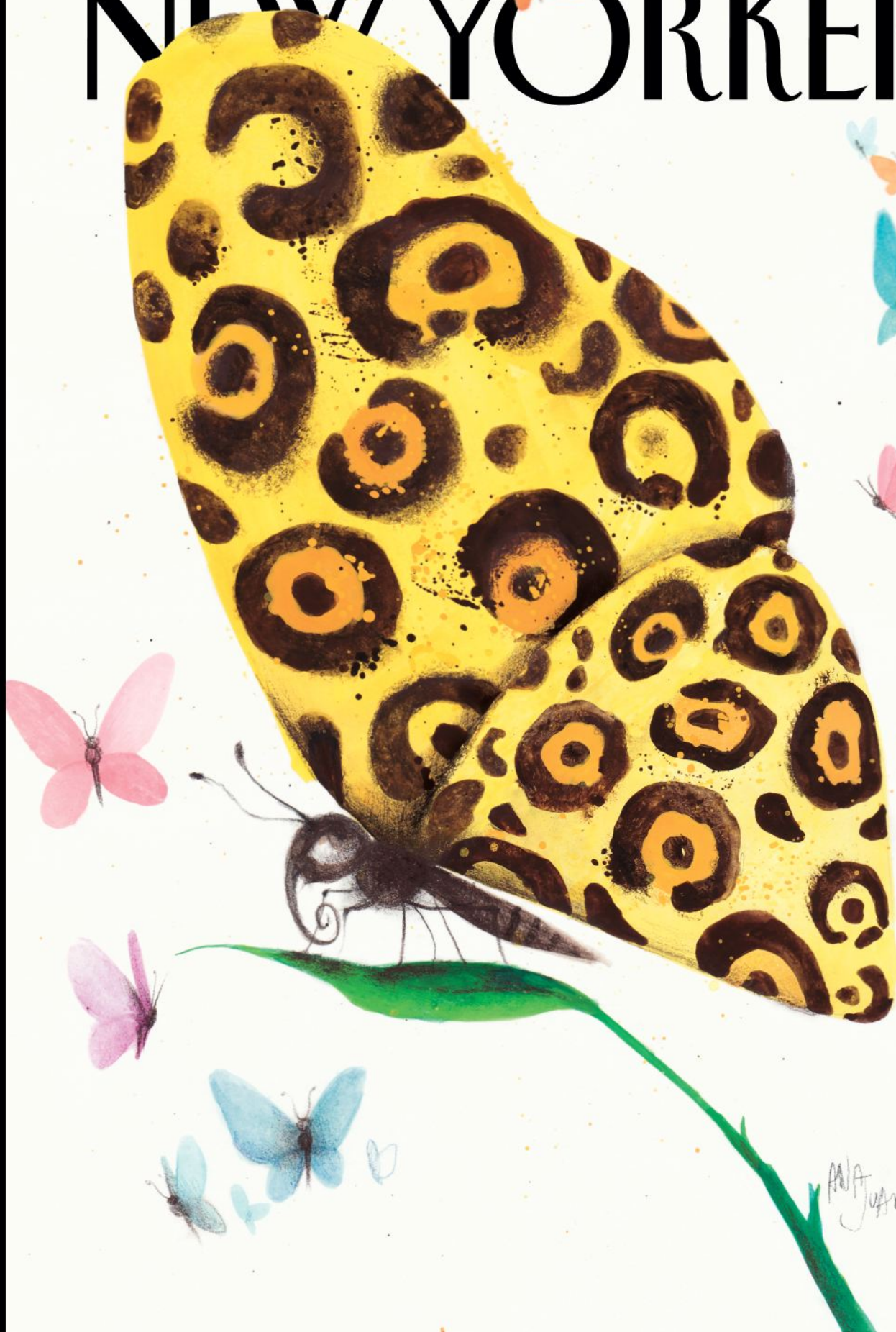


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MAR. 24, 2014

THE NEW YORKER



CHANEL







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THE NEW YORKER

MARCH 24, 2014

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*Sun, Moon, and Five Peaks (detail),
19th century, Korea (Private Collection)*

This exhibition is made possible by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, and the Korea Foundation. In Philadelphia, the exhibition is presented in part by The Exelon Foundation and PECO. It is organized by the National Museum of Korea, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

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NICK PAUMGARTEN (**"BERLIN NIGHTS," P. 64**) is a staff writer.

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TESSA HADLEY (**FICTION, P. 74**) has published two short-story collections and five novels, including "Clever Girl," which came out earlier this month.

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ANA JUAN (**COVER**) is the illustrator of the "Fairyland" series of children's books, the most recent of which is "The Girl Who Fell Beneath Fairyland and Led the Revels There."

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analysis by Jeffrey
Toobin and others.

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her new story.

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Richard Brody on his
DVD of the Week,
"We Can't Go Home
Again," from 1973.

VIDEO

Profiles of New
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artists.

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Emily Nussbaum and Rachel Syme
discuss television finales. Plus, Ryan
Lizza and Hendrik Hertzberg talk to
Dorothy Wickenden about Obamacare.

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BOTTEGA VENETA

THE MAIL

THE LANZA TRAGEDY

I read Andrew Solomon's article detailing the psychological background of the Sandy Hook killer, Adam Lanza, with interest and with feelings of sympathy for his parents, both of whom struggled valiantly to do their best for their deeply troubled son ("The Reckoning," March 17th). However, I wish more attention had been paid to the question of gun ownership. Did Nancy Lanza make firearms available to her son because she herself was a gun enthusiast? Were gun shows and target shooting one of the few ways that she could engage Adam's interest? Much is made of the fact that no one, neither Adam's parents nor any of the several mental-health professionals who examined him, recognized any violent tendencies. But isn't a preoccupation with weapons itself evidence of a proclivity for violence? Whether or not there was any medical or psychotherapeutic intervention that could have altered Adam Lanza's tragic trajectory is a matter of speculation, but it can hardly be doubted that if either his mother or the law had denied him access to a semiautomatic rifle with a thirty-round magazine—essentially, a weapon of war—the outcome at Sandy Hook would have been far less deadly than it was.

Aaron Walton

Newtown, Victoria, Australia

Solomon writes about his interviews with Peter Lanza with heartfelt compassion for Lanza's pain and despair, and he deserves both compassion and support. As Peter Lanza himself notes, although there were obvious signs that Adam was mentally ill, the horrific outcome at Sandy Hook cannot be explained by an Asperger's diagnosis or behaviors, or by social discomfort alone. His troubled life reflected much deeper psychopathy. Although Adam refused to have contact with his father and brother in the two years before his death, surely his worsening behavior had been observed, at least by his mother. A request for a visit by legal authorities or local police officers might have illuminated Adam's condition. The outcome might have been state conservatorship or hospitalization

and treatment, in which case perhaps the tragedy could have been averted.

*Maureen Michael
Lafayette, Calif.*

ALL OF THE ABOVE

Elizabeth Kolbert describes her recent taking of the SAT, and concludes, "As befits an exam named for itself, the SAT measures those skills—and really only those skills—necessary for the SATs" ("Big Score," March 3rd). In fact, some of the best available scientific evidence indicates that the SAT predicts success in college. In a key study published in *Psychological Science*, researchers analyzed data from nearly a hundred and fifty thousand students, at a hundred and ten colleges and universities. Both the students' SAT scores and high-school grades predicted college grade-point average, and the most predictive formula was one that included both factors. To be sure, some people who do poorly on the SAT go on to do spectacularly well in college, and vice versa. Human behavior can never be predicted with certainty, but the SAT works relatively well for its intended purpose.

*David Z. Hambrick
Department of Psychology
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Mich.*

The SAT may be the bane of upper-middle-class parents trying to launch their children on a path to success. But sometimes one person's obstacle is another person's springboard. I am the daughter of a single, immigrant father who never attended college, and a good SAT score was one of the achievements that catapulted me into my state's flagship university and, from there, on to medical school. Flawed though it is, the SAT afforded me, as it has thousands of others, a way to prove that a poor, public-school kid who never had any test prep can do just as well as, if not better than, her better-off peers. The SAT is an imperfect measure of good old-fashioned grit—and there's still no substitute for that.

*Dawn Harris Sherling, M.D.
Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.*

BOOK VALUE

George Packer's piece points out all that Amazon does which hurts local booksellers and publishers, but I wonder about its value for customers ("Cheap Words," February 17th & 24th). I have bought books from my local bookstore for between twenty and eighty per cent more than what I pay through Amazon, because I thought that this was the right thing to do for my community. Why? Does it benefit me? The answer is a resounding no. Local booksellers don't provide value that compensates for their full-price bookselling. I can go to Amazon and read reviews from both readers and professional critics. If Amazon doesn't sell the book, the Web site directs you to someone who does. Amazon is good for customers, and to propose that it isn't good for books because certain people in the book-publishing business dislike it—but also benefit from it economically—is inadequate.

*Bruce Stern
Sonoma, Calif.*

As a writer of short fiction, I recently embraced Amazon's self-publishing platforms, creating e-books for the Kindle and paperbacks printed on demand by CreateSpace. How wonderful for an author to be able to use easy technology to reach audiences. So I was stunned when my friends expressed disappointment that they wouldn't be able to pick up my book at the local bookstore—even at a Barnes & Noble—or the town library. Still, the great shortcoming of the Amazon business model, a point that Packer drives home, is the inability to reduce the cost, whether for the publisher or the author, of finding an audience. The proliferation of titles only drives marketing costs higher, despite the advantages of database targeting. Regardless of the size of the publishing house, this is the greatest threat to the survival of literature.

*Kevin Windorf
Westfield, N.J.*

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



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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



MARCH 2014 WEDNESDAY 19TH THURSDAY 20TH FRIDAY 21ST SATURDAY 22ND SUNDAY 23RD MONDAY 24TH TUESDAY 25TH

WHEN THE OUTRAGEOUSLY DYSTOPIAN teen comedy “Heathers” came out, in 1989, it was a box-office failure, but its straight-faced camp and pitch-black plot—Veronica, the fourth wheel of a fierce high-school clique, falls in love with J.D., a mischievous, murderous rebel—have made it a widely adored cult classic. “Heathers” also kick-started the careers of Winona Ryder and Christian Slater. Twenty-five years later, its issues of bully-related suicide, school shootings, and bomb threats are even more relevant, and the highly un-P.C. escapade takes on an even darker hue. Get ready for the return of fluffy bangs, shoulder pads, and vicious croquet matches, because the stage adaptation, “Heathers: The Musical,” directed by Andy Fickman, is in previews at New World Stages. It will be so very.

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DVD OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Nicholas Ray's "We Can't Go Home Again," from 1973, in our digital edition.

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Act One

Santino Fontana and Tony Shalhoub both star as the writer and director Moss Hart, in this play written and directed by James Lapine and based on Hart's autobiography. Also with Andrea Martin. Previews begin March 20. (Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

Aladdin

The 1992 Disney film has been adapted into a musical, with music by Alan Menken; lyrics by Howard Ashman, Tim Rice, and Chad Beguelin; and a book by Beguelin. Casey Nicholaw directs and choreographs. In previews. Opens March 20. (New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 866-870-2717.)

And Baby Makes Seven

New Ohio Theatre revives Paula Vogel's play from 1984, about a lesbian couple who enlist their gay friend to help them have a baby, even though they already have three imaginary children. Marc Stuart Weitz directs. In previews. Opens March 23. (154 Christopher St. 888-596-1027.)

Beyond Therapy

TACT revives the Christopher Durang comedy from 1981, in which a first date provides fodder for the daters' therapy sessions. Scott Alan Evans directs. In previews. Opens March 25. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

Bullets Over Broadway

A musical adaptation of Woody Allen and Douglas McGrath's screenplay for the 1994 film, with a book by Allen. Starring Marin Mazzie, Brooks Ashmanskas, Zach Braff, Karen Ziemba, and Vincent Pastore. Susan Stroman directs and choreographs. In previews. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

Cabaret

Alan Cumming, Michelle Williams, Linda Emond, and Danny Burstein star in Sam Mendes and Rob Marshall's production of the musical by John Kander, Fred Ebb, and Joe Masteroff. A Roundabout Theatre Company production. Previews begin March 21. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

Heathers: The Musical

Andy Fickman directs a musical based on the 1989 movie by Daniel Waters, with a book, music, and lyrics by Laurence O'Keefe and Kevin Murphy. In previews. (New

World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

Hellman v. McCarthy

Jan Buttram directs the world premiere of a play by Brian Richard Mori, about the feud between the novelist and literary critic Mary McCarthy and the playwright Lillian Hellman, which began when McCarthy disparaged Hellman on "The Dick Cavett Show." Starring Dick Cavett, Roberta Maxwell, and Marcia Rodd. In previews. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 866-811-4111.)

If/Then

A new musical by Tom Kitt (music) and Brian Yorkey (book and lyrics) imagines different life paths for an urban planner (Idina Menzel) moving back to New York. Also starring Anthony Rapp and LaChanze; Michael Greif directs. In previews. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 800-745-3000.)

I Remember Mama

John Van Druten wrote this play, about Norwegian immigrants in San Francisco in the nineteen-tens. Jack Cummings III directs the Transport Group production. In previews. (Gym at Judson, 243 Thompson St. 866-811-4111.)

King Lear

Theatre for a New Audience presents the Shakespeare tragedy, starring Michael Pennington. Arin Arbus directs. In previews. (Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111.)

Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill

Audra McDonald plays Billie Holiday in the Broadway premiere of a musical play by Lanie Robertson, set in Philadelphia in 1959. Lonnie Price directs. Previews begin March 25. (Circle in the Square, 235 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

The Library

Steven Soderbergh directs a play by Scott Z. Burns, about a girl who survives a shooting in her high school, and the media reactions that thereafter taint her reputation. Starring Chloë Grace Moretz, Lili Taylor, Michael O'Keefe, Tamara Tunie, David Townsend, and Jennifer Westfeldt. Previews begin March 25. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

Les Misérables

The 1987 musical, written by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel

Schönberg and based on Victor Hugo's 1862 novel, returns. Directed by Laurence Connor and James Powell. In previews. Opens March 23. (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Mothers and Sons

Tyne Daly stars in Terrence McNally's new play, about a woman who confronts the man her son loved—who now lives with another man and their young child—twenty years after her son's death. Sheryl Kaller directs. In previews. Opens March 24. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Of Mice and Men

James Franco and Chris O'Dowd make their Broadway debuts in the work by John Steinbeck, about George and Lennie, who look for farm work in California and dream of having land of their own. In previews. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

A Raisin in the Sun

Denzel Washington and LaTanya Richardson Jackson star in the Lorraine Hansberry play, directed by Kenny Leon. Also starring Sophie Okonedo, Anika Noni Rose, David Cromer, and Stephen McKinley Henderson. In previews. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

The Realistic Joneses

Sam Gold directs a new play by Will Eno, about two couples, suburban neighbors, whose lives become intertwined. Starring Toni Collette, Michael C. Hall, Tracy Letts, and Marisa Tomei. In previews. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Red Velvet

This play by Lolita Chakrabarti, set in London in 1833, follows the true story of Ira Aldridge, the African-American actor called in to replace Edmund Kean, who had died suddenly during a production of "Othello." Indhu Rubasingham directs the Tricycle Theatre production. Starring Adrian Lester. Previews begin March 25. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 29 Jay St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

A Second Chance

A new musical with a book, music, and lyrics by Ted Shen, about a widower and a divorcee who meet in midlife. Jonathan Butterell directs. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

The Threepenny Opera

Martha Clarke directs and choreographs Marc Blitzstein's adaptation of the musical by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill. Starring F. Murray Abraham, Mary Beth Peil, Laura Osnes, and Michael Park. In previews. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111.)

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WICKED

Gershwin

Uriel Acosta: I Want That Man!

Target Margin Theatre presents a play about the seventeenth-century Jewish philosopher, who challenged the views of his Amsterdam contemporaries. In previews. Opens March 24. (The Chocolate Factory, 5-49 49th Ave., Long Island City. 866-811-4111.)

NOW PLAYING**All the Way**

Bryan Cranston plays Lyndon B. Johnson in Robert Schenkkan's overlong, overcrowded, and middlebrow play, directed by Bill Rauch. The play is mostly set in the House of Representatives, and takes place during the course of a year—November, 1963, to November, 1964—during which time the Civil Rights Act is passed and Johnson works to get out from under the long shadow of John F. Kennedy's assassination. One particularly touching moment has the Texas-born Johnson in a heated but affectionate conversation with a "go slow" Democratic senator from Georgia named Richard Russell (John McMartin), while also trying to deal with Martin Luther King, Jr. (Brandon J. Dirden), then the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. (McMartin and Dirden fully realize their roles.) Schenkkan and Rauch are very good at choreographing the internal rhythms of political life—a world where "commitment" passes for depth—but that isn't quite enough to distract us from Cranston's huff-and-puff butch acting. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/17/14.) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 877-250-2929.)

Antony and Cleopatra

The playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney ("The Brother/Sister Plays") has remixed Shakespeare's tragedy and set it in Hispaniola during the era of French colonialism. Cleopatra (Joaquina Kalukango) is now a dreadlocked island queen, and Antony (Jonathan Cake) an eighteenth-century conqueror in

epaulets, though Cake has the beefy contrapposto of a Roman statue. A reflecting pool and a Caribbean band complete the mood, perfect for the simmering erotic languor of the title duo. Still, they seem more like honeymooning lovers than one of history's great power couples, and as war breaks out, thanks to the Napoleonic Octavius Caesar (Samuel Collings), the performances feel underscaled. Cake's Antony has a goofy, hungover side, and Kalukango, while lovely, misses some of Cleopatra's diva grandeur (and its accompanying humor). (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Through March 23.)

Beauty and the Beast

Julie Atlas Muz and the disabled performer Mat Fraser perform an adult version of the fairy tale. Phelim McDermott directs. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101.)

A Doll's House

When Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play is done well, as it is here, in Carrie Cracknell's energetic, excellently cast production, we feel like we're watching a story told by a director who has the eye and the sensibility of an unusually intense and observant child—one who knows that convention is a bogeyman we are reluctant to cast off, because we dread freedom. Nora Helmer (Hattie Morahan) is Ibsen's multilayered, optimistic, and beautifully obdurate protagonist. She's living a double life, and the secrets she's been keeping to herself, and from her husband, Torvald (Dominic Rowan)—about her marriage, and the money she has borrowed—convey her more interesting truth. Fifteen minutes into the play, Morahan, largely through her exquisite voice and carriage (she sounds like a contralto and is as physically precise as a tango dancer), has already projected Nora's emotional reality—her hunger—and her act: the wife as little girl. (3/10/14) (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Through March 23.)

50 Shades! The Musical

How many writers does it take to screw up a parody of a bad best-selling soft-core porn novel? Six! (Plus two directors!) In Al Samuels, Emily Doreza, Amanda Blake Davis, Jody Shelton, Ashley Ward, and Dan Wessell's theatrical misstep based on E. L. James's novel, "Fifty Shades of Grey," a ditzy virgin (Amber Petty) falls in love with a sadist (Chris Grace), but finds herself in a quandary when he pushes her to sign a contract saying she'll agree to be "fisted"—apparently the only sex act outside her comfort zone (which includes being spanked with a Jedi light sabre). Rather than intelligently making fun of trashy pornography for housewives, this show uses the book as a stepping-off point to fur-

ther titillate a strangely whipped-up audience of middle-aged and elderly ladies who, one night, were so vocal that the lead actress, clearly annoyed, had to cue them to stop yelling during her numbers. (Elektra, 300 W. 43rd St. 866-811-4111.)

No Exit

In Jean-Paul Sartre's 1944 play, Sartre himself keeps us in the metaphorical dark about where the play is set or how its characters meet. Cradeau (Bradford Cover), Inez (Jolly Abraham), and Estelle (Sameerah Luqmaan-Harris) each enter the same elegant, well-lit room, surrounded by a transparent wall through which we can see a jumble of old chairs and other junk (is this Hell?). All the characters in "No Exit" are dead, though they don't talk about their deaths directly, not at first: giving words to the truth would mean facing it. Eventually, we learn their stories, in language that's alternately poetic and matter-of-fact. Sartre shows us something of Inez's "masculine" nature by having her resort, again and again, to hard-nosed rationality. The only time she loses it is when the third inmate, Estelle, enters the room and hijacks it with her neediness. "No Exit" is a play with a fantastic theme, but, as directed by Linda Ames Key (adapted from the French by Paul Bowles), it's not so fantastic to watch. (3/17/14) (Pearl, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-563-9261.)

The Pig; or, Václav Havel's Hunt for the Pig

In 2010, the Czech director Vladimír Morávek combined an article written by Václav Havel for an underground magazine—a shaggy-dog tale about the time the Czech writer couldn't find a pig for a pig roast he was hosting—with a well-known Czech operetta, "The Bartered Bride," and produced it with Havel's blessing at a theatre festival in Brno. Now, three years after Havel's death, Edward Einhorn, the artistic director of the Untitled Theatre Company #61, has translated and adapted Morávek's piece, adding his own dialogue, a few characters, and some video clips to make it more comprehensible to Americans. What Einhorn calls a "collage," though, feels thin, repetitious, and more than just a little juvenile: under the direction of Henry Akona, various stock Czech characters do the same jiggy dance over and over, while singing what seems like the same two songs—one happy-go-lucky, one mournful—about how fun or disappointing (depending on pork availability) Havel's pig party will be. (3LD Art & Technology Center, 80 Greenwich St. 212-352-3101.)

Republic

Hoi Polloi premières a play inspired by Plato's masterwork. Alec Duffy directs. (JACK, 505 ½ Waverly Ave., Brooklyn. jackny.org. Through March 22.)

OF NOTE HAND TO GOD

What kind of puppet would Jesus choose? A marionette? A Bunraku mannequin? Robert Askins's "Hand to God," remounted by MCC Theatre, won't say. But it does suggest that the devil has a penchant for sock puppets. Somewhere in Texas, the recently widowed Margery (Geneva Carr) leads a puppet workshop in a church basement. Of the "Christketeers," only her teen-age son, Jason (the exquisite Steven Boyer), shows any aptitude. Yet his creation, a wide-mouthed vulgarian named Tyrone, soon turns sinister. You could argue that Tyrone, obsessed with sex and scatology, is merely a manifestation of Jason's id—but then how can he smash light bulbs and slam doors from afar? Askins has reworked the play since its 2011 début (it's again directed by Moritz von Stuelpnagel), though he still hasn't solved the ending. When puppet exorcism and self-mutilation fail, few options remain. Happily, this version still boasts Boyer's jaw-dropping double act as shy adolescent and Satanic slip-on. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101.)

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THE ROOSEVELT NEW ORLEANS



WALDORF
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HOTELS & RESORTS



Joanne Greenbaum's exuberant untitled painting, at the Rachel Uffner gallery's new location on Suffolk Street.

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Museum of Modern Art

"Gauguin: Metamorphoses"

Where Paul Gauguin's paintings burst with life, his prints are startlingly death-soaked. This revelatory exhibition looks past the artist's seductive oils on canvas, concentrating on his anomic multiples—woodcuts, lithographs, monotypes, and, toward the end of his life, oil-transfer drawings—which rework his paintings for darker purposes. Already murky during his years in Brittany, his over-inked prints became near-blackouts in Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands; in several versions here of "Te Faruru (Here We Make Love)," an embracing couple is detailed so hazily that the composition becomes an abstract cloud, the lovers swallowed by night. In a major feat, the curator, Starr Figura, nabbed loans from fifty-six institutions and private collectors. The resulting show does nothing less than reinvent Gauguin as a gloomy, traumatized symbolist—the Munch of the South Seas. Through June 8.

Metropolitan Museum

"The Passions of Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux"

The academic sculptor of the Second Empire may be best known for "Ugolino and His Sons" (1860), his anguished portrayal of a scene from Dante's "Inferno," in which one of the damned gnaws at his fingers while his children beg him to eat them. In this exhibition, co-organized by the Musée d'Orsay, Carpeaux comes off less as a classicist than as a compulsively productive late Romantic, who infused his marble and bronze works with the emotion of his predecessors Delacroix and Géricault. (One of the figures of "Ugolino" quotes Géricault's "Raft of the Medusa," that other masterpiece of cannibalism, as seen here in a vigorous Carpeaux chalk study.) Alexandre Dumas, whose bust is on view, called Carpeaux's finished sculptures "more alive than life itself." He was right—but this show, which exhibits scruffy terracotta models and messy plaster experiments alongside polished final works, proves that such vitality

didn't come naturally. It was the result of endless, anxious work. Through May 26.

Whitney Museum

"2014 Whitney Biennial"

This exhibition will be remembered as the last at the noble Marcel Breuer building (next year, the museum relocates to the foot of the High Line). But most of the art in the show will likely be remembered only in a general way, as expressing a frazzled, peculiarly melancholy Zeitgeist. Presenting works by a hundred and three participants, the show was organized by three guest curators, each with his or her own floor. (That's a novelty, which suggests either praiseworthy openness or a wish to spread around the critical rancor that routinely befalls Whitney Biennials.) Start on the fourth floor, which is, by far, the most visually appealing—it's practically buoyant. Curated by the artist Michelle Grabner, it includes assertive works by mid-career female abstract painters and things whose chief reason for being is shameless splendor. Be warned that the other floors are not as viewer-friendly. The curators Stuart Comer and Anthony Elms thrill to the esoteric, in works by artists who virtuously resist the art world's prevailing values of commerce and spectacle. That sounds like a good thing, but the results can strain a person's patience. Through May 25.

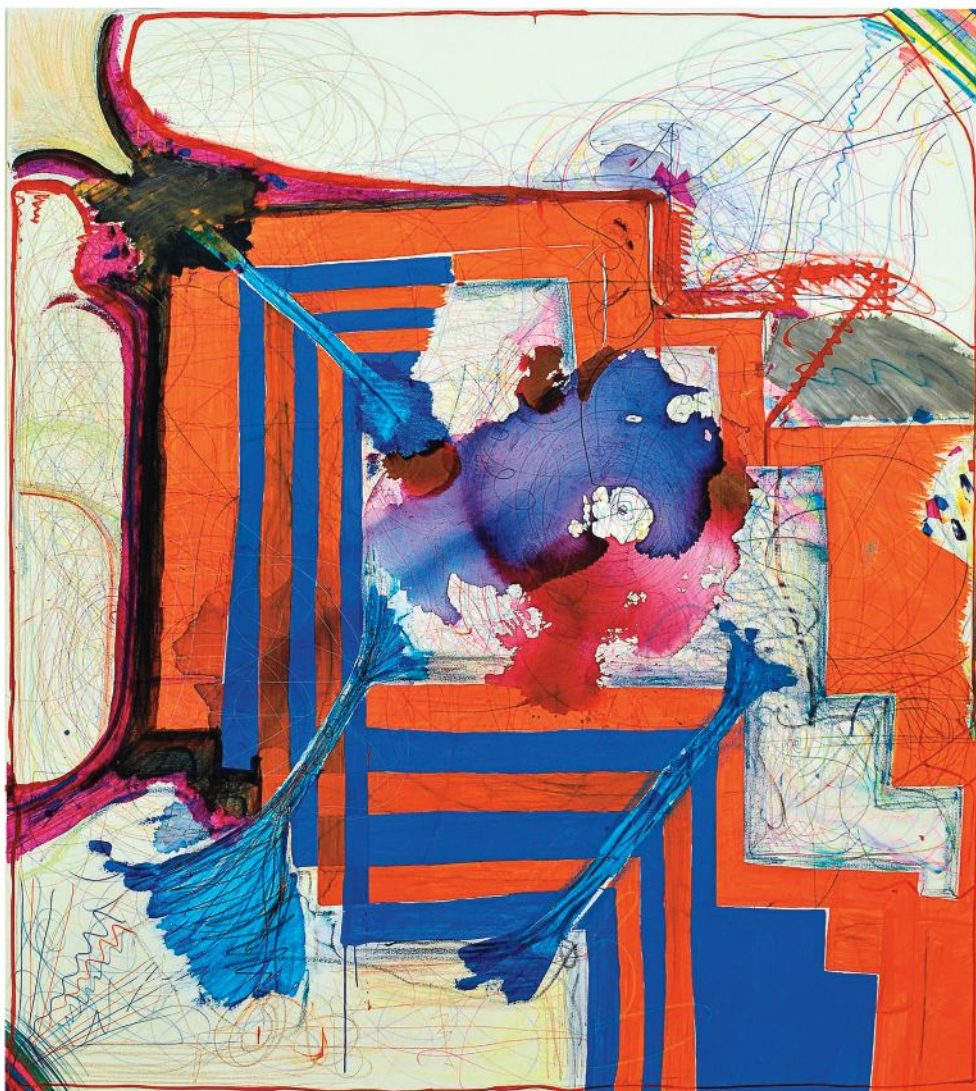
GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Matias Faldbakken

Faldbakken, a pacesetter of the flourishing Oslo art scene whose wrecked public library was a highlight of the 2013 "Documenta," looks surprisingly tame. An installation of ladders, jammed into the wooden rafters of the gallery's high ceiling and attached to concrete traffic barriers with straps, is pushed to one side of the space, as if to vex selfie-taking spectacle hunters. A newspaper printed by the artist extends the theme of withdrawal and frustration: many of its pages are blank. Through April 5. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)

Gauri Gill

The Indian photographer's black-and-white portraits of young girls, taken in a tent in a rural village in Rajasthan in 2003, were collaborative: the subjects chose their own props (paper hats, paper flowers, a camera) and fabric backdrops. In this casual setting, the girls strike self-consciously formal poses, staring directly at the camera, unsmiling. In a society in which female infanticide and bride-burning remain common practices, the determined presence of the girls is compelling—they look like rebel warriors or budding Furies.





BVLGARI

MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

"Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China." Through April 6.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"Robert Heineken: Object Matter." Through Sept. 7.

MOMA PSI

"Maria Lassnig." Through May 25.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

"Italian Futurism, 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe." Through Sept. 1.

WHITNEY MUSEUM

"American Legends: From Calder to O'Keeffe." Through Oct. 19.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

"Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties." Through July 6.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

"The Power of Poison." Through Aug. 10.

NEW MUSEUM

"Pawel Althamer: The Neighbors." Through April 20.

Through March 29. (Erben, 526 W. 26th St. 212-645-8701.)

Collier Schorr

From an artist who has often used images of men to explore ideas about femininity comes a knockout show of portraits of women. Schorr takes on the fluidity of gender and the complicated tug of desire in her pictures, some of which are recycled from her work as a fashion photographer. In one small self-portrait, her head appears in the clasped hands of another woman. Next to the image is the show's only man: a muscular nude whose face is made up with eyeliner and lipstick. This is Schorr's most provocative, most personal show and one of the strongest in New York right now. Through April 12. (303 Gallery, 507 W. 24th St. 212-255-1121.)

Kiki Smith

A hit-or-miss outing from a great artist. A stainless-steel model of ice crystals and an aluminum bird are overbearing, but several works

in stained glass and three arresting jacquard tapestries convey both the splendor and the strangeness of the natural world. The handblown glass panels depict felled trees and soaring eagles. The tapestries, woven in unsettling combinations of blue, pink, and gold, feature Smith's familiar cast of fauns and nude girls in their upper sections, but burst, in the lower reaches, into riotous, gripping abstraction. Through March 29. (Pace, 510 W. 25th St. 212-255-4044.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Amy Arbus

These photographs, which were taken on the streets of New York for the *Village Voice*, capture flamboyant figures of the downtown demimonde in the eighties. Madonna, Grace Jones, Ann Magnuson, John Sex, and other celebrities face serious competition from people with equally distinctive styles. Arbus (daughter of Diane) was particularly interested in subjects who blurred gender lines—men in heels, women in suits—and people

for whom dressing up was a kind of performance art. As sympathetic as it is sociological, her work is both a brilliant contribution to fashion history and a souvenir of the city at a creative peak. Through April 19. (Leica Gallery, 670 Broadway, at Bond St. 212-777-3051.)

Hans Schabus

Last year, the Austrian artist removed the glass doors of this Lower East Side gallery and exhibited them in its booth at an art fair. Apparently, the piece didn't sell, because here it is again, inside the gallery, along with the plywood-and-padlock construction that Schabus devised as a temporary façade and a drawing of the storefront at one-to-one scale. As institutional critique, it's hardly groundbreaking; in 1976, Michael Asher displaced the windows and doors of New York's Clocktower gallery. But the relay of the real entrance and its replacement does succeed as a palimpsest of a neighborhood in the midst of all too rapid change. Through April 20. (Preston, 301 Broome St. 212-431-1105.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

"Choice Eats"

According to a recent Op-Ed piece in the *New York Times*, alternative papers are under threat. The *Village Voice* is no exception—it's a shell of what it once was, and, as it struggles, it has come up with some clever ways to survive, including producing events. This one, in which restaurants it's covered bring their dishes to one location, is in its seventh year, and it is moving to a new venue, Basketball City, a sprawling space overlooking the East River, on Pier 36. More than eighty eateries are participating, and there will be demonstrations by Andres Fernandez, the executive chef of Morgan's Brooklyn Barbecue, and Allison Kave, the author of the cookbook "First Prize Pies," along with music from the indie-rockers D.I.V. (299 South St. villagevoice.com/choiceeats. March 25 at 7.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

On March 19, **Sotheby's** presents South Asian and Himalayan art, with contemporary pieces in the morning and Tibetan ritual objects (as well as eighteenth-century Indian miniatures) in the afternoon. The market in Indian modernist paintings grows in quality and volume every season; the current sale is led by a

dreamlike canvas, "Painting No. 3," by the Indian artist Vasudeo Gaitonde, from a 1962 series that documents his gradual turn toward abstraction (in painting) and meditation (in life). Many of the Himalayan works, like the small twelfth-century figurine of Bodhisattva Manjushri, from Tibet, depict characters in various stages of enlightenment. The final day of Asian sales, on March 20, is devoted to classical Chinese painting and calligraphy, ranging from the fourteenth century to the twentieth. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • A pantheon of gods and goddesses graces two of **Christie's** auctions this week, beginning with a selection of Indian and Southeast Asian art (March 19) that includes a fetching eleventh-century depiction of Rukmini, a Hindu queen who is also an avatar of Lakshmi, goddess of fortune; on the same day, a selection of Chinese paintings goes under the gavel. The next sale (March 20) features works from across Asia. Here, you'll encounter a cross-section of Buddhas: regal and serene in a twelfth-century Japanese bronze, lily white and enthroned in a sixteenth-century Nepalese painting, and surrounded by a flaming aureole in a sixth-century Gandharan sculpture. The house's star lot, however, is

a two-foot-tall Chinese bronze ritual vessel, circa the twelfth to the eleventh century B.C., whose surface teems with bas-reliefs of dragons, masks, cicadas, and birds. When this massive jug last

appeared at auction, in 2001, its sale set records. The week ends with two sessions of Chinese ceramics (March 20-21). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

READINGS AND TALKS

The PowerHouse Arena

Colman Andrews, a co-founder of *Saveur* magazine, talks about his memoir, "My Usual Table," with Ruth Reichl, the former editor of *Gourmet*. (37 Main St., at Water St., Brooklyn. 718-666-3049. March 24 at 7.)

"The Jesus Lizard Book"

On March 25 at 7, David Yow, David Wm. Sims, and Mac McNeilly, from the legendary indie-rock group of the nineties, visit the Barnes & Noble at Union Square (33 E. 17th St. 212-253-0810) to discuss their new book documenting the band's history with Sasha Frere-Jones, the pop-music critic for this magazine. The following night, the musicians make their way to Word, a bookstore in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, to chat with Johnny Temple, the publisher of Akashic Books and the bass player in the band Girls Against Boys. (126 Franklin St. 718-383-0096. March 26 at 7.)

The Bridge

This reading series dedicated to literary translation celebrates its third anniversary by bringing the translators Peter Bush, Mary Ann Newman, and Rowan Ricardo Phillips to McNally Jackson for a night of Catalan fiction. The series' curators, Sal Robinson and Bill Martin, are the hosts. (52 Prince St. 212-274-1160. March 25 at 7.)

"Live from the NYPL"

The curator Sarah Lewis discusses her new book, "The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure, and the Search for Mastery," with the actress and playwright Anna Deavere Smith and the psychologist Angela Lee Duckworth. (Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 212-930-0855. March 26 at 7.)

A full-body portrait of a middle-aged man with grey hair, smiling slightly. He is wearing a dark navy blue Moncler jacket over a light grey crewneck t-shirt. His hands are in his jacket pockets. He is wearing a dark watch on his left wrist. The background is a plain, light grey.

A GOODMAN FINISHES FIRST

Goodman's
MEN'S STORE
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ERIC GOODE / CONSERVATIONIST & ENTREPRENEUR / IN MONCLER



George Raft as an ex-convict on the prowl, in Fritz Lang's crime musical, "You and Me," from 1938.

THE SINGULARITIES

Unusual masterworks by great directors, at Anthology Film Archives.

FOR MAJOR DIRECTORS, there are no more typical productions. Darren Aronofsky follows a low-budget erotic thriller with a grand-scale Biblical epic; Wes Anderson makes a historical anti-Nazi fantasy as well as an animated adaptation of a children's classic. Every new movie is, by definition, eccentric, whereas in the studio era directors often found a niche and stuck (or were stuck) with it. Anthology Film Archives' series "Auteurs Gone Wild" (March 20-30) offers some of the exotic masterworks that arose when golden-age directors strayed from their usual fare to create some of their most distinguished works.

Fritz Lang, a refugee from Nazi Germany, is best known for the crime story "M" and the dystopian fantasy "Metropolis." "**You and Me**," a musical vision of working-class New York, from 1938, is his third American film. It features Kurt Weill's only feature-film score, and its authentically Brechtian spirit evokes Weimar-era Berlin, where the director and the composer won fame. The romantic yet

didactic drama stars two native New Yorkers, George Raft and Sylvia Sydney, as employees at a department store where the compassionate owner augments his staff with ex-convicts to help them gain parole. One of them, Joe Dennis (Raft), marries a gentle-hearted colleague, Helen Roberts (Sydney), who is harboring a secret that threatens to tear the couple apart.

The film opens with an avant-garde montage sequence set to a strident ballad warning the viewer, "You cannot get something for nothing"; in a reflexive touch, Lang's hectic parade of pricey goods includes a Hollywood movie camera. A downbeat waterfront fantasy inspired by a night-club torch song seems borrowed from "Mahagonny," and a rhythmic chant by gangsters in their lair elicits a sardonic, nostalgic view of prison camaraderie. Lang's fixation on the material side of modernity—the department store's behind-the-scenes workings, the price of staple foods, the rent on a bigger apartment—and its ties to the underworld builds to a brilliant monologue that strips the phrase "Crime doesn't

pay" of morality and frames it in to-the-dollar calculations.

Ernst Lubitsch, who left Berlin for Hollywood in the early twenties, took a break from frothy sex comedies in 1932 to make "**Broken Lullaby**," an agonized First World War drama. It stars Phillips Holmes as a French soldier and musician who kills a German soldier in trench warfare and, while rummaging through the victim's effects, learns that he was a musician as well. Tormented in peacetime by the killing, he finds his way to the slain soldier's family—and fiancée (Nancy Carroll)—in a small German town. Lubitsch's sly irony is on display in an early scene of officers commemorating the Armistice in a church where the aisles are lined with their swords, but the unresolved blend of love, regret, hatred, and guilt yields one of Hollywood's most desperate endings.

Josef von Sternberg, who made Marlene Dietrich a star in seven features in the nineteen-thirties, ended his career in 1953 with "**The Saga of Anatahan**," about Japanese sailors in the Second World War who survive a shipwreck on an isolated South Seas island. Sternberg created a spikily Expressionistic jungle in a Kyoto studio; when a woman turns out to be hiding on the island, the tale of physical endurance morphs into one of mad desire for sex and power. Von Sternberg casts off social graces to confront the destructive primal forces from which society and its dramas arise. These three masterworks are unavailable on DVD—perhaps because of their idiosyncrasy—which may also have deprived them of the canonical status that they merit.

—Richard Brody

NOW PLAYING

The Bowery

The director Raoul Walsh, born in 1887, infused this rowdy comedy with his memories of roughhouse New York of the Gay Nineties and inflated it with legends of earlier times. The stout, glad-handing Chuck Connors (Wallace Beery) runs the street's gaudiest saloon but is outsmarted at every turn by the slim, suave gambler Steve Brodie (George Raft), who steals Connors's thunder with the ultimate P.R. stunt—jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge. The race between their rival volunteer fire brigades to a Mott Street conflagration instantly becomes an epic battle royal. The sentimental side involves a refined young woman (Fay Wray) who stumbles onto the road to perdition, and a ragamuffin (Jackie Cooper) whom Connors takes in and calls his own. But the casual and constant violence, the drunkenness and gambling, the punished, unkempt bodies, and the mercurial swings between gutter and glory make Walsh's raw, raunchy film the authentic "Gangs of New York." He caught the chewy, gimcrack accents, the grotesquely atavistic manners—and the ugly, unquestioned racism, which is repellently prominent from the film's first shot onward. Released in 1933.—*Richard Brody* (BAM Cinémathèque; March 25.)

Edward, My Son

One of the director George Cukor's greatest, strangest, and darkest movies, released in 1949, tells the story of a business empire built on secrets and lies. Spencer Tracy gives one of his fullest and hardest performances as Arnold Boulton, a Canadian in London who torches his failing furniture shop in order to pay for his young son's operation. The movie begins and ends with Boulton staring into the camera and delivering a monologue—this effectively turns him into a public figure who reveals the intimate drama of his rise and fall. His troubled relationship with his wife, Evelyn (Deborah Kerr), is centered on problems with the boy of the title, who, in a brilliant directorial stroke, is never seen, but is both a source of conflict and its victim. The family's greatest anguish isn't in the shock of revelations but, rather, in the burden of concealment. The movie silently shrieks under the pressure of constant, hectic fear.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; March 21 and March 23.)

Enemy

A brief and perplexing fable, starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Jake Gyllenhaal. He plays two bearded men, both living in Toronto, who find themselves to be identical, down to their handwriting and scars. In other hands, such uncanny doubling could have—and often has had—a funny side, but the director, Denis Villeneuve, who made

the even glummer "Prisoners," is in no mood to amuse. The light is low and scummy, the buildings unfriendly and hard, and neither man can decide how to treat his opposite number: seek, evade, or destroy? And what about the fact that one of them first saw the other in a movie: does that enthralling coincidence not merit further investigation? (After all, we are watching a film ourselves.) Gyllenhaal does a careful job of distinguishing the two heroes, one more aggressive, the other shy; their respective partners are played by Mélanie Laurent and Sarah Gadon (who has done strong work for David Cronenberg), though both female roles seem perilously thin. The movie sticks to you, however, and the ending is strange and sudden enough to make you revise, or interrogate, all that has come before. Based on a novel by José Saramago.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 3/17/14.) (In limited release.)

The Grand Budapest Hotel

In Wes Anderson's new movie, the past becomes visible in stages, as if seen through the wrong end of a telescope that gets repeatedly extended. The movie is a kind of pastry-chef fantasia, set in a fictional country in some hapless corner of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. The chief character is the hotel concierge Gustave H., played by Ralph Fiennes as a man of intricate sexual tastes—he's homosexual but sleeps with elderly bejeweled ladies staying at the hotel. The opéra-bouffe plot serves as a strand of bright golden wire on which Anderson hangs innumerable encounters, scampering chases, and an archly decorative style of commentary. The director likes to cozy his visual imagination; he devotes himself to the rectangular hotel lobby, and to closets, prison cells, cable cars, train compartments, and their adjoining windows and doorways. He handsomely boxes himself in, perhaps as a way of avoiding the coarse physical vitality that has been central to so many great movies. With Jude Law, F. Murray Abraham, Tilda Swinton, Tony Revolori, and, in the movie's best bit, Bill Murray, Bob Balaban, and other savory actors as masterful Old World concierges making haughty demands into ornate telephones.—*David Denby* (3/10/14) (In limited release.)

It Felt Like Love

Eliza Hittman's first feature brings bracing insight and intimacy to the story of a teen-ager's sexual awakening, aided by the nuanced, yearning performance of Gina Piersanti, as Lila, a nerdy Brooklyn high-school student. Lila spends the summer hanging out at Coney Island and other nearby playlands with her much cooler best friend, Chiara (Giovanna Salimeni), whose boyfriend, Patrick (Jesse Cordasco), is always around.

Tantalized by the seeming ubiquity of sex, the virginal Lila seeks to narrow the experience gap, passing from fantasy to the fumbling pursuit of Sammy (Ronen Rubinstein), a swaggering college student who toys with her. With a sure sense of place, Hittman moves the action from sidewalks and subways to marshlands suggestive of idylls and mysteries, and lightly sketches Lila's complex bonds with her widowed father (Kevin Anthony Ryan) and the boy next door (Casey Prime). Keeping the camera daringly near her actors' bare skin and depicting the confident caste of people at ease with their bodies, the director portrays her protagonist as a permanent outsider. Lila's intelligence and sensibility make her crushingly aware of her predicament—she's condemned by physical and social awkwardness to pleasure mixed with humiliation and desire crossed with aversion.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

The Lego Movie

As a rule, movies about toys need to be approached with extreme caution; some of them have been bad enough to count as health hazards. This one is the exception. Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, who made "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs," have delivered another essay in controlled madness, bombarding you with far more candy-colored detail than you can process—though, by some miracle, not too much to stomach. In short, pop culture eats itself. Everything you see, until the closing scenes, is Lego: people, landscapes, and products. Even fiery bolts of laser beam are orange plastic rods. You could try to resist or lament this marketing frenzy, but the movie is way, way ahead of you, landing joke after joke about the shiny pretensions of the Lego world. Our hero is a construction worker who stumbles on a magic brick that will reveal some higher truth, though the film takes ruthless comic pains to knock down the pomposity that usually attends—and spoils—the genre. ("Transformers," we're looking at you.) With the voices of Chris Pratt, Will Ferrell, Elizabeth Banks, and, in a spoof of his divine status, Morgan Freeman.—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

The Lunchbox

This gentle romantic drama, by the Indian director Ritesh Batra, packs twenty minutes of action into its hour-and-three-quarters running time. The story involves Ila (Nimrat Kaur), a neglected young housewife and mother in Mumbai, who begins an epistolary affair with Saajan (Irrfan Khan), a widowed older accountant, when a messenger mistakenly delivers to him the lunches that she has lovingly prepared for her husband. Saajan, on the verge of retirement, is saddled with the training of his eager successor, Ahmed Shaikh (Nawa-

OPENING

IT FELT LIKE LOVE

Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening March 21. (In limited release.)

THE MISSING PICTURE

Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening March 21. (In limited release.)

NYMPHOMANIAC: VOLUME I

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 21. (In limited release.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles in bold are reviewed.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

"Auteurs Gone Wild." March 20 at 9: "You and Me" (1938, Fritz Lang). • March 21 at 9 and March 23 at 4:15: "**Edward, My Son.**" • March 22 at 4:45 and March 23 at 8:30: "**A Woman of Paris.**" • March 23 at 6:45: "Broken Lullaby" (1932, Ernst Lubitsch). • March 24 at 9: "The Saga of Anatahan" (1953, Josef von Sternberg).

BAM CINÉMATEK

"Under the Influence." March 23 at 2, 5:30, and 9: "Casino" (1995, Martin Scorsese). • March 24 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Roaring Twenties" (1939, Raoul Walsh). • March 25 at 7 and 9:15: "**The Bowery.**"

FILM FORUM

The films of Alfred Hitchcock. March 20 at 1, 4, and 9: "**Marnie.**" • March 21 at 1:15, 3:30, and 8:15: "Shadow of a Doubt" (1942). • March 22 at 1, 5:30, and 10:05: "Psycho" (1960). • March 22 at 3:10 and 7:45: "The Birds" (1963). • March 23 at 5:10 and 9:50 and March 24 at 3 and 9:45: "Spellbound" (1945).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

"New Directors/New Films." March 21 at 9: "Dear White People" (2014, Justin Simien). • March 22 at 1:30: "The Vanquishing of the Witch Baba Yaga" (2013, Jessica Oreck). • March 22 at 3:45: "We Come as Friends" (2014, Hubert Sauper). • March 23 at 6:15: "Buzzard" (2014, Joel Potrykus) and "**Person to Person.**"

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

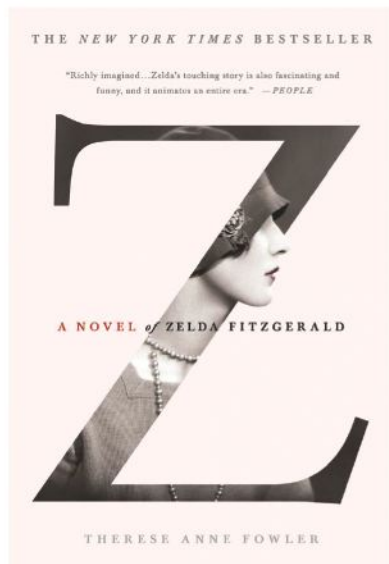
"New Directors/New Films." March 19 at 7 and 8: "A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night" (2014, Ana Lily Amirpour). • March 24 at 8:30: "Buzzard" (2014, Joel Potrykus) and "**Person to Person.**" • March 23 at 6: "Dear White People" (2014, Justin Simien). • March 25 at 9: "The Strange Little Cat" (2013, Ramon Zürcher).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

The films of Darren Aronofsky. March 21 at 7: "Requiem for a Dream" (2000). • March 22 at 4:30: "Pi" (1998). • March 22 at 7: "The Fountain" (2006). • March 23 at 4: "The Wrestler" (2008). • March 23 at 7: "Black Swan" (2010).

BOOKMARKS

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zuddin Siddiqui), who, in turn, tries to coax the grieving, weary introvert out of his shell. Batra's poised, observational direction gets much mileage from his actors' soulful gazes, shading the sentimental mist with unspoken misery. Yet his loving attention to local customs—starting in Ila's kitchen, including the very lunch-delivery network on which the story runs, involving Saajan's white-collar workplace, and extending to the particulars of public transportation that bind the city together—serves mainly as an ornamental backdrop for a slight, undeveloped anecdote. In Hindi and English.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Marnie

Tippi Hedren's cool grace in "The Birds" hardly prepares a viewer for her porcelain froideur as a sexually traumatized kleptomaniac in Alfred Hitchcock's psychologically resonant, visually transcendent film, from 1964. Sean Connery co-stars as a businessman who hires Marnie as his secretary, lusts mightily after her, and, catching her with a hand in his till, takes it upon himself to win her heart—and, above all, her body—by healing her mind. Borrowing liberally from himself (notably, several tropes from "Spellbound," "Vertigo," and "Psycho"), Hitchcock gives his obsessions luridly free rein—intentionally and not. He was, in fact, obsessed with Hedren, whose rejections he repaid with harsh treatment, and it shows in his images: few films have looked as longingly and as relentlessly at a woman, few onscreen gazes at an actress have so perfectly crystallized an integral and unique style of performance, and few performances have so precisely defined a director's world view, even unto the vanishing point. He could, and did, go no further.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; March 20.)

The Missing Picture

Working with clay figurines posed in diorama-like landscapes, the director Rithy Panh bears witness to the Khmer Rouge's destruction of Cambodian society in the nineteen-seventies, which he lived through as an adolescent. When the capital, Phnom Penh, was completely emptied in 1975—except for officials who turned a high school into a torture center—Panh and his family were among the deportees shipped in cattle cars to labor camps (his brother, a rock musician, was immediately executed). With meticulous direction that seems to bring the film's little dolls to life, he tells the story of his parents' death and recounts the dehumanizing horrors that he, among other survivors, endured. Panh conjures his childhood by superimposing the colorful figurines onto black-and-white archival footage of the city in earlier, thriving times; he analyzes propaganda footage put out by the Khmer Rouge to reveal depravities lurking beneath the guise of progress and revolution. With a tribute to Ang Sarun, a cameraman who paid for his images with his life, and bitter recollections of China's support for the regime and Western receptivity to its slogans, Panh honors the Khmer Rouge's victims while staging the agony and responsibility of memory itself. In French.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Non-Stop

Liam Neeson, as an alcoholic air marshal who must defend a packed flight against a terrorist, is even grimmer and angrier than he was in "Unknown," his previous collaboration with the Spanish-born director Jaume Collet-Serra. Essentially, you've seen this bomb-on-a-plane movie before, but Neeson, who brings enormous conviction to these late-career action roles, moves his big body through confined spaces (virtually

the entire movie takes place in the airplane) with so much power that you expect him to rip out the seats.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

Omar

Omar (Adam Bakri) is a young Palestinian living in the West Bank, under trying conditions. In order to merely visit his friends Tarek (Iyad Hoorani) and Amjad (Samer Bisharat), not to mention the beautiful Nadia (Leem Lubany), with whom he is furtively in love, he must scale the concrete security barrier that cuts through his community. A plan is hatched to attack Israeli soldiers; Omar is apprehended, tortured, turned, and sent back among his comrades. From here on, up to the final moments, the movie is snared in secrets and divided loyalties, and the point of the action sequences—in which Omar hustles and leaps through local houses and alleys, chased by the law—is not just to thrill but to offer a burst of release, away from the tangles and traps of fate. The director, Hany Abu-Assad, is Palestinian, and there is no doubt where his political sympathies lie; yet his finest coup, in a fraught film, is to grant dramatic space and substance to the enemy—an Israeli intelligence agent who becomes Omar's handler, and who is played by Waleed Zuaiter with fierce purpose plus a dangerous touch of playfulness. In Arabic and Hebrew.—*A.L.* (3/3/14) (In limited release.)

Person to Person

With its shrewd structure, observational poise, and snappy performances, this short film by Dustin Guy Defa lends a Chekhovian depth of mood to Brooklyn street life. Bene Cooperson stars as a version of himself, a real local character, a clerk-cum-therapist in a grungy record store who tells a group of friends and customers an odd tale (shown in flashbacks). The morning after a party in his small apartment, Bene finds an unnamed woman (Deragh Campbell) passed out on his living-room floor—and when she comes to, she doesn't want to leave. He buys her an egg sandwich, puts on a record, and urges her out by means of a colorful music-world story, but the woman won't budge. Meanwhile, in his comings and goings, he maintains a running commentary with neighbors on the stoop—and then the action cuts ahead to the store for another level of atmospheric chat. Defa's eye is imaginatively curious—the woman, on Bene's fire escape, gets a point-of-view shot, of treetops and wires, that evokes volumes in a glance—and as the light fades and the workday runs out, he seems to capture something vital and ironic about time itself.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center, March 23; MOMA, March 24.)

Teenage

A delightful and substantial provocation, and something of a cheat. The director Matt Wolf's documentary tells the story of the invention and the self-assertion of the adolescent with a diverse assemblage of historical footage and incisive attention to detail. The voice-over focusses on the impact of such political events as the two World Wars and the Depression, but depoliticizes them to come up with strange sets of parallels—such as the Hitler Youth and the Civilian Conservation Corps. The apparently archival images that fill the screen from beginning to end are piquant and nuanced, but the end credits reveal Wolf's reliance on some dramatic re-creations of old times, which are "aged" to render them indistinguishable from the truly archival. It's a disappointment; the cannily chosen (or, as it turns out, staged) scenes have a time-capsule aura that invites home-video contemplation through slow

motion and freeze-frames. Such analytical devices might unmask the trickery. If ever a feature film needed truth in labelling, not in the fine print but in real time onscreen, this is it. Based on a book by Jon Savage; with Alden Ehrenreich, Malik Peters, and the voices of Ben Whishaw and Jena Malone.—R.B. (In limited release.)

Le Week-End

In Roger Michell's new film, written by Hanif Kureishi, a middle-aged British couple (Jim Broadbent and Lindsay Duncan), married for thirty years, take the train to Paris, determined to have a good time and resigned to the fact that, in all probability, they won't. They seem riven with bickering, and yet, at the same time, the sheer habit of argument serves to bind them together. Pleasure is grabbed on the go, in glimpses of the city and in helpings of food and wine; no less intermittent, but more awkward, is the movie's farcical strain, which twice finds husband and wife running out without paying the check. It's easy to tire (if not despair) of them, but both lead actors are in fine sparring form, and the story is rescued and revived, just in time, by a delectable cameo from Jeff Goldblum. He plays an American in Paris—hopelessly pleased with himself, and eternally foolish, yet very hard to dislike. He could almost use a movie of his own.—A.L. (3/17/14) (In limited release.)

The Wind Rises

Hayao Miyazaki's masterly animated bio-pic of Jiro Horikoshi, Japan's great airplane engineer of the nineteen-thirties, feels intensely realistic. Using pastel colors and sharply outlined figures, Miyazaki creates as detailed an impression of prewar Japan as conventionally photographed live-action movies do. Much of the textural and aural actuality of this world touches him. The sound of tobacco and paper burning while someone takes a long drag on a cigarette is given the same emotional weight as, say, the view of the Japanese countryside from the air. Miyazaki's hero, Horikoshi, eventually created the forerunner of the Mitsubishi A6M, or Zero, the fighter-bomber that was used to subdue China and assault Pearl Harbor, and the movie is suffused with a melancholy sense of doom. What begins as an aesthetic passion—the design of a beautiful new airplane—ends in tragedy. With the voices of Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Emily Blunt, and Werner Herzog.—D.D. (3/10/14) (In wide release.)

A Woman of Paris

The title of Charlie Chaplin's 1923 drama, in which he does not appear, is a slight misnomer. Though the story concerns a young French woman cast adrift in the capital, its underlying theme of the corrupting influence of sumptuous displays and frivolous pleasures mirrors the Hollywood of the first-generation moguls, where Chaplin was king. The innocent Marie St. Clair (Edna Purviance), who has a misunderstanding with her artist fiancé Jean Millet (Carl Miller), ends up in Paris as the mistress of Pierre Revel (Adolphe Menjou), the richest roué in town. Though she lives and entertains in style, she's knocked off course by a chance reunion with Jean, in a stunning moment of recognition foreshadowing the romantic climax of Chaplin's "City Lights." The director's manner is deft and witty, but his depiction of unchecked wealth and the moral rot it breeds (as seen in the carefree stripping of one reveller by another at exactly the kind of riotous house party that Chaplin must have known by the dozens) links this drawing-room romance to the fierce political comedies in which he stars. Silent.—R.B. (Anthology Film Archives; March 22-23.)

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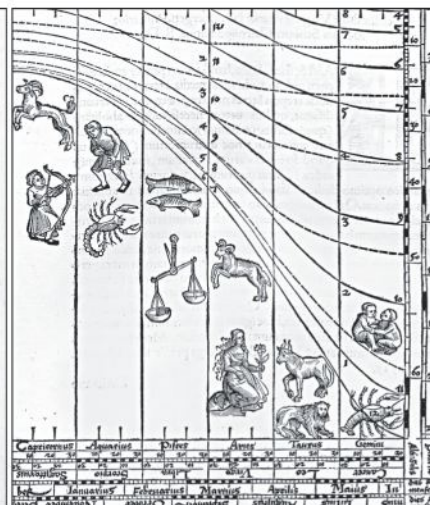
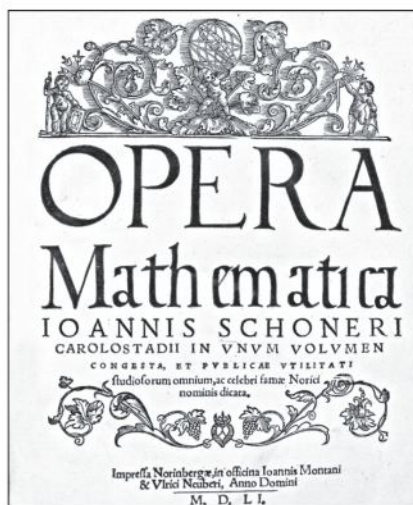
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The Peridance Contemporary Dance Company presents “El Amor Brujo” at the Salvatore Capezio Theatre, March 22-23.



DANCE



COUNTRY STRONG

Manuel de Falla and the struggle to define Spanish dance.

“EL AMOR BRUJO” (“Love, the Magician,” from 1915), a flamenco music drama that will be shown in three performances at Peridance this weekend, was composed by the refined Spaniard Manuel de Falla, but it was meant to coruscate with Gypsy passion. Here is a snatch of the lyrics:

Only Hell’s fire burns hotter
than all my blood . . .
Suffering condemns me!
Love poisons me!
Sorrow kills me!
Ay! Ay!

These days, nationalism is a suspect emotion. People have not forgotten the Second World War. But in the nineteenth century—and even up to the nineteen-thirties—love of homeland was one of the most powerful sources of European art, above all of the music. As Western Europe became increasingly consolidated, with different countries drawing close to each other under the banners of industrialism and democracy, people became more self-aware about what their nationality was, and how it measured up to others’. This process was more contentious in countries that were farther from Europe’s cultural capitals, and therefore more likely to be seen, and to see themselves, as backward. The most famous example is Russia, but Spain had similar problems. Some Spanish artists tried to imitate European styles, or at least to make some money on their country’s sexy barbarism, but many Spanish intellectuals regarded

such concessions with disgust and argued that their folk traditions should be closely guarded. Federico García Lorca, for example, believed that the gutty “deep song” of the Spanish Gypsies was an Iberian racial property. Now it was being adapted for middle-class consumption in cafés. Or, in his rather hysterical words, it was being stained by “the professional pimp.”

By the standards of the hard-line nationalists, however, a lot of good artists had taken to pimping—in other words, absorbing influences from beyond their national boundaries. That included Falla, who spent his late years creating what he hoped was a universalized version of Spanish music. He thus ran afoul of the watchful nationalists many times. They thought he was too cosmopolitan—Frenchie.

The version of “El Amor Brujo” at Peridance—a collaboration between PostClassical Productions and Peridance Contemporary Dance Company—will have a small orchestra, as in the première, in 1915. The original flamenco dances, like almost all improvised dances of the past, are lost, and the new choreography, by Igal Perry, is only flamenco-flavored. (If you want to see some serious flamenco dancing to this score, rent Carlos Saura’s film “El Amor Brujo.” It stars Cristina Hoyos, a tremendous virtuoso. There’s also an excellent knife fight.) The songs, which for decades have been performed by an operatic mezzo-soprano, will be sung by a celebrated flamenco *cantaora*, Rocío Bazán. Lorca would approve.

—Joan Acocella

Martha Graham Dance Company

The resurgent company presents its first City Center season since 2005, with three programs to choose from. The gala (March 19) emphasizes Graham's focus on Greek mythology, and includes a new work by the Greek choreographer Andonis Foniadakis, based on the story of Echo. Foniadakis, relatively unknown in the U.S., is having a moment here—the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève performs his "Glory" later in the week. The gala also features excerpts from the company's new version of Graham's "Clytemnestra" (1958). This one-act précis—likely to rub Graham purists the wrong way—anchors Program A, with the blond, hieratic Katherine Crocket dancing the role of the murderous queen. The program also includes Graham's final work, "Maple Leaf Rag," from 1990. The highlight of Program B is "Appalachian Spring" (1944), from Graham's most fertile period, set to the ravishing and familiar score by Aaron Copland. Abdiel Jacobsen (March 20) and Lloyd Mayor (March 22), who alternate in the role of the hopeful frontiersman, represent a promising new generation that's bringing fresh life to the company. Program B also includes "Depak Ine," a new commission from the peripatetic contemporary choreographer Nacho Duato. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Gala, March 19 at 7: "Echo," excerpts from "Clytemnestra," and "Panorama." • Program A, March 21 at 8: "Echo," one-act "Clytemnestra," and "Maple Leaf Rag." • Program B, March 20 and March 22 at 8: "Depak Ine," "Appalachian Spring," and "The Rite of Spring.")

Alonzo King LINES Ballet / "Constellation"

The San Francisco-based company returns to New York with an evening-length work whose choreography, visual design, and music are based on astronomy. "Constellation" includes vocal music by Handel, Vivaldi, and Strauss, sung onstage by the mezzo-soprano Maya Lahyani to recorded accompaniment, as well as excerpts from works by Arvo Pärt, the Japanese neo-traditionalist Somei Satoh, and others. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 19 at 7:30, March 20-21 at 8, March 22 at 2 and 8, and March 23 at 2.)

Rubberbandance Group

For the past ten years, the trademark of the Montreal-based choreographer Victor Quijada has been a blend of urban and contemporary, break dancing and ballet. "Empirical Quotient," the first full-length work his company has presented in New York, uses that elastic technique to stage entanglements, physical and emotional, among six dancers. (Michael Schimmel Center for the Arts, Pace University, 3 Spruce St. 866-811-4111. March 20-22 at 7:30.)

Rocío Molina / "Afectos"

Molina is one of the most intriguing new figures in flamenco—and an exceptional dancer with a small, pliant frame, muscular arms, rapid-fire feet, and a mask-like face. "Afectos"—part of the citywide Flamenco Festival—is an intimate, shifting conversation between three artists: Molina, the singer Rosario (La Tremendita) Guerrero, and the double bassist Pablo Martín. Molina's style is unique: she dances barefoot, twists and tilts, whispers secrets to her collaborators, and moves in Graham-like contractions. Whether what she does is strictly flamenco is in the eye of the beholder, but her imagination and intensity are never in doubt. (Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. 866-811-4111. March 20-22 at 8.)

Lance Gries

In recent years, the former Trisha Brown dancer has specialized in exquisitely precise solos and duets. For "If Immanent Field," he expands the cast, surrounding himself with three dancers of high subtlety: Jimena Paz, Juliette Mapp, and Diane Madden. The title refers to the energy shared by performers, an often intangible connection that these dancers make vivid. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. March 20-22 at 8.)

Juilliard Dances Repertory

The impeccably trained dancers of Juilliard perform a strong program that includes one of Twyla Tharp's most appealing works, "Baker's Dozen." This jazz-era ballroom fantasy, by turns playful and grandiloquent, is set to the jazzy piano tunes of Willie (the Lion) Smith, played here by Christopher Ziemba. The program also includes Lar Lubovitch's lyrical "Concerto Six Twenty-Two," set to Mozart's heart-catching clarinet concerto. The work is famous for its tender duet for two men, an anomaly in 1986, when the dance was made. The Juilliard Orchestra plays the concerto. The closing piece, "The Jig Is Up," is a jokey riff on Scottish folk dances by Eliot Feld. (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. 212-721-6500. March 21-22 and March 24-25 at 8 and March 23 at 3.)

David Dorfman Dance

To close out the 92nd Street Y's Harkness Dance Festival, Dorfman repeats the program he brought to its stage ten years ago. Fortunately, "Lightbulb Theory" and "Impending Joy" are two of his best works, addressing life and death and freedom and attachment without getting too tripped up in sentimentality. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 21-22 at 8 and March 23 at 3.)

"Works & Process" / "Bach Interpreted"

This behind-the-scenes series often brings together two choreographers

to create dances set to the same piece of music. Here, a single choreographer, Emery LeCrone, presents two contrasting readings of Bach's Second Piano Partita (played live by the excellent Vassily Primakov), a composition that draws on Baroque dance forms like the courante and the sarabande. One version, danced by members of New York City Ballet including Teresa Reichlen, is more classical, and uses pointe work; the second, performed by a cast of freelance dancers, moves beyond the strictures of classical form. The Sunday performance will be live-streamed on guggenheim.org/live. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. March 23 at 3 and 7:30 and March 24 at 7:30.)

Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève / "Glory"

It's a big week for the Greek choreographer Andonis Foniadakis in New York. The Martha Graham company (see above) is presenting his new work, and the Swiss ballet troupe, a regular visitor, is bringing his 2012 evening-length piece, "Glory," to the Joyce. Stylistic similarities between this work and the one for the Graham dancers abound, particularly the thrashing limbs and hyperkinetic—one could say manic—activity that sends the dancers hurtling through space like supercharged particles. This company, however, brings a greater focus on line to the choreography, which is set to an assortment of Handel's vocal and orchestral pieces, including the familiar "Hallelujah" Chorus. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 25 at 7:30. Through March 30.)

OF NOTE

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY

The second week of the sixtieth-anniversary season offers more chances to catch the new pieces: the pastoral "American Dreamer," set to Stephen Foster songs, and the speedy "Marathon Cadenzas," set to Raymond Scott recordings. "Fibers," a rarity, is an abstraction from 1961. But the big event comes on March 23, when forty company alumni join the current troupe for "From Sea to Shining Sea," a wicked satire of Americana. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. March 19-20 and 25 at 7, March 21 at 8, March 22 at 2 and 8, and March 23 at 2 and 6. Through March 30.)

BETH GILL

Gill's 2011 "Electric Midwife" was a breakthrough—a construction of kaleidoscopic symmetry that crystallized many years of formal experimentation and gained the choreographer a new level of renown. She's taken her time, and the much anticipated follow-up is now here. "New Work for the Desert" promises to be saturated with the shifting colors of the American Southwest and the influence of Trisha Brown. Dry beauty is something Gill understands. (New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. March 19-22 at 7:30.)



FRONT ROW

Richard Brody discusses atypical films by Hollywood studio directors.



CULTURE DESK

On our Web site, Leon Neyfakh profiles Lord Jamar, the obscure rapper who has emerged as the genre's leading reactionary, decrying hip-hop as too feminine, gay-friendly, and white. Plus, Sasha Frere-Jones listens to ForGOTIFY, the Web site that serves up tracks that have never been played before on the streaming-music service Spotify.

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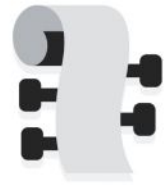


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CLASSICAL MUSIC



OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

When Thomas Hampson, recently laid up with bronchitis, finally joins the cast of **"Wozzeck,"** he will find that the show is in good hands. For Deborah Voigt, the role of Marie could be the gateway to a promising late career: she trumpets the high notes with authority, and her dramatic gifts are sufficient to communicate the character's fractured feelings of sympathy, desperation, and bravado. Clive Bayley and Peter Hoare, as the Doctor and the Captain, offer sharply etched portraits of evil, and the house regulars Tamara Mumford, Russell Thomas, and Richard Bernstein shine in smaller roles. James Levine's love for Berg's craggy chords and yearning melodies remains undimmed, and the orchestra responds in kind. (March 22 at 1. This is the final performance.) • **Also playing:** Will the Zeffirelli production of **"La Bohème"** run forever? The laws of physics are unlikely to allow it, but, for now, this ultimate crowd-pleaser is a useful way for the Met to bring fine young artists to the public. Vittorio Grigolo, who recently gave a winning solo recital at the house, anchors the cast as Rodolfo; joining him are two débutantes, Anita Hartig and Jennifer Rowley, along with Massimo Cavalletti, in his first Met performances as Marcello; Stefano Ranzani conducts. (March 19 and March 22 at 8.) • The final performance of **"The Enchanted Island,"** a charming Baroque pasticcio by Jeremy Sams that uses music by Handel, Vivaldi, and Rameau to decorate a plot that borrows elements from "The Tempest" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The star-strewn cast features Danielle de Niese, Susan Graham, Andriana Chuchman, David Daniels, Luca Pisaroni, Anthony Roth Costanzo, and Plácido Domingo; Patrick Summers. (March 20 at 8.) • Mary Zimmerman's recent production of Bellini's **"La Sonnambula,"** set in a contemporary opera company that is rehearsing the work, created dramatic inconsistencies that irked a big portion of the Met audience. But the staging remains a welcome attempt to freshen up a piece that has one of the most absurd plots in all of bel canto. It would be pointless to offer this lyrically seductive score without a major singer in the title role (the sleepwalker, Amina), and the Met has Diana Damrau to meet the challenge. She is joined by the up-and-coming tenor Javier Camarena and the fine bass Michele Pertusi; Marco Armiliato conducts. (March 21 and March 25 at 7:30.) • In 1970 alone, the title role in **"Andrea Chénier,"** one of the great verismo warhorses, was taken up at the Met by Richard Tucker, Carlo Bergonzi, and a young Plácido Domingo. Now Marcelo Álvarez is set to portray the French Revolution firebrand, joined by three more Met veterans, Patricia Racette, Željko Lučić, and the estimable conductor Gianandrea Noseda. (March 24 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

The engaging pianist Jeffrey Kahane's conduct-and-perform act, not without charm, has been a

going concern for many years now. An intriguing rarity, Kurt Weill's Symphony No. 2, is at the center of his upcoming program with his old friends at the Phil; it is preceded by Ravel's Concerto in G Major and followed by Gershwin's Concerto in F, both of which he'll lead from the keyboard. (The Saturday-matinée program substitutes a chamber performance of Debussy's String Quartet for the Weill, followed by the two concertos.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. March 20 and March 25 at 7:30, March 21 at 8, and March 22 at 2 and 8.)

Symphonie des Dragons

The wind bands of ancien-régime Versailles must have made a brilliant, braying sound. The oboist Gonzalo X. Ruiz, one of the superb period-performance experts brought in by Juilliard in recent years, leads a concert at the Americas Society that surveys the military and ceremonial music of the French Baroque. (680 Park Ave. as-coa.org. March 19 at 7.)

Israel Philharmonic Orchestra

Zubin Mehta, in town to conduct the Vienna Philharmonic, remains to lead this august group, of which he is music director for life. The violinist Pinchas Zukerman and his wife, the cellist Amanda Forsyth, are the soloists in Brahms's Double Concerto; the concert begins with the Concertino for String Orchestra by Odeon Partos (the orchestra's principal violist from 1938 to 1956) and ends with Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 20 at 7.)

Australian Chamber Orchestra

Richard Tognetti's group has long been known for edgy programming. The violinist brings a chamber-sized contingent to (Le) Poisson Rouge, for an acoustic and electric set with a repertory that ranges from Bach and Stravinsky to Nirvana and Nine Inch Nails. (158 Bleecker St. lprnyc.com. March 20 at 7:30.)

RECITALS

Ecstatic Music Festival

The young pianist and rising postminimalist composer Timo Andres joins his multi-instrumentalist composer friends Gabriel Kahane, Ted Hearne, Becca Stevens, and Nathan Koci (some of whom sing, too) in the première of his song cycle "Work Songs," then sits in with them as they perform music of their own. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. March 19 at 7:30.)

Leif Ove Andsnes

Carnegie Hall's Vienna festival is over, but that city's composers continue their domination of the repertory. One can hardly blame the commanding pianist for indulging in an all-Beethoven program; this one traces the course of the composer's career, including the Sonatas in B-Flat Major, Op. 22, in F Minor, Op. 57 ("Appassionata"), and in A Major, Op. 101. (212-247-7800. March 19 at 8.)

**Curtis 20/21 Ensemble:
Krzysztof Penderecki**

The Curtis Institute's contemporary-music group may be a recent addition to its collection of ensembles, but music by this eminent Polish composer is hardly new to the school's students. Penderecki's eightieth birthday gives Philly's best a good reason to come to New York; they're bringing a program that features the Duo Concertante, the "Sinfonietta per Archi," and other works. The composer himself conducts. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. March 20 at 7:30.)

**Chamber Music Society of
Lincoln Center**

Light textures and superior craftsmanship have long been the standout features of French music, and in its next concert the Society celebrates them, offering music by Ravel, Debussy (the Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp), and Roussel, among others; the musicians include the harpist Bridget Kibbey and the violist Paul Neubauer. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. March 21 at 7:30.)

**Chiara String Quartet:
"Brahms by Heart"**

The impressive young group, now hitting its stride, goes the extra

mile in its next concert, performing quartets by Ravel, Bartók, and Brahms (No. 2 in A Minor) from memory. (WQXR Greene Space, 44 Charlton St. thegreenspace.org. March 21 at 7.)

Bargemusic

The violinist Mark Peskanov, the artistic director of the floating chamber-music series, leads the weekend's major concert, joining the cellist Nicholas Tzavaras and the pianist Nina Kogan in a program of music by Schubert, Brahms (the Sonata No. 2 in F Major for Cello and Piano), and Beethoven (the "Archduke" Trio). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. March 22 at 7 and March 23 at 4. For tickets and full schedule, see bargemusic.org.)

**New York Philharmonic
Ensembles**

The latest program in the orchestra musicians' chamber series is an especially ambitious one; it offers not only works by Haydn and Brahms (the Clarinet Trio, Op. 114) but also Webern's intimate arrangement of Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony (with a guest, the pianist Margaret Kampmeier). (Merkin

Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. March 23 at 3.)

The Kitchen: Okkyung Lee

The Korean-born cellist and improviser has been part of the Kitchen's extended family of artists for several years; she returns to join the violinist Laurie Ortman and the percussionist Ches Smith in performing her new compositions, based on writings by Samuel Beckett ("First Love") and the Korean surrealist Yi Sang. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. March 21-22 at 8.)

Wave Hill: Enso String Quartet

Here's hoping the ghost of Toscanini is smiling, now that concerts have returned to the house in which he once lived, long a public garden spot in the Bronx. The ultra-demanding maestro would doubtless listen closely to the excellent young quartet's upcoming program, which features music by composers whose work he knew intimately—Puccini ("Crisantemi") and Verdi (the Quartet in E Minor). (Independence Ave. at W. 249th St. wavehill.org. March 23 at 2.)

Emerson String Quartet

Having spent a year settling in with their new cellist, Paul Watkins, the

Emersons bring their new sound to Alice Tully Hall, beginning a spring series centered on quartets by Shostakovich; this one offers the mercurial Eleventh Quartet and the towering Twelfth, with Mendelssohn's impassioned Quartet in F Minor, Op. 80, in between. (212-721-6500. March 23 at 5.)

Artemis Quartet

The formidable German ensemble, one of Europe's finest, comes to Zankel Hall this week, bringing its clear-eyed intensity to classics by Brahms, Beethoven (the String Quartet in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 131), and Kurtág (the spectral "Officium Breve"). (212-247-7800. March 23 at 7:30.)

Le Train Bleu

Kathleen Supové, the downtown piano diva, joins Ransom Wilson's new-music band for the world premiere of "Battery" (by her husband, Randall Woolf), a piece that requires skills both at the keyboard and in martial arts. High-energy works (both New York premieres) by Sean Friar and Ted Hearne are also featured. (Drom, 85 Ave. A, between 5th and 6th Sts. dromnyc.com. March 25 at 7:15.)



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NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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

Cabinet of Wonders

The singer-songwriter **Wesley Stace**, who made his debut in 1988 with "It Happened One Night" and recorded and performed under the name John Wesley Harding until last year, is also a novelist (his latest book, "Wonderkid," is about a rock band that finds success playing to kids). With his signature variety show, which is syndicated nationally on NPR, he sleekly combines his interests by mixing song, comedy, and literature. His guests on March 22 are the poet and former paratrooper **Derrick Brown**, the singer-songwriter **A. J. Croce**, the novelist **David Grand**, the Jayhawks co-founder **Gary Louris**, the comedian **Eugene Mirman**, and the indie-rock band **Nada Surf**. (City Winery, 155 Varick St. 212-608-0555.)

Drive-By Truckers

The Truckers have evolved several times in their long history. They started out as a loud punkabilly enterprise founded on a three-guitar attack and are now a more contemplative roots-rock outfit, but one thing that has remained consistent is the high quality of their songwriting, thanks in large part to Paterson Hood and Mike Cooley, the band's core for its entire tenure. The gifted singer-songwriter Jason Isbell was a band member from 2001 to 2007, adding another color to the palette; his departure simplified their sound somewhat, but it didn't diminish it. "English Oceans," the group's twelfth record, is just out,

and it finds Cooley taking a more active songwriting role, which has led to a slight decrease in the band's reliance on Hood's Southern-fried, often explicitly political character sketches (the album of highlights from the band's first decade was titled "Ugly Buildings, Whores & Politicians: Greatest Hits 1998-2009"). (Terminal 5, 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. March 20.)

Dum Dum Girls

Burnt out on being in bands, the singer-songwriter Kristin Gundred, who records and performs as Dee Dee Penny, started this act as a home recording project in 2008. Six years later, they have largely outgrown the bedroom, blossoming into an all-female four-piece who just released their third album, "Too True." Co-produced by Sune Rose Wagner, of the Raveonettes, and Richard Gottehrer (Blondie, the Go-Go's), the Girls' latest work combines sixties-girl-group tropes with elements of New Wave, punk, goth, and garage rock; it's all tied together by Gundred's impeccable craftsmanship and vixenish allure. (March 25, at the Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-533-2111; March 26, at the Music Hall of Williamsburg, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 718-486-5400.)

Elysian Fields

This group's dark, meticulous pop ought to be more widely known. The band, essentially a duo consisting of the singer Jennifer Charles and the guitarist Oren Bloedow augmented by an ever-changing coterie of downtown musicians, has been together for nearly twenty years. This month, they released their ninth full-length album, an engaging collection called "For House Cats and Sea Fans," full of Charles's sultry, stylized vocals and Bloedow's tasteful yet harmonically adventurous accompaniment. While the record displays more obvious aspects of jazz and electronica than their previous efforts, it retains, at its core, their compelling love for ambiguity. (Rough Trade NYC, 64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn. 718-388-4111. roughtradenyc.com. March 22.)

Keren Ann

The indie chanteuse, who was born in Israel and has lived in France and New York City, specializes in lightly psychedelic folk that frames her modest yet seductive vocals. She has released albums of sharply observed, often darkly romantic songs as well as albums filled with idiosyncratic



The singer Jennifer Charles and the guitarist

touches in the manner of Suzanne Vega's more recent output. Her last record, "101," which came out in 2011, brought new sounds into the mix, including straightforward pop ("Sugar Mama"). With the singer-songwriter **Chris Garneau**, whose fanciful and ornate compositions are haunted with melancholia and a dreamlike innocence; his falsetto voice often dances over staccato piano notes accompanied by sorrowful violin and pastoral cello parts. The show is part of the Newish Jewish Music Festival (see below). (City Winery, 155 Varick St. 212-608-0555. March 20.)

Gary Numan

People of a certain age know Numan for "Cars," one of the finest singles of the late seventies and a landmark in the intersection of electronic music, New Wave, Philip K. Dick-influenced dystopian science fiction, mainstream rock and roll, and the burgeoning goth movement. Numan, who started out as the leader of the band Tubeway Army, has been a venerable solo artist for decades now, and in the most recent phase of his career he has embraced music made by artists he influenced, such as Nine Inch Nails and Depeche Mode. His new album, "Splinter (Songs from a Broken Mind)," showcases his continued dedication to exploring the darker side of both

OF NOTE "BOB DYLAN IN THE 80S"

The Bob Dylan of thirty years ago was a dicey proposition, to say the least. He had his ups—no one can question the quality of "Infidels" or the decade-capping "Oh Mercy"—but it's become increasingly difficult to go to bat for the overproduction of "Empire Burlesque," and nearly impossible to make a sustained case for "Knocked Out Loaded" or "Down in the Groove," ramshackle releases with a few masterpieces ("Brownsville Girl," "Death Is Not the End") hidden amid the junk. Now ATO Records is reclaiming the decade with a tribute album, featuring such artists as Langhorne Slim, Elvis Perkins, Dawn Landes, and Hannah Cohen. The record's launch party is on March 22, with those performers and others. Audience members are encouraged to dress up eighties style. Here's a hint if you want to look like Dylan: the secret's not in the hair—it's in the blazer. (Music Hall of Williamsburg, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 718-486-5400.)



Oren Bloedow bring their long-running group, Elysian Fields, to Rough Trade NYC, in Brooklyn, for a night of dark and captivating music, before starting a European tour.

sonics and psychology. (Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. 212-353-1600. March 22.)

War on Drugs

These days, this group may be best known for being the original musical home of the rising indie troubadour Kurt Vile, who co-founded the band in Philadelphia in 2005 with the singer Adam Granduciel. Vile left after the group's first record, "Wagonwheel Blues," came out, in 2008, to focus on his solo career, but Granduciel kept the war going, releasing "Slave Ambient" in 2011 and "Lost in the Dream" this month. The latest record is moody and expansive, with an understated but relentless sense of forward motion, all qualities that are present in large amounts in the first single, "Red Eyes." (Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-533-2111. March 19-20.)

Warpaint

This Los Angeles-based act has been around for more than a decade, but it wasn't fully formed until 2009, when the drummer Stella Mozgawa joined and helped shape the all-female troupe's sultry, trip-hoppy, and occasionally tribal sound. The ensemble was soon signed to Rough Trade Records, and released "The Fool" in 2010, to critical acclaim. The outfit's self-titled follow-up

album is laced with songs that are sensual, hypnotic, and occasionally predatory, thanks to such lyrics as "Don't you battle, we'll kill you. We'll rip you up and tear you in two." (Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. 212-353-1600. March 21.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Michael Feinstein

Basking in his comfort zone, Feinstein brings his gentle vocal style and subtly displayed erudition to the enduring songs of Cole Porter. It takes a sure singer to unlock the extremes of Porter's art, with its crafty wordplay and openhearted sentiment. Feinstein, to his credit, has found the key. (Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall, Seventh Ave. at 57th St. 212-247-7800. March 19.)

Bill Frisell

The influential guitarist's Beautiful Dreamers outfit, at the Village Vanguard starting March 18, is usually a lean interactive trio in which **Eyvind Kang's** viola and **Rudy Royston's** drums animate a sonically skewed collage that draws gleefully from Americana, swing jazz, rural blues, and sixties pop. However, for the latter part of this run, Frisell's guests include the bassist **Thomas Morgan** on March 20-22, the saxophonist **Greg Osby** on March 21-22, and

the pianist **Jason Moran** on the final night, March 23. (178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037.)

Newish Jewish Music Festival

This ambitious, multi-venue festival kicks off on March 19 at Town Hall with the premiere of **John Zorn's** "Masada Book Three: The Book Beriah," in which twenty different ensembles will interpret new pieces by the iconoclastic composer. On March 23, also at Town Hall, the **Klezmatiks** collaborate with **Arturo O'Farrill** and others. Meanwhile, **Keren Ann** plays City Winery (see above), and at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola the Israeli-based pianist **Anat Fort** performs on March 21, **Oran Etkin** offers a present-day twist on the Benny Goodman trio on March 22, and **Steven Bernstein's Diaspora Soul** ensemble takes over on March 23. (For more information about the festival, visit thetownhall.org.)

Now This

The illustrious bassist **Gary Peacock** is no stranger to playing a decisive role in piano trios; he's been a linchpin in Keith Jarrett's popular threesome for thirty years now. But Peacock likes to occasionally mix it up with other instrumentalists. The results can be revelatory, especially when Peacock's own compositions are showcased. He couldn't ask for

more sympathetic partners than the pianist **Marc Copland**, a frequent collaborator, and the supremely responsive drummer **Joey Baron**, who join him here. (Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. March 18-22.)

John Pizzarelli

The smoothly swinging singer and accomplished guitarist has never hidden his soft spot for bossa nova, one of Brazil's most durable musical exports. Adding native authenticity to this program will be the pianist and vocalist **Daniel Jobim**, the grandson of the brilliant composer Antonio Carlos Jobim. They'll be joined by the drummer **Duduka Da Fonseca** and the keyboardist **Helio Alves**. (Café Carlyle, Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. 212-744-1600. March 18-29.)

SFJazz Collective

To celebrate its tenth anniversary, this coöperative ensemble, dedicated to reinterpreting the work of major jazz artists, has gone on tour. Their sets feature classics from such iconic figures as Ornette Coleman, Wayne Shorter, Horace Silver, and Thelonious Monk. Among the chief soloists are the saxophonists **Miguel Zenón** and **David Sánchez** and the vibraphonist **Warren Wolf**. (Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. March 19-23.)



FOOD & DRINK

BAR TAB TERROIR

413 E. 12th St. (646-602-1300)

"What do you think Joey Ramone would think if he found out there was a cheese board named after him?" a wine lover asked on a recent Saturday night, puzzling over his menu at Terroir, the "elitist wine bar for everyone." The wine list, a riot of fonts, manifestos, and fun facts that comes in a binder, evokes a cross between a Dr. Bronner's label and a Sex Pistols album cover. The bar, which began as an offshoot of the restaurant Hearth in 2008, now has outposts all over town. Its emphasis on environment—terroir—extends beyond its wine selection to its beer list (many are local) and its neighborhood aesthetic. Oak bookshelves display records by Patti Smith, Blondie, and Television; in Park Slope, there's a Sandy Koufax charcuterie plate. As for the wine, a 2010 Vinosia Primitivo ("Puglia—is that the heel of the boot? That's going to be raisiny," the wine lover said) and a 2012 Fattoria Paradiso Sangiovese di Romagna Superiore were both delicious. "It has a lot of backbone," he said of the Sangiovese, offering it to his friend. "Graphite. Take a sip of that and think of pencil shavings. Have you ever licked a rock? Like slate?" Verdict: good wine, amusing terroir. He concluded: "They're trying to make wine punk rock, but you don't really want punk-rock wine bars." It's the elitist wine bar for almost everyone.

—Sarah Larson



TABLES FOR TWO

CONTRA

138 Orchard St. (212-466-4633)

THE DINERS OF THIS CITY have lost the bread-service battle, in that it is now a service, and comes at a cost. On the upside, the complimentary but soul-crushing wicker basket of day-old baguette and frozen butter is now difficult to find anywhere but the most cynical tourist spots. The humblest of offerings has become a way for chefs to signal their ingenuity, and at Contra, a new restaurant on the Lower East Side, three dollars is a fair price for a warm, dense loaf of French bread, baked with sunflower seeds and served with butter shot through with chocolate, whipped into peaks, and sprinkled with onion salt.

The food at Contra can be intricate, even challenging, but the concept is not: a prix-fixe of five courses, for fifty-five dollars. This seems low for a protein-heavy, technically showy meal from which no one will walk away hungry, but there are plenty of ways to spend more money. The add-ons vary in quality. That bread is important, but an eight-dollar cheese course is not; on a recent evening, it was an odd presentation of cheddar shavings, accompanied by a pine-nut nougat so salty it verged on inedible.

Whether you would like to eat here will depend on your comfort level with little crescents of celery in your elderflower-granita dessert, or pears blended into the onion soubise on your slow-roasted cod. Some of these unexpected elements work beautifully. Steak tartare came with XO sauce to up the umami factor, radishes the right side of sharp, and raw sea scallops, which were unsettling and intensely fishy yet also clean and beguiling in a way that raw beef could never be. Bits of smoked boudin scattered about a guinea hen were almost enough to distract from the bird's sweet, lacquered skin, and wound up being the mysterious, funky dark to the hen's juicy lightness. Giant chunks of pickled pear next to a too chewy pork loin didn't work so well, nor did the dehydrated and then rehydrated orange and grapefruit slices on a goat's-milk vanilla ice cream. ("Hungover citrus" was one unofficial description of the overly elaborate process, and there really was a parched crunchiness to the dish that suggested it could have done with some Gatorade.)

The wine selection is mostly organic, and not without drama. "They had an affair, and then they made this red. You can taste the infidelity," said the sommelier of a wine that tasted uncomfortably like vinegar, and betrayal. A lot of the bottles have funny titles, like a cider called This Side Up, or a meadlike sparkling wine from the Ardèche called You Are So Bubbly, which made everyone seem so. Wines with nicknames are a sure sign that you're dealing with the cool kids, and that's exactly how eating at Contra feels: sometimes it's too clever by half, but sometimes it's thrilling.

—Amelia Lester

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

THE SENATOR VS. THE C.I.A.

In the vestibule of Room 211 of the Hart Senate Office Building, just to the north of the Capitol, a cop guards an inner door that requires a numerical code to open it. The room, where the staff of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence sits, is called a “skiff,” for “sensitive compartmented information facility.” Last week, Senator Dianne Feinstein, the committee’s chair, described secret documents that are now apparently stored in the office. She did so publicly, during a remarkable jeremiad on the Senate floor, which was part “Homeland” treatment, part grand-jury instruction. She recounted several years of maneuvering between the committee staff and the C.I.A., before announcing “grave concerns” that agency officers had broken the law and violated the Constitution during a struggle over the documents.

Feinstein called them the Panetta Review, in reference to the former C.I.A. director Leon Panetta, who left the agency in 2011. The documents were prepared by C.I.A. officers, and although their contents are secret, their subject matter is clear and vitally important: the true history of the brutal interrogation of about a hundred Al Qaeda leaders and suspects at offshore C.I.A. “black sites” between roughly 2002 and 2006, on orders of the Bush Administration. The interrogations included the use of “enhanced interrogation techniques,” such as waterboarding, which constituted torture in the judgment of the Red Cross and many other authorities. Feinstein suggested that the Panetta Review may illuminate still disputed issues; namely, whether the program produced significant intelligence, whether the C.I.A. lied to Congress about it, and how cruel and degrading the black sites really were.

Barack Obama ended the program on his second day in office, in 2009, denouncing it as torture. Yet he also signalled that he would not hold the C.I.A. or its career officers accountable for the past. Moreover, he decided to advance the C.I.A.’s role in counterterrorism, which complicated the options for examining the inter-

rogation program. The C.I.A.’s Counterterrorism Center ran the sites. It also managed the agency’s drone program and the hunt for Osama bin Laden. Obama called its officers into action, ordering drone strikes in Pakistan and encouraging the agency to finally find bin Laden, which it did, in 2011. For the President to have investigated some of the same personnel for past complicity in torture would have been awkward.

Feinstein has endorsed Obama’s muscular counterterrorism policy, at some cost to her reputation among civil libertarians. Lately, she has also been criticized for defending the legality of the National Security Agency surveillance exposed by Edward Snowden. Her critics may detect a reputation-reviving opportunism in her recent dudgeon toward the C.I.A. But it was under Feinstein, after 2009, that the Select Committee took on an ambitious investigation into the defunct black sites. Senate investigators worked in a skiff near C.I.A. headquarters, in Virginia. Under a protocol that Feinstein described last week, the agency provided a segregated computer network and loaded in some six million pages of classified documents. Several times, by Feinstein’s account, C.I.A. officers secretly withdrew documents from the Senate staff’s collection. When they were caught, she said, they claimed, falsely, that the White House had ordered their action. The agency later apologized.

One of the questions that the committee explored was whether torture worked—that is, whether it produced exclusive intelligence that saved innocent lives. Even if it did, it would be wrong as policy, because it is immoral; but during the investigation former C.I.A. leaders said that the interrogations had proved very valuable and would withstand history’s judgment. Many Americans still think that such claims might be true, but they have no way to evaluate them, since the facts on which they are purportedly based remain highly classified.

In 2012, after three years’ work, the Senate staff completed a six-thousand-three-hundred-page report. It, too,



remains classified. According to press stories and statements by Feinstein and other senators, the first draft concluded that C.I.A. and Bush Administration officials had greatly overstated the interrogations' role in generating useful intelligence, and that the C.I.A. had seriously misled Congress as well. Feinstein showed the draft to the agency. The C.I.A. objected, as the current director, John Brennan, said last week, to "factual errors" and "errors in judgment or assessments." The two sides have been arguing for months about what the report should say.

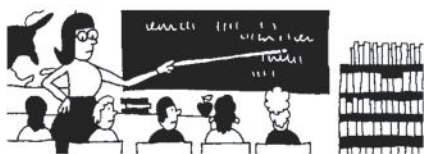
The Panetta Review figures in all this because it may influence the final report's conclusions. C.I.A. officers apparently composed the review after reading the same documents that Feinstein's staff studied. According to Feinstein, the officers also reached some of the same judgments, and acknowledged "significant C.I.A. wrongdoing"—a form of dissent, she implies, that agency superiors have overruled or suppressed. At some point after last June, Senate investigators removed printed copies of parts of the Panetta Review from the skiff in Virginia and took them to Capitol Hill, without telling the C.I.A. The agency, conducting electronic searches on the segregated computers to examine how the files had been handled, found what its lawyers believed to be evidence of criminality, implicating Senate investigators, and referred it to the Justice Department. Last week, Feinstein replied to the accusations, and, by the

standards of Washington scandal instigation, she delivered a full Monty. She said that the C.I.A., in searching her staff's computers, might have "violated the Fourth Amendment, the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, as well as Executive Order 12333, which prohibits the C.I.A. from conducting domestic searches or surveillance." C.I.A. leaders prove their mettle inside the agency by defending career officers against congressional second-guessing. Brennan, who advised Obama on counterterrorism for four years, is an agency veteran; it would not be surprising if he had authorized resistance to the Senate investigation. But it is hard to fathom how he could have so lost control of surveillance practices or so mismanaged negotiations with Feinstein that she would launch such a rare broadside.

Regrettably, the imbroglio may draw the media and the public into complex details of a Washington procedural, in which, as in a "House of Cards" plot, there is presumed to be no moral center. There is one here, however. It concerns the soundness of American representative government. Can the C.I.A., after a decade of fat budgets and swaggering prerogative, adjust to emboldened congressional oversight? Can Congress provide such oversight? And can the American people at last have the facts about the Bush Administration's embrace of torture as national policy, carried out in their name?

—Steve Coll

BRAVE NEW WORLD DEPT. CHARTER CHIEF



Last Wednesday morning, Andrew Malone, the principal of Success Academy Harlem Central, stood in front of his school, on West 111th Street. He held a cup of coffee in his left hand; with his right he shook the hand of each arriving student.

"Mr. Malone, what's the capital of a capital?" Amir Kimbrough-Smith, a fifth grader, asked.

Malone replied, "Are you thinking of a building that's called a capitol?"

"No, I mean, like, what's the capital of Albany?" Amir said.

"Amir, that is such an interesting question that I have no idea how to answer it," Malone said, rustling Amir inside.

The first Success Academy opened in 2006, and the network, which is supported by both public and private funds, is now the largest charter-school group in the city, with a thousand employees and twenty-two schools. Its founder and C.E.O., Eva Moskowitz, is a divisive figure: a conquering hero to charter-

school converts, and "Evil Moskowitz" to the teachers' union and its allies, who like to mention her four-hundred-and-seventy-five-thousand-dollar salary. ("We believe in rewarding excellence," she says.)

Moskowitz, who is fifty, arrived at Harlem Central that morning wearing a colorful print dress. She left her coat and handbag with Adriana Trovato, one of her four assistants, and she and Malone visited a classroom where students were working silently on white MacBooks. Soothing New Age music played on a stereo.

"They're on Code.org," the teacher, Greg Michnikov, said. "They're learning the underlying concepts of computer programming. They can see how many levels they've completed relative to their peers."

"Mr. Malone is also taking the course," Moskowitz said.

"Am I still in the lead?" Malone asked.

"No, you're now behind one person," Michnikov said.

Prestina St. Louis, a fifth grader with braids, said, "It's me!"

"Mr. Malone!" Moskowitz chided, making a tsk-tsk noise. She went on, "My ambition is to start a summer coding camp. But it's been hard to focus on that, given the current . . . distraction."

Last fall, Mayor Bloomberg approved

forty-five proposals for 2014, including eight for Success Academy schools that wanted to "co-locate"—that is, move to underused space in public-school buildings. Last month, Mayor Bill de Blasio reversed nine of those decisions, including Harlem Central's request to move.

"This space is temporary," Moskowitz said. "So unless we figure out a backup plan these kids will be educationally homeless come September." The city says that the move would displace special-needs students, but the tabloids have



Eva Moskowitz



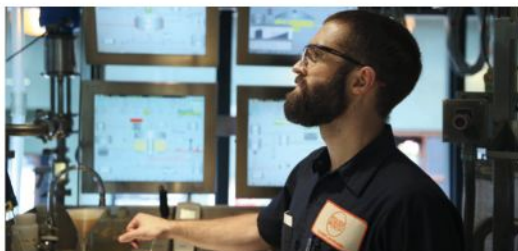
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suggested that the decision was personal. For four years, Moskowitz served on the City Council with de Blasio. “As far as I’m aware, we had no animosity and no bad experiences with each other,” Moskowitz said. (She was unable to recount any good experiences.) Still, speaking at a teachers’ union event during his campaign last year, de Blasio said, “It’s time for Eva Moskowitz to stop having the run of the place. She has to stop being tolerated, enabled, supported.”

As Moskowitz entered another classroom, Trovato, the assistant, appeared, holding a tall latte from Starbucks. “Eva, your vitamins,” an aide said.

Moskowitz grew up on West 118th Street, the daughter of professors. “They were very liberal and deeply devoted to public education,” Moskowitz said. “Their belief was that if there were escape hatches you’d be leaving other kids behind.” Moskowitz attended New York public schools and graduated from Stuyvesant. “The poor quality of the schools was evident to us”—to her and her older brother—“and we argued strenuously that we should be allowed to leave. Instead, my father taught us math starting at six o’clock every night, because we didn’t learn anything during the day.” (Moskowitz has three children; two attend Success Academy Harlem East, and one is a tenth grader at Avenues, a private school.)

She earned a doctorate at Johns Hopkins, writing a dissertation on second-wave feminism. “I then became obsessed with this mesmerist from the eighteenth-thirties, and that led to my first book, about America’s obsession with therapy. But I felt that no one was dealing with the education crisis, and eventually I ran for office.” Of public education, she said, “I have some sympathy for the view that

says, ‘Why can’t we have one system that works for everyone?’ But, speaking empirically, our system is broken.”

On state tests, Success Academy students score far above average. “And yet no one from the Mayor’s office is asking us, ‘How do you do it?’” Malone said.

“I’ve offered to speak with the Mayor many times,” Moskowitz said. “We disagree on some things, but I take him at his word when he says he wants to work on inequality. Although a little humility on his part would help.”

Trovato came to collect Moskowitz, and they walked to a livery cab. “I looked into getting a Segway a few years ago,” she said. “Then the city outlawed them, unfortunately.”

—Andrew Marantz

DEPT. OF HYPHENATES IN SHATNER’S SHOES



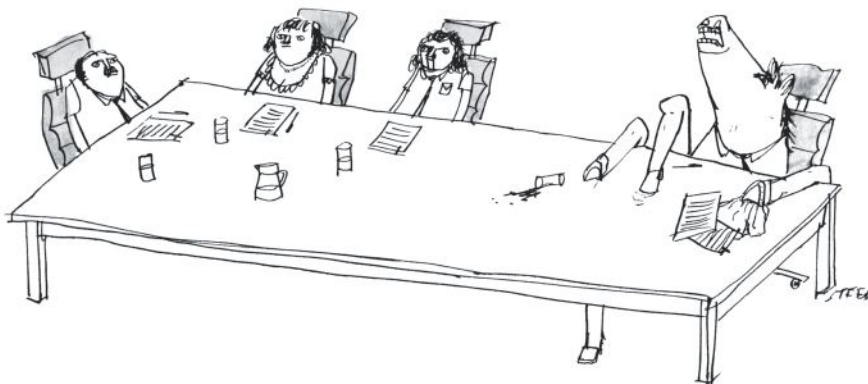
In 1983, Jeff Daniels arrived in Houston to shoot his first major film role, in “Terms of Endearment.” He was a twenty-eight-year-old Off Broadway actor with twelve hundred dollars in the bank. Suddenly, he was in a movie with Jack Nicholson, Debra Winger, and Shirley MacLaine: “a big damn deal,” he recalled recently. At the airport, he saw three limos. In went Nicholson, Winger, and MacLaine. Everyone else climbed into a van. He’d heard that the cast was putting up at the Ritz. Twenty minutes later, the van dropped him off at the Allen Parkway Inn. “Hellhole does not begin to describe this dump,” he said.

“This is where Texas businessmen bring their secretaries for lunch.”

For most actors, this would one day be an anecdote for the “Tonight Show.” For Daniels, it was the beginning of a song. Kept awake by a brawl in the next room, he started writing lyrics. The result, “Allen Parkway Inn,” is an “Alice’s Restaurant”-style folk lament (“My accommodations are less than first-class/If home is where the heart is, I’m right up its ass”). Daniels now performs it as part of his wandering-troubadour act, most recently at 54 Below, downstairs from Studio 54. He has been writing music for decades, but began playing publicly only a few years ago. “In the event that the acting career fell apart, it was either work at my dad’s lumber company or maybe do this,” he said after a sound check.

Daniels knows what you’re thinking: Christ, another actor with a music habit? To preempt criticism, he used to start his gigs with a song called “If William Shatner Can I Can Too.” “Russell Crowe and I talked about it,” he said. (Crowe has sung with the band The Ordinary Fear of God.) “I said, ‘They just aren’t going to let us do two things. You’re the Gladiator, I’m “Dumb and Dumber.”’” He wore a blue plaid shirt and jeans, and had three finger picks lined up in front of him. Growing up in Michigan, Daniels listened to Arlo Guthrie, Steve Goodman, and Elton John. He bought his first guitar in 1976, the year he moved to New York, and between auditions taught himself to play. “I could look out my tenth-floor window and see the Hotel Chelsea,” he recalled. “They were either shooting ‘Kojak’ there or bringing Sid Vicious out on a gurney.” In 1978, he was in Lanford Wilson’s play “Fifth of July” when Wilson overheard him playing guitar in his dressing room. The playwright handed him a poem to set to music, about a bus trip he had taken from Missouri to Chicago. The song, “Road Signs,” is now part of Daniels’s set. He and his old cast-mate Jonathan Hogan played it for Wilson when he was dying, in 2011. “We did what Arlo and Dylan and Ramblin’ Jack Elliott did to Woody Guthrie,” Daniels said. “They went and played around his bed.”

Daniels now lives back in Michigan with his wife, Kathleen, and their Australian shepherd, Magglio. Many of his songs are drawn from movie sets. While shooting “Paper Man,” in 2009, he and



“Ergonomic for you, maybe.”

Ryan Reynolds once got caught in an “excuse me” vortex in the hallway. “He said, ‘How about we take our pants off and relax?’” Daniels said. That’s now the title of a song about a blind date. On the set of “The Newsroom,” the HBO drama on which Daniels plays a cable-news anchor, he heard a crew member say of her husband, “That was back when he was into me.” The phrase inspired a lovelorn ballad (still a work in progress).

That night, Daniels walked onstage with his custom Martin guitar. (Martin sells an OM Jeff Daniels Custom Signature Edition, for \$4,999.) “You’re spending far too much money to watch an actor sing,” he told the crowd. He had just filmed “Dumb and Dumber To,” a sequel to the 1994 Farrelly brothers’ comedy. Perhaps the dumbest thing he’s ever done is the basis of a spoken-word number called “Recreational Vehicle,” which he performed at 54 Below. He and his family were driving to Cooperstown when they stopped at a gas station in Erie, Pennsylvania. (A guy there asked for his autograph, thinking he was Jeff Bridges.) Back on the road, Daniels’s son tapped him on the shoulder and said, “Where’s Mom?” He had left Kathleen at the gas station. By then, she had hitched a ride with a theology student; he found her, eventually, at a rest stop. Several months later, he was on Letterman. “Dave turns to me,” Daniels recalled, strumming, “and he says, ‘How was your summer? Do anything interesting?’”

—Michael Schulman

UP LIFE'S LADDER TEEN BEAT



The photographer Andres Serrano’s most famous work is “Piss Christ” (1987), a picture of a crucifix submerged in the artist’s urine. Its exhibition launched a crusade by the late senator Jesse Helms to revoke N.E.A. funding for art he didn’t like. (“He is not an artist. He is a jerk,” Helms told the Senate.) The other morning, Serrano, now sixty-three, tested a new method of provocation: he was expected at the headquarters of Scholastic, Inc., in SoHo, to judge

photos submitted by twelfth graders to the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards competition, and he was late.

“Where’s Andres?” asked Casey Kelbaugh, another judge, a photographer who runs the nonprofit Slideluck (pot-lucks featuring art slide shows).

“Maybe we can just start looking at the works?” the third judge, the gallerist Julie Saul, proposed.

There were twelve hundred and forty-eight images to sort through. They would be projected on a screen at the front of a very red room: red carpet, red U-shaped table, red chairs—décor inspired by Clifford the Big Red Dog. Following an elimination round, thirty-seven to forty-six of the photographs would be awarded gold medals and sixty-two to eighty-seven silver, based on originality, technical skill, and “emergence of personal vision.”

“Sorry I’m late,” Serrano said as he slunk in. He had on a white tuxedo shirt with a popped collar, a black vest, and sweatpants tucked into black Alexander McQueen boots.

A moderator clicked through JPEGs of the photographs. “There’s an Ophelia thing going on here,” Saul said, after the third or fourth image of a soggy woman.

“It’s just so high school,” Kelbaugh said, approvingly, of a photograph of a young man, his mouth stuffed with fries, getting hit in the face with a burger and soda next to a McDonald’s “I’m Lovin’ It” logo. “He’s got a big advertising career ahead of him.” (Gold.)

An image of a dead squirrel with a bouquet of flowers in its paws and a cherry stuffed in its mouth elicited laughter. “I always say, if art can be good and funny, that’s really great,” Saul said. (Silver.)

Serrano and Saul gasped at a sepia image of a wrinkly puppy. “Well, he’s adorable,” Saul said.

“All those folds!” Serrano whispered. (Gold.)

A Christmas-card-ready group portrait depicted a gaggle of young men in clingy sweaters. “I think that it has no irony, which is really disturbing,” Saul said. “Do you think he got them all dressed up as preppies and did this whole staging thing? Or do you think they’re just hanging out in their house?” (Gold.)

Maurice Robinson, the founder of Scholastic Magazines, established the awards in 1923, for writing. There are

now twenty-eight categories, including video-game design, comic art, and fashion. Past winners have included Sylvia Plath and Robert Redford, both for paintings; Richard Avedon, for a poem (“You must not think because my glance is quick . . . That I shall never total up to much”); Andy Warhol; and Lena Dunham.

“This is totally Cindy Sherman, but it’s good,” Saul said of a photograph of a woman in fifties clothing.

“It’s as good as a Cindy,” Serrano said. “Certainly as good as any Cindy Sherman I’ve ever seen.” (Gold.)

When Serrano was seventeen, he enrolled in the Brooklyn Museum Art School. “It was some of the best time of my life,” he recalled. “I remember I did a conceptual piece—it was a column, and I covered it with obituary columns from the *Times*. I called it ‘Obituary Column.’”

“High school was a complete desert for me artistically,” Kelbaugh said. “I went to a public inner-city school in Seattle. The arts were abysmal, except for, like, jazz band.” Saul, who grew up in Tampa, Florida, said, “I really never did anything very creative. I made a lot of beaded necklaces.”

“Something is bothering me,” Serrano said. “There’s an image that I wanted to look at again that’s just in my head.” He went on, “I mean, if it’s lost, it’s lost . . .”

“We just ruined his life. Or hers,” Saul joked.

“It was the image of soldiers,” Serrano said. “And I feel that soldiers can be a cliché. It can also be sort of passé to take a political stance. But visually it was a good image, and I regret not speaking up for it. There’s no dishonor in recognizing people who die for your country, even though I’m not a Vietnam vet—I avoided the draft in the sixties.” The moderator pulled up the photograph: in color, rows of soldiers wearing fatigues, observed from behind.

“I see hearts in the way that they’re holding their hands,” Kelbaugh offered. “Is that corny?”

“You know what the hands are also like?” Saul asked. “I hate to say it, it’s so morbid. They’re like wings, like seraphs.” There was a unanimous vote for gold. Serrano smiled. “It was one of those things that I didn’t want to regret forever,” he said.

—Emma Allen

Vladimir Putin, in his campaign to restore Russian dominance over post-Soviet states, has an unconventional weapon in his arsenal: vast supplies of natural gas. In 2006 and 2009, Gazprom, the Russian gas company, cut off supplies to Ukraine (the second time, this created shortages in Europe, too). In 2010, it reduced supplies to Belarus, and last fall Russia threatened Moldovans with the same if they didn't abandon plans to sign a free-trade accord with the European Union. "We hope that you will not freeze," a Russian deputy foreign minister said ominously. During the current crisis in Crimea, Putin's readiness to use natural resources for strategic ends has made it difficult for Europeans to take a hard line against him, since Europe gets roughly thirty per cent of its gas from Russia, mostly via pipelines running through Ukraine. "One big difference between the U.S. and Europe on this issue is energy," Jeffrey Mankoff, a Russia expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told me. "The assumption that, because of the energy relationship, Europe was not going to risk a major confrontation over Ukraine was surely part of Russia's calculations."

You might take Putin's brandishing of the gas weapon as a shrewd geopolitical move. But it's a classic case of putting short-term interests ahead of long-term gain. Although the region's need for Gazprom supplies may strengthen his hand in the present, the strategy is forcing Europe to end its reliance on Russia. After the crises of 2006 and 2009, Europe increased imports from Norway and Qatar. It built new facilities for receiving liquefied natural gas, and upgraded storage capacity, so that supplies could be stockpiled in case of a cutoff. It imported more coal. Pipeline connections within the E.U. were improved, making shortages easier to alleviate. The Crimea crisis will give new impetus to these efforts. The U.K.'s foreign secretary has said that the crisis is likely to make Europe "recast" its approach to energy. A draft document prepared for a forthcoming E.U. summit deplored the Continent's "high energy dependency" and called on E.U. members to diversify their supplies. These moves are reminiscent of what happened after the oil crises of the nineteen-seventies made it clear to the West and Japan that relying on OPEC suppliers was foolish. Europe installed energy-saving technologies and invested heavily in nuclear energy and natural gas. France built fifty-six nuclear reactors in the fifteen years after the oil embargo of 1973.

This time around, we're sure to see more infrastructure for liquefied natural gas and more emphasis on renewables. Europe may also finally make its peace with fracking—a hard sell till now, not just because of environmental concerns but also

because European landowners typically don't own the mineral rights to their property, and so have no incentive to allow drilling. But there are Eastern European countries, including Poland and Ukraine, sitting on billions of cubic feet of shale gas, and Ukraine signed exploration contracts with Chevron last year. Russia is clearly anxious. Gazprom executives have been quick to belittle fracking's potential, and the issue has turned Putin into the world's most unlikely environmentalist. Fracking, he says, makes "black stuff" come out of your faucet.

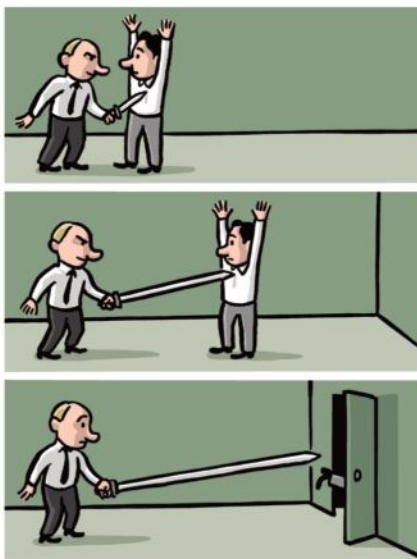
There's also the question of American natural gas, currently something of a congressional obsession. A couple of weeks ago, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic called on the U.S. to begin exports to Europe, and Republican congressmen have been pushing the same idea as a way to combat Russia. For now, this is just grandstanding: even if the U.S. did issue companies permits to export gas, building the necessary infrastructure would take till at least late 2015. But an increase in U.S. exports will hurt Russia no matter where the gas actually goes;

the U.S. is well placed to compete with Russia in Asian markets, which are increasingly important to Gazprom's business. Indeed, the boom in U.S. gas production has already weakened Russia's hand. Former suppliers are free to export elsewhere; Qatar quadrupled its supply of gas to Europe between 2008 and 2013, and now provides a tenth of Europe's imports. More fundamentally, increased supply means increased competition, which puts pressure on how much Russia can charge for its gas. Gazprom historically pegged its price to the price of oil, which has remained stubbornly high. But, as gas prices in the U.S. have fallen, countries have demanded concessions. In 2012, Bulgaria got a twenty-per-cent price cut over ten years, and some of

Gazprom's biggest customers have been pushing it to do away with the oil-price peg. As Mankoff puts it, "global changes in energy markets are not working to Russia's advantage."

Still, Russia's predicament is essentially of its own making. It remains the world's second-largest natural-gas producer, and its pipelines into Europe make it a low-cost supplier there. (Sending gas through pipelines is typically cheaper than transporting it in liquid form.) If Gazprom were seen as a reliable supplier, rather than as a tool of the Russian government, it wouldn't be so vulnerable to competition. Of course, former K.G.B. agents aren't known for their respect for market forces, and Putin cares far more about using Russian power than about Gazprom's profits. But he's about to find out that, when you're running an authoritarian petrostate, energy profits *are* power: Russia depends on oil and gas revenue to fund its imperial ambitions and maintain stability at home. Alienating customers and giving competitors an opening isn't just bad business. It's bad politics. Putin likes to think of himself as a geopolitical grandmaster. But when it comes to natural gas he isn't thinking enough moves ahead.

—James Surowiecki



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EXPERIMENTAL PEOPLE

The exuberant world of a video-art visionary.

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

Video art was invented in the mid-nineteen-sixties by a slightly mad, Korean-born genius named Nam June Paik, and in spite of the oceanic flood of video artists that his discovery unleashed, for the longest time I was convinced that no one had come close to improving on Paik's mastery of the form. I'm no longer convinced. About a year ago, I started

mer had their New York premiere on December 11th, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and the event was sold out. I got there early, and watched the two-hundred-and-seventy-two-seat theatre fill up with excited young people in groups of three or more, many of them dressed in jeans and hoodies. They cheered and whooped and whistled

fifteen years ago, when he was a high-school senior in Ohio, but not edited until last year. It showed a lot of blond, angelic-looking Midwestern boys and girls getting drunk, passing out, smashing mailboxes, tossing TV sets out the windows of speeding cars, setting small fires, and revelling in the annual rites of destruction that highlight autumn homecoming week in Whitehouse, Ohio. What struck me right away was how closely this early footage predicted Trecartin's future work. The chaotic energy, the virtuoso use of handheld camera techniques, the breaking of rules, and the theme of young people trying out different identities were all on display, although most of the time it was difficult to follow what the kids were saying.



Ryan Trecartin initially assumed that his videos might appear at film festivals: "I didn't even know that museums showed films."

looking at the work that Ryan Trecartin and his loosely associated group of fellow artists and performers have produced during the past decade. Not even Paik, I decided, made videos that are as consistently non-boring as these, or as full of breaking news about the future.

Four new works that Trecartin showed at the Venice Biennale last sum-

mer when Trecartin, who is thirty-three but looks ten years younger, was brought onstage before the screening. "Hi, guys," he said, grinning broadly, and then, with an awkward wave before exiting, "I hope you like them."

The first video (Trecartin prefers to call them movies) was "Junior War," twenty-four minutes of footage shot

The three other videos—"Comma Boat," "Center Jenny," and "Item Falls"—were technically more sophisticated and a good deal more complex in structure than "Junior War." In "Center Jenny," whose running time is fifty-three minutes, Trecartin's repertory troupe is augmented by a few professional actresses. Many are named Jenny in the

film, and they are trying to emulate an archetypal Jenny who has evolved to a higher level of existence. A profusion of events and social interactions unfold, sometimes in split screens. Fragments of disjointed dialogue catch your ear (“We’ve got to learn to walk backward if we’re going to fly”), but there is no sense of a coherent narrative. “My parents owned and funded the war,” one girl announces, convincingly. “This fucking donkeybutt is dating my dad, and I can’t fucking take it anymore,” another says.

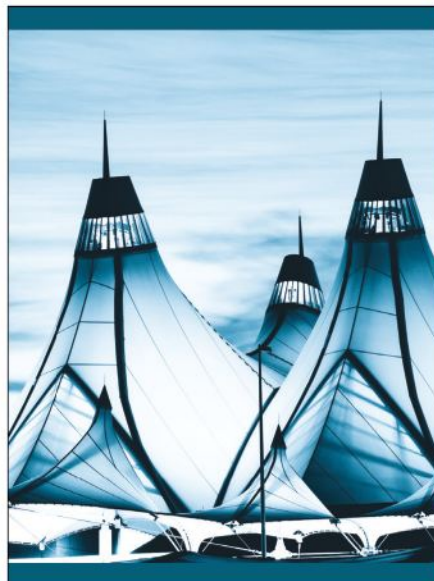
Trecartin himself, whose androgynous intensity usually makes him the most vivid presence in his films, is less visible in this one. The action is propelled by characters making loopy declarative statements about themselves, as young people tend to do, and doing inexplicable things, such as smashing fake concrete blocks with their bare hands, and, for reasons that are not entirely clear to me, my attention never flagged for the entire fifty-three minutes. It was caught and held by the shifting kaleidoscope of color-besotted images and animations, the cocksure pace and rhythm of the editing, and the spectacle of past and present collapsing into a wilderness of digital all-at-once.

Reviews of Trecartin’s videos often verge on the ecstatic. The *Times* critic Roberta Smith described him, in 2011, as “an immense but not fully developed talent that seems bound for greatness.” Peter Schjeldahl, of this magazine, called him “the most consequential artist to have emerged since the nineteen-eighties.” Massimiliano Gioni, the chief curator and the associate director of the New Museum, told me recently that Trecartin’s 2007 video “I-Be Area” was one of the inspirations for his “Younger Than Jesus” exhibition, in 2009. (It was a group show of artists born around 1980, making them younger than Jesus was when he died.) Although Gioni is only seven years older than Trecartin, the work opened up a world he knew nothing about. “It was like a cultural watershed,” he said. “I felt this was the voice of a different age and a different time, a different sexuality, a different kind of behavior. There’s this idea that a character can be many people at the same time. And the act of communication becomes the subject of his videos. We’re all trying to communicate, and

what we communicate about is less and less relevant. When I watch his videos, I feel a speeded-up version of what we’re all doing.”

Trecartin came of age when new technologies were changing the way we look at moving images—from the big screen to laptops and iPhones, from network to cable and broadband streaming—and the Internet was messing with our brains. He sees himself as a “bridge” person, someone who grew up before the revolution in digital technology, whose effects are now second nature to the generation that was born into it. His work is not about technology or social media, he has said, but about how the Internet changes the way we relate to the world and to one another, and his videos are rooted in the very world these changes have brought about. It is a place of multiple individual narratives unfolding simultaneously, of shifting identities and genders, of triumphant consumerism, and of young people yakking maniacally into cell phones, breaking windows and furniture, and saying things like “The world ended three weeks ago, starting now,” or “I exist because of Command V.... Don’t ignore ignore ignore me me me me.” Everybody in Trecartin’s work overcommunicates, Gioni observed, and the message is almost always about the self—a melodrama of solipsism, with occasional references to larger, public events whose reality is peripheral or fantastical. (“Reality, in Trecartin’s multi-racial social bubble, derives from personality assertion,” as Wayne Koestenbaum wrote in *Artforum*.) This may sound ludicrously self-indulgent, but by some alchemy of language, technical virtuosity, and visual seduction Trecartin makes it seem compelling and hugely enjoyable. He is one of the few artists of the postmodern era who are not opposed to pleasure. He once said, “My satisfaction comes—at least in part—from giving people what they want.”

Trecartin, his close friend and collaborator Lizzie Fitch, and several other co-workers have been based, since the end of 2010, in a Spanish-style house in the Los Feliz section of Los Angeles. The house has seen better days, but its eccentric shabbiness suits the group’s raffish life style and intensive work habits. Fitch does much of the cooking, and



Vision



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her companion, Sergio Pastor, publishes books and applies his computer wizardry to an endless variety of technical problems that crop up in Trecartin's work and in the activities of four or five young people who live elsewhere but have computer stations in a large, otherwise empty common room on the ground floor. The sitting room to the left of the front door still looks the way it did as a set for the video "Item Falls"—turquoise walls and four queen-size beds side by side, facing a giant flat-screen TV. Alison Powell, a rather shy African-American woman who has been a regular performer in Trecartin's videos since they were both undergraduates at the Rhode Island School of Design, lives in a separate apartment below the office space. Anthony Valdez, whom Trecartin has been dating since 2012, was in New York when I visited, working on a project with a group from the online magazine *dis*, whose investigations of future trends in fashion, retailing, and art have often included Trecartin's active participation. Three cats have the run of the house, and a dozen or more chickens occupy a coop in the front yard and provide eggs for breakfast; they evolved from three chicks that appear in "Item Falls."

Trecartin, an exuberantly alert young man, wearing cut-off jeans, sneakers, and a bleached T-shirt, led me up a winding staircase to the second floor. We passed through his bedroom—a windowless cave with drifts of discarded clothes underfoot and several bookshelves full of vitamins and health supplements—and into the darkened editing room, where he not infrequently spends eighteen-hour stretches working at one or more of his three desktop computers. Apart from a long table against the opposite wall, some plastic crates full of files, and three office chairs on rollers, there was no furniture. Black plastic bags were taped to the windows in lieu of shades; he removed one of them to admit some daylight. A ceiling light kept going off and on, unnoticed by Trecartin as he sat in an office chair with one leg tucked under him, taking swigs from a bottle of kombucha and talking a blue streak. His voice is deep and resonant—

surprisingly, considering his slight frame and ingenuous, newly hatched look. He laughs a lot (his e-mails teem with "lol"s), and he speaks with what one of his friends calls "extreme confidence and very little arrogance."

When I asked him to explain the title of "I-Be Area," his video about adoption, cloning, shared identities, and other possible aspects of the new social order, he said that it came partly from his thinking about people having areas, which he described—I am paraphrasing—as the totality of each person's cumulative effect on others. "There is this character I-Be 2, whom I play, and he's a clone who's trying to find his independent identity.



The basic idea of the film is that what identifies people is not necessarily their bodies anymore; it's all the relationships they maintain with others. You are your area, rather than you are yourself. If someone describes you, that description becomes a part of your area, whether you like it or not." He paused, and said, doubtfully, "Is that clear?"

Trecartin's area has many layers, one of which is that he appears to have had an uncommonly happy childhood. He and his brother, Adam, who is two and a half years younger, spent their earliest years in Texas, in a suburb of Houston. Their father, Burdell (Dell), worked in various divisions of the steel industry, and in 1985, when Ryan was four, they moved to Massillon, Ohio, where Dell had taken a new job. "My dad is an extremely creative person who doesn't know he's creative," Trecartin told me. "He left work at work, so I never really knew what he did. On the phone to someone at the plant, he'd sound so macho, but around us he wasn't like that at all. He never put pressure on me to do sports, although one year he did make me go out for baseball. It was kind of a joke—my brother was much better at stuff like that. Dad would say, 'You guys can go to the candy store if Ryan can catch two balls in a row,' and I never could." He rummaged through some boxes, and pulled out an old snapshot of himself at about five, with his face painted in lurid colors for Halloween. "My dad did that," he said. "When we

got older, all my school friends wanted to come to our house, because they liked my parents so much." His mother, Cathy, was a teacher who had switched to part-time private tutoring and substitute teaching so that she could stay at home with the boys. (She had trained at a Montessori school, and had a master's degree in early-childhood education.) "My mom was very psychological, and I like talking, so we got along really well," he said.

He was encouraged to repeat first grade, and he and Adam were thought to have learning disabilities at school, the result of what was probably a mild form of dyslexia (although it was never diagnosed as such). Being held back didn't bother Ryan at all. "I remember feeling so happy when my mom told me, because I always thought the grade below mine was special," he said. "It was the Class of 2000, and they got to do a lot of special things." As a child, Cathy recalls, Ryan was almost always excited about something he was doing. "He had a lot of friends, and he had what I want to call joyfulness, not that he couldn't be a pain in the butt sometimes." He had always loved to draw. He started piano lessons in first grade, and a year later, after his parents let him watch the movie "Dirty Dancing," he took dance lessons. His mother borrowed an early VHS camera from a friend, so that she could film his dance routines—improvised after watching performances on MTV—and also the skits that he made up and performed, with Adam and their friends, in the basement at home.

Cathy discovered a magnet school in Canton, Ohio, about fifteen miles away, which offered classes for students who were gifted in dance, drama, music, and art. Ryan applied, and was accepted. "It was one of those schools where you had to live in the township to attend, and so we moved there," Trecartin said. "My parents were always really supportive." (The school was for grades four through eight, and when Adam was old enough he went there, too.) For the last three years, Ryan concentrated on music and dance and then on drama and dance. "In drama class, I was told I overacted, so I rarely got parts," he said. "But I always got the dancing parts." He quit the dance classes after eighth grade, because some of the kids had started making fun

of him. "They were calling me a faggot," he said. By then, Ryan knew he was gay, but he hadn't told his parents. "I was afraid they'd be disappointed, and I was really scared about AIDS," he said. Deprived of dancing, he shifted his focus to music, and began playing in bands, and skateboarding. He also became a topflight snowboarder. He was always popular, never feeling like an outsider, and in eighth grade he was elected class president.

After Ryan spent a year at GlenOak High School, in Canton, his father's next job took the family to Whitehouse, Ohio, a farm town in the northwest corner of the state. Lisa Reyerse, who is now a senior graphic designer at the Toledo Museum of Art, told me about her first encounter with Ryan: "He was the new kid, and he was in a couple of my classes. One day in history class, I was turning in one of my exams, and Ryan grabbed me from behind, picked me up and cracked my back, took both my hands and cracked my knuckles, and then broke up laughing. That's how we met." They were such close friends in their junior and senior years that everyone—including, at times, Trecartin and Reyerse—assumed they were boyfriend and girlfriend. Reyerse said, "There was a lot of respect for Ryan at the school, just because he was so different, and he didn't really care what people thought. He wasn't interested in sports, but to be social he would go to the football games and the bonfires."

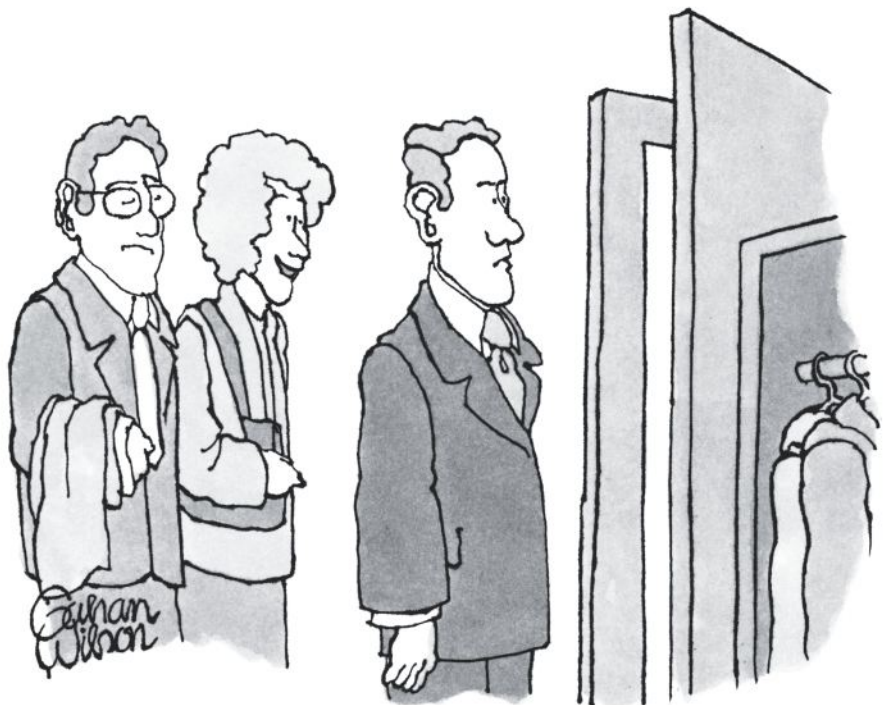
For Ryan's seventeenth birthday, his mother gave him a Sony Handycam, and in his senior year he began filming school events—among them the astonishing carnival known as the Senior-Junior Wars. (There had been nothing like this in the more citified schools he'd gone to before.) "The juniors and seniors would have this war, which lasted all week," Reyerse recalled. "When Ryan showed up with his video camera, it caused huge excitement." Trecartin had recently seen "The Blair Witch Project," and so had most of the other students. His Handycam had a night-vision lens, which allowed him to shoot after dark, when the misbehavior was at its height. "It looks so absurd now, but I made all these friendships that I probably would never have made otherwise," he said. The gleeful vandalism in his high-school footage carries over into his early videos, where

young people trash rooms, break windows and walls and lamps and furniture, and set things on fire. When I asked him about this, he grinned and ducked his head. "Destruction is a creative act at that age," he said. "It's something I've done my whole life," he later added. "I don't know where it comes from, but I usually break more things when I'm happy."

There were no dance or music classes at the school in Whitehouse, but there was an art teacher named Sue Ladd, who loved Ryan's drawings and paintings, and told him that he should think about going to art school. In his senior year, he was allowed to take two photography courses at the University of Toledo, which was a thirty-minute drive from Whitehouse. (Trecartin had inherited the family's old Ford Tempo.) His teacher there showed him some photographs by Cindy Sherman, which were his first significant introduction to contemporary art. For his art classes, Trecartin also spent time at the Toledo Museum, but nothing there inspired him—he has never had much interest in museums, or in art history. By the time he graduated from high school, he had put together a portfolio of drawings, paintings, sculptures, and photographs, which got him into the Rhode Island School of Design.

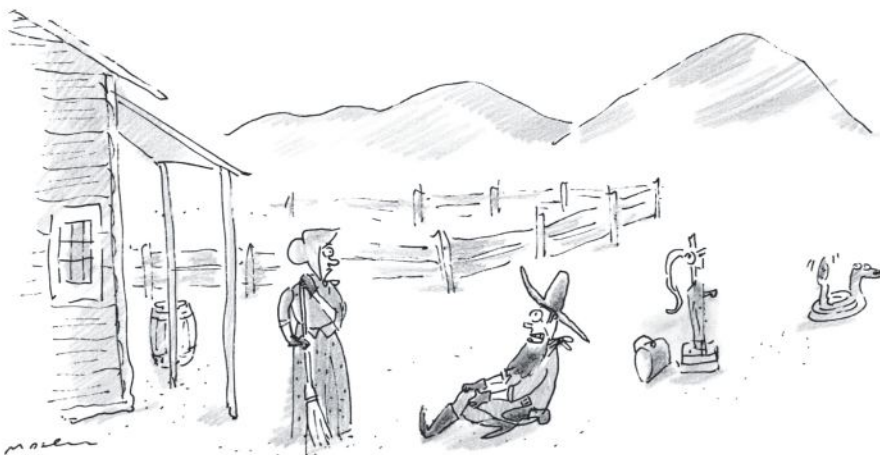
Many art schools now favor a conceptual approach to art-making, encouraging students to figure out their own path through experimentation and a critical awareness of prevailing styles, but RISD adheres to an older tradition. The teaching is skill-oriented, and after a first-year foundation course students are expected to major in a specific area. Trecartin chose Film/Animation/Video. Very early in his sophomore year, he began working with Lizzie Fitch, a classmate who was in the painting department. Fitch had grown up in Oberlin, Ohio. A highly intelligent girl with short, permanently tousled blond hair, she read a lot (unlike Trecartin, whose knowledge of literature and art history comes mostly from talking with people like Fitch). Trecartin asked her to be in a video that he was making for a class assignment that involved continuity, and the result was "Kitchen Girl," a very short (just under three minutes), extremely funny, and somewhat disturbing vignette, in which Fitch, screaming her head off, yanks a baby stroller—filled with oddly shaped woollen objects that she had crocheted—up a flight of stairs and into a kitchen. Her screams are neither frightened nor crazed but triumphant.

Fitch was in most of his student videos after that. "My work at RISD was very



"Say something pompous!"

THE MILD MILD WEST



"This snakebite is hurtin' mighty bad, Annabelle—I'm thinkin' of utterin' a cussword."

unfocussed," she said, when I talked with her last fall. "I knew I didn't want to just be a painter. Because I was so interested in trying to locate what my work actually is, it was easier for me to work inside of his work, which is a really comfortable space for me to be." The paintings, drawings, and sculptures she was doing in her own studio often functioned as props or sets in his videos, and her remarkable ability to compel the viewer's rapt attention in a wide variety of roles inspired and fed his prolific inventiveness. Trecartin told me, "I need a lot of time alone, but I don't like making things alone," and in Fitch he found not just a collaborator and a performer but the partner his work required. Without her, he often says, he would never have been the artist he's become.

Their friendship was untroubled by sex. Fitch dated other guys, and so did Trecartin. Home for a break in his freshman year, he told his parents that he was gay, and the news came as a complete surprise to them. "It's horrible to say, but my heart sank," Cathy told me. "Part of it was that I was afraid for him. I wasn't upset with him, and neither was his father." Dell said, "I didn't understand it,

because he'd had girlfriends and all that. It took me a while, but today it doesn't mean a thing. There's been ten times more joy with Ryan's presence than any of that could ever affect." Ryan also told Lisa Reyerse, his high-school friend, who wasn't so surprised. "It made everything else make sense," she said. "But my mom cried when I told her. She really, really likes him, and she always thought we would be married."

In their junior year, Fitch, Trecartin, and five or six other students who had lived in the same dormitory as freshmen shared off-campus quarters in what became known as the Pink House. They started a band called Experimental People, later shortened to XPPL—Ryan played the keyboard and the bass guitar, made electronic sounds with a computer, and sometimes sang. Fitch was always in the thick of whatever was going on at the Pink House, but Trecartin spent most of his time working. He didn't drink much, he didn't do drugs—a bad experience with hallucinogenic mushrooms in high school had made him afraid to go near them—and he worked harder than anyone else. "Ryan was always so focussed on becoming an artist, and so certain it

was going to happen," Brian McKelligott, one of the Pink House fraternity, told me. "I don't think I've ever met anybody who was so determined."

He had no trouble getting people to appear in his videos. "It was always fun to be in Ryan's videos," Rhett LaRue, another Pink House resident, recalls. (He and Trecartin had come out at around the same time; LaRue is now the Trecartin group's go-to person for animation.) "He knew what he wanted, but he was always very flexible." Trecartin told the performers what to do and say. They all painted their faces in primary colors, and there was a lot of gender shifting, enhanced by wigs and exaggerated vamping.

Critics often assume that Trecartin's movies were influenced by Andy Warhol, John Waters, Paul McCarthy, or other anti-traditionalists. Trecartin, however, was simply following his own established methods. "When I was a kid, organizing scenarios and directing people to do things, I always thought of it as something I would film if I could," he told me. "My understanding of structuring a scene, of movement through space, of cutaways and perspective and all those things people do to create a sense of place—I absorbed them intuitively. And then when I started watching films with people who studied that stuff"—his teachers at RISD—"they would point things out to me and I would think, Yeah, I do that." He had watched a lot of TV when he was growing up—everything from "Pee-wee's Playhouse" to the latest music videos. He likes TV more than movies because its structure is episodic and open-ended. Certain aspects of the Broadway shows that his parents took him to see when they visited his grandparents in New Jersey made him cringe. "I hate the way people talk onstage," he said. "That affected way of projecting so people in the back rows can hear."

In his senior year at RISD, he stopped going to classes and worked exclusively on his thesis project, a forty-one-minute video called "A Family Finds Entertainment." All his friends were in it, along with about forty others, several of whom played multiple roles. There was a script, Trecartin's first really detailed one, which evolved and changed as the filming progressed. He didn't show the script to the

performers, or try to explain to them what he had in mind. Working with his actors one at a time, he would give them a line of dialogue—maybe just four or five words—and have them say it over and over. If an actor said something that Trecartin liked better, which “gave it a weird twist,” he would keep the change and write it into the script. He had already initiated the process, which he has continued ever since, of shooting at night and sleeping during the day. “There’s no light coming in the windows at night, and people have fewer distractions—they’re not checking their cell phones, and their associations are weirder at night, somehow,” he explained. “As a director, I ask a lot from people, and then I kind of let them take control of it. I yield a lot. I tell them very basic things, like what to do, and I work on their accent, but I also allow them to run with something if they need to.” Later, alone in the editing room, he shapes this raw material in ways that, as often as not, he had not anticipated. “A Family Finds Entertainment,” with its chaotic pace and energy, dizzying color palette, driving soundtrack of noise music and ambient noise, and fragmented collage of teen-age language patterns, gave viewers direct access to the hyperconnected, electronic souk of the millennial generation.

Some people thought the video was about Ryan coming out as a gay person, but he says no, it’s more like a coming-of-age story. Running through it is a vastly expanded notion of what “family” can mean to young people who live on the Internet and are free to assume various personalities at will. After a prologue involving a little girl (Trecartin’s cousin) and her grownup, imaginary companion (played by Trecartin), we are in a suburban living room, where four or five people are sitting around talking and occasionally calling out to their friend Skippy, who has locked himself in the bathroom. Cut to Skippy (Trecartin), in a tank top, his front teeth blackened. He’s holding a bread knife, looking in the bathroom mirror, and talking to the camera. (“I’m not sixteen anymore, but I feel like I’m five with sunglasses on.”) He cuts his arm with the knife, and fake blood pours out. The screen breaks up into multiple images—portraits and abstract patterns, revolving and zooming in and out. Later, unscathed and wearing a Hawaiian shirt,

Skippy enters a cluttered kitchen, where a skinny, fortyish woman tells him, “This family is poisonous. You need to find a new home.” Skippy turns and confides to the camera, “Mama is a snake, yes, she is.” Enter Billy (Kenny Curran), naked except for a flag around his shoulders; he has white lips and a blackened penis. After more conversation, Mama gives Skippy fifty dollars, embraces him, and says, “Get the fuck outta my house.” He goes downstairs and out the door, saying, “Yay-yuh, it’s a nice night out to die.” Outside, he meets a young woman named Zoe, who says she’s making a documentary on “medium-age kids all over the world.” Skippy runs out into the street and is hit by a car, which doesn’t stop. Zoe videotapes him lying in the street.

The narrative thread more or less disappears at this point, and the images get wilder and more frenetic. We’re in the Pink House, where Shin, a red-haired girl (Trecartin again) whose face is painted in a clownish mask of red, yellow, and blue patches, dominates the increasingly crowded premises. Closeups of performers, all of them singing, zoom in and out against chaotically colorful backgrounds—video paintings. Faces get doubled, fragmented, collaged. Fifteen versions of repeated images appear in grids. Then we are in a wildly decorated

room where more and more young people, wearing body paint, say things like “Identity failure,” “Gravity slave,” “Non-linear trash,” “Artificial intelligence,” and “Cosmic puke.” Bands hammer away in several rooms, and everybody dances. Out on the street, Skippy hears the music, revives, and goes to join the party. The revellers erupt into the street, and Shin, dancing in a child’s inflatable pool, ducks underwater and comes up without the wig or the face paint—she has merged with Skippy (I think). Fireworks fill the night sky. A title fills the screen: “Dedicated to My Mom and Dad.” The credits roll.

Cathy and Dell Trecartin travelled from Ohio for the film’s first public screening, at RISD, in the spring of 2004. “It just shocked me,” Dell said. His childhood friend Ken Johnson, an art critic for the *Times*, was there, along with Linda Norden, who, at the time, was a curator at the Fogg Museum, at Harvard, and would become one of Trecartin’s most effective supporters. After the screening, Dell took Johnson aside and asked him what he thought. “Ken said, ‘Listen, I have never seen anything like this. Leave him alone. It’s great.’” The film may be autobiographical in some ways, but the family in it is not Ryan’s. Cathy remembers seeing Ryan come into the bar they had gone to after the



screening, and thinking, It's all right. It's Ryan. Exhausted from his struggles with the final edit, Ryan spent the next three weeks in bed, recovering from a cold and a venomous-spider bite.

In the fall, Trecartin, Fitch, and most of the Pink House contingent moved to New Orleans. They rented a cheap house in the Ninth Ward, and got restaurant jobs that allowed time for their art work. Trecartin started a new video, and he and Fitch and the others made free-form sculptures. (Fitch had worked briefly for a Mardi Gras company, and learned a technique that involved using cardboard strips and contact cement to build figurative objects.) Trecartin, with a lot of help from his mother, was also burning DVDs of "A Family Finds Entertainment" and sending them to film festivals and college film societies. It was Cathy who told him about YouTube, which was just starting then; he posted "Family" on it some time later. The following August, Hurricane Katrina drove them all out of town. After three months in Oberlin, where Fitch's mother lived, they went to Los Angeles. Elizabeth Dee, a young New York art dealer, had arranged for them to have a group show at a gallery she co-owned there, called QED.

Dee had heard about Trecartin a few months earlier, from a curator at the New Museum named Rachel Greene, who learned about him from the artist Sue de Beer. Some students at the Cleveland Institute of Art had shown de Beer a DVD of "A Family Finds Entertainment," which she described to Greene as "incredibly hard-core," and Greene had tracked Trecartin down in New Orleans, through Friendster. After seeing the video, she invited him to New York, and introduced him to a number of curators and dealers, including Dee. "I can remember the temperature of the room when I watched the video," Dee said. "I was mesmerized, disturbed, and I just knew this was going to be huge." When Dee met Trecartin in New York, she recalls, "I said, 'Talk, tell me everything—where is this coming from?' He was so young and boylike and enthusiastic and positive. The core of his work is language, the experimental language that comes from an intuitive place, but this was combined with a complete lack of regard for the theoretical attitudes of conceptual art."

The show that Dee organized, called "I Smell Pregnant," opened at QED in January, 2006, and nearly everything was sold—around forty sculptures and the entire edition of "A Family Finds Entertainment," eight videos plus one of the artist's proofs at four thousand dollars apiece. Trecartin was mortified, because some sculptures by other members of the group were accidentally attributed to him. "That was extremely upsetting," he told me. "We got it corrected, and in the end it was probably a good thing, because it made us deal with the whole problem of giving credit. With the movies, I am the author. I write the script, although everyone influences it, and I direct, and then I edit, and they're all comfortable with that." The sculptures that he and Fitch make together—humanoid forms juxtaposed with manufactured objects—are signed "Fitch/Trecartin"; the others are credited to their makers, all of whom have their own independent practices, and everyone gets listed in the movie credits. In a piece for *Artforum* that came out in the same month as the QED show, Dennis Cooper concluded, "It's early yet, but the great excitement of Trecartin's work is that it honestly does seem to have come from out of nowhere."

Chrissie Iles and Philippe Vergne decided to include "A Family Finds Entertainment" in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, which they were co-curating. "You know how it is when you feel a page turning," Iles said, last fall. "What struck me about



the work is that it marked a shift away from television as we knew it. Because of the Internet, television was becoming something else. Ryan emerged at the beginning of the Internet's involvement with the art world, and his work has a visual richness that really engages your eye. He was also coming out of something we addressed in the 2004 Biennial, which was the queer voice—gay male artists who were making that important in their work." It had only recently dawned on

Trecartin that the art world might be interested in his videos; he had assumed that they might appear at film festivals or art-house theatres. "I didn't even know museums showed films," he admitted. "The art world attached itself at just the right moment, because there was no way I could have had the freedom to do this anywhere else."

The videos he has done since 2006 build on the innovations of "A Family Finds Entertainment" and "I-Be Area," his much longer 2007 film (an hour and forty-two minutes), in increasingly complex and original ways. The "Any Ever" series (2009-11), seven separate but connected videos whose combined running time is three hours and fifty-five minutes, moves beyond the domestic sphere and makes frequent references to the recession, global corporate careerism, office life, and the "branding" of personalities and products. "I would like to Re-Brand, Re-Organize, and Internalize the entire 'Communications War,' so that, in effect, we are on all sides," a character in "K-CoreaINC.K" says. "Roamie View," another in the "Any Ever" series, closes with one of Trecartin's more openly poetic fancies:

Well, if I is you and is all and personal now
I have a news flash for you.
Everyone shares a Katie.
You're not the only sky to touch that star.

Except for "Junior War," the videos he showed in Venice last summer are paced more slowly than those in the "Any Ever" series, and it's somewhat easier to follow the dialogue. People tend to stay the same gender throughout, and to talk to each other, rather than to the camera. In "Comma Boat," a frenetic Trecartin, his face stained green and purple, plays the part of a "director," harassing the players in a parody of his own, much calmer directorial style. He and the other characters seem like tentative adults, reaching out to lives that might extend beyond the self, or selves.

The Trecartin ménage has moved several times in the past few years: to Philadelphia, where "I-Be Area" was made; to Miami, for the shooting of "Any Ever"; and then to Los Angeles, at the end of 2010. "I've never wanted to live in New York," Trecartin told me. "I feel it's a place where ideas are brought to

be shown and judged, and I don't think I could work there." His associates have always had other jobs to support themselves, but, now that more money is coming in, three new studio employees receive salaries paid by Fitch Trecartin Studio, a corporate entity founded in 2011. A few new people have come on board. Telfar Clemens, an African-American clothing designer who was born in LeFrak City, Queens, went to Philadelphia with some friends in 2006 and found himself playing several key parts in "I-Be Area." He told me, "I was twenty at the time, and I had no clue what the movie was about, but there was a lot of pizza and whiskey on the set." Clemens had an unpredictable charisma that Trecartin spotted immediately. "He'll never say a line the way I've given it to him, but what comes out of his mouth is way better," Trecartin said. Kevin McGarry, who studied filmmaking at N.Y.U. and, later, as a member of the selection committee for the New York Underground Film Festival, argued successfully for putting "A Family Finds Entertainment" in the 2005 festival, moved to Philadelphia in 2009, and became a close friend of the group's. Now a freelance writer, McGarry has written synopses of Trecartin's videos, and helps him answer people who ask for written statements about his work.

Trecartin ended his relationship with Elizabeth Dee in 2011. The break came with a lot of pain on both sides. Dee's passionate belief in him and his work had been a crucial element in getting it produced and shown, and their association had worked well for seven years. She had raised money for production costs, persuading several collectors to commit to the "Any Ever" films sight unseen, in exchange for discounts on the finished work. Dee had no objection to Trecartin's keeping his videos on YouTube or Vimeo—she recognized that his work was "conceptually native to online," and should be available to a wide public as well as to curators and collectors.

The edition of eight "I-Be Area" videos and one artist's proof sold out very quickly, for between twenty thousand and twenty-five thousand dollars apiece. The film had ended up costing more than a hundred thousand dollars, though, and Trecartin had maxed out



several credit cards and borrowed money from his parents, who took out a line of credit on their house to come up with it. (They were also paying off some of his college loans.) With "Any Ever," which Dee co-produced, the costs rose exponentially. Trecartin and Fitch started building sculptural environments in which to show the videos, spaces furnished with lamps, bureaus, and other items that they bought at Target or IKEA. Dee was able to sell most of these (environment plus video for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars; single videos from forty-five thousand to sixty-five thousand dollars). This and two grants from private foundations enabled Trecartin to pay his parents back in full for the line of credit they had taken out. Dee brought in crucial support from two German collectors when the post-2008 recession made funding harder to find, and in 2010 and 2011 she put together a five-museum tour of the "Any Ever" material, with important stops at MOMA PS1, in Queens, and the Musée d'Art Moderne, in Paris. Tensions had been building in Trecartin and Fitch's relationship with Dee, however, and soon after the "Any Ever" museum tour they reached an impasse.

Trecartin and Fitch had learned a lot more by this time about the art world and the artist-dealer relationship. Although Trecartin comes across to ev-

eryone as sweet and a little naïve, he has always been uncompromising where his work is concerned, and he and Fitch wanted to have a larger share in the over-all decision-making. Dee, they felt, either couldn't or wouldn't deal with this. "Once we started trying to have a different relationship with her, things got really messy," Trecartin said. Dee was shattered by the break. "I would have collaborated in any form that Ryan desired," she said. "It's very hard to watch an artist as talented as he is grow up in public." For a year after the association dissolved, Trecartin and Fitch chose to have no primary gallery. They are now represented in this country by two well-established dealers, Andrea Rosen Gallery, in New York, and Regen Projects, in Los Angeles. Working together, the Rosen and Regen galleries raised the money up front for Trecartin and Fitch to make and install the four new videos that premiered at the Venice Biennale, and they have been, as Trecartin put it, "so generous about cleaning up our messes."

The Venice videos were shown as sculptural theatre at the Arsenale, a medieval network of shipyards that serve as one of the main venues for the show, in spaces made for them by Trecartin and Fitch. I'm not convinced that the installations enhance the viewing experience, or that the "sculptural" elements are



"How much are we supposed to tip the guy who followed us to our room and flicked the light switch?"

really sculpture—to me, they seem more like props. Many viewers wander in and out of them, staying for only a few minutes. Massimiliano Gioni, of the New Museum, who served as the director of the 2013 Biennale, nevertheless assured me that “the number of people who spent time with those pieces in Venice was amazing. They just sat there with headphones on.” Lauren Cornell, a curator at the New Museum, values Trecartin’s sense of the new cultural climate so highly that she asked him to co-curate the New Museum’s next big triennial exhibition, which opens in February, 2015. “Ryan is an incredibly keen listener and observer,” Cornell told me. “So much of his work comes from his intense attention to people—how they act and operate.”

When I checked in with Trecartin in Los Angeles last month, he and Fitch were shooting a new movie in what used to be a Masonic temple, on Wilshire Boulevard. “Do you know Maurice Marciano?” he asked, referring to one of the founders of Guess jeans, who bought the building with his brother Paul last year. “The temple has been abandoned since the nineteen-nineties, and he’s going to gut the whole thing and turn it into a private museum. He said we could break

whatever we want in there.” Most of the familiar faces in Trecartin’s extended family appear in the new film. He’s also using some parkour athletes, “to jump from high places and do splits and stuff.” Trecartin got interested in stunts when they were making “Any Ever.” He works with parkour people because they’re not professional stunt artists, and are willing to collaborate on ideas.

Trecartin and Fitch had planned to show several new, post-Venice videos this fall, in Los Angeles, New York, and Berlin, but at this point nothing is certain. The Masonic-temple movie, which won’t have anything to do with Masonic rites or symbols, is turning into a major work. It will include new footage shot last summer at a lake house in Minnesota that Rhett LaRue’s grandfather owns, and the story in the temple itself will reflect Trecartin’s recent research and thinking about zombies—beings “who foreshadow certain inevitable things, like life extension, and our past being reanimated,” Trecartin informed me. His current body of work, which began with the four Venice films, may not be completed for some time.

Trecartin talks of moving to Mexico City next year. The group has never done two big projects in the same place,

and a new location stimulates fresh thinking. He is aware of the dangers that early success can bring. Almost everything that he and Lizzie Fitch earn goes back into their work, and they are determined not to be constrained by market pressures. “We’re deliberately abandoning things we planned to do, in order to explore new things,” he said. Fitch, who continues to work on and act in their movies, co-manage the over-all operation, and sell her own sculptures, has become increasingly involved in their joint creative process. She sometimes handles the camera when Trecartin is acting, and she co-edited “Comma Boat” when they were struggling to finish it in time for the Biennale. There are limits, though, to Trecartin’s willingness to share control. “I found out that, if I’m not writing and editing, I’m not doing my work,” he told me. “I just love editing, and I want to do it alone.” He can see them eventually working together on a Fitch-Trecartin production, but what’s more likely, he said, is that he’ll help Fitch make her own movie. They still discuss everything, and argue heatedly over decisions, such as whether a scene works. I asked Fitch who usually wins their arguments. “We both win,” she said, beaming. “That’s the best part. He’s really my closest friend.”

Trecartin wants to make another movie from the thirty reels of his high-school videos. “I think the new work really came out of the high-school movie, because it made me realize I had a past—I didn’t even know I had one until then,” he said. His default mode is still the future, though, and his main preoccupation is still with the ways technology has changed and is changing us. He said, “Everything we do is going to be captured and archived in an accessible form, whether you want it or not. It’s going to change all of our lives. We are a species that can no longer assume a sense of privacy. It’s not an individual decision, and I feel that’s exciting to explore—or something. There’s a lot of cultural content being generated right now that sees itself as post-human, but it’s assuming the twentieth century as its audience. It leans on structures that we already understand, but that we’re moving away from. My work is about humanity, and about the time I’m making it.” ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

ON TEXAS

BY IAN FRAZIER

Civics 1.0: Why We Have Texas

Did you ever stop to think about all the advantages we receive as a result of Texas? Without Texas, our government would not be able to function. To give just one example, Texas made it possible for us to have a full complement of Presidents during the past fifty years. If not for Texas, we would have had to forgo the terms of Lyndon B. Johnson and George W. Bush. It was our Texas that made the existence of those Presidents possible.

Or consider the space program, one of our country's proudest accomplishments. It achieved such outstanding success mainly because we, as a country, committed a sizable amount of Texas to it. Another important benefit that Texas provides is national defense. Thanks to a robust and sensible allocation of Texas, we have a military that is the envy of the entire world. It has grown to its present size and strength because of clear-sighted citizens who understood that to build a first-rate military you must have Texas. Our lives are enriched, and we live in a better and more civilized society, because of Texas.

1.1: The Cultural Rainbow Includes Dissenting Views of Texas

Despite the obvious benefits, many Americans do not like Texas. Some even say they despise Texas, and make no secret of their feelings. They show their concern by calling for reform, while drawing attention to the fact that our Texas is very big already. Some cite studies showing that Texas in our country is already the second biggest, a finding borne out by investigation. Interestingly, they note that almost every country in the world makes do with *any* Texas. Did you know that?

1.2: A Historical Perspective

More than a hundred and seventy years ago, the corrupt, undemocratic government of Mexico, unlike us, had enormous Texas. In the years that followed,

the situation became reversed, and now our Texas is as big as Mexico's used to be.

1.3: Sidebar

A national pollster writes, "My firm recently selected a random sampling of passersby in Times Square and asked them how they felt about Texas. Most respondents expressed a somewhat grudging acceptance. 'Nothing you can do about Texas! Let's move on to a happier topic!'



was one individual's comment, which can stand for many. Strangely, however, a few vocal outliers said they loved Texas and became irate when we could not conceal our surprise. They offered loud policy opinions, such as 'Don't mess with Texas!' or even cried, 'God bless Texas!' Such strongly held, irrational feelings would suggest little room for compromise. One interview subject went so far as to claim that he was *from* Texas—a logical impossibility, if he was not speaking metaphorically—but he was also wearing an outsized hat and sharply pointed boots, and appeared to be deliberately eccentric or perhaps insane."

1.4: A Healthy Democracy Works Toward Consensus

With careful planning, more moderate voices say, we can find an acceptable middle ground. America can enjoy a vital, fully functioning government, with all the benefits provided by Texas, while reducing Texas at the same time. Leading economists have shown that by shrinking Texas we can actually create more income for

Texas in the long run. Although the notion goes against our intuition and even our common sense, we are told that smaller Texas will lead to more freedom for the average person, and thus to greater private outlays, resulting, finally, in enhanced infusions into the coffers for Texas (mostly in the form of the usual energy expenditures). The prospect is an exciting one.

1.5: Sidebar

"Now, the craziest thing we could ever do is *increase* Texas!" an influential politician says. "But, believe it or not, that's what some of the real lunatics out there want to do. For myself, and for my country, I have signed a sacred pledge that, if I ever vote to make our Texas even one tiny bit bigger than the Texas of today, I hope—I *demand*—that my aroused and angry constituents throw me out. The thought of Texas growing and growing and ultimately consuming all of our gross national product is a cold fear that keeps me up at night. I believe Texas is the main issue confronting our country. If we don't deal with the threat of rising Texas, our children and grandchildren will find themselves in a land that is free only in name."

1.6: Conclusion and Topics for Further Study

In the changing America of today, we must allow ourselves to look at fresh ideas—in this case, to imagine Texas in new and perhaps unfamiliar ways. Try to think of what it would be like to live in an America with very, very small Texas. In this revitalized place, almost all Texas will have been eliminated. Services provided by today's bloated Texas will be taken care of more efficiently by private contractors working with volunteers, robotics, or—you fill in the details! Then, with our Texas dramatically reduced, perhaps we can phase out some of the unnecessary government officials now supported by Texas.

Imagine all that we Americans could accomplish if we never had to worry about Texas! The urge to get rid of Texas entirely is tempting, to be sure. On the other hand, if we did, might we actually start to miss Texas? Remember the benefits of Texas that we talked about before. Would we be the same country if we had no Texas? There are difficult trade-offs and serious arguments on both sides. What to do about Texas is a question that each new generation must answer for itself. ♦

SKIN IN THE GAME

Under Armour knows athletes. Can it sell to everyone else?

BY KELEFA SANNEH



The logo for Under Armour, the sporting-goods company, consists of two overlapping parabolas, opening in opposite directions, which suggest the company's initials. If you start looking for it, you may find that you see it all the time. In 1999, Jamie Foxx wore Under Armour in "Any Given Sunday"; in 2009, in the fourth season of "Friday Night Lights," a compassionate Under Armour sales representative helped Coach Taylor secure new uniforms for his beleaguered East Dillon Lions. The company has the exclusive rights to equip athletes at thirteen colleges, among them Notre Dame, which became an Under Armour school in January, after

signing a ten-year deal that is reportedly worth around ninety million dollars. Under Armour's roster of paid endorsers includes the skier Lindsey Vonn, the quarterback Tom Brady, and the duck dynast Willie Robertson. Its roster of unpaid endorsers includes President Obama, who was photographed clutching a pair of its high-tops on one occasion and wearing a warmup jacket on another. George Zimmerman is evidently a fan: last year, when he was detained by police after an argument with his estranged wife, he was wearing an Under Armour baseball hat. And, during an infamous "60 Minutes" interview about the attack in Benghazi, the former secu-

rity contractor Dylan Davies was shown wearing a sober black T-shirt, plain except for a pair of small gray parabolas on its left breast.

These are clothes designed for serious activity, though many customers have noticed that they are no less suitable for serious inactivity. As a consequence, the logo seems to turn up anywhere in the country where people are dressed casually and comfortably, which is just about everywhere—Under Armour helps supply America's national uniform. Even so, the company's image is maximally sports-centric: customers are referred to as "athletes," and the changing rooms at some stores are stocked with complimentary bottles of water, in case anyone gets dehydrated while squeezing into the tight-fitting shirts that are the brand's signature product. The company's athlete-in-chief is Kevin Plank, who founded Under Armour in 1996, after a college football career at the University of Maryland. "Under Armour means performance," he likes to say, but this reputation may have been besmirched last month, in Sochi, when the U.S. speed-skating team was outraced by much of the rest of the world. Some athletes and commentators wondered whether the team's new suits, manufactured by Under Armour in collaboration with the aerospace company Lockheed Martin, might have provided a disadvantage. Plank decried the accusation as a "witch hunt," while carefully avoiding any criticism of the skaters themselves. He knew that there was no functional connection between the drag reduction of Under Armour's speed-skating suits and the quality of its retail product line, but he knew that customers might confuse the two—in fact, the company had spent years and more than a million dollars on the suit in the expectation that they would.

Under Armour's main offices occupy a former Procter & Gamble factory complex, a ten-acre cluster of warehouses on the Baltimore waterfront. The campus is bisected by an active railroad, but most of the other industrial hallmarks have been thoroughly overhauled. The concrete wharf is now a half-size football field, sodded with artificial turf, and from the window of Plank's office you can see three molasses-storage tanks that have been refitted as cylindrical

The company's great strength, the C.E.O. says, is that "we let you believe."

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COMME des GARÇONS ^{*} SHIRT



Under Armour billboards bearing portraits of three local sports heroes: Michael Phelps, Cal Ripken, Jr., and Ray Lewis. On a rainy Friday morning, Plank had just flown back from South Bend, Indiana, where he had finished negotiating the Notre Dame deal. Plank is forty-one, and he doesn't look especially footballish: he is fit but average-sized, with a restless and analytic temperament that makes plain his allergy to indecision—he speaks, often, like a coach rushing through his halftime pep talk so he can get back to the game. Thirteen hundred people work at the Baltimore offices, all of them answering, ultimately, to the same hands-on boss; no meeting seems complete without at least a brief chorus of “Kevin wants” and “Kevin says” and “Kevin thinks.” During a recent retail-strategy session, one participant asked, only half in jest, if anyone knew Plank's upcoming travel schedule—he wanted stores along the itinerary to be ready, in case Plank turned up for an impromptu inspection.

Plank always wears Under Armour, which doesn't mean that he conducts business in sweatpants. He is, he says, “a Tom Ford guy,” albeit one who finds himself annoyed that twelve-hundred-dollar blazers might not be designed to withstand rough treatment. He says, “You're telling me that nobody reinforced this button that I'm buttoning

and unbuttoning twenty-five times during the course of the day? I look at that and I go, ‘How does someone accept that?’” On this day, he was wearing a long-sleeved black shirt, dark-gray slacks, Gucci loafers, and a Breitling watch with a face the size of a poker chip. This outfit lent a luxurious aura to the windbreaker he had on, a sleek gray prototype with a discreet black logo on the front and a less discreet neon-green vertical stripe on the back, spelling out “Under Armour” in negative space.

Plank objects when people describe Under Armour as a sportswear company, even though “sportswear” is an accurate description of just about everything it currently makes. (Under Armour can be found in all sorts of stores, but no store sells more of it than Dick's Sporting Goods.) He sees no reason that the company's obsession with “performance,” and with exotic materials—novel polyester blends, water-resistant cotton, extra-compressive spandex—should be limited to athletics. Plank's favorite building on campus is the innovation lab, which requires a special key fob and a vascular scan for entry, and which retains a self-conscious air of secrecy; behind the second of two doors is a row of mannequins, all shrouded in black, like Supreme Court Justices. The lab is run by Kevin Haley, a former S.E.C. lawyer, who takes a hobbyist's delight in the

arsenal over which he presides: an assortment of 3-D printers, climate-controlled chambers, motion-capture cameras, and—for old-fashioned but crucial stress tests—washing machines. Although Haley is neither a designer nor an engineer, he can talk convincingly about the proprioceptive benefits of high-top cleats, the proper mechanics of a sports bra (it should minimize jerk, instead of trying to eliminate jostling), and the way that excessive stitching can make sneakers rigid.

In keeping with the company's new focus, Haley downplayed Under Armour's most specialized products even while bragging about them. “There's nothing funner than working on a speed-skating suit,” he said. “There's a single purpose: you want to go as fast as possible; it's all about aerodynamics. But I think it's even cooler to work on something you can wear to work.” One of the lab's proudest inventions is ColdGear Infrared, an insulation system meant to provide warmth without bulk. (The technology was purportedly inspired by a “powderized ceramic” that protects military aircraft.) This fall, some of Under Armour's winter jackets will also feature something called MagZip, a magnetic clasp system that will, Haley promises, make it easy to zip up a jacket with one hand.

Plank, too, likes to emphasize the importance of Under Armour's non-specialized clothes, because he knows that plenty of his current and future customers really aren't athletes, no matter how broadly one defines the term. He says, “If I told you this jacket's been to the Himalayas, you're going, ‘I don't know if I'm ever going to the Himalayas, but if anything ever happens I've got an extra layer of protection—I've got something you don't.’ It's like a superpower.” He thinks a lot these days about making clothes you can wear with jeans. Like many ambitious C.E.O.s before him, Plank is betting that his company can broaden its focus while retaining that magical brand power which induces customers to trust, and to spend, more than they otherwise might.



“Dead? He gets that a lot.”

When Plank talks about Under Armour, he often sounds as if he were selling something more important and less tangible than performance apparel. At times, a kind of religious

conviction creeps into his sales pitch. "Do we make the best product? You're darn right," he said in a recent promotional speech. "I'll march twenty scientists in here and tell you why we have the best product in the world. But, most importantly, we let you *believe*."

Even as a boy, Plank was an industrious salesman, and one of his early successes came with a product that he later worked to make obsolete: the plain cotton T-shirt. He grew up in Kensington, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, where his father was a real-estate developer and his mother was, for much of his childhood, the mayor. (She later worked in Reagan's State Department.) He had four older brothers, and proved the most valuable player in the various businesses they formed together, including an initiative to sell bootleg T-shirts to Grateful Dead fans. He went to high school at St. John's, a football-loving Catholic prep school in Washington, where he became fixated on the sport. To increase his chances of making a college team, he spent a postgraduate year at Fork Union, a private military academy in Virginia known for grooming football players; among his classmates was Eddie George, who became one of the best N.F.L. running backs of his era. At the University of Maryland, Plank earned extra money by starting a flower-delivery service, recruiting fellow-students into his sales force as the business grew.

Although Maryland has never been a top football school, it is in Division I, the home of all serious college programs. Plank joined the team as a walk-on, but eventually earned a football scholarship, along with a reputation for enthusiasm; in his senior year, the team's media guide included a picture of him with his arms raised, above the caption "Kevin Plank (37) breeds emotion." On the field, Plank worked hard and sweated harder, and he grew to hate the way his cropped cotton T-shirt, known as a *shimmel*, grew soggy and bunched up beneath his pads. By the time he graduated, with a degree in business administration, he had become obsessed with giving football players the undershirt they deserved.

Plank quickly concluded that the main problem was cotton itself, which functions well in clothing only as long as it remains dry. He tried a series of

synthetic fabrics, many of them developed by the lingerie industry, which is almost entirely devoted to snugness, comfort, and support. Nylon seemed promising, until Plank realized that nylon is what is known as a color scavenger: the red Maryland jerseys were turning his white nylon T-shirts pink. Polyester worked better. The fabric is hydrophobic—it repels water—but when treated with a silicone-based solution it becomes slightly more receptive, drawing in moisture and then releasing it. Clothing made from this treated polyester "wicks" sweat away from skin and onto the surface of the fabric, where it can evaporate. By weaving in spandex fibres, Plank could manufacture a shirt that also offered muscle compression, which is said to fight fatigue and aid recovery.

Moisture-wicking clothing wasn't new: DuPont had introduced an influential wicking fabric called CoolMax in 1986. Compression wasn't a novel idea, either; women had been wearing spandex-based support hose for decades. But in football locker rooms Plank's product seemed like an audacious leap forward: an expensive, futuristic-looking T-shirt that promised to keep players dry, comfortable, and compressed. While some players had reservations about playing football in something that looked like the top half of a leotard, many were happy to leave soggy cotton behind. Plank called his product Under Armour, which is essentially a macho synonym for lingerie, and he spelled "armour" the English way not because he wanted to be distinctive but because it fit a memorable toll-free number: (888) 4-ARMOUR.

Today, an upstart company with an experimental product might never find its way into influential locker rooms, because sponsors wouldn't allow it. Last season, the N.F.L. fined Cam Newton, the incendiary Carolina Panthers quarterback, who is one of Under Armour's most important endorsers, ten thousand dollars for using visor clips that showed the company's logo. But in the nineties players and equipment managers were not so constrained. The equipment manager at Maryland, a friend of Plank's,

called his counterparts at other schools, and a Georgia Tech manager named Tom Conner agreed to give sample shirts to his players. He discovered that the shirts kept players comfortable and, just as important, that they allowed his industrial dryers to run faster. (Sixty wet cotton T-shirts could add as much as twenty minutes to each drying cycle.) A few weeks later, Conner called to give

Plank his first significant order: about four hundred shirts, at about twenty dollars apiece. For a moment, Plank was silent; he was trying to figure out how he would manufacture that many shirts. "I assumed he was a regional manufacturer looking to broaden his base," Conner says now. "I

never imagined he was just a startup."

Part of Under Armour's appeal, in those early days, was its obscurity: it was a grass-roots brand, created by and for football fanatics, and it encouraged players to think of their T-shirts as specialized equipment, like mouth guards or thigh pads. Plank's initial funding was seventeen thousand dollars, which he had saved from his flower-delivery business, and he spent more than half of it on a futile attempt to patent his invention. He found that there was no effective way to prevent competitors from selling tight T-shirts, so he had to corner the market through speed and charm. When a high-school classmate was drafted by the Dallas Cowboys, Plank sent him a package of compression shirts. Although the classmate was cut from the team before he had a chance to proselytize, the word spread from college programs to the N.F.L. and beyond. Top players started requesting Plank's products, including Deion Sanders, who paid for four shirts with a personal check, and Barry Bonds, who liked the shirts enough to agree to an absurdly cheap sponsorship arrangement: five thousand dollars a season, which was all Plank could afford. When producers from "Any Given Sunday" wanted clothes for their actors, Plank persuaded them to pay for what they used.

Under Armour sometimes seemed in danger of becoming a one-item company, identified exclusively with tight-fitting undergarments, a category now





"You're the only one in here who had to ask for a knife and fork."

known as "base layer." Its executives talk, ambivalently, about customers walking into a Nike shop, asking for "under armours," and being shown to the Nike base-layer section. "That's a powerful place to be, but that's a complacent place to be," Plank says. Slowly, the catalogue grew from compression shirts to compression shorts, and then to a loose-fitting, quick-drying T-shirt called the Performance Grey. As sales and product lines increased, the company invested in marketing campaigns that summoned the core football values of toughness and discipline. One of the most resonant, for a line of football shoes, featured a string of football players ominously intoning the phrase "Click clack," which was meant to evoke the sound of cleats hitting cement—"the last sound you hear before you step on the field."

Football players aren't known for setting fashion trends: the equipment they wear is too specialized, and too bulky, to allow much in the way of personal expression. But part of the reason for Under Armour's rapid spread is that players liked the way they looked in these ostentatiously tight T-shirts, much the way weight lifters, in the nineteen-eighties, took to spandex shorts and muscle shirts. "We absolutely

played on that vanity of guys," Plank says. "They've got these incredible physiques, but no one is showcasing them." Cam Newton remembers the day, in high school, when he finally persuaded his mother to spend more than a hundred dollars on a long-sleeved Under Armour base-layer set. When he got it, he did what his teammates were doing: he cut off one arm and one leg, in deference to the local fashion. "She was mortified," he says, remembering his mother's reaction. "But as a kid you're only worried about two things: Is it comfortable? And does it look cool?"

In 2004, Under Armour's sales passed two hundred million dollars, and the next year Plank decided to take the company public. On the day of the I.P.O., shares more than doubled their offering price, and Plank, who retains a majority of the voting stock, became a member of the nation's corporate aristocracy. He lives with his wife, D.J.—one of his former flower-sellers from college—and two children outside Baltimore, but he also owns a ski lodge in Park City, Utah, and a historic Thoroughbred ranch in Maryland, Sagamore Farm, which will be the home base for a line of old-fashioned Maryland whiskey that he is launching. In January, he

flew to New York for Super Bowl week, and though the company had no official presence at the game, Plank toured the city like an honorary N.F.L. executive: in his presence, it was easy to forget that the Super Bowl isn't, in fact, an Under Armour production.

The company had rented Vanderbilt Hall, in Grand Central Terminal, where tourists and commuters were confronted with an elaborate display of cleats and sticky gloves—the two Under Armour-branded products that the N.F.L. allows to be shown during games. Employees milled around, looking as if they were deciding whether to dash out for a quick marathon. It was Thursday, January 30th, and the company had just announced its earnings for 2013: \$2.33 billion, which included surprisingly high fourth-quarter sales. Shares had jumped by more than twenty per cent that morning, increasing Plank's net worth by about four hundred million dollars. As a d.j. muted his virtual turntables, Plank ascended the stage, saying, "It's a very good day for Under Armour."

The year's earnings put the company about equal with J. Crew, although nowhere near Nike, which sells ten times as much. In the early years, Plank used to sit down every December to compose a Christmas card to Phil Knight, the Nike chairman, telling him to watch out. As the imaginary rivalry evolved into a real one, Plank's approach changed: nowadays, he avoids saying the word "Nike," referring instead, when he must, to "the guys out West." Nike's headquarters are in Beaverton, Oregon; Under Armour recently opened an office in neighboring Portland. Plank has given his executives three main tasks this year: sell more to women, sell more internationally, and sell more shoes.

The event at Vanderbilt Hall was a launch party for the company's most important new product, a lightweight running shoe called Speedform Apollo. Six years ago, Under Armour bought a Super Bowl commercial to promote a sneaker called the Prototype, an ungainly cross-trainer that didn't catch on. This time, it is hoping to convince skeptical sneaker connoisseurs that being an apparel company is an advantage: Speedform is being promoted as the first sneaker built entirely in a clothing factory—in fact, a Chinese lingerie factory

that specializes in padded bras. Many running-shoe companies concentrate on building the perfect sole: Nike touts a technology called Dynamic Support; Brooks sells shoes enhanced by a Progressive Diagonal Rollbar. In creating Speedform, Under Armour concentrated, instead, on the soft part of the sneaker, the upper. The idea was to build on the company's strength in textiles and clothing—and, perhaps, compensate for its relative weakness in footwear. The heel is stitchless and seamless, like the inside of a bra cup, and the forefoot has a striation on top, to guide the big toe into place. Speedform Apollo is supposed to be a sneaker that fits as well as a compression shirt; an early version didn't even have shoelaces. Plank claims that it could become Under Armour's defining product, although his optimism may be less significant than his stubbornness. "We believe like crazy in it," he says. "But, if it doesn't work out, it's not 'Go and fold up the camp.' I'm telling you—our company is committed to footwear."

The next afternoon, Plank was driven downtown, to the headquarters of the New York Stock Exchange, where he was to ring the closing bell. As he arrived, he saw Lindsey Vonn, who had hobbled in on crutches a few minutes earlier. After a series of knee injuries, she had withdrawn from the Sochi Olympics so that she could have reconstructive surgery on her anterior cruciate ligament. "Let me do my Mr. Miyagi," Plank said, looking at Vonn's stitched-up knee, and making as if to massage it. Plank has become a constant and effective speech-maker, enlivening his earnest corporate paeans with jockish expressions of good cheer. On this afternoon, he joked that the catalyst for Under Armour's move from Nasdaq to the N.Y.S.E., a few years before, had been the bankruptcy of United Airlines, which freed up the only ticker symbol that he ever wanted. He also talked about how much his seven-year-old daughter loves Vonn, pivoting to a consideration of the way athletes—and, by extension, brands—can transmit self-confidence to their devotees. "There is some little boy and some little girl out there, somewhere, who believe that when they put Under Armour on they can do just a little bit more," he

said. This belief is the key to the company's continued success, more important than any product and in some ways more reliable: unlike a putatively revolutionary textile or design, it can't be debunked by a skeptic or mimicked by a competitor. As Plank talked, he kept glancing down at Vonn, who was sitting while everyone else stood. She had her leg propped up on a chair, with a bag of ice and a linen napkin covering her aching knee.

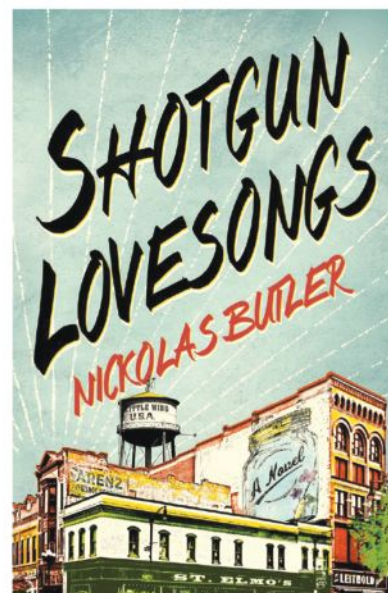
No doubt there are plenty of little girls who take inspiration from Under Armour, but Plank is well aware that they are outnumbered by boys. Although sales to women have been growing, Under Armour's women's business accounted for scarcely twenty-five per cent of its revenue last year. Matt Mirchin, the head of marketing, says that the company's hyper-athletic image attracts men of all ages and body-fat indices—apparently older, softer guys find the brawny advertisements "aspirational." But in its woman-focussed campaigns the company is learning to adopt a more tolerant tone, targeting "athletic females" as well as female athletes. To this end, it has signed up an extremely athletic female who is nevertheless not an athlete: Misty Copeland, a soloist at American Ballet Theatre, who appears in a new campaign, demonstrating her relevé in lightly branded Under Armour gear.

The company also opened a New York office and showroom, in Chelsea's Starrett-Lehigh Building, where it installed Leanne Fremar, recently hired away from Theory, as the creative director of women's products. The culture there is much less macho than the one in Baltimore, which is shaped by Plank's belief in hard work and hard play. In Plank's office, there is a huge television flanked by bottles of Dom Pérignon; Fremar's is decorated with art books and vases. The idea of the Chelsea office is to prove that the company belongs in the fashion world, and that it has learned from its bad old days. "The company was started by a bunch of aggressive, Type A males who played football and lacrosse," one former executive says. "We didn't really have a woman's voice." The official, derisive shorthand for the old approach to

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feminizing products is “pink it and shrink it.”

On a recent afternoon in Baltimore, half a dozen of the company’s women’s-wear designers gathered in a showroom to present the upcoming collections to Plank. The room had been set up to resemble a dance studio—one wall had a floor-to-ceiling mirror and a ballet barre—and it was full of products that aimed for sophistication: single-hued, thin-soled sneakers in eggplant or dark blue; leggings with batik stripes or muted animal prints. The room seemed like a provocation aimed not at Nike but at Lululemon, the apparel company known for its yoga gear. (Under Armour has a yoga-oriented line called StudioLux.) Plank was particularly excited about the wide variety of skintight Capri pants, which he saw as a workout staple. “The Capri is happening in men’s, too,” he said. “Men will no longer be in shorts, with nasty white hairy legs sticking out, dry and scaly. There will be a cool legging solution underneath, and a short on top.”

Noreen Naroo-Pucci, who helped put the collection together, eagerly agreed. “It’s happening in boys,” she said. “You’ve got ‘Under Armour’ popping out, you’ve got the basketball short—it’s so attitudey, it’s got swagger.”

Under Armour is opening a string of flagship stores, and Plank reminded Naroo-Pucci that mannequins should always wear Under Armour on top of Under Armour: shorts over leggings, T-shirts over base layers, tank tops over tank tops. “Just layering, in general,” he said. “Anytime we don’t layer, I have a problem.”

The company’s women’s-wear initiative has expanded its field of competitors. “Justice—I don’t know if you’ve been in there recently,” Naroo-Pucci said. “They are basically copying what we’re doing.”

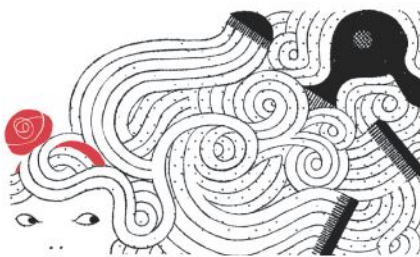
Plank interrupted her. “Justice? What’s Justice?”

Justice, as many of Under Armour’s best customers may not know, is a chain of more than nine hundred stores, aimed at tween girls. “Imagine the Spice Girls when they were growing up,” Naroo-Pucci said. It wasn’t clear whether Plank found this suggestion useful.

As the company tries to broaden its scope, its message is undergoing a subtle but pervasive shift in emphasis, from

sports to fitness. Its early clothes were “armour” for a war on a zero-sum field of play, where success requires a certain amount of violence. (One of its first slogans was a call to arms issued by Eric Ogbogu, a former N.F.L. defensive end who now works for the company: “Protect this house.”) For football players, as for most professional athletes, the goal is victory, not good health—in fact, achieving victory may often mean sacrificing health. Any product that makes hard work a bit easier provides a competitive advantage, or, at least, a modicum of relief. But to a casual exerciser, for whom hard work is the whole point, Under Armour’s marketing can seem paradoxical: the clothes promise to make your life easier and harder at the same time. Often, the “performance” that the company touts is indistinguishable from cossetting: these are clothes guaranteed not to chafe or poke, no matter which mountains you are or aren’t climbing.

In the new, inclusive Under Armour, Plank is learning to speak of athletic activity in holistic terms, reprising the theme of empowerment that Jane Fonda popularized in the eighties. Wearing her own version of base-layer apparel—spandex leotard, lightweight tights, cotton leg warmers, superfluous belt—she promised to help her followers “look better, feel better,” and be “more able to confront life with energy and enthusiasm.” The appeal was emo-



tional, even spiritual, and clothes played a crucial role. “Dress for it,” Fonda wrote. “An exercise outfit helps because it sets this time apart from the rest of the day and makes it matter more.” Freemar, the creative director of women’s products, describes Under Armour’s successful—and expensive—sports bras in similar terms. “Women are willing to invest in something that is going to make them perform better, feel better, make their workout better, make

their experience better,” she said. In football or in yoga, the promise is the same: we can be inspired, and possibly sanctified, by what we put on in the locker room.

On that Thursday in Grand Central Terminal, a mannequin wearing the Mach 39 speed-skating suit was mounted, mid-stride, on a platform that might not have seemed out of place at a natural-history museum. “We think we’re going to change the game,” Plank said. “There’s going to be a lot of gold ringing for the United States of America.” At the 2002 Games, Nike outfitted American and Dutch skaters in a multi-fabric suit called Swift Skin; the two teams combined to win six of the ten available gold medals. An innovation that seems to give athletes a small advantage will quickly spread; this year, Under Armour was one of several companies making multi-fabric suits. But an innovation that seems to give athletes a big advantage may suffer a different fate: in 2009, swimming’s governing body banned ankle-length suits, like Speedo’s LZR Racer, on the ground that they were too fast.

Last November, after years of development, Under Armour’s engineers delivered the Mach 39 suit to Salt Lake City, where the U.S. was competing in a Speed Skating World Cup event. There might not be a way to quantify the advantage a football player gets from a well-designed undershirt, but in speed skating it is theoretically possible to judge exactly which suit makes skaters fastest. Plank says that the Mach 39 performed so well in Salt Lake City that one skater wanted to keep it secret: “The reaction was ‘Get it off, quick, because there’s some competitors in there, and we don’t want them to see how fast this suit is.’” After some final modifications, the skaters received their suits in early January, and brought them to Collalbo, Italy, where they trained for the Olympics. By the time the athletes arrived in Sochi, the excellence of the suit was taken for granted. Under Armour alerted the media to the tiny dimples, which redirect airflow; to the mesh panel on the back, to keep skaters’ bodies cool; to the off-center zipper, designed to make the neckline more comfortable and, perhaps, to stand out on television. Before the first

race began, Steve Sands, who served as NBC's speed-skating reporter, held up one of the suits and related an anecdote he had heard from an American skater, Patrick Meek: "The coaches from the Dutch are taking pictures of the American suits, just to check 'em out, and find out what's so good about them."

It was no big surprise when Meek, who had never posted a top time, finished twentieth in that first race. But the U.S. performance didn't improve: Shani Davis, the two-time gold medalist, finished eighth in his strongest event, the thousand-metre; Heather Richardson, who'd been given a good chance to win the women's thousand-metre, finished seventh. On Thursday, February 13th, the *Wall Street Journal* posted an article suggesting that Under Armour's much publicized suit had a design flaw. Quoting "three people familiar with the U.S. team," the *Journal* suggested that the air vent on the back was causing the suit to inflate, making it harder for skaters to stay properly tucked. Davis, who is personally sponsored by Under Armour, offered a comment that was devastatingly noncommittal. "I would like to think that it's not the suit," he said, adding, "I would never blame the suit. I'd much rather blame myself."

The story spread, adding some narrative momentum to an Olympics that had started to seem rather dull, given all the reports about corruption and terrorism that preceded it. Plank and Haley, his innovation chief, gave interviews to try to quiet the speculation, even as the case against the suit seemed to be dissolving. The *Journal* noted that Richardson, before the thousand-metre race, had already got a tailor to cover her suit's vent with rubber. On Friday, the team decided to switch back to its old suits, also manufactured by Under Armour, but the skaters' performance didn't improve; the U.S. didn't win a single long-track speed-skating medal in Sochi.

Under Armour's executives were in a difficult position: faced with disappointing results in a sport where apparel really can make a difference, they had to argue that the gear hadn't been so important, after all. In Plank's view, the collapse in Sochi was partly a crisis of faith. Ideally, athletes aren't thinking about their gear when they compete. "We tried to cover, on the front end, by giving the team such

incredible confidence that when they put this skin on there's no way they can lose," he says. But the notion that something was wrong with the new ones had become impossible to ignore. "The athletes started believing that," he says. "So removing that barrier, I think, was the only option." If he was relieved when Davis and the others performed no better in the older suits, he isn't admitting it—he would never want to be seen to be rooting against an athlete, least of all a U.S. Olympian.

As the crisis subsided, Plank returned to the Under Armour campus, to deliver his annual town-hall address to employees. Hundreds of them crowded into the campus's indoor basketball court, where a stage had been erected, and hundreds more gathered in the corporate cafeteria, where a large video screen was flanked by recent Under Armour products—including, defiantly, a couple of Mach 39 suits. "This company does not point fingers," he said, sternly, hinting that a less scrupulous C.E.O. might not have had trouble finding someone to blame for the debacle. (One popular theory: having trained in Collalbo, at an elevation of half a mile, the team was unprepared for the greater air resistance in Sochi, which is close to sea level.) "We accept responsibility, but we also know where that responsibility begins and that responsibility ends," he said. He read the latest statement from Scott Blackmun, the head of the U.S. Olympic Committee: "Based on current information, we do not believe the suits were the problem." Plank went a step further. "We built a great product," he said.

Perhaps the American skaters hadn't proved it, but to his way of thinking they hadn't disproved it, either. Less than a week later, Under Armour announced that it had renewed its sponsorship of the speed-skating team through the 2022 Winter Olympics. That effectively ended the story—at least until 2018, when both Under Armour and the team will be strongly motivated to avoid embarrassment. The company's stock price barely flinched during the speed-skating collapse, and Plank seemed almost pleased to have some new inspiration for his pep talks. "We're a little pissed off, and our American speed skaters are pissed off, too," he said. "So let's go out and do something about it." ♦

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Johansson has two new films: "Captain America: The Winter Soldier" and "Under the Skin," which is like nothing that Johansson buffs, or

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pretty much anyone else, have seen before.

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

HER AGAIN

The unstoppable Scarlett Johansson.

BY ANTHONY LANE

These are exciting times for Scarlett Johansson. In the past year, she has played the girlfriend of a porn addict, in “Don Jon”; she has played an operating system, using nothing but the honey of her voice, in “Her”; and she has seen her friend Scott Stringer become New York City Comptroller. It’s been one thrill after another. And now, on April 4th, she has two films coming out: “Captain America: The Winter Soldier,” in which she resumes her role from “The Avengers” as Black Widow, a dogooder who dresses like a dominatrix; and “Under the Skin,” in which she undresses to do bad, and which is like nothing that Johansson buffs, or pretty much anyone else, have seen before. In February, clad in Dior, bejewelled in Cartier, and accompanied by her fiancé, Romain Dauriac, she was awarded an honorary César—the French equivalent of an Oscar. “I’d never be so presumptuous as to say I could become a French woman,” she says. Give it time.

There is no getting away from Johansson, and that is how her uncountable fans, female as well as male, would like it to be forever. They do not want to get away. Even if they can’t afford to open a bottle of Moët & Chandon champagne, as endorsed by Johansson in 2011, they can still enjoy her likeness on the shell case of their iPhone 5, and come a little closer to her with a deep sniff of The One, the Dolce & Gabbana fragrance that the actress, as an official face of the fashion house, is paid to advertise. Ideally, we are informed, it should be “used to adorn pulse points or misted into the air.” She made a short film, in luscious black-and-white, as a means of encouraging us to buy the perfume. The director was Martin Scorsese, who, presumably, was attracted by its top notes of zesty bergamot and mandarin. And the co-star was Matthew McConaughey, one of Johansson’s few rivals, right now, in the stakes of

global celebrity. As I said, exciting times; and she doesn’t even turn thirty until November. Oh, and one other thing. She’s pregnant.

The announcement was made on March 3rd, to much rejoicing, and a flurry of helpful predictions. E! Online put the question that everyone was asking: “Is there any doubt Scarlett Johansson is going to be one of the best moms ever?” The prospect of a baby is generally viewed as a blessing, but, when I met with Johansson a few days later, in a suite at the Waldorf-Astoria, I was under stringent instructions not to mention the good news. A friend of mine, ungallantly but correctly, called it the elephant in the womb. I had to suppress any natural urge to offer congratulations, let alone polite inquiries into the due date or the sex of the child. Throughout the conversation, a member of Johansson’s team sat in the corner, just in case I suddenly leaped to my feet, lunged toward the expectant mother with a bottle of gel, and tried to give her an ultrasound.

Would it be construed as trespass, therefore, to state that Johansson looks tellingly radiant in the flesh? Mind you, she rarely looks unradiant, so it’s hard to say whether her condition has made a difference. One of the few occasions on which Johansson’s radiance levels took a measurable drop came six years ago, during a previous pregnancy—a fictional one, true, but hefty with significance. In “The Other Boleyn Girl,” she played Mary Boleyn, the sister to the future queen of England and an appointed doe to King Henry VIII, who was, if we believe the film, barely distinguishable from a rutting stag. At one point, Anne (Natalie Portman) paid her a courtesy call. “Do you feel as awful as you look?” Anne asked. Try that approach as an interviewer, these days, and you, too, could end up minus a head.

In the event, at the Waldorf, no such



"I always said I'd sleep when I'm dead, and yet here I am doing paperwork."

harshness was required. "Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful," the photographer, Pari Dukovic, said. I watched two male assistants, in denim shirts and matching baseball caps, one of whom repeatedly stepped forward to make tiny adjustments to her hair. Don't we all need them in our lives? She stood in a striated green-and-black top, black pants, and heels that could have been pinched from Black Widow's closet. "Give me nothing," Dukovic said, and Johansson wiped the expression from her face, saying, "I'll just pretend to be a model." Pause. "I rarely have anything inside me." Then came the laugh: dry and dirty, as if this were a drama class and her task was to play a Martini. Invited to simulate a Renaissance picture, she immediately slipped into a sixteenth-century persona, pretending to hold a pose for a painter and kvetching about

it: "How long do I have to *sit* here for? My sciatica is *killing* me." You could not wish for a more plausible insight into the mind-set of the Mona Lisa. A small table and a stool were provided, and Johansson sat down with her arms folded in front of her. "I want to look Presidential," she declared. "I want this to be my Mt. Rushmore portrait." Once more, Dukovic told her what to show: "Absolutely nothing." Not long after, he and his team began to pack up. The whole shoot had taken seventeen minutes. She had given him absolutely everything.

We should not be surprised by this. After all, film stars are those unlikely beings who seem more alive, not less, when images are made of them; who unfurl and reach toward the light, instead of seizing up, when confronted by a camera; and who, by some miracle or trick, become enriched versions of

themselves, even as they ramify into other selves on cue. Clarence Sinclair Bull, the great stills photographer at M-G-M, said of Greta Garbo that "she seems to feel the emotion for each pose as part of her personality." From the late nineteen-twenties, he held a near-monopoly on pictures of Garbo, so uncanny was their rapport. "All I did was to light the face and wait. And watch," he said.

Why should we watch Johansson with any more attention than we pay to other actors? When did moviegoers come to realize that she was worth the wait, in gold? Well, there was Woody Allen's "Vicky Cristina Barcelona" (2008), which was loaded with physical gorgeousness, and lit with suitable fervor. There was one scene, at a champagne reception in a Spanish art gallery, where Johansson was, indeed, gilded to behold. She seemed to be *made* from champagne. But you need to wind back five more years, and to the colder skies of Japan, to find her moment—the exact point at which the public looked at her and discovered, to its consternation, that it could not look away. She may not have found fame with "Lost in Translation" alone, but it was certainly the time at which fame found her; the same year, she played Vermeer's model, in "Girl with a Pearl Earring," and was transfigured, by the movie's final shot, into a work of art.

In "Lost in Translation," directed by Sofia Coppola, Johansson was an unappreciated young wife who moseyed around Tokyo, surveying the unfamiliar with aplomb. Her deadpan demeanor, here as elsewhere, suggested that we should be summoned, not repelled, by things that we do not understand. If the opening shot was a sly joke, presenting us directly with Johansson's backside, barely veiled in peach-colored underwear, the rest of the movie was dedicated to the principle that she would no longer be treated as a nice piece of ass. Fifteen minutes in, there was a breathtaking closeup of her face, as she applied lipstick; then, halfway through, came the karaoke scene. Johansson, on yet another sleepless night, wore a pink wig and sang along to "Brass in Pocket," by the Pretenders. Having assured us—and Bill Murray, laid-back and gazing on—that she would use her arms, legs,

style, sidestep, and so forth, she came to the crunch:

'Cause I
Gonna make you see
Nobody else here
No one like me.

Murray shook his head, smiling, in dopey wonderment, as if to say, "You're not wrong, girl." He, the lord and master of underreaction, had finally met his match. The fact that he was more than twice her age didn't feel creepy at all, first because he barely laid a hand on her, and second because she seemed older and calmer, if not wiser, than her years. "You're the boss," he said. (Imagine if his role had gone to a young gun—to Josh Hartnett, say, who was her boyfriend at the time. Without Murray and Johansson, the odd couple par excellence, would we still be talking about the film today?) Until "Lost in Translation," she had been a promising young actress, graduating smoothly from an unknown to a half-known; now she would keep the promise. Stardom would come upon her, and with it the unknowability that both tempts and eludes the public's craving to know more.

Among the skills of stardom, of course, is learning how to deal with that craving when it veers out of control. Some actors never get the knack; Johansson is an expert, schooled by her experience on films like "Vicky Cristina Barcelona." As a rule, you cannot hang out with Penélope Cruz and Javier Bardem and expect to pass incognito. "Shooting that movie was such a huge event in Barcelona at that time that you would get to the set, and there would be literally two thousand people standing behind the camera," Johansson recalls. "So it was mostly just a mental exercise in finding peace of mind, and the stillness." And how was the filmmaker, when all this was going on? "Woody was 'They love you! Turn and wave!,' and I was, like, I hate you so much right now." She is a loyal fan; they also made "Match Point" and "Scoop" together. Would she work with him again, in the wake of recent events? "I don't see why anyone wouldn't," she replies.

Lately, she has had contretemps of her own. Her forthcoming project, "Lucy," a thriller directed by Luc Besson, bumped into trouble during filming in Taiwan, although, according to Johansson, "I didn't have as bad an expe-

rience as was reported." Still, one particular flare-up stayed with her. "I think people sometimes just lose all sense of reality," she says. "Driving back from work, the car stopped at a red light, and, all of a sudden, out of nowhere, these guys that had been following us got out of their car and started banging on our windows. It was terrifying. I felt like, I don't know, Bernie Madoff or something." How often Madoff gets to feel like Scarlett Johansson is hard to gauge.

Then, in January, up popped SodaStream. Her promotion of the brand, which included an advertising spot during the Super Bowl, was deemed to clash with her position as a global ambassador for Oxfam. One of SodaStream's main factories is in an Israeli settlement in the West Bank, and Oxfam is opposed to trade with the settlements. Given the impasse, Johansson resigned from the charity, leaving seltzer drinkers everywhere in an agony of ethical indecision. She issued a statement, lauding working conditions in the SodaStream factory and the company's role in "building a bridge to peace between Israel and Palestine," but this attempt at clarification made things messier still. Step back a little, and the whole farrago acquires a comic flavor, and Johansson sounds plausibly dumbfounded by her time at the heart of the storm: "I think I was put into a position that was way larger than anything I could possibly—I mean, this is an issue that is

much bigger than something I could just be dropped into the middle of." The only folk who relished the affair, I guess, were the board of Moët & Chandon, who could have told her, holding their noses, to stay away from inferior fizz.

The effect of the SodaStream incident, like all controversies, was to push its subject ever farther into the limelight. Johansson is seldom out of it, whether she is performing, modelling, spraying scent about her person, or campaigning for the Democratic cause. As a long-term supporter of the Party, she was recruited, along with her voice, for a pro-Obama music video, in 2008, when the clarion call of "Yes We Can" was grooved into a song. There may be tribes, deep in the Amazon Basin, which have yet to be disturbed by illegal downloads of "Iron Man 2." There could be aging monks, high in the Atlas Mountains, who have long since abjured the sins of the flesh and would rather not be reminded of them by spotting a copy of the Scarlett Johansson 2014 Calendar on the wall of a local store, especially the sweater-girl shot for Miss November. But just about everyone else is clued in. So where on earth would Johansson not be recognized? Answer: Scotland.

By any reckoning, "Under the Skin," which is directed by Jonathan Glazer, is Johansson's best movie to date. She will never make a more unlikely one. It is a science-fiction film, and a horror



"To the peasants: Love you guys, love you all.' Sign it me."

story, but much of it resembles a documentary. She describes her role as “so revealing that it’s ugly at times.” It shows her at her boldest and her most withheld: she yields herself up, without demur, and yet keeps so much in check that the outcome will reduce many viewers to a state of confusion and rage. Nobody is more alive to the weirdness of this situation than Johansson. It reminds her, she told me, of watching “Eyes Wide Shut”—“the first Kubrick I ever saw in the cinema. The first time I hated it, the second time I loved it, by the third time I was obsessed.” Not until the premiere of “Under the Skin” at the Venice Film Festival, last September, did she have a chance to view it with an audience. “I didn’t breathe the entire time,” she says. “I remember looking over at Jonathan at the end of that screening, and people were simultaneously standing and applauding and booing, and Jonathan looked like a kid in a candy store.”

Quite right, too; think how often we exit the cinema in a dim haze of indifference. Still, such cleaving of opinion is not unprecedented. Many people in Cannes, in 1960, were freaked out by “L’Avventura,” and gave protesting voice to their unease. Michelangelo Antonioni’s film, like Glazer’s, could be labelled a mystery without a solution, but neither man is simply ripping out the final pages of an Agatha Christie. What they seek is a combination of scrambled brains, pricked nerves, and dazzled eyes, and it seems to me perfectly feasible both to be fixated on “Under the Skin” and to shrink from its touch. I have seen it twice, and I want to see it again, yet the prospect fills me with dread.

Johansson’s character has no name. She has no job, no family, and no permanent address. Nor does she have anything as tacky, or as burdensome, as a backstory. Much of the film—the heart of it—consists of Johansson driving around the streets of Glasgow in a black wig and a white van. Not the majestic, eighteenth-century squares of the city, either, but damp, unlovely streets, beneath skies the color of cement. The young woman in the wig has a habit: she looks for men, pulls over, hails them, greets them in a friendly British accent, requests directions, and then, if she so pleases, offers them a ride. Some chat briefly, in their dense Glaswegian

brogue, and wander off. Others thank her, and climb in. Bad move.

Much of the filming was done with concealed cameras, inside the van. Not only were some of the men devoid of a script; they didn’t even know they were in a movie. And—most provoking of all—they also didn’t know whom they were talking to. Can one really blame them? If you’re ambling along on a dull day, wearing your Celtic scarf or shirt (Celtic, the dominant local soccer team, being every bit as divisive as “Under the Skin”), and a nice lass winds down her car window and asks you how to get to the next major road, you do not, by and large, expect that lass to be the star of “The Avengers.” This tactic of Glazer’s was repeated elsewhere: in a mall, where Johansson dawdles through a crowd, looks at clothes, and buys a pink sweater that she will wear from now on; in a club, where dancers and drinkers jostle her, amid the music’s throb; and out on the street, where she trips and falls, heavily, and lies prostrate, with her nose to the sidewalk. “It was pretty much the worst thing I’ve ever done,” Johansson told me. And what were the reactions around her? “Some people stopped, some took photographs, some of them tried to help. People were going ‘Touch her,’ ‘Don’t touch her.’” But, if they were momentarily at a loss, it was not because they were dealing with Scarlett Johansson. It was because of our common flailing in the face of distress.

The principal figure is not, we gradually learn, a simple pickup artist. She is a form of alien, landed or stranded among us, and acquiring human males not for sex or friendship but for the serial harvesting of their meat; we see them follow her, through a dark and cavernous space, and descend into an inky pool until it closes over their heads. There are yet more astounding sequences, in which the men are suspended, helpless and naked, in a kind of amniotic bath. As they peer into the gloom, and creak slightly, it is unclear whether they are facing death or rebirth. We soon find out. Nothing is left on-screen but a loose, drifting bag of epidermis. By this stage, any Johansson fans who intended to see “Captain America” and walked into the wrong auditorium will not, as you might think, be asking for their money back. They



Among the skills of stardom is learning how to

will be too busy crouching on the floor and screaming.

“Under the Skin” reminds you of many things, from “The Man Who Fell to Earth,” in which David Bowie was cast—or typecast—as an extraterrestrial, to Cocteau’s “Orphée,” which, like “Under the Skin,” features some extremely scary bikers, plus a beautiful woman in the role of Death. Glazer lays down a challenge with his lengthy opening sequence, as Ingmar Bergman did in “Persona,” and the shivering music, by the twenty-six-year-old British composer Mica Levi, has the same nagging insistence that drove Jonny Green-



deal with the public when its craving to know more veers out of control. Some actors never get the knack; Johansson is an expert.

wood's score for "There Will Be Blood." Yet the film is very much its own beast. There are harrowing sights and spasms of sexual candor. "Apparently, there are always a couple of women who walk out during that scene with the kid on the beach, but when you get to the erect penises there are always a couple of *men* who walk out," Johansson said to me.

I could be wrong, but I doubt that her work on "The Nanny Diaries" (2007) evinced the same response. Yet she takes "Under the Skin" in her unhurried stride, and, on reflection, holds it all together. What links the casual glances of the street scenes to the more surreal, infernal plight

of the victims is Johansson's gaze. "Seeing the mundane through alien eyes," she calls it, and, on a second viewing, Glazer's film struck me as desperately sad. Rarely have the minutiae of our mortal activity—watching TV, shopping, waiting for a bus—felt so charged with strangeness. Poets should flock to the movie in droves, if there are still enough poets around to make a drove. As Johansson says, "It's a film that you have to sit with. It allows you to observe things that you don't really take the time to notice in your everyday laundromat, or whatever." And, as you sit with it, her character changes. Rather than purely sizing us up for prey, she begins to

be consumed with curiosity about our peculiar species, and to release us from her claws. The turning point is a touching encounter with a disfigured and lonely man. No one will ever quite unravel what Johansson is or does, in "Under the Skin," but no one, equally, could improve on her own distillation of the outsider's time on Earth: "She goes from an it to a her."

In 2007, in Maurice, Louisiana, Johansson made an album. For anybody who likes nothing more than to watch movie stars make fools of themselves, "Anywhere I Lay My Head" was a disappointment, because Johansson can

really sing. More than that, she is smart enough to stay within her range—low, affectless, and dreamily tired, as though she were trying, after a long and whiskey-ish evening, to sing herself to sleep. Ten of the tracks were cover versions of Tom Waits, who, it must be said, makes Johansson sound like Betty Boop. Some became music videos, including “Falling Down,” which kicks off with startling lines, written by Waits years before: “I’ve come 500 miles just to see your halo, / Come from St. Petersburg, Scarlett and me.” The video shows Johansson in full-blown superstar mode, with helpers fussing over her makeup, the throng of a photo shoot, and a clinch with Salman Rushdie. At the end, bearing a bouquet of flowers, she sits in the back of a car, bids farewell to those outside, then closes the window. The effort is over; her expression flattens out, dropping into relief and then, as the screen fades, into blankness. And that—a single shot, lasting a few seconds—is what made Jonathan Glazer want her for “Under the Skin.”

It counts as one of the most stylish casting decisions on record. First prize goes to Slim Hawks, the wife of How-

ard, who saw a teen-age Lauren Bacall on the cover of *Harper's Bazaar*, and, on the strength of that photograph, recommended her—whoever she was—to her husband. He put her in “To Have and Have Not,” playing a free spirit named Slim, and she met Humphrey Bogart. But that was a switch from minor to major, whereas “Under the Skin” was more like going atonal. Nothing in Johansson’s work on “He’s Just Not That Into You,” her romantic comedy from 2009, or even in her voice-over for “The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie” (2004), had prepared us for her prowlings around Glasgow. Scroll carefully through the résumé, however, and you find signs and portents, not least in the jetlagged bewilderment of “Lost in Translation,” or, long before, in “Manny & Lo,” which came out when Johansson was eleven. She plays a kid (and the narrator of the film) who runs away from foster care in the company of her older, pregnant sister. The younger girl is the less fretful of the two, and, as she sits in a car, with a lollipop bulging one cheek, and stares at the passing world, you can see her wondering what’s to be had from it—not

what harm it might inflict on her, which would be the prime concern of most kids, but what stuff is out there, begging to be dug up. That is the Johansson look, already potent and unnerving. She was starting to poke under the skin.

How early did this begin? Born in 1984, she was one of four children, including a twin brother. “I didn’t go to the movies a lot when I was a kid,” she recalls. “We had a lot of tapes. I loved all Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, I loved old Judy Garland films, I loved fantastic movies, I loved ‘Moonstruck,’ I loved ‘Crossing Delancey.’” For a star-to-be, that counts as a classical education. Also, she grew up in New York, which can be a head start for anyone who wants the growing to go fast. She says, “I was very competitive as an actor, as a kid. I remember having a temper tantrum in the subway because I was going to some commercial audition, and I hated commercial auditions, because I was terrible at them, and my mom said to me, ‘You have to want this. I can’t want this for you. I don’t want to be dragging you all over to these things if it’s miserable for you. It’s a waste of my time, and yours.’ And I think I was eight years old, and I realized, O.K., I’ve got to get serious about this.”

YouTube has a clip of her, age nine, reading for a part, and the self-consciousness is frightening; not that she is clenched or maladroit, but that she seems like a child impersonating a child, and a spoiled one at that—finding everything a drag and a bind, batting away time with a slow blink. (She still does that, and it always gets results.) For someone of that precocity, adulthood is not another country, many leagues distant, but just around the corner. “Do kids feel like children?” Johansson said to me, and answered her own question: “I don’t think kids do really feel like kids, unless someone tells you you’re a kid.” She entered the young actors’ program at the Lee Strasberg Institute, and stayed four years. “I moved into the young-adult class, but I was a kid,” she recalls. “I was, like, ten, and everybody else in the class was probably eighteen.” She made her movie debut in Rob Reiner’s “North” (1994), and, a few roles later, Robert Redford cast her as the juvenile heroine of “The Horse Whisperer,” who endures a grievous injury and has to recover her strength of



“Three straight white men walk into a bar...”

will by climbing back in the saddle. At the time, Redford described her as “thirteen going on thirty.” One is tempted to ask if she was truly ever young at all.

The struggle to be a star leaves many junior actors gasping on the field of battle, abandoned and forgotten in the fray. Some of them go to pieces. So how come people like Jodie Foster, Anna Paquin, and Johansson manage to survive and prosper, remaining orderly and sane? It helps to be a good picker; 2001 found Johansson in “The Man Who Wasn’t There,” for the Coen brothers, as a piano-playing minx who comes on to Billy Bob Thornton while he’s driving, and in “Ghost World,” as a sullen high-school graduate—resplendent in chunky black ankle boots, like a disaffected soldier. Again, she was not old enough for the role, but nobody noticed or cared.

“Eight Legged Freaks” (2002), which really was about giant arachnids, was, to her admirers, a backward step, or a sideways scuttle and crawl; but I have a weakness for the movie, not least for the moment in which Johansson, wearing a bath towel, greets a spider the size of a jeep, as it enters her bedroom window, with a look of genuine interest. Only when it starts spraying webs into her face does she permit herself a scream. The ambition was plain: Johansson had no intention of being the new Fay Wray. Volume was there to be turned down; a muted reaction would make more impact than an outburst. Ripeness was within reach, and almost everything about Johansson was complete, except her beauty. Those strong features—the eyes with heavy lids, the major-league mouth—could still look gawky and sardonic, perfect for the sneerings of “Ghost World.” One more year, and everything would settle and soften into place. “Lost in Translation” was waiting in the wings. She was ready.

To argue that none of this has been achieved without calculated vampship would be naïve. As they say down at Dolce & Gabbana, she adorns pulse points, although even she had to brake in shock beside a billboard in Los Angeles, brought up short by what she called “my cleavage the size of a brontosaurus.” Then, there’s the voice; like Bacall, Veronica Lake, and Jessica Rabbit before her, Johansson appears to speak to us

through a stream of invisible smoke, and her seductive nonappearance as Samantha, in “Her,” showed how much body survives in the disembodied. Marvel, of course, remains wholly confounded by sex, as befits a company that feeds, and shares, the fantasies of adolescents. It should count itself lucky to have Johansson on its books, for she is evidently, and profitably, aware of her sultriness, and of how much, down to the last inch, it contributes to the contours of her reputa-



tion; think of the sublime look that she fires up at Robert Downey, Jr., in “Iron Man 2,” as she ducks under the ropes of a boxing ring. She then flips Jon Favreau over and slams him onto the mat. Downey drinks her in and says, “I want one”—the best line in any Marvel picture, telling us everything about Iron Man, the superhero so blasé that his only option is to buy, or build, enough toys to perk him up. Most of the characters are no better than playthings, anyway. But not her.

The fun part, for connoisseurs of such erotic power, is predicting when and where Johansson will turn it on. I was convinced that she would leave it at home for last year’s “We Bought a Zoo,” an easygoing, tiger-enhanced family drama with Matt Damon. Johansson wore denim, thick sweaters, and rain hoods, and much of the plot revolved around animal-welfare inspections. Surely even she could find no mischief here? Mid-film, there is the mildest of flirtations, as Damon asks, “Please don’t take offense if I don’t hit on you.” “I’d be offended if you did,” she replies, as prim as a village schoolmistress. Then, just when he’s almost clear of danger, she adds, “If I wanted to be kissed by you, you wouldn’t have a choice.” It’s not the crack of a whip, just a flick, but it’s enough. Damon is in her cage.

No wonder she seems right for “Under the Skin.” What better way to stretch and twist the image of a popular

femme fatale than to make her literally and overwhelmingly fatal? The movie would not have worked with a less famous actress, let alone an ingénue, as the lead; partly because, as a filmmaker, you can raise funds more easily with a big name attached to your project but also because Johansson’s presence lends a frisson to the anonymity of the role. Her character regards humans much as we regard movie stars—as unreachable creatures, whose rituals we yearn to uncover and to mimic. A pattern may be emerging: “Under the Skin” slots in neatly beside “Her,” and also beside the upcoming “Lucy,” in which she plays a drug mule who ingests some of her cargo and develops unusual superpowers. All three movies are drawn to otherworldliness. “There’s an existential feel to each project—a near-distant, futuristic feel,” Johansson says.

The irony is that, for all this sheen of modernity, she is an old-fashioned kind of star. She has faith in the gleam of stardom, and in the polished necessity of its allure—keeping her composure and her cool, but also keeping her public at arm’s length. “I like to believe that the audience still wants to have the element of surprise,” she told me. “I don’t want to see actors in their character costumes smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee.” Yes, but millions of people do, and they will not be fended off without a fight. As Johansson admits, “I don’t think my generation of actor was picked apart like they are now. We came away unscathed. It wasn’t like now, when you look at actors like Kristen Stewart or Jennifer Lawrence, and it’s crazy for them, it’s awful.” Hence, I guess, her refusal to air the subject of her pregnancy; limits have to be set somewhere, and you might as well start with your unborn child. Hence, also, the note of fond nostalgia that I heard, as she talked of Janet Leigh—another blonde who made the headlines, in another age. Johansson played her, in “Hitchcock” (2012), and got everything right: the pertness and the curves, the nicely balanced sense of life as a sport and film as a job worth doing well. Work hard; shine forth; be a total pro. “She was used to holding up the façade of being America’s Sweetheart,” Johansson said. “With Hitch, she allowed herself to be girly, to be naughty, to play games—to be innocent together.” Happy days. ♦

BERLIN NIGHTS

The thrall of techno.

BY NICK PAUMGARTEN

The first person I met in Berlin was a boar-hunting friend of a friend, who agreed to talk to me only if I didn't print his name. He was in his early forties, six and a half feet tall, muscular, lean, and fair, with shaggy reddish-brown hair, some stubble, and a great deal of self-confidence. He had on worn jeans, biker boots, a loose faded black T-shirt, and a scarf, and yet I'll confess I found myself picturing him trim and tidy in Heidelberg duelling garb. Pre-conceptions can be hard to shake when you're fresh in town.

It was a Sunday night in the dregs of December, sleety and dark. We were at a bar in Mitte, the formerly bombed-out and abandoned East Berlin district that was reclaimed by squatters, clubbers, and artists after the Wall came down and is now agleam with fancy restaurants, galleries, and shops. Transplants often describe Berlin's neighborhoods as analogues of New York's, to assess where they fit along the gentrification continuum. Mitte, they say, is SoHo. Like SoHo, it is often full of tourists. But this bar, an early post-Wall pioneer, had a gruff, local air.

The boar hunter stirred an espresso at arm's length and regarded me with martial skepticism. He was a veteran of the city's after-hours party scene, but he seemed weary of it. "Everyone knows about this," he said. "You should write instead about black rhinos." He'd recently bought fifteen thousand acres in Namibia, in a rhinoceros preserve, to help support a conservation program. He said, "I once shot an elephant."

He had moved to Berlin from Düsseldorf in 1993. He was a philosopher by training (his business card had him as a "Dr.") but an industrialist by trade: he'd inherited a manufacturing firm from his father, and had done well enough with it to pursue a life of pleasure and ease, though without ostentation, in keeping with the ethos of Berlin. He'd recently

returned from a four-week surfing trip to the Basque coast, where he and a girlfriend—two, actually: one for the first half of the trip, and one for the second—had lived out of a VW bus. There were other women in his life, among them a physician's wife, whom he'd met online. ("He gave her fake tits—Thank you, Mister!") He described his plans for the following weekend: a day hunting wild boar in a forest on the city's outskirts, then a "sex party" (which should never be said without a German accent) at an acquaintance's apartment, where he'd arrive with one woman but pair up with others ("It's a seedy thing"), and, finally, perhaps, just before Sunday dawn, Berghain.

Berghain is a night club that opened in 2004 in an abandoned power plant in what used to be East Berlin. The name is a mashup of the last syllable of its neighborhood, Friedrichshain, and the one across the Spree, Kreuzberg, on what was once the other side of the Wall. It is the most famous techno club in the world—to Berlin what Fenway is to Boston—and yet still kind of underground and, as such, a microcosm of Berlin. The people I'd talked to who had been to Berghain—and there were many—conjured ecstatic evenings, Boschian contortions, and a dusky Arcadia that an American hockey dad like me had never even imagined wanting to experience.

Berghain's renown rests on many attributes: the quality of the music, and of the d.j.s who present it; the power and clarity of the sound system; the eyeball-bending decadence of the weekend parties, which often spill into Monday morning; the stringent and mysterious door policy, and the menacing head doorman, with a tattoo on his face; the majesty and complexity of the interior; and the tolerant and indulgent atmosphere, most infamously in its so-called dark rooms, where patrons, gay and straight, can get it on with friends or strangers in an anonymous murk. For

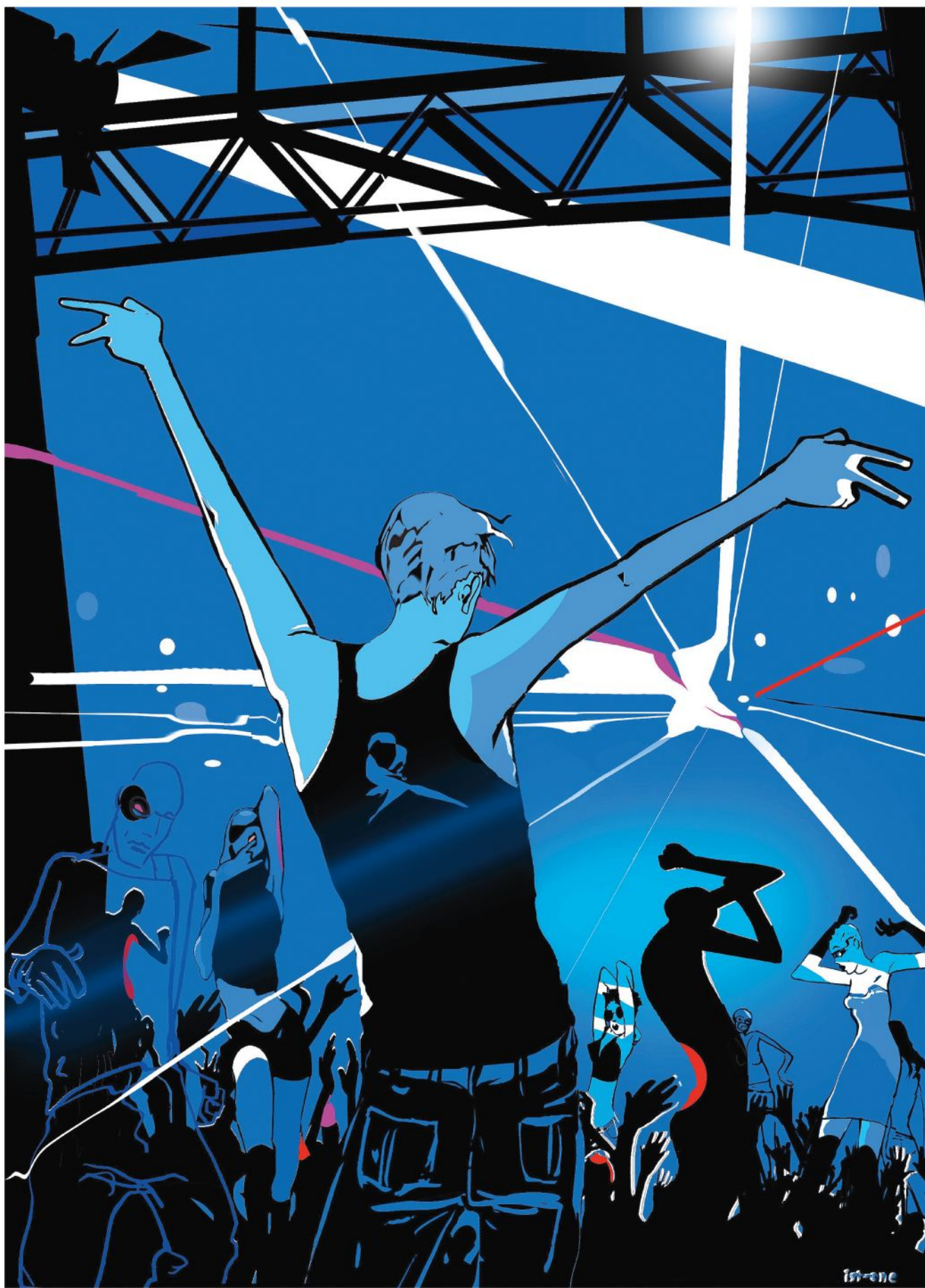
some Berliners, Berghain is an elemental part of their weekly existence, a perfectly pitched and carefully conceived apotheosis of Berlin's post-Wall club culture. To pilgrims and many expats, it is a temple of techno, a consecrated space, a source of enchantment and wonder.

"It's half art project, half social experiment," a friend in New York had told me. "It's the vampire night club to end all vampire night clubs. People want something like it here, but New York could never metabolize it."

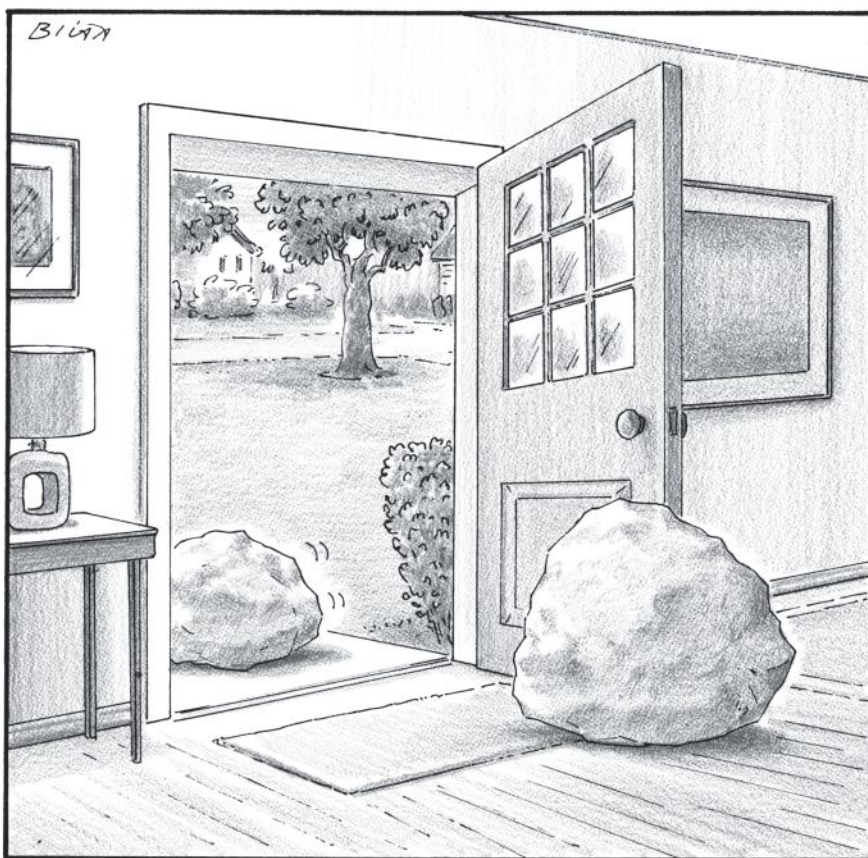
"It's a social-political-economic achievement," another friend said. "It's such a fucking unicorn."

"It's dystopian and utopian," a third said. "Prepare yourself."

The boar hunter had been going to Berghain for years, mainly for the music and the sex. He said he preferred it to, say, the KitKatClub. "The sex clubs have bad music," he explained. He avoided drugs, mostly. He drank alcohol and occasionally smoked damiana, a mild herbal stimulant that is thought to have some aphrodisiac effects. "It's like pot, except it doesn't make you stupid," he said. Perhaps it was for this reason that he had a more prosaic affection for the place. He didn't seem to see it in transcendental terms. He had a Teutonic bluntness with regard to sex. Typically, he'd dance and then go to the dark room. He explained that straight couples, in deference to the predominantly gay clientele in the dark rooms, often preferred the toilet stalls, but, for whatever reason, he didn't like the idea of screwing on a toilet. He'd noticed in recent visits to the dark room that, to judge by wandering hands, the patrons were less interested in him than in the woman he was with. Also, he'd had two cell phones stolen. All this was a symptom of gentrification. "Berghain's not as kinky as it used to be, not as eccentric," he said. "There are the easyJet people—Spanish people, Italians. The black-leather homosexuals



Berghain, the “vampire night club to end all vampire night clubs,” has been called “half art project, half social experiment.”



"Come back—I can change!"

are gone." Apparently, they patronized the club downstairs—Lab.oratory, which has a separate entrance and a more single-minded clientele. In Berlin, off-hand references to instances of excess at Lab.oratory—oh, the things that men will do to each other!—are as commonplace as best-burger recommendations in New York.

After a moment, the boar hunter said, "We could go to Berghain now. Would you like to go?"

"Now?" I was jet-lagged. It was Sunday. He looked me up and down, the way Germans do when you walk into a restaurant. He didn't think I'd get in. We made a plan to meet there in a week.

The next morning, the sidewalks in Mitte teemed with citizens on their way to work. Through the windows of an office building across the street from my hotel, you could see young people busy in their cubicles. Somehow, I'd assumed that on Monday mornings everyone in Berlin would be lurking in a club some-

where or else sleeping it off. But it turns out there is a Berlin of museums and gallery openings, of the Bundestag and the Chancellery, of Holocaust remembrance and Naziphilia, of Turkish immigrants and academics on sabbatical, and even of ordinary middle-class families going about their lives and escaping to Wannsee on weekends. It's just that, if you are on techno time, you hardly see any of it. You can't fathom that, a few U-Bahn stops away, Angela Merkel is busy presiding over the affairs of Europe.

This particular Berlin—cradle of techno culture, hotbed of lost weekends and lost minds—has been an object of international yearning and fascination for more than twenty years. Berlin is to electronic music what Florence was to Renaissance art: crucible, arbiter, patron. Credit for this could go as far back as Bismarck; the city owes its peculiar fertility as much to the follies of statesmen and generals as to any generation of ardent youth. Citizens have spoken and sung for many years of the "*Berliner Luft*"—"the

nervous, endlessly quivering Berlin air," as Conrad Alberti wrote in 1889, "which works upon people like alcohol, morphine, cocaine, exciting, inspiring, relaxing, deadly."

The First World War was a bracing infusion. Defeat, poverty, inflation, desperation: the celebrated cultural efflorescence and social tolerance of the Weimar years arose out of, or in spite of, a perhaps equally celebrated atmosphere of perversion and abandon. Berlin was the whorehouse of Europe. War widows, or their children, would do anything for a mark, even as a mark came to be worth practically nothing (four trillion to a dollar at one point in 1923). The Kaiser's censors and police were gone. In came the Continent's decadents, with their strong currencies and peculiar fetishes. Sally Bowles at the Lady Windermere, transvestites at the Eldorado, "sugar-lickers" (pederasts), *Münzis* (pregnant whores). Mel Gordon, in "Voluptuous Panic: The Erotic World of Weimar Berlin," cites the journalist Luigi Barzini: "The story went around that a male goose of which one cut the neck at the ecstatic moment would give you the most delicious, economical, and time-saving frisson of all, as it allowed you to enjoy sodomy, bestiality, homosexuality, necrophilia, and sadism at one stroke. Gastronomy too, as one could eat the goose afterward."

Apocryphal, one hopes, but such was the rep. In some respects, the notion of decadence was as integral as decadence itself. So people, in those Weimar years, also came to gawk, or to get close enough at least for the "mystery-magic of foreignness," as Christopher Isherwood wrote, to rub off. A commodified, self-conscious version of the real thing existed even then. Isherwood cited Berlin's "dens of pseudo-vice": "Here screaming boys in drag and monocled, Eton-cropped girls in dinner jackets play-acted the high jinks of Sodom and Gomorrah, horrifying the onlookers and reassuring them that Berlin was still the most decadent city in Europe." Berlin was already a brand.

The Nazis closed the clubs, hounded and exterminated the homosexuals, and, in the end, brought ruin on the city. Bombed and desolate, traumatized by street fighting, starvation, and mass rape, and ultimately carved up, Berlin, after the war, barely heaved back to life. West Berlin, surrounded on all sides by East

Germany, survived primarily as a political gesture, a flagpole in the sand and a thumb in the Politburo's eye. There was very little industry, turnover, or travel in or out. No corporation could take the political risk or tolerate the barriers to commerce. To encourage people to move there, the West German government gave out stipends and exemptions from military service, so the city tended to attract the West's mavericks and oddballs—hippies, homosexuals, political renegades—who shared the town with the elderly and the soldiers watching over them. In such hothouse isolation, a small but fervid club scene took root.

In 1988, the founders of a small record label, Interfish, started throwing illegal all-night parties in their office. The space, in a Kreuzberg basement reached via ladder, had six-foot ceilings. It took on the name UFO. The year before, Dimitri Hegemann, one of the founders, had travelled to Chicago to arrange a licensing deal with another label. While there, he had idly browsed through its so-called white labels—rough demos, not ready for sale—and picked out something strange. It was techno from Detroit. Hegemann, a Westphalian, who had moved to Berlin in 1978, was a musicologist, a producer of British electronic music, a fan of American punk (especially the Dead Kennedys), and the founder of an experimental electronic-music festival called Berlin Atonal, but he had never heard music quite like this. He brought a stack of Detroit techno records back to Berlin.

Electronic music spans many genres, from the experimental bleeps and blurts that you might hear at the fringes of Berlin's CTM Festival to the megapopular sets performed by famous d.j.s like Skrillex and Avicii—which you won't really find in Berlin. The genres for which Berlin is best known, house and, especially, techno, are mostly, as manifested there, noncommercial, rigorous, esoteric, and both experimental and orthodox. The music isn't pop, although many elements of it derive from and inform pop. It isn't punk, although it owes something to punk, in spirit and scene. It isn't high art, either. It is, fundamentally, *Gebrauchsmusik*—"utility music," as Paul Nettl, the Bohemian musicologist, described dance music, in 1921. The util-

ity, in this case, is mostly that of providing succor and pleasure, a sense of direction and purpose, to addled bodies and minds. The most characteristic subgenre, which peaked in popularity about a decade ago and has been explored to the edges of tolerability ever since, is minimal techno, a spare distillation that people have sometimes likened to the knocking of spoons on pots but which others parse as though it were Brahms.

Techno is repetitive, relying on subtle changes over time to intrigue the ear. It eschews lyrics, melody, and, arguably, harmonics. It doesn't resolve. You don't get crowd-pleasing drops. Its essential element is a basic four-on-the-floor beat—a 4/4 dictatorship in which the bass drum, or its proxy, is struck on every beat, with a snare on each "and." It sounds like "boots and pants, boots and pants." Say it. Say it again. The pleasure comes in repetition, in sly referents, and in the nature of the sound—the depth and texture of the low frequencies or, in the case of acid house, the squelchy bass of the Roland TB-303 synthesizer. House, which originated in the gay dance clubs of Chicago and (less so) New York in the eighties, often features a snare on the two and the four. "It's to give people with no rhythm a way to hold on to it," a d.j. friend, my techno rabbi, told me. "It's the grandma handle in the shower."

Purists object when you call this music E.D.M., though it is indisputably electronic music made for dancing. "Electronic dance music," lowercase, used to be an acceptable catchall term for the entire range of genres (house, deep house, acid house, trance, techno, industrial, drum and bass, dubstep, brostep, hardcore, happy hardcore, jungle, garage, etc.) created and performed on computers and synthesizers. Shortened to E.D.M., however, the term has come to signify the party-crowd d.j. music that has been the biggest pop phenomenon of the past half decade—Skrillex in Vegas, bros in the house. "E.D.M. took all the gayness and blackness out of it," my techno rabbi explained. "It's fascistic, with the d.j. on a stage." Some prefer to call it commercial electronic music. It doesn't have much to do with Berlin, except to the extent that Berlin defines it-

self in opposition to it. The nomenclature is convoluted. To the dabbler, it can seem that there are more genres than there are differences between them.

Techno emerged in the early to mid-eighties in and around Detroit, at the hands of black middle-class d.j.s who for some reason idealized the glamour and suavity of European electronic pop and Italo disco, as it reached them via *GQ* and the radio d.j. who called himself the Electrifying Mojo. They brought some rigor and a hint of Motown to it and created an industrial-sounding music that was funky, futuristic, and kind of arch—evoking the auto plants that were putting these kids' parents out of work.

Techno was also developing on its own in West Germany, in the underground clubs of Frankfurt, as a logical extension of the early electronic music of Kraftwerk and of the rhythms and sounds to be mined from the records of synthpop acts like Depeche Mode. Juan Atkins, one of the godfathers of Detroit techno, says he lifted the term from the futurist Alvin Toffler, but it may have been in use in Europe before anyone in Detroit took it up, in record stores, as a designation for synthpop or for the sound that would come to be called electro. The debate goes on. The techno that would flourish in Berlin was the Detroit strand that Hegemann brought back.

As the pent-up underground energy of the West spilled into the empty wastes of the East, Hegemann and his partners, amid the rush to colonize derelict spaces,

discovered a hidden depositary in a Mitte basement beneath a former Wertheim department store near what had been the Wall. It had been vacant since 1945. They set up in the vault and called it Tresor. The space was symbolic of reconciliation: straddling East and West, packed with reunified

Berliners—skinheads and soccer hooligans from the East in frenzied harmony with the gays and the hippies. The soundtrack was techno. In Detroit, techno had hardly left a mark, but in Berlin the music, and the Detroit d.j.s who made it, found a home. Hegemann has called techno "the most important musical movement of the last century." In Europe, anyway, this statement does not



necessarily seem hyperbolic. In some respects, techno—and its variants and relatives—represents a kind of post-Cold War folk music, endlessly adaptable, performable by anyone. As Hegemann has said, “We knew that the concept of the artist who drew all the attention from the audience was dead. Techno was all about anonymity. The artist became part of the public.” Not long ago, the Berlin d.j. Boys Noize tweeted, “If you see a d.j. that uses a mic and screams ‘put your hands up’ throw a banana at him.”

Most Berlin night clubs aren’t like the American kind. Security is light, rules are lax. Generally, there is no bottle service, no V.I.P. section, and, Berghain aside, no velvet rope. In this respect, they bear little resemblance to, say, Studio 54, which, glorious as it may have been, begat a stratified style that metastasized into the models-and-bankers Maybach-and-Cristal rat race that deflected a generation away from the clubbing life in the U.S.

Low-density neighborhoods make for lenient noise enforcement and therefore endless nights and powerful subwoofers; a liberal civic spirit means no blue laws or last calls. In Berlin, the authorities don’t especially mind your drinking on the street or on the subway. Actually, you can do pretty much anything on the street except jaywalk. It’s not a hierarchy town. There’s little compunction to network or to strive for entry into more elite social circles. “It doesn’t matter who you are here—or it matters less here, anyway, than elsewhere,” Robert Henke, a composer of electronic music who performs occasionally at Berghain, said.

Wednesday has always been a big night in Berlin, especially for resident d.j.s trying new things before a sympathetic crowd. Someone had told me to go to Farbfarnseher, a small club in an old television store under the S-Bahn tracks on Skalitzer Strasse. To kill time beforehand, I wandered the streets of Kreuzberg, expecting to find bars and crowds, but on this bitter, windy night—I’d heard this weather system called the Siberian Whip—there was no one around. What bars I passed were all but empty. On my last visit to Berlin, in the spring of 1990, just after the Wall fell, a friend and I had driven from

DR. ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, BACK FROM THE DEAD, TALKING ENDLESSLY ON A TINY TV

He says in the newsreel, like
a hundred little dodges
to make his Sherlock Holmes think straight,
meaning crooked, meaning sense and surprise do mix.
A museum thing. Surgeons’ Hall, Edinburgh—
bones in bottles, flesh ravaged by disease or musket balls
or plain bad DNA, oh chloroform, save us,
carbolic soap and Lister Lister Lister, now
Conan Doyle, homeboy
of this old and gorgeous city.

It’s just that, holy jealous! His detective
gets mail. One young woman would drop her darling
village boy to marry him. Holmes,
that is. The doctor should be saying, yes, my stilted prose,
yes, rare luck of the draw, a great character
came to me. Dogged effort pays off.
Everything’s a mystery until
a narrative kicks in.

You know what? It’s still a mystery.
Such a small screen. The film scarred, badly lit, on repeat.
I sit in a chair, watch
the big man welcome the camera as I imagine
he rose to the wide-eyed patient who’s
quite forgotten why she came or what is wrong.

southern Poland, expecting a kind of punk paradise. Instead, we found a desolate sprawling half city with no center and no discernible scene. In other words, a punk paradise, but we didn’t have eyes to see it. Here I was in Berlin again, a generation later, still wondering where Berlin was.

Farbfarnseher was a shuttered storefront on the ground floor of a graffitied apartment house with building sites on either side. I got there early, at around midnight, and claimed a spot along the wall by the bar, overlooking a small dance floor. The drink prices were listed in a Pong-era font on the screen of an old black-and-white TV. A few people sat on high benches along the walls, and a handful stood on the dance floor, watching the d.j. To my left, a stocky guy in a salmon-colored hoodie was bobbing and bouncing with great enthusiasm. His name was Ash. He and a friend, a d.j. and producer named J.P., were from Cambridge and were in town for four nights of clubbing. “Our main objective

is to listen to lots of techno and get blasted,” Ash said. They were twenty-four and twenty-three. Mates, not dates. “This is what you might call introspective dancing,” Ash said, looking down at the floor. “This room needs some psychedelics.” They pointed out, with approval, the analog Atari mixing deck that the d.j. was using: old school. The display brought to mind an abacus. “It’s stuff like this that makes me question people who say electronic music is divorced from instrumentalism,” J.P. said. “That’s a keyboard, basically.”

At around 2:30 A.M., I left for Tresor. The walk was about a mile along deserted streets, past giant apartment blocks. It was like a zombie movie set in the outskirts of Helsinki. I tacked toward a pair of giant smokestacks, red lights blinking slow. The original Tresor closed in 2005, and eventually the land was sold to a developer. In 2007, Hegemann and his partners opened a new Tresor in a gigantic decommissioned power plant on Köpenicker Strasse, on

That sweet blank stare of the lens
is hers. Now it's mine.
But he hasn't practiced for years, outdoors in the footage,
blurry shade, late Twenties, his
my stories, my novels and what to do, and how
do it and not doctor all day, and so on
and so forth

to 1929. Where my mother turns eight
in the mind's eye behind him,
or the stock market—hear that crash?
Disaster comes. And it goes. Probably
a flower bed
the real backdrop, and shade means
oak or wych elm, a house,
wicker table for tea, this loop this loop this loop . . .

So much is plain exhausting
and exacting and every stupid reason loves its reason,
those hundred little dodges that
get us in the end.

Sir Arthur, my name is
Merely and it's Dust Mote, it's Future and Gray Dissolve
where time put me in this chair
to watch you by accident because
so what. Or who knows. And no telling.

—Marianne Boruch

the Spree. I had no trouble getting in. Inside, an assault of pounding primal techno lured me down a corridor of smoke and strobes, into a smoky basement, figures appearing and disappearing in it like ships in fog. It didn't seem crowded, but everyone looked to be in a world of his own, some speedy, others half catatonic. The music was muscular, unrelenting. The d.j. stood behind steel bars, as though in a cell, and pressed buttons on two laptops. I got a beer from a stern bartender and went to stand in front of a wall of old blackened safe-deposit boxes from Wertheim. One could admire this music—the rigor, the noise, the industrial badassness of it—but after a while it began to seem absurd. Ash and J.P. appeared out of the fog, and we stood together awhile, watching. Scattered about were men in tight T-shirts making severe moves. “This is the solitary-rave, demolish-your-own-personality school!” Ash shouted. Later, he remarked, with something approaching admiration, “That was the

single most oppressive club atmosphere I've ever encountered.” I lasted eighty-four minutes.

I returned the next day, in the late afternoon, having all but missed whatever daylight the Siberian Whip would permit. The offices were upstairs, shabby and pleasant, with a backstage vibe. Some gaunt young dudes skulked about. Hegemann, in a faded hoodie, was at his desk, nibbling from a bag of licorice and talking in German with a colleague over photos of the ruins of Detroit.

“I'm a space pioneer,” he said. “My mission is to transform industrial ruins into cultural spaces. I have ideas. We save cities, you know? We are like a consulting firm. I could save Detroit.”

Hegemann went on, “The music came to us from Detroit. We got the milk when the milk was fresh. Now I'm older, the music's older. It's not fresh. We have competition. Techno is known. It is nearly pop. But it has not lost the intensity.”

Downstairs, the techno vault, now

without smoke, strobes, or aural assault, seemed no more remarkable than a fraternity tap room. The bank-vault boxes had been salvaged from the original Tresor. Their reincarnation here hinted at the creep of affectation and nostalgia in the techno culture of Berlin. We went up a stairwell and emerged into the main power plant—an old East German distance-heating facility that had served Mitte until 1996. It was now a vast empty cathedral of concrete, with towering pillars and vaults, arcane markings, and a trace of dusky natural light. Hegemann and his partners were calling this space Kraftwerk (*natürlich*) and didn't know quite what to do with it. To get it up to code, for safety and fire, they'd need to invest millions of dollars that they didn't have but hoped to pry from the City of Berlin, under the rationale of government support for an essential cultural industry and tourism draw. In the gloom, you could imagine the rhythmic clamor of the old turbines and pumps—the rudiments of techno.

The post-Wall abundance of derelict building and excess housing was decisive. “Empty spaces allowed there to be a club culture,” Robert Henke said. “With no empty space, you get a closed-at-2 A.M., restrictive-alcohol culture.” At first, the reclamation seemed slapdash, improvisational, anarchic, as squatters took over buildings and neighborhoods and set off a period of cultural ferment. But the powers that be had been dreaming up developments for years before the Wall came down, and now—amid a boom in real-estate speculation and investment (everyone spoke of the Swedes)—empty space, and the sense of wildness that comes with it, has become harder to come by. “Flats are getting more expensive,” Hegemann said. “But we still have many free spaces. This is the secret for why Berlin is still alive.”

Some empty spaces have completed their life cycles. One afternoon, I visited the old Reichsbahnbunker, a five-story fortress of reinforced concrete built by the Nazis in 1942 as an air-raid shelter. The Soviets turned it into a jail for P.O.W.s. Then it was used to store bananas and other tropical fruit. It was abandoned. In the nineties, it became an infamous techno night club, the Bunker. No ventilation, no fire exits. The

government eventually shut it down. In 2003, an advertising executive and his wife bought the building and converted it into a museum to house their collection of contemporary art. They also built a glass-and-steel penthouse on the roof, to house themselves. Now the collection is open to the public, by appointment only. I joined a tour one afternoon. The guide, a young art student with a sweet monotone, took us into a cell-like space featuring giant manipulated photographs of the night sky, by Thomas Ruff, and explained that it had been the original dark room of Berlin. "It was very extreme," she said. "It was hot, damp, loud, and dark. It was said to be the hardest club in the world. I'm sure you can imagine the things." She gave a coy smile.

Except for Lisbon, Berlin is the cheapest capital in Western Europe. This despite being the capital of the continent's richest country. Its population is still lower than it was at the outset of the Second World War. It's a little like a mountain town with ski bums and trustafarians cycling through. The kids come to play, not to stay. Crammed into their WGs (*Wohngemeinschaften*, or "shared flats"), they luxuriate in cheap rents, idle hours, and a capricious and creative cohort. What had been a very German scene became, a decade ago, pan-European, with the rise of cheap air travel and subsidized unemployment. Then came the Americans. It can be hard to find young people willing to work more than three days a week. And yet it can also be hard for someone who is working three days a week, and who is earning the low wages that are typical of Berlin, to salt away enough money to leave—to afford, say, the first month's rent in London or New York. So it favors those who have some money to spare or who don't care. One ex-Berliner said, "It's spring break for RISD kids."

In recent years, there has been more in the way of regular employment. There are tech startups, which attract engineers. Berlin is Europe's mobile-gaming hub, with the headquarters of Wooga. There are call centers, staffed by legions of young people pulling relatively arduous shifts, and a number of successful startups grounded in the electronic-music scene: SoundCloud, Ableton,

Native Instruments. Techno has quietly been professionalized, attracting private and government capital.

Ewan Pearson, a d.j. and producer, made his bones in the U.K. rave scene in the nineties and moved to Berlin in 2003, for a clubbing culture he found to be unpretentious and, if not temperate, then at least benign. "I'm from the West Midlands," he told me. "Every time you went out, you were primed for danger."

He and his wife, Caroline Drucker, a Bryn Mawr graduate who came to Berlin in 2003 to pursue a master's in architectural theory, have what passes in Berlin for a bourgeois life. Most weekends, he travels around Europe for d.j. gigs. She helped to launch Vice Media in Germany, then moved to SoundCloud, and now she is an executive in the Berlin office of Etsy, the online retailer of vintage and handmade stuff.

Pearson was featured in "Feiern" ("Party"), a 2006 documentary about the Berlin club scene. After describing the vortex into which one can disappear on a strong night, Pearson, wry and already going a little gray (he's forty-one now), remarks, "Don't forget to go home." The line gave the film its English title and became a catchphrase among the clubbers of his generation, a click of the slippers in this particular Oz. In a way, it's an accidental mantra for the scene's survivors, those who have fashioned a daytime life out of all those nights, and who have found a way to mellow a bit with age, without quitting entirely.

I'd been warned by a few adherents about what they called "the Berlin jade," the cynicism of the locals, native or adopted, toward the naïve enthusiasms of outsiders. Nearly everyone I talked to considered Berlin's peak—its finest, purest, most interesting, authentic, blissful period—to have occurred a year or two before he or she arrived. Newcomers perpetually catch the tail end and stake their claim to the remnants. Anytime an article comes out about what you might call the *Berlingeist*—how hip the city is, or no longer is—Berliners stick their fingers down their throats.

The writer Gideon Lewis-Kraus observed, in the Berlin chapter of "A Sense of Direction," his 2012 pilgrimage memoir, "What the word 'over' really means is that your expectations of a place, your fantasies of who you might have become

there, have been confounded by the persistence of you."

Each generation finds a Berlin to test that persistence. One night, I had a drink with two sisters from the suburbs of Chicago, Arielle and Adina Bier, formerly performance artists of a kind, who had recently settled in Berlin, which their grandparents were forced out of in the late thirties. Adina was interested in queer Berlin and liked to go to Homopatik—an all-weekend gay party at a club called Aboutblank—and the Sunday-night Pork party at Ficken 3000. (Its Web site: "Drink – Dance – Strip – Fuck. Music for prostitutes, indie anti-hits, pink noise, raw static, synth cherry pop, spunk rock, cock 'n' hole, artcore + lo-fi 4 low lifes.")

Arielle mentioned, with some disdain, an advertisement for Coca-Cola that had been making the rounds, in which a karaoke vender on a bicycle sets up his karaoke machine in Mauerpark, in Prenzlauer Berg, which is known for its flea market, and before long has an amphitheatre full of hipsters joyfully taking part. Later that night, I watched the ad a few times and wondered how the jaded Berliners had been persuaded to carry on like that for the Coca-Cola Company. The next day, I had coffee with Tilman Brembs, a very early visitor to Tresor. He worked for a casting agency, DEEBEE-PHUNKY, one of the biggest in Berlin; it had a portfolio of a thousand young Berliners as models and actors for hire, and had done ads for Microsoft, IKEA, and McDonald's. It turned out that he had cast that Coca-Cola campaign. He told me that the kids who appeared on camera were well paid. Goodbye, jade.

Brembs had come to Berlin in 1982—military-service avoidance. "The techno movement was like a second puberty for me," he said. When he arrived at Tresor, he helped tend bar and clean up after the parties. "In the early years, there was no running water. We had buckets of water to wash with. It was a crazy time. It was magic. Everything was possible. There were not so many tourists. We had a lot of English from the Allied Forces. They got out of their bases at night and they were full of drugs. Then they came no more. Probably they were arrested. They brought a different style, the ravers, the Ecstasy, the big printed T-shirts." At the clubs, he went on, "we had the

hooligans, all these rough guys, together with the gays. There was no violence. Maybe it was the Ecstasy. There was a Wild East atmosphere. People robbed shops. The police, they drove Trabants and were not fast enough for all the Golf GTEs. We preferred to take speed. It was the speed users versus the coke users. The coke people were arrogant. But the drugs were not the motor of the movement.”

He’s been finding ways to capitalize on techno ever since. In the nineties, he was a sanctioned photographer at Tresor (“The Bunker was too hard for me”). He put ten thousand photos online in 2007, under the heading “Zeitmaschine” (“Time Machine”). He’d started a company with D.J. Tanith, an early techno pioneer in Berlin, selling camouflage fabrics and party gear. For a while, Brembs worked for the Love Parade, the street jubilee that was cancelled in 2010, after twenty-one people were killed in a stampede—the Altamont of techno. He is married to a woman from New Hampshire and living in Prenzlauer Berg (Park Slope), and for the most part no longer spends much time in the clubs.

In the nineties, two Bunker regulars, Michael Teufele and Norbert Thormann, began throwing their own gay sex parties, called Snax, at various sites around the city. Around 1999, they opened a dance club in a train-repair depot in Friedrichshain, which they called Ostgut. It was essentially a gay club devoted to techno music, but it was mixed-friendly—open to women and straight men. Two years later, they started Panorama Bar, a separate space upstairs, which was straighter, and played house music and lighter techno. Downstairs were the burly, bare-chested men in camo pants and leather boots. Upstairs you had all kinds. The techno clubs of Mitte didn’t yet rely so much on the gay scene, and the gay clubs were less attentive to the quality of the music. Ostgut was a marriage of the two, and as such created something new—a gay club with mainstream appeal. It became a kind of distillation of the nineties scene. In many respects, Berlin’s queer culture is the city’s most essential and distinguishing element—the coagulant and the zest. It was thus in the twenties and in pre-1989 West Berlin, and remains so today. The clubs are its public face. No one in Berlin

is made nervous or embarrassed by the idea of going to a gay club.

Ostgut closed in 2003, and the building was torn down to make way for a sports arena. A year later, Teufele and Thormann opened Berghain. Not much is known about them. Thormann is a former fashion photographer. They like ballet. They never give interviews or pose for pictures, in part because they value their privacy and in part because of a kind of underground code of silence, exile, and cunning—a combination, perhaps, of vestigial Stasi-era paranoia, punkish disdain for the media, and an embrace of the techno-culture virtue of anonymity. Whatever the case, it has added to the club’s mystique, and so one could understand their not wanting to change. By all accounts, they make a lot of money. It is remarkable, in a high-turnover town, that the place has been able to sustain the spell for so long.

People strain to explain Berghain’s appeal. The effort is widely deemed futile (to say nothing of blasphemous). This may be a by-product of psychotropic drugs and the ineffability of chemical transcendence. Tales of nights out are like other people’s recounted dreams.

You are not allowed to take photographs inside the club. If you so much as hold a smartphone up, you will likely be thrown out. The philosophy is that whatever happens here is for the moment and doesn’t exist outside of that moment or outside the club—a righteous stand, perhaps, in a social-media world. There aren’t any mirrors. The European press for years has obsessed over the difficulty of getting in. Blogs, and even apps, have tried to decode it: “Don’t look too glamorous; look queer; don’t act like a tourist; don’t look too young; don’t show up as a group of straight men or women; dress eccentrically; go alone.” Don’t speak English, don’t



“Look, Peg, you don’t really have to dress like that for computer crime.”

stand out, don't act drunk or tweaked. The abiding idea seems to be don't be a jerk.

No one dances to be watched. Fighting and aggression aren't tolerated. Drug use must be discreet. If you're wasted, they'll kick you out. Generally, though, the security presence is subtle. Henke, the composer, told me, "There are lots of things you *can* do there, but there are things that you are not *obliged* to do. You don't go to a fetish party and think, Maybe I'll just have a drink and listen to some music. At Berghain, the architecture, and the social architecture, doesn't force me into a ritual human behavior."

I talked to a promoter who had had a lot of trouble getting into Berghain. Maybe he was too young. ("Older is better," he said. "Kids are idiots.") He was afraid of being quoted by name, because of the power that the Berghain owners have in Berlin. Playing there is such a privilege—not only for professional reputation but also for the sheer pleasure of playing extra-long sets in a wild and tasteful place—that no one wants to be subject to a *Hausverbot*. "A huge ingredient

in their secret sauce is control," he said. Henke, who knows the owners well, said, "They're still not sure how to handle how this place became so popular."

One way they'd handled it was by keeping journalists and other squares like me out. But my techno rabbi had got me onto the guest list of a d.j.

On wide, empty streets, I rehearsed my pidgin-Deutsch greeting—"Ich bin auf der Hausliste"—and walked past superstores that had sprung up in recent years on vacant lots. Before long, I fell in with a few other cloaked figures and came upon a line of taxis, then followed a muddy path along a metal grate toward the old power station, an industrial-deco block of stone and concrete. Berghain. Through the windows you could hear the kick drum and see flashing colored lights. The line wasn't long: a few dozen bundled and murmuring souls. I circumvented it, as instructed, and waited by the entrance while the bouncer, a big square-jawed crewcut man in an overcoat, dealt with some supplicants. He was in intense but quiet con-

versation, as though about a medical condition, with two young men with the sides of their heads shaved. Turks, perhaps.

"In spite of this, we say no because we can say no," he told them. "It's just bad luck."

For some reason, they were holding out their passports, open to their photos. "Please," one said. "Please," the other said.

"You're not getting in," the bouncer said gently. He ignored the passports and turned his back. They looked crestfallen. Next up was a group of five British men, probably in their early thirties, with a City of London polish about them. The bouncer explained that there wouldn't be a place inside for them tonight, and one of them said something cheeky about Berlin being a backwater. The bouncer shrugged.

"I'm just joking," the Brit said.

"I got it," the bouncer said. He waited for them to go away and then he turned to face me.

"Ich bin . . ." The bouncer disappeared inside. I'd been told that the list was no guarantee. I also knew that they didn't want me in their club. ("You're an American," I'd been told, "and to them that makes you a Puritan.") After a moment, he came back out with two other bouncers. They looked me up and down, then motioned me in. Another man patted me down. Nearby, Sven Marquardt, the infamously intimidating tattooed bouncer, was talking and laughing with a group. He didn't look so scary, at least compared with the others. At a ticket window, a man stamped my wrist and said, "See? Easy."

Through a door was a big concrete hall. Coat check: the operation was brisk. For a chit, you got a dog tag to wear around your neck, so you wouldn't lose it. I tried some doors and found them to be locked, and realized that Berghain proper wasn't open until the following night. Tonight was just Panorama Bar, an evening billed as "Get Perlonized!," a celebration of the music of Perlon, a small but beloved Berlin techno and house record label. I walked up some side stairs decorated with giant photo portraits of the resident d.j.s, who were all, it seemed, forbiddingly handsome, and, at a small bar half hidden behind a grate, ordered a Club-Mate—an herbal energy drink—into which, as is the custom, I poured a shot of vodka, and then went Carrawaying around.



"The pink ones are sashimi, and I believe the little yellow ones just fell off the Pollock."

A seasoned crowd: diverse in age, appearance, sexual preference, condition of mind. The vibe was laid-back, the look dishevelled, wild-eyed, attractive, louche. Bedhead, shaved head—intentional hair. Dark clothing, layers, leather, natural fibres, boots, scarves, piercings. The smell of tobacco and weed and sweat. Groups lounged on benches and in comfy chairs and on the floor. The bathrooms were buzzing with cokey conversation. Couples entered hand in hand and found stalls. While using one for its intended purpose, I heard laughter to one side and rustling to the other, and felt the embarrassment of my Puritanical roots. The main bar, three-sided and occupying the back half of the main space, was cleverly lit, with attentive bartenders and no risk of being overlooked. The prices were low. I walked behind the bar area, along a dark corridor of cubbies in which people were fooling around or spacing out, and tacked back toward the d.j., who was working at the front of the room. The d.j. table hung from the ceiling on chains. You couldn't get very close, but there was space along the wall, where the floor was strewn with empty bottles—beer, water, Club-Mate—which people generally just toss on the floor. Now and then, a man came through with a crate and unobtrusively gathered some up, but as the night wore on the floor pooled up with broken glass—Berghain jetsam. The sound was loud and yet clean enough to allow conversation. A friend had told me, with regard to the evolution of minimal techno, “If you amplify it really loud, you need less music.”

Nothing to photograph here. I stayed until 7 A.M.

Saturday night, or really Sunday morning, is *Klubnacht* at Berghain. I was back at 3 A.M., this time in the main club, approaching peak tourist hour. Past the coat check, there was a giant concrete atrium, pretty much empty, with a bar in the corner. A few glass bottles rained down from above and shattered at my feet. A steel staircase led up to a big dance floor surrounded by various bars and nooks. The left side of the dance floor was dominated by muscular men, many shirtless, and a few doing a dance that I'd heard called, jokingly, Pressing the Dwarf. The straight crowd was to the right, but it seemed that most were up at

Panorama Bar. Here and there were concrete plinths, upon which pretty people danced. Groups lounged on beds hanging from chains, gently swinging back and forth.

The dark rooms were around somewhere, but I didn't go looking for them. Perhaps I'd wait for the boar hunter. Here and there stuff was going on, in plain sight, yet I saw little to upset or titillate. The Caligula mystique, the stories of men defecating on each other or using frozen turds as dildos, seemed disproportionate. No one offered me so much as a glance, to say nothing of an Icy Mike. I had a shot of Jägermeister and an espresso and went out onto the dance floor and stood in front of one of the speakers. There were six of them, each about the size of a Trabant. The sound was revelatory, the deep bass tones like a drug. A d.j. named Mathew Jonson, from Vancouver, had taken over the booth for an improvisational turn with two others, who performed under the name Minilogue. The three men hunched over laptops and mixers as though herding tiny animals with their hands. Jonson had a curly mop of hair and a beard, and looked like some wild ape-man of electronica. The music was churning, hypnotic, almost psychedelic, and I abandoned myself to it.

The hours passed. During a weekend, the clubbers come and go, as if to a tidal rhythm. A friend had likened the scene to a coral reef: various schools of multi-colored fish, stubborn crustaceans, the occasional ray or eel gliding by, swimming in an ocean of techno. In the eddies, there were people who, though all but motionless, seemed caught up in something intense—you could see it in their eyes. “You are touched by the different frequencies,” the d.j. Ricardo Villalobos says in “Feiern.” “You start to think about your childhood.” Transcendence and transgression lurked just out of sight.

At one point, I went up to Panorama Bar, where a d.j. from Windsor, Ontario, was playing a set of Chicago house and Detroit techno. Her name was Heidi—Heidi Van den Amstel. She had curly peroxided hair, a white T-shirt, tattoos on her arms, and leather pants. She'd arrived

from London shortly before her set, amid flight delays across Europe—an entire Continent of revellers vexed by a disruption to the techno supply chain. She was part of the generation of Windsorites who'd fallen hard for the dance music across the river, in Detroit. She moved to Europe a dozen years ago, living in London and Berlin. This was the first time she had played Panorama Bar in almost four years. She had been nervous, but now she was in the thick of it, dancing and tossing her hair as she worked the mixing console. She flipped through a binder of CDs and manipulated knobs, her pinkie out, as though she were drinking tea. Her agent brought her a shot of tequila, which she chased with a lemon wedge,



and she shuddered. A voice in the music intoned, as though from a *Zeitmaschine*, “Can you feel it acid house acid house I was there.” People were jammed up in front of her dancing, some with Avalon Ballroom abandon. “I want you, I need you.” This was fun music, joyous music, not the austere minimal techno of downstairs, or the jazzy techno of Jonson and Minilogue, or the hardcore techno that would inspire one to press the dwarf. The bass rattled the empty tin record bins behind the d.j. I sent a text to the boar hunter, wondering if he was around. He replied, “KitKatClub.”

After a few hours, Heidi stretched her back and leaned into the climax of her set. Downstairs, the techno—and the crowd—had turned hard. Upstairs, the dingy gray light of another Baltic morning leaked past the edges of the louvred shutters at the windows. Soon the shades would flash open in synch with the music, to astonish the congregation with the insult of daylight.

Two d.j.s who go by the name Bicep took over. Heidi checked her face in her compact, gave herself over to the adulation of the dancers down in front, and then, after a moment, made her way to the bar with her boyfriend and her agent. I joined them for tequila shots and beers. Breakfast in Berlin. This went on for a while. Heidi had had a marvellous time—too much for words, really—but she didn't want to talk about Berghain. She was afraid that if she did she'd never get to play there again. ♦

UNDER
THE SIGN OF
THE MOON

Tessa Hadley

The train paused at a red light on its way into the station, waiting for a platform to clear. The passengers had put on their coats and put away their laptops and lifted their bags down from the luggage rack; some were already standing, queuing between the seats. Liverpool was the last station, the end of the two-and-a-half-hour journey from London; they were ready to move on but could not move anywhere yet. Quiet and stillness settled unexpectedly on the carriage. Because the forward motion of their lives was suspended while they waited, the passengers were suddenly more intimately present to one another—although no one spoke or made eye contact. Greta felt the change in atmosphere and looked up from her book and out the window, keeping her finger on her page. They were waiting in shadow, in a cutting between high walls of red sandstone.

In the rock, she could see, like art patterns following the natural lines of the strata, the chisel marks of the navvies who'd once cut and blasted down into it. The rock face was streaked with moss, and here and there buddleia and fern had rooted, scrawny because they lived out their lives in this subterranean railway kingdom; far above, ash saplings stood out against a pale sky. The strata in the rock were woven into sections of brick wall and the old bricks—small and vivid, rust-colored, crusted with salts—seemed to flow as if they, too, had been put down in sedimentary layers. Elegantly arched recesses were built into the base of the wall. The old engineering was as magnificent in its scale and ambition as a Roman ruin, Greta thought, its ancientness inscrutable and daunting and moving.

The man sitting across the table from her noticed that she was looking out. He told her that this was the oldest stretch of railway in the world, and that they used to have to haul the trains into Lime Street from here, because it was too steep for the early locomotives. "There are stables built into the rock for all the horses," he said. "We're inside a hill they call Mount Olive."

Greta didn't know whether she believed him: whether he was the sort of man who knew about things or the sort who made them up. She made an interested noise, then looked back down at her book without speaking. Since her illness began, at least in the intervals when

she felt well enough to read, she had immersed herself in books almost fanatically, trying not to leave open any chink in her consciousness through which she could be waylaid by awareness of her body or by fear or disgust. She read only fiction, not history or politics, and nothing experimental or difficult that would require her to pause for reflection or argument. She had read a lot of novels recently that she would have disdained in the past.

As soon as she had settled into her seat at Euston, the man across the table had shown signs of wanting to talk. He had asked her how far she was going, and then whether she was travelling for business or on a holiday. Greta had answered, friendly enough, that she was going to see her daughter, Kate, who had moved to Liverpool recently. It hadn't occurred to her at first that he might want their conversation to continue past these preliminaries. The gap between them had seemed too immense; she was almost sixty, and he was surely nearer to her daughter's age. His rather distinctive hair was short and thick: dark blond, wavy, and wiry, with burnished gold threads in it. When he found out that Kate lived in Aigburth, he told her that he was born there, and seemed disproportionately astonished and delighted by the coincidence. Greta couldn't hear any traces of a Liverpool accent, but he might have shed it or never had it.

There was something in his eagerness to please that warned her off. His good looks reminded her of those of certain damaged film stars and pop stars from her nineteen-fifties childhood: cheekbones and jaw chiselled too rigidly, mouth loose-lipped and needy, handsome head oversized in relation to the slack, slight body. He was neatly dressed: none of Kate's male friends would ever have chosen to wear a belted short white mac, an open-necked yellow shirt, and a maroon V-necked jumper. If Greta hadn't heard the man speak she might have thought he was a foreigner, a Central European, dressing according to a different code. He took the mac off at some point and folded it, laying it carefully on the seat beside him, on top of a leather box-briefcase with a combination lock. You didn't see those briefcases so often now, she realized, because every-

body carried a laptop. The briefcase was old-fashioned, like his clothes.

He kept telling her how much she was going to like Liverpool. It had a reputation, he said, but actually it had changed completely since the bad old days. Liverpoolians were the most warmhearted people you'd ever meet; they'd give you their last crust if you needed it. Greta thought she could hear the accent then, slipping into his speech—almost as if he were putting it on for her benefit. The only thing she didn't like about Liverpool, she thought, was the way people who came from there harped on about how warmhearted they were. She didn't bother to tell him that she had visited Kate once already, a year ago, just after her diagnosis. And she had lived in Liverpool for a while, too, in the seventies, with Kate's father—who was not the man she was married to now. So she knew something about how much the city had changed.

Determinedly, she opened up her book.

"I can see you're a great reader," he said.

"Yes."

"I wish I had more time for it. I used to love stories when I was a kid. Mum said the world could end while I was reading and I wouldn't even notice."

Smiling noncommittally, she pretended to be wrapped up at once in her novel—though for a few moments the words she stared at swam in her mind, not conveying any meaning. She was too aware of her companion's presence across the table, and of having so firmly cut off his desire to talk. He seemed at a loss as to what to do without her. He didn't even have a newspaper with him. But Greta had to save herself, and didn't care if he thought she was rude or cold.

He didn't show any sign of being offended. He spoke to her again from time to time—usually when, having forgotten about him, she looked up inadvertently from her reading. "How's it going?" he asked jocularly once, nodding at her book as if it were a marathon test she'd set herself. The train stopped at Stafford, and he seemed to know all about that, too—he told her about a castle, and a battle in the Civil War. Was she imagining things, or did she detect faint traces then of a Midlands accent? He might be one of those chameleons,

changing his coloration to match wherever he was. When he went to get coffee from the buffet he offered to bring one for her, too; she longed for coffee but refused, because she knew she'd feel obliged to pay for it with conversation.

She would have been quite sure, once, that this man was trying to chat her up—there was a certain persistent, burrowing sweetness in his attentions. However, that was out of the question now. When Greta put on her reading glasses to look in the mirror these days, she saw that her skin was papery and sagged on her neck and under her jaw, her face was criss-crossed by tiny creases. This wasn't all the effect of her illness; much of it was just ordinary aging. She had spent yesterday afternoon at the hairdresser's, having her hair cut and highlighted so that she could present a cheerful, sanely coping front to Kate, but still her brown hair was full of gray. Also, Greta couldn't help believing that her problems, which were gynecological, showed on the surface somehow, barring her definitively from the world of sexual attraction. That part of her life was over. She didn't want to read online

about women who'd had what she had and gone on to enjoy exciting sex lives for years afterward. She dreaded the smiling pretense even more than the bleak truth.

When Greta wheeled her suitcase off the platform and onto the main Liverpool concourse, she expected to catch sight of Kate at once. The rush of emotion in this expectation took her by surprise: most of her feelings, over these past months, had been muted, as if she were persisting through grim effort. She anticipated with her whole body the instant when she would see Kate and they would be enfolded together; looking keenly around, she seemed to see her daughter already stepping forward—handsome, tall, spirited—out of the crowd. They weren't the kind of mother and daughter who were always cuddling and touching, but surely they would embrace now, after everything that had happened.

Then she heard her phone ping and had to rummage for it in her handbag and put her glasses on to read the text. Kate would be about twenty minutes late—no hint of regret or apology. And

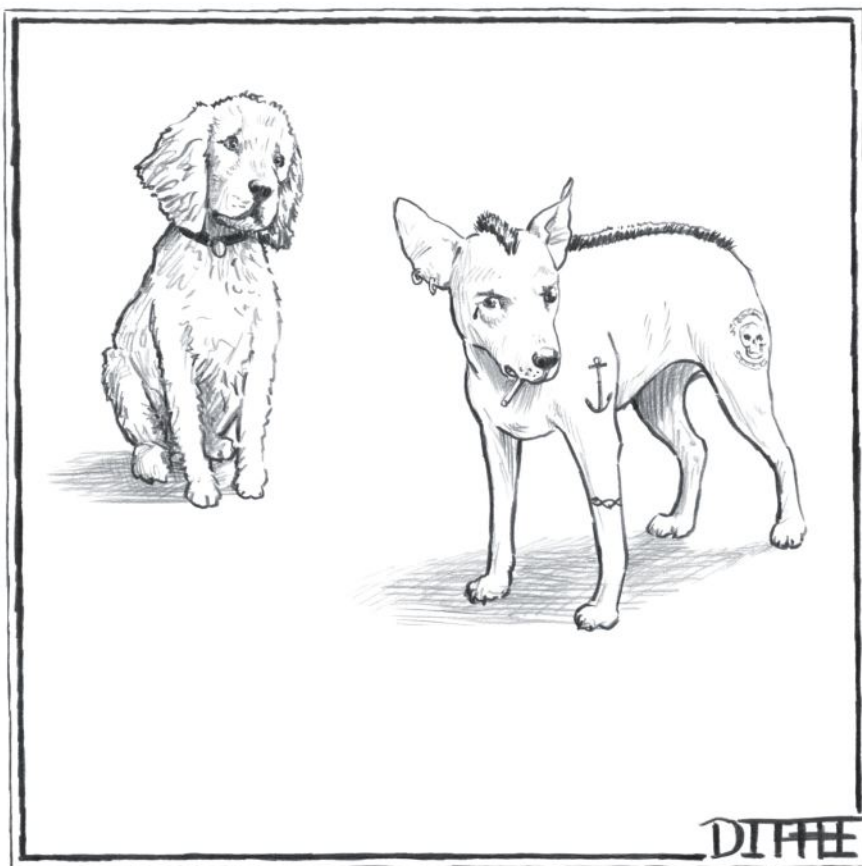
Greta knew Kate: twenty minutes meant half an hour, at least. Her disappointment as she read was infantile. What did it matter if Kate was a bit late? But the idea of her daughter's waiting for her had seemed for a moment like a rich gift of the good luck she had got used to doing without. She had been trying so sedulously not to want anything too much. Quickly she wiped her eyes with a tissue from her sleeve. Nothing had gone wrong; everything was still on track. She could use the time to get herself the coffee she had wanted earlier. Wheeling her suitcase over to one of the café franchises in the station, she didn't see until the last minute that her companion from the train was there ahead of her, sitting at a table out on the concourse, beside the dark little den where the coffee was made.

He hadn't seen her, either: he was bending his head over his coffee, blowing on it to cool it. At least she couldn't accuse him of stalking her; it looked now, if anything, as if she were in pursuit of him. Away from the train, with his mac on and a paisley silk scarf tied around his neck, he didn't seem quite so unfortunate; there was even something touchingly contained and self-sufficient in the way he sat absorbed in the steam from his cup, not texting or talking on his phone, no phone in evidence at all. His skin was rough and pitted, but the slanting lines and planes of his cheekbones were striking in profile, beautiful like those of a peasant in an old Central European photograph, though Greta thought he didn't know it. When he did notice her—a wheel on her suitcase got caught on the leg of one of the wrought-iron café chairs, scraping it along the floor—he put down his cup with what appeared to be genuine pleasure at seeing her again. Concerned, he asked if everything was all right. Probably her nose was flushed red—that was usually what happened when she cried. She explained brightly that her daughter had been delayed, and she'd decided to have a coffee while she waited.

On an impulse, she paused beside his table. "Do you mind if I sit here?"

He leaped to pull out a chair for her. "Be my guest."

This time, Greta allowed him to buy her a coffee, a cappuccino; he went to queue for it at the counter inside. Actually, she was grateful; she needed to sit



"Kennel changes a dog, Muffin."

down. She wasn't in pain, exactly: there was only the deep ache where her womb once was, and a familiar draining sensation as if her blood were waves, dragging at the gravel on a shore. There was no need to hold herself so carefully apart from this stranger, she thought, just because he was needy and lonely. She was needy, too. They might as well keep each other company.

He was keen to talk about himself, when Greta encouraged him. He had come to Liverpool to visit relatives who lived in Blundell Sands, but they wouldn't be home from work yet so he was in no hurry; he would have a little look around before he caught the bus. He had only a small suitcase with him, she saw, along with the briefcase. These relatives weren't his own age; they were his mother's cousins. Greta began to guess that he was one of those people who spent their youth involved with an older generation, until they themselves became elderly by association—and didn't mind it in the least or try to escape. This would explain his clothes, and something quaint and dated in his manner. She could imagine him as the cherished boy in a strong extended family, which for no particular reason hadn't produced many children. Such a good, obedient boy, and so nice-looking: they would be bemused by the fact that he didn't have more friends his own age, or a girlfriend. Greta inquired about girlfriends and he reddened, said he was afraid not, not at present. He might be gay: she had already wondered about that.

He worked for his uncle, who managed a small wholesaler's in Brentford, supplying foil containers and other utensils to the food trade. The Liverpool relatives had invited him to stay because he needed a change of scene: he was still getting over the shock of his mother's death, six months ago. He and his mother had been very close, he said; he had lived at home to keep her company after his father died. It was easy to assume that families like this didn't exist anymore: submissive, frugal, unpolitical, tribal. Greta knew for certain, as though she'd seen it, that last night he had laid out his clothes for the journey, along with his train ticket, just as his mother would have done for him when she was alive, and that he had checked several times to be sure he hadn't forgotten anything. This was the world of



"So this is what you do when I pretend to leave, then come back unexpectedly in five minutes."

Greta's childhood, which she had rejected so absolutely. She knew that the tragic story of his mother's visits to the G.P., her misdiagnosis, and her falling down unconscious in the street while she was shopping must have been recounted many times: it was as well-worn as the track of footsteps around an old carpet. You could feel the reality collapsing into the familiar safe phrases, becoming part of a routine, becoming myth: "The nurses in the hospital were very kind. They did everything they could. She looked very peaceful when they laid her out."

Then Greta lifted her head and saw Kate in the distance.

"Ah, here's my daughter!" she cried, triumphant, interrupting him, half standing up from the table to wave to Kate. She knew it was unseemly of her to abandon him like that mid-sentence: he was telling her something so intimate and so important to him, and she had encouraged him to tell her these things, had skillfully probed for them. Kate was wearing silky loose trousers, a cropped top tight across her breasts, showing her bare midriff, and some kind of military-style coat with yellow frogging, hanging open. She was the very opposite type to

Greta's new friend, not in the least meek or old-fashioned. The long rope of her hair, worn in a ponytail high on her head, was red by nature, dyed with streaks of a wilder red. Catching sight of Greta, she strode across the concourse toward her, impatient as if she weren't the one who was late. "I don't have the car," she announced, only glancing disparagingly at her mother's companion. "Boyd needed it today. We have to get a taxi."

Kate always had an air of submitting to her mother's kisses, rather than returning them: her quickly proffered cheek tasted of moisturizer, the skin so clear. There was hardly time for Greta to say goodbye to the young man, and they parted as if it were the merest accident that they'd been sitting at the same table. She hadn't properly looked at him again, once she'd seen Kate. And yet, while she was smiling proudly, watching Kate make her way toward them, he had said something fairly astonishing—so quickly, and with such an air of its being an acceptable and reasonable suggestion, that Greta wasn't sure at first that she'd heard correctly. Then she didn't have time to respond before Kate was there, taking charge. He'd said that he would be

at the Palm House, in Sefton Park, on Thursday afternoon, at two o'clock. If she wanted, she could meet him there.

When Greta lived in Liverpool, in the seventies, with her first husband, before Kate was born—in fact the very summer Kate was conceived—she wasn't called Greta. Her name then was Margaret: Maggie. And Ian, Kate's father, wasn't strictly Greta's husband, either, not by law. It was while they were staying with friends in that squat in Liverpool that they had devised their own marriage ceremony. *Under the sign of the moon and the eye of the goddess*, it began. *With my body I thee worship*. It was difficult to know, with Ian, just how much irony there was in this. He could be pretty mocking about phony mysticism. He knew about the real pagans, he said: he had read classics at York University, which was where he and Greta had met, though Ian had dropped out halfway through their second year. And he had a way of inciting other people to behave extravagantly, then looking on with gleeful amusement, as if he couldn't believe how biddable they were.

Ian and Greta made little cuts on their thumbs in front of their friends in the squat, and mingled bloods, and ate their food from the same dish. He was smaller than she was, very skinny and lithe and excitable, always jumping about like a kid, with a silky beard and very pale skin and the same silky auburn hair as Kate's. Sometimes he was exquisitely kind to Greta—especially in sex, but not only then. He loved it when she absorbed herself in his crazes, for planting things or baking bread or Hungarian folk music; they had talked seriously about moving to Wales together, to try subsistence farming. She had learned never to relax her guard, though. He could snatch his favor away from one moment to the next, retreating into a dark mood, leaving her bereft.

Ian dropped acid for the first time on their wedding day, along with a gang of their friends. Greta was too afraid to try it, but said she would stay with the others to watch out for them. They went wandering around the streets at night, exclaiming over all the ordinary sights: telephone boxes and cars and garden shrubs. All natural things were beautiful; everything man-made seemed monstrous. Ian announced that he could see

into the atomic structure of the paving stones under their feet, which was like a fluorescent grid of energy: he could have sunk through it if he'd wanted, but he consented to the laws of physics, allowing it to hold him up. They climbed over a fence into a park—it might have been Sefton Park—and headed for the open grassy slopes, where they lay on their backs looking up at the sky. Some of the boys built a fire out of fallen branches and stood talking to it. "Brother fire, we won't hurt you," they said. They found it funny and profound when someone asked whether the fire was heating them or they were heating the fire.

Then Ian wanted Greta to consummate the marriage with him there on the grass, in honor of the moon goddess: except that there wasn't a moon, the night was cloudy, and the grass was wet. Obviously they had had sex many times before—but he insisted that this time was sacred. Greta said that she couldn't, because of the others being there.

"Don't be afraid," he said, coaxing her, lying half on top of her, rubbing her breast with his palm, covering her neck with little nibbling kisses. "Trust me: Margaret, Maggie, Marguerite. It will be different, because we're man and wife. It will be amazing. Don't be uptight, don't be bourgeois."

He often teased her for being bour-

EAST FEBRUARY

Out there the air is moist I
can tell walking through it.
Thank you so much for coming in.
It's late isn't it,
almost grotesque.
My crew will be in touch.

Not expecting friends
that you don't know yet are coming.
Foxtrot,
performance art,
that I gaze on so fondly today—
this hymn to dowdiness
Howdy-Doody shaped . . .

A mouse can show what works
even if no one knows why, he said.

—John Ashbery

geois. His own family was far nastier than Greta's—his father was a bully, who worked for the BBC, and his mother was an actress and an alcoholic. But perhaps it was worse to be safe and dull. Their lovemaking would be beautiful for everyone to see, he told her. "Knock knock, open up."

"How come your title doesn't change," Greta said, "and mine does? You're still man, but I'm wife? Why don't you call yourself husband?"

Her feminism in those days consisted mostly of these niggling technicalities. Usually Ian tolerated them, as if they were of no importance. Now he stopped kissing her but stayed on top of her, his hand still on her breast; his breath on her cheek smelled sour. He was looking through the dark into her face—not at it but into it. Up to that point she had wondered whether the tab of acid was really having any effect on him, because he had sounded too much like himself, putting on what he imagined tripping ought to be like.

"I can see into your thoughts," he said. "I can see them pulsing. I can see the little petty, sulky worms of your thoughts, eating you up because you're dead. Poor little Maggie, everyone. So pretty, isn't she? But I found out she's dead."

For a moment, Greta seemed to see what Ian saw, as if she were looking down

at herself. The whole sum of her being had a kind of corpse-luminescence in the darkness: stiff and mechanical, inhibited. Because of her background, or perhaps just because of her intrinsic nature, there were certain levels of experience she would never be able to attain; she would never break out of the bounds of her reasonable self. Then she pushed him away and sat up and was upset and angry, and he ignored her, cutting her out of conversations as if she weren't there.

The others all seemed by now to have passed into a world she couldn't enter. Eventually she left them to it and made her way back to the squat; she spent her wedding night alone, sobbing and desolate, worrying that something terrible would happen because she'd abandoned them. Nothing terrible did happen—although the police turned up in the park, because of the fire, and chased them out. And she did find out, weeks later, that after she left Ian had made love on the grass anyway, with a girl called Carol, whom they hardly knew: a friend of a friend, passing through the squat. Greta had wondered why Carol left so precipitously the next day. When she confronted Ian, he asked if she thought she owned his body, just because she was married to him. "We're not going to do any of that crap," he said. "And, by the way, that trippy sex was amazing—like fucking the universe, for eternity. You should try it sometime. Honestly."

Greta sometimes told stories about Ian to her second husband—the real one, Graham, who came later. Reliably, Graham would be outraged by Ian's arrogance and swaggering selfishness. Whenever the two men crossed paths—Ian would take a fancy, every so often, to being involved in his daughter's upbringing—Ian could be counted on to turn up hours late, to feed Kate the sweets that made her hyper, and to keep her up long past her bedtime, so that she had a sick headache the next day. He condescended with amusement to Greta and Graham's domestic routines. Greta, by this time, was an English teacher at a comprehensive school, and Graham worked with disaffected teen-agers. Ian never settled down to anything so steady; for a while, he had a business buying old

pine furniture and stripping it. It didn't help that when Kate was little she adored her father, who forgot about her for months at a time: it was Graham who pushed her on the swings in the playground, packed her little bag for nursery school, got up with her at night when she had bad dreams.

There was something not quite honest, Greta knew, in the way she prodded Graham to say those dismissive and loathing things about Ian. Partly, it smoothed out certain tricky passages in their relationship, made Graham her defender. Otherwise, he might have wondered how much she still yearned, treacherously, for Ian—because there were aspects of the stories about Ian that she withheld. When he told her, for instance, about the "trippy sex," Greta had actually laughed, because she knew that he had chosen the word "trippy" deliberately to flaunt at her, with its plastic, blaring garishness, calculated to make her curl up. Fucking the universe for eternity, *really*? He couldn't mean it, not in those preposterous words. And when she'd laughed, Ian had laughed, too, and their quarrel had finished, as usual, in vengeful, untender lovemaking, the two of them gripping hard, staring shamelessly, right to the bitter end, or almost to the end. "Look at you," Ian had said with amazement. "Just look at you."

Ian died when Kate was nine, knocked off his bike by a lorry in London. And these days she didn't want to hear anything about him; she called Graham "Dad," which she had refused to do when she was a child. In the taxi from the station, she chattered insistently, and Greta knew that it was because she was afraid of hearing about her mother's illness. Greta would find that they'd made a few changes in the flat, Kate said. They'd bought a new sofa,

and because they couldn't afford a new kitchen they'd painted the cupboard doors a different color. Greta guessed that Kate was vaguely aggrieved about the new kitchen—her sense of her entitlement to material things was somehow not greedy, just part of her natural force. She and Boyd were doing well at the university: the department had won an important research grant, which would



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fund their fellowships for at least three more years. Boyd and Kate both worked in Ocean Sciences, Boyd on the carbon cycle, Kate on fish stocks.

Greta sat forward to look out the taxi window, trying to spot landmarks from the seventies. "I remember once it was dusk," she said, "and we were in a car. I don't know whose car—Ian didn't own one. And the road ran around in front of a great circle of Victorian buildings, so tall they blocked out the sky—so many windows. Huge hotels, perhaps, railway hotels. Then we realized these buildings were empty shells, half-ruined—you could see right through them in places. Like being in ancient Rome after the fall of the empire."

The whole idea of her mother's past made Kate uneasy. "Who was that creepy guy you were with at the station?" she asked suspiciously. "You were chatting merrily away together."

Greta was practiced at presenting a face wiped clean of knowledge. "Just someone who was sitting there when I sat down," she said. "There weren't any empty tables."

"Yes, there were."

It wasn't until Greta's suitcase had been unloaded onto the pavement in front of Kate's flat that Kate asked about her health, hastily, as if in passing. The flat was a recent conversion, in a detached house in a wide street planted with hornbeams, where a few houses were still crazily derelict.

"So what do the doctors say? Are they pleased with you?"

Greta was paying the driver. She didn't mind that Kate always asked like this, appealing above her head to the doctors, as if her mother couldn't be trusted to understand her own disease; it was only Kate's way of channelling her emotions. Greta said she thought the doctors were pleased: they didn't want to see her for three months. This was the truth, although she pronounced it with an air of blessed reprieve that wasn't exactly what she felt. Her expectations lately were so muffled and diminished, and there was too much that could happen in three months.

Inside the flat, Kate solicitously made Greta comfortable on the new sofa, put the kettle on for tea; she had bought almond cakes from an organic place Boyd approved of. Kate could for-

give her mother for being ill, now that she was allowed not to dread the worst—she could even forgive her for not wanting cake. "You have to eat, you know," Kate said. "You're horribly thin. It doesn't suit you."

Greta closed her eyes, giving herself up to the kettle's roaring undertow, the thud and rattle of the fridge door closing, the chiming of a spoon against china mugs, Kate's low humming to herself, the central-heating radiators coming to life, clicking and easing. Greta's awareness of her daughter's coming and going was like a thick thread of feeling, connecting them materially. In these past months, her mind would quite often submerge like this in her surroundings. This is all there is, she'd think—being alive, just here, right now. It wasn't a reductive or depressing insight; it was almost a form of happiness, the kind of apprehension religious people strove for.

Away from Boyd, Greta could find herself resenting him; you might have thought he was a tyrant, from Kate's anxious attention to his opinions and judgments. He wouldn't touch alcohol; he liked only European jazz; because of climate change, he refused to fly. But Greta and Graham had scrutinized him with deep suspicion and had to conclude that it was Kate who made the tyranny, for her own purposes—she who had never submitted to anyone before. And, if it was tyranny, then she was thriving on it, blooming and softened and eager in his presence.

Boyd arrived home, the first evening of Greta's stay, laden with bags full of meat and vegetables from the farmers' market he'd visited in the morning; he cooked a stir-fry, which was just the thing to appeal to Greta's appetite. And, as soon as he was actually present, Greta remembered how much she liked him: fair and trim and rosy, light on his feet, with a neat round head and a bald patch like a monk's tonsure. His fleecy clothes in primary colors were no doubt scientifically designed to keep him warm, or cool, or whatever it was he wanted. He was much better than Kate at asking sensibly how Greta was, and then not making a big deal of it but drawing her into more general conversation, doing her the courtesy of presuming that she was still interested in things. Boyd was

definitely the kind of man who knew things. He had strong opinions, but they were always worth listening to. When Kate held forth about the degradation of the oceans she was indignant, as if it were everyone's fault but hers; Boyd was more measured and realistic. Sometimes Greta even thought he coluded with her in amusement—which Kate didn't notice—at Kate's passionate partisanship. And no doubt his responses to Greta, when she didn't know things or muddled her ideas, were tinged with the same, not ungenerous humor.

The life Kate and Boyd led wasn't anything like Greta's life had been, when she was in her thirties. For instance, Greta and Graham would have chosen to live on this street precisely because of its mixture of renovated houses with derelict ones. They'd liked to feel that they were living on the edge of something "real," not retreating too far inside the safety of privilege; whereas, Boyd explained to Greta, unapologetically, that he and Kate saw this flat as a transitional step on their way to buying a house in a nicer area. And yet this younger couple were more likely to effect radical change in the world, for the good, through their work, than she and Graham ever had been. Their certainty and their energy warmed her—even if she couldn't quite suppress her habit of critical observation. Boyd was comical, sorting the recycling with such earnest pedantry. And Greta enjoyed noticing that he had a weakness for sweet things—after he'd eaten his own almond cake, he finished the one that she had hardly touched.

She asked him about the cutting where her train had waited outside the station. Was it true that it was the oldest railway in the world? Someone had told her it was. Boyd thought it might be—the oldest passenger railway, at least. And, yes, they really had once hauled the trains up the last steep stretch into Lime Street station, because the old locomotives weren't strong enough. But Boyd was skeptical when she mentioned stables. Horses would never have been strong enough to pull an entire train uphill. No, he thought that there had been some kind of pulley system—wagons laden with ballast going down, pulling up the coaches full of people. The

evening began to be filled with their interest. Boyd looked things up on the Internet and read them out to Greta, about the building of the railways and the hard lives of the navvies. He was more or less right, it turned out, about the pulley system; Greta wondered whether she'd misunderstood the man on the train, who had mentioned horses, or whether he'd made a mistake. Kate didn't care about the railways, but she was happy because Boyd wasn't bored; he was enjoying himself.

That night Greta dreamed that she was at the Palm House in Sefton Park—although this wasn't a place she remembered ever having visited in her real life. Her idea of it had obviously got mixed up with the memory of those Victorian hotels in their ruined grandeur; the high walls of the Palm House were precarious and toppling, and inside it was wildly overgrown with the exotic plants that must once have been cultivated there. In her dream, she was pushing through thick foliage—brittle, dusty leaves and clinging creepers and intricately fleshy blooms. And she was aware of someone else moving around nearby, rattling the spiky, dark-green leaves, grunting with puzzled and exasperated effort: at any moment they might come face to face. Then she must have wandered out somehow without meaning to. From outside, the Palm House looked more like a glasshouse, crazily dilapidated, its iron frame rusty and festooned with some kind of municipal tape, perhaps meant as a safety warning. A solid mass of plant growth pressed against the steamed-up glass inside and pushed out through broken panes. Dark figures seemed to be standing around the perimeter of the building at intervals, facing outward as if they were on guard. Greta woke up then, and opened her eyes in the pitch dark. She was on the sofa bed in Kate and Boyd's spare room, which was also their study: lying on her back, which always made her snore. Probably that accounted for the grunting and the exasperated efforts.

Kate had managed to free up some time to spend with her mother, but on the Thursday, as it happened, she needed to go in to work. Greta reassured her that she would be happy spending

the day by herself. She would go out for coffee to that friendly place nearby where Kate had taken her. And if the weather was fine she might manage a stroll in the park afterward.

On Thursday morning, when Boyd and Kate had gone and she was alone in the flat, Greta took a long time getting ready. She knew she had to pace herself, for these efforts; when she took a bath, she was careful not to wet her hair, which still looked all right from the hairdresser's, because washing and drying it would use up too much of her strength. Then she put on the nicest outfit she had brought with her: a dark-navy cord skirt and red wool shirt and navy cashmere jumper. She even got out Kate's ironing board and pressed the skirt, which was creased from her suitcase. Sitting at the mirror in Kate's bedroom, she made up her face, beginning with moisturizer, then putting on a very light foundation—which she never used to wear but thought she needed now, to make herself presentable. It seemed significant, but not unbearable, to be confronting her own worn-out face with such purposeful attention—pulling it into the old grimaces, creaming and painting and smudging with her fingertip—in the mirror that usually reflected Kate. In Greta's imagination Kate's youthful looks were somehow balanced against hers, redeeming them.

Not that Kate wasted much time staring at her reflection. Her beautifying was still lordly and dismissive: fastening the long tail of her hair in a few quick movements, tugging earrings hastily into her piercings, stooping to the mirror to draw thickly with black eyeliner along her lids, finishing with that bold upward stroke. Kate could have gone naked into the street and been lovely.

The place Greta went for coffee was around the corner from the flat, in a row of independent restaurants and small shops selling home-baked bread and local pottery. A converted chapel offered Pilates and art classes, and Sefton Park was beyond that, at the end of the road. Greta bought a copy of *The Guardian* and found herself a corner by a warm radiator in the shabby red-and-yellow-painted café-bar. "It's a hippie place, Mum," Kate had said. "Just your kind of thing."

Students were working on laptops; a couple of men probably Greta's age, with flaring drinkers' faces, were on to pints already, at the bar. Young mothers had escaped from home to gossip with their friends, steering their bulky pushchairs in beside the tables. There was plenty of room—no one would mind if Greta took her time over her coffee. It was a relief to be away from Graham for a while, she thought, though the thought wasn't



"Aren't they killing you?"



*"What if we're just a ship in somebody's bottle?
Yar, here comes me existential crisis."*

drastic or hostile: she never wavered, these days, in her appreciation of his kindness. When she looked at her watch at quarter to two, she decided to buy herself a second cup of coffee; then, on impulse, at the bar she asked for a glass of Pinot Grigio instead, though that was risky in the middle of the day. She was wary of alcohol, in her weakened state.

Although it was very ordinary wine—Graham would have refused to drink it—the cold green taste of each mouthful was heady and transforming, worth whatever it would cost her afterward. She began to feel liberated and exhilarated, just as she might have felt when she was twenty. It occurred to her—but very calmly, the way you might describe a limb getting over an attack of pins and needles—that she was coming back to life. And yet all her attention was focussed on what was in the newspaper, not on herself. She understood that her own experience was a tiny atom beside the cold, hard masses of history and politics, full of cruel truths. Boyd had read to her, the other night, about the men who had died cutting or tunnelling through the rock to build those early railways: killed in explosions or by runaway wagons, or crushed by falling

stones, or by the buckets that carried the stone—and the men—up and down in the shafts. Twenty-six were killed, to make one tunnel.

She didn't look at her watch again until two-twenty: it was surely too late now, for any meeting in the Palm House. Then, glancing out the café window, she actually saw the young man from the train walking purposefully along the street, away from the park. So he had turned up; Greta had begun not to believe in the meeting, thinking she must have misheard him. This proof of his independent, real existence was dismaying, because he'd come to seem a figment of her fantasy: in her memory, she had smoothed him out, forgetting that in his looks there was something unsettling and blatant—the thick lashes and coarse skin and big, sensuous mouth were in excess of any personality he'd shown her. His expression was intent and preoccupied; he wore his white mac and was still carrying his briefcase, and she was jolted by a pang of guilt for his loneliness. As he passed close by the café window, she tapped on the glass to attract his attention. Looking around, he was startled and forlorn. She had caught him out in

his desolation: they were strangers to each other; he might even be angry with her because she'd let him down.

Smiling, placatory, Greta beckoned him inside. As soon as he recognized her, she saw him smother the raw truth she'd glimpsed, preparing his bright face for her approval like a good boy. While he made his way toward her—rattling at the wrong door first, which didn't open—she was already regretting the loss of her solitude. He looked out of place in the hippie bar: he had even put on a tie under the maroon jumper, perhaps in her honor. She wanted to buy him a drink in return for the coffee at the station, but he insisted that he'd never let a lady pay for anything, and it wasn't worth arguing with him. He bought himself a Coke, and got her another glass of wine, though she'd said she didn't want one, and really didn't. Still, once the wine was in front of her she couldn't help taking swallows of it, just to ease the awkwardness of the situation. He didn't mention that she hadn't turned up to meet him. In fact, he said he was so glad she'd come, as if the bar had been their plan all along; counting his change carefully, he put it away in a little purse in the pocket of his mac.

"I knew you were an easy person to get on with," he said. "As soon as I saw you."

"I'm not really very easy. You don't know me at all."

He insisted that he was a good judge of people, he could always tell. Then they exchanged names: he was Mitchell, and she explained that she was Greta, short for Margaret. Astonished and delighted, he said that Margaret was his mother's name. "You see, it's funny because I had this feeling, before you even told me. I just knew what you were going to say." Greta wasn't sure that she believed in this coincidence, although it would be a strange thing for him to lie about. She remembered the impression she'd had on the train, that he was a chameleon making himself up to fit into any circumstances—to please her, or so that he could appear competent and connected. The wine was making her dizzy. "Kate's father persuaded me to change my name to Greta," she said. "Even before Mrs. Thatcher, he hated Margaret."

"Are you divorced?"

She explained that Ian had died in an accident, long ago. "Though we weren't

together by then, anyway. And I've been married for years to someone else."

"But I suppose Kate's father was the love of your life."

Greta was aware of laughing too loudly, and thought people were looking at them. They might imagine that Mitchell was her son or her nephew. Or they might detect something fervid and artificial in her reactions to him, and wonder whether he was a con man tricking her out of her money, or a gigolo she was paying for. She said she didn't believe in that kind of love. It turned out that Mitchell believed not only in true love but also in destiny. Certain individuals were fated to be together. Everything that happened had its purpose, he said, even if we couldn't see it. Yet, all the time he was setting out these platitudes with such solemnity, Greta felt sure that they weren't the real content of his thoughts, just as her own skeptical, condescending cleverness, when she argued with him, wasn't the real content of her thoughts, either. This conversation took place on the surface, while their real lives were hidden underground beneath it, crouching, listening out, mutely attentive. Mitchell's physical reality was like a third presence at the table: his bitten skin and slanted, suffering cheekbones.

"I brought something for you," he said. "It's a present."

Greta protested anxiously that she didn't want any present, but he ignored her and twiddled with the combination lock on his briefcase, then lifted the lid importantly and took out a thick paperback book, well-read, its pages furry with use. Judging by the cover illustration and the title in embossed gold letters, it was the kind of historical novel Greta wouldn't dream of reading: a gritty, working-class romance, all arrogant mill owners and salt-of-the-earth girls in shawls and clogs.

"I don't want it," she said. "I hardly know you."

"Please. I want you to have it. I know you'll enjoy it."

Thrusting the book at her, he managed somehow to knock over his drink; sticky Coke ran down the edge of the table and onto her skirt, though she shoved herself smartly backward in her chair. She had thought he was just drinking Coke, but she could smell now that there was alcohol in it, too, some-

thing sweet and strong—rum, perhaps.

"Oh, Jesus!" Mitchell said. "Jesus, I'm so sorry."

"It doesn't matter. Don't make a fuss."

While Greta rummaged for a packet of tissues in her handbag, Mitchell ran to the bar for paper napkins. When he came back he knelt on the floor in front of her, dabbing at the wet patch on her skirt. "Will the stain come out?" he said.

"Don't fuss. It's nothing, honestly. It won't stain."

Their table was in a little nook beside the window, so that he wasn't easily visible to the other customers. Suddenly he dropped his head into her lap, face down between her thighs. It was so unexpected, and his head weighed so heavily, that at first Greta thought he must have passed out. She could feel the heat of his breath through the wet cloth. She pushed at his head, not liking the feel of the coarse wire of his hair in her hands.

"Get off me," she said urgently and quietly, not wanting to draw anyone's attention. "Get up right now."

He lifted his head and looked at her blearily, as if he hardly saw her, as if she'd roused him out of sleep.

"Leave me alone," she said.

"I'm sorry. I'm really sorry."

"You'd better go. You're making a spectacle of yourself."

Obediently, he got to his feet then, and he grabbed at his mac and briefcase and headed to the wrong door again, tugging desperately at the handle. Greta wouldn't look up to see him go; she was burning with humiliation, exposed to all the customers in the café. He had left his book on the table and she opened it, just so that she didn't have to see whether anyone was watching. A business card was tucked inside the front cover, with Mitchell's name printed on it, and the name of the company he worked for. His phone number was circled in Biro. And there, written on the flyleaf of the book, was her name. "To Margaret," it said. "With love." Greta was confused, and for one long moment she really believed that it was fated, that this stranger had known her before he ever met her, and that he had written her name inside his book before she even told him what it was. ♦

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Tessa Hadley on her story.



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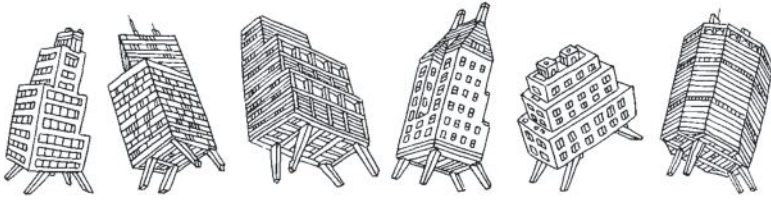
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"Nymphomaniac."

BY DAVID DENBY

Lars von Trier's "Nymphomaniac," a film in two "volumes" (each to be shown separately), is a pornographic work of art—an obsessive, violent, and at times remarkably eccentric sex epic that is often brilliant and never simple-minded or dull. The earlier work of the fifty-seven-year-old Danish director—"Breaking the Waves," "The Idiots," "Antichrist"—was soaked in show-off despair. For almost twenty years, he has triumphed on the international art-film circuit as a sensationalist and a boor, making lurid "metaphysical" movies and offering, on one occasion—at Cannes—a hapless pro-Nazi rant. His previous film, "Melancholia" (2011), chronicled the end of the world (a rogue planet wipes us out), something that he appeared to welcome, at least as a visually radiant experience.

But now he has sprung back from the apocalypse to create the fictional history of an insatiable woman. And a personal renewal devoted to *that* subject raises complicated issues. Saying that a movie is filled with explicit scenes hardly means that it's trash; there are both artistically challenging and purely exploitative kinds of pornography. Von Trier, working in a rigorously formal style, and adding his own intellectual intricacy to the narrative, couldn't be farther from the glazed single-mindedness of a routine porn director. "Nymphomaniac," with its always-searching-for-an-orgasm heroine—her head flung back in posters for the movie—may be ripe for parody, but it passes a basic test: it remains

formidable throughout its four-hour length and demanding to think about afterward.

A middle-aged loner, Seligman (Stellan Skarsgård), sees a badly beaten woman, Joe (Charlotte Gainsbourg), lying in a dark alley. He takes her to his flat, gives her tea, and gently asks to hear her story. "I discovered my cunt as a two-year-old," she begins, and launches into the story of her life as a girl and as a young woman, eventually returning to the present. Her manner is intensely serious, her face unsmiling, her mode of speech self-condemning. "I behaved reprehensibly," she says. "I was an addict out of lust, not out of need." As she talks, we see episodes from her life, and, after each one, Seligman offers elaborate, sometimes bizarre observations that provoke Joe into fresh memories. If you sum up her past as a series of would-be realistic events, they immediately collapse into absurdity. From the beginning, however, it's clear that the story is not a slice of life but something *told*—interpreted, enhanced, varied, recast. The emotional heart of "Nymphomaniac" isn't the sex scenes but the conversations between Joe and her protector, which mix artful nonsense, curious semi-nonsense, and startling good sense in daunting profusion.

Who is Joe? She has little history except for her erotic history, little temperament apart from undifferentiated lust. Yet she's not one of those passive de Sade girls who get hauled off to a château in the forest to be repeatedly violated by

lustful men; nor is she like their descendant in "The Story of O." On the contrary, Joe chooses, she demands, she arranges. In the first part of "Nymphomaniac," she sleeps with dozens of men, and finally reunites with her first partner, Jérôme (Shia LaBeouf), whom she has come to love. Initially happy with him—she gives birth to his son—she nevertheless announces, in despair, that she has lost any sensation of sexual pleasure. In Volume II, Jérôme urges her to get her groove back by experimenting, and, in a comic episode, she takes up with two African brothers she spies from her window. Then, ever more desperate, she flings herself into masochistic rituals with a professional sadist (Jamie Bell), which is not at all comical—the sessions are recreated in excruciating detail. (Von Trier seems to be saying, "You're fascinated? Well, stomach *this*.") Eventually, Joe falls into bed with a young female protégée (Mia Goth).

The "plot" has obviously been engineered to put Joe through every kind of sex act. Her encounters, in their bounteous variety, would seem to equal those of Catherine Millet, as recounted in her 2002 chronicle, "The Sexual Life of Catherine M." Both Catherine and Joe have multiple lovers every day for years and yet never suffer the perils of a sexually hyperactive life—disease, death. Millet, recording her own experience, is an exhibitionist and a boaster and, unfortunately, not much of a writer. Von Trier is a filmmaker who uses his art to dramatize not the real world but extreme fantasy. Male or female fantasy? Both, perhaps. Joe may be enacting a darker version of the "Fifty Shades of Grey" saga, but she also represents male imagining. The resented "male gaze" of film theory has become something like awe of a fearless woman who recognizes no other reality but pleasure.

In a blasphemous scene in Volume I, Joe and her high-school friends chant, "*Mea vulva, mea maxima vulva*" (words that they have written on a wall). When she was a teen-ager, Joe tells Seligman, she wanted to destroy the consumerist enshrinement of "love," and we see her and a friend smashing the window of a store selling valentine trinkets. In Volume II, von Trier extends the notion of ungovernable female desire as social rebellion; he even morphs into a

ABOVE: VASCO MOURÃO



Lars von Trier links his hungry woman to philosophical ideas; sex, it turns out, is meaningless without interpretation.

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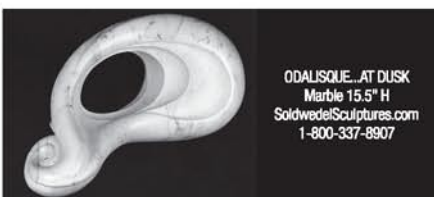
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nineteen-seventies kind of radical feminist. Joe, sacrificing everything to sexual adventure, walks out on Jérôme and their little boy, and at that point she's wrecking the family, tearing at the basis of society. Sitting with Seligman years later, she speaks of regret and guilt, and he demurs, saying that if she were a man her behavior wouldn't cause more than a ripple of interest. It's only as a woman that she's a revolutionary.

The movie was shot in Germany and Belgium, but it isn't set anywhere in particular (everyone speaks international English), and the casting is erratic. Propping herself up in Seligman's bed, Charlotte Gainsbourg, now forty-two, has a smudged, bruised face. She looks like an unhappy child who has been playing in the mud. However badly battered, her Joe is articulate and precise—overprecise, it feels at first, but it becomes clear that the act of telling, from a distance, as a way of exercising control, is as much the point as the tale itself. When the movie switches to the past, however, Joe is a blank. The twenty-three-year-old model who plays her in those scenes, Stacy Martin, has the same long jaw and slender form as Gainsbourg, and, in an early scene on a train, she flashes an engagingly naughty grin as Joe services a solid bourgeois in a first-class compartment. But there's generally not much going on in her face. Perhaps her director didn't help her; pursuing his anti-realist aesthetic, von Trier may have wanted her affectless. And Shia LaBeouf, struggling with a vaguely conceived part, looks more unformed than ever; his features are almost fetal. Yet the blankness of the young actors doesn't kill the movie. Sexual encounters don't—can't—complete Joe. Her only true relationship is with Seligman, who offers her release by listening to her.

Seligman is an asexual bachelor and scholar, who lives in a bare apartment that looks like a monk's cell. He murmurs that Joe suffers from a mistaken sense of sin, that she was just a girl having adventures, giving herself and other people pleasure. Skarsgård is remarkably calm and benevolent, his sixtyish handsome face a landscape of empathy. Seligman likens Joe's efforts to seduce men to, of all things, fly-fishing, as it is

described in Izaak Walton's classic text, "The Compleat Angler" (1653). And that's just the beginning. Von Trier has become a virtuoso of baroque elucidation and quasi-absurdist play. When Joe describes her initiation at the hands of Jérôme, Seligman adds up their couplings (front and rear) and says that they remind him of Fibonacci numbers, a series that we later see written on the screen. She takes a turn at exegesis herself. Seligman mentions Bach's three-part polyphony, with its separate voices creating harmony, and she talks of three men at one point in her life who gave her different things sexually, which amounted to having one complete lover.

Von Trier links his hungry woman to philosophical ideas, mathematics, digressions of all sorts. Sex, it turns out, is meaningless without interpretation. The character has only one way of experiencing her life; the director has many ways of telling it. He gives us a catalogue of male members belonging to Joe's lovers, and, in medical-textbook mode, drawings and photographs of female genitalia. However profane, "Nymphomaniac" is a modern variant of illustrated seventeenth-century books of miscellaneous erudition, like "Angler" or Robert Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy," and of such eighteenth-century libertine texts as the Marquis d'Argens's "Thérèse Philosophe"—a volume in which the sexual "education" of the heroine gets interrupted by discourses on the truth of philosophical materialism and the falsity of religion. But, though the movie is marvellously intriguing when it's bookish and artificial, it becomes weak when it attempts sincerity. The repeated scene of Joe walking in the woods with her adored father (Christian Slater) is poetic in a flossy, boring way. Uma Thurman, playing the wife of a man sleeping with Joe, shows up with her three young sons at Joe's apartment and rages magnificently, but she seems to be in a different movie—one in which real people have real feelings. This is a work of pornography, in which fantasy, and the contemplation of it, is the only thing that's real. Like most porn, even art porn, "Nymphomaniac" falls apart at the end. Von Trier even seems to be pranking the audience. But the director has at last created a genuine scandal—a provocation worth talking about. ♦

A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE DE MAN CASE

Does a critic's past explain his criticism?

BY LOUIS MENAND



The idea that there is literature, and then there is something that professors do with literature called “theory,” is a little strange. To think about literature is to think theoretically. If you believe that literature is different from other kinds of writing (like philosophy and self-help books), if you have ideas about what’s relevant and what isn’t for understanding it (which class had ownership of the means of production, whether it gives you goose bumps, what color the author painted his toenails), and if you have standards for judging whether it’s great or not so great (a pleasing style or a displeasing politics), then you have a theory of literature.

You can’t make much sense of it without one.

It’s the job of people in literature departments to think about these questions, to debate them, and to disseminate their views. This is not arid academicism. It affects the way students will respond to literature for the rest of their lives. But it’s also part of an inquiry into the role of art in human life, the effort to figure out why we make this stuff, what it means, and why we care so much about it. If this is not the most important thing in the world to understand, it is certainly not the least.

Twenty-five years ago, literary theory went through a crisis, and it has never

really recovered its reputation. The crisis would have happened even if Paul de Man had never existed, or had never left Belgium, from which he emigrated to the United States, in 1948. But de Man became its symbol. His story, the story of a concealed past, was almost too perfect a synecdoche for everything that made people feel puzzled, threatened, or angry about literary theory.

Evelyn Barish’s new biography, “The Double Life of Paul de Man” (Liveright), is an important update on the story. Barish worked in Belgian archives, and she interviewed many people who knew de Man, including both of his wives. She’s not a hundred per cent reliable on the historical background; she is a little over her head with the theoretical issues; and she sometimes characterizes as manipulative or deceptive behavior that might have a more benign explanation. Her book is a brief for the prosecution. But it is not a hatchet job, and she has an amazing tale to tell. In her account, all guns are smoking. There are enough to stock a miniseries.

Starting in 1960, de Man taught at three American universities whose literature departments were industry leaders: Cornell, Johns Hopkins, and Yale, where he was a professor in the departments of French and comparative literature from 1970 until his death, in 1983, at the age of sixty-four. Within the profession, de Man had a mystique. There were doubters and dissenters, of course, but he was generally admired as a thinker, esteemed as a colleague, and idolized as a teacher.

Faculty found him erudite but ironic, cool but not aloof; students found him intimidating and charismatic. “Rigorous” is the word people used to describe the work; “austere” is one of the ways people described the man. Several of his articles became celebrated and much studied texts, and a number of his graduate students went on to have distinguished careers at Yale and elsewhere.

It’s common to exaggerate—I think Barish exaggerates a little, even though she is a retired English professor—the extent to which the kind of criticism de Man wrote and taught permeated American literature departments. Literary studies is a very big tent. A small number of professors were drawn to the criticism that de Man and his colleagues

Paul de Man became the symbol of what made people anxious about literary theory.

were writing, and a number probably equally small actively animadverted against it. But it was not the only game in town. You did not need to pass a quiz on “Semiology and Rhetoric” to have an academic career in literature in the nineteen-seventies.

At the same time, everybody was aware of what those critics were up to. They were important not because there were so many of them but because their heads were visible above the horizon of university literature departments. They got the attention of professors in other fields and, eventually, of people outside the academy—people who write for journals of opinion, people in the art world and in the law, people at the *New York Times*.

Some of this attention was respectful; a lot of it was not. But it gave a glamour to literary studies. The word was out that world-shaking claims were being made, not just about how to read a poem but about language and interpretation and meaning—ultimately, about knowledge, which is what universities are in business to produce. Literary criticism was getting a lot of traffic. Times were good.

So when it was learned, in the spring of 1987, three and a half years after de Man’s death, that he had written during the war for two Belgian newspapers controlled by the Nazis more was at stake than the reputation of a deceased academic. The articles were found by a Belgian graduate student named Ortwin de Graef; he informed two former students of de Man’s, and they spread the news among the de Manians, all of whom were stunned. For the few people who knew, or thought they knew, anything about de Man’s past—de Man was always highly discreet about personal matters—the revelation upended the image they had formed. There was a vague understanding that de Man had had a complicated war, but it was assumed that this was because of his antipathy to the German occupiers, not, as it now appeared, the other way around.

At a conference at the University of Alabama in October, 1987, a group that included some of de Man’s former students and colleagues decided to publish all the wartime journalism—some two

hundred articles, most of them column-length, that de Man wrote for the two German-controlled papers, plus pieces he published in other venues between 1939 and 1943—along with a companion volume of thirty-eight scholarly responses.

The goals—full disclosure and open discussion—were worthy, but the timing was bad. By the time the two, scrupulously edited volumes came out, de Graef’s revelation had been reported widely in the press; the *Times Magazine* had published an article on de Man’s past that contained additional damaging information (specifically, that he was a bigamist); and the people who wrote for journals of opinion had

mostly savaged de Man, his work, and academic literary theory. The public-relations battle, probably unwinnable under the best of circumstances, was already over.

As it turned out, full disclosure did not make the case any less unpalatable. The record showed that, for all intents and purposes, the young de Man was a fascist. His eyes were open; he did not write in the shadows. The paper he did most of his journalism for, *Le Soir*, was the biggest daily in Belgium. The Germans took it over almost immediately after occupying the country, in May, 1940, and staffed it with collaborationists. Anti-Semitic articles were sometimes a front-page feature.

De Man started writing for the paper in December, 1940, just after his twenty-first birthday. His articles—he eventually had a weekly column, called “Our Literary Chronicle”—largely followed the Nazi line, as did the pieces he contributed to a smaller German-controlled paper, *Het Vlaamsche Land* (*The Flemish Land*). He championed a Germanic aesthetic, denigrated French culture as effete, associated Jews with cultural degeneracy, praised pro-Nazi writers and intellectuals, and assured *Le Soir*’s readers that the New Order had come to Europe. The war was over. It was time to join the winners.

The response by the scholars, in the companion volume and elsewhere, only made matters worse. They had been dealt an impossible hand, it’s true, and

their chief desire, naturally, was to dissociate de Man’s wartime writings from his later criticism. But there was disagreement about what, exactly, the differences were. There was also some reckless shooting at the messengers. One of de Man’s Yale colleagues complained that the campaign against literary theory in the press “repeats the well-known totalitarian procedures of vilification it pretends to deplore.” Another professor accused *The Nation*, which had published an attack on de Man, of anti-Semitism, on the ground that de Man and his criticism were “somehow overwhelmingly Jewish.”

And there was some hermeneutical fancy footwork—a big mistake when what most needed defending was the integrity of hermeneutics. No one approved of what de Man’s articles appeared to be saying, but a few tried to suggest that, on finer analysis, they weren’t really saying it, or they were saying it and unsaying it at the same time—that the articles were, as one professor put it, “enormously complex and profoundly ambiguous.”

In general, the scholars wanted to find reasons for believing that after de Man stopped writing for *Le Soir*, in late 1942, he repudiated his collaborationist past. They hoped that the wartime journalism would prove to be an isolated episode, a youthful error that, if not corrected quite as speedily as one might have liked, was corrected nonetheless.

From what Barish has found, it seems that this was wishful thinking. De Man may have secretly held his German overlords in contempt, and some percentage of his fascism may have been opportunism. But he didn’t quit writing for *Le Soir* because he had second thoughts about the merits of German hegemony or the wisdom of collaboration. He quit because he was fired, and he was fired because he was caught overreaching. De Man seems to have had ambitions for a grand career in postwar Belgium, possibly as a powerful editor, possibly as minister of culture. *Le Soir* was only a small part of the scheme.

How did he get so far down this terrible road? De Man came from a fairly prosperous and well-established Flemish family. He was intelligent, athletic, poised, good-looking. His father,



Bob, was a gentle man, a businessman who loved classical music and played the violin; his mother, Madeleine, was the daughter of a successful architect. His uncle Henri de Man was a leading non-Marxist socialist, a political figure known across Europe.

There were some demons. Madeleine suffered from severe depression, and Paul was sometimes obliged to care for her while his father was off with his mistress. When Paul was thirteen or fourteen, his older brother, Rik, raped a twelve-year-old cousin. (Barish says that Rik was a serial rapist.) In 1936, while biking, he was hit by a train and killed. Less than a year later, Paul found his mother in an attic laundry room. She had hanged herself.

Paul was then seventeen, and in his final year at the Royal Athenaeum, an academically demanding school in Antwerp, where he had an excellent record. He told no one at the school about his mother's suicide; two months later, he took his exams, and graduated first in his class. Soon afterward, he seems to have had some sort of psychological break. In 1937, he entered the Free University of Brussels, planning to study engineering, but found that he could no longer apply himself academically. He became a quasi dropout, switching fields of study, skipping or failing exams, and, finally, leaving without earning a degree.

In 1938, just before he turned nineteen, he met Anaide Baraghian, known as Anne. She was from Georgia by way of Romania, where she had married a Belgian, Gilbert Jaeger, in order to get to the West. Anne and Paul became a couple, and she was still married to Jaeger when, in 1941, she and Paul had the first of three children, a boy named Rik.

Anne seems to have been demanding and temperamental. She and Paul lived and entertained extravagantly during the war, probably, Barish thinks, in an apartment that had been appropriated from Jews, and Barish found one person who believes that she pressed him to make money. Henri de Man, meanwhile, had become a minister without portfolio in the Belgian government and, after the Germans arrived, a leading collaborator. Like some other European intellectuals disgusted by the prewar liberal order, he interpreted Nazism as the fulfillment of his socialist ideals. He and Paul were close, and his prominence gave

his nephew entrée to the new regime.

Paul pursued every opportunity. In addition to his job at *Le Soir*, he was a reader at a publishing house, founded by a pro-Nazi Belgian, Lucienne Didier, that was devoted to bringing out works favorable to the Nazi regime. The company, Editions de la Toison d'Or (Golden Fleece Publishers), was headed by her husband, Édouard. De Man also worked at Belgium's largest book-and-magazine distributor, Agence Dechenne, where he ran the French book department, buying books in Paris to be sold in Belgian bookstores. Finally, Barish says that, together with the German-appointed editor of *Le Soir*, Raymond De Becker, he wrote a prospectus for an art magazine whose purpose was "to promote the entire range of the most bizarre Nazi ideologies."

Then, in late 1942, the edifice began to topple. De Man attempted a coup at Editions de la Toison d'Or by sending a fallacious report to Berlin blaming Didier for mismanagement of the company. But he was punching over his weight, and his uncle was no longer around; the Germans had lost their trust in him, and he had fled to Paris. Didier got wind of de Man's plot, successfully defended himself in Berlin, and then sent a letter to De Becker accusing de Man of negligence and malfeasance. Caught between de Man and the Germans, De Becker did the intelligent thing. He fired de Man. A few months later, de Man was pushed out of Agence Dechenne as well, for gross mismanagement. It was discovered that he had overbought merchandise for resale to the tune of several million Belgian francs. The firm was left with tens of thousands of unsold books and calendars.

After the liberation, all those entities—the newspaper, the publishing house, and the book-distribution company—were investigated and declared treasonous. De Becker and Édouard Didier were sentenced to death (neither sentence was carried out); Henri de Man was sentenced, in absentia, to prison time. Paul de Man's name, Barish found, "runs like a red thread" through the dossiers compiled by the military court that conducted the inquiries.

Yet de Man escaped prosecution. The interviews with investigators that Barish quotes suggest that he was considered too small a fish to be in serious jeopardy.

They also suggest that he was an uncommonly smooth prevaricator. That talent was an asset in his next endeavor, which was the establishment of a new publishing house, called Hermès. The company opened for business in February, 1946. In the next two years, it published, at most, two books. Its sole purpose seems to have been to provide de Man with cash.

De Man raised capital from many sources, including family friends, his father, even his old nurse. Then, Anne told Barish, "he just went in and took out the money." He wrote contracts for books and translations and pocketed half of the advances. He forged receipts, gave himself money that was supposed to pay the bills, cooked the books, and paid himself a salary right up to the inevitable crash. Although Bob de Man repaid some of the investors his son had swindled, none of the creditors recovered a penny from the company itself. It had been thoroughly looted. Bob was almost ruined. The nurse lost everything.

Seeing a criminal prosecution looming, Bob obtained visas for Paul and Anne (who were now legally married). Anne took the children to South America, where her parents had emigrated. Paul went to New York. In 1951, he was convicted in a Belgian court of multiple acts of forgery, falsifying records, and taking money under false pretenses, and sentenced to five years in prison, plus costs and fines. The court ordered that he be arrested if he ever returned to Belgium. De Man's father refused to see or speak to him again.

And that's just the Belgian chapter! Arriving in New York in 1948, de Man charms his way into left-wing intellectual circles, where he meets Mary McCarthy, who finds him cosmopolitan and très chic. She recommends him for a teaching job at Bard College, where she has friends. De Man duly provides a résumé listing an imaginary master's thesis ("The Bergsonian Conception of Time in the Contemporary Novel") and an "interrupted" doctoral dissertation ("Introduction to a Phenomenology of Aesthetic Consciousness"). On a separate form, he describes his service in a resistance group during the war. He gets the appointment, but proceeds to default on his rent, which is owed to the professor



who helped get him the job, and who is abroad on leave.

Anne unexpectedly shows up with the children, but de Man has fallen in love with a Bard student named Patricia Kelley. He promises Anne financial support. She returns to South America, leaving the oldest child, Rik, with de Man, who quickly places him with Patricia's mother, in Washington, D.C. De Man never returns phone calls from Rik, and repeatedly reneges on his promise to send Anne money. When she finally receives a check, it bounces. They are not divorced until 1960. In 1950, de Man marries Patricia; they have two children. She doesn't learn definitively that the marriage is bigamous for ten years.

Along the way, there is a ridiculous number of close calls. Immigration and Naturalization Service agents arrive at Bard looking for de Man. De Man manages to put them off. The absent professor returns and accuses him not only of failing to pay the rent but of damaging his house. De Man is fired from Bard.

De Man makes his way to Boston, and is admitted to the Ph.D. program in comparative literature at Harvard. When his transcript arrives, from the Free University of Brussels, he doctors it to appear that he got his degree. I.N.S. agents show up

again, and tell de Man that he can voluntarily leave the country or be deported. At almost the same time, Harvard's Society of Fellows, where de Man is a Junior Fellow, receives a mysterious letter recounting some of his Belgian activities. De Man explains that he is being persecuted because he is the son of the "controversial" Henri de Man, and his advisers buy the story.

De Man goes back to Europe voluntarily, with his family, but he manages to return to the United States two years later, by freighter. He is without passport or visa, but enters the country unquestioned when agents in New York are distracted by other passengers. He nearly fails his Ph.D. examinations, and never completes one of the chapters of his dissertation, but he is awarded the degree. Through it all, he has been writing criticism. An article called "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image" is published in France, in 1960, and attracts interest. That fall, he is hired at Cornell. And here, regrettably, Barish ends her messy but fascinating book.

Barish doesn't attempt a psychiatric diagnosis of her subject. She does note that de Man had a habit of staring at his face in the mirror, which she interprets as a sign of narcissism. It may

be, but narcissism doesn't account for such an astonishing run of deceit. That is the record of a sociopath. De Man must have known the difference between right and wrong, but those concepts appear to have had no purchase on his inner life. Writing anti-Semitic articles for pro-Nazi papers, stealing from his nurse, sending his child off to be brought up by virtual strangers, lying his way through Harvard: if those things had not been easy for him to do, they would have been impossible for him to do.

De Man wasn't loyal to his family or his country, but he wasn't loyal to the Nazis, either. He sheltered Jewish friends in his apartment, and he helped distribute a journal for the resistance. One reason that no one in the United States suspected there might be something amiss was the sheer magnitude of the risks he took. If you were an émigré trying to hide a criminal past, would you default on your rent pretty much everywhere you lived? Would you claim to hold fictitious academic degrees, and doctor transcripts that could easily be checked? Would you talk your way out of a jam by pretending that you were the son of your uncle?

For that matter, would you become the leader of a high-profile and controversial school of literary criticism? You would not. You would try to fade into the woodwork. De Man didn't do that. The behavior Barish describes does not seem like the behavior of a man who wants to get caught. It seems like that of a man who lacks a normal superego.

After he took the job at Cornell, de Man got his life under control. At least, aside from financial delinquencies, there seem to be no rumors of further misdeeds. Barish thinks that Paul straightened out, in part, because of Patricia. Women found de Man attractive, and he was not a prude. But he disapproved of open marriages and promiscuity, things he had witnessed in his parents' circle growing up. When he met Patricia, Barish says, "he fell immediately and completely in love, and he would remain so, possessively and passionately, for the rest of his life." There was nothing sketchy about Patricia's past, and she adored him. "It's very corny," she told Barish. "He was the love of my life. Except for some stubbornness. [We] shared so

much. We enjoyed each other's company so much. [We] never seemed to have enough time to say what we had to say to each other."

Barish has put together a story that reads like an academic version of "House of Cards." But, even if everything she says is true, what does it tell us about de Man's criticism? She offers only the vaguest speculation. She believes, she says, that "there is a profound connection between the man who secretly fled from Belgium, exiled in 1948 and never publicly to return, and the one we knew for generations later as our intellectual and cultural leader," but she leaves the task of figuring the connection out to others.

It was the prudent choice. At the time of the original revelations about de Man's wartime journalism, virtually every attempt to show that his past proved that there are dangerous tendencies in his criticism depended on a caricature of the criticism. It's remarkable how many people back then who attacked literary theorists for indifference to the concept of getting things right didn't feel obliged to get the theories right.

De Man may have been a scoundrel who found a career teaching a certain method of reading, but that method of reading does not turn people into scoundrels. Probably ninety-nine per cent of the people who studied with de Man wouldn't run a red light—forget about altering a transcript or voluntarily collaborating with Nazis. If there is an ethical takeaway from what de Man taught, it would be self-doubt.

Barish's own attempt to describe de Manian theory is unhelpful: "a stance of ironic 'undecideability,' in which reality is an endless hall of mirrors and writing is a necessarily 'perverse' enterprise based on human lies, or the inability of language itself to express truth." De Man never said any of those things. They are pop postmodernist clichés, and they have about as much relation to de Man as social Darwinism has to Darwin.

As a literary critic, de Man was doing what American literature professors had been doing since the nineteen-forties. He was trying to develop insights into the way literary language works. That's what "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image" is about: how the im-

ages in Romantic poems work. De Man found contradictions and paradoxes in the meaning that Romantic images are supposed to have. But that, too, was what literature professors did. Critics in the nineteen-fifties, the era of the New Criticism, thought that poems work by holding multiple, sometimes opposing, meanings in tension. Irony and paradox were essential principles of literary form. If it was a poem, it had paradoxes. The critic's job was to find them.

When he was a graduate student at Harvard, de Man taught in a course, now semi-legendary, called Humanities 6, and directed by an English professor named Reuben Brower, that was designed to instruct students in exactly this method of close reading. He turned out to have a real genius for it. One of his Harvard students, Peter Brooks, remembered how, in class, de Man would "sit in front of a text and just pluck magical things out of it." That was the name of the game in literary criticism in 1960, and it was all that de Man ever did. He pulled things out of texts. His criticism was a demonstration of a way of reading. He used to warn his students not to confuse it with life.

Just before "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image" came out, de Man met Geoffrey Hartman at a Modern Language Association convention, where de Man was giving a paper on Yeats. Hartman, also an émi-



gré, was an assistant professor at Yale. They became friends, and when de Man's article appeared Hartman brought it to the attention of M. H. Abrams, at Cornell. Abrams was the dean of American Romanticists and a dominant figure in literary studies: he was the founding editor of "The Norton Anthology of English Literature," which appeared in 1962. Abrams got de Man a Cornell appointment, and his career was launched. In 1964,

without a book or, for that matter, a college degree, de Man was promoted to full professor.

The transformative event in de Man's academic life occurred in October, 1966, at a symposium at Johns Hopkins. This was where Jacques Derrida made his American debut. In 1966, Derrida was virtually unknown in the United States. He had spent a quiet year in Cambridge, from 1956 to 1957, reading in the Harvard library. (That overlapped with part of the time de Man spent in Europe.) When he arrived at Hopkins, though, he had recently made a splash in France with the publication, in the journal *Critique*, of a two-part essay called "Writing Before the Letter." Michel Foucault had called it "the most radical text I have ever read."

"Writing Before the Letter" is where Derrida first used the term "deconstruction," and deconstruction is what he introduced to the symposiasts at Hopkins. His paper landed like a bomb. The event had been organized to showcase structuralism, and the intellectual hero of structuralism was the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. On the last day, Derrida delivered a paper that, while appearing to wrap Lévi-Strauss in a warm embrace of attentive admiration, basically left structuralism, as far as literary studies were concerned, for dead.

De Man had already read "Writing Before the Letter" in *Critique*, and he realized that he and Derrida were trying to do similar things. When Derrida was at Hopkins, they had breakfast together, and when Derrida's book "Of Grammatology" was published in France, in 1967, de Man wrote him to say how "thrilled and interested" he was, and how he expected it to help in the "clarification and progression of my own thinking."

De Man was eleven years older than Derrida, and he was, as Barish says, essentially an autodidact. Derrida was a graduate of the École Normale Supérieure. But they had things in common, particularly an interest in the philosopher Martin Heidegger, who was a major influence on deconstruction (and on de Man's "Intentional Structure" essay). Most important, their professional obsessions were beautifully complementary. De Man's was reading; Derrida's was writing.

The friendship blossomed. De Man

induced Derrida to teach a seminar, in Paris, on the philosophical foundations of literary criticism for specially selected students from Cornell and Hopkins. In 1970, thanks to the exertions of Hartman, de Man moved to Yale. (Hartman dealt with the difficulty that de Man had no book by assisting him in collecting his essays, which were published, in 1971, as “Blindness and Insight,” a classic of twentieth-century criticism.)

In 1975, de Man and J. Hillis Miller, another English professor who had attended the Hopkins conference, arranged a regular visiting appointment for Derrida at Yale. After his first visit, Derrida wrote to de Man. “Those three weeks at Yale, with you, now seem even more like a paradise lost,” he told him. “What I most appreciated, as I’ve already told you, very clumsily, was your attentive and affectionate closeness.” Derrida’s biographer Benoît Peeters thinks that “the essential element of his annual stays in Yale continued to be his personal and intellectual bond with Paul de Man.”

And so Derrida, de Man, Hartman, and Miller became the face of “theory.” They were “the Yale school of criticism” (an identity promoted by Miller). Derrida’s books soon began appearing in English, notably “Of Grammatology,” in 1976, in a translation by a former student of de Man’s, Gayatri Spivak. In 1979, along with their colleague Harold Bloom, the four published a book called “Deconstruction and Criticism.” It may not have been intended as a manifesto, but it was received as one.

The people who attacked de Man after the revelations about his wartime writings were attacking deconstruction, or what they imagined was deconstruction. “Deconstructionism views language as a slippery and inherently false medium that always reflects the biases of its users,” the *Times* advised its readers when it broke the news of de Man’s wartime journalism. Attempts to characterize deconstruction got a little better than that, but not much.

Deconstruction is difficult to explain in a manner consistent with deconstruction. That’s what accounts for the notorious wordplay and circularity in Derrida’s prose. (Derrida’s essay in “Deconstruction and Criticism,” for example, has a hundred-page footnote.) We could say

that deconstruction is an attempt to go through the looking glass, to get beyond or behind language, but a deconstructionist would have to begin by explaining that the concepts “beyond” and “behind” are themselves effects of language. Deconstruction is all about interrogating apparently unproblematic terms. It’s like digging a hole in the middle of the ocean with a shovel made of water.

Which, when you watch it being done by a writer like Derrida, can be exhilarating. De Man wanted to do something like that with literature. He called his method “rhetorical reading.” The idea is that we organize—we stabilize—language as we read it. We bring to a text mental habits that fix the meaning of the words, and then we attribute that meaning to the words. We say, “That’s what the text really says.” De Man’s point was that often, and almost always in the case of literature, it’s in fact not what the text really says. He wanted to get the reader’s mental habits out of the act of reading.

Most people would agree that one of the things that make literature different from philosophy and self-help books is that in nonliterary texts rhetorical devices and figures of speech are incidental to the meaning, and in literary texts that sort of language—metaphors, symbols, allegories, all the forms and styles of fiction—are sources of meaning. We don’t read literature literally. We assume that what is meant is more than, or other than, what the words literally say. This is the belief that de Man complicated (as he also complicated the belief that philosophical writing is fundamentally not figurative and rhetorical).

The simplest and best-known illustration of the de Manian method involves the line that ends Yeats’s poem “Among School Children”: “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” We naturally read that question rhetorically, to mean “We cannot know the difference.” But, de Man points out, in “Semiotics and Rhetoric,” grammatically the sentence is a question, and it means “Please tell me, how can I know the difference?” The meanings are contradictory, but there is nothing in “what the text really says” that tells us which one is correct.

This observation doesn’t debunk the poem, or prove that language is “inher-

ently false,” or reduce Yeats to incoherence. On the contrary, it complicates lines that are usually read as a celebration of Romantic symbolism, lines about the union of sign and referent, word and thing, and turns the poem into a reflection on its own (to use a de Manian phrase) aesthetic ideology.

De Man believed that he was defending literature. He claimed that literature is the only kind of writing that is aware of the instability of the distinction between the literal and the figurative, between grammatical and rhetorical modes of meaning. His method of reading, he said, enables us “to come closer to being as rigorous a reader as the author had to be in order to write the sentence in the first place.” You might find this kind of criticism pedantic or uninteresting, but it is hard to see anything scandalous about it.

Hartman had been in the Kindertransport, the program that evacuated Jewish children from Nazi Germany and resettled them in England. He left Germany in 1939, when he was nine years old. His mother had already emigrated to the United States (his father had left the family), and he did not see her again until 1945. During the war, Derrida had been expelled from his school in Algiers when the quota for Jewish students was reduced, and Algerian Jews were stripped of French citizenship. Both men were devastated when they learned that de Man had written anti-Semitic articles, and both published responses. Hartman argued that de Man’s later criticism could be understood as a kind of atonement for his youthful errors. Derrida’s meditation on the case tried to interpret the collaborationist writings in an exculpatory way. That piece may have done more to discredit deconstruction than anything in de Man’s past.

By then, though, the crisis was well under way. In France, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, and Foucault were dead, and a new generation of philosophers was making its name by attacking what two of them, in a book published in 1985, called “French Philosophy of the Sixties.” A main theme was the pernicious influence of Heidegger, and in 1987, just before the news of de Man’s journalism became public, a book by Victor Fariás, called “Heidegger and

Nazism,” ignited a firestorm about Heidegger’s Nazi past that enveloped Derrida and deconstruction.

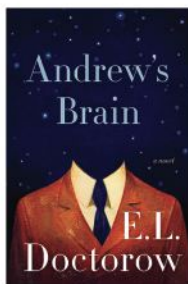
In February, 1986, the *Times Magazine* printed a story on deconstruction headlined “The Tyranny of the Yale Critics” (even though de Man was dead and Miller was on his way to California, where Derrida followed him). A year later, Allan Bloom published “The Closing of the American Mind,” an attack on the contemporary university, which became a runaway best-seller. Its unexpected success helped release a store of resentment toward theory and literature departments generally that has become an unfortunate fixture in the culture.

Yale-school criticism had the same appeal and the same shortcomings as the New Criticism. It generated intellectual power by bracketing off most of what might be called (with due acknowledgment of the constructed nature of the concept) the real-life aspects of literature—that literature is written by people, that it affects people, that it is a report on experience. But it was exciting to get inside the atom. “We knew we were at the center of intellectual life,” Alice Kaplan, a former student of de Man’s who published one of the few coolheaded responses to his wartime journalism, writes in her memoir, “French Lessons.” De Man’s was a fantastically limited approach, she admits, but everything that has happened since in literary studies has seemed “unworthy by comparison.”

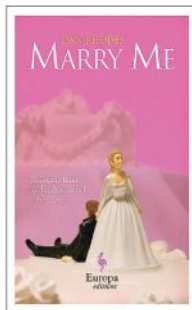
What did de Man believe? That’s the mystery. Deconstruction is a *via negativa*. It’s good for getting down to what de Man called the mechanical level of language. But it can’t bring anything substantive back, because anything substantive is subject to the rigors of deconstruction all over again. Deconstruction started to run into the sands when it got used to interpret texts in conformance with the political views of the interpreter (a type of self-fulfilling prophecy that afflicts many schools of criticism). Deconstruction is not a train you can get off of at the most convenient station.

“He is a connoisseur of nothingness,” Hartman wrote of de Man the critic. De Man took the train to the end of the line. It may be that he was able to write what he did, both the chillingly deplorable things and the chillingly inspiring ones, because he believed in nothing. ♦

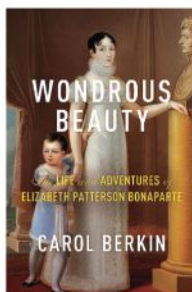
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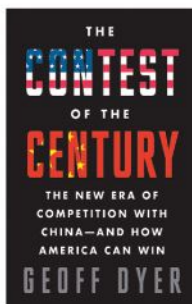
ANDREW'S BRAIN, by E. L. Doctorow (*Random House*). This novel follows the meandering thoughts of Andrew, a cognitive scientist and psychotherapy patient, as he recounts the story of his love affair with a former student. The book moves back and forth in time and space, as Andrew ruminates on abstract concepts, such as “cloud thinking, a chemical ubermensch,” or basks in the pleasant memory of seeing a young woman practice gymnastics. The disaster of Andrew’s life involves 9/11, and in its aftermath he turns for help to his ex-wife, with ruinous consequences. It’s a fitting mistake for a character who remains out of step, even with himself, throughout the novel.



MARRY ME, by Dan Rhodes (*Europa*). The seventy-nine vignettes in this slim, addictive volume range in length from two sentences to two pages, and are concerned with the absurdities of modern marriage. In one, a couple spend all their money on their wedding and end up homeless. Memories of the special day—“The calligraphy was exquisite”—keep them going as they “huddle together for warmth.” In another, a woman ends her marriage as if resigning from a job, thanking her husband for the opportunity “to develop a valuable set of skills.” Some of the stories fall flat, but Rhodes’s playful approach to storytelling and language beguiles.



WONDROUS BEAUTY, by Carol Berkin (*Knopf*). In 1803, in Baltimore, Elizabeth Patterson, an American débutante, married Jérôme Bonaparte, Napoleon’s youngest brother. Fifteen months later, heavily pregnant, she was abandoned; Napoleon had the diplomatically unproductive marriage annulled. The scandal made her a celebrity on both sides of the Atlantic, and, as Berkin writes, launched her on a path of self-reliance unusual for women of the era. She split her time between Baltimore and Paris, where she frequented the salons, resisted suitors, and petitioned the courts for recognition of her son’s legitimacy. A shrewd investor in American real estate and government bonds, she turned a small pension into a sizable fortune. Berkin incisively paints her subject’s life as a conflict between the Old World and the New, between the “cultural asylum” extended to women in Europe and the economic opportunities of America.



THE CONTEST OF THE CENTURY, by Geoff Dyer (*Knopf*). Assessing China’s growing rivalry with the U.S., the author, a former Beijing bureau chief for the *Financial Times*, does not subscribe to the idea of a “linear transfer” of power from the U.S. to China. Instead, he highlights three areas of competition: military superiority at sea, political influence in greater Asia, and the preferred global currency. China has increased its military presence in the Pacific and in the Indian Ocean, and both countries also compete for the loyalties of burgeoning Asian nations, often benefitting from one another’s missteps. Dyer does not anticipate direct confrontation, but he thinks that the contest with China will come to define U.S. foreign policy, and that America’s interests are best served by fiscal and military restraint.

THE VIENNA FIXATION

The “City of Dreams” festival, at Carnegie Hall.

BY ALEX ROSS

“*Tradition ist Schlamperei*,” Gustav Mahler liked to say—“Tradition is sloppiness.” When Mahler took charge of the Vienna Court Opera, in 1897, he resolved to banish bad habits that had encrusted that institution. The city of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert has long cherished the belief that music is native to its air, that a certain sound and sensibility

State Opera have taken up residence at Carnegie Hall, heading a festival called “Vienna: City of Dreams.” A semblance of the Vienna sound unquestionably remains, even if it has faded with time. One passage toward the end of the Adagio of Bruckner’s Sixth Symphony was emblematic: violins and cellos glided variously downward and upward in stepwise motion while

Nazi past (last year, the orchestra found itself in the awkward position of very belatedly revoking an honor that had been given to Baldur von Schirach, the leader of the Hitler Youth); its reluctance to engage female musicians (the first was hired in 1997, and there are now seven tenured women); its nearly all-white personnel. Tradition is often cited as the reason for the extreme gradualism of the Philharmonic’s evolution. It may be, though, that its lack of diversity has sapped the very sound that it aims to preserve. Without vitality, all that beauty decays into kitsch.

The first night of the series brought a humdrum account of Beethoven’s Ninth. The monumental first movement pattered along, short on rhythmic drive and tragic weight. A hint of carelessness crept into



The Vienna Philharmonic, heading the festival, performed works by composers ranging from Haydn to Berg and beyond.

can flourish only in its climate. In Mahler’s day, the Vienna Philharmonic, the élite ensemble associated with the Court (later the State) Opera, already prided itself on its painterly approach to sonority, on its shimmering strings and golden horns. Mahler, the scourge from the provinces, shook things up. His Beethoven Ninth was described as a “triumph of lucidity,” and caused unease for that very reason: critics found it too precisely delineated, too nervously driven. Mahler left the opera ten years later, exhausted by his struggle with a mentality that seemed to enshrine and embalm music in equal measure.

In recent weeks, the Vienna Philharmonic and other forces from the Vienna

flutes and a clarinet sustained shining but never piercing tones. It was a texture so palpably plush that you felt as if you were sinking into a pillow-top mattress at the Hotel Imperial. Yet the first three concerts in the series—all of which were led by Franz Welser-Möst, the Vienna State Opera’s music director—dwelled on surface sensuousness at the expense of structural logic and expressive vigor.

Schlamperei may not be the right word. Smugness, perhaps—an expectation that concertgoers should pay hundreds of dollars to witness a beautiful routine. Self-satisfaction has been at the root of other problems at the Philharmonic in recent years: a failure to deal adequately with its

the Scherzo: at several crucial moments, the strings failed to enter as one. The Adagio had ravishing, songful stretches, but the emotional temperature remained low. In the finale, with the entry of the potent young bass Günther Groissböck (“O friends, not these tones!” sounded like a review), the ensemble at last woke up, and the playing took on a festive brilliance.

In the Bruckner Sixth, which appeared alongside Johannes Maria Staud’s recent piece “On Comparative Meteorology,” the orchestra dug in more intently: the pulsing momentum of the outer movements matched the gorgeousness of the slow movement. But the finale lacked a feeling of triumphant release, instead coming

simply to a loud stop. Two nights later, Welser-Möst presided over a peculiarly restrained concert rendition of Berg's eruptive "Wozzeck," with Matthias Goerne in the title role and Evelyn Herlitzius as Marie. There was no doubt of Berg's Viennese roots: the opulent chords at the close of the hallucinatory scene in the fields were Mahlerian to the max. Still, the performance glowed without catching fire. When, the following week, James Levine led "Wozzeck" at the Met, the work's elemental energies were restored, and Goerne, substituting at short notice for Thomas Hampson, was able to realize his mournfully menacing conception of the role.

The haze lifted at the fourth Philharmonic concert, at which the young Latvian maestro Andris Nelsons conducted Strauss's "Salome." This was a curious choice for a Vienna festival, since at the time Strauss finished the opera, in 1905, he had little connection with the city; indeed, censors banned "Salome" from the Court Opera. Nonetheless, Nelsons provided an animating jolt. The orchestra dropped institutional caution, emphasizing contrasts and embracing extremes. Gun-Brit Barkmin showed strain in the title role, but Tomasz Konieczny thundered magnificently as Jochanaan. The central Salome-Jochanaan scene, leading into the prophet's cry of "*Du bist verflucht!*" ("You are cursed!") and the subsequent orchestral interlude, was nothing short of awesome. Here was a performance in which Mahler might have taken pride.

Carnegie Hall augmented the Philharmonic series with an array of chamber concerts and recitals. Because Viennese music is hardly a rarity at the hall, the festival concept often seemed superfluous. It was excellent to hear the Greek violinist Leonidas Kavakos giving his super-refined view of Beethoven's violin sonatas, and to witness Goerne's alternately turbulent and inward account of "Die Schöne Müllerin," and to catch the subtleties of Kristian Bezuidenhout playing Mozart on a fortepiano, but these events were indistinguishable from Carnegie's regular programming. Better to have featured, say, Alexander Zemlinsky, Ernst Krenek, or Hanns Eisler, all Vienna-trained composers who went into exile after the Nazis took power. Such a focus would have buttressed the Philharmonic's announced project of "Confronting the Past," which

is evident more in its publications and panel discussions than in its repertoire.

Happily, the Austrian Cultural Forum widened the scope of the festival by presenting an auxiliary series titled "Vienna Complex," which involved events at the Forum, on East Fifty-second Street, and at the Czech Center and (Le) Poisson Rouge. Here one felt the vibrancy of Vienna's modernist tradition, which began with the emergence of atonality in the works of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, in the first years of the twentieth century. No one has criticized the Viennese cult of beauty more furiously than the Viennese themselves: in recent decades, new generations of avant-gardists, not only in classical music but also in jazz, rock, and the electronic underground, have carried on the mission that Schoenberg called the "emancipation of the dissonance."

A pair of concerts by the Talea Ensemble, a New York group oriented toward the European avant-garde, explored works by three modern-day Viennese composers: Olga Neuwirth, Bernhard Gander, and Pierluigi Billone, an Alpine Italian who has lived in Vienna for more than a decade. Of these, the most striking was Billone's 2001 piece "Mani.Long," a ritualistic procession of irregular sound. Fifty minutes long, it had the feeling of an extended improvisation, yet a glance at the score showed that every detail had been plotted in advance. Frenzied instrumental outbursts and explosions of percussion, including pummelled sheet metal and gongs scraped with stones, alternated with immensely eerie episodes of near-stasis, with bass clarinets engaging in trancelike duets and strings issuing ethereal harmonics. As in "Salome," one seemed to be listening at the edge of a cistern, waiting for the axe to fall.

What is it like to be a composer today in the City of Dreams? A panel discussion with Neuwirth, Gander, and Billone, at the Austrian Cultural Forum, was commendably free of cant. Neuwirth described her love-hate relationship with Vienna, mentioned the vagaries of Austrian politics, and joked that "Vienna Complex" could be understood in a Freudian sense. Billone, on the other hand, said that the city had given him the "chance to survive as a composer." I had fun picturing a panel discussion with Mahler, Schoenberg, and Berg: the conversation might have sounded much the same. ♦

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THE ANTI-MODERNISTS

Why the Third Reich targeted artists.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



You might not expect much drama from “Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Germany 1937,” a succinct historical show at the Neue Galerie. The subject—the propagandistic “Degenerate Art” exhibition, which presented modernist works for popular vilification—is familiar, and it ranks as scarcely a footnote in the annals of Third Reich infamy. But the nuanced treatment of the event, by the German curator Olaf Peters, shocks anew, even at a distance of seventy-seven years. Peters has done a lot with a little: only about twenty works that appeared in the show, along with others by the same artists. Apposite photographs and films accompany

the works. One room features empty frames that once held large paintings—probably destroyed—by the likes of Max Beckmann, Paul Klee, Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Oskar Kokoschka. The show decants an essence of Nazism’s malice and the mass hysteria on which it fed. Is the target only art? Art was no incidental matter for Adolf Hitler, whose designs on the world, keyed to the rightful dominance of a purified master race, were aesthetic at their twisted root.

The hate-fest of “Degenerate Art,” which travelled to eleven cities in Germany and Austria, commenced in Munich on July 19, 1937. On display, in the cramped quarters of an archeological mu-

seum, were some six hundred and fifty of the twenty thousand works that the Nazis eventually confiscated from German institutions and collections. Many were subsequently burned; others were sold abroad, for hard currency. Wall texts noted the prices that public museums had paid for the works with “the taxes of the German working people,” and derided the art as mentally and morally diseased or as a “revelation of the Jewish racial soul.” Only a handful of the artists were Jews, but that made scant difference to a regime that could detect Semitic contagion anywhere. Some months earlier, Joseph Goebbels, the propaganda minister, had announced a ban on art criticism, as “a legacy of the Jewish influence.”

“Degenerate Art” was a blockbuster, far outdrawing a show that had opened the day before, a short walk away, in a new edifice, dear to Hitler, called the House of German Art. “The Great German Art Exhibition” had been planned to demonstrate a triumphant new spirit in the nation’s high culture, but the preponderance of academic hackery in the work produced for it came as a rankling disappointment to Hitler, whose taste was blinkered but not blind. By official count, more than two million visitors thronged “Degenerate Art” during its four-month run in Munich. Little is recorded of what they thought, but the American critic A. I. Philpot remarked, in the *Boston Globe*, that “there are probably plenty of people—art lovers—in Boston who will side with Hitler in this particular purge.” Germany had no monopoly on philistinism.

“Degenerate Art” slandered every innovative style of the previous three decades—Hitler having dictated a starting date of 1910—but mainly, in an ironic emphasis, homegrown German Expressionism. Some leading Nazis had been enthusiasts for the movement—Goebbels considered it a fitly nationalist complement to the New Order, with parallels in German medieval, Renaissance, and folk art. He had his apartment in Berlin remodelled by the architect Albert Speer, who incorporated watercolors by the great Expressionist—and devoted Nazi—Emil Nolde. But Hitler idealized pre-Christian Greek and Roman art and countenanced no kind of painting more contemporary than nineteenth-century

Works on view include, at rear, triptychs by Adolf Ziegler and Max Beckmann.

Bavarian genre scenes. The Führer paid a visit to the apartment and his rage, at the sight of the paintings, snapped Goebbels into line. (Political fealty cut no ice with Hitler in matters of art.) Further motivated by a determination to outflank anti-modernist radicals in the Nazi hierarchy, such as the bumbling fanatic Alfred Rosenberg, Goebbels became the driving force behind "Degenerate Art." He well understood the political utility of organized loathing; the Munich show included thirty-six pictures by Nolde, the most by any one artist.

What might the culture of the Reich have been if it had embraced Expressionism? That amounts to imagining Nazism without Hitler. The failure of his favored artists to fulfill his expectations might have taught him that greatness in art cannot be willed, but, of course, it didn't. He just willed harder. The most celebrated German moderns either fled the country, like Beckmann and Klee, or retreated into internal exile, like Dix, who painted anodyne landscapes in rural obscurity. Nolde spent the war years working in watercolors, so as not to risk a telltale odor of oils in his studio, because he was officially forbidden to paint. In 1938, the most prominent originator of Expressionism, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, committed suicide, in Switzerland. The Bauhaus, which is featured in one room of the Neue Galerie, had been forced to disband, in 1933, despite a pledge of political neutrality from its director, Mies van der Rohe.

Photographs blown up to mural size serve as backdrops for some works in the new show. Two aerial views of Dresden,

before and after its devastation by Allied bombs, in February, 1945, dramatize the toll of war in a city that was both the home of the pioneering Expressionist cohort called Die Brücke (the Bridge) and an early site of anti-modernist "exhibitions of shame," staged by Rosenberg's Militant League for German Culture, which anticipated "Degenerate Art." In a corridor hung with Nazi propaganda posters, a wall-spanning photograph of crowds lined up to attend "Degenerate Art" faces one of Jews arriving at Auschwitz. (This might seem heavy-handed, but its relevance is impossible to overstate.) The show climaxes with a comparison of "Great German Art" works and works that appeared, or might as well have, among the "degenerates." Two triptychs are strikingly juxtaposed: a masterpiece by Beckmann, "The Departure" (1932-33), which escaped confiscation and was given a place of honor in the Museum of Modern Art during the war, and "The Four Elements" (1937), by Adolf Ziegler, who was the least bad aesthetically of the Nazi painters but one of the most vicious spokesmen among them.

The central panel of the Beckmann depicts a king in a boat at sea; in the side panels, enigmatic figures perform sadistic acts. In the Ziegler, which Hitler owned, four nude Aryan beauties repose on a long plinth and wield attributes of fire, water, earth, and air. They are kitschy enough, as confections of a trumped-up sensibility that Hitler had wishfully termed "Greco-Nordic," but well done, in simmering harmonies of light-blue sky and delicately shadowed, effulgent flesh. The pleasure imparted by

"The Four Elements" is disturbing. In presenting the work, and other, lesser but not entirely miserable examples of "great German art," Peters plainly means to disrupt complacent assumptions about a moment when people, if untouched by the terror, might still have condoned some aspect of the Reich. Further complicating matters, not all the "degenerate" artists were first-rate, or even very good, as witness a cartoonishly grotesque sculpture of a head, by Otto Freundlich, that provided the chief image in publicity materials for the Munich show.

The art historian Ruth Heftig, one of eleven essayists in the Neue Galerie's compulsively readable catalogue, states a crowning irony: that the "stigmatization of modernism caused by the National Socialists is partly responsible for the current boom in modern art," having "created a canon, so to speak, that had not existed previously." The glamour of martyrdom came to halo modern artists with political virtues that few of them either sought or merited. This set the stage, in Cold War America, for the public acceptance of Abstract Expressionism as, for all its esoteric aesthetics, a potent symbol of liberal democracy, versus Communist dogmatism. In Germany, the reaction spurred a revival of Expressionism and fuelled a spirit of purgatorial atonement, which found focus in the career of the former Luftwaffe pilot Joseph Beuys and led to the global eminence of the painters Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, and Anselm Kiefer. Divorcing our thinking about modern culture from the residual consequences of "Degenerate Art" probably can't be done. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Drew Dernavich, must be received by Sunday, March 23rd. The finalists in the March 10th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 7th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



*"I'm not feeling much love, but
my arthritis is a lot better."*
Rich Goldman, Franklin Square, N.Y.



THE FINALISTS

"You bought the sofa—you find the remote."
Cindy Findlay, Toronto, Ont.

"I want to R-E-D-E-C-O-R-A-T-E."
Paulina Ospina, Santa Barbara, Calif.

*"He was cute as an ottoman, but we
both knew this day would come."*
Logan Ward, Fairfax, Va.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“

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This little piggy stayed home...



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