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WINTER GAMES NORTH KOREAN SKATERS COME ALIVE ON THE ICE

# The New York Times

**INTERNATIONAL EDITION** | THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2018

#### In Tehran, more death by hanging



**Roger Cohen** 

#### **OPINION**

So Kavous Seyed Emami, an Iranian-Canadian university professor and environmentalist, "commits suicide" in Tehran's Evin prison two weeks after his arrest. His wife Maryam, summoned last Friday, is shown his body hanging in a cell. He is buried four days later in a village north of the capital, without an independent autopsy and after his family has come under intense Revolutionary Guard pressure to accept the official version of events.

Tell me another. Emami's death is an outrage and an embarrassment to the Islamic Republic.

The supposed "suicide" in prison of a professor is an outrage that reflects heightened tensions in

I met him in Iran in 2009, on the eve of a tumultuous presidential election that would lead to massive demonstrations and bloody repression. The theocratic regime that promised freedom in 1979 only to deliver another form of repression stood briefly on a

knife-edge. Emami was a thoughtful, mild-mannered man, a sociologist and patriot with a love of nature. The notion that he would hang himself in a prison where they remove even your shoelaces strikes me as preposterous.

"I still can't believe this," his son Ramin Seyed Emami, a musician whose stage name is King Raam, wrote on Instagram.

Since anti-government protests began late last year, mainly in poorer areas that had been strongholds of the regime, Emami is the third case of a supposed suicide while in custody. In him, several of the phobias of Iranian hard-liners found a focus.

He was a dual national of the kind President Hassan Rouhani, a reformist, is trying to lure back to the country to spur growth. He was an environmentalist, one of the founders of the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation, at a time when mismanagement and reckless dam building by the Revolutionary Guard and its front companies have contributed to water shortages. He was a Western-educated Iranian of the Rouhani camp, whose confrontation with the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is in a particularly delicate COHEN, PAGE 13

The New York Times publishes opinion from a wide range of perspectives in hopes of promoting constructive debate

about consequential questions.



Fishermen working on nets this month before sailing from the Chinese archipelago of Zhoushan. The authorities have ordered a ban on fishing in waters affected by the Jan. 6 spill.

## Menace of a ghostly spill

**ZHOUSHAN, CHINA** 

Rich fisheries in Asia threatened by huge leak

BY STEVEN LEE MYERS AND JAVIER C. HERNÁNDEZ

A fiery collision that sank an Iranian tanker in the East China Sea a month ago has resulted in an environmental threat that experts say is unlike any before: An almost invisible type of petroleum has begun to contaminate some of the most important fishing grounds in Asia, from China to Japan and beyond.

It is the largest oil spill in decades, but the disaster has unfolded outside the glare of international attention that big spills have previously attracted. That is because of its remote location on the high seas and also the type of petroleum involved: condensate, a toxic, liquid byproduct of natural gas production.

Unlike the crude oil in better-known disasters like those of the Exxon Valdez and the Deepwater Horizon, condensate does not clump into black globules that can be easily spotted or produce heartwrenching images of animals mired in muck. There's no visible slick that can

be pumped out. Experts said the only real solution is to let it evaporate or dissolve. Absorbed into the water, it will remain toxic for a time, though it will also disperse more quickly into the ocean than crude oil.

Experts say there has never been so large a spill of condensate; up to 111,000 metric tons has poured into the ocean. It has almost certainly already invaded an ecosystem that includes some of the world's most bountiful fisheries off Zhoushan, the archipelago that rises where the Yangtze River flows into the East China Sea.

The area produced five million tons of seafood for China alone last year, according to Greenpeace, including crab, squid, yellow croaker, mackerel and a local favorite, hairtail. If projections are correct, the toxins could soon make their way into equally abundant Japanese fisheries. Exposure to condensate is extremely unhealthy to humans and potentially fatal. The effects of eating fish contaminated with it remain essentially untested, but experts strongly advise against doing so.

"This is an oil spill of a type we haven't seen before," said Paul Johnston, a scientist at Greenpeace Research Laboratories at the University of Exeter in England. "Working out the impact is actually a huge task — probably next to im-



On Jan. 10, days after the tanker Sanchi erupted into flames following a collision with the bulk carrier CF Crystal in the East China Sea, the authorities were still battling flames.

For China, the disaster has become a test of its ambitions as a global and regional steward of the seas, especially at a time when it is reinforcing its territorial claims, including disputed territories with Japan in these waters. Given its proximity, China has taken the lead in investigating the disaster and monitoring the spill, but it has faced some criticism for what some see as a slow and inadequate response thus far.

Officials in Beijing announced on Feb. 1 that samples of fish taken within four to five nautical miles of the sunken ship contained traces of petroleum hydrocar-SPILL, PAGE 2

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#### President of South Africa faces ouster vote

JOHANNESBURG

#### His A.N.C. party plans no-confidence motion as early as Thursday

BY NORIMITSU ONISHI

The extraordinary confrontation between South Africa's president, Jacob Zuma, and the leaders of his African National Congress party highlights the internal power struggle within the party, which has governed the country since the end of apartheid and has become less known for its heroic past than for widespread corruption and mismanage-

That power struggle has paralyzed South Africa, which has the continent's largest economy.

In what appeared to be a turning point, the A.N.C., for the first time, moved decisively against the leader it had shielded for the past nine years from a seemingly endless series of accusations of misconduct, asking him to step down on Tuesday.

But in an indication of what may be the limits of the A.N.C.'s self-inquiry, party leaders stated that Mr. Zuma was being dismissed because he was harming the A.N.C.'s prospects — not because of the ethical issues surrounding him.

'President Zuma has not been found guilty by any court of law," Ace Magashule, the party's secretary general, said. "And when we took these decisions, we did not take these decisions because Comrade Jacob Zuma has done anything wrong."

On Wednesday, party leaders stepped up the pressure on Mr. Zuma by announcing that if the president does not resign, they would try to remove him through a vote of no confidence in Parliament as early as Thursday, the latest in a series of extraordinary moments in the history of the party, which has shielded the president for nearly nine years through a series of scandals and corruption charges.

"The ball is in his court," Paul Mashatile, the party's treasurer general, said at a news conference.

Mr. Zuma also came under pressure on a new front Wednesday, as the police raided the residence in Johannesburg of the Guptas, a family with wide-ranging business interests and close ties to one of the president's sons and his political

Local news outlets reported that three people, including a member of the family, had been arrested as part of a new police inquiry into influence-ped-

The drawn-out negotiations over Mr. Zuma's future have cast a pall over the optimism that followed Ramaphosa's election in December to succeed him as leader of the A.N.C. and his pledge to steer South Africa on a new ZUMA, PAGE 4

### Majesty of the everyday in Obama portraits

WASHINGTON

Artists say paintings reflected the couple's openness and presence

BY ROBIN POGREBIN

For 50 years, the official paintings of the nation's former leaders at the National Portrait Gallery have been composed of white presidents painted by white artists. But when the curtains fell this week from the two latest portraits, they revealed the first black president and first lady, Barack and Michelle Obama, painted, for the first time in the gallery's history, by black artists, Amy Sherald and Kehinde Wiley.

"I'm also thinking about all the young people — particularly girls and girls of color — who in years ahead will come to this place, and they will look up and they will see an image of someone who looks like them hanging on the wall of this



great American institution," Mrs. Obama said in her remarks at the ceremony on Monday. "I know the kind of impact that will have on their lives, because I was one of those girls."

While they were interviewing artists for the portraits, Mrs. Obama said, she knew immediately that Ms. Sherald, 44, was the one. "We started talking and Barack kind of faded into the woodwork," the former first lady said. "There was an instant sister-girl connection. That was true all the way through the process."

When Ms. Sherald walked in, "she was fly and poised," Mrs. Obama added. "She had this lightness and freshness of personality."

Mr. Obama, in his remarks, said he, too, bonded with his artist of choice, Mr. Wiley, 40, though "maybe not in the same way — this whole sister-girl thing.

"He and I make different sartorial decisions," Mr. Obama continued, a joking reference to the Mr. Wiley's bold clothing choices (he wore a black-and-white patterned suit to the ceremony). "But PORTRAITS, PAGE 2



nytimes.com/thedaily

The unveiling of the official portraits of former President Barack Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama with the artists Kehinde Wiley, left, and Amy Sherald, right.

#### PAGE TWO

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A fish buyer, above, on one of the Chinese islands closest to the spill. Below, Zhoushan harbor. Experts advise against eating fish contaminated by the petroleum that was leaked.

## Spill menaces a rich Asian fishery

SPILL, FROM PAGE 1

bons, suggesting possible condensate contamination; the officials pledged to expand the range of testing to 90 miles and closely monitor fish coming into markets. The threat of contamination has raised anxiety in the ports that cling to the rugged coastlines of Zhoushan's islands, though such fears are usually expressed with quiet resignation lest one offend the government.

"The quality will go down because of the oil in the water," Hai Tao, a fish wholesaler at the International Aquatic Product City in Putuo, a district on Zhoushan's biggest island, said as he watched a ship unload hundreds of crates of mantis shrimp, a delicacy headed to restaurants across China.

The spill began on the evening of Jan. 6, when the Sanchi, a Panamanianflagged, Iranian-owned tanker, collided with a cargo ship in waters roughly 160 nautical miles east of Shanghai. The Sanchi exploded and burned for more than a week before sinking. All 32 crew members are presumed dead.

Katya Popova, a senior research scientist at the National Oceanography Center in England, said there had not been a sufficiently coordinated international operation, and that was exacerbating the scale of the disaster.

The lack of visible devastation has almost certainly dampened public reaction that might have galvanized a more vigorous response. "A much larger-scale operation is needed," she said. "It hasn't been monitored. It's a mystery."

In Beijing, officials have been eager to demonstrate that the government was doing everything possible first to respond to the disaster and then to protect the health of its economically and politically sensitive fishing industry, which employs 14 million people.

They have issued regular statements and held briefings, showing video of efforts to clean up the condensate and to monitor the sunken wreck, which is believed to still be leaking condensate and other fuels.

Han Xu, the deputy director of the fisheries administration bureau of the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture, told reporters at a news conference in Beijing



late last month that the accident had "a certain impact on the density of fishery resources" in the area, but that the government did not yet know the extent of

"At present, the investigation and monitoring are still ongoing and we are awaiting results of investigations into pollution and successive fishery resource investigations," he said.

In the meantime, the authorities have ordered a ban on fishing in the areas af-

In the East River Fish Market in Putuo, one seller brusquely dismissed questions about the spill as she stood beside a stall full of fish, including a tuna selling for roughly \$100. "Our fish are not from out there," she said, though some of them very likely were.

The size of the area affected by the disaster has expanded and contracted. At one point in January, there were three different spills spotted on the surface, covering an area that measured more than 128 square miles. Complicating the calculations is uncertainty about the amount of condensate that ended up in the water.

China's Ministry of Transportation initially played down the possibility of a spill, then said 136,000 metric tons had been lost. Later, it revised the figure downward to 111,000 tons — still enough to make it the worst tanker spill at sea

Some of the condensate may have burned off in the fires, sparing the sea, but contaminating the air. Officials said they were testing air samples in the provinces around Shanghai.

If any fuel washes ashore, there may be ways to limit the damage in the immediate vicinity, with machines or by hand. But the biggest issue now seems to be that nobody knows the scale of the problem or which parts of the high seas are affected. The spill is already drifting east toward Japan, but winds and currents can be unpredictable. The contamination could even reach waters as far off as Tokvo.

The Japanese Coast Guard has announced that black globules had been found on at least nine islands along the chain between Okinawa and the main Japanese islands. Those would not be from the condensate, though they could be other oil from the Sanchi wreck.

In any case, the discoveries suggested the condensate may have already reach Japan's third most important fishery, teeming with bonito and yellowfin tuna. A dead sea turtle, evidently choked by oil, washed ashore on one island, Amami Oshima.

Hiroshi Takahashi, a fisheries official in Kagoshima, Japan, said that the impacts of the spill on seafood were "the biggest concern right now."

The cause of the disaster remains a mystery. The Sanchi was nearing the end of its voyage to South Korea when it collided with the CF Crystal, a bulk carrier flagged in Hong Kong that was delivering grain to China from the United States. As the Sanchi erupted into flames, the Crystal managed to make harbor — and is now in one of Zhoushan's many ports.

At least five Chinese Coast Guard ships, aided by fishing boats, led the rescue efforts and the long struggle to extinguish the blaze that consumed the tanker for eight days before it sank on Jan. 14. Japan and South Korea each sent one ship, and the United States Navy sent a P-8A Poseidon aircraft from Kadena Air Base on Okinawa.

A Chinese emergency team in flameresistant suits at one point boarded the burning ship, recovering the bodies of two crewmen and the "black box" data recorder before the intensity of the heat drove them off. One other body was pulled from the sea.

On the Shengsi islands, the part of the Zhoushan archipelago closest to the accident, the spill could threaten an industry already strained by polluted runoff from the Yangtze and by overfishing.

At one village nestled in a harbor, three boats unloaded their final catches before the start this week of the Lunar New Year holidays. Wu Zhihong, who with her husband owns one of the trawlers, said the catch over the last year had been an improvement over the year be-

Ms. Wu expressed hope that the damage from the spill would be limited, absorbed into a wider, forgiving ocean. "The sea is very big," she said amid a cacophony of fishmongers who descended on the pier to bargain over the catch.

Steven Lee Myers reported from Beijing and Zhoushan, and Javier C. Hernández from Beijing. Olivia Mitchell Ryan contributed research from Zhoushan, Zoe Mou from Beijing and Hisako Ueno from

#### Abstract expressionist acclaimed for technique

**SONIA GECHTOFF** 1926-2018

BY NEIL GENZLINGER

Sonia Gechtoff, a prominent Abstract Expressionist on the West Coast early in her career and later a mainstay of the New York art scene, died on Feb. 1 at a hospice center in the Bronx. She was 91.

Her daughter, Susannah Kelly, confirmed the death.

Ms. Gechtoff made a quick and substantial impression in San Francisco, where she had arrived in 1951, a time when the Bay Area art scene was bubbling. An early oil, "Self Portrait," made in 1954 when she was still in her 20s, is now in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution. That same year she was represented in a group show of young painters at the Guggenheim Museum in Man-

She was also becoming well known in the California art world, with solo exhibitions at outlets like the de Young Museum in San Francisco and the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles, both in 1957.

But in 1958 she and her husband, the artist James Kelly, whom she had married in 1953, decamped for New York. Though she was identified with the Abstract Expressionist genre her whole life — her early work has been the focus of a rediscovery recently — she experimented with styles and materials throughout her career.

In 1976, when Hilton Kramer of The New York Times called her "one of the most gifted artists of her generation," he was reviewing a show of her pencil drawings.

Sonia Alice Gechtoff was born on Sept. 25, 1926, in Philadelphia, into a family with art in its genes. Her father, Leonid, was a painter, and her mother, Etya, was a gallery owner and manager. Ms. Gechtoff received a bachelor of

fine arts degree from the Philadelphia Museum School of Art (now the University of the Arts) in 1950. After moving to San Francisco, she largely abandoned figurative work in favor of the abstract. It was a time of envelope pushing

among artists, which included experimenting with ways to apply paint other than with a brush. (Jackson Pollock's drip-painting period began in the mid-1940s.) Ms. Gechtoff started working with the palette knife.

The palette knife has been used for ages to mix and move paint, but until Sonia's generation, the brush ruled as far as the mechanism to apply paint to canvas," Marshall N. Price, the Nancy Hanks curator of modern and contemporary art at Duke University's Nasher Museum of Art, wrote in an email. "Sonia refined her palette knife technique, and by the late 1950s the slashing marks, often applied in a vortexlike way, were a hallmark of her work."

Reviewing Ms. Gechtoff's first New York exhibition after her move east, a

1959 show at the Poindexter Gallery, the critic Dore Ashton wrote in The Times that the technique had produced "a surface similar to the overlapping feathers of a wet bird."

However it was described, it made Ms. Gechtoff stand out in a genre that was largely male. A 1961 article in The Times about a brewing boycott by artists, in response to fire-code restrictions that threatened their lofts, said that "some big box-office names" had pledged to support the strike. It then listed 21 of those names. Ms. Gechtoff was the only woman on the list.

Ms. Kelly said that having two artists as parents made for a "home environment filled with creativity" for her and her brother, Miles, a musician who also survives their mother. Artists and other friends of their parents were always stopping by to talk art, politics, film and more.

"She was not an average mother in that we as her children learned to curse from her and to never hold back on our opinion," Ms. Kelly said by email. Ms. Gechtoff was still displaying her

spiritedness late in life. A 2011 article in Art in America magazine began, "Tough, straight-talking abstract painter Sonia Gechtoff is currently being rescued from ill-deserved obscurity."

The "ill-deserved obscurity" had come gradually. Ms. Gechtoff continued to produce new work throughout her life, and to experiment. In a 1983 exhibition at the Gruenebaum Gallery in New York, Michael Brenson wrote in The Times, she veered from abstraction and "put her mastery of color and composition in the service of identifiable subjects," including the Brooklyn Bridge and the temples at Paestum in Italy.

"She finds the angles and scale that reveal the grandeur of the ancient stone and modern steel," Mr. Brenson wrote. "And she illuminates her blocks of color with her own muted yet intense light."

Her name, though, became less and less familiar as the art world moved on until recently, when Abstract Expressionism and female artists both began to be rediscovered.

She was among 18 artists featured in "Bella Pacifica: Bay Area Abstraction 1946-1963, a Symphony in Four Parts," a 2011 exhibition at four galleries in New York. She was one of 12 in "Women of Abstract Expressionism," an exhibition organized by the Denver Art Museum in 2016 that later toured. Mr. Kelly, her husband, died in 2003.

Her children are her only immediate survivors. Ms. Gechtoff had lived in Greenwich Village. In the 2011 interview with Art in

America, Ms. Gechtoff talked about the female forms in her abstract work from the 1950s, playing down the idea that they were a feminist statement.

"I wasn't the least bit interested in feminist art, and I still am not," she said. "We were feminist before the feminist



Sonia Gechtoff, who was a mainstay of the New York art scene for decades, at her studio in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of the city, in an undated photograph.

## In Obama portraits, the everyday and the extraordinary

PORTRAITS, FROM PAGE 1 what we did find was we had certain

things in common. Both of us had American mothers who raised us with extraordinary love and support. Both of us had African fathers who were absent in our lives.

Mr. Wiley, 40, whose father is Nigerian, was raised along with four siblings in South Central Los Angeles by his African-American mother, who relied on welfare benefits and earnings from the family thrift shop. His mother was present at the Portrait Gallery ceremony, and Mr. Wiley thanked her from the stage, with tears in his eyes.
"We did not have much, but she found

a way to get paint," he said. "The ability to picture something bigger than that piece of South Central L.A. — you saw it, you did it, thank you."

The artist also thanked Mr. Obama

"for giving me a chance" and "for giving this nation a chance to experience your

Part of what Mr. Obama saw in Mr. W ley's work, the former president said, was the capacity to elevate ordinary people to the level of royalty, those "so often out of sight and out of mind."

"Kehinde lifted them up and gave them a platform and said they belong at the center of American life," Mr. Obama said. "That was something that moved me deeply, that's part of what I believe politics should be about — not simply celebrating the high and the mighty and expecting that the country unfolds from the top down, but rather that it comes from the bottom up.'

On a lighter note, Mr. Obama said that, while he and Mr. Wiley saw eye to eye on most elements of the painting, there were a number of negotiating points during their two sittings. "I tried to negotiate less gray hair, and Kehinde's artistic integrity would not allow him to do what I asked," he said. "I tried to negotiate smaller ears. Struck out on that as well."

Mr. Wiley tried posing him in settings with partridges and scepters and thrones," Mr. Obama said, even "mounting me on horses.'

"I had to explain that I've got enough political problems without you making me look like Napoleon," he said. "You've got to bring it down just a touch."

The former president also thanked Ms. Sherald "for so spectacularly capturing the grace and beauty and intelligence and charm and hotness of the woman that I love."

Ms. Sherald, in her remarks, paid tribute to Mrs. Obama. "You exist in our minds and hearts in the way that you do because we can see ourselves in you,"

"I tried to negotiate less gray hair, and Kehinde's artistic integrity would not allow him to do what I asked."

she said. "What you represent to this country is an ideal — a human being with integrity, intellect, confidence and compassion. And the paintings I create aspire to express these attributes."

Among the prominent figures who turned out for the ceremony were Steven Spielberg, the filmmaker, and his wife, the actress Kate Capshaw, who helped fund the commission of the portraits. Also in attendance were several former members of Mr. Obama's admin-

istration, including Eric H. Holder Jr., the former attorney general; David Axelrod, the former senior strategist; Jay Carney, the former press secretary; and Sam Kass, Mr. Obama's senior policy adviser for nutrition (who sat with his baby in his arms). "We miss you guys," Mr. Obama told them, in his remarks.

Mr. Wiley's work often features African-Americans in the regal poses of emperors and kings, his own distinctive riff on historic portraiture. The Obama portrait, too, has its own majesty. But the former president is also depicted in a chair, with his hands crossed and elbows on his knees — a posture of informality and intimacy.

The two men paged through Mr. Wiley's collection of art history books and thought about "the grand tradition of presidential portraits," Mr. Wiley said, in an interview after the unveiling. "Then we decided very quickly that we were just going to strike out a path of our own and try to create a type of singular narrative surrounding what this picture looks like — discarding history but also embracing it at once."

'The narrative had to do with accessi-

bility, the narrative had to do with a language of openness," he added. "There were no ties, it's an open collar, it's a much more relaxed body language the sense of repose yet at the same time a kind of radical vigilance in the eyes."

Ms. Sherald's portrait of Mrs. Obama similarly conveys a certain casualness. But, dressed in a flowing white patterned gown, the former first lady also projects what Ms. Sherald called "a quiet, strong presence," one in keeping with Ms. Sherald's own restrained style.

"You just feel connected to them because they're so much like you. They just happen to be the first black president and the first black first lady. But other than that, they're like your mother or your cousin or your dad," Ms. Sherald said in an interview afterward. "It was great to walk into the Oval Office and to see these brown faces.'

Born in Columbus, Ga., Ms. Sherald waited tables and worked in an unheated studio before having her first solo show in Chicago and becoming the first woman to win the Portrait Gallery's Outwin Boochever competition. She was diagnosed with congestive heart failure at

age 30 — just as she was earning her master's degree at the Maryland Institute College of Art and received a transplant at 39.

In selecting the artists, the Portrait Gallery worked with three advisers: Thelma Golden, the director of the Studio Museum in the New York City district of Harlem; Bill Allman, the former White House curator; and Michael Smith, the Obamas' White House deco-

"We're really trying to engage contemporary artists today to be doing portraits," said Kim Sajet, the Portrait Gallery's director, in an interview after the ceremony, "to be thinking about the importance of what portraiture does in communicating with people."

By choosing two black artists, Ms. Sherald said, the Obamas sent a strong message that people of color and paintings by people of color also belong on museum walls. "Something big happened, something that wasn't supposed to happen happened: We had our first black president and our first black first lady," Ms. Sherald said. "Their choices of Kehinde and I represent that."

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## Come for the herring, stay for the chitchat

HAMBURG JOURNAL

City plan to close cafeteria older residents depend on saddens patrons and staff

BY MELISSA EDDY

Ask the regulars seated at the sturdy, rectangular tables in the Staff Restaurant Billstedt, the cafeteria for workers in the basement of a municipal building in Hamburg, whether they have a favorite dish. They all give the same answer.

"It's all good," insisted nearly a dozen patrons, most of them over 60, packing four rows of five tables each, when asked about their favorite meal on a recent Wednesday.

"You can get salads, soups, a proper meal and whatever you choose, it is good," said Karin Ahlf, sitting at a table along the back wall watching patrons arrive, hang up their coats on a row of hooks beside the door and head past the tables for the rack of melamine trays at the counter near the back.

"I have been coming here every day for more than 20 years," she added. She's not alone. Many older people in

this heavily immigrant district of Billstedt have come to depend on the cafeteria, which, although intended for city employees, is also open to the public. They like the traditional German fare,

affordable prices and the willingness of the chef, Stephan Kulosa, to cut slabs of meat into bite-size pieces for guests who have trouble managing a knife and fork.

Some days, patrons wait 30 minutes in line for plates heaped with slices of juicy roast pork and boiled waxy potatoes, terrines of steaming semolina pudding topped with blueberries, or silvery strips of Hamburg's traditional herring fillets covered with a sauce of sour cream, apples and onion.

Some diners regularly ride several stops on the subway, or drive six miles, just for the lunch.

But the canteen's very success among the retirees — and increasing lack of popularity among city workers — has become a problem for the Hamburg authorities. They plan to close the cafete-



GORDON WELTERS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Many older people depend on the Staff Restaurant Billstedt in Hamburg, Germany. Although it is intended for city employees, the cafeteria is open to the public.

ria at the end of June, citing the need for er's company over a quick, warm mea

ria at the end of June, citing the need for renovations estimated at around 1.7 million euros, or about \$2 million. That is too high a price, they say, for the income the cafeteria generates.

Jennyfer Dutschke, a lawmaker with the opposition Free Democrats in the Hamburg legislature, asked the government about the decision to shutter the canteen. The answer she received further provoked patrons' ire; in a formal response, the government said the cafeteria was intended as a place where municipal employees can enjoy one another's company over a quick, warm meal and suggested that "the missing atmosphere of a staff canteen, given the many 'foreign guests,' " may be a reason many city workers choose to stay away.

Although Hamburg is booming, Billstedt has remained the port city's poorest district, with an average annual income of €21,400, less than half the pay in the city's hip districts. It is also home to a large number of immigrants, whose culinary traditions are visible in the fast-food shops selling falafel and kebab.

"Kebabs and more kebabs," Ms. Ahlf

said, shaking her head. "There are three Chinese and several Italians. But since the department store closed, no one else offers traditional German food."

Elke Horn, 77, nodded as she cut bites of her green beans, praising their tenderness and her meal's affordability. "We are all asking ourselves: Where are we supposed to go?"

Ms. Horn and Ms. Ahlf, who would not give her age because "all of the men who keep asking me for it would be able to find it out," are among the nearly 18 million Germans aged 65 or older, accord-

ing to Germany's Federal Statistics Office.

Over the next two decades, the num-

ber of older Germans is expected to increase to more than 23 million, nearly a third of the population, posing challenges to society and the government over how to provide for them under a social system that is already straining to meet their needs.

Many retirees live off ever smaller state pensions. The number of older people applying for welfare benefits to pad their pensions more than doubled between 2003 and 2015, according to the Sozialverband VdK, an independent social justice lobby group based in Berlin.

Mr. Kulosa, the cafeteria's chef — a big man with an equally large laugh — offers city workers the right to skip the long line of retirees waiting for their meals, and provides a carryout option for those who would rather eat at their desks. His brother, who runs the cash register, takes the meal of anyone in a wheelchair to their table.

Mr. Kulosa did not intend to become so popular among Billstedt's older residents when he took over the place 22 years ago, he said over a plate of feta cheese baked with tomatoes and peppers. It just happened over the course of time. What hasn't changed are the quality of his offerings.

"I make everything myself: no powders, nothing from a package," he said.

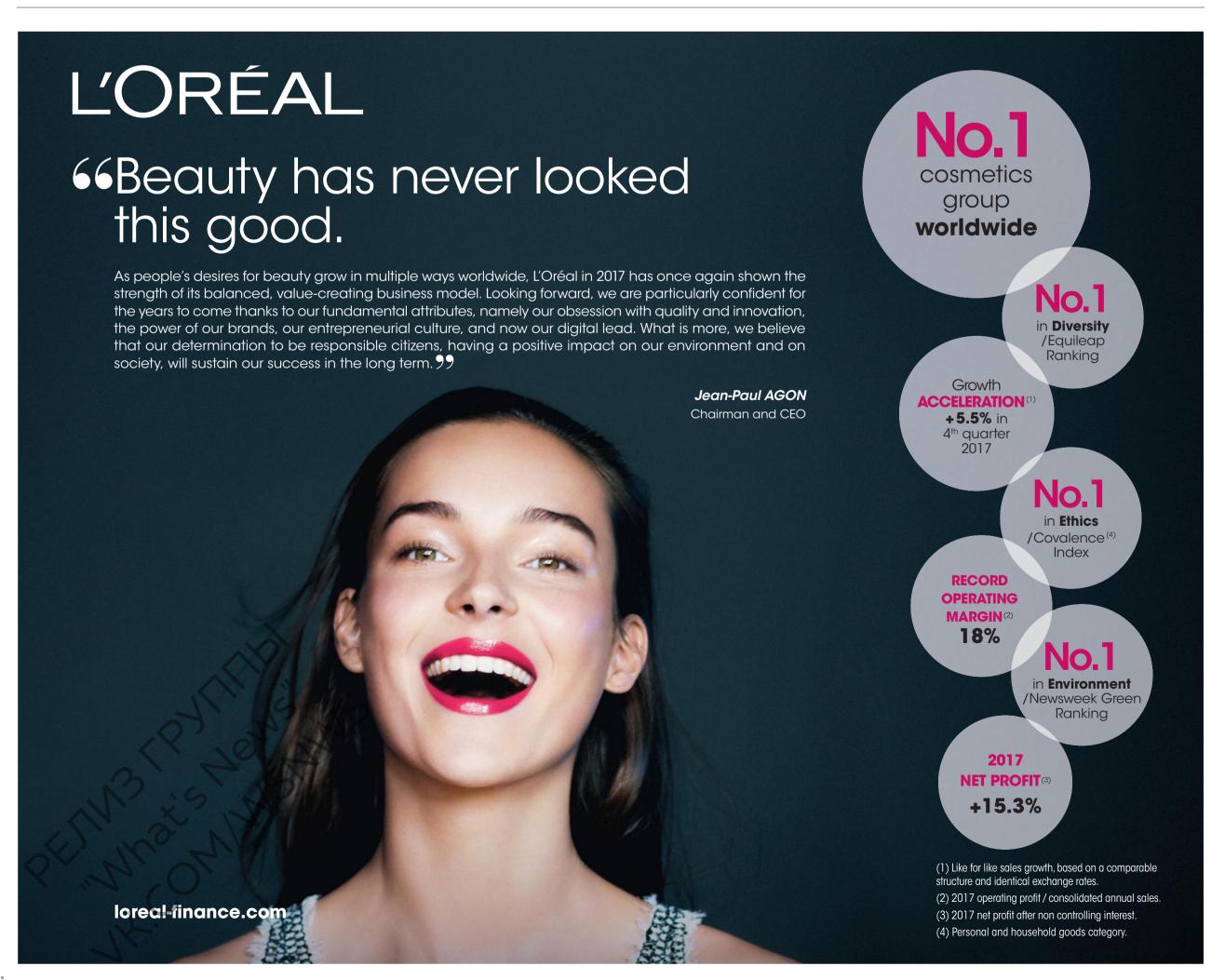
At 54, he would like to continue running the cafeteria but does not have the money to put into the renovations himself, even if that were a possibility. "Either I stay here or I have to look for a new job," he said. So would his wife, brother and daughter — half of his staff.

Reinhard Neuling is doing his utmost to prevent that. The head of the 60-plus group of the local chapter of the left-leaning Social Democrats, he went table to table in the cafeteria to gather more than 1,000 signatures for a petition to urge the mayor to reconsider the decision to close.

Mr. Neuling, a Billstedt resident since the 1970s and self-proclaimed "cafeteria guy," is steeped in the social history of staff canteens. He worries that the tradition is dying out, leaving a generation with nowhere to go for a square meal.

He points to the restaurant in the district's municipal culture center, which he said had changed hands. With the new owner came a new name, the Palace Kitchen, and a new menu that Mr. Neuling describes as "three leaves of salad on a plate with a few other bits and bobs, all of it organic," for what he said was three times the price.

"We don't want a kitchen palace, we just want our canteen," Mr. Neuling said, gesturing to the window sills lined with potted green plants and framed jigsaw puzzles on the walls. "It's beautiful just as it is."



#### WORLD



Kathy Robinson, left, and Ethel Kroska, selling lottery tickets in Merrimack, N.H., last month. The state says there is a public interest in revealing the names of lottery winners.

## Putting a price on privacy

NASHUA, N.H.

A lottery winner wants to be anonymous, risking her \$560 million prize

BY KATHARINE Q. SEELYE

The winner of a \$560 million Powerball lottery jackpot has yet to claim her prize, but her lawyers say she is already being preyed upon and is highly

When the winner, known in court papers only as Jane Doe, said last month that she wanted to remain anonymous, New Hampshire officials said they could not give her the money — the seventhlargest jackpot in United States history — unless her name was made public.

Since then, her lawyers have been deluged with offers from around the world of ideas for how she might get the money and still keep her privacy.

Dozens of people offered to legally change their names to match Ms. Doe's in order to collect the money for her for fees of \$1 million or more.

A homeless mother of five in North Carolina offered to turn in Ms. Doe's winning ticket in exchange for a six-bedroom house, a used car and a small trust for each of her children.

Someone in Costa Rica would accept the winning ticket on behalf of Ms. Doe in exchange for \$1 million, travel expenses and "warm clothes to wear in New Hampshire." Other people wrote simply asking for handouts.

The outpouring of appeals, outlined by Ms. Doe's lawyers in legal papers, underscored the point they tried to make on Tuesday in a courtroom in Nashua that sudden wealth exposes an unsuspecting citizen to vultures, swindlers and other parasites who harass the winner in an attempt to leech off some of the money for themselves.

The lawyers said they want to keep their client's real name private to protect her from what they described as "violence, threats, harassment, scams and constant unwanted solicitation" that have befallen previous lottery winners.





Charles R. McIntyre, above, chief of the New Hampshire lottery, and Steven M. Gordon, at right, a lawyer for the unidentified winner.

But New Hampshire's lottery commission takes a very different stance, arguing that the state has an overriding interest in disclosing the names of lottery winners — not to satisfy the curiosity of neighbors or promote sales of tickets,

but as a hedge against corruption. The commission oversees hundreds of millions of dollars in revenues and prizes a vear.

"When somebody wins a public lottery of \$560 million, there is a public interest in knowing who the winner was, and that it is a fair and equitable process," John J. Conforti, an assistant attorney general representing the lottery commission, told the court.

The state gave little credence to the argument that identifying Ms. Doe would jeopardize her safety, saying that any risk could be managed by engaging a security detail. Ms. Doe's lawyers said they were already lining up bodyguards.

Most states view the names of winners of significant prizes as a matter of public record, though a few permit winners to keep their identities private. Some states, including New Hampshire, allow trusts and not just individuals to claim winnings.

For almost two hours Tuesday, Judge Charles Temple of the Hillsborough County Superior Court heard arguments in the case, which has made headlines around the world for the eye-popping size of the prize and for an "if only"

twist in Ms. Doe's plight.

When Ms. Doe realized she had the winning ticket, she followed the instructions on the ticket and on the lottery commission's website to "sign the ticket."

If only she had talked to a lawyer first, she might have avoided the entire issue. She could have set up a trust that would sign the ticket, claim the prize and be the public face of the winner, rather than Ms. Doe personally. But lottery officials say the chance to do that ended when she signed her name.

Ms. Doe's lawyers — Steven M. Gordon and Billy Shaheen, high-powered attorneys in the state — said the ticket and state's website were misleading because they did not explain that by signing a ticket, winners give up their anonymity. Nowhere, they said, does the website advise the winner "that there is

an option for a trust to claim a prize." Lottery officials said they urge winners to sign the ticket as a safeguard in case it is lost or stolen, and that the lottery could not dispense legal advice.

The fact that New Hampshire already allows trusts to sign the tickets, effectively allowing a winner to remain anonymous, undermines the state's argument that a winner's identity must be publicly disclosed to protect the integrity of the process, Mr. Gordon said.

Before going to court, Ms. Doe's lawyers talked with the lottery commission

to try to resolve the matter. Ms. Doe's lawyers suggested that she be allowed to "white-out" her signature in front of the commission — a procedure used at least once, in Ohio — and then have a trust sign it.

The commission rejected that idea saying removing her name would alter the ticket, which is against the lottery rules, and thus render it void.

Ms. Doe's lawyers also suggested that the original winning ticket could be photocopied and put under seal, while her signature on the photocopy could be covered up and replaced with the name of the trust.

For each day that passes, Ms. Doe is forgoing about \$14,000 in interest on the unclaimed winnings.

The two sides indicated that they were close to agreeing that while the judge mulls his decision about whether to make Ms. Doe's name public, the money could be transferred to her.

But that will take at least a few days Charles R. McIntyre, executive director of the state lottery, who called the winning ticket "the most valuable piece of paper on the planet, more valuable than a Rembrandt," said it would take some time "to get that much cash in the state."

After court, Mr. Shaheen, one of her lawyers, told reporters that his advice to her was simple: "If you like your family and you like your friends and you like your relatives, don't tell anybody."

#### South Africa in turmoil as party waits on Zuma

course. Although Mr. Ramaphosa, deputy president since 2014, has a mixed record in both politics and business, he has spoken forcefully against corruption and is allied with A.N.C. officials who have reputations as reformers.

A no-confidence vote would bring renewed attention to the widespread corruption in the A.N.C. and expose the governing party to charges of hypocrisy. It has used its dominance in Parliament to quash eight previous opposition-led motions of no confidence, as recently as last August.

In a meeting with party leaders Monday night, Mr. Zuma was defiant, insisting that he had done nothing wrong and refusing to resign, according to South African news media. Mr. Magashule said that Mr. Zuma

had asked to serve for an additional three to six months before stepping down. But Mr. Magashule said that party leaders rejected the request, saying, "the period is too long." Officials pushing for Mr. Zuma's early

exit had argued that the longer he stayed in power, the harder it would be for Mr. Ramaphosa to rebuild the A.N.C. before national elections in 2019. Mr. Magashule said that the uncer-

tainty over the presidency would "erode the renewed hope and confidence among South Africans" since the party elections in December. Mr. Magashule, a longtime ally of Mr.

Zuma's, dismissed suggestions that the party's move had also been influenced by corruption charges and inquiries that the president is facing.

The A.N.C.'s decision to dismiss Mr. Zuma was the culmination of a week of high-level party meetings and direct talks that failed to resolve an impasse between Mr. Zuma and Mr. Ramaphosa. Seeking to avoid a confrontation that could deepen a party split, Mr. Ramaphosa had pressed Mr. Zuma to resign voluntarily. Under the Constitution, Parliament selects the president, effectively putting the decision in the hands of the A.N.C.'s top leaders.

A vote of no confidence was already scheduled for Feb. 22, and opposition parties have demanded that it be moved up to this week.

The A.N.C.'s leaders hammered out their position in a marathon meeting of the party's national executive committee at a hotel in Pretoria, the executive capital, which started Monday afternoon and lasted until early Tuesday.

Around midnight, Mr. Ramaphosa's motorcade was seen making its way to Mr. Zuma's residence, where Mr. Ramaphosa directly asked for the president's resignation.

Mr. Magashule, who accompanied Mr. Ramaphosa, said that Mr. Zuma pleaded again for more time.

"Our discussions were very cordial," Mr. Magashule said.

#### "The ball is in his court," said Paul Mashatile, the A.N.C.'s treasurer general.

After the president refused to step down, Mr. Ramaphosa's motorcade returned to the hotel where, in a tense meeting over the next few hours, Mr. Ramaphosa pushed members of the executive committee to formally demand that the president step down.

The developments amounted to a setback for Mr. Ramaphosa, who had confidently told South Africans increasingly weary of the continuing power struggle that Mr. Zuma's future would be decided during the meeting on Monday.

The situation appeared to be moving in Mr. Ramaphosa's direction last week. A scheduled executive committee meeting was suddenly canceled after he began direct talks with Mr. Zuma, which he had optimistically described as "constructive." But despite Mr. Ramaphosa's reputation as a skilled negotiator, the talks ultimately proved unfruitful.

At the A.N.C. elective conference in December, Mr. Ramaphosa's margin of victory over Mr. Zuma's chosen successor was slim, indicating the deep party split and presaging the difficulties he would face in pressing Mr. Zuma to step down as the nation's leader before his term expires in mid-2019.





Top, President Jacob Zuma of South Africa in 2015. The confrontation between Mr. Zuma and his party, the African National Congress, heightened a power struggle that has paralyzed the country. Above, Ace Magashule, the party's secretary general.

## The man who could bring down Israel's prime minister

**JERUSALEM** 

Attorney general to decide whether to formally charge his political benefactor

BY ISABEL KERSHNER

Israel's attorney general, Avichai Man delblit, was Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's favored candidate for the country's top legal job. Now, Mr. Netanyahu's fate lies in Mr. Mandelblit's hands.

Critics suspect that Mr. Mandelblit having previously served as Mr. Netansecretary, and once widely considered a Netanyahu loyalist, remains beholden to the prime minister who promoted him. Admirers say the law is Mr. Mandelblit's only agenda and his moral compass

Either way, Mr. Mandelblit, who rose from relative obscurity as a military prosecutor, is likely to become the most scrutinized person in Israel in the com-

After the Israeli police on Tuesday recommended that Mr. Netanyahu be



when he was cabinet secretary. Mr. Mandelblit became attorney general in 2016.

charged with bribery, fraud and breach of trust in two corruption cases, Mr. Mandelblit became the one who will ultimately decide, in consultation with state prosecutors, whether the evidence warrants taking Mr. Netanyahu to court.

Mr. Mandelblit rose through the ranks of the military justice system to become the military advocate general. He was catapulted into the political limelight when Mr. Netanyahu appointed him as his cabinet secretary in 2013. In his

mid-50s, and a father of six, Mr. Mandelblit is known to be an avid soccer fan. He became an observant Jew in his mid-20s and wears a black skullcap.

His appointment two years ago to the post of attorney general was criticized by some legal experts as too swift a transition into a role that requires absolute independence as the guardian of the law and the public interest. Although Mr. Netanyahu has blamed

the left and the news media of plotting to oust him by legal means because they cannot beat him at the ballot box, Mr. Mandelblit hardly fits the profile of a politically motivated insurgent intent on bringing down the government, often described as the most right-wing and religious in Israel's history.

On the contrary, Mr. Mandelblit, who has closely followed the police investigations all along, has been accused of dragging his feet to stall them. What started as small, weekly demonstrations on Saturday nights outside Mr. Mandelblit's house in the city of Petah Tikva, east of Tel Aviv, recently grew into several mass rallies in Tel Aviv against corruption and what many of the protesters saw as procrastination by the authorities.

The police recommendations relate to

two cases in which Mr. Netanyahu is a suspect: a gifts-for-favors affair known as Case 1000, involving the Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan and an Australian businessman, James Packer; and a second scandal, called Case 2000, in which Mr. Netanyahu is suspected of back-room dealings with Arnon Mozes, publisher of the popular newspaper Yediot Aharonot, to ensure more favorable coverage.

#### Mr. Mandelblit has not shied from controversy.

His supporters say Mr. Mandelblit has exercised caution regarding the cases, aware of the responsibility of potentially bringing down a prime minister. If he indeed decides to press formal charges, Mr. Netanyahu will be the first sitting prime minister in Israel to be indicted.

But Mr. Mandelblit has not shied from controversy

In September, he said that he intended to bring fraud charges against Sara Netanyahu, the prime minister's wife, pending a hearing, accusing her of misusing some \$100,000 in public funds for takeout meals and mismanagement of the prime minister's official residence.

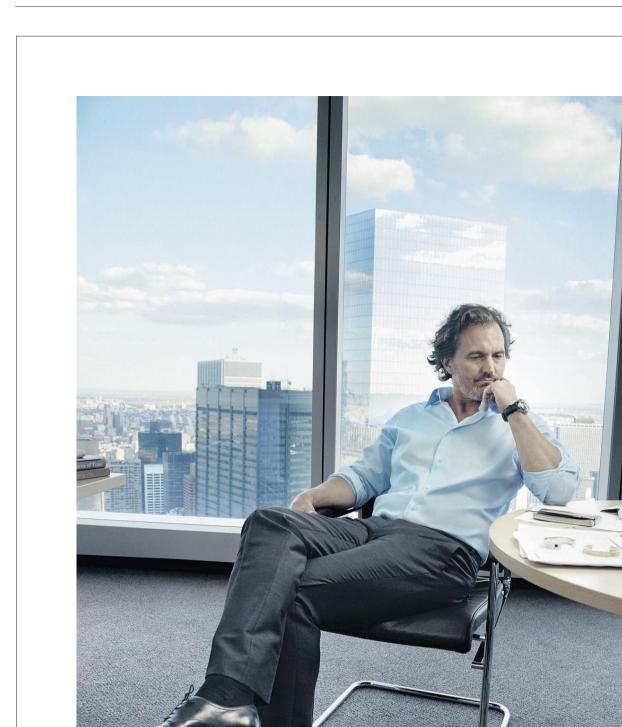
Mr. Mandelblit has avoided giving interviews but has been outspoken at legal forums, often on camera.

During his time in the military, Mr. Mandelblit worked with human rights organizations, saying he valued their contributions in dealing with Palestinian complaints and helping uncover the truth.

He has more recently broken with Mr. Netanyahu on issues regarding land ownership in the West Bank, insisting on the evacuation of an illegal settlement outpost that Mr. Netanyahu and his political allies were trying to sal-

Mr. Mandelblit also opposed legislation to bar the police from issuing recommendations to charge public figures. After a concerted effort by allies of Mr. Netanyahu, legislation barring the police from issuing recommendations passed in December - but only on the condition that it would not apply to the current investigations against the prime

Irit Pazner Garshowitz contributed re-



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# Sports

#### Canada, of all teams, is a hockey underdog

With N.H.L. stars absent, it has scoured lower-tier leagues to fill its roster

BY CURTIS RUSH

Woitek Wolski was lying in a hospital bed with a broken neck after having crashed headfirst into the boards early in the 2016-17 hockey season.

He did not know whether he would heal or what his life would look like. He certainly did not expect to be on skates, at the Winter Olympics, 13 months later.

On Jan. 11, when he was named to the Canadian Olympic men's hockey team, Wolski said he looked back at a photo of himself wearing a neck brace "and cried like a baby.'

"For a lot of us, this wasn't even a possibility a couple of months ago, a couple of years ago," said Wolski, 31, who plays for Metallurg Magnitogorsk in the Russia-based Kontinental Hockey League. "The whole team is filled with these stories that I think people are going to

With N.H.L. players staying on the sideline for the first time since 1994, Canada had to do something unfamiliar - scour hockey's international scrap heap to fill its roster. Also unfamiliar, the Canadians are not the favorite to win their third straight gold medal when they open the Olympic tournament against Switzerland on Thursday.

That honor goes to the Russians, or the "Olympic Athletes From Russia," as they are being called during Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea. They are the most skilled team, with the former N.H.L. stars Ilya Kovalchuk and Pavel Datsvuk.

The Canadian team, on the other hand, is made up of long shots. Forward Eric O'Dell, 27, who plays with HC Sochi in the K.H.L., was considered the long-

"In his first practice, he didn't look very good," said Canada Coach Willie Desjardins, who coached the Vancouver Canucks in the N.H.L. from 2014 to 2017. "Guys are going, 'This guy will never make it.' But he finally worked his way onto the team."

"The N.H.L. is the best league in the world, and I don't think anybody would disagree with that. But Canada still has a large pool of talent."

General Manager Sean Burke noticed that O'Dell had been named captain of his team in Russia, and suspected there was more to him than met the eye.

"You're in Russia and the guys don't speak English," Burke said. "Having your captain being an English-speaking Canadian really says a lot about his character."

Burke uses the word "character" a lot in describing this team, which he said will epitomize "the Canadian Way." Usually that means having gobs more talent than any other team in the tournament. This year that means the team will not be outworked

Only two players on the roster are without any N.H.L. experience, so Burke expects some to carry a chip on their shoulders.

"The N.H.L. is the best league in the world, and I don't think anybody would disagree with that," he said. "But Canada still has a large pool of talent. Try to tell them it's not the N.H.L. players, it's not the best players in the world."

In naming his team, Burke pulled together bits and pieces from six leagues, including 13 from the K.H.L., three from the American Hockey League and the rest from the Austrian, German, Swiss and Swedish leagues. Sidney Crosby and Jonathan Toews they are not.

Still, Derek Roy, a veteran center of 738 N.H.L. games who now plays in Sweden, has been preparing for this day longer than most people think.

"Everyone here has worked their entire lives to get to this point," Roy said. "It's not like all of a sudden one day they told us, 'O.K., you can play in the Olympics.'

The Canadian goaltenders are Kevir Poulin, 27, Justin Peters, 31, and Ben Scrivens, 31. Scrivens, who plays for Salavat Yulaev Ufa in the K.H.L., has the most N.H.L. experience, with 130 starts.

Defensemen Chris Lee, 37, and Mat Robinson, 31, don't have any N.H.L. experience. Then again, Chris Kelly, Rene Bourque and Roy have each racked up more than 700 N.H.L. games. The downside — Kelly, Bourque and Roy are 37, 36

and 34.

Hockey Canada officials scouted junior and college players, but ultimately decided they were too inexperienced and raw for such a big stage.

Although it is without marquee names, the team is not completely lacking telept at least on pages. Linden Very

ing talent, at least on paper. Linden Vey, 26, is among the scoring leaders in the K.H.L. Kelly, Wolski, Bourque, Roy and Mason Raymond have each registered 20-goal seasons in the N.H.L.



The American snowboarder Shaun White in the men's halfpipe finals on Wednesday. He won his third gold medal in four trips to the Olympics with a narrow victory over the Japanese teenager Ayumu Hirano.

## Pushing the envelope in the halfpipe

**PYEONGCHANG, SOUTH KOREA** 

Shaun White wins gold using bolder tricks and taking ever bigger risks

BY KAREN CROUSE

Shaun White's train of thought was briefly derailed on Tuesday by the music blaring at Phoenix Snow Park. The song was "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," and the lyrics seemed fitting: "No wind, no rain, nor winter's cold can stop me,

White, 31, had just produced two nearperfect halfpipe runs to lead the field in the qualifying event. On Wednesday, he proceeded to outdo himself and everyone else in the final. He won his third gold medal in four trips to the Olympics with a masterful final run that earned him 97.75 points and a narrow victory over the Japanese teenager Ayumu Hirano, who had posted a 95.25 on his sec-

White's 11 competitors averaged 21.9 years of age, led by Hirano, 19, who last month became the first snowboarder to pop back-to-back 1440s, or four revolutions, in competition. When White, 31,

was Hirano's age, he won the first of his two previous Olympic titles with a run that included two 1080s.

Playing catch-up with the sport he revolutionized, White uncorked back-toback 1440s in Wednesday's final — a trick that had led to a nasty fall in a practice session in October, resulting in a gash that required 62 stitches. "I watched these young guys do amazing runs, and it fired me up," White said.

It certainly did. Hirano had nailed a ridiculous series of stunning flips and twists on his second run, but he fell on his third and final ride. That left the door open for White, who delivered the run of his life to win the third gold medal of his career and his first since 2010. He finished fourth in Sochi four years ago.

The quest for more complex tricks is coded in the DNA of adrenaline-seeking athletes like White, passed down from generation to generation

"It's just the evolution of the sport," White said.

But in pushing the envelope, the athletes are also pushing their own luck.

Conspicuously absent from the competition was the 2014 Olympic champion Iouri Podladtchikov of Switzerland, who withdrew last week because of the lingering effects of a head injury that he sustained during a fall at last month's Winter X Games in Colorado. Pod-

Emily Arthur of Australia after she fell

face first near the end of a halfpipe run. "I'm good, and I'm alive," she said later. ladtchikov, 29, participated in one practice at Phoenix Snow Park before releasing a statement saying it was "in no way safe or responsible" for him to compete. On Twitter, Podladtchikov wrote, "Un-

> able to compete." A gloom fell over the halfpipe on Wednesday when 16-year-old Yuto Totsuka of Japan, the youngest finalist, ricocheted off the wall during his second run and spun out. He was tended to by paramedics, who immobilized him on a sled and carted him off the course.

> fortunately, my brain needs time to re-

cover from the bruises and I will not be

The day before the men's final, the 17-

year-old American Chloe Kim performed two 1080s — as White had 12 years before — on her way to the gold in the women's halfpipe. During her runs, Kim's family members watched anxiously from the bottom of the hill. Asked which trick made her the most apprehensive, Kim's mother, Boran Yun, said, "the whole run, from the beginning to

While Kim celebrated, one of her fellow teenage competitors, Emily Arthur of Australia, assessed the damage after she face-planted near the end of her third run. Arthur, 18, who finished 11th, remained facedown in the snow for several seconds before she shakily got back on her feet. She had a bloodied nose, a swollen lip and a swollen eye, and she said her head hurt, but she later told an Australia Channel 7 reporter, "I'm good, and I'm alive.'

Roughly 7,000 miles away, Kevin Pearce was rattled by Arthur's fall as he watched the final from his home in Vermont. "It looked so bad that I just hope she takes it seriously enough and gets the help she needs," Pearce said in a telephone interview.

According to an Australian team official. Arthur was checked by a team doctor, who didn't believe she had suffered a concussion but said that she would be monitored for the next 36 hours.

Arthur's crash reminded Pearce of a bad spill that he walked away from during a U.S. qualifier before the 2010 Games. For the next several days his head didn't feel right, he said, but he kept his symptoms — nausea, sluggishness and mental fogginess — to himself. He was expected to challenge White for the gold medal at the Vancouver Games, and he did not want to jeopardize his

chances of making the Olympics. Less than two weeks later, Pearce sustained a traumatic brain injury during training when he hit his head on the edge of the halfpipe. He remained in a coma for weeks. In retrospect, he said, he believes that he sustained a concussion in the earlier fall and that it contributed to the later crash that ended his competitive career.

After Podladtchikov, known as IPod, pulled out of the Olympics, Pearce wrote him a message on Instagram with praise for the wisdom and courage "to give up a shot at another gold medal. To me, it was unbelievable that he was able to know that his head wasn't in the right

Pearce hoped Arthur would show the same prudence. "I just hope she can take it from people like myself and IPod and take care," he said. "With the brain, you just never know if you're O.K. until

## Trailblazer zigs as others zag

**GANGNEUNG, SOUTH KOREA** 

Shani Davis has kept quiet since denouncing a move by the U.S.O.C.

BY ANDREW KEH

The American speedskater Shani Davis swerved around a corner, on foot, in a subterranean postrace interview room at the Gangneung Oval on Tuesday night and slowed to a halt in front of a small pack of mostly American journalsts. Davis, a celebrated Olympian, was about to take his first questions from the news media since arriving at the Winter Games last week.

But first came a mandate from the press officer for the United States speedskating team. "Skating questions only," he said, disqualifying with a single sentence about half of the questions on the reporters' minds. A 35-year-old four-time Olympic med-

alist, Davis could have treated his fifth Olympic Games as a congenial victory lap. But as he has shown through the

vears, he tends to do things his own way. While the American team, trying to bounce back from a disastrous showing at the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, Russia, has tried hard to project a sense of placidity and collective well-being, Davis, the first African-American to win an individual gold medal at a Winter Olympics, has been more than happy to

complicate that effort.

Last week, his long-fractured relationship with the United States Olympic Committee further degenerated when he criticized a selection process that denied him a chance to carry the flag at the opening ceremony. The U.S.O.C. had used a coin flip to settle a tie vote between Davis and the luger Erin Hamlin, 31, a bronze medalist at the 2014 Games. Davis took to Twitter and wrote that

the committee "dishonorably tossed a coin to decide its 2018 flag bearer."

"No problem," he continued. "I can wait until 2022. #BlackHistoryMonth 2018 #PyeongChange2018."

Then he skipped the ceremony and made his Twitter account private. He also did not attend the team's customary introductory news conference last

After his race on Tuesday - he finished 19th out of 35 skaters in the men's 1,500 meters — the closest he got to addressing the controversy was when a reporter asked if the events of the previ-

ous week had affected his skating at all. "Well, I've been through a lot worse than what's going on the past few weeks," Davis said. "So this didn't disturb me whatsoever.

Davis struck a positive tone after his race. He said he thought he was better suited for the 1,000 meters and complimented the atmosphere at the Games. He suggested his technique had never been better, but the burst of his younger days has been harder to find.

He may not be expected to win a medal, but as one of the biggest stars in speedskating, he still has the ability to invoke respect and awe in his competi-



Shani Davis speedskating Tuesday in the men's 1,500 meters. He finished 19th.

tors and teammates.

To grasp his influence on the generation of athletes making their mark now at the Games, one needs only to comb through the official athlete biographies, which give competitors here a chance to list their personal heroes. Davis was named by a disparate collection of skaters including Takuro Oda, 25, of Japan; Havard Lorentzen, 25, of Norway; Ekaterina Konstantinova, 22, of Russia; and several of his younger American team-

Kimani Griffin, 27, a long-track skater from Winston-Salem, N.C., was 13 or 14 years old when he first met Davis at a

short-track competition in Ohio. Griffin guessed Davis would not remember the interaction. But it had a big impact on Griffin as a young skater.

"I think I had a big Afro, and he had a big Afro back then," Griffin said with a

As Griffin spent more time around Davis, his respect for him grew. In a sport that has struggled with diversity in the United States, Griffin found some-

"Getting to know him as a person outside of the sport and more on a personal level, seeing how hard he dedicates him-

one to whom he could relate, someone to

self to training, and all the accolades and accomplishments he has despite whatever adversity he may have overcome, it says a lot about his character," Griffin said. "And for me, being half African-American, he's set the tone for me as far as what champions are made of, even with any adversity."

"He's accomplished everything there is to accomplish," he added.

Davis won a gold medal in the 1,000 meters and a silver medal in the 1,500 meters at the Winter Games in 2006 in Turin, Italy, and repeated with the same medals in the same events at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Davis made reference to these accomplishments when he took to Twitter to express his disappointment that he had not been picked to carry the flag.

Anthony Barthell, a coach on the United States short-track team who at one point lived with Davis for five years, said his legacy would be secure no matter what, not only for his victories on the ice but also for the way he widened the lane for minority athletes in winter sports that demographically remain overwhelmingly white.

Barthell said Davis had paved the way for black skaters like himself and Maame Biney, an 18-year-old shorttrack skater who is at her first Olympics.

"A lot of things he had to endure, I didn't have to go through that, and Maame doesn't have to go through that," Barthell said. "His record stands for itself. He's going to be a legend no matter what. I think he's the best long-tracker

#### A pair's short program is part of a bigger plan

BY JERÉ LONGMAN
Facing enormous pressure and scrutiny, North Korea's only elic athletes at these Winter Olympics delivered the best performance of their career on Wednesday in pairs figure skating, helping to enliven a mostly subdued, half-empty arena.
The skaters, Ryom Tae-ok, 19, and Kim Ju-sik, 25, have zero chance for a medal. But that is not their measurement of success. Their aim was to finish in the top 16 among 22 pairs in the short program, enabling them to participate in the long program on Thursday. They accomplished their goal, finishing Ilth in the short program with a personal best of 69.40 points from the judges.
Ryom and Kim come from the world's most isolated nation, but, to a point, they appear open and expressive and embracing of outside influences. Their choice of music Wednesday was an instrumental version of the Beatles' "A Day in the Life," as performed by the guitarist Jeff Beck, and the mostly somnolent crowd responded by clapping along during the song's signature tempo change.

"We could really feel the power and

change.
"We could really feel the power and energy of the Korean people," Kim said before the skaters hurried through an interview area without stopping. Still, they were clearly elated with their per-formance. Ryom jumped into her coach's arms as she left the ice, and the

formance. Ryom jumped into her coach's arms as she left the ice, and the pair stood and pumped their fists when their score was announced.

The skaters are the only two of the 22 North Korean athletes here to have qualified for these Games by merit instead of wild-card entry. Advancing to the medal round confirmed their arrival here via skill instead of afargess.

"They're not even close to medal contenders," said Bruno Marcotte, a prominent Canadian coach who has assisted the North Koreans over the last year. "But I'm so happy they're here because they belong here. They're a world-class level team."

South Koreans have expressed conflicted feelings about North Korea's participation in these Olympics. But individual North Korean athletes appear and kills of the second of the



am Tae-ok, left, and Kim Ju-sik of North Korea finished 11th in the short program of the Olympic pairs competition on Wednesday to advance to Thursday's long program.

Some have found in her a comparison to another North Korean visitor, Kim Yojong — the sister of the country's leader, Kim Jong-un — who attended the opening ceremony and charmed the South Korea news media without ever speaking in public.

"North Korea will probably use the performance of the figure skaters to boast how much North Korea is getting international attention, just as Kim Yojong got the media following her and demonstrated to its people that North Korea has reached a certain status in the world," said Kim Kyung-sung, the president of the South and North Korean Sports Exchange Association.

At practice on Tuesday, South Korean fans filled the lower section of the Olympic ice arena, taking pictures with their smartphones and oohing, ashing and clapping as Ryom and Kim rehearsed their jumps, splins and lifts. "I hope they will connect us together," said Cho Da-in, 20, a student who also had a ticke to Wednesday's short programment of their familiar bour before Wednesday's competition began, a North Korean news media contingent arrived, followed by a group of cheerleaders in their familiar red outfits, waving reunification flags.

When the pair took the ice to were more

tion flags.
When the pair took the ice to warm up,

4 2 1 3 2 1 3 4 1 3 4 2 4 2 1 the cheerleaders waved North Korean flags. A group of fans chanted the skat-ers' names and held up a banner ac-knowledging them, while bearing a sign that said, "Because One Korea."

that said, "Because One Korea."

Ryom and Kim are under tight control. When they arrive by bus at the Olympic arena, a security detail flanks them, standing arm to arm, as they enter the building. But unlike the country's cheerleaders, they are not being kept totally apart from outsiders.

The skaters waved jubliantly to the crowd before and after Wednesday's routine. And on Tuesday, they walked without any monitors through an inter-

view area, promising to sp

9 Not fer

fully after the competition.

"There have been no inconveniences whatsoever, when it comes to life in the South area," Kim, who with Ryom is competing for the first time in South Korea, said on Wednesday.

Around other skaters, Ryom and Kim have shown a playful side. Recently, in a waiting room before practice, the North Koreans and their couch rolled their gloves into a ball and played an impromptu game of soccer to get their bodies limber.

On Feb. 2, when Ryom celebrated her birthday, Kim Kyu-eun, a South Korean Olympic pairs skater, gave her a gift of cosmetics. The North and South Korean

Marcotte in Montreal, alongside pairs teams from Canada and the United

teams from Canada and the United States.

Kim Hyon-son, the North Koreans' primary coach, made kimchi for the South Koreans in Montreal. And Meagan Duhamel, a two-time world champion pairs skater and Marcotte's wife, took the North Koreans shopping.

"Everyone is really supportive of them," said Alex Kam, the South Korean skating partner of Kim Kyu-eun. "It's good to see how sports brings everyone together without boundaries."

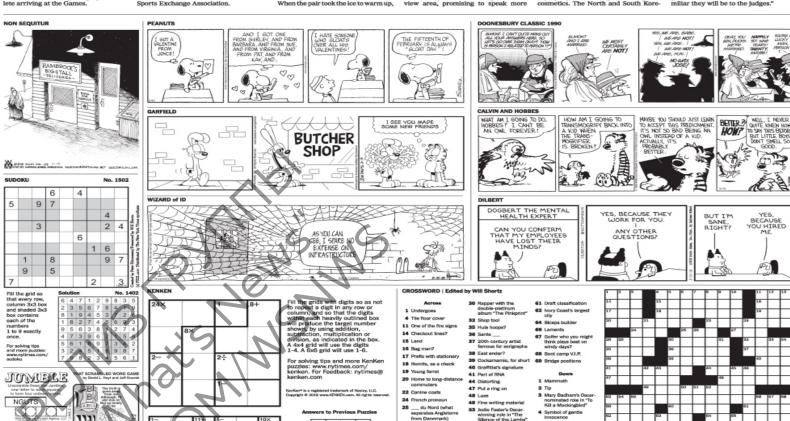
In their few international competitions, Ryom and Kim have remained composed, as they were on Wednesday. They finished 15th at the 2017 World Figure Skating Championships.

Ryom and Kim come from the world's most isolated nation, but, to a point, they appear open, expressive and embracing of outside influences.

In September, they were self-possessed, if not flawless, in qualifying for the Olympics at a competition in Germany. There they traveled without security and sometimes left the rink unaccompanied by their coach or officials of the self-possessed of the self-posses

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# Business

8 | THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2018



Workers testing an R1 drone at Skydio's office in Redwood City, Calif. The machine will be the closest thing to a fully autonomous drone you can buy.

## The rise of self-flying drones



#### Farhad Manjoo

STATE OF THE ART

It's 2035, the Second American Civil War has been won by the other side, and you find yourself in a heap of trouble with Attorney General Logan Paul. (The future is very troubling.) He has dispatched an all-seeing eye-inthe-sky to tail you, an agile flying machine equipped with 13 cameras and a top speed of 25 miles per hour.

The drone knows your face, your gait and your clothing. It hovers persistently behind your back, moving when you move, stopping when you stop, resisting every effort to shake it. You run into the woods, but you still can't lose it.

So now what? Clip this article and save it as a guide for surviving our airborne future. In a woodsy park in San Francisco last week, I had an encounter with just such a self-flying drone, and I found only one trick for escape. Hint: It involved the indignity

of repeatedly running around a tree. As the hapless chump in its cross hairs, I will tell you this: Being tailed by a 13-eyed flying machine has a way of focusing the mind.

The drone chasing me, the R1, was created by a start-up called Skydio; it sells for \$2,499 and will begin shipping to customers in two to three weeks, the company says. It is the closest thing to a fully autonomous drone you can buy

Autonomous drones have long been hyped, but until recently they've been little more than that. The technology in Skydio's machine suggests a new turn. Drones that fly themselves — whether following people for self-photography, which is Skydio's intended use, or for longer-range applications like delivery, monitoring and surveillance — are





Skydio R1 drones, made at a California factory, left, use cameras, arranged in eyelike pairs on every side, to track a person and avoid obstacles.

coming faster than you think.

They're likely to get much cheaper, smaller and more capable. They're going to be everywhere, probably sooner than we can all adjust to them.

Most consumer drones rely on some degree of automation in flight. DJI, the Chinese drone company that commands much of the market, makes several drones that can avoid obstacles and track subjects.

But these features tend to be less than perfect, working best in mostly open areas. Just about every drone on the market requires a pilot.

"Our view is that almost all of the use cases for drones would be better with autonomy," said Adam Bry, Skydio's chief executive.

Skydio was founded by Mr. Bry and Abe Bachrach — who met as graduate students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and later started Google's drone program, Project Wing along with Matt Donahoe, an interface designer.

In 2014, with funding from the venture firm Andreessen Horowitz, the company began working on what would become the R1. Skydio has since raised \$70 million from Andreessen and several other investors, including Institutional Venture Partners, Playground Global and the basketball player Kevin Durant.

Skydio's basic goal was a drone that requires no pilot. When you launch the R1 using a smartphone app, you have your subject stand in front of the drone, then tap that person on the screen — now it's locked on. You can

also select one of several "cinematic modes," which specify the direction from which the drone will try to record its subject. (It can even predict your path and stay ahead of you to shoot a

selfie from the front.)

After takeoff, it's hands off. The drone operates independently. In the eight-minute flight I saw — through a wooded trail sparsely populated with runners and dogs — the R1 followed its target with eerie determination, avoiding every obstacle as naturally as an experienced human pilot might, and never requiring help. It lost its subject — me — only once, but I had to really work to make that happen.

Time for some caveats: Skydio's technology is far from perfect. It doesn't work well in inclement weather or at night. It also requires a very highpowered processor, which gobbles up battery life; the R1 gets 16 minutes per flight, compared with around 20 for competing drones

Skydio's drone is also entering a crowded marketplace that hasn't been kind to new players. A parade of drone start-ups have gone belly up in the last couple of years, unable to compete with DJI's technical innovation and manufacturing scale.

"I know this technology is so much smarter, but I'm just not sure it's enough to overtake the behemoth that is DJI," said Sally French, a journalist who covers the drone industry at her site, The Drone Girl. She was also shown a preview of the R1 last week.

Yet whatever happens to Skydio as a company, its flavor of autonomous tech

seems likely to become ubiquitous. How Skydio has achieved autonomy is, at bottom, a marvel of software rather than hardware, and the software is likely to get cheaper and better quite

There are two basic ways for computers to process the visual world. They can use cameras alone, or they can also use depth sensors, like lasers or radar, that precisely determine where objects are in space.

Most self-driving car systems use expensive laser sensors, known as lidar, a spinning disk that sits on the car's roof like a propeller beanie. Lidar was the key technology at issue in Waymo's now-settled trade secrets lawsuit against Uber. The trial surfaced a note from Travis Kalanick, Uber's former chief executive, that underscored lidar's importance: "Laser is the sauce." he wrote.

But to Skydio, laser wasn't the sauce. Lasers aren't only expensive; they're also heavy and bulky. Cameras, meanwhile, are plentiful and cheap. Several years ago, Skydio took a gamble: It would use only cameras, arranged in eyelike pairs on every side of the drone, and hope that it could get laserlike accuracy using ever-improving artificial intelligence techniques.

"A bird doesn't need lidar to fly," Mr. Bry told me.

As I watched the R1 tail Mr. Bry, I played the scene forward in my mind: What happens when dozens or hundreds of runners and bikers and skiers and hikers and tourists begin setting out their own self-flying GoPros to record themselves? Our society has proved to be in thrall to photography; if you can throw up a camera and get a shot of you reaching the summit, who's not going to do it?

Which brings me to the escape plan. How do you lose an R1 that has been told to follow you? Here's what worked for me: Find a tree. Run around it very precisely, just fast enough to stay exactly opposite the drone, so the tree trunk blocks its view of you for seconds at a time. Do it just right and the bird will lose you, stopping in its tracks, confused. But I don't imagine this trick will

work for long.

## Global philanthropy in the era of Trump

KIRKLAND, WASH.

Bill and Melinda Gates say the president's policies are affecting their work

BY NICK WINGFIELD

For the past year, Bill and Melinda Gates have received the same question repeatedly while jetting around the world: How is President Trump affecting their work as two of the world's top philanthropists?

The president has rattled it in several ways, they answer. His policies have shaken up the field of family planning, they say, and his derogatory comments about African countries and Haiti have caused disbelief among people they work with outside the United States.

"Those disparaging comments don't belong in any public discourse," Ms. Gates said in a recent joint interview with her husband, the co-founder of Microsoft and one of the richest people

"That's not how we teach our kids to speak," she continued. "So it's discouraging to hear that kind of talk."

Mr. and Ms. Gates are badgered about Mr. Trump so often that they made the topic part of the annual letter they published on Tuesday, a digest the couple releases about the philanthropic activities of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Believed to be the largest in the world, the foundation gave away more than \$41 billion from its inception in 2000 through the end of 2016, and is now spending \$4 billion to \$5 billion a year to combat malaria, reduce poverty and improve education.

This is the 10th annual letter the Gateses have published, which they're marking by answering 10 "tough questions" they frequently get. In addition to Mr. Trump, they address topics like why they team up with corporations and whether they're imposing their values on other cultures. The first Gates letter was inspired by

the annual update the billionaire investor Warren E. Buffett writes to shareholders of his holding company, Berkshire Hathaway. In 2006, Mr. Buffett, a longtime friend of the couple's, pledged the majority of his fortune to the Gates Foundation, where he is a trustee. In philanthropic circles, the annual Gates letter is read as avidly for tidbits about giving trends as Mr. Buffett's letter is by investors.

"There have been some interesting ip-offs about where they're heading or their perspectives on things," said David Callahan, the founder and editor of Inside Philanthropy, a news site about charitable giving.

While the mood in many parts of the world seems to have darkened, Mr. and Ms. Gates say in their letter that they remain militantly optimistic about global progress. "The headlines are filled with awful news," they write in the letter. "Every day brings a different story of political division, violence or natural disaster. Despite the headlines, we see a world that's getting better."

They expanded on some of those themes and fielded questions about other topics in the recent interview. It was held at bgC3, a company that oversees many of Mr. Gates's independent projects, including for-profit investments in clean energy.

Through her own private company, Pivotal Ventures, Ms. Gates has advocated for greater participation by women in the STEM fields - science, technology, engineering and mathematics and other gender equity issues. Pivotal recently helped fund Aspect Ventures, the largest venture capital firm led by women. Not long ago, she moved Pivotal to its own private office near her hus-

As one of the founders of the modern tech industry, Mr. Gates is often looked to for technical answers. For instance, while running for president, Mr. Trump floated the idea of asking Mr. Gates to help close "that internet up in some way" to curb communications by terrorists online. But when asked about the growing criticism that big technology companies like Facebook and Twitter have faced over their role in spreading misinformation, Mr. Gates said he hadn't "seen great solutions," though "I'm hopeful they'll come."

'The whole tech world should look at these criticisms, look at these effects, you know, try to make sure that without giving up what's good about that, that we can reduce some of it," he said.

When asked if the national reckoning over sexual harassment had affected her investments through Pivotal, Ms. Gates said that it hadn't so far, but that it had encouraged her to use her voice to encourage more women to speak out. "I want to make it O.K. for women to talk about their real experience," she said. "I think it's a long time coming that the sexual harassment stuff worldwide comes out."

"I wish our president would treat people, and especially women, with more respect when he speaks and tweets," Ms. Gates wrote.

Ms. Gates has made family planning a focus of her work with the foundation. She said the Trump administration's decision last year to expand a ban prohibiting American aid to any health organizations that provide or discuss abortion in family planning had caused "chaos" in the field — forcing them to stall their work as they figured out how to adhere to the rules.

And in their annual letter, Ms. Gates, 53, is blunt in her view of the way Mr. Trump communicates. "I wish our president would treat people, and especially women, with more respect when he speaks and tweets," she writes.

A White House spokesman did not respond to requests for comment.

Mr. Gates, 62, said he was particularly worried about Mr. Trump's threats to cut foreign aid, which the Gates Foundation considers critical in the global battle against disease and poverty. He said that he was reassured that Congress had so far resisted the president's demands to cut aid and that he and his wife had increased their visits to Republican members of Congress to stress the im-

portance of maintaining the aid budget. "Although we disagree with this administration more than the others we've met with, we believe it's still important to work together whenever possible," he writes in the letter. "We keep talking to them because if the U.S. cuts back on its investments abroad, people in other countries will die, and Americans will be

One of the questions in the letter is about what happens when the two of them disagree. Mr. Gates wrote, "When get really enthusiastic about something, I count on her to make sure I'm being realistic." Ms. Gates said they tended to avoid hashing out their disagreements in front of bigger groups at the foundation, saving them for private discussions, which they have on walks.

"Having a little bit of grist in the system is actually a good thing," she said.

## California governor warns of a downturn

**SAN FRANCISCO** 

In a state that is known for highs and lows, he wants it to start preparing

BY CONOR DOUGHERTY

The United States is on track to achieve the second-longest economic expansion in its history. Unemployment is at a 17year low. And California's state budget has a multibillion-dollar surplus. So why is its longtime governor, Jerry

Brown, issuing prophecies of doom?
"What's out there is darkness, uncertainty, decline and recession," Mr. Brown said recently after presenting his final budget to legislators.

California has accounted for about 20 percent of the nation's economic growth since 2010, significantly more than its share of the population or overall output. But Mr. Brown, in his final year in office, has raised the question on the minds of those paid to think about the economy: How long can this last? For California and the nation, there is

a long list of things that could go wrong. A surging budget deficit could stoke higher interest rates. And if the recent upheaval in stocks signals a longer-term decline, it would hurt California in particular because its budget relies heavily on high earners whose incomes rise and fall with the market. President Trump's moves to upend longstanding trade arrangements could be a setback for the state, home of the country's biggest port complex. And because the growth of the technology industry has played a huge role in California's recent boom, a drop in company valuations or in venture capital investments would reverberate swiftly through the state's economy and

"I don't think there's any reason to believe we are going to have a recession this year or the next year," said Christo-

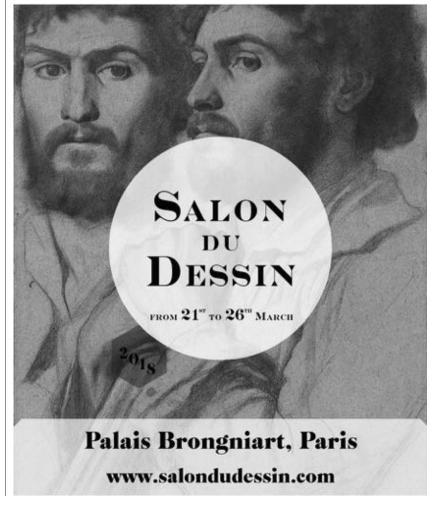
California's employment volatility, relative to the U.S. average INDEX: U.S. = 100

140 130 '10 '15 Source: Moody's Analytics THE NEW YORK TIMES

pher Thornberg, founding partner of Beacon Economics, a consulting firm in Los Angeles, referring to Mr. Brown's grim forecast. "He's just pointing out the obvious, which is that things feel good now, but there is going to come a time when all hell is going to break loose and we better be ready for it.'

Mr. Brown's statements highlight California's distinction as a state of high highs and low lows. From the recession of the early 1990s to the 2001 dot-com crash to the housing collapse of a decade ago, downturns often end up being more pronounced in the state than elsewhere. The next recession, whenever it comes will almost certainly land harder in California than it does in the rest of the country. And that boom-bust pattern is especially tough on the state budget - something that Mr. Brown, who was first elected governor more than four decades ago, knows well. In 2009, as the last recession took

hold, California state revenue fell 19 per-CALIFORNIA, PAGE 9



Dolores Park in San Francisco. The bulk of California's recent gains have flowed to wealthier coastal cities, leaving inland areas behind.

JASON HENRY FOR THE NEW YORK TIME

## Governor warns of a downturn

CALIFORNIA, FROM PAGE 8

cent, versus 8 percent for state revenues nationwide, according to Moody's Analytics. There has been a strong rebound since then, but the gains are unlikely to last. That is because California's government relies on a heavily progressive income tax that generates most of its revenue from a relatively small number of wealthy taxpayers whose incomes are

Even a blip in the stock market can punch holes in the state's budget. And because stock prices have more than doubled during Mr. Brown's term, it seems like a good bet that whoever succeeds him will face challenges. If and when that day comes, any proposal to increase taxes will probably be unpopular. Mr. Brown already raised income taxes to address the state's last budget mess, and California taxpayers took a further hit as a result of the new tax bill, which curbed the deductibility of state

and local taxes on federal returns. "His successor gets a world in which revenues are more volatile," without the option of raising taxes, said David Crane, a lecturer in public policy at Stanford University and a former adviser to Mr. Brown's predecessor, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. "That's a really tough world to operate in."

A recession would also further expose problems that have festered for decades. Across California, cities and school districts are having trouble keeping up with ballooning pension obligations, squeezing teacher salaries and state services. In warning about budget troubles to come, Mr. Brown was making a case for adding more of today's surplus to the state's rainy day fund to cushion the blow of the next downturn.

Mr. Brown's final State of the State speech also included plenty of optimistic notes and pushes for big spending in the future on items mostly outside the state's general fund. He talked about "setting the pace for the entire nation" and embracing big infrastructure projects like a high-speed rail line despite doubts about its viability as costs mount.

"You have all of these projects that he wants to do," said Stephen Levy, the director of the Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy, an independent research organization. "He's saying, this year may be rosy, but watch out, it ain't going to continue. And I

Even in prosperity, California has plenty of problems. The bulk of its recent gains have flowed to wealthier coastal cities, leaving inland areas behind, and a severe housing shortage has led to punishing rent increases and rising homelessness.

Still, economists generally agree that the state's long-term prospects are bright. It is home to many of the world's most valuable and innovative companies, and it attracts an outsize portion of the skilled work force and venture capital financing, helping it create new industries as old ones slow down or fade

And recession forecasting is a tough business even for those whose livelihoods depend on it, like Ed Del Beccaro, a senior managing director in the Walnut Creek, Calif., office of Transwestern, a commercial real estate brokerage.

He manages a team of brokers and travels around the San Francisco region giving speeches and forecasts to chambers of commerce and other business

"Two years ago I was predicting a recession in September of 2017, and in October I said we were going to have a recession at the end of  $\bar{2}018$ ," he said. "Today I think that unless we get bombed by North Korea, we will have a pretty amazing two years of growth."

With a sudden spurt in demand for office space, Mr. Del Beccaro said, he is hiring new workers and spending more on marketing to prospective clients.

But winter will come eventually, and when it does, Mr. Brown's counsel about planning ahead may help shape how California weathers it.

## When rising stocks carry economic pain



**Eduardo Porter** 

**ECONOMIC SCENE** 

Stocks are too expensive.

This is not a market forecast. I wouldn't be particularly surprised if the Dow shrugged off its recent turbulence and continued its long upward thrust. What I contend is that if the American economy behaved in the way that most economists say market economies should, stocks would in all likelihood be cheaper.

It is a grim proposition. Wall Street's titans might welcome the fact that equity prices have grossly exceeded what a well-functioning, competitive economy should deliver. But for almost everybody else, it amounts to a disaster. From wage stagnation to the depressed investment rates that are holding back long-term economic growth, many of the fault lines running through the American economy can be traced back to the same root cause powering the rise of America's overpriced stocks.

Consider a few facts. The average financial wealth of American households — the market value of housing, stocks, bonds, business assets and the like, beyond their liabilities — has grown much faster than the nation's income over the last half-century.

This would not be weird were American households saving more and investing their savings in productive ventures. They are not. The personal savings rate has declined sharply. The ratio of the capital stock — the value of factories, machines and such — to the nation's economic output has actually declined a little since the 1970s.

What has enhanced wealth in recent years is the huge rise in stock prices. The Standard & Poor's 500-stock index increased 8 percent per year from 1970 to 2015, on average. According to an analysis by Germán Gutiérrez and Thomas Philippon of New York University, the ratio of the market value of American corporations to the replacement value of their capital stock has roughly tripled since the 1970s.

What makes this particularly puzzling for scholars reared on the classical models of competitive economies is that all this happened despite a persistent decline in real interest rates. In a more orthodox economy, declining rates on corporate bonds would encourage a surge in corporate investment. As companies invested more and more capital, the returns on investments would gradually decline until companies' returns matched their cost of capital: the interest rate they pay to

In the United States, neither has occurred. Investment has been stuck at stubbornly low rates. And even as interest rates have fallen, the average return on productive capital has stayed roughly constant.

In a nutshell, the United States has built an economy where businesses don't invest even though it has rarely been cheaper to finance investment. Still, they reap spectacular profits that warrant runaway share prices.

"These are not your father's growth facts," wrote Gauti Eggertsson, Jacob A. Robbins and Ella Getz Wold of

the American economy's unorthodox behavior. As Mr. Eggertsson and his colleagues argue, the standard economic theory based on competitive markets cannot apply when markets are not competitive. And competition,

These rents don't fall from the sky. Companies free of competitive pressures, with the power to set prices more or less at will, squeeze them from their customers and their workers. They pad corporate profits and send stock prices sky high.

Executives love it. The critical question is what these rents hold in store for the rest of us.

This doesn't necessarily mean, by the way, that the corporate landscape has been taken over by evil monopolists that resort to illegal tricks to keep competitors out. High-tech titans like Google and Facebook may just have the ability and the deep pockets to out-innovate everybody — delivering wonderful new experiences to consumers along the way, and maintaining monopoly control over their latest innovations. One intriguing theory is that the globalized economy is reorganizing the business landscape, encouraging the rise of corporate superstars.

Not everybody agrees that competition is waning. Hal Varian, Google's chief economist, argues plausibly in a recent study that the case to worry about market concentration across the economy is weak. Even as concentration has increased in many sectors, there is plenty of competition in most industries and markets. Carl Shapiro, an antitrust scholar from the University of California, Berkeley, who served in President Barack Obama's Justice Department, worries that the new populism infecting American politics could prompt antitrust policy to take aim at all big successful companies.

Still, there are good reasons to worry about rising rents, no matter where they come from. Mr. Shapiro argues that while some measures of market concentration may not be meaningful,

In a nutshell,

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don't invest.

profits are of themselves a cause for concern. Here is why we

persistently high

should worry. Mr. Eggertsson and his colleagues built an alternative

model of the American economy by doing away with the assumption of per-

fect competition. They contend that there are barriers to entry that stop competitors and allow rents to persist.

In this economy, stock prices don't just reflect the future stream of normal economic returns that would accrue to a company's capital investment. They also include a claim to a stream of rents that generate "pure profits." These profits can't be replicated by another company's capital investment. They are owned by a specific company.

So what features might an economy like this possess? Wages are unlikely to rise much in a job market dominated by a few big employers. As I speculated last week, markets dominated by a few businesses will most likely deter

start-ups from appearing on the scene. Rising rents will take larger shares of the nation's income. That will bolster the proportion of income that goes to corporate profits but squeeze the share that flows to workers — in wages and benefits — and to productive capital. This will discourage both work and capital investment. It will weigh on

overall economic growth. Rents interfere with incentives in a big way. Companies will spend more time and effort trying to preserve those rents — often by working to block rivals from their markets. Rivals will fight to grab a share of those rents for themselves, perhaps through lobby-

And inevitably, inequality will rise: The owners of the shares in the powerful corporations capturing the economy's growing monopoly rents will peel further and further away from the average Jane and Joe, who own little

This is not the kind of economy proposed by classical economic theory. It is not the kind of country portrayed by evangelists of the American dream. But it looks as if we are stuck with it, regardless of what the stock market does tomorrow



in the United States, is shriveling. The scholars argue that the Ameri-



SEAN PROCTOR FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A furniture factory in Holland, Mich. Rising stock prices have greatly benefited Wall Street's titans but reflect an economy where wages are stagnating

## New life for old post offices

Locations and space make buildings enticing candidates for makeovers

BY MICAH MAIDENBERG

The United States Postal Service moved out of its longtime main post office in downtown Chicago in 1997, but ideas for remaking the Art Deco behemoth never gained traction. The huge building sat vacant, a far cry from the time when workers could sort up to 35 million letters a day there and residents posted mail in its elegant lobby, an airy space with stone floors and decorative panels.

Now, the real estate firm 601W Companies is taking a crack at reviving it. With a \$500 million construction loan in hand, 601W is transforming a place once known for catalogs and stamps into a 2.8-million-square-foot office building called, simply enough, the Post Office.

The project is one of several major postal building redevelopments in the works around the country, including in New York and Houston. With their central locations and warehouse areas that can be converted into new uses, older postal facilities are seen as tantalizing candidates for transformation.

"Truly unique postindustrial space can't be replicated, especially in great locations," said Matt Garrison, a managing principal at R2 Companies, a Chicago real estate company that bought a 1.1-million-square-foot postal distribution center in downtown Milwaukee from an investor in 2015. "It's very finite in supply. That's what makes the spaces special and unique — you can't fabricate

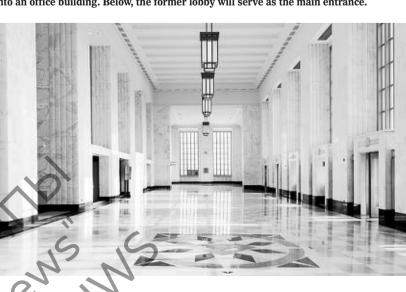
R2 plans to redevelop the property in Milwaukee primarily as an office building, though the Postal Service is still us-

In Chicago, 601W bought the old post-al structure in May 2016 from a British investor. Since then, workers have been replacing windows, hauling away debris and preparing to install new building systems inside. The redevelopment will turn former mail-processing areas into uncommon office spaces, taking advantage of expansive spaces with 19-foothigh ceilings, said Brian Whiting, president of Tales Grange Chicago, president dent of Telos Group, a Chicago brokerage firm looking for tenants to fill the building. The biggest floor space stretches 285,000 square feet.

"It's very simple," Mr. Whiting said.



Chicago's old main post office has sat vacant since 1997, but is now being redeveloped



We're building a building to attract a younger work force that is calling for more open, collaborative, neighborhood-feeling space."

Two developers, the Related Companies and Vornado Realty Trust, are making a similar bet on the James A. Farley Building in Manhattan, a building completed in 1913 that features a facade with Corinthian-style columns along one side. Across Eighth Avenue from Pennsylvania Station, the property will be turned into a train hall named after Senator Daniel P. Moynihan, who died in

Amtrak and the Long Island Rail Road will use the rail capacity that Skan-

ska, the Swedish construction contractor, has been constructing at the site. Vornado and Related will focus on about 588,000 square feet in the building's second through fifth floors and on bringing in new tenants to retail areas on the first and concourse levels. The Postal Service will retain offices on the third floor.

The prospect of converting the upperfloor mail-processing areas into offices made the Farley property stand out, said Andrew Rosen, a senior vice president at Related. Such spaces are rare in New York, he said, but in demand from technology, media and other companies.

"It's two full city blocks. It's up to 200,000 square feet on a floor and a re-

ally open space with great light" and transportation links, Mr. Rosen said. "You end up with something that's very unique."

Lovett Commercial, a developer in Houston, plans to turn the former Barbara Jordan Post Office near that city's downtown into a commercial hub as well. Lovett acquired the property, built in 1962 in the Brutalist style, from the

Postal Service in 2015. The building is "sort of a relic of Houston's golden age," said Kirby Liu, director of development at Lovett. "That's a heritage we wanted to preserve. It's an orientation of the past that we want to

ton, because most never realized how much stuff was behind the curtain."

One example of that: multiple nuclear fallout shelters in the property.

Developers have reimagined postal buildings into new uses for years. Completed projects include a prominent building that dates to 1884 in downtown St. Louis and the Old Post Office in Washington, which President Trump's real estate company leased in 2013 from the General Services Administration and converted into a hotel.

The Postal Service owned 8,448 properties as of September, according to its 2017 annual report, down about 2 percent from 2011. The post office leases the vast majority of its facilities, a total of 23,184 properties, the annual report said. Over its last seven fiscal years, the agency has sold an average of 32 properties annually, according to its financial statements and reports. Sales can be contentious. In some cases, communities have fought to ensure buildings remain in public hands and open to serve customers. The agency has also faced criticism for selling buildings with historic elements.

"Places that have a sense of neighborhood usually don't like it," said Steve Hutkins, a New York University professor who operates a website, Save the Post Office, that tracks building dispositions and other agency news.

# FashionNewYork

# The popcorn apocalypse

BY VANESSA FRIEDMAN

New York Fashion Week finally came to life Tuesday evening in the shadow of the valley of — well, not death exactly. More like a post-apocalyptic prairie seen through a B-movie lens. Toto, what happened to Kansas?

Raf Simons buried it under 50,000 gallons of popcorn.

Or, to be fair, he buried the floor of the American Stock Exchange building under 50,000 gallons of popcorn, trucked in for a wackadoodle Calvin Klein show. It piled up in drifts around the weathered sides of four skeletal barns hung with blood red Sterling Ruby mop heads and papered with spectral black and white Warhol reproductions.

It was crushed under the shoes of guests, so little motes of popcorn dust blew through the air. They landed on the coats and skirts and hair of Michael B. Jordan and Nicole Kidman and Millie Bobby Brown (among many other famous people), making everyone look as though they had an unfortunate case of dandruff or had wandered into a Food Channel version of nuclear winter.

Then a model in a bright orange hazmat suit and waders appeared. Let's rephrase: Welcome to the pop-calypse.

Since he arrived at the brand that bluejeans and minimalism built, Mr. Simons, who is from Belgium, has been fixated on defining his own brand of twisted Americana, largely built on the twin pillars of Laura Ingalls Wilder and "On the Road" (the Netflix versions) after the rot set in.

This season he took it even further, with women in giant tweed coats over sweeping lawn skirts and men in sweater vests that looked more like life vests over skinny suits and shirts buttoned tight to the neck. Everyone wore knit Fair Isle balaclavas and often big firefighters' gloves in silver foil, which also was used in false-front A-line cocktail dresses trimmed in white lace that turned into camper-blanket sheaths at the back.

Also the two-tone cowboy shirts and placket trousers that Mr. Simons has used in every collection since his Calvin debut, and skinny striped sweaters and sweaters with Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner knit in, plus apron dresses with nothing underneath, so the breasts were exposed (a strange segue into Naughty Nellie from the general store). front the cultural mutation occurring



SHAWN BRACKBILL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

white shirts and reworked as bias-cut chiffon evening gowns. The effect was all very survivalist. Simon & Garfunkle's "Sound of Silence" played in the background. So did "California Dreamin' "by The Mamas & The Papas.

It was both a reductionist view of the country's most accessible myths and also stomach-churningly right. That's where we are now: drowning in a sea of puffed corn kernels and empty calories, appropriating the appropriators.

You might not like it all (though it's not hard to imagine those homespun balaclavas becoming a thing the next time the temperatures hit minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit), but it was viscerally recognizable, the way really good fashion which is not the same thing as wearable clothes — is supposed to be.

The kind of fashion that suggests a different way of expressing how you think of yourself or your world at that moment. The kind of fashion that has been largely missing from the runways this week.

Instead it has seemed like most designers were strolling around, heads turned to the sky, la-la-la-ing and minding their own business (in every sense) rather than pushing themselves to con-Quilting squares were pieced onto crisp around them. Maybe it takes an out-



sider's perspective, or gumption. It's risky to pontificate on national identity.

Fashion often likes to talk about how it offers an escape from everyday ugliness, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with beauty for beauty's sake, but at a time of turmoil it can feel a little

empty Confrontation often isn't pretty, but it

gets you somewhere.

Stuart Vevers, the creative director of Coach and a Brit, shares many of the same American obsessions as Mr. Simons, especially when it comes to the Badlands and biker dressing. It's expressed differently — his men and women look like luxe hobos, loaded up with tiny prairie florals in vintage lines, rough shearlings, laces and lamés, everything dangling tassels and charms — have a convincing proposition for a look

season, was the sense of dystopia.

Though instead of wading through snack food, Mr. Vevers' models had to wend their way through a forest of de-nuded trees, like something out of the Brothers Grimm or "The Blair Witch Project." Maybe that's why the bags and knapsacks they all carried were cavernous enough to fit a large part of their worldly goods inside.

(For what it's worth, big bags are a trend this season. They were everywhere, including at Monse, which had a top-handled carnie-striped version that also can be folded and squished under the arm. So are amped-up white shirts: See Vaquera's dress versions, sporting portraits of its fashion forbearers, including Vivienne Westwood and Miguel Adrover, over the left breast. And widewhale corduroy — Maria Cornejo did an especially appealing cherry red jump-suit in her Zero Maria Cornejo line.)

But back to Coach.

"I was thinking, 'What is our goal?' " Mr. Vevers said backstage before the show. Then of the people who populate his imagination: "What are they doing here? Where are they going?"

He didn't have an answer — his Elvises just left the building — but he did It's probably not a coincidence that but the ingredients are similar. So, this We all have to start somewhere.

## Playing the Generation Game

BY VANESSA FRIEDMAN

There was something awfully appropriate about the fact that Michelle Obama's official-for-posterity portrait by the painter Amy Sherald was unveiled smack in the middle of the New York shows. In it, the former first lady and great champion of the American fashion industry is depicted in a Thinker-like pose while wearing a halter-neck evening gown in a geometric print by the designer Michelle Smith, founder of the accessible luxury line Milly.

Milly? The times they are a-changin'. During her tenure in the White House, Mrs. Obama was known for wearing clothes from approximately 90 percent of the names on the fashion week schedule, from up-and-coming designers to the tent pole brands of the industry, providing all of them with an enormous boost to their name recognition.

This choice was fully in line with that legacy. She had always treated the most formal outfit with a certain throwaway ease, and had no truck with traditional hierarchies

They are breaking down nonetheless. New York fashion is suffering some sort of identity crisis, and not just be-cause designers are decamping for for-eign shores (that's the easy excuse), or making movies instead of shows (get ready for Monse) but because it's in the midst of generational shift — both internally, with founders of a certain age preparing to hand over power, and exter-nally, when it comes to what the customer may want. Athleisure? Streetwear? Gender fluidity? Ball gowns? All of the above?
As a resulf, the big brands that used to

dominate the city no longer have quite the same aesthetic authority. When Ralph Lauren cruises from barefoot-in-Jamaica (where he has a vacation house) in lovely blue and white and faded denim sundresses to Cap d'Antibes in bright red, yellow, blue and green sequined minidresses, patent leather sweats, and an Art Deco ocean liner print, it's hard not to feel a little lost. The clothing compass is pointing in too

many directions at once. It also got a little wiggly at Carolina





Herrera — who is herself sailing off into the sunset, at least sort of, by becoming the brand's global ambassador, and anointing Wes Gordon as creative director — made the admirable, if not always successful, decision to look forward instead of back, swapping her usual florals for a lame leapin' leopard print in glint-

The awning stripes she favors were still in there, as were the polka dots (sequined, on a flowing cape), but the mix-

ing lamé.

ing of ostrich feather and silver ribbon on a skirt and coat had less direction than the parade of floor-sweeping faille skirts in a rainbow of shades paired with crisp white shirts and belted in contrasting colors that closed the show.

A homage to Mrs. Herrera's signature style, it was the best look on the runway. There's often a lot of pressure on new designers to "youthify" older brands, but here's hoping that Mr. Gordon — who presented his boss with a giant bouquet



of red roses during her bow - sticks

In this, he might take a page from Laura Kim and Fernando Garcia, who have been smartly diplomatic about updating Oscar de la Renta without reinventing it. This season, a trip to the Cloisters inspired a host of tapestry prints, parchment shades and stylized florals, not to mention chain mail and silver filigree embroideries, all balanced by a stripped-down silhouette: narrow pants with deep cuffs and squared-off jackets; pencil skirts with slouchy sweaters sporting jeweled bouquets.

There were lots of the usual party dresses, to be sure. Presumably, many will end up on the red carpet at the Met Gala in May, for the opening of "Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination" (or even at the Oscars' next month). But hidden among all the sparkle was one genuinely new idea: Many of the untucked shirttails poking from under the jackets were not actually shirts at all. They were fake-tails that belted around the waist, so they read as

casual without the layers. They made sense — more so than the horses and . . . wait, was that a cow? that reared across the linen serapes and shirts of Derek Lam's otherwise understated and sporty Western-inspired suedes and slouchy trousers. Just as the lyrical, swaddling suiting in earthy shades at The Row makes sense. (The more ecclesiastical evening wear would also be good for the Met Gala, if anyone

is feeling a little party Puritan.) For Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, the



brand's designers, it's all about the inside, and the tiny detail: jackets cut in a classic hourglass or pulled just off-center, a single lapel flying out like a scarf; a trench coat secured by one button just above the waist. The show was held in a makeshift gallery spotted by 13 Isamu Noguchi sculptures on loan from the artist's foundation.

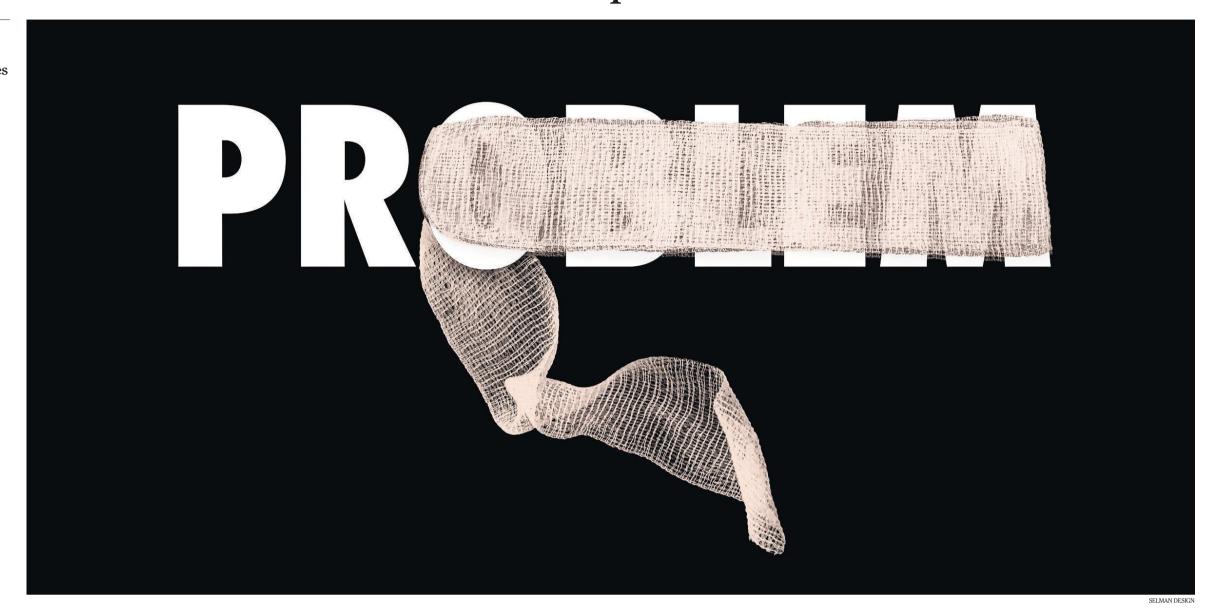
That's a pretty ambitious connection to imply. But as the old order shifts, there's room at the top.

THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL EDITION

## Puerto Rico needs more help

The island's power and water utilities require wholesale rebuilding to achieve resilience against the next big

storm.



#### **Mekela Panditharatne**

Four months after Puerto Rico was battered by Hurricane Maria, Congress last week approved more badly needed emergency assistance, including \$2 billion to repair the island's severely damaged power grid. An additional \$9 billion will be directed to recovery and restoration projects in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

The expectation is that this aid will help provide relief not only to the hundreds of thousands of utility customers in Puerto Rico who are still without power but also to the more than three million islanders as a whole, who are still being warned to boil water before drinking it. But the money from Washington falls far short of the island's requirements.

Puerto Rico needs more than bandages. It needs to rethink and redesign its electric, water and wastewater systems, both to protect them against the next big storm and to provide the dependable service they were failing to give residents before Hurricane Maria. To accomplish that and other rebuilding needs, Puerto Rico had

sought \$94.4 billion in total disaster aid in November. That included nearly \$18 billion to rebuild the power grid — nine times what Congress has provided.

Achieving resiliency in the face of powerful storms will require the wholesale rebuilding of the island's utilities. Simply patching them up will not be enough. If that's the extent of the fix, the island is likely to find itself back in the same place after the next big storm, with taxpayers asked to spend new billions on more life preservers.

Even before Hurricane Maria, decades of disinvestment had left Puerto Rico's energy grid and water and wastewater systems particularly vulnerable to hurricanes.

Among its many problems, a storm-damaged dam is putting 70,000 people downstream at risk, and the island's water system is old and leaky; about half of the water conveyed by its pipes disappears. These leaks make the system vulnerable to contamination by microbes in the ground and water — a problem worsened by hurricane-induced pressure loss.

And, of course, when the power goes off, water and sewage treatment systems shut down. Millions of gallons of untreated sewage and contaminated

water were released after the hurricane. Even today, Puerto Ricans remain at risk of bacterial contamination in their water.

Before the storm hit, Puerto Rico had the worst drinking water quality of any state or territory in the nation.

Nearly 70 percent of the island's water customers received their tap water from systems that were found to have

A stormdamaged dam is putting 70,000 people downstream at risk, and the island's water system is old and leaky. unlawfully high levels of contaminants like coliform bacteria, volatile organic compounds and harmful byproducts of disinfection, or that were not treating their water in accord with federal standards.

The island'

largest utility, the
Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer
Authority, which operates water and
wastewater systems, was under several court-enforced agreements to end
sewage discharges from degraded
wastewater plants that violated the
Clean Water Act. Making matters
worse, the Environmental Protection
Agency cut off funds to the utility

because it was unable to repay earlier loans.

Before Hurricane Maria, the island's water and wastewater utility said that it would need to invest \$2.4 billion over the next decade to fix these longstanding issues. That number would be higher now: Puerto Rico's government has said that a majority of its water and wastewater treatment infrastructure was damaged by the hurricane.

The island's brittle electricity grid provides another lesson in disaster mitigation. Before Hurricane Maria, the grid was prone to blackouts. Puerto Ricans experienced power failures four to five times more often than did the average utility customer elsewhere in the United States. Transmission lines cutting across the island's mountain regions often failed. In 2016, a fire shut down the entire grid for three days. Even when it worked, electricity was expensive.

Investment in renewables like solar power and improving energy efficiency would increase Puerto Rico's resiliency. The use of microgrids that combine solar power and battery storage could significantly cut fuel consumption and help hospitals, water treatment plants and schools keep working in a weather-induced blackout. Such

microgrids would also provide more reliable power to isolated communi-

Whether or not a plan announced recently by the island's governor to privatize Puerto Rico's energy utility is carried through, the funds set aside by Congress for the island's power grid will still allow Puerto Rico to release this latest federal money to private utilities for resilient, sustainable rebuilding.

Scientists point to the possible contribution of climate change to Maria's intense rainfall — as well as to the rainfall of Harvey and Irma, its predecessor hurricanes. The Caribbean is already seeing changes in land and ocean temperatures that mimic global climate trends. The mass movement of Puerto Ricans to the mainland after last fall's hurricanes may provide one of the first examples of a large-scale climate migration in the Americas.

It's no surprise that Hurricane Maria wreaked the havoc that it did in Puerto Rico. The island's fragile infrastructure was ripe for a clobbering. These lessons shouldn't need to be learned twice.

**MEKELA PANDITHARATNE** is a lawyer with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

## What the White House knew about Rob Porter

Maybe he was a great staff secretary. You can't separate that from the allegations

against him.

**Lindy West**Contributing Writer

The White House knew about problems with the staff secretary Rob Porter's security clearance nearly a year before he was forced to resign, F.B.I. director Christopher Wray said this week. We know now that the hold up on his clearance was tied to allegations of domestic abuse — and the Trump White House seems to have known that by last November, too.

This contradicts Trump aides' reassurances that they were as shocked as anyone to read about Porter's alleged misogynist violence in the Daily Mail last week. (I fail to see how the notion that the executive branch gets its intelligence from the Daily Mail could possibly be reassuring to any sentient creature crawling this planet's sizzling crust, but many things are beyond me these days.)

Wray testified that the F.B.I. sent the White House a partial report about the "problems" with Porter in March 2017, following that with a full background check in July, and a further update in November. The investigation was "administratively closed" in January, several weeks before Donald Trump presumably — according to the White House's initial timeline — heard about the allegations against his buddy.

True to form for the Trump White House, even doing nothing was an unachievably high bar. Not only was Porter allowed to remain in his position (and briefly defended by the administration after the allegations finally became public), at the time of his termination he was reportedly being considered for multiple promotions: speechwriting, an expanded policy portfolio, a crack at deputy chief of

staff. CNN reported that chief of staff John Kelly, aware of the allegations for months, "told associates that Porter was one of the few competent professionals on his staff and wanted to ensure that he was being used to his full potential." One wonders if Kelly saw the photographs of Porter's exwife's face, the gold and the purple nimbus around her eye, the angry swell, the throb of it.

well, the throb of it.

What a luxurious degree of compartmentalization we afford white men — to not only separate Porter the guywhose-ex-wife-filed-a-protective-orderagainst-him from Porter the guy-whois-pretty-good-at-being-a-staff-secretary, but then to weigh their relative importance and choose the latter. (I believe that unit of measurement is called "capitalism.")

Inasmuch as we can judge a per-

son's interior based on their actions, it's fair to say that a man who disregards women's physical and sexual boundaries, as President Trump reportedly has, does not care about women. If it is possible to simultaneously care about women and subordinate their wishes to yours, to prioritize your sexual urges over their bodily autonomy, then what does care" even mean? I think it's also fair to say that a man who lashes out at women with physical violence, as Porter allegedly has, harbors some degree of hatred for them. What else does "hatred" mean if not this — the object of our fury, the thing we love to

It should come as no surprise, then, that the Trump White House shrugged at the safety of two individual American women; after all, it is expressly hostile to the safety of 125 million. This is an administration that campaigned, explicitly, on a promised return to some midcentury mirage of American "greatness," when white men ruled



Rob Porter, former White House staff secretary, in Washington in January.

unfettered and the rest of us resumed our places on the spectrum between property and servitude.

The Trumpists long to disembowel the health care system and force pregnant people to give birth against their will. They are wholly obsessed with shoring up intergenerational poverty and leaving the most vulnerable to die. They seem determined to irreparably rend gay families and immigrant families and ship the sons and husbands of impoverished women off to frivolous vanity wars and sacrifice the sons and husbands of black women to our "Anglo-American" law enforcement traditions. What is that but carelessness and hate on a global scale? When have they demonstrated genuine, substantive care for any women other than their token pets?

Porter's "problems" and his superiors' indifference to them are not anomalous in Trump's White House; both are foundational to its ethos. It's no coincidence that Steve Bannon (himself an accused domestic abuser) perceived #MeToo and #TimesUp as a direct response to the Trump presidency itself.

This quadrangular tug-of-war — private violence, public service, public atrocities, private kindness — has sprung up around the #MeToo movement in a similar way. Before the ink was dry on the first wave of allegations, somber heralds of a supposed "backlash" began attempting to drag the movement back into the shadows. Where will it end, they asked? What about due process? What about separating the art from the artist? But he's

so nice! He never tried to rape *me*. (The same fatal flaw lies at the heart of every "humanizing" media expedition into Trump country. But they love soup! They take care of their pets!)

It's true that we have a lot to figure out. The very foundations of our culture are marbled with violence, exploitation, and exclusion — the work of brilliant abusers (and mediocre ones), the institutional scaffolding that enabled them, and the conspicuous absence of their victims. Separating art from artist, to some degree, may not be a choice. We can't un-Miles-Davis music, or de-Alfred-Hitchcock film nor, necessarily, should we. I don't know the answers. There is doing harm, there is making amends, there is being better, and there is hoping the world will take you back. Being forgiven is not a guarantee, nor is being remembered. But it is a privilege, not a burden, to get to witness and participate in this conversation, to build better institutions and better systems together

The question of whether we can separate the art from the artist — or the fairly competent secretarial work from the domestic violence allegations is bigger than Harvey Weinstein, or Quentin Tarantino, or Rob Porter. It is bigger than art. It is bigger than politics. It's the question of whether anything at all can be truly divorced from its context. Americans are, arguably, too adept at such compartmentalization. It is our defining sickness. We separate the founding of this country from the slave-owning founding fathers. We separate the theft of this continent from our own bodies standing on it. We separate the present from

Sometimes the past catches up.

**LINDY WEST** is the author of "Shrill: Notes From a Loud Woman."

#### **OPINION**

#### The New York Times

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#### HOPES AND DOUBTS AFTER KOREANS MEET

Uncertainty about the North's sincerity shouldn't block efforts to end a nuclear standoff.

After its charm offensive at the Olympics, North Korea's delegation has returned home from South Korea, leaving some questions behind. Chief among them: Can the new opening between the two Koreas, begun amid the feel-good spirit of the Winter Games, be nudged and nurtured into serious dialogue over North Korea's nuclear program?

While still a long shot, there's a somewhat better chance of engagement now owing to two developments since President Moon Jae-in of South Korea, Vice President Mike Pence, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and the North Korean delegation, including Kim Yo-jong, the only sister of the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, attended the Olympic opening

First was Mr. Kim's surprise decision to dispatch his sister, his most trusted envoy, to carry his personal invitation for Mr. Moon to join him in a summit meeting in the North. Mr. Moon and Ms. Kim met four times during the Olympics, the highest-level contact between the two Koreas in years. Mr. Moon's visit would be an even rarer event, since the reclusive Mr. Kim has never met another foreign leader.

While many officials fear that North Korea's primary goal is to drive a wedge between South Korea, which has been eager to engage the North, and the United States, which has resisted engagement, close coordination between Washington and Seoul would keep the alliance strong.

At the very least, the North-South contacts provide a communications channel for Seoul to directly explain to Pyongyang what it and the United States are doing and saying and why, thus hopefully avoiding any miscalculation that could lead to military confrontations in this fraught period.

The other seemingly positive development was Mr. Pence's telling The Washington Post that the Trump administration was willing to hold preliminary talks with North Korea even as Washington continues to toughen sanctions and apply other pressures. Only days earlier Mr. Pence insisted there would be no talks until the North made concessions, including taking steps to give up its nuclear weapons.

The new iteration would align Mr. Pence with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. President Trump, who has dismissed engagement with North Korea as "appeasement," hasn't repudiated Mr. Pence's comments.

The administration has long been hostile to the North and critical of its participation in the Games. In recent days, Mr. Pence used increasingly hostile language, calling the North the most tyrannical regime on the planet.

He wasn't the only critic who felt the attention paid to North Korea's delegation was unseemly given the brutal nature of the regime. Yet it is impossible to know how even a brief exposure to South Korea, the world's eighth largest economy and a democracy, could impact attitudes among North Koreans used to living in a country with many deprivations.

Mr. Pence did not shake hands with, or even smile at, Ms. Kim, as he sat in front of her at the opening ceremony. He could have at least stood when South Korean and North Korean athletes marched in togeth-

North Korea is a reprehensible regime and the world must never forget that. Mr. Pence made that point by bringing the father of Otto Warmbier, the American college student who died after being jailed by North Korea, to the Olympics and meeting there with North Korean defectors. Still, leaders seeking solutions to major problems like North Korea's nuclear program don't have the luxury of picking their adversaries. Mr. Pence might have used the occasion to raise American concerns with Ms. Kim directly, although the South Koreans say she didn't seem to want to speak with him, either.

All of which leaves unresolved the question of whether North Korea is exploiting South Korea's desire for peace in order to secure economic or other benefits and break the alliance with the United States, or it wants to resolve the nuclear crisis and other

disputed issues.

Neither does anyone know whether Mr. Trump, who has been effective at winning international support for tougher sanctions against North Korea, is serious about pursuing negotiations. Both are wild cards. Much will depend on how the North-South dialogue

But a special burden rests with North Korea, whose nuclear program violates United Nations Security Council resolutions and is a real threat. If Mr. Kim is serious about resolving the crisis, he could send an early signal by releasing the three Americans still held in North Korean prisons or announcing a pause in his nuclear and missiles testing.

## Israeli students and Auschwitz

**Shmuel Rosner** 

Contributing Writer

**TEL AVIV** This month, Poland decided to outlaw claims of Polish complicity in the Holocaust. This was widely — and rightly — condemned around the world. But for understandable reasons, no country has responded as angrily as Israel, the Jewish state and the guardian of Jewish interests.

"The law is baseless; I strongly oppose it," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said. "One cannot change history." The opposition, which rarely agrees with Mr. Netanyahu, joined him in condemnation. Tzipi Livni, the former foreign minister, called the law "spitting in the face of Israel." Yair Lapid, a member of the Knesset and the son of a Holocaust survivor, wrote that "hundreds of thousands of Jews were murdered without ever meeting a German soldier.'

The Poles were unimpressed with the righteous rhetoric of faraway political leaders. To drive the point home. Warsaw even canceled a planned visit from Israel's education minister, Naftali Bennett, who had been especially critical of the new law. ("I am honored," he said in response, "The blood of Polish Jews cries from the ground, and no law will silence it.") Relations between the two countries — which had recently been warm — are now in

But with crisis comes opportunity. Obviously, Israel should continue to try to convince Poland that the law does more harm than good. But more important, Israel should take this chance to change its relationship not with Poland but with the Holocaust. The debate over the Polish law and Poland's role in the Holocaust forces a spotlight on how the mass murder of Jews in the 20th century is remembered in Israel today.

Each year, tens of thousands of young Israelis (mostly students and also soldiers) visit Poland in what feels like the culmination of their Holocaust education. On these trips — encouraged by the Ministry of Education and undertaken, according to some measures, by about a third of Israel's Jewish students — teenagers visit the sites of

the ghettos, the cemeteries and the A controdeath camps. They versial law see the remnants of in Poland a once great Jewish provides an center and learn opportunity about the killing to reassess machine that ended it. They often wrap Israel's themselves in Israeli relationship flags; they often cry. with the How can anyone memory visit Auschwitz and of the not cry? Holocaust.

This visit, almost a rite of passage in today's Israel, is a "first-class education"

powerful tool as Mr. Bennett put it — for instilling in students the need to remember what happened to the Jews of Europe. Nonetheless, it is time to end these trips.

And it may likewise be time to end Israel's participation in the March of the Living, an annual program in which Jews from around the world converge at Auschwitz and then walk to its companion death camp, Birkenau. Israel shouldn't end its participation in these programs to save its relationship with Poland — but rather to save Israelis.

There's no doubt that these trips have merit. They certainly make Israeli students appreciate the scope and severity of the horrors of the Holocaust. These trips also force young Israelis see with their own eyes what can happen to a people when they are hated and defenseless — a lesson that is as important today as it ever was.

So why end these trips? First, because they contribute to a misperception by many Jews that remembering the Holocaust is the main feature of Judaism. Second, because they perpetuate the myth that Israel itself is born only of the ashes of Europe

That the memory of the Holocaust has in some ways become the main manifestation of commitment to Judaism is well documented. The Pew Research Center found that 73 percent of American Jews believe "remembering the Holocaust" is essential to being Jewish — a higher percentage than believe following Jewish law or caring about Israel is essential to their Jewish identity.

Among Israeli Jews, 65 percent say remembering the Holocaust is an essential part of their Jewish identity, more than living in Israel or working for justice and equality. That Israeli teenagers spend a hefty part of their schooling preparing for a trip to death camps in Poland suggests that the next generation will feel similarly.

A healthy society cannot be defined by the memory of a tragedy. A healthy culture does not make a trip to where it was almost eliminated its main point for pilgrimage. Jewish youngsters would do better to focus their energies on the site that all generations of Jews have wanted to make pilgrimages to: Jerusalem. Auschwitz should not be elevated to sacredness

Altering Israel's historical education will also help to change the perception in the country that the Jewish state is here only because of the horrors of Nazism. Israel's existence should not

be seen as compensation for the butchery of Jews in Europe. But pilgrimages that connect Poland and Israel, or those using Poland as a tool with which to bolster the commitment of young Israelis to their own country, send exactly this message. There is a tragedy, and then rebirth.

But there is no resurrection. The dead are still dead. The Jewish culture that was destroyed in Poland and across Europe will never re-emerge. Israel is not a compensation for Auschwitz, and its marching teenagers, with their flags and their songs, with their we-are-still-here spirit, spite only the ghosts

When I was growing up, in the 1970s, there were no trips to Poland. My high school Holocaust education did not include a gut-wrenching visit to Auschwitz, Nonetheless, I remember the murder of Europe's Jews by the

I think about it, like many Israelis, almost daily. When I say that we should end the teenage Holocaust tourism to Poland, I am not calling for forgetting. I do not want to trivialize or marginalize that history or tell Jews that they need to "get over it."

What I believe we Israelis need is a realignment. We need to remember the dead without forgetting them or forgiving their butchers. We need to draw the proper lessons from the Holocaust - one of which is that there is no merit in dying and Jews must be proactive in our quest to keep living. So let's not confuse ourselves by making Auschwitz the axis of our culture and the culmination of our civic religion. Let's keep our March of the Living where it belongs: here, in Israel.

**SHMUEL ROSNER** is the political editor at The Jewish Journal and a senior fellow at the Jewish People Policy Institute.



Visitors wearing Israeli flags take photographs after touring the death camp complex known as Auschwitz-Birkenau, this month.

## What will you give up for Lent?

#### **Rick Hamlin**

Lent is here, and as a practicing Christian, I know the question is inevitable: "What are you planning to give up?" It's a tougher decision than it sounds; I look with awe at a woman who gave up sarcasm one Lent. Now, that would be a real hardship.

Lent is the penitential season in the Christian calendar that traditionally runs from Ash Wednesday to Easter. It is 40 days long, not counting Sundays because Sundays are feast days (that woman could indulge in sarcasm on Sundays), and it marks the 40 days and nights Jesus spent in the wilderness before he began his ministry.

Forty is one of those biblical numbers that means a long time and is linked to periods of trial, like the 40 days and nights that the torrential rains floated Noah's ark, and the 40 years that the Israelites wandered in the desert after escaping the pharaoh's clutches

You can see why the idea of giving up stuff is linked to this period — "fasting' like Jesus did in the desert. Indeed, many people give up certain foods, going without chocolate or red wine or desserts. A little bit of self-imposed suffering to mark the season and a

reason to kick up your heels with chocolate eggs and jelly beans when Easter finally rolls around. Even if you're not a Christian, the idea of going without for 40 days is not so bad. Call it a diet.

But there's something else in this Gospel story that I'd rather honor. What does it mean to wander in the wilderness for 40 days and nights and face vour demons? How would I do that today? How do you give up all distractions and listen to that inner voice that tells you what you need to be doing but you can't quite face yet? The idea fills me with a weird combination of joy and

Years ago a wise friend — O.K., he happened to be an Episcopal priest told me that when religious norms start excluding an essential practice, it pops up elsewhere, often in a secular garb. I feel like that's one reason meditation has boomed recently, practiced by everybody from Silicon Valley executives to kindergartners. The church forgot how important a regular discipline of emptiness is, something so easy to do in prayer — but its flock

I guess it's not unlike something I do already. I started praying regularly on my morning commute on the subway. I discovered how the external stimuli of doors opening and closing and wheels creaking on the tracks could be channels for some of my own inner doors opening. As long as I kept my eyes

closed (funny about that). Then I took up the practice sitting on the sofa at home. When you get silent you hear a lot of the noise in your head. Sometimes it will masquerade as a fabulous idea that you have to pursue right now, or some item on your to-do list that if you don't get up from that

Even if you're not a Christian, the idea of going without for 40 days is not so bad.

sofa and log on to your computer, you'll forget. You won't. In fact, what I look to is the forgetting. In the 14th century an anonymous author wrote a wonderful book on contemplative prayer called "The Cloud of Unknowing."

"Whatever you don't know and whatever you've forgotten are

'dark' to you," he says, "because you don't see them with your spiritual eves." (This translation of the original Middle English is by Carmen Acevedo

Butcher.) Emptiness is this process of It seems a happy accident that Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day are on the same day this year, love and mortal-

ity meeting. Not long ago, my twenty-

something son stood on a New York

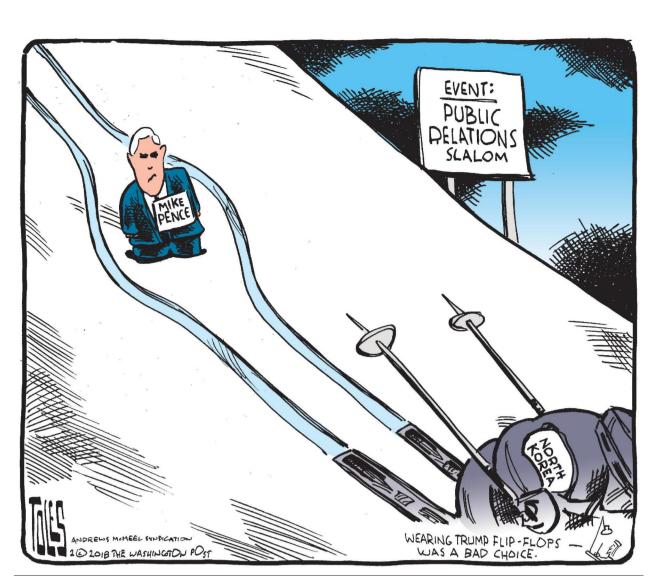
City street corner with some of his church pals and marked anyone who asked with the traditional cross of ashes on their forehead one Ash Wednesday. He even did it to a bus driver who pulled over to the curb and called him inside, an extraordinary moment of spiritual intimacy on a busy

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, we are forced to remember that our lives are short indeed. "Lent" has its origins in an Old English word for spring, but I sometimes like to think it's a reminder that our lives are not a right. They're a gift. In a way, they're "lent."

It would be a mark of false humility to tell you what I plan to give up or take on for Lent, if anything. But as I consider the options, I hold on to this idea of self-emptying, wilderness wander-

Which brings me to one final comment. People will say, "If you're giving up something for Lent, isn't it something you should be giving up anyway?" Oh, come on. Enjoy the rhythms of life, savor the seasons, listen to what they ask. How wonderful that there is this time to not do more but to do less. Happy Lent.

RICK HAMLIN is the executive editor of Guideposts magazine and the author of "Pray for Me."



#### The Ivanka Trump of North Korea?



THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL EDITION

**Frank Bruni** 

It's not often that I'm offended on Ivanka Trump's behalf, but I now find myself in that exceedingly strange position. And I clearly have some explaining to do.

Last week the Winter Olympics got underway in South Korea. The country's archenemy, North Korea, sent a delegation of athletes, cheerleaders and so-called dignitaries. This was a big development, given that North Korea is a rogue state run by a homicidal fanatic, Kim Jong-un, who gleefully threatens to nuke other countries. with the United States at the top of his list. So a buffet of news stories and a smorgasbord of tweets were obviously warranted.

But I saw far too little coverage that gasped at the audacity of the North Koreans' attempts to pawn themselves off as the good-natured emissaries of a normal place. I saw too much that their wiles.

I saw rapt descriptions of the outfits and expressions worn by Kim's sister, Kim Yo-jong, the first member of her family to visit South Korea since the Korean War. I saw the phrase "charm offensive." North Koreans as international coquettes looking for a diplomatic do-over? If you can square that with Otto Warmbier's moribund condition when he was finally sprung from a North Korean gulag and mailed back, like expired meat, to his devastated parents, then you're a nimbler moralist

Where does Ivanka come in? The response to North Korea's overtures at the Olympics was epitomized by what quickly became a popular characterization of Kim Yo-jong. South Korean journalists called her "North Korea's Ivanka." Straight-faced American journalists repeated it.

I get it. Both young women attempt to put a pretty, pert face on a clan and a government — of transcendent ugliness. Both decided to do that in the context of triple axels and the luge. Ivanka is due in South Korea for the closing ceremony.

But not all ugliness is created equal, Donald Trump is not Kim Jong-un, the United States is nothing like North Korea and to come anywhere near that suggestion is nuts. Be outraged about what's going on in America. Don't be

Don't blur the difference between a rogue state and America.

ridiculous. In doing her father's bidding, Ivanka Trump is trying to tell the world that a sexist really wants to empower women, that a racist really cares

about equal opportunity and that a narcissistic plutocrat is acting in the high-minded interests of the little people. She's willfully delusional, totally complicit and compiling one hell she's ultimately all about.

In doing her brother's bidding, Kim Yo-jong is airbrushing a dictator who authorizes public executions that, according to defectors, must be watched by all adult citizens, so that they can savor the wages of disobedience. She is diverting attention from his roles in the murders of his half brother, who was smeared with a fatal toxin while walking through an airport, and of many senior government officials, slaughtered in grotesque ways. Is it any wonder that she's making the effort? The alternative, apparently, is

being drawn and quartered.

So bizarrely nonjudgmental was some of the chatter about her that BuzzFeed News published what it cheekily labeled a public service announcement. The headline, referring to a disapproving glance that she'd thrown at Vice President Mike Pence, reminded Americans that she was "not your new fave shade queen," and the article bluntly asked those who seemed to be so taken with her, "What the hell is wrong with you people?"

In National Review, David French floated some answers, positing that hatred of President Trump was so blinding that his opponents regarded all international incidents as potential diminutions of his administration. To these appalled critics, Pence exists on the same level as Kim's sister — or even below it. French filed this under the rubric of overheated partisanship, which is indeed a problem but not tidily applicable here. Anti-Trump fervor has as much to do with his out-of-bounds actions and words as with any reflexive tribalism.

And Trump himself has been guilty of galling equivalences. When he campaigned for the presidency and made goo-goo eyes at Vladimir Putin, he famously minimized Putin's reputation for having journalists and political adversaries eliminated, telling Joe scarborough, "well, I think that oul country does plenty of killing, too, Joe."

Both French's complaint and the BuzzFeed News article touch on something troubling and important: a tendency — in the media and beyond it to treat all of public life as a pageant and a public relations contest, with winners and losers determined less by their souls than by their sizzle. Kim Yo-jong got points for being a fascinating distraction. That's a role that Trump has long played.

But there can be no mistake: America is in a rotten moment. North Korea is rotten to the core.

#### Syria: You own it, you fix it, so just rent it



**Thomas L. Friedman** 

Two weeks ago, standing on the Syria-Israel border in the Golan Heights, I wrote a column positing that this frontier was the "second most dangerous" war zone in the world today — after the Korean Peninsula.

Your honor, I'd like to revise and amend that column.

Having watched the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics, where North and South Korean athletes marched last week into the stadium together in a love fest; and having also watched Israel shoot down an Iranian drone from Syria, bomb an Iranian base in Syria and lose one of its own F-16s to a Syrian missile; and after U.S jets killed a bunch of Russian "contractors" who got too close to our forces in Syria, I now think the Syria-Israel-Lebanon front is the most dangerous corner in the world.

Where else can you find Syrian, Russian, American, Iranian and Turkish troops or advisers squaring off on the ground and in the air — along with pro-Iranian Shiite mercenaries from Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan and Afghanistan; pro-U.S. Kurdish fighters from northern Syria; ISIS remnants; various pro-Saudi and pro-Jordanian anti-Syrian regime Sunni rebels and — I am not making this up — pro-Syrian regime Russian Orthodox Cossack "contractors" who went to Syria to defend Mother Russia from "crazy barbarians" — all rubbing against one an-

As The Washington Post pointed out, "In the space of a single week last week, Russia, Turkey, Iran and Israel lost aircraft to hostile fire" in Syria.

The term "powder keg" was invented for this place. And the term "3-D battlefield" doesn't even begin to capture its complexity. It is a multidimensional battlefield that requires a

quantum computer to sort out the myriad number of actors, shifting alliances and lines of conflict.

But if this story has crept up on you and left you confused as to what U.S. policy should be, let me try to untangle it for you.

The bad news and the good news about the war in Syria is that all the parties involved are guided by one iron rule: You don't want to "own" this war. This is the ultimate rent-a-war. Each party wants to maximize its interests and minimize the influence of its rivals by putting as few of its own soldiers at risk and instead fighting for its goals through air power, mercenaries and local rebels.

They've all learned — Russia from Afghanistan, Iran from the Iran-Iraq war, Israel from south Lebanon, and the U.S. from Iraq and Afghanistan that their publics will not tolerate large numbers of body bags fighting any ground war in the Middle East.

Everyone's so loss averse that it's unlikely anyone will get too reckless.

Vladimir Putin wants to be able to tell Russians that "Russia is back" as a superpower and that he's the kingmaker in Syria — but he isn't putting any Russian soldiers at risk. Instead, Putin is using Iran to provide ground forces and

enlisting contractors, like those Cossacks from a private Russian company named Wagner, to fight and die — as dozens did the other day in a U.S. airstrike — on the ground.

Iran, which just witnessed an uprising by its own people, demanding that Tehran spend its money at home, not in Syria, is subcontracting the ground war that Russia subcontracted to Iran to Iran's proxies — Hezbollah and various Shiite mercenaries from Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan. This way Iran can control Damascus and use Syria as a forward base to put pressure on Israel but pay "wholesale," not "retail."

U.S. Special Forces are arming and advising Kurdish fighters from northern Syria to carry out the ground war against ISIS. Turkey is using Sunni rebels to fight the same Kurds. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan all use various Sunni rebels to fight the pro-Iranian, pro-Shiite regime forces, and Israel is using the long arm of its air force.

In 2003 I wrote a column in the run-up to the U.S. toppling of Saddam Hussein, which I supported, in which I warned: "The first rule of any Iraq invasion is the pottery store rule: You break it, you own it. We break Iraq, we

own Iraq." So in Syria today, the abiding rule is, 'You own it, you fix it." And because no one wants to own responsibility for fixing Syria — a gargantuan project they all want to just rent their influence there.

They all want to use as many proxies or air power as possible to secure as much influence as possible and weaken the influence of their rivals as much as possible for as a cheap as possible. There is something very 21st century about this war.

But this is distressing. It means none of the local parties has enough power, resources — or willingness to compromise — to stabilize Syria from the bottom up, and none of the external parties is ready to invest enough power and resources to stabilize it from the top down.

The "good news," sort of, is that because everyone is so "loss averse" in Syria, it's less likely that any party will get too reckless. The Iranians and Hezbollah will most likely continue to prod and poke Israel, but not to such a degree that the Israelis do what they are capable of doing, which is to devastate every Hezbollah neighborhood in Lebanon and hit Iran's homeland with rockets; Israel knows that its high-tech corridor along its coastal plain would be devastated by Iranian rockets coming back.

The Turks don't want a war with America. America doesn't want a war with Russia, and the Russians just want to siphon off as much oil as they can from Syria, and use it as a base and an ego booster, without clashing with anyone — because they are much weaker than they look.

Maybe, eventually, the players will get tired and forge a power-sharing accord in Syria, as the Lebanese eventually did in 1989 to end their civil war. Alas, though, it took the Lebanese 14 years to come to their senses. So get ready for a lot more news from Syria.

#### In Iran, death by hanging

COHEN, FROM PAGE 1

Why delicate? Because nobody knows how to handle the succession to Khamenei, who is 78, has ruled for almost three decades and, as divine arbiter (a man standing in for the occulted 12th imam until his expected reappearance), embodies the antidemocratic intrusion of heaven on a system with a veneer of democratic institutions.

Women now chafing at compulsory use of hijabs, and tearing them off in public, are just one manifestation of exasperation with an ossified system. Far from revolutionary, the Islamic Republic is stuck, its internal contradictions more conspicuous than ever and much of its young population estranged.

Raised expectations induced by the lifting of sanctions that accompanied the 2015 nuclear deal have met incompetence, bank failures and corruption. At the same time, tensions have flared, particularly in Syria, with Donald Trump's United States, Mohammed bin Salman's Saudi Arabia, and Benjamin Netanyahu's Israel itching to fight Iran

Rouhani, in a speech this month marking the 39th anniversary of the Islamic Republic, suggested that if there were differences, 'We should refer to the vote of the people and a referen-dum.' That's unlikely to happen; it would be the death warrant of the regime. Still, its mere mention was auda-

Enter Emami, a man who returned to his country after the Revolution and fought in the war against Iraq; a family man with a quiet determination to usher the country to a better future; and a man in the wrong place at the wrong

"He fell victim as a pawn," Hadi Ghaemi, the executive director of the Center for Human Rights in Iran, told me. "The official account has no credibility. Why no autopsy? Why terrorize his family? Emami's death is an indication of the gathering storm in Iran."

In a written statement to The New York Times, Chrystia Freeland, the Canadian minister of foreign affairs, demanded an accounting. She said: "We are seriously concerned by the situation surrounding the detention and death of Mr. Seyed-Emami." Freeland continued: "A Canadian has died. We expect the Government of Iran to provide information and answers into the circumstances surrounding this tragedy."

Iranian authorities say Emami confessed to spying. They say they have a video of him preparing his suicide. Mohammad Javad Zarif will be at the Munich Security Conference this weekend. Perhaps he would elucidate on this unlikely sequence. Certainly, he should be pressed.

When I met Emami in 2009, at the height of the Green Movement for political change, he told me that the surging turnout meant that, "It's become impossible for Ahmadinejad to win 50 percent in the first round. And that means a second round."

This conclusion was based on scientific polling. The second round never happened, of course. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won a second presidential term in the first round - divine intervention. He proceeded to reward his Revolutionary Guard cronies, whose business interests saw a bonanza. A reckoning was deferred. But, as Emami's death suggests, it is inescapable one day because the Iranian people will demand it.

#### FROM READERS

#### A lesson from Britain?

Re "How Nations Recover," by David Brooks (column, Feb. 7):

While there are lessons to be learned from Britain's ability to revive itself, one should never forget that the racism against Irish Catholics was so pervasive during the Irish potato famine from 1845 to 1852 that more than a million Irish died and a million more were forced to emigrate because of the unwillingness of the British to see them as human

So even the most enlightened and politically adroit of political systems can still be guilty of the most unconscionable acts of inhumanity, and maybe that is the real lesson we can learn from this history. MICHAEL SCOTT, SAN FRANCISCO

**SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS** To submit a letter to the editor, email nytiletters@nytimes.com

#### **CORRECTION**

An Op-Ed essay "My Simple Italian Town Is at Risk of an Oscar" (Feb. 10) about the setting of "Call Me by Your Name" misstated where it was filmed. It was shot in and around Crema, Italy, not entirely in Crema. The article also mischaracterized the origin of the name of a character in the film. Mafalda is the name of a similar character in the book that inspired the film; the movie character was not named in tribute to the elderly woman whom the actor Timothée Chalamet befriended.



The New York Times

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# Culture

## In class, this topic is killer

Film enthusiasts devote themselves to the horror genre in a scholarly setting

BY ERIK PIEPENBURG

A figment of H. P. Lovecraft's wicked imagination, Miskatonic University is the Harvard of his horror stories. It appears to be a typical New England college, but elements of the occult are never far from the surface.

In contrast, at the Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies, which takes its name from the fictional university, frights are the reason it's alive.

During a recent class in the darkened hall at Film Noir, a microcinema in the New York City borough of Brooklyn that houses the real Miskatonic, the topic was "Penda's Fen," an obscure 1974 film about a boy who has encounters with an angel and a crucified Jesus. A ghost light illuminated the instructor's face.

Formed eight years ago in Canada but now existing in branches in New York and London and one set to open this fall in Los Angeles, Miskatonic is the brainchild of Kier-La Janisse, a film writer and programmer. Ms. Janisse started it after she grew tired of people dismissing horror "because they thought it was for complete morons," as she put it.

#### The Miskatonic Institute was formed eight years ago in Canada but now exists in branches in New York and London.

The institute has operated out of its current location in Brooklyn since September, offering courses led by writers, scholars, directors and others with a passion for the genre. This spring, classes in New York are about two and a half hours, and cost \$12 (in advance), \$15 (at the door) or \$50 for a semester pass. Teachers are paid. There are no homework assignments or tests, and students who attend every class both semesters are considered graduates.

"When I was a teenager, I hated school," Ms. Janisse, who lives in Toronto, said. "But I read Lovecraft and became obsessed with this idea of how we romanticized academic life, with scholars that worked in libraries and solved mysteries. It made me want to go back to

Ms. Janisse, the author of "House of Psychotic Women," about female neuroses in horror films, runs the Brooklyn Miskatonic branch with the writer Joe Yanick. Besides exploring film, classes this semester will cover the novelists John Gilmore and Shirley Jackson, and the preservation of genre cinema.

The Miskatonic course calendar would look at home in any film studies curriculum; its class this past Tuesday was called "Black Horror: The Revolutionary Act of Subverting the White Gaze." Its scholarly approach follows decades of horror studies that have produced influential texts like Carol J. Clover's "Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film." The field has its own journal, and there are stand-alone courses and webinars on the subject. But the institute is unique in its all-horror focus.

Sukhdev Sandhu, who taught the class on "Penda's Fen," said the school was an

example of "underground scholarship." "People are creating spaces in their living rooms affordably and cheaply in order to create a different model of education, and Miskatonic is part of that," said Mr. Sandhu, an associate professor of English at New York University, where he runs the Colloquium for Un-

popular Culture. But Miskatonic is also tapping into the golden age of horror in the wider culture, propelled in part by the Oscar-nominated films "Get Out" and "The Shape of Water." Adam Lowenstein, a professor of English and film and media studies at the University of Pittsburgh, cited



Miskatonic as one of many passionate players in "a watershed moment for the study of the horror film." This fresh academic embrace dovetails enthusiastically with the new vogue for horror, which hasn't resonated with such urgency since 1968, the year of "Night of the Living Dead" and "Rosemary's Baby," Mr. Lowenstein said.

"To understand the change, it would be like if 'Night of the Living Dead' got an Academy Award nomination like

'Get Out' did," said Mr. Lowenstein, the author of "Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema and the Modern Horror Film.'

"That's mind-boggling, and thrilling," he added.

What's different now is a new generation of horror filmmakers who are hitting the raw nerves exposed by current social movements. A feminist critique of horror has long been a staple of horror studies, thanks to the genre's fixation on

male villains and female victims. But with Jordan Peele's "Get Out." a "Twilight Zone"-style indictment of liberal racism, it's race that's most prominently capturing scholarly attention.

The writer Dianca London Potts, who is teaching Miskatonic's "Black Horror" class, said Mr. Peele's film was a so-

bering conversation starter. "The movie creeped me out in a way I haven't experienced since the original 'The Hills Have Eyes,' " she said, mentioning Wes Craven's 1977 exploitation shocker about a family terrorized by psychopaths. "There's something so terrifying about what we do as a people. Now because of 'Get Out,' people are willing to sit with being uncomfortable."

And that, Ms. Janisse said, is good news for Miskatonic and its quest for a "balanced education" of history, theory, production and, perhaps most impor-

tant, community building. "A lot of us come from a place where

Clockwise from above: the Film Noir Cinema in New York, where the Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies holds classes: a scene from "Penda's Fen." the topic of a recent class; and horror-themed

horror was maligned," she said. "But in the classroom, people are enthusiastic

Derek Boeckelmann of Brooklyn, a student in the "Penda's Fen" class — his third at Miskatonic — said he grew up watching horror movies. A film studies graduate of the University of California, Santa Barbara, he said horror was being taken more seriously in part because it was where box-office success met the political consciousness of the Black

Lives Matter and #MeToo movements. "There's this spotlight on horror because the genre is good for a lot of the social stuff, like 'Get Out,' " he said. "It's a great genre for female directors and

And for parents who question the validity of a film studies class: Mr. Lowenstein said it could be quite beneficial.

"Because horror films have a vocabulary for the horrific, the painful, the traumatic, the things we don't want to look at or see or think about, they really give us an invaluable opportunity to understand and perhaps change the things in ourselves and our society that need changing," he said. "Horror is healthy."

## Love, betrayal and a little cannibalism

**OPERA REVIEW** PHILADELPHIA

An opera about the making of a medieval manuscript is turbulent yet subdued

BY ZACHARY WOOLFE

"Written on Skin," an opera about the creation of an illuminated manuscript, isn't an open book. At my first live encounter with this 2012 work, at the Academy of Music here for the pre-miere of a new staging by Opera Phila-delphia that runs through Sunday, I was struck by how reserved George

Benjamin's score is.

Not that there aren't passages of loud density or idiosyncratic instrumentation — a typewriter, pebbles, sets of small tablas and glass harmonica augment the traditional orchestra — but on the whole the music gives the sense of being artfully curbed. It's as though "Pelléas et Mélisande" or

"Wozzeck" had been partly quieted, even half-vaporized, the roiling energy kept — and sometimes not — at bay. Will Kerley's stage direction in Philadelphia amplifies this impression of reticence concealing glinting, surging colors. The set, designed by Tom Rogers, is a giant gray box that rotates on a turntable and reveals, as doors open and walls push aside, a labyrinth of shifting spaces: raw wood incom-pletely painted a radiant blue and studded with panels with the jewel

tones of stained glass. This is the home of a married couple in medieval times. The wife (referred to sometimes as the Woman, sometimes as Agnès) is restive; the husband (the Protector), controlling. Commenting on and guiding the action from our own moment, and dressed in this staging in futuristic, Sprocketsstyle black, is a trio of angels, vaguely sinister in its affectlessness. One of the three doubles as the Boy, who enters the household under commission to depict the Protector's dominion in

images and letters.



The Protector (Mark Stone) and his wife (Lauren Snouffer) in "Written on Skin."

Representing the world in art is portrayed by Mr. Benjamin and the librettist, the playwright Martin Crimp, as a complex, empowering, exposing, explosive, inevitably destructive enter-

prise. (Their next opera, "Lessons in Love and Violence," will have its premiere in London in May.) Agnès, her mind fired with new possibilities, begins an affair with the Boy. When

they're discovered — the Protector, of course, reads about it in the book - he is murdered and she, after a cannibalistic climax that suggests "Salome" and "Titus Andronicus," kills herself. A coda reflects on the angels' "cold fascination with human disaster.

A story about a woman's defiant emergence into selfhood and her repression by a brutal husband obviously resonates differently now than it did just a year ago. But the detached, enigmatic text keeps our sympathies distant and implicates our own fascination with disaster as much as it does the patriarchy it shows in action. We perceive onstage not personalities but vivid puppets, drawn to their doom by forces outside themselves.

Pity is particularly hard to summon in this new production, which conceives the central couple as more aristocratic, in a Disney "Sleeping Beauty" way, than the rough, flinty country gentry imagined by Katie Mitchell's staging, in which the opera was first seen, captured on DVD and widely traveled. Barbara Hannigan,

the Agnès in that premiere version, gave a performance of virtuosic vulnerability — dirty and wide-eyed.

In Philadelphia, the penetrating soprano Lauren Snouffer is more poised and self-possessed, more equal to her husband (the baritone Mark Stone, booming even in desperation) in presence if not in rights. As the Boy and First Angel, the countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo adroitly navigates the luminous and piercing, the gentle and chilly sides of his two-sided character.

Corrado Rovaris leads a muted account of the score — a coolly paced, gravish take that emphasizes the opera's aloofness more than its expressiveness or range.

It's not the most richly satisfying conducting. But the excellent cast and resourceful staging further burnish the reputation of Opera Philadelphia, a company that, with the recent inauguration of an annual fall festival focusing on new work, has swiftly become one of the most creative and ambitious in the United States.

## Pondering a move rightward in Europe

THEATER REVIEW

A play about an actress doing a voice-over job echoes and re-echoes

BY BEN BRANTLEY

"It's not theater."

So says the director to the actress. Spoken with jokey reassurance, this disclaimer is delivered in the opening moments of "Returning to Reims," an all-too-timely rumination on workingclass disaffection and nationalist politics from the German director Thomas Ostermeier, running through Feb. 25 at St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn.

What Paul (Bush Moukarzel), the director, means is that the performer, Katy (Nina Hoss), needn't worry about fluffing lines. After all, they're in a studio where she'll be recording the voice-over for a film by Paul, and mistakes can be erased with the flick of a dial.

But audiences familiar with the work of Mr. Ostermeier, and his Schaubühne Berlin company, may hear a different, more confrontational meaning in Paul's words. Mr. Ostermeier, whose productions of classics like "Richard III" (seen at the Brooklyn Academy of Music last fall) seemed not so much to push envelopes as to rip them apart, is celebrated for redefining how theater should behave.

But even his longtime fans are unlikely to be prepared for the seeming noneventfulness of the first half of "Returning to Reims," adapted from a 2009 memoir by the French philosopher Didier Eribon. Most of what happens during that hour seems to be willfully, even numbingly anti-dra-

The spectacle, such as it is, consists almost entirely of Ms. Hoss reading the words of Mr. Eribon, while annotative video footage (some featuring Mr. Eribon himself) is projected onto a large screen behind her. It's true that a lot of what is said — about the disavowal of progressive politics by the blue-collar provincial society from which Mr. Eribon emerged (and escaped) - provides rich food for

It is also true that Ms. Hoss, best known to American audiences for playing Astrid the German spy on the Showtime series "Homeland," is an attention-worthy narrator. She reads in a low-pitched, deceptively neutral voice that inflects ostensible objectivity with the slightest whisper of lamen-

The charisma of its central interpreter aside, what distinguishes "Returning" from a presentation at an academic conference or perhaps, given its European glamour quotient, Davos? The answer emerges by furtive degrees, in ways that remind us that what is being discussed here is by no means just academic. The show is definitely worth seeing, but you may not think so until after it's over.

The production, which is performed in English, was conceived by Ms. Hoss in response to the election of Donald J. Trump as president of the United States. Like many members of the urban intelligentsia, Ms. Hoss was surprised and alarmed by the sharp rightward turn among American voters, which reflected a similar political drift in her native Germany and throughout Europe

She found that Mr. Eribon's memoir expanded thoughtfully on similar questions. Like Eduoard Louis's bestselling French novel, "The End of Eddy" (2014), "Returning to Reims" portrays a gay, bookish youth growing up in a provincial, blue-collar town where homosexuality and intellectualism are anathema.

The adult Mr. Eribon, now living in Paris, revisits that world after the death of his father. It is a journey that prompts its own, outward-reaching odyssey of self-examination.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SARA KRUI WICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Top, Nina Hoss in "Returning to Reims" as the actress Katy, reading the words of the French philosopher Didier Eribon while video footage is projected behind her. Above, Ms. Hoss with Bush Moukarzel as her director.

How, he wonders, did the sort of people who religiously voted Communist when he was growing up among them come to support the populist National Front of Marine Le Pen? Mr. Eribon further considers how the

intellectual left, his adopted tribe, has contributed to such alienation, even to the point of waging "an implacable

war" against blue-collar interests. Mr. Eribon's language may be academic, but it is infused with anguished

passion. And it soon becomes clear that those involved with the stage version of "Returning" — and by that I mean both its characters and their creators — take this material very personally.

As she reads into the microphone. Katy reveals intermittent flickers of uneasiness — not with Mr. Eribon's words but with how Paul has edited them, and with the accompanying footage. She interrupts, tentatively at first, with her objections. Paul and Toni (Ali Gadema), who runs the studio, point out that they have deadlines to

It soon becomes clear that those involved — both the characters and their creators — take this material very personally.

"That's insane," she says to the men. "We're doing a political movie here and you can't have a political discussion?"

Those of us watching from our seats may extrapolate that since Ms. Hoss and associates are doing a political play, shouldn't we too be part of the political discussion? Of course, we should. And we are.

From that point, the fourth wall between stage and audience becomes increasingly porous. Comments and asides are now occasionally and casually pitched directly to the house. Toni turns out to have a sideline as a rapper, and he performs for us with support from Paul.

In other words, the line between us and them becomes blurrier, making us think about the bigger, class-oriented

division between another Us and Them at the heart of this production. Speaking of which, is Paul's interpretation of Mr. Eribon's book itself guilty of intellectual dishonesty?

We find ourselves newly contextualizing earlier encounters among Katy, Paul and Toni, which had a whiff of sexual and professional condescension. It is Katy, as a woman and actress, who is mostly the recipient of such atti-

But it is also she who prevails. By the end, she is presenting what amounts to her own film, an account of the life of a German political activist and idealist of optimistically expanding vistas and pursuits. His name is Willi Hoss, and he is the father of the actress Nina Hoss

As I said, "Returning" takes its politics personally.

In the viewing, this production is rarely exciting in the terms of conventional drama. Nor is its portrayal of the creation of a film entirely credible. But it's smart in expressly theatrical ways, and its effectiveness is subliminal. Even the seeming somnolence of Ms. Hoss's voice-over narration has its

Ideas have been planted in your head without your even being aware of it, as if while you were sleeping. The conversation conducted on such different levels on the stage is likely to keep talking, and talking, in your head the next morning.

## Two tales in tune in a deft debut

**BOOK REVIEW** 

**ASYMMETRY** By Lisa Halliday. 275 pp. Simon & Schuster. \$26.

BY PARUL SEHGAL

Anthropologists studying a tribe in southern Africa in the 1970s distinguished between two kinds of stories: those told during daylight — gossipy anecdotes, your average water-cooler chat — and those told at night. Around the fire, stories turned starkly philo-sophical, full of allusions to the ances-tors and the spirit world. Nighttime tales seemed to speak to a different

Among the abundant pleasures of "Asymmetry," a scorchingly intelligent first novel by Lisa Halliday, is that it satisfies both these appetites — it's a clever comedy of manners set in Manhattan as well as a slowly unspooling tragedy about an Iraqi-American family, which poses deep questions about

free will, fate and freedom, the all-powerful accident of one's birth and how life is alchemized into fiction. The first section follows Alice, a 20-something assistant at a publishing house, as she tumbles down a rabbit hole of a relationship with Ezra Blazer, a literary eminence 40 years her senior who bears a terrifically unabashed

resemblance to Philip Roth (with

whom Halliday had a relationship whìle in her 20s). For all the obvious imbalances in their relationship, the pair meet at a moment when they're both at a precipice. Alice longs to fully enter the world, to write and create: Ezra struggles with leaving it, his body starting to break down. Each becomes the custodian of the other's dignity. He pays off her student loans and teaches her how to pronounce Camus. She picks up his Mylanta from the drugstore and gets him a new cord for his reading glasses. They watch baseball in bed together and talk writing. "If

there's a gun hanging on the wall in the

first chapter, in a later chapter it must

go off," Ezra instructs Alice, passing along Chekhov's famous rule. She responds in her customary deadpan, "If there's a defibrillator hanging on the wall in the first chapter, in a later chapter must it go off?" (Does it ever.) In the distance, there is the rumbling of the American invasion of Iraq.

It's a fresh twist on a familiar story — a May-December romance that so shrewdly anticipates and skirts expectations, I would not have minded if the novel had trundled along in this vein for another 200 pages. ("Asymmetry" joins a group of recent acclaimed debuts by women that revolve around the theme of a young woman, usually a would-be writer who takes up with an older male artist — Sally Rooney's "Conversations With Friends" and Hermione Hoby's "Neon in Daylight," to name just two. The younger woman, handmaiden to genius, has been such a curiously central *and* peripheral figure in fiction; it's as if she's being energetically reclaimed.) But Halliday shifts

course, and the book's scope widens. We're transported to a holding room



CALOGERO RUSSO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES Lisa Halliday.

in London's Heathrow Airport, where Amar, an Iraqi-American economist, has been detained on his way to Kurdistan to see his brother. This section is delivered in first person, and by a narrator as different from sweet, somnolent Alice as you can imagine. Amar is introspective, given to scrutinizing his not only own motives but those of

everyone around him, of whole cultures — it's how he has survived, or has tried to, as he's watched his family and Iraq decimated by war.

The two stories never explicitly intersect. A third section, a radio interview with Ezra, hints at the link between them, but the game — and real pleasure — for the reader is to trace deeper resonances. What does it mean that these lives coexist? Alice in Manhattan, preoccupied with her erotic and intellectual ambitions, and Amar in Baghdad, watching his family's life being choked by checkpoints, travel restrictions and constant threat.

The questions that crop up — about the illusion of choice and the fateful hand of luck, of birth — form the philosophical core of the novel, but luckily they come to us largely through Amar, and are handled lightly, leavened by

his sarcasm, his mournful wit. As you search for the symmetries in "Asymmetry," you won't find one key that will unlock all its mysteries — this book is musical, not architectural in

structure; themes don't build on one

another as much as chime and rhyme, repeat and harmonize, so what we receive is less a series of thesis statements than a shimmering web of associations; in short, the world as we

You hunt for buried clues — the repeated references to a Stephen Crane quote, the mentions of an abortion. You do close readings of the fragments of "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" and "Eichmann in Jerusalem" that appear. On every page, you interrogate every detail: What are you doing here? Why do you matter? "Asymmetry" is not complicated, but it cannot be read complacently. Like it or not, it will make you a better reader, a more active noticer. It hones your

Toward the end of the book, a radio interviewer asks Ezra what it's like to grow old. He responds, "The short answer is that you go about your business reminding yourself to look at everything as though you're looking at it for the last time." Why wait? Halliday challenges us. Start now.

#### TRAVEL

## In land of innovative brews, less is more

**HEADS UP** 

Swedish capital sees an uptick in venues selling low-alcohol craft beers

BY INGRID K. WILLIAMS

To understand the rigidity — and some would say absurdity — of Sweden's alcohol laws, step inside a Systembolaget, a government-run liquor store, on a Saturday afternoon. It's predictable chaos because these shops are the only retailers permitted to sell beverages containing more than 3.5 percent alcohol by volume (A.B.V.). At precisely 3 p.m., the doors will shut until Monday morning, and anyone hoping to buy a bottle of wine for a spontaneous dinner party or a few beers for a Sunday cookout will be out of luck.

But increasingly, Stockholmers have other palatable options.

Grocery stores are allowed to sell what is known as folkol ("people's beer"), containing 2.8 percent to 3.5 percent A.B.V. Long maligned as tasteless, watered-down pilsners, these low-A.B.V. beers are now getting a reboot by craft brewers seeking to shake up the Swedish market. At the same time, a wave of new folkol-focused bars and bottle shops — all opened in the last two years — is fueling interest in this formerly low-prestige beverage.

In a country known for its innovative craft beer, which often are high-alcohol India pale ales or sour ales, this emerging trend in the opposite direction is being driven by Swedes' interest in healthier living, but it's also a way to skirt Sweden's strict alcohol laws. Whatever the reason, it's making the city's drinking scene notably livelier.

First up was Bottl3.5hop, which opened in June 2016 as a low-alcohol bottle shop, a designation that necessitates neither a liquor license nor a kitchen (Swedish regulations require that bars also serve food)

The shop doubles as a bar with lowalcohol beers on tap and a rotating assortment of about 120 different bottles from around the world.

At the forefront of the trend in Stockholm is Omnipollo, a beer producer founded here in 2011 by Henok Fentie



and Karl Grandin.

"For us, it's always been about getting as good beer as possible into as many hands as possible, to be frank," Mr. Fentie said. "We want to replace your average beer for something that's more

One of the top folkol options available right now is Omnipollo's Bianca Mango

Lassi Gose — "an Indian-beverage-inspired German-style sour beer, which sounds quite far-fetched, but it worked really well," he said.

shied away from low-A.B.V. beers for a very long time because part of the truth is that flavor does go hand in hand with higher A.B.V.s," continued Mr. Fentie, who has a reputation for brewing potent I.P.A.s and sublime stouts with double-digit A.B.V.s.

"But as we progressed as brewers and also as consumers, it's become more of an enticing challenge to try to create a lower A.B.V. beer that has a lot of flavor," he said.

"The other part of it is that we're parents," he said, and lower-A.B.V.s make western Sodermalm.

Left and above, customers at Omnipollo in Stockholm. Omnipollo, one of Sweden's

leading craft breweries, offers low-alcohol brews like Bianca Mango Lassi Gose, below.

"I think everybody has this mind-set that they want to drink for pleasure, not for effect," she said.

The couple, both former homebrewers, had noticed an uptick in quality of low-A.B.V. beers, especially among Swedish craft brewers such as Poppels, Oppigards, Brekeriet and Omnipollo.

"I realized there was a big trend going on with the folkol," she said. "More brewers were brewing it, and the quality was becoming better and better, and it still is to this day."

Folkolsbutiken, another bar and bottle shop that opened on Sodermalm in August 2016, is focused on promoting Nordic, primarily Swedish, brewers.

Despite increased buzz, many fledgling craft breweries struggle to get their beers to consumers, said the owner, Johan Palo, noting the difficulty of landing a spot in Systembolaget's inventory.

To introduce flavorful folkol to a wider audience, Folkolsbutiken also has a beer bike pouring sour beers and low-alcohol I.P.A.s at Hornstulls Marknad, a weekend market open April through Septem-

"It's a coincidence that we opened at the same time," said Mr. Palo of his fellow folkol-focused establishments. "But it definitely says something about how Swedes want to drink now.'

#### Stately, stylish accommodations

**CHECK IN** 

BY RATHA TEP

BRISTOL HARBOUR HOTEL & SPA, **BRISTOL, ENGLAND** 

Doubles from 165 pounds (about \$230)

The 42-room, four-story Bristol Harbour Hotel & Spa provides a dose of 21st century chic to Bristol's Old City and its stately Victorian and Georgian facades. The British-based Harbour Hotels has turned two ornate bank buildings, including one inspired by a 16th-century Venetian library, into stylish accommodations. It opened in late 2016. Public spaces now burst with vibrant colors and exuberant modern design set against a backdrop of curving stone walls and intricately carved friezes that are more than a century old.

The property is in the heart of the cobblestoned Old City just opposite St. Nicholas Market and its bustling glasscovered arcade, along with lots of restaurants, bars and night life. Most of Bristol's main attractions are within a 20-minute stroll, including the massive ocean liner-turned experiential museum S.S. Great Britain, the local history museum M Shed, the Wills Memorial Building, and two works of street art from the city's most notorious son, Banksy.

#### THE ROOM

We had booked a Superior Double, the lowest tier available, but got upgraded to a Deluxe Double, the next tier up. At 323 square feet (32 square feet more than a Superior), it was surprisingly roomy. The comfortable king-size bed had a tall tufted headboard and was topped with a fluffy white duvet, a tan and gray coverlet and plenty of pillows. Matte gold reading lamps flanked the bed, as did a wooden writing desk and nightstand. There was a burnt orange velvet sofa at the foot of the bed, as well as a brown leather armchair with a seat cushion upholstered in a bold floral-pat-terned fabric. The complimentary gin terned fabric. The complimentary gin and sherry, in month-blown glass de-canters, along with crystal glasses, were a nice touch. But despite a double-set of windows and heavily lined drapes, we could still hear the faint bass beat of a nearby club going late into the night.

THE BATHROOM The bathroom, entered by a set of double doors, was amply sized, with a bathtub and separate, spacious stall with a rainfall shower head. There was an extra-wide sink and plenty of marble

counter space. Numerous thick white towels hung from a heated rack, and





The Bristol Harbour Hotel & Spa, which opened in 2016. Above, the Gold Bar.

plush white bathrobes were also provided. High-end toiletries by the White Company were scented with notes of rose and jasmine.

AMENITIES Situated in the former bank vaults underground, the hotel's small spa offers a

hydrotherapy pool, sauna and steam room that are free for guests, while treatments such as hot stone massage cost extra. The next-door gym is well-equipped with treadmills, exercise bikes, weight machines — and an original bank vault door.

#### DINING

The lobby-level restaurant, the Jetty, is decorated in shades of blue, a reference to both Bristol blue glass, once produced throughout the city — it forms a decorative border around the room's extralarge windows — and the sea, which inspires much of the menu. Addictive, lightly floured cockle "popcorn" arrived

hot and crisp in a miniature copper pan, and lobster bisque topped a creamy cheese soufflé. The stylish Gold Bar served creative cocktails like the Clear and Breezy, a fizzy, zesty twist on the classic Dark 'n' Stormy. Our lush breakfast, ordered up to our room, included delicious grilled kippers with caper beurre noisette, and toast accompanied by butter served in a scallop shell and a selection of Wilkin & Sons jam and honey. Unfortunately, it took an agonizing 50 minutes to arrive.

#### **BOTTOM LINE**

The Bristol Harbour Hotel & Spa offers plush accommodations and high-gloss design in an Old World setting, conveniently located near many of the city's main attractions. Just make sure to bring earplugs.

Bristol Harbour Hotel & Spa, 55 Corn Street, Bristol, England. bristol-harbour-

#### **How to Understand Our Times The #MeToo Moment**

early mornings easier.

The ability to enjoy a beer without the

attendant side effects was also part of

the appeal for Alli McCleary Olin, a Ten-

nessee native who in December 2016 opened Folk & Friends, a dog-friendly

folkol cafe on Kungsholmen, with her

husband, Victor. A second location is

scheduled to open later this winter in

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