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JULY 21, 2014

THE NEW YORKER



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	5	GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN
	19	THE TALK OF THE TOWN <i>George Packer on the most vulnerable Iraqis; Tim Wu's new campaign; Adam Levine; underwriting fat chances; order-in booze.</i>
BEN McGRATH	24	BIG AIR <i>The X Games are feeling their age.</i>
SETH MNOOKIN	32	ONE OF A KIND <i>When a child's disorder is unknown to science.</i>
PAUL RUDNICK	39	HOBBY LOBBYIST
NICHOLAS LEMANN	42	THE HAND ON THE LEVER <i>Janet Yellen takes charge at the Fed.</i>
MAIRA KALMAN	49	"THE NOODLE-CUTTING MACHINE"
RACHEL AVIV	54	WRONG ANSWER <i>A struggling school in the era of high-stakes tests.</i>
		FICTION
GREG JACKSON	66	"WAGNER IN THE DESERT"
		THE CRITICS
		A CRITIC AT LARGE
LOUIS MENAND	74	<i>When civil rights met equal rights.</i>
		BOOKS
	81	<i>Briefly Noted</i>
		POP MUSIC
SASHA FRERE-JONES	82	<i>The new R. & B.</i>
		ON TELEVISION
EMILY NUSSBAUM	84	<i>"Being Mary Jane."</i>
		THE CURRENT CINEMA
ANTHONY LANE	86	<i>"Dawn of the Planet of the Apes," "Boyhood."</i>
		POEMS
J. T. BARBARESE	50	<i>"The Night He Picked Up Wallace Stevens"</i>
SUE SONG	70	<i>"Heart"</i>
		COVER
MARK ULRIKSEN		<i>"Coney Island"</i>

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PORT

Issue 14, Summer 2014

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

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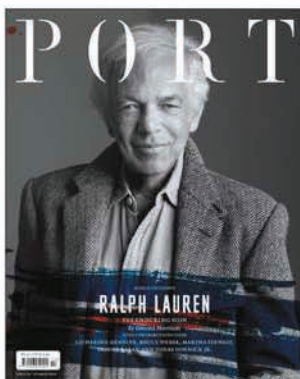
The Nonfiction Artist:
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MARK ULRIKSEN (COVER) wrote and illustrated "Dogs Rule, Nonchalantly," which will be published in August.

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Readings by J. T. Barbarese and Sue Song.

FILM

Richard Brody on his Movie of the Week pick.

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THE MAIL

VALLEY RIFTS

Nathan Heller, in his article “California Screaming” (July 7th & 14th), quotes the entrepreneur Joe Green as saying, of Silicon Valley, “If there’s anything that reflects the spirit of the Valley, it’s having a meritocracy, and the idea that anyone should be able to rise up through the system.” In fact, various studies have shown that high-tech companies are far less diverse than American corporations in general, employing fewer women, minorities, and people over forty. Even Asians, the most heavily represented minority in tech, tend to peak at the professional level and decline at the managerial and executive levels. Tech companies like to tout their diversity, but the numbers show whom they’re interested in promoting: young white males. The gentrification and housing issues plaguing San Francisco are complex. Working solutions that involve both the high-tech community and the San Francisco community are highly unlikely, given the narrow nature and interests of people in tech.

Louis Gudem

Newton, Mass.

The squabbling about limo buses and culture clash misses the point about the civic irresponsibility of Silicon Valley business interests. Advocating intensive building to increase density in San Francisco will do nothing for Bay Area housing affordability. All this does is make developers rich. As soon as a unit in San Francisco becomes available, its price becomes exorbitant. The Bay Area has plenty of land for residential development: it’s in the South Bay. If the tech giants really cared, they would sponsor—or strong-arm—residential development near their sprawling, ever-growing campuses instead of busing their employees in from San Francisco. The assumption that San Francisco must adapt to being a bedroom community for Silicon Valley is erroneous. Better regional planning is necessary. New

housing should not be the burden of San Francisco alone.

Adele Framer

San Francisco, Calif.

THE VIEWS OF CRUZ

In Jeffrey Toobin’s story on Senator Ted Cruz (“The Absolutist,” June 30th), Cruz says of his immigrant father’s arriving from Cuba, “Thank the good Lord that when my dad was a teen-age immigrant in Texas fifty-five years ago, how grateful I am that some well-meaning liberal did not come and put his arm around him and say, ‘Let me take care of you . . . let me make you dependent on the government . . . don’t bother working.’” Cruz should also thank the good Lord that some less well-meaning immigration officer did not come and tell his father, “Immigrants are not welcome in the U.S.”

Charles W. Mitchell

Parkton, Md.

When Ted Cruz asserts that Republican moderates have lost the Presidency in recent years because of their moderation, he is being simplistic, tendentious, and—at least in the case of Mitt Romney—flat-out disingenuous. Romney ran as a staunch conservative, advocating for immigrants’ “self-deportation.” At the end of his campaign, he tacked toward the center, but the uptick that followed was too sudden and too late. Other moderately conservative Republicans cited by Cruz lost for reasons that had nothing to do with their moderation: George H.W. Bush because the economy began its recovery too late and too incrementally, not because he raised taxes (hadn’t Ronald Reagan done the same?); Gerald Ford because his gaffe on Eastern Europe made him appear foolish and incompetent. One could go on.

Albion M. Urdank

Los Angeles, Calif.

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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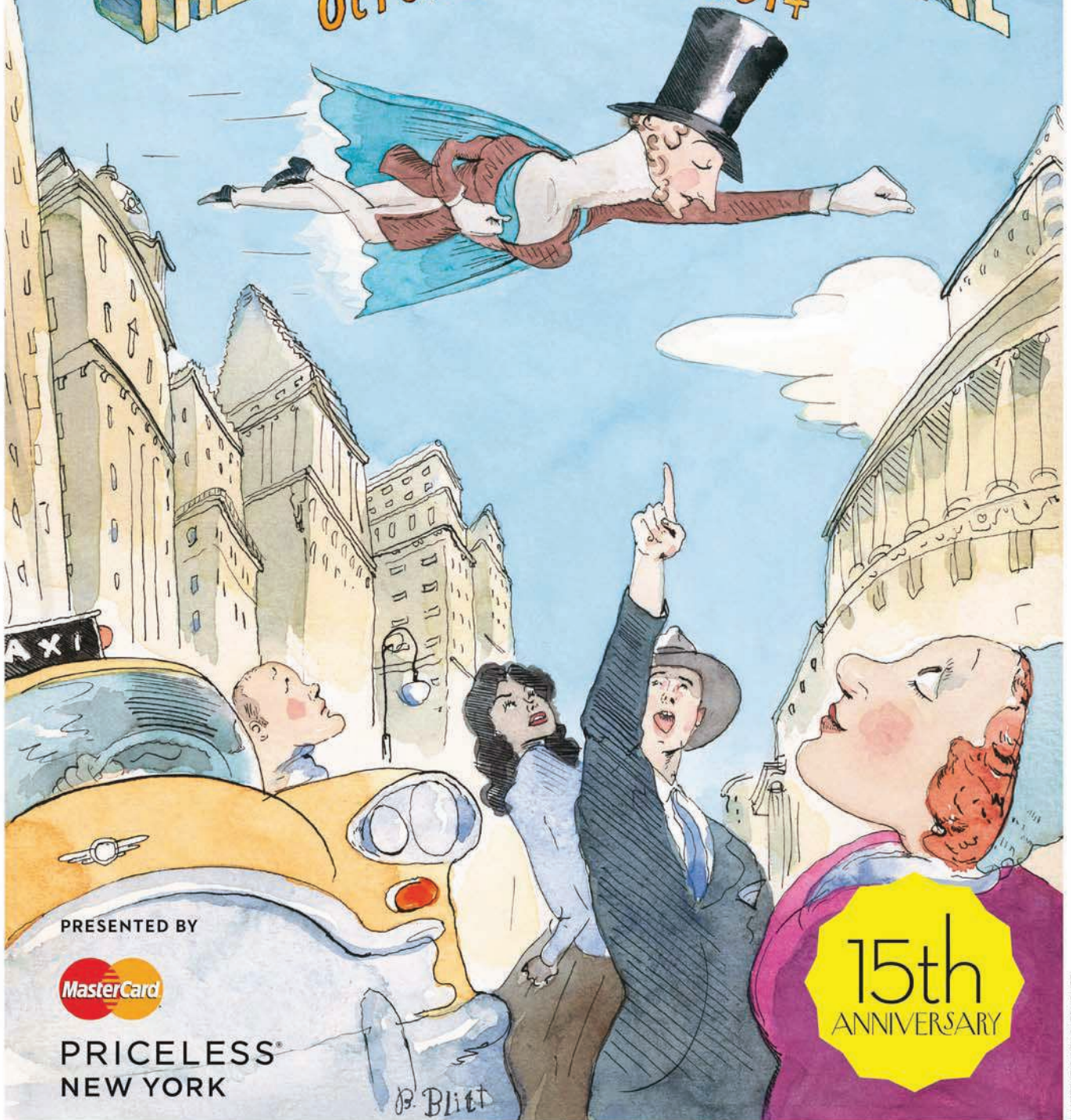
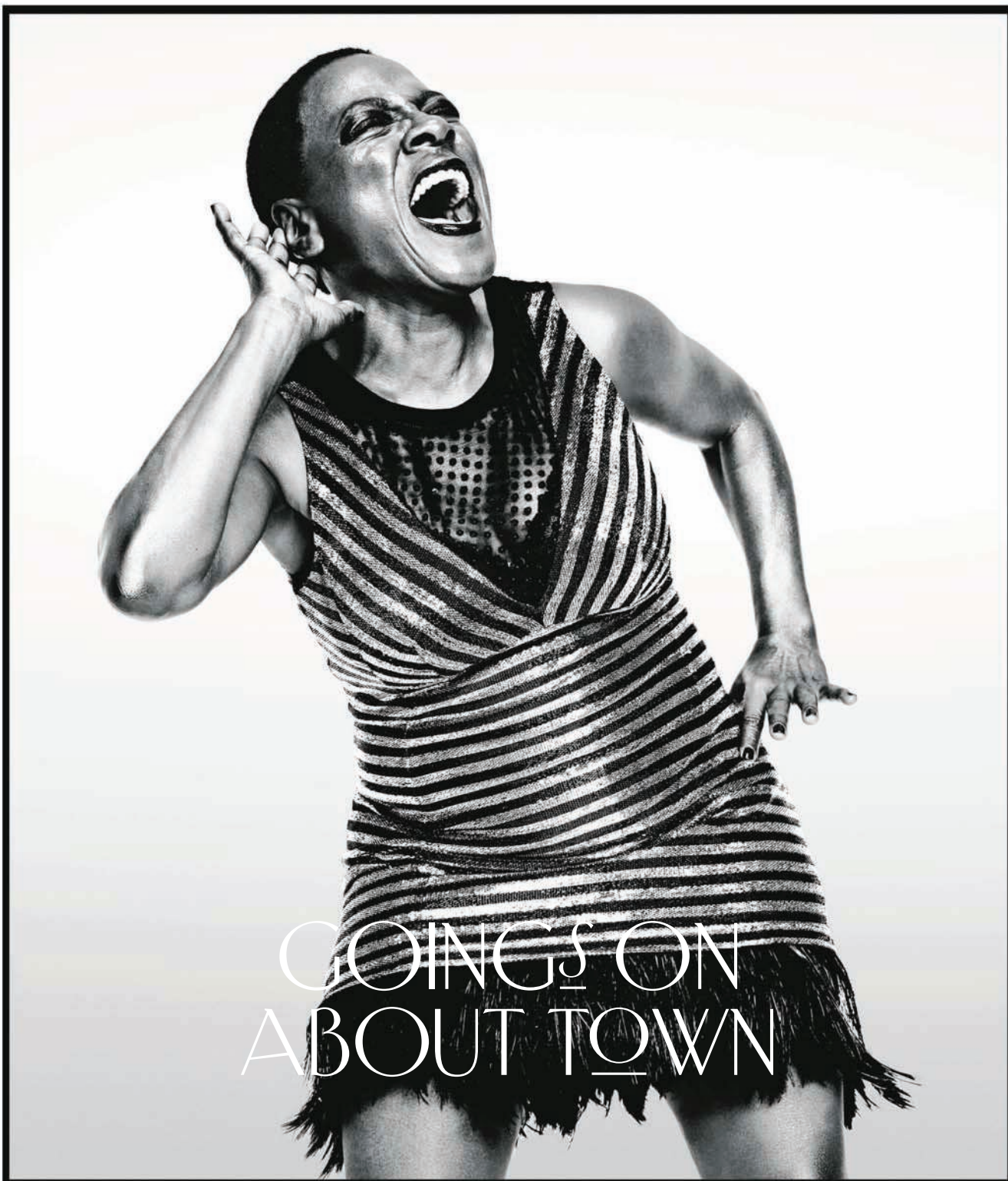


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GOING ON ABOUT TOWN

JULY 2014 WEDNESDAY 16TH THURSDAY 17TH FRIDAY 18TH SATURDAY 19TH SUNDAY 20TH MONDAY 21ST TUESDAY 22ND

FOR YEARS, WHEN THE SINGER Sharon Jones spoke onstage, it was mostly to introduce a new song or to exhort the crowd to get up and dance. But these days she's just as likely to venture into more serious territory: mentioning her pancreatic cancer, which sidelined her for much of last year, and thanking her fans for their support during her treatment and recovery. But Jones and her backing band, the Dap-Kings, never let too much time pass before they return to their hard-driving soul music, which mixes elements from Stax, Motown, James Brown, and Aretha Franklin. The group's most recent album is titled "Give the People What They Want," and Jones and the Dap-Kings will do just that when they kick off the two-day, outdoor Lowdown Hudson Blues Festival, on July 16.

MOVIES | ART | NIGHT LIFE
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ABOVE & BEYOND

PHOTOGRAPH BY RUVEN AFANADOR



Joan Bennett plays a woman who confronts a blackmailer, in Max Ophuls's "The Reckless Moment."

MOTHERS AND LOVERS

Women onscreen in two series of film-noir classics, at Film Forum and MOMA.

THE FILM NOIR REMAINS the most enduring old-Hollywood genre, as confirmed by a pair of simultaneous retrospectives, "Femmes Noirs," at Film Forum, and "Lady in the Dark: Crime Films from Columbia Pictures, 1932-1957," at the Museum of Modern Art. The physical and emotional violence of these bitter-toned, highly stylized, low-budget movies exposed lurid fantasies and social traumas that went unmentioned in the studios' more prestigious productions. Almost all of these films were directed by men, so it's no surprise that, as the titles of the series indicate, many are centered on women—women in trouble or women who are trouble.

MOMA's program is distinguished by such rare movies as the director Richard Quine's sunlit, doom-laden "**Drive a Crooked Road**," from 1954. Quine dramatizes the stereotypical male gaze with derisive scenes of four brawny auto mechanics slobbering and hooting as women walk past their shopwindow. But their shy, slight, and plainspoken co-worker (Mickey Rooney), who shuns such displays, is the one who gets snared in the criminal schemes of a seductress (Dianne Foster). Here, the carnal leer, despite its simian repugnance, suggests a fitness for the battle of the sexes, to which the sensitive romantic shows up unarmed.

The sacred vows of motherhood are debased in several of the best films in MOMA's series, including "**My Name Is Julia Ross**," a terrifyingly claustrophobic drama by the audacious stylist Joseph H. Lewis, from 1945. Nina Foch stars in the title role, as an American woman alone and adrift in London, who is hired as a private secretary by an elderly dowager, Mrs. Hughes (Dame May Whitty). The job turns out to be part of Mrs. Hughes's plot to cover up her son's murder of his wife; she holds Julia captive in a rural mansion and attempts to brainwash her and efface her identity. The story runs on a local version of the dictator's big lie. Without a word about war, Lewis, showing bars and gates, a striped dress, and the credulous regard of well-meaning neighbors, conjures visions of the

concentration camps, which went largely unnoticed during wartime and came to light just before the start of filming.

The grand ironist Max Ophuls gave a similar story of furious maternal devotion a bittersweet tinge in "**The Reckless Moment**," from 1949 (also at MOMA). A headstrong teen-age girl in a California seaside town accidentally kills her caddish boyfriend. Her mother (Joan Bennett) tries to cover it up, but is blackmailed by a suave grifter (James Mason), who ends up falling in love with her. With his elegantly gliding and soaring images, Ophuls lends an exquisite dignity to unfulfilled longing and criminal passion alike.

The Film Forum series includes "**Angel Face**" (1952), in which Otto Preminger, a rationalistic master of hidden madness, stages a conflict between two feminine tropes, the evil stepmother and the predatory vixen, and a male one, the freelancer with a roving eye. A writer (Herbert Marshall) who was widowed during the London Blitz lives in California with his second wife (Barbara O'Neil), a wealthy woman who clashes with him and his viperish daughter, Diane (Jean Simmons). The sexually swaggering Frank (Robert Mitchum), an ambulance driver whose irrepressible lust is his point of vulnerability, is called to the house, where he falls under Diane's spell and gets pulled into her plot to kill her stepmother. Preminger, who studied law, builds tragic results from the evenhanded workings of the judicial system.

—Richard Brody

EVERETT



ABOVE: © MACDUFF EVERTON

Roads Less Travelled

Exploring the Japanese Island of **Shikoku**

For travellers who have seen and experienced Tokyo, Kyoto, and other hot spots in Japan, and who are inclined to venture off the beaten path, **Shikoku** should top the list of must-see travel destinations in 2014.

Of Japan's four main islands—Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu—Shikoku is the smallest and remains a world apart, mysterious even to many Japanese. A two-hour flight from Tokyo, its rugged beauty and isolation are typified by **Iya Valley**, a gorge located in the center of the island and surrounded by cliffs and thickly wooded mountains.

For centuries, the only way to navigate Shikoku's challenging terrain was over suspension bridges. The 140-foot-long double-vine bridge, the **Oku-Iya Niju Kazura Bash**, beckons as a thrilling link to the past, traversing the Iya River, a tributary of the mighty Yoshino.

The enormous rock formations along the upper reaches of the Yoshino near **Oboke** and **Kobo** have made the area a favorite for hikers, photographers, and outdoor adventurers. The river also offers some of the best whitewater rafting in Japan. After a day of excitement, visitors can retreat to the area's ancient *ryokans* (traditional inns), restaurants, and hot-spring baths for a warm introduction to Shikoku hospitality.

2015 is the 1,200th anniversary of the **Shikoku Pilgrimage**, an 868-mile trek that loops the island and traces the spiritual

journey first walked in the 9th century by Kukai, Japan's most revered scholar, poet, and priest. Known posthumously as Kobo Daishi, he famously founded the Shingon school of Buddhism. Tracing small portions of his path, visitors join white-robed priests making regular pilgrimages along the circuitous route, passing through sacred mountain vistas and stopping along the way to pay homage in the 88 temples that adorn the path.

The **Dogo Onsen**, Japan's most venerable hot springs spa and hotel, is the perfect place to cap an exploration of the island. In celebration of its 120th birthday, the hotel invited some of Japan's best-known contemporary artists—including Nobuyoshi Araki, Fujiwo Ishimoto, and Yayoi Kusama—to reimagine some of its guest rooms along dramatic themes. The designs brought to life inside the hotel extend throughout the city of Matsuyama as part of the **Dogo Onsenart 2014** art festival. Works on display explore a mix of innovative design and playful modernity, providing a vivid collage of contemporary Japan.

Explore Shikoku and see a side of Japan more than 3,000 years in the making. Visit **JapanTravelInfo.com** for more information.



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NOW PLAYING

Begin Again

Another sappy but engaging musical fable from the Irish writer and director John Carney, who made "Once." In New York, a high-minded and depressive singer-songwriter (Keira Knightley)—a British Joni Mitchell, perhaps, whose music seems crossed with that of Burt Bacharach—links up with a down-and-out record producer (Mark Ruffalo). They cut an album, with unlimited free help from New York musicians, working all over the city—in alleys, in Central Park, near the Empire State Building. We hear songs at every stage of development: as they are written, rehearsed, recorded, and performed. (Gregg Alexander wrote most of them.) Carney brings a relaxed, offhand style, the illusion of on-the-fly moviemaking, to his wish-fulfilling tales. It's as if Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland had returned to put on a show—enthusiasm is what matters most. Co-starring Adam Levine, as a narcissistic rocker. —*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 7/7 & 14/14.) (In limited release.)

Closed Curtain

The audacious five-minute-long opening shot of this clandestinely made film by the Iranian directors Jafar Panahi (whom the government has banned from filmmaking) and Kambozia Partovi sets a paranoid tone—a furtive trip to a remote beachfront house, observed from behind the bars of a metal gate. That's where a screenwriter (Partovi) has chosen to hide—behind closed curtains, turning day into a permanent night—in order to protect his dog, Boy, from murder by the regime, which has banned dogs on religious grounds. (His fight with the authorities over the pet has made him a wanted criminal.) But his sanctuary is penetrated twice, by a young woman (Maryam Moghadam), who is also on the run, and by robbers—and then a third time, when Panahi himself walks in on the staged action that he's filming. The covert setting wreaks a nearly surrealistic transformation on the stuff of daily life; footfalls and flickers of light, the click of doors and the roar of cars carry the terror of arrest. But, when the filmmakers dare to open the curtains, they see another, unofficial Iran, one that eludes their persecutors, as imagination and reality flow together in surprising and exhilarating ways. In Farsi. —*Richard Brody* (Film Forum.)

Jersey Boys

Is Clint Eastwood the right man to film a jukebox musical? Given the lean, uncluttered movement of his best films, it's no surprise to find him discomforted by the jerky, half-joke mood that prevails here. The story starts in the nineteen-fifties, with Tommy DeVito (Vincent Piazza) dividing his time between petty crime

and putting together bands. He takes on Frankie Castelluccio (John Lloyd Young), a kid with a high, pure voice, who changes his name to Valli; add Nick Massi (Michael Lomenda) and Bob Gaudio (Erich Bergen), who doesn't just play keyboards but actually writes music, and you get the Four Seasons, and a string of shining hits. The director is clearly more at ease in the first half of the saga, when the guys still bump up against the rough edges of Jersey life, than he is in the slog of the later scenes, in which we are asked to worry about debts and contractual tiffs. Worse yet is the coda, in which, bowed down by terrible makeup, the men return to take their spot in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; how can Eastwood, an unflinching observer of advancing age, summon such crummy fake oldsters? Still, when he does stand back and let the songs ring out, the film coheres. Christopher Walken plays a gangster who can fix anything; maybe he should have taken charge of the film. —*Anthony Lane* (6/30/14) (In wide release.)

Land Ho!

A well-meaning, good-souled, essentially naïve dud. Two elderly men—Mitch (Earl Lynn Nelson), ebullient and overbearing, and Colin (Paul Eenhoorn), reticent and shy—reunite after some years (they were once married to two sisters) and head off uneasily to Iceland for adventure. They quarrel, exchange confidences, wander around, navigate icy waters, and flirt harmlessly with young women. The trouble is that neither of them is interesting: Mitch, a doctor, is one of those intelligent but hearty backslappers whom most of us would run from, and Colin (understandably) guards his privacy. Enjoy it for the bleakly beautiful mountains and the stark lava deserts. Written and directed by Martha Stephens and Aaron Katz. —*D.D.* (In limited release.)

Life Itself

This documentary about the film critic Roger Ebert (who died in 2013), directed by Steve James, fulfills the promise of the title, which is also that of Ebert's autobiography. The filming coincided with the last stages of Ebert's treatment for cancer, which cost him his ability to speak. Ebert grants James access to the painful minutiae of his final ordeal and, for that matter, insists on their inclusion in the film, even as—prompted by James's e-mailed questions—he looks back at the full course of his life. Interviews with Ebert's widow, Chaz Ebert, and with longtime friends and other critics are intercut with archival footage in a conventional format, to present a celebratory but unstinting portrait of Ebert. A paradoxical and vitally overflowing character emerges: a compassionate moralist with vast appetites, a raucous

public performer whose confessional candor has a nearly religious purity. Though acclaimed for his writing, Ebert was famous for his televised collaboration with Gene Siskel; their conflicted and mysterious relationship is central to the film, as it was in his life. For Ebert, movies were human, social matters, and he makes sure that James's film shares that trait; ailing and fatigued, back in the hospital, Ebert turns to the camera with a look of serene and humble love. —*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Mr. Majestyk

Charles Bronson, a Lithuanian coal miner's son who, as a teenager, toiled in the mines himself, embodied the vitality, the striving, and the no-nonsense strength of America's working class. He acted with his creased brow, his jagged bone structure, and his narrowed eyes, as well as with the muscles in his chest, shoulders, and neck. This above-average Bronson vehicle, from 1974, features a hardscrabble script by Elmore Leonard and the straight-ahead direction of Richard Fleischer. Bronson stars in the title role of a Colorado melon grower who treats his immigrant workers decently and earns the loyalty of Nancy Chavez (Linda Cristal), a union organizer, after he battles a corrupt labor operator who's running a protection racket. Majestyk eventually lands in jail and becomes the target of an assassin (Al Lettieri), and, by the end, it's Majestyk and Chavez against the world. (Guess who wins.) Despite the film's pat inevitability, Majestyk is a multidimensional hero. He's socially conscious yet individualistic, half-smart and semi-tough, human enough to make mistakes and man enough to correct them. Bronson knew how to lend an underdog role a good, mean snap. —*Michael Sragow* (Anthology Film Archives; July 17.)

Snowpiercer

Violent, often absurd, but full of brilliant surprises. The accomplished South Korean director Bong Joon-ho ("The Host" and "Mother") transcends the clichés of the film's post-apocalyptic premise. After a climate-change crisis, everyone in the world is dead except for a few hundred survivors, who are circling the snowy earth in an enormous high-speed train. At the rear of the train, the lower classes, living in filthy muck, mount a revolt against the swells in the front cars, who are protected by the fascist overlord Wilford (Ed Harris), a genius who cooks steak while wearing a silk robe. The proles encounter armed thugs and numerous obstacles, the most formidable of which is Wilford's chief ideologue, played by the fearless Tilda Swinton, who holds forth, in the tones of a Victorian schoolmistress, on the "eternal order" by which the privileged lord it over ungrateful

OPENING DOUBLE PLAY

A documentary, directed by Gabe Klinger, about the friendship of the filmmakers James Benning and Richard Linklater. Opening July 18. (Anthology Film Archives.)

I, ORIGINS

Mike Cahill directed this science-fiction film, about two scientists (Michael Pitt and Brit Marling) who seek a way into past lives. Opening July 18. (In limited release.)

MOOD INDIGO

Michel Gondry directed this romantic fantasy, based on a novel by Boris Vian, about a woman (Audrey Tautou) whose illness costs her wealthy husband (Romain Duris) his fortune. In French. Opening July 18. (In limited release.)

SEX TAPE

Jason Segel and Cameron Diaz star in this comedy, as a married couple whose private video gets leaked online. Directed by Jake Kasdan; co-starring Rob Corddry, Ellie Kemper, and Jack Black. Opening July 18. (In wide release.)

WISH I WAS HERE

Zach Braff directed and stars in this comedy, about a thirty-five-year-old man in search of the meaning of life. Co-starring Kate Hudson. Opening July 18. (In limited release.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles in bold are reviewed.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

A tribute to Elmore Leonard. July 17 at 6:45: "Mr. Majestyk." • July 17 at 9:15: "Touch" (1997, Paul Schrader). • July 18 at 6:45 and July 21 at 9:15: "Out of Sight" (1998, Steven Soderbergh). • July 19 at 4: "The Tall T" (1957, Budd Boetticher). • Films by James Benning and Richard Linklater. July 18 at 9: "11 x 14" (1976, Benning). • July 19 at 5: "North on Evers" (1991, Benning). • July 19 at 9: "Slacker" (1991, Linklater). • July 21 at 8:45: "It's Impossible to Learn to Plow by Reading Books" (1988, Linklater). • July 22 at 8:45: "The Newton Boys" (1998, Linklater).

BAM CINÉMATEK

The films of Luis Buñuel. July 16 at 7:30 and 9: "Land Without Bread" (1933). • July 17 at 7:30 and 9:30: "Susana" (1951). • July 18 at 2, 4, 6, 8, and 9:50 and July 19 at 4:30 and 9: "Viridiana" (1961). • July 19 at 2 and 6:45 and July 20 at 2, 4:15, 6:30, and 8:45: "Tristana." • "Overdue." July 22 at 4:30 and 8:15: "I Love Melvin" (1953, Don Weis) and "The Adventures of Hajji Baba" (1954, Weis), introduced by the critics Nick Pinkerton and Nicolas Rapold.

FILM FORUM

"Femmes Noirs." July 18-19 at 12:45, 5:30, and 9:45: "The Postman Always Rings Twice" (1946, Tay Garnett). • July 18-19 at 3 and 7:30: "Mildred Pierce" (1945, Michael Curtiz). • July 20 at 12:45, 5:15, and 9:40 and July 21 at 12:45 and 5:15: "Leave Her to Heaven" (1945, John Stahl). • July 20 at 3 and 7:30 and July 2 at 3 and 10:15: "Out of the Past" (1947, Jacques Tourneur). • July 22 at 12:40, 4:40, and 9:15: "Angel Face" (1952, Otto Preminger). • July 22 at 2:40 and 7: "Niagara" (1953, Henry Hathaway).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

"70s Domestic Discontent." July 22 at 6:30: "Diary of a Mad Housewife" (1970, Frank Perry) and "Portnoy's Complaint" (1972, Ernest Lehman), introduced by the filmmaker Alex Ross Perry.

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

"A Salute to Vincent Lindon." July 22 at 7:30: "Friday Night" (2002, Claire Denis).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"An Auteurist History of Film." July 16-18 at 1: "Barry Lyndon" (1975, Stanley Kubrick). • "Lady in the Dark: Crime Films from Columbia Pictures, 1932-1957." July 16 at 5 and July 20 at 2:30: "Mysterious Intruder" (1946, William Castle). • July 18 at 6:45: "Let Us Live" (1939, John Brahm). • July 19 at 6:15: "The Big Heat" (1953, Fritz Lang). • July 21 at 4:30: "In a Lonely Place" (1950, Nicholas Ray). • July 21 at 6:45: "Blind Spot" (1947, Robert Gordon). • July 22 at 4:30: "Chinatown at Midnight" (1949, Seymour Friedman). • July 22 at 6:30: "The Sniper" (1952, Edward Dmytryk).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

Special screenings. July 19 at 1 and 4: "The Trials of Muhammad Ali" (2013, Bill Siegel). • "Chuck Jones Matinees." July 19-20 at 1: Short animated films, including "Duck Amuck" (1953). • "Star Presence on Screen." July 20 at 3: "Voyage to Italy." • July 20 at 6: "The Little Foxes" (1941, William Wyler).



MOVIE OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of John Cassavetes's "Love Streams," from 1984, in our digital edition.

scum. There's much fighting at close quarters with axes, clubs, lances, and various other medieval instruments (bullets are in short supply). The deluxe front cars are a triumph of imaginative design. With Chris Evans, Jamie Bell, Octavia Spencer, John Hurt, and Song Kang-ho.—*D.D.* (7/7 & 14/14) (In limited release.)

Tammy

It's daring of Melissa McCarthy—who produced the film and co-wrote the script with her husband, Ben Falcone (who directed)—to cast herself as an aggressive, uneducated, irresponsible, and vain young woman who causes trouble wherever she goes and gets into trouble that she can't get out of. The movie is a showcase for her talent, and, although it's a comedy, it suggests an incisive vision that, unfortunately, is never fully realized. Tammy, a fast-food employee in a small town in Illinois, loses her job and her husband on the same day. Desperate and penniless, she goes on a road trip with her grandmother, Pearl (Susan Sarandon), a former adventurer now constrained by infirmity. Their destination is Niagara Falls, but they go the long way, which involves near-catastrophic crashes, lots of alcohol, some violent crime, and some jail time. The harrowing story of downward-spiralling expectations, a rapid fall from a tenuous toehold on middle-class security, is the movie's grand inspiration. Though flamboyant, McCarthy ultimately hedges her performance. She doesn't plumb the depths of Tammy's degradation, and the fine actors who round out the cast—including Kathy Bates, Gary Cole, and Mark Duplass—remain on the surface of their characters. Falcone leaves the story undeveloped, the theme unexplored.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

Transformers: Age of Extinction

With Chicago ravaged and the country healing slowly from war between the Autobots and the Decepticons, two men, unknown to each other, accidentally reignite the conflict. Cade Yeager (Mark Wahlberg), a ramshackle inventor in rural Texas, buys a rusty truck that reveals itself to be Optimus Prime, the clanking colossus who is the Autobot leader. Meanwhile, Joshua Joyce (Stanley Tucci), an arrogant industrialist, clones a Decepticon for commercial gain, but his product turns against him. In the resulting battle, the human race is imperilled, parts of Texas and Hong Kong and places beyond are reduced to ruins, and Cade learns to accept his daughter's boyfriend (Jack Reynor). The director, Michael Bay, deftly integrates digital wonders and live action, and he stages scenes of extensive destruction with bloodless exuberance. The dialogue, though bite-size, nonetheless gives the able actors (also including Kelsey Grammer, as a dastardly government agent;

Thomas Lennon, as the President's chief of staff; and Nicola Peltz, as Cade's daughter) their moments to shine, but the few authentic inspirations to be found in the movie's hundred and sixty-five roiling minutes involve gigantic science-fiction contrivances. The mighty scale of Bay's crude and cynical vision is, at times, shocking and awesome.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

Tristana

The Spanish director Luis Buñuel reworked his lifelong theme—the erotic allure of Catholic moralism—in this 1970 melodrama. Catherine Deneuve plays the title character, a devout Spanish orphan who emerges from a convent to become the ward of Don Lope (Fernando Rey), an aging roué who takes advantage of her gratitude and her dependence. Feeling unworthy of the true love that she finds with a young artist (Franco Nero), the fallen innocent becomes even more ruthlessly cynical than the hardened libertine whose lessons she distills. Meanwhile, Tristana secretly drives her servant's son, Saturno (Jesús Fernández)—whose deafness inures him to pious admonitions—to priapic distraction while, already damned in her own eyes, she cloaks her predatory plot in the garb of decency. Filming in Franco's Spain with the surffrance of the Church, Buñuel set the action in pre-Civil War Toledo, but his sly, ironic fancies do the established order no favors. Here, the rigid rituals of duty and honor form an inextricable bond of pleasure and degradation, of sex and death—and render sin all the more exciting. In Spanish.—*R.B.* (BAM Cinémathèque; July 19-20.)

Venus in Fur

Ever the alchemist, Roman Polanski continues his quest for the process whereby theatre is transmuted and reformed into film. This new attempt is more successful than his last one, "Carnage," though its scope is smaller still. There are just two performers: Emmanuelle Seigner is Vanda, an actress, arriving late and rain-lashed for an audition, and Mathieu Amalric is Thomas, who has written a play about a sadomasochistic pact, and has yet to find the leading lady he requires. She reads for one role; he, at her suggestion, takes the other; and, before long, it grows impossible to draw a line between the real world, rife with argument and interrupted by cell phones, and the intensity—not just erotic—of fictional life. The passage between the two is made all the smoother by the dance of Polanski's camera; he seems in his element, and, far from allowing the claims of the creative artist to hold sway, he loses no opportunity, via the sharp-tongued Vanda, to give them a decent whipping. Adapted from the play by David Ives. In French.—*A.L.* (6/30/14) (In limited release.)

Voyage to Italy

One of the most quietly revolutionary works in the history of cinema, Roberto Rossellini's third feature starring Ingrid Bergman (his wife at the time), from 1953, turns romantic melodrama into an intellectual adventure. An English couple—Alex Joyce (George Sanders), a cynical, supercilious businessman, and his sensitive, cultured wife, Katherine (Bergman)—arrive in Naples to deal with an inheritance. As they travel alone together for the first time in eight years of childless marriage, their festering estrangement, from each other and from their comfortable way of life, bursts into open conflict. Filming on location, Rossellini devotes as much attention to the Italian settings and their cultural treasures as to the characters wandering among them; at Pompeii, the entwined bodies of lovers blasted by Vesuvius put an existential spin on Katherine's misery. Rossellini realizes his political agenda—regarding the discontents of bourgeois sophisticates whose sensibility is stunted by comfort—with a vision of redemption through aesthetic passion and populist experience. Like his characters, his Hollywood stars get out of the Bentley and into the streets. From Rossellini's example, the young French New Wave critics learned to fuse studio style with European philosophy, to make high-relief drama on a low budget.—*R.B.* (Museum of the Moving Image; July 20.)

Whitey: United States of America v. James J. Bulger

Complicated beyond imagining, and, in the end, a genuine shocker. By means of court transcripts, the documentary filmmaker Joe Berlinger re-creates the 2013 trial of Boston's Irish gang lord Whitey Bulger, who committed innumerable crimes for twenty-five years without a single charge being levelled against him. Using the trial as a frame, Berlinger pulls together the many strands of Bulger's connections with fellow-mobsters, corrupt F.B.I. agents (and a possibly corrupt U.S. attorney), local prosecutors, victims of his extortion racket, and the families of people he murdered. Much of the testimony and interviews, delivered in the richest Boston idiom, is riveting. Bulger's obsession was to bury the idea that he had informed on anyone. (He can be heard on the phone with his lawyer, lying with pathological precision.) But the clear implication of the movie is that he bought and informed his way out of prosecution, corrupting many of the law-enforcement people who were paid to protect Boston, including those in the Justice Department, which continues to cover up its relationship with Bulger to this day. Of the memorable thugs in Bulger's posse, the ineffable Kevin Weeks, who admits to various gruesome crimes as if they were nothing, is at once the most appealing and the most horrifying.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)



MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum "Garry Winogrand"

Thirty years after his death and twenty-five years since his last museum retrospective, the great American photographer gets an intelligent and thorough reevaluation in a show that could finally make him as popular as he is influential. Winogrand's snapshot aesthetic—fast, loose, and spontaneous—still defines a wide swath of our visual culture, but this selection skews toward the dark and pessimistic, and makes his debt to Robert Frank more obvious than before. At his peak, in the sixties and seventies, Winogrand had an instinctive feel for the moment and for the time—capturing elation, disillusion, boom, and collapse on city streets and suburban lawns, as well as at protests, parties, riots, state fairs, be-ins, and political conventions. Wildly prolific and famously undisciplined, Winogrand shot many more pictures than he ever printed—he left behind in excess of sixty-six hundred rolls of film. As noted on wall labels, close to a third of the show's hundred and seventy-five pictures are posthumous prints, which would be more of an issue had Winogrand not had a long history of allowing curators and friends to choose what he should show. It's tempting to second-guess the decisions here, but the quality of the images is consistent and strong. Big and meaty, the show is full of sharp observations, small revelations, and not a little despair. Through Sept. 21.

Guggenheim Museum "Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today"

If conceptualism is the lingua franca of global contemporary art, then Latin America is where it's spoken with the greatest fluency. Not every work shines in this show of new acquisitions (made possible by funds from a bank keen on the region's emerging markets), but the hit rate is high and the issues are serious, whether in the Cuban artist Tania Bruguera's establishment of a rare zone for free speech in Havana or in the Venezuelan-born Javier Téllez's parade in Tijuana, which culminated with a human cannonball flying

over the U.S.-Mexico border. The Brazilians, especially, have brought their A game. The young artist Jonathan de Andrade skewers his country's racial stereotypes with fake posters for an old anthropological museum in Pernambuco, while Rivane Neuenschwander has produced a line of postcards depicting unremarkable locations with global names: a Hotel Madrid, a Texas Bar, and sixty-three other places that make the distinction between here and elsewhere seem overdrawn. Through Oct. 1.

Museum of Arts and Design "NYC Makers: The MAD Biennial"

The museum's first biennial is so stuffed to the rafters with art, design, and everything else that it does none of its participants any favors. More than a hundred "makers" have little in common except locale and, too often, frivolity. Works by some predictable elder stateswomen (Laurie Anderson, Meredith Monk, Yoko Ono) are degraded by their proximity to giant sugar candies bearing the museum's logo, not to mention to organic espresso beans from the dogmatists of Blue Bottle Coffee. Even the museum's security staff has been conscripted, outfitted with knit vests designed by the downtown fashion house Eckhaus Latta. Only a handful of contributions—notably Natalie Jeremijenko's collaboration with New York schoolchildren on a nutrition program—convey the idea that design can effect change. Through Oct. 12.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN Marcel Duchamp

It is no small feat to assemble a complete set of the Master's Readymades—or, more precisely, of the copies that he authorized, in 1964, to replace the lost originals. The bicycle wheel, the coat hooks, the bottle rack, the urinal: they're more blissful and less ponderous as a group, and it's gratifying to see them all together, accompanied by graphic works and a "Boîte-en-Valise"—one of Duchamp's portable museums, featuring miniature versions of the painting "Nude Descending a Staircase" and "The Large Glass." Duchamp, at his core, was a withholder, producing just a few dozen objects during his fecund First World War years and essentially nothing in his chess-playing decades. Which means that you need only one small gallery to produce a major show of works by the great artist, who still has plenty to teach his successors about invention and restraint. Through Aug. 8. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313.)

"Photography Into Sculpture"
Inspired by MOMA's 1970 exhibition of the same name—and including

many of the same artists—the curator Olivier Renaud-Clement has pulled together a wide range of works from the era that take photography off the wall and explore its sculptural potential. Established figures like Robert Heineken (whose current retrospective at MOMA is an obvious touchstone) are joined by lesser-known contemporaries, some of whom turn images into objects in witty but overly literal ways (see Robert Watts's Lucite pork chop). Once radical, many of the pieces here now look dated—still clever, but quaint. Ellen Brooks's life-size, seductively shaped image of a naked couple lazing on an AstroTurf lawn is a showstopping exception. Through July 25. (Hauser & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-794-4970.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA Brea Souders

In an impressive solo debut, the New York-based photographer turns even her most straightforward images into intriguing picture puzzles. In several pieces, fragments of larger prints (an open hand, a clothesline) float alone on a white ground; in others, tiny snippets of negatives accumulate on or tumble through blank space like transparent confetti. Souders's still-lives also seesaw between representation and abstraction, layering swatches of solid color with, for instance, a snail, a leaf, and a torn picture of a Michelangelo sculpture. Although the range of the work here is almost too varied, the best of it is utterly assured and inventive. Through Aug. 1. (Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN "Glass Puzzle"

This cracking group show lifts its title from a piece by Joan Jonas, who will represent the U.S. at next year's Venice Biennale; in the grainy 1973-74 piece, Jonas and her fellow-artist Lois Lane mirror each other's movements with the help of a monitor, at which Jonas aimed another camera, with which she shot another video. Themes of doubling, replacement, and reconstitution course through the gallery, whether in the diaphanous, imperfectly symmetric paintings of Mary Simpson (also the exhibition's curator) or in a video featuring Uri Aran clutching his dog and weeping uncontrollably. At first glance, a small painting by Andrea Büttner is a simple triangular abstraction; look longer, and it takes on three dimensions, resolving into a corner that could be a site of protection or a place of shame. Through Aug. 1. (Subal, 131 Bowery, at Grand St. 917-334-1147.)

MUSEUMS SHORT LIST METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

"Lost Kingdoms of Early Southeast Asia."
Through July 27.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
"Alibis: Sigmar Polke, 1963-2010." Through Aug. 3.

MOMA PS1
"Christoph Schlingensief." Through Aug. 31.

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

WHITNEY MUSEUM
"Jeff Koons: A Retrospective." Through Oct. 19.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
"Ai Weiwei: According to What?" Through Aug. 10.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
"Spiders Alive!" Through Dec. 2.

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
"Self-Taught Genius: Treasures from the American Folk Art Museum." Through Aug. 17.

BRONX MUSEUM
"Sarah Sze: Triple Point (Planetarium)." Through Aug. 24.

FRICK COLLECTION
"The Poetry of Parmigianino's 'Schiava Turca.'" Through July 20.

NEW MUSEUM
"Here and Elsewhere." Opens July 16.

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
"Madeline in New York: The Art of Ludwig Bemelmans." Through Oct. 19.

QUEENS MUSEUM
"Bringing the World Into the World." Through Oct. 12.

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
"Charles Gaines: Gridwork, 1974-1989." Opens July 17.



GOINGS ON, ONLINE

Visit our Web site's Classical Music section for information about the Hudson Valley's Maverick Concerts series, where classical, jazz, and contemporary music mix in concerts by the Harlem String Quartet and Duo Parnas.

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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

Jon Hopkins

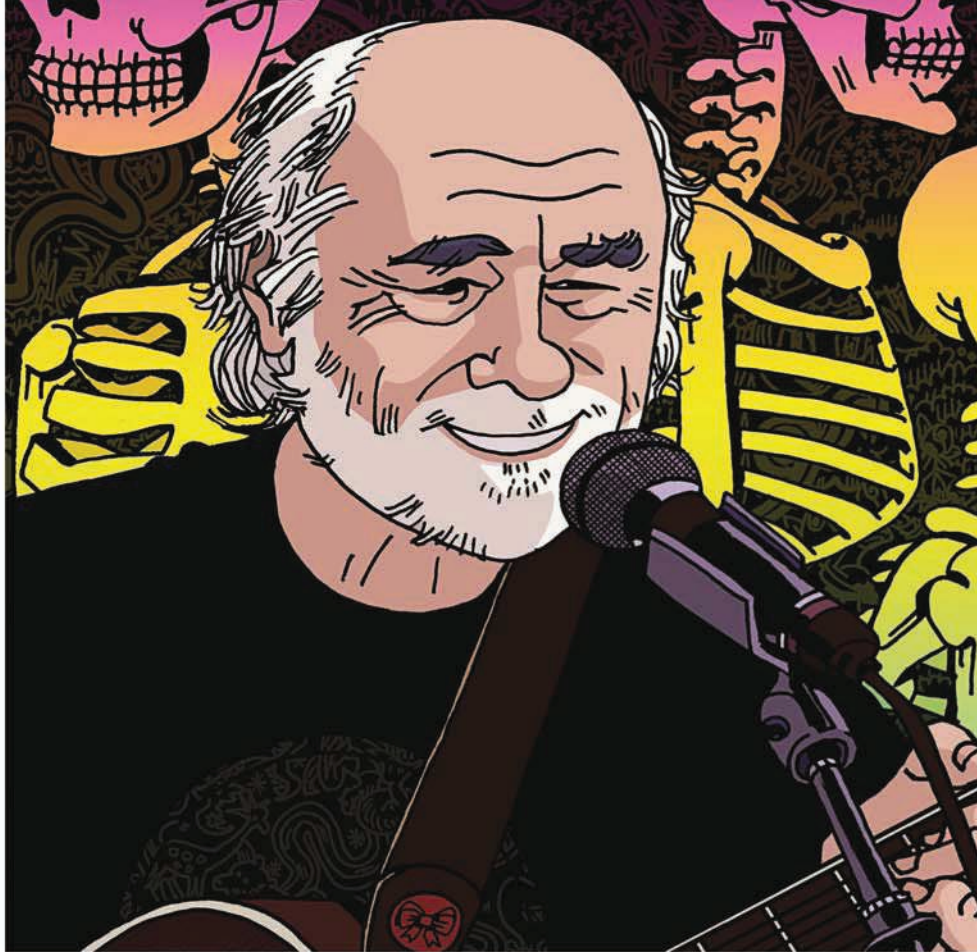
It's been more than a year since this talented British producer, who has worked with Brian Eno, Massive Attack, Coldplay, and Herbie Hancock, released "Immunity," a stunning techno album. Since then, the demand to hear his expansive, pulsing, thoughtful tracks hasn't wavered; this summer, Hopkins has hit nearly every major festival in Europe, and this week he's in town on his way to Chicago for the Pitchfork Music Festival, later this month. (Le Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleecker St. 212-505-3474. July 17.)

Arto Lindsay

The multifaceted downtown guitarist, producer, and singer recently released a fascinating two-disk compilation called "Encyclopedia of Arto." The new collection, which includes studio and live recordings, features songs that are rooted in the harsh and inventive atonal style that Lindsay developed in the late seventies and early eighties, when he led the pioneering No Wave trio DNA. The set also includes songs that showcase Lindsay's deep feeling for mellifluous Brazilian music, a result of his growing up near Recife in the late sixties, during the heyday of Tropicália. Occasionally, his two impulses collide in a single song, and a refined, understated verse can morph suddenly into an arrhythmic guitar solo with no obvious musical antecedent. That incongruous (and sometimes otherworldly) contrast plays out in performance, too; Lindsay's body moves with the music, alternating between calm repose and spasmodic thrashing. Opening for him is the passionate and frenetic noise-rock band **Zs**. (Le Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleecker St. 212-505-3474. July 22.)

OOIOO

This daring Japanese act is led by Yoshimi P-We, a key member of the Boredoms and an inspiration behind the Flaming Lips' 2002 album, "Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots." As a rule, their music defies easy classification, drawing from drone, funk, and tribal music. This week, the group



RAIN MAN

The visionary wordsmith Robert Hunter takes to the stage.

FOR A CERTAIN GENERATION of high-school students, the knowing way to quote the Grateful Dead in one's yearbook was not by naming the band. Rather, it was by attributing a line to its likely source—Robert Hunter, the group's first principal lyricist. Hunter is now seventy-three, and two years ago he almost died. "I got really, really sick, with a spinal infection that put me in a hospital for a couple of months, and it was touch and go," he said recently. "I had my guitar with me, and as soon as I got well enough to play there was nothing else to do in that hospital. The nurses would come in and request songs."

One sunny afternoon in London, in 1970, Hunter wrote the words to three magical Grateful Dead songs, "To Lay Me Down," "Ripple," and "Brokedown Palace." He is a lyricist with few equals, and, together with Jerry Garcia, he conjured up the majority of the Dead's original songs. Their collaboration continued until Garcia's death, in 1995. Along the way, Hunter recorded a few solo albums, performed sporadically, translated Rilke's "Duino Elegies," and published his own poetry. Mostly, though, he stayed home, to be with his family and to write for many artists, including Bob Dylan. "When I got out of the hospital, it was one of those classic things—you're looking death in the eye, and it changes you. I thought, I ought to go back on the road." He booked a short tour, his first in a decade, which brought him to New York last fall. The shows went so well that Hunter, who lives in San Rafael, California, and hates to travel, is returning for more gigs on the East Coast this summer. "It's natural for me," he said. "I'm going to keep it up for as long as my health allows it."

Hunter knows his audience. "I'll put in a little bit of my own stuff," he said. "But they don't really come to hear me do new songs." Instead, he sticks with classics from the Dead. "My two honeys are 'Sugaree' and 'Ripple.' I always do those. I'm going to break out 'Attics of My Life,' which I've never performed before, as far as I can remember." He plans on including "Touch of Grey," as well as, possibly, "Casey Jones" and "West LA Fadeaway," but he said that, for the most part, he likes to keep the set list a surprise.

His newfound pleasure onstage creates a challenge. Performing, he said, "kind of knocks me off my writer's game." The distinction between the two activities is complicated. "It's probably like the difference between eating watermelon and playing basketball," he said. "It's like 'China Cat Sunflower'—the early and imaginative Dead song. 'You know what it means, or you don't.' Hunter is at City Winery July 21-23 and Aug. 2.

—John Donohue

returns to the United States for the first time in seven years, to celebrate the release of "Gamel," a new album that features traditional Indonesian gamelan music. For these shows, they are being joined by the gamelan players who recorded on the album. (July 18: Rough Trade NYC, 64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn. 718-388-4111. July 20: Le Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleecker St. 212-505-3474.)

Seeger Fest

Pete Seeger, who died in January, and Toshi-Aline Ohta Seeger, who died last July, were married for just under seventy years, and for nearly that long they were tireless and benevolent champions of peace, environmental issues, and anti-discrimination causes. As the composer of "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" and "Turn! Turn! Turn!" (among many others) and the prime popularizer of "We Shall Overcome," Pete Seeger was responsible for three of the most iconic and important pieces of music of the second half of the twentieth century. The couple's grandson Kitama Cahill-Jackson has organized a five-day celebration of their legacy, with events in the Hudson Valley, as well as two free, all-star memorial concerts in the city. On July 20, at the Damrosch Park Bandshell, at Lincoln Center, **Judy Collins, Peter Yarrow, Fred Hellerman, the Paul Winter Consort, Tom Chapin, David Amram,** and many other artists who worked with the Seegers take the stage. The speakers include **George Wein, Harry Belafonte, and Michael Moore.** On July 21, at Central Park's SummerStage, "New Songs of Justice" features acoustic appearances by **Amanda Palmer** and **Anti-Flag**, along with performances by **Steve Earle, Toni Blackman,** and many others. (seegerfest.org. July 17-21.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Henry Butler-Sтивен Bernstein and the Hot 9

The trumpeter and arranger Bernstein is a left-of-center provocateur and the singer and pianist Butler clings a bit more tightly to tradition, but a shared passion for the bluesy, good-time spirit of classic New Orleans jazz and early swing unites them. Their new album, "Viper's Drag," is part of the relaunch of the legendary label Impulse!, which, in its sixties heyday, was a home for wide-ranging recordings by the likes of John Coltrane and Pee Wee Russell. (Cutting Room, 44 E. 32nd St. 212-691-1900. July 16.)

Uri Caine

Any attempts to classify the pianist Caine have been futile for decades; he's likely to draw inspiration from any of the diverse strains of jazz, classical music, popular song, and the contemporary avant-garde. His voracious imagination and superb technical skills are comforting constants, though. A trio performance with the bassist **Mark Helias** and the drummer **Clarence Penn** hints at the conventional, but betting on any stylistic certainties is inadvisable. (Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. 212-252-5091. July 21.)

Fred Hersch

As gifted younger pianists crowd the scene, Hersch, who is in his late fifties, is easing into the role of grand master with the elegance of an experienced player at the top of his game. His latest trio, with the perfectly attuned teammates **John Hébert**, on bass, and **Eric McPherson**, on drums, can be heard to winning effect on the new album "Floating," which gracefully blends the leader's skillful originals with imperishable standards. A highlight is "Let's Cool One," by Hersch's longtime muse, Thelonious Monk. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. July 15-20.)

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CONDÉ NAST

CLASSICAL MUSIC

CONCERTS IN TOWN "Summergarden: New Music for New York"

The Museum of Modern Art turns to music every summer, hosting a variety of classical, jazz, and pop performers in its Sculpture Garden. Juilliard runs the classical department, with Joel Sachs leading members of the New Juilliard Ensemble; this week's concert offers contemporary works for strings by Roberto Sierra, Eric Lindsay, and the dean of Australian composers, Peter Sculthorpe (the String Quartet No. 15, from 1999), as well as a piece for flute and strings by the Belize-born British composer Errollyn Wallen. (11 W. 53rd St. July 20 at 8. Free with museum admission.)

Naumburg Orchestral Concerts: The Knights

Eric Jacobsen conducts the dynamic young chamber orchestra in a typically offbeat mix of repertoire, all suitable for a summer night: Bartók's "Divertimento," Stravinsky's "Dumbarton Oaks" Concerto, Ligeti's "Old Hungarian Ballroom Dances," and new music by Sufjan Stevens and Ljova, two free spirits of the Brooklyn scene. (Naumburg Bandshell, mid-Park, south of 72nd St. July 22 at 7:30. No tickets required.)

National Youth Orchestra of the United States of America

Kudos to Carnegie Hall for heading up the formation of a blue-ribbon national ensemble for young musicians, a development long overdue. David Robertson is conducting the group on a U.S. tour; its second stop is at Carnegie, with a program that offers Bernstein's "Symphonic Dances" from "West Side Story," Britten's Violin Concerto (with a special guest, Gil Shaham), a newly commissioned piece by the young composer Samuel Adams, and Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition." (212-247-7800. July 22 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN Tanglewood

July 16 at 8 and July 18 at 8:30: Thomas Hampson shows his equal devotion to the European and the American repertoires in two concerts at the Boston Symphony Orchestra's storied summer home. In the first, with the pianist Wolfram Rieger, he marks the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of Richard Strauss's birth by singing a clutch of his songs, along with lieder by Berg, Korngold, and Zemlinsky; in the second, he performs a selection of Copland's "Old American Songs" with the B.S.O.,

in a program (conducted by Edward Gardner) that begins with Strauss's "Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks" and concludes with Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. • July 19 at 8:30 and July 20 at 2:30: The vigorous young maestro Andris Nelsons, who finally takes the helm of the B.S.O. this fall, makes two highly anticipated appearances with his ensemble this week. On Saturday, he collaborates with the trumpeter Håkan Hardenberger, a renowned master of his instrument, in "Bridge," a concerto by the prominent Swedish composer Rolf Martinsson, on a program that also features music by Brahms (the Third Symphony) and Tchaikovsky; on Sunday afternoon, he leads the orchestra in works by Christopher Rouse, Lalo (the "Symphonie Espagnole," with the violinist Joshua Bell), and Beethoven (the Fifth Symphony). (Lenox, Mass. For tickets, and for information about Tanglewood's annual Festival of Contemporary Music, see tanglewood.org.)

Glimmerglass Festival

Under the firm leadership of Francesca Zambello, Glimmerglass, the reigning summer opera festival in the Northeast, concentrates equally on European classics and American works; all four of the season's productions are now up and running. July 17 at 7:30 and July 21 at 1:30: Zambello directs Puccini's "*Madama Butterfly*," a production featuring Yunah Lee and Dinyar Vania in the leading roles, conducted by the estimable Joseph Colaneri. • July 18 at 7:30: "*Carousel*" is this year's installment in Zambello's mission to present great American musicals. Andrea Carroll and Ryan McKinny portray the work's vulnerable lead couple, Julie Jordan and Billy Bigelow; Doug Peck conducts a production by Charles Newell. • July 19 at 8 and July 22 at 1:30: If one Glimmerglass production this summer is truly unmissable, it will be Zambello's staging of Strauss and Hofmannsthal's "*Ariadne in Naxos*," set in a New York country home and sung in a combination of English and German, with the regal title role taken by Christine Goerke, whose natural and ingratiating acting style and refulgent voice made her a breakout star at the Met last season. Catherine Martin, Rachele Gilmore, Corey Bix, and Carlton Ford take the other leading roles; Kathleen Kelly. • July 20 at 1:30: When Tobias Picker and Gene Scheer's "*An American Tragedy*" (based on the Dreiser novel) had its world premiere at the Met, in 2005, Zambello herself was at the controls. Now, for Glimmerglass's

own production of the creators' new, revised version, she hands the reins to Peter Kazaras, who directs a cast that features the young artists Christian Bowers, Vanessa Isiguen, and Cynthia Cook in the major parts, with the veteran Patricia Schuman in the pungent character role of Elvira; George Manahan. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

Caramoor

It's opera week at the elegant Westchester festival, and the scholar-conductor Will Crutchfield is in command. July 18 at 8: The Met standout Angela Meade stars in an encore performance of Donizetti's tragedy "*Lucrezia Borgia*," joined by such singers as Tamara Mumford and Michele Angelini. • July 19 at 8: Not only is Verdi's "*Rigoletto*" based, like "*Lucrezia Borgia*," on a Victor Hugo play; its composer also continues the development, in a more muscular fashion, of the bel-canto style that Donizetti built before him. In the post-City Opera era, Crutchfield's alternative take on this bedrock work should be especially welcome; he conducts a cast led by Georgia Jarman, John Osborn, and Stephen Powell, with the Bel Canto Young Artists and, as always, the Orchestra of St. Luke's. (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)

Norfolk Chamber Music Festival

Each summer, the Yale School of Music's faculty decamps to the Stoeckel estate, in the Litchfield Hills, to teach and play in the intimate majesty of its Music Shed. One of the brightest programs of the season will come from the Brentano Quartet, bringing its well-polished intensity to string quartets by Mozart, Bartók (No. 3), and Beethoven (in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 131). (Norfolk, Conn. norfolkmusic.org. July 19 at 8.)

Marlboro Music Festival

The legendary festival, which blends American spontaneity and European tradition, brings the world's leading musicians together with a flock of their impressive protégés to play chamber-music masterpieces. Detailed concert programs are announced a week in advance on the festival's Web site, marlboromusic.org. (Marlboro, Vt. July 19 at 8:30 and July 20 at 2:30. Through Aug. 17.)

Music Mountain

This longtime northwestern Connecticut series, devoted to the art of the string quartet, presents one of its most distinguished concerts this week, an afternoon with the lauded Orion String Quartet and the magisterial pianist Peter Serkin that features not only Haydn's Quartet in D Major, Op. 76, No. 5, but also the piano quintets by both Brahms and Dvořák. (Falls Village, Conn. musicmountain.org. July 20 at 3.)



Christine Goerke takes the title role in "*Ariadne in Naxos*," at Glimmerglass.



THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Drop Dead Perfect

Peccadillo Theatre Company presents a Penguin Rep production of a new comedy by Erasmus Fenn, directed by Joe Brancato, about a grande dame of Key West. Everett Quinton stars. In previews. Opens July 20. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 845-786-2873.)

King Lear

The Public Theatre's free Shakespeare in the Park series concludes with the Shakespeare tragedy, starring John Lithgow, Annette Bening, Jessica Collins, and Jessica Hecht. Daniel Sullivan directs. Previews begin July 22. (Delacorte, Central Park. Enter at 81st St. at Central Park W. 212-967-7555.)

Mala Hierba

Second Stage Uptown presents this play by Tanya Saracho, directed by Jerry Ruiz, about a woman married to a Texas business magnate living on the border of Mexico. In previews. (McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

The Pianist of Willesden Lane

Hershey Felder adapted this drama from the book "The Children of Willesden Lane," which tells the true story of Lisa Jura (Mona Golabek), a young Jewish pianist who dreamed of playing at Vienna's Musikverein in 1938. Felder directs the inaugural 5A production, at 59E59. In previews. Opens July 22. (59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

Piece of My Heart

A new musical, with a book by Daniel Goldfarb, based on the life and songs of Bert Berns, who wrote the title song, as well as "Twist and Shout," "I Want Candy," "Hang on Sloopy," and many more. The cast includes Zak Resnick, Leslie Kritzer, and De'Adre Aziza. Denis Jones directs. In previews. Opens July 21. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

PTP/NYC

Potomac Theatre Project's repertory includes Howard Barker's "Gertrude—The Cry" (opens July 15), directed by Richard Romagnoli, and David Edgar's "Pentecost" (opens July 16), directed by Cheryl Faraone. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 866-811-4111.)

Pump Boys and Dinettes

"Encores! Off-Center" presents the musical, conceived and written by

John Foley, Mark Hardwick, Debra Monk, Cass Morgan, John Schimmel, and Jim Wann. Hunter Foster stars; Lear de Bessonet directs. July 16-19. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

Summer Shorts 2014

The annual festival of new short plays includes works by Albert Innaurato, Warren Leight, and Neil LaBute. Opens July 18. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

Clown Bar

At this Pipeline Theatre event, written by Adam Szymkowitz, you're handed a spongy red nose at the door and led to a table where a pretty young woman dressed as a clown takes your drink order. Then a clown in big shoes (Willy Appleman) sings goofy cabaret songs while people talk and drink and play with whoopee cushions. At one point, a "play" is performed in the aisles—a silly noir skit, really, in which an ex-clown cop (Shane Ziegler) enters the lair of evil clown gangsters to hunt down his brother's killer—but there's not much to it other than a lot more lame clown jokes, a little clown sex, and, by the end, several dead clowns. (The Box, 189 Chrystie St. 800-838-3006.)

Romeo N Juliet

Classical Theatre of Harlem has taken Shakespeare's romantic tragedy and transported it to modern-day Harlem. Sword fights become break-dancing battles, Juliet's balcony is a fire escape, the apothecary is a drug dealer on the corner, and the young men killing one another in their families' names are engaged in a class war. Despite some distractions—cheesy canned music playing even while the actors are speaking; a crazy person from the park, on one evening, walking through the outdoor theatre ranting—this adaptation works. Especially strong are the two young actors playing Romeo and Juliet, Sheldon Best and Natalie Paul, who make young love palpable—it's especially giddy and innocent, and, under the circumstances, foolish and tragic. Adapted and directed by Justin Emeka. (Marcus Garvey Park, Madison Ave. between 120th and 124th Sts. 212-360-2777.)

Wayra

When "De La Guarda" opened, in 1998, it seemed impossibly vigorous and dynamic. Performers soared above the screaming, thrashing audience while music thrummed and indoor rain cascaded. Now its creators have made a new piece, the third in their acrobatic trilogy. This time, the music is live, but the performance feels less so. Immersive theatre has moved on; this show hasn't. Most of the numbers are borrowed from the

previous show, "Fuerza Bruta"—like the "Matrix"-ish man in a white suit running headlong, and the quartet of young women slip'n'sliding overhead on clear plastic sheeting, the better for us to see their underwear. (Flashed thighs aside, there's not much in the way of plot or theme, which is probably a good thing, since one of the set pieces resembles a giant condom.) The athleticism of the performers is undeniable, and at a recent show many in the young crowd seemed enthralled, but nearly as many were checking their phones. (Daryl Roth, 101 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

OUT OF TOWN

Bard SummerScape

The theatrical event of the summer festival is John Banville's "Love in the Wars," directed by Ken Rus Schmoll. (Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900.)

Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival

In repertory with "The Liar," the festival is putting on two Shakespeare works. "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" is a delightfully high-spirited modern take on the early comedy of ardor, selfishness, infidelity, and, finally, forgiveness. The director, Eric Tucker, collaborates imaginatively with the choreographer, Alexandra Beller, and the props designer, Sue Rees, to create a fluid, funny sequence of movements and tableaux vivants that keep the perspective spinning. Jennifer Johnson (Speed), Nance Williamson (Lucetta), and Kurt Rhoads (Launce) provide uproarious knockabout verbal and physical comedy. "Othello" begins promisingly, as a military company in modern fatigues marches smartly from the banks of the Hudson into the tented playing area, with West Point visible across the river. But then the show, under the direction of Christopher V. Edwards, begins to wobble. Most damagingly, the conflict at the center of the play is distressingly out of balance: Leopold Lowe's malleable Othello is no match for Kurt Rhoads's steamrolling Iago. At the climax, laughs bump up oddly close to murderous mayhem, as the audience reacts to the phrase "honest, honest Iago." (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

Williamstown Theatre Festival

On the Main Stage, Renée Fleming stars as the diva in "Living on Love," a comedy by Joe DiPietro, adapted from "Peccadillo" and directed by Kathleen Marshall. Also starring Douglas Sils, Justin Long, and Anna Chlumsky. On the Nikos Stage, Eric Ting directs Samuel D. Hunter's play "A Great Wilderness" (through July 20), about a Christian youth leader who attempts to "cure" gay teens. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

ALSO NOTABLE

ALADDIN
New Amsterdam

BEAUTIFUL—THE CAROLE KING MUSICAL
Stephen Sondheim

BETWEEN RIVERSIDE AND CRAZY
Atlantic Theatre Company

BULLETS OVER BROADWAY
St. James

CABARET
Studio 54

CHICAGO
Ambassador

THE CITY OF CONVERSATION
Mitzi E. Newhouse

THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN
Cort. Through July 20.

DONOGOO
Mint

A GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE TO LOVE AND MURDER
Walter Kerr

HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH
Belasco

HERE LIES LOVE
Public

ICE FACTORY FESTIVAL
New Ohio Theatre

KINKY BOOTS
Hirschfeld

LADY DAY AT EMERSON'S BAR & GRILL
Circle in the Square

THE LONG SHRIFT
Rattlestick

MATILDA THE MUSICAL
Shubert

LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial

NEWSIES
Nederlander

OF MICE AND MEN
Longacre

ONCE
Jacobs

ROCKY
Winter Garden

SEX WITH STRANGERS
Second Stage

VIOLET
American Airlines Theatre

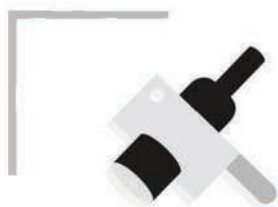
WHEN WE WERE YOUNG AND UNAFRAID
City Center Stage I

THE WHO & THE WHAT
Claire Tow



GOINGS ON, ONLINE

See our Web site for more dance events, including the Mount Tremper Summer Arts Festival.



FOOD & DRINK

BAR TAB BOTANIC LAB

86 Orchard St. (212-777-2664)

A block away from the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, downstairs from the lantern-festooned Mexican eatery Casa Mezcal, is a red-walled hideaway, accented with an upside-down bouquet of malachite-tinted eucalyptus. This isn't the kind of place that has forty kinds of whiskey behind the bar; the main draw is the array of creative herbal concoctions made by the barman Miguel Aranda, a native of Mexico City. Colorful rows of arcane-looking apothecary bottles hold tinctures with ingredients like saffron, poppy seed, hibiscus, yerba maté, and tonka (a bean with a scent between that of almond and vanilla). Aranda revels in the unexpected, mixing whiskey with powdery Japanese matcha tea or adding lemongrass to frothy egg whites for a variant of the Ramos Gin Fizz. In the Rosemary's Sephora, rosemary-infused gin has an arboreal taste that nestles within the sweetness of velvety falernum. On a recent weekday evening, Aranda extolled a vodka made from fair-trade quinoa. "My friend in Bolivia makes it," he said. "It's a very clean taste." The room was quiet. Under an alligator skin tacked to the wall, a d.j. and a colleague planned future entertainments—there's a stage for music and burlesque performers. On the other side of the bar, a young man was trying to impress a girl: "You know, J. P. Morgan stole our software."

—Jiayang Fan



TABLES FOR TWO

BARCHETTA

461 W. 23rd St. (212-255-7400)

HOW MANY DIFFERENT KINDS of crudo do you need? At Barchetta, a new Italian restaurant in Chelsea, there are eleven, and that's probably too many. Each preparation of raw seafood has an exotic-sounding accompaniment: Indian River grapefruit, Spanish olive oil, Antarctic sea salt. Yet the crudo tasting, selected by the kitchen, winds up a haze of indistinct citrus flavors, pooled in oil, punctuated with too much salt, and occasionally verging on chewy.

It's clear that the restaurant, whose name means "little boat" in Italian, is yet to find its sea legs. The service, in particular, is odd. Four or five people who seem to be affiliated with the operation, though not necessarily versed in greeting diners, hover by the door, but once you're seated waitstaff are elusive, and getting advice on the erratically priced wine list requires patience. The general air of confusion is surprising, since the man behind Barchetta is Dave Pasternack, who, with Mario Batali and Joe Bastianich, created Esca, which, even after fourteen years, is the city's gold standard for Italian seafood.

One ingredient associated less with high-end seafood establishments and more with hotel room-service menus is melon. In a dismaying turn, the soft-shell-crab special on a recent evening came with a mountain of it. The crab itself, slick with a lemony glaze, had a burnt, almost acrid taste. (The menu changes often, and a later, more promising iteration came with asparagus and radish.) There are few additions to a dish that bring as much reliable joy as crispy capers, and they make a welcome appearance, in the midst of a bewildering meal, scattered on top of golden troutlings. The little fish are so addictive they have the potential to undercut fried calamari's stranglehold on bar menus. The squid here is eaten whole, in a traditional Mediterranean preparation, swimming in its own ink. It's grilled, not fried, and tastes meaty, a little sweet, and a lot more interesting than when battered and dunked in marinara sauce.

After the highs and lows of the seafood antipasti, there is a benign lobster fettuccine, and a clam fusilli that has Calabrian chilis but very little heat. The waiters tend to push the whole porgy as a signature dish. The serving is ample, and it's pleasantly heavy on the rosemary. What else is memorable? The acoustics, which sometimes allow the raucous conversation from a table of men in suits drinking Barolo to waft over the rest of the place. And then there's the rhubarb crostata. Every restaurant below Fourteenth Street has it on the menu, but this one actually works, tasting like toasted caramel and flaking in a way that suggests a pleasing intimacy with butter. Finally, Barchetta finds smoother waters.

—Amelia Lester

Open daily for dinner. Entrées \$22-\$33.

ILLUSTRATION BY MORGAN ELLIOTT

Pilobolus Dance Theatre

The popular troupe of acrobat-dancers, capable of strange poetry when they aren't being cutesy or glib, fills its annual four-week season with two repertory programs, each with a New York premiere. The first is "On the Nature of Things," set to recordings of Baroque songs, in which three dancers explore the theme of desire while balanced on a narrow column. The second is a more promising work, "The Inconsistent Pedaler," a collaboration with the Israeli fiction writer Etgar Keret and the director Shira Gefen; it's a fable about a girl whose bicycle can control the speed of time. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. July 15-16 at 7:30, July 17-18 at 8, and July 19 at 2 and 8. Through Aug. 10.)

Lincoln Center Festival / Bolshoi Ballet

After an absence of six years, the company returns to New York under the direction of Sergei Filin, at the helm after the acid attack that nearly blinded him. If only he were bringing more interesting ballets. The troupe offers three staples from its repertoire: "Swan Lake," "Spartacus," and "Don Quixote." The company's "Swan Lake," by the Soviet-era choreographer Yuri Grigorovich, is streamlined to two acts and contains almost no mime; it also ends without the usual redemptive flourish. Luckily, it retains much of the familiar choreography in the all-important lakeside scenes. Fans of the extraordinary American dancer David Hallberg can see him alongside the coolly elegant Svetlana Zakharova

on July 15 and July 17. The rising star Olga Smirnova—long neck, expressive eyes—performs on July 18 and July 20. Then, there's the skirt-swishing "Don Quixote," a company specialty, with its feisty, Spanish-inflected music by Ludwig Minkus. Catch the high-flying Maria Alexandrova on July 22 or the vivacious Ekaterina Shipulina on the evening of July 23. See lincolncenterfestival.org for schedules and casts. • July 15-18 at 8, July 19 at 2 and 8, and July 20 at 2: "Swan Lake." • July 22 at 8 and July 23 at 2 and 8: "Don Quixote." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through July 27.)

Ballet Hispanico / A Palo Seco

On the eleventh anniversary of the death of the salsa icon Celia Cruz, Ballet Hispanico anchors a free concert at Central Park SummerStage with "Asuka," a murky Cruz tribute by the troupe's artistic director, Eduardo Vilaro. The recent "Sobrerísimo" and the company staple "Tito on Timbales" are lighter, more crowd-pleasing showcases. The bare-bones flamenco of Rebeca Tomas's troupe A Palo Seco opens the program. (Rumsey Playfield, Central Park, mid-Park at 69th St. 800-745-3000. July 16 at 8.)

Celebrate Brooklyn! / Shen Wei Dance Arts

The series presents a free performance by this intensely physical company at the Prospect Park Bandshell. "Map," from 2005, is one of Shen's most abstract and complex works, a collage of pared-down movement set to Steve Reich's minimalist composition "The



Desert Music." Each section explores a theme—rolling, folding, spiralling, swivelling—laid out in intricate, layered detail, until, in a final, dizzying tableau, all the parts come together. "Map" appears alongside excerpts from a more recent work, "Collective Measures." (Prospect Park W. at 9th St. 718-683-5600. July 17 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

Jacob's Pillow

Rooted in tradition but poised in the present, Michelle Dorrance is the freshest voice in tap dance today. "ETM: The Initial Approach" is a collaboration with Nicholas Van Young, a rhythm fiend who is also a whiz at outfitting wooden platforms with electronics. Other fine musicians join a talented cast of youthful, effervescent dancers, including the b-girl Ephrat Asherie. • The enterprising young New York City Ballet principal Daniel Ulbricht has put together a group that includes Teresa Reichlen, Robert Fairchild, and Tiler Peck, who perform at the Ted Shawn Theatre,

under the moniker Ballet 2014. The program features Jerome Robbins's "Fancy Free," a pair of contemporary pas de deux from the City Ballet repertory—Christopher Wheeldon's "Liturgy" and an excerpt from Benjamin Millepied's "Two Hearts"—and some new pieces by Larry Keigwin, the ballet "it" boy Justin Peck, and Emery LeCrone. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. July 16-20.)

Fire Island Dance Festival

Now in its twentieth year, this annual benefit for Dancers Responding to AIDS is hard to beat for its picturesque setting, against a backdrop of sea and sky. The dancing can also be spectacular. Highlights of this anniversary show include the majestic ballerina Sara Mearns in a number by the "Smash" choreographer Josh Bergasse, American Ballet Theatre's hunky Marcelo Gomes in the balcony scene from "Romeo and Juliet," and a new piece by the up-and-coming choreographer Troy Schumacher. (Fire Island Pines. 212-840-0770, ext. 268. July 19 at 5 and 7 and July 20 at 7.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

Come Out and Play Festival

Whether one is maneuvering a bicycle through traffic, snagging a seat on a crowded subway train, or dodging tourists in Times Square, life in New York often feels like a game. This festival of street games ups the ante. Beginning on the evening of July 18, "After Dark" turns Dumbo's cobblestoned streets into a stage for PG-rated play. Activities include smartphone laser tag and an anti-gentrification game that transports players to 1979 to save Dumbo's buildings from redevelopment. On July 19, the action moves to Governors Island, where "Field Day" features new sports and field games such as Full-Contact Catan, in which the popular board game of territory and resource acquisition becomes a physical contest of slides and tackles. There's also Kill the Kraken, which utilizes pool noodles, socks, and hula hoops; Stepball, which combines handball

and rock-paper-scissors; and Hoot Pootooter, which involves throwing and catching vegetables. Also on Governors Island, there will be interconnected time-travel games for children. (comeoutandplay.org.)

New Museum Block Party

Taking art out of the gallery and onto the streets, the eighth annual block party uses the museum's current exhibitions and the Lower East Side's culturally (and now, also, monetarily) rich neighborhood as inspiration. The museum is offering free tours of "Here and Elsewhere," its exhibition of art from and about the Arab world. There are also interactive projects, workshops, and performances by musicians who bend genres, genders, tongues, and traditions, including the operatic singing and Negro spirituals of M. Lamar, the entrancing and deeply weird beatboxing of Lumberob, the enchanting warbling of the

singer-songwriter Joy Askew, and the carnivalesque hip-hop of Akim Funk Buddha. (Sara D. Roosevelt

Park, Chrystie St. between Delancey and Broome Sts. newmuseum.org. July 19.)

READINGS AND TALKS

Barnes & Noble

The journalist Marja Mills, who lived beside Alice and Nelle (Harper) Lee, reads from "The Mockingbird Next Door: Life with Harper Lee." (150 E. 86th St. 212-369-2180. July 16 at 7.)

McNally Jackson Books

Christina Nichol discusses her debut novel, "Waiting for the Electricity," about an American entrepreneur's efforts in the former Soviet territory of Georgia, with Susan Choi, the author of "My Education." (52 Prince St. 212-274-1160. July 16 at 7.)

Greenlight Bookstore

The writer Sean Wilsey talks about his book of essays, "More Curious," with Matt Weiland, an editor who worked with Wilsey on "State by State: A Panoramic Portrait of America" and "The Thinking Fan's Guide to the World Cup." (686 Fulton St., at S. Portland Ave., Brooklyn. 718-246-0200. July 16 at 7:30.)

Word

Edan Lepucki reads from her first novel, "California," a favorite of Stephen Colbert. (126 Franklin St., Brooklyn. 718-383-0096. July 22 at 7.)

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Let's
Go
Places



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

TRAPPED IN IRAQ

Ali is a self-described “agnostic Shiite” who lives in Baghdad. Karim lives in Sinjar, the badlands between Mosul and the Syrian border, in a town made up of Yazidis—believers in an ancient faith related to Zoroastrianism. Ali and Karim (they asked to be given pseudonyms) are Iraqis in their thirties, married with children. Both worked for the United States Army when there were American troops in Iraq. From 2004 to 2008, Ali interpreted for soldiers on patrol in tense neighborhoods, then helped in the training of Iraqi security forces. In 2009, he became a freelance journalist and a researcher for Western non-governmental organizations in Baghdad, including Human Rights Watch. Karim, an engineer, signed on in May, 2003, after American troops entered Sinjar, supervising water projects and the renovation of schools in areas too dangerous for the Army to reach. In 2005, he left his job with the American military and went to work for an American medical charity outside Mosul. Few Iraqis offer so many armed groups so many reasons to kill them as Ali and Karim.

Over the years, both men have been threatened repeatedly—by phone calls, by strangers appearing at their front doors, by carloads of gunmen. Once, travelling on a highway outside Tal Afar, insurgents fired AK-47s at Karim, who survived only because he was driving a faster car. In 2010, Ali had to leave his family and go into hiding, after Human Rights Watch issued a report on a secret prison, and a government spokesman proclaimed that an Iraqi researcher was feeding the organization lies. But Ali and Karim stayed in Iraq long after others in their situation had fled. Ali tried to downplay threats. “I’m the guy who believes if you hear the mortars whistling they’re already past you,” he said last week. “I worry about the mortars you haven’t heard.” He remained proud of his job with the U.S. Army, and liked working as a human-rights researcher: “I was dreaming of a better Iraq.” Similarly, Karim held on through the worst years of

the civil war: “I always said, ‘It’s my country, I am an engineer, I have a future here.’”

Two years ago, Ali finally stopped dreaming. In May, 2012, he applied for a Special Immigrant Visa to the U.S.—a category created by Congress, in 2008, for Iraqis and Afghans who worked for the American government and military during the wars. In November, 2012, Ali’s application fell into “Administrative Processing,” a bureaucratic black hole that offers no further explanation, and remained there. Earlier this year, Karim also applied. The process has been notoriously slow and opaque, with thousands of visa slots going unfilled while thousands of applicants languish, their money and their hope ebbing away as they wait to be told whether they have a future in America.

Ali and Karim were still waiting last month when militant fighters of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham attacked Mosul and other Iraqi cities. The army that Ali had helped the Americans to train collapsed with disheartening speed. ISIS slaughtered government workers and members of the security forces, and three of Karim’s Yazidi friends were killed—two border guards and a man who was in prison when the militants reached Mosul. “ISIS treats other religions two ways—kill

them or transform them into Muslims,” Karim said. “He refused to transform into Muslim, and they killed him.” Karim is now trapped with his family and other Yazidis. Their town, he told me, is being defended by armed locals and around a hundred Kurdish militiamen, with the power cut off and gas and food supplies running low; ISIS fighters, positioned six miles away, have attacked several times. Karim thought about burning the documents that prove his service to the Americans; instead, he hid them in a small bag that he can grab at a moment’s notice. “It’s dangerous to be Yazidi in Iraq,” he said. “It’s even more dangerous to be Yazidi who worked for the U.S. Army.”

In Baghdad, Ali’s situation is hardly



better. In the hysteria following the collapse of Iraqi security forces in the north, Shiite militias went through the city, setting up checkpoints, waving guns, and blasting religious music. Amid this mass mobilization, Ali completed work on two reports for Human Rights Watch that detail abuses by the Shiite militias against Sunni prisoners and others. Worried about reprisals, Ali is thinking of moving his family out of the neighborhood. "These people believe what they are doing is a holy fight," he said. "They don't like it if you call it a crime."

Ali and Karim have persevered through violent years, but Iraq has never seemed more dangerous to them. There's no way out: their path to Kurdistan is blocked off by ISIS forces, neighboring countries have virtually stopped giving visas to Iraqis, and the American Embassy in Baghdad has evacuated the personnel who issue refugee visas. Last October, five hundred and seven Iraqis arrived in America on Special Immigrant Visas; in June, the number fell to fifty-three, a nearly ten-fold drop. Seventeen hundred Iraqis are awaiting action on their applications; the program expires in September. Tens of thousands of others have applied in the broader category of "U.S.-affiliated Iraqis"—so many that the waiting period for an initial interview sometimes took eighteen months, until the fall of Mosul stopped the process completely.

Becca Heller, the director of the Iraqi Refugee Assistance

Project, said, "ISIS has exponentially increased the danger for anyone with a U.S. affiliation, while simultaneously diverting U.S. government resources from providing protection for those same people. We're receiving over a hundred e-mails a week from people who think they'll be dead by Friday."

Last year, Congress became fed up with the delays, and specified that the government must decide on Special Immigrant Visa applications within nine months. Ali has been kept waiting for more than two years, with no idea why. "I'm trapped between the sky and planet Earth," he said. "What should I do in order to convince them I'm in danger? Should I get shot?" This week, IRAP and the international law firm Freshfields are filing a lawsuit in federal court on behalf of Ali, asking a judge to compel the government to act on his case, on the ground of "unreasonable delay." Heller said, "If they're going to reject him, I want them to have to do it in front of a judge."

President Barack Obama has sent several hundred American military advisers to help the demoralized Iraqi Army stave off ISIS. He has also declared the American war in Iraq over, and expressed skepticism that U.S. power could hold together a violently divided and badly ruled Iraq. But surely America has the capacity to save its Iraqi friends whose war never ended, before ISIS or the militias kill them first.

—George Packer

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL MAKEROCRACY



A few years ago, Kathryn Tucker, a film producer and app developer, was writing what she describes as "a romantic comedy about net neutrality." She got stuck and, in what sounds like a plot-line from a romantic comedy about net neutrality, sent a late-night e-mail to Tim Wu, a law professor at Columbia, asking for help. (It was Wu who, in 2002, coined the term, to characterize the principle that Internet service providers should serve all users equally.) "He wrote to me at three in the morning—he is that kind of guy—and said, 'Yes?'" Tucker recalled the other evening. "We met at Doma, in the Village, and talked for five hours, and we immediately became almost best friends."

With the script long completed, if as yet unproduced—"There's a big hearing at the end. Don't you think every romantic comedy should end with a congressional hearing?"—Tucker recently repaid the favor by hosting a fund-raiser for Wu, who is running for lieutenant governor in the Democratic primary in September.

(Wu has contributed to this magazine's Web site.) The event also honored Zephyr Teachout, who is running for governor and teaches law at Fordham University, and it was held on the roof deck of Tucker's Fourteenth Street apartment building, which has views uptown toward the most iconic manifestation of the Empire State. It was the kind of vantage point from which the frankly implausible seems giddily imaginable. The lefty, progressive Teachout-Wu challenge to Governor Andrew Cuomo and his conservative candidate for lieutenant governor, Kathy Hochul, was only two weeks old, but there were hopeful murmurs among some guests, who recalled house parties around Hyde Park in 1996, in support of a certain would-be state senator who went on to bigger things.

Tucker's co-hosts included Elizabeth Spiers, the founding editor of Gawker; Matt Mullenweg, a co-founder of WordPress; and Andrew McLaughlin, the C.E.O. of Digg. Scott Beale, the founder of Laughing Squid, was there, as was Cole Stryker, whose book, "Epic Win for Anonymous," is about 4chan. Other guests were tech and new-media types—the sort of people who know what 4chan and Laughing Squid and Digg are. "These are people who don't typically show up to a political fund-raiser," said

Peter Feld, another host, who worked on the Presidential campaigns of Paul Tsongas and Michael Dukakis.

Teachout, who was the director of Internet organizing for Howard Dean's 2004 Presidential bid, and the national director for the Sunlight Foundation, which seeks to make congressional activities more transparent, circulated among the guests with flair, shaking hands and meeting eyes as if she had been campaigning her whole life. She talked about income inequality and compared challenging powerful incumbents in New York politics with battles more familiar among the guests—against Comcast and Amazon. Wu, too, saw similarities. "Open infrastructure is the exact opposite of political corruption," he explained. Like net neutrality, the state should fund public projects without being beholden to wealthy political donors; roads, bridges, and public transit are, he said, like a subsidy to any entrepreneur who finds a way to take advantage of them. "It's a better government when the government doesn't know who they are helping."

Halfway through the evening, Teachout clambered atop a bench, baring a skinned knee: the result of running to get to the Pride rally. "This is a maker campaign, for people who are making things," she said. "But it is also a maker campaign

in the sense that we are encouraging people, whoever they are and wherever they are, to be a part of the campaign itself. Maker democracy is built on the same kind of open-source principles that built WordPress, and the same kind of open-source principles that built the foundations of this country.”

When it was Wu’s turn on the bench, he expressed frustration that New York, of all places, didn’t have more inspiring and inspired leadership. “This is a place people come to—there’s nothing *wrong* with being born here, but this is the kind of state that people come to in order to make it,” he said. He added that he was running in the spirit of Louis Brandeis and Theodore Roosevelt. “I’m an old-fashioned trust-buster,” he said. “Who!” someone in the crowd exclaimed, or, possibly, “Wu!”

After the speeches, volunteers circulated with credit-card squares attached to their cell phones, for easy donation collection. Andrew Rasiej, the chairman of NY Tech Meetup, reflected on his own political experience. In 2005, he ran for public advocate; his platform included making New York City wireless. “I lost miserably, but I didn’t lose the battle of ideas,” he said. He pumped Wu’s hand. “You’ll have a great time,” he told Wu. “The journey is the reward. But you’ve got to convince people to give you money. Otherwise, they are not going to think that you think you are going to win.”

“Actually, I do think I am going to win,” Wu said cheerily, then went to pose for a photograph, flexing his arm in what he called a “trust-buster pose,” with the Empire State Building behind him, catching the last light of the golden hour.

—Rebecca Mead

THE MUSICAL LIFE ELECTRIC MAN



Adam Levine rolled into the Electric Lady recording studio on a tide of smooth. When one of his waiting handlers asked, “Do you remember me?,” he cooed, “How could I forget?” When another inquired, “You need anything?,” he purred, “Just your love.” Then, having

proved *People’s* theorem that he’s the sexiest man in the world, he kicked back onto a black leather sofa.

At thirty-five, the spiky-haired Maroon 5 frontman has conquered nearly every province of celebrity. He explained, “Before the show”—his ongoing turn coaching aspirant singers on NBC’s “The Voice”—“people who didn’t know me thought I was a bimbo, that all I could do was sing and date models. Now they actually know me, so when they say, ‘You’re an asshole,’ I’m, like, ‘O.K., cool!’” He’s



Adam Levine

gone on to extend his brand with a clothing line—“oversized grandpa sweaters that are awesome”—and a cologne: “I actually hate cologne, so I wanted to make a cologne people who hate cologne would like. It’s citrusy—it smells almost like Lemon Pledge.”

He also has his first film role, in “Begin Again,” a new feature about the New York music world set, in part, at Electric Lady, a heavily mirrored spliff of the seventies on West Eighth Street. Levine stands out as Dave Kohl, a rising rock star who cheats on his girlfriend, Gretta (Keira Knightley), lets the record company tart up his sound, and hides behind a self-pitying beard. A douche, in short. “Dave’s discomfort with himself is like the way I used to change my facial hair and look when the success was first happening,” Levine said. “When he grows the beard, you want to fucking punch him.” He added, “It’s so overwhelming when people suddenly offer you whatever you want—drugs, women, money. I had a friggin’ blast, but if I hadn’t been able to

curb my tendencies we know how that record goes. People die.” He made Dave redeemable, he said, by having him be “very polite to Gretta, very apologetic. In real life, I’m unapologetic. I am a confident person—I don’t think that’s a crime. It’d be *arrogant* to believe you’re actually the sexiest man alive, but I do think my comfort with myself can come off as—dare I fucking say this?—sexy.”

He lay back, his “Highway to Hell” T-shirt facing Heaven, and said, “I just wish somebody would believe I could play a non-musician.” Would acting classes help? “Acting lessons are like a fire extinguisher in a glass case, and I don’t think I’ll ever need to get myself into an uncomfortable enough place to break the glass,” he said. “There’s natural qualities that I possess—being at ease in front of a camera, and very moldable—that I don’t want to squash just yet. I didn’t learn my lines for the movie till the night before, or the morning of, and I did great.”

After a moment, Levine went on, “This studio, Electric Lady, where the rugs seem to be the way they were when Hendrix recorded here, had a massive impact on my life.” His voice grew soft. “When I was nineteen or twenty, I had a girlfriend, a very significant girlfriend.” Jane? (Maroon 5’s first album was “Songs About Jane.”) “Maybe,” he said, with a chuckle. “Perhaps. She had an apartment about four doors down from here. We were young, and everything was melodramatic. Breakups took place, and as I wandered the streets I’d walk by Electric Lady, and I’d think, One day I’d like to record there—but I didn’t have the courage to look in. Then I wound up recording here, and shooting this movie here.”

He seemed on the verge of an epiphany, but one of his assistants arrived with a plate of apple wedges and turkey slices. “Snacks?” he said, rising to one elbow. “Love you, buddy!” As he replenished, he said, “There’s just a lot of shit going on, like the first live performance of our new single, ‘Maps,’ tonight. Plus, I’m getting married in a few weeks”—to the Namibian model Behati Prinsloo. “I can’t work at this pace forever, but it’s exciting, being on eleven all the time. I want to look back on this as the craziest time in my life, when I was never saying ‘No.’ I’m tired and totally fucking nuts, but, you know, caviar problems, man.”

He spoke about yoga and finding

peace, then said, “And, by the way, getting hammered once a month on tequila? Just as important. Tequila is good for you.” Perhaps an Adam Levine tequila, with citrusy notes? “Don’t think that’s not in the works!” he cried, sweeping the snack plate clean.

—Tad Friend

ODD JOBS RISKY BUSINESS



When a fellow-passenger asks Norman Beck, a more than frequent flier, what he does for a living, Beck has two standard replies. If he’s not in the mood for conversation, he says, “I’m in the claims business.” If he’s feeling chatty, they hear, poetically hyperbolically, “I have the strangest job in the world.”

Last month, Beck left his home in Dallas, flew to Fargo, North Dakota, drove three hours to Bismarck, and checked into a Comfort Suites. The Professional Bull Riders tour was in town, and a local promoter was offering J. W. Harris, a four-time Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association champion, a hundred thousand dollars if he could stay

atop a California-bred bucking bull named Bushwacker, a two-time P.B.R. World Champion Bull—according to Beck, “the Muhammad Ali of bulls”—for eight seconds. If Harris succeeded, Beck would be writing the promoter a check to cover most of the payout.

Strictly speaking, Beck’s employer, SCA Promotions, Inc., where his title is vice-president of claims and security, is not in the insurance business. “Promotional risk coverage” is the preferred term; when consumers or contestants are offered the chance to win a car or a vacation or a pile of money, SCA, for a negotiated fee, agrees to pay any winners. Before joining SCA, Beck, who is now in his mid-fifties, worked as a State Farm claims adjuster in Oklahoma. Before that, he was a cop. On the side, he’s a magician and a tournament bridge player, which is how he met SCA’s founder, Bob Hamman, who, *Texas Monthly* once noted, is “widely recognized as the best bridge player on the planet.” SCA’s contract with the North Dakota promoter, Chad Berger, stipulated that, if the bull rider won the hundred thousand, Berger’s risk would be limited to a five-figure amount, based on the actuarial calculation that Bushwacker bucks off nineteen of every twenty riders.

In New York one recent day on other business, Beck decided to visit the American Museum of Natural History. The

beastly heat had also come to town, so he picked a cool spot inside the Hall of Asian Mammals, sat on a bench not far from a diorama featuring Bushwacker’s distant cousin, a gaur (a.k.a. Indian bison), one of the world’s largest surviving bovine species, and chatted about the art and science of fat chances. “Any way to win a million dollars you can imagine, we’ve probably covered that,” he said.

Beck’s duties extend beyond globe-trotting with a loaded checkbook. On a trip to New York ten years ago, he brought a bottle of spaghetti sauce bearing a winning-numbered label worth a million dollars. (The promotion was the sauce company’s idea.) Accompanied by a third party, he hid the bottle inside his shirt, took it to a randomly selected grocery store in Bay Ridge, and reverse-shoplifted. Whoever eventually bought it, sadly, never checked the label. Though Beck has no interest in gambling, he spends a lot of time in casinos—e.g., Tunica, Mississippi, seven blackjack players, one hand apiece, a million to anyone dealt the ace and the jack of spades; Las Vegas, Hard Rock Casino, one roll of the dice, a million for snake eyes or boxcars. At an ESPN Zone in Chicago, one of five pool players had a shot at a million if he could sink the eight ball on the break. In Bangkok, in 2007, with five million dollars on the line and one contestant holding a three-digit ticket, an elephant pulled numbers out of a trash can. Each time, only Beck went home truly happy.

In Bismarck, Beck spent several hours with Bushwacker before the big event. “It was interesting to see his demeanor change,” he said. “As soon as they started moving the bulls out of the pens into the bucking chutes, I could see Bushwacker go from docile to this”—he pantomimed a bull pawing the ground—“and I thought, This bull *knows*.” He watched J. W. Harris successfully ride a bull named Cowtown Slinger and noticed that, afterward, he seemed to have a sore arm. “Even before he got on Bushwacker, I was pretty sure he had no chance,” Beck said.

The ride lasted less than four seconds. Beck returned to his hotel, set the alarm, and went to bed. It had been a profitable day at the office, if less exciting than March 23, 2001, when the de-orbiting Mir space station missed, by thousands of miles, a forty-foot floating target that was part of a Taco Bell promotion—and



“I’m concerned about my legacy—kill the historians.”

everyone in the United States did not win a free taco on SCA's dime. Still, it was far preferable to the occasion, in Davenport, Iowa, when two golfers were each able to drive golf balls at least three hundred and sixty yards into a forty-yard-wide area. "We took the business based upon our knowledge of the outer limits of how far a golf ball could be hit," Beck said. "But I neglected to check into it thoroughly, so I wasn't aware that the balls were going to be hit from the top of a six-story casino and would land on asphalt. That was a twenty-thousand-dollar mistake. Exactly what happened there? Let me put it in plain terms: I fucked up."

—Mark Singer

DEPT. OF GENTRIFICATION DOOR-TO-DOOR



On a Saturday evening ripped from the nightmares of New York City deliverymen—pelting rain, flooding—Guido Venitucci, the manager of Atlantic Cellars, a Brooklyn liquor store, packed bag after bag of bottles, to be shuttled out into the squal. Venitucci, who is from Rome and has a soul patch, ran laps around the counter as his computer went *ping, ping, ping*.

That was the sound of orders coming in from Minibar, an app that aspires to be Seamless for booze: plug in your address, select your wines, beers, and liquors, and receive them in less than an hour, from the nearest affiliated shop. There is no delivery charge; the stores pay Minibar a fee. Atlantic Cellars is one of Minibar's two Brooklyn providers. "As you see, it does not stop," Venitucci said.

Miranda MacDonald, one of Cel-lars's delivery people, burst in, loaded up, and dashed back out to a silver Honda. There was Red Bull and coffee in the cup holders, jazz on the radio, and a copy of André Gide's "Travels in the Congo" on the front seat.

"Yeah, man, I love to drive," MacDonald told her passenger. "I like cars. I like to keep moving—long distance, short distance, fast, whatever." MacDonald and her teen-age daughter moved to Brooklyn from Boston several years ago. "I

didn't come out here thinking I was going to be a star," she said. "I just knew this was where I needed to be." She wore a black leather jacket and gray jeans; in her nose were two piercings. Her drink of choice is "any good whiskey."

Veering around potholes, MacDonald mused about her Minibar customers. (She has also driven for restaurants, like Burger It Up.) "Anybody who's sitting at home and wants to select a certain type of wine, they're going to have antiques, come to the door, and be polite and smile with you," she said. Not everyone is civil. "I've run into a lot of crazy situations," she said. "Bushwick, especially. You get a funny mixed bag of nuts."

Minibar is the creation of Lindsey Andrews and Lara Crystal, who grew up on the Upper East Side, met during Welcome Weekend at Wharton, and now live a block from each other in the West Village. They have done marketing for e-startups (Andrews at Soap.com, Crystal at Rent the Runway) and are white-wine drinkers. Andrews described the app's target users as "twenty-one to forty-five, urban, on-the-go people who don't have time to run errands." A Minibar slogan: "Drinking is fun. Let us make it easy." It recently expanded service to the Hamptons.

The car's clock was broken, but MacDonald's cell phone indicated that it was 7:25 P.M. She was an hour behind schedule as she rode up in an elevator that opened directly into the fragrant Williamsburg apartment of an adman named Joel (Paperwood Grove Pinot Grigio, \$24.00; Sincerite Sauvignon Blanc, \$12.25). He padded over in plaid pajama pants. Scented candles twinkled. A small dog yipped in another room, and a man sat by a picture window reading from an iPad. "Can I see your I.D., please?" MacDonald said, as the elevator doors attempted to close on her.

"Really? That's *awfully* nice of you," Joel joked. As he hunted for his wallet, he explained that this was his second time using Minibar. "The first time, they didn't have the wine that I wanted. And then today took a little longer, but I was told I'll get a coupon."

On the way out, MacDonald whispered, "See that—Minibar status. I don't even want to know what that apartment costs." Next stop, a new high-rise on DeKalb Avenue. At 8:18 P.M., MacDon-

ald made her way to the twenty-ninth floor. "I'm going to drink it," said a young woman named Jaime (Domaine Bousquet Cabernet Sauvignon, \$12.25; Brooklyn Winery Chardonnay, \$20.00) of her plans for the wine and the night. "I'm a law student"—Brooklyn Law School—"so I can drink pretty much whenever. You kind of need it. More often, second year."



At 8:35 P.M., MacDonald parked near the Barclays Center. Marie (Bombay Dry Gin, \$26.00; Tito's Handmade Vodka, \$27.00) came to the door, wearing spandex; a yoga mat was propped against a wall. "I'm making this cherry-tonic-gin cocktail, and then another vodka cocktail with mint in it," she said, standing in tree pose. "I'm an immigration lawyer for Brooklyn Defender Services." (It seems you need Minibar after graduating from law school, too.)

The final stop, a Boerum Hill brownstone, had multiple buzzers, and MacDonald rang all of them—"I'm an annoying delivery person!" Renee (Ceuso Scurati Grillo Terre Siciliane, \$15.00; Sincerite Sauvignon Blanc, \$12.25), who works for the city, appeared in the chandelier-lit foyer. "I got two bottles of white wine, mostly because there's a minimum," she said softly. "My boyfriend's out of town."

As MacDonald drove away, she reflected, "You catch people in vulnerable moments. But convenience, man! This is how New York makes money." Her passenger went home and ordered Chinese food, and when a sopping man showed up she tipped big.

—Emma Allen

THE SPORTING SCENE

BIG AIR

Are the X Games aging out?

BY BEN McGRATH



The Games have even colonized the Olympics—possibly at their own expense.

Last month, at a party in downtown Austin to celebrate the start of the X Games, ESPN's showcase for action sports, now in its twentieth year, I met a marketing manager named Scott Schoppert. He wasn't a fan of the X Games per se, although he did recognize in the crowd the pioneering BMX jumper Mat Hoffman, a.k.a. the Condor, and shouted after him, to no avail. Schoppert was there for the free beer. He had won two tickets to the party in a radio contest sponsored by the local alternative-rock station KROX, whose morning-show hosts, Jason and Deb, are action-sports enthusiasts. Schoppert's achievement was having spent the most "manly" weekend of any caller. "I started off working on my friend's Jeep," he told me. "And then, after we fixed his Jeep, we took it mud-din'." He recounted this with a mixture of bravado and self-mockery. The kicker: they'd made it back from mud-din' in time for Schoppert's daughter's second-birthday party, after which he learned that his wife was pregnant again. Dad's mud-din' days, one sensed, were numbered. His date for the party was his brother-in-law,

Paul Swanson, another young father, who wore a T-shirt exposing tattoos on his arms. The men sat outside drinking and sweating as the sun went down, watching G. Love perform slacker hits from the nineties, and then, at nine-thirty, headed home to their families.

I thought about Schoppert and Swanson occasionally over the next few days, as I wandered about the Circuit of the Americas, Austin's new Formula One track, where the majority of the events were staged. The speedway—vast, hilly, and self-contained—allowed ESPN to experiment with a new "festival model" for the Games, in which television ratings are secondary to an immersive cross-branding experience, like a Renaissance Faire for skaters and motor heads. A daily ticket gained you access to the endurocross track, the Harley-Davidson booth, the U.S. Navy recruiting station, the zip line, the barbershop, the BMX dirt mounds, the Dillon Francis concert—any and all, for as many hours of Texas heat as you could endure. Broadly speaking, human-powered venues occupied the southwestern half, internal

combustion the northeast, and, in the middle, the pièce de résistance, the megaramp, a kind of snow-less ski jump, eight stories high, with a gap in the middle and a quarter-pipe at the end, for added tricks and "big air" measurements.

Atop the more standard vert ramp, or half-pipe, I saw a skateboarder, Bucky Lasek, wearing a T-shirt on which he'd scrawled the words "I'm hurt, not old" and then, on the back, "Maybe a little old." Lasek is forty-one. This year's first medalists—in BMX Vert—were no younger. Their average age was forty-three. The winner, a Brit named Jamie Bestwick, had a few days' worth of gray stubble, and punctuated his victory by doing crunches and pushups at the base of the ramp, like Jack Palance at the Oscars. "How did you keep it going out there?" the official pipe-side correspondent asked Bestwick, who had completed a mesmerizing sequence of tricks with names like Alley-oop Tail-whip Turndown and 540 One-Foot Seat Grab. "Hot yoga and Viagra!" Bestwick replied. His nine-year-old son stood beside him, raising his fist in the air.

"One thing I always ask people is 'Do you have kids?'" another BMXer, Kevin Robinson, told me, while lamenting what he called a "creeping jock mentality" in action sports. Robinson, or K-Rob, has a girl and two boys. He retired from competition last year, but participated this summer, along with the skateboarder Tony Hawk and other X Games Hall of Famers, in an exhibition staged in front of the Texas State Capitol, during which he wore padded jeans that looked almost like a fat suit. These were Grindz, part of K-Rob's clothing line, which he created because he was tired of seeing young riders and skaters let vanity get in the way of protection. An aversion to pads and helmets was part of the jock mentality that he was hoping to combat. Grindz were meant to be fashionably safe, safely inconspicuous. "I think with age comes wisdom," he said, and later invited me to look up a video of a recent surgical intervention—his forty-fifth, a hip resurfacing—that he'd posted on YouTube. "Warning," the video begins. "Surgical Imagery." Then: "GNARLY!!!"

The prevailing manliness (and mindfulness) came as a surprise, because the X Games were invented specifically for boys. They were an experiment in demographic profiling—sports as "content,"

How a Chicago Doctor Shook Up the Hearing Aid Industry with his Newest Invention

New nearly invisible digital hearing aid breaks price barrier in affordability

Reported by J. Page

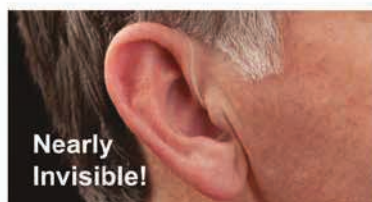
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at a time when only a handful of media executives used the term. This was in the mid-nineties, shortly before Disney acquired the company. ESPN had recently expanded by adding another channel, ESPN2, to its network, with the aim of capturing a younger and more elusive (i.e., “alternative”) audience. It was in desperate need of programming. Ron Semiao, a programming director, got an idea while browsing the magazine racks at Barnes & Noble. He noticed a broad variety of niche publications—verticals—devoted to pursuits like surfing, skateboarding, and BMX riding, with no unifying horizontal. He called his project the Extreme Games. “In effect, it was an erroneous term,” Semiao, who now works for the N.F.L., said recently. “The word ‘extreme’ was sort of overexposed then, and no longer cool. But when I came up with this idea I knew that in order to sell it at ESPN I’d need to be able to reduce it to one sentence.”

The first Games, which took place in Newport and Providence in 1995—the *Times* called them the “psycho Olympics”—are remembered best, by the original participants, for the overabundance of neon-pink and neon-green paint and for the circus-like atmosphere, an affront to the athletes’ dedication. “People wandered by and were wondering what it was,” Tony Hawk, who is now forty-six, with flecks of gray in his sandy hair, told me. “They weren’t sure what to make of it, because we got grouped together with

a bunch of random other activities. I hesitate to call them sports.” Those activities included barefoot waterskiing, street luge, kite skiing, and bungee jumping. The kite skiers disappointed—one blew so far off course that he had to hail a cab back to the competition—and ESPN ultimately declined to put them on the air, going instead with the bungee jumper who showed up at the freestyle heat with a kayak for a prop. For the past two decades, skateboarders and BMX riders, when disappointed by this or that decision on the part of the corporate suits, have exchanged jokes about “bungee kayaking,” as if to say, “It could be worse.”

Validated by the size of the audience, if not by the critics, ESPN sought the athletes’ input and gradually corrected course. The colors were muted. The Extreme Games became the X Games. Events were discontinued if they failed to demonstrate “progression”—an action-sports buzzword, as integral to the youth culture the organizers were hoping to monetize as “rad,” “stoked,” and “sick.” Street luge may have resulted in entertaining crashes, but there weren’t enough lunatics careering down asphalt slopes during the ostensible off-season to produce any noticeable improvement from one year to the next. Merely repeating a dangerous activity, for thrills, without seeming to push the limits of human ingenuity was tantamount to pro wrestling—an invitation to scolds, like the *New York Post*’s Phil Mushnick, to in-

voke Disney, as a reminder that wholesome family entertainment this was not.

Was skateboarding a sport? Judges were stoned, and the scores had to be reevaluated and in some cases altered, *ex post facto*. The condition of the contestants’ hotel rooms seemed to suggest, at times, that the afternoons spent performing tricks for the cameras were little more than preludes to a rager. But the progression was inarguable. Tony Hawk’s two and a half spins—a 900—on the half-pipe, in San Francisco in 1999, seemed to defy physics and expanded a generation’s imagination. He also expanded the very definition of athletics—a pursuit that traditionally measured achievement against the constraints of rules, if not opponents. Hawk’s 900 came on his eleventh attempt in a “best trick” competition, after his allotted time had expired. “We make up the rules as we go along,” the announcer said. “Let’s give him another try!” A dozen more skaters have since equalled or bested Hawk’s standard, including, most recently, a ten-year-old boy—someone born into a world where the possibility of twirling nine hundred degrees above a plywood ramp was a given. Last year, sixteen-year-old Mitchie Brusco completed an X Games 1080.

The Games themselves progressed. A winter counterpart was added, with snowboarders standing in for skateboarders as the slacker soul of the genre. Engines were introduced: first snowmobiles, then motorcycles, and, later, rally cars, all in an attempt to carve a younger slice out of the ascendant Nascar base. Mountain Dew, an original X Games sponsor, gave way to Red Bull, and then to Monster Energy—a ratcheting up of caffeine to complement the octane quotient. Truer action sports, like surfing and mountain biking, were ditched, because they proved too costly to stage. The culture edged into the red: more Valley than Venice. New Hampshire, not Vermont. Mudders welcome.

X Games sports—snowboard cross, freestyle skiing, and so on—accounted for twelve of the twenty-eight medals won by the United States at the Olympics in Sochi; without them, we’d have ranked behind Norway, the Netherlands, and Germany, in addition to Russia, which topped the standings. The Summer Olympics, too, have embraced the formerly extreme, adding, in 2008, BMX racing. Vert ramps, for both BMXes



“Do you really know what you’re doing, or do you Google-search know?”

and skateboards, are rumored to be on the program for 2020, in Tokyo. “You’re never going to see Usain Bolt crash and smash himself up ten yards before the finish line,” Jamie Bestwick, the British vert winner, said, explaining that he’d been gratified to see that the BMX races were one of the hottest tickets in London in 2012. “That’s what kids want to see. No disrespect to Canadians, but curling?”

Yet if the X Games culture has successfully penetrated the once staid Olympic movement, it has arguably done so at some cost to the original franchise, which has failed in recent years to produce a crossover star on the order of Tony Hawk or Shaun White. The X Games in Austin were the first in the city, coming after an eleven-summer stint in Los Angeles, during which everyone involved in the production seemed to agree that they’d overstayed their welcome. A certain Hollywood jadedness had set in—“Oh, X Games this weekend, don’t drive downtown,” as one skateboarder put it—and crowds began to shrink.

Traditionally, the Summer X Games have been scheduled for late July or early August, a relative dead zone on the sports calendar, with only midseason baseball (and its grandfatherly demographic) to contend with. Austin’s climate effectively prohibited such a late date, and this year the Games coincided with the start of the N.B.A. finals and the Stanley Cup, in early June, a shift in programming that some action-sports partisans took as a slight, indicating a reduced commitment on ESPN’s part, after a difficult 2013. First had come the death of the snowmobiler Caleb Moore, whose four-hundred-and-fifty-pound machine came down on his chest during a failed attempt at a flip, at the Winter Games, in Aspen. He was able to limp off the mountain but suffered a heart attack soon after, and died in the hospital. It was the first death directly attributable to X Games competition. Then came the highly anticipated but ultimately aborted “Global X” expansion—a series of international competitions, held in France, Brazil, Spain, and Germany, that were reported to have lost the network more than thirty million dollars.

There were two new medal categories in Austin, each a source of some chagrin to the purists. One was Stadium Super Trucks, a further progression of horsepower. “Here we are at the speedway,” the

skateboarder Andy Macdonald reminded me. Macdonald, or Andy Mac, as he is more often known, is forty, and the owner of twenty-three X Games medals. He complimented me for drinking Coke, as he was doing: old school. “I think it’s just, no matter how big skateboarding gets, you’ve got to be somewhat educated, and it’s harder to comprehend,” he continued. “People still, after all these years—twenty years!—can’t tell the difference between a kick flip and a heel flip. Whereas racing, whether you’re on motorcycles or in cars, the first guy across the line wins.”

The other addition was more troubling, because, like bungee kayaking, it threatened to undermine the seriousness of the participants’ status as athletes. This year, medals would be given out to video gamers. X Games, meet Xbox. What’s more, the game in question had nothing to do with action sports—or any sports. It was “Call of Duty: Ghosts.” The medals were to be awarded for prowess in the art—sport?—of gaming itself. “What does playing war games on the computer have to do with skateboarding and BMX and all that stuff?” Macdonald asked. He wasn’t alone in his skepticism. “You got to make sure to protect the value of what is done here, and the value of those medals,” the skateboarder Bob Burnquist, the most decorated X Games athlete of all time, told me. But Andy Mac was especially frustrated, because he felt that he’d been excluded—relegated to “alternate” status—from the park-skating competition, one of his better events, on what he perceived as demographic grounds. “I have as many or more medals than anyone in that event,” he said. “I’ve been in that event since its inception. But this year somebody was just like, ‘Well, we want to try these other guys.’ That doesn’t happen in other sports. It’s weird.” By somebody, he meant ESPN’s sports organizers, who handpick the contestants they invite, rather than relying on an open qualifying series. “Name me another sporting event where, No. 1, the network owns it, and, No. 2, the network decides who plays,” Macdonald said.

The athletes and the fans alike seemed to embrace the festival model, which amplified the Games’ appealingly ad-hoc scruffiness. An ESPN staffer walked around with a can of Red Bull wrapped in neon tape with the words “Not Red Bull” written in marker. (Monster Energy,

which the staffer considered undrinkable, was the official beverage sponsor.) In a hospitality tent near the Capitol, I saw another staffer fanning Tony Hawk’s neck with an envelope, and found something nice in the image of the Worldwide Leader in Sports and the world’s most famous skateboarder together without air-conditioning. Even the interactive commercial experiences had their moments. You could race go-karts around a track at sixty miles an hour, provided that you passed a Breathalyzer. The rogue spirit of progression can also be infectious. On the hillside down to the base of the megaramp, I noticed a man who had unfolded a pizza box, so that his young son could surf the grass. Up top, by a large fountain that had become a makeshift wading pool, I saw knuckleheads on Razor scooters filming their own stunt videos.

On a given afternoon or evening, there might be tens of thousands of people roaming the grounds—the festival drew a hundred and sixty thousand, over four days—and yet the shortcuts and choke points were such that you’d start to recognize familiar characters, like the exuberantly pregnant woman who was defying the heat in a bikini, or Wee Man, from “Jackass,” or even Tim Reed, the Games’ director of events and content. A suit in disguise, he wore an “Uplift the Youth” T-shirt, a flat-brimmed ball cap, and orange socks. From scanning his bio in the media guide, I had the impression that Reed’s background, like that of most ESPN executives, was in conventional sports. At Yale, in the mid-nineties, he played both varsity football and basketball. But he told me that he used to ride a skateboard to practice. After graduation, he resolved to find a job in the snowboarding industry, and wound up with an internship in the X Games’ sports-and-competitions department—close enough. Now thirty-nine, he’d worked his way up the chain, and I gathered that his résumé included innovations along the way, like creating the Speed and Style events for both snowmobiles and motorcycles, in which pairs of riders race head to head while also being judged for their airborne creativity. “It’s not like it’s revolutionary or anything,” he told me, downplaying the eureka moment. “It’s literally just there’s racing, and there’s jumping. Combine ‘em together!”

Reed’s job, as he described it, began

to seem like a child's dream: the Wizard of Weird Sports. He talked about the variables he was contending with in terms of "big obstacles" and "big machines that can do things." He'd been instrumental in the development of the Games' rallycross series, building bigger and better jumps, including a seventy-foot gap at a Los Angeles parking lot, where the cars crossed over one another. "It's kind of like Hot Wheels meets 'The Fast and the Furious,'" he said. "That's where we fall into that bucket of creating entertainment, because it's just kind of fun stuff." Fun also meant good for the demographic. Rallycross uses "cars that millennials drive," as an ESPN spokesman put it. And, unlike Nascar, the races are short, better suited for digital-era attention spans.

Talking to Reed also made me realize how stage-managed and, in some senses, artificial the X Games' vaunted progression can be. One of the signature achievements, on a par with Tony Hawk's 900, was Travis Pastrana's double backflip, on a motorcycle, in 2006. "Travis was like, 'Oh, I need the ramp set up like this,'" Reed recalled, explaining that part of his job was to be in regular touch with the show's talent, to find out what the stars are working on, and to incorporate as much potential for iconic moments into the event program, whether by tweaking the rules or the format. This year, he'd added a quarter-pipe to the freestyle motocross course, at the suggestion of a French rider named Thomas Pagès, who planned to perform a "bike flip"—that is, the bike would rotate in his hands while his head and torso remained still. "We try to make sure we build and position everything, so that they can come in and perform what they want to do," Reed said. "We like to think we're good at producing what the athletes are doing." It's as though Bud Selig consulted with R. A. Dickey on the development of his knuckleball, offering to change the elevation of the mound to showcase its effects.

If Tim Reed is the showrunner, then the Games' guiding spirit is the Condor, Mat Hoffman, whose no-handed 900 on the vert ramp, in 2002, completes the holy trinity of Summer X Games majesty, alongside Hawk's and Pastrana's feats. "You dream stuff," Hoffman told me. "A lot of us will just get this thought

of something that's impossible and making it possible. When I thought about doing a no-handed 900, it was just in my head for two months. And I'd be walking around and have to stop and I'd be like, spinning, and my wife would be like, 'What are you doing?' I was like, 'Hold on! Oh, I crashed.' I didn't want to talk about it, because I didn't want to make her nervous. It's something that feels possible, but, really, everybody says it's impossible. And then you just end up making it reality. That moment makes you think anything is possible."

Hoffman is forty-two, and remains a slightly anarchic figure, sweet-natured and with the kind of charisma that may come only from having flown higher and more inventively than the more earthbound among us. He serves as the president of the International BMX Freestyle Federation, which means that he's in frequent touch with the International Olympic Committee and the Union Cycliste Internationale about the continued prospects for legitimatizing what were once known as "kids' bikes." He also oversees the BMX events for ESPN, and acts as their head judge. "My job is to kind of keep authenticity—sport as art," he said. "The whole rule is to not have any rules, so that it can evolve into whatever it wants." He added, "How much you can dream is how big your sport can be."

The evolution of the X Games, in the past decade, from impressive tricks to outright daredevilry can be traced, in large part, to Hoffman's outsized dreaming as a



teen-ager in Oklahoma, in the late nineteen-eighties. He wanted to go higher, and he had an extensive back yard, so he built a bigger ramp. (He had permissive parents.) Each successive milestone only encouraged him to go bigger still. Eventually, he was enlisting friends to tow him with their motorcycles so that he could generate enough speed to ascend the rickety towers, above which he'd placed measuring sticks, for gauging amplitude. He caught the attention of Evel Knievel, with

whom he became friends. Hoffman's exploits were the subject of an ESPN documentary, "The Birth of Big Air," produced by Spike Jonze and Johnny Knoxville. He was, in effect, the godfather of the megaramp, which made its X Games debut in 2004.

He was also a cautionary tale on the tension inherent in the pursuit of progression. I noticed that Hoffman had a large gauze bandage near his right elbow, and two Band-Aids running vertically along the back of his neck, and was reminded to ask him if it was true, as I'd read, that he had sustained more than a hundred concussions. "Yeah," he said, with an amiable sigh, and went on to explain that he was skipping the exhibition with Tony Hawk in front of the Capitol, "because I've knocked myself out three times this year already." The first such instance, in January, he'd been riding in his back yard. The next thing he knew, his son was frantically waking him up. Hoffman had a GoPro camera affixed to his helmet, so they reviewed the footage. It showed that he had been lying unconscious for nine and a half minutes before the battery ran out.

"There was a time in my life when it was easier to not be afraid, and so I would ignore fear," Hoffman said. "But then I started realizing that if you ignore fear you lose the instinct of survival. I would just start taking myself out more and more, and harder and harder, and I was like, 'O.K., wait. I got to train myself to be scared again.'"

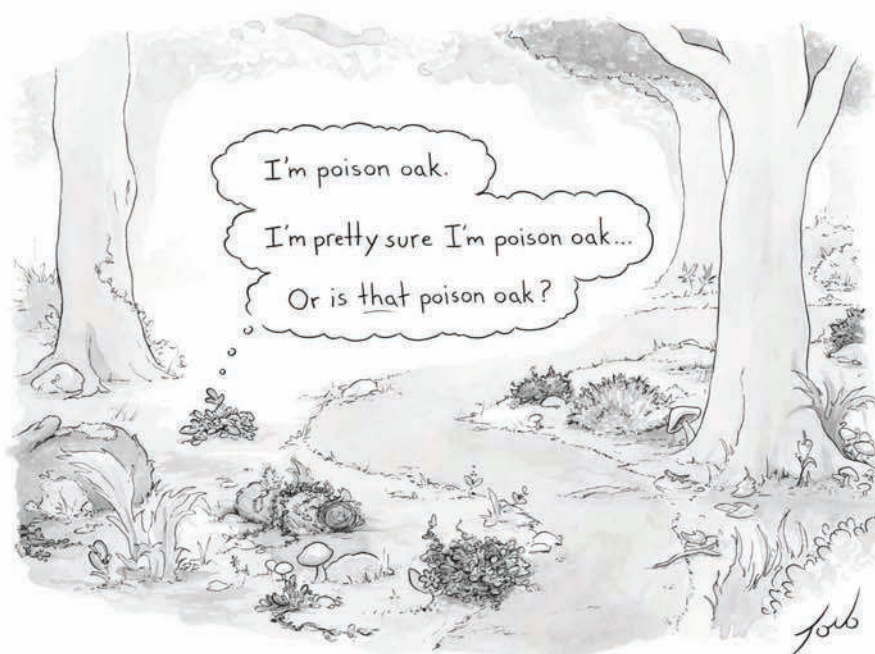
Athletes, like the public at large, now have a better understanding of traumatic brain injury. Hoffman seemed to accept its possible consequences. "I guess I have a hard head, because I can hold a conversation still, and most people haven't been so lucky," he said. "But, yeah, I do—I do really need to stop hitting my head."

Big Air events, for skateboarding and BMX, respectively, filled the prime-time slots on Friday and Saturday nights, bringing dope clouds to the hillside overlooking the megaramp. I watched the skateboarders with an acrobat named Kristin Allen, a former world-champion gymnast who went on to join Cirque du Soleil. Last summer, she and a partner were invited to perform at Glimpses, an annual "human

potential” conference at Red Bull’s Santa Monica headquarters, and there Allen was exposed to the concept of Janusian thinking, a theory of creativity named for the two-faced Roman god. The idea is that holding opposing thoughts simultaneously can be liberating. (Sounds like bullshit—but also intriguing!) As an acrobatic gymnast, she said, “I was at a plateau, doing the same tricks, and I came upon this whole new world. I grew up in gymnastics, which was so rigid: thirty hours a week. It was really misguided.”

After Glimpses, Allen accompanied some of the Red Bull-sponsored athletes to a breath-holding camp in Hawaii, where everyone learned to free-dive a hundred feet, and to remain underwater for more than three minutes. “You start convulsing, because your diaphragm is pushing on your lungs,” she recalled. “It’s all about fighting through your survival mechanism.” Unlike Mat Hoffman, who was trying to reconnect with his survival instincts, she was learning to overcome them. By the end, she’d managed three minutes and forty-five seconds. The camp was originally intended for surfers, who might well need such skills in an emergency. (Allen’s friend Maya Gabeira, the big-wave surfer, “almost died last year surfing one of the biggest, biggest waves—just gnarly,” as Allen put it.) Then Andy Walshe, the head of Red Bull’s lavishly funded “high performance” program, theorized that such mastery of panic could be applied to any number of stressful scenarios—like, say, standing on top of a megaramp on a skateboard.

Eighty-five feet above us, a fourteen-year-old boy took off down the ramp, spun a couple of times in the air, seeming almost to hang there—and wiped out, shredding his pants, while his board continued without him, up the quarter-pipe and beyond, rocketing into the crowd. The boy, whose name was Tom Schaar, fiddled with his mouthguard and flashed a frustrated smile. “They grow up learning how to be their own brands, and they get agents,” Allen said, pointing out Lowell Taub, from Creative Artists Agency, leaning against a barricade nearby, talking to Schaar’s father. “That doesn’t often happen in gymnastics.”



In October, Allen’s longtime gymnastics partner, who had continued working with her at Cirque du Soleil, quit, leaving her in a bind, so she decided to move to Santa Monica full time and drink the taurine. For a four-day BMX camp, she taught a handstand workshop, with the idea that spending more time upside down might help the riders maintain better control while executing flips. “It’s all experimental,” she said. “It’s not a science yet.”

Allen had even worked with video gamers, whom she found to be more receptive, if less able-bodied, than the bikers, who tended to resist coaching on principle. Competitive gaming, after all, is not without its own dangers. More than half a dozen people, most of them in Asia, have died from, in effect, over-concentration—playing too many hours without moving, eating, or sleeping. Allen worked with the gamers on hand stretches, breathing, and posture. “Are your knees over your ankles, hips over your knees?” she’d ask them. “Keep your shoulders back.” For the last twenty minutes of each class, she’d ask them to lie down and visualize affirmations. “They’d lash out at each other, so being able to calm themselves down in the moment was big,” she said.

Back up on top of the ramp, Tom Schaar was ready for another attempt. His father, Nick, called the experience,

viewed from down below, “horrible,” but I could have watched these acts of flight all night. Schaar stuck his landing over the gap jump—a 720—this time, wobbling just slightly, and pumped his legs into the quarter-pipe, good enough for nearly thirteen feet of air and a tight 900 to finish. His father threw his hands over his head. It wasn’t a 1080, but it was good enough for gold: “progression of age,” as Tim Reed later put it, noting that Schaar was the youngest-ever Big Air winner, by ten years.

Seeking refuge from the sun, on Day Three I wandered into the official “sports bar” tent—“something for Dad,” as an ESPN rep had put it—and realized that it was nearly post time at the Belmont Stakes, where California Chrome was going for the Triple Crown. The tent was crowded, and loud, and from my vantage, near the back, it was even more difficult than usual to discern which horse was which, but, inevitably, everyone yelled encouragement at the distant TV, and the noise built to a crescendo in the final ten or fifteen seconds, before giving way to a collective sigh. “It’s a fascinating study of human nature,” a woman standing behind me said. People who had bought tickets to see humans perform daring feats were instead huddled together, drunk, watching horses race around a circle. They

were rooting for an unlikely outcome—for California Chrome to pull off a feat that hadn't been achieved since 1978—and the sigh was a necessary concession to reality, and to its tendency to be unremarkable.

Whether the motor-sports fans were rooting for success was a more open question, one that, in light of the safety risk, pervades the X Games. "You guys having fun?" a sideline reporter asked, trying to rev up the crowd before the start of Stadium Super Trucks. "We gonna see some carnage?"

"I, potentially, am promising some calamity at Turn One, just like rallycross," the announcer said. "They're going to go hard, and—boom! Just preparing you for some red flags."

The dirt on the track was slick and relatively free of gravel, and the rallycross tournament had featured a few too many collisions and spinouts, causing long delays. There were no major injuries, fortunately, but, on the other hand, the professional stunt driver Tanner Foust flamed out early, and I heard the winning strategy employed by Scott Speed, a Nascar alumnus, described as "patient." Borrrring. Silver went to Bucky Lasek, the "hurt, not old—maybe a little old" skateboarder, who took up driving just a couple of years ago, following the X Games mantra "With age, get in the cage."

On the paddock, I'd spent much of my time in the garage of the eventual bronze medallist, Nelson Piquet, Jr., a Brazilian who used to compete in Formula One, and there I noticed, on a table, a sticker with the words "Certified Gnarly." The evident lack of progression in the action-sports argot had surprised me—these were words, like "extreme," that seemed overused even in 1995—but I began to understand that I was mistaken. The progression was horizontal, in the spirit of Ron Semiao's original insight at Barnes & Noble. Piquet's girlfriend, Brooke Basinger, rolled her eyes when I called her attention to it. "'Certified gnarly' is kind of like their saying or their team name now," she said, referring to SH Racing, Piquet's outfit. "Coming out of even my mouth, or his mouth, I don't know. It took me a minute. And his P.R. from Brazil, when he says it, he has an accent, so it's even funnier. But yeah: gnarly. 'Gnarly, dude!'"

Freestyle motocross, on the other hand, should be credited for truly inventive and evocative language when it comes to naming tricks. While watching the riders warm up, I heard the announcers refer to a dead sailor, a California roll, electric doom, a candy bar, a look-back helicopter, a kiss of death, and a one-handed Hart attack. To be fair, the warm-ups were prolonged, because of a strong cross-breeze that threatened to make proceeding with the event too dangerous, so they had a lot of airtime to fill. These stunts were, in some cases, purely hypothetical. "The big tricks are coming," one commentator said.

"We know they exist," another said.

The rider Wes Agee landed awkwardly and appeared to dislocate his shoulder. "A little Bruce Willis 'Die Hard' moment there—just knock it back in the socket!" the first commentator said. (Actually, Mel Gibson in "Lethal Weapon.") Then, exhibiting some Janusian thinking, he added, "X Games 2014: safety is our No. 1 priority."

On Sunday afternoon, I stepped inside the gaming tent, which had air-conditioning but no windows—a giant arcade, with the blue light and the eerie whirr of too much circuitry. Katie Goldberg, a representative of Major League Gaming, the organization that was supervising the event, greeted me, and asked if I'd seen the X Games mobile app. Demonstrating on her iPhone, she showed me a feature ranking the most popular X Games personalities, as voted by the app's users. Of the top twenty, nineteen were gamers. The other was Tony Hawk—and he was twentieth. "It just shows how engaged this audience is, how digitally savvy they are, how stoked they are to be at X Games," Goldberg said, referring to the so-called "e-sports community." Stoked, really? "Yeah, totally!" she said. "There's a lot of similar lingo, and there's also a lot of lingo they use that maybe you wouldn't understand." She also added, unprompted, "They have girlfriends."

The semifinals were under way. Aluminum bleachers with seating for two hundred had been set up in the back of the tent. They faced two soundproofed booths, side by side. Four young men—a team's worth—sat in each booth, wearing headsets and facing monitors. Camera-

men occasionally patrolled the fronts of the booths, zooming in on the players' facial reactions, presumably for the benefit of viewers at home. A pair of larger monitors faced out toward the live audience, showing the action inside the game itself: characters with machine guns navigating a war zone. On a stage up above the booths, two men sat behind a desk, with microphones, providing live commentary. ("So far, they're doing a phenomenal job of rotating around this map, keeping OpTic off their flags.") The team on the left, Evil Geniuses, was the favorite, the tournament's No. 1 seed. It was sponsored by Monster. OpTic Gaming, on the right, seemed to have the support of the crowd. One of its players had Red Bull decals on his earpieces. As someone who's never played "Call of Duty," I had a hard time distinguishing good guys from bad guys, but the audience exhibited no ambiguity when it came to cheering for carnage.

Goldberg introduced me to Mike Sepso, one of Major League Gaming's co-founders, who was dressed in Vans, checkered shorts, and a purple T-shirt. "If this was twenty years ago, we would have tried to build M.L.G. into a big professional league and then done a TV deal with somebody," he said. "The reality is that's not the model anymore. Not only do we have this, you know, weird activity that we're trying to turn into a sport but we're on the tip of the spear in terms of the transition from traditional media to digital media."

What Sepso meant was that he needed ESPN not for its viewers but for the mainstream credibility. Major League Gaming was founded in 2002, and cultivated a relationship with the sports network almost from the start. Sundance Di-Giovanni, another co-founder, landed a gig as the weekly gaming correspondent on "Cold Pizza," a morning show on ESPN2. But a failed experiment with broadcasting tournaments on the USA network made them realize that their target audience didn't really watch television. They were the so-called "cord cutters" who threatened ESPN's power over the cable industry. As we spoke, a hundred and fifty thousand people were streaming the action live, via phones and Xboxes, on MLG.tv. In the past four years, the M.L.G. audience has grown by nearly sixteen hundred per cent.

"Initially, there was a little bit of, like,

‘Whoa, that’s not really an action sport,’” Sepso said. “But I think there’s a lot of parallels. I remember when X Games started. I was more of an N.B.A., N.F.L., baseball fan. I was not really into action sports. I remember thinking, I can’t believe ESPN’s going to jump in and give medals to skateboarders. It seemed so weird. So I think there’s some of that now, with skateboarders saying, ‘Whoa, you’re giving medals to kids playing games? That’s crazy!’”

As we watched the action, the medals arrived, in boxes. Sepso took a gold one in his hand. It was designed to resemble a belt buckle, in the spirit of Texas. “It’s heavy,” he said. “It’s real.”

OpTic Gaming pulled off an upset, thrilling the crowd. I watched an Evil Genius pick up his backpack and head abruptly for the exit, so I followed him, catching him just in time to see him put on a pair of Ray-Bans with camouflaged frames, good for blending in with the fans arriving for Super Trucks. He said that his name was Ian Porter, or Crimsix, as his fans would know him. One such fan, a young Asian woman, was now approaching nervously from behind, with a Sharpie and a T-shirt in hand.

Tim Reed and his staff continued monitoring the anemometers, but the wind persisted, and freestyle motocross was ultimately cancelled, rendering the Frenchman’s new bike-flipping quarter-pipe for naught. Safety first. The emergency medical teams on hand spent more time attending to festivalgoers—a combination of heat, booze, and, in some cases, meth—than to athletes.

The gamers’ after-party started at 8 P.M. on Sunday, on a rooftop downtown. I thought I’d stop by early, to be polite, and then move on to something bigger and better. Maybe I’d find Johnny Manziel—Johnny Football, the new Cleveland Browns quarterback—whose putative escapades atop an inflatable swan, at an Austin night club earlier in the weekend, had turned up online. Instead, I met Matt Haag, better known as Nadeshot, a twenty-one-year-old former McDonald’s employee turned BMW-driving OpTic Gaming captain, whose 1.2 million YouTube subscribers outnumber Johnny Football’s Twitter followers by two hundred thousand. And I met a couple of team owners, onetime gamers in their mid-thirties who were speculat-

ing in thumb-twiddling talent, providing lodging, meals, and even exercise schedules for their human-entertainment investments. I wasn’t sure if I’d stepped into a portal to East Germany, circa 1976, or an episode of HBO’s “Silicon Valley,” but I knew that I wasn’t leaving anytime soon.

OpTic had gone on to win gold. Its members, dressed in untucked button-downs, stood off to the side, tentative at first. (As official X Games athletes, the gamers had stayed in the same hotels as the skaters and the rally drivers, where, socializing at night, they’d been treated “like we’re the new kid at school,” as Crimsix, the Evil Genius, put it.) They included, in addition to Nadeshot, Seth (Scumpii) Abner, the son of a former New York Met. “You could obviously tell he was disappointed,” Scumpii, who is eighteen, told me, of his father’s reaction to his decision to quit football and become a full-time gamer. “He just wanted to see me play sports. But he actually just told me that he enjoys gaming now more than football.” The guys were solicitous, eager to know if I’d been entertained, and spoke of the stresses and anxieties of providing daily content for their fans.

Gradually, the dance floor filled, and the party progressed from junior high to senior prom. The gamers did indeed appear to have girlfriends, or, at least, suitors. One of the play-by-play callers, a chubby ginger-haired guy named Benson Bowe, a.k.a. Red Panda, began dancing so boisterously that a circle was cleared. The battle was then joined—and won—by Jeremy (StuDyy) Astacio, a nineteen-year-old former subway dancer from the Bronx, who had recently moved into the Team EnVyUs house, in North Carolina. There was talk of the fifteen-thousand-seat arena that M.L.G. is building on Hengqin Island, in China, next to the world’s largest aquarium, and across the harbor from Macau. (It’s scheduled for completion in 2017.) Tequila shots were passed around, and the mood grew heady. Eyebrows were raised when there was discussion of rumors of a looming Google acquisition, for a billion dollars, of Twitch, another big e-sports streaming entity. Tim Reed had mentioned the Twitch rumors to me, too, explaining that the online consumption for e-sports was huge. “So they’re sitting on something real,” he said. “That’s why I told ‘em, ‘Remember the little guys.’” ♦

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ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST



PHOTO BY ERHARD PFEIFFER;
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ONE OF A KIND

What do you do if your child has a condition that is new to science?

BY SETH MNOOKIN

Matt Might and Cristina Casanova met in the spring of 2002, as twenty-year-old undergraduates at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Cristina was an industrial-design major with an interest in philosophy; Matt was a shy computer geek obsessed with “Star Trek.” At first, Cristina took no notice of him, but the two soon became friends, and that fall

worry. Matt and Cristina described Bertrand to friends as being “jiggly”; his body appeared always to be in motion, as if he were lying on a bed of Jell-O. He also seemed to be in near-constant distress, and Matt’s efforts to comfort him “just enraged him,” Matt says. “I felt like a failure as a father.” When the Might family raised their concerns with Bertrand’s

City, and the first available appointment fell on the same day as a mandatory faculty retreat. That afternoon, when Matt was able to check his phone, he saw that Cristina had left several messages. “I didn’t listen to them,” he told me in an e-mail. “I didn’t have to. The number of them told me this was really bad.”

Bertrand had brain damage—or, at least, that was the diagnosis until an MRI revealed that his brain was perfectly normal. After a new round of lab work was done, Bertrand’s doctors concluded that he likely had a rare, inherited movement disorder called ataxia-telangiectasia. A subsequent genetic screen ruled out that diagnosis. When Bertrand was fifteen months old, the Might family was told that urine screening suggested that



Until recently, Bertrand Might was the only known patient with a certain genetic disorder. His parents began searching for others.

they began dating. Within a year, they were married.

The couple had their first child, a son, on December 9, 2007, not long after Matt completed his Ph.D. in computer science and Cristina earned her M.B.A. They named him Bertrand, in honor of the British philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell. After a few blissful weeks, the new parents began to

doctor, they were assured that his development was within normal variations. Not until Bertrand’s six-month checkup did his pediatrician agree that there was cause for concern.

By then, Matt had a new job, as an assistant professor at the University of Utah’s School of Computing. It took two months to get Bertrand on the schedule of a developmental specialist in Salt Lake

he suffered from one of a suite of rare, often fatal diseases known as inborn errors of metabolism. During the next three months, additional tests ruled out most of those ailments as well.

As Matt tried to get a foothold in his new job, Cristina struggled to care for a wheelchair-bound child whose condition seemed to worsen by the day. When Bertrand was hospitalized, she would stay by

his bedside, often neglecting to eat; the constant stress contributed to osteoarthritis so severe that her doctor told her she'd need to have her right knee replaced. In April of 2009, the Mightys flew to Duke University, in Durham, North Carolina, to meet with a range of specialists, including a geneticist named Vandana Shashi, whose clinical practice focusses on children with birth defects, intellectual disabilities, and developmental delays. After five days of tests and consultations, the Duke team told the Mightys that there was widespread damage to Bertrand's nervous system and that some of his odd behavior—wringing his hands, grinding his teeth, staring into space—was likely due to the fact that his brain appeared to be suffering from spikes of seizure-like activity.

When Bertrand was a newborn, Matt joked to friends that he would be so relaxed as a parent that he wouldn't care which technical field his son chose to pursue for his Ph.D. In May of 2009, the Mightys closed Bertrand's college savings accounts so that they could use the money for medical care. That fall, Bertrand was rushed to the emergency room after suffering a series of life-threatening seizures. When the technicians tried to start an I.V., they found Bertrand's veins so scarred from months of blood draws that they were unable to insert a needle. Later that evening, when Cristina was alone with Matt, she broke down in tears. "What have we done to our child?" she said. "How many things can we put him through?" As one obscure genetic condition after another was ruled out, the Mightys began to wonder whether they would ever learn the cause of their son's agony. What if Bertrand was suffering from a disorder that was not just extremely rare but entirely unknown to science?

In September of 2012, I visited the Mightys in Salt Lake City, where they lived in a two-story brick Craftsman bungalow. Matt wore a striped Brooks Brothers polo shirt and jeans; with a neatly trimmed beard and shoulder-length brownish-blond hair, he brought to mind Björn Borg of the late nineteen-seventies. Cristina, who is five feet ten, with porcelain skin and long black hair, greeted me with a hug and a wry smile.

In early 2010, the couple had decided to

try to have a second child. This was a gamble: if Bertrand's condition was indeed new to science, there was a chance that it was caused by a spontaneous, or *de novo*, mutation in the egg or sperm cell, and was not in Matt's or Cristina's DNA. On the other hand, if the condition had a genetic history, the Mightys could pass it on to other children. That summer, Cristina learned that she was pregnant, and on April 14, 2011, she gave birth to a girl, Victoria. Within minutes of the delivery, Matt and Cristina knew that their daughter was healthy; she moved with a fluidity that Bertrand never had. When I arrived at the Mightys' house, Victoria was bouncing around and grabbing at her mother's sleeve. "Victoria, you need to wait for Mommy to say hello," Cristina said. To me, she added, "I had no idea how easy we had it with Bertrand."

Bertrand, who was four at the time, was on the floor in the playroom, around the corner from the kitchen. He had round cheeks and a mop of brown hair. As with many children with genetic disorders, he also had some mild facial abnormalities: his eyelids drooped, and his nose was smaller than is typical, with an indentation on the bridge and slightly upturned nostrils. Two years earlier, the Mightys had noticed that Bertrand didn't produce tears; every time he blinked it was as if sandpaper were scraping against his corneas. To keep the resulting scar tissue from causing permanent blindness, Matt and Cristina put medicated drops and lubricating ointment in Bertrand's eyes every few hours, which made the skin around his eyes look as if it had been rubbed with Vaseline. Because Bertrand doesn't reflexively align his head with his body, his face was often pointed away from where he was trying to look, and he ground his teeth with such force that it sounded as though he were chewing on rocks. Yet the Mightys told me that, for all of his medical issues and his many hospitalizations, he seemed oddly immune to more ordinary ailments, such as colds and allergies.

I had brought each of the kids a small plush doll; when I placed Curious George on Bertrand's stomach, Victoria grabbed hold of Harry the Dirty Dog. When Cristina went to get something in the kitchen, she warned me not to let Victoria bite her brother. "She doesn't understand that Bertrand just can't interact with her the way everybody else can," she said. "So she gets frustrated and does everything she can to

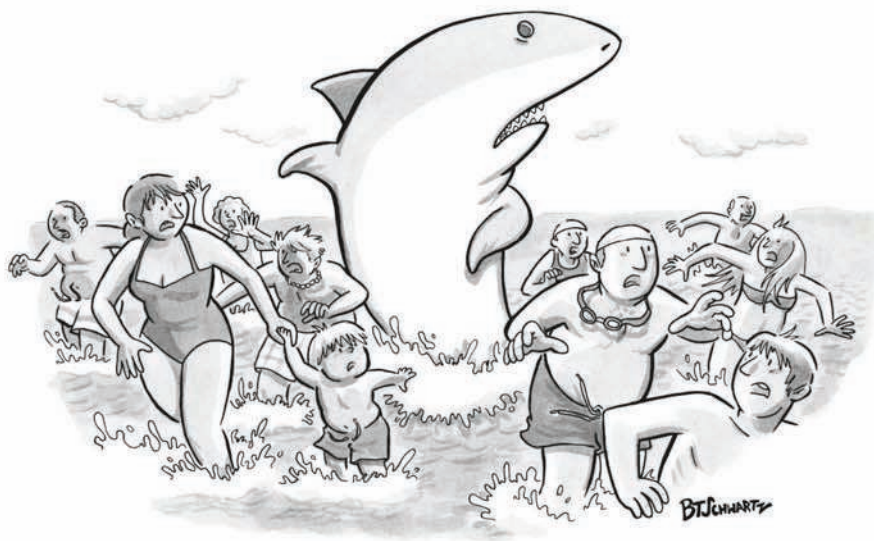
get his attention." Later, when I was lying on the floor with Bertrand and Victoria teetered into view, he seemed to flinch.

That evening, over pizza in their dining room, the Mightys told me about a pattern they had noticed when Bertrand was a year old. At first, they said, he seemed to represent a challenging problem for each new specialist to solve. But, as one conjecture after another was proved wrong, the specialists lost interest; many then insisted that the cause of Bertrand's illness lay in someone else's area of expertise. "There was a lot of finger-pointing," Cristina said. "It was really frustrating for us—our child hot-potatoed back and forth, nothing getting done, nothing being found out, nobody even telling us what the next step should be."

Then, in the summer of 2010, Vandana Shashi, the Duke geneticist, contacted the Mightys about a new research project that was exploring whether genetic sequencing could be used to diagnose unknown conditions. There was a chance, Shashi said, that by looking for places where Bertrand's genome differed from Matt's and Cristina's, Shashi and her colleagues would be able to pinpoint the cause of Bertrand's problems. The Mightys enrolled Bertrand in the study.

Genetic testing has been a part of regular medical practice since the nineteen-seventies; it enables doctors to search for mutations that cause known disorders, such as Tay-Sachs disease and sickle-cell anemia. Genetic sequencing, which entered the popular lexicon with the launch of the Human Genome Project, in 1990, allows for the opposite type of search: comparing the entire genomes of people who suffer from an unknown disorder, to see if they have genetic mutations in common. Sequencing also allows researchers to compare people who share genetic mutations, to see if they also share any previously unidentified disorders.

For years, sequencing was too expensive for common use—in 2001, the cost of sequencing a single human genome was around a hundred million dollars. But by 2010, with the advent of new technologies, that figure had dropped by more than ninety-nine per cent, to roughly fifty thousand dollars. To reduce costs further, the Duke researchers, including Shashi and a geneticist named David Goldstein, planned to sequence only the exome—the less than two per cent of the genome that



"Where? Where?"

codes for proteins and gives rise to the vast majority of known genetic disorders. In a handful of isolated cases, exome sequencing had been successfully used by doctors desperate to identify the causes of mysterious, life-threatening conditions. If the technique could be shown to be more broadly effective, the Duke team might help usher in a new approach to disease discovery.

For their study, Shashi, Goldstein, and their colleagues assembled a dozen test subjects, all suffering from various undiagnosed disorders. There were nine children, two teen-agers, and one adult; their symptoms included everything from spine abnormalities to severe intellectual disabilities. The researchers began by sequencing each patient and both biological parents—what's known as a parent-child trio. There are between thirty and fifty million base pairs in the human exome; the average child's exome differs from each of his parents' in roughly fifteen thousand spots. The researchers could dismiss most of those variations—either they corresponded to already known conditions, or they occurred frequently enough in the general population to rule out their being the cause of a rare disease, or they were involved in biological processes that were unrelated to the patient's symptoms. That left a short list of about a dozen genes for each patient.

The next step was to search through databases to see if any of those candidate genes were already associated with a rare

disorder; if so, the patient was probably suffering from an unusual form of a known disease. In three of the twelve subjects, that's exactly what the researchers found. Two others had de-novo mutations on the same gene, which meant that the Duke team had likely discovered the genetic basis of a new disorder. As a diagnostic tool, sequencing seemed to work. In several of the remaining cases, the technique helped identify genetic mutations that accounted for some, but not all, of a patient's symptoms; in others it simply determined that none of the identified candidate genes were involved in the patient's illness.

Then there was Bertrand. The Duke team thought it was likely that mutations on one of his candidate genes, known as NGLY1, were responsible for his problems. Normally, NGLY1 produces an enzyme that plays a crucial role in recycling cellular waste, by removing sugar molecules from damaged proteins, effectively decommissioning them. Diseases that affect the way proteins and sugar molecules interact, known as congenital disorders of glycosylation, or CDGs, are extremely rare—there are fewer than five hundred cases in the United States. Since the NGLY1 gene operates in cells throughout the body, its malfunction could conceivably cause problems in a wide range of biological systems.

In September of 2011, Goldstein sent an e-mail to Hudson Freeze, a glyco-

biologist at Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute, in La Jolla, California, and the foremost authority on CDGs. Goldstein told Freeze that he believed he'd found a child suffering from a glycosylation disorder that had never before been seen. That November, Goldstein shipped Freeze a supply of Bertrand's cells. Freeze was unable to find evidence of a functioning NGLY1 gene. He soon reported back: Goldstein's hypothesis—that Bertrand suffered from a new glycosylation disorder caused by NGLY1 mutations—was almost certainly correct.

On May 3, 2012, nearly two years after the sequencing study began, the Mightys met with the Duke team in an examination room of a children's hospital in Durham. Shashi explained that Bertrand's condition was probably not caused by a de-novo mutation, as the Mightys had thought; rather, Matt and Cristina each had a different NGLY1 mutation, and Bertrand had inherited both. Matt and Cristina had only to look at their daughter playing on the floor to realize how lucky they'd been: Victoria had had a twenty-five-percent chance of being born with the same disorder as Bertrand. (Later testing showed that she had not inherited either parent's NGLY1 mutation.)

Goldstein, who was meeting the Mightys for the first time, spoke next. He explained that, until other patients with the same condition were found, there was a chance, however remote, that Bertrand's disorder was caused by something else. Moreover, without additional cases, there was virtually no possibility of getting a pharmaceutical company to investigate the disorder, no chance of drug trials, no way even to persuade the F.D.A. to allow Bertrand to try off-label drugs that might be beneficial. The Duke researchers estimated that there might be between ten and fifty other patients in the country with Bertrand's condition, which would make it one of the rarest diseases in the world. "That's basically what they left us with—'You need more patients,'" Matt told me. "And I said, 'All right, we'll get more.'"

As recently as a decade ago, researchers could spend years trying to find a second case of a newly discovered disease. When a paper describing two or more cases finally appeared in one of hundreds of medical journals, it still had to be

read and remembered by clinicians in order for awareness of the disorder to spread. Genetic sequencing has dramatically sped up the process, theoretically enabling a child like Bertrand to receive a tentative diagnosis in just weeks or months.

But a number of factors prevent sequencing from reaching its full diagnostic potential. As a matter of protocol, researchers typically avoid sharing test results with subjects until the research is published; the Mights didn't learn that NGLY1 was the likely cause of Bertrand's condition until months after the Duke team reached that conclusion.

Researchers also hesitate to share data with potential competitors, both to protect their funding and to insure that they get credit for their work. In their attempt to confirm Bertrand's condition, the Duke team searched for NGLY1 mutations in everyone who had been sequenced at Duke, and also combed through an exome database maintained by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. This gave them access to the genetic data of more than six thousand people—a small fraction of those around the country who have been sequenced. Isaac Kohane, a pediatric endocrinologist at Boston Children's Hospital, told me that many researchers believe, incorrectly, that patient-privacy laws prohibit sharing useful information.

"If you want to be charitable, you can say there's just a lack of awareness" about what kind of sharing is permissible, Kohane said. "If you want to be uncharitable, you can say that researchers use that concern about privacy as a shield by which they can actually hide their more selfish motivations."

If a team hunting for a new disease were to find a second case with the help of researchers from a competing lab, it could claim to have "solved" a new disease. But it would also have to share credit with competitors who may have done nothing more than grant access to existing data. When I asked Shashi if she could imagine a scenario that would result in one research team's publishing a paper with data from a different research group working on a similar project, she said, "Not that I can think of."

David Goldstein added, "It's not an overstatement to say that there are inherent conflicts of interest at work." Daniel

MacArthur, a genetics researcher at Massachusetts General Hospital, is even more blunt. "It's an enormous deal," he told me. "And it's a big criticism of all of us, but it's a criticism we all need to hear. The current academic publication system does patients an enormous disservice."

The National Institutes of Health is taking steps to promote the sharing of genomic data about rare diseases. In January, the agency awarded nine million dollars to researchers at Harvard Medical School to coordinate a nationwide network of centers for rare diseases. Each center will mirror the type of work being done by the N.I.H.'s Undiagnosed Diseases Program, in Bethesda, Maryland, and each will be required to share its data with the others. Kohane, who develops software to make it easier for institutions to share information, will organize the initiative. "It's creating an ecosystem that I think represents the medicine of the future," he said.

The Mights couldn't wait for the culture of scientific research to change: they had been told that Bertrand could have as little as a few months left to live. The same day that they learned about NGLY1, they began plotting ways to find more patients on their own. Several years earlier, Matt had written a blog post, called "The Illustrated Guide to a Ph.D.," that became a worldwide phenomenon; it was eventually translated into dozens of languages, including Serbian, Urdu, and Vietnamese. The popularity of the post, combined with Matt's rising profile among computer programmers, meant



that almost anything he put online was quickly re-posted to Hacker News, the main social news site for computer scientists and entrepreneurs. He decided to use his online presence to create what he referred to as a "Google dragnet" for new patients.

For the next three weeks, Matt worked on an essay that described Bertrand's medical history in clinical detail. Matt called the result, which was more than five thousand words long, "Hunting Down

My Son's Killer," and on May 29, 2012, he posted it to his personal Web site. It began: "I found my son's killer. It took three years. But we did it. I should clarify one point: my son is very much alive. Yet, my wife Cristina and I have been found responsible for his death."

Half an hour after Matt hit "publish," Twitter began to light up. By the end of the day, "Hunting Down My Son's Killer" was the top story on Reddit. The next morning, an editor from Gizmodo, a tech blog owned by Gawker Media, asked Matt for permission to republish the essay. In less than twenty-four hours, the post had gone viral. The more it was shared and linked to, the higher it rose in search engines' rankings, and the easier it would be for parents of other children to find.

Eight days later, the co-founder of a commercial genetic-testing company in San Francisco e-mailed the piece to a friend, Matt Wilsey. The Wilseys are one of the most prominent families in San Francisco, famous both for their philanthropic generosity and for the complicated marital life of Alfred Wilsey, Matt's grandfather, who died in 2002. Matt Wilsey, who is thirty-six, graduated from Stanford in 2000. After working on George W. Bush's election campaign and spending five months as an aide in the Pentagon, he returned to Northern California to work as a tech entrepreneur. In the fall of 2007, he married a former classmate at Stanford. Two years later, Matt and Kristen Wilsey had their first child, a girl they named Grace.

Last fall, I met Matt Wilsey at the annual conference of the Society of Glycobiology, in St. Petersburg, Florida. He has a wide smile and black hair that is flecked with gray. Over lunch at an outdoor café, he told me that Grace's problems began before she was born: she was delivered by emergency Cesarean section after her heartbeat dipped dangerously low. Almost immediately after Grace's birth, he and Kristen began to worry. "She just seemed out of it," Matt said. Within days, Grace was admitted to the neonatal I.C.U. Her doctors collected a number of samples, including cerebrospinal fluid from a lumbar puncture. Three weeks later, when she was discharged from intensive care, the Wilseys still did not know what was causing their daughter's problems.

In the months to come, the Wilseys received one piece of bad news after

another. They were told that Grace was not growing sufficiently, that she had low muscle tone, and that there were signs that she was suffering from developmental delays. "It was a continuous grief process," Kristen told me last December. When Grace was around six months old, the Wilseys met Gregory Enns, the director of the biochemical-genetics program at Stanford's Lucile Packard Children's Hospital. Before long, Enns, whose research focusses on mitochondrial disorders, was functioning as Grace's de-facto pediatrician. (Mitochondria are the so-called "power plants" within cells that generate most of the body's energy.)

During the next two years, Matt Wilsey used his networking skills to set up meetings with specialists at institutions around the country, including Baylor College of Medicine, in Houston; the Broad Institute of M.I.T. and Harvard; Johns Hopkins; Columbia; and the University of California, San Francisco. "We'd talk to one great doctor and say, 'Who's the best liver person in the country?'" he told me. "And then that would lead us to one person and then that person would lead us to two more. That's just kind of how we did it."

When the Wilseys first read Matt Might's blog post, it didn't occur to them that Grace and Bertrand might be suffering from the same disease. "Their phenotypes were too different," Matt Wilsey said. Grace could crawl and pull herself up to a standing position, while, at age four, Bertrand wasn't even able to roll over. She also had a vocabulary of more than two

dozen words, and was able to follow one-step directions, while Bertrand could only make indistinguishable grunts. The most striking difference, Kristen said, had to do with Bertrand's seizures. "At the time, we didn't think Grace was having seizures," she said. "And so we thought, Oh, no, no—she's completely different from Bertrand. So we just ruled it out." (Later testing showed some abnormal activity in Grace's brain.)

By the spring of 2012, Grace's genome had already been sequenced twice: once at Baylor and once at Stanford. As it happened, Stanford geneticists had identified NGLY1 as a candidate gene, but they set it aside because Enns believed that Grace was suffering from an unidentified mitochondrial disorder. By the time Grace turned three, that October, the Wilseys had consulted more than a hundred researchers around the world, yet they were still without a diagnosis. Around this time, Kristen said, "I told Matt, 'I don't want to do this anymore. I'm just exhausted.'"

Matt asked Kristen if they could make one final trip to Baylor, and in February of 2013 the Wilseys took Grace back to Houston. They were introduced there to a young geneticist named Matthew Bainbridge. When he looked through Grace's genome, he ignored mitochondrial genes entirely—"I figured Stanford had that covered," he told me—and soon narrowed his search to three genes: one known to cause intellectual disability, one associated with a movement disorder, and NGLY1.

"NGLY1 stuck out, because I'd never seen it before," Bainbridge said. When he searched a Baylor database of more than seven thousand people, he found that a handful of them had a single NGLY1 mutation, but none had two.

Bainbridge next looked online for information about the gene. He quickly found "Hunting Down My Son's Killer." After reading about one of Bertrand's more unusual symptoms, Bainbridge e-mailed the Wilseys a question: Did Grace produce tears? Kristen replied almost immediately: Grace could produce tears but not very often. Then, four and a half hours later, Kristen wrote back, "After thinking about it this afternoon, it is actually very rare that Grace will make a tear. I have only seen it a handful of times in her three years." As soon as Bainbridge read that, he told me, he thought, "Oh, we fucking got it."

On March 19, 2013, Bainbridge sent the Might's an e-mail. He told them that he believed he had identified a second case of Bertrand's disorder, and that Matt's blog post had been instrumental in his finding it. The next day, the Might's received an e-mail from Matt Wilsey. "I wanted to connect with you directly as you have heard about my daughter, Grace," Wilsey wrote. "We are so thankful to find you."

As it happened, Grace Wilsey was not the first new NGLY1 case that the Might's had uncovered. On June 3, 2012, five days after "Hunting Down My Son's Killer" was published, Joseph Gleeson, a neurogeneticist at the University of California, San Diego, e-mailed Hudson Freeze, the Sanford-Burnham glycobiochemist that the Duke team had consulted on Bertrand's case, to ask him if he'd seen the post. Gleeson told Freeze about Murat Günel, a Yale neurosurgeon and geneticist who had sequenced a pair of severely disabled siblings from Turkey, each of whom had two NGLY1 mutations. In August, Freeze confirmed that the siblings were suffering from the same condition as Bertrand.

Then, the following March, nine days before the Might's learned of Grace Wilsey, they were contacted by a researcher working with an Israeli medical geneticist named Tzipora Falik-Zaccai, who said that their group had also identified siblings with NGLY1 mutations. In



"And for an extra fourteen hundred dollars I'll stop touching your arm."

May, the Might's received an e-mail from Pam Stinchcomb, a woman in Georgia who had just learned that two of her daughters had NGLY1 mutations: Jordan, sixteen, who had been thought to have cerebral palsy, and Jessie, who was two. Later that month, the Might's heard from a doctor in Delaware with a twenty-year-old patient in whom sequencing had just revealed two NGLY1 mutations.

The most remarkable discovery came in June. Cristina Might received an e-mail from a German woman who was living in India with her husband and their severely disabled two-year-old son. (She asked that her name be withheld.) The woman had been looking online for information about how better to control her son's seizures when she came upon a blog post that Cristina Might had written about Bertrand when he was two. Within weeks, the woman had sent her son's cells to Freeze, who confirmed that the boy was, in all likelihood, an NGLY1 patient—the first person to be identified before he had even been sequenced. Freeze told me that if someone had predicted a year earlier that the Might's would identify new patients through blog posts alone, "I'd have said, 'Ah, come on, you can't do that.'"

Thirteen months after Bertrand Might became the first NGLY1 patient in the world, the Might's had helped identify nine more cases. "There were more kids—it wasn't just our son," Cristina told me one afternoon in her kitchen. "There are parents like us, who have been lost and confused and jerked around." Matt nodded. "Even if Bertrand dies, there are kids out there that are just like him," he said.

Last November, the Might's moved to a new home, in Federal Heights, an upscale Salt Lake City neighborhood at the foot of the Wasatch Range. Bertrand was about to turn six, and soon it would be difficult to carry him up and down stairs. The new house had several amenities for a family with a handicapped child, including an entrance at street level, wider hallways, and an elevator.

I visited the Might's three days after they moved. When I arrived, Cristina told me that she was two months preg-

nant. (Six weeks later, prenatal testing showed that the fetus had not inherited either parent's NGLY1 mutation.) Most of the family's possessions were still in boxes, but a small alcove off the kitchen had been set up as Bertrand's playroom, where, six days a week, he would spend up to three hours with a physical therapist. The room resembled an infant's nursery, with a stock of diapers, changing pads, and an assortment of soft toys. Bertrand seemed different from the way he'd been during my last visit, fourteen months earlier. He had become much more expressive: he furrowed his eyebrows and scrunched his nose and, when he was pleased, grinned broadly and let out what the Might's called a "happy hoot." He

was also much more coordinated, and, with considerable effort, he could roll over and push himself up to a sitting position. To everyone's surprise, he had even learned to communicate preferences between objects by pointing or leaning toward the one he wanted to play with.

The Might's attribute their son's improvement to several factors. Because his diagnosis revealed that Bertrand was not suffering from a seizure disorder, he was no longer on a severely restrictive diet or receiving painful, sometimes dangerous treatments such as steroids. Two over-the-counter supplements seemed to be helping, as well. The first was a highly concentrated cocoa extract. "It sounds like a scam, except there's research showing that cocoa actually improves cells' energy production," Matt told me. The second was N-acetylcysteine, or NAC, an amino acid that helps produce a naturally occurring antioxidant. Bertrand hadn't been admitted to the hospital since he'd had his tonsils removed, nearly a year and a half earlier—a stark contrast to 2010 and 2011, when he'd been rushed to the hospital more than a dozen times.

In the past year, the Might's and the Wilseys have formed a coalition dedicated to researching their children's condition. Patient-advocacy groups have been around for decades, but it's extremely unusual for one or two families to single-handedly direct an international research agenda. It helps that



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both the Might and the Wilseys have family money. (Matt Might's father is the president and C.E.O. of Cable One, the cable-television division of the former Washington Post Company.) Since 2012, the Might family has devoted more than a hundred thousand dollars a year to NGLY1-related research in Hudson Freeze's lab, while the Wilseys have spent two million dollars funding researchers around the world.

Still, one of the Might family's and the Wilseys' biggest accomplishments to date required no money at all: they successfully pushed for the clinicians and researchers with whom they were working to collaborate on a single, all-encompassing clinical report on the disease. The paper, written by Gregory Enns, contained contributions from thirty-three authors, including Matthew Bainbridge, Hudson Freeze, David Goldstein, and Vandana Shashi. Eighteen departments from eleven institutions in the U.S., Canada, Germany, and the U.K. were represented. After the paper was all but completed, one of the challenges in getting it published was agreeing on the order in which the authors' names would appear.

Neither Murat Günel, at Yale, nor Tzipora Falik-Zaccai, in Israel, joined in the publication. Günel had been invited but his research team had already submitted a paper elsewhere. (It was later rejected.) Freeze told me that Falik-Zaccai had stopped responding to his e-mails, and that when he inquired about the specific NGLY1 mutations of Falik-Zaccai's patients she had all but told him that he would find out what he wanted to know when he read about it in a journal. (When I contacted Falik-Zaccai, in March, she denied this account and said that she would be delighted to work with the other researchers.)

The Might and Wilsey collaboration has also prompted the N.I.H. to study the condition. This past spring, the agency began inviting NGLY1 patients to come to Bethesda for a week of tests and examinations. Bertrand was the first child to take part, and his participation has already yielded a potentially important insight. As Bertrand and the other NGLY1 patients illustrated, the inability to get rid of malfunctioning glycoproteins has devastating consequences, especially for developing infants. But Sergio Rosenzweig, an

N.I.H. immunologist who met with Bertrand, thinks it might confer one advantage, as well.

Rosenzweig recently published a paper describing two siblings who rarely got viral infections, despite being severely lacking in antibodies. Rosenzweig and his colleagues discovered that the siblings suffer from an ultra-rare congenital disorder of glycosylation known as CDG-IIb. The puzzle began to make sense. Since CDG-IIb patients have trouble making glycoproteins, it is possible that the siblings had some protection from a class of viruses that are known to depend on those molecules to spread within the body. (There have been only two other known CDG-IIb patients. One is now deceased and the other does not seem to be able to ward off infection.)

When Rosenzweig learned that Bertrand rarely caught colds, he couldn't hide his excitement: perhaps Bertrand was able to avoid infections because viruses got stuck after attaching themselves to his defective glycoproteins. Rosenzweig is quick to emphasize that until he can test other NGLY1 patients he won't know if his hypothesis warrants further exploration. But if it bears out, he says, it could point to a way to treat acute infections ranging from influenza to Ebola hemorrhagic fever.

"We try to help these patients with rare diseases," he told me. "Sometimes we are able to, and sometimes we're not—but these children are teaching us a lot we didn't know about ourselves. And we can use what they are teaching us to help other people."

On a Thursday night this past February, the families of five NGLY1 patients met at the restaurant of the Estancia La Jolla Hotel and Spa, outside San Diego. They were in town for the annual Rare Disease Symposium at Sanford-Burnham, which Freeze had organized. This year's meeting was devoted entirely to NGLY1. Kristen Wilsey and Grace were the first to arrive at dinner. A few minutes later, the German woman, her husband, and their son, all of whom had travelled from India, entered. Next came the Might family, followed by Kaylee Mayes, a four-year-old from Washington state who had received a diagnosis of NGLY1 disorder the previous month, and her parents, Kelsey and Daniel.

Pam and Tony Stinchcomb and their youngest daughter, Jessie, arrived last. (The Stinchcombs' older daughter, Jordan, was too sick to travel.) The trip from Atlanta was just the second time that Tony Stinchcomb had been on a plane. "I'm not much into flying," Tony, a large, affable man with a gray goatee, told me. "But this seemed worth it."

That night marked the first time that two unrelated NGLY1 children were in the same room at the same time. For several hours, over ahi sliders, fish tacos, and empanadas, the families shared stories about what it had been like to care for children who were severely ill for reasons their doctors didn't understand. Just before everyone went back to their hotel rooms for the night, the German woman, fighting back tears, told me, "It feels like we've come home, but to a home we didn't know we had."

The next morning, five researchers presented their work on NGLY1 to around ninety people, a group that included the families, a handful of their friends, and scientists from as far away as Japan. Both Matt Might's and Matt Wilsey's parents were there, as were Michael Gambello, an Emory University geneticist who had sequenced the Stinchcombs, and Gregory Enns. Cristina Might, who was five and a half months pregnant at the time, looked on from the front row. (In June, she gave birth to a healthy boy.) Bertrand, who was the most severely disabled of all the children there, sat nearby in his wheelchair, humming to himself, as Kaylee amused herself on the floor.

That afternoon, Matt Might gave a talk titled "Accelerating Rare Disease." After describing the effects of his blog post, he told the crowd that it was inevitable that parents of children with other newly discovered diseases would form proactive communities, much as he, Cristina, and the Wilseys had done. Vandana Shashi believes that such communities represent a new paradigm for conducting medical research. "It's kind of a shift in the scientific world that we have to recognize—that, in this day of social media, dedicated, educated, and well-informed families have the ability to make a huge impact," she told me. "Gone are the days when we could just say, 'We're a cloistered community of researchers, and we alone know how to do this.'"

HOBBY LOBBYIST

BY PAUL RUDNICK

Many people have been wondering exactly what edged the Supreme Court toward its recent decision involving Hobby Lobby, the chain of crafts stores that has been allowed a religious exemption from funding birth control for its employees. An urgent letter has come to light, which may clarify the matter.

To the Supreme Court, especially Justice Scalia, who is a prime candidate for the benefits of therapeutic elder-crafting in a calming environment:

My name is Eleanor Crimley-Dabbins, and as one of this country's most dedicated crafters, and a three-time second runner-up in our local Let's Get Craftin' Craftboree here in San Diego, I would like to express how thoroughly crafting is intertwined with my deepest religious convictions.

A careful reading of Genesis reveals that when the Serpent first offered Eve the apple she replied, "I bet if I shel-lacked that apple and studded it with fragrant cloves, and then hot-glued the whole thing with an overlay of jumbo red sequins, it would make a darling year-round ornament for our Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil."

To which Adam, Eve's husband, responded, "That sounds great, sweetheart. Why don't you get crackin' while I finish creating a rustic gun rack from all these hooves and antlers? Because animal parts aren't just for eatin'—they're for craftin'!"

So, as you can see, crafting started on practically Day One of the Judeo-Christian world. Why, some folks claim that our planet itself is just a doodad the Almighty came up with after spinning His Rainy-Day-Fun, Pick-a-Project Activities Wheel.

As civilization progressed, so did crafting. Moses originally intended to use his home woodburning kit to char the Ten Commandments onto a knotty-pine plaque, which could also be used, with the addition of screw-in brass-plated hooks, as a holdall for

house keys, but he ultimately settled on a poured-resin, look-of-granite option. I like to think that Moses wanted to include an Eleventh Commandment: Thou Shalt Not Use Condoms or Real Stained Glass, Not When the Acrylic Colors Are Even More Vibrant and Easier to Keep Clean!

I'll admit that I wasn't always such a fervent believer, either in God or in the sort of homemade Mother's Day cards



that can land a person in the emergency room with a hole-punch wound. My commitment to the twin glories of Jesus and yard-sale-ready collectibles began when I was fourteen years old and my parents dragged me to a Christmas Midnight Mass. As I was yawning, and wishing that I was off with my friends in someone's unchaperoned finished basement, guzzling eggnog laced with cranberry juice, I happened to glance at the Nativity scene on the high altar—where the miracle of Jesus' birth had been imaginatively interpreted with sock monkeys.

At that very moment, I heard a voice telling me, "Eleanor, go ye forth and tell of the Lord's wonders, using pipe cleaners, Popsicle sticks, and enormous Day-Glo crêpe-paper sunflowers with plastic googly eyes and refrigerator-magnet grins." By the very next day, I had crafted a miniature replica of the Last Supper, entirely out of those tiny Jet-Puffed marshmallows, empty bottles of mini-bar vodka, and human hair.

I soon joined a fast-growing church

called Our Lady of the Decoupage Trinket Box. Our beloved pastor, the Reverend Lionel Harmwater, has led his flock in scrapbooking the entire Bible by adding doily borders to every page, along with oaktag-framed photos of bowling pins on which parishioners have enamelled the faces of their patron saints. This Bible now weighs more than fifty-eight pounds and rests on a reinforced redwood picnic table in the sacristy, surrounded by beeswax candles set inside coffee cans that have been spray-painted to look like spray-painted coffee cans. I love to page through this Bible, to discover pop-up tinfoil angels holding antiqued parchment banners reading "Pray & Crochet!" or "You Can't Commit Adultery with a Staple Gun!"

Of course, there are plenty of folks who just don't believe, either in God or in using frayed extension cords to wire together old Frisbees and oven mitts to create a one-of-a-kind holiday wreath for a nursing-home front door. These nonbelievers, or, as I like to call them, people without hand-tooled Navajo-inspired Naugahyde change purses, live mostly in the northeastern portion of America, which, frankly, is a crafting sinkhole.

There is hope, however: a Crafters' Gospel has just been discovered, rolled up inside a Clorox bottle that had been repurposed as a piggy bank and hidden in a cavern outside Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. This Gospel includes a revelatory sermon in which Jesus, in no uncertain terms, condemns any undecorated surface, including simple pine coffins, which can be made so much more appealing, and therefore more righteous, by adding bottle caps dusted with clear glitter and arranged in snowflake patterns. Jesus also tells us, and here I'm quoting Him directly, that "any truly Christian apron must include both colorful rickrack and a hand-embroidered image of a dancing pepper mill."

When it comes to the Court's decision on contraception, I think I can be of service. For my five beautiful daughters, and the other one, I have used a cheerful heavy-gauge yarn, mixing strands of cashmere, alpaca, and barbed wire, to knit what I call a Crotch Cozy. When my girls wear their Crotch Cozies, they not only receive endless compliments in the locker room but sexual intercourse becomes impossible. Any additional form of birth control is unnecessary. Case closed! ♦

MAD NEW

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What's incredible to others is our everyday. Our average. As such, we're our restaurants with stars, our theater with reviews, and our hospitals holding every New York icon of creativity, culture, and science close they do. At NYU Langone Medical Center, we understand that to be

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more discerning and more demanding. So we measure things. We rank with badges. We reward the best of the best with loyalty and pride, to our hearts. We guard them as if they belong to us. And in a sense, the best means always striving to be better. To be made for New York.

THE HAND ON THE LEVER

How Janet Yellen is redefining the Federal Reserve.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

In April, two months after Janet Yellen took over as chair of the Federal Reserve Board, she went to New York to make her first speech to the financial industry. In a Times Square hotel ballroom, Yellen, a small woman with a helmet of white hair, sat on a three-tier dais, looking out over a hundred tables of paying guests. She was visually amplified by two Jumbotron screens, and read scripted remarks about her “expectation that the achievement of our economic objectives will likely require low real interest rates for some time.” It’s one of the institution’s central rituals for the chair to drop deliberately bland hints about the future direction of interest rates, and for the markets instantly to respond, as if on command of an omnipotent genie. In this case, the movement was upward. For Yellen, the speech was the equivalent of an incoming President’s reassuring State of the Union address.

This was not Yellen’s first full-dress official appearance. She had gone to Chicago a few weeks earlier, to speak at a conference for neighborhood-revitalization organizations—not the venue a new Fed chair would ordinarily choose for a maiden speech. Yellen was sending a signal. As she put it that day, “Although we work through financial markets, our goal is to help Main Street, not Wall Street.” More than five years after the financial crisis, historically high numbers of Americans are still out of the labor force, working part time when they’d rather be full time, or unemployed for more than six months. Yellen spoke mainly about unemployment, and told the stories of three blue-collar Chicagoans, two black, one white, who had lost their jobs in the recession. Her staff had found these people for her, and she had spoken to them on the phone before her speech. Two of the three—from

Chicago’s desperately poor West Side—had criminal records.

The Federal Reserve Board celebrated its centennial last year. Its main activity has been to try to keep the economy of the United States healthy by making adjustments in interest rates, while also maintaining an atmosphere of dignified, scholastic, uncommunicative grandeur—it’s the *Skull and Bones* of American governance. Yellen is notable not only for being the first female Fed chair but also for being the most liberal since Marriner Eccles, who held the job during the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations. Ordinarily, the Fed’s role is to engender a sense of calm in the eternally jittery financial markets, not to crusade against urban poverty. The day after Yellen’s speech in Chicago, I visited her at the Fed’s headquarters, in Washington, in a classically inspired stone building with oversized bronze double doors facing Constitution Avenue. Sixty-seven years old, she has hazel eyes, sharp features, and an informal manner. She speaks with a distinct trace of old Brooklyn: “goyd” for guide, “wount” for wouldn’t. She recalled how she had decided where to make her first speech.

“I felt I wanted to talk about the Fed’s mission, and I wanted to do so in understandable terms,” she said. “And to emphasize that unemployment is part of our mission. The recession has taken a particularly heavy toll on those who have less education and income—middle-income and low-income families—and the Fed’s concern with the job market is a theme I’ve wanted to get across. Why are we doing all these things that are in the newspapers all the time? I was trying to explain that we’re doing this to help American families who are struggling in the aftermath of the Great Recession. I wanted to be completely clear and

Yellen prides herself on being more in touch with the real world of the economy than most economists. “I always had an aspiration to be involved in public policy,” she says.



PHOTOGRAPH BY SOFIA SANCHEZ & MAURO MONGIELLO

straightforward about what I'm talking about. Examples serve a very valuable role in making something that would seem abstract and general very down to earth. It's pretty rare to just talk to people who are having a tough time in the economy, to hear their individual stories."

Economic misfortune for ordinary people, and its connection to the financial system, has been on Yellen's mind for most of her life. She was born in 1946, in the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn. Her father, who had grown up on the Lower East Side, the son of immigrants from Poland, was a family doctor who had to go to medical school abroad because of the Jewish quotas that American medical schools maintained at the time; her mother, who grew up in Brooklyn, was an elementary-school teacher. "When I was very young, my father had an accident," Yellen told me. "He fell down a flight of stairs, fractured his skull, and lost sight in one eye. In those days, family doctors went out on house calls. My father visited patients in their homes—and so that he could continue his practice my mother became his chauffeur. That continued for a good part of my life. My parents were born in 1906 and 1907. I think the experience of the Depression greatly influenced the way they thought about the world." Her mother, she said, also managed the fam-

ily finances and kept an eye on the stock market, and she thought some of that had rubbed off on her.

Yellen graduated, as valedictorian, from Fort Hamilton High School in Bay Ridge, in 1963—toward the end of the era of undimmed postwar optimism about the future of the United States, and in particular about the glorious potential of government. She went to Brown University, thinking she would pursue math or science (her only sibling, John Yellen, is the director of the archeology program at the National Science Foundation), but she wound up majoring in economics, which she talks about as if it were one of the helping professions. "What I really liked about economics was that it provided a rigorous, analytical way of thinking about issues that have great impact on people's lives," Yellen told me. "Economics is a subject that really relates to core aspects of human well-being, and there's a methodology for thinking about these things. This was a very appealing combination to me. Market systems are capable of massive breakdowns that can result in long, devastating periods of high unemployment. And I felt that economists had really learned something about how to address that."

In her senior year, Yellen attended a talk by James Tobin, an economist at Yale who had served in John F. Kennedy's

White House. Tobin spoke about the "life-cycle model of consumption"—a theory about how much people spend and save at different stages of life, and what that means for the management of the economy. She was so entranced that she applied to graduate school at Yale so that she could study with him. "Tobin was a person who really impressed me, because he had a passion for social justice and for public policy," she said. She noted that economists are sometimes legitimately criticized for engaging in abstract mathematics without caring much about its ramifications. "But for Tobin it was always something that was about making the lives of people better."

In 1971, Yellen took a job as an assistant professor in the Harvard economics department. Like most junior faculty members at Harvard in those days, she did not get tenure, and when she was looking for the next step in her career she spent a year working at the Fed in Washington. She met her future husband there—George Akerlof, an economist at the University of California at Berkeley, who also had a temporary job at the Fed. They married at the end of the year and have been frequent professional collaborators ever since. (Their only child, Robert Akerlof, is an economist on the faculty of the University of Warwick, in England.) Akerlof and Yellen moved to England and taught at the London School of Economics for two years, then moved to Berkeley, where he returned to the faculty of the economics department and she joined the business school. She stopped teaching at Berkeley in 2004 and Akerlof retired in 2008. Akerlof, a 2001 Nobel Prize winner in economics, now does research at the International Monetary Fund, a few blocks away from Yellen's office. His current interest is something he calls "identity economics," which is the study of how people's conceptions of who they are, including race, gender, and ethnicity, can shape their lives and decisions more than standard economic incentives.

When Akerlof was eleven, his father, a research chemist at Princeton, lost his job. The family's experience with unemployment left a deep impression on him. Both Yellen and Akerlof are known among their colleagues for being cautious. During an earlier period when Yellen was in government, Akerlof



"For now, I want you to stay off siege ladders."

moved to Washington with her but flew home to teach his courses, lest Berkeley eliminate his job. Yellen timed her initial government jobs in Washington—first as a governor of the Federal Reserve Board, then as chair of the White House Council of Economic Advisers—partly with an eye to the five-year limit that Berkeley had given her for how long she could be away and retain her professorship. “Both of us, separately and together, really, really care about unemployment,” Akerlof told me. When jobs are unavailable for someone looking for work, as he put it, “you’re seriously in the soup. You’re in the soup in two ways. One, you have insufficient savings. Two, for a very significant portion of the unemployed, that’s what they do all day. You’re sitting at home, feeling bad about yourself. You’re not fulfilling what you think you should be doing. We feel very seriously about all this.”

The Federal Reserve Board makes policy in Washington, which quickly turns into direct operations in the financial markets. Those operations, by one of the biggest players in the world, occur at the headquarters of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, a few blocks north of Wall Street. In a conference room on the first floor, at the height of the financial crisis in September, 2008, the chair of the Fed, Ben Bernanke, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Paulson, and Timothy Geithner, the president of the New York Fed, ran a desperate weekend-long round-the-clock emergency rescue operation aimed at preventing a collapse of the global economy. There are half a million gold bars stored in the New York Fed’s basement—a quaint vestige of a financial system that hasn’t existed for decades—but the real manifestation of the power of the institution is what goes on in the Operations Room, a vast, anonymous space on an upper floor of the building populated by employees sitting at computer screens. (For security reasons, the Fed asked me not to say which floor.) Imagine the trading floor in a movie about Wall Street, except that the people at the desks look like graduate students, dress business casual, and work in library-like silence.

There are a few seminar-size rooms off the main floor. In one, on the spring morning I visited, there were five very

serious-looking people. They were buying, in daily quantities small enough for the financial markets to digest, long-term U.S. government bonds amounting to thirty billion dollars every month. In the next room were seven people, buying mortgage-backed securities (twenty-five billion dollars every month). Can a spectacle so lacking in the indicia of importance—no pageantry, no emotions, not even any speaking—really be the beating heart of capitalism?

Since the financial crisis, the people working in those two small rooms, carrying out orders from Washington, have displaced China as the dominant buyers of American government debt. They have driven down the value of the dollar, infuriating exporting nations such as Brazil and India. They have kept interest rates low enough to give enormous advantages to debtors, from homeowners to hedge-fund managers and private-equity barons, at the expense of people who depend on the interest from their life savings. They have conferred significant government subsidies on the biggest banks, thus reawakening an unpredictable, bipartisan note of incipient populist rage, which has sounded intermittently in American politics for two centuries. By keeping interest rates low, they are helping to push stock prices higher. Any indication that they might buy fewer assets causes tangible anxiety in the stock market.

In 2008, when the insolvency of Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers set off the financial crisis, the Fed became intimately involved in the affairs of nearly every big financial entity in the United States. In its traditional role as steward of the over-all economy, the Fed initially did what it was bred to do in a downturn: lower interest rates to invigorate the economy. Within a few weeks, interest rates had dropped to near zero, but the country still seemed to be spiralling toward another Great Depression. The Fed had to find another way to goose the economy. President George W. Bush had appointed Ben Bernanke Fed chair in 2006. During Bernanke’s early years there, he told me, “I wrote a lot of thoughtful speeches.” Now, under intense time pressure, he had to come up

with a new, extreme policy that was well outside the Fed’s experience.

As a last-ditch means of energizing the economy, the Fed began acquiring mortgage-backed securities and other assets from troubled financial companies, so that they would not be dragged under; the Fed could afford to hold on to these assets until they regained economic value, and the banks couldn’t.

(The Fed created a series of new entities called Maiden Lane, which acquired about thirty billion dollars of Bear Stearns’s assets, and, later, nearly fifty billion dollars of assets related to American International Group, or A.I.G., the giant insurance company that was then at the brink of failure.) In early 2009, the Fed began buying large quantities of financial instruments every month, as an additional means of stimulating the economy; these asset purchases eventually rose to eighty-five billion dollars a month. Before the crisis, the Fed owned more than nine hundred billion dollars in assets; by the end of last year, it owned more than four trillion dollars. The Bank of England followed with a similar program. A year ago, Bernanke, then winding up his second four-year term as chair, laid out a plan under which in the future, if the economy continued to improve, the Fed would begin scaling back its unusual purchases. He described it to me as throttling back an airplane, but investors were so spooked by Bernanke’s even mentioning it as a possibility that the Dow Jones average plummeted more than five hundred and fifty points in two days. Alan Greenspan, who served for nineteen years as the Fed’s chair before Bernanke, told me, “We are going through a period with no precedent in American history.”

There is an old saw that the Fed chair is the second most powerful person in government. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, that may actually be an understatement. Most people familiar with the job believe that Yellen’s most daunting task will be to figure out how to return the Fed to something like its normal role without causing the economy to blow up again. But her own view of her mission has another element that





"Hey, you're the one who wanted a three-way."

she speaks about in a way that indicates it is at least as important to her: to help bring to an end, once and for all, a dark period in economics that began decades before the financial crisis.

Economic management sounds technical, but it also has the quality of a powerful fable—like *"Animal Farm,"* with a happier ending. The founding patriarch was John Maynard Keynes, Yellen's hero. Keynes was a member of the Bloomsbury group. His published work would not pass muster with a tenure committee in a contemporary economics department; there are few formulas in *"The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money."* But he came up with what might be the most successful liberal idea of the past century: that central governments, through spending, taxes, and manipulating interest rates, could prevent the periodic economic disasters that had characterized modern capitalism. He published *"The General Theory"* in 1936, deep into the Great Depression. By the nineteen-sixties, when Yellen was in graduate school, Keynes's followers had established their primacy both in the leading economics departments and in the economic policymaking offices in government. In these venues, at least, it's not an exaggeration to say that the prevailing view was that if Keynes had published the *"General Theory"* ten years

earlier the mass unemployment of the Great Depression might have been avoided—along with the nearly incalculable carnage of the Second World War. And, at the time when Yellen was entering the profession, it looked as if, thanks to the development of modern economic policymaking, we were safe from future economically generated human catastrophes. Carrying on this project would be her life's work.

Then, in 1967, the year Yellen graduated from college, Milton Friedman, a professor in the University of Chicago economics department, in a speech at an annual economists' convention in Washington, signalled an end to the unquestioned primacy of Keynesian economics. Friedman declared that the government cannot affect the rate of unemployment for more than very short periods, which contradicted most economists' view that government could prevent very high unemployment permanently. Friedman also later argued that inflation and unemployment could rise in tandem—something Keynesians saw as conceptually impossible, because they believed that higher inflation caused lower unemployment, and vice versa, and it was government's job to strike the perfect balance between these two conflicting forces.

Friedman did not propose dispensing with Keynes. He's usually credited

with inventing the phrase, which Richard Nixon adopted, *"We are all Keynesians now."* But in 1976 Robert Lucas, another professor in the market-oriented, government-skeptical University of Chicago economics department, launched a frontal assault on Keynesian economics, in the form of a formula-filled article titled *"Econometric Policy Evaluation: A Critique."* Lucas declared that government economic policy could not control the rates of inflation and unemployment for any length of time. Prices and wages would always set their own levels in the marketplace. In this view, which gathered a flock of adherents, Keynes became a figure of merely historic interest; the whole idea of wise liberal economists steering the economy away from disaster was seen as a fantasy. It didn't help the Keynesians that both inflation and unemployment were rising, so the government's ability to manage the economy effectively wasn't immediately obvious. New classical economics had arrived, and it began to gain primacy in government, in economics departments, and in textbooks.

A decades-long battle was joined, between "freshwater economists," at inland departments like Chicago's, and "saltwater economists," at Berkeley, Yale, and M.I.T. Yellen deplored the caricature of Keynesian economics, and it's not too much to say that she has devoted her career, in universities and in government, to setting things right. New classical economics, she told me, "was the starting point for a rightward shift in economics that went against the idea that monetary policy can improve macroeconomic outcomes." Lucas and his followers, she said, believe that markets function well on their own and that the effect of Keynesian economic policy can only be harmful. "In this framework, monetary policy is not even benign—it's perverse. This reasoning takes Keynesian economics and completely stands it on its head. It suggests that all monetary policy does is affect the economy—adversely—by fooling people. This is as radical a shift as can be imagined."

Back in the nineteen-thirties, Keynes blew apart the classical economic tradition, which held that unemployment was a self-correcting problem, because firms would simply cut their workers' wages to the point that there would

be more jobs, at lower pay. In the Depression, that did not happen—because high unemployment kept demand for employers' goods low, and because companies tend to lay people off rather than save money by cutting everyone's pay. Yellen proposed the case of a factory owner, when the unemployment rate is ten per cent, who sees a line of job applicants outside his factory gates: "O.K., so what does standard new classical economics say? You should cut the wages of everybody who works for you. Because there are all the people standing outside the factory gates, and they have the same skill set as the people who work for you. You should at least be willing, according to this view, if not to hire them, to say to your own workers, 'If you don't take a pay cut, I'm going to replace you with them.' But one goes around, actually talks to firms, and you'll find that no firm would do that."

Yellen, who prides herself on being more in touch with the real world of the economy than most economists are, and Akerlof have published a series of papers on why labor markets don't automatically work according to the laws of supply and demand. They believe that people's economic behavior is not mechanically rational, and that government—specifically the Fed—can often manage the economy in ways that produce happier results than the markets would achieve on their own. As Ben Bernanke, who unhesitatingly called himself a "neo-Keynesian," put it when I spoke with him, "Because wages and prices do not adjust quickly enough to keep the economy at full employment all the time, sometimes monetary and fiscal policies are needed to avoid long periods of unemployment."

In Yellen's professional partnership with Akerlof, she has been the one more drawn to government. "When I started studying economics, I always had an aspiration to be involved in public policy," she said. "I come from an intellectual tradition where public policy is important, it can make a positive contribution, it's our social obligation to do this. We can help to make the world a better place. That's where I was coming from. And so the notion of having the opportunity to serve in a high-level public-policy position, especially the Fed—this was really very attractive to me. It was something I

couldn't say no to, as long as my family was willing to support me." After her Clinton Administration jobs as a Fed governor and as chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, she returned to the Berkeley faculty. In 2004, she became president of the Fed's San Francisco bank, and then, in 2010, vice-chair of the Board of Governors, in Washington.

I asked Akerlof why he had never held a government job. Gesturing at his ancient sweater, his unruly hair, and his battered hiking boots, he said, "Isn't it obvious?" In his academic work, he has written papers with provocative titles such as "The Market for Lemons" and "Looting: The Economic Underworld of Bankruptcy for Profit." When they wrote together, one Berkeley colleague told me, "one of Janet's roles was to be the reality check." In 2003, Akerlof gave an interview to *Der Spiegel*, in which he said of the Bush Administration, "I think this is the worst government the U.S. has ever had in its more than 200 years of history. It has engaged in extraordinarily irresponsible policies not only in foreign and economic but also in social and environmental policy. This is not normal government policy. Now is

the time for people to engage in civil disobedience." (Bush had cut taxes and created big government deficits, an unpardonable sin to a Keynesian, because those are powerful tools that need to be kept honed and ready for use during recessions, to stimulate demand.) Yellen would never be so impolitic, but she is no less passionate about the liberal tradition in economics. Now she has the chance to prove that her side has been right all along. For that to happen, of course, her policies have to work.

The financial crisis and the ensuing recession represented a significant, if indirect, victory for the Keynesians. The economists' wars over the past few decades have been mainly about monetary policy; regulation of the financial system was of distinctly secondary interest to both sides. But the freshwater economists, with their abiding faith in markets, were less inclined to regulate the financial industry than the saltwater economists were. When the crisis made it obvious that finance has been severely underregulated, it was the anti-Keynesians who were discredited. The Keynesians were accidental beneficiaries. "New



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Keynesian economics did not predict the crisis,” Bernanke said. “The crisis came from causes not captured by the new Keynesian models used at the Fed, such as excessive risk-taking in financial markets and failures of financial regulation and supervision. We had to figure out how to incorporate the effects of the crisis in our models.”

In the nineteen-nineties, when Yellen was in the White House, she was neither a strong voice in favor of late-Clintonian financial deregulation nor a strong voice against it. Other federal officials, such as Brooksley Born, the head of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, earned prophetic status by issuing warnings about deregulation, but Yellen did not. Still, one could say that the failures of financial deregulation got Yellen her job. “If you’re looking for a kind of thinking that did have practical applications and has been blown out of the water by the financial crisis, this is a good area to concentrate on,” Yellen told me. A note of sarcasm crept into her voice. “People who believe that financial markets are fully efficient, financial firms are always well managed—these are people who know what they’re doing, they understand about risk, they’re sophisticated. But the financial crisis really diminished the prestige of those who think that financial markets are always efficient and work extremely well.” The Keynesian tradition, she said, and the line of research known as “behavioral finance” have “come out of this crisis with greatly enhanced prestige in academia, and in institutions like this.”

During and after the financial crisis, with the economy careering downward and unemployment rising, the public was understandably focussed on avoiding immediate disaster. But offstage was an equally urgent matter: the government would now be regulating the financial system more rigorously, and the question of who in government would be in control was resolved dramatically in the Fed’s favor.

The Fed is the most powerful of the financial regulatory agencies, commissions, and councils in Washington, and is the subject of intermittent resentment by the others. Over the years, highly visible Fed chairs—Paul Volcker, Greenspan, Bernanke—built their public rep-

utations on how they managed interest rates. None of them were known as financial regulators. Greenspan was openly skeptical of regulation, believing that the self-preservative instinct of financial firms would keep them from putting themselves at risk. (During the crisis he apologized.)

Officially, before the crisis, the Fed’s supervision of large financial companies was mostly limited to bank holding companies. Countrywide, the mortgage company that went under in 2008, chose to conduct its mortgage business through a “thrift institution,” so it fell under the purview of the Office of Thrift Supervision, an agency so notoriously lenient that it was abolished after the crisis. When the crisis arrived, the Fed had two powerful additional weapons in its arsenal: money and a previously obscure provision of the Federal Reserve Act called Section 13(3), which permitted it to lend money to pretty much anybody it wanted during “unusual and exigent circumstances.” When Bear Stearns was collapsing, Maiden Lane, funded by the Fed, spent billions to buy some of the soured assets that had got the company into trouble, making the transaction far less risky for the bank that acquired the remains of Bear Stearns, JPMorgan Chase. In the days after Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy, that September, the Fed backed a hundred and thirty-eight billion dollars of advances that JPMorgan made to Lehman’s broker affiliate—advances that allowed the affiliate to settle trades, preventing a potential implosion in the financial markets. And, again through Maiden Lane, it shelled out more billions to purchase derivatives and securities from A.I.G., because its failure would have brought down other financial institutions with it.

When Bank of America considered walking away from a deal to acquire Merrill Lynch—another move that would have shaken the markets—the Fed and the Treasury Department worked together to save the transaction, and afterward the Fed bailed out Bank of America. Throughout the most tenuous months of the financial crisis, the Fed made billions of dollars of loans to financial institutions, including insurers and foreign banks—the peak outstanding balance was \$1.2 trillion on Decem-

ber 5, 2008, according to Bloomberg News. The Fed did not require banks to report these loans, presumably fearful of what public disclosure might do to markets. And the Fed arranged a number of emergency facilities through which troubled lenders could get cash by pledging assets that no one else would touch.

Last fall, a report by the government’s General Accountability Office confirmed that the very biggest banks got significantly more special help from the Fed during the crisis than other banks did. All this amounted to a subsidy, conferred in order to keep the big banks from going under. Senator David Vitter, a Republican from Louisiana, who requested the report, told me that he estimates the total amount of the Fed’s subsidy to big banks during the crisis at eighty-three billion dollars. This money is not recoverable, because the subsidy was in the form of low interest rates, not in the taking over of assets that the Fed could later resell.

The price the Fed paid for its largesse was the widespread accusation that it has informally conferred “too big to fail” status on the largest financial institutions, but it also won significant political spoils. The two largest surviving investment banks, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley, had operated without the Fed’s supervision, but in the heat of the crisis their capital-markets funding dried up, and they had no choice but to convert—“at the point of a sword,” as one former Fed official put it to me—into bank holding companies to get access to the Fed’s especially favorable loans. This meant that the Fed had supervisory power over all six of the largest surviving American financial institutions: Morgan, Goldman, Chase, Citi, Bank of America, and Wells Fargo.

In the protracted negotiations over the details of the Dodd-Frank law, which Congress passed in 2010, the Fed also did very well for itself. Senator Chris Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut, feeling that the crisis proved the Fed had failed as a regulator, had wanted to strip it of its supervisory authority, but the Fed wound up with a much bigger budget and more staff to supervise banks, and a host of new powers. The Fed now requires banks to undergo “stress tests” and to produce “living

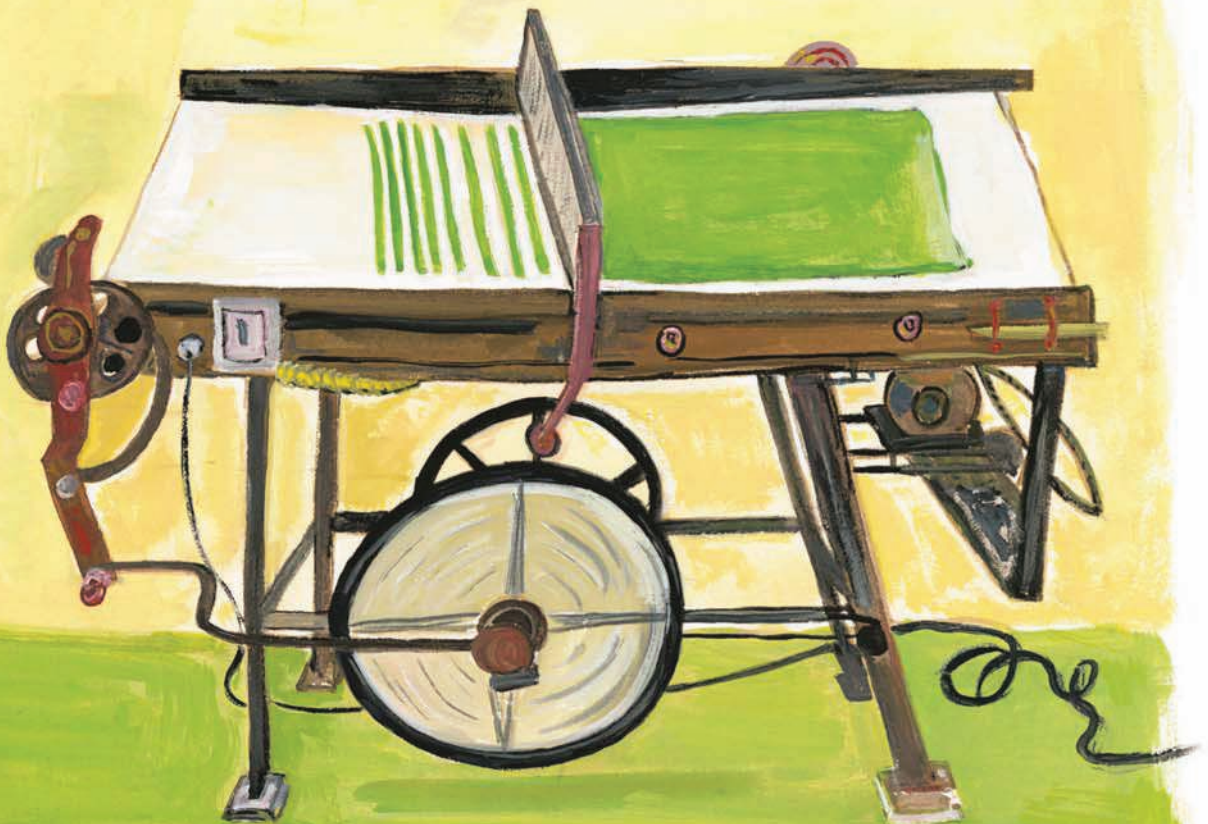
THE NOODLE-CUTTING MACHINE

IT'S BEEN AT RAFFETTO'S, ON HOUSTON STREET,
CUTTING NOODLES SINCE 1916. IT'S A RICKETY,
CLACKETY, GORGEOUS GIZMO—AND RELIABLE, TOO.

POTS OF BOLOGNESE AND
MARINARA ARE COOKING
IN THE BACK OF THE SHOP.

PLACE YOUR ORDER AND
GO HOME WITH A
PERFECT LUNCH.

FRESH NOODLE SIZES		
NO. 2	LINGUINE	$\frac{1}{8}$ "
NO. 3	TAGLIATELLE	$\frac{1}{4}$ "
NO. 4	FETTUCCHINE	$\frac{3}{8}$ "
NO. 5	FETT. WIDE	$\frac{1}{2}$ "
NO. 6	RAPPARDELLE	1"
	LASAGNE	3"



wills”—in which they put together plans both for recovering from a crisis and for going out of business, without creating or exacerbating financial turmoil. These measures were meant to reduce the risk that banks will fail, and to insure that, if they do, they won't take the entire system down with them. The Fed can also raise banks' capital requirements. It got supervisory power over “systemically important financial institutions,” including some that aren't banks but are judged capable of taking down the financial system—a new category that so far includes G.E. Capital, Prudential, and A.I.G., with several more big financial companies likely to follow. It got the power to share supervision, with the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, of eight “financial market utilities”—trading markets such as the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. Dodd-Frank also has a “Hotel California” provision (“You can check out anytime you like, but you can never leave”), which says that any large bank that received special help from the Fed during the crisis would remain forever under Fed supervision. The one significant battle the Fed lost was over Section 13(3): the Fed can no longer rescue specific financial institutions like A.I.G. without congressional approval.

As a result of the Fed's decision to give the largest firms special help rather than to let them fail, these firms are now more dominant in the financial system than they were before. Dodd-Frank regulated them more heavily, but it did not address their size. The crisis placed financial power in the United States in fewer hands, and gave a government institution that stands at a remove from democratic politics more power to supervise those giant organizations. It's a contest of titans. According to the Government Accountability Office report, each of the four biggest banks in the country contains more than two thousand legally distinct entities.

After the crisis, it became clear that Keynes's followers were not, in their moment of triumph, as unified as you might think. For the sake of continuity, President Obama had appointed Bernanke, a Republican, to a second four-year term as Fed chair. Four years later, in the summer of 2013, Obama said that

THE NIGHT HE PICKED UP WALLACE STEVENS

in his cab, the stars were out
and danced on the windshield, Stevens wrote,
in his poem about my father.

They danced like skaters on the slick glass
and in their reel and tinselling, he saw
the whole of life as a taxi ride through Philadelphia.

Not reading poetry, not recognizing his passenger,
those were the years he might have picked up Yeats,
Eliot, even Pound, who grew up in Wyncote,

but the only fare he knew on sight was John Carradine,
who he insisted was Italian
because his last name ended in a vowel.

If you did not look too close, Pop said,
stars looked better in the rear view.
So did he. In the poem about him

he wonders when his life will come to something,
if it's all been worth it. The wife,
the three boys, that one huge financial reversal . . .

so he taxis stars in a yellow cab, and
his meter runs, and the motor runs,
and his time runs out.

—J.T. Barbarese

Bernanke had been in the job “longer than he wanted,” a gracious way of saying that he would not get a third term. The world of Keynesians who had worked together in the Clinton Administration then began an uncharacteristically public battle over who would succeed Bernanke. The two leading candidates were Lawrence Summers, the former Treasury Secretary, and Yellen. Stanley Fischer, an African-born American citizen who at the time was the president of the Bank of Israel, was a long-shot third possibility. (Yellen recently appointed Fischer as vice-chair of the Fed.)

Summers was widely reported to be Obama's first choice, but he was also far more controversial than Yellen. The scion of an economics royal family (both of his parents have brothers who won the Nobel Prize in Economic Science), he got tenure at Harvard at the age of twenty-eight and became its president at forty-six. He is spectacu-

larly abrupt, and polarizing; his presidency of Harvard, a job that requires keeping many constituencies happy, ended unhappily after only five years. Summers had a reputation for being one of the prime architects of financial deregulation in the Clinton Administration, and for being generally close to Wall Street.

Yellen doesn't leave footprints; Summers does. In 1998, in a key White House meeting of Brooksley Born, Summers, and other top Administration economic policymakers, Born made an impassioned case for regulating the proliferating new types of financial derivatives, and Summers rudely dismissed the idea. A 2009 “Frontline” documentary quoted one of Born's associates as saying that Summers had told her that if she got her way, “you're going to cause the worst financial crisis since the end of World War II,” and “Stop, right away. No more.” Timothy Geithner, then the Assistant

Treasury Secretary for International Affairs, writes in his new memoir, “The air was thick with warnings that Bern’s ideas would create financial chaos.” Yellen, then chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, was at the meeting, too, but she was both more skeptical of the financial markets and more discreet than Summers, so she didn’t say much. At an annual summer retreat for central bankers in Jackson Hole in 2005, when the economist Raghuram Rajan, who now chairs India’s central bank, warned about risks that derivatives posed to the financial system, Summers mocked his concern as “slightly Luddite.”

Last summer, Senator Sherrod Brown, a Democrat from Ohio, released a letter co-signed by twenty senators—one independent and nineteen Democrats, including the freshman senator Elizabeth Warren, from Massachusetts, Summers’s home state—saying that they believed Janet Yellen would make an excellent Fed chair. Its subtext was that all the signers, whose votes the Administration would likely need to get the new Fed chair confirmed, were prepared to vote against Summers.

Members of Congress had not forgotten the enormous anger about the recession that swept the country. Some of it was directed at Wall Street, some of it at the financial deregulation of the preceding twenty-five years (at the time, it was hardly noticed), and a great deal of it at the Fed: a mysterious institution originally conceived by a group of bankers, which was now using its power to bail out the biggest bankers with taxpayer dollars, despite their recklessness, rather than help ordinary Americans who were struggling desperately. “I get it,” William Dudley, the president of the New York Fed, told me. “I get why people are upset. I understand why people think, Was justice done? Savers are getting less than pennies on the dollar. There does seem to be some fundamental unfairness. To save the financial system, we had to save individual entities. That was unfortunate. We want to be in a situation where we can allow firms to fail.”

The anti-Fed sentiment was neither liberal nor conservative. Sarah Palin and Ron and Rand Paul are anti-Fed, and so is Senator Bernie Sanders, of Vermont, a self-described democratic socialist. Dave Brat, the underdog who beat the House

majority leader, Eric Cantor, in a Republican primary by running to the right of him, made attacking Wall Street one of the major themes of his campaign, and called for an audit of the Fed. In 2011 and 2012, members of the Bay Area Occupy movement camped out in front of Yellen’s former office at the San Francisco Fed. During the negotiations over Dodd-Frank, the ranking Republican on the Senate Banking Committee, Richard Shelby, of Alabama, a Democrat-turned-Republican from a state with a long populist tradition, and a passionate Fed critic, walked out, leaving a freshman senator from Tennessee, Bob Corker, to take his place as the lead Republican negotiator. “There was a point in time,” Corker told me, “probably 2009, 2010, when I’d go home, and if we did a town-hall meeting, it was an outpouring. It was ‘the Fed, the Fed, the Fed.’ It was everything from people who were concerned about the debasing of the currency, to the idea that it wasn’t audited, to the idea that it was opaque, to conspiracy theories.” In the early stages of the 2012 Presidential campaign, Rick Perry, the governor of Texas, another Democrat-turned-Republican with deep roots in Southern populism, told an audience, referring to Bernanke, “I dunno what y’all would do to him in Iowa, but we would treat him pretty ugly down in Texas. Printing more money to play politics at this particular time in American history is almost treasonous in my opinion.”

“You won’t get me to say the letter was about Summers,” Sherrod Brown told me. But he did say that “Wall Street has too much political power and too much economic power,” and that his conversations with Yellen left him assured that she understood that. A litmus test for Brown and his allies is whether a government economic policymaker is willing to admit that the leading banks have been too big to fail, because the government showed during the crisis that it would bail the banks out if they took on too much risk. (Dodd-Frank was supposed to solve this problem by committing the government to policies that would make bank bailouts unnecessary in the future; another General Accountability Office report, due out later this month, is expected

to conclude that, as of now, the biggest banks are still too big to fail—meaning that, in a crisis brought on by their excessively risky behavior, the Fed would still be able and willing to perform a rescue for giant financial institutions.) In her public speeches, Yellen has used the phrase “too big to fail,” but treated it as a concern the Fed knows it must address, rather than as a description of reality. Yet Brown told me that in a private conversation she had used the phrase in a less carefully distanced way.

While Brown was organizing the letter, two prominent economists who are close to Yellen—Alan Blinder, the Princeton economist and a former Fed governor, and Joseph Stiglitz, a former head of the Council of Economic Advisers who taught Yellen at Yale and is now at Columbia—campaigning ardently on her behalf. Yellen’s supporters spoke to prominent economists, including Republicans, and to Brown and other members of the banking committee. Stiglitz also wrote a *Times* Op-Ed piece saying why he thought Summers should not be Fed chair. Stiglitz told me, “Where was the soul of the Democratic Party? Was it about making the world safe for Goldman Sachs?”

Obama evidently was not willing or politically able to push through Summers’s nomination. Brad DeLong, a Berkeley economist and a leading member of what he called Team Larry, who posted pro-Summers material on his blog during this period (in a recent post, he called Summers “terrifyingly brilliant”), told me, “The people from the Administration should have gone around to the senators and said, ‘Those were our mistakes, not Larry’s.’ The senators were waiting for a call from the White House.

That task was never accomplished.” Meanwhile, Team Janet, undeterred by the insult implied by the assumption that she was Obama’s second choice, never rested, although Yellen was never visibly involved in its activities. (There is no evidence that Summers and Yellen ever disagreed personally; Yellen has respectfully cited him in her work.) As president of Harvard, Summers had made a famously impolitic remark about the small number of prominent women



in science, and women's groups made it known that they preferred Yellen. Back in the late nineteen-nineties, when the Kyoto Protocol on global warming was being formulated, both Summers and Yellen clashed with Al Gore over how strict a position on limiting carbon emissions the United States should take; somehow, as often happens with Summers, his arguments became known, but Yellen's did not. She loyally testified in favor of the Administration's position. Last year, environmentalists weighed in on her behalf. In September, Summers announced he was withdrawing his candidacy. In October, Obama nominated Yellen as chair of the Federal Reserve Board.

Yellen spent much of last fall making the rounds of Senate offices. In January, she was confirmed, by a vote of fifty-six to twenty-six. David Vitter and Richard Shelby voted no. Bob Corker, who voted against her appointment as vice-chair in 2010, voted yes—after Yellen went to his office for two long private meetings, which left him persuaded that she was planning to stick to Bernanke's announced plan to wind down the Fed's program of unusual multibillion-dollar asset purchases to stimulate the economy. In 2010, thirty senators, mainly Republicans, voted against Bernanke's reappointment as chair—the most votes against a

chair's nomination in the history of the Fed. Yellen got almost as many negative votes, all from Republicans.

It isn't only Congress that Yellen has to keep calm. The Fed's key policy-making body is the twelve-member Federal Open Markets Committee, made up of the Fed governors and the presidents of five of the twelve Fed banks, which meets eight times a year to set monetary policy. The F.O.M.C. contains a range of hawks and doves, but to promote serenity in the markets they strive for unanimous, or nearly unanimous, votes at their meetings. When Greenspan was chair, he offered a pronouncement at each meeting about where he thought the economy was going. The other members of the F.O.M.C. were encouraged to see him privately if they disagreed with him about something. Yellen, who doesn't have Greenspan's lordly confidence and tends to overprepare for everything (when she flies, she likes to be the first person at the departure gate), held an F.O.M.C. video-conference three weeks before the first meeting she chaired, to make sure that she knew what everyone thought. She opened the meeting, in March, by asking each of the other members to speak in turn, about the state of the economy and about what they thought the Fed should do next. Then she went around the room

summarizing what each person had said, demonstrating that she had been listening. The F.O.M.C.'s vote on the pronouncement was eleven to one.

Because of the extraordinary expansion of the Fed's role since the crisis, the hawks have a lot more to squawk about now than inflation. They don't approve of the Fed's buying large quantities of financial assets and they don't think the too-big-to-fail problem has been solved. Richard Fisher, the president of the Dallas Fed and a political conservative, at least by East Coast standards, told me, "My concern is are we helping the middle-income groups or are we just helping the rich and the quick? The wealth effect of our policies has been highly concentrated. I'm a bit of a populist on this. We've seen job destruction in the middle two quartiles of the income distribution. That's the backbone of America!" But Yellen has spent time both with Fisher and with the Fed's other vocal hawk, Charles Plosser, the president of the Philadelphia Fed, and at the four F.O.M.C. meetings Yellen has chaired thus far they both voted in favor of the reassuring official statements.

Wall Street is another ornery constituency. Yellen is lucky, given the markets' suspicion of someone who is as concerned as she is with unemployment, to have assumed her job at a time when inflation was extremely low. At a press conference after her first F.O.M.C. meeting, someone asked when the Fed might begin to raise interest rates to forestall inflation. She responded, "Around six months," and the Dow Jones average fell by about two hundred points. Historically, Fed-watching traders have been concerned that stimulating the economy will set off inflation, but these days they are so wary of another downturn that an offhand, arguably hawkish remark like Yellen's unnerves them.

Eventually, Yellen will have to make a special effort to show that worries about inflation keep her up at night. In early June, a prominent Republican economist, Martin Feldstein, sent up a warning flare, writing in an op-ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal* that he thinks the Fed is underestimating the risk of inflation. There is an old Fed saying: "Only hawks go to central-bank heaven." Yellen hasn't had to demonstrate that she understands that



Hafeez.

"Why Waldo?"

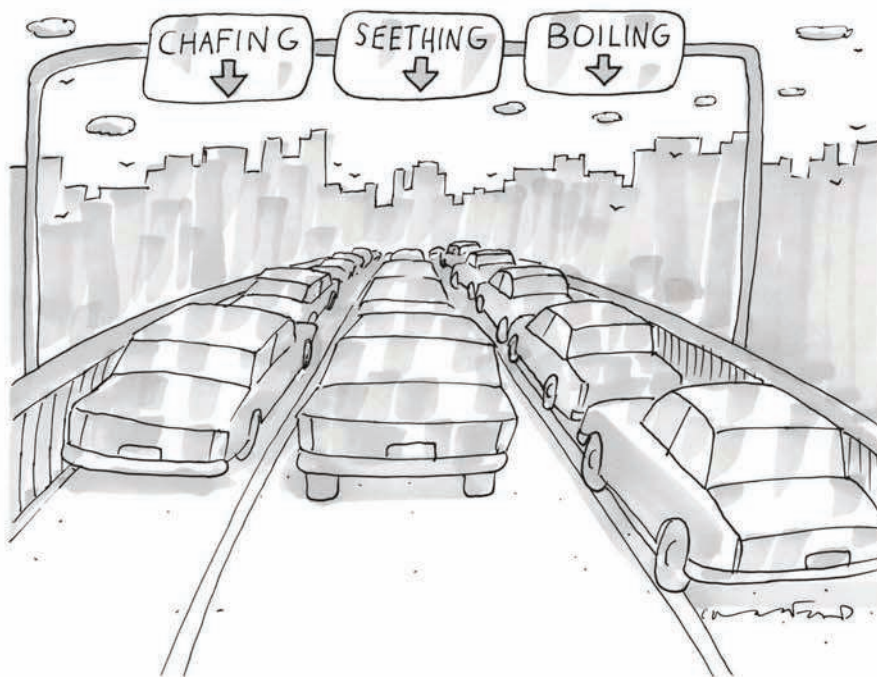
the saying applies to her, but it's likely that eventually she will feel pressure to do so.

Yellen thinks of herself as more than just an academic economist who has mastered the data. She likes to talk to people and dig into the details of specific situations. The region covered by the San Francisco Fed includes Las Vegas and Phoenix, which in 2008 and 2009 were among the hardest-hit places in the country. She used to grill people she encountered, starting with the security guards at the Fed's building, about their personal experiences. Someone who worked for her in San Francisco told me that when the government was conducting an auction of a small failed bank, Yellen recalculated the bids, from a number of stronger banks, on a legal pad over a weekend.

In 2005 and 2006, she began to be concerned that there was a dangerous bubble in the housing markets. "I'm sorry that light bulbs didn't go off in my head a couple of years before they really did, but there was no question," she told me. "I was hearing stuff that was scary. And I wouldn't have seen it in the data." Her business contacts told her that people were trying to give them money to invest without asking questions about what they were going to do with it. The connection she failed to make, however, was between the housing bubble and a full-on economic disaster: "I absolutely did not see it as something that could take the financial system down."

During the first few weeks after she took office, somebody came up to Yellen in an airport and said, "You look just like Janet Yellen!" That comment represents a step in a progression that she is rapidly making, between being unrecognized and being unmistakable. Her ability to move in the real world, and to use the information she collects to hone her economic instincts, is rapidly narrowing. She told me, regretfully, that she doesn't feel she can meet regularly anymore with people in business and finance who make a living predicting what the Fed will do, because she can't control what they might report about the conversation.

The more constrained Yellen's world becomes, the more her instinct will be to return to the distilled essence of her-



self, the unrepentant Keynesian; the pressure to demonstrate hawkish capabilities comes from without, and the Keynesian inclinations from within. "You can't think about what is happening in the economy constructively, from a policy standpoint, unless you have some theoretical paradigm in mind," she told me. Alan Blinder told me that, in the mid-nineteen-nineties, when he and Yellen were both Fed governors and felt they might have momentarily pushed Greenspan into a more dovish position, one of them said to the other, "I think we might have just saved five hundred thousand jobs." He went on, "We felt pretty good about that.... Now she can raise her sights—one million jobs. Two million."

Yellen doubtless will keep stimulating the weak economy. "Imagine I've got my hands on your shoulders and I'm pushing you," she said. She held out her palms and gave the air a firm shove, to indicate how forcefully the economy was holding people back. "In the aftermath of the financial crisis, I was pushing you so hard you couldn't get to where you wanted to go. You were dead in the water. And now I'm pushing you a little less hard, so you're able to make some forward movement"—because the economy today isn't quite so bad—"but I'm still pushing you. The headwinds are still there. And so even when the headwinds have

diminished to the point where the economy is finally back on track and it's where we want it to be, it's still going to require an unusually accommodative monetary policy."

This view isn't at all controversial among Keynesian economists. In recent months, Summers has written a series of op-ed pieces calling for government stimulus in much more aggressive terms than Yellen uses, as if to disprove those who believed that he'd have been more hawkish than Yellen. But, because the Fed's power has grown so significantly since the financial crisis, it can no longer simply embody a consensus among economists and go unnoticed. The Fed, not the Treasury or the White House or Congress, is now the primary economic policymaker in the United States, and therefore the world. Everybody is watching. During the next year, Yellen has to decide how quickly to wind down the asset purchases that began five years ago; when to begin notching interest rates higher to forestall inflation; and how aggressively to supervise the big financial institutions so as to prevent another wave of expensive and unpopular government bailouts if the markets go sour. And she has to maintain her very public commitment to improve the economy as ordinary people, rather than market players, experience it. Yellen is an economist. She has to become a politician. ♦

WRONG ANSWER

In an era of high-stakes testing, a struggling school made a shocking choice.

BY RACHEL AVIV

One afternoon in the spring of 2006, Damany Lewis, a math teacher at Parks Middle School, in Atlanta, unlocked the room where standardized tests were kept. It was the week before his students took the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test, which determined whether schools in Georgia had met federal standards of achievement. The tests were wrapped in cellophane and stacked in cardboard boxes. Lewis, a slim twenty-nine-year-old with dreadlocks, contemplated opening the test with scissors, but he thought his cut marks would be too obvious. Instead, he left the school, walked to the corner store, and bought a razor blade. When he returned, he slit open the cellophane and gently pulled a test book from its wrapping. Then he used a lighter to warm the razor, which he wedged under the adhesive sealing the booklet, and peeled back the tab.

He photocopied the math, reading, and language-arts sections—the subjects that would determine, under the No Child Left Behind guidelines, whether Parks would be classified as a “school in need of improvement” for the sixth year in a row. Unless fifty-eight per cent of students passed the math portion of the test and sixty-seven per cent passed in language arts, the state could shut down the school. Lewis put on gloves, to prevent oil from his hands from leaving a residue on the plastic, and then used his lighter to melt the edges of the cellophane together, so that it appeared as if the package had never been opened. He gave the reading and language-arts sections to two teachers he trusted and took the math section home.

Flipping through its pages, he felt proud of how much material he had covered that year. “Without even reading the question, I could tell you just by the shape of the graph, ‘Oh, my kids know that,’” he told me. He put the test

in his fireplace once he’d confirmed that he had taught the necessary concepts. But he worried that his students would struggle with questions that were delivered in paragraph form. Some of his seventh-grade students were still reading by sounding out the letters. It seemed unfair that the concepts were “buried in words.” Lewis felt that he had pushed them to work harder than they ever had in their lives. “I’m not going to let the state slap them in the face and say they’re failures,” he told me. “I’m going to do everything I can to prevent the why-try spirit.”

The principal of Parks, Christopher Waller, knew that he had seen the questions before the test. Waller told me that Lewis was a “star teacher,” a “very hard worker, who will go the extra mile.” When the math portion of the test had been completed, Lewis said that Waller asked him how his students had done. Since Lewis had looked at the questions, it no longer seemed like a big deal to review the answers. Lewis returned to the testing office and opened up the answer sheets of a few students in his class who got average grades. He looked for a hard question and, when he saw that they’d solved it, he moved on, assuming that they had done fine. Then he said that he “piddled” in the room, wasting time. When he felt that he had been in there long enough, he told Waller that it looked as if his students had done O.K. But Waller told him to check the answers of students who weren’t in his class. This time, when he looked, Lewis saw that some of the smartest students at Parks had the wrong answers.

At the end of the testing week, Lewis went back to the testing office with Crystal Draper, a language-arts teacher. For about an hour, they erased wrong answers and bubbled in the right ones. They exchanged no words. Lewis couldn’t even look at her. “I couldn’t be-

lieve what we’d been reduced to,” he said. He tried to stay focussed on the mechanics of the work: he took care to change, at most, one or two answers for every ten questions. “I had a minor in statistics, and it’s not that hard to figure out windows of probability,” he told me. Many students were on the cusp of passing, and he gave them a little nudge, so that they would pass by one or two points.

A month later, when the scores came back, Waller told the students to gather in the hallway outside the cafeteria, where there was a spread of ice cream, pizza, and hot wings. A teacher announced, “You did it! You finally made it!” For the first time since the passage of No Child Left Behind, Parks had met its annual goals: the percentage of eighth graders who passed rose thirty-one points in reading and sixty-two points in math. “Everyone was jumping up and down,” Neekisia Jackson, a student, said. “It was like our World Series, our Olympics.” She went on, “We had heard what everyone was saying: *Y’all aren’t good enough*. Now we could finally go to school with our heads held high.”

Parks Middle School is three miles south of downtown Atlanta, in Pittsburgh, a neighborhood bordered by a run-down trucking lot and railway tracks fallen into disuse. Founded after the Civil War, Pittsburgh was a black working-class area until the nineteen-sixties and seventies, when residents began leaving for the suburbs. Half the homes in the neighborhood are now vacant. Lewis’s students called the area Little Vietnam and Jack City, because of all the armed robberies. Once, when Lewis stopped at a convenience store to tell his students to go home and do their homework, a prostitute approached him. “I’m, like, ‘Whoa, whoa, I’m a teacher!’” he

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Christopher Waller, the principal of Parks, was lauded in Atlanta, and became a minor celebrity of the school-reform movement.

said. "And she's, like, 'I don't care. Teachers get down.'"

Lewis grew up in a violent neighborhood in East Oakland, California, in a house built by Habitat for Humanity. His father was a crack addict, and his mother supported four children by working as a bank teller; she later opened a safe house for ex-prostitutes. "She's a real underdog-lover," Lewis told me. On the weekends, she took Lewis to picnics hosted by the Black Panther Party. She worked so much that the neighbors helped raise Lewis: they often told him to wash his face or tuck in his shirt or put Vaseline on his chapped lips. His football coach became a father figure and encouraged Lewis to go to college in Atlanta so that he could have a "historical black experience."

Lewis received a scholarship to attend Clark Atlanta University, which is less than three miles from Parks. He was homeless for several months and got arrested for possessing marijuana, but he still earned good grades. He was a "lightweight nerd," as he put it. When he graduated with degrees in math and philosophy, his mother urged him to try teaching, since he'd always had a talent for simplifying complex ideas. In 2000,

he started working at Parks and was immediately moved by his students' despair. "Being born in the seventies, coming out of the civil-rights movement, amidst the Black Panther meetings in Oakland, I didn't have limitations," he told me. "I was raised in the generation that lost the shame of being black."

His students, who came to school with bad breath and parkas that smelled of urine, seemed to lack the conviction that they would ever leave the neighborhood. Parks was run by an older woman who was not inclined to innovate. Homework was a joke. There was litter in the hallways, and students urinated in trash cans. A veteran teacher told Lewis that only twenty per cent of his students would grasp what he was teaching, so he should go over each lesson five times. "Please—I'm a better teacher than that," he remembered thinking. "She was just making excuses for why she spiralled in circles."

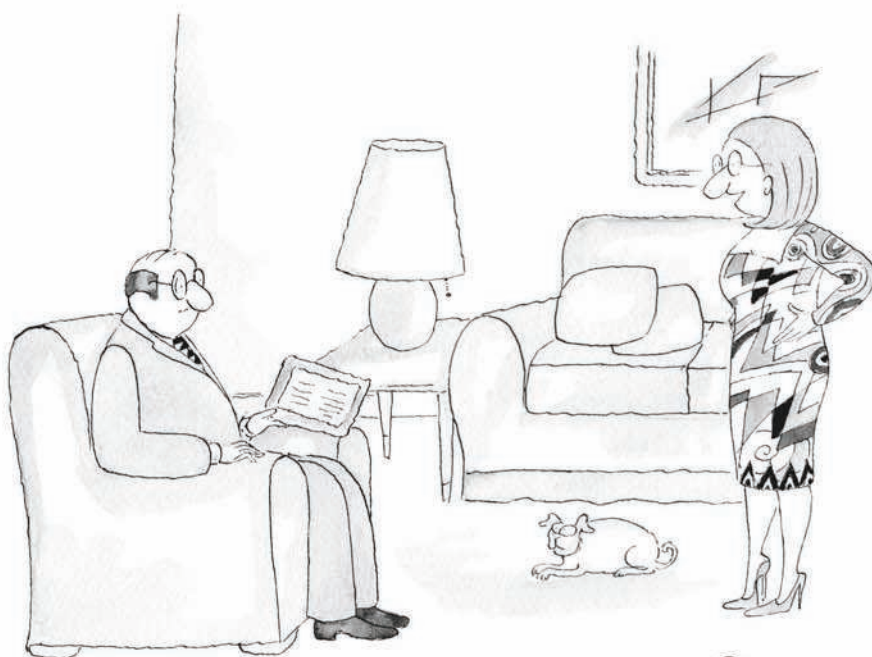
Atlanta's school superintendent, Beverly Hall, who was hired in 1999, quickly became aware of the problems at Parks. A neighborhood minister repeatedly called to complain about drug dealing in front of the school. Hall, who

was born in Jamaica, had spent her career in underperforming urban districts: she began as a teacher in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, in the seventies, and moved on to become a superintendent in Newark. At one of her first meetings in Atlanta, she said, someone "got up and was literally screaming, 'Just tell us what to do. We've got to do something about education in Atlanta.'" Three-quarters of the students in the district were living near or below the poverty line—ninety per cent were black or Latino—and fewer than forty per cent graduated from high school.

Hall belonged to a movement of reformers who believed that the values of the marketplace could resuscitate public education. She approached the job like a business executive: she courted philanthropists, set accountability measures, and created performance objectives that were more rigorous than those required by No Child Left Behind, which became law in 2002. When a school met its targets, all employees, including bus drivers and cafeteria staff, received up to two thousand dollars. She linked teacher evaluations to test scores and warned principals that they'd be fired if they didn't meet targets within three years. Eventually, ninety per cent were replaced. She repeated the mantra "No exceptions and no excuses."

In 2001, she hired a new principal for Parks, a former college-football player named Michael Sims, whom Lewis described as the "father I never had." Sims focussed nearly as much on building a sense of community as he did on academics: he renovated the school, hired guidance counsellors, and replaced the "P" that had fallen off the sign at Parks's entryway. He told students that they were representing their school even when they were off campus. If they got into a fight over the weekend, they would be suspended on Monday. The school provided computer classes to parents, who had been so removed from their children's academic lives that it was a struggle to get them to sign progress reports. "We had to trick the parents and give away this, that, and the third in order to get them into the building," Lewis said. "Some of them looked like they were on drugs—not fun drugs but ruin-your-life drugs."

Parks started to feel like a place where



Victoria Roberts

"Ever wake up and think, No, I did nothing to change the course of human history?"

both teachers and students, nearly all of them black, could expose their vulnerabilities. “All our little problems that we grew up hiding from the rest of the world—it became our line of communication,” Lewis said. He told students to dump their laundry into the back of his pickup truck, so that he could wash it for them, and encouraged them to sleep at his house when their mothers were absent or high. (Few had fathers in their lives.) He became the football coach, and if practice ran late he dropped students off at their homes. Several ended up calling him Dad. He told them, “I don’t know how you feel about me, but I, at least, feel like I made it. If you want to know if you can make it, look at me.” He married a language-arts teacher at Parks, who was similarly devoted to the students. “She was a great model of what an adult woman is supposed to act like, talk like,” Lewis said.

With the help of a college-prep program called Project Grad, which Beverly Hall implemented after securing millions of dollars from donors, Parks set up after-school programs and hired tutors. A 2004 documentary called “Expect the Best” explained that Parks, which had previously functioned like “day care,” had become a “model of what a good school can and should be.” The video shows Lewis on his porch, playing chess with a student who had moved in with him. The narrator of the video explains that the student, Antonio, was living with his math teacher “because his mother is in no shape to support or care for him. This arrangement, though temporary and unusual, has done a lot to stabilize Antonio’s life.”

The school steadily improved, but students’ test scores were never high enough for Parks to make “adequate yearly progress,” a measurement defined by No Child Left Behind, a nearly utopian statute that required all public-school students to become proficient in math and reading by 2014, as judged by their test scores. The reform model, which drew on an accountability system used in Texas in the nineties, ignored less quantifiable signs of intellectual development. Schools that didn’t progress at an appropriate pace were eligible for federally funded support. They also received



“What is the name of your first pet?”

• •

a series of escalating sanctions, including state monitoring, a revised curriculum, replacement of staff, and restructuring or closure of the school. LaShawn Hoffman, the head of the Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association, told me that when Parks opened, in 1966, it was a source of pride for the community, the neighborhood’s “jewel.” Now he worried about the burden of another large abandoned building in the neighborhood.

When Lewis showed up for the new school year in 2004, Parks’s principal was absent. Lewis knew that Sims would never miss the first day of school and assumed that he must have been in some sort of accident. Then a district administrator called a meeting and explained that Sims would not be returning; he had resigned after being accused of sexual misconduct in a previous job.

After a few months, Christopher Waller, a Methodist pastor who had worked in public schools for nine years, became the new leader of Parks. Waller was burly and freckled, and, at thirty-one, he was the youngest principal in the district. After a week of introductory

meetings, he saw that the district prioritized testing results more than any other place he’d ever worked did. “All decisions have to be made by data—you have to be baptized in it,” he told me. “I lived it, slept it, ate it.”

He held a meeting with the faculty and explained that teachers needed to use data to drive every aspect of instruction. Lewis raised his hand and said, “I need to be excused from this meeting.” He left the room. Another administrator followed him into the hallway and tried to appease him, but he told her, “You all come in here trying to change every goddam thing we’ve been doing for years. We’ve been making step-by-step progress, and it’s working.”

The next day, Lewis said that Waller asked him to come to his office. “I hear you’re the man around here,” he told Lewis. At that point, Lewis was the football, soccer, and softball coach, the athletic director, and the founder of the chess club. As they talked, Lewis found himself impressed by Waller’s intellect and social awareness. When Waller asked him what changes he should make, Lewis told him to bide his time. “It’s like if you get a new



"Run, everybody—run for your life! It's them—it's the Koch brothers!"

stepmom in the house," he said. "If she immediately comes in and changes everything, she'll be hated forever."

Every fall, the district held a convocation ceremony, which was usually in the Georgia Dome, where the Atlanta Falcons play. Schools that met their performance targets were seated on the field, while schools that fell short were relegated to the bleachers. Teachers spoke nervously all year about whether they would "make the floor." At Waller's first convocation, in 2005, he was humiliated by his seat in the bleachers. "It's almost like having leprosy in the Bible," he told me. "No one wants to associate with failure."

Waller quickly learned that principals in the district insured loyalty by working with teachers whom they had personally selected. At one of his first meetings with Beverly Hall, Waller said that he was willing to work with the school's current teachers. Hall laughed and told him, "You will need your own team." Waller began encouraging veteran teachers to retire early. Lewis soon

found himself one of the most senior teachers at Parks. He worried that the new faculty were being deprived of the "ethical guidance that comes from listening to older teachers."

Under Hall, four sub-superintendents oversaw different regions within the district, making sure that schools advanced toward their targets. After Waller had been at the school for a year, he received a stern memo, titled "Mid-year Review," from Michael Pitts, the sub-superintendent who was responsible for Parks. "Please understand that no excuse can or will be accepted for any results that are less than 70% of school-based target acquisition," Pitts wrote.

Waller told Pitts that the targets—set by the district's Department of Research, Planning, and Accountability—were unrealistic. It took a quarter of the year just to gain students' trust. Two students, he said, were raped in the neighborhood that year. Others lived alone, with neither parent at home, or were on the verge of being placed in juvenile detention. When a student was arrested for stealing cars, Waller went to court

and asked the judge not to send him to jail. Waller told me, "The administration wanted to move kids out of poverty—I do believe that. But test scores could not be the only means." When Waller expressed his concerns, Pitts reiterated that Hall accepted no excuses, and told him, "The way principals keep their jobs in Atlanta is they make targets."

Waller struggled to understand his students' success in elementary school. They had passed the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test in fifth grade, and yet when they arrived at Parks they were reading at a first-grade level. "The students and the data aren't matching," he told Pitts. "They've got to be cheating at the elementary schools. There's no way those scores are real." One day, when he and Pitts were walking through Parks, Waller pointed out a disruptive sixth grader who had excelled on the test the year before, even though his academic skills were dismal. He recalled that Pitts laughed and said, "Sometimes children just test well." Then Pitts told him, "You need to keep your mouth shut." He urged Waller to "forge stronger relationships" with the principals at the elementary schools, which Waller interpreted as a message to learn how they'd artificially boosted their scores.

Waller concluded that the school couldn't meet its targets that year. More than half of the students were performing below grade level. The reading coordinator, Sandra Ward, told Waller that she had heard about an elementary school where teachers changed students' answers under the pretense of erasing stray pencil marks. According to Waller and Ward, the vice-principal, Gregory Reid, informed them that he knew of another school where teachers were obtaining test questions in advance. (Reid has denied this.) Waller decided to adopt both strategies by recruiting a "team" of teachers who could be trusted. He told himself, "We're helping them. They'll catch up by eighth grade."

The first teacher he approached was Lewis, who was resistant. Lewis told him, "Fuck the test. Our students are doing hot. We know they are learning." But after several months, Lewis said, Waller "chewed away at me." Waller reminded him that Parks was a "sanctuary," a "safe haven" for the community. If the school

didn't meet its targets, Waller explained, the students would be separated and sent to different schools, outside Pittsburgh. Lewis said he felt that "it was my sole obligation to never let that happen."

In 2006, Tameka Grant, a sixth-grade teacher at Parks, sent a letter to Beverly Hall. She wrote that Waller was attempting to persuade teachers to cheat by describing how the teachers at elementary schools did it. "If you can't beat them, join them," she heard him say. She also noted that he often asked teachers how many of their students would pass the test, and when they equivocated he said, "Are you a team player? Are you on my team?"

The president of the Atlanta Federation of Teachers sent a letter to the district's central office, reporting that "Mr. Waller frequently intimidates the staff by telling them that the school will either be closing, or will be taken over." The letter described an "us/them mentality among staff where Mr. Waller works with new staff and not old and is trying to divide and conquer the seasoned staff." Lewis and other favored teachers were part of what became known as "Waller's circle." Some had their own reserved parking spaces.

After learning of the complaints, Pitts, the sub-superintendent, attended a faculty meeting at Parks. Teachers remember him saying, "Stop writing letters about Waller, because he is not going anywhere. There is nothing you can do to make us think negatively of Principal Waller." Lewis said he admired Tameka Grant for writing the letter, and he found it confusing that Pitts seemed to view her complaints as a low form of snitching. "I was, like, Damn, I thought that was kind of our obligation," he said.

At the request of the district's Office of Internal Resolution, a private investigator, Reginal Dukes, looked into the reported problems and, in March of 2006, concluded that teachers at Parks had cheated on the Georgia Middle Grades Writing Assessment, leaking the essay prompt to students. Dukes presented his preliminary findings to Hall at a lunch meeting with her senior staff and was shocked by her apparent lack of interest. "I expected her to take definite

action," he told me. Instead, he was informed that he couldn't hire any additional investigators. Hall asked few questions. The only one he remembered was "Is there any more evidence?" "That question floored me," Dukes said. "I'd just gone through this litany of violations."

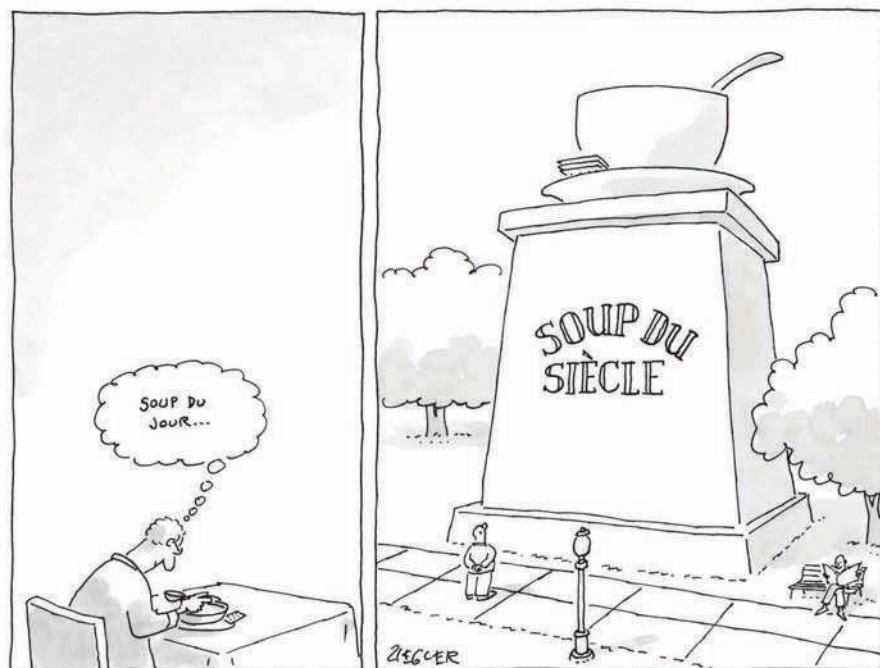
Waller was never reprimanded, and he said he never heard anything about the outcome of the investigation. The next year, Tameka Grant was transferred against her will to Long Middle School, known at the time as one of the most dangerous schools in the district.

In 2007, Parks had to score even higher to surpass its falsely achieved scores from the previous year. According to statements later made by teachers and administrators (obtained through Georgia's open-records act), the cheating process began to take the form of a routine. During testing week, after students had completed the day's section, Waller distracted the testing coordinator, Alfred Kiel, by taking him out for leisurely lunches in downtown Atlanta. On their way, Waller called the reading coordinator to let her know that it was safe to enter Kiel's office. She then paged up to six teachers and told them to report to the room. While their students were at recess, the teachers erased wrong answers and filled in the right ones. Lewis took photographs of the office with his cell

phone so that he could make sure he left every object, even the pencils on Kiel's desk, exactly as he'd found them.

Lewis dreaded the process. It felt to him like "a bad date where you've had too much to drink." He woke up the morning after erasing answers and thought, I shouldn't have gone that far. He worried that, because of the cheating, students wouldn't develop "the feeling you get when you take a test and know whether you did all right or whether you knocked that shit out of the park," he said. He also felt guilty that other teachers were deprived of feedback. Lewis never told his wife that other teachers were correcting her students' answers. One year, she got the highest scores in the building. Lewis said, "I wasn't going to burst her bubble. I was, like, 'Good job. Keep going strong.'"

At happy-hour drinks, he and other teachers complained that the legislators who wrote No Child Left Behind must never have been near a school like Parks. He felt as if he and his colleagues were part of a nationwide "biological experiment" in which the variables—the fact that so many children were hungry and transient, and witnessing violence—hadn't been controlled. David Berliner, the former dean of the school of education at Arizona State University, told me that, with the passage of the law, teachers were asked to compensate for factors outside their control. He said, "The people who say poverty is no excuse for low



performance are now using teacher accountability as an excuse for doing nothing about poverty.”

Hall’s targets required that the number of students who met standards rise by nearly three per cent annually; in addition, a group of students had to “exceed” standards each year. Later, when asked by a state investigator how she had arrived at those figures, she acknowledged that there were no studies supporting that rate of improvement. According to Waller, the district became increasingly “corporate,” with every school focussed on the “bottom line.” He wrote teachers’ targets in marker on the floor of the entryway to their classrooms, in view of the students. He instructed the teachers, “I need those numbers,” and, “You need to teach to the test. Do what you’ve got to do.”

A 2007 report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, titled “Beating the Odds at Atlanta’s Parks Middle School,” attributed its unlikely progress, in part, to its “relentless focus on data.” The report noted that Waller kept an index card in his pocket listing all the school’s achievements, which he read aloud to parents and students. “Even the kids know their data,” Waller said. Kiel, the testing coordinator, told the foundation that data is a “passion, it’s a love, because it tells the truth: it’s not what I think—and what I feel, and what ought to be, and how I perceive it—but how it actually *is*.”

Lewis was initially enthusiastic about judging teaching by what appeared to be an objective metric. Since college, he had found himself devising mathematical equations to make sense of events in his own life. He was no longer as disappointed when his father, who was in and out of rehab, didn’t return his calls, because he saw the situation in terms of mathematical probability: if he assigned a zero to every day that his father hadn’t called and a one to every day that he had and added all the digits and divided them by three hundred and sixty-five, he saw that the probability that his father would call on any given day was about zero. His calculations “gave me back my sense of control,” he said.

But Lewis began to worry that mathematics had assumed an unhealthy role in the district. “Data” and “accountability” had become almost magic words: if ad-

ministrators repeated them enough, it seemed they believed that scores should rise, even if there hadn’t been significant enhancements in instruction. Lewis welcomed the district’s new emphasis on reading—teachers got specialized training and taught reading more intensively—but many of the other reforms were oriented around deadlines and time frames. Lewis said, “We had two weeks to teach percentages, and if you’re still on percentages at week three, because your kids don’t get it yet, they’ll say, ‘You don’t teach well enough!’ Well, come, now, we are dealing with human brains.” He continued, “I sincerely believe that demographics does not determine destiny. But you have to be patient.”

Lewis felt pressure not only to make testing targets but to meet more ambitious attendance goals. After two years of improvement, teachers began taking attendance later in the day so that students had more time to get to school. Eventually, Lewis recalled, the teachers ceased marking absences altogether. In a letter of complaint, the school secretary, who refused to delete absences from the records, informed the district’s central office that her attendance duties had been taken away and “given to someone whom my principal calls a team player.” “I am lying low because I feel my job is on the line,” she wrote. “I am so overwhelmed by what I’m seeing.”

Waller said that he had never experienced so much pressure in his life. Although administrators throughout the district knew that there was cheating, he said that “nobody wanted to talk about it.” “We’d been cultivated in so many untruths throughout the years,” he told me. In 2008, he decided to resign, but Hall worked with the Casey Foundation to give him an “incentive award grant” of fifteen thousand dollars. He agreed to stay, believing that soon he would have the strength to tell the district that its targets couldn’t continue to rise.

By 2008, there were nine teachers on Waller’s team, and cheating had become a “well-oiled machine,” as he put it. A principal at an elementary school in southeast Atlanta e-mailed Waller charts detailing the number of questions stu-

dents in each grade needed to answer correctly in order to get a passing score—information that the state’s Department of Education does not publish. The teachers now changed answers in the chorus room, because they didn’t want to raise the suspicions of the testing coordinator, who noticed that someone had been in his office and had changed the lock. (A day later, Lewis found a copy of the new key in his school mailbox.) The room was so crowded that two teachers placed test booklets in a cooler and took them to another room. “It went from a two-man show to out of control,” Lewis said. A sixth-grade teacher, who asked that his name not be used, told me that he got involved only because he respected Lewis, whom he described as the “alpha male of the building” and a “humanitarian.” “I don’t think Waller could have run the school without him,” he said. “It’s kind of like every king has to have a general, and the general gets his hands way dirtier than the king does.”

When teachers panicked about what they’d done, Lewis reminded them that the school had already gone through three principals in five years. “Calm down,” he told them. “Waller’s going to be gone in a minute. Let’s just survive until he’s gone.” He tried not to reflect on the cheating process at all. “Cheating was just something we did in April, when the tests were in the building,” he said.

In the spring of 2008, Parks’s scores were almost as high as those of a middle school in Inman Park, a gentrified neighborhood with yoga studios, bike paths, and million-dollar houses. Waller thought the results seemed obviously false, and he called his supervisor, Michael Pitts, to warn him. Pitts gave Waller the cell-phone number for Lester McKee, the executive director of the district’s Department of Research, Planning, and Accountability. When Waller explained that Parks’s results were unusually high, he said that McKee responded, “Shit happens, and sometimes when it happens it’s not always bad. Let’s see if anyone else says something.” The district took no action to investigate the improbable scores. (McKee, who could not be reached for comment, was not charged with any wrongdoing.)

Morris Johnson, the president of the parent-teacher association at Parks in 2009, told me that he never “questioned



those test scores—not for one minute.” He was in the school nearly every day, and he saw administrators and teachers giving “a hundred per cent plus” and instilling in students a “winning attitude.” Both the football and the basketball teams were nearly undefeated. Using money from fund-raisers and donations, students took field trips to Washington, D.C., New Orleans, and New York. “I was so impressed,” Johnson said. “Mr. Waller wanted to expose these kids to other parts of life. They were finally escaping their Zip Code.”

Waller was lauded by the district, and became a minor celebrity of the reform movement. Hall invited him to attend the Harvard Leadership Conference with her, and she arranged a “Tour of Georgia” bus ride for civic leaders which made a stop at Parks, where Hall gave a speech. Once, at a meeting, when the principal of a middle school said that the targets were out of his students’ reach, Hall responded, “You have to make your targets,” and then pointed to a chart with data from Parks, explaining, “Parks did it.” Waller thought it would have been “evident even to a blind man that the scores were not legitimate.”

Parks attracted so many visitors who were eager to understand the school’s turnaround that teachers had to come up with ways to explain it. At Waller’s direction, they began maintaining what they called “standard-based mastery folders,” an index of all the objectives that each student needed to grasp in order to comprehend a given lesson. Lewis, who was taking night classes at the School of Education at Clark Atlanta University, wrote his master’s thesis on the technique. “It was a wonderful system,” he said. “But we only put it in place to hide the fact that we were cheating.”

Lewis took pride in the attention that Parks was receiving, and he liked the fact that his students had developed egos about their education. A few tattooed the number of the school zone on their arms. The only time an accolade made him uncomfortable was when Parks won a 2009 Dispelling the Myth Award. He and other teachers were sent to Arlington, Virginia, for a ceremony in the ballroom of a Marriott hotel. Arne Duncan, the Secretary of Education, gave the keynote speech. “I swear to God, I need to write that man, Duncan,



“I can’t. I’m under penthouse arrest.”

a letter of apology,” Lewis told me. “I stood in his court and acted like I was doing something I wasn’t. He held us at the tip-top of education.”

On September 8, 2009, the Atlanta city council declared that the date should be known as Dr. Beverly L. Hall Day. Hall had just been named Superintendent of the Year by the American Association of School Administrators, and the city held a ceremony to honor her for making the district one of the highest-performing urban school systems in the nation. Under her leadership, the district had received more than forty million dollars from the G. E. Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. When she began as superintendent, fewer than fifty per cent of eighth graders met the state’s standards in language arts. By 2009, ninety per cent of eighth graders had passed the exam.

A month after the dedication, Heather Vogell and John Perry, of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, reported that there were statistically improbable testing gains at several schools in Atlanta. Hall’s deputy superintendent told the paper, “I don’t have any reason to look at that.” The paper’s reporting prompted the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement to conduct its own analysis of testing improprieties, not only in Atlanta but throughout the state. In early 2010, the office found that one in five schools exhibited an abnormal pattern of erasure marks, in which a wrong answer had been corrected. At Parks and at one of its feeder schools, there were suspicious erasure marks on tests from more than seventy-five per cent of the classrooms.

At the instruction of the governor, Sonny Perdue, Atlanta’s Board of Education formed a panel to investigate the erasures. Although the investigation was



"They're expelling Drew from camp for hiding his face from the security cameras."

supposed to be independent, it was run by civic leaders who had invested in the district and touted its success, and Hall's administrators sat in on interviews. The panel concluded that there had been no coordinated effort to manipulate test scores, a finding that Perdue called "woefully inadequate." He decided that Atlanta was incapable of investigating itself. In August, 2010, he issued an executive order that granted authority to the former state attorney general, along with a prosecutor and a special investigator, to conduct a more thorough investigation.

There have been accounts of widespread cheating in dozens of cities, including Philadelphia, Toledo, El Paso, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Houston, and St. Louis. According to a 2013 report by the Government Accountability Office, forty states detected instances of cheating by educators in the previous two years. But Atlanta is one of the few districts in which educators have been subpoenaed. "It's hard to find anyone in the system who wants to look

under the rock and see what's there," Jennifer Jennings, a sociology professor at N.Y.U. who studies standardized tests, said. She noted that even in Texas, whose reform model inspired No Child Left Behind, scholars doubted whether students had progressed as rapidly as the data suggested—administrators exempted low-performing students from taking the test and underreported dropouts. Jennings worries that one consequence of cheating and other forms of gaming the system is that it interferes with the "policy-feedback loop," the conclusions we draw about student learning and the narratives we tell about reform. Given what happened in Texas, she said, the cheating in Atlanta "should have been very easy to anticipate."

In October, 2010, fifty agents with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation visited Parks and other Atlanta schools. They ate in school cafeterias, handed out their business cards, and befriended teachers in the doorways of their class-

rooms. As soon as Lewis learned of the investigation, he was ready to confess. Occasionally, in the middle of teaching a lesson, he had to step outside the classroom and lean silently against the wall, closing his eyes. He and his wife had separated—they shared custody of a young daughter—and he found himself lying in bed, startled awake by nightmares. In one, he heard a knock at his door, and when he opened it one of his former students shot him.

His first meeting with investigators was in Waller's office. He wondered if Waller was clever enough to bug the room and told the agents, "I'd feel a lot more comfortable at your office." A few weeks later, he and several other teachers met at the downtown law office of Balch & Bingham, which was assisting with the investigation. The agents told the teachers that anyone who cooperated would be granted immunity from criminal prosecution. A social-studies teacher asked, "Can we all huddle for a minute?" When the agents left the room, Lewis told everyone, "The jig is up. I'm not letting this shit drive me crazy." He urged his colleagues to blame the cheating on him, but they refused.

They all decided to tell the truth. Righton Johnson, a lawyer with Balch & Bingham who sat in on interviews, told me that it became clear that most teachers thought they were committing a victimless crime. "They didn't see the value in the test, so they didn't see that they were devaluing the kids by cheating," she said. Unlike recent cheating scandals at Harvard and at Stuyvesant High School, where privileged students were concerned with their own advancement, those who cheated at Parks were never convinced of the importance of the tests; they viewed the cheating as a door they had to pass through in order to focus on issues that seemed more relevant to their students' lives.

Waller initially refused to acknowledge to the agents that he'd cheated. He told himself that, since he hadn't physically handled the tests himself, he hadn't committed the act. Hoping to extract more information, the agents asked Latasha Smiley, a teacher who had already confessed, to surreptitiously record a meeting with Waller at a Panera Bread. Waller seemed flustered

and suspicious when he spoke with her. “It’s messy—it’s messy,” he said. “We’ve worked too hard . . . all kids can learn. . . . I don’t have—a lot of people kick a dog when they down.” When Smiley, who had transferred to a different school, told Waller that she missed Parks, he responded, “That school is going to hell.”

After more than two thousand interviews, the investigators concluded that forty-four schools had cheated and that a “culture of fear, intimidation and retaliation has infested the district, allowing cheating—at all levels—to go unchecked for years.” They wrote that data had been “used as an abusive and cruel weapon to embarrass and punish.” Several teachers had been told that they had a choice: either make targets or be placed on a Performance Development Plan, which was often a precursor to termination. At one elementary school, during a faculty meeting, a principal forced a teacher whose students had tested poorly to crawl under the table.

The investigators’ report didn’t conclude that Hall had directed anyone to cheat, but it did recount a number of episodes in which she ignored or minimized evidence that scores had been falsely achieved. In one instance, her staff had ordered an administrator to shred a draft of a report that described cheating at an elementary school. But in an eight-hour interview with investigators Hall insisted that there was no reason to doubt students’ scores, because other metrics showed the same trajectory. During her tenure, the graduation rate in Atlanta rose by thirty percentage points. On the National Assessment of Educational Progress test, which is less susceptible to tampering, Atlanta’s reading scores rose more rapidly than those of the other nine cities where students took the test. (Critics have suggested that the gains may be partly the result of a demographic shift, but it appears that there was also authentic improvement.)

To explain the improvement in scores, Hall told the investigators that “an effective teacher three years in a row will completely close the gap between a child born in poverty and a child born to a middle-income family.” This the-

ory, in its earliest form, derives from a study by William L. Sanders, a statistician formerly at the University of Tennessee, but the findings, which have contributed to a nationwide effort to rate teachers rigorously, have been overstated to the point of becoming a myth. According to a recent statement by the American Statistical Association, most studies show that teachers account for between one and fourteen per cent of variability in test scores.

John Ewing, who served as the executive director of the American Mathematical Society for fifteen years, told me that he is perplexed by educators’ “infatuation with data,” their faith that it is more authoritative than using their own judgment. He explains the problem in terms of Campbell’s law, a principle that describes the risks of using a single indicator to measure complex social phenomena: the greater the value placed on a quantitative measure, like test scores, the more likely it is that the people using it and the process it measures will be corrupted. “The end goal of education isn’t to get students to answer the right number of questions,” he said. “The goal is to have curious and creative students who can function in life.” In a 2011 paper in *Notices of the American Mathematical Society*, he warned that policymakers were using mathematics

“to intimidate—to preempt debate about the goals of education and measures of success.”

In July, 2011, the district placed a hundred and ten teachers who had either confessed to having cheated or been accused of it on administrative leave. Lewis received a letter that read, “Your actions and inactions brought embarrassment, suspicion, scorn, and disrepute upon APS”—Atlanta Public Schools. The district intended to fire him unless he could prove at a hearing that he was innocent of the charges. His colleagues at Parks got similar letters and wanted to resign, but Lewis felt that they should express their devotion to Parks by “standing arm in arm before the firing squad.”

A woman from Oakland who had dated Lewis on and off since middle school saw his name in the news and called him, and said, “Tell me you didn’t cheat. You were the smartest guy I knew. Tell me that guy didn’t change.” He invited her to Atlanta so that he could explain himself in person. In the fall of 2011, they were married. Lewis was comforted by the fact that “she knew me as a child and could hold me to the character that my mom instilled in me.” To his mother, his decision to cheat was an act of civil disobedience. She told him that as soon as she heard about



“How’s the eggplant Parmesan in this place?”

cheating in Atlanta she thought, “I bet my son was part of that.”

His termination hearing was held in March, 2012, at the district’s headquarters. It was the first hearing to arise from the cheating investigation; many of the other teachers in the district who had been implicated resigned. Three former educators, appointed by the school board, served as the jury. Lewis wore a gray striped button-up shirt, untucked, and sat with his chin resting on his hand, looking down. He waived his right to an attorney, thinking, he said, “I did this shit—I brought it onto myself—and I’m going to take it in the face.” When the hearing officer asked him to give an opening statement, he said, “I think the

evidence will prove that there was a systemic problem in the Atlanta public schools. That’s my statement.” An agent from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation served as a witness for the district, and, after detailing Lewis’s wrongdoing, explained that he “seemed to be well liked by the school and the teachers that were there. They kind of looked up to him.”

When Lewis was questioned by the district’s lawyer, he repeatedly invoked the Fifth Amendment, taking care not to incriminate anyone else. He didn’t speak at length until his closing statement, at which point he stood up and began reading, through tears, from a long speech that he had written about his eleven years at Parks. He described how Parks had

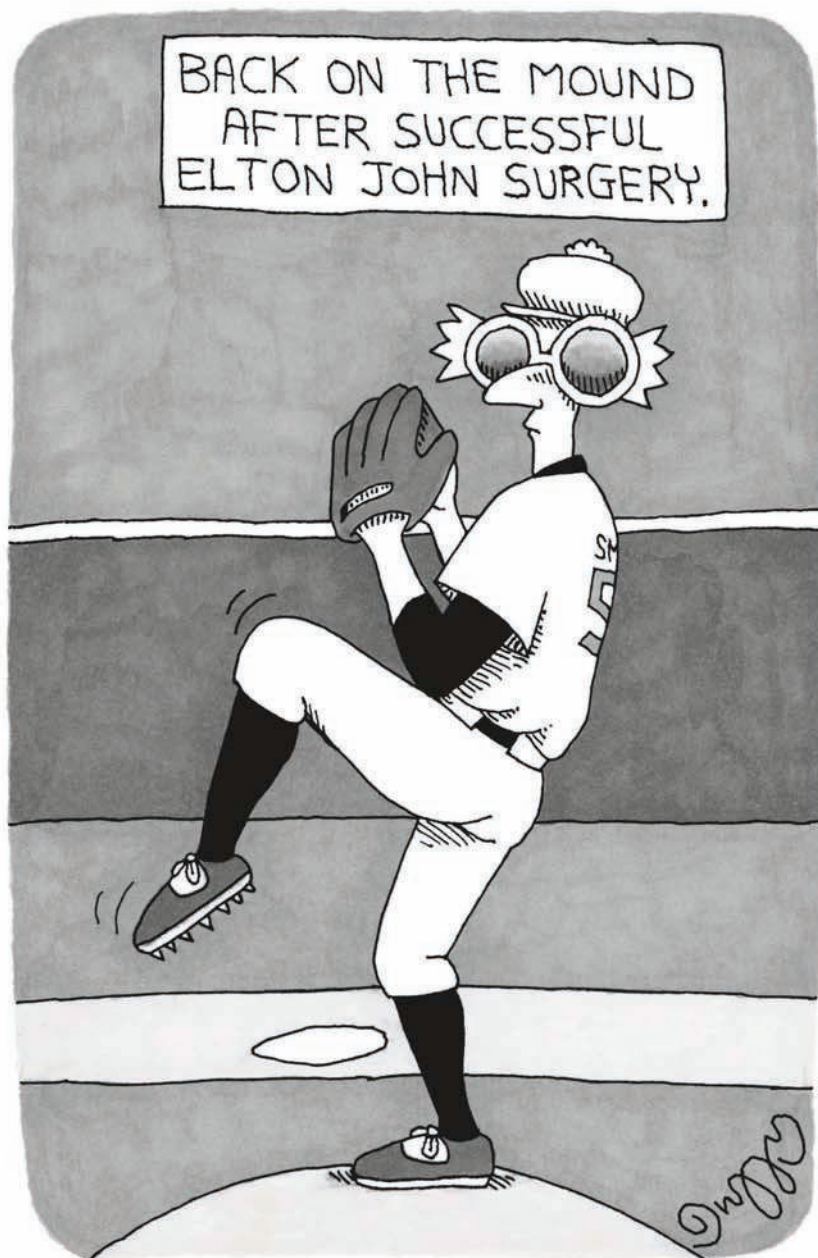
made incremental progress each year, but its test scores “cast a cloud of doubt over whether Parks Middle School even deserved to exist at all.” Soon, data became the “underlying force behind everything we did.” He described the resilience of the students, who were “down but never out, losing but never lost.” He told the panel, “You may wonder why I haven’t resigned. It’s because the morality that resides within me are the same morals I taught my students for years; that is, whenever you are persecuted or face challenges or circumstances rise against you, you must see things through to the end.”

Of a hundred and seventy-eight educators named in the cheating investigation, Lewis was the first to be fired. “I felt like someone had hit me with the butt end of an axe,” he said. He shaved off his dreadlocks, which, in Rastafarian tradition—a culture with which he sporadically associated—signalled the loss of a child. What troubled him most, he said, was that “I was fired for doing something that I didn’t even believe in.”

He applied for jobs at charter and alternative schools, community centers, and jails, but he didn’t get any of them. “Education let me go,” he finally concluded. He broadened his search, applying for positions that required manual labor. In interviews, he promised employers that he had the “persistence and tough skin of a middle-school teacher to bring to the workforce.” He applied for a job installing cable, and, after getting a nearly perfect score on the applicant test, he daydreamed about how he would use his teaching skills to help employees streamline the process. But a few days later the company told him that he didn’t have enough experience.

His house was foreclosed on and his car was repossessed. Old friends came to him with alternative methods of earning money. “They had some of the most illegal propositions,” he said. “They were, like, ‘Man, remember when we used to take that trip to St. Louis? Don’t you want to take over that run?’” He supported his wife, their newborn son, and his daughter from his previous marriage by working as an auto mechanic.

At first, he was glad to see the district attorney bring charges against Christopher Waller, Beverly Hall, and



thirty-three administrators and teachers, but he became troubled by the portrayal of their crimes as mercenary. On April 2, 2013, on the evening news, he watched his colleagues, nearly all of them black, report to the Fulton County Jail in an event that was described in the media as a “perp walk.” They were charged under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations statute—used to apprehend criminal organizations like the Mafia—and accused of conspiring in order to receive the bonuses tied to high test scores. Hall, who earned more than five hundred thousand dollars in bonuses, faces up to forty-five years in prison.

More than half of the defendants, including Christopher Waller, pleaded guilty to lesser charges. Now the senior pastor at a church three miles from Parks, Waller agreed to serve five years of probation, pay forty thousand dollars in restitution, and testify as a witness for the prosecution. He told me that he was offended by the idea that he would cheat in order to get what amounted to five thousand dollars in bonuses. He and other teachers at Parks spent their own money to buy groceries, H.I.V. medications, furniture, and clothes for students and their mothers, and this continued even after he was fired. “It wasn’t because of the money—I can promise you that,” he said.

In lengthy plea statements, Waller and the other defendants provided a miniature history of the past twelve years in education policy, describing how No Child Left Behind, in conjunction with the district’s targets, created an atmosphere in which cheating came to seem like a reasonable option. One principal described a “toxic culture throughout APS where all that mattered was test scores, even if ill-gotten.” Another said that the district’s “primary focus . . . became meeting targets instead of focusing on the needs of the students.”

In statements sent to me through their respective lawyers, Hall and Michael Pitts both denied wrongdoing and said they were confident that a jury would find them innocent of the charges. Hall wrote, “I did not order, request, or condone cheating to meet targets nor did I have knowledge of cheating.” She explained that in setting targets she had “relied on

APS educators to behave with integrity.” She also said that, compared with the objectives set by No Child Left Behind, Atlanta’s targets were “decidedly more incremental in nature,” and the sanctions less “draconian.” (Many of her employees disagree; the district was unusual in that it required a certain percentage of students to exceed targets each year.)

Since the investigation, the stakes for testing in Georgia have escalated. Although the state is replacing the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test with a more comprehensive method of evaluation, this fall Georgia is implementing a new teacher-evaluation program that bases fifty per cent of a teacher’s assessment on test scores. The program, along with a merit-pay system, is required as a condition for receiving a four-hundred-million-dollar grant from President Obama’s Race to the Top program. Tim Callahan, the spokesman for the Professional Association of Georgia Educators, which represents eighty-four thousand teachers, told me, “The state is going down the same path as Atlanta, and we are not exactly enthused.” He said that many teachers have become so demoralized that they’re retiring early or transferring to private schools. He told me, “Our teachers’ best qualities—their sense of humor, their love for the subject, their excitement, their interest in students as individuals—are not being honored or valued, because those qualities aren’t measurable.”

This spring, Lewis was hired as a database developer at a mortgage company. He was thrilled by the job, to such a degree that his energy level was out of synch with that of his colleagues. When I met him at his home, a small ranch house in East Point, Georgia, he said that he found his co-workers surprisingly detached and unemotional. He often dreamed about his students. “I miss having a classroom full of Energizer bunnies,” he told me. In his dreams, Waller occasionally apologized or offered him a new job.

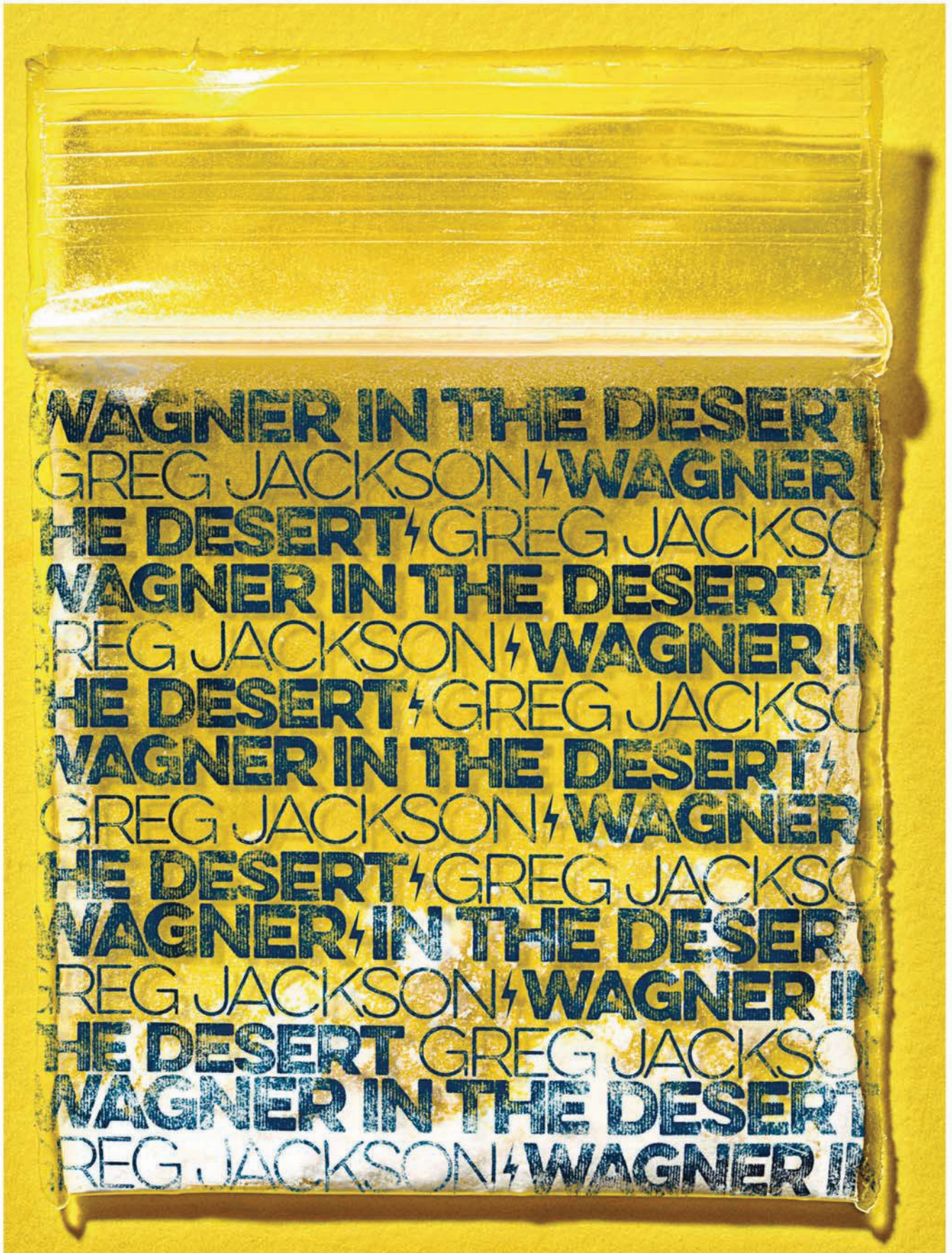
Lewis was looking forward to hearing Beverly Hall explain herself at the cheating trial, which is scheduled to begin in August. It had been delayed several

months, because Hall is undergoing treatment for cancer. She’s now bedridden and may not be able to attend her trial. For years, Lewis had assumed that Hall instructed people to cheat, but now he began to wonder if she’d been so idealistic that she didn’t understand the environment she had created and, when it became clear, didn’t want to undermine her cause—the idea that educational reform could swiftly lift children out of poverty—by acknowledging the evidence that was in front of her. Lewis said, “I know that sometimes when you’re in the fight, and you’re swinging, you want to win so badly that you don’t recognize where your blows land.”

Last year, Parks merged with Sylvan Hills Middle School, which Lewis called “our archival.” The students were still in the Parks building, which had been renamed, but in a year they would move into a renovated building outside Pittsburgh. No one in the community knew what would become of the vacated building. Lewis blamed himself for the fact that Parks had ceased to exist. According to the district, the school closed because of low enrollment, but Pittsburgh residents believed that it was because Parks’s reputation had been ruined. After the cheating investigation, and the departure of nine teachers and administrators, students’ scores dropped each year.

Lewis told me that in a week one of his most ambitious students, Neekisia Jackson, who graduated from Parks in 2006, would receive her diploma from Emory University. She had asked Lewis and two other former teachers from Parks to come to her graduation. Lewis found himself, almost against his will, plotting out Jackson’s future. She would go to law school, become a judge—no matter what kind of defendant was in her courtroom, she would be able to “empathetically go there”—and then become a model for kids in Pittsburgh, just as he’d been. For the past year, he’d been putting away a small percentage of his paycheck so that he could give Jackson some cash. “This is a real drop in the bucket for what life has in store for you,” he planned to tell her at graduation. “Just spread your wings—the wind is coming.” ♦





First we did molly, lay on the thick carpet touching it, ourselves, one another. We did edibles, bathed dumbly in the sun, took naps on suède couches. Later, we did blow off the keys to ecologically responsible cars. We powdered glass tables and bathroom fixtures. We ate mushrooms—ate and waited, ate and waited. Then we just ate, emptied the Ziplocs into our mouths like chip bags. We smoked cigarettes and joints, sucked on lozenges lacquered in hash oil. We tried one another's benzos and antivirals, Restoril, Avodart, YAZ, and Dexedrine, looking for contraindications. We ate well: cassoulets, steak *frites*, squid-ink risotto with porcini, spices from Andhra Pradesh, Kyoto, Antwerp. Of course we drank, too: pure agaves, rye whiskeys, St-Germain, old Scotch. We spent our hot December afternoons next to the custom saltwater pool or below the parasols of palm fronds, waiting, I suppose, to feel at peace, to baptize our minds in an enforced nullity, to return to a place from which we could begin again.

This was a few years ago in Palm Springs, at the end of a very forgettable year.

When I say that I was visiting old friends, friends from whom my life and my sense of life had diverged, I am not trying to set myself apart. Marta and Eli had lived in Los Angeles for a number of years—long enough, I suppose, that whatever logic connected immediate impulse to long-term goal to life plan to identity had slipped below conscious awareness and become simply a part of them. I was by no means innocent, either, of the slow supplanting drift by which the means to our most cherished and noble ends become the ends themselves—so that, for instance, writing something to change the world becomes writing something that matters to you becomes publishing something halfway decent becomes writing something publishable; or, to give another arbitrary example, finding everlasting love becomes finding somewhat lasting love becomes finding a reasonable mix of tolerance and lust becomes finding a sensible social teammate. And, of course, with each recalibration you think not that you are trading down or betraying your values but that you are becoming more *mature*. And maybe you are.

In any case I *was* writing a book, one

that I hoped would make my contemporaries see how petty and misguided their lives were, how worthwhile my sacrifices, how refreshing my repudiations, how heroic my stubbornness, etc.

Eli and Marta, for their part, were trying to have a baby. They would spend the ensuing year attempting to get pregnant, and eventually they would, and later this baby, and their second baby, would grant them some reprieve from the confusion we were all afflicted by in those years. But before they had their baby, during the week when this story takes place, they had decided to do every last thing that a baby precludes, every last irresponsible thing, so as, I guess, to be able to say, Yes, I have lived, I have done the things that mean you have lived, brushed shoulders with the lurid genie Dionysus, who counsels recklessness and abandon, decadence, self-destruction, and waste. The Baby Bucket List, they were calling it.

And I was game. Though I was not planning to have a child anytime soon, I thought we could all stand to chemically unfasten our fingers from their death grips on our careers and wardrobes and topiarian social lives and ne-plus-ultra vacations in tropical Asia. The words “we” and “our” are somewhat figurative here; I remain unsure whether I rounded out our group's eclecticism or stood in contrast to it. But we were, in any case, a particular sort of modern hustler: filmmakers and writers (screen, Web, magazine), who periodically worked as narrative consultants on ad campaigns, sustainability experts, P.R. lifers, designers or design consultants, social entrepreneurs, and that strange species of human being who has invented an app. We rubbed elbows with media moguls and Hollywood actors and the lesser-known but still powerful strata that include producers and directors, and C.F.O.s, and the half-famous relatives of the more famous. We listened to U2 and Morrissey and Kylie Minogue post-ironically, which is not to say, exactly, sincerely. We donated to charity, served on the boards of not-for-profits, and shepherded socially responsible enterprises for work. We thought we were not bad people. Not the best, a bit spoiled, maybe, but pleasant, insouciantly decent. We paid a tax on the lives we lived, in order to say in public, I have sacrificed, tithed, given back. A system of pre-Lutheran indulgences. Of carbon offsets. A green-washing of our

sins. We were affiliated. We had access.

I was by far the poorest of our group, though I was not poor for principled reasons. I'm not sure *why* I was so poor. Laziness, perhaps. I didn't have much energy or imagination when it came to monetizing my talents, and I think, to be honest, that I had a bad conscience about getting paid to do what I loved, what seemed, on the face of it, self-indulgent, and what never met my expectations anyway. So in the Palm Springs house that week, where I stayed on need-blind sufferance, I had the dual consciousness of a Voltaire in the court of Frederick the Great or the Marxists who brood through high-society parties in Wyndham Lewis novels—which is to say I partook, mooched, sponged, *and* felt myself apart and non-implicated.

From the start I had been set up as the counterpart to Lily, a pretty and neurotic executive-in-training who was also not there as half of a couple. Lily had brought a tote bag for her cosmetics, which numbered in the dozens and included machines I was not familiar with. Like all the women in the house, she had exceptional hair. Her hair had the tattered elegance of a *Rolling Stone* cover model's, and I decided early on that one of my goals for the week would be to sleep with Lily, though this was less a decision, really, than the final figure in some back-of-the-envelope biological math.

Lily was in the habit of always needing things she didn't have: water, iced tea, Chablis, spray-on sunscreen, her phone, Kindle, iPad, a hand, advice. I remark on this because, given that my position in the group was as a secular boyfriend of sorts to Lily, it often fell to me to fetch her things or to hold things for her while she did stuff like pee. But I also think that her constant fidgeting neediness captured something we all felt: the ever-present urge to tweak or adjust the experience to make it a touch more perfect. “Can you just hold this?” Lily would say, or “Can you just do my back?” or “Can you just come look at something?,” and I slowly understood what it is to be a man for a certain type of high-strung, successful, and thin woman: you are an avatar of capability, like a living Swiss Army knife. So I fixed things and it felt good, and maybe anyone could have fixed them, and maybe Lily only asked to flatter me, to give me a sense of purpose in a modern economy that had creatively destroyed men, but it worked, it

allowed me to feel masculine and useful, and I experienced an uneasy gratification that Lily and I could confirm for each other this two-dimensional idea of who we were, who our genders made us, even as we recognized how stupid and old-fashioned the idea was.

But this was a place to be old-fashioned, I guess. It was, after all, the town of Elvis and Charles Farrell, and the Rat Pack, of Jack Benny's broadcasts from the desert, New Year's at Sunnyslands with the Reagans, and drives hooking off the fifth tee like the Laffer curve—a place in thrall to an era when the impulse was to leave the lush coastline for a desert town as seedy and plotted as an Elmore Leonard paperback, where pills were prescribed to be abused, drinks took their names from Dean Martin taglines, and the wedge salad never died.

On the afternoon of Day Three, Eli and I took his dog, Lyle, for a walk, and he confessed to me that a good chunk of the financing for his new film had fallen through. One of the backers had pulled out, and now the production company attached to his script and the director and whatever hamlet-sized retinue a more or less green-lit film accretes were all scrambling to gin up new money. Eli had it on good intelligence that a financier named Wagner was in Palm Springs that week, and so one of our running intrigues became Eli's attempt to casually intersect with him. The movie sounded like a hard sell to me, a bio-pic about the economist Albert O. Hirschman focussed on his war years, but Eli assured me that Wagner was their man.

"This guy"—Eli brought his hands together as if in prayer. "You know Richard Branson? O.K. This guy is like the Richard Branson of nature and environment music. His wife's cousin—or no, no, no. Here's what it is. His wife's mother's sister, his aunt-in-law—Hirschman helped get her out in '41."

It was not quite evening. The sun had fallen below San Jacinto as it did every afternoon, leaving us in a long penumbral dusk the color of a pinkish bruise. For the second straight day, we had missed the canyon hike we had intended to take, arriving seven minutes after the cutoff, according to the park ranger, who took evident pleasure in disappointing us and had the air less of a park ranger than of an

actor playing a park ranger—I doubted that he did much "ranging." And so, to salvage the excursion we had driven around the tony western edge of the city, taking in the walled-off, single-story period homes, including Elvis's strange bow-window of a house, and we would have explored longer if we hadn't wandered into a postmortem garage sale and found, laid out like memento mori among old Steve Martin Betamaxes, an assortment of superannuated chemotherapy supplies, which so depressed us that we each immediately took a bump off the key to Lily's Nissan Leaf.

Walking now with Eli, I was feeling a bristling love for my friend, who hadn't said a word to me in five minutes, showing, in the understated way of competitive men, that our friendship transcended his need to sell other people on a garish idea of his life, that we could be quiet together and find peace in each other, for the simple reason that we had nothing else to offer each other, when I looked up to see a slight Hasidic man pacing a jogger down the middle of the street. The Hasid was in full getup, shuffle-walking to keep up with the jogging man and insistently pointing something out to him on a piece of paper. The jogger looked at us with a grin or a grimace that was perhaps self-excusing, but he needn't have. It became clear to us in the days following: Chabad-Lubavitch was everywhere, South Williamsburg had emptied out into our corner of the California desert, bearded men in long black robes haunting our bacchanal, coy and twinkling with a great-avuncular look that seemed to say, You will understand in time, you will see—or maybe not.

But it's also possible that I was losing my mind. It was Day Three, as I said, and the wheels were beginning to come off. Lily and I had made out for a while in bed the night before, humping a bit halfheartedly before she sent me away to sleep by myself—and I had felt grateful, because this way I would actually sleep and wouldn't have to wake up next to her, tired and noisome, with a single-minded erection, but I'd also felt spurned, or confused, because whereas Eli had the goal of finding and wooing Wagner, and Marta had the goal of treating her body like a chemistry set, and Lily had the goal of having a man around to hold her purse, and the others in the house had various faintly boring goals that involved their partners and spa treatments, my only goal up to

that point had been to get laid in a state of near-primal cognitive disintegration. And so, when I awoke that morning and realized just how seriously in jeopardy this goal was, I promptly ate an entire rainbow Rice Krispies treat of marijuana and lost track of everything but a premonition that the world was going to end.

I was lying motionless on the couch, under a protective throw that had become important to me, when Lily came over and started talking. She played with my hair while she talked, and I tried to think up one grammatical sentence that would indicate that I was still a human being. The only recognizable thought among the debris in my mind, however, was the sudden overpowering desire to have sex, and this wasn't even a thought as such. If I had been in any state to speak, let alone make an argument, I would have brought a Christian martyr's passion to the task of getting Lily receptive, but all I managed to say, interrupting her arbitrarily to say it, was "I'm very stoned."

Lily looked at me curiously. "Really?" she said. I was briefly furious at her—that she was so wrapped up in telling me whatever shit, none of which I could translate into meaningful ideation, anyway, that she had failed to notice that I was demonstrating the vital signs of a Pet Rock. Eli walked over to ask if I wanted lunch, or anything, or what did I want, and I said "no," "maybe," and "later," in some order, and then I realized that there *was* something I wanted, though it wasn't exactly a group activity, which was to lie on the bathroom floor and masturbate until I died.

"Excuse me," I said, getting up. I was not terribly steady on my feet and had to brace myself on furniture all the way to the bathroom, but I was excited, let's say ludicrously excited, by the prospect of masturbating, and, more than that, even *amazed* that I had forgotten the possibility of masturbation as a sort of compromise-formation in my ongoing sham-coupledness with Lily. And though I could barely breathe or stand, the sensitivity I felt to the world just then was a revelation. I seemed to feel the blood in my body running along the inner banks of its vessels, a trembling life force lighting up my meridians like neon, and, as I pushed off from the free-form couch by the fireplace, the lone thought surfacing within me was something like: *I know what a chakra is.*

In the bathroom, I locked the doors

and stripped to nothing, put the cold-water tap on low, and lay down on the bathmat. Something like fevered joy clenched in my abdomen. If there is an end point to the confessional mode it is surely the things we think about while masturbating, but here goes: I thought of the breasts of a woman who had been at dinner the night before, big, heavy breasts. I thought of her telling me to fuck them, or maybe having multiple dicks, or a kind of “Matrix”-like displacement of dicks, and fucking her and her tits at the same time. I thought of ass-fucking. I thought of someone wanting it, maybe begging for it, maybe Lily. There were mirrors all over the bathroom, and I thought of fucking Lily standing up, of gazing at the mirror and our eyes meeting in a look that said, Wow, we are fucking and it feels *awesome*. I thought, Mental note: return to question of mirrors, why we like watching ourselves fuck in mirrors—then I forgot this immediately. I thought, This feels *so* good, and when it is over I will die, but there won’t be any reason to live anyway, so that’s fine. And I thought, What am I doing with my life? And I thought, Am I a good person or a bad person or just a person? And I thought, Am I powerful or weak? And I thought, Now’s maybe not the time. . . . And I thought, Let’s pretend powerful, just for now, let’s pretend I’m powerful and Lily’s powerful and I’m fucking her in the ass, and she’s asking for it, pleading probably, and our eyes meet in the mirror in a look of concern or coital oneness or existential hurt or gratitude that something could feel this good. Yes, *that*. Let’s pretend *that*.

And I came just then, for the first time in my life, before even getting hard.

I awoke on the morning of Day Four, New Year’s Eve, on a deflated air mattress, without any memory of having gone to sleep. It turned out that I was not licking Julie Delpy, after all, but holding Lyle in a kind of Pietà. When he saw that I was awake he began chewing on my hair, and I thought about going and getting into bed with Lily, then decided to conserve good will. I don’t mean to give the impression that sex is all I think about, but I am goal-oriented. I need goals. And I felt cheated out of something. Lily’s car kept breaking, and so did her toilet, and she needed water and grapes like several dozen times a day. I was getting all the bad boyfriend jobs, I felt, and none of the good.

But in retrospect it wasn’t really about Lily, this sense of being cheated. I needed something to *happen*. Something new and totalizing to push forward a dithering life. I needed to remember what it felt like to *live*. And drugs were not just handmaiden or enabler but part and parcel of the same impossible quest, which you could say was the search for the mythical point of most vivid existence, the El Dorado of aliveness, which I did not believe in but which tantalized me nonetheless, a point of mastering the moment in some perfect way, seeing all the power inside you rise up and coincide with itself, suspending life’s give-and-take until you are only taking, claiming every last thing you’ve ever needed or wanted—love, fear, kinship, respect—and experiencing it all at the very instant that every appetite within you is satisfied.

It’s a stupid dream, but there it is. And not a bad agenda for a day as far as agendas go, as far as days go.

It was a perfect afternoon—each one was—and we mobilized early for our hike, nearly two hours before the closing time, which by that point had been embossed forever on our psyches. The sun hung in the southern sky at the height of a double off the left-field wall, hot and pleasant and a whitish color, slipping at its edges into a pale powdered blue that had the particulate quality of noise in a photograph. I was glad that we were going for the hike. It felt almost moral in the context, and even if it was a relatively level hike and only about an hour round trip, and there was a waterfall at the end, hidden among the sere folds of rock, I thought at least we would have to put *something* in, something of ourselves, some effort, to get whatever out.

Our friend the ranger was waiting for us at the gate, and this time we approached him with an air of triumph, as though he had doubted our resolve but we had persevered and now things would be different.

“Hey,” we said.

“Hello,” he said, smiling a little, I thought.

We looked at one another for a minute.

“Trail’s closed,” he said. “Closes early today, on account of the holiday.”

“Oh, come *on*,” Eli said. “You realize we’ve been here every day this week.”

The ranger actually had his hands on his hips, as if posing for a catalogue photo. The olive-green uniform hung on him so perfectly that I wondered whether he wasn’t perhaps the fit model for the entire clothing line.

“Park reopens January 2nd,” he said. “8 A.M. sharp.”

“Is it because we’re Jews?” Marta asked.

The ranger’s gaze, emerging from his tan and handsomely creased face, cast out to the distant escarpments on the far side of the valley.

“Same rules for everyone,” he said.

“Your hike is a piece of shit,” Eli informed him.

“You can always hike the sagebrush trail,” he said, pointing vaguely to a boulder-strewn slope in the distance that seemed to rise, precipitously, toward nothing.

“And the sagebrush trail has a waterfall?” I said.

“Ha, ha. No,” the ranger said.

We did hike the sagebrush trail. We hiked until boredom overtook us. At the top of the ridge, where we stopped, a Hasid in black robes stared out across the Coachella Valley, past the lush plot of Palm Springs, which sat in the dun funnel of mountains like a piece of sod on a field of dirt. I wondered what it would take to imagine my way into his mind. I tried to look out at the scene through his eyes and couldn’t. I could see it only through my eyes: the grid of roads, the golf courses twined around their fancy houses, the brassy glow of the sun catching on the mountain faces to the south, the lights of convenience stores blinking on in the dusk. Another mellow California evening, where the velour air seemed a kind of permission—to be cosmically insignificant, maybe—an evening exactly as lovely and forgiving as it was unsacred.

Our steaks—the steaks we ate that night—had been cows that had eaten Lord knows how much grain, grain farmed using heavy machinery and fertilizer and then shipped on trucks; cows that had produced Lord knows how much waste and methane before they were slaughtered, before they were butchered and shipped to us on different trucks. It was a very special dinner, courtesy of the



Maldives, Bangladesh, Venice. We were each supposed to say something, something meaningful or thankful, I suppose, that would begin to repay our debt to the cows and the people of Sumatra. I wanted to read a poem that had recently moved me. I'd been trying to read it every night, as a prelude to dinner or a coda to dinner, but things kept getting in the way. The mood, for instance. It wasn't a very poem-y poem, but it was a poem, and I guess it had that against it. Still, it was funny and affecting, and I saw it as a sort of moral Trojan horse, a coy and subtle rebuke to everything that was going on, which would, in the manner of all great art, make its case through no more than the appeal and persuasiveness of its sensibility. The others would hear it and sit there dumbfounded, I imagined, amazed at the shallowness of their lives, their capacity nonetheless to *apprehend* the sublime, and the fact that I had chosen a life in which I regularly made contact with this mood. Don't get me wrong, I didn't expect this state to last for more than forty-five seconds, but the poem had become meaningful to me, and I was about to read it when dinner was very suddenly ready, and then when dinner was over dessert appeared, and then there were post-dinner cigarettes, and then we got a call that our cabs were on the way and we had to hurry to clear the table so that we could all do a few lines before the next party. We crushed the coke into still finer powder and spread it, thin and beautiful, on the glass coffee table, and by the time we were all packed into two cabs any memory that I had been about to read a poem or that poetry was a thing that existed had vanished.

Eli had done a line or two himself, and I could feel him growing tense in the way he did, which I had come to know years before, when we were roommates in college. It was the tenseness of someone who gets almost everything he wants very easily actually wanting something he's not sure he can get. The thing Eli wanted, most proximately, was Wagner, who we'd heard was at the party to which we were en route, and, yes, Eli wanted Wagner's money, wanted the financing so that his film about Albert O. Hirschman could be made and play the festival circuit and make a bid to be picked up by Focus or Searchlight or whatever, but more than that, I think, Eli wanted to know that he could bag a fish as big as Wagner. To try to

get his mind off things, I asked him who he liked in the Cotton Bowl, but he must not have heard me because he said, "It's all the fucking drugs, drink some water when we get there," and then I realized that we were shouting across six people from opposite ends of a taxi minivan.

At the party, we were greeted by a contingent of bashful children in party hats who blew party horns and kazoos at us. I went directly to the kitchen and poured half a bottle of Aperol into a Solo Cup because—well, let's assume I had a reason at the time. I didn't know anyone, but I was feeling pretty great, when Eli came over to me and whispered in my ear.

"Wagner's here," he said.

"Where?"

"Fuck if I know. This place is a catacombs."

I asked whether we should go looking.

HEART

When removed, I know
you will be more mahogany
than vermillion. The mass
of you less than one pound—
fisted fibre of muscle, language
of tremor under the breastbone
quieted.

Sorry for blaming you.

Too many nights I felt you
transform to the heaviest alloy
and demand to be carried,
rite of my fidelity to you.
Then, on whim, you'd dissolve
quick as mercury,
rise to cast my throat,
cause an allergy of tears.

I hated your cadence, betraying
me. Contraction and beat,
stenograph of your honesty
when my lips were complicit.

I understand you are sensitive.

Forgive those years I left you
pounding your Morse of grief, alone—
knocking against my sternum,
wondering if I was even there.

—Sue Song

"In a minute," Eli said. "Anyway, there's something I want to ask you."

I followed him to a recessed living room—there were several—where we settled into the deep embrace of leather armchairs, draping our ankles over our knees, and had the following conversation while the seven or twelve other versions of us that appeared in the intricately mirrored wall had it, too.

ME: So.

ELI (*after a beat*): Are people *happy*?

ME: Like, *spiritually*? Like, which people?

ELI: Our friends, our group. Am I being a good host?

ME: You're making me sleep on an air mattress.

ELI: I'm serious.

ME: It sort of deflates every—

ELI: Is there more I could be doing?

ME: I'm not sure I know what we're talking about. Are you happy?

ELI (*pausing for effect*): I am *so* happy. It's Marta, though. I mean, is this it? If we have

kids, it's going to change everything in our lives, hers more than mine. I want her to feel like she's done all the things she wanted to do.

ME: Yeah, I don't think that's the way it works.

ELI: Meaning . . . ?

ME: The bucket-list thing. I don't buy it. There's a hole in the bucket list!

ELI: What hole?

ME: Life, tomorrow, the astonishing insufficiency of memory . . .

ELI: I just don't want her to have regrets.

ME: Jesus, don't be insane. And, look, it's not like there's some perfect moment of some perfect evening when you go: *That*. That was it. That was living, and it doesn't get any better, and now I can die. Or have kids.

ELI (*a little peevishly*): I know.

I was pretty out of it, but still it wasn't lost on me that what I had just denied the truth of was exactly the fantasy I had let myself entertain throughout the trip. And I felt, realizing this, neither wise nor duplicitous but tired—tired of all the things that were equally true and not true, which seemed to be just about everything right then.

"C'mon, let's go find Marta and Lily," Eli said, because we hadn't seen them in a while and that could mean only one thing. And, sure enough, in the third bathroom we checked there was Lily speaking without punctuation, lining up lacy filaments of blow on the porcelain tank of the toilet while Marta did smoothing or plumping things to her eyelashes that only girls understand. And somehow the four of us squeezed into that bathroom, which was the size of a telephone booth, and did our lines and got most of the excess into our teeth, and Eli scraped what was left very carefully over the bevelled edge and into a bag the size of one Cheez-It.

"We're going to go find Wagner," Eli announced.

Lily and I looked at each other, or our eyes met in the wall of mirror before us, and we both made a motion to speak before realizing that there was nothing we meant to say. And, realizing this, we smiled, because maybe we were not in love, and maybe love is a chemical sickness, anyway, one that blinds us to who the person we love really is, but we were committed to each other, committed somehow to forgiving each other every stupid, careless, needy, and unpleasant thing we did or said that week.

It didn't take us all that long to find Wagner, though time had grown a bit fishy at this point. We scrabbled through

doors and rooms, and when we got to the library a voice said, "Come in, come in," as if it had been expecting us. The voice belonged to a man of perhaps seventy-one, who was sitting low behind a desk, sipping from a snifter of what looked like corrupted urine and talking on a phone that for an instant I took to be a large kitten. It was such a striking sight that I almost missed the Amazonian woman standing to the side in a studded black leather bra and garters. I did a double take, but she didn't seem to register my gaze, just looked off glassily with impassive disgust and worked the tassels of her riding crop like a rosary.

"Satellite," Wagner told us, covering the mouthpiece with his hand. Then: "Yeah, yeah, go fuck yourself, Fred. Ten A.M."

"Mustique," he said, putting the phone down. "I'm supposed to fly out tonight."

"Frank," Eli said, and took a few larger-than-normal steps toward Wagner and held out his hand, smiling as if they were old war buddies whom a comedy of errors had kept apart for years.

"Do I know you?" Wagner said. "I don't think I know you."

Eli laughed his public laugh. "Eli. Eli Geller-Frucht," he said. "I'm the writer on the Hirschman film. 'Philosopher's Whetstone'? Actually that title sucks, but Marley Jones at Buzzard told me her people talked to your people, she said you had a personal connection to the story—tell me if I'm making this up? Your wife's family? So we're thinking sort of a John Nash in 'The Good Shepherd' thing, but without all the schizophrenia, of course, and David's got this big fucking man-crush on Louis Malle, so we're doing kind of an 'Au Revoir les Enfants' open, very faithful to the *spirit* of Hirschman's story, you know, but—"

Wagner held up a hand as though in some vague pain. "Yeah, yeah, I get it. I talked to David. Look, I'm on board. I don't give a fuck about Hirschman, but my wife, Lydia, she won't shut up about 'Nana would have wanted to see her Albie as Zac Efron' or whatever. It's fucking ridiculous, but you get to the point of certain understandings"—Wagner inclined his head toward the half-dressed woman in the corner—"and, well, you get the picture." He put his hands on the desk and raised himself, and he must have been sitting in a comically small chair, because

when he stood, far from being the wizened troll I had come to imagine, he loomed over both of us, six-four easy, with an elegant and gawky grace.

"Here," he said, "give me some of that blow you're on and I'll let you in on a secret." Eli reached into his pocket without taking his eyes off Wagner and passed him the bag.

The man looked at us like we had to be joking but then produced a two-inch piece of straw from the breast pocket of his jacket and snorted everything that was left, right from the plastic. He thumbed his nose and sniffed a few times, then gave a small shrug of disdain and settled, half sitting, on the front of the desk. "That coke sucks, but I'll tell you, anyway," he said. "Here's what I was going to say: Stop giving so much of a shit."

We blinked at him. "What do you mean?" I said. I love that you can ask people what they mean right after they've said the most obvious things and almost invariably they'll assume that *they* are the ones who've failed to be clear and go to elaborate lengths to make themselves understood.

Wagner looked at me, then turned to Eli. "Your friend's retarded," he said. "What I mean is—look, if you care about something, like horses, go raise horses. Go ride them and fuck them or whatever people do with horses. Sell them to Arabs, I'd guess. But if you're going to stay in this crappy business, and they're *all* crappy, stop giving a shit. Because you're here for one reason and you should know what that reason is. Do you?"

He looked from one of us to the other, then barked "Sonial," and we jumped, but Sonia didn't. She just walked over and spanked us both insanely hard on the ass with her riding crop.

"The reason you're here," Wagner said, "is that you already have nice cars"—I didn't, but I went along with the spirit of his admonition—"and girlfriends with that taut skin, and nice rentals in the hills—or maybe you own?" He looked at us doubtfully. "But you don't have the good stuff, do you, the *really* hard-to-come-by shit. You know what I'm talking about: *Envy*. Serious, irrefutable reasons for people to envy you. And not just any sort of people, of course. You need people well informed enough to understand just how enviable you are. And people clever enough to know how to show their envy

without being sycophants, and worldly enough to be charming company while they're envying you. . . . You need *courtiers*, see? Oh, they're better and worse than friends. They don't care about you, sure, but they understand the *terms* of your success far better than a friend ever could. And so when you forget why you did all the shit you did, all you have to do is look at their greedy, glowing, envious faces and say, 'Ah, yes. *That's* why.'

Wagner stared out the sliding glass doors for a minute, while Sonia cracked walnuts on a teak coffee table with the blunt end of a Bowie knife, then he continued more softly. "And here's the really fucked-up thing," he said. "When you've bloated yourself on all the envy a person can take and you're still not satisfied, you'll see there's only one place left to go. You *have* everything that can be bought, all the blow jobs the people who covet your power can give, but what you don't have, you'll see, is *pain*. And that's where Sonia comes in. Sure, I *pay* her. But she would hate me just as much if I didn't. And that's real." He sipped his drink contemplatively. "It's the realest thing in the world."

He shook his head, as though to clear away the cobwebs of this sentimentality, and it must have worked, because he started again in a livelier tone. "It reminds me of when Nietzsche and I had our falling-out," he said.

"Wait," I said. "Hold on. You're the *real* Wagner?"

He looked at me with what I think was hatred. "There is really something wrong with your friend," he said to Eli. "Of course I'm not the real Wagner. How much fucking blow did you do? I'm talking about David Nietzsche. The exec over at Iscariot?"

Well, I'm not going to dwell on this chapter of the night any longer. We got out as soon as we could. The change of year, we discovered, had come and gone. We'd missed the countdown and the kisses. Marta put a silly hat on Eli, and Lily kissed me chastely. I won't bore you with the rest: the long unaccountable conversation I had about Gaelic football, or buying more coke in a bathroom at the Ace, or skinny-dipping at the Ace and getting kicked out, or sneaking back in and waking up among the patio furniture cuddling a metal vase full of flowers. I found Lily asleep in the faux ship-rigging of a window arrangement, and after a while, when I got her untangled, we walked home, her tripping in high heels, me carrying a bag that turned out not to be hers (or a bag), then later carrying her, then climbing a wall to fetch her shoes after she threw them, in either joy or rage, into the koi pond of a meditation center.

At home we each peed while the other showered. Lily removed her contacts while I kissed her shoulders, then she applied three different lotions to her face.

When we finally lay down, I said,

"Look, we're here, we're happy, it's a new year, let's just . . ."

Lily sat up partway and looked at me. Her blemish-free face looked tired and sober all of a sudden, a bit how I picture the Greek Fates when I picture them—handsome, pristine, sadly knowing. "The thing is," Lily said, "we could and I'm sure it would feel good. And it's not like sex is any big deal. But we're old enough now to know some things, to know what happens next, to know that we have sex and then we text and e-mail for a bit, and then you come visit me, or I come visit you, and we start to get a little excited and talk about the thing to our friends, and then we get a little bored because our friends don't really care, and we remember that we live in different places and think, Who the fuck are we kidding?, and then we realize that we were *always* just a little bored, and the e-mails and text messages taper off, and the one of us who's a bit more invested feels hurt and starts giving the whole thing more weight than it deserves—because these things become referendums on our lives, right?—and so we drift apart and the thought of the other person arouses a slight bitterness or guilt, depending on who's who at this point, and when the topic of the other person comes up we grit our teeth and say, 'Yeah, I know him,' or, 'Yeah, I know her'—and all that for a few fucks that aren't even very good, because we're drunk and hardly know each other and aren't all that into it anyway."

"We could get married," I said.

"Don't be cute," Lily said. "I like you better when you're not cute."

I may have looked a little hurt, because she said, "Hey, but don't feel bad. I really do like you. I don't want you to feel rejected. That's not what this is."

Really? It wasn't? Well, yes and no. She didn't want me to *feel* rejected but she did want to reject me. Still, Lily's reasoning was very sensible, and she was right that I was bored, I am often bored, and I felt a strange relief and, behind the relief, a faint sadness. It was sadness about a lot of things, but perhaps, most simply stated, it was regret that we had grown self-knowing enough to avoid our mistakes.

I left Lily's room and walked right into Eli and Marta's, because I thought I should tell Eli what I had just understood, he being a screenwriter and all—that our lives had become scripts, that love had become a three-act formula worthy of



"If I ask you something, will you promise not to get mad?"

Robert McKee—but then I saw that he and Marta were going at it, Eli behind her, while they watched themselves in the mirrored doors of the wall closet. When they saw me, they paused mid-thrust, and I said, “Oh, God, sorry,” and Marta blinked and said, “It’s fine, sweetie,” and Eli kind of surreptitiously finished the suspended thrust and said, “Yeah, no biggie. What’s up?”

We all felt amazingly good the next day. This seemed remarkable, but it was the truth. The coke had somehow burned off whatever residue encrusts on you throughout the year: free radicals, shame, whatever. We felt unashamed. We were done auditioning for one another and could now be friends, or not-friends, but ourselves.

We left for Joshua Tree that morning. It was the same day it always was, but that day was beautiful, and although the park was busy by the time we got there we didn’t care. We climbed a rock pile and ate a sandwich bag of mushrooms and lay contented in the sun. There were families around, white families and Latino families and Asian families, and everyone said, “Happy New Year,” all of us very pleased, it seemed, that we had something to say to one another. There were people rock-climbing and tightrope-walking on a distant butte, and we hiked over to them, while distances took on a subtle fun-house deception and the rocks grew more interesting and our bodies less reliable. The sun tore through the tissue of the sky. The stone-littered ochre valley below recalled a time when humans and dinosaurs had shared the earth—not a real time, of course, but the time in our collective imagination when we were the scrappy dreamers, and they were the powerful monsters, and we all had a lot more business with volcanoes.

We ate lunch on the low wall of a lookout. You could see down into the Coachella Valley to the south, see the Salton Sea and the San Andreas Fault, which ran like a post-Impressionist margin in the landscape, but I was mostly focussed on my sandwich, the way the Gala apple and the country-style mustard interacted with the sharp white Cheddar and the arugula, how the tastes all came together and produced nuances in their interaction that I had never encountered before. I was tripping very deeply and beautifully at this

point, and I strolled to the top of a nearby sightseeing hillock. It must have been the presence of another Hasid there that accounted for the turn my thoughts took, because I remember thinking, You and I are not so different. We are desert people, sons of a Trimalchio race. We come to places like this, where there is nothing, and don’t see nothing. We see a long, trailing history of wandering and persecution and the melancholic fruits of so much lineal sharpening. But then I remembered the truth, which was that I didn’t really have a “people” or a “race,” not as such. I was a mutt, like everyone, and whatever confluent strands had produced me had their own chapters of persecution and oppression, or, to be less polite—society about it, of rape and forced labor and murder.

“Pretty amazing,” I said to my fellow-gazer, and I was briefly proud of myself for coming up with something so appropriate, when the gazer turned and I saw that he was not a Hasid, after all, but just a teen-ager in a black hoodie, and he looked at me and his eyes said, unmistakably, “You can do one of two things right now, and both of them are to go fuck yourself.” And I thought, Well, O.K. You’re sixteen. I’d probably feel the same way. And then I thought I had to shit very badly, so I went to the single-occupancy bathroom and waited with a twelve-year-old boy while his mother shat inside. And that seemed poignant to me, too, his waiting for his mother, our uneasy and yet companionable waiting, and for a second it occurred to me that perhaps I was travelling back to my own birth along a sequence of encounters with boys of diminishing ages. But I wasn’t. I just had a stomachache, it turned out.

The early evening was upon us, a dwindling and rapturous light invigorating the mountains as we debouched from the hills, descending to the Cholla Cactus Garden and the smoldering twilight valley below. The cactuses themselves appeared to glow, as round and chartreuse as tennis balls, the air wholesome with a hovering feculence, and we stood together, smiling with goofy acquiescence at all that we felt and lacked the words to speak. We ate the last caps and stems of the mushrooms. We were high, but we weren’t courting death. We were just some nobody hustlers in the desert, trying to make a film about the economist Albert O. Hirschman, trying to read a poem and be present together

and save the shards of hearts splintered many times in incautious romance from further comminution, trying to keep up with our Instagram and Twitter feeds and all the autodocumentary imperatives of the age, trying to keep checking items off our private bucket lists, because pretty soon we would have babies and devote our lives to giving them the right prods and cushioning so that they could grow up to be about as bad and as careful as we were, and avoid stepping with too big a carbon footprint on our African and Asian brothers and sisters and the Dutch. We were looking for a moment, not a perfect moment but a moment in which the boundaries of ourselves and the world grew indistinct and overlapped.

We were not heroes. We were trying to find ways not to be villains.

The sun was setting and we were rising—me, Marta, Eli, and Lily—the four of us in a Prius, experiencing a transcendental glee as we rode back through Twentynine Palms and the towns of Joshua Tree and Yucca Valley, the whole thing one unbroken span of luminous development, or so it seemed, more beautiful than you can imagine. We were listening to a late Beatles album very loud, finding folds within the music that seemed never to have been there before and unlikely to be there again. Lily, every few minutes, burst out laughing wildly, I don’t know why. We petted each other a little, sensually, asexually, then we passed into the Coachella Valley, swept down, down into the vast grid of lights, so many colors, all communicating with one another in a lattice of shifting and persistent harmony. And as we returned to the valley floor, where the windmills blinked red and the stars through our open windows were small rounded jewels in the great velvet scrim of night, Lily spoke.

“It’s like . . . it was all *choreographed* for me,” she said, her voice hushed and marvelling. “Like everything was arranged for *me*. To experience just like *this*.”

It took me a second to realize what she was saying and what it meant, to gather my thoughts and say the only thing there was to say.

“But that’s what it is,” I said. “That’s what being on drugs is.” ♦

NYR.KR/THISWEEKINFICTION

Greg Jackson on “Wagner in the Desert.”

THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE SEX AMENDMENT

How women got in on the Civil Rights Act.

BY LOUIS MENAND

Most Americans who made it past the fourth grade have a pretty good idea who Thurgood Marshall, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, Jr., were. Not many Americans have even heard of Alice Paul, Howard W. Smith, and Martha Griffiths. But they played almost as big a role in the history of women's rights as Marshall and King played in the history of civil rights for African-Americans. They gave women the handle to the door to economic opportunity, and nearly all the gains women have made in that sphere since the nineteen-sixties were made because of what they did.

What's peculiar about their achievement—and this may have something to do with why fourth graders don't learn about them, and why streets and schools all across the land are not named after them—is that it was accomplished in the face of the unequivocal opposition of the liberal establishment. Their story is a classic case of what Hegel called “the cunning of reason”: the way apparently random or anomalous events later turn out to be pieces in a larger historical design.

Among those who opposed the efforts of Paul, Smith, and Griffiths were the leaders of the civil-rights movement themselves. They thought that women's-rights advocates were trying to piggyback on the movement for rights for African-Americans, and that the load would kill the piggy. They turned out to be wrong about the second thing, but they were completely right about the first.

The crusade for civil rights for African-Americans dates back well into the nineteenth century, but from the failure of Reconstruction until 1954 it was mostly a crusade in futility. Then, suddenly, it enjoyed two unexpected and spectacular successes: the unanimous Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, striking down the doctrine of “separate but equal,” and, a year later, the Montgomery bus boycott, triggered by Parks's arrest and ending, almost thirteen months later, with the court-ordered integration of city buses.

These triumphs eventually brought together most, if not quite all, of the disparate advocates for rights for African-Americans. The movement expanded to include an extraordinary range of people: veteran organizers like Roy Wilkins and Bayard Rustin; young activists like James Bevel, Diane Nash, and Bob Moses; religious groups like the National Council of Churches, headed by the millionaire industrialist J. Irwin Miller; and cautious but increasingly committed Justice Department officials like Burke Marshall, John Doar, Nicholas Katzenbach, and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

All these people believed that they were playing with fire. White opposition to civil rights in the seventeen states that had de-jure segregation had the unapologetic support of Southern judges and elected officials, and was backed by official and officially condoned vigilante vi-

olence. Some whites elsewhere were sympathetic to the marches, boycotts, and sit-ins run by King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and by groups like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). But many thought that, although old customs die hard, they die eventually, and blamed the protesters for inciting the violence. Politically, the movement lived in perpetual fear of a white backlash.

People in the movement also knew that broad-based coalitions of the kind they were part of are rare in politics, and that its unity depended on maintaining publicly the appearance of forward momentum, along with the willingness privately to suppress disagreements in the interest of the common goal. The last thing any of these people wanted was a group with a different agenda crashing the party.

The story of how the movement's signature piece of legislation, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, was written and passed has been told many times, in books like Hugh Davis Graham's “The Civil Rights Era” and Taylor Branch's great trilogy, “America in the King Years.” In recognition of the fiftieth anniversary of the day the bill was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson—July 2, 1964—two new books about the legislative process have appeared: Clay Risen's “The Bill of the Century” (Bloomsbury) and Todd Purdum's “An Idea Whose Time Has Come” (Holt).

They are worthy books, timely and intelligent. Risen's is a little more rooted in the archives; Purdum's is a bit lighter on its feet. By good luck or bad, they are also substantively pretty much the same book and make pretty much the same points.

One is that Johnson's part in the story has been overblown. Almost a century after the Emancipation Proclamation, Robert Caro writes in the most recent volume of his Johnson biography, black men and women “still did not enjoy many of the rights which America supposedly guaranteed its citizens. . . . It was Lyndon Johnson who gave them those rights.” Risen doesn't quote this, but it's the kind of thing he has in mind when he complains that Johnson's role “has grown to mythic proportions.”

Purdum largely agrees, although he thinks that, in getting the bill through

Strange bedfellows behind the act: J.F.K., Martha Griffiths, Martin Luther King, Jr., Howard W. Smith, and (above) Alice Paul.



Congress, Johnson was “the shotgun behind the door.” Politicians were wary of crossing him. Purdum and Risen believe that it was really thanks to the efforts of the unsung and under-sung that the bill came relatively unscathed through a Congress thick with Southern trolls and procedural booby traps. For Risen, the grassroots work of the National Council of Churches was crucial. Purdum thinks that the hero of the hour was a now forgotten Republican congressman from Ohio named William McCulloch.

It’s a little bit of a which-part-of-the-elephant problem. Johnson was obsessed with the bill; he made it a priority from almost the day Kennedy was assassinated. If you tell the story from his point of view, his moves look crucial to the outcome. But there were a lot of moving pieces because there was a lot that could go wrong. If you enjoy legislative chess, you will enjoy these books.

The books do make two things clear. The first is how deliberately the 1964 Civil Rights Act was conceived of as the accomplishment of white men. The second is that it really wasn’t Johnson’s or King’s act. It was the Kennedys’ act. The Kennedy Administration wrote the bill, and, after John Kennedy died, Robert, who despised Lyndon Johnson and knew he would take the credit, dedicated himself to seeing it through. “He didn’t even have the satisfaction of being killed for civil rights. It had to be some silly little Communist,” Jackie Kennedy is supposed to have said after her husband’s assassination. John Kennedy was not a martyr for civil rights, but his death aided the cause.

“The child of a storm,” King called the act. He meant that by 1964 the movement for civil rights was in the streets. The N.A.A.C.P.’s legal strategy of using the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to chip away at segregation laws—Marshall and the N.A.A.C.P. spent eight years clearing a jurisprudential path to Brown—had been eclipsed by a movement based largely on Scripture that involved putting bodies in the way of billy clubs, fire hoses, and, occasionally, bullets. As King knew, it was the images of the bodies, not the constitutional logic of the case, that got Kennedy’s attention.

The rap on Kennedy is that he was a reluctant advocate for civil rights, and the

rap is true as far as it goes. Those were the days when the Republican Party was proud to call itself “the Party of Lincoln” and really mean it. In the 1956 Presidential election, in which Dwight Eisenhower clobbered Adlai Stevenson, Eisenhower’s African-American support was broad. Stevenson carried just seven states, every one of them with laws mandating racial segregation.

When Kennedy ran for President, four years later, his campaign managers avoided even mentioning the words “civil rights.” The most admired African-American in the country, Jackie Robinson, was campaigning for his opponent, Richard Nixon. And Nixon was running to the left of Kennedy on the issue of racial equality: when Nixon’s running mate, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., suggested that, if he and Nixon were elected, an African-American would be appointed to the Cabinet, Kennedy was quick to call the promise “racism at its worst.”

Still, King was in touch with the Kennedy campaign through two Kennedy aides, Louis Martin and Harris Wofford, who were friendly to civil rights. And when King was sentenced, in Atlanta, to four months of hard labor on a state road gang—the original charge was driving with an out-of-state license—Wofford arranged for Kennedy to place a two-minute sympathy call to King’s wife, Coretta.

When Robert Kennedy, who was his brother’s chief campaign manager, heard about the call, he was livid. “You bomb-throwers have lost the whole campaign,” he complained. But he secretly called the judge in Georgia and got King

released, thereby transforming a courtesy call into an act of statesmanship. The campaign distributed to black voters the news of Kennedy’s call as surreptitiously as possible, and, in one of the closest Presidential elections in American history, Kennedy got about seventy per cent of the African-American vote, much more than Stevenson had got.

Civil-rights leaders naturally felt that Kennedy owed them. Kennedy didn’t see it that way. The only allusion to civil

rights in his inaugural address—the only mention of domestic issues at all in a speech otherwise entirely devoted to Cold War exhortation—was the phrase “at home” in a sentence about America’s commitment to human rights. The words were inserted at the last minute in response to pleas from Martin and Wofford.

But civil rights was not on the minds of the electorate in 1960. In opinion polls, voters named relations with the Soviet Union as their No. 1 concern. Branch says that in the Kennedy White House civil-rights violations were considered human-interest stories, minor distractions from the business of protecting the Free World.

Alabama changed all that. King’s movement had been losing traction during Kennedy’s first two years in office. Demonstrations in Albany, Georgia, had led to minor rioting and no concessions from city officials. This was in part because local officials, displaying a degree of wisdom virtually Solomonic by Southern standards in that period, had responded with restraint, and let the protesters wear themselves out.

Officials in Alabama did not get the message. “Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever!” the state’s new governor, George Wallace, vowed in his inaugural address, on January 14, 1963. Demonstrations in Birmingham began on April 3rd. On May 3rd, Birmingham police, under the direction of the public-safety commissioner, Eugene (Bull) Connor, trained fire hoses and sicked dogs on young protesters.

The pictures were seen around the world, and Kennedy began to understand that racial oppression might not be so incidental to international politics. The Administration stopped treating civil-rights violations as back-page stories. On June 11th in Tuscaloosa, Wallace, in a face-to-face standoff with Katzenbach, representing the Justice Department, barred the entrance of two black students, Vivian Malone and James Hood, to the University of Alabama.

In fact, the confrontation—Wallace’s famous “stand in the schoolhouse door”—was staged. By prior agreement, the students were quietly admitted to the university through another building. This was consistent with the Administration’s policy of defusing tensions by making back-



channel deals with Southern judges and officials. This time, Kennedy seems to have realized that allowing men like Wallace to be seen resisting an order of the federal government was no way to win a war. He decided it was time to take ownership of the issue, and that evening he delivered a television address on civil rights.

The Administration had little time to produce a speech, and Kennedy was obliged to ad-lib the last four minutes:

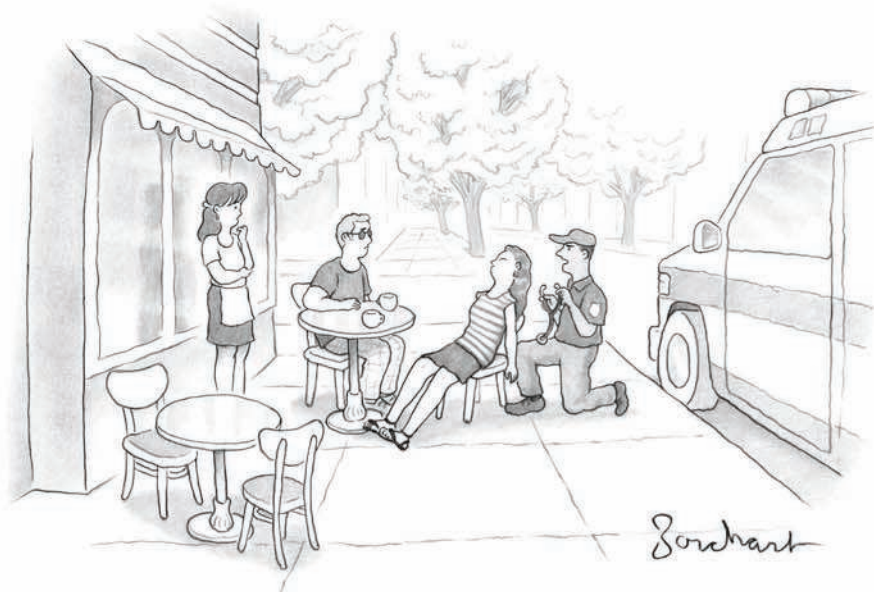
We have a right to expect that the Negro community will be responsible, will uphold the law, but they have a right to expect that the law will be fair, that the Constitution will be color blind, as Justice Harlan said at the turn of the century. This is what we are talking about and this is a matter which concerns this country and what it stands for, and in meeting it I ask the support of all our citizens.

Purdum says that, with his speech, “Kennedy had done what no other American president, not even Abraham Lincoln, had ever done: he had committed his country to assuring full equality for black Americans in the eyes of the law, and had declared that doing so was a moral imperative.”

This is not quite true. Harry Truman had said much the same thing in a speech to the N.A.A.C.P. in 1947. But Truman was whistling in the wind. He was able to end racial segregation in the armed forces by executive order, which he did, in 1948, but there was no chance that his Congress would pass anti-lynching or anti-segregation laws.

Kennedy’s televised address put civil rights in the public eye. And events kept it there. In Jackson that night, the N.A.A.C.P. field secretary for Mississippi, Medgar Evers, was shot and killed by a Klansman named Byron De La Beckwith. Evers’s wife and his three little children, who had stayed up to watch Kennedy’s speech, saw him die. A week later, on June 19th, Evers was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. The same day, the White House sent a civil-rights bill to Congress.

The bill faced three problems: Democrats, Republicans, and African-Americans. The “we” in Kennedy’s television address clearly referred to white Americans. That use of the collective pronoun was characteristic of Johnson’s civil-rights rhetoric, too. It was a way of casting the issue as a commitment by the American government to come to the aid of an oppressed people, in much the way



“She’s in a conversationally induced coma.”

that the United States might intervene in a foreign war of aggression. It was important to Kennedy that he not be perceived as dancing to a tune played by King and other movement figures. Kennedy was not part of the movement. He was the leader of the Free World.

Kennedy was initially opposed to the March on Washington, on August 28th, although, after assurances, he relented. He worried that a demonstration would hurt the bill’s chances in Congress, whose members might resent the display of public pressure, and he didn’t want to be associated with whatever extreme views might be expressed. Some of the remarks that John Lewis, of SNCC, had prepared were censored as inflammatory, and Risen says that a Justice Department official stood by with a 78-r.p.m. record of Mahalia Jackson singing “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands” hooked up to the sound system, to be switched on if any of the speakers strayed from their approved scripts.

The Kennedys were impressed by King’s famous speech. But they continued to keep their relations with King, as much as possible, off camera. As did Johnson when he was President. After the bill passed, King was one of two hundred guests at the Presidential signing, on July 2nd. Two days later, when Johnson heard that his press secretary, George Reedy, had informed reporters that the President was “in touch with Martin Luther King con-

tinuously,” he demanded to know why Reedy had said such a thing. Reedy pointed out that the press had, after all, seen King at the signing. “I’m sorry he was there,” Johnson said. “It was very unfortunate he was there.” The Civil Rights Act was an act for, not by, African-Americans.

Republicans presented a different peril. The Republicans calculated that, if the bill passed and African-Americans became a force at the ballot box, their party stood to benefit. In their wildest dreams, they imagined white Southerners waking up to the thought that a pro-business, budget-cutting party like the Republican Party was their kind of party, and envisioned Republicans stealing the South away from the Democrats forever.

Some Republicans in Congress therefore decided to outflank the Administration by proposing maximalist civil-rights legislation of their own. They were playing with house money: they didn’t need their bills to pass; they only needed African-Americans to see that it was Democrats who diluted or killed the bills. As a result, by the middle of June, 1963, there were more than a hundred civil-rights bills before the House of Representatives, many of them sponsored by Republicans.

Two Republicans were key players in keeping the Administration’s bill from being butchered in the legislative process. One was McCulloch, the ranking minority member of the House Judiciary

Committee and a conservative lawmaker. Purdum points out that he “supported school prayer and gun rights, opposed foreign aid and federal involvement in education.” African-Americans constituted less than three per cent of the electorate in his district. But he had been a consistent supporter of civil rights.

The liberal approach to civil-rights legislation was to have the House pass a bill overloaded with strong provisions, on the theory that those could then be traded away for support in the Senate. But the bills always either died or emerged toothless. That is what had happened to the 1957 Civil Rights Act, pruned to the point of ineffectuality by Johnson himself, then the Senate majority leader. McCulloch had no respect for this stratagem, and he offered the Justice Department a deal. If the Democrats presented the strongest bill they could hope to see pass, and resisted attempts to load it up with trade bait, he would support the legislation and keep Republicans who followed his lead in line.

The other Republican principal was Everett Dirksen, of Illinois, the Senate minority leader, a word machine for whom the word “oleaginous” might have been coined. Risen recounts a political joke of the era in which a reporter says to Dirksen, “In a thousand words or less, are you verbose?”

The Administration figured that, if the bill passed, Dirksen would want a large share of the credit. Dirksen had reservations about Title II, which outlawed segregation in public accommodations (hotels, restaurants, theatres, and so on), and he was clearly planning to use those reservations as a bargaining chip. The White House and the Justice Department decided that Dirksen should be kept in the loop, in the

expectation that if the train looked like it was leaving the station he would jump on board. They did, and so did he.

Last, but not least annoying, there were the Democrats. As they had in every Congress since 1932 but two (1947-49 and 1953-55), Democrats had a majority in both houses. But many were from the South, and virtually every legislative accomplishment since 1932, including New Deal legislation under Franklin Roosevelt, had required a compromise with the South’s insistence on maintaining Jim Crow and the regime of white supremacy.

It wasn’t just that the Southerners could be counted on to oppose the bill in its entirety, which they did. It was also that key committees were chaired by Southerners, providing them with many opportunities to delay or sabotage the legislation. The chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee was James Eastland, of Mississippi, a man who called the bill a “complete blueprint for a totalitarian state.” In the House, the major player was the Democratic chairman of the Rules Committee, Howard Smith, of Virginia, a legendary wizard of procedure. “The House substitute for the Dixie filibuster,” said the *Times*, “is Howard Smith.”

Smith was eighty. His name was attached to two notoriously illiberal Acts of Congress: the Alien Registration Act of 1940 (known as the Smith Act), used to prosecute resident aliens suspected of subversiveness; and the War Labor Disputes Act of 1943 (the Smith-Connally Act), which curbed the power of labor unions.

The Southerners’ plan was to delay a vote, in the hope that violent protests would lead to a white backlash. Smith promised to drag out hearings on the bill.

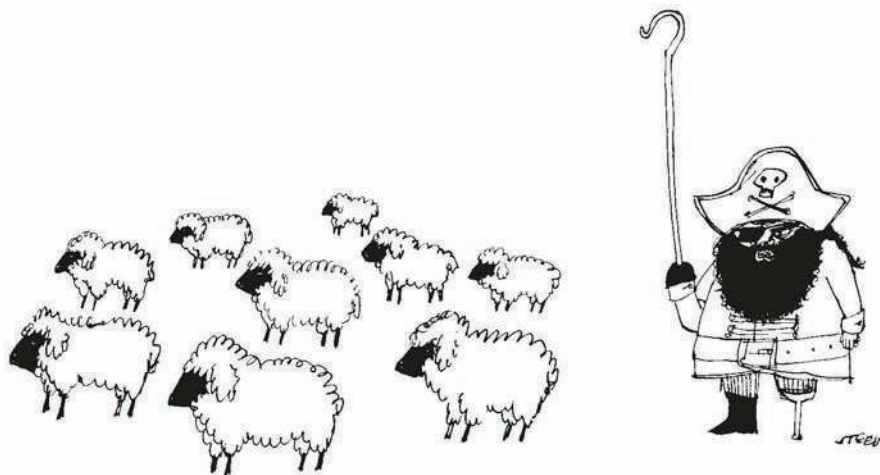
But in January, 1964, he was threatened with a discharge petition—a measure, rarely used, to bring legislation out of committee against the wishes of the chairman—into releasing it for debate. It was during that debate that he introduced, on February 8, 1964, the sex amendment.

The amendment was a one-word addition, “sex,” to Title VII of the bill, which prohibited employers from discriminating on the basis of “race, color, religion, or national origin.” Opponents of Smith’s amendment, led by Emanuel Celler, of Brooklyn, the seventy-five-year-old chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and the bill’s floor leader, regarded it as either a prank intended to expose the limits of liberal egalitarianism or a poison pill that would make the bill more difficult to pass in the House, which had twelve female members, and impossible to pass in the Senate, which had two.

Opponents of civil-rights legislation had offered the sex amendment before. In 1950, Congress debated the resurrection of the Fair Employment Practices Committee, which had been created by Roosevelt to ban discrimination by government contractors, but which, after the war, under the leadership of Smith and Richard Russell, of Georgia, Congress had shut down. A Florida congressman, Dwight Rogers, proposed adding “sex” to the list of categories to be protected from discrimination. The House adopted the amendment, and the bill died in the Senate.

If Smith’s amendment was a prank, it backfired. The House accepted it by a “teller” vote (that is, a head count) of 168 to 133. Most of the yeas were reported to have been Republicans and Southern Democrats. Johnson and Robert Kennedy were firm about minimizing changes to the bill after it reached the Senate, and although there were some alterations, the ban on discrimination by gender stayed in. On July 2nd, it became law.

For twenty years, the belief that the sex provision was a monkey wrench that unintentionally became part of the machine was the conventional wisdom about Title VII. But when scholars—including Michael Gold, Carl Brauer, Cynthia Deitch, Jo Freeman, and Robert Bird—dug into the archives they not only learned that the real story of the sex amendment was quite different; they



essentially uncovered an alternative history of women's rights.

The person behind the sex amendment was the seventy-nine-year-old leader of a tiny fringe organization called the National Woman's Party. Alice Paul was a major figure in the American suffragist movement, back at the time of the First World War. Paul was a Quaker. She attended Swarthmore and then the University of Pennsylvania, where she earned the first of many advanced degrees. In 1907, she went to study in Britain and got caught up in the suffragist movement, led by Emmeline Pankhurst. It changed her life.

Pankhurst ranks with Gandhi and King as one of the great practitioners of what King and others called "direct action." She had suffragists break windows, chain themselves to the gates of Buckingham Palace, disrupt meetings. Demonstrators were jailed and went on hunger strikes. Paul herself was arrested several times, and when she returned to the United States she energized the American suffragist movement. She shifted its focus to securing a constitutional amendment, and protesters started chaining themselves to the fence in front of the White House and burning President Wilson's speeches at public rallies. Paul was described as the Lenin of suffragism.

By 1918, Wilson had had enough. He proclaimed that giving women the right to vote was "vital to the winning of the war," and Congress passed the Nineteenth Amendment. Ratification was completed in 1920. A new, carefully researched biography by J. D. Zahniser and Amelia R. Fry, "Alice Paul: Claiming Power" (Oxford), ends her story there. But Paul lived for another fifty-seven years, and not in vain.

The women's-suffrage movement had been led by an organization called the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Paul thought that its approach was insufficiently militant (NAWSA thought that Paul was a maniac), and in 1916 she formed the much smaller National Woman's Party (N.W.P.). After the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, Paul embarked on a new crusade: to pass an Equal Rights Amendment.

The N.W.P. became a lobby. It sent out letters promoting the election and appointment of sympathetic candidates and judges, and wrote annually to mem-

bers of Congress to ask them to introduce an E.R.A. bill. Every year, starting in 1923, an equal-rights bill was brought before Congress.

The E.R.A. was opposed by virtually every other women's organization; they believed that it was reactionary. One of the great achievements of the Progressive Era had been the passage of laws that protected women in the workplace. In 1908, Louis Brandeis's brief on behalf of the state of Oregon had helped persuade the Supreme Court to abandon the constitutionally dubious theory of "liberty of contract," and uphold a law limiting the number of hours that women could work. An Equal Rights Amendment would make such laws unconstitutionally discriminatory.

Who might be in favor of such an amendment? Businessmen might be. So the N.W.P.'s best customers on Capitol Hill tended to be anti-union conservatives—for example, Howard Smith. Virginia textile mills employed large numbers of women, and Smith was interested in any legislation that might benefit mill owners. Smith and Paul were also friends, and Smith had been a supporter of the E.R.A. since 1945.

African-American groups were onto the N.W.P.'s game. When civil-rights legislation was before Congress in 1956, for example, Paul persuaded a California congressman named Gordon McDonough to introduce a sex amendment. The N.A.A.C.P. got wind of it, and its chief Washington lobbyist, Clarence Mitchell, called McDonough's wife to warn her. She took him to mean that if the Congressman didn't withdraw his amendment the N.A.A.C.P. would see that he did not win reelection. McDonough stuck with the amendment.

Tension between advocates of women's rights and advocates of rights for African-Americans goes back to the days of the abolitionists, and it continued after the Civil War. The view of the African-Americans in these disputes was that blacks came first. They argued that the privileges of being white, minus the disadvantages of being a woman, left white women far better off than black Americans. The view of the women was that a law protecting all African-Americans from discrimination as a class would leave one group legally unprotected: white women.

There was no love lost between the groups. In 1869, after listening to advocates for women's suffrage speak at the annual meeting of the American Equal Rights Association, Frederick Douglass rose to object. "I must say that I do not see how any one can pretend that there is the same urgency in giving the ballot to woman as to the negro," he said.

When women, because they are women, are hunted down through the cities of New York and New Orleans; when they are dragged from their houses and hung upon lamp-posts; when their children are torn from their arms, and their brains dashed out upon the pavement; when they are objects of insult and outrage at every turn; when they are in danger of having their homes burnt down over their heads; when their children are not allowed to enter schools; then they will have an urgency to obtain the ballot equal to our own.

The great reformer Susan B. Anthony saw fit to reply as follows:

If you will not give the whole loaf of suffrage to the entire people, give it to the most intelligent first. If intelligence, justice, and morality are to have precedence in the Government, let the question of woman be brought up first and that of the negro last.

The long-standing practice of keeping women's rights distinct from racial issues may have been one reason that there were almost no women on the three-hour program at the March on Washington.

By 1963, the N.W.P. was an organization of mostly wealthy white women, many of them elderly veterans of the suffrage movement. The chair, Emma Guffey Miller, was eighty-nine. The Civil Rights Bill presented it with a huge target of opportunity. Paul called on two N.W.P. members from Virginia, Nina Avery and Butler Franklin, to begin lobbying. Both wrote to Smith in December, 1963, asking him to add "sex" to the bill.

In January, Avery wrote to another Virginia congressman, J. Vaughan Gary. She explained that she disliked the bill itself, though, and hoped it would not pass anytime soon:

Thank God for the Members of Congress who are from the South and for those Members from the East, North and West who will use their brains and energies to prevent a mongrel race in the United States and who will fight for the rights of white citizens in order that discriminations against them may be stopped.

The N.W.P.'s lobbying was no secret. Katzenbach called the Oregon congresswoman Edith Green and told her that if

a sex amendment was proposed she needed to speak against it. She did, but she was too late. For Martha Griffiths, a congresswoman from Michigan, had raised the stakes.

Smith made his motion in a jocular spirit. He read a letter from a constituent who asked him to offer an additional amendment addressing the demographic imbalance between men and women—a “grave injustice” that abrogated the right of every woman to have a husband of her own. Emanuel Celler replied that he knew all about equality for women. He had been married for forty-nine years, he said, and he usually had the last two words: “Yes, dear.” The jokes continued until Griffiths got the floor. “If there had been any necessity to have pointed out that women were a second-class sex,” she said, “the laughter would have proved it.”

Griffiths had anticipated this moment, and she was prepared. She had been in Congress since 1955; she had also been a member of the N.W.P. She answered Celler with the N.W.P. line. If you pass this bill, she said, “you are going to have white men in one bracket, you are going to try to take colored men and colored women and give them equal employment rights, and down at the bottom of the list is going to be a white woman with no rights at all.” The law would protect a black woman from employment discrimination on account of race, but not a white woman. Other congresswomen rose to join Griffiths.

Liberals counterattacked. New York’s John Lindsay spoke against the amendment. James Roosevelt said that his mother, Eleanor, would have been opposed to it. (Eleanor Roosevelt had indeed been a lifelong opponent of the E.R.A.) Letters were read from the Department of Labor and the American Association of University Women opposing the amendment. But the House accepted it. When the vote was announced, two women in the visitors’ gallery shouted, “We’ve won!” and “We’ve made it!” They were removed by guards.

Before the bill reached the Senate, Emma Miller wrote to a Mississippi member of the N.W.P., explaining that “you and I as white Christian women could be discriminated against,” and asking her to write to Senator Eastland on behalf of the sex provision. But the provision provoked little substantive debate in

the Senate; Dirksen eventually dropped his opposition to it, in order, he explained, “to avoid the wrath of the women.” Three months later, after surviving the longest debate in Senate history, capped by a fourteen-hour speech by West Virginia Senator Robert Byrd, the Civil Rights Bill became law.

On the day the bill went to the President, July 2nd, Smith pronounced his valediction in the House. “You have sowed the wind,” he told his colleagues. “Now an oppressed people are to reap the whirlwind.”

Already the second invasion of carpetbaggers of the Southland has begun. Hordes of beatniks, misfits, and agitators from the North, with the admitted aid of the Communists, are streaming into the Southland on mischief bent, backed and defended by other hordes of Federal marshals, Federal agents, and Federal power.

In the event, compliance with Title II was relatively painless. In Georgia, Lester Maddox chased African-Americans out of his fried-chicken restaurant, waving a pistol. But on December 14, 1964, in *Heart of Atlanta Motel v. U.S.*, a suit filed within hours of Johnson’s signing, the Supreme Court unanimously rejected a challenge to Title II’s constitutionality. After that, there were efforts to evade the law (by turning restaurants into private clubs, which were exempt, for example), but it was rarely defied.

Title VII was more complicated. To oversee it, the act created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (E.E.O.C.), but gave it no enforcement powers. The commission was supposed to induce compliance by persuasion and mediation. It came into existence on July 2, 1965, after employers had had a year to adapt to the new law. As chair, Johnson appointed Franklin Roosevelt, Jr. “What about sex?” Roosevelt was asked at his first press conference. “Don’t get me started,” he said. “I’m all for it.”

Roosevelt maintained that the ban on sex discrimination was an inadvertent add-on, not to be interpreted as strictly as the ban on racial discrimination. The commission’s second executive director, Herman Edelsberg, who took office that fall, referred to the sex provision as a “fluke” that was “conceived out of wedlock.” It became known in Washington as the Bunny Law, after a hypothetical case in which a man is turned down for a job

as a bunny in a Playboy Club. But, of 8,854 complaints filed in the E.E.O.C.’s first year, almost a third charged gender discrimination. To process them, the commission hired the lawyer wife of a staff member. She was a temp.

Two cases in particular tied the commissioners in knots. One was newspapers’ practice of listing classified help-wanted ads by gender; the other was airlines’ practice of laying off female flight attendants—stewardesses—after they married or reached a certain age. The commission wondered whether, in the case of flight attendants, gender might qualify as a “bona fide occupational qualification”—known as a B.F.O.Q.

In June, 1966, during a conference of state Commissions on the Status of Women, Administration officials made it clear that the E.E.O.C. would maintain a soft approach to gender discrimination. That month, Griffiths delivered a scathing address in the House. “The whole attitude of the E.E.O.C. toward discrimination based on sex is specious, negative, and arrogant,” she said. No one would think that the law permitted a newspaper to list help-wanted ads under “white” and “colored.” Why was it O.K. to list them under “male” and “female”?

As for B.F.O.Q.s, “Can any Equal Employment Opportunity Commissioner seriously believe that the business of the airlines would suffer if all of them hired flight attendants on the basis of their individual qualifications and ability?” Griffiths asked. “Do they really think for one moment that men or women make plane trips for the sole purpose of having a female—or male—flight attendant serve them lunch or give them an aspirin?” In an earlier congressional hearing, she had made the point with less nuance. “If you are trying to run a whorehouse in the sky,” she said, “get a license.”

Copies of Griffiths’s speech were circulated among participants at the conference. For many of them, the moment called for an organization that would do for women what the N.A.A.C.P. did for African-Americans. And that summer the National Organization for Women was born, with Betty Friedan as its first president. The first thing NOW did was to seek a writ of mandamus against the E.E.O.C., compelling it to perform its legal function. For Title VII was the only statutory

weapon the women's movement had.

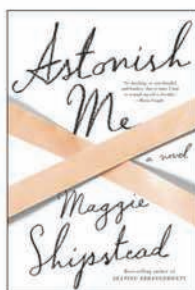
Changes were swift. In February, 1968, the E.E.O.C. denied flight attendants B.F.O.Q. status. (The real reason airlines laid off the attendants was that the practice prevented the women from gaining seniority, and kept wages low.) In August, it determined that listing help-wanted ads by gender was unlawful. In November, a federal district court ruled that Title VII made state women's labor-protection laws unconstitutional. Labor-protection laws did not disappear, as many liberals had feared; they were now written to cover both sexes.

Title VII enabled a limited rapprochement between feminists and civil-rights organizations. The first Title VII gender-discrimination case to reach the Supreme Court was *Phillips v. Martin Marietta*, in 1971. In a unanimous decision, the Court held that Martin Marietta's policy of not hiring women with children of preschool age violated Title VII. The case was brought by a white woman, Ida Phillips, who was represented by the Legal Defense and Education Fund of the N.A.A.C.P.

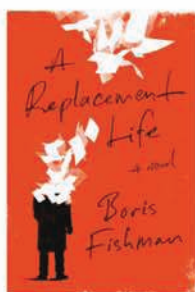
And in 1970, at the urging of, among others, Emma Miller, now ninety-four, Martha Griffiths used a discharge petition to extract Equal Rights Amendment legislation from Celler's Judiciary Committee. Celler complained that "neither the National Woman's Party nor the delightful, delectable, and dedicated gentlelady from Michigan can change nature," but the amendment passed both houses by the required two-thirds majorities and went to the states for ratification in 1972. The E.R.A. had the enthusiastic support of liberal politicians and rights groups. No one mentioned Alice Paul, but she was still alive.

Howard Smith lost in the 1966 mid-term elections, but Russell and Eastland were both reelected. The same year, Lester Maddox was elected governor of Georgia. In 1968, after Johnson withdrew from the race and King and Robert Kennedy were killed, George Wallace ran for President on the American Independent Party ticket and carried five states. In 1972, Emanuel Celler lost the Democratic primary to Elizabeth Holtzman, who became one of seven new women, including three African-Americans, to join the House. Everett Dirksen died in 1969. In 2005, his seat was taken by Barack Obama. ♦

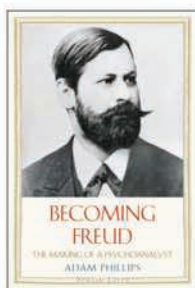
BRIEFLY NOTED



ASTONISH ME, by Maggie Shipstead (*Knopf*). Set in the world of ballet, this gripping novel spans three decades, starting in the mid-seventies, when Joan, a young American dancer, helps a Baryshnikov-like star defect from the Soviet Union. A brief relationship ensues, after which she retreats with another man to a life of suburban motherhood. The novel's frequent chronological shifts feel strained and jarring, but the narrative effectively dramatizes the tensions between family and career, perfectionism and compromise. A young dancer spends her life in front of a mirror, and "without it she is halved, uncertain of her existence." Shipstead rises to the challenge of evoking the excitement of dance, and her descriptions are all the more powerful for emphasizing the hard work behind the grace.



A REPLACEMENT LIFE, by Boris Fishman (*Harper*). At the start of this ingenious debut, Slava Gelman, a junior editor at a magazine, hears that his grandmother has died. She was a Holocaust survivor, and Gelman's grandfather produces a letter from the German government offering her compensation. He asks Slava to forge an account of suffering in his name. Soon, friends and neighbors are demanding similar help, and Slava must balance his day job with his clandestine new career, while also evading an investigator from the German government. The novel is often very funny, but its most rewarding moments come as Slava, listening to the war stories of these elderly strangers, finds himself drawing closer to the grandmother whose secrets once seemed lost to him.



BECOMING FREUD, by Adam Phillips (*Yale*). Freud once warned off a prospective biographer, writing, "To be a biographer you must tie yourself up in lies, concealments, hypocrisies, false colorings, and even in hiding a lack of understanding, for biographical truth is not to be had." Taking these admonishments to heart, Phillips, a psychoanalyst himself, attempts "a Freudian life of the young Freud." The result is anti-biography. Phillips eschews scene setting, character sketches, and chronology, in favor of a string of musings on the first fifty or so years of Freud's life, with special emphasis on his Jewishness and on his relationships with his mentors. There's gold in these pages, but the reader has to sift through much silt to find each aphoristic nugget.

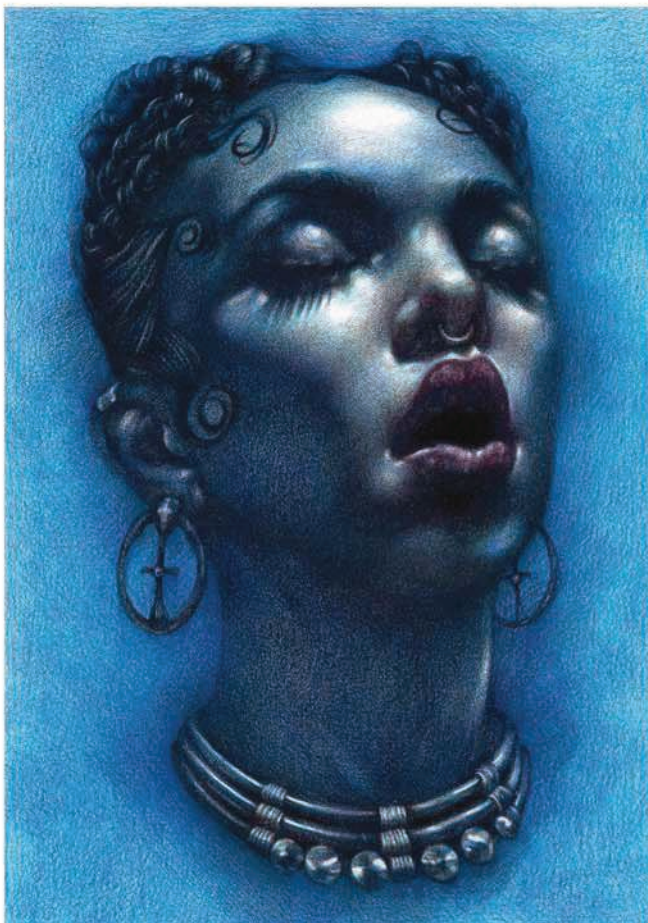


AMERICAN SMOKE, by Iain Sinclair (*Faber*). This book chronicles a tour, undertaken over several decades, of the American landscape of the Beat movement, including childhood homes of Jack Kerouac in Lowell, Massachusetts; William S. Burroughs's final grim redoubt in Lawrence, Kansas; and Gary Snyder's hundred acres in the Sierra Nevada. Despite the familiar conceit—travel as framework for literary criticism—the result is beguiling, full of sparkling prose and odd, unexpected detours. Sinclair, a British writer with a penchant for unorthodox expeditions, has an eye for America's contradictions and extravagances, but his trip is mostly a journey of the imagination, to places shaped by the writers who lived and worked there. He came to America, he writes, "hoping to reconnect with the heroes of my youth."

QUIET RIOT

The new R. & B.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES



R. & B. has always constituted a large part of pop music. But, more than a decade ago, when Beyoncé was a member of Destiny's Child, R. & B. was a genre like many others, healthy but not dominant. 'NSync, Britney Spears, and Christina Aguilera could borrow its phrasing and dance moves but just as easily leave them behind. Now it is the lingua franca of pop, spawning a variety of subgenres and approaches. A new hit album by the British singer Sam Smith, "In the Lonely Hour," aims for the rafters, making it of a piece with a style of music whose boundaries have been defined by Adele and Beyoncé. These

two alpha performers are radically different from each other, and from Smith, but they all believe in the big gesture, the primacy of vocal athletics, and the power of power. Smith, who is twenty-two, is an inoffensive singer who has mastered the moves of his elders without adding any idiosyncrasies. "In the Lonely Hour," his debut album, is currently No. 2 on the *Billboard* album charts. It represents a savvy compromise among the sincerity of Adele, the coherence of Beyoncé, and the commercial appeal of electronic dance music. However, since Smith is a traditionalist at heart, the frame for his voice is of little concern; the tourists

will come because they think he's hip, but the faithful will come because they know he's not. Strings, electronic beats, live bands—no matter. Smith is here to reassure you, and he's done a good job of it. When Adele and Beyoncé release new albums, dominance will be less easy. For now, though, platinum is his, in the absence of genius.

Beyoncé is an expressionist, like Mariah Carey and Whitney Houston, and like other singers rooted in the church. A more low-key set of musicians, such as FKA Twigs and Kelela, has taken cues not from these stars but from another pop leader—Aaliyah, who died in a plane crash in 2001, at the age of twenty-two, after recording three studio albums. For these artists, Beyoncé's mastery of melismatic runs and roof-raising hollers may be a touchstone—Kelela explicitly cites Beyoncé as an inspiration—but they are more formally indebted to Aaliyah. Hers was an R. & B. that didn't shine but rather defrosted, showing its center last instead of first. Aaliyah rarely broke a sweat, aesthetically, and, often with the producer Timbaland, created a body of work that has been building to a canonical status. One of her last hits, "Rock the Boat," takes a fairly obvious sexual metaphor and creates a state of extended ecstasy that never offers full catharsis. Her voice, which is multitracked, is soft, as if her eyes were closed in the recording booth, looking inward while letting her voice out. The beat is of the era, with steady kick drums, but it feels gentle, and the producer throws in conga slaps, guitar figures, and synth blasts that don't always recur. This is an R. & B. that's related to the spiritual slow burn of Al Green, but it's more obscure. It's abstracted from the church but charged with a secular power, no matter how icy and distant it is.

FKA Twigs was reared in Gloucestershire and is twenty-six years old. Kelela, who is thirty-one, is a second-generation Ethiopian immigrant who was born in Maryland and moved to Los Angeles in 2010. Both singers find transcendence in the higher register, with occasional forays into full falsetto. Their music doesn't seek elaboration or explosion, and their backing tracks avoid articulated drumbeats,

The R. & B. of FKA Twigs projects an intimacy distinct from what's on the radio.

leaning on hi-hats and varieties of thump. A listener could dance, if so inspired, but it doesn't feel required. The music projects an intimacy that's distant from the stadium, and even from the exposure of radio: these artists are bringing R. & B. into the dark, where someone is more likely to hear a song on his or her own, rather than in a room with others.

FKA Twigs divides her energy evenly between visuals and music. As a performer, she is an extrovert, making videos that use images from Egyptian mythology, and wearing elaborate outfits. She has mastered a graphic language that matches her movement—a neglected skill in recent generations of pop stars. She is also fluid and self-contained as a dancer.

In contrast, her first two releases—which bear the utilitarian names “EP” and “EP2”—were calibrated for close quarters. “Papi Pacify,” from “EP2” (2013), has already been covered by the English singer and guitarist Anna Calvi. This would not be remarkable except that the song barely registers—it's a twist of voice and noises that rarely sticks to a time signature. The straightforward words play against the music: “Clarify, pacify our love. Oh, show—tell me I'm the only one, like I didn't know.” Twigs's voice sounds as if it never rises above a whisper, even when it does. The producer, Arca, drops in various sounds that seem at odds with the gentle pleading of the voice—there are wobbling chords, enormous clanks, and wandering hi-hats, but never a fully committed downbeat. This is a style that both acknowledges R. & B. and rejects it, comfortable with allegiance without agreeing to compromise.

Twigs's debut full-length album, “LP1,” which will be released in August, makes no systemic changes. Working with a variety of producers—including Clams Casino, who has made well-known tracks for A\$AP Rocky, among others—Twigs hides her feelings in plain sight. On “Lights On,” she sneaks in what sounds like a manifesto: “When I trust you we can do it with the lights on.” It's another song decorated with sirens and clashing sounds and rumbles but nothing resolving into a steady beat. On “Two

Weeks,” the album's first single, she extends the theme of song as prelude, not payoff: “You say you want me, I say you'll live without it. Unless you're the only one who instigates, got your mouth, open your heart.” It's an intriguing and fertile template: she places all the romantic and sexual action offstage, thereby returning to a premodern era of nondisclosure in pop lyrics. Yet it feels entirely postmodern. The sounds on the album span such a wide range that it's hard to know what to call any of it. Some passages sound like string quartets played backward, some like eggs dropped from a great height. The main effect is of non-resolution. FKA Twigs dresses like a high-fashion model from antiquity, but her songs promise the very contemporary pleasures of texture and emotional immediacy.

While Kelela is still at work on her first full-length album, her music has already landed closer to the mainstream than Twigs's. She's no more given to a big gesture than Twigs is, but her singing is slightly more direct, and she has no problem letting her collaborators—producers like Kingdom and Bok Bok—lay a solid beat behind her. However, in this context, solid is still a fair distance from the metrics of mainstream pop. Her single “Want It,” performed with the rapper Tink and produced by DJ Dahi, released on SoundCloud earlier this year, isn't nearly as unearthly as the work of Twigs. DJ Dahi provides rhythms that move in a single time signature, while a synth bass line and chords repeat with a traditional regularity, though percussive elements drop in and out. Kelela uses overlapping lines, singing, “Your body is telling me yes,” and then echoing the phrase; both lines eventually converge, to sing, “You want it.” In a different era, Kelela might have chased the kind of record deal that Aaliyah had. But she's thrown her lot in with Kingdom's Fade to Mind label, and the fans who thirty years ago might have flocked to Sade or Gwen Guthrie will find Kelela now. With artists like these, R. & B. has found a way to nurture its own underground, even while Beyoncé is still ascendant. Call it estate planning. ♦

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MISS INDEPENDENT

The lives and loves of "Being Mary Jane."

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



In the first episode of "Being Mary Jane," a cable-news anchor (Gabrielle Union) gets a booty call. While her drunk boyfriend waits outside the door, she plucks off her bandanna, hides her vibrator in a drawer, and frenziedly strips her wall of yellow stickies, on which she has scribbled inspirational quotes—Dante, Kathie Lee Gifford, Katharine Graham. Later, as her man sleeps by her side, she says a prayer: "Please, God, if he's mine, just give me a sign." He promptly vomits on her pricey duvet. Minutes later, she finds his wedding ring.

The sequence is at once crass, funny, sad, and sexy, a savvy start for the BET

drama about a super-achiever with a messy personal life, created by Mara Brock Akil and directed by her husband, Salim Akil. Brock Akil is an up-and-coming pop auteur; she's best known for the sitcom "Girlfriends" and its spinoff "The Game," both of which aired on the CW. "Being Mary Jane" is Akil's first one-hour series, and its debut season was a major hit, scoring higher ratings than "True Detective" and "Mad Men," though you wouldn't know it from media coverage. Alert to its audience, the show opens with a cautionary claim: "Forty-two percent of black women have never been married. This is one black woman's story, not meant to represent all black women."

The words, in white letters against a black background, feel defensive, but they make sense, not just because Mary Jane is such a basket case (at one point, she steals a hookup's sperm and freezes it, which might be the romantic-comedy analogue of "breaking bad") but also because the rarity of African-American heroines puts such pressure on each one. This is true even, or maybe especially, on BET, a network that emphasizes black creators and audiences. Luckily, matters are improving: aside from ABC's "Scandal," there's the adorable "Sleepy Hollow," on Fox, and next year we'll get a new Shonda Rhimes show, starring Viola Davis. "Being Mary Jane" has obvious parallels with "Scandal"—black super-achiever stuck on a married man—but the more fruitful comparison is with HBO's "The Newsroom." Both shows are slick, energetic stories about cable-news pundits with lousy impulse control, advice-givers with high standards for everyone but themselves. (It seems plausible that Mary Jane and Will McAvoy could meet—get on the case, fan-fiction writers.) Like "The Newsroom," "Being Mary Jane" makes a strong first impression, then flies off the rails. But because the show is a bouncier, looser project, less rigid with moral righteousness, it's more fun; for all its flaws, it's an overstuffed page-turner—if you don't like one plot, another will be along in a minute or two.

Mary Jane Paul—all dimples and curves—is the daughter of a wealthy airline executive. She's the star of "Talk Back with Mary Jane Paul," a show that resembles Melissa Harris-Perry's: it's a mix of hard news and life-style pieces, and it has turned Mary Jane into a role model for other black women. Her home life, naturally, is a wreck. "Oh, how the Huxtables have fallen," Mary Jane's brother Patrick, played by the wry Richard Brooks, says. Patrick has lost his career as a night-club owner to cocaine; now sober, he lives with their parents. Their college-student brother deals weed; Patrick's teen-age daughter is pregnant. The family's glamour-queen mom, Helen (the sly Margaret Avery), has lupus, but, even as an invalid, she pulls the strings. "Ooh, shake it, Miss Lucy," Helen says fondly, staring at herself in an old photo—and then she turns to her daughter, whom she regards, as

The show is an overstuffed page-turner—if you don't like one plot, wait for another.

she does all other women in her world, as competition. "Now, if the old me was to walk in the room with the *you* of today, all you could do is hold my purse, baby." Then she removes her wig, and her daughter tenderly brushes her hair.

Mary Jane's extended family is full of such rich dynamics, which get short shrift—there's simply too much to fit in. The show can't seem to decide if it's an ensemble family series, a love triangle, or a workplace drama. By far the most effective bits are newsroom plots, particularly Mary Jane's dialectic with her two colleagues—her flinty producer, Kara, a divorced Latina mom, and Mark, a closeted gay black anchor whose focus on hard news turns off viewers. As Kara, Lisa Vidal is a rude and hilarious figure, so ravenous for ratings that bad news makes her eyes pop like Wile E. Coyote's. From her perspective, she has sacrificed her marriage for Mary Jane's show, and when the two women fall into blunt debates about office politics, dating, and race the show shines. In the episode "Storm Advisory," Kara becomes obsessed with getting Anderson-Cooper-in-Katrina footage of a major hurricane. She pressures Mary Jane to stay on the air, even as the elderly couple she's interviewing are at risk of dying. It's tense, clever storytelling, grounded in the realities of cable-TV journalism—the kind of thing that makes you wish all of "Being Mary Jane" were this nuanced and vigorous.

Unfortunately, the show takes a dive whenever it returns to Mary Jane's relationship with Andre—that drunk hookup, played by Omari Hardwick—and his seething wife. As sexy as the actors are, the affair feels oddly airless, at once cartoonish and abstract. "Being Mary Jane" is far sharper on a related issue: the strain that the "man shortage" puts on Mary Jane's Buppie girl gang, which is made up of doctors, journalists, and high-end stylists who long for "black love" but doubt that it exists, at least without strategic compromise. During one bonding session, a friend shows off her fancy couture handbag, crowing that she's better off than her lover's wife: "I'm not so much the other woman as a modern-day geisha." A rival African-American anchor blurts out, "I paid for my ring and I'm afraid it's going to ruin my marriage." As far as they've

climbed, these women face a fixed game, in which the prize—a high-achieving black man and a family—turns women who might be allies into enemies.

Money distorts all relationships, romantic and otherwise. "I didn't vote for Obama," one woman confesses, during a game of Truth or Dare. "I'm that one per cent that didn't want to pay higher taxes." One of the most pungent subplots concerns Mary Jane's relationship with her sulky, taciturn niece, Niecy (Raven Goodwin, a standout on "Huge"), a "ghetto" teen mom who hits her aunt up for fancy strollers. As much as Mary Jane lectures Niecy, the two women share more than she admits: both are "side pieces," who get high on sexual competition. But Niecy has a Realpolitik bluntness that both appalls and fascinates her aunt. "Come on—she's going to be half Filipino, half black," Niecy explains about her choice to keep her second pregnancy. "That means she's going to be pretty. She's going to have light skin and good hair and an easier life."

As provocative as the show's themes are, "Being Mary Jane" keeps wavering in its perspective on the title character, a problem that deepens as the first season goes on. Do we root for Mary Jane? Or roll our eyes? The question of whether characters should "empower" viewers comes up all the time in stories for and about women; it's part of the DNA of romantic comedy, the rare genre that places women's love lives center stage. The issue is even more charged for black women, who are haunted by respectability politics, the pressure to be "classy" and "well-spoken," de-sexed in order to fend off racist clichés. Mary Jane doesn't need to be likable, but she does need to make sense, and in the show's first season she doesn't, always, despite Union's stubborn charm. It's worth noting that the show's marketing, unlike that early disclaimer, encourages viewers to identify with her: fans are told to tweet the hashtag "#IAmMaryJane." Brock Akil has said that she deliberately chose a generic name for her heroine, hoping that the show would trigger debate among an audience of women whose stories are finally being aired: "It's time for us to redefine who we are and not keep chasing what we have been told." Fingers crossed that the next season can fulfill that ambitious vision. ♦

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BALANCING ACTS

"Dawn of the Planet of the Apes" and "Boyhood."

BY ANTHONY LANE

*Jason Clarke, Keri Russell, and Caesar the chimp strive for peace on the planet.*

It was crucial, with “Rise of the Planet of the Apes” (2011), to stay to the bittersweet end. A regiment of apes, loosed from bondage and commanded by a chimp named Caesar, the king of the swingers, took to the woods beyond San Francisco and fêted their freedom in leaps and bounds. Then, during the final credits, a single drop of blood, bearing a fatal strain of simian flu, fell from the nose of an airline pilot, signalling the start of a pandemic. As we join the sequel, “Dawn of the Planet of the Apes,” maps reveal the global spread of the infection, suggesting that, while apes are enjoying a new day, mankind has donned its last pajamas and put out the light.

Surprisingly, we are still in the Bay Area. These apes have a whole world to play with, but they choose to stick to their familiar forest. Pity. I was hoping that Caesar would conquer Gaul or something—you know, hang out with hot French gibbons who would teach him to smoke and go on strike over their retirement plans. Instead, he leads a thoroughly conservative American life. He inhabits a leafy neighborhood, with a loving partner, a son who is gratify-

ingly weaker than him, and a new baby. His community is close-knit; residents communicate in a blend of gestures, grunts, and very plain English, not unlike the customers in a sports bar. There is even a teacher, Maurice the orangutan, who has learned to write—the words “Ape not kill ape” are scrawled on a rock, proving that Maurice is as pure of heart as he is poor at grammar. What the apes lack is a foreign policy, but they are forced to devise one, double-quick, when a human, of all things, strays into their domain. Where did *he* come from?

The answer, of course, is San Francisco, where a few hundred men and women, survivors of the disease, are scratching out a meagre living downtown. Compared with the apes, they are woefully short on discipline and self-sufficiency, and you soon begin to ask just what was so damned *sapiens* about *Homo* in the first place. That was true of “Rise of the Planet of the Apes,” too, but the dramatic balance between man and primate was precise, thanks in part to a lovely performance from John Lithgow, as an Alzheimer’s sufferer whom Caesar was anxious to protect.

Their scenes together would have made Charles Darwin’s head spin around, and there is nothing to match them here; the human roles are vague and underwritten, with Gary Oldman as a leading belligerent, and Jason Clarke and Keri Russell as Malcolm and Ellie, a pro-ape, anti-conflict couple who look a bit stunned throughout, as if still amazed that years of recycling didn’t manage to save the Earth. Clarke was very good as the friendly torturer in “Zero Dark Thirty,” but here he is simply a foil for his hairy acquaintances—his lowers and betters.

Technically, they wipe the floor. The C.G.I., so dazzling in “Rise of the Planet of the Apes,” delivers marvels afresh; through the wonders of motion capture, every frown, snarl, and scurry of the actors, led by Andy Serkis as Caesar, is bodied forth into apehood. Caesar’s son, for instance, performed by Nick Thurston, needs only one look to convince us of his gentleness, and of his bewilderment at the violence into which he is helplessly thrust—first, when he is clawed by a bear, and then when, along with the rest of the clan, he is pitched into battle against men. This has been a long time brewing; Caesar sought to avoid it, riding into town at the head of an ape army and barking, “Apes do not want war,” but he is undone by the plotting of Koba (Toby Kebbell), a bonobo with a scarred face and a bad attitude. There is one tremendous scene in which Koba acts like an old-school chimp in a zoo, all floppy arm waves and clownish hoo-hoos, in order to disarm a couple of dolts before he kills them, but elsewhere his meanness verges on a kind of savage kitsch, and I had to smother a laugh as he burst through a wall of nighttime fire, on horseback, toting an automatic weapon, like something created by Quentin Tarantino for Discovery Channel.

What is missing from the film is wit—the deep wit that comes from playing off species and environments against each other. It was much more satisfying to watch a mob of apes swarm darkly through the gleaming office of a biotech firm, in the previous movie, than it is to see them pass from the dank, shadowy menace of the woods to the equally dank shadows of a ruined

San Francisco. “Dawn of the Planet of the Apes” is directed by Matt Reeves, who, unlike his predecessor, Rupert Wyatt, finds little that is amusing, curious, or surreal in the plight of his characters. Instead, we get heaps of blood and thunder, notably in the final third, and Reeves clings far more needily than Wyatt did to the standard form of the blockbuster: busy brutality, digital magic, indifference to human figures, a mawkish moistness (brace yourself for weepy chimps), and a risible refusal to contemplate the joys of sex—which are, let’s face it, a major feature of the average ape day. Bonobos, bless them, think about nothing else. Still, we do get a touching final pact between Malcolm and Caesar, brow to jutting brow: “I thought we had a chance,” one says to the other. But, hang on, they’re standing near what used to be City Hall, and Proposition 8 has long since been overturned; what better place to make the whole thing legal? Go on, monkey, pop the question! Man up!

The boy of “Boyhood” is Mason (Ellar Coltrane), whose story we follow, in fits and starts, until he is no longer a boy at all; the movie, written and directed by Richard Linklater, was shot over twelve years. When we initially meet Mason, he is in first grade, living in Texas with his older sister, Samantha (Lorelei Linklater), and his mother, Olivia (Patricia Arquette). His parents are divorced, and the children have not seen their father, Mason, Sr. (Ethan Hawke), for months. In other words, we are joining Mason on a voyage that has already hit the rocks, and on a tough, daily quest

to refloat and sail on. Rarely does a childhood like this involve what Wordsworth called “the glory and the freshness of a dream.” Instead, it means being woken up in the early morning by your sister, who annoys you with her Britney Spears impression, whereupon your mom storms in and tells you to go back to sleep. Some dream.

Olivia moves the family from town to town. She goes back to school, and marries her professor, a silver-haired smiler who calcifies into a drunk; in one remarkable sequence, Mason and his stepbrother cycle blithely home, on a balmy day, just in time to see Olivia lying on the floor of the garage, felled by a blow from her husband. She then takes up with an Iraq veteran, who becomes a corrections officer, and whom we see sitting on the front porch, clutching his can of beer, seething at an uncorrectable world. So many of the men in “Boyhood” seem like losers, or bullies, or both, minds and mouths locked tight with disapproval and denial, and the challenge for Mason—and, you feel, for any kid—is not just to survive the squalls of youth but somehow to grow from boy to man without suffering a death of the spirit.

More complex is the case of Mason, Sr.—a devoted performance from Hawke, surrendering to time’s flow. At first blush, he is flighty and feckless, and there are scores of blushes to come, as in the tricky moment at an Astros game, amid a raucous crowd, when Mason turns to his dad and asks whether he has a job. Yet his love for the kids is a constant, even if his practical care is a fragment of what their mother provides,

and we are not surprised—though we are vastly relieved—when Mason and Samantha wing it to the brink of adult life. The profuse pleasures of “Boyhood” spring not from amazement but from recognition—from saying, Yes, *that’s* true, and *that* feels right, or *that’s* how it was for me, too.

One evening in 2005, Mason and Samantha, suitably gowned, line up at a bookstore, like millions of kids, to get their midnight copies of “Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince,” leaving us with a difficult question: We traced the arc of Harry’s youth, too, in even greater detail than Linklater can furnish, so how come we feel that we know Mason so much better? Perhaps because Harry’s life, on the page and, even more luridly, onscreen, was measured out in highlights, as the plot demanded, whereas Mason is revealed in a string of lowlights, or in those episodes which seem dim and dull at the time, and only later shine in memory’s cave. A haircut, in short, matters more than a Quidditch match. We happen upon ourselves when nothing much happens to us, and we are transformed in the process; that is why the Mason with the earring from whom we take our leave, on his first, blissed-out day of college, both is and is not the affable imp of seven, or the mumbler who bumped his way through puberty, and that twin sense of continuity and interruption—of life itself as tracking shot and jump cut—applies to everyone. Just like the final fade. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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THE WINNING CAPTION



"Say something viral."
Robert Bray, Philadelphia, Pa.



THE FINALISTS

"Let's flip this house."
Brian Gallay, Toronto, Ont.

"I told you to tip the movers."
Robbie Rosenfeld, Bronx, N.Y.

"We're not really utilizing our wall space."
Christopher Sunami, Columbus, Ohio

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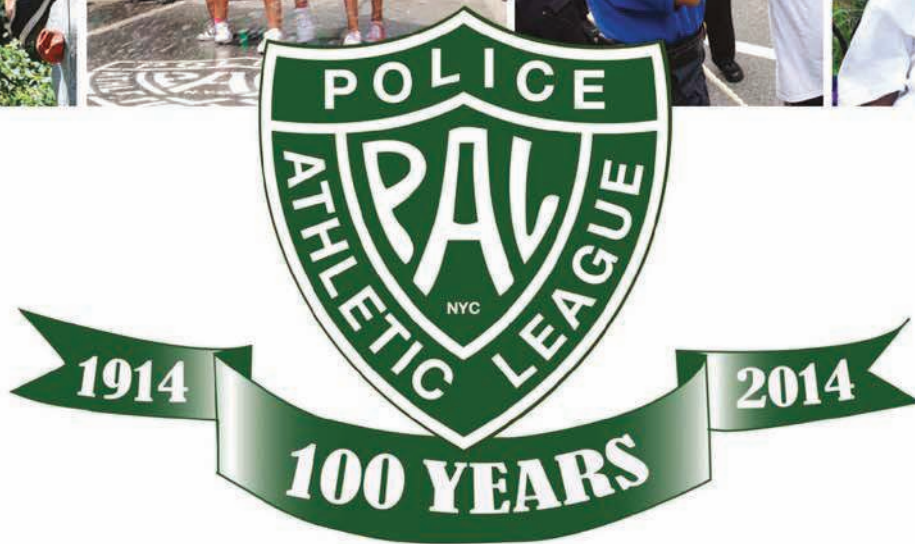


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