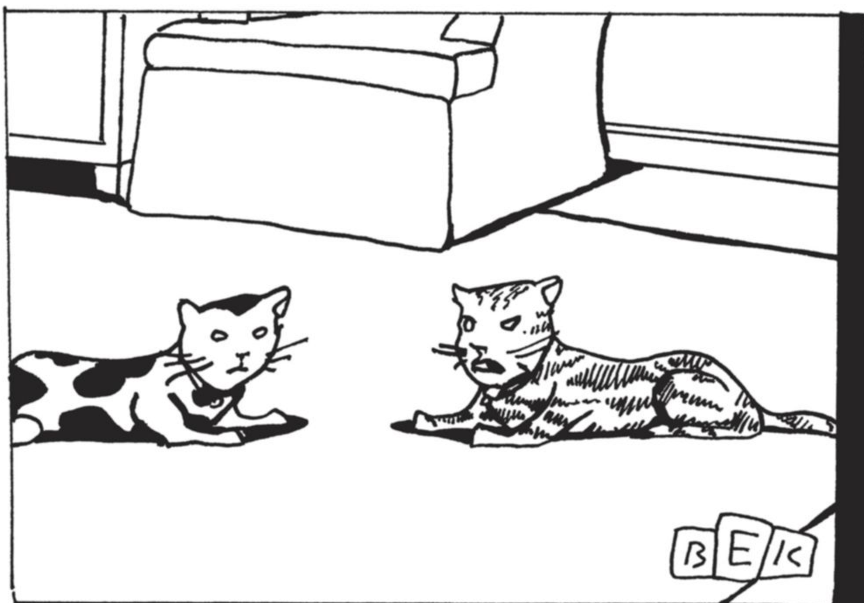
Well, yes: we are now very Awick, although whether we will go on is a different question. Kelley conceived "dunfords travels everywheres" in conscious thrall to "Finnegans Wake," and his own book is, for long stretches, similarly rough going. Kelley tells Chig's and Carlyle's separate stories mostly straight, but in between he grabs language by its edges and bends it as far as he can, in order to pull the bourgeois, Ivy-educated Chig and the impoverished, street-smart Carlyle into a single consciousness, made of their common national history.

Kelley had long been fascinated by the way one language can accommodate many different speakers. "Early on," he wrote, "blessed with an ear for variations of spoken English, I realized that I lived in four linguistic worlds": the Standard English he spoke at home; the working-class Italian-American English he learned in the Bronx; the heavily Latinate, slightly Yiddish English he heard at Fieldston; and black English, which he regarded, like jazz, as one of the great creative contributions of African-Americans. At the same time, he was fascinated by the relationship between language and power. Tucker Caliban is taciturn almost to the point of mute. Even his wife can barely eke speech out of him, and he rejects oration and persuasion, refusing to explain, or even articulate, the beliefs behind his scorched-earth exit from the state. With one exception—a militant Northern preacher, who is voluble, dislikable, and doomed—the other black characters are likewise silent. In "dunfords," by contrast, the black characters have plenty to say, but their voices intermittently wax incomprehensible.

That is the same problem solved two different ways. Like many who are steeped in but structurally excluded from conventional English and its canon, Kelley had doubts about its capacity to adequately express African-American life. His epigraph for "dunfords," borrowed from Joyce, is "My soul frets in the shadow of his language." The language he creates in its place blends the black vernacular with puns, patois, and linguistic borrowings that most readers (this one included) will struggle to identify.

The result is best read out loud—and, in fact, is nearly impossible to read any other way. It's sometimes rewarding, since Kelley is smart and funny no matter what language he uses, but it is never easy, and it slows down a book that, in its bones, wants to be headlong and exuberant—so much so that readers can be forgiven for wanting to skip the difficult bits to get back to the plot. (And also to sentences that offer more familiar pleasures. Here as everywhere, Kelley's straightforward prose is both plain and shining, like sunlight catching the windows of an apartment building. When the devil drives away in his limousine, Carlyle watches it "designing the fresh snow with row after row of tiny interlaced hammers, its tail-end, finally, becoming part of the shadows.")

But simply ignoring the tough parts won't work, of course. Kelley's private language is difficult to decode but



"Dogs are men."

essential to the book, and so a determined reader must soldier on, grateful that "dunfords" is, at least, short by comparison with "Finnegans Wake." The result is like roaring down a roller coaster with the brakes on: thrilling, frustrating, dominated by sheer sound.

William Kelley was thirty-two when "dunfords travels everywheres" appeared. He wrote constantly for the next forty-seven years, never published another book, and died a year ago, at the age of seventy-nine.

By then, Kelley had been back in his native New York for decades. He loved Jamaica, but eventually the family's visas expired, and their relatives began hounding them to come home. In 1977, the Kelleys returned to the United States and rented a sixth-floor walkup at 125th Street and Fifth Avenue. The gentrification of Harlem had not yet begun, and their new home had an absentee slumlord, an alcoholic super, no heat, no electricity, no gas, no phone, and no lock on the door. The Kelleys bought winter clothes for the first time in a decade, together with candles, a Coleman stove, and a padlock for the door.

It wasn't ideal, but it was all they could afford. The book advances, the speaking gigs, the magazine requests, and the university appointments had dried up, and the family had hardly any money. This was fine by Kelley, who had long since read Thoreau ("A Different Drummer" takes its title from "Walden") and embraced the idea of voluntary poverty. By day, he kept writing, at a desk crammed below a loft bed in their tiny apartment. After midnight, when the local stores put their unsold produce in the trash, he did the family grocery shopping. "Going through the garbage at the Korean grocers didn't embarrass him," his daughter Jesi said. "He was utterly unafraid to be poor."

He was also unafraid to keep writing in the absence of public encouragement. When he died, he left behind a considerable quantity of prose, including two unpublished novels. One of these, "Daddy Peaceful," is loosely based on his own family, whom he never previously wrote about though unabashedly adored. The other, "Dis/integration," is a meta-fiction that concerns the further adventures of Chig Dunford, and, like "The Brothers Karamazov" and "Pale Fire," contains within it an entirely separate work: a complete novel by a white Hemingwayesque writer. That embedded novel, "Death Fall," features no black characters at all, and describes the unravelling of a small Kansas town after a new and highly addictive drug is introduced there.

Kelley tried to publish both of these novels during his lifetime, to no avail. Eventually, in 1989, he began teaching fiction at Sarah Lawrence, and liked it enough to continue doing so for nearly three decades. But, even then, he never stopped writing. "There are artistic people who have that moment of 'Ugh, I suck,'" Jesi said. "He wasn't like that. He never got depressed. He never thought he was bad. He never doubted himself. He just didn't understand what happened."

What did happen? It's difficult to say; both present-day fame and posthumous reputation are elusive, mercurial, and multifactorial. Some of the downturn in Kelley's fortunes likely had to do with the changing political climate. "We always said, we made a revolution and we lost," Aiki Kelley said, and she believes that her husband was one casualty of that defeat; as the momentum of the civil-rights movement ebbed, those with the power to make publishing decisions turned their attention elsewhere.

Still, Kelley was never a pat enough political writer to simply wash in and out with the ideological tides, and there were many other considerations, too. Chief among these was the strange chiasmus at the heart of his work: a black man writing about how white people think about black people. That perspective was smart and important—in effect, it transformed W. E. B. Du Bois's double consciousness into a narrative device—but it radically diminished Kelley's audience. Many white readers didn't want a black writer telling them what they thought, especially when so much of it was withering, while many black readers, long starved for literary representation, didn't want to read about more white characters. To make matters worse, very few people, white or black, wanted to subscribe to a vision of America that grew progressively more damning in the course of Kelley's career. And, regardless of the topic of a book or the race of its author, almost no one wanted to contend with experimental prose.

Ultimately, though, Kelley may have suffered most from the relentless conveyor belt of life, which constantly carries new things into sight and propels older ones away. Time, too, is an arrow that all of us follow. Critics love the adjective "timeless," but the truth is that most writers, even most exceptionally gifted ones, are of a time, even if not always of their own.

In 1962, when William Kelley met Langston Hughes, the two writers were at opposite ends of their careers. Hughes had dozens of books, plays, and poetry collections behind him, and only five years of life left ahead of him. But he loved championing up-and-coming writers of color, and he needed help packing away some material in his apartment for posterity. Kelley, meanwhile, admired Hughes, needed money, and agreed to do the job. The inscribed copy of "Ask Your Mama" was a kind of bonus pay, but, in those final months before "A Different Drummer" appeared, it must have also seemed like an affirmation. In its pages, Hughes, too, could be found imagining a counterfactual history:

> DREAMING THAT THE NEGROES
> OF THE SOUTH HAVE TAKEN OVER—
> VOTED ALL THE DIXIECRATS
> RIGHT OUT OF POWER—
> COMES THE *COLORED HOUR*:
> MARTIN LUTHER KING IS GOVERNOR OF
> GEORGIA . . .

Six years later, King was dead, and Hughes, too, and although Kelley didn't know it at the time, his copy of "Ask Your Mama" had gone missing. Each time he and his family left the country, they shed whatever possessions they didn't need and stashed anything of value with family and friends. Those things of value included the gift from Hughes, but somewhere between 1963, when the Kelleys first left the country, and 1977, when they returned for good, it vanished from a relative's apartment in Manhattan.

How it got from there to rural Maryland forty years later, and where else it went along the way, is anybody's guess. The beauty of a true junk shop is that it is a kind of island in the stream of time. Things wash up there and are granted temporary clemency from the all-devouring future; people stop by there and mingle, like time travellers at a rest stop, with fragments of the past. Mostly, you can't expect to leave with much of value. But every once in a while you find what I did in that Langston Hughes book, and in the man to whom it was given: in both senses, a real deal. ♦

In the fall of 2014, word got around Pendleton, in Indiana, that a crew was coming to make a film, called "O.G." It was to

A REPORTER AT LARGE

GETTING A SHOT

A movie made in a prison captures inmates' hope and despair.

BY NICK PAUMGARTEN

feature inmates and guards as actors and extras. No one had ever attempted anything like it.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KRISANNE JOHNSON

When Theothus Carter was eleven, he and some friends stole a car, just for kicks. This led to his first arrest. It was the early nineties, in the Haughville section of Indianapolis. His older sister, who liked to watch reruns of "The Andy Griffith Show," often called him Oppie, for Opie Taylor, the cute kid played by Ron Howard, but Haughville wasn't Mayberry. By the time Carter was twelve, Oppie had come to denote his alter ego, who began each morning by smoking a blunt and was often drunk by noon, and whose principal skill was beating people up. "Oppie never lost a fight," Carter told me. "God gave me the talent to kick ass."

When Carter was fourteen, his father was shot and killed by a family friend who'd got into an argument with Carter's brother over a box of blunts. Carter and two of his brothers (he had seven siblings) were sent to a juvenile home. There followed a cycle of drug dealing, ass kicking, and incarceration. When Carter's mother died, in 2001, of complications related to AIDS ("She contracted it from my father—he was an everything addict"), Carter was serving a couple of years on a drug conviction at the Pendleton Correctional Facility, a maximum-security state prison near Indianapolis. For the rest of the decade, he was in and out of jail. Out again in 2010, he kicked in the door of a house belonging to "some guy with too much money" and shot one of the inhabitants. He was convicted of armed burglary and attempted murder, and given a sentence of sixty-five years. Carter, undone by Oppie, was back at Pendleton, to live out most of his life in jail.

Before long, he began to tire of Oppie, and all the trouble he'd caused. "He's the motherfucker that destroyed my life," Carter said. "I gotta keep my foot on his neck at all times." Carter wanted to be a role model, or a vestige of one, for his son, Theothus, Jr., who was born in 1999 and lived with his mother in Indianapolis. "He's the only good thing I got out of the dope game," Carter said. "I see him every week now. I told him, 'It took your daddy going to prison to make sense of himself.' "

In the fall of 2014, word got around the cell blocks that a crew was coming to Pendleton to make a feature film. The movie, called "O.G.," is about an older inmate who, on the verge of his release, befriends a younger inmate; complications ensue. It was to be shot inside the prison, using inmates and guards as actors and extras. No one had ever attempted anything like it.

At the time, Carter wasn't eligible to participate. One had to be free of any recent disciplinary writeups, and he had just been caught with a quarter pound of marijuana. But, as preparations for the film inched along, Carter's probationary period ended, and he got a chance to read for two small roles. Something about his ability to inhabit two very different characters, while remaining very much himself—to act without seeming to act—bowled over the filmmakers. When Carter was done, the casting director exclaimed, "That guy just won the Oscars of prison!"

By last summer, Carter had a new nickname in the prison yard: Movie Star. He'd been cast as the younger inmate, Beecher, beating out an eighteen-year-old who soon thereafter got into trouble and lost his film privileges. "One guy's misfortune is another's opportunity," Carter said. Only Jeffrey Wright, in the role of the older inmate, Louis, the original gangster of the title, had more scenes. Wright found that although he'd worked with the likes of Christopher Walken, Al Pacino, and Anthony Hopkins, he had never worked with an actor as intense as Theothus Carter.

"Would you mind taking a look at this collection of my poems? Your opinion would mean a lot."

The director of "O.G." is Madeleine Sackler, who is best known for her 2010 documentary, "The Lottery," about a Harlem charter school and the debate around school choice. While shooting "The Lottery," she began thinking, vaguely, about prison. "It's kind of the flip side," she recalled. "It's

what happens when people don't get a good education. I knew we had more people in prison than anywhere in the world, and that, with the longer sentences, we were letting them out older. I knew I wanted to make a narrative film, and that I wanted to tell a story of an older man on the eve of his release. And I wanted to make it with prisoners acting." This would be her first fictional feature.

Sackler is thirty-four, slight, with a deliberate and unhurried air. A mild disposition and a tendency toward upspeak disguise an abundance of self-assurance and drive, and seem to have the effect of putting her collaborators and subjects at ease. You don't see her coming. When she first showed up, the prisoners weren't sure who was in charge. It may be that, weary of being ordered around by uniformed, armed guards, they were open to her kind of command. Wright referred to her as "our quiet general." Stephen Belber, the film's screenwriter, said, "She has an inner confidence that replaces the need to flap her wings loudly." Sackler doesn't make a big show of her good intentions, or of her affluent background.

Her grandfather Raymond was one of the three Sackler brothers who owned Purdue Pharma, makers, since 1995, of the painkiller OxyContin. Opioid sales have made the Sacklers one of the nation's wealthiest families. Sackler's father, Jonathan, is a Purdue director (and notably, in light of "The Lottery," an avid charter-school advocate). She nevertheless describes her upbringing, in Greenwich, Connecticut, as fairly ordinary, by the standards, anyway, of Greenwich. She went to a public high school, and then to Duke.

One might detect a certain irony in Sackler's social activism. A great portion of the Pendleton population is there because of the scourge of drugs, or, if you'd prefer, the scourge of the drug war. OxyContin has undoubtedly deepened the problem of addiction, and contributed to the current heroin plague. So one might suppose that Sackler's concern and sympathy for the incarcerated is some kind of expiation. But she thinks this is baloney. She points out that her other grandfather was a mathematician, and that she has also made films about basketball and Belarus. It pains her to think that the perception of her project, and of the hard work of everyone involved, would be tainted in some way by her pedigree.

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Sackler reached out to about twenty state departments of correction before Doug Garrison, the chief of communications at the Indiana D.O.C., responded with something other than a pro-forma no. Garrison, a former special agent in the F.B.I., had helped create the Discovery documentary "G-Man: Making of an FBI Agent," and so had developed an uncommonly dovish perspective on the relationship between the media and law enforcement.

"The more people who know what we do, the more support we get," Garrison said. "Still, there was a long tradition of law enforcement being distrustful of TV or media or of opening ourselves up. I thought it would be cool to teach offenders about the process—not that they will ever get out to practice that skill. It would improve their mind and spirit and make their time in prison better." Nonetheless, he suggested that Sackler set aside, for the moment, the impracticable notions of shooting on location with real prisoners, and focus on conducting background research. She went along for the time being, although, in selecting from Garrison's array of possible penitentiaries, she had those notions still chiefly in mind. She wanted maximum security—"Maybe because the inmates would be the most marginalized," she said—and picturesque. "So I picked the prettiest one." Garrison got everyone to buy in: his boss at the D.O.C., the Pendleton superintendent, even the office of the governor, Mike Pence, who was not much known for such indulgences.

Pendleton was built in the nineteen-twenties, mostly by inmates, after the warden realized that it would be cheaper to have them do all the work. John Dillinger was an early inhabitant. On one side, it abuts a golf course. Just down the road is a medium-security prison and a juvenile lockup. This is corn and soybean country, but there's a trace of strange fruit in the soil. The small town of Pendleton, nearby, sits on the site of the Fall Creek Massacre of 1824, in which a gang of white settlers slaughtered a band of Native Americans, including women and children. Twenty years later, a white mob attacked a group of abolitionists gathered for a lecture by Frederick Douglass, who was badly beaten and left unconscious.

The state pen isn't one of those spare, futuristic, lightless dystopias, as in "Oz." It's an old-fashioned hoosegow—brown brick, arched windows, red tiled roof—not unlike Shawshank. From the parking lot, you might mistake the place for a dingy version of Stanford. But, like any prison, it is a soul-crushing complex, with its own fraught history of violence. In the eighties and nineties, the inmates called it Little Nam.

Sackler visited Pendleton in September, 2014, with Belber and Wolfgang

Theothus Carter, a prisoner who is one of the lead actors, with the film's director, Madeleine Sackler.

Held, her director of photography. Over five days, they did dozens of hours of interviews on camera, with staff and inmates of all ages, races, and affiliations. Belber used these interviews to write a script. In January, 2015, Sackler returned for what she called the good-will tour. "We needed to stress-test filming and casting there," she said. "I had no idea how they would react to reading a script like this. Would they be uncomfortable, or find it cheesy, or just bad?" She led readings and discussions with groups ranging from five to sixty prisoners, and tried to get a sense of whether the general population would abide the story, and the process of shooting it. Sackler and the crew had to undergo inmate-manipulation training (to protect themselves from what are called "setups"). She also spoke with leaders of the bigger gangs to secure their permission to incorporate gangs into the plot.

Whenever Sackler mentioned the project to anyone outside the prison, the two things she almost always heard were "There's no way they'll let you do it" and "Are you afraid?" They did, and she wasn't, really. She was ill at ease, at first, imposing on the prisoners' lives. "If anything, I was afraid of offending people," she said. Wright told the prisoners, "My challenge is to fit in with you guys."

To Garrison's surprise, if not Sackler's, the authorities started to buy in. Sackler met with the superintendent, and he approved the over-all concept. "If she had a script about how hopeless and shitty prison is, with someone who gets fucked in the end, we wouldn't have coöperated," Garrison said. "I desperately want this to be successful. My neck is out there a bit."

The guards in the film were taking part on their days off. They, and the twenty-eight inmates with speaking parts, were being paid scale, the Screen Actors Guild minimum of three hundred and thirty-five dollars a day, with ten per cent of the inmates' earnings going to a victims' fund and another forty per cent to the prison for "room and board." The non-speaking extras weren't getting paid but were promised meals—a craft-services recompense that, in light of their usual chow-hall fare, was enticing enough on its own. (They got a taste on the good-will tour: "What was that green stuff, with the chips?" "Guacamole, man." "That shit was *good*.") Really, prisoners and guards were happy for the break from their usual routine, the chance to interact with some civilians and movie stars, and the opportunity to convey to the public a more nuanced sense of their lives.

Precedents were tenuous and few. "Caesar Must Die," a 2012 film shot in Rebibbia Prison, outside Rome, consisted of real convicts putting on a performance of "Julius Caesar." "Act V," a 2002 radio segment on "This American Life," followed a group of prisoners as they staged the last act of "Hamlet." While making "Natural Born Killers," Oliver Stone attempted to film a riot scene in a prison outside Chicago, using prisoners as extras, but the riot turned real, and the authorities shut down the shoot for a week. There has recently been a slew of documentaries and reality shows shot in active prisons, including "60 Days In," in which a group of civilians are embedded in the general population at a county jail, unbeknownst to inmates or guards. But

shooting in an active maximum-security state penitentiary, with the inmates taking on most of the parts, using a script modelled on their own experiences there: this was new.

I first visited the prison in June, 2016, during the final week of rehearsals. The previous month, an inmate had died from an overdose, and for a while the prison had been on lockdown. The filmmakers had been barred from the grounds. Shooting was to begin in less than two weeks and last just twenty-four days, not an hour longer.

Past security, Sackler, in jeans, Stan Smith tennis shoes, and an untucked blue plaid shirt, awaited the arrival of Michelle Rains, an administrative assistant and Sackler's fixer. Habituated as Sackler had become to the place, and as its inhabitants had become to her (they called her Maddy or Miss Madeleine), Sackler still couldn't move around without a minder. Rains, known to all as Mo, is a compact, lightly sardonic woman in her forties who has worked at the prison since she was nineteen. She held a binder and a big ring of keys and had on jeans, Day-Glo-orange sneakers, and a green T-shirt with "Indiana Reformatory" on the back. She is married to a retired internal-affairs investigator at Pendleton, Mike Rains, whom she met in the prison. Their daughter worked there, too. Rains also oversees the prison's cat sanctuary, an abandoned office overrun by rescued strays, where several members of the cast of "O.G." are employed. A placard in her office reads "Meow or Never." "Mo is everyone's agent and everyone's boss, including mine," Sackler said. "She's the movie fairy here."

Rains led us through a series of locked gates—"If it's a lock, lock it," the signs read—and past a shoeshine stand where an inmate was buffing a guard's boots. After passing through some more gates, we emerged into the yard, a grassy expanse that Sackler referred to as the Quad. (Guards are called correctional officers, or C.O.s, although the inmates, who are called offenders, occasionally refer to them as "cops." The offenders' baggy milk-coffee-colored jumpsuits are "browns." Sackler prefers to call the offenders "men who are incarcerated," so as not to define them by their status; she doesn't generally ask what they are in for.) On the left: J-Cellhouse, a vast three-story stable of cells. On the right, K-Dorm, where offenders sleep in open bunks. Across the yard are the laundry, the chow hall, and an old schoolhouse that was to serve as the film crew's base of operations. Farther on, past mazes of fencing and razor wire, was the mental-health unit and, surrounding the whole complex, a wall thirty feet tall, with guard towers every hundred yards. Cell blocks devoted to "restrictive housing"—solitary confinement—are scattered throughout the grounds. Rains instructed us to step aside as the line—a few dozen inmates on the move—ambled from chow to J-Cellhouse, under the supervision of a few guards. Some of the offenders called out to Sackler and waved. Others glowered.

For a low-budget independent film, the location was peerless, as was the talent. "Prison—it's like a character-actor convention," Sackler said.

"You can't fake that funk," Wright said.

In a big, drab conference room on the second floor of the schoolhouse, we found Sackler's friend Boyd Holbrook, her partner in a production company called Madbrook Films. Holbrook is an actor; he plays the lead D.E.A. agent in the Netflix series "Narcos." Entering the prison on his first morning, he was caught with a pack of cigarettes (tobacco is banned at Pendleton), so the next day he resorted to hiding a nicotine patch on his upper thigh. He was there for a few days to help teach the inmates some acting techniques.

Wright had told me, "Some of these guys are really interesting actors. They're gonna bring it. You see some charismatic guys who were the star of their hood or their block. They were forceful and had presence, because they had to. They have skills of persuasion."

"We really been acting our whole life," Theothus Carter said. "We act every time we go in a courtroom to try to get out of this shit we put ourselves in."

Holbrook sat with an offender named Markus Murray, thirty-nine, with a pharaoh's beard, a shaved head, lots of tattoos, and shades resting on his pate. He was playing a white-supremacist gang member who, in the script, gets into a violent dispute with Jeffrey Wright's character, Louis. Sackler said, "Markus has the unfortunate job of being Louis's fall guy."

"You don't like each other," Holbrook said. "But Jeffrey's a professional. He's not gonna pull any weird shit on you."

"He's a nice guy," Murray said, recalling earlier read-throughs. There was a hint of Texas in his voice.

The room was bare, except for a card table and a few chairs in the middle, some chairs along the wall, and a basketball. An officer named Brooke Edwards stood sentry, as she would throughout the shoot. (She had also been cast in the film, as a forensic photographer.) Charles Lawrence, a shy, muscular, middle-aged African-American with a genial smile and wraparound sunglasses, was hanging out, after his rehearsal. He was doing a hundred and twenty years, for murder and attempted murder. Another inmate, Franklin Cox, known as Franko, also in for murder, was recording the proceedings on a video camera. Lawrence and Cox were both students in a documentary class that Sackler was teaching; she'd been helping them make a documentary about their lives, and also grooming them to work on the "O.G." crew. Cox, tall and skinny, with dreadlocks and glasses, was a keen pupil; he had become the ubiquitous production assistant, although, as Sackler said, "Franko can't be much of a P.A., because he can't have a phone." (The entire production was allowed just three cell phones, owing to their value as contraband. "Actually," a producer told me, "I'm more concerned about making a film without cigarettes.") Just before filming began, prison brass decreed that the inmates wouldn't be permitted to work on the crew, after all. Soon afterward, Franko was accused of mouthing off to some guards at count (Franko says it was a miscommunication), got written up, and had his film privilege temporarily revoked.

Holbrook and Murray began running the lines, which required him to repeat, over and over, a slur that his character shouts at Wright's: "Fucking coon!"

Murray stopped. "I feel so odd saying this."

"It's make-believe," Holbrook replied. "I don't care if we're in a prison or a fucking hedge-fund office. A certain

rage builds up in each of us." He tapped out a rhythm.

Murray tried to make it rote: "Fucking coon! Fucking coon! Fucking coon!"

Lawrence, leaning back in his chair, chuckled. "That's *bothering* him."

During a break, Murray recalled an earlier version of the scene, in which the script had him addressing Wright as an ape. "I didn't want to do it," he said. "I told them, I'm not gonna say the N-word, either. I have to live with a lot of people in here." He also wasn't sure that, in the context of Pendleton, either was a realistic insult. "Coon" was the compromise.

"They used to call me Carcass," Murray told me. He was in his seventeenth year of a murder sentence of sixty. (Because of good-behavior provisions, he is unlikely to serve more than thirty.) "I went to a guy's house, I'd heard he was abusing a girl, I broke down the door, and I beat him to death with a baseball bat," he said. (Many of the men I talked to described their crimes in righteous terms, if they admitted to them at all—they cast themselves as avengers and vigilantes in a wicked world.) Murray also said, as one will, that he was not in a gang. Others said that he was a member of the Saxon Knights, a white-supremacist gang that was founded at Pendleton.

In any case, he seemed to have a gentle disposition and an inquisitive mind. He said that he'd read about a thousand books during his time inside. "I like history—European history, the Vikings." He was a movie buff and said that his favorite film was "The Virgin Spring," the Ingmar Bergman classic about a farmer's revenge on some goatherds who have raped and murdered his daughter.

"If I have a legacy at all, maybe this film would be something to be proud of," he said. But he was worried, too, about being known, inside the prison and out in public, for as long as people watch movies, as the racist guy who called Jeffrey Wright a fucking coon. "A lot of people think this stuff is real," he said.

"What's up, Hollywood?" Holbrook said. Theothus Carter strode into the rehearsal room. An immediate presence: he was tall, lean, and broad-shouldered, with long low-calibre dreads drawn up in a ponytail, gentle-seeming brown eyes, a deep voice, an air of self-containment, and no shortage of self-confidence. He had on heavy brown boots and a fancy-looking watch, which he'd accepted in payment for a gambling debt.

He picked up the basketball and flipped it from hand to hand. "I'm a professional with this right here," he said.

"I don't know, I'm from Kentucky," Holbrook said. They talked some smack about hoops. Then Holbrook led Carter through a routine of breathing, stretching, and vocal exercise: "This is going to be your ritual every day. Get the instrument loosened up and ready to go." They made nonsense noises and funny faces. "This is a little silly, but stretch your tongue in circles." Carter complied, without embarrassment. He mentioned his Ramadan regimen, and Holbrook looked concerned. "You're going to need sleep, food. You're going to have to drink a lot of water."

"It's going to be hard. I don't like water."

"You guys get limes here?"

"No."

"Lemons?"

"No."

Carter tapped the script and said, "There ain't nothing in there I haven't been through. I don't know where that motherfucker came up with all this shit, but everything in there has happened

here. I don't know how they did this. It's like they were living in my head and then wrote a script about it, then handed it to me and put me in my own movie about me, and they didn't even know it."

No offender carried a bigger load, or evinced greater devotion. He read the script more than a hundred times, hardly venturing from his bunk except to attend rehearsals. He steered clear of the rec center and the chow hall, in order to avoid entanglements. There were certainly inmates and guards who disapproved of the "O.G." shoot, whether because of their racial views (some white inmates complained to the filmmakers, in idle moments, that the script was too sympathetic to black inmates) or because they objected to coöperation with authority of any kind. And so Carter was vulnerable to provocation. It is hard for a civilian to understand what form such challenges took—he was coy about all this, and no one, among the daytime visitors, could really comprehend what it was like to live there—but he made it clear that the threat of instigation was incessant.

He lay as low as possible, listening to music and going over his lines. He ate once a day, of provisions he bought for himself in the prison commissary. "I got ramen noodles, pickles, sausage, potato chips, Debbie cakes—a lot of fucking gas-station food," he told me. "I drink microwaved coffee all day." The cash came from poker. "No one sends me money," he said. During the weeks of rehearsal, he was observing Ramadan, though he said he was not a Muslim. "It's a discipline thing," he said. "Take out one thing at a time." His job, inside, was cleaning the dorm, which he did at around 1 A.M. "I eat at two-thirty in the morning, sleep from 5 A.M. to the afternoon. Get up, shower. Maybe play some cards or chess. Watch 'SportsCenter' all fuckin' day. You got a whole lot of older men just busting on each other." Carter was the youngest in the dorm. "Those old fuckers just wanna lay around all day," he said. "They will not help me run lines." The listlessness frustrated and depressed him, as much a glimpse of his future as a pox on the present. During lockdowns, when the filmmakers weren't allowed inside, he did nothing, really, but sleep. "This is the only thing I'm focussed on. Eye on the prize. I gotta make some sacrifices, not just for me but for the other people involved. I don't wanna fuck it up." He had to keep a boot on Oppie's throat.

"I wish I had a salary that disgusted people."

They sat down to run lines. Carter ignored his script—he already had it memorized—and stared back at Holbrook with a slack expression. Through the windows you could hear the *thwok* of a handball hitting the wall. Discussing a scene in which Carter's character is about to get into a fight with Murray's, Holbrook asked Carter about his mind-set. "Like I'm ready to fuck him up?" Carter said. "I was daydreaming on this. I go back to when I did actually get in it with a white dude. I remember how it felt. I'm trying to bring up all that shit that was going on around me when it happened—the bouncing of a basketball, the weights clinking, the smell of sweat."

Next, Carter and Holbrook worked through a six-page scene set in the chow hall, in which he and Wright's character discuss how the prison works.

"This scene right here is meat," Carter said. Leaning back in his chair, spinning the basketball on the floor, he began running through the lines:

BEECHER: Food here's fuckin' gross, man.
LOUIS: Half the time I eat in my cell.
BEECHER: People put money on commissary for you?
LOUIS: No one *puts* it there; I got my pay.

Louis works in the prison's auto-body shop, the real version of which features prominently in the film. He also earns money betting on sports. He is a former gang head now minding his own business and trying to finish out his stretch without incident. Beecher's arrival at the prison enmeshes him in gang politics, as he tries to steer this younger version of himself away from violence. These efforts jeopardize his own release, about which he's somewhat ambivalent, or at least very anxious.

BEECHER: What you readin'?
LOUIS: "War Against the Weak." About eugenics, America's attempt to make a master race by breeding out the so-called weak.
BEECHER: Why you readin' that?
LOUIS: Try an' understand the history of why things are what they are around here.

Carter and Holbrook rehearsed the scene while playing five-card draw. Carter, slipping out of character, admired the deck. Usually, he said, the prisoners had to play with Indiana cold-case cards—each card has a different crime victim on it. "Idea is, you look at them so much you'll feel so bad that you'll say something, if you know something. They force us to buy these. Casinos used to give us their used decks, charge us a buck a pack. Now it's these dead-people cards."

Later, when it was time for Carter to return to his bunk for count, he told Holbrook, "I'm having so much fun

"You're quitting school? After everything we sacrificed for you?"

here. Time's going so fast. I sold dope my entire life and thought it was the most exciting thing. Crack, women, walking around with guns, the life at night. People don't know—it's actually fun as fuck. But this here, this is past dope. This is the most exciting thing I done my whole life."

"There's a magnetism between you and acting," Holbrook said.

"I'm busting up inside. When you come from where I come from, where I grew up, and you look at who I'm working with? I'm in prison doing sixty-five years, and I'm working with Jeffrey Wright." He was standing in the middle of the room with his boot on the basketball. "Let me tell you what it feels like when you're in prison. It feels like you're dead. And this is like waking up."

In late June, Buck Staiger, an assistant director, drove a Ryder truck with all the film equipment from Brooklyn to Pendleton. After an inspection of the cargo, he and the crew unloaded everything into the schoolhouse basement. On the way out, prior to the last gate, the truck, now empty, approached a yellow line. The guard escorting Staiger told him, "If you don't stop at that yellow line, I can't tell you how many holes'll be in you." Staiger pulled up, got out with his hands up, and stood aside for another inspection.

The rest of the crew, two dozen in all, arrived soon thereafter, and filming began. Sackler said, "I can't believe this is happening."

Each morning, in the schoolhouse basement, Wright changed into his browns, and a makeup artist reapplied his temporary tattoos. He had grown a bushy beard and shaved his head. Because of the costume, guards and inmates, unfamiliar with his work, sometimes assumed he was an offender, and occasionally treated him like one. "This is a powerful piece of cloth," he said.

He'd been at the prison several times in the previous year, to rehearse and to get to know the guys. It was a delicate act for him, instilling trust without being disingenuous. Like most of the inmates he was working with, he was a black man in America. His father died when he was a year old, and he was reared in southeast Washington, D.C., but he went to fancy schools (St. Albans and then Amherst), played lacrosse, and became an acclaimed actor, who did a lot of philanthropic work in Sierra Leone and was an impassioned supporter of Hillary Clinton. "Jeffrey is trying to understand what it's like to be a prisoner in America at this moment in time," Belber told me. "He juggles a lot. The accusation of exploitation is so huge."

There were other professional actors in the cast: William Fichtner, Yul Vazquez, David Patrick Kelly, Stephanie Berry. They flew in for short stints. But Wright was in every scene—in and out of Pendleton for six weeks, though he flew to the East and West Coasts on a couple of weekends to surf and to attend a party for his goddaughter's fourth birthday in the Hamptons, where he felt out of place. "People seemed soft," he said. As hard as it was to be in that bad place, he missed the guys.

The shooting schedule was unrelenting and vulnerable to the whims of the prison or the prisoners. On Day One, a guy in a key part had to appear at his own murder trial; the role was recast. On Day Three, there was a half-day lockdown. Inmates slotted for roles suddenly lost their film privileges. Waiting for the line to cross the yard began to cost time, and therefore shots, and even scenes, that the film crew would never be able to make up.

The security measures were stiff. The crew arrived just after dawn. One at a time: shoes off, pockets emptied, film equipment examined, I.D. check, metal detector, X-ray, full-body pat-down, and a glance at the soles of your feet. Once cleared, the whole crew moved together—always as a pack, no stragglers allowed—through a succession of I.D. checks and steel-barred doors. They crammed into holding pens that, like submarine airlocks, acted as passages from one environment to another. They were constantly admonished against leaving behind so much as a pen or a roll of tape. Prisoners are magpies. Still, the crew kept slipping up. One morning, someone forgot a battery charger and a spring clamp. At lunch, Brooke Edwards, the guard assigned to the shoot, addressed the whole crew: "Here's the deal. Every one of you have heard me talk about this. This leaving shit behind? I'm fucking done. You're fucking with my job. Keep track of your stuff. I'm not your mother. Understood?"

"Understood," they mumbled, but they chafed at such scoldings. As the weeks wore on, the novelty and the thrill of entering a prison gave way, in many, to a kind of depression and irritability over the miserable surroundings. After an incident in which an inmate called the cell phone of one of

the women on the crew, some of her colleagues did a little Internet sleuthing and discovered that one offender with a speaking part had been convicted of sex crimes: he had drugged and sexually assaulted several women. A few crew members began to regret taking the job.

There were all kinds of cons among the extras, including, I was told one day, a number of child molesters. "I could throw a deck of cards and hit twelve of them in the head right now," Murray, the Bergman enthusiast, told me one day on set. "They get the best jobs. They won't bust a grape. The cops used to say, 'Have at it,' but now it's 'Leave my child molester alone.'" Rains said that, to her knowledge, only one inmate who acted in the movie had been convicted of a sex crime.

The crosscurrents of injustice were confounding. One day, as the crew made its way back to the staging area, an order went out: "Everybody off the sidewalk. Everybody off the sidewalk." The crew stood aside and went quiet as a pair of white guards approached, escorting a black convict in an orange jumpsuit, his ankles and wrists in irons. Orange meant solitary confinement. He had a bewildered, twisted half smile, as though struggling in vain to convey to these improbable witnesses that he remained unbroken. Was he to be pitied or feared?

Wright leaned hard toward the former. "All the negligence, abuse, addiction—a lot of these guys never had a chance," he said. "You see in the eyes of these guys, the older ones, an absence of direction, a lostness, yet a desire for course correction. Here they are, living in a series of buildings choked to the brim with warriors. The air is heavy with positive ions. It's palpable. It's dense." He went on, "Some of these guys are smart, forceful, ambitious characters. I mean, sure, some guys are just fuckups. There are some deranged guys, too. Still, the numbers could be reduced. It's purgatorial." He was troubled by the relationship between certain white guards and black prisoners. "If you don't think that this all goes back to the original sin of fucking slavery—it's as clear as day. Look around. It's like the antebellum South in here."

Around the prison, the white inmates were reputed to be inferior fighters. Mike Rains, Mo's husband, told me, "Shit, we had to teach the white boys in here to fight." (Mike is white.) He told the story of a black inmate, Christopher Anderson, one of Theothus Carter's mentors, who had a small part in the film. One night, years ago, four Aryan Brotherhood gang members burst into Anderson's cell. Anderson shut the door behind them and throttled them all, nearly to death. For this, he spent six years in the segregation unit—solitary confinement for twenty-three hours a day.

Anderson, known as Anda Janda, was now forty-six. He was first sent to prison in 1987, and arrived in Pendleton in 1996. On this stint, he had been there since 2001, serving a sentence of a hundred and four years for murder and other charges. His brother had committed suicide at Pendleton. "I known Theothus when he got here," Anderson said. "Reminded me of a young version of me. That's why we get along." He had glasses and gold teeth, and talked without moving his mouth much. When I asked him for his independent assessment of Carter's fighting skills, he looked at me sideways and said, "If you want confirmation, he done whooped a few motherfuckin' asses, that's for sure."

A certain symbiosis kicks in. Captors and captives come to see the arrangement as a natural one. Mo Rains told me that it's prison that seems normal to her and civilian life that's unruly and strange. "My anxiety increases on the outside," she said. The premise of the film, in some respects, was that this is so for many of the prisoners, too. It's the world they know. The anxiety of the soon to be released is a corollary of the air of jocularity one sometimes detects between guards and inmates—the collegial recounting of old conflicts and wounds. Or was this, too, a bit of a put-on? A guard told one of the crew, "We got the bad guys hidden. It's not normally like this."

On July 15th, the week after a cop shot Philando Castile, in Minnesota, and a man in Dallas killed five policemen, the prison was shut down again, for reasons unexplained and a duration unspecified. The following

"Before this goes any farther, you should know that I have kids, and I'm old, and I live in a shoe."

day, an inmate tried to sexually assault a guard, beating her badly in his cell. The lockdown ended before I showed up a week later, to watch the filming of some of the more violent scenes in the movie, including a fight between Wright and Carter, one between Wright and Murray, and, finally, a race riot set in the chow hall.

My first day on set ended in the laundry, a cavernous industrial expanse that Sackler and Held, the director of photography, had chosen as the site of a tense meeting between Wright's character and a gang leader named Terry. They had a little more than three hours before count, and so they worked with fretful intent to set up and scheme a series of shots. They wouldn't get another chance to film here. The heat and the time pressed in. A few extras lounged around, their browns shed to the waist. A couple of others filled out W-4s. A sign at the supervisor's station read "Don't Judge Someone Just Because They Sin Differently from You."

The inmate playing Terry was James Durham, who'd been sentenced to a hundred and seventy years for killing two people and wounding three in a tavern shooting. His attorney had recommended that he plead insanity, but Durham had decided against this. He was edgy, high-strung. During rehearsals, he'd asked Wright, "Do I make you nervous?" At the first read-through, he stopped and said, "I'm gonna be straight with you all. I don't trust anyone in this room." In Wright's view, Durham wasn't crazy. Instead, as a child of the streets and the crack wars of the nineties—like so many of the men here—he was a possible victim of P.T.S.D.: a combat veteran, essentially. "He is as naturally gifted a performer as I've ever seen," Wright said.

I asked Carter, who was sitting off to the side, if Durham was a friend of his. "Actually, no," he said. "But you gotta work with people in any profession, right?"

Durham—fit, compact, bald, with wraparound shades—sat on a table, fidgeting, kicking his legs, and muttering to the guy playing his henchman, as a few extras (his character's cronies) looked on and sorted laundry. The shot called for Wright to come down some steel stairs into the heart of the laundry, where Terry was holding court. They did a dry run, and Durham blew his second line. He growled with embarrassment, "Oh, shit! This heat is getting to me."

"It's all right," Wright said. "It's all right. It's all right."

He tried to get Durham to remove his sunglasses: "Madeleine wants the option, for later. I like no shades. This is a mask—drop the mask. Let's see your eyes."

"I have killer eyes, man. Don't look at these eyes."

"Well, that's where we need to go," Wright said. Then he added, "This is your world. I'm here to learn."

"I appreciate it," Durham said. Wright went back upstairs to commence the first take.

Durham said to his henchman, "Fuck it, I'll take a sock." The henchman handed him a sock from the laundry pile, and Durham used it to pat his face dry of sweat.

The henchman murmured to him, "This is the real moment. You gotta kill it."

They did a few takes, settling into hard stares and hard talk, with some ad-libbing at the margins, with the encouragement of Sackler and Wright. As per the script, Durham, as Terry, was saying, of Beecher, "He's got good *hands*, he's *smart*, he's an *asset*." (Carter himself was sitting off to the side, getting his neck and shoulders rubbed by one of the extras.) But then Wright went off script, and Durham, with an odd smile, began calmly improvising proverbs and threats: "You want the velvet glove? Or the iron fist?"

When this take was done, everyone laughed, and Wright said, "You fucked *all* of us up."

Durham, dabbing at his forehead, as though waking from a trance, said, "You got me wiping myself off with a sock."

As Wright walked upstairs for another take, Durham spoke quietly to the henchman, their conversation audible through the film crew's headphones.

"He made me do that," he said. "You like that? Was that cool? I just gotta stick to the script. They keep trying to make me go off." He looked around with a grin. "I think we got this. I could do this all day."

"I bet you could," the henchman said.

Later, during a break, Durham asked Wright, "We going to do a party or something, when this is done?"

"There's limitations," Wright said. "We can only do what they let us do."

"It'd be like an album-release party," Durham said. He paused, and went on, "Don't forget about us, man. I can't stand this place."

"We can only control what we can control. We'll get the story out there."

A few moments later, Durham leaned in again. "I just found some stuff in the library about sentencing orders."

"About what?" Wright asked.

"Sentencing orders. If anyone can help . . . I ain't saying give me anything. I just want a door to be open."

"Ain't no guarantees in this," Wright said.

"Don't forget about me," Durham said. "I want to stay in contact. I want some humanity."

Wright had resolved to refrain from offering false hope ("Never overpromise—I learned that in Sierra Leone," he told me), but he also needed to maintain the trust and even the shared sense of mission. The extent to which these men viewed him as a movie star, capable of miracles, in some respects undermined his attempt to pass himself off as one of them, yet it also induced them to put in the effort required. He said, "The best you can do, the best I can do, is do this thing right now."

Wright went upstairs again, and Durham said to his henchman, "They gonna be mad about this, boy. The females. We pioneers. We gonna benefit on this and take it to the next level." He was quiet a minute, then said, "They got me bent."

Theothus Carter, wearing headphones, called out, "I can hear everything you say."

The next day, a stunt coördinator named Jeremy Sample, a former linebacker at Notre Dame, was at Pendleton to help shoot the rough stuff. The crew set up in the rec yard, next to a Quonset gym, for the fight between Wright and Carter. No one was sure how simulated violence would play in this setting. "Just another day of doing stunts in a maximum-security prison," Sackler said. "There's pushback against our using a shank, for some reason." They

were shooting by the east wall, which was pocked in a way that was pleasing to a director of photography. A white guard watched from a tower. At one point, he called down, "Can I get in on the fight?" Carter had a towel over his head and a plastic coffee mug in hand. Dozens of offenders milled around in T-shirts and shorts—extras. Some played handball, others kibbitzed at a picnic table, a few jumped rope. Staiger, the assistant director, said, "These guys are the best background I've ever had. Their continuity awareness is really great."

Every day was a race. There was something perverse about being so squeezed for time in a place where no one had anything but. This morning, the opponent was the sun; the shot was in the wall's shadow, which would be gone by eleven. The heat was already grave. Sample, tank-framed and motivationally upbeat, quickly choreographed a scuffle only vaguely delineated in the script. He pantomimed overhand right, left hook, defensive block, choke, rear naked choke hold into the wall. "The reaction sells the violence," he told Carter and Wright.

"It's cool trying to unlearn how to beat someone up," Carter said. "I've had to unlearn some shit I might do in a real fight to do a fight in a movie."

He said to Wright, "Don't sucker out, now. Put on the pads and let's do this." He and Carter fake-fought along the wall, over and over. Between takes, Wright had to change his sweatshirt, owing to grass stains. After the fifth take, Sample did a little dance. "I love it when it comes together," he said. Makeup got to work on Wright, who had a raspberry on the back of his head. Carter said, "Make sure you tell them I don't do makeup. I don't even wipe the sweat off me."

By the pull-up bars on the far side of the gym, Sackler and Held tried to block out a few shots of Louis attacking the white supremacist played by Markus Murray. It was time for "fucking coon." Wright explained that he wanted to hit Murray so hard that he'd go slack. Carter said, "You hit a motherfucker and they just freeze up. Their whole body locks up." (None of this, in the end, would wind up in the film.)

An order came down from the tower to halt filming, while offenders in a nearby cell block, who'd been on lockdown for days, were released into the yard. "They just got out of restriction, so if we're filming they'll act like dingdongs," a prison official said. Crew and extras milled around the idled set. Carter entertained them by performing, at a sprint, four back handsprings and a backflip. Thunderheads massed, and the yard darkened. When shooting resumed—Wright kneeling over Murray, delivering phantom elbows to his head, over and over—a cooling wind blew in, followed soon by a heavy downpour, and lightning. The crew scurried to protect their gear. Mo Rains, with the approval of the tower, unlocked a back gate to the rec gym, and cast and crew dashed inside. She conducted a count, offenders dripping in the middle of the basketball court, and then a kind of snow-day tumult broke out: wet-floor-wipeout hoops, fake-fighting tutorials, general horsing around. At the weight station, Durham and some others goaded Wright into bench-pressing two hundred pounds. Someone wheeled in a trolley of individual pizzas—guacamole dreams deferred—and the inmates closed in.

"A lot of these guys never had a chance," Jeffrey Wright said, of the prisoners.

Carter stood to the side, disdainful of uncontrollable appetites. "I won't come here no more," he said. "Everyone tough, everyone argue." He watched a crew member swat at a fly. "I wouldn't

even kill a fly," he said. "I'm done hurting stuff."

The rain let up. The production moved on to a loading dock behind the chow hall. Scene 7: two black inmates beat up a white inmate and steal his shoes.

The culmination of the stunt work was the race riot in the chow hall. Sackler had a day to shoot it. This involved all the participants—some eighty inmates, the full crew of thirty, the guards—packed into a dining hall about an acre in size, with eighty tables, each with four stools, everything bolted to the floor. There wasn't much security on hand. For whatever reason, the guards and the administrators didn't seem nervous about the prospect of inciting a brawl.

The kitchen cranked out meals as props: each a cardboard sectional tray with a spork, a pepper packet, and portions of corn, iceberg lettuce, corn bread, and a macaroni-and-ground-mystery-meat confection that the offenders call goulash. An inmate invited Sackler to try some: "Take the Pendleton challenge. Show us you're one of us."

Sackler declined. "I get offered food here more than I do when I go to friends' houses," she said.

The riot kicks off as Wright and Carter have a hushed conversation—the one about eugenics. Shooting went deep into the afternoon, as the prisoners hung around doing nothing in the suffocating heat. One felt bad for them, having to endure such excruciating boredom, until one realized that, on a good day anyway, excruciating boredom was their lot. The run-up to the riot has blacks and whites sorting themselves on either side of the dining room, as Wright and Carter talk. Eventually, Christopher Anderson gets jumped, the black guys rush in, and the mayhem unfurls. Jeremy Sample had choreographed a slew of individual jousts. Come riot time, he took over the set and excitedly called out orders, as though this arrangement of cons were a nickel defense.

A white inmate nearby, sixty-seven years old, said, "I was here for a real riot, in 1976. I got stabbed in the neck. I saw a black dude stab a friend in the face, and I hit him with a crowbar three times. All the black dudes and white dudes separated and then—" Sample pulled him into place for another take.

Mike Rains, standing with a cane in the corner next to another guard, had an idea for better verisimilitude. "I keep telling Mo: we gotta go to the captain's office and get a gas grenade in here. C.S. gas: it's awful. It will change their thought process." He laughed. "You gotta make it a comedy. It's prison, man."

With thirty minutes until count, they re-racked for one try. Anderson got his fake beating, and off it went, bodies flying all over the place, well past the call of "cut." Sample opened his eyes wide: "That one looked a little real." The offenders, sweaty and ebullient, collected their pizzas and filed out, under guard.

The last day was seventeen hours in the cell block. The crew wrapped just before dawn and said farewell. Sackler would be back, to record additional dialogue and sound, and to cut the prison choir's versions of "Old Man" and "Love or Confusion" and other songs for the "O.G." soundtrack, but for the most part the offenders' work, and, more acutely, their respite, was done.

Weeks later, Sackler told me, "I had concerns about Theothus's well-being. It was a very emotional experience for him." She went on, "Sometimes I found myself looking around and wondering about the outcome, about whether we might be doing more harm than good. But, at the end of the day, it showed that this could be done."

"It was the most powerful experience I've ever had on a movie," Wright said. "I miss those guys. I think about them every day. But I needed to get away from the place."

He and Carter had talked often about their lives, and about the trials of being a parent. Carter's son, Theothus, Jr., who was sixteen, had apparently been getting into trouble in school. "It sounded intense," Wright said. Wright had heard from some of the guards that they'd had to reprimand the boy on previous visits for comportment—for, say, wearing his jeans too low. "He'd been noticed,"

AUBADE

At 1 A.M. the dairy sink
in your yard was a deer-glyphed megalith
caught in my headlights.
I found not only sermons
in stones but Tamerlane of Samarkand
in the Timberland mukluks
tossed on your bedroom floor.
Now I'd rather shop for staples
(bread, milk, Clorox),
at the twenty-four-hour Supermart
than lag
behind the laggard
dawn about to steal
from haystack to haystack, no less bent

on taking us to the brink
of destruction than was Clement V
on dissolving the Knights
Templar. He was determined
to disband
that herd of ten-point bucks
by showing them the door

courtesy of a papal
bull he dubbed "Vox
in excelso." For I'm averse, sweetheart,
to ever again seeing a stag
take the head staggers,
ever again seeing dawn kneel
as if it might repent,

as if it might come to think
of itself as a figure from some ancient myth—
Mesopotamian? Hittite?
Greek? German?—
throwing up its hands
with the dumbstruck
oaks or shaking to their cores
the Japanese maples,
unyoking the great ox
from the straw-laden cart
even as it divines the hag
in the haggard,
then putting its shoulder to the wheel
it means to reinvent.

—*Paul Muldoon*

Wright recalled. Wright got to meet the kid, and his mother, one day when they came to visit Carter.

Theothus, Jr., had expressed some interest in pursuing the military, but Carter, out of opposition to the system, had discouraged this. "He felt this would be joining the wrong team," Wright said. Wright urged Carter to reconsider; the service could be an escape from the streets, and the life that had brought the father low.

Three weeks after filming wrapped, Wright and Sackler set up a call with Carter, to discuss a few things. While they waited to be connected, Sackler got a text from Rains. Theothus, Jr., had been killed in Indianapolis. A gunman had shot him multiple times at a gas station while the boy was sitting in a car at the pump. The assailant drove off, caught on camera but not by police. (The case remains unsolved.) Carter came on the line. "He was clearly devastated and rocked," Wright recalled. "At the same time, he seemed somewhat rational about it. Clearly, premature death is not a new phenomenon for him. But this was his only son."

"I look at death different from most people," Carter told me, over the phone.

Carter, of course, wasn't allowed to attend the funeral. He sent the boy's mother two thousand dollars—half his savings—to help cover the cost. He seemed determined to continue his commitment to the film. He wanted to dedicate his performance to his son. He got a tattoo on his back that read "Madbrook Films-JW." But a couple of days later he had a run-in with a C.O. and was put in segregation for two weeks. Sackler and Wright could no longer even talk to him on the phone.

"It's impossible to know what's going on in there," Sackler said. "That's part of the persistent anxiety of this project."

In the course of the next year, Sackler labored to finish. Time dragged on, in the penitentiary and in the editing bay. She returned again and again to Pendleton, increasingly devoting her time to working with her students, as they assembled their documentary. That film, called "It's a Hard Truth, Ain't It," had grown in scope; she and the men had decided to add animation sequences (created by Yoni Goodman, who made "Waltz with Bashir") to dramatize their recollections of the circumstances and choices that had led to their confinement. Sackler was now completing two full-length films about the place—one fiction, one nonfiction—with little in common save the setting, a few faces, and a resolute regard for the humanity of men doing hard time.

By the second week of this year, the two films were nearly done, and Sackler and her producers (among them George Clooney, whose Smoke House Pictures signed on over the summer) had begun talking to distributors about how best to show and market them together. I saw near-final versions of both, and they make for a powerful pair. One could even say that they aren't really prison films, according to the traditional mechanics of the genre. There's no rape, no evil warden, no solitary-confinement montage. Prison is the village where they live. Sackler hopes to stage a screening at Pendleton, for all the inmates and guards who participated. Durham may get his party, after all.

Theothus Carter might not get to join them, though. He'd found trouble again. Last week, I received a letter from him: five pages on lined paper, in a careful script. Accused of assaulting staff and attempted drug trafficking, he'd been sentenced to two years in segregation. "I'm not allowed anything," he wrote. "Basically I'm confined to an 8 x 10 ft cell for 24 hrs a day." He enumerated the deprivations—no phone calls, even with family; no visits; limited shower privileges; lousy hygiene products—and wrote, "So life isn't looking pretty bright for me at this present moment."

He was certain that his role in "O.G." had made him a target. "I've been harassed by the guards more during and after filming than in my whole time I've been in this prison," he wrote. "I could never understand why they would allow us to make a film in prison if all they were gonna do was punish some of us for being able to participate in it." (A prison official said, "Offender Carter is being held responsible for his actions.") Nonetheless, Carter deemed the experience to have been more than worthwhile—the best time of his life, "second only to the birth of my one and only son." He was determined to continue to improve as an actor. "This will be my new profession." ♦

PROFILES

THE WHOLE THING IS CRAZY

How Danh Vo's art challenges the idea of aesthetic authorship.

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

Danh Vo had just started to gain recognition as a rising young artist when he decided, in 2010, to make a full-scale replica of the Statue of Liberty. He had been offered a one-man show at the Fridericianum, a huge exhibition space in Kassel, Germany. "The curator said he had seen shows of mine, and that I could deal with big spaces without putting too much into them," Vo told me. "I'm very childish. When people want to put me in boxes, I go the other way, so I was thinking, How can I stuff that space? And my simple mind came up with the Statue of Liberty." The whole hundred-and-fifty-foot monolith, he meant, cast in many separate elements, which would remain separate and unassembled.

Vo, who was born in Vietnam and brought up in Denmark, knew the statue only from photographs. He Googled it, and discovered that the outer surface was a 2.4-millimetre layer of hammered copper. "That was something interesting," he said, "the surface being so thin and fragile. My next thought was that maybe an image like the Statue of Liberty could liberate me from being categorized as an artist who deals with his own history as a Vietnamese refugee." More research followed. He got bids for making the aluminum casts and applying the copper skin from foundries in France (where Frédéric Bartholdi's design for the statue was fabricated), Poland, and China.

This was a big change in Vo's approach to art-making—until then, he had worked mainly with objects he found or appropriated. "Danh is a hunter and gatherer," Marian Goodman, his New York-based dealer, had told me, but in this project everything would have to be made, at considerable cost. In less than a month, what had seemed like an absurd notion was on its way to becoming reality. Vo chose a Shanghai foundry, because its estimate was far lower than the others. He supervised the fabrication process, which took five years from start to finish, and cost more than a million and a half dollars. It was financed largely by Sheikha al-Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, the Qatari art collector. She had wanted to buy all the elements—more than three hundred sculptural forms ranging from abstract shapes to a massive and recognizable section of Lady Liberty's armpit—but Vo would only let her have a third of them. The rest, as he directed, have been dispersed, in small groups, to museums or public institutions around the world. The title of the work is "We the People."

When the casts began appearing, in 2011, first at the Fridericianum, and then at the New Museum and City Hall Park in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, and several other venues, the art press assumed that they referred to immigration and the worldwide refugee crisis. This exasperated Vo, who is hard to exasperate. "I chose the Statue of Liberty because I thought it was for all of us," he said to me recently. "I wanted to take a very familiar icon and make it a little bit unfamiliar." He also felt that, at a time when America's moral authority was increasingly compromised, the Statue of Liberty broken into fragments could refer to more than one thing. "I always say that liberty has been raped often enough," Vo said. "Words like that are not static. Sometimes we have to throw them up in the air to reclaim their meaning."

A group of "We the People" elements will be in Vo's first big survey show in the United States, which opens at the Guggenheim Museum on February 9th. Vo, who is forty-two, with permanently dishevelled dark hair and a gently humorous kind of authority, has been involved in every aspect of the installation process. Although he lives mainly in Berlin and Mexico City, he has made many trips to New York, to work with the Guggenheim's curatorial staff. The most important decisions, about where and how individual pieces will be displayed, won't be finalized until the last two weeks before the opening, and those decisions will be made by Vo. Katherine Brinson, the Guggenheim curator who proposed the exhibition and made it happen, has worked with Vo before, and she is at ease with his largely intuitive, unpredictable, and playful approach to the process—which he once compared to "changing your underwear in public." Vo, she told me last month, "is very good at pressing us to be less rigid."

For the Guggenheim, the show is a risk. Works by Vo have appeared in New York before, but he is not well known here, and the Guggenheim's tourist-heavy audience, about half of whom will be visiting the museum for the first time, may be put off by the diversity of strange objects and images in his work—kitchen appliances, furniture, tombstones, historical documents, packing cartons, chandeliers, mammoth bones, parts of Roman and early-Christian sculptures, a list of the obscenities and ravings voiced by the demon Pazuzu in William Friedkin's 1973 film "The Exorcist," to name a few. In Vo's art, elements of his biography interact with and vivify evidence of the historical events and the political ideas that have shaped the world he lives in. The connections may not be apparent to every viewer, but, as Vo sees it, "That's the strange and beautiful thing about the art world. It's not mass communication. If you want mass communication, then you are in the wrong field."

Vo's rise to prominence in contemporary art still surprises him. "I don't know how I did it," he told me. "The whole thing is crazy. When I came out of art school, I couldn't even take care

Vo in his home in Mexico City. Born in Vietnam and brought up in Denmark, he divides his time between Mexico and Germany.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSÉ LUIS CUEVAS

of myself." A major work by Vo can now sell for up to a million dollars on the primary market (he also sells other works for much less). He owns a town house in Mexico City and an apartment in Berlin, and he is restoring a house on the island of Pantelleria, off the coast of Sicily. "I'm a lucky man," Vo says. The demand for what he does led a Dutch collector to sue him for not producing a promised work. A Dutch court ruled against Vo, saying he must deliver a large new work in the style of his recent pieces; Vo offered the collector a text piece that would read, in large letters, "Shove it up your ass, you faggot!," which happens to be the title of one of his sculptural collages. In the end, that wasn't necessary, because his legal team managed to reach a settlement, and the collector dropped the suit.

Trung Ky-Danh Vo was born in August, 1975, in the village of Ba Ria, outside Saigon. The Vietnam War had ended three months earlier. In its final stages, as the North Vietnamese advanced, the Vo family—mother and father, two sons, and a daughter—was among thousands of South Vietnamese evacuated, in American ships, from Quy Nhon, on the central coast, to the island of Phu Quoc, at the southern end of the country. One of the sons, Thanh, died there, the day after the fall of Saigon, of a childhood disease that went untreated. That summer, the Vo family was allowed to resettle in Ba Ria, where Danh was born. (A younger sister followed three years later.) Danh has no memory of the next four years. By 1979, Vietnam was at war with Cambodia and China, and hundreds of thousands of people were leaving the country in makeshift boats. Phung Vo, Danh's father, who had been exempt from military service, was an energetic and resourceful man. He went around to all his relatives and friends and collected enough money to buy a fairly large wooden boat, and in 1979 the Vos and more than a hundred other people embarked on a voyage that they hoped would take them to the United States.

They got as far as the shipping lanes between Vietnam and Singapore, where a container ship of the Danish Maersk line spotted their obviously unseaworthy vessel, picked up the passengers, and dropped them in Singapore. After four months in a refugee camp, the Vo family, including Danh's paternal grandmother, received emigration papers and took a commercial airliner to Denmark. (They were also given the option of going to Germany, and Danh's maternal grandmother, who had three children already living there, elected to do so.) "We lived in the suburbs of Copenhagen," Vo told me. "My first memories are of there." His parents ran a coffee shop for factory workers—the first in a succession of food carts, cafés, and restaurants that became the family business. "In that town, we were the only Vietnamese," Vo said. "I just hated the idea of being different, and I knew I was."

He was an extremely bright and somewhat mischievous child, who excelled in math at school and who tended to argue with teachers. (When a teacher wrote a letter to his parents about Danh's disruptive behavior, Danh intercepted it and wrote the reply, deftly copying his mother's handwriting. It said, "I accept my son as he is.") The four children learned to speak Danish at school. Their mother, Hao Thi Nguyen, picked up enough of the language to get by, but Phung Vo never became fluent—the family spoke Vietnamese at home. Hao Thi was a devout Catholic, and Phung had converted to Catholicism during the war, as a silent protest against the American-sanctioned assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem, South Vietnam's Catholic President. "My parents decided, because I was such a troublemaker at school, to send all four of us to a private Catholic school," Vo said. "I have no idea how they managed to pay for it. I went to church until I was eighteen, but by then I understood that the Church wasn't for people like me, gay people. My mother, who was very concerned, knew I was gay before I did. She was always asking, 'You're not gay, are you?' I didn't know what gay was, but I knew that I should say no."

In high school, he took several art classes, and a teacher told him that he had a good sense of form and color. After graduating, he applied for admission to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, in Copenhagen. The application was rejected. For the next three years, he lived at home and worked in the family restaurant. He kept applying to the Royal Academy, though, and in 1998, on his third try, he was accepted. The teachers were somewhat provincial, Vo remembers. "Trung Ky-Danh Vo has been in my class for one year," his painting teacher wrote, in a recommendation letter, "and I might / might not understand his agenda, but I strongly recommend he quit painting." (Vo kept the letter and used it as one of his art works.) Vo told me, "I knew I was not going to make art, because to me art was painting, and my painting was terrible. I was about to drop out of school, but in Denmark you get money while you study, and in art school you meet a lot of great people. So I decided to stay and get the best out of it. I'd never travelled much—why not use the school to do that?" He was planning to apply to an exchange program with the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, and asked Rirkrit Tiravanija, a visiting artist at the Royal Academy, to write him a letter of recommendation. Tiravanija, a leading figure in the new, socially based form of conceptual art called relational aesthetics—he was known for turning art galleries into kitchens, and serving Thai food to the visitors—told him to forget about Düsseldorf. "Don't go there!" he said. "I'll call a friend." His friend was Tobias Rehberger, an artist who taught at the Städelschule in Frankfurt, one of Germany's most progressive art schools, which accepted Vo as an exchange student.

His first significant art work, done while he was at the Royal Academy, was a performance piece that consisted of Vo marrying and almost immediately divorcing, in succession, two friends, whose last names he then added to his own. The first, Mia Rosasco, was a female student at the Royal Academy. As soon as their divorce was official, he entered into a civil union with Mads Rasmussen, a male bartender in a gay bar in Copenhagen, where Vo also worked. All three of them saw the project as a conceptual art work, using a social structure (marriage) for a purpose (art-making) that it was not intended to serve, and they all agreed that no trace of romanticism was involved. Vo's official name, which he

uses to sign important documents, is Trung Ky-Danh Vo Rosasco Rasmussen. But the project is ongoing, and if there are additional marriages his name will get longer.

In 2006, while he was still at the Städelschule, Vo moved to Berlin. "That's what you did then," he said. "Berlin was very cheap. I still never thought I would have an artist career, but I came into a circle of friends whom I felt affiliated with, and whose work made sense to me." He started seeing Michael Elmgreen, of the duo Elmgreen & Dragset, whose avant-garde architectural and sculptural installations were attracting attention in Europe. "They got me into a few exhibitions, but it didn't help," Vo told me. "It was just one failure after another." The relationship broke up when Vo used Elmgreen's name (without permission) as a reference in applying for a travel grant to Marfa, Texas, so he could see the mock Prada store that Elmgreen & Dragset had built there. Vo said, "I needed to find my own environment and my own peers."

Vo's work found him, purely by chance, in 2006. He had gone to California on a three-month residency at the Villa Aurora, a retreat for writers and artists in Pacific Palisades. During a reception to introduce the residents to the local community, a seventy-eight-year-old man named Joseph Carrier addressed him by his first name, pronouncing it, correctly, as "Yan." Surprised, because most non-Asians pronounced it "Daan," Vo asked how he knew to do this. Carrier explained that he had been in Vietnam for several years during the war, as a counterinsurgency analyst working for the Rand Corporation. His house was nearby, he said, and he would be happy if Vo came over. Vo went the next day, and on many days after that—it was the start of a deep platonic friendship that would change Vo's life.

The Rand people had fired Carrier in 1967, when they realized that he was gay, but in 1972 the National Academy of Sciences had sent him back to Vietnam to study the effects of Agent Orange, a defoliant that the U.S. forces had used extensively. Carrier had taken photographs of the tribal people in the

A chandelier Vo acquired from the Hotel Majestic hangs by his piece "Oma Totem."

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MUSEO JUMEX, MEXICO CITY; PHOTOGRAPH: ABIGAIL ENZALDO AND EMILIO BERNABÉ GARCÍA

Central Highlands, where Agent Orange had caused great devastation. He wanted to go back and get current pictures of the same areas, for a photography exhibition he was having at the University of California, Irvine, called "Surviving War, Surviving Peace," but he needed someone who spoke Vietnamese more fluently than he did. Carrier asked whether Vo would be interested, and Vo immediately said yes. They met in Saigon—now called Ho Chi Minh City—six months later. It was the first time Vo had been there since he left, in 1979. "I wasn't interested before," he told me. "If I was raised with anything, it was the understanding of not having a place to come from. My mother looks back sometimes, but my father never does." Vo and Carrier spent a week in the Central Highlands, and then visited Hanoi, where Vo bought tribal blankets with images of American helicopters woven into them.

Soon after this trip, Vo returned to Los Angeles. He spent a week in Carrier's Pacific Palisades garage, going through Carrier's Vietnam diaries and looking at hundreds of photographs he had taken there during the nineteen-sixties. "He was very nosy," Carrier wrote, in a privately published autobiography. "Before leaving he told me he was particularly interested in using a series of black and white photographs

I had taken of young Vietnamese men holding hands... to illustrate cultural differences between American and Vietnamese men." (Physical intimacy between men is fairly common in Vietnam, where, for the most part, it has no homoerotic overtones.) Carrier gave Vo his enthusiastic permission to use the photographs in his work. Many of them, along with other mementos of Carrier's time in Vietnam, appeared soon afterward in Vo's first important solo show, in 2007, at the Isabella Bortolozzi gallery, in Berlin. "It's a weird thing—how do I put this?" Vo said to me. "I never thought the material belonged to Joe. I thought it belonged equally to me, so I had no guilt." Carrier wrote part of the show's press release, and in his autobiography he states that he is immensely grateful to Vo because "my photos were being seen by an international audience instead of being hidden forever in boxes in my garage." In his will, Carrier has bequeathed his entire Vietnam archive to Vo.

With that show, which was called "Good Life," Vo gave himself permission to use ready-made material of all kinds, and to challenge the whole idea of aesthetic authorship. Many of his early works referred, in one way or another, to members of his family. One, dated 2006, is a glass display case containing three of his father's most prized possessions—a Rolex watch, a Dupont lighter, and a U.S. military signet ring. Phung Vo had bought them soon after leaving Vietnam, and each one reflects his pride in acquiring symbols of Western culture. (Vo gave him the money to replace them.) The work's title is from a Rolex ad: "If You Were to Climb the Himalayas Tomorrow." "Grave Marker for Maria Ngo Thi Ha," which came two years later, is a white wooden cross that had been used as a temporary marker for the Copenhagen grave site of Vo's recently deceased grandmother until the ground settled enough to support a permanent stone. "My father made the crucifix, and when the headstone came, somebody threw it out," Vo explained. "But my little sister saved the marker and brought it to me in Berlin. It stayed in a corner with the beer bottles for half a year, maybe, and then, one day, it just seemed to have inherited all the traces of my grandmother." "Oma Totem," from 2009, is a stacked tower of household appliances—a washing machine, a small refrigerator, and a television set, with a crucifix mounted on the front. The appliances were gifts from an immigrant relief program in Hamburg to Vo's other grandmother. Her local Catholic church had sent the cross. Vo, who had spent summer vacations with his Hamburg grandmother, persuaded her to let him replace all three appliances, plus the cross, so that he could take away the originals.

All these works have appeared in a number of Vo's exhibitions, in different settings, and with little or no explanatory material for the viewer. "I hate all this idea of the press release," Vo told me. "I want people to see the show before they have any information." But what can a viewer who knows nothing about Phung Vo get from seeing his watch, lighter, and signet ring in a glass case? Quite a lot, apparently. The emotional charge that Vo implants in these family-oriented works seems to get through to viewers—some of them, anyway—and my guess is that their impact is due in large part to the way he installs them. "My work is really through installation," he told me. "It's always about how things speak together." His exhibitions, then and now, can be very spare, with a lot of empty space between objects. Each work invites close attention, to itself and to the repercussions that it sets off with others. A quietly intense conversation is going on, which we can enter or not, as we choose.

In 2009, the Kadist Art Foundation in Paris, an interdisciplinary study center for contemporary art, awarded Vo a five-month residency. This was his first time in Paris, and one of the places he wanted to visit was the archives of the Missions Étrangères de Paris, an organization devoted to preserving and carrying on the three-century history of French Catholic missionaries, primarily in Asia. In Vietnam, Vo had been shown, in a Catholic church, the head of a young priest named Jean-Théophane Vénard, who had been decapitated on February 2, 1861; the body had been sent back to France, he learned, and it was interred in the vaults of the Missions Étrangères. Vo didn't see the body, but he found a sizable archive of material about Vénard and other nineteenth-century French missionaries, many of whom had been executed by the country's Confucian overlords. Vo went back again and again, to learn more about the missionaries and about Vietnamese history. Some of the young priests had been tortured to death. The killings had eventually led to French military intervention, which had led in turn to the colonization of Vietnam, Cambodia, and adjacent territories—what would become French Indochina. "People really believe they are doing good, and that's the terrible part," he said to me.

On one visit, Vo found a letter that Vénard had written to his father, in France, shortly before his execution. It is a remarkable document—calm, poetic, almost joyous. "A slight sabre cut will separate my head from my body, like the spring flower which the Master of the Garden gathers for His pleasure. We are all flowers planted on this earth, which God plucks in His own good time, some a little sooner, some a little later."

Reading the letter, Vo was seized by the idea of getting his own father to reproduce it, in the calligraphy that he had learned as a child. "I remember my father's handwriting on the menus of their cafés," he told me. "He'd write 'Burger and Fries, Twenty Kroner,' but so beautifully, and I wanted to reactivate that." His father copied the letter, and kept on doing so. Although Phung Vo knows no French, and has only a vague idea of what the words mean, in the last nine years he has copied Vénard's letter more than twelve hundred times. The copies are all sold as art works by Danh Vo, who pays his father a third of the three-hundred-euro purchase price. (Vo and his gallery share the rest.) The price will not change, he has said, and new copies will be produced until his father is no longer able to make them. Entitled "2.2.1861," the document has become a signature item in Vo's

exhibitions. "It breaks all conventions of thinking about works of art," he says, "and it has its own life."

During his Paris residency, Vo also went to see the grand ballroom of the Hotel Majestic, where the 1973 Paris Peace Accords to end the Vietnam War were signed. The hotel was closed down, but he looked through a window on the ground floor and saw, in the ballroom, the three magnificent chandeliers he remembered from photographs of the treaty-signing. Vo became obsessed with the idea of buying them. When he found out that the French government, which had owned the Majestic, had sold it to a company run by members of the royal family of Qatar, and that a hotel group in China was partnering with the Qataris to sell the furnishings, he got in touch with the Chinese. After lengthy negotiations, they agreed to sell all three chandeliers to him for seventy-five thousand dollars, which, of course, he did not have. Vo somehow talked the sellers into letting him exhibit the chandeliers, as art works, before he paid for them. He showed one of them in a small exhibition at the Kadist Art Foundation in 2009, and, shortly afterward, included a chandelier in his breakthrough show at the Kunsthalle Basel, which was seen by curators and collectors attending the annual Basel art fair. Among the other works on view there were a horizontal re-creation of "Oma Totem" (the stacked household appliances), which Vo had paid a stonecutter to carve in marble, as a gravestone for his grandmother; some branches that Vo had cut from a tree in the Phu Quoc cemetery where his older brother was buried; and several small relics and photographs of nineteenth-century missionaries. But the exhibition was really built around the chandelier—which Vo hadn't been sure he would get until the last minute. "I don't think I'd have that sort of nerve today," he told me. "You need nerve, but you also need ignorance." It hung from the ceiling of the Kunsthalle's main gallery. At subsequent shows, one of the two smaller chandeliers was disassembled and spread out on the floor, and its twin was mounted on a floor-based metal rack.

Christian Rattemeyer, the associate curator of drawings and prints at New York's Museum of Modern Art, saw the Kunsthalle Basel show. It struck him as "a quantum leap" by a uniquely gifted young artist: "He'd found a way to take a very dramatic personal story and make it speak about the fate of his native country." Rattemeyer and Doryun Chong, at the time an associate curator of painting and sculpture at MOMA, persuaded the museum to buy one of the smaller chandeliers in 2010, and the sale allowed Vo to pay off the Chinese hotel group. "I sold it before I bought it," Vo said, gleefully. He sold another to the Centre Georges Pompidou, in Paris, and the largest of the three went to the National Gallery of Denmark, in Copenhagen. What, I wondered, had given a thirty-four-year-old Danish-speaking immigrant the chutzpah to negotiate this complex international operation? I put the question to Julie Ault, an American artist and teacher who met Vo in 2003, when she taught a course at the Royal Academy in Copenhagen. (They became very close friends—Vo says she knows him and his work better than he does.) "It was a big risk, and he didn't know he was going to pull it off," Ault said. "But Danh is a buoyant person. He's very good at choosing the people he works with, and he doesn't worry about what's going to happen." Most of Vo's projects come out of his talent for working with others. His combination of irreverence, humor, and generosity makes it hard to say no to him.

In the midst of his negotiations, Vo took his father to see the Hotel Majestic ballroom. Phung Vo had been reluctant to go. The Paris Peace Accords, as they both knew, had been a cynical farce, a way for the U.S. to declare peace and remove most of its troops from a war it was losing. The truce was broken almost immediately, and the war went on for two more years. Why, his father asked, was Danh taking him to this room of betrayal? But when they got there, Phung became very quiet. Overcome by the splendor of the chandeliers, which had shed their light impartially on society balls and on the Nazi high command during the Occupation, he said, reverently, "I think the Queen of Denmark must have one of these in her castle." His words removed any lingering doubt on Vo's part about going after them. Sometimes, mere beauty was enough. Vo knew then that he wanted the big one to go eventually to Denmark's National Gallery, "so my father could see it whenever he wanted."

Vo's house in Mexico City is in the Roma Norte section, which has become popular with artists and professional people. A giant cypress, a tree that can live for more than a thousand years, towers over the three-story house and overwhelms the uneven sidewalk in front. Embedded in the floor of the entrance hall is a roughly seven-foot steel shaft, shaped like a javelin and tapering to a sharp point at both ends; it's a sculpture by the Portuguese artist Leonor Antunes, who carried it to an upper floor and dropped it through a hole cut for that purpose. Vo has turned the front room

"Can't you clip your nails on the subway like everyone else?"

THE HOUSE APROPOS-OF-NOTHING COMMITTEE

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into a spacious kitchen and dining space. The rest of the ground floor is a mostly uncovered patio, with high walls and folding glass panels that can be closed in bad weather. There's a fig tree, and a bush that attracts hummingbirds, and a variety of plants and handmade stools and low tables, and baskets with local fruit, and objects Vo has found on his Mexican travels—a braided leather lasso, Coca-Cola bottles with scorpions embalmed in mezcal. There is a sectional sofa in one corner; an outdoor flight of open concrete stairs (with no handrail) leads to the second floor.

In 2012, Vo was invited to be in a group show at the Museo Tamayo, in Mexico City. He returned to Mexico several times after that. He met a lot of artists, saw his first bullfights, and had many long conversations with José Kuri and his wife, Mónica Manzutto, the owners of the Kurimanzutto gallery, which gave him a show the next year. Vo had been thinking about other places to live. He'd been travelling more or less continuously since 2007, when he'd won the Blauorange prize for young artists working in Germany, and used the prize money to buy a round-the-world airline ticket. He had gone back to Vietnam with his mother, who wanted to visit her older son's grave and connect with relatives. Vo had no personal life at all in those years, he remembers, because all his energy went into work and travel. But in 2010 he met Heinz Peter Knes, a Berlin-based photographer, and discovered the pleasures of travelling with someone he cared about. "Heinz saved my life in so many ways," Vo told me. They share the apartment in Berlin. Vo wanted another place, though, a place outside Europe. He and Knes had driven across the United States and back several times, by different routes, visiting all but seven states, and Vo had spent a year in New York. But New York was "too tough," he had decided. Mexico City, with its dramatic history, intersecting cultures, and native art traditions that stretched from pre-Columbian Mayan and Aztec sculpture to a lively contemporary-art scene, presented an interesting alternative.

"It's the only place outside Europe and the United States where you find a modernism so strong and self-contained," Vo told me. "I feel an affinity to Asia, and I would never move there for that reason—it's too close to me. Mexico seemed like the right balance." He bought the Roma Norte house and moved into it in 2014, just in time for the opening of his biggest museum show to date, at the Museo Jumex, in Mexico City.

The exhibition included several of the early family pieces, but the emphasis was on Vo's more recent work, in which political elements were dominant. From a Sotheby's auction called "The White House Years of Robert S. McNamara," Vo had bought a carved ivory tusk, given to McNamara by a South Vietnamese military officer, and the nibs of fountain pens that were used, while McNamara was the United States Secretary of Defense, to sign key documents, one of which was the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which led to a major escalation of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. At the Museo Jumex, these and other objects and documents relating to the war were joined by two office chairs from the Kennedy Administration—shown in a dismantled state, with their leather and muslin coverings stripped off and drooping forlornly from nails in the wall. There was also a set of framed letters from Henry Kissinger to the New York *Post* columnist Leonard Lyons. Dated from 1969 through 1975—the years when Kissinger was acting as the mastermind behind Richard Nixon's conduct of the Vietnam War—they all concerned getting or declining tickets to popular Broadway shows.

Not all Vo's recent work is political. His cardboard sculptures—shipping cartons whose labels are relettered in gold leaf—seem untouched by any message at all, except, perhaps, his admiration for somewhat similar works that Robert Rauschenberg did in the nineteen-seventies. Vo started making them in 2009, after travelling to Thailand, where restoring the gold leaf on temples is an active profession. Around the same time, Vo began making sculptural collages, which he described to me as "looking at different periods in art history and squeezing them together." The collages consist of Roman marble busts, medieval wooden saints and Madonnas, and other relics that he finds in antique shops or buys at auction; he cuts each one up into two or more parts, and joins part of one to part of another. Some of the mismatches become freestanding sculptures, others are cut to fit precisely into wooden crates that were once used for Carnation milk, Johnnie Walker Scotch, or other products.

In her catalogue essay for the Guggenheim show, Katherine Brinson links

this dismemberment of relatively unimportant but still genuine art works to "the dense compression and intermingling of narrative strata that is the hallmark of his work." A certain amount of black humor is also involved, and it becomes overt in some of the titles. "Shove It Up Your Ass, You Faggot!" and "Your Mother Sucks Cock in Hell," the titles of two sculptural collages that combine classical and early-Christian fragments, are phrases spoken by the demon in "The Exorcist," which Vo saw on video when he was a young boy. His mother was addicted to horror films, but found them too scary to watch alone, so the children watched with her.

Vo has continued the practice of putting works by other artists in his exhibitions. David Wojnarowicz's indelible late-nineteen-eighties photograph of three bison plunging head first over a cliff has been in several of them, and so have Peter Hujar's photographs of the New York cultural underground in the nineteen-seventies. A small photograph, he has found, can converse eloquently with a large-scale sculpture. In 2010, Vo co-curated a show of work by the late Felix Gonzalez-Torres, whose use of mundane but evocative materials (piles of wrapped candies that viewers were invited to share, strings of unadorned light bulbs) had been an inspiration for him when he was starting out. When Vo won the Hugo Boss Prize, in 2012, he chose not to show his own work in the small Guggenheim Museum exhibition that goes with it; instead, he put together a display of hundreds of small figurines, ceramics, and gift-shop tchotchkes that had been collected by Martin Wong, a little-known (up to then) Chinese-American artist who died of AIDS in 1999. "That show really changed me as a curator," Katherine Brinson told me. "Who was the author? Was it collaboration, or appropriation? The show criticized our concepts of authorship, in a way, but it was also a beautiful, generous gesture."

Travel is still a big part of Vo's life. He has spent a lot of time in China and explored Sinaloa, Chiapas, Yucatán, and other parts of Mexico. "The more you travel, the less you know," he quips. "Danh's a great observer," his friend Eungie Joo, a curator at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, said recently. "He is the only person I know who does not get lost in Venice." When he and Knes are not travelling, they divide their time between Mexico City and Berlin. Vo and three other artists, Nairy Baghramian, Haegue Yang, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, are currently renovating an old barn in the countryside near Berlin, to use as a multipurpose space where other artists can come to work, teach classes, and share experiences. "Berlin is for work," Vo told me. "Mexico is for discovery." Sitting on the patio of his house in Roma Norte, we drank hibiscus tea and talked about his family. All of them still live in or near Copenhagen, he said, and he goes back to see them once a year. (His older brother and sister are engineers; his younger sister works in catering.) "I think my father and my family have always been something for me to look into, something that I was not really part of," he said. "Like most immigrants, they trained their children to move on."

Although his father figures in many of his works, Vo told me that "I was my mother's child. My father and I became closer through the work he does for me—reactivating his calligraphy has always felt like one of my biggest accomplishments. But I don't want to get that close. I love my family, I have a lot of fun with them, and I support my parents financially, but I'm not so emotionally attached." I asked him if his parents understand what he does. "No," he said. His work and his success "just baffle them." Some years back, Vo and his father collaborated on what will be Phung Vo's tombstone, a black granite slab with the words "Here Lies One Whose Name Was Writ in Water" inscribed on it in gold. Vo had seen this inscription on John Keats's grave, in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome. He asked his father if he would like to have it on his gravestone; his father said yes, and chose the Gothic typeface to be used. "Tombstone for Phung Vo" is temporarily installed in the garden of the Walker Art Center, in Minneapolis. When Phung dies, the stone will be shipped to Copenhagen, and the Walker will receive, in return, a new version of the piece with Phung's watch, lighter, and signet ring.

Vo is bringing his entire family—parents, three siblings, and nine nieces and nephews—to New York for the Guggenheim opening. Phung Vo arrived in January and is at work etching the show's title on the museum's south window. Vo wants a live, potted chestnut tree in the ground-floor atrium, and he has been working with a landscape designer to redo the plantings inside and outside the museum—not as part of the exhibition, he explained, but as "a good thing for the institution and for the future." At Vo's request, the covering over the central skylight will be removed before the opening—something that has not been done in years—to allow unfiltered daylight into the museum. Daylight is not kind to paintings, and Vo is borrowing an Old Master for this exhibition.

In September, he e-mailed Katherine Brinson the image of a Renaissance painting called "Charity," showing a woman with a baby at her breast, and two other small children. Brinson thought it was a joke—she was about to give birth to her second child. But a few days later, Vo told her that he wanted to borrow the painting from the National Gallery of Denmark, in Copenhagen, to use in the show. (The artist who painted it, called the Master of the Copenhagen Charity, was recently identified as a little-known Florentine painter named Bartolomeo Ghetti.) Vo negotiated the loan himself—he has a close relationship with Marianne Torp, the chief curator there. Brinson didn't know how he would use the picture, and when I called Vo to ask that question, I got one of his adroitly elusive answers. "Breastfeeding is pure charity," he said. "It's a voluptuous charity, and that's maybe why I want to combine it with condensed milk. We haven't figured out how that works, but it should be possible." Brinson is not worried about the painting's safety. "It's total trust," she said. "It always is." ♦

The Boundary

Jhumpa Lahiri

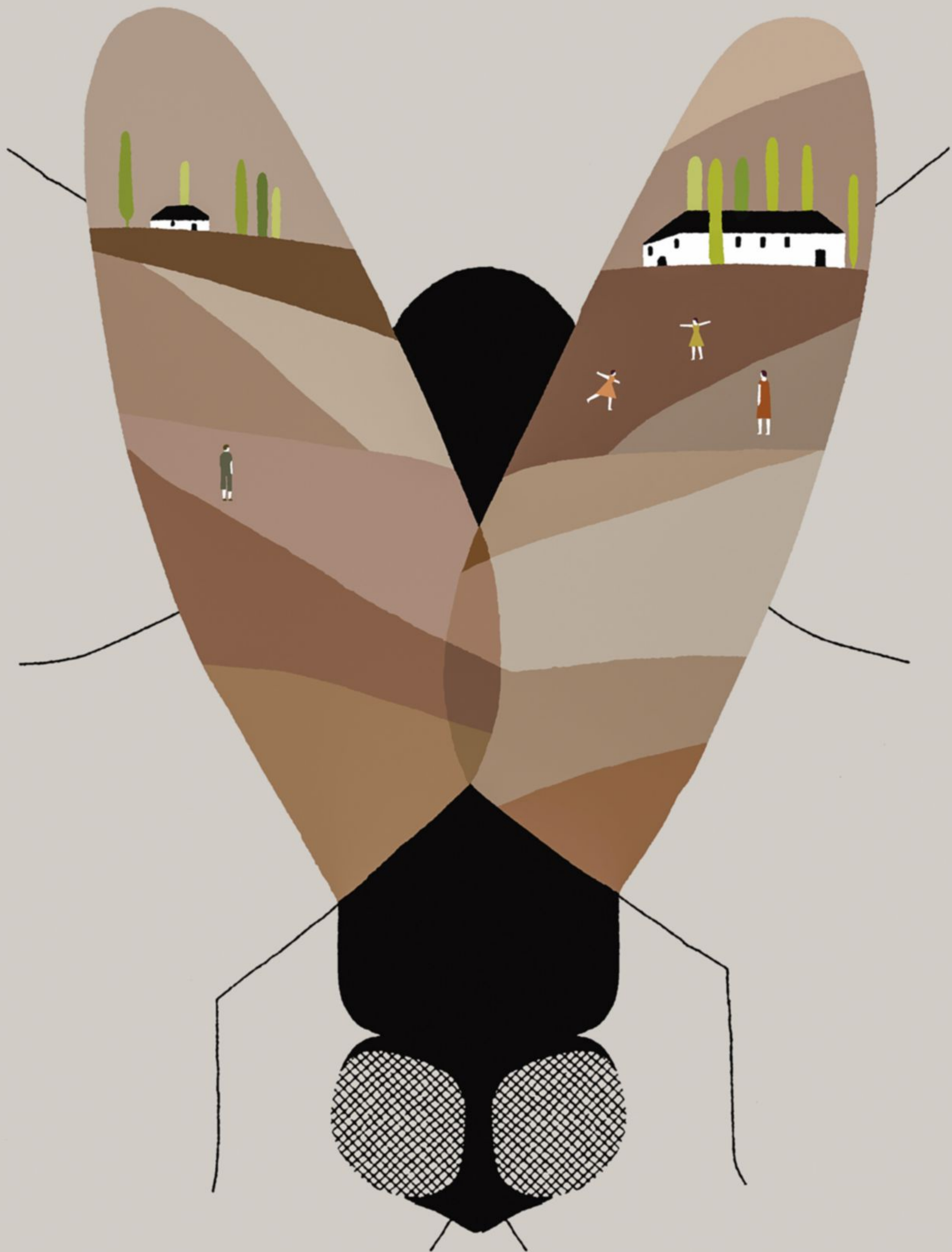


ILLUSTRATION BY PABLO AMARGO

Every Saturday, a new family comes to stay. Some arrive early in the morning, from afar, ready to begin their vacation. Others don't turn up until sunset, in bad moods, maybe having lost their way. It's easy to get lost in these hills; the roads are poorly signposted.

Today, after they introduce themselves, I show them around. My mother used to do the welcoming. But she's spending the summer in a nearby town, helping out an elderly gentleman who's also on vacation, so I have to do it.

As usual, there are four of them: mother, father, two daughters. They follow me, their eyes wide, happy to stretch their legs.

We stop for a moment on the shaded patio that looks out over the lawn, under a thatched roof that filters the light. There are two armchairs and a sofa, covered with white fabric, lounge chairs for sunbathing, and a wooden table big enough for ten people.

I open the sliding glass door and show them inside: the cozy living room with two comfortable sofas in front of the fireplace, the well-stocked kitchen, two bedrooms.

While the father unloads the car and the girls, who are probably around seven and nine, disappear into their room, shutting the door behind them, I tell the mother where to find extra towels, and woollen blankets, in case it gets cold at night.

I show her where the mouse poison is hidden. Kill the flies before going to bed, I suggest, otherwise they start buzzing at dawn and become a nuisance. I explain how to get to the supermarket, how to use the washing machine behind the house, and where to hang the laundry, just on the other side of my father's garden.

Guests are free to pick lettuce and tomatoes, I add. There were lots of tomatoes this year, but most of them spoiled in the July rain.

I pretend not to watch them, to be discreet. I do the housework and water the garden, but I can't help noticing how happy and excited they are. I hear the girls' voices as they run across the lawn, I learn their names. Since the guests usually leave the sliding door open, I overhear what the parents say to each other as they settle into the house, as they unpack their suitcases and decide what to have for lunch.

The cottage where my family lives is a few yards away, behind a tall hedge that forms a kind of screen. For years, our house was just a room that served as both kitchen and bedroom for the three of us. Then, two years ago, when I turned thirteen, my mother started working for the elderly gentleman, and, after saving up enough money, my parents asked the man who owns the property if they could add a small room for me.

My father is the caretaker. He looks after the big house, chops the wood, works the fields and the vineyard. He looks after the horses, which the owner loves with a passion.

The owner lives abroad, but he's not a foreigner like us. He comes every now and then, on his own. He doesn't have a family. During the days he goes horseback riding; in the evenings he reads in front of the fireplace. Then he goes away again.

Not many people rent his house other than in summer. The winters here are biting, and in the spring there's lots of rain. In the mornings, from September to June, my father drives me to school, where I feel out of place. I don't mix easily with others; I don't look like anyone else.

The girls in this family resemble each other. You can tell right away that they're sisters. They've already put on matching bathing suits to go to the beach later on. The beach is about fifteen miles from here. The mother looks like a girl, too. She's small and thin, she wears her long hair loose. Her shoulders are delicate. She walks barefoot on the grass even though the father tells her not to, saying (and he's right) that there might be porcupines, hornets, snakes.

After just a few hours, it's as if they'd always lived here. The things they've brought for a week in the country are scattered all over the place: books, magazines, a laptop computer, dolls, hoodies, colored pencils, pads of paper, flip-flops, sunscreen. At lunch I hear forks striking plates. I notice each time one of them sets a glass down on the table. I detect the calm thread of their conversation, the sound and smell of the coffeepot, smoke from a cigarette.

After lunch, the father asks one of the girls to bring him his glasses. For a long time, he studies a road map. He lists small towns to visit nearby, archeological sites, ruins. The mother isn't interested. She says this is her only week of the year without appointments and obligations.

Later on, the father heads off to the sea with his daughters. He asks me, as they're leaving, how long it takes to get there, which of the beaches is nicest. He asks me about the weather forecast for the week, and I tell him there's a heat wave coming.

The mother stays home. She's put on her bathing suit anyway, to get some sun.

She stretches out on one of the lounge chairs. I assume she's going to take a nap, but when I go to hang up the wash I see her writing something. She writes by hand, in a little notebook resting on her thighs.

Now and then she lifts her head and looks intently at the landscape that surrounds us. She stares at the various greens of the lawn, the hills, the woods in the distance. The glaring blue of the sky, the yellow hay. The bleached fence and the low stone wall that marks the property line. She studies everything I look at every day. But I wonder what else she sees in it.

When the sun starts to go down, they put on sweaters and long pants to shield themselves from mosquitoes. The father and the girls have wet hair from the hot showers they took after the beach.

The girls tell their mother about their trip: the burning sand, the slightly murky water, the gentle, disappointing waves. The whole family goes for a short walk. They go to look at the horses, the donkeys, a wild boar kept in a pen behind the stables. They go to see the flock of sheep that passes in front of the house every day around this time, blocking, for a few minutes, the cars on the dusty road.

The father keeps taking pictures with his cell phone. He shows the girls the small plum trees, the fig trees, the olives. He says fruit picked straight from the tree tastes different because it smells of the sun, the countryside.

The parents open a bottle of wine

on the patio. They taste some cheese, the local honey. They admire the blazing landscape and marvel at the huge, glowing clouds, the color of pomegranates in October.

Evening falls. They hear frogs, crickets, the rustle of the wind. In spite of the breeze, they decide to eat outside, to take advantage of the lingering light.

My father and I eat inside, in silence. He doesn't look up when he eats. With my mother away, there's no conversation during dinner. She's the one who talks at meals.

My mother can't stand this place. Like my father, she comes from much farther away than anyone who vacations here. She hates living in the country, in the middle of nowhere. She says that the people here aren't nice, that they're closed.

I don't miss her complaining. I don't like listening to her, even though she's probably right. Sometimes, when she complains too much, my father sleeps in the car instead of in bed with her.

After dinner, the girls wander around the lawn, following fireflies. They play with their flashlights. The parents sit on the patio contemplating the starry sky, the intense darkness.

The mother sips some hot water with lemon, the father a little grappa. They say that being here is all they need, that even the air is different, that it cleanses. How lovely, they say, being together like this, away from everyone.

First thing in the morning, I go to the chicken coop to gather eggs. They're warm and pale, filthy. I put a few in a bowl and bring them to the guests for breakfast. Normally there's no one around and I just leave them on the patio table. But then I notice, through the sliding door, that the girls are already awake. I see bags of cookies on the sofa, crumbs, a cereal box overturned on the coffee table.

The girls are trying to swat the flies that buzz around the house in the morning. The older one is holding the flyswatter. The little sister, frustrated, complains that she's still waiting for her turn. She says she wants to swat them, too.

I put down the eggs and go back to our house. Then I knock on their door and lend the girls our flyswatter; that way they're both happy. I don't repeat the fact that it's better to kill the flies before you go to bed. It's clear that they're having fun while the parents, in spite of the annoying flies and the girls' racket, continue sleeping.

After two days, a predictable routine sets in. In the late morning, the father goes to the café in town, to buy milk and the paper, to get a second coffee. He pops over to the supermarket if need be. When he gets back, he goes running in the hills despite the humidity. One time he comes home rattled after crossing paths with a sheepdog that blocked his way, even though in the end nothing happened.

The mother does what I do: she sweeps the floor, cooks, washes dishes. At least once a day she hangs up the laundry. Our clothes mingle and dry on a shared line. She tells her husband, clasping the laundry basket in her arms, how happy this makes her. Since they live in the city, in a crowded apartment, she can never hang their clothes out in the open like this.

After lunch, the father takes the girls to the beach and the mother stays home alone. She stretches out and smokes a cigarette, writing in her notebook with an air of concentration.

One day, back from the beach, the girls run around for hours trying to catch crickets that jump through the grass. They snatch them up. They put a few in a jar with little pieces of tomato stolen from their parents' salads.

They turn them into pets, even naming them. The next day the crickets die, suffocated in the jar, and the girls cry. They bury them under one of the plum trees and put some wildflowers on top.

Another day, the father discovers that one of the flip-flops he'd left outside is missing. I tell him that a fox probably took it; there's been one prowling around. I tell my father, who knows the habits and hideouts of all the animals around here, and he manages to find the shoe, along with a ball and a shopping bag abandoned by the previous family.

I realize how much the guests like this rural, unchanging landscape, how much they appreciate every detail, how these things help them think, rest, dream. When the girls pick blackberries, staining the pretty dresses they're wearing, the mother doesn't get mad at them. Instead she laughs. She asks the father to take a picture, and then throws the dresses in the wash.

At the same time I wonder what they know about the loneliness here. What do they know about the days, always the same, in our dilapidated cottage? The nights when the wind blows so hard the earth seems to shake, or when the sound of rain keeps me awake? The months we live alone among the hills, the horses, the insects, the birds that pass over the fields? Would they like the harsh quiet that reigns here all winter?

On the last night, more cars arrive. Friends of the parents have been invited along with their children, who run around on the meadow. A couple of people report that the traffic was light coming in from the city. The adults take a look around the house, and walk in the garden at sunset. The table on the patio is already set.

I hear everything as they eat. The laughter and chatter are louder tonight. The family relates all their mishaps in the country: the tomato-eating crickets, the funeral under the plum tree, the sheepdog, the fox that carried off the flip-flop. The mother says that being in touch with nature like this has been good for the girls.

At a certain point a cake comes out, with candles, and I realize it's the father's birthday. He's turning forty-five. Everyone sings and they slice the cake.

My father and I finish up some overripe grapes. I'm about to clear the table when I hear a knock at the door. I see the girls, hesitant, out of breath. They give me a plate with two slices of cake on it: one for me and one for my father. They dash off before I can say thanks.

We eat the cake while the guests talk about politics, trips, life in the city. Someone asks the mother where she got the cake. It came from a bakery in their neighborhood, she says, adding that one of the other guests brought

it up. She mentions the name of the bakery, the piazza where it's situated.

My father lays down his fork and lowers his head. His eyes are agitated when he looks at me. He gets up abruptly and then steps out to smoke a cigarette, unobserved.

We used to live in the city, too. My father sold flowers in that very piazza. My mother used to help.

They spent their days next to each other in a small but pleasant stand, arranging bouquets that people took home to decorate their tables and terraces. New to this country, they learned the names of the flowers: rose, sunflower, carnation, daisy. They kept them, their stems submerged, in a row of buckets.

One night three men showed up. My father was alone; my mother, pregnant with me at the time, was at home, because he didn't want her to work at night. It was late. The other stores around the piazza were closed, and my father was about to lower his grate.

One of the men asked him to open up again, saying that he was about to go and see his girlfriend. He wanted a nice bouquet. My father agreed that he'd make him one, even though the men were rude, a little drunk.

When my father held up the bouquet the man said that it was skimpy and asked him to make it bigger. My father added more flowers, an excessive number of them, until the man was satisfied. He wrapped paper around the bouquet, then he bound it up with colored ribbon, tying a bow. He told him the price.

The man pulled some money out of his wallet. It wasn't enough. And when my father refused to hand over the bouquet the man told him that he was an idiot, that he didn't even know how to put together a nice bouquet for a beautiful girl. Then, together with the others, he started beating my father until his mouth filled with blood, until his front teeth were shattered.

My father yelled, but at that hour no one heard. They said, Go back to wherever you came from. They took the bouquet and left him like that on the ground.

My father went to the emergency room. He couldn't eat solid foods for a year. After I was born, when he saw me for the first time, he couldn't say a word.

Ever since, he's struggled to speak. He garbles his words, as if he were an old man. He's ashamed to smile, because of his missing teeth. My mother and I understand him, but others don't. They think, since he's a foreigner, that he doesn't speak the language. Sometimes they even think he's mute.

When the pears and red apples that grow in the garden are ripe, we cut them into thin slices, almost transparent, so that he can savor them.

One of his compatriots told him about this job, in this secluded place. He wasn't familiar with the countryside: he'd always lived in cities.

He can live and work here without opening his mouth. He's not afraid of being attacked. He prefers to live among the animals, cultivating the land. He's become used to this untamed place that protects him.

When he talks to me, as he drives me to school, he always says the same thing: that he couldn't make anything of his life. All he wants me to do is study and finish school, go to college, and then go far away from them.

The next day, late in the morning, the father starts to load the car. I see four people, tanned, even more closely knit. They don't want to leave. At breakfast they say that they'd like to come back next year. Nearly all the guests say the same thing when they go. A few faithfully return, but for most of them once is enough.

Before heading out, the mother shows me the stuff in the fridge that they don't want to take back to the city. She tells me that she's grown quite fond of this house, that she already misses it. Maybe, when she's feeling stressed, or overwhelmed by work, she'll think of this place: the clean air, the hills, the clouds blazing at sunset.

I wish the family safe travels and say goodbye. I stand there waiting until the car's out of sight. Then I start to prepare the house for the new family that's supposed to get here tomorrow. I make the beds. I tidy the room the girls turned upside down. I sweep the flies they swatted.

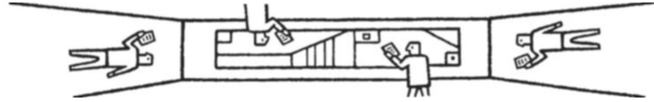
They've forgotten, or left on purpose, a few things they don't need, things I hold on to. Pictures the girls drew, shells they picked up at the beach, the last drops of a perfumed shower gel. Shopping lists in the faint, small script that the mother used, on other sheets of paper, to write all about us. ♦

(*Translated, from the Italian, by the author.*)

"You'll have to speak up. I'm very loud in here."

NEWYORKER.COM
Jhumpa Lahiri on writing in Italian.

THE CRITICS



THE CURRENT CINEMA

FIGHTING TO BE HEARD

"The Final Year" and "A Fantastic Woman."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The first crisis that erupts in "The Final Year" involves Samantha Power, the former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. The film is a documentary about the last quarter of Barack Obama's second term, and the subjects covered include the Iran nuclear deal, the Presidential visit to Hiroshima, and the intractable plight of Syria. These are issues of immense weight, but none are as pressing as Power's discovery that one of her children is heading to school minus the statutory bagel. It must be traced. World peace will have to wait.

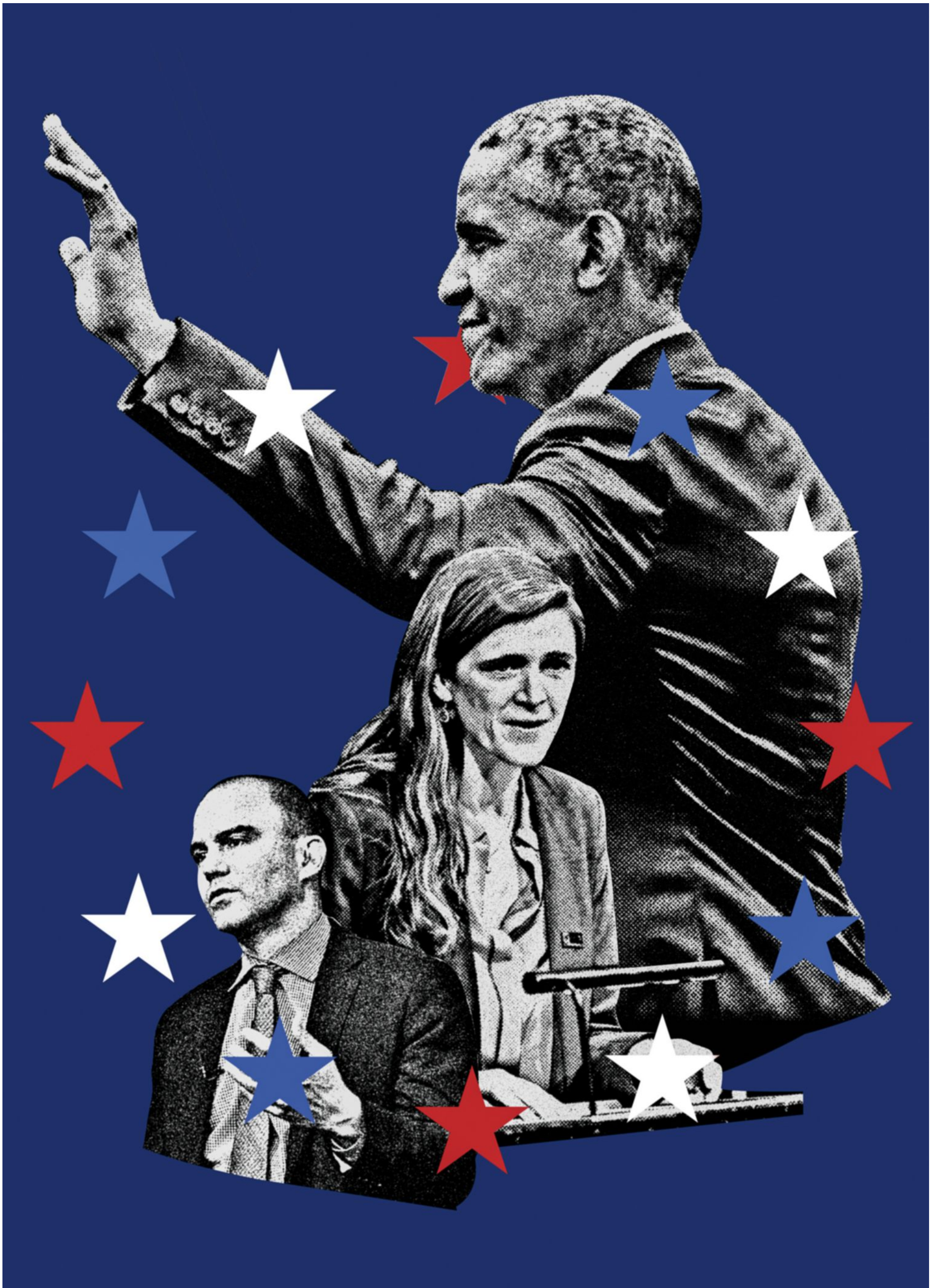
The focus of Greg Barker's film is on diplomacy—a mere slice of the duties undertaken by the outgoing Administration, but more than enough to fill an hour and a half. We are swiftly introduced to the leading players: Power; John Kerry, the Secretary of State; and Ben Rhodes, the deputy national-security adviser for strategic communications. When the national-security adviser herself appears, the words "With Susan Rice" flash onscreen, as if we were watching the opening credits of a thriller and she were Angela Bassett or Glenn Close. There is also a special guest appearance by the President, who pops up to ruminate on the non-Hegelian shape of history ("It zigs and zags") or to check his Greek pronunciation before addressing an audience in Athens.

Not that there's even a tremor of Eurocentric bias in the movie. In the eyes of the establishment, as Rhodes points out, "abroad" essentially means Russia and the Middle East. Aside from fleeting mentions of Colombia and Venezuela, South America fails to land a role in "The Final Year," and, as for Europe, it seems risibly redundant: a dozy collection of old buildings, best used as a conference chamber in which to thrash out the global grievances that *really* matter. Vienna, say, is where Kerry and his team trudge through thirty hours of discussions, in May, 2016, designed to broker peace in Syria. (The American plan was to implement an orderly transition of government, with President Assad stepping down by August 1st. That went well.)

No Secretary of State has been more peregrine than Kerry, and the movie aims to match his frantic schedule, tracking him from Vietnam to Greenland. What should feel urgent and engaged, however, often comes across as itchy and impatient. The Viennese talks, for instance, are succeeded by a typically trenchant remark from Power, who declares, "What Russia has done is wrong as a matter of law, wrong as a matter of history." Hang on, what did Russia do to earn that particular rebuke? And when? Anybody studying the film a decade from now will, I suspect, be infuriated by its want of context. Although we sense how busy the State Department is—and, when warranted, how indignant—the actual meat and potatoes of diplomatic effort are rarely dished up. We flit from Rhodes gazing thoughtfully over the Cuban seafront to him wearing a sash and serving rice to Buddhist monks in Laos, with only one of his loftier mission statements ("We looked at the world and decided where we wanted to do things affirmatively") to guide us. And, in the sequence after *that*, a young Laotian asks whether Donald Trump, the Republican nominee, might be elected. "No," Rhodes says, with a smile. The very idea.

It's impossible, in 2018, to view "The Final Year" except through the crazy prism of what happened next. Barker might as well have made a documentary about the upkeep of the Empire State Building in the months preceding the arrival of King Kong. Mind you, Kong, being a gentleman, was content to shake his fist at passing biplanes, whereas Trump, it would seem, is bent upon trashing or suspending any number of initiatives, including the Paris climate accord, purely because they were proposed or backed by Obama in the first place. Is it the fate of the high-minded to be undone by low blows? The glummest spectacle in "The Final Year" is the glassy bewilderment on Rhodes's face, toward the end, as the result of the election emerges. He's been writing Presidential speeches, and now he can barely speak: "I mean I, I . . . I can't. I can't. I can't. I can't put it into words." The poor guy is constitutionally unable to imagine how such an event could arise. And that, a Trumpist would say, is Washington for you.

Those who mourn the passing of the Obama era, and shudder at the current dispensation, will doubtless warm to "The Final Year," and thrill to the intimate access that Barker enjoyed. Yet even they may find the film too mild for their taste, and wonder if the White House of 2016 was truly as harmonious as the film suggests. Were tempers never lost? There's a moment when Rhodes confesses, "I had this huge fight with



OPPOSITE: LEWIS SCOTT; PHOTOGRAPHS: THIS PAGE, FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: SAUL LOEB/AFP/GETTY; JEWEL SAMAD/AFP/GETTY; CHERISS MAY/NURPHOTO/GETTY

Ben Rhodes and Samantha Power are among the figures in a documentary about Obama's last foreign-policy initiatives.

ILLUSTRATION BY ADAM MAIDA

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Samantha last night." Power adds that Obama, too, was involved, the casus belli being the tenor of his valedictory address to the U.N.—too optimistic for Power, who is versed in genocide and can see nothing rosy in "a world where you have sixty-five million displaced." In a way, her disagreement with Obama gets to the heart of his doctrine, his legacy, and his faith in the better angels of our nature. So where were Barker's cameras when they were needed most? "The Final Year" is stirring and saddening, but too well behaved by half; I wanted it to be a little less Steven Pinker and a little more Dwayne Johnson. I wanted the huge fight.

One night, in Santiago, a middle-aged Chilean man, Orlando Onetto (Francisco Reyes), expires. There are worse ways to go; earlier that evening, he has had sex with his young partner, Marina Vidal (Daniela Vega), after hearing her sing at a night club and taking her to dinner for her birthday. When he dies of an aneurysm, she is stricken with shock, and her distress is only just beginning. At the hospital, a doctor looks at her suspiciously, as does a policeman. "Miss, I need your details," he says, before asking for her name. "Marina," she replies. He inspects her I.D. card. Then he calls her "Sir."

Such is the predicament that drives "A Fantastic Woman," the new film from Sebastián Lelio. Marina is a transgender woman, whose dominant wish is that she be allowed to grieve—the most basic of human rights, you might think, although it is continually denied her. She waits tables at a restaurant, and when a detective named Adriana Cortés (Amparo Noguera) shows up there, explaining that she's from the Sexual Offenses Unit, you can see Marina thinking, What offense? Adriana seems affable enough, yet her inquiries are like slaps. "Was he paying you?" she asks. "We were a couple," Marina answers, adding, "It was a healthy, consensual relationship between two adults."

That line exemplifies both the strength and the frailty of the film. What Marina says is honest and true, but it doesn't sound much like dialogue; it sounds like something that a lawyer would enunciate, or a columnist write, in her defense. In ethical terms, "A Fantastic Woman" is impeccable, corralling us in outrage at an intolerant society. Marina is subjected to a humiliating physical examination—"How should I treat him?" the medical orderly whispers—and, later, hustled out of church for having dared to trespass upon Orlando's wake, where a child starts crying at the sight of her. Lelio's own stance, in short, could not be clearer; dramatically, though, it has a flattening effect, and we soon realize how few surprises lie in store. The insults mount, with Marina being labelled a chimera and a monster. Orlando's estranged wife, Sonia (Aline Küppenheim), stares at her and admits, "When I look at you, I don't know what I'm seeing." Set against such ignorance is the blithe approbation of the title: Marina is fantastic, and that's that.

Fans of Lelio will recall the eponymous heroine of "Gloria," his memorable film of 2014. She was a divorced woman in her fifties who hung out in singles bars, saw too little of her children, and woke up on a beach, alone, after a heavy night. Something about Gloria evaded our grasp, whereas Marina feels all too solidly present and, despite the defiant poise of Vega's performance, oddly bereft of moral ambiguity. Her conversations tend to be the opposite of quick-fire, with the characters pausing for a while—or an eternity—before responding, just to make quite sure that we get the point.

Now and then, Lelio departs into reverie and daydream, and it's here, loosening the bonds of his naturalistic style, that he draws us closer to the mystery of Marina. Watch her straining against a cyclonic wind, to the sound of a Baroque aria, pelted by trash and tipping forward like Buster Keaton in "Steamboat Bill, Jr." (1928), or sharing a red-lit, imaginary embrace with Orlando during a visit to the crematorium, as though he were still more flesh than ash. I was left in the unusual position of praying for a prequel. How did the couple meet, and how far did Sonia's jaw drop when Orlando informed her of his *coup de foudre*? If only we could see how he and Marina managed their love, in the face of everything, before they were torn asunder. That would be fantastic. ♦

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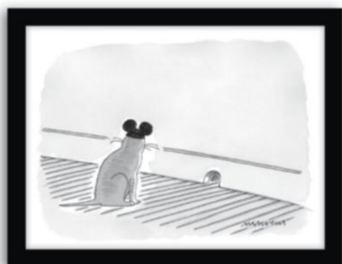

Mick Stevens, May 31, 1999

"It is not you. It is we."

Jason Adam Katzenstein, February 8, 2016

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THE NEW YORKER

BOOKS

SOUNDS LIKE

The work of wordplay in the novels of Ali Smith.

BY JAMES WOOD

If you are tired of puns, are you tired of life? Puns are easy to disdain. They are essentially found, not made; discovered after the fact rather than intended before it. Puns are accidental echoes, random likenesses thrown out by our lexical cosmos. They lurk, pallidly hibernating, inside fortune cookies and Christmas crackers; the groan is the pun's appropriate unit of appreciation. On the other hand, everyone secretly loves a pun, and, wonderfully, the worst are often as funny as the best, as the great punster Nabokov knew, because the genre is so democratically debased. Puns are part of the careless abundance of creation, the delicious surplus of life, and, therefore, fundamentally joyful. Being accidental, they are like free money—nature's charity. There's a reason that the most abundant writer in the language was so abundant in puns: words, like Bottom's dream, are bottomless.

The Scottish writer Ali Smith is surely the most pun-besotted of contemporary novelists, edging out even Thomas Pynchon. It's not simply that she loves puns; it's that she thinks through and with them; her narratives move forward, develop and expand, by mobilizing them. She is an insistently political writer, and her most recent work can be seen as an urgent, sometimes didactic intervention into post-Brexit British animosities, into a world that could be called, to borrow from one of her many punning characters, "nasty, British and short." Since that calamitous referendum, in June, 2016, Smith has quickly published two novels, "Autumn," in October of that year, and now "Winter" (Pantheon), the second of a projected seasonal quartet. But, for all the sense of bitter urgency, her work remains essentially sunny (pun-drenched, pun-kissed). "Autumn" and "Winter," novels full of political foreboding, are also brief and almost breezy—topical, sweet-natured, something fun to be inside. The last page of "Winter" bears a baleful reference to President Trump's hideous speech to the Boy Scouts in West Virginia, and the book contains a fair amount of family strife; yet the novel ends more like a Shakespearean comedy than like a political tragedy, with an air of optimistic renaissance and familial unity. One of the characters makes a reference to "Cymbeline" that might also function as a description of the novel we have just read: "Cymbeline, he says. The one about poison, mess, bitterness, then the balance coming back. The lies revealed. The losses compensated." And much of the comedy and the fundamental cheerfulness in Smith's work has to do, I think, with the figurative consolations the pun embodies: that life is generative, and that, even as things split apart, they can be brought together. For the pun is essentially a rhyme, and rhyme unites.

Words aren't stable in Smith's fiction: as in Shakespeare, everything is mutable.

Is Smith drawn to creating wordy, precocious characters because she is so fond of puns, or do her intelligent characters naturally lead their author toward such wordplay? Certainly, her books contain a lot of high-spirited banter, spoken and thought. Her third novel, "The Accidental" (2005), opens as the preternaturally brilliant twelve-year-old girl Astrid Smart is waking up, and reflecting on her family and the summer holiday they are taking in a Norfolk village. Characteristically, her thought proceeds by way of verbal fission and replication:

> She shifts on the substandard bed. The substandard bed creaks loudly. After the creak she can hear the silence in the rest of the house. They are all asleep. Nobody knows she

ILLUSTRATION BY CHLOE SCHEFFE

"I'm going to send you to someone who's not afraid of doing a little harm."

is awake. Nobody is any the wiser. Any the wiser sounds like a character from ancient history. Astrid in the year 1003 BC (Before Celebrity) goes to the woods where Any the Wiser, who is really royalty and a king but who has unexpectedly chosen to be a Nobody and to live the simple life, lives in a hut, no, a cave, and answers the questions that the people of the commonweal come from miles around to ask him (most probably a him since if it was a her she'd have to be in a convent or burnt).

I associate this happy, whimsical music, arch in places, with the sound of antique English children's literature. Perhaps it's odd to find this old, golden register in the work of a contemporary author, who grew up in a working-class family in the Highland town of Inverness, who is gay, and who often writes about gender, sexuality, and politics. But Smith's capacious art warmly embraces variety, and creates eccentric stylistic families out of disparate inheritances: "English" whimsy sits easily enough alongside "Scottish" postmodernism; the realistic premises of conventional bourgeois fiction (families on holiday, unfaithful spouses, unhappy children, difficult parents) are regularly disrupted by surreal, experimental, or anarchic elements (time travel, ghosts, digressions, adaptations of late Shakespearean romances, and, in "Winter," apparitions such as a floating head and a piece of landscape that hangs over a dining table, visible only to one of the characters). Sometimes you finish an Ali Smith book unsure about the final meaning of this variety show but certain that you have been in the presence of an artist who rarely sounds like anyone else.

There are, of course, literary progenitors—you can hear the satirical scrape of Muriel Spark (whom Smith admires), and detect the influence of Virginia Woolf (fluid interior monologue, an interest in artists, and in genderless creativity). But the greatest influence is the writer whom no novelist can either escape or ever really sound like: Shakespeare. As in Shakespeare, especially Shakespearean comedy, everything is mutable. Reality dissolves into magic; men and women swap genders. Words are never stable in Smith's fiction, because, as in Shakespeare, author and characters are always picking them up and turning them upside down to see what's going on underneath. "Any the wiser" is flipped, in a moment's reverie, into King Any the Wiser. In "Winter," a "carapace" becomes "a caravan that goes at a great pace," and England's green and pleasant land becomes "England's green unpleasant land." In the same book, a character named Art is the one who sees, at the dining table, a chunk of landscape, just hanging above him, as if "someone had cut a slice out of the coast and dipped it into the room with us, like we're the coffee and it's the biscotti." Art's friend Lux tells his aunt that "Art is seeing things," to which she replies, "That's a great description of what art is." Samuel Johnson, who created one of the first modern English dictionaries, threatens to merge with the politician and Brexiteer Boris Johnson until Lux helpfully distinguishes them: "The man who wrote the dictionary . . . The opposite of Boris. A man interested in the meanings of words, not one whose interests leave words meaningless."

Elsewhere in Smith's writing, received notions become "deceived notions." I want to go to college, a precocious young Elisabeth Demand says, in "Autumn." Her older interlocutor, Daniel Gluck, demurs: "You want to go to collage . . . an institute of education where all the rules can be thrown into the air, and . . . because of these skills everything you think you know gets made into something new and strange." In "There but for the" (2011), Miles Garth, another of Smith's brilliant punsters, turns the line of an ABBA song, "I believe in angels," into a fighting manifesto: "I believe in Engels." In the same novel, Anna asks nine-year-old Brooke, clever beyond her years, if she knows what A4 is: "A4, like paper? the child says. Or a road that is smaller than a motorway?" "Such good pun we're having," Anna adds, a moment later.

Puns are delightful because they are at once deep and shallow. Still, some are more significant than others. A superabundant art naturally produces superfluity—lexical runoff, weak in nutrients. Carapace/caravan is a throwaway; "England's green unpleasant land" is too familiar to do any useful work; the college/collage joke seems forced; the thing about A4 paper being like a British A road seems like something Smith just had lying around. At times, you have the suspicion that Smith needs her characters to play around with words like this because she doesn't know how to animate them as actual human

beings, motivated by need rather than by whimsy.

Her art is at its most powerful when she gets her wordplay to resonate, and send meaningful vibrations throughout the fiction. One of her best and most captivating novels is a contemporary retelling of Ovid's gender-bending myth of Iphis, entitled "Girl Meets Boy" (2007). Ovid's tale is about a young girl who pretends to be a boy, and who is named Iphis, "a name both boys and girls could be called." Iphis falls in love with Ianthe, a beautiful girl, and on the eve of her wedding is magically turned into a boy so that the marriage can be consummated. Smith's version is set in modern Inverness, and concerns two sisters, Anthea and Imogen. Anthea falls in love with Robin Goodman, a woman who looks like a man. ("But he really looked like a girl. She was the most beautiful boy I had ever seen.") Robin praises the classical writer for his fluidity: "He knows, more than most, that the imagination doesn't have a gender." Thus the novel, in ways both playful and deep, makes good on the cliché of its title: "girl meets boy" by *meeting* boy in the middle. The pun expands meaning and possibility.

"I have this need . . . to be more," Helena Fisker says in Smith's best-known novel, "How to Be Both" (2014), in which a woman becomes a man, and two contemporary English girls, living in Cambridge, imagine themselves into the life of a medieval Italian artist. Indeed, if all of Dostoyevsky's novels could be called "Crime and Punishment" (as Proust joked), all of Ali Smith's could be called "How to Be Both." Her characters are uneasy with single selves; they long to expand, to duplicate and generate. In "Girl Meets Boy," Smith makes a truly Shakespearean joke out of the phrase "alas and alack," which slyly becomes "A lass and a lack" (i.e., a girl, and a girl who "lacks" the all-important male parts). Recall the terms in which Samuel Johnson criticized Shakespeare's ceaseless punning. Johnson appears to demote the pun to a mere "quibble," and announced that a quibble was "the fatal Cleopatra" for whom Shakespeare, like Antony, "lost the world, and was content to lose it." The pun for Dr. Johnson was lack, weakness, and female: a lass and a lack. Yet expansiveness is at the heart of Smith's work; her characters aspire to the generative power of the pun.

Smith's latest work can seem breezy, almost makeshift. "Autumn" and "Winter," which must have been written at great speed, have the aspect of political pop-up books, quick, witty reads eager to have their say on the very latest news: Brexit, the refugee crisis, Donald Trump, climate change, the terrible fire that, last summer, demolished Grenfell Tower, in West London, killing seventy-one people. Smith's political hunger is at times ravenous enough to swallow proportion. But, again, the best wordplay here earns its keep by growing new meanings, or new ways of looking at old meanings. "Autumn" is partly about a friendship between Elisabeth Demand, a lecturer in art history, and Daniel Gluck, who was Elisabeth's neighbor when she was a child, and who is now very old, and dying in a nursing home. The book is replete with allusion—to the work of Pauline Boty, a neglected British Pop artist from the nineteen-sixties, to "A Tale of Two Cities," to "The Tempest," and to "Brave New World" (whose title is taken from Shakespeare's play). Early in the book, Elisabeth is reading Huxley's novel for the first time. It is a week after the Brexit vote.

Everything fits together, and "Autumn," like "Winter," can be thought

of as instant political allegory. Elisabeth is in the process of applying for a new passport, symbol of British sovereignty and European Union membership; Elisabeth's mother is furious about the Brexit result; Daniel, too old to care about such things, represents a lost sweetness, a piece of "old" Britain. Half the country voted for Brexit, and half did not. The country is at war with itself (a tale of two countries). It is indeed a brave new world, not in Shakespeare's sense but in Huxley's dystopian one (that is to say, nasty, British, and short). At one moment in the book, Elisabeth is listening to a political radio program, in which a conservative M.P. denounces the threat of immigration (one of the anxieties behind the Brexit vote). Elisabeth's ears, Smith writes—channelling Shakespeare—"had undergone a sea-change. Or the world had." And then she rewrites lines from "The Tempest":

> *But doth suffer a sea-change*
> *Into something rich and—*
> Rich and what? she thought.
> Rich and poor.

In place of "rich and strange" comes "rich and poor." Smith's lovely correction picks up on the idea of self-division (a country of opposing positions), and also on the idea of external contradiction: a wealthy island now bereft of political imagination, at once rich *and* poor.

"Winter" extends the seasonal allegory. Nature is out of joint: instead of a "proper" wintry Christmas, there is only a "half-season grey selfsameness." In post-Brexit Britain, one character explains, everyone is angry with everyone else, "and the government we've got has done nothing to assuage it and instead is using people's rage for its own political expediency. . . . And what's happening in the United States is directly related, and probably financially related." This strife is concentrated in a singular family, a microcosm of the state, which gathers in a large house in Cornwall for a Christmas reunion. A solidly conventional novelistic setup is steadily subverted. The matriarch, Sophia Cleves, is eccentric and withdrawn, doesn't seem to want her family with her, and has made no preparation for her visitors. Politically myopic, Sophia has long been estranged from her politically progressive sister, Iris, who nevertheless decides to turn up. Sophia's son Art (who has a difficult relationship with his mother) is supposed to bring his girlfriend, Charlotte. But the couple have split up, so Art pays a stranger, Lux, whom he met at a bus stop, to travel with him to Cornwall and impersonate Charlotte. Lux is clever, playful, wordy—"a brainiac nerd"—originally from Croatia (via

Canada). She has no intention of shacking up with Art—she is gay—and has come along simply for the money. But, like a figure in a Shakespearean romance—there are many references to "Cymbeline"—she is the angelic agent who magically brings Art, Iris, and Sophia together.

"Winter" lacks the cohesion of "Autumn." It's an antic collage, with a daub or two that might usefully have been suppressed. Like a number of Smith's novels, it doesn't know when to end—usually an element of her joyful profligacy—and trundles along into silliness. On the day after Christmas, a bus full of bird-watchers turns up in the garden of the Cornwall house; it seems to be there only so that Smith can have Lux, the lover of Samuel Johnson, deploy a leaky pun: "I refute it bus." (The story goes that Johnson announced that he refuted the idealism of the philosopher George Berkeley by going outside and kicking a stone: "I refute it thus.") As in "Autumn," there are references to a female artist—this time, the sculptor Barbara Hepworth—but her presence here seems gestural. The political warfare in the Cleves family is rather too starkly laid out, and the novel can become earnestly didactic. "But what will the world do," Lux asks, "if we can't solve the problem of the millions and millions of people with no home to go to or whose homes aren't good enough, except by saying go away and building fences and walls? . . . Human beings have to be more ingenious than this, and more generous. We've got to come up with a better answer." The elements of realism and surrealism, of tradition and experiment, usually so deftly choreographed in Smith's fiction, rub awkwardly alongside each other here. And there's that not quite convincing bit about how "Art is seeing things."

On the other hand, Art does see something, and his visionary moment at the dining table is one of the novel's unlikely triumphs, an oddly moving mixture of the fantastical and the allegorical. The Cleves family has been arguing steadily, about contemporary Britain, about borders and walls and refugees, when Art realizes that something is falling onto the table—pieces of dirt, grit, rubble. He looks up: "A foot and a half above all their heads, floating, precarious, suspended by nothing, a piece of rock or a slab of landscape roughly the size of a small car or a grand piano is hanging there in the air." No one else notices it. Later, when Art tells Lux about it, she jokes that he has banged his head on the world. As if, she implies, instead of Dr. Johnson kicking the stone, the stone came and kicked Dr. Johnson. Reality exists, and it has come knocking, and Art, who shares some of his mother's political obliviousness, will be knocked into a resensitized political awareness.

Perhaps Art's political schooling is too obvious. But there's something delicate, almost spectral—despite the hulking *thisness* of the symbol—about that piece of hanging landscape. It's a piece of earth, a piece of Britain. (The English poet Edward Thomas, asked what he was going to fight for in the Great War, picked up some earth and replied, "Literally, for this.") But, when I encountered the scene, I imagined not earth so much as a piece of cliff, perhaps a slice of the white cliffs of Dover; in other words, I imagined an edge, a border. The vision is surreally real, at once literal and symbolic, and the meanings productively multiply.

In "Girl Meets Boy," Smith tells us that Imogen used to get cross with her lexically ludic grandfather, because he was "always changing the words to things." (For instance, her grandfather liked to switch the male gender of Kipling's poem "If": "which is more—you'll be a woman, my daughter.") Smith also likes to change the words to things, and in both senses of the phrase: she likes turning words *into* things. Her elastic, jovial art delights in transforming things into figures, and figures back into things. An argument about sovereignty becomes a piece of landscape, and then the magical symbol is turned back into political argument. Her novel "There but for the" is an ingenious tale about a man who leaves a disagreeable London dinner party, goes upstairs, locks himself in the spare bedroom, and refuses to come out—for months. The event becomes a local sensation. Reporters and TV crews mass outside. But perhaps the man never actually locked himself in the room. (People knocked at the door but never tried to open it.) What if he left the room long before the media circus descended? And, really, the entire novel is just a suggestive riff on the "Knock knock! Who's there?" jokes. Knock knock! Who's there? Answer: No one. In "The Accidental," a mysterious stranger, Amber, who has appeared in the holiday house out of nowhere, raps her knuckle on twelve-year-old Astrid Smart's clever head, and asks, "Anybody in?" The impact is meaningful. For quite a while, Smith writes, Astrid can feel where Amber touched her head: "The top of Astrid's head feels completely different from the rest of her, like the hand is still there touching her head." In "Winter," you could say that, essentially, a piece of British landscape knocks on Art's head and asks, "Anybody in?"

This sort of bonhomous playfulness won't delight everyone. It's not always to my taste. The cost of inhabiting a world of postmodern Shakespearean comedy is precisely that life is seen buoyantly but not very tragically. The neatness of the pun, its capacity to make things rhyme, exists at the expense, perhaps, of mess, despair, and sheer human intractability. Yet there is also something beautiful about art as play, about witnessing jokes and figures of speech and clichés and stray words shimmer into reality—seeing them become things, become central to a book's machinery—and then slip away again into gauzy abstraction, rather as Smith's mysterious fictional strangers seem to pass through her books and then slip away. In "Winter," one of those characters, Lux, eloquently describes how she once looked at her family tree, and saw herself at the very bottom of centuries of existence. She suddenly felt history as a palpable burden. Once again, Smith turns a figure of speech into an object:

> I knew for the first time I was, I am, carrying on my head, like a washerwoman or a waterwoman, not just one container or basket, but hundreds of baskets all balanced on each other, full to their tops with bones, high as a skyscraper, and they were so heavy on my head and shoulders that either I was going to have to offload them or they were going to drive me down through the pavement into the ground, like that machine that workmen use to break up tarmac. . . . Don't misunderstand me. I also knew they weren't there, there were no bones, no baskets, nothing on my head. But all the same. They were. ♦

BOOKS

THE PARENTING PARADOX

Does child rearing have to be a competitive sport?

BY ADAM GOPNIK

We know we've come to a crossroads when German childhood is being held up as an idealized model for Americans. It was, after all, Teutonic styles of child rearing that were once viewed with disgust—as in "The Sound of Music," for a long time the most popular of all American movies, with all those over-regimented Trapp kids rescued by wearing the bedroom drapes and singing scales. But Sara Zaske's "Achtung Baby: An American Mom on the German Art of Raising Self-Reliant Children" (Picador) is perhaps an inevitable follow-up to "Bringing Up Bébé," that best-selling book about parenting the way the French supposedly do it—basically, as though the kids were little grownups, presumably ready for adultery and erotic appetites. So why not move eastward through Europe, until we get the book on parenting the Moldavian way?

What's wrong with such books is not that we can't learn a lot from other people's "parenting principles" but that, invariably, you get the problems along with the principles. French kids are often sensitive and unspoiled in ways that American kids aren't; they are also often driven so crazy by the enervating 8:30 A.M.-to-4:30 P.M. school system and by a tradition of remote parenting that they rebel as bitterly as American adolescents do, only putting off the rebellion until they're forty, when the sex and drugs really start to kick in. And you can wonder whether the German molding system leaves German kids molded quite so thoroughly as Zaske, an American long resident in Berlin, insists.

In her depiction, the new German style of child rearing remains, well, extremely German: here are the most highly organized forms of not being highly organized that have ever existed. Nowhere else, it seems, will you find such tightly controlled varieties of freedom, such militarized ordering of open-ended play, such centralized rules for creative anarchy. Kids aren't merely encouraged not to be dependent on toys; there is a "toy-free" month when no one at the day-care center is allowed to play with them. Adolescents are not only indulged in their freewheeling impulses; whole parks are specifically set aside for their explorations. "In addition to park areas designed for them, adolescents can go into almost all places in Berlin, including dance clubs and bars," Zaske writes. "There are some rules, including a curfew: teens under sixteen must be out of the clubs and restaurants by ten p.m., those under eighteen must leave by midnight." (Could these fine-print rules be effectively enforced anywhere *except* in Germany?) German parents don't merely not hover; they *refuse* to hover, on considered principle, and send the kids off to school and back, after having digested the odds of a child's being snatched along the way and, sensibly enough, decided that it's a safe bet they won't be.

And here we arrive at the real ghost that haunts these books, the one that sends us to Paris or Berlin for help: the sense that American parents have gone radically wrong, making themselves and their kids miserable in the process, by hovering over them like helicopters instead of observing them from a watchtower, at a safe distance. The helicopter metaphor is an odd one, since helicopters can often *only* hover, helplessly, as in the Vietnam-era newsreels, as the action goes on below. The style of middle-class child rearing that the Germans and the French and the rest might help us escape from is really more handcuff than helicopter, with the parent and the child both, like the man and woman

The result of cramming kids isn't as predictable as enthusiasts hope or critics fear.

ILLUSTRATION BY GOLDEN COSMOS

agents in a sixties spy movie, shackled to the same valise—in this case, the one that carries not the secret plans for a bomb but the college-admission papers. Until we get to that final destination, we'll never be apart.

In "Off the Charts: The Hidden Lives and Lessons of American Child Prodigies" (Knopf), Ann Hulbert seems to be taking up the opposite end of the child-rearing stick; rather than ordinary kids with ordinary parents, these are the outliers, right here in America. Yet her book shares some themes with the Europhile ones. There's the same agonizing question of American achievement: What can we learn, in a society dedicated to high-achieving children, from children who seem "naturally" off the charts in their achievements? How can we make our children less anxious while still making sure that they achieve? Are prodigies a race apart, or are they merely more persistent than other kids? (As Hulbert cautions, the paradox of the self-made prodigy is that persistence itself is an inborn gift, as odd as any other.) The arguments seem to echo ancient religious ones—mysterious innate grace does battle with hard-won grit, Catholics vs. Protestants in undersized clothing—which may be a giveaway that what's at stake is ethical before it's educational.

Hulbert's book is smart—as all her books have been, particularly the child-centric "Raising America"—and often sad. There seems nothing more melancholy than the fate of prodigies. The book takes us from William James Sidis and Norbert Wiener, Jewish prodigies at Harvard at the beginning of the twentieth century (Sidis was the subject of a profile by James Thurber, of all people, in these pages), to their seeming successors in Silicon Valley, the hero-nerds who have become as much an American typology as the *enfants sauvages* of France ever were. Along the way, we encounter the big names in prodigy-land, among them Philippa Schuyler, the African-American child genius of the nineteen-thirties and forties (and also the subject of a *New Yorker* profile, by Joseph Mitchell), and Bobby Fischer, the chess-playing son of Jewish Communists, who ended up a crazed anti-Semite. That many of these kids, despite being outliers, have already been much documented suggests that we use mental prodigies the way Renaissance people used physical prodigies (the boy-wolf, the fish-woman): that is, to prove a moral point. In the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill's breakdown was a cautionary tale about being stuffed with too much knowledge; Louisa May Alcott included an ex-prodigy of this kind in "Little Men" to show the danger. We watch movies about Bobby Fischer in part because his is a touching story and in part because we are secretly glad that our kids, though not prodigious, are at least not *that*.

Hulbert does the good work, throughout, of resisting morals or too neat generalizations; one suspects that the alliterative "Lessons" in her subtitle was a publisher's creation. Some prodigies are pushed; some do the pushing from within. Sidis had a bleak life after Harvard: never quite finding his footing, he self-published speculative manuscripts on the second law of thermodynamics, the crank's specialty, and obsessively collected street-car transfers. But Norbert Wiener, who spent his career at M.I.T., became one of the most significant scientists of his era, the founder of cybernetics and a pioneer in information theory. He suffered from depression, it's true, but was no more miserable than many other tenured professors. Philippa Schuyler had a terribly unhappy adulthood; Hulbert produces a heartbreaking letter of indictment that, in her late twenties, she wrote to her pushy, well-meaning mother. Yet Shirley Temple, her show-biz counterpart in the thirties (she was, as Hulbert points out, the first white female ever to dance with a black man onscreen, albeit in a movie where she wears a Confederate cap), went on to have a successful life as a Republican politico and diplomat.

The math prodigies are set somewhat apart from the more general-capacity prodigies, being seemingly possessed of a weird bit of wiring more than an over-all enhanced capacity for learning to do things. The math kids don't learn math by studying math, the way the rest of us do; they learn math the way the rest of us learn language. Hulbert picks her way through the minefield of "spectrum" or "savant" kids and the question of whether what we call autism, with its bestowal of exceptionally close and persistent focus on some object, can be a help in the arts and sciences. There appear to be as many learning styles among prodigies as there are prodigies to express them. Bobby Fischer turns out to be, in most ways, a freak, an outlier among outliers. His incipient paranoia provided a wonderful advantage in playing a game that *depends* on paranoia—Is that pawn sneaking up on me from behind? It isn't threatening now, but, in four moves, I can see that knight becoming my fatal enemy!—and ruined him as a person. His wasn't a general intelligence deliberately adapted to a game; it was a game-playing octopus-eyed gift that crowded out his general intelligence.

The tricky thing, which Hulbert doesn't oversell, is that, on the whole and with the expected exceptions, exactly the kind of hover parenting that we rightly deplore does seem to be essential to the kind of hyperachievement that we admire. The Chinese piano prodigy Lang Lang, whom Hulbert writes about at length, was driven relentlessly by his father. "Lang Lang's mother and father joined a generation of parents who, not surprisingly, focused on the futures of their 'little emperors' with an intensity that pushed traditional Confucian tenets of 'family education' to extremes," she writes. The piano was hauled into the living room, and five- and six-hour daily sessions of practice were imposed by the time Lang Lang was seven.

As Hulbert points out, our own pet prejudices would predict a boy crushed under the pressure, which seems at times to have been deep-dive-submarine intense. But Lang Lang emerged as a fine musician and about as well adjusted as any artist can hope to be. The

grit theory of achievement seems justified by the results, if the results are what you're after. We wince at the brutality of parents who ship their young kids around to perform for adults at the expense of their childhood—but, then, that was Mozart's childhood, and though by the end Mozart may have wished for less attention as a kid performer and more as a grownup composer, he never for a moment wished not to be Mozart.

For every prodigy doomed to misery by early success, we can cite another who started off strong and kept going. It's significant that we tend not to judge prodigies in sports too harshly. Wayne Gretzky was a goal-scoring genius in hockey by the age of ten and had a true tiger father, albeit a mild Canadian kind, who trained him in the back-yard ice rink. Yet we don't usually criticize such parents, or expect their offspring to become exemplars of a life well lived, because we understand that there's a time fuse burning on athletic achievement. Nobody looks at Gretzky now and feels sorry for him, though his post-athletic life has been about as hit-or-miss as any other prodigy's. We understand instinctively that being a prodigy wasn't his platform for a lifetime's achievement; it marked the possibility of a highly specific, highly term-limited kind of performance.

"I don't mean to be a snob, but I know what real leather sounds like."

The secrets of that kind of athletic achievement are the subject of Karen Crouse's book "Norwich: One Tiny Vermont Town's Secret to Happiness and Excellence" (Simon & Schuster). Crouse, a *Times* sportswriter disillusioned by drug-enhanced results and joyless competitions, stumbled on Norwich in the midst of her travels with more or less the same stunned enthusiasm with which Ronald Colman, in the movie "Lost Horizon," stumbles on Shangri-La. In Norwich, no parent presses, no bar is set, and after a kid scores two goals in a soccer game he is sat down so that some other kid has a chance to score. Yet Norwich continually sends athletes to the Olympics and other competitions in numbers ridiculously disproportionate to its size.

What we don't get to see, in Crouse's account, is the little town nearby, where, as must be the case, everyone coöperates and yet no one is a champion. (And there must also be, in Norwich, at least one Holden Caulfield type who thinks the whole Norwich thing is phony.) Looking at Norwich, we're told that the non-competitive, non-pressuring approach is best because it gets us to the medal stand, or close. But what if it didn't? If Norwich values matter, it's because they're good, not because they're shortcuts to victory. The point of a non-competitive attitude can't be that it makes us better able to compete; the value of an unpressured approach can't be that it creates a more effective kind of pressure. In any case, one has the sense that what Crouse has found is not a "secret" but a well-known effect: unusual excellence emerges within tightly structured local traditions, whether they are in fifteenth-century Florence, in painting, or in San Pedro de Macorís, the "cradle of shortstops." One good painter with an apprentice produces a Renaissance, just as one good coach with willing kids supplies the major leagues.

But *are* results what we're after? Timed and scored competitions aside, the results are far more relative to the eye of the beholder than any account of high-pressure child rearing can quite allow. Lang Lang's six-hour-a-day training certainly produced a fast-fingered fiend, but also, to many music-critics' ears, *merely* a fast-fingered fiend, more loud than lyrical. Then again, Mitsuko Uchida, a Japanese prodigy of an earlier vintage, is as sensitive a pianist as exists; prodigies are particulars first of all. With all the effort in the world, the results of cramming kids are likely to be more ambiguous than we can predict, not because the child rearing was done wrong but because *all* such results tend to be ambiguous.

What typically emerges from looking at kids, gifted and ordinary, is that, from the kids' point of view, *accomplishment,* that is, the private sense of mastery, the hard thing suddenly made easy, counts for far more in their inner lives than does the achievement—the competition won, the reward secured. The mystery of mastery, felt in the child's mind or muscles, is more compelling than the concreteness of achievement, the trophy pressed in

her hands. What sustains us in any competition are the moments of interiority when the competition vanishes; what sustains us in any struggle are the moments when we forget the struggle. Philippe Petit didn't walk the wire between the Twin Towers by working harder while he was up there; he worked hard to get to a state where it would never feel like work.

Lang Lang admits to the brutal pressures placed on him by his father, and, though he does it nicely, he blames his father for overstressing him. He was saved because he had, as Hulbert writes, "carved out space for a version of the 'autotelic experience'—absorption in an activity purely for its own sake, a specialty of childhood." Following the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Hulbert maintains that it was being caught in "the flow," the feeling of the sudden loss of oneself in an activity, that preserved Lang Lang's sanity: "The prize always beckoned, but Lang was finding ways to get lost in the process." There's a similarly lovely scene in Hulbert's book of Shirley Temple learning to tap-dance with Bill Robinson, who told her to "get your feet attached to your ears"; the moment was bright enough to stay with her forever after. The process was not only more important than the prize morally; it was more essential than the prize existentially. By the time that Temple was an adult, most of the money she had made was gone. But the moment of learning, matching ears to feet with Bill Robinson, left her with a lifetime of confidence.

Accomplishment, the feeling of absorption in the flow, of mastery for its own sake, of knowing how to do this thing, is what keeps all of us doing what we do, if we like what we do at all. The prizes are inevitably disappointing, even when we get them (as the life of Bob Dylan, prize-getter and grump extraordinaire, suggests). It is, perhaps, necessary only that we like the process as we seek the prize. Andre Agassi, in his account of becoming an embittered prodigy, seems never to have liked tennis much, except as a vehicle for achievement. The kids who do like life inside the lines can find the flow within that green-and-white geometry.

"So what are you the earl of?"

What really helicopters over these books is what one might call the Causal Catastrophe: the belief that the proof of the rightness or wrongness of some way of bringing up children is in the kinds of adults it produces. This appears, on the surface, so uncontroversial a position—what other standard would you use?—that to question it seems a little crazy. But, after all, chains of human causality are, if not infinite, very long; in every life, *some* bad consequence of your upbringing will eventually emerge. We disapprove of parental hovering not because it won't pay off later—it might; it does!—but because it's obnoxious now. Strenuously competitive parents may indeed produce high-achieving grownups, but it's in the nature of things that high-achieving adults are likely to become frustrated and embittered old people, once the rug is pulled out from under their occupation. If a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, then all chains are infinitely weak, since everybody ends up broken.

Childhood should not be considered a chain of causes leading to an ultimate effect: you do this so that will happen. The popular motto of stoic acceptance, "It is what it is," should be replaced by a stronger motto, embracing existence: "What is is what is." The reason we don't want our kids to watch violent movies is not that doing so will turn them into psychos when they grow up; it's that we don't want them seeing bloody movies now. As the nineteenth-century Russian philosopher Alexander Herzen said, after the unimaginable loss of a child drowned (in words famously adapted by Tom Stoppard in "The Coast of Utopia"), "Because children grow up, we think a child's purpose is to grow up. But a child's purpose is to be a child. Nature doesn't disdain what only lives for a *day*. It pours the whole of itself into each moment. . . . Life's bounty is in its flow, later is too late."

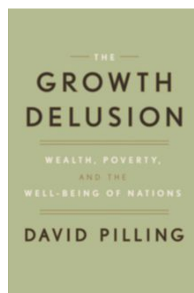
Child rearing is an art, and what makes art art is that it is doing several things at once. The trick is accepting

limits while insisting on standards. Character may not be malleable, but behavior is. The same parents can raise a dreamy, reflective girl and a driven, competitive one—the job is not to nurse her nature but to help elicit the essential opposite: to help the dreamy one to be a little more driven, the competitive one to be a little more reflective. The one artisanal, teachable thing is outer conduct. You can't restructure a genome, but, as Mr. Turveydrop, in "Bleak House," insisted, you really can teach deportment.

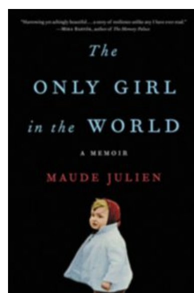
A clue may be present here in the truth, which Hulbert reports, that many "spectrum" kids can be taught—with painful effort, but, still, they can be—to behave more or less normally (no scare quotes on the word; a norm is a norm even if it isn't a virtue) through careful inculcation and rote repetition. Teaching kids to become something other than what they were born to be is probably impossible; teaching them to behave in ways that seem unnatural to them at the start is actually not that hard. As satirists have pointed out for millennia, civilized behavior is artificial and ridiculous: it means pretending to be glad to see people you aren't glad to see, praising parties you wished you hadn't gone to, thanking friends for presents you wish you hadn't received. Training kids to feign a passion is the art of parenting. The passions they really have belong only to them.

Nothing works in child rearing because everything works. If kids are happy and absorbed, in the flow, that's all we can ask of them, in Berlin or in Brooklyn. Nothing works in the long run, but the mistake lies in thinking that the long run is the one that counts. Crouse, in her annals of Norwich, tells the nice story of Mike Holland, a local ski jumper, who at one point in his career became the first ever to jump six hundred and ten feet. The record lasted less than half an hour; Matti Nykänen, a Finn and a much better ski jumper, broke it shortly afterward. But every time Holland watches video of his briefly held record jump "the hairs on his neck stand at attention." For twenty-seven minutes, he had accomplished something wonderful. It was enough to sustain a life. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

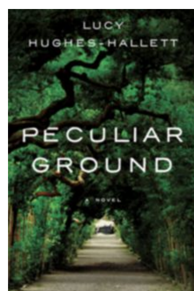


The Growth Delusion, *by David Pilling (Tim Duggan Books).* According to the author of this critique of gross domestic product as a metric and as a policy tool, "Only in economics is endless expansion seen as a virtue. In biology it is called cancer." The originator of G.D.P., the economist Simon Kuznets, never intended it to serve as a proxy for societal well-being. Pilling explores alternative models, including Maryland's Genuine Progress Indicator, Bhutan's Gross National Happiness concept, and the U.N.'s Human Development Index. He suggests other metrics—levels of inequality, carbon emissions, life satisfaction—that could enhance our view of where we are and where we're headed. As Kuznets wrote, "What are we growing? And why?"



The Only Girl in the World, *by Maude Julien with Ursula Gauthier, translated from the French by Adriana Hunter (Little, Brown).* The author of this harrowing memoir describes a childhood trapped in her family's grand house on the outskirts of a small French town in the nineteen-sixties. Aiming to produce a superhuman, her father forced her into a gruelling schedule devoid of rest or play and made her withstand tests of will power, like holding on to an electric fence for ten minutes "without betraying any feeling." She was sustained by music, books, and contact with animals on the estate. Now working as a therapist specializing in cases of psychological manipulation, she tells her story with the unflinching clarity of someone who is no longer ruled by her trauma.

The World Goes On, *by László Krasznahorkai, translated from the Hungarian by John Batki, Ottilie Mulzet, and George Szirtes (New Directions).* An unnamed narrator engages in frantic meditations and recounts eerie, baffling tales in this demanding, remarkable work. A waterfall-obsessed interpreter gets lost in Shanghai; a normally timid man tries to reach a mysterious "Zone," to the bewilderment of his friends. There are fake lectures, an invented liturgy, seventeen blank pages, and metafictional comment on Krasznahorkai's own previous novel "The Melancholy of Resistance." From the author's "uncontrollable impulse to look upon the very axis of the world" emerges a work that shows, undiminished, the complexity of existence—as well as its "sad and temporarily self-evident goal: oblivion."



Peculiar Ground, *by Lucy Hughes-Hallett (Harper).* In a narrative that skips from the Restoration of Charles II, in 1660, to the Cold War, this novel charts the life and slow death of an ancient English estate, Wychwood, that is also a sometime haven for religious dissenters. Though events like the plague of 1666 or the erection of the Berlin Wall occasionally threaten Wychwood's tranquillity, it is a "blessed enclosure," an island of graceful extravagance protected by high walls—"the materialisation of the imaginary"—and by the money and power of returning Royalists and their successors. But the walls that exclude also confine and the community "festers." As one character observes, "Gardens and prison camps, they have a lot in common."

THE ART WORLD

ALL AMERICAN

Questions of identity at the National Museum of the American Indian.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Images of Native Americans ossified in kitsch awaken complicated, living truths.

I don't often cotton to museum shows that are educational in character—when I want instruction, I'll read something—but I love, and I wish everyone would see, "Americans," at the National Museum of the American Indian, in Washington, D.C. It is keyed to the ubiquity of Native Americans in popular culture. Spectacularly installed, in a grand hall, are hundreds of Indian-themed artifacts, from movie posters, toys, and commercial and sports-team logos to weaponry (a Tomahawk missile, on loan from the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, intimidates overhead). "Indians Everywhere," the display is entitled. Other sections unpack the legends of Pocahontas, the first Thanksgiving, the Trail of Tears, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn—stories that everybody knows, at least hazily. Apt photographs and entertaining videos abound. So do irresistibly readable texts. There's no through line. You bounce, pinball fashion, among the show's parts, seduced into cognizance. Is it worrisome to relish aspects of a harrowing history that commonly stirs feelings of guilt, shame, anger, and fear, perhaps smeared over with sentimental treacle? Yes, and that's a thought that "Americans" anticipates but leaves hanging—and haunting—to deal with as one can and will.

"We want viewers to feel smart," Paul Chaat Smith remarked while I toured the show, which he co-curated with Cécile R. Ganteaume. Smith is Comanche on his mother's side and a member of the tribe. Born in Texas, he grew up in Oklahoma and Maryland. In 1974, he dropped out of Antioch College to join the American Indian Movement, shortly after that radical group's seventy-one-day, at times violent standoff with federal and local law-enforcement agents at Wounded Knee—the infamous site of a massacre of Sioux men, women, and children by U.S. Army soldiers in 1890—on the Pine Ridge Reservation, in South Dakota. (The immediate issue was a rebellion against the reservation's elected leader, but news of the event stoked Indian militancy nationwide.) Smith is a daring thinker and writer. He co-wrote, with Robert Warrior, a consummate history, "Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee" (1996). A collection of his essays, "Everything You Know About Indians Is Wrong" (2009), one of my favorite books of recent years, does indeed make me feel smart, abruptly wised up to ramifications of a modern "embrace of love and hate and narcissism" between post-1492 latecomers to the continent and inhabitants who "only became Indians once the armed struggle was over in 1890. Before then we were Shoshone or Mohawk or Crow."

Smith joined the American Indian museum in 2001, three years before its opening, on the Mall, in an exuberantly curvilinear limestone building by the Blackfoot architect Douglas Cardinal. Smith has concurred in a policy of congeniality to the museum's overwhelmingly non-Indian, though not wholly white, audience of around a million visitors annually. This puts him at odds with some of his former comrades. In 2004, the American Indian Movement demanded that the museum "forever be named and referred to as the National Holocaust Museum of the American Indian," detailing the reduction by violence, disease, and displacement of the native population from the millions—estimates vary widely, from a few million to tens of millions—in the fifteenth century to barely a quarter of a million by the end of the nineteenth. (Today, there are about three million people who identify as members of more than five hundred tribes.) Smith hardly dismisses the tragedy, an unhealable wound like that left by slavery, but he cedes protest to such other Indian intellectuals as the Choctaw historian Jacki Thompson Rand, whose eloquent essay "Why I Can't Visit the

COURTESY NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

National Museum of the American Indian" (2007), in the online journal Common-Place, rejects any notion of compromise with "colonial privilege." Smith, having chosen to be a diplomat rather than a combatant for the interests of Native Americans, proposes conciliations that needn't be sought, because they are baked into American memory and hope.

Start with "The Invention of Thanksgiving," a funny and moving four-minute animated video narrated by Smith in a style that he has of deadpan drollery with gravitas at its heart. As generally understood—general understandings, including clichés and stereotypes, being grist for the show's mill—the holiday commemorates a neighborly feast that was shared by Pilgrims and Indians in 1621: a true event that was little known for two centuries, until mention of it turned up in a footnote to a document from the time. The narration admits that the promise of comity wasn't kept: America is "a national project that came about at great expense to native people." The video succinctly acknowledges the national consciousness of Indian suffering, and also of African slavery, with an animated image of a brain on fire. But it proposes that we—all Americans—like the annual observance because it helps us aspire to "our best selves," even amid the difficult travel, emotional turmoil, and family fights that typically attend it. Stating a premise for the show, the narration avers, "However imperfectly we remember Indians, we're remembering Indians." The video ends with a cartoon of Smith, taciturn and sporting a feather, at a middle-class white-family table. "I'm glad to be here," he says. Pause. "Better than the alternative." But something in his laconic tone hints that the alternative—upending the table, perhaps—has been well considered and retains an attractive rationale.

The show tells the tale of Pocahontas, who, in 1617, died in England, at the age of twenty-two or so, after having a son with the early Jamestown settler John Rolfe, in terms of her strange posthumous prestige for aristocratic and, of course, slaveholding Virginia families. A bit of Indian blood from her line could be an ornamental exception to pure whiteness. (Thomas Jefferson's daughter married a direct descendant.) The Trail of Tears—the forced relocation, in the eighteen-thirties, of whole tribes from Eastern states to Western territories—occasions the show's deepest dive into historical detail, citing characters and quoting testimony in a national debate that raged for years before and after the passage, by a close vote in Congress, of the Indian Removal Act, in 1830. There's nothing revisionist in the show's assessment of the Trail, which was atrocious: thousands of Indians perished on the way to mostly barren lands. But the plenitude of contending voices, white and Indian, has a you-are-there effect, demonstrating positions that, with minor editing, could be at one with both the enlightenments and the bigotries of our day. Regarding the 1876 Little Bighorn battle, the show exposes, without quite espousing, a triumphalist Indian point of view. Featured is a wall-filling blowup of a terrific—and terrifying—contemporaneous ledger drawing of the battle, by a Sioux artist. Custer's men spout blood from well-aimed spears and arrows or, often decapitated and dismembered, litter the ground.

As an old white man, I can't propose my pleasure in "Americans" as a model response to it, given the plurality of brains that burn with variants of rage or anguish in this time of identity politics. But I'll dare to endorse an approach—a specialty of Smith's—that lets identity and politics float a little free of each other, allowing wisdom to seep in. The show attempts it by parading crudely exaggerated understandings of Native Americans, ossified in kitsch, to awaken reactive senses of complicated, deep, living truths. (Not all the items are crap, by the way. I found it hard to take my eyes off one of the most beautiful machines in existence: a butter-yellow 1948 Indian Motorcycle.) The project gains drama, and a degree of peril, from occurring in the tax-funded Mall museum that is physically the nearest to the Capitol Building. Absent any correct attitude or even argument on offer, viewers will be thrown back on their own assumptions, if they think about them—and I expect that many will. The show's disarming sweetness and its bracing challenge come down to the same thing: a Whitmanesque idea of what Americanness means not only involving Indians but as a possible solvent of antagonisms past, present, and fated. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Tom Cheney, must be received by Sunday, January 28th. The finalists in the January 15th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the February 12th & 19th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

“ ”

THE FINALISTS

“We found it tethered to an inferior life-form.”
Sandy Treadwell, Ojai, Calif.

“You beamed him up. You feed him.”
Robert Moore, Vienna, Va.

“Results are still preliminary, but all indications suggest that he is a good boy.”
Nathan Bragg, Chicago, Ill.

THE WINNING CAPTION

“It's for my back. You have two more questions.”
Dan Dratch, Los Angeles, Calif.

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