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CAUGHT IN THE MATRIX
by Adam Gopnik

THE NEW YO

THE AIDS REVOLT

How a former male prostitute became the most significant protest leader in South Africa since Nelson Mandela. Samantha Power reports

The Sheik and his lovers

Thomas Mallon on the Rudolph Valentino legend

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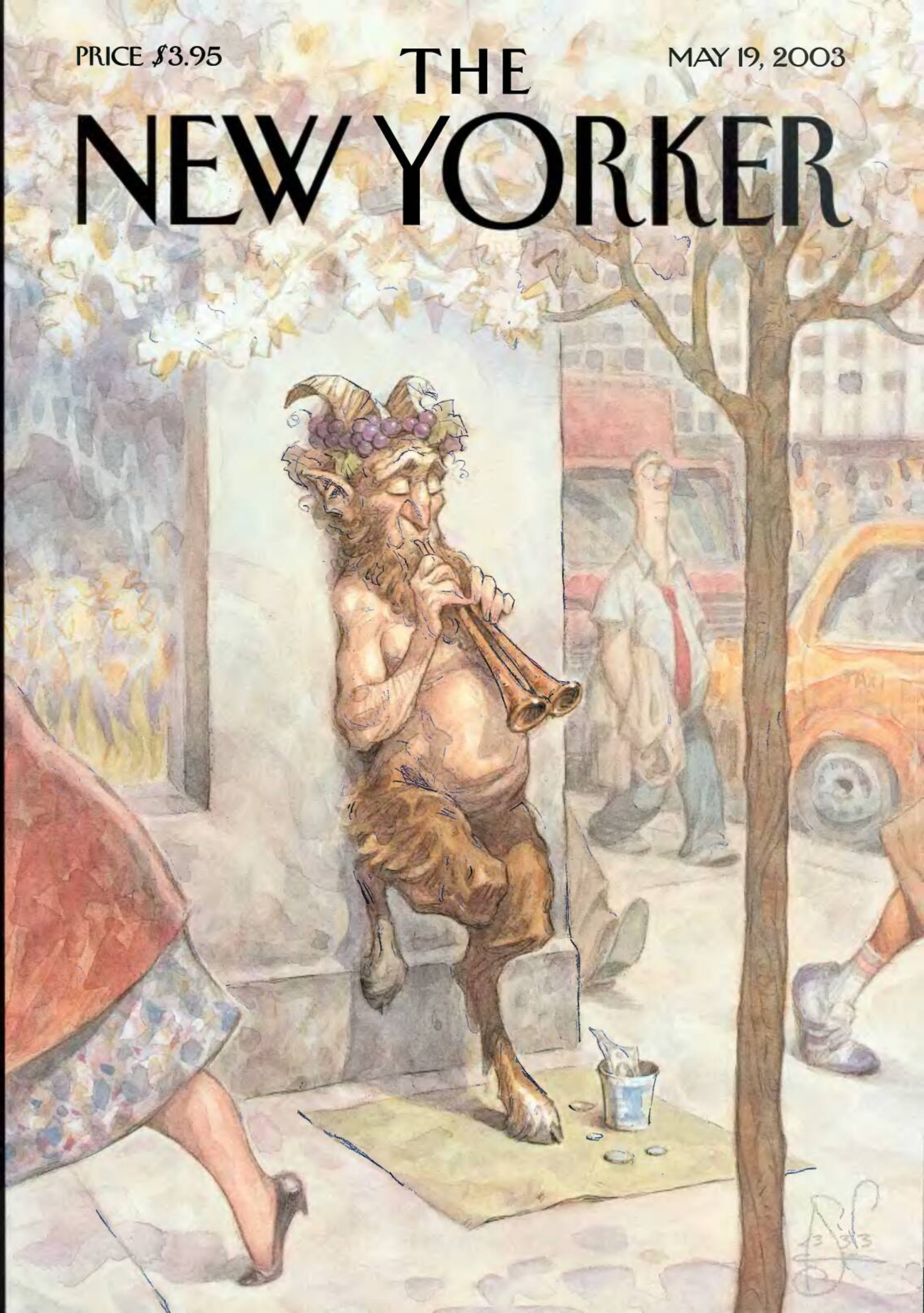
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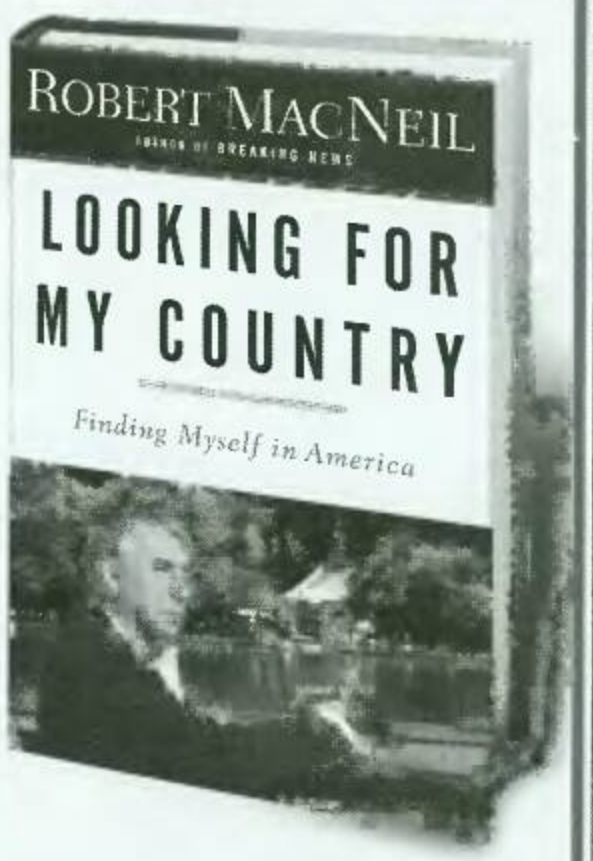
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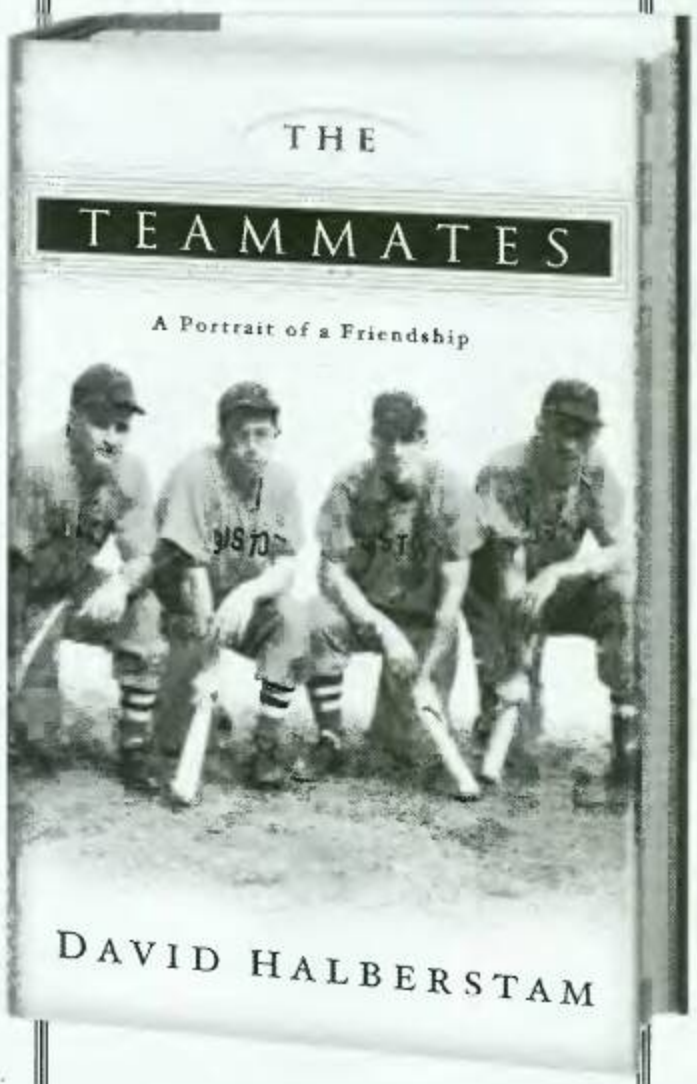
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CONTRIBUTORS

Samantha Power ("The AIDS Rebel," p. 54) won this year's Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction for her book "'A Problem from Hell': America and the Age of Genocide."

Christopher Buckley (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 44) is the author of, most recently, "Washington Schlepped Here."

Elizabeth Kolbert ("Accountants in the Sky," p. 38) writes about New York politics for the magazine.

Les Murray (Poem, p. 64) has published eleven collections of poetry, including "Poems the Size of Photographs."

David Bezmozgis (Fiction, p. 74) is a writer and filmmaker living in Toronto. His first collection of short stories will be published in 2004.

Calvin Tomkins ("The Mission," p. 46) writes about art and cultural affairs for the magazine. His books include "Living Well Is the Best Revenge" and "Duchamp: A Biography."

Adam Gopnik ("The Unreal Thing," p. 68) is a staff writer and the author of "Paris to the Moon," which has now been published in paperback.

Thomas Mallon (Books, p. 84) is a novelist and critic. His books include "In Fact: Essays on Writers and Writing."

Lorrie Moore (Books, p. 88) has published two novels and three collections of short stories, including "Birds of America" and "Like Life."

Alex Ross (Annals of Show Business, p. 90) is the magazine's music critic. ♦



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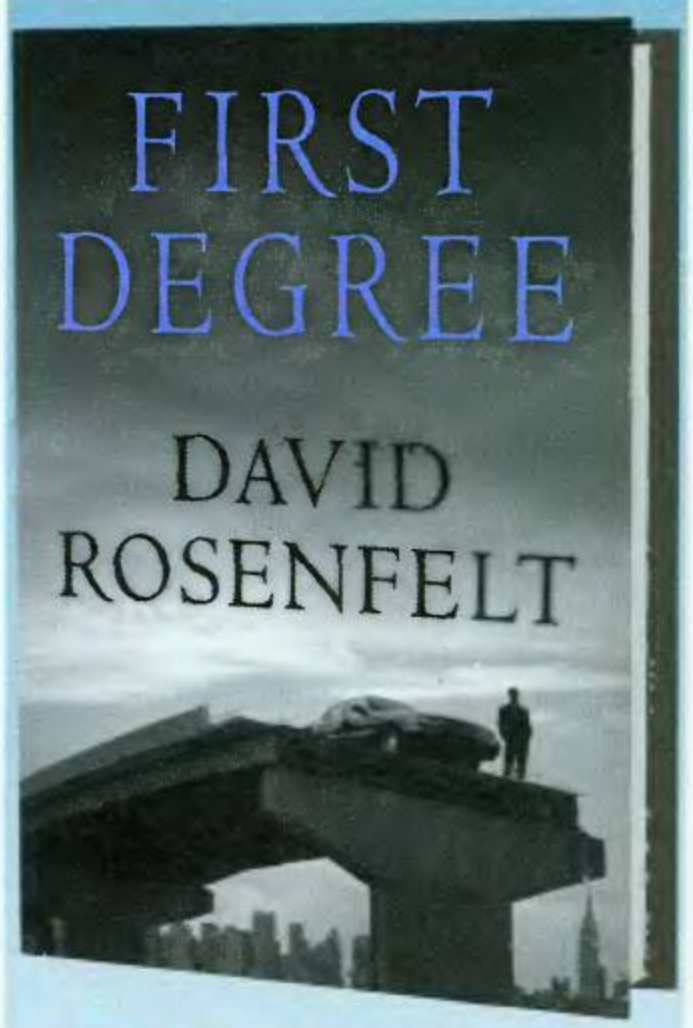
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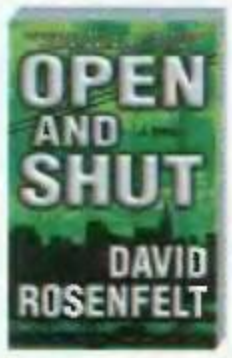
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A SURGEON'S DOUBTS

Atul Gawande's Profile of the surgeon Francis Moore offers a vivid portrayal of a now quite distant era of medical research ("Desperate Measures," May 5th). Doctors like Moore were virtually unrestrained by the rules, procedures, and ethical guidelines that now prevail. Moore's refusal for much of his career to respect limits led him, as Gawande relates, to perform groundbreaking experiments. But the part of the story that is particularly remarkable is the account of how Moore came to reconsider the need for constraints on researchers, ultimately deciding to champion them. The recognition that vital research can and should be pursued within such boundaries may have been his most lasting contribution.

J. Russell Claybrook
New Hampton, N.Y.

Gawande's article recalls a time when a patient's death was an outcome that physicians such as Francis Moore were willing to take any risk to avoid. Their "desperate measures" led to great advances, ushering in an era where recovery from illness is presumed, rather than hoped for. But today, with the managed-care system putting a premium on monetary costs, decisions as to what is medically necessary are often no longer even made by treating physicians. Given the government's emphasis on national standardization and the desire of private carriers to increase profits, we may be entering a time when medical explorers will no longer be willing or able to enter uncharted territory.

Steven R. Shanin
Highland Park, Ill.

IT HAPPENED ON THE BUS

Adam Gopnik, in his observations of New York bus culture, remarks on the relative lack of great bus scenes in literature ("The People on the Bus," May 5th). In fact, some very dramatic bus scenes can be found in the first fifty pages of Saul Bellow's 1969 novel, "Mr. Sammler's Planet." Sammler spends time each day on the northbound No. 5 watching a black pickpocket in a camel-hair coat and designer sunglasses ply his trade. The fashionable thief, realizing that Sammler has been observing him, follows Sammler to the lobby of his building and exposes himself. This incident becomes a symbol of the barbarism of the city around which the rest of the novel revolves. The bus scenes are vividly described, as are the routes. Bellow also supports Gopnik's early suspicion that buses are for old people, and that they can offer some sense of safety in dangerous times. He describes the aging Sammler's fear of encountering the pickpocket again in these terms: "Buses were bearable, subways were killing. Must he give up the bus?"

Michael Wreszin
New York City

Gopnik writes that he had trouble finding unforgettable scenes involving New York City buses in the movies. But there are plenty of good ones. Just to glance at a few classic films: Buster Keaton in "The Cameraman," nonchalantly perched on the outside of an all too crowded bus; Jean Arthur in "Easy Living," riding upper deck only to disappear under a mink coat thrown off a penthouse terrace by millionaire Edward Arnold; or Judy Garland's bus ride up Fifth Avenue in Vincente Minnelli's "The Clock." And, if you count buses that are headed into and out of the city, there's also Audrey Hepburn bidding goodbye to her unlikely ex, Buddy Ebsen, at the bus station in "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and Claudette Colbert and Clark Gable taking a ride into town on the most famous bus in film history, in Frank Capra's "It Happened One Night."

Michael A. Kaplan
New York City

•

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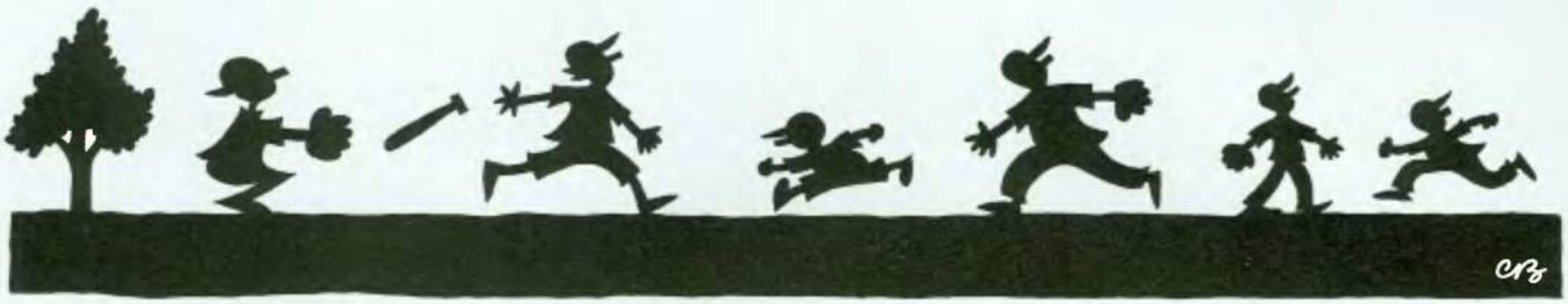
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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HUMBLE BOY
Manhattan Theatre Club presents the American première of a play by Charlotte Jones, loosely based on "Hamlet" and set in Cambridge, England. Blair Brown, as Flora Humble, and Jared Harris, as her son, Felix, lead the cast, which also includes Mary Beth Hurt and Paul Hecht. Directed by John Caird. Sets and costumes by Tim Hatley. In previews. Opens May 18 at 7:30. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

MASTER HAROLD . . . AND THE BOYS
Danny Glover returns to Broadway in a revival of Athol Fugard's 1982 play about a white South African boy's friendship with two black servants. Directed by Lonny Price (who played the boy back in 1982). With Michael Boatman and Christopher Denham. In previews. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

MESHUGAH
A play by Emily Mann, based on the novel by Isaac Bashevis Singer, concerns a love triangle among Jewish émigrés in Manhattan in the nineteen-fifties. Directed by Loretta Greco. One preview on May 14. Opens May 15 at 8. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

MOLLY'S DREAM
Daniel Aukin directs a play with music by Maria Irene Fornes, about a waitress whose encounter with a stranger spurs a fantastical dream. In previews. Opens May 16 at 7:30. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 212-868-4444.)

RAIN DANCE
The Signature Theatre Company presents the New York première of a new play by Lanford Wilson, set in Los Alamos, New Mexico, in 1945, on the eve of the creation of the atom bomb. The cast includes Randolph Mantooth, Suzanne Regan, James Van Der Beek, and Harris Yulin. Guy Sanville directs. In previews. Opens May 20 at 7. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

ROMOLA AND NIJINKSY
A new play by Lynne Alvarez tackles the stormy marriage of Vaslav Nijinsky (David Barlow) and Romola De Pulsky (Kelly Hutchinson). Directed by David Levine, with choreography by Robert La Fosse. One preview on May 14. Opens May 15 at 7. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

WRITER'S BLOCK
Woody Allen directs a double bill of his two new one-act comedies, "Riverside Drive" and "Old Saybrook," with an ensemble cast that includes Bebe Neuwirth, Paul Reiser, and Jay Thomas. In previews. Opens May 15 at 7:30. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

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OPENED RECENTLY

AMERICAN MAGIC
In a satiric new play by Gil Kofman, a mind reader at a birthday gala for the President of the United States plies his art too well and falls victim to the post-9/11 clash between civil liberties and national security. Directed by Matthew Wilder, with original music by Lee Ranaldo of Sonic Youth—and with the voice of the President supplied by the playwright Richard Foreman. (Altered Stages, 212 W. 29th St. 212-352-3101.)

CAVEDWELLER
After her boyfriend dies in a motorcycle accident, the rock star Delia Byrd (Deirde O'Connell) leaves her California home with her daughter Cissy (Merritt Wever) to return to Cairo, Georgia, hoping to reclaim two other daughters she had abandoned years earlier. Kate Moira Ryan adapted this new play from Dorothy Allison's 1998 novel, and she and the director Michael Greif use supertitled excerpts from the book to complement the action. Stories of this scope are usually reserved for the big and small screens, but in spite of a certain narrative unwieldiness, "Cavedweller" is engrossing, and even piercing—especially when it travels into the local caves. With terrific new rock songs, as background music, by Stephen Trask. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200. Closes June 1.)

GYPSY
Bernadette Peters's performance as Mama Rose is a marvel, a startling reinvention of the musical warhorse created by Arthur Laurents, Jule Styne, and Stephen Sondheim. Other Mamas—such as Rosalind Russell and Ethel Merman—spotlighted Rose's resentments, but Peters humanizes the character, making her vulnerable and occasionally decent. Instead of competing with her two daughters, she is visibly delighted when they tear up the stage. Heather Tepe, as the preteen "Dainty June," sings and dances with captivating hysteria, and Addison Timlin plays her dreamy, slow-moving sister, Louise. As the grown-up Louise, who becomes the stripper Gypsy Rose Lee, Tammy Blanchard is a coquette, but a nice one. The director Sam Mendes has treated the show more as a play with music than as a musical. The actors don't ingratiate themselves with the audience or try to knock their socks off; Mendes wants the audience to think instead—perhaps too much—about the world he has created for the characters. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/12/03.) (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE INDIAN WANTS THE BRONX
A revival of Israel Horovitz's play about two boys from Washington Heights who run into an Indian man stars the Dell-computer dude Benjamin Curtis as Murphy—a role originated in 1968 by Al Pacino. (Common Basis Theatre, 750 Eighth Ave. 212-505-2599. Closes May 18.)

KIKI AND HERB: COUP DE THÉÂTRE
The camp duo deliver their self-described "bruising vocal style," sodden with glitz, at the Cherry Lane, in an open-ended engagement. With Justin Bond (Kiki) and Kenny Mellman (Herb). Directed by Scott Elliott. (Reviewed in this issue.) (38 Commerce St. between Bedford and Hudson. 212-239-6200.)

KOLTÈS NEW YORK 2003
Four plays by the French writer Bernard Marie Koltès, who died of AIDS in Paris in 1989, at the age of forty-one, have been translated into English, and play in repertory throughout the month of May at the Ohio Theatre. Titles include "West Pier," "Roberto Zucco," "Battle of Black and Dogs," and "In the Solitude of Cotton Fields." (66 Wooster St. 212-966-4844. Through May 31.)

THE LADIES OF THE CORRIDOR
A remarkable 1953 play by Dorothy Parker and Arnaud d'Usseau, revived by the Peccadillo Theatre Company, proves that Parker was the mistress of much more than the acid one-liner. The drama unfolds in a hotel not unlike the Algonquin, where six discarded women live in not so quiet desperation. Peggy Cowles gives a gripping performance as a genteel matron who blackmails her middle-aged son into living with her, Patricia Randell is riveting as an alcoholic wife who fled her philandering husband, and Susan Jeffries is painful to watch, but excellent, as a widow who ruins a romance with a much younger man—well played by Kelly AuCoin. All the actors are strong; it's a testament to their powers that the apricot poodle, Sassy, doesn't steal the show. Directed with Mankiewicz flair by Dan Wackerman. (Bank Street Theatre, 155 Bank St. 212-561-9635. Closes May 25.)

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT
Vanessa Redgrave and Brian Dennehy are Mary and James Tyrone, and Philip Seymour Hoffman and Robert Sean Leonard are their sons, in a new production of Eugene O'Neill's family drama, directed by Robert Falls. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE LOOK OF LOVE
The Roundabout Theatre Company presents a musical revue of the songs of Burt Bacharach and Hal

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David. Directed by Scott Ellis and choreographed by Ann Reinking. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
The acclaimed Aquila Theatre Company brings Shakespeare's comedy to the New Victory, set during the fin de siècle, with a French-impressionist-influenced lighting scheme. Robert Richmond directs. (209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Closes May 18.)

NEW BOY
A bittersweet, comic play about the hormonal miseries of adolescent boys at a private school, based on a novel by the British writer William Sutcliffe, stars Neil Henry and Todd Swenson. Russell Labey, who adapted the book, directs. (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Closes May 18.)

NINE
In this elegant revival of Arthur Kopit and Maury Yeston's 1982 musical—an adaptation of Fellini's "8½"—Antonio Banderas plays Guido Contini, a film director whose genius is inextricable from his childlike narcissism. Good-looking, confident, and amusing, Banderas has a European restraint that only magnifies his passionate nature. He doesn't have to strain to make the audience believe that he is catnip to women. He also has a fine voice. The other characters are satellites around Planet Guido: his put-upon wife (Mary Stuart Masterson), his battle-axe producer (Chita Rivera), and his tenacious and lubricious mistress, Carla (Jane Krakowski), who descends semi-nude from the rafters. Directed by David Leveaux, with a high-tech set (featuring an impressive spiral staircase) by Scott Pask. (4/21 & 28/03) (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND
Jonathan Ames stars in a revival of Eric Bogosian's play, a sparely staged diary of a neurotic New Yorker who descends into madness. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-477-5288. Closes May 25.)

PRIVATE JOKES, PUBLIC PLACES
Oren Safdie's X-Acto-blade-sharp new comedy is a scream—although the scream doubles as a cry of indignation. The son of the architect Moshe Safdie, the playwright has evidently had ample opportunity to spy on the architectural community's puffery and sexism, and here he exposes the emperor's new blueprints for all to see. It's a short, tight play, more of a manifesto than a drama, in which two preening European architects critique the model built by a young Asian-American student, Margaret (M. J. Kang), taking more interest in her breasts than in her work. David Chandler and Graeme Malcolm create delicious caricatures as the pompous sages. Shrewdly directed by Craig Carlisle. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. Closes May 18.)

STONE COLD DEAD SERIOUS
Adam Rapp's latest show is a dark new American Gothic: a portrait of a family floundering in the heartland. On the outskirts of Chicago, an alienated teen computer genius (Matt Stadelmann) decides to try to save his unemployed, pain-pill-popping dad, his overworked waitress mom, and his drug-addicted sister by hopping a bus to Manhattan and competing for the million-dollar prize in a video-game tournament. Irony notwithstanding, the script shows surprising tenderness. Carolyn Cantor directs the well-knit cast. (Chashama, 135 W. 42nd St. 212-206-1515. Closes May 17.)

URBAN COWBOY
This musical is big, brash, eager to please, and none too subtle. The story is the same as in the 1980 film with John Travolta and Debra Winger: small-town Texan comes to Houston, meets girl, falls in love, marries girl, then gets spooked by her need to ride the mechanical bull at the local beer hall. What the show lacks in depth the singers and dancers make up for with energy, verve, and well-toned calves and abs, but it's hard to feel anything strongly about the performers except that they are too heavily miked. With Matt Cavenaugh as Bud, Sally Mayes as his funny Aunt Corene, Jenn Colella as his girl, Sissy, and Marcus Chait as Wes, a sexy spoiler. Choreographed by Melinda Roy, with musical direction by Jason Robert Brown. Directed by Lonny Price. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4747.
BARBRA'S WEDDING
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.
BILL MAHER: VICTORY BEGINS AT HOME
Virginia, 245 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. (Closes May 18.)
BLUE MAN GROUP
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 212-254-4370.
LA BOHÈME
Broadway, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.
CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.
CHICAGO
Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.
A DAY IN THE DEATH OF JOE EGG
American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.
DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 212-239-6200.
LIFE (X) 3
Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 212-239-6200.
THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.
MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.
MAN OF LA MANCHA
Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.
LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes May 18.)
MOVIN' OUT
Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100.
THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
THE PLAY WHAT I WROTE
Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.
THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
PUPPETRY OF THE PENIS
John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.
RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-921-8000.
SALOME
Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.



Sarah East Johnson's Lava dancers in "High Tide," at Dance Theatre Workshop.

RUBEN TOLEDO

DREAM A LITTLE DREAM
Village, 158 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.
ENCHANTED APRIL
Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
THE EXONERATED
45 Bleecker Street Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.
FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.
42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.
GOLDA'S BALCONY
Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200. (Closes June 1.)
HAIRSPRAY
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.
THE LAST SUNDAY IN JUNE
Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.
SAY GOODNIGHT, GRACIE
Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 212-477-2477.
TAKE ME OUT
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.
TEA AT FIVE
Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.
THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.
TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes May 18.)
TRUMBO
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. (Mondays only. Closes June 16.)
URINETOWN
Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.

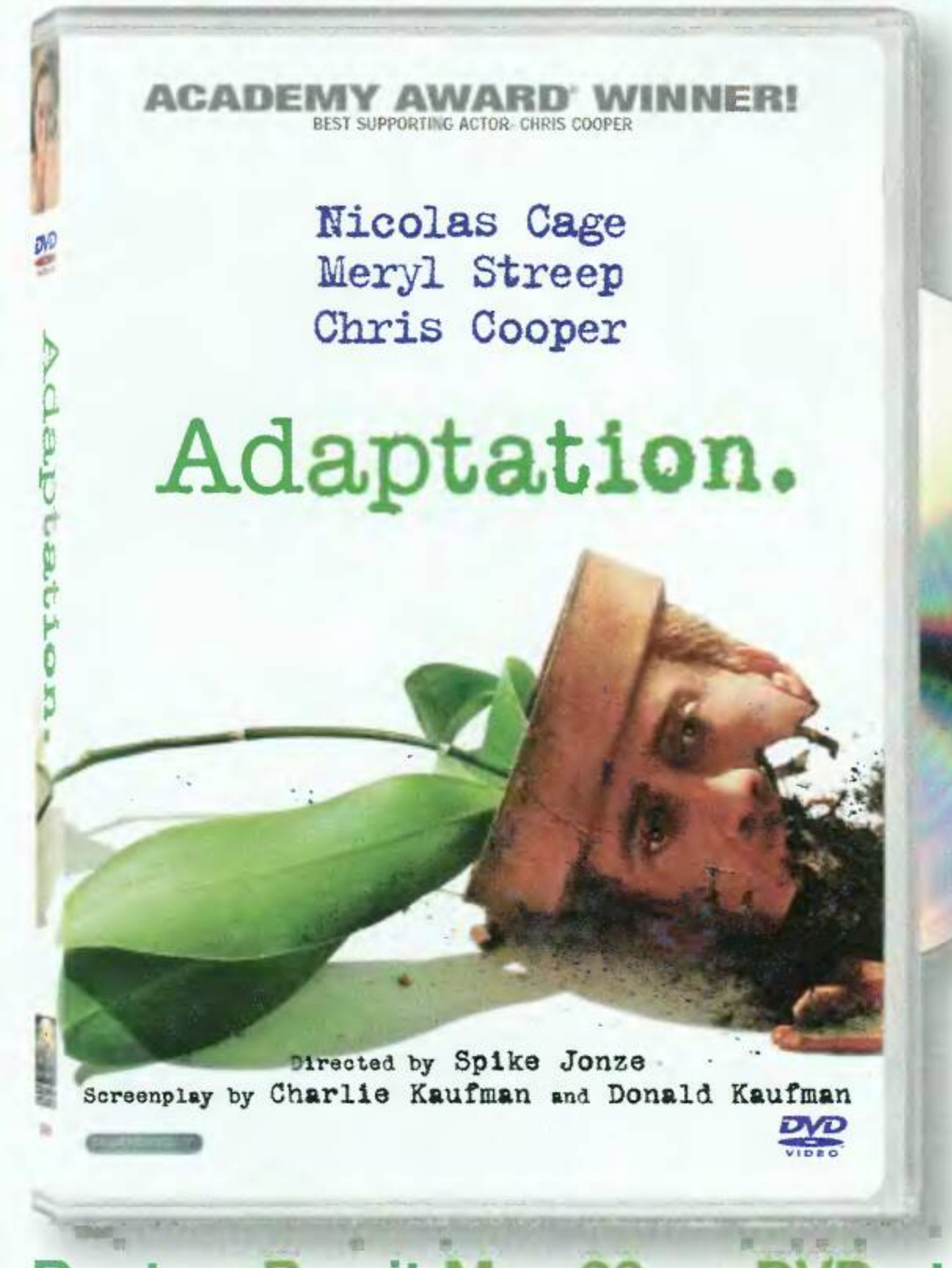
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Kenneth Turan, *LOS ANGELES TIMES*

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Peter Travers, *ROLLING STONE*

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ZANNA, DON'T!
John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Christopher Wheeldon's new ballet "Carnival of the Animals," set to the suite by Camille Saint-Saëns, has its première, along with a new Peter Martins ballet, "Guide to Strange Places," set to music by John Adams, who will conduct the first two performances. ♦ May 14 at 7:30: "Guide to Strange Places" (preview) and "Carnival of the Animals." ♦ May 15 at 8: "Hallelujah Junction," "Symphony in Three Movements," and "Guide to Strange Places." ♦ May 16 at 8 (an all-Balanchine program): "Donizetti Variations," "Agon," and "Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2." ♦ May 17 at 2: "Carnival of the Animals," "Sinfonia," "Concerto Barocco," and "Symphony in Three Movements." ♦ May 17 at 8: "Guide to Strange Places," "Concerto Barocco," "Sonatas and Interludes," and "Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2." ♦ May 18 at 3: "Donizetti Variations," "Carnival of the Animals," and "Agon." ♦ May 20 at 7:30: "Concerto Barocco," "Ives, Songs," and "Guide to Strange Places." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
Petipa's 1877 ballet "La Bayadère" ("The Temple Dancer") was little known outside Russia until a century later, when it was restaged by Makarova. Nominally set in India, the ballet has about as much to do with the Subcontinent as "Aïda" has to do with Egypt. As in the opera, the setting provides the backdrop for a bravura spectacle. A.B.T. presents Makarova's staging, with her glorious dance of the shades. The week also offers two premières. The first, "HereAfter," by Natalie Weir and Stanton Welch, is set to Orff's "Carmina Burana" and John Adams' "Harmonium" and sung by the New York Choral Society. The second, "Artemis," by Lar Lubovitch, falls within a gala celebration of Greek culture called "All Around Is Light," on May 20 at 8. Hosted by the filmmaker Costa-Gavras, the evening also includes filmed projections, singing, and readings by Grecophile luminaries. *Opa!* ♦ May 14 at 2 and 8 and May 15 at 8: "La Bayadère." ♦ May 16 and May 19 at 8 and May 17 at 2 and 8: "HereAfter." ♦ (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000. Through June 28.)

RENNIE HARRIS
Nobody brings hip-hop to the concert stage more convincingly than this b-boy from Philly. In "Facing Mekka," his latest evening-length work, Harris leaves behind his customary jaw-dropping stunts and combative inventiveness and travels toward a quieter, more sustained aesthetic. The head spins, flips, popping, and locking remain, but they're spread out and slowed down. Also, for the first time, half of the dancers are women. Set against murky video images of refugees and civil-rights confrontations, the work ends with a long, disjointed solo for Harris, his imposing body convulsing as if he were possessed. The effect is deeply spiritual, as is Darrin Ross's score for tabla, *berimbau,* and conga drums. The house rocks only when Kenny Muhammad starts beat-boxing, in an old-school display of virtuosity. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. May 13-16 at 8, May 17 at 2 and 8, and May 18 at 7:30.)

"AFROFUTURISTIC"
Tracie Morris, a Nuyorican Poets Café Grand Slam champion, has woven her rhymes into music and has written lyrics for the choreographer Ralph Lemon. Not until now, though, has she tried to bust a move herself. In "Afrofuturistic," Morris takes the stage with David Thomson to groove through several visions of the future, as she chants a densely allusive text that incorporates papal dispensations, James Brown, and the TV show "Bewitched." With live electronica and world-beat music by Graham Haynes, played by a seven-piece band. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. May 15-17 at 8. Through May 24.)

"HIGH TIDE"
Lava's season at Dance Theatre Workshop continues with Sarah East Johnson's thrilling choreography, in which six brawny women use acrobatics as a metaphor for emotional connection, flinging themselves fearlessly into feats of daring. (Bessie Schönberg Theatre, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. May 15-18 at 7.)

"GLOBAL EXCHANGE"
Intimate dramas unfold in a shared program of work by Amos Pinhasi, an Israeli living in New York, and André Gringas, a Canadian living in Amsterdam—part of Danspace's "Global Exchange" series. In his solo, "The House with the Red Roof," the willowy Pinhasi dances with a cardboard model



BEING JONATHAN AMES *In an engrossing revival of Eric Bogosian's one-act play "Notes from Underground," the comic writer and talker-about-town Jonathan Ames gives John Malkovich a run for his money as the possessor of the creepiest voice in show biz. Ames journeys from self-absorption to insanity in the course of seventy-five minutes, beginning as a harmless loner and ending as a garbage-sifting child abductor. Now at P.S. 122.*

of a house; his gestures suggest doves flying out its front door and tears being shed down its chimney. Gringas, a longtime Robert Wilson performer, presents "Primes," a piece for two dancers and one actor that was inspired by autistic twins who communicated through numbers. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. May 16-18 at 8:30.)

NETA DANCE COMPANY
In a whimsical new dance-theatre work at the Flea Theatre, Neta Pulvermacher celebrates a character called Rainbow Girl with eight dances that invoke the colors of the spectrum, set to Shubert piano impromptus played live by Sara Davis Buechner. Each hue is introduced by a kooky faux radio interview that ruminates on Rainbow Girl's polychrome mystique. In "Yellow," six dancers drop lemons on the floor, matching musical stresses in the score; in "Green," a romantic solo, the marvellous Brittany Reese moves her arms like ferns unfurling, and in the centerpiece, "Blue," Pulvermacher curls on the floor in a fluffy heap and shyly peeks out from under her crinolines. (41 White St. 212-226-2407. May 14 and May 16 at 7 and May 17 at 3 and 7.)

"LEMLUNAY"
Kinding Sindaw, the New York-based Philippine dance and martial-arts troupe, brings to life an epic myth from the Mindanao region of the Philippines—a sort of Asian-Pacific Camelot. Choreographed by Potri Ranka Manis and directed by Wayland Quintero, the dance takes place around a traditional Philippine longhouse called a *bong guno,* made of rattan, palm leaves, grass, and bamboo. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. May 15-17 at 7:30 and May 18 at 2:30 and 7:30.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

3 DOORS DOWN
This Mississippi quintet scored a hit back in 2000 with the glum albeit catchy ditty "Kryptonite." They seemed destined for the arid wasteland of one-hit-wonderdom until their recent pro-troops single, "When I'm Gone," yanked them back into relevance. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 212-307-7171. May 15 at 7:30.)

"HIGHLIGHTS IN JAZZ"
They both play jazz piano, but no one is about to confuse **McCoy Tyner** and **Dena DeRose,** the headliners on this double bill. The legendary Tyner—one of the most influential musical figures of the past half century—has pistons for fingers, and there's enormous gravity behind his every note. DeRose, who is also a singer, has a more decorous touch and a voice to match; her strength lies in her stealth. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 212-346-1715. May 15 at 8.)

VERIZON MUSIC FESTIVAL
With a helter-skelter mix of jazz, Latin, and R. & B. performers, this festival may not have a clear identity, but its A-list acts give it credibility. **George Benson** and **Dee Dee Bridgewater,** for example, play Alice Tully Hall on May 16 at 7:30. **India** and **Toño Rosario** are at the Copacabana (560 W. 34th St.) on May 16 at 10. **Erykah Badu** appears at the Apollo Theatre (253 W. 125th St.) on May 17 at 8. The festival ends with the **Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, Sherrie Maricle & the Diva Orchestra,** the **Donald Harrison** quintet, and the **Ray Vega Latin Jazz Sextet** performing outdoors on the plaza at Lincoln Center on May 18 at 4. For more information, call 212-501-1390.

"LOST JAZZ SHRINES"
Some jazz clubs are more than just jazz clubs. Barney Josephson's Café Society, a popular nightspot of the forties, was the first integrated club in the United States; no wonder it was the room in which Billie Holiday introduced "Strange Fruit" to the world. The first show in a three-part tribute to the club features the music of the tenor-saxophone giants Lester Young and Coleman Hawkins. The brilliantly idiosyncratic Chicago mainstay **Von Freeman** will do the horn honors, supported by the pianist **Barry Harris.** (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460. May 16 at 8.)

"ACOUSTIC EDGE"
Poignant songwriting from Lucy Kaplansky, John Wesley Harding, and Nerissa and Katryna Nields. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. May 17 at 7.)

T. BROUSSARD & THE ZYDECO STEPPERS
Top-notch dance music from southwestern Louisiana. (Hungarian House, 213 E. 82nd St. For more information, call 212-685-7597. May 18 at 7.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—May 15: The dual musical life of **John Scofield** continues. Having indulged his passion for straight-ahead jazz with the all-star Scolohofo band, the far-sighted guitarist hooks up with some youngsters and jams a bit. This gig celebrates the release of "Up All Night,"

MARCELLUS HALL

TABLES FOR TWO



RM
33 E. 60th St. (212-319-3800)—"I wonder if it's possible to get something simply grilled, with herbs and a little olive oil?" a diner said, as she surveyed the menu with a look of dismay. "Well, you can always ask," her friend said. "But the chef might feel insulted." A good bet, since the chef at this nautically outfitted, upscale fish restaurant, situated on the inland stretch between Barneys and Bloomingdale's, is Rick Moonen, who is renowned for doing to fish what Hattie Carnegie once did to headwear. For Moonen and the growing number of chefs around town who got their sea legs upstate at the Culinary Institute of America, a fish isn't anything until it's been accessorized nearly beyond recognition.

Forget broiled or baked—Moonen's creations are apt to come wrapped, as in the potato-clad walleye with pickled ramps and truffle-leek emulsion; or encrusted, as in the seven-grain-coated salmon, with English peas, gnocchi, and morels; or steamed, as in the halibut with fava beans and porcini oil in a mushroom foam. (That Moonen has succumbed to the foam-fetish epidemic comes as something of a surprise.)

Despite the fussiness, he uses only the freshest raw materials—the oysters on the half shell and the yellowtail *crudo* seem to have been harvested within the past hour—and his silky combinations are never jarring. The butter-poached lobster, for example, with leeks and potato in a smoked-tomato broth, banishes any nostalgia for a Maine shore dinner. But in other areas, RM is comfortingly traditional: the service is warm and efficient, and the desserts tend toward the indulgent (the "peanut butter variation" consists of brown butter cake, milk-chocolate mousse, banana sorbet, and salted peanuts). And there are a few dishes on the lunch and dinner menus in which the seafare is readily identifiable. The woman who wanted her fish plain settled for gulf shrimp on a bed of fresh fettuccine, and she had no complaints when it arrived tossed with butter and caviar. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner and Saturdays for dinner only. Entrées $20-$37.)

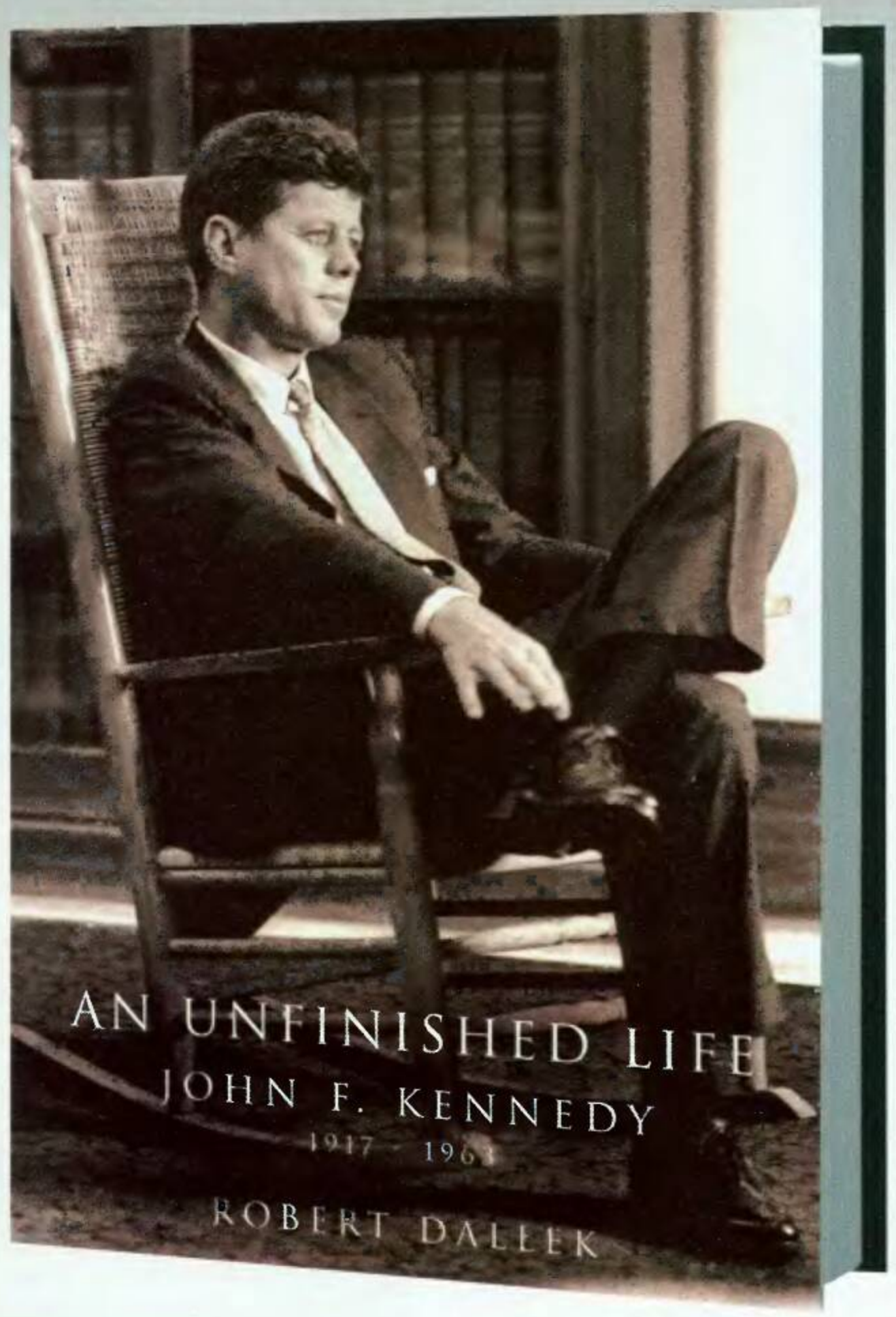
—Charles Michener

one of his more successful attempts at techno-funk. May 16: **Kate Pierson,** of the B-52's, **Bill Janovitz,** of Buffalo Tom, and **Graham Parker,** all of whom can be heard on the new album "From a Window: The Lost Songs of Lennon and McCartney," gather for a night of vintage Merseybeat.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—May 17: Pairing a purposely crude brand of lo-fi electronic music with a predilection for overtly lurid subject matter (song titles include "Diddle My Skittle" and "Cum Undun"), the sexually assertive Canadian performer **Peaches** (a.k.a. Merill Nisker) has created a name for herself by burying the needle on the lewd-o-meter at every opportunity. May 18: The British space-pop combo **Broadcast.**

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—May 14-15: **Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks.** When Malkmus conquered and reinvented the indie-rock world with Pavement, his ruling ethos seemed to be that you didn't have to be a great guitarist to write great music. Since teaming up with the Jicks, Malkmus has become a versatile guitarist, but that hasn't taken anything away from his songwriting. On his new album, "Pig Lib," Malkmus retains his simultaneously piercing and oddball sensibility, along with his wide-ranging vocal inflection. Now he's just opening up the songs to free-range grooves and messy riffs that seem to turn in midair. May 16-17: The Hammond-organ-driven retro jazz and funk of **Soulive.** May 18: The **Datsuns,** hirsute rockers from New Zealand.

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A seventies-era photograph of a monorail at Butlin's Minehead, a British holiday camp, showing at Borden (see Photography).

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—On May 14 the late show belongs to the **Majesticons.** Though Mike Ladd is known for marrying articulate, political raps to quirky and full-textured production, his two-thirds-completed trilogy, "Infesticons v. Majesticons," has shown him to be one of hip-hop's most conceptually gifted producers. In the latest installment, Ladd has formed a fictional crew called the Majesticons (made up of luminaries from underground hip-hop), whose release, "The Beauty Party," is a parody of a bloated and obscene mainstream rap album; the intent is to vanquish the politically conscious Infesticons, an equally fictitious group that Ladd created two years ago.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—May 15: The **Black Keys** are a drums-and-guitar duo out of Akron, Ohio, that traffics in nerve-rattling blues-rock. May 18: **T-Model Ford,** a septuagenarian bluesman from Mississippi. May 19: **Jesse Harris,** a songwriter and guitarist best known for his work with Norah Jones, stops by with his own adult-oriented music. With **Davíd Garza,** an Irving, Texas, native and inventive singer-songwriter.

WARSAW
261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-0505)—May 16: One of the truly original bands to emerge from late-seventies punk rock, the **Cramps** arrived in New York shunning the tuneless caterwauling of their peers in favor of a mutated rockabilly sound and pitch-black gallows humor. They remain one of the most entertaining live rock shows ever to defile a stage.

JAZZ AND *STANDARDS*

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through May 24: The ever-elegant vocalist **Karen Akers** may be doing an evening of theatre songs, but don't expect to hear chestnuts. Her imaginative program touches on rarely heard gems from "Nine," "Applause," and other personal favorites. Dining.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—May 15-17: The beloved *charanga* band **Orquesta Aragón.**

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—May 15-18: Though Latin jazz is all the rage again, let's not forget that the master *conguero* **Poncho Sanchez** and his steaming **Latin Jazz Ensemble** held the torch high during the leaner years.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through May 18: The alto-saxophone legend **Jackie McLean** folds the history of modern jazz, from bebop to free jazz to contemporary mainstream, into his passionate playing. He celebrates his seventy-first birthday with his saxophonist son, Rene, the pianist Allen Palmer, the bassist Nat Reeves, and the drummer Eric McPherson. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ GALLERY
290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—May 14: High lyricism is guaranteed when the pianist **Bill Charlap** duets with a kindred spirit, the trumpeter **Warren Vaché.** May 18-20: A contemporary gadfly who backs up the talk with the walk, the saxophonist **Steve Coleman** uses the various editions of his Five Elements band to mix and match the disparate influences of his original vision.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—May 17-18: **Lynne Arriale,** an outstanding yet undervalued pianist, thinks orchestrally with her practiced trio; such is the rapport she's established with the bassist **Jay Anderson** and the drummer **Steve Davis.** May 19 and Mondays: **Steve Bernstein's Millennial Territory Orchestra.** May 20: **Bob Belden** may be a walking historian of jazz, but that doesn't mean that this talented saxophonist, composer, and arranger is averse to bringing hip-hop into the mix when it comes to his own music. Dining.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through May 15: The **Ted Nash** quintet. May 16-18: Ted Nash's **Odeon.** The saxophonist and composer Nash brings in his mainstream-leaning quintet to begin the week and wraps things up with his unconventional Odeon ensemble, which finds room for sousaphone, violin, and accordion. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—The Costume Institute is throwing a glamorous toga party called "Goddess"; Jacqueline Kennedy and Jennifer Lopez—or at least their gowns, by Valentino and Chanel, respectively—are in attendance. In the early nineteenth

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I was born fast.
Faster than those who would challenge me.

I was born strong.
Full of heart.
Quiet in confidence.
And blessed with might.

I was born with instinctive quickness.
Quick to recognize.
To adapt.
To respond.
Quick to be quick.

I was born to be seen
by everything but the wind.

I was born at the beginning of the last century,
but I am undoubtedly of the next century.

I am

JAGUAR

Born to perform

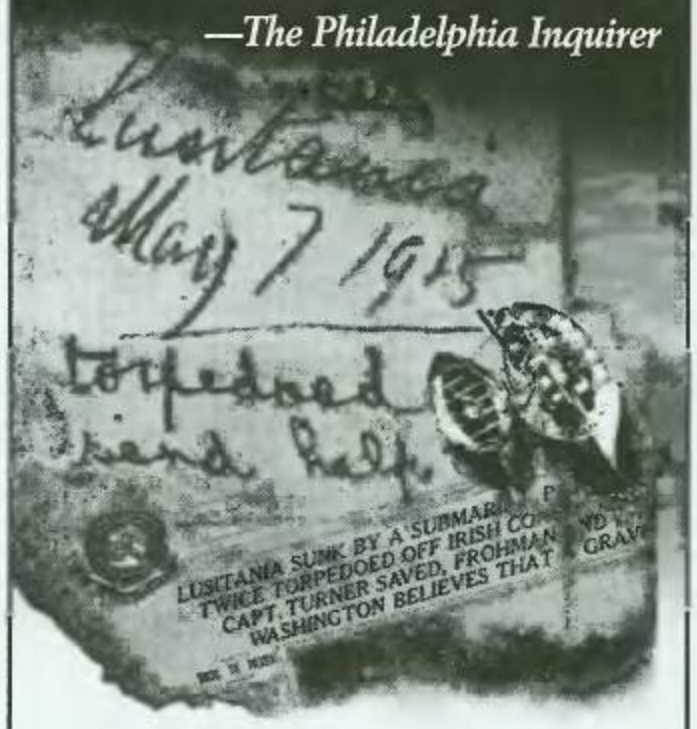


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century, the Greco-Roman look was popular; judging from a group of prints here the effect was more "Middlemarch" than Mount Olympus. The uncorseted body of the twentieth century freed designers to drape and fold, from the pleated silk of Fortuny to the fluid chiffon of Tom Ford for Gucci (the show's sponsor, along with Condé Nast). As for goddesses, the one-shouldered sea-green dress that Mrs. Kennedy wore on a state visit to Cambodia would have looked just fine on Aphrodite as she emerged from the foam. Through Aug. 3. ♦ Museumgoers still searching for the perfect summer house should visit the playful roof-garden sculpture by Roy Lichtenstein, the late Pop artist who gave comic books cachet. The painted aluminum cottage has a red roof, white and yellow walls, and a blue chimney. Curtains resembling the artist's signature brushstrokes frame the windows. From the front, the structure appears nearly flat, like a 2-D illustration on vacation in physical space, and it plays a neat trick in inverted perspective: one corner that seems to advance toward the museum in fact recedes toward the park. The house sits on its own little lawn with a sign warning viewers to keep off the grass. Through Nov. 2. ♦ **"Manet/Velázquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting,"** a ravishing and keenly illuminating show, marshalls great paintings to demonstrate a miracle in art history: the rebirth of Spanish Baroque painting in nineteenth-century Paris, brought about by Édouard Manet. At one end of its two-century leap, the show is augmented with works by Zurbarán, Murillo, and other Spaniards, and, at the other, by relevant figures from Delacroix to Sargent. But the summit meeting of Velázquez and Manet dominates. Through June 8. ♦ A mid-career retrospective of the photographs and video portraits of the German photographer Thomas Struth. Through May 18. ♦ **"Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus."** Through Aug. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—Even what's wrong with **"Matisse Picasso,"** the magnificent show that deploys a hundred and thirty-three works by the twin godheads of modern painting, is revelatory. It is a double-barrelled blast of an exhibition with a popgun thesis: that Picasso and Matisse goaded and influenced each other. So do most artistic contemporaries. In any case, trying to absorb fine curatorial points of comparison between such stunners as Picasso's "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon" and Matisse's "Bathers with a Turtle" is like trying to check the oil in a speeding truck. The show's payoff comes from the jagged, overwhelming sense it gives of how different the two were as men and artists—as antithetical, and evenly matched, as Ali and Frazier. Through May 19. (Open Thursdays, Sundays, and Mondays, 10 to 5, and Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 9.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle."** Through June 11. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—Elie Nadelman, the Polish-American sculptor, had his first major success in 1909 in Paris with an exhibition of classically inspired heads and statues. Around the same time, Nadelman was beginning to update fourth-century Greek sculpture with contemporary touches such as bowler hats, bow ties, and exaggerated contours. In this retrospective, more than two hundred sculptures, arranged chronologically, trace the evolution of Nadelman's concerns: from his early busts, which speak to ancient ideals of beauty, to his jazz-era middle works, folksy wooden genre figures of dancers and circus performers with sinuous bodies and gessoed features, to his final postwar efforts, rows of plaster figurines that look like toy-size gods and monsters. Through July 20. ♦ **"Paul Sietsema: Empire"** presents the chef d'œuvre of an experimental filmmaker: a ragged twenty-four-minute silent 16-mm. film that bristles with pans, fades, jump cuts, and so on of static objects in negative black and white or red and white. The main subjects are beau-



The libidinous singer Peaches, at the Bowery Ballroom (see Night Life).

YUKO SHIMIZU

tifully made models of an eighteenth-century French rococo interior and of Clement Greenberg's art-filled living room in 1964—shrines of extreme taste, which Sietsema's camera explores like a tongue probing broken teeth. (The models and some related drawings are displayed elsewhere.) The film's hermetic fervor becomes as disquieting as urgent warnings in a language that you don't quite understand. Sequences of dizzying geometric animation and ominous closeups of a grasshopper vary the spell. Through June 8. ♦ **"Scanning: The Aberrant Architectures of Diller + Scofidio,"** a retrospective featuring the designs of the husband-and-wife team. Through May 25. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6; Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—Old-fashioned museological Egyptology meets state-of-the-art, user-friendly installation in **"Egypt Reborn,"** the new long-term setting for the museum's collection. The sunny, spacious galleries present thousands of objects, tracing an evolution from the pre-dynastic period in 3500 B.C. to the period of Roman influence. Wonders include a lavishly painted cartonnage with matching interior coffin lid, a frog-shaped childbirth amulet in brilliant blue faience, and a mummified crocodile from the crocodile cemetery at Kahun. An almost infinite listing of favorites is possible—just don't miss the bird-headed terracotta figure thought to be a fertility goddess, one of the oldest, most renowned, and most beautiful artifacts in the world. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

ASIA SOCIETY

725 Park Ave., at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—The original trust-fund beatnik, Siddhartha Gautama, was born into a prominent family and groomed for political life, and then, at age twenty-nine, he left it all to travel in search of enlightenment. **"The World of Buddhism,"** a selection of Buddhist sculpture, scripture, and paintings from the museum's Rockefeller collection, gives viewers a sense of the way a prophet's life and work mature into a religion: among other things, the graven images get more and more baroque, in direct contravention of the master's teachings. A sign outside the exhibit's heavily carpeted, underused meditation room asks viewers to be "tolerant of those who wish to enjoy the paintings for their aesthetic as well as spiritual qualities." Through Dec. 14. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

JAPAN SOCIETY

333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—It took Buddhism more than a thousand years to spread from India to Japan, and when it did arrive, in the middle of the sixth century, it came through Korea. An envoy from the Paekche Kingdom introduced the new divine order with its devotional icons: sculpted renderings of Buddhas and bodhisattvas in ceramic, soapstone, and gilt bronze. **"Transmitting the Forms of Divinity: Early Buddhist Art from Korea and Japan"** puts a variety of these figures on display, including a Korean statue of Yaksa Yorae, the Buddha of Healing, who stands on two lotus blossoms holding a medicine pot, and a Japanese bronze of the bodhisattva Kannon, whose crown bears the image of the Buddha of Infinite Light. Through June 22. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 to 6, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—Works by eighteen artists, created since 1975 and acquired by the museum over the past two years, emphasize memory, history, and loss—not to mention video, photography, and film. The usual suspects—a self-portrait by Nan Goldin, the animated films of William Kentridge—are accompanied by some surprises, including photographs documenting a 1977 performance by Gloria Bornstein (wearing her grandmother's clothes, she proceeds to disrobe). The most moving piece, if also the most sensational, is a triptych of large-scale sepia-toned photographs of the artist Jorge Zontal that were shot by his collaborator AA Bronson one week before Zontal's AIDS-related death. Zontal's father survived Auschwitz, and the emaciated artist posed in homage to his father's legacy. Through July 27. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45; Thursdays, 11 to 8; and Fridays, 11 to 3.)



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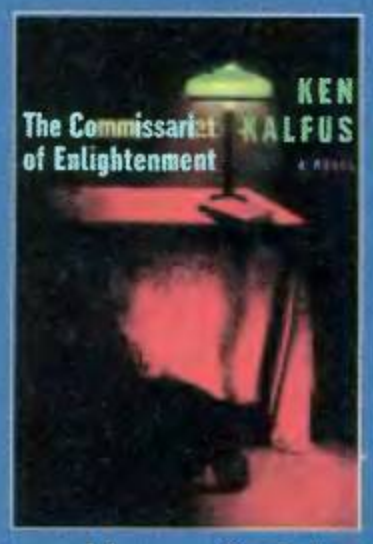
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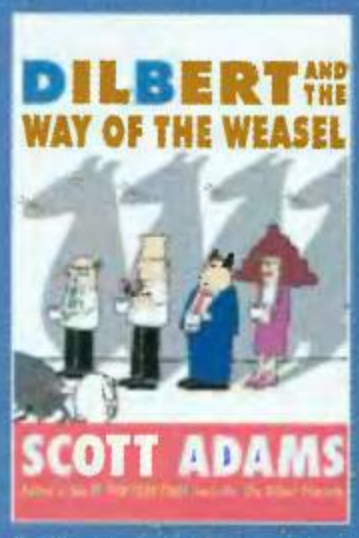
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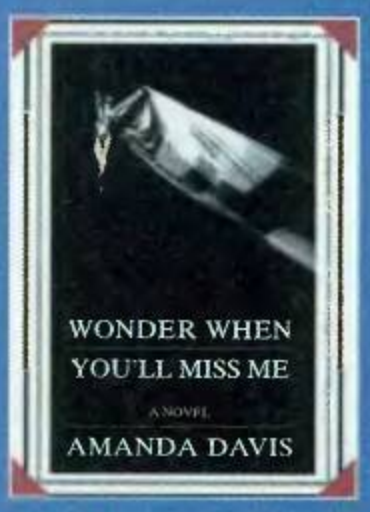
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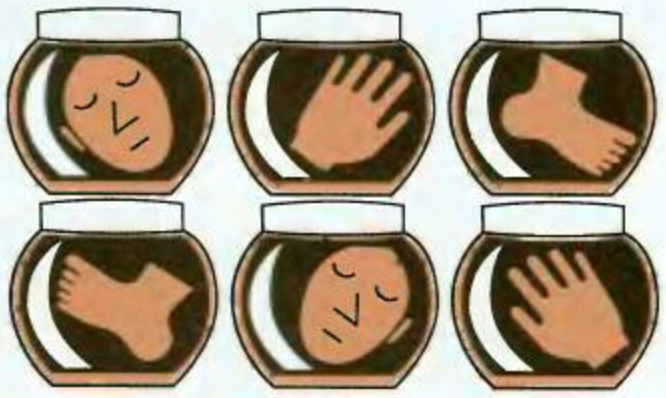
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BOOK CURRENTS

Going, Going, Gone

In the twelfth century, the bazaars of Arabia were known to offer an exotic and allegedly salutary concoction called "mellified man"—essentially human remains steeped in honey. Mellified man was also known as "human mummy confection," and one recipe for it called specifically for "a young, lusty man" as



the main ingredient. This strange footnote in the history of death and decay is recalled by Mary Roach in her surprisingly lively **STIFF: THE CURIOUS LIVES OF HUMAN CADAVERS** (Norton). "Cadavers," Roach writes, "are our superheroes: They brave fire without flinching, withstand falls from tall buildings and head-on car crashes into walls." We learn, among other notable macabre facts, that a detached human head is about the size and weight of a roaster chicken, that King Ptolemy I of Egypt first green-lighted autopsies in 300 B.C., that embalming-fluid companies once sponsored best-preserved-body contests, and that the French at the time of the Revolution were obsessed with discovering how long guillotined heads remained aware of their surroundings.

Roach reports that the next big thing on the mortuary horizon is something called the "tissue digestor," which replaces the outmoded options of burial or cremation with, essentially, a big tub of lye. In **REST IN PEACE** (Oxford), the historian Gary Laderman looks into the culture of funeral homes in America, noting that embalming took off after the Lincoln assassination and became a booming business in the twentieth century, nudged along by the popularity of mummy films and a burgeoning class of undertakers leafing through *Casket & Sunnyside* magazine. As Roach puts it: "Death. It doesn't have to be boring."

—*Mark Rozzo*

GALLERIES–UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

POLLY APFELBAUM
Apfelbaum's floor sculpture, a soothing, simple installation with the happy-go-lucky title "Today I Love Everybody," presents lily-pad-like groups of spangled shapes cut from thin velour. Each of the hundreds of three- or four-inch fabric pieces is dyed with a flower-shaped mark. These ad-hoc carpets clustered near the gallery's columns resemble fallen leaves gathered around tree trunks, or clumped dendrites, or stars. So the installation is a landscape, although the patently fake velvet and crudely drawn blossoms keep the imagination from straying too far into the pastoral. Through May 25. (Triple Candie, 461 W. 126th St. 212-865-0783.)

KORI NEWKIRK
But for a fuzzy nude self-portrait—a tall black man standing in an icy forest scene—everything in this show is white: fake snow, neon icicles, a circle of ghostly encaustic shark silhouettes incised into the walls. Loitering in the gallery upstairs, there's a life-sized model of the marine predator, in fibreglass with rhinestone eyes—almost as eerie in the icy surroundings as Damian Hirst's shark. Through June 8. (The Project, 427 W. 126th St. 212-662-8610.)

KURT SCHWITTERS
Schwitters invented the nonsense word "Merz" for all that *Kommerz* (commerce) cast aside: beer labels, tram tickets, cigarette wrappers, torn ads, newspaper articles, and photographs. The visionary pack rat hoarded these scraps and composed jagged, jazzy, exquisitely balanced little compositions that offer glimpses of abstract perfection but never lose touch with their beginnings in the gutter. Reproduction doesn't do Schwitters justice, since texture is as important to him as shape and color. Up close, his shattered, kaleidoscopic collages and assemblages still deliver a shock of Dadaist energy. Through May 23. (Ubu, 416 E. 59th St. 212-753-4444.)

Short List

FRANZ KLINE
C&M Arts, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020. Through June 7.

GEORGE SEGAL
Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-744-7400. Through June 14.

GALLERIES–CHELSEA

LOUISE FISHMAN
Fishman's earnest, swashbuckling, and cerebral paintings cycle through the roster of Ab Ex and minimalist attitudes, arriving at a hybrid that is neither post- nor neo-. She quotes from both movements, but unironically, attesting to a persistent though mournful belief in painting as pure form. Not that pure means unmuddied, since her palette tends toward the dour—scumbly blues and pond-water greens, with the occasional splash of toxic-looking orange. Titles like "Then," "The Way Back," and "My City" hint at some disaffection in the aftermath of September 11th, but the thematic gesture seems merely polite. In these paintings, only the colors burn. Through May 24. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

LIZ LARNER
As an artist and teacher in Los Angeles, Larner has helped to establish that city's present reputation for innovative, smart, and beautiful new sculpture. Here she shows nine roughly basketball-size jumbles of four or five open cubes apiece, all made of paper-wrapped metal rods that are painted in intricate alterations of soft colors. The works are sprightly perceptual machines. As you move around their triangular pedestals, geometric and colored forms take shape momentarily, then disintegrate. Looking at them takes practice. Try keeping one

RICHARD McGUIRE

eye closed until you get the knack. Through June 14. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121.)

JOEL SHAPIRO

Shapiro has gone colossal with two pieces, one of them twenty feet high, whose abstract animation and brawny materiality suggest a collaboration between Alexander Calder and Richard Serra. Less obviously figurative than other recent stuff by the artist, the configurations of bronze beams still contain surprises of lurching gestures and giddy balances. In some svelte wooden pieces, Shapiro introduces a propping element here and there to keep things upright—the effect is not structural but comic, evoking the designated driver at a wild party. Through July 31. (Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000.)

LUC TUYMANS

The most influential European painter since Gerhard Richter says he still completes each of his pictures—densely stroked, pale-colored paintings on gnomic, somehow troubling themes—in a single day. This point of honor was impressive when he worked in small formats; it's awesome now, on canvases of up to ten feet on a side. The subjects include a man in a car, an Antwerp shop window, a paintball-tournament panorama, a patterned carpet, and a long shot of Farley Granger at the Jefferson Memorial from "Strangers on a Train." Tuymans infallibly generates a sense of urgent mystery, in images that suggest poor reception on an old TV or memories struggling up out of forgetfulness. The last thing you notice, every time, is the preternatural giftedness of Tuymans's touch. Through May 21. (Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

Short List

AMY SILLMAN

Sikkema, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262. Through May 23.

RICHARD TUTTLE

Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St. 212-999-7337. Through May 31.

GALLERIES–SOHO

HELMUT FEDERLE

This extensive show of small-scale drawings opens with a handful of abstracted mountain studies (the artist is Swiss) from the mid-seventies that reveal Federle's interests in the mystical and the mathematical. The reductive geometry of the planar sketches suggests diagrams, blueprints, and hermetic runes. But nature is never far off, as a straight line and two ellipses become stem and leaves, or thick black-and-blue bands of rolled ink suggest the infinite depth of a starless sky. Through July 12. (Peter Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441.)

GALLERIES–BROOKLYN

CARL SCHOLZ

Scholz, part of the team who brought us "Internalized," a well-appointed apartment in a rusty station wagon, parked in Queens and advertised as "just eight blocks from the subway—sunset views of Manhattan," continues to make wry comments about art and car culture. He began this project by locking his keys in his Jaguar. He then covered the windows, stripped the exterior, and painted the entire shell with silver enamel, so that it was hard to tell whether there was a real vehicle in there at all. From Momenta's front window, "Cherry" looks like a ghost; closer up, it reflects the viewer and whatever mixture of envy and vanity the Jag inspires. Through June 2. (72 Berry St. 718-218-8058.)

ANDY YODER

Gallerygoers encountering "In a Perfect World" tend to lean down and smell the art. That's because Yoder, whose dream is to curl up in his father's closet among all the costumery of grown-up power, has cobbled himself a pair of eighty-seven-inch-long licorice wing tips, meant to re-create, with their "sugared and crude" smell, the bittersweetness of nostalgia. They do satisfyingly unite the monumental Pop of Claes Oldenberg with the goofy food sculpture of David Shapiro (who sculpted portraits of his friends out of tofu). Through June 1. (Plus Ultra, 235 S. 1st St. 718-387-3844.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

ROBERT RICHFIELD

These photo assemblages—views of placid English landscapes ranging from 180 to 360 degrees—scroll across the walls of the gallery in long, ribbony stretches. Only a few of the pictures are dotted with people, and they, like the unpeopled landscapes—an abandoned amusement park in Lancashire or a topiary garden in Cumbria—feel hushed and expectant. In one of the show's best pieces, a triple-tiered, many-panelled scene of a Yorkshire train station, a train speeds by and barely ruffles the waiting passengers' staunch reserve; it seems the perfect visual metaphor for a countryside dreamily oblivious to the fast-paced whir of the outside world. Through May 31. (Klotz/Sirmon, 511 W. 25th St. 212-741-4764.)

"NOT NEUTRAL"

There's something defensive about the title of this show of contemporary Swiss photography; the Swiss, it would appear, fear that the world thinks of them merely as stuffy gold hoarders and boring geopolitical wallflowers. This fascinating but frustrating show, however, is unlikely to change anyone's mind; much of the younger photographers' work here is, while primly, icily accomplished, either derivative or reductive. Nonetheless, there are some interesting and original works, including Hans Danuser's mysterious, tactile photos of eggy swirls of frozen embryos and Annelies Štrba's vividly hued aerial photographs of cities, which look like they were captured through the crosshairs of a fighter jet's gun. What exactly these pictures say about the Swiss, though, is unclear; Swiss photography may not be neutral, but what's shown here doesn't inspire an alternate qualifier. Through July 19. (Grey, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6780.)

"OUR TRUE INTENT IS ALL FOR YOUR DELIGHT"

Stunningly up-to-the-minute large-format photographs filled with fond ironies—except that all the images originated in the sixties and early seventies as straightforward promotional materials for Butlin Holiday Camps, which were scattered across England. The highly choreographed scenes of high-capacity resort locales—pools, dance floors, posh lounge areas, outdoor roller rinks, beachcomber bars, reception halls—are stocked with real people posing in their own clothes; the postcard photographers capture the sort of bright, color-saturated period detail you might expect from a Baz Luhrmann production. That it's all authentic turns them into time-capsule-style documents, by turns achingly sincere and unwittingly goofy. Opens May 15. (Borden, 560 Broadway. 212-431-0166.)

Short List

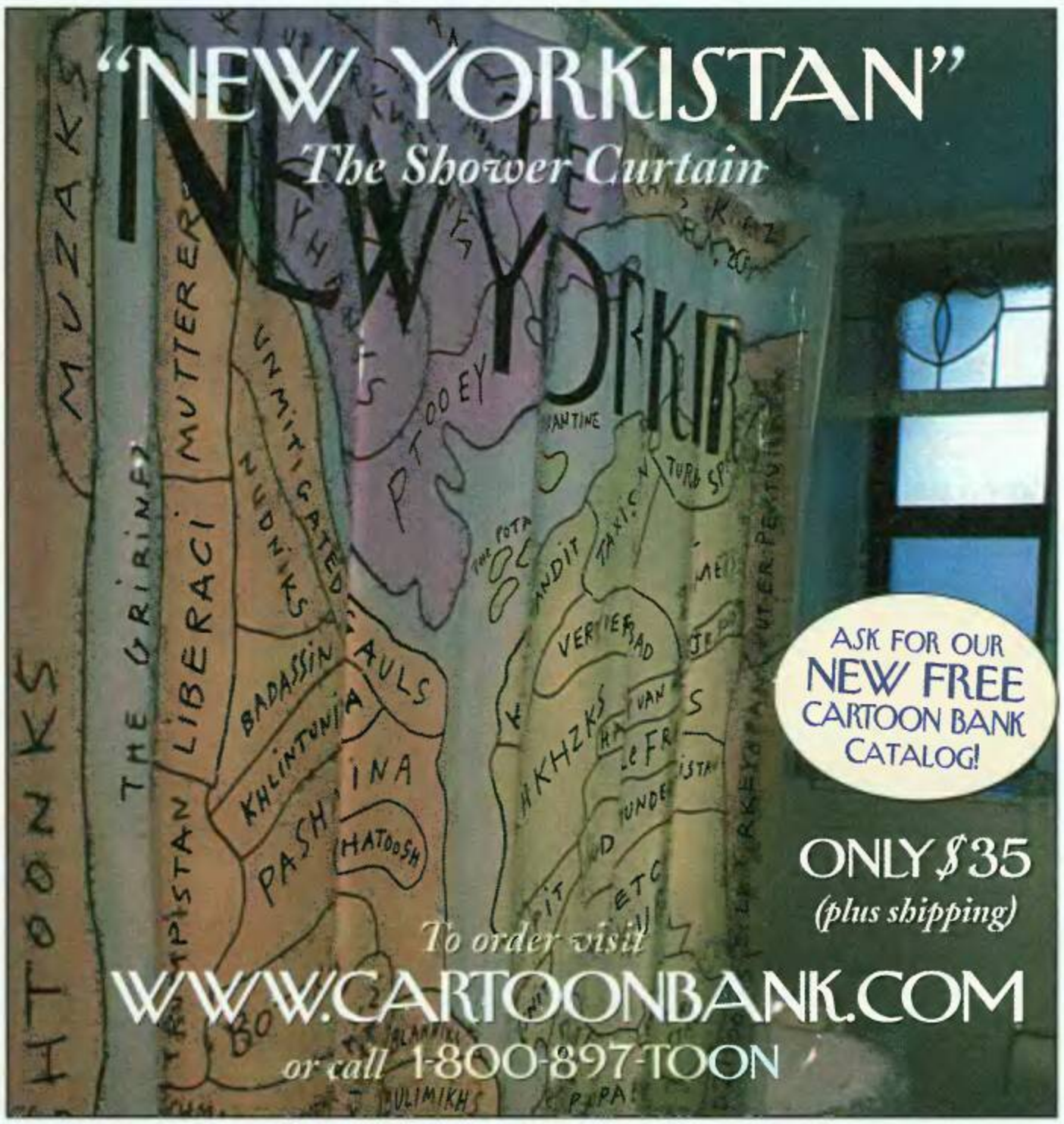
ROBERT POLIDORI

Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999. Through June 14.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S

May 14 at 10:15 A.M.: The second session of a three-part sale of contemporary art features paintings and sculptures by Calder, Albers, Pollock, Mitchell ("Canada V"), and Thiebaud ("Cup Cakes," a painting from 1961, expected to bring up to three hundred and fifty thousand dollars). ♦ May 14 at 2: The sale concludes with an afternoon session of works by Schnabel, Basquiat, Kiefer, Hirst, and many others. ♦



May 15 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: African, Oceanic, and American Indian art. ♦ May 17 at 9:30 A.M. and 2: A sale of wine. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S

May 14 at 7: Arshile Gorky's painting "Year After Year" (expected to bring up to fifteen million dollars), one of his last works from 1947 still in private hands, highlights the evening session of a three-part sale of contemporary art which also features important works by Rothko, Warhol ("Marlon," from 1966), and Stella. ♦ May 15 at 10 A.M. and 2: The sale concludes with two sessions of works by such artists as Gottlieb, Richter, Frankenthaler, and Murakami. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

DOYLE

May 14 at 10 A.M.: English and Continental furniture and decorations, along with a selection of Old Master paintings and drawings. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)

PHILLIPS

May 15 at 7: A two-part sale of contemporary art begins with a session devoted to works by, among others, Sherman, Twombly, Judd, Klein ("Re 21," expected to bring up to eight million dollars), and Warhol. ♦ May 16 at 11 A.M.: The sale concludes with a selection of works by Rauschenberg, Richter, Currin, Neshat, and many others. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

SWANN

May 15 at 10:30 A.M.: Photographic books by such masters as Adams, Stieglitz, and Cartier-Bresson. ♦ May 15 at 2:30: An untitled mixed-media work from 1965 by a young Robert Mapplethorpe—an odd assemblage of images made in homage to Nancy Nemeth, the photographer's date at a military-academy ball—is among the highlights of a sale of photographs from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; the selections also include works by Talbot, Baltermants, Abbott, and Penn. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK: "LA DONNA DEL LAGO"

Eve Queler's invaluable concert-opera company offers, once again, a rare performance of a work the Met has never staged—Rossini's bel-canto masterwork from 1819, based on Walter Scott's poem "The Lady of the Lake." Ruth Ann Swenson and Bruce Fowler—who recently sang the roles of the heroine Elena and the warrior Rodrigo at the Salzburg Festival—join Stephanie Blythe, who takes the pants role of Malcolm, Elena's suitor. (Carnegie Hall. 212-799-1982. May 19 at 8.)

AMATO OPERA: "ANDREA CHÉNIER"

The Lower East Side's feisty chamber-opera group, in its last production of the season, squeezes Giordano's verismo spectacle of the French Revolution into its pint-size theatre. Anthony Amato directs and conducts. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. May 17 at 7:30 and May 18 at 2:30. Through June 15.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

André Previn may have conservative tastes, but throughout his career he has been an eloquent advocate for works that are both sophisticated and accessible. His latest Philharmonic concert features two of them, Takemitsu's "Ceremonial" (heard in its New York première), for orchestra and *shō* (the ancient Japanese mouth organ, played by Mayumi Miyata), and Dutilleux's now classic Symphony No. 2, "Le Double," a hard-edged yet richly evocative composition from 1950 that gets its name from the quasi-Baroque chamber ensemble that acts as a "soloist" from within the larger orchestra. The program concludes with Brahms's Violin Concerto (with Kyung-Wha Chung). (May 15 and May 20 at 7:30, May 16 at 2, and May 17 at 8.) ♦ Note: Previn will conduct the Brahms and Takemitsu works in a special "rush hour" concert on May 14 at 6:45. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

THE MET ORCHESTRA AND CHORUS

James Levine turns to the choral repertory for the orchestra's last concert of the season, a program of Brahms, Stravinsky (the "Symphony of Psalms"), and Mozart (the Mass in C Minor). Heidi Grant Murphy, Susan Graham, Matthew Polenzani, and John Relyea are the vocal soloists. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 16 at 8 and May 18 at 3.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

The conductor-free ensemble performs music by Gunther Schuller (the New York première of the Concerto da Camera No. 2), Mozart, and Strauss. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 17 at 8.)

TOD MACHOVER'S "TOY SYMPHONY"

Machover, one of the most innovative composers around, has spent much of the last three years in his Media Lab studio at M.I.T. developing a set of computerized instruments called Music Toys (including Beatbugs and Music Shapers) that aim to liberate the musical potential of children—without the need for all those pesky piano lessons. Kids are an integral part of the "Toy Symphony" music-education caravan, which arrives in Gotham after a European tour; the public concert features a collection of string-orchestra pieces written by students from New York's public schools using Hyperscore, Machover's "electronic musical sketch pad." Young singers and players will also participate in the rest of the program, performing music supplied by a clutch of composers, including Machover (the eponymous "Toy Symphony," featuring the Irish violinist Cora Venus Lunny) and the twelve-year-old phenom Natasha Sinha. Gil Rose conducts the Boston Modern Orchestra Project. (Winter Garden, World Financial Center, Battery Park City. May 17 at 7. No tickets required. ♦ Note: A free Family Day event follows on May 18 from noon to 3, at which visitors can sample the Music Toys for themselves.)

LONDON SINFONIETTA

John Adams wraps up Lincoln Center's festival in his honor by conducting the crackerjack new-music orchestra in three essential works—the picaresque clarinet concerto "Gnarly Buttons" (with Michael Collins), the magisterial Chamber Symphony (already a classic of the genre), and "Grand Pianola Music" (with the singers of Theatre of Voices), a seminal post-minimalist score from the early eighties that, according to the composer, sounds like "a barking dog running around with no leash." (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. May 17 at 8. ♦ Note: "American Music Today," a panel discussion featuring the composers Tan Dun and Ingram Marshall, among others, will be held at the Kaplan Penthouse at 3.)

ORATORIO SOCIETY OF NEW YORK

Performing music by Fauré (including the Requiem, with the singers Brenda Harris and Woodrow Bynum) and Poulenc (the "Gloria"). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 20 at 8.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC

May 15-16 at 7:30: The cellist Zuill Bailey and the pianists Navah Perlman and Rohan DeSilva perform music by Schubert (including the Fantasia in F Minor for Piano Four Hands), Mendelssohn, and Brahms (the Cello Sonata in E Minor). ♦ May 17 at 7:30 and May 18 at 4: Ilya Gringolts is one of the most promising of Itzhak Perlman's violin protégés; his playing combines a keen intelligence with an almost casual flair. The clarinettist Alexander Fiterstein and the pianist Orion Weiss join him for his début at the barge, a program of Beethoven, Dvořák, Stravinsky (a suite from "Histoire du Soldat"), and Bartók ("Contrasts"). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

BROOKLYN CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

The violinist Carmit Zori—who, until recently, was an artistic director at Bargemusic—gives the floating chamber-music festival some competition



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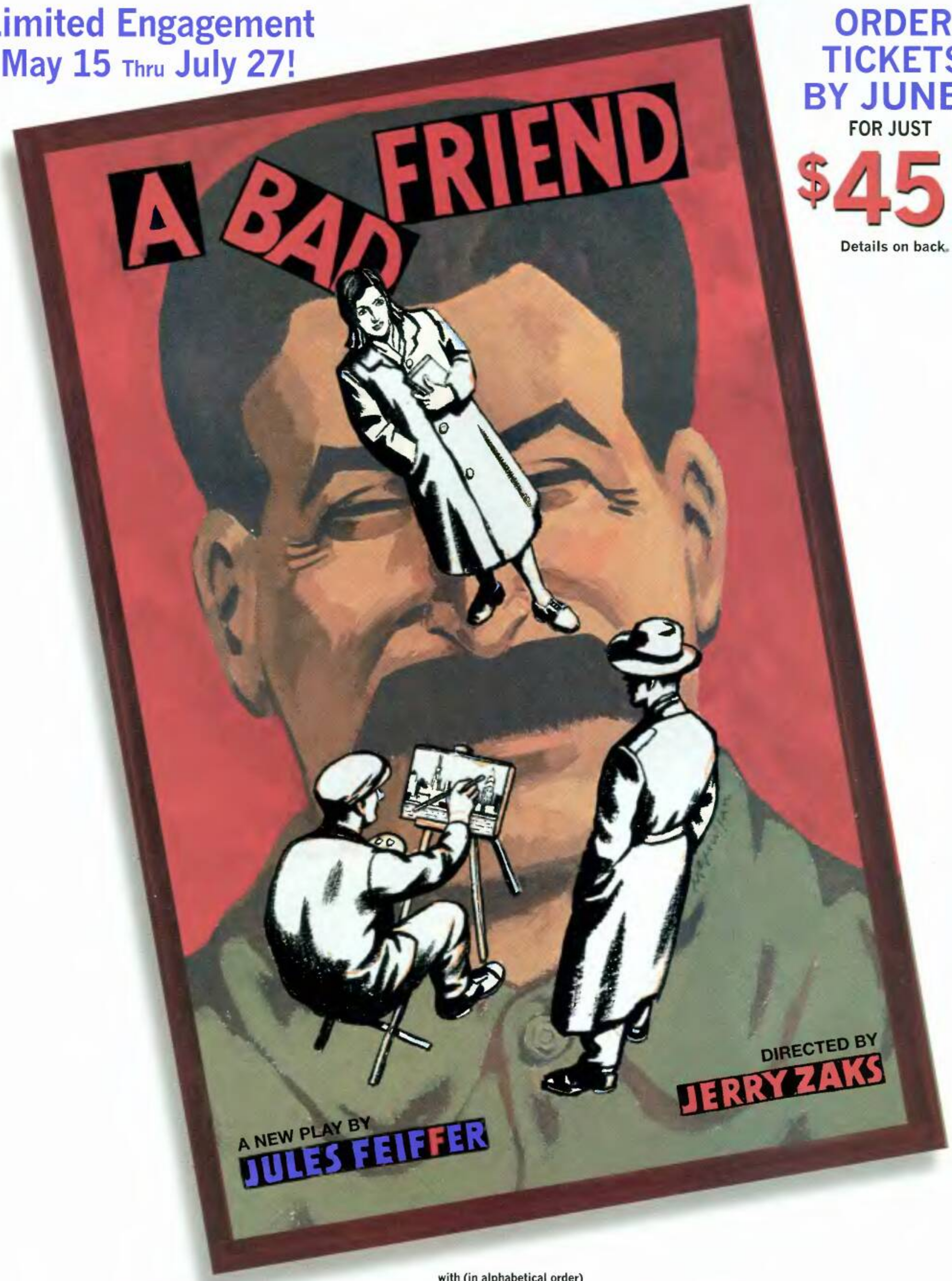
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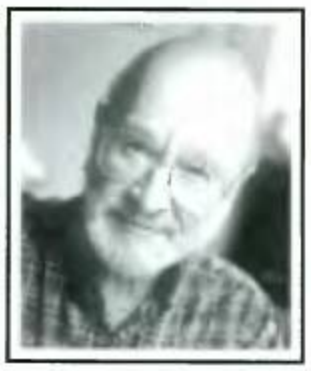
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A BAD FRIEND UNITES TWO OF THE THEATER'S BEST AND BRIGHTEST:



Cartoonist and Playwright JULES FEIFFER and Director Extraordinaire JERRY ZAKS



A Bad Friend tells the story of Rose, a typical New York teenager experiencing the strains and pains of growing up in 1953 Brooklyn. What isn't typical about Rose, however, is her family's membership in the Communist Party. This circumstance makes for a surprisingly funny, moving and suspenseful play about a family's efforts to hold on to its unpopular beliefs against the backdrop of rampant McCarthyism.

Jules Feiffer is perhaps best known for his Pulitzer Prize-winning career as a cartoonist, but as a playwright, his satiric comedy *Little Murders* won an Obie Award, *Knock Knock* was nominated for a Tony Award and *Grown-Ups* was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.

Four-time Tony Award winner Jerry Zaks makes a long overdue return to Lincoln Center Theater to direct **A Bad Friend**. Among his long list of theater credits, he has staged four of LCT's most honored productions — *Six Degrees of Separation*, *Anything Goes*, *The Front Page* and *The House of Blue Leaves*.

The outstanding cast of **A Bad Friend** includes Larry Bryggman (*Proof, Prelude to a Kiss*), Mark Feuerstein (*television's "Good Morning, Miami" and "The West Wing"*), Jonathan Hadary (*Guys and Dolls, Gypsy*), David Harbour (*The Invention of Love, Fifth of July*), Jan Maxwell (*A Doll's House, House/Garden*) and Kala Savage (in her New York debut).



A BAD FRIEND



Artwork by James McMullan

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with an inaugural concert of Mozart and Dvořák (the String Quintet with Viola in E-Flat Major); her distinguished colleagues include the violinist Ani Kavafian and the cellist Timothy Eddy. (First Unitarian Church, 50 Monroe Pl., at Pierrepont St. 718-858-0718. May 16 at 8.)

FRIENDS & ENEMIES OF NEW MUSIC
The New York première of a piano work by Steven Burke—a young composer who, somehow, learned as much from the outrageously Romantic David Del Tredici as he did from the coolheaded mod-

SEQUITUR: "POWER—A CABARET"
The hip and high-class new-music group continues the concert series with which it made its name, a program featuring new songs (backed up by a jazz-style combo) on a single theme. This year's installment includes nuggets by Ned Rorem (settings of two sermons by John Donne), Elena Kats-Chernin, and Robert Carl (setting words by Elias Canetti), along with standards by Marc Blitzstein, Kurt Weill, and others. (Joe's Pub, 425 W. Lafayette St. 212-239-6200. May 18 at 7.)



Tod Machover's interactive "Toy Symphony" concert tour arrives at the World Financial Center's Winter Garden on May 17.

ernist Jacob Druckman—is among the highlights of the collective's latest concert, which also features Virgil Thomson's renowned settings of William Blake ("Songs of Innocence and Experience"). The performers include the soprano Meagan Miller and the bass-baritone Robert Osborne. (Elebash Auditorium, CUNY Graduate Center, 365 Fifth Ave. May 16 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

CONTINUUM
Music from Central Asia (by such composers as Benjamin Yusupov and Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky) is the focus of the group's final concert of the season, which features the soprano Wonjung Kim and the pianist Joel Sachs. (Asia Society, Park Ave. at 70th St. 212-517-2742. May 17 at 8.)

SUNDAYS ON THE ISLAND
The hardy little chamber-music series—ensconced in a cozy cottage on the grounds of a French-style country inn—marks its eleventh anniversary with a concert of music by Mendelssohn, the pianist Ilan Rechtman (the series' founder), and others; the performers include Rechtman and the cellist Wolfram Koessel, the current director. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., the Bronx. 914-664-6934. May 18 at 12:30.)

EMERSON STRING QUARTET WORKSHOP
Three very lucky young string quartets—the Addison, the Euclid, and the Parker—perform a culminating concert of Bartók's Quartets Nos. 2, 4, and 6, prepared under the Emerson's attentive ears. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 18 at 2.)

"DOWLAND AND THE NEW MEN"
The Musicians in Ordinary, a Canadian lute-and-soprano duo, make their New York début performing music by the Renaissance master and several of his followers. (Christ Church, Kane St. at Clinton St., Cobble Hill, Brooklyn. May 18 at 3. Tickets at the door.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: OCTETS BY SCHUBERT AND SPOHR
A distinguished lineup of Society regulars—including the clarinettist David Shifrin, the bassoonist Milan Turkovic, and the cellist Fred Sherry—offer their final program of the season. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. May 18 at 5 and May 20 at 7:30.)

SERGIO RUZZIER

"SOUNDS FRESH": MUSIC FOR TWO PIANOS
Marc Peloquin and Roberto Hidalgo dig into seldom heard works by Stravinsky (the Concerto for Two Solo Pianos, which the composer wrote to perform with his son Soulima) and Rzewski. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 19 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS
May 14 at 7: The novelists Danyel Smith and Martha Southgate read from their recent work. (Housing Works Used Book Café, 126 Crosby St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ May 14 at 8: Amy Sedaris, Stephen Colbert, and Paul Dinello, formerly of the television show "Strangers with Candy," read from their new book, "Wigfield: The Can-Do Town That Just May Not." (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400.) ♦ May 15 at 7:30: Poets, actors, musicians, and friends of Frank O'Hara, including Hettie Jones, Vincent Katz, and Jack Larson, gather for a reading and musical performance of his poems, as well as a reading from "Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O'Hara," a newly published memoir by Joe LeSueur. Slides of O'Hara's favorite art work will also be shown. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. For more information, call 212-254-9628.)

TALKS
May 14 at 7: Following a screening of "Dr. Strangelove," the critic John Leonard joins the artist Art Spiegelman and others for a discussion about satire and protest. (United Artists 16 at Battery Park, 102 North End Ave. Tickets at the door.) ♦ May 14 at 7:30: The rare-books curator Leslie K. Overstreet discusses the life of Mark Catesby, an eighteenth-century artist whose work is on display at the New York Academy of Art. (111 Franklin St. 212-966-0300, ext. 332.) ♦ May 15 at 7: Calvin Trillin talks to three generations of the family that owns Russ & Daughters, a smoked-fish shop that has graced the Lower East Side for nearly ninety years. (Museum of Jewish Heritage, 18 First Pl. 212-945-0039.)

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and more

AND: A calendar of *New Yorker* events across the country

MOVIES
OPENING

L'AUBERGE ESPAGNOLE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening May 16. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square.)

CINEMANIA
A documentary about five compulsive New York City film buffs, directed by Angela Christlieb and Stephen Kijak. Opening May 16. (Cinema Village.)

DOWN WITH LOVE
Renée Zellweger and Ewan McGregor play the romantic leads in a comedy inspired by the films of Doris Day and Rock Hudson. Directed by Peyton Reed ("Bring It On"). Opening May 16. (Beekman.)

DRACULA: PAGES FROM A VIRGIN'S DIARY
Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening May 14. (Film Forum.)

THE MATRIX RELOADED
Keanu Reeves, Carrie-Anne Moss, Laurence Fishburne, and Hugo Weaving return in a sequel to the 1999 science-fiction film. Written and directed by the Wachowski brothers. Opening May 15.

POKÉMON HEROES
The animated series continues with the further adventures of Ash and Pikachu. Opening May 16.

THE SEA
Set in a small modern-day village in Iceland, this family-reunion drama revolves around a patriarch trying to pass on his fishery business. Written and directed by Baltasar Kormákur ("101 Reykjavik"). In Icelandic. Opening May 16. (Sunshine Cinema.)

SECRET LIVES
Aviva Slesin directed this documentary about Jewish children who were hidden from the Nazis by non-Jews. Opening May 16. (Quad Cinema.)

SWEET SIXTEEN
A drama from Ken Loach about a Glasgow teenager (Martin Compston) who wants to start a new life with his mother (Michelle Coulter), due to be released from jail in time for his birthday. Opening May 16. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

FILM NOTES

BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM
A crowd-pleasing British movie devoted to the radical idea that girls can play soccer and sprain their ankles. Jess (Parminder Nagra) is a Sikh who hides her love of the game from her conservative parents, while Jules (Keira Knightley) is a tomboy who defies her English mother. Both have a thing for their Irish coach, Joe (Jonathan Rhys-Meyers)—he of the wounded knee and the watery eyes. The movie is a hodgepodge: nicely barbed scenes with Jess's family bump against weird practice montages that play like sports-bra ads. What it all adds up to is multicultural empowerment for the pre-teen shin-guard crowd.—*Michael Agger* (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

BLACK NARCISSUS
This lush 1947 adaptation of Rumer Godden's 1939 novel was made by the British producing-directing-writing team the Archers (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger). It's about faith and temptation: Anglican nuns wrestle with the sensual environment surrounding their Himalayan mission. Much of the Archers' career is summed up when a British estate manager (David Farrar) tells the Sister Superior (a suggestively tense Deborah Kerr), "There's something in the atmosphere that makes everything seem exaggerated." Without leaving England, the Archers create a rapturous landscape whose colors seem to spill over onto the nuns' off-white habits. Filmed in Pinewood Studios and the Lenardslee Gardens, in Horsham, this is a landmark of Hollywood-on-Thames trompe-l'oeil. With Flora Robson, Kathleen Byron, Sabu, and Jean Simmons (as a native girl); Jack Cardiff and Alfred Junge won Academy Awards



for (respectively) the legendary cinematography and production design.—*Michael Sragow* (Moving Image; May 17-18.)

CITY OF GOD
Just how far into your face can a movie get? This one has every intention of leaving you scalded and bruised. Set in Rio de Janeiro, it was directed by Fernando Meirelles, who tries every trick known to cameramen: freeze frames, whip pans, multiple dissolves, slow motion, double motion, any kind of motion. The object is to keep pace with his characters, the young and dispossessed of the Brazilian slums. The movie hastens roughly from the nineteen-sixties to the eighties, as we watch the boys either die or grow old before their time. The result is a jolting ride, but such is the skill on show that we run the risk of being too exhilarated to notice every death; does the film convince in its plea for the forgotten poor, or are we encouraged to forget them as they fall? In Portuguese.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 1/20/03.) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, and 64th and 2nd.)

DADDY DAY CARE
The promising premise of two out-of-work dads (Eddie Murphy and Jeff Garlin) who open up a "guy" day-care center sputters to a halt in this tepid comedy, clumsily directed by Steve Carr. The film is a series of pratfalls and toilet jokes aimed to please only the "Rugrats" demographic. Not even the considerable talents of Steve Zahn (as a gifted recruit who joins the staff) and Anjelica Huston (as the snooty mistress of a competing school) can save the day.—*Bruce Diones* (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, and 34th Street Theatre.)

THE DANCER UPSTAIRS
John Malkovich's premier effort as a movie director, an adaptation of Nicholas Shakespeare's 1995 novel about the hunt for a Shining Path terrorist in Peru, is at times rather vague. Malkovich rushes through some of his scenes, and his Spanish, French, and Argentinean actors fail to sound colloquial and relaxed in English. But the movie has a sinister atmosphere that begins to work on you. In the nameless capital city (i.e., Lima), cryptic, intimidating posters show up on the street and dead dogs with menacing signs around their necks are found hanging from lampposts. The revolutionaries are everywhere and nowhere, a murderously mischievous presence; they are like artists of revolution, staging their gruesome acts at their own convenience, and Malkovich doesn't prepare us for the horrors or underline them with ominous music. With Javier Bardem as the civilized policeman who pursues the terrorist for years and Laura Morante as a ballet teacher who may be involved in dangerous activities.—*David Denby* (5/5/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

DRACULA: PAGES FROM A VIRGIN'S DIARY
Guy Maddin, the director of "Careful," "Archangel," and the five-minute mini-masterpiece "The Heart of the World," among others, returns with a dizzying cinematic take on the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's production of Bram Stoker's classic. While transposing the ballet's interpretation from stage to screen, Maddin's phantasmagoric movie—which starts off as a silent black-and-white film set to the music of Gustav Mahler—becomes wildly, and erotically, exotic. Victorian sexuality and melodrama are brought together in a shadowy world of expressionistic images (flashlights pierce the dark in the shape of crosses, a trickle of blood moves across a map showing Dracula's progress) and an athletic, almost rabid, choreography. Maddin has discovered a new kind of cinema, the welding of silent-film techniques, avant-garde imagery, and twenty-first-century technology (there are digital effects smuggled in throughout the picture). This is one of his most consistent, vibrant films, and a perfect primer for exploring his other fantastic works.—*B.D.* (Film Forum.)

FELLINI: I'M A BORN LIAR
In this superb documentary fantasia, Fellini is seen directing an erotic scene from "Fellini Satyricon," shaping the performances of three beautiful young people with his hands, caressing the air as he croons instructions to first one and then another. His control of the scene is remarkable, but it makes one laugh, too, because in so much of the surrounding interview material, the director describes himself as a kind of medium through which a given movie passes, a mere craftsman in the service of reverie. His actual practice, as we can see from the many scenes of him at work, is consciously to shape every breath of air in his films, to dominate, terrify, seduce, and to dream and suffer for everyone. This Franco-Italian-Scottish co-production, directed by Damian Pettigrew, is an extraordinary piece of film in its own right. Pettigrew and his collaborators surround the interview material with a texture of film excerpts and freshly shot footage that has the density of one of the maestro's own movies, without the excess. In English and Italian.—*D.D.* (4/14/03) (Film Forum.)

THE GOOD THIEF
Nick Nolte plays Bob, half French, half American, whose days—and, more spectacularly, his nights—are spent in Nice. He is a chronic gambler and a heroin addict. He also used to be a thief, and Neil Jordan's movie shows him circling back to his old ways, as a sumptuous collection of paintings lures him into action—Bob is a bear, and his honey is fine art. With him are a bunch of henchmen, notably the smooth Raoul (Gérard Darmon); against him is a local detective (Tchéky Karyo), although the two of them are old, if not trusted, friends. The movie comes alive in the hero's presence: the camera frame is crammed with Nolte's shambling bulk, and we watch the wasting of his powers and his lunges at respectability. As a heist movie, however, this is a dud, the plot splintering badly in the middle. With Nolte to rely on, why does Jordan allow his attention to be distracted by lesser figures? Happily, the finale is a smooth run, as Bob and a young companion (Nutsa Kukhianidze) make hay at the tables of a casino. The material is lightly adapted from Jean-Pierre Melville's "Bob le Flambeur," with some patches of dialogue preserved intact.—*A.L.* (4/7/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Cinema 3, East 85th Street, Empire 25, Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

HOLES
Louis Sachar's entertaining children's novel is given a snappy, faithful treatment by the director Andrew Davis and his boisterous cast (which includes Sigourney Weaver, Jon Voight, and Shia LaBeouf). The story, about a young Texan boy unjustly sent to a work camp for delinquents, retains all the magic realism of the book (the author wrote the screenplay). Flashbacks to the Old West, deadly lizards, family curses—Davis combines all of the movie's disparate pieces with enormous skill. It's an emotional tall tale, intelligent and original.—*B.D.* (Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Orpheum VII.)

LAUREL CANYON
After the solemnities of "High Art," the director Lisa Cholodenko has turned to lighter matters: specifically, what to do if your mother is an unreconstructed hippie. Sam (Christian Bale) takes his fiancée, Alex (Kate Beckinsale), home to California to meet his mom, Jane (Frances McDormand), a

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First Course: BRUSCHETTA WITH GRILL-ROASTED BEETS AND GOAT CHEESE

Brilliantly colored beets and fresh goat cheese make an eye-catching topping for bruschetta (you can use red beets in this recipe, but be aware that they will stain the white cheese). A brushing of garlic on the warm bread just as it comes off the grill adds wonderful flavor. Note: The beets are grilled over Indirect Medium heat, the bread over Direct Medium heat.

Indirect/Medium

For the topping:

4	medium beets (yellow or orange), about 4 ounces each
	Extra-virgin olive oil
5	ounces fresh goat cheese, crumbled
2	scallions, white and light green part only, minced
2	teaspoons white wine vinegar
1	teaspoon finely chopped fresh thyme
1/2	teaspoon kosher salt
1/2	teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
12 to 15	slices (1/3 inch thick) pugliese or other Italian bread
1	large garlic clove

To make the topping: Trim the stem ends of beets and any long roots. Scrub the beets clean under cool water and brush or spray with oil. Grill over Indirect Medium heat until tender when pierced with the tip of a knife, 1 to 1-1/2 hours depending on size, turning once halfway through grilling time. When cool enough to touch, rub or peel skins from beets and cut the beets into 1/4-inch dice. Place in a medium bowl. Add 1 tablespoon of olive oil along with the remaining topping ingredients. Mix well.

Lightly brush or spray the bread slices on both sides with oil. Grill over Direct Medium heat until toasted and marked, 2 to 3 minutes, turning once halfway through grilling time. Remove the bread from the grill; brush vigorously on one side with the garlic clove. Top with the beet mixture. Serve at room temperature. Makes 12 to 15 servings.

Main Course: RED WINE-MARINATED STEAKS WITH SUN-DRIED TOMATO BUTTER

Allow your steaks to absorb the robust flavors in this marinade, and then pat the meat dry so it beautifully caramelizes on the grill. With a dollop of butter melting over the top, you are ready for a real steakhouse experience.

Direct/High

For the marinade:

2	cups dry red wine
1/4	cup balsamic vinegar
1/4	cup extra-virgin olive oil
8	medium garlic cloves, roughly chopped
3	tablespoons roughly chopped fresh rosemary
2	teaspoons crushed red pepper flakes
2	teaspoons kosher salt
1	teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
4	New York or rib-eye steaks, each about 3/4 inch thick

For the butter:

1/4	cup sun-dried tomatoes packed in oil, drained
1/2	cup unsalted butter, softened
1/2	teaspoon kosher salt
1/4	teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

To make the marinade: In a medium bowl whisk together the marinade ingredients.

Place the steaks in a large, resealable plastic bag and pour in the marinade. Press the air out of the bag and seal tightly. Turn the bag to distribute the marinade, place in a bowl, and refrigerate for 1 to 2 hours, turning the bag occasionally.

To prepare the butter: Place the sun-dried tomatoes in a food processor or blender; process until smooth. Place the butter in a small bowl. Add the sun-dried tomatoes, salt, and pepper to the butter. Blend until the ingredients are evenly distributed.

Remove the steaks from the bag and discard the marinade. Pat the steaks dry with paper towels and allow them to sit at room temperature for 20 to 30 minutes before grilling. Grill the steaks over Direct High heat until medium rare, 6 to 8 minutes, turning once halfway through grilling time. Allow the steaks to rest at room temperature for a few minutes before serving warm with a spoonful of butter on top of each one. Makes 4 servings.

Dessert: GRILLED PEACHES WITH AMARETTO GLAZE

If you have never had a grilled peach before, you'll be amazed at how intense the flavors become as they cook. Amaretto is an Italian liqueur with a great affinity for both peaches and ice cream. Buono appetito!

Direct/Medium

For the topping:

4	tablespoons unsalted butter
2	tablespoons granulated sugar
2	tablespoons Amaretto or other almond liqueur
1/4	teaspoon vanilla extract
4	large peaches, firm but ripe
1	pint vanilla or caramel ice cream

To make the glaze: In a small pan over medium-high heat, melt the glaze ingredients. Stir constantly until the mixture just begins to boil. Remove the pan from the heat.

Halve and pit the peaches. Brush the peaches all over with the glaze. Grill over Direct Medium heat until browned in spots and warm throughout, 8 to 10 minutes, turning every 2 to 3 minutes. Brush the peaches with more glaze each time you turn them. Serve the peaches warm with the ice cream. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

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VIELUXE.

record producer whose walls of photographs bear testament to a life misspent in rock. She is all the family that Sam has but far more than he wants, especially since Jane's idea of quality time is to come within an inch of seducing her son's girlfriend while bringing a shameless young rock star (Alessandro Nivola) along for the ride. The movie has poise and a lightly perspiring sexiness, but also an uncertain sense of humor, and you end up rooting for the squares—especially Sam and his colleague Sara (Natascha McElhone), who have more fun in the front of a Volvo than seems either practical or legal. The soundtrack is full of ersatz British pop, so tuneless and squally that it could almost be the real thing.—*A.L.* (3/10/03) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square.)

LILYA 4-EVER

Lilya (Oksana Akinshina) is a chirpy girl of sixteen, sunk in a stagnant backwater of what used to be the Soviet Union. She is, to all intents and purposes, orphaned when her witch of a mother abandons her to seek a life in America. Lilya starts with practically nothing and goes downhill from there, winding up selling her body to the vulpine patrons of a bar; what redeems the movie—what renders a squalid experience quite sacred in its intensity—is the vehemence with which the writer and director, Lukas Moodysson, asks whether his heroine has also sold her soul. The caustic portrait that he paints of his native Sweden, to which the deluded Lilya is transported in her quest for a future, has brought him both outrage and acclaim; what is beyond doubt is the brio of his storytelling and the branding of the girl's misfortune onto our hearts and nerves. With Artiom Bogucharski as the artless dodger who becomes her only friend. In German, Swedish, English, and Russian.—*A.L.* (4/21 & 28/03) (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE LIZZIE MC GUIRE MOVIE

After a successful cable-TV series and some bubbly children's radio hits, Disney's Miss Lizzie gets the green light for her own film. The effervescent tween-ager, sweetly portrayed by Hilary Duff, is a kiddie-pop phenomenon. The Disney studio, which markets as effectively as M-G-M in its heyday, is responsible for many teen sensations (Christina Aguilera, Justin Timberlake, and Britney Spears among them), and Duff is as professional as her predecessors, but with one major difference: she actually seems to be enjoying herself. The story takes her on a class trip to Rome where a "Gidget"-like romance and a shot at pop-star fame are given a gentle going over. With its winsome, fairy-tale notions about life and love, the movie is just sweet enough.—*B.D.* (East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, and Village East Cinemas.)

MAN ON THE TRAIN

The French director Patrice Leconte, having flitted from one genre to the next with movies as different as "Ridicule" and "The Girl on the Bridge," has now settled on his most consoling subject: the comedy of good companionship. Johnny Hallyday (who was, in his time, France's answer to Elvis) plays Milan, a low-level hit man who arrives, at the bluish end of a day, in a small French town and accepts the offer of a room from Manesquier (Jean Rochefort), a retired schoolteacher. For an hour, not much happens, and we are granted the languorous—and, to many filmgoers, increasingly rare—pleasure of watching two people lock gently together. They even trade roles: Rochefort, the most playful melancholic in cinema, learns to fire a gun, while Hallyday takes up pipe and slippers. All of this is delectable: Leconte has a taste for minor, chewed-up lives, and you can't help sighing with regret as he gathers his wits and hurries the plot toward an unnecessary climax. In French.—*A.L.* (5/12/03) (Cinema 2 and Sunshine Cinema.)

CORNEL RUBINO

THE MAN WITHOUT A PAST

A huge Finn (Markku Peltola), unnamed and undemonstrative, is beaten up and left for dead. Knowing almost nothing of his former life, he begins a new one—living in a converted storage container on the Helsinki waterfront, befriending a dog, and cooking regrettable meals for a quiet blonde (Kati Outinen) from the Salvation Army. The director is Aki Kaurismäki, and even by his rigorous standards this is laconic fare—long, peaceful silences broken by tentative conversation and the steady puff of cigarettes. The result is oddly affecting: you come to feel not just sympathy for the hero, with his bandaged brow and utter want of self-pity, but even a mild envy for his uncluttered existence. In Finnish.—*A.L.* (4/7/03) (Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)



Opening May 14, "Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary."

A MIGHTY WIND

The latest satirical documentary from the writer-director-actor Christopher Guest and his wonderful stock company. This one, set in the present day, is about a reunion of schlock commercial folksingers (of the Peter, Paul & Mary or Ian & Sylvia type) from the sixties, and though the movie is not as funny as "This Is Spinal Tap" or "Best in Show" it's brighter and more revivifying than anything else around these days. Guest's subjects, in all these films, are people from the drearier corners of show business who are so deep within whatever it is they do that they have lost all traces of self-consciousness. His films are, in the end, not so much mock documentaries as records of a deep-down dorkiness that becomes a form of blessedness. Guest is a realist who loves his subjects. With Eugene Levy, Catherine O'Hara, Michael McKean, Parker Posey, et al. Ed Begley, Jr., is particularly good as the Swedish-born public-television executive who drops Yiddish into every sentence in order to remain a success in New York.—*D.D.* (5/5/03) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kew Gardens Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 72nd Street East, and 34th Street Theatre.)

PLANET OF THE APES

One of the most entertaining science-fiction fantasies ever to come out of Hollywood. The writing, by Michael Wilson and Rod Serling, who adapted Pierre Boulle's novel "Monkey Planet," is often fancy-ironic in the old school of poetic disillusion, but the construction is first-rate. With his perfect, lean-hipped, powerful body, Charlton Heston is a godlike hero; built for strength, he's an archetype of what makes Americans win. He doesn't play a nice guy; he's harsh and hostile, self-centered and hot-tempered. The director, Franklin Schaffner, has thought out the action in terms of the wide screen, and he uses space and distance dramatically. The costuming of the actors playing the apes is rather witty, and the apes have a wonderful nervous, hopping walk. The best little hopper is Kim Hunter, as an ape lady doctor; she somehow manages to give a distinctive, charming performance through all the makeup.—*Pauline Kael* (Thalia Theatre; May 17-18.)

RAISING VICTOR VARGAS

A lovely small-scale comedy about the commonplace mating rituals in a Dominican section of Manhattan. It's summer, and everyone is on the prowl, but the neighborhood is friendly and peaceful; chickens run through the alleys, and small gardens pop up here and there among the projects. The boys act cocky even when they're unsure of themselves, and the girls pretend they don't need boys. Nothing very important happens, but, moment by moment, the movie is alive with the play of gestures and glances, the faces of aggression and withdrawal. Victor Rasuk is well cast as the good-looking local Casanova, perhaps eighteen years old, and Judy Marte is the wary young beauty who gets him to change his style. The writer-director Peter Sollett stays close to the actors, all nonprofessionals, and they greet the camera with a modest but exploratory willingness.—*D.D.* (3/31/03) (Chelsea Cinemas, Eastside Playhouse, Kew Gardens Cinema, and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE SHAPE OF THINGS

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Lincoln Square and Village Theatre VII.)

SPELLBOUND

Jeffrey Blitz's charming documentary follows eight elementary students competing in the 1999 National Spelling Bee; he rode the bus to school with them, interviewed their teachers, checked out their rooms, and, in one case, listened while a kid talked like a robot. The sample of children is appropriately diverse—in region, in race, in the intensity of their preparations. Some of their parents see the spelling bee as representing the immigrant dream of America in miniature, while others seem amazed at the intensity of their nerdy offspring. The competitions are tense, and Blitz cobbles together a series of heartbreaking reaction shots of errant spellers. His direction shows a clever, occasionally flippant, selection of detail—the dog-eared unabridged dictionaries, the congratulatory sign posted outside Hooters, the prodigy who signs his autographs "Trust in Jesus."—*M.A.* (Film Forum.)

X2

This is the sequel to "X-Men," Bryan Singer's sleek saga of extravagantly gifted humanoids known as mutants. Early grosses suggest that Singer has repeated his success, and that there may be further installments to come. But does the source material suit an extended franchise? The plotting seems dangerously self-interested, being concerned almost exclusively with the survival of the mutants themselves, and, behind the succulent effects, the tone is oddly hectoring, instructing us to behave liberally toward these nice boys and girls whose only quirk is the ability to create thunderstorms or hurl fire. Also, the need for fresh mutants will soon overcrowd the screen. Hugh Jackman, as Wolverine, is one of the few who emerge from the picture with

their dignity enhanced; by contrast, Anna Paquin, Halle Berry, and even Ian McKellen are cruelly underused. With Alan Cumming, enjoying himself to a quite illicit degree as a Teutonic devil, and Brian Cox as a neo-con mutant-hunter, whose goatee may be the most villainous effect of all.—*A.L.* (5/12/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

ALSO PLAYING

BETTER LUCK TOMORROW
Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Square.



"Cinemania," opening May 16, documents the lives of five obsessive moviegoers.

BLUE CAR
Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.
MAROONED IN IRAQ
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Kew Gardens Cinema.
ONLY THE STRONG SURVIVE
Angelika Film Center.
WINGED MIGRATION
Paris.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kew Gardens Cinema, 81-05 Lefferts Blvd., Queens (718-441-9835).
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (212-334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through May 25: "Czech Horror and Fantasy on Film." May 17 at 2: "The Ear" (1970, Karel Kachyna). ♦ May 17 at 4:15: "The Pied Piper" (1986, Jiri Barta). ♦ May 18 at 2: "Valerie and Her Week of Wonders" (1970, Jaromil Jires). ♦ May 18 at 4: "Little Otik" (2000, Jan Svankmajer). ♦ Repertory nights. May 17-18 at 6:30: "Black Narcissus" (†).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Starting May 14: "Miike! Miike! Miike!" The films of the Japanese director. May 14-18 at 7: "The Happiness of the Katakuris" (2001). ♦ May 14-18 at 9:30: "Audition" (2000). ♦ May 19-20 at 7 and 9:30: "Ichi the Killer" (2001). ♦ Starting May 15: "Asian Films Are Go!!!," contemporary films from Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Thailand. See www.subwaycinema.com for a schedule.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Selections from the New Festival. May 14 at 4:30 and 9:10: "Everything Will Be Fine" (1997, Angelina Maccarone). ♦ May 14 at 7: "The Odds of Recovery" (2002, Su Friedrich). ♦ Movies written by Horton Foote. May 15 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "To Kill a Mockingbird" (1962, Robert Mulligan). ♦ May 16 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Tender Mercies" (1983, Bruce Beresford). ♦ May 17 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Baby, the Rain Must Fall" (1964, Mulligan). ♦ May 18 at 3: "Courtship" (1987, Howard Cummings). ♦ May 18 at 5: "On Valentine's Day" (1986, Ken Harrison). ♦ May 18 at 8:30: "1918" (1985, Harrison). ♦ A tribute to the actor and director Sergei Bodrov, Jr. May 19 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Brother" (1997, Aleksei Balabanov; in Russian). ♦ The cinematography of Conrad Hall. May 20 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Fat City" (1972, John Huston).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—May 14-15 at 1:20, 3:20, 5:20, 7:20, and 9:20: "King of Hearts" (1966, Philippe de Broca). ♦ May 16-20 at 1, 2:45, 4:30, 6:15, 8, and 9:45: "A Woman Is a Woman" (1961, Jean-Luc Godard; in French).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-315-6160)—Through May 20: The films of William Klein. May 20 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Muhammad Ali the Greatest" (1964-74).

GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through May 25: Films supported by the Hubert Bals Fund. May 15 at 3: "Three Brothers" (2000, Serik Aprymov; in Russian). ♦ May 15 at 6: "The Price of Forgiveness" (2001, Mansour Sora Wade; in Wolof). ♦ May 15 at 8:15: "The Wrestlers" (2000, Buddhadeb Dasgupta; in Bengali). ♦ May 16 at 2 and May 17 at 6: "Journey to the Sun" (1999, Yesim Ustaoglu; in Turkish and Kurdish). ♦ May 16 at 4:30 and May 17 at 3: "Rose, Violet & Lily" (1992, Tato Kotetishvili and Ineke Smits; in Georgian, German, and Dutch). ♦ May 16 at 6:30 and May 17 at 1: "Genesis" (1999, Cheick Oumar Sissoko; in Bambara). ♦ May 16 at 8:30 and May 18 at 2: "Suzhou River" (2000, Lou Ye; in Mandarin). ♦ May 17 at 8:15 and May 19 at 6: "Bemani" (2002, Dariush Mehrjui; in Farsi). ♦ May 18 at 3:45: "Chronicle of a Disappearance" (1996, Elia Suleiman; in Arabic, French, and Hebrew). ♦ May 18 at 6: "Japón" (2002, Carlos Reygadas; in Spanish). ♦ May 19 at 8: "Crane World" (1999, Pablo Trapero; in Spanish).

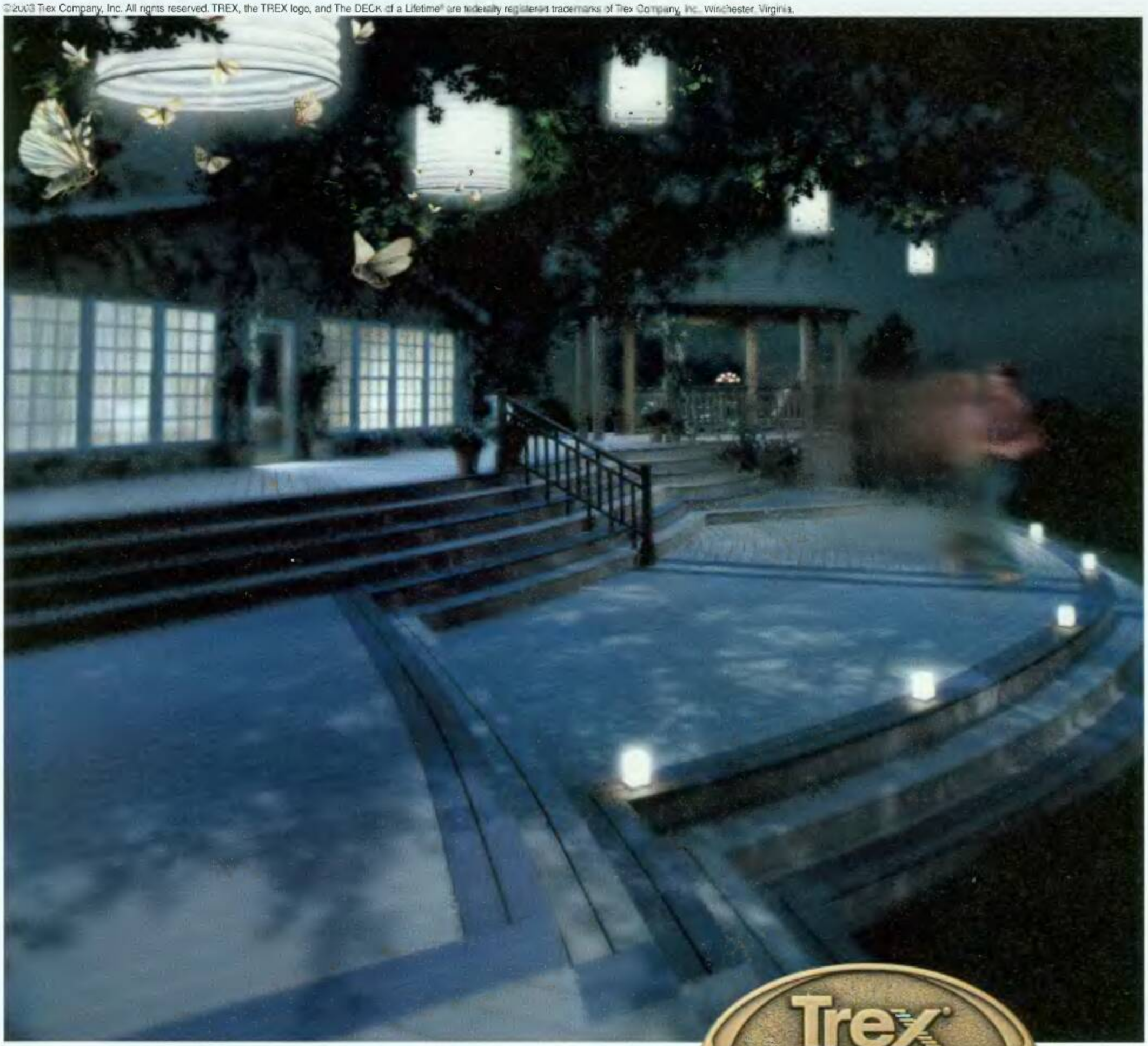
SUNSHINE CINEMA
139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight movies. May 16-17: "The Matrix" (1999, the Wachowski brothers).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Through July 13: Sci-Fi Flick Fest. May 17 at 1 and May 18 at 7:45: "Planet of the Apes" (†). ♦ May 17 at 3 and May 18 at 9:45: "When Worlds Collide" (1951, Rudolph Mate). ♦ May 17 at 5 and 8:15 and May 18 at 1 and 4:15: "Solaris" (1972, Andrei Tarkovsky; in Russian).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through May 29: "Films from Along the Silk Road." The movies are listed with their country of origin. May 14 at 1 and 9: "The Adopted Son" (1998, Aktan Abdikalikov; Kyrgyzstan). ♦ May 14 at 3: "Killer" (1998, Darezhan Omirbaev; Kazakhstan). ♦ May 15 at 1: "The Fall of Otrar" (1990, Ardak Amirkulov; Kazakhstan). ♦ May 15 at 4:15, May 16 at 1 and 7, and May 18 at 2:30 and 6:30: "Tenderness" (1967, Elyer Ishmukhamedov; Uzbekistan). ♦ May 15 at 8:30, May 16 at 4:45, and May 17 at 9: "Brother" (1991, Bachtiyar Hudoynazarov; Tadzhikistan). ♦ May 16 at 2:45 and May 17 at 7: "Little Angel, Bring Me Joy" (1993, Usman Saparov; Turkmenistan). ♦ May 16 at 9, May 17 at 5, May 19 at 3, and May 20 at 1 and 9: "Takhir and Zukhra" (1945, Nabi Ganiev; Uzbekistan). ♦ May 18 at 4:30 and 8:30, May 19 at 1, and May 20 at 3: "The Time of Yellow Grass" (1991, Mairam Yusupova; Tadzhikistan).

GAHAN WILSON

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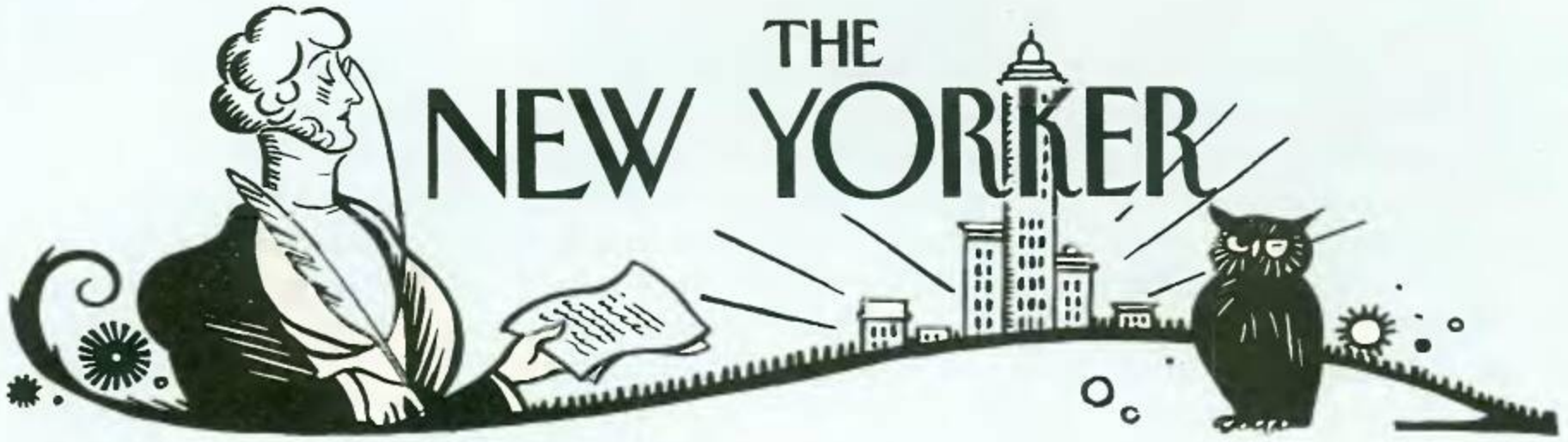
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
MARCHES AND PARADES



The sight of President Bush taking his extraordinary victory lap earlier this month aboard the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln made it more difficult to argue with those (a planet-wide majority, if we can believe the international polls) who accuse our leaders of arrogance. Flying in at the controls of a Navy jet, making a tail-hook landing, back-slapping sailors in the California sunshine while wearing a fighter-pilot flight suit, then announcing, against the blue Pacific, the end of major combat in Iraq—well, it had a certain swagger. And yet there are signs that the Bush Administration is genuinely concerned about not seeming triumphal over its victory in Iraq. In fact, we are told, there was no victory—only a liberation—and the Administration has been trying to get out the message that homecoming parades for the troops, including a big one here in New York, should somehow make that distinction clear. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and some of the military's top brass have been spending "significant time talking about this and thinking it through," according to Victoria Clarke, a spokeswoman for the Pentagon. They're all hoping to avoid, as the *Times* put it, "parades that might appear to be gloating."

Why this sudden sensitivity to appearances? To anyone even slightly familiar with the record of Saddam Hussein's regime, a bit of gloating over its destruction doesn't seem unreasonable. And this is, after all, the President who dismissed the demonstrations of February 15th—when ten million people, in six hundred cities across the globe, marched against the invasion of Iraq in what was probably the largest one-day protest in history—with the observation that he never listened to "focus groups."

Still, the protesters had a greater effect on events than today's conventional wisdom recalls. Domestic and foreign opposition pushed the Administration to go back to the United Nations, for instance, for one more round of weapons inspections, and perhaps to take added care in avoiding civilian casualties. The war, of course, went ahead. The more dire predictions of its opponents did not, thankfully, prove correct, and the relatively quick fall of Saddam Hussein seemed to mean, both logically and morally, the defeat of the antiwar movement.

Except that few of the war's opponents, domestic or foreign, have become wholehearted supporters of the Administration or of its plans for Iraq's future. And support matters. Even though Spain's Prime Minister, for example, was one of the willing, the opposition of ninety per cent of his voting public meant that he was confined to contributing a hospital ship and humanitarian help, rather than combat troops, to the war effort. A private deal cut with Turkey's top politicians fell apart on the parliament floor despite American inducements amounting to some twenty-six billion dollars, because the Turkish public wouldn't abide it. If the United States learned anything in the tortuous months of politicking leading up to the war, it was that today it must win over not only the leaders of foreign countries but their citizens.

That may explain why the Administration's rationales for invasion, which seemed to change constantly, from anthrax and Al Qaeda to supposed nuclear sales in Africa, all eventually acquired, whatever their merits, the hectoring sound of sales pitches being made to skeptical, even hostile crowds. This rhetorical escalation was driven, in part, by the pressure of sustained opposition, as



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

was the Administration's tendency to overstate its claims about Saddam Hussein's capabilities and intentions.

The Administration seemed similarly compelled to exaggerate the short-term prospects for turning Iraq into a democratic, peaceful, modern capitalist state. Simply installing a few reliable exiles would probably never have worked, to judge from the nationalist and religious passions now roiling the country. Even so, after all that has been argued and promised, anything less than a sustained effort to restore order, keep the country together, and generally nation-build would expose the Administration to charges of wantonness and hypocrisy.

The war was won without Turkey, and despite the French. But, as the Administration's attempt last week to craft a resolution on lifting sanctions that would be acceptable to the entire Security Council suggests, we'd rather not have to win the peace without them. One problem with the "v" word is that the victory, even on the Administration's own terms, is incomplete. As President Bush said in his speech aboard the aircraft carrier, it wasn't actually a war we just fought; it was a battle in a larger, longer war against global terrorism. Even the most myopic unilateralist must realize that to fight such a war we need allies. Without the help of Pakistan and Germany, just to take two obvious examples, we would be making little, if any, progress against Al Qaeda. American triumphalism over the war in Iraq plays very poorly in both of those countries.

At the same time, many Americans are deeply wary of the notion of an ongoing, or even permanent, war. (The Democrats dread this prospect for their own reasons, since they badly need to change the subject to the domestic economy if they are to gain any traction in the 2004 election campaigns.) According to a recent Times/CBS poll, a majority of Americans still oppose preemptive military strikes. The vast street protests we saw before the war were expressing, it should be remembered, the fears and concerns of many more Americans (tens of millions, apparently) than ever got out and marched.

This is not to say that Secretary Rumsfeld is living in fear of the peace movement. But the minuet being danced by the Bush Administration and its many antagonists over Iraq has been exceedingly intricate, and it is likely to become more so in the months ahead, when sharing the costs of reconstruction will become increasingly urgent and the Pentagon will seek to replace our soldiers with troops from countries where people remain strongly opposed to American policy. The peace marchers are quiet for now, in London and Berlin as well as in New York and Washington, but they're still there.

—William Finnegan

DEPT. OF CALCULATION

TWO BUCKS



Two dollars doesn't buy much—half a hot dog at Yankee Stadium, one shined shoe outside Grand Central—but it is twice as much as one, and everybody, unfortunately, is acquainted with the value of a dollar. Two dollars will get you a roll of hockey tape, or a Budweiser tall boy, or a few .9-millimetre rounds, or a bet at OTB. At the Brighton Clean laundromat, on West Fifteenth Street, it buys an hour and twenty minutes of dryer time; at Show World, the peep-show palace on Eighth Avenue, it's good for six minutes of "Barefoot & Pregnant" or "Dawn of the Debutantes" in booth No. 16. Two dollars also happens to be the amount, according to the World Bank, that a person must earn every day in order to stay above the poverty line. This standard applies to the underdeveloped world and not to an overdeveloped town like New York, where, last week, the price of a subway or bus ride finally rose from a dollar-fifty to two bucks, after a judge ruled that allegations of financial shenanigans at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority did not preclude a fare hike. You don't have to be starving to feel that two dollars is a lot to pay for a token, especially now that you don't actually get the token (tokens were eliminated last week, too). MetroCards will henceforth be depleted in giant steps. Two trips a day, five days a week, fifty weeks a year: that comes to an extra two hundred and fifty dollars annually, the equivalent of seven whole dryer days at Brighton Clean. In the middle of all this, the Federal Reserve muttered some things last Tuesday about deflation, though almost everything in these parts seems to be going up: taxes, taxis, tolls, gas, rent, yogurt.

One good thing the fare hike did was to reinstate the pizza principle, an economic axiom advanced twenty-three years ago, in the *Times*' Metropolitan Diary, by Eric M. Bram, a patent attorney in Tarrytown. Bram observed that in New York the subway fare almost always mirrors the cost of a slice. In 1964, when he first noticed this phenomenon (on a trip out to the World's Fair, in Flushing Meadows), both were fifteen cents, and they moved more or less in lockstep until recently, when, for whatever reason, the slice inched ahead; most pizzerias now charge a dollar seventy-five or an even two dollars. The discrepancy was troubling, because it forced New Yorkers to wonder if pizza, like coffee and college, had become a ripoff. Now pizza is once again the bargain it was designed to be. "But will this relationship remain now that the subway token itself has been relegated to history?" Bram wondered last week. "And will the quality of our pizza suffer?"

Everyone remembers when something that now costs a lot of money could be had for two dollars—a movie, a lid, a pack of smokes—and there are still many people who can summon up the original "remember when" denomination, the nickel, or even break into song: "Pepsi-Cola hits the spot/Twelve full ounces, that's a lot/Twice as much for a nickel, too/Pepsi-Cola is the drink for you." The majority of these people, though, are probably at least seventy years old, and if you are attempting to do effective nostalgia/inflation calculations and you're using the "senior discount factor" that was recently applied in a pair of Bush Administration clean-air studies, in which the life of each American older than seventy was valued at $2.3 million and that of each American younger than seventy was valued at $3.7 million, you're going to have to start doing some serious math. Here's one unaudited tabulation: two dollars seems thirty-seven per cent less egregiously expensive to someone younger than seventy. In fact, it feels about like a dollar-fifty.

—Nick Paumgarten

AT TEA
COGNITO



On a recent sunny Friday afternoon, Yoko Ono was sipping an iced coffee at La Lanterna di Vittorio, one of the less touristy cafés in Greenwich Village, and reflecting on life at the age of seventy. She wore black jeans, black suède shoes, a black knit top, and a black blazer; the rectangular lenses of her glasses were tinted green, and her black hair was short, with mink-colored highlights. She didn't look seventy. She had with her some buttons and posters that said "Imagine Peace" on them—black letters, white background—as well as a copy of some thoughts on world peace which she had written on the occasion of her birthday, in February. She sat facing the door, with her back to the brick wall. The café got busier and people looked at her, although in a discreet, New York sort of way.

Not very many seventy-year-olds have a chart-topping hit. Ono's new CD features ten remixes of her 1981 release "Walking on Thin Ice" by various producers, including the Pet Shop Boys. Last week, "Walking on Thin Ice (The Remixes)" appeared on three *Billboard* lists—mostly dance charts that reflect what d.j.s are playing in clubs. Ono was recording the song on the night that her husband, John Lennon, was murdered, and it was released several months later. At the time, it seemed to be a commentary on her own fragile state of mind, especially the spoken-word lyrics about a frozen lake:

> I knew a girl who tried to walk across the lake, 'course it was winter and all this was ice. That's a hell of a thing to do, you know. They say this lake is as big as the ocean. I wonder if she knew about it.

What did Ono think kids were finding in the song today?

"I think maybe they are feeling like they are walking on thin ice again," she said. "There is this fear, and there is a desire to ritualize that fear by dancing."

Ono said that she didn't listen to much new music: "I like Eminem. I think he's brilliant. His sensibility is extremely now. Otherwise, I listen to my remixes, I listen to my late husband's music a lot, and I listen to my son." (Sean Lennon, who is now twenty-seven, is working on the songs for his second album.) She said that she was currently putting together a collection of John Lennon's hits on DVD, which will feature videos and home movies associated with different songs.

She is also busy with her own work as an artist. She does not travel for pleasure—she finds travel boring, she said—but her work takes her around the world; she'll be mounting her "Yes Yoko Ono" exhibition, a forty-year retrospective of her art, in South Korea soon, and she has a piece in the Venice Biennale.

"Work is something I love, and is what comes naturally to me," she said. "Business is harder. Motherhood is extremely complicated and difficult, though I suppose some mothers would say it's as natural as breathing."

The conversation turned to the dearth of popular protest songs about the war in Iraq. Ono, who has played a role in promoting peace since September 11th—she paid for peace billboards in Times Square, London, and Toyko, and has taken out two full-page ads in the *Times*—said she did not think that songs were as effective at rallying people as they used to be. Now, instead of songs, the world has "e-mail power," she said. "E-mail is horizontal power; it represents horizontal thinking. Vertical thinking is when we presume power is above us, but horizontal thinking makes us realize that the power is ours." She added, "Today, the people making war are much more intelligent; they know exactly what they're doing, and instead of dialoguing or fighting with the peace people they're just ignoring us."

The afternoon sun was slanting through the café's front window. Ono hadn't had time for breakfast or lunch because she was so busy attending to business affairs—chiefly licensing requests for her late husband's songs. "I am the only person who does it—every day," she said. And then, with a light handshake and a slight bow, she disappeared into a town car that had been waiting for her, leaving her "Imagine Peace" posters behind.

—John Seabrook



Yoko Ono

HERE IN THE HOMELAND
READY OR NOT



The Secretary of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge, was at the Fire Museum in SoHo last week, at a breakfast meeting to promote his department's new antiterrorism public-information campaign, which is called Ready. The program consists of television spots, brochures to be distributed to libraries and post offices, placements in the Yellow Pages, and an elaborate Web site that explains the difference between a chemical attack and a biological one, and includes a handy glossary of terrorism-related terminology. The site, Ready.gov, urges Americans to stock up on three days' worth of food and water, invest in flashlights, keep the car's tank at least half full of gas at all times, decide on the best routes out of town, and develop a "family communications plan," so that, if disaster should strike, everyone can congregate and go where the food, water, flashlights, gas, and nearest uncongested freeways might be.

Attending the breakfast along with

Secretary Ridge were editors from such publications as *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Redbook*, and *Parenting*, who had been selected to convey the government's readiness message to the public because, as Susan Neely, Ridge's assistant secretary for public affairs, explained, "Mothers are two-thirds more likely to be making preparedness plans." Ridge, who was looking much more tanned and relaxed than he does in the sober television spots produced for the Ready campaign by the Ad Council, sought common ground with the editors by chatting about his own children. "I used to coach my daughter's softball team when I was governor," he said. "She's very competitive. I don't know where she gets that. She gets very frustrated when she doesn't play well. I remember my son saying to her after one game, 'Sissy, breathe in; breathe out.'"

Advice of quite a different kind is to be found on the Ready.gov Web site: there, Americans are urged to make face masks out of towels or T-shirts for all family members to wear in the event of an unspecified attack that may release into the air what the site demotically if vaguely refers to as "junk." Ridge said that on the evening of September 11, 2001, he faced the task of telling his kids not what had happened but why it had happened. "It is going to be a changed world for my children," he said. "I am fifty-seven years old, and the time I've been alive has probably been the best time ever to be an American citizen. There was Vietnam—that blip on the scene that caused some social unrest—but there was prosperity, and we didn't have to worry about international terrorism." He told his audience that his wife, Michele, had stocked the Ridge household in Maryland with sufficient water and provisions for three days, although he did not mention the fact, later provided by his press office, that there were also sufficient supplies for the family's three Labradors.

The Ready campaign is supposed to strike a fine balance between being informative and being alarmist. Ridge told the editors, "You can be afraid, or you can be ready"—which happens to be the tag line of the campaign (with "we" in place of "you"). Ridge said that he hoped the Ready.gov campaign would be received with less skepticism than the suggestion, several months ago, that citizens arm themselves with duct tape. "I am one who believes that humor is a very powerful means of communicating troubling information," he said. "But we got to a point where people were using the duct tape more to ridicule than to inform."

Similarly disappointing was the way that the five-color alert system had been misunderstood: Codes Red, Orange, Yellow, Blue, and Green were not intended to alarm the public but to instruct "first responders"—firefighters, the police, guards of public monuments—to put extra security precautions into effect. "We don't want parents and children to think that it means anything other than that the government has determined that the risk of a terrorist attack is a little bit higher," he said, which was meant to be reassuring. It was suggested to him that perhaps the five-color alert had been greeted with confusion and late-night-television waggery because the colors do not follow the spectrum—blue and green are in the wrong order—and thus make no intuitive sense. Ridge looked surprised. "No one has ever said that to me before," he said. "I guess I didn't get a good mark in natural science. Next time I look at the rainbow, I'm going to think, I messed up."

The message of Ready.gov, Ridge explained, differed from Cold War duck-and-cover drills. The current advisory for what to do in the event of a dirty-bomb or chemical attack, called Shelter-in-Place, is much more advanced than diving under a desk. "A radiological event is not a nuclear event," he said. "The best thing to do is stay put, seal the windows and doors, and wait for the plume to move on." Ridge seemed almost nostalgic for the advisories of his youth, while being certain of the distance between their faint, antiquated ridiculousness and his own Ready program. "I remember hiding under my desk in school, though I don't think ducking and covering would have done me any good in a nuclear explosion," he said cheerily. "But Sister said we had to do it."

—Rebecca Mead



Tom Ridge

SALES DEPT.

CAKES



The other day in Chinatown, at the corner of Bowery and Grand, David Chen, the seventy-year-old, five-foot-three Cantonese-born owner and proprietor of a small food cart, was going about his business. There was no hint of any anxiety about SARS, nuclear weaponry, or banking flimflam—just the usual focus on coming and going, especially of honking cars and trucks and of backpack wearers shuffling on foot. There was not a face mask in sight.

Chen stood inside his gleaming stainless-steel roofed cart, which was stocked with his single ware—"ALL NATURAL HOT MINI CAKES—20 PIECES FOR $1.00." This label, in English and Chinese, appears on three sides of the cart. He seemed to be spotting every likely customer from half a block away, and they came to him in bunches, especially Chinese-speaking mothers escorting small children, with dollar bills in hand. Most of his customers were Chinese. There was a plump woman with a small boy who said they had come on a special ten-dollar bus trip from Boston. "Can't go wrong for a dollar," she said.

Behind Chen's cart, on the curb, stood a huge open umbrella. Chen was sportily attired in an immaculate baby-blue windbreaker over a crisp matching shirt,

creased black pants, and black shoes. Pinned to the jacket was his license:

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A tan porkpie hat was perched on Chen's head. He wore bright-white cotton gloves. Under a shelf in the cart he kept containers of batter that he had prepared at home—wheat flour, water, and cane sugar. On a propane stove stood an iron mold with thirty holes. (This is the only part of the enterprise not made in the U.S.A. It was brought by a friend from Hong Kong.) Chen ladled batter into the holes. It took sixty seconds to bake a batch of thirty cakes, each the size of a gumball. With a large steel spoon, he scooped out the hot cakes and put them on a plate. Stacks of small waxed-paper bags, larger brown paper bags, and white paper napkins were at the ready. The waxed-paper bags were filled rapidly. A jar of batter would yield twenty batches of thirty mini cakes.

Most of Chen's customers spoke to him in Chinese. He seemed to bark the answers, but he smiled a lot as he barked. A few spoke to him in English.

"Do you eat the cakes yourself?"

"You ever see a chef eat in his own kitchen?" came the bark, accompanied by a long, raucous, what-a-stupid-question laugh.

"When do you eat?"

"Home! Home! Rice, rice, rice!" Very loud laughter. "Fish. Vegetables. For dessert, mini cakes. For dessert!" More laughs.

A customer, munching a mini cake, complimented Chen on his English.

"I go to English class! English for me very important. I go to class at University Settlement, on Eldridge Street. I also go to class for writing English, with teacher from Gallatin School. I learn to write English. Very, very important."

He smiled. "Very happy," he said. "I have Chinese first name, but I always use name David. Police arranged my corner here four years ago. I have a business. Not a store, but a real business. In a store, you know the people. In my business, all you know is they come from Brooklyn, they come from Queens. They like my cakes. At night, I push everything to parking lot on Chrystie Street. I pay one hundred dollars a month to park there. Then I go home, on Allen Street. On my best day, I make one hundred dollars. On bad day, I make eighteen dollars. If it snows, rains, I stay home. No work. Nobody says I must do this, I must do that. I make mini cakes. People like it. If they don't like it, they don't buy it. In Canton, everything different. Had to stay in one job. My wages a hundred fifty dollars a month. Work in factory to make machines for sugarcane. I had wife and three children. I wait eight years for our visas to come to America. I go Hong Kong to New York in 1989. My son now twenty-eight, drives subway car. Here I always happy. Mayor Bloomberg says Chinatown business is bad, people afraid of SARS." He gave the raucous laugh. "Mayor Bloomberg says Chinatown has wrong image. People worried. So he comes down here to restaurant and eats, to show it's clean. Very funny." He went on, "You see my business here? Look. Everything in my business is very clean. No SARS. I don't worry about it."

A chubby youngster wearing oversized bluejeans approached the cart and stared at a fresh batch of fragrant mini cakes.

"I'll try one," he said assertively, reaching for the platter.

"No!" Chen said.

"Try one!" the boy said.

"No."

The fat boy retreated.

" 'Try one, try one!' " Chen barked. "This is a business. I am American businessman. If you want it free, go to church."

—Lillian Ross



"But in my screenplay the young female P.O.W. is in the shower when her rescuers arrive."

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ACCOUNTANTS IN THE *SKY*

To make sense of Albany, you have to turn everything on its head.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

Before I worked in Albany, I had always wanted to be a political reporter, perhaps because I had no real idea what the job entailed. I arrived there on December 31, 1986, the eve of Mario Cuomo's second inaugural, and almost immediately was assigned to cover a scandal involving an assemblywoman named Gerdi Lipschutz. A sixty-three-year-old former dental assistant from Queens, Lipschutz had served in the Legislature for six terms and had risen to the chairmanship of the Assembly Majority Steering Committee. At the behest of her county's Democratic organization, she had also, prosecutors revealed, maintained two "no-show" employees on her legislative payroll. First, her indignant colleagues shunned her; later, they voted to strip her of her seniority and deprive her of her legislative stipend—or "lulu"—and collectively called on her to resign. On her last day in office, it fell to me to follow her out to her car in the Capitol's underground garage. I can still recall the baleful look that she shot me when I asked her if she had any final observations to share about her situation.

In principle, Albany is a state capital much like any other, with struggles that are no more or less edifying; as a practical matter, anyone who has ever spent much time there knows different. (William Kennedy, Albany's Virgil, who has described the city as "a state of mind," notes that "wickedness has been our lot for more years than any man alive can remember.") I ended up reporting on Albany for five legislative sessions. During that time, the State Senate Minority Leader, Manfred Ohrenstein, was indicted on five hundred and sixty-four counts of grand larceny and conspiracy, and the Assembly Speaker, Mel Miller, was indicted on nineteen counts of conspiracy and mail fraud. Both cases were eventually dismissed. (Shortly after I left, the state's chief judge, Sol Wachtler, was charged with extortion after demanding a payoff from his ex-girlfriend and threatening to kidnap her daughter.) The commanding officer of the New York State militia was discovered not only to have accepted bribes and falsified official documents but also to have been a bigamist, and two janitorial workers were reprimanded for having had sex—repeatedly—on a desk at the headquarters of the New York State Department of Transportation. The state's drug-treatment commissioner was forced to resign after allegations that he had steered contracts to friends who failed to provide any actual drug treatment. He became a pushcart vender and on warm days sold hot dogs in front of the Capitol. He called himself the Knishener.

Late last month, I went back to the Capitol to see how Albany would handle this year's twelve-billion-dollar budget gap, the worst since the Great Depression. On the first day I spent in the city, the state's legislative leaders emerged from a meeting with Governor George Pataki to say that they still hoped to reach an agreement with him on a spending plan, which was interpreted to mean that they had reached an impasse. On the second day, the Governor asserted, "In times of challenge, New Yorkers have always stood together in making the right decisions," which was understood to signal a complete breakdown in negotiations. By the end of the week, the Legislature had approved a ninety-three-billion-dollar budget that violated just about every condition Pataki had laid down. The Governor has labelled it "patently unconstitutional." At one point, standing in the Capitol's Red Room, he declared, "I will do everything in my ability to prevent this plan from becoming law, including exercising my veto powers." Depending on how things play out, the struggle between the Governor and the

Legislature will either merely prolong the state's fiscal problems or, more likely, compound them.

Such are the ways of Albany that when things seem to be proceeding in an orderly, democratic fashion it is an almost sure bet that they are about to spin out of control. Thus, the first sign that the budget process had broken down last month came when it began to move forward. Members of the State Senate and the Assembly returned to work after a ten-day spring recess to find that budget bills had been printed and were being distributed by the clerks who sit on either side of the Capitol. Lobbyists wandered through the hallways, clutching legislation with titles like "An act to amend the general business law, in relation to allowing the department of correctional services' division of correctional industries to purchase inmate-made goods," and grinning like kids who have just discovered their dad's stack of *Juggs*.

In general, the only way to make sense of what goes on in the Capitol is to turn things on their head. The Assembly meets in a grand chamber with red granite columns and carved sandstone pilasters. The Senate convenes in an even more splendid room, with walls covered in embossed Spanish leather, Mexican onyx, and 23k. gold leaf. Meanwhile, all the decisions that matter occur elsewhere. Of the two hundred and twelve members of the Legislature, two hundred and ten are, for all intents and purposes, superfluous, like so many extras from "Gangs of New York." ("What's the difference between a state legislator and a welfare recipient?" ran a joke that recently made the rounds in the Capitol. "At least the welfare recipient has a work requirement.")



Will the struggle between Pataki and the Legislature merely prolong the state's fiscal problems or will it compound them?

The two legislators who do count are the Senate Majority Leader, Joseph Bruno, and the Assembly Speaker, Sheldon Silver. Bruno, a Republican from the city of Troy, made a lot of money selling telephone systems and now owns a horse farm. He dresses well—Mario Cuomo used to make fun of his good looks—and radiates geniality. Silver, a Democrat from lower Manhattan, is by training a trial lawyer and by temperament a misanthrope. He speaks in a lugubrious baritone, and generally gives the impression of having just returned from a funeral.

Partly because of the New York State constitution and partly because of the way the constitution has been exploited, these two men are, in their own spheres, virtually omnipotent. The Legislature has an elaborate committee structure, which is supposed to insure that every bill can be debated, in public, by lawmakers who are knowledgeable in the subject area. In reality, if a bill is of any significance it is Bruno and Silver who determine, independently of the committees, whether or not it will advance. The same is true once a bill gets to the floor. In Albany, except under total-eclipse-of-the-sun-like circumstances, votes have only one possible result.

David Paterson, a Democrat from upper Manhattan, is the Minority Leader of the State Senate, which sounds like a position that has considerable authority but, because of the way the Legislature is organized, has very little. Paterson has been in the Senate for eighteen years, and in this time has watched some seventy-five thousand pieces of legislation come to the floor. He told me that in only four instances had there been any uncertainty about the outcome of the vote, and in only one, involving a constitutional amendment to allow casino gambling, had the measure actually failed. He recalled the event wistfully: "Then you start to feel like you're a real senator, on TV.

"How do you get such uniformity of voting from such individual people from different regions of the state, diverse populations, and different income groups?" Paterson went on. "Because everybody's afraid of the leader. And if you don't coöperate you may go back to your office and find that the lights are off and the computers are shut down. Sometimes you go back to your office and the door is locked."

So well established is the leaders' dominance that, by now, even keeping up the pretense of deliberation is regarded as a waste of effort. When I was in the Capitol recently, I happened in on a meeting of the Senate Committee on Veterans,

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Homeland Security, and Military Affairs. Only two members had bothered to show up—the eleven others were voting via proxy—and neither had a word to say in defense of or opposition to any of the five measures under consideration. It took about ninety seconds for the chairman to call the meeting to order, run through the agenda—one bill was held in committee and four were reported out—and adjourn. Later that afternoon, the Assembly took up the first two budget bills, worth more than ten billion dollars. The debate, such as it was, lasted less than fifteen minutes. As legislators went through the motions of considering the second bill, a member of the Assembly's Republican minority, James Tedisco, of Schenectady County, rose to berate the members of the majority for their slavish behavior. "You're going to vote for whatever the Speaker tells you to vote for," he said. Tedisco pointed out, accurately, that lawmakers were being asked to vote on a spending plan before the bill laying out the tax increases intended to pay for it had even been introduced. "It is very clear that you don't give a rat's tail," he declared. No one in the room took the trouble to challenge Tedisco's account, although one Democrat stood to observe that the minority was really no different: "Could you just enlighten us what makes you so special?" (Two days later, in fact, the ranking Republican assemblyman on the Racing and Wagering Committee was stripped of his position by the Assembly Minority Leader for refusing to vote the party line.)

A particularly neat illustration of how Albany has reinterpreted the rules of democracy is provided by the so-called message of necessity. As its name suggests, the measure is supposed to be invoked only in emergencies. It allows the Legislature, with the approval of the governor, to introduce and vote on bills virtually instantaneously, with no time at all for public input. Such are the attractions of this arrangement that nowadays in the Capitol an emergency is declared whenever it's convenient. Not long ago, Eric Lane, a professor at Hofstra Law School, decided to try to quantify the phenomenon. He found that eighty per cent of the major bills that were approved in the past several years had been passed under messages of necessity.

This spring, the state was facing a genuine fiscal emergency, so, by the logic of Albany, the Capitol had to revert to actually observing the constitution. Since Bruno and Silver were at war with the Governor, they couldn't ask him for a message, and had to have the budget bills printed a full three days in advance of scheduling a vote on them. As one public-interest lobbyist I ran into observed with grim satisfaction, "This is practically open government."

On the same day the Legislature began to pass its budget, the Governor began to issue dire warnings about the consequences. In particular, he objected to the Legislature's plan to restore many of the spending cuts he had proposed and to raise the state's income-tax and sales-tax rates in order to do so. He presented the choice confronting New York in Manichaean terms. On one side were those who planned to "show the courage, the leadership, the fiscal restraint necessary to balance the state budget without gimmicks or taxes," and on the other were those who intended to "ignore the realities, revert to politics as usual and, in the process, prolong the fiscal and economic crisis." Although the Governor declined to name names, he made it clear that, in his view, at least, the former group had only one member.

New York's impending budget catastrophe had been evident for at least two years, and possibly longer. Between the bursting of the Internet bubble, in 2000, and now, the state lost an estimated three hundred thousand jobs. State tax receipts, after growing on average by more than seven per cent a year through the late nineteen-nineties, shrank by an average of nearly five per cent in 2001 and 2002. Pataki's immediate response to all this bad news, courage and leadership notwithstanding, was to ignore it. In 2002, a gubernatorial-election year, he crisscrossed the state insisting that things had never been better—"Our state remains firmly on the right track"—and, rather than trying to restrain spending, proposed a budget that increased it by four billion dollars. In an all but explicit deal for the support of 1199/S.E.I.U., the state's powerful—and politically active—hospital workers' union, he promised, for example, two billion dollars in salary increases. When, shortly before the election, his fellow-Republican Joseph Bruno acknowledged that the state was facing a ten-billion-dollar budget short-

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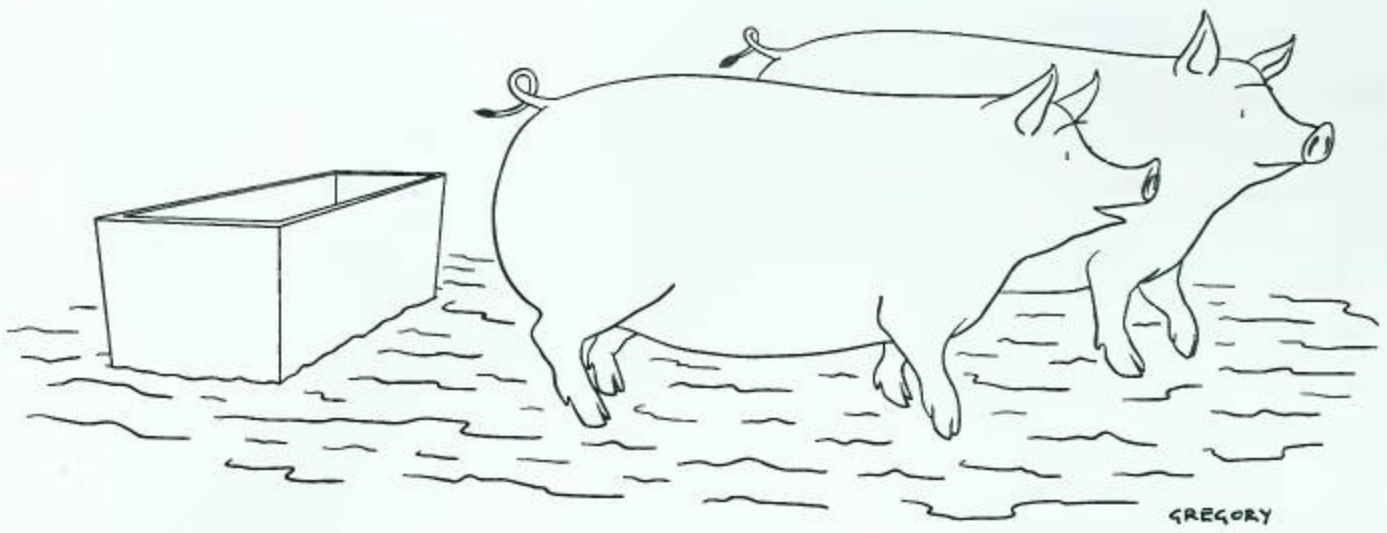
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fall, Pataki dismissed this, telling the *News*, "I don't know where it came from. Joe is a wonderful leader. He doesn't always do thorough research before putting out an analysis." A few weeks later, while the voting machines were still being packed away, the Governor let it be known that Bruno had been right about the ten billion dollars, except that the figure was actually closer to twelve billion.

New York has always been something of a pioneer in the field of fiscal mismanagement. The Capitol itself is a prime example. In 1867, when the building was commissioned, the anticipated cost was four million dollars; by 1874, only two out of five stories had been completed, but the estimated cost had tripled. New York was an early issuer of debt—it floated some of the nation's first state bonds to pay for the construction of the Erie Canal—and, since then, has borrowed against the classroom buildings at its state universities, a parking lot at the Aqueduct racetrack, and revenues that it hopes in a vague sort of way may somehow materialize in the future. Governor Nelson Rockefeller, whose plans for the state invariably outstripped its ability to pay for them, was particularly innovative in this way. In the nineteen-sixties, to build Albany's Brasília-like Empire State Plaza, he transferred the land next to the Capitol to Albany County, had the county pay for the plaza's construction, and then bought the whole thing back for the state through an elaborate lease-purchase agreement. When I was in Albany in the late nineteen-eighties, the Cuomo administration came up with an arguably even more inventive scheme: "selling" Attica prison to New York's Urban Development Corporation, for two hundred million dollars. The arrangement ended up costing New York taxpayers some two hundred and ninety million dollars in interest payments, but from the administration's perspective it worked out so well that Cuomo subsequently "sold" a section of I-84 to the Thruway Authority, which also assumed the road's multimillion-dollar maintenance costs. "I did not come into government to win an award as the great accountant in the sky," he once declared.

Even against such illustrious predecessors, Pataki has managed to hold his own. (A recent piece in *The Economist* called him "the governor who gave away the store.") Most of Pataki's first two terms coincided with one of the longest economic expansions in American history. In that period of enormous growth, he nevertheless managed to preside over an impressive increase in state borrowing: New York took on ten billion dollars' worth of new debt in less than eight years. Its outstanding obligations now amount to thirty-eight billion dollars, making it—Excelsior!—by far the most indebted state in the nation. (California, the runner-up, has obligations of thirty-three billion.)

Pataki presented his own budget plan back in January. In contrast to the Legislature's, it calls for significant cuts in state aid to education and health care and no increase in the state's broad-based taxes. Still, to call it fiscally responsible would be quite a stretch. Pataki has recommended that the state create yet another authority, simply in order to borrow, in this case against money that New York is set to receive as a result of the 1998 tobacco settlement. (He has also proposed using the money that is to be raised this way—some four billion dollars—to pay routine operating expenses, just the sort of move, fiscal monitors have pointed out, that

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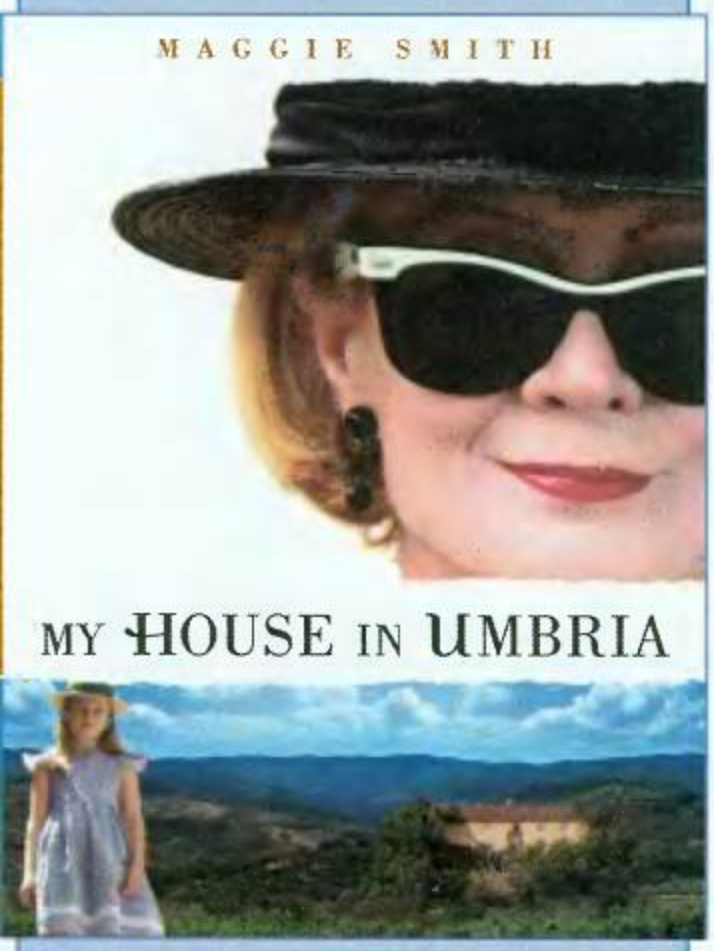
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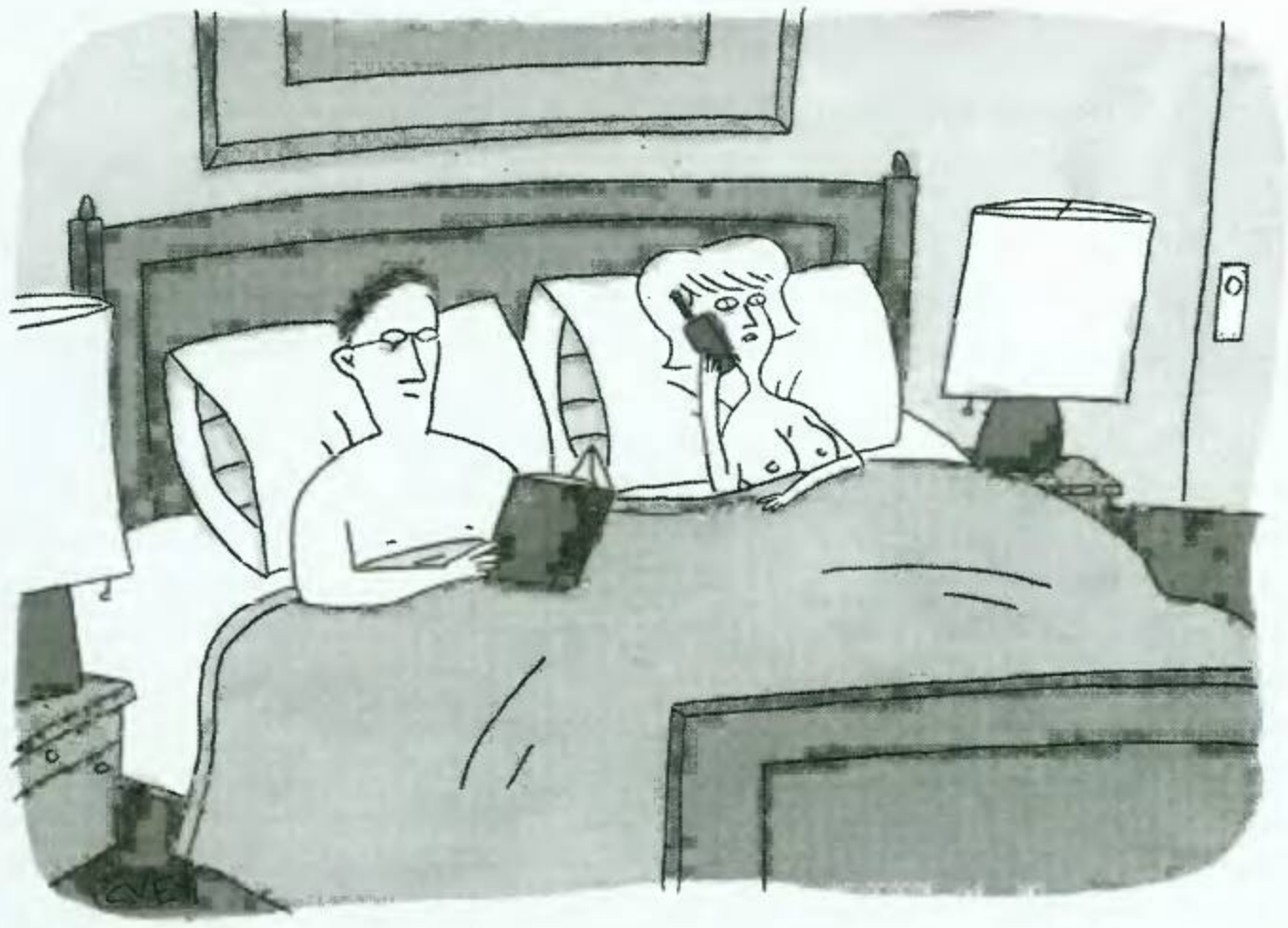
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brought New York City to the edge of bankruptcy in 1975.) When, last month, it was revealed that the tobacco companies might not be able to make the payments that Pataki's plan is based upon, his response, rather than to reduce the amount of proposed borrowing, was to lament that the debt had not already been issued. "It would have been better to go in December, and that's why I was pushing it in December," he said.

A few days after the Governor and the Legislature stopped speaking to each other, Mayor Michael Bloomberg went up to Albany to discuss New York City's budget problems, which every month grow more severe. The state's job loss has been concentrated in the city—the unemployment rate here is now more than nine per cent—and, for obvious reasons, the city's treasury has been particularly hard-hit by the collapse of the stock market and the events of September 11th. Last month, when the Mayor issued his revised budget, he said that under the best-case scenario the city would have to lay off forty-five hundred workers in the coming year, and under the worst case fifteen thousand.

One of the most touching aspects of Bloomberg's mayoralty has been his enduring faith that Albany would act to help the city, if only because it was in everyone's best interests. The Mayor's fondest fantasy was a multibillion-dollar commuter tax on those who work in the city but live elsewhere—an idea he continued to push long after everyone else in New York politics had abandoned it, which was about ten seconds after he brought it up. Initially, Bloomberg seems to have believed that Pataki was going to be his ally in this quest. During the gubernatorial campaign, the Mayor held a fund-raiser for Pataki at his town house on the Upper East Side, and, at significant political risk to himself, he waited until after the Governor had been safely reëlected to push through an eighteen-and-a-half-per-cent city property-tax increase. At just about every point, however, Pataki rewarded the Mayor's fealty with indifference. Not only did the Governor nix the commuter tax; when he presented his spending plan, he proposed cutting annual state aid to the city by nearly a billion dollars. (In one particularly treacherous move, the Governor suggested rejiggering the state's Medicaid formula in a way that would have saved most counties money but increased costs to the five boroughs.)

In the plan that the Legislature recently adopted, much of the aid to the city that the Governor had threatened to cut was restored. For the remainder, the Mayor won permission from the Legislature to raise the city's sales tax by an eighth of a per cent and impose an income-tax surcharge on city residents earning more than a hundred thousand dollars. These increases would come on top of the one-quarter-per-cent increase in the state sales tax and the surcharge on the state income



"He's nice, but he won't leave."

tax that the Legislature has approved, and potentially place the city at a disadvantage vis-à-vis its suburbs. (This was what the Mayor had hoped to avoid with a commuter tax.) Then the lawmakers came up with a plan to refinance the debt the city is still paying off from the fiscal crisis of the nineteen-seventies. Short term, it will save the city half a billion dollars a year; long term, it means that in 2033 our children will still be paying for the sins of our fathers. Putting the best face on events, as he so often does, Bloomberg declared himself satisfied, saying, "It is painful, but it is the right thing to do."

Local taxes will be going up next year not only in the city but across the state. Already, for example, Nassau County has announced a twenty-per-cent increase in property taxes, and Rensselaer County has announced a twenty-eight-per-cent hike. Rising local taxes are the reason that Silver and Bruno were under such pressure to resist Pataki. Of the ninety billion-plus that Albany spends every year—debt service and pension costs excluded—nearly seventy per cent is distributed to hospitals and local governments in the form of payments like Medicaid and school aid. Thus, when the state cuts its budget, most of the savings come from simply shifting the losses onto county legislatures and school districts. These bodies can, in turn, cut services, but only up to a point: the state itself imposes very specific mandates about what services must be provided. Seen in this context, Pataki's insistence on not raising state taxes may represent a genuine fiscal policy decision or it may simply amount to so much political rhetoric. The latter interpretation is the more popular in Albany; it is generally taken for granted in the Capitol that the Governor's top priority these days is finding a new job for himself, perhaps in the Bush Administration.

What happens next in Albany is, at this point, anybody's guess. It is possible that the Senate and the Assembly will fail to override Pataki's promised vetoes, in which case parts of the budget will have to be negotiated all over again. Or it's possible that they will succeed, in which case Pataki may mount a legal challenge. Finally, it is possible that some sort of compromise will be worked out. Whatever the outcome, the conflict itself will have been extremely costly, generating yet more uncertainty at a moment when, as Governor Pataki put it, "we owe it to the people of New York to again rise and meet the challenges we face and demonstrate the courage to make the right decisions at the right time for the right reasons."

Not long ago, I went to a forum on Albany politics—"Three Men and a Budget: What's Wrong with New York's Legislative Process and How Do We Fix It?"—sponsored by the New York City Bar Association. Participants included both good-government types, like Blair Horner, the legislative director of the New York Public Interest Research Group, and industry lobbyists, like Lester Shulklapper, whose clients include the state Beer Wholesalers Association and R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. A good part of the evening was devoted to rehearsing the various ways in which ostensibly democratic procedures and institutions have been subverted. Eric Lane, the Hofstra Law School professor, noted that the staffs of legislative committees are hired not by the committee chairmen but by the legislative leaders. "If you understand the Albany mentality, that is done so committees can't function," he said. Horner pointed out that in Albany redistricting is controlled by those who stand to benefit from it the most, so "the system is rigged to begin with." Alone among the panelists, Shulklapper defended the ways of the Capitol, observing, "There have been wonderful debates in the Legislature." (He recalled one, on the topic of abortion, which took place in 1970.) The participants—again with the exception of Shulklapper—agreed that Albany was a fantastically inefficient place in all ways except one. For the last nineteen years, the Legislature has not managed to pass the state budget on time even once, but during that same period ninety-nine per cent of incumbent lawmakers held on to their seats in general elections. Viewed in these terms, Albany does what it does all too well. The key to understanding Capitol politics is knowing what matters and what doesn't.

At one point in the evening, I bumped into Andrew Cuomo, the former U.S. housing secretary, who ran for governor of New York last year and lost. I first met Cuomo when he was building housing for the homeless in Brooklyn and I was covering his father. He asked me what I was doing, and I told him that I was planning to write a piece about Albany. He laughed. "But who would read it?" he asked. ♦



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JOHN LE KERRY

BY CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

Marc Racicot, the Republican national chairman, said recently that [Massachusetts Senator John] Kerry "is going to have a hard time translating out of New England." Another Bush adviser said of Mr. Kerry, "He looks French."—*The Times.*

President Bush told the Union of English-Speaking Peoples today that those who seek the U.S. Presidency should "at least make an effort to look American."

The President told the monolingual audience that, "at a time when American values are being assaulted by a country we've had to liberate twice in the last century, it's a bit much that Senator Kerry goes around acting like the headwaiter at some snooty French restaurant."

Mr. Bush conceded that the most American-looking President was probably Harry S. Truman, a Democrat, but he said that Franklin Roosevelt's middle name, Delano, "sounded pretty French."

Top Republican strategist Karl Rove today dismissed Senator John Kerry's charge that President Bush is understating budget deficits as a "typically Gallic smear."

In a speech to the Anti-French League of Greater Indianapolis, Rove said, "If it quacks like a *canard*, and walks like a *canard*, you can bet it's a *canard*." He added, "I guess I don't have to translate that for Monsieur Kerry."

He suggested that the Massachusetts Senator was basing his calculations on euros instead of dollars.

In a sign that the Bush campaign plans to portray Senator John Kerry as an aloof, anti-American snob who doodles on legal pads during Senate committee hearings by conjugating French irregular verbs, Bush media adviser Mark McKinnon unveiled a half-dozen thirty-second spots designed to emphasize Mr. Kerry's "alarming and unapologetic Francophilia."

The ads, which McKinnon admits have been "somewhat" computer-enhanced, variously depict the Senator singing the "Marseillaise" on the floor of the U.S. Senate during a filibuster in the discussion of Bush judicial appointees, raising the French tricolor over the U.S. Capitol, and groping French actress Sophie Marceau during an anti-Iraq-war protest march on the Mall in Washington.

The Bush campaign today denied that it played any role in the leaking of video-rental records showing that Senator Kerry favors French films. The list of movies allegedly borrowed by Mr. Kerry includes "Mr. Hulot's Holiday," "The 400 Blows," and "Claire's Knee," all by French directors.

The movies are subtitled in English. However, a top Bush aide remarked that the Senator "wouldn't need the translations, since French is practically his first language."

He added, "It's deplorable, at a time when Americans are struggling to make ends meet, that Mr. Kerry is pouring money into the economy of a country that sided with Saddam Hussein during Operation Iraqi Freedom."

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld today said that Senator Kerry, when he was a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, "probably" went to Vietnam for the purpose of winning the country back "for the French."

"I'm not saying he wasn't brave," Rumsfeld said. "Oh, my goodness, no. But was he really there to fight against Communist aggression, or was it to get back at the North Vietnamese for the loss of Dien Bien Phu? I think that's a perfectly legitimate question."

Responding to allegations by the Kerry campaign that his surname denotes French ancestry, Vice-President Cheney issued a statement that he would "probably commit suicide" if he found out that he had "so much as one cc. of French blood."

He said that the name Cheney was German-Scots-Irish, with "a touch of Faeroe Islands and Mohican Indian." One ancestor, he said proudly, had fought against the French at Waterloo, while another "scalped enough Frenchmen during the French and Indian War to make himself a warm winter coat."

The Vice-President admitted that his wife, who has a Ph.D., speaks French, but he said that she prefers not to.

During the first Presidential debate, last night, President Bush repeatedly addressed Democratic challenger John Kerry with French expressions, calling him "*mon vieux*," "*mon cher*," and even "*mon petit chou*." The latter means, literally, "my little cabbage."

Senator Kerry for the most part ignored the President, until Mr. Bush asserted that Mr. Kerry looked as though he had "been weaned on a cornichon." At this point, the Senator had apparently had enough.

"*Merde, alors!*" he said, his face a mask of cold, distinctly Gallic fury. "*Assez! Salopard! Tu veux un morceau de moi? Eh?*"

In what was viewed by many as a bid to woo Hispanic voters, Mr. Bush responded in Spanish, inviting Mr. Kerry either to kiss a burro or to sit on a burrito. The exact meaning was not immediately clear.

Both sides claimed victory. ♦

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE MISSION

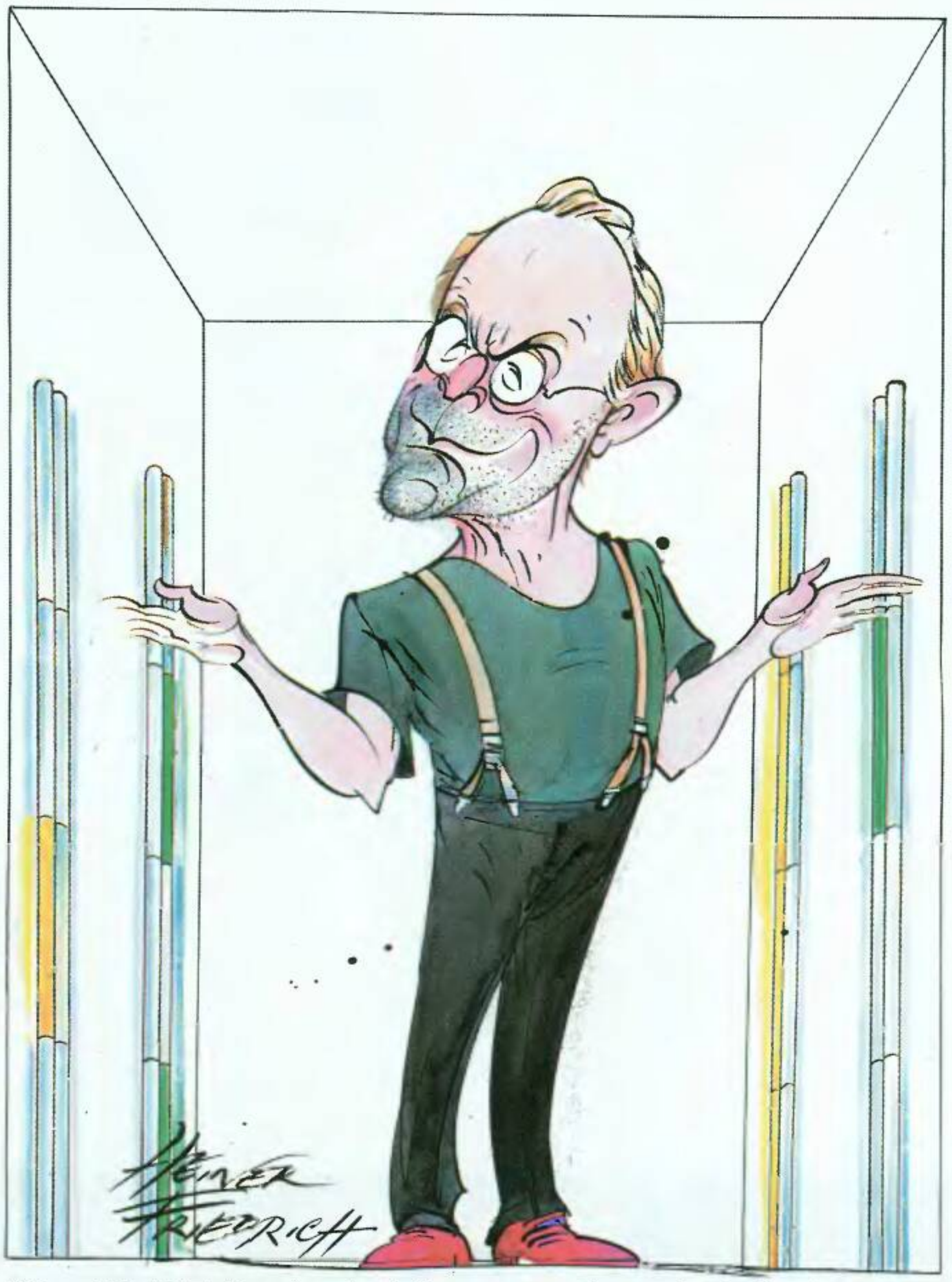
How the Dia Art Foundation survived feuds, legal crises, and its own ambitions.

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

"I have nothing to say about works of art," said Heiner Friedrich, who rarely talks about anything else. "They speak for themselves, very clearly and very powerfully." His voluminous black raincoat and crimson scarf, cast aside as he entered the restaurant, lay across an empty chair. He wore a gray-green T-shirt, tan suspenders, loose black pants, and maroon shoes. At sixty-five, Friedrich looks much the way he looked thirty years ago, when I first met him—trim, buoyant, with thinning ginger-blond hair and rimless glasses. Although he has lived here since 1971, his German accent is intact, and he speaks with the disjointed, barely suppressed excitement of someone who expects to convert you. "Art has no history—there is only a continuous present," he went on. "The non-stop presence of art! Velázquez, Goya, Manet are all in one line, which extends to Matisse and Warhol. If art is alive, it is always new. Listen, listen, my wish is that we visit the Giotto chapel in Padua and stand for an hour, you silently and I silently, and we see what happens to us. It is as contemporary as anything in the world today. That is what Dia is about. A focus on art is the specialty of Dia."

Dia—the Dia Art Foundation—conceived by Friedrich and brought into being by him and two associates in 1974, is the renewal of an old idea about art patronage. Unlike museums, which collect and display a more or less representative sampling of the art of certain historical periods, cultures, or styles, Dia has focussed on supporting post-1960 work by a very few artists, which it collects in depth and presents in isolated, long-term, single-artist installations. During its first ten years, Dia's level of support for the chosen few was so ambitious and so ecstatically impractical that, when a financial crisis loomed, the experiment nearly foundered. Dia survived, but without Friedrich. Having resigned in 1985 from the institution he had created, he bided his time, haunting the peripheries and offering fervent advice and dire warnings.

Time has now vindicated his vision, more or less. A week or so before our lunch, he had gone up to Beacon, New York, sixty miles north of Manhattan, to see the vast museum that Dia was preparing to open in a former Nabisco printing plant. Dia:Beacon, which opens on May 18th, has two hundred and forty thousand square feet of exhibition space—nearly twice as much as the new MOMA will have—filled with the work of twenty-four artists. Some of them are well known, and some are not. "Shadows," seventy-two abstract paintings by Andy Warhol, blanket the walls of a three-hundred-foot-long gallery to the left of the main entrance. Three gigantic "Torqued Ellipses" and one "Torqued Spiral" by the sculptor Richard Serra fill what was once Nabisco's railroad shed and loading dock. The first thing the visitor sees on entering the museum, however, is a pair of rectangular galleries, each one as long as a football field and forty feet wide, containing a single work of sculpture, called "The Equal Area Series," by Walter De Maria, a reclusive artist who doesn't grant interviews and who hasn't shown in New York for many



Heiner Friedrich believes in a level of art patronage last seen in the Renaissance.

years. Each gallery contains six pairs of stainless-steel circles and squares, seven-eighths of an inch thick, which lie flat on the floor and increase fractionally in size from one pair to the next.

Comparable spaces have been allotted to Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, John Chamberlain, Fred Sandback, Joseph Beuys, and other charter members of the Dia cenacle, and to such relative newcomers as Agnes Martin, Sol LeWitt, Hanne Darboven, Robert Smithson, Bruce Nauman, Michael Heizer, Lawrence Weiner, and Robert Ryman, whose work Dia has acquired since Friedrich left. No common denominator links the artists. Judd and Flavin, who died in 1994 and 1996, respectively, are often cited as leaders of the Minimalist movement. De Maria and Heizer were pioneers of earth art in the nineteen-sixties, excavating and shaping monumental works in the deserts of Nevada and California. Ryman and Martin are painters, while Nauman, Darboven, and Weiner have explored radically dissimilar ramifications of conceptual art. It is in keeping with Friedrich's encompassing idea that the Beacon installations will be long-term and unchanging (unless an artist approves a change), and that, whenever possible, the artists were invited to choose their own spaces and to oversee their installations. But Friedrich's approval of Dia:Beacon is qualified, at best. "Compromise is the word at Beacon," he told me. He has informed Michael Govan, Dia's young director, and Leonard Riggio, the chairman of Dia's board of trustees, that they have gone about this in the wrong way. "My request for Beacon was that they choose not twenty-two or twenty-four artists but maybe five, six, or seven," he told me, "and those being alive today could be commissioned the way Matisse was commissioned for the chapel in Vence, the way Giotto was commissioned for the Cappella Scrovegni, in Padua." For someone who fully believes, as he does, that the art of the past fifty years rivals that of the Italian Renaissance, compromise is never an option.

Growing up in Berlin during the war years, Friedrich saw enough suffering and destruction to make him yearn for something that would last, but until 1963, he said, "I had no inkling that I would go into art." That was the year he and his friend Franz Dahlem decided to open a gallery in Munich. Friedrich came from a well-to-do family; his father owned a firm that made industrial machinery. Dahlem knew the charismatic Joseph Beuys, and before long their gallery was showing Beuys and other rising German artists, and also several young Americans, including Walter De Maria, Dan Flavin, Cy Twombly, John Chamberlain, and Andy Warhol, whom Friedrich had met in New York. "One of the more bitter experiences," as he expressed it to me, "was that these exhibitions just disappeared." Friedrich opened another gallery, in Cologne, and enlisted his wife to run the Munich gallery. He also began to think about longer-term exhibitions, and about commissioning works that would remain in place. The 1972 Munich Olympics gave him great hope. He secured commissions for De Maria, Flavin, Carl Andre, Beuys, Warhol, and other artists to do public art works that would be paid for by the city, and the city authorities' sudden decision not to build any of these profoundly shocked and disillusioned him about Europe. In 1971, leaving his wife and two children behind, he moved to New York. He opened a gallery at 141 Wooster Street, where he presented work by many of the artists he had shown in Munich and Cologne.

At this point, Heizer and De Maria were working in the Nevada desert, supported mainly by the dealer Virginia Dwan and the collector Robert Scull. Friedrich had helped to finance some of Heizer's earlier earth works, though, and in the late sixties he had gone to see Heizer's recently completed "Double Negative," two huge cuts in the side of a mesa, each one thirty feet wide by fifty feet deep. He also saw De Maria's "Las Vegas Piece," a mile-long cruciform "drawing" inscribed by a bulldozer on a high desert plateau. Immensely excited by the scale, the ambition, and the uncompromisingly noncommercial purity of these works, Friedrich tried, in 1972, to persuade John and Dominique de Menil, the Houston collectors, to visit them. The de Menils declined his invitation, but they encouraged Helen Winkler, a young Houston postgraduate student, to visit the Heizer and

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De Maria earth works with Friedrich, and the trip changed her life. She moved to New York soon afterward to help Friedrich run his gallery. Winkler introduced Friedrich to her friend Philippa de Menil, John and Dominique's youngest daughter, whose ethereal soul was captured by Friedrich's dedication to helping artists, and who eventually married him.

Friedrich, Helen Winkler, and Philippa de Menil founded Dia in 1974. Their goal, as stated in the foundation's first annual report, was "to plan, realize and maintain public projects of artists . . . which cannot be easily produced, financed or owned by individual collectors because of their cost and magnitude." The word Dia, from the Greek for "through," accurately expressed the founders' ambition: to serve as a conduit for the realization of major works by great artists.

The money to do this came from Philippa de Menil's inheritance, which descended like manna on a small band of artists, who, thus nourished, took greatness for granted. It financed De Maria's "New York Earth Room," a hundred tons of raked earth filling Friedrich's Wooster Street gallery to a level of twenty-two inches, and "The Broken Kilometer," also by De Maria, who covered the ground floor of a building on West Broadway with five hundred gleaming brass rods (each one two metres long) in five parallel rows. Both installations began as temporary shows in galleries owned by Friedrich, who decided to move out and leave them permanently in place; both are still there today. Dia spent more than a million dollars to buy the Mercantile Exchange Building, on Harrison Street, as a "total environment" for the electronic composer La Monte Young and the light artist Marian Zazeela, and around eight hundred thousand dollars on a West Nineteenth Street space for the performance artist Robert Whitman. Looking farther afield, it bought a former bank in Winchendon, Massachusetts, for the sculptor Fred Sandback, who defines interior spaces with stretched lengths of colored acrylic yarn; a church in Bridgehampton, Long Island, which became a museum for the fluorescent-light sculptures of Dan Flavin; and a former Army base in Marfa, Texas, which Donald Judd would convert into a complex of galleries for his own work and the work of Flavin, Chamberlain, and several other artists.

Monthly stipends to the chosen artists ranged from two thousand dollars on up to a reported seventeen thousand five hundred dollars for Judd, whose Marfa operations made him, for several years, the largest employer in town. Dia helped James Turrell acquire the land surrounding Roden Crater, in Arizona, which he would eventually turn into a monumental observatory for celestial events. It bought twenty-two square miles of desert land in New Mexico for De Maria's "Lightning Field," a light-catching grid of four hundred stainless-steel poles, which was completed in 1977. A separate foundation, called Lone Star, was established to buy art works—many of them from Friedrich—for a permanent Dia collection. The collection, which was largely but not exclusively American, was utterly Heiner-centric, reflecting Friedrich's passionate enthusiasms and significant exclusions—nothing, for example, by Frank Stella, Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt, Richard Serra, or other artists who might have been expected to appear on the Dia roster, as Serra and LeWitt eventually did, post-Friedrich.

Friedrich told the artist Bob Whitman that he "wanted to establish a level of funding not seen since the Renaissance." The artists had no problem with that, but, as time passed, some of them began to wonder about their patron. Was Friedrich's obsession as selfless as it seemed, or was he using them, for complicated and not solely altruistic reasons, to build his own empire as a modern Medici: Heiner the Magnificent? Relations between Friedrich and Judd soured in the early eighties, over a number of issues. Friedrich and Philippa de Menil had become Sufi Muslims in 1979 (the year they got married), and began devoting themselves more and more to Sufism, a mystical, quietist form of Islam that places great emphasis on poetry, music, and philosophy. Dia turned a former firehouse on Mercer Street into a mosque for their Sufi master, Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak. Judd thought the Sufis were siphoning money away from the Dia art projects (Friedrich vehemently denies this), and he suspected that a ranch property Friedrich had bought in West Texas, sixty miles from Marfa, was slated to become a Sufi retreat. An irascible man whose vision of the Marfa operation allowed no room for outside interference or suggestions, Judd also resented Friedrich's efforts to place it under an independent, self-supporting foundation. "The real problem was over control," according to Marianne Stockebrand, Judd's former companion and now the director of the Chinati Foundation, which eventually took over Dia's Marfa hold-



ON OCCASION

I forget the names of my friends
and the names of the flowers in
my garden my friends remind me
Grace it's us the flowers just
stand there stunned by the mid-
summer day

A long time ago my mother said
darling there are also wild flowers
but look these I planted

my flowers are pink and rose and
orange they're sturdy they make
new petals every day to fill in
their fat round faces

suddenly before thought I
called out ZINNIA ZINNIA
ZINNIA along came a sunny
summer breeze they swayed and
lightly bowed so I said Mother

—Grace Paley

ings. "Heiner wanted to control a lot of things, and Don didn't want anybody to control him."

The oil crisis in the eighties dealt Dia a near-fatal blow. Philippa (who now went by her Muslim name, Fariha) had an inheritance based exclusively on stock in Schlumberger, the oil-services firm founded by Dominique de Menil's father and uncle. By 1984, she had given more than thirty million dollars to Dia, selling stock or using it as collateral for huge loans, and she would have been happy to keep right on doing so. As Schlumberger's stock price fell, though, and kept on falling, more and more of her holdings had to be sold. Friedrich began cutting back on support to the artists, some of whom were outraged. Judd threatened to sue for breach of contract. The attorney general of New York, Robert Abrams, following up on information from undisclosed sources, opened an investigation into Dia's chaotic accounting practices, and at this point Dominique de Menil, thoroughly alarmed, engaged a New York law firm and exercised her parental authority. Fariha's remaining funds were put into a trust controlled by her brothers. In 1985, Heiner Friedrich was forced to resign, a new board of directors was appointed, and Dia's second phase began.

For a time, it appeared that the new phase would be painful and brief. To pay off outstanding debts, the new board sold eighteen works from Dia's art collection and eleven pieces of real estate. The contracts with the artists were not renewed. Dia's staff, which had grown to eighty people, was cut back to fewer than eight. There was talk of selling off the "New York Earth Room" and the "Broken Kilometer" properties, and some board members assumed that Dia itself would go out of business. What saved it was the astute and dedicated efforts of the new board chairman, Ashton Hawkins, and a few other board members, and the conciliatory, imaginative, and tenacious efforts of Charles Wright, a young Seattle lawyer whom Hawkins brought in to be Dia's director. Hawkins, a culturally savvy New Yorker who had been for many years the Metropolitan Museum's chief legal counsel, persuaded the Attorney General to call off his investigation of Dia. Wright went out to Marfa and soothed the monumentally angry Judd. "Judd had a vitriol in him like nobody I've ever seen," Wright recalls. "But he knew what he wanted, which was to preserve the things that were there."

Over the next few years, using funds remaining from the art and real-estate sales, the new team stabilized Dia's finances, changed it from a private to a public institution, and initiated a series of exhibitions, poetry readings, lectures, concerts, and other events in the new Dia Center for the Arts, a former warehouse building on West Twenty-second Street. "We tried to do a program that would put Dia in the public eye for the first time," Wright said, "but to do it in a way that would be consistent with Dia's initial aspirations, and to us this meant focussing on single-artist projects for longer-term exhibitions." The term was usually one year; the artists were sometimes Dia's original anointees (Beuys, Warhol, Blinky Palermo) and sometimes new ones (Robert Ryman, Jenny Holzer, Robert Gober, Brice Marden), who struck Wright as being compatible with the Dia canon—whatever that was. It seemed to stand for a certain austerity of means and approach, a conceptual rigor that disdained the novelties and caperings of the art world. But what it really stood for was Heiner Friedrich's eye, and, somewhat later, Donald Judd's impassioned conviction (fully shared by Friedrich) that the context—the way a work was installed and presented—was as important as the art itself.

Friedrich hated the Dia exhibition program, of course; one year was nothing, in his view. He stayed away and complained to Wright, who went to see him almost every week. Fariha Friedrich had remained on Dia's board of directors, but her primary allegiance now was to Sufism. (Today, separated from Friedrich, she has become a sheikh, and one of the leading Sufi teachers in this country.) Dia, meanwhile, was emerging as a significant fixture on the New York art scene. Its programs attracted a loyal audience. Its annual benefit dinners became A-list events on the art-social circuit. Dia's growing mainstream cachet, ironically enough, was one of the factors in its next administrative disaster.

Charles Wright and Ashton Hawkins wanted to do something about Dia's large but invisible permanent collection. They



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arranged to donate more than a hundred and fifty Warhols (excluding the "Shadows" series) to the Andy Warhol Museum, in Pittsburgh, which Dia had helped to establish, and they sold a number of Cy Twombly's paintings to the Menil Collection, in Houston, for its new Cy Twombly Gallery. Dia still had more than seven hundred works of art in storage, though, and it was clear that to put them on view in New York would require a lot of money. The original Hawkins board of trustees was short on billionaires, having been formed primarily to deal with Dia's legal crises, but over the years, as Dia became more prominent in New York, some wealthy and socially ambitious people had joined the board and, as so often happens on museum boards, the money began to flex its muscle.

When Charles Wright left, in 1994, to run the family business in Seattle, his successor was Michael Govan, a young man who had spent his professional career working for Thomas Krens, first at the Williams College Museum of Art and later at the Guggenheim. He had played a key role, in concert with Krens and another former Krens student named Joseph Thompson, in conceiving and negotiating with the state of Massachusetts for what became MASS MOCA, in a group of converted factories in North Adams, Massachusetts. Like both Krens and Friedrich, Govan was comfortable with daring concepts and large ideas. His ideas and his freewheeling management style troubled some Dia trustees, who thought he was aiming to reactivate Friedrich's ruinously grandiose ambitions. The board disintegrated into warring factions and personal acrimony, "much more than I've ever encountered on any board," said Hawkins, who resigned in January, 1996. Seven other board members resigned with him, and Dia staggered toward its third and current reincarnation.

Michael Govan, who is thirty-nine, had planned to be an artist until Krens lured him into museum work. His plans for Dia, from the moment he took over, were to reconnect with Heizer, Turrell, Flavin, and other artists whom Dia had cut loose ten years earlier, and to start buying art again. No important new works had been added to the collection since 1985, and "some people," as Govan put it, "thought we ought to start closing down spaces like 'The Broken Kilometer' and the 'Earth Room.' But if that's what they wanted they'd have to find someone else to do it." Govan thought Dia should "lead from its strength," and Dia's strength, as he saw it, derived from Heiner Friedrich's founding vision. Govan wangled a million-dollar challenge grant from the Mellon Foundation, and initiated a twelve-million-dollar fund drive. He went to see Patrick Lannan, Jr., of the Santa Fe-based Lannan Foundation, which Wright had persuaded a few years earlier to provide new funding for Turrell's Roden Crater and for Heizer's "City" project, a mile-long earth-and-concrete structure in the Nevada desert that Heizer has been working on since 1971. Govan and Lannan agreed to collaborate on future funding for both these vast projects, with Dia assuming administrative responsibilities for them, and over the next few years the Lannan Foundation would finance many of Dia's new acquisitions. And then, not quite out of the blue, the gods weighed in with Leonard Riggio.

Govan had been eying Riggio for some time. A self-made marketing mogul who had built the Barnes & Noble book chain and made it a significant force in American publishing, Riggio was active in a number of liberal causes (including the Children's Defense Fund and the movement to ban capital punishment), but he had not yet been tapped for the board of any major cultural institution. It was his friend Jay Chiat, the advertising executive and a Dia board member, who brought him to a board meeting at the Dia Center in 1997. Govan and Lynne Cooke, Dia's curator, had recently installed, on Twenty-second Street, an exhibition of three "Torqued Ellipses" by Richard Serra—gigantic sculptures made by bending and shaping twelve- and thirteen-foot-tall steel plates in an industrial press—and Riggio, who had started collecting modern sculpture ten years earlier, found them irresistible. Govan remembers him saying that Dia ought to buy all of them, close off the building, and make the installation permanent. "And he had never met Heiner Friedrich!" Govan marvelled. "A few days later, I went to see him, and he told

me to find out what sort of deal I could make with Serra. Richard made a very nice deal for all three, and Len bought them for us."

Riggio came on the board in 1998 and was named its chairman a few months later. His influence on Dia's third phase has been as pervasive as Govan's in some ways, and so has his immersion in the Dia culture. "I've had many long discussions with Heiner," Riggio told me recently, when I went to see him in his Park Avenue apartment. "We get along pretty good. Of course, you can't have a conversation with Heiner without his telling you what you should be doing the rest of your life. But I respect him, I respect his vision. I'm proud to be, in a sense, a successor patron to him." Riggio and his wife, Louise, have contributed more than thirty million dollars to Dia so far, and the galleries at Beacon have been named after them. But often, when he talks about Dia's art and Dia's objectives, Riggio—like Govan, like Wright—echoes the founder. "Dia cannot become important in and of itself," he told me. "It must remain a facilitator and an enabler."

After the "Torqued Ellipses" purchase, finding a place to show Dia's permanent collection took on new momentum. Govan had shelved the previous board's plan to renovate a warehouse across the street from the Dia Center, after deciding that there was no way they could afford it at the time. As new funds started to come in, though, he began looking for commercial buildings to renovate—warehouses, garages, the Chelsea Piers, the Starrett-Lehigh Building—but nothing worked until, one day in 1999, he and Lynne Cooke happened on a very large abandoned factory with continuous north-facing sawtooth skylights, on the Hudson River in Beacon.

The factory had been built in 1929 by what was then the National Biscuit Company, as a printing plant for Saltine boxes and other containers. Owned by the International Paper Corporation but vacant since 1991, it was for sale. The minute Govan set foot in the building he was sure. Lynne Cooke and Len Riggio agreed; Riggio, who had visited all the other sites, arranged to have a board meeting at the factory, where the Friedrich-like intensity of his conviction—backed by his initial five-million-dollar pledge toward the renovation costs—carried the day.



"Well, maybe we haven't found any weapons of mass destruction, but you can't deny that we've destroyed a massive amount of weapons."

• •

International Paper agreed to donate the building and the land, and Governor George Pataki, whom Govan described as "extremely sympathetic," got the state to assemble a development package of $2.7 million. The Dia board raised the rest, with a lot of help from the Riggios—the rest being twenty-nine million dollars to renovate the building, plus another eighteen to twenty million dollars for endowment funds and art acquisitions. To plan and oversee the renovation of the building and its grounds, Dia chose an artist, not an architect—the California light-and-space artist Robert Irwin, known for his environmental installations and, most recently, for his hyper-exfoliating and highly controversial garden at the Getty Center, in Los Angeles. Working with the architectural firm Open Office, Irwin left things the way they were, for the most part, and revealed the structure. "My role as an artist is not to identify my own taste and my own aesthetic but to find the aesthetic of the place," he explained recently. Irwin provided long vistas and clear sight lines throughout the building; you can see from one end to the other in some places. Although he didn't know Judd well, and used to think of Friedrich as "the Dr. Strangelove of the art world," he has given Dia the austere, naturally lit, industrial-space functionalism that Judd was among the first to identify as the right context for his work and that of his contemporaries. It will be interesting to see, at Beacon, whether this aesthetic provides viewers with something beyond what they experience in other museums. Nothing less would satisfy Heiner Friedrich.

Friedrich had been urging me to visit Marfa, and De Maria's "Lightning Field." He had said I must absolutely do that if I wanted to understand Dia, so I made arrangements to see both of them with Michael Govan. "You will be amazed, amazed, amazed," said Friedrich. "We must meet again when you come back and maybe we have something new to say."

Marfa, population 2,121, is the west Texas cowtown where "Giant" was filmed. It's about two hundred miles

south of El Paso and two miles from the Rio Grande. Judd, who was born in Missouri, came here in 1971, looking for a summer place that had no infrastructure and no connection to the art world. He liked what he saw—the wide main street, the low buildings, the railroad tracks running through the center of town—and two years later he began buying Marfa real estate. In 1978, Heiner Friedrich came to Marfa and, prompted by Judd, had Dia buy Fort D. A. Russell, just outside town. The fort, built as a cavalry post to guard the border during the Mexican Revolution, had been decommissioned in 1945, and it was in pretty bad shape. Over the next few years, Judd, funded entirely by Dia, converted two huge munitions sheds into galleries and filled them with what many Judd fans consider his masterwork: a hundred milled aluminum boxes, each forty-one by fifty-one by seventy-two inches, identical on the outside but divided differently inside by partitions or shelves or slanted panels. The Texas light, coming through the huge four-pane windows that Judd installed on two sides, caresses the soft-looking aluminum surfaces in strange ways, turning them dark or near-transparent or reflective as you walk among them. Fifteen much larger concrete box sculptures, each made up of several units, can be seen through the windows on one side, in a field some distance away, silhouetted against distant mountains. For years, I had been seeing Judd's work in museums or New York apartments. My reaction to those stark cubes and stacked metal wall boxes was dutiful: High Minimalism, not much fun, but probably good for you. In Marfa I got a sense of what I'd been missing. It was the element of time. Judd's boxes work on you over time, and through movement, and, yes, the context matters. As you move among these softly shimmering boxes, the shapes and the light and the space seem to interact not only with each other but with your body, so that the experience is not just visual. Marfa is very far from the usual museum experience. No noise, no crowds, no gift shops or restaurants, and no alien objects to intrude on and distract the mind.

The Flavin installations are in six former Army barracks nearby. There is one installation per barracks, a barrier of fluorescent tubes in various combinations of green, pink, yellow, and blue. With Flavin, you can't help being in the work. The light bathes you and tints the walls and the ceiling and hangs in the air like a mist, and if you get close enough you can hear a slight buzzing from the electrical sockets, another reminder that the art exists in time, as you do. Compared with Judd's and Flavin's work, John Chamberlain's car-body sculptures, twenty-three of which reside in a former wool-and-mohair warehouse in the center of Marfa, seem almost traditional. They are discrete objects, big but nimble, and even when you get close to them they keep their distance. Chamberlain is an irrepressible artist who once advised Friedrich, when Dia was facing financial disaster, that it was time to stop buying his work. (Dia owns more than sixty of his sculptures.) He thinks Friedrich may be "overenergized" by art. "I've never seen anybody who didn't do art so energized by art," he told me recently.

To get to the "Lightning Field," you fly to Albuquerque and then drive due west for a little more than two hours. The viewing season is from May through October, by reservation only, and visitors—no more than six at a time—are expected to spend the night. They park their cars in Quemado, New Mexico, where the caretaker picks them up, drives them for several miles on a dirt road, and drops them off at a log cabin, whose primitive facilities include a precooked dinner ready to be heated up. We went in early March, out of season, and Helen Winkler, now sixty-one and living in Houston, met us at the airport and drove right to the cabin. She said she was very happy to do this, because she hadn't been there in more than a year. "I'm hoping we get snowed in," she said.

When Winkler met Walter De Maria, in 1972, he had been looking for a place to build his "Lightning Field" for several years. "He wanted a two-square-mile piece of flat land with a clear three-hundred-and-sixty-degree horizon," she told me. She helped him find it, and she and her husband, the artist Robert Fosdick, spent the next three and a half years getting it built. The cabin was already there, collapsing from disuse. The land is in the high Sonoran Desert, where the temperature can fluctuate by fifty degrees on a given day. It's very flat, with a lot of mesquite, and wind, and snow-tipped mountains on three sides, a long way off. De Maria had done a small test field in Arizona two years earlier, and had decided that the poles should be taller—twenty-one feet or higher, instead of eighteen—and that they should be installed so that an imaginary sheet of glass would rest evenly on their pointed tips. It was about four-thirty in the afternoon when we arrived, and we immediately set out—Helen Winkler, Michael Govan, Lynne Cooke, my wife, and I—on separate paths through the field. At that hour and in fading light, with storm clouds building up, the four hundred slender steel poles seemed to blend into the landscape. You could see the ones in your vicinity, but beyond fifty yards they were virtually invisible. The poles are spaced in a precise grid, at intervals of two hundred and twenty feet. When I touched one, it was vibrating—registering the wind. We went back to the cabin to warm up. Winkler took my wife and me out again an hour later, at dusk, and, after making sure we had on enough layers of clothing, left us alone with instructions not to come back until after dark. Night came down fast enough, along with a rising wind and occasional snow flurries or sleet. The moon didn't appear. We heard some rumbles of distant thunder, but saw no lightning. There are supposedly sixty days a year when electrical storms hit this area, but visitors rarely see lightning strike the poles. What you come here for is the light, not the lightning. At dinner that evening, we toasted the "Lightning Field" 's twenty-fifth anniversary, and Michael Govan estimated that, at around eight hundred visitors a year, it had probably been seen by about fifteen thousand people. The audience, like the work, has a time dimension.



Twice during the night, I woke up and considered going outside again, and later regretted not doing so. When my wife and I did go out, just before dawn, there was a light dusting of snow on

the ground. The sky was just starting to lighten over a line of low hills on the horizon. The field was still dark, but the poles seemed to give off a silvery light of their own. Some shone more intensely than others. The air was very still—no wind at all. A coyote barked, then another. We walked slowly, keeping our backs to the east, watching out for jackrabbit holes. The light on (or from) the poles was changing from minute to minute, causing them to stand out more and more clearly against the gray sky. As the sun inched upward, turning some small clouds over the low hills pink, hints of yellow and red started to flash from the poles. The whole field of them was glowing with light, as far as you could see. The poles dominated the landscape, without being in any way separate from it. ("The land is not the setting for the work but a part of the work," De Maria has written.) I remembered hearing Heizer say, when I interviewed him thirty years ago, "Don't misunderstand, when you go up against nature, nature always wins," and it struck me that in this case De Maria hadn't gone up against nature at all. He had worked with it to achieve something as ephemeral as life and as natural as the sunrise. A bursting sense of loveliness made us stand very still. Then, quite suddenly, the sun disappeared into a heavy cloud bank, the poles went dull, and it started to snow.

Heiner Friedrich kept smiling and nodding, yes, yes, yes. "This is it," he said, still nodding. "So you have Marfa and you have the 'Lightning Field.' Which is not like going to a museum and running around like sheep, seeing all those works together." I asked him what he thought of the argument, which museum curators often make, that works by different artists can communicate with one another, and that seeing contemporary art together with older art can reveal things about both. He gave me a look of amused disgust. "Curators might need that stuff," he said, "but nobody who goes to a museum needs to see a Manet, a Monet next to a Cézanne and a Sisley, and whatever. The height of all this is now the Matisse-Picasso show, you know, bang-bang, bang-bang, bang-bang. This is such a misunderstanding, to consider art just in comparison. Comparison means nothing!"

We talked some more about Dia: Beacon. "I went there again," Friedrich said. "I saw how big it is, and how big it is, and how big it is. We'll see. Maybe it will work out. But Dia will have to grow beyond Beacon, and the direction is New York. There is such need for major settings for works of art here." He turned to my wife, across the table, and grasped her hands in both of his. "Do you know somebody, some friend, who wants to give me a building?" he asked her. "That I would still love to do—one, two, three, four buildings in New York. Can you call all your friends who seem to be ready to let me have a building? It doesn't need to be a gift. If they want it back in fifty years, fine! But a ten-year period is the minimum." ♦

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The Economist

LETTER FROM SOUTH AFRICA

THE AIDS REBEL

An activist fights drug companies, the government—and his own illness.

BY SAMANTHA POWER

Khayelitsha is a sprawling, ramshackle township on the outskirts of Cape Town, South Africa. Most of the settlement's residents live in huts that have been constructed with corrugated tin and insulated with cardboard, plastic tarps, and sheet metal. More than five hundred thousand people live in the township; half are unemployed, and the average monthly wage is less than a hundred dollars. The dominant language is Xhosa. Although Khayelitsha resembles a squatter's retreat, it was in fact designed by the apartheid government. In 1983, the white regime decided to purge blacks from settlements close to the heart of Cape Town. The authorities dumped the evicted residents in Khayelitsha, which means "Our New Home." Houses were laid out in a grid pattern to help the police control disgruntled inhabitants. Since then, many families have established roots in Khayelitsha, but the crowded, unsanitary neighborhoods have also become home to viruses and germs. Khayelitsha has long had one of the highest tuberculosis rates in the world, and in recent years it has been decimated by AIDS. About fifty thousand people are infected with H.I.V.

On a warm March morning, a man named Zackie Achmat walked through Khayelitsha's dusty streets. He wore a white sweatshirt bearing a large message in garish purple letters: "H.I.V. POSITIVE." It was a typically audacious gesture by Achmat, a former male prostitute who has become South Africa's most prominent AIDS activist. He is the chairman of the Treatment Action Campaign, or TAC, a grassroots movement that works to secure life-saving AIDS medicines for poor South Africans. Achmat, who is forty-one years old, is the most important dissident in the country since Nelson Mandela. He looks nothing like his elegant predecessor, however. His skin is golden, reflecting his Malaysian heritage, and his wide, boyish face is incongruously framed by chic, horn-rimmed spectacles.

Achmat, who lives in Muizenberg, a pleasant coastal town twelve miles from Khayelitsha, received a mixed greeting from the locals. Some people shuffled by him, straining to avoid eye contact. For them, Achmat is an unwelcome reminder of an unstoppable and unspeakable menace. South Africa has five million H.I.V.-positive people, more than in any other country. (If the disease were as prevalent in the United States, more than thirty million citizens would have H.I.V.) A more common reaction to Achmat, however, was awe. People gaped and whispered as he passed by, as if he were a pop star. A few had the nerve to approach. "Zackie, thank you for all you've done," one woman said. "Please keep fighting."

Achmat pumped his fist and nodded. "We will," he said. "And we'll win!"

A few minutes later, Achmat came across a pair of teen-age girls walking arm in arm. One wore an "H.I.V. POSITIVE" shirt just like Achmat's, which had been given to her by the local TAC branch.

"Khayelitsha fashion," Achmat said. He then passed an older woman planting vegetables in a small garden patch. She, too, was wearing an "H.I.V. POSITIVE" shirt. Her face lit up when she saw him. "I have seen you only on television," she said.

Achmat pointed to a "Wanted" poster that had been plastered to a nearby telephone pole by TAC supporters. The poster featured head shots of the health minister and the trade minister, both of whom were high-ranking members of the African National Congress, or A.N.C. The government has refused to distribute drugs like AZT to the public, and, in response, TAC was charging the officials with "culpable homicide." Such pugnacious rhetoric repelled some South Af-



Zackie Achmat, who is H.I.V.-positive, has been



on a drug strike for four years, refusing to take antiretrovirals until poor South Africans can get them. Photograph by David Goldblatt.

ricans, but Achmat said it was justified.

Achmat's real adversary is not the A.N.C. bureaucracy but its leader, Thabo Mbeki. A cerebral, proud man credited with helping to negotiate South Africa's remarkable transition to democratic rule, Mbeki succeeded Nelson Mandela as President in 1999, with the goal of fostering an "African renaissance." He celebrated the idea that African solutions could be devised for African problems. Mbeki's insistence on self-reliance became corrosive, however, when he applied it to AIDS. He denounced Western antiretrovirals, which suppressed the H.I.V. virus, as "harmful to health." He even questioned the link between H.I.V. and AIDS. Mbeki's stance not only bewildered people outside South Africa; it alienated many of his supporters at home, including Achmat.

At 10 A.M., Achmat arrived at a small white bungalow. The building housed the AIDS ward of the local health clinic. He stepped inside reluctantly. "Too many sick people," he muttered. "I hate missionary work." Once indoors, however, he chatted warmly with patients and staff. The Khayelitsha AIDS ward represents a triumph for Achmat. It is the first public clinic in South Africa to have begun offering antiretroviral therapy. The program is run by Doctors Without Borders, the international humanitarian organization; to save money, the clinic imports generic AIDS drugs from Brazil.

The H.I.V. clinic is led by Eric Goemaere, a Belgian doctor. When Goemaere came to South Africa, in 1999, he had hoped to set up a drug-therapy program in Johannesburg. He was rebuffed by government officials, who said that antiretroviral medicines weren't affordable. Goemaere packed his bags. On his way back to Belgium, he stopped in Cape Town to have dinner with Achmat, whom he knew only by reputation as a charismatic campaigner for AIDS treatment. Achmat immediately persuaded Goemaere to stay. He told Goemaere that a group of renegade A.N.C. officials in Khayelitsha had just staged a revolt and begun administering AZT to pregnant mothers, with the goal of reducing H.I.V. transmission to newborns. Goemaere agreed to meet with these A.N.C. officials, and soon took over the Khayelitsha program.

Three hundred and eighty men and women are now enrolled in an expanded antiretroviral program, and in ninety-two per cent of them, Goemaere said, the virus had been suppressed to the point of being undetectable. "The medicines are incredible," he said. Despite claims by some American officials that Africans would not be able to stick to the complex drug regimens, the clinic's patients were even more fastidious than those in the United States.

Goemaere's program had also helped to alleviate the shame that many Africans felt about being infected. Most patients entered the AIDS ward without embarrassment, in full view of the community. "Much of the stigma around H.I.V. is because it has been seen as a disease of automatic death," Goemaere said. "If we offer people hope that they can live with the disease, then the stigma begins to fade." He added that far more Khayelitsha residents were asking for H.I.V. tests. "This is the impact of treatment on prevention," he said.

As word of Khayelitsha's "miracle clinic" has spread, infected South Africans from all across the country have attempted to gain entry. One young woman from Langa, a neighboring township, was so desperate for medicine that she assumed the identity of a cousin from Khayelitsha. Unsuspecting doctors admitted her into the program, but generally only Khayelitsha residents are eligible for antiretrovirals. Even with this limited scope, the clinic cannot meet the demand. Thousands of locals need antiretrovirals, and Khayelitsha's pilot program can afford to treat only a fraction of them.

"Does anybody have medicines here?" Achmat asked a group of patients crowded inside the clinic's small waiting room.

Out of twenty people, two patients raised their hands. One woman said that she had started antiretroviral therapy last year, after falling sick. She had since gained fourteen pounds and returned to work. "I'm feeling great," she said. She then pulled back the lapel of her shirt to reveal dark bumps along her neck and shoulder; a rash is an occasional side effect of taking antiretrovirals.

"So will you stop taking the medicines?" Achmat asked.

"No way," she said, wagging her finger. "Never!"

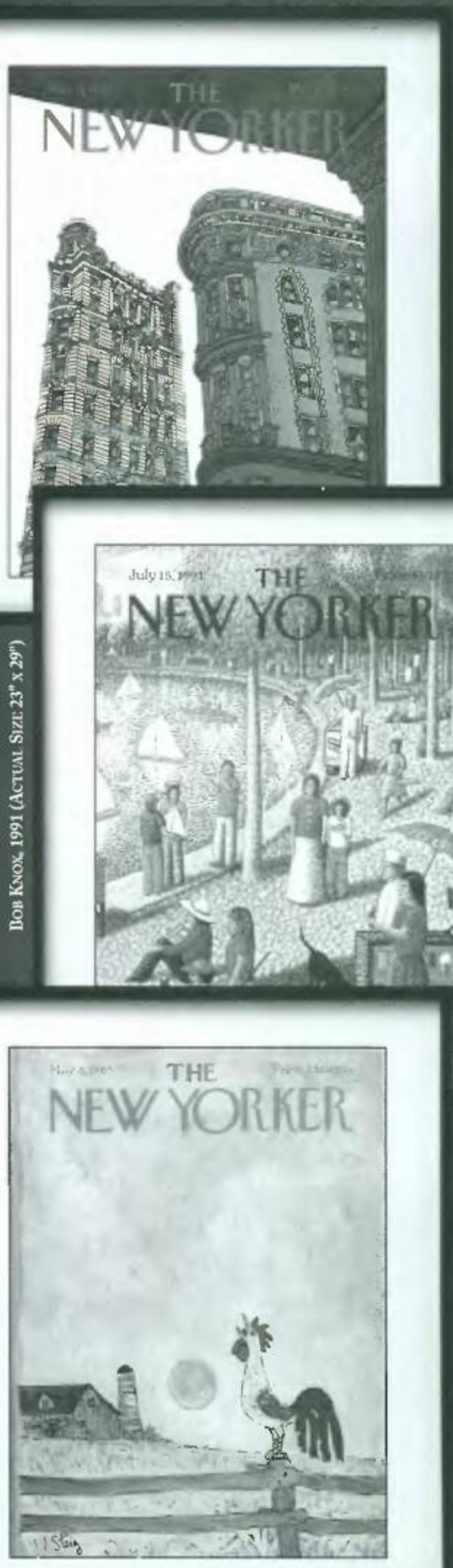
Achmat smiled. Although he is H.I.V.-positive himself and needs antiretroviral drugs, he does not take them. In 1999, Achmat began the world's first drug strike. "I will not take expensive treatment until all ordinary South Africans can get it on the public-health system," he announced. "That probably means I will die a horrible death, even though medical science has made it unnecessary." Achmat has since fallen ill; his pledge, however reckless, has made him a hero to many poor South Africans.

Before Achmat left the clinic, he spoke with some nurses. "Why do you fight so much, Zackie?" one asked. They were referring to the images of Achmat in that week's newspapers depicting their normally cheery spokesman shouting "Murderer!" at the country's health minister, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang. For years, Achmat had managed to maintain warm ties with many A.N.C. officials even as he fought for change. In late March, he gave up, and TAC launched a national civil-disobedience campaign against the A.N.C.—his own party. "It's really not nice at all," he told the nurse. "But we have to get the government to give us the medicines."

Achmat is a determined fighter, but so is his opposition. The government has suspended doctors who furtively supplied antiretrovirals to their patients. For nearly two years, Mbeki has refused to grant interviews about AIDS, but his deputies made it clear to me that they and the President still believed that antiretrovirals were dangerous—and that the "H.I.V. model" was at best a theory. "Western scientists once said to us the earth was flat," a senior A.N.C. official told me. "Now we know it's round. I bet one day we look at AIDS the same way." When the truth at last emerges, she added, "The world will have President Mbeki to thank."

Achmat grew up in a Muslim community on the Western Cape during the nineteen-sixties. It was the height of apartheid, and he was labelled a "colored" child because of his Asian ancestry. His father was a member of the Communist Party; his mother and his aunt were shop stewards who or-

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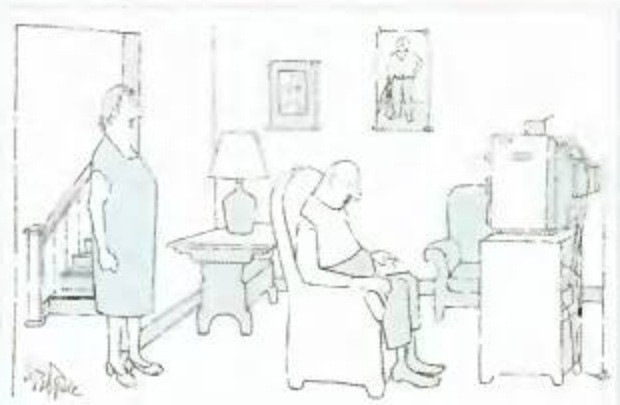
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ganized union protests. Achmat, who was appalled by the treatment of black workers at his mother's factory, quickly became a radical himself. He had an additional reason to become politicized: he was gay. "These elements were recipes either for fascist sympathies or for socialist sympathies," Achmat recalled, grinning.

In the nineteen-seventies, school boycotts became a popular form of civil disobedience against apartheid. Although the coloreds typically joined blacks in striking, Achmat noted that his ethnic kin were often the first to cave in and scurry back to school. Achmat decided that a new approach was necessary. "Instead of convincing colored kids to continue the boycott, I thought it might be easier if I just made it impossible for them to attend school," he said. During the Soweto uprisings of 1976, Achmat, who was fourteen years old, set his high school on fire. Nobody was injured. (He now seems embarrassed by the incident.) He was jailed for three months, and endured severe beatings. By the time Achmat was eighteen, he had embraced Trotskyism and been arrested five times. In a 1980 prison stint, he joined sixty other detainees in staging a landmark hunger strike, which won the inmates beds, books, and radios. Achmat saw how effective the threat of mortal sacrifice could be.

In the years that followed, Achmat, who was often unemployed, turned tricks for money. He heard talk of a "gay plague" striking down men in North America, but he didn't take the threat seriously. He visited bathhouses and indulged in the sexual freedoms of a liberalizing South Africa. Like many A.N.C. loyalists, he felt that Western governments were hyping the dangers of AIDS. "It seemed far-fetched that a disease would conveniently kill fags, prostitutes, drug users, *and* blacks," Achmat said. "Doesn't it sound like propaganda? It was a Reaganite wet dream!" The fact that he retained his health made him dismiss further warnings.

In 1990, Mandela was released from prison, and the white government agreed to dismantle apartheid. Achmat was poised to celebrate when, after a routine doctor's examination, he learned that he had H.I.V. "First, I went into denial," he said. "Then I fell into the most profound depression. We had just won our freedom—it was the most exciting time in this country's history—and I was preparing for death." He didn't leave home for six months. He rented hundreds of films on video, ordered takeout, and girded himself for the end.

"My doctor told me I had six months to live," he recalled. "When I looked around after six months and noticed I was still alive, I concluded it might be time to leave the house." Achmat decided to channel his political fervor toward ending discrimination against gay South Africans. He had never studied law—indeed, because he had been a teen-age revolutionary, he had never graduated from high school. Yet he had a flair for persuasion, a talent that would serve him well in a courtroom.

In 1994, Achmat founded the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian



"Honey, I'm home."

Equality. He initiated a campaign to incorporate gay rights into the new South African constitution. Achmat won successive victories at the Constitutional Court, helping to bring about the decriminalization of sodomy. "It was a right in which I had an obvious self-interest," he told me.

Achmat also became involved in AIDS activism. An openly gay judge named Edwin Cameron had recently created an advocacy group called the AIDS Law Project, and he hired Achmat. "I had the formal skills of an experienced lawyer, but Zackie had the guile of a street fighter," Cameron said. Achmat became close friends with Cameron, who had been one of only a few white lawyers willing to defend A.N.C. guerrillas under apartheid.

It was predictable that the apartheid regime would do little about a disease that mainly afflicted poor black people, but the A.N.C. proved to be surprisingly inattentive to AIDS. Mandela, a traditional African elder, was uncomfortable speaking publicly about sex. South Africa's disorganized new government was struggling to provide basic services: housing, electricity, water, and jobs. Gun-wielding Zulu secessionists and powerful white élites had to be placated. With so many pressing problems to confront, the government regarded the country's soaring H.I.V. infection rate as an abstract worry.

In February, 1996, Cameron requested a meeting with Mandela to discuss the government's AIDS policy. Mandela delegated the task to Deputy President F. W. de Klerk. Halfway through the meeting, a senior A.N.C. official arrived unexpectedly. It was Thabo Mbeki, who shared the post of Deputy President with de Klerk. The tenor of the meeting changed. Mbeki expressed grave concern about AIDS, firing questions at Cameron about the possibility of finding a medical solution. "He really, really cared," Cameron recalled.

Mbeki was particularly interested in finding an African remedy. Continued dependence on foreign "charity," in his view, would keep Africans locked in a state of subjugation. "We are our own liberators!" Mbeki liked to say. As a former A.N.C. revolutionary, he also relished the idea of bucking conventional wisdom. Surely Western drug companies did not have all the answers.

After the meeting, Mbeki pursued his own investigation of AIDS therapies. In early 1997, he approached his A.N.C. colleagues and informed them with great excitement about Virodene, a new South African drug. Whereas antiretroviral triple therapy, which entailed the use of three drugs in tandem, cost more than twelve hundred dollars a month, Virodene cost six dollars. If Virodene was everything its makers claimed it was, Mbeki said, South Africa would be able to bypass the Western pharmaceutical industry.

The makers of Virodene and a group of patients were invited to speak before the Cabinet. The patients offered stunning testimonies. One man claimed that on Virodene he had gained twenty-two pounds in three weeks, and that boils on his body had vanished. "It was like a church confessional," Jakes Gerwel, Mandela's Cabinet secretary at the time, told me. "The patients said they were dying, they got this treatment, and then they were saved! The thing I will always remember is the pride in South African scientists."

The inventors of Virodene had been turned down for a license by the Medicines Control Council, South Africa's equivalent to the Food and Drug Administration, which said that the experimental drug was potentially harmful and ineffective. The Virodene scientists charged that the real reason was that South Africa's "AIDS research establishment" was beholden to Western drug firms. Mbeki was sympathetic to this argument. Over the years, thousands of South Africans had participated in experimental drug trials, only to be abandoned once results were tallied. Most of these trials were supervised by white doctors, who were paid huge sums by pharmaceutical firms.

The discovery of Virodene was touted in the South African press. Achmat saw the headlines on his way home from work. "When I saw 'South African Researchers Find a Cure for AIDS for Fifty Rand a Month,' I was so overjoyed," he said. Then Achmat read the details in the paper. "My heart sank," he said. He saw that Virodene's makers had tested the drug on humans without demonstrating its safety.

In fact, South Africans soon learned, Virodene was toxic. The drug's main ingredient, dimethylformamide, was an industrial solvent that caused severe liver damage. The South African media, still dominated by white journalists, seized on Mbeki's mistake. The *Sunday Times*



"Meow, but don't quote me on that."

of Johannesburg said that the Cabinet's "combined technical knowledge of the HIV virus would fit on the back of a postcard." Politicians were equally withering. Tony Leon, the head of the Democratic Party, said that Mbeki suffered from a "near obsession with finding 'African solutions' to every problem," even if it meant turning to "snake-oil cures and quackery."

Mbeki refused to admit his error. He and other A.N.C. officials called the criticism racist. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, the health minister at the time, claimed that members of the Democratic Party hated A.N.C. supporters, adding, "If they had their way, we would all die of AIDS."

The politics of AIDS had long been racially charged. Conspiracy theories had circulated all over Africa, and even among some African-Americans, suggesting that AIDS was part of a plot to wipe out blacks. In South Africa, these fears had some basis in fact. The apartheid government sponsored a clandestine germ-warfare program that was accused of targeting A.N.C. officials. Far-right white politicians expressed the hope that AIDS would leave whites less outnumbered. Clive Derby-Lewis, a Conservative Party M.P., once said, "If AIDS stops black population growth, it would be like Father Christmas." The A.N.C. government had always shown remarkable magnanimity toward South African whites, granting amnesties to confessed killers and withstanding appeals for Zimbabwe-style land seizures. But the combination of the Virodene scandal, South Africa's tainted past, and the whiteness of the medical establishment helped turn the AIDS debate into a race war by other means.

Achmat was dismayed by the Virodene incident, but he remained faithful to the A.N.C. Mbeki had made a serious mistake, but, he said, "at least this was an attempt to find a solution on the established basis that H.I.V. causes AIDS."

In October, 1997, Achmat visited the home of Edwin Cameron, his friend, who had fallen dangerously ill with full-blown AIDS. He had a severe lung infection. Achmat was horrified. Not only was he watching a beloved friend in agony; he was seeing his own future.



"Let's let them play through."

Three weeks later, Cameron began antiretroviral triple therapy. The drugs, which had just become available in South African pharmacies, cost Cameron a third of his salary. They had an immediate effect. By December, Cameron was able to hike up Table Mountain, which looms over Cape Town. "Zackie and I knew that the only reason I was alive was something very artificial—my capacity to afford these drugs," he said.

The following year, Achmat himself fell ill. He developed thrush, an oral fungal infection, which made it difficult for him to swallow; he believed he would soon die. His doctor told him that an expensive drug called fluconazole could treat his opportunistic infection. Achmat spent what money he had, and his friends helped to cover the rest. The drug, manufactured by Pfizer, cost fourteen dollars a day. In countries where generics were available, Achmat learned, the drug cost seventy-five cents.

Achmat's friend Simon Nkoli, a well-known gay-rights activist, suffered from the same ailment but could not afford the drug. In November, 1998, he died, and Achmat found a new cause. Speaking at Nkoli's memorial service, he announced the formation of the Treatment Action Campaign.

At the same time that Achmat and several activist friends were organizing TAC, a thirty-six-year-old Zulu woman named Gugu Dlamini disclosed on radio and television that she was H.I.V.-positive. Although more than three million South Africans then had H.I.V., fewer than a hundred had spoken openly about their disease. In the West, AIDS had been stigmatized by its association with homosexuals, drug users, and contagious death. In Africa, where AIDS mainly affected heterosexuals, the infected were commonly branded as promiscuous, unfaithful sinners. Three weeks after Dlamini spoke out, she was knifed to death by a group of neighbors. Some of the attackers were rumored to be her ex-boyfriends.

Both Mbeki and Achmat expressed dismay over Dlamini's murder. "We have to treat people who have H.I.V. with care and support, and not as if they have an illness that is evil," Mbeki said. Achmat spoke out in a different way. He recalled an apocryphal but inspiring tale about Christian X, the Danish king. The monarch was said to have begun wearing the Star of David after the Nazis invaded his country, in 1940. His action, legend had it, prompted Gentiles throughout Denmark to do the same: Jews would feel embraced and the Nazis would have trouble finding their targets. TAC had a hundred T-shirts printed. On the back of each shirt was a photograph of Dlamini and the words "Never again." On the front, in purple lettering, was the phrase "H.I.V. POSITIVE."

In April, 1999, Edwin Cameron became the first government official in

South Africa to announce publicly that he had H.I.V. The judge revealed his status on national television, becoming his country's Magic Johnson. "I'd fallen sick with AIDS and been brought back to life by the medicines, and I held public office," he told me. "This was something I couldn't *not* do." Cameron had no idea how people would respond. "I thought I might be reviled," he said. Several days before admitting his condition, Cameron, driving home from a friend's house, became so racked with fear that he pulled his car over to the side of the road, rested his head against the steering wheel, and burst into tears. The day after his announcement, however, Cameron arrived at work to find his office filled with flowers. "The country had been waiting for someone in public life to come out," he said.

Although Cameron had been courageous, the fact that he was white and upper middle class made him an imperfect spokesperson for South Africa's AIDS epidemic. Achmat felt that the AIDS movement needed a figurehead, and impetuously decided to put himself in the position of the millions of South Africans who couldn't afford the medicines that were keeping Cameron alive. He would stage his drug strike.

Achmat made the announcement at a workshop for AIDS groups. "The truth is, with the right medication, H.I.V./AIDS is like diabetes—it can be managed," he said. "The only reason we don't have this medication in South Africa is because we are poor, not because it doesn't exist." To force change, he said, he would risk his own life.



Cameron opposed Achmat's stand. "There's an element of hubris to any form of martyrdom," Cameron said. "He was expressing Zackie rather than the issue." Their friendship was strained for several months. Still, there was no question that Achmat's extreme act helped TAC gain notoriety. The organization set up field offices in Durban and Johannesburg. The group's membership grew rapidly, especially among young people. Some signed up out of nostalgia for the anti-apartheid struggle, but most joined for a more personal reason: the loss of loved ones. The longer the epidemic raged, the stronger TAC grew. "For most people, it's the fact that their brother or sister or their aunt or their mother or their neighbor is going to die," Achmat said.

The township of Mitchell's Plain is separated from Khayelitsha by a large sand dune. It is slightly wealthier than its impoverished neighbor, yet in March it seemed enveloped in gloom. Nyameka Ndashe, a twenty-one-year-old resident, recently dropped out of school to take care of her ailing mother. Her stepfather, she said, had infected her mother with H.I.V. several years ago; Ndashe had since run him out of the house. "He knows he better not come anywhere near here," she said. Ndashe's three-year-old brother, who was born with H.I.V., died last year.

Ndashe's mother urgently needed antiretroviral therapy, but it was unavailable in Mitchell's Plain. Ndashe took me to visit her mother, who was in the hospital. She was barely visible beneath the covers of her bed. Up until December, Ndashe told me, this skeletal woman was healthy enough to work full time as a domestic helper and part time as a church volunteer. Then, suddenly, she developed AIDS. In the last five weeks, her weight had dropped from a hundred and forty-six pounds to ninety-five pounds. She had also lost her hearing and begun muttering to herself. Ndashe hadn't visited in several days. Observing her mother's head bobbing up and down, Ndashe pleaded with her to stop. Her mother said, faintly but firmly, "I can't stop. I'm losing my mind." She had contracted tuberculosis, which often exploits the weakened immune system. The doctor told Ndashe that the disease had made its way to her mother's brain.

When her mother's condition worsened, Ndashe became a volunteer for Achmat's organization. TAC, she hoped, would bring antiretrovirals to Mitchell's Plain. A social worker stopped by her mother's bed, and Ndashe began pressing her about antiretroviral therapy. The social worker shrugged. "The medicines are too expensive for the government to afford," she said. Ndashe reminded her that the government would save money if it offered the drugs rather than paying for the extended hospital stays of AIDS patients and shouldering the loss to South Africa's workforce. The social worker wasn't swayed. "The medicines have toxic side effects," she said.

"Yes, but look at the side effects from not taking the medicines," Ndashe said. She pointed to her mother, who had turned to face the wall. "You have to go to Khayelitsha to believe it," Ndashe said, springing up from the edge of her mother's bed. "There the people with H.I.V. are so healthy they walk around like this!" Ndashe, a slender young woman who is more than six feet tall, puffed out her cheeks and curved her arms in front of her, suggesting the shape of a belly. She ambled across the filthy, cracked tiles of the hospital ward, imitating the fleshy Khayelitsha patients who had been brought back to life. When she sat back down, her laughter quickly faded as she glanced at her mother. "Zackie better hurry," she said.

When Achmat first made his drug pledge, his primary target was the Western pharmaceutical industry, not the A.N.C. He understood that the government could not possibly subsidize antiretroviral treatment until drug companies agreed to drop their prices—or their patents—in South Africa. "We didn't want to burden our government with a bill that it couldn't afford," Achmat recalled. There was also a tactical reason for targeting the drug industry first. If anything could rally activists who had been dormant since apartheid, it was a big-business enemy with a reputation for greed and callousness.

TAC decided to publicize the plight of the most helpless segment of the country's burgeoning AIDS population: babies. By 1999, some forty thousand babies were being born each year to H.I.V.-positive mothers in South Africa. A short course of AZT given to infected pregnant women would diminish by half the likelihood that the newborn would inherit the virus. Yet the regimen's cost—fifty dollars—was prohibitive for most South Africans. By highlighting the deaths of innocent children, TAC's campaign aimed to shame AZT's manufacturer, Glaxo, into lowering the price of the drug.

The A.N.C. supported Achmat's campaign. "If you want to fight for affordable treatment, then I will be with you all the way," Dlamini Zuma, the health minister, said. In a joint statement, Achmat and Dlamini Zuma called upon business, labor, and religious organizations to pressure Glaxo to lower prices.

The government seemed to be waking up to the AIDS crisis. It had launched a prevention campaign, erecting billboards that promoted abstinence and safe sex. The health ministry had increased free condom distribution from six million in 1994 to a hundred and ninety-eight million in 1999. Achmat even felt that he had the implicit support of Mbeki, whom Mandela had chosen as his successor. In a speech, Mbeki had accused the pharmaceutical companies of profiteering. "As long as it is only available at exorbitant prices," Mbeki said of AZT, "it makes it impossible for the government to make it available to ordinary people." As Achmat saw it, "We were fighting on the same side."

TAC joined the A.N.C. in supporting the Medicines Act, legislation that would make it possible for South Africa to override drug patents and provide more affordable generics. The measure had passed but never gone into effect, thanks to an intense lobbying effort by the pharmaceutical industry and the Clinton Administration. In February, 1998, thirty-nine drug companies had filed suit in Pretoria's High Court to stop South Africa from manufacturing generics. The drug companies argued that there would be no incentive for research and development if patents were not enforced. Charlene Barshefsky, the United States Trade Representative, threatened to punish South Africa with trade sanctions. Several other Clinton Administration officials, including Vice-President Al Gore, demanded the repeal of the Medicines Act.

In response, TAC positioned hundreds of protesters from AIDS groups, unions, and churches outside the American consulates in Cape Town, Durban, and Pretoria. "STOP BULLYING!" the signs urged Washington. TAC then teamed up with four advocacy groups: Doctors Without Borders, ACT-UP, Health GAP, and Consumer Project on Technology.

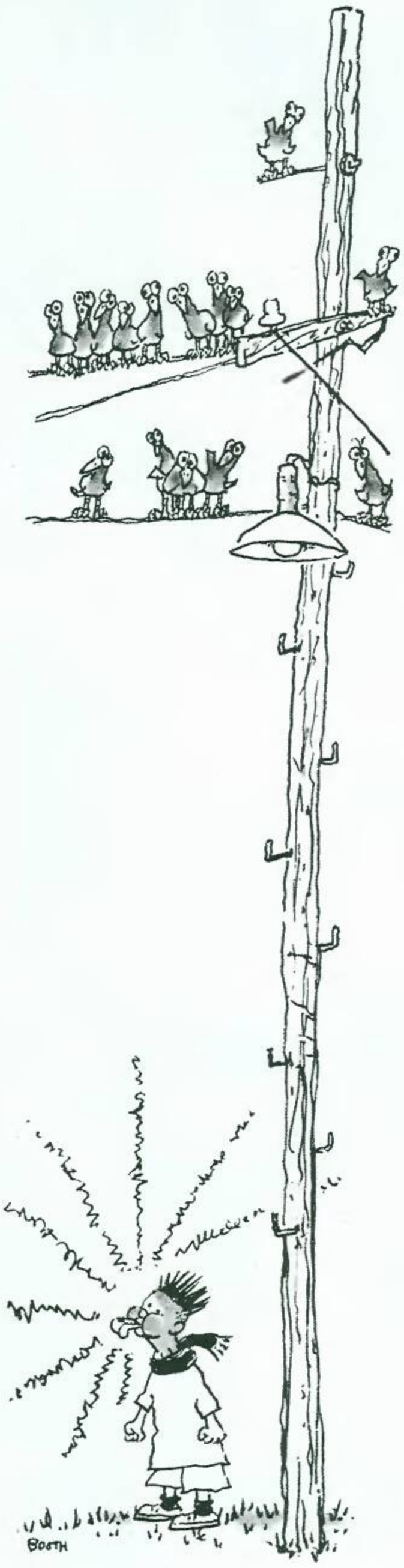
In June, 1999, in Carthage, Tennessee, just as Gore was declaring his intention to run for President, a dozen people interrupted his speech and began chanting, "Gore's greed kills!" The Vice-President looked aghast. The protesters continued to hound him along the campaign trail.

Achmat and the other activists achieved their goal: the Clinton Administration removed South Africa from its sanctions watch list and ended its campaign against the Medicines Act. President Clinton announced that the United States would henceforth insure that "people in the poorest countries won't have to go without medicine."

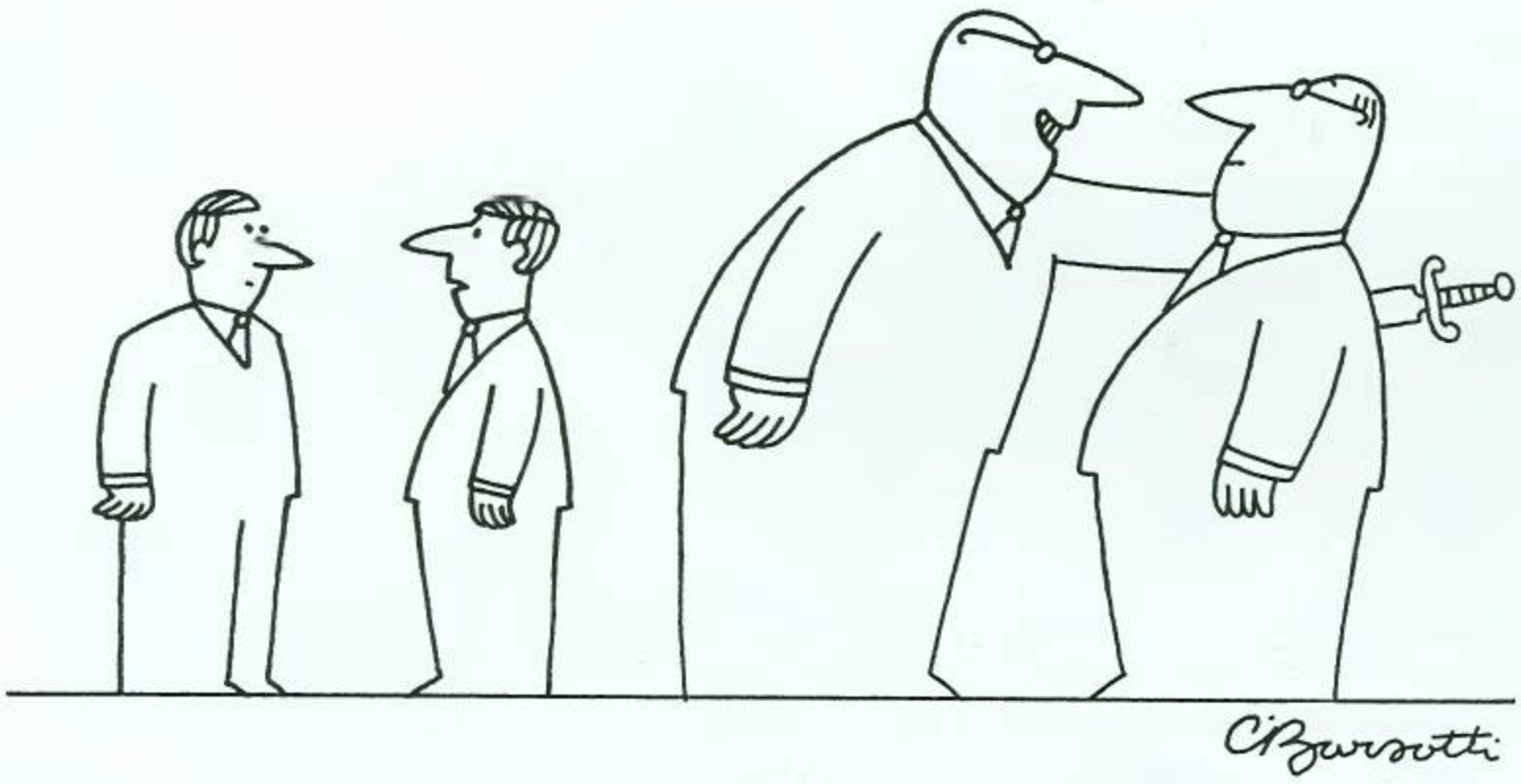
South Africa was now free to produce generics, yet its newly elected President, Thabo Mbeki, was developing doubts about the safety of antiretroviral drugs. A high-ranking official in the health ministry had given Mbeki an advance copy of a book, "Debating AZT," which suggested that the drug was toxic. Mbeki, a micromanager who juggled a wide range of intellectual pursuits, decided to research the matter. He learned of an obscure group of academics and journalists who called themselves "AIDS dissidents." The group made three startling claims: H.I.V. was a harmless "passenger" virus; AIDS was a "life-style disease" caused by poverty and malnutrition; antiretroviral drugs didn't help patients, and often wrecked their immune systems. These views lacked scientific support. The Food and Drug Administration, the World Health Organization, and South Africa's own Medicines Control Council had all deemed AZT a safe, beneficial drug.

Nevertheless, in October, 1999, Mbeki, speaking before the National Council of Provinces, argued that "a large volume of scientific literature" claimed that AZT was "a danger to health." He continued, "It would be irresponsible for us not to heed the dire warnings which medical researchers have been making." Mbeki said that his new health minister, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, would be entrusted with finding out "where the truth lies." At a conference in December, the minister was unequivocal. "Could you, with a clear conscience, introduce those toxic drugs to a woman and her child?" she said. "I say no."

Mbeki telephoned David Rasnick,



GEORGE BOOTH



"Watch these old guys—you can learn a lot."

• • •

an American biochemist who disputed the idea that H.I.V. caused AIDS. "He asked me if I would support his efforts regarding AZT and AIDS," Rasnick later said. An intense e-mail correspondence ensued between Rasnick and Mbeki. Rasnick began contributing articles to the South African media. "The contagious H.I.V. hypothesis of AIDS is the biggest scientific, medical blunder of the twentieth century," he wrote in the *Mail & Guardian*, a Johannesburg newspaper. International health institutions, he wrote, were "terrorizing hundreds of millions of people around the world by their reckless and absurd policy of equating sex with death." Money should be steered not toward harmful antiretroviral drugs, Rasnick argued, but toward the improvement of nutrition and sanitation. Mbeki's photograph was posted on a Web site, Virusmyth.com, that promoted the views of Rasnick and other skeptics.

Edwin Cameron had first learned of the AIDS dissidents' views in the nineteen-eighties, shortly after receiving a diagnosis of H.I.V. He knew that the dissidents blamed the spread of AIDS on recreational drug use among homosexuals. "I was all too bitterly aware of the dissidents and their blame agenda," Cameron said, "but the thought that it would reach the mind and heart of our President ..."

In March, 2000, Cameron and three civic leaders wrote Mbeki in defense of AZT. Sitting in his judge's quarters several days later, he heard the sound of paper coming through the fax machine. The President had responded to him directly. Cameron read Mbeki's sixteen-page reply with a "sense of fear and dismay." The President questioned the "available evidence" suggesting AZT was safe, noting that a similar "consensus" had once "existed on the use of Thalidomide."

Mbeki went public with his iconoclastic view. He argued that the AIDS epidemic had been cynically hyped by drug companies. "The reality is that the predominant feature of illnesses that cause disease and death among the black people in our country is poverty," he said.

Mbeki was partly right. Poverty had accelerated the spread of AIDS in Africa. Whereas a middle-class person who contracted herpes could easily be treated, a poor person with lingering sores was left highly vulnerable to H.I.V. Moreover, antiretroviral therapy required carefully calibrated doses. Failure to adhere to these complex regimens could inspire resistance to the drugs, rendering them less effective. Although the Khayelitsha program had proved that antiretrovirals could be dispensed in poor urban townships, rural areas often lacked the proper infrastructure.

Nonetheless, the fact was that antiretrovirals helped patients live longer—and H.I.V.'s role in causing AIDS had been confirmed by thousands of researchers. Yet Mbeki was starting to think like a conspiracy theorist. It was as if, having harbored dreams of African self-reliance, he couldn't quite bring himself to believe in a disease that could undermine all his grand plans. Mbeki denounced the notion that the disease had African origins as "wild and insulting." He insisted that his critics dismissed his arguments because they viewed Africans as "germ carriers, and human beings of a lower order that cannot subject its passions to reason."

While Mbeki's position was hardening, Achmat's organization was continuing its pressure on Glaxo to lower prices. TAC demanded that the company reduce the cost of AZT. H.I.V.-positive protesters picketed Glaxo's South African headquarters. They staged fasts and rallies in Durban, Cape Town, and Soweto. In March, 2000, TAC scored a big victory: Glaxo announced that it would halve the price of AZT in South Africa.

Mbeki was unmoved, however, by those who urged him to buy the drug. "I am taken aback by the determination of many people in our country to sacrifice all intellectual integrity to act as salespersons of the product of one pharmaceutical company," he said. Mbeki linked his stand to larger moral principles at the core of South Africa's post-apartheid identity, such as freedom of speech. Why was it, Mbeki asked, that the mainstream was trying to muzzle dissent? "Not long ago, in our own country, people were killed, tortured and imprisoned ... because the established authority believed that their views were dangerous," Mbeki wrote in a letter sent in April, 2000, to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and President Clinton. "We are now being asked to do precisely the same thing that the racist apartheid tyranny we opposed did, because, it is said, there exists a scientific view that is supported by the majority against which dissent is prohibited." He charged that those who were supporting the use of antiretrovirals were actually trying to poison blacks. A statement from the President's office likened antiretroviral therapy to the "biological warfare of the

apartheid era." It said, "Our people are being used as guinea pigs and conned into using dangerous and toxic drugs."

Earlier that year, Mbeki had ordered the formation of an international AIDS advisory panel. The panel was made up of thirty-three scientists, two-thirds of whom subscribed to the standard H.I.V. model and a third of whom claimed it was false. The panel held its first meeting in May, 2000. World-renowned virologists and fringe scientists were given equal time. In the words of David Rasnick, the biochemist, "It was a victory from the moment we stepped off the plane."

The panel was lambasted in newspapers around the world. Dr. Jerry Coovadia, a physician at the University of Natal, wrote an op-ed in South Africa's *Sunday Independent* entitled "Leave Science to the Scientists, Mr. President." An op-ed in *Newsday* said of Mbeki, "A person can be so open-minded that his brains fall out."

That summer, South Africa hosted an international AIDS conference that drew twelve thousand delegates. People expected Mbeki to use the occasion to clarify his position. But in his keynote address Mbeki declared that extreme poverty, not AIDS, was "the world's biggest killer." Since poverty also broke down peoples' immune systems, Mbeki said, "We could not blame everything on a single virus."

These statements, combined with Mbeki's indulgence of skeptics like Rasnick, gave him a reputation for saying that H.I.V. didn't cause AIDS. In fact, A.N.C. loyalists told me, this was an exaggeration designed to humiliate the President. Essop Pahad, Mbeki's close friend and adviser, said, "He has *never* said it. You will never produce a shred of evidence that he said any such thing."

Whether or not Mbeki explicitly rejected the H.I.V. model, he subjected it to relentless challenge. Poverty may increase people's vulnerability to AIDS, but Mbeki's words implied that a variety of diseases that had always afflicted the poor—like malaria and tuberculosis—were suddenly being dressed up as AIDS. By attributing the AIDS epidemic to mass poverty and malnutrition, Mbeki sidestepped difficult questions about sex and responsibility. If AIDS was the "logical" outgrowth of economic deprivation, not unprotected sex, then it was easy to conclude that there was little that destitute Africans could do to save themselves. Mbeki championed African self-reliance, yet he had taken a stance on AIDS which treated his countrymen as helpless.

Achmat was stunned by the intractability of the A.N.C. leadership. When he initiated his drug strike, he had expected that the hardest part of his battle would be fighting companies like Glaxo. "Zackie got trapped," Cameron said. "When he made his pledge, there was no way he could have anticipated that the dissident position would so influence government policy."

Within Mbeki's inner circle, suspicion of antiretrovirals grew deeper. Some officials even suggested that keeping H.I.V.-positive people alive could accelerate the spread of AIDS. "If an infected person on retrovirals has an improvement in quality of life, he may stop preventive methods," Pahad told me. There was a brute logic to this argument, but TAC naturally insisted that allowing millions to die wasn't the proper response. Persuading people who begin antiretroviral treatment to practice safe sex, Achmat argued, would more effectively rein in the epidemic.

Toward the end of 2000, Achmat flew to Thailand, where he bought five thousand capsules of fluconazole, the drug that had alleviated his thrush. In Thailand, the generic version was available for twenty-eight cents per capsule, whereas Pfizer was selling the patented form, Diflucan, for as much as eighteen dollars. Achmat passed through customs carrying three thousand capsules, and enlisted a South African soap-opera star to carry the rest. Doctors applauded TAC, but the government arrested Achmat on smuggling charges.

Nevertheless, after Achmat's Thailand stunt, Pfizer agreed to offer Diflucan free to public clinics in South Africa. Five major drug companies had announced discounts on antiretrovirals of up to ninety per cent in South Africa. Prices kept falling, increasing the pres-



sure on the Mbeki regime to purchase the drugs and offer them free of charge in public clinics. By 2001, antiretroviral therapy that cost fifteen thousand dollars per year in the United States was available in South Africa for three thousand dollars; the government could likely have reduced the price to three hundred and fifty dollars by purchasing generic antiretrovirals from India. By that point, however, Mbeki had staked his reputation on the idea that the drugs were dangerous. The fact that they were now affordable could hardly justify a change in course.

"We saw the government policy wouldn't change even with cheap drugs," Achmat said. "It was devastating."

Mbeki's intransigence began to inspire a revolt within the A.N.C. Party loyalists noted grotesque inconsistencies in government policy; for example, H.I.V.-positive members of parliament were covered by health plans that paid for the very medicines that were deemed too toxic for South Africa's poor. The trade unions, a core A.N.C. constituency, mutinied, and joined TAC in demanding that H.I.V.-positive workers be treated. South Africa's ambassadors abroad and its foreign minister began to complain that they could no longer advance the country's agenda. All anybody wanted to talk about, they said, was Mbeki's baffling views on AIDS.

Even the judicial system turned against the President. In August, 2001, a coalition that included TAC sued the government for failing to provide Nevirapine, an antiretroviral that was often used to curb transmission of H.I.V. from mothers to their newborns. The drug had been offered free by its manufacturer, Boehringer Ingleheim, but the government had refused to administer it, citing its alleged toxicity. TAC presented affidavits from pregnant mothers who had been denied the treatment they sought. Physicians described their eagerness to begin dispensing Nevirapine. "Doctors at this hospital have bought Nevirapine with their own money and are already administering it," Dr. Andrew Grant, the acting superintendent of a hospital in the KwaZulu-Natal province, wrote. "We have seen no side effects on this regime (except extreme gratefulness)." South Africa's highest court ruled that Mbeki's government was violating the constitution. The state was forced to begin providing Nevirapine to pregnant mothers.

Most important of all, Nelson Mandela joined TAC's cause. Since leaving office, Mandela had begun to offer leadership on AIDS. He had called for pregnant mothers to be given AZT. He had said openly that he believed H.I.V. caused AIDS, a statement noteworthy only in South Africa. He had disclosed that he had lost a niece and two sons of a nephew to AIDS, becoming one of the first A.N.C. officials to "out" his family members. But Mandela, an A.N.C. loyalist, had delivered only oblique criticism of Mbeki. At one ceremony honoring AIDS workers, Mandela stumbled over his text, told members of the audience he had made a mistake—then joked that at least *he* was willing to admit it when he'd done so. At a Soweto clinic, Mandela said, "If the government says, 'Don't make any move until we have completed our research,' young people and babies are going to die in scores every day." He argued, "It is necessary to be broad-minded, not to feel that your ego has been attacked, if you listen to what the public is saying."



Mandela was in Barcelona last summer for an international AIDS conference, and Achmat, who had been scheduled to fly to Spain to speak but had contracted a lung infection, delivered video testimony from his sickbed. He described the success of Khayelitsha's pilot program. "Just because we are poor," Achmat said, "just because we are black, just because we live in environments and continents that are far from you does not mean that our lives should be valued any less." Mandela decided that he would go to see Achmat when he returned to South Africa.

Mandela's visit to Achmat's home, in July, 2002, offered a kind of coronation. The local papers carried photographs of the two men together. They began to speak regularly by phone. "The sin-

ELEVEN POEMS

That wasn't horses: that was
rain yawning to life in the night
on metal roofs.

Lying back so smugly
phallic, the ampersand
in the deck chair of itself.

Spirituality?
she snorted. And poetry?
They're like yellow and gold.

Being rushed through streets
at dusk, by trees and rain, the
equinoctial gales!

The best love poems are known
as such to the lovers alone.

Creek pools, grown top heavy,
are speaking silver-age verse
through their gravel beards.

Demure as a navel;
and like a cat on wet grass—
but they'll be a pair.

Tired from understanding
life, the animals approach man
to be mystified.

A spider walking
in circles is celebrating
the birthday of logic.

To win me, they told
me all my bad attitudes
but they got them wrong.

Filling in a form
the simple man asks his mother
Mum, what sex are we?

—Les Murray

ner and the saint," Achmat liked to say. In December, Mandela visited the Khayelitsha clinic. One patient presented Mandela with an "H.I.V. POSITIVE" shirt. The former President took off his floral shirt and put on the TAC shirt—doing more with one gesture to lessen the stigma of H.I.V. than any South African before him.

Mandela's actions made clear that the A.N.C. had split into two factions, and, for a moment, it appeared that Mandela's side was gaining control. In April, 2002, the President's Cabinet issued a striking statement: "The government's starting point is based on the premise that H.I.V. causes AIDS." The budget for AIDS prevention and treatment would be tripled. Rape survivors would be given prophylactic doses of antiretrovirals. And, at long last, the A.N.C. announced that it would explore the cost of offering antiretroviral drugs to the wider public.

Mbeki approved all of these actions, leaving many with the impression that he had finally changed his mind. He had not. Last spring, he sent his colleagues a rambling e-mail message. The document, which ran to a hundred and fourteen pages, was written mainly by Peter Mokaba, the former head of the A.N.C. Youth League. It attacked drug companies, antiretrovirals, and the mainstream "thesis" on H.I.V. The centerpiece of the document was a sarcastic monologue that lashed out at racial stereotypes:

> Yes, we are sex-crazy! Yes, we are diseased! Yes, we spread the deadly H.I.V. virus through our uncontrolled heterosexual sex! In this regard, yes, we are different from the U.S. and Western Europe! Yes, we, the men, abuse women and the girl-child with gay abandon! Yes, among us rape is endemic because of our culture! Yes, we do believe that sleeping with young virgins will cure us of AIDS! Yes, as a result of all this, we are threatened with destruction by the H.I.V./AIDS pandemic! Yes, what we need, and cannot afford because we are poor, are condoms and antiretroviral drugs! Help!

Achmat was given the paper before he boarded a flight for a meeting at the U.N. He was crushed. "On the record, you had, for the first time, an indication of the madness, the irrationality, the blindness, the willfulness, the vindictiveness of Mbeki on this question," he said. Several weeks after Achmat read the essay, he learned that Mokaba had died of AIDS.

Mbeki disassociated himself from AIDS skeptics like Rasnick, but, because he had not stopped sympathizing with their position, he never retracted his earlier remarks, leaving many South Africans confused about the science of AIDS. Although fifteen hundred South Africans were being infected each day, he failed to assume a central role in the government's AIDS-prevention campaign, and he devoted no public speeches to the disease. In his few public references to AIDS, he persisted in calling it a disease "of poverty and underdevelopment."

In January, 2003, Tshabalala-Msimang invited Roberto Giraldo, a scientist and AIDS skeptic, to South Africa to deliver a presentation. Even though Giraldo declared that "the transmission of AIDS from person to person is a myth," the health minister eagerly took up his recommendations on nutrition. She urged AIDS patients to take "garlic, lemon, olive oil, and African potatoes" to boost their immune systems. "These things are affordable for South Africans," she said, "not like things like antiretrovirals." Indeed, when the KwaZulu-Natal province secured seventy-two million dollars from the Global Fund to help pay for antiretroviral programs, Tshabalala-Msimang blocked disbursement of the money, claiming that the grant application had been improperly filed. Meanwhile, Botswana had already begun providing antiretrovirals free to the public.

Achmat was forced to accept that nothing had really changed. TAC's leadership decided that it was time to organize a country-wide campaign of civil disobedience. They intended the protests to be the biggest in South Africa since the days of apartheid. "The difficult decision for me was not to take off my suit and go to the streets to fight for treatment," Achmat said. "That was easy. The emotionally torturous thing for me to do was to recognize we had to take on the A.N.C. *Our* A.N.C."

On March 20th, Achmat squatted near the Cape Town Central Police Station with a hundred or so black South Africans. "We have bail money for everyone," he told the crowd. "Who wants to be arrested first?" Dozens of arms shot into the air. Those gathered ranged in age from fifteen to seventy-one. Few had ever been to jail before.

That morning, Achmat had left a polite message on the voice mail of Jacob

Zuma, Mbeki's deputy, who had negotiated with TAC in the past. "If you call us back, we'll meet anytime, so we can sort out what can be sorted out," he had said. "Call anytime!"

At one o'clock, Achmat and his colleagues stood up. They walked with their arms linked to the police station, a couple of blocks away, carrying TAC's "Wanted" posters, the hallmark of the civil-disobedience campaign that was being launched that day. TAC protesters flooded the police station, catching a half-dozen officers off guard. Achmat asked to see the station commander. "We'd like you to arrest the minister of health and the minister of trade and industry," he said to the guard who greeted him. "We are staying right here. You either have to arrest the minister of health and the minister of trade and industry or you must arrest us."

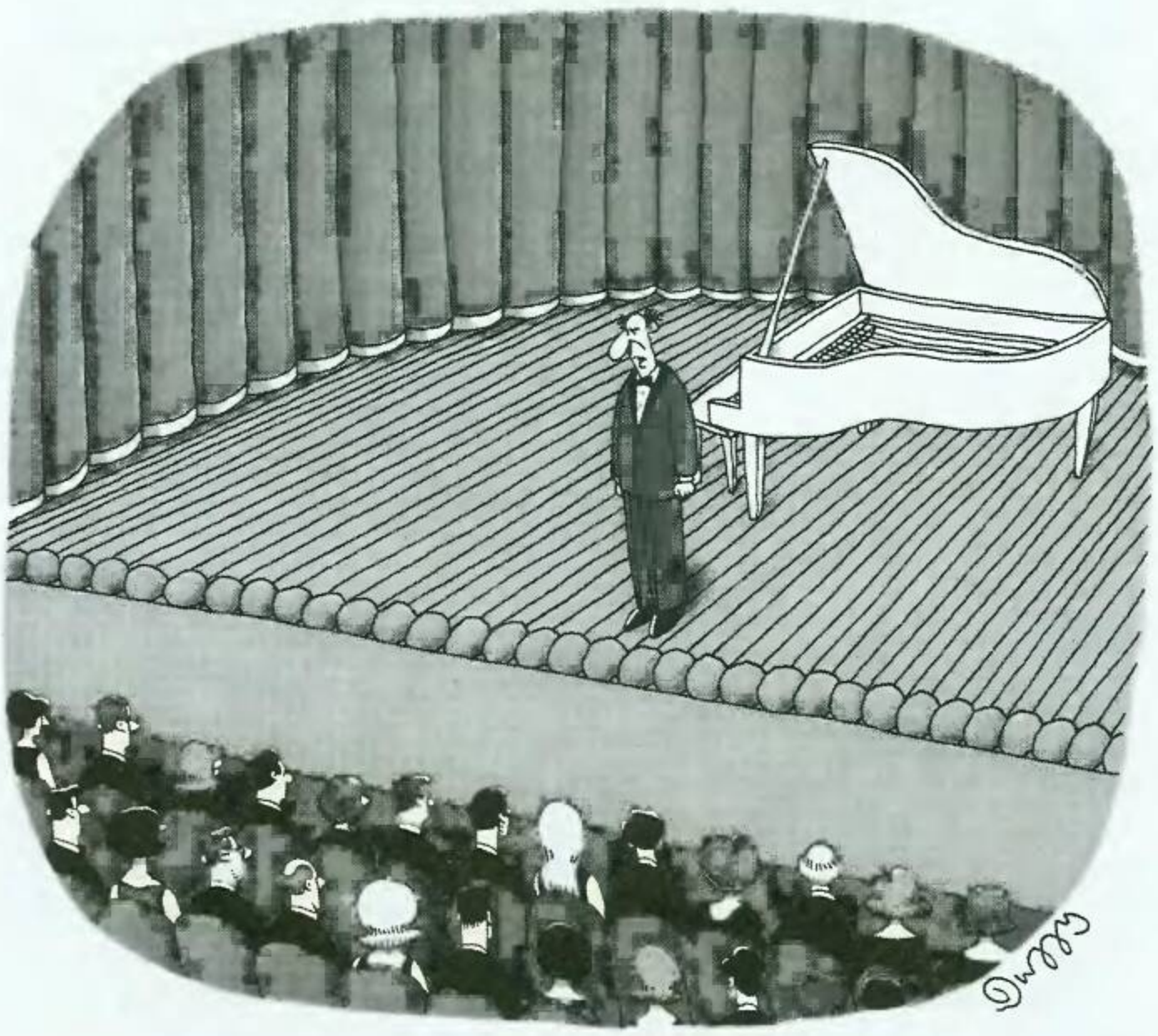
"Arrest us or them," Nyameka Ndashe, the young woman from Mitchell's Plain township, shouted. "They are killers!" She told me, "I can't take it that my mother must die because of H.I.V. that can be treated."

Achmat had just recovered from bronchitis, and he looked worn out. His CD4 count, a conventional measure of a person's immune system, was hovering around two hundred; AIDS patients in the United States are typically urged to begin taking antiretrovirals at three hundred and fifty. I asked Ndashe if Achmat should abandon his pledge and take his medicines. "He is our comrade," she said. "He will never take them until we get our treatment."

Achmat answered a ring on his cell phone, and gave the thumbs-up sign: two hundred TAC protesters had occupied a police station outside Johannesburg. The goal was to have six hundred volunteers arrested, in tribute to the six hundred South Africans who died of AIDS each day. The TAC protesters, most of whom had H.I.V., began dancing and stomping in unison. The few on antiretrovirals shook their green pill containers like tambourines. "In the parliament they are shivering," they sang in Xhosa. "Don't be scared, comrades!" Achmat disappeared with two TAC associates into a back room for negotiations with the police. An hour or so passed, and the crowd began to chant, "Bring out Zackie, we want Zackie!"

Achmat emerged from the rear of the station and announced, "The police have opened up a docket against the minister of health for culpable homicide." The protesters burst into song once more, and Achmat offered a dance of his own. Ndashe grimaced, watching him. "Zackie has many things," she told me, "but he has no rhythm. None!"

The protesters were then formally charged with unlawful entry. They filed into a booking area, where they proudly stated their names. Many were disappointed to learn that the police didn't have enough cells to hold them overnight. Achmat assured them, "You'll have plenty more chances to go to jail in the weeks ahead."



"Don't make me come down there."

Just after the launch of the civil-disobedience campaign, six TAC volunteers died of AIDS, including several who had been involved in police-station takeovers. All were under forty. Achmat, who said that he had already lost about fifty friends to AIDS, wondered whether it was wrong to have waited four years before launching a campaign against the government. "Most of us who are A.N.C. members have put our party loyalty before people's lives," Achmat said bitterly.

In late March, at a health conference in Cape Town, Achmat's rage erupted in public for the first time. When Tshabalala-Msimang, the health minister, stepped up to the podium to speak, dozens of TAC protesters began shouting, "You're a disgrace!" When Achmat and a TAC colleague began reading a prepared statement, the minister left the podium and sidled up to Achmat in front of TV cameras.

"I'll stand next to you," Tshabalala-Msimang said.

"You should be in jail," he screamed.

"You're sweating, Zackie," she noted, seeming to mock his illness. "Shall I give you a tissue to wipe your sweat?"

"Does somebody *decent* have a tissue?" he asked, incensed. Achmat's hand shook wildly as he tried to continue reading the statement. "You never visited the pilot program in Khayelitsha," he said.

"Wipe your sweat," the minister commanded.

"Take your wig off!" Achmat replied.

The South African newspapers covered the incident on their front pages. Achmat was mortified that he had lost his temper. He was embarrassed further

when, a few days later, the nurse at Khayelitsha asked him about the outburst. Yet he concluded that the AIDS crisis demanded an end to politeness. "I've never been afraid of making people uncomfortable," he told me. "I also know that the only reason you make people feel uncomfortable is when it's absolutely necessary."

After a month of protests, Jacob Zuma agreed to hold a meeting in late May with TAC leaders, who in turn agreed to suspend civil disobedience. In addition, the government announced that an extra four hundred million dollars would be budgeted for "appropriate medical treatment." All that was left was for the Cabinet to deem antiretrovirals "appropriate" and announce a national treatment program. If it didn't, TAC promised, civil disobedience would begin again.

The government's actions were encouraging, but Mbeki remained aloof. Indeed, people who had spoken with the President about AIDS did not believe that he would change his views. A prominent Cabinet member, who refused to be named, related a conversation that he once had with the President.

"I've been to so many AIDS funerals," the minister said. "I attend more every month."

The President was irritated by the comment. "What makes you so sure they died of AIDS?"

The official explained that young men in their twenties and thirties don't just die of pneumonia.

"Yes," Mbeki said, "but you don't really know how they died, do you?"



"I'm going back inside to get some air."

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A few days after his arrest in Cape Town, Achmat wondered whether TAC's activism had made Mbeki more stubborn. "If we didn't act, would he have caved in and let people live?" he asked. "I doubt it. It's not the way he's approached this thing." He paused. "If we had remained quiet, the H.I.V. dissidents would have had a much stronger position. What would have happened is it would have looked like American white doctors telling the government what to do with its people, and Mbeki's cranky ideas—which he still holds—would have been the dominant position in the government. And that would have been a tragedy for the country."

Achmat said that his drug strike had damaged his immune system, which was now "seriously messed up." He was constantly exhausted and, despite being coddled by fellow TAC volunteers and friends, had been plagued all year by a recurrent lung infection. "My health is very consistent," he quipped. "It is going steadily downward."

Achmat had always rejected pleas that he resume taking medicine, citing the government's refusal to announce a treatment plan. He even resisted requests from Mandela. However, in March, when I asked what would persuade him to relent, I was startled by his response. "I'm seriously considering taking my medicines," he said. "There's a strong possibility, indeed a probability, that I'll take them, because the situation is so close to changing."

Achmat hadn't yet made public his readiness to take antiretrovirals, and he said he was afraid that he might still change his mind. He also worried that if he took medicine and then died—antiretrovirals didn't save everyone—his death would be exploited by AIDS skeptics. But, for the moment, he was prepared to retreat from his pledge, even if it earned him public scorn. Unlike Mbeki, he was not too proud to moderate his position. "I never took my stand in order to score a point," he said. "I did it as part of a campaign, and it served its purpose."

Achmat pointed to some of the positive developments that had occurred in the years since he began his drug strike. "So much has changed," he said. "There's a critical mass of people living openly with H.I.V. Drug prices have come way down. And now there's money allocated by the Treasury." Achmat knew that this sounded like a rationalization. Until the government officially reversed its policies, four hundred thousand South Africans who needed antiretrovirals wouldn't get them.

It seemed that what Achmat was really trying to say was that if he remained committed to his stand he would do more harm than good to his comrades—who needed him alive and healthy in the struggle. "I don't want to kill myself for Thabo," he said, laughing. "I want to make sure that people get medicines."

Edwin Cameron was relieved when he was told about Achmat's change of heart. "We already have two hundred and fifty thousand deaths a year," he said. "We don't need another. And we certainly don't need to lose the most visionary voice in the movement." ♦

A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE UNREAL THING

What's wrong with the Matrix?

BY ADAM GOPNIK

For the past four years, a lot of people have been obsessed with the movie "The Matrix." As the sequel, "The Matrix Reloaded," arrived in theatres this week, it was obvious that the strange, violent science-fiction film, by the previously more or less unknown Wachowski brothers, had already inspired both a cult and a craze. (And had made a lot of money into the bargain, enough to fuel two sequels; "Matrix Revolutions" is supposed to be out in November.) There hasn't been anything quite like it since "2001: A Space Odyssey," which had a similar mix of mysticism, solemnity, and mega-effects. Shortly after its mostly unheralded release, in 1999, "The Matrix" became an egghead *extase*. The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek's latest work, "Welcome to the Desert of the Real," took its title from a bit of dialogue in the film; college courses on epistemology have used "The Matrix" as a chief point of reference; and there are at least three books devoted to teasing out its meanings. ("Taking the Red Pill: Science, Philosophy and Religion in 'The Matrix' " is a typical title.) If the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, whose books—"The Gulf War Did Not Take Place" is one—popularized the view that reality itself has become a simulation, has not yet embraced the film it may be because he is thinking of suing for a screen credit. (The "desert of the real" line came from him.) The movie, it seemed, dramatized a host of doubts and fears and fascinations, some half as old as time, some with a decent claim to be postmodern. To a lot of people, it looked like a fable: *our* fable.

The first "Matrix"—for anyone who has been living in Antarctica for the past four years—depended on a neatly knotted marriage between a spectacle and a



Since "The Matrix" appeared, in 1999, books and college courses, along with countless Web sites, have been devoted to parsing its fine point

speculation. The spectacle has by now become part of the common language of action movies: the amazing "balletic" fight scenes and the slow-motion aerial display of destruction. The speculation, more peculiar, and even, in its way, esoteric, is that reality is a fiction, programmed into the heads of sleeping millions by evil computers. When we meet the hero of the "Matrix" saga, he's a computer programmer—online name Neo—who works in a generic office building in a present-day, Chicago-like metropolis. Revelation arrives when he's recruited by a mysterious guerrilla figure named Morpheus, played by Laurence Fishburne with a baritone aplomb worthy of Orson Welles. Morpheus offers Neo a choice between two pills, one blue and one red: "You take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill . . . and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes." Neo takes the red pill and wakes up as he really is: a comatose body in a cocoon, his brain penetrated by a cable that inserts the Matrix, an interactive virtual-reality program, directly into his consciousness. All the people he has ever known, he realizes, are recumbent in incubators, stacks of identical clear pods, piled in high towers; the cocooned sleepers have the simulation piped into their heads by the machines as music is piped into headphones. What they take to be experiences is simply the effect of brain impulses interacting with the virtual-reality program. Guerrilla warriors who have been unplugged from the Matrix survive in an underground city called Zion, and travel in hovercraft to unplug promising humans. Morpheus has chosen to unplug Neo, it turns out, because he believes Neo is the One—the Messiah figure who will see through the Matrix and help free mankind. The first film, which told of Neo's education by Morpheus and his pursuit of the awesomely cute and Matrix-defying Trinity (the rubber-suited Carrie-Anne Moss), ends with Neo seeing the Matrix for what it is: a row of green digits, which he has learned to alter as easily as a skilled player can alter the levels of a video game.

What made the spectacle work was the ingenuity and the attention to detail with which it was rendered. The faintly greenish cast and the curious sterility of life within the Matrix; the reddish grungy reality of Morpheus's ship; the bizarre and convincing interlude with the elderly Oracle; and, of course, those action sequences, the weightless midair battles—few movies have had so much faith in their own mythology. And the actors rose to it, Laurence Fishburne managing to anchor the whole thing in a grandiloquent theatricality. Even Keanu Reeves, bless him, played his part with a stolidity that made him the only possible hero of the film, so slow in his reactions that he seemed perfect for virtual reality, his expressions changing with the finger-drumming time lag of a digital image loading online.

If it was the spectacle that made the



The notion that reality had been swallowed by its simulations reached its apogee in an action flick. Illustration by John Ritter.



"We made a miscalculation, but it's consistent with our over-all strategy."

• •

movie work, though, it was the speculations that made it last in people's heads. It spoke to an old nightmare. The basic conceit of "The Matrix"—the notion that the material world is a malevolent delusion, designed by the forces of evil with the purpose of keeping people in a state of slavery, has a history. It is most famous as the belief for which the medieval Christian sect known as the Cathars fought and died, and in great numbers, too. The Cathars were sure that the material world was a phantasm created by Satan, and that Jesus of Nazareth—their Neo—had shown mankind a way beyond that matrix by standing outside it and seeing through it. The Cathars were fighting a losing battle, but the interesting thing was that they were fighting at all. It is not unusual to take up a sword and die for a belief. It is unusual to take up a sword to die for the belief that swords do not exist.

The Cathars, like the heroes of "The Matrix," had an especially handy rationale for violence: if it ain't real, it can't really bleed. One reason that the violence in "The Matrix"—those floating fistfights, the annihilation of entire squads of soldiers by cartwheeling guerrillas—can fairly be called balletic is that, according to the rules of the movie, what is being destroyed is not real in the first place: the action has the safety of play and the excitement of the apocalyptic. Of course, the destruction of a blank, featureless, mirrored skyscraper by a helicopter, and the massacre of the soldiers who protect it, has a different resonance now than it did in 1999. The notion that some human beings are not really human but, rather, mere slaves, nonhuman ciphers, and therefore expendable, is exactly the vision of the revolutionary hero—and also of the mass terrorist. The Matrix is where all violent fanatics insist that they are living, even when they are not.

It would have been nice if some of that complexity, or any complexity, had made its way into the sequel. But—to get to the bad news—"Matrix Reloaded" is, unlike the first film, a conventional comic-book movie, in places a campy conventional comic-book movie, and in places a ludicrously campy conventional comic-book movie. It feels not so much like "Matrix II" as like "Matrix XIV"—a franchise film made after a decade of increasing grosses and thinning material. The thing that made the Matrix so creepy—the idea of a sleeping human population with a secondary life in a simulated world—is barely referred to in the new movie; in fact, if you hadn't seen the first film, not just the action but the basic premise would be pretty much unintelligible. The first forty-five minutes—set mainly in Zion, that human city buried deep in the earth—are particularly excruciating. Zion seems to be modelled on the parking garage of a giant indoor mall, with nested levels clustered around an atrium. Like every good-guy citadel in every science-fiction movie ever made, Zion is peopled by stern-jawed uniformed men who say things like "And what if you're wrong, God damn it, what then?" and "Are you doubting my command, Captain?" and by short-haired and surprisingly powerful women whose eyes moisten but don't overflow as they watch the men prepare to go off to war. Everybody wears earth tones and burlap and silk, and there are craggy perches from which speeches can be made while the courageous citizens hold torches. (The stuccoed, soft-contour interiors of Zion look like the most interesting fusion restaurant in Santa Fe.)

The only thing setting Zion apart from the good-guy planets in "The Phantom Menace" or "Star Trek" is that it seems to have been redlined at some moment in the mythic past and is heavily populated by people of color. They are all, like Morpheus, grave, orotund, and articulate to the point of prosiness, so that official exchanges in Zion put one in mind of what it must have been like at a meeting at the Afro-American Studies department at Harvard before Larry Summers got to it. (And no sooner has this thought crossed one's mind when—lo! there is Professor Cornel West himself, playing one of the Councillors.) Morpheus, winningly laconic in the first film, here tends to speechify, and, in a sequence that passes so far into the mystically absurd that it is almost witty, leads the inhabitants of Zion in a torchlit orgy, presumably meant to show the machines what humans can do that they can't; the

humans heave and slam well-toned bodies in a giant rave—Plato's Retreat to the last leaping shadow. Neo and Trinity make love while this is going on, and we can see the cable holes up and down Neo's back, like a fashion-forward appliqué. (Soon, everyone will want them.) No cliché goes unresisted; there is an annoying street kid who wants Neo's attention, and a wise Councillor with swept-back silver hair (he is played by Anthony Zerbe, Hal Holbrook presumably having been unavailable) who twinkles benignly and creases up his eyes as he wanders the city at night by Neo's side. Smiles gather at the corner of his mouth. He's that kind of wise.

More damagingly, once Zion has been realized and mundanely inhabited, most of the magic disappears from the fable; it becomes a cartoon battle between more or less equally opposed forces, and the sense of a desperately uneven contest between man and machine is gone. The Matrix, far from being a rigorously imposed program, turns out to be as porous as good old-fashioned reality, letting in all kinds of James Bond villains. (They are explained as defunct programs that refused to die, but they seem more like character ideas that refused to be edited.) Lambert Wilson appears as a sort of digital Dominique de Villepin—even virtual Frenchmen are now amoral, the mark of Cain imprinted on their foreheads, so to speak, like a spot of chocolate mousse. He is called the Merovingian ("Holy Blood, Holy Grail" having apparently been added to the reading list) and announces that "choice is an illusion created between zose wis power and zose wisout" as he constructs a virtual dessert with which he inflames the passion of a virtual woman. The stunning Monica Bellucci appears as his wife, who sells out his secrets in exchange for a remarkably chaste kiss from Neo, while Trinity looks on, smoldering like Betty in an "Archie" comic. (But then Monica is Italian, a member of the coalition of the willing.) Then, there are his twin dreadlocked henchmen, dressed entirely in white, who have all the smirking conviction of Siegfried and Roy. Even the action sequences, which must have been quite hard to make, remind one of those in the later Bond films; interesting to describe, they are so unbound by any rules except the rule of Now He'll Jump Off That Fast-Moving Thing Onto the Next Fast-Moving Thing that they are tedious to watch. A long freeway sequence has the buzzing predictability of the video game it will doubtless become. In the first film, the rules of reality were bendable, and that was what gave the action its surprises; in the new one there are hardly any rules at all. The idea of a fight between Neo and a hundred identical evil "agents" sounds cool but is unintentionally comic. Dressed in identical black suits and ties, like the staff of MCA in the Lew Wasserman era (is that why they're called agents?), they simultaneously rush Neo and leap on him in a giant scrum; it's like watching a football team made up of ten-year-olds attempt to tackle Bronko Nagurski—you know he's going to rise up and shake them off. Neo has become a superhuman power within the Matrix and nothing threatens him. He fights the identical agents for fifteen minutes, practically yawning while he does, and then flies away, and you wonder—why didn't he fly away to start with? As he chops and jabs at his enemies, there isn't the slightest doubt about the outcome, and Keanu Reeves seems merely preoccupied, as though ready to get on his cell phone for a few sage words with Slavoj Zizek. There are a few arresting moments at the conclusion when Neo meets the architect of the Matrix. But by then the spectacle has swept right over the speculation, leaving a lot of vinyl and rubber shreds on the incoming tide.

For anyone who was transfixed by the first movie, watching the new one is a little like being unplugged from the Matrix: What was I experiencing all that time? Could it have been . . . *all a dream*? A reassuring viewing of the old movie suggests that its appeal had less to do with its accessories than with its premise. Could it be that what you took to be your life was merely piped into your brain like experiential Muzak? The question casts a spell even when the spell casters turn out to be more merchandisers than magi.

Long before the first "Matrix" was released, of course, there was a lot of fictional life in the idea that life is a fiction. The finest of American speculators, Philip K. Dick, whose writing has served as the basis of some of the more ambitious science-fiction movies of the past couple of decades ("Blade Runner," "Total Recall," "Minority Report"), was



"We've completely child-proofed our home."

preoccupied with two questions: how do we know that a robot doesn't have consciousness, and how do we know that we can trust our own memories and perceptions? "Blade Runner" dramatized the first of these two problems, and "The Matrix" was an extremely and probably self-consciously Dickian dramatization of the second. In one of Dick's most famous novels, for instance, "The Three Stigmata of Palmer Erdrich," a colony of earth-men on Mars, trapped in a miserable life, take an illegal drug that transports them into "Perky Pat Layouts"—miniature Ken and Barbie doll houses, where they live out their lives in an idealized Southern California. Like Poe, Dick took the science of his time, gave it a paranoid twist, and then became truly paranoid himself. In a long, half-crazy book called "Valis," he proposed that the world we live in is a weird scramble of information, that a wicked empire has produced thousands of years of fake history, and that the fabric of reality is being ripped by a battle between good and evil. The Dick scholar Erik Davis points out that, in a sequel to "Valis," Dick even used the term "matrix" in something like a Wachowskian context.

In the academy, too, the age-old topic of radical doubt has acquired renewed life in recent years. In fact, what's often called the "brain-in-the-vat problem" has practically become its own academic discipline. The philosopher Daniel Dennett invoked it to probe the paradoxes of identity. Robert Nozick, famous as a theorist of the minimal state, used it to ask whether you would agree to plug into an "experience machine" that would give you any experience you desired—writing a great book, making a friend—even though you'd really just be floating in a vat with electrodes attached to your brain. Nozick's perhaps too hasty assumption was that you wouldn't want to plug in. His point was that usually something has to happen in the world, not just in our heads, for our desires to be satisfied. The guerrilla warriors in "The Matrix," confirming the point, are persuaded that the Matrix is wrong because it isn't "real," and we intuitively side with them. Yet, unlike Nozick, we also recognize that it might be a lot more comfortable to remain within the virtual universe. That's the decision made by a turncoat among the guerrillas, Cypher. (Agents of the "machine world" seal the pact with him over dinner at a posh restaurant: "I know this steak doesn't exist," Cypher tells them, enjoying every calorie-free bite. "I know that when I put it in my mouth the Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy and delicious. After nine years, you know what I realize? Ignorance is bliss.")

A key feature of "The Matrix" is that all those brains are wired together—that they really can interact with one another. And it was, improbably, the Harvard philosopher and mathematician Hilary Putnam who, a couple of decades back, proposed the essential Matrixian setup: a bunch of brains in a vat hooked up to a machine that was "programmed to give [them] all a *collective* hallucination, rather than a number of separate unrelated hallucinations." Putnam used his Matrix to make a tricky argument about meaning: since words mean what they normally refer to within a community, a member of the vatted-brain community might be telling the truth if it said it was looking at a tree, or, for that matter, at Monica Bellucci. That's because the brains in that vat aren't really speaking our language. What they are speaking, he said, is "vat-English," because by "a tree" they don't mean a tree; they mean, roughly, a tree image. Presumably, by "Monica Bellucci" they mean "the image of Monica Bellucci in 'Malèna,'" rather than the image of Monica Bellucci in "Matrix Reloaded," brains-in-vats having taste and large DVD collections.

Like most thought experiments, the brain-in-the-vat scenario was intended to sharpen our intuitions. But recurrent philosophical examples tend to have a little symbolic halo around them, a touch of their time—those angels dancing on the head of a pin were dancing to a thirteenth-century rhythm. The fact that the brain-in-a-vat literature has grown so abundant, the vat so vast, suggests that it has a grip on our imagination as a story in itself.



"Don't ask me. I don't know what 'my country 'tis of thee' means, either."



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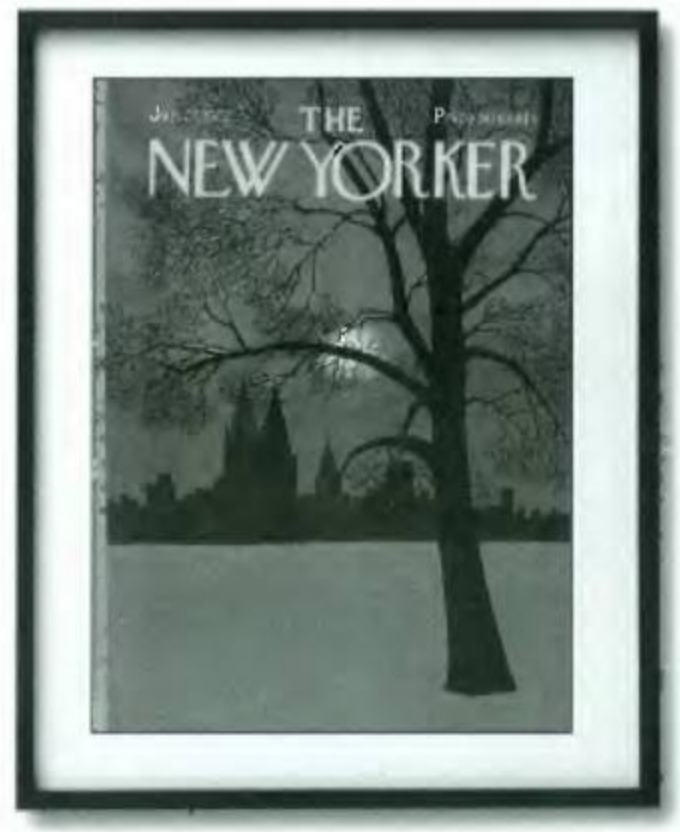


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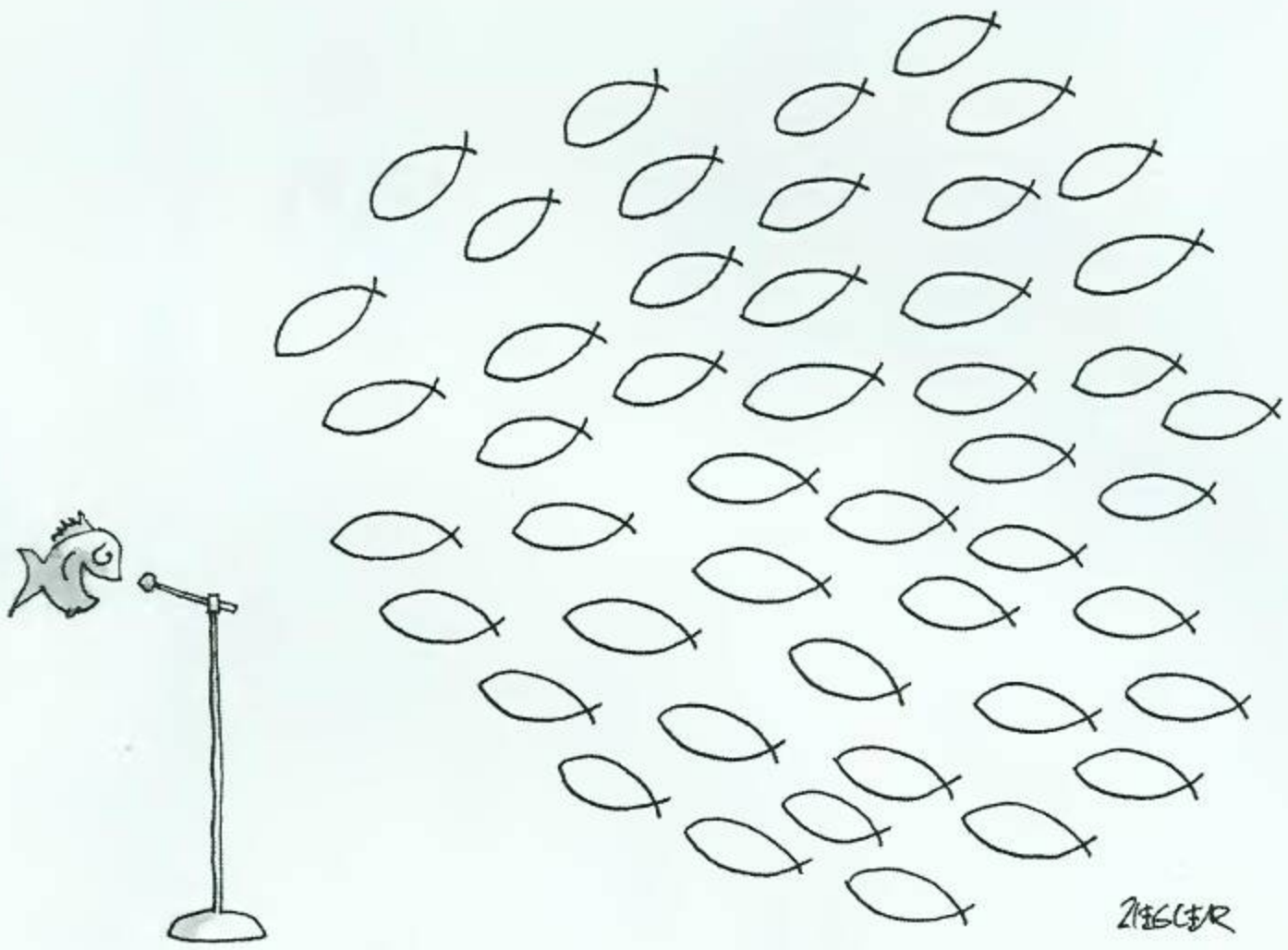


"I'm going to be late, dear. It's total craziness here."

LEO CULLUM, 1998 (ACTUAL SIZE 11' X 14")



ALEX GREGORY, 2000 (ACTUAL SIZE 11" X 14")



"Whew! Tough crowd."

• •

And there, in retrospect, might lie the secret of the first "Matrix": beyond the balletic violence, beyond the cool stunts, the idea that the world we live in isn't real is one that speaks right now to a general condition. For the curious thing about the movie was that everybody could grasp the basic setup instantly. Whether it occurs in cult science fiction or academic philosophy, we seem to be fascinated by the possibility that our world might not exist. We're not strangers to the feeling that, for much of our lives, we might just as well *be* brains-in-vats, floating in an amniotic fluid of simulations. It doesn't just strike us as plausibly weird. It strikes us as weirdly plausible.

When, in the first film, Neo sees the Matrix for what it is, a stream of green glowing digits, and thus is able to stop bullets by looking at them, the moment of vision is not simply liberating. It is also spooky and, in a Dickian way, chilling. This moment is the opposite of the equivalent scene in "Star Wars," a quarter century ago, when Luke Skywalker refuses to wear the helmet that will put him in contact with his targeting machinery, and decides instead to bliss out and trust the Force, the benevolent vital energy of the universe. Neo's epiphany is the reverse: the world around him is a cascade of cold digital algorithms, unfeeling and lifeless. His charge is not to turn on and tune in but to turn off and tune out.

This moment of discovery—that the world is not merely evil but fake—has become a familiar turn in American entertainment. ("The Truman Show" does it with stage sets, but the virtual-reality versions are played out in "Dark City" and "eXistenZ" and, especially, the fine, frightening film noir "The Thirteenth Floor," in which the hero drives to the edge of Los Angeles and discovers that the landscape beyond is made of the glowing green lines and honeycombs of a computer graphic—that he has been living his life within someone else's program.) Even if we don't remotely buy the notion that reality has been drowned by its simulations, we accept it as the melodramatic expression of a kind of truth. The Grand Guignol is possible only because the Petit Guignol exists.

There are so many brains in vats around, in fact, that we need to remind ourselves why we don't want to be one. In a long article on the first "Matrix" film, the Princeton philosopher James Pryor posed the question "What's so bad about living in the Matrix?," and, after sorting through some possible answers, he concluded that the real problem probably has to do with freedom, or the lack of it. "If your ambitions in the Matrix are relatively small-scale, like opening a restaurant or becoming a famous actor, then you may very well be able to achieve them," Pryor says. "But if your ambitions are larger—e.g., introducing some long-term social change—then whatever progress you make toward that goal will be wiped out when the simulation gets reset. . . . One thing we place a lot of value on is being in charge of our own lives, not being someone else's slave or plaything. We want to be *politically free*."

Here's where the first "Matrix" pushed beyond the fun of seeing a richly painted dystopia. Although the movie was made in 1999, its strength as a metaphor has only increased in the years since. The monopolization of information by vast corporations; the substitution of an agreed-on fiction, imposed from above, for anything that corresponds to our own reality; the sense that we have lost control not only of our fate but of our small sense of what's real—all these things can seem part of ordinary life now. ("More Like 'The Matrix' Every Day" was the title of a recent political column by Farai Chideya.) In a mood of Dickian paranoia, one can even start to wonder whether the language we hear constantly on television and talk radio ("the war on terror," "homeland security," etc.) is a sort of vat-English—a language from which all earthly reference has been bled away. This isn't to say that any of us yet exist within an entirely fictive universe created by the forces of evil for the purpose of deluding a benumbed population—not unless you work for Fox News, anyway. But we know what it's like to be captive to representations of the world that have, well, a faintly greenish cast.

Especially in view of the conventionality of the second film, it's clear that the first film struck so deep not because it showed us a new world but because it reminded us of this one, and dramatized a simple, memorable choice between the plugged and the unplugged life. It reminded us that the idea of free lives is inseparable from the idea of the real thing. Apparently, we needed the reminder. "Free your mind!," the sixties-ish slogan of the new film, is too ambitious to be convincing, and betrays the darkness that made the first film so unusual. "Unplug thy neighbor!," though, still sounds *just* possible. ♦

FICTION

TAPKA

BY DAVID BEZMOZGIS



Goldfinch was flapping clotheslines, a tenement delirious with striving. 6030 Bathurst: insomniac, scheming Odessa. Cedarcroft: reeking borscht in the hallways. My parents, Soviet refugees but Baltic aristocrats, took an apartment at 715 Finch, fronting a ravine and across from an elementary school—one respectable block away from the Russian swarm. We lived on the fifth floor, my cousin, aunt, and uncle directly below us on the fourth. Except for the Nahumovskys, a couple in their fifties, there were no other Russians in the building. For this privilege, my parents paid twenty extra dollars a month in rent.

In March of 1980, near the end of the school year but only three weeks after our arrival in Toronto, I was enrolled in Charles H. Best Elementary. Each morning, with our house key hanging from a brown shoelace around my neck, I kissed my parents goodbye and, along with my cousin Jana, tramped across the ravine—I to the first grade, she to the second. At three o'clock, bearing the germs of a new vocabulary, we tramped back home. Together, we then waited until six for our parents to return from George Brown City College, where they were taking an obligatory six-month course in English—a course that provided them with the rudiments of communication along with a modest government stipend.

In the evenings, we assembled and compiled our linguistic bounty.

Hello, havaryew?
Red, yellow, green, blue.
May I please go to the washroom?
Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenny.

Joining us most nights were the Nahumovskys. They attended the same English classes and travelled with my parents on the same bus. Rita Nahumovsky was a beautician who wore layers of makeup, and Misha Nahumovsky was a tool-and-die maker. They came from Minsk and didn't know a soul in Canada. With abounding enthusiasm, they incorporated themselves into our family. My parents were glad to have them. Our life was tough, we had it hard—but the Nahumovskys had it harder. They were alone, they were older, they were stupefied by the demands of language. Being essentially helpless themselves, my parents found it gratifying to help the more helpless Nahumovskys.

After dinner, with everyone gathered on cheap stools around our table, my mother repeated the day's lessons for the benefit of the Nahumovskys and, to a slightly lesser degree, for the benefit of my father. My mother had always been an exceptional and dedicated student, and she extended this dedication to George Brown City College. My father and the Nahumovskys came to rely on her detailed notes and her understanding of the curriculum. For as long as they could, they listened attentively and groped desperately toward comprehension. When this became too frustrating, my father put on the kettle, Rita painted my mother's nails, and Misha told Soviet *anekdoti*.

In a first-grade classroom a teacher calls on her students and inquires after their nationalities. "Sasha," she says. Sasha says, "Russian." "Very good," says the teacher. "Arnan," she says. Arnan says, "Armenian." "Very good," says the teacher. "Lyubka," she says. Lyubka says, "Ukrainian." "Very good," says the teacher. And then she asks Dima. Dima says, "Jewish." "What a shame," says the teacher. "So young and already a Jew."

The Nahumovskys had no children, only a white Lhasa Apso named Tapka. The dog had lived with them for years before they emigrated and then travelled with them from Minsk to Vienna, from Vienna to Rome, and from Rome to Toronto. During our first month in the building, Tapka was in quarantine, and I saw her only in photographs. Rita had dedicated an entire album to the dog, and, to dampen the pangs of separation, she consulted the album daily. There were shots of Tapka in the Nahumovskys' old Minsk apartment, seated on the cushions of faux-Louis XIV furniture; there was Tapka on the steps of a famous Viennese palace; Tapka at the Vatican, in front of the Colosseum, at the Sistine Chapel, and under the Leaning Tower of Pisa. My mother—despite having grown up with goats and chickens in her yard—didn't like animals and found it impossible to feign interest in Rita's dog. Shown a picture of Tapka, my mother wrinkled her nose and said, "Phoo." My father also couldn't be bothered. With no English, no money, no job, and only a murky conception of what the future held, he wasn't equipped to admire Tapka on the Italian Riviera. Only I cared. Through the photographs, I became attached to Tapka and projected upon her the ideal traits of the dog I did not have. Like Rita, I counted the days until Tapka's liberation.

The day Tapka was to be released from quarantine, Rita prepared an elaborate dinner. My family was invited to celebrate the dog's arrival. While Rita cooked, Misha was banished from their apartment. For distraction, he seated himself at our table with a deck of cards. As my mother reviewed sentence construction, Misha played hand after hand of *durak* with me.

"The woman loves this dog more than me. A taxi to the customs facility is going to cost us ten, maybe fifteen dollars. But what can I do? The dog is truly a sweet little dog."

When it came time to collect the dog, my mother went with Misha and Rita to act as their interpreter. With my nose to the window, I watched the taxi take them away. Every few minutes, I reapplied my nose to the window. Three hours later, the taxi pulled into our parking lot, and Rita emerged from the back seat cradling animated fur. She set the fur down on the pavement where it assumed the shape of a dog. The length of its coat concealed its legs, and, as it hovered around Rita's ankles, it appeared to have either a thousand tiny legs or none at all. My head ringing "Tapka, Tapka, Tapka," I raced into the hallway to meet the elevator.

That evening, Misha toasted the dog: "This last month, for the first time in years, I have enjoyed my wife's undivided attention. But I believe no man, not even one as perfect as me, can survive so much attention from his wife. So I say, with all my heart, thank God our Tapka is back home with us. Another day and I fear I may have requested a divorce."

Before he drank, Misha dipped his pinkie finger into his vodka glass and offered it to the dog. Obediently, Tapka gave Misha's finger a thorough licking. Impressed, my uncle declared her a good Russian dog. He also gave her a lick of his vodka. I gave her a piece

J.H. LARTIGUE "TOBY" (1923) © MINISTÈRE DE LA CULTURE-FRANCE/A.A.J.H.I.

of my chicken. Jana rolled her a pellet of bread. Misha taught us how to dangle food just out of Tapka's reach and thereby induce her to perform a charming little dance. Rita also produced Clonchik, a red-and-yellow rag clown. She tossed Clonchik under the table, onto the couch, down the hallway, and into the kitchen; over and over, Rita called, "Tapka, get Clonchik," and, without fail, Tapka got Clonchik. Everyone delighted in Tapka's antics except my mother, who sat stiffly in her chair, her feet slightly off the floor, as though preparing herself for a mild electric shock.

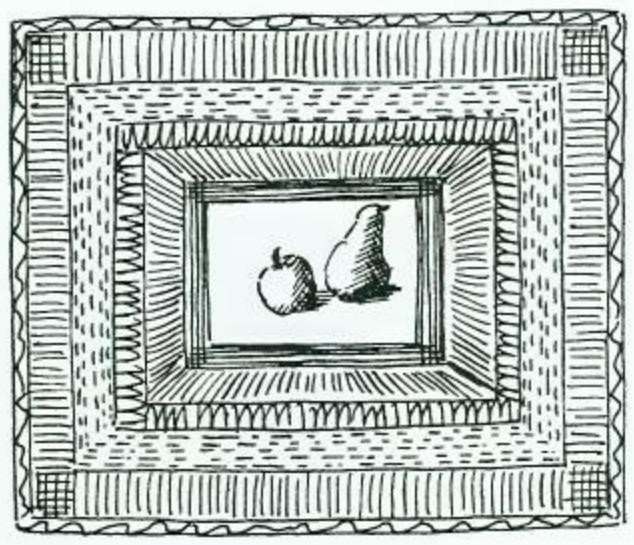
After the dinner, when we returned home, my mother announced that she would no longer set foot in the Nahumovskys' apartment. She liked Rita, she liked Misha, but she couldn't sympathize with their attachment to the dog. She understood that the attachment was a consequence of their lack of sophistication and also their childlessness. They were simple people. Rita had never attended university. She could derive contentment from talking to a dog, brushing its coat, putting ribbons in its hair, and repeatedly throwing a rag clown across the apartment. And Misha, although very lively and a genius with his hands, was also not an intellectual. They were good people, but a dog ruled their lives.

Rita and Misha were sensitive to my mother's attitude toward Tapka. As a result, and to the detriment of her progress with English, Rita stopped visiting our apartment. Nightly, Misha would arrive alone while Rita attended to the dog. Tapka never set foot in our home. This meant that, in order to see her, I spent more and more time at the Nahumovskys'. Each evening, after I had finished my homework, I went to play with Tapka. My heart soared every time Rita opened the door and Tapka raced to greet me. The dog knew no hierarchy of affection. Her excitement was infectious. In Tapka's presence, I resonated with doglike glee.

Because of my devotion to the dog, and their lack of an alternative, Misha and Rita added their house key to the shoelace hanging around my neck. During our lunch break and again after school, Jana and I were charged with caring for Tapka. Our task was simple: put Tapka on her leash, walk her to the ravine, release her to chase Clonchik, and then bring her home.

Every day, sitting in my classroom, understanding little, effectively friendless, I counted down the minutes to lunchtime. When the bell rang, I met Jana on the playground and we sprinted across the grass toward our building. In the hall, our approaching footsteps elicited panting and scratching. When I inserted the key into the lock, I felt emanations of love through the door. And once the door was open Tapka hurled herself at us, her entire body consumed with the ecstasy of wagging. Jana and I took turns embracing her, petting her, covertly vying for her favor. Free of Rita's scrutiny, we also satisfied certain anatomical curiosities. We examined Tapka's ears, her paws, her teeth, the roots of her fur, and her doggy genitals. We poked and prodded her, we threw her up in the air, rolled her over and over, and swung her by her front legs. I felt such overwhelming love for Tapka that sometimes, when hugging her, I had to restrain myself from squeezing too hard and crushing her little bones.

It was April when we began to care for Tapka. Snow melted in the ravine; sometimes it rained. April became May. Grass absorbed the thaw, turned green; dandelions and wildflowers sprouted yellow and blue; birds and insects flew, crawled, and made their characteristic noises. Faithfully and reliably, Jana and I attended to Tapka. We walked her across the parking lot and down into the ravine. We threw Clonchik and said, "Tapka, get Clonchik." Tapka always got Clonchik. Everyone was proud of us. My mother and my aunt wiped tears from their eyes while talking about how responsible we were. Rita and Misha rewarded us with praise and chocolates. Jana was seven and I was six; much had been asked of us, but we had risen to the challenge.



Inspired by everyone's confidence, we grew confident. Whereas at first we made sure to walk thirty paces into the ravine before releasing Tapka, we gradually reduced that requirement to ten paces, then five paces, until finally we released her at the grassy border between the parking lot and the ravine. We did this not because of laziness or intentional recklessness but because we wanted proof of Tapka's love. That she came when we called was evidence of her love, that she didn't piss in the elevator was evidence of her love, that she offered up her belly for scratching was evidence of her love, that she licked our faces was evidence of her love. All of this was evidence, but it wasn't proof. Proof could come in only one form. We had intuited an elemental truth: love needs no leash.

That first spring, even though most of what was said around me remained a mystery, a thin rivulet of meaning trickled into my cerebral catch basin and collected into a little pool of knowledge. By the end of May, I could sing the ABC song. Television taught me to say "What's up, Doc?" and "superduper." The playground introduced me to "shithead," "mental case," and "gaylord." I seized upon every opportunity to apply my new knowledge.

One afternoon, after spending nearly an hour in the ravine throwing Clonchik in a thousand different directions, Jana and I lolled in sunlit pollen. I called her shithead, mental case, and gaylord, and she responded by calling me gaylord, shithead, and mental case.

"Shithead."

"Gaylord."

"Mental case."

"Tapka, get Clonchik."

"Shithead."

"Gaylord."

"Come, Tapka-lapka."

"Mental case."

We went on like this, over and over, until Jana threw the clown and said, "Shithead, get Clonchik." Initially, I couldn't tell if she had said this on purpose or if it had merely been a blip in

her rhythm. But when I looked at Jana her smile was triumphant.

"Mental case, get Clonchik."

For the first time, as I watched Tapka bounding happily after Clonchik, the profanity sounded profane.

"Don't say that to the dog."

"Why not?"

"It's not right."

"But she doesn't understand."

"You shouldn't say it."

"Don't be a baby. Come, shithead, come my dear one."

Her tail wagging with accomplishment, Tapka dropped Clonchik at my feet.

"You see, she likes it."

I held Clonchik as Tapka pawed frantically at my shins.

"Call her shithead. Throw the clown."

"I'm not calling her shithead."

"What are you afraid of, shithead?"

I aimed the clown at Jana's head and missed.

"Shithead, get Clonchik."

As the clown left my hand, Tapka, a white shining blur, oblivious to insult, was already cutting through the grass. I wanted to believe that I had intended the "shithead" exclusively for Jana, but I knew it wasn't true.

"I told you, gaylord, she doesn't care."

I couldn't help thinking, Poor Tapka. I felt moral residue and looked around for some sign of recrimination. The day, however, persisted in unimpeachable brilliance: sparrows winged overhead; bumblebees levitated above flowers; beside a lilac shrub, Tapka clamped down on Clonchik. I was amazed at the absence of consequences.

Jana said, "I'm going home."

As she started for home, I saw that she was still holding Tapka's leash. It swung insouciantly from her hand. I called after her just as, once again, Tapka deposited Clonchik at my feet.

"I need the leash."

"Why?"

"Don't be stupid. I need the leash."

"No, you don't. She comes when we call her. Even shithead. She won't run away."

Jana turned her back on me and proceeded toward our building. I called her again, but she refused to turn around. Her receding back was a blatant provocation. Guided more by anger than by logic, I decided that if Tapka was closer to Jana then the onus of responsibility would be on her. I picked up the doll and threw it as far as I could into the parking lot.

"Tapka, get Clonchik."

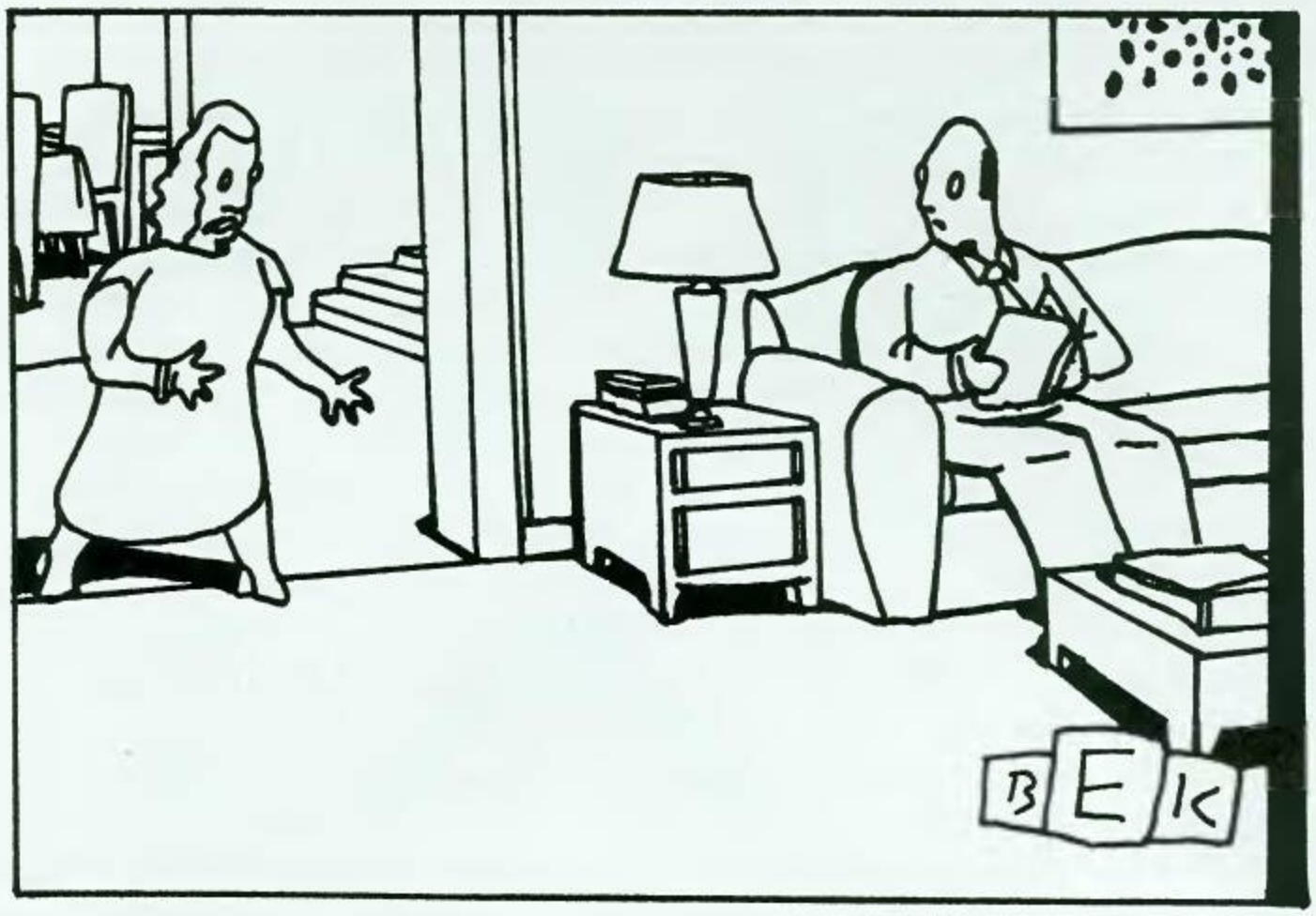
Clonchik tumbled through the air. I had put everything in my six-year-old arm behind the throw, which still meant that the doll wasn't going very far. Its trajectory promised a drop no more than twenty feet from the edge of the ravine. Running, her head arched to the sky, Tapka tracked the flying clown. As the doll reached its apex, it crossed paths with a sparrow. The bird veered off toward Finch Avenue, and the clown plummeted to the asphalt. When the doll hit the ground, Tapka raced past it after the bird.

A thousand times we had thrown Clonchik and a thousand times Tapka had retrieved him. But who knows what passes for a thought in the mind of a dog? One moment a Clonchik is a Clonchik, and the next moment a sparrow is a Clonchik.

I shouted at Jana to catch Tapka and then watched in abject horror as the dog, her attention fixed on the sparrow, skirted past Jana and directly into traffic. From my vantage point on the slope of the ravine, I couldn't see what happened. I saw only that Jana broke into a sprint and I heard the caterwauling of tires, followed by Tapka's shrill fractured yip.

By the time I reached the street, a line of cars already stretched a block beyond Goldfinch. At the front of the line were a brown station wagon and a pale-blue sedan blistered with rust. As I neared, I noted the chrome letters on the back of the sedan: D-U-S-T-E-R. In front of the sedan, Jana kneeled in a tight semicircle with a pimply young man and an older woman with very large sunglasses. Tapka lay on her side at the center of their circle. She panted in quick shallow bursts. She stared impassively at me, at Jana. Except for a hind leg twitching at the sky at an impossible angle, she seemed completely unharmed. She looked much as she did when she rested on the rug at the Nahumovskys' apartment after a vigorous romp in the ravine.

Seeing her this way, barely mangled, I felt a sense of relief. I started to convince myself that things weren't as bad as I had feared, and I tentatively edged forward to pet her. The woman in the sunglasses said something in a restrictive tone that I neither understood nor heeded. I placed my hand on Tapka's head, and she responded by opening her mouth and allowing a trickle of blood to escape onto the asphalt. This was the first time I had ever seen dog blood,



"Here you are—I've been all over the Internet looking for you."

and I was struck by the depth of its color. I hadn't expected it to be red, although I also hadn't expected it to be not-red. Set against the gray asphalt and her white coat, Tapka's blood was the red I envisioned when I closed my eyes and thought: red.

I sat with Tapka until several dozen car horns demanded that we clear the way. The woman with the large sunglasses ran to her station wagon, returned with a blanket, and scooped Tapka off the street. The pimply young man stammered a few sentences, of which I understood nothing except the word "sorry." Then we were in the back seat of the station wagon with Tapka in Jana's lap. The woman kept talking until she finally realized that we couldn't understand her at all. As we started to drive off, Jana remembered something. I motioned for the woman to stop the car and scrambled out. Above the atonal chorus of car horns, I heard: "Mark, get Clonchik."

I ran and got Clonchik.

For two hours, Jana and I sat in the reception area of a small veterinary clinic in an unfamiliar part of town. In another room, with a menagerie of afflicted creatures, Tapka lay in traction, connected to a blinking machine by a series of tubes. Jana and I had been allowed to see her once but were rushed out when we both burst into tears. Tapka's doctor, a woman wearing a white coat and furry slippers resembling bear paws, tried to calm us down. Again, we could neither explain ourselves nor understand what she was saying. We managed only to establish that Tapka was not our dog. The doctor gave us coloring books, stickers, and access to the phone. Every fifteen minutes, we called home. Between phone calls, we absently flipped pages and sniffled for Tapka and for ourselves. We had no idea what would happen to Tapka; all we knew was that she wasn't dead. As for ourselves, we already felt punished and knew only that more punishment was to come.

"Why did you throw Clonchik?"

"Why didn't you give me the leash?"

"You could have held on to her collar."

"You shouldn't have called her shithead."

At six-thirty, my mother picked up the phone. I could hear the agitation in her voice. The ten minutes she had spent at home not knowing where I was had taken their toll. For ten minutes, she had been the mother of a dead child. I explained to her about the dog and felt a twinge of resentment when she said, "So it's only the dog?" Behind her I heard other voices. It sounded as though everyone were speaking at once, pursuing personal agendas, translating the phone conversation from Russian to Russian until one anguished voice separated itself: "My God, what happened?" Rita.

After getting the address from the veterinarian, my mother hung up and ordered another expensive taxi. Within a half hour, my parents, my aunt, and Misha and Rita pulled up at the clinic. Jana and I waited for them on the sidewalk. As soon as the taxi doors opened, we began to sob uncontrollably, partly out of relief but mainly in the hope of engendering sympathy. I ran to my mother and caught sight of Rita's face. Her face made me regret that I also hadn't been hit by a car.

As we clung to our mothers, Rita descended upon us.

"Children, what, oh, what have you done?"

She pinched compulsively at the loose skin of her neck, raising a cluster of pink marks.

While Misha methodically counted individual bills for the taxi-driver, we swore on our lives that Tapka had simply got away from us. That we had minded her as always but, inexplicably, she had seen a bird and bolted from the ravine and into the road. We had done everything in our power to catch her, but she had surprised us, eluded us, been too fast.

Rita considered our story.

"You are liars. Liars!"

She uttered the words with such hatred that we again burst into sobs.

My father spoke in our defense.

"Rita Borisovna, how can you say this? They are children."

"They are liars. I know my Tapka. Tapka never chased birds. Tapka never ran from the ravine."

"Maybe today she did?"

"Liars."

Having delivered her verdict, she had nothing more to say. She waited anxiously for Misha to finish paying the driver.

"Misha, enough already. Count it a hundred times, it will still be the same."

Inside the clinic, there was no longer anyone at the reception desk. During our time there, Jana and I had watched a procession of dyspeptic cats and lethargic parakeets disappear into the back rooms for examination and diagnosis. One after another they had come and gone until, by the time of our parents' arrival, the waiting area was entirely empty and the clinic officially closed. The only people remaining were a night nurse and the doctor in the bear-paw slippers, who had stayed expressly for our sake.

Looking desperately around the room, Rita screamed, "Doctor! Doctor!" But when the doctor appeared she was incapable of making herself understood. Haltingly, with my mother's help, it was communicated to the doctor that Rita wanted to see her dog. Pointing vigorously at herself, Rita asserted, "Tapka. Mine dog."

The doctor led Rita and Misha into the veterinary version of an intensive-care ward. Tapka lay on her little bed, Clonchik resting directly beside her. At the sight of Rita and Misha, Tapka weakly wagged her tail. Little more than an hour had elapsed since I had seen her last, but somehow over the course of that time Tapka had shrunk considerably. She had always been a small dog, but now she looked desiccated. She was the embodiment of defeat. Rita started to cry, grotesquely smearing her mascara. With trembling hands, and with sublime tenderness, she stroked Tapka's head.

"My God, my God, what has happened to you, my Tapkochka?"

Through my mother, and with the aid of pen and paper, the doctor provided the answer. Tapka required two operations. One for her leg. Another to stop internal bleeding. An organ had been damaged. For now, a machine was helping her, but without the machine she would die. On the paper, the doctor drew a picture of a scalpel, of a dog, of a leg, of an organ. She made an arrow pointing at the organ and drew a teardrop and colored it in to represent blood.

She also wrote down a number preceded by a dollar sign. The number was fifteen hundred.

At the sight of the number, Rita let out a low animal moan and steadied herself against Tapka's little bed. My parents exchanged a glance. I looked at the floor. Misha said, "My dear God." The Nahumovskys and my parents each took in less than five hundred dollars a month. We had arrived in Canada with almost nothing, a few hundred dollars, which had all but disappeared on furniture. There were no savings. Fifteen hundred dollars. The doctor could just as well have written a million.

In the middle of the intensive-care ward, Rita slid down to the floor and wailed. Her head thrown back, she appealed to the fluorescent lights: "*Nu*, Tapkochka, what is going to become of us?"

I looked up from my feet and saw horror and bewilderment on the doctor's face. She tried to put a hand on Rita's shoulder, but Rita violently shrugged it off.

My father attempted to intercede.

"Rita Borisovna, I understand that it is painful, but it is not the end of the world."

"And what do you know about it?"

"I know that it must be hard, but soon you will see. . . . Even tomorrow we could go and help you find a new one."

My father looked to my mother for approval, to insure that he had not promised too much. He needn't have worried.

"A new one? What do you mean, a new one? I don't want a new one. Why don't you get yourself a new son? A new little liar? How about that? New. Everything we have now is new. New everything."

On the linoleum floor, Rita keened, rocking back and forth. She hiccupped, as though hyperventilating. Pausing for a moment, she looked up at my mother and told her to translate for the doctor. To tell her that she would not let Tapka die.

"I will sit here on this floor forever. And if the police come to drag me out I will bite them."

"Ritochka, this is crazy."

"Why is it crazy? My Tapka's life is worth more than a thousand dollars. Because we don't have the money, she should die here? It's not her fault."

Seeking rationality, my mother turned to Misha—Misha who had said nothing all this time except "My dear God."

"Misha, do you want me to tell the doctor what Rita said?"

Misha shrugged philosophically.

"Tell her or don't tell her, you see my wife has made up her mind. The doctor will figure it out soon enough."

"And you think this is reasonable?"

"Sure. Why not? I'll sit on the floor, too. The police can take us both to jail. Besides Tapka, what else do we have?"

Misha sat on the floor beside his wife.

I watched as my mother struggled to explain to the doctor what was happening. With a mixture of words and gesticulations, she got the point across. The doctor, after considering her options, sat down on the floor beside Rita and Misha. Once again, she tried to put her hand on Rita's shoulder. This time, Rita, who was still rocking back and forth, allowed it. Misha rocked in time to his wife's rhythm. So did the doctor. The three of them sat in a line, swaying together, like campers at a campfire. Nobody said anything. We looked at each other. I watched Rita, Misha, and the doctor swaying and swaying. I became mesmerized by the swaying. I wanted to know what would happen to Tapka; the swaying answered me.

The swaying said: Listen, shithead, Tapka will live. The doctor will perform the operation. Either money will be found or money will not be necessary.

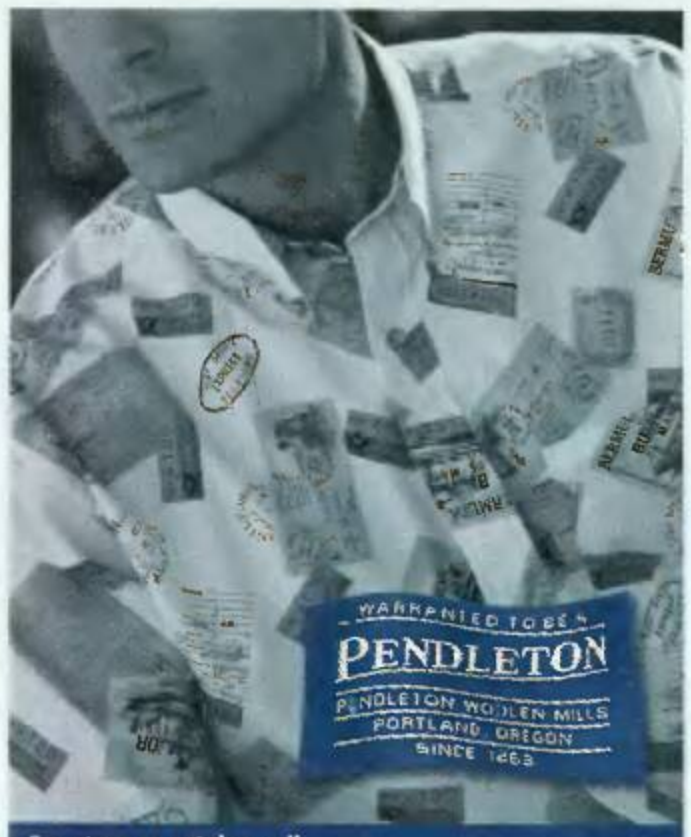
I said to the swaying: This is very good. I love Tapka. I meant her no harm. I want to be forgiven.

The swaying replied: There is reality and then there is truth. The reality is that Tapka will live. But, let's be honest, the truth is you killed Tapka. Look at Rita; look at Misha. You see, who are you kidding? You killed Tapka and you will never be forgiven. ♦

NEATEST TRICK OF THE WEEK

From the Toronto Globe & Mail.

Many Canadian scientists are playing a leading role in the exploration of the nanoscale world. The University of Toronto, for example, offers the world's only undergraduate degree in nanoengineering. It was students in that program who invented Mr. Eigler to address them this week.



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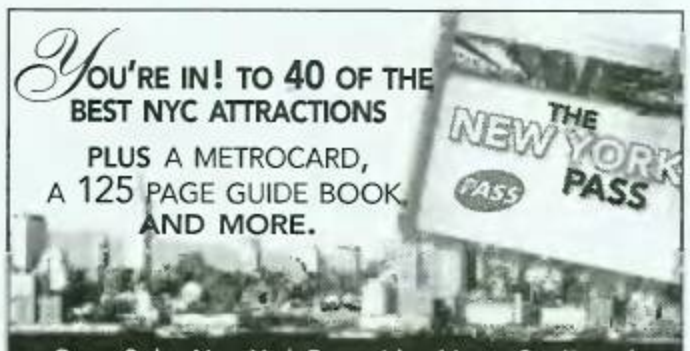
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THE CRITICS



THE THEATRE

FOGBOUND

Eugene O'Neill on the ties that bind.

BY JOHN LAHR

In his masterpiece "Long Day's Journey Into Night" (superbly revived at the Plymouth), Eugene O'Neill brought his own spectral, heartbroken family—"the four haunted Tyrones," he called them—to the stage. Here, in the course of a single day in 1912, within the creosoted knotty-pine walls of the Tyrone family's Connecticut summer home, are reënacted the mad scenes of O'Neill's childhood, the claustrophobic and punishing double binds, and the moments of loss that twisted his family's ties. "Long Day's Journey" is a sort of séance with the dead, and O'Neill saw the writing of the play as an expiation; but it is also a resuscitation—a way of both mourning his self-destructive family and keeping it alive. "At the final curtain," O'Neill wrote to George Jean Nathan in 1940, the year he completed the play (it was first produced three years after his death, in 1956), "there they still are, trapped within each other by the past, each guilty and at the same time innocent, scorning, loving, pitying each other, understanding and yet not understanding at all, forgiving, but still doomed never to be able to forget."

At the beginning of the play, the family's youngest son and O'Neill's stage surrogate, Edmund Tyrone (expertly played by Robert Sean Leonard), is suffering from a nagging cough, which may be tuberculosis, and the crisis sends his fragile, nervy mother, Mary (Vanessa Redgrave), back to the morphine habit from which she had been recovering. (She started taking the drug after giving birth to Edmund, whom she has never quite focussed on or forgiven.) Redgrave, with her high cheekbones and large forlorn eyes, has a wan, gangling, skeletal presence that subtly conveys Mary's ghostly half-life. Her face is sweet and startled, but bitterness often flickers through her litany of lamentation. Of the summer house, she tells Edmund, "I've never felt it was my home. It was wrong from the start. Everything was done in the cheapest way. Your father would never spend the money to make it right. It was just as well we haven't any friends here." Redgrave has developed an original physical vocabulary for Mary's skittishness and isolation. At once lyrical and feral, she moves like a trapped animal in a cage of her own choosing, longing for freedom yet fearful of escape. Her long, tapered fingers knot themselves together in arthritic as well as spiritual pain. And Redgrave's natural reserve adds to the paradoxical quality of Mary's detachment, her absent presence. "You can't talk to her now," Mary's feckless, constantly belittled eldest son, Jamie (the incomparable Philip Seymour Hoffman), tells Edmund. "She'll listen, but she won't listen. She'll be here, but she won't be here."

And so it proves. As Mary applies a damp handkerchief to her son's feverish brow or tries to fan him with a magazine, she goes through the motions of care, but she doesn't connect. In Robert Sean Leonard's shrewd, low-key performance, Edmund's strategic cajoling of Mary—to rest, to stop talking, to hold on to reality and resist the oblivion of drugs—masks a child's desperate need for a reliable parent. He fights to reconstitute her even as she is disappearing by degrees before our eyes. Mary's combination of seductive charm and negligence represents a profound abandonment, one that was central to O'Neill's anguished relationship with his own mother and fed his demand for total attention, an indulgence that was played out both in his compulsively long plays—at four hours, "Long Day's Journey" takes the better part of an evening—and in his three marriages. ("I want it to be not you and me, but *us*," he wrote in 1917 to his second wife, the writer Agnes Boulton, whom he forced to give up her own child in order to be with him. "I want you in an aloneness broken by nothing. Not even children.") By the end of the play, Mary is quite literally a shadow of her former self, clutching her wedding dress in her arms and speaking in the delusional innocent voice of childhood that incarnates the lost soul she believes herself to be. "None of us can help the things life has done to us," she tells Edmund while she's still sentient. "They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever."

Mary's tightfisted, restless husband, the successful actor James Tyrone (Brian Dennehy), is also fatalistic, but his resignation takes the form of commercial success. Like O'Neill's father, who was a sort of Richard Burton of his day, Tyrone has traded his great theatrical gift for the potage of the box office, forever touring in a popular melodrama. (James O'Neill played in "The Count of Monte Cristo" more than six thousand times.) The father's glory becomes the fam-

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

Brian Dennehy and Vanessa Redgrave in "Long Day's Journey Into Night."

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She was nineteen when she died.
We don't know if she was lovely and flirtatious,
or if perhaps she looked like those
intelligent, dry girls in glasses
from whom mirrors are kept hidden.
She left behind just a few hexameters.
We suspect that she strove
with the secret, uncertain ambition of introverts.
Her parents loved her to distraction.
We speculate that she wanted to express
some vast truth about life, ruthless
on the surface, sweet inside,
about August nights, when the sea
breathes and shines and sings like a starling,
and about love, ineffable and dear.
We don't know if she cried when she met darkness.
She left behind only a few hexameters
and an epigram about a grasshopper.

—Adam Zagajewski

(Translated, from the Polish, by Clare Cavanagh)

ily's inheritance of grief—"One-night stands, cheap hotels, dirty trains, leaving children, never having a home," as Mary describes it. "What the hell was it I wanted to buy, I wonder, that was worth—Well, no matter," James says to Edmund. "It's a late day for regrets." In a sense, the atrophy of spirit which the play slowly reveals in its characters is the dark side of the American-immigrant story, of the climb from impoverished nonentity to prosperous individuality. Dennehy, a powerhouse with a matinée idol's rugged profile, makes James's bog-Irish roots immediately credible, and his burly and bombastic presence—the unsettling drizzle of his sentimentality and sarcasm—anchors the play in its climate of disappointment.

The director, Robert Falls, seems mostly to have stayed out of the way of his A-list actors. Since he has chosen, perhaps unwisely, to stage the play uncut, there are inevitable longueurs, but no moment onstage is unexplored and almost no choice is indulgent. A few incidents—Edmund's fight with Jamie, Jamie's drunken confession of envy of his brother (Hoffman's toxic sorrow kicks the play onto a completely new emotional level), and Mary's final aria—pack an unforgettable wallop. The production is stately and compelling, but Falls does miss one important scenic opportunity. In "Long Day's Journey," there are constant references to fog; it is a physical presence even before it becomes a crucial symbol of the family's impenetrable confusion. Mary welcomes the fog as a promise of invisibility. "It hides you from the world and the world from you," she says. To Edmund, it works both as a loss of memory and as a memory of loss. "The fog was where I wanted to be," he says. "Halfway down the path you can't see this house. You'd never know it was here." But here, in a Broadway show where a smoke machine might finally be used to legitimate poetic effect, no fog rolls up to the doorstep or hovers around the house. In such a fine and meticulous revival, the absence of this visual detail mutes but doesn't mar the haunting that O'Neill so brilliantly called out of his own spooked soul.

"The Look of Love" (a Roundabout Theatre production, at the Brooks Atkinson) is a song cycle masquerading as a musical, which canters through twenty-nine numbers from the Hal David–Burt Bacharach easy-listening catalogue. It's the epitome of the commercial Broadway folderol—"the show

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shop"—that O'Neill abhorred. Nine singers clamor around the high-tech parabolas of Derek McLane's set in an evening that offers no narrative, no characterization, no playfulness, no penetration, and, finally, no reason for anyone to turn up. (Just put on a Dionne Warwick cassette, instead, and kick back at home.)

In their day, the David-Bacharach songs, with their slick, jazz-inflected arrangements, were the perfect three-minute Brill Building epiphanies. To turn these fragile confections about the hiccups of the heart into dramatic material is to turn caprice into superficiality. Too many of the numbers ("She Likes Basketball," "Are You There," "I Just Don't Know What to Do with Myself," "Casino Royale") don't deserve the time devoted to them; their inoffensive vernacular becomes offensive when the production struggles to make more of them than meets the ear. Even the best numbers—"Walk on By," "I Say a Little Prayer"—already describe an action that makes the staging of them a tautology.

Ann Reinking, whose choreography never gets beyond the industrial-show level of invention, achieves a moment of full sadomasochistic Fosseosity in "What's New Pussycat?": three women singers in men's black suit jackets, black garters, and black hats disport themselves on three black chairs, giving the audience a Cubist cornucopia of crotch shots—the full frontal, the *à la derrière*, and the rarely, if ever, seen *en tête*. And, just when you think "The Look of Love" has hit rock bottom, it finds new depths of shallowness. In "Twenty-Four Hours from Tulsa," one woman's saga of seduction a day away from her lover's arms, the director, Scott Ellis, recklessly adds idiocy to emptiness by staging the song as a spoof. During the number, the tequila-drinking singer, in a black cocktail dress and pearls—standard gear for driving across country—ends up sprawled on a bar while the other dancers sprinkle salt and squeeze lime juice over her prostrate body. As we took our seats for the second act, the intrepid *Times* reviewer Bruce Weber turned to me with a look of bewilderment. "My date didn't come back," he said. "I don't know if it's me or the show." It was the show, Bruce. ♦





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BOOKS

THOSE LIPS, THOSE EYES

The lives of Rudolph Valentino.

BY THOMAS MALLON

One imagines how it might have been—without the sudden death, in New York, at thirty-one; without the riotous mourners outside the Frank E. Campbell funeral home; without the subsequent female-fan suicides, or the "lady in black" showing up at the tomb every year.

One imagines a spring night in 1971, fifty years after the release of "The Sheik." Inside the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, a career-highlights film ends, and the silent, smoldering screen caliph gives way to the televised elderly gentleman, rising from his seat. He is tanned and toupeed (he'd been hiding a bald spot as far back as 1923) and quite heavy now (he still eats snails by the dozen with the six-foot-long pasta he likes to cook). Sophia Loren hands him his honorary Oscar.

He'd never made the transition to talkies: a nice baritone voice, but the accent, if no thicker than Sophia's, had sometimes been a problem back then. He has lately been showing up in TV cameos: an aging rancher on "Gunsmoke," the guest villain on "Batman." (Even now, he needs the money, his youthful spending habits having persisted.) After the standing ovation, he rejoins his latest wife—let's say a status-seeking blonde of about fifty—somewhere backstage. In the wider television audience, one or two surviving wives from his middle years—rich women, then as now a little older than him—are feeling pleased that he's at last got his due. After all, almost no one who has met him, not even H. L. Mencken, has ever thought Rudy anything but a decent fellow.

But instead of all this we have the brief existence—from 1895 to 1926—described in "Dark Lover: The Life and Death of Rudolph Valentino" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $35), Emily W. Leider's long and pleasingly overwrought biography of this star who came into the world the year that the Lumière brothers projected the first motion picture. Growing up in the Southern Italian village of Castellaneta, Rodolfo Guglielmi idolized his mother and irritated his father, a former Army officer and research veterinarian whose fatal illness, in 1906, provided "a heart-stopping, melodramatic deathbed scene," complete with clutched crucifix and the extraction of pledges to *madre* and to Italia from Dr. Guglielmi's two boys. None of it was lost on the already theatrical Rodolfo, then only ten.

After a poor showing at an agricultural college, he took the first steps toward his eventual vocation during several feverish weeks in Paris, where, as he racked up gambling debts, he also learned to dance and dress. Late in 1913, on the theory that America would help cure his wastrel ways, Gabriella Guglielmi bought her son a second-class ticket to New York on the S.S. Cleveland. Once aboard, he traded up to first class and wore a tuxedo every night to champagne suppers.

Lounge-lizardry suited the new Manhattanite better than stints at car-washing and landscape labor. Before long, Rodolfo became a sought-after taxi-dancer at Maxim's Restaurant-Cabaret, on East Thirty-eighth Street, partnering women who'd be paying, a few years later, to watch him on the movie screen. Additional success as an exhibition dancer (he and a partner performed for Woodrow Wilson) was compromised by Rodolfo's knack for innocently stumbling into others' scandals: within a few years, he had been arrested as a material witness in a vice raid, and had testified as the wife's supportive friend in a society divorce that soon led to the husband's murder. By 1917, it again seemed wise to head West, this time for California, where, despite a few "photoplay" credits amassed in New York—he's an extra in the wedding scene in "Seventeen"—he still thought he might wind up in farming rather than in films.

But during the next two years he managed to find small movie roles, and in 1919 the screenwriter June Mathis saw him steal a scene as the "cabaret parasite" in "Eyes of Youth." She got the director Rex Ingram to cast him in "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," adapted from the novel by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez. Playing Julio, the now renamed Valentino was required to go from spoiled playboy to soldier-martyr, an affecting alchemy that included a star-making tango scene. Leider writes that "no future Valentino picture would appeal as much to highbrow audiences."

Certainly what followed did not. "The Sheik" (1921)—whose happily ravished heroine, one tends to forget, is Lady Diana—grossed more than a million dollars, prompted many humbled American males to walk out of the theatre, and spawned so many imitations that the Hollywood journalist Herbert Howe (the future lover of Valentino's budding rival Ramon Novarro) declared, "There are more sheiks here than in the Sahara." Another movie-magazine writer defined Valentino's sudden, tumultuous appeal to women by a process of elimination: "He does not look like your husband. He is not in the least like your brother. He does not resemble the man your mother thinks you ought to marry." Actually, as Ahmed Ben Hassan, the star employs an acting style so dependent on popping the huge whites of his eyes that he sometimes resembles, for latter-day viewers, no one so much as Marty Feldman.

Valentino toned things down for "Blood and Sand" (1922). As Gallardo, the guiltily adulterous matador, he emotes with much more modern subtlety than he did in "The Sheik." Leider, who likes to see him as a sort of proto-Method actor, maintains that Valentino, like his character, "did grapple with contradictory impulses and values, did seek a mate who managed to unite the Madonna and the vamp in one body. In real life he sought both an old-fashioned stay-at-home wife like Carmen and an aggressive, exotic siren like Doña Sol." In truth, it's difficult to imagine Valentino wringing much

out of the part, whatever his psychological kinship with the matador. For one thing, he and the actress playing Doña Sol, Nita Naldi—an ex-"Follies" girl born Anita Donna Dooley, in New York—knew that they had to stay fresh for a second take, during which they would speak their silent parts in Spanish, so as not to destroy the illusions of any lip-readers south of the border.

Valentino's leading ladies generally agreed that, offscreen, the Great Lover was no great shakes. He was indeed like a brother, playful and protective, and, despite those dual yearnings discerned by his biographer, neither of the wives he chose came very close to being a madonna or a vamp. His first marriage, to the actress Jean Acker, a lesbian who had been a lover of the redoubtable Alla Nazimova, was a sort of slapstick one-reeler, probably unconsummated. As Nazimova wrote to the actress Edith Luckett (Nancy Reagan's mother) about the manipulative bride, "It was the worst thing she had done on top of all the other worst things she has done."



Onscreen, Valentino looks less likely to devour anyone than to be swallowed up.

Valentino's attachment to his second wife, the ballet dancer and costume designer Natacha Rambova (born Winifred Shaughnessy, in Salt Lake City), went deeper, but the influence she exerted on his career quickly made her unpopular with Rudy's friends and fans. "I've been called everything from Messalina to a dope fiend," she eventually admitted to Myrna Loy. Leider tells us that Rambova's "people skills were imperfect."

In the process of changing wives, Valentino managed to get himself arrested for bigamy: after his Mexican wedding to Rambova, it was discovered that his divorce from Acker was less than final. The charges were dismissed only after several tsunamis of publicity. Valentino was by then caught up in an even messier divorce, from the Famous Players-Lasky studios. His grievances were varied, but the central one—the lack of better, more artistic projects—quickly earned him a reputation as a whiner. During the long dispute, F.P.-L. was able to keep him from working elsewhere ("Ben-Hur," over at M-G-M, went to Novarro), and in order to pay their bills Valentino and Rambova signed on as dancing spokespeople for the Mineralava line of beauty products. In the early months of 1923, while continuing to complain about Rudy's Hollywood bosses, they performed the flamenco and the tango on a personal-appearance tour of dozens of cities. The attendant press coverage "sent the world some mixed cues," Leider writes. "Here he was, blasting the studios, and in particular Famous Players-Lasky, for turning him into a commodity, and in the next sentence he was shilling for a cosmetics firm."

At most of the Mineralava stops, Valentino oversaw a beauty contest; later, when all the local winners gathered as finalists in Madison Square Garden, he crowned the company's North American queen. The twenty-one-year-old David O. Selznick made a short film of the event, "Rudolph Valentino and His 88 American Beauties," which can be found as a bonus on at least one videocassette version of "Blood and Sand." The footage looks as gauzy and ghostly as the film that preserves Marilyn Monroe's appearance in another Madison Square Garden, forty years later. Both stars came to their events as beautiful bought-and-paid-for freaks, leopards on a satin leash, but, if Monroe looks to be repressing her own terror, Valentino, glimpsed in casual conversation, seems relaxed and remarkably unstylized—As You've Never Seen Him Before, one might say.

The contract war kept him off movie screens for nearly two years, a large portion of what would be a very short career. Call it folly—or prescience. In the same way that James Dean, by the demand-side economics of early death and legend, is better off for having made three pictures instead of thirteen, Valentino was doing himself a favor with posterity.

His comeback, in any case, proved to be a disappointment. "Monsieur Beaucaire" (1924), done for Famous Players-Lasky as part of his settlement with the studio, was a too-expensive eighteenth-century costume drama based on a Booth Tarkington novel—a women's picture, though not in the hubba-hubba sense that "The Sheik" had been. Despite all Valentino's hopes, his subsequent work with J. D. Williams at the newly formed Ritz-Carlton Pictures did little to raise his bank balance or his reputation for seriousness.

About "Cobra," which came out the following year, one small-town exhibitor reported, "This one killed Valentino for good as far as Kalispell, Montana, is concerned." Leider describes the film as the story of "two young men who become partners in an antiques business and fall in love with the same woman." By the time it was out, Rambova had left him. "Alone in

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Palm Springs," the biographer writes, seizing upon life's imitation of box-office, "Rudy was discovered by the locals wandering in the desert at night."

"The Eagle," released in 1925, in which he played opposite Vilma Banky for United Artists, fared well enough with the public and the critics but nothing like "The Son of the Sheik," his last picture, which was also made with Banky. Under the direction of George Fitzmaurice, he succeeded in creating a sequel that Leider correctly judges to be better than the original. The film went into general release only after he died, and audiences in the fall of 1926 had their own opportunity to imagine what might have been, as they watched Valentino play not only the son but also the original Sheik, for whose scenes he'd been aged by the makeup department, with remarkable plausibility, into a sort of stern, burnoused bourgeois.

He died on August 23, 1926, after a week in New York's Polyclinic Hospital, from perforated gastric ulcers, a ruptured appendix, and, finally, peritonitis. There were rumors of poisoning, both accidental (bad liquor at the last party he'd gone to?) and deliberate (somebody's jealous husband?). The tabloids kept a frenzied vigil, and when he was gone Bernarr Macfadden's *Evening Graphic*—unsurpassed even now for lurid hilarity (it once tried using perfumed ink)—ran a "Composograph" photo showing Valentino in celestial conversation with Caruso. (Three years earlier, Macfadden had published "Day Dreams," a volume of Valentino's verse.) Frank E. Campbell reportedly hired women to faint, and men to start fights, in a crowd of mourners that would have been clamorous enough without them. Rambova was in Europe, but Jean Acker, vying for a widow's share of publicity amid the swoons of the star's recent girlfriend, Pola Negri, wrote a song entitled "We Will Meet at the End of the Trail": the sheet music featured pictures of her and Rudy—whose hairpiece she got from the hospital. That other twenties R.V., Rudy Vallee, quickly recorded "There's a New Star in Heaven Tonight," and before long Valentino's heretofore level-headed brother, Alberto, was undergoing the first of seven plastic surgeries in pursuit of a fraternal resemblance that he hoped would give him a film career.

By the time Leider gets through with all this, the reader may be inclined to regard "Chicago" more as a documentary than as a musical. For that matter, the author of "Dark Lover" suffers more than a few fainting spells of her own. The book's sources necessarily include a vast pulpy welter of fan magazines—among them Macfadden's *Movie Weekly*—but Leider often adopts an astonishing fanzine prose herself: "His good name, a man's most precious possession, had been forever tarnished. Again he revisited the place called shame." Leider sometimes seems as nervous as a studio head that her subject might have been gay (she comes close to contradicting herself over the scant evidence), and she will charge in like a sob sister or a fan-club president to defend Rudy and Natacha against various calumnies: "This seems to me a harsh view"; "I beg to differ"; "but surely there were nobler impulses at work." One can almost hear Christine Baranski singing, "Understandable! Understandable!"

The author's previous book, "Becoming Mae West" (1997), had much less of this sort of thing. One supposes that Valentino is a special case. Even Mae West, that diamond-tough cookie, tried to contact him by séance not long after his death. Perhaps Leider's style this time out is itself a kind of Method acting, the rhetorical channelling of a past time and milieu. The breathlessness can be charming (she uses "Gotham" for New York without any archness), and it's certainly preferable to her more contemporary blends of sex and sociology: one female character is described as a "definitely heterosexual woman at peace with her own estrogen," and Valentino himself, we are told, "helped deflower postwar America."

In fact, the Sheik brand of condom long carried Valentino's silhouette, a peculiar reminder of how safe viewers always were in his arms. After describing a moment of bad behavior toward Marguerite that he has to act as Armand in the 1921 "Camille" (directed in part by Nazimova), Leider goes on to remark, "This was the cruel Valentino, the 'sex-menace' that sent shivers down feminine spines. Combined with his ability to submit, it makes a potent love cocktail." If it does, the cruelty component is the merest whiff of vermouth. In most of his films, Valentino looks far less likely to devour anyone than to be swallowed up. Doña Sol, the extramarital temptation in "Blood and Sand," tells him, in a wonderful pre-Production Code title, "Some day you will beat me with those strong hands! I should like to know what it feels like!" We never believe anything like that will happen, and just a few feet of film later it's Doña Sol who's taking a big lustful bite out of Valentino's hand. The men who walked out of "The Sheik" might have calmed down had they read Heywood Broun's review of Valentino's effortful ravishings, which ran in the New York *World* on November 7, 1921:

> We gathered from the comments of the young lady who went to the movies that Valentino is one of the most bewitchingly handsome juveniles on the screen. She said that it distressed her to see him take on so. She wanted to pat him on the back and say, "There, there, my little man, what is it you want, anyway?"

Though the patent-leather-haired star had his young imitators ("Vaselinos"), most male American moviegoers knew that they were supposed to scorn him as a gigolo or a pansy. In 1926, when the Chicago *Tribune* denounced a "degeneration into effeminacy" signified by the appearance of a face-powder dispenser in the men's washroom of a new dance hall on the city's North Side, the editorialist cried, "A powder vending machine! In a men's washroom! Homo Americanus! Why didn't someone quietly drown Rudolph Guglielmo [sic], alias, Valentino, years ago?" (Decades later, Valentino came in for a curious sort of blame in the death of Novarro, murdered by male hustlers in his Laurel Canyon home in 1968. Kenneth Anger's mythically tawdry "Hollywood Babylon" alleges that the murder weapon was an Art Deco dildo presented long ago by Valentino to Novarro, though a recent book about the Mexican star concludes with a plea against the injustice of Novarro's being "chiefly remembered today as a perverted elderly homosexual killed by a sex toy that never existed.")

Watching Valentino's movies, and reading this version of his life, one is

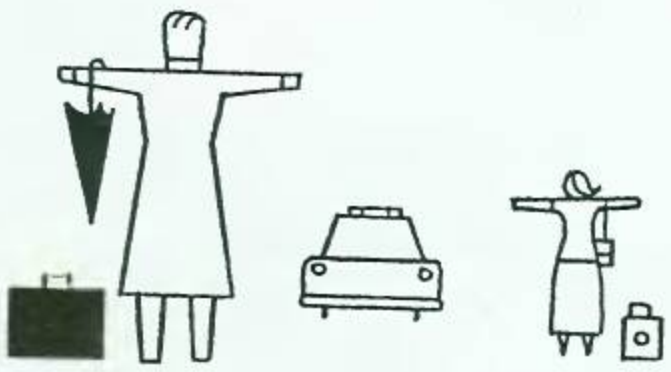
reminded, more than anyone else, of Elvis. Both men worshipped their mothers; both craved the company of their cronies (there was a kind of Memphis Mafia at Valentino's Falcon Lair mansion); and both could show more gusto for food than for women. The leading lady's quest to capture the movie Elvis is always, essentially, maternal, and with Valentino the male star's pliability is strangely more extreme. Even the real-life Rudy seems to spend stretches of Leider's book sitting alone in his dressing room, waiting for the doting biographer to tell him what he'll be doing next. Rudolf Nureyev, playing the title role in Ken Russell's 1977 movie, "Valentino," felt defeated by the director's passive conception of the character and, according to Nureyev's biographer, Diane Solway, reinterpreted the role to align it somewhat better with his own "rapacious nature."

Onscreen, Valentino doesn't appear effeminate, but he never looks more beautiful than when he's lying prostrate or dead—positions, Leider points out, that he is frequently asked to assume. His sexiest moments are often in a sort of Pietà composition: receiving deathbed forgiveness from his wife in "Blood and Sand," or just being fussed over, when wounded and unconscious, by Lady Diana and Raoul St. Hubert (Adolphe Menjou). "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" includes an appearance by his ghost. Even the long "dressing" scene in "Monsieur Beaucaire," drawn out to give women viewers the chance to ogle his torso, seems—perhaps only in hindsight, perhaps not—like the preparation of a body for viewing in a funeral parlor. His real death was more than just "well rehearsed," as Leider says. I would actually go further than she does about the "shadow side" of his romantic appeal ("His velvet eyes beckoned toward unknown realms in the beyond"). Valentino's whole filmography seems the corpus of a corpse, and one can't now view it, or finish this book, without feeling that all the films were somehow a long trailer, a preview of his apotheosis in the open casket at Frank E. Campbell's, where seventy-four viewers per minute, fifty thousand by the end of the first day, found him ready for his closeup. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Quality of Life Report, *by Meghan Daum (Viking; $24.95).* Daum brings a crisp, wisecracking voice to her novel about Lucinda, a life-style correspondent for a morning television show, who, in search of a more interesting life, leaves New York for Prairie City, a fictional Midwestern town. The "Report" of the title is a series of dispatches on life there which Lucinda pitches to her boss as "'A Year in Provence' meets 'Lake Wobegon Days.'" (The boss observes that it's more like "Girl, Interrupted" meets "Deliverance.") Although the New Yorkers here are as predictable as the TV show's reports on bridal-registry etiquette, the people Lucinda meets in Prairie City become real characters, particularly the novel's love interest, a painter whose day job is in a grain elevator. Their relationship gives Lucinda more insight than she might have liked into the lives of some of the women in her adopted town, and leads the novel beyond clichés of city slickers and country bumpkins toward an admirably nuanced view of the American heartland.

Judge, *by Dwight Allen (Algonquin; $23.95).* Slight, dishevelled, almost totally without guile, eighty-two-year-old Judge William Dupree, of Louisville, departs this world leaving behind only the shimmer of his beneficence. His death leaves his family—his hypochondriac wife and his peripatetic sons—at a loss. Without the love that he steadily, but unobtrusively, supplied, his sons go haywire: the elder leaves his amiable wife for an aspiring ventriloquist, and the younger, a struggling writer, returns home, where he falls into the arms of his father's law clerk. Allen's preoccupation with ardor in all its forms brings Walker Percy to mind, and his lovely, elegiac book shows how easily even the most well-made life can unravel.



White Mughals, *by William Dalrymple (Viking; $34.95).* At the end of the eighteenth century, James Achilles Kirkpatrick, the promising young British Resident at the Shia court of Hyderabad, fell in love with Khair un-Nissa, an adolescent noblewoman and a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. The story of their romance and semi-secret marriage endured in local legend and family lore but was otherwise forgotten. After five years' work with a trove of documents in several languages, Dalrymple has emerged not only with a gripping tale of politics and power but also with evidence of the surprising extent of cultural exchange in pre-Victorian India, before the arrogance of empire set in. His book, ambitious in scope and rich in detail, demonstrates that a century before Kipling's "never the twain"—and two centuries before neocons and radical Islamists trumpeted the clash of civilizations—the story of the Westerner in Muslim India was one not of conquest but of appreciation, adaptation, and seduction.

The Apprentice: My Life in the Kitchen, *by Jacques Pépin (Houghton Mifflin; $26).* In this beguiling memoir, the celebrated French chef and cooking-show host recounts his start as a scrappy thirteen-year-old country boy who arrived at his first restaurant apprenticeship still wearing short pants. An incorrigible prankster (he once coated a colleague's eyeglasses in aspic), Pépin never fully submitted to the strict regimen of the French kitchen, and, after a stint as a cook for Charles de Gaulle, he headed for New York, where he ended up working for the chain-restaurant entrepreneur Howard Johnson. Making clam chowder by the gallon was a quirky turn for a classically trained chef, but it enabled Pépin to revolutionize mass-produced food. With appealing modesty, he sees himself as essentially a blue-collar worker, whose "vantage point to history-in-the-making was the crack between two swinging kitchen doors."

BOOKS

BIOPERVERSITY

Margaret Atwood's genetically engineered nightmare.

BY LORRIE MOORE

The novelist Margaret Atwood has wandered off from us before: once, in 1986, to the mid-twenty-first century, for a feminist dystopia, "The Handmaid's Tale," in which women are enslaved according to their reproductive usefulness; another time, in 1996, to the nineteenth century, to make thrifty use of her graduate work at Radcliffe in the faux-Victorian novel "Alias Grace." These were forays and raids. In her chronicling of contemporary sexual manners and politics, Atwood has always been interested in pilfering popular forms—comic books, gothic tales, detective novels, science fiction—in order to make them do her more literary bidding. Her previous novel, "The Blind Assassin," is the best example of the kind of narrative pastiche at which she excels.

In her towering and intrepid new novel, "Oryx and Crake" (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday; $26), Atwood, who is the daughter of a biologist, vividly imagines a late-twenty-first-century world ravaged by innovations in biological science. Like most literary imaginings of the future, her vision is mournful, bleak, and infernal, and is punctuated, in Atwood style, with the occasional macabre joke—perhaps not unlike Dante's own literary vision. Atwood's pilgrim in Hell is Snowman, who, following a genetically engineered viral cataclysm, is, as far as he knows, the only human being who has survived. Snowman (formerly Jimmy) has become arboreal, living in trees and in shelters of junk, roaming the beaches and picnic grounds of a former park—where fungi sprout from rotting picnic tables and barbecues are festooned with bindweed—scavenging for food. His only companions are a dozen or so humanoids, the Crakers—gentle, naked, beautiful creations of Jimmy's old, half-mad scientist friend Crake. Freed from their experimental lab, the Crakers also live near the beach. They eat nothing but grass, leaves, and roots; their sexual rituals have been elegantly and efficiently programmed to minimize both sexual reproduction and unrequited lust. To them, the man they call Snowman is a demigod or a prophet. Unable to tolerate sunlight, Jimmy wears a ghostly bedsheet. For the Crakers, the real gods are Crake, whom they have never seen, and his girlfriend, Oryx, whom they have. The Crakers await their return and listen to stories that Snowman tells them about Crake and Oryx. A holy, yarny scripture is already emerging.



Margaret Atwood

Parallel with this vision of a blighted future is the novel's dramatic story of how the global apocalypse came to pass, told in flashback. Jimmy and Crake grow up as friends in gated communities, safe from the environmental degradation that has already overtaken the outside world. They are the privileged children of scientists who work for top-secret agribusiness and biotech companies with names like HelthWyzer and OrganicInc Farms. The latter, for medical-transplant purposes, makes pigs that are genetically altered with human DNA; after the apocalypse, these extra-clever "pigoons" go hunting for Snowman like hounds after a fox. There are other mistakes, too—creatures called wolvogs, which are exactly what you would expect. Later, Crake's classmates work on developing, for a fast-food venture, headless, legless chickens—"Sort of like a chicken hookworm," Crake says. Such genetic ambitions will not sound outlandish to anyone who has kept abreast of current poultry-farming practices or knows that scientists have experimented with splicing fish genes into tomatoes to prevent freezing.

Although the boys' daily lives are full of swimming pools, bullet trains, completely self-contained shopping malls, and games like Kwiktime Osama, they maintain a curiosity about the world outside in "the pleeblands," of which they have little experience. They have lost parents in the madness of this sinister and isolated life style. Crake's father, burdened with the knowledge of pharmaceutical conspiracies, "jumped" from an overpass; Jimmy's mother, critical of her husband's work, grew depressed, then disappeared. While quite young, both boys come to suspect that their parents have been executed.

In their college years, Crake and Jimmy part ways, Crake being the more scientifically brilliant and ambitious, Jimmy the more verbal and skeptical. Crake goes to the prestigious Watson-Crick Institute (also known as Asperger's U), where the cafeteria serves shrimp (in contrast to the genetically processed fare available to the general populace), and prostitutes of one's choosing are available through Student Services: "Once a student there and your future was assured. It was like going to Harvard had been, back before it got drowned." From then on, Crake is destined to be a prized geneticist. As a student he is able to reap half the profits of anything he creates; thereafter he can name his price. Jimmy, on the other hand, is sent to the crumbling, neglected Martha Graham Academy:

> The Martha Graham Academy was named after some gory old dance goddess of the twentieth century who'd apparently mowed quite a swath in her day. There was a grue-

TOM BACHTELL

some statue of her in front of the administration building, in her role—said the bronze plaque—as Judith, cutting off the head of a guy in a historical robe outfit called Holofernes. Retro feminist shit, was the general student opinion. Every once in a while the statue got its tits decorated or steel wool glued onto its pubic region—Jimmy himself had done some of this glueing—and so comatose was the management that the ornaments often stayed up there for months before they were noticed.

Tonally, "Oryx and Crake" is a roller-coaster ride. The book proceeds from terrifying grimness, through lonely mournfulness, until, midway, a morbid silliness begins sporadically to assert itself, like someone, exhausted by bad news, hysterically succumbing to giggles at a funeral. Atwood begins to smirk and deadpan: "There was a lot of dismay out there, and not nearly enough ambulances." She invents an assisted-suicide site called nitee-nite.com. Of Crake's experimental BlyssPluss Pill, she writes, "They hadn't got it to work seamlessly yet. . . . A couple of the test subjects had literally fucked themselves to death, several had assaulted old ladies and household pets, and there had been a few unfortunate cases of priapism and split dicks." Here she is on the scientifically designed mating rituals of the Crakers:

> Courtship begins at the first whiff, the first faint blush of azure, with the males presenting flowers to the females—just as male penguins present round stones. . . . At the same time they indulge in musical outbursts, like songbirds. Their penises turn bright blue to match the blue abdomens of the females, and they do a sort of blue-dick dance number, erect members waving to and fro in unison, in time to the foot movements and the singing: a feature suggested to Crake by the sexual semaphoring of crabs. From amongst the floral tributes the female chooses four flowers, and the sexual ardour of the unsuccessful candidates dissipates immediately, with no hard feelings left. Then, when the blue of her abdomen has reached its deepest shade, the female and her quartet find a secluded spot and go at it until the woman becomes pregnant and her blue colouring fades. And that is that.
>
> No more *No means yes*, anyway, thinks Snowman.

In the world of "Oryx and Crake"—a future rendered pre-civilized by catastrophe—one can feel the influences of Denis Johnson's "Fiskadoro," or Walter M. Miller, Jr.,'s "A Canticle for Leibowitz." In the novel's whimsical fantasies of biological evolution and technology, one can discern the dark left hand of Ursula K. Le Guin, and in its shrugging, eschatological amusement it channels the spirit of Kurt Vonnegut. In fact, the sick joke and the botched experiment are offered up as rough equivalents and become, through the technical alchemy of the novel, a kind of trope for life itself.

Seventeen years ago, Mary McCarthy, reviewing "The Handmaid's Tale," found it unconvincing as a jeremiad: "Surely the essential element of a cautionary tale is recognition. . . . It is an effect, for me, almost strikingly missing." She complained, too, about the weak characterizations, and suggested that the novel's lack of a new language for its future, such as Orwell had created in "1984," left its world less than fully imagined. But a dystopian novel is not intended as a literal forecast, or even necessarily as a logical extension of our current world. It is simply, and not so simply, a bad dream of our present time, an exquisitely designed horror show in which things are changed from what we do know to a dream version of what we don't. Atwood does this well. To ask a novel to do more is to misunderstand its nature. Besides, given what is known about fish-gene-enhanced tomatoes—or those genetically modified goats that produce spider silk—the biologically reëngineered world of "Oryx and Crake" ceases to seem very far-fetched. As for the characters here, McCarthy would be more pleased. They are mostly male, Atwood being rare among feminist writers in apparently liking her men—if not their institutions—better than her women. (Not since Edith Wharton has a female writer filled her œuvre with so many unpleasant female characters.) Jimmy is not only complex, sympathetic, and anchoring; he is also the observer of the new language that abounds in this new world, and the curator and lexicographer of the old words that no one uses anymore—"Knell. Kern. Alack." Atwood does Orwell, and McCarthy, one better. She even devises a kind of exuberant elegy for the word "toast."

With such a portrait of devastation, it may be important for the reader both to know and to feel what it is that Atwood values. (It is, arguably, immoral of an author not to share.) Given all that has been destroyed, and what has survived, has she discovered anything of worth from the old world that is ours? What is enduring and significant? What can be remembered and held dear? Clearly, she tells us, language. Also love-making, a jazz horn solo, the attractiveness of an imperfect body, and twelve thousand years of man-canine devotion. But there is a more pervasive and recurrent idea, one that would be sentimental if it were not for its inherent animal truth, and that is the power of maternal love. Jimmy scans the world—news footage, postcards sent in code—for his lost mother. Oryx, too, reflects, "She herself would rather have had her mother's love—the love she still continued to believe in, the love that had followed her through the jungle in the form of a bird so she would not be too frightened or lonely." In this we have a theme reminiscent of Margaret Wise Brown's "The Runaway Bunny," that children's parable of maternal devotion which is also a gender Rorschach test—the masculine perspective finding the ubiquitous and undeterrable love of the mother suffocating, the feminine finding it beautiful. Atwood takes the feminine view; here mother love is the great sustainer, the protean protector, the tender magician, and its loss the great loss.

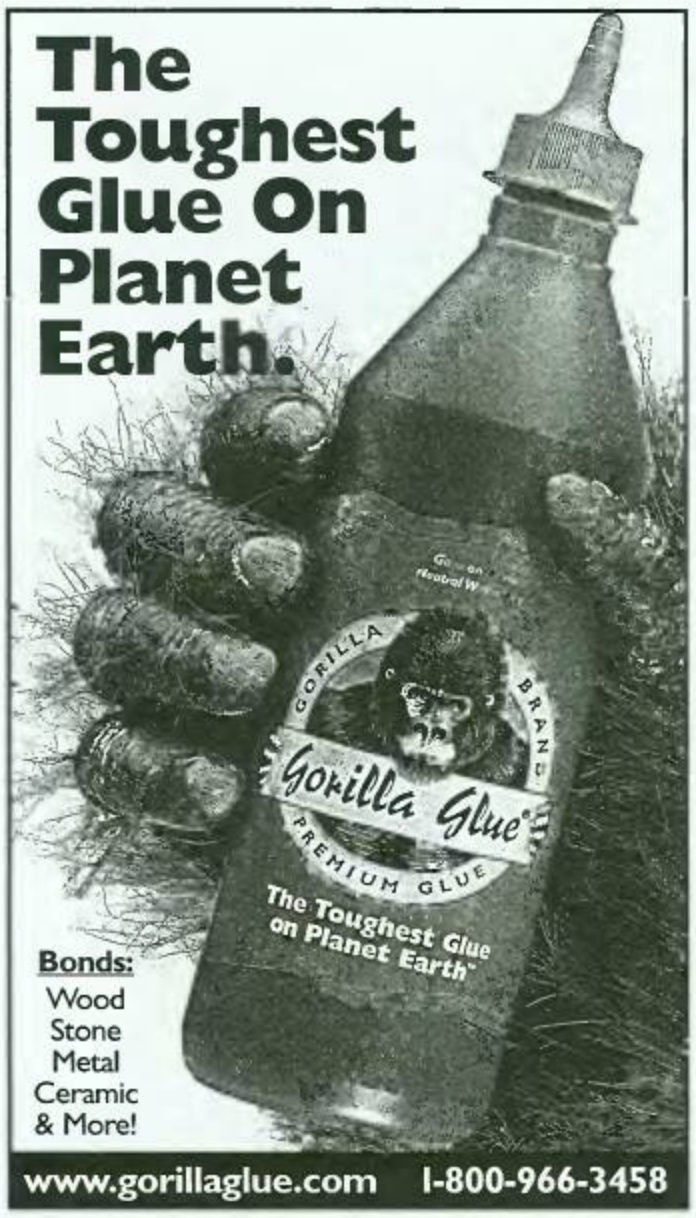
The ur-mother in "Oryx and Crake" is, of course, Mother Nature herself—captured, tortured, and mocked, in classic gothic fashion, but elusive and indestructible, in her way. As a curious aside in this year's fiftieth-anniversary celebration of the discovery of DNA by Watson and Crick, it was reported recently that Crick's wife, a professional illustrator, did only two scientific drawings in the course of her career. One was of her husband's famous double helix. The other was of a woman running. ♦

DEPT. OF PROCRASTINATION

From the Fort Atkinson (Wisc.) Daily Jefferson County Union.

4:30 p.m.: A caller asked to speak to an officer after finding out her son was contemplating suicide. An officer spoke with the woman and was going to meet with her at her residence when he was called away.

Later, the officer responded to the home, where the woman's son told the officer he was not planning to harm himself now, but that he might do something in a few years.



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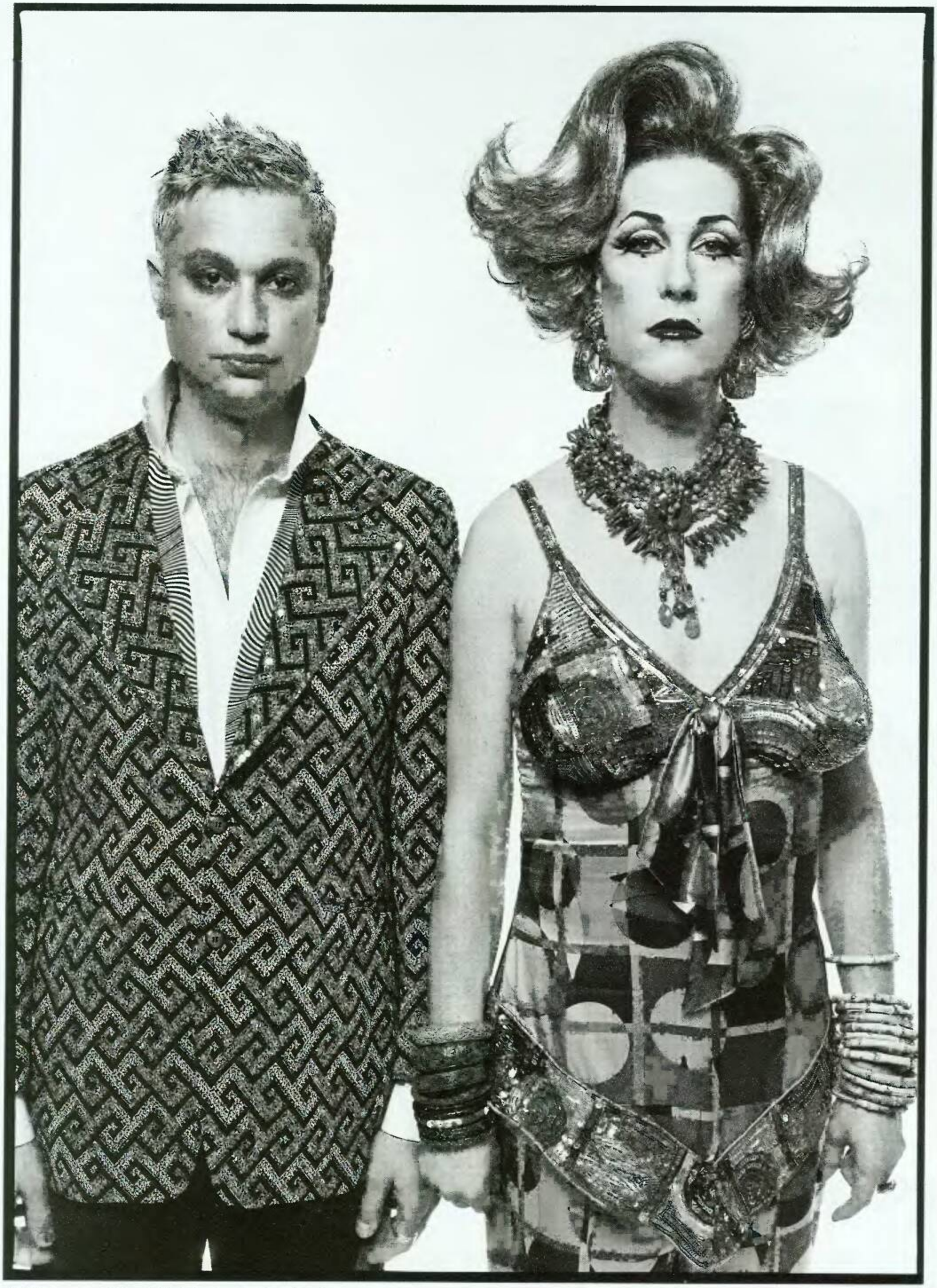
Down memory lane with Kiki and Herb.

BY ALEX ROSS

It is said of many show-business legends that they lose touch with the ordinary world and become cartoons of their former selves. The opulently dissipated Kiki DuRane—a sixty-something lounge singer who tours ad nauseam with a doleful accompanist named Herb—has gone in the opposite direction; she is a fictional creation who has acquired the grit and the glow of the real. Kiki and Herb are the invention of the writer-performer Justin Bond and the pianist Kenny Mellman, who have long been fixtures at downtown New York venues like Flamingo East, P.S. 122, and Fez. They have refined their act into an Off Broadway show, "Kiki & Herb: Coup de Théâtre," which recently opened at the Cherry Lane. It is a slashingly funny, psychically unsettling entertainment—part cabaret, part rock and roll, part Victorian melodrama—to which the category of camp does not apply. Camp implies knowingness and detachment; Bond's Kiki is anarchic and atavistic, in the grip of forces beyond her control. She is almost militant in her decrepitude. Reminiscing airily about her old friend Grace Kelly, barking obscenely at childhood foes, drifting into a sullen stupor, snapping back to life with yawps of vicious glee, Kiki is a beacon of insanity in a world that may finally be coming around to her point of view.

The conceit of the show is that Kiki, a self-described "boozy chanteusie," is aiming to attract new listeners by singing contemporary hits. "It is both thrilling and humbling that so many young people have, as it were, 'tuned in to our sound,' " she says, with the overenunciation of the early-evening alcoholic. Thus begins a scorched-earth advance across decades of pop music, from Bob Merrill's "Make Yourself Comfortable" to Kylie Minogue's "Can't Get You Out of My Head." Kiki's wild stabs at modern trends recall such classic miscalculations as Mae West's renditions of Beatles songs and Ethel Merman's disco album, but the genius of Kiki is that her entire career seems to consist of bungled crossover projects: a bossa-nova album ("Kiki and Herb: Don't Blame It on Kiki and Herb," 1964); a spoken-word record ("Kiki and Herb: Whitey on the Moon," 1972); a belated disco effort ("Kiki and Herb: One Last Chance to Blow," 1983). The songstress hurls herself at this material with such dire enthusiasm that she takes full possession of it. Lately, she has taken an interest in rap, which she calls "the folk music of today." In past shows, she has sung Wu-Tang Clan and Snoop Doggy Dogg, adding jazz vocalise to such lyrics as "All my niggaz and my bitches / Throw your motherfuckin' hands in the air!" This time, she takes on Eminem, whose self-pitying hysteria suits her beautifully.

Between the songs come autobiographical vignettes. Bond has mapped out the life of Kiki in loving detail, and each show adds a few new twists to the familiar downward spiral. The singer was born during the Great Depression, overshadowed by tragedy from the start. "A lot of people jumped out of windows when the stock market collapsed in 1929," she recalls, "but not all of them died. My father was such a man." She was given the diagnosis of "retard" and placed in a children's institution in western Pennsylvania. There she met Herb, a foundling of indeterminate origin. When Herb fell victim to a predatory delinquent named Danny, Kiki was there to comfort him, and a great friendship was born. (The Danny episode inspires one of the show's set pieces, a dramatic monologue built around the song "I'm Ugly and I Don't Know Why," by an obscure band called Butt Trumpet, with adornments from the inspirational Christian poem "Footprints.") The duo's musical career developed only in fits and starts. There was a prolonged interruption when Kiki had to serve a jail sentence for the attempted murder of her



Mellman and Bond: Musical vagabonds whose savage comedy transcends camp. Photograph by Ruven Afanador.

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first husband, an abusive boxer named Ruby. "I wasn't trying to kill him," Kiki explains, "only trying to get his attention."

Throughout the evening, the chanteuse looks back wistfully to the year 1967, when her life turned momentarily grand. A flashback sequence re-creates the scene: Kiki and Herb are playing at the Grand Casino, in Monte Carlo, at the invitation of Princess Grace. They are making what should have been their triumphant comeback album, "Kiki and Herb: It's Not Unusual." Kiki has Aristotle Onassis as a lover, Maria Callas as a rival. Fortune has raised her up, but now a terrible tragedy lays her low. During a Mediterranean cruise, she leaves her seven-year-old daughter, Coco, alone on deck while she goes below to satisfy her carnal needs. "Ladies and gentlemen," she says, head cast down, "where the hell can a kid go on the deck of a boat?" At this juncture, the performance begins to waver between black comedy and something like genuine pathos. Kiki's failures as a singer pale next to her failures as a mother. The watery death of Coco haunts her. She has lost touch with her two other children, who claim not to know her, even though she sends them all her press clippings. She takes refuge in another glass of Canadian Club and ginger ale—the piano is equipped with a drink holder—and the drink begins to take its toll. She digresses, and digresses again—"Where was I, ladeezh n genlmn?"—and then stops, staring fixedly at nothing.

Just when it seems that the comic spirit of the evening has been swallowed up in melancholy, the original, rampaging Kiki returns, her extreme jazz vocals now fuelled by rage at herself and the world. She turns for solace to her fans, who have always stood by her side, albeit in dwindling numbers. What the world needs, she says, is more love, for "without love . . . there is only rape."

"Kiki & Herb" is a comedy, at least on the surface, but the performers are serious people who have managed to smuggle into their act a fair degree of theatrical and musical sophistication. Bond, who is forty, is a native of Hagerstown, Maryland. He studied classical acting in London, but he developed a distaste for that aspect of theatre which involved working with directors. He moved to San Francisco in 1988 and threw himself into street theatre, avant-garde noise, and conceptual cabaret. One night, while trying to think of an innovative birthday present for a friend, he drew age marks on his face and assumed the Kiki persona. He is resigned to being labelled a "drag queen," although, after meeting him offstage, you want to find a mellower label for his particular brand of gender vagueness. Bond is simply a svelte person who looks stylish in women's clothes, especially swinging-sixties outfits, like the ones that Faye Dunaway wore in "The Thomas Crown Affair."

Mellman, who is thirty-four, has the innocent face, diffident air, and slightly bewildered expression of someone who has spent long hours at the piano since childhood. He studied composition at the University of California at Berkeley, but became disenchanted with the music department when he was told that Erik Satie's seldom heard "Socrate" was too boring to warrant a performance. He switched to San Francisco State to study poetry, and sought a new medium for his musical curiosity. He found it when he met Bond, and began accompanying the singer in such hard-to-reconstruct night-club evenings as "Dixie McCall's Patterns for Living." Kiki barged to the forefront one night in 1993, when, at the end of a Gay Pride weekend, Bond and Mellman felt too exhausted to do their usual program. "You're Herb, I'm Kiki," Bond said, before they went onstage, and a fading star was born.

The early Kiki and Herb shows were more chaotic than the one now running at the Cherry Lane. They were fuelled by the energy and rage of AIDS activism—the in-your-face tactics of ACT UP and Queer Nation. Bond and Mellman used to heighten the naturalism of the show by getting exactly as drunk onstage as the scenario demanded. When I first saw them, five years ago, Kiki would climb on top of café tables and order the customers to lick her legs. If you tried to move your drink out of the way, she might grab it out of your hand. Another night, she threw a tray of steak knives, fortunately causing no harm. When Bond was asked to perform at Madonna's birthday party, he got into a scuffle with the R. & B. artist D'Angelo. Kiki and Herb emerged as much from the spit-spewing, scenery-chewing mentality of punk rock as from

the cabaret tradition. It's not much of a contradiction, when you consider how many of the original New York punk rockers came out of the avant-garde art scene, the gay underground, and other bohemias.

In the end, "Kiki & Herb" is a more political show than its premise suggests. We should really have expected no less from a woman who alleges to have been engaged to the radical black Presidential candidate Dick Gregory. The politics emerges not just in Kiki's commentary on current affairs—summing up George W. Bush's approach to homeland security, she advises, "Whatever you do, don't go out and don't stay in"—but also in her obsession with the figure of the abandoned, abused, or socially outcast child. The stories return relentlessly to this theme—a young gay boy raped by his classmates, a girl cast aside by her mother and placed in an institution. Of course, whenever Kiki is beginning to break your heart with these tales, she has to blurt out something stunningly grotesque. "If you weren't abused as a child," she declares, "you must have been an ugly kid." The unshockable downtown crowd never fails to gasp at that one.



"What, exactly, did you say to the maître d'?"

Only an academic paper in gender studies could do justice to the complexities of Kikiness. (In fact, an N.Y.U. graduate student has written a thesis on the subject.) The show also makes interesting points about music—about how songs are sung and about what they mean. This is where poor Herb comes to the fore. Kenny Mellman's job is to make sense on the piano of his partner's bizarre repertoire, and those who feel that modern pop songs have too much technology and too little music will enjoy his Luddite solutions. Rachmaninovian bass octaves give symphonic majesty to a song like Radiohead's "Exit Music (for a Film)." To mimic the saturated textures of hip-hop production, he attacks the instrument in a dissonant, Cecil Taylor frenzy, substituting cluster chords for synthetic beats. He gets a huge, bellowing sound out of the piano. Herb, as Kiki portrays him, is a damaged child seeking refuge in music, and the piano is the vehicle of his revenge.

The high points of the show are the medleys, which are carefully constructed simulations of music losing its mind. One song morphs into the next before you really notice what's going on. In Kiki and Herb's beloved Christmas medleys, "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" becomes the Velvet Underground's "Heroin"; "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" becomes Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit." The tour de force in the current show begins with "Whitey's on the Moon," Gil Scott-Heron's protest song about moon landings and racial injustice. After a minute or two, Scott-Heron's spoken-word anthem has mutated into latter-day rap—Eminem's "Lose Yourself," with its inspiring chorus, "You better lose yourself in the music, the moment / you own it, you better never let it go." A second later, Kiki shrieks, "And you may ask yourself, 'What is that beautiful house?,' " and we are in the middle of the Talking Heads' "Once in a Lifetime." The transitions are seamless because Mellman translates all the songs into his own peculiar musical voice, which might be described as John Cage cocktail lounge.

When I asked Mellman about the Eminem medley, he said that he had spent a weekend working on it and that the theme of it was appropriation. Kiki singing Eminem is ridiculous; but no less ridiculous than Eminem, a white kid, mimicking black culture, or the Talking Heads incorporating African beats into their SoHo art rock. Every singer, even Gil Scott-Heron, is pretending in one way or another—putting on drag—and Kiki does the service of bulldozing all the façades of authenticity. There's something liberating about the way the songs break free of categories and come together in a midnight carnival. The music becomes as androgynous as the performer: it is always changing shape and identity. This is probably why fellow-musicians find Kiki and Herb so riveting. Everyone from Lou Reed to the Pet Shop Boys has attended their shows. Among the rock memorabilia that Bond has accumulated is Edie Sedgwick's leopard-skin pillbox hat; he wears it while singing Bob Dylan's "Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat."

Bond and Mellman are in the curious position of being celebrities' celebrities—famous to the famous but little known outside the downtown scene. For years, they have contemplated taking their act out of lounges and into legitimate theatres; with some trepidation, they are now doing it. If they find wider fame, it will be richly deserved, but their longtime fans don't want them to wander too far from their punk-drag roots, when they scared the daylights out of unsuspecting customers. Once, during a show in San Francisco, Bond went to an open window and began shouting to people on the street outside: "Just don't get too comfortable out there!" ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

SCHOOL DAYS

Nasty and nice at home and abroad.

BY DAVID DENBY

Cédric Klapisch, the talented director of "When the Cat's Away," wrote his new picture, "L'Auberge Espagnole," in less than two weeks, cast it on the fly in different European cities, and shot it in Barcelona with a lightweight digital camera. "L'Auberge Espagnole" is a discursive, sketchbook movie about a twenty-five-year-old Parisian graduate student, Xavier (Romain Duris), who goes to Spain on an exchange program and lives with a polyglot mix of students in a cramped walkup apartment. Lousy with books, magazines, clothes, and a variety of unspeakable leftovers, rudely crammed into the fridge, the apartment is, understandably, a mess. Xavier's father is a businessman, his mother a hippie; he's a handsome young man, but conventional and rather withdrawn, and not quite sure who he is. Xavier is in suspension—all seven of the Barcelona apartment dwellers are in suspension, studying and dawdling in delicious bohemian squalor before taking the government and corporate jobs that will, as the movie suggests, bring the bourgeois prison walls down around them. "L'Auberge Espagnole" is vignettish and offhand, but it's extremely pleasant, and it suggests what can be done with lightweight equipment and a loose-limbed approach to the right subject. Such things as Xavier's résumé and various Web sites pop onto the screen, eagerly overlapping one another. Episodes set in bureaucratic Paris are speeded up while the mocking sound of scurrying feet is heard on the soundtrack. The flashing digital methods and the playful use of graphics and sound punch up the subject of youthful indeterminacy. "L'Auberge Espagnole" (which in French slang means a free-for-all) is intended to be evanescent—a quick glance at the young people of the new, unified Europe as they noodle their way to adulthood. Tomorrow, the moment will have passed and the portrait may be different.

Forty years ago, lightweight cameras and tape recorders liberated the cinéma-vérité filmmakers in America and the New Wave directors in Paris, sending the Americans into political caucus rooms and prison cells and the French into streets and cafés; digital equipment, which is lighter still, could have a similar effect in opening up new subjects. At least, it will revive the old dream of spontaneity, which goes back to Mack Sennett and Chaplin—the dream of just going out with a group of colleagues and friends and making a movie. Sometimes, of course, the results are disastrous—movies like Steven Soderbergh's arrogantly indecipherable "Full Frontal." But Klapisch is an entertainer—he loves anecdotes—and "L'Auberge Espagnole" trips along charmingly. Shot with the Sony HD24p high-definition camera, the movie looks surprisingly good. The characters, searching for romance and good times, wander through Barcelona's raffishly glamorous ochre streets, across the Gaudí pavilions, the sun-drenched piazzas; the movie is as much a love letter to the erotic pleasures of Barcelona as the New Wave films were to the endless social and intellectual enchantments of Paris.

Yet the young people in the Barcelona apartment don't have explicit ideas or attitudes, the way Godard's political youth did in "La Chinoise." They merely want to get along together as Europeans, an undertaking that Klapisch (and his audience in France, where the movie was a big hit) apparently finds ineffably funny. The movie is a Euro pajama party, an awkward rite of passage involving endless misunderstandings and quarrels, but the mix of nationalities may be more novel to the French than it is to Americans, who take an ethnic jumble for granted. Xavier's identity is unseated by the Spanish, Danish, German, English, and Italian voices in his head, and he undergoes an internal revolution. Having left a girlfriend behind in Paris, he falls in with a young French couple in Barcelona and has an affair with the wife (Judith Godrèche), a ravishing but rather dim beauty. One of his roommates, Isabelle (Cécile De France), a Walloon speaker from Belgium, is a lesbian who instructs him in the intricacies of how women like to be touched and held. It may be evidence of the extreme mildness of Klapisch's film that this nonsexual relationship is the sexiest thing in the movie. Isabelle's lesson, as far as we can see, turns out to be more important than all the courses Xavier takes in Barcelona, and he returns home a European rather than simply French, and a free man.



A polyglot mix of exchange students share an apartment in "L'Auberge Espagnole."

JEAN-CLAUDE GOTTING

I have seen the three movies that Neil LaBute has directed from his own material—"In the Company of Men" (1997), "Your Friends & Neighbors" (1998), and

the new "The Shape of Things"—and I have emerged from all three in a foul mood, ready to stomp a pooch or knock down an old lady. It's possible, of course, that these movies made me angry because they jolted me into a fresh perception of life, forcing me to abandon routine ways of thinking and feeling. But I doubt it—after the initial spasms, I very quickly forgot them. They didn't get under my skin; they acted on the surface, as an abrasive. "In the Company of Men" was an airless fable of malevolence. Two young corporate players, arriving at a nameless branch office for a six-week tour, decide, in order to take general revenge against women, to seduce and abandon a lovely secretary. They choose her, in part, because she is deaf and almost completely defenseless. The games they play on the secretary have a certain sinister fascination, as sadism always does. Yet we were invited to see the men's ferocity not as an aberration but as a natural outgrowth of the competitive ethos bred into them by corporate life. The fable has a didactic and accusatory tone, and some people were both shocked and excited by the heartlessness of it, which they interpreted as an attack on American insensitivity. Those of us who hated "In the Company of Men" were shocked instead by a movie so underpopulated and schematic that it became an amoral attack on amorality—an example of the thing it was inveighing against. The picture had the emotional coloration of a portentous Off Broadway play, in which nasty theatre games (bullyragging, role reversals, surprises) hold the stage through the sheer intensity they produce in the actors—and the uneasiness they inspire in the audience. Sitting all the way through the movie's crass manipulations made one feel a little sordid. Much the same was true of "Your Friends & Neighbors," in which a group of six friends (three men, three women) harass and betray one another in a series of short, preposterously unpleasant scenes. If only LaBute were a satirist who took some pleasure in the shenanigans of his screwed-up characters! But he comes off as earnestly censorious, a man who sermonizes about situations that only he could have concocted and sustained in the first place.

"The Shape of Things," which originated as a play, is also about betrayal. Evelyn (Rachel Weisz), a graduate student in art who is a fire-breathing free spirit, unaccountably takes up with an overweight and maladroit undergraduate, Adam (Paul Rudd). At first, the movie seems an updated screwball comedy—a new, campus version of, say, "Bringing Up Baby," in which Katharine Hepburn teased, infuriated, and loosened up Cary Grant's repressed paleontologist. But LaBute's didactic purpose kills any possibility of frivolous entertainment. Evelyn reshapes Adam, changing his body, his hair, his walk, his nose, convincing him that he's attractive, and soon he *is* attractive, which causes a great deal of trouble between two undergraduate friends of Adam's (Frederick Weller and Gretchen Mol) who are about to get married. The movie is about the misuse of sexual power, but mostly it consists of endless dialogue scenes that may have produced a claustrophobic intensity onstage but which, again, feel groundless and airless in a movie. For instance, the two college men played by Paul Rudd and Frederick Weller are so different that their friendship is inconceivable, and, since they don't belong together in the first place, there's no shock—just irritation—in watching them quarrel. With the character of Evelyn, LaBute is playing with notions about artists cannibalizing the life around them, but he springs the theme so late in the movie that it seems more like a gimmick than like a dramatic idea. I can't avoid the impression that LaBute's moments of loathing and vileness grow out of nothing more urgent than the need to create scenes with a savage tone. He may not know how to create anything else—certainly his movie adaptation of A. S. Byatt's "Possession" was all but inert. LaBute's own material has a peculiar vicious triviality, yet he has been hailed, in some quarters, as a master. Is it possible that most of our plays and movies are so bland that when critics have their feathers ruffled by something mean and low they assume it must be art? ♦

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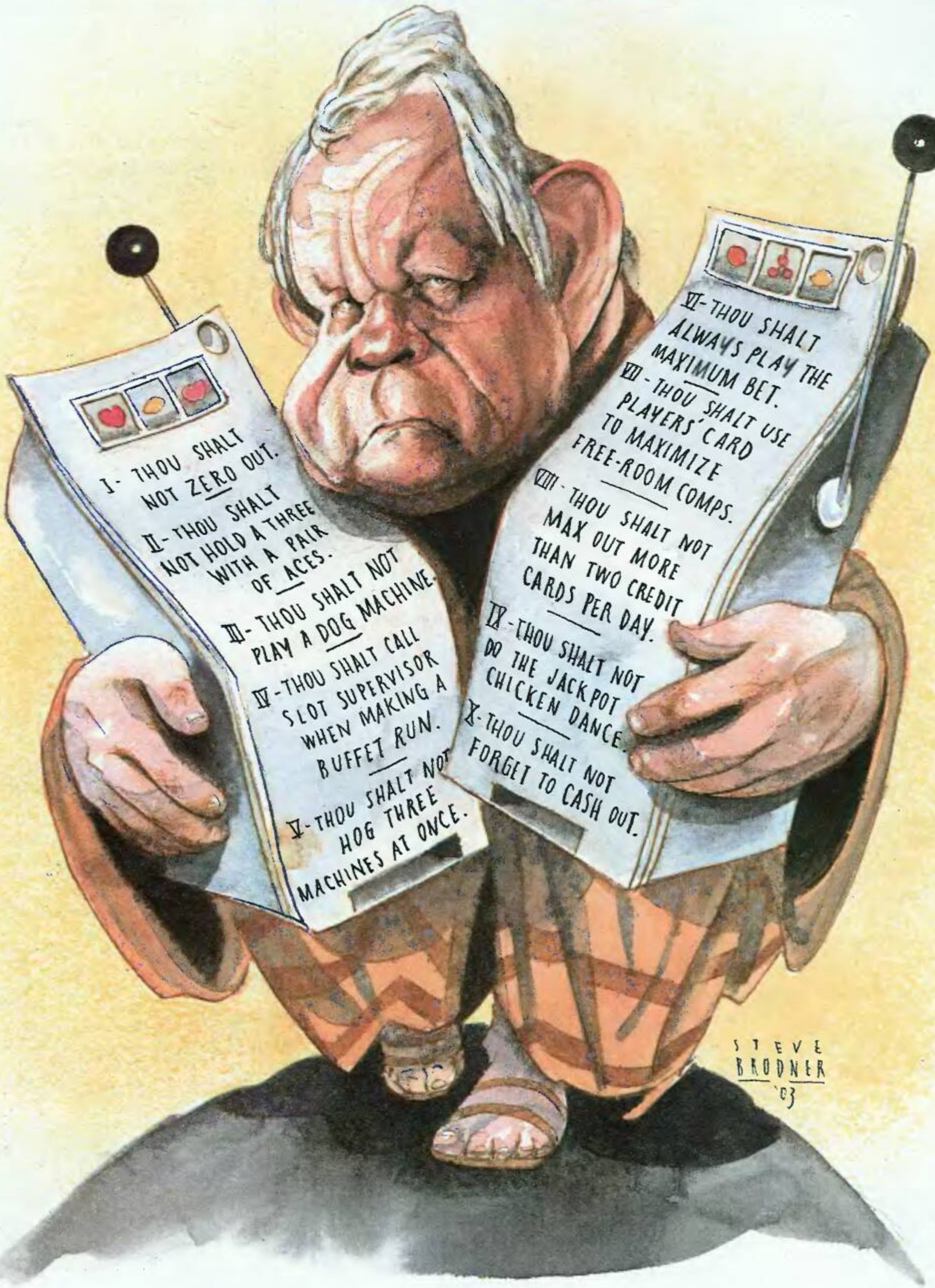
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